



Food And Emotional Transitions: A Psychoanalytic Study Of Anjali Joseph's Portrayal Of Food And Human Emotion In Her Novel, "Another Country"

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In Anjali Joseph's novel *Another Country*, food emerges as a significant motif intricately linked to the emotional states and transitions of the characters, particularly Leela Ghosh. This research paper explores the psychoanalytic dimensions of food and human emotion in Joseph's narrative through the lens of Donald Winnicott's theory of transitional objects. Winnicott, a pioneering psychoanalyst, introduced the concept of transitional objects as elements in the external world that provide comfort and facilitate the transition from dependence to independence. In *Another Country*, food serves as a metaphorical transitional object, bridging the characters' internal emotional landscapes with their external realities.

Winnicott's theory postulates that transitional objects help individuals manage separation anxiety and navigate the complex journey of personal development. These objects, which can range from physical items like a child's teddy bear to symbolic elements like food, offer a sense of security and continuity amidst change (Manolachi 1). In Joseph's novel, the protagonist Leela's interactions with food reveal deeper psychological processes and emotional transitions as she traverses different cultural landscapes and personal relationships. Winnicott says:

I have introduced the terms 'transitional objects' and 'transitional phenomena' for designation of the intermediate area of experience, - between the thumb and the teddy bear, between the oral erotism and the true object-relationship, between primary creative activity and projection of what has already been introjected, between primary unawareness of indebtedness and the acknowledgement of indebtedness (Winnicott 1)

Donald Winnicott's theory of transitional objects offers a profound understanding of human development, beginning with infancy and early childhood. "A transitional object provides an understanding of human development commencing with infancy and early childhood. As children procure and utilize transitional objects, this becomes indicative of how they will interact with and maintain human relationships." These objects, such as a beloved blanket or teddy bear, help children manage separation anxiety and develop independence, serving as crucial mediators between their inner and outer worlds. However, any disturbances in the interaction often causes psychological issues even in adults. "A

transitional object provides an understanding of human development commencing with infancy and early childhood. As children procure and utilize transitional objects, this becomes indicative of how they will interact with and maintain human relationships.” (Goddard) This foundational concept extends beyond childhood, suggesting that individuals of all ages use external objects and experiences—ranging from relationships to symbolic elements like food—to navigate emotional transitions and maintain stability throughout life. This broader application of Winnicott’s theory allows for a deeper exploration of how people cope with changes, losses, and new environments across their lifespan.

Food in *Another Country* is not merely sustenance; it is laden with symbolic meanings and emotional resonances. The novel’s protagonist, Leela, an English woman of Indian origin, navigates her life in Paris, London, and India, with food acting as a constant yet evolving companion. The narrative demonstrates how food reflects the characters’ emotional states, serves as a medium of connection, and symbolizes cultural identity and belonging. (Shah 1)

Leela’s journey in the novel is marked by her encounters with different culinary traditions, which in turn reflect her internal emotional states. For instance, her experiences of eating and sharing meals with others often mirror her feelings of alienation, comfort, and longing. In one instance, Joseph writes, “They sat on either side of the table, their folders out and their faces growing warmer, their expressions more indistinct as they drank and laughed and ate cheese and bread and salad” (Joseph 23-24). This scene, laden with the sensory experience of food, illustrates how

Leela’s emotional journey is further highlighted through her culinary experiences, which often evoke memories of home and identity. The act of eating becomes a way for her to navigate her feelings of displacement and search for belonging. In another passage, Leela reflects on her past as she consumes a meal, “Leela worked her way through hummus, tahini, and aubergine dip, and wondered why she wasn’t enjoying the food more. It was the Taj, after all. When she had to come here for a meeting, she fell on the biscuits and tea with delight. Now, she wasn’t having a particularly good time” (Joseph 247). Here, food serves as a bridge to her past experiences, yet its failure to bring her comfort signifies her current emotional dissonance.

Winnicott’s notion of transitional objects helps elucidate these dynamics by framing food as a medium that allows Leela to negotiate her emotional transitions. As she moves through different phases of her life and relationships, food becomes a symbolic anchor, providing a semblance of stability and familiarity. The psychoanalytic perspective offers a profound understanding of how Leela’s culinary interactions are not just about physical nourishment but also about emotional sustenance and continuity.

In *Another Country*, food acts as a pivotal transitional object in Leela’s journey, embodying her emotional states and facilitating her navigation through various personal and cultural transitions. Through the lens of Donald Winnicott’s theory, food in the novel serves as a medium that helps Leela manage her emotions, providing comfort and continuity amid the uncertainties of her life.

Leela’s experiences with food often highlight her feelings of displacement and her search for belonging. For instance, in the passage where Leela and Nina share a meal, Joseph writes, “They sat on either side of the table, their folders out and their faces growing warmer, their expressions more indistinct as they drank and laughed and ate cheese and bread and salad” (Joseph 24). This scene encapsulates the role of food as a transitional object, fostering a sense of intimacy and connection between the characters. The warmth and camaraderie that emerge during the meal help mitigate Leela’s sense of alienation in a foreign land, underscoring the comforting and bonding properties of shared food.

Leela’s interaction with Simon further illustrates how food serves as a transitional object, bridging her internal emotional state with her external environment. During a visit to Simon’s place, Leela feels a sense of relaxation and warmth as Simon prepares tea for her. Joseph describes the scene: “Simon worked methodically, unhurried: he took tonic out of the fridge, and a lime, sliced it, got the ice cubes and so on as he made his drink. Leela watched. She was aware that he didn’t really care whether or not she had been there, and this made her relax and warm to him in a way she would have found difficult to explain” (Joseph 44-45). The act of preparing and sharing tea becomes a ritual that provides Leela with a momentary sense of stability and acceptance, highlighting the transitional role of food in her emotional journey.

Winnicott's theory emphasizes that transitional objects help individuals navigate the space between their internal emotional worlds and the external reality. In Leela's case, food frequently serves as this bridge, connecting her to her past and her evolving sense of identity. When Leela reflects on her childhood memories and her parents' return to India, food becomes a conduit for these emotions. Joseph writes, "Leela's a strange place familiar only from early childhood and emotion, the India to which her parents had unexpectedly returned, a place of silence, bird calls, a balcony next to her room, trees outside, and the life of the facing building" (Joseph 24-25). The sensory details associated with food and home evoke a sense of nostalgia and longing, reinforcing the role of food as a transitional object that links her past with her present.

Moreover, Leela's culinary experiences often reveal her internal conflicts and emotional states. During a lunch with her friend Amy, the disarray in Amy's home and the chaotic meal preparation reflect Leela's own sense of turmoil and confusion. Joseph describes, "Amy viciously, whacking tea bags into not very clean mugs. 'It's disgusting here, disgusting. No one's washed up in weeks. We're paying a cleaner a hundred quid to come round and sort it out'" (Joseph 62-63). The state of the kitchen and the haphazard preparation of tea mirror Leela's inner chaos, underscoring the symbolic connection between food and emotion.

Winnicott's concept of transitional objects provides a valuable framework for understanding these dynamics. As Leela navigates her complex emotional landscape, food serves as a stable and comforting presence, offering a semblance of continuity and familiarity. This is particularly evident in her interactions with different cuisines and culinary traditions, which not only reflect her cultural identity but also her emotional states.

In *Another Country*, food not only serves as a transitional object for Leela's emotional journey but also as a profound symbol of cultural identity and belonging. Through the culinary experiences and food references, Anjali Joseph intricately weaves a narrative that underscores the complex interplay between cultural heritage and personal identity. Leela's cultural identity is deeply intertwined with her culinary experiences, which evoke memories of her Indian heritage and connect her to her past. When Leela reminisces about her childhood and her parents' return to India, the sensory details of food and home become vivid markers of her cultural background. Joseph writes, "Leela's a strange place familiar only from early childhood and emotion, the India to which her parents had unexpectedly returned, a place of silence, bird calls, a balcony next to her room, trees outside, and the life of the facing building" (Joseph 24-25). These details, linked to the sensory experience of food, highlight how culinary elements serve as conduits for cultural memory and identity.

The juxtaposition of different culinary traditions in the novel further accentuates Leela's feelings of displacement and her search for belonging. In Paris, Leela's interactions with French cuisine symbolize her attempts to assimilate into a foreign culture while grappling with her own cultural identity. During a meal with Nina, Leela reflects on the foreignness of her surroundings and the familiarity of the shared experience: "It was instead the unspoken sense of their homes, in other countries: Leela's a strange place familiar only from early childhood and emotion... For each girl, the other's home was non-concrete, but superstitiously to be believed, in the way of a story heard in infancy" (Joseph 24-25). This passage underscores the cultural dissonance Leela feels and how food acts as a bridge, connecting her to her roots while allowing her to navigate her new environment.

Leela's culinary experiences in London further illustrate her complex relationship with cultural identity and belonging. In one instance, she describes her mundane routine, highlighting how food becomes a marker of her emotional state and cultural dislocation: "Leela worked her way through hummus, tahini, and aubergine dip, and wondered why she wasn't enjoying the food more. It was the Taj, after all. When she had to come here for a meeting, she fell on the biscuits and tea with delight. Now, she wasn't having a particularly good time" (Joseph 247). The familiar yet dissatisfying food reflects Leela's inner turmoil and her struggle to reconcile her cultural heritage with her current reality.

Moreover, food in the novel often symbolizes the complexities of human relationships and the search for connection. Leela's interactions with others over meals reveal the emotional undercurrents of her relationships and her quest for intimacy. During a meal with Simon, Leela's observations about his meticulous preparation of tea highlight the subtle dynamics of their relationship: "Simon worked methodically, unhurried... Leela watched. She was aware that he didn't really care whether or not she had been there, and this made her relax and warm to him in a way she would have found difficult to explain"

(Joseph 44-45). The act of sharing tea becomes a moment of connection, where food facilitates emotional intimacy and understanding.

Winnicott's theory of transitional objects helps elucidate the role of food as a symbol of cultural identity and belonging. As transitional objects, food items provide a sense of continuity and familiarity, allowing individuals to navigate cultural transitions and maintain a connection to their roots. For Leela, food becomes a medium through which she negotiates her cultural identity, finding comfort and stability amid the uncertainties of her journey.

In *Another Country*, food frequently symbolizes the emotional turmoil and inner conflicts experienced by Leela and other characters. The sensory and ritualistic aspects of food serve as a reflection of their emotional states, illustrating how culinary experiences mirror their psychological landscapes. One poignant example of food reflecting emotional turmoil occurs during Leela's visit to Amy's disordered home. The chaotic preparation of tea in a filthy kitchen mirrors Leela's inner chaos and confusion. Joseph writes, "Amy viciously, whacking tea bags into not very clean mugs. 'It's disgusting here, disgusting. No one's washed up in weeks. We're paying a cleaner a hundred quid to come round and sort it out'" (Joseph 62-63). The disarray in the kitchen and the haphazard preparation of tea highlight the emotional turbulence both characters are experiencing. The state of the kitchen serves as a metaphor for their psychological disarray, underscoring how food preparation and consumption can reflect deeper emotional states.

Similarly, Leela's interaction with Simon reveals her emotional vulnerability and the comfort she seeks through food. As Simon prepares tea for her, Leela experiences a sense of relaxation and warmth, despite the underlying emotional detachment. Joseph describes, "Simon worked methodically, unhurried... Leela watched. She was aware that he didn't really care whether or not she had been there, and this made her relax and warm to him in a way she would have found difficult to explain" (Joseph 44-45). The meticulous preparation and consumption of tea become a soothing ritual, providing Leela with a semblance of stability and comfort amid her emotional uncertainties.

Leela's feelings of displacement and cultural dissonance are also mirrored in her culinary experiences. In a passage reflecting on her lunch with her father, Leela's discomfort with the cultural expectations and her relationship with Vikram become evident. Joseph writes, "'Lovely, yes. What does he eat or not eat?' Mr. Ghosh enquired. Leela cringed, imagining his expression at the other end of the line, the look of warning or having something to elaborate on that he might have given her mother. 'Everything, he eats everything. Don't worry too much about the food,' she said" (Joseph 239). The conversation about food preferences becomes a conduit for Leela's anxiety about cultural expectations and her father's approval, highlighting how culinary elements can symbolize broader emotional and cultural tensions.

Winnicott's concept of transitional objects provides a framework for understanding these dynamics. Transitional objects offer a sense of security and continuity, helping individuals manage emotional turbulence and navigate complex emotional landscapes. (Southgate 90) In *Another Country*, food often serves this function, acting as a stabilizing force for characters grappling with emotional conflicts and uncertainties.

The novel also explores how food rituals and shared meals can become spaces for negotiating emotional relationships and power dynamics. During a meal with Vikram, the interaction between food and emotion becomes particularly pronounced. Joseph writes, "'We should just get married, you know,' Vikram had said. He'd smiled at her... 'I could marry you tomorrow, too,' she'd said" (Joseph 256-257). The casual yet significant conversation about marriage occurs in the context of shared food and drink, illustrating how culinary experiences can mediate important emotional and relational negotiations.

Leela's solitary meals often reflect her emotional isolation and introspection. Her mundane routine of preparing and consuming simple meals underscores her inner loneliness and search for meaning. Joseph describes, "She cleaned the bath. She went to the small supermarket on the High Road, and bought avocados, bread, butter, lemons, coffee, milk, cereal. She came home and put away the food" (Joseph 88-89). The repetitive and solitary nature of these activities highlights Leela's emotional detachment and the role of food as a silent witness to her inner struggles.

In *Another Country*, food not only symbolizes emotional turmoil and cultural dissonance but also plays a crucial role in the resolution of these conflicts. Through shared meals and culinary experiences, the characters find moments of connection, understanding, and emotional healing. Leela's journey toward

emotional resolution is marked by key moments involving food that facilitate her self-discovery and acceptance. One significant instance is her conversation with her father about Vikram. Despite the initial tension regarding cultural expectations and food preferences, the act of discussing and sharing a meal with Vikram in her parents' home becomes a moment of acceptance and connection. Joseph writes, "So it happened that Vikram was sitting in her parents' drawing room, on the sofa, where a jittery Leela also sat" (Joseph 239). The shared meal serves as a bridge between different cultural worlds, allowing Leela to reconcile her dual identities and find a sense of belonging.

Similarly, Leela's interactions with Simon reveal how food can mediate emotional intimacy and understanding. During a casual meal, Simon's methodical preparation of tea provides Leela with a sense of comfort and relaxation, despite their emotional detachment. This ritualistic act of sharing tea helps Leela navigate her emotional landscape and find a momentary sense of stability. Joseph describes, "He picked up his own glass. 'Let's go through to the other room.' Leela followed him, and he put on a floor lamp near the back sofa and sat down" (Joseph 44-45). The transition from the kitchen to the living room, accompanied by the shared act of drinking tea, symbolizes a movement toward emotional resolution and connection. Winnicott's theory of transitional objects emphasizes the role of these objects in facilitating emotional growth and stability. (Bachar, & Canetti 149) In *Another Country*, food functions as a transitional object that helps the characters manage their emotional conflicts and move toward resolution. The shared culinary experiences provide moments of connection and understanding, helping the characters navigate their emotional transitions and find a sense of peace.

Leela's solitary culinary routines also reflect her journey toward emotional resolution. Her repetitive and mundane activities of preparing and consuming simple meals underscore her introspective process of self-discovery. Joseph writes, "She went to the small supermarket on the High Road, and bought avocados, bread, butter, lemons, coffee, milk, cereal. She came home and put away the food" (Joseph 88-89). These solitary routines symbolize Leela's gradual acceptance of her emotional state and her journey toward self-sufficiency and independence.

The novel's concluding scenes highlight the therapeutic aspects of food in resolving emotional conflicts. During a meal with Vikram, Leela contemplates the possibility of marriage and the stability it could bring. Joseph writes, "'We should just get married, you know,' Vikram had said. He'd smiled at her... 'I could marry you tomorrow, too,' she'd said" (Joseph 256-257). The shared act of discussing their future over a meal becomes a moment of emotional resolution, symbolizing Leela's acceptance of her desires and the stability she seeks. Moreover, Leela's final interactions with her family, involving shared meals and discussions, underscore the role of food in fostering emotional healing and connection. The act of sharing food with loved ones becomes a medium for expressing emotions and resolving conflicts, highlighting the therapeutic potential of culinary experiences.

Anjali Joseph's *Another Country* uses food as a powerful medium for exploring and resolving emotional conflicts. By applying Donald Winnicott's theory of transitional objects, this paper has illustrated how culinary elements in the novel serve as bridges between the characters' internal emotional worlds and their external realities. Through shared meals and culinary rituals, the characters find moments of connection, understanding, and emotional healing, highlighting the symbolic significance of food in their journey toward personal growth and resolution.

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