

Ten Excerpts from an Annotated Bibliography on the Cannibal Women of Ratnabar Island by Nibedita Sen

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May 15, 2019

1. Clifton, Astrid. "The Day the Sea Ran Red." *Uncontacted Peoples of the World*. Routledge Press, 1965, pp. 71-98.

"There are few tales as tragic as that of the denizens of Ratnabar Island. When a British expedition made landfall on its shores in 1891, they did so armed to the teeth, braced for the same hostile reception other indigenous peoples of the Andamans had given them. What they found, instead, was a primitive hunter-gatherer community composed almost entirely of women and children. [. . .] The savage cultural clash that followed would transmute the natives' offer of a welcoming meal into direst offense, triggering a massacre at the hands of the repulsed British . . ."

2. Feldwin, Hortensia. *Roots of Evil: A Headmistress' Account of What Would Come To Be Known as the Churchill Dinner*. Westminster Press, 1943.

"Three girl-children were saved from Ratnabar. One would perish on the sea voyage, while two were conducted to England as Her Majesty's wards. Of these, one would go on to be enrolled in Churchill Academy, where she was given a Christian name and the promise of a life far removed from the savagery of her homeland. [. . .] Regina proved herself an apt pupil, industrious, soaking up offered tutelage like a sponge does ink, if prone to intemperate moods and a tendency to attach herself with sudden fits of feverish fondness to one or more of the other girls [. . .] None of us could have foreseen what she and Emma Yates whispered into each others' ears behind closed doors as they planned their foul feast."

3. Schofield, Eleanor. "Eating the Other." *Word of Mouth*. State University of New York, 2004, pp. 56-89.

"It's not for no reason that women have, historically, been burdened with the duties of food preparation. Or that it is women, not men, who are called upon to limit their appetites, shrink themselves, rein in their ambitions. A hungry woman is dangerous. [. . .] Men are arbiters of discourse, women the dish to be consumed. And the Ratnabari, in the exercising of their transgressive appetites, quite literally turn the tables on their oppressors."

4. Morris, Victoria. "Memory, Mouth, Mother: Funerary Cannibalism among the Ratnabari." *Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, vol. 2, no. 2, 1994, pp. 105-129. Jstor, doi: 10.2707/464631.

“We are all cannibals at birth, and our mother-tongue is the language of the mouth. When the Ratnabari eat of their dead, they embrace what Kristeva calls ‘the abject’—the visceral, the polluted, the blood and bile and placenta and the unclean flesh we associate with the female body. Return to us, they say to their dead, be with us always. [. . .] Science has yet to explain how it is that they almost never bear sons, only daughters, but it is scarce to be wondered at that their society is matriarchal in nature, for they spurn the clean, rational world of the patriarchal symbolic, remaining locked in a close, almost incestuous relationship with the maternal semiotic instead.”

5. Aspioti, Elli. “A Love That Devours: Emma Yates and Regina Gaur.” *A History of Twentieth-Century Lesbians*, edited by Jenna Atkinson, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, pp. 180-195.

“What is it about love that makes us take leave of our senses? What makes a girl of barely seventeen carve fillets of flesh from her ribs and, lacing her clothes back up over the bulk of soaked bandages, serve her own stewed flesh to a table of her classmates at her wealthy private school?”

6. Rainier, Richard. “A Rebuttal of Recent Rumours Heard Among the Populace.” *The Times*, 24 Apr. 1904, pp. 14.

“Every rag barely worth the paper it is printed on has pounced on the regrettable happenings at Churchill Academy, and as such salacious reporting is wont to do, this has had an impact on the minds of impressionable youth. [. . .] [A] rash of imitative new fads in the area of courtship, such as presenting a lover with a hair from one’s head or a clipping of fingernail to consume, perhaps even a shaving of skin, or blood, sucked from a pricked finger [. . .] As to the rumours that the Ratnabari gain shapeshifting powers through the consumption of human flesh, or that they practice a form of virgin birth—I can say with certainty that these are pure exaggeration, and that their proponents are likely muddling real events with the mythological figure of the rakshasi, a female demon from the Orient.”

7. Gaur, Shalini. “The Subaltern Will Speak, If You’ll Shut Up and Listen.” *Interviews in Intersectionality*, by Shaafat Shahbandari and Harold Singh, 2012.

“[. . .] the problem is that we have everyone and their maiden aunt dropping critique on Ratnabar, but we’re not hearing from us, the Ratnabari diaspora ourselves. If I have to deal with one more white feminist quoting Kristeva at me . . . [. . .] No, the real problem is that our goals are fundamentally different. They want to wring significance from our lives, we just want to find a way to live. There’s not a lot of us, but we exist. We’re here. We don’t always quite see eye to eye with each other’s . . . ideology, but we’re not going anywhere, and we have to figure out what we are to each other, how we can live side by side. So why aren’t we getting published?”

8. Gaur, Roopkatha. *A Daughter's Confession: The Collected Letters of Roopkatha Gaur*, edited by Mary Anolik, Archon Books, 2010, pp. 197-216.

"Mother didn't know. What Emma was planning, what was in the food that night, any of it. I've kept this secret so many years, but now that she's long gone, and I am old, I feel I can tell it at last, at least to you, my darling, and if only so I can pass beyond this world free of its weight. [. . .] Why did Emma do it? Does it matter? Love, foolishness, a hunger to believe in magic and power, a twisted obsession with Mother's supposed exotic origins, what does it matter? She did it. The truth is, I'm grateful. Whatever her motives, that meal gave Mother what she needed to escape that place. And I wouldn't have been born without it, though that's another story altogether. You could say a little bit of Emma lives on in me, even after all this time."

9. Gaur, Shalini. "We Can Never Go Home." *Hungry Diasporas: Annual Humanities Colloquium*, May 2008, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ.

"We know Ratnabar's coordinates. Aerial reconnaissance has confirmed people still live on the island. But how do I set foot on its shores, with my English accent and my English clothes, and not have them flee from me in the terror that was taught to them in 1891? Where do we go, descendants of stolen ones, trapped between two islands and belonging on neither—too brown for English sensibilities, too alien now for the home of our great-grandmothers? How shall we live, with Ratnabar in our blood but English on our tongues?"

10. Gaur, Ashanti. "Dead and Delicious II: Eat What You Want, and If People Don't Like It, Eat Them Too." *Bitch Media*, 2 Nov. 2016, <https://www.bitchmedia.org/article/eat-want-people-eat/2016>. Accessed 8 Dec. 2017.

"My cousin Shalini is an optimist. She believes in keeping the peace, getting along, not rocking the boat. What do I believe in? I think—let's be real, ladies, who among us hasn't sometimes had a craving to eat the whole damn world? You know which of you I'm talking to. Yes you, out there. You've tried so hard to be good. To not be too greedy. You made yourself small and you hoped they'd like you better for it, but they didn't, of course, because they're the ones who're insatiable. Who'll take everything you have to give them and still hunger for more. It's time to stop making ourselves small. And above all, remember . . . there may be more of them, but we don't need them to make more of us."

[Submitted for Professor Blackwood's Sociology 402 class, by Ranita Gaur.]