

Ivory Seeds of Nostalgia

On a chilly night, the aroma of white rice simmering in a giant pot was what made me feel there was still a part of me that hadn't completely disappeared just yet. Moving across the globe to a different country in the middle of the school year was bad enough but then came the process of acculturation. The fragrance of rice being cooked was a symbol of peace. It meant dinner would be ready and a part of me would once again become whole. In 2000, when I had moved to the United States from South Asia at the tender age of eight, my world was topsy-turvy. Except one important fact: My family still ate traditional South Asian cuisine.

After long days at work and school rice is what brought my family together as it's the heart of South Asian food. A reminder to us, that despite feeling like outsiders all day, we had something in common. School seemed to be the only indication life was moving forward though I felt like stepping back in time. Bubbles of joy would emanate from my body when anyone asked about my home and lifestyle that I had left behind. Imagine my shock when people around me told me they had never eaten rice or tried it at all. How was this possible? Something that I'd eaten since the day of my birth was almost to the point of non-existent to some people. One of the first moments of cultural shock was this. Vivid memories of watching various family members preparing to cook rice came back to me.

Frothy water rushed through the peepholes of the strainer. The grainy hard texture pressing hard against bare skin. Sweet aftertaste of consuming without the flavor of any other dishes.

There were frequent flashes of identity crisis. I was neither here nor there. Eating food from back home was how I got the sense of still being tethered to my roots. As Vietnamese-

American writer Monique Truong accurately sums it up in her essay *American Like Me* (2006), “*remote* or *faraway*, may have been an even better word to describe me ” (para. 2). Rice is an integral part of South Asian people’s life. If you are in a detrimental financial situation and somehow money is acquired, the first food item you will buy is rice. It is a staple diet that represents the people’s livelihood.

These days my hunger for rice still hasn’t gone away. Besides being a daily part of my diet, rice represents my past and forms part of my cultural identity. Even now when I order rice at a restaurant a pleasant tingling sensation goes down my spine upon getting my first glimpse of this delicious food when it is first served. However, this also leads to jovial mockery from mostly my South Asian friends and colleagues. Somehow, I just can’t seem to ever get enough.

Reference:

Truong, Monique, “American Like Me” August 2006, *Gourmet*, Reading Supplement