

# Questioning the Culture of Food and Cuisine in Colonial Bengal: Reading Select Cookbooks

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## Abstract

The Bengali cuisine in the late 19th century was hybrid in nature under the influence of West. It would be a significant call to understand its making, the very production of the hybrid space in the domesticity of the Bengali kitchen, accommodating the politics of gastronomy in simulating the brand of 'bangaliana'. The introductions of professional cookbooks in the household reflect this transfusion space as well as determine the platter, broadly the food culture in Bengal. This paper would take this drifting period between 1883 to 1907, precisely from the first publication of Bengali cookbook of Bipradas Mukhopadhyay, *Pak-Pranali* to the first professional cookbook of Prajnasundari Devi, *Amish O Niramish Ahar* to explore this gradual transformation of the kitchen space, to examine how the Bengali 'pathya', (diet food) upheld and preached in the medico-moral Bengali magazines and periodicals is finally assimilated into the cosmopolitan platter as manifested in the professional cookbooks. Therefore, the performance of production, writing, presentation and consumption of food in a culturally codified sequence would be the plethora of this research. This research seeks to demonstrate how the question of gastronomic taste and consumption not only became a marker of identity for the middle class but actually came to define their everyday existence.

**Key words:** Cuisine, Taste, Food, Middle Class, Colonial Bengal