

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

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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* (Cooking-Recipes) to the first professional cookbook of Prajnasundari Devi, *Amish O Niramish Ahar* (Non-veg and Veg platter) 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 paper. This paper seeks to demonstrate how the question of gastronomic taste and consumption not only became a marker of identity for the middle class but came to define their everyday existence.

The print culture and literature emerged as an important instrument in framing social and political identities in colonial India. The establishment of the vernacular press enabled the formation of a nationalistic feeling, and thus nationalism found its first expression. Learning the vernacular language was crucial in order to cultivate a national identity for the indigenous people. On the other hand, it helped the ruling class monitor the rhetoric of nationalistic speech in order to maintain law and order. The indigenous population depended on language and

writing to form a cultural identity. However, the trend of necessitating the social divide between 'bhadralok' and 'chotolok' was marked by the latter's coarse use of vernacular language and lifestyle.

The mutual concern of both the colonizer and the colonized in the nineteenth century revolved around the nature and extent of education. With the introduction of cheap print technology and the colonial form of education in the city, Calcutta became the centrifugal site of knowledge. The journey to the city to acquire education worked as an epistemic pilgrimage from the rural to the urban cityscape. The elite indigenous population upheld the practice of reading, writing and speaking the colonial language thus, in turn contributing to the 'bhadralok' identity. Members of the trading community, settling in the dingy alleys of Black Town had little to do with the language of the elite. This settling population, with their make-shift residence in the northern part of the city formed a majority of the vernacular readership.

The canon of elite literature was formed by a conscious choice of preventing language from being defiled by accommodating the language, lifestyle and food practices of the lowly communities and the cultural 'other'. The print technology dominated by the educated middle class has essentially produced occidental knowledge, without adequately appreciating and documented cheap printing techniques. In this context, Ghosh writes:

Commercial print- cultures emanating from the numerous cheaper presses in Calcutta and its suburbs, that were shared by a wide range of literate but not so educated people actively disseminated literary preferences that ran counter to the efforts of the reforming literati. Far from being abashed by their ‘vulgarity’, these groups made the use of the vibrant publishing milieu to proudly assert their linguistic (and social) alterity. (Ghosh 2006, 8)

Vernacular printing reached its climax around 1857, small presses cluttered around the numerous dingy lanes in the Battala area of the Black Town and College Street. The variety of books published ranged from religious and mythological to comics and anonymous cookbooks and lifestyle magazines printed in budget. These Battala books had a significant readership in Bengali homes, they were cheap, vibrant, entertaining as well as informative. The first cook-book was published around 1831. *Samachardarpan*, one of the earliest Bengali periodicals, consisted of an advertisement of a cookbook called *Pakrajeshwar*. The second edition of the book was funded by the Maharaja of Burdwan and was published along with *Byanjan-ratnakar*. The first professional cookbook however appeared after half a decade in 1883 with Bipradas Mukhopadhyay.

Recipe, as the most textual form of food in cookbooks is a fairly recent phenomenon, originated in the post-colonial period. However, the literature of food that we

read from the nineteenth century onwards was heavily influenced by the texts that have survived the test of time. A scanty number of scholars have documented the art of preparing food. Manuscripts that have survived like the 'Paka-yaajana' by Pashupati, an elder brother of Halayudha, an ancient smriti writer of Bengal. The miscellaneous tantric text, 'Matsya-sukta-tantra' dealing with body, food and purity by Halayudha; 'Pak-vidhi' by Divakarachandra, 'Chikitsa-Samagraha' by Chakradutta are some of the records that trace back the culinary practices of ancient Bengal.

A majority of texts presenting the food habits of ancient Bengal lay down norms of ritualistic eating. A strict Hindu code of conduct was followed in preparation, and consumption of food served both in feasts and mourning rituals. The sacred oblation or the ritualistic offering of 'pinda' to satisfy the soul of a deceased relative was offered for ten days after death. The offering consisted of a handful of cooked or raw rice harvested in autumn- 'Sali', along with some fruits or 'phala', some esculent roots or 'mula', edible pot- herbs or 'sakas', milk 'payas' and molasses or 'guda'. Some tentative inferences can be drawn from the description of Damyanti's wedding banquet in 'Naisadhacarita', of the food served in feast of 'bhoj'. The pattern of serving food was based on taste, from bitter to sweet or 'tita' to 'meetha'. These traditional modes of cooking were carried forward by cheaply printed anonymous books and leaflets around the Battala market.

Bipradas Mukhopadhyay in *Pak-Pranali* talks about the inclusion of culinary skills in the educational curriculum of the nineteenth century colonial Bengal. When the middle class insisted upon the inclusion of cookery skills in the curriculum, they argued for the education system in Britain which included cookery skills as a part of its curriculum. Unlike Victorian England where cookery was clearly a part of women's education, in colonial Bengal, the discourse of preparing food was gendered in a more complex pattern. In the European counterpart, there was a clear-cut demarcation between the private and the public sphere, but in colonial Bengal the demarcation was much more complicated. Although women were situated in the domestic space of the 'grihasta', bestowed with the responsibility of preparing food, the knowledge of cooking was primarily monopolized by men. What was generally considered to be a woman's domain, was co-opted by educated middle-class men who took keen interest in the subject of cookery and wrote about it. Through, the production of recipes, cooking as an act of 'grihasta' crossed the boundary of the private space

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The kitchen space in a Bengali household was heavily laced with religious connotations, thus the eateries serving homely meal around the newly introduced railway stations necessarily had Hindu names, highlighting the taboo around taste and touch. It was presumed that the already maligned practice of consuming food out-

side home would be less sacrilegious if it is somehow religiously attuned. Women from affluent families, like Prajnasundari Devi, Rabindranath Tagore's niece, transformed the humble Bengali kitchen into an aesthetically charged space; documenting and innovating traditional knowledge creating a new identity for herself through cookbooks.

Existing scholarship of nineteenth century colonial Bengal has often merged the notion of 'grihastha' and that of 'bhadralok'. But a study of the kitchen and the domestic space inevitably demands for a clear understanding of these two categories. The urban middle class was busy educating itself with the vogue of Imperialism, self-fashioning into the newly found 'babu culture', in embracing the idea of a 'bhadralok'. In the nineteenth century, 'grihastha' was understood as an upper-class male dominated category. However, the category of 'grihastha' can incorporate a variety of caste, class and gender cutting across the demarcation of the urban and the rural as well as the traditional and the modern. The category of 'grihastha' need not necessarily merge with the idea of the 'bhadralok' and inherit its rigidity.

The nostalgia around the authentic Bengali cuisine in the 19th century can be considered as a bioethical construction of an inter-class conflict resisting colonial modernity while capitalizing on the sentimental bond of the 'grihastha' with domesticity of food. Thus, the tradition

of prescribing 'pathya' (diet) nullified the celebration of a traditional Bengali notion of 'bhoj' (feast) bearing the traces of cultural transaction. The nostalgia itself is the outcome of a deterritorialization from the rural to the urban space distorting the idea of home and domesticity. The cityscape revises and re-appropriates the notion of the kitchen space and the modes of production of the Bengali cuisine and its professional documentation. The cookbooks document these sentiments and channelize us further into an acceptance of a hybrid food culture. One needs to consider the power of tradition that refused to be reformed as embodied in the hierarchies of caste and gender that were necessarily interlocked. The questions of taste and touch were consolidated in some ways under the British rule but certainly did not originate from colonialism; "Taste is the sense which communicates to us a knowledge of vapid bodies by means of sensations which they excite" (Brillat - Savarin 2011, 46). Taste is culture specific, a particular community might or might not be inclined to a particular taste depending on the locality it inhabits, the climate condition and the topography. The culinary culture of ancient Bengal records the use of sugar, jaggery, honey, milk, fish and herbs both for the usual day to day meal and as a means of 'pathya'.

The tendency to romanticize the pre-colonial era as idyllic, one must recall the Brahminical 'ideology of discipline' and 'public control over public life' that had already prevailed much before the colonial presence.

This paper aims to question the motive of creating the genre of Bengali 'haute cuisine', its formation through a process of continuous dissolution of the taboo around desire, consumption, touch and taste. We would closely scrutinize the gradual evolution, originating from the pedagogy of medico-moral journals controlling the inner circle of 'grihastha', through 'pathya' to the popularity of fusion food and street food in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

In most nineteenth century texts, Bengal was prefigured as the landscape of diseases, presenting debility as a constant household presence. The narrative of debility was well circulated in advertisements published in newspapers with commercial interest in investing in the healthcare system of colonial Bengal. Rajnarayan Basu in *Shekalar Ekal* (1874) talked about the degeneration of Bengali men as a result of incorporating European working schedule and lifestyle. Debility was often perceived as a precondition of a disease and the widely circulated medico-moral journals tried to control and curb the desire for the excess. Contemporary literature celebrating gluttony in myth and folklore through 'bhoj' (feast), was simultaneously accompanied by the norms laid out for 'pathya'(diet).

Chikitsa Darpan (1880), *Paribarik Chikitsa Bidhan* (1889), *Svastha Raksha* (1881) sought to safeguard the health of 'grihastha' beyond the clinically configured ailments suggesting 'pathya' so that it could help the financial-

ly insolvent towards a perfect lifestyle. The nineteenth century medical literature emphasised on the need of 'pathya' or medically sanctioned diet routine for the debilitated body. Medical manuals cutting across traditions maintained that a physician's prescription would be redundant without an elaborate sick-diet. In these manuals, 'pathya' or medically endorsed diet emerged as a normative means of taming various forms of lust, greed and desire. They harped on the need to carefully distance oneself from the objects of unbridled seduction and lust.

However, advice concerning 'pathya' clearly transcended its preliminary cause of addressing physical ailments. These manuals seemed to acknowledge 'durbalata', or debility as attributes of the 'normal' in the late nineteenth century 'grihastha' life in Bengal. These manuals seemed to circulate the idea, that the 'normal' Bengali body remained inevitably debilitated. Variations were tolerated as long as they conformed to the configuration: a balance between 'paripak'(digestion) and 'push-ti'(nourishment). Medico-moral manuals thus tried to impose restraints on individual through consumption of everyday food.

In *Pathya Randhan*, Bipradas Mukhopadhyay talks about three distinct forms of culinary practice, 'sahaj-randhan'(Easily digestible recipe), 'mulyaban-randhan'(Recipes with rich ingredients) and 'rogir-pathya '(Cooking

for the debilitated), here traditional modes of cooking 'pathya' accommodated with the European components of a diet for the sick, so that chicken broth could be placed along with 'jaber-manda' or barley soups. Strict disciplined dietary practice was also recommended for nursing mothers in Hemangini Ray Dastidar's *Grihinir Hitopodesh* (1915).

The claim for a refined Bengali cuisine needs to be contextualized into the mesh of an evolving material culture of colonial Bengal. These changes ushered in a surge of writing on the refinement of taste. The Bengali identity as a liberal, cosmopolitan yet familial was born from this discourse of taste. Unlike food cultures around the world, Bengali cuisine not only refused to be national but at the same time remained emphatically regional. This regional as well as cosmopolitan nature emerged from a myriad of caste, class, communal and gender negotiations. In *Bhojan Shilpi Bangali* (Bengali Gastronomy) 1971, Buddhadeb Basu claims that, the element that sets Bengali cuisine apart from any other cuisine is its distinctive nature of domesticity, protecting it from the vulgarity of random commercialization.

Bengali cuisine in late nineteenth century is both liberal and cosmopolitan in nature with the potential to incorporate different flavours and indigenizing them; thus, representing a synthesis of multiple flavours. Exploring this intrinsic hybridity characterized in the process

of producing a Bengali cuisine, generally utilizing local ingredients and using European modes of cooking displayed the process of a healthy cultural transaction. However, this hybridity also refers to the influence of sub-regional culinary practices incorporated into the folds of Bengali cuisine.

Both Mukhopadhyay's and Prajnasundari's cookbooks are classic testimonies to the changing food habit of the Bengalis. The vegetarian recipes that Mukhopadhyay described were mostly made from vegetables already available in India. However, the cosmopolitan Bengali gastronome also took delight in new vegetables such as cabbage and cauliflower. Since cabbage was a new vegetable, Mukhopadhyay deemed it necessary to first introduce cabbage to his readers, Mukhopadhyay tried to make his readers aware of different categories of cabbage, like drumhead and sugar loop, and they also learnt from *Pak Pranali* that cabbage seeds were brought into India every year from abroad. A detailed discussion of how to choose and clean a cabbage preceded the recipes in the first volume of *Pak Pranali*.

In the periodical, as well as the cookbook of Pak Pranali, so-called Bengali recipes happily coexisted with 'new' recipes, which ranged from British to Italian to French cuisines. Recipes included Jewish fried fish, Italian mutton, French cutlets, English chops, plum pudding, ginger pudding, hasty pudding, orange jelly, Irish stew, orange custard, and the like. What must be noted in this context

is that the nomenclature itself, was becoming hybrid. “Kochi Mangser Akhni Soup” (Soup made with tender meat, rice and legumes) suggests that, ‘the meat used in brewing the soup should be necessarily tender’ (Mukhopadhyay 2000, 22-23, translation mine). Mukhopadhyay had recipes for ‘English bhuni khichuri’ (khichuri being a dish made of rice, lentils, and spices consumed commonly by people all over India) and ‘English shik kebab’ (‘shik kebab’ again was a form of skewered mutton generally eaten by the Muslims in India). The British who resided in India loved khichri/ khichuri and Mukhopadhyay went one step further and gave an English flavour to Indian dishes. He was creating a cuisine that was a synthesis of incorporation and localization. The result was a ‘new’ cuisine that would shape the identity of the Bengali middle class.

The play on nomenclature was perhaps most evident in both Mukhopadhyay's and Prajnasundari Devi's use of the term 'curry', which was often an English innovation of an Indian recipe of a mixture of spices. However, for Mukhopadhyay, curry had an entirely different definition, quite dissimilar to what the British recipe writers had to say. Mukhopadhyay defined curry thus: “Europeans learnt to cook "curry" from the Jews and the Jews learnt it from the Muslims” (Mukhopadhyay 2000, 210, translation mine). When Mukhopadhyay described recipes for 'curry', he was quite emphatic that he was either following the English or Muslims.

Prajnasundari Devi hardly used the English formulaic recipe for 'curry', which was generally made from a hodgepodge of spices known as curry powder. She used different recipes for 'curry' and these recipes were applied to quintessentially Bengali vegetables like 'enchor' (green jackfruit) and 'mocha' (banana blossom), and fish like 'hilsa' and 'parshe' (Bengal mullet) (almost iconic ingredients of Bengali cuisine). She used different spices for each 'curry' recipe. Again, her play on names in this context is noteworthy. She named one dish "firringi", Anglo- Indian/Eurasian/European] 'curry' even though she used 'patol' (wax gourd), a vegetable native to Bengal, in the recipe. Neither 'firringi' nor 'curry' can be called either British or Bengali, but essentially hybrid. Historically, the culture of street-food is not very old in Bengal. Before the late 19th century and that, too, in the context of Calcutta, there is no mention of street-food anywhere in old Bengali literature, though references to food and meals are plenty, the larger part of Bengali investment on body being mostly through food. This is understandable because in a society ruled by caste and intricate codes of purity and pollution connected with eating and touch, the very anonymity of street-food would be unthinkable. The first reference to street-food, 'telebhaja' and roasted grams along with chilli-chutney, appears in Kedarnath Dutta's *Sachitra Guljarnagar* (1871), one of the picturesque novels about the 'mysteries' of the big city.

It is the cultural image around the food, its exchange, rather than use-value in the symbolic economy, that is important. Eating these non-nutritious foods that break the code of diet and 'meal', entails the membership of a cultural group and confers on the eater a certain non-conformist identity. The signs of a certain 'civilizing process', of an 'education of desire', became visible in British Bengal at around the end of the 19th century. A good deal of the history of recent post-colonial intervention can be written through their use of the term 'culture'. Central to our interest here is a certain ramification in the Bengali palate implicated in Bankimchandra's idea of change in the food-habit that must come through proper 'anusilan'(practice). 'Katu' ('jhal' in colloquial Bengali) and 'amla'(sour) had stable but extreme positions in the spectrum of Bengali taste hierarchy. The former comes from chillies and peppers and the latter from tamarind and 'amra'(Hog plum), 'chalta'(Elephant apple) and other very sour fruits. Historic disavowal of these two tastes comes across clearly in an effort to expurgate these from the enlightened neo-Bengali 'haute cuisine'.

The narrative of the marginalization of chilli and tamarind in the construction of Bengali 'haute cuisine' in the late 19th-century remains to be documented. All the 'classic' recipe books in Bengali from Bipradas Mukhopadhyay's *Pak-pranali* (1987[1885–1902]) through Pragasundari Devi's *Amis O Niramis Ahar* (1900) to Baisnab

charan Basak's *Soukhin Pakpranali* (1916) make passing references to tamarind only in sections on 'amla' (where there are recipes of chutney and pickles), and chilli of course comes in as an inevitable ingredient, but such 'excesses' are not to be indulged in. This taboo around taste had much to do with disciplining youngsters, maturing and widowed women. Controlling the desire for the forbidden creates a sense of domination over the body. Thus, sensitizing a section of the society to avoid extreme tastes, ensured satisfying parental domination and in turn cultural control:

The chaste Bengali of Bankim became a flexible vehicle in his hands for communicating a wide range of ideas- pride in the past Hindu traditions in his historical novels; views and attitudes of the bhadralok on contemporary issues like love in marriage, the kulin system and position of widows in his social novels; opinions on Hinduism and Utilitarianism in his theoretical articles; and raillery at the expense of the Anglicized babus in his satirical pieces... The code of love as found in English romantic novels of the period, marked by a display of male gallantry and heroism, female subservience and the ultimate triumph of fidelity and domestic bliss, was presented in Bankim's novels in the framework of the traditional Brahminical value system. (Banerjee 1989, 179)

Gastronomic pleasures reached their heights by the end of nineteenth century, both because of the slowly in-

creasing number of hotels and restaurants and because of the new cookbooks that made it easier to enjoy 'exotic' cuisine at home. A central point of criticism was that the city had become a place of excess and greed. The expenditure on the feasts symbolized that excess in consumption. Hence, there was a sharp distinction between what was consumed at home and what was eaten in the public eateries. However, notions of the public and the private also needs to be problematized in this context. The cityscape no longer maintained the defined taboo of touch and taste. The private space of grihastha and the sacred kitchen space allowed contamination of street food. The popularity of cabin-culture and coffee houses in urban Calcutta served as a melting pot of regional and colonial cuisine and cultivated a section of enthusiastic young consumers eager to experiment with fusion cuisine. "Allen Kitchen", "Anandi Cabin", "Niranjan Agar", "Dilkhusha Cabin", "Basanta Cabin", "Favourite Cabin" are some of the pioneers of the cabin culture that sprouted in the evolving cityscape incorporating the black town into its fold of cosmopolitanism.

In the late colonial Bengal, the newly jeopardized family structure develops a taste for cookbooks and the genre in turn aestheticizes the actions performed in the professional and the domestic space, coinhabiting the liminality of class, caste, gender and the nostalgia around the Bengali cuisine. Existing Scholarship of nineteenth century colonial Bengal has often merged the notion of

‘grihastha’ and that of ‘bhadralok’. But a study of the kitchen and the domestic space inevitably demands for a clear understanding of these two categories. The urban middle class was busy educating itself to the vogue of Imperialism, self-fashioning into the newly found ‘Babu culture’, in embracing the idea of a ‘bhadralok’. The apparently homogenized idea of ‘bhadralok’ is rather stratified, and a strict cultural hierarchy is deliberately maintained to distinguish the lifestyle and social status of each stratum. Sumit Sarkar’s account on the ‘kerani’(clerk) in *Writing Social History* (1997) hints at the socio-economic differences within the category of ‘bhadralok’ and the ways in which such differences were maintained. In Bhabanicharan Bandhyopadhyay’s *Kalikata Kamalaya* (1823), the category of ‘bhadralok’ has been divided into three major divisions. The employees in the higher office were called ‘banias’ or ‘dewans’ who directly served the British administration. The next strata termed as - the ‘madyabitta’ or the moderately rich, the third were the poor but ‘bhadra’ group of people working as accountants or ‘sarkars’. In eastern India, racially discriminating administrative policies encouraged an exclusively British dominated economy till the outbreak of the First World War affecting the growth of Indian Enterprise. With the decline of Bengali entrepreneurship and the rise of a professional, elite middle-class we popularly term as the ‘bhadralok’; shifting their livelihood from ‘byabsa’ to ‘chakri’ as Tithi Bhattacharya observes:

“Writing in the earlier part of the century on the Faridapur District, J. C. Jack observes that ‘clerks, lawyers and government officers’ who work in the headquarter towns ‘very rarely bring their wives and still more rarely their children to the town to live with them’. This he concluded, was ‘partly due to the difficulties and expenses of conveyance’. It was thus a class of petty landowners, who came to the city under duress to become the white-collar worker or the much maligned ‘kerani’. While ownership of even a small holding in a village provided a degree of status, the city in all its impersonal homogeneity and pecuniary hardship robbed him of even that. A large literature of this period was thus devoted to positing a nostalgic green village where all was well, against a hard-concrete city where life was a treadmill of chakri and humiliating drudgery.” (Bhattacharya 2005, 57)

The human body posits ambiguous or even paradoxical role in modern civilization. It is at the same time the subject and the object, the raw material or the tool to be worked upon. It is the site where realization of corporeal presence and absence solidifies. Most importantly, it is the vessel of existence through which we exercise our sense of being into the world. The mysteries of the human body is not merely biological, physiological or even cultural. It occupies a significant role in being cerebral, negotiating the spatiotemporal, and the psycho-somatic aspect of a sensory and sensual existence. Focusing on

the ambivalence of body politics, we may realize the rhetorical complication in its representation. It is often objectified, at times animated and capitalized on. Thus, 'being' and 'having' a body are not similar expressions. The body is both the container and the contained in reaction to the 'inside' and the 'outside' of culture and society.

The human body is simultaneously corporeal and cultural; thus, sustaining the tangible frame of the human body necessitates consumption. The consuming body links the sense of 'self', body and the cultural together in a common topological scheme. It is the potential site of self -construction, integrating personal and the social. The topology of the body opens and closes in response to external stimuli, contextualizing the sensory experiences in a particular social order.

“The role of the different senses, or in topological terms, different sensory bodily openings conventionally categorized as the close or contact senses (touch, smell, taste) and the distant ones (sight, hearing) is by no means a biological constant. Sensory organization is, in a fundamental way, dependent on the cultural and social Order. The changes in the sensory organization are always, in one way or another, conditioned by the changes in the Order defined in general terms, from practices to discourses. (Falk 1997, 10)

The mouth is the central element in the act of consumption. Based on the relationship between sensory percep-

tion and the 'Order', traditional western philosophy hierarchize distant sense of sight as higher and that of touch, smell and taste as lower aesthetic experience. Eating builds up a relationship of the body with the outside world. Different sensory stimulus synchronizes in the act of eating; the process of assimilating food involves identification of consumable material through sight, appreciating the aroma of the food and finally tasting it. The mental and visual understanding of this process of consumption is largely influenced by culture. Thus, the human body as a cultural entity is in constant interaction with the 'outside', assimilating, absorbing and accommodating it, into the 'inside' of corporeal existence.

The Bengali identity formed through its culinary practice, displays an inclusive pool of food culture which accommodates food from the 'poly-colonial' influences of other cultures. The tabooed tastes are incorporated in the everyday pallet along with the age-old tradition of consuming otherwise forbidden food erasing borders of nation, class and cast essentially created a progressive cultural experience. The topology of taste extends a multicultural, ethnic, flexibility to the literature of Bengali food in turn sensitizing the consuming body .

Utsa Ray, in *Culinary Culture in Colonial India: A Cosmopolitan Platter and the Middle Class* (2015), writes that the changing patterns of consumption revolve around the issues of hybridity and authenticity. Both Indian and

British ingredients and modes of cooking were intelligently combined to create hybrid recipe. Parasuram or Rajsekhar Basu wittily highlights the impact of hybrid cuisine on the younger generation. In his short story, “Ratarati” mocks the eccentricity of fusion food through a child’s quest for “Murgir French malpoa”(Fried chicken pancake dunked in sugar syrup). The introduction of fusion food in the newly mushroomed eateries and fast-food joints inspired awe and admiration. With the gradual inclusion of traditionally ‘tabooed’ food into the everyday food habit of the ‘ghrihastha’ Bengali, the rigidity around the consumption of fowl or chicken and eggs melted away. The British tradition of eating roasted chicken contributed to the north Indian variety of “Butter Chicken” recipe, recycling the leftover pieces of roasted chicken cooked in a lightly spiced gravy to suit the English taste. A similar variety is also found in the “Dak-Bungalow”(Buildings accommodating British officials), version of cooking goat and chicken. Both the recipes were well received by the residents of the British officials. The English version of scotch egg was localized as “dim er devil”; the tradition of consuming fish and fretters contributed to the hybrid recipe of the famous fish-fry. Similarly, an Indian version of cooking Chinese cuisine emerged from the Chinese population settled in the area around Tangra or the old China Town, in Calcutta.

Traditional practices have always associated the consumption of meat with the lower section of the soci-

ety, indulged in scavenging and manual labour. The predominant Hindu tradition prohibited the consumption of a variety of meat and certain fishes. The 'grihastha' was barred from fish and meat consumption on specific lunar and solar cycles, allowing a scanty number of proteins in the traditional platter throughout the year. With the ushering in of cabin culture in the cityscape, consumption of experimental cuisine was normalized. Pubs and restaurants offering variety of alcohol, meat and fish sprung up. Experimental cuisine gained popularity in the food industry appeasing the affluent section of the society while, affordable street food sustained the majority of working-class population settled in slums with minimum or no provisions to build up a kitchen space. The taboo around street food still prevails, it is notorious among the wealthier section of the Bengali elite and the middle-class. The food industry has conveniently created and maintained a hierarchy in the practice of 'eating out'. The glamorous fine dining or 'take away' is marketed as desirable and hygienic while street food is scorned upon. The pandemic situation and the popularity of apps like Swiggy and Zomato have further consolidated such hierarchies.

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