

# Authenticity v/s Glocalization as Represented in the Digital Platforms: A Study on the Food Culture with Special Reference to Tripura

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## Abstract

Food habit articulates the local culture of a region. Tripura, a land-locked state of varied communities (the tribes and Bengalis of the soil) negotiates the countercultural exchange of cuisines. Traditional ethnic foods are markers of shared cultural values and identity. Preparation of traditional food involves the role of memory which involves passing down culinary skills, techniques, and ingredients from one generation to the next. The marketing industry and the restaurant culture have changed the taste of the consumers but again the 'losses' and the 'need' to preserve the traditional cuisines are archived in digital platforms. With the rise in YouTube food channels, Facebook pages, food delivery companies like Swiggy and Zomato; the local food met with the global consumer culture. On one hand, lost ethnic food habits are preserved by documenting the procedures of cooking traditional dishes. On the other, restaurants and bloggers are experimenting to prepare local food using global spices and techniques, resulting in a hybridized food identified by their hybridized name. This paper shall focus on how a new taste for food has developed in Tripura with the rise in digital participatory culture. The focus shall also be on the marketing signs and signifiers used in digital platforms to attract digital food readership. As e-readers, a survey of digital menu cards shall try to identify how the local food has evolved as glocalized cuisines.

**Keywords:** Local, Global, Glocal, Hybrid, Food, Tripura, Bengalis, Tribes, Cuisine, Authentic, Digital, Culture.

## Introduction

“Then I see the birds of the jungle  
leaving their nest and pecking for food grains,  
And men and women, poor and destitute  
moving out in search of a living.”  
-Dawn at Hokutwisa, Sachlang Tripura.

Tripura, a landlocked-hilly state, one of the seven sisters of Northeast India, surrounded by Bangladesh by three sides, making her a bottle-necked state has a

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moderate but humid climate. Tripura is the homeland of different tribes who are original inhabitants and migrants to the state. The traditional food habits amongst the tribal and non-tribal populace differ from each community to the community. People had a culture of self-sufficiency farming. Farming was done where farmers grew agricultural products necessary to feed their family. People here had the tradition of practicing jhum cultivation, a shifting agricultural practice where a tract of virgin land is burnt for cultivation and then abandoned to allow the regain of its nutrients in the soil. The farmers (men and women) would carry 'langa', cooked sticky rice wrapped in a banana leaf for their mid-day meal. In the afternoon, they would catch fish, crabs or shrimps, to prepare 'godok'<sup>i</sup> and enjoy their sumptuous lunch (Murasingh, 2011, 276-284). The sustainable families had a range of miniature crops, animal farms and wild vegetation that was sufficient to feed their family. The knowledge of the ethnic traditional food is not only dependent on the availability of local, natural resources and ingredients. It is also dependent on family recipes which have been prepared through trial and error method. The ethnic food occupations consist of high nutritional value. These cuisines are prepared based on occasions, festivals, socio-cultural rituals, seasons, health, etc. and sometimes there are protocols of eating food. The culture of a community gets reflected a great extent by the food habits which articulate the local culture of the region. Local cuisine is prepared by ingredients, spices available in a particular location or region, known to the families and the community. Regional food preserves the traditional ethnic culture that are markers of shared cultural values and identity passed down from one generation to the other. The preparation of ethnic food involves the role of memory which is passed down from one generation to the other.

### **Food as a Material Culture**

Material culture plays a crucial role in the formation of human civilization. Food and clothing is one such material which forms the identity of a community. Study on food material culture looks into the community's (tribes and non-tribes) procedure of cooking, preparing artefacts in which food are cooked, the community based occasional and celebration patterns, etc. The beginning of human civilization made early men eat raw fruits, leaves and vegetables. With the development of human civilization, the concept of cooking helped human beings learn different techniques of cooking, methods of preserving food and also men invented utensils where they prepared their dishes. The different geographic location had variety climate and varied availability of food which made local diets unique and specific from each community. The preparation of food included- a selection of ingredients, techniques of preparation (grinding, chopping, smashing, etc.), nutritional value, the ethnic or community taboos and belief system. This contributes to the material culture of food tradition specific to every community's cultural behavior. These indigenous ingredients are collected by womenfolk; children which help them conserve the ethnic recipes. The women folk generally take the girls to the forest to teach them the techniques of recognizing, and collecting the ingredients of the indigenous food materials used for the preparation of dishes. These ingredients are

sometimes even planted in their kitchen garden which helps the community to develop their own ethno-botanical resources. Sir John Rankine Goody or Jack Goody in his book *A Study in Comparative Sociology* (1982) suggested five main processes through which food is provided and transformed within communities. They are- production, distribution, preparation, consumption and disposal. Interestingly, these five processes are methods used by the contemporary food industry to encode marketing signs for consumers. This paper shall focus on the digital signs and signifiers used by the food industry.

The food heritage of a community constructs the notion of traditional beliefs, rituals, practices, ideologies which are integral to that group. This paper will try to understand how studies on food culture reveal the changing food style and habits across time and space. The dietary custom shall reveal how the human diet has evolved due to the impact of global culture over the local culture. Consumption of food was a family or community practice but in the contemporary era, the ideology behind the consumption of food is constructed by the marketing and food industry. These local food identities of a community are getting transferred into a global identity or towards a glocal identity. Due to globalization and modernization, traditional food habits and culture are getting eroded which is affecting the cultural identity of communities like Tripura. For instance, the new generation has adopted the westernized culture thus adopting modern agriculture methods, change in cropping pattern, usage of processed food, etc. These have changed the social-cultural and traditional agricultural practices that resulted in the loss of the available ethnic fruits and vegetables; techniques used in ethnic food consumption pattern. This paper will try to analyze how the traditional ethnic methods of preparing food are documented.

### **Traditional values of Tripura cuisine**

Fermented fish products or dry fish (like shidol, nuna ilish, loitta shutki, tengra sutki<sup>ii</sup>, etc.) is a part of the daily diet. It is believed that consumption of dry fish prevents fatal disease like malaria.

The chemical constituents of raw substrates of plant or animal sources convert by microbes during food fermentation and enhance the nutritional value, improve the flavour and texture, antioxidant and antimicrobial compounds and stimulate the probiotic function. (Uchoi et al., p.440)

Thus, besides nutritional value, the traditional cuisine of Tripura processes medicinal value too. There are many other food resources which are ethnic and traditional food items for the bengalis and the tribes of Tripura. Various parts of bamboo are prepared through raw, boiled, or fermented procedures. It is believed to improve digestion, cardiovascular diseases, and cancer. Raw, boiled, pasted, fermented elephant foot yam is

consumed and is believed to help one from cough, bronchitis, anemia, etc. Even raw seeds, flowers, vegetables and fruits are used in the traditional dishes which adds not only taste, aroma but also has medicinal values. Northeast is also popular for the traditional fermented alcoholic drink which is preserved from rice. The rice beer has social-ritualistic practices in every community. Rice beer in Tripura is known as 'langi' or 'gora', 'chauhan', 'bangla' etc. The preparation of these food items is passed down from one generation to the other and requires practice. This requires the role of memory which helps to preserve the recipe within the family or within the community which institutionalizes collective experiences that serves as a cultural marker of status, taste and cultivation. In the poem *Pot of Liquor* written by Shefali Debbarma, she says that her husband likes strong liquor, so early in the morning; she has placed the “liquor pot on fire” and adds-

In the traps of the three layered bamboo frame,  
just above the oven meat is being smoked  
with the pot of rice and vegetables in between and  
country liquor on the topmost layer  
While repeatedly changing the water of the liquor pot,  
The cool water pitcher becomes empty (Gupta, 2017, p.121)

Thus, this needs knowledge, patience and the method of preparation needs to be traditionally acquired and practiced.

The importance of the traditional dishes is documented in the poetries of Tripura poets. Sachlang Tripura writes in his poem *Love notes to the moon* that while he is hungry for food and to write poems, he is-

.....‘In moments of intense hunger  
the moon transforms into mushrooms.  
A few green chilies, a bit of shidal,  
stuffed into a bamboo chong,  
with a pinch a salt  
and a banana leaf full full of rice;  
I would perceive  
when my hunger would be satiated’ (Gupta, 2017, p.99).

The poem reflects upon the simplicity and authenticity of the Tripuri dishes. Sunil Debbarma in the poem *Do not call anymore*, while claiming to take a break from work claims:

The southern wind

couriers the burnt joom's fragrance.  
Marks of previous years crisscrossing footsteps  
On the abandoned joom  
had not been smudged off till then.  
Reminiscing of green bamboo shoots, wild potatoes  
And godak of gantha leaves-  
the bamboo chong stands lonely in the tong ghar's nook. (Gupta, 2017, p.136).

Through the poem, the readers come to know the ecocritical relationship possessed between the people of Tripura and Mother Nature. While getting emotional for his father whom the poet Nanda Debbarma has not seen for a long time, he recalls his father's memories through agricultural land-

He used to play the ektara,  
gourd from the field, bamboo from plantation, thread string  
used to compose lyrics and sing his own tunes,  
Dahatatva, Goshtho, Krishnaleela (Gupta, 2017, p.46).

### **Preservation and loss of traditional food after partition**

After the partition, many people got displaced from their homeland owing to the procedure of making traditional food only through memory. It is true that after getting uprooted from their homeland, through memory associated with the preparation of traditional food, the first generation has preserved their recipes. Even the first generation always claimed that their lost food had superlative size and shape- "a place where water was sweeter, vegetables greener, and milk purer." (Nandy, 2004, p.17). He adds-

As the contemporary word pushes more and more cultures into extinction, talking incessantly of multiculturalism and democratic tolerance, ethnic cuisine becomes more and more like a museum or a stage on which a culture writes its name or sighs an attendance register, declaring its survival for the sake of appeasing our moral conscience. (Nandy, 2004, p.18).

### **Mobility and change in food habits**

Change in modes of identity and change of cultural values happen even due to place, mobility and feeling of belongingness. After a change of place, every aspect of livelihood meets with the construction of a new identity. A new place disrupts the old forms of food preparation resulting in new techniques of food preparation and consumption. (Chapter V: Globalization and Foods Impact on Mising Food Culture, p.159-160). Tripura is a hilly land which was recognized as Chakla Roshanabad in the pre-

partition era (before 1947). The pre-partition Tipperah<sup>iii</sup> land included four districts of present Bangladesh- parts of Noakhali, Comilla, Sylhet, and Chittagong. In this land different communities migrated from different parts of the world- the Mogs, Chakmas, Halamas, Garos and Khasis, Mundas, Bhils, Uchois, etc. have pre-partition (before 1947) migration history. The migrated community if they have to move from their homeland needs to adopt a new culinary culture in the hostland. They try to retain the flavors and tastes- the source of the community's pride. On the contrary, the Bengalis who were part of the Chakla Roshanabad before the annexation of India lost a huge portion of their home and land after the Radcliff line was declared. The age-long brotherhood between the tribals and the Bengalis as documented in *Rajmala*<sup>iv</sup>, got disrupted. The districts which belonged to Tipperah, after partition, belonged to East Pakistan (present Bangladesh). This initiated mass mobility among the Bengalis. They felt an urgent need to belong to the state which is their homeland, but as they shifted from one place to another, they were labeled migrants inside their own land (Tipperah). Redrawing of the national boundaries was a political necessity but in redrawing of ethnic boundaries and a new hybrid culture evolved. The new place brought changes in their lifestyle. With the change of geographic location, availability of ingredients also started to change, bringing in change in the authenticity of their food culture. Creating cultural stability of the lost homeland takes unmeasurable time after the change of geography because establishing the authentic food habits in the new land becomes challenging. This results in a change of authentic food production. The next generation finds it more difficult to adopt the authentic pattern of food consumption (Chapter V: Globalization and Foods Impact on Mising Food Culture, p.160-161). This breaks the chain of tradition and the new generation accepts either a new collective mode of authentic food habit; tries to learn the techniques of preparing the authentic dishes; or they prepare hybridized dishes connecting the old culture with the adopted new culture. Here, the question on the authenticity of the dish is also symbolic until and unless the 'claimed authentic' dish is documented. Because with the change of time, there comes a generation gap and the authenticity of dishes cannot be verified, if the succeeding generations stop the practice of the traditional dishes. Thus the concept of the authenticity of the food is a socially constructed idea (based on geography, ingredients, the processes of making dishes, etc.). A homogenous concept on the authenticity of the food is difficult to establish. Heldke (2005) claims that authenticity of the food is sentimental as the taste of the food involve a "cognitive activity involving memory, experience, emotion, etc." (Liu, 2019, p.37). However, the inauthenticity of food usually has "two meanings- compromises made with recipes to cope with the unavailability or paucity of ingredients. Such a concept of authenticity presumes the existence of boundaries that are difficult to associate with Indian food". (Nandy, 2004, p.11).

In a multi-cultural and multi-lingual state like Tripura acceptance of a common food identity which will represent the state is traditionally not possible. Obscuring the changes of time people

.....are experiencing external pressures on their culture and tradition, including the threat of losing their food culture heritage or identity. In these gastronomic interactions, a region's heritage foods form a valuable 'blueprint' of its people, whereby food represents not only the physical need but also local culture and custom. (Ramli et al., 2017, p.32).

However may be the "external pressures" (hostland's pressure) act as a threat on the migrant's cultural heritage (including food), as in reality, the diasporic people try to attach to their roots and the

"culinary and dietary border crossing does often happen at the level of personal and idiosyncratic choice and predilection, which may or may not be conditioned by either spatial removal from one's homeland spatio-temporal location and/or situation during once formative years. Furthermore, such individual cosmopolitanism as of dietary-culinary taste may also be a result of deeply ingrained and schooled appropriations of ideational and aspirational norms in terms of lifestyle and food-habits" (Chakrabarti, 306-307).

The diasporic people have to adapt to the cultural changes psychologically, emotionally, and geographically to avoid the "external pressures" which act as a threat.

## **Glocalization**

For Appadurai, the culture associated with locality is a "complex phenomenological quality" that is "relational and contextual" rather than being "scalar or spatial" (1996). The identity of local space is under a constant state of flux. Earlier, a group of people living in a community had shared cultural homogeneity. With the gradual change of time, with globalization's impact on local culture, the concept of local identity has been changing. The local culture became heterogeneous; on the other hand, there was a cultural homogenization with global coordination. It is at the crux of this stage where the multilingual societies adopt the homogenized cultural signifiers that are referred to as global culture. (Chapter V: Globalization and Foods Impact on Mising Food Culture, p.161-163). As already stated, in Tripura, a land of the multilingual ethnic group already has countercultural sharing of values resulting in the hybridization of culture.

"In contemporary cultural landscape culture influences is blended and layered upon one another. Hybridity is not a single idea rather it comprises of multiple ideas, concepts and themes. As a universal description of culture hybridity is sometimes varied and contradictory in nature. Hybridity is called through several registers such as historical, economic, rhetorical, and existential when fragments of discourse or data are cobbled together." (Chapter V: Globalization and Foods Impact on Mising Food Culture, p.164)

## Global, Local & Glocalized Culture

The term glocalization was derived from the Japanese word “dochakuka” which means interference of the global with the local culture. This was published in the late 1980s in an article in a Harvard Business Review article. Robertson has used the term “glocalization” in *Glocalization: Time- Space and Homogeneity- Heterogeneity* (1995). Globalization tends towards an international brand awareness of product, technology and information where the market economy and consumers are converged towards a capital income. Localization tends to promote the local culture, ethnicity and language to retain the traditional ethnic cultural markers of a community. Glocalization is the integration of the global market with the local market which is also a strategic convergence towards capital income. Global corporate brands like McDonald's, Pizza Hut, Lays etc. have introduced much local food in India. In India McDonald's have introduced Maharaja Mac, Veggie McNuggets; Lays have flavored chips like Indian Magic Masala, Cheddar Jalapeno, Lemon flavored, etc.

The local culture is always located within defined boundaries which get disorganized with the interference of the global culture which introduces the local people with a capitalist mindset, thus dissolving the local institutional shared consumption culture. Online shopping culture has changed the local consumption trends. Delivery at doorstep, customizable products, and preferences of choice have made local products a commodifiable object. (Chapter V: Globalization and Foods Impact on Mising Food Culture, p.156-158). This initiates food industry to introduce dhosa flavoured pizza to enter the Indian market besides providing customizable Indian toppings of varied masala (spices). This kind of experimentation is done in *Taj-an exclusive vegetarian restaurant*. Many other hybridised experiments have been made by the restaurants in Agartala. A popular hybridized cuisine- 'bamboo biryani' is served in *Curlies* and *The New Ashoka Restaurant*. *Pork Hut* has experimented pork with lime and the name of the dish is 'pork hut special lime pork'. *Hotel Woodland Park* has experimented 'bhetki sorsey', though the cuisine is a common dish among the Bengalis but the dish is not easily available in Tripura restaurants. *Barbie Food Stall* experimented with 'palak pork'. The Fat Chicken experimented with Indo-Western and Chinese platter namely 'grill chicken platter'. It contains three pieces of grilled chicken prepared in Middle East style; three pieces of Afghani gravy; three pieces of chicken periperi which is a Chinese dish and three pieces of satay chicken which is a continental dish served with corridor rice. The restaurant also keeps experimenting with its presentation of food. In figure 1, the same dish 'grill chicken platter' is served in three different styles. Thus customers keep getting a new touch even if they order the same item.



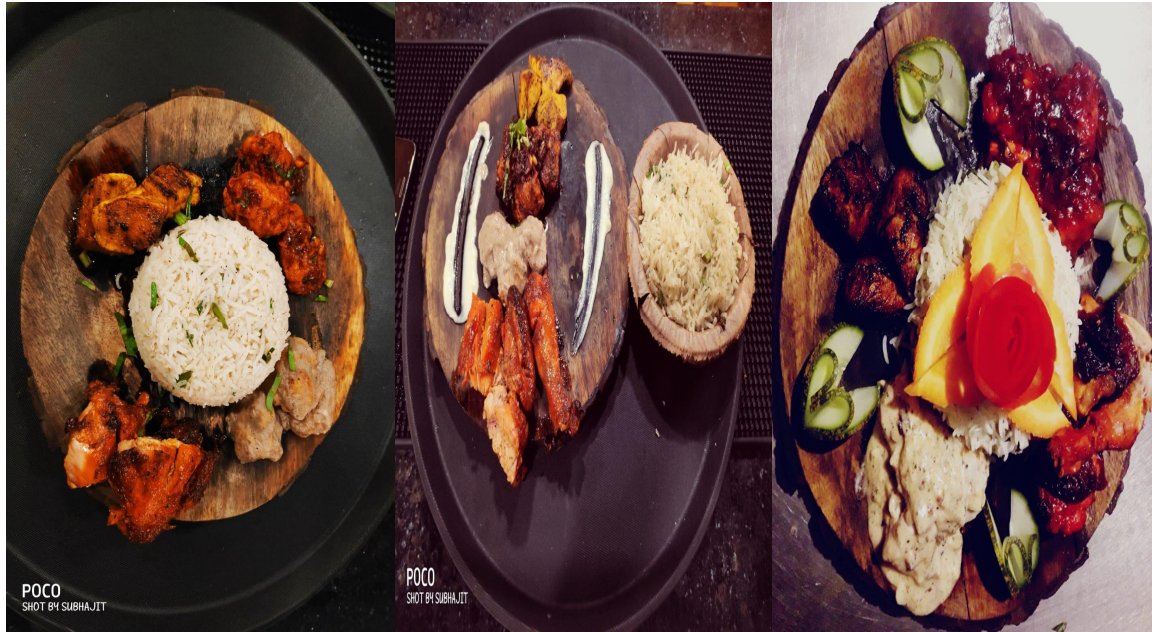


Figure 1: 'Grill Chicken Platter' of *The Fat Chicken* restaurant served in three different styles.

### Indianized Chinese food culture

Observing the adaptation and fusion of Chinese food with Indian styles which have

“emerged from Old Chinese settlements outside China and they have acquired distinctive nuances, thanks to exposure to local cuisines, food habits, availability of some ingredients and unavailability of others. It carries a detectable touch of its Bengali ambience. Thousands of miles away from mainland China, the Chinese in Calcutta had to improvise in the matter of ingredients and, when they opened restaurants, they had to adapt to local taste...The first kind of elaboration, due to the unavailability of some ingredients and the incorporation of local, easily available, vegetables, meats, fishes and spices, obviously should have only legitimacy, but also a certain fascination. It should give the Indian Chinese cuisine a special appeal. (Nandy, 2004, p.16).

Thus, it is a misconception that the Chinese cuisines offered in the menu cards of restaurants are authentic Chinese food. In fact, the Chinese cuisines in India met with Indian fusion due to non-availability of Chinese ingredients. As claimed by Nandy (2004) and Liu (2019), Chinese food in India came in through the people of China who settled or came in India for studying or for business purpose. As observed by John W. Berry, diasporic people either assimilate completely with the host land, thus losing their identity; they construct an amalgamated identity, thus adopting to hybrid food habits; or

they can completely deject themselves from the hostland resulting in preservation of their rooted culture, but this group then undergoes deculturation from the land they live in (Liu, 2019, p.16-17).

Visser (1999) also observes that the food choices of an individual are generally oriented by powerful marketing agencies (Liu, 2019, p.17) which in the contemporary scenario are dominated by the online food industry either through apps, Facebook or YouTube. Indo-Chinese cuisines like- 'pork hakka noodles', 'schezwan chili pork', 'pork chili Manchurian gravy', etc. are served in many restaurants in Tripura like *Heritage, Hungrilla, Momos and More*, etc. In the contemporary period, the Chinese food offered in various parts of India has undergone commodified hybridization of Chinese cuisines. The signifier 'Chinese cuisine' may have no connection with the authentic Chinese way of preparing a dish resulting in the dissolution of Chinese culinary identity in Indian gastronomical space. This is a process of acculturation where authentic Chinese dishes have undergone both assimilation and deculturation within the consumption pattern of consumers. S.C.H. Cheung & D.Y.H. Wu (2004) observes that food behaviors passed down through generations are "signs of membership to the cultural group" as it is a "representation of ethnic ties." (Liu, 2019, 20).

### **Creolization**

Creolization is a term which emerged from linguistics. Wikipedia claims that "now scholars in other social sciences use the term to describe new cultural expressions brought about by contact between societies and relocated peoples".

Further adds-

Sociologist Robin Cohen rights that creolization occurs when "participants select particular elements from incoming or inherited cultures, and endow these with meanings different from those they possessed in the original cultures, and then creatively merge these to create a new varieties that supersede the prior forms." (Wikipedia)

Thus, creolization is an interdisciplinary term used in contemporary times to indicate the invention of new cultural practices which emerged out of countercultural interaction between dominant and sub-dominant culture. In Tripura, cultural hybridity is a common phenomenon as different community's values and customs are transferred from one to the other which gets reflected even in the food habits. With the coming of globalized restaurant culture, Tripura's food culture is adopting hybridized cuisine in the digital era. This allows the tradition of the past to be transformed, welcoming cultural hybridity.

### **Digital archiving of traditional Tripuri dishes**

A Facebook and YouTube blogger, Aditya Kumar Debnath uses a typical Bangla dialectical language to communicate with his viewers and followers. He prepares traditional dishes using organic ingredients available in the backyard of his and his neighbors' kitchen garden but very recently he is experimenting with fusional dishes too. While cooking he often narrates stories of his neighbors, friends and family members to keep the audience entertained and engaged. Traditional dishes like 'singh macher kach kolar torkari', a curry of fried raw banana made with a fish named singh are prepared and uploaded. Recently, he started preparing two to three dishes in one single video, using the same ingredients. Generally, one dish is traditional and other dishes are fusional and experimental dishes. In one of the dishes prepared with raw banana, he uses the raw banana skin. Another dish he prepared with 'sutki' (dry fish) and banana skin, by smashing them together rather than cooking on fire. So, basically with the raw banana he prepared-(1) a traditional Bengali cuisine, (2) a fusional experimented dish, and, (3) a 'godok'-style cuisine. He also prepared dishes using 'chalta' (*dillenia indica* or elephant apple) with chicken, 'guramach' (small, tiny fishes) and 'sutki' (dry fish). Another ingredient known as 'chora' in Bengali or elephant yam is used by him to prepare dish with chicken, 'nuna ilish sutki' (dry Hilsa fish) and a veg curry of 'chora'. He uploads videos both in YouTube and Facebook where the viewers will find him using 'poto' (pointed gourd), 'begun' (brinjal), 'bishkochu' (colocasia), 'chalkumra' (white gourd), etc. to prepare his homemade food cuisine.

The land of Tripura is known for its bamboo products and the people of the land uses the various parts of bamboo in their dishes too. With bamboo parts, Aditya made several dishes like- 'bash kuruler pochatok' (fermented bamboo shoot curry, bamboo shoot prepared with 'nuna ilish', the internodes of the bamboo is also used to prepare the stuffed boiled curry. He prepared varied experimental hybridized dishes. One such dish is prepared using ingredients like- rice, potato, paneer, boiled button mushroom, raw jackfruit mixed with spices and oil; stuffed within internodes of bamboo and burnt it for more than thirty minutes. Thus, the third generation Bangal blogger is yet retaining the culture of his ancestral lost land. At the same time, he prepares dishes which are hybridized in nature using local ingredients and procedures that reflect that he has adopted the new culture from the new replaced land which is his birthplace. He even tries dishes like 'handi biryani', 'chicken kosha', 'chicken momo'; thus, ensuring his participatory culture as a part of the digital blogging world. Tripura, his birthplace made him adopt dietary acculturation and hybridization which gets reflected through his blogs. His preparation of cuisines has a localized authenticity- an authenticity which is rooted in the Bangal culture and Tripuri culture but at the same point of time, he has a contemporary trend of fusion and experimentation. Though hybridized in nature, still his dishes belong to an in-between space of authenticity (if considered from the traditional local perspective) and inauthentic (if considered from an outsider's perspective, here

outsider is a non tribal, that is, Bangal). He typically uses local ingredients and prepares hybridized dishes where culinary boundaries are blurred.

Identity is coded as a representational device to connect an individual to the roots, sometimes resulting in hybridization. Being a third-generation Tripura Bangal, representing the regional dialectical identity in digital platforms is both- paradoxical as well as a marker of a lost identity. Paradoxical because the dialect has changed with the change of space and the pre-partition (before 1947, Chakla Roshanabad) district has no existence in the 21st century Tripura map. But the people who got dislocated from the region still carries the regional culture which is passed down from one generation to another. Hence they may get dislocated from their geographic space but they try to relocate their rooted homeland identity. This enables him to create a cyber-ethnographic space where the viewers develop a sense of belongingness with their lost homeland through digital platforms. This develops a cyber narrative space for the third generation Bengali food blogger. Soo Hee Lee observes that the interaction between the followers and food bloggers enhances a process of cross fertilization where content is discussed, links promoted to other sites resulting in popularity. Creolized tribal dishes are also experimented by some restaurants in Agartala. *Cilantro* prepares 'pork sambal' which contains dry prawns along with pork. *The Framandi* prepares 'pork rib barbeque' and in the description, it is written: "made in classic American style". Though the description claims a globalised marketing term but pork ribs are locally used in the region to prepare dishes either in form of curry or burnt (which is termed as barbeque).

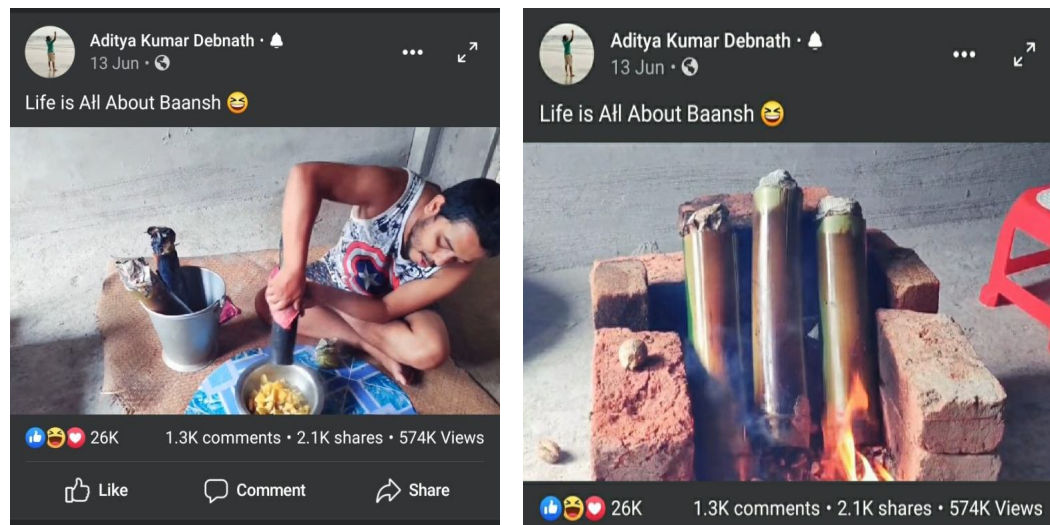


Figure 2: The Agartala blogger Aditya Kumar Debnath making dishes using the internodes of bamboo.

## Online Food Delivery Services

An emerging trend in the food and beverage industry in Tripura is online food delivery (OFD) services. OFD is a chain marketing business where the food from local restaurants is delivered to the customers' doorstep with the help of systematized and computerized web page or app. In 1994, the first online food ordering company named *Pizza Hut* was established. Before a big brand like *Swiggy* and *Zomato* took up the market in Agartala, *Foodielal* had food delivery service through telephonic orders. OFD services have changed the urban Agartala's consumer culture and behavior pattern. The market industry is aware of the behavioral intention of the customer's perception. Thus, the apps/ the websites/ the webpages are designed to create signs and signifiers which have a coded language for the consumers. The language of the online marketing industry is towards a group of target audience whose purchase behavior is predictable and this and this helps the web-developers to generate signs. These signs give a perception to the customers that online services are customer-friendly. Research on the rapid growth of online food ordering found that people find limited time to prepare food or even to go to a restaurant. This is one of the primary reasons why online food delivery services emerged as a business model (Lau Teck Chai & et al., p.63). With the online ordering of food, customer can track the presentation time, pick-up time of the food by the services boy and can also track the time and location of the delivery service boys. Other reasons being-wide variety and choice of food on a single click initiates the customers to order online food. The idea of eating a particular food requires pre-planning, collection of ingredients, preparation time and then can be consumed. With online food delivery system larger choices of healthier/ non-healthier, "better food but a surfeit of non-nutritive, expensive, often seductive, cleverly marketed food that has created a scarcity of food that one can eat and enjoy without pre-planning or thinking" (Nandy, 2004, p.1) has made cooking and eating seem effortless.

## Hybridity

In Tripura, practicing one particular culture is a utopia since it is a land of varied tribes and non-tribes living together since the pre-partition era. There are "many aspects of language particularly the terms related to the popular culture and picked up from the markets which are important elements of the hybrid nature" and many "words related to new commodities and trends and thus enter language as loan word" (Chapter V: Globalization and Foods Impact on Mising Food Culture, p.165). During the time, when Tipperah dwellers practised jhum cultivation, the ways, the techniques and instruments used are considered to have been time-consuming. Jhumias<sup>v</sup> used bamboo baskets, dao, kanchi<sup>vi</sup>, etc. Later, the Manikya king made the jhumias learn wet cultivation which was ecologically friendly. During this phase, the eating habits of the common people were simple- oil-free and boiled food. The traditional dishes like 'goduk', 'wahan mosdeng', etc. when served in the restaurant change the authenticity of food heritage/the methods of preparation, serving, plating, eating decorum changes. With these adoptions of a new culture, dissolution of ethnic authentic food culture is changing drastically.

These developments have induced subtle changes in the cultural status and meanings of Indian cuisines, taking place mostly outside the range of vision of nutritionists, ethnographers and columnists writing on food or restaurants. Few seem aware that the traditional concerns of ethnography of food- the cooked and the raw, the pure and the polluted, commensality and its absence, the sanctified and the profane- have merged now with a new, more fluid politics of food in countries like India. (Nandy, 2004, p.10).

In India, as remarked by Ashis Nandy “politics of ‘authenticity’ ” within dominant and ethnic communities will always exist as,

.....most Indians consider, the less familiar territory of Indianness as a form of ethnicity that is being re-imported from the diaspora into India to reshape many domains of life, including the cultures of food within the country (Nandy, 2004, p.10).

While discussing “political authenticity”, Nandy throws light on how politics of inclusion and exclusion is developing in the study of food discourse. South- Indians’ pride is claimed to have similarity with ‘cuisine rice balls’, ‘jalebi’ seems to have come from Persia, besides, dishes like ‘pulao’ and ‘biryani’ also has roots to a foreign culture. Thus to identify dishes to be authentic or inauthentic is historically difficult to justify.

### **Street foods of Agartala, Tripura**

Street foods are primarily fast foods sold in small shops. Ashis Nandy comments on the emergence of 19th century fast food industry during the colonial period where those who "commuted long distances from home to work", were identified as "the 'daily passengers' "(Nandy, 2004, p.12) adopted the culture of eating fast food from the streets. He further adds,

One part of the menu or which the restaurants thrived were, at least in name, English or French: cutlet, patties, chops, omlettes, and so on. These, of course, had little to do with their namesakes in the west, in looks, smell and taste. (Nandy, 2004, 12).

In this group of street food from North are ‘samosas’, ‘parathas’ and ‘puri’<sup>vii</sup>; from South are ‘dhosas’, ‘vada’, ‘uttappam’; from West are ‘dhoklas’; and all these gave “new concept of ‘tiffin’, an earlier version of what today might be called snacks” (Nandy, 2004, p.12). Some age-old generational street food centers are serving the same items for many years. Few have adopted the market trends, whereas few serve food in the same old traditional manner. Open local restaurants in Battala, Agartala serves yellow rice with chicken curry and salad which is popularly known as 'battala biryani' but the aroma and taste are nostalgic and this dish carries the authenticity of its own kind, specific to the local geographic location. This biryani is not a canonical biryani but the localised 'battala biryani' carries its own identity where many restaurants in the same locality serve this item. In Post Office Chowmuhani, Agartala, 'Montu-r biryani', is served in thela<sup>viii</sup> and is



very popular since the last two generations. The second generation now provides a variety of choices between rice- polao and yellow fried rice; curry of- mutton, chicken and duck. Another fast food center is famously known as *Kashar-pattir-chop-er-dukan* also sells fast food for two generations. The first generation owner began with only fried chops<sup>ix</sup> served with kasundi<sup>x</sup>. Now the second-generation owner sells various chops stuffed with-chicken, mutton, prawns, egg, vegetables, etc. Another old destination for chop is Laxmi bakery which has its own identity and is different from other chops of Agartala.

The thela culture of selling Chinese food and momos is quite famous in Agartala. Though they serve 'noodles', 'chowmein', 'maggi', etc., the cuisines have an improvisation in a matter of ingredients which has a touch of Bengali spices. Along with these items they also serve 'chop', 'puri-sabji', 'patties', 'fish fingers'<sup>xi</sup>, etc. In the lanes of Shakuntala road, Hariganga Basak road, Melarmath, these small open restaurant-cum-thelas serve these quite popular cuisines. This popular food “is influenced not merely by the political interplay of cuisines and mutating tastes but also by less institutionalized roles for food that collective experiences in contemporary times have created” (Nandy, 2004, p.17). The popularity of dishes results in “cultural markers of status, taste, and cultivation” which “begins to mirror new constituents of self-definition” (Nandy, 2004, p.17). The other old famous street food is found in Gurkhabasti where shops are aligned one after another to serve 'momos' and 'thupkas'. There is a Nepali colony nearby and the business of the momos centers is run by these families which still retain the authenticity of the steamed traditional momos. Though, now-a-days fried momos are also served that adds variety for the customers. Now even different types of momos are experimented by restaurants. Momos have the option of chicken or pork stuffing. Some hybridized name of momos found in the restaurant *Lets Dimsum* is- 'classic chicken steamed momo', 'cheesy chicken steamed momo', 'classic chicken crunchy fried momo', 'garlic Chicken crunchy fried momo', etc.

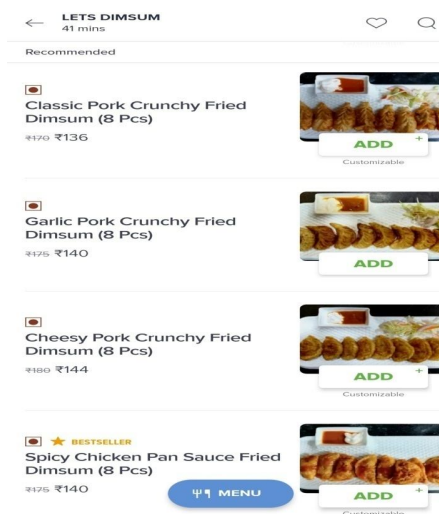


Figure 3: Hybridized momos in the Swiggy page of the restaurant *Lets Dimsum*

Now-a-days, mushroom street food centers have emerged which has flavors from all over India. *Bobby Punjab da Dhaba* serves 'paratha'<sup>xii</sup>, 'rajma-rice'<sup>xiii</sup>, lassi, etc. The South Indian street food serves 'dhosas', 'idlis' and 'vadas'<sup>xiv</sup> but with a Bengali touch. Like the 'sambar' instead of having South Indian spices is made of Bengali spices. With 'idli', 'schezwan sauce' or 'tomato curry' is served, etc. Thus, the original or authentic dish is given a hybridized touch to address the taste of the local customer's cosmopolitan taste buds. Still the market demand, popularity and,

...easy co-existence of the street-corner versions of these cuisines heights and important issue germane to the upper reaches of restaurant culture: the legitimacy of ethnic food that blatantly bears an imprint of the local. There seems to be two kinds of adaptation involved here, one produced by enterprising restaurateurs from the receiving community, the other by the expatriate ethnics involved in food business themselves. (Nandy, 2004, p.16).

Another emerging trend in the street of Agartala is juice centers which sell 'ganne ki juice'<sup>xv</sup>, 'pudine ki juice'<sup>xvi</sup>, etc. Even local ice-cream centre which offers customizable ice-scoops are also found. Tea stalls are found in almost every main road in Agartala, but *Babuana* tea stall has taken a remarkable market place in the heart of the city. With no place to sit, still, groups of boys and girls are found enjoying the special tea. The tea is served in an earthen pot with 'amul butter' and 'amul cream' which adds to the flavor of the tea. Recently some variety of snacks has also been made available. *Babuana* now has a variety of customizable tea- 'plain tea', 'special tea with butter-malai', 'kesar tea', etc. Even snacks like sandwiches stuffed with customizable cheese, chicken, and egg are also available. The street food culture shows not only the influence of global culture on the local culture but also reflects upon the fact that the family culture is also changing. Earlier, people preferred taking evening snacks with family at home rather than moving out. Indian adda<sup>xvii</sup>-culture also reflects upon the changing nature of food habits adopted by the present generation.

### Food and Traditional Space

The preparation of ethnic food includes practice and experience of handing down the cultural codes of belief, customs, and methods from one generation to another which is a tradition of a family, community or a race. "Maintenance of the ritual purity in the domestic space was the responsibility of the women" (Chapter V: Gendering Food and Cuisine, p.150). When these ritualistic practices are passed on from one generation to the other, there used to be the relocation of power- the old generation getting replaced by the new generation. However, it cannot be stated that rituals related to food culture are looked after only by the women because in tribal societies, the preparation of rice beer is done by menfolk also and the traditions are preserved by them.



The rich cultural value creates a sense of ‘belongingness’ and helps to enhance people’s pride that in turn would lead their willingness to conserve and preserve their cultural food heritage. (Ramil et al., 2017, p.33).

To name some traditional dishes from Tripura are- ‘goduk’ (boiled and smashed item prepared with dry fish), ‘wahan mosdeng’ (pork bharta), ‘tohan mosdeng’ (chicken bharta), ‘mosdeng serma’ (tomato chutney prepared with berma, red chili, garlic,etc.), ‘bhangui’ (boiled rice prepared inside banana leaf), etc. In Tripura, authentic Tripuri dishes are served in *New Ashoka Restaurant*, *Debbarma Food Corner* (a thela-shop), *Shanghai Bites*, *Mairang*, *Chathai Nog*, etc. They serve dishes like ‘wild red rice’, ‘sticky rice’, ‘soru chakuli roti’ (a kind of tribal bread), ‘wahan mosdeng’, ‘tohan mosdeng’, ‘bangu’, ‘pork bamboo with mushroom stir fry’, etc. It is noteworthy that *The Framandi* serves Northeast cuisines belonging from the seven sisters and one brother. The dishes are- ‘oying’ from Arunachal, ‘jadoh’ from Khasis, ‘bai’ from Mizoram, ‘bastenga with pork’ from Nagaland, ‘chakhur’ and ‘bangu’ and many more from Tripura, ‘thepa’ from Garos, ‘sinju’ from Manipur, ‘khorisa maas’ from Assam, ‘gundruk soup’ from Sikkim. The markers of packaging food promoted by the restaurants have a language of visual rhetoric. Under A.C, well-furnished furniture, nicely decorated walls, customer survives; the restaurants serve traditional dishes. This is paradoxical. The interior décor is modernized; on the other hand, traditional dishes are promoted as identity markers.

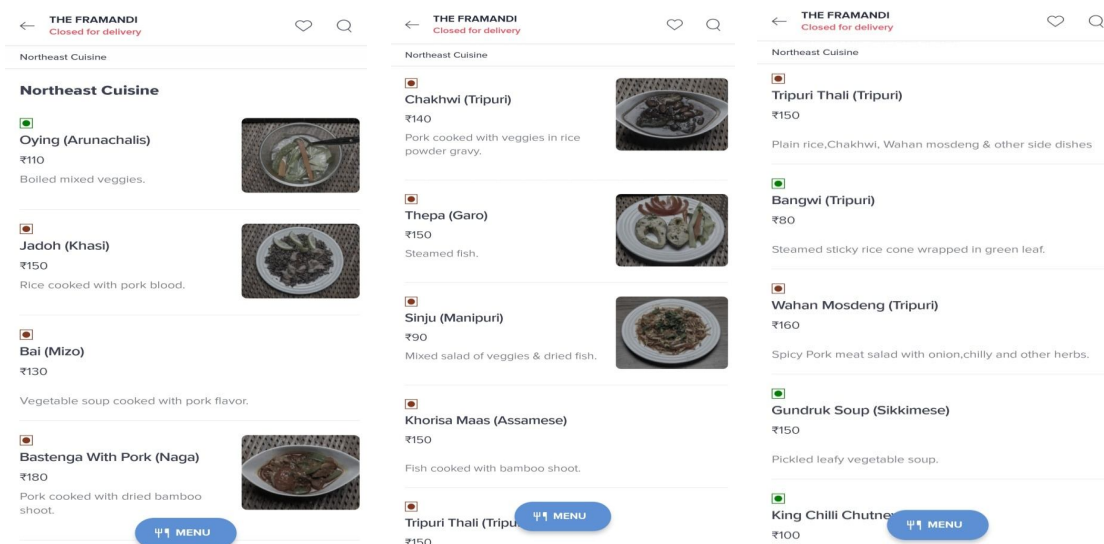


Figure 4: Screenshots of the e-menu (from Swiggy) of the restaurant *The Framandi*

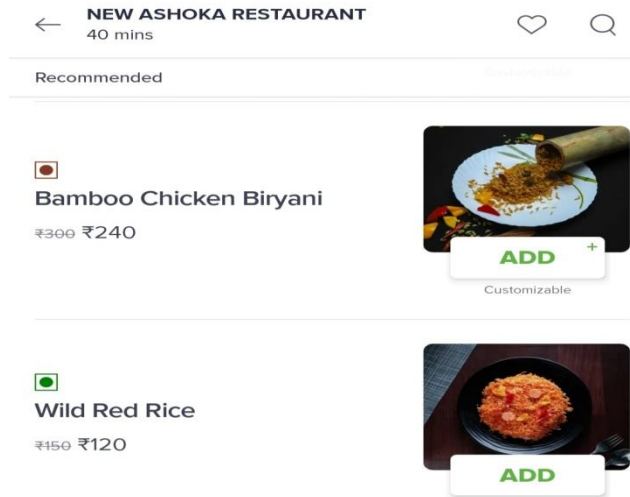


Figure 5: Screenshot of the e-menu (from Zomato) of the restaurant *New Ashoka Restaurant* which displays the popular 'bamboo biriyani'

Bengali traditional dishes are also served in restaurants like *Bahari Paanch Phoron*, *Khunti Karae*, *Sankar hotel*, *The New Ashoka restaurant*, *Ritwika's Food Fresto*, *SKF Food World*, *Royal Biryani*, etc. to name some. They serve typical Bengali dishes like 'ilish bhapa' (steamed ilish fish curry), 'basanti polao' (preparation made of rice) with mutton or chicken, 'muchar ghanto' (part of the banana bud used to make curry), 'aloo bharta' (smashed potato), 'thankuni patar sobji' (curry made with a leaf called 'thankuni'), 'pui dada chochorri' (a curry made with the stem of a creeper called 'pui'), 'lao mug dal sabji' (curry made of cereal and white gourd), 'sutki kochur loti' (curry made of dry fish and a type of colocasia), 'nuna ilish bora' (fries made of dry hilsa), 'posto bora' (fries made of poppy seeds), 'pitol posto' (pointed gourd with poppy seeds), 'karkol pur' (stuffed item inside spiny gourd), etc. Bengalis have always been

... '*khadya-rasiks*' (gourmets, connoisseurs of the *rasa* implicit in food, bordering on gluttony). They were capable of hybridizing '*bileti*' (<*vilayati*= foreign, European) dishes to suit their epicurean- indeed even sybaritic- and/ or eclectic taste buds. (Chakrabarti, p.308)

The considered English staple fish and chips are a Bengali food, the hybridization of which was done by a Jewish immigrant, Joseph Malin in the year 1860.

### Hybridized sweet dishes and beetle leaf/ pan served in restaurants and shops

Sweet dishes among the Bengalis are famous for its 'rasogolla' (milk batter soaked in sugar syrup) and 'doi' (curd). But now-a-days experimentation with sweets is hybridized in nature. Hybridized sweet made with 'kaju' (cashew nut) like 'kaju cadbury', 'kajubarfi' given a twist of chocolate dressing; 'kaju pizza', 'kajubarfi' stuffed with sweet

and tangy mixture of any fruits. Glocalized sweet dishes like ‘two in one sandesh’- a baked milk product of two flavors; ‘dark choco chips laddu’, ‘oreo sandesh’, etc are available. These kinds of hybridized sweets are found in *Daya Hari Mithai*, *New Gopal Mistanna Bhandar*, *Sherowali Sweets*, etc. The local old generational sweet shops like *Giridhari*, *Gopal Mistanna Bhandar*, *Jadab*, *Sukh Santi*, etc. prepare ‘sandesh’- a dry milk baked product of the shape of ‘ilish fish’ and the name of the sweet dish is ‘ilish macher peti’. Ilish being one of the favorite fish among the Bengalis attracts customers when they find it in sweet dish form.

Items made of beetle leaves (paan) are hybridized in many forms in shops like *Misti Pan & Mast Banarasi Pan*. These are completely glocalized pan shops. Options of two pans are given- ‘sanchi’ and ‘bangla’ paan. Option for ‘zardas’ (flavored tobacco) are also provided- 60, 132, 120, 142, 350. Other items are dependent on the paan order by the customers. Some name of the glocalized paans are as follows- ‘misti strawberry/mango/caramel/kheer paan’, ‘peanut butter jelly paan’, ‘pineapple chocolate paan’, ‘roasted almond paan’, ‘tooti frooti paan’, ‘kitkat paan’, ‘fire paan’, etc.

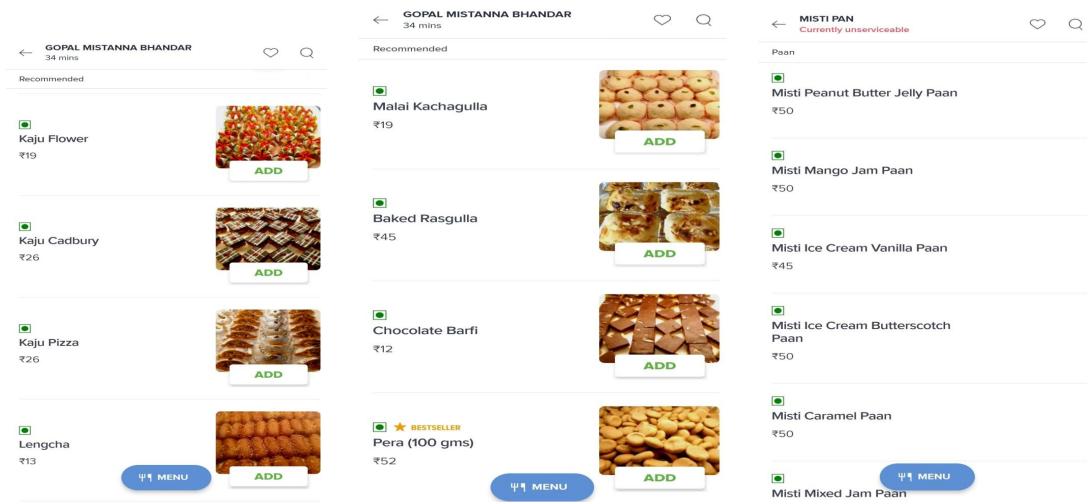


Figure 6: Screenshots of the e-menu (from Swiggy) of the sweet and paan shops reflecting the hybridized food item

### The food culture on public and social media platforms

Food as a material is a basic necessity for any living being but in the human society, food has “progressed from a basic need to something that demands glamorous visual representation” (Shohe, 2019, p.5). Food is not only part of community identity; it has a language that carries meaning embedded as ‘codes of sign’ specific to a group of people. For instances, preparation of food has some “sacred” practices within the kitchen which differs from community to community. These are communicative modes of

performance rituals that “revolves around a particular dish such as the process of making and serving conveys an understanding of culture’s approach to life” (Shohe, 2019, p.24). Thus, the food served in a restaurant (even if traditional food is served) cannot convey or represent the authentic food culture when video-recorded, photo-shopped and uploaded on social media platforms. Representation is never static as noted by Hall (1997) and rather keeps on changing based on the shared cultural practices performed by society. According to Duveen and Lloyd, the process of representation are generated by two way-

The sociogenesis is seen as society evolution and diffusing the knowledge gained while ontogenesis mean the acceptance and re-construction of representation which is affected by change and development in the society (Psaltis, 2012).

Thus, the restaurant culture and customer performance space is both a process of “sociogenesis” and “ontogenesis”. Restaurants have evolved by gathering the knowledge of preparing food and the customers have also accepted the evolved culture. They have also reconstructed the ways of presenting the dishes. Restaurants already have their language of presenting the prepared dishes but the customers while uploading an image on social media platform reorganize the dishes to upload the food’s image which they are to consume after uploading. Here, the organization is dual in nature- customers re-organizes the platters on the table to upload an image of the food whereas the restaurant owner recognize the ingredients, presentation, etc. to attract the customers to try new dishes.

Social networking sites enable connectivity and interactivity between the owners and the customers. The restaurant rating and uploaded images create a positive or negative impact on the customer’s perception. Thus, the social media sites are used as performative space by the restaurant owner where they try to establish a customer-friendly environment. Going through the comment section if the customer goes across appreciative feedback from other customers, this strengthens their reliability on the restaurant. Thus, even the uploaded menu cards are information provided by restaurants to attract customers. Consumer’s choice of food is based on two factors according to Mkono et al., 2013,- (1) Tasting and searching for their favorite item, and (2) Trying different dishes at different restaurants (Santosh, 2017, p.12). Hence, online sites are used as advertising and marketing platforms. On the other hand, customers have developed a trend which has become a “routinised part of our everyday lives is through the production and circulation of amateur food imagery online” (Lewis, 2018, p.214).

The visual aspect of food culture is trending through photo and video uploading in the contemporary 21<sup>st</sup> century digitalized culture. According to Grimes and Harper (2008), human-food-interaction is of two types- “corrective technologies” and “celebratory technologies”.

Corrective technologies aim to provide information and knowledge about methods of making established practices and traditions more effective and efficient (Barker, 2003). In contrast, celebratory technologies use digital media to present the aesthetic, social, cultural and emotional experiences of food cultures. Corrective

technologies therefore popularise the production, communication and consumption of food cultures, accelerating the diffusion of external cultural influences, while celebratory technologies indicate the motives and behaviour of users which underlie the hybridisation of food cultures, with digital media acting as platforms to broaden the integration of internal and external cultural influences. (Soo Hee Lee & et al., 2014, p.8).

These technological mediums are popular among tech-users because the online services have a transparency interface which provides the customers to capture information about the “display and delivery information to users with clarity, accuracy and efficiency. The interface is a ‘window’ on the ‘real world’ because it is invisible to users, allowing them to access a reality by looking through it” and instead of hiding the interface from the customers, visibility to the interface is provided “which is a ‘mirror’ that reflects the users’ physical, social and cultural context” (Soo Hee Lee & et al., 2014, p.9-10).

### **The evolution from print menu cards to e-menus**

Restaurant menu card provides information about the available items and the prices of the items. Menu cards are documented mediums to create an impact on the customers' perception. The designing, display and graphics of a menu card act as an iconic and semantic representation which impacts the customer's ordering behavior (Ozdemir & Nebioglu, 2018, p.206). The spectacle of the customer or the customer's gaze plays a crucial role in the selection of a food item. The menu cards are a space of display, where food items are arranged and categorized for maximum visual appeal to instill a desire in the customer to purchase items. The images of food items on menu cards are signifiers used to instill a spectacle of fantasy. The customer's fantasy is a planned displayed suggestion, provided by the restaurants and OFD services, which increases the possibility of the customer to order the product which is desired by his fantasy of perception and to try the food displayed on the menu.

The menu cards on *Swiggy* and *Zomato* have an organization of choices like:

1. Choice of food is categorized as
  - Combos/Thalis- two or three items are offered at comparatively low prices
  - Pasta,
  - Soups,
  - Chinese starters/ main courses,
  - Indian starters/ main courses,
  - Tandoori,
  - Roti,

- Seafood,
  - Deserts,
  - Nutrition based food (calorie and fat-free food), etc.
2. Choice based on special offers
- 50% off on order above Rs.1000/-,
  - “min 40% off”, “min 30% off”, “min 20% off”,
  - Veggie friendly eateries,
  - Budget-friendly options,
  - Single-ready to mingle with food,
  - Top rated foods,
  - Lockdown cravings, etc.
3. Theme based offers on special days
- Independence day offers on chef special dishes,
  - Valentine day offers for couples,
  - Raksha Bandhan offers for cousins,
  - Friendship day offers for a group of friends, etc.



Figure 7: Independence Day chef-special dish prepared in the restaurant *Curlies* as uploaded in the Facebook page

The special offers are decisional interference wherein the predictive nature of customer is emphasized upon. The customer would get attracted to the signified offers which are strategically placed by the online companies and the restaurants based on the predictable customer behavioral pattern. These are evocative labels which "had a potential to assimilate customer's post-consumption evaluations (value, taste, and quality) as well as their pre-consumption expectations (Ozdemir & Nebioglu, 2018, p.209). Mehrabin and Russell (1974) propounded a stimulus-organism-response (SOR) model where they state that the environmental stimuli (hard copy of a menu card/ e-menu) lead an individual/customer to assess the quality, taste, value of a food based on the signifiers exhibited on screen/ on hardcopies of menu cards. Here the customers' response is driven by the company's strategic positive customer perceptions. The positive customer perception is profitable signifiers for the marketing and food industry. Online menu cards have detailed description of the cuisines, their prices (which can be compared from one restaurant to the other), quantity, nutritional content, ingredients used, and the visual image of the food which helps the customer to choose and select cuisine according to their need. Post ordering, the customer get an update about his order- food preparation, time taken by the restaurant, delivery boy's location, and payment mode has multiple options (cash, Google play, Paytm, etc.), doorstep delivery, etc.

Historical events, family occasions, festivals, personal life events are commercialized and made a staged public event in the digital era where after enjoying food ordered from restaurant pictures are uploaded in social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram. This is a new culture of promotion marketed strategically through socially constructed shared cultural practices. These cultural conventions are generated by the food industry making the multi-ethnic communities of Tripura celebrate every festival of each other's community. This reflects that Tripura has no hegemonic festival space; instead, Tripura is a land where different communities and multilingual people share their multicultural space ensuring a collective consciousness. A research conducted by K.F.Backman and others shows that

"...although the attendance motivations of the insiders to the culture can be different from the motivations of other festival attendees, some of the motivations do overlap and they are no longer just about identity formation or cultural exploration but also about entertainment and relaxation" (Liu, 2019, p.26).

The "insiders" understand the cultural signifiers related to a festival and thus their gastronomical performances (methods of maintaining sacredness, traditional preparation and process of serving, ways of eating, traditions of sharing, etc.) will possess a particular code of conduct for the outsiders to mimic the procedural rituals. This helps the outsiders to socialize and belong to a multicultural gastronomical discourse bringing them closer to the insider's performative domain. However, it is noteworthy that in Tripura though there are many festive offers given by the restaurants and online delivery services, but till now no offers have been given for local festive occasions (except for Bengali festivals). Though, many restaurants serve northeast and Tripuri cuisines. Thus, the ideology of providing

special offers is oriented by the dominant mainstream cuisine marketing culture which is generated by branded online food delivery services.

### **Digitalized health blogs and pages**

Deuze (2006) defines blogs as "the online, usually public, personal or professional websites that publish posts chronologically, allowing other users to leave comments under each one" and is characterized as "do it yourself" journalism" (Soo Hee Lee, 2014, p.13). Food blogging is storytelling of recipes narrated through visuals like videography and photography. A trending phenomenon in the digital space is writing health blogs. A page which showcases tasty but healthy food receives high consumerism value. Here comes the role of creating a hegemonic authenticity of the food. Northeast food being made from natural resources, with less oil, more boiled organic items, tends to make it easy for bloggers to establish authenticity of Northeast food being healthy. Slowly and gradually these blogs or pages become a dominant representational medium to highlight the authentic ethnic dishes. The sites then give space to new talent to experimental new dishes leading to the representation of hybridised food and sometimes even representation of local food with a global touch. This is how the glocalisation of food changes the traditional authenticity of food by establishing a new cultural marker. A new marker of food culture emerges out when the authenticity of a food item is questioned-

".....the term 'inauthentic' has usually two meanings- compromises made with the taste of those who do not belong to the ethnic cuisine for commercial or other reasons extraneous to local taste, and compromise is made with recipes to cope with the unavailability or paucity of ingredients" (Nandy, 2004, p.11).

Asish Nandy also claims that as far as Indian food is considered, India has heavily borrowed from foreigners like Mughals, Afghanis, Chinese, etc. Quite contrary, people from the northeast have tried to preserve the authentic nature of their food. In contemporary times, many restaurants have changed its presentation skills of dishes but yet try to retain their authenticity- in terms of the ingredients and sometimes with the method of preparing a dish. It, however, cannot be denied that commercialization of fast food through brands like McDonald's, Pizza Hut, Dominos, etc., the Indian food is not only experimented by these brands but they have made hybridised food items with western ingredients but with Indian taste. The age-old fast foods like- 'patties', 'chops', 'bondas', 'cutlets', various kind of 'telebhaja' (fries) word replaced by burgers and sandwiches is due to the influence of the branded food industry. 'Lassies', 'sharbat', 'dahi' got replaced with cokes and soft drinks. The regional 'Punjabi chole bhature', South Indian 'idli' and 'dosa', North Indian 'parathas', Mughlai dishes have new identities. 'Cholle bhature do pyaza', 'fried idli', 'pizza dhosa', 'chessy paratha' dip with mayonnaise and customizable stuffed Mughlai or Indian side dishes. This kind of hybridization instills a sense of familiarity among the customers and the restaurant initiates a sense of loyalty with Indian cultural root, resulting in the establishment of signifiers which would attract customers. This kind of hybridization is the narrative of 'newness' which helps in the rise



of consumption value because consumers are driven by the pulse of experimenting with new food items. However, food blogs

"..... provide the hybrid space in which bloggers, experts and consumers can interact and create meaning, remediating existing structures for food cultures, such as magazines and other food-related publications. Food blogs in particular, allow consumers to add comments and to shift position from consumers to bloggers by generating content without requiring institutional accreditations" (Soo Her Lee, 2014, p.11).

Food bloggers fuse the digital and traditional (authentic and inauthentic) aspects of food culture through their improvisation of cuisines by creatively presenting the dishes on digital platforms. Thus, the performance space (of the restaurants and the customers) results in hybridization of mass culture as the viewer consumes the codified signs and practices them as have been presented on the digital platforms. Thus, the process of creating, distributing and circulating of food blogging content is a digital social navigation space of consumerism, commodified through multiple levels of marketing signs.

### Television food shows and food blogging

Writing about food and recipes in India begin during the late 19th century. Women magazines focused on issues related to food and cuisines from different regions. To name some magazines which published issues on food are *Sarada*, *Lakshmibai*, *The Indian Ladies Magazine*, *Kereleeya Sugunbodhini*, etc. These magazines paved way for many Indian women to come to the forefront- out from their domestic space to the public sphere. This helped them to establish and celebrate their own identity through the food culture. Cooking shows and food blogging is a new trend in the 21st century. However, food bloggers when writing in the digital platform should be aware that creating a food discourse is associated with the identity of the dishes and with the communities.

### Misrepresentation of Tripuri food in digital platforms

Representation of traditional food on TV shows, the online platform has become a recent trend. In an episode of *Zee Bangla Rannaghar* represented Tripura's traditional cuisine through the famous dish 'wahan mosdeng'. The chef claimed that 'wahan' means "meat" and 'mosdeng' means "roasted chilli" or "chili paste". She also claims that generally this item is prepared with red meat. The following chart will give a clear picture of the local meanings.

WORD	AS NARRATED BY THE CHEF
'Wahan'	Meat

'Mosdeng'	Roasted chilli or chili paste
-----------	-------------------------------

WORD	LOCAL MEANING (LOCAL NAME)
'Wak'	Pig
'Tok'	Chicken
'Moso'	Chili
'Deng'	Smashing
'Bahan'	Meat

LOCAL MEANING OF THE DISHES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Wak' + 'Bahan' = 'Wak Bahan' (Pork Meat)</li> <li>• 'Wak' + 'Mosdeng' = 'Wahan Mosdeng' (Pork Bharta)</li> <li>• 'Tok' + 'Bahan' = 'Tohan' (Chicken Meat)</li> <li>• 'Tok' + 'Mosdeng' = 'Tohan Mosdeng' (Chicken Bharta)</li> </ul>

Figure 8: Deviation from the actual meaning of the local dish as represented in the television show

Thus, pig meat i.e. 'wak' when prepared by grinding and smashing chilies is 'wahan mosdeng' and as the chef used chicken, the name of the dish should have been 'tohan mosdeng'. Representing Tripura in regional or national platforms comes with a huge responsibility as the whole community's food habits become a cultural sign for the viewers and Tripura, an unexplored region, if misrepresented, those cultural signs will get established and as it can be seen in figure 9, the video has already received 6.6 K likes

with 297 K views. This misrepresentation shows the risk associated with the digital world. The risk of circulating wrong information which is accepted and believed by the ignorant mass becomes an established culture which will lead to the circulation of a misrepresented and fabricated truth. The 21st century viewer believes in participatory culture and hence the viewers, if they do not have proper knowledge of the viewed subject, generally tend to accept information to be real, if not well-researched. To name some YouTube channels like *Snigdha's Bioscope*, *Shangnairan*, *Best Indian Food Blog* have shown the authentic way of making 'wahan mosdeng'; and *Sanzay DB*, *Borok Food Tripuri* used chicken to prepare the traditional 'tohan mosdeng'.



Figure 9: Misrepresentation of 'tohan mosdeng' as 'wahan mosdeng'.

An incident on misrepresentation of Northeast food was reported in the year 2016 by a group of people belonging to North East. An article, *Food Sambharo to Tamatar Ka Chokha, a comprehensive guide to Indian salads*, published on 1st July 2016 by the Indian Express claimed that Manipuri 'eromba' and Tripuri 'godok' are salads. The article by a nutrition coach and culinary consultant, read that the Manipuri 'eromba' and Tripuri 'godok' are prepared by boiling local ingredients but claiming the dish as a salad by a reputed nutritionist misrepresents the ethnic North Eastern food. It got widely circulated in Facebook and many users criticized the misrepresentation of Northeast cuisines. Reading the comments section of the Facebook users belonging to the northeastern states, who have shared the article on their wall to voice against the misrepresentation done by an outsider; made many users angry about the under-researched work done by the nutritionist. But even after four years, the article exists and with no editing done yet. This reflects that the mainstream media, sometimes, not only publishes under-researched articles but even after reporting the issues, they marginalize the voices of the northeastern, resulting in the misrepresentation of Northeast culture. A. Walis in *Representation Theory* (2012) states that representation "that become familiar to constant reuse come to feel natural and unmediated". He further adds,

"Regardless of the fact being accurate, when individual is exposed to certain information about a group or a community, they start to develop a notion. Hence, media represents multiple forms of reality which may not necessarily be reliable..... while society strives to solve or seek solutions to a social problem, it fails to address the misrepresentation. Due to this, even the food culture is largely at stake" (Shohe, 2019, p.02).

In the digital era where information is easily accessible, digital readers develop a "sense of dependency. The reliability of information is no longer a concern for consumers" (Shohe, 2019, p.02). Perhaps, this is the reason where misrepresentations remain unchanged in the digital platforms. "Thus when a culture is misrepresented it leads to misrepresenting reality" (Shohe, 2019, p.02). Northeast's geographical positioning makes the rest of India treat the culture of North East as exotic.

"Tribal societies are considered to be located outside the civilized society, therefore lacking the finesse of the developed world (Shimreiywung, 2009). It is often seen that NE people are confused is foreigners and very often their food is associated with dumplings, noodles and so on. NE food is unique and exotic from the other regional states. Not everyone is familiar with the variety of options available in their cuisines" (Shohe, 2019, p.3).

This is the reason why publication on social media platform will lead to fabricated reality which is a misrepresentation.

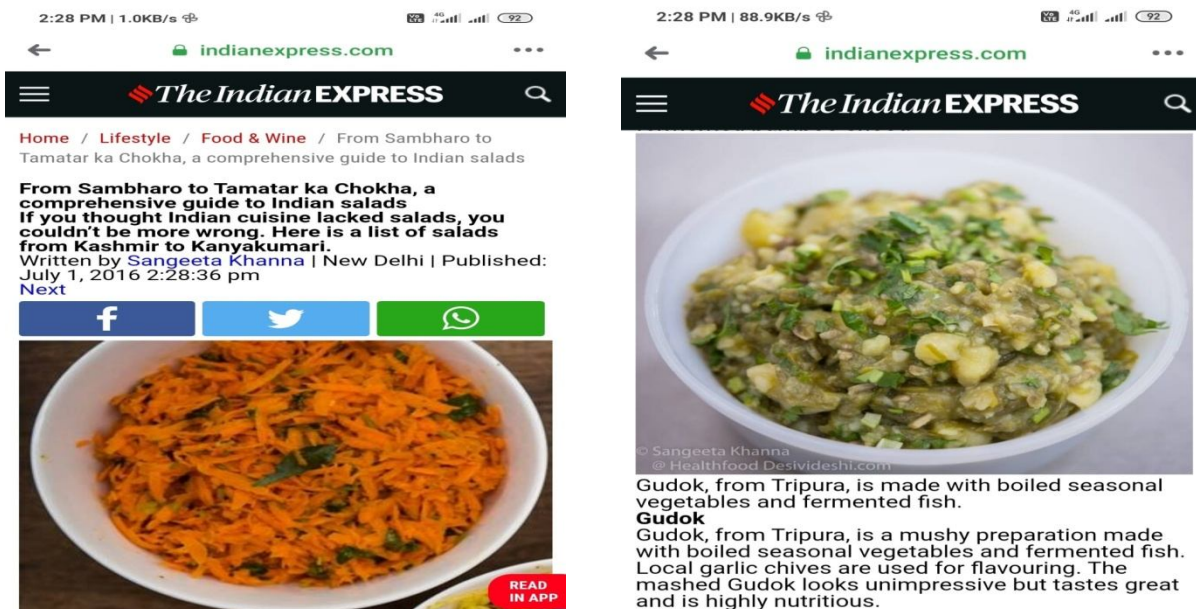


Figure 9: Screenshot of the misrepresented article where 'gudok' is stated as a salad.



Figure 10: Screenshot from Facebook user posting about the wrong representation of the NE cuisine

### Lockdown impact and assurance of risk management through Facebook

Due to the Corona pandemic, all the restaurants were closed in Tripura along with whole India and the world. As per government direction, since 8th June 2020, restaurants were back to business. Still, customers were hesitant to go to public places. In an interview conducted by a local news channel, the owner of *The Fat Chicken* assured the minimization of risk. Systematization of contemporary restaurant marketing culture includes:

1. The non-contact infrared thermometer used to check the temperature of each person entering the restaurant,
2. Multiple sanitization points are kept,
3. Free sanitization stashes are given to each customer,
4. To enhance body immunity of the customers, free lemon immunity shots are provided named as 'mocktail power shots'.

Another restaurant, *Curlies*, posted a video of sanitizing the whole restaurant and stated that for them, customers are like kings and they make sure that the king stays healthy. Tim Dant (1999) observes that these are all the vehicle of meanings to establish signs of status and ideology (ideology construction that customers are like family which masks the profit-driven nature of the business under the guise of care) to create an aesthetic value which are used as indicators of lifestyle and identity” (Nagar, 2017, p.142-143).

## Conclusion

Food culture article is a geological identity of a community. With the change of time and rise of digital culture, new ways of representing, documenting and circulation of food material culture have transgressed the traditional gastronomical boundaries. The change in food consumption pattern and the preferences of digital consumers have generated a participatory food culture which enhances a steep growth of the food industry through social media platforms like YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, etc. This paper tries to identify the consumer behavior of the people who uses online food delivery services. The paper also shows how traditional ethnic food is used as markers of strategic marketing signifiers that attract customers. This also results in a misrepresentation of the northeast cuisine due to under-research work done by bloggers. Under the influence of the global culture meeting the local culture, the food industry in Tripura (especially Agartala) has observed hybridization of food. This has created sensitivity among the communities who question the authenticity of the food served in the restaurant. Under such circumstances, the digital platform contributes to the promotion of restaurants making the food industry of Tripura create a hybridized food discourse. In regional territories, the impact of globalization and digitalization is giving rise to homogenized culinary culture, thus either dissolving or making local indigenous culture a hybridized one. If the question on the authenticity of traditional dishes is raised then the cultural markers associated with the identities of the local communities has given birth to accultured gastronomical culture. With the growth of digitalized platform (like YouTube, Facebook and Instagram) and online food delivery services, identities of the food culture in Tripura have undergone intercultural hybridization.

## Endnotes

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\* The focus area of the research was based on the Tripura. Due to non-availability of online food delivery services outside Agartala, the research on the digital impact of online food services was limited to the capital city of Agartala.

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\*Views and data expressed herein are based solely on information available publicly (YouTube, Facebook, Swiggy & Zomato) and are not used to promote/defaming any entity.

<sup>i</sup> Prepared primarily by the tribal people with a different combination of vegetables, bamboo shoot and dry fish.

<sup>ii</sup> Different types of dry fishes.

<sup>iii</sup> Undivided Tripura before the partition of India, 1947.

- <sup>iv</sup> 15<sup>th</sup> century chronicles of the Manikya dynasty.
- <sup>v</sup> People associated with Jhum cultivation.
- <sup>vi</sup> Instruments used for digging mud and cutting crops.
- <sup>vii</sup> Items made of a different kind of flour.
- <sup>viii</sup> A movable shop made on a wheel-cart.
- <sup>ix</sup> Stuffed items like chicken or vegetable are deep-fried.
- <sup>x</sup> Fermented mustard seed.
- <sup>xi</sup> Fast foods.
- <sup>xii</sup> A type of Bread.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Red-kidney beans served with rice.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Items made of rice flour.
- <sup>xv</sup> Sugarcane juice.
- <sup>xvi</sup> Mint juice.
- <sup>xvii</sup> Gossiping and chatting.

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