

**FOOD HABITS IN BENGALI HOUSEHOLDS: A STUDY
OF THE URBAN
MIDDLE CLASS AND THE URBAN POOR**

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By

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FOOD HABITS IN BENGALI HOUSEHOLDS: A STUDY OF THE URBAN MIDDLE CLASS AND THE URBAN POOR submitted by me for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Arts at Jadavpur University is based upon my work carried out under the Supervision of Dr. Dalia Chakraborty and that neither this thesis nor any part of it has been submitted before for any degree or diploma anywhere/ elsewhere.

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Supervisor:

Candidate:

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DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my husband Abhishek, my lovely daughter Mihira and to my Mother without whom the task could not have been accomplished. I also dedicate my research to my brother Devdatta for being my greatest inspiration.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“Food is a central activity of mankind and one of the single most significant trademarks of a culture”-----Mark Kurlansky, ‘Choice Cuts’ (2002).

1. CONTEXTUALISING MY RESEARCH

It was 7 am in the morning when the doorbell of a middle class household in south Kolkata rang. The woman of the house opens the door making way for the domestic help Lata into the kitchen. The maid after washing her hands in the kitchen sink sits on her haunches to chop vegetables laid down on the floor beside the bonti¹. The woman waiting by her side rebukes, “Yesterday you made a mess of the cauliflower curry. ‘We’ don’t cook like this. The vegetables were not sautéed well and still had the raw smell. Today you will fry the onions till golden brown before putting the masalas (spices)”.

It was twelve noon by the time Lata rushed back home in the Manoharpukur slums. She would have to go again in the evening to her babu bari (employer’s house) for washing the left over utensils. She entered her one room house and set herself on the floor to chop eggplants and potatoes. She would have to cook her food before her husband came back home from work for the afternoon lunch of rice, shak bhaja, eggplants and smashed potatoes. They would eat together. She looked over the concrete bed and saw her two children lying and watching TV.

Such incidents commonly observed in the Kolkata’s middle class households and in the slums made me conceptualise my research on ‘Food Habits in Bengali Households: A Study of the Urban Middle Class and the Urban Poor’. The purpose was to address the differences amidst similar food habits across classes reflecting on different lifestyles. Here I would be essentially dealing with the notion of shared identity among groups. For instance the Bengalis across the world form an ethno-linguistic identity that is shaped through one of the vital aspects of human living, i.e. food. On the other hand Bengalis are a large heterogeneous lot of

¹ A cutting instrument found in Bengali kitchens used to peel, chop, dice or shred (Banerji, C 2001)

people who differ in terms of other primordial identities like caste, class, region, religion and gender. In this research I intend to address how food habits are shared across middle class and urban poor Bengalis of Kolkata city and in turn perpetuate class differences.

Human relations are a complex phenomena and more so when it is associated with 'eating'. We as humans, as members of specific groups, cultures and societies are the most possessive about our ways of eating, our food habits. This is primarily the reason why the saying goes, "You are what you eat". Now what is meant by eating? Kass (1994) states, "eating something means transforming it chemically as well as physically. Eating comprises the appropriation, incorporation and deformation of a complex other and its homogenizing into simples, into preparation for their transformation into complex same" (Paul, Rozin 1999: 10). This is merely a biological process of food intake by the body. However, eating among human civilization is more than just a biological act. It is one of the fundamental processes of social evolution though. The procurement of food, its preparation and process of consumption all make it a highly social activity. Eating is a habitual response because people generally want to stick to a specific way of eating as members of specific groups that provide them with an identity. However humans also have the unique ability to adapt to their new environment and surrounding bringing about a change in their food habits. Interestingly unlike other living beings, food for humans have several other meanings, the most important being that of taste and pleasure. Food or eating is definitely a pleasurable experience which people aspire for. After the fulfilment of need, taste and pleasure another major function of food is to provide people their identity of the 'self' and as members of social groups.

My research on food habits in Bengali household will precisely take up the issue of identity that is established through domestic eating habits. Keeping the ethnic identity constant I intend to explore the habits, practices, preferences, prejudices and beliefs associated with household cooking and eating among two classes, the middle class and the urban poor of Kolkata respectively. My study doesn't bring in the upper class of elites though since the 'Bengaliness' or '*Bangalitto*' is typified by the middle class largely. The lower class also shares their lives more with the middle strata, which is often overlapping. This group forms the so called 'lower middle class'.

I intend to explore the different patterns of household cooking and consumption of food among the two social-economic groups with the aim of establishing the areas of convergence and divergence of food habits among them to see how and why class differences predominate

over shared ethnic identity. I feel every household has an idiosyncratic story to narrate and different ways to negotiate with the most important aspect of human life- eating. Differences are fundamental part of human life amidst similarities. It is this complexity with regard to food and eating that I intend to capture through my research.

1.1 WHAT AM I LOOKING AT- OBJECTIVES

- a. How food habits in everyday life perpetuates differences and similarities across classes sharing the same ethnic identity and to view other social and cultural factors affecting contemporary Bengali household food
- b. What kind of foods are eaten in contemporary Bengali middle class households compared to the lower class and why. It will reflect on the meanings, negotiations and considerations undertaken by different social classes in relation to food in everyday life.
- c. Analyse the food consumption pattern of middle class and lower class households in terms of factors like commensality, rites and rituals, technology and health
- d. Analyse what, why and how are foods consumed on special occasions in both middle class and lower class households vi-a-vis everyday food.

1.2 WHY THE BENGALI ETHNIC GROUP?

Bengalis are a social-linguistic group inhabiting the region of Bengal (divided between West Bengal and Bangladesh) and are always known to have a quest, appetite and taste for all kinds of cuisines. Hence they are known as ‘gastronomes’ (*Bhojan Roshik*). On the other hand Bengali food is best known for its versatility. Perhaps this is the reason why this ethnic group serves the best choice for making a study of food and culture. Bengalis have been very innovative about their cuisine. Although a basic Bengali diet as notified in ample number of fictional and non fictional works on Bengali cuisine, is an assortment of rice, *dal*, vegetables, fish/meat, the household cuisine have had many variations since the medieval, down to the modern and contemporary times². Many of the new additions to household cuisine have in

² Banerjee Chitrita,1991,Life and Food in Bengal,Weidenfeld and Nicolson,London

due course of time featured as essential parts of Bengali cuisine and are savoured and relished even today. For instance the *biryani* or the *pilaf* introduced by the Muslims during medieval period has found its own space in Bengali kitchens since the medieval times to the present. So has been the fate of *Chinese* cuisine in Kolkata. Bengali households during the colonial period were known to consume several exotic meat dishes which are unheard of today. However it was mostly the class of *Bhadraloks** belonging to the upper echelons of society who experimented with such culinary delights³. The food culture of *chotoloks* supposedly varied from that of the middle class and upper middle class of *bhadraloks*. Chitrita Banerji (1991) in her fictional work described for instance that mustard oil was earlier used only by the lower class people in society (*chotoloks*). Today however mustard oil is predominantly used in Bengali households of Kolkata across all social strata.

Nonetheless Bengalis as an ethnic group has shown immense versatility in adapting ways of eating so much so that what constitutes the typical Bengali cuisine is questionable. Undoubtedly then food provides Bengalis their cultural identity as a gourmet, food loving, rice and fish eating people. But the story is not as simple as it sounds. This is precisely because Bengalis do not form a uniform, homogeneous, monolithic group. While Bengalis around the world differ in terms of their dialect, their regional habitat, culture, caste, class and lifestyle to be precise, the food habits of them also takes different forms adapting to different contexts.

1.3 WHY HOUSEHOLD FOOD?

A set of discourses promulgates the eternal significance and function of household eating habits. A reason for producing meals within household groups is to construct home and family around shared consumption practices (DeVault 1991; Moisio R et al, 2004: 364). Domestic food habits within society is never indistinguishable and often vary from household to household depending on a series of factors like household size, its structural composition, economy, social and cultural status, abidance of traditions and customs, number of male and female members et al. Besides there are several forces in contemporary society that has especially affected household food or domestic eating habits. Eating habits symbolizes one's lifestyle, social status and identity. Some of the well known factors affecting urban lifestyle

*The Bhadraloks claim themselves of middle class status and consciously distinguish themselves from the class of chotoloks in terms of education, culture, eating and dressing habits etc in Chakrabarty Dalia, 2005, Colonial Clerks: A Social History of Deprivation and Domination, K.P Bagchi and Company, Kolkata, Pp 37

³ Deb Chitra, Thakur Barir Andarmahal, Ananda Publishers, Kolkata

today are consumerism and the market, media and forces of globalization. Today's modern, urban, globalized culture has created a revolution in food habits. "Food consumption and the availability of new foods in the Indian market reflected the dramatic change in the lifestyle and growing consumerism among the Indian middle classes" (Donner, 2008). Growing fast food industries across the world, introduction of processed and ready-to-cook food products, corporate food marketing practices and media etc are known to have triggered changes in domestic eating habits and relationships (Moisio, R et al., 2004). Home food does not entail only home cooked food. It includes a wide array of choices in terms of packet food, tinned food, and ready to eat or heat food or even food purchased from outside and eaten at home for today's consumers. Hence from this point of view household food has attained a new milestone. For instance Srinivas (2006) speaks of the significance of package and 'ready to heat' 'homemade foods' in a cosmopolitan city like Bangalore. Such products are ubiquitous in the market today in all major cities of the world. These not only saves time for working women but also provides a wide array of choices for the consumer to experiment with taste. On the one hand ready to heat and eat food products substitute original homemade recipes and saves women of the pressure to recreate the original taste of recipes at home. It also enables ethnic groups to secure their identities in a foreign place. "The retrieving of the self through the eating of the cuisine of one's caste, ethnic group, region and locale becomes a precious experience" (Srinivas 2006: 209). The basic contention therefore is about what is actual homemade food? Besides with growing restaurant food and eating in public places, it is important to view what happens to the meal or domestic eating and how does it affect household food preparation and consumption across classes.

1.4 ACADEMIC RELEVANCE OF RESEARCH

This research tries to enrich the present literature on identity, class, culture of consumption and lifestyle established through food. By exploring and examining critically the different processes of food preparing and eating across two contrasting social and economic classes in society I intend to locate the differences and pluralities that exist in our society not only with reference to class but other categories as well. Food consumption has both nutritional and symbolic dimensions. It is to the symbolic meaning associated with food practices that I wish to turn to in order to discern whether class identity prevails over ethnic identity in the choices of food and exhibition of taste in everyday life and special circumstances.

My research will also reflect on the other dimensions of differences and identities like caste, region, religion and gender that exist along with class and ethnicity in society. Sociology is ruled by pluralities and complexities in social life. Social structures are dependent on social processes. Similarly household food also depicts different social processes that shape the class structure. Ethnic identity is a part of cultural identity just like regional, religious and caste identities. This cultural identity is gradually being disturbed by the forces of globalization, homogenization and standardization acting on people's choice of consumption (Tomlinson, 2003). The larger external forces of market, media, cultural globalization and standardization is affecting all sections of society even the lower economic groups. This study will contribute to the discourses on globalization, consumption and identity formation in society.

Identity in modernity is seen in terms of self-identity boosted through stylization process and consumption of goods and commodities while on the other hand traditional identity is viewed in terms of the normative. Mennell (1985) and Fishler (1988) for instance vouched for a standardization of diet and individualization theory of food habits, Bourdieu (1984) and Warde (1997) on the other opposed the same in favour of distinction created through taste and choice in society. According to Bourdieu (1984), one of the most sensitizing and significant theories of this research, distinctions of taste and preference are created through categories of classes marked by their possession of economic, social or cultural capital. Bourdieu also provides his concept of habitus to ascertain that it is within the normative that people's consumption, taste and preference depend. Keeping Bourdieu (1986, 1984) in mind, this research will subsequently contribute to the larger discourse of class, dissolution of class in the context of consumption and globalization or proliferation of the same. The concept of class is supposedly becoming obliterated in late modern society with changing consumption practices of the people and prominence of status groups instead. While scholars are differentiated in their opinion for or against the prevalence of class, this research considers classes as fluid entities since there is a lot of overlapping between class boundaries in contemporary society. Food habits of middle class and urban poor Bengali households will take into account all these areas of class discourse. Further my research on household food would add to the growing discourse of food, culture and lifestyle in contemporary society.

1.5 METHOD OF RESEARCH

1.5.1. Identifying the problem and method of study

My research was executed after deciding on the topic of study with the help of existing literatures on food, class, stratification, culture, consumption, globalization and others. I chose a descriptive-exploratory and analytical study following the inductive method after deciding on the topic of research and going through the existing literatures. Inductive method helped me to generalise my research from a specific set of observation. I stress on descriptive-exploratory because I have used descriptive account of food practices in Bengali households among the urban middle class and urban poor in the city with an intention to explore different possibilities of food negotiations and reasons behind embarking on respective food choices. The unit of analysis are the households who fall within the middle class category and those that fall in the lower class or urban poor category in the city of Kolkata. I chose a cross section of the middle class and urban poor who call themselves Bengalis through the use of Bengali dialect.

1.5.2. Conceptualization and Operationalization

Conceptualization is the process by which I have tried to identify the meanings of some major concepts used in the study (Babbie, E 2004).

A). Household can be defined as a group of person living together and taking food from a common kitchen. The members of the household include temporary stay-away but not temporary visitors. Popular academic conception of the household is that it comprises the ‘subsistence arrangements’ of a domestic or family group, the composition or type of domestic groups and their function may vary across societies and among different ethnic groups of the same society. According to the 1961 census, household consists of a group of people who commonly live together and take food from a common kitchen. NSS or the labour department insists that the ‘household’ should be family established or a group related by blood or marriage⁴. In this research I have interchangeably used the word ‘household’ with ‘family’. This is because almost every household representing the sample were families based on blood or alliance. While the study includes families residing in a specific household and sharing a common kitchen it excludes people living in mess, hostels or as paying guests.

⁴ NSS Report; October 2012; No 554: Household Consumer Expenditure across Socio Economic Group

Households can be divided structurally in terms of single person households, nuclear or joint households depending on the number of family members and the relations they share. In this study I have employed all the three categories from both middle class and urban poor groups in order to view how the number of family members influence food cooked and consumed at home. Family members taken into account are those who eat food from a common kitchen. In some cases the maids or workers who take food from the kitchen have also been included as a member of the household. Those members who reside outside the household and are occasional visitors have not been considered. However since the study is more of a qualitative kind, addition of family members on special occasions and their impact on everyday food habit will be considered in the analysis.

B). Middle Class is a concept that found prevalence among Marxist and Neo-Marxist scholars as the intermediate group of petty bourgeoisie. They were identified as small producers, proprietors, shopkeepers, independent artisans and small manufactures. They are also identified as the white collar professionals, the salaried and the self-employed who are characterised by an increasing level of education (Sridharan, E 2011: 29). The concept of middle class is rather abstruse. This is because the middle class is difficult to situate and hard to define. The Marxists always debated over the class structure of advanced capitalism. Neo-Marxists like Eric Olin Wright (1980) saw the middle strata as ‘contradictory locations within class relations’. Weber regards middle class in terms of social status. Whatever the significance of income differentiation, money alone is not sufficient for a middle class status. The middle class in India is a product of colonial history. It has evolved over a period of time with the transformation of the Indian economy, opening of the market to global investments, liberalization and privatization which shaped the new economic policies (Fernandes, L 2007). Advanced capitalism divides the middle class into the old middle class and the new middle class, the latter influenced by advanced capitalist forces, consumerism and new lifestyle. Among Bengalis the middle class are also called as ‘*bhadraloks*’⁵ (decent people) while the lower class are seen as ‘*chotoloks*’ (indecent people). The *bhadralok* category is idiosyncratic to Bengali cultural life and hence is worth mentioning in order to conceptualise the middle class. Das, S.N (2002) tries to distinguish between the terms ‘*bhadralok*’ and ‘middle class’. He writes that if class refers to status groups (in the Parsonian sense) then the *bhadraloks* will fall in the upper class category and not the middle class. If class is used in the Marxian sense

⁵ The Bengali word ‘*bhadralok*’ denotes social honour and prestige. It is a kind of status group in Weberian term and not an economic and occupational class (Das, S.N 2002).

of an economic group then the *bhadralok* will seem to have excluded many middle class men (Das, S.N 2002). For the purpose of this study I have essentially and consciously used the term 'middle class' and tried to accommodate different sections of the urban middle class defined on the basis of education and occupation. Identifying the middle class in society is a tricky one and at times difficult. Following Giddens (1979) I tried to identify the middle class as those who are located in non manual occupations and form a part of the white collar professionals in the city. My middle class respondents mostly belong to the service class including both private and public sector with minimum education level being school leaving while the maximum being a doctorate. Apart from the service class I have also included few self-employed people with similar educational level as the service class. My respondents all live in proper housing in the city. They have a distinct cultural life and consumption pattern similar to that believed to be middle class.

C). Urban Poor are defined in terms of the poverty line which distinguishes between the poor and the non poor. The poverty line can be established on the basis of a minimum nutritional requirement of a person expressed in calories, which are around 2400 calories in rural areas and 2100 calories in urban areas. However there are other identifying features of the urban poor. The urban poor can be identified in terms of their inaccessibility to housing and shelter, water, sanitation, health, education, social security and livelihoods along with special needs of vulnerable groups like women, children, differently abled and aged people. Even when segments of the population are not income-poor, they face deprivation in terms of lack of access to sanitary living conditions and their well being is hampered by discrimination, social exclusion, crime, and violence, insecurity of tenure, hazardous environmental conditions and lack of voice in governance⁶. Slums/bustees are a feature of urban poverty. Most of the slum dwellers that also form a part of the urban poor belong to the fast growing informal sector. A slum is a compact settlement with a collection of poorly built tenements, mostly of temporary nature, crowded together usually with inadequate sanitary and drinking water facilities in unhygienic conditions in a compact area⁷. In a slum the huts all cluster together. Families residing in each room share a common latrine. There is hardly any water supply, drains, disposal of solid waste and garbage in the slum area. Apart from the

⁶ Report of the Expert Group to Recommend the Detailed Methodology for Identification of Families Living Below Poverty Line in the Urban Areas, Planning Commission, Perspective Planning Division, Government of India, December 2012

⁷ NSS 65TH Round, January 2013, Some Characteristics of Urban Slums in West Bengal, Socio-Economic Survey Office, Bureau of Applied Economics and Statistics, Department of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of West Bengal

squatter settlements, there are two types of slums in Kolkata, the registered slums and the unregistered slums. The registered slums are those that belong to the CMC/KMC (Kolkata Municipal Corporation) and are given out to tenants. The unregistered slums are those that have come up on government lands, canals, roads etc (Kundu, N 2003). The urban poor lack proper education but are found to spend a large part of their monthly income in educating their children. They are mostly appointed in the informal sector like daily wage workers, construction labour, petty traders, hawkers, sex workers, rickshaw pullers and domestic workers etc⁸. This research includes the households located in the registered slums of both southern and northern fringe of Kolkata city. The slums comprise of both nuclear and joint family structures. Minimum household members include two persons while maximum members residing in one household goes up to around ten people. The members of these households all belong to the informal sector and work as rickshaw pullers, shop keepers, vendors, drivers while there are respondents who also work in clerical jobs. An urban slum household is classified as 'self employed', 'regular wage', 'salary earning' or 'casual labour'.

For the purpose of my research I identified my urban poor or the lower class respondents as those who are employed in the unorganised sector and perform manual labour. They are mostly wage earners working as plumbers, tile mistry, bus and private car drivers, domestic helps, ayahs and the like with poor educational level and all of them reside in the slums and lack proper housing. There are also few self employed people like tea stall owners, vegetable vendors, and food vendors. Some of the lower class people have no fixed employment and lay their hands on any petty work like washing cars or working in shops as sales boy as temporary employment. There is a thin line of demarcation between the lower middle class and the urban poor in terms of income, education and occupation. The study excludes household living below the poverty line, people residing in squatter settlements, roadside shelters and street dwellers.

1.5.3. Population and sampling

The middle class and urban poor are expansive and heterogeneous. Hence in order to perform research sampling was undertaken as a representation of the universe or population. Sampling is the process of selecting observation (Babbie, E 2004: 180). I chose to use purposive sampling technique, a process of non probability sampling method for finding respondents

⁸ Report of the Expert Group to Recommend the Detailed Methodology for Identification of Families Living Below Poverty Line in the Urban Areas, Planning Commission, Perspective Planning Division, Government of India, December 2012, Pp 30

who belong to middle class households and the urban poor respectively. The non probability sampling method is a technique of sampling which doesn't follow the rules of probability sampling method (for probability sampling see Babbie, E 2004: 181). Purposive sampling can be defined as a type of non probability sampling in which units for observation are selected on the basis of one's own judgement about which ones will be more representative (ibid: 183). I sampled around hundred middle class households and sixty lower class households from within the city slums.

While the middle class respondents were selected from within the city effort was made to include samples from the different fringes of the city. The middle class is visible everywhere in the city. This makes it easier and not so easier to locate them within my study. Using my own judgement I started approaching people of different occupations or professions like doctors, executives working in IT sectors along with school and college teachers. Coming from a middle class family helped me identify more people from the middle class itself in my neighbourhood from among relatives and friends. My middle class respondents share similar cultural values and life choices. They have fixed employment, certain level of education among the family members, proper housing to live in mostly owned and some rented. Most of the respondents have their own cars and their children go to private schools. They also possess certain social status in terms of wealth, work and culture. Most importantly they segregate themselves from the lower class or the urban poor in society in terms of material and cultural attributes. I also made an effort to locate few Bengali speaking Muslims and Bengali Christians as subjects for my research in order to gather information on the religious impact on household food. The Muslim respondents were located from Muslim dominated areas like *Park Circus*, *Rajabazaar*, *Central Kolkata* and *Broad Street* in the city. I had used a gatekeeper⁹ that helped me get access to these minority household. Being an alumnus of a minority institution helped me to get connected to few Bengali Christians in Kolkata. The Bengali Christians mostly had inter-religious marriages with one spouse being a Hindu or Muslim. This reflected in their choice of foods within the household as well.

I sampled the urban poor from few slums in the city from areas like *Manoharpukur* (Ward 85), *Dhakuria*, *Gobindopur*, *Rahim Ostanagar* (Ward 93) in the south and *Bagbazaar* (Ward 7) area in north Kolkata. I could access these slums with the help of a gatekeeper belonging

⁹ Gatekeepers are individuals at research sites that provide access to the site and allow or permit a qualitative research study to be undertaken [Creswell, John W 2009: 229].

to these slums. The *bustees* that I visited for my field work were inhabited essentially by Hindu population from West Bengal itself. They all had their *desh* in the villages in south 24 Parganas. Few were originally from Bangladesh. There were few Bengali Muslim households in the slums of *Rahim Ostanagar* near *Bosepukur* while the rest of the households were mainly dominated by Bihari Muslims and Bengali Hindus. This is a limitation of my sample. I was unable to get access to substantial amount of Bengali Muslims residing in the slums. My urban poor sample doesn't contain Bengali Christians either due to unavailability of Christian dominated slums.

The slums extended over large areas. There was one common public toilet shared by around ten households. Most of the households were one room huts with electricity. The difference in the type of interiors reflected prosperity of the households. A little tiled space, a grilled door; fitted kitchen racks separated the more affluent households from the others. In the one room huts beds were formed out of concrete slabs that jutted out from one of the walls. Food is usually cooked underneath the bed. In some cases food is also cooked on one *verandah* attached to the room or even outside the house in a small *unan* (traditional hearth). Some households had two rooms though. There are no running water facility in the slums and hence plastic containers, jars, and buckets full of water are a common sight ear one of the common taps in the slums. There are fixed hour of water supply in the taps. Television sets and refrigerator are commonly found in most of the slums.

1.5.4. Data Collection

A) Location and time of study:

The study is essentially based on the city of Kolkata, the capital of West Bengal. The city of Kolkata is governed by the Municipal Corporation which falls under the Kolkata Municipal Region. According to the Census 2011, the population of the city is 4,496,694. The male population is 2,356,766 and female population is 2,139,938. There are 76.5 percent Hindus, 20.60 percent Muslims and 0.88 percent Christians in the city's population. The average literacy rate of the city is 84.06 percent.

Kolkata has a vast colonial history. Prior to emerging as a major port for British India, the city was extended within three villages, *Sutanuti*, *Gobindopur* and *Kalikata*. Earlier known by the name of Calcutta (which is still popular among different regions of the world), the city

emerged as a commercial centre comprising of both Bengalis and Europeans. Calcutta emerged as a plan territory in 1742 and was occupied by Christians mostly Armenians and Portuguese in the northern fringe known as the 'White Town' (Sinha, P 1991). Earlier in the 18th and 19th centuries Calcutta was divided into a number of quarters based upon occupational or caste groups. Some such divisions are still found in the northern part of the city for example, *Kumartuli* for *Kumars* (Potters), *Colooatola* for oil pressers, *Ahirtola* for *Ahirs* and many more (Sinha, P 1991). Urbanization also started along caste lines. While the city grew consisting of heterogeneous elements, there were different business communities from north India that made the city their very own and resided in the area now called *Burrabazaar*. The rich cultural heritage of the city with a cosmopolitan set up also influences the food habits of the people residing here. Large traces of European food culture have seeped into Bengali food since the period of colonialism which also was responsible for the formation of a 'Bengali cuisine'. One also cannot miss the other cultural influences (note north Indian, Muslim) on the city's food habits. Post Independence the city started being occupied by the refugee population from Bangladesh. The civic administration was not resourceful enough at the time. Urbanization process continued in the city. Calcutta's municipal boundary never remained static henceforth and led to formation of suburbs (Bhattacharya, M 1991). Calcutta also had and still has a large migrant labour population from the neighbouring states of Bihar and Orissa (ibid). All this along with the refugee inflow from Bangladesh formed the slums or *bustees* which saw overcrowding, poor housing and water supply, lack of education, lack of new industries, unemployment.

As N.K Bose (1958) stated, the *bustees* came up as a result of unplanned industrialization and economic growth. It comprises of migrant villages and migrants from neighbouring Bangladesh and other states of India. The houses in the *bustees* are built closer to one another and through the narrow windings lanes. *Bustees* have narrow lanes and bylanes. Every *para* or locality is surrounded by a neighbouring *bustess* in the city. While most houses are hutments of one storey and mostly one room, some also have two storeys or two rooms. There are two kinds of people residing in these slums. One is the lessee who takes an annual lease from the landlords and builds huts at his own expense. These huts are then rented out to the tenants.

Within the *bustees* there are people of different linguistic backgrounds but people of same ethnicity are found to cluster together. Both Hindus and Muslims inhabit the slums though there are certain pockets of the city that are inhabited by the Muslims predominantly. On the

other hand the middle class in the city started growing in the phase of post liberalization in India. This created a set of new middle class of professionals with an emerging, aspiring, consumerist lifestyle. Most of the city neighbourhoods are middle class *paras* (neighbourhoods). Nevertheless there is an overlapping among the middle class and the lower class whereby certain sections of the lower middle class merge with the lower class.

For the purpose of this research a pilot study was conducted from December 2012-February 2013 among few respondents from middle class background and some of the slum households in the city. The pilot study helped to gather an idea about the field and make sure that the research tool was suitable for acquiring data. The pilot study extended into the main study.

1.5.5. Techniques of data collection

The tools of data collection employed were a questionnaire and an interview schedule constructed to elicit data from middle class households and an interview schedule for collecting data from the lower class households in the slums. A questionnaire is a document containing questions and other types of items designed to solicit information appropriate for analysis (Babbie, E 2004: 244). The questionnaire comprised of both open ended and close ended questions. Open ended questions are those where the respondents are asked to provide his or her answers. Close ended questions are those where the respondents are asked to select answers provided by the researcher (ibid: 245). I preferred to take a non-standardised interview where questions were freely asked about the respondents household eating habits on regular and special occasions. A non-standardised interview is the one where the respondents are free to talk about a set of topics selected by the respondents and the interviewer also freely phrases the questions as they wish (Fielding N and Thomas H, 2008: 247).

For the middle class the process of data collection occurred in three phases. Face to face interviews were conducted predominantly on those respondents who could afford time for a meeting at home. The interview is a way of bringing together multiple views of people and a condition for critical self reflective dialogue to emerge (Kvale, 1996; Barbour and Schostak, 2005). Prior appointment was taken from the respondents and a convenient time was chosen to visit the family. In most cases the respondent chose to answer the questions alone while in some families one or two members of the households too provided valuable inputs. Although it was not a conscious gesture, most if not all of the respondents were women (due to the

popular belief that women are the best persons to provide data on domestic eating habits). Respondents were all adults but belonged to different age groups. A structured Interview Schedule was used to elicit information on domestic food habits and the type of meals consumed at home by the respondents. However interview followed into normal meaningful conversations after a point of time. Rapport building was instrumental in gathering details about food and eating practices of household members. Food is an uninhibited aspect of middle class life compared to more serious issues like voting behaviour or sexuality questions and respondents found it easy and casual to open up. This I see as an advantage for my research. Interviews took almost over an hour or two and yet there were non tiring responses from the respondents. Subsequently I was treated with tea and gourmet snacks. Respondents stated their fear on being a part of an interview but soon settled down engaging themselves in the interview heartily. The pace of the interview was gradual and smooth. I initiated the questions and let the interviewee talk as much as possible. So it became difficult to follow the structure of the interview schedule totally. Food is one aspect of middle class life that they love detailing about. Normal conversations between two middle class Bengalis usually start and end with food (general observation).

The Interview Schedule was mailed online to some of the respondents in the form of a questionnaire as e-mail attachments, who could not spare time for a face to face meeting or due to inaccessibility to their homes. A list of research participants was first selected and a cover letter describing the purpose of this research, its scope and nature were emailed, requesting voluntary participation. Most of these respondents fall in the younger age group and are professionals working in private sectors. These respondents had irregular work schedule and found it difficult to accommodate time for the interview.

In the third phase, few more participants were needed to get a wider picture of household food habits among the middle class across the city and hence questionnaires were handed out to them in person. This helped save time and the problem of inaccessibility to the households. They were also followed over telephonic interviews.

Simultaneously, separate field work was conducted in the slums. Unlike middle class households, no prior appointment was taken for visiting the families in the slums. The gatekeepers introduced me to a few households in the slums. Without a gatekeeper finding access to the households were getting difficult. This was found in the pilot study itself. In

many cases there was direct refusal on the part of the family members for participating in the research. Some slum dwellers saw it as a direct encroachment upon their private spheres unlike the middle class households. In one of the slums in Rahim Ostar, a Muslim household was approached for the study. I faced tremendous opposition from the daughter, a young girl in her twenties for interviewing her mother on household food. She clearly stated that it was a 'private matter' as to what they ate and I had no right to encroach that space. Fortunately such incidents were rare. However unlike middle class households the lower class families felt inhibited to speak about their food habit. Some felt there was not much to know or tell either. The slum dwellers stated that they ate 'normal' food a term which was collectively used by almost every household I visited. Some householders asserted themselves as 'middle classes' and so their food habit was also similar to the middle class. I found this assertion similar to the 'embourgeoisement thesis' which shows that normatively the worker and his family may stake a claim to middle class status by adopting the values and standards of the class above them (Lockwood, 1960: 249). Such views were not collectively shared though. Most of the poor families lamented about their limited resources to feed their stomachs. Unlike middle class households I was faced with a lot of queries and questions as to my field work and how it could benefit the lives of the slum dwellers. I had to make an effort to evoke trust and faith which I managed by flashing a simple smile and making a friendly tone in order to counter their apprehension towards me. There was indeed no doubt that I was treated as the 'Other' which evoked certain apprehensions among slum dwellers at an initial point.

In most cases the respondents were women, who had just returned from work [as house maids or cooks] for an afternoon siesta but were busy with their household chores like cooking, washing or eating or feeding family members. The respondents were questioned on their income, education, place of origin, caste and number of family members accommodating one household. Questions were asked in detail about their eating habits, the type of food consumed daily, cooking process, cooking medium, religious practices if any, associated with food and health issues. The field was usually visited in the late morning or noon and evening time. Afternoon was the best time to make observations on cooking and household chores practiced by the slum dwellers on a daily basis.

Observation and participant observation were also employed as methods of eliciting information from the samples. Qualitative observations are those in which the researcher

takes field notes on the behaviour and activities of individuals at the research site (Creswell, 2009: 181). While holding conversations and dialogues with the participants in my research I could observe their performances. In middle class households for instance I could observe their interaction and conversation with other family members regarding food or cooking in an informal way. Within the slums field work enabled me to observe the private spheres domains of their homes which spoke a lot about their everyday food practices. Some also shared their problems and asked for remedial measures regarding health and problems like alcoholism.

I also observed people in public spaces like markets; bazaars and food stores which helped me gain view the kind of food products entering middle class homes and lower class homes. Participant observation, a common method used in both anthropology and sociology especially in case of field ethnography was widely used in my case. Being a Bengali from a middle class family I had the first hand opportunity to view and understand the different nuances of family eating in middle class Bengali homes in the mode of auto ethnography. This was advantageous for my research. On the other hand it has also handicapped me in my field research on the urban poor. However my sociological imagination¹⁰ and sociological consciousness helped me to analytically comprehend my field.

The data collected through face to face interviews were recorded using a voice recorder and transcript for future reference. Transcripts are used mainly in qualitative research whereby it helps to make fleeting conversation behaviour permanently available on paper (Kowal and O'Connell, 2004: 249). Field notes were jotted down on the basis of observation of the field. I also used public and private documents in the form of newspaper articles and cookbooks in order to collect data about cooking and cuisine among Bengalis. During the interview process I shared a relationship of trust, faith and friendliness with my respondents so much so that it unfolded into normal everyday conversations. This gave me an opportunity to understand my subjects in depth. I could also try probing¹¹ my respondents to bring out the best information as possible. Probing was highly instrumental in eliciting information because food is a taken for granted area of life and much of the detailed information are not provided by the respondents.

¹⁰ Mills, C.W. 1959. *The Sociological Imagination*. New York. Oxford University Press

¹¹ A technique employed in interviewing to solicit a more complete answer to a question (Babbie, E 2004: G8)

1.5.6. Data Analysis and Interpretation

The data was analysed and interpreted in qualitative form keeping in mind the objectives of research. Qualitative research is used to study things in their natural settings and attempts to make sense or interpret phenomena in terms of the meaning people make of their reality. This kind of research use semiotics, narrative, content, discourse, archival, phonemic analysis or even statistics (see Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). They are opposed to quantitative method of research for example a study on the voting behaviour and perception of the middle class or studying the crime rate in a particular society which depends a lot on numbers and statistical representation. Qualitative approach used for interpreting data enabled me to use the *emic* approach in research. *Emic* approach compared to the *etic* approach of quantitative research provides an insider's view.

Prior to analysing data I chose SPSS method¹² to sort out the data in quantitative terms through the process of coding. Data was coded thematically though. SPSS helped me to draw the frequencies of some of the data that was needed to support my analysis. Hence along with qualitative method of data analysis I used quantitative techniques of data representation to take out the percentages of some of my findings. However my interpretations have been largely qualitative.

Data analysis can be defined as the process of making sense out of a text and image data (Creswell, 2009: 183). Once the coding of data was done on the basis of responses provided by the respondents using the questionnaire and interview schedule I went through the transcripts of the conversation that I held with the subjects of my study. Coding is a process of classifying written answers and transfer all the information to a computer (Babbie, E 2004).

I used the technique of interpretation largely to analyse my findings. Through the process of interpretation I tried to situate my subjects from middle class and urban poor background within their own life worlds. The process of interpretation forms the basis of Weberian sociology which indicates on the 'subjectively intended meaning' that actors relate to their actions. In phenomenological sociology normal everyday life can be interpreted by analysing the shared meanings among subjects. "Shared beliefs always facilitate and determine our everyday lives which again are a matter of living together I have been inspired by phenomenological research and life world which helps to analyse the way individuals

¹² Statistical Package for Social Science

perceive their own lives or particular phenomena in order to analyse the way individuals negotiate with food habits in everyday life. “In the place of the claim that habit is devoid of subjective meaning both phenomenologist and psychoanalysts have proposed that habitual action does exhibit a meaningful character either taken for granted by the actor or lodged in the unconscious (Berger and Luckman, 1966; Hartmann, 1939; Kestenbaum; Schutz; Camic, 1986: 1044).

1.5.7. Nature of data

PROFILE OF MIDDLE CLASS AND URBAN POOR RESPONDENTS AND THEIR HOUSEHOLD RESPECTIVELY

Table- 1. Percentage of gender of the selected respondents in middle class and urban poor households respectively

Category	Middle class	Urban Poor
Male	20.0	15.5
Female	80.0	85.5
Total	100	60

Source: Self

Note: The above table represents the gender distribution in percentage of middle class respondents and slum dwellers respectively. Among the middle class 20 percent of the respondents were male while 80 percent were female while among the urban poor 15.5 percent of the respondents were male while 85.5 percent of them were female.

Table-2 Percentage of age groups of selected respondents from middle class and urban poor

Age groups	Middle class	Urban poor
20-39	47.0	58.3
40-59	28.0	38.3
60-79	11.0	3.3
Total	100.0	100.0

Source: Self

Note: This table shows the percentage of age groups among middle class and urban poor respondents. 47 percent of middle class respondents fall between age group of 20-39 years while 58.3 percent of respondents fall in the same age group. Between age group 40-39 years, 28 percent of the middle class respondents fall and 38.3 percent of urban poor. 11 percent of the middle class respondents and 3.3 percent of urban poor respondents fall between age group of 60-79 years respectively.

Table- 3. Percentage of religion of selected middle class and urban poor respondents respectively

Category	Middle Class	Urban Poor
Hindu	83.0	90.0
Muslim	8.0	10.0
Christian	9.0	0
Total	100	60

Source: Self

Note: The above table shows the percentage of religion of middle class and urban poor respondents respectively. In the study 83 percent of the respondents from the middle class were Hindus by faith, 8 percent of the respondents were Muslims and 9 percent of the respondents were Christians. Among the urban poor 90 percent of the respondents were Hindus and 10 percent of the respondents were Muslims.

Table-4. Percentage of levels of education of selected middle class respondents

Levels of education	Middle Class	Urban Poor
Not literate	0	25.0
Primary education	0	51.7
Madhyamik	0	11.7
Higher secondary	2.0	8.3
Graduate	44.0	3.3
Post graduate	45.0	0
Doctorate	9.0	0
Total	100.0	100.0

Source: Self

Note: The above table shows that 25 percent of the urban poor in my sample were illiterate and had no schooling. 51.7 percent of the urban poor had primary education. Most of them had studied till class three or four. Some went up till class nine and were school drop outs. 11.7 percent of the urban poor had qualified Madhyamik or state level examination. 8.3 percent of the urban poor had qualified school leaving or higher secondary examination while 3.3 percent were graduates. These were the young respondents of the sample.

Among the middle class lowest educational level was the Higher secondary which was qualified only by 2 percent of the respondents. They were pursuing their graduation degrees in city colleges. 44 percent of the respondents were graduates while 45 percent of them had post graduate degrees. 9 percent of the respondents held doctorate degrees. The total sample for middle class was 100 while that of the urban poor were 60.

Table- 5. Percentage of Marital status of selected middle class and urban poor respondents respectively

Category	Middle class	Urban poor
Single	36.0	15.0
Married	54.0	76.7
Divorcee	1.0	0
Other	9.0	8.3
Total	100	60

Source: Self

Note: The above table shows that 36 percent of middle class respondents were single while only 15 percent of the lower class respondents were single. Among the middle class 54 percent of the respondents were married while among the lower class 76.7 percent of the respondents were married. Among the middle class only 1 percent of the respondents were divorcees while there were no divorcees among the lower class. Among the middle class 9 percent of the respondents were widows or separated while 8.3 percent of the respondents among the urban poor were either widows or separated.

Table - 6. Employment status of selected respondents from the middle class

Content	Frequency	Percentage
Working	56	56.0
Not working	44	44.0
Total	100	100.0

Source: Self

Note: The above table shows that 56 percent of the respondents in the sample are working while 44 percent of the respondents are unemployed.

Table- 7. Percentage of selected employment status of selected respondents belonging to the urban poor

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Self employed	10	16.7
Regular wage	19	31.7
Casual workers	2	3.3
Unemployed	28	46.7
Pensioner	1	1.7
Total	60	100.0

Source: Self

Note: The above table shows that around 46.7 percent of the respondents were unemployed or not working where as 31.7 percent of the respondents worked as regular wage or salaried labour. 16.7 percent of the respondents were self employed where as 3.3 percent worked as casual workers. Only 1.7 percent of the respondents were pension holders.

Table- 8. Percentage of selected occupation of middle class respondents

Occupation	Frequency	Percent
Professional/technical and related work	40	40.0
Administrative/executive/managerial	6	6.0
Clerical and related work	3	3.0
Sales work	3	3.0
Artisans	2	2.0
Businessman	2	2.0
Other	44	44.0
Total	100	100.0

Source: Self

Note: The above table shows the percentage of occupational groups of respondents among the middle class. The middle class in this study is divided in terms of different occupations like professional/technical and related work 40 percent, administrative, executive and managerial work 6 percent, clerical and related work 3 percent, sales work 3 percent, artisans 2 percent and businessman 2 percent while 44 percent of the respondents were not working comprising of homemakers and students. The professionals include a wide range of occupations like doctors, engineers, architects, journalists, teachers of school and colleges and research scholars. The administrative/executive and managerial workers are mostly employed in the IT industry. Clerical work includes clerks of government and private organizations. The artisans are basically goldsmith who owns a small enterprise of their own while businessmen are self-employed people owning small garment shops.

Table-9. Percentage of the range of total monthly income of selected middle class households

Category (in rupees)	Frequency	Percentage
10,001-20,000	9	9.0
20,001-30,000	12	12.0
30,001-40,000	17	17.0
40,001-50,000	9	9.0
50,001-60,000	12	12.0
60,001-70,000	7	7.0
70,001-80,000	13	13.0
80,001-1,00,000	15	15.0
1,00,000-above	6	6.0
Total	100	100.0

Source: Self

Note: The above table shows that monthly household income of the middle class respondents in the sample range from Rs 10,000 to Rs one lakh and above. Monthly household income of 9 percent of the respondents fall between Rs 10,000 to 20,000, 12 percent of the respondents monthly household income fall between Rs 20,000-30,000, 17 percent of the respondents monthly income fall between Rs 30,000-40,000, 9 percent of the respondents total monthly income fall between Rs 40,000-50,000, 12 percent of the respondents monthly income fall between Rs 50,000-60,000, 7 percent of the respondents monthly income fall between 60,000-70,000, 13 percent of the respondents monthly income fall between Rs 70,000-80,000 while 15 percent of the respondents monthly income fall between Rs 80,000 and Rs 1,00,000 while 6 percent of the respondents monthly is above Rs 10,00,00.

Table- 10. Percentage of range of monthly household income of selected urban poor households in rupees

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 1500	1	1.7
1501-3000	7	11.7
3001-4500	17	28.3
4501-6000	10	16.7
6001-7500	8	13.3
7501-9000	3	5.0
9001-10500	2	3.3
10501-12000	3	5.0
12000-above	7	11.7
Not known	1	1.7
No response	1	1.7
Total	60	100.0

Source: Self

Note: The above table shows the total household income of the slum dwellers per month. Around 1.7 percent of the respondent's total household monthly income fall below Rs 1500 while 11.7 percent respondent's household income fall between Rs 1500-3000 per month. 28.3 percent of the respondent's monthly household income range between Rs 3000-4500 while 16.7 percent of the respondent's monthly household income fall between Rs 4500-6000 per month. 13.3 percent of the respondent's total household income falls between Rs 6000 - 7500. Around 5 percent of the respondent's monthly household income falls between Rs 7500-9000 and Rs 10500-12000 respectively. 3 percent of the respondent's total household income falls between Rs 9000-10500 per month where as 11.7 percent of the respondent's total household income fall between Rs 12000 and above.

Table- 11. Monthly expenditure on food in selected middle class households in rupees approximately

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 10,000	23	23.0
10,001-20,000	56	56.0
20,001-30,000	7	7.0
30,001-40,000	0	0
40,001-50,000	1	1.0
Not known	12	12.0
Total	100	100.0

Source: Self

Note: The above table summarises the percentage of monthly household expenditure on food in middle class households. 23 percent of the respondents stated that they spend less than Rs 10000 on household food per month approximately while 56 percent of the respondents said that they spend something between Rs 10000-20000 on food per month. 7 percent of the respondents claimed that they spend between Rs 20000-30000 on food per month while only 1 percent of the respondents mentioned that their monthly household food expenditure falls between Rs 40000-50000. 12 percent of the respondents stated that they are unaware of their total household budget on food per month. According to the respondents food expenses have no fixed budget and they hardly keep in mind the expenditure while spending on food and eating.

Table- 12. Household monthly expenditure on food among the selected urban poor in rupees approximately

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Less than Rs 1000	2	3.3
Rs 1001-2000	5	8.3
Rs 2001-3000	19	31.7
Rs 3001-4000	13	21.7
Rs 4001-5000	9	15.0
Rs 5001-6000	1	1.7
Rs 6001-7000	1	1.7
Rs 7001-8000	2	3.3
Rs 8001-9000	0	0
Rs 9001-10000	1	1.7
Rs 10001-above	4	6.7
Not known	3	5.0
Total	60	100.0

Source: Self

Note: The above table shows a description of the total household expenditure on food in the slum households in percentage approximately. Around 3.3 percent of the respondents stated that their monthly expense on food is less than Rs 1000 while 8.3 percent of the respondents said that their household expense on food is around Rs 1000-2000 per month. 53.4 percent of the respondents said that their household expense on food lies between Rs 2000-4000 per month. 16.7 percent of the respondents said that they spend somewhere between Rs 4000-6000 per month on food while 5 percent of the respondents said that they spend around Rs 6000-8000 on food per month. 1.7 percent of the respondents said that they spend nearly between Rs 9000-10000 on food every month while 6.7 percent of the respondents claimed that their monthly expense on food exceeds Rs 10000. 5 percent of the households said that they are unaware about their expenses on food per month.

1.5.7. Validity and Reliability of the data

The issue of validity and reliability have been found to be problematic in case of qualitative research unlike its quantitative counterpart. Validity doesnot contain the some connotations in qualitative research along with reliability and generalizability (Creswell, 2009: 190). Reliability in qualitative research indicates the researcher's approach is consistent across different researchers and projects (Gibbs, 2007; *ibid*). In my research I tried to check reliability of my data by meticulously going through the transcripts of the interviews. I also had put some checks in my questions by initiating different ways of asking to elicit similar responses. This allowed me to check any inconsistencies in my data. As Babbie (2004) observed field research is a good means of gathering first hand information about stbtle nuances of attitudes and perceptions of people and their behaviour. Hence validity of field research is usually very high (Babbie, 2004; Creswell, 2009) because it entails direct observation. While this addresses the validity of my research in some ground reliability becomes a question since the Muslim respondents in my sample are few in number and most of them are located in Hindu dominated areas. This has affected the authenticity of data on Muslim food habits. Being a middle class Hindu Bengali myself, I might have intercepted my thoughts and reflection with certain amount of bias which is unavoidable on the part of the researcher, being a subjective being herself/himself. So some amount of interpretation of my findings has also been formulated by my social, cultural and economic identity.

1.6 ORGANIZATION OF THESIS

This research is organised into seven chapters. The first chapter entails the general introduction to the topic of research along with the research question and objectives of research. The introduction will provide an idea of why the research is conducted and on whom. The 'how' question of research has been reflected in the section called Methodology of Research' which discusses the various steps undertaken for the study. The chapter ends with the profile of research subjects.

The first chapter unfolds into chapter two which states the 'Review of literature'. The review of literature has been arranged thematically on the basis of multidisciplinary works, sociological works and some major concepts related to food. Special references have been provided on food in Indian society and food culture of Bengalis. The chapter ends with a brief conclusion. The next four chapters are based on findings of the research. I have

arranged the data chapters on the basis of four major themes undertaken in the research question.

Chapter three is called 'Food intake in everyday life' which provides a descriptive account of the type of foods that are consumed in middle class households and urban poor households respectively. The chapter starts with a definition of 'food habits' and moves to examining the different type of meals consumed in Bengali households across classes. It includes both food and beverages.

Chapter four is identified as 'Food preparation'. The chapter starts with an introduction of food preparation moving on to the different sources of purchasing raw food products among both middle class and urban poor households respectively. It also identifies the factors affecting sources of food among both middle class and urban poor respectively. The next section of the chapter deals with the different agents of food preparation considering the role of women, gender division of labour, external agents and decision making process with regard to food among the middle class and urban poor households in the city. The next section includes the techniques of food preparation reflecting on the way food is prepared along with the use of kitchen technologies. Comparison across classes is drawn in every section. The last section of the chapter is all about the basic know-how of food preparation and all the major sources of information and knowledge of cooking found among middle class and urban poor households.

The fifth chapter is on 'Consumption of food' and includes several sub themes on commensality, food rites and rituals and food choice and taste preferences. Each of these subthemes is again broken down into sub points for touching upon all the dimensions. Commensality includes a discussion on food production, distribution, serving, meal time and place and food sharing. The section on food rites and rituals deal with food and social customs along with food taboos and avoidances. Food choice and taste preferences try to touch upon areas like role of women, food choice andn primordial identities, time, packaged food and home delivery, health and body.

Chapter six is called 'Special foods' in Bengali households. This section deals with special foods consumed on religious ceremonies looking into aspects of special food preparation compared to everyday food. Food and symbolism of fasting finds place in this chapter along with foods on festivals. Other themes deal with food and life cycle rituals, food and feasts and everyday foods on special occasions.

The thesis ends with the chapter seven as ‘Conclusion’ to the whole work. Conclusion is drawn upon along lines of research objectives. In the conclusion I have tried to identify some of my major findings on food habits of middle class and urban poor considering the complexities that entail the whole act of eating in human society. I have also tried to delve into some of the future prospects of this research, areas which can become the subject of intense sociological study on food, society and culture. Last of all I have also tried to discuss some of the basic limitations of my research. I have sincerely tried to capture every aspect of food in Bengali society across middle class and lower class of Kolkata city to the best of my ability.

1.7 CONCLUSION

This introduction opens the window to my research about food habits of middle class and lower class urban households. I have tried to the best of my ability, skills and knowledge to truly reflect on the different nuances of life surrounding food habits. I hope this research will leave an imprint on the epistemological bases of sociology in the fields of culture, social stratification, especially class theories, consumption and lifestyle studies.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 INTRODUCTION

A research is formulated on the basis of past academic works that have been conducted on the related field of study. The review of literature forms the backbone of the study which helps to contextualise the research and situate it within the larger body of academic discourses and knowledge. The concept of discourse was carried forward by Foucault (1980) for whom it is knowledge that is embedded within the realms of power (Basu, P 2010). Following Foucault one can say that “After food and shelter, which are necessary for survival, the exercise the most crucial determinations in our social relations, our thought processes, and our understanding of who we are”. Hence discourses shape the way we look at the world.

For my research on the food habits of urban Bengali middle class and urban poor households of Kolkata I was inspired by several classical works in the area of food, culture, stratification, class, consumption and others. Starting from a multidisciplinary approach to food and culture I tried to highlight on the different aspects of food that are drawn under the lens of anthropologists, archaeologists, historians, sociologists and other social sciences. I moved on to more specific areas that are usually studied by sociologists in their small venture on food studies. I felt that a vast area of investigation like food is yet to be fully acknowledged by sociologists which are still at an incipient stage. Sociological works on food and culture borrows more from cultural anthropology dealing with issues like commensality, food taboos, changing food pattern and the family meal. After dealing with some major sociological studies on food I chose to comprehend the different concepts that are associated with food in the vast gamut of interdisciplinary studies. These works have helped me formulate my research question and ways of analysis of my own study trying to fill into the gaps of research.

I found that food scholarships in Indian society and Bengali food and culture need special reference to because this is where I intend to situate my research. Indian society has always been hierarchical and this hierarchy has been maintained mainly through food habits and practices. Food in Indian society is often considered in terms of ritual purity, sacred and the profane and leads much of people’s everyday life and culture. On the other hand my

exploration of several literary works has found a dearth in studies dealing with food in contemporary society and capturing the contemporary culture and lifestyle of the people. Most of the works I found centre around Hindu lives while Indian food is co-terminus as Hindu food. Besides there is not much reference on the relationship between food and class compared to the other concept of caste. Keeping all this in mind I would like to present my review of literature.

2.2 MULTIDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVES ON FOOD

This study has been particularly inspired by the several multidisciplinary works on food studies and seeks to make a contribution to the sociology of food and culture. Food studies have been found relevant across different disciplines of social sciences like anthropology, history, psychology, sociology and others. Social scientists have long perceived the significance of food and eating behaviour in social life since it is believed that food is more than a biological process of fuelling the human body. It is rather a cultural manifestation. This cultural aspect of food has been captured largely by anthropologists and ethnographers through their study on primitive aboriginal societies in the world. Some of the major themes undertaken by these studies are issues of commensality which includes not only the process of eating but also the way certain foods are forbidden by certain communities. Anthropologists in general provide an account of food and eating practices of certain societies and how these practices depict the lives of such societies. It was in Mintz and Du Bois's (2002) paper on food and eating that enabled me to gather a holistic view of several works done by anthropologists in the area of food and culture. Mintz and Du Bois (2002) provide a vivid overview of the several arenas captured by anthropology in the context of food. It shows the purpose of food is not just about satiating one's hunger but has deep social and symbolic implications. For a start Mintz and Du Bois (2002) brings forth the relevance of such works in the context of theory building. "In theory building food system has been used to illuminate broad societal processes such as political-economic-value-creation (Mintz (1985), Symbolic value-creation (Munn 1986), and the social construction of memory (Sutton 2001) (ibid: 100). Detailed ethnographic work that forms part of the methodology in food studies deal with areas like food preparation, consumption, food politics, gender and identity construction through food.

Early anthropologists like Radcliffe Brown (1948[1922]) and Malinowski's (1935) study of Andaman Islanders and Trobriand Islanders respectively had references to food and

commensality as a process of eating (Janeja, M 2010: 4). One also finds reference of food sharing and exchange in Mauss's study of *The Gift* (1967). Mauss writes about the exchange of food and feasts in a potlatch among the various tribes of Melanesia and Polynesia. He has shown the pervasive cultural power of the gift which keeps individuals constantly indebted to each other and continuously engaged in positive interaction through giving. Anthropologists like Levi-Strauss (1966, 1970) and Roland Barthes (1972) have always harped on the significance of food in understanding societal structures similar to language. Food studies are often based on different theoretical premises among which structuralism features the most. Both Anthropologists and sociologists employ perspectives like structural-functionalism in their understanding of food and culture. French structuralism developed in the late 1950s and 1960s in the writings of Ferdinand de Saussure who is known as a structural linguist.

Saussure was interested in the 'structure' which he saw as a form of language and also tried to develop a science of language in which communications of all kinds follow underlying rules (Ashley et al., 2004: 4). Structuralism showed concern for the working of general laws through structures. Individual phenomena were also reduced to the structures or general laws. The basic tenet of structuralism is that society constitutes of underlying laws that assign meanings to the various signs and symbols in society. Every sign according to Saussure (1916) has a 'signifier' and a 'signified'. A signifying system can include any structure or system of organization that creates meaning out of cultural signs (Basu, P 2010: 37). According to Structuralists, a structure exists prior to human beings and exercise control over them. "Structures exist prior to their human subjects, profoundly shaping their consciousness of the world and limiting their freedom of action within it" (Ashley et al., 2004: 7). Even food can be perceived as a system of signs under structuralism.

Levi-Strauss in particular tried to provide meaning to food as a sign or code in human society. According to him binary opposites like the 'raw and the cooked' form the basic structure of all human cultures (Basu, P 2010: 43). Structuralists like Levi-Strauss believed that taste is a cultural thing and is not resort to change. He transposed the principles of linguistic to the understanding of food and cooking in society. He arranged the forms of cooking in a triangular semantic field. The raw, cooked and the rotten are the three major categories of cooking that explains the transformation of eating as a natural process to eating as a social process. According to him there is no culture without language and the art of cooking. This he explained through the different forms of cooking the raw, cooked and the rotten. He showed how the raw food is much closer to nature waiting to be transformed into a

cultural form with the application of heat (cooked). Rotten on the other hand is a natural transformation (Levi-Strauss, 1997: 37). He also mentions about two other forms of cooking, the boiled and the roasted. The boiled falls on the side of culture since boiling in water is done using a cultural object which is absent in case of roasted (ibid). Just like language people move from their natural disposition to cultural form through their art of cooking unelaborated meals to elaborated meals. Levi-Strauss has been critiqued in terms of his failure to look into micro social relations. His theory discussed universal meanings common for every human society.

Roland Barthes viewed food as a system of **communication**, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations and behaviour (Barthes, 1997: 29). Food also signifies. “All food serves as a sign among the members of a given society” (ibid). Such significations can be used to explain the differences in food taste among social groups in society. Barthes in his *‘Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption’* discusses the rampant use of sugar in American diet compared to the French counterpart. He finds that food is not just a nutritive element but a means of communication. “...substances, techniques of preparation, habits, all become a part of a system of differences in signification; and as soon as this happens, we have communication by way of food” (Barthes, 1997: 30). Barthes for instance gave the example of rising consumption of brown bread among certain sections of the people. Brown bread inevitably signifies refined eating (ibid). The signifying unit of food also varies across cultures. Barthes’s writing is significant because it speaks about the food habit of modernity shaped and transmitted by external forces like media and mass communication. The characteristic of food in modern society is its ability to signify multiple things. Food features across every human activity like ‘work, sports, leisure and festive occasions’ unlike traditional societies (Barthes, 1997). Mary Douglas (1972) also tried to segregate between a ‘meal’ and ‘eating food’. Similar to Levi-Strauss she was also interested in the linguistic analogies to food behaviour (Ferro-Luzi, 1977: 507).

Food avoidances and taboos are among the most sought after topics related to food and eating and ethnographers have dealt with the issue from several aspects. Douglas (1972) laid down rules for food consumption according to the Hebrew dietary laws. Food categories therefore encode social events (Douglas, 1972: 61). This also reflects on food taboos and avoidance of certain food types. ‘The word ‘taboo’ is often associated with food and is used with respect to touch, eat, speak or see (Douglas, 1979: 72). The word taboo supposedly originated from Polynesia and implied religious restrictions and was perceived as a theory of

contagion by scholars who tried to differentiate it from the modern knowledge of disease (ibid: 72-73). Taboos help to maintain the social order and also flow from social boundaries and support the social structure (ibid: 76). While Douglas looks at food taboos from a structural point of view, for Harris (1997), food avoidance and taboos though reflect religious prohibitions and dietary rules actually result out of ecological and environmental problems. His study was on the forbiddance of pork consumption in the Middle East. He writes, “As ecological conditions became unfavourable for pig raising, there was no alternative function which could redeem its existence. The creature became not only useless, but worse than useless- harmful, a curse to touch or merely see- a pariah animal” (Harris, M; Counihan and Penny Van esteriks, 1997: 60). One can trace this to the avoidance and prohibition of beef eating among the Hindus.

It holds enormous significance in understanding human society because food avoidances that vary across cultures are the basis of social identity. Goody (1982) noted how in early anthropology food was understood only with regard to food taboos, totemism and sacrifices. Goody (1982) also accounted for the functionalist perspective of food in anthropology which paid more attention to the role of the production and distribution of food in the domestic group, the significance of sacrifice for humanity as well as divinity, the meaning of prohibitions on the consumption of food especially the flesh of domestic animals (totem and taboo) (ibid: 17). These general approaches to food studies helped him to situate his own study on African cuisine in the discourse. He also tried to differentiate between pre industrial food and industrial foods noting that new techniques of food production and consumption have lessened the gap across classes in industrial countries of the west. Like language food habits are also learned and acquired components of culture. This is best tapped by anthropologists whose aim is to study people’s interactions and perceptions of their reality, culture and social space.

Perhaps the most holistic study on food and its relevance in human society has been provided by Fox (2002). Fox’s essay starts with the myth of nutrition whereby he states that apart from providing sufficient bodily needs the greater goal of food and eating in human society is to cater to the social needs of human beings. ‘*You are what you eat*’ connotes human beings as members of social groups through their shared eating practices which includes both acceptance and forbiddance of foods. This helps to foster in-group feeling among the members of groups. The way foods are eaten in terms of the manners and etiquettes on both regular and ceremonial occasions also provide group identity to the people. Fox (2002)

projects the functional aspect of food in human society distinguishing it from the natural process of eating. According to Caplan (1997) the anthropological works on food in the 1960s and 1970s show how culture plays a significant role in determining food and how we eat it. However it lacks in its effort to explain myriad social relationships involved in food transactions along with the changes it incurs (Caplan, P 1997: 2-3). Caplan (1997) therefore rightly observes that way food is a concept which cannot be only a physical bodily requirement. Rather it is associated with social phenomena like power relationships, practices of inclusion and exclusion and health and wellbeing et al (ibid). According to him sociological and anthropological works on food have referred to 'food as a marker of difference along variables like gender, age, class and ethnicity which frequently 'make a difference' to eating patterns' (Caplan, 1997: 9).

Audrey Richards (1932, 1937, and 1939) studied the production and consumption of food among the African tribes in order to seek the way food abides by life cycle rituals and interpersonal relationships (Mennell et al., 1992: 7). For Audrey Richards food does not imply nutrition only. Rather there are sociological and psychological context of food, its production, preparation and consumption which shows the way these processes are linked to life-cycle, ones interpersonal relationships and to the structure of social groups. She made a study on the Bemba in the work '*Land, Labour and Diet in Northern Rhodesia* (Richards, 1939; Goody J, 1982: 16).

Another major area taken up by classical ethnographers are food as **single substances** and their functional and structural role in society. One cannot miss the classic work on sugar and sweetness (Mintz, 1985). In Mintz's (1985) pioneering work showed how a sugar, an unknown substance became a major part of English diet. This sugar is invented out of human technology and extracted out of sugarcane. "...radical dietary changes of the last three hundred years have largely been achieved by revolutionary pressures in food processing and consumption by adding new foods, rather than simply cutting back on older ones" (Mintz, S 1985: 13). Production of sugar was not only economically significant for England but also politically profound. Consumption of sugar is a relatively modern phenomenon in history. Mintz (1985) skilfully provides interesting account of a sugar free world where consumption was largely wheat based. Introduction of sugar in the western world reflects on the changing dietary choices of the people. Sugar was earlier treated at par with spices or condiments which has now altered signifying the change in meaning and use of sugar in relationship to other spices (ibid: 80). Sugar initially a luxury food gradually became an everyday necessity

of the normal mundane reality and also the food of the poor. Sugar is also highly placed in ceremonial foods (ibid: 187). This work helped me understand the way food substances can bridge the gap across classes by transforming into diet of necessity.

Another major area taken up by anthropologists is the area of **social change**. For instance Adrian Mayer shows the way caste relations are changing in Indian village (Mayer, 1996; Mintz and Du Bois, 2002). Cultural anthropology through the works of Mead (1997, 2008) helps to discern the aspect of change in food habits. A study of American food habit by Mead determines the way food habits form 'standard sets of behaviour'. Food habits are seen in the light of other co-existing factors or behaviour within the same culture and are not viewed in isolation (Mead 1997, 2008). Mead tried to identify the different social psychological factors affecting American food pattern. American society with a cultural diversity and multi ethnic inhabitants have witnessed dynamic changes in its food culture. Here are groups of people who have acquired a preference for certain foods mainly based upon its puritan values and not taste. For others appearance of a food which is highly processed and packaged matter more compared to the taste of the food. 'In any study of food habits, it is important to define the patterns into which the available foods are arranged, such as number and form of meals, and the cultural as opposed to the nutritional- equivalences which can be invoked within these patterns (Mead 1997: 21).

Anthropologists have covered different areas of food like food wars to food insecurities, rituals related to eating and commensality among many more. We find a variety of anthropological literature on food studies. Freeman (2006) in her editorial explains the anthropologist's role in discovering the way cuisines and food habits are shaped culturally across human civilizations. Cuisine she defines as 'culturally defined foodstuffs also may or may not be locally produced or gathered¹³'. She further notes how a cuisine or food habit have been the centre of many discourses in fields of sciences like 'environmental studies, economics, politics, philosophy, religion, kinship and social organization, population, biology and nutrition, and taste and aesthetics' (Freeman, 2006)

Food also finds representation in various **literary and textual works**. Food has been used as a metaphor by writers in their study of migrant's connection with their homelands. Nayana Chakrabarti (2011) tried to comprehend the metaphoric use of food in the lives of 'bicultural immigrants of Indian origin' through three fictional tales. Messages that are encoded in the

¹³ Freeman Susan Tax, 2006, Culturing Food, *Gastronomica: The Journal of Critical Food Studies*, 6(4): 100

essay show how meals are a part of the lived experience of individuals through their acceptance and non- acceptance of certain foods (Chakrabarti, 2011: 152).It also shows the way food is a process by which people communicate and connect to larger society. Foods are usually encoded with certain beliefs which are idiosyncratic of certain cultures (ibid: 161). Dusselier brings forth Shobha Narayan's food memoir which shows her experiences with different types of foods through train trips across India. 'Narayan's narratives of visiting localities and consuming regional specialties are endless and remind us that foods are important identity builders (ibid: 335). Narayan's memoir also sheds light on environmental issues. Dusselier also enlightens us on how food studies can question displacement issues. Foods reflect the sense of place or space among human beings. Hence food ways may help people to reposition themselves in foreign spaces or adapt to newer environments. One finds archaeological interest in food on Neolithic origins of food production. Pollock (2012) brings together studies of commensality of everyday food and luxury food among the cultures of Neolithic and Chalcolithic age. The scholarly works are built on several anthropological and historical studies on commensality. It touches upon all the specific areas of commensality and eating including hospitality which marks gestures of amiability and social inclusion on special festive occasions. Although Pollock talks about forms of commensality in case of prehistoric cultures, the discourses help in the understanding of the same in modern society. Dusselier (2009) tried to encourage an interdisciplinary analysis of food studies that will help to understand human experiences and meaning of human existence. Influenced by structuralism and semiotics in understanding food ways, she focused on the 'way America's taste for candy was culturally constructed'¹⁴ (Dusselier, 2009: 332). Food as an everyday object often questions bigger ideologies, issues and social phenomena. Dusselier states a series of influences on her work on Asian-American foods which are excellent representations of histories, cultures and environments shaped through food.

Anthropologists have touched upon a wide array of topics like in food and eating starting from commensality, to food production, agriculture, food serving, food avoidance and food changes largely from an ethnographic point of view adopting the structural functional and symbolic perspective to their study. Literature and history have also tried to decipher the metaphoric implications of food in everyday life perceiving food as a system of communication. A widely acclaimed literature on food has helped me situate my study in the

¹⁴ Dusselier Jane, 2009, Understandings of Food as Culture, *Environmental History*, 14(2): 331-338

larger discourse of food and culture. It has also strengthened my incipient understanding of the social significance of food.

2.3 SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON FOOD

While one can undoubtedly find the context of food in relation to different aspects of social life upheld across a multidisciplinary endeavour, food has remained a much neglected area in the discipline of Sociology which was mostly popularised by cultural anthropology. Nevertheless there are certain academic scholarships on the subject which are worth mentioning. Some of the works are shared and borrowed across disciplines providing an interdisciplinary picture. While doing research on food and culture one cannot miss the works of some of the stalwarts like Mary Douglas (1966, 1971), Charles and Kerr (1988), Anne Murcott (1982), Georg Simmel (1997) and Stephen Mennell (1985) among others. All these works provide insight into the different dimensions of food in human society. The focus of sociological works is mostly on human diets, socio-cultural determinants of diet, changing food patterns of production and involvement of the market, food security at community and household levels etc. Among the early sociologists reference to food can be found in Engels's *'The Condition of the working class in England'* (1969 [1845]). Among the classical thinkers in sociology, Durkheim did not perceive food as a social fact. Durkheim's concept of the sacred and profane developed in his *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912) can be further extended to the concept of ritual purity related to food preparation and consumption. It was in the writings of Simmel (1997) that food became a significant point of discourse. Simmel's study on 'meal' from a sociological point of view tried to grapple with the questions of sociability or sociation. For Simmel the process of eating is an individualised act which is made 'social'. Similarly, Murcott (1982) explained that for sociologists food choices are not just dependent on bodily and psychological needs and neither on individual preference. Rather they are determined by large number of social factors which makes food habits a good sociological study. "Habits of eating and drinking are invested with significance by a particular culture or sub culture to which they belong" (Murcott, 1982: 203). For Murcott food habits are largely shaped by people's social relationships and their cultural identity (Murcott, 1982). Murcott (1982) draws upon Levi-Strauss's dialectics between nature and culture and his theory of the culinary triangle while comprehending human food habits. Mary Douglas and Anne Murcott also emerged with the concept of a 'proper meal' (Tivadar, 2006). According to Murcott [1982: 682-684] and Charles and Kerr

[1988:18-25] ‘the ideal British proper meal of the eighties is prepared from fresh ingredients like meat, potatoes, vegetables and gravy, which are cooked from scratch and served hot. It is essentially as a family occasion, prepared by the woman-wife-mother for her husband and children and eaten by the whole family. A proper meal involves eating together with family members, sitting around a dinner table, enjoying the food and pleasant conversation. The proper meal symbolizes the existence of the ‘proper family’. The concept of an ideal meal is found to lose significance in post industrial society and brings forth further arguments of changing lifestyle, culture, taste and habits of people (Warde, 1997). Taking up from these studies, I intend to understand the meaning of meal in contemporary Bengali society. The notion of development through food can be found in Torres and De la Feunt (2012) study of a traditional regional cuisine in a rural society of Mexico which turned into a heritage cuisine for the place. Urbanization is a process that can bring about great changes in food habits of rural societies. On a positive note, Torres and De la Feunt found that transformation of traditional diet led to the development of commercial food chains in rural societies of Mexico. “In general culinary knowledge and practices related to the traditional regional food in San Pedro El Saucito are an expression of an identity with the rural past and of cultural resistance in the face of a more urban lifestyle” (Torres and De la Feunt, 2012). This study shows the way traditional family meals can be transformed into commercialised diets as a form of cultural resistance among the people.

Food is therefore seen as an extremely important component of reciprocal exchanges more so than any other object or substance (Counihan and Kaplan, 1998: 3). Man’s food habit is also connected to all the above social processes (Warde, 1997: 22). Food has been marked as an industry in itself (Goodman and Redcliff 1991; *ibid*) where it involves myriad activities in social life from ‘shopping, planning, storing, cooking and serving...’and hence calls for a micro sociological study on social interactions and relationships associated with food processes. It has been widely acknowledged by the academia of social sciences that food is not just a biological requirement but is a product of social and cultural processes. Hence it can also be used as a ‘means of cultural expression’ (*ibid*). This culture has a dynamic status. As human civilizations advance culture also changes its form through man’s learning and re-learning process. The same holds true for food as well. Sociology of food is associated with sociology of culture. Reference to food in order to gauge the dynamics of people’s life and society can be sought from a number of works.

Beardsworth and Keil (1997) tried to explore the dynamics of food and eating from a sociological point of view. They have tried to look at the different dimensions of food with references to food and health along with food preferences and forbiddance. It again shows the way food can be an important instrument of symbolism as stated by the anthropological works following structuralism. Food symbolises power relations within society. Sociological perspectives deal with food from a functional, structural and developmental perspective. There are innumerable number of works that try to depict different aspects of human relations, interactions, emotions and culture through food. These studies helped me to frame my understanding of Bengali society and culture through food. Mennell et al. (1992) provides a comprehensive account of the different areas of social life assessed through food. According to them the significance of sociology of food grew in modern society due to greater awareness of nutritional requirement and hunger problems in industrial society. Sociological research on food caters to different areas like food shortage, food and social stratification, food security and commensality among others (ibid).

In the above section I have tried to reflect on the different theoretical works that discern the concept and meaning of food in human society. These works have helped me understand the concept of food and conceptualise my research. Much of these academic endeavours centre around food in simple societies and does not reflect much on the changing circumstances of everyday food in a modern cosmopolitan society. In my research I intend to understand the way modern human beings sharing the same ethnic identity and inhabiting a cosmopolitan society negotiate with their every day food practices. There are several discourses built around food in modern society.

2.4 CONCEPT OF CLASS

Class is an economic concept which is defined in terms of possession of material resources like income and wealth. The concept of class is quite contested in sociology. The relevance of class was sought by the classical thinkers like Marx and Weber as one of the markers of social stratification in modern society. Contemporary sociology has thinkers who are not in support of class and believes that class as an institution is losing its significance over the primacy of status. Wright (2003) states, “classes are social categories sharing subjectively-salient attributes used by people to rank those categories within a system of economic stratification. They are shared subjective understandings of people about rankings within social inequality. In this sense class is contrasted with other forms of stratification like

ethnicity, religion, gender and occupation” (Wright, 2003: 1-2). Objectively class is located in terms of possession of material goods. This is also the gradational aspect of class which divides it into upper, middle and lower class categories respectively (ibid). My research particularly takes into account the gradational aspect of class namely the middle class and lower class. Before delving into the more nuanced theories of class, one cannot undermine the two major schools of thought on class theory- the Marxist tradition and the Weberian tradition of class.

The Marxian concept of class revolves around the issue of exploitation. For Marx classes are based on the possession of capital or private property and unequal distribution of resources. “The central task of the theory is to demonstrate first, that poverty in the midst of plenty is not somehow an inevitable consequence of the laws of nature, but the result of our specific design of our social institutions, and second, that these institutions can be transformed in such a way as to eliminate such socially unnecessary suffering (ibid: 7). there are several neo-Marxist theorists who broke free from the traditional concept of middle class. For Wright (1985), the middle class are the intermediate classes within the bipolar class of bourgeoisie and proletariat as predicted by Marx while Poulantzas (1975) refer it to the unproductive class in society. Weberian thesis on class states that the class situation is represented under conditions of commodity or labour markets. Class situation is also defined in terms of market situation (Weber, 1978 [1922]); Wright, 2003: 4). Other theorists who follow the Weberian concept of class are Giddens (1973), Parkin (1971), Scott (1996). Giddens right observed that for Weber possession or non possessions of property are the basic categories of class position. Giddens never found much dissimilarity in the ideas of Marx and Weber with respect to class. Weber showed that ‘marketables skills constitute a “form of property” which the individual is able to disposeof to secure a given economic return. From a Weberian perspective Giddens observed that ‘ownership of property’, ‘possession of education or technical qualification’ and ‘possession of manual labour-power’ is the basis of the formation of three class systems in a capitalist society (Giddens, 1973; Urry and Abercrombie, 2014: 22-23). For Giddens the middle class is based upon education and technical qualification and this market capacity produces economic differences between white collar and manual workers. Giddens follows Lockwood in emphasising the differences between white collar and manual workers (ibid: 24). Giddens further notes how the nature of relationship between the middle class and other classes vary from one society to another depending on the nature of structuration (ibid: 25). Developing a socially relevant conceptual framework for studying

and intervening on eating patterns involves operationalising Giddens' concepts of social structure, agency and social practices (Stones 2005, Delormier 2008: 219). Giddens' structuration theory tries to explain the dualism between structure (rules and resources) and agency (voluntary action) (Giddens, 1984).

Bourdieu (1984) perceives class as an agent or set of agents who determine their position through their access to three forms of capital, economic, social and cultural capital respectively (Bourdieu, 1986, 1987). Chan T.W and Goldthorpe (2010) view class positions as one defined by relations in the labour market, production units and employment relations. However Weber feels classes are collectivities that exist in so far as 'a number of people have in common a specific causal component of their life chances' (Weber, 1968; Chan, T.W and Goldthorpe, 2010: 11). "Social hierarchy created is expressed in differential association and more intimate forms of what Weber refers to as commensality' and 'connubium'- who eats with whom, who sleeps with whom; and further in lifestyles that are seen as appropriate to different status levels (ibid: 12). Social class is not defined by a property...nor even by a collection of properties...nor even by a chain of properties strung out of a fundamental property (position in relation of production) in a relation of cause and effect, conditioner and conditioned but by the structure of relations between all the pertinent properties which gives its specific value to each of them and to the effects they exert on practice" (Bourdieu, 1984: 106). Bourdieu notes that as one rises in the class hierarchy the proportion of income spent on food diminishes. The real principle of preference becomes taste which creates a distance from 'necessity'. The true basis of difference found in the area of consumption and far beyond it, is the opposition between the tastes of luxury (or freedom) and the taste of necessity. The former are the tastes of individuals who are the product of material conditions of existence defined by distance from necessity, by the freedom or facilities stemming from possession of capital. The latter express precisely in their adjustment the necessities of which they are the product (Bourdieu, 1984: 177). Within the dominant class Bourdieu (1984) distinguishes between three structures of consumption: food, culture and presentation (ibid: 183-184).

Bourdieu's tendency to homogenise lifestyles within social classes drew attention to earlier theories which stressed on diversity rather than uniformity of lifestyles among the higher social strata (Shils, 1972; Bell, 1976; Chan, T.W and Goldthorpe, 2010: 5). The new individualization thesis upheld the 'death of class'. Beck (1992) and Giddens (1991) believed that class and status started declining in their influence on lifestyle and consumption pattern in the 'late' modern period (ibid). An important point stated by Chan T.W and Goldthorpe

(2010) was the rise in other kinds of identity like gender and ethnicity which overshadowed class influences in depicting one's lifestyle. They said, "Rising standards of living, greater geographical and social mobility, exogamy, and a growing awareness of alternative social basis of identity like gender, ethnicity and sexuality help to free individuals from social class constraints and status preoccupations". People are free to exercise their own personal choice in framing their lifestyles which adds to the narrative of 'social identity (Chan, T.W and Goldthorpe, 2010: 6). Warde emphasised on the shift from habitus to freedom (Warde, 1997).

This study is concerned the distinction and interrelationship across two classes namely the middle class and the lower class (urban poor) with respect to food habits. The middle class is a large heterogeneous mass of people and are in common parlance defined as those that fall in the middle strata or middle income group in society. The concept of middle class is comparatively new among the classical class theorists and has more than just income based social position. As Bourdieu noted, the middle class is divided in terms of their occupation of the different forms of capital (1986). However the urban middle class is a growing phenomenon across the world and are seen as the main harbingers of advanced capitalism, consumerism and globalism. The middle class Bengalis referred to in this study form an integral part of the larger cross section of the middle class in India.

The **Indian Middle Class** have been conceptualised by eminent scholars through various discourses (Varma 1998; Fernandes 2000, 2006; Scrase and Scrase 2009; Sridharan, E 2011; Joshi 2011). The Indian middle class is a product of colonialism in India [Varma 1998; Joshi 2011] and is divided among the old middle class and the new middle class in contemporary class discourses. Since its formation, the middle class has always been a topic of contention, often deplored and often epitomised. Sanjay Joshi's (2011) writing on '*The Spectre of Comparisons: Studying the Middle Class of Colonial India*', harps on the 'dualities' of the middle class in an Indian city. The middle class in India, since its colonial inception is often denigrated for its Eurocentric disposition, adoption of western cultural values and being a hybrid product (Joshi 2011: 83-84). "Examining the rise of a middle class in colonial Lucknow however is beyond simple economic indicators of income and occupation in defining this social category. It was not simply similarities in education, occupation or profession that made a middle class in colonial India. It was by transforming traditional cultural values and the basis of social hierarchy that a distinctive middle class emerged" (Joshi 2011: 91). Scholastic works often reflected on this growing middle class in Indian

society in the light of liberalization and changes in economic policy of the country since 1991. The middle classes round the world are known to be those intermediate strata within society who neither fall in the class of the very rich and neither within the category of the poor. They are occupants of white collar professions, salaried and often self employed. They are also the educated class in society (Sridharan E, 2011: 29). “Their importance grows as economies the world over, including developing economies shift towards the service sector, in terms of both the share of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employment” [ibid]. They possess all forms of human capital, social, economic and cultural and nevertheless a privileged section of society compared to the mass of urban poor (Bourdieu, 1986). Sridharan’s (2011), *‘The Growth and Sectoral Composition of India’s Middle Classes: Their Impact on the Politics of Economic Liberalization’*, provides a conceptual clarification on the middle class in post liberalized India through an amalgamation of views of different scholastic works. Based upon the Marxist and Neo Marxist schema, the middle classes are those in-between layers of society who fall within the upper rich sections of society and the very poor. Neo Marxist intellectuals perceive the intermediate class as those whose relationship to capitalism and industrialization are much critical. This is because while the middle classes are found to be sustained by capitalism, they are also misused and fall prey to the capitalist system (Wright 1985; Sridharan 2011). The Indian middle class is often presented in different nuances. With their possession of all forms of human capital, social, economic and cultural, the middle class is the main proponent of public sphere, taking active part in political decision making and are in possession of values both tradition and modern. They are also a class responsible for their hegemonic presence in society and often find space among the elite sections of society (Ahmad 1985; Bardhan 1994; Deshpande 2003; Sridharan 2011). Rudra (1989) defined the middle class as a group of non manual labourers which included white collar workers, public servants, professionals in organised or private sector and the self employed (Sridharan 2011: 31). Rudra (1989) characterised this group as a part of the ‘intelligentsia’ which is different from the old middle class of petty bourgeoisie, small shopkeepers and artisans [ibid].

Pranab Bardhan’s (1994) views about the middle class in India were that of a ‘dominant proprietor’ aiding the state or public sector for its own interest and hence form the professional elites of society. “The dominant coalition included not only the bourgeois-landlord alliance but also professionals, including white-collar workers, in the public sector as one of the dominant proprietary classes in themselves, with their own corporate class

interests, distinct from, and to some extent conflicting with, those of industrialists and landlords” (Sridharan 2011: 33). Andre Beteille (2001) defined the middle class in terms of occupation, education and income. The most important occupational division is between manual and non-manual work, with typical middle class occupations being non manual [ibid: 35]. Income cum occupation criteria have been adopted by many as a suitable for categorising the middle class.

“According to MISH data (Market Information Survey of Households), the middle class can be divided into the Elite middle class, the expanded middle class and the broadest middle class. It includes all those occupational groups which fall in the non manual category, be it salaried and self employed. Hence the occupational sector of the middle class includes professional, managerial, technical and clerical jobs. It excludes public sector employees in Group D like peons, drivers, sweepers etc. However the Group D or manual employees often identify themselves as middle class” (Sridharan, E ; Baviskar and Ray, 2011: 49). Satish Deshpande (2006) in his “*Mapping the ‘Middle’: Issues in the Analysis of the ‘Non-Poor’ Classes in India*”¹⁵, developed more nuanced argument of the middle class. Deshpande (2006) classifies the middle class as the ‘Non-Poor’ sections of society vis-a-vis the ‘Poor’. Another interesting argument put forward by Deshpande (2006) shows how the bridge between classes is often diminished by accordance of a middle class status. “The attraction of the middle class label is especially strong when the actual economic when qualifiers like ‘upper’ and ‘lower’ are prefixed to the middle class” (ibid: 218). He prefers to call the ‘middle class’ as the affluent class in society and hence questions the usage of the term middle class altogether due to its ambiguity and incoherence (ibid: 216). This is because the ‘middle class’ lie at the top of the income distribution (ibid: 218). Based upon the above definitions and discourses respondents from a diverse occupational, educational and income category have been chosen as representatives of the middle class for this study. This class of people are seen in opposition to the class of have-nots or the urban poor.

The Urban Poor are defined in terms of the poverty line which distinguishes between the poor and the non poor. The poverty line can be established on the basis of a minimum nutritional requirement of a person expressed in calories, which are around 2400 calories in rural areas and 2100 calories in urban areas. However there are other identifying features of

¹⁵ Deshpande, Satish, *Mapping the ‘Middle’: Issues in the Analysis of the Non-Poor’ Classes in India* in John Mary E (eds), 2006, *Contested Transformations: Changing Economies and Identities in Contemporary India*, Tulika Books, New Delhi

the urban poor. Social and cultural anthropologists identified a culture of poverty which shapes a distinct lifestyle perpetuating poverty itself. Oscar Lewis (1966) provided the concept of a culture of poverty which enables the poor to form a subculture of their own. According to Lewis (1966) poverty does not only entail deprivation or disorganization, rather there is a certain ghettoization, a sub cultural form that enables them to live and sustain amidst the privileged and the powerful. “The most likely candidates for the culture of poverty would be the people who come from the lower strata of a rapidly changing society and who are partially alienated from it (Lewis, 1966: 24). Lewis (1966) categorises between poverty and the culture of poverty as a particular way of life. Sen (1981) provides account of the concept of poverty and how it can be well defined. “The poor are those people whose consumption standards fall short of the norms or whose incomes lie below the poverty line (Sen, A 1981: 9). The translation of minimum nutritional requirements into minimum food requirements depends on the choice of the commodities whereas the actual incomes on which nutritional needs are based depend a lot on food habit (ibid: 12). Sen (1981) further relates poverty with inequality while he carefully notes that they are different in various aspects. Poverty is often viewed as a relative concept by many known by the name of relative deprivation¹⁶ which according to Sen (1981) doesn’t explain poverty in entirety. In his explanation of poverty, Sen (1981) perceives inflexibility of taste as a major criteria resulting in poverty. It is not only the inability to spend on commodities but rather the inability to convert ones food habits that account for poverty to a large extent.

The urban poor can be identified in objective terms of their inaccessibility to housing and shelter, water, sanitation, health, education, social security and livelihoods along with special needs of vulnerable groups like women, children, differently abled and aged people. Even when segments of the population are not income-poor, they face deprivation in terms of lack of access to sanitary living conditions and their well being is hampered by discrimination, social exclusion, crime, and violence, insecurity of tenure, hazardous environmental conditions and lack of voice in governance¹⁷. Slums/bustees are a feature of urban poverty. Most of the slum dwellers that also form a part of the urban poor belong to the fast growing informal sector. A slum is a compact settlement with a collection of poorly built tenements,

¹⁶ The concept of relative deprivation is understood in terms of ‘reference group theory’ which states that one has to look at the groups with which the people in question actually compare themselves and thus can be one of the most difficult aspects of the study of poverty based on relative deprivation (Sen, A, 1981 : 17)

¹⁷ Report of the Expert Group to Recommend the Detailed Methodology for Identification of Families Living Below Poverty Line in the Urban Areas, Planning Commission, Perspective Planning Division, Government of India, December 2012

mostly of temporary nature, crowded together usually with inadequate sanitary and drinking water facilities in unhygienic conditions in a compact area¹⁸. In a slum the huts all cluster together. Families residing in each room share a common latrine. There is hardly any water supply, drains, disposal of solid waste and garbage in the slum area. Apart from the squatter settlements, there are two types of slums in Kolkata, the registered slums and the unregistered slums. The registered slums are those that belong to the CMC/KMC (Kolkata Municipal Corporation) and are given out to tenants. The unregistered slums are those that have come up on government lands, canals, roads etc¹⁹. The urban poor lack proper education but are found to spend a large part of their monthly income in educating their children. They are mostly appointed in the informal sector like daily wage workers, construction labour, petty traders, hawkers, sex workers, rickshaw pullers and domestic workers etc²⁰. The slum dwellers are best representatives of the urban poor. The slums comprise of both nuclear and joint family structures. Minimum household members include two persons while maximum members residing in one household goes up to around ten people. The members of these households all belong to the informal sector and work as rickshaw pullers, shop keepers, vendors, drivers while there are respondents who also work in clerical jobs. There is a thin line of demarcation between the lower middle class and the urban poor in terms of income, education and occupation.

Adrian Peace (1984) draws a parallel between the state employed middle class of Jaipur city and the urban poor who are self-employed. In her study Mayer gathers the middle class as the privileged sections of society who has access to property ownership, private education and class endogamy while the poor are distinguished in terms of social exclusionary practices, insecurity and poverty (Peace, 1984: 267). The middle class and urban poor inhabit different social worlds which create distinctions between the two. The middle class dissociates from the poor through their possession of resources and patterns of privileges (ibid: 272).

¹⁸ NSS 65TH Round, January 2013, Some Characteristics of Urban Slums in West Bengal, Socio-Economic Survey Office, Bureau of Applied Economics and Statistics, Department of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of West Bengal

¹⁹ Kundu Netai, Urban Slum Reports: The case of Kolkata, India, Understanding Slums: Case Studies for the Global Report on Human Settlements, 2003

²⁰ Report of the Expert Group to Recommend the Detailed Methodology for Identification of Families Living Below Poverty Line in the Urban Areas, Planning Commission, Perspective Planning Division, Government of India, December 2012, Pp 30

2.5 FOOD AND CONSUMPTION

The study of consumption is a fairly new subject matter in sociology. Neither sociologists nor consumer researchers however have accepted the challenge of studying society's consumption in relation to other social characteristics (Nicosia and Mayer, 1976: 65). Consumption was seen as a function of production among the classical thinkers like Marx, Weber and also Simmel (Warde, 1997: 7). Consumption studies also revolved around notions of class, inequality and hierarchy. We find traces of consumption in Veblen's (1970 [1899]) theory of conspicuous consumption among the leisure class. Consumption then was perceived in terms of class position in society. For instance "differential consumption practices were explained in terms of the location of social classes in the system of production" (Warde, 1997: 8). This idea gets more profound in theorists like Weber (1967 [1922]) and Bourdieu (1984).

One of the most sensitizing theories applicable to this research is Bourdieu's (1984) understanding of 'Distinction' and his study of 'Field'. Bourdieu was in support of the class based consumption system and believed that consumption depend on people's habitus. For Bourdieu (1984) taste and desire for commodities develops and perpetuates class formations. Consumption capacity creates distinction across social classes. This is in turn related to one's habitus which links a person's social and economic position with corresponding position in 'the universe of lifestyle' and 'makes it possible to account both for classifiable practices and products and products and for the judgement, themselves classified, which makes these practices and works into a system of distinctive signs' (1984; Warde, 1997: 9). The habitus is internalised and converted into a disposition that creates meaningful practices (Bourdieu, 1984; *ibid*). In the process Bourdieu (1984) accords such dispositions to specific lifestyles that rule social classes. Bourdieu (1984) made a detailed study of different forms of consumption like, food, art and clothes across different categories of social classes in French society before arriving at his theory of 'Distinction'. He further relates social position through ones access to different forms of capital in society namely-economic capital, social capital and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). The question is whether Bourdieu's (1984) theory can be generalised across societies. For instance scholars were sceptical of his theory on Distinction with regard to North American society where distinction between the elites and the masses were not so predominant. "Several authors (e.g Lamont and Lareau, 1988; Lamont, 1992; Halle, 1993; Erickson, 1996), observed that in North America members of

higher social strata were not distinguished by their refined aesthetic tastes and their levels of participation in high cultural activities” (Tak Wing Chan and Goldthorpe, 2010: 5). Bourdieu’s (1984) theory is succeeded by two more theories, Individualization and theory of ‘Omnivore-Univore’ in order to understand the status of class and consumption in late modern society. Individualization thesis implies greater freedom and autonomy to exert choice of consumption unlike Bourdieu’s idea of homology (Bourdieu, 1984; Bauman, 1992; Chan, Warde, 1997). The ‘omnivore-univore’ argument emerged in the 1960s that showed that members of higher social strata did not have any aversion to popular culture and were also regular consumers of it (ibid: 7).

Mc Cracken (1986) contributes to the study of consumption by drawing the significance of consumer goods which has the ability to communicate cultural meanings (Douglas and Isherwood, 1978; Sahlins, 1976; McCracken, 1986). Cultural meanings of goods bought or used (as the principle of consumption) are seen in terms of what he calls cultural categories. Cultural categories of time, space, nature and person make up the vast body of categories creating a system of distinction that organises the phenomenal world (ibid: 72). For McCracken cultural categories are substantiated through material culture (ibid: 73). Possession of goods can be used to represent different cultural categories.

According to Warde (1997) it is important to note how far theories of consumption cater to the understanding of food consumption in society. Food consumption is different from other forms of consumption since it is universal and embedded in the mundane (p. 180). Warde (1997) also notes there are few complicated tendencies in the sociology of food consumption. These four tendencies illustrated by Warde (1997) are the forces of Individualization, ‘Communification’, Stylization, and Informalization (ibid: 181). The Individualization thesis of food consumption propagated by Bauman (1991), Beck (1992) and Giddens (1991) will be explained subsequently in relation to the concept of food and identity. One should understand that the Individualization theory developed in contradistinction to the class theory of consumption. It complies that “each individual member of a household eats in ways increasingly distinct from other household members, such that common patterns of behaviour within the households diminish” (ibid). The Individualization theory depicts the new global trend of consumption. Hence it is important to see the implication of the same in the context of Bengali food habit which is again marked by ‘regionalism’ and embedded in the normative to an extent. Forces of Individualization also speak about subsequent fragmentations in eating pattern of the people. This is due to the innumerable variety of choices provided by global

and consumer forces (ibid: 182). The next force acting on food consumption is the process of 'communification' which makes one shape ones food habits based upon the community one is part of. This is again understood in terms of identity formation established through food (ibid: 183). Buaman (1990) spoke about the formation of niche-groups or the 'neo-tribe' as new consumer behaviour dependent on 'stylization'. "Compared to the community, the neo-tribe requires more discipline with respect to taste and judgement. Aesthetic rules are constitutive of such neo-tribes (Warde, 1997: 185). Contrary to the forces of stylization, Warde (1997) provides the concept of Informalization in food habits. Informalization is a mundane, casual mode of behaviour which has been attributed to the Cultural Revolution in Britain in the 1960s. Informalization is evidenced in British food system due to high rates of individual diversity (ibid: 187). Warde (1997) study of *Consumption, Food and Taste*, is essentially a depiction of food consumption pattern in British society. Nonetheless the book brings forward some of the new and global trends of consumption theories with special reference to food. I intend to contextualise my research within these larger theories of consumption in order to analyse food consumption pattern across classes in Bengali households.

Diane Reay (2004) in his *Rethinking of Social Class: Qualitative Perspectives on Class and Gender* proclaimed the way class still exists as an important indicator of social identity. His qualitative study reflected on the way mother's subjectivities are ruled by their class positions and influence their action regarding children's education. "Social class is a dynamic mobile aspect of identity that continues to permeate daily interactions despite its marginalization in prevailing contemporary discourses" (Reay 2004: 140). The discourse unfolds with a greater discourse on women's class position which is often left undebated in traditional class theories. Women's social class is mediated through their relationships with men (Goldthorpe 1980, 1983; Lockwood 1986; Goldthorpe and Marshall 1992; Reay 2004: 140). According to Reay (2004) the logic of market does not displace the logic of class but rather masks it behind a rhetoric of freedom of choice for all. Despite the rhetoric markets are shaped by class, culture and consumption (Cookson 1992; Reay 2004: 142). For example the education market acts in for the middle class groupings. It is also found that class relations are increasingly constructed through patterns of consumption and their associated technologies of desire (Kenway 1995; Reay 2004: 143). Consumption no less than production is a classed and classifying process. An example of discourses which operate in middle and elite class interests is the divisive exclusionary mechanisms of the 1990s whereby the working classes,

predominantly lone mothers, and their children are represented as underclass (Reay 2004: 143). Through his research on the educational system in the 1990s, Reay claimed that the meanings of class are infused in everyday interactions of the people. Contesting the arguments raised by Pakulski and Waters (1996, 1980) regarding the disappearing of class and class based exploitation in contemporary society, Reay notes that exclusionary practices still exist. “It is the ways in which they are manifested that have shifted and muted” (Reay 2004: 145).

2.6 FOOD AND IDENTITY

Modernity perceives identity as mobile, multiple, personal and self reflexive and subject to change and innovation (Berman, 1892; Kellner, 1995: 231). Identity needs to be self-validated by others. This is evident in the writings of Hegel and Mead (ibid). However in modern society the question of identity itself is a complex one. On the one hand identity is mediated by socially instituted norms while on the other hand there is a profound identity crisis growing as an aftermath of modernity (ibid). This is the post modern situation where identity is all the more fragmented and unstable, notes Kellner (1995). Television and advertisements are considered to create fragmented identities in post modern world (ibid). While this is one of the prominent discourses on identity, the issue is also explored further through ones consumption pattern especially food.

Food studies in social sciences revolve around identity issues. Food is seen as a marker of identity. Discourses on food and identity are established across theories on consumption. The process of food consumption and preparation can help to maintain one’s social and cultural identity, the question of individual or self-identity cannot be ruled out in contemporary society. A number of social science scholars have tried to emphasize on the assimilation of food with identity formation and conservation (Caplan 1997, Counihan and Kaplan, 1998, Wilk, 1999 et al.). Food and eating habits provide social identity to individuals. The messages encoded in ways of cooking, eating, serving and distributing all speak about identity formations across groups. Social identity can be in the form of one’s class, race, ethnicity, gender and caste. Food practices essentially deal with the concept of personal identity which makes it a ‘cultural signifier’ borrowing from other fields like literature, anthropology, sociology and history (Almerico 2014: 3). “In a world where there is an increasing number of commodities available to act as props in this process, identity becomes more than ever a matter of personal selection of self image. Individuals are forced to choose their identities

(Warde, 1994; Gronow, 1997: 5). Identity in late modern society is also associated with personal food choices as opposed to social or cultural choices. As Bourdieu (1984) noted there can be very little choice for the people since consumption depends a lot on habitus (see page). Contrary to this notion, Bauman (1992) for instance believed that modern consumer society provides enough scope for personal freedom in exercising one's choice. This gets reflected in the creation of 'self-identity' among the people. Hence on the one hand we find the concept of social and cultural identity growing out of shared food consumption while on the other hand theorists predict the notion of self-identity created through individualised choice or will.

Claude Fischler in his *Food, Self and Identity* (1988) reflects that food that is incorporated in our bodies forms the basis of one's identity. Food and cuisines provide a sense of collective belongingness. He gives an example by stating, "In some situations of migration or of minority cultures, it has been observed that certain features of cuisine are sometimes retained even when the original language of the culture has been forgotten (Calvio 1982; *ibid*: 280). Fischler (1988) tries to understand the various ways in which food forms the identity of human beings. He states that it is important to clarify how and why food is linked to identity by relating it to multidimensional behaviour of human beings. He explains this complicated phenomena through what he calls the 'Omnivore's paradox' and the other as 'Incorporation principle'. According to the Omnivore's Paradox theory human beings have to be extremely cautious about what food stuffs to choose and what not to choose. This is because while on the one hand man's eating habit is enmeshed in variety of foods with variety of nutrients on the other hand man needs to restraint his acts. So there is always a tension between the fear of the unknown and the lookout for novelty and variety. For Fischler, the present-day alterations in the world of food (technologically as well as culturally) are causing a crisis of identification with food ('what are we actually eating?') and, hence, a crisis of incorporation' gains its full importance when it is well understood that eating is a part of a system of classification and representation, and that it operates in the 'register of the imagination', which is why 'cookery helps to give food and its eaters a place in the world' (Fischler, 1988; Scholliers P, 2001: 9).

Warde (1997) argues that there are other social researchers who doubt's this argument. For most people food is a 'marginal way of expressing personal identity'. 'Food is just one of the many ways by which to express identity, and, moreover, a minor one' (Warde, 1997). For instance, the concept of ethnic identity established through food finds its place in migrant and

Diaspora studies which tries to examine the way food habits adapted or exhibited by the migrants in a foreign land aim at executing their indigenous identity. In Jhumpa Lahiri's fictional novel *Interpreter of Maladies*, Choubey (2001) mentions the way native food becomes a manifestation of an individual's ethnic and cultural identity. Food becomes an important part of cultural exchange. Besides it is through food that the protagonist initiates herself in a foreign land. While the concept of self-identity and individual freedom gains predominance in western literature, there are several works among South Asian scholars that demonstrate the preponderance of 'group identity' through food.

Identities based on food are usually categorised as national identities and regional or local identities. Scholars have contented with the notion of the emergence of a national cuisine vis-a-vis regional cuisine. Appadurai (1988) made a study on cookbooks in India which helped to form a national cuisine for the country. Cookbooks are a bi-product of post colonial society in India which led to the formation of a national cuisine. This is analogous to the rising new middle class in the country. Along with the growth of English educated middle class, Appadurai (1988) also finds the prevalence of English language cookbooks in society. His major point is to draw interplay between the regional and ethnic cuisines and national cuisine which is more standardised. Appadurai (1988) also notes the way new foods exhibited in the cookbooks and introduction of formal dining have transgressed primordial boundaries in Indian society like caste, class and ethnicity (Appadurai, 1988: 7). His work enables questions on the way domestic food consumption strengthens ethnic identity compared to public consumption of food in India since "restaurants both humble and pretentious, have increasingly become arenas for the transcendence of ethnic difference and for the exploration of the culinary Other" (ibid: 9). Appadurai's (1988) notion about a national cuisine in India revolves essentially around the Hindu religious group of the country and speaks nothing about the large sections of minorities. It also offers little to the diversity that thrives in every sphere of Indian cultural life. He was concerned about the way Indian cookbooks failed to emerge a national cuisine and reasoned in terms of the Hindu dietary laws with their focus on 'gastronomy'. He asserted "while gastronomic issues play a critical role in Hindu texts, culinary issues do not" (ibid: 11). One of the prominent reasons why India could not emerge a national pan-Indian cuisine is because of the Hindu hierarchical division across regions in the country. On the other hand regional cookbooks are functional in preserving the ethnic 'Other' in a diverse country like India. Appadurai's (1988) work has enabled me to place my

research on Bengali household food within the larger Indian context and reflect on the essence of household food across classes vis-a-vis outside or public food.

Ashis Nandy in his *Ethnic Cuisine: the 'significant other'* (2002-2003), claims further that such cuisines are usually manifestations of an individual's class and status identity. However commercialisation of ethnic cuisine has made it easily available to the larger gastronomes. In this way ethnic food has become the measure of one's tolerance of cultural diversity (Nandy, 2002-2003: 248). What Nandy hints at is essentially the growing eating out trend among the people exploring a multicultural cuisine. He also provides the economic development manifested by ethnic cuisine as an enterprising business worldwide. This argument further complicates the story of food and identity in society. It provides new inroads into the research on ethnic food between the domestic and public sphere.

Uma Narayan (1995) examines contemporary Indian culture and identity through the lens of curry which is a mixture of many spices with various combinations of turmeric, cumin, chilli etc. This unique dish having several regional variations have been fabricated into a "one mixture fits all combination" curry powder by the English similar to the way in which England "fabricated" an India from a variety of cultural and political entities [Avakian and Haber, 2005: 10]. "...by "eating ethnic" without any concern for the people of the culture which produced the food, Westerners replicate colonialist relations of power [Heldke 1993, Narayan 1995, Avakian and Haber 2005: 11]. Pilcher (1997) shows the way community cookbooks returned by women helped to restore traditional Mexican cuisine as the national cuisine while resisting the incorporation of European standards of healthy "proper" meals as an extension of European culture. This is how a national cuisine was constructed which contributed to a Mexican national identity [Avakian and Haber, 2005: 14]. Ethnicity and identity politics are the key terms discerned by the discourse of contemporary globalisation thesis. Along with globalisation proliferated through trans-nationalisation, commodity markets, cultural markets etc, the concept of national is losing significance in the context of growing regionalism and de-territorialisation. The concept of de-territorialisation indicates global subversion of territoriality on which local cultures and collective identities rest (Berking, 2003: 251). This also gets reflected in food studies where local and indigenous food habits are well executed.

2.7 FOOD AND COMMENSALITY

One of the key ideas revolving around the study of food in social sciences is that of 'commensality'. The word has been used by various social science disciplines in addressing issues of food consumption. The word commensality enforces several connotations. It is precisely associated with the way meals are consumed or shared in human society. In sociology, commensality has been defined as the process of eating with other people (Sobal and Nelson, 2003; Fischler, 2011). Commensality is perceived largely in the context of the 'meal'. As has been noted before the proper meal implies sharing of food along regulated rules (Douglas, 1972). Simmel (1997) took up the cause of commensality when he tried to discern the sociology of the 'meal'. For Simmel eating is an individualised phenomenon. He wrote "What I think I can communicate to others, what I see I can let them see, what I say can be heard by hundreds of others- but what a single individual eats can under no circumstances be eaten by another" (Simmel, 1997 [1910]; Fischler, 2011: 531). He further shows that commensality is enforced through the process of socialisation which helps to develop the sociology of the meal. It is through social forms, interaction and socialisation that eating habits turn into social processes (Simmel, 1910). For Simmel it is the regulation of table manners and their standardization according to the aesthetic principles that result in 'socialization of meal' (ibid). Simmel's socialization of the meal can be countered with the new thesis on individualization of meal. It questions the future of the family meal or commensal relations in a world infested with individualism.

The discourse on individualisation thesis has been brought forward by Fischler (2011) who noted that the process of individualisation is growing particularly in areas of health, body, appearance and corporal images (ibid: 531). This individualisation thesis poses a threat to the practice of commensality as believed by many social scientists. Fischler (2011) observed that commensality is associated with other dimensions like identity. "If eating a food makes one become more like that food, then those sharing the same food become more like each other (ibid: 533). Commensality also evokes 'generalised reciprocity' (Sahlins, 1972; Fishcler, 2011: 535). For Fischler (2011) commensality is in opposition to the ideas of 'eating alone', increasing health concern, rising problems of obesity and medicalisation of the body which leads to individual choice. The discourse of commensality is brought forth by Sobal and Nelson (2003) who claims the essence of commensality resides in the process of 'sharing'. Shared meals forms social integration and reinforces common identities (Bossard and Boll,

1956; Mennell, Murcott and van Otterloo, 1992; Sobal and Nelson, 2003: 181). It is found that while most people are commensal eaters, a substantial amount of eating is done alone (ibid: 188).

While western scholars revel with the significance of commensality vis-a-vis individual eating, south Asian scholars like Appadurai perceives commensality in terms of different meanings it bestows in the regular life of individuals in a society embraced by cultural hierarchy. Appadurai (1981) explains the rigidity of commensality in a south Indian household through his concept of *gastropolitics*. *Gastropolitics* is defined by Appadurai as “conflict or competition over specific cultural or economic resources as it emerges in social transactions around food” (Appadurai, 1981: 495). He states that *gastropolitics* which defines commensal relations within the household depends not only on the household head but also the recipients, dependents, guests and subordinates (ibid: 501). Strict rules of commensality are observed in Indian society surrounding the notion of caste especially. Rules of commensality include prohibitions of inter-dining across caste groups, maintenance of ritual purity, food taboos and avoidances. Commensality is functional in maintaining social distance where members of different castes are not free to inter-dine (Harper, 2007: 59). In Indian society commensality is usually referred to the Hindu practice of food sharing (Marriott, 1976; Dumont 1980; Savaala, 2010; Donner, 2012), while not much is discussed about the minority groups in society. Indian scholarship also provides limited account of commensal relations among the lower class in society.

2.8 FOOD AND TASTE

While assessing consumption theories in late modern society, one has to engage with the concept of ‘taste’. The sociology of taste is a relatively new discipline and not much explored in Indian sociology. The notion of consumption and taste got recognition in the works of Bourdieu (1984) itself whereby it helped to demarcate social classes distinctively. Bourdieu’s (1984) idea of taste conformed to the habitus of individuals and can be perceived in terms of class distinctions like ‘high brow’ and ‘low brow’. The *habitus* is constructed as the generative formula which makes it possible to account both for classifiable practices and products and for the judgements, themselves classified, which makes these practices and works into a system of distinctive signs (Bourdieu, P 1984: 170).

In Bourdieu's study both food preferences and table manners are important indicators of lifestyles and class tastes (Bourdieu, 1984; Gronow, 1997: 10). It further manifests into cultural hierarchies. Bourdieu provides a detailed fragmentation of classes on the basis of different forms of capital possessed by the same which in turn determines their consumption pattern. Bourdieu further notes that in order to construct the space of lifestyles within which cultural practices are defined one has to establish the generative formula of *habitus* for each class and class fraction (Bourdieu, P 1984: 208). Departing from the concept of class, habitus and taste, this study tries to understand the why and how class determines food habits of a certain group of people sharing the same ethnic identity. Bourdieu's study features among the many classical works on class and consumption like that of Marx, Weber and Simmel. According to Goffman's (1951) classical thesis goods may be said to take the properties of status symbols if the purchase of them is indicative of membership in a particular status group (ibid: 33). Theorists like Simmel, Elias and Bourdieu all claim that goods are primarily appropriated as status symbols (ibid). Bourdieu (1984) reflected that the dynamics of cultural change and fashion can be explained by the eternal flow of status symbols- and tastes along the social ladder (Gronow, J 1997: 33). Once the refined tastes have been adopted by the lower echelons of society (In Bourdieu's case the new middle class) the ruling class must invest its cultural capital and financial capital in signs of distinction (ibid). This is also true for food consumption. Veblen emphasises on an important point which says, social groups and classes do not always try to aim at adopting the taste and preference of social elites but the group right above them. In this way a hierarchic and multi graded system of tastes and manners is created in society (ibid: 36). Veblen in particular have always been interested in the consumption of the 'leisure class' or the social elites. Opposing Bourdieu there have been other sociological works which tries to understand the relationship of individuals to food.

For instance Mennell (1985) acknowledged the standardisation of diet which results out of market forces that have bridged the gap between social classes and food consumption practices in contemporary times. He notes that the market has led to varied experiences in eating and developed more varied taste. According to him contemporary society moves towards the trend of *diminishing contrasts* and *increasing varieties* in food habits and culinary taste (Warde, A 1997). Society is moving towards an egalitarian consumption pattern whereby social inequalities with respect to everyday food are on a decline. Warde further criticized Mennell's views on diminishing contrasts by stating that, "If diminishing contrasts increased variety, it is unclear which of three quite different outcomes would

transpire, whether it will lead to greater individualization of diet without any social patterns or regularities in diet, class differences giving way to a new social contrasts with new types of social division or the formation of a uniform national diet' (ibid: 29). Mennell (1985) spoke about diminishing contrasts with respect to consumption of outside food. Expansion of commercial eating joints has created a flux of changing taste across all social classes. What he meant was, people of lower social ranks are eating in commercial eating places and sampling a wider variety of cuisines than they did in previous generations (Mennell, 1985: 26). Scholars like Mennell and Warde identifies a cultural pluralism in the context of changing tastes and food.

Bourdieu's theory on distinction in a way propagated 'ethical hedonism'. The new culture of consumption suits the need of the new bourgeoisie in society as much as the economic order of society. Bourdieu noted that the new middle class is the 'vanguard of aesthetic and ethical dispositions' which in turn leads to economic development (Gronow, J 1997: 22). This new bourgeoisie of Bourdieu can be tallied with the new rising middle class of India who are separate themselves from the old middle class as well as the lower class of society through their lifestyle and consumption pattern. 'Bourdieu recognised hedonism as one of the characteristics of the culture of new middle class which did not feature among the old bourgeoisie of classical period. The critiques of post industrial society like Daniel Bell and Lasch mentioned that previous work ethics and asceticism has been displaced by hedonism' (ibid: 24). Through the works of Bourdieu one can understand that the lifestyles of members of a social class are homogeneous (ibid: 28).

Gronow (1997) in his book '*Sociology of Taste*' develops three major aspects of consumption in terms of need, taste and pleasure. His understanding of taste essentially develops around food consumption or gastronomy revelling on the aesthetics of taste on the one hand and that of need on the other. Gronow (1997) looked at need and taste as antithetical to each other. The discourse of need and taste with regard to food consumption emerged in the 18th and 19th century in Europe, especially in the context of development of French Haute cuisine. While need based consumption is perceived in the context of good health and body, taste is seen in terms of aestheticization, a process which differentiates classes in society. Good taste as Gronow (1997) discerned indicates 'refinement', a characteristic of the high class or elite in society. While contemporary social theorists in western society reflect on the divide between high culture and middle or low culture through consumption and taste, it is important to see

how far such theories cater to the heterogeneity of Indian society, especially in the context of a growing heterogeneous middle class.

In recent times there has been the rapidly changing popularity of various national cuisines and the life history of convenience foods found on the shelves of supermarkets. These foods are often introduced as delicacies which in turn become a part of traditional diet (Gronow, 1997:111). Harvey Levenstein (1988) made a study of food consumption pattern in American society where he mentioned about the changes in American diet due to development of modern nutrition and science. With respect to this Mennell claimed that increasing homogenization of eating habits has been followed by greater individualization and differentiation. Modern food culture offers a picture of confusion. But despite that Levenstein feels that it is scientific knowledge about nutrition that determines most of the food choices in modern society. People try to differentiate between taste (simply what one enjoys) from nutritional or bodily needs (Levenstein 1988; Gronow, 1997: 112).

“The new ethics of health appears to offer a universal and generally accepted norm to the modern consumer mainly because it conceals its moralizing tone behind a pseudo-scientific analysis of everyday practices” (cf Bourdieu 1984; Gronow 1997: 114). Fischler (1980) suggested that the modern culinary culture is in a state of crisis. Modern society is in a state of gastro-anomie. For Fischler in order to maintain order it is important to keep the standard of a balanced diet (Fischler 1986; Gronow 1997: 117). There is a new health movement in America in 1950 which tried to establish a nutrition full diet. Counihan spoke about the pseudo-scientific rules adopted by the students favoured restraint in eating ‘because it is a path to personal attractiveness, moral superiority, high status and dominance (Counihan, 1992; Gronow 1997: 119). According to Fischler a society with more individualised process of food selection is in a state of crisis and danger. New fashion trends play similar roles like traditional norms in guiding the eating and drinking behaviour of the people (Campbell 1987; Gronow, 1997: 129). “For Simmel the aesthetic aspects of the meal are associated purely with its form, but this form does not consist of the harmonious totality of tastes and smells but of the social form or interaction of the meal, which derives from sociability (ibid: 135). Individuality and the freedom to choose, closely connected to each other are conditions of sociability (ibid: 136). Simmel also described a kind of process of civilization or cultivation of eating following the civilization of Norbert Elias. As this process advances the subjective or the natural purpose of eating gives way to more regulated and complicated etiquettes in the act of eating and social interaction during meals (ibid: 137). The historical development of

the meal is described by Simmel as a kind of civilizing process. As one moves up the social ladder the social forms and rules of interactions become complicated. The sociability of eating presumes social rules (ibid). Simmel's sociology of meal shows that he always thought that an aesthetic dimension is combined with any social interaction- or in fact the very social interaction is aesthetic by nature (ibid: 138).

2.9 FOOD AND GENDER

Food and gender can be situated within the larger area of sociology of culture, feminism and cultural reproduction. In the 1970s sociology of culture focussed on class culture and contribution of cultural conflict in class struggle (Arnot, M 2002: 5). Gender relations were taken up by scholars like Juliet Mitchell (1966) simultaneously at a time when cultural identity proliferated across social science along with sub group identities, youth culture and male dominated culture across classes. Women's role and function within the family started being recognised in Mitchell's (1966) work (ibid: 7). It was also a time when housework finally became the object of serious discussion among academicians, historians, sociologists and economists (Oakley, 1974; Arnot, 2002). Domestic technologies were related to women's unpaid work within the household while the household was still perceived as a unit of production and not consumption (Cowan, 1983; Wajcman, 2010: 83). Nonetheless in these western literatures not much was stated about household food preparation or consumption while food was equated with clothing, healthcare and others (ibid).

A gendered and feminist perspective on food has often been introduced by scholars of late. Gender has been useful in structuring different areas of human life and is hence an integral part of food studies (Moore, 1988; Counihan et al. 1998). Gender is constituted through men's and women's roles in the production, distribution and symbolism of food (ibid: 3) and also forms part of the discourse on food and identity. This is because food plays a major role in forming gendered identity. Earlier food studies often ignored discussing women's relationship to food practices. Studying the relationship between women and food can help us to understand how women reproduce, rebel and resist against gender constructions as they are practiced and contested in various sites (Avakian and Haber, 2005:2). Anthropologists were the first to recognize the importance of food studies and women studies by analyzing food practices. Carole. M. Counihan's perspective on food is that food practices are both constitutive and reflective of gender construction (Counihan et al., 1998: 7). Exploring the construction of gender and family through food practices, the sociologist, Marjorie DeVault

(1991) argues that food preparation is work that defines family. Through the work of feeding, “women quite literally produce family life from day to day” (Avakian and Haber 2005: 9). DeVault (1991) maintains that this work of feeding, though is central to the construction of family, is often denied by women themselves as work. Decision of planning a meal must be made in relationship to other people’s desires, most importantly husband and then children, and in accordance with what the culture considers a proper meal (ibid). Often the identity of class and gender are merged together. For instance DeVault (1991) addresses issues of class by positing that the decision making process to answer the question “what’s for dinner” is dealt with by working class women through the traditions in their families, and by middle class women by reference to cookbooks and new trends in food preparation (ibid: 9-10). Narayan in her work posits the way serving of food is associated with the maintenance of that distinctive spiritual “essence” since it takes place within the “intimacies of Indian family life” (ibid: 11).

In Inness’s (2001) research, women in popular media like cookbooks, advertisements and articles in magazines about cooking are analysed. It speaks about the way these images construct gender by depicting “kitchen work as ‘naturally rewarding to women both emotionally...and aesthetically” (Avakian and Haber 2005: 14). Women are associated with food in terms of not only food intake but also food abstention. Fasting is mostly associated with women and a whole lot of prejudiced, normative rules and regulations. Some of it is also linked to religious values and beliefs. Bynum (1997) found that food disorders are more common among women than among men. Such disorders in the medieval period were largely theologised instead of seeking medical help. In medieval Europe women were associated with food preparation and distribution rather than food consumption. Food was *the* resource that women controlled. Economic resources were controlled by men while fasting and charitable food distributions were natural religious activities for women. Food related behaviour was central to women socially and religiously not only because food was a resource women controlled but also because, by means of food, women controlled themselves and their world (Bynum 1997: 129). While much of food studies concentrate of women and their role in meal preparation, gender faces a backseat. No much is addressed about men’s role in the food processing sector within domestics or outside. However one cannot evade the concept of gender while acknowledging food habits and practices of social groups. Anthropologists and sociologists have time and again drawn reference to the gendering of eating processes in human society. Food and gender builds on the notion of power and gender

division of labour in society along with the demarcation of the private and public. Another interesting paper by Nita Kumar (2003) depicts the way a single substance like pan (betel leaf) symbolises gender differentiation and hierarchy in society both public sphere and private life. It shows how women are associated more with production than with consumption of food. Good taste is always prerogative of the man when it comes to food consumption while for a woman it is more sacrificial.

2.10 FOOD IN INDIAN SOCIETY

This research have been inspired by several rich and enlightening works on food across South Asia reflecting on ideas surrounding gastronomy, religion, class, ethnicity and gender. Colleen Sen's (2015) *Feasts and Fasts: A History of Food in India*, attempts to trace the history of Indian food from its ancient times, to medieval and modern accounting to the diverse gastronomic culture of the subcontinent. Development of this gastronomic culture is seen in the light of religious, moral and philosophical realm throwing light on the dictum that 'food is a marker of identity'. (Sen, 2015: 8). The book addresses the emergence of food in a country filled with religious and cultural diversity. For instance food habits are formed through different religious prescriptions and proscriptions. Spiritual and medical reasons also influences what people eat. 'In the light of this diversity, it is intriguing to unearth what makes Indian food recognizably Indian and how it came to be that way, and to investigate whether there is a gastronomic culture common to all Indians' (Sen, 2015: 8). We get a descriptive account of food in the form of early crops, fruits and vegetables that were grown in ancient India. Climatic conditions play a great role in cultivation of food products along with exchange of food items through trade. India is a land of diversity not only in social and cultural terms but also in physical and geographical terms. This diverse climatic condition of different regions of the sub continent has enabled growing of a variety of seeds and crops which later shaped the food habits of the people of the country. Hence India is entitled to a variety of cuisines and gastronomic conditions (Sen, 2015). Sen's book provides a descriptive account of the regional variations in the country along with reference to Bengali culinary culture.

Scholars have taken special interest in unravelling the symbolic meanings associated with Hindu food culture in particular. Khare (1992) shows how in India food is endowed with 'mundane and profound meanings'. He called it *gastrosemantics* which means the

phenomenon of symbolization and communication that takes through food²¹. Among the Hindus, food practices are embedded with meanings that connect the *worldly* to the *otherworldly* (Khare, 1992: 28). Parry (1985) states that in Hindu culture a man is what he eats²². Not only is his bodily substance created out of food, but so is his moral disposition-bio-genetic substance and moral code being, as they say in Chicago, two aspects of the same thing [(Parry 1985: 613). For a Hindu, food and commensality are rooted in the notion of pure and impure/purity and pollution. Traditional Hindus differentiate between *kaccha* food and *pakka* food, *cultivated* and *uncultivated* food²³. There is also a lot of significance of food in death rituals of the Hindus. Parry observed the Hindu mortuary rites practiced in the Holy city of Benaras. It is through the right kind of food that a deceased man can attain the heavenly abode. This food is called *pinda* (balls of rice, barley flour or *khoa* made into a thick paste by adding boiled milk)²⁴ which is offered to the dead ancestors of the deceased. The cultural ethos of a family living is also directly related to and reflected in a domestic food cycle of a Hindu household²⁵. By 'Food cycle' Khare (1976) refers to everyday domestic activities related to preparation, serving and eating foods along with food consumed on ceremonial occasions. Mukhopadhyay (2004) perceives family meals in contradistinction to the burgeoning street food culture in Calcutta since the 19th century. Unlike the quintessential Bengali family meal the street-food culture of Calcutta exhibit the acculturation of different ethnic groups within the city. While street food is seen as an item of pollution due to its taste, home food is seen more suitable for health. The rise of street food in urban Bengali context is strictly correlated with the decline of familial meal as a ritual activity and rise of non-ritual eating (snacks) directed at sensual stimulation rather than assuaging hunger pangs (Mukhopadhyay 2004: 40). Caplan (2008) addressed different meanings of commensality with respect to vegetarianism and non vegetarianism among the middle classes in Madras. Normally Brahmins are the ones who espouse a purely vegetarian diet. However it is not just caste but other factors like class, gender, age, religious preference and spatial distinctions that add to complexities in commensality. Caplan (2008) observed

²¹ Khare R.S(ed.),1992,*Food with Saints: An Aspect of Hindu Gastrosemantics in The Eternal Food: Gastronomic Ideas and Experiences of Hindus and Buddhists*,Sri Satguru Publications,Delhi

²² Parry Jonathan,1985,*Death and Digestion: The Symbolism of Food and Eating of North Indian Mortuary Rites*,Man,New Series,Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland,Vol 20,No 4,Pp 621-630

²³ See Jonathan Parry,1985,Pp 613

²⁴ *Ibid.* 615

²⁵ Khare R.S,1976,*Culture and Reality: Essays on Hindu system of managing food*,Indian Institute of Advanced Study,Simla,Ch 2

that there is fluidity in vegetarian and non vegetarian commensality depending upon age, gender, sociality, public space and others.

Food is often used as an instrument of suppression, social discrimination and violence. Chiggateri's (2008) article on the debate on consumption of beef in 'Hindu India' provides an account of such social atrocities. Beef consumption and slaughter of cows is based upon the hierarchical division of Hindu social structure and is built on notions of purity and pollution and untouchability. The study also reflects on the broader food hierarchy in a 'Hindu India' that sustains an order of superiority of food consumption- which goes down from vegetarianism, meat-eating to beef eating (Ambedkar, 2002; Chiggateri, 2008: 11). Beef consumption and cow slaughter leads to communal conflict and violence. Ambedkar for instance found beef eating as the primary cause of untouchability in India which gradually led to caste discrimination among the Dalits and minority Christians and Muslims vis-a-vis the upper caste Hindus and Brahmins. The hierarchical food structure of Indian society essentially symbolises the Brahmanical food structure. "South Asian scholarship on food has primarily focussed on Hindu Food. In this light Mookherjee lays down the essence of food and cuisine in the construction of Bangladeshi identity" (Mookherjee, 2008). Mookherjee's work demonstrates the way food habits and eating practices create a sense of 'other'. In her study on food habits in Bangladesh, food related practices juxtaposed between the West Bengali and Bangladeshi identity. This also bore semblance with the religious identity of the two regions respectively. While West Bengal is dominated by the Bengali Hindus, Bangladesh on the other hand is dominated by the Bengali Muslims and both share similar food habits. It shows that "food and practices around food become central to this construction of distinctiveness and in the process of place-making for both regions" (Mookherjee, 2008: 68).

2.11 HISTORY OF BENGALI CUISINE

History of Bengali cuisine can be traced to the ancient times when food in Bengal was bountiful. While Bengali cuisine has transformed itself over the years certain types of food like rice and milk for common everyday food while *luchi* (fried cakes made of flour and fried boiling ghee or clarified butter) were served in festive occasions (Chakravarti, T 1959). Food habits during that time entailed *Pakka- Pranali* or the process and method and methods adopted and the ingredients used by the people of Bengal, *Paka-Yajna* or methods of cooking

and *Matsy Sukta-Tantra* or food purification. These can be found in texts like Prakrta-Paingala, Purana and Smriti Texts (ibid). People were found to use plants and plant parts like roots, tubers, leaves and other herbs in their everyday food as a part of a medicated diet. Such foods are still traceable in Bengali diet today. Consumption of boiled rice also known as *Siddhaanna* was more prevalent in regions of Bengal, Assam and Orissa due to hot climate (ibid). Chakravarti's (1959) work provides a descriptive account of the type of food and drink consumed by people in ancient Bengal.

While not much is found on the Muslim cuisine in traditional Bengal, a vast array of literature can be found on the impact of westerners- Portuguese and British primarily on Bengali cuisine. While earlier works on ancient Bengal provide a more historical and descriptive account of foods the later works situates themselves in colonial history and tries to capture the food politics and culture of the time. Prior to the arrival of Europeans in the early 16th century, the staple Bengali food was the rice which was locally grown. Other dietary staples were wheat, fruits, vegetables, milk, milk products like yogurt and clarified butter or ghee. The basic diet of the poor people was rice with a little salt and green vegetable [Sen 1996: 5]. Lentils were absent in the staple diet of the people of Bengal till much later. Sen (1996) traces the presence of fish and meat in the Bengali diet which served as a reason for absence of lentils. Bengali Brahmins are also known for eating fish and meat unlike orthodox Hindus in other parts of the country. There were restrictions on a wide array of food products [see K.T Achaya 1994, Sen 1996: 5]. Nearly forty varieties of rice, sixty kinds of fruits and 120 vegetables adorned the dietary palate of Bengal in the 9th and 10th century [Sen 1996: 5]. Spices like turmeric, ginger, poppy seeds, asafoetida which are commonly used in every Bengali cooking today was found in use much before the 12th century in Bengal. Ghee was a common cooking medium then used by the affluent while mustard oil and sesame oil were used by the common people. Consumption of sweets can be traced into the middle ages. Sugar was also grown in Bengal since the ancient times and was known as *sharkara* in Sanskrit. In Bengal it is known as *chini* [Sen 1996: 5]. The two basic ingredients for sweets are sugar and milk. Milk is boiled down into khoya or into chana by curdling it with lemon juice or yogurt [Sen 1996: 9]. Potatoes, Tomatoes and chillies which form an integral part of Bengali cuisine today were first brought to this land by the Portuguese. Other common fruits and vegetables include okra, sweet potato, egg plant, guava and papaya [Banerji, Sen 1996: 6].

What we know as Bengali cuisine essentially took shape during and after the colonial rule in Bengal. Colonial Bengal developed a series of changes in the food habit of its people which was later to become an integral part of Bengali cuisine. Utsa Ray (2015) in her work attempts to identify several socio-economic and political factors that underplay in the formation of modern Bengali culinary culture. For Ray it is the 'culinary culture' that the same due to its accommodating nature. Bengali cuisine is versatile in terms of taste, food types, methods of cooking etc. This versatility makes it unique in its own sense. According to Ray Bengali cuisine as we know today was born out of the colonial modernity.

While colonialism led to the formation of the much debated middle class in India it became responsible for developing a new cultural taste among the middle class. However this taste for something 'new' and foreign was never at the cost of one's indigenous culture. Ray compares the colonial middle class to the modern Malay consumer who can retain their Malay identity at the same time, responding positively to the expanding markets and modern demands of fashion (Johan Fischer, Ray Utsa, 2015: 6). While in search for a true Bengali cuisine one fails to identify Utsa Ray (2015) recognized this cosmopolitan character of Bengali culinary culture. She raved that "on one level British food was appropriated within the fold of 'traditional' cuisine to create a modern cuisine" (Ray Utsa 2015: 62). At the same time it became necessary to restore ones own tradition or indigenous food culture and hence an amalgamation of British and traditional Bengali cuisine took place. 'Thus hybridity and authenticity were merely flip sides of the same coin' (ibid). The colonial middle class was often found to valorize the food of the lower classes in society as simple and austere (ibid: 16). However there are also instances that show the way middle class treid to define its own taste in order to distinguish themselves from the other social classes. This was a phenomenon prevalent among the middle classes worldwide. 'Food or culinary practices are a crucial indicator of the differences that the middle class had with other classes, castes, and communities' (ibid: 19). Ray's work predominantly deals with the Bengali middle class Hindus with little traces of the middle class Muslims and their diet culture. The Muslims and the lower class, also the lower caste groups are seen as the relational 'other' to the dominant Hindus. It was as if the Bengali middle class gastronomy signified the Hindu gastronomy only. 'It was the Bengali middle class (Hindus) who reframed this cuisine within a gastronomic paradigm (ibid: 79). What is noteworthy about Ray's discourse on Bengali middle class gastronomy is that it celebrates the domesticity of cuisines more than commercialization.

Cookbooks that became a rage in colonial Bengal are interesting sources of information on Bengali food, life and culture. Prior to cookbooks a lot used to be written on medical aspects of food and diet. Food has always been associated with health and body in this respect. The first significant Bengali cookbook was written by Bipradas Mukhopadhyay (1842-1914) and is still read as *Pakpranali*. Another significant Bengali cookbook that is published till date is Prajna Sundari Devi's (1870-1950) *Amish O Niramish Ahar*. Both these cookbooks are classic examples of the changing diet of the Bengalis (Ray Utsa 2015: 63-64). As per Ray the cookbooks at the time also suggested that 'distinctive nature of Bengali cuisine is its distinctive nature of domesticity'. 'According to Buddhadeb Bose for instance, this nature of Bengali cuisine saved it from the vulgarity of commercialization. Bengali cuisine had originated at home and from familial affection' (ibid: 75-76).

Jayanta Sengupta (2010) presented different discourses on food and cuisine in colonial Bengal. His points of reference were the way food culture in colonial Bengal was being shaped by the British Raj, whether it is through a 'gendered politics of the body', nationalist construction of an ideal Indian platter and construction of new ideologies of domesticity [Sengupta J, 2010: 82]. In the late 19th and early 20th century, new importance was accorded to food and cuisine by the bhadraloks of Calcutta. This grew out a larger discourse of domesticity that was emerging in Bengal and other parts of India [ibid 90]. The new vernacular print media started highlighting the new ideology of domesticity reflecting on issues like family, household and kin relationships. Their focus was mostly middle class women [ibid 91]. Bengalis have shaped their cuisine within the ecological limits of their land, which they have transformed in turn to yield what they seek from it. In the process they have crafted a pattern of eating that, through repetition, they have turned into a norm and its distinctive ingredients, methods of cooking, spices, and signature dishes have come to embody Bengaliness. Bengalis have loaded the process of cooking and eating with meanings about "meals," kinship, family, and communion [Ray 2009: 47]. The Socio-economic and political situation of Calcutta is viewed by different primordial segments of the population (linguistic and dialect groups, religious communities and races) from distinct and partially insulated vantage points. These many distinct patterns of participation in Calcutta life may be recorded by doing purposive ethnography among the various communities both in their areas of residential concentration as also in neighbourhoods where they are in minority situation. One should see how has the cultural pattern of dominant Bengalee been affected by these processes of inter-cultural communication and what has been the impact of the overarching

Bengalee milieu on the other groups (Surajit Sinha, pp. 73). Calcutta is divided between the “North” and “South Calcutta” in the minds of the citizen. North Calcutta carries the stereotype of stable neighbourhoods with social links running through generations, presence of old aristocratic families who are called (*Bonedi paribar*) with their distinct linguistic styles, architectures and so on. South Calcutta has larger proportion of people from East Bengal (Bangal), which are relatively new settlements with relatively feeble *para* based social relationship and provide a distinct look in architecture and arrangement of houses, roads and lanes (ibid. 74).

Ronald Inden and Ralph Nicholas (1977: 18-19) stated that there was a sharp contrast between ordinary cooked food and variety of special foods in Bengali culture. Ordinary cooked food would include boiled rice, lentils, vegetables and fish. This type of food is known to provide good health and nourishment. Special cooked food is richer and is cooked on occasions of visits by relatives and friends. Ordinary cooked food is also easily digestible. Special cooked foods such as rice prepared with clarified butter or cooked with milk and sugar are thought to be digested slowly [Ray Krishnendu, 2009:36]. According to Partha Chatterjee (1993), every day practices of food production and consumption were considered a part of the “inner”, the spiritual or the private domain. Within the “inner” domain, efforts were made by the urban and elite minorities to borrow foreign ideas and adapt them to local use [Ray 2009: 42].

Janeja (2010) attempts to analyse the way food becomes an agent of everyday transactions in order to generate ‘normality’. Everyday life is the observable manifestation of social existence, and therefore it always includes relationships with other people. Everyday life also signifies the cyclical, routine and repetition of events. Everyday life is a situation of normalcy. This normalcy or normality is often perpetuated and restored by food production, distribution and consumption in everyday life. Following Latour’s concept of agency, food is perceived in the light of everyday transactions (Janeja, 2010: 2). She defines perceived normality as ‘the specific form of relations that food engenders in such agentive capacities’ (ibid: 2). Janeja’s study is on the way food transactions in Bengali middle class households elicit social relationships. ‘It illuminates the character of sociality itself and perceptions of relatedness as Bengaliness (*Bangalitto*)’ (ibid: 2). She perceives food in terms of its ‘*desh*’, a person’s native land. Food passes through distinct geographical space and often attains different characters. This becomes evident by the way east and West Bengali people exhibit their culinary practices. Janeja on the one hand speaks about ‘normal’ home food in Bengali

households securing a position of normality through distinct sense of *desh* while on the other hand ‘commoditised home food’ in the form of restaurants whereby Bengali food is homogenised (ibid). According to Janeja consumption of everyday food elicits relations perceived as normal and aberrations from the normal, that is, not-normal. This is how food acts as a collaborative agency towards normality (Janeja 2010: 43). Janeja notes that the whole process of food production, consumption and distribution is accomplished under a condition of normalcy.

2.12 CONCLUSION

I have tried to amalgamate several different dimensions in the work on food. First of all I tried to locate the major classical works on food and culture which helped me identify with some key concepts like class, consumption, identity, commensality, taste and others. Theoretical positions dealing with these concepts have been assimilated to get a wider picture of the problem. Works on Bengali food and culture have been analysed to situate my own research in the existing body of literature. All these works have been sensitizing and inspirational for my own research. Nevertheless departing from the existing studies my study aims to capture the modern concepts of food, taste, choice and health in relation to the existing class theories. This will also reflect on the changing lifestyle and culture of people residing in a cosmopolitan city with a far more exposure to external forces like media, culture and globalization. It will also reflect on the notion of tradition and modernity through food habits in a new way. Further, most importantly it will be a contribution to the newer theories on middle class and lower class in advanced capitalist societies.

CHAPTER 3

FOOD INTAKE IN EVERYDAY LIFE

3.1 INTRODUCTION

We are now all familiar with the significance of food in our lives and culture. Nonetheless it is important to conceptualise the word ‘food habit’ since it is the main objective of this research. Contrary to other living beings, human beings can boast about a certain food habit that determines the way people choose particular food types, cooking methods or consumption processes in their daily life. This is probably one unique feature of ours just like the ability to speak a language, which distinguishes us from the others on our planet. Humans are the only species gifted with the art of producing food, sharing food, distributing food, conflicting food and preserving food. Cooking ones food and eating it is a habitual process found in human society. The term ‘food habit’ was coined by Kittler, Sucher and Nelms (2012) in order to describe the process or manner in which food is chosen, acquired, distributed, prepared, served and eaten.

Before delving deep into the sociology of household food among urban Bengalis, it is important to understand the true meaning of ‘food habit’ or habit of eating food of a certain kind. It is said that social sciences are yet to define a mundane concept like ‘habit’ (Camic, 1986; Swartz, 2002; Wood, Quinn and Kashy, 2002) and that there is still no standard measure of ‘habit’. However the word finds regular usage in common parlance signifying something which is prolonged, unchanging and ongoing. While discussing food habit one can assume a set of food products or specific ways of food production that are consistent with certain groups of individuals. This routine process of gathering, acquiring, producing and consuming food speaks a lot about everyday life of individuals and groups. However the concept is not as simple as it sounds. Habit cannot be defined just as a repetitive and routine behaviour, according to social scientists. Although contemporary social scientists and even sociologists have refrained themselves from dealing with issues of habit, leave alone with respect to food, early classical sociologists like Durkheim and Weber do show reflections of ‘habit’ in their writings. In his *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912) Durkheim mentioned habit while reflecting on the lives of primitive people. “Durkheim proposed that religion itself first emerges as a theory to explain and make sense of [everyday] habits

(Camic 1986: 1051). Habits are also an integral part of moral conduct according to Durkheim. For Weber, “the pattern of use and of relationship among [modern] economic units is determined by habit” (1922a, *ibid*: 1058). ‘Habit’ ordinarily designates actions that “are relatively unmotivated” (Giddens 1979, p. 218), actions for which “means-end relations are... [from the actors standpoint] not subject to argument” (Hartmann 1939, p. 91) (*ibid*: 1044). The sociological implication of the term habit can also be found in the writings of Pierre Bourdieu. He refused to acknowledge the concept of habit as a routine process determined by external constraints and norms that make one conform. Rather, ‘habits are not only constituted by past experiences of socialization but also *constitutive* of ongoing practice’ (Swartz, David L, 2002: 665). Bourdieu rather gave the concept of ‘*habitus*’ in order to understand the way human actions are regulated. For Bourdieu, *habitus* consist of deeply internalized dispositions, schemas and forms of know-how and competence, both mental and corporeal, first acquired by the individual through early childhood and socialization (*ibid*).

Food habits are practices which are deeply imbedded in the dispositions of individuals. Food habit of a specific ethnic or cultural group is something which is learned and internalized through the process of socialization. Human socialization occur in every sphere of life starting from the primary organization or group called the family to larger social groups like class, status, ethnicity and others. *Habitus* ensures one to consider ways in which individual habits have collective dimensions like class or status-group characteristics that situate individuals in social group hierarchies (*ibid*: 675). Family or households are one of the main sources of *habitus*. It is the family or household that leads to the formation of the preliminary taste buds and dietary choices among individuals. This is the reason why it becomes essential to study household food habits. Food habits are however both learned and acquired. Deborah Lupton (1996) recognises the way food helps to form identity of people. ‘Food discourse and the power relations embedded within it and which it produces along with early bodily experiences of eating, she theorizes, construct *who we are*’(Avakian Voski and Haber, 2005:16).

This paper seeks to interpret the dynamics of intake of daily food in urban middle class Bengalis and the urban poor households respectively. Each group of people have their own pattern of food consumption, taste preferences and different ways by which they negotiate with the larger agents of food production and distribution in the household. Such froth negotiations keep changing and altering in a vibrant society. Each household within a group has a different story to narrate all together depending on the way they negotiate with their

family structure and food habits. This paper will start with a descriptive analysis of the different meals and food types consumed in different households across the middle class and urban poor respectively. It will subsequently compare and contrast the different food types that are consumed across classes.

3.2 FOOD IN CONTEMPORARY HOUSEHOLDS

Meal intake pattern in Bengali households are unanimously shared across all social groups and classes. The Bengalis usually have three major meals a day and they call it the '*jol khabar*' or snack, '*bhat*' indicating the afternoon lunch and '*raater khabar*' or dinner. The language used to describe Bengali food is very interesting because it indicates the meanings assigned to each category of meal. However factors like family structure and family size, working and non working members within the family, age of the family members, household income and consumption power are some vital determinants of food intake of food across Kolkata's Bengali homes. The pattern of food intake is subjected to change with the inclusion and exclusion of family members, changing tastes and preferences of family members and health concerns among others.

3.2.1 THE BREAKFAST

In contemporary Kolkata the term *jol khabar* is interchangeably used as breakfast or even '*tiffin*' across all social groups. *Jol khabar* in the morning traditionally comprise of *rooti-torkari*. *Rooti* is round flat bread made of wheat. This is eaten with freshly cooked or left over *torkari* (vegetable curry) from the previous night. Alongside the *hath-rooti*, the *pao-rooti* also is a quintessential part of a Bengali kitchen. The *pao-rooti* is bakery made sliced or unsliced bread which has a colonial history. The concept of *pao-rooti* emerged during the Portuguese era in India much like many other new fruits and vegetables that form an integral part of Bengali food platter. Cereals like *muri* and *cheere* have always been a part of the Bengali morning meal. Rice or *bhat* finds an important place in the breakfast menu of many middle class homes. There are two types of *bhat*, the plain or *sada bhat* and boiled or *sheddho bhat*. Although *bhat* is cooked as par boiled, the term *sheddho bhat* symbolises its other boiled accompaniments (generally *sheddho bhat* implies *bhat* eaten with other vegetables which are boiled and smashed). These may include potatoes, bitter *gourd*, pumpkin and also *masoor dal*. Plain rice is eaten with cooked food products.

Such traditional foods are being shared by the new global cereals of different kinds. Cornflakes, wheat flakes, oats, muesli and others form the major breakfast food basket in Bengali households today. Most of these cereals are from the global brand *Kelloggs*. The *Pao-rooti* of yester years which are still found in unsliced form among road side tea stalls and local bakery carts are replaced by brown breads, *atta* breads, white breads, milk breads. Other choices are instant noodles, pasta noodles, milk with or without health drinks and fruits. Tea and biscuits are the simplest form of breakfast found among those who want to skip the morning meal.

INTAKE OF BREAKFAST IN MIDDLE CLASS HOUSEHOLDS

Table- 13. Percentage of the types of food consumed for breakfast in selected middle class homes

Food Types	Frequency	Percentage
Cereals/milk/eggs/fruits	25	25.0
Only tea and biscuits	08	8.0
Rooti-torkari	17	17.0
Muri, cheere, khoi	02	2.0
Maggie	01	1.0
Breads, eggs, fruit, Sandwich	31	31.0
Rice	04	4.0
All the above	12	12.0
Total	100	100.0

Source: Self

Note: The above stable shows that cereals of some variety form the majority of diet among middle class households. Cereals are consumed in two forms- one is the quintessential *muri* (puffed rice), *khoi* (popped rice) or *chira* (flattened rice) of the traditional kind while the other is westernised packaged foods like wheat flakes, cornflakes, oats and muesli. Near about 27 percent of respondents stated of having some form of ‘cereals’ or the other. The consumption of rice is also prevalent in many households across Kolkata. However 4 percent of my respondents clarified of consuming rice in the morning as a form of breakfast. 31 percent of the respondents clarified that bread with eggs or bread in sandwich form along with a fruit is a common form of breakfast in the morning. 17 of the respondents mentioned that *haath rooti* is preferred as a morning breakfast since it is filling and convenient to

prepare. *Haath rooti* is eaten with any form of vegetables preferably potatoes. Only 1 percent reported of having Maggie noodles in the morning. Around 8 percent of the respondents said that they don't consume anything in the morning except tea and biscuits.

Table- 14. Percentage of selected Middle class respondents who consume breakfast every morning

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	89	89.0
No	10	10.0
Occasionally	01	1.0
Total	100	100.0

Source: Self

Note: The above table shows that around eighty nine percent of the respondents across middle class households confirmed of having some form of breakfast every morning while ten percent of them said that the concept of breakfast doesn't exist in their lives. Only one percent of the respondent stated that breakfast is consumed occasionally.

In traditional Bengali society breakfast never had much significance as a major meal. The 19th century Bengali with the rise of middle class service groups in society the concept of a morning meal became quintessential. The middle class in the following years would always eat a plate of rice in the morning or few *rooti* and *torkari*. The children would take milk and go off to school. There are many households where intake of rice in the morning is more common than any other foods. People have often reasoned consuming rice in the morning as an age old habit since their childhood. Bengalis are major rice eaters. Intake of rice is a cultural manifestation. The image of breakfast has changed in contemporary times.

In middle class households, convenience and time features predominantly in their choice of food for breakfast. The middle class respondents stated that families have more working women these days which ensures a busy morning and very little time for breakfast. In such cases the households depend on convenience foods like cereals or milk. In certain households rice is consumed as breakfast in the morning, if people have to leave for work and school. For some families breakfast on working days of the week is homogeneous while weekends are times for special foods. Seldom will families indulge in elaborate traditional cuisines like

luchi or *porota* for breakfast on a weekday. Since time is very important in contemporary urban life food types are also simple, easy and packaged.

Health is yet another dimension involved in the choice of food for the morning meal. The form and content of breakfast in middle class households is changing. Unlike yesteryears contemporary Bengali households of middle class status try to gorge on a sumptuous healthy breakfast diet. People are today more conscious about their health and bodies which results in popularity of foods that may help reduce weight and fall under the category of healthy. The choice of food for breakfast is vast for the middle class. Some households have reported of regularly consuming health foods like brown bread²⁶, muesli, oats, and green tea in the morning. Such ideas are propagated by the growing media and consumerist market policies. People who practice such food habits form niche groups of people within the middle class category and depict a modern westernised lifestyle among the many. Usually a combination of foods is preferred by middle class men and women as a form of healthy breakfast.

Intake of breakfast across Bengali households in the city reflects on the kind of lifestyle people in contemporary Kolkata are nurturing. While the percentage of households eating breakfast is comparatively more, the trend towards 'no breakfast' is on the rise among the young middle class. Several young couples find it more convenient to sip a cup of coffee at work instead of preparing food in the morning.

In single person households the concept of breakfast is again very erratic and unstructured. Lone people often state that loneliness is the biggest factor of avoiding well structured meals. Families prepare breakfast on the basis of their convenience and choices of family members. Food for children is usually different from those of the aged. The adult working independent members again has different sets of food. The most convenient and comfort food for breakfast is the sumptuous rice which is provided to school going children and office going men.

Intake of breakfast largely differs across gender in Bengali households. In most cases women or mothers are found to miss the morning meal. Almost every middle class household narrates a story of mothers catering to the needs of other family members while her own needs go unnoticed. It is a very rare sight of families sitting for breakfast every morning

²⁶ Consumption of white bread was more prevalent in middle class homes until recently when availability of different types of loaves has spoiled people for choice. Brown bread is usually made of wheat and is perceived to be healthier.

especially the women. While working women prefer leaving home with some light *tiffin* for home makers a light mid morning snack is enough to relieve hunger pangs till lunch. The lower middle class of artisans, clerks and small shop owners eat simple foods like rice or *rooti* for breakfast. Consumption of different kinds of packaged cereals like *Kelloggs* cornflakes and oats especially are a trend found among the upper middle class. Not many differences exist among different religious groups in Kolkata. The Bengali Muslims and Christian families usually eat anything from *haath rooti* to bread and butter.

INTAKE OF BREAKFAST AMONG THE URBAN POOR

The urban poor households have a much less variety of choices in the breakfast meal unlike the middle class households who have a varied food platter. Among the lower class *Jol khabar* or *tiffin* can mean anything from a cup of hot tea and local bakery biscuits, *muri*, *hath-rooti* or *pao-rooti*, rarely a *luchi* or *porota* and *panta*. *Panta* which is a common food item among the lower classes and is barely found in modern urban middle class homes is left over rice smeared with water and kept overnight. Most of the households abscond from eating a proper meal in the morning. However children are fed a proper breakfast meal before leaving for school. In most cases they eat the left over *panta bhat* with little vegetables that are cooked and left in the morning before their parents leave for work. Among those who are more affluent than others, children are provided the ready to prepare instant *Maggie* noodles. *Maggie* noodles as a brand has bridged the hiatus between and within social economic classes. A doting mother from the slums stated that she gives *Maggie* noodles to her children since they won't eat anything else. *Maggie* noodles and many other packaged foods have entered the lower class households and formed a part of their everyday food. This is because such products are found in small packets of low price. Such foods are responsible in creating a certain standardisation of taste across classes. This is an effect of commercialization and internationalization of food production and distribution (Mennell, 1997: 24). While for the middle class, such products are indulged in for convenience of homemakers, among the lower class it has a different meaning altogether. One should note that spending on certain foods might evoke a kind of status. While for a middle class homemaker *Maggie* might be a convenience food to provide, for the lower class woman it is a luxury item to cherish by her children. Again not every urban poor household would treat *Maggie* regularly to their children.

Another family of eight members reported of having a proper breakfast every morning. This household was prosperous compared to other neighbouring ones. The young bride when asked about breakfast replied:

“Every family member eats breakfast in our household. We eat ruti-torkari, paratha, egg toast, sandwich or even pasta at home. Everyone works in our family. My sasuri (mother-in-law), my husband and his brother all work and earn around Rs 5000 per month respectively”.

This shows that the choice of breakfast menu often depends on the earning and spending capacity of the household. A household with many earning members and a proper occupation is found to have a hearty breakfast everyday. At times instead of an early morning breakfast, the slum inhabitants prefer to have a mid day meal of *rooti-torkari* or rice merging both lunch and breakfast. Some of the households said they eat *pau-rooti* with tea in the morning. *Luchi-torkari* a quintessential Bengali gourmet food is made often on holidays when the whole family eats together. In case of lower class families, the choice of breakfast often builds a hierarchy of ‘poor’ and ‘non-poor’.

Table-15. Percentage of selected urban poor respondents who consume breakfast every morning

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	43	71.7
No	17	28.3
Total	60	100.0

Source: Self

Note: The above table shows that 71.7 percent of the respondents from urban slums stated that there is some form of breakfast consumed every morning among family members. However nearly 28.3 percent of them said there is no proper breakfast eaten in their homes on a daily basis. Many lower class households stated of not affording a proper breakfast meal in the morning. At times it is only the children or the man of the house who eat a morning meal while the women are left out.

For the lower class in Kolkata slums, breakfast holds less significance compared to the middle class. The prevalence of *pao-ruti* and not ‘bread’ is more among the urban poor’s first morning meal. However unlike the middle class the lower class people eat locally baked

'*pao-ruti*' purchased from nearby tea stalls or small grocery stores. Some households have no morning meal. Domestic helps coming from the slums usually eat food at the employer's house. Food that is eaten in the morning by the lower class residing in urban slums is usually left over meals from previous night. Awareness of health and taste is lacking among the poor and food is eaten to fill the stomach in most cases.

Families with more members working have a more structured meal in the form of breakfast. Such families equate themselves with the middle class (the lower middle in this case) and eat hearty meals of bread, egg or *porota*. For some poor families a breakfast may seem a luxury. For most having breakfast is not a compulsory phenomenon while the morning tea and light biscuits can do the work. Light snacks like *muri* and peanuts are often indulged in the morning if hungry. The lower class work in unorganised sector and leave for work in the morning. In most cases they come back home for meal and an afternoon siesta. Hence breakfast is of little relevance to them.

3.2.2. THE AFTERNOON MEAL

The morning breakfast is followed by the **afternoon meal or lunch**. Bengalis are known for their elaborate lunch meals and as major consumers of rice and fish. *Maacher jhol-bhaat* becomes synonymous to Bengali identity and Bengalis worldwide are known as major fish eaters. There is a distinction between home food and outside food in this regard. *Bhaat* becomes synonymous to lunch. "*Ajke dupure bhaat khaoni*" is a common phrase used to mean whether one has taken lunch or not? For most Bengalis *bhaat* or rather *maach-bhat* is an ideal Bengali meal which has the innate capacity to satiate ones hunger. A *maach-bhaat* platter can satiate hunger pangs for the whole day, as goes the popular belief among many a Bengali mother across time. Rice is synonymous to the Bengali way of life because it was a subsistence crop in pre-British India which also symbolized self-sustenance. Rice was not merely a staple in Bengal; it was also a potent cultural symbol of Bengaliness (Ray, U 2015: 33). According to scholars exploring the food and culture of colonial Bengal, rice not only evoked a sense of belongingness with the rural agrarian life of the *bhadraloks* but also became an expression of resistance and freedom against the new emerging non-Bengali communities of Calcutta which were largely wheat eaters (Prasad, S 2006: 257).

Although popularly found in other eastern regions mainly south East Asia and even in Kerala down south, the fish and rice combination as the ideal form of food are found can be found unanimously across Bengali households of caste, class, religion and regional disparity.

Kalyani Dutta's (1992) literary work *Thod Bodi Khada* provides a description of everyday life in a traditional joint family of Bengal where *maach bhat* which was accessible to all the members of the household throughout the year reflected self sufficiency of a large middle class family. Hence fish and rice denotes prosperity as well as self sufficiency and adequacy for the Bengali household. Every Bengali household across Kolkata is particular about the kind of rice consumed at home. The plain boiled rice has a variety depending on the size of the grains, the flavour and if it is parboiled or not (Banerji, C 1991).

Among myriad choices there are two main forms of rice eaten in Bengali households every day. These are the *sheddho chal* or boiled rice and the *Atop chal*. It is said that the *Sheddho chal* consumption is more typical of the *Ghotis*²⁷ of West Bengal where as the *Atop chal* is commonly found in erstwhile East Bengal or present day Bangladesh. Hence it features in the diet of most *Bangals* of Kolkata. However such distinctions have little relevance in a cross cultural society today. Rice grows in the state in three seasons- *Aus* (autumn rice), *Aman* (winter rice), *Boro* (summer rice). Consumption of a specific kind of rice often becomes a differentiating factor between 'us' and 'them' for the otherwise heterogeneous Bengali ethnic group.

Bengalis are fish lovers since the ancient times. Fish is an integral part of Bengali life and culture. Banerji (1991) in her fictional work on Bengali food and life observes the way fish has always been a part of the culture of Bengalis. This tradition prevailed since the ancient times and is portrayed on different cultural heritage. The *Anandamangalkabya* by *Bharatchandra* from 1752-1753 lists some fifty one varieties of fish eaten by Bengalis (ibid). According to Dr. Niharranjan Ray (1994), several rivers and their tributaries surrounding the land of Bengal makes its civilization most dependent on fish which is easily available in large varieties (Ghosh Alpana, 2015: 3). There is a proverb which says, "*Maache bhaate Bangali*". "*Bangalir shukher name je chilo maache bhaate thaka* " (Dutta Kalyani, 1992: 53) (Fish and rice reflects happiness and prosperity among Bengalis) Bengalis still today are considered as major fish eaters whose variety ranges from sweet fresh water fishes to salt water or sea fishes of all kinds. Most of the fishes that are sold in Calcutta markets come from port Canning which is also the gateway to the *Sundarbans*.

²⁷ Original inhabitants of West Bengal are colloquially referred to as 'Ghoti' contrary to the derogatory *Bangals* who are usually migrant Bengalis from East Bengal (Bangladesh). The Ghoti-Bangal distinction forms an integral part of Bengali food and cultural life.

The most common fishes consumed in Bengali homes today are *Pona* both *katapona* and *chara pona*, *Rui*, *Katla*, *Magud*, *Ilish*, *Chingri*, *Tangra*, *Parshe*, *Koi*, *Pabda*, *Ilish*, *Koi*, *chital*, *Mourola* etc. Common fresh water fishes can be grouped in categories like –Carp: *Rui* (*Labeorohita*), *Catla* (*Catla b Buchananani*); Catfish: *Aar or Aar tangra* (*Osteogeniosus militaris*), *the fresh water shark boyari* (*Wallagonia attu*), *Pabda* (*Callichrous pabda*), *Tengra* (*Macrones cavasius*), *Sing or Singer* (*Saccobrauchus fossils*); Herring and Shad: The *Hilsa* or *Ilish* (*Hilsa Ilishi*), *Chandane Ilish* or *Silver Hilsa* (*Hilsa Toli*), *Dhala* (*Ilishi Clongate*); The Featherback fish: *Chital* (*Notopterus Chitala*); *Koi* : The Climbing Perch (*Anabas Testudineus*), The American Koi also known as *talapia*; Giant Prawn or fresh water lobster: *Golda Chingri* (*Poleomon*); Perch: *Bekti*, *Bhetki* (*Lates Calcarifer*), *Tuladana* (*Sillago Domina*), a delicate fish that resembles a cod in size and appearance (Sen Colleen Taylor and Joe Roberts, 1998: 254)

If asked a Bengali, “what kind of fish do you eat at home”? The prompt reply comes “*we eat all kinds of fish*”. It is not only about eating but fish forms the very basic of Bengali commensality. It is a part of a complicated web of values and categories related to health, purity, aesthetics etc (Sen Colleen Taylor and Joe Roberts, 1998). Fish is eaten in two major forms across Bengali households. Fish *jhol* or stew with all kinds of seasonal vegetables spiced up with *jeere* and *kalonji* is a favourite *Ghoti* dish. Fish *jhol* adds to the mundane. According to few middle class respondents:

“A Rui fish stew with vegetables is a staple diet in my household. For lunch one dal and fish jhol will compensate for a sumptuous meal”.

Another delectable fish preparation is the *jhal*. This is spicier with less or no vegetables in the stew. Fish *jhal* is traditionally more common among the *Bangal* households due to their taste for something spicier unlike the *Ghotis*. However Fish *jhal* preparations are still sought after in every Bengali household. A respondent originally from West Bengal (and denoted as a *Ghoti*) stated:

“We eat maacher jhol and bhaat for lunch. If it is a niramish (vegetarian) jhol then may be a fish jhal is added to the platter”.

The whole act of buying, cooking and eating fish in Bengali households speaks for the various interactions and relationships that are encountered in everyday life. Even in the early 19th and 20th century buying a fish from a Kolkata market brought about froth negotiations between the fish seller and the buyer. Fishes were considered expensive in those days as well

yet buying them was indispensable for the housewives and men of all social classes. In middle class joint family households of Kolkata the distribution of the fish *muro* (head) and *leja* (tail) among family members often became the source of conflict (Dutta, K, 1992: 55-56).

In most middle class Bengali homes a meal without a fish course would be considered incomplete to the point that very poor people will flavour the *dal* or vegetable dishes with fish scales sold in the market for that purpose (Sen Colleen Taylor and Joe Roberts, 1998: 255). Bengalis are known to eat a variety of vegetables and greens. Seasonal vegetables form a part of the every diet of a Bengali householder. Vegetables and their preparations change with the change of season. For instance some vegetables like *lau* (white gourd), *potol* (okra), *jhinge*, *karola* or *ucche* (bitter gourd) are more common during the summers. *Sukto*, a kind of bitter stew made of all kinds of summer vegetables form an ideal food to beat the summers. *Sukto* is among one of the favourite Bengali cuisines.

Sukto is derived from the medieval Bengali *Shukata*, meaning dried leaves of a plant usually the bitter jute plant (Banerji, 1990). Others like carrots, cauliflower, cabbage, different kinds of green leafy vegetables are more common during the winter season. However most of the vegetables that find a common place in the Bengali diet and kitchen today were not so common in the medieval or ancient Bengal. Rather they owe their presence to the colonial politics of the 19th century. “Many of the new food crops introduced in India were a direct result of the Columbian Exchange and some of them came from Europe itself” (Ray, U 2015: 39). The Portuguese who were the first settlers in India introduced some common Indian vegetables like potato, tomato, okra, papaya etc. The reason for the cultivation of such foreign food crops in India is a political endeavour. According to Ray (2015) ‘the introduction of exotic vegetables by the colonial state had two purposes. One was to bring new (modern) food to the subject population as a symbol of progress. The other was to recreate a sense of belonging for the coloniser in the colony’ (ibid). Ray’s work constantly situates the whole discourse of middle class taste in the whole gamut of colonial politics. The new fruits and vegetables that were introduced by the British started getting recognition in middle class homes and have become perennial in contemporary Bengali households. As Ray rightly observed, it is hard to imagine a winter meal in contemporary Calcutta without cauliflower and cabbages (ibid: 53). Some other foreign vegetables like turnip, beet, broccoli, arrowroot, artichoke, celery, lettuce, leek and squash were also grown (Umeshchandra Sen, Krishi-Chandrika, 1875; Utsa Ray, 2015: 53). Certain food items are typical of Bengalis.

Thor, *mocha* (banana flower), *enchor* (raw jackfruit), *posto* (poppy seeds), *chichinga* (snake gourd), *sags of all kinds* (Green Leafy vegetables), *shosha* (cucumber), *Lau* (gourd), *Jhinga* (ridge gourd) are some of the delectable cuisines that are unique to the Bengali diet and exist since the ancient time.

INTAKE OF LUNCH IN MIDDLE CLASS HOUSEHOLDS

Table-16. Percentage of the type of meal consumed for lunch in selected middle class homes

Food Types	Frequency	Percentage
Four course traditional Bengali meal with rice	81	81.0
<i>Rooti</i> and <i>sabzi</i> with fish or chicken	07	7.0
Continental food	02	2.0
Fruits and salads	01	1.0
Rice and <i>rooti</i> both	02	2.0
Rice with one course meal	01	1.0
Not applicable	06	6.0
Total	100	100.0

Source: Self

Note: The above table provides a description of the type of food consumed for lunch in middle class homes of Kolkata. It is found that 81 percent of the respondents stated that they eat a traditional four course meal of rice for lunch while 7 percent of the respondents consume *rooti* and *sabzi* for lunch instead of rice. 2 percent of the respondents claimed that they have continental food for lunch and one percent said that they have nothing but salads and fruits for lunch. Only 1 percent of the household consume rice with one course meal a day and two percent of the household combine rice with *rooti* for lunch. 6 percent of the respondents said that they don't eat lunch at home.

The lunch meal is an extensive and elaborate spread in middle class Bengali households of Kolkata. The above categories mentioned in the table have been deciphered from the different responses provided by the respondents in the due course of the study. It was found that afternoon meal still is predominated by a wide spread of rice as the main dish with other

supplementary foods like vegetables, pulses, fish and meat. While rice is the main food shared across all sections of society, some households have started experimenting with different food types. While *rooti* was earlier only consumed for dinner, people have claimed to substitute rice with *rooti* even in the afternoons. There is also a difference in the kind of food consumed for lunch at home, over weekdays and weekends and at work. Preference for food depends a lot on individual choices which in turn revolve around the different social and cultural forces around us. Issues of health and body weight have constantly cropped in the several responses to food choices among the middle class. I found a woman aged thirty five years and working in a leading newspaper office stating:

“At times I switch to a dieting mode. It is then that I stop consuming rice for lunch except on Sundays. Instead I prefer to eat rooti since it is healthy and not weight gaining”.

One also finds an inclusion of western diet in terms of continental foods and salads for lunch at home. Such trends are more predominant among the middle aged women. Body consciousness features as the most important dimension in choosing household meals. Nonetheless most of these choices are more individualistic and are seldom incorporated by all the family members. Traditional foods are however shared equally among all the members of the household.

As mentioned above fish forms a major part of Bengali’s lunch meal. Every household reported of having one fish meal a day. At times fish is cooked for both lunch and dinner and a meal without fish seems incomplete. Although the fetish for fish and rice combination forms a typical Bengali trait and a quintessential Bengali is known for his knowledge of the right kind of fish, discrepancies in this age old trait of Bengali identity can be felt across the new generation. It shows that the few young men and women is not much of a fish lover. According to another respondent:

“We mostly buy fishes with big bones because small boned fishes are difficult to eat and my children cannot eat them”.

Such responses show that the trend of eating boned fish since the times of *Anandamangalkavya* and *Chandimangalkavya* are gradually on a decline. This new trend of eating less bones and boneless fishes among the younger generation can be due to the impact of western food preparations that have started entering the private domains of the households. Even restaurants offering Bengali food often provide deboned fish preparations that are easier

to eat. Time is another big factor in this regard. A busy urban life leaves less time for food preparation and consumption and hence popularizing easy cooking recipes with lesser time constraint. This point will be elucidated later.

This is probably the prime cause for a rise in consumption of chicken in middle class households which was earlier a taboo. Chicken was prohibited from the Bengali kitchen due to its association with Muslims and Westerners, as stated by Banerji (1991). However the acceptance of chicken in modern domestic homes has been quite revolutionary. A respondent from south Kolkata stated:

“At my place chicken is cooked regularly along with two kinds of fish. My brother and I eat chicken while fish is taken by our parents”.

According to Donner (2008) in his study of food in Bengali households in the early 90’s showed the transformation in middle class diet with the rising popularity of chicken in middle class households. The reason for chicken’s popularity as an important non vegetarian food next to fish was due to growing prevalence of poultry farming. “The success of *Arambagh Limited*, a chain selling poultry, signifies this pattern, whereby foods which used to be seen as *bideshi* (foreign), or which were strongly associated with other communities, for instance chicken, have found their way into the kitchen, and thus the heart of Bengali Hindu life” (Donner, 2008 : 168). However it is not just among the Hindu households but even among Muslim and Christian households that chicken finds a popular place. A Christian woman mentioned:

“We buy a lot of chicken for the whole week. Chicken is easy to prepare and tastes good. Even though fish forms a major part of Bengali diet my daughter loves having chicken”.

Other respondents stress on health issues as the main factor behind rising intake of chicken compared to other meats. Chicken is supposed to be healthier and light compared to other red meats. This increased predominance of chicken as the necessary other in the Bengali food platter has led to a decline in other forms of meat that used to find its place among the Bengalis. Mutton is consumed as an alternative meat to chicken. In recent times several middle class households have started avoiding red meat for health reasons.

INTAKE OF LUNCH IN AMONG THE URBAN POOR

Lower class households eat a lot of rice for their afternoon meal. The rice consumption of the lower class is much more compared to the middle class. This is probably because rice is cheaper than any other food products and also high in calorie content. Rice is a rich source of energy for the poor who tend to perform manual labour compared to the educated white collar middle class. Rice is accompanied with a vegetable and sometimes *dal*. The urban poor choose between a *dal* and fish in a day as both are sources of protein for them. Intake of fish features as an important part of lower class diet as well similar to the middle class. Difference lies in the kinds of fish consumed by the poor compared to the middle class. The poor usually eat lesser quality fishes which are also less in price. All kinds of seasonal vegetables are more or less eaten by the poor in the city slums. But smashed potatoes are more common among the poor.

Table-17. Percentage of consumption of certain foods in selected Urban Poor Households

Frequency	Type of Foods						
	Egg	Fish	Chicken	Mutton	Beef	Pork	Other
Everyday	11.7	20.0	0	0	0	0	0
Once a week	28.3	11.7	43.3	5.0	3.3	0	0
Twice or thrice a week	41.7	56.7	0	0	0	0	0
Once a month	1.7	1.7	15	1.7	0	0	0
Rarely	10.0	8.4	26.7	15.0	3.3	1.7	0
No/Never	6.6	1.5	15.0	78.3	93.4	98.3	100
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Self

Note: The above table shows the frequency of intake of non vegetarian food items like egg, fish and meat in urban poor households. It is found that fish is most frequently consumed in lower class households compared to other foods. Nearly 20 percent of the households mentioned of consuming fish everyday while around 12 percent of the households stated that egg is consumed almost every day of the week. Chicken is usually consumed only once a week. Mutton and beef consumption is very rare and more prevalent among the Muslims. The urban poor of Kolkata residing in the various slums scattered across the city try to maintain more or less this staple diet structure for their afternoon meal. One of the slum dwellers report:

“We eat rice in the afternoon. If we have money then we get fish or else we eat vegetarian food”.

Fish is found to be expensive and unaffordable by many of the slum dwellers. Usually the kind of fishes consumed in poor households varies from the middle class households in the city. The poor look for less priced, cheap quality fishes. The *pona fish* (including *chara pona* and *katapona*) are regularly consumed by the poor. According to Sheikh Anwar Hussain, lunch consists of *aloo sheddho* or smashed potatoes, *dal*, rice and *sabzi*. *Katapona* fish is consumed occasionally. Another resident of Rahim Ostagar slum stated, they eat whatever they can lay their hands on. At times it is only rice, *dal* and *sabzi* while at times there is chicken or even fish of lower variety. Slums are diverse units and this can be found through the kind of food people choose to eat in their everyday lives. Few households among the poor confirm that fish and rice are staple meal forms. These households are economically sounder than the others with a steady job security and employment. For some slum dwellers egg omelette popularly called *dim bhaja* and *aloo sheddho* can accompany a bowl of rice for lunch. According to forty years old widow, lunch is *niramish ranna* (vegetarian meal) which comprise mostly seasonal vegetables like gourd, pumpkin, brinjal. She cooks some variety only when her daughter and son in law come to visit her. Slums dwellers often lament of lack of money to prepare good food. One of my respondents mentioned:

“There is nothing special about our regular food. If I can make a little more money then we can buy chicken”.

Masoor dal is the most common form of lentil followed by *moong dal*. No other form of *dal* has been reported by the respondents. Varieties of fish include *katapona*, *charapon*, *shilkata*, *shol maach*, *shilidarka maach*, *nere maach*, *telapia*. Chicken is the most common form of *mangsho* (a local word to denote any form of meat) that is consumed and is also a special

food for some. Goat meat consumption is rare and varies from household to household depending on taste and financial status. Beef is more prevalent among the Muslims while the Hindu respondents find it a taboo while pork consumption is almost obliterated. The lower class slum inhabitants often buy the leftover pieces of chicken from the market, those which are not bought by the upper classes. They are also known to consume the head of the *khasi* (goat), the kidneys, and other parts which are sold in cheaper prices and not preferred by the middle and upper classes.

3.2.3 DINNER IN MIDDLE CLASS AND URBAN POOR HOUSEHOLDS

Consumption of wheat in the form of *rooti* has become the norm in middle class households of Kolkata in the contemporary world. *Rooti* is commonly eaten at night for dinner. Most urban households refrain from rice consumption at night and have shifted to consuming wheat *rootis*. While rice is preserved mainly for the children at night, the adults mostly indulge in *rooti* and *torkari* which is a vegetable curry of some sort. While many households repeat the same vegetable preparation that was cooked for lunch some households prepare a fresh vegetable or non vegetarian curry for dinner. However for people who have their afternoon meal outside home and are deprived of their wholesome household lunch, dinner in the form of rice, *dal*, vegetables, fish or meat compensate for it. When asked about the increased consumption of *rooti* in Bengali households, people often cite health reasons.

Wheat is more beneficent to health compared to rice and are hence incorporated in one major meal of the day. It is however noteworthy that wheat was introduced in Bengal amidst the colonial politics of cultivation whereby new food crops were introduced in the land for profit of the British Raj. Bengali men are often reported to be effeminate, lazy and physically weak compared to the men from the northern states of India. These physical attributes are often the result of excess rice consumption among the Bengalis. The north Indian men are seen as physically tough and masculine compared to their eastern counterparts because of their consumption of wheat (Ray, Utsa 2014). On the whole unlike the elaborate lunch and dinner in Bengali middle class households is much lighter and less elaborate. Middle class families constantly exhibit different consumption patterns. There are some families who prepare different continental cuisines for dinner at home. Such cuisines are not exceptions to the norm but the norm itself. A middle aged home maker from south Kolkata remarked:

“We usually try to eat something different for dinner. While lunch is more traditional dinner is mostly continental. Either there is pasta or some form of noodles or any other continental food that I prepare for dinner at home”.

Influence of western food culture has always been a part of Bengali cuisine since it started taking shape in the advent of modern period in history. Nevertheless such impacts were less felt on the *maddhiyobitta*²⁸ household food. Today’s middle class are open to exploring new kinds of cuisines and food types at home. New food choices are being made without much inhibition to outside food. This indicates the diverse cultural dispositions of the middle class.

Food habits of the **urban poor** in Bengali households are very similar to that of the middle class or mostly the lower middle class. Dinner is consumed late and comprises of both rice and *rooti* depending upon the preference of household members. Rice is consumed more among the lower class compared to the middle class though. Often it is the same vegetable that was cooked for the day that is eaten at night again. If food gets over in the day, fresh food is cooked for the night meal. The family sits together for dinner which is mostly very late. This is because the men who mostly work in unorganised sector return home late in the evening. The middle class and the urban poor share different realities which get embodied in the kind of lifestyle they execute. Food intake pattern depends more on choice and taste preferences of its consumers which again is based on the choice of style of life.

3.2.4 SMALL MEALS IN BENGALI HOUSEHOLDS: SNACK FOOD

Apart from the three big meals consumed by Bengalis there are one or two small meals that are eaten in a day. These are popularly called snack foods or at time *jol khabar* or Tiffin. Tiffin is a snack that is consumed in small portions between major meals of the day. These include fast foods, processed foods, packaged foods, fruits or even homemade foods. Among the Bengali middle class snack foods are eaten usually in the evenings between the afternoon meal and dinner. Snacks are also eaten as accompaniments with the evening tea. Bengalis are great tea lovers. This tradition also grew out of the colonial influence in Bengal. There are several snack foods that are typically found among the Bengali middle class. Before the days of processed and packaged food households with large family members would store a wide range of eatables like *muri* (puffed rice), *khoi* (popped rice), *chira* (flattened rice), *chal bhaja* (rice that is fried dry without the use of oil or water), *chanachur* (traditional Indian snack),

²⁸ I use the term *madhyabitta* to address that section of the middle class who fall in the middle income category and belong to the service class. The *madhyabitta* are the middle income people who are not rich but are in a comfortable position. This was used to differentiate among the middle class.

sweets and savouries of all kinds. The *muri* or puffed rice is a quintessential Bengali snack stacked in every a Bengali kitchen.

Since Bengalis are rice oriented many of their snacks also come from the same in the form of *muri*, *khoi*, *chira* and *chal bhaja* To start with *muri* finds a special place among Bengali foods. *Muri* is relished in the form of *jhal muri* by adding a little spice to the otherwise plain food type. In West Bengal districts like Bardhaman, Medinipur, Bankura, Birbhum and its many villages are known to consume *muri* even twice a day as a major food. *Muri* is also an integral part of the famous Kolkata street food culture similar to the *Phuchka*²⁹. *Muri makha* or *jhal muri* is a mixture of all kinds of spices like green chillies, chopped onions, tomatoes, peanuts, salt and little oil. At home a little cucumber and coconut along with *chanachur* may be added to enhance the taste. The *chira bhaja* is another traditional snack whereby the *chira* or flat rice had to be roasted with peanuts and salt to attain the right taste and flavour. There are also varieties of ‘baked *chira*’ labels that find its place in the modern health maniac households of the city. However the traditional practice of eating *chira* with yogurt among school going children is a passé with the rise of other delectable ready to eat food products like *Maggie noodles* and *pasta*.

Over the years several other food types have started entering the Bengali larder some of which have become synonymous to Bengali identity and culture. The colonial period has been the main source of cosmopolitan taste in Bengal. Different types of foods like chops, cutlets, rolls have all been introduced to the new middle class of the era. All kinds of chops like fish chop, chicken chop, egg chop and others are savoured by the middle class Bengalis across Kolkata. North Calcutta (as still pronounced by the Bengalis) are especially famous for these delicacies and are found in many a road side eateries and stalls. Another remarkable creation is the *tele bhaja* (Fried foods) which is the essence of Bengali food.

The *telebhaja* is unique to Bengalis and are a common evening snack in many middle class homes of Kolkata today. *Tele bhajas* are best relished on light drizzle, rainy days or cold wintry evenings. These delectable creations are best savoured when bought from roadside stalls. *Telebhaja* is so popular in Kolkata that it can be called the national food of Bengal (Ray, Pratap Kumar, 2002) Every nook or corner of a *para* (locality) will have a *telebhaja* stall in Kolkata. *Telebhaja* is a food that fosters localization for people have their own

²⁹ It is a famous street food of Kolkata known by the name of *pani puri* in Bombay and *Golgappa* in Delhi. *Phuchka* is made out of round hollow *puri* or balls made of flour which are then deep fried. It is eaten by adding smashed potatoes and spices along with tamarind water

preferable shops to savour the delicacy from”. The *telebhaja* is best savoured with a bowl of *muri*. The *chanachur* or *dalmoot* is another common food stuff found in almost every Bengali home. The *chanachur* contains a mixture of fried *besan* (gram flour) shaped in the form of noodles, *dalmoot* (pulses), *badam* (peanuts), with spices and condiments. *Chanachur* is also mixed with *muri* and consumed among all sections of society. It is believed to be a healthy snack among the middle class and an affordable snack among the lower class. *Muri*, *chira bhaja* and even *chanachur* have become processed foods which are packaged and marketed today.

Biscuits are the most common eatables found in every domestic home across the city. ‘Biscuits were earlier considered a forbidden foreign element in the middle class household. One can find a narrative from Bipin Chandra Pal’s autobiography on how biscuit became tempting among the middle class who developed new tastes and gourmand desires under the British rule’(Ray, Utsa 2015). Today it is a mundane item of grocery in middle class household. One can always find a packet of *Marie* or *thin arrowroot* biscuit³⁰ in every Bengali household though there are a wide variety of choices that are offered to middle class consumers. Some major brands of biscuits that find its place in Bengali homes are *Britannia*, *Bisk Farm*, *Sunfeast*. Some middle class consumers vouch for *Patanjali*³¹ biscuits which are made of wheat (*atta*) and are low in cholesterol. Digestive biscuits have also become a new fad among the health and body weight conscious middle class.

Noodles in the form of *Maggie*, *Top Ramen*, *Yippie*, *Pasta* and *chowmein* have revolutionised the concept of small meals. They are most popular among the young and the youth. Doting yet busy mothers find it an easy and affordable food snack to serve their family anytime of the day. It is the best way of satiating hunger in no time at all. These packaged ready to eat food products suit the taste buds of the people and are easily made with little effort. *Maggie* noodles are often the first cooked food made by the amateur cook in domestic circles. Even young men and little children can cook a packet of *Maggie* noodles and help themselves without adult supervision.

Momos are another delectable cuisine that has become very popular in middle class Bengali homes. These small round dumplings of Tibetan origin can be easily made at home or purchased in every locality. *Momo* sellers throng the city in every quarter and if hungry for a

³⁰ Marie or Thin arrowroot biscuits were introduced by Britannia. The Britannia Company was established in Kolkata in 1892.

³¹ Patanjali is a brand launched by Yoga guru Ramdev

light evening snack, *momos* can easily be packed home. *Momos* are more popular because they are supposed to have low calories although it is not the case for the fried ones. Other items like chips, popcorn, frozen ready to eat fritters and fries, pastries and cakes add to the innumerable choices available to the urban middle class.

Meal pattern in Bengali households across all classes, region and religion are an elaborate affair. Bengalis like tasting different types of foods all of which find place in the Bengali kitchen. However a generalised meal pattern cannot speak about the essence of Bengali community as a whole due to its vast heterogeneity and vividness. The intake of food across social classes depends on essentially choice and necessity. Households between and within classes have different intake patterns.

The **middle class Bengalis** usually snack twice daily between major meals. The mid morning snack and the evening snack play vital role in middle class life. The mid morning snack is usually consumed after breakfast. It is kept light with either a fruit or a small toast or even a juice. A small cup of tea can also relieve the hectic start of the day. For the Bengali middle class, the choice of snack foods is endless. However there are three main kinds of consumers. One kind is those who would have no snack foods in between meals apart from a biscuit to go with a cup of tea. The other kind is those who prefer a light snack of *muri* or *chira* to accompany with tea in the late evenings. These are mostly women who sit down to relinquish their thirst for tea in the evening after wrapping up the household chores of cooking for the day. “*In the late evening we eat muri. Shingara³² is consumed at times*”.

Often homemakers engaged in household tasks don't eat a proper breakfast meal and munch on such snacks mid day. The third kind is those people who need to have a heavy evening snack with a variety of food types. Often in those homes, foods are bought from outside where the whole family gathers together for a small chat after the day's work. Dinner in this case is usually late. Evenings are the best time to sit with such delicacies and a cup of tea while enjoying the best TV show in the sitting room. A respondent from a family of three with all members working mentioned:

“We don't eat snacks every day at home. On Sundays when everybody is at home may be we order something from KFC or a fish fry”.

³² Shingara is a stuffed pastry which is fried or bakes with fillings like potato, cauliflower and the like. Another name for Singara is samosa. This is a common snack among Bengalis.

School going children returning home are provided with their favourite snacks. While the mid day meal or lunch happens the traditional way, evening snacks are more generous with a cosmopolitan platter. Generally snacks are indulgence which is not very healthy. They are mostly fried or processed. However some snacks can be very healthy and are becoming popular among middle class women in particular.

“I prefer to eat salads with boiled pulses like kabuli chana, yellow peas as a snack between lunch and dinner” claimed a young woman.

For a middle class housewife and a mother evening snacks are mandatory. So she decides to serve her husband and son *sherbet* made of fruits or something. Dry fruits like almonds, nuts and raisins are also consumed by a lot of middle class men and women these days as *“healthy snack foods”*. Snacks are also multi cultural and multi-culinary. This is the best way to get a taste of foods from other regions of the country which are otherwise shunned as the ‘other food’. *Vadas, Uttapams, momos, burgers, pizzas* all fall in this category.

Table- 18. Percentage of respondents consuming types of snack foods in middle class households

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Health food	32	32.0
Junk food	28	28.0
Fast food	02	2.0
Both health and junk food	34	34.0
I don't know	03	3.0
Total	100	100.0

Source: Self

Note: The table shows that there are different categories of snack foods consumed by the middle class Bengalis in Kolkata. I have categories them under health food, junk food and fast foods. 32 percent of the respondents said they usually try consuming something healthy for a snack. Fruits are considered the most healthy snack food among the middle class along with *muri* or puffed rice. Health and body conscious men and women restrict their diet to consumption of simple healthy snacks anytime of the day. 28 percent of respondents stated that they mostly eat junk foods as an evening snack. According to them junk foods like chips, wafers, pastries, frozen finger foods, *chanachur* and even chocolates are the unhealthiest and

unavoidable foods that are eaten regularly within the household. 34 percent of the respondents clarified of consuming both health foods and junk foods depending on their taste preference while two percent of the respondents mentioned of eating fast foods like rolls and *chowmein* (Indian noodles) occasionally.

In **lower class** households snacking in between meals is not a common affair. The urban poor cook their lunch late and hence they eat their mid day meal later in the day. An evening tea is not mandatory for them. Later in the evening light tea and a biscuit is munched on. At times *muri*, chop or roll is eaten though it's very rare. *Rolls* (mostly of egg) and chops, *ghugni*³³ or *telebhaja* of poor quality are also found in the nooks of the slums. Children are often giving money to buy some food of their choice. They reward themselves with a candy, ice cream, a small packet of chips or even *Maggie* noodles of rupees five. Small packets of processed foods which are low in price often cater to the lower rungs of society who can acclimatise themselves to the taste and pleasures of middle class culture. *Chowmein* is a favourite snack food among some of the lower class. Made with poor quality noodles and left over vegetables like cabbage, beans and potatoes and oil, *chowmein* is often prepared in small portion for the household as a fancy snack. Biscuits are also consumed with tea. These are often purchased from the tea stalls or vendors. The tea stalls sells bakery biscuits of local variety mostly. The lower class henceforth consumes all kinds of foods like fast foods, packaged foods and also home made foods similar to the middle class. Again the major difference lies in the quality of the food products. The lower class also acquires homogeneous taste like the middle class in the process.

3.3 CONSUMPTION OF BEVEARGES IN BENGALI HOUSEHOLDS (Tea/Coffee/Aerated Water/Liquor/Water)

Water is the most important source of life. In urban middle class households the form of drinking water consumption has also undergone a huge change over the years. It is no longer a common sight to find women working as household maids carrying earthen pitchers (*ghora/kolshi*) on their waists to be filled with water under tube wells in the street pavements. Very few households still use the ground water bought from tube wells for drinking. This is because ground water is no longer safe these days due to a rise in iron content. Many of the tube wells in the city corners are not even in good working condition while some are

³³ *Ghugni* is a popular snack food in eastern India especially in parts of Bengal and Bihar. It is made of dry yellow peas popularly known as *Ghugni matar*.

damaged or have been lifted. The urban middle class have resorted to drinking water from the municipal corporation water supply in their domestic homes. Most of the households have a water filter or water purifiers which are used either manually or electrically.

Water from the household kitchen tap is filtered with the help of these filters. *Aquaguard*, the leading brand of water purifier (electric water purifier) has become a household name. People are also conscious about drinking water and often ask whether they are from an *Aquaguard* or not. Packaged water has become important for the middle class consumer when travelling outside or in restaurants but not in the household. However many of the middle income groups are contented with filtered water outside home than spending on packaged drinking water in top notched restaurants.

Table-19. Percentage on the frequency of Tea consumption in selected Middle Class Households

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Once a day	22	22.0
Twice a day	42	42.0
More than twice a day	29	29.0
Occasionally	01	1.0
Rarely	05	5.0
None of the above	01	1.0
Total	100	100.0

Source: Self

Note: The above table shows the frequency of consumption of tea in middle class Bengali homes. Tea is the most common beverage in Kolkata and is immensely popular among the middle class Bengalis. 42 percent of respondents claimed that tea is consumed at home nearly twice everyday while 29 percent of the respondents stated that tea is consumed more than twice daily. 22 percent of them said that tea is consumed at least once a day.

Bengalis are great tea lovers. Every Bengali middle class household will have at least one cup of tea in a day. In many cases it goes up to two or more than two cups in a day. Tea is not

original to Bengal. Rather it was introduced by the British in the 19th century which started gaining acceptance among the people in the 20th century. Hence tea culture which seems ubiquitous to Bengal is relatively new and is the result of colonial interaction and cultural exchange just like many other modern food products. Drinking tea is a social endeavour. Every household in the city will offer a cup of tea to the guests coming home. It helps to gather *adda* or social interaction within close knit groups. While the city streets are thronged with *cha alas* and tea stalls, household is arena where modern *Calcuttans* experiment with their tea tasting. While milk tea is always the popular form of tea consumed in India as well as West Bengal, middle class Bengalis in Kolkata are gradually drinking more of liquor tea with less or no sugar.

Table- 20. Percentage of responses on different forms of Tea in selected middle class households

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Milk tea	43	43.0
Liquor tea	39	39.0
Green tea	03	3.0
Both milk and liquor tea	13	13.0
Flavoured tea	02	2.0
Total	100	100.0

Source: Self

Note: The above table shows the different varieties of tea that are preferred and consumed in middle class households of Kolkata. Around 43 percent of the respondents stated that they prefer drinking milk tea while 39 percent voted for liquor tea. Around 13 percent said they like to drink both milk and liquor tea respectively. 3 percent of the respondents stated that they drink green tea on a regular basis while 2 percent of them said that they like all kinds of flavoured tea as well.

Many of the middle class tea consumers consider tea without milk to be beneficent of good health. Among the young and middle aged respondents some also claimed of rejuvenating oneself with a cup of green tea. Green tea is marketed and promoted as an antioxidant which is supposed to help in weight loss. Green tea is relished by many occasionally along with other forms of tea. It often symbolises social status among the highly aspiring middle class

because green tea is expensive and considered more aesthetic. The new and younger middle class also experiments with other kinds of flavoured tea that are launched in the market. Consuming tea is also perceived as gendered. This is because almost 70 percent of my women respondents mentioned of drinking tea more than twice daily compared to the men. Men also have reported women of consuming more tea than required within the household.

Table- 21. Percentage on frequency of Coffee consumption in selected middle class households

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Once a day	10	10.0
Twice a day	05	5.0
More than twice a day	03	3.0
Occasionally	29	29.0
Rarely	46	46.0
Never	07	7.0
Total	100	100.0

Source: Self

Note: The above table shows the frequency of consumption of coffee among the middle class. It shows that 46 percent of respondents stated that coffee is rarely consumed at home while twenty nine percent of them stated that it is occasionally consumed. Only 10 percent said that coffee is consumed by them every day. 7 percent of the respondents stated that coffee is never consumed at home.

Table-22. Percentage on the form of Coffee consumed in selected middle class households

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Coffee with milk	80	80.0
Coffee without milk	10	10.0
Cold Coffee	02	2.0
Other	01	1.0
Not applicable	07	7.0
Total	100	100.0

Source: Self

Note: The above table shows the different forms of coffee that are consumed in middle class households of Kolkata. Coffee with milk is the most common form of the drink that is prepared in middle class homes with eighty percent of respondents voting for it. Around 10 percent of the respondents said that they prefer coffee without milk. Only 2 percent of the respondents stated that they only prepare cold coffee at home while 1 percent said that they prefer coffee of different International flavours like *Capuccino* and *Irish coffee*.

Coffee is not a popular drink for household consumption among the middle class compared to tea. One of the respondents for instance stated that:

“I prefer coffee though tea is common at home”. “Tea is preferred over coffee at our place”. “Coffee is mostly consumed during winters”.

For the middle class coffee consumption is restricted to time. It is not a quotidian practice to sit with a cup of coffee during the day or in the evening except during the winter months. Coffee is supposed to make the body warm. Nevertheless consumption of coffee has gained momentum in the public sphere due to globalized marketing of goods and commodities. Recent years have seen an upsurge in the consumption of coffee leading to a rapid cultural change across the city. While the scenario is the same in all big metropolitan cities of the country, in Kolkata coffee parlours and cafes have been rapidly mushrooming in every nook and corner of *para* lanes. While earlier the space for *adda* (social gathering in this case) was the *para* tea stall, new generation men and women among the middle class are substituting *para cha walas* with plush coffee parlours. So although consumption of coffee is on the rise outdoors with the growing number of cafes and eating joints offering Cappuccino and Espresso coffee, at homes coffee is seldom made. Among homemade coffees varieties include milk coffee, black coffee and cold coffee. Black coffee has much less takers compared to coffee with milk while cold coffee is also not much popular for home consumption.

Table-23. Percentage on consumption of Aerated water with food in selected Middle Class households

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	37	37.0
No	60	60.0
Sometimes	03	3.0
Total	100	100.0

Source: Self

Note: The table shows the percentage of respondents who confirmed having aerated drinks with food. 60 percent of the respondents stated that they don't consume aerated drinks with food while 37 percent confirmed that they drink aerated drinks with food frequently. Only 3 percent stated that aerated drinks are consumed with food sometimes and not frequently. Consumption of aerated drinks with food is more popular among the youth today.

Table-24. Percentage on frequency of Aerated drinks consumed in selected Middle Class households

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Every meal	04	4.0
Once a day with one major meal	08	8.0
Less than a day	04	4.0
Once in a while	54	54.0
Never	30	30.0
Total	100	100.0

Source: Self

Note: In the above table one finds the percentage of responses on the frequency of consumption of aerated drinks in the household. 54 percent of the respondents stated that aerated drinks are consumed within the household once in a while 30 percent stated that they never consume aerated drinks at home. Only 8 percent of the respondents said that aerated drinks are consumed once a day with one major meal and the other 8 percent mentioned of drinking aerated waters at home very frequently.

Aerated waters like *Coke*, *Pepsi*, *Thumbsup* and others have found its place among the regular consumption pattern of the Bengali middle class. Almost every household claimed of storing aerated drinks at home. Consumption of these cold drinks is also on the rise. Among the young population drinking such products with food, at least one major meal has become a common practice. For others it is highly preferred as an offering to guests. Some of the respondents have admitted that while cold drink consumption is definitely high among family members, yet they try to keep it low personally. According to a middle class man:

“These products have high calorie content and are weight gaining. We have aerated drinks only when we eat rich foods like biriyani”.

These drinks have gained immense popularity leaving behind traditional drinks like fruit juices and homemade sorbets. Respondents stated that all kinds of juices and aerated drinks in large bottles and discounted prices in malls and food marts lure consumers into drinking them. This has increased their intake in recent times. Also such drinks are very popular among children and adolescents. Often children locate their favourite *bollywood* actors on Television performing advertisements on aerated drinks and this increases their intake and popularity among the young. Few other respondents feel that lack of alternative fresh juices in the city have made people turn to such substances to quench their thirst in this hot and humid city. People are however divided in their opinion on the intake of aerated drinks especially within the domestics. A middle aged housewife belonging to an upper middle class family confirmed:

“We avoid consumption of aerated waters as much as possible. We don’t have the custom of providing our guests with a glass of ThumbsUp or Coke. Rather we prefer to make fresh household drink out of yogurt or green mangoes during summers consciously”.

Such categories of people are usually found to be among the upper middle class, well educated and well informed with a keen aesthetic or artistic sense. In this case choice of a drink is determined by people’s level of education or self awareness.

Table -25. Percentage on consumption of Juices in selected Middle Class Households

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Fresh Juices	07	7.0
Processed Juices	47	47.0
Both fresh and processed juice	05	5.0
None	41	41.0
Total	100	100.0

Source: Self

Note: The above table shows that percentage of preference for all kinds of juices in middle class households. Only 7 percent of the respondents showed a preference and intake of fresh juices within the household. 47 percent of the respondents clarified of consuming processed juices of all kinds regularly at home. Only 5 percent said that they consume both fresh and

processed juices at home while 41 percent of the respondents said that they consume no such juices at home.

Consuming processed and packaged juices like *Tropicana* and *Real* fruit juices have become rather common. People love indulging in processed foods more compared to something traditionally cooked or prepared at home because they are easily available in the market. It is a process of marketisation of commodities that shape our food habits.

Table- 26. Percentage of consumption of Alcohol in selected Middle Class Household

Frequency	Male	Female
Everyday	0	3.75
Less than a day	0	2.5
Every week	20.0	3.75
Less than a week	5.0	1.25
Less than a month	5.0	6.25
Rarely	5.0	1.25
Never	65.0	81.25
Total	100.0	100.0

Source: Self

Note: The above table shows the percentage of male and female consuming alcohol within the household. Here number of male respondents has been taken as 20 and number of female respondents has been taken as 80. The table shows that nearly 20 percent of male respondents reported of consuming alcohol at home every week while 65 percent of the male respondents claimed that never drink. Among females 81 percent of them stated that they never drink alcohol while the rest 19 percent of them said they drink alcohol at home occasionally over the week or sometimes less than a month.

The respondents were questioned on the intake of alcohol within the household whereby most of the female respondents declined of drinking ever. Drinking alcohol within the household is associated with some kind of stigma among middle class Bengalis especially the women. It is a negative behaviour or an impure activity that is shunned by many within the middle class domesticity. Most of the middle class respondents answer in negative when questioned about the consumption of alcohol in the household.

“*We don’t have this trend in our family*”, was the reply of many a respondent.

More so, drinking (alcohol) is a gendered practice and is seen as the “*practice of the other*”. While the aged house wives refused to give a positive answer with regard to this drinking practice, the young women were curter in stating a positive reply. It was found that while drinking was earlier considered solely a men’s prerogative (“*My husband drinks with his friends*”) , more and more women are open about their drinking practices within the household (“*Me and my wife both drink socially, every week*”). According to a Christian family,

“Drinking is not practiced in our household but it’s a culture among the Christians. My father never drank at home. But when guests arrive at 31st night they bring a ‘bottle’ which is seen as high esteem”.

For another female respondent aged thirty, “*No one drinks at home but I drink outside home*”. “*Nobody drinks at home but baba (father) drinks when outside or with friends.*

For the young respondents drinking is not an issue and social drinking once a week is a common affair. But for many drinking alcohol is often associated with stigma or some kind of negativity. Middle class *bhadraloks* and *bhadramahilas* often shy away from revealing about their drinking bouts. People were not comfortable or open in answering questions related to alcohol consumption within the household. While drinking outside is seen as a social gesture, drinking at home is seen as a taboo.

The **lower class** residing in slums are still exposed to poor drinking water. Filtered water or water purifiers are unaffordable. The slum dwellers are commonly known for their detrimental living conditions and consumption of unclean water from municipal taps and tube wells which often develop the risk of water borne diseases like typhoid and jaundice.

Table-27. Percentage showing frequency of Tea consumption in selected urban poor households

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Once daily	09	15.0
Twice daily	36	60
More than twice daily	14	23.3
Never	01	1.7
Total	60	100.0

Source: Self

Note: The above table indicates that nearly 60 percent of the respondents drink tea twice daily while only 23 percent said intake of tea is more than twice daily. 15 percent of the respondent mentioned that tea is consumed at least once daily.

In lower class households intake of tea is quite high similar to the middle class. The slum dwellers were found to drink liquor tea or tea without milk. This is again similar to the growing preference for liquor tea among the middle class. According to the slum respondent milk consumption is not very frequent among them since most of their family members are intolerant to milk. Some of the respondents stated that buying milk becomes expensive and hence they prefer to consume liquor tea. The slum dwellers usually purchase cheap powder milk and not liquid milk occasionally. Children are provided with milk by some families but consumption of the same among adult members is limited. Few of the slum dwellers have their own tea stalls and take their morning tea at the shop. Wage labourers often gulp many cups of tea at the workplace.

Table- 28. Percentage showing frequency of Coffee consumption in selected urban poor households

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Always	01	1.7
Occasionally	05	8.3
Only during winters	03	5.0
Never	51	85
Total	60	100.0

Source: Self

Note: The above table displays the frequency of intake of coffee across urban slums. Coffee is not a popular drink among the poor. In fact consumption of coffee is usually avoided by the lower class. Around 85 percent of the respondents negated the consumption of coffee in their households while eight percent stated they might drink coffee occasionally. Only 5 percent said coffee is mostly consumed in small measures during the winter months in Kolkata. Coffee is too hot to be consumed throughout the year. The lower class people prefer drinking liquor coffee due to lack of milk tolerance.

Table- 29. Percentage of Alcohol consumption in selected urban poor households

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes I drink	04	6.7
No I don't drink	39	65.0
Husband/wife drinks	10	16.7
Other family member drinks	04	6.7
Nobody drinks at home	03	5.0
Total	60	100.0

Source: Self

Note: The above table shows that 65 percent of the respondents stated that they don't consume alcohol while nearly 17 percent of the respondents confirmed that either their spouses drink. 7 percent of the respondents said they consume alcohol at home. Another seven percent of the respondents noted that there are other family members who drink.

Alcoholism is a social problem within urban slums. In general the slum dwellers preferred to drink outside their homes and in company of friends. The response to drinking among women was very low. Alcohol consumption is marked with negative connotation among the slum dwellers. Since most of the respondents interviewed were women, many of them refused to answer the question on alcohol consumption in their families. Some women even made casual negative remarks stating that drinking is not practiced in their household. On probing few women admitted that men of the house consume alcohol at home while some even drink outside home. Very few women admitted that alcohol consumption is a menacing problem for them.

Table- 30. Percentage showing consumption of Aerated Water in selected urban poor households

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes regularly	38	63.3
Only when guests come home	06	10.0
Only the children drink	03	5.0
Never	13	21.7
Total	60	100.0

Source: Self

Note: The above table displays the responses to consumption of aerated waters in urban poor households residing in Kolkata slums. Nearly 63 percent of the respondents stated that they drink aerated waters like cold drinks regularly within the household while 10 percent stated that consumption of aerated water is limited to arrival of guests at home. 5 percent of the respondent said that it is only the children at home who consume aerated drinks while 22 percent almost stated that they never purchase aerated drinks for household consumption.

In lower class household consumption of aerated waters like *ThumbsUp*, *Coke*, *Pepsi* and *Limca* were found to be high. Slum dwellers admitted that they occasionally buy bottles of cold drinks and juices like *Mazaa* for their families. One of the slum dwellers reported:

“We frequently consume aerated drinks especially during the summers. We have fridge at home and store a bottle of ThumbsUp in it. We usually drink cold drinks at night or the evenings when all the family members are at home. It is like a social drinking”.

Several households have stated that children are especially fond of aerated drinks and it is for them that such things are bought home. Guests coming home are at times served cold drinks by the lower class.

3.4 FOOD EXPENDITURE AND DECISION MAKING

EXPENDITURE ON FOOD IN MIDDLE CLASS HOUSEHOLDS

In middle class households food expenditure forms a small part of the total household expenditure. The expenditure on food is shared between household food and cooking and those foods bought from outside. Apart from raw foods expenses are allotted to packaged foods and beverages as well. In some households cooks monthly wage is also included in the total budget of food intake. The difference between total household expenditure and food expenditure is greater with rising income of the households. The study shows that several middle class respondents hardly maintain a fixed budget on food every month. This became evident when they found it difficult to specify their monthly expenditure on food. According to the middle class respondents maintaining a strict budget on food is difficult. This is because food expenses are usually shared among family members. This includes not only raw foods (vegetables, fish and meat) but also packaged foods and beverages. Even restaurant foods or street foods fall into the category which is quite often purchased and consumed at home. In case of dual earning families, food expenses on the basis of monthly raw food

bazaar and grocery are shared among the two. In case of multiple earning members food expenses are shared again. Such families have been found to have no clue about their food expenses. Decision taken on food expenses are usually jointly made in dual earning households while in single earning households a monthly amount is provided to the woman who then decides on the food budget.

FOOD EXPENDITURE IN URBAN POOR HOUSEHOLDS

The urban poor often share their plight of lack of proper income and poor expenditure on food. In urban poor households food expenses form a greater margin of all the other expenses so much so that they in most cases reported of buying food products on credit from the shopkeepers and vendors. This makes them indebted to the market for a prolonged period of time. The urban poor have no fixed budget on food. Since their employment status remains inconsistent in many cases at times they are unable to spend on fish and meat and live on rice and potatoes. When they earn a little more money they usually indulge in 'good' food. Some slum women however mentioned of going an extra mile and spending on exquisite fishes like Hilsa if it is yearned by their children. In such cases foods are not purchased and consumed by every family member. The women in most cases face discrimination on distribution of food in urban poor households. "*We live to eat and we earn to eat*" was a common statement I found among the several lower class respondents when asked about their food expenditures. Decision on food expenditures are usually taken by the male members of the household who provide their wives with the necessary money to buy raw foods from the bazaars. In some families where the husband is estranged or refuses to contribute to family the woman takes charge. It becomes her sole responsibility to feed her family. Expenses on street food are a luxury for most of the urban poor while it is not totally negligible. Paclaged food expenses are also meted through consumption of aerated drinks and others.

Food prices make food choices vulnerable across both the middle class and urban poor in the city. In recent times there has been a hike in the cost of some basic foods like onion and other seasonal vegetables in the city. Costs of fish are also found to be rising along with the price of lentils. The economic factors of the market play a major impact on domestic food choices. However respondents mention that they have to eat whatever may be the price. This shows that consumption of meals especially the lunch is embedded within the normative. It is the

norm to consume fish and rice for the afternoon meal across Bengali households unanimously.

3.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter tried to provide an account of the intake of food in Bengali households shared across social classes. The paper started with a descriptive account of the different types of food that comprise the major meals for Bengalis. There is an influx of tradition and modernity in the food culture of Bengalis across both the middle class and urban poor. The middle class and urban poor share similar food intake but the differences are eminent in the way they perceive and choose what to eat. Several empirical studies in western society determine the way structural differentiation become the main determinants of food choices among individuals. Most importantly it was Bourdieu (1984) who showed the way individual taste and preference for certain items of consumption including food depend on ones *habitus*. Habitus links a person's social and economic position with corresponding position in the 'universe of lifestyles' and 'makes it possible to account both for classifiable practices and products and for the judgements, themselves classified, which makes these practices and works into a system of distinctive signs' (Bourdieu 1984; Warde, A 1997: 9). In this case the food intake pattern of middle class and urban poor respectively depend on their habitus. It is their social and cultural life that determines what they regularly eat at home. Therefore the type of food intake differs across social classes. The poor slum dwellers are negotiating their everyday life between economic capitals on the one hand and changing cultural forces affecting middle class life which in turn affects the lifestyle of the poor.

Differences are not just apparent across the hierarchical class system but also within specific class groups as well. The middle class is definitely not a single entity and its variations become obvious in the pattern of food intake across its homes. Dimensions of time, convenience, health and taste discriminate set of households from one another. However economic resources will be inadequate to explain such diversities of food consumption. The whole gamut of food intake across Bengali households in Kolkata is a complex phenomenon. This complexity in the understanding of why certain groups of people eat what they eat will be unravelled in the subsequent chapters on food preparation, consumption and special foods across social and economic classes.

3.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The chapter begins with a discourse on what is meant by ‘food habits’. It tries to question the notion of habit in the intake of food across Bengali households of Kolkata. Habit is a word with connotations of being repetitive or in some case monotonous. Hence the expression ‘food habit’ would imply a habitual compliance to daily food intake. The attempt is to decode the meaning behind the habitual practice of eating in everyday life of Bengali middle class and urban poor respectively. The chapter starts with a general description of the type of food consumed and shared among Bengalis reflecting on the Bengali food and culture in everyday life. Referring to fictional works of Banerji (1991), food culture of Bengalis are found to be extremely complex, diverse and deeply embedded in the culture of everyday life of the people. The geographical terrain of a particular region is primarily responsible for the choice of food of the people inhabiting that region. However social and cultural processes add on to the dynamics of eating practices. Bengalis were major rice eaters till the advent of British colonialism and incorporation of wheat *rootis* in the Bengali diet. The changing dietary practices have also trickled down to the lower segments of society with the lower class of people embracing similar dietary choices like the middle class. This was a major change that took place in the habitual norm of food practices.

There have been several additions to the food practices of Bengalis with the rise of modernity in Bengal. The bread or *pao-ruti* is another major incorporation in the Bengali food culture and forms an indelible part of the breakfast meal. Description has been provided on different kinds of meals and their contents starting from breakfast, lunch, dinner and snack foods. There is interplay between tradition and modernity while choosing food types for different meals among the middle class. Besides traditional food types there are several new commercialised food products that are finding its place in middle class kitchen. Subsequent adoption of such dietary practices can be felt among certain sections of lower middle class and lower class households.

The next section of this chapter provides account of the type of foods consumed in contemporary middle class and urban poor households. Meals include both food and beverages. Separate meals like breakfast, lunch, dinner and snack along with the different kinds of beverages consumed across middle class and urban poor households have been represented in table forms with the help of frequency distribution and percentages. It shows

that food intake across middle class and urban poor are a complex phenomenon. Apart from class differences based upon economic resources there are other cultural and social factors that motivate people in choosing their diet in everyday life. Social differences are created on the basis of choices people administer in selecting their everyday food. Why people eat what they eat in contemporary society depends on people's perception of their body image and health predominantly along with the kind of lifestyle they lead. Unanimously middle class respondents have spoken about the time and convenience food ruling their food choices. Findings also show that people are ready to explore alternative food forms in everyday diet and trend is towards western food pattern. There is also a growing trend towards individualised food consumption practices among the middle class. Such changes are yet to be incorporated in the food habits of the urban poor.

CHAPTER 4

FOOD PREPARATION

4.1 WHAT IS FOOD PREPARATION

We prepare food before eating them. Cooking, the basic tenet of food preparation is a cultural process. Levi-Strauss (1997) equated the process of cooking with ‘culture’, opposed to food in raw state as a characteristic of ‘nature’. Cooked food can be distinguished from the raw (food in natural state) by the application of fire or heat. “...like the control of fire, cooking is an element of culture. It has to be learned, and such learning is done in groups. It demands some division of labour, mutual cooperation, individual attention and patience. One has to watch the food from time to time and to postpone eating it until it is well cooked...” (Goudsblom 1992: 34-5).

Hence cooking is a cultural act which is learnt, acquired or even shared. The process of cooking generates a cuisine which entails other preconditions like purchasing or gathering raw food products and essential ingredients for accentuating taste, acquiring the knowledge of cooking, employing the right skill or gesture and in the process developing social relationships. Preparation of food is one of the basics of the ‘art of gastronomy’ which amalgamates different flavours and tastes to give shape to a cuisine. So, culinary habits are formed out of such mechanisms of cooking and making ‘food’ which are much more culture specific for a particular social group. Cuisines are indicators of group identity which vary across cultures: class, caste, community, region, religion et al. Food preparation is significant because it is not only about ‘what we eat but how we eat it’ (Douglas Mary, 2003: 2). Methods of food preparation are also not static processes but keep on changing over time. One can trace such noteworthy changes in Bengali food culture especially since the British period (Utsa Ray 2009, 2015).

Food preparation hence becomes an object of sociological investigation because it develops into a series of question regarding what is being prepared, when it is prepared, who prepares, how and why such foods are prepared and reflects on the larger social structure and process. This chapter is an exploration of the basic processes of food preparation in everyday life among the middle class and urban poor Bengali households across the city. It will try to address how and why food preparation techniques are class specific and whether it creates

social differences. This chapter will try to discuss the ways in which food preparation techniques and processes in society construct and reconstruct taste. The chapter has been divided into subthemes like: An analytic reflection of the market and other sources of raw food products in middle class and lower class households addressing issues of quality of food products, price negotiation, and urban space; the agents of food preparation in both middle class and urban poor households; techniques of food preparation with special reference to old and new kitchen technologies used in making food and the way it impacts household food consumption; analyse the significance of knowledge and information of food preparation in middle class and urban poor domestics.

4.2 FOOD SOURCES: THE MARKET

The primary source of food for household preparation and consumption is the market. In contemporary society the market plays an indelible role in determining the choice of food that enters the household across all sections of society. Consumers are spoilt for choice in terms of the variety of options on the type of food, place of food, delivery systems, prices, alternative foods etc that has a huge impact on household food preparation in contemporary society. In this section I have tried to locate the different sources of food that are bought home as a pre condition for preparation of everyday meals in middle class households and lower class households respectively and view how different sources impact the domestic food preparation of social classes. It will also reflect on the factors that influence purchase of food among households across classes. Every Bengali household purchase three kinds of food for household consumption, one is raw food that needs to be cooked for household consumption, packaged foods and beverages, and cooked food bought from eateries and restaurants to be consumed at home. However the concern here is mainly on uncooked foods that are gathered or purchased for home cooking.

Bengalis across all social classes prefer buying fresh food products from the market for daily consumption and thrive less on packaged food or ready to cook foods. Hence the food market or the local bazaar has an eminent position in the everyday life of a 'Bengali'. Many a picture captures the image of the market or the bazaar going Bengali *Babu* holding his most prized fish in hand. Needless to say, the city is also thronged by numerous bazaars selling fresh raw foods along with packaged food products. The market or the bazaars of Kolkata were developed since the British period and hence some central parts of the city are named after big retail markets of colonial era like *Sozabazaar*, *Shyambazaar*, *Burra bazaar*, *Rajabazaar*

and the like. One kind of bazaars is the old bazaars usually are located within big building filled with vendors and stalls. Vendors spread plastic sheets on the floor or on concrete slabs emptying out heaps of vegetables and fruits. The fish market occupies one section of the bazaars while the vegetables are sold on the other side. Adjacent are the chicken and meat stalls. There are separate zones for grocery and other utility things. Another kind of bazaar situates itself on pavements or sides of roads and lanes in the morning and evening forming a small bazaar for the local inhabitants. These are small areas which sell just adequate vegetables, fish and meat required for everyday cooking in the household.

A third kind of bazaar is found in every residential area or *para* where a vegetable vendor places himself in a corner catering to the little everyday needs of the people. Fresh food bazaar can also be found adjacent to the railway tracks or station area. In Calcutta vendors sell fruits, vegetables or even fish moving around the *paras* (neighbourhoods) shouting their lungs out for their fresh contents. Many householders across middle class neighbourhoods as well as the corridors of the slums have reported of buying fish from mongers coming home and selling their products. Grocery shops are also located in every nook and corner of the city. Hence people have easy access to the necessary ingredients for food preparation in everyday life. The local food bazaars are accessible to all classes of people without any segregation.

Apart from the old pattern of bazaar there are new retail malls or outlets commonly known as supermarkets booming and thriving in the city. These supermarkets have separate section for fresh foods and raw fish and meat along with grocery. Along with the traditional bazaars, supermarkets like *Spencer's*, *Bigbazaar*, *Aarambagh Food Mart*, *Metro Cash and Carry* are expanding their presence throughout the city as an alternative source for raw, packaged and frozen food products. These are air conditioned spaces designed in accordance with the western concept of shopping where the respondents are free to choose their item of necessity from the shelf and get them billed through cash or card (electronic money). The use of modern technology in the form of credit cards itself speak about a class specific ambience from which the urban poor are whipped off. Although supermarkets have become an integral part of urban city life, the popularity of fresh market has not decreased when it comes to regular domestic purchases. There is still a huge hiatus between shopping food from regular fresh markets and that from the supermarkets in the city. Supermarkets are yet to find a prominent place in India. Their focus is on certain product categories which are at times sold at discounted rates and offer prices in order to attract consumers. They depend a lot on

convenience and service. In spite of the various supermarkets and food bazaars spread across the city, people still prefer to buy foods from local vegetable sellers or from nearby vegetable markets.

FOOD SOURCES IN MIDDLE CLASS HOUSEHOLDS

Table-31. Percentage of different sources of raw food products in middle class household

Content	Frequency	Percentage
Bazaar	92	92.0
Food Vendor	3	3.0
Supermarket	4	4.0
No response	1	1.0
Total	100	100.0

Sources: Self

Note: The above table provides a description of the different sources which people frequent for purchasing raw food products. Nearly 92% of the respondents specified that they visit the fresh food market for buying food products for preparing household food. Around 3% of the respondents claim that they buy regular food products from vegetable vendors in their neighbourhood or *para* while 4% of the respondents stated that they visit only supermarkets for obtaining fresh food products.

Table-32. Percentage of source of grocery in middle class household

Content	Frequency	Percent
<i>Bazaar</i>	31	31.0
<i>Para kirana Store</i>	29	29.0
Supermarket	31	31.0
Anywhere as per convenience	9	9.0
Total	100	100.0

Source: Self

Note: The above table shows the percentage of respondents purchasing grocery from selective sources. 31% of the respondents mentioned that they buy grocery from the bazaar. 29% of the respondents mentioned they buy grocery from *kirana* store in the *para* (neighbourhood). Another 31% of the respondents claimed that they visit supermarkets for

purchase of grocery food items while 9% stated that they buy grocery from anywhere as per convenience. Unlike the main food like vegetables, fish and meat for which fresh markets are considered the best, grocery like grains, edible oil and spices are bought from different sources as mentioned above.

For some households while raw foods are purchased from the fresh market, grocery or dry food items including spices and oil are often purchased from supermarkets or retail stores in the neighbourhood. Grocery products include anything ranging from rice, pulses, legumes, and spices like turmeric, *jeera* (cumin), *kalo jeere* (black cumin seeds), *dhone* (coriander powder), chilli powder, edible oil and others required for food preparation in the household. Packaged dry foods like biscuits and other snack, beverages like aerated drinks and juices, sauces, jams, butter and other such products are also included within the grocery. Some families depend on *para kirana* stores where the grocery products get delivered home on a monthly basis.

FACTORS AFFECTING SOURCE OF FOODS IN MIDDLE CLASS HOUSEHOLDS: **MARKET**

The middle class heavily rely on fresh food bazaars for their daily shopping of raw foods like vegetables, fish, meat and eggs. At times some middle class women would visit the supermarkets to purchase vegetables and frozen fish. However Bengalis still prefer to buy fresh foods. But dry foods like grocery products that include, grains, pulses, spices, oil and others are frequently purchased from supermarkets. I found there are several factors indicating the choice of buying food products from respective sources in the market. Middle class respondents are divided in their opinion about shopping food products from regular bazaars or super markets the most. Some major factors are that of -

I. Convenience:

The middle class choice of market or supermarket for necessary foods required for cooking depend on convenience. Most of the respondents confirmed that it is the time and convenience that are given due importance to while buying food from respective places. Every locality or *para* has a vegetable vendor in the city and middle class people prefer to buy fresh vegetables from these shops on an everyday basis. The city also has big bazaars which are visited by those living in the vicinity to get a variety of products. Super markets are visited less for raw foods but mostly for grocery. Most middle class households rely on

grocery stores to deliver products home on a monthly basis. Busy work schedule and small family size have been reported as impediments to buy grocery on a regular basis. These are people who work in managerial posts or are executives in IT industries which are more demanding compared to other professions. For a middle class working mother of two who resides in an apartment in south Kolkata supermarkets are the best venues for purchasing food products because they are more consumer friendly. It is easy to locate the products from the shelves as per ones need and is also the new trend. She states succinctly:

“Supermarkets are the place for people like me. I never go to the bazaar. My maid goes to buy food from the bazaar in the morning but whenever I need something I get it from Spencer’s”.

Again small family of two or single person households are on a rise among the Bengali middle class. Such households prefer purchasing food and other ingredients necessary for cooking on small measure. Markets are visited often in such cases.

II Age:

Buying food products from supermarkets is a rising trend among the younger age group. Many of the young respondents reported of purchasing regular food products for home preparation from supermarkets and not from the bazaars. These are mostly packaged foods or grocery food items. Age is another determinant of the place for choice of food purchased for household consumption. For the young upwardly mobile working men and women from the higher middle class supermarkets are the best places to buy necessary products like food and others. Supermarkets cater to the needs of the new generation consumers and shoppers providing them with a clean perfect ambience and individualised shopping which they find more appealing. A middle aged school teacher and a resident of *Bagbazaar* in north Kolkata states:

“We purchase grocery from supermarkets every month. All three of us including my husband and son go to supermarkets as a family outing and shop for grocery as well”.

The older men and women stress on buying fresh foods from the local bazaar along with grocery. According to a respondent from the middle class:

“You don’t get fresh meat and fish products at Spencer’s. They are all frozen products so we prefer buying them from the bazaar”.

While the younger age group are keener on experiencing newer modes of consumption of goods and services, for the older generation of middle class Bengalis traditional modes of buying are far preferred. Nonetheless these are not water tight demarcations for we also find a lot of old people visiting the supermarket stores these days.

1 Faith or trust

However preference for local bazaars over big retail markets can be due to other reasons.

A young Muslim woman who works in a private enterprise states:

“My parents have a strong relation with the bazaar. There are vendors and people who are known for a long time. It is assumed that they will sell the best products. This has built a trusted relationship but for me it is different. I will prefer shopping from the supermarkets like Spencer’s. I can’t go to the bazaar and shop”.

Local bazaars are still the most preferred places to purchase everyday household food due to its freshness. The bazaar is a place for myriad choices that are negotiable. People sustain on social relationships which are well executed in such places brimming with social activities. There is also constant interaction between the lower class and the higher classes through the medium of food in the public space. The vegetable sellers, fish mongers and meat sellers mostly belong to the unorganised sector and comprise of the economically weaker sections of society. Respondents often claim that they share a deep relationship of trust and faith with the respective sellers that they purchase from. Each individual has their own preferential shop/seller and believe that they are provided with the best possible bargain while shopping.

Household food is a regular food which is habitually consumed. Often these foods are associated with ones native land or *desh*. Relatives, friends or kins staying away in the *desh*³⁴ bring fresh vegetables, spices, bakery biscuits for their urban folks often as gifts and often in exchange of money. This also enhances a sense of belongingness to the community. One of the Muslim respondents stated:

“In our home there are always some people who come from desh with loads of fresh vegetables and fish in large quantities which are then cooked at home”.

For another Muslim woman, food grains like rice in particular come from their *desh* in Burdwan which is famous for rice. This is a common practice among both middle class and

³⁴ Desh refers to ‘native birth place’, ‘local homeland’ (Gardner 1995; Janeja 2010: 2)

lower class households. Such foods that have connections with ones *desh* is perceived as best in quality are well trusted and associated with a sense of belonging.

2 Novelty and Entertainment

Shopping in supermarkets provide a new experience. People visit such air conditioned places as a part of leisure or entertainment. In such cases purchase of foods comes secondary to the primary motive of visiting the place as a leisure activity. Some of my respondents confessed that supermarkets which form a part of the big Malls are visited as a form of leisure and entertainment. It is only then that the food and grocery sections are visited and some food products are purchased. At times such places are visited purposefully to purchase some new food item like sauce, jams, jellies, green tea or coffee or even frozen food products like sardine and tuna which are not easily available in the local markets new the respondent's house.

FOOD SOURCES IN URBAN POOR HOUSEHOLDS

Unlike the middle class the lower class slum dwellers mostly buy raw food from the **bazaar** in the nearby locality. The slums that have grown besides railway tracks have a fulfilling fresh market spreading round the platform area and on the side of the tracks. The people of *Dhakuria* slums in south Kolkata for instance buy their food from the bazaar near the railway station. These markets are cheaper than the bigger fresh food bazaars. The slums thriving in the middle of a residential locality generally have bazaars in close proximity. For example *Manoharpukur* slum residents often purchase raw food products from the nearby market in the locality or from the bigger *gariahat* market. The vegetable vendors and sellers who also belong to the category of the urban poor are at times residents of these slums themselves. There are vegetable vendors and fish mongers found in the narrow lanes of the slums themselves.

For the urban poor grocery and packaged foods like Maggie noodles, chips, health drinks like horlicks etc are purchased from *para kirana* stores or **small grocery shops** that are located within the slums. Such stores are owned by the lower middle class people while the workers belong to the urban poor strata. This is because unlike the middle and upper middle class of people who purchase grocery foods like oil, spices, other packaged foods like biscuits; frozen foods etc on a monthly basis or in bulk, people residing in the slums bring specific items needed for food preparation and consumption as and when required in small amounts. At

times food grains and oil are bought on credit by paying later once they get their wages. In the process they are forever indebted to the shop owners due to lack of money.

The **supermarkets** are also a source of raw food products for some urban poor households. According to a woman residing in Manoharpukur slum of south Kolkata and working as a household maid:

“My son would get food grains and oil from Bigbazaar when he used to work. Now that he is unemployed we are not able to afford it anymore”.

Middle class households are a big source of food for the lower class. In Kolkata many of the lower class women work as domestic help in middle class households. They receive regular meals in middle class homes and also get to carry extra food for themselves and their children back home. These foods are either cooked or raw like parts of fish, left over rice and *dal* that are not consumed by the middle class employers. According to an aged widow living alone all by herself:

“Whenever I buy a full Hilsa for myself, I am forced to give away some of the uncooked pieces to my domestic help that I don’t prefer to eat. I give away the raw fish in that case so that they can cook it at home”.

Apart from the regular food bazaars and retail stores, **public distribution system** have launched ration stores that sell basic ingredients like food grains, rice, *dal*, sugar, wheat, kerosene oil. These are the fair priced shops that aid the urban poor mostly.

The slum inhabitants also visit **public places** especially temples, mosques and churches where foods are distributed among the poor. They often acquire a piece of bread, fruits or even a meal of rice or *khichudi* that are distributed by the rich.

FACTORS AFFECTING SOURCES OF FOOD AMONG THE POOR

I. Price

The urban poor usually look for affordable cheap quality goods in the market. The same holds true for items of food consumption. The markets or shops visited by the poor sell in cheaper quality and low prices. Nonetheless such places are also visited by the neighbouring middle class households. Big supermarkets sell essential food products in large quantities and lower discounted rates on specific days of the week as a part of their marketing strategy. At times those people from the slums who can afford crowd supermarkets on such respective

days to purchase food grains and other spices at low costs and large amounts. Such schemes are unavailable at small retail stores in the local bazaar areas.

The supermarkets are spaces exclusively designed for the middle class and the upper class whereas the local bazaars cater to all sections of society who can afford a purchase. However besides income, the choice of place for shopping food products depends mostly on individuals approach to a particular culture. More than the capacity to spend, the choice of spending becomes more important for the consumer. On the one hand these big retail chains demarcate the social space on the basis of class hierarchies while on the other marketing strategies often help to bridge the existing gap. Providing food grains in offer prices attract all sections of society especially the lower middle class people and at times the lower class as well. This leads to an exchange of culture or cultural exposure for the lower class people whose presence in such places might be a rarity.

Fair price shops are constantly visited by the slum dwellers in order to acquire food grains, pulses and oil for cooking. These ration stores are hardly accessed by the middle class. The lower class people at times use the ration cards of middle class families to purchase oil and other necessities. This indicates a relationship of sharing across classes. This also reflects on the interdependence between the two classes.

FACTORS AFFECTING PURCHASE OF FOOD IN MIDDLE CLASS AND URBAN POOR HOUSEHOLDS

There are various factors affecting the purchase of food across middle class and urban poor households.

Cost of food: In recent years there has been a profound increase in food prices due to inflation which has affected all sections of the society³⁵. Yet the way people negotiate with such crises vary across society. In response to the question on price rise and cost of food grains and fishes, most middle class families claimed of still buying foods that they are used to consume on an everyday basis. Most of the respondents have ruled out the possibility of alternative food types even though the costs are rising. While again there are certain families who would not consider the expenditure while buying certain foods like fishes or meat if one feels like consuming it. For instance according to a housewife whose husband works in a private firm stated:

³⁵³⁵ The Times of India. 2013. Food price pinch worst in Kolkata

“Hilsa is priced at Rs 2000 per kg. But I still bought one of 700-800g. After all it is not every day that we are eating Hilsa”.

However such views are definitely not shared by a pensioner and a widow who feels that it is no point in spending so much money on a particular fish. Households are divided in their opinion in terms of their occupations among the middle class. It is found that food expenses in middle class homes are shared between raw food products and cooked food bought from outside or eaten in public spaces.

A middle class homemaker remarked:

“The food prices are going up day by day. It becomes difficult to decide what food should be cooked at home. In that case it is best to resort to home delivery system”.

For other **poor slum** inhabitants cost of food and purchasing power of working members in the household determine the type of meals cooked at home. The urban poor usually visit bazaar later in the day or in the evening when the fresh foods have been sold to the rich, moneyed upper classes. For the lower class, differences of opinion emerge with regard to the cost of foods. High priced foods like fishes of particular kinds, red meat and vegetables are not consumed equally across all social classes. Some of the families among the urban poor are found to spend more on food compared to other household amenities compared to others. These families have more earning members and food expenses are shared among themselves. This also denotes compliance with a certain lifestyle and image building. Respondents of the poor working class have been questioned on the growing prices of vegetables, fish and meat and the way they cope with the growing price rise. A woman working as a household cook residing in the Manoharpukur slum stated:

“Fishes are very expensive these days. But I still manage to buy even two pieces of my son’s favourite fish at times. I don’t eat then, it is for my children”.

Few other slum dwellers have reflected on the growing cost of rice grains and pulses by stating that they have to purchase expensive rice from the grocery shops in the locality because rice provided by fair price shops are not fit for consumption. They often lament on the cost of necessary food products in the market. Among the slum dwellers foods are purchased for home consumption. The lower class spends much less on outside food than household food compared to the upper classes. Differences across classes are sought on the basis of the type of food products purchased for regular household food.

Taste/Health: While the middle class are more concerned about taste preference and health issues while purchasing food products from the market, such considerations are not found much among the urban poor. However the middle class are also divided among themselves in their preference for taste and health. Some families might feel cost is a big factor in choosing the food products for home consumption while others feel that it is always the quality of the product and health issues that are vital. Some families also find taste buds as the ruling factor in determining food choices.

While cost of food products are always significant, taste preference and health issues have gathered momentum in recent years as important determinants of food purchase and preparation although such issues even prevailed in traditional societies. Middle class respondents often stressed on price, quality of food, taste and health as vital aspects of choosing the right kind of food for cooking.. Major factors include health and taste or choice of family members among the middle class. A middle class family of two married couples observed:

“We try to buy organic not packaged organic food products. We can recognise the difference. You should try to locate small farmers who bring few of their products to the market. Their things are fresh and pesticide free. We try to stress a lot on freshness of the product”.

This differentiates the middle class status from the lower classes. The lower class on the other hand claim to compromise on both cost and health while they are ruled by an overwhelming desire to eat.

Time for going to the market determines ones choice of food in terms of cost and quality. Unlike the middle class men and women who visit the market in early hours products sold to the urban poor are of low quality and cheap. For the lower class considerations of health are negligible however preference of children are often given priority in deciding the purchase of certain foods like meat or fish for daily consumption.

This questions whether income is a major criterion for determining class differences vis a vis food habits. This also questions the theories on class convergences and divergences enabled through food and purchasing power. ‘Class is not just a matter of money, though one of its manifestations is the option open to some to purchase expensive foods and to eat in an exclusive fashion. This contradicts the theory of eradication of class (Warde, A 1997: 175). This view is in contrast to Stephen Mennells’s theory of ‘diminishing contrasts’ which

stresses on the declining of the importance of class (ibid: 169). As per Mennell's view, the market offers much greater choice to consumers in recent times leading to standardisation of taste. However there are other social and cultural constraints which help determine food preparation across social classes in society.

4.3 AGENTS OF FOOD PREPARATION

4.3.1 Role of women in food preparation across middle class households

This section looks at the different agents of food preparation across middle class and urban poor households and how such agents influence the choice of food that is cooked and consumed at home. The task of food preparation in middle class households is accomplished by the female members of the household with the support of external agents like the household cook or domestic help. In general cases it is mostly the women of the house who take care of food making. In case the woman refrains herself from the kitchen, the task is bestowed upon a household cook or help. Ideologically women are seen as the prime agents of food preparation, a task which comprise of all those activities that are requisite for preparing cooked food for the household. In other words women are responsible for the proper functioning of the food area which in turn helps in maintaining the equilibrium of the household. One can say that it is the woman whose hard toil helps maintain the household structure. Over the years Bengali women have been glorified for their aesthetic culinary prowess. Traditionally women were employed with the skill of producing gourmet delicacies and were even tested for the same by the groom's family during marriage. Women's life, work and leisure revolved around the kitchen while her sole responsibility was feeding her family. In traditional joint family women shared kitchen chores with other women of the household.

The conventional norm of food preparation and division of labour has undergone subtle changes in modern society with the development in working conditions of men and women, economic changes, changing household structures and other social and cultural changes. Such influences have tremendous impact on middle class Bengalis where traditional pattern of women's devotion to household food and cooking is not devoid of exception. Most women in middle class Bengali households practically refrain from the process of cooking. For many of them cooking every day meals leads to boredom and is perceived as a treacherous activity. Young women are particularly not fond of preparing regular household food. Besides

working women are losing dexterity in preparing every day meal with ease and succumb to external help.

This implies that women in contemporary society are devoting less and less time in the kitchen or in food related activities compared to earlier times. Even home makers find it futile to spend time in the kitchen. According to one female respondent:

“Cooking depends on my mood. When I have work pressure I don’t cook even though my maid is absent”.

An aged middle class home maker confirmed: *“When my maid doesn’t turn up, I ask for home delivery”.*

Women no longer depend solely on home cooked food. Availability of home delivery system by different food joints and restaurants along with small entrepreneurs has also changed women’s perception of household food. Among the younger generation, women resort to recreational cooking more while duty cooking is performed by the elderly members or household cooks. For a young media professional:

“I love cooking but it is usually different kinds of experimental food that I cook. I never make everyday household meals. We have a cook for that”.

4.3.2. Hiring of Cook in Middle Class Households

The gradual abstinence of women from regular cooking within the household has made domestic cooks a prized possession. The cook forms an important component of the household because the cook is related to normal everyday situation, the absence of whom will disrupt the equilibrium of normalcy. Household cooks have become a dire necessity in middle class homes. The cook or the domestic help is almost appointed by the mistress or the woman of the house. In most cases cooks are appointed on a part time basis or *thike*. Specific time slots are allotted to the person for doing cooking. This depends on the convenience of the family members especially the women. Cooks are significant for all kinds of household whether nuclear, joint or single person household. Maintaining a household cook has enormous social significance for the middle class. Appointing a cook symbolises high social status and affluence among the middle class creating further differences. In a household with working couples a cook becomes indispensable. In households where women are unemployed and not working cooks are still a necessity. Appointing cooks among the middle class creates

social differences across classes whereby the lower middle class or lower class is usually not in a position to hire one.

A cook's position in the household varies across households depending on the involvement of the women in cooking chores. Many middle class women reported of keeping the reins of the hearth in their own hands. Cook is there to share the household chores with the mistress of the house. While the main food is cooked by the woman of the house, a cook is a mere helping hand. A thirty year old researcher who resides with her husband and dependent father in law stated:

“In my house food is prepared by me and my maid. I instruct her on the way food should be cooked”.

In most households cooks are there for mundane cooking while special cooking on specific occasions is reserved for the domestic women. However few Brahmin households don't prefer to eat food cooked by domestic helps. In such cases the woman performs food preparation activities. Brahmins usually prefer to take cooked food from the hands of a Brahmin (high caste) who is considered to be ritually pure. Although I haven't found prevalence of caste based distinctions in my data among the contemporary middle class Bengalis, especially with regard to food and commensality, traces of such practices are subtly present among the upper caste groups, mainly the Brahmins.

There are households where women are more finicky about the techniques of food preparation while men fetish about the right tastes of food. Such households don't prefer to appoint cooks. The issue revolves around not only health and hygiene (read cooks are considered unhygienic by many middle class women) but also in terms of ritual purity. A Muslim woman showed the differences in their attitude towards ritual purity across religions by stating:

“My mother in law who is a Hindu will never hire a cook because she maintains ‘ento’ and all. But in my place (a Muslim household) there are no such things. We don't hire a cook here because we are not satisfied with the cooking”.

Most of the agents hired in Bengali domestic homes are part time workers hailing from the lower class. Many of them are residents of nearby slums and are deprived economically, socially and culturally. Working as domestic helps or cooks in middle class homes are considered as most lucrative jobs among the lower slum inhabitants. Household cooks have

higher social esteem and money. Cooks are appointed in much higher wages compared to the helps for domestic chores. Their demand in the market has increased in recent times. They also spend less physical labour and time compared to those who perform menial jobs like washing and cleaning. This is a way by which the lower class entering middle class homes are directly exposed to the food ways of the latter. In such cases some amount of cultural exchanges of food is implicit. An aged women dependent on a cook exclaimed:

“She (cook) once bought me chicken rice which she had cooked at home. During puja³⁶ she had made luchi at her place and also fed us few”.

It is hard to miss the exchange of culture and strengthening of relationships administered through food sharing across classes in this regard. Another young woman described a similar relationship with her domestic help where food is shared in a downward direction in the social hierarchy. Some lower class men and women pass on their food to the higher classes in the form of gift giving. Food at times creates social inclusion among groups while differences are settled. The cook an outside agent can help one to connect with ones group to developing ones ethnic identity. A divorcee who stays alone with her two children supported by a domestic help:

“My father was in a transferable job so that we are mostly out of Kolkata. Hence my food habit is a bit probashi (non residential Bengalis). We do eat fish at home though the types of fishes in Kolkata are different. We did have fish at home but mocha, thor, etc were rare. But now we have a proper Bengali cuisine at home. This is because of our maid who brings everything from mocha. Thor, begun pora etc. we are ghotis originally from Calcutta. My maid is also a ghoti. I assume that from her cooking style. She puts mishti (sugar) in her cooking. The way she talks like ‘nebu’ for lebu (lime) and nonka for lonka (chillies) one can make out that she is a ghoti. What is important is that our taste has developed according to her taste”.

Cooks in middle class homes are appointed on the basis of their gender. This was not the scenario earlier when male Brahmin cooks, often Oriyas were a common phenomenon. These days’ domestic helps are mostly women. Women workers are preferred within the private realm of the household compared to the male workers. This is yet another instance where women are perceived as natural care givers of society. Women workers also make householders feel more secured. This reflects the larger gender discrimination and crime against women that take place in our society. Most middle class household confess of being bothered about the gender of their workers. However according to one male respondent:

³⁶ Puja refers to Durga puja which is a huge festival among Bengalis

“If I find a male cook then I will be bothered because I am not habituated and will be startled. Besides I will also doubt his conduct inside the house and in my kitchen. May be I will not hire him. As of now no such situation has arisen. It’s mostly female cooks that I have got”.

Religious identity of the cook still matters in Hindu household who would not be happy with a Muslim worker in the domestic sphere. Among the Bengali Christians and Muslims religious preference for domestic helps are less prioritised. One of the Christian respondents stated:

“Our cook is a Hindu but she has no issues. She only doesn’t want to touch beef”.

However lower class maids often prioritise religion of the employers. A Muslim respondent mentioned that domestic helps who are Hindus often quit jobs in Muslim households after knowing the religious identity of the employer. I found that caste discrimination has lessened its grip over hiring domestic help among my respondents which was the norm earlier. Like the middle class the lower class also exerts their choice or preference while choosing households based upon primordial categories. For instance one of the women who are a Christian by faith mentions:

“My maid doesn’t like cooking non vegetarian dishes at our place because she is a Bengali Hindu and we are Bengali Christians”.

Similar instance has been shared by other Muslim and Christian respondents. Negotiate with everyday food is a highly complex affair. While there are certain normative rules and regulations which are followed during people’s approach to food and cooking at times normative rules give way to reasoning.

4.3.3 Gender division of labour in middle class households

Food preparation is a gendered activity in middle class and urban poor household. “Chafetz wrote, ‘undergirding of all systems of gender stratification is a gender based division of labour by which women are chiefly responsible for different tasks than are men (Chafetz 1991; Cohen 2004: 239). In the middle class households of urban Bengalis preparing food is not an egalitarian process which is shared by every family member. Members within a household are usually dependent on one or two female members who shoulder the responsibility of making food for the whole house. While women are seen to perform food related activities, men are seen to perform other tasks mostly related to outside work. A

man's participation in domestic food chores revolve around the purchase of food products from the market which is often performed at the behest of the woman's instructions. As a middle class working woman of 55 years of age stated:

“My husband brings the kaanचा bazaar from the market. He believes big things will taste good as well. Once he goes for marketing I specify what all he has to buy because he doesn't have a good understanding of it”.

This humble initiative by the woman shows that administration of the kitchen is taken up by the woman in her own hands and it is solely her influence that reflects in the choice of food cooked at home. Customarily buying food products from the local market have always been a man's forte. It is the man or the *bhadralok*³⁷ *babu* who knows his fish well with an art of delivering the best bidding at the best price. Like all other public spaces the bazaar was always a man's domain while the women are shrouded within the confines of the kitchen. With changes in the family structure from joint to nuclear and increase in the number of working women per family, whereby women share the work space equally with men at home, exposure to western culture and global lifestyle outlook towards this stark demarcation between the public and private are diluted. Women now shop on their own convenience. A middle aged home maker of south Kolkata states:

“I go to the bazaar myself. This is because my husband is not skilled enough to do the bazaar. He being a doctor is always on calls. It is me who takes all responsibilities of the household”.

Sample data shows that around 41 percent of the respondents stated that bazaar is bought by the men of the house. It is either the husband or the father in law in most cases who visit the morning bazaar. Some men prefer visiting the market in the evening after work. Evidences show that the whole act of purchasing food products along with the foods itself is gendered. Men are found to purchase more of non vegetarian foods like fish and meat while vegetables, fruits and other grocery products are largely shopped by the women. Around 26 percent of women buy daily food products from the market. The number of women entering the fresh food bazaar in recent times has increased. Women today find full confidence in doing outside chores that were earlier restricted to men. Only 19 of the respondents stated that food

³⁷ The Bhadrals claim themselves of middle class status and consciously distinguish themselves from the class of chotoloks in terms of education, culture, eating and dressing habits etc in Chakrabarty Dalia, 2005, Colonial Clerks: A Social History of Deprivation and Domination, K.P Bagchi and Company, Kolkata, Pp 37

products are bought from the bazaar by any one of the family members as per convenience. In joint families responsibilities like buying food products are often shared among family members. Only 9 percent of the elderly family members are sent to the bazaars for buying food products while 4 percent of the households reported of sending their maids or cook to the market.

Vis-a-vis women, Bengali men have always shown a keen interest in food preparation. Most of the male respondents claimed that they have had some exposure to the culinary art in some form or the other. One unmarried thirty years old male was quoted saying:

“My mom cooks regular household meals. We have a maid but we don’t give her to cook. I can also cook...I try to make continental food which I am good with...my dad can’t cook at all. My mom is the main cook and I am the second cook...I cook only when mom is not there at home...I can make roti, paratha, luchi better than any girl”.

While men from the lower rungs indulge in cooking regular household food in the absence of their women, middle class men mostly engage themselves in leisure cooking. There is a difference between ‘duty cooking’ and ‘recreational cooking’ (Avakian 2005: 276). Many men have been reported of performing occasional cooking for leisure in middle class homes.

A Christian woman states proudly:

“Whenever good food is to be cooked at home, it is my husband who prepares it. I leave the kitchen to him. He is an excellent cook. I make food for my family along with a household attendant and my husband. If there are guests coming home then my husband is the main cook and I become the helper. He has good idea about cooking”.

A middle class husband who works as a researcher talks about the cooking skills of his home making wife. The respondent is originally from Midnapore district in West Bengal and has his ancestral home in the village. He states:

“It is my wife who does the cooking at home. At times I make an omelette for us at dinner. But I know a lot about cooking. It’s me who taught my wife how to make food. We don’t have any discrimination at home; rather I always help her in food preparation”.

Very interestingly non vegetarian foods are again associated with men while vegetarian foods are associated with women. Men are known to cook non vegetarian foods better than women. This perception is in accordance with the idea of women’s association with ritual purity.

While non vegetarian foods contain hot substances like onion and garlic in large proportions women in traditional Hindu culture are forbade from consuming it. Such restrictions were there on the widows of Bengal for the same purpose. It was assumed that women would lose their sexuality if they ate too much of non vegetarian. This notion can be related to men's cooking non vegetarian food better than women.

In recent times subtle changes are taking place with respect to the agents of food preparation and decision making on food choices from the gender perspective. In the absence of the working men and women, elderly members both men and women have to take up the responsibility of household management and supervision. While food is cooked by the domestic help, cooking is supervised and controlled by senior members especially in a joint family residence. In the absence of any senior members in the household of working couples, while cook is hired for making food at fixed hours, cooking is often shared over weekends or holidays. In such cases men show active involvement in food preparation process in contrast to earlier times. Women or mothers who often prioritised cooking in yester years have found other interests in modern times. Women stay busy with other activities outside the home while the children help themselves out with little culinary skills in the kitchen.

“My son often fries ready to eat chicken nuggets and eats in the evening whenever he is hungry. He can also make Maggie”, claimed a middle class school teacher.

4.3.4 Food preparation and Decision Making among the Middle Class

While cooking food is sourced out to domestic helps or public eateries decision making process with regard to food preparation and consumption lie in the hands of the women among the Bengali middle class, where male members seldom interfere. In some families decision regarding what meal is to be cooked in the house is a collective affair whereby women approach other household members to know about their preference. According to a middle class homemaker:

“I decide on all food matters. I keep in mind the taste and preference of my family members. I try to avoid outside food and cook everything at home”.

Middle class Bengali women take it in her pride to control and manage the hearth. Cooks are delivered detailed instructions as to what and how cooking is to be performed. Unlike the traditional joint families in Kolkata which are dwindling, contemporary nuclear families with both spouses working find a shift in the traditional power structure of the household with

special reference to food preparation and decision making. Traditionally it was the family matriarch who presided over the kitchen and food preparation while the lesser women, brides and daughters succumbed to their authority. Such instances are yet not irrelevant in today's modernized world. One of my respondents who is a newlywed wife stated:

“It is mostly my mother in law who decides what is to be cooked. But I decide what to cook when I feel like making some snacks or an added item for dinner or lunch. At times I even cook the whole food when my mother in law is sick and there are people coming over”.

Nonetheless it is not difficult to assert that times are changing. Today middle class households experience greater autonomy, more division of labour and collective decision making with regard to food. In some cases the young generation men come up with cooking ideas and new cuisines to be tried at leisure. However children's preference and taste are definitely prioritised in small nuclear families unlike in the large joint families. For a thirty nine years old male respondent cooking on holidays and weekends shared by him and his wife to come up with new delicacies to win hearts of their children. Although senior members especially women feature the most in this category at times the power structure of the household changes which gets exhibited through one's own right over the kitchen. One of the respondents who is married for the past twenty years claimed that earlier it was her mother in law who would decide on what food to be cooked and eaten at home.

“Foods were more of a traditional kind like thor and mocha. But now I decide what is to be eaten. We don't have a whole time maid but only a thike who comes and makes lunch. If there is rooti or paratha for dinner then the maid cooks before leaving. But of different kinds of cuisine it is I who cook while she only does the jogar. Such foods were never prepared during the time of my mother in law”.

There are certain sections of the lower middle class, especially those working as artisans, petty entrepreneurs or shopkeepers who mentioned that decision making and power resides with the male members of the household. A women's identity revolves around the man she is married to. Lack of education, work culture and kind of occupation has been found to influence power relations in the family.

4.3.5. Role of women in food preparation across urban poor households

Women across all social classes are expected to be responsible for the most trivial of household chores, i.e. supplying cooked food to the family. “Through the food system

women express and maintain their social positions in the community” (Theophano and Curtis, 1991; Ray 2004: 122). Among the lower class, girls from a tender age lay their hands in food preparation along with their mothers and become well attuned to the whole act of cooking and serving. Women also have to purchase food products from the bazaars in the absence of the man of the house. Among the urban poor there are many single women who run the household. At times women spend their full earning in feeding her children and the elderly while the man decides not to contribute to the household food expense.

4.3.6. Gender division of labour in urban poor households

In lower class households it is only the family members who take part in food preparation. In urban poor families women are the primary cooks in a household by the elderly women, older children or even at times men. Along with the task of food preparation, shopping for food products are also predominantly undertaken by the women. Nearly 53 percent of the women purchase food for cooking at home in the urban slums while 30 percent of the men go to the market to buy raw vegetables, meat and fish. Lower class women have greater toil compared to their upper class counterparts. While finance is controlled by the men, the hard work is conferred upon the women. 10 percent of the elderly have been reported to purchase food for home consumption while only 6.7 percent of the children are sent to the market. Elderly women who sit back at home perform small tasks like bringing vegetables from the vendors, chopping vegetables, preparing the *dal* etc in order to contribute to the family chore. On the whole there is greater division of labour among the lower class compared to the middle class when it comes to food preparation.

According to Chapman (2004) evidences have shown that women’s oppression in the family is sustained through men’s economic domination which is achieved through their paid employment (Crompton 1997: 55). In lower class households economic domination is enforced by the men of the house even though their women are working unlike middle class men. While the family budget is controlled by the men, women take up other regular household chores. In such households within the slums, women perform cooking. Around sixty six percent of the respondents stated that cooking is performed by the women of the house.

Children especially the older ones often extend help by preparing their own food while parents leave for work. 10 percent of the respondents mentioned that children make food at home. Children’s intervention in the cooking area is nearly absent or much limited compared

to the educated middle class. Even older children both boys and girls have limited access to the kitchen in middle class Bengali families where the primary task of the young is learning and education. This marks a difference between the middle class and urban poor. Around 12 percent of the respondents specified those at times elderly household members like the mother or the mother-in-law make food at home in the absence of other family members.

4.3.7 Food preparation and Decision making among the urban poor

People from the lower middle class category follow the patriarchal norm strictly when it comes to household chores and demarcation is maintained in terms of private and public sphere. Women from such households rely on their men's preference while preparing food. While in middle class households food expenditure is not prioritised over other household expenses, among the lower class food expenditure plays a very important part. Men are in charge of employing decision over how much to spend on food. At times they also state what should be cooked at home on a daily basis. The elderly matriarchs who take part in food preparation decide on the meals and expenses as well.

Cooking and food preparation can also be an empowering job for many. It is through the power to make decisions on what to feed ones family that create hierarchy within the household. On the whole it is easier to ascertain that food choices with regard to cooking rest in the hands of the women be it the mother, daughter and daughter in law in most Bengali middle class households. While higher class women especially those who are highly educated and/or working enjoy more autonomy with regard to cooking methods, meals and menus, lower class women are majorly controlled by their men or by the matriarch. Women in such households try to prioritise taste preference and needs of their children and family proudly investing in foods that are consumed by the higher social classes. Few households have reported of sharing the food expenditure among the man and the wife while decisions on food related expenses are collectively administered. However such freedom and autonomy always do not exist in case of lower class women. Among the urban poor, working women however have an upper hand on taking family decisions than non working women.

4.4 FOOD PREPARATION: THE ART OF GASTRONOMY

“Eating something means transforming it chemically as well as physically. Eating comprises of the appropriation, incorporation and deformation of a complex other and its homogenisation into simples in preparation of their transformation into complex same” (Kass

1994; Rozin 1999: 10). This process is accomplished by the very art and science of cooking. Food preparation in practice entails tasks like washing, cleaning, serving and storing food products in specific ways. Cooking is a process by which raw food is transformed into substance that suits the taste buds of the people. This is done by applying heat and mixing several other ingredients in a concoction. “According to ancient Hindu dietary theory, every meal is supposed to include six tastes in the following order: sweet, sour, salty, pungent, bitter, astringent” (Sen 2015: 239). In Bengali food one can find a synthesis of all the above tastes in one platter or meal. So taste is also a major dimension of food preparation. Then will it be right to state that a particular taste governs the whole gamut of Bengali cuisine? May be not, for the phenomenon of taste is again culture specific. There are several tastes located in the complex web of politics of taste to which I will revert to soon.

In general every Bengali food is prepared with a wide array of spices and condiments like *haldi* (turmeric), *jeere* (cumin), *kalo jeere* (black cumin seeds), *paanch phoron* (a blend of five spices like cumin, brown mustard, fenugreek, nigella and fennel). The *paanch phoron* is a vital ingredient in many a Bengali food cooked on a daily basis. Other ingredients include onion, ginger, garlic and *posto* (poppy seeds). These ingredients are used in everyday food preparation. Traditionally Bengalis follow a distinct pattern of food preparation. The most common techniques used to prepare food are fried, sautéed and boiled. Oil is a vital medium used in food preparation. The popular belief goes that Bengalis love cooking in mustard oil. Traditionally ghee or clarified butter was the major cooking medium used in Bengali foods while mustard oil was known as food for the poor (Banerji, 1991). Modern Bengali homes are found to use a combination of oils like mustard oil, white oil (vegetable oil) and even olive oil. The kind of oil used in everyday household food leads to an insurmountable argument over its following health hazards and benefits among the middle class. There is no such debate about oil consumption among the lower class.

Traditionally ‘*bata moshla*’ (spices made into a paste using the *shil nora* or the Bengali mortar and pestle) served as the main ingredient for creating an epicurean delicacy. In modern middle class homes the concept of *bata moshla* is a passé. The middle class people have taken recourse to technology by using the mixer grinder. Technology used in food preparation in a way creates differences across classes whereby the lower class of urban poor has little or no access to such technologies. There are several *masala* pastes found in packaged forms which finds its way into the kitchen. Often middle class men and women lament the redundancy of *bata moshla* which can enhance the exquisite Bengali flavour.

Among the urban poor *bata moshla* is still very much prevalent along with little powdered spices of cheap quality. While the middle class use more packaged branded *masalas* or spices from reputed stores in the market, the lower class people purchase similar ingredients which are of lesser quality in small amount from shops within or near the slums.

Spices used for cooking in **lower class** households are kept very simple and limited. They however use ingredients like *haldi*, chilli, *jeere* and little *paanch phoron* similar to the other higher classes in their cooking. Both mustard oil for everyday food and white oil bought in loose packets are used among the lower class. Some of the households have reported of using packaged oil of low price while others mentioned the use of loose oil which are not packaged or branded. The use of oil is perceived as a sign of affluence among the lower class. One of the slum inhabitants when questioned about their everyday food and preparation techniques confirmed:

“We use a lot of oil in food just like ‘you people’. In my house we consume five litres of packaged oil every month”.

Food preparation techniques often vary within and between groups. Such variations in cooking methods include the use of different ingredients to the same preparation, cooking different kinds of food, eating some foods that are forbidden or is a taboo for another. The basic difference however lies in the taste. Within the Bengali ethnic group differences in food preparation and eating habits are found among people of different regions in Bengal among the *Bangals* and *Ghotis* (including West Bengal and erstwhile East Bengal), religion, caste and class.

4.4.1. Regional differences in food preparation- Middle class households

Regional differences are more pronounced in food preparation techniques. While discussing the process of food making in Bengali households the middle class often come up with the differences in the *Bangal* and *Ghoti* style of cooking with a conflicting debate on the culinary practices of these two groups. The presence of sugar in foods cooked by the *Ghotis* used to enhance the taste of foods stand in opposition to the spicy tangy *Bangal* taste buds. The addition of extra sweetness to food is perceived in the light of the behavioural characteristics of the *Ghotis* as being sugary sweet yet malicious while the *Bangals* are condemned as more open minded and outspoken. Besides, *Bangals* prefer a variety of fishes including the much despised dried fish or *shuntki*. *Ghotis* on the other hand mainly prefer sweet water fishes of

limited variety. The food preparation techniques of the two communities also vary distinctively. A teacher of a private school in Kolkata observed:

“I love making shukto but in our shukto we don’t put ucche (bitter gourd) like the Ghotis and it’s not a teto (bitter) preparation. We rather put coconut”.

This shows that differences in food preparation exist within social classes. Eating habits therefore are endowed with emotions invoking resentment and animosity within groups. One of the middle class respondents stated:

“We love eating shuntki since we are Bangals. But I am never able to cook it often at home since my neighbours in our complex opposed to it because of its smell. However I have to cook shuntki if my relatives come home for lunch”.

Women are most often forced to comply with new tastes and food preparation methods after marriage. A middle aged respondent stated:

“Ghotis make small white luchis of maida while the Bangals use atta to make big round luchis. Initially it was a strange sight for me at my Bangal in-laws house. Adjustment was difficult and challenging. Now I have accommodated the same technique and taste”.

Apart from the general distinctiveness among two larger categories of *Bangals* and *Ghotis* one cannot undermine further differences that exist in culinary preparations within and between regions of west Bengal and East Bengal respectively which are often enforced by the respondents. In the light of modern cosmopolitan city life such regional specifications have become blurred though.

4.4.2. Religious differences in food preparation: Middle class households

Religion often presides over the cooking techniques and culinary practices of its followers. The Bengali Hindu and Muslims share similar food habits which provide a homogeneous character to the Bengali ethnic group. However diverging practices are even more explicit and this brings out feelings of animosity of one group over the other. The basic difference in the eating habits of Bengali Hindus and Muslims lie in the method of food preparation. While the Hindus use the same spices similar to their Muslim counterparts the latter’s addition of meat in every vegetarian food forms a major point of contention among the two communities. Muslims are known for their rampant use of onion and garlic to their food unlike the Hindus. Consumption of beef among the Muslims and Christians further segregates them from the Hindus who consider it a taboo. A Bengali Muslim working in a private sector said:

“At our place my mother cooks Muslim food well but not Bengali cuisine. We eat shaks (greens) but not all kinds typical of Hindu Bengali households. We have more of meat and paratha and less of Bengali cuisine. The basic difference is in taste”.

For another Muslim respondent married to a Hindu, differences in food making are stark in both consanguinal and affinal homes. While discussing about cooking methods she remarked:

“I have a lot of problem in eating at my in-laws place. Their food is light and full of niramish (vegetarian dishes). I am used to consuming more meat and spicy food”.

Bengali Christians have more of continental food, an aftermath of British influence on the converts in India. Such differences in food preparation in techniques lead to feelings of ‘we’ versus ‘they’ among the same ethnic group. It has been found that families established by inter communal marriages are more liberal in selecting food choices and adopting a more diverse food preparation techniques. According to a Christian respondent:

“My mother is a hard core Hindu while my father is a Bengali Christian. So are all great cooks. We enjoy both typical Bengali foods along with continental cuisine at home”.

4.4.3. Regional and religious differences in food preparation: The urban poor

Regional and religious differences are found among the urban poor as well. However the slum inhabitants are found to share culinary practices more often compared to the higher classes due to their physical proximity with diverse cultural groups. The slum dwellers mention about sharing of food and thus taste among themselves across households and families. The process of acculturation among slum dwellers gets exhibited in their food culture as well. In this respect the whole notion of a generalised Bengali food or an ideal Bengali identity built on food habits becomes questionable. Cooking techniques differ in terms of the type of ingredients used and the way or in what sequence they are used in recipes. Bengalis are food lovers who relish gourmet food exhibiting a particular taste.

4.4.4. Food and Taste: Across middle class and urban poor

Taste is further conditioned by class position which creates distinction across classes. Methods of food preparation segregate people across social classes. The middle class maintains a separate sphere from the lower class through cooking methods and eating practices. The middle class often condemns the cooking methods and taste employed by the

lower class leading to hegemony of taste. A middle class home maker referred to her lower class cook while stating:

“I asked my maid to make aam dal but she did not put sugar in it. We like it little sweet but they eat it sour”.

Differences in cooking techniques among the middle class and the lower class are more subtle yet omnipresent. The lower class households use limited spices in food preparation with a lot of chillies unlike the upper classes. There are fewer variations in food preparation techniques among themselves compared to the middle class which is highly distinctive. The food prepared and consumed by the lower class is tarnished as inappropriate and of low taste by the middle class. Manpreet Janeja’s work on food in everyday life of Bengalis in two major cities of Kolkata and Dhaka among two main religious groups of Hindus and Muslims respectively provide an interesting account of such politics of taste. The method of cooking among the lower class is closer to food prepared in the rural villages of Bengal. The lower class slum dwellers have their kin and relatives residing in the neighbouring villages who are visited often. The everyday lives of the middle class intertwine with the lower strata in every sphere. This creates a sort of interdependence and sharing of food practices across classes. Domestic helps working in middle class households form an important agent of such interplay. There is exchange of taste and culture through food distribution and sharing activities. Everyday meals are hence indirectly transmitted across class borders which blur the separation of spheres. However social classes always try to maintain their distinctive identity through taste and consumption practices. According to one of the slum inhabitants of *Gobindopur*:

“Our food habits are different from the upper class babu baris. We don’t eat like them and our children don’t want that kind of food”.

4.4.5. _New trends in Food Preparation

Cooking techniques are attaining new forms in a world infested by consumerism, media and marketing. Such impacts are much higher among certain social classes. People are adopting new food habits which are in sync with contemporary social values, lifestyle and culture. Among the youth oil free cooking is becoming a rage. There has also been a shift from consumption of mustard oil to other forms of white oil including sunflower oil, olive oil and canola oil in everyday cooking. This is an indicator of cultural change in food preparation. Consumption of olive oil for instance indicates new food types and cuisines that are emerging

in middle and upper middle class homes. For a certain social class health and body are being redefined. The aim is to maintain a healthy body free from lifestyle diseases and excess body fat. New food habits and preparation techniques are being nurtured by all age groups of the population. A fifty three years old teacher speaks about her colleagues:

“In our school teachers bring oil free food as tiffin. At home they don’t eat rice and have oats a lot. They want to maintain a leaner body in order to wear dresses”.

Another respondent in a similar context stated:

“We prefer eating grilled food because it is cooked in less oil and is tasty”.

Continental cuisines are finding its place in the middle class food platter along with normal Bengali food like rice. People are opting for shallow fried foods instead of deep fry. Cuisines like *idli* and *momo* which require less oil are prepared more often among the middle class. Such variation in taste is achieved through more exposure to other regions and culture across the globe due to a mobile lifestyle. Almost every middle class household in Kolkata have one family member residing outside the city. This brings forth exchange of food practices and enables the acquisition of new tastes. According to an aged couple residing in north Kolkata:

“My daughter is married and lives in the southern part of the city. They are exposed to a lot of junk food or continental food. When my granddaughter comes to visit us, I try to prepare such fancy foods. Otherwise we cook simple Bengali foods”.

She further stated:

“When we stayed abroad we ate different kinds of food even pork, mushrooms and cheese. I have acquired that taste. Here I cook mushrooms too but not pork so much due to health reasons”.

Consumption practices are the main basis for differentiating between social classes. Ways of consumption again depend on a large number of factors. Exposure to different cultures broadens food consumption practices of the people. A young respondent observed:

“I grew up in Karnataka and I love south Indian food. Every morning I have idli and curry leaves are always put in our food. I also use a lot of tok doi (yogurt) in my food even in dal or fish curry which becomes unbearable for my Bengali family”.

Such new trends are characteristic of the growing urban middle class.

The **urban poor** too has exposure to new food types and brands through television advertisements, middle class kitchen, grocery stores and shops selling new food products etc. While purchasing power of the lower class is the basic hindrance to their changing tastes, their lifestyle and culture are not in congruence with such food habits. However I found that respondents have reported of eagerness to try new foods among the young household members. Children are also keen on tasting good food which is different from the mundane. While for the older members traditional Bengali cuisine is the much sought after (they usually do not prefer ‘fancy cooking of the middle class’), it is not true in case of the younger lot. So cuisines mainly fast foods like chowmein, biriyani and momo are cooked at times in many slum dwellings.

4.5 FOOD PREPARATION AND USE OF TECHNOLOGY

New kitchen technologies have changed the way time is used in food preparation in Bengali households. Chapman (2004) showed how the introduction of refrigerators and freezers reduced the need to take delivery of and shop for fresh food on a daily basis. “Encouraging householders to stock up with a growing proliferation of readymade products had the effect of undermining the social institution of daily family meal and replacing it with a television dinner or snacking culture that encouraged different members of the household with varied leisure and work pattern to expect meals on demand” (Mennell 1985; Charles and Kerr 1988; Lupton 1996; Grieshaber 1997; Chapman 2004: 103). Such impact of kitchen technologies are felt even in the food practices of urban middle class Bengalis and much less in urban poor households.

4.5.1. Use of Kitchen technology in middle class households

Modern middle class kitchens are inhabited by various kitchen equipments and gadgets like the toaster, mixer, OTG oven, microwave, kitchen chimney and many others. Alongside the modern kitchen gadgets, traditional kitchen tools like the *bonti* (a cutting instrument typical of Bengali household) and the *shil nora* (grinding stone) are also present. The *shil* is an effective slab of stone while the *nora* is a black oval shaped stone used to crush and grind spices like cumin, ginger, garlic, coriander, poppy seeds and mustard seeds, those that are used in regular food preparation. One has to sit on the haunches to grind the ingredients which will bring out the right consistency of the paste. Such is the importance of the *shil* that it is customary to worship the *shil* on rituals like *Annapuja*. The *bonti* is yet another

remarkable instrument used for cutting and chopping vegetables, meat and fish. The *bonti* is significant to Bengali tradition and culture. It is a common feature in every Bengali household irrespective of class, caste, religion and region. It is symbolic of femininity and is commonly portrayed as women cutting foods at the *bonti*. Chitrita Banerji (2001) provides a vivid description of the significance of *bonti* in everyday Bengali life. The *bonti* as she describes is a curved blade rising out of narrow flat wooden base. The *bonti* is unique because it invites a particular sitting style or posture while cutting or chopping. One sits on ones haunches on a flat surface pressing the wooden base of the *bonti*. At times one knee is folded upward to give support. Traditionally the *bonti* had an esteemed place in the Bengali kitchen. The *bonti* came in different sizes and there were different *bontis* used for cutting vegetables, meat or fish. The latter was referred to as *ansh bonti* (in reference to fish scale) and was kept separate from the normal *bonti* used for *kutno* (vegetables).

In contemporary middle class homes the use of *bonti* and the *shil nora* has declined among the women. The shift from *bonti* to the knife and *shil nora* to the mixer grinder is revolutionary in the preparation of food among the middle class Bengalis. A big transformation that has occurred in food preparation techniques is the changing posture from a sitting to a standing erectile position. As Banerji (2001) notes the tradition of sitting and preparing food on the floor is a dated practice which comes from the practice of sitting or resting on the floor among the eastern cultures. Similar practices also evolved in Bengal where women often sat on *pinris* (low wooden slab like stools) to cook food or even cut or chop vegetables. Even today in rural India such practices flourish. However subsequent changes in the whole posture of standing from sitting while preparing food is whether an impact of westernization is hard to say. The middle class women often blame their poor feet and health on this which makes sitting for long hours miserable. Besides, the modern design of middle class kitchen has elevated the position of women. Women no longer connect to the earth while preparing food which has become a more mundane and mechanical process surrounded by modern technologies and gadgets. Middle class women have switched over to the knife and chopping board from the quintessential Bengali *bonti*. The *shil nora* also narrates a story of an archaic world where the modern mixer grinder has found its place. The *shil nora* and the *bonti* are today stacked away in one corner of the kitchen but is put to good use by the household maids or cooks. The domestic helps representing the poorer sections of society are yet not adept with the process of mastering the knife. Again restricting them from the knife, limits them to the floor or the low position that is supposedly characteristic of them.

In this way the middle class woman separates herself from her low class counterpart. Interestingly the knife and the mixer grinder have no symbolic meanings attached to it similar to the *bonti* and the *shil* respectively. Knives are even more fashionable and speak of a class or rather status of the household where women ape the western ways of food preparation. Young women in middle class homes has no experience with the *bonti* nor the *shil nora*. How and why such a transition took place is difficult to proclaim but undoubtedly the media delivering images of a modern, secular domestic kitchen in different cookery shows and exhibiting a cosmopolitan approach to food and food ways have been responsible in bringing about such subtle yet significant changes in the realm of food preparation and everyday life among the Bengali middle class.

The mixer grinder is fundamental cooking equipment in middle class homes. It is cardinal for women who has refrained themselves from squatting on the floor with the *shil nora* to obtain the precise *bata moshla* paste. Besides it acts as both a time saver and energy saver. One requires dispensing huge amount of energy to move the heavy mortar stone in rhythmic to and fro motion to get the right consistency of paste. In its place the mixer grinder does the same job with ultimate perfection and sophistication for the status conscious middle class women. However the *shil nora* is still active in middle class homes thanks to the domestic helps who use it for pasting special ingredients like poppy seeds which help to enhance its taste more. According to women, the mixer grinder as a mechanical device cannot bring out the actual taste of the mustard (*shorshe*) or poppy seeds (*posto*) same as the *shil nora*. So it is the lower class poor women who utilize the traditional kitchen tool and equipments saving them from mere extinction.

Such modern mechanisms have also transformed the process of cooking. According to a seventy year old respondent:

“I love eating dhoka. These days you get dhoka mix in readymade packages. But I always prefer it the traditional way by grinding the dal and making it into a paste before the dhoka can be seasoned and cut into pieces, ready to be fried and turned into gravy. My wife and daughter in laws use the ready to cook mixture which doesn’t taste the same. Nobody wants to do such laborious chores these days”.

Several other electronic gadgets and devices that rule urban middle class kitchen separates them from the lower class of urban poor.

Table- 33. Possession of kitchen technologies in Middle class households

Categories	Yes	No
Microwave oven	72%	28%
Rice Cooker	39%	61%
Juicer	53%	47%
Induction heater	33%	67%
Mixer grinder	88%	12%
Toaster	58%	42%
Any other	26%	74%

Source: Self

Note: The above table shows that near about 72 percent of the respondents claimed that they possess a microwave oven in the household. 69 percent of the household stated that they don't possess a rice cooker while juicer is owned by 53 percent of the respondents. Some respondents claimed that juicer is attached to the mixer grinder itself as a combo. Purchase of induction heater is subsequently increasing with many houses as an additional burner. It is used mostly for boiling purposes. Mixer grinder is the most widely used kitchen gadget in domestic households of the middle class with near about 88 percent of the respondents stated of owning one. 58 percent of the respondents possess a toaster while 26 percent of the respondents stated that they also possess other types of kitchen gadgets like *roti maker*, *momo maker*, *grilled tandoor*, oven for making cakes etc. These gadgets are not used for everyday food preparation.

Table- 34. Most frequently used kitchen gadget in Middle Class household

Categories	Frequency	Percent
Microwave	41	41.0
Induction	7	7.0
Toaster	8	28.0
Mixer grinder	27	27.0
Griller	1	1.0
OTG	2	2.0
Rice cooker	1	1.0
All of them	8	8.0
Not Applicable	5	5.0
Total	100	100.0

Source: Self

Note: The above table shows the most frequently used kitchen gadgets in middle class households. Around 41 percent of the household stated that microwave oven is the mostly frequently used kitchen gadget in the household while 27 percent of the respondents claimed that it is the mixer grinder which is most frequently used in the domestic kitchens. 28 percent of the respondents stated that the toaster is regularly used in the household for food preparation. 8 percent of the respondents stated that all the kitchen gadgets are important for food preparation and are regularly used at home. 2 percent of the respondents specified that the OTG oven is the most important cooking gadget while one percent of the respondents stated that the griller and rice cooker are the most frequently used kitchen equipments in their households.

Kitchen technologies make the tedious cooking process easier and time saving. However in Bengali middle class homes advanced kitchen gadgets like the microwave oven, rice cooker, *roti maker* are seldom put to use. The microwave oven has revolutionised cooking throughout the world. The microwave has speeded up the process of cooking but also increased flexibility and demand for instant meals (Chapman 2004). In urban Bengali homes the microwave is utilised only for heating foods before meals. Small percentage of respondents reported of using the microwave for cooking food regularly at home. Even if in use, it is mainly employed for boiling foods, water or making rice occasionally. Bengali cooking requires a lot of hand work where the food has to stir well to get the right flavour. Many women feel that manual cooking is the best way to acquire the right taste of food and kitchen gadgets are good for occasional fancy foods. Hence purchase of kitchen technologies newly launched in the market is a mere reflection of consumerism and an attempt to modernise ones kitchen.

Aluminium and steel cookware are commonly used across all social classes. Food is cooked in a *kadai*, frying pan and the pressure cooker. Pressure cooker is yet another technology without which a kitchen is difficult to run. In recent times cookware and crockery have changed their forms with new non stick cooking utensils, anodised cookware, microwave proof and dishwasher proof crockery and cookware occupying the consumer market. Non stick cooking wares and utensils have become essential for the middle class kitchen which prevents the use of excess oil in foods. Some households also possess utensils specifically built for induction ovens and microwaves. In most households regular food is consumed either in steel plates or in microwave proof plastic crockery. There are different crockery sets for regular mundane food consumption and food served on special occasions and to guests.

Special crockery made of bone china or glasses are put away for guests. Crockery projects the extravagance of the households building on a certain image in front of outsiders (Goffman 1959). Traditionally Bengali middle class households used utensils made of copper. Such things are seen as treasures of the past in contemporary times.

4.5.2. Use of kitchen technology among the urban poor

The urban poor lack such sophisticated kitchen gadgets. They use simple tools like the *shil nora* and *bonti* for cooking. While Television is a common device that is owned across all households of the lower class next only to the mobile phone, kitchen technologies have not yet paved their way into the kitchen. The refrigerator is a common sight in almost every household of the slum though. One of the household maids residing in a south Kolkata slum however confessed:

“One of our neighbours owns a microwave oven which is used for heating food. At times she offers me to warm my rice. I don’t have any such gadgets but possess some microwave oven proof cookware”.

This statement is revolutionary whereby technology trickles down to the lowest segments of society blurring the lines of class divisions by converging cooking methods and food consumption pattern. Among the urban poor the introduction of the LPG burner itself is a radical change which has made cooking simpler. However traditional burners are still retained by the families.

Table- 35. Burner used for cooking in Lower class Household

Content	Frequency	Percent
LPG	14	23.3
Stove	16	26.7
Traditional chulla	15	25.0
Both LPG and Stove	15	25.0
Total	60	100.0

Source: Self

Note: The above table shows that 23.3 percent of the respondents possess LPG gas cylinder in their homes while 26.7 percent of them possess stove from the *Janata* brand. 25 percent of the respondents claimed that they cook food in traditional *chulla* (hearth) or *unun* while 25 percent of the respondents stated that they possess both LPG and stove. Few households

possess LPG, stove as well as *unun* although the *unun* is not functional now. Both gas and stove are maintained by some households which can help in case of emergency situations. The urban poor are not resourceful enough to invest in cooking technologies unlike the middle and upper classes. In urban slums of Kolkata refrigerator is a commonly owned electrical gadget which is used to store cooked food, soft drinks and water. Food is cooked either on a stove (*Janata*) or LPG burner. Utensils used for cooking food are rather simple. They are either made of aluminium or steel of cheap quality and price. Food is eaten in steel plates of cheap plastic wares. Guests are served in the same crockery that one eats regular meals in. Hence one can say that possession and use of technologies are signs of class differences and similarities.

4.6. RECONSTRUCTING TASTE: THE KNOWHOW OF COOKING

Cooking is a learnt process. The basic knowledge of cooking everyday Bengali meals is attained through socialization within the family, extended *kins*, affine, peers and others. In modern society food is cooked keeping in mind several considerations of health, convenience, time and taste buds. Similarly the agents of food preparation take recourse to other available sources of knowledge and information that helps make appropriate choices of food preparation.

4.6.1. Food Preparation: Family and Friends- Middle class

In modern Bengali middle class household family and friends are the vital sources of information and knowledge on regular household cooking. Since women are perceived as the main agents or supervisors of food preparation in our society, female members are socialized in the art of cuisine from an early age. In educated Bengali families girls seldom exhibit the knowledge of culinary prowess but the situation changes once they are married off. Married women are still considered as the main proprietor of household food while the best source to which they can revert is the family. A young married woman was questioned about her cooking skills. She confessed:

“Before marriage I never knew how to prepare food. But post marriage when I started living with my husband alone, the task of cooking fell upon me and that is when I learnt the process of food making. My source of knowledge and information was my mother and also the female members at my in-laws”.

Mother is generally the one who is responsible to transfer the heritage of culinary skill which is supposed to be inherited by the daughter. In a society measured by patriarchal forces such deliberations are seldom bestowed upon the male child. However Bengali men also possess fair knowledge of cooking which is symbolic of their gourmandising behaviour. For some people family is the best source of traditional recipes and everyday food. This is needless to say that food habits are formed out of family socialization and interactions. People adhering to family food habits are mostly in search for authenticity of diet. Traces of regionalism and other cultural manifestations become synonymous to everyday household food that is best inculcated through the family. Friends and peers on the other hand promote new cooking processes bringing a twist in the mundane food structure of the household.

4.6.2 Food preparation and Electronic media- Middle class

Television and the internet are the major sources of audio-visual entertainment and information in society today and spread across all social strata. From the upper classes to the lower rungs of society, people have access to Television along with the private satellite channels. Growth of regional language TV channels has affected women viewers mostly who find themselves glued to TV soaps, serials, films and cookery shows. Cookery shows have gained momentum with every private channel having at least one show to telecast. The cookery shows on Television showing all kinds of cuisines from traditional Bengali foods to modern fast foods and continental foods have become a rage these days. Women of all social classes love watching telecasts of these shows on TV as a form of entertainment. Many of the respondents have reported of just viewing such shows with limited incorporation of such practices in everyday life. According to a middle aged homemaker:

“I love watching cookery shows on TV though we hardly make such foods at home”.

Hence TV cookery shows telecasted in *DD Bangla* and other private Bengali channels are not only gendered but also class specific. They focus mostly on female viewers where male guests are rarely invited to show their culinary prowess. Even the hosts of such shows are largely the upper class women while their guests belong to the same class position. These shows try to uphold traditional Bengali recipes which are almost lost from the everyday Bengali meal platter while at the same time there is an attempt to project the modern through new fusion foods. At times traditional foods are given a contemporary flavour through fusion with unconventional fruits and vegetables. The images not only signify the kind of food

prepared but also the way such foods should be prepared and served on specific occasions. This is a way of reproducing a certain taste of food that is prevalent among the upper classes namely the middle and upper class of society. Lower class food habits, cuisines and tastes find no place in such shows (Bourdieu, 1984).

More than what food is cooked, how the food is cooked and how it should be served and eaten become more significant projections constructing a certain image of life and culture. This is again attuned with the dominant cultural forms in society. These shows demonstrate cooking within a short span of time. The viewers are attracted to the well groomed host of the cookery show along with the kitchen on display with its module structure, crockery, kitchen gadgets and equipments. The images portrayed in such shows made cooking the most desirable task in hand.

A respondent when asked about the impact of cookery shows on everyday cooking replied:

“Visual media has a huge effect. It is important how the foods look like. The way they eat and serve it, you feel the food is yum”.

Such shows generate huge business with different sponsors from modern kitchen appliances and branded cooking medium, crockery sets etc. The most popular show *Rannaghar* telecasted in *Zee Bangla* is viewed by people across all social classes. The show is tied up with popular brand of module kitchen and kitchen appliances *Kutchina* along with *Emami Healthy and Tasty Kacchi Ghani Mustard Oil*. Another important aspect of these shows is to portray a certain health factor when it comes to cooking. The advertisement on the branded mustard oil itself is symbolic of ‘healthy’ food for the consumers. Such health images are ingrained in the minds of the consumers. While regional cookery shows are viewed popularly across all social classes, even the poor residing in slums with their access to TV, they don’t fail to reproduce and reconstruct the aesthetic taste and high end culture that are remotely connected to the lower segments of society. Even for the lower middle class categories such sophisticated mode of cooking and modernised hearth in the form of module kitchen is a far cry. Undoubtedly such images are used to promote ‘hedonistic consumerism’ (explain) by building on upper class aspirations.

For the young upwardly mobile professional middle class, western cookery shows appeal much more than the regional shows. Shows like *TLC food* are a big draw in particular along with national level shows like *FoodFood*. The middle class is itself divided in their choice of cookery shows and also the kind of food being showcased in such shows. Middle class

Bengali women of middle and old age prefer Bengali cookery shows compared to the younger generation. Fusion foods, western continental cuisines, cuisines of other regions find its place in the gastronomy of young vibrant culturally exposed middle class. The urban poor are yet to be affected by such fantasies.

Television takes a back foot with the growing usage of ICTs (information and communication technologies). There are ample blogs and food sites in the air that are viewed and accessed by large number of viewers. Respondents were questioned on their source of knowledge and information on cooking irrespective of gender. Respondents belonging to the young age group have reported of viewing recipes more on the internet than any other source for entertainment or cooking purposes. TV cookery shows can also be viewed on YouTube at ease and this makes the internet a more favourable choice. A young media professional reported:

“I am glued to blogs and food sites, mostly western and continental cuisines which I regularly love cooking at home. Regular home food is not sought after since it is already made at home”.

Respondents have confirmed surfing the net at random for new recipes and alternative cuisines along with health benefits of food products, natural home food remedies, baby food recipes, traditional Bengali food recipes and others. The internet gives a wider access to information on cuisines and cooking processes though how much of it incorporated in everyday food practices is questionable. Barring few most of the respondents across the educated middle class confirmed that everyday household food preparation is a simple affair with minimal improvisations. While the younger family members look for diversity of cuisines, for the older members regular household meal is still very conservative.

4.6.3. Food preparation and Print Media- Middle class

The origin of print media dates back to the 19th century, a period of colonialism. One important area where the print media intervenes in order to propagate is the food culture of Bengal. ‘The idea of Bengali cuisine emanated from the ideological formation of Bengali nation out of Bengali Hindu middle class and their new identity, taste and aesthetics’³⁸ (Ray Utsa 2009: 22). Print media in the form of cookbooks were responsible in propagating the idea of a ‘new Bengali cuisine’. The first Bengali cookbook was called *Pakrajeshwar* which was published as early as 1831. But it was Bipradas Mmukhopadhyay’s *Pakpranali* (1842-

³⁸ This argument was placed by Ray (2009) following Niharranjan Ray’s *Bangalir Itihas*

1914) which gained popularity as the first cookbook. Prajna Sundari Devi's (1870-1950) *Amish O Niramish Ahar* published in two volumes finds its place in bookstores even today. These cookbooks contained versatile recipes of foods combining both Indian and European tastes and flavours giving rise to a more hybrid culinary culture. Hence the authenticity of Bengali cuisine was the question even during the advent of modern period as it is in the late modern times. Bengali food culture is a synthesis of different flavours and tastes. In the realm of such diversified tastes it is difficult to find a true Bengali cuisine.

Cookbooks and other print materials like newspapers and magazines are still prevalent and relevant today even in the times of increased popularity and usage of electronic media. Almost all middle class households have reported of owning different kinds of cookbooks over the years. The older generation would maintain diaries of newspaper cuttings and magazine pages of different recipes for household cooking. Bengali magazines like *Sananda Parama* and *Hangla Henshel* are famous for their food columns among the middle class. *Hangla Henshel* is also promoted by cookery shows like *Rannaghar*. The Bengali cookbooks and food columns in magazines portray different kinds of food recipes. It is not only about how the food is prepared but when is the best time to cook such foods and how they should be served to get the best compliments feature regularly for their readers. Cookbooks also range from everyday food, festival foods, food for *tiffin* or breakfast, recipes for children etc. the variety is endless. The print media definitely caters to a large group of consumers but restricts itself to only the literate educated group of 'women'. Several scholarly works on cookbooks and magazines with food recipes have highlighted on the gendered approach of the same³⁹. This unveils the patriarchal structure of food and food preparation in our society. Similar images of patriarchy where women are considered as the sole recipients of cookbooks and food columns are found in Bengali society leading to gender differences. Similar differences are executed across class whereby the lower class have almost no or limited access to the print media. Differences are also created in terms of regional variations and religion. Most of the popular cookbooks and food columns highlight on the dominant Hindu food habits as a part of everyday household food with little reference to the food habits of other religious groups.

The recipes in cookbooks and food columns never forget to mention the cooking time and the ingredients used for preparation. Narratives are then provided about the techniques of

³⁹ See Appadurai, A 2006; Sreekumar Sharmila 2011

preparation and importance of such foods on specific occasions. Foods are arranged according to types like starters, main course, sour foods and sweet dishes. Most of the cookbooks and food columns present recipes thematically. There are recipes for different seasons, festivals and other occasions. The foods are depicted presenting a happy picture that allures the consumers keeping a high satiety value. For light snacks and breakfast a cosmopolitan platter is the trend with recipes like crispy corn, *palang* fritters, beetroot and prawn *salan* etc. the nomenclatures of foods are also different which are only comprehensible to the upper echelons of society exposed to multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism. It is remotely connected to the lower segments of social strata.

The middle class respondents confirm of possessing different forms recipes in the form of print material though their use in regular household menus is limited. A middle class home maker responded when queried about the use of cookbooks:

“Earlier I would buy various cookbooks and follow magazines with food columns regularly. Some were even tried at home but now it has waned. I don’t find an interest or urge to prepare new foods anymore with age”.

It has been found that interests in new foods are more widespread among the young and middle aged people compared to the old. Newly married women and men often like trying out new recipes with their amateur culinary skills and that is when cookbooks come in hand. However most of the print materials can be accessed through electronic media with subscriptions these days and this has increased their readership. Some of the respondents have claimed that they find the pictures displayed in the cookbooks and internet sites most interesting more than the preparations. Some respondents also lament about the unavailability of ingredients and difficulty in the cooking process that makes such food preparations cumbersome at home. Both print and electronic media through the diverse culinary recipes and forms often try to bridge the gap between the public and the private. The cuisines displayed in printed and electronic forms adorn the menu cards of restaurants and food joints serving both Bengali and cosmopolitan foods which are far pricier than home cooked foods. Now those foods can be easily prepared within the territory of the household.

Another interesting feature of cookbooks and food columns in periodicals has been their take on health issues. From the earlier phases of their existence periodicals highlighted on the ‘medicalization of food’. Several insights were provided on what to eat in order to maintain good health and a body free of diseases. Such preaching is still found in contemporary food

recipes which more than often bring out the health and fitness dimension. The effect of food is nuanced by the social situation of consumers. This again creates divergence among the middle class and the urban poor keeping their heterogeneity intact. Recipes pertain to particular social classes nuanced with certain lifestyle may be sedentary, time absorbing and stressful. One cannot miss the customary reference to oil free cooking, continental cuisine, sugar free sweets, and organic foods (and the list is endless) which sums up new age food preparation.

4.6.4. Food Preparation: Family and Friends- Urban poor

Lower class women learn and share the basic process of cooking through the family and extended *kins*. Similar to middle class households, the urban poor also learn methods of cooking, health and hygiene from their families. Food habits are a part of one's socialization. Food preparation is also an acquired method which entails training from within the family. Young boys and girls in the slums are initiated into cooking from an early age by their parents and elderly. Cooking is a natural process for them henceforth.

4.6.5. Food preparation : Impact of middle class households among urban poor

Lower class women working in middle class homes are found to imitate their cooking style in their own domestics. Some slum women working in middle class homes confessed of getting influenced by their cooking. Some of them often try making food in a different style in their household as well. In this way food habits become a learnt and shared process with an attempt to bridge the gap across class domains, though not in entirety.

4.7 CONCLUSION

This paper intended to unravel the different dimensions of food preparation undertaken in Bengali households across all social classes. In the process effort was to locate the areas of convergence and the points of distinction regarding food sourced out for cooking, the agents of food preparation along with the methods, techniques and approaches of food preparation within and between middle class and urban poor respectively. In the concluding paragraph I would like to sum up the findings for the study on preparation of food in everyday life with the help of theories of consumption. The findings of the study reveal that food choices made by individuals are normative to a large extent. People like to associate themselves with particular social groups like status group, caste group, class group, religious group and others.

Pattern of food preparation helps to ascertain group identity and solidarity. Food expenditures and consumption are reduced to subjective disposition. People's preference for particular food products depend on their social position on the one hand and social relationships and family on the other. Social differentiation is attained through the different considerations undertaken for food preparation. Family structures and division of labour between sexes also determine different food habits across social and economic groups. "Taste for particular dishes...is associated, through preparation and cooking, with a whole conception of the domestic economy and of the division of labour between the sexes....Cooking symbolizes one state of female existence and the division of labour..." (Bourdieu, 1986: 186-187).

Health and taste are two dichotomous categories that rule household food preparation and lead to differences across classes. For instance the middle class at large are more considerate about prospective good health compared to the urban poor. This notion of health is again a social construction induced by market forces that target the growing middle class in society. Taste developed through food preparation is a process by which groups differentiate from each other. Taste differences are not only class specific but depend on other social and cultural variations. Choice of food and taste preference is often controlled and influenced by women and their normative influences. Hence food preparation is largely gendered across classes.

On the whole Bengalis as an ethnic group follow similar patterns of food preparation but differences are more profound. However class is one of the bases of differentiation attained through food preparation while other regional, religious and cultural variations are preponderant. New trends in food preparation can be envisaged among the younger generation of both the middle class and urban poor. This cohort is more exposed to new technologies of the kitchen, mass media and information and communication technologies which introduce new cuisines and methods of cooking that are easier to comply. However technologies again help to perpetuate social differences. Overall food preparation in everyday life undergoes greater complexities whereby people constantly negotiate with societal structures and processes.

4.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter starts with a brief explanation of the meaning of food preparation which develops into a series of questions like what is prepared, why and how it is prepared, when it

is prepared and who prepares. It tries to explain the different processes involved in food preparation across middle class and the urban poor bringing about a comparison between the two. The first section of this chapter projects the different sources of food from the market. It is found that while the city has innumerable market options there are different factors that establish the choice of markets. Broadly division exists between people's opinion for purchasing from fresh markets or bazaars which in turn depends on factors like convenience, age, faith or trust between the buyer and seller, novelty and entertainment. Among the urban poor similar choices exist on the basis of price mainly. Factors like food cost, taste and health are seen as primary factors for choice of foods.

The next section deals with agents of food preparation. It speaks about women's unending effort in the kitchen and their growing dependence on external help like cooks or home delivery system. Gender division of labour is not strong in middle class homes but food preparation and decision making largely lies with the women. Women due to their education and working status enjoy greater autonomy in choosing and preferring what to eat. For the lower class women's role in food preparation is similar to the middle class. Women's role in the kitchen is a universal function. But lower class households enjoy greater gender division of labour than middle class household regarding food preparation. Everybody from the woman to her husband, elderly and even the children help in domestic cooking as per need. Decision making regarding food budget and other household expenses even what food is to be cooked lies with the male members. Working women enjoy little more autonomy compared to the non working women.

The third section of the chapter is on techniques of food preparation. It provides a general description of the basic spices used in preparing food along with traditional tools like *bonti* and *shil nora*. It subsequently draws upon the different tastes of cooking among different regions, religious groups and also reflects on the food and taste of the class groups. New trends in food preparation are highlighted among both the middle class and urban poor. Food preparation and use of technology shows how difference between the two classes are embedded within modern practices. Kitchen technologies make cooking easier and shorter. In lower class households use of traditional gadgets like *bonti* and *shil* are directly involved. Most of them cook over LPG, stove and traditional chulla. The final section of this chapter deals with the know-how of cooking. Among the middle class friends, peer groups and family socialise individuals into the act of cooking. Along with it electronic media, print media both

influence new cooking while for the lower class family's impact is the most. However middle class families often influence the food preparation techniques of lower class households.

As a conclusion one can say that food choices are embedded within the normative but modern practices are emerging. It affects the middle class more than the lower class. People also associate themselves with caste, class and religion through their food habits. Food expenditures are based on subjective disposition.

CHAPTER 5

CONSUMPTION OF FOOD

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The process of food consumption can narrate different realities of everyday life. It evokes social and cultural values of men and women through food in the process of eating, serving and distributing. It talks about the structures of hierarchy laid down by the whole act of eating. It also creates different social identities. Household food consumption is an important arena to understand the changes that take place in interpersonal relationships along with the larger social structure. Food consumption is a process of symbolization and communication endowed with mundane and profound meanings. R. S Khare (1992) called this '*Gastrosemantics*⁴⁰'. The last chapter on 'Food preparation in everyday life' dealt with the processes of preparing food in Bengali households across the middle class and urban poor. The questions of who, how, what and why with regard to cooking food helps to discern the importance of household food in everyday life of the people. The focus of the chapter was on the way food preparation techniques perpetuate differences and similarities across classes. It showed that while class differences persist with reference to the way food is prepared, other social and cultural factors like region and religion enforces greater differences. Economic forces have been found to bridge the hiatus between classes to some extent while on the other cultural forces help to reproduce the dominant middle class taste in food preparation.

While food preparation is one part of household food, the other essential part is that of consumption. This chapter on 'Consumption of food in everyday life' aims to discern the different rules of commensality across Bengali households, the rites and rituals performed with respect to eating food including the normative choices of eating and other cultural considerations that help to determine 'what we eat'. While exploring the eating practices of the Bengali middle class and urban poor it is important to include all sorts of variations and differences that exist within and between these two classes in order to capture the essence of complexity bestowed through food habits. Both the middle class and urban poor are varied and versatile due to several social and cultural forces acting on it. So instead of the saying,

⁴⁰ See Khare, R,S 1992: 44

'we are what we eat', it is more important to identify 'how we eat it' and 'why do we eat'. Along with comprehending the value laden normative social behaviour that works best on food choices, the objective is also to reflect on the changing patterns of food consumption across the middle class and lower class and view the aspects of convergence and divergence of the same. The chapter will start with a general discourse on commensality and identify its meaning in everyday life through the forms of food presentation, distribution and serving, meal place and time and food sharing. It will also move on to the various rites and rituals associated with Bengali food across the middle and lower classes respectively and reflect on the various social customs related to food making and eating and food avoidance and taboos in Bengali homes. The last section of this chapter is that which deals with personal choice and preference of food like the role of women as the sole determinants of taste and choice of household food along with food taste and primordial identities, packaged foods and home delivery as a growing cultural change along with food health and body.

5.2 COMMENSALITY

The word commensality when broken originates from the dual words *com* which means 'together' and *mensa* which means 'table'. This indicates the process of sitting together for a meal. However consumption of meal does not only imply coming together for food and drink but encompasses different social acts like presentation of food and beverages, sitting and serving, utensils used, the setting, time of the day, conversation, smell, sounds and taste" (Sutton 2002; Pearson 2003; Pollock 2012: 3). The primary essence of commensality is sharing of food. This is because human beings are known to eat together since the beginning of human civilization where in lies the significance of food as a social and cultural act besides being a mere biological process. This has been the very essence of food studies in social sciences. Several scholars of food studies have found it difficult to evade commensality in their writings (Simmel, 1910; Mennell, 1992; Sobal and Nelson, 2003; Janeja, 2010; Fischler, 2011; Pollock, 2012). Commensality defines who eats food with whom. It is a process of social demarcation within and between families. "The eating patterns vary between and help to define the boundaries of classes, ethnic, religious, age and sexual groups" (Sobal and Nelson, 2003: 181). Commensality is comprehended from two reigning perspectives on food sharing in contemporary society. One is 'cultural values' while the other is 'structural individualism'. Traditionally scholars on food studies like Mary Douglas (1972), Charles and Kerr (1988), Anne Murcott (1982, 1983 and 1977) have focussed on the food sharing aspect of commensality reflecting on the social structures and hierarchies, social inclusion and

exclusion, discrimination and differences in human societies (ibid). On the other hand structural individualism is a new concept invoking the rising trend of 'eating alone' in modern societies (ibid). Mennell, Murcott and Van Otterloo (1992) reported on the changes in pattern of commensality by stating, "Though inconveniently investigated, it is highly likely that the meals that are held to be the very stuff of sociality are in danger of disappearing...part and parcel of the trends characterised earlier in this report as increasing tendencies towards individualisation" (Fischler, 2011: 529).

Arguments always have counter-arguments. The process of eating with others has deep sociological significance and gains pre-eminence in writings of Simmel in his '*Sociology of Meal*'. What Simmel stated was that people are prone to eat all by themselves in an individualised manner since one's food is solely eaten by oneself and not by others. Simmel's interactional sociology however could not evade the social aspect of eating. He perceived that the individual act of eating a meal manifests in social interaction in case of shared meals. Hence he writes:

"Hence of all the things people have in common, the most common is that they must eat and drink. And precisely this, in a remarkable way, is the most egoistical thing, indeed the one most absolutely and immediately confined to the individual. What I think I can communicate to others; what I see, I can let them see, what I say can be heard by hundreds of others- but what a single person eats can under no circumstances be eaten by another. In none of the higher spheres is it the case that others have to forego absolutely that which one person should have" (Simmel Georg, 1910: 130).

In this chapter I have tried to discern the meaning of commensality in Bengali homes among the middle class and urban poor respectively. Commensality in Indian society always follows norms of ritualistic eating, purity and pollution with respect to 'touch' along with principles of social inclusion and exclusion (Appadurai, 1981). Who eats food with whom and where reinforce issues of power and politics in everyday life. Commensality specifies certain rules or customs related to eating food that integrate social life. Keeping this in mind, my objective is to understand forms of commensality in modern households of Kolkata and highlight on the changes that are profound with respect to food sharing.

5.2.1. FOOD PRESENTATION

There is a specific pattern of food presentation, distribution and eating typical and customary of the Bengalis of all social categories irrespective of caste, class, religion. Food is consumed in a specific order starting with bitter foods first, leading to pulses, vegetables, fish or meat and sweets. Bengalis mix small portions of rice with each of these foods in the following order to get the right taste of it all. The order follows like *teto* (bitter), *dal* (lentil), *torkari* (vegetables), fish or meat (non vegetarian foods), *chutney* (sour), sweets (sweet).

Traditionally Bengalis follow a typical pattern of consuming meals. Rice would be served in a round circular plate while the other assortment of foods would be served in separate bowls surrounding the main plate of rice. The hierarchical order of the food platter is idiosyncratic to Bengali food culture. Since Bengalis are non vegetarians irrespective of caste⁴¹, class, religion and other primordial identities, fish and meat are given high status in the hierarchy of foods compared to vegetables while sweets (Bengalis are known for their sweet tooth) are accorded the highest status in terms of its purity⁴². The afternoon meal is still the biggest of all the other meals consumed in Bengali domestics. However the presentation of meals has changed its form.

The Bengali middle class generally eat three square meals a day which includes breakfast, lunch and dinner along with light mid morning and evening snack. Among these the breakfast and evening snacks portray individualised eating with limited food sharing. This is because in most cases individuals within a household prefer eating different foods for breakfast. Under limited circumstances food are shared at the breakfast table. This is usually done of weekends or holidays when the family enjoys a special meal. In case of evening snack family members are usually found to eat by themselves. There might be times when some amount of food sharing takes place on occasional basis. Bengali food is mostly known for its elaborate meal spreads which is consumed during the afternoon meal. Unlike breakfast and evening snack, lunch and dinner is still an elaborate affair among the middle class. The amount and variation of food consumed for breakfast is less compared to that consumed for lunch. Some families like to start their afternoon meal with a *sheddho* (boiled foods like potatoes, pumpkin, raw papaya etc). This is a normal food order in almost every Bengali middle class household. For dinner several middle class men and women prefer to eat *roti* which is at times combined with rice as individual preferences. According to Utsa Ray (2015) consumption of wheat in

⁴¹ Bengali Brahmins unlike other non Bengali Brahmins are fish eaters.

⁴² *Payesh* a sweet dish made of milk and rice(*anna*) is considered most pure and sacred since the ancient times

the form of *roti* is a by product of colonial impact on Bengali cuisine and is very much a part of the food politics played by the colonial rulers. This is followed by *dal*, vegetable curry, fish or meat. Evening snack is not very elaborate among the middle class. People also depend largely on fast foods parcelled home or in the form of packaged food for evening snack.

The general stereotypical pattern of food presentation during meals in Bengali middle class households is under attack of changing lifestyle. Variations are profound among households depending upon the number of family members, age of family members and number of working family members. Earlier the men in middle class household would gorge on their favourite rice and fish before leaving for work in the morning. Breakfast was not relevant then. The women of the house would sit together for their afternoon meal later in the day. Dinner was a shared collective affair. With changing times, such institutionalization of meal is no longer observed. People do not eat such elaborate meals simply because they don't have the time. Most of the people do not take meals in the household which has been replaced by the workplace. Cooking elaborate cuisines have also lost its appeal.

The rise of single person households in the city has also changed the eating pattern in everyday life. Most of the single person households comprise of old people who are retired or pensioners with no family members to cater to them. In a single person household presentation of food doesn't follow a strict order of precedence. In such cases food is kept simple with rice, *dal*, vegetable, fish or meat. A single individual refrains from cooking a versatile platter. The person might just finish a meal with one curry and rice or anything of personal choice. Dinner is even simpler with either rice or *roti* and one vegetable or curry. Breakfast is not elaborate either. An aged woman who is also a widow living alone stated:

“At times I don't like cooking since I stay alone. In that case I get home delivery. I buy chicken or fish but not rice or dal (lentil soup). Those are cooked at home. But such is not the case when I have my children coming and staying with me. I prepare normal foods then with an elaborate platter”.

Commensality is not observed in single person households on an everyday basis. Individuals under circumstances tend to adapt to their surroundings through food. Food is consumed alone leading to individualised eating as observed as the new trend in food consumption put forth by western scholars. In a household comprising of young couple presentation of food is again different where eating habits and commensality differ from weekdays to weekends. Some working couples put forth that food eaten on weekdays is very simple with a limited assortment while elaborate meals are cooked on weekends. For instance almost every middle

class household confirmed of consuming a special food for breakfast on Sundays which is a holiday or on other holidays. A young school teacher living in a nuclear household and a resident of north Kolkata proclaimed:

“In our house we hardly cook elaborate meals on weekdays because I have to leave the house early and cooking in the mornings is not possible. Even dinner is kept much simple. I usually prepare a jhol (stew) with fish and vegetables along with pressure cooked rice. But on weekends we eat to our hearts content. I also prepare laborious food preparations on weekends”.

On the other hand families with more aged member special foods on weekends do not feature commonly compared to young households. Health becomes the primary concern here. Special food is always associated with poor health. Food presented in dinner is comparatively simple. Most of the literatures on Bengali food culture have highlighted on the Bengali Hindu *bhadralok* with little reference to the minorities. The Bengali Muslims and Christians forming minority groups have been found to adhere to similar food presentation patterns during meals. The Bengali Christian families of Kolkata are those who converted to Christianity during the early nineteenth century. These households are mostly formed out of interreligious marriage between converted Christians and Hindus. Such households exhibit a mixed eating habit which is more attuned to the dominant Hindu culture. Among the Bengali Muslims food presentation is very similar to their Hindu counterparts. Some households with a hybrid structure comprising of *urdu* speaking and Bengali speaking Muslims have variations in eating patterns which are more synonymous to the *urdu* Muslim habits. Again among the Muslims too differences in terms of *Shias* and *Sunnis* are apparent in case of meal sharing. While Shia Muslims prefer to eat food from the same plate with all family members housed together, no such practices are displayed among the Sunnis who claim to be more liberal and relaxed. Regional differences especially among the *Bangals* and *Ghotis* are not located in case of food presentation in everyday life.

Among the poor food pattern and presentation of meals vary compared to the urban middle class, food pattern and presentation of meals vary. However such variations are not a contrasting picture to the middle class due to the fluidity of class barriers.

Table- 36. Number of meals eaten by the selected urban poor in a day

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Once a day	03	5.0
Twice a day	13	22.0
Three times a day	34	57.0
Four times a day	10	17.0
Total	60	100.0

Source: Self

Note: The above table shows the number of meals consumed by the urban poor in a particular day. Findings reveal that around 57 percent of the respondents stated that they eat three meals a day while 22 percent of them said they eat only two meals a day. 17 percent of the respondents claimed that they eat four times a day including two major meals and two smaller meals while only 5 percent of the respondent said that they eat just one major meal a day.

The urban poor divulges between two or three meals a day. For the slum dwellers it is mostly lunch and dinner that is more significant compared to the morning meal. Breakfast in urban poor households include light snack ranging from tea and biscuits, *muri* or even left over (*bansi*) *roti*. In quite a few households intake of rice is very high unlike middle class homes. The urban poor eat *panta bhat* (left over rice from previous night smeared with water and left overnight) as a morning brunch. Lunch in urban poor households is simple compared to middle class households where the meal spread seldom starts with bitter foods and ending with sweet tooth. The poor have not much resource to spend on such a wide food platter and generally survive on light vegetables or *dal* or fish and meat products with rice. The quantity of rice consumed by the urban poor is always greater than the middle class. Foods taken for lunch always do not follow a hierarchical pattern of starting with bitter food and ending with sweets for such elaborate cuisines are characteristic of extravagance and luxury. A woman residing in a south Kolkata slum when questioned about her daily food intake lamented:

“We eat all kinds of vegetables that are available. But generally we have one or two vegetables which might include bitter foods like ucche (bitter gourd) cooked with begun (egg plant) and dal (lentil soup). We scarcely eat more than two vegetables meat or fish”.

Unlike middle class families among the urban poor there is not much variation of meals between weekdays and weekends. However chicken meat is consumed mostly on Sundays similar to the middle class. Some households in the slums with more members working and getting proper wages have exhibit similar eating habits to that of the middle class. Meals are prepared same for all family members irrespective of age with limited health considerations. One finds a transformation from a complete rice oriented diet to a wheat and rice diet among the urban poor similar to middle class households. The slum dwellers confirmed of consuming *roti* at night. Sometimes rice and *roti* are equally consumed. There is always a process of imitation of higher class food habits and lifestyle among the lower class categories. This even gets reflected in the way foods are presented during meal times.

For both the middle class and the urban poor afternoon meals are not served in courses. Foods like vegetables, *dal*, fries, fish or meat are eaten one after the other in a specific order of arrangement. “The *dal* and sauce of the fish curry are typically poured over rice and eaten with the fingers of the right hand” (Ray, K 2004: 29). Hence this presentation of food becomes a marker of Bengali identity. Nevertheless the middle class would differ from the mass of urban poor on the number of dishes consumed as accompaniments with rice. While the middle class usually includes two or three preparations of *dal*, vegetable, fish/meat either in the form of fried, stewed or curried, the lower class people are found to eat only one or two types of foods with rice. Rice consumption is found to decrease with an increase in class stratification. For instance the upper middle class report of eating less rice and more of other foods like vegetables, fish, meat, fruits etc. The reason is more people rise up the class hierarchy the more they acquire a low carbohydrate diet. While on the other hand people belonging to lower occupational categories like lower division clerks consume more rice and less of other accompaniments. Among the urban poor consumption of rice is far greater than the assortment of vegetables, *dal* or any other item. Occupation and work culture has an impacting role in everyday food. These subtleties embark on the distinctiveness of eating habits across classes.

5.2.2. FOOD DISTRIBUTION

Distribution of food is an important component of commensality which might indicate all forms of social relationships, associations and differences. It is the way food is distributed or served among the members of the household, whether there is any discrepancy or inequality meted out to the members in terms of providing unequal share of foods. Food can be

unequally distributed among the members of a household based upon age and sex or any other criteria. In traditional joint families of Kolkata for instance, distribution of the fish head and the fish tail would become a major point of contention often resulting in family feuds. In many Indian households for instance, women are the last to eat among the family and are seen to sacrifice the best pieces or servings of food to their children or husband. Young people are preferred more in some cases to old people while serving the portions of a food. This section addresses the way food is shared and distributed among family or household members during meals and snack times. The objective is to reflect on any kind of discrimination, power relations or other processes involved in sharing of food within middle class and urban poor households.

Table- 37. Household food distribution practices among the middle class

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Distribution varies in case of children	06	6.0
It depends on preference of family members	29	29.0
It depends on health	16	16.0
Equal among family members	41	41.0
Not equal, it depends on affordability	05	5.0
Not applicable	03	3.0
Total	100	100.0

Source: Self

Note: The above table gives the percentage of responses regarding distribution of food products across middle class households. It is found that around 41 percent of the respondents mentioned that distribution of food products among family members is equal while 29 percent of the respondents state that food distributed among family members depend on their personal preference and choice. 16 percent of the respondents claim that distribution of food depends more on health of family members while 6 percent said that food distribution changes with respect to children. However 5 percent of the respondents stated that distribution of food in their households is not equal because it depends on affordability. For 3 percent of the households such distribution of foods is not applicable due to them being single person households.

In middle class Bengali households distribution of food depends upon the intake capacity of individuals, the desire or preference of family members along with age and health. The subjects of investigation were asked about the unequal distribution of foods among household members in an open ended form. Most of the respondents specified distribution of certain food products like fruits, eggs, milk, meat products which are consumed on an unequal basis depending on the voluntary choice or preference of family members. The middle class unanimously stress on equal distribution of foods in situations where there is no preference or choice of the members involved. Some also clarified that there is no gender bias or discrimination found in the household over food. Although this holds true to a large extent, my participant observation witnessed subtle forms of discrimination that are deeply embedded within the system that it gets unnoticed. One major form of unequal distribution is the sacrificial image of the woman or the mother of the house. Like many other Indian households, the Bengali mother more than often sacrifices her food or preference in the name of her children while it never features the same in case of a man or the father. A middle aged mother confirmed:

“I buy fruits mostly for my children. I never eat them. Fruits are very expensive these days so children are given the first priority. If they don’t eat it then I might eat but not otherwise”.

This is a mundane household picture of very as many Bengali household. While motherhood portrays the image of a selfless sacrificial woman, it is the obligation of the woman to demonstrate such a ‘self’ free of gluttony. No such expectations are conferred over the men of the house. Women are found to give away their morsel of food to their men. However such gender stereotypes are seen to be shifting in the light of post modernity where women exert their new found independence in their choice of food within the household. Contemporary working women do not deter from exhibiting her choice or preference in terms of the kind of piece of meat or chicken or fish that she would love to eat. She would also not shy away from making her favourite savoury only for herself unlike earlier times. This is a big change among the middle class food distribution and choice of food made within the household. However women exerting their own choice in food distribution and eating is more apparent among the upper rungs of middle class in society while little traces of such independent choice of food are found among the lower middle class. This adds on to the complexity of the group due to fluid class barriers among the middle strata of society. Other forms of unequal distribution of food but not discriminatory are found in case of very young children and the

elderly suffering from lifestyle diseases or ill health and are forbidden to consume some category of food or the other.

In spite of the horizontal lines of discrimination against distribution of food, differences in food distribution occur on a vertical or hierarchical level in the household. There is a thick line of demarcation among the household members across middle class families and the household domestic help or worker. In case of full time workers, seldom are the workers treated as equal to the family members. The best possible method of such discrimination is through the distribution of food. Although the situation doesn't hold truth for every middle class family, some respondents have specified such differences in consumption of food among the household members and their domestic helpers. The domestic helps are provided with foods that are mostly unaccepted or not preferred by the household members. Foods that are not consumed by the family members are usually given away to the workers. In some cases such foods are low in quality or are supposed to be disposed off. Many of the middle class respondents, for instance, confirmed of giving away leftover food stuffs to their domestic helps. Respondents stated that while stale food items are usually thrown away, left over foods in pretty good conditions are given away to the maids. In some households an evening snack is usually consumed by the family members while the household domestic helps are often left out of such food sharing occasions. Food when bought from outside to be consumed at home is limited to the direct family members leaving aside the domestic help.

The **urban poor** households of Kolkata slums were questioned on the pattern of distribution of food during meals. Unlike middle class homes, the poor households experience more discrimination in distributing foods among family members. In most households food cooked is first consumed by the children and the male members within the family. The left over substances are eaten by the women. Often the higher category of foods like fish and meat are distributed first among the children and men. This unequal distribution of foods comes naturally and is a taken for granted phenomenon in most urban poor domestics. A woman respondent of the slum confirmed:

“During times of crisis fish is bought only for the children and my husband. I only eat after they finish eating or if there is anything left”.

Respondents however don't feel this unequal distribution pattern as discriminating. Women take it on their stride to eat left over foods. Nevertheless priority is bestowed on men and

children compared to women. Some women also stressed on going out of their way to cook food cherished by their children. According to a woman working as a household maid:

“Even though I have limited money in hand, I would buy two pieces of fish for my son if he yearns for it because that is what we live for”.

Some important food products that are unequally distributed among family members in the lower class are fruits, milk, packaged foods like Maggie noodles and health drinks. These are supposed to be beneficent of good health and are bought and fed to the children and at times men. Generally Indian families have been known to discriminate among genders when it comes to distributing household chores, resources or even food. In Bengali middle class households food discrimination on the basis of gender is not explicit unlike among the urban poor but is subtle and subdued since such practices are deeply ingrained within the normative. Participant observation method has helped to perceive such variability although people are seldom conscious about such practices. Women in the role of wives and mothers are expected to be ‘sacrificing’. Food is generally a way of portraying ones sacrificing self. While mothers commonly store away the best portion of food for their children, wives too eat portions that are left over by their husbands or prefer to distribute the better part of food to the same. In case of limited quantity of foods men and children are often prioritised over women. In traditional Indian culture wives are the last ones to eat. In many cultures wives are forced to eat out of the leftovers of their husbands. Such archaic practices are unheard of among the contemporary middle class and lower class Bengalis. Differences in distribution of food between male and female child is also not very explicit in urban middle class households. However it is pertinent to reflect on changing times with regard to household food distribution. Among the young generation such sacrificing behaviour gets unnoticed. Contemporary women are more conscious about their rights acquired through economic independence. Young women also share similar social space and upbringing with their male counterparts and this gets reflected in everyday eating habits and patterns. Today women no longer wait for their husbands to eat first before they can start their meal. Such changes have become more profound under the rubric of post industrialism through increased feminisation of labour.

5.2.3. FOOD SERVING

A study of meal serving can be interesting enough to understand social relationships within the household. Besides the way foods are served on an everyday basis will depict the normal essence of the household separating it from special occasions. Food serving in case of regular meals is different from that of special meals. Foods are served differently at different meal times of the day. The platter used to serve rice for instance will always be different from that of snack foods or foods eaten at breakfast. Serving of food also talks about the culture of a particular group.

In **middle class** households food is usually served and eaten in stainless steel crockery or ceramic plates on a mundane basis. Bengali households use typical crockery and vessels for cooking and displaying of food. Usually rice is served in big round stainless steel plates or *thalas*. There are other medium sized bowls called *bati* or *rekabi* used to serve *dal*, fish curry and vegetables. Bengalis usually eat with their own hands and fingers. The use of spoon is limited to ladles like *hatha* for picking the rice from the bowl and *chamoch* or big spoons for pouring the *dal* and other foods. Separate spoons are used for vegetables and non vegetarian foods. This is a reflection of the notion of purity associated with vegetarian foods and impurity with non vegetarian foods; hence the two shouldn't get touched. Some households even use the traditional *kansa* (bell metal) plates and bowls for eating though it is not a common sight these days. The use of tradition can be a depiction of social status as the *abhijato*⁴³ in society.

In modern middle class homes, change is deliberate with rampant use of ceramic or microware proof crockery. These are not only easy to handle but also easy to heat or warm food in before meal times. Few of my respondents vouched for the use of glass or bone china wares instead of plastics for eating and serving food since plastics are harmful and have high risk of contamination. This is also the effect of *medicalization of food* as stated by Fischler (2011). In a high risk society the educated middle class depicts a growing concern with food health and hygiene much of which is absent among the lower grades of society.

Women are the primary agents of serving food worldwide. Even among the Bengali middle class food is either served by the women of the house or by the household domestic workers in separate plates among the people sharing food together. At times food is laid on the dining

⁴³ *Abhijato*'s are described as Kolkata's old aristocratic families (Janeja, M 2010: 27)

table where people can serve themselves. Men are usually not seen serving rice and other foods in everyday meals within the household. Serving of food comes naturally to women be they mothers, sisters or daughters. While the major meals are served by the household women, small snack meals are often eaten by the people themselves without being served or offered. Children at times help themselves to foods that are kept at the table in the absence of parents. Food serving is termed as *biroktikor* or irritating task by several of the women respondents. Women feel that is their duty to distribute food on choice basis among the household members. Hence the women have to keep in mind the needs and preferences of family members. Although such processes are not problematic in small nuclear households, in bigger joint families with many members food serving may result in animosity and quarrels within the household. Appadurai termed this *gastropolitics* (Appadurai, 1981).

Some middle class respondents specified of having separate plates, cups and bowls for lower class domestic helps as a marker of status difference between the two. Such practices of segregation and discrimination have always been a common feature across middle class homes which establish the norms of social differences. But there are households who have discarded such discriminating practices. In a Christian household, all the household members including the servants and employers come together at the table for a meal. Such egalitarian practices are signs of a changing culture.

In **urban poor** households food is eaten in stainless steel or aluminium plates and bowls. Some households also own cheap fibre plates. Often the poor use old plates and saucers given away by the higher classes. The urban poor households seldom eat breakfast. Food is provided only to the children and at times to the male members of the household who leave for work. During the day food is cooked and kept in steel plates, covered. These are eaten by the family members as per convenience. The children before leaving for school eat early and leave the remaining food for the adults. An old lady who works as an ayah in hospitals stated:

“In our family food is cooked and kept in the morning itself. Now people eat whenever they feel like. The children come back home and eat whatever they can lay their hands on. They simply ask how many people are left to eat and then eat accordingly. No one is there to serve them. We are all working”.

Urban poor households have shown more egalitarianism when it comes to cooking and serving food. While food is predominantly cooked by women, men also play active role in cooking in the absence of the women. Men also take part in serving food to children and him unlike middle class homes. But if the whole family sits together for a meal women naturally

preside over the whole process of food presentation, distribution and serving. Women usually eat late or after meals are finished by the rest of the family members. The sole duty of an ideal-typical woman is the wait upon her family members and serves them with utmost care and patience.

5.2.4. MEAL PLACE AND MEAL TIME

Over the years the way meals are consumed in urban Bengali households have undergone changes. This includes the place and time of eating meals; the way food is served, gathering of family members during meals and also the type of food eaten. Households across the middle class differ in their food habit and consumption pattern in terms of the place and time of eating and drinking. Such households can be differentiated on the basis of age, employment of women and number of working members. In contemporary times the number of working members per household is increasing due to women joining the workforce. Men and women working for private corporations in IT sectors have a more demanding job and have to leave early for work. In such households working couple do not eat breakfast or even lunch at home while dinner is eaten together in the household. Occupation and work culture defines commensality in contemporary times. A young IT professional reported:

“We have very erratic work hours, both me and my husband. We work in different shifts in the same company. While I go for work he stays back at home and when I get back home it is time for him to leave. So we hardly get to eat food together. We mostly eat outside home, at workplace”.

While in the above case no afternoon meal is cooked at home, there are other professionals who prepare regular food which is consumed at the workplace. For instance, a school teacher stated:

“My husband leaves very early for work in the morning. So there is no scope for breakfast. I pack him lunch from home which includes rice, vegetables and fish. I leave later in the day for school. So I can eat little rice before leaving for work but that is not lunch. I pack lunch from home to eat at school”.

While earlier men would go out to work leaving behind women folks at home who shared food and drinks together, many of the nuclear households with both spouses working and school going children do not eat their afternoon lunch at home. Such households eat breakfast at specific hours in the morning before going out to work and come back home to share dinner. In almost every middle class household dinner is a joint family affair. In households

with aged couples or aged dependent members the afternoon meal is eaten in isolation as other members leave for work or eat at different hours. Some respondents have reported of feeling lonely which has a bearing on their food intake. Similar feelings are expressed by non working women and mothers.

Meal timings across middle class households are again scheduled according to the lifestyle of the people. Some families have the habit of eating early meals starting from morning, to noon and night while others eat late meals. Household members if present more or less follow similar eating schedules. But individuals might not share the same table for food at the same time. A joint family household of seven members specified of sharing the same breakfast time but not the same space for sharing food. This is very different from the traditional joint family culture that used to prevail in the city. With changing times and work culture place and timings of meals are also shifting. Often timing of food imposes identity on others. For the Muslims, lunch and dinner times are set to accommodate the time table prayers (Siddique 2011: 28). For some Hindu respondents as well meal time especially the morning breakfast succeeds after the Morning Prayer. This holds true for both the middle class and the urban poor.

In contemporary middle class homes meals are no longer consumed by sitting on the floor on *asanas* (mats). Almost every modern domestic among the middle (upper, middle and lower) class owns a dining table and chairs which is of utmost significance. Food is usually eaten in an elevated form by sitting upright at the dining table and chairs, an effect of westernization. The primary meals are consumed sitting at the dining table. It is a space that signifies co sharing of food bringing about integrity within the household. People usually flock together while eating at the table. This calls for a more socialized way of eating food. The dining table is a space which witnesses all kinds of conversations no matter how banal they are. “Although conversation may range from the apparently banal to highly stereotyped forms of politeness, its role in establishing, reinforcing as well as modifying social relations cannot be underestimated” (Goffman 1967; Habermas 1981; Pollock 2002: 3). Commensality develops at the restricted space of the dining table and makes the whole act of eating more than just consuming food; rather it is a process of interaction, a social act among individuals. Most of the respondents claimed that major meals within the household are eaten at the dining table. Food is often laid at the table where the members of the family can individually help themselves to each dish from the common vessel to their individual plates, a sign of equal distribution. This is different from being served by another, mainly the women in traditional

Bengali homes. In middle class homes, women eat food together with other household members. However serving is performed by mothers or wives.

Nonetheless eating area is not just restricted to the dining space but can extend to other spaces like the sitting area or bedrooms. The sitting area is growing in popularity for indulging in bites. Modern buildings or apartments are built in a way that connects both the dining hall and sitting area. The dining hall which was once connected to the kitchen share the same domestic space with the sitting area extending one into the other. The living room or sitting area is that part of domestic space where people like unwinding after a whole day's chore. An important component of the living room is the television which occupies a prominent position facing which are the sitting arrangements. Women and children prefer sitting with their food in front of the Television. TV viewing and eating is a personal act unlike the dining table which gives opportunity to share ones food with others. Individuals also connect well with the food while restricting themselves at the table which is absent in case of eating in front of the TV in the sitting area. A middle aged woman belonging to a nuclear household said:

“At night I eat in the living room while watching TV where as other foods is consumed at the dining table. I love to spend some time on my own in front of the TV and since my daughter comes home late from work I eat alone watching my favourite programme”.

The sitting area is also an informal space compared to the dining area and hence the type of food eaten at the sitting area is small, effortless and informal foods.

Table- 38. Percentage of respondent having meals at specific places in middle class households

Category	Breakfast	Lunch	Dinner
Dining room	62.0	88.0	81.0
Sitting room	23.0	7.0	11.0
Individual room	15.0	5.0	8.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Self

Note: The above table describes the percentage of people eating respective meals at specific places among the middle class. Almost every middle class household own a dining table placed near the food area which serves as the place for commensality. Most of the meals are consumed in the dining area sitting at the table. This holds true for the three major meals of

the day, breakfast, lunch and dinner. The breakfast meal shares the most versatile space. 62 percent of the respondents prefer to eat breakfast at the table while 23 percent of them prefer to eat at the sitting area or living room. This type of eating also encourages individualised eating. It should be kept in mind that breakfast in Bengali homes are small compared to the lunch or dinner spread comprising usually of one major item. 15 percent of the respondents stated that they prefer eating breakfast in individual rooms. This trend is more common among the youth. Eating food alone in respective rooms is not a common trend in middle class households though. People usually prefer to have their afternoon meal at the table because the lunch in middle class homes consists of a wide platter of three or four spreads of food. 88 percent of the respondents mentioned of eating lunch at the dining room, 7 percent said they eat in the sitting area while 5 percent said they eat in their respective rooms. 81 percent of the respondents said they eat dinner at the dining table while 11 percent of them mentioned that they prefer eating at the sitting area, 8 percent said that dinner is consumed in individual rooms.

The dining table marks a space of food sharing and integration on the one hand and segregation and stratification on the other. It can also build upon politics of food. Middle and upper class households demarcate spaces for dining of family members and workers or maids of the household respectively. The dining table is definitely not the space for them which act as a form of segregation for those who are seen to fall outside the class hierarchy. The domestic helps are provided food on the kitchen floor and never at the table. Eating on the floor or ground in this respect demonstrates the difference in social levels of the workers vis-a-vis other family members. While such practices are a common sight in Hindu households of the middle class, some Bengali Christians and Muslim families have made the exception as the rule. In one of the Christian households, the aged respondent spoke about sharing meals at the same table with her domestic helps. For her it is her religion that preaches to treat all individuals as equal which she wilfully practices. However such benevolent acts are exceptions to the rule. It is unnatural for the middle class to share such social spaces with the mass of ordinary lower class people.

Among the **urban poor** meals are mostly consumed at home. This is because most of the slum dwellers work closer to the slums and can easily get back home for a quick meal. Some households have reported of men eating food at workplace. Packed lunch taken from home is not much prevalent among the slum people. According to the women who are non-working:

“Our men usually come back home for lunch after which they leave for work again. This is because their workplace is close by. We don’t have enough money to spend on outside food along with household food so it is not affordable to buy and eat food at workplace”.

Few slum dwellers also work on a part time basis as daily wage labour. In such cases either they leave very early for work and come back home by mid day or they leave for work later in the day. In almost every hutment in the slum there are one or two dependent members, the children, the aged or the unemployed who stay back at home. The urban poor serve and eat food on the floor of their one or two room huts. Some of the slum houses comprise of one or two rooms. Most of the families reside in one room huts occupied by four or five members or more. The one room hutments usually have a concrete slab made out of cement adjacent to the wall. This functions as the bed for the family. The space beneath the concrete bed functions as the kitchen. Food is eaten on the little floor space that is left. Some houses with two small rooms have a small balcony which functions as the food area. People eat food on the balcony. On the whole the rooms in the slums are so small and tiny that one has to do with just little space left for lying, sitting or eating on the same floor. The dining table is not a common sight in slum dwellings though it is not obscure as well. Some wealthy households who are also the landlords of the huts own small cheap dining table and chairs. These groups of people fall in between the lower class and the middle class respectively. However they share the middle class identity. While the urban poor are delimited to sit on the floor and eat, options for eating places are varied among the upper classes. For instance many middle class households reported of eating food in the sitting area, on the floor or in individual rooms often on the bed. Among the slum dwellers the food area is shared by all the family members alike.

Place of eating meals are significant symbols of socialization and integration within the family. As Simmel (1910) pointed out even though individuals eat their own food, the facts the meals are consumed together in a particular place ensure socialising of individuals. In contemporary society socialising at meal in everyday life is giving way to individualised eating while meal times are no longer events when the whole family assembles together. Besides what you eat, how you eat and the way you eat all are projections of a person’s social status. The difference in the way of eating meals, sitting at the table or on the floor, the way foods are spread out all create differences between the middle class and the urban poor.

5.2.5. FOOD SHARING

Food sharing is an important aspect of commensality. Simmel advanced that “people cannot actually share food- what one person has eaten another cannot” (Pollock 2002: 2). Commensality is a much needed practice to ensure ‘socialization of the meal’. Sharing here implies the presence of all the household members when consuming meals at a particular space within the household. This practice of sharing food with family members is becoming an occasional practice in contemporary middle class domestics. One of the middle class respondents reminisced about meal sharing process in her paternal home which happened to be a joint family:

“Earlier at our place meals were eaten together by all the family members. At times there were two or three batches of people who would sit together for meals, be it breakfast, lunch or dinner. The first batch comprised of children and men while the second batch was always of the women (mothers and aunts). Now such customs have changed”.

Another working woman spoke about her joint family of in laws and their food sharing customs. She reflected:

“Soon after my marriage we all lived together in the boro bari (big house) consisting of twenty to twenty five people. We would all sit together in a linear fashion to eat food. Usually the men and children were the first to eat followed by women. At times women would sit to eat after putting all the vessels and bowls of food in front which used to be passed down. There was also constant influx of relatives coming from desh (villages) and sharing food with us”.

This indicates a big change in food sharing and ‘eating together’ norms. Families today share very few meals together. Sharing of family meals varies from breakfast to lunch and dinner. While most of the households share breakfast meal only on weekends and holidays or occasionally, dinner is consumed more often together by the middle class respondents. Lunch is hardly consumed together since all the family members are seldom available for lunch throughout the week. It is mostly on weekends and holidays that people can sit together for their afternoon meal. For working couples food pattern on weekdays differ from that of weekends. Weekends then indicate consumption of special foods. These foods are regular foods that can’t be consumed throughout the week. A young woman responds:

“We eat good food on Sundays or weekends. Good food means teto (bitter vegetables), more vegetables than usual working days like mocha, good fish etc”.

People have specified of eating more on weekends than on weekdays. In some households with all members working, lunch is hardly eaten at home while dinner consists of an elaborate spread. Food sharing also implies the place of eating as mentioned a prior. Sharing of meals by sitting on the ground is customary and a tradition of every Bengali household irrespective of religion, class and caste. For some Hindu middle class households, eating meals on the floor is still a regular practice. Among the Muslims sitting on the floor and eating meals by co sharing brings *sunnat* (in this case good custom) and hence is preferred. According to a young Muslim woman:

“In our family sitting on the floor and eating food is preferred and perceived as a good omen mostly during festivals. It brings sunnat, though modern living trends have obliterated such practices in everyday life”.

Sharing of food also implies serving and consuming food from the same bowl or vessel. Among the *Shia* Muslims for instance there is the practice of eating food from the same plate by all. This increases ‘we- feeling’ and fraternal sentiments within the group. Sunni Muslims are not so rigid about such practices though. On the other hand among Bengali Hindus the tradition of eating food from the same plate is prohibited and denigrated as polluting (*ento*).

In modern everyday life such traditions are difficult to maintain all the time. Hence respondents across the middle class spoke about their food sharing experiences keeping in mind their work schedules, lifestyle and other cultural influences.

Table- 39 Family sits together for breakfast in middle class households:

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Everyday	14	14.0
Only on weekends or holidays	36	36.0
Sometimes	35	35.0
Never	12	12.0
Not applicable	03	3.0
Total	100	100.0

Source: Self

Note: The above table shows that 14 percent of the respondents stated that their family sits together for breakfast every day, 36 percent of the respondents stated that they sit together for breakfast only on weekends and holidays, 35 percent of the respondents stated that they sometimes sit together for breakfast while 12 percent of the respondents said that they never sit together for breakfast. 3 percent of the respondents belong to single person households.

Table- 40. Family sits together for dinner in middle class households

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	63	63.0
No	22	22.0
Occasionally	07	7.0
Rarely	05	5.0
Not applicable	03	3.0
Total	100	100.0

Source: Self

Note: The above table shows that 75 percent of the respondents stated that dinner is consumed together with the whole family among which 63 percent said that it happens every day while 7 percent said that they eat dinner occasionally and 5 percent said that they eat dinner together rarely. 22 percent of the respondents stated that dinner is never consumed together with the whole family. For 3 percent of the respondents it is not applicable since they are single person households. Dinner is the only meal that individuals try to share among themselves. Here sharing indicates sitting together for a meal. However in most cases individual choices are inflicted in the type of food consumed during a dinner meal among the family members. In some cases householders often sit in different places at the same time to eat their food. For instance some might prefer to eat in the living room while others at the dining table. Hence even if the time of eating meals is shared, the space for eating is not shared.

In **lower class** households, respondents proclaim that everyday meals are shared among the family members. However the respondents clarified that people sit to eat as per their preference. Children and adults usually eat separately if the family is large. In case of small families meals are consumed together. Most of the household members in urban poor households go out to work. Those who stay back at home eat their own food at their own convenience. Breakfast is hardly consumed by every family member alike. At times it is only the children who eat breakfast while women and men refrain from a hearty morning meal by adjusting with a cup of tea. Some households share *panta* (a special form of rice smeared with water and kept overnight) as a morning meal before leaving for work. In such cases all the household members sit and eat *panta* together. This indicates that consumption of rice is a shared affair among households.

The women who work as domestic helps at times drinks only a cup of tea and some light snack in upper class homes. Lunch is cooked and kept for everyone at home. People in lower class households eat lunch at different times. Children come back from school, work or play at different hours and eat their own meals. Women eat at different times while men at times serve themselves on their own. The lower class people usually prefer eating food at home. Even at work they mostly prefer coming back home for lunch since most of the slum dwellers find work closer to the slums. They mostly work in unorganised services which grow up in the surrounding areas of the slums. Meals are shared among family members at night. While in many households children eat prior to the parents and older residents, women wait for their husbands to return from work till they can sit and eat food together. Unlike middle class households where the kitchen and dining area are separated, in the small huts of slums, the cooking area shares the same space as the dining area. However watching TV while dining is a common habit shared among both the middle class and the slum dwellers respectively. The women respondents mainly specified about watching their favourite TV programmes while eating food at night. While the children eat first, the adult members eat late in the night after everyone comes back home from work.

Some amount of food sharing takes place between and across households as well. Such practices are found widely in a society. The usual practice of food exchange is limited to ones social circle in terms of class, caste and religion. Besides special foods or foods on festivals, there is a trend of exchanging everyday food between middle class domestics be it relatives, friends or even neighbours. This exaggerates community bonding between the people in society.

A middle class respondent observed:

“My mama’r bari (maternal uncle’s home) is very close to our place. We eat some of our meals like evening snacks there which is visited almost every day. There is also exchange of cooked food between the households”.

Food is exchanged among different religious groups as well. Families have specified such give and take relationship through food among neighbours with different religious identities. A Muslim respondent noted how her Christian neighbour would send cakes for Christmas every year. A Hindu respondent often take notes of *Mughlai* cuisines from her Muslim friend. Similar instances were shared by other respondents who exchanged foods regularly across households quite often. Food sharing is a common practice across the middle class and lower

class as well. Mitali a middle class home maker spoke about her maid who brings her food stuffs from home. She once said:

“My household help gets me kochur loti⁴⁴ (Taro stems) from their village when she goes home. She also steams it for me. Kochur loti is a laborious job so when it is only when she gets it for me I cook it at home”.

People gather that more the exposure more is the breakdown of traditional food practices, discrimination and segregation.

Among the **lower class** of slum dwellers such food sharing is a common practice. For the slum people neighbours are more like extended *kins* due to closer proximity of the people. Slum people are found to share almost every aspect of their lives together unlike the middle class. Each and every slum therefore forms a community of its own. Women in the slums have observed that such food sharing practices are common between the neighbouring households within the corridors of the slums. The Bengali Hindus and Muslims often exchange cooking practices or even get to taste the food of the other. The Bengali Muslims also share the cooking process of non-Bengali Bihari Muslims residing in the slums whose food habits are synonymous to the *Moghal* cooking style.

Food sharing is a process which secures the community bonding between people. Within the household food sharing fosters co habitation, strengthens relationships and mutual love and affection. Nevertheless the fact that food sharing process are undergoing changes among the middle class emphasise on a more individualistic approach to eating food. This is in contradiction to the whole notion of commensality. Food sharing becomes time specific and more profound in case of special foods while everyday foods are becoming an individual affair within households. Food sharing is more common among the lower class groups compared to the upper middle class. Lack of time devoted to eating and cooking are often stated as causes for decrease in sharing of everyday meals among the Bengali middle class. Even the type of food eaten is less elaborate and more individualistic.

⁴⁴ *Kochur loti* also known as Taro stems is a popular Bengali vegetable traditionally of East Bengal

5.3 FOOD: RITES AND RITUALS

Everyday food is a ritual. In every society and culture food habits are endowed with religious practices, rites and rituals which regulate the everyday life of the people. Anthropologists have always been interested in food studies and have associated everyday food with rituals and rites of passages. “Because of its centrality in our lives, food becomes a perfect vehicle for ritual, and food rituals become central to most religions; food taboos mark of one religious sect or denomination from another” (Fox, R 2003: 18-19). Classical sociologists like Emile Durkheim also looked upon the social significance of food in terms of rituals and religious practices considering which foods are sacred and which are profane but never considered it as a social fact. Durkheim limited food to its mere biological necessities. However rituals related to food practices have always featured among anthropologists pursuing food studies in traditional and primitive cultures (Douglas, 1972; Harris, 1997 Khare, 1976; Appadurai, 1981). Traditionally Bengali food culture is ingrained within various rituals and practices revolving around everyday life. Not much is said about the prevalence and observance of traditional rituals and rites with respect to food habits in modern urban societies. This section tries to locate the observance of such rituals, norms, beliefs and practices associated with everyday food in contemporary society across both the middle class and the lower class respectively. Rituals and rites associated with food revolve around certain social customs, religious practices, concept of forbidden or tabooed foods and fasting.

5.3.1. FOOD AND SOCIAL CUSTOMS: BENGALI ACHAAR-BICHAAR

Traditional Bengali society was enmeshed with several customs related to cooking, eating and sharing food. While some of these customs, also known as *achaar-bichaar* in the Bengali dialect still prevail, many or rather most of them are obliterate from everyday life of contemporary middle class and urban poor households. Customs are ritualistic. They speak about the mundane repetitive life. The primary social custom related to cooking that prevails in almost every Bengali household is the ritual of cleanliness. Cleanliness with respect to food is viewed in two respects- one is the modern scientific hygiene of food preparation and the other is the traditional Bengali concept of purity and pollution or *ento*.

In middle class households food preparation is followed by the ritual of cleaning the dirt or the *ento*. Here the two words, ‘dirt’ and ‘ento’ have two social implications. As observed by Shubhendra Bhowmick (2012), dirt is something which needs to be cleaned or removed with

the aid of some scientific mechanisms, for instance use of a chemical. Dirt is specific to the physical or 'body corporeal'. On the other hand the concept of ento, typical of Bengalis is connected to the concept of social purity and pollution. Ento is a ritually impure condition. Bengalis are very particular about both dirt removal and the ritual of ento. Food before cooking should go through a rigorous process of cleaning in every middle class household, be it vegetables, especially the shak (green leafy vegetables) or fish and meat. Such cleaning tasks are bestowed upon the cooks, household maids or the mistress of the house. In some households cleaning the fish, removing the scales and washing the meat under running water might be done by the men as a helping hand. Besides there is also the ritual of cleaning the rice grains and pulses to remove any kind of dust, dirt or stones from it before cooking is accomplished. In middle class households, domestic helps are often assigned the task of cleaning with special instructions from the mistress. Many of the women even commend the cook's cleaning ability. In such cases cleaning is performed by the woman herself.

Once food is cooked, the kitchen needs to be cleaned. In this case the process entails two things- one is the removal of physical dirt, oil, grit, stains, spilled over foods on the gas burner etc while the other is removal of ento or shogri from the kitchen or making it ritually pure. For the Bengalis cooked food is considered ento (ritually impure) and one needs to wash his/her hands, feet, clothes after cooking. Traditionally across all classes, Bengali women would take a bath first before entering the kitchen and prior to cooking food. After food is prepared and the kitchen cleaned another ritual of bathing followed. I have seen this in my childhood days when my grandmother would do the same before preparing food in her kitchen. But the custom never prevailed with my mother who chose to physically clean herself through bathing once the unclean job of cooking was done.

Earlier household maids would clean the utensils like handi and kadai with chai (ash) which they often bought with them collected from their own unun (traditional hearth). In modern middle class domestics, such customs have given way to modern mechanisms of cleaning. The market today provides innumerable options of soaps and detergents, utensil bar soaps along with steel wool and scotch brites for cleaning and scrubbing the kitchen and its utensils. Modern technology like the dishwasher is also availed by some households though it is yet to gain popularity among the Bengali middle class. Modern kitchen utensils made of ceramic, fibres, anodised coated, non sticks requires delicate scrubbing and cleaning to ensure its longevity. Some middle class homemakers have stated how glass wares and expensive crockery are washed by themselves instead of handing them to the maids who wouldnt know

how to handle them. The domestic helps who belong to the lower strata of people are considered low in status and culture than the middle class who lack aesthetic sense and 'worth of things'. In middle class homes, the food area including the place of eating food is considered polluted or *ento* if touched by cooked food. Even the rice bowl symbolises *ento* or impurity, touching which results in washing ones hands immediately. All those area which is touched by cooked food or cooked food platter needs to be cleaned immediately after eating is over. While such practices are customary and ritualistic among the middle class, modern men and women perceive them as acts of hygiene and cleanliness. Bhowmick (2012) discerned the economic condition is the primary factor of cleanliness especially among the middle class. This distinguishes the middle class from the urban poor. The chic modern middle class kitchen offers a cleaner picture with new kitchen technologies and equipments like the kitchen chimney, exhaust fan, well fashioned tiled walls, cabinets and sink (Bhowmick, 2012: 47). Bhowmick notes that the *ento* or ritual impurity prevalent in Bengali community is equivalent to the notion of purity and pollution of the caste system (ibid:48).

Cleaning the 'dirt' is the job of the domestic help in most cases or the cook. In some households the cook performs the cooking and leaves while the *thike* (part time maid) does the cleaning part. These maids are from the lower rungs of society, at times the lower caste groups as well. In contemporary middle class households the domestic helps are segregated from the rest of the family members but are not discriminated. Neither are they considered polluting. This is probably so because the modern kitchen is not perceived as a polluted or dirty space anymore under the guise of modern designs and technology.

The concept of *ento* or a condition of ritual impurity is deeply embedded in the Bengali food culture. Traditionally people taking food from the same spoon or ladle as others and touching it with his/her own mouth is considered *ento* and highly polluting, especially among the Hindus. Such customs are also undergoing changes among the youth and forces of modernization and westernization. However among the Muslims sharing food from the same vessel or spoon and mouth touch isn't considered polluting. More so the concept of *ento* prevails among the Hindu Bengalis compared to the Bengali Muslims and Christians. The Bengali Muslims and Christians differentiate themselves from their Hindu counterparts in terms of '*choya-chuyi*' or the concept of touch. A Muslim women observed:

“We are not like the Hindus. We don't have any issues of *choya-chuyi* as observed by the Hindus”.

Similar beliefs were shared by Bengali Christians who also perceived that Hindus are more discriminatory when it comes to food while Christians are customarily more egalitarian. There is an inherent urge among the people to fall back on their primordial identities while mentioning their food habits even though there is an effort to accommodate themselves within the larger ethnic identity of a Bengali. While or sharing of touched food, i.e. food contaminated by contact with another person indicates greater closeness in personal relationships (Fischler, C 2011: 533), such practices might result in conflict or refrainment from food and drinks among the Hindus.

Among the lower class or the urban poor the notion of *ento* persists similar to that of the middle class. The lower class people are often denigrated by the middle and upper classes for being dirty and filthy. The slum dwellers are viewed as people living amidst filth and squalor. In the eyes of the middle class the untidy, dirty shacks or huts located in the slums are unhygienic spaces. Besides the urban poor are unable to maintain good hygiene and cleanliness due to their lack of knowledge and information on cleanliness. Slum dwellers also lack water facility. Water taps are shared and in most cases water is filled in buckets beforehand which are then used for cooking and cleaning. Hence it is difficult for them to maintain hygiene and cleanliness like the middle class. However ritual purity is always observed among all sections of society more so due to the process of *sanskritisation*. *Sanskritisation* as specified by M.N Srinivas is a process by which the lower caste groups imitate the lifestyle, culture and values of the upper castes in order to move up the social hierarchy. Such attempts are also made by the urban poor or the lower middle class. Imitation is always a way of life among the lower sections of society to seek upward mobility. In some slum households among the better income categories I have witnessed similarly designed kitchen or kitchen spaces compared to the middle class. In some households the kitchen walls were tiled while the walls held utensil racks made of stainless steel. LPG gas and burner are used by these households who held position of affluence among the slum dwellers. On the other hand there are households who still cook in the traditional *unun* or stove in which case maintaining cleanliness and dirt free space becomes a difficult job.

Daily rituals of cleaning and the way hygiene is perceived differentiates the middle class from the urban poor. The concept of hygiene is a modern one as opposed to ritual cleaning. One has to keep in mind that the urban poor lack basic education and knowledge unlike the middle class and this gets reflected in their ideas about cleaning and washing. The lower class people would spend much less capital on cleaning products unlike the middle class because it

is not their priority. For the new rising middle class, a good looking modern, well designed, clean, airy and hygienic kitchen is something which one aspires for as it becomes the face of ones status position in society. “Even though the hygienic consciousness of a modernist revolves primarily around the wellbeing of the corporeal body of some individual person or the physical environment s/he inhabits, her/his notions of dirt or cleanliness are still somewhat intertwined with respective class and/or respective status position...” (Bhowmick 2012: 56). The way hygiene and cleanliness is perceived varies not only across class and religious groups but also across individual households.

5.3.2 FOOD TABOOS AND FOOD AVOIDANCE

Every society maintains certain foods as taboos which are prohibited or forbidden from consuming. They are human universals that prescribe certain foods fit for consumption while others are restricted or prohibited. Food taboos and restricted foods differ across cultures and have several religious, social and cultural underpinnings. Food taboos and restrictions often go unexplained because they are deeply embedded within the system and go unquestioned. They form the fundamental part of the system (Douglas M, 1966)⁴⁵. Forbidden foods account for several reasons. In most cases it is any form of meat or fish that is forbidden for consumption like the pork and beef. At times forbidden foods have religious proscriptions although the reason might be ecological factors (Hariss, M 1997).

The middle class and lower class Bengalis often do not account for the food and dietary avoidance or taboos that prevail in their everyday life. The respondents when asked about food prohibitions could not find any foods that are prohibited from consuming within their domestics. A woman who was asked about social rules and rituals related to food habits stated:

“Earlier Brahmins were not allowed to touch chicken but could eat mutton. Vegetables like lau (bottle gourd) had to cut first by the men of the house but now such customs are no longer followed”.

Food taboos are symbolic of predominant social and cultural values. Religion prescribes and proscribes certain practices related to food and eating which impacts ones food choices and eating habits. Even in contemporary society where the effects of caste and class are found to be dwindling in certain spheres, religion gets manifested everywhere especially in case of food in everyday life. In Bengali middle class households the impact of religion can be felt

⁴⁵ Mary Douglas (ed.), 1972, Man, Myth and Magic, Vol 20, pp-2767-71

most on forbidden foods or taboos. In Hindu households there was a time when consumption of chicken was a taboo and totally forbidden while no such restrictions prevailed in case of mutton or goats meat. This is because chicken was mostly introduced by the British.

Beef consumption is prohibited among the Hindus all over India. The cow is perceived as the Holy animal among the Hindus and the reason behind beef taboo is a reverence for the animal. In the course of modernity chicken became one of the majorly consumed convenience food in almost every middle class household. While mutton is consumed occasionally, chicken meat forms an indelible part of the middle class diet. No other meat features within household consumption of the middle class. Some respondents mention lack of availability of other types of meats in the market as a primary cause. Beef is considered a forbidden food unanimously by large sections of the Hindu middle class. But some exceptions to the rule mention of having no problem with consuming beef, though none specify cooking beef in the domestic hearth. Even in Bengali Christian and Muslim families with comprising of Hindu family members, beef is restricted from consumption within the household but can be eaten outside home.

Another interesting finding show that while women are forbidden from eating several meat products in and outside homes, it is mostly the men who try different kinds of forbidden foods outside home but never in the household. Women are always looked upon as the one upholding the family tradition and culture and hence needs to bear with several impositions. The middle class is a differential mass of people. There is segmentation in every sphere. The newly aspiring middle class, the secularists and areligious do not believe in such customs. Several respondents observed that they have no qualms in tasting forbidden foods like beef irrespective of religion. This shows the liberal attitude of Bengalis about food compared to other ethnic groups.

Similar to the Hindus, the Bengali Muslims also are ruled by their religious laws and dietary precriptions. Pork meat is prohibited for the Muslims to which they comply judiciously. Muslims also need to halal their meat before eating. Muslims all over the world are guided by the Quran about their dietary practices. In reference to Islam halal is an Arabic word meaning lawful or permitted or that what is permitted and allowed by the law giver (Allah) and haram means that unlawful or prohibited (Bonne and Verbeke 2008: 4). It includes beasts or prey and other specific animals. Consuming alcohol is also forbidden among the Muslims since it falls within the category of haram. "Halal foods are those where the animals must be

slaughtered in a specified way. For larger animals this includes cutting the throat quickly with a sharp knife so that the animals suffer minimally and as much blood comes out of the body as possible, saying 'In the name of God, the merciful, the compassionate', as the animal is killed and pointing the animals head towards Mecca. Halal is administered to any food substance which may include meat derivatives or even lard or alcohol" (Shepard, W.E 2009: 116-117). While food prohibition or taboos are seen as baseless or irrational among modernists and secularists, the concept of halal is certified as scientific. As Shepard (2009) observed, technology and trade in the International circle has made halal food a huge industry. Today halal food is advertised and marked everywhere including supermarkets. Muslim respondents in my study often went to the extent of stating that apart from being a religious dictum, halal is also rational and scientific. Needless to say it makes the food tasty. A Muslim woman mentioned:

"We never eat non-halal foods. we have specific shops which sell halal meat. even our non-Muslim friends, especially the Hindus ask us about halal meat and say it makes the meat more tasty. Even they consume halal meat".

Among the Hindus certain beliefs and practices like *shuchi-ashuchi*, *choya-chuyi*, pure and impure are attuned to the Hindu philosophy of life. One major difference lies between vegetarian and non vegetarian foods. In several households of the middle class, especially among the Brahmins vegetarian foods are separately cooked and kept aside to avoid contamination with the non vegetarian foods. Certain foods like onion, ginger and garlic are considered non-vegetarian by the Hindus and are usually kept aside from other vegetables. Some Hindu families of north Kolkata also mentioned of having separate places for cooked vegetarian dishes and non vegetarian foods. Implicit in the devotion to vegetarianism is the idea of clean and unclean foods. Meat becomes the ultimate unclean food though the list of unclean foods drawn up by different people in different periods will include many vegetable items too. There was a time when onion and garlic was fit food only for the lower castes and not the twice-borns. Even today there are many people who consider garlic unclean" (Siddiqui, Mohammad Asim, 2011: 23). However the refrigerator is a space where contamination of food is unavoidable. Most families are prohibited to eat non vegetarian foods on selective days of the week. Fishes of several kinds are not acceptable as a diet among many households. Among the Brahmins for instance, consuming fish without scales are a taboo. Fishes like *shol*, *magur*, *tangra* are forbidden among many households. Some of the lower caste groups also follow such prohibitions as a process of *Sanskritisation*. For the

modern educated middle class it is the personal choice and preference that allow or disallow a person to eat certain fish and exclude others. There are specific days on which certain foods are prohibited for consumption and cooking. *Begun pora* (roasted eggplant) is avoided on certain days of the week like Mondays, Wednesdays or Thursdays. Mocha (banana blossom) a delicacy of Bengali cuisine is forbidden to be consumed on specific days of the week. Anything roasted (*pora* or *shenka*) which is not cooked in oil or water is avoided even on the birth days of the male child. These rituals are strictly observed among Hindu women of all social classes as a tradition.

In many Hindu families across all regions and caste groups, rituals revolve around foods like rice and fish besides others. Several of my respondents mentioned about the practice of leaving little amount of rice grain in the container while taking out the rest in the vessel to be cooked. This custom ensures the presence of Goddess *Lakshmi* in the household or the hearth and symbolises self-sufficiency and affluence. The same ritual is practiced across different regional and caste groups with slight variations. For some the ritual will be observed thrice consequently while for others it is practiced only once. Some of the educated middle class try to rationalise traditional rituals. A young woman in her twenties feels that such customs, though religion bound has some rationality. She stated:

“I feel the custom of leaving little rice grains back in the same container or a different container indicates that in times of crisis you will have some food in store. Besides one can be prepared beforehand in case the rice finishes”.

In some families one is forbidden to eat meals wearing *basi* (impure) clothes⁴⁶. For the younger generation such rituals and customs are perfunctory. Some feel these lack rationality and are archaic customs built in superstitions. Nevertheless the customs are performed as per people’s convenience as a ritual.

Bengali Christians claim that Christianity is an egalitarian religion which offers no discrimination. Christians are neither forbidden to eat any kinds of food, vegetables, fish and meat. Interestingly some of the customs that prevail among the Hindus are also performed among the converted Christians of Kolkata. Almost every Christian family I interviewed had inter-religious marriage with a Hindu. In such cases Hindu rituals are performed with respect

⁴⁶ *Basi* is a Bengali word which denotes something as impure or stale. Generally foods or clothes worn overnight are considered *basi*, the next morning. It is advisable for people to wear fresh clothes after bath in order to ritually purify oneself before cooking or eating food.

to food habits in Christian households. A Christian woman originally from Bangladesh mention:

“I perform the Hindu ritual of keeping aside little grains of rice in a pot while taking out some for cooking. This is called ‘Lakshmi Sree’⁴⁷”.

According to her these practices have prevailed in her family over the years and have been inherited by her through socialization. It is found that people belonging to the same *desh* (homeland) often perform similar rituals as their neighbours irrespective of religious differences. This calls for a cultural exchange of rituals which binds the community together.

Among the **lower class** food taboos and rituals followed are similar to the middle class groups. While some god fearing rituals are followed taboos and stigma attached to foods are found to be less. The lower class Hindus find consumption of beef a taboo similar to the higher classes. Among the Muslims consuming *halal* meat is the norm while *haram* foods are forbidden. On the whole the urban poor eat a lot more variety of fishes and meats compared to the middle class. There is a difference between the way the middle class perceive eating practices and rituals of lower class or the poor in society. The urban poor are found to eat all kinds of vegetables, fish and meat which are shunned by the middle class. Consumption of fish scales, goat head, kidney and other parts which are disposed off by the middle class also form a part of the lower class diet. The lower classes are perceived to consume impure foods by the middle class.

While prohibitions and forbidden foods are perceived to have religious implications, contemporary middle class households put a lot of emphasis on personal taste and preference for restricting certain foods (fish, meat and vegetables) in the household. However among some middle class and high caste people, household is an arena pertaining to purity and hence religious or ritualistic restrictions are followed in case of domestic foods. The same restrictions of prohibitions hold less or no significance in case of outside food. For instance a middle class Brahmin man commented that being a Brahmin consumption of pork or beef or any other kind of meat in the household is forbidden however fluidity exists in case of food consumed in the public sphere. Food taboos are much less significant in present day when multi-cuisine and multi dining in plush restaurants offer wider choices to consumers which help to break superstitious beliefs and prohibitions.

⁴⁷ *Lakshmi Sree* is a cultural expression in Bengali which indicates good and wellbeing. It is associated with Goddess *Lakshmi* who is considered as an embodiment of supreme being endowed with wealth and prosperity

The younger generation are more exposed to continental foods and international food culture which enables them to cross the threshold of food taboos easily. Modernisation and westernisation have changed the way people discern traditional rituals and customs with respect to food habits in everyday life. Nevertheless socialization plays an important role in binding people into such faiths and beliefs.

5.4 FOOD CHOICE AND TASTE PREFERENCE

What we eat or what we like to eat is predominantly taste oriented. Gastronomic taste is perceived as that quality of food that is assessed by ones sensory organs like tongue and nose. While scholars have always spoken about the physiology of taste relating it to ones mental disposition, sociologists have perceived taste as largely a social phenomenon. This becomes evident from Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* which makes it a learned and shared process of culture. Thus it becomes easier to predict why particular groups of people have similar gastronomic tastes. According to Stephen Mennell (1985) this innate characteristic of human beings to identify and differentiate food tastes can be traced to the primitive men.

In modern society the choice of what to eat might rest with the individual but it is determined by various social forces. Contemporary food habits are associated more with the lifestyle of the people be it the expanding middle class which is changing and transforming its gamut or the large intercepting mass of lower class whose lives continuously intertwine with the middle class. One of the areas which witnessed major changes is that of domestic eating habits. Household food habits and tastes are altering amidst modern ways of living, new forms of occupation and new work culture, changing family and household structures, changing roles, expanding urbanisation, education, media and technology. Along with learnt tastes, there are new acquired tastes that are entering the domain of household food. While such facets directly affect the variegated middle class in the country, the lower class or the mass of urban poor are not bereft of such influences either.

5.4.1. ROLE OF WOMEN AS DETERMINANTS OF TASTE

Across both the middle class and the urban poor women's role as food providers and food facilitators helps shape the taste buds and food choices of individuals. Every household portray different eating habits in terms of the way food is cooked, the necessary ingredients used and not used, the type of products bought home, distributed and served. All these activities are related to the woman who takes care of the household hearth. So our

preliminary taste buds are formed out of taste buds of our mothers. It is the woman who introduces a child to its first cultural food through weaning. Dietary choices are also influenced by women and their cooking to a large extent.

In middle class Bengali households a woman's role in the kitchen is optimal. It is she who decides what is to be cooked at home. Even though modern Bengali women spend less time in the kitchen, food is cooked according to her discretion solely. Women have reported of getting approval and noting the choice or preference of her family members while preparing every day meals. Nonetheless it is always the woman who makes the final choice. A young married woman when asked about her choice of cuisines at home remarked:

“My father's house is a Bangal while my in laws house is Ghoti. But again my mother in laws family was a Bangal. Usually taste depends on the person who cooks food and rules the kitchen. In that case my husband's taste developed like a Bangal because his mother was a Bangal. This helped me a lot because my eating habits are very similar to theirs. Similar taste preferences will help to sustain our relationship because food habits play a very important role in maintaining and sustaining conjugal relationships”.

This evidences that food choices are administered by matriarchal forces within the household. In Indian families it is a common sight for the mother in law to reprimand the young bride in preparing food. Many of the young married female respondents have been quoted saying that it is the mother in law who decides on the different meals that are to be consumed and cooked at home while decisions regarding other household chores are most often collectively shared. So the food taste of the woman becomes predominantly the food taste of the household. Young brides are therefore socialized into family cooking, bringing out the right taste of food and preference of family members by the mother in laws.

Another young newly married woman was asked about her food choices in her in laws house. She claimed:

“After marriage when I lay my hands in cooking I tried to recreate the taste that I am most familiar with, that is of my mother's cooking”.

Similar views were shared by other middle class women across all ages. Women have also been inspirational for imbibing the right taste of gastronomy within her family members essentially the children. A woman who is in her late yearly thirties stated:

“We don't make biriyani at home like other Muslims. My mother can't make biriyani. The reason is that the Bengalis of Murshidabad are more like Bangladeshis. Our

mother's para was also located in the Hindu anchal (area). So our food habit is not like the Moghul style. For instance our porota is a teen kona porota made with less oil”.

The same respondent stated:

“My boro mami (elder maternal aunt) is a north Indian Muslim so her cooking has a lot of meat products. We rather have a variety of fishes since my mother is a Bengali Muslim. We rather buy a big fish and use its oil (fat) to make something and the kanta (bones) to prepare some other dishes”.

The taste of the woman gains predominance in the construction of taste buds within the household. Even food advertisements cash on the concept of ‘*Ma ka hath ka khana*’ or ‘*Mayer hather ranna*’ while propagating a particular product.

Table- 41: Who decides on meals that are consumed in middle class households?

Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Woman of the house	66	66.0
Man of the house	03	3.0
Children of the house	01	1.0
Elderly	09	9.0
Collectively	20	20.0
Cook or maid	01	1.0
Total	100	100.0

Source: Self

Note: The above table reports on the percentage of categories of people who decide on everyday household meals in middle class households. The table shows that women are predominantly the main drivers of family meals which also help them establish the taste and food preference of the family members. 66 percent of the respondents reported of women as the main decision maker on choice of food for everyday meals. Only 3 percent of the respondents claimed men as deciding the family meals in their household while 1 percent of the respondents stated that children decide upon the family meals. 9 percent of the respondents claimed that it is the elderly men or women both who often takes decision

regarding family meals while another 1 percent stated that cooks or maids decide what meals are to be cooked and consumed. 20 percent of the respondents stated that decision on food cooked and consumed is often taken collectively among the family members. While food taste is controlled by the women, the amount required to spend on food items is controlled by the men or the main earning member of the household. An aged respondent confirms:

“Our son gives us the money and we purchase food accordingly. I decide on all food matters. I keep in mind the taste and preferences of my family members. I try to avoid outside food and cook everything at home”.

On the other hand some respondents have stated that women of the household have greater involvement in purchasing food products for the household. While earlier it was the men who visited the market and purchased fishes and vegetables of their choice which were then cooked by the women, in contemporary Bengali society roles are reversed. It is the women who either purchase food products on their own keeping in mind what is to be eaten or cooked or they provide a list of food substances that are to be bought for household consumption. Through manoeuvring of food choices women in Bengali middle class homes tries to establish ones identity of authority within the patriarchal set up. In a way there is an innate tendency to differentiate one from that of lower class women who lack both knowledge and efficiency of the middle class women to cultivate refined taste for her family. “The everyday activity of domestic food production is a creative site through which a middle class Indian Hindu woman makes choices, although not necessarily independent of meanings thrust upon her by society, which in turn defines the kind of producer and consumer she eventually turns out to be” (Devasahayam, T.W 2005: 4).

The lower class of **urban poor** are not very conscious about the taste of food and food choices. Similar to the middle class poor women have a larger contribution to everyday meals in the household catering to the needs and preferences of their family members. However in poor families ‘tastes’ don’t feature predominantly compared to other considerations like cost, consumption capacity, knowledge, availability and distribution of food within the household among others. Besides apart from women, men have an equally greater role in facilitating food for the family. The lower class are always seeking opportunity to earn. Most of the family members try to earn meagre amounts for the family which become important for survival. In such situations women often go out to work on a regular or occasional/ temporary basis leaving the kitchen in the hands of the men or even the children. Reproducing the desirable taste in food cooked and consumed is often not a great concern for the poor unlike

the middle class. The poor are concerned only about the food itself irrespective of its desirable taste.

The role of women in influencing the taste or choice of foods consumed within the household is more pronounced among the middle class compared to the urban poor. This is because middle class women have a greater knowledge and exposure to gastronomic culture along with the necessary resources to build taste which is absent in case of the poor women. Middle class women enjoy greater autonomy and power over the family members by undertaking decision making on everyday household food compared to poor women.

5.4.2. FOOD CHOICES, TASTE AND PRIMORDIAL IDENTITY

Gastronomic taste and preferences are shaped by one's allegiance to primordial groups like religion, caste, region and ethnicity. This facet of food habit makes it all the more complicated. Ashis Nandy (2002) noted that ethnic cuisines are always a marker of one's social status. Besides ethnic cuisines form an indelible part of household food. He mentioned that 'in Calcutta Bengalis have always sung the glories of Bengali food, but when it comes to eating outside the home in a restaurant, they choose some version of *Mughal* North Indian or less frequently European food' (Nandy, A 2002 : 247). Taking a departure from Nandy in his discourse on the growing popularity of 'ethnic cuisines' in eating out prospects, I find that ethnic cuisines are highly fragmented and the way they are perceived as identity formations differ among the middle class. In case of household food in particular cuisines of primordial groups like religion, caste and region hold enormous significance in the normal everyday life of individuals. It provides them with a kind of security and belongingness that helps in binding them to the group. In Bengali middle class households I found people glorifying themselves as 'Bengalis' as a part of the ethnic-linguistic group established through the quintessential 'rice-fish' combination of food or what is popularly known as '*Maache-Bhaate Bangali*'. This is analogous to the quintessential 'curry' which is identified as an Indian national cuisine worldwide (Narayan, 1997). Bengalis are also identified as a cohesive integrated ethnic group through their preference for sweets of all kinds. Bengalis are known for their sweet-tooth and sweets unite all sections of Bengali society irrespective of class, caste, region, religion etc. However an ethnic cuisine of a national status is made up of fragmented regional cultures.

In **middle class** Bengali homes these cultural differences are far more apparent than generalisation of Bengali cuisine. In this study, middle class respondents claimed that

preliminary taste of food is shaped by their families which again are a part of the larger cultural groups like religion, caste and regional specifications. A Muslim girl in her thirties was questioned about her cooking styles and taste preferences being different from the Bengali Hindus. According to her Bengali Hindus and Muslims do not share the same food taste and cooking methods. She advanced:

“We are very different from the ‘Bengalis’ because we are Muslims. Our cooking style is very different from yours (indicating to the interviewer). If we say our food habits are same it will be wrong. We don’t cook dal the way you do, neither have we eaten shukto and all such foods like the Hindus. We eat a lot of shak (greens) though but when I visit my Hindu friends for food I find a stark difference in taste”.

While some households prefer to differentiate themselves from the larger ethnic group there are others who are in an urge to reproduce their ethnic identity of being a Bengali. *Rowshan Kadir* is in her sixties. She was asked about the basic difference between Bengali Hindus and Muslim food when she answered that there is no difference in the taste of foods of Bengali Muslims and Hindus who share the same food habits. According to her the only difference between the two religious groups lies in the addition of meat to *dal* and vegetables which are typical of Muslims and not found among the Hindus. She also stated that differences in food habits result out of the place one resides in.

Regional differences are more significant in case of household food habits of Bengalis. Respondents have observed that variations in the choice of food for domestic consumption depend a lot on their regional identity. The *Bangals* (originally from Bangladesh) and *Ghotis* (originally from West Bengal) have their own idiosyncrasies when it comes to food choices. While *Bangals* are known for consuming hot spicy foods full of chillies, the *Ghotis* prefer to add more sweet flavour to their foods. The *shutki maach* (dried fish) is used to define a *Bangal* opposed to the *Ghoti* though not all *Bangals* prefer to eat *shutki*. A young girl in her twenties stated:

“Some of our neighbours are refugees from Bangladesh. Their food habit is very different from ours. They eat shutki maach pasted in raw form. They also eat peanut pasted and cooked in oil. They are from Kumilla gram in Bangladesh but are staying here for a long time. They eat a lot of spice in their food and make the gravy red by using a lot of chilli powder. I have tasted their food. It is very different from ours and I didn’t like it”.

Again, the indiscriminate use of poppy seeds in *Ghoti* cooking differentiates them from being a *Bangal* whereas the *Bangals* are known to use coconut more frequently compared to the

Ghotis. Food choices are not just about the process of cooking but also about the kind of fruit, vegetables, fish, meat consumed within the household. Even the popularity of sweet consumption among Bengalis has regional specifications. But the types of sweets consumed largely differ across region, religion and ethnicity. A Muslim respondent stated:

“We eat sweets after every meal. Sweets are generally bought from shops outside but they are also made at home. People from Murshidabad are very fond of sweets. Ma will make morabba or any other form of sweet because we love them at home. There is a mishti called Manohara which is very popular in Murshidabad. It is made of coconut coated with sugar. It is then dipped in sugar syrup”.

While ethnic cuisine features in regular household food, cuisines of other ethnic cultures are also entering the domestic sphere of Bengali middle class. Proximity with people of different ethnicities, religion, region and caste leads to greater flexibility of food choices. People living outside their homeland have greater exposure to other cultures which influences their choice of domestic cuisines. A young Muslim respondent for instance reasoned:

“Ma lived in Kerala for a long time. In the Navy quarters there were people of every region. Their bakery is very good there and people use a lot of coconut and chocolate in baking. In our building there is a community of people from different regions. Women often share cooked foods among themselves. So our food choices have been very flexible”.

Another woman in her mid thirties claimed:

“Since childhood we have been living in south India. So my food choices are shaped accordingly. I love curd⁴⁸ (yogurt) in my food even if I am having dal or fish curry to the utter dismay of my family members”.

While eating out has become preponderant in affecting domestic food, eating outside food at home has also gained momentum. On such occasions people prefer to eat cuisines of different cultures than one's own. Most of the middle class respondents stated that Bengali cuisine is not frequently parcelled or ordered for home consumption. This is because Bengali cuisine is mostly associated with 'normal', 'regular', and 'home cooked meals'. The whole discourse on food and taste is a complex one due to intermixing of groups and identities which again gets reflected majorly in food.

In case of the urban poor, primordial loyalties for cooking are stronger than the middle class. This is because the lower class people have less cultural exposure and cultural capital. They

⁴⁸ Curd is typical of south Indian cuisines

are more rooted to their habitat which shapes their food habits in turn. The lower class people have less influence of other cultures in their food habits. Regional specifications are far more among the lower class than the middle class who seem to have a greater exposure to different cultures and lifestyle that often blur such distinctions. The discourse of taste revolves around two things. One is the aesthetic of taste or gastronomy while the other is the need discourse (Gronow, Jukka: 2). Aesthetic of taste is more specific to the middle classes in society. For the urban poor food is more need based and doesn't depend on taste unlike the middle class. Unlike the middle layers of social strata, among the poor identity differences in terms of food habits are not so apparent. The slum dwellers were not very clear about the differences in cooking styles or food choices across different categories of Bengalis.

One of the slum women stated:

“In our slum there are people from different regional backgrounds. Everybody cooks their own food. There are Bihari and Hindusthani people staying with us but their food is different from ours”.

The slum dwellers maintain their own ethnic, regional and cultural groups within the slums even though there is fair amount of cultural exchange that takes place. Food sharing or commensality is restricted to ones ethnic or religious group.

Another woman from the *Manohar pukur* slums stated:

“There are all kinds of people staying in the slums. We share cooked food among ourselves. However the Brahmins exclude themselves from the group and nobody shares their food”.

This was the first instance of caste in relation to food that came up in the course of the fieldwork. The Bengali Muslims sharing the same neighbourhood with their Hindu counterparts in the slums also stated that their eating habits are similar to the majority of Hindus. Consumption of beef is also rare among the slum Muslims of *Kasba Bosepukur* due to lack of availability in the area. On the whole people love to identify their food habits with their primordial identities which get much reflected in everyday household food. Food is one big medium which helps one to connect with ones group or community.

5.4.3. TIME, PACKAGED FOOD AND HOME DELIVERY

In middle class Bengali homes food choices are influenced by time devoted to purchasing cooking, serving and eating. In other words how much time a person devotes to cooking food in the kitchen influences the choice of food in everyday meals. For instance in many middle

class families preparing traditional cuisines which are laborious and time consuming have become a passé. People especially women who are bestowed solely with the task of the most vital of all domestic chores, ie, cooking are found to spend less and less time in the kitchen preparing food. Besides people also expend far less time in eating and prefer to eat small portions of food with less variety. Hence time factor becomes an important component for the choice of foods, type of food products, kind of food preparation etc. Consequences of limiting time meted out to food preparation are twofold- one is the exorbitant use of packaged foods prevalent in the market and accessible to all class categories in society and the other is the rise of home delivered foods and restaurants serving authentic Bengali cuisine. Packaged foods are also known as convenience foods. There are several definitions of convenience food. Charles and Kerr (1988) defined convenience food as ‘any food which has had work performed on it outside the home [...] can be regarded as convenience foods, which refers to the basic fact that convenience food make life easier, not just for those preparing a meal, but also for those eating it (united by place, time or company) (Schollier, P 2015:4). Brunner et al. (2010) define convenience food products “as those that help consumers minimize time as well as physical and mental effort required for food preparation, consumption and clean-up”. Emphasis is not only put on time and physical efforts but also on mental worries (ie encumbering question “what will we eat today?”) (ibid). There are different forms of packaged foods that enter Bengali households in recent years, although almost every food products are packaged and branded these days starting from biscuits, spices, sauce, jams and jellies, butter, cheese, powder milk, yogurts, all kinds of finger foods, frozen foods, chips, wafers, *chanachur* (a kind of Bengali snack), soups, noodles, pastas and the list goes on. There are ready to cook food products displayed well in supermarkets. Choices for the consumers are endless. The market providing myriad choices is an important force in making food choices. Packaged foods or ready to eat foods are regularly bought for household consumption. Sausages, frozen *aloo tikkis* (smashed potatoes turned into round shape and shallow fried in oil), nuggets and frozen peas are some common packaged foods that are bought home. Besides cooking oil, wheat, flour, *besan* (gram flour) and other ingredients are also found largely in packaged form. Since the 1990s diet of ordinary middle class people started changing with the advent of processed and packaged foods like pasta, frozen pizzas, tomato products and frozen chicken products. Although Bengali food with rice as its centre remained staple western and non vegetarian items suddenly began to figure on weekly shopping lists testimony to the transformation taking place in the way middle class residents ate (Donner, H 2008: 155).

These products are launched through advertisements transmitted through the media and target especially the large diverse middle class. The middle class is an ambiguous class category which is also India's major consuming class. So while the market actually targets the middle class buyers, products types like sachets, small packets of lesser price and discounted rates make an effort to include the wider mass of people including those who directly don't fall into the middle group. This section of people often occupies the lower rungs of the middle income group known as the lower middle class. Several of the slum dwellers in Kolkata fall within the lower middle class category. Such dietary practices limit the widening gap between classes.

Packaged foods have changed the process of cooking in Bengali households. For instance Bengalis are known to make a paste of all spices on the *shil nora* (a traditional Bengali kitchen tool) before adding it to the oil for cooking. This is popularly known as *bata moshla* and is said to enhance the taste of food. In contemporary society there has been a shift from traditional *bata moshla* (pastes) to *guro moshla* (powder) which is evidence of such changing choice of food. *Bata moshla* is time consuming and expends more energy where as *guro moshla* bought in packaged forms are much easier and convenient. Other packaged items in the form of convenience foods are thronging the markets both fresh markets and supermarkets tapping on the needs of the busy time bound urban woman. Packaged foods like French fries and fish fingers are always kept at home to save time. These are convenient foods. A fifty years old respondent stated:

“Personally I don't like to buy packaged food or ready to cook/eat food products. Fresh food is cooked regularly at my place. Packaged foods are more useful for bachelors and young people who have no time to cook. My son-in-law before marriage would bring tinned food because they don't have the time to cook”.

Packaged ready to eat foods are of great convenience in middle class homes because they can be easily prepared by the men and children sparing women some time for work and leisure. Media and advertisements are ready to promote new packaged food products falling under the category of convenience foods. One of the respondents commented on TV ads by stating:

“I buy a lot of packaged food products at home. When people are not there at home I buy and eat pork sausages defying the norms of the household. I feel packaged food has a toll on household cooking because it hampers health and is easy to cook. Television ads play a devastating effect on the minds of the consumers. For instance I bought a mayonnaise sauce after watching it on TV. It was horrible. I was duped

because the way it is projected on TV I feel such products are tasty and healthy. This is how it affects my mind”.

People are divided in their opinion on the use of pre-processed and packaged foods for household consumption widely. While for some certain packaged foods are products of necessity and convenience, others feel each and every substance need not be packaged and marketed. This leads to loss of good taste and essence of good cooking. The market always caters to the demands of the consumers. One can find chopped vegetables, all kinds of pastes in packaged forms which are time saving for the consumers. To this an aged home maker remarked:

“These days you get everything in the market. If you want to prepare thor (banana stem) who get everything in chopped form. You can also find mustard paste in the market in packaged form. A shopkeeper urged me to buy a packaged mustard paste. I replied till now my hands are working. I don’t need such pastes”.

Women respondents also stated that there are times when they don’t feel like cooking at home due to whims or ill health. On such occasions either food prepared is very simple like *sheddho bhat* (boiled rice) or *khichudi* (a preparation of roasted *moong dal* or green gram and rice cooked together).

External dining or home delivery is on the rise among the Bengalis. This was unheard of even a few years back when Bengalis especially the middle class would pride themselves in eating everything home made. The women’s primary role was to supply food to her family and she would happily create all kinds of delicacies in the *henshel* (kitchen). In fact eating out was looked down upon by many and a trend more prevalent among the higher echelons of society. With the growth of the middle class through changing occupations, rise of IT industry and the new professional and managerial class in society, one can witness a shift from the traditional *babu* culture to a more cosmopolitan urbane lifestyle among the Bengalis. Along with such changes, family cooking also have taken a new turn. Homemade food is not mandatory with rising external agents in the form of home delivery system. On such occasions the family is dependent on outside food which is home delivered. In the city of Kolkata several small and big eating joints and restaurants provide home delivery service of a wide variety of cuisines. Almost every *para* (neighbourhood) is arrayed with shacks or hawkers selling everyday Bengali food like rice, *dal*, vegetables, fish and meat. While such roadside stalls cater to the lower class people who can have a hearty meal on the streets, several middle class men and women are regular customers of such shops. While the lower class people have options of

sitting on the old wooden benches and tables eating a fish meal or egg meal, for the middle class foods are packed for household consumption. A woman in her sixties reported:

“I don’t feel like cooking all the time. Besides thinking about what should be cooked for today’s meal every morning is a big ordeal. On such occasions we prefer to get fish curry and some vegetables or even a chicken curry from the roadside stalls. Their foods are fresh and just like home cooked everyday food. It also brings about a change of taste”.

The roadside eateries selling everyday Bengali food like fish, meat, egg-curry with rice, *dal* and other vegetables are owned by people of the neighbouring slums. While lower class cooks in middle class households are generally taught to produce the right gastronomic taste, food bought from the shacks located on pavements in the neighbourhood are never shunned or looked down upon as inferior taste. Outside food always have a special status in middle class homes compared to home cooked everyday food.

A young respondent in her late twenties admitted:

“It is when Ma is ill or she doesn’t want to cook that we get food from outside. At times cooking becomes boring for her. But rice is always cooked at home because they don’t offer good quality chaal (grains)”.

The quality of rice is significant of a good connoisseur of food and taste. Across all social classes people are particular about the kind of rice grains consumed within the household and each one wants to stick to their own preference. Even the way rice will be boiled (whether the grains will be loose and individual or whether it will be soft) differs from household to household. Detail on the rice grains will be provided in chapter three.

For working women deciding upon everyday food is a huge ordeal. Several working women have lamented about lack of time to cook proper meals for their families. In such cases eating out traditional Bengali foods has become an option among the middle class. For instance a Muslim respondent when queried about the increased trend of eating out across the middle class mentioned:

“The trend of eating out is a big impact on household food. Time is the biggest factor here. Earlier people had the time to cook elaborate tasty cuisines for household consumption. But traditional Bengali foods are very time consuming. Instead it is easy to consume milk and cornflakes in the morning for breakfast. It was easy for my

mother who was working earlier. Once a week we would go to eat mochar ghonta⁴⁹ outside home”.

Eating out has become a rage among the urbanites while the educated middle class have several options of cuisines to choose from. New eateries and restaurants serve more cosmopolitan food platter along with fusion foods and traditional ethnic cuisines. This has opened alternatives to home cooked food. Such practices are more prevalent among the youth leading to a huge generation divide among the members of the household. Many older men and women have reported of not supporting the practice of eating out among the young. Older men and women rather vouch for home cooked foods which are not only healthy but far tastier keeping up with tradition. Eating outside food is a brush with the modern and attuned to a westernized way of living.

In contemporary middle class households the young generation often defy the regular normal everyday household meals by enforcing their own choice propagated under the influence of peer group and social media. Preference for more cosmopolitan meals like soups and breads, grilled vegetables, pastas and grilled chicken have become a common phenomena across different groups of people irrespective of caste and religious identity. The young people are too busy to share meals with parents in a nuclear household. Food is one big means of exercising their autonomy and choice within the household.

One of the respondents who were questioned on the effects of fast food on domestic cooking lamented that it is the children who are mostly affected by fast food in the form of pizzas and KFC chicken. Children also make a lot of fuss in eating home cooked food. According to Claude Fischler (1988) the emergence of fast-food restaurants and self service are symptoms of contemporary social anomie and represent the regression of taste and the disintegration of commensal relationships of solidarity. Fischler refers to these contemporary practices of food and nutrition as *gastro-anomie* (Fischler 1998). While some of the respondents have positively addressed the growing problem of fast food industry and its ill effects on household food, for some respondents such issues are handled by changing the kind of food cooked at home on an everyday basis. Hence the fast food industry also gives rise to innovation and creativity in household cooking. A respondent residing in a nuclear family stated:

⁴⁹ *Mochar ghonto* is a delicacy for Bengalis. It is called banana blossom dry curry and traditionally cooked using the banana flower and seasoned with spices like cumin, bay leaf, ginger, turmeric, *garam masala*, grated coconut and salt-sugar for taste. The preparation is labourious and requires much time for *jogar*. It has found its place in many urban chic restaurants serving and promoting ethnic Bengali cuisines.

“We love eating Bengali and experimental fusions with north Indian dishes. It is often made at home”.

For a seventy year old Christian woman, fast foods or ready to eat food products are hazardous to children and youngsters but it is important to feed them good nutritious yet tasty foods. In order to accomplish her goal she often prepares innovative nutritious foods for her grandson and daughter even at this age. She remarked:

“Home cooked food has to look good and taste good. For that it is important to be innovative and think about new ways to feed the old stuffs to your family. That’s what I do”.

Leftover cooked foods are at times put to good use by creating something new from them. Several cookbooks and recipe columns write on the ‘tasty’ cuisines cooked out of mundane boring vegetables or refrigerated cooked fish and meats which have gained immense popularity among the middle class.

Consumption of packaged food is prevalent among the poor or the **lower class** in society as well. Unlike middle class men and women, the poor are not much concerned about the issue of time and convenience foods. Packaged foods and drinks like Maggie noodles, chocolates, and aerated waters are highly popular among the poor. These foods ironically don’t add to the required nutrition of the body but instead may lead to health hazards. Nevertheless the urban poor confirmed consuming such products or buying them for their children. Maggie noodles are an extremely popular product which has bridged the gap between class hierarchies. Nestlé’s *Maggie* sells products costing as low as rupees five which are easily purchased by the lower income groups. According to the lower class women such products are tasty and easy to make. Moreover they are loved by the children and hence are purchased regularly in small amounts. Aerated water popularly known as cold drinks are consumed very frequently by the slum dwellers. Possession of refrigerator enables storage of such drinks which are consumed in leisure or served to guests coming home. A woman of *Dhakuria* slum replied to the question on consumption of aerated drinks:

“We drink cold drinks at times especially during the summers. It is mostly in the evening or after dinner that everyone at home sits together to get a sip of cold drinks. Children consume them more”.

Consumption of butter, cheese, powder milk, sauce, jam are also prevalent among the slum dwellers though it is only limited to few lower middle class group. Sauce, jam, butter are bought in small amounts in pouches or sachets occasionally though and fall a part of the

special foods consumed in everyday life. Powder milk is common among the lower class that does not purchase packet liquid milks. Consumption of milk is less among the poor but some households mentioned of using locally produced powder milk of poor quality for tea at times or fed to children. Some households also use packets of *Amulya* milk powder occasionally.

It is needless to say that the slums are a diverse unit of settlements which comprise of people who are very poor, poor and not so poor. Some of the respondents claimed their middle class and high caste status when asked about their caste identity. People are divided on their use of packaged food products like branded cooking oil versus loose oil, packaged wheat flour versus loose locally produced flour. While some respondents mentioned of using branded cooking oil like *Mahakosh* and *Fortune*, for others it is loose mustard oil that is used for cooking.

The lower class people usually prefer to eat home cooked food compared to outside food cooked in roadside stalls and eateries. Unlike the middle class who spends a large amount of money on outside food along with home cooked food, the urban poor spends money mostly on home cooked food. While regular meals are always consumed at home, rarely fast foods like chops, cutlets, rolls, *chowmein* (noodles) and *momo* (a type of dumpling originally of Tibet) are bought from the roadside vendors or stalls and consumed as an evening snack. The young generation are always looking out for diversity. Even among the urban poor fast foods from road side stalls, vendors and the like are on a rise. The slum inhabitants mention of cooking fast foods like Chinese or *biriyani* at home several times in a month on popular request of their children. However the foods that are eaten by the lower class are different from the middle class in terms of quality of the product, its taste and price. The concept of home delivery doesn't exist among the lower class. Foods are never ordered to be delivered home. The lower class are found to buy foods from vendors belonging to the lower class itself. These people are mostly residents of the same slum who owns stalls or shacks selling food near to the slums.

The lower class groups are always found to imitate the middle class in their choices of food, clothing, and other commodities of consumption. This is because the middle class is easily accessible to the lower class whose lives intertwine with that of the middle class. The middle class lifestyle, values, and beliefs also trickle down to the lower segments of society through the process of *Sanskritisation*. Food habits also seep down to the poor and become a part of their everyday life through their exposure to upper class culture and lifestyle. Packaged food

consumption among the poor indicates the same which calls for an imitation of the middle class.

Table- 42: Consumption of packaged foods among the urban poor

Categories	Yes	No
Powder milk	16.7	83.3
Maggie noodles	68.3	31.7
Sauce	45.0	55.0
Jam	26.7	73.3
Cheese	16.7	83.3
Pasta/ <i>chowmein</i> noodles	6.7	93.3
Health drinks	6.7	93.3
Cornflakes/ <i>kelloggs chocos</i>	3.3	96.7
Potato chips	3.3	96.7
Aerated water	78.3	21.7

Source: Self

Note: The above table represents the percentage of responses to the consumption of packaged foods. Among the different packaged foods mentioned above the slum dwellers mentioned of consuming packaged ghee, Maggie noodles and aerated waters like *Thumbs Up*, *Coke*, *Pepsi* and the like the most.

5.4.4 FOOD, HEALTH AND BODY

A major indicator of food choices is the dimension of health which affects household food habits to a large extent. The notion of ‘health eating’ in Bengali food and culture emerged early in the nineteenth century. As Ray (2015) observed, changes in the dietary pattern of the urban middle class revolved around the issue of a ‘healthy body’. A discourse of health emerged under the garb of the ‘debilitating constitution of Bengali men’. The issue of masculine body was significant and associated with the wheat eating community of non Bengalis. Such discourses have given way to new discourses revolving around food, health

and body in post industrial society. The new age finds a growing concern with healthy eating. One group of middle class men and women fear illness in old age. This restricts people's diets. People fear several new life style diseases like diabetes, hypertension, cholesterol and the like which are on the rise. Along with it body weight is a growing issue and concern among all age groups of men and women alike.

Middle class men and women speak about a healthy diet which is essential to their wellbeing. Food choices revolve around such health issues especially among the old, as stated by several respondents. Certain food products have gained popularity in the everyday diet of the middle class in recent times. For instance people are consuming more of products like oatmeal, muesli, cornflakes, brown bread and fruits as a healthy breakfast meal. According to an aged woman:

“We eat a lot of cornflakes, oats and milk while butter and jam are not consumed much. Fruit is a must every day. I eat chana (Indian cottage cheese) consciously while my daughter takes health drinks like Horlicks. We make it a point to eat a hearty breakfast because we are all suffering from high blood pressure and sugar”.

Another respondent who is a Bengali Christian and resides in a joint family stated:

“We eat brown bread, put less salt and less oil in our food these days. We also include curd in our food along with dal and salads. Red meat is avoided consciously along with fried foods. These are the foods that are cooked and eaten at home thinking about the health of family members. More or less we try to maintain a healthy and nutritious diet. We also keep a check on our body weight regularly, especially the women. Over the years we have become more health conscious. If you ask about the changes in our food I can't think of any though health factor is being considered now”.

The older men and women agree to have become conscious about their diet and eating. Red meat (in this case goat meat) is restricted in many households due to high risk of heart diseases. Some have also mentioned sedentary work culture as leading to such risks. People eat less amount of food now than they used to earlier. Respondents among the older age group comment that in their youth they would eat more amounts of food compared to the youth now and still not be bothered about calories and more oil. Rather, good taste was all that mattered. Nonetheless today people suffering from lifestyle diseases are far more compared to earlier times. People are also gorging on unhealthy foods like fast foods and junk foods which have resulted in high risk diseases among all sections of society. Medical studies have shown that high risk diets are common among the literate sections and among

the young age in both middle class and slum population of Kolkata (Deb and Dasgupta 2008). While health risks are on a rise, the middle class are differentiated in the ways with which health and body is dealt with through food. For instance, vegetarianism was always a part of Bengali food and culture. In recent times vegetarianism is practiced and popularized among certain individuals. Some families have also started practicing eating vegetarian on selective days of the week. Vegetarianism⁵⁰ which includes consumption of vegetables and fruits excluding fish, chicken and meat products is associated with good health and a healthy body, something that the health conscious middle class aspires for. However their preference for fish makes it a far cry among many. Some older women especially widows have been found to resort to complete vegetarianism, even excluding fish from their diet. But they are an exception to the rule. On the whole vegetarianism is a personal choice.

Bengali food culture always prioritised health and wellbeing. This becomes evident from the fact that Bengali cuisines are eaten depending on the seasonal variations. “The belief in the hot and cold foods that features predominantly in everyday diet of Bengalis can be traced back to the theories of indigenous *Ayurvedic* medicine that developed under the Aryans. The *Charakasamhita*, an *Ayurvedic* text written by *Charaka* in the first century B.C also contained descriptions of food and their medical properties. During the summers Bengalis eat seasonal vegetables like *korola* (bitter gourd), *shukto*⁵¹, *lau* (bottle gourd), *potol* (pointed gourd or *parval*) etc which are supposed to keep the body cool. A bitter food which is a regular part of everyday Bengali food is an indicator of the health and medicinal properties of the diet (Banerji, C 1991). Irrespective of this, certain upper middle class sections of society believe western diet is synonymous to good health. Such perceptions are more prominent among the youth due to the images constructed by mass media, social media, peer pressure and an urbane westernised lifestyle. The middle class youth in particular believe in continental cuisines, food cooked in alternative cooking medium like olive oil, consumption of salads and salad dressings as the path towards healthy eating. Inclusion of herbs like rosemary, thyme and oregano in food features regularly in the everyday diet. All these foods are associated with a ‘healthy body’ and a healthy lifestyle. According to a thirty six years

⁵⁰ The concept of vegetarianism discussed here is different from Henrick Donner’s (2008) understanding of a vegetarian diet which includes consumption of fish but excludes meat products like chicken and goat among the Bengali middle class

⁵¹ Shukto originates from medieval Bengal and was referred to as *Shukata*, which meant dried leaves of a plant especially the bitter jute plant. These leaves were stored throughout the year and used to make a bitter dish with seasonal vegetables (Banerji, Chitrita).

old woman healthy diet ensures more vegetables and meat instead of grains like rice. She stated:

“We regularly eat boiled chicken with lemon juice, sautéed vegetables, fresh juice, baked/ grilled fish and meat with minimum spices” which are healthy for us but sausages, frozen foods and ice creams are unhealthy for us yet we regularly eat them”.

In a similar instance, another respondent noted:

“Some food items that are cooked thinking they are healthy are steamed vegetables, carrots, brown sugar, sea fish, olive oil, brown rice, nuts. People are changing their diet to low cholesterol and low fat diet. I would like to intake more salads, sprouted beans and less of refined carbohydrates”.

People are taking health foods like sweet corn and broccoli which were earlier unheard of as a part of regular household consumption. A middle aged respondent staying alone with her husband stated mentioned of the regular intake of foods like soya milk, almonds, baked fish and cornflakes for breakfast every morning and brown rice for lunch while her husband prefers to eat traditional Bengali cuisine that is home cooked. Some respondents even mentioned about the purchase of organic food products for regular consumption. Although organic food grains and vegetables in packaged form are yet to gain popularity among the Kolkata buyers (which is mostly due to their high price), some respondents mentioned of trying to purchase pesticide free organic fruits and vegetables from small farmers in the market who bring limited produce. One has to learn the talent of making the right food choices, was the popular belief. While new food products launched in the market project better health for the consumers, home cooked meals are also perceived as healthy by many middle class people. People are found resorting to some traditional foods as well in order to reduce fat from body. Dalia, ruti-torkari, muri, cheere etc are consumed by many as a form of healthy foods.

A married woman in her early thirties mentioned of consuming home cooked food in order to keep a healthy body free of diseases. She stated:

“For us health is the priority. In fact we decide our diet based on what is healthy. Awareness is very important. I will never eat Kellogg’s’ cornflakes instead will take a local product like Mohuns. Knor soups or Maggie noodles are a strict no. Even pasta is avoided. We prefer locally made fresh foods from the market. Usually home cooked Bengali cuisine is healthy for us”.

Everyday food is also conceptualised by different people in different ways. For some people household food that entails ideal typical Bengali cuisine builds an unhealthy body. While for others home cooked food is equated with weight loss and a healthy body. People are looking for varieties in home cooked food leaving aside the traditional Bengali meals. Use of unconventional cooking oil, brown rice, baked, braised and sautéed food preparations are evidences of changing tastes and food choices keeping in mind the incentive of health. Hence according to a twenty four year old respondent if given a chance she would vouch for home food making as being ideal for weight loss. She also mentioned that over the years home food has become less spicy and oily due to growing awareness among the people about the ill effects of using excessive oil in food. Respondents also agree that this changing dietary practice is an urbane affair and a consequence of a cosmopolitan city life. For instance, according to a Muslim woman:

“Since my parents are both from moforshal (suburbs- the respondent’s parents hail from Murshidabad) they are not conscious about a healthy breakfast like Kolkatans”.

The **lower class** food habit differs subsequently from the middle class diet with respect to health. The notion of good health and wellbeing is almost absent among the urban poor. There is limited or no awareness regarding health and nutrition which affects the urban poor more than the middle class. Respondents during interviews were asked about their views on a healthy diet and how far they thought their diet was nutritious for them. Most of the respondents were not aware about what a nutritious diet could be of. Neither was there much concern among them to maintain a good healthy body. While lack of education is viewed as a detriment to healthy food choices, several of the slum residents blamed poor economic condition as hazardous to diet and food choices. However one finds consumption of certain food and drinks on the rise among the urban poor which are detrimental to good health. Several slum dwellers also consume some amount of fast foods from road side stalls but hardly spend much on fruits and milk. The slum dwellers are found to use extra oil in food while cooking along with chillies to make the food hot and spicy. This is their way of preparing a ‘tasty’ cuisine. The poor are also found to be affected by high risk diseases like cardiovascular diseases, hypertension which also results in heart problems, high blood pressure and diabetes. A high risk dietary pattern is more prevalent among the literate groups compared to the illiterate groups in the lower class. Some of the slum respondents mentioned about eating controlled food due to health problems. Several slum dwellers were found to be lactose intolerant and lacked milk or milk products in their diet. However the urban poor stick

to traditional Bengali foods. Consumption of sour foods like tamarind and green mango and *panta* are high among the poor to keep their bodies cool during hot summer months. For instance a poor woman remarked:

“It’s very hot these days, so I eat something ‘tok’ (sour) with rice. I also make tok dal with tentul (tamarind) or tentul aachar with rice. I don’t like eating fish in this heat. I eat rice twice daily. Who will make roti”.

Unlike the middle class the urban poor lack ‘specific foods’ to keep them in good health. Abundance of rice in the diet calls for good health among the lower class.

The definition of ‘health’ has attained new form in modern society. ‘Good health’ is viewed in two respects- one is to maintain a disease free body while the other is to maintain a weight free body. For the middle class it is the ‘body’ that holds immense significance and in turn determines food choices. This differentiates them from the class of urban poor. Unlike poor women, it is the middle class educated women who are more affected by the new fad of weight loss and healthy body compared to men. Stereotypically the middle class Bengali woman’s diet has always been controversial whereby a woman is urged towards a more vegetarian diet inclusive of fish while a non vegetarian diet of meat products are synonymous to the male appetite. Women are known to be abstained from certain foods that are considered ‘hot’ in order to have full control over their sexuality. Asceticism has always been a part of women’s dietary ways. Such dietary impositions are prevalent among the poor as well. There have been subsequent changes in such dietary impositions on women in contemporary society especially among the middle class. Women today experience far greater freedom and exert their own choice of diet compared to what it was even a decade or two back. Nevertheless women are faced with new problems and challenge today, that of an urge to possess a slim body. The image of a slim lean body is constructed by the new market forces including advertisements of all kinds aired on Television, found in magazines, cookbooks, internet blogs and social media. The image of a perfect healthy body is created through adequate diet and consumption of certain kinds of foods. Women are the easy and vulnerable targets of such dispositions. Many young women feel the need to attain a perfect body shape in order to fit into modern western clothes. The social networking sites and capturing one’s image on mobile phones as *selfie*⁵² also works towards pressurising women to acquire a well toned body. This affects one’s diet. “The dieting industry itself is big

⁵² According to the Oxford dictionary selfie is a photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically one taken from a smartphone or a webcam and shared via social media

business, manufacturing special foods, placing advertising copies, selling advice in magazines and books, and offering personal therapy. Articles and recipes in the magazines, while sometimes directly addressed to slimming are more notable perhaps for the indirect means by which they stress the significance of body shape” (Warde, Alan 1997: 88). Miles (1995) notes that it is not just about the trivial female body as constructed through media and advertisements but rather about the greater complexity of the phenomenon of consumerism that holds supreme. Food and consumption often leads to contradictions. The notion of health has attained new scale. Health is associated with fitness, body and a fetish to look good, approving in the eyes of others. Cooking on health terms has become the new fad among the urban middle class because they are the primary targets of the market. The urban poor don’t suffer from the need to possess a well shaped body. Neither are they aware about the notion of a risk free body. This differentiates the choice of food induced by health and body among the middle class and urban poor respectively.

5.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter focuses on two aspects of food consumption in everyday life. One is the significance of commensality while the other is food choices that help to build the food habits of the people. Food consumption practices and commensality symbolises ritual of everyday life. These rituals are tied to people’s emotions as a form of interaction within the group. Rituals also symbolises group relationships that are administered through commensality. Durkheim in his *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* focused on rituals that arouse emotions among the aboriginal groups. While Durkheim’s theory of ritual extended only to the domain of religion and the sacred, Goffman’s views on ritual focussed on the interactions (both formal and informal) in everyday life. Food consumption pattern also evokes similar emotions across groups.

The ritual of commensality for instance manifests social distinctions through differences in what one eats and how. Among the middle class and urban poor similar distinctions can be witnessed surrounding the way food is arranged and consumed in everyday life, to distribution of food in the families of the two classes respectively, place of eating and the whole process of food sharing. In other words distinctions in commensality and food rituals aid to foster greater social differences not just on caste lines but also on class lines. Nonetheless patterns of commensality binds the group, in this case the middle class vis-a-vis the lower class people. On the other hand everyday rituals surrounding food practices again

creates further social and cultural differences across caste, class, ethnicity and religion through processes of change. This change is brought about by large social forces like modernisation, globalisation and westernisation. For instance, food choices of urban Bengali middle class and urban poor are changing under the rubric of market forces. For Bourdieu while food choices reflect individuality, the actual freedom of choice is embedded within the power of capital. For instance food choices exhibit two forces, one is luxury and the other is necessity. “The true basis of the differences found in the area of consumption, and far beyond it, is the opposition between the tastes of luxury (or freedom) and the tastes of necessity. The former are the tastes of individuals who are the product of material conditions of existence defined by distance from necessity, by the freedoms or facilities stemming from possession of capital; the latter express, precisely in their adjustment, the necessities of which they are the product (Bourdieu, P 1986: 177). In this case, the urban middle class are segmented in their possession of economic and cultural capital. This depicts the heterogeneity of the class with respect to food consumption. Similar segmentation occurs within the urban poor and also between the middle class and the urban poor. Nevertheless there is always a tendency of the lower class groups to ape the higher classes and cultural forms. “Certain items of consumption (foodstuffs) have a high social status value because their consumption is restricted to the higher echelons of society. The lower classes are tempted to buy and eat these foodstuffs and prepare meals from them-even though they actually cannot afford to, or even if they are detrimental to their health-because of this higher social value or status associated with them” (Gronow, J: 6). On the whole there is no particular parameter of defining food habits of people in modern complex societies where class relationships at times become ambiguous.

Household food transforms as society progresses through different stages of innovation and cultural change. While fast foods have become a big industry today, such foods are being regularly cooked in households across social classes. For those who can afford, purchasing outside food is becoming a routine activity vis-a-vis homemade foods. Even among the lower sections cooking different kinds of food from ones traditional cuisine has become a quotidian practice. As the middle class harbours new trends in food preparation and consumption, the urban poor too transforms the way it negotiates with everyday food.

5.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The objective of this chapter has been to discern the aspects of food consumption in middle class and the lower class households of Kolkata. The chapter started with a general introduction on the meaning of food consumption in social sciences and its significance in the study of the everyday. It moves on to discuss the objectives of the chapter and its points of focus on consumption of everyday food. Effort has been made to locate the points of differences and analogy at every sphere of consumption both within and between classes.

The first section of the chapter dealt with the process of commensality in everyday life of the middle class and lower class slum inhabitants of Kolkata. Commensality is a process which discusses the way food is consumed among groups, how it is eaten, where and why foods are consumed. The first section on commensality addressed the presentation of everyday food in Bengali households. It was found that food consumed and presented during meals vary from households to households depending on the age, type of occupation of family members and number of family members among the middle class. The difference between the middle class and lower class are based on occupational, income and cultural differences.

Food distribution in everyday life embarks upon processes of social inclusion and exclusion leading to the politics of food. Distribution of household food among the members of the household is significant enough to understand how much egalitarian the household is. The stereotypical image of the sacrificial Bengali women is no doubt changing under the pressure of a secular, cosmopolitan, westernised lifestyle among certain sections of the middle class. Women enjoy greater independence in exerting their own choice on food and drinks compared to earlier times. However unequal distribution of food gathers around specific situation in subtle forms which helps to uphold the image of an ideal mother, a true home maker. Among the lower class however, such effects are yet to be found and women are often discriminated against food prepared in the house. One also notes further discrimination among the employers and the domestic helps working in middle class households which in a way asserts class distinctions.

Household distribution of food has been an unequal affair in traditional Bengali homes where the best pieces of food were meted out to the men and children or the male child is preferred over the female child in providing the best quality of food. In contemporary society such discriminatory ways leading to inequality are changing with women exerting their freedom of

choice in relishing the food they like. The place of eating and sharing of food forms an essential part of commensality. The process of eating meals and sharing food is found to change in contemporary society. Middle class employed respondents are found to take at least one meal outside home. Increase in number of working women per household affects the meals in middle class households. The place of eating and the process of food sharing in contemporary middle class households no longer follow the traditional meal patterns of yester years. Meals have ceased to be socializing; rather individualised practices of eating get reflected more through different eating places and food sharing practices. This further differentiates between classes where the middle class Bengalis are more prone to the individualised way of eating under the influence of westernization while the lower classes still stick to traditional practices of eating and sharing food.

Food habits and consumption pattern are related to rituals, rules and regulations. These rituals are functional for the maintenance of order. Every Bengali household across classes have specific rituals and rules that are adhered to with respect to eating food. Customs like cleanliness, food taboos, avoidance of foods all help to integrate the community. Religion for instance prescribes over such dietary rules and restrictions. For the middle class, there are no specific dietary rules and restrictions that are prescribed as a ritual of everyday meal. But this is not true. This is because such rules and restrictions are deeply embedded within the system and are mostly seen as routine processes. People are habituated to perform such acts which are handed down through generations and are obeyed without much questioning. Modern lifestyle often has led to dilution of the processes but some are still deeply and religiously followed and practiced across the middle class. Among the lower class too slum dwellers vilify any kinds of dietary restrictions and prohibitions while some rituals are still performed habitually with regard to cooking food. The lower class in this regard follow the process of imitation of the upper classes in order to establish themselves on the class hierarchy. People are however differentiated on their opinion regarding everyday food rituals which shows a highly segmented class classification.

The second part of this chapter tries to decipher the meanings and causes behind food choices in everyday life among the urban middle class and urban poor respectively. Food choices are determined by a whole lot of social, cultural and economic factors. Family for instance is the biggest source or influence on people's dietary choices. The women of the household are mothers and wives who are in charge of cooking are the prime causes of our taste buds and the choice of food consumed for every day meals. The middle class women especially

through their culinary prowess and information mould the taste and choices of the family members and in turn are found to reproduce the middle class taste and food culture. The lower class women are differentiated from the middle class in this regard since they lack the basic knowledge and information on cooking processes. Cooking and decision on meals are shared among other family members in lower class slum households which lessen the impact of poor women on domestic food choices. Apart from this people's dietary choices are to a large extent based upon their social identity which is critical in shaping 'who we are'. Hence choices of meals, cooking procedures and others vary across religious and regional groups creating further segmentation within the larger Bengali ethnic group. This also shatters the notion of a national Bengali cuisine. Other than family and primordial loyalties, larger forces like urbanisation, cosmopolitanism, globalisation and western impact changes the way people choose their meals and food. Time is a big factor in today's world which has formed new eating habits among the middle class. Increase consumption of package foods as convenience foods, alternative modes of eating, resistances to homemade cooking all leads to new food choices and patterns of consumption of everyday food. Such nuances have a trickledown effect among the lower sections of society where consumption of new foods is a reflected of cultural exchange and imitation. Another major determining cause of food choices is the issue concerning health. 'Health' is perceived in new light among the bourgeois middle class in society. Middle class Bengalis show greater concern for 'good health' in terms of a disease free body and weight free body which reflects in their new dietary choices, selection of new kinds of food like packaged cereals, use of alternative low cholesterol cooking oil, fat free diet and new cooking methods like baking and grilling instead of frying. The image of a healthy body is constructed through strategic marketing, globalisation and media. The lower class of urban poor show less concern about health and body compared to the middle class who are the easy and primary targets of the market forces.

The chapter ends with a conclusion following Bourdieu (1986) and his theory on distinction of tastes across social classes. It shows how the norms of commensality aggravate class distinctions on the one hand and ushering new changes on the other. However one cannot miss the growing individualism related to consumption practices and food choices across the middle class. This further creates differences within the middle class as well as the lower class vis-a-vis the middle class.

Extra point: Food habits are changing under work pressure. People are looking for convenient foods that can be cooked in short time in which food will be ready. Food consumption and

cooking depends on work culture. Working women are pressured by dual rules of home management and work management. This reflects on their choice of food. Among the poor working women stress related to cooking is much less compared to the middle class. The middle class are always in a pressure to secure a particular lifestyle and culture through food habits. For the working class such forces are not active.

CHAPTER 6

SPECIAL FOODS IN BENGALI HOUSEHOLDS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Household food can be categorised as regular and banal on the one hand and special, festive and occasional on the other. This paper seeks to delve into foods that are cooked, served and eaten on special days, occasionally and is not a part of the normal, everyday food structure of middle class and lower class Bengali households in the city. Often special foods can be denoted as those that are consumed on special occasions. By special occasion I mean something which doesn't fall within the purview of the 'everyday'. Special occasions are created out of the mundane to break the monotony of everyday life. An important element of 'special foods' is that such foods are not supposed to fall within the purview of the 'normal' and the routine process of 'everyday'. While several processes like food preparation and consumption associated with everyday food help to restore the normality in everyday life (Janeja, M 2010), foods prepared and consumed on special events are more symbolic in understanding everyday life situation of a group of people.

De Garine (1976) and Goody (1982) have drawn attention to the fact that there are marked differences between societies in the type of foods used at special occasions. According to some scholar speciality of special foods lie in the quantity of foods produced on a specific occasion and not on the quality of foods. He showed that foods used in celebrations are usually the same foods that are consumed normally but in more quantity (Veen 2003:411). It is essential to see whether it holds true in case of Bengalis as well. Hence it is always not about the quality or type of foods but the quantity that separates it from the everyday food habits. In the discourse on gastronomy consumption of luxury foods might signify hedonism (Gronow, J: 3).

Just like regular food habits, special foods can also help to ascertain the differences and similarities across social and economic groups in society. In this chapter effort will be made to draw the differences and analogies with reference to the special foods that are prepared and consumed across social classes. Questions like what are the special foods? How are they different from normal foods? What is the relevance of special foods in everyday life? How

distinct are special foods across social classes? How does special foods create and maintain class hierarchies etc will be answered. The chapter therefore is divided into sections like Special foods and religious ceremonies, foods and Bengali festivals, foods associated with rites de passage, foods at feasts and also foods that are consumed occasionally within domestics as a part of the everyday.

6.2 SPECIAL FOODS AND RELIGIOUS CEREMONIES ACROSS CLASSES

Food habits in Bengali middle class and urban poor households revolve around myriad factors among which religion play important role. The role of food in everyday life of the people is often determined by faith and religion. Such foods that preside over religious observance are considered special foods that are unique to every community and culture. While discussing the significance of special cuisines that fall outside the normal and everyday one cannot miss the innumerable religious practices and festivals that make food central. An important characteristic of food is construction of group identity. The choice of food, and the cooking, eating, sharing and even touching of it, cannot be underestimated in the construction of identity (Siddiqui 2011: 20). This is again unique to each class group in society. Food specific to religious groups within the larger ethnic identity are symbolic of a way of life of the people. Religious prescriptions and proscriptions that are often obliterated from everyday food become manifested on certain specific occasions, festivals or religious ceremonies. Among the Bengali ethnic group religious rites, rituals and worship are always associated with food and drinks. Hence it is important to account for whether special foods on religious celebrations create vast social differences among the larger ethnic community and how far they intercept class differences.

The Bengali middle class and urban poor are again a divisive group who share people of different faiths. In Kolkata Bengalis predominantly belong to three major religious groups namely the Hindu majority and the minority groups of Muslims and Christians respectively. According to census 2011, 76.5 percent of the population of Kolkata are Hindus, 20.60 percent are Muslims and 0.88 percent is Christians respectively. While the Bengali middle class are divided across these three major religions, the slum inhabitants mostly belong to the category of Hindus and Muslims. My study was unable to locate Bengali Christians from among the slums of urban poor. The Hindus are known as the original inhabitant of this land. During the medieval period lower caste Hindus are known to have converted to Islam

forming the category of Bengali Muslims. Their population can largely be found in the eastern part of Bengal which eventually led to the formation of East Pakistan or present day Bangladesh. West Bengal also contains fair amount of Muslim population which includes both Bengali speaking Muslims and Urdu speaking Muslims. Bengali Muslims are those who speak the Bengali dialect. Their food habit is attuned to that of the Bengalis. Muslim cuisine was introduced in Bengal in the medieval period. Food culture of Bengali Muslims find traces of Awadhi and *Mughlai* cuisine as well. Similar to the Bengali Muslims the Bengali Christians were also converted to Christianity in the modern period with the advent of the Christian missionaries to India. The colonial period that swept over Bengal and other parts of India had a profound effect on the history, life and culture of the natives. Several new food and taste were introduced in the daily diet of Bengalis. All this together combines the everyday and special foods of Bengali middle class and urban poor respectively.

Interestingly enough Bengalis across all religions share similar food habits in everyday life amidst differences. Mundane everyday food for Bengalis in general comprise of rice, *dal* or pulses, vegetable in the form of curry, fried vegetables and fish or meat curry. Nevertheless cultural life of Bengalis is not homogeneous round the world. This gets reflected in the way Bengalis negotiate with their everyday food across classes. Amidst the quotidian practices of everyday food it is important to perceive the way religious differences account for special cuisines on ceremonial occasions. We find various problematic areas in the approach to everyday food among different categories of Bengalis on the basis of class, caste, region and religion. Similarly this chapter will highlight on the different areas of similarity and differences in case of special foods in order to understand the complexities of social processes in middle class and urban poor lives. As stated Bengalis do not unite as a homogeneous entity and hence the special foods largely vary in terms of one's primordial identities on the one hand and modern food choices on the other.

In this section I will make an effort to compare the special foods prepared and consumed among the three major religions in Kolkata and reflect on their areas of convergence and divergence across classes and household types.

The Hindus are known to have thirteen festivals in twelve months as the saying goes '*Baro mashe tero parbon*', all of which revolve around both, consuming specific kinds of food and abstaining from foods. This can be found across all classes. The middle class Hindu Bengalis observe several rituals and processes during these festivals making special effort to cook and

eat specific cuisines. Among the Hindus certain foods are considered special foods and are associated with religious festivals. These are the *luchi* (Round puffed bread made of flour and fried in oil), *aloodum* (spicy potatoes), *halwa* (Indian sweet dish), *khichuri* (a mixture of rice and pulses), *bhaja* (fried vegetables), chutney, *payesh* (traditional sweet dish) and sweets. Apart from these general foods there are other specific foods for specific *puja* (worship) occasions. These are known as *prasad* or God's leftover. Prasad can be in both cooked and uncooked form. Uncooked *prasad* consists mostly of fruits.

Most of the middle class households observe common forms of worship like *Lakshmi puja* (Goddess of wealth and prosperity) *Saraswati puja* (Goddess of learning), *Durga puja* (Goddess of *Shakti* or strength) which is one of the major festivals of Bengalis and the different kinds of *Shoshthi pujas*⁵³ at home. Each of these occasions are allotted specific days of worship which is commonly carried out in ones house. *Durga puja* however is mainly practiced as community festival in *puja pandals*. Only a few elite bourgeoisie or middle class homes in the city perform the worship of *Goddess Durga* in their household. The most prominent part of worshipping these deities is the change in the regular meal structure of the household.

During these *puja* occasions **Hindu middle class** households bring about a change or shift in their daily consumption practices. Food chosen for such occasions is also different. People embrace vegetarian food on days of worship. This is an aberration from the predominant fish or meat based diet of Bengalis. Even the Bengali Brahmins are usually non-vegetarian unlike other parts of India (Ray, Krishnendu 2004). *Lakshmi puja* and *Saraswati puja* are most common among the Bengali Hindus of all social categories. *Lakshmi puja* is performed in many Bengali homes once a week on Thursday, a day assigned to the deity. This is a part of mundane ritual when the *panchali* (a form of narrative with stories of Gods and Goddesses) is read mostly by the woman of the house who perform the *puja* but there is no change in eating habits of the people. Besides once a year goddess *Lakshmi* is worshipped on a grand scale in Bengali households on *Kojagori purnima*⁵⁴ or full moon night. On that occasion believers usually keep fast till they perform the *anjali* (showering the deity with flowers often reciting the *puja* hymns). Prasad (consecrated food) in the form of seasonal fruits, *shinni* (an offering of a mixture of ripe bananas, whole grain wheat flour, batasha or candied sugar, milk, raisins,

⁵³ Reference of Goddess *Shoshthi* is found in the Bengali literatures of folk. The Goddess is worshipped as a benefactor of children, especially the male child. *Shoshthi puja* is observed widely observed among married women with children across rural and urban Bengal (Bhattacharya, S 2014)

⁵⁴ *Kojagari purnima* is also called *Sharad purnima* and is a harvest festival.

cashew nut, camphor, grated coconut and jaggery), *chal-kola makha* or *noibiddiyo*⁵⁵ and sweets are distributed among the worshippers. In this case it is not cooked. It is followed by a feast of *khichuri* (a preparation of rice and lentils), fried potatoes, aubergine or any seasonal vegetable, chutney and *payesh* (Bengali rice pudding) or cooked *prasad*. Similarly *Saraswati*, the goddess of learning, music and culture is ushered into Bengali domestics between the month of January and February. There is a specific day allotted to *Saraswati puja* which is a *puja* for school and college going children. On the auspicious occasion of *Saraswati puja* several households among the middle class Bengalis consume specific foods that are special for the occasion. Rituals vary across regions of Bengal. While some of the *Ghoti* (original inhabitants of West Bengal is colloquially termed so) respondents claimed of performing the ritual of *gota sheddho*⁵⁶ on the next day of *puja*, among the *Bangals* (original inhabitants of East Bengal) there is a custom of eating *jora Ilish* (a pair of *Hilsa*) on the day of *puja*. A young married woman observed that on *Saraswati puja* the traditional Bengali *luchi* (deep fried bread made of wheat flour) with *suji* (semolina cooked in milk or water) is a ritual which is special for the occasion. *Jora Ilish* is a common special food that is brought home which also signifies eating more *Ilish* (*Hilsa*), considered a delicacy among Bengalis. *Saraswati puja* also commences the making of *kuler* chutney (jube), another delicacy that is specific to the occasion. *Kul* is a seasonal fruit which is found during that time of the year. The popular belief goes that the *kul* can only be eaten after it has been offered to the goddess in order to be blessed by the deity. Consumption of seasonal fruits and vegetables need to follow the normative rule of society which is in turn prescribed by divine dictum. While regional variations are profound in modern society one finds a constant interchange of rituals and customs through cultural exchange. Even a *Bangal* household might lay hands in cooking *Gota sheddho* for the occasion of *Saraswati puja*.

Khichuri is the most common form of food that is eaten on any festive occasions among the Bengali Hindus across all social strata. *Janmashtami* (birth of lord Krishna or Gopala) celebrations are unfulfilled without the making of *taler bora* (a sweet dish made of sugar palm), *tal kheer* (a kind of rice pudding made from sugar palm), *narkol naru* (round sweet balls made from coconut and jaggery or sugar) and others. On *Rath Yatra* (the chariot ceremony of lord *Jagannath*) there is also a tradition of munching on crisp fried *papad*. These

⁵⁵ It is an offering made to the Gods and consists of small mounds of raw rice soaked in water along with raw yellow *moong dal* soaked. These are mixed with sweets (*sandesh*) and ripe banana (source: Bong Mom's Cookbook, Sunday, February 10, 2013)

⁵⁶ It means "boiled whole", a dish which includes whole potatoes, green pea pods, small eggplants and spinach boiled in salt with green chillies. This is eaten with a drizzle of pungent mustard oil (Ray, 2004: 39)

foods typically signify religious events and festivals and are marked by people's emotions and faith. Men and women fast and worship Goddess Kali on *phalaharini kalipuja* during this time. Diet is kept simple consisting of fruits of all kinds found in the market along with *yougurt*, sweets, *chira* (flattened rice) or *khoi* (popped rice). People keeping fast would eat a meal of vegetarian food like *luchi* and *aloo torkari* (potato curry) or *porota* (paratha). On such occasions, non-vegetarian foods like fish, meat and onion-garlic are not taken. Traditionally such practices would include all the family members but in modern Bengali households such ceremonies are observed mostly by the elderly men and women. At times the mother in law forces such rituals on the daughter in law. Young men and women among the upper middle class usually do not practice such ceremonies nor are such fruit diets (*phalahar*⁵⁷) maintained within the household at large.

The **urban poor** in Kolkata slums also celebrate religious occasions through prayer or worship over food. *Puja* celebrations and performance of rituals are propagated by the higher castes and higher class groups in society which are then emulated by the lower class. However the way *puja* is offered within the lower class domestics differ in various respects from that of the *bhadralok* (middle class) households of Kolkata. The *bhadralok* is a connotative term symbolising cultural differences from its relative 'other', the *chotoloks*. The *chotolok* here refer to the lower class or urban poor who are not just financially inferior but culturally as well. The *bhadralok* are known as the respectable educated lot of people who are also the harbingers of culture and tradition in society. The lower class of *chotoloks* are often found to imitate the upper class beliefs, values, culture and tradition. Among the Hindus, the lower class slum dwellers perform the *Rannapuja* or *Annapuja* religiously in their homes. The letter 'R' is mispronounced as 'A' among the illiterate mass of urban poor and is perceived as derogatory by the educated middle class. Even though there are few middle class *ghoti* households who perform *Rannapuja* (worshipping the hearth or the kitchen) in their domestics, nevertheless it is widely embraced by the village folks and urban poor of Kolkata. The custom is prevalent among the *Ghotis* or the original inhabitants of West Bengal and not the *Bangals* (originally from East Bengal or present day Bangladesh). *Ranna puja* is observed in the month of *Bhadra* (as per the Bengali calendar) among the people of West Bengal. On the occasion of *Rannapuja*, cooking is not performed in the domestic kitchen or hearth. It is a

⁵⁷ Phalahar is the food for fasting which discriminates between ordinary everyday food and special foods (Parry, J 1985: 613)

day of 'no cooking' while the traditional *unun* or gas burner is worshipped. Food is cooked the night before the auspicious day.

Women of the house, relatives and kins often join hands in preparing dry food like *sukno dal*, all kinds of fried vegetables, *chorchori* (vegetables cooked dry) fried fish and rice. Rice is cooked and kept overnight soaked in water to form *panta*. This is then served and eaten on the day of *Rannapuja* after offering food and prayer at home. The custom is to eat stale food from the previous night which has to be served cold. On this day Bengalis also celebrate *Vishwakarma puja* (God of machines). The lower class drivers and mechanics are often found to perform the same. But celebrations take place outside the household while *Khichuri*, vegetables and sweets are the common culinary tradition that is maintained. The urban poor also take part in *Lakshmi* and *Saraswati puja* celebrations. Although such *puja* rituals are seldom performed individually in the lower class households, every slum locality will have their own *puja pandal* and deity to celebrate the *puja* collectively. Funds for *puja* are arranged from different sources like influential people in the locality, local clubs, political parties or even middle class homes in the vicinity. On such occasions food is cooked in large measures and feasted on by the slum dwellers.

Analogous to the Hindus, Muslims also celebrate major ritual festivals like *Eid-ul-fitr* or *Ramzaan* Eid, *Eid-ul-zoha*, Muharram and *Shab-e- Barat* through food. *Eid* is one of the major Islamic festivals which follow after one month of fasting during the holy month of *Ramzaan*. On such auspicious occasion people celebrate over new clothes and feasts. Such festivals and ceremonies are shared across all classes in Muslim households. However the type of food consumed might differ in terms of quantity based on the amount of money spent.

There are several foods that are considered special for *Eid* like *biriyani* (an Indian dish made with highly seasoned rice, meat, fish or vegetables) kebabs and *shir kurma* (milk based dessert made of vermicelli and dry fruits). The *Ramzaan* fasting is followed by *Iftaar* (evening meal to break the fast) in the evenings after sunset which is again a celebration over food and feasts. While the types of food cooked and eaten during *Eid* and *Iftaar* might vary across the country there are certain foods that are idiosyncratic to that festival or culture. Sweet dishes are an eminent part of Muslim special cuisine along with meat preparations. Bengali Muslims prepare *halwa* (a sweet dish) made of *cholar dal* (gram *dal*) considered auspicious for the occasions along with the popular *firmi* (a sweet Indian dish of thickened milk, dry fruit and ground rice) and *simui* (vermicelli) which is the main food for *Eid*.

During *Ramzaan* every middle class and upper class household organise an *Iftaar* party or celebration over food and drinks. Muslims take pride in arranging the *Iftaar* which often becomes a reflection of one's social status and high social esteem. Some of them however restrict it to their own household. One of the respondents stated that *Iftaar* party is held among relatives and *kins* by taking turns throughout the month of *Ramzaan*. In this way everybody gets to arrange an *Iftaar* party at home. The *Iftaar* celebration is not just restricted to the Muslims but people of other religions like Hindu and Christian friends also get a chance to feast on the *Iftaar*. There are fruits followed by fried snacks like *bhaja* (fritters), *chola* (Bengal gram), *daler bora* (lentil dumpling) and *halim* (an assortment of several pulses and meat). *Halim* is also sold on the streets in public eateries and many of the families find it convenient to purchase it from outside instead of preparing at home. In lower class households *Iftaar* is held in a small scale or grandeur. At times few households within the slums together arrange an *Iftaar* party. In a Hindu dominated locality minority celebrations like *Iftaar* still gets prominence due to the support of political parties. This shows how food is also politicised.

Shab-e-barat is a festival that is observed fifteen days before *Ramzaan*. During that time The Muslims offer prayer to Allah and remember the deceased by offering prayer and devotion to lost family members. Some people even fast on *Shab-e-barat*. The festival is again incomplete without food. A woman working in a private school and married to a Hindu household confirmed:

“Shab-e-barat is extremely holy for us. We have to stay awake for the night and eat breakfast only after sunset. It is followed by lots of fruits and sherbet. On such festivals we cook biriyani. Sweet savouries like daler halwa, sujir halwa, gajar halwa are made at home for family members. Though gajar halwa no longer falls in the festival menus because it is made on and off at home”.

On *Shab-e-barat* Muslims also perform the ritual of *korbani* or sacrifice of one animal. *Bakhri-Eid* is another festival on which there is the ritual of offering one animal to Allah (God). One of my Muslim respondents narrates the story and significance of *Bakhri-Eid*:

“On Bakhri Id, Ibrahim goes to kill his son in the mountains. When he was about to kill a dumba (yak) comes in between and gets killed. From then on ritual is followed. In the name of God we sacrifice an animal. We don't keep the whole meat at home but distribute it among others even the poor”.

The *Korbani* is part of the Islamic ritual. Such sacrifices of animals entail the process of food sharing among fellow Islamic people. One part of sharing goes to the family or extended *kins* while the other part to the greater community. Even the poor become a part of the sharing of *kurbani* meat. People offer *Kurbani* depending on their financial ability. It also depends on how much money one wants to spend. Respondents stated that usually a small animal is cheaper than a big animal like cow to sacrifice. But a small animal can be sacrificed in the name of one person. Bigger the animal more inclusions of family names can be made. So it is lucrative to opt for a cow than a small goat. However cost does matter for most especially the poor.

On *Muhurram* which is considered to be one of the most sacred months of the Islamic calendar, foods like *khichdra*- which is *pulao* with meat, *aloo dum* and *chana dal* (split Bengal gram) is cooked at home. This is also distributed among the poor. *Rooh afza* (a kind of squash) with milk and *rasna* juice are made. This shows that every festival is marked by some special food or the other. However such customs are undergoing subtle changes in contemporary society. Unlike traditional societies, middle class households might just make one customary special food and not many. Smaller family size becomes responsible for this. Among the poor variations in food are much less depending on financial inability.

In **lower class** Muslim household ceremonies like *Eid*, *Ramazan* and other festivals are unanimous celebrated. Among the Muslims, special foods indicate a break from the mundane simple everyday cuisine. The Muslim slum folks gather that on occasions of *Eid* and eat beef which is otherwise not frequently consumed due to lack of availability in the area or even make a simple *biryani* at home. *Halwa* is also a common form of sweet meat. Some foods like *halim* and *firni* are bought from cheap roadside stalls near the vicinity of slums.

Bengali Christians, who are predominantly middle class, celebrate two major festivals namely the Easter and the Christmas. Easter is a happy occasions for Christians which is celebrated only after forty days of fasting before Good Friday. Good Friday is a day of mourning for the Christians since that marked the death of Christ. According to an aged Catholic woman:

“If you come to our place on Good Friday you will only get to eat ucche bhaja (fried bitter gourd), rice and dal (pulses). Customarily we don’t light the kitchen hearth on that day as a sign of mourning”.

Food is kept very simple than on regular days. Easter Saturday saw the rise of Christ and hence Easter Sunday is celebrated for joy with fruits, cakes, *Easter* eggs and good household food. It is a family affair. For Christmas cake is the most special food. The family gears up together to make preparations for the Christmas cake. A male respondent when asked about festivals and food elaborated on the making of the cake for Christmas. He stated:

“During Christmas we make 60-70 pound cake which is not possible to make at home. For a month we stock all the ingredients like morobba (a kind of fruit preserve or jam), wine, butter, vanilla essence, cashews and other dry fruits. We contact the bakery and ask them about the quantity of ingredients required. The bakery comes home and mixes the cake here. They get their gadgets. Then it’s taken to the shop and baked. This is then distributed among relatives. 90 percent Christian families does that”.

Cake and wine are indispensable for Christmas celebration which is consumed by young and old alike. The diversity of Bengali cuisine can be gauged from its myriad foods consumed on special religious celebrations. Special foods cooked or consumed on religious occasions embody different social meanings related to everyday life. For the Hindus foods prepared on religious ceremonies are endowed with concepts like ‘purity’ because they are offered to the Gods and whose touch in the form of *prasad* is consumed by all. In case of Muslims similar norms are established through the *Kurbani* meat or offering. Among the Christians fruits, yogurt and dry fruits are consumed after offering the same to God. Nevertheless consuming God’s leftover foods is believed to purify and elevate the soul of a Hindu. This indicates the superior position of Gods vis-a-vis man in the universe. This is why although Gods are the receivers of food their leftovers are considered the purest of all foods (Berger, 2011: 4).

The Hindu majority differentiate itself from their Muslim and Christian counterparts through the prevalence of a vegetarian food culture on religious occasions. Vegetarianism which is not the norm of Bengali food culture finds its indelible presence on Hindu religious celebrations. However the complexity of the situation can be gauged by the fact that non-vegetarian meat features in Hindu ceremonies like *Kali puja*. This shows that complicated nuances of food in both everyday and special occasions.

Vegetarianism never became prevalent in Indian society till the later Vedic period or the times of *Dharmasutras* (Achaya, K.T 1994). But it never took shape in Bengal due to the abundance of water bodies and fishes for diet in the region. It was mainly in the Buddhist period that people started adopting vegetarian food habits. Vegetarianism not only prohibits

eating of fish and meat of any forms but also certain heat producing vegetables like onion and garlic. The Hindus famous for their ideology of purity and pollution find vegetarian food as that of utmost purity. Hence religious foods are mostly vegetarian with the lack of even onion and garlic.

Significance of religious celebrations and festivals lie in the way food choices are negotiated and embraced by the community at large. This is because religious foods are always for the greater community than the individual per se. Hence festive foods and drinks integrate members of the household as well as those outside the household. In case of everyday meals Bengali middle class households have been found to show less homogeneity with differences in choices and tastes. Cuisines specific to religious occasions and *pujas* are more homogeneous compared to every day food. They are also bound by ones tradition and culture and become the norm. Every household have their own primordial specifications in preparing food for religious occasions. These foods are consumed by every household member alike unlike everyday food. While there are differences in the types of food eaten on religious celebrations among regional and religious groups, a fair amount of unity can be found on these occasions when people intermingle together sharing the same food. Liberal Bengali Hindus have been found to taste pork and beef in Christian and Muslim households respectively. Religious celebrations also find distribution of food across classes whereby the lower class people also form an extended part of upper class celebration.

Food culture is never sacrosanct. The middle class households are differentiated from one another on the basis of their perception of religious impositions and influence on food. There are Hindu households where vegetarianism is not the norm on ceremonial occasions. One of the respondents also belonging to the low caste further specified:

“We have the custom of eating hilsa on the day of Lakshmi puja at our place. This has been going on since generations”.

Hence one finds myriad factors overlapping together to shape food habits. Factors like family traditions, age, modern living all are determinants to food. This can be witnessed from the fact that while Muslim and Christians never follow a vegetarian diet even on festive occasions, some Hindu households abhor the practice of vegetarianism even on religious occasions. Many of the younger generation of Hindus have condemned such dietary prohibitions and restrictions on religious occasions. Such specifications are often caste centric though modern individuals fail to draw such associations. There is a dialectical relationship

between tradition and modernity which gets manifested in people's dietary choices on religious ceremonies. There are households where egg omelette is cooked immediately after the completion of the *puja* and eaten with *khichuri*. This is again determined by the age of the family members. Such deviancy is more common in households with younger family members while the presence of aged family members might not allow such deviations from the norm.

Single person households seldom prepare special foods on religious occasions. Young married couples with both spouses working fail to follow dietary prescriptions on religious ceremonies. However the presence of elderly members in the family changes the pattern of food consumption on special religious festivals. There are some Muslim households who do not practice the Islamic rituals of fasting and *kurbani* religiously. These practices of choice are an aberration from the norm and depict the diversity of the middle class culture and traditions. Among the lower class, individual choices become less significant under normative pressures. The lower class of Hindus and Muslims show greater homogeneity in exercising of religious norms and customs in food choices on ceremonial occasions compared to the middle class.

6.2.1. Food preparation and religious ceremonies within the household

Food cooked on religious occasions is considered special and hence lots of care and devotion go into the making of such gourmet delicacies. The type of food eaten on religious occasions is often similar to food consumed in everyday life. At times the same foods are cooked on religious occasions along with any mundane day. However the process of food preparation for religious occasions varies greatly from that of food preparation in everyday life and differs over social processes. The process of food preparation for religious events and festivals break away from the normal everyday life situation. There are differences in the way necessary food products are purchased and stored for cooking on such days from that of the everyday. These are more common among the middle class. The urban poor are not so particular about such cooking intricacies. Due to lack of appropriate knowledge and learning the urban poor are not well aware about good storage of food products.

In middle class household food cooked on special religious festivals or events are purchased separately from that of regular household meals. In Hindu households, cooking oil, sugar, salt and spices are also bought separately for the purpose of *puja*. This is more customary among the Hindus because Hindus maintain the notion of touch associated with purity and impurity.

Foods prepared for *pujas* are considered holy and sacred. For a Hindu such foods should be prepared with utmost care and devotion lest it should get spoiled by the profane touch. There is a difference between the food offered to deities and those served to human beings. For example a simple cuisine like *khichuri* is differentiated between the *bhoger khichuri* or that which is offered to the deities and is separated from the regular *khichuri* cooked in middle class homes. As per a blog on *bhoger khichuri* on the site “*Bong Mom’s Cookbook*”⁵⁸, the difference between *bhoger khichuri* and regular *khichuri* cooked at home lies in the faith, devotion and respect that follows the former and is absent in the latter and hence tastes divine. Even the ingredients used in such case by the middle class are different from those used in making the same on an everyday basis. For example the rice grain used for *Bhoger Khichuri* is usually of a better quality. In households where offering *bhog* (food offered to the deities) on religious festivals are the norm, cooking is done separately as an observance of ritual purity from everyday food.

The kitchen space is thoroughly cleaned as a form of ritual purification before special food for *puja* is cooked on the gas burner. According to middle aged home maker of north Kolkata:

“I have separate space for cooking food on special puja occasions. I don’t prepare those foods on the regular gas burner. Foods prepared for bhog should not touch regular mundane food. This makes the food impure and unfit for offering to the deity”.

In some households a traditional stove is kept aside for preparing special foods for religious occasions. In Hindu households religious foods are usually vegetarian cuisines which are separated from the touch of non vegetarian foods. On religious occasions households refrain from cooking any non vegetarian foods like eggs, fish or meat in the kitchen which are considered impure. An aged woman stated:

*“On any religious occasion when I prepare special food as an offering, regular meals also change in the household. I mostly prepare vegetarian food or sheddho bhaat”*⁵⁹
while no non-veg are cooked on that day”.

However there are no such rituals among the Muslim and Christians. The religions of Islam and Christianity are perceived as more egalitarian compared to Hinduism which is

⁵⁸ www.BongCookBook.com

⁵⁹ Sheddho bhaat is a common Bengali meal of boiled rice, boiled lentils, smashed potatoes and other vegetables in boiled or steamed form. Boiled food is considered pure compared to cooked food in Indian society

supposedly more hierarchical entrenched with notions of purity and pollution. *Anjali Gomes*, a Bengali Christian confessed:

“I was a Bengali Brahmin by birth and converted to Christianity after marrying a Bengali Christian. In our religion there is no concept of ‘impure touch’ unlike Brahmanical Hinduism. Christianity treats all as equal”.

Women are the main agents of food preparation on religious occasions. They are the primary organisers and preparers of foods cooked within the domestic sphere. At times men extend their cooperation and labour by making arrangements for the cooking ingredients. Nevertheless cooking food for religious purposes is mostly a communal affair. There are people mainly relatives and close family friends who extend their help in food preparation. Such foods are always cooked in large amounts which are distributed and served among other worshippers, guests and invitees. While in case of everyday food, food preparation is bestowed upon hired cooks or domestic helps, on religious occasions, women become the main preparers of food. Women also state that they are aided by domestic helps or other women among relatives and *kins* who do the *jogar* (arrangements for cooking). Earlier Brahmin cooks would make the sacred food for the deities.

Food preparation practices and choices change over time. Traditionally women from *maddhiyobitto* families would put on fresh garb after bathing and enter the kitchen to exert their culinary expertise to prepare delicacies of religious festivals. Contemporary middle class women have spoken about their inability to prepare special foods at home. Easy availability of readymade foods has made them resort to purchasing such products from the market. These are also offered to the deities before it is consumed by the householders. A middle aged woman living in north Kolkata when asked about preparing special cuisines on *Janmashtami* stressed that:

“I don’t prepare taler bora (dumplings made of ripe sugar palm) and naru (balls made of coconut and sugar or jiggery) any more on Janmashtami. These are laborious task which requires a lot of time and energy. These days you get everything in the market so it is easy to purchase them”.

There are several small and big sweet shops in the city which sells these typical sweetmeats before the festive occasions. Several women also spoke about the rising cost of food products in the market which makes these things difficult to be prepared at home. Some also reasoned that earlier such special foods used to be prepared in large amounts for the whole household. Today households have shrunk in size and there are very few members left. The young

people mostly stay away from home and hence there aren't many people to cherish such gourmets. The structural transformation of Hindu households has led to a shift in cooking practices on religious celebrations.

Among the Muslims, special cuisines on religious events are cooked in a special manner from the everyday meals. Cuisines like *biryani* and *sheer korma* which also find a place in everyday food in Muslim households are prepared by the household women with utmost care and efficiency. Bengali Muslim households usually have a light diet compared to their Urdu-speaking counterparts. But on occasions of religious festivals the food prepared is much rich and spicy. There are also specific processes of preservation of food on religious occasions. For instance among the Muslims, the *kurbani* meat is preserved in the form of *namak goshth*. It is a preparation where raw meat is preserved with salt and taken out for cooking in small amounts. Usually the *kurbani* meat is distributed in large amounts among the community of relatives and friends. Hence it is not possible to eat the whole meat at one time. The *namak goshth* (salted meat) is prepared in a different manner from the regular meat preparations. In some families *pulao* (pilaf) and meat are cooked in a spicy manner.

Muslims also eat *halim* during *Ramzaan*. *Halim* is also a laborious and time consuming preparation due to which most of the families no longer cook *halim* at home. It is more convenient to purchase these foods from the eateries on the roads. Even foods like *keema tillia* (a preparation of minced meat) are bought from outside and eaten at home. For the Christians too outside agencies like bakery are ushered in to bake Christmas cakes. These are special cakes that are baked in big sizes. It is not possible to bake these cakes at home because of which they are sent to the bakery along with the different ingredients needed. Respondents confirm that dry fruits of variety are soaked in wine and dried in the sun for a month till they are ready to be sent to the bakers. The bakery bakes the cake and delivers them to respective families. The cake is usually distributed across homes as a form of sharing.

Outside agencies or the market are found to commercialise special festive foods. While earlier preparing such foods were prerogative of the household, women's lack of time, changing family structure and work culture respectively are also changing the way festival or religious foods are perceived today. Women also feel preparing special foods is time consuming and laborious hence is easier to purchase them from the market. This also shows a

changing attitude of women towards cooking. Such changes are much more significant among the middle class compared to the lower middle and lower class respectively.

Foods for religious occasions are also cooked in utensils made of copper, bell metal and brass which are believed to be ritually pure. These are also signs of *abhijatyo* (high status) among the middle class. The lower middle class or *moddhyobitto* often use steel cook wares which are kept away from mundane use. Even in Muslim households special religious foods are cooked in special vessels and cook wares which are taken out for the occasion. Gas ovens and traditional burners are used for preparing *Mughlai* cuisines like kebabs and grilled foods. Foods are however served in regular crockery and plates of ceramic or melamine. If there are a lot of invitees many families take resort to thermocol plates and cups. The use of disposable plates and cups are functional in sublating social differences. People of all social class participating in such events share similar platter equating people across social hierarchies. Disposability of thermocol or paper plates and cups douse the fear of getting polluted by the lower classes.

Ritual purity observed in food preparation and consumption on special religious occasions are also caste specific. The Brahmins especially have their own customary ways which differentiate them from the other castes. One also finds an interception between upper caste and upper class in Bengali society. In general most of the upper class people also belong to the upper castes. However my data is more specific to class differences while data on caste specifications have been less explored.

In **urban poor** households *pujas* are not arranged frequently compared to the middle class. Arranging a *puja* and inviting guests is an expensive affair and is always not affordable by many poor households. In individual households festive or religious foods are prepared by the women who are also helped by other women among relatives and in the neighbourhood. The urban poor do not always possess separate vessels and cook wares for preparing food for religious purposes. The lower class seldom offer *bhog* or cooked food to deities. Food offered to Gods as a form of worship is very simple. People offer fruits like banana, cucumber, *chiku* (a kind of plum) and *payes* on *pujas*. Festive occasions find the arrangements of feasts within the corridors of the slums. Food is also shared among several people who are neighbours but more than *kins*. Often slum dwellers visit their *desh* or villages on such *pujas*.

6.2.2. Consumption of food on religious ceremonies within the household

Norms of commensality are different in case of special foods on religious occasions compared to everyday meals and foods consumed on other occasions. Food served and distributed on religious ceremonies and *pujas* are usually perceived as the *prasad* or consecrated food (that which has been offered to the deities). Hence it needs to be accepted with reverence and utmost devotion. Such foods must be shared among the group. Meals or light snacks served and eaten on religious celebrations form a communal affair developing the process of socialization. Special foods cooked on religious occasions are endowed with high religious significance. It symbolises the whole act of sharing food with the deity by the worshippers on the one hand and second of all among the members of the household along with outside guests after it is offered to the deities during worship. This is a form of 'respect pollution'. On occasions of *Lakshmi puja* or *Saraswati puja* in Hindu households there are two types of food prepared. One which includes the *naibediyo*, fruits, *shinni* and the *bhog* (*luchi*, *suji* or *halwa*, *khicuri*, vegetables *chorchori* (a preparation of mixed vegetables) or *labra* (a special Bengali dish of all kinds of seasonal vegetables sautéed with seasonings), *payesh* etc that are offered to the deity and the other is the same foods that are prepared for the mortal beings. The *bhog prasad* (consecrated food) is distributed in small amounts among the people taking part in the *puja* while the rest of the food is served as a meal. The popular belief goes that a *prasad* should always be consumed by distributing it to others. Hence such foods have a special significance in the lives of individuals. Such special food is shared among a wider section of the people who fall outside the general food sharing group or the close family members. Food distribution is meted out equally among family members, guests or even domestic helps. These occasions always have a social gathering where people are invited to come and participate.

Another interesting point of commensality noted on religious occasions is the way food is served or distributed. Like earlier times when people would sit on *asans* (mat) on the floor in a linear fashion, in modern contemporary households foods on religious occasions are usually served in hand. People hold plates of food or *prasad* in their hands and seat themselves anywhere in the household. Some foods are also packed and distributed among different households like neighbours, friends or relatives. Among the Muslims, food on major festivals like *Iftaar* or *Eid* is also shared among non-Muslim friends. On occasions of *Shab-e-barat* or *bakhri-eid* the uncooked meat is distributed among relatives and *kins* before eating. There is

also the custom of sharing a part of the food with the poor. Domestic helps are also given away *kurbani* meat by middle class households.

In **lower middle class and lower class** households as well food in the form of *prasad* is equally distributed among those who participate in the *puja*. The workers or maids working in middle class households most often get a share of the *prasad* either in the form of *khichuri* or *luchi*. In both middle class and lower class households women are the main servers or distributors of food. This reflects a woman's control over the hearth and the household to a large extent. Even in middle class households it is always the woman who decides how much is to be distributed to whom. There is also the trend of sending the *prasad* to those who could not participate in the ceremony. These are usually close family friends or *kins*. In many cases neighbours across religion are also offered such foods. Ritual offering also becomes community activity. Political parties also become active on such occasions by upholding all religious festivals. This though falls outside the arena of home food, yet create a picture of political calculations.

Religious foods are functional in facilitating unity and integrity among the people. Differences are created across religious and regional variations. Class based discrimination is not much profound in the process of consumption of food on religious occasions and festivals. Anthropologists have always been interested in the study of food rituals and taboos which are mostly associated with ones religious beliefs. Religious foods are seen as sacred and are highly significant across cultures. In most cases specific foods eaten on special occasions are perceived as sharing it with Gods. This can be evidenced from the Last Supper in the Holy Communion (Fox, R 2002). Special foods always have a special significance. They also serve secular and temporal functions. They are not only prepared in a special manner but also eaten in a special way which is different from the regular mundane food habit. People often try to rationalise rituals and customs which becomes the reason for their obeisance.

6.3 FOOD AND SYMBOLISM OF FASTING

Special foods in Bengali households are much associated with religious ceremonies and fasting. Fasting is the process of abstaining oneself from food and water. It is an integral part of ceremonial rituals among all religions. Fasting is a phenomenon that prevails across all sections of society. The middle class and the poor perform fasts equally on eminent religious

festivals and ceremonies. While fasting might be an individual process it has deep social implications. Bengalis across social and economic class have confirmed fasting on several religious occasions. Certain religious ceremonies remain incomplete without the act of fasting. Hindu Bengalis fast on all the major religious ceremonies and *pujas* like *Lakshmi puja*, *Saraswati puja*, *Kali puja*, *Durga ashtami* and in various *shoshthi pujas*. Muslims are known to fast in the holy month of *Ramzaan* before Id-ul-fitr. During *Ramzaan* they are prohibited from taking food and drink after sunrise and before sunset.

Devout Muslims eat food and drink water in the early hours of dawn while they fast throughout the day. One cannot even gulp one's spit or saliva during the fast. Food and water are taken again after sunset which is followed by the *Iftaar* feast. Muslims usually break the fast by sipping water and eating fruits like dates and other seasonal fruits which are sweet and nutritious. This is then followed by *Iftaar* delicacies ranging from all sorts of fries, *pakor*s and fritters, *halim* and meat dishes, rice and *roti* of preferences along with sweets and savouries like *firni* and *halwa*. *Ramzaan* is followed and practiced by all devout Muslims. Some Bengali families have stressed that keeping the fast is a duty (*farz*) but it depends on individual decision. Children are often refrained from fasting.

Women cannot keep the fast during menstruation since one needs to be bodily pure in order to practice *Ramzaan*. This also holds true for Hindu women or women of any religion. For a Muslim fasting on *Ramzaan* often brings parity between the rich and the poor since it is a way by which the rich can experience the plight of the poor. Both middle class and poor Muslims are found to religiously fast on *Ramzaan*. For a Christian too it is mandatory to keep fast for forty days before Good Friday. Christians do not take food or drink throughout the day while they break their fast by consuming fruits and sweets.

Ritual fasts are encouraged on certain days of the year mainly for women both married and unmarried. Married women's fast is different from that of unmarried women (Nath and Punekar, 2011: 96). Among the middle class Hindus certain religious *pujas* or ceremonies demand fasting before offering *pushpanjali* (offering of flowers) to the deities, there are other kinds of fasts which are observed almost throughout the day. On major religious ceremonies men, women and children abstain from food and at times even water till the *puja* is complete and flowers are offered to the deities. People fast till a certain time on *Lakshmi puja*, *Saraswati puja* and also *Durgashtami* in middle class Bengali homes. Middle class Bengalis also have the ritual of worshipping lord *Vishnu (Narayan)* on *Purnima* (full moon

night). On such occasions people refrain from food and water till the *puja* is complete. Such ceremonies are conducted for the wellbeing of the family members. On such occasions, it is needless to say that women play the role of principal organisers. Among the Brahmins men also take an active part in *puja* ceremonies, it being the occupation of the said caste group. According to an aged Brahmin man:

“I fast on Purnima pujas along with my wife and my daughter in law but not on any other occasions”.

While men’s fasting and offering worship is exhibited through choice, for women it is more of a social imposition. Bengali women in particular are supposed to keep *bratas* or fasts on specific days of the year. There are several major fasts that are kept on occasions of *shoshthi* through out Bengal. These fasts are maintained across all sections of Hindu women. *Shoshthi pujas* hold immense significance in the lives of Bengali women. According to several anthropological studies, fasting and serving or distributing food is perceived as natural activities for women worldwide. In medieval Europe for instance women are associated with food preparation and distribution, rather than consumption. Since food was the only resource that women controlled, fasting was seen as charitable for women which made them part with their own foods happily (Bynum, 1997: 129). Indian women have also been fasting for their children and husbands as a part of their ritual duty. Such performances are expected out of married women more whose sole duty is to serve her in-laws family. Fasting of women is essentialized. “Women had to be enabled to control their natural urges by means of domestic ritual centred around fasting and accultured to thinking of their traditional commitment to serving husband and extended family as a service to the wider nation” (Donner, 2008: 152).

The ritual of *shoshthi* is widely celebrated mainly by the women of west Bengal or the *Ghotis* and holds less significance among *Bangal* women. A middle aged school teacher noted:

“Since we are ghotis we observe all kinds of shoshthi which means having vegetarian food. At our place there were two widows who used to have god’s Prasad as meals”.

Traditionally fasts are observed on *shoshthi pujas* like *neel shoshthi*, *ashok shoshthi*, *chabra shoshthi*, *jamaishoshthi*, *shital shoshthi* and *Durga shoshthi* as an offering to Goddess *shoshthi* for the wellbeing of the children. On such occasions women of the house abstain from food and water throughout the day. At times simple foods like fruits, sago, milk and sweets are eaten at night after whole days fast. Rice is strictly forbidden for consumption on

days of fast. Rather one can eat *luchi* or *porota* made of flour, in the evening. Widows have even stricter rules of fasting. Widows are forbidden to eat or drink on every *Ekadashi*⁶⁰. Fasting is a highly gendered practice. It is a common sight to see middle class Bengali women keeping a fast on one ceremony or the other. *Neel shoshthi* and *Shivratri* are the two major occasions of fasting for Indian women. While *neel shoshthi* is a ceremony for ‘mothers’, *shivratri* can be observed by anyone. Several unmarried young girls fast on *shivratri* in hope of getting married to the perfect groom, as the saying goes. This is true among the Hindu Bengalis of both middle and lower class respectively.

Compared to the **middle class** the **lower class women** residing in the slums maintain strict rules of fasting. Along with the above mentioned ceremonies, the urban poor fasts on several other occasions like *Bipottarini puja* (A form of Goddess Kali), *Manasa puja* (Goddess Manasa), *Ranna puja* (worshipping the hearth). For poor women fasting is an integral part of their everyday life. They are functional in creating a cohesive integrity among poor women. At times women from the slums connect to the women in their *desh* through process of fasting. Rituals and ceremonials are performed in their villages among other family members. Fasting for children, husbands and in-laws ensures the chastity and devotion of the ideal woman. Such is the belief especially among the poor. On days of fasting food is kept minimalist. Some women refrain even from drinking a sip of water while others break their fasts later in the evening to gorge on light simple food. Rice is totally forbidden on days of fasting. While rules are followed by every married woman, men and children are eliminated from such rigidities. Food is prepared and kept aside for the rest of the family while the woman maintains her fast. This sharpens the image of women as providers of food while the others are the receivers. Hindu women generally associate their men and children with Gods. Children are perceived as offspring of Goddess *Shoshthi* while the husbands are seen as *parameshwar* (the Supreme Being) and hence they should be offered food in analogous to Gods. “Why humans should feed the Gods, reversing thereby the principles of hierarchy, could be explained by the Upanishadic injunction that the first duty for the preservation of life is not to eat, but to feed others. It is readily apparent that men assume this duty by feeding the gods and being fed their leftovers” (Moreno, M 1992: 18). Indian women traditionally have been found to eat the leftovers of their children and husband.

⁶⁰ *Ekadashi* is the eleventh day in a lunar month and is considered holy among the Hindus when abstinence from food is perceived as the norm for the general wellbeing of the body. It is believed that our body is ruled by the cosmos including the planets and stars in the external space which has a bearing on our body. As the popular perception goes women especially widows are expected to fast on *ekadashi* to control their physical desires and urges

While religious fasting may sound regressive among many educated men and women, in contemporary times the tradition of fast has attained new meanings. There are some set of women who perform fasts as a marker of freedom and choice. For them controlling their bodies and materialist desire is empowering. Women also form niche groups who take to religious performances. Religious practices are also recreational for some. They claim that these rituals give them immensely pleasurable and satisfying. Few older respondents shared fasting as their duty and hence are performed out of will. Some associate fasting on specific lunar days like *Ekadashi* as therapeutic measure of controlling physical pain. For others, ritual fasts are no longer stereotypically performed. One finds a huge hiatus between the way abstinence from food is perceived among the older generation of men and women compared to the young. Working women in middle class households have limited time to devote on such rituals of fasting. Many young high profile women working in big MNCs stated that they don't believe in keeping fasts and hence never perform the same. A school teacher stated:

“Since I was married into a joint family I had to fast on four Tuesdays in the month of Baishakh. Those are for mangal chandi⁶¹. The married women of the house have to fast till afternoon. Now I only fast on the first and last Tuesday because I work. Now it has become flexible. We also need to fast on jamai shoshthi. I don't fast on shivratri and neel (neel shoshthi is celebrated in the name of lord Shiva). On such occasions we eat sago and beler pana (bael juice). Men never fast”.

Another older woman had remarked:

“Earlier I would religiously fast on all the major days of the year. But now I am unable to because of age and poor health”.

While both middle class and lower class women have been found to glorify fasting, in contemporary Bengali society both middle class and poor women denounce fasting due to health issues. Physical conditions and lifestyle diseases like diabetes, gastro enteritis, high blood pressure etc disable them from fasting for longer hours. Women who would keep numerous fasts at a young age stated of keeping probably one fast a month. This shows that fasting forms an integral part of Bengali woman's life across all classes.

⁶¹ *Mangalchandi brata* is performed to appease Goddess *Mangalachandi*. On this occasion women fast only to thrive on a *phalahar* (a diet of seasonal fruits) on every Tuesday in the month of *Jaishtha* (lunar month of Hindu calendar). Along with fruits like mangoes and bananas, sweetened yogurt or milk mixed with flat rice (*chira*) is taken while fish, meat, onion and garlic are forbidden (Banerji 1997; Ray 2004: 37).

6.4 FOOD AND 'BENGALI' FESTIVALS

Apart from specific religious festivals, there are few other festivals which are embraced by every Bengali around the world. Celebration of festivals over food and drink is part of every culture. Among the Bengalis festivals and their celebrations form an integral part of food and culture. The Bengali calendar is ruled by six seasons namely *grishma* (summer), *barsha* (monsoon), *sharat* and *hemanta* (autumn) and *sheet* (winter), *basanta* (spring). There are special foods for every seasonal festival among Bengalis. Starting with the summer months of *baishakh* and *jaishtha*, seasonal fruits like mangoes, litchis and bananas form the diet of both middle class and poor Bengalis.

Poila Baishakh marks the beginning of the Bengali New Year and is celebrated among Bengali homes with high spirit. *Poila Baishakh* or *Nababarsho* is welcomed by putting on new clothes and experiencing delicacies at home. Almost every middle class household in the city claimed that they prepare some special cuisines on such an occasion. Most of food on *Nababarsho* is kept traditional with fish as the primary food. Generally people eat good expensive fishes which are usually avoided on regular days. Consumption of goat's meat is also common. There is the tradition of *haal khata* on this auspicious day for opening ledger especially among the traders and businessmen. People worship Goddess *Lakshmi* and Lord *Ganesha* on the occasion over new clothes and sweets. Among the urban poor *Nababarsho* is marked with little celebration over food like meat (chicken) and sweets. While *Poila Baishakh* is commonly celebrated among the Hindus even Christians and Muslims are found to celebrate the same in equal measure.

Among the Hindus *Jamai shoshthi* is yet another festival that is religiously followed. Recently the government of West Bengal even declared the occasion as a public holiday which further sanctioned the ritual. *Jamai shoshthi* among the *Ghotis* is among the many *shoshthi pujas* that are observed mostly by women. There are some *Bangal* households as well who judiciously worship Goddess *shoshthi* on this day. Besides *Jamai shoshthi* has significance in Bengal. The word '*Jamai*' means 'son-in-law' and the ceremony is in the honour of the son-in-law which is widely acclaimed in Bengal. The wife's mother would invite her *Jamai* by arranging a feast for him. The *Jamai* would also be showered with gifts in the form of new clothes and blessings by the mother in law. *Jamai shoshthi* is prevalent across all classes and the festival is usually followed by sumptuous feasts. On this auspicious occasion special foods are prepared for the son-in-law. Foods for *Jamai shoshthi* range from good fishes like *Hilsa*,

chingri (prawns or lobsters), and meat along with seasonal vegetables, fruits and sweets of different varieties. These days eating out in restaurants have become more prevalent among the affluent middle class. Newly launched restaurants serving traditional Bengali cuisine provide gourmet delicacies on special occasions like *Jamai shoshthi* which caters to certain sections of society. Among the urban poor as well such customs are more prevalent where good food is cooked at home and served to the daughter and her husband by the bride's family.

Durga puja is the major festival in Bengal and brings together all sections and groups of society. Even the Bengali Muslims and Christians along with other communities of people living in Kolkata take part in this grandeur of the festival. Among the Hindus, the festive occasion of *Durga puja* begins with the *shoshthi puja* performed by married women and mothers. On the day of *Mahashoshthi* (sixth day of Durga puja), women young and old fast since morning and appease Ma *Shoshthi* by visiting the *shoshthi tala* in a nearby temple. On the day women forbid themselves from eating rice and consume other religious foods like *luchi* and sweets. Men, women and children unanimously fast on the morning of *Durga Ashtami* which is the most significant day of the festival. After worshipping the Goddess and offering *pushpanjali* people help themselves to a vegetarian diet. Ray (2004) gives a vivid description of the food prepared on such occasion in middle class Bengali households. "For lunch *loochi* is typically served with *alur dum*- a steamed potato curry lightly flavoured with asafoetida- and a *dal* with yellow split peas with bits of coconut. The *Ashtami* dinner concludes with *kheer*" (Ray, 2004: 38).

Middle class respondents when questioned about preparation of festive foods at home stated that in most cases *Durga puja* is an occasion where family members gorge on outside food. Consumption of street foods is on a high then. Within the household simple festival centric foods like *luchi* or *khichuri* is common. On the occasion of *Navami*, people prefer consuming meat or mutton. In several upper middle class households, *pandal* hopping on days of *puja* has been replaced by *adda*⁶² at home over foods and drinks. While young folks prefer to step outdoor with friends, the older people sit back at home enjoying gourmet foods. *Bijoya Dashami* the final day of the five days *puja* celebration ends with distribution of sweets among close *kins*, relatives and friends.

⁶² A generic word in Bengali used to denote chatting or idle conversations between a group of people

Christmas is yet another major festival shared by every Bengali irrespective of caste, class and religion. Christmas popularly known as *Boro-din* is celebrated over the special Christmas cake. The cake is a food that helps to create homogeneity through consumption. The Christmas cake is an indispensable part of Bengali food culture. Traditionally a typical family recipe of Anglo Indians, the cake has a specific style of preparation with all kinds of dry fruits soaked in rum for days. Bengalis of Kolkata irrespective of class and religion explore the culinary pleasure of the cake from different shops big and small. Even the urban poor in slums would buy a small fruit cake for their children on Christmas. Commercialisation of foods helps to create standardisation of food choices. Distinctions are maintained in terms of the size, quality, price and source of the cake.

In the winter months another important festival that sweeps across Bengal is the *Poush Sankranti* or the *Makar Sankranti*. The month of *Poush* augments the festival of *pitheparban* (the festival of pancakes). On the auspicious occasion of *poush parbon* (harvest festival), middle class and lower class households feast on rice based pancakes called *pithe* (These rice based pancakes are of various kinds like *gokul pithe*, *aske pithe*, *jhal pithe*, *puli pithe* etc), *pati shapta*, *doodh puli*, *malpoa* and other savouries. The culture of *pithe parbon* is prevalent among all religious groups including Muslims and Christians. Bengali Muslim households have also confirmed the trend of making gourmet *pithe* of all kinds similar to the Hindu families. One of the Muslim respondents who is originally from Murshidabad narrated:

“In the villages poush parbon is observed among all the households, Hindus and Muslims. People of Murshidabad love eating coconut. At our ancestral home we would make different variety of pithe both sweet and spicy or jhal. Those used to be cooked on the unun. Taler cake used to be made on earthen unun. It used to taste like chocolate flavour. But this is difficult to make in the gas burner. These food trends were restricted to desher bari and no longer followed in the city”.

Bengali Christians are also known to cook *pithe* and *puli* on *Sankranti*. Even among the urban poor, sweets like *pithe* and *payesh* are cooked as a celebration of *poushparbon*. One of the slum dwellers stated:

“We make a whole variety of pithe and doodh puli on the occasion of Sankranti and also serve any visitors coming home. In the villages the celebrations are enormous though”.

The festival centric foods differ from the religious ones because it is shared across Bengali households of different caste, class, religion and region. These foods are symbolic of ethnic unity and integrity amidst differences.

6.5 SPECIAL FOOD PREPARATION AND CONSUMPTION: AN INTERCEPTION BETWEEN TRADITION AND MODERNITY

Women in Bengali households have always been the major preparers of food. Even though in modern society men's collaboration in domestic cooking doesn't go unnoticed, in case of preparation of festival centric cuisines it is always the women who come to the forefront. This passes well with the identity of women as household cooks and distributors of food. In Bengali middle class households of Kolkata women's domestic labour helps to create gourmet delicacies on special occasions. Women are found to put in immense strength and creativity to replicate the customary gourmet delicacies in the private sphere. Literature shows that special foods took up a woman's leisure hours in traditional societies. Women's artistic skill would be exhibited through the culinary art of producing excellent mouth watering dishes on festivals and auspicious occasions. These will be different from the regular everyday cuisine. With the tradition of preparing festival centric foods is substituted by modern agency like the market. The cohesiveness of the joint family breaking down special food preparation and consumption within households has taken new forms.

Recent times find such ambitions of **middle class** women changing under the pressure of public work culture. Women no longer find the time or the zeal to exhibit such culinary craftsmanship even on special days of the year. Preparing traditional foods on festivals can be laborious and time constraining. On the other hand the public sphere has opened itself to private consumption. The new eating out culture and restaurants, a bi-product of colonial culture in Bengal serve all kinds of festival centric cuisines for the upwardly mobile. These places not only serve traditional Bengali cuisine by tapping the sentiments of the people but also cater to the needs of their consumers. Foods are served in conventional platters and decor. They provide not just the food but the perfect mood and ambience that one looks out for on the occasion. Hence traditional foods come in modern packages. For instance on occasion of *poila baishakh* several middle class respondents stated of going out to dine with family and friends. Magazines and newspapers display advertisements of exquisite Bengali cuisine propagated by certain restaurants promising fine dining. There were others who lamented the loss of old skill and expertise in creating good traditional food due to the incumbent of modern culture. After all ceremonial and festival food culture reflects the

identity and emotions of the group. All this changed women's perception of home cooked food. Women feel relieved to not spare time in the kitchen. The reason they state is lack of time, small family size, lack of domestic help in the form of relatives and kins and so on. Earlier in a joint family all the household women would come together to prepare delicacies on special occasions. Such situation no longer exists in advanced or late modern society.

Among the **urban poor** such practices of preparing special delicacies still continue especially in the rural setting. Women from the slums confirmed that special foods of lesser variety are often cooked on festivals and ceremonies at home. Such foods however are not elaborately prepared along the middle class standards. The urban poor households are also not consistent enough in preparing special foods on every occasion. Women have stated that cooking food on special occasions is their task while they are aided by their men. If they have more money women try to cook good food for their men and children. They are also offered food from the middle class households on festivals and other ceremonies.

6.6 FESTIVAL FOOD: IDENTITY AND EMOTION

Special foods prepared on festivals are culturally symbolic and culture specific. Most often they reflect the ethnic identity of the group leaving aside all other differences. More than often people live up to their group identity through the dietary choices they make in everyday life. Special cuisines give them an occasion to administer their rights over their groups through their group identity. For example preparing and consuming *pithe* (a type of pancake) on *poushparbon* was unanimously shared across all classes, regional and religious groups of respondents. Although the form and process of preparation has subtle regional specifications, such foods create a sense of belongingness among the larger ethnic group of Bengalis. A Muslim woman in her thirties reflected:

“We do eat pithe on sankranti but it is not religion specific. It is a cultural influence”.

Cultural influences are more predominant in case of special foods than for regular everyday meals. Such cultural influences help to break the barriers across heterogeneous lines to a large extent. While one cannot overlook differences in food choices among individuals and groups, special foods consumed on festivals are functional for forming group identity.

Another important facet of festival foods are that it breaks the individual paradox of regular food consumption by building on homogeneity. Special foods are collectively shared by the

people in most cases. Food items that are prepared at home are served and consumed by all unanimously. In very few circumstances special foods are formed out of individual preferences of family members. This may be due to generation gap in households. Unlike regular mundane food, special festival menus are consumed together by sharing the same social space among family members. These are situations when even outsiders get a share of the food cooked within the family. Festival foods are also emotion bound. People often narrated feeling of nostalgia when talking about foods prepared on major festivals shared by Bengalis. One of the respondents, a young woman recounted:

“Earlier on Bijoya (The tenth day of Durga puja) I would visit my maternal uncles’ home. We would be served special delicacies like sweets, chola masala (black gram) and halwa. All these were made by my grandmother. These were like tradition which soon subsided after her death”.

While preparation and consumption of regular everyday food is a necessity, creation of festival foods are expressions of emotions. People cherish tasting foods that are unique to certain festivals. Some also complain of such traditions and customs being lost under the rubric of urbanisation and westernisation. Western food culture is held responsible for the loss simple emotions tied to food. Children are often blamed for their inability to acquire the old customary tastes giving way to the lust of fabricated taste buds.

Such expressions are more common in middle class households. In slum dwelling poor families seldom there is reminiscing of old times. The poor are still eager to maintain their customs if they can afford. They have no problem of time or busy life schedule. Neither do they face the problem of family segregation from kins. This is because in many slums relatives live in close proximity. Besides the urban poor are well connected to their rural folks back home.

6.7 FOOD AND LIFE CYCLE RITUALS

Life cycle rituals in every culture revolve around set of dietary practices. Such practices are not just pertinent to Hindu life and culture but to other religious groups as well. Bengali households consume special foods on major rites de passage like birth, *Annaprasana* (a baby’s first food), death and marriage.

6.7.1. Birth, Death and food

Birth and death rituals for instance lead to irregular dietary processes. In Bengali households the birth of a child is celebrated over sweets. Women during pregnancy and after child birth face huge amounts of dietary restrictions and are forbidden from eating spicy (*jhal*) and hot foods. After the birth of a child especially a male, the family prepares itself for *Annaprasana* or the baby's first rice ceremony. While a son's rice ceremony is celebrated with huge aplomb with all kinds of rituals for the girl child families just arrange a dinner feast among the middle class. However in modern one child family even the girl child gets an equal treatment like a boy child. This reflects on changing times and people's perception on certain educated affluent middle class. The baby gets to taste all kinds of food among which the fish head or tail, fried vegetables, *dal*, vegetable curry and *payesh* (sweet dish) play a prominent role. *Annaprasana* is more prevalent among the Bengali Hindus. In lower class households *payesh* is fed to the child as a process of weaning.

In Hindu households the death of a household member alters the whole process of cooking and food consumption within the household. The sons of the deceased perform *habishi* by cooking parboiled rice in earthen clay pot (*malsha*) over the traditional *unun* for fifteen days. This period is known as *Ashouch* (impurity). The number of days varies between different caste groups. On the final day of *Ashouch*, the *Shraddha*⁶³ (a death ritual) is performed only after which the deceased's family can return to normality of everyday life. On the day of *Shraddha* family and relatives of the deceased has to eat pure vegetarian food. Jonathan Parry in his study of north Indian mortuary rite discussed the symbolic relation of food with the dead during which the primary mourner who offers *shraddha* equates oneself with the deceased body. The *pinda* (balls of rice, barley, *khoa* and milk) are perceived as the food of the deceased which is symbolically eaten by the family members of the deceased as well as the Brahmins (Parry, J 1985). The next day of the *Shraddha* is assigned as the *Niyombhanga* (breaking of rules) among Bengalis. This is the day when the family and close *kins* of deceased return to their normal everyday life. This day is triggered with the consumption of regular foods like fish, onion and garlic. This symbolises a shift from the sacred to the profane, the latter being the regular. Hence consumption of non vegetarian food fosters the regularity of everyday life.

⁶³ Etymologically the term is related to the concept of faith and indicates offerings to the dead by faith (Parry, J 1985: 615)

While such elaborate rituals are common among the Bengali Hindus with slight variations across castes and sub castes, among the Muslims and Christians mourning takes place for four days. On such occasions cooking food is forbidden in the domestic hearth and foods are provided by relatives and *kins* outside the household. Unlike the Hindu mortuary rites, Bengali Muslims and Christians do not have such elaborate rituals to perform. Vegetarian food is the norm on the days of mourning among both Muslim and Christians.

The death rites are similar across all classes sharing the same caste or religious identity. This forms a cohesive unity among the groups. Variations exist within sub castes, and sects across religions. Although death rites and associated dietary rules are tradition bound, modern urban city life has created immense flexibility in the way these rites are observed especially among the middle class. For instance preparing the *habishi* in a separate hearth from that of those used for regular foods are not strictly followed in many middle class households. Children are often secluded from such norms while rules are impinged only on the adult family members. Besides apart from cooking parboiled rice only, pure vegetarian foods are consumed by the mourners of the deceased. There is greater flexibility in the rules observed on the death of a person within the household in modern society which helps to submerge social differences. This calls for a change in such rigidity associated with food.

The significance of death rituals lies in the fact that apart from connecting the body of both the mourner and the deceased with the cosmos it enables greater interaction among extended relatives and *kins*. On the death of a relative, the other family members who do not share the same kitchen or the household observe similar dietary restraints. They eat vegetarian food and resist eating fish, meat, onion or garlic for the whole period of mourning or *Ashouch* till the *Niyombhanga* is complete. The *Niyombhanga* is a feast arranged for all the close relatives or *kins* tied by blood relations. The process helps to create feelings of oneness among the extended family who otherwise remain detached round the year.

6.7.2. Food and Marriage Rituals

For Bengalis the most important rituals encompassing food are associated with marriage. Hindu marriage rituals entail feeding the sacred fire with ghee (clarified butter) before the bride and bridegroom ties the knot (Ray 2004: 35). In Hindu Bengali household food plays an important and symbolic role in marriages. Before marriage it is customary for the bride and grooms to experience the ritual of *aiburobhat* in their respective households. The term consists of two words *aiburo* (unmarried) and *bhat* (rice). It denotes the consumption of the

last grain of rice in the mother's house before marriage. On the wedding day the bride and groom are supposed to keep fast in order to purify themselves. In Ghoti households across all classes they are respectively provided with *doi-chira* (yogurt and flattened rice) in the early hours of dawn after which they will abstain from all foods. Such a custom varies in case of *Bangal* families. Again such rituals vary in terms of regional specifications.

Marriage remains incomplete without the practice of *striachar* (women's rites). The bride has to stand on the *shil-nora* (an essential kitchen tool) while performing the *haldi* (turmeric) ceremony. The fish is of utmost significance in every Bengali culture. There is the custom of sending a whole fish (preferable *Rohu*) smeared with vermilion and turmeric and adorned like a bride to the groom's family. The fish is a symbol of fertility (ibid). During the wedding both the bride and groom throw *khoi* (popped rice) in the sacred fire as an offering to the fire God. As soon as the bride reaches the home of the groom, milk is put to boil and allowed to spill over as a good omen. Among the *Bangals* the wife also has to hold a slimy fish like *loita* or *shol* in her hand before entering the household. All this symbolises the wealth, prosperity and patience that she would bring to the household. On the next day there is the ritual of *bou-bhat* which indicates the rice served and distributed by the new wife among the household men. These customs are uniform across all classes, caste and regional groups with minor ritualistic variations.

In contemporary middle class households such normative practices are at times altered flexibility to suit the needs of individuals. The bride or the grooms are at times provided a light breakfast of *luchi* and *torkari* but not rice. Sweets can also be consumed if desired. For the other family members feasts start with the morning meal itself. Guests and family members are served hot puffed *luchi* and potato curry along with sweets. This is followed by a simple luncheon of rice, *dal*, *shukto* (a Bengali preparation made of bitter gourd and other vegetables), vegetable curry and fish. The lunch is arranged by the bride's and groom's family separately. Marriage takes place in the evenings followed by sumptuous feast of all kinds of delicacies. In modern Hindu marriages the wedding menu is highly commercialised arranged in large banquets. People resort to outside agencies like caterers and menus are selected from a multi culinary platter.

Distinctions arise in case of Bengali Muslims and Christians for whom religious rituals and customs are different from their Hindu counterparts. Nonetheless it is important to note that several of the Bengali Muslim and Christian families are formed out of interreligious

marriages and hence such customs are shared across religious boundaries as well. For the Bengali Muslims the bride and groom are not supposed to consume rice in particular. Rice here indicates a proper meal or satiety of hunger. However it is customary to feed the bride and groom *simui* or sweets. This is analogous to the Hindu *payesh* cooked out of milk and rice grains. Rice grains, milk and ghee are considered the purest form of foods since the time of ancient Bengal.

Marriage is always followed by feasts comprising of all kinds of gourmet cuisines. Bengali Muslims prepare *Mughlai* cuisines on such occasions. In both Christian and Muslim families the ritual of *aiburobhat* prevails. There is also the custom of applying turmeric on the bride and groom before marriage. Along with religious practices, most of the rituals are regional and shared among the community as a whole. Among the Christians, rituals and ceremonies are conducted in the groom's household first followed by the bride's unlike in Hindu marriages. The girl has to bedeck herself in the clothes and ornaments gifted by the groom's family on the day of the wedding. The groom's family is treated by the bride's family on the day of the marriage. The groom and his relatives visit the bride's household in the morning. A Bengali Christian respondent provides a vivid description of the food offered to the groom and his family members on the day of wedding. She stated:

“We usually start honouring the groom by serving breakfast. Even though the groom visits the bride's house in the afternoon the custom is to offer the morning meal. Traditional foods like pithe are served along with sandwich and beverages. This shows a confluence of Indian and English culture. After food we also have to serve doi or yogurt. For lunch traditional cuisines include ruti pithe, meat preparations, bhajacurry, pork vindaloo and fried fish. Even the Anglo Indians have learnt to eat. They hire Bengali cooks and eat”.

The above narrative shows that special foods or ritualistic ceremonial foods create homogeneity across groups providing one with the group identity of being a Bengali. Here religious identity is shrouded by one's ethnic identity of Bengaliness. As Ray puts it, “Bengalis have crafted a pattern of eating that, through repetition, they have turned into a norm and its distinctive ingredients, methods of cooking, spices and signature dishes have come to embody Bengaliness” (ibid: 47). Food and religious practices provide dichotomous picture of life and culture. On the other hand one's diet reinforces one's religious and ritual status along. Abstaining from food items considered to be alien marks the boundary between oneself and other (Savaala, M 2010: 130).

6.8 FOOD AND FEASTS

Special foods in Bengali households portray two social messages- one is that of renunciation through fasting and consuming simple austere foods and the other is acceptance of materialism, pleasure and hedonism through food. Special foods in Bengali households are prepared and consumed on several occasions that digress from the mundane and the everyday. Apart from religious ceremonies, festivals and rituals we prepare special culinary delights on various others events that we consider as special. Bengalis are food lovers and hence every occasion big and small is celebrated over foods and drinks. Birthdays, anniversaries, weddings, casual get together and any kind of happy occasions like children's good performance in school etc are some common instances of preparing special household food. This section will deal with few of the special occasions (which are actually numerous and difficult to capture in totality) that lead to the preparation of special cuisines in middle class and urban poor households in the city respectively catering to questions like who prepares such foods and for whom? How such foods are different from regular mundane foods and what is the significance of special foods in the everyday forms of interaction across classes.

6.8.1. Celebrations of birthdays

Celebration of birthdays is a modern phenomenon which requires awareness of time other than that based on the agricultural seasons and calendar (Savaala, M 2010: 133). In modern society birthdays are made memorable with the cutting of the birthday cake and gorging on sumptuous food. While the birthday cake is a modern universal construction Bengalis have their own normative ways to celebrate such occasions. Traditionally the *payesh* (sweet dish made of rice, milk and sugar) is symbolic of something auspicious and special. Bengalis have the custom of feeding *payesh* (*payasam*) to people on their birthdays. Along with *payesh* the fish which is also a symbol of ritual purity among Bengalis play a significant role in the meals served to individuals on occasion of birthdays. A middle aged woman living in north Kolkata mentioned for instance:

“Payesh is cooked only for birthdays. On my son's birthday as well as my husband's I make payesh, muro (fish head) and leja bhaja (fish tail) of fish and shukto. On my birthday I visit my mother”.

The ritual of feeding *payesh* on birthdays is specific to middle class Hindus and not customary of other religious groups. There is also a norm of cooking five types of fried

vegetables on any auspicious occasions, especially among the Hindus. Some lower class households also follow such customs to mark the auspicious day of the birth of their child. Traditionally such customs marked the celebration of the male child in the family but in modern society the girl child are also bestowed with equal treatment in most cases.

While preparing *payesh* is bound by tradition, the western concept of cake also finds its place alongside it. This shows the interplay between tradition and modernity when it comes to food practices. In contemporary **middle class** households the cake with the name written on it is the marker of birthday celebrations. Birthdays are usually celebrated among the children in the household. Adult members especially parents do not usually cut a cake to celebrate their birthdays. The city of Kolkata has innumerable cake shops selling different varieties of birthday cakes. While the traditional cakes are usually fruit cakes which are also known as Christmas cakes popularly, birthday cakes are the ones which are made out of cream and icing along with candles. Birthday cakes are things that need to be bought from cake shops and never made at home. In middle class households different variety of cakes signify ones social status within ones status groups. According to Saavala (2010) the cake is a modern and western manifestation since techniques of cake preparation like baking were never a part of Indian culinary culture. In Bengal consumption and baking of cakes can be traced to the nineteenth century colonial rule. Thus one can say that tradition of baking always prevailed in the Bengali culinary culture since the rule of modern period. Cakes were introduced in India by the Portuguese and British colonialists and hence are identified with the Anglo-Indian and Christian populations (ibid). Birthday cakes are unanimously bought and eaten by Hindus, Muslims and Christians alike.

While the westernised cake adorns almost every middle class birthday in the city, cuisines that are prepared for the occasion are more traditional. At times food cooked within the household on occasions like birthdays would just include some good fish and meat along with rice or pilaf just like any other regular day. There is also a growing trend of ordering outside food for domestic consumption. In such cases the kitchen or the hearth is given respite from cooking for a day. On occasions such as these it is the women who form the primary domestic cook. Besides women are the ones who hold on to tradition on the one hand and imbibe the modern on the other. A woman would most likely purchase or order the birthday cake for her children or even her husband while preparing a bowl of *payesh* on the other (the special *payesh* is not usually cooked by the cook). “Birthday celebrations combine the occident and the orient by indigenising the process” (ibid: 139). Indian sweets are also

distributed on occasions of birthdays. But a woman would seldom bake a birthday cake at home. While the Bengali middle class might try to replicate gourmet delicacies at home the birthday cake is something that one should spend on. There is also the custom of sending birthday cakes as surprise gifts to near and dear ones. While a woman celebrates the birthdays of her children and husband a woman's birthday often gets unnoticed.

In **urban poor** households celebration of birthdays was never a common phenomenon until recently. With increasing consumerism and exposure to westernised culture through constant interaction with the upper echelons of society the lower class families also try to celebrate birthdays of children over cheaper quality birthday cakes. For them as well the birthday cake must have the cheap cream and icing decor along with candles. One of the domestic helps residing in a south Kolkata slum stated:

“My son had come to attend the birthday party of my employer's daughter. After that he kept talking about his birthday celebration and the birthday cake. I will buy him a cake for his birthday”.

However not every family would celebrate birthdays over cakes. Some households also mentioned about cooking the customary *payesh* on their children's birthday instead of the birthday cake. Among few birthday celebrations are cursed and are never observed. For families with very low income and many children to feed celebration of birthdays holds no significance. Similar to the middle class the urban poor would never bake a cake since they hardly possess the basic knowledge and equipments required for baking. Among lower class families often delicacies like chicken and rice are prepared on special occasions like birthdays. Few mothers have claimed of preparing their children's favourite dishes. A woman said:

“I at times make biriyani for my son on his birthday. He loves to eat my biriyani but never eats it from the shops outside”.

Special foods and culinary experiences travel across cultural spaces. While Bourdieu showed that tastes are specific to people sharing the same habitus, cultural influence can result in the trickle down of food tastes adding to food choices. This is in accordance with Bourdieu's (1993) concept of field theory. This reflects Bourdieu's notion of both the individual and society being important determinants. He said, “The dispositions represented by the habitus are durable in that they last throughout an agent's life time. They are transposable in that they may generate practices in multiple and diverse fields of activity, and they are ‘structured

structures' in that they inevitably incorporate the objective social conditions of their inculcation" (Bourdieu, 1993:5).

6.8.2. Wedding and Luxury foods

Weddings are special occasions when people usually expend a lot of resource on food besides other things. For the **middle class** a wedding is followed by grand feasts arranged especially outside the household. While rituals and traditions mentioned earlier help people to conform to normative practices creating an egalitarian process differences are sought on the grandeur and extravagance that families exhibit in getting their children married. The significance of modern marriages is the shift towards consumerism. Grand feasts are arranged in big banquet halls across the city. Even within the household feasts include all kind of expensive fishes, vegetables and meat preparations. The evening dinner is more luxurious. On such occasions food is cooked by catering services. Wedding menus make interesting sociological analysis. With changing times the wedding menus of Bengalis have undergone subsequent changes. "Chitrita Banerji notes, there would first be *loochi*, to be eaten with sautéed vegetables such as *potol* and eggplant. Next there would be a vegetable stew cooked with entrails and fish head...the *dal* and fish *kalia* would be served, often with pilaf of basmati rice cooked in ghee, yellow split peas, and a bouquet of *garam masala*, nutmeg, mace, saffron, and cumin" (Ray, 2004:).

Even two or three decades back a middle class family would arrange the wedding within ones household with the much support and help of relatives and friends. The most talked about phenomenon of any wedding arrangement is the food. Earlier food used to be served on banana leaves while people would sit at the long bench like tables and wooden folding chairs to dip their wrists in the food and explore the delectable cuisines. Men with buckets of rice, hot pipping *dal*, fried eggplant, *shukto* (a Bengali preparation including bitter gourd and other vegetables), vegetable curry, fish and then meat would busily serve the guests. A wedge of lemon and salt would be laid aside on the banana leaf beforehand. Chutney, *papad*, *doi* (yogurt) and sweets would follow eventually.

In contemporary **middle class** households in the city wedding menus have changed its form along with changes in the way foods are served and eaten. Such an image of food distribution on wedding occasions have altered in the light of new cosmopolitan culture and westernised lifestyle. On the wedding day the task of preparation and distribution of food is delivered to external agents like catering services. On such occasions the presence of too many guests and

invitees makes cooking food at home difficult for small nuclear families. There is a change in social relationships. Earlier family and relatives would play important role in arranging household feasts. Now family sizes are shrinking. Relationships are becoming more formal. Even close relatives and kins accept formal invitation instead of being a part of the ceremony. Weddings are occasions in which food is shared across wider groups of people including agnates and cognates, friends, domestic helps and workers.

The traditional Bengali cuisine has given way to newer and aesthetic forms of culinary ventures. The menu offered on wedding cards is more multi cultural. The compilation of the menu is changed. No longer do people seat themselves at long tables in front of banana leaves waiting for their turn to be fed. Today's society is more individualistic and food offered on such occasions are also individualised. People are made to choose from a wide array of variable dishes and eat whether in standing or sitting depending upon choice and convenience. The arrangement is called a buffet. Such a system of serving food has no personal touch and promotes individualised singular eating practices. Even the method of eating has changed from the use of fingers to use of hard fork and spoons.

In **urban slums**, the lower class people also arrange feasts on weddings similar to the middle class. On such occasions cooks (especially Oriya Brahmins) are hired for preparing food. Wedding in slums is like a communal affair. The slum dwellers come together to arrange the feasts. *Pandals* are constructed within the by lanes of the slums. At times feasts are arranged in buildings which are under construction near to the slums. The feast menu includes rice, *dal*, *chorchori*, fish *kalia* (rich fish gravy) and chicken. Goat meat is unaffordable for the slum dwellers. The urban poor emulate the lower middle class in various respects.

Marriage feasts are ways of denoting ones prestige and self esteem in society. It is not only about what food is being distributed across guests but also the way food is distributed, served and displayed, the seating arrangements of guests and the type of cuisine served among others that differentiate between classes. The lower class of Kolkata share similar feasting pattern as the rural village folks on the one hand and maintain poor standards of emulation of middle class lifestyle on the other.

Luxury foods form an important component of special foods in every society. This is because luxury foods are special foods that are consumed only on selective occasions by certain groups of people. The basic characteristic that determines luxury food is wealth or affordability. These foods are usually expensive and not easily available across a larger cross

section of people. Luxury foods are contextual. A food considered luxurious in one context might be seen as banal in the other.

The **Bengali middle class** are highly differentiated in their consumption of certain foods that can be discerned as luxury for some. For the middle class Bengalis consuming exotic fishes like *golda chingri* (lobster), chital *muitha* (round balls formed out of the flesh of chital fish) and *Ilish* might be considered luxury foods. A male respondent working as a clerk in a public sector mentioned:

“Ilish is a luxury food for me. It is always not affordable. I buy it occasionally on months when household expense is less”.

Such foods are mainly served to guests on specific occasions, weddings and other special days since consuming them on a regular basis seems unaffordable. Some foods were earlier not part of luxury foods but with time and new market forces they have become less affordable among all sections of society. The middle class is an extremely fluid category and income cannot be the determining factor of consumption of luxury foods. An aged woman referred to her sister and her husband by stating:

“At one point of time they face financial crisis and at other they purchase expensive fishes like Hilsa and Golda. I don’t know how they can afford such luxuries in everyday life”.

It won't be wrong to state that “luxury foods are those foods that are not specific items of food, but those that in any particular place and time are regarded an indulgence and a status indicator. Special foods are known by all cultures, just as some degree of social differentiation and the status quest, though the categories of food chosen as luxuries do vary between different types of society...food used in religious ceremonies or as medicines are not luxuries, as neither is eaten out of a desire- neither represents an indulgence- even though there is clearly a component of status distinction involved in both” (Veen 2003: 420).

Consumption of luxury foods becomes an indicator of social status and might lead to gastro-politics between households, families, relatives and friends. In the post industrial society under the impact of globalization and deterritorialisation⁶⁴ different food of other cultures and

⁶⁴ Deterritorialization is a process which means spaces are not bound by territorial limitations (space flows) (Appadurai 1996; Berking). Here deterritorialization reflects on the movement of people across world territories or Bengali diaspora which has an effect on acquisition of new food tastes.

regions find their place in high culture middle class families. A Muslim household stressed on its liberal outlook while claiming:

“We often indulge in continental cuisines at home on special gathering. Recently I used sweet chilli Mexican sauce to cook a special food”.

Among the middle class experimental foods can often be luxury foods. A young media professional with a fetish for cooking notes that it is not just preparing mundane everyday foods that excite her but experimenting with new exotic foods are more self gratifying. She stated:

“I am more inclined toward Asian foods. I love Japanese. I will be making sushi for the first time”. We always have a get together with a theme like pork or fish. I made fish in garlic wine sauce”.

Food of other cultures usually when consumed falls under the category of special. Western foods are occasionally consumed and fall under the category of luxury foods because such tastes need to be acquired through the use of expensive spices and condiments. Other exotic foods that are gradually incorporated within certain middle class households are foods like brown rice, green tea, organic grains and spices to name a few.

The knowledge of luxury exotic cuisines is gathered essentially from the media. International cookery shows like *TLC* and *FoodFood* have gained immense popularity among the young and aspiring consumerist middle class. These shows provide descriptive culinary account of exotic cuisines from around the globe which are viewed by certain sections of the middle class. Some of the respondents observed that watching exotic cuisines on Television shows are gratifying more than preparing and consuming them. This makes such shows highly popular among the youth.

Across the **lower class** luxury foods indicate those that are rarely cooked and consumed at home due to their soaring prices in the market. The slum dwellers in the city are divided in their consumption of good food or special food within the household. For some cooking a small packet of pasta noodles for their children might be a luxury food while for others cooking half a kilo goat's meat on a special festival might be luxurious. Consumption of ghee or butter might also be luxurious for a certain set of people. At times the lower class people get a taste of few exotic cuisines that are shared by the middle class families. Domestic workers who take food from the middle class kitchen might share good fishes and unconventional food preparations that might be luxurious for them. Again middle class and

upper class food habits might seem luxurious for the urban poor. In Bengali households fast foods like *chowmein* and pasta noodles could be perceived as luxury foods among urban poor households which in due course of time have penetrated the food habits of the latter.

Hence luxury foods are relative. In contemporary Bengali households it is not just the quantity of food shared on ceremonious occasions but the quality, taste and type of food that are perceived as luxury foods. Some foods do not suit their tastes. This is again a matter of social status. Luxury foods can be attained with the help of economic resources. However the taste for luxury foods needs to be acquired through exposure to high culture. Luxury food is always equated with 'high culture' which in due course of time can penetrate into middle or low culture. Veen (2003) also observed the trickledown effect of luxury foods which reduces them to ordinary everyday foods in due course of time.

6.9 EVERYDAY IN THE SPECIAL

Special foods are most often embedded within the everyday. While special foods are discerned as those that are discrete and segregated from the mundane with an acclaim of sacredness there are certain foods that are very much a part of everyday reality but consumed as special foods. Such foods help to eliminate the monotony of the everyday. At times differentiating the special from the everyday becomes difficult.

6.9.1. Everyday food

Bengalis are fond of the *khichuri* which is a food that shares the borderline between the regular and the special. *Khichuri* is symbolic to the Bengali way of life in many ways. The cuisine is often associated as an ideal meal on a rainy day. *Khichuri* is a mixture of rice and *dal* cooked with little spices. *Khichuri* with fried *Hilsa* will make a delectable cuisine on a rainy afternoon in Bengal. However *khichuri* is mostly a poor man's food which can often be consumed as a light nutritious diet with little effort. The same food is also a special cuisine on religious ceremonies among the Hindus. *Khichuri* also has several variations. The mundane *khichuri* is differentiated from the *bhoger khichuri* on the basis of its profanity. Again *khichuri* cooked by the Muslims are considered an inappropriate form by the Hindus. Bengali Muslims prepare *khichuri* by adding meat which is absent in the *khichuri* of a Hindu household. The ways of preparation of specific foods generate cultural differences and helps to establish ones identity in the group.

Among the Muslims *nihari*⁶⁵ is a preparation which is very special and is consumed only during the winter months. *Nihari* is never cooked at home since it is an arduous task. It is quite often purchased from roadside stalls and eateries in Muslim localities. While *nihari* is a common food among the non-Bengali Muslims, for the Bengali Muslims consumption of *nihari* is a cultural influence. The food is never consumed at home in other time of the year except for the winter months since it helps to keep the body warm. The *paya* is also another common food which is specially explored during winters as a breakfast menu. *Paya* is a kind of soup made out of goat legs. Cooking continental cuisines in middle class Bengali households can also be special food for the household members.

Special foods are usually shared and eaten together within the household. Almost every middle class household confirmed of cooking some special food on Sundays or any other holidays. That is when the family members are all easily available and sharing of food in close proximity becomes easier. Families would cook a good mutton curry on a Sunday afternoon as a special holiday menu which would be enjoyed by all the young and old alike. On such occasions families sit huddled together in a particular space (the dining table in most cases) and relish the gourmet delicacy over banal conversations or a national holiday would be celebrated over good fish curry like lobsters or *bekti* as a pleasurable experience.

Special foods foster greater proximity and sociality among family members which are usually absent in everyday life. The middle class gourmand Bengali loves discussing and arguing about food. Almost every conversation in a Bengali's life has something on food. Hence everyday lives are also spaces to discuss special cuisines and delicacies that one believes to cook and eat at home. A young respondent mentioned:

“On every holiday the first thing that starts our day is a discussion on a special food that needs to be cooked and eaten”.

Consumption of special foods on holidays has been found to decrease among the **lower segment of social strata**. For instance prevalence of cooking special foods like meat or fish or even sweet preparations is more apparent among the upper middle class and less predominant among the lower middle class. This is because cooking special delicacies within normal everyday life itself is a reflection of prosperous lifestyle and high social status. In urban poor households the *panta bhat* is a delectable cuisine which is very much part of the everyday yet can be denoted as the special. *Panta* is eaten on any festive occasions among the

⁶⁵ Nihari is a stew made out of slow cooked meat especially beef or lamb bone marrow

poor both rural and urban. *Panta* is the stale (basi) rice which is smeared with water and left over night. This is consumed with green chillies and salt the next morning. On special occasions the lower class people eat *panta* along with *chorchori* (a kind of dry fried preparation using more oil) and fried fish. It is known to be a favourite cuisine of many lower class men and women. The urban poor occasionally would relish on goat meat or beef as special foods. Such foods are eaten on a Sunday or on any other holiday. Meat is expensive to afford on a regular basis while beef is always not readily available. The poor Muslims sharing a Hindu neighbourhood would find the availability of beef difficult. This is the reason why Bengali Muslims in the slums of *Bosepukur* reported of not eating beef on a regular basis.

Special foods feature in the household menu at the advent of occasional visitors or guests. Middle class households are differentiated in terms of the way they treat their guests through food. Every Bengali household welcomes visitors at home over food and drinks. Food is a marker of hospitality in Bengali households. The kind of food served to guests depends on different factors like the age group of the people, relatedness to the hosts, and level of proximity to the hosts and also the time of paying visit. Households are divided in their opinion of serving home cooked food or food bought from outside to the guests. Most of the respondents have stated that serving home cooked food or outside food depends on the convenience of the hosts. If guests are coming for a light evening chat, food is usually bought from outside and served. Sweets are the most preferred foods that are served to almost every occasional visitor paying a visit in Bengali homes. Other than that fast foods of all forms are usually bought from outside. For close relatives and *kins* traditional meals are best suited while for young people or friends non conventional, fast foods or even continental foods are cooked or bought. On the whole every middle class household aspires to serve some special delicacies to their guests.

Women are the main creators of special delicacies in middle class homes. But men also play a key role in preparing exquisite food on a holiday when at home. Leisure cooking has always been bestowed upon the men or even young adults and at times growing teenage children. On specific holidays the woman might get liberty from the kitchen to explore other chores while the man would come up with a good meat or chicken curry to please the mistress of the house or her children. Daughters are found to make special delicacies with the help of their mothers on a regular day as an impromptu cooking. One of my respondents mentioned of trying to bake different kinds of cakes and puddings on specific days. While

such foods are very much situated within the normal every day the foods or preparation process make them special since they fall out of the routine every day.

Special foods are cooked and processed in special ways. The ingredients used for preparing special foods are also different from those used in everyday household cooking. Starting from the cooking oil to spices and processes of cooking like baking, grilling, sautéing or shallow frying are all part of special foods. Use of specific technologies like *tandoor* or *bar-b-que*, air-fryer, oven and others separate the mundane cooking process from the special culinary processes. Knowledge of special foods can be accessed from the biggest source of information- the media. Cookbooks, cookery columns, food shows and internet are excellent sources of information for cooking special delicacies. Besides elderly family members are more reliable sources of information.

6.9.2. Food for Guests

Foods cooked specially for visitors are more elaborate meals, with a touch of novelty in the way spices are mixed and garnishing is done. There are more preparations on display starting with starter or finger foods to main course like rice or Indian breads of some form or the other, vegetables, fish and meat. All this ends with a sweet tooth. Foods are also served in special plates and saucers. Every middle class household maintain a stock of good bone china crockery sets. For the lower middle class glass crockery or melamine plates with floral prints are kept aside for the guests. Drinks apart from water include aerated waters at the most.

It is usually the mistress of the house who takes the job of making arrangements and distributing food amongst family members and outsiders. It is she who decides what to serve in which order and how much to serve. The guests are given the highest priority with the best portions of the food meted out. The children of the house get the next preference followed by the men. The woman usually keeps nothing for herself and plays the perfect hostess. The leftover food is either distributed among the domestic helps or stored away in the refrigerator for consuming on the following day.

In **lower class households** guests in the form of relatives and *kins* come as visitors from *desh*. At times married daughters would arrive along with their husbands. On such occasions guests are welcomes over food and drinks. Among the urban slum dwellers consumption of aerated drinks are on a high. Guests are served light snacks like *muri* with *telebhaja* (potato and aubergine dipped in gram flour and deep fried), *singara* (a Bengali snack food) and

sweets along with cold drinks. In most cases guests will be served meals comprising of everyday food like rice and fish or chicken. For the slum dwellers special foods for guests are very much a part of everyday food with no exotic dishes on offer. Food is cooked by the woman just like any other day. In poor households food will be first distributed among the outsiders and if left will be shared among family members.

6.9.3. Forbidden Foods

Foods that are **taboed** or forbidden often become special foods for some groups of people. There are Hindus who do not believe in dietary taboos and prohibitions on beef consumption. Cooking and consuming beef becomes a special occasion within the household. Similar trends are found across other religious groups as well. One of the Muslim respondents confirmed:

“I love eating pork even though it is prohibited among the Muslims and prohibited to be cooked at home. I still relish on pork once my parents are away from home”.

Consumption of other varieties of meat that fall outside the normative can also be special for few households. In Bengali households across all social classes meat consumption is limited to chicken meat and goat’s meat while any other kind of meat is considered inappropriate for consumption. Some middle class men and women of older age group find eating other animals as defiling. This creates a generational difference which leads to a dichotomy between the normative on the one hand and individual choice on the other. Few young respondents have confirmed about their preference for consuming other meat forms similar to western diets. Some have even gone to the extent of tasting meats of duck, turkey, and other kinds of birds, turtle and the like. Consumption of different meat forms was a common phenomenon among the rich upper classes of colonial Bengal. This was an impact of cultural exchange that was consequential of the ‘New World’ (Ray, U 2015). Special foods form the upper hierarchy of food structure. Special foods in due course of time can change to the mundane and everyday just like luxury foods which can lose its status with time.

6.9.4. Food and Novelty

Newly launched foods (packaged) might be special for the middle class. This in due course of time and rising popularity gets reduced to the ordinary and become part of the everyday. Donner (2008) in his study on Bengali middle class provided a vivid account of the newly

launched processed and semi-processed foods in the Calcutta market around the 1908s. These were then special foods which soon got absorbed in the daily consumption pattern of both middle and lower middle class households. "...a variety of pre-processed foods like pasta, frozen pizzas, tomato purees and frozen chicken, as well as wide range of dairy products, were introduced successfully...western and non-vegetarian items now figured on weekly shopping lists and transformed the way middle-class Calcuttans ate, as the lower –(and middle) middle-class households emulate the more cosmopolitan habitus of the elite" (Donner, 2008: 168).

6.10. SPECIAL FOOD EXPENDITURE

Expenditure on food determines the choice of cuisines across all classes. How much one spends their resources of food are however determined by several other factors like the earning capacity, family size, age, occupation and job security, depicting social status. The middle class expends more resources on special foods every month compared to the urban poor. But it would be wrong to state that it is only because of their earning capacity. This is because the middle class are also divided in terms of the amount of money they might spend on special foods. The respondents were unable to mention a fixed budget on special foods. This is because special foods vary in terms of priorities and there is no mandatory basis of arranging special foods. Huge amount of money is spent on wedding feasts at home or outside by the middle class. Spending on luxury foods also evokes special social status. Ven arranging a feast at home will expend more money than on any average days. Some of my respondents even stated that calling guests at home for meals is an expensive affair.

For the urban poor spending on special foods make them borrow sums of money from their employers or family and friends. Even when guests come over the urban poor tries to treat them to a good fish or chicken meat. Good hospitality is ensured through good choice of food and serving across all sections of Bengalis unanimously with variations of their own. It is also a depiction of ones social prestige among relatives, friends, kins and neighbour.

6.11 CONCLUSION

Special foods are identified among everyday food as those that are eaten exclusively on some special occasion, purpose, ritual and ceremony. This chapter on Special Foods in Bengali Households tried to address the various instances and occasions when special cuisines find a place across Bengali homes. It was found that consumption of special foods has several

underlying meanings in the lives of individuals. In order to address the significance of special foods across the middle and lower class respectively and their areas of convergence and divergence across groups the chapter has been divided into different kinds of special occasions and their celebration through foods. Special foods find their place on religious occasions, festivals, life cycle rituals, feasts and also a part of everyday life. So there is a cyclical relationship between the special and the everyday.

Foods consumed on religious occasions are symbolically different from that of food consumed on feasts. Religious foods for instance are considered sacred compared to everyday food and hedonistic pleasures associated with feasts. Food as Barthes said is a “system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations and behaviour” (Barthes, R 1997: 28). Religious foods can best be explained with the help of semiotics. These foods symbolise certain meanings with the help of signs like what kind of food is prepared, when and how. Religious foods also discriminate across groups based on caste, region and religion. Major differences are sought between religions among Hindus, Muslims and Christians. Religious foods symbolise notions of purity and pollution that are embedded within the structure of Hindu society. This characteristic of the same differentiates itself from the meanings associated with food of other religions. These differences help to communicate social messages reflecting the norms of a particular society and culture. While foods typical of religious occasions and ceremonies are common to all sections of society, variations ply across households. Similar special foods on festivals and Life cycle rituals create and foster group identity.

Consumption of special foods is marked by an interface between traditional values on the one hand and modern outlook on the other. The middle class are divided among those who keep up to traditional practices through food preparation and consumption of special foods on festivals and rituals while others try to rationalise the whole acts of special foods through novel eating ways and methods. People rely on indigenous cuisines on religious ceremonies and occasions while modern food choices are made in case of family feasts and gatherings.

The lower class makes an effort to live up to tradition by making the appropriate dietary choices on special occasions. Religious foods help to carve out niche groups from within the mundane and in turn create greater homogeneity unlike everyday food. Similarly meals offered at feasts are different from religious foods along with regular everyday foods. Change of food types, the way food are distributed and displayed all exhibit meanings behind such

acts. Special cuisines are generally reflections of high social status in society because it is usually the affluent who exhibit special foods in their everyday life. Feasts on major festivals and occasions are bounded by display of not just resources but also refined taste among the middle class; special foods on festive occasions are seen to have positive effects on society. Special foods make us happy. They are bounded by a whole gamut of human emotions unlike everyday food.

6.12 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter on special foods marks a transition of food habits from regular everyday food to food consumed on special occasions. Special occasions are formed out of the mundane leading to change from the monotonous everyday life. While everyday food seeks to restore normality in everyday life food on special occasions symbolise a shift from normality. The chapter tries to address questions like what are special foods and how are they different from everyday food along with the relevance of the study of special foods in everyday life. The chapter is divided into different sections dealing with different occasions and their special culinary choices. It tries to unravel the significance of special foods on religious occasions which create distinctions across different religious groups.

Amidst differences there is apparent sharing of food across different religious groups across social classes. One can say that religious and festive occasions help to unite different sections of society through food. Food preparation and consumption on religious occasions are different from that of everyday life. Special foods are cooked out of faith and devotion along with greater essence of ritual purity and cleanliness. Hence such foods are considered sacred compared to everyday food. Special foods are also equally shared and distributed among household members and outsiders alike.

The concept of fasting symbolise the prevalence of social and cultural norms of patriarchy especially among the Hindus. While men's fasting is executed by choice, for women is normative. Lower class women follow rigid rules of fasting compared to the middle class where stereotypical image of women and fasting are challenged by the young working women. Growing concern for health and certain lifestyle diseases have also promoted alternative views on fasting across classes.

Special cuisines revolve around seasons and festivals for the Bengalis. Foods prepared on festivals foster homogeneity across groups on the one hand and shared identity on the other.

Instead of fragmented identities people are embodied within the single ethnic identity through food. Festival centric cuisines try to bridge the gap between indigenous foods and modern cuisines. Public eating joints and shops selling festival centric foods have made women refrain from cooking food at home.

Food associated with lifecycle rituals show differences that exist between primordial groups. There are subtle distinction of dietary choices on life cycle rituals among the middle class and lower class along with religious differences. Feasting on the other hand revolves around modern celebrations like birthdays, anniversaries, get together, wedding feasts and the like. Food on such occasions is differently prepared from everyday food and religious foods. While traditional cuisines are always a part of special foods, modern westernised, extravagant cuisines often become a part of feasts. Feasting in middle class households differ from lower middle class and lower class households in terms of culinary choices, style of food preparation, distribution and sharing.

Feasting also includes consumption of luxury foods. Luxury foods are an indicator of a person's social status. However luxury foods are relative across classes. Often the distinction between special food and regular foods become blurred. There are few foods or cuisines that feature regularly in everyday life. This questions the compartmentalisation of the normal and the special.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The journey of food is an incessant engagement with different processes in society. We adapt, we negotiate, we assimilate, and we feud with eating practices in our everyday life. As a conclusion to this research on 'Food Habits in Bengali Households: A Study of the Urban Middle Class and the Urban Poor' I would like to reflect on some of the major areas that have been touched upon along with some of the major outcomes of the research. My basic objective was to unravel the different factors that influence the choice people made of their everyday food practices on the one hand and situate their engagement with special foods within the everyday. This was met by analysing what people ate, how they ate and with whom they ate. The greater objective was to situate the study in the larger discourse on identity, with special reference to class and ethnicity. Human society is a complex phenomenon of social processes embedded within the societal structures. Food is a highly social activity where individual choices are exerted. But there is still a dialectics between the individual and the social. This was also identified by Simmel (1910) in his 'Sociology of the Meal'. This research found that similarities and differences both are co-existent between the two classes with respect to household food. However food is a changing arena where new foods are coming up and at the same time old foods are seen anew. There are various specifications that prompt food intake of Bengalis across the middle and lower class in the city respectively.

7.2 FACTORS INFLUENCING HOUSEHOLD FOOD

There are some major determinants of household food among the middle class and urban poor found on the basis of the analysis of all the major findings in the four main chapters. These are as follows.

7.2.1. Occupation or status of work

It influences the choice of food intake in the different meals consumed at home across classes. The middle class eats certain kinds of food at certain meals due to their work culture and occupational status. For instance in some families where all the members are working

and return home late, the evening meal in the form of snack do not feature, while at the same time in some families since the whole day is spent in work family members sit together for a heavy evening meal and a late dinner. The same holds true for the lower class residing in the slums as well. People of different occupational groups choose different kinds of foods, meal timings, food preparation styles and commensality. Those who leave early for work in the morning in slum dwellings usually eat rice since they won't be returning home for lunch.

Meal timings are found to change with change in work timings. Among the middle class there is a categorization of families who are involved in more demanding jobs like that in private organizations and IT industries and those with less demanding and time consuming jobs. Among the urban poor occupation of family members have been found to influence the kind of food consumed. In families with more consistent occupation and more earning members food habits converge with the middle class while in others there is wide disparity in choice of meals. Therefore it was found that food habits are determined by not only the nature of occupation but also number of earning members. This gives a security to life.

Another important factor is the way money is allocated to food. Among 22.2 percent of middle class households whose monthly income range between Rs 10,000-20,000 is found to allocate something between Rs10,000-20,000 on food per month. These are usually the lower income households whose monthly income range between. On the other hand 78 percent of respondents with a monthly income of Rs 50,000-60,000 also allocate food expenses between Rs 10,000-20,000 per month where as 50 percent of those earning between Rs 80,000-1,00,000 are found to allocate something between Rs10,000-20,000 on food per month. These figures are in approximations and might vary occasionally as mentioned by the respondents. This shows that as income rises, allocation of money to food expenses decreases. This is because there are other priorities which are taken over. Nonetheless one should keep in mind that all these categories are not very straight forward.

7.2.2. Occupational status of women

It has greater effects on both middle class and urban poor household food habits. In working women households especially where both the spouses are working food habits are different from those in which the woman is a home maker. Among the middle class gender division of labour is not very strong even if the woman is working since male participation is much less still compared to urban poor households. However food preparation and consumption pattern undergoes changes especially from weekdays and weekends. Even among the urban poor

both spouses working create more division of labour and male participation in cooking. There is greater division of labour in the household with other family members participating equally. Hence occupational status of both men and women lead to structural changes in food habits.

7.2.3. Levels of education

This has an impact on food choices reproducing class differences. It is found that the educational level of middle class on an average is much higher than the lower class Bengalis. This gets reflected in the way they negotiate with food and health benefits. It is found that the middle class are more concerned about the health aspects of food in contemporary society. A common example is the avoidance of indiscriminate use of oil in food preparation. Today's urban middle class are careful about the use of oil in food and are resorting to alternative forms of light cooking oil. Such awareness is usually not found among the urban poor. Even among the educated younger age groups residing in the slums such difference in attitude could not be deciphered.

7.2.4. Changing structure of family

This is responsible in determining the choice of foods across and within middle class and urban poor households respectively. Middle class respondents who have witnessed the changes in their family structure from joint family to nuclear family to single person households stated that it had a bearing on their food habits. For example in a middle class joint family the amount or variety of food produced are usually not found in small nuclear households. Disparity can be observed in case of nuclear families with both couples working and those in which the woman is not working. In a poor household where both the couples are working, food is cooked by the children or the elderly members. In middle class families in case both couples are working food cooked is very simple and not a laborious spread. In case of the urban poor the number of family members within a household leads to differential food consumption pattern. In households with more family members who are earning food consumed is varied compared to those in with one earning member. In joint families within the slums food preparation and distribution is shared among the family members where as in small nuclear families distribution is unequal in terms of gender and age of the family members.

7.2.5. Identity

This is created and maintained through food. It may be self identity or group identity. Self-identity is more profound among the younger age group of middle class respondents. The research found that some middle class men and women have idiosyncratic choice of food and taste in order to create what we know as 'self-identity'. The concept of self-identity can be found in the works of Fischler (2011) whereby he speaks of individualised eating trend existing in modern society. I found some instances of individualised eating among certain youths whose eating norms are not in coherence with the family eating habits. While normatively food habits reflect group identities like regional, religious and class, this research found that the barrier of identity is transcending. This is more in case of consumption of special foods. Nonetheless this is more class specific.

Among the urban poor food consumed is bound more by tradition and conventions. New multi cultural cuisines are yet to find a place in urban poor households. This is because in case of urban poor food is more driven by physical necessity compared to cultural forces.

7.2.6. Novelty and change

It is an important dimension of household food of the 'consuming middle class'. The middle class of all categories constantly negotiate with the changing market culture, media effects through advertising, hoardings, and newspaper columns on food, recipe books and the internet. This provides them with incessant options on cooking and cuisine. Among the middle class refinement of taste exists through new culinary practices, new choice of ingredients, food types and cuisines. This also creates distinction among the middle class households. On the one hand some households hold a liberal attitude to exploring multi cultural cuisines while on the other hand others posit a more traditional and conservative picture when it comes to household food. However in case of outside food respondents show far more liberal attitude comparatively. Changes in culinary practices, consumption and preparation have been voiced by almost every middle class Bengali household in the study. Changes have come about in the commensality; type of food cooked at home, newer food choices and most importantly consumption of outside food in the form of home delivery. This aspect has increased tremendously in recent years among the middle class Bengalis. One can say that the middle class are accepting diversity in foods, acquiring new tastes through exposure to restaurant culture and packaged foods, mass media and social networks forming new sub cultures.

Among the urban poor as well one can note several new changes with respect to food. Certain sections of the poor are exposed to the food culture of the upper classes which at times percolates down to their own food habits as a trickle down effect. For example women from the slums who work as household maid confessed of improvising their cooking similar to the middle class homes they work in. Some foods like *biryani*, *chowmein* and *Maggie noodles* intercept all class categories and are widely found in urban poor kitchens as well and are occasionally consumed by them. This shows that novel cooking and eating practices are shared culturally across class hierarchy.

7.2.7. Age

It is one of the key variables that determine the choice of food both across middle class and lower class households, as found through this study. Among the middle class there is a wide discrepancy among the younger age group and the older population about food choices and eating behaviour. Through my research I found that middle class households with older family members have more settled and conservative food habits. They rely on traditional modes of cooking and are not very keen on improvising new culinary techniques. They are also more serious about ritual purity of food and religious practices revolving around everyday food. Such behaviour cannot be noticed among the younger age groups who are more open to novelty and change. Most young family members are deviants when it comes to food. They are more influenced by media especially social media, peer group and the internet when it comes to making food choices. A family with young couple has a different food habit compared to that with older couples.

Age determines choice of food among the urban poor as well though less than the urban middle class. My study found that new foods enter urban poor households through the young family members. Packaged foods like *Maggie*, health drinks, aerated drinks, chocolates, cakes etc are bought mainly for the children and the young. Even foods like *momo*, *rolls* and *chowmein* which are quite often eaten by the poor is popular among the youth. The young generation of slum dwellers are more culturally exposed and try to imitate the upper classes.

7.2.8. Gender

One cannot evade the question of gender when it comes to food habits especially among Bengali households. Women have always been the suppliers of food while the men and other family members are the major recipients. Food choices are largely determined by the woman

of the house, young or old. Even though male participation within the household kitchen is increasing among the middle class and is found among the poor, it is majorly a woman's domain. Women not only prepare food but also play the task of distributing food among the household members. In middle class households traditionally women have been the main cooks in the house. In contemporary times women have started refraining themselves from cooking (though not the kitchen space) which is replaced by hiring of household cooks. This in turn has changed some of the culinary practices like cooking traditional foods within middle class homes. However middle class women have reported of maintaining their control over the domestic hearth. It is that space that marks power to women.

In urban poor families however there is greater gender division of labour where men and women both participate in food preparation along with the children in case both the man and woman are working. Nevertheless household food is majorly a gendered practice. For instance it is a woman who distributes scarce resources judiciously among family members.

7.3 KEY FINDINGS OF RESEARCH

The main findings of research show that there is considerable amount of overlapping or superimposition of different factors on household food habits. It is difficult to identify any one factor as the overarching imposition on household food intake pattern.

7.3.1. Multiple Identities

This study is based upon the premise of a comparison between two distinct social and economic classes in society. Nevertheless it was found that there are heterogeneity amidst homogeneity of food habits among both the middle class and urban poor respectively. The major question is whether food habits reproduce class differences in society within a group sharing the same ethnic identity and bounded by similar culinary culture. The research showed that food is a marker of multiple fragmented identities. While the ethnic identity of the group remains constant, members nevertheless experience multiple identities which are all established through food. There are differences both within and between groups in terms of all the above mentioned factors along with other primordial identities. All these are experienced through food. In this case food becomes mere representation of one's collective identity. Taste of foods is culturally reproduced as stated by Bourdieu in his study of *habitus*. As Bourdieu stated *habitus* is formed out of 'objectively classifiable conditions of existence' which in turn generates certain perception of taste along with classifiable practices. This leads

to a distinctive lifestyle showing distinctive signs of taste (Bourdieu, 1984). In this study the middle class projects a distinctive taste of choice of cuisines which helps them distinguish themselves from the lower class. The lower class in turn are in constant emulation of the middle class taste since they are in direct contact with the class above them. The middle class and urban poor lives intertwine in various spheres. In this way the middle class taste gets reproduced as the dominant culture in society which is then followed by the lower class. On the other hand lower class tastes also penetrate middle class lives in small measures whereby some foods penetrate the middle class households through the lower class.

7.3.2. Physical Proximity

It is found that there is growing physical proximity across middle class and lower class Bengalis in the city. This further leads to multiple fragmented food habits on the one hand and constantly overlapping of eating norms on the other. Earlier people's lives were more ghettoized and segregated in terms of physical proximity between classes which has now reduced to a large extent. The middle class and urban poor lives are in constant interception. Household maids and domestic cooks belonging to the lower strata have considerably increased in middle class homes. There is much more sharing of food habits now. Even the market through its techniques of standardisation of food products has diminished the differences to some extent. Television advertisements, popular cookery shows, billboards and hoardings all are experienced and perceived by the lower class as equally as the middle class which has reduced their physical proximity. Even among the layers of middle class proximity is extended through similar food sharing habits. All this speaks for greater overlapping of food habits across classes making the picture all the more complicated

7.3.3. Separation of the everyday from the special

There is a marked separation of the 'special' from the 'everyday' through food habits among the middle class and the urban poor. Special days emerge out of the regular. They are based upon some special events like festivals both social or religious, birthdays, anniversaries and any happy moment in the lives of individuals. Foods on such occasions are also special. Special days also evoke special food cycles. While everyday food is treated as the 'normal' or the norm special foods are a deviant from the norm. The middle class's engagement with special cuisines be it traditional Bengali food or cuisines of different regions and culture are witness to that. It also transcends the identity barrier of the middle class bringing about a rationalised approach to food. In cases of festivals and religious rituals foods for the occasion

are considered as the sacred and ritually pure compared to the profanity of mundane everyday food. The difference between the everyday and the special are also found in urban poor homes but exploration of new cuisines is much less among the poor compared to the middle strata. The poor try to make those foods special which are seen as a luxury to them. Hence the concept of special food is relative to social classes.

7.4 CONTRIBUTION TO THEORETICAL KNOWLEDGE

This research is an inspiration from and a contribution to class theories. It draws the basic inspiration from the classical thinkers like Weber and Simmel. Food is a marker of one's social status. The concept of status was first used by Weber which he differentiated from class on the basis of non material qualities like rank, honour and prestige. Weber was also inclined towards the role of agencies in the duality between structures and agents. Such dualities are also found in case of Bengali food habits across classes. Simmel analysed food with the help of interactionist perspective whereby he also similarly spoke about the dichotomy that exists between individualised eating and eating as a socialized activity. Following Simmel, this research seeks to address the collectivity of food choice amidst individuality.

Contemporary class theories and consumption often propose the dissolution of class in human society which is replaced by status groups. Stephen Mennell (1985, 1987) deciphered some significant changes like 'emergence of body discipline, the rise and fall of class differentiation in diet, and the commercialization and internationalization of food production and distribution' (Warde 1997: 24). His concept of 'standardization of diet' which evades class distinctions eventually results out of expanding market driven by mass culture. Mennell noted that contrasting food practices have diminished due to decline in social inequality. This he gathered through an increase in fast food and convenient foods (Mennell, 1985; Warde, 1997).). This research showed that although consumption of fast foods has entered the domestic sphere of both middle class and lower class families yet it has not resulted in a decline in social inequality. This is because such foods are consumed in small amounts and occasionally by lower class families and does not form a part of their regular diet like the middle class. Social inequality in our society is perpetuated through other cultural forces like gender, religious and caste inequalities.

The individualization theory of Fischler (2011) is significant in certain aspects but largely food habits are still collective practices across the middle class and urban poor households of Kolkata. The analysis of this research tried to imbibe Bourdieu's (1984) theory of *habitus* in various instances. Bourdieu made an attempt to equate both objectivity of structuralism and subjectivity of existentialism (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Swingewood, 1998). However there are certain aspects of food habit that cannot be explained with the help of *habitus* alone. In some cases it is just the field that becomes operative. For instance choice of new forms of food can be examined through the field theory and not based upon *habitus* alone. The concept of field is based upon a network of objective relations between different positions defined in terms of the distribution of economic, social and cultural capital (ibid: 100). This research further shows that new eating trend towards individualisation and eclecticism is attuned with postmodernism but how far of the individualised is the collective remains questionable.

7.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This field research has few limitations. First and foremost the study was not conducted on a large sample size which would include different categories of respondents in terms of occupation and religious groups equally. This I found as a major limitation of my study because I was unable to gather a substantial amount of minority data for the study. The slums I could visit were predominantly Hindu. The few Bengali Muslims residing there also shared similar food habits with the dominant Hindu majority with minor religious and cultural differences. This became a drawback for the study. I believe the sample size could have been a little more in order to be more representative but due to lack of time it could not be possible. While I could use a gatekeeper for my slum visits I could not gather data from a more widespread and heterogeneous slums due to inaccessibility to the same. I was unable to gather accurate quantitative data on household food budget of the respondents from the middle class and urban poor. The respondents could not share the accuracy of the figures and in most cases were arbitrary in their responses. This I found mainly because majority of my respondents were women who had less knowledge about total monthly household expenses. For them food expenses were catered more on a daily basis and it was difficult to state how much actually goes into household food consumption.

Nonetheless I tried to capture the narratives of household food, lifestyle and culture diligently and with passion. I also tried to connect to my respondents with ease. Since my research is not very controversial I did not face much opposition from the middle class respondents.

However it was not very easy to gather data from the slums since I was met with oppositions for encroaching into the personal private spaces of the slum dwellers.

7.6 FUTURE RESEARCH PROSPECTS

This research on food habits across Bengali middle class and urban poor households respectively creates new possibilities for future scope and research in the area of food studies. It helps to look at the context of household food anew. This is because there is a growing trend of 'eating out' in Kolkata these days and Bengalis of all social strata are nonetheless open to experiencing them. Even few years back when middle class households could not think of restaurant dining, today's middle class has made it a part of their lifestyle. Such trends are also followed among the lower social strata especially by the youth or second and first generation learners. These people might eventually overlap with the lower middle class category which will then rise up to the middle strata. The situation is all the more complex. Future prospects of the study is in investigating the new eating out trends with multicultural dining experiences across all class groups.

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APPENDIX I

Questionnaire for Urban Middle Class

Food Habits in Bengali Households: A Study of the Urban Middle Class and the Urban Poor in Kolkata

Key Note for Respondents:

This research intends to study the food habits and associated cultural values in middle class Bengali households in Kolkata and also understand the different socio, cultural, economic and technological factors that play a role in shaping the food habits within the domestic sphere in Bengali homes. The set of questions in this schedule represent the objectives of this research and are related to production and consumption of household food, social norms related to food, technologies affecting food preparation and food, health and wellbeing.

I hereby request you to read the following questions and answer to the best of your ability. Your responses will be confidential. You can select from the options given for specific questions. The rest of the questions are open ended and you are free to provide your own answers.

Nabaruna Majumder

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BIODATA:

Name of the respondent:				
Age of the respondent:				
Residential address:				
Residential area	North Kolkata	Central Kolkata	South Kolkata	Other [specify]
Contact [mobile & email]				
Marital status	Single	Married	Divorcee	Other

Religion of the respondent	Hindu	Muslim	Christian	Other [specify]
Educational qualification	Graduate	Post graduate	Doctorate	Other [specify]
Occupation of the respondent	<input type="checkbox"/> Professional/technical and related work [specify] <input type="checkbox"/> Administrative/ executive/managerial work [,,] <input type="checkbox"/> Clerical and related work			

	<input type="checkbox"/> Sales work <input type="checkbox"/> Artisans <input type="checkbox"/> Petty shopkeepers <input type="checkbox"/> Businessman <input type="checkbox"/> Others [specify]		
Occupation of the main earning member of the household	[Mention from above]		
Income of the respondent [per month in Rs]	Up to 10,000 Specify	10,001-20,000	20,001-30,000
	30,001-40,000	40,001-50,000	50,001-60,000
	60,001-70,000	70,001-80,000	80,001-above Specify
Income of the main earning member of the household [per month in Rs]	Up to 10,000 specify	10,001-20,000	20,001-30,000
	30,001-40,000	40,001-50,000	50,001-60,000
	60,001-70,000	70,001-80,000	80,001-above Specify
Total monthly income of the household [approx in Rs]			

Total monthly expenditure of the household [approx in Rs]			
Total monthly household expenditure on food [approx in Rs]			
Type of food habit:	Vegetarian	Non vegetarian	Other [specify]
Caste of the respondent [in case of Hindus]:			
Place of origin of the respondent:			
Number of family members and their relations:			

CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION OF HOUSEHOLD FOOD:

[Tick the right answers from the options. For others, give details].

<p>1.1 What do you eat for breakfast every morning?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Cereals like cornflakes/wheat flakes/ muesli/ oats <input type="checkbox"/> Bread like milk bread/brown bread/ wheat bread/ plain bread with butter or jam <input type="checkbox"/> Tea and biscuits <input type="checkbox"/> sandwich and coffee/tea <input type="checkbox"/> Eggs poach/omlette/boiled/scrambled <input type="checkbox"/> Maggie/ chowmien <input type="checkbox"/> Milk/Horlicks/Complan <input type="checkbox"/> Roti –sabzi/ paratha/ luchi <input type="checkbox"/> Fruits <input type="checkbox"/> Others
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<p>1.2 The same breakfast eaten by every member of the household?</p> <p>If no, then give details.</p> <p>1.3 All the family members sit and eat breakfast together.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> everyday <input type="checkbox"/> only on weekends or holidays <input type="checkbox"/> sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> never</p>
<p>1.4 Mention the time for breakfast in your household every morning? Is it same for all family members? Is it same for both weekdays and weekends?</p> <p>1.5 You eat breakfast on weekends or on Holidays at the.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> breakfast table or dining table <input type="checkbox"/> sitting room <input type="checkbox"/> in individual rooms <input type="checkbox"/> other [specify]</p>
<p>1.6 Write about the special breakfast that is cooked on Sundays or any other holiday in your household.</p> <p>1.7 What did you eat for breakfast yesterday morning and today in the morning?</p>	

<p>1.8 Where do you have your lunch every day?</p> <p>1.9 What do you eat for lunch when at home and outside?</p> <p>2.1 Write about your special Sunday lunch.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> home <input type="checkbox"/> outside <input type="checkbox"/> work place <input type="checkbox"/> other [specify]</p>
<p>2.2 Do all the members of the household eat the same food for lunch?</p> <p>If no, why?</p> <p>2.3 Mention the time and space for lunch?</p> <p>2.4 What was your lunch yesterday?</p>	
<p>2.5 What do you eat for dinner on weekdays as well as weekends?</p> <p>2.6 For dinner you eat more of</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Rice <input type="checkbox"/> Roti <input type="checkbox"/> Paratha <input type="checkbox"/> Bread <input type="checkbox"/> other</p>

<p>2.7 Do you have dinner sitting with your whole family every day?</p> <p>2.8 Mention the time and space for dinner at your household.</p> <p>2.9 What did you eat for dinner yesterday?</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Occasionally <input type="checkbox"/> Rarely</p>
<p>3.1 How often do you visit restaurants for lunch and dinner?</p> <p>3.2 Are there any specific food item cooked for children in your family? Mention them.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Everyday <input type="checkbox"/> Once in a while <input type="checkbox"/> every week</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> only on weekends <input type="checkbox"/> other</p>

<p>3.7 How often do you eat in-between meals? Which is your favorite snack?</p> <p>3.8 What kind of eatables is there in your kitchen for snacks in between meals?</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Biscuits <input type="checkbox"/> chanachur/nimki/murukku <input type="checkbox"/> muri/khoi/cheere bhaja</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Chicken nuggets/popcorn <input type="checkbox"/> chips/wafers <input type="checkbox"/> others [specify]</p>
<p>3.9 Does every member in your family consume fruits, milk, fish, eggs, meat on a regular basis. Is the distribution of these food products equal among family members? Specify.</p>	
<p>4.1 How often do you consume beverages like tea and coffee on a daily basis?</p>	<p>Tea: <input type="checkbox"/> once a day <input type="checkbox"/> Twice a day <input type="checkbox"/> More than twice a day <input type="checkbox"/> Occasionally</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Rarely</p> <p>Tea: <input type="checkbox"/> Milk Tea <input type="checkbox"/> Tea without milk <input type="checkbox"/> green tea <input type="checkbox"/> other</p> <p>Coffee: <input type="checkbox"/> once a day <input type="checkbox"/> twice a day <input type="checkbox"/> more than twice a day <input type="checkbox"/> occasionally</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Rarely</p> <p>Coffee: <input type="checkbox"/> with milk <input type="checkbox"/> black coffee <input type="checkbox"/> cold coffee <input type="checkbox"/> other</p>

<p>4.2 You consume drinks like colas with your food?</p> <p>4.3 The kind of aerated drink you consume the most?</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p>I consume aerated drink or juice like</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> With every meal <input type="checkbox"/> once a day with one major meal <input type="checkbox"/> less than a day</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> once in a while <input type="checkbox"/> never</p>
<p>4.4 I consume alcohol at home.</p> <p>4.5 Is it consumed by any other household member? [give relation]</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Everyday <input type="checkbox"/> less than a day <input type="checkbox"/> every week <input type="checkbox"/> less than a week</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> less than a month <input type="checkbox"/> never</p>
<p>4.6 I like to serve my guests</p> <p>4.7 What kind of homemade food is usually served to guests in your household?</p> <p>4.8 What kind of outside food is usually served to guests in your household?</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Home cooked food always</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Food bought from outside always</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Either homemade or outside food depending upon convenience</p>

<p>4.9 How fond are you of homemade food?</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> I love homemade food</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I love homemade food to outside food</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I am not at all fond of homemade food</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I am not at all fond of outside food</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I like both homemade food and outside food</p>
<p>5.1 Which is your favorite cuisine and how often do you eat or cook that at home?</p>	
<p>5.2 Are there any specific vegetables, fruits, meat and fish that are never consumed by you and your family members in your household?</p> <p>If yes what are they? Give reasons</p>	
<p>5.3 How often do you consume the following food items at home:</p>	<p>a. Fish : <input type="checkbox"/> everyday every meal <input type="checkbox"/> once in two or three days <input type="checkbox"/> once a week <input type="checkbox"/> more than a week <input type="checkbox"/> never</p> <p>b. Chicken: <input type="checkbox"/> everyday <input type="checkbox"/> every meal <input type="checkbox"/> once in two or three days <input type="checkbox"/> once a week <input type="checkbox"/> more than a week <input type="checkbox"/> never</p> <p>c. Mutton: <input type="checkbox"/> everyday <input type="checkbox"/> every meal <input type="checkbox"/> once in two or three days <input type="checkbox"/> once a week <input type="checkbox"/> more than a week <input type="checkbox"/> never</p> <p>d. Egg: <input type="checkbox"/> everyday <input type="checkbox"/> every meal <input type="checkbox"/> once in two or three days <input type="checkbox"/> once a week <input type="checkbox"/> more than a week <input type="checkbox"/> never</p> <p>e. Pork: <input type="checkbox"/> everyday <input type="checkbox"/> every meal <input type="checkbox"/> once in two or three days <input type="checkbox"/> once a week <input type="checkbox"/> more than a week <input type="checkbox"/> never</p> <p>f. Beef : <input type="checkbox"/> everyday <input type="checkbox"/> every meal <input type="checkbox"/> once in two or three days <input type="checkbox"/> once a week <input type="checkbox"/> more than a week <input type="checkbox"/> never</p>

<p>5.4 Is there any other type of meat that is cooked in your house? If yes then how frequently? Specify the type.</p>			
<p>5.5 Are you fond of sweets? If yes, how often do you consume them?</p>	<input type="checkbox"/> After meals	<input type="checkbox"/> Once in two or three days	<input type="checkbox"/> Once a week
	<input type="checkbox"/> More than once a week	<input type="checkbox"/> Once a month	<input type="checkbox"/> Never
<p>5.6 What kind of sweet dishes do you make at home?</p> <p>5.7 How frequent or on what occasions do you make them. Specify?</p> <p>5.8 Mention the type of sweets you purchase from outside?</p> <p>5.9 Which is your favorite sweet shop in the city?</p>			

6.1 Who cooks all the meals in your household for you and your family?	<input type="checkbox"/> Self	<input type="checkbox"/> other member [state relation]	<input type="checkbox"/> Cook		
6.2 Do you have a household cook or maid? 6.3 If yes, is he/she a full time employee or a part time worker? 6.4 Which part of the country is she from?					
6.5 How important is the cook's gender/religion/caste for you or your family members as an employer?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender : <input type="checkbox"/> bothered <input type="checkbox"/> not bothered <input type="checkbox"/> indifferent • Religion: <input type="checkbox"/> bothered <input type="checkbox"/> not bothered <input type="checkbox"/> indifferent • Caste: <input type="checkbox"/> bothered <input type="checkbox"/> not bothered <input type="checkbox"/> indifferent 				
6.6 Who cooks meals at home during holidays or weekends? Specify 6.7 Is there any specific time for cooking food in your household?					
6.8 How many times are meals cooked in the kitchen throughout the day?	<input type="checkbox"/> Once a day	<input type="checkbox"/> Twice daily, in the morning and in the evening	<input type="checkbox"/> Once in two days	<input type="checkbox"/> Weekly	<input type="checkbox"/> We order home delivery

<p>6.9 Can you list some food items that are never cooked at home or prohibited for cooking but bought from outside and eaten or eaten outdoors? Give reasons.</p>					
<p>7.1 Who/Who all decides on the different meals to be cooked in the house every day? Specify.</p>					
<p>7.2 Who /Who all shops for raw food products from the market for your household?</p> <p>7.3 What time do you go to the market to purchase food products [grocery & kaancha bazaar]?</p>					
<p>7.4 How frequently are kaancha bazaar bought from the market?</p>	<input type="checkbox"/> Once a day	<input type="checkbox"/> twice a day	<input type="checkbox"/> once in two days	<input type="checkbox"/> once a week	<input type="checkbox"/> more than a week

7.5 How frequently is grocery food items bought from the market?	<input type="checkbox"/> Daily	<input type="checkbox"/> once in two days	<input type="checkbox"/> weekly	<input type="checkbox"/> monthly	<input type="checkbox"/> As and when required
7.6 Where do you buy kaancha bazaar? 7.7 Where do you buy grocery from?	<input type="checkbox"/> Bazaar	<input type="checkbox"/> para kirana store	<input type="checkbox"/> Supermarkets [Spencer's/ Big bazaar/Metro Cash and carry/Others]	<input type="checkbox"/> Other [Specify].	
7.8 Mention some of the regular ingredients used for daily food preparation at your home?					
7.9 Mention some of the special spices or ingredients that you have purchased recently for cooking a special dish at home? 8.1 What kind of cooking medium [Oil] do you use at home regularly? Specify.					

<p>8.2 Can you name some of the food items that can be easily cooked at home but you purchase from outside to eat at home?</p>	
<p>8.3 Do you like experimenting with new recipes at home?</p> <p>8.4 If yes can you specify a few new recipes that you have cooked recently at home [in week/month]?</p>	
<p>8.5 Are there any specific food preparations you want to cook but are unable to at home? Give reasons.</p>	
<p>8.6 Where do you get hold of new recipes?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> family and friends <input type="checkbox"/> TV cookery shows [mention the show] <input type="checkbox"/> Internet sites or blogs [mention the site] <input type="checkbox"/> Cookbook or recipe book [mention the book] <input type="checkbox"/> Newspapers/magazines [mention the name]

<p>8.7 Who decides on the total expenses on food consumption in the household [both kaancha bazaar and grocery]?</p> <p>8.8 Does the same person decide on all the other household expenses including food? [Specify].</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Self</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Others [give relations]</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>			
<p>8.9 Do you have a say in the household expense on food consumption?</p> <p>If no, then why?</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No [Give reason]]</p>			
<p>9.1 What are the essential things that you keep in mind while buying food products to be cooked and eaten at home?</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Cost of the food products</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Health of the family members</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Taste or choice of family members</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Freshness of the food product</p>
	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Availability of the food product</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> other [specify]</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> All the above</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> I don't know</p>
<p>9.2 Do you buy any kind of packaged food or ready to eat/ready to cook food</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> No [give reason]</p>		<p><input type="checkbox"/> I don't know</p>

<p>products for your home?</p> <p>If yes, then specify the products.</p> <p>If no then give reason.</p>				
<p>9.3 Are you aware of organic food products in the market?</p>	<input type="checkbox"/> Aware <input type="checkbox"/> Not aware <input type="checkbox"/> Indifferent			
<p>9.4 Have you ever tried purchasing any kind of organic food product recently or earlier? [Specify the product].</p> <p>9.5 If yes, would you prefer buying such food products more frequently?</p> <p>9.6 Mention the type of organic food product you have purchased and from where?</p>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Occasionally <input type="checkbox"/> Never			
<p>9.7 What do you do with excess food cooked at home?</p>	<input type="checkbox"/> Store for future consumption	<input type="checkbox"/> Re-use in making some new preparations	<input type="checkbox"/> Give them to the maids	<input type="checkbox"/> Throw them away

QUESTIONS ON SOCIAL RULES AND NORMS RELATED TO FOOD HABITS

<p>9.8 Are you aware of any social rules or norms [achaar-bichhaar] traditionally practiced in Bengali households related to cooking or food consumption? State them.</p> <p>9.9 Are such practices performed by you or any other family member at home? If yes, specify.</p>	
<p>10.1 Do you cook/eat any special or specific dish or food on major festive occasions celebrated by Bengalis at home? Specify</p> <p>Also name the festival or occasion.</p>	
<p>10.2 During festivals do you usually cook at home or go out to eat in restaurants?</p> <p>10.3 What special food do you eat on Poila Baishak [Bengali New Year] and where?</p>	
<p>10.4 Which are the specific foods that you can't eat in your household on festivals/ puja in your household?</p> <p>10.5 Do you believe in such prohibitions or customs? Give reasons.</p>	
<p>10.6 Do you fast?</p> <p>10.7 If yes then which are the occasions that you fast on? Specify.</p> <p>If no, then give reasons.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>

<p>10.8 Is fasting performed by other members of the household on similar occasions? Specify relations.</p>	
<p>10.1 Do you cook/eat any special or specific dish or food on major festive occasions celebrated by Bengalis at home? Specify</p> <p>Also name the festival or occasion.</p>	
<p>10.2 During festivals do you usually cook at home or go out to eat in restaurants?</p> <p>10.3 What special food do you eat on Poila Baishak [Bengali New Year] and where?</p>	
<p>10.4 Which are the specific foods that you can't eat in your household on festivals/ puja in your household?</p> <p>10.5 Do you believe in such prohibitions or customs? Give reasons.</p>	
<p>10.6 Do you fast?</p> <p>10.7 If yes then which are the occasions that you fast on? Specify.</p> <p>If no, then give reasons.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>
<p>10.8 Is fasting performed by other members of the household on similar occasions? Specify relations.</p>	

QUESTIONS ON TECHNOLOGY AND FOOD

<p>10.9 Which of the following kitchen gadgets do you have at home for food preparation?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Microwave oven<input type="checkbox"/> OTG oven<input type="checkbox"/> Rice cooker<input type="checkbox"/> Mixer grinder<input type="checkbox"/> Juicer<input type="checkbox"/> Hotplate/Induction heater<input type="checkbox"/> toaster<input type="checkbox"/> any other specify
<p>11.1 Which of the above kitchen gadgets is most frequently used at home for food preparation?</p>	
<p>11.2 How do you use your microwave oven?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Cook food<input type="checkbox"/> heat/warm food<input type="checkbox"/> both cook and heat food<input type="checkbox"/> Don't have or use microwave oven

QUESTIONS ON FOOD, HEALTH AND WELLBEING

<p>12.2 What kind of food do you cook or eat during illness?</p> <p>Specify</p>	
<p>12.3 Can you specify some food items that are cooked or eaten at home regularly which you think are healthy for your family?</p>	
<p>12.4 Can you specify some food items in your home which are not healthy for you and your family but are still consumed?</p>	
<p>12.5 Are you sure that what you eat is healthy and nutritious?</p> <p>12.6 Do you consult a dietitian or a doctor for your regular diet?</p>	
<p>12.7 Do you keep a check on your body weight on a regular basis?</p> <p>12.8 Do you keep a check on your diet on a regular basis?</p>	

<p>12.9 Have you brought any changes in your diet over the past one year or more? Specify.</p>	
<p>13.1 If given a chance what are the changes that you would like to bring about in your daily diet? Specify</p>	
<p>13.2 You eat according to your taste buds or your health needs?</p>	
<p>13.3 Have there been any changes in your household food over the last 10 years. If yes, can you specify some of the significant changes and the reasons for it?</p>	

APPENDIX II

প্রশ্নপত্র নিম্নবিত্ত পরিবারের

কলকাতার বাঙালি মধ্যবিত্ত পরিবার ও নিম্নবিত্ত পরিবারের খাদ্যাভ্যাস

Food Habits in Bengali Households: A Study of the Urban Middle Class and the Urban Poor in Kolkata

উত্তরদাতার পরিচিতি পত্র

উত্তরদাতার নাম				
উত্তরদাতার বয়স				
উত্তরদাতার ঠিকানা				
এলাকা	উত্তর কোলকাতা	মধ্য কোলকাতা	দক্ষিণ কোলকাতা	অন্যান্য
ওয়ার্ড নং				
বিবাহ পরিচয়	বিবাহিত	আবিবাহিত	অন্যান্য	

উত্তরদাতার ধর্ম	হিন্দু	মুসলমান	খ্রিষ্টান	অন্যান্য
উত্তরদাতার শিক্ষাগত যোগ্যতা	মাধ্যমিক	উচ্চমাধ্যমিক	স্নাতক	অন্যান্য
উত্তরদাতার পেশা				
পরিবারের প্রধান উপার্জনকারী পেশা				
উত্তরদাতার মাসিক আয় [Rs]				
পরিবারের প্রধান উপার্জনকারীর মাসিক আয় [Rs]				
পরিবারের মাসিক আয় [Rs]				

পরিবারের মোট মাসিকব্যয় [Rs]			
খাবারের ওপর পরিবারের মোট মাসিকব্যয় [Rs]			
খাবারেরে ধরন	আমিষ	নিরামিষ	অন্যান্য
উত্তরদাতার জাত [হিন্দুদের ক্ষেত্রে]			
উত্তরদাতার আদি বাড়ি			
পারিবারিক স্বদস্য ও তাদের স্বস্বস্ব			

আপনি দিনে কতবার আহাৰ করেন?	একবার দুবার তিনবার চারবার চার বারের অধিক
সকালে উঠে প্ৰথমে আপনি কি খান বা পান করেন?	
আপনি প্ৰতিদিন সকালে নিয়মিত জলখাবার খান? যদি হ্যাঁ তাহলে কথায় এবং কখন?	
আপনার বাড়িতে জলখাবার প্ৰতিদিন কে তৈরি করে?	
জলখাবারে আপনি কি খান প্ৰতিদিন?	
বাড়ির সকলে একি জলখাবার খায় কি?	
বাড়িতে তৈরি খাবার ছাড়া জলখাবারে বাইরের কোন খাবার খান কি?	
দুপুরের খাবারে কি রান্না হয়?	

আজকে দুপুরে খাবারে কি রান্না হয়েছে?	
দুপুরের রান্না প্রতিদিন কে করে?	
প্রতিদিন দুপুরে খাবারে একই রকম রান্না হয় কি? যদি না তাহলে কি কি হয়?	
দুপুরের খাবার কোথায় এবং কখন খাওয়া হয়?	
রবিবার বা কোন ছুটির দিনে অন্যরকম কিছু রান্না হয় কি? সেটা কি বলুন?	
বাড়িতে সকল সদস্য মিলে একসাথে বসে খাওয়া হয় কি?	
রাতের খাবার কটার সময় খান?	
রাতের খাবারে কি খান? ভাত বেশি খাওয়া হয় নাকি রুটি ? বাড়ির সবাই একই রকম খাবার খায়?	
প্রধান খাবারের মাঝে অন্য কিছু খান কি? যদি হ্যাঁ তাহলে কি এবং কোথায় ?	
আপনার প্রিয় স্ন্যাক খাবার কি? সেটি আপনি কখন খান?	
দিনে চা কতবার খান? দিনে কফি কতবার খান?	

বাড়িতে মদ্যপান করেন কি? কখন করেন?	
পরিবারের অন্য কেউ মদ্যপান করে কি?	
আপনি কি বাড়িতে কোন্ড ড্রিঙ্কস ইত্যাদি কিনে এনে খান? বাড়ির সকলে খায় কি?	
আপনার বাড়িতে রান্না কে করে?	
আপনি কখন রান্না করেন?	
রান্নার বাজার কে করে? এবং কোথেকে বাজার করেন?	
রান্নার অন্যান্য উপকরণ যেমন তেল, নুন, মশলা, চাল, ডাল ইত্যাদি কথেকে কেনেন?	
বাজারে প্রত্যেক দিন যাওয়া হয় কি?	
সাধারণত বাড়িতে রোজকার কি কি রান্না হয়?	
রোজ ডাল খান কি? কোন ধরনের ডাল বেশী খাওয়া হয়?	
কি ধরনেরস সাক সজ্জি অ তরকারি বেশী খান? নাম বলুন।	
কোন কোন আমিষ গুলি বাড়িতে বেশী খাওয়া হয় এবং কবে কবে?	ডিমঃ মাছঃ

	<p>মুরগী মাংসঃ</p> <p>গরুর মাংসঃ</p> <p>শূকরের মাংসঃ</p> <p>অন্যান্যঃ</p>
উপড়িয়ো কোন খাদ্য গুলি আপনার বাড়িত কখনই রান্না করা বা খাওয়া হয়না?	
আপনি ফল খান? কোন ধরনের ফল বেশী খাওয়া হয়? সপ্তাহে কতদিন খান?	
বাড়িতে প্রতিদিন দুধ খাওয়া হয়? দুধের অন্য কোন পদার্থ খান কি যেমনঃ	ছানা, ক্ষীর, পায়স, আইক্রিম, ঘি, মাখন, অন্যান্য
রান্নার জন্য কোন ধরনের জ্বালানি ব্যবহার করেন? অন্য কোন ধরনের করেন কি?	গ্যাস, স্টোভ, উনুন অন্যান্য
রান্নার জন্য কি তেল ব্যবহার করেন?	
রান্নার জন্য কি কি ধরনের মশলাপাতি বেশি ব্যবহার করা হয়?	

<p>বাড়িতে একই রকমের খাবার সকল সদস্যের জন্য হয় কি?</p> <p>যদি না তাহলে কারন কি?</p>	
<p>খাবারের পরিবেষণ কে করে?</p> <p>আপনি কি পরিবাসন করেন?</p>	
<p>বাড়িতে অতিথি আসলে কি খাবার পরিবেষণ করেন?</p> <p>চা- জলখাবারে কি পরিবেষণ করেন?</p> <p>দুপুর বা রাতের খাবার হলে কি পরিবেষণ করেন?</p>	
<p>বাড়িতে অতিথি আসলে রান্না কে করে?</p>	
<p>বাইরের কেনা কোন খাবার বাড়িতে এনে খান কি? যদি হ্যাঁ তাহলে কি ধরনের খাবার বেশি খান?</p> <p>সপ্তাহে কতবার এই ধরনের খাবার খান?</p> <p>বাড়ির সকলে খায় কি?</p>	
<p>বাইরের খাবার কিনলে কোথা থেকে কেনেন, উল্লেখ করুন।</p>	
<p>বাড়িতে খাবারের খরচ কে নির্ণয় করে?</p>	
<p>একই ব্যক্তি কি বাড়ির অন্য সকল খরচ নির্ণয় করে?</p>	

বাড়িতে বাজার বা রান্না কি হবে, তার সিদ্ধান্ত কে নেয়?	
কোন কোন প্যাকেজ খাবারগুলি আপনি বাড়িতে খান? বাজার থেকে কেনা কোল্ড ড্রিঙ্ক বা অন্য কোন পানীয় খান কি?	ম্যাগি সস জ্যাম চিজ আচার মাখন অন্যান্য
কতবার ভাত খাওয়া হয়? বাড়ির সকল সদস্যরা কি ভাত খায়? ভাতের সাথে কি প্রত্যেকদিন মাছ খাওয়া হয়? কোন কোন ধরনের মাছ বেশি খান?	
কোন ধরনের খাবার বেশী খাওয়া হয়?	দুধ ভাত শাক ভাত মাছ ভাত
মিষ্টি খান? নিয়মিত খাওয়া হয়? বাড়িতে কোন মিষ্টি, পায়োস ইত্যাদি বানান?	
আপনার বাড়িতে রান্না কখন করেন? [সময়] দুবেলাই রান্না করেন কি?	
বাড়ির সকলে মিলে একসাথে বসে খাবার খান কি? যদি না তাহলে কারন বলুন?	
বাড়িতে ফ্রিজ আছে? যদি না তাহলে রান্না করা খাবার কি ভাবে রাখেন?	

বারতি খাবারগুলি কে কি করেন?	
রান্না বা খাওয়া দাওয়া সঙ্কান্ত কোন সামাজিক আচার বিচার বা নিয়ম মানেন কি? বাড়ির আর কেউ মানে কি? আগে কখনো মানতেন কি?	
পুজপালার দিনে বাড়িতে কি রান্না হয়?	
কোন কোন পুজ বাড়িতে করেন বা মানেন?	
উপোষ করেন? বাড়ির আর কেউ করে কি? কোন কোন দিনে উপোষ করেন? কেন উপোষ করেন? বাড়িতে যখন কোন শিশুর জন্ম হয় তখন কি বাড়ির খাবারের ধরণ পালটে যায়? বাড়িতে কারুর মৃত্যু ঘটলে কি ধরণের খাবার খাওয়া হয়? কি ধরণের সামাজিক নিয়ম নীতি মেনে চলা হয়? অন্য কোন সামাজিক অনুষ্ঠান মেনে চলেন যে ক্ষেত্রে বাড়ির খাওয়া দাওয়ায় পরিবর্তন ঘটে?	

<p>শারীরিক দুর্বলতা বা অসুস্থতার সময় কি ধরনের খাবার বেশি খান?</p> <p>আপনার মনে হয় যে বাড়িতে যেই খাবার আপনি খান তা সম্পূর্ণ ভাবে পুষ্টিকর ?</p>	
<p>আপনার ও আপনার পরিবারের স্বাস্থ্য সম্পর্কে আপনি কতোটা সচেতন থাকেন?</p> <p>আপনি নিয়মিত সাক সজ্জি খান? পরিবারের সকলে খায়?</p> <p>আপনি নিয়মিত দুধ খান?</p> <p>নিয়মিত ভাবে ফল খাওয়া হয়?</p> <p>এমন কোন খাবার খান কি যেটা আপনার মনে হয় সঠিক পুষ্টি দেয়?</p> <p>এমন কোন খাবার বাড়িতে খান যেটা পুষ্টিকর নয় কিন্তু খেতে ভাল লাগে?</p> <p>আপনার পরিবারের আহারে গত দশ বছরে কোন বিশেষ পরিবর্তন এসেছে কি?</p> <p>কন কন খাবার গুলি আপনি নিয়মিত খেতে চান কিন্তু পারেননা এবং কেন?</p>	

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