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A Study on Food Habits, Food Culture, Impacting Health and Lifestyles among Two Communities of West Bengal

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***Abstract:** Bengali or Bangalee is someone whose linguistic, cultural and ancestral origin is belonged to Bengal.in this study the two broader communities were taken under observations. The identity of both communities was elaborated, the origin and evolution along with present existence was discussed. The food culture and food habits pertained by both communities were generalised with some specifications of categorizations in food intake. It was observed that Bangals and Ghatis. Matrimonial relation between two communities has helped mixing the food culture in many ways. Other than that curiosity and urge of experimenting with food has impacted the food habits of both the sides. In long term it was found that the two distinguished communities are dealing and facing certain type of health issues and severe diseases or illness just because of unplanned and unaware healthy food intake. In the case of lifestyle both the communities acquire few different lifestyles to improve their previous circumstances, mainly the rural areas where food is still under the grasp of superstitions.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Bengali or Bangalee is someone whose linguistic, cultural and ancestral origin is belonged to Bengal. The geographical area of Bengal has changed with the course of time. Generally, the area of Gangetic delta is called Bengal and there was a time when Bihar, Odissa and for some times Assam was also a part of Bengal. But in modern days, Republic of Bangladesh and West Bengal of India is considered as Bengal.

And a person whose mother tongue is Bengali, is globally known as a Bengali or Bangalee. Presently in India, Bengalis are divided into two distinct communities, known as Bangal and Ghati. This division was existed in pre independence era, but became vivid after the partition of India.

Bengalis of West Bengal or any part of India are belonged to either of these groups and though they all are called Bengali, but they have distinct culture and food habits.

II. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

To study the food culture and food habit of two communities impacting their health and lifestyle.

III. DELIMITATIONS

1) To conduct the study the samples were taken from various districts of west Bengal.
2) The subjects were all from Bengali community.
3) Self-made, open-ended questionnaire was used to collect the data.

IV. IDENTITY AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF TWO COMMUNITIES

A. *Bangals*

There is a bengali saying “Padmaparer Bangal”, means the people who live in the banks of river Padma, are Bangals. For a very long time the habitants of Eastern banks of Padma-Brahmaputra are known as Bangal. Even we can trace the word Bangal in Rabindranath Tagore's writing as well. But after the partition of India,1947 and Bangladesh Liberation War,1971, this term is used to refer to those persons, who migrated from present day Bangladesh to West Bengal of India. Bangals have their own linguistic distinction and even today they can be easily identified by their dialect.

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B. Ghatis

For Ghatis, there is also a saying- "Gangaparer Ghatis", means the people who live in the banks of river Ganges, are called Ghatis. Usually, the inhabitants of southern banks of Ganges and Padma rivers, are known as Ghatis. Ghatis are also known as 'Paschimbangiya' or Western Bengali. We can trace the term 'Paschimbangiya' in Rabindranath Tagore's writing as well. It is noted that in 1905 Lord Curzon divided Bengal into two parts and according to his proposal today's West Bengal, Bihar and Odissa combinedly known as Western Bengal. Initially the term Ghatis was used to refer the original inhabitants of Calcutta (now Kolkata), but after the partition of India,1947 this term became popular to indicate the original inhabitants of present-day West Bengal.

V. CONCEPT OF FOOD HABITS

It's something which is inculcated or cultivated in any culture or community based on the place they are living in because environment or geographical factors in broader aspect determines the food habit. Other than that one's taste or appetite construct his or her food habit. This is the reason, we see a food is acceptable to someone, whereas the other thinks the same food as unacceptable. For example, Genri-Googli, kind of a snail is available throughout the ponds of undivided Bengal, but it is noted that most of the Bangals don't like it, where as most of the Ghatis like it very much. Eating habits are defined as "conscious, collective, and repetitive behaviours, which lead people to select, consume, and use certain foods or diets, in response to social and cultural influences"

A. Food Habits of Bangals

The main attraction of Bangal food is that, they use more oil (mustard or refined) and spice in their cooking. Use of lots of chillies (dry and green) or black pepper is an integral part of their cooking, as they like jhal (hotness) in their food.

Bangals cook varieties of recipes with single vegetable and can add and cook anything with fish be it the vegetables, pulses, rice etc. As their ancestral homeland was surrounded by many rivers and water bodies, fish became the most preferred food for them. They use many kinds of fish in their cooking, but best of them is Ilish (Hilsa). They admire hilsa of Padma, still today. Apart from this most of the Bangals like to have Shutki machh (dried fish) and this is considered one of their signature dishes.

In the past Bangals lived a much harder life. They faced natural calamity, such as flood and drought, quite regularly. At the time of migration (1947 & 1971) to India, they were compelled to live in adverse conditions. To survive these, their food habit may have been constructed in accordance with the mentioned conditions. This is the reason, there is a saying that 'Bangals can cook even grass tasty.' Using Many types and almost all the parts of kochu(arum) can be an example of that. Probably this is also the reason that, they believe in 'zero waste' policy and cook food from the morsel or the leftover of the vegetables. They use more of coconut in food as the production of coconut is more, as their ancestral homeland, Bangladesh has salty soil for its location in the Bay of Bengal coastline.

B. Food Habits of Ghatis

Ghatis mostly use mustard oil in their cooking, but using lesser oil and spice is the key factor of their cooking. They do not like much jhal (hotness) in their food and use of sugar in food is the integral part of Ghati cooking. They usually like Patla jhol(bouillon) of any kind of dish, be it fish, meat or vegetable. Ghatis also like to have many kinds of fish, but they like Chingri (Prawn) the most. Though Ghatis prepare famous hilsa fish in their kitchen, but it is true that they cannot make variety of dishes with hilsa. Another fact is that, apart from Kolkata and other coastal parts of Bengal, Ghatis don't have a habit of eating marine fishes. Unavailability and high prices of marine fishes can be a reason behind that.

There are some kinds of Natural mushrooms, which Ghatis consider as delicacy. They call these mushrooms as 'chhatu'. These mushrooms are grown in a specific time of a year. The local names of these mushrooms are-Poal chhatu, karhan chhatu, kurkuri chhatu, Sal chhatu etc. Among these, karhan chhatu or Durga chhatu has a high demand and sells in high price. The most famous food of the Ghatis is any preparation with Poppy seed.

As Poppy seed or posto was cultivated in this 'western' part of Bengal (specially in Bihar) in British era, Poppy was easily available for Ghatis.

They use Poppy seed to prepare many dishes. Alu posto (Poppy seed with potato) is an eternal dish for Ghatis. Apart from this they cook other vegetables such as bottle gourd (Lau-posto), luffa (Jhinge-posto), onion (Peyaj-posto), tomato (Tomato-posto) with Poppy seed. Ghatis even cook fish with Poppy seed. Rui-posto (Rohu fish with Poppy seed) is a famous Ghati dish in Bardhhaman region. Posto bora(Vada made of Poppy seed) is a mark of artistry of Ghatis cooking.

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VI. FOOD CULTURE OF BANGALS AND GHATIS

Food culture can be defined as a system for processing and cooking foods combined with food consumption activity (Kim, Kim, Ahn, Lee & Han, 1999). So, Food culture includes way of cooking, serving the cooked food and way of consuming the food. Table etiquette is also a part of food culture. In these contexts, we can see Bangals and Ghatis follow distinct food culture. Where Bangals strictly follow the order of eating served dishes and they eat each dish one by one with parts of the rice served to them. On the other hand, Ghatis do not follow such order and eat according to their choice. They even mix two or more dishes with rice and eat it. Dal (Lentil)is a common dish for both Bangals and Ghatis. But almost all Bangals eat it by mixing it with rice. Whereas there is a practice in many Ghatis to sup it up after finishing the meal.

VII. IMPACT ON HEALTH AND LIFESTYLE

As Bangals and Ghatis belong to same geographical area, and though they prepare food in different ways, but they eat same kind of foods. Nutritional goodness of these foods is same. In the proceeded research work it was found and predicted that health comes in secondary priority. In both the communities it was found that they have preferred some primary aspects while adapting food culture and habit, they are availability food, sources of income and by managing the work load. Healthy diet or as per W.H.O balanced diet is very essential in leading daily healthy lifestyle, but in this scenario, it was something different they used to adapt some food culture which is not healthy but fulfilling the daily needs to meet the required activities. In long term it was found that the two distinguished communities are dealing and facing certain type of health issues and severe diseases or illness just because of unplanned and unaware healthy food intake. In the case of lifestyle both the communities acquire few different lifestyles to improve their previous circumstances, mainly the rural areas where food is still under the grasp of superstitions.

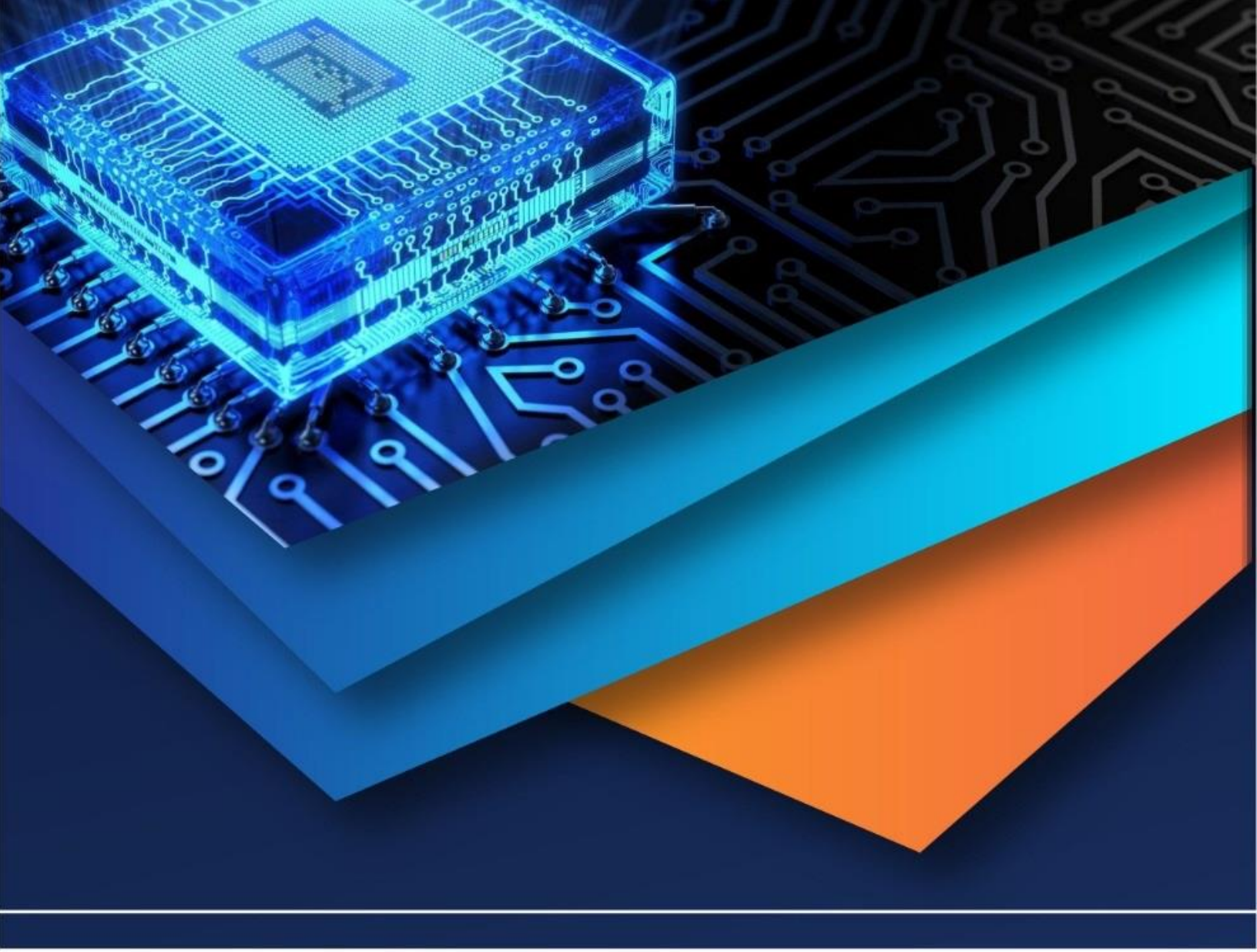
VIII. CONCLUSION

Living side by side for more than 50 years has impacted the food habit and food culture of both, Bangals and Ghatis. Matrimonial relation between two communities has helped mixing the food culture in many ways. Other than that curiosity and urge of experimenting with food has impacted the food habits of both the sides. There are Bangals, who cook and eat Karhan Chhatu (kind of natural mushroom) in their home. Earlier they called it ‘Byanger chhatu'(Toad-stool). Poppy seed, which is identical with Ghati cooking, Bangals are using this too. Some Bangals even eat Genri-googli (kind of a snail) in or outside the home. On the other hand, Ghatis also cook identical Bangal foods such as kochur loti(arum-lobe), loittya machh (Bombay duck) etc in their home. Popularity in eating marine fishes has also increased in Ghatis. Making different kinds of pitha(pie), such as pati-sapta, dudh puli,chusi pitha is also a mark of cultural exchange in food. So, it is hard to point out Bangal or Ghati, which food is healthier. But surely, they are exchanging their food culture by improving their health and lifestyles.

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