11

Defining Bengali Cuisine: The Culinary Difference Between West Bengal and Bangladesh

Pinaki Dasgupta

11.1 Introduction: Food Remains the Only Point of Redemption

"An interesting step in the history of the food film genre was Julie & Julia (2009) by Nora Ephron. The plot is based on a culinary project (later turned into a book) by one Julie Powell, who challenged herself to spend one year to cook all five hundred and twenty-four recipes included in the already mentioned famous book by Julia Child. Accounts of her progress and experience were regularly posted on her blog. Nora Ephron shows how cuisine may become a link between the stories of two very

The author wishes to place on record his sincere gratitude to Sampada Kumar Dash, Research Fellow, IMI New Delhi for all the help and support during background research.

P. Dasgupta (✉)
Marketing Area, IMI, New Delhi, India
e-mail: pinaki@imi.edu

A. Banik and M. K. Barai (eds.), *Two Bengals*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-99-2185-0_11

different people living in very different times." From Aleksandra Drzał-Sierocka, A Brief History of Food in Film, Lodz Ethnographic Studies, Vol. 54. 2015

11.1.1 The Origin

The above piece beautifully sums up the context in which Food is a unifier. Food brings culture and people together. It helps to bond and bind, and it even helps to reduce hostilities. The story of Food in colonial India and Bengal is fascinating and all about being a unifier. Look at some of the Food we are consuming today has an intense hangover of how the colonial powers left their traces behind. It starts with the humble potato, which the Portuguese brought to India in the early seventeenth century. Since then, it has stayed back and remains a great unifier to many a dish pan India. The Mughals, the Aryans, the Parsis, the Syrians, the Jews, and everybody who came to settle here or visited left a trace of their visit through Food. In Kerala, during Christmas, a cake is made from Syrian Catholic origins in terms of the recipe. The way raisins and sultanas are used in the recipe and whole spices and rum leaves a substantial edifice of how settlers and travellers have left their footprints behind. Food, therefore, has a unique space in the history of time and space.

First, let us start with when civilization started and how the first traces of that came to this part of the world. The earliest humans were more food gatherers and dependent mostly on fruits. The journey from being a food gatherer to becoming a food cultivator is of special interest. The long hominid phase of man fruits remained the primary Food, which they collected in the vicinity of their living. Many million years (200 approximately) ago, when the Pangaea had broken up to form Laurasia and Gondwana and eventually when 15,000 years (the last warm period) when the man came into his own, Food became his first necessity. And that is when he started collecting his Food in the form of fruits. As human and ape lines got divergent and in the phase of Homo stabilized, meat entered his meal, and finally, with Homo erectus, crude tools started coming in. With tools, man could prey for larger quantities of meat. During archaeological excavations, the accumulation of animal bones found at human abodes directly strongly affected how meat was

collected and consumed. Alongside meat, fruits remained the alternate option, and after 10,000 BC, as agriculture was discovered, dependence on meat was further reduced. As humans started migrating across the globe, traces of them found through paintings or in archaeological excavations strongly pointed towards the adaptations they made in the Food they ate and of tools used for hunting. Paintings from the era reveal hunting as an important activity, and the use of spears, axe, fishing nets, and knives in hunting are evidence of how hunting was done. The search for Food and the constant quest are all firmly etched in those paintings and the collectibles from the archaeological excavations. Imagine, 15,000 years later, one can order Food at the click of his mobile one!

Traces of civilization before the Indus Valley Civilisation (3300 BCE-1300 BCE) are strewn all along the country from Ladakh to Baluchistan (now in Pakistan) and around Mehrgarh are about humans and their efforts to look for Food. This was also the Stone age it showed traces of the use of different tools to hunt and for processing Food. Tools like small flat blades and small grinding stones were used to process barley and wheat. There were traces of date foods and wild animals found to indicate the choices made. The period is approximately 6000 BCE. As the Indus Valley Civilisation spread over northwest India (undivided India), Food took a different shape and form in which it was cooked and consumed. Several kinds of barley, wheat, millet, different kinds of stems, pulses, oilseeds, and fruits like pomegranate & coconut were found in the excavations in the region. The civilization diversified around the river Indus and possibly played a critical role in the lives and livelihood of the people. The quantity of various animal bones found during the excavation also signals the consumption of various kinds of meat like beef, buffalo, mutton, turtles, tortoise, gharials, and river & sea fish. Domesticated fowl, known to be the originator of the chicken, was found in a limited among the civilization here. In summation, the Indus Valley Civilisation was about traces of Food, many of which have found their way through in contemporary times. Vessels, utensils, tools, and storage types were evidence of an advanced civilization ahead of the times. As the Vedic period set, foot traces of the civilization were found in the Food that was cooked and consumed.

11.1.2 The Vedic Era

After the Harappan era, the period of 1600 BC and onwards till 200 BCE is shrouded in uncertainty. The era is called as Vedic period, during which the settlers from the Ural region who came to settle in the northern part of the country and were called Aryans, the second were the Dhaityas who followed a particular form of Brahminism and the third were the Manva or Dravidians, who came much earlier to the above two. Another group came from Central Europe and Iran and eventually settled in the land of seven rivers (Saptasandhu). The Vedas and the Upanishads were written around this time. In the words of K. T. Achaya, in his seminal book, Indian Food- A Historical Companion, states that the Harappan civilization was essentially an urban one as compared to the Vedic era, which was agricultural, pastoral, and philosophical. This provides a glimpse into the kind of activities of the time. This was also when Buddhism and Jainism emerged, two significant streams of religion that changed the texture of the time and place. As religion was parallelly establishing its hold, the Vedic Puranas were being written, norms were being laid down for much of what contemporary India today is all about, and the societal definition of living in a predefined space, what we ate (Food) became a part of this process. Agriculture was thriving in the Aryan period, and several grains and pulses were being cultivated, harvested, and consumed. Tables 11.1 and 11.2 gives an indication of the kind of pulses and grains which were consumed around the region. The detailing is evidence of how agriculture was pronounced and was able to produce a range of pulses and grains.

Activities like religious-related rituals, death, birth, marriage, and numerous daily chores started integrating Food as a part of the process. A concept like soaking overnight seeds or using cow dung, sesame, honey, ghee (clarified butter), oilseeds, and even elaborate dressing in Food was gradually becoming the norm. *Cereals and Pulses*, *Milk Products*, *Fruits and Vegetables*, *Oilseeds and Oil, Sweeter foods*, *Water and Beverages* slowly started permeating into the mainstream, and various iterations of the same also evolved. Much of the Vedic scriptures of the time elaborate on the type of Food consumed, the type that should be consumed for rituals, and even based on climate, the food type was described. Food

Table 11.1 The main pulses in pre-historic South Asia and their Region of Origin

Latin name	English name	Hindi name	Probable region of origin
Cajanus cajan	Red gram	Arhar, Tuvar	India: Orissa, Northern Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh
Vigna mungo	Urad, black gram	Urad	South India: forest-savanna margin
Vigna radiata	Mung, green gram	Mung gram	South India: forest-savanna margin
Macrotyloma imiflorum	Horse gram	Kulthi	India: savannas, peninsula (?)
Cicer arietinum	Chickpea, Bengal Chana gram, Garbanzo beans, Chana Dal	Chana	Southwest Asia, Levant
Lathyrus sativus	Grass pea	Khesari	Southwest Asia, Levant
Lens culinaris	Lentil	Masur	Southwest Asia, Levant
Pisum sativum	Pea	Matter	Southwest Asia, Levant
Lablab purpureus	Hyacinth bean	Sem	East Africa
Vigna unguiculata	Cow pea	Chowli, Iboia	West Africa, Ghana

Source Sen, Colleen Taylor. (2015). *Feasts and Fasts: A History of Food in India*. Reaktion Books.

and its importance in medicinal significance were also discovered around this time. The leaves, stems, berries, and seeds all find mention in various medicinal books of the time.

Jainism and Buddhism also laid guidelines on Food and consumption. Jainism had very stringent guidelines in terms of the types of Food to consume and the time of consumption. The entire principle of religion was based on not hurting any living being. The five items which

Table 11.2 Major grains in South Asia and their region sources

Latin name	English name	Hindi name	Probable region of origin
Triticum spp.	Wheat	Gehun	Euphrates Valley
Hordeum vulgare	Barley	Jau	Euphrates Valley
Oryza Sativa	Rice	Dhaan (Paddy)	Yangtze Valley
Paspalum scrobiculatum	Kodo millet	Kodra	India
Sorghum bicolor	Sorghum	Jowar	Africa
Pennisetum glaucum	Pearl millet	Bajra/ Bajri	Africa
Eleusine Coracana	Finger millet	Ragi	Africa
Panicum sumatrense	Little millet	Kutki	Western India
Panicum miliaceum	Broom corn, Common millet	Cheena	Manchurua
Setaria Italica	Foxtail millet	Kangni	Probably China
Brachiaria Ramosa	Brown top millet	Pedda-sama	India
Echinochloa Frumentacea	Barnyard Millet	Jahngora	Unknown
Fagopyrum esculentum	Buckwheat	Kuttu/ Kotto	Central Asia

Source ibid.

are absolutely forbidden according to Jainism are meat and meat products, fish, eggs, alcohol, and honey. On the other hand, Buddhism was not rigid in terms of Food and chose the middle path. While the monasteries served vegetarian Food, the monks (referred to as Bhikshus) had to survive on alms and therefore were open to meat (but it had to be blameless) too. But some meats like elephants, horses, dogs, snakes, lions, and tigers were complete "No". Buddhism was a proselytizing region, and emissaries from the monasteries travelled far and wide, especially in and around Asia. With them, they not only carried the essence of the religion but also their principles about Food. A lot of subcontinental fares travelled with the monks to the rest of the world.

Box 11.1: A world of puzzle

The piece, or rather a trivia, illustrates how possibly the context of Food and the effects and aftereffects of the same can be a challenge. Though the cause of death may remain shrouded in mystery, the incident provides a glimpse into how the discriminations in Food were still not in place and humans were still trying to understand the finer nuances of it.

Source From: Achaya, K. T. 1994. *Indian Food: Historical Companion.* Oxford University Press.

11.1.3 The Rise of the Mahajanpadas and Tracing the South of India

As the Vedic period gradually made way for the Mahajanpadas, the country was gradually divided into sixteen janpads each with its capital. Figure 11.1 indicates the states (the sixteen Mahajanpadas) and their capital. Among them, the Magadha janpada which came up in modern-day Bihar was the most powerful of the states. It had some of the most ambitious kings like Bimbisara, Ajatshatru, and Mahapadma Nanda. Agriculture thrived in the region, this was also the Iron age, and because of proximity to modern Jharkhand, mining and rich deposits were not an issue. It was also located among some of the most influential riverbeds, providing cheap transport and communication.

Unfortunately, there is no record of the Food served at the Mauryan court. According to Rachel Laudan the famed food historian, Mauryan emperors emulated the Achaemenid rulers of Persia (550–330 BCE); banquets featured hundreds of dishes, including bread made from wheat and barley flour of various grades; the meat of geese and other birds; fresh, fermented, and sweetened milk; garlic, onions; fruit juice; and the date and grape wine. Thousands of cooks toiling in vast kitchens at the Achaemenid court specialized in certain dishes: stews, roasts, boiled fish, a particular kind of bread, and so on.[1]

[1] *Source* Sen, Colleen Taylor. (2015). *Feasts and Fasts: A History of Food in India*. Reaktion Books.

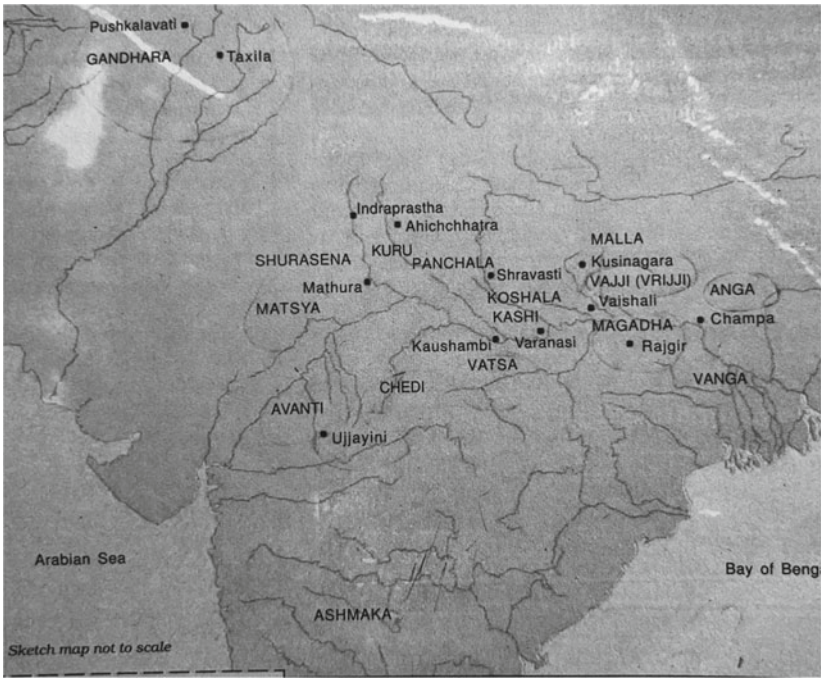

Fig. 11.1 Early states and their capital (*Source* Themes in Indian History—Part 1; 2007. Textbook in History for Class XII, NCERT, 30–31)

South India has a different narration than the discussions one had so far around the rest of India. Historically, the south had better proximity to Africa as a region and to northern Africa too. This resulted in a lot of Food that the south consumed connected with Africa and all the way to Europe. The Food consumed had much influence from Africa and Southeast Asia. Coconut, Areca Nuts, Betel Leaf, certain kinds of Palms, and Yam all came to the south from varied sources. In addition to what was grown in the south, the diverse Food also added to the range. Rice remained the predominant grain to be consumed, followed by Ragi, which again had several types.

Figure 11.2 above gives a sense of the kind of network that the south of India was able to create. Evidence like the Roman wine amphora found in Pondicherry suggests the connection established through the various

ports. Plenty of evidence found today strongly resonates with the presence of a strong regional export network. The dichotomy of the south and the north of Deccan in terms of Food is about the synergy (and fusion) of various regions of the world into the Food of the south as opposed to more organic food in the northern parts.

In the entire gamut of the discussion, there are some beliefs with respect to Food, and that value system continues even today. The etiquette and hygiene factors related to kitchen and cooking in the kitchen, how one eats Food, how guests are served and treated, much of that has been laid in the Vedic period. As the Vedas and the Upanishads were being written, the code of conduct regarding Food was also being documented. For instance, water is always to be poured into the mouth and sipped from the tumbler as it can lead to saliva and bacteria infecting the same. Water used to rinse the mouth must be spit out instead of

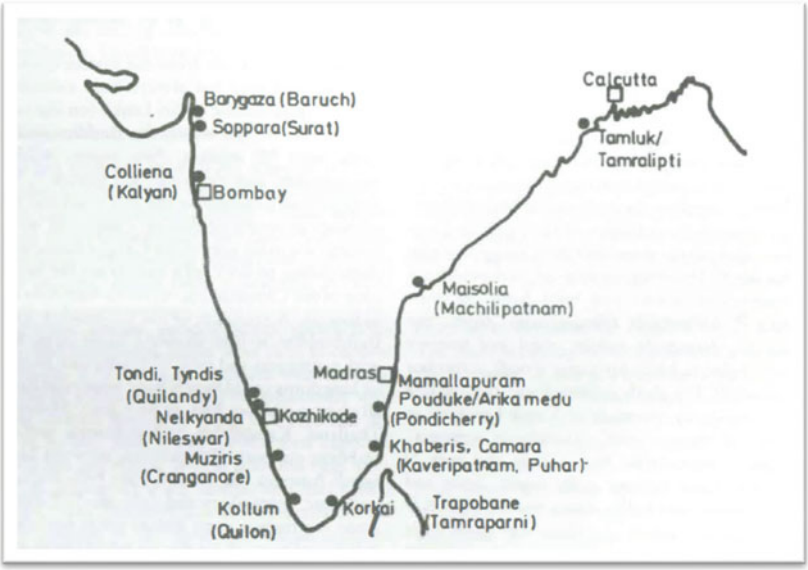

Fig. 11.2 Ports of South India, when trade with Rome was at its highest (*Source* From: Achaya, K. T. (1994). *Indian Food: Historical Companion*. Oxford University Press)

swallowing, and numerous other protocols were recorded. Food material was classified into various Vargas and much of it is still in use today. Sukhadhanya (cereals), samidhanya (pulses), shakna (vegetables), phala (fruits), supyam (spices), payovarga (milk products), mamsavarga (animal meats) and madhyavarga (alcoholic beverages).[2] From a ritual perspective, though, classification was based on Food that was cultivated (rice, grain, lentils, etc.) and food that grew on its own, like wild grains, vegetables, and grain. There was also the classification of kaccha and pacca food, something that is loosely still followed by some sects. Food cooked in a water base is kaccha, and the properly cooked is pacca. During death in the family, it is still not a norm to cook at home, and neighbours have to send Food; Food that will be cooked is outside the house, and the base remains water, a practice still followed. Hygiene factors with respect to cooking are stringent, and most Indian homes follow that to a T. In the 1960s, when LPG cylinders came to replace kerosene stoves and wood-based cooking, the biggest taboo was the outside entering the kitchen to replace (refill) the cylinder, something Indian women were not comfortable or used to. The kitchen remained the holy grail of the house next to the temple (in the house), and Food being cooked was considered a gift of God (Anna). Much of the rituals and practices both in cooking and dealing with Food come from the norms laid down in this (Vedic) era. Washing hands before eating, sitting on the floor while eating, using hands while eating, thoroughly rinsing the mouth after eating, and cleaning the kitchen after eating, all of them have clearly laid nomenclatures.

11.1.4 Food and Beyond

In addition to Food that we consume, the subcontinent has also looked at Food from medicinal value. For thousands of years, there has been documentation done on the kind of Food to be consumed during ailments and sickness; there are dossiers on the different kinds of medicines which are made from plant extracts and prescribed diet during

[2] *Source* ibid., 61.

the times when one is under the weather. The Vedic period remains the time when a lot of documentation was done with respect to the medicinal properties of various plants and their roots. Seeds, berries, and stems were also used for various kinds of treatments. Charaka, Shusrutha and Vagbhata are considered the pillars of Indian medicine, along with some lesser-known names. The basic codes they devised for staving ailment and illness were:

1. Vatika and Gutika (pills and balls)
2. Modaka (sweet uncooked pills)
3. Thaila (oil-based decoction for external and internal use)
4. Arishta and Asava (medicated fermented liquor)
5. Kanjika (rice gruel sourced by fermentation).

Most of these listed above remained the base (or form) for any of the medicinal extract which was added. According to the Bhagvad Gita there are three kinds of Food; *Tamasic* foods like pork, beef, non-scaly fish, and strong brews, *Sattvika* foods (milk and milk products, jaggery, honey, fruits, goat and sheep meat, chicken, eggs, and wine and *Rajasic* foods which are bitter, sour, salty, pungent, dry, and burning. Out-of-season food (fruits, vegetables, etc.) was strictly unadvisable.

Around these times, the Food of eastern India needs special mention owing to the topicality of the content, and Bengal has always remained a resource-heavy region. Blessed with moderate temperatures, conducive weather, and fertile soil, agriculture of the region was always good enough to produce abundance. Produce of various kinds, from grains, oilseeds, fruits, and vegetables, and later the European travellers brought with them various kinds of items, including tomatoes, pineapples, cashews, potatoes, and chilies. These travellers usually marvelled at the country's indigenous produce like lentils (such as urad, mung, and masur dal), millet, aubergines, many tubers, pumpkins, melons and gourds, mangoes, jackfruit, citrus fruit, ginger, turmeric, tamarind, and black and long pepper. It was also the home of domesticated chickens. Many of them continue to occupy kitchen space and the Indian diet.

Fish in Bengal was intrinsic to the place, and it remains the only other place (besides Kashmiri pandits) where the Brahmins consume fish.

Though there were designated days for vegetarian affairs, predominantly the Brahmins from Bengal were fish eaters (non-vegetarian). The Vaishnavites from Bengal (Navadvip area), though, were vegetarian. They were followers of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, and the Food was purely vegetarian with no onion and garlic. In fact, they abhorred potatoes and tomatoes for a long time owing to their origins. Despite the non-vegetarian affair, Bengal has always experimented with vegetables, and the cuisine is resplendent with vegetables. Later with time, Bengal cuisine got divided into West Bengal and East Bengal, which were diametrically different. While the East Bengalis preferred river fish, the West Bengalis preferred the sea fish (this was also because of the proximity of the river and sea, respectively). More on this will be discussed later. Sweets remained an integral part of the subculture. Figure 11.3 is a symbolic illustration of a classical sweetmeat seller. Though in the Vedic period, sweets remained ingrained mainly in the basic form through jaggery and honey, with time, particularly with the advent of the Mughals and the Christians, the landscape of sweetmeats changed too.

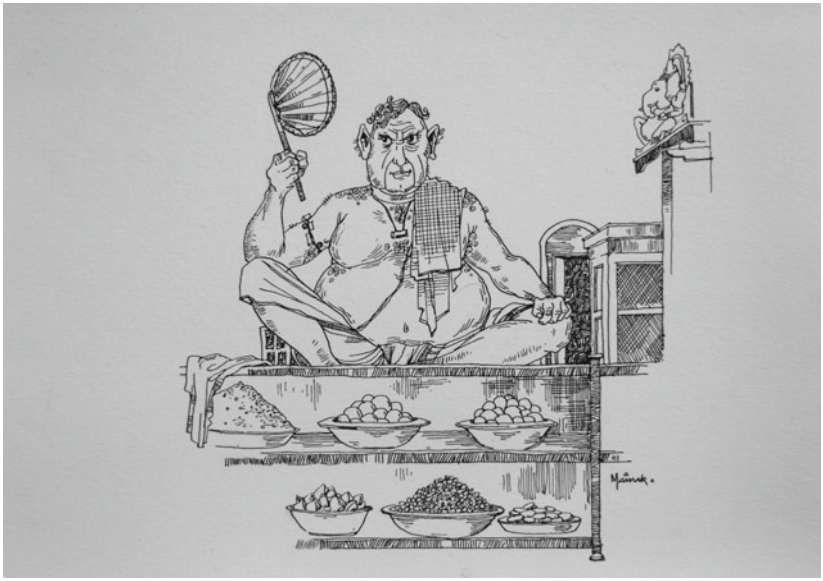

Fig. 11.3 Bengali sweetmeat seller

11.1.5 The Post-Vedic Period and After

The development of agriculture around this time led to two distinct outcomes: a rapid increase in population and migration into new areas. This phase of the time when the Mauryan dynasty and later Gupta dynasty thrived was called the "second urbanization". (the first being the Indus Valley civilization). This was the time when towns and cities were built, many on rivers or the coast. The most important were Champa in West Bengal; Kashi (modern-day Varanasi); Mathur and Kaushambi in Uttar Pradesh; Pataliputra (Patna), the capital of the Magadha kingdom in Bihar; Taxila in the Punjab; and the port of Bharuch on the west coast. Urban craftsmen and artisans made textiles, pottery, ceramics, glassware, and metal artefacts and tools for domestic use and export. Merchants traded local products for horses and woollen goods from Afghanistan, Persia, and Central Asia.[3]

As the waning glory of the Gupta dynasty made way for a new order and around 700CE Arab raiders started coming to the subcontinent (they already were well established in the Sindh province). Eventually, Muslim presence started getting pronounced since 1000CE after Mahmud of Ghazni started his raids, followed by Mughal Sultanate (two from the house of Balbans, six Khaljis, three Tughlaks, four Saiyyids and three Lodis) that lasted for three hundred years and later the Mughal dynasty formally made Delhi their seat of power to control the rest of India from 1526 onwards. Amir Khusarau and Ibn Batuta, the Moroccan traveller, documented the Sultanate era. Later, formal documentation was made of the time and place when the formal Mughal Dynasty made the subcontinent their seat of power. This documentation includes much of the information on food, food typology, eating food, the class divide in food, and new nomenclatures of food. Akbar, one of the greatest Mughal emperor's chronicles, is all reflected through Ain-e-Akbari and Akbar-Nama (written by the court historian Abul Faizal). The Mughals brought differences in the food consumed here and changed their cuisines. Flavours of Uzbekistan, Persia, and Afghanistan were further infused

[3] *Source* Sen, Colleen Taylor. (2015). *Feasts and Fasts: A History of Food in India*. Reaktion Books.

with local flavours of Kashmir, Deccan, and parts of Bengal. The ubiquitous Samosa, which remains a perennial favourite of the country today, was introduced by the Mughals. Initially laced with meat, but over time, it has now been Indianized with vegetarian filling. The use of pistachios, almonds, and other nuts in different Mughal dishes is now mainstream across the country. Dishes like the Pilaf (called Pulao), the proverbial Biryani, the concept of slow cooking (in Dum), cooking with whole foods (Mussaalam), etc., were also introduced by the Mughals.

The era of Akbar and thereafter was the golden period of Mughal cuisine and how food evolved. Various kinds of spices, rice, fruits, nuts and seeds, meat, and poultry were resplendent in class and royalty. Of particular interest would be the era of Shah Jahan, who invested heavily in food and further developed and expanded the range of Mughlai food that is father and grandfather (Jahangir and Akbar) had curated. Mango became a popular fruit of the Mughals, and Akbar even ensured a private mango garden in Bihar. Surprisingly, Aurangzeb, the last of the notable rulers, preferred vegetarian dishes (dal paanchmel was his favourite) than non-vegetarian due to medical conditions. The Mughal Khansamas (chefs/cooks), though, took special attention to cooking as they always consulted the hakims (doctors) for the medicinal value of the food. They always took care of not only making food wholesome and delicious but also having medicinal value to help in digestion along with being an aphrodisiac. The famed *Tunday Kababi of Lucknow* known for their melt-in-the-mouth Galauti Kababs keep their recipe still a closely guarded secret, which has been passed on through generations from the era of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah. However, they always insist that the ingredient (in the Galauti) has medicinal properties known to help in digestion. The 700 years of Mughals in India have been definitive and contributed immensely to the food of the country today. What started with the food for the Nawabs and the royal family has now gone mainstream and is now found across gullies and mohallas of small cities. Haleem is a very Hyderabadi dish and remains a perennial favourite of the Ramzan months originated from the Mughal era and is now available across the city of Hyderabad (a legacy passed on through generations). Kebabs of numerous kinds that adorn restaurants and eateries originated in this (Mughal) era. Biryani which now claims a national dish (unofficially)

status, was an idea of Mumtaz Mahal to feed her soldiers healthy (a perfect combination of rice and meat) to be better prepared for times of war, as on visits to the barracks. They looked weak and impoverished. Later, the Nizam of Hyderabad and the Nawab of Lucknow (known to have world-class Khansamas in their repertoire) further improvised on the rice and meat concoction to make what the present-day Biryani looks like.

11.1.6 The Colonial Conundrum

The first traces of the West coming to this part of the world (India) was in 1292 when John of Monte Corvino came from Italy and spent thirteen months here. During his visit, diaries and writings reveal his exposure to the country's food and agricultural produce. Large ginger plantations, spices like pepper trees, cinnamon barks, coconut, honey, and rice were something new to the traveller. Later, when Europeans started gradually started exploring the East and, more specifically Indian subcontinent, they discovered a whole new world of food and cuisine. Later, the steady advent of the travellers, preachers, pastors, traders, and explorers brought in their own home country culture, which blended with the local culture of the region they entered. The Portuguese, French, British, and Danish influence can still be seen in much of the food we eat and the architecture around us. Figure 11.4 gives an indication of what the Europeans had with respect to settlements and colonies in India. Notice carefully how the port cities have had an impact in terms of letting the settlers in. Once these cities became the seat of the settlers, they gradually created a hub around them.

As the colonial forces started entering from the length and breadth of the country, the fabric of food started changing too. Table 11.3 gives an indication of the plants introduced by the Portuguese in Bengal and their use in Bengali cuisine. The Portuguese influence in Bengal, Goa and parts of Kerala was distinct. Use of meat, vegetables, and spices in preparing food using distinct Portuguese and Indian spices and vegetables made for a unique flavour. The famed Vindaloo, a popular Goan delicacy, has Portuguese origins in terms of the spices used. In India,

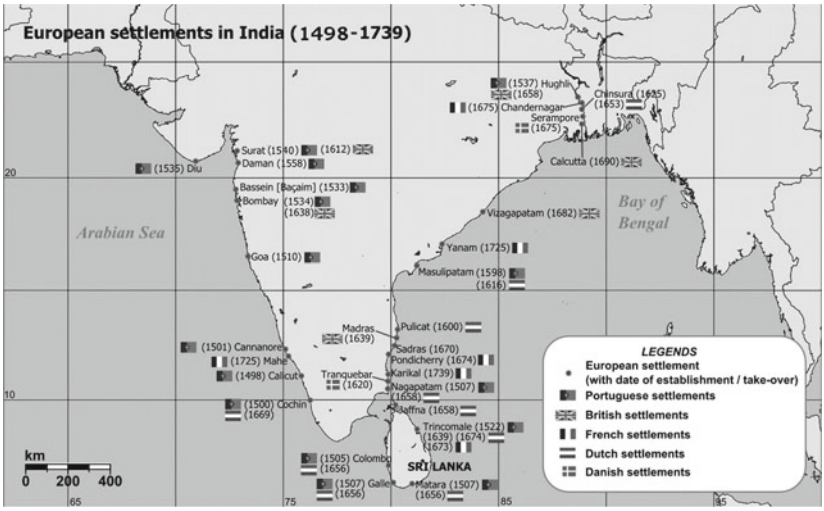

Fig. 11.4 European settlements in India (1498–1739) (*Source* https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/29/European_settlements_in_India_from_1498-1739.PNG [accessed on 30th October 2022])

the Portuguese introduced potatoes, chilies, okra, papayas, pineapples, cashews, peanuts, maize, sapodilla, custard apples, guavas, and tobacco, though there are some controversies on the statement. The Portuguese are also known to have introduced the concept of Chana (cottage cheese) nu girdling the milk. It was considered taboo in Hindu dharma to girdle milk, but the Portuguese, having invented this, laid the foundation for making sweets. It is also important to note that during the time when the colonial people were settling down, or some of them were doing business, the process of amalgamation with the local culture was also parallelly happening. Even though they (Portuguese and other colonial powers) despised the local customs, the climate, and the spices and cuisine, they soon adapted to the local taste and food, further going into fusion food too (mixing the local with their own recipes). The biggest contribution of the Portuguese was the Colombian exchange,[4] and it is believed

[4] Colombian exchange: The far-flung trading posts of the Portuguese and Spanish empires (Portugal was united with Spain between 1580 and 1640) became the hubs of a global

that much of what India gained in terms of agricultural produce came through the Colombian exchange.

Eventually, after the British established their hegemony for two hundred years, they ruled the country. The Britishers initially carried the baggage of their home country and devoured the food they had back home. The cold, moist, and rain-drenched British weather may have suited the meat, wine, and heavy carbohydrate (bread) diet. But the hot and humid subcontinent weather would have none of it. The suffering, mainly in the form of diarrhoea, stomach infections, constipation, colon-related problems, and general sickness due to vagrant weather, was always a dampener. The British physicians deputed here soon realized the cause of these ailments and problems and warned the officials about the diet. But the British hegemony and high-handedness would simply refuse to get cowed down. Much later, after the mutiny and as the rulers were preparing for the long haul, did the normalization and understanding of the local food and cuisine happen. Noticeably, the difference in the Mughals' and Britishers' approaches to dealing with the subcontinent and food are radically opposite. The Mughals not only carried their legacy but even integrated themselves into the subculture of food in the country.

As the British gradually settled, they passed on their wisdom to several things to do with their lives and livelihoods. Particularly in food, their contribution has been introducing tea to Indians, beer, the kind of vegetables they ate like cabbage, cauliflower, orange, spinach, carrots, different kinds of puddings, meat-based dishes, and wine. While the British were introduced to the famed curry, which is in vogue in modern Britain. Though anything runny and could be poured onto rice was a curry to them, they realized how infusing the curry with spices and herbs, along with meats and vegetables, spruced up the thing over time. Across the country, there were regional experiences, and the royals and nobility helped the Britishers settle and acclimatize. Food, in most cases, was a redeemer. Though cultural differences were stark, a sense of common ground was worked upon. Eating food with hands versus knives and

exchange of fruit, vegetables, nuts and other plants between the western hemisphere, Africa, the Philippines, Oceania, and the Indian subcontinent

Table 11.3 Some plants introduced by the Portuguese in Bengal and their use in Bengali Cuisine

Sl No	English name (Botanical Name)	Bengali name	Comments	Use in Bengali cuisine
1.	Cashew (anacardium occidentale)	Kaju	Hijli badam. Native of S.E. Brazil, introduced to the west coast of India to check soil erosion. Today India is the world leader in its production. 'Kaju' is Portuguese corruption of Brazilian 'acajau.' 'Hijli' is a coastal region in Bengal where the cashew is grown	Snack
2.	Pineapple (*ananas sativa)*	Anaras	Introduced in Bengal in 1594 from Brazil	Fresh in chutney
3.	Peanut (arachis hypogaea)	Chinar Badam	Introduced from America, perhaps via Africa. The Bengali name means 'Chinese nut' which indicates that it could have arrived via Manila or China. However, 'Chinese' is also an adjective used by Bengalis to denote anything foreign	Snack

Sl No	English name (Botanical Name)	Bengali name	Comments	Use in Bengali cuisine
4.	Papaya (carica papaya)	Papaya	Originated in Central America. Came to India via Philippines (where the Spanish brought it) and Malaysia	Unripe as a vegetable. Paste used as meat tenderizer
5.	Mangosteen (*garcinia mangostana*)	Mangustan	Mangustan was brought from Malacca	
6.	Sweet Potato (*impoaoea batatas*)	Ranga alu, chine alu	Introduced from Africa or Brazil. Bengali name means 'red potato'	Vegetable dishes, shrimp dishes
7.	Potato (*solanum tuberosum)*	Alu; bilayati alu	('European potato') The Spanish brought the first potatoes to Europe in 1570. On the west coast of India, it is called batata (sweet potato). In 1780, a basket of potatoes was presented to Sir Warren Hastings in Calcutta. It was grown in the foothills of the Himalayas in the 1830s. By 1860, potatoes had become popular in Calcutta, although orthodox people avoided them until [the twentieth] century	Vegetable dishes, dried and with gravy; in *shukto*, *poshto*. In curries with meat and seafood. Filling for samosas

(continued)

Table 11.3 (continued)

Sl No	English name (Botanical Name)	Bengali name	Comments	Use in Bengali cuisine
8.	Tomato (lycopersicony coperiscum)	bilayati begoon ('European eggplant')	Originated in Mexico or Peru. Came via England in the late eighteenth century	Chutney. Flavouring for dals
9.	Chilies (capsicum frutescens)	Lanka	The Bengali name indicates it may have come via Sri Lanka. Originated in Central America. Spread rapidly in India as substitute for long or black pepper. By the mid-sixteenth century, Europeans were calling it 'Calcutta pepper.'	Fresh, dried, and powdered. Used for flavouring and decoration
10.	Custard Apple (anona squamosa)	Ata	Native to S. America, came to India from West Indies via the Cape of Good Hope or the Philippines. Naturalized in Bengal	
11.	Tobacco (*nicotiana tabacum*)	Tamak	Introduced into South India by the Portuguese in the early sixteenth century	
12.	Guava (psidium guyava)	Peyara	May have originated in Peru. Known in Eastern India as early as 1550. Widely grown in Bengal	Eaten as fruit. Also, Guava cheese, jelly
13.	Corn or Maize (zea maya)	Bhutta	Originated in Central America. Achaya notes temple carvings from twelfth Century A.D. showing what he claims are corn cobs	Roasted and eaten on the cob, usually purchased from street sellers

Sl No	English name (Botanical Name)	Bengali name	Comments	Use in Bengali cuisine
14.	Sapodilla (manilkara achras)	Chiku	The bark of the tree yields chicle used by Aztecs for chewing; hence Bengali 'chiku'. Brought from Mozambique to Goa or Philippines to Malaysia, and then to the east coast	
15.	Litchi (niphelium litcvhi)	Lichu	Native to southern China. The Portuguese brought it to Bengal at end of the nineteenth century	Eaten as fruit. Goan's make litchi wine
16.	Okra, Lady's Fingers (abnelmoschus esculentus)	Bhindi	Probably from Africa	Popular vegetable. Fried, cooked in stews

Source https://www.sahapedia.org/our-food-their-food-historical-overview-of-the-bengali-platter (accessed on 30th October 2022)

forks, washing hands and rinsing of mouth versus merely wiping the mouth with a cloth, eating in parts versus eating as a whole, use of oil to cook versus bland European food (for lack of spice) was all about adjusting to the local tastes and attitude.

11.1.7 Colonial Impact on Food in Bengal

> "Our chota haziri, or little breakfast, was at five-thirty to six, and consisted of tea, eggs boiled or poached, toast and fruit... Breakfast at eleven consisted of fried or broiled fish, a dish or two of meat—generally fowl cutlets, hashes and stews, or cold meat and salad followed by curry and rice and dessert. We drank either bottled beer—the universal Bass—or claret... Between four and five there was tea and cakes,... Dinner at half past seven or eight consisted of soup, and entr´ee, roast fowls or ducks, occasionally mutton, and in cold weather once or twice beef, an entremet of game or a savoury, and sweets." **From Jayanta Sengupta. (2010). Nation on a Platter: The Culture and Politics of Food and Cuisine in Colonial Bengal. Modern Asian Studies, 44, pp. 81–98**. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X09990072

The small anecdote above from the writings of Jayanta Sengupta throws light on how the typical day in the life of a British official was. Opulence and splurging showed in what was consumed. The hierarchy was unmissable and, in a nation where there were many hungry mouths to feed and the burden of famine to bear, this was a signal of the class divide and how food from the west and east blended onto a classic British plate. They had a substantial impact on the food of the region. Table 11.3 indicates how the Portuguese impacted the region but let us now get into understanding the Britishers and their impact. There are two aspects to the same. One was where the Britishers carried their own legacy (bread, wine, beef, pork), and the second was how they integrated the local ingredients and spices. Before the colonial era, the classical Bengali dish consisted of Rice, Pulses, Vegetables, and Fish. Fish and Rice were integral to a standardized meal, and meat (not chicken but lamb and goat) was the other staple. However, the poor and underprivileged often

did not have the luxury of meat and relied mostly on rice and pulses. The backdrop of all this was about Bengal quietly emerging from the dark period of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when rituals and practices of child marriage, sati, and widows being oppressed under the social norms, caste systems, and draconian religious rituals had virtually put the region in darkness. The Bengal renaissance from the late eighteenth century to the early twentieth century brought major societal changes. It also brought out some of the strongest and most powerful social reformers like Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Dayanand Saraswathi, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, and Rabindra Nath Tagore, to name a few. There were changes in the religious standpoints, art, music, literature, and overall, a sense of realization of how education and social progress go hand in hand. The Britishers were a catalyst in the process, and their support helped the region to come out of the dark period.

Along with many such reforms, food also came under the spotlight, and particularly the politics of bread[5] is noteworthy. The bread was quintessentially a British import and was considered taboo. The use of flour to make bread, and in Bengali, bread is referred to as Paoruti (bread made with legs as the flour was mashed into a dough using the feet), was considered as a strict no from a religious and ethical standpoint. The puritan society strictly abhorred the use of bread. Now, as the renaissance threw in the social reformers, quietly, another set of the classical Bengali middle class saw an uprising. They were educated and worked under the colonial rulers as their deputies. Education and exposure to global work ethics opened the eyes of the Bengali middle class. The politics of bread perhaps was a bitter battle between the puritans (especially the religious leaders and the Brahminical lords), the social reformers, and the educated

[5] The piece has been taken from an article titled Bread and resistance in colonial Bengal by Mohd. Amar Alvi in Hypothesis: The recipe project (2022)—The aversion exhibited by upper-caste Hindus was predicated on a set of strong Brahmanical religious beliefs. In Hinduism, food can carry a plethora of diktats. It dictates your job, social status, whether you are "pure" or "polluted", and whether you are entitled to enter a temple. The food one eats becomes the defining factor of one's caste. One such way that upper-caste Hindus distinguish themselves from the lower ones is by denying the food touched or cooked by, the lower castes. A high-caste Hindu can only accept food or drink from a person of a similar rank. It must be rejected if the food is prepared or touched by a lower caste person. Therefore, accepting bread from Dalits' hands would be polluting and profaning to *savarnas* (caste Hindus).

middle class. There are many tales of how a pitched battle (mostly political and through media) was fought between the two sides. Today, the harmless bread has virtually become a breakfast essential (modern dieticians, though, sneer at bread and urge millennials to go back to roti, rava, and rice).

The debate on pork and beef was also on the back of the bread controversy. Fish and rice were considered a staple diet; the occasional meat was lamb. The chicken was considered a very Muslim household affair. The meat in Bengali households was also cooked without the use of onion and garlic and mostly spices like black pepper, cumin, and coriander powder. As the Britishers introduced pork and beef more formally, the upper-caste Hindus and the Brahmins resisted strongly. The free flow of wine and spirit was another cause of concern, which the religious norms strictly defined as taboo. In Muslim households, pork and wine were also considered strictly a pariah. In all of this, the reformist Bengalis looked down upon the guardians of religion and moral high ground, and to them, having bread or pork or beef or wine was announcing the privileges and equality with the aristocracy and Raj era. Many of these thoughts stayed put much after the British left India. In food, education, art, and music, the hint of the colonial era stayed back, and today both in West Bengal and Bangladesh, there are outlets that serve food and drinks with a strong hint from the days of the Raj.

Park Street in Calcutta was known to be the melting pot for glamour, food, and wine during the British era. A place prohibited for the locals saw some of the finest in music coming down to perform in the city. The best food (which was blended in the local and British flavour), and wine of the best quality was served here. Much of the same is still intact in the restaurants there. Restaurants like Trincas, Mocambo, Peter Cat, and Moulin Rouge are still there, with the essence of them remaining very British, including the cuisine being served. The street is perhaps a witness and flag bearer for the modern educated Bengali who was more than happy to gesticulate to the past and the practices that stifled them. However, Calcutta remained the bustling hub while the rest of Bengal continued to reel in the darkness of time, and much of the tradition in terms of food remained. A lot of young scholars from East Bengal or

North Bengal who came to study in Calcutta were warned about the glamour and glitz of the city and were told to stay away from it.

A small anecdote on the famed Ledikeni (a sweetmeat made of split milk) which was conceptualized and introduced by a famous sweetmeat maker of Calcutta Bhim Chandra Nag in honour of Lady Charlotte Canning (wife of Lord Charles Canning, the first Viceroy of India and the last Governor General of India). It was her birthday or welcoming her to Calcutta (the origins remain still shrouded in the past) when the sweet meat Ledikeni was offered to her. Initially referred to as Lady Canning, and over time, it got muddled into being now called as Ledikeni. Its more famous cousin Gulab Jamun is often confused with Ledikeni, but Ledikeni is made with split milk, and Gulab Jamun with reduced milk. Small incidents such as this also illustrate that all were not British, and even the locals had their way of introducing new food with a veiled or guided reference such as the one here.

11.2 Bangladesh: The Uprising

11.2.1 The Colonial Era and the Impact

As a part of the undivided Bengal, Bangladesh was also known for the rivers and rivulets; much of the food evolved from there. Fish remained the common and staple diet for the most time, along with rice and vegetables. The fertile nature of the land and the abundance of agricultural produce also meant that most homes, along with fish, had a variety of vegetables and rice. In undivided Bengal, rice remained the staple food for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. The combination of fish and vegetables could change accordingly. Close proximity to the mighty river Padma meant that fish of all kinds was found here, most notably the Hilsa fish. Hilsa is a soft fish with supple bones and is the best catch during monsoon when it comes to laying eggs from the sea to the river. As it has swum upstream to the river, the supple bones provide the strength to swim against the tide. It is a dense bony fish and needs expert hands to be devoured. Hilsa continues to be the pride of Bangladesh; today, the West Bengal population still craves for the Padma's Hilsa (or, as Bengalis say

Illish). After partition, a lot of original cuisine from Bangladesh got lost in the process, but today, many local food experts are trying to revive the spirit of East Bengal. The food of East Bengal was spicy and had less onion and garlic in it. Even the lamb cooked was without garlic and onion. In the post-partition period, beef became mainstream as the Muslim population started increasing. Much of the meat in Bangladesh today is beef based. If West Bengal is more chicken and mutton biryani, Bangladesh is beef biryani. Pulses (referred as Daal) in Bangladesh are consumed during breakfast as opposed to in West Bengal that consumed during lunch or dinner. The prevalence of dried fish, particularly in the southern part of the country, is more prevalent. The dried fish (often referred to as Shutki) is used in various region recipes. Recipes from the erstwhile East Bengal have got lost, and some people like Pritha Sen, a journalist, and food researcher, are trying to revive them. A small trivia on a dish from Bangladesh is in the footnote.[6] Similarly, there are many lost recipes that the traditional homes in Bangladesh (particularly in Dhaka) are trying to revive. In summation, the food in Bangladesh today is roughly classified in terms of typology as follows[7]:

1. The western parts of Bangladesh, including Khulna and Jessore, share food traditions with West Bengal of India, and traditional Bengali recipes dominate the local food scene.
2. The northern parts strongly influence Eastern India (mainly Assam and Manipur), and traditional food includes many sweets and fruits such as bananas, mango, and papaya.
3. Eastern parts of Bangladesh are famous for fish and rice, as well as the authentic cooking style of the Sylheti community.

[6] During the late 1800s, passengers took the East Bengal Express connecting the Gateway to the East, Calcutta, now Kolkata, with Goalondo, from where people took the ferry service on the Padma River to cross into the erstwhile East Bengal, now Bangladesh. From Goalondo Ghat people fanned out in different directions all over East Bengal and to the tea gardens of Assam or to Burma where there was a huge Bengali population. Sadly, the express train was discontinued in 1964 after the war, but one particular thing was not forgotten—the famous Goalondo fowl curry—this was served as the signature dish to the passengers travelling by the steamers that ferried from Goalondo Ghat. This is a light preparation of country chicken, cooked with basic spices by the boatmen who hailed from East Bengal and Chittagong.

[7] *Source* https://www.thedailystar.net/lifestyle/spotlight/bangladesh-cuisine-part-i-delectable-and-diverse-1325551 (accessed on 31st October 2022).

4. Southern Bangladesh is inhabited by many indigenous tribes, each of one of them with its own different cooking and culinary traditions.
5. The Arakan influence that originated in Burma has a strong influence in the southern parts of the country, and this is well exemplified by the abundance of bamboo shoots, fish, and coconut in many recipes.
6. Central Bangladesh, including the capital city of Dhaka, is famous for fresh fish but also the Nawab Awadhi cuisine. Kebabs, biriyani, and mutton are particularly distinctive in this part of the country.

11.2.2 Bangladesh Today

As Bangladesh tries to come to terms with a new and independent nation, food is one of the prime movers in the city. The Hotel and Restaurant Survey 2020 showcase the first of its kind in 10 years, a 59% increase from a decade ago, from 11.7 lakhs to 43.6 lakhs in terms of the number of restaurants. The industry that contributed 0.75% to the gross domestic product in 2020 has witnessed a steady increase of over 70% of women workforces in 2020 over 1992 (Table 11.4).

The history and legacy of Bangladesh today have placed the country with respect to food in a different position as compared to the past. The history of the Mughals, the colonial era, and the post-1971 era have all led to a new dimension and whole new world order. There remains a lot of influence in terms of how the Mughals and the colonial era have influenced food, but among the same, the country has been able to create a niche of its own. Modern Bangladesh has a young and thriving population. They are restless and always thriving for something new. The city of Dhaka, the country's most important city, is a fast-paced centre where the hustle and bustle seem to have overtaken the laid-back attitude of the past. It is this hustle and bustle, perhaps, that has somewhere benefited the city of the soul in the food. According to Riaz Mahmud Hossain[8] one of the influential food bloggers, writers, and experts believes that the traditional food of Bangladesh, which was the pre-Mughal era, the Mughal era, and the colonial era are now gradually fading, making way

[8] Riaz is one of the top Bangladeshi food bloggers. He is active on several social media handles and can be found here on: https://www.youtube.com/c/AdnanFaruque.

Table 11.4 Hotel and restaurant survey 2020: Key findings

Sl. No	Characteristics	Year			
		1992–1993	2002–2003	2009–2010	2019–2020
1.	Number of establishments	117,981	215,103	275,324	436,274
2.	Number of persons engaged by sex				
	Male	336,616	471,825	856,321	1,803,753
	Female	6721	5878	47,463	479,779
	Total	343,337	477,703	903,784	2,283,532
3.	Employment cost (million taka)	2363	4012	35,751	157,674
4.	Gross output (million taka)	30,975	66,472	351,592	886,431
5.	Gross value added (million taka)	8277	66,472	119,861	879,268
6.	Average employment cost per establishment (000 taka')	20.03	18.65	39.56	361.41
7.	Employment cost per person per annum (Tk.)	6882	8399	39,557	69,048

Source The Hotel and restaurant survey report 2020, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), the National Statistical Organization (NSO), Government of Bangladesh

for new versions. He thinks like fast fashion food is also now about fast and instant. Take the quintessential Kachhi Biryani of Dhaka, where raw rice and meat are mixed in a blend of spices and slow-cooked to perfection. Modern biryani is about cooking the rice and meat separately and then having a gravy, eventually mixing the three at the time of delivery. The soul of the food (read biryani), in this case, is missing. Old Dhaka and some of the Basha Bari (home chefs) are still experimenting with traditional cuisines, but those are very limited. The traditional meals of the pre-Mughal era of rice, pulses, vegetables, fish, or meat do exist, but they are now being shortened in terms of time taken to cook and often, because of rising costs, people cut corners.

Fish which was always known to Bangladesh as the home to some of the finest river fish products, are now all cultivated, and fish feeds

are often compromised. The original river fish (which can cost anywhere from 1000 to 1200 BT[9]) is being replaced by cultivated fish (which costs anywhere between 450 and 600 BT). The quality and hygiene factors are heavily compromised. The taste of the fish also is not the same too. Consumerism and rapid commercialization are to be blamed for such compromises. Business ethics are compromised, and restaurant owners are more than happy to supply inferior products as the demand for food remains consistent and steady. Rising costs (input costs) have also been another deterrent. Post-COVID, this has become a major dampener, and the restaurant business is particularly affected and perhaps the reason why owners are cutting corners.

Bangladesh is home to a very large labour force; these people often have to eat on the streets. Street food is a thriving business here in a big city like Dhaka, but again there is always the risk of sub-standard food being served, or perhaps contamination[10] is rampant. The range of food available might be diverse, but the cost of the food and the quality remains a dampener. This may be a major sore point for a big city like Dhaka. On the other hand, the smaller town and the mofussil towns are still not affected by rapid urbanization. Bigger cities are also witnessing corporatization of the food business, particularly the sweetmeat business, where some of the big names like the Pran Group, Premium, Meena sweets are entering. They are experimenting more with sweets for the moment, but the food is also on the agenda to corporatize soon. When such groups enter the market, the common problem is templates that get created, and the soul (essence) gets lost.

Today, in a country with a population of 162 million people with a per square mile population of 1251 the density of the population is quite high. Ordering food online is quite popular, and Mobile Food Ordering Apps (MFOAs) have been considered one of the most popular platforms for ordering. Some of the apps like Pathao Foods, with 7000 registered Bangladeshi restaurants, Sohoz Food, with 6000 restaurants,

[9] BT- Bangladeshi Taka.

[10] Use of the textile color in the bakery business or replacing ghee with dalda or even procuring sub standard inputs to cook.

and Foodpanda, with 6500 restaurants until 2019[11] remain the popular choice. Mobile commerce applications have been considered as new ways to capture the market, which is predominantly millennial-driven.[12]

11.3 West Bengal: Food Shall Remain a Redeemer

Much of what was undivided by Bengal fell in the lap of West Bengal in the post-partition era. As the Bengali population's love for food and all things food continues to surge, the Mughlai and Colonial influences and flavours still abound. In addition, the original Bengali recipes continue to hold forth. A staple dish consists of a bitter starter which can be a bitter gourd fry or neem & brinjal fry or Shukto (a combination of brinjal, drumsticks, bottle gourd, bitter gourd, raw papaya with a phoron of the classic Bengali paanch phoron and radhuni), followed by pulses (daal), fried vegetables like brinjal or potato or any seasonal vegetable, a curried mixed vegetable, followed by fish or meat and finally chutney with sweets. In this basic template, the point of departure can be the approach to cooking and the intermittent changes in the pulse, vegetable, and meat type. Rice remains the staple to all lunch and dinner. However, West Bengal prefers fried flatbread or simple flat bread too for breakfast.

West Bengal cuisine, as compared to Bangladesh, is sweeter and less spicy. Fish remains a preferred option, but back in the day, the saying was that East Bengal consumed more river fish and West Bengal, sea fish (mostly Prawns and Lobsters). There has always remained a rivalry between the Ghoti (West Bengal) versus Bangal (East Bengal). They never saw each other eye to eye, and they looked down on each other. Marriages often were restricted to each other's community. The rivalry even went into the football grounds, with the East Bengal versus Mohan Bagan clubs fighting it out.

[11] *Source* https://www.thedailystar.net/business/news/restaurants-iftar-seasonsalvaged-food-delivery-platforms-1898902 (accessed 30th October 2022).

[12] *Source* https://www.thedailystar.net/city/news/bleak-baishakh-restaurants-1892812 (accessed 30th October 2022).

Britishers' love for cakes and biscuits has profoundly impacted the city and around. There are many outlets that still serve distinctive tea cakes and loaves. A famous Jew bakery, Nahoum in New Market, Calcutta still serves the age-old recipes since 1902. Though the Jewish community is now reduced to 4000–6000 Jews, this store retains the aura and appeal. Many bakers and commercial chains that bake cakes and biscuits are strewn around the city of Calcutta. Historically, the bakery culture has thrived in India wherever the Britishers have settled over time. Calcutta is a testimony of that. In Bangladesh, too, parts of Dhaka and Chittagong have a culture of bakery outlets. Contrast this to Northern India, where cake purchasing is occasion-based (birthdays, anniversaries, etc.). In these parts, cakes are a daily affair with tea or coffee.

The Mughlai and the colonial cuisines are now being redefined and retailed. The biryani, which came to the city with the troupe of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah upon his exile to the city, gradually formed a Calcutta version of it with potatoes and eggs (the Lucknow version does not have eggs and potatoes and just meat). With limited pension being doled out, the Mughal Khansamas tried to make the meal wholesome, so meat, potatoes, and eggs made it complete. Several other dishes like the Murg Mussalam, Mutton Rezala, and Kebabs from the Mughal era have stood the test of time. Many home chefs in Calcutta and around are trying to revive the old cuisines that are gradually losing touch too. The restaurants in Park Street continue to serve some of the colonial dishes like the Chicken Ala-Kiev or the Devilled Eggs etc., that help the cuisines of the past stay in public memory and stay noticed. The love for food among the Bengali also is a point that helps to keep the urge to keep discovering afloat.

In India, the restaurant industry is worth Rs 4.23 lakh crore, and it is likely to expand to Rs 6 lakh crore by 2023, according to NRAI data.[13] The total restaurant in Kolkata reaches 38,838 and directly employs 66,234 people. It stands fourth after Mumbai, Delhi, and Bengaluru. As per NRAI India Food Services Report, 2019, the Kolkata food service sector is pegged at Rs 5049 crore. Though the numbers as compared

[13] *Source* https://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/bengal-govt-to-extend-all-support-to-restaurant-sector-119070201470_1.html (accessed on 31st July 2022).

to the other three metros are small yet, Calcutta and particularly West Bengal have diversity in food.

The various kind of workforce that came to Calcutta also helped the city create a diversified gastronomic range. The migrant labour from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh looked for a low-cost high fibre diet to the Marwari sitting on the gaddi (his place of work), which was mostly stationary to the middle-class Bengali who was a 9-5er and the college-going youth and families. The city was always known to serve a range of food across different price ranges. From low-cost, high-quality food to fine dining, Calcutta had it all. Today, numerous outlets and street food shacks across the city sell everything from curd and flattened rice (for the labour force) to dal bati churma (a Rajasthani delicacy for the Marwari community). In central Calcutta, the famed Decker's Lane houses Chittoda's outlet, which is famous for chicken stew and toast. Both dishes are from the colonial era and still remain popular. Sweets of West Bengal are more popular for Sandesh and sweets made from split milk than in Bangladesh, where hard sweets are more popular (chamcham).

11.4 The Dichotomy of Two Bengals

The two Bengals with a shared past are now trying to carve a niche for themselves to revive some of the lost recipes of the pre-Mughal era, Mughal era, and the British Raj. Though the two states are now trying to cater to the millennial audience and are finding new foods (momo, sushi, soups, and noodles) to sell, the foundation will remain unchanged. A look at the Table 11.5 gives a sense of the kind of restaurants which operate today in both regions, and there is hardly anything that separates the two.

Though the approach to making food may remain different, the spices, ingredients, and the base of cooking remain the same for both West Bengal and Bangladesh. The major departure points that remain are:

Table 11.5 Types of restaurants

Types of restaurants	West Bengal	Bangladesh
Ethnic (ethnic or national cuisines)	Available	Available
Fast food (small-scale street vendors with food carts to multibillion-dollar corporations like McDonald's and Burger King)	Available	Available
Fast casual (Pub, Buffet, Café, Coffee House, Destination Restaurants, tabletop cooking)	Available	Available
Casual dining (sit down restaurant)	Available	Available
Premium casual (dining room section and a lounge section)	Available	Available
Family style (casual dining restaurants where food is often served on platters and the diners serve themselves)	Available	Available
Fine dining (full-service restaurants with specific dedicated meal courses)	Available	Available

Source http://www.millenniumpost.in/features/kolkatas-restaurant-count-reaches-38838-361348

1. The West Bengal food is sweeter (adding jaggery or sugar is a norm here) as compared to Bangladesh, which is spicier.
2. Beef is more in consumption in Bangladesh as compared to West Bengal.
3. The types of fish being used in both places are almost the same, but dried fish is more in use in Bangladesh.
4. The approach to making Biryani in both places is different, and the prominence of Kacchi Biryani is more in Bangladesh.
5. The debate on Hilsa versus Prawns shall always remain, but both nations do thrive on the two varieties equally.
6. Pulses and consumption of pulses are more during breakfast in Bangladesh, whereas it is more of a lunch affair in West Bengal.
7. The demographic of West Bengal being different in terms of ethnic groups of more diversified kinds leads to food variety being more here as compared to Bangladesh.
8. The concept of Muslim cooking (owing to the large Muslim population in the country) is more pronounced (Halal food) in Bangladesh as compared to West Bengal.

9. Dishes like the simple bhorta, vegetables, fish, and meats are served in Bangladesh as compared to West Bengal, where the bhorta can be replaced with fries and fritters.
10. The concept of chutney in Bangladesh is something that is served initially and is often not a separate dish, compared to West Bengal, where the chutney is served at the end as a dish preceding the dessert.
11. The kind of sweets in Bangladesh and West Bengal differ in terms of the type (the hard-boiled sugar-coated ones versus the softer Sandesh) being sold; sweets in West Bengal, though, has a wider range and is more looking at Fusion.

11.5 Conclusion

The start of the chapter had opening lines on the journey that food has taken. Starting from the Harappan era to the Vedic era to the Mahajanpadas, the advent of the Mughals, and finally, the Europeans. Many food items came with the visitors and travelled back with them. Vasco De Gama came for spices and sold them back to his country. The Portuguese brought new kinds of vegetables to the country and new technologies to make food. In essence, the greater the distance food travels, the more likely it gets stronger and rooted in its origin. The famed curry, which is now a popular dish in Britain, originated here in the country. Once looked down upon as a poor man's food, the curry now sells in different avatars. What has not changed the essence of the curry and how it is made? The food of the two Bengals for the longest time remained the same. The resource-endowed East Bengal had more of the resources (grains, vegetables, fish), and West Bengal was the seat of learning where the region colluded. It created a world of more liberal and opinionated norms for one to follow. The controversy over bread and the refusal to make it a part of the Bengali household was a step towards looking at food as a point of resistance. Today, when in a country (India) where the beef ban and consumption of beef has been tightened, one cannot but feel about the time when the ubiquitous bread met a similar fate. However, the bread did find a way to enter the mainstream culture. For a predominantly vegetarian nation accepting meat (mostly what the

Britishers brought with them) was difficult, yet one can safely assume that in the large subcultural context, food remains the redeemer, and it was accepted in the form and shape as was given, but it evolved. The quote from Cesar Chavez is all about how food in the subcontinent context has been looked at. Numerous travellers, plunderers, explorers, rulers, emperors, and passers-by came and dined with us, and we made friends with all of them.

> If you really want to make a friend, go to someone's house and eat with him…the people who give you their food give you, their heart. Cesar Chavez

References

Achaya, K. T. (1994). *Indian Food: Historical Companion*. Oxford University Press.

Amin Al, M., Arefin, M. S., Sultana, N., Islam, M. R. (2021). Evaluating the Customers' Dining Attitudes, E-satisfaction, and Continuance Intention Toward Mobile Food Ordering Apps (MFOAs): Evidence from Bangladesh. *European Journal of Management and Business Economics, 30*(2), 211–229.

Appadurai, A. (2007). Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value. In A. Appadurai (Ed.), *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*. Cambridge University Press.

Dey, S., & Maart, R. (2020). Decolonisation and Food: The Burden of Colonial Gastronomy—Stories from West Bengal. *Alternation Special Edition, 33*, 290–329. Print ISSN 1023-1757; Electronic ISSN: 2519-5476; https://doi.org/10.29086/2519-5476/2020/sp33a12

Haldar, S. (2017). Bread, Biscuit and Fowl. *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress, 78*, 660–667. Published by: Indian History Congress.

Ishani, C. (2017). A Palatable Journey through the Pages: Bengali Cookbooks and the "Ideal" Kitchen in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century, *Global Food History, 3*(1), 24–39, https://doi.org/10.1080/20549547.2016.1256186

Mitra, R. (2019). Eating Well in Uncle's House: Bengali Culinary Practices in a Bucolic Calcutta/Kolkata in Amit Chaudhuri's A Strange and Sublime

Address. *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities* (ISSN 0975-2935).

Naumov, N., & Hassan, A. (2022). Gastronomic Tourism in Bangladesh: Opportunities and Challenges. In Hassan, A. (Ed.), *Tourism in Bangladesh: Investment and Development Perspectives* (pp. 165–176). Frankfurt: Springer, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-1858-1_11

Ray, U. (2012, May). Eating 'Modernity': Changing Dietary Practices in Colonial Bengal. *Modern Asian Studies,* 46(3), 703–730. Cambridge University Press.

Ray, U. (2015). *Culinary Culture in Colonial India—A Cosmopolitan Platter and the Middle-Class*. Cambridge University Press.

Sen, C. T. (2015). *Feasts and Fasts: A History of Food in India*. Reaktion Books.

Sengupta, J. (2010). Nation on a Platter: the Culture and Politics of Food and Cuisine in Colonial Bengal. *Modern Asian Studies,* 44, 81–98. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X09990072