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Thinking with Food

This journal is committed to advancing food studies as a field that takes everyday practices seriously as sites of social meaning, memory, and knowledge. It brings together writing that approaches food not only as sustenance or heritage, but as a medium through which histories of movement, labour, care, exclusion, and attachment are lived and negotiated. The journal is especially interested in work that remains attentive to the ordinary and the intimate, while also situating these experiences within broader social, cultural, political, and ecological contexts.

The contributions published here often draw on personal narratives, ethnographic encounters, sensory recall, and material traces such as ingredients, smells, leaves, utensils, and recipes. These forms are treated as legitimate sources of insight, capable of revealing how food mediates relationships across generations, geographies, and social boundaries. At the same time, the journal welcomes scholarship that critically engages with questions of access, stigma, visibility, and representation, including how food practices are shaped by migration, digital platforms, environmental change, and uneven power relations.

Methodologically, the journal is open to a wide range of approaches, including autoethnography, qualitative fieldwork, archival research, media analysis, and reflective essays that blur the boundaries between academic and narrative writing. What connects these approaches is an emphasis on care: care in how stories are told, how people and practices are represented, and how knowledge is situated. Authors are encouraged to be transparent about their positionality and methods, and to reflect on the ethical dimensions of writing about food, memory, and community.

The journal seeks to establish a discourse among scholars, practitioners, and authors from diverse disciplines as a way of thinking rather than merely an object of study. It aims to enhance food studies scholarship that is grounded, attentive, and accountable, while staying accessible to audiences beyond strictly circumscribed academic circles. We invite readers to spend time with the pieces gathered here and to find in them possibilities for connection, curiosity, and continued inquiry into the many ways food shapes everyday life.

Editor's Note

We are pleased to present the inaugural issue of the Food Studies Journal by the Bihun Collective. This first issue is anchored around the theme of food beyond consumption - approaching food as a site of memory, belonging, continuity, and loss. Collectively, the contributions in this volume demonstrate how everyday food practices carry histories that are intimate yet deeply social, shaped by migration, marginality, labour, and changing forms of kinship.

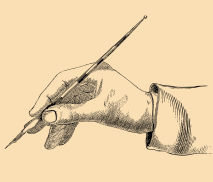
Aashirwad's autoethnographic essay locates memory within material culture, tracing affect and meaning through his aita's practice of consuming betel quid. Archana reflects on foraging practices to show how ecological change and social transitions have led to an impending loss of wisdom, resilience, and everyday skills that once sustained communities.

Itimayee's piece dwells on the many textures, tastes, and combinations of puffed rice, drawing attention to how certain food pairings are slowly disappearing from daily diets. This sense of absence and fading continuity also runs through Manan's article, where family recipes become mnemonic devices - carrying the taste of loss, longing, and care across time.

Food as memory is further explored by Mansha through histories of migration and displacement during Partition, where cooking was less about aesthetics and more about survival, shared labour, and the remembrance of lives left behind. Contribution from Priyam also draw attention to foods that continue to occupy marginal spaces, burdened with stigma despite processes of globalization and culinary modernization.

Changing social structures have reshaped everyday food practices as well. Risaya examines the decline of shared cooking, showing how shrinking households and growing social disconnection have rendered communal kitchens increasingly rare. Finally, Sanskriti's article on vernacular mukbangs from Northeast India examines how global media technologies are indigenized to sustain indigenous worldviews. Situating borderland creators within a plural media modernity, the article shows how digital infrastructures can become sites of care, continuity, and cultural sovereignty.

We hope this issue sets the tone for the journal as a space for grounded and critical engagements with food.



The People at the Table

This journal is shaped through collaborative editorial work that brings together different scholarly locations, disciplinary commitments, and methodological approaches within food studies. The editorial team is responsible for curating the contributions, guiding the review process, and ensuring that the journal maintains its academic integrity and ethical standards. The advisory editors provide intellectual guidance and critical oversight, supporting the journal's engagement with ongoing debates in food, culture, and society. This collective work enables the journal to function as a space for careful scholarship, dialogue, and reflection.

Cover Design:

Sushmita Das

What's on the Menu?

Chewing Memory: Autoethnography, Food and the Betel Box

Aashirwad Chakravarty

Afternoons in my grandparents' house in Tinsukia, Assam were never complete without the slow, ritualised preparation of betel leaves and areca nuts. Consumed as a quid, this practice extends far beyond the realm of a mere mouth freshener in Assamese cultural life. After meals, when the house settled into a rhythm of silence, rice plates rinsed, the smell of curry still faint in the kitchen, the familiar sight of opening the betel box would echo in the dining room. The lid of the pink betel box opened with a faint metallic creak, worn down by age, and inside lay a neatly arranged mosaic of condiments: cut areca nuts, betel leaves (tamul-paan in Assamese) folded neatly like green envelopes, lime paste and shredded tobacco leaves. The box bore stains from years of use, reddish smudges from the quid that bled into its corners. The faint earthly smell, partly bitter from the nut, partly pungent from the lime, mingled with the aftertaste of food, binds everyday sustenance with something more lingering and intimate. For my koka and aita (Assamese transliteration of grandfather and grandmother respectively), chewing betel and areca was not just an indulgence but a punctuation in the day's narrative. It followed meals like a ritual of closure, a mark of satisfaction. More than that, it was a shared act - the two of them seated together, preparing and chewing slowly, speaking in hushed voices about matters of everyday life.

This essay is an attempt to make sense of that memory and to situate betel quid and the box within the broader context of autoethnography, food and material culture. It is about how objects and food practices extend beyond consumption to embody memory and belonging, and how writing the self into culture (as autoethnography invites) becomes a way to understand the past. It is not merely a private recollection but a thread in a wider cultural tapestry. Autoethnography, as Carolyn Ellis and Arthur Bochner (2000) remind us, is a method where the personal becomes a route to the cultural. It insists that lived experience is not merely anecdotal but a legitimate way of knowing. I argue that such acts of food consumption are not only personal rituals of habit or refreshment but also archives of intimacy - material and edible objects that embody memory, belonging, and cultural continuity.

Memory and Autoethnography

My recollection of the betel box, the condiments inside and the very act of sharing them is not just an individual memory of my grandparents; it gestures outward, towards a shared practice, sensory attachment and the way food carries memory across generations. It follows a social pattern and a collective way of holding on to the past. Memory itself is never wholly personal. Maurice Halbwachs (1992), in his reflections on collective memory, argued that we remember through the frameworks that our society provides us. Sarah Pink's writing on sensory ethnography (2015) highlights how smell, touch, and taste shape understanding in the field. Janet Carsten (2007), writing on kinship and memory, shows how everyday substances and gestures produce relatedness. These works open a contemporary conversation around how memory is generated through sensory life. They help place the betel box within debates that extend beyond canonical scholarship. Aita's memory of her husband, evoked each time she reached for the box, is entangled in a broader cultural world where chewing betel quid has long been a sociocultural practice in Assam and across South Asia. Her remembrance was not just about him, but about participating in a continuum of gestures, conversations and rituals that gave meaning to the act of chewing.

Writing autoethnographically about this memory is dwelling on the intersection where the intimate merges with the collective, where private recollection becomes a point of entry into the anthropology of food, materiality, and emotion. Writing about the box and quid, I realise that I too am engaging in a ritual of remembrance much like her chewing of tamul-paan. Where she folded leaves and smeared lime, I fold memories into words, layering descriptions with reflection. Both acts - her chewing and my writing - are forms of embodied memory work, sustaining connection across absence. Autoethnography does not ask for distance; it demands immersion, a willingness to let the 'self' become part of the field. Autoethnography has the capacity to bring readers in proximity to the lived experience of a researcher. At the same time, critics caution that it may risk excessive subjectivity, blurring the boundary between scholarship and autobiography (Atkinson 1997). To write is to analyse, and an autoethnography lets me hold together these two movements - the intimacy of memory and the distance of reflection. Here, as I weave the sociological narrative around food, memory and embodied practice, a careful balance between reflexivity and analytical rigour is targeted.

Food, embodied memory, and loss

Food has always been a carrier of memory. David Sutton (2001) in Remembrance of Repasts: An Anthropology of Food and Memory, explored how tastes and smells can act as triggers of recollection, binding the past to the present in inexplicable sensory ways. Aita's act of chewing betel quid after koka's demise was just such an embodied memory. When they were together, chewing was an act of ritual, slowing down the day, with intimate conversations between two people who had spent decades together. From talking about their children and grandchildren, to discussing rations, bills, pensions, and politics, it was a quietly profound experience.

After koka's demise in 2015, the rhythms of this shared act were shattered. Even though aita kept the betel box, something changed. An act of togetherness became one of remembrance. This practice was a doorway for her to enter into a memory each time she unfolded the leaf and layered it with areca nut. For her, chewing betel-nut was no longer about freshening the mouth or a digestive condiment, but about sitting once again beside him, reliving the intimacy of shared silence and conversation. This is where food collapses the boundary between the living and the absent. Each bite was an invocation and the intimacy of the betel quid proved to be not just about sharing in life but about continuing to share across absence.

However, she began chewing less frequently, and gradually, almost imperceptibly, the practice reduced. Yes, health was one of the reasons that prompted this change, but when asked, she admitted something deeper: each chew vividly showcasing the absence of her late husband. Paul Connerton (1989) emphasized that memory is also inscribed in the body, sedimented in gestures, habits, and performances. Eating betel quid had been a habitual performance, a bodily memory enacted daily. With the disruption of death, the same practice now evoked absence. My grandmother's reduced consumption can be seen in two ways. First, a larger cultural shift in patterns of consumption of betel quid. Betel chewing, once integral to hospitality and social life, has increasingly come under medical scrutiny as carcinogenic, leading to public health campaigns and changing attitudes. Among younger generations, chewing is often stigmatized, associated with addiction, poor health, or rural backwardness. Second, it was also a reconfiguration of her memory. The quid, instead of sustaining her in the present, transported her too vividly into the past. For aita, memory was not only about cultural meanings but about bodily

practice. The folding of a leaf, the spreading of lime, the insertion of areca nuts - these were bodily rhythms cultivated over decades of shared life. Even after my grandfather's absence, the body remembered what the mind struggled to bear.

Placed together, Halbwachs (1992) and Connerton (1989) illuminate the dual dimensions of her practice. Halbwachs explains why the act carried cultural meaning; Connerton explains how bodily repetition reproduced intimacy. Where collective frameworks gave the act its symbolic weight, bodily memory gave it its sensory force. Yet they also diverge: Hawlbachs stresses the social scaffolding of memory, while Connerton emphasizes embodied performance Aita's reduction in chewing thus mirrored both her personal mourning and a generational transition. What was once a practice of intimacy, became untenable with her both her body and her society. The decline of chewing in her life was also the decline of a cultural rhythm, a shift from everyday normalcy to near-taboo. In this way, her story is not only about memory and intimacy but about the transformation of cultural practices under the weight of health discourse, modernity, and generational change.

Objects and materiality

Nonetheless, she kept the betel box close to her, carefully, as a gentle reminder of his vivid presence. The betel box itself was heavy with time. Its surface scratched from daily use and its corners still carrying the faint scent of lime. To me, and perhaps to aita as well, it seemed alive, storing not only ingredients of the quid, but also fragments of my grandparents' life together. Daniel Miller (2008) has written of objects as extensions of the self, suggesting that the things we hold close do not merely reflect us but shape who we are. In this sense, the box was not inert, nor were the ingredients inside. It was an extension of koka, and then by inheritance, my aita. Arjun Appadurai's (1986) reminder that objects have social lives feels appropriate here - the box was not a static possession but a participant in the life of the household, mediating relationships, hosting memory, and preserving intimacy. The materiality of the box mattered as much as the condiments inside. Its walls bore stains that traced years of chewing. These stains were not flaws but rather archives, keeping alive what words could not capture. For my aita, to open the box was to open a memory; to chew was to dwell within the continuity of a relationship interrupted by death but never fully severed.

As I write this essay, it is a week since aita passed away, and thus I return to the image of her and koka seated with the box, unfolding a betel leaf, applying lime on it, putting chunks of areca nut, and eating the quid with deliberate care. To an outsider, it may appear as a habit, but to them, it was a way of being, which later on, for aita, became a mode of keeping alive the intimacy. After her demise, the box has come to hold a different meaning for me. I inherit not only an object but the sensory world surrounding it. Marianne Hirsch's idea of "postmemory" (2012) describes how the next generation receives memories they did not directly live yet still feel closely. This form of inheritance does not rely on direct experience. It works through stories, gestures, textures, and objects. The betel box operates in this way. It carries their world into mine, not through narrative alone but through the senses.

This essay has sought to understand the materiality of the box, its condiments, and the act of eating it not only as a personal memory but as a cultural and material practice. Autoethnography allows us to see how the smallest of objects - betel leaves, areca nuts, lime, and the box - can open into larger worlds of meaning. It also becomes ritualistic, akin to the very practice of consuming food that is embodied with memories and emotions. Food, as both sustenance and symbol, binds people together in life and after loss. Objects, as Miller and Appadurai remind us, are never passive, and memory, as Halbwachs and Sutton show, is never private. The betel box and the things inside then become an archive of intimacy, a vessel of continuity and a reminder that memory is not only stored in the mind but also in the material, the edible and the everyday. To chew, for aita, was to remember. To hold the box was to belong, and for me, to write is to join that continuum.

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Leaf by Leaf: Greens we once ate

Dr. Archana Bhatt

It's a foggy Friday evening in December 2014 as I return from my hostel at Pantnagar to my home at Haldwani, a bustling town in the foothills of Uttarakhand. Though I am just a few kilometers away from home, applying for leave during college felt like running a marathon. Please don't ask! You don't wanna know!

But the moment my footsteps reach the door, the exhaustion disappears, replaced by the excitement of the one thing I missed deeply – papa's hari sabzi. Yes, hari sabzi is literally one of my favourite things to eat during winters. I can never have enough of it. Yeah, I know some of you might be baffled and think, who likes hari sabzi when you have so many winter delicacies around. But, I do! For me hari sabzi is not just food; it's a memory from the warmth of a home, especially my father's. Yes, these simple and humble greens, lightly spiced and lovingly cooked are one of my comfort foods in winters. This piece explores how leafy greens embody memories, biodiversity and nutritional resilience across mountain and tropical landscapes.

One of my favourite rituals back home was going to the sabzi mandi – an amalgam of colour and chaos blending beautifully together. From glossy red tomatoes to all types of cucurbits, and then of course the leafy greens. The leaves, each one a shade of green from the colour palette; from dark violet green mustard leaves (lai or sarson) to lighter shades of chenopodium (bathua), from robust radish leaves (mooli ke patte) to tiny fenugreek (methi) leaves – every bunch arranged in a geometrical fashion.

These visits to the mandi eventually led to papa preparing the delish hari sabzi, be it a regular stir fry or a creamy blend of cooked spinach or colocasia leaves (kaapa or kafuli made with arbi or pinalu ke patte as we call it in the hills).

But this deep connection to leafy greens took an unexpected turn when I moved to Wayanad, Kerala – God's own country, but also a place where I've struggled to find the greens I once took for granted. The hilly terrains and lush tropics do remind me of the mountains where I come from but at the same time they carry a uniqueness of their own. A walk through the local market leaves me puzzled as there are some greens, yes mostly amaranth (cheera)– but very few and not the ones that taste like home. I deeply miss my favs lai ki sabzi (mustard greens) along with mooli k patte (radish greens)

Leafy greens displayed at a Sabzi Mandi in Uttarakhand
Source: Author

Ironically though, Wayanad, a district nestled in the Western ghats is a biodiversity and bio-cultural hot-spot home to amazing leafy greens utilized by several tribal communities. I still remember when I first visited one of the Paniya tribal hamlets named Madamgunnu, a tiny landmass surrounded by the catchment water of the Karapuzha dam. To my surprise, what I considered as a patch of ornamental plants or weeds (Begonia, ponnankanni, etc.) growing diligently in the courtyard, were actually edible greens rooted in the tribal culinary heritage. Ammani amma, one of the matriarchs of the family there was intrigued by and teased me left, right and centre as I couldn't understand any Malayalam at that time. I still visit the place as part of my field visits and monitoring the interventions, and can understand Ammani amma mostly, but the teasing is permanent. Her teasing has become a tradition that I've come to cherish deeply now.

So getting back to the wealth of leafy greens in Wayanad, tribal communities especially Paniyas, Kattunaikans and others here consumed a range of leafy greens (more than 50 types for sure!) sometimes grown in the house premises and other times foraged from the wild or agricultural landscapes. A study conducted in 2016 by MSSRF reported 37 plant species that are used as food and are foraged from the paddy wetland and paddy levee alone. Communities utilize these greens over time ranging from culinary purpose, medicine, fodder, ethno-veterinary, plant protection and cultural value (Prajeesh & Kumar, 2016). Many of these greens being nutrient dense, interlinked with the seasonal cycles and the traditional wisdom were not just greens but they represented culture and resilience.

Some of the notable greens from Wayanad (as shown in image) are:

S. No	Common Name	Botanical name
1	Malampuli	Begonia malabarica
2	Cheera	Amaranthus viridis
3	Thalu	Colocasia esculenta
4	Thakara	Senna tora
5	Vankadaladi	Achyranthes aspera
6	Churuli	Diplazium esculentum

S. No	Common Name	Botanical name
7	Kannichappu	Commelina benghalensis
8	Mudangachappu	Solanum americanum
9	Chuvanna cheera	Alternanthera bettzickiana
10	Thazhuthama	Boerhvia diffusa
11	Moringa	Moringa oleifera
12	Madhura cheera	Phyllanthus androgynous
13	Chuvapan cheera	Alternanthera brasiliana
14	Kanthari chappu	Capsicum fruitescense
15	Thiruthanni	Persicaria chinensis
16	Puthari chunda	Solanum indicum
17	Mullan cheera	Amaranthus spinosus
18	Kudangal	Centella asiatica
19	Karin thakara	Senna occidentalis
20	Vayal chuli	Hygrophila schulli

Leafy greens are not only rich in various minerals, particularly Iron and calcium but also contain good levels of fibre and vitamins including beta carotene (a precursor of VitA) & Vit C compared to certain commonly consumed vegetables (National Institute of Nutrition, 2013). Communities in Wayanad mostly consume them as thoran (stir fry) with coconut or add-on in parippu (dahl or lentil based curry) along with cooked rice. Tamarind water is especially added to avoid the itchiness caused by the oxalates present in taro leaves.

But this amazing rich diversity has dwindled over time. As you enter the tribal hamlets today, most of the greens have vanished from the yards and people hardly forage from the wild or neighbouring landscape. As aspirations changed and access to packaged food grew, the traditional food palate started fading. The community that consumed these greens and other foods regularly at some point in time is now anaemic and nutritionally deprived as observed in the Paniya hamlet I have visited over time. Paniya community has consistently been at the bottom of the socio-economic hierarchy and as per various reports prevalence of anaemia is very high among the women and children from tribal communities in Wayanad (Philip et al. 2015 and Bhardwaj et al. 2020). However, understanding the underlying causal factors for anaemia is important, especially factors such as poor health & hygiene, tobacco consumption and limited access to nutritious food due to lower socio-economic status of the community.

What was once normal is now considered backward. The shift has not only affected the health of the community but also the cultural lineage and wisdom associated with them. The generation today opts for store-bought snacks over traditional nutritional foods; coke over shikanji, or energy drink over coconut water, to name a few. Moreover, the public distribution system and mid-day meal programs do not necessarily have a focus on adding leafy greens and other local traditional crops on a regular basis (Rehman, 2024). Studies have reported various limitations & challenges in inclusion of nutritional foods under such programs on account of various factors like financial limitations, delay in supply, food hygiene & waste, availability of human resources, food preference of children and others (Mehta et al, 2013; Raveenthiranathan L. et al, 2024). It's pretty ironic to see that on one hand this rich diversity of leafy greens exists in real time and place but at the same time, it's not accessible to some and it's not a want for some. On a personal note, I struggle to get my hands on these nutritional bundles except when I am lucky to visit spaces to forage and learn about their use while working with the community as a researcher.

An important point to ponder upon is that with this ongoing shift in the food palate, we're not just losing the traditional wisdom but we're losing resilience. As we let go of our time-tested indigenous food wisdom, we lose the ability to adapt to the changing climate and the growing challenges associated with health and nutrition. With the country struggling from 'double burden of malnutrition' with rising rates of obesity and lifestyle diseases, coupled with undernourished children, it's high time to understand and utilize the rich nutritional diversity, before it's too late. These greens, which we discussed earlier aren't just nutritious; many of them are climate resilient, pest-resistant, and adapted to the local ecosystems. As climate change challenges our food systems, we may find that our future lies in the forgotten foods of the past. As per the Global Manifesto on Forgotten Foods, Forgotten foods or Neglected & Underutilized Species offer nutritious, climate-resilient options that support local communities and agro-ecosystem diversity. Despite being conserved by farmers for generations, they remain underutilized, under-resourced, and overlooked in global food systems and knowledge frameworks.

When I see the shelves of the supermarkets or online stores flooded with 'superfoods' and vegetable powders (ahem Kale or spinach), I wonder about the fate of these forgotten greens. Will they find the same place someday? And if they do, will they be only consumed by the so-called urban elite or fancy dining at high-end restaurants or will they also equally become the part of the food palate of the community who actually holds the traditional knowledge associated with the cultivation & consumption of the greens? This is a question I play in my mind occasionally as a researcher and development practitioner. I look forward to do something from my end to mainstream forgotten foods to the mass that needs it the most for their nutritional and livelihood needs. Maybe, writing this piece is a tiny step toward that goal!

Although it's a small step, there are people who are already taking the lead in mainstreaming forgotten foods and neglected & underutilized crops to the masses. One of the individuals is for sure Ms Shruti Tharayil from 'forgotten greens', a platform for sharing the love and knowledge on leafy greens across the country. There are many such people around all of us who are contributing toward the larger goal of agrobiodiversity conservation. However, conservation alone cannot solve the underlying challenges especially with respect to nutrition security and securing livelihoods. Without linking conserved agro biodiversity to local production, diets, and livelihoods, conservation remains disconnected from improving nutritional outcomes as they are all interconnected.

The C4 framework formulated by Prof M S Swaminathan often mentioned in the context of sustainable agriculture and biodiversity conservation, promotes a comprehensive strategy that connects the conservation, cultivation, consumption, and commercialization as part of the community agro biodiversity conservation continuum. It is important that we must use these resources sustainably while promoting their inclusion in modern diets while supporting the local farmers and tribal communities. The concept of Biohappiness which means that the true wellbeing and happiness can only be achieved by utilizing biodiversity (in this case the leafy greens) for people in a sustainable and equitable manner seems apt to achieve this.

Nostalgia sets in as I reminisce about the cozy winters spent back home weaving through the busy sabzi mandi glancing through the different shades of greens. I also remember how some of the greens were foraged by my chachi (aunt) from the fields or roadside of my village in the hills of Nainital especially the infamous but nutritious bichoo or sisuna (a spiny leafy green Urtica dioca), sagauti (Amaranthus spp.) and another of my favourites, Ugal or Buckwheat (Fagopyrum esculentum); all having their own unique taste and connection to the mountains.

I often find myself hoping to discover my own hari sabzi - that might one day offer the same warmth and the same love to my son, who my papa had always generously showered on me.

So yes, I still miss my hari sabzi. But I also see it as part of a bigger story, a reminder of how food connects us not just to people, place and memory, but also to biodiversity and resilience. Maybe it's time we looked into the fringes of our homes, farms and forests again. Maybe the leaves we've overlooked hold the answers we're searching for.

Dr Archana Bhatt is a Scientist at MSSRF Community Agrobiodiversity Centre, Wayanad, Kerala with a background in agricultural extension & communication. She is a research & development practitioner and her interests revolve around agrobiodiversity conservation, climate change and indigenous food systems.

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Memories that linger: The taste of puffed rice

Itimayee Behera

There was a special kind of excitement that filled the air whenever the aroma of a rich, simmering gravy wafted through the home. But it was not just the main dish that drew everyone to the kitchen - it was the simple joy of pairing that flavourful chicken (Mangsha) gravy with puffed rice.

At the lunchtime, after just a few spoonfuls of rice, we would eagerly switch to puffed rice, savouring the way it soaked up the spices while still offering a delightful crunch. And if it was dinner, there was no need for rice at all - just a hearty plate of puffed rice with gravy, and the meal felt complete.

It is a reminder that sometimes, it is not the main course but the little combinations, rooted in habit, memory, and love, that bring the most joy (Naraharipur, 2024).

Inside other parts of Odisha, we are known to have this identity that “tume Balasore prabala mudhi khao” (We the people of Balasore district ate so much of puffed rice) "Mudhi khai, badabhabana".

“Eating puffed rice but dreaming big” - this mocks someone who lives simply or has limited means but harbors grand ambitions or pride. It's kind of like the Odia version of "champagne taste on a beer budget. “Another variant used humorously: "Mudhi au jala - raja bhala." Puffed rice and water - a king’s meal.”. This emphasizes contentment in simplicity, suggesting that even basic food can feel royal when one is satisfied. In these two popular narratives, one is depicted as having limited access to means, and the other is telling about how, if you have a sense of contentment and gratitude, even the simplest meal, like puffed rice and water, can feel like a grand feast. It is about finding joy in the small, everyday pleasures rather than always seeking something more extravagant or complex. We can relate it to the Buddhist philosophy that true happiness does not come from accumulating wealth or indulging in luxuries, but from appreciating the present moment and being at peace with the basics of life. When you eat, for instance, Buddhism teaches you to eat mindfully, appreciating the simple food and savouring each bite (Achaya 1994, Bodhi, 2000).

Puffed rice and different ways of eating:

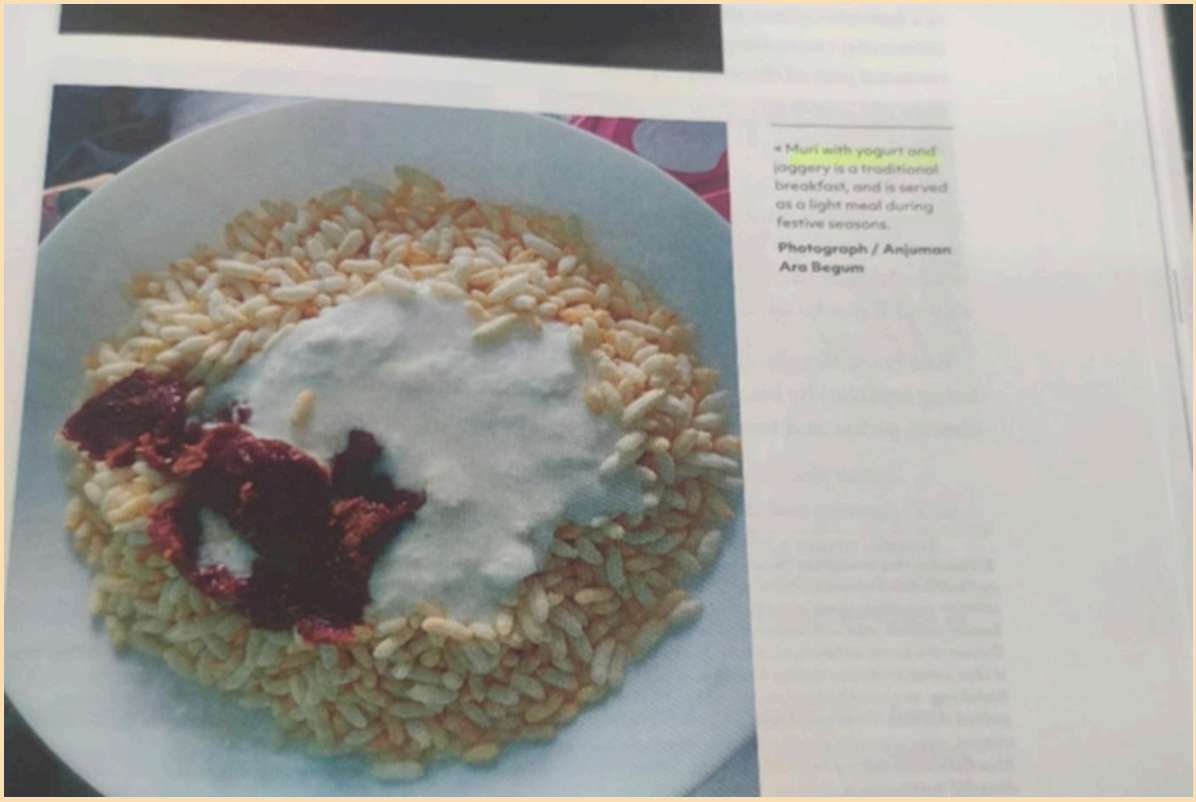
Source: Author

In the past in the coastal belt of Odisha, we did not have the culture of having breakfast; we usually had water and puffed rice (Bhuja) with any vegetable like potato fry or potato chutney (Alu chatuni), Tomato chutney (Bilati chatuni), Brinjal (Bigana poda), cucumber (Kakudi), Onion (Piaja), homemade pickle (Achar). In agricultural households, puffed rice is also packed for the field. In the evening, it is used as a most cherished snack (Mudhi mixture) with puffed rice. We add chopped onion, tomato, pickle, cucumber, fried items like (Alu chop, singhada,) and mustard oil. In the summer, mango pulp or jackfruit is mixed with puffed rice.

This snack forges a sense of belonging. At home, whenever puffed rice is prepared, it's always in large quantities, keeping in mind everyone in the home, from the elders to the youngest members. Sitting together in a circle on the ground with mudhi in between was not only a food-sharing gathering, but it also allowed us to share our stories of our daily lives, our joys, and sorrows over the mudhi. Even during hostel days, especially during holidays, friends would prepare puffed rice, and what began as a simple snack often turned into long hours of gossip and heartfelt conversations. It becomes a space for connection, care, and community. Badal, originally from outside Balasore, has been living there for the past three years. He shared, I had never seen people eating puffed rice in the morning. We eat flattened rice. But here, I saw my friends keeping puffed rice in the cupboard like a precious thing.

A rural agricultural worker Tiluchana also shared his experience: When we go for farm work, the landowners give us puffed rice. With four to five people working, it's hard to provide rice every day. A little onion, chili, mixture, and pickle with mudhi is enough for us.

He added, "Sometimes, along with wages, they give puffed rice too. If we ask for other things, people may think twice, but no one refuses when it's bhuja.". These accounts show the role of puffed rice in everyday labour economics, where it becomes both sustenance and a currency of care and obligation.



Source: Author

Anjuman Ara Begum's (p.282) study of Mahendraganj in Meghalaya describes that where rice is revered as Maa Lakkhi (Goddess Lakshmi), like other parts of the agricultural regions of Odisha, shapes both life and ritual, symbolizing prosperity. Begum interviews Saleha, a muri (puffed rice) seller, who shares that muri with yogurt and jaggery was once a traditional festival snack for guests. However, this practice is fading due to limited access to fresh yogurt and a shift toward processed foods. Evening snacks like red tea with muri are now replaced by biscuits and packaged snacks like Haldiram's bhujia.

Puffed rice and the history of Balasore district:

Bhujakhia Pir temple, is situated at Sunhat in the Balasore district of Odisha. It is the sacred tomb of the Sufi saint Hazrat Swale Mohammad, who is remembered by the people as Bhujakhia Pir. This shrine is a symbol of harmony between Hindus and Muslims. On the occasion of Urs, both Hindus and Muslims gathered to offer puffed rice as a symbol of unity. He came to Odisha in the 16th century and devoted himself to social service, especially for cholera victims. He used to beg for food and later distributed it to children, mostly puffed rice (Bhuja), which was found in every household.

Source: https://greatindianjourney.wordpress.com/2015/03/11/destination-of-the-week-bhujak hia-pir-balasore/

Puffed rice making process and changes over time

Traditionally, puffed rice was made from parboiled rice using the sand-heat method with coconut sticks—a time-consuming process done mainly by women. After puffing, it was manually cleaned with a sieve, but now machines have largely replaced these practices.

Source: https://i.ytimg.com/vi/kmkZ1uTTNxM/maxresdefault.jpg

The sensory appeal of homemade puffed rice (its freshness and firm texture) comes from the control households maintain over ingredients and timing, whereas machine-made varieties, produced at scale and sometimes treated with colouring agents, offer a more standardised product while reduces the value placed on women's knowledge of grain. Broader dietary shifts have influenced how such foods are valued. Colonial-era nutrition campaigns, urban aspirational diets, and the association of wheat-based items such as roti and bread with modernity have contributed to the perception that locally prepared foods are less desirable. At the same time, the labour-intensive process of making puffed rice, once undertaken largely by women, has become harder to sustain as domestic time has contracted.

Attached emotion with Puffed rice and chicken (Mudhi Mansha):

Puffed rice is now industrialized, with brands like Haldiram selling it, while chefs Vikas Khanna and Kunal Kapur note Odisha's cuisine is underrated in India. Dishes like Mudhi Mansha are scarcely visible in urban food spaces, while Jhal Mudhi appears only in limited places such as trains, local fairs, and melas. This limited presence may be linked to its lower popularity outside the region and to the stigma of being perceived as "poor people's food," historically associated with farmers and labourers. In restaurants, too it is mostly North Indian and South Indian. Now, Northeast cuisine is also gaining popularity, but the lacks of representation, cultural visibility, lack of culinary documentation Odisha cuisine is hardly found, and the state's rich culinary traditions remain largely absent from mainstream dining experiences. While it is deeply rooted in the household practices, rituals, and community feasts.

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Mudhi Mansha - a combination of Mudhi (puffed rice) and Mansha (mutton or chicken gravy) - is more than just a dish for the people of Balasore and Mayurbhanj districts in Odisha. It is an emotion, a symbol of tradition, and a cherished culinary identity.

Mudhi Mansha, once a key wedding dish served on eco-friendly Sal leaves, uses homemade puffed rice, showcasing women's labor and preserving traditional flavor. Served with minimal gravy to keep it crunchy, it evokes nostalgia in Balasore and Mayurbhanj. In Mahendraganj, diverse communities share cuisines, with beef curry and puffed rice popular during Bakri Eid (Begum Ara 2023, p.286).

Changing Narratives of Puffed Rice

Traditional foods are increasingly threatened by the growing presence of packaged and processed items, which are marketed as convenient and time-saving alternatives to homemade snacks. In this changing food landscape, puffed rice - once a staple snack and a symbol of shared community life - is gradually losing its prominence. As ready-to-eat industrial products such as instant noodles become popular markers of modernity, puffed rice is often perceived as old-fashioned or less desirable. Advertisements and shifting dietary preferences further reinforce these perceptions, making puffed rice appear inferior compared to branded packaged snacks. Consequently, its cultural significance and everyday consumption have steadily declined.

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The Smell of Undhiyu and the Layers of Memory

Manan Dhuldhoya

I remember smelling the undhiyu before I would even open the door. Its many layers was how I would know that Mum had coaxed the perfect balance of leelu lasan (green garlic), fresh copru (grated coconut), aadu-marcha (a ginger-chilli paste), and spices that flavoured her undhiyu, an indoors adaptation of the umbadiyu that, instead of being cooked in an earthen pot outdoors, would be slow-cooked in a tapeli (pot) on the stove.

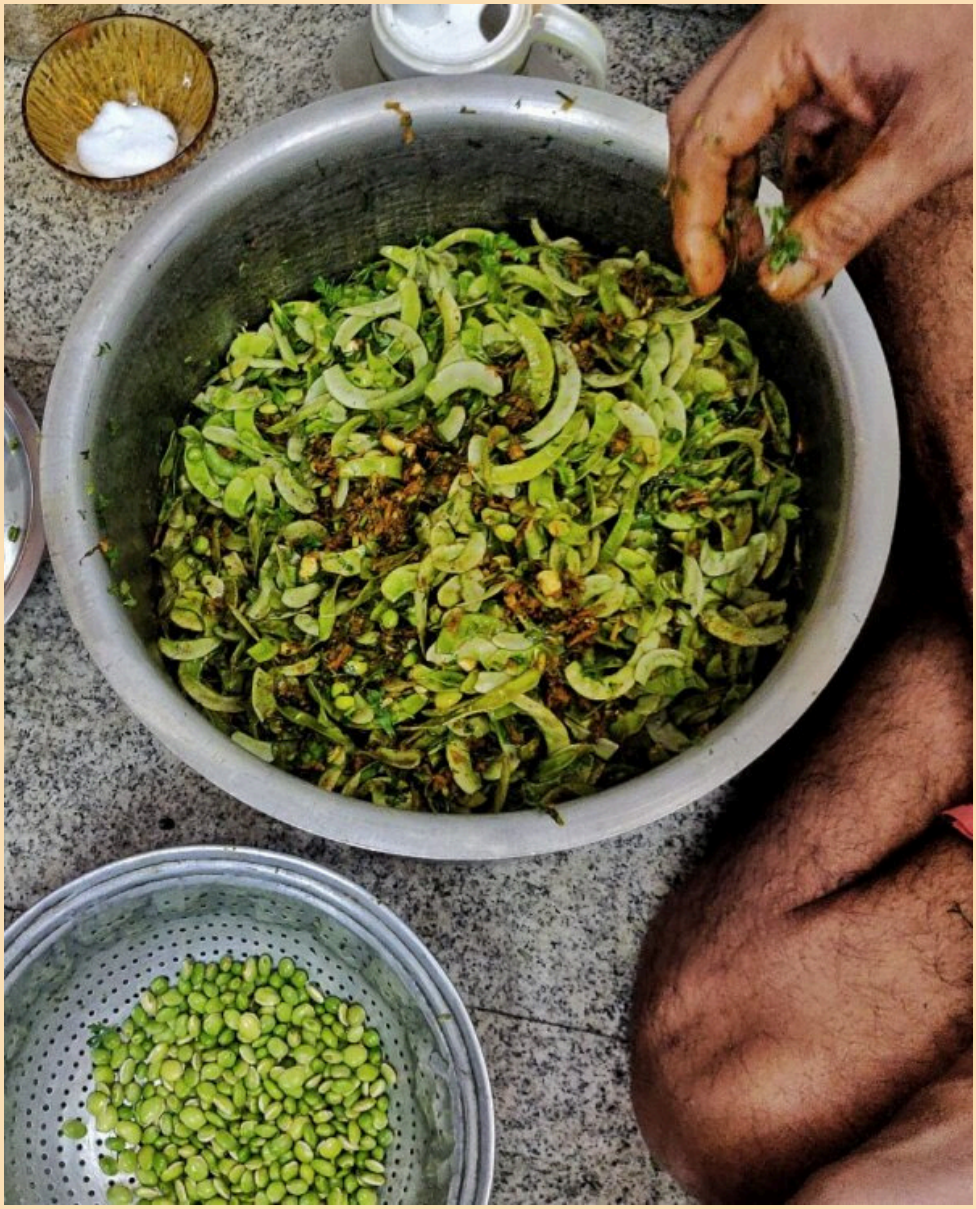
What is undhiyu, you ask? It is not just a dish but an eagerly awaited sign that winter has finally landed in Gujarat. The star ingredients - papdi, leelu lasan, and kand (purple yam) - are winter produce, which is why I feel that undhiyu is the No. 1 reason that Gujaratis wait for this season. Well, at least this Gujarati does. Cooked across the state, the way undhiyu is made is a marker of the region its makers hail from. In Saurashtra, undhiyu is often red-hued, mirroring the region's love for chilli powder. In Ahmedabad, where my father's family is from, the undhiyu is sweeter and oilier. The Surti version, from in and around Surat, is garlicky and uses copru. But it is the version that my mother's community – the Anavil Brahmins of southern Gujarat – make and that is the only version I have ever truly enjoyed.

The Anavil Brahmins are a small community hailing from south Gujarat, traditionally from the land between the city of Vapi and the Tapi River to its north. While mention of "Gujarat" usually brings to mind the dusty, arid vistas of Kachchh or the dry, open forests of Gir, this part of the state lies on the peninsular coast. Consequently, it receives copious rain during the monsoon, is verdant and green, and is home to rolling fields and sprawling orchards, especially of mangoes like the Kesar. This plenitude makes the region perfect for the undhiyu's vegetables to grow in. But here, they also make the umbadiyu. Think undhiyu but with earthier, more bold flavours and an emphasis on the surti papdi, leelu lasan, and aadu-marcha.

But what really sets the umbadiyu apart is that it is cooked in an earthen pot that is placed over burning leaves, often in a pit in the ground. This imparts an earthy flavour that the stove-cooked undhiyu lacks. As I now understand it, Mum's undhiyu was styled on the umbadiyu, but cooked in a pot on our stove.

While undhiyu is like a multi-starrer film made from many lead actors, it is the leelu lasan that perfumes a home with its unique pungent freshness as it would do as it slowly cooked a few times every winter in our home. So, like I did growing up, take a seat and enjoy the show.

The surti papdi (field beans) in the undhiyu is like Sanjeev Kumar when he co-starred with Amitabh Bachchan in Hindi films – taken for granted in the presence of the more charismatic characters but someone who would do a lot of the heavy lifting. A bounty of the winter, this variety is grown in and around Surat, giving it its name. My mother also added katargam ni papdi, a sweet variety grown in the fields of Katargam near Surat that is three times the price of its "regular" cousin.



Layering the Pot

The peeling of a batch of papdi is long and tedious, and before the lockdown made me look at the kitchen as a place to make and not just take, it was the one culinary chore I would happily embrace. That, and shelling peas in the winter, but Mum put an end to that because I would eat half of what I peeled as my fee. She could never willingly participate in a loss-making transaction, even if it was one from which her first-born profited.

There is more to undhiyu than just papdi. Like leelu lasan, for instance, which is harvested before the bulb matures into the head of garlic that we're used to. This results in a single-clove seasonal celebrity that is fragrant without being pungent and whose tender green stalks can and must be eaten. Even more than the papdi, Mum was finicky about the leelu lasan. Undhiyu would not just get made if the leelu lasan didn't pass muster.

Leelu Lasan

Another integral component of the undhiyu are the muthiya which are dumplings made of masalas rolled with methi (fenugreek) leaves in atta (wheat flour),. These are named for the way they are made - by being rolled into oblong shapes in one's fist. Where Mum's approach to muthiya differed from what I have seen and eaten in other homes and in eateries is that she would not fry the muthiya before putting them in the undhiyu. Instead, she used to layer the freshly rolled muthiya into the pot. The layer on the top would always, always be one of muthiya. Why? Not just because they looked good. It was because, the doneness of the topmost layer of muthiya gave her an indication of much longer the papdi, which needed the longest time to be ready, would need to cook for. This she would test like how I've seen others check for sponge cake - by passing a knife through it. If the knife came out sticky, the muthiya were not fully done, and it meant the papdi underneath wasn't either. If the knife met resistance going in, it had likely been cooked too long and

dry and hard, not firm. But if the knife went in and out smoothly without leaving much residue on the blade (quite like one would expect with a well-baked cake), she knew that not only had the papdi been cooked to the perfect level of chewiness but the kand would also have gotten soft and sweeter, thanks to the caramelisation of the tuber's sugars.

Kand

Speaking of which, kand is one of my favourite ingredients of all. Named after its internal colour, this purple yam is an integral part of undhiyu. Many families also put sweet potatoes and suran (elephant yam) into their undhiyu, but all of us are too devoted to kand to allow any tuber to share this stage. Except potatoes, which add a familiar comfort with stealing the spotlight.

Making Muthiya

Undhiyu is a shared experience, both in how it is prepared and in how it is eaten. As Mum aged, Anisha, our longtime cook, graduated from Commis to Sous Chef in La Cuisine Sonal. Short in stature but long in patience, Anisha became the one that Mum trusted with her special recipes. Over a few winters of helping Mum make undhiyu, she paid attention to the precise proportions of masalas, the sequence of layering the various ingredients, and the amount of time each "load" took to cook. Her diligence and enthusiasm for making such a laborious dish didn't escape Mum's eye, and she acknowledged it with the highest compliment - by taking learning to take a back seat and only overseeing Anisha as she took charge of making the undhiyu. Suffice to say, she never let Mum down. Even today, Anisha leads the undhiyu making at home while patiently teaching me the ropes.

The hurly-burly of its preparation would be followed by a few hours of eager calm as we waited for our undhiyu, lovingly layered in a huge pot perched on a roti tawa, to slowly cook its way to an initially firm yet quickly yielding spicy warmth that mirrored the personalities of its originator and current maker.

I used to wonder why the undhiyu was always made at a let-us-have-a-grand-party scale and I always ascribed that to my parents' gregarious, and generous nature and their love for feeding the ones they loved. Niyati, my sister, and I grew up in a home built on eating, washed down with beverages of choice and copious amounts of laughter. But it was only after I started cooking that I understood about the sliding scale of effort to output in the kitchen, especially for food that was best made in (large) pots. Like daal, or biryani, or undhiyu. The time and effort it takes to make a small batch of the dish for 3 people is not much less that what it takes to put on a pot for 10 people. This is why I think Mum always made kilos of undhiyu at one go. And then, she hosted undhiyu parties. There was no shortage of fans who'd happily wait while the undhiyu cooked. Also, her undhiyu was so popular that there was always a long list of friends and family that would ask for dabbas (boxes) to be saved for or sent to them. Like for Meena Aunty, our next door neighbour, who would always ring the bell and grin as she asked if we'd made undhiyu today because she had smelled it as she opened the lift door.

Once checked and declared ready, Mum would start portioning out dabbas and filling them for whoever had been promised some from this batch. And that often meant that at least half of the 5 plus kilos that we would have made was sent out. Or, if the recipient was really enthusiastic, collected that very night!

Distribution duties dispensed with, we would gather around to finally savour the undhiyu. Just undhiyu. Always. Mum considered puris, rotlis, chutneys, and any other accompaniment an affront, an almost-offensive distraction from the perfect balance of the undhiyu. We never disputed that with her. Not just because we wouldn't want to poke the bear, which Niyati and I often did, but because she was right. With its balance of flavours, textures, and food groups, it was the perfect vegetarian one-pot meal. The only allowance she'd gladly make was for some homemade mattho - hung curd that was never too thickened, or highly sweetened, like shrikhand was and lightly flavoured with some powdered elaichi (cardamom). The light and sweet-sour taste of it would provide the perfect break from the aadu-marcha kick of the undhiyu.

The Finished Undhiyu

Smells evoke emotions. And while the many-layered smell of undhiyu has always reminded me of winter, of family, and of home, it now also evokes a new emotion for me - loss. Not because I'll never smell the leelu lasan waft out as I push open the front door, but because now I will no longer hear Mum asking "Baba?" as she hears it shut.

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Matters of Taste: A Story Told Through Food

Mansha Bedi

When my grandmother was just seven years old, she was forced to evacuate her village of Abbottabad in Pakistan. She was brought to India, where her family eventually settled in Roop Nagar - one of the many colonies that emerged to shelter displaced families, offering a patchwork of Punjab and a roof over their heads. Soon, these colonies converted from modest single-story houses into pucca makans, with a slice of Punjab recreated in the new environment to make it their own. They journeyed on foot, in bullock carts, and packed tightly in lorries and trains, ultimately abandoning what they called their home, while carrying with them the trauma, fear of the partition, and the loss of their identities and memories.

Along with their memories came sentiments and a deep love for food to this new unknown land. When they arrived at their new homes, they carried not only a few modest belongings but also the flavors of their homeland. Palak aloo was one such dish - an edible archive that evokes the fading memories of a past passed down through generations. This passed down love for food has always meant more to me than simple nourishment. It is memory, migration, identity, and inheritance - quietly folded into the routines of daily life, carried in aromas, textures, and the rituals of preparation.

Just like how my grandmother found her way to India, so did palak (spinach) travelled through the trade routes to India. An ancient Persian vegetable that today is deeply woven into the fabrics of Indian cuisine. Over time becoming a beloved part of Indian cooking. This much loved vegetable which is now cooked in two ways - one made with humble vegetable aloo (potatoes) and the other with rich dairy-based royal cheese called paneer. Both today are considered as North Indian dishes with different textures on the tongue, incorporating palak as one of the main ingredients.

It begins with a molten pool of Punjabi gold - desi ghee, spreading the nostalgic aroma of milk-rich land, shivering and dancing when the diced onions are added. The sharp edges of the onions transform from translucent to amber to golden brown. Then comes the diced tomatoes cooked on low flames until the water evaporates and reduces, followed by fresh green thrice-washed, coarsely cut spinach (palak), making the onion and tomato combination sizzle.

The boiled, peeled and diced potatoes, some salt, lal mirch and garam masala are then added to the dish for taste. “Let it sit for a while and don’t open the lid”, my mother says to me. Once opened and transferred to a striking serving bowl, the dish is garnished with two neatly sliced green chillies - artfully placed to create a picture-perfect look, ideal for sharing on social media.

This dish was me re-making my grandmother’s love for her actual home, but the only difference being the time, the place, the mitti or the soil, the air, the quality of the produce and the thought process. When I made the dish, my constant idea was to pluck the baby spinach I grew in my small patch of kitchen garden, which made me feel extra proud of my effort, to select the tomatoes and onions and make sure they were visually appealing. None of them had abrasions, bumps or marks. I’m not disregarding my efforts but choosing the prettier vegetables was very unintentional; it was as natural as breathing for me. On the other hand, my ancestors would have labouriously grown all the ingredients on their khet with all their grit, hard work and passion while being indifferent to the idea of the shape, size and looks of the vegetables. This change of perspective on presentation and looks was something that I noticed in my thought process. While making the dish, I even asked my mother to find the most authentic-looking kadhai and bowl to serve my recreated palak-aloo, which will look close to the original yet appealing for me to display on the digital landscape. The life that we now live has pushed us to expand, and with that, our food and palates have also evolved. The mindset and the idea of everything being well manicured, flawless and pristine has now reached a point where even food has to undergo changes to fit in socially acceptable foodgasm norms.

While preparing the dish with my mother, many questions popped into my mind. I wondered why we never had palak aloo; instead, we were always eating palak paneer. Even when we went out, the menu mostly read palak paneer. This very same rustic dish of palak aloo soon evolved into the creamy revolution of palak paneer – a shift in the staple dish from aloo to paneer in most of the Punjabi households, rich in texture & taste, creamy and complicated in preparation, slides quickly into one's mouth, with less effort in chewing and into the belly, breaks easily with just a touch of a finger, now made the nutritious palak aloo look inconsequential. Modest in its ingredients, yet deeply generous in meaning, not so pretty looking, but it was more than a meal; it was a thread that connected me to the women in my family who cooked before me. So then why did we, or rather I, lose this connection? In this shift, I see the erasure of roughness, the pressure to refine everything, even how spinach feels on the

tongue. Where palak aloo asks for slow chewing and familiarity, palak paneer offers silkiness, ease, and visual elegance - no labour of jaws, no resistance.

The recipe that belonged to my great-grandmother, whose kitchen was bathed in natural light and filled with the scent of seasonality that trickled down to the third generation, is now being prepared in our contemporary modular kitchen. The tempting aroma still fills the house with fond memories, and the sizzling desi ghee topping gives that sheen to this unpretentious dish of palak aloo. A dish much looked down upon in front of palak paneer. The dairy content in palak paneer makes it heavy and royal vis-à-vis the palak aloo, which looks like a humble dish, forming the nostalgic recount. What made us shift? Why this change? What if they never migrated? Or what if I never came across this deglamorous recipe that holds more importance than just its taste?

The word, so loosely used in today's times, curated is applied to how our food looks for screens more than for sustenance. The “Instagrammable” plate has become a new measure of value. The visual appeal of food often outweighs its story or the hands that made it with so much love and affection. This shift feels intimate - almost like a rupture. A break from the kitchens of my ancestors, where others applauded food for its flavour, comfort, and the love it held, not by symmetry or gloss.

Now, food is cooked not for the family table, but for the viewer’s gaze, where a plain-looking food presentation and deformed vegetables are considered less appealing. Our meals are now a spectacle - vegetables our nani’s and dadi’s chose were not beautiful, but available in those days, fresh, local, imperfect. We form opinions based on the images we see on social media, how the food should look, how the plating of the food is done, and even how the vegetables are not given the liberty to bend and bulge. That’s why I feel a deep pull toward the Ugly Produce Movement.

While observing myself cooking in the kitchen, I noticed my selection of vegetables, no stunted onions, blemished tomatoes, gnarled potatoes — all full of nutrition, flavour, and integrity - yet not the ones I picked. This thought makes me feel like a hypocrite. While wanting to re-create the authentic recipe, I forgot the value systems and the conditionings that came along with my parents and my grandparents. In these imperfect vegetables, I see a reflection of our changing values: how even our food must conform to ideals of beauty, how appearance has eclipsed essence. That dish that once travelled through generations and borders, morphing not just in how it’s made, but in how it’s

served and seen, is today, plated neatly, garnished with flair, and framed for the camera before the first bite.

For my ancestors, many of whom arrived in a new land with little more than their memories, food was never about presentation. It was about survival, community, and remembrance. They didn't choose vegetables based on their appearance but on what they could offer. And somewhere between their kitchens and our current food culture, we've lost sight of that.

Palak aloo isn't just a recipe - it is a living thread of history, flowing from one generation to the next, honoring our roots and the creativity of our ancestors. Each dish becomes a way to reconnect with the past, to taste memory, and to question the standards of beauty and value we often impose—not only on food, but on people, labour, and heritage itself.

In these humble preparations lies something profound: dignity in a twisted carrot, history in a simple meal, and a reminder that taste, like identity, runs far deeper than appearances. Food, after all, is not only nourishment—it is a testament to resilience, continuity, and the quiet artistry of those who came before us.

Still From the video Matters of Taste: A Story Told Through Food 2023 (https://vimeo.com/1096171872?share=copy)

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Shutki Maach: Smells of Memory, Politics of Taste

Priyam Chatterjee

Introduction

This paper critically examines dried Bombay duck as a site of negotiation between stigma and pride, poverty and survival, exclusion and cultural assertion. In the culinary landscapes of Bengal, few food items generate as much emotional intensity as shutki maach - dried fish prepared from a variety of species, most notably the Bombay duck (loitta maach or loitta shutki). Its sharp, pungent aroma is polarizing: for some, it provokes disgust, while for others it evokes home, nostalgia, and belonging. To engage with shutki is therefore to move beyond cuisine into the realms of history, caste, class, gender, ecology, and migration. This paper grounds these claims through a mixed-source methodological approach, drawing on secondary historical literature, ethnographic scholarship on Bengal's coastal foodways, and a content analysis of contemporary digital food media, particularly YouTube cooking channels and online recipe forums. These materials are used to trace how meanings of shutki circulate across time, region, and social location, allowing the paper to triangulate cultural narratives with broader sociological arguments.

Historical Context: From Abundance to Preservation

Colonial accounts reveal the duality of shutki's trajectory. British officials frequently disparaged its odor while simultaneously enabling and expanding its trade. Early references in the Bombay Gazetteer (Volume XII, 1882) describe the large-scale drying of Harpadon nehereus along the Konkan coast and note its transport inland through the "Bombay Dak" railway system - an infrastructural linkage that many scholars identify as the origin of the term "Bombay duck." As noted in Edward Miles's Report on the Sea Fisheries of India (1877), colonial postal and freight lines routinely documented the movement of dried fish from coastal districts to urban centers, thereby integrating a previously local commodity into broader imperial market circuits. Similarly, traveler Henry Ling Roth (1890) remarked on both the pungency and popularity of the fish among local consumers, capturing the contradictory colonial perception of the product. Ironically, a food derided as unrefined was simultaneously commodified and even exported to Britain, where it appeared intermittently in trade records and urban markets. Shutki thus reflects how colonial infrastructures shaped Indian diets and food markets while embedding enduring hierarchies of taste.

Smell, Stigma, and the Politics of Taste

Food is never neutral; it is imbued with power relations. Pierre Bourdieu (1984) famously argued that taste is a form of social distinction. Shutki exemplifies this: its strong odor is socially coded as "low-class" or "dirty" by sections of the Bengali middle class.

Post-independence urban food cultures in Bengal witnessed a gradual class-coding of fish consumption, where certain varieties especially fresh hilsa (ilish) and rohu (rui) came to symbolize refinement and culinary sophistication among the urban middle and upper classes. Research identifies hilsa as a "premium table fish" with high cultural and economic value, often featured in festive and elite consumption contexts (Das et al., 2024). This symbolic elevation of fresh fish stands in contrast to the social positioning of shutki, or dried fish, which contemporary studies show to be most accessible to lower-income groups, migrants, and fishing communities, and strongly associated with economically marginal livelihoods (WorldFish, 2021). Empirical work further indicates that dried-fish producers and retailers largely belong to underprivileged socio-economic segments, reinforcing its location in the culinary hierarchies of poverty (Rahman et al., 2023). Together, these patterns illustrate how fresh fish acquired the status of an urban elite marker, while shutki became relegated to the identities of the rural poor and migrant households. For migrants from coastal Bengal, the aroma of dried Bombay duck frying in mustard oil is a sensory anchor of identity, transforming stigma into intimacy. This tension highlights what Appadurai (1981) termed "gastro-politics" , the contestations over food that mirror wider struggles of power, belonging, and exclusion.

Gendered Practices and Culinary Knowledge

Shutki maach is not only eaten but also crafted through gendered, skill-intensive labour, undertaken largely by women in coastal and deltaic Bengal. In Namasudra, Rajbanshi, Matua, and Muslim fishing households across the Sundarbans and coastal Bangladesh, women manage washing, drying, and storing the fish, with older women directing the process and younger girls assisting—revealing age- and hierarchy-based divisions of labour.

Urban migrant families typically buy shutki but retain distinct regional preparation styles through variations in spice blends and cooking techniques. These differences show that shutki practices vary by caste, religion, and location rather than forming a uniform Bengali tradition. This work also reflects what feminist scholars describe as embodied domestic and sensory labour

essential to household economies (Counihan, 1999; Narotzky, 1997), yet remains undervalued within patriarchal structures.

The preparation process often requires negotiating the "smell politics" of households. In many urban Bengali homes, shutki is cooked outdoors or on terraces to avoid complaints from neighbors and family members. This speaks to how women navigate culinary stigma while keeping alive ancestral foodways. Shutki, therefore, is both a material resource and a repository of women's cultural agency.

Caste, Purity, and Pollution

Caste significantly shapes the politics of dried fish in Bengal. For many upper-caste Hindu households - especially in nineteenth - and early twentieth-century Bengal - shutki was historically marked as "impure," while its regular consumption was more common among Dalit, Muslim, and fisherfolk communities. This observation draws on historical food-culture scholarship (e.g., Chatterjee, 2001; Ray, 2016) and contemporary ethnographic studies of coastal Bengal that document how caste and occupation have long structured taste, taboo, and access to specific fish varieties. This association of smell with pollution mirrors broader hierarchies where bodily practices and food choices reinforce caste boundaries (Khare, 1992). At the same time, for marginalized communities, shutki is not merely survival food but an affirmation of identity. It offers high nutritional value at low cost and can be stored for long periods. For many, eating shutki is not about deficiency but about taste and preference.

Migrant Memories and Everyday Negotiations

Partition in 1947 and subsequent waves of migration from East Bengal (now Bangladesh) to West Bengal carried shutki into new urban contexts. Refugee households from East Bengal to Kolkata maintained shutki as part of their culinary heritage, carrying it across the border as a portable tradition. East Bengali migrants were associated with eating shutki, revealing how the dish was a marker of migrant identity. In refugee-settlement studies too, food has been shown to function as a stabilizing force: in the example of Victory Colony (1950), partition refugees used traditional recipes to evoke memory, community, and belonging.

Yet, this memory-making clashed with dominant urban sensibilities. Landlords frequently prohibited cooking shutki due to its odor, forcing migrants to adapt strategies cooking at odd hours, using outdoor stoves, or soaking fish in

advance to reduce pungency. Thus, shutki becomes a site of everyday negotiation between cultural survival and imposed respectability.

Shutki in Contemporary Culinary Politics

Interestingly, shutki has recently entered upscale culinary and digital food spaces in Kolkata and Dhaka. Popular YouTube channels such as Bong Eats, Mukti's Cooking World, SalmaTheChef, and the Deshi Food Channel have begun featuring shutki-based recipes in polished, high-quality formats. By presenting shutki through curated visuals, refined plating, and narrative framing that highlights heritage rather than stigma, these channels contribute to the contemporary revalorization of shutki as a sophisticated, rediscovered element of Bengali cuisine. Chefs experiment with shutki-infused pastes, chutneys, or even fine-dining curries, reframing it as exotic rather than stigmatized. The same food once ridiculed as "smelly" is valorized when reframed for elite consumption, often stripped of its socio-political context.

This commodification resonates with broader critiques of "food gentrification" (Johnston & Baumann, 2010), where marginalized cuisines are celebrated only after being rebranded through elite discourse. The question remains: who benefits when shutki enters the gourmet stage the fisherfolk communities that sustain its production or the restaurateurs and middle-class consumers who capitalize on its novelty?

Ecology and Sustainability

Shutki also embodies ecological knowledge. The drying process relies on renewable natural elements like the sun, wind and salt, making it one of the most sustainable preservation techniques. However, modern challenges such as overfishing, industrial pollution, and climate change increasingly threaten the survival of species like the Bombay duck. (Salagrama, 2012) For instance, a 2022 length based stock assessment of Bombay duck along the northern Bay of Bengal coast found the spawning potential ratio (SPR) to be just 8%, well below the 20% threshold that signals sustainable recruitment, a key indicator that the fishery is severely overexploited. Without concerted conservation and fisheries management measures (e.g., regulating mesh sizes, limiting juvenile catch, establishing protected spawning periods), the long term viability of Bombay duck, and thus the livelihoods and culinary traditions dependent on it, is in jeopardy. Given these uncertainties, more region specific population assessments are urgently required to link ecological vulnerability with social justice concerns around shutki-dependent communities.

For the small-scale fisherfolk dried fish is both livelihood and sustenance. Supporting sustainable fisheries, providing clean drying spaces, and recognizing the cultural values of shutki are crucial for ecological and social justice.

Cultural Representation and Resistance

Despite stigma, shutki continues to appear in songs, proverbs, and literary works of Bengal. Its presence in everyday speech signifies both affection and ambivalence. To dismiss it as "smelly" is to silence a history of resilience. Communities continue to assert pride in their shutki recipes, resisting attempts to marginalize them. In this sense, shutki is more than just food; it is a cultural resource of resistance. Cooking it in defiance of complaints, serving it in family gatherings, or carrying it across borders reflects the insistence of marginalized groups to maintain control over their foodways and, by extension, their dignity.

Conclusion

Shutki maach, particularly dried Bombay duck, is a powerful lens through which to examine India's food cultures. It traverses histories of colonial mockery, caste-based stigma, gendered labor, ecological adaptation, and migrant memory. Its pungent smell may divide opinion, but that very odor embodies the struggles and resilience of those who continue to claim it as their own.

To engage with shutki is to acknowledge that food is never just about sustenance or flavor, it is about politics, identity, and belonging. As Bengal continues to modernize and globalize, the story of shutki reminds us that the pungent, the stigmatized, and the marginalized are as much a part of India's culinary heritage as the celebrated hilsa or the refined biriyani. Recognizing this is not only a matter of taste but also one of justice.

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Leaves Left Behind

Rishaya Palkhivala

It was a potluck at my friend's house, and my mother had decided to push the envelope. Serving an audience of Tamilian, Sindhi and Gujarati descent, she brought a dish from her coastal Karnataka roots - what my grandmother calls arasina iretha gatti (turmeric leaf 'gatti'). It comprises a rice paste layer stuffed with sweetened cardamom-flavoured grated coconut, wrapped and steamed in haldi leaves. I don't clearly remember having had it before, nor had she made it at home before, so the courage with which she brought it to such a populated scene is to be applauded. The strong taste of turmeric in a sweet dish caught some of us off guard and brought back pleasant memories for others. While we had varying degrees of familiarity with this particular wrapped dessert, the use of leaves as vessels to create regional delicacies is common across India.

Being half-Parsi and half-Kannadiga, I recall the leaves of either side. A reluctant non-vegetarian, I have never so much as nibbled on the iconic banana leaf wrapped patra ni macchi (meaning 'fish wrapped in a leaf'), but have had a blasphemous paneer version. Going even further away from tradition, we made patra ni paneer at home with a cabbage leaf exterior that rendered the leaf delicious as well. While my own dietary preferences distance me from the widely accepted Parsi fare, I lean on my dear anthropology professor's rejection of the abstract notion of 'authentic food'. Just like those before me, I take my food legacy forward with my own experiments and substitutions. Coming back to the banana leaf, it binds both sides of my family's weddings, with the Parsi 'lagan nu patra' ('wedding leaf') and South Indian wedding meals being served atop it. Banana leaves are also the inedible leaves I have seen most often in the markets I frequent in South Mumbai. It is on festive occasions that I have seen leaves like turmeric make their special appearance.

So why take the trouble to use inedible leaves for cooking? Contrary to aluminium foil, butter paper and plastic cling wrap, just cooking in leaves is healthy. On a recent forest walk with an Ayurvedic practitioner, he informed us that leaves of banana and flame of the forest (palash) are used for eating due to their alkaline properties or 'khar' which helps with digestion. Scientists report that banana leaves are abundant in polyphenols, which have possible benefits as far reaching as cancer prevention.

Beyond cooking, leaves as packaging or as vessels to eat from boast a naturally water-repelling surface, which we merely mimic with plastics which use this excuse to never degrade. What makes cooking in leaves even more special is the seasonality,

unique characteristics and subtle flavour each leaf imparts, literally and figuratively adding a new layer to the dish. At the same time, the produce we eat is laden with pesticides and other residues, and contamination is always possible with leaves too - which is not to say we wash our plates with natural substances. Nevertheless, one may be partial to polyphenols over polyethene and the variety of plastic-lined single-use containers we often eat food in.

In times when cooking vessels may have been less accessible or more expensive, leaves were a useful tool for cooking food on the flame. In rural areas, leaves have been in abundance, just a few steps away. They could be immediately disposed of after use, eliminating the need for washing and maintenance. During travel, or for those without a permanent residence or sufficient means, they may have been extremely convenient. The leaves that accompany wedding feasts and line brass plates at swanky restaurants may have been more suited for subsistence, or as a marker of austerity. Leaves are also useful containers for liquid batter or dough that breaks easily. Using this natural wrap for vegetables or fish or meats helps retain moisture, flavour, and reduces the need for fats. No wonder the world has such a wide variety of dishes that use leaves as vessels for cooking. India's enduri pitha, paturi, kanchipuram idli, kozhukattai, damni dhokla, paknam, popti, singauri, chhena poda, paniya, panki, and tandlachi bhakri are regional leaf-wrapped dishes that span the length and breadth of the country. The selection of leaves is equally diverse, going beyond banana to turmeric, alpina, colocasia, pumpkin, bottle gourd, mountain

ebony, palm, bay, cinnamon, banyan, almond, lettuce blumea, liana creeper, shorea robusta and crown flower leaves. Unfortunately, our current lifestyles and locations make these local and seasonal leaves hard to source and barely known.

My mother's parents grew up in villages near Udupi. When my grandmother (ajji) was young, her family owned a lot of land in the village, and they used to celebrate Diwali by inviting their tenants (now owners, post PM Indira Gandhi's land reforms) over for a festive meal. Her mother and grandmother busied themselves with making special idlis to give to anyone who came by. Uddarge is idli steamed in baskets made of dried wild creepers lined with soft, fresh pongare ire (leaves of the Indian Coral Tree). After my grandparents retired from city careers, my grandfather was eager to go back to his roots. They built a house on the land my grandmother inherited and we visited them every Diwali. When I was young, our Diwalis were marked by the making of little baskets of pelakkaida ire (jackfruit leaves). We folded four leaves and secured them with bits of twigs. On Diwali, my ajji would fill them with idli batter and steam them for our lunch - gunda. The ripe jackfruit was turned into a gatti (steamed cake) between teak leaves. Another idli for special occasions was moode, steamed in a cylinder made of kedige (screwpine) leaves, which grows near water bodies like small streams. The kedige flowers are fragrant and often used to adorn the hair. I was fascinated to realise this leaf is a variety of pandan, a cousin of which is used in South East Asian cuisine to add flavour and fragrance. Its flowers are known in other regions as kewra, the water of which adds aroma to biryanis and sweet dishes. In my childhood, I had never even considered the name of the leaf, where it was born, who its cousins were, or where else it was well liked.

This month, I attended a workshop which involved interacting with craftspersons in a village outside Jabalpur. Over two mornings, our group learned how to make leaf plates, bowls and cones from a family of pattal (leaf plate) makers. Despite being similar to the making of gunda leaf baskets in my childhood, the leaves and shapes were different. We plucked palash leaves ourselves and foraged twigs from the remnants of a nearby temple's used agarbatti stash.

We arranged and pinned five leaves to form a plate and two leaves to form a bowl or cone. We learned what side and angle to position each leaf and twig. We tried using different types of leaves, and realised fresh leaves were easier to fashion than older ones. We filled the bowls we had made and ate a hearty breakfast in it. Once we were done we simply fed it to the cows. The loop of circular economy was closed by breakfast time.

In cities, taking the time to find these elusive leaves, prepare dishes with them, and then dispose of them in the mixed waste of landfills sounds somewhat unsustainable. Why not just rely on the trusty steel pan?

Time is money, time is the most precious commodity, time is life itself. For those living amidst nature or for those with limited means, leaves may offer a free and easily disposable means to cook and eat. However, current trends lead us towards skipping cooking and ordering delivery in plastic food containers, with even villages relying on single-use plastic crockery and cutlery for street food. Access to and knowledge of hyper local ingredients, recipes and traditions are reserved for special occasions rather than embedded in our daily living. As families grow smaller and more disconnected, communal cooking is fading quickly. Who makes festive sweets from scratch at home? Who prepares the right food to punctuate each individual celebration, with the assistance of a family assembly line? Health benefits? Sure. Novelty? Yes. Seasonality? Of course. Beyond those are the connections beyond convenience. Time spent on special occasions coming together not just at the table or for the pictures, but in the collective effort leading up to it. It is through the mundane and repeated community activities that culture is shared, performed, reiterated. If women were more often tasked with the kitchen labour, swapping ruminations over folded leaves, I can only hope men offered a worthy alternative to produce sustenance, meaning, art and culture at the same time. Today, our leaf wrapped delicacies are no longer plucked from a nearby tree and shared with neighbours. They have a shiny price tag and a superior sheen of sustainability. Then again, not so long ago, my family would sit on the floor, securing four freshly plucked jackfruit leaves together to make idli vessels on Diwali morning in my grandmother's village. It was a togetherness that bound us in shared creation, wrapped in leaves and baked into memories that last.

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Mukbangs as Vernacular Infrastructures of Care in Borderlands of Northeast India

Sanskriti

Introduction

My understanding of crisis media draws on the Sarai Reader 04: Crisis/Media manifesto (2004), which calls for disrupting centralized information networks in the face of global crises. Following Ricardo Rosas's notion of tactical media, I treat crisis media not just as documentation of distress but as the creation of infrastructures of care that respond to structural vulnerability. In the borderlands[1] of Manipur, Nagaland, and Mizoram, indigenous mukbang[2] creators exemplify this approach, turning constrained infrastructures - intermittent electricity, internet shutdowns, patchy networks, and low-cost devices (SFLC.in, 2023; TRAI, 2023) - into spaces of creative participation and community resilience.

In a region marked by infrastructural deficit, militarized borderland governance, surveillance, and ecological and political crises, vernacular mukbangs have emerged as embodied archives of care, culinary memory, and cultural resilience. Here, mukbang operates as crisis media by offering dynamic sites of cultural production grounded in haptic reprieve, infrastructural improvisation, and everyday acts of eating that nourish kinship and resistance amid systemic dislocation. By locating mukbangs within the overlapping frameworks of vernacular infrastructures and indigeneity, this work extends conversations in media anthropology toward understanding how borderland creators negotiate with (digital) modernity to reconfigure its terms through acts of care, kinship, and improvisation.

This article, therefore, asks: how do indigenous mukbang creators in Northeast India reconfigure a globally circulated digital form into vernacular infrastructures of food sovereignty, cultural continuity, and political presence amid crisis and infrastructural precarity?

[1] In this work, I define borderlands as the tribal-majority cities of Northeast India, specifically Shillong, Kohima, Dimapur, Imphal, and Aizawl. These are towns not necessarily positioned against a visible international boundary, yet they operate as borderlands through everyday negotiations of belonging and mobility, exhibiting distinct borderland subjectivities. They sit at the uneasy threshold between state presence and state absence, where national imaginaries of modernity coexist with infrastructural neglect and unstable governance.

[2] Mukbang, a portmanteau of the Korean words meokja ("let's eat") and bangsong ("broadcast"), originated in South Korea in the late 2000s and rapidly evolved into a global digital phenomenon.

Methodology

This study is situated within the frameworks of digital ethnography and media anthropology, examining how vernacular mukbangs function as crisis media in Northeast India. Between January and June 2025, I conducted a longitudinal digital ethnography of approximately 35-38 mukbang videos across 15 YouTube channels. In this situated, small-scale inquiry, I adopted a digital ethnographic approach, combining video ethnography, digital engaged observation, and comment ethnography. The corpus was intentionally distributed across time periods to trace the genre's evolution - from early adopters (2016-2019), who experimented with Korean-inspired ASMR aesthetics, to post-2020 creators who localized mukbang through community storytelling, outdoor cooking, and participatory fan engagement during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The videos analyzed were produced in multiple vernacular languages and dialects, including Meiteilon (Manipuri), Nagamese, Ao, Angami, and Mizo, often with partial or uneven subtitles. Analysis was conducted primarily in the original languages; where subtitles were provided by creators, these were used, and where they were absent, translations were undertaken by the author. Meaning was not treated as residing solely in speech: visual composition, food practices, bodily gestures, and affective pacing were central to the analysis and enabled ethnographic interpretation across linguistic differences.

A purposive sampling strategy guided the selection, emphasizing regional, ethnic, rural-urban, diasporic, and gendered diversity presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Mukbang Channels Included in the Study

Channel Name	Location	Ethnic Affiliation	Language / Dialect	Year Joined
Meitei Mukbang	Manipur (Valley)	Meitei	Meiteilon	2019
Delicious Wave	Manipur (Valley)	Meitei	Meiteilon	2020
Manem Mamou	Manipur (Valley)	Meitei	Meiteilon	2020

Channel Name	Location	Ethnic Affiliation	Language / Dialect	Year Joined
Sanagi Mathel Lukoi	Manipur (Valley)	Meitei	Meiteilon	2021
Farmer Hepao Kuki	Manipur (Hill)	Kuki	Kuki / English	2020
Premson Kiirii Vlog	Manipur (Hill)	Monsang Naga	Monsang / English	2021
Kent's Vlog	Nagaland	Rengma Naga	Nagamese / English	2018
The Mom's Vlog	Nagaland	Naga	Nagamese	2019
Bite of Naga	Nagaland	Naga	English / Nagamese	2017
Sori Eats & Vlogs	Nagaland	Naga	Nagamese	2019
S. Metha Naga Vlog	Nagaland	Angami Naga	Nagamese	2020
Khips Vlog	Nagaland	Sema Naga	Nagamese	2020
Smake	Mizoram	Mizo	Mizo	2020

Mukbang as Vernacular Media

Mukbangs are not only expressions of cultural identity but also infrastructural interventions that utilize food aesthetics, oral storytelling, and affective intimacy to rewire the circuits of media visibility from the borderlands inward. Some of the characteristics that I identified based on close readings of mukbang uploads are following:

(i) **Spaces of Performance and Ecological Aesthetics**

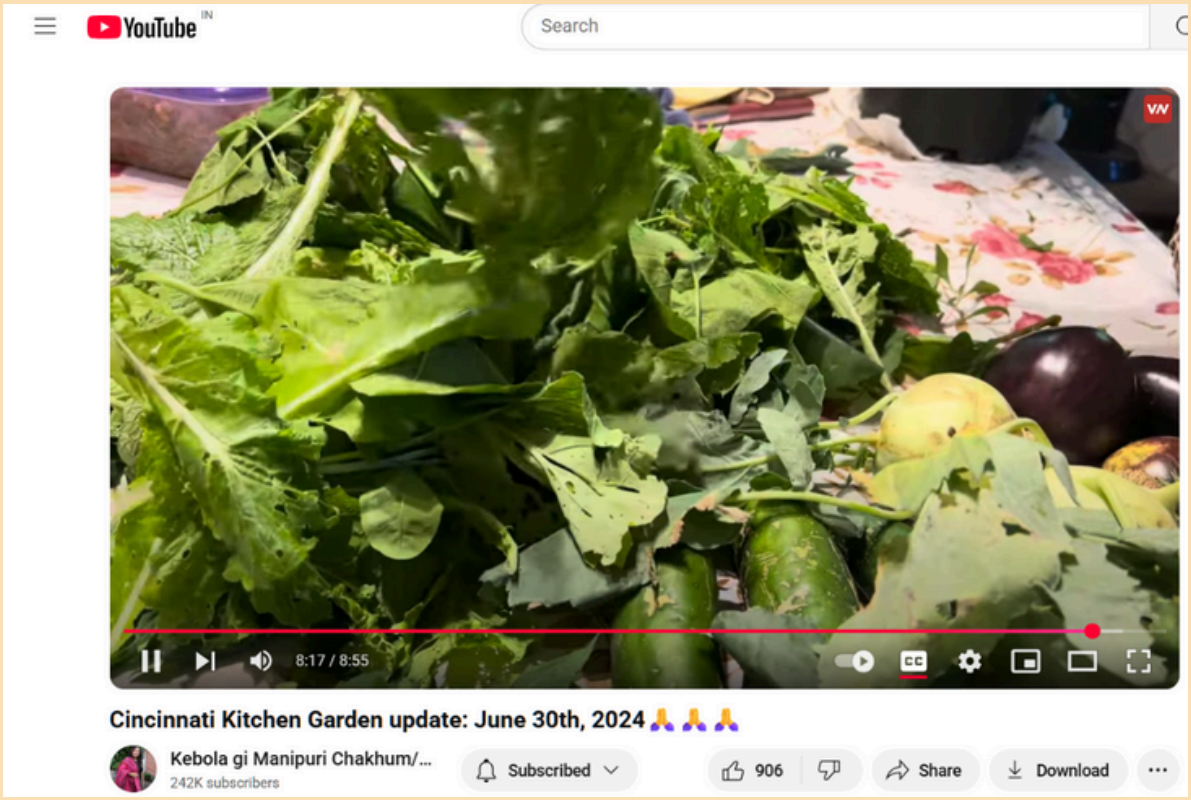
These videos enact a form of food sovereignty rooted in ancestral ecological knowledge and land-based practices. A noticeable trend is the deliberate use of ecologically and culturally significant spaces as performance/shooting sites for mukbang videos. Videos are increasingly filmed in open-air courtyards, kitchen gardens, the hilltops of Kohima, the paddy fields of Ukhrul, or the floating islands (phumdis) of Loktak Lake in Manipur (see Fig. 1). The mise-en-scène highlights ecological intimacy – lush greenery, rustic wooden tools, crackling firewood, birdsong, and spontaneous interruptions by livestock or children.

Unlike the polished aesthetic of urban mukbangs, these creators embrace unscripted and non-glamorous scenes. In my viewing and coding process, particular attention was paid to sensory elements – ambient sounds of firewood crackling, livestock strutting, thunder and rainstorms; collective labour of cooking, kids' laughter, and verbal descriptions of taste, texture, and smell. The focus shifts from the volume of food consumed to the ritual of foraging, cooking, and sharing food, often within indigenous landscapes. These visual and auditory vignettes foreground a sensory ethnography that centres kinship, environmental knowledge, and sustainability. In this sense, the camera does not merely record consumption but bears testimony to indigenous modes of living with and through the land (Tsing, 2015).

Meitei Mukbang recording a mukbang on the floating islands (phumdis) of Loktak Lake in Manipur (Meitei Mukbang 2022, 5:37)

(ii) **Ancestral Foodways and Ecological Knowledge**

Mukbang creators such as Manem Mamou, Delicious Wave, Apei Eats (Manipur), Kent's Vlog (Nagaland), The Mom's Vlog (Nagaland), S. Metha Naga Vlogs (Nagaland), and Smake (Mizoram) foreground culinary repertoires deeply tied to seasonal rhythms, forest ecologies, and indigenous knowledge systems. These creators showcase foraged foods like yongchak (stink beans), bitter herbs, wild snails, bamboo shoots, and various smoked meats and fermented soybeans (axone/ngari), as well as meat/fish hentak, prepared with minimal technological intervention and presented in open-air or hearthside kitchens. Their mukbangs emphasize preparation rituals – such as cleaning, fermenting, and open-fire cooking – filmed in gardens or hearths.



Kebola's diasporic makeshift garden in the United States (Kebola 2024, 8:17)

Kebola Wahengbam's diasporic mukbangs from the United States often feature the use of home-grown herbs from her organic garden (see Fig. 2 for reference) and discuss their medicinal and cultural significance, situating food as both sustenance and a means of ancestral knowledge. Their emphasis on local biodiversity and ancestral cooking methods creates what may be called an "ethno-gastronomic archive," a living repository of knowledge produced through the sensorium of mukbang.

(iii) **Ritual or Festival Foods**

In addition to everyday meals, mukbang creators in Northeast India increasingly feature festival and ritual foods associated with culturally significant occasions, such as Ningol Chakouba, Chairoba, Yaoshang (Manipur), Moatsu and Tokhü Emong (Nagaland), as well as Christmas or Easter celebrations across valley and hill districts. These videos serve as culinary showcases and temporal markers, attesting to the cyclical rhythms of indigenous calendars and the embodied memory of celebration, kinship, and reciprocity.

Kent's Vlog depicting the communal feast on Christmas (Kent's Vlog 2021, 14:33)

For instance, Kent's Vlog documents Christmas celebrations through collective food preparation on banana leaves, sometimes accompanied by church hymns and communal rituals (see Fig. 3). These videos, through aesthetic and temporal framing, produce what Appadurai (1981) calls "gastro-nostalgia," where even diasporic viewers and fans are reconnected to cultural temporality through the sensory immersion of festival foods.

Channels like Shawalo Alem Seb, Kent's Vlog, and Sori Eats and Vlogs (Nagaland) regularly showcase Naga dishes such as axone (fermented soybean), dry bamboo shoot curry, smoked pork fat, and locally brewed rice beer. These are often framed within ritualistic or communal contexts – such as harvest festivals, village cooking events, or post-church gatherings - underscoring a sense of mediated belonging. These creators foster affective ties with audiences, many of whom are part of diasporic or migrant communiti-

-es across Indian metros or abroad, with comment-sections often echoing phrases like “tastes like home” or “reminds me of my mother’s cooking.” Similarly, Premson Kiirii from Manipur created a mukbang around a church-building dedication feast (see Fig. 4), incorporating tribal worldviews and vernacular references to territory and cultural endurance. In this context, food mediates a sensory bridge across distances and temporalities, especially for those who cannot exercise their indigenous culinary subjectivities in rented houses or university hostels in mainstream India (Patgiri, 2022).

Premson Kiirii’s mukbang on a church-building dedication feast (Premson Kiirii 2024, 33:41)

Conclusion

In the borderlands of Manipur, Nagaland, and Mizoram, mukbangs enable a situated and everyday practice of indigenous sovereignty shaped by infrastructural precarity and militarized governance. Rather than asserting sovereignty in formal or juridical terms, these videos enact it through embodied choices about food, language, and landscape made under conditions of surveillance, restricted mobility, and unstable digital infrastructures. By preparing ancestral foods, speaking in indigenous dialects, and filming within ecologically significant settings, creators exercise limited yet meaningful control over how indigenous worlds are made visible online. Sovereignty here emerges as a relational and improvised practice, grounded in care, kinship, and land-based knowledge, sustained through acts of cooking and storytelling.

Drawing on Faye Ginsburg's understanding of indigenous media as practices of cultural production and self-determination, vernacular mukbangs from Northeast India show how global media technologies are indigenized to sustain indigenous worldviews. They situate borderland creators within a plural media modernity, where digital infrastructures become sites to practice care and sovereignty. They remind us that even in conditions of crisis, indigenous creators continue to cook, record, and connect, transforming scarcity itself into a medium of presence and survival.

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