Genealogies of the Intimate: The Sensate Home of the Middle-Class

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During the nineteenth-century, Calcutta witnessed an unprecedented churning of the urban cauldron and some of the apparently innocuous masalas were certain indispensible characters and hitherto un-experienced commodities. Unimpeded by the imperialist nationalist discourses, that predominated the century, the exigencies of daily urban living led to imperceptible shifts in the social codes of living. It is in this vein that, the paper argues, urbanity experienced by the relevant embodied subjects had a catalytic bearing in reformatting their sensorial registers. The paper, delving into the riches of the contemporary repositories, gleans out the persons who were unavoidable in the colonial urban backdrop and were quite crucial in smudging the boundaries between the inner and the outer world of the *bhadralok*, namely: the housemaid and the cook. Then the gaze is turned on the staggered entries of frowned upon food in the middle-class households which was aided partially by the aforesaid onslaught and dictated by the newly realised rules of comfort and health. The paper concludes with the advent of the cleansing and disinfecting products in the *fin de siècle*. This, again, is an instance of embracing the outer unfamiliar (odours) amongst the familiar (traditional households). Through such histories, the paper seeks to convene a story of the interiorization and invention of new social norms in the urban *mise en scène* by the embodied individual.

The aggregation of the middle-class homesteads in the burgeoning colonial city was not merely a story of geographical relocations of households from the neighbouring areas to Calcutta, or an improvement of architectural structures of brick and mortar but at the heart of it lay the re-alignment of the domestic space of the middle-class household

in terms of the sensorial that had gone into a tailspin negotiating the whirlpool of the colonial milieu. It found anchorage by rendering, in terms of tactile, gustatory and olfactory, a new mesh of the household that held it together and brought to the fore a new set of expectations from the fundamental unit of 'home' all the while scripting a palimpsest of the sensate. The paper tries to historicise this transfiguration in the context of the new-found advantage of anonymity in the urban scenario that went hand in glove with the logic of comfort, pleasure and hygiene, that together informed the middle—class' notion of the new sacred home or the *grihamandir*.

THE DOMESTIC HELP

It was the 1820s. Few pockets of the city were teeming with prostitutes. These women rented out rooms in the same tenements where they prostituted themselves at nights. The tenants were mainly immigrants sans their womenfolk and such arrangements were very much agreeable to these newcomers as nowhere else in Calcutta were rooms available at such affordable rates. Often such women in their old age worked- in all probability through the reference of such acquaintances—as maids in bhadralok households.[1] Given the backstory of such women, they were considered as potential threats. Not surprisingly, the world of fiction resonated with such distrust and presented how these maids, flower girls, milk maids or the barber's wives who had entered the household for apparently above-board services turned out to be the perpetrators in luring the bhadralok women out of their houses.

The flower girls, the barber's wife, the milkmaid, neri or a woman who chanted prayers from door to door and often acted as an aid in the kitchen and the maidservant, these five specific types of women were dubbed as messengers by Bhabanicharan Bandyopadhyay, a popular author, in one of his literary works of the early nineteenth century.[2] And he warns his readers to be wary of these figures who had unrestricted access to the inner domain. That such women—who had easy access to

the houses of the bhadralok—could be approached by nefarious men wanting to liaise with the women inmates was common knowledge and they were often portrayed as cohorts in a number of farces of the day. For example, Nimchand, a drunken character tries to coax one of the servants to become his *aide de champ* to bring out the woman he desired.[3] Another literary work of 1856 titled *Bidhabābihāha nātak* shows how a widow named Sulochana could meet her lover due to the instrumental role played by barber's wife which then resulted in her unwanted pregnancy and eventual suicide.[4]

In spite of the potential threat, the bhadralok families could not do away with the servants. In 1873, an article in Education Gazette underlines how servants were common in Bengali household.[5] Shib Chunder Bose, who authored a manual (1873) propagating the idea of the Hindoo family as an insulated domain, could not also be oblivious to the fact that the *jhee*, or the maid-servants were drawn from the dregs of the society, and their (mis-)conduct sometimes led to unhappy consequences in the family.[6] Such potent was the fear that in a leading women's periodical of late nineteenth century, Mahila, women were advised to protect themselves against the characterless maids who had in them to tempt the housewives into bringing disgrace for the family.[7] Nevertheless, the unrestricted access to the zenana of the middle-class household, by such domestic helps, disrupted the compartmentalized understanding of the inner and outer domains.[8]

The effort to maintain the 'purity of the kitchen', the 'inner sanctum' of the house of the Bengali middle class householder, thrown in the cross-caste milieu of the metropolis, revealed the inner tensions in the most explicit way. The tension was inherent in the very figure of the 'Brahmin cook'. It was very important that this 'outsider' to the house would bear the essential qualities of the 'cultural agent' whose entry would not violate the sanctity of the kitchen. So ideally the cook, who was given free access to the kitchen, a space that was sought to be hermetically sealed off from the outside world, had to be from the 'appropriate' caste but that his true caste was always a matter of doubt

was known to all as far back as the beginning of the nineteenth century. Bhabanicharan Bandhyopadhay underlined this anomaly in his sketch of urban living in Calcutta:

> "Any indifferent outsider calling himself a Brahmin could enter the inner space (antahpur) of the house as a Brahmin cook…and the food cooked by him is eaten by all."[9]

Yet despite such awareness, the fact that the Brahmin cook was sought after in the middle class Hindu cosmos of nineteenth century Calcutta, indicated the acceptance of even a hypocritical stance to display their abidance to the food proscriptive strictures and also to a certain extent to flaunt their newly acquired social status. Both Rammohan Roy and Dwarakanath Tagore, known for their disregard of Hindu caste scruples, had Brahmin cooks throughout their sojourns abroad.[10] This evinced the importance attached to this figure in maintenance of the caste hierarchy of the Bengali bhadralok household. Yet there was a constant doubt about the trustworthiness of this figure who threatened to overturn and demolish the purity of the sanctum.

The neonate metropolis with its lure of the novelties and a space to re-position oneself in social pecking order provided the necessary context for the rising demands of the Brahmin cooks. S N Mukherjee convincingly argues that bhadralok was not a caste category but a composition from different castes who had risen in the economic ladder.[11] In all probability such a new class to increase their status employed such Brahmin cooks.

Also, it was noticed, from the eighteen thirties, that the exposure of the bhadraloks to food hitherto not allowed in the house, e.g. preparations of meat, meant a new role for the Brahmin cooks, as their masters compelled them to cook such 'prohibited' dishes. This meant that the rest of the family more often than not laced a lurking suspicion on the purity of the other food dishes prepared by them in such households. One of the earliest remedies to this botheration was

to be found in the premises of the Tagore house. Dwarkanath and his younger brother, under the influence of Rammohan Roy, had overcome their inhibitions and learnt to relish both meat and alcohol in their house. Nevertheless, they could not do away with Brahmin cooks. So a compromise was worked out whereby these Brahmins still cooked such dishes for them within the compound but at a distance from the house and the earthen pots used to cook the same were thrown out of the compound after being used.[12] That such dictates of new taste of the masters were often concealed by such brahmin cooks to the public at large, so as not to lose their recruitment potential, revealed yet another threat that had to be tackled in the household. For example, Ramtanu Lahiri, one of the first avant-garde of the first generation of Hindoo College narrated that even though he was compelled to keep a Brahmin cook for his wife (who invariably did not allow any cook from another caste), he often had the same cook prepare the meat dishes which he had grown a fondness for.[13] He was aware of the predicament of the cook who had to prevaricate to maintain a facade of caste purity. In fact he had to cope with a series of cooks quitting who refused to work at his place around 1852. But by the 1870s the cooks had adapted themselves to the changing tastes and merely concealed information about cooking the proscribed eatables.[14]

Affluent Bengali households could not do without the presence of such cooks, a marker of their status as well as a means to satiate their new found appetites. Hence by 1885 the presence of employed cooks was more or less a regular feature in affluent households which earned them the scorn from the conservative sections.[15] Already in the eighteen seventies in his *Statistical Account of Bengal*, W.W. Hunter had made a detailed survey of the nature of jobs in the different districts in Bengal and he found that in the area around Calcutta, the number of cooks was as high as five thousand one hundred and fifty-two.[16] This often led to accommodative stances within the household in the *quotidien*. In Calcutta, it was a known fact (from aspersions cast by contemporary literary works) by the sixties that many Hindu

households employed Muslim cooks. In spite of the frequent adverse fallouts as in the instance of Kailasbasini Devi, wife of Ramtanu Lahiri who has been ostracized by the society for keeping a Muslim cook and other Muslim servants,[17] the 'bhadraloks' at large persisted with staff of different castes and they interacted and ate together.[18] In the Tagore house, the Brahmin cooks cooked the rice and pulses while the meat dishes were prepared by the lower-caste cooks.[19]

Women's periodicals, manuals, recipe books repeatedly counselled women of the household to take charge of cooking. A cursory glance at the leading periodicals of the day reveals the repeated implorations to bhadralok woman to maintain the purity of the *antahpur*, by her cooking for her family. Her figure in the house of the upper caste middle class householder, thereby gained increasing prominence—her body was portrayed to be the last bulwark of gastronomic tradition in more than one capacity. Mahesh Chandra Deb quipped that the only ambition which women should harbour was "to attain the fame of a 'good cook' " and one who achieved it was regarded as a woman of no ordinary accomplishments![20] In this capacity of the cook, she was required, more than the male counterpart, to abide by the logic of the food proscription and maintain the caste rank of the family. Yet ironically, by the 1880s, when such discourses in the periodicals reached their climax, reference to employed cooks in Bengali households was becoming more and more frequent and ubiquitous in nature. For example, Bipradas Mukhopadhyay (1842-1914) attests in *Pāk Pranali,* a comprehensive recipe book, the decreasing interest of cooking in women.[21] Mahendranath Datta lamented that in the age of Brahmin cooks the uniqueness of food lent by the distinctive cooking style of each woman had disappeared for ever.[22]

However one noticeable shift was that such employees were mostly women.[23] Stating about the domestic servants in the family mesh of later nineteenth century, Shib Chunder Bose speaks of the figure of the cook;

> "The cook may be either male or female. In most families preference is shown for female cooks. Whether descendant from a Brahmin or Kāyastha family, she goes by the general name of bāmun didi (Brahmin sister), so named so that the members of the other families might unsuspectingly eat out of her hands."[24]

Always doubts persisted of his/her caste, still such a figure inch by inch gained access to the household. Therefore the periodicals changed their tone before the turn of the century and advice was doled as to how to supervise them instead of preventing them from entering the kitchen. For example, Pragyasundari debi (1870-1950) testified that by the end of the century most women had left the kitchen and left it to the cooks and other maids who paid scant regard to hygiene and cleanliness. In fact she emphasised that rather than dispensing away with them, care should be taken to supervise their health and character. Cleanliness was a priority and in this respect the widows should be considered as ideal according to her.[25]

Thus the caste of the employed cook; male or female, was always a matter of suspicion, throughout the century, compelling a compromise of the caste scruples of the upper-castes residents of the city whose abidance meant not partaking food made by the other castes. Axioms like modern women don't know how to cook[26] or a cook and two to three maids are a must in the houses of educated wives as they are busy with other things, especially needle work and novels[27] reveal how such employed figures of the household were sought for rather than shunned.

Further, by the latter half of the century, escalating the scarcity was the fact of the steady increase in the number of the Bengali bhadraloks, often foreign returned, with proclivities for the occidental cuisine. This meant a surge of demand for cooks not shying away from serving their masters overtly with such dishes. As this surge could not be accommodated by the available supply of Brahmin cooks willing to comply openly with such food dictates, Muslim and other lower caste

(Hari) cooks had their ingress to the erstwhile protected domain of the kitchen in such households.[28]

So when the nationalist paradigm was devising a new role for bhadralok woman as the sole symbol of the home/family (often as the cook, apparently inviolate due to her seclusion from the outside realm), regarded as one of the last bastions to be free of alien intrusion, the doors to the inner domain were more and more left ajar to the intrusion of the indispensable domestic help in the kitchen; the much polemical figure of the outside cook. The scruples of touch and taste were undoubtedly being destabilised through such figures. The conscious efforts of all the forces who made it their intent to thwart the entry of the outsider in the kitchen were laid waste in front of the logics of status, comforts and other newly tasted pleasures of urban culture and gradually the cook, albeit a threatening figure, became a necessary cog of the entire apparatus of the city life.

THE DELECTABLE DELICACIES

Along with the figures of intrusion, quite a few gourmets gradually found their place in the regular food habits of the Bengali household. In this section, the undeniable liaison between touch, smell and taste through such entries is underlined. By the end of the eighteenth century, in the rising urban hub of Calcutta, it was predominantly through food that the everyday exclusiveness of "the caste" were performed, defended and policed. The relevant shastric injunctions invoked in this period revolved around as to what should be avoided as food by the caste-Hindus, from whom they should not accept the food and with whom they cannot have their food. Taste and touch were inextricably related to the caste society. The enticement and the accessibility of new delectable, on the one hand, and the shifting rationale of the bhadralok living made the upper-caste household ever more susceptible to what was regarded as '*akhādya*', '*kukhādya*' and *'mlecchader khābār'*.

The earliest instances of consumption of new food items can be traced to the rise of the *bābu*, the *nouveau riche* of contemporary Calcutta, whose apparent imitations of European social values was a matter of much ridicule in the literary works of the time—be it at the garden houses or at the prostitute quarters, their consumption of the prohibited food was often invoked.[29] But soon the *bhadralok* too, who lived with his family in the city, had to deal with the constant risk of ingression of the household in terms of ready eats like bread and biscuits from the Muslim and European establishments, and staples like onion, garlic and chicken.

A number of reasons brought about this change in nineteenth century Calcutta; the influx of people to the city, the rise of the educational institutions, association with Europeans and the evolution of clerkdom, the increasing reference to medical science, rise of boarding houses, and cultural associations, collectively infused a new lifestyle among the people.

The Derozians, the first alumni of the Hindoo College were known for their open defiance of the Hindu conventions in matters of food and drink.[30] Even the retreat of the figure of the bold Derozian could not prevent the inroad of such food items into the household. Understandingly, the contemporary periodicals warned their readers against those students of Hindoo College and other missionary schools, who surreptitiously indulged in proscribed food outside and then unashamedly went back home and had regular meals with their family members. So it was not unnatural that these journals continued to portray the dilemma of the parents of such students trapped between their beliefs that western education benefited their sons and their apprehensions that their family might lose their caste status in the bargain.[31] But city life, by the third decade of the century, could not be imagined without these new food items as seen in the poems of Ishwar Chandra Gupta portraying contemporary city life.[32] Be it Peary Chand Mitra,[33] Bholanath Mukhopadhay,[34] Tekchand Thakur Junior[35] or other authors, they reiterated continuously the hypocrisy of the

so-called orthodox Hindus who tried to preserve their jātidharma by refusing to proclaim overtly their habit of consuming the proscribed food while enjoying the very same in the privacy of the dining rooms of the Wilson's hotel, their 'baithakkhana' or any other place in between which provided the desired purdah.

Rajnarayan Basu, a leading author and intellectual of those times, narrates an incident of his youth. Without divulging to anybody, his father used to stash *kebabs*, *pulao* and other proscribed delicacies in a tin box commonly meant for important documents.[36] The other household members, including Rajanarayan Basu, never envisaged that the tin box could contain anything but such papers. So only when his father asked him to share a meal and the actual contents of the tin were revealed to him, he could fathom the extent of his father's ploy to dissuade him from his uncontrolled bohemian life. Peary Chand Mitra had the proscribed food in private but refrained from partaking it in public.[37] The underlying factor that provided this spirit of adventurism to break the shackles of inhibition was the shroud of anonymity the city provided to its dwellers. Indeed colonial Calcutta chronicled the diversity of people's continuous readjustment to become a cohesive part of the newly tasted urban life. *'Anachār'* emerged in an all-new avatar when contemporary literary works[38] and journals[39] gave a vivid picture of the threat posed by the England returned bhadralok, who was considered 'fallen', by the very same society of which he was, not too long ago, a part of. This was because they were increasingly refusing not only to go through acts of expiation and amends, which offered a way back into the folds of the caste Hindu society, but also many among them desired and believed that their wives would adopt the English social values along with them.

Bread and biscuits, the talismans of the 1830s Derozians' uprising became everyday household necessities by the second half of the century. *Pākrajeshwar* (one of the first recipe books whose popularity is attested by the sale in three editions between 1831 and 1881) was also the first book with a reference of *firngee roti* or bread.[40] Even the

Brahmos embraced biscuit and sherry as part of their initiation ritual.[41] The fact that by the late 1860's and 1870's of the century, bread and biscuits had become an accepted form of diet for the Bengali household in the city was perceivably through the influence of the Brahmos.[42] As recounted in one of the literary works of the day, even the gods were amazed, during their visit to Calcutta in 1871, at the sight of packed boats disgorging their load of clerks at the pier, and the clerks then gorging on bread and biscuits bought from Muslim sellers rushing onto them. And a few even tucked them away in their pockets for consumption at a later time.[43] Recipe books by the eighties of the century, meant for the household were recommending toast-water and other preparations of bread, by then a regular item fitting well in the household grocery.[44]

The first lot of biscuits, often clubbed with bread as proscribed items in the hierarchy of food to be avoided, was procured from the brāhmin shops, but by the latter half of the century, such a selectiveness was largely abandoned. By the 1880s, biscuits too became a part of daily life of the household; so much so that for a number of recipes of chops and cutlets, its use as an ingredient appeared without any footnote of its proscription by the author.[45] Also by this time breads and biscuits bought from outside, from brāhmin makers or not, was a daily ingredient so much so that the author of a recipe book warned readers that the ones bought from the roadside was susceptible to adulteration. But the author attested that a type of bread sold at Wilson' hotel was very good for the patients.[46] Such recommendations can be counted as additional validations, apart from the affordability of bread that led to its featuring a part of the everyday diet of the bhadralok family.

Such was the popularity that by the latter half of the nineteenth century biscuits and essences were made available in abundance by Huntley and Palmer.[47] Not to miss out on the still staunch section of the prospective consumers, Swadeshi enterprises highlighted their Hindu identity by putting out advertisements like the one in 1906 by Swadeshi Biscuits of V S Brothers which proclaimed

"Hindu Biscuits Pure, wholesome, Fresh and Tasteful
Thin Arrowroot, People's Mixed, Maharaja, Tiffin,
Gem, Milk etc."[48]

Such advertisements not only provide evidence of an initiative to leverage one's national identity but that by then a market, for such products, with a healthy demand had emerged. In fact, biscuits and bread had formed indispensable constituents of the daily diet of the middle-class bhadralok of the society. In fact by 1900, bread was treated as a staple food just like rice or pulses, fit for the consumption of children.[49]

Chops and cutlets too also found their place in the kitchen of the bhadralok whose preparation entailed the use of biscuit crumbs, by then as already seen, an essential item on the kitchen shelf.[50] Around 1860s meat chops with Worcester sauce had entered a few houses where friends met to spend time together in the evening.[51] By 1868, women were expected to know how to cook the cutlet or Fowl curry as it was served at Great Eastern.[52] In fact, undeterred by the stiff resistance and vitriolic tirades, the triumvirate of onion, garlic and meat soon tore down the puritanical defenses to rubble and filled every nook and corner of the bhadralok household with their singular aroma. In fact, these were the most prominent battering rams to breach the sanctum of the Bengali household.

Most of the arguments against onion, garlic and meat proposed the climatic and constitutional sensibleness as the merits for adherence to the diet in cadence with one's constitution, climate and traditional practices. This was the principal rationale sought to keep these at bay from the household.[53] In such a discourse, the physicians of the day could not keep themselves aloof from what primarily was under their purview. In fact their recommendations of it were pivotal to the entry of chicken in the household. Thus it is not aberrant to find such debates also being published in the medical journals that circulated on an increasing scale in Bengal from 1860s onwards. Here, the question

of the weakness of the Bengali man as a consequence of the diet he follows was constantly raised and remedial recommendations were regularly put forward. The significance of the doctors prescribing meat to rejuvenate the convalescing patient had a remarkable contribution to the gradual adaptation of meat in the dietary habits of the Bengali bhadralok. Concurrently, recipe books that celebrated meat dishes found its acceptance amongst the city inhabitants.54

Steadily the new concepts of *'sukhādyo', 'sushāstya', 'parimitāhār'* and *'shorir rakha'* projected the new dietary consciousness of the middle class Bengali. Contemporary manuals played an important role, along with the western doctors, in bringing about the entry of the proscribed chicken in the Bengali household. In *Sasthya Sahay* Kaviraaj Girishchandra Sen Kaviratna stressed the nutritious quality of the chicken broth (mangsher shush): *"a curry of chicken prepared with the mildest of spice in health, is nourishing to the body and thoroughly digestible…"* The same argument was seen in Vipradas Mukhopadhyay's book wherein he argued that in the changing times, it was no longer possible to think of a simplistic definition of *pathya* defined in terms of a diet in barley and so incorporation of the 'imported biomedical understandings of the sick man's diet' (e.g. chicken broth) was a necessity.[55] Many articles in the medical journals criticized the Bengali diet of rice and pulses with no or very less amount of meat, as nutritiously inadequate and the major cause of the lack of strength of the Bengalis. They time and again urged to improve the same with the inclusion of adequate quantities of meat and other proteins. In fact some of them carried advice as to how to model the diet of the school going youth according to the norms followed in England to develop the physique of the indigenous youth.[56]

The putative opposition of the bivariate of the elderly generation and women of the household to foreign food were also often liberal in the daily scenario. The scene of mothers/wives, smelling out the stench (of onion or alcohol) on their sons/husbands, on their return to the home featured in many literary works and autobiographies. Rajnarayan

Basu too narrated how his mother was irked when he returned in his college days with such stench in his mouth.[57] But it was not that such repeat offenders were ostracised and so it may be inferred that soon such households were familiar with these tell-tale odours which still had kept such eatables and drinkables at bay. For example, Nilmani Chakrabarti, a leading member of the Brahmo Samaj in the 1880s recounted how his family continued to eat with him in the kitchen in spite of the fact that he had cast away the sacred thread.[58]

The elderly generation also found through the medical prescriptions, a rationale to lower their resistance and allow food to enter the household. Sarada Sundari Devi, in her *Atmakatha* narrated how she tried to make her son Keshab Chandra Sen eat the chicken broth (māngser shush) following the prescription of the doctor[59] Bipin Chandra Pal, the radical nationalist was severely admonished by his father for having lemonade when he was a kid. However later on, his father made Pal drink lemonade when the latter had diarrhoea as an antidote. When asked, Pal's father said that as a medicine it was like food that had been blessed by God.[60]

From the latter half of the century domestic manuals and periodicals delved deeper into the Hindu dietary discourse and in it meat, onion and garlic were becoming common enough to be discussed with their pros and cons in mind.[61] With more fervour than ever before, in the last decade of the century, one of the most ardent defenders of indigenous gastronomic practices, Bhudev Mukhopadhyay defended the logic of proscription in the domain of food in terms of *'deshachar'* (traditions of the nation). In his *Achar Prabandha* he recommended the meticulous observance of shastric injunctions in every minute detail, even if they appeared to be superstitious because; "ritually prescribed conduct was like codes of decent behaviour in civilized society-not necessarily rational."[62]

The profusion of such frequent and varied visits to the discourse of diet, be it in the journals, medical or non-medical, in the manuals of healthy living only but reinforces the fact that meat and its

accompaniments like garlic and onion had already found a place of favour and desire in the eating habits of the bhadralok and advices of Bhudev Mukhopadhyay and Sasadhar Tarkachuramani were imperceptibly receding to the background.[63] While narrating the life of Kissory Chand Mitra (1822-1873) Manmathanath Ghosh remarked that European food and alcohol was consumed daily by the class of educated Bengalis.[64] The fact that a contemporary sketch of Calcutta as early as in the sixties could comfortably place in the daily scene of the Calcutta streets, the butchers of Chitpore who passed along the road carrying large chunks of mutton on their shoulders only reiterates the acceptance of the erstwhile proscribed food items in the regular diet of the Hindoo Bengali.[65]

By the 1880s recipe books had started proclaiming that meat was better than sweets, for a healthy body.[66] In fact direct from the kaviraji prescriptions of the new genre, Bipradas Mukhopadhay prescribed chicken stew for the patients.[67] Onions too were simultaneously praised for its nutritive value. That the only reason Hindus, the above author surmised, stayed away from it was because of its strong pungent smell. But he attested its increasing popularity and how meat dishes were unimaginable without onions. Along with onions, garlic too found its way through commendations of its beneficial effects on the human body.[68] The baby-steps that were taken by onion into the kitchen were noticed by *Pakrajeshwar* which warned that its usage was not for all but depended on individual preference. In fact the absence of onions in the meat recipes of this book was quite clear.[69] But with *Banjan Ratnakar*, the ubiquitous presence of onions and garlic was marked.[70]

By then a complete metamorphosis of the olfactory and the taste receptors of the bengali bhadralok had occurred and he must have craved for the distinct aroma of onion and garlic in the traditional *nirāmish* fare. Hence, Pragyasundari Debi, one of the popular authors of Bengali recipes shared the secret of how the smell of onion can be brought in dishes without its use by soaking asafoetida in ginger juice.[71] The salivating attraction of onions was such that, certain

necessary culinary skills were imparted by the recipe books, to preserve it. For example for the method of cooking *mughlai khichuri*, Bipradas Mukhopadhyay warns that the utensil where it is being cooked should be covered so that the aroma of the food does not dissipate till such time it is consumed. He stresses that though the above can be cooked without onions but it would fail to entice the gourmands.[72] In fact it was noted in 1897 that women had also began consuming meat with the men folk.[73]

Therefore, it is evident that while the nationalist discourse was sparing no effort to resurrect the idealistic and utopian idea of perfect and pure diet, in the everyday life of average bhadralok, his diet was a marked departure from such lofty puritanical scorn redrawing the new sensibilities of the household. And while the public dialogues was rife with the pros and cons of meat, onion and garlic, the middle-class bhadralok was unobtrusively visiting his nearby butchers to carry back home a supply of animal protein to be prepared in his premises as per the recipes of the latest culinary publications. Lost, were the not too distant cries of exhalation of the triumph of overcoming the caste inhibitions of the Derozians buying bread and biscuits from Muslim shops, amidst the chaotic din of economic pragmatisms of the city.

THE DISINFECTING WHIFF

At the turn of the century, cleansers and disinfectants were yet another class of products emanating "new odours" that entered the household on the promise to keep the house clean and fresh in the fast paced over crowded city. There was a certain awareness noticed in the latter half of the century, to maintain a degree of hygiene in one's house. Medical journals had underlined its importance in numerous articles, often authored by doctors be it from homeopathy, allopath or ayurveda branches. In 1888, a medical journal propagated the benefits of keeping the rooms free of dirt and advised its readers to limit the amount of furniture in the bedroom so that they do not impede upon the free

circulation of air.[74] Also, that the beds should be kept away from the walls as the circulation of air is in the least there. Doors and windows should be left wide open for proper ventilation, ran the prescription. Even mothers, unlike the out-of-date disgusting 'native' habit, should not sleep in the same bed with her child as her sweaty bodily exhalations would affect the child's health.[75] In 1898 Svasthya too elaborated the medical essence of well-ventilating the houses and went to the extent of defining an ideal housewife as one who was aware of the proper ways of keeping the rooms airy and fresh![76] One journal went as far as to opine that the reason for the well-being of the scavengers (who cleaned and carried away the filth of the houses) was that they slept in open air and so the body managed to get abundant oxygen to keep them healthy and fit.[77]

These prevailing discourses on the ways to improve the living habit, in fact, paved the way for an emollient entry of the disinfectants into the bhadralok households. Cleanliness, neatness and tidy residences became a byword and eradicating all dirt and unwanted pollutants that cast their shadows on a healthy household became almost an obsession for the bhadraloks of the later years. This preoccupation soon began having a significant bearing on the planning of the new residences too. Consequently, well-ventilated tidied household of the bhadralok was sought to be canonized by such writers like Bhudev Mukhopadhyay who summarised;

> "the master and his wife should summon the servant and give him proper instructions to clean the room which was not swept properly and whose bed sheets and pillows have remained unkept, should be properly tidied as per the given time-slot."[78]

Overcrowding, congestion due to increasing traffic, rise of industrial units and epidemic such as plagues, all contributed to this newfound notion of cleanliness. Tidiness, neatness and proper ventilation became the new *mantra* of all household manuals and periodicals and in

such a background, purifying the house, with the newly available disinfectants were accepted in open arms.

By the latter half of the century, Calcutta was won over by the practicality of the mass produced chemical disinfectants like phenyl and carbolic acid. The deodorisers, the use of bleaching powder and later carbolic acid and phenyl, the colonial products, earlier used only in hospitals gained a growing entry as indispensable products to keep the household clean.[79] Plagues epidemics in Calcutta, more than anything, undeniably altered the notion of purity from its traditional understanding. It was a far cry from the early nineteenth century when housewives, under the strict supervision of their mothers-in-laws cleaned the house themselves (without the help of the housemaids) with water.[80] Cow dung or other till then the tried-and-true substances were more and more discarded on back the growing awareness to more modern cleansers.

A new benchmark for the city housewives was by now the cognizant use of disinfectants to ensure the health of the family. And contemporary journals guided them to put them to effective use. Cleanliness of the house was the new logic of survival that insulated the house from the outside unclean environment. In fact, methods to sanitize the households, contaminated with the patients' clothing, residing in them, was well laid out, in which the abundant use of carbolic acid was prescribed.[81] Vernacular periodicals facilitated the spread of awareness regarding the utility of phenyl, carbolic lotion and chloride of lime (bleaching powder) in the households.[82]

The state too played an active role in promoting the usage of such disinfectants in domestic scenario. Contemporary periodicals reveal that during the outbreaks of plague epidemics, patients often refused to go to the state hospitals.[83] In such a scenario, the government decision of not to implement 'forcible segregation' in Bengal as it had implemented in Bombay, resulted, in upper-classes setting up hospital facilities in their homes during such crises. If a plague affected victim refused to be treated in the caste hospitals (the temporary ones built

to treat the patients), he or she was to be treated in isolation in his house and the government sent free medical attendants and medicine. Later the entire place was 'disinfected' free of cost.[84] Such incidences had also a positive impact on the overall acceptability of these items.

The trepidation of having their near ones die hospitals or on their way in plague coaches (coaches arranged to take the plague patients from the home to the hospital for prevention of the spread of the epidemic in town) was a major stumbling block in effecting appropriate quarantine. There was a strong belief by then that the plague coaches emanated such a foul odor that the patients die the very moment they enter such gurneys.[85] To work a way around it, by the end of the nineteenth century it was postulated that the nitrate of lead and the chloride of lead could come handy in treating the plague victims in the house instead. In lieu of such congested and infected spaces of the hospitals, households evolved as 'safe' havens which were holy and hygienic *à la fois*, symbolised by the new sacred; the phenyl. The admittance of quick lime, carbolic acid and per chloride of mercury lotion in the households was also fostered by the municipal authorities.[86] Behind it lay a new play between the sanitised and the sacred: home as temple. Disinfectants became so reliable that late nineteenth-century house-holder sought to use it as a remedy for all insalubrity.[87] Before the turn of the century such disinfectants became readily available in the doctors' chambers and markets.[88] It would be pertinent to remember that the standard phrase of the domestic manuals for the households; the *"grihamandir"* (temple-house) now entwined the holy with the hygienic. The sanitarians' obsession with disinfectants came *sans doute* from concerns with epidemics such as the plague. But such products also gave the Calcuttans the capacity to cordon off the house from its disease prone surroundings. This contemporary mentality ensured that the presence of 'new smells' in the household was there to stay. Before the turn of the century, vernacular periodicals prescribed carbolic acid (best sold by Calvert) for floors along with carbolic powder, chloride of lime and sulphuric acid gas as well as terebene soap and eucalyptus

to keep the inner sanctum free of germs and dirt.89 These, likewise became regular items in the shopping list of the middle-class households and their presence assured the purity of the house and thereby the creation of a homely space as a refuge and escape the myriad strange odours of the city.

A watershed was reached with P. C Roy's swadeshi enterprise Bengal Chemical & Pharmaceutical Works (1901) dedicating an entire Division for "cosmetics and home products" such as hair oils, disinfectants, moth repellents and other products that by then had carved their niche.[90] The *raison d'être* behind a professional entrepreneur like P C Roy to earmark such considerable portion of his resources and energy was these products had a substantial demand riding the crest of the newfound sensibilities of the dwellers of the young city. In the Swadeshi period these same disinfectants were locally produced with the help of the western scientific know-how and used as propaganda against the anti-colonial movement. In such a context the discourse of hygiene could coexist with (relaxed, but not displaced) caste norms. But the paradox lay in the usage of industrially produced secular goods as sensorial markers of privacy and intimacy!

To conclude, focusing on the undercurrents of everyday that invigorated the rules of pleasure, comfort and health, the paper sought to narrate the history of the unmissable entrants from realms beyond the ken of the Bengali middle-class household (in the context of the colonial urban) that assailed, tweaked and irreversibly reconstructed the sensory give-and-take in terms of taste, smell and touch between the home and the world.

NOTES

1 Sibnath Shastri, *Ramtanu Lahiri o Tathkalin Bangasamaj* (Calcutta: New Age Publishers, 2007), 29.

2 Bhabanicharan Bandyopadhyay, *Dutibilas* (Calcutta, Anglo Inidan Press, 1860).

3 Kshetra Gupta, Sadabar Ekadasi, in *Dinabandhu Rachanavali* (Calcutta: Sishu Sahitya Samsad, 1967), 145.
4 Sharmistha Sen, *Bānglā Sāhitye Bidhobā Citran 1856-1902* (Calcutta: Pustak Bipani, 2007), 97. To cite another example of a maid acting as a messenger was Hara, the milkmaid in; Hardik Bishwas, *Beshyasakti Nibarttak Natak*, *in Prahasane Kalikaler Bangamahila 1860-1909* (Calcutta: Carcapad: 2011).
5 Swapan Basu, *Adhunatan Dampatya, Educational Gazette,* 20 May 1873, in *Sanbad Samayikpatre Unish Sataker Bangali Samaj,* Vol. 2 (Calcutta: Paschimbanga Bangla Academy, 2003), 99.
6 Shib Chunder Bose, *The Hindoos as They Are: A description of the Manners, Customs, and Inner Life of Hindoo Society in Bengal* (London: Thacker Spink & Co., 1883), 15. This is the second edition of his book published in a span of two years. His intention was to draw a picture of the domestic and social economy of the Hindus.
7 Pradip Basu, *Paribarik Prabandha: Bangali Paribarer Sandharva Bichar* (Calcutta: Gangchil, 2012), 71.
8 Partha Chatterjee has shown how marking out the unanimous inner spiritually unpolluted space was crucial for the nationalists who had lost their identity in the outer colonial world and how in such an urge attempts were made to shape an ideal woman in the middle-class *bhadramahilā* and an ideal family out of the home of a middle-class householder. See Partha Chatterjee, *Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Post-Colonial History* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995).
9 Bhabanicharan Bandhopadhay, *Kalikata Kamalalay (1823) in Bhabanicharan Bandhopadhayer Rachanasamagra* (Calcutta: Nabapatra Prakashan, 1987), 9.
10 Pragyasundari Debi, Āmish o Nirāmish Āhar (Calcutta: Ananda, 2008), Preface.
11 S.N. Mukherjee, *Calcutta: Essays in Urban History,* (Calcutta: Subarnarekha, 1993), 97.
12 Krishna Kripalani, *Dwarkanath Tagore: A Forgotten Pioneer: A Life,* (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1981), 51.
13 Sibnath Shastri, *Ramtanu Lahiri O Tathkalin Bangasamaj,* 126.
14 Ibid., 127.
15 Swapan Basu, "Stree Sikhya o Stree Sadhinata" in *Sambad Samayikpatre Unish Sataker Bangali Samaj,* Vol. 2, (Calcutta: Paschimbanga Bangla Academy,

2003), 344, 343-350; Bipradas Mukhopadhay, Pak Pranali (Calcutta: Ananda, 2007), 28.

16 Utsa Ray, *Culture of Food in Colonial Bengal* (PhD dissertation, Pennsylvania State University, 2009).

17 Manmathanath Ghose, *Kissory Chand Mitra* (Calcutta: Parul, 2010), 158.

18 Kshetra Gupta*, Buro Sāliker Ghāre Ro in Madhusudan Rachanavali* (Calcutta: Sahitya Samsad, 1965), 259.

19 Pragyasundar Debi, Āmish o Nirāmish Āhar, Vol. 2 (Calcutta: Ananda Publishers, 1995), 58.

20 Taken from the paper of Mahesh Chandra Deb, January 1839, Before The Society for Acquisition of General Knowledge, reprinted in Amiya Sen, *Social and Religious Reform* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), 140.

21 Bipradas Mukhopadhay, *Pak Pranali*, 27.

22 Utsa Ray, *Culture of Food in Colonial Bengal,* 102.

23 Swapan Basu, "Bangamahilar Bartaman Abastā," *Dipika,* Vol. 1, 1294 (1887) in *Sanbad Samayikpatre Unish Sataker Bangali Samaj,* Vol. 2, 123.

24 Shib Chunder Bose, *The Hindoos As They Are,* 14.

25 Pragyasundari Debi, Āmish o Nirāmish Āhar, Vol. 1, 57f.

26 Swapan Basu (ed.), *Dipika* (1887), *Sambad-Samayikpatre Unish Sataker Bangali Samaj,* Vol. 2, 125.

27 Ibid., *Samaj Dipika* (1885), 346.

28 Rathindranath Roy, *Kalki-Avatar, in Dwijendra Rachanavali,* Vol. 1, (Calcutta: Sahitya Samsad, 1964), 368.

29 Bhabanicharan Bandhyopadhyay, *Nababāu Bilās* (1825), in *Bhabanicharan Bandhyopadhyayer Rachanasamagra* (Calcutta: Nabapatra Prakasan, 1987).

30 Rajnarayan Basu, *Sekal ar Ekal,* (Calcutta: Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, 1874). 37-38.

31 For example, in the news of *Samachar Darpan,* 8 September 1832, taken from Brajendranath Bandhopadhay, *Sambadpatre Sekaler Katha,* Vol. 2, 1830-1840 (Calcutta: Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, 1939), 17. See Jogesh Chandra Bagal, *Unabingsha Satabdir Bangla* (Calcutta: Ranjan Publishing House, September 1963), 178.

32 Ishwar Gupta*, Borodin,* published in *Sambad Pravakar, December 1850; Benoy Ghosh, Samayik Patre Banglar Samajchitra,* Vol. 1, 1840-1905 (Calcutta: Bengal Publishers Pvt. Ltd, 1962), 415-418; Ishwar Gupta, *Anachar, Chobi O Chora,* (Calcutta: Kahini, 1954), 28.

33 Peary Chand Mitra, *Mod Khaoya Boro Dai, Jaat Thakar Ki Upay, in Dusprapya Sahitya Sangraha,* Vol. 3, edited by Kanchan Basu (Calcutta: Reflect Publication, 2004).
34 Bholanath Mukhopadhay, *Apanar Mukh Apani Dekho, in Dusprapya Sahitya Sangraha,* Vol. 2, edited by Kanchan Basu (Calcutta: Reflect Publication, 2002).
35 Tekchand Thakur Junior, *Kalikatar Nukochuri, in Dusprapya Sahitya Sangraha*, Vol. 1, edited by Kanchan Basu (Calcutta: Reflect Publication, 2002).
36 Rajnarayan Basu, *Atmacharit (*Calcutta: Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, 1974), 42.
37 Ibid., 136.
38 D. L. Roy, *Samaj Bibhrat o Kalki Avatar* (1895), from *Dwijendra Rachana Samagraha* (Calcutta: Shakkharata Prokashan, 1973) or D L Roy*, Ekghare* (1889), from *Dwijendra Rachana Samagraha,* (Calcutta: Shakkharata Prokashan, 1973).
39 *Somprakash, 21 Ashar,1288 Bangabda,* in Benoy Ghosh, *Samayik Patre Banglar Samajchitra*, Vol. 4, 1840-1905 (Calcutta: Bengal Publishers Pvt. Ltd, 1966), 301-303.
40 Sripantha, *Pakrajeshwar o Ratnakar* (Calcutta: Subarnarekha, 2004), 64.
41 Rajnarayan Basu, *Rajnarayan Basur Atmacharit: An Autobiography of Rajnarayan Basu* (Calcutta: Chirayata Prakashan, 2006), 12, 44.
42 Bipin Chandra Pal*, Memories of my Life and Times: In the Days of My Youth 1857-1884* (Calcutta Modern Book Academy, 1932), 196-197.
43 Durgacharan Ray, *Debganer Marte Agaman* (Calcutta: Dey's Publishing, 2009), 269.
44 Bipradas Mukhopadhay, *Pak Pranali*, 286.
45 Ibid., 200.
46 Ibid., 2, 290.
47 Utsa Ray, *Culture of Food in Colonial Bengal,* 138.
48 Iqbal Bhuiyan, Advertisements, in *Selections from The Mussalman*, 1906-1908 (Calcutta: Papyrus, 1994), 204.
49 Pragyasundari Debi, *Āmish o Nirāmish Āhar*, Vol. 1 (Calcutta: Ananda, 2008), 450.
50 Ibid., 180, 187.
51 Manmathanath Ghose, "Swadeshbrati Sir Ashutosh Choudhuri," in *Sekaler Kriti Bangali* (Calcutta: Parul, 2014), 279.

52 Sripantha, *Pakrajeshwar o Ratnakar,* 63.

53 Rajnarayan Basu, *Sekal r Ekal* (Calcutta: Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, 1874), 43-47.

54 Notably, *Pākrājeshwar*, which was first published in 1831 by Bishweswar Tarkalankar and later edited by Gourisankar Tarkabhagis in 1854 under the auspices of the Burdwan Raj, was followed (four years later) by *Bānjan Ratnākār* (1858), both replete with meat dishes. Sripantha, *Pakrajeshwar o Ratnakar* (Calcutta: Subarnarekha, 2004), 12, 15.

55 Vipradas Mukhopadhay, *Pathya Randhan*, (Maniktala Street Pak Pranali Office, Calcutta, 1899).

56 To cite an instance see *Shasthya,* Agrahayan, 1307 Bangabda (1900) in Pradip Basu*, Samayiki: Purono Samayik Patrer Prabanda Sankalan,* Vol.1: Bigyan O Samaj 1850-1901 (Calcutta: Ananda Publishers, 1998), 142.

57 Rajnarayan Basu, *Atmacharit.* See Gautam Niyogi (ed.), *Saradsundari Debi, Atmakatha* (Calcutta: Ababhash, 2010), 47.

58 Nilmani Chakrabarti, *Atmajibansmriti* (Calcutta: Sadharan Brahmasamaj, 1975), 37.

59 Gautam Niyogi (ed.) *Saradsundari Debi, Atmakatha,* 44.

60 Bipinchandra Pal. *Sattar Batsar: Atmajibani* (Calcutta: 2005), 57–61.

61 *Chikitshak o Samalochak, Bhadra-Poush 1302* (1895) in Pradip Basu*, Samayiki: Purono Samayik Patrer Prabanda Sankalan,* Vol. 1: Bigyan O Samaj 1850-1901 (Calcutta: Ananda Publishers, 1998); Ibid., 109. *Chikitsha Sammilani Baishak, 1292 Bangabda* (1885) in Ibid., 81; *Chikitsā Sammilani, 1292 Bangabda,* (1885), in Ibid., 154-155. See *Chikitsha Sammilani 1292 Bangabda* (1885) in Ibid., 137, 141; *Shasthya, Shraban, 1306, Bangabda* (1899) in Ibid., 334.

62 Mansawita Sanyal and Ranjan Bandhyopadhay, *Achar Prabandha (*Essay on Correct Conduct), 1898, *Bhudev Mukhopādhāy Prabandha Samagra* (Calcutta: Mitra and Ghosh, 1968).

63 Sasadhar Tarkachuramani, *Dharma Bakhya* (Calcutta: title page missing, 1910) 302, 382, 394.

64 Manmathanath Ghose, *Karambir Kissory Chand Mitra* (Calcutta: Parul: 2010), 119.

65 *The Observant Owl: Hootum's Vignettes of Nineteenth-Century Calcutta*, translated by Swarup Roy, Kaliprasanna Sinha's *Hootum Pyachar Naksha* (Calcutta: Black Kite: 2007), 11.

66 Bipradas Mukhopadhay, Pak Pranali, 35.
67 Ibid., 276, 297.
68 Ibid., 44.
69 Sripantha, *Pakrajeshwar o Ratnakar,* 11, 23.
70 Ibid., 102.
71 Pragyasundari Debi, *Āmish o Nirāmish Āhar*, 460, Also, recipe books contained a number of meat recipes to cater to different tastes. See Vols. 2, 17, 33, 36, and 45.
72 Bipradas Mukhopadhay, *Pak Pranali,* 114.
73 Anonymous, *Mangsho Randhan o Bakshan*, in *Mahilā* 3, no. 5 (1897): 100-110.
74 "Svasthya bijnan," *Chikitsā Sammilani* 2, no. 1, Baishakh 1292 (1885): 8.
75 Ibid., 10
76 D. D. Gupta, *Svasthya* 2, no. 4, 1305 (1898): 145–151.
77 *Svasthya* 4, no. 2 (1900): 34.
78 Mansawita Sanyal and Ranjan.Bandhyopadhay, "Pāribārik prabandha" in *Bhudev Mukhopādhāy Prabandha Samagra*, 86.
79 Purnima Debi, *Thakurbarir Gaganthakur* (Calcutta: Punascha, 2009), 51.
80 Gautam Niyogi (ed.), *Saradsundari Debi, Ātmakathā.*
81 "Bubonic Plague er Chikitsā", *Bishāk Darpan*, March 1897, 363.
82 "Kalikātāi Plague," *Svasthya* 2, no. 1, Baishakh 1305 (1898): 13, 18.
83 "Plague Haite Sikhyā", *Svasthya* 2, no. 2, Jaishtha 1305 (1898): 43.
84 Srilata Chatterjee, *Plague and Politics in Bengal, Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol. 66 (2005–06), 1197f.
85 "Plaguer Pradurbhābe Kalikātār Atit o Bartamān Obosthā," *Svasthya* 2, no. 4, Sraban 1305 (1898): 81.
86 "Plague Nibāran Bishyai Government er Cheshtā," *Svasthya* 4, no. 1, Baishakh 1307 (1900): 14f.
87 "Sankramak Pirā," *Svasthya* 2, no. 12, Chaitra 1305 (1898): 273.
88 "Kalikātāi Plague," *Svasthya* 2, no. 1, Baishakh 1305 (1898): 15; "Plague Bij Nāsh," *Svasthya* 2, no. 12, Chaitra 1305 (1899), 285.
89 "Plague Bij Nāsh," *Svasthya* 2, no. 12, Chaitra 1305 (1899): 286f.
90 Bengal Chemicals (n.d.). Accessed 13 July 2019, http://bengalchemicals.co.in/our-founder-history/; *P C Ray: Life and Experiences of a Bengali Chemist* (Calcutta: Chukerbutty and Chatterjee, 1935).