



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Shedol shutki: The diminishing cultural art of fish preservation from erstwhile East Bengal

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Abstract

Shedol Shutki, a variant of dried fish, is a gastronomical delight for Bengalis and is a dominant cuisine of the erstwhile East Bengal in regions of north-east India and Bangladesh. While before partition, this culinary delight was a household tradition, after partition, when the East Bengal immigrants brought this food culture along with them, it wasn't received with much welcome. While the host region considered it pungent, the newer generations choose to refrain from it on several grounds, one being their immigrant recognition as a part of the cuisine identity. This study explores the multidimensional aspects of this indigenous food practice, probing its historical importance, nutritional content, and the modern challenges endangering its cultural continuity. The research employs an ethnographic qualitative analysis to explore the intricate balance of this fermented fish preservation practice as a mode of cultural preservation and the dwindling of this culture with the modern generation, who degrade this traditional kitchen recipe as an odious fetish.

Keywords: Cuisine identity, Cultural preservation, East Bengal, Food culture, Immigrant recognition, Shedol shutki.

"Shutki is not merely preserved protein, but a complex cultural artifact encoding the coastal Bengalis' relationship with seasonality, preservation techniques, and communal labor. The pungent aroma of Shedol that repels outsiders simultaneously functions as an olfactory marker of belonging, demarcating cultural boundaries and shared historical memory."

— Manoshi Mitra, "Agrarian Social Structure."

"In the gastronomic geography of East Bengal, Shedol Shutki serves as both taste and text—a potent symbol of regional identity that survived displacement and partition. Its preparation and consumption constitute a ritualized performance of collective memory, linking diaspora communities to ancestral landscapes they may never have personally known."

— Amitav Ghosh.

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Introduction

Food and culture have always been an integral part of traditional collective identity, transmitted through generations. In Bengali culture, Shedol Shutki, a centuries-old technique of fish preservation procured through fermentation and drying, is not just a gastronomic tradition but also ineluctably connected to the historical, geographical, and social context of bygone East Bengal (now Bangladesh). This pungent, palatable delicacy, which East Bengalis have relished through generations, has had a chequered path through partition, migration, and the attendant battles of cultural preservation and assimilation. The 1947 partition of Bengal initiated a large-scale migration of Bengali Hindus from East Pakistan (subsequently Bangladesh) to India, especially to West Bengal, Tripura, and Assam. Along with their physical belongings, these refugees brought their food culture, including the preparation and consumption of Shedol Shutki. But the transfer of this food practice to new spatial and cultural locations was not frictionless. The umami smell of the fermented fish, which was once a symbol of communal identity and culinary delight, was generally met with disdain by the host societies, thus placing it at the periphery of acceptability and frequently stigmatizing its adherents. The preparation and consumption of Shedol Shutki have been transformed into a field of cultural identity negotiation, particularly among the India-based East Bengali diaspora. For the first generation, it is a remembrance of homeland and culture, whereas for the

majority in the second generation, it is an odious food that asserts their immigrant identity. Of specific concern is the paradoxical circumstance that, in spite of its nutritional and cultural value, Shedol Shutki is waning because of altered food demands, modernization, and the internalized stigma attached to its consumption. The multidimensional aspects of Shedol Shutki contribute to the broader horizon of food anthropology when we locate its ethnographic nature of diasporic identities.

Historical Background of Shedol Shutki and Its Cultural Significance

Origin and Evolution of Shedol Shutki Consumption

Fish and meat preservation has been an ancient practice in many Asian culinary preparations. Geographically, the consumption of dried fish spans across a wide stretch of South Asian countries where there is only seasonal availability of fresh fish. Hence, preservation enables a supply of fish all year round, meeting the nutritional quota. Through archaeological and historical studies, researchers have discovered that this process of fish preservation has existed for centuries in the deltaic environment. (Chakraborty, 2018). The rich rivers, marshlands and coastlines of East Bengal have an abundant source of fish; however, their availability is seasonal, hence preserving them through fermented drying is essential for a perennial supply. This process of making Shedol Shutki was developed among East Bengal coastal and riverine dwellers, who would take tiny freshwater fish like *Puntius Sphore*, locally called 'puti', clean and salt it before regular drying in the sun. This technique not only added shelf life of a few months to the dried fish but also built up a strong flavour characteristic that came to identify this culinary custom. (Rahman et al., 2017). Colonial historical records speak of the commonality of dried fish consumption among the Bengalis, especially in the eastern tracts. British colonial reports, though ethnographically deprecating of the pungent smell, reported the pervasiveness of dried fish in the rural East Bengali diet (Sengupta, 2010).

Cultural and Social Significance

In the sociocultural context of East Bengal, Shedol Shutki evolved from its functional beginnings to serve as a symbol of regional identity and culinary skill. The preparation of Shedol Shutki began as a feminine community-driven activity, in which women mostly partook. These women required certain skills in choosing the correct size of fish, cleaning and gutting them, adding preservatives like salt and spices and were knowledgeable about the drying process, time and correct method of preserving. (Bhattacharjee, 2019). Shedol Shutki's consumption was woven into the observational calendar of life in East Bengal, where certain dishes with this ingredient seemed to correspond to some agricultural activities or other seasonal festivities. For rural

people, during the monsoon months when fresh fish was hard to find or relatively costly, Shedol Shutki served as an easy and cheap source of protein, providing both a practical food solution and a culturally important cuisine. Apart from its practical usage, Shedol Shutki is also embedded as a cultural identity for the East Bengal communities, for whom this was more than a staple. It intertwined through Bangla folk songs, oral lore, proverbs, and literature, which contained ample references of Shedol Shutki as a cultural distinction of East Bengal. Therefore, it found its expression in the form of a metaphor for endurance, sustenance and preservation of the distinctive character of the regional culture (Chowdhury, 2015).

Partition and Cultural Displacement

Bengal was a dominant hub of colonial interest and hence it underwent partition thrice. First was the partition of Bengal by Lord Curzon based on religious division, second was the bordering through the Radcliffe line, which marked East Pakistan as a separate nation and finally the Bangladesh liberation movement of 1971. This massive uproar triggered significant migration that deeply influenced the region's cultural landscape. Millions of East Bengali Hindus were forced to migrate and settled mostly in West Bengal, Tripura, Assam, and other parts of India. For these displaced populations, the making and consumption of Shedol Shutki became an important way to navigate spaces in the diaspora where their cultural heritage and identity could be maintained despite their forced cultural transition (Dasgupta, 2016). However, this custom wasn't received with a positive embrace, which proved to be culturally challenging in the newly constructed nation of social and geographical contexts. The unique smell of Shedol Shutki, once a common feature of East Bengali cuisine, became controversial in the more crowded urban areas where many refugees relocated. Although the West Bengali population shared linguistic and cultural roots, they often looked down on this culinary tradition, associating it with lower socio-economic status or a lack of refinement (Bandyopadhyay, 2020).

The consequential stigma centering on Shedol Shutki consumption led to a quintessential inquisitorial of the refugee identity among the displaced communities. For the first-generation migrants, the consumption of shedol shutki became more of a cultural preservation that emerged as a form of resistance and holding onto their identity. Conversely, others, particularly those aiming for acceptance and integration into their new communities, chose to distance themselves from this distinctive culinary practice as a means of fitting in and achieving social mobility.

Nutritional Aspects and Preparation Methods

Traditional Preparation Methods and Nutritional Value

Despite the negative social perception often linked to Shedol Shutki these days, scientific research shows that

this traditional food has a lot of nutritional benefits. The process of fermenting and drying not only keeps the fish fresh but also boosts some of its nutritional qualities while creating the unique flavors that make this dish special. Based on different studies concerning its nutrition, Shedol Shutki is rich in protein, with its protein content ranging from 30 to 45% depending on the type of preparation and fish species used (Majumdar et al., 2018). That is a very large quantity in comparison to fresh fish protein content, thus extremely important for human beings with traditional protein-scarce diets. Shedol Shutki contains non-negligible amounts of calcium and phosphorus as well, the reason being the presence of small bones softened and made edible as a result of the fermentation process. Most notably, in one study, around 100 grams of Shedol Shutki was said to supply 1000-1200 mg of calcium, much more than many common food sources (Sarker et al., 2020). Because of that, this nutritional value was profoundly important in traditional rural nourishments, where dairy products were unavailable regularly. Apart from that, the preparation of Shedol Shutki procedures makes fermentation possible, along with the development of beneficial microorganisms. According to research, several heat-lactic-acid bacteria occur in a properly fermented Shedol Shutki that may produce probiotic effects on consumption (Ahmed et al., 2019). These microorganisms, in conjunction with fermentation, will also break down some raw fish anti-nutritional factors and further enhance the bioavailability of nutrients. Traditional preparation methods use high salt concentrations that serve as a natural preservative to impede the growth of pathogenic bacteria, but current considerations for nutrition caution about the potentially hazardous impacts of high sodium consumption. However, certain modern ways of preparation exist to modulate salt input while retaining both safety and taste features.

Regional Variations and Culinary Applications

Shedol Shutki's preparation and use in cookery vary distinctly between present-day Bangladesh and the diaspora from East Bengal in other landscaped after partition. The differences reflect local tastes, available ingredients, and adaptation to new surroundings. In the regions of Sylhet and the northeast, Shedol Shutki is usually salty; the fermentation process is longer, producing a sharp, pungent taste. The coastal belts like Chittagong and Cox market add a lot of chilies to curtail the pungency and make it a spicy version. This particular type of Shutki is usually cooked with different kinds of vegetable curries in winter, like eggplant, potato, and pumpkin. In the central part, particularly Mymensingh, Shedol Shutki is fermented for a shorter period, then cooked with spices like cumin, nigella seeds, and raw papaya, forming "Shedol Jhol," a spicy curry. In West Bengal, the East Bengali resettled communities made further adaptations, such as shorter

methods of fermenting due to the lack of space to carry out the tradition and the possible aversion of neighbours to its strong fragrance. Other adaptations include cooking it outdoors or on rooftops, so that its odor would not affect the people residing close (Roy, 2016). These adaptations reveal the resilience and flexibility of this culinary tradition, though it continues to struggle in contemporary contexts for its continued practice.

Classism and Reception of Shedol Shutki after Partition in India

Sociocultural Dynamics of Food and Status

The reception of Shedol Shutki post-partition, in the newly constructed territory of Bengal, was a symbolic identity of being a refugee. The food was not only considered inferior in social status but also framed cultural identity stories where a sizable number of East Bengali refugees settled. After partition, the reception of East Bengali cuisine underwent discrimination and scrutiny within the all-encompassing ambit of Bengali culture, although they shared a linguistic and cultural continuum together. Before partition, the separate regional traditions of East and West Bengal in cooking form had always been diffused through the prism of innate naturalness, but not valorized in any decisive manner pertaining to social hierarchy. However, in the post-partition West Bengal, a place that saw East Bengali migration as a chance to make competition among refugees for resources, the culinary practices soon became magnified and hierarchized. The sweetness in flavor and the unassuming sublimity of West Bengali cuisine became commonly identified as "refined" or "sophisticated" in direct contrast to the stronger preferences of East Bengali cuisine, with marked use of strong-smelling ingredients and fermented food like Shedol Shutki. The culinary differentiation was laced with overtones of class; increasingly, cuisine from West Bengal began to be associated with urban, educated, middle-class sensibilities, while East Bengali food practices elaborated further by invoking powerful fragrances exuding from Shedol Shutki became markers of lower economic status or rural backwardness. Such culinary classism was further entrenched by literature, media portrayals, and quotidian social interactions, often written shallowly, that branded East Bengali refugees as unsophisticated or culturally inferior.

Sensory Dimensions of Cultural Belonging and Exclusion

The example of Shedol Shutki illustrates the ways in which sensory sensations—specifically olfactory ones—are such strong carriers of cultural belonging and exclusion. As David Howes (2003) makes out in his classic text on sensory anthropology, "the senses are not so much biological as they are culturally conditioned, with societies evolving unique sensory orders which elevate certain sensory sensations to a privileged status over others." (Howes 139)

This form of sensory stigmatization was key to the marginalization of East Bengali refugees. Sarah Pink (2015) in her sensory ethnography studies, contends that sensory experiences are central to the ways that individuals make sense and classify their social worlds through physical segregation, housing disputes, and social stigma based upon the odor of Shedol Shutki exemplifies how sensory bias operates as a mechanism of social control and exclusion. Particularly, the aversion amongst younger generations to Shedol Shutki is a prime example of what Sutton (2001) terms “sensory acculturation.” This explains how children of immigrants may develop a sensory taste preference related to the host culture, as opposed to that of their family origins. The transition from preference to sensing unease is not just about taste, but rather constitutes an affective re-orientation to new cultural values and social aspirations. Further, the affective discomfort and indignity exhibited by younger generations in relation to Shedol Shutki illustrate the embodied and pre-cognitive emotional responses, cultural identification and distancing.

Cultural Capital and the Social Dynamics of Food Practices

Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital presents a strong framework for analyzing the class dynamics that shaped the reception of Shedol Shutki in post-partition India. As Bourdieu (1984) defines it, cultural capital refers to the knowledge, skills, education, and advantages that individuals have, allowing them to claim a higher status in society. In post-partition Bengal, the West Bengali cuisine was linked with having more cultural capital, and the East Bengali food practices, like the eating of Shedol Shutki, were framed in relation to being lesser in the cultural hierarchy. This categorization was not torrential but instead inscribed in a larger portrayal of power relations that attached greater value to certain forms of cultural expression. As Bourdieu would argue, the “refined” or “sophisticated” taste of West Bengali cuisine was in contrast to the “unsophisticated” or “backward” character of East Bengali food practices— this notion of hyper-distinction gave language to the way social groups create and reinforce class distinctions based on taste preferences. The educated and middle-class West Bengalis articulated their cultural superiority by constituting their food practices as refined, thus allowing them to render East Bengali food into a lesser status within the power hierarchy of cultural practices. (Bourdieu, 118).

Contemporary attempts to revitalize Shedol Shutki represent efforts to reframe its cultural value from negative to positive by reframing the dish within new discourses of heritage, sustainability and culinary distinction. By archiving, theorizing and creatively reimagining Shedol Shutki, cultural organizations and individuals are working to contest the value systems that previously devalued the foodway.

Sensory and Capital Integration

Sensory studies and capital theorization overlap to highlight the deeply embodied sensory dispositions that link identifiers of social status and identity formation. The sensory qualities of Shedol Shutki, for East Bengali refugees, produced an affective response associated with heritage, belonging, and cultural identity. However, those same sensory experiences should now consider the context of post-partition, where these sensory experiences have become associated with negative social meaning, or what Sara Ahmed (2010) refers to as “sticky affects” – emotions or feelings that cling to things (or, in this case, activities) as a means of monitoring the subjects of the society of what we should immediately recoil from as a cultural practice.

This emotional component adds a layer of complexity to Bourdieu’s largely static construct of cultural capital by emphasizing how embodied, sensory experiences create emotional relationships to cultural practices that can escape rational deliberation of social gain. For first-generation refugees, the emotional ease created by familiar sensory experiences often outweighed the social disadvantages associated with practicing stigmatized cultures. In contrast, the succeeding generations without direct sensory memories of homeland, the negative effects that adhered to Shedol Shutki and other non-dispositional cultural practices exemplify a collection of motivations like embarrassment, disgust, and social anxiety, overshadowing any cultural value.

Spatial Politics and Sensory Discrimination

The material circumstances of refugee resettlement also impacted Shedol Shutki’s acceptance in post-partition India. For the first few weeks, East Bengal refugees were housed in refugee camps that were highly populated before they moved to colony settlements or shared accommodation in previously established neighborhoods. These spatial relations, determined by density levels and the nature of shared housing, had particular constraining effects on sustaining foodways that were conditioned by strong sensory properties. The East Bengali recipes that were made available were often remodeled for West Bengal consumption by reducing the pungency and fermented nature of the recipes that came with their preparation in East Bengal. These physical arrangements, defined by a high density of populations and shared accommodations, posed specific difficulties for the sustainability of traditional food practices that entailed strong smells.

The strong odour of Shedol Shutki, whether in preparation or while cooking, became a source of conflict in such communal areas. Neighbours, especially those from the West Bengali community, frequently complained about the “putrid” smell and often created housing disputes and additional social exclusion of East Bengali households who maintained this tradition (Banerjee, 2017). Certain housing

societies even went so far as to enact formal or informal policies against cooking food with pungent smells, directly affecting the capacity of East Bengali families to continue this part of their culinary tradition.

This sensory discrimination translated from the household into affecting social life more widely. Anecdotal evidence collected in oral history interviews cited that East Bengali children were teased at school as “smelling like shutki” or as having houses that bore this telltale odour. This sort of bullying lent support to internalized shame on the part of younger generations in the East Bengali diaspora about this gastronomic practice (Chakraborty, 2019).

Institutional and Media Representations

The marginalization of Shedol Shutki was also reinforced in institutional and media portrayals of Bengali food in post-partition India. Post-partition cookbooks, restaurant menus, and food writing overwhelmingly portrayed West Bengali food as the “authentic” or “normative” expression of Bengali cuisine, whereas East Bengali specialties, especially those featuring fermented or pungently flavored foods, were sometimes excluded or written about as quirkily local variations and not as essential part of Bengali culinary tradition (Ray, 2016).

Such gastronomic hegemony manifested in the fledgling restaurant culture of Kolkata and other urban areas, where the presentation of Bengali cuisine was vastly slanted towards West Bengali recipes. The East Bengali recipes that were presented were usually refashioned for West Bengali palates by reducing the pungency and fermented elements that characterized the original preparations. Shedol Shutki was rarely featured on restaurant menus and sporadically included in food festivals as a culinary representation, which again highlighted its marginal cultural position within a larger foodie representation of Indian Bengali cuisine (Ghosh, 2017). Negative media representations of East Bengal cuisines in literature, film, and television augmented the problematic positionality of the food or individuals as subpar. For example, Shedol Shutki was ambivalently employed to cue either an inability to assimilate to the elite palate or signaled a lower social class, cultural incapacity, or obstinate adherence to outdated practices. (Sengupta, 2018). Thus, snippets of social exclusion, valid or invalid, cumulatively shaped a nuanced relationship between East Bengali refugees, their gastronomic tradition, and social mobility in post-partition India. It also reflected complex decision-making regarding how to maintain culture versus assimilation, among many other ensuing consequences.

Succeeding Generations and Their Reception of Shedol Shutki

Intergenerational Transmission and Cultural Continuity

The pattern of Shedol Shutki consumption over generations of the Indian East Bengali diaspora documents a steadily

downward trend that tracks larger processes of cultural assimilation and change. This downward trend can be identified through successive generations with different affiliations with this food culture. The first generation, those directly experiencing migration from East Bengal, generally had strong affinities to pre-migration food customs. For this generation, these food customs were a concrete retention of homelands and cultural identity in sojourning and sometimes alienating places. Interviews with surviving members of this generation reveal the emotional value associated with these food practices even when faced with logistical difficulties and social prejudices (Bose, 2019). The second generation, children of refugees born in India, have had an ambivalent experience with Shedol Shutki. Having experienced it through their parents, who prepared and ate it for enjoyment or sustenance, they were accustomed to its flavor and cultural significance, but these participants also experienced the social stigma associated with the food practice. This generation also abruptly positioned themselves in ambivalent ways — partaking and eating the food practice as family members, yet resisting accepting the tradition as a public member with others (Bhattacharya, 2018). The third and fourth generations — both the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of the original refugee populations developed an aversion towards Shedol Shutki. These later generations, raised in settings where the connection to East Bengal is now much more tenuous and where integration with larger Indian Bengali culture is further developed, often treat Shedol Shutki as an anachronistic oddity and a dissimulated embarrassment. Therefore, their dietary preference is toward a modern urban Indian diet or a multicultural globalized diet (Chakraborty, A., 2020). This generational change is part of a wider trajectory of cultural change in which salient diasporic practices fade into the distant past with each passing generation and with increasing incorporation into host societies.

Sensory Acculturation and Changing Taste Preferences

The younger generations’ dislike for Shedol Shutki stems from social pressures and major changes in how people develop their senses and tastes. Sensory acculturation describes how individuals adjust their sensory preferences, taste and smell to match a new cultural environment (Jamal, 2018). Young people growing up in Indian cities have been exposed to many food cultures. These range from various regional Indian dishes to pan-Asian influences and global fast food. This exposure has shaped their taste preferences, making them quite different from their East Bengali ancestors.

Shedol Shutki has a strong profile of umami, sharp, and fermented flavors. Unlike their sweetness, mildness, and more consistent taste blends that typified modern eating habits in urban areas (Goyal 2019), Shedol Shutki’s strong taste and smell communicated culinary pleasure and

connected East Bengalis to their culture. However, younger generations find this smell challenging. Neuroscience shows that our preference for smell depends on our environment and cultural upbringing. (Shepherd, 2016). Neuroscientific studies indicate that olfactory preference is heavily influenced by early environmental exposure and cultural conditioning..(Shepherd,2016).

This sensory acculturation is complemented by the growing prevalence of air-conditioned, enclosed urban spaces, which enhance sensitivity to pungent food and create functional disincentives for cooking foods with distinctive smells. The transition from open, ventilated traditional housing to apartment dwellings has material consequences for the perpetuation of culinary traditions that generate potent aromas (Roy, 2019).

Building New Identity and Culture

For younger generations of the East Bengali diaspora, the association with Shedol Shutki is bound up with identity formation and negotiation. In contrast to their preceding generations, who closely identified themselves as East Bengalis or Bangaals, younger generations more often identify as generic Indian Bengalis, with refugee origins becoming an ebbing feature of their lineage rather than a defining part of personal identity (Datta, 2020). In this, the distinctive gastronomy of East Bengal refugee identity and the entailing stigma, such as the consumption of Shedol Shutki, are subjected to active distancing. Hence, the succeeding generations exhibit embarrassment or discomfort in their discussion of such cuisine and reject it as a component of social opinion management and making new identities (Sarkar, 2021). This cultural distancing process is particular to Shedol Shutki and is a widespread trend where generation after generation of immigrant or refugee groups tend to shed unique cultural practices that are different from what is found among the majority of society.

Younger generations' rejection of Shedol Shutki, therefore, signifies more than a mere food choice shift; it is a product of intricate identity, belonging, and social positioning negotiations in the modern Indian context. For some, this rejection is embedded within a larger project of upward social mobility and integration, while for others, it is an expression of real sensory distaste developed through varied environmental and cultural experiences. These forces have profound implications for the cultural continuity of this traditional practice, with each successive generation less likely to know about Shedol Shutki preparation or to add it to their repertoire of dishes.

Cultural Preservation through Balance of Tradition and Modernity

Contemporary Efforts at Cultural Revitalization

The last few years have seen nascent attempts at preserving and reviving the cultural heritage surrounding Shedol

Shutki. These efforts are part of a larger trend in which aspects of culinary heritage that were once stigmatized or marginalized are being reappropriated and revalued within new theoretical frameworks that foreground cultural diversity and heritage preservation.

One major advancement has been the creation of cultural institutions dedicated to East Bengali heritage preservation, including the "East Bengal Heritage Foundation" in Kolkata and the "Barisal Sammilani" in other cities that have high East Bengali diaspora populations. These institutions have undertaken documentation efforts to document traditional knowledge associated with Shedol Shutki preparation, including oral history interviews with older community members who hold this knowledge (Ghosh, 2020).

Academic institutions, particularly in the Global North, reposition Shedol Shutki through scientific studies that connect it both to its nutritional value, historic significance, and role in larger fermented food cultures around the world. Research at West Bengal, Tripura, and Assam universities has examined the microbiological characteristics, preservation methods, and nutritional contents of Shedol Shutki, creating scientific validation for indigenous knowledge that was only passed down in practice before (Majumdar et al., 2021). These food revival efforts tend to locate East Bengali food culture in discourses about authenticity, biodiversity, and sustainable food systems, thus producing new appreciation contexts different from the stigmatized consumption these same food practices received during the post-partition decades (Chowdhury, 2022).

Modernization and Adaptation of Traditional Practices

While the traditional method of Shedol Shutki preparation is waning, attempts are made to preserve it with various variations and modifications. Technical modifications to traditional preparation methods have appeared to solve certain issues that are related to health, practical matters, and changes in sensory preferences. Some artisans prepare a reduced-salt version of Shedol Shutki that remains safe on account of a pH-controlled process and refrigeration, thus addressing modern concerns of sodium intake. While others have designed closed fermentation systems to contain the distinctive aroma during the preparation process, making the transition from traditional to urban living smoother (Sarma, 2021). Innovations in cooking have given a contemporary context to Shedol Shutki in cooking styles and presentation formats. Chefs in Bengali restaurants and home cooks who post recipes on digital platforms use Shedol Shutki as a flavoring element in making new dishes that cater to contemporary taste buds. In doing so, they explore using Shedol Shutki as a umami-enhancing ingredient in smaller quantities rather than as a dish centerpiece, pairing it up with other ingredients that complement or moderate its flavor, and are packaging it within fusion dishes and tasting menus to make it more

palatable to the younger generations (Roy, 2022). Such marketing and presentation strategies have also changed to redefine how Shedol Shutki fits into contemporary food discourses. Specifically, some producers put artists [TB1] labels and elaborate branding on Shedol Shutki made in the traditional manner to present them as cultural heritage products, very different from traditional staple foods. Some of these marketing approaches often foreground claims to global trends concerning the popularity of fermented foods for their probiotic benefits, traditional means of food preservation as alternatives to industrial processing, and culinary authenticity as a cultural experience form (Banerjee, 2020).

Digital Media and Diaspora Connections

Digital revitalization efforts present new opportunities for sensory transference and accumulation of cultural capital. Online environments allow the user to understand Shedol Shutki, visually and narratively, at primary levels while omitting the moment of interaction with the potent image of its smell. Online environments are imagined to generate new experiences of appreciation that disassociate from the negative sensory experience. In tandem, the efforts to reframe Shedol Shutki as cultural heritage within academic and culinary environments attempt to recast an experience of liability to an experience of asset within Bourdieu's economy of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 229).

The digital platforms have built a repository through which Shedol Shutki recipes are revived as a cultural identity. Digital forums, such as "Bangal Recipes" on Facebook and "East Bengal Food Heritage" on Instagram, dedicate themselves to the East Bengali cultural heritage, providing spaces for people spanning all generations and geographical locations to exchange recipes, memories, and even contemporary takes on traditional dishes. Such platforms have evolved as a cultural exchange medium to embrace and debunk the myths associated with the consumption of Shedol Shutki, and transcend the geographical boundaries in passing down of the culinary art. (Das, 2021). Such material gives the younger generations or those raised without direct family connection to this culinary knowledge an accessible entryway to consider it an aspect of their cultural heritage. These digital formats further allow modifications of presentation that might contribute toward enhancing the appeal of such practices to contemporary audiences, for example, through the use of visually appealing aesthetic forms, linking to wider food world trends, or humanizing cultural practice within the context of narrating personal stories (Chowdhury, S., 2021). The digital space operates in tandem with transnational ties between East Bengali groups in India and post-liberation Bangladesh, forging new ecologies of cultural exchange and heritage value. Online spaces in which Bengalis from both countries share perspectives regarding their shared culinary

heritage marked the advent of visibility for this specific food practice as an irreplaceable cultural heritage and not merely as a signifier of their refugee experience. These cross-border digital links have also made it easier to get real ingredients and old knowledge that some diaspora groups might have forgotten (Sen, 2020).

Future Directions with Greater Implications

The theoretical synthesis of Shedol Shutki leads to numerous pathways for the future of cultural practices. First, it highlights the need to consider sensory dimensions of cultural heritage preservation in addition to the documentation of recipes or techniques. Unless modes of sensory acculturation are addressed, which are creating generations of individuals who have become averse to these sensory experiences (e.g., smell and taste), heritage preservation may become stagnant, or preserved cultural practices may become obsolete. Second, reframing Shedol Shutki in new discourses of cultural distinction in terms of heritage, authenticity and sustainability creates a hindrance in advancing Shedol Shutki from potential liability to potential asset. Third, this analysis raises broader questions about the relationship between embodied cultural knowledge and social power. The stigma associated with Shedol Shutki represents a devaluation of a singular food practice, and more of an entire way of knowing and relating to oneself, others, and the world through the senses. The disinvestment of practices not only diminishes dietary diversity but also unique and persistent systems of embodied knowledge developed over generations.

Conclusion

Food customs, such as Shedol Shutki, not only contain nutritional or culinary benefits, they are wonderfully enmeshed in intricate webs of sensory experience, affective attachment, social distinction and cultural identity. Understanding the decline and possible resurgence of food customs such as Shedol Shutki requires attention to both the embodied, sensory dimensions of cultural experience as well as the social structures through which value is assigned to distinct cultural expressions. Contemporary scholars and cultural practitioners are now considering the complexity of food traditions with nuance: the emotional weight of sensory traditions and the social contexts that either endanger or maintain them. Shedol Shutki has therefore traced its path from a respected culinary tradition in East Bengal to a contested cultural practice in the post-partition Indian context, most recently recognized as an endangered cultural heritage facing processes of revaluation and revitalization. Some intriguing conclusions arise from this exploration of the interrelations between food, identity, migration, and cultural continuity. First, Shedol Shutki demonstrates that food practices serve not only as a way of nutrition, but rather as very much empowered carriers of cultural identity capable of uniting and dividing communities.

For the East Bengali diaspora, this particular fermented fish preparation functioned simultaneously as a means of connecting to their homeland and heritage and a telltale sign through which they were subject to discrimination and stigmatization in new sociocultural contexts. But the aspects of tensions created by such a dual role were multilayered, especially for the people involved across the generations engaged in negotiations between the challenges of cultural preservation and social assimilation. Second, the unveiling of classism operating through the cultural practices of food from the post-partition landscape of India comes embedded in the worldview of socioeconomics and culture, which aromatically foundation has sought and given rise to distinctions between the edible and the inedible. This exemplifies particularly how sensory experiences involving pungent odours become sites for inducing exclusion. This process gained wider ramifications in the backdrop of structural and material conditions of refugee resettlement, the media's representation, along with institutional practices collectively disenchanting East Bengali culinary traditions within the larger sociocultural landscape of Bengal. Third, as generations of East Bengalis reduced the consumption of Shedol Shutki, they recalled the idea of practice from which they drew rationale, delineating their set of strategies to come to terms with multi-occupying cultural frameworks. The blatant dislike of Shedol Shutki by the younger generations constitutes a general understanding of the society toward assimilation, yet they also represent real alterations in processes of sensory acculturation and identity formation that in one way or another could have a different meaning for those with direct links to the homeland as opposed to those relying on inherited ties. Fourth, the recent attempts at cultural revitalization accentuate the potential for traditional practices to be things that can be reevaluated and reinterpreted in a new conceptual and practical context. The reinterpretation of Shedol Shutki through scholarly research, cultural documentation, culinary creativity, and digital media platforms sheds light on the persistence and adaptiveness of even cultural traditions that are under one of the most profound threats from their discontinuity. These attempts create avenues within which reconciliation is made between the preservation of core cultural knowledge and adaptations to the present.

The case of Shedol Shutki demonstrates that the conservation of culture need not mean unyielding adherence to tradition but instead can reflect negotiated adjustments that preserve basic cultural values while adapting to new contexts. This offers a more sophisticated response to binary models that perceive tradition and modernity as being opposed to one another, seeing the potential for innovative synthesis that is strong in respect for cultural tradition yet accepts current realities. In short,

the future of Shedol Shutki as a genuine cultural tradition is still undecided; however, the fledgling maneuvers towards documentation, accommodation, and reappraisal suggest paths along which its contemporary viability could continue.

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