

COMMODIFICATION OF FOOD CULTURE: A STUDY OF THE BODO COMMUNITY, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE CHARIDUAR AREA OF THE SONITPUR DISTRICT

Anurag Hazarika ¹
Samikshya Madhukullya

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ABSTRACT

Food, which is a basic requirement for a healthy life and survival, has broadened its scope. In a nutshell, it states that, aside from being a necessary component of survival, It has also evolved into a commodity for commerce and financial gain. The North-East of India, particularly Assam, is home to a diverse range of ethnic and other linguistic groups, each with its own distinct personality, resulting in a vibrant and colourful landscape. Every town has its own traditional foods, as well as a particular style of preparing, presenting, and exhibiting its cultural identity. This paper provides an outline of food commodification. Indigenous foods, which were previously primarily conserved and limited within the four walls of a community, are now being shared on global platforms and among other communities for economic gain, community representation, and man and woman empowerment to improve lifestyle and culture. The study area is comprised of six villages and sub-urban areas in Sonitpur District, Assam, India, primarily in the Chariduar area, where the majority of the population is from the Bodo community. The data and facts for the preparation and conservation of the Bodos' local traditional ethnic foods were gathered through discussions with families, commercial outlets such as ethnic restaurants, local markets, and other people involved in the process of preparing and selling the unique dishes on a commercial scale. The report also considers the chances for continued development of Assam's ethnic cuisine industry.



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1. INTRODUCTION

Simply put, commodification is the process of converting something into a commodity (Heusinkveld & Benders 2005).. When there is a mutual desire and trade understandings between members of a society and outsiders, a thing becomes a commodity. When these things are turned into commodities, they provide a source of money for the community, allowing them to maintain their lifestyle and way of life. Commodification not only contributes to economic

empowerment, but it also aids in the good depiction of the community at national and international levels, resulting in the creation of an identity as well as a food identifier or identification tag for that community (Driver & Martell 1999, Dunn 2008). Culture is fluid and ever-evolving. Food is such a vital part of any culture that it is easy to mould with minor variations (Sims 2009).. As a result, it is simpler for a group to acculturate its eating customs, and as a result, it has a wider reach and penetrates more easily into diverse cultures. As a result of this penetration, fusion food is

¹ Corresponding author: Anurag Hazarika
Email: anuraghazarika2@gmail.com

created, and oicotypification begins. With time, food culture may accept certain changes, resulting in the emergence of variation in its aura while maintaining the core elements. As a result, it is not possible to claim that there is a loss of aura, but rather that there is a change in aura. Commodification is the transformation of an object into a commodity and market product, which is tied to capitalism. Food, like commodification, is a market product that goes through a mobilisation process in the global business era, resulting in new business opportunities (Mardatillah et al. 2019). A lot of interest is currently being generated by research into the commodification, authenticity, and long-term survivability of cultural culinary legacies in the global market period. There is a significant debate in the global economic era over the monetization of traditional cuisine's legacy. Because it is tied to consumerism, commodification has become a prominent subject and a hot problem in today's global society (Lind & Barham 2004).. Every part of culture, whether tangible commodities like clothing or intangible ones like traditions and customs, has been transformed into a commodity in today's world for its monetary exchange value. On the other hand, the commercial side must not completely obscure the cultural components. As a result, a war between culture and commerce has erupted, with a dynamic relationship distinguished by interdependencies (Coleman 2006).. On the one hand, the commercialization process should aid in the preservation of culture. The practise of trade, on the other hand, is only feasible because of the existence of culture.

Cuisine is an intangible cultural heritage that symbolises cultural identity and is passed down from generation to generation, and its presence indicates a community's cultural diversity (Wanda George 2010).. This sacred cultural treasure has now become a commodity of trade as a result of commercialization throughout the global market age. The purpose of cuisine is to provide nourishment. Every aspect of people's life, as well as the range and complexity of their cultural arts, reveals their cultural ideals. Culinary heritage is seen as a global asset as well as a local resource that may be exploited to build a historical narrative based on social, environmental, economic, and political variables (Leach et al. 1999).

According to gastronomy, traditional cuisine is a culinary product that has not been modified and has been passed down from a previous age and is still in use now (Amorim et al. 2022). Traditional food is regarded to have a relatively high inherent quality due to its historical relevance. It's a traditional cuisine that's known for eliciting intense emotions, sensuality, and sentiments.

Food preferences, according to researchers four decades ago, are a social interaction indicator, a representation of social caste, class, and hierarchy, and a metaphor for establishing a culture's ethnicity and identity (Cheung 2005).. Food also functions as a marker of identification

for individuals and groups of people because it can transmit classes, community, and ethnicity.

1.1 The Culinary Triangle, Claude- Levi Strauss

Claude-Levi Strauss (1908-2009), a French anthropologist, examined the eating habits of North and South American tribes in the twentieth century (Lévi-Strauss 1997, Hénaff 1998).. He deduced that all societies had a three-phase classification system for food, with raw, cooked, and rotten being the most common. Levi-Strauss noticed that, just as each culture has its own language, each culture cooks its food in a unique way. He came up with the concept of "The Culinary Triangle" as a result of this (Lévi-Strauss 1997, Polat & Aktaş-Polat 2020)..

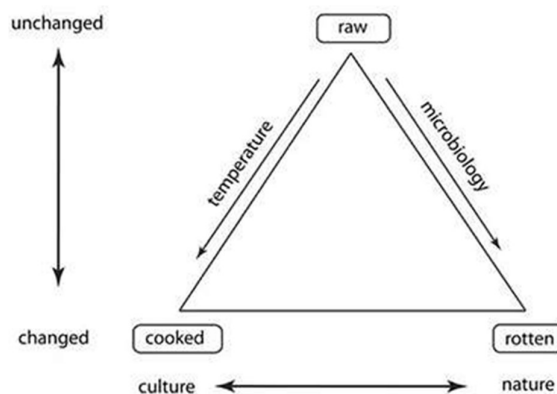


Figure 1. Triangle

Source: <https://www.thesmartset.com/article07181301/>

Raw, cooked, and rotting are the three points of the triangle. When looking at the triangle with "raw" at the top, the other two points can be seen as the results of several procedures. The following is Levi-Strauss' explanation for the triangle (Lévi-Strauss 1997).

- Raw food straddles the line between cultural and natural forms. This implies that it should be free of human interference and degradation. True raw food, for example, would be carrots grown on a farm before being washed or peeled for human consumption; cooked food, on the other hand, is raw food that has been processed by culture. Potatoes, for example, can be boiled before being used in a meal.
- Finally, rotting food is raw food that has been altered by natural processes. Fruits that have been stored for a long time, for example, may turn rotten and begin to degrade. If the triangle is turned on its side and the word "cooked" is placed at the top, the other two points can be interpreted as distinct categories of inedibility.
- Levi-Strauss developed the culinary triangle not only as a classification of foodstuffs, but also as a means of cultural difference. Cooking, he claims, is the primary difference between other animals and humans since animals eat raw food, whereas all human societies heat food in some way. Once a newborn has been weaned from their mother's milk, societal norms determine what is and is not acceptable to consume. As a result, Levi-Strauss claimed that each society's cuisine

is similar to an unconscious language that structures individuals' daily life. Each culture places a premium on eating at a specific time, which foods are appropriate for which social occasions, and which animals are socially acceptable to eat. Many wild animals, such as snails, bats, and songbirds, are offered in Chinese restaurants. The majority of the rest of the world frowns on such eating habits. Due to the implementation and strengthening of numerous laws on eating wild animals, the recent COVID-19 epidemic played a significant effect in modifying the food choices of many Chinese people (Sinha 2021).. As a result, Levi-Strauss underlined the importance of gastronomy in determining the culture of a civilization and vice versa.

1.2 McDonalization of Society

Society Has Been McDonalized The McDonalization of Society, written by George Ritzer in 1993, was the first book to establish the concept of McDonalization (Ritzer, 2011).. Since then, the notion has been increasingly important in the area of sociology, particularly in the field of globalization sociology. McDonalization of society is a phenomena that occurs when society, its institutions, and its organizations adopt the same qualities as fast-food restaurants. Efficiency, calculability, predictability and uniformity, and control are among them. Ritzer's McDonalization theory is an update on Max Weber's famous sociological theory of how scientific reason spawned bureaucracy, which became the fundamental organizing force of contemporary society for much of the twentieth century. The modern bureaucracy, according to Weber, was characterized by hierarchical roles, compartmentalized information and duties, a perceived merit-based system of hiring and development, and the rule of law's legal-rationality authority. These qualities could (and still may) be seen in a wide range of communities around the world. Changes in science, economy, and culture, according to Ritzer, have changed nations away from Weber's bureaucracy and toward a new social structure and order known as McDonalization. This new economic and social order is defined by four important features, as he discusses in his book of the same name.

1. Efficiency is defined as a managerial focus on reducing the time it takes to accomplish individual jobs as well as the time it takes to complete the entire production and distribution process.
2. Calculability is defined as an emphasis on objective that can be measured (counting things) rather than subjective aims (evaluation of quality).
3. Predictability and standardization can be seen in repeated and routinized production or service delivery processes, as well as in the consistent output of same or nearly equal products or experiences (predictability of the consumer experience).
4. Finally, management wields control throughout McDonalization to ensure that workers appear and perform the same from moment to moment and day to day. It also refers to the employment of robotics and technology to lessen or eliminate the need

for human employees. These traits, according to Ritzer, are not only visible in production, work, and the customer experience, but that their defining presence in these sectors has rippling effects across society. Our beliefs, interests, objectives, and worldviews, as well as our identities and social interactions, are all influenced by McDonalization. Furthermore, sociologists acknowledge that McDonalization is a global phenomenon fueled by Western businesses, economic power, and cultural supremacy, and that it leads to a global uniformity of economic and social life.

1.3 Globalization and its Impact on Bodo Food Culture

Globalization has increased the pace with which people, goods, and services, capital, technologies, and cultural traditions are moved and exchanged around the world. Human nature is responsible for the global phenomenon. Globalization, according to some, began around 60,000 years ago, at the dawn of human history. Different civilizations have created commercial trade routes and experienced cultural exchanges throughout history. It has occurred throughout history, but especially after the second half of the twentieth century, when world trade sped to such an extent and at such rates that the term 'globalization' became widely used. Globalization began long before European explorers set sail across the huge Atlantic Ocean on voyages that would eventually expose the existence of the Americans— and even before the term "globalization" was invented. 1 Globalization, according to Nayan Chanda, is a process that has been going on for millennia without being given a name. 2 Globalization is defined by the Oxford dictionary as "the process of developing or operating on a global scale." As a result of globalization, a community or culture adopts the values, beliefs, and clothing of other civilizations, losing its identity in favor of a single globalized supra-culture. Globalization has had an impact on every community in the globe, and the Bodo community is one of them. The Bodos, like other groups around the world, have consciously or unknowingly participated in the Globalization process. There have been many changes in their culture since the early nineteenth century, and they are still happening today, and the impact of Globalization will be felt in the future. Globalization has had an impact on many Indigenous communities throughout the world. Furthermore, the Bodo is a transnational Indigenous community that has been impacted by globalization. For a long time, we have witnessed the development of globalization in many political, economic, cultural, and religious contexts. This effect or impact is now felt in Bodos as well. As a result, there is no way to stop globalization in any way. Many different types of changes have occurred in many cultural communities around the world as a result of globalization or the impact of globalization, such as in their way of life, thought process, clothing, eating habits, religion, festivals, belief system, and many other

aspects of their culture. As a result, they are transitioning into an other cultural dimension, and their original cultural identities are being lost. Many Indian cultural communities, including the Bodo, are knowingly or unknowingly accepting, following, or influenced by westernized culture, and they are attempting to blend into their ideologies by going hand in hand or following the influential westernized thoughts, methods of thinking, and trying to blend into their ideologies. It would not be inaccurate to state that they are mixing their overall culture with other civilizations and on their way to developing a new globalized culture in which cultural variety is diminishing. They are gradually losing their pure cultural qualities, originality, and originalities under this environment. Many cultural communities have abandoned traditional cultural aspects of their societies. Because of the phenomenon of globalization, significant changes have been noticed in the Bodo people in every aspect of their culture. These changes or repercussions of globalization have primarily been observed since the 19th century, and they are altering Bodo people's thoughts, living styles, livelihoods, and all other aspects of their lives. This has an impact on their ability to transition their culture to a new one. As a result, their religious activities, such as festivals, rites, and rituals, are changing, with old traditional practices and rituals being abandoned or lost. Again, nowadays, it is fashionable to discuss modernism in social science. Modernity, on the other hand, cannot be defined by a single concept. Modernity can be viewed from a variety of angles. Modernity is defined as a way of life and a manner of experiencing a new way of existence. New beliefs have produced new habits and actions, which are referred to as modernity. The term "modernity" refers to the ability to think rationally. Progress, science, optimism, and universality are valued in modernity. Modernity entails a transformation of ideals and institutional structures. Changes in conceptions of space and time, as well as the speed with which information is exchanged, are referred to as modernity. Traditional views of society are discouraged in modern culture. Modernity entails increased production mechanization, a transition from agricultural to industry, and an increase in urbanization. Industrialization and capitalism are associated with modernity. Modernity brought about changes in people's minds, societies, and cultures. It alludes to a progressive mindset. Furthermore, modernity attempts to ruin what we have and puts an element of uncertainty, risk, and confusion into our lives. The desire for absolute knowledge in science and technology, society and politics, and the concept that attaining knowledge of the true self was the essential foundation for all other knowledge and rationality are all connected with modernity. Modernity has a profound influence on social structures and cultural institutions all across the world. Traditions have been steadily weakened as a result of modernity. Modernity dealt the first blow to religion and religious customs.

1.4 Commodification and Bodo Food

Traditional meals are part of the Bodo people's cultural inheritance. Traditional food is a cultural product of ancestral labor that needs to be preserved, developed, and incorporated into the philosophy it represents. Traditional cuisines are being maintained so that they can always be enjoyed and meet the cultural demands of modern society. Traditional cuisine, on the other hand, is more complicated than modern cookery. The practice of eating traditional meals is declining as a result of people's changing consumption patterns. People nowadays prefer to eat fast food or other modern forms of meals in order to save time on cooking and consumption. As a result, commercialization of traditional food has been ingrained in Bodo society. Local values can inspire local culture, which is born out of living values and gives life meaning. Culture is typically commodified with the goal of generating cash from a certain cultural feature, such as art, cuisine, heritage and archaeology, tourism, and so on. The Ethnic Bodo Cuisine is categorically chosen as a study area in this research work to interpret the commodification of the culinary element of the Bodo Culture and to reflect how commodification is helping to enhance the community's distinct identity factor in the face of a dynamic and globalized world. Currently, in the case of Bodo ethnic cuisine, the issue of commodification of traditional food leading to commercialization and modernization is being investigated from the perspective of socio-economic empowerment and community well-being, which will result in commodification of the community's food culture as an important facet of cultural representation. Prospects for commodification of ethnic foods will result in new sources of income not only for producers but also for active bearers of each ethnic community, which will have a positive long-term impact on the community's socio-economic growth and establishment as an empowered community pursuing progressive growth and as a distinct ethnic identity for society in general and the world at large.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study is an attempt to examine the Commodification aspect of the Bodo Ethnic Food of Assam with particular respect to the Chariduar area of Sonitpur District of Assam. The following are the objectives of the study:

1. To find out how commodification of ethnic food can impact the Bodo Community of Assam and thereby representing its cultural identity as a whole.
2. To examine whether the change of food servings of the foresaid community has created an impact in the lifestyle of the new generation.

2.1 Research Questions

Keeping consonance with the objectives, the following research queries have been developed. The above research objectives are expected to meet by answering the following questions.

1. Defining the Commodification of Ethnic Food. How can these sale of the ethnic foods contribute to the social upliftment of the community?
2. Is there any change in the lifestyle of the new generation as a result of food commodification?

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Type of Research

The present study is both qualitative and quantitative in nature as it consists of both numerical values as well as case study. It is exploratory and descriptive too. The researcher has used both the primary and secondary sources of data. For the intended study qualitative data will be collected using –Interview method and Case Study. Face to Face Interview and Controlled Observation method will be used for quantitative data collection. The data is collected using unstructured interviews, survey schedules and by taking field notes.

For Secondary Sources the researcher has gone through Census Data 2011, read articles and books and gone through various journals, research papers, Government Records and magazines to get a detailed understanding of the arena of work.

3.2 Sampling Unit

The respondents will consist of population both male and female who are involved in the Commodification of Bodo ethnic food cuisines from all the selected six villages, where the maximum number of Bodo residence is found.

3.3 Sampling Method

A purposive, convenient and stratified sampling technique is applied to select a total of 316 respondents as a sample size for the study as the interviewee with relevant knowledge may not be found everywhere or might not be willing to share their views.

The respondents are stratified into the following categories consisting of-

- Sellers
- Producers
- Individuals who are both Sellers and Producers.

3.3 Sample Size

According to the Census of India record 2011, the total population of Chariduar 343749, out of which male 176589 and female 167160. The total number of people residing in Rural area is 94.6% and the urban population consists of 5.4%. The total number of schedule tribes in the entire area is 50,996 out of which 25,695 are male and 25301 are female i.e. 14.8% consists Schedule Tribe out of the entire population.

The villages selected for the study:

1. BakolaGaon has a population of 2366 out of which 669 are Schedule Tribes.
2. Amloga 1 has a population of 813 out of which 314 are Schedule Tribes.
3. Amloga 2 has a population of 769 out of which 666 are Schedule Tribes.
4. Chengelimari has a population of 594 out of which 173 are Schedule Tribes.
5. Chapaguri has a population of 692 out of which 264 are Schedule Tribes.
6. Jogi Basti has population of 485 out of which 258 are Schedule Tribes.

The Total Population is 5719, out of which 2344 consists of the schedule tribe. Among the 2344 schedule tribes, the Bodo population is 1758. The sample size is taken to be 316 keeping the confidence level 95% and margin of error to be 5%. So, as per the data the sample size is determined at 316 respondents.

4. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The study has been conducted under selected six (6) villages of the Chariduar area of Sonitpur district of Assam where Bodo population is found to be in majority and were commodification of Ethnic Food has seen to be on a large scale.

Out of the total sample size of 50 respondents, in this six monthly progress from the field report conducted, following observations have been made.:

In the study there are 6 numbers of villages have been selected and randomly survey has been conducted to collect the primary data related to ethnic food among the Bodo tribes in Assam. There are all total 50 (fifty) numbers of people has been surveyed from the locality and accordingly data analyses have been made.

Table 1. Sample Villages

Sl.No	Sample Villages	SampleSize
1	BakolaGaon	7
2	AmlogaNo.2	10
3	AmlogaNo.1	8
4	Chapaguri	12
5	JogiBasti	5
6	Chengelimari	8
	Total =	50

From the above table, it could be determined that from Chapaguri village, 12 respondents were selected for

survey who are directly or indirectly associated with the commodification process followed by Amloga No. 2 with 10 respondents, Amolga No. 1 with 8 respondents, Chengelimari with 8 respondents and finally Jogi Basti with 5 respondents.

Table 2. Respondents' gender type

Sl.No.	Gender	Numbers	% Of Total
1	Female	23	46%
2	Male	27	54%
	Total	50	100.00%

From the above table, it could be seen that out of 50 respondents selected under the area of study, Female stands to 23 and Male stands to 27 in number, when it comes to the engagement in the commodification of the Bodo Ethnic Food.

Table 4. Respondent's commodification rank on selective ethnic food

Rank /Food	RiceBeer	Pork	Silkworm	Mushroom	TekeliPitha	Total
1 st Rank	6	35	3	2	4	50
2 nd Rank	37	5	0	0	8	50
3 rd Rank	5	4	3	36	2	50
4 th Rank	6	7	30	3	4	50
5 th Rank	0	3	3	2	42	50

From the above table, it can be analyzed that from the selected six villages under the area of study, pork has the highest rate of commodification because of the high demand for consumption within the villages and arising of new cuisines with pork as the primary food item and ingredients in the local dishes, because of which its demand has reached out even to the nearby town area daily markets. Followed by pork, the second rank is held by the most popular local beverage, rice beer (traditionally known as Zumai), because of its traditional heritage as a local drink to be consumed mostly on occasions and festivities as well as welcome drink for their guests. A perfect example of commodification of Rice Beer was noticed from the field, where villagers from the selected villages under the area of study sell the rice beer in packed bottles in the local markets and food festivals organized by the Govt. of Assam, which led to a wider prevalence about its specialty amongst the Non-Bodo population as well. Third Place in the preference rank of the respondents for the selected Ethnic Food items is occupied by TekeliPitha, where its commodification in the past two-three years has increased manifold in the cities and towns during Bihu, Baisagu, and in the ethnic food festivals. Self Help Groups of the Bodo community has established a supply-chain in the towns and hotels. From the field report, it was enunciated that Silk Worm occupies the fourth preference when it comes to commodification of ethnic food, where it is commodified as food items in the local markets and ethnic food festivals. In case of Mushroom, it still

Table 3. Respondents' Age Group

SINo	AgeGroup	SampleSize	%of Total
1	Below20Years	7	14%
2	20to 40Years	22	44%
3	40to 60Years	15	30%
4	Above60 Years	6	12%
	Total =	50	100%

From the above table, it could be inferred that more than half of the respondents are from the age-group of 20-40 years who are mostly the producing generation engaged in commodification of Bodo Ethnic Food, whereas the next highest respondents are from the age-group of 40-60 years and respondents from below 20 years of age not at a vast difference from the previous age-group and the respondents from above 60 years are the least persons who are involved in the process of Bodo Food Commodification under the selected area of study.

infamous as a commodified food items but its cultivation and popularity has steadily increased amongst the Bodo Population.

Table 5. Respondents response to marketing facility of food products

Sl. No.	Responses	Numbers	% Of Total
1	Agree	27	54%
2	Disagree	12	24%
3	Cannot Determine	11	22%
	Total =	50	100.00%

When asked about whether there is any proper marketing or supply-chain management with regard to the popular ethnic foods under the area of study, it was known that 27 number of respondents agreed to having marketing the food products they produce for commodification, whereas 12 disagreed to the same when asked. And around 11 respondents were not sure regarding what was asked and its status.

Table 6. Respondents' Responses to Food Commodification Culture as a source of Livelihood

Sl. No.	Responses	Numbers	% Of Total
1	Agree	36	72%
2	Disagree	6	12%
3	CannotDetermine	8	16%
	Total =	50	100.00%

The above table represents the responses of the respondents with respect to Commodification of Food Culture as a source of livelihood of their commodified ethnic foods were it was seen that out of the total of 50 respondents under the selected villages for study, 36 agreed, 6 disagreed and 8 said they cannot determine a proper answer to the question being asked or they could not understand the concept of food commodification as a source of livelihood at all.

5. RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Some of the impact and effect of Commodification of Ethnic Bodo Food on the Surveyed Areas are discussed below:

1. Under the surveyed areas of this research paper, the aspect of commodification of Bodo Ethnic Foods has brought to light the various vegetarian and non-vegetarian foods of the Bodo Community, which will be useful in representing this community in the world stage with their unique customs and traditions.

2. The commodification of Bodo ethnic cuisine has inundated their local market places, contributing to the community's socioeconomic development and instilling in the youths an entrepreneurial spirit that would help them become financially stable.

3. The commodification of Bodo ethnic cuisines has aided in the economic upliftment of both male and female producers and merchants, empowering them to a large extent.

4. The Bodos' traditional dishes have their own distinct and identical taste and cultural representation. In this scenario, commercialization has allowed ample opportunity to sample the flavor of Bodo meals in general.

5. The need for the government to preserve, patent, and grow the ethnic food industry on a large scale is urgent, and there is plenty of opportunity to do so with the expansion of food processing industries and the provision of patenting rights to ethnic foods so that they can be marketed in the country in particular and globally in the Asian/South East Asian market in general to generate revenue for the government and

community empowerment in particular. This will allow for cross-cultural contacts, as well as contribute to peace and brotherhood among neighboring countries.

6. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The Bodos' rich traditional culinary habits depict the society's socio-cultural aspect as a whole. The rising demand for traditional ethnic foods of the Bodos in local communities' markets as a result of commodification of ethnic food culture, as well as in Bodo ethnic festivals like the 'Dwijing festival,' which represents the ethnic identity of the Bodos, and the growing up of retail and commercial outlets and ethnic Bodo restaurants (albeit few in number) is acting as a boon for the community to establish its ethnic identity. Although the scope of this study is limited to a few Bodo villages in the Chariduar area of the Sonitpur district of Assam, India, the evidence presented here shows that the trend of commodification of Bodo foods, which eventually leads to commercialization, is increasing day by day, even though within the local and nearby markets of the study's focus areas, it can be inferred that the rise in commodification of these foods is accelerating. The government should increase seed capital with a low rate of interest for Bodo youths interested in commercialization of these ethnic foods, and food processing research of Bodo foods should be enhanced to scientifically determine the aspects for patenting so that these foods can be sold not only in Assam and other states of India, but also in foreign countries. Food chains have sprouted up in practically every aspect of the world's countries as a result of Globalization and McDonaldization. Punjabi food, Gujarati food, Bengali food, and other Indian popular food chains have practically occupied many food restaurants abroad as a result of Globalization. This is also conceivable for Ethnic Bodo cuisines with good planning and measures by the government at the correct moment, which is a must.

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Anurag Hazarika

Research Scholar, Dept. of
Sociology, University of Science
and Technology, Meghalaya,
India

ORCID: 0000-0002-0005-4813

Samikshya Madhukullya

Research Fellow Dept. of
Sociology, University of Science
and Technology, Meghalaya,
India