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THE INEDIBLE: VISUALS AND FOOD ANXIETY

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Abstract

Anxiety about food as a principal item of consumption is universal. Who can and can not eat what and when, are, in most cases, normatively settled. Any violation of such norm generates anxiety. Though the focus of this paper is on the visuals, it is needless to point out, seeing food or drink invariably acts in conjunction with smelling and hearing. We usually refer to the enticing power of visuals of edible. But images of food/drink also generate anxiety regarding inedible, leading sometimes to dietary changes like the decrease in consumption of red meat, street food or food from restaurants. This paper explores how the visuals often set up, sometimes by design, distraction, disenchantment and caution - thereby inhibiting consumption. The visuals that generate food anxiety concerning routinized everyday consumption as well as to the consumption experience in extraordinary times have been probed. The site chosen is the city of Kolkata. The inquiry is confined to women because they are still in charge of supervising food and hence have a definite association with the circulation of food taboos. The work is confined to the upper-middle-class or rich sections of the city women because among the poor and food-insecure people, there is not much of a choice regarding consumption. The focus is on contemporary experience, without neglecting its historical dynamics.

Keywords

Inedible, Anxiety, Visual, Norm, Food Taboo, Consumption

1. Introduction

Levi-Strauss famously remarked that the food is good to think with as well as good to eat (Levi-Strauss, 1997). The ‘consumption turn’ within social sciences creates a favourable condition for a study on how the images of food/drink often inhibit consumption, and how this reaffirms or transgresses social norms, and in the process, generates and manages anxiety. The rise of scientific and rational temper, though expected to alleviate many fears, actually generates new sites of anxiety (Bourke 2003) including the food scares. U. Beck’s account of risk society (1992) portrays how our individualized lives, free from traditional restrictions, become more vulnerable to uncertainty, anxiety and risks. The expert-centric risk management including a variety of socio-technical measures like refrigeration, food labelling, institutionalized quality regulation, or the alternative measures, like organic farming, adopting vegan lifestyle - all have been designed to improve food safety and increase consumer confidence to mitigate their anxieties concerning health, hygiene and species survival.

Food can be a sensory treat and a source of nutrient, essential for survival. But the same may also be a source of anxiety. The omnivore’s paradox lies in the fact that humans may consume a wide variety of things, but the material and symbolic meanings associated with certain food items make them inedible for a given people at a specific historical time and space. Inedible should not be incorporated into the body, so the boundary between inside and outside, between self and the world becomes important. Any form of transgression of such boundary or its possibility generates anxiety. Visuals in this regard play an essential role, as seeing is believing. In Kolkata, in 2018 a meat scandal took place. Tonnes of packaged meat with labels of well-established companies were found to be mixed with rotten meat of cats and dogs. Soon this scandal made headlines and stories with vivid images of the rotten meat circulated on various media platforms (Figure 1). The meat the Kolkata-Bengalis have been savouring in restaurants all these while suddenly became a source of anxiety and completely inedible. Such food scares are becoming a global routine nowadays. BSE (bovine spongiform encephalopathy) originating in Europe in the 1990s, large incidences of avian flu, the contamination of baby formula with melatonin in China are a few of many contemporary food safety concerns. Furthermore, the emergence of certain aspirational food-related health, beauty and

lifestyle trends for well-off women, still largely a phenomenon of the cities, generate another type of anxiety concerning food consumption.

The site was chosen for the study on inedible and the food norms and the anxiety associated with the relation between the two, mediated by visual experience, in Kolkata in West Bengal, India. The inquiry is confined to women in the age range of 20-70, who are in charge of food and hence have a definite association with the circulation of food taboos. The work centres on the upper-middle class or rich sections of the city women, who enjoy a decent level of food security, and thus capable of choosing food consumption. Theories of practice have been broadly accepted here as sensitizing theories to unravel the common social processes associated with inedible. In the field of consumption studies, these theories have challenged both individualistic explanations and cultural excess (Warde, 2014). With the emphasis on habit and routine, recognition of the importance of local setting in the steering of behaviour, and shared and social nature of practices, this theoretical orientation offers interesting insights into eating and refusal to eat on the part of people of a specific space, time and culture.



Figure 1: 20 Tons of Rotten Frozen Meat, Neatly Packed in 1000 Plastic Packets was Seized by Police from a Private Cold Storage in Kolkata

Source: Hindustan Times, April 2018

2. Method

To unravel the subjective feelings and discourses on inedibility, food norms, and food anxiety the semi-structured narrative interview technique has been used. The interviewees, middle and upper-class women (students, homemakers and professionals) from diverse religious

backgrounds (Hindu, Muslim, Christian and Buddhist) including those belonging to tribal communities have been chosen based on non-probability sampling. Editorial letters and articles, featured in news dailies and online blogs, health guides available with local vendors and sold on public transport, health journals published by medical organizations, along with the existing body of academic literature on the relevant themes have been drawn upon.

3. Food Images

The idea of sight is not just related to the food item itself, but the whole process of preparation, the surrounding in which one is eating etc.-- all giving a larger sensory meaning to it. Food has become more visible in our lives now. Due to the exponential growth in the availability of digital interfaces and audiovisual media most people now have daily access to digital screens. Food photography as a mania has evolved in very recent times (Figure 2, 3, 4). Such images can make a portion of food look edible though inedible and does not taste good in reality.



Figure 2: Clicking Photograph and sharing it Precede Eating Food at Restaurant

Source: Project Respondent



Figure 3: Clicking Photograph and sharing it Precede Eating Food at Restaurant

Source: Project Respondent



Figure 4: Clicking Photograph and sharing it Precede Eating Food at Restaurant

Source: Project Respondent

The visual discourse has also been opted by animal rights activists for protest and sensitization. As illustrative examples protest demonstration at Victoria Memorial Hall, a landmark destination in Kolkata (Figure 5) or ‘Animal Work’, a series of paintings of animals depicting their miserable condition by Sunaura Taylor, 2009, maybe cited. In Kolkata, we often find PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) protesting against popular food joints like KFC (Kentucky Fried Chicken, the American fast food restaurant chain) using visual materials for unethically and cruelly treating animals for business. In certain cases, these visual protest materials are intentionally designed in such a manner to create revulsion. For example,

images of blood-smeared and disembodied animals often used by vegans to communicate the violence one inflict on animals for one's own diet choices. Such pictures, hence, often come with trigger warnings.



Figure 5: A Demonstration outside Victoria Memorial, Kolkata

Source: Kolkata Vegans, Facebook

Also Published in Ei Samay, a Bengali Daily, 1st November 2019 and was credited to Kaushik Ray

On other occasions, animals are lent human-like characteristics and/or are seen engaging in human activities to stimulate empathy, to convey that they are no longer a ‘thing’ to be consumed (Figure 6). This event harks back to our childhood memories and visuals, where many of the beloved cartoon characters were animals, but lived human lives.



Figure 6: Animals, which are, otherwise, popularly Consumed as Meat is shown Engaging in a Variety of Musical Activities at Ubuntu Community Café, a vegan and Eco-Friendly Café at Gariahat, Kolkata (Ubuntu: Kolkata's First Vegan Community Café, Facebook)

Visuals, circulated by media generate a collective sense among the people. In the context of the ongoing pandemic due to the outbreak of deadly COVID-19, news dailies frequently publish photos on the absence of gloves amongst food workers, thereby potentially passing the virus onto food items and surfaces (Figure 7). These surely create a public opinion against food from outside as inedible in the present situation.



Figure 7: Food Service Workers flouting Covid-19 Safety – Guidelines

Source: *Ei Samay, Bengali news daily, 18 March 2020*

4. Visuals Inhibiting Consumption

The question of revulsion is intimately tied to the visual aspect of the food like the consumers' squeamishness about touching raw meat with a bloodstain on it, while the cleaned and packaged meat of the same variety can be handled and consumed at ease. The sight of animal slaughtering for food instils a sense of anxiety and disgust insensitive minds which may lead to 'moral shock' (Jasper, 1997). A positive evaluation of the "freshness" of uncooked raw vegetables may be counterposed vis-à-vis the anxiety associated with the sight of raw meat. The connection between visually and inedibility is also evident in the way vegetables and fruits are marketed and

consequently bought at grocery store chains and even, neighbourhood bazaars. Appearance in terms of shape, size, colour and unblemished, shiny surfaces have been rated more than the nutritive aspects. These factors not only affect the price of the fruits and vegetables in local bazaars but in case of grocery food chains the items, which do not appeal visually, do not even make it to the shelf. Globally dubbed as the “ugly food movement”, the consumption of ‘cosmetically challenged’ fruits and vegetables are being advocated as a way to counter food wastage.

Often texture of a food item makes it inedible. There is a common hatred for food that appears to be very ‘runny’, ‘slimy’ or ‘sticky’ in its texture. Pineapple, banana, jelly, ladies finger, octopus, fish fat etc fall into this category. Even the change of texture of otherwise edible food makes it inedible. Thicker rice or watery lentil offered at college hostel or road-side eateries have been cited as unacceptable on the ground of its difference from home-cooked items in typical Bengali households. While preparing food it is important to ensure that a certain texture is maintained by what the food to be like in an ideal situation (Figure 8). It, therefore, makes a broader point that edibility and texture are not purely based on the individual taste but are shaped by broader social parameters of what the texture of certain food items should be like. Something cooked with bamboo shoot, jackfruit, dried fish etc, even though recognized as a delicacy for certain communities, are inedible for others, who are not socialized into specific food cultures, which cherish the taste of those items. A point to remember is that the first impression of food, familiar or otherwise, depends not only on its look but also on its smell. The sensory interplay of visual and olfactory becomes more significant if the subject does not possess a memory of the taste of that food. Eating is thus founded in bodily habits and learned the taste of both sensual and social type.



Figure 8: *Omelet Curry considered Inedible because of its too Runny and Spicy Texture*
Source: Project Respondent

5. Food Presentation

The popular educational cooking series and the high drama food competition shows make a presentation of food all the more important by, among other things, teaching various garnishing and serving tricks and allotting marks for food-presentation while evaluating cooking skill. The young mothers of school-going kids are groomed to apply many creative visual tricks like using red tomato sauce to draw smiley faces on regular sandwiches, to make it edible for the fussy eaters. The aesthetic presentation becomes more important with ‘unfamiliar’ food, food which is not usually considered tasty, or food from outside (not the trust-worthy home-cooked one). Sometimes it is understood as a question of organization and cleanliness, sometimes a display of elitism or high culture, and on some occasions just an attempt to add value to the food by adopting a specific style of garnishing the food to make it visually attractive. Absence of any of these visually-relevant dimensions makes food inedible for some, even when the item itself is culturally acceptable, tasty and healthy. As an illustrative example of inedibility stemming from lack of desirable organization of food, the serving of different side dishes on the plate of the main course, leading invariably to mixing of items, foreclosing the possibility of enjoying the different tastes of each item, maybe cited (Figure 9,10).



Figure 9: *Daal (Lentil soup) poured on the Rice Plate indicating a Lack of Organization of Food Served (Source: Project Respondent)*



Figure 10: Side Dishes Served in Separate Bowls

Source: Project Respondent

A certain idea of cultural capital and class becomes evident in the insistence on one's inability to eat in the absence of 'right' kind of crockery, the incorrect arrangement of plates, and improper setting of the table during routine meals or on special occasions at home or outside. Interestingly, home is often marked by a relative absence of preoccupation with the presentation, except for a basic concern with cleanliness, quality, and taste. Its intimacy and its association with everyday routine might allow such relaxation. But when one goes out to eat, the décor of the place, the way food has been served; nature of cutlery used, etc become the important yardstick for evaluation. With the advent of food applications like Zomato, the users look and scan the 'aesthetics' of the place before making their decision to visit. The same happens while ordering food items.

6. Norms and Inedibility

Inedibility is not intrinsic to food. It depends, in most cases, on the normative specifications, revealing thereby the interface of the eating/non-eating body, the subjective self and the broader society. What is not on one's plate may signify either social commitment or the transgressive nature of the food. Goodman and Sage establish that for the human body 'there are few things more essentially transgressive and boundary-crossing than food (Goodman and Sage, 2014)'. We understand such boundaries as fluid 'areas' marked by relational interaction between blurred rather than supposedly clear-cut categories (Lamont and Molnar, 2002).

6.1 Permanent and Temporary Restrictions

Some normative restrictions are fixed for a community of people, as they are closely related to identities. In this case, you are what you do not eat. So, to a person, who identifies as a “vegan”, meat and dairy products are inedible and to a person, who identifies as a “Hindu”, consuming beef is a taboo, while pork and alcohol are strictly forbidden in a religious Muslim household. While pork is often accepted as a mark of western modern lifestyle, the religious Hindu ideals come into play vigorously with regards to the taboos around the consumption of beef at home, safeguarding the ritual purity of its domestic sphere. In most cases, following these restrictions are matters of habitual repetition and part of unconscious every day. Giddens’ (1984) difference between the practical and discursive consciousness may be relevant here. Practical consciousness does not make one anxious about the choices. But deliberate indoctrination, which might be an outcome of a sense of anxiety, is also not rare. Hindustan Times reports on 2 January 2020 that the Indian central minister Giriraj Singh prescribes the teaching of the *Bhagavad Gita* in schools to prevent Indians from consuming beef when they go abroad. This kind of anxiety about food taboos and its transgression has a long history. The rumour of eating beef during his foreign tour did not even spare Swami Vivekananda once he came back home. He was the famous Bengali Hindu monk from the then Calcutta, who successfully represented India and Hinduism at the Parliament of the World’s Religions in 1893 at Chicago (Shankar, 2017).

Inedibility can be temporary. For example, in a normally non-vegetarian Bengali Hindu, household non-vegetarian items become inedible on one or two specific days in a week, mostly associated with observances of religious rituals. The fact that members of the family freely consume meat and poultry on other days reveals that the same food may traverse the boundary between the edible and inedible even for the same person. In general, though, children and sick are excluded from such temporary restrictions. It is not the biological age of the child, rather generational status of children matters here.

A food item may suddenly become inedible for people for a specific period due to certain developments in the domain of food and health. The Kolkata rotten meat scandal, 2018, made meat, the packed and sliced raw meat or cooked meat from restaurant inedible. This accounts for the publication of a photograph of a Kolkata eatery in a news daily with a caption saying the vegetarian green jackfruit dish, which to a great extent, resembles the taste of meat, may only be relied upon in the context of the carcass meat scare. Paromita Sen (2019) notes: “Raw jackfruit is like a

chameleon, taking on the tastes of the *masalas* used to cook it. Its texture imitates that of meat — possibly the reason it is called tree meat or *gaach patha* in Bengali — and it can be made to taste like meat too with a little bit of pampering.” The photo shows an eatery almost full with customers having their rice and curry lunch. The table of the manager or owner displays the board specifying the ‘special menu’ of unripe green jackfruit dish as a ‘safe’ and ‘vegetarian’ delicacy. It is understood that to retain its clientele in the condition of food scare this board has been freshly written, indicating deviation from its normal custom of offering chicken or mutton preparations as special items (Figure 11).

ভাগড়ের মাংসের ভয়, ভরসা গাছপাঠা!



Figure 11: Hotel Offering ‘Safe’ Vegetarian Dish during Kolkata Meat Scandal, 2018

Source: Ananda Bazaar Patrika, 3 May 2018, Photo by Suman Ballav

6.2. Region Specific Restrictions

Apart from religious restrictions, regional restrictions are found to play a role. For example, those who are the original residents of West Bengal, the ‘ghotis’ in common Bengali parlance, usually consider sea fish inedible, unlike the ‘bangals’, who migrated to West Bengal from, what was earlier known as East Pakistan and now called Bangladesh. Adding sugar generously while cooking curries, for example, is normative for a ghoti, though it makes the item simply inedible for a ‘bangal’. Years of intermixing and replacement of the original migrants by their younger generations, who have largely grown up in the city of Kolkata with no physical exposure to their ancestral place, surely blur the rigid differences. But, the study finds, the ancestral root remains an important marker of collective identity, especially in the domain of food preferences and cooking styles. Migrant families in general experience conflict over food choices as they have to negotiate

the food culture of their old home and the culture of their new place of residence. Often a brief exposure to a food culture of a certain place, if imbibed with readiness and cultivated regularly, may stay with the subject for years, long after leaving that place. Fish curry and Kolkata Biryani (an Indian dish made with highly seasoned rice and meat, fish or vegetables with Kolkata-specific addition of a big piece of boiled potato and egg) are the food items most immigrant students and professionals, even those from the strictly vegetarian background, embrace readily. Thus inedible at home may become preferred items under the overwhelming influence of the norm of the new place. It raises questions about how people ‘perform’ the spaces that they inhabit, through food consumption, by making inedible edible or vice versa.

6.3. Normative Continuity

The research endorses the overall continuity of the traditional norms about food consumption. Conformity, it seems, is a matter of routine here. Routines are temporal and procedural sequences which reliably and regularly fulfil purposes without deliberation. Such routines are both mental and procedural (Warde, 2014). Sights of the normatively prescribed food have been deeply embedded in the mind as edible. The majority are found at a loss while explaining their eating practices. Habit, social milieu with a definite normative prescription, and practical sense may be located as factors explaining their actions. Some interesting rationalizations are also reported. Some young educated women, who are otherwise modern and liberated in their temperament and action (eg. having friends and relations across religious boundaries, western outfit as regular sartorial preference etc.) are found deliberately following the traditional religion-specific food restrictions. The justification offered is that they do not intend to hurt the sentiments of their mothers by eating tabooed food items. Possibly their emotional attachment and gender identity with their mothers, the custodian of household ritual purity, explain this efficient intergenerational transmission of culture. Thus norm and effect may go hand in hand. Possibly the affective feeling of guilt and its interplay with a learned idea about inedibility from the milieu of their upbringing are structuring their habitus (Bourdieu, 1984). In cases of mixed-marriages (eg. Hindu-Muslim or Hindu-Christian), women usually retain the food taboo of their natal families/communities and pass it on to the next generation. It shows the centrality of women as the guardian of social and cultural norms at the familial level. A variation in the attitude has also been located, where the mother herself follows the food taboo of her Hindu natal family, but allows her daughter to consume beef, though outside the house. She rationalizes this by pointing out that the daughter belongs to her

Muslim father's community, which permits eating such meat. The same logic applies to her also, as marriage traditionally entails a change of belongingness for the women. But food habits are so intensely embedded that, when confronted, it prevails over the conventional marriage rules. She not only retains her taboos but enforces it in her affinal domestic space, signifying her control over that space. All these are indicative of the status of middle/upper class educated women of Kolkata. Another variety of rationalization for following the food taboos is a combination of respect for religious faith and a commitment to a healthy eating habit, locating the tabooed items as sources of health hazards in the hot and humid climatic condition of Kolkata. Interestingly, here the opposite discourses of traditional religion and modern scientific awareness of health are co-constitutive in shaping subjectivity and questions of inedibility. The study also reiterates J Ehlert's (2019) point regarding how food femininities are constructed through discourses and practices of mothering and rooted in the embodiment of caring for oneself and one's children. Many women share their growing anxiety to identify healthy and safe food for their children and themselves as a responsible and informed caregiver. Thus the continuity of the role of mother as custodian of food and health for the children gets established. Furthermore, quite widespread is the belief that the mother's life is precious for the well-being of her children. Hence women as mothers, unlike the teenagers, or young adults without kids, are found taking less liberty with the inedible – be it normatively located tabooed items or the unhealthy junk food.

6.4 Transgression

Educated, highly-mobile, young, professional women more frequently question and reflect on conventional food norms. One may find the link between the discourse of liberal modernity and the transgression of religious taboos. It may also be explained as agency and deliberation as opposed to habit, social environment and practical sense. The visual appeal of the forbidden or new, or the rational accommodation with the sights of items prescribed by the newly-embraced norm facilitate the transgression. A few instances of marital conflict over the transgression of food norms have been located. Stigmatization against the transgressors by family relations and peers is also reported.

Inedible often serves as a source of pleasure through transgressions. Deborah Lupton notes "...The desire to reject the food habits of one's childhood and family origin, either because they are too 'boring' or as a direct act of rebellion in the face of parental authority over food

choices...Another is a desire to appear innovative and adventurous, conforming to the ‘gourmand’ model of constantly seeking new taste experiences and transgressing established categories of ‘edible’ and ‘inedible’ as a practice of the self...” (Lupton, 1996) So, home-cooked vegetable might merrily be abandoned to indulge in junk food. Mothers in Kolkata complain about the frequent parcels from food delivering applications being ordered by their children. Uber Eats, a food delivering application seems to have capitalized on it. In a television clip of the advertisement, Alia Bhatt, the rising star of Bollywood, is seen expressing disappointment after learning that the vegetable ‘tinda’(apple gourd) has been cooked for dinner and decides instead, to order food on the application as the caption reads – “Uber Eats for your Tinda moments”. In the advertisement published in Calcutta Times, on 7 December 2019, Bhatt is posing in wonder in front of a food parcel as the hashtag reads – “Eats New every day”, which almost resonates with the ‘gourmand’ model Lupton spoke about.

Re-socialization into a new set of norms has a similar disciplining effect on food choices. The fear of gaining fat and eating right has almost turned into an obsession for many young women leading to their radical abstinence from food as such or some specific items commonly blamed for obesity like rice, potato, spicy curries and sweets – all integral to Bengali diet. In Giddens’ work, the rise of anorexia and bulimia is attributed to, among other things, the proliferation of consumer ‘choice’ and the need for modern consumers to construct their diets rather than being restricted by norms (Giddens, 2006). Ethical anxiety vis-a-vis animal cruelty, as well as ecological anxiety to save the planet by reducing the carbon foot-print inspire some, though still few, to embrace veganism as a belief system. This calls for an alternative plant-based food habit and lifestyle, making fish, meat and dairy products - the items consumed routinely in Kolkata, over the generations, and across communities, inedible. Vegetarians, on the other hand, might not consume meat but may consume animal milk, which involves certain forms of violence on animals in dairy farms. They may wear leather products, which is made from animal hide and might even engage in the ritualistic sacrifice of animals following religious prescriptions. Then, there is the Jain Vegetarianism which excludes even root vegetables. Hence, it is of little surprise that Hakuna Matata, a Kolkata-based restaurant, has made use of all these tags in its promotional as just a “*pure veg*” tag does not suffice, any longer (Figure 12).



Figure 12: The Hakuna Matata Restaurant at 12D, Park Street, Kolkata

Source: Kolkata Vegans, Facebook

Hakuna Matata even runs promotional, which features availability of catering services with the same tags of “Vegetarian”, “Vegan” and “Jain”. In the advertisement shared below (Figure 13), one even sees the endorsement of live counters which has become a recent trend in wedding and adds the concept of “fresh” to food (implying thereby the already cooked food as less worthy of eating) as one can see their food being prepared right in front of their eyes. It also creates the notion of endless supply, as food running short is one of the anxieties, which often features at weddings. On the other hand, it might even ensure less wastage.



Figure 13: A *Hakuna Matata* Promotional (Source: *Hakuna Matata*, Facebook)

Fusion foods are by-products of flexibility about food norms displaying a level of openness and experimentation with the diverse genre of food. These have been on the city's palette for a while now as they continue to be offered by the ever-growing number of cafes and restaurants. *Hakuna Matata*, the restaurant mentioned above, serves, what they claim are "global fusion" dishes such as Manchurian Vada Pao, Pinde Chole Tacos and Nolen Gur Cheesecake. However, one finds, that such culinary fusion is not only a restaurant-specific affair but to some extent, it has reached Indian households as well, as western sauces and condiments such as mayonnaise, pasta and pizza sauces are used as taste enhancers (Tandon 2019). This is especially true for urban well-off households. But fusion foods have often received mixed reviews indicating the entrenched nature of old food habits in our lives. For some, they are even the objects of ridicule, especially by the older generation. A comic strip (which is perhaps about the loyal non-vegetarianism among Bengalis and the impossibility of blending certain special Bengali vegetarian dishes with non-vegetarian ones) by the well-known cartoonist Debashish Deb features a panel which depicts a humorous take on the same (Figure 14).



Figure 14: A Debasish Deb creation

Source: Cartoonist Debasish Deb Fan Club, Facebook

7. Conclusion

The research reveals continuity as well as a change about food norms, both having the potentiality of generating anxiety. It also establishes the fact that multiplicity of such norms are functioning at a given point of time impacting on this fundamental foundation of human existence and gratification. But, on most occasions, individuals eat and perform related activities habitually. Action about inedible, it is found, is largely not premised upon individual choice and decision, but rather upon habit and routine in conditions of distraction. The finding reiterates the stand taken by theories of practice. Barnes points out that practices may be taken as a habitual and routine collective activity. These habits are not just individual competences but are implicated in people's mutual orientation to one another as necessary to achieve coordination (Barnes, 2001: 24-25). Several factors like ageing, encountering health issues, motherhood, and development of a sense of responsibility to self and others, be it one's children, elderly parents, or future generation of human species, persuade individuals to reflect on their food choices. True, the age-old traditional food norms, specific to a given community, as a constituent of one's shared habitus, attached to a

position in a field, almost automatically provide the basic guideline for choosing food for self and family. But a cosmopolitan city like Kolkata continuously offers a plurality of food norms like diverse religious or regional food taboos, state-backed knowledge regimes suggesting food items to be avoided on the ground of health (e.g. campaign against smoking, visually represented by the red cross sign), the medical discourses, popular lifestyle discourses on beauty and health, or ecological discourses like veganism, to its people. Articles and news items, advertisements in print and audio-visual media, billboards, posters, awareness-generating programmes etc. surely make everybody exposed to all such norms. In most cases, choices made by individuals are hybrid and fluid. An example of hybrid choice can be traced to the practice of a family that does not take non-vegetarian items on Thursdays for years, now include a soya bean dish on that day's meal to balance the protein ratio of the daily food intake. Thus traditional ritualistic observance about inedibility gets intertwined with a modern scientific understanding of a balanced diet. The fluid nature of the choice may be located in the tea-drinking habit, which is often portrayed as a characteristic feature of Kolkata culture. A shift from the practice of making tea with milk and lots of sugar to tea liqueur without or with very little sugar, or having green tea in the morning, has been located among the health-conscious educated Bengalis. These days even in roadside tea stalls and railway stations, such type of tea referred to as 'laal cha' (red tea, the name follows the visual dimension of colour) is available.

Routines and habit, of egos and alters, produce social order(s), perhaps because of expectations formed in the light of how others do things (Warde, 2014). The coexistence of diverse normative structures, on the other hand, generates tension and imbalances. The disciplining nature of norms very often generates a craving for rebellion. Frequent ordering of mouth-watering junk food through food apps, crowding around the visible unhygienic set-up of the street food vendors, relishing sweetmeats at the local shops by diabetic patients- all these are testimonies of embracing inedible, flouting the norms set by community, elders or health experts. Transgressions may not always be of such mundane or routine nature, which is mildly rebuked or largely overlooked. Occasionally serious transgressions occur, like using rotten meat for preparing food at a restaurant, eating tabooed food openly in the presence of family elders etc. Every transgression has its impact. It may be felt at the level of the body, or takes the form of inner conflict between the conformist and rebellious/adventurous self, or expressed at the level of social relations through stigmatization, conflict or even ex-communication. Food norms invariably suggest inedible. Both the routine and

the occasional transgressions generate anxiety for the practising agent and the others in her social milieu.

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