



## Food as an Opportunity for Living: The Case Study of a Foodpreneur at Alipurduar District

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### **Abstract**

*Beyond the notion of food as a basic need, there is lot to uncover. It can turn a housewife into successful businesswomen and bring a ray of hope for financial independence. But, are always the motivations behind starting business same? How do the so called inspirations execute the whole journey? Because, becoming a foodpreneur may not be the dream for everyone. Each and every person has their own reason behind the beginning. It may be out of passion or out of boredom. Some of them might have compelled to choose this path to overcome a crisis etc. Therefore, the essay is a small endeavor to penetrate the back stage scenario of foodpreneurship in a (Mofussil Definition & Meaning - Merriam-Webster, n.d.)moffusil area of North Bengal(North Bengal Tourism - Official Website - North Bengal, n.d.) i.e. Alipurduar District.*

**Keywords:** Foodpreneur, Mofussil, Back Stage, Inspiration, Independence



## **Introduction:-**

Human is a social being. From birth to till death , they spend their life in a society ,which bind people with one another, create new bonding through rituals(*Ritual Definition & Meaning - Merriam-Webster, n.d.*), customs and maintained by law and order. After birth, at a certain age, men have to start their journey to become financially independent, to be able to make living on their own. Well in our patriarchal society men are usually the breadwinner or the earning member. For woman the path is bit different. Women of our society are not bound to do job till today. On the other, they are expected to begin conjugal life after a decent amount of education and within a certain age limit to play their role as a housewife. Change happened but it takes more to make a difference which is permanent.

At present, women empowerment is discussed elaborately. Various government initiatives(*Department of Women & Child Development & Social Welfare, n.d.*) have been taken to change the economic status of women. Prioritize work over family is not well accepted for them, as if it's something out of the natural way. They have to walk through the path of guilty, dilemma, rude comments etc. It's like; she has done something very offensive. Whereas men are expected to do outside work and earn money for the family. If a man wants to do the household chores, criticisms are served for them also; they don't have the freedom to be a house husband. Basically the core patriarchal mind set did not permit men to be vulnerable, to do conventional household works like women do. So the societal role expectations from men and women both are one of the, major factor behind the choice of role rather the compulsion of doing job for men and prioritize household work over job for women.

But life is not what one planned or expected. Nowadays, those humongous terms i.e. women empowerment, financial independence – these terms are used a lot but how many of them do actually know the meanings of these words?

Is education enough to make women aware, to make them free of dependency on other? Or to say is it enough to evoke the consciousness within them?

## **Objectives**

The paper is dedicated to describe the journey of Mrs. Meenu Chetri , a foodpreneur at Alipurduar District(*Alipurduar District | Government of West Bengal | India, n.d.*), West Bengal.

## **Methodology**

The data has been collected through observation (*Bryman's Social Research Methods - Paperback - Tom Clark, Liam Foster, Luke Sloan, Alan Bryman - Oxford University Press, n.d.*) as well as face to face interview. An interview schedule along with open ended questions had used for the



documentation of the data. The place of data collection is- Momo point, college Halt, Alipurduar District, Pin-736122.

## **Findings**

Mrs. Meenu Chetri Dey Sarkar, a resident of Alipurduar District, West Bengal (*Government of West Bengal - Egiye Bangla*, n.d.). Her birthplace is at Thimphu (*Thimphu / Map, Bhutan, & Facts / Britannica*, 2024), Bhutan (*Ritual Definition & Meaning - Merriam-Webster*, n.d.). She has done the schooling at Kalimpong District (*Official Website Of Kalimpong District / India*, n.d.), West Bengal. After that she came to Alipurduar for further studies. She got bachelor's degree from there. Few years from then she started teaching at a school, located in Jaigaon, Alipurduar District. Like many of others Meenu left her job and married to her husband. After getting married she came to live at Alipurduar. While staying in a liberal environment at her in-laws, Meenu was not vocal of her financial independence. As she said – my mother in law supported me a lot to do the business, she took care of my children, so that I can work here peacefully. It is quite clear that she is not restricted from doing job or anything related to earning.

Gradually time passes by; an unexpected struggle hit their family. Meenu's family became economically weak. At this point she realized, that she have to do something to support her family. Being an educated person, she was in dilemma on choosing work. She said – “At that time I was in a dilemma, like I am not suitable for a maid servant job nor as a cook. Finally she had decided to begin food business. What kind of food to begin with??- Momo (Jain, 2022) it was. The word Momo is not unknown to people nowadays. It is a very popular food item. It is made out of flour dough stuffed with vegetables or chicken etc, served with chutney and a bowl of soup. On a macro view, among Nepali community, they are expertise in making Momo's. It is a traditional food of their culture and very much popular. Her husband has a Xerox shop at Alipurduar town area. The shop consisted of two rooms. One of them left unused. Meenu make that room suitable for her work. In the earlier days of her journey, she made all the food at her home and carries them to the shop to sell. Gradually people give positive feedback on her food. As a result the business makes its way towards prosperity. The shop named after one of her bestselling food item that is – ‘Momo Point’. Though her husband's financial condition get better but Meenu madam continued business till today. This venture brings back her awareness of financial freedom.

Now she said, every woman must do some work to support herself and her family. A group of twelve women created a self-help group; of which Meenu madam is one of the members. Members of the group took loan and used it in their business. Not all of them are associated with food business. By seeing Meenu madam as a successful business person, they get inspired and despite of various obstacles, their endeavors are continuing. Apart from selling from shop, Momo point



is also delivering food through Swiggy (*Order Food Online from India's Best Food Delivery Service / Swiggy, n.d.*), Zomato(*Best Restaurants in India - Zomato, n.d.*) online food delivery App. Local residents ordered food from Momo (Marshall, 2019) Point on occasions like birthday party, house warming party etc. On the question of obstacle during her journey, she said that the struggle was about capital. Because as the business grows further, it needs manpower to support the demand/supply and equipment are also needed to reduce the preparation time, without capital which was impossible. In this situation, she took loan from the self-help group and done the needful.

Beside Momo, there are other food items which are available in her shop e.g. pasta(*Pasta / Definition, Processing, & Preparation / Britannica, n.d.*), noodles, etc. She also sell uncooked rice noodles(Li et al., 2015), egg noodles etc. At present she has recruited one woman to help her with the food preparation. Momo point becomes one of the famous woman led food shop at Alipurduar.

## **Conclusion**

The whole process of becoming a successful foodpreneur was a crisis situation in this case. Because , not every time there is going to be an earlier dream which is to be fulfilled , there will be crisis, financial struggle and one's own traditional food item to begin a new venture. That venture changes the mental construct of being dependent after receiving education, will create the intrinsic will to make financial independence a new normal. Because , tradition is what helps to know about one's culture in one hand but it also keep alive some role expectations which are need to be changed .Again it can help someone to make progress. Meenu Chetri is just a one case study of a moffusil area like Alipurduar district. There are many women out there who are progressing in their way towards independence with the support of their traditional cuisine(Chowdhury & Gangopadhyay, 2023).



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