**Assignment 01**

**Beef Bhuna: A Dish That Connects Me to My Roots**

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According to anthropology, food is deeply tied to culture, shaping the way we live, think, and connect with each other. It’s just not about survival, but also holds social, economic, and symbolic meaning. People from every culture have their own unique traditions for growing, preparing, and sharing food, shaped by their environment, history, and beliefs. Cooking, for example, not only changed our biology but also strengthened communal bonds. Food practices also reflect traditions, values, and even social structures, such as who cooks or eats first in a family. By studying food, anthropologists uncover how it links to identity, relationships, and even global issues like sustainability and food security. Every culture has some main dishes that are mandatory and stand at the heart of its celebrations, gatherings, and rituals. Not just as a food but these dishes are cultural symbols that carry stories of heritage, community, and tradition. In Bangladesh, one such dish that reflects our cultural identity and values is beef bhuna. Its preparation methods, variations, and role in our lives tells the story of family bonds, regional diversity, and communal traditions that bring people together.

For Bangladeshis, beef bhuna is more than a food; it serves as a symbol of cultural pride. Its unique flavor and cooking methods distinguish it as a meal that is a part of who we are. Since making a perfect bhuna takes time, love, and attention, it represents the values of patience and care. Growing up in Dhaka and belonging to a Muslim family, beef bhuna has always been at the center of our family gatherings. Whether served during a celebration or during an ordinary family dinner, it symbolizes our culture's value of flavourful, heavy meals. The use of our traditional spices like turmeric, cumin, chili peppers, garam masala and various other types of masala is deeply rooted with our food culture. Beef bhuna has a deep connection with both our religious practices and cultural identity.

In Islam, beef plays a big role during Eid-ul-Adha, when Muslims around the world perform Qurbani, a religious practice where an animal, often a cow, goat, sheep or sometimes even camel is sacrificed as a remembrance of our Prophet Ibrahim (AS)’s sacrifice for Allah SWT. The meat of the animal is distributed among the poors and needy people and a portion of it is kept by the family. It's very normal that, for several consecutive days after the actual Eid day, beef bhuna becomes a central part of our meals, appearing at breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Personally, I never get tired of having beef bhuna three times a day as it is at the top of my favorite food list.

The variations in the preparation methods of beef bhuna across different regions of Bangladesh reflect its deep connection to our culture. These regional differences make the dish even more special. For example, in Khulna, chui jhal is added to beef bhuna, giving it a spicy and unique flavor that stands out from other regional variations. Chui jhal is basically a special type of spice that gives a spicy kick that can be even more intense than black pepper. So, that is why Khulna’s beef bhuna with chui jhal is famous all across Bangladesh. If someone wants to experience the authentic chui jhal beef bhuna, they must visit Khulna. The region itself holds the true taste of this dish, with a recipe passed down through generations, offering a unique flavor that cannot be replicated elsewhere.

Another great example that reflects the strong connection of beef bhuna with our culture is Chittagong region, the people of Chittagong are renowned for having a close bond with beef. For the people of Chittagong beef bhuna is not just a dish but a part of every significant occasion. Whether it is a wedding, a birthday celebration, festive or any sort of happy moments, beef bhuna is always a central part of the menu. Even during solemn moments, such as mourning a death, the tradition of mejban brings the community together. The mejbani event is organized by the family of the deceased. In this ceremony, a cow or sometimes more than one cow is sacrificed and the beef is prepared with a special blend of various types of spices to create a rich, flavorful bhuna which is the central, mandatory and special part of the event. This event is not just limited to family or friends; it’s an open invitation to the entire community, where people from all walks of life come together to share a meal, showing a sense of unity and generosity for the dead. Basically, beef is a mandatory thing in all types of occasions for the people of Chittagong whether it’s a joyful celebration or a time of mourning.

Beef bhuna has been significant to me not just as a dish but as a part of my identity and connection to my community. Growing up in Bangladesh, in a Muslim family and as a bengali, beef bhuna was present in almost every important moment, from family gatherings to festivals like Eid. Growing up in such a way, such practices made it sort of a ritual for me. Although food is not always the central focus of a joyful occasion, there are moments when preparing a large meal becomes essential. For example when relatives visit our home or when my friends come over for the first time or a birthday party, etc. On these occasions, beef bhuna is always a part of the menu and also the main course because, without it, the meal feels incomplete. If I reflect on one of my personal experiences, it takes me back to a time one and a half years ago when I shifted to a new apartment near my university campus away from my home. I lived there for two consecutive semesters along with my few friends renting an apartment near our university campus. As I had grown older, I had stopped celebrating my birthdays in a big way, considering myself mature enough to let go of such practices. However, there is one thing my mom always does for me on my birthday. She would always cook kalo bhuna for me on my birthday. There is no parties or guests, just her way of making the day special because she knows how much I love kalo bhuna. kalo bhuna is another preparation method for beef. It has thick and rich dark gravy which requires slow cooking and lots of onions and spices are added. The meat becomes soft and juicy due to the extended cooking process, often melting in the mouth and has a slightly sticky texture. It's very aromatic and about the taste, it is a bit spicy and a hint of smoky, slightly burnt flavor, which is highly desirable and goes best with plain white rice. Now, on my first birthday away from home, it was unfortunate that I was so much busy with my academic work that I could not visit my family on the day of my birthday as exams were also near. It felt so incomplete being not able to have kalo bhuna specially cooked by my mom. Although we ordered food from outside, which also included beef. But, still the feeling of having kalo bhuna cooked with love on my birthday with mom, dad and my siblings, all sitting on the same table, this feeling of completeness is irreplaceable. That year, I truly understood how much this simple tradition meant to me, not just as a meal but as a bond that connected me with my family.

In our culture, not only beef bhuna goes beyond being a central food item, sometimes it creates a tradition that binds us, just like my story of my birthday. My mom's act of cooking kalo bhuna with such care and attention is her unique way of expressing love, a tradition that has become a part of my identity. Sitting on the same table with my parents and my siblings and sharing this flavourful dish is more than just a meal, it's a ritual that brings warmth and makes us feel complete. So, it reflects how food can hold emotional significance and create lasting bonds within a family. Beef bhuna has become a significant part of my life through practices influenced by both cultural and religious traditions.

Therefore, food is much more than sustenance, it is a strong emotional and cultural part that defines who we are and strengthens our links to our families and communities. Beef bhuna, is a dish that is deeply rooted into Bangladeshi culture and acts as a symbol of tradition as well as a medium for shared memories. It is also Rooted in both religious practices like Qurbani during Eid-ul-Adha and cultural rituals such as mejban in Chittagong. It reflects the values of generosity, unity, and patience. Its significance is strengthened by regional variations, such as Khulna's chui jhal, which highlights the diversity of Bangladeshi food culture. Its preparation methods reflect patience, love, and care, while its appearance at different occasions starting from joyful festivals to solemn rituals shows its cultural and religious significance. Personally, beef bhuna has developed more than its role as a meal to become a symbol of familial love and togetherness, as seen from my own personal experience of my mothers Kalo bhuna tradition on my every birthday. This small tradition has become a ritual of our family every year on the same day. It contains the flavors of our cultural heritage, the beauty of unity, and the warmth of togetherness. Through its cultural, religious, and personal meanings, beef bhuna is a significant part of my identity and a valued connection to my origin.