

Food, Ritual and Belief: Exploring the Religious and Cultural Significance of Narzi and Ondla among the Bodo Community of Assam

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Abstract:

The study examines two traditional Bodo cuisines *Narzi* and *Ondla*, treated as distinct cuisine within Bodo community. The study also explores their socio-cultural and ritual significance within Bodo society. *Narzi* is prepared from dried jute leaves and *Ondla* is prepared from ground rice flour and they are not merely food items that needs for nutritional fulfilment but are embedded within the religious beliefs, cultural practice and social life of the Bodo community. Moving beyond the understanding of food as a means of satisfying hunger, the study explores how particular foods acquire symbolic meanings and significance within specific social and ritual contexts. Drawing on the foodway's perspective, the study analyses food as cultural practice through which social relationships, religious beliefs, traditions and collective identities are expressed and reproduced. The study adopted qualitative approach to understand the meaning embedded with foods and data was collected using purposive sampling through semi-structured in-dept interviews, observation and secondary sources like Books in Bodo language about food preparation. Thematic analysis of data indicate that *Narzi* holds particular significance in death related rituals, while *Ondla* occupies an important place in the traditional Bodo wedding ceremony known as *Hathasuni Haba* among the followers of Bathouism. The study further finds that both foods have significance in agricultural practices, particularly during the pre-harvesting period of rice. These findings demonstrate that traditional Bodo cuisines are embedded in broader system of ritual, religious, agricultural and social meanings highlighting the role of foodways in sustaining, transmitting cultural practices and collective identity.

Keywords: Foodways, Bodo Society, Bathouism, Cultural Practice, Collective Identity

1. Introduction

The concept of foodways is particularly significance for examining food as a culturally embedded practice. Foodways encompass not only what people eat but also how food is produced, prepared, consumed and attach cultural meanings (Armah & Ashraf, 2026). In this sense, food can operate as a symbolic system through which cultural meanings are structured and reproduced across the generation (Candraningtyas et al., 2025; Reddy & Van Dam, 2020). Even though food is fundamental for human existence, yet its significance extends far beyond biological sustenance. The preparation and consumption of food are embedded with cultural values and religious beliefs. Food practices are can function as cultural texts through which ethnic and community identities regulated. Particular food can also be directly associated with religious beliefs and ritual practice. Religious frameworks can shape what is considered permissible, prohibited, and sacred for consumption (Desjardins, 2022). The social significance of food is further

evident in communal eating and shared food practices. Preparing and consuming food collectively can create opportunities for social interaction, reciprocity and harmony within the community (Kalundang & Salainti, 2026).

This perspective is particularly relevant to the Bodo community of Assam, which possesses a distinctive culinary tradition that embedded with it's socio-cultural, agricultural and religious life. Traditional Bodo foodways involve locally available ingredients and knowledge that have been transmitted across the generation. Bodo food is not restricted to everyday consumption but is also incorporated into particular social and ceremonial contexts. Certain foods have specific meanings and relevance associated with religious practices, agricultural activities and important social occasions. Among the Bodo community, two popular cuisines Narzi and Ondla provide important examples of culturally embedded food practice. Their association with death, marriage, religion and agriculture among the followers of original Bodo religion Bathouism indicates that they have significant cultural values while preparing and consuming them. The significance of Narzi and Ondla can be understood through multiple interconnected dimensions of foodways. Studying these cuisines thus provide an opportunity to examine how an ordinary food practice can be embedded within the wider systems of social and cultural meanings.

Despite the growing study on food, culture and religion, there remains scope for examining the specific traditional cuisines like Narzi and Ondla through integrated foodways perspective. In this understanding, greater attention can be given to how individual food items can acquire social, religious and cultural meanings. Rather than treating traditional cuisines as merely food, examining them as a cultural practice can reveal the way in which communities preserve and reproduced their social identity through food. Against this background, the present study examines Narzi and Ondla as culturally embedded traditional Bodo foodways and explores their socio-cultural meanings, ritual significance and associations with religious beliefs and agricultural practices. Drawing on the foodway's perspective, the study seeks to addresses two interrelated questions: 1) What are the socio-cultural and ritual meanings associated with associated with Narzi and Ondla among the Bodo community? 2) How are the foodways of Narzi and Ondla connected with Bodo religious beliefs and agricultural practices? By approaching food as a social and symbolic practice rather than merely an object of consumption, the study aims to contribute a broader sociological understanding of Bodo foodways and the role of traditional cuisine in community life.

2. Review of Literature

Food is not merely a biological necessity but a socially and culturally embedded practice through which community express identity and communicates social meanings. Every community has their distinct food habits that symbolizes their culture and religious practices. Food prepared by different ethnic groups is unique and distinct due to the differences in geographical location, food preference and availability of dietary sources. Religious beliefs and customary practice exert a strong influence on food habits that can be taboos imposed on consumption. Kwon & Tamang (2015) argues that ethnic food practices are shaped by geographical location, environmental conditions, food preferences, customary beliefs, religious practices and availability of resources. Food therefore becomes an important marker of cultural distinctiveness, particularly when particular foods are associated with celebration, occasions and religious festivals.

The relationship between food and culture is further reinforced through enculturation. Food related behavior such as food selection, preparation, acceptance and consumption is learned through interaction with family and community members. The study also highlights that the culture of particular community

and its social institution such as family, economy, kinship and belief have larger amount of influence on food practice of people. At the same time changes in foodways can contribute to changes in traditional culture and values. Therefore, food consumption cannot be understood only as a response of psychosocial needs to fill hunger but also have equal influence on culture and social system (Mohan, 2023). Traditional foods habits embody accumulated knowledge regarding ingredients, preparation techniques, appropriate occasions of consumption and accepted ways of serving them. Syamsia (2025) demonstrate that traditional foods can embody values extending beyond their culinary function and their association with weddings, communal gathering can reinforce cooperation, solidarity and respect for elders. Suryawati (2025) conceptualizes food as a cultural and symbolic artefact through which societies articulate their identity. Similarly, Premchandra and Chakma (2025) demonstrate that festive cuisines establish relationship between people, land, tradition and embodies symbolic meanings. These studies indicate that the significance of food lies not only in what people consume, but also in when and where food is prepared and consume.

A substantial body of literature demonstrate that there is a close relationship between food, religion and community life. Culture and religious system influence what people consume, what they avoid and the occasions on which particular food are prepared. Shipman & Durmus (2017) demonstrate that cultural and religious tradition may influence food consumption patterns. Food practices in certain cultural and religious occasion are generally restricted as per the tradition. The study on Baritan ceremony in Indonesia demonstrate that ritual food offerings can express gratitude, religious beliefs and social harmony (Suwandi et al., 2025). Such food practices symbolically connect people with God, ancestors, nature and community life. Research on indigenous foodways demonstrate that the ritual use of indigenous foods reflects not only dietary preferences but also relationship of reciprocity between humans, nature and ancestors (Srivastava et al., 2026). Food plays important role in creating, maintaining and sustaining community relationship. Preparing and consuming food collectively creates opportunities for interaction, reciprocity and communal solidarity. Festival and ceremonial food practices form cultural memory that connects communities with histories and ancestors. Therefore, communal eating is not just an act of food consumption but a social and religious practices that fosters social interaction (Iswari et al., 2025; Kalundang & Salainti, 2026; Premchandra & Chakma, 2025). Festival foodways further demonstrate that this intersection of food, ritual and perform both symbolic and functional roles by contributing to communal identity (Syamchand, 2026). However, the existing literature often examines festival food through particular dimensions such as gender, identity and ritual rather than examining how food simultaneously connects religion, culture, agriculture and social dimension of community life.

The literature on indigenous foodways highlights the importance of food as a repository of local knowledge and traditional food practice may preserve knowledge preparation techniques, agricultural cycles, environmental condition and culturally appropriate form of food consumption. Srivastava et al. (2026) emphasize that indigenous foods can connect communities with their ecological environment. Similarly, Reddy & Van Dam (2020) highlighted that traditional food may be associated with culturally specific understanding of health, beliefs and medicinal properties of particular foods. Such knowledge is often maintained through everyday practices and transmitted across the generation highlighting that traditional foodways can function as informal system through which knowledge about health and the environment is preserved. Gender is another dimension embedded with food practices as women and older members of plays important role in food preparation and the transmission of culinary knowledge. Reddy & Van Dam (2020) demonstrated the role of women in maintaining knowledge concerning traditional

foods and their perceived health properties. At the same time, foodways are not static and are influenced by modernization, globalization, changing occupations, education and changing household structure. A food may become less common in everyday consumption while continuing to be prepared during particular festivals, ceremonies such as weddings, agricultural and religious festivals.

The existing literature establishes that food should be understood as a social, symbolic, religious, cultural and relational practice. Previous studies have examined the relationship between food and ethnic identity, cultural learning and social institution, communal relationship, religious meanings, indigenous ecological knowledge, cultural continuity and transformation. However, these dimensions have frequently been examined separately. There remains need for studies that examines specific indigenous foods as multidimensional cultural practice. There needs to connect the ritual significance of food with agricultural practices, religious beliefs, community relationship and expression of identity.

This gap provides the basis for examining the Narzi and Ondla among the Bodos not simply as traditional dishes but as indigenous foodways through which cultural and religious meanings are embedded. Their preparation and consumption can be examined in relation to religious beliefs, agricultural activities and community identity. The present study adopts foodways perspective to understand how Ondla and Narzi acquires and retain cultural and religious meanings. Rather than limiting only on their ingredients and preparation, the study examines the broader social and religious context. This approach allows the study to explore how food function as a medium of social cohesion, religious expression and community identity.

3. Material and Methods

This study adopts a qualitative methodology to understand the socio-cultural and religious values presence in food items Narzi and Onla (Ondla) among the Bodo community. The study prioritizes the subjective meanings, lived experiences and symbolic interactions of community members that attached with such foods. Guided by a foodway's perspective, the study conceptualizes these foods as culturally embedded practices through which religious beliefs, indigenous knowledge, ritual obligations and collective identities are expressed and reproduced. A multi-sited fieldwork research design was employed to explore the meanings and practices associated with these foods across seven districts of Assam i.e. Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa, Tamulpur, Udalguri, Sonitpur and Dhemaji. These locations were selected with reference to the geographical distribution of the Bodo population as per the 2011 census and the relevant demographic sources. Primary data were collected from purposively selected participants possessing relevant knowledge and experience of the preparation, consumption and cultural or ritual significance of Narzi and Ondla. Semi structured interviews, generally lasting 15-20 minutes were conducted through face-to-face and telephone interactions, dependent on fieldwork accessibility. Observation of food preparation practices supplemented the interview narratives, facilitating a contextual understanding of the relationship between culinary practices and their associated cultural meanings. Particular attention was given to the participants' interpretations of the religious significance of these foods, their incorporation into ritual contexts and the transmission of food related knowledge. The study also draws upon published books into Bodo language and relevant academic literature to contextualize the empirical material within broader discussion of food, culture, religion and indigenous traditions. The collected data were analysed through a combined deductive-inductive thematic approach. Initial analytical categories were informed by the research objectives, existing literature and the foodways perspective. While inducting coding enabled the identification of emergent meanings and patterns within participants' narratives. The resulting themes

were examined to understand how Narzi and Ondla function beyond their material and nutritional dimensions as expression of the cultural identity, religious practice and collective continuity. This analytical strategy facilitated an interpretation of foodways that remained theoretically informed while being responsive to participants lived experiences and culturally situated understanding.

4. Findings

The analysis of the ethnographic data using semi-structured interview with participants on Narzi and Ondla was guided by two research questions. The central ideas about research questions are around socio-cultural and ritual meanings and their relationship with religious beliefs and agricultural practices. The data was analysed thematically by identifying recurring meanings, practices and beliefs. The Analysis generated four major themes: 1) Narzi and ondla as culturally embedded foods 2) ondla Amao and ritual marking of marriage 3) Narzi, death rituals and regulation of mourning and 4) food restrictions, agricultural cycles and indigenous agrarian beliefs. These themes demonstrate that both of these foods are not understood merely as food items but are embedded with culture, ritual, religious beliefs and agricultural practices.

4.1 Narzi/Narzwi and Ondla/Onla as Culturally Embedded foods

The participants reported that both Narzi and Ondla occupy important position within the food practices of Bodo people who follows Bathouism. Although both are consumed as food, their preparation and forms of consumption are embedded within broader cultural practices. Narzi is a traditional Bodo food prepared from jute leaves collected from jute plants. They are dried in the Sun and preserved for later use or consumption. The participant explained that dried Narzi can be preserved for extended period and prepared whenever required for consumption. It can be cooked with pork, fish and Napham (fermented fish). It indicates that Narzi forms part of the everyday food repertoire and is incorporated into meals. Another traditional food Ondla is prepared from rice ground into flour and cooked with khardwi, alkaline liquid made from the ash of burnt mustard plant, lentil plants, banana stems and others. It is commonly cooked with local chicken, pork, bamboo shoots or seasonal vegetables. The participants identified different forms of it like general meal Ondla which is consumed in everyday life and another one is Ondla Amao that is consumed in Bodo traditional wedding. General ondla is prepared and consumed more commonly in everyday life. The findings therefore demonstrate that Narzi and Ondla possess both culinary and cultural dimensions. Their significance does not arise only from the ingredients used in their preparation but also from the knowledge and practices associated with their production and consumption. The preservation of dried Narzi reflects knowledge of how a locally available plant resource can be processed and retained for future consumption. Similarly, preparation of ondla involves the transformation of rice into flour and its subsequent cooking.

From the foodway's perspective, these practices demonstrate that food is not simply a biological necessity but a culturally organised practice involving particular ingredients, preparation techniques, preservation methods and pattern of consumption. Thus, Narzi and Ondla can be understood as culturally embedded foods through which knowledge about food preparation and consumption is maintained.

4.2 Ondla Amao (Rice Flour Curry without Turmeric) and the Ritual Marking of marriage

A particularly significant finding is the distinction between everyday consumed general ondla and special ondla amao. While general onlda is consumed more commonly, ondla amao is specially associated with Hatasuni Haba, a traditional form of Bodo wedding. The participant explained that ondla amao differs from general ondla in its preparation process. It is prepared with simple ingredients like salt without

turmeric and other masalas. During a traditional Bodo marriage ceremony called aa Hatha-Suni Haba, the ritual is considered as incomplete without this dish. According to customary tradition, the new bride prepares Ondla Amao by grinding rice into flour manually using traditional implement known as *uwalgahen*. Other women in the household often assist in the preparation process. The dish is customarily prepared using a pair of local chickens, one male and one female, which may symbolically represent balance and complementarity. Unlike other preparation for household consumption, turmeric is excluded from this ceremonial version of Ondla, distinguishing it from its everyday culinary forms. Following this preparation, the bride performs a ritual known as Hatha Khurnai, during which bride serves the meal to the groom before offering it to other family members and publics. This act of serving carries significance beyond the provision of food, as it marks the bride's preparation of in the ritual life of her new household. It marks the beginning of their new married life without complexity. This distinction of the same food based on the ingredients added to it demonstrate that the same category of food can acquire different meanings depending upon the context in which it is prepared and consumed. General ondla forms part of the ordinary food practice and ondla amao is associated with a particular ritual occasion. The limited preparation of ondla amao is also significant. The absence of turmeric differentiates it from the more flexible preparation of general ondla.

This finding suggests that the significance of ondla amao lies not only in its material consumption but in the social and ritual context of its consumption. Food becomes part of the process through which a major life-cycle transition is culturally marked. Marriage is therefore not represented only through interpersonal or ceremonial activities but also expressed through specific food practices. From sociological perspective ondla amao demonstrate how food can participate in the social recognition of life-cycle transitions. It's consumption by the groom and his assistant during *Hathasuni Haba* symbolically situates food within the process of beginning married life. The finding therefore supports the broader understanding of foodways through social relation, rituals and cultural meanings.

4.3 Narzi, Death Rituals and the Regulation of Mourning

In contrast to the association of Ondla Amao with marriage, Narzi has distinctive connection n with death rituals. The participant described a ritual known as Narzi Orgarnai, which takes place post-cremation of a deceased person in family. Beyond its culinary significance, narzi is associated with certain Bodo death rituals. According to the account of participants, during funeral practices involving burial or cremation, a ritual specialist known as a Douri prepares post funeral ritual near a river or pond. The surface is prepared with mud and facing south, the specialists offer Narzi on banana leaf alongside rice grains, a stone and white cotton thread. Following the cremation, villagers collect a few dried jute leaves, rice grain and bite them as part of the ritual known as Narzi Orgarnai. This practice symbolises the separation of the deceased from the living. Narzi is also reportedly consumed during Saradu, a post- death commemorative gathering observed by some Bodo followers of Bathouism. This practice illustrates how a food used in everyday meals can acquire traditional meanings within ritual context, becoming associated with death, mourning and the relationship between the living and the deceased.

In everyday settings Narzi is consumed with rice, fish, pork and Napham. However, in the context of death it assumes a ritual role associated with the transition from life to death. The inclusion of Narzi in *Narzi Orgarnai* ritual indicates that food may acquire meanings beyond ordinary consumption (Swargiary & Wary, 2025). In this context, its significance derived from the cultural settings and religious interpretation attached to it. The participants explanation of the practice as symbolising the separation of the soul from the physical body reflects a culturally meaningful understanding of death. Another aspect of the finding is

that Narzi is subject to a prolong restriction after the death. Many families avoid consumption of Narzi for one year and many families consumes it if the food is cooked by other households. According to a participant from Sonitpur, Narzi cannot be consumed for ten days following the death of a family member. Another participant from Kokrajhar reported that they follow it until seven days following the death of family member as they observed Shraddha in next same day of the death. In many families this restriction continues even after the shraddha ceremony and remains in effect for one year from the date of death. This extended prohibition is analytically significant because it shows that food practices are involved not only in the performance of rituals but also in regulating the period that follows ritual event. The restriction establishes a temporal boundary around food consumption after death and links dietary behaviour with the experience of mourning.

Narzi therefore, operates at multiple levels as an everyday food, as a ritual substance in Narzi Orgarnai and as a prohibited food during an extended post-death period. Its shifting status demonstrate that the cultural meaning of food is context and regional dependent. This finding may therefore be understood as an example of how foodways are connected to death, mourning, ritual time and religious meaning. Food is not merely consumed in everyday social life but also can be restricted as part of the cultural regulation of bereavement.

4.4 Food Restrictions, Agricultural Cycles and Agrarian Beliefs

Another major theme emerging from the participant's narration concerns the relationship between Narzi, Ondla and the agricultural cycle. The participant explained that both foods are avoided during the pre-harvesting period of rice starting from milky stage and continues until the rice grain reaches the maturity. This restriction is associate with specific beliefs about rice development. Regarding Narzi the participants explained that its consumption is avoided when paddy fields are bloom or when the rice is nearing the seeding stage. Consumpition of Narzi during this milky stage is believed to affect rice growth and the rice may fail to emerge properly and even if flowering occurs the rice may not develop into proper grain. This restriction is grounded in the belief that consuming Narzi during this sensitive period could adversely affect crop development. These accounts suggest that agricultural beliefs can shape dietary choices alongside farming activities.

A similar belief is associated with Ondla as farmers avoid consuming Ondla during the milky stage or from blooming to maturity of grain. It is believed that eating ondla during this period may cause developing rice grains to become "saffy". This abstention is rooted in traditional ecological knowledge, reflecting a belief that consuming ondla during this sensitive agricultural phase could negatively affect the crop. Reflecting on the restriction against eating Ondla during the rice growing period, one participant stated

"Narzi is my favourite curry and I wanted to have Ondla curry also, but what I can do now, the rice in our field is still growing. I could not risk harming the crop by eating ondla at that time" (translated from Bodo)

This account illustrates how food consumption can be regulated by culturally embedded beliefs about the relationship between human behaviour and agricultural processes. Although the participant expressed a desire to eat Ondla, this preference was subordinated to the perceived need to protect the growing rice crop. The decision to abstain from eating Narzi and Ondla was therefore not simply a matter of individual dietary choice but it reflects a culturally informed understanding of the possible consequences of food consumption for agricultural productivity.

The parallel restriction on the consumption of these two foods is significant because it demonstrates that dietary practices are regulated in relation to a particular stage of agricultural production. The agricultural calendar therefore extends beyond farming activities and shapes everyday food consumption. Even though these findings are not scientific claim about food practice and its relation with agricultural growth, it reflects a culturally held belief concerning the relationship between food consumption and agricultural productivity. The significance of this belief lies in its influence on behaviour and in the rules, it establishes regarding when particular foods may or may not be consumed. The milky stage of rice thus functions as more than agricultural phase and becomes a culturally meaningful period during which specific dietary restrictions are observed. They resume consumption once the rice is harvested and offer traditional ritual called “*wngkham gwrlwi janai* (eating newly harvested rice)” further demonstrates how food practices are synchronised with the agricultural cycle. This finding highlights the close relationship between foodways and indigenous agrarian knowledge representing the influence of agricultural processes in food consumption. It suggests that foodways may serve as a medium through which agricultural knowledge, seasonal awareness and culturally embedded beliefs are reproduced.

4.5 Interconnection of Food, Ritual, Religion and Agriculture

These four themes demonstrate that Narzi and Ondla occupy interconnected domains of Bodo social and cultural life. They function as everyday foods but acquire additional meanings in particular ritual and agricultural contexts. Ondla is associated with everyday consumption but ondla amao requires a distinctive ritual significance during *hathasuni haba*. Narzi is similarly consumed as everyday food but becomes part of narzi orgarnai in the context of death of family member. At the same time, both foods are connected with agricultural cycle through restriction during pre-harvesting period from milky stage to maturity and specifically ondla is first serve while having *wngkham gwrlwi* festival. These practices demonstrate that food, ritual, religion and agriculture are not necessarily separate cultural domains but the intersect through particular food.

5. Discussion

5.1 Food Beyond Nutrition

The findings from the study of Narzi and Ondla demonstrate that both of these food items cannot understood only in terms of their cultural and culinary functions. Their meanings are produced through the social context in which they are prepared and consumed. This finding is consistent with the foodway’s perspective which treat food as a social and cultural practice (Reddy & Van Dam, 2020). The preparation of different forms of ondla, narzi and the restrictions surrounding both foods demonstrate that food practices involve cultural knowledge, social rules and symbolic meanings. The finding therefore extends the understanding of Bodo food practices by showing how particular foods operate across everyday and ritual domains through which meanings are communicated and reproduced.

5.2 Food and Life Cycle Rituals

The association of Ondla Amao and Narzi respectively with marriage and death ritual demonstrate the role of food in making life cycle transitions. Ondla Amao is associated with the beginning of married life whereas Narzi orgarnai is associated with post cremation ritual and is understood by the participants as separation of relation between the death physical body and other members of the family. The two foods consequently occupy different but complementary positions with marriage and death. This suggests that food can serve as a material medium through which culturally significant events are experienced and food can form an integral part of ritual practice. This finding aligns with existing research on food, ritual and

cultural identity which highlights how food practice can communicate collective meanings and reproduce social relationship (Kwon & Tamang, 2015; Markowitz & Avieli, 2022). In the Bodo context, Ondla Amao and Narzi demonstrate how foodways connect ritual practices with culturally specific understanding of marriage, death and relatedness.

5.6 Foodways and Religious Worldview

The findings also demonstrate the connection between food practices and religious, culturally embedded understanding of life and death. The participants explained the significance of Narzi and Ondla within the context of Bodo people who follows Bathouism. The use of Narzi in post funeral ritual called as *narzi orgarnai* and its importance in understanding the practice of separation of relation between the death physical body and other members of the family demonstrate that food can be incorporated into broader religious worldview of human being. The important point is that these beliefs and practices provide embedded meanings to ritual and religious action. The ritual practice becomes meaningful because it is understood within particular religious framework. This interpretation is consistent with research showing that food and ritual practices can express religious beliefs and culturally specific understanding of the world (Kwon & Tamang, 2015; Markowitz & Avieli, 2022). Thus, foodways can be understood as one of the ways through which religious worldviews become embodied in everyday life.

5.7 Foodways and Agricultural Knowledge

The relationship between food restrictions and the milky stage of rice provides an important insight into the connection between foodways and agricultural practices. The participant's belief that consuming Narzi and Ondla during this period could negatively affect rice development demonstrate that agricultural knowledge is expressed through dietary rules and regulates not only agricultural labour but also food consumption. This is significant because it shows that agriculture is embedded within a broader cultural system and the milky stage of rice is recognised as a period requiring particular behavioural restrictions and such restrictions may function as mechanisms through which knowledge and beliefs concerning agricultural production are transmitted between generations. The findings can be discussed alongside research on indigenous knowledge and agricultural practices, particularly the relationship between cultural beliefs, local ecological knowledge and food production (Castagnetti et al., 2021). Thus, the finding illustrates how indigenous agrarian knowledge can become embedded in foodways and everyday practices.

5.8 Food Restriction as Cultural Regulation

Another important analytical insight is the role of food restrictions. The prohibition of Narzi following the death of family member, Narzi and Ondla during the pre-harvesting period of rice from milky stage to first eating of new rice demonstrate two different forms of food regulation. The first restriction is associated with death and mourning, while the second restriction is associated with agriculture and crop development. In both food items, their consumption is governed by culturally recognised circumstances which suggests that food restrictions can function as mechanism of cultural regulation. They establish rules about what may be consumed and under what circumstances such food should be avoided. This interpretation can be connected with research examining how ritual food practices contribute to the reproduction of cultural meanings and collective identity (Dewantara et al., 2023). Therefore, food restriction contributes to the reproduction of cultural norms and collective understanding.

5.9 Narzi and Ondla as Cultural Connectors

The most significant contribution emerging from the findings is that there is interconnection between Narzi and Ondla within Bodo cultural life. Rather than belonging exclusively to the domain of food, they connect

with several domain such as food, Ritual, Religion, Agriculture and Social Life. Narzi connects everyday food consumption with death ritual, beliefs concerning the souls, body, mourning practices and agricultural restrictions. Similarly, ondlā connects everyday food consumption with marriage rituals and agricultural beliefs. This interconnectedness suggests that foodways can provide an analytical entry point for understanding broader cultural systems. This study becomes important to analyse how religious beliefs, social relationships, life cycle ritual and agricultural knowledge intersect. Thus, Narzi and Ondla may be understood as cultural connectors through which different aspect of Bodo social life are brought together.

6. Conclusion

This study examined the socio-cultural and ritual meanings of Narzi and Ondla and the findings reveals that there is relationship between religious beliefs and agricultural practices. This demonstrates that these foods extend beyond everyday consumption and function as culturally embedded foodways through which ritual practice, religious meanings and cultural values are expressed. Ondla Amao is closely associated with Hatasuni Haba, where its distinctive preparation by bride and serving to the groom, his assistant marks the new married life. Narzi, in contrast is associate with death rituals through Narzi orgarnai and is subject to prolong restrictions following the death of family member. These practices demonstrate how food becomes incorporated into important life cycle ritual and regulation of mourning. The findings further show that both Narzi and Ondla are avoided during the milky stage of rice cultivation and rice growth. This demonstrates the close relationship between foodways and the agricultural cycle. Overall, Narzi and Ondla function as cultural connectors linking everyday food consumption, life cycle rituals, religious worldview and agricultural practices. The study highlights the importance of examining indigenous foodways as sociological phenomena that provide insight into broader processes of cultural continuity, knowledge transmission and social life.

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