Village Flute

Shutkani Torkari à la Kurigram

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How to make *shutkani torkari* etc. in 12 easy steps:-

Opening note: the following process would've been much simpler had I'd met my friend's younger brother stationed at Ulipur fire station at first, as described last week. But that was on the second arrival in Ulipur in the space of days, while discovering *shutkani torkari*, a Kurigram District specialty, was a task of the first. I didn't know any Ulipur locals then. Anyway, let's get started...

Ingredients

250 grams fresh puti fish
3 onions
2 cloves of garlic
15–20 small chillies
25 grams jute leaves
2 pinches salt
2 teaspoons turmeric
half a glass of water
cooking oil
2 brothers and 1 sister-in-law
1 village kitchen
a generous serving of Ulipur hospitality

Method

Step 1: For the best result in experiencing *shutkani torkari* you'll first need a *bou*, *amma* or *apa* – a wife, mother or older sister from Kurigram District, preferably from a village, who will be expert in cooking. Local dishes are not served in restaurants and home-made food is best. Political correctness aside, it remains a general truth that the ladies of a household are the culinary master chefs.

However, finding one of these relatives at short notice isn't easy – and in the case of a *bou* the endeavour will be complicated and have lifelong consequences. But don't despair – a suitable substitute is to find a generous *bhabi* or elder sister-in-law. It is well-known that a Bangladeshi bhabi is a close relation akin to a friend and that bhabis by habit take care of their *choto bhais* or little brothers, especially when it comes to food.

The good news is that bhabis are easier to find. Bangladesh is full of bhabis – all you need to do is to first locate a kindly *bhai* or brother.

Step 2: A recommended starting point for locating a bhai in Ulipur is the Al Shad Hotel on College Road. With the hotel managers and patrons it will be easy to quickly establish cordial relations and enquiries regarding a desire to sample the local cuisine will be received with enthusiasm and lively discussion.



PHOTO: ANDREW EAGLE

Brothers Mizanur and Shohidur Rahman in their house yard at the time of the *shutkani torkari* experiment.

If possible, try to raise the subject when Health Assistant Md. Shohidur Rahman has stopped by for a bite to eat. It is likely he will kindly volunteer the cooking skills of his own bhabi in Bisnubhallabhe village of Dhamsreni Union, some ten kilometres from the town.

It might be that he is able to call ahead to ask if it is okay, at which point his bhabi, Umma Habiba Mitu, will likely agree. Any offer to buy the ingredients before setting out on his Honda will be firmly refused – everything is available at the house, you will be told. In such a case, one may be on the way to the beautiful village by Shohidur Bhai's motorcycle within minutes.

Step 3: Shohidur Bhai will likely stop to show the fishing nets in the waterlogged land beside ricefields at the entrance to the village where the pint-sized puti fish are caught. In the meantime,