The Value of Ghee

ANDREW EAGLE

Swoosh-swoosh-swoosh. Swoosh-swoosh-swoosh. It's the sound of that ever busy household yard in Ghoshpara, Balijuri, in Jamalpur's Madariganj. It's off the road and down an alleyway to the right, unless you care to tread the straw between the weighty "Australian" and half-weighty "half-Australian" cows. Swoosh-swoosh-swoosh. There's a thin rope being pulled, indeed there are two. First one side then the other, backwards and forwards in unison. The energy of teamwork is turning a claw-footed stick called a *gholat* or a *kata* – churning milk in a bucket into butter. Swoosh-swoosh-swoosh. It's the sound of a thousand years. It's hypnotic.

Dulal, Ananda, Shopon, Paresh... There's a row of rooms, a long row along one side of the narrow yard. Morali, Dhiren, Mitu, Panesh... And more rooms, on the other side and somewhere down the back. It can't be easy for Renu Bala Chandra Ghosh, 80, to get about like she does. But she's too busy to think about it, hauling baskets of leaf litter in from the roadside. Chanmahan, Dilip. Noresh and Niresh... It can't be easy to count the cousin-brothers, without even considering the wives and grandchildren. There are many members of the Ghosh household. She is of course the mother of Paresh. Anyway, she's too busy to think of it. The sun is setting. She's collecting hand-ful-gloops of butter from the bucket and slopping them into a metal pot. She knows the family's life-recipe that's descended through the ages. Hers must be a longer life of simple steps.

Swoosh-swoosh-swoosh. Swoosh-swoosh-swoosh. There's a woman, indeed there are two, walking up and down the yard nursing babies in their arms. A couple of children are amused, busily, with a drumming toy on the dirt. Chickens are moving about with their broods while warily two kittens watch the butter making from the side of the house, half-concealed by its tin wall. The cats are waiting for their chance to stealthily sample a little of that Ghosh dairy hospitality. Swoosh-swoosh-swoosh. Every day. What a torment! It must be cat hell to have that sound, those enticing smells; except of course when the luck runs and it suddenly, briefly becomes cat heaven.

Ghee is a South Asian type of clarified butter. Its colour, texture and taste depend on the quality of the butter and the technicalities of the boiling process. Ghee has been used in *homa*, fire sacrifices, for over 5,000 years; and of course in food.

Nilma Chandra Ghosh, 25, has discovered guests in the yard, or maybe customers. There is no official market for Ghosh ghee. The customers are drawn in by the family name – like the kittens they find the source. She is of course the wife of Liton, son of Paresh; and she's soon thinking about tea. She calls to Narayan, 18, to find biscuits. He is of course the son of Noresh.

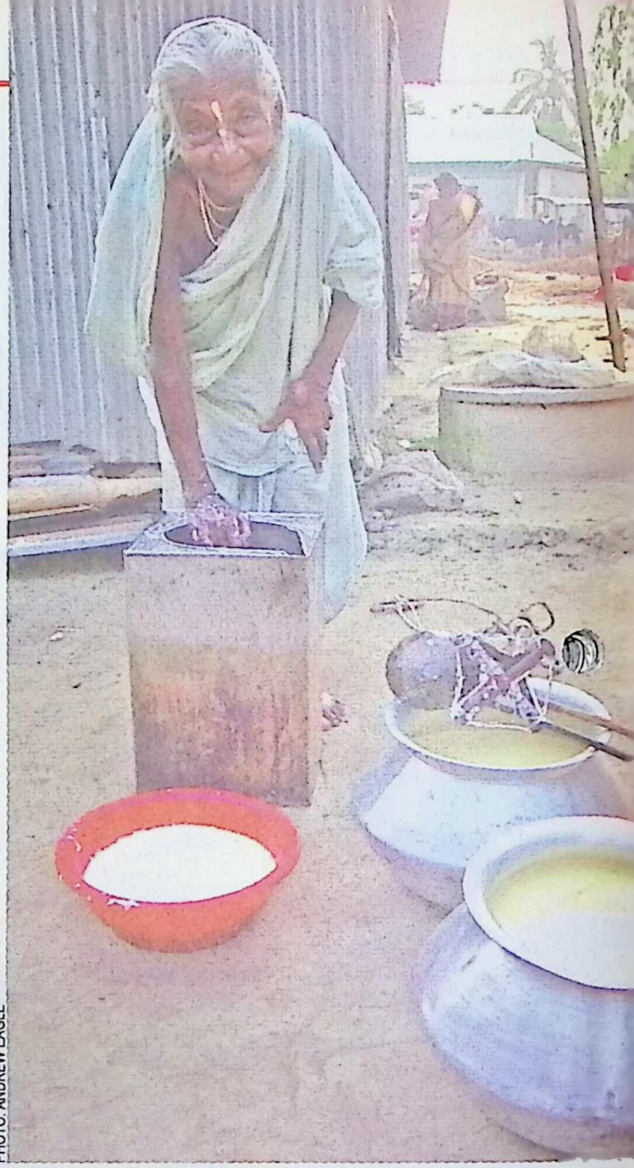


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Renu Bala Chandra Ghosh, who is of course Paresh's mother. At 80, there's still nothing to stop her being involved in the ghee production.