

Buffalo Curd: Heritage of Bhola

Keeping a traditional dessert alive



PHOTO: HRIDOYE MATI O MANUSH

Shykh Seraj speaks to a local curd-maker of Bhola. Unlike other sources of milk, raw buffalo milk is enough in itself for congealing. A common method for other types of milk requires using old curd.

SHYKH SERAJ

On a recent visit to southern Bangladesh, my destination was the district of islands - Bhola. The nature of the region has changed a lot over time, many rivers have dried - but, thankfully, some things have not changed, such as the tradition of Bhola's Buffalo curd. While I was in Bhola, Tofail Ahmed, the Commerce Minister was also visiting his village Dakhhin Dighaldi, his birthplace. As he came to know about our filming, he kindly invited the filming crew for lunch at his home. We then headed for Dakhhin Dighaldi at Sadar Upazila. After we finished our lunch, my eyes got stuck on a dessert - it is the most prestigious and ancient brand of Bhola. Buffalo curd, made from raw buffalo milk. I wanted to learn more about it more from the minister. "It's really popular. We mix molasses with the buffalo curd, making

the dessert even tastier. I have been eating this since my childhood and the heritage dates back to an ancient time, I guess", said the minister. The buffalo curd really charged the whole team up and I wanted to know more about it. I planned to go to the Bhola city. At the city entrance, at Chairman Lane, I found a buffalo curd store called, 'Adarsho Dadhi Bhandar' (Ideal Curd Store). It was a real pleasure talking with the store-owner Abdul Hai. "Is this raw buffalo milk?" "Yes from our own buffalos, we rear at the bathan (cow pastures)." "How much milk do you get every day?" "60 KGs." "How much buffalo curd can you make?" "About 30 KGs." They use a traditional clay pot for buffalo curd making, and the process is eighteen

hours long. Moreover, for the congealing process, they don't use the old curd which is a common method for making curds in case of other types of milk. The raw buffalo milk is enough in itself for congealing. Buffalo curd is really popular in Bhola. Everybody loves it. People serve it to guests at weddings and at other festivals and occasions. I spoke to another store owner of buffalo curd, Abdul Jabbar. "For how long have you been a part of this trade?" "It's my family business. After my father



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Livelihoods of drum players of Kurigram at risk

ABDUL WAHED, Kurigram

People of the Hindu Kaishobo (Malee) community of Kurigram Sadar upazila, who make a living out of playing drums, are facing an existential risk due to low income. This practice has been going on from generation to generation. They would lead their lives playing drums - being uneducated, they don't have access to other kinds of work. In addition to playing drums in various occasions, they also work as janitors from in people's homes at the moment.

Unlike before, demand for drum players have fallen and they are not called to play as frequently. They earn only for seven months every year as they get one to five orders for using drums or musical instruments per month. They form a team of five to nine members and take Tk 4,000 to Tk 10,000 based on the requirements. They mainly earn from various puja festivals, such as Durga, Kali, Laskmi pujas and they also play at Hindu weddings.

They use various types of instruments such as, locally called dhak, dhol, khol, kashi, karka, big-drum, side-drum, 7-set, flute, harmonium, shanai, jhumur, juri and so on. At least 110 people of 34 families of Malee community live in Hari Para (Malee Para) of Belgachha union under Kurigram Sadar upazila. Gaynath Chandra Malee, 52, said, "We cannot earn in other ways besides playing drums. Our income has become limited. We would like to earn in other ways but we do not receive any support from any government organization or NGO." Atul Chandra Malee, 27, said, "We need a burning spot (Shashan) as over 110 of us live on 35 decimals of land. Beside Kurigram-Rajarhat road in Hari Para (Malee Para), we have a Debattar land of around 20 decimals which has been grabbed illegally by a local influential person."

Shantu Chandra Malee, 25, said, "Almost all of us are non-educated. We are trained to play musical instruments including drums as children. Now, 9 of 30 children of our community go to primary school. Nitai Chandra Malee was the first of our community to pass SSC examination in 2014. Our children would can become educated if we receive the right support and if the government or an NGO takes an initiative to save our livelihood."



Drum players of Kurigram face falling demand for their work. PHOTO: STAR



PHOTO: STAR

Wheat plantations in Rangpur region see excellent growth and good yield this season. The photo was taken from Machari village in Kawnia upazila of Rangpur district a couple of days ago.

Growers eye bumper wheat yield in Rangpur agri zone

The low-cost farming proves more profitable than paddy

MEHEDY HASAN, Rangpur

Agriculturists and farmers are expecting bumper yield of wheat in five districts under Rangpur Agriculture Zone this season as the plants are growing well amid favourable weather.

Harvest is likely to begin by the end of this month.

The Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) in Rangpur has fixed a target of wheat cultivation on 24,283 hectares of land in the region but the farmers have cultivated the crop on 28,053 hectares this season, which is 15.53 per cent higher than the target.

The original production

target was 75,278 tonnes of wheat.

District-wise, the cultivation areas are 3,730 hectares of land in Rangpur district, 3,095 hectares in Gaibandha, 13,578 hectares in Kurigram, 5,960 hectares in Nilphamari and 1,690 hectares in Lalmonirhat district.

Frustrated over the earlier price fall of aman paddy, many farmers of the region have become interested in wheat cultivation instead of boro paddy this season, locals said.

Easy cultivation process and lower production cost compared to other crops also encouraged the farmers to cultivate wheat.

"It requires Tk 4,800 to Tk 5,000 to cultivate wheat on one bigha of land. I cultivated it on four bighas of land this year and hope to get 10 to 15 maunds of yield from per bigha, if the weather remains favourable. We sold wheat at Tk 700 to 900 per maund last year," said Shajahan Mian of Machari village in Kaunia upazila under Rangpur district.

Abdul Hakim of Changmari village under Gangachara upazila of the same district said he cultivated wheat on two bighas of land this season and the growth is excellent.

Smooth supply of water and agro-inputs like fertilis-

ers and pesticides helped the growth, he added.

Farmers have mostly cultivated high yielding wheat varieties Pradip, BARI Gom-26, Bijoy, Protiva, Shotabdi, Sourav, Gaurab, and Swarna, said Pratip Kumar Mandal, Rangpur regional additional director of the DAE.

"The farmers are showing more interest in wheat cultivation after getting repeated bumper yields along with good prices. They have been supplied with quality wheat seeds, fertilisers and other inputs, and provided training on latest technologies to achieve the production target," he said.

The Chinese miners of Barapukuria

BY ANDREW EAGLE

Dhaka, Khulna, Rangpur and Barisal: Mr Zhang likes to travel. "Bangladesh is poor," he says, interpreted from Mandarin, "but people are very honest, especially in northern villages."

As a Buddhist, Mr. Zhang believes in reincarnation. According to him, everything in this life is the outcome of a previous life. Something in his previous life brought him to Bangladesh this time around.

The office buildings at his workplace are white tiled on the outer walls, with blue tiled angular eaves to break the monotony of a flat roof. The driveway is circular. It could be any random factory office in industrial China except it isn't. Mr. Zhang works as an engineer at Barapukuria Coal Mine in Dinajpur's Parbatipur. He

has done for a decade.

"I mostly speak to local colleagues in English," he says, "but with the help of books and audio material I also learnt some Bangla. In Bangla it's interesting how when people introduce how many siblings they have they include themselves in the number."

Barapukuria is run by Chinese contractors. Along with more than 1000 locals, the mine employs over 300 Chinese. Signs commonly feature Mandarin and the canteen serves Chinese cuisine. There's even a mosque built for local workers in ubiquitous Chinese tiled style.

"At the core," says Mr. Zhang, "all religions are the same."

From the surface, the first level of the mine is 293 metres down, sitting at 260 metres below sea level. From there, 1.5 kilometres

of roadway and train track tunnels slope to a final depth of 430 metres below sea level. Miners work a six-hour shift.

Local miner Kabirul Islam, 33, says that to cooperate with Chinese colleagues he has learnt to understand some Mandarin. "Kem cha means train," he says. The Mandarin word for train is actually 'hūochē' but in a tunnel with the sounds of a coal mine going on and a train quite possibly approaching at the time of use, 'kem cha' undoubtedly suffices.

Like Mr. Zhang and most Chinese miners, Mr. Li, locally called 'Om,' is from the city of Suzhou in Jiangsu Province. For five years he's worked at Barapukuria and in very basic Bangla and English he praises the skill of some of the managers.

But he misses his native

food. "Some of the Chinese food here is good," he says, "but the variety is limited." To supplement, miners grow Chinese vegetables on land beside their quarters. As can be expected, Mr. Li misses his one-year-old daughter who he sees only on home visits every six months.

Life at Barapukuria is strenuous and not without risk. Yet despite the hardships Bangladeshi and Chinese miners cooperate in bringing the underground wealth of Bangladesh to the surface.

"External forces are not issues," says Mr. Zhang. "What matters is internal attitude, which can turn any challenge into an opportunity and bring good fortune. Good deeds make for happy endings."

With thanks to Ms. Olivia Qu for interpreting from Mandarin.



PHOTO: STAR

Like the two in the picture, around 300 Chinese people work at Barapukuria Coal Mine in Parbatipur upazila under Dinajpur district.