



LIFE STYLE

WHY I LOVE WINTER



I hate winter season. The mornings are the worst. Getting out of the warm bed is a challenge by itself. The harsh, icy water and the bone shattering cold air doesn't make life easier for anyone. The dense fog, which is adamant, refuses to go away till midday, creating a nuisance of traffic.



As it is apparent, winter does not charm me. But there is one exception. The only reason winter is worth waiting for, in my opinion, is pitha.

I hate winter season. But I love pitha. It is hard for a Bangladeshi not to. The fascination with pitha has existed among Bengalis for centuries and is now probably inscribed in our genes!

Niaz Zaman in her book 'Bosha Bhat to Biriyani: The Legacy of Bangladeshi Cuisine' mentions a reference to pitha in the seventeenth century Mymensingh ballad, Kajal-Rekha:

Nanajati pitha karey gandhey amodita
Chandrapuli karey kanya chandrer
akrita...

The Mymensingh ballads mention a variety of pithas. This variety is seen during pitha fests.

I hate winter season. But I love how it makes people come together - to go to picnics, to take part in barbecue parties, and of course, to enjoy pitha fests.

Many companies and clubs hold pitha fests, where you will come with friends, colleagues and family to spend a delightful time savouring a wide array of pithas. Yet another kind of pitha fest, the one that is more personal, happens at homes - during family get-togethers.

People used to flock to their village-homes to enjoy fresh 'kejurer rosh' and to eat mouth-watering pithas prepared by the elderly of the house, like the grandmother. Villages always provide a treat anyhow - with food, with hospitality, with serenity. But when your 'dadi' makes you pitha, it's a different ball game all together.

But many of today's 'dabis' and 'nanis' live in cities. And that has resulted in pitha fests at their homes. The programme, which brings the whole family together, is usually held on the rooftop, or at the front or backyard of the house.

Pitha fests can be an elaborate affair.



Live stations continue to make rice cakes as long as there are people to eat them. And the sheer variety of pithas the host offers is impressive by itself.

There are of course the common ones, like 'bhapa', which boasts delicious jaggery inside; 'patishtapa', which is much like a roll stuffed with cream; and the classic and simple 'chitoi'. But that's just the start.

A richer version of chitoi pitha is 'dudh chitoi', where the pitha is served dipped in

'Naksa' essentially means designs. Naksa pitha has various intricate designs on them.

I hate winter season. But I love tea. A myriad range of the things accompany pitha. And to begin with, there is the hot cup of tea, which provides the much-needed comfort during the cold weather. Dipping chitoi pitha into tea, like biscuit, is a very common scene in winter breakfasts.

Pithas are also eaten with a lot of



fervour of eating ducks. Other than bhuna khichuri, you also eat them with pitha. Take a plate full of the hot, spicy duck meat, tear a crumb of chitoi pitha, mix it with the curry and put it in your mouth with a piece of meat - and voila, you are in heaven!

Kejurer rosh is a much cherished juice. It also happens to be the most missed among city dwellers. But hosts of pitha fests often take the trouble of bringing it in from the outskirts of Dhaka. Pitha dipped in the sweet kejurer rosh is simply magical.

I hate winter season. But I love street food. Vendors selling pitha becomes a ubiquitous scene in this time of year. Indeed, many of them actually sell all year round. But for a major chunk of them, selling pitha is only a seasonal business.

Nur Alam, for example, is a vendor at Farmgate who sells pineapples and other fruits all throughout the year - albeit winter, when he offers bhapa, chitoi and 'poa' at a flat price of Tk5 per piece. "I start from early evening and continue till about 9pm," Alam said. "I am currently selling around 1000 pieces a day".

Making so many in a span of just a few hours means that Nur Alam is constantly cooking, which he does on his mini-van, which has three makeshift stoves. The customers gather around him - eating, asking for more, chatting, and above all, enjoying the warmth of the stoves in the chilly weather.

Winter has never succeeded in charming me. I have never liked the cold. But indeed, winter also brings with it many things that everybody loves: from family get-togethers, great street food and more. And this is mainly because of pitha.

I hate winter season. But I love pitha.
By M H Haider
Photo: Shahriar Kabir Heemel
Food Styling: LS Desk



bhertas. If Bangladeshis love something as much as pitha, it has to be bhorta. And when you combine them both, life seems perfect. The spicy bhortas provide a burst of flavours. The delicious 'shuktir bhorta' and 'chingri bhorta' are must-haves with chitoi pitha. For the more adventurous souls, there is 'morich er bhorta'. And if you have caught a cold - which is a common situation given the weather - the peppery 'shorishar bhorta' provides much relief.

Winter is a season when we get into the

