

Underrated *Deshi* Food Combinations

NISHAT TASNEEM SHAHARA

It was an early Saturday morning and I was on a Zoom call with my best friend, making breakfast and catching up. Ten minutes into the conversation, she took a double take, asking, "Did you just... is that salt?"

The disgust in her voice was barely concealed, and I was confused. She saw me add a pinch of salt in my mug of tea. Is this not normal? This is how my mother always brewed *laal cha*. It got me thinking. How many of our quirky food habits, passed down to us through generations, do we just assume to be common? I ended up collecting a small list of odd but popular food combinations that are niche to their localities. Trust me, they make a lot of sense.

BHAPA PITHA WITH MAACH ER JHOL

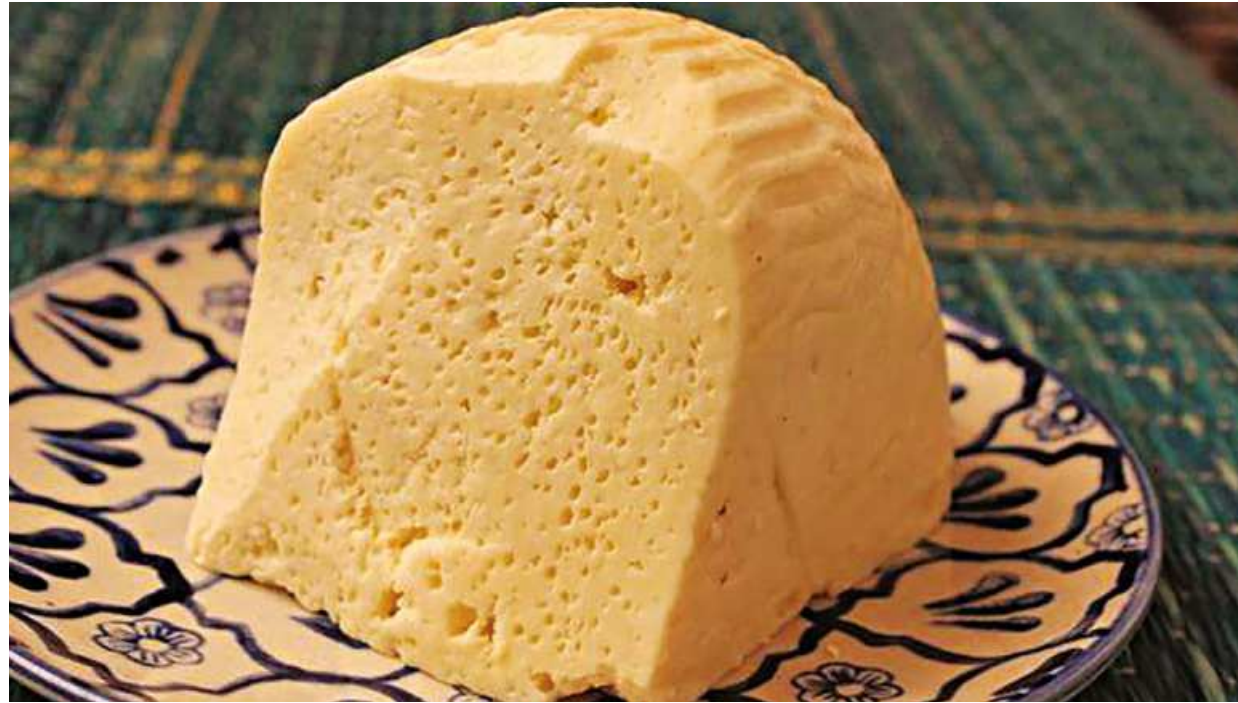
Bhapa pitha is the quintessential winter treat. Growing up in a northern district, it was the norm to have *bhapa pitha* for breakfast during winters, with a side dish of fish curry. My friend from Dinajpur insists that this tastes best when the *bhapa pitha* is freshly baked and the fish is served cold, right out of the freezer. If this is all too shocking for your taste buds, try dipping *bhapa pitha* in some fish broth and have a taste test experiment.

CHINI POLAO

This too, is a quirky food habit very specific to the northernmost regions of the country. The combination of *polao* with unconventional sweet items seems to be very popular here – be it *polao* with *mishiti doi*, or *polao* with just sugar. Similar to how you would add a little salt to your food at times, the sugar is added generously for that extra crunch with every bite.

THE PONEER OBSESSION

From *bakorkhani* to the special *Nanna biriyani* and *kacchi*, Puraan Dhaka is a world of food adventures. What made it to this list is something that's often overlooked: their *poneer* obsession. Puraan Dhaka's rich tradition of snacks includes the *deshi* version of hardened cheese, *poneer*.



From dunking it in the morning tea, to pairing it with *bakorkhani*, and even using it as a substitute for salad with daily meals, *poneer* is the most versatile add-on for your regular boring dishes.

MOLIDA

Finally, I found the ultimate substitute for the *lacchi*: a Barishal staple, *molida*. Made with a blend of what seems like the most confusing mix of food and ingredients, it is a drink that's quite popular with the locals. A basic *molida* recipe includes a blend of rice flour, coconut, ginger,

sugar and salt – essentially making it a spicy-sweet, chewy concoction. It's mostly popular during winters and Ramadan, and is often made as a treat for special visitors.

All the food combinations in this list are simple, and can be easily replicated in your own home. Although I can't vouch for the *chini polao*, I hope some of these inspire you to look into our culture's abundant history with food and conduct experiments in your kitchen.

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Ekushey Boi Mela 2021 To Attend or Not To Attend?

RASHA JAMEEL

Here's how I'd pictured my month of February this year: Catching up with my friends and fellow bookworms amongst the crowded gathering at the annual Ekushey Boi Mela held at the Bangla Academy premises, feasting on a plethora of *fuchka*, *chopoti*, *shingara*, and *malai cha*, and having the time of my life hauling mountains of books.

The pandemic threw an undeniably large wrench right into the middle of my plans. The wholesome picture I'd painted earlier had now proven itself to be rather difficult to be converted into reality.

To attend or not to attend this year is a confusing question for many. I can always just put it all on the pandemic and consider that the deciding factor. But the pandemic is merely the driving factor behind many more factors that are poised to influence our decision.

Safety must be a priority at a time like this, when there's an infectious viral disease on the loose. The most sensible thing to do would be to avoid crowds, wherever they may be. We ought to remain at home, isolated. It's perhaps this isolation that has now resulted in a significant amount of the population to become increasingly accustomed to all the social distancing protocols.

Adhora Ahmed, a regular attendee of



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

the Ekushey Book Fair, spoke about her reasons for not attending this year, "For me, it's like a ritual to attend the boi mela every February at least once. But this year, my fear of contracting the coronavirus has managed to override the nostalgic pull I've always felt towards this fair. Besides, even if I get vaccinated this month, it'll

still take me some time to get used to public gatherings again."

Hiya Islam, a massive fan of the Unmad stall at the Fair, expressed safety concerns as well saying, "I honestly don't want to miss it this year as it's something we as a family attend every year. I hope the organisers are taking appropriate

safety measures against the coronavirus, otherwise I'm not sure if I'll be going."

Long-term residents of Dhaka are thus largely undecided, weighing nostalgia against the fear of contracting a fatal infection. Meanwhile Bangladeshis who've been away from home are finding the nostalgic pull rather difficult to resist.

Currently residing abroad, Shafiq Shafiq recounted his fond memories of book fair saying, "Boi Mela felt like this huge chaotic library where you didn't just go to buy books, but also to catch a break from your everyday Dhaka-dwellings, and spend some quality time with your friends and family whilst celebrating Bangla literature. For the youngsters out there, I believe Ekushey Boi Mela offers the best avenue to step into the world of books. The main theme of attraction in my opinion was the aura of the *boi mela*."

Given people's indecisiveness and fear surrounding the pandemic, I don't know whether or not you'll be attending the Ekushey Boi Mela this year, but I do know that we won't be running into each other. The uncertainty poses too much of a risk. What do you think?

Rasha Jameel is your neighborhood feminist-apu-who-writes-big-essays. Remind her to also finish writing her bioinformatics research paper at rasha.jameel@outlook.com

GREENWASHING

Questioning the Sustainability of Lifestyle Products

RASHA JAMEEL & RAYA RAFIA CHOUDHURY

Eating clean. Living green. An idea of sustainability that is perfect for Instagram, complete with a shot of your cup of organic green smoothie sourced "fresh" from a million-dollar brand that caters to your needs of a fast-paced lifestyle.

Your eco-friendly habits are all the rage.

Let's talk about the contents of your trash can. How many layers of plastic packaging did you have to shove in there today? Five from the spill-proof wrap-

can often get away with it by reaping easy profits, all due to the significant amount of ambiguity and vagueness surrounding the concept.

In recent years, the rise of environmental crises has led many people to put in more sincere efforts to lead a sustainable lifestyle and brands to appear more environmentally conscious and "greener".

In 2015 alone, it was reported that nearly 55 percent of plastic waste discarded consists of mixed material, which means that these types of plastics simply cannot be recycled due to their composition and design, leading to only



ping of your smoothie first, and then perhaps some more from the disposable smoothie cup in your hands that comes with a plastic straw?

Your eco-friendly habits are all for naught.

In our desperation to be more environmentally conscious, we turn to brands that we're all well acquainted with, in hopes of receiving our desired sustainable goods from them. The reality couldn't be further from the truth. Instead of making the effort to supply consumers with their true demands, brands prefer to take the shortcut of an illusion, where sustainability is present only in name for marketing purposes.

The aforementioned strategy is cheaper, easier to execute, and promises a high rate of success.

We call it "greenwashing", a term popularised by environmentalist Jay Westerveld in 1986. To put it plainly, greenwashing is a marketing tool used by brands to attract environmentally conscious consumers with vague definitions of sustainability, without actually adhering to its true meaning.

As consumers, by contributing to greenwashing we are doing more harm to the environment as opposed to protecting it, like we're initially led to believe by big brands. Greenwashing of products can be difficult to identify and brands

20 percent of the waste being recycled. This is where greenwashing comes in and proves to be dangerous rather than helpful since consumers are more likely to buy a product that is marketed as "sustainable" or "ethical" without pausing to look into the details of the brand's ethical and sustainable sourcing.

These days' lifestyle labels are more likely to sell eco-friendly products such as metal straws, or market sustainable clothing lines that customers are more likely to purchase from them. As a result of which the customers themselves are unknowingly contributing to increased pollution levels. Recent studies have shown that plastic makes up nearly 80 percent of marine pollution causing harm to more than 100,000 species of aquatic creatures. Moreover, fast-fashion clothing brands contribute to nearly 10 percent of carbon emissions with almost 85 percent of all fabrics and textiles being dumped annually. If you're wondering how such brands continue to rake in sky-high profits all the time, the answer's pretty simple: they keep the products affordable.

Picture this: a regular university student who's recently attempting to master adulthood would try to make better life choices within a limited budget. This person has bills to

pay and part-time jobs can only do so much. What do you think would be a wiser choice as per our student's budget constraints, a fast-fashion outfit retailing for a 3-digit price tag, or a limited-edition outfit crafted by a high-end label with a 5-digit price tag? The choice here is quite obvious.

Swedish retailer H&M launched their first eco-friendly clothing line "Conscious" in 2019. The brand ensured repetitive usage of the terms "green" and "organic" when promoting the new line, successfully steering people's interest towards those terms instead of the data associated with the production of such goods.

H&M's eco-friendly collection featured clothes made of 100 percent organic cotton. The sentence is an oxymoron, for it is highly unlikely that a product that uses up nearly 20,000 litres of water in its making could ever be deemed as a necessity for sustainability.

To go even deeper into the long-term impacts of the large-scale production of cotton, we'll have to bring up the dying Indus Delta and the shrinking Aral Sea, both ecosystems victimised by the unsustainable industrial methods of cotton production. Current scenarios allow us to paint a bleak picture of what the future might hypothetically look like. Fashion and lifestyle brands already require a massive amount of resources to continue with their production and keep up with the high demands of consumerism, using textile dyes for

production purposes which accounts for about 20 percent of industrial water pollution worldwide. Meanwhile the fashion sector has also been reported to increase the carbon emission levels up to 26 percent in 2050, alongside their generation of plastic products from which micro-plastic makes up about 31 percent of non-degradable plastic waste in oceans. By 2020, nearly 35 metric tonnes of plastic waste entered the water bodies and this amount is projected to increase up to 53 metric tonnes by 2050.

According to sustainable fashion activist Aditi Mayer, "True sustainability is a nuanced conversation that extends not only to the materials used or the labour conditions but also to the scale of production and consumption as well."

The next time you decide to buy a reusable cutlery or an item of clothing from a brand's "sustainably sourced" product line, do take a minute to ponder the behind-the-scenes action.

Look beyond the marketing. Ask the right questions. Our planet needs you, now more than ever.

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