

The economics of shutki trade

Drying is a common method of food preservation and has been part of human civilisation since ancient times. In many cases, it not only preserves the food but also elevates the taste. Dried fish or shutki maach is a glorious example. In Bangladesh, the popularity of dried fish is rising and there is a thriving shutki trade.

THE SHUTKI ITSELF

Shutki maach is made using the age-old method of preservation where the food item is dried in the sun and air, thus removing the water content. This allows for preservation that can make the fish last for months, even years. In Bangladesh, dried fish are commonly made using the native method where the fish is dried under the open sky. Of course, some new farmers are embracing modern

methods but the essence remains the same — let the sun do its work!

Even a few years ago, shutki was considered a delicacy but people are leaning towards trying new food and experience, and while shutki is an acquired taste for many, it keeps getting more popular in the country.

With many different recipes to try and so many different shutki available to choose from, it's easy to see why many people maintain a special attraction to this particular food.

TALES OF THE TRADE

Dhaka might not produce any shutki, but there are multiple trading spots in the city — Karwan Bazar, Rayer Bazar, and Jatrabari being the most prominent. But unfortunately, Karwan Bazar's days of shutki glory are all but over. Only a few of the shutki traders remain, while others have moved on to Rayer Bazar.

Rayer Bazar on the other hand is thriving, with almost 60 shutki shops. Shutki from all over the country is available here.

"I've been in this business for two generations. When Karwan Bazar was broken apart, we had no choice but to move here. I hear the few that are still there are having a hard time," said one Md Anis from Rayer Bazar.

The shutki trade in Chattogram is a whole different story. There is a market there named Asadganj, locally called Shutki Potti, and for good reasons.

Asadganj is the largest wholesale dried fish market in the country. Located by the Karnaphuli River and under the administration of Chattogram City Corporation, this place supplies shutki all over Bangladesh.

"Winter is the best business season for the shutki trade. We have more than 40 different types of shutki that we can offer at any time. And there are qualities of the same fish which also affect the price. Many people do not know this but depending on the origin of the fish, the taste can be very different," said Tanvir Hasan, Managing Partner of a shutki trading shop at Asadganj.

"Many people buy the wrong kind of shutki; the taste does not suit them and they end up hating it. But they (consumers) should let us know where they are from so, we can suggest the right shutki for them because it's impossible for everyone to become a shutki expert," he added, explaining that people from different parts of Bangladesh have a fondness for different types of shutki.

Almost 50 stockists and more than 260 wholesalers are involved in Asadganj Shutki Potti. It is estimated that annually, 20,000 to 40,000 tonnes of dried fish move through Asadganj wholesale market.

Shutki farmers bring their products to this market and sell them to the *araddars*.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 26



methods and using greenhouses to dry fish, but there is a marked difference in taste depending on which process is used.

Some fish are dried as a whole, some are sliced, others are cut open and have their intestines removed; some are salted and some are dried without salt. Different species and sizes of fish are dried using different

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