

#COVER STORY



For different people, the word achar — the South Asian term for pickles — evokes different memories. Some revel in the memory of seeing their mothers or grandmothers sitting in the courtyards with jars of achar. And for others, the Burmese achar and mango bars stand out in their gallery of recollections. These unique variants — with their perfect blend of sweetness and sourness — were a childhood delight!

ACHAR CHRONICLES

From sun-drenched rooftops to digital marketplaces



By Ayman Anika
Photo: Faria's Delicacy/
Pickle Tickle BD/ Ferdous Uthso

"Making *achar* has been acherished tradition in our family for a long time, and my children enjoy my handmade *achar* very much," shared Moni. Consequently, thanks to the encouragement from her family, Moni started her venture Pickle Tickle BD.

"Taking the step to sell *achar* online was fuelled by a mix of hope and determination. Our page is new. So, we are still awaiting a noteworthy response from our clients. Nevertheless, the experience has been transformative for me — it has given me a sense of accomplishment," expresses Moni.

Platforms such as Facebook and Instagram have provided many women like Moni with the opportunity to turn their passion and traditional knowledge into thriving businesses. Each jar of *achar* sold online carries with it a story — of tradition, of family recipes passed down through generations, and of the individual journey of the woman who made it.

Faria Chowdhury of Faria's Delicacy shares her journey from making *achar* at home to becoming a successful entrepreneur. "I used to make *achar* before I started my venture. Around seven years ago, I took a job leave and was thinking about doing something worthwhile."

"Then one day, I thought of making the *achar* of chalta (Elephant apple pickle) and selling it online. Surprisingly, I got a great response from my clients and I never looked back," she reflects. Chowdhury's story exemplifies the spice of digital entrepreneurship, where passion meets opportunity, leading to the birth of promising online ventures.

Chowdhury emphasises the uniqueness of homemade *achar*, stating, "There is a certain charm about homemade *achar*. It is not only delicious but also offers a unique flavour that you wouldn't find in packeted *achar* sold in the markets."

Quite recently, Chowdhury has started offering different fruit bars, which have also been liked by many. She mentions, "I started to make food bars such as mango bars and strawberry bars and my clients have praised them very much!" This allure

of homemade *achar*, coupled with the feasibility of selling online, adds depth and value to the products, engaging customers on a more personal level.

Online platforms have made it easier for small-scale producers and entrepreneurs to sell their products beyond their geographical boundaries — connecting with customers, who seek authentic tastes or a piece of their cultural heritage.

Again, the commercialisation of *achar* represents a fascinating intersection of tradition and modernity, where age-old recipes meet the dynamics of an expanded marketplace. This transformation from a homemade staple to a commercially viable product has not only broadened the reach of this beloved condiment but has also introduced a variety of challenges and opportunities for producers and consumers alike.

Local brands have tapped into the nostalgic appeal of *achar* and created a certain appeal among *achar* lovers — marketing it not just as a food item but as a cultural experience. Perhaps, in future, the commercialisation of *achar* will continue to grow, fuelled by a growing interest in global cuisines and the diaspora communities longing for a taste of home.

While many cherish the homemade recipes passed down through generations, the availability of commercial *achar* has made it accessible to those who may not have the means or time to prepare it at home. This balance between tradition and convenience has contributed significantly to its wider appeal.

Nevertheless, as years pass and generations change, the tradition of making and distributing *achar* might evolve, but the essence remains the same!

The *achar*, once prepared, has at all times, found its way to every meal and hopefully, will continue to do so — adding zest to the simplest dishes and elevating our celebrations. And for us, the tangy, spicy, and sweet flavours of *achar* will always be synonymous with home, comfort, and belonging.



MEET THE ACHAR ARTISAN OF DHAKA: MOHAMMAD SIRAJ'S CULINARY JOURNEY

If you are an urban explorer of Dhaka, the *achar* carts — found in different alleys and gullies of the city — would not be something surprising for you. However, if you haven't been to Gulshan 1 DNCC Market yet, unfortunately, you have missed a vibrant emissary of tradition and taste, thanks to the variety of achar he sells.

We are talking about Mohammad Siraj, hailing from Barisal, who has been selling achar in the city for more than a decade now.

Whether it was the vibrant corridors of the Dhaka International Trade Fair (DITF) or the bustling lanes of Rayer Bazaar, Siraj's journey with his *achar* cart has been one of exploration and passion.

Today, settled in Gulshan, he has found his niche and sells *achar* to his loyal client base.

"Many of my customers have been buying *achar* from me for a long time; some even pre-order a specific flavour in bulk," shares Siraj, his eyes lighting up with pride as he talks about his loyal clientele in Gulshan.

After a day spent perusing the latest fashions or bargaining for vegetables at Gulshan 1 DNCC Kacha Market, shoppers are often drawn to Siraj's cart, lured by the promise of the perfect accompaniment to their next meal.

Mind you, this is not merely a business for Siraj, but a legacy of love and tradition. "I prepare the *achar* at home and my family helps me to run my business. So, technically, you can call this a family-run business," he explains. The inception of "Motaleb Achar Ghor" — named affectionately after his son — marks a poignant chapter in Siraj's life, signifying the birth of both his child and his entrepreneurial journey.

But why *achar*, one might wonder? Siraj's response is as straightforward as it is profound: "The love for achar is an inherited trait for most Bengalis, and this tradition has been passed down to us from generations. I prepare each of my achars with utmost dedication and care. From ensuring hygiene to picking out the best ingredient, I do all of these because I love making achar for my clients. I want my products to reflect my sincerity."

His statement echoes the sentiments of many who hold the tradition of achar-making close to their hearts. In a time when the art of making achar by hand is fading, becoming a rare skill cherished by few, Mohammad Siraj is a symbol of preservation and pride. "The art of making achar by hand is a dying art. Perhaps, you have seen your mother or grandmother do this. But nowadays, there are not many people interested in learning and making a jar of achar," he laments.

Yet, in the face of changing times and evolving tastes, the elderly vendor continues to ply his trade with an unwavering spirit. The move to Gulshan, driven by a desire to reach a broader and more diverse clientele, has indeed paid off.

As he continues to serve his beloved *achar*, Mohammad Siraj not only offers a taste of tradition, but also invites the *achar* lovers to partake in the preservation of a culinary art form that defines our culture.

If you wish to taste the delicious *achar* of Mohammad Siraj, contact him at +8801725404060

