



PITHA

the heart of winter celebrations

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STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In Bangladesh, winter is more than a season – it's a celebration. It's the time for weddings, marked by steaming plates of biryani, fragrant with ghee and tender, flavourful potatoes.

Cozy sweaters reappear from closets, accompanied by the faint, familiar scent of naphthalene balls. Neighborhoods buzz with spirited badminton matches under crisp, clear skies, while nights are made cozier with soft blankets and the quirky charm of monkey caps.

And at the heart of it all lies the crowning jewel of the season – the beloved pithas.

No winter is complete without the cherished pithas, a hallmark of the season that brings families together. The process of making pithas is a communal affair, where generations gather to share laughter, stories, and warmth while carefully crafting these seasonal delicacies. From mixing the ingredients to shaping and cooking, each step becomes a celebration of togetherness.

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The rice harvest in rural Bangladesh is celebrated with Nobanno Utsab, a festival steeped in tradition and community spirit. The earthy aroma of freshly husked rice fills the air, accompanied by the rhythmic sounds of the dhecki – a traditional tool resembling a large mortar and pestle – echoing from courtyards as it pounds rice into powder and removes husks. This age-old practice brings families together, embodying the essence of shared labour and festivity.

Winter also brings the sweet delight of khejur er rosh, the sap extracted from the tops of date trees. Across rural landscapes, clay pots attached to the tops of date palms collect the sap overnight, ready to be harvested early in the morning. This nectar is savored fresh for its natural sweetness or boiled down into molasses and jaggery, essential ingredients for making pithas.

Together, Nobanno and the seasonal treat of date juice weave a drapery of flavours and traditions that make Bangladeshi winters uniquely special.

Deeply ingrained in Bangladeshi culture, pithas hold a special place in the hearts of Bangalees. Their presence transforms winter into a season of joy, nostalgia, and indulgence, making every moment feel like a festive embrace.

Pithas are traditional delicacies made from rice flour, often sweetened with date or sugarcane molasses. While savory variations exist, the sweeter ones are the undisputed favourites.

In Dhaka, pitha festivals and utsabs take place throughout winter, at Shilpakala Academy, Dhaka University and are also organised by many localities.

The two most popular pithas in and around the city are "bhapa" and "chittoi".

The first is a steamed-rice-flour-disc sweetened with jaggery and desiccated coconut and chittoi is a runny mixture made with rice-flour and salt and then cooked on iron cooking pots to be eaten with mustard paste or chilli chutney.

There are many other varieties of course such as patisapta (crepes with thick sweetened milk), rosher pitha (chittoi pitha soaked in aromatic and flavoured milk with coconut flakes), and many others such as pakan, andosha, kulshi pitha, pata pitha, jhuri pitha and muthi pitha.

Winter in Bangladesh is a celebration of flavours, traditions, and togetherness, with pithas at its heart. From Nobanno Utsab at rural villages to pitha festivals in Dhaka, pithas capture the essence of Bangladeshi winter, blending nostalgia and festivity in every bite.



PHOTO:
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