



#REVIEW

# Shutki chronicles: Our love-hate affair with dried fish

In Bengali households, shutki (dried fish) is often on everyone's list of favourite foods. Those who love it do so for its intense smell and those who do not, perhaps share their loathing for the same reason. There is another group straddling the middle, who cannot stand the smell during cooking but love to eat it nonetheless.



This begs the question, despite having so much fresh fish, why must Bengalis have shutkis? Many people who live along the riverside areas are not particularly fond of it and residents of Patuakhali, Barishal, Bhola, or Barguna prefer fresh fish, and usually do not cook shutki at all!

#### Born out of necessity

Fresh fish easily goes bad so an old way of preserving fish was to dry it under the sun and turn it into shutki. In Bangladesh, dried fish are produced between October and April and the lion's share comes from Cox's Bazar. These days it has been reported that various chemicals and pesticides may be used during production, to

preserve shutki for extended periods, causing grave harm to the human body.

#### Where shutki reigns supreme

No one ever visits Dublar Char in the Sundarbans, Saint Martin's Island, Sonadia, Maheshkhali, Cox's Bazar, Naziratek, Ibrahimpur in Sunamganj, Mymensingh, the Chalan Beel region, or Sirajganj without bringing some dried fish with them. The fishermen in these regions produce shutki from a sizable chunk of their catch because dried fish can be preserved for many days and it has a high demand. In fact, in times of trouble, many families live on shutkis and the income it brings in.

