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The aroma of caramelised sugar and boiling milk envelopes you the moment you set foot in a sweets factory in Tangail. Workers are seen moving in unison — some diligently stirring the milk over open flames, while others sit in corners skilfully shaping soft, spongy, and light-as-air *chhana* balls with their hands, which will soon become the legendary chamcham. It is the dedication and trained hands of these artisans that have made the Porabari chamcham a household name in the country for generations.

THE ORIGINS

"The story of chamcham stretches back nearly 200 years, but the exact records are scarce. Nevertheless, I can say for sure that the name Porabari chamcham originates from the village of Porabari, located about six or seven kilometres from Pachani Bazar," shares Swapna Ghosh, proprietor of JoyKali Mistanna Bhandar and Vice-President of the Tangail Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

According to Ghosh, the popularity of this village, and in turn, the chamcham itself, can be credited to a



small but busy river port (located in Porabari) in the British era where goods-laden steamers and launches anchored regularly.

"A bustling steamer terminal at Porabari, in the past, played a vital role in distributing the sweets far and wide. However, after the river dried up, many of these businesses moved to Pachani Bazar, where my family has been operating our sweet shop for generations," he elaborates.

Ghosh proudly shared that his business, JoyKali Mistanna Bhandar, has been making sweets for 85 years. The sweet shop was first set up by his father and after him, Ghosh took over. With hope in his eyes and an infectious

smile, he said his son is ready to carry the business forward.

Years ago — like Ghosh's family — humble sweet makers of Tangail, started to experiment with *chhana* (curdled milk) and sugar syrup, and the result was a masterpiece — a cylindrical and spongy sweet that was neither too dense nor too soft, but just perfect. The praise of this delectable creation spread like wildfire and now, people from all over the country pour into Tangail to get a taste of the legendary chamcham of Porabari.

SO, WHAT MAKES CHAMCHAM UNIQUE?

The magic of chamcham lies perhaps in its meticulous preparation. It is an art that demands precision, patience,

and experience. And unlike many other sweets that rely on external flavourings, the authentic taste of milk and sugar is the star of Porabari chamcham.

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The heart of chamcham is the

freshly prepared curdled milk and then the *chhana* is kneaded thoroughly to achieve the perfect consistency. It is a labour-intensive and entirely manual process.

Ghosh credits the uniqueness of chamcham to the natural ingredients and traditional preparation methods: "The secret lies in the precise balance of *chhana*, sugar, and flour. Previously, we have experimented with machines. However, they failed to handle the delicate *chhana* properly, which is the soul of the chamcham. Every piece is shaped by the hands of our artisans, preserving its authenticity."

After smooth doughs are made, a small amount of flour is added to enhance the texture. Beautiful oval cylinders are made from the dough — purely by hand — and then are boiled in delicious sugar syrup. Chamcham is mainly cooked in caramelised sugar syrup, unlike most other sweets, and this gives it a rich golden-brown hue and a slightly smoky undertone. A final garnish of *mawa* (reduced milk solids) is added to elevate the flavour of chamcham to new heights.

CHALLENGES IN PASSING DOWN THE LEGACY

In our culture, sweets are perceived as a quintessential gift during important occasions from family gatherings and weddings to religious festivals. The chamcham of Porabari is undoubtedly one of the most sought-after sweets for gifting, largely because of its durability, as mentioned by Swapna Ghosh.

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