



#MUSING

# THE GREAT JILAPI DEBATE

## Does it belong in “muri makhano”?

Ramadan in Bangladesh is a sensory overload. The call to prayer, the crackle of piyaju frying in bubbling oil, the vendor aggressively shouting “Bhai, gorom jilapi!” — it all comes together in glorious, chaotic harmony. And then there’s muri makhano, the unassuming iftar staple that quietly exists in the background, letting the big shots like alur chop and beguni bask in the limelight. However, within its humble bowl lies a brewing storm, an age-old debate whispered across dining tables and Facebook comment sections: Does jilapi belong in muri makhano?

### A bite of context: The origins and the sidekicks

Muri (puffed rice) has been around for centuries, its light and airy form making it an easily digestible, no-fuss snack. In the iftar lineup, it usually mingles with mustard oil, onions, green chillies, a bit of salt, and occasionally some chhola. But the real wildcard? The piece of jilapi some people unapologetically crumble into the mix.

Now, jilapi itself is a relic of the Mughal era, brought to the subcontinent by Persian traders who loved their deep-fried sweets as much as we do. Meanwhile, piyaju and beguni? Straight from the streets of Bengal, where deep-frying anything has long been considered a legitimate sport.

Alur chop has its roots in Portuguese-influenced Indian cuisine (yes, the same Portuguese that gave us vindaloo and bandel cheese). But none of these items spark controversy quite like the jilapi-in-muri combo.

### The lovers: “Sweet and savoury is the best combo!”

Shahin is a university student with an addiction to jilapi that borders on



concerning.

“People dip French fries in ice cream, okay? Why can’t I put a jilapi in my muri? It’s called innovation. Also, what do these haters even know about taste? Half of them think tomato sauce is a fine dining condiment.”

His logic? Contrast makes everything better. The crispy puffed rice, the sharpness of mustard oil, the gentle burn of green chillies — all of it needs a counterbalance. And what better than a sticky, sugary jilapi that melts into the mix like a guilty pleasure? He’s got a point — sweet and savoury pairings work. Think salted caramel. Think cheese and honey. Even our beloved doi-mishti thrives on this very principle.

Mukta, a stay-at-home mum with an iftar spread bigger than your monthly grocery list, agrees.

“I spend hours in the kitchen making everything from scratch, and now you’re telling me I need a separate plate for jilapi? No thanks, it’s going in the muri. Also, who made these so-called ‘rules’ anyway? The muri makhano police?”

Her argument? Convenience. There’s already so much to do — so many plates to fill, so many fried things to monitor. Why not simplify life by just tossing that jilapi into the muri and calling it a day?

### The haters: “Don’t ruin a classic!”

On the other side, you have Shefali, a service holder who barely makes it home before iftar and doesn’t have the time (or patience) for jilapi-related experiments.

“Muri makhano is supposed to be light. Jilapi is like a sugar bomb. Mixing them is just chaos on the taste buds. If I wanted an

existential crisis with my iftar, I’d just check my bank balance.”

And she has science on her side. The crispy nature of muri relies on staying dry — throwing in something sticky turns the whole thing into a soggy mess within minutes. It’s like putting biscuits in tea for too long; the mushiness is inevitable and borderline tragic.

Then there’s Kashem Dadu, a grandfather of two and a strict traditionalist.

“In my day, muri makhano had nothing but muri, salt, onion, and mustard oil. This new generation has lost its way. What’s next? Adding chocolate syrup? Calling jhalmuri ‘deconstructed puffed rice’ and selling it for 500 taka?”

For him, it’s a matter of principle. The classic muri makhano has survived decades without jilapi — why start now? To him, it’s as absurd as pouring sherbet over biryani. Some things just aren’t meant to mix.

### So, does jilapi belong in muri-mix?

The answer is both yes and no because, at the end of the day, food is personal. What makes one person’s iftar plate perfect might be another person’s nightmare. Maybe you are the type who loves the chaotic contrast of sugary-salty flavours, or maybe you prefer keeping things simple and traditional. Either way, we can all agree that Ramadan is as much about food as it is about community and whether you’re pro-jilapi or anti-jilapi, there’s a seat at the iftar table for everyone.

Just, you know, maybe don’t put jilapi in *someone else’s* muri makhano without asking first. Otherwise, prepare for a food fight!

By K Tanzeel Zaman

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