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TRADITION
in every fold

PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA



Isra Fuljhuri Khan

Their story is not about overnight success or going viral on social media. It's about continuity — not just of a musical tradition, but of familial responsibility, cultural defiance, and personal conviction.

In an age of viral trends and digital distractions, the sarod does not exactly scream “popular”. It doesn’t feature in TikTok dance reels, nor does it fit easily into algorithm-driven playlists. And yet, in a modest room in Dhaka, two teenage sisters tune the strings of this 17 to 25-stringed instrument with the kind of reverence usually reserved for rituals. They are Ilham Fuljhuri Khan and Isra Fuljhuri Khan — known to most simply as the Fuljhuri Sisters.

Born into sound, not silence

For Ilham and Isra Fuljhuri Khan, music was not a choice — it was an inheritance. Their father, Ustad Md Ilyas Khan is a tabla player; their mother, Supriya Akter, introduced them to vocal music early on.

“In our childhood, both of us had our teachings in singing from our mother and in tabla from our father,” Ilham recalls. By 2015, the sarod entered their lives. “Our father placed the first sarod in our hands,” says Ilham. “Since then, we’ve been learning together.”

The weight of legacy is undeniable.

“We are the sixth generation in our family involved in music,” Ilham notes.

Isra adds, “My paternal grandfather is Ustad Fuljhuri Khan, a Swadhinata Padak winner. And we are descendants of Ustad Alauddin Khan.”

This is not a casual lineage. It’s a living discipline — practised daily, carried with care, and quietly passed on through the fingers of two teenage girls playing an instrument most people their age cannot even name.

The sarod sisters

Though both trained in vocals and tabla, it is the sarod that shaped their identity, so much so that audiences and organisers alike began referring to them simply as the Sarod Sisters or Fuljhuri Sisters.

“We didn’t plan it,” Ilham reflects. “It just happened. We performed our first duet in 2017 at a Baithak at Bengal Parampara Sangeetalay. People liked it. And then it just stuck.”

Performing mostly in duets, they have carved out an identity that balances individuality and synergy.

Isra, the younger sister, is already composing her own pieces and working in studios on soundtracks, commercials, and projects. Ilham, balancing HSC exams and daily riyaz, maintains a quieter presence,

SAROD, sisterhood, and the quiet defiance of convention



Ilham Fuljhuri Khan

but when they play together, there’s no “older” or “younger.” Just music.

Not glamorous, not easy

It’s easy to romanticise their journey. Daughters of a musical dynasty, trained under maestros like Pandit Tejendra Narayan Majumdar and Kaushik Mukherjee. But the sisters are candid about the less pleasant parts.

“We live in a country where classical music is not prioritised. That’s just the reality,” Ilham says without bitterness. “People think girls should not be out performing in the evening. And they don’t stop.”

Their defence? Silence. Practice. Progress.

Their parents, especially their mother, have acted as the first line of resistance. “My mother has endured more than people know,” Ilham says. “All so we would not have to.”

Isra adds, “People say things. I’ve stopped listening.”

What comes next?

For now, they’re focused on refinement. “There’s still so much to learn from our Guruji,” Ilham says.

Isra dreams of performing with him someday — not as equals, but as a disciple, on the same stage.

Isra’s broader aspiration is to make

classical music more accessible, especially to people her age. “Right now, children don’t listen to it. Maybe they don’t relate. I want to change that. Not to make it trendy, but to make it visible.”

Their performances are slowly gaining ground in festivals and unconventional venues. Isra has already played with Chirkutt at the Joy Bangla Concert and in experimental platforms like Dhaka Makers and the Rishka Festival. Ilham, the quieter half, focuses more on the purity of form and on making it to her next exam without dropping her sarod.

No hashtags, just harmony

The Fuljhuri Sisters are not here to entertain the algorithm. They are here to hold onto something that many are letting slip — an entire vocabulary of music that predates YouTube, Spotify, and the attention economy.

So, the next time you hear a drone of strings and mistake it for background score, listen a little harder. It might be two sisters, a pair of sarods, and generations of tradition, threading their way into a future that still has room for silence, depth, and sound that refuses to be forgotten.

By Ayman Anika
Photos: Courtesy



Typhoon

Fabric Care



প্রথম ওয়াশেই কাপড়ের কঠিন থেকে
কঠিনতম দাগ দূর করে।

টাইফুন... লাগে কম, তাই সশ্রয় বেশী।



Fabric Care -এর

সুপার প্রাওয়ার



Berger EcoCoat: A revolutionary solution to combat air pollution in Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, where air pollution is no longer a seasonal headline but a year-round reality, the idea of walls that “clean the air” might sound like science fiction. Yet, that fiction has turned into fact, thanks to Berger EcoCoat – a groundbreaking innovation and South Asia’s first eco-friendly anti-pollution paint. Berger EcoCoat was introduced at the seminar titled “Climate Resilience and Sustainable Development: The Bangladesh Context,” organised by the Institute of Environmentalists, Bangladesh (BIE) on April 25, 2025.

Framed within the broader theme of Climate Resilience and Sustainable Development, the seminar gathered architects, researchers, and environmentalists to discuss urgent environmental challenges and local solutions. Amidst powerful presentations on water security, green building standards, and migration due to climate change, one message stood out boldly: the battle for clean air might begin not on the streets, but on our walls.

At the heart of this message was Dr A S M Obaidullah Mahmud, Chief R&D Officer of Berger Paints Bangladesh Limited, who introduced EcoCoat not just as a product, but as a vision – where paint becomes a public health ally and environmental shield. What followed was more than a technical discussion – it was a wake-up call wrapped in scientific innovation, proving that sometimes, revolution comes in layers.

Developed using Air Purifying Hybrid (APH) Technology, EcoCoat does more than just coat walls – it absorbs and neutralises



harmful airborne pollutants including carbon monoxide (CO), carbon dioxide (CO₂), sulfur oxides (SO_x), nitrogen oxides (NO_x), methane (CH₄), hydrogen sulfide (H₂S), and even formaldehyde. Once absorbed, these are transformed into inert compounds, making the surrounding air dramatically cleaner.

In his presentation, Dr Obaidullah explained that the aim behind creating EcoCoat was to offer a product to the consumer that doesn’t just decorate walls – it defends the lungs that breathe within them.

The seminar equally included experts committed to sustainable development. Among the key speakers were Dr Qazi Azizul Mowla, Adviser, Institute of Environmentalists, Bangladesh (BIE),

who delivered the keynote speech on “Water Management for Sustainable Settlement Planning in Bangladesh.” His talk emphasised the role of water-sensitive urban design in climate-resilient city planning.

Md. Nafizur Rahman, Principal Research Officer, Housing and Building Research Institute (HBRI), presented a session on Green ARCH, a green building certification initiative by HBRI. The talk offered a roadmap to promote environmentally conscious construction practices across Bangladesh.

Dr Afshana Parven Shahid, Assistant Professor, Department of Fisheries and Marine Science, Noakhali Science and Technology University (NSTU), explored the National Adaptation Plan (NAP) through the

lens of climate change and migration. Her session illustrated how poor environmental planning is displacing communities.

Most Bangladeshis spend the majority of their time indoors – whether at home, school, or the office. But indoor air can often be more polluted than outdoor air, especially in humid conditions where mold, bacteria, and allergens thrive. EcoCoat combats this with built-in anti-bacterial protection and mold resistance, creating a safer environment for children, the elderly, and people with respiratory conditions.

Tested and validated by international bodies like SGS, Rudolf (Germany), and BUET, EcoCoat reduces indoor air pollution by up to 90 per cent. Its matte finish also adds a modern aesthetic touch, proving that beauty and health can go hand in hand.

Berger EcoCoat is more than a product – it’s a paradigm shift. At a time when environmental challenges often feel overwhelming, EcoCoat represents something rare: a simple, affordable solution with the power to create measurable change. Whether it’s in classrooms, homes, hospitals, or corporate buildings, this anti-pollution paint offers everyone a chance to be part of a cleaner, healthier future.

As the seminar concluded, one message resonated deeply: true innovation doesn’t always require building something new – it requires reimagining the old. In Berger’s case, a wall is no longer just a wall. It’s a line of defence against a polluted world.

Photo: Collected



OLD DHAKA WEDDINGS

Of flavours and traditions

Star Lifestyle, in partnership with the Goethe-Institut Bangladesh, brings you a flavourful journey into the culinary traditions of Old Dhaka, from the grand feasts of traditional weddings to the vibrant rooftop gatherings of Shakrai.

We also delve into the distinguished food heritage of Dhaka's Nawab family, whose kitchens once set the gold standard for culinary excellence in the region. Dive in to discover more about these rich traditions



and the timeless flavours that continue to define Old Dhaka's identity.

In Old Dhaka, while couples unite in holy matrimony, family and friends celebrate

over a hearty helping of polao and meat dishes. Kachchi biriyani has emerged as the quintessential wedding dish, but a flashback to the bygone days will probably remind one of saffron-infused murg polao. So, how did Old Dhaka's palate change from a love for decadent chicken recipes to a mutton staple? This is that story — one of taste, family, and much more.

A history of flavours

From Chawk Bazar, an eight-minute walk through Jail Road will take you to our destination: 48 Abul Hasnat Road. Residents of this establishment are the illustrious Syed family. Their household is a witness to the confluence of culture that has taken place in the old town, as they have lived in this same location for more than three centuries.

"If you talk about wedding food, you must appreciate that assimilation of

traditions has taken place and there is no longer an exclusive 'Dhakaiya menu.' This was not the case even five decades ago," said Syed Ahmed Ali, who himself is a food connoisseur. "True, certain customs are still very much in place, but at the end of the day, it is kachchi, chicken roast, and rezala that reign supreme," he added with a smile.

Perhaps, the diversity in an Old Dhaka wedding lies not in the preparation of the dishes, but in its epicurean culture, how a long list of food-related rituals makes it the centre stage of all Old Dhaka weddings.

Unique events, delectable foods

Zeenat Parveen serves as the president, Jahanara Foundation Museum located at Bangshal and has been a keen observer of the Dhakaiya lifestyle for decades.

"Weddings are an elaborate affair for the people of old Dhaka, starting with the paanchini, jamai khawon, balabali,



And the biye. They are then followed by a series of post-wedding events like boubhat and firani,” Parveen says.

She adds, “At one point in time, each of these events had features unique to the locality and the community that lived there. To this day, the paanchini or baatpakka, for instance, remains a significant event in Old Dhaka weddings.”

In Muslim marriages, the day also marks the settlement of the wedding mahr (dower) through consultation and mutual understanding.

The groom is kept away from these discussions, and to compensate for the missed feast of the baatpakka, the custom of “jamai khawon” evolved. The idea is simple — the bride’s family sends food to the groom, for his entourage, and members of the closely-knit community. Traditionally, the list of food sent for jamai khawon was long and varied and to this day, carrying all the dishes from the bride’s household to the groom’s place often involves a truck!

While the pomp of this ritual remains a fond practice among Dhakaite, the extravagance raises questions. One can easily argue that jamai khawon should serve as a reminder that one must strike a balance in preserving cultural heritage while at the same time coming to terms with modern-day sensibilities.

A love for chicken

It is surprising to many that the quintessential wedding dish of Dhakaite involved neither beef nor mutton. So, what



was the secret to the popularity of chicken?

The answer is in the secrets of the Mughal kitchen. The preparation of the polao was a laborious process and considerably different from how it is now cooked in households of Dhaka and beyond.

In his book, ‘Dhakai Khabar O Khaddo Sangskriti,’ food historian Saad ur Rahman chronicles the elaborate method of cooking murg polao.

“Four chickens cut into 16 pieces were mixed with one kilogram of fine-grained, chinigura rice and this was slow-cooked along with raisins, a variety of nuts, alu Bukhara, clarified butter, milk cream, and saffron,” Rahman mentions.

He adds, “The meat and rice were mixed in such a precise manner that the meat would stand out from the grains. The rice would soak the ghee and have an oily texture, but never greasy, to release the oil when pressed.”

The Mughal, murg polao was devoid of green chillies or fiery spices. It is easy to imagine that the dish that comes out of our modern kitchens is pale in comparison to the authentic murg polao once served at various wedding events.

A noteworthy culinary tradition at wedding events was that burhani was never followed by firni but rather, jarda or mutanjan. Fine grain rice steeped in saffron and mixed with cashew, raisins, almonds,

khoya, and topped with slivers of silver leaf. What makes it extraordinary are the shreds of well-seasoned, subtly sweetened meat!

Of kachchi and other traditions

Although known as a festive delicacy, kachchi biryani gained prominence as a wedding dish after the migrations following the Partition of 1947.

According to Zeenat Parveen, the rich and hearty nature of kachchi biryani made it an ideal choice for wintry celebrations. This Central Asian dish reached a pinnacle of taste in the hands of our local chefs, and it is now prized for its warmth and decadence.

“The enduring appeal of kachchi lies in its ability to serve as a complete, standalone meal. With its luxurious blend of tender mutton, aromatic rice, and perfectly balanced spices, it quickly earned its place as the quintessential dish for Dhaka weddings, blending tradition with indulgence,” she said.

Marriages are made in heaven, and Bengali weddings are incomplete without events brimming with good food. Like a flowing river, traditions evolve. From chicken delicacies to today’s staple kachchi, Old Dhaka’s wedding menus too, have changed. A decade ago, serving naan and vegetables before kachchi was unheard of — perhaps 50 years from now, this “novelty” will be part of our wedding culture and something to write about.

Photo: Orchid Chakma

TIMELESS TAGORE

A celebration of Rabindranath's artistic legacy

This year's theme, Timeless Tagore, celebrated the literary genius of Rabindranath Tagore through the profound beauty of South Asia's traditional dance forms, a true testament to the enduring power of art to transcend generations.

Maya Bengal in Motion was born from a bold vision to provide a transformative platform for local artists to showcase their talents, fuel their growth, and connect with audiences beyond borders. It is a celebration not only of dance but the limitless potential within Bangladesh's creative community.

This year, the event delved deep into the soul of Tagore's works, breathing new life into his timeless melodies and universal messages through the language of dance. The evening, meticulously curated by Anisul Islam Hero, Director of Srishti Cultural Centre, opened with a stirring performance by Anisul Islam Hero and Mehbooba Mahnoor Chandni, setting the tone for a night of pure artistic

In celebration of International Dance Day, MW Bangladesh magazine and Maya, the natural wellness brand of Square Toiletries Ltd, came together to present the second edition of Maya Bengal in Motion on 25 April at the Aloki Convention Centre, Dhaka.



brilliance.

The stage came alive with performances by some of Bangladesh's most celebrated artists including Sadia Islam Mou, Sabrina Shafi Nisa, Benazir Salam's troupe, Samina Husain Prema, Anika Kabir Shokh, Tamanna Rahman and their ensembles, each weaving the magic of Tagore's philosophy with the passion of modern expression.

The evening also featured heartfelt reflections from visionary leaders Anjan Chowdhury, Managing Director of Square Toiletries Limited, and Rumana Chowdhury, Editor and Publisher of MW Bangladesh. Their words resonated deeply, highlighting the transformative power of art to inspire, unite, and empower future generations.

Throughout the evening, the audiences were not merely spectators, they were part of a shared journey, uplifted by the spirit of Tagore and the limitless possibilities that his legacy continues to inspire.

Maya Bengal in Motion: Timeless Tagore was a powerful reminder that while times change true genius remains eternal and with the right platform, creativity knows no bounds.

By Maisha Tarannum Iqbal
Photo: Shahrear Kabir Heemel

BENGAL *in* Motion

Rumana Chowdhury's ode to

HERITAGE AND ART



In a time when we often find ourselves lost in the fast pace of life, where convenience tends to overshadow culture, Rumana Chowdhury strives to preserve and celebrate art and tradition by bringing it into our everyday lives. A designer with a timeless vision, Chowdhury is renowned for her fashion label, WARAH, where she focuses on Khaadi, Muslin, and Jamdani, creating enduring masterpieces that highlight local fabrics and honour our rich heritage.

Star
LIFE Style



They say a creative mind's thirst for creation never ends, and this is especially true for Rumana Chowdhury. Not only has she been a dominant force in the fashion world for years, but she also plans to go beyond mere fabric and form.

MW Bangladesh, where Chowdhury leads as both publisher and editor, is yet another platform where her vision shines.

"I aimed to develop something that was not limited to fashion. Something that enabled me to connect with heritage in a more nuanced, vibrant manner," Chowdhury shared, explaining her vision.



that honoured our rich culture and heritage.

Now in its second year, Bengal in Motion, presented by MAYA, returns as a flagship event of MW Bangladesh, with the theme "Timeless Tagore": a night dedicated to celebrating the lifelong legacy of Rabindranath Tagore. With performances spanning diverse dance forms to captivating dance dramas, the event envisions a magical evening steeped in culture and heritage.

Chowdhury expresses, "Tagore was never just a poet or a musician — he represented a universe. His creations resonate across time, connecting with every



The magazine serves as a platform through which she delivers content of global standards, all while staying deeply rooted in cultural identity.

"Bengal in Motion" began as a signature platform of the magazine, an event that fosters beautiful collaborations while promoting Bangladeshi artists. It not only provides a space for them to showcase their talents but also offers glimpses of our rich culture to both national and international audiences.

Last year's Bengal in Motion was a mesmerising tribute to the timeless power of dance, featuring iconic forms like Bharatanatyam, Kathak, Manipuri, and more. In collaboration with MAYA, the natural wellness brand by Square Toiletries, the evening unfolded as an immersive journey through rhythm, memory, and tradition.

The outcome was captivating. Viewers were not only watching a show, they were experiencing the magic of memory through movement. It was a night



aspect of our being: our uncertainties, our aspirations, and our deep desire for acceptance."

Every detail — from décor to ambience — bears Chowdhury's artistic touch: simple yet heartfelt, traditional yet modern. The event's visual narrative reflects her design philosophy, crafting a festive atmosphere where creativity thrives and Tagore is celebrated in every corner.

Rumana Chowdhury concluded by expressing her heartfelt gratitude to MAYA, the natural wellness brand by Square Toiletries, acknowledging that such a remarkable event would not have been possible without their generous support.

As Bengal in Motion was inaugurated for its second edition on 25 April 2025, it was evident that Rumana Chowdhury was creating a movement where the past and the future do not clash but coexist harmoniously.

By Maisha Tarannum Iqbal



#HERITAGE

SHAKRAIN

Kites and tastes of Old Dhaka

Every year, on the evening of 14 January, a walk around the streets of Old Dhaka would reveal an unfamiliar vibe in the familiar streets as Dhakaites prepare to celebrate Shakrai. Along with the lively chatter on the streets, rooftops become active, and the sky turns into a battleground for aerial kite fights.

Marking the end of Poush on the Bengali calendar, "Poush Sankranti", as it is known, is not just about outward celebrations. As kites soar high in the air, households remain busy preparing traditional Bengali pithas, rice cakes, and other treats that bring families and neighbours together.

Narinda and the tradition of Shakrai

Among Dhaka's oldest neighbourhoods, Narinda is noted for landmark structures like the Binat Bibi Mosque, established in 1452 C.E., the famed Baldha Garden, and the historic Christian cemetery. As you stroll around the neighbourhood, you will come across eateries like Beauty Lassi and Jhunur Polao, which add a gastronomic layer to the fabric of this famed locality.

Syed Jahangir, 74, has lived here for the better part of his life and can trace his ancestral roots in Narinda's Lalmohan Saha Street. For generations, his family has witnessed the glory days of Old Dhaka, its fall from prominence, and a recent but renewed interest in its history and culture.

"Shakrai is now observed by the entire community of Old Dhaka," he said. "To this day, Narinda remains one of the hotspots of the Shakrai festival."

Strolling through these streets, one feels a sense of unity as residents prepare for the celebration. It seems that while the rituals of the occasion have not been fully adopted, the festivities have been widely accepted and practised.

Early memories and festive foods

Syed Jahangir gave us a snippet of his earliest recollections of the festivities, which would always begin at dawn.

"Soon after morning prayers, families would gather around a spread of delectable pithas prepared by the women of the

household," he said.

For over forty years, Nasima Jahan has held the mantle of the Jahangir family. She shared that the fragrant rice cakes somewhat symbolised the warmth of the tradition.

"The preparations for the elaborate breakfast would begin days before as the finest rice grains from the harvest were sourced, husked, and chipped or powdered for making pithas.





The best quality jaggery and date palm juice were also used as sweeteners," Jahan shared.

This was also a chance for the seniors to once again show off their culinary skills to their sons-in-law, as they were the special guests of this yearly tradition.

"By 8 AM everyone would have been on the rooftops with their kites, ready to engage in aerial duels," mentioned Syed Jahangir. He added, "Popular songs from the silver screen would play in the background as an encouragement for the 'fighters.'"

The whiff of mustard oil from the kitchen signalled that lunch was ready. Both Syed Jahangir and his wife, Nasima Jahan, recalled that back in the day, and even today, Shakrain's lunch was incomplete at their household without beef tehari.

"In my family, duck meat was served along with the occasional game father would bring from his hunting adventures," Nasima Jahan added. "This was eaten with warm, soft chittoi pithas."

As the day progressed, an air of excitement would build along the lanes, with the kite-flying matches reaching their heights. There were standard rules for the game with score sheets, and by sunset, the winners would be decided.

"Traditionally, the Shakrain festival would have been wrapped up by sundown. An evening snack of pithas and fritters ended the evening on a high note," said Nasima Jahan. As the event drew to a close each year, families and friends left the rooftops

not just with memories of kite fights but with the lingering taste of Dhaka's beloved dishes.

Of evolving flavours

The food of Shakrain and the diverse flavours still keep the spirit of the festival alive. Syed Murtaja Jahangir, an investment professional, recalls celebrating Shakrain with his parent since the early 1990s.

"While the festival once revolved around local favourites like pithas and tehari, the modern-day versions include tandoori and barbecue — dishes that have found their way into Old Dhaka's rooftop scene alongside the kites.

"Walking past various rooftops now, the smell of grilled skewers is often stronger than that of the traditional rice cakes.

Honestly, the younger generations look forward to grilled skewers more than the pithas," noting the changes in taste and tradition.

Murtaja has had the opportunity of witnessing Shakrain being celebrated in its more orthodox forms along with the 21st-century additions.

"By the early 2000s, as far as the celebrations were concerned, kite flying was now accompanied by music loaned from Bollywood, soon to be replaced by Western chart-toppers," he said.

Now things have become quite 'chaotic' with DJs being hired and fire-spinners in action. This change is expected but perhaps not accepted by a majority of the people.

For senior citizens like Syed Jahangir and Nasima Jahan, this is not the way they want Shakrain to be celebrated. Even Murtaja, their son, has reservations.

"Traditionally, the festivity would have been wrapped up by sunset. An evening snack of pithas and fritters drew the curtain of Shakrain for a whole year. Yet, as you pass by, some rooftops now remain alight with dancing and music well into the night."

Shakrain in Narinda beautifully captures the spirit of a community bound by tradition and good food. While evolving tastes and modern additions reshape its celebrations, the festival remains a cherished marker of Dhaka's cultural heritage. It has united generations in the past and continues to do so today.



Photo: Orchid Chakma
Food styling: Raffat Binte Rashid

#HERITAGE

The Dhaka Nawabs and their culinary adventures

Overlooking the Buriganga River, Ahsan Manzil stands as an architectural and historical gem of Old Dhaka. The palatial building was home to the Nawabs of Dhaka during the British Raj, a political seat and an embodiment of affluence. Today, it is a museum — a testament to the once powerful dynasty — drawing local and foreign visitors alike. Of course, the foodie in you is bound to ask: what gastronomic delights did this aristocratic family treat themselves to?

Glimpses of the Dhaka Nawab family

Before jumping to food, a basic history lesson is in order for the sake of setting a context. A good way to start is by asking, “What do the people of Dhaka today remember the Nawabs as?”

Some may say they were the landlords who lived in the grand Ahsan Manzil, leading a lavish lifestyle. Others may point out that they paved the political landscape of Bengal. But many people will also fondly discuss the generous contributions the family made to the development of Dhaka.

According to Banglapedia, the family's philanthropic activities included making hefty donations and spearheading projects for the development of water supply, electric supply, education, etc.

Banglapedia further tells us that the colonial British government bestowed the title of Nawab upon Khwaja Abdul Ghani (1813-1896). He was the man who built Ahsan Manzil, named after his son, Nawab Khwaja Ahsanullah (1846-1901). Subsequently, Nawab Ahsanullah's son was Nawab Khwaja Salimullah (1871-1915), a legendary politician.

The family's roots can

be traced back to Kashmir.

Dining at Ahsan Manzil

The Pink Palace — so called due to Ahsan Manzil's pink colour — is a majestic edifice, with its imposing staircase, spacious verandas, semi-circular arches, and, of course, the magnificent dome as the crowned jewel.

The sense of splendour continues in the interior of the building. Case in point: the dining hall of Ahsan Manzil!

The amused visitor sees a very long and elegant dining table, with beautiful crockery laid out. One can only imagine the sights, the clinking of spoons and plates, and the overall buzz of this dining hall during the olden times.

To get a better picture, we spoke to writer and researcher Saad ur Rahman, general secretary of Dhaka Forum, who has authored several books on this city's food, culture, and history.

He opined, “I don't think that there was generally much chance to sit alone just with the family in the dining hall, because officials and relatives were always visiting Ahsan Manzil for various purposes and meetings, which would be followed by meals. The table would not be empty.”

On the other hand, Yasmeen Murshed, a family descendent — an eminent personality whose many roles include serving as an advisor of a previous caretaker government of Bangladesh — wrote in her book ‘Khana Peena: Memories of Food and Family,’

“The dining room was the venue where the family gathered in full force for festive lunches and more formal dinners. The long table would be covered with dishes of food that teased the senses with their combination of aromas, so that one could hardly wait to reach out and fill one's plate.”

The menu

The culinary treats of the Nawabs were numerous and varied, as Murshed pointed out in her book, “The list of dishes is as long as the days of the year because variety was prized and jaded appetites had to be stimulated by the harried cooks and the supervising Begums.”

Since the dynasty had Kashmiri origins, it comes as no surprise that many of their foods reflected that heritage. To illustrate, according to Rahman, the household used to serve Kashmiri tea, which was alien to our city and is not prevalent nowadays as well. This tea was of two types: *namkin cha*, (salty tea) and *sheer cha* (sweet tea).

Continuing with drinks, there was the exotic and rich *namash* or *nimash*, a winter delight described by Murshed as “*nothing less than whipped cream in tall cool glasses.*”

The process involved putting out sweetened milk overnight in the cold air. Then, early in the morning, the laborious churning of the milk would produce the cream, poured into glasses and served.

Another example of a speciality is *khoshka*. “This is basically a goat's head — along with the meat as well — cooked with milk and ghee,” Saad ur Rahman said. “It is best to have it with plain rice.”

Seems like a royal affair!

Rahman continued, “*Kabli polao* was very common and popular in the Nawab household. Do not confuse it with the *kabli polao* we are familiar with. It was different, using ingredients like *kishmish*, nuts, *dalim* fruit, saffron, and ghee. It was very expensive to make!”

If all that seems too distant and enigmatic, the dining spread also featured many other items which we are familiar with. In the book ‘Dhakai Rondhonshoily,’ Rahman mentions several iftar delicacies enjoyed by the nawabs that we all know of — albeit the taste or recipe may have been different or with a twist — such as kebabs, biriyani, *doi bora*, and *falooda*.

In addition to Kashmiri recipes, the nawabs' eating habits were, of course, influenced by cuisines and popular delicacies of the Mughal, the British Raj, and Bengal — often cooked with their own preferences or inclinations in mind, as is the case with any household. For example, Yasmeen Murshed states in her book about Bengalis' favourite fish, hilsa, “For the Family, hilsawas often cooked in yoghurt and flavoured with sugar and tamarind to give it a distinctive sweet and sour taste.”

When we visit Ahsan Manzil, we think of the philanthropic works done by the people who once called it their home, the affluence of the family, and the politics they partook in.

One should also remember that the palate is as complicated as politics, and that Ahsan Manzil was a master of both!

Special thanks to Waqar A Khan, founder, Bangladesh Forum for Heritage Studies, for helping with the research for the article.

Photo: Orchid Chakma





Preventing dementia through yoga

As rates of dementia continue to rise worldwide, research is increasingly pointing to the role of lifestyle in protecting our health.

Among the most powerful tools we have is yoga, not just as a physical practice but as a comprehensive system that enhances mental clarity, emotional balance, and neural function.

KUNDALINI RISING SHAZIA OMAR

Writer, activist and yogini
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Yoga requires focused attention on multiple points at once: breath, alignment, movement, and internal body awareness. This complex engagement activates and strengthens various regions of the brain, building the kind of cognitive flexibility and resilience that guards against degeneration.

Every yoga practice begins with the breath. Conscious breathing stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system, calming the stress response that, when chronic, can contribute to memory loss and cognitive decline.

Deep, rhythmic breathing increases oxygen flow to the brain and improves circulation throughout the body. As the heart rate slows and the breath deepens,

the brain receives more nourishment, helping maintain neural pathways and potentially creating new ones, critical for ageing with vitality and mental sharpness.

Another powerful aspect of yoga is its ability to reduce chronic stress, one of the most insidious contributors to cognitive

brain responsible for memory and learning.

Yoga provides a safe, embodied way to discharge stress through movement, breathwork, and meditative practices, allowing the body to process and release tension before it becomes toxic. Over time, this strengthens emotional regulation and improves overall brain function.

Finally, yoga brings the practitioner into the present moment, training the mind to stay focused and aware. These mindfulness skills not only combat mental fog and distraction but also protect against the kind of mental disuse that can hasten dementia.

Like any muscle, the brain needs stimulation to stay strong, and yoga, with its combination of physical challenge, breath control, and internal focus, is a multidimensional workout for body and mind. It is important that we recognise and honour yoga as not just a tool for flexibility or relaxation, but as a powerful practice for long-term cognitive health and clarity.

Photo: LS Archive/ Sazzad Ibne Sayed



dysfunction. High cortisol levels — produced during prolonged stress — can damage the hippocampus, the part of the

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Leading the Payroll Banking Market

In today's dynamic business landscape, Payroll Banking has emerged as a transformative solution for enterprises, streamlining operations, reducing costs, and providing employees with seamless access to their salaries. Recognising the transformative role of Payroll Banking, Eastern Bank PLC (EBL) has established itself as a leader in this segment through innovation, inclusivity, and service excellence.

Understanding the importance of service standards, EBL launched its Payroll Banking department in 2011. Currently, EBL is serving 1,800 companies and 186,000 individuals as their Payroll Banking customers.

EBL's comprehensive Payroll Banking product offerings are designed to meet the diverse financial needs of businesses and their employees. The Executive Account provides employees with a zero-maintenance fee account and a dual-currency debit card, empowering them with the opportunity to maximise the usage of their hard-earned money.

For blue-collar employees, EBL Payroll Card is a popular option that doesn't require an account, helping them avoid additional expenses.

In a groundbreaking move towards financial inclusion, EBL has introduced two exclusive Payroll Banking suites tailored to the unique needs of diverse professional



segments. The Women Payroll Suite, the first of its kind in the country, offers preferential loan rates and exclusive, personalised services to empower women professionals financially. For corporates seeking Shariah-compliant banking solutions, EBL offers the Islamic Payroll Suite, providing profit-sharing accounts and services based on Islamic Mudarabah principles.

On the digital front, EBL offers EBL Connect, a web portal for business entities, which simplifies 24/7 salary disbursement, fund transfers, bills, taxes, VAT payments, and more — all through a seamless online interface.

A significant number of the country's online transactions are routed through EBL Connect. To make managing finances even easier for employees, the Skybanking mobile app puts all the necessary tools right at their fingertips, from fund transfers to bill payments, balance statements, and more, making financial management seamless, efficient and hassle-free.

The key to EBL's success lies in its pursuit of service excellence, and its achievements would not have been attainable without the dedicated efforts of the Business Development Managers. They are efficiently onboarding and managing the payroll

companies with the help of Payroll Support team and Central Processing Unit, who are working tirelessly to ensure account opening, salary disbursements and providing exclusive support to payroll clients.

With EBL's digital customer onboarding solution, Insta Banking, customers can conveniently open their payroll account instantly from anywhere.

EBL addresses individual financial needs through preferential lending rates, smoother and quicker loan processing, and flexible lending terms and offers some of the best credit card offerings in the market, including many benefits such as 'First year free, lifetime free' offers.

Payroll Priority is an exclusive proposition for top executives, with premium services and lifestyle benefits. EBL Payroll Banking provides Bancassurance products by collaborating with leading insurance providers to offer a range of insurance plans, including life and group insurance.

In a world that is swiftly embracing digital transformation and personalised financial solutions, EBL Payroll Banking stands as a powerful medium to enhance employee satisfaction and financial well-being. As organisations look for smarter employee solutions, Payroll Banking continues to be a strategic advantage — efficient, rewarding, and future-ready.



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