The Tree from Which Haribhanga Mango Originated

76-year-old mother tree still bears fruit—and carries history

When buyers tasted the mangoes and asked about the variety, Nofol would chuckle and say, "These are from the tree whose pots the boys kept breaking." Thus, the name Haribhanga—literally meaning "pot-breaking"—took root, spreading by word of mouth until it became legend.

S DILIP ROY

Tucked away beside a mosque in the quiet village of Tekani in Rangpur's Mithapukur upazila stands a tree that once changed the course of an entire region's agricultural history.

This is no ordinary tree—it's the mother tree of the famed Haribhanga mango, a variety known across Bangladesh and abroad for its distinct aroma, rich sweetness, and now, a certified Geographical Indication (GI) status. Planted 76 years ago, this historic mango tree still bears fruit today, continuing to nurture a legacy that began with a humble story.

Locals said, as summer heat ripens the mangoes, the tree stands quietly beside the mosque—its branches weathered, its trunk gnarled, its roots deep. It is a tree, yes—but it is also history. A story still living, still fruiting.

In 1949, local farmer Nofol Uddin Paikar brought home two saplings from a nearby forest. One was stolen, but the other thrived. As the tree began to bloom, he would hang earthen pots filled with water from its branches to protect the buds—an old practice rooted in folk wisdom. But mischievous boys from the village would often break the pots.

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Nofol Uddin passed away in 1969, but his son Amzad Uddin Paikar, 68, carried on the care of the tree. In the 1980s, grafting began in earnest, and by the 1990s, Haribhanga mangoes had spread across Rangpur and far beyond.

Today, nearly every family in Tekani village owns Haribhanga mango trees—ranging from 200 to 2,000 per household. The mango has transformed the local economy; farmers now cultivate the fruit commercially and have even started nurseries to sell grafted saplings across the country.

The 76-year-old mother tree of Haribhanga mango still stands tall in Tekani village, Rangpur—where the iconic variety first took root. PHOTO: S DILIP ROY

The saplings have made their way to India, Malaysia, and Saudi Arabia, establishing the Haribhanga name well beyond Bangladesh.

"This tree isn't just a tree—it's part of our identity," says 80-year-old Lutfar Rahman, a local farmer. "I've planted over two thousand trees grafted from this one. We're proud that our village gave birth to something the whole country now cherishes."

Eighty-five-year-old muazzin Momdel Hossain has served the Tekani Jame Mosque next to the mother tree for over 40 years.

"Every day people come from faraway places to see the tree," he says. "Not just for its fruit—but to hear its story."

Farmer Ansar Ali, 77, reflects on how the mango was born out of a simple joke:

"No one knew about this mango before. Now, it's a national pride. People won't find any other mango variety in our village anymore."

Amzad Uddin Paikar, now 68 and in poor health, continues to guard the tree planted by his father. His family land has shrunk to just 50 decimals, of which the mother tree occupies 14.

"This tree once gave us 30-35 maunds of fruit every season," he recalls. "Now it's only 7-8 maunds. It's getting shorter, ageing. But I use no chemicals, and that's why its taste and aroma are still unmatched."

Buyers from Rangpur city still come directly to his home to buy mangoes from the original tree, often paying premium prices.

Despite financial hardship, Amzad refuses to cut the tree or sell the land.

"I could clear the land for other crops, but I won't. I've told my son Firoz—this tree must be protected, even after I'm gone." He has officially appealed to the government to preserve the tree.

Data from the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) in Rangpur shows that Haribhanga mangoes are being cultivated on 2,567 hectares of land across Rangpur, Lalmonirhat, Kurigram, Gaibandha, and Nilphamari—an 11-hectare increase from last year. Of this, 1,915 hectares are in Rangpur district alone, with 80 percent of production concentrated in Mithapukur and Badarganj upazilas.

The projected output for the current season stands at 39,006 tonnes, with an estimated market value exceeding Tk 140 crore.

The seasonal mango trade officially kicked off on June 15 this year, and already more than a dozen bustling markets have emerged across Mithapukur and Badarganj upazilas—with Padaganj standing out as the largest and most vibrant among them.

From early morning till evening, the marketplaces are abuzz with activity. Mango growers are bringing their harvests directly to buyers, while traders and customers from across the region, and even other districts, are flocking to secure their share of the beloved fruit.

From permanent fruit shops to makeshift roadside stalls, Haribhanga now dominates every corner of the local fruit scene. Its popularity is not limited to Rangpur alone—boxes are being couriered nationwide and even shipped abroad.

According to farmers, traders, and buyers, both supply and prices of Haribhanga mangoes are satisfactory this season.

With its round-to-elongated shape, fibreless flesh, firm texture, and excellent shelf life, Haribhanga mango stands apart from other varieties. Thanks to its unique genetic traits, even wrinkled skins don't indicate spoilage. Its appeal is visual, nutritional, and gastronomic.

Last year, Haribhanga was granted Geographical Indication (GI) status, and local orchard owners have already begun receiving export orders from Middle Eastern buyers this season.

Deputy Director (DD) of the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) in Rangpur, Sirajul Islam, confirmed that officials have inspected the site. "This tree is the origin of a GI-certified product. We're actively discussing plans for its preservation," he said, adding, "From one forgotten sapling came a name, a fruit, and a legacy that continues to grow."

He added, "Haribhanga originated from Tekani village; today, the mango is cultivated in over 80 villages across Mithapukur and Badarganj, transforming the lives of many farming families."

S Dilip Roy *is a journalist at The Daily Star.*

SATTAR PAGLA'S LEGACY

The Voice of Haor and Heart

NURUNNABI SHANTO

When the traditional haor song Lechur Baganey ("In the litchi orchard...") was repurposed as an "item song" in a recent Bengali film, it sparked an outpouring of debate among music lovers and across social media platforms. At the heart of these conversations emerged the name of Sattar Pagla—a mystic folk singer from Mohanganj whose life and music embody the essence of the region. To grasp his true importance, one must step into the world he inhabited: his lived philosophy, his raw musical expression, and his conscious choice to remain rooted within the deeper soil of Bangladesh's folk heritage.

Born in the village of Hironpur in Purbadhala upazila, Netrokona, Sattar Pagla spent his childhood in Lalchapur before settling in Naluar Char, Mohanganj. Since his passing in 2014, an annual Uras has been held in his honour—a reflection of how deeply his songs, lifestyle, and spiritual aura continue to resonate with his community. By the 1980s and '90s, his songs had already travelled far beyond haor lands—he wasn't 'discovered' by a filmmaker yesterday.

Sattar Pagla's music was an extension of the lives around him. He sang of families and dreams, of poverty and protest, of laughter and longing. His songs echoed through railway stations, train compartments, village gatherings, and festive evenings—not concert halls. His raw, unamplified voice was often accompanied by handmade instruments crafted from leaves, bamboo, or broken toys—a birdlike realism that favoured truth over polish.

Adorned with garlands, bangles, caps, and turbans, he looked every bit the earthy, vibrant spirit of the folk singer. His performances blurred the line between artist and audience, heavy with improvisation and emotional immediacy. Songs like Harveja Re/Ball Khelada tauba kore char... ("Give up playing ball...") warned the youth against recklessness, layered with philosophical undertones—just as a ball needs air to keep its shape, so too does the body depend on breath.

Music was a family affair. His daughters often joined him in song, while he composed originals and reinterpreted traditional pieces. One such example is Lechur Baganey—a song not just performed but transformed by Sattar Pagla. Through his lyrical and melodic touch, it became his own. In the haor, his version is the version.

Folk music is not frozen in time—it flows through generations, reshaped by memory and community. It survives not through scripts, but through voices like Sattar Pagla's, who become living bridges between the past and the present. He was not just a singer, but a cultural archetype of the haor region, carrying forward the legacy of Rashid Uddin, Jalal Khan, and Ukil Munshi.

His songs often seemed to drift from the skies over the wetlands—natural, unforced, and filled with feeling. In Kangal Mere Jangal Dile Guna Hoiba Tor ("Killing the poor to plant trellised greens will add to your sin..."), he gave voice to the pain of the powerless. In Shapla Banu, he spun a pastoral dream rooted in myth and making every rendition feel personal and alive. This participatory spirit turned his songs into communal property, shared by singer and listener alike.

Ethnomusicologist Timothy Rice reminds us that traditional music is not merely an art form—it is a social and cultural process, a vessel of memory and identity. Sattar Pagla embodied this philosophy. His creative reinterpretation of Lechur Baganey, though now reality—milk without a calf, a village's miracle.

Traditional folk music is inherently adaptable. Its lyrics and delivery shift with audience and time. In Dinga Pota Bondh..., Sattar would change names and places mid-performance, commercialised, was part of a living tradition. His voice, memory, and artistry helped preserve and transform it for the present generation.

Sattar Pagla.

Sattar Pagla's folk song Lechur Baganey ("In the Litchi Orchard…") was recently reimagined as an "item song" in the Bengali film Taandob.

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In his later years, with the help of admirers, Sattar attempted to document his songs—including Lechur Baganey—highlighting how central it was to his musical identity. Its recent cinematic adaptation has rekindled interest in his legacy. Like the renewed appreciation for Shah Abdul Karim or Ukil Munshi, this could become a bridge to deeper cultural engagement—if done with respect.

But caution is key. Stripping folk songs of their context and dressing them solely for mass appeal risks reducing them to caricatures. Films like Britter Bairey illustrate this danger—where an artist loses his spirit when uprooted from his cultural soil.

Handled with care, however, folk traditions can enrich popular culture. The first step is recognising the value of artists like Sattar Pagla—not just as performers, but as guardians of heritage. His music captures the depth of Bangladeshi folk—spiritual, local, lyrical, and layered.

If his philosophy and songs are portrayed with authenticity, they can offer more than entertainment. They can shape a richer, more rooted national identity. In today's age of globalisation and digital saturation, preserving the legacy of Sattar Pagla is not only necessary—it is vital. His music reminds us who we are, and where we come from. Celebrating him is an act of collective self-respect.

Nurunnabi Shanto *is a writer of short fiction and a researcher of intangible cultural heritage.*