

#MUSING

Is chicken haleem even haleem?

Forgive me, readers, for stirring up a debate in Ramadan with a provocation served in a bowl — the very bowl that redeems iftar from the tragic mediocrity of piyaju and dates.

Yes, I'm talking about haleem. But not that chicken imposter skulking around the stalls, pretending to be something it's not. Because, according to the self-appointed tribunal of haleem loyalists, chicken haleem isn't just "less haleem" — it's not even haleem!

We even cornered a few haleem loyalists

crossed borders before reaching Dhaka. You think it endured centuries just to be replaced by broiler chicken?"

No. Not in a million iftars. We agree!

"We Bangalis can't leave a recipe alone," laughs Aboni. "We see something traditional



to defend their fiery proclamations, because food isn't merely eaten; it is defended. And defend they did.

"I'm sorry, but to me, chicken haleem is basically letka khichuri smashed and plated politely; throw in some vegetables and you are good to go," declares Farhan, 28, outside a Dhanmondi eatery.

Well, one can only wonder what sort of 'haleem' Farhan was served to make him compare it to letka khichuri!

However, Tanvir then jumps in, adjusting his glasses like a man about to defend a thesis. "Haleem didn't arrive yesterday," he says. "It travelled from Arabian harees, survived Mughal kitchens, impressed the Nizams of Hyderabad, and

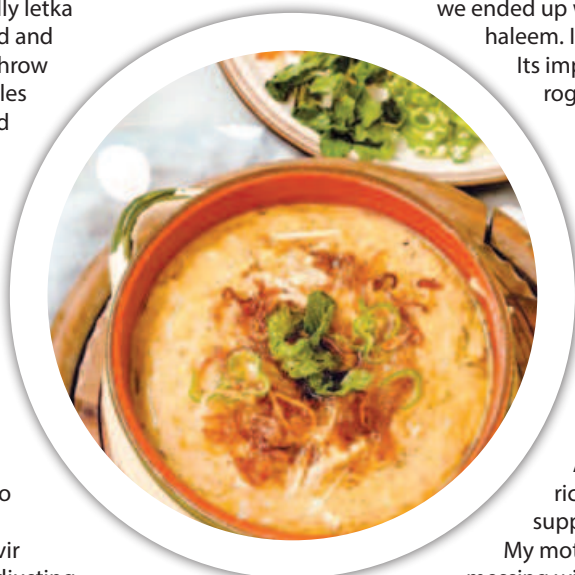
and immediately try to edit it. Add sugar here, remove spice there, replace the meat with whatever is affordable — and then insist it's authentic. That's how

we ended up with chicken haleem. It's not evolution. Its impatience gone rogue."

She also shares, smirking, "Once my mother made chicken haleem for iftar. My dadi looked at it like we'd committed a felony. She goes, 'Dal and chicken? And where's the rice? How am I supposed to eat this?'"

My mother stopped messing with haleem after that."

Biva counters slightly. "It's about cost and convenience. Chicken is cheaper, faster to cook, available everywhere. Make beef or mutton as accessible as chicken, and watch



people return to it. And, isn't this how culture shifts?"

Maybe!

But Tanvir is unconvinced, and frankly, neither are we. "Adaptation is not the same as dilution," he says, almost patiently. "Yes, recipes evolve. But not every alteration deserves the dignity of inheritance.



Haleem is built on endurance — on meat that withstands hours of slow fire until it surrenders completely. That surrender is the soul of the dish. Chicken doesn't have it. Call it innovation if you like, but beef is the foundation here, and structures often collapse when you try to replace their

foundation."

And here, I agree with Tanvir, because sure, you can tweak the garnish, adjust the heat, experiment

at the margins. But once you change the central covenant between meat and wheat, you're not adapting the recipe, you simply are rewriting it!

However, another voice from the group offers a counterpoint: "Not everyone can eat beef or mutton. Chicken haleem exists because people want to participate in the ritual without risking their health."

To which, loyalists (including me) roll their eyes in unison and respond: "Then call it chicken stew. Call it porridge. Call it anything. Just don't call it haleem. That word has history, patience, and honour — none of which are in your bowl."

No! Chicken in haleem is not a conspiracy. We are not saying that. It exists for reasons like cost, convenience, allergies, fear of a cholesterol spike. It undoubtedly lets more people participate in the ritual of having haleem at iftar. We get all of it. But that doesn't make it authentic. Let's not confuse accessibility with authenticity and pretend this is culinary creativity. Culinary creativity cannot be measured by accessibility alone.

So yes, eat your chicken if your health, budget, or schedule demands it. But let's call it what it is: a bowl of supply chain logic. Polite. Manageable. Fast. But not haleem. Not history. Not patience. Not art. Not devotion.

Final verdict? If you thought chicken in your haleem could ever inherit centuries of slow-cooked glory, congratulations. You have been charmed by convenience, and that, dear reader, is not tradition — that is compromise masquerading as culture.

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