

#FOOD & RECIPES

Reviving indigenous rice variants



Although modern diets push “no-carb” lifestyles, rice remains irreplaceable in our culture. Our love for it is so well-known that we are often teased with the phrase “bheto Bangali.” A plate of piping hot rice with daal and a homely, thin broth of free-range chicken curry cooked with potatoes, onions, ginger, garlic, and red chilli is not just food; it is home. This quintessential comfort meal nourishes body and spirit, reminding us of fields, festivals, and the rhythm of life itself.

Bangladesh has an incredible wealth of rice varieties, a heritage that reads like a living archive of resilience. With nearly 1,000 indigenous strains alongside 127 high-yielding varieties developed through research, the diversity is staggering. Yet, prized grains like Barisal’s famous Balam chaal are now rare as machine-cut rice dominates the market.

At Manikganj’s Pran Boichitra Khamar, the Prakritik Krishi movement treats rice as a heritage crop. Founded by Delowar Jahan, the farm grows over 20 indigenous varieties season after season, ensuring they adapt naturally to shifting weather. Rejecting chemicals, the paddies teem with earthworms and snails, while organic straw feeds cattle and roofs homes.

The model now spans four villages, training farmers to preserve their own seeds and breaking dependence on corporations. It strongly advocates unpolished heirloom rice that is fibrous, antioxidant-rich, and better for managing diabetes.

Aziza Ahmed is the Director of Operations at the Bangladesh Business & Disability Network (BBDN). She has an agrarian heart and tries to source all her food

from organic sources.

“For many of us, the journey to Pran Boichitra Khamar began with a simple desire to eat better food. But it soon became something much deeper. Through Delowar’s work, I discovered that rice is not just a commodity — it is memory, landscape, history, and identity,” says Aziza Ahmed.

She adds, “I have made it a personal practice to bring a different indigenous rice variety into my kitchen every month. What began as an individual choice gradually became cultural stewardship. In a world where uniformity is replacing diversity, preserving our native grains is an act of care for both biodiversity and heritage.”

Perhaps, the most inspiring realisation is that one is never alone in this effort. A growing community believes that protecting local seeds, supporting ethical farmers, and celebrating Bengal’s food traditions is not nostalgia but a commitment to the future.

By RBR

Photo: Shahrear Kabir Heemel

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