

Traditional ‘Kalai Ruti’: Street to Restaurant

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ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Received: January 20, 2022
Accepted: February 24, 2022
Volume: 3
Issue: 2

KEYWORDS

Kalairuti, Streetfood,
Restaurant

This article is focused on a traditional food named ‘Kalai Ruti’ that is creating an impact on the local economy and food culture of the Rajshahi city of Bangladesh. Kalai Ruti is a regional delicacy originating in the Chapainawabganj district but it is found on the street of Rajshahi as well. The article also highlights how folk food has become a survival tool for the livelihood of the laboring people in the city of Rajshahi and how it exists with its various limitations in the competitive market of this capitalistic society. The content analysis method was used as the research method in this article. This article has been organized primarily based on two types of data, i.e. (a) primary data and (b) secondary data. A large number of information on the topic have been collected from the persons of two different ‘Kalai Ruti’ venders for that multiple interviews were taken but only the relevant information was used for the analysis. Different news articles, articles, and web content were used as secondary data sources. This study has been a shrewd analysis of the facts derived from the primary, secondary, and other related sources.

1. Introduction

‘Kalai Ruti’ is a well-liked folk food of Rajshahi and Chapainawabganj district in Bangladesh. At one time ‘Kalai Ruti’ was the traditional street food of Rajshahi and Chapainawabganj. But in recent times ‘Kalai Ruti’ has become a regular food in Rajshahi restaurants due to its popularity among gourmands. Over the last ten years several kalai shops have sprung up because of the popularity of ‘kalai ruti’ and that’s why the demand of the kalai ruti makers have been increased and employments also. In pursuit of livelihood, both men and women in the city have chosen the profession of making and selling Kalai Ruti

From primitive days Kalai was exceedingly produced in the northern part of Bangladesh. In the past, the farmers had the tradition of eating Kalai Ruti because of the abundance of kalai. Now the cultivation of kalai has decreased. But people of Rajshahi are still carrying the tradition from generation to generation. There are two types of Kalai Ruti—Normal and Special. Usually, the bread prepared with a mix of rice flour and kalai flour is called ‘normal bread’ which costs around 20/25 taka in street-shop and 30/35 in Restaurant. And another type which is made by mixing two portions of kalai flour with one portion of rice flour is called Special Kalai Ruti. Kalai ruti is called “lahari” in the local area. The word “lahari” means breakfast.

2. History of its origin

The history of Kalai Ruti's origin is—'In The land of Behula, Chapainawabganj, a district of Rajshahi, was once upon a time a vacation destination for the nawabs of Murshidabad and Daudpur Mouja before the British came to India. It is unique from other districts in its ethnicity, dialect, and its organic cuisine. The streams of the mighty Ganges regularly flood the shores of this riverine land, giving a distinctive character to the land and its people. The fertile land with the hottest of summers and the coldest of winters gave birth to the mouth-watering "Kalai Ruti," a thick flatbread made of lentil(kalai) flour which is good for breakfast, lunch, or dinner on a busy day'.¹

3. Data, Observation, and Analysis

'Kalai Ruti' is the most familiar in Rajshahi than in other parts of the country. It is a century-old traditional staple delicacy of the Rajshahi region gaining popularity. Even the United States (US) Ambassador to Bangladesh, Earl Robert Miller, visited Rajshahi and was delighted by the tasty treat.

Kalai Ruti is traditionally made in a special earthen pan and the entire process, from kneading to rolling, needs the skillful hands of a chef to ensure its full potential. . No other tool is needed. Coriander leaves, green or dried chili, mustard oil, and onions are mixed to prepare a very spicy sauce which is served with kalai ruti. Kalai Ruti is also served with various sauces, mashed and spicy roasted consisting of duck, beef, or chicken meat.

Due to Kalai ruti's popularity nowadays, Kalai Ruti is served not only in the street food stall but also is served in fancy restaurants. So, the demand for Kalai Ruti-maker is increased. As a result, many employment opportunities have been sparked through opening kalaishop or joining as a Kalai Ruti-maker in restaurants. So, this folk food is also playing a vital role in the economy and employment of Rajshahi. People who once sold the bread as street food, are now employed in famous restaurants. Now the economy of both Chapainawabganj and Rajshahi are getting a much-needed boost from this local delicacy.

Actually "Kalai Ruti" is found all over Rajshahi city here and there. But tastes are different everywhere. "Kalai Ruti" in Rajshahi court area and uposhohor new market area are most well-known to people. It's the working-class people who have kept this local and traditional food item alive among the city people along with hard-working marginal people who are involved with Kalai Ruti Business. A big number of various trades like rickshaw pullers, day laborers, and workers of different occupations come from the near village to work regularly. All of these workers prefer the Kalai Ruti for their meals. Low-paid laborers are the main customers of this food. Students are also one of the important customers of Kalai Ruti. It can be seen that this business is being run by the hardworking men and women of the working class. Also, people from different classes would come once to enjoy this traditional food. The busiest hours for the Kalai Ruti shops fall in the morning and evening till late at night.

4. Case study 01

Runa Begum (33) has been running the Kalai Ruti shop at Rajshahi university campus (Old Folklore Chatyar) for 4/5 years. the shop has been set up on roadsides and covered with big plastic sheets. She serves Kalai Ruti with ‘Begun(brinjal) Varta and coriander and green chili Chutney’” This shop is the only and main earning source for her family. Runa Begum and Her assistant Bilkis have been working here from the beginning. Her husband does nothing for his family. Poverty along with 2 children forced her to accept this occupation. She said that she is happy with her occupation. She said that her monthly income is approximately 10000/- or 12000/-. It depends on her customers. She also said that she didn’t have to pay any money to the university administration. The campus students and many of the office stuff, in particular, are her regular customers when she was asked why the hard-working women have come to choose this occupation in Rajshahi city, she replied: "Poverty and the husbands' refusal to take care of the children are the main reasons for the women to embrace this occupation.”ⁱⁱⁱ



In case study 1 it’s visible that the poor and middle-aged woman Runa Begum who comes to this occupation to get rid of poverty and survive along with her family. Her husband does nothing for their family. In crucial moments, many women have chosen this easy profession to earn money. They face hard labor outside the home to earn for their family. By this profession, Runa Begum has found a way to become self-dependent and earn for her family.

5. Case study 2

Kalai house is a restaurant located in Uposhohor Newmarket, Rajshahi, Bangladesh. 22 years have passed since this restaurant started serving kalai ruti. Fuad Hasan Ripon (55) is the owner of the restaurant. Mohammad Uzzal and Mostafizur Rahman are working here as Kalai Ruti makers for 7/8 years. this is the only source of their income. They get 25000/-per month as payment. From the restaurant, the owner earns around 2.5 or 3 lakhs taka monthly. Restaurant authorities have to pay 800 takas per day for the government place. They serve Kalai Ruti with ‘Begun (brinjal) varta’, ‘Chutney’ and ‘spicy duck curry’ or ‘beef vuna’ and ‘mutton bot’. This restaurants’ most famous item is Kalai Ruti with spicy duck curry.ⁱⁱⁱ



In case study 2, it's visible that, Kalai House is a restaurant with large places and full of customers. They vend Kalai Ruti over the day. There are two bread makers and 3/4 waiters in the restaurant and they are fully dependent on these occupations. They make and vend at least thousands of bread in a day. The price range is pretty high here rather than any street shop.

Folklore is a continual process and 'Folk' encompasses not only the rural peasantry but also the urban laboring class (Sen 2008, p. 19) In Rajshahi city many men and women initiated the tradition of keeping existent of this folk food named 'Kalai Ruti', taking it as their profession. Once this folk food was used to eat at home now has been a major meal for the laborers in the changing social structure of the city of Rajshahi. Except for the little quantity, Kalai Ruti was never served in Restaurant. Now Along with the street shop, many shops of this folk-food are seen in Rajshahi. It indicates that the demand for Kalai Ruti is highly incorporated with the people of the laboring class. Men and Women of the city or suburbs who are deprived of institutional education have timbered the shop at one stage in their life to survive. They are playing a leading role in maintaining and buttressing the tradition of food through these shops. By running, Kalai Ruti's business successfully marginal people can achieve a sustainable economic condition.

6. Conclusion

Kalai ruti which was once considered traditional food of working-class people is now considered a local delicacy for gourmands people of all classes. And this phenomenon is creating a great impact on the local economy by creating more working opportunities for unemployed struggling people. Not only the working class people like Runa Begum are being able to make a living by using Kalai Ruti as a medium, though the profit that they are getting is quite little like 10-15 thousand taka per month yet that money is enough to run their family for that whole month but also entrepreneur like Fuad Hasan Ripon can run a moderately large food serving business using the same medium while creating more earning opportunities for the working-class people with a handsome profit per month in their arsenal.

7. References and Notes

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NOTES

Begum, R. Age:33, Meherchandi, Rajshahi. Shop located in Rajshahi University campus, Old Folklore Chattar.

<https://bdfoodreviews.blogspot.com/2020/08/kalai-ruti-most-traditional-food-of.html>

Mohammad U., and Mostafizur R. work as bread maker at kalai house, Uposahar New Market, Rajshahi.

ⁱ <https://bdfoodreviews.blogspot.com/2020/08/kalai-ruti-most-traditional-food-of.html>

ⁱⁱ Runa Begum, Age:33, Meherchandi, Rajshahi. Shop located in Rajshahi University campus , Old Folklore Chattar

ⁱⁱⁱ Mohammad Uzzal and Mostafizur Rahman , works as bread maker at kalai house, Uposahar New Market, Rajshahi.

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