

# Rice Diversity and Food Festival

## Report



**Venue:** Ridoypur Biddaghor, UBINIG center, Bishnupur village, Pathrail, Delduar, Tangail



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## Contents

Rice Diversity and Food Festival.....	3
Cooking & Food Festival.....	3
Table 1. Food items displayed at the food festival.....	4
Discussion on “Seed diversity and Our Food Sovereignty” .....	6
Ronnie Vernooy, the Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT Keynote: “Healthy food systems require resilient seed systems” .....	6
Dr. M. A. Sobhan, President Beez Bistar Foundation .....	7
S. M. Ferdous, Former Upazilla Chairman, Delduar .....	7
Mahbubul Haque Maruf, Upazilla Chairman, Delduar .....	7
Farmer speakers: Ruposhi Begum and Rizia Begum .....	8
Abdur Razzak, Deputy Director, Department of Agricultural Extension, Tangail.....	8
Farhad Mazhar, Managing Director, UBINIG.....	8
Photo Album: Cooking Festival .....	11
Cooking: .....	11
Pithas .....	13
Food (Lunch) .....	15
Eating .....	17
Display of Seeds.....	19
Songs: Nayakrishi Farmer .....	21

## Rice Diversity and Food Festival

As seeds play a pivotal role in maintaining biodiversity in our ecology, Nayakrishi farmers' movement has been emphasizing its role in preserving diversity of seeds through the Community Seed Wealth Centers. Farmers use diverse variety of seeds, particularly of rice, in the daily lives as well as on different religious, social and cultural occasions during a year. So the yearly crop cultivation is planned not only to produce the staple food but also various other food dishes that require special varieties of rice, vegetables, fruits etc. In order to create awareness about it on a broader scale, and also among the farmers, UBINIG and Nayakrishi arranged a food festival and a discussion session on February 4, 2020 underscoring the role of seed in maintaining biodiversity and food sovereignty. Genetic resources policy specialist Ronnie Vernooy of Bioversity International Alliance; Farida Akhter, Executive Director; Farhad Mazhar, Managing Director; Shima Das Shimu, Director of UBINIG; Dr. M. A. Sobhan, President Beez Bistar Foundation; development workers; local dignitaries; journalists and Nayakrishi farmers from Natore, Pabna and Tangail district participated in this day-long program.

## Cooking & Food Festival

On February 4, 2020 early in the winter morning, when the nature was still shrouded by dense mist, farmer women from different villages gathered in the premise of Ridoypur Biddaghor, where under the Banyan tree arrangements were made for a cooking and food festival. Six makeshift Chulas (clay stove) were set up for cooking breakfast and lunch for this festival. From very early in the morning Rina, Ruposhi, Selina, Rizia, Jahanara, Nabiron, Nihar, Sohagi, Amena and others started making varieties of pithas (rice-based snacks). They were also singing songs, known as Nayakrishi songs, describing the name of the rice varieties used in making those pithas, their distinctive features, and the occasions in which they are made. Four kinds of pithas were made each with a different rice variety—Sweet Bhapa pitha and chilli Bhapa pithas were made using Chamara Digha rice,

Chittoi pitha with Kotok Tara rice, and Siddha Kuli pithas with Lal Bhawailya rice variety. Besides, they displayed about 21 rice varieties which are usually used for making pithas.

As the women farmers were cooking under the Banyan tree, the male farmers Akkas Ali, Arfan Ali, Amir Hossain Khan and others were also singing Nayakrishi songs and other local songs with musical instruments like Harmonium, Tabla, flute, Ektara, etc. describing different food items made for different festivals which created a festive atmosphere befitting the occasion.

The guests greatly enjoyed the festival and highly praised the tasty pithas made from Nayakrishi rice varieties. Ronnie Vernooy, genetic resources policy specialist from Bioversity International, also visited Nayakrishi Seed Wealth Center (NSWC) and was amazed seeing the rich variety of seeds of different crops. Mr. M. A. Sobhan, President of Beez Bistar Foundation informed Mr. Vernooy that there are 1700 rice varieties in the NSWC. Two Indonesian visitors who were visiting Tangail at that time also visited the food festival and tasted the delicious pithas. The first part of the cooking festival ended with eating breakfast with pithas.



Photo Credit: Ronnie Vernooy/ Bioversity International



Photo Credit: Ronnie Vernooy/ Bioversity International



Photo Credit: Ronnie Vernooy/ Bioversity International

The next round of cooking started immediately for cooking different food items for lunch.

Nayakrishi farmer women cooked several items of food such as plain rice, Polau (aromatic rice with butter oil and spices) with 2 varieties Badshah bhog and Kalijira; Khichuri (Spicy rice with lentils) with 2 rice varieties Kotok tara and Moina giri and payesh (sweet desert dish) with Chinigura rice variety. The plain rice was cooked with rice varieties such as Naya Katra, Abchaya, Paijam, Najirshail, Bhawailya Digha, and Sada Dhepa. Women described the distinctive methods of cooking different foods and the nutritional value of those foods as they were cooking. They also mentioned the occasions during which these are cooked. Different rice varieties are used in different religious and social occasions like Eid, Puja, Bengali New year, marriage ceremony, etc. The women also displayed 20 rice varieties of Aman and Aush. Besides fish and chicken curry, vegetable curry, spinach, and lentil were among the 20 food items that were prepared for the food festival. The importance of knowing the name of different varieties of rice was explained to the guests, as it would help to make us aware of the diversity of crops and the necessity of preserving them.

**Table 1. Food items displayed at the food festival**

Name of the crop	Name of the food
<b>Rice</b>	
1. Patjag	Chira or Flattened rice
2. Chamara Digha	Bhapa Pitha or Bhapa cake of sweet and chilli flavour
3. Naya Katra	Plain rice
4. Kaktara	Khichuri or Hotchpotch, Chitai Pitha or Chitai cake, Rice
5. Badsha Bhogh	Polao, Khichuri or Hotchpotch, Payesh, Biriyani
6. Dadkhani	Plain rice, Khichuri or Hotchpotch
7. Abchaya	Plain rice, Khichuri or Hotchpotch
8. Pokhraj	Khoi or Parched rice
9. Kalijira	Polao
10. Chinigura	Payesh or Sweet desert dish
11. Paijam	Plain rice
12. Borodigha	Chitai Pitha or Chitai cake
13. Hijaldigha	Patishapta Pitha or Patishapta cake
14. Moynagiri	Khichuri or Hotchpotch, Plain rice
15. Kartikjhul	Pitha or Cake, Muri or Puffed rice
16. Dhepor	Chira or Flattened rice
17. Bhawailya Digha	Plain rice, Cake
18. Najirshail	Plain rice, Kheer
19. Modushail	Muri or Puffed rice, Chira or Flattened rice, Cake
20. Sadahepa	Plain rice
21. Lal Bhawailya	Siddha Kuli Pitha or Siddha Kuli cake
22. Kartikshail	Siddha Kuli Pitha or Siddha Kuli cake
23. Basmati	Polao
24. Begun Bichi	Polao
25. Ukunmodhu	Payesh or sweet desert dish
26. Kalo Bakri	Plain rice
27. Dhepaboro	Plain rice
28. Hidi	Plain rice
29. Pakri	Plain rice

<b>Lentil</b>	
1.Sona Mugdaal	Muroghonto or Curry cooked with the head of Rui fish
2. Moshur Daal	Spicy lentil soup
3. Mashkalai	Lentil, Khichuri or Hotchpotch
4. Motor	Lentil
5. Khesari	Lentil pate, Lentil
6. Chola or Chickpea	Spicy lentil soup
<b>Vegetables</b>	
1.Boiragi Lau or Boiragi Gourd	Taki fish Ghonto, Lau Ghonto with Mashkalai Daal.
2. Pumpkin	Vegetable curry cooked with pumpkin and malabar spinach, Pumpkin fry, Mashed pumpkin
3. Katikuta Beans	Bean curry, Bean fry, Mashed beans.
4. Atgharia Brinjal	Mashed eggplant, Fried eggplant, Eggplant cooked with dried fish
5. Yardlong bean	Cooked with curry, fried and mashed Yardlong bean.
6. Gol Alu, Saheb Alu, Gojia Alu	Mashed potato, cooked with fish curry and fried potato
7. Tomato	Salad, Chutney, Mashed tomato.
8. Daikon	Vegetable curry
9. Soyla begun	Fried brinjal
10. Ghia Shim or Ghia bean	Fried bean
11. Tabla Mistikumra or Tabla pumpkin	Fried pumpkin
12. Puti Shim or Puti bean	Fried bean with potato
13. Red radish	Fried radish
<b>Natural herbs</b>	
1.Bothua shak	Fried herbs, Ghonto.
2. Kochu shak	Gonto with the head of Hilsha fish
3. Dwando Kolosh	Fried herbs
4. Thankuni	Mashed herb
5. Kharkon	Mashed herb
6. Helencha	Fried herb
7. Telakucha	Mashed herb
8. Khesari shak	Fried herb
9. Palong Shaak or spinach	Fried spinach, cooked with Mashkalai Daal or Mashkalai lentil.

**UBINIG, Ridoypur Bidyaghar, Tangail**

## Discussion on “Seed diversity and Our Food Sovereignty”

After lunch, at 3 pm the discussion session on ‘Seed diversity and our food sovereignty’ began which was jointly organized by UBINIG, Nayakrishi Andolon and Beez Bistar Foundation at the Nam Ghor of Ridoypur Bidyaghor. It was chaired by Farhad Mazhar, Managing Director, while Farida Akhter, Executive Director conducted the session. Mr. Md. Abdur Razzak, Deputy Director, Agricultural Extension in Tangail district was the Chief Guest. The Special guests were Mr. S. M. Ferdous, former Upazilla Chairman, and Mr. Mahmudul Hasan Maruf, present Upazilla Chairman of Delduar Upazilla Parishad. Dr. Ronnie Vernooy, of Bioversity International Alliance presented the Keynote paper. Dr. M. A. Sobhan, President of Beez Bistar Foundation spoke on the principles of Nayakrishi Andolon. Farida Akhter, at the beginning of the session introduced the farmers, who came from different parts of the country. The guests applauded the farmers for cultivating the different varieties of crops by following the Nayakrishi method and the women for cooking varieties of delicious foods in the food festival.



Photo Credit: Ronnie Vernooy/ Bioversity International

In her introductory remark, Farida Akhter said that Nayakrishi farmers have been working towards bringing a positive change in the agriculture and overall ecology since 1993 through introducing Nayakrishi farming method. It would be an understatement if it is said that the activities of Nayakrishi movement are limited to agricultural sector only, rather Nayakrishi aims at a larger goal of securing food safety as well as ensuring a safe environment where all kinds of life forms can sustain their life. Till now 300,000 farmers have been involved with Nayakrishi and approximately 2700 varieties of rice seeds have been preserved by Nayakrishi Community Seed Wealth Center (CSWC). Many local farmers of Delduar upazila are now following Naykrishi cultivation method being encouraged by the success of the Nayakrishi farmers as it helps them to become self-sufficient reducing their dependency on market as well as promote food safety and biodiversity. As a result, Delduar Upazila of Tangail has been declared Safe Food Upazila by FAO.

### **Ronnie Vernooy, the Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT Keynote: “Healthy food systems require resilient seed systems”**

Before starting his presentation, Ronnie Vernooy requested the invited guests to thank the farmers for their unyielding role in preserving agro-biodiversity and contributions to improve the overall agro-ecology. He said that he was truly amazed seeing such a rich variety of seeds and foods. He said that he has been working in agriculture for the last 30 years and first came to know about Nayakrishi first in 1993 through the work of one of his colleagues, Daniel Buckles, when both of them worked for the International Development Research Centre of Canada. But he only had a chance to visit Bangladesh in 2018; and now for a second time. At the beginning of his presentation, he introduced Bioversity International, which has recently joined with CIAT and is now working as the Alliance of the two CGIAR centers.

Dr. Vernooy explained why healthy food systems require resilient seed system. He expressed his concern over the global ecological crisis, including various types of pollution. One of the main challenges in this sector is that seed systems are under stress due to a number of factors. Urbanization, agricultural intensification and commoditization and privatization of natural resources are contributing to a decline in collective local seed management. Farmers are substituting local varieties with hybrids that can be easily purchased from agro-dealer shops or at local markets. Traditional seed exchange relationships have become weaker in many areas. Recent studies have revealed that the legal operating space for farmers and communities to save, produce,

exchange and sell seed is being reduced. Dr. Vernooy further said that women play a crucial role in conserving seeds, but are often not recognized let alone rewarded for this. He also put emphasis on the necessity of proper preservation of seeds so that the seeds do not lose their vitality. Climate change also poses a huge threat to food security. According to a study of IPCC, cited by Dr. Vernooy, by 2050 the average yield of eight major crops will decline by 8% across Africa and South Asia.

To deal with these challenges, Dr. Vernooy emphasized that more efforts need to be made for the conservation and sustainable use of agro-biodiversity. Exchanging seeds on a much larger scale than what is being done right now among farmers is one mechanism. The government has to play an effective role through (re)formulating seed policies and seed laws to support such effective mechanisms, which are conducive for farmers and the overall agro-ecology. Among other topics, he also discussed about the necessity of identification and testing of promising varieties, which can adapt well to climate change. As to maintaining diversity, Dr. Vernooy said that farmers need access to good quality diverse seeds at the right time and in sufficient quantity. Dr. Vernooy also discussed the key roles of community seed banks, diversity fairs, diversity field schools, and participatory plant breeding. At the end of his presentation, Dr. Vernooy talked about the need of formulating an efficient mechanism through which farmers themselves will be able to bring their seeds to the market without the interference of any intermediary bodies, as it will boost the farmers economically.



Photo Credit: Abul Kalam/UBINIG

Acknowledging the positive outcomes that Nayakrishi has brought about in Bangladesh, Dr. Vernooy proposed that community seed banking should be stimulated on a national scale.

### **Dr. M. A. Sobhan, President Beez Bistar Foundation**

Dr. M. A. Sobhan explained the necessity of seed preservation and the role rural women play in preserving seed varieties and maintaining biodiversity. He explained to the guests the role of Nayakrishi in preserving seeds and maintaining the diversity of seeds.

### **S. M. Ferdous, Former Upazilla Chairman, Delduar**

After Dr. Sobhan, former vice-president of the Delduar upazila Mr. S. M. Ferdous discussed the importance of the diversity of seeds and threat of monopoly of few large companies in the seed business in his speech.

### **Mahbubul Haque Maruf, Upazilla Chairman, Delduar**

Upazila chairman of Delduar upazila Eng. Mahbubul Haque Maruf appreciated the work Nayakrishi has been doing for years to bring about positive change in agriculture and overall ecology of several districts of Bangladesh. He expressed his concern about the use of chemical fertilizer and pesticides in the fields. He also addressed the issue of decreasing diversity of seeds and the effects of climate change in the agricultural sector. He thanked UBINIG for promoting seed variety and food safety and also promised to bring support from the government to encourage local farmers in preserving seeds and promoting diversity of seeds.

## Farmer speakers: Ruposhi Begum and Rizia Begum

At this point two farmer women shared their experience about how Nayakrishi movement has changed not only their economic condition but also has played an important role in improving the overall ecological systems of their locality.

Ruposhi Begum, a farmer from Delduar Upazila, Tangail, told that Nayakrishi has helped her to improve her economic condition and encouraged her to cultivate different varieties of crops without using any chemical fertilizers or pesticides. She urged the government officials to help farmers so that the local farmers become encouraged to cultivate diverse varieties of crops and preserve seeds in their hands.

Rizia Begum, a farmer from the village Parasidhai, Atgharia, Pabna, talked about the varieties of crops she has cultivated in her lands, preservation method of the seeds, and the benefit of mixed cropping in the seminar. She told that in her village farmers exchange seeds among themselves and always try to collect new varieties of seeds to bring diversity in the crops.



Photo Credit: Ronnie Vernooy/ Bioversity International

## Abdur Razzak, Deputy Director, Department of Agricultural Extension, Tangail

Abdur Razzak, Deputy Director, Department of Agricultural Extension, Tangail discussed how chemical fertilizers and pesticides endanger human health and overall ecology. He expressed his concern and explained how less diversity in crops affects not only human health but also other animals. Mr. Razzak said that seeds should be preserved in a proper manner to ensure the vitality of the seeds. He said that to eat healthy food we should begin at producing pesticide-free and chemical fertilizer-free crops in the first place. He also said a farmer-friendly marketing strategy should be devised so that farmers get proper price from the sale of their crops.

## Farhad Mazhar, Managing Director, UBINIG

As chair of the session, Farhad Mazhar, Managing Director of UBINIG, thanked all the guests for coming to the food festival and attending the seminar at the beginning of his speech. He expressed his grave concern and appealed everyone present to become aware of the emerging dangers regarding food safety, seed diversity and overall ecology. He explained how Nayakrishi movement is playing an important role in preserving seed, maintaining biodiversity and genetic resource and ensuring regeneration of the ecological foundation of farming. 'In Nayakrishi, we do not need to preserve seeds in the Gene Banks as farmers are capable of preserving seeds on their own effort and at the same time allowing seeds to co-evolve with nature. Gene banks cannot achieve this goal, but might play a better role if we strategically conceive them as back-up to farmers, and not falsely imagine them as primary seed keepers and thus replace or destroy the vital ecological function of farmers', Mr. Mazhar said in his speech.

He said that monopoly of the food sector in the hands of few large companies poses a threat to the diversity. Modern industrialized agriculture has destroyed seed variety and made us dependent on fewer varieties of crops only for maximizing profit for handful large companies of this sector. Such agricultural practices have differentiated poultry, animals and fish farming as a separate branch destroying the reciprocal and interdependent relation of crop sector with the rest of agricultural domain. Traditionally chickens and other domesticated birds used to be kept and reared in the homestead and fed with the crops found from the fields.

Rice varieties were valued not only for the quantity of cereals, but for the biomass they produced as feed poultry, animal and fish feed as well as providing organic matter for the soil.

According to Mr. Mazhar, attaining sovereignty on seeds also ensures the food safety of all kinds of living being besides securing food safety for human beings. Crop diversity helps to minimize the dependence of farmers on the market economy and thus provides a more solid ground for self sufficiency of the farmers. Nayakrishi not only ensures food supply for human and other living beings but by ensuring bio-ecological regeneration of the system enables the farming household to participate more gainfully in the market economy. Hence Nayakrishi movement has prioritized preserving seed varieties and promoting diversity of crops among its multifarious activities in agricultural sector not merely as ecological strategy, but equally as an economic activity that has been systematically denied by conventional development programmes. Nayakrishi Seed Wealth Center and Nayakrishi Seed Hut not only preserve seeds and ensure their proper utilization but also is involved in many social and cultural activities revolving around seeds in order to enhance community bonds as Nayakrishi offers new idea of community building and development.

Farhad Mazhar said that political science reduces the term 'sovereignty' to a mere notion of holding juridical authority to make ultimate decision and portrays it as a power of political enforcement of authority over a population occupying a territory. Such notion requires an ecological critique, particularly from farmer's perspective. The idea of sovereignty should also be discussed in terms of who controls our biological lives and survival conditions. Sovereignty should be understood from of a broader perspective. Once it is understood, the Nayakrishi's demand for food, nutrition and seed sovereignty could be better appreciated. To attain sovereignty on seeds for a population means at the same time to attain food safety for human and other living beings as a fundamental step towards attaining national security.



Photo Credit: Abul kalam/UBINIG

'Since the very beginning, Nayakrishi has been emphasizing the agricultural activities that are based on the seed and biodiversity to ensure and inculcate the knowledge, science, and research that are deeply embedded in our history and rich tradition which has developed over hundreds of years. It does not necessarily mean Nayakrishi is against modern technology. On the contrary, Nayakrishi always embraces new knowledge, technology and methods without compromising our historical knowledge and the biological foundation of our life, i.e. agriculture. So, we insist on a critical appropriation of knowledge, science and technology and resists imposing harmful corporate interventions in the cloak of marketing 'modern technology'. Knowledge, science and technology must be in the best interest of the farmers and bio-ecological foundation of life. What Nayakrishi opposes is not modern technology and new inventions, but corporate interventions that threatens our life, livelihood and nature. 'Nayakrishi movement opposes and tries to resist the monopolization of large corporate companies in the agricultural sector which for the sake of maximizing their own profit uses technology to introduce chemical fertilizers and pesticides and contrive to attain full control over seeds.', Mr. Mazhar added.

Nayakrishi movement also underscores the deep philosophical aspects immanent with the concept of biodiversity. The connotation of 'Life' can be fully understood through active undertaking of agricultural work. Agricultural undertakings that pivots on the concept of 'Life' helps us to understand our deeply imbedded relation with the earth and encourages us to practice and bolster our relation with nature instead of being

alienated from it. Through Nayakrishi movement we can understand why fossil-fuel based civilization is inherently destructive in nature. Nayakrishi movement helps us to understand why fossil-fuel based civilization is not an option that we can rely on for marching towards a brighter prospective, rather it is a retrograde step that has endangered the earth for human as well as all other living beings. Destruction has been done in the name of 'development'; fossil-fuel based industrial cities have been built, at the cost of rural agriculture and numerous villages. True development must address the serious consequence of the city/town, or urban/rural dichotomy. Destroying nature for building cities cannot be a development option.

'Nayakrishi movement imparts and deepens the realization on a philosophical level through its initiatives that human beings are connected with nature and thus inalienable from it as opposed to the anthropocentric notion that has estranged man from nature. Nayakrishi helps us to see nature as the abode of all living beings and thus urges us to keeping this abode safe and livable for all its habitants. A development strategy where life is affirmed instead of being endangered is viable, this is what we like to demonstrate.'

'Through its initiatives, Nayakrishi imparts a broader and more profound meaning of the notion of 'Body'. We view the nature as part or extension of our own body. Nayakrishi tries to encapsulate the philosophical movement of Nadia, Bengal which sees body and outer world not as two separate entities, rather as two distinct expression of the same essence that are intertwined with one another. To highlight and better articulate this life affirming philosophy, Nayakrishi works with Nobopran Andolon.', Mr. Mazhar added further.

At the end of his speech, Mr. Mazhar appealed to the guests to extend helping hands towards Nayakrishi movement so that it can perform its role on a broader and deeper level. He said that proper policy and its implementation on a national scale will ensure food sovereignty and bolster bio-diversity in the long run.

The day-long program ended in the evening as all the participants vowed to take the Nayakrishi movement to the next level to ensure food sovereignty and biodiversity nationally.

**Report:** Hasanul Hasib, Researcher, UBINIG

## Photo Album: Cooking Festival

*Nayakrishi farmers Rina, Ruposhi, Selina, Rizia, Jahanara, Nabiron, Nihar, Sohagi, Amena, Parul and few others gathered in Bishnupur village at the cooking festival on 4 February, 2020. It was a cold winter day and a very chilly atmosphere for having pithas with newly arrived Aman paddy varieties produced by the farmers in Pabna, Natore and Tangail.*

### **Cooking:**

*Farmers are given the required ingredients of cooking, pots and a make-shift Chula to cook the food. Each farmer group is using the collective recipe for cooking.*





## Pithas

*Farmers are preparing for the morning breakfast 4 different kinds of pithas (rice powder based cakes/snack items), Bhapa pitha (sweet) and Bhapa pitha (jhal) with Chamara Digha rice, Chittoi pitha with Kotok tara and Shiddo kuli with Lal Bhawailya rice variety.*

*They make designs in pithas and also use sweet and hot taste to make the pithas edible to all age groups.*





## Food (Lunch)

Farmers cooked at least 20 different dishes of different varieties of plain (steamed) rice, pulao, khichuri, vegetable curries, spinach, fish and meat curries. Every food item was tagged with name and variety. Even the bean, pumpkin, sweetgourd, brinjals had names.





## Eating

*There were invited guests from Upazilla and district agricultural offices, local government representatives, journalists and most importantly farmers. It was attended by foreign guests Dr. Ronnie Vernooy Genetic resources policy specialist of Bioversity International Alliance, Dr. Niladri Chattarji (India) now living in Oslo, Norway, guests from Dhaka Rezaur Rahman Lenin, a Human Rights activist.*





## Display of Seeds

It was not possible to cook all different kinds of rice varieties in one day. So farmers had displayed many other varieties that they cultivate and preserve for preparing different food items. Over 90 varieties of rice were displayed under the banyan tree with their names.





## Songs: Nayakrishi Farmer

*Nayakrishi farmers compose their own songs. Farmer Akkas Ali, Arfan ali, Zinnat, Ekram, Nobokumar sing while the women farmers were cooking. With them joined Amir Hossain Khan and Joakim Man Sang of Nobopran Andolon helped with musical instruments Harmonium, Tabla, Ektara and Dhol.*

