Sticky rice of extended Bengal

Divisive politics may alienate various human societies and cultures, but we often stand united owing to our shared cultural history that is quite resistant to erosion. The same holds true for the large rice-eating populations of Assam, Bangladesh, Tripura, and West Bengal, so much so that rice has been assimilated in various forms, shades and tastes. Thus, our food culture is tied with rice, from staples to appetizers, snacks to sweets, savories to desserts, so on. One such case is sticky rice, though sticky or waxy rice has not been a mainstay of south Asian food generally it catered various delicacies to tickling tongues of this vast region.

In Assam, the commonly used landrace of sticky rice is *Bora Saul* (*bora* means sticky), it is generally soaked, ground, and mixed with jaggery and milk to prepare various kinds of *pitha* (traditional sweet dish) in Assam mostly during their state festival *Bihu*. In Assam and also the neighboring country, Bangladesh, sticky rice also finds great use in breakfast and ceremonial dishes, comes in various avatars, where it is known as *Beruin chaal* (which also means sticky rice). This is quite a to-die-for rice and in great demand which farmers used to fulfill growing this rice prior to special occasions with proper care. *Binni dhan* (unhusked sticky rice) is another kind of sticky rice equally popular among Bangladeshis is mostly cultivated hilly tracts of *Garo Pahar* in Jamalpur district. The *Binni* is also locally appreciated to prepare rice bubbles or puffed rice (*Muri / Khoi*).

However, the fame and appreciation of *Binni* or *Beruin or pitha* had easily eluded borders and diffused all through into locales of Assam and Bengal alike owing to their long entwined socio-political and cultural history through the ages. Sniffing through nooks and corners of extended Bengal may also reveal striking similarities which compels us to satiate our hunger and appreciate the great diversity of food and culture.

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