

# Estate Chronicles: Roti Bhai gave us fond memories

By [Ravindran Raman Kutty](#) - April 30, 2023 @ 7:10am



A modern-day 'roti man' making his rounds. The Roti Bhai man who visited the writer's home rode a bicycle with a bamboo basket containing the bread. FILE PIC

EVERY day we would eagerly listen for the 4pm pealing of Roti Bhai's bicycle bell.

A Pakistani man in his late 40s or early 50s, he stood tall, fair and thin, with soft grey eyes arched with silver eyebrows, and hollowed jaws beautifully covered by a silver-streak beard.

Clad in a white or grey *shalwar kameez*, topped with a white skullcap, Roti Bhai would fervently visit our estate without fail.

He would ride in on his Hercules bicycle and stop right in front of our house where the common staircase connected our house and that of our neighbour, Uncle Mohammed.

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Roti Bhai would perform *asar* prayers at Uncle Mohammed's house. Once prayers were over, my siblings, neighbours and I would usually buy our bread from him for tea.

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Roti Bhai's bicycle came with a bamboo basket containing the bread; it was covered with a dark green tarpaulin protected with a metallic cover to prevent water from soiling his bread whenever it rained.

When he opened the cover, the bread's aroma swept me off my feet.

I was too short to see what was inside the bread basket, but my parents or my elder siblings would usually help to tell.

I always used to wonder how much bread he carried in his basket.

We used to buy the plain buns. Roti Bhai would place the bread on a plank that was tucked neatly on the edges of the bamboo basket.

Then with his sharp, long bread knife, he would cut the bread seamlessly and effortlessly. We would spread lots of kaya on it and enjoy it immensely.

Roti Bhai also sold *Benggali Roti*. This *roti* was an unusually long loaf that had a caramel- coloured crust and yellow turmeric-like fluffiness inside.

I would enjoy the *roti* by dipping it in hot tea while my brothers would dip theirs in fish curry. The bread tasted so good and super soft. I used to love eating the crust the most.

He kept a green *Buku 3 Lima* book to record his sales. He used a blunt pencil to note down his transactions in his rather unique handwriting; the digits 3 and 5 seemed to look quite similar.

The bread was bought on credit, and my parents would pay him right after receiving their salary on the seventh day of each month.

Roti Bhai and I had a very basic yet pleasant understanding with each other.

By simply cheerfully shouting from our house "Roti Bhai!!!" whenever I spotted him, he would stop and give us a glowing and caring smile.

I would run up the front staircase and say "*mahu roti bun*" (want bread).

He would reach into his basket and his hand would reappear with a bun. Accepting it happily and gratefully, I would run off to my home to be welcomed with a cup of delicious, piping hot, creamy and sweet *chaya* or *teh tarik*.

My eldest sister knew my heart's craving — bun with kaya and *chaya* – one of the simplest but most memorable joys of a little boy.

The image of this Roti Bhai in his *shalwar kameez* will always be in my mind, and memories with him in my heart. He might be rather old by now, or perhaps is no longer with us in this mortal world.

May you be at peace, Roti Bhai. You may not know that there is a little boy who grew up on your Roti Bun Kaya and still reminisces about the days you gave him smiles.

Bless you, Roti Bhai, for your kindness, and for the fond memories.

How simple life was then. A simple bread gives such pleasures.

Today, we are spoilt for choice but taste is a question mark. Roti Bhai did not carry many varieties of bread, but he carried the right one, to appease this scribe and many other estate dwellers.

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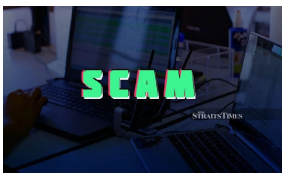
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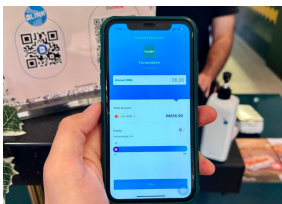
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