

NYAWA 2014

tapai tower

Muhammad Shahrin Abdul Karim
Hasanah Mohd Ghazali

Malaysia is blessed with different types of traditional sweets. One of the most delicious and tempting desserts is tapai. It is a glutinous rice based sweets, but it can be made from other types of carbohydrates such as rice, tapioca and black glutinous rice as well. It originated from Indonesia but now tapai can be found in other South East Asian countries such as Malaysia, Thailand, Philippines and Vietnam. Tapai is a fermented food and requires various moulds such as *Aspergillus oryzae*, *Rhizopus oryzae*, *Amylomyces rouxii*, and yeasts including *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*, *S. fibulinger*, and *Endomycopsis burtonii*.

The process of making tapai is considered very spiritual and tedious. There are only three key ingredients in making tapai, steamed glutinous rice, or tapioca, sugar and yeast. The ingredients are mixed well and individually portioned and wrapped in banana leaves. Other leaves such as rubber leaves, balik angin leaves are also used, but today it is wrapped in plastic, paper or small plastic container. There are many superstitions in tapai making e.g. if the person who is making tapai is not considered so clean, i.e. a woman having a period, the tapai will not turn out well. Additionally, if one says something bad, it would not turn out to be sweet or if someone is wearing red colour, the tapai will turn out to be red. Tapai should be very soft as silk and white as cotton plus it should be sweet. It is served at special occasions such as wedding receptions and major festivals in Malaysia. In the heyday, tapai used to be the popular and favourite dessert, and today tapai is still popular and it is served with ice-cream and combined with other desserts as well. It is a very unique traditional heritage food that has to be passed down to our future generations.

