

A Love Letter to the Best Thing Ever

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My eyes first register the display of my phone as I turn off the alarm, and then immediately roll back inwards as my mind goes to its happy place: THOUGHTS OF FOOD.

The cerebral folds in my brain fight off the sleep gradually as images of warm flaky paratha, savoury beef nihari, and fried egg, flood every corner of my mind. My nose gets imaginative with the smell of fresh of *jhalmuri* with the help of someone's discarded business card, straight out of a paper cone. I can say the same about the mixture of mangoes, rice, and milk on a summer day -- *aam-doodh-bhaat* -- the true ambrosia, if there ever was one. And if you aren't spending your rainy days having *khichuri* and *begun bhaji*, you're missing out.

Speaking of *khichuri*, did you know that the dish itself has managed to connect cultures throughout the Indian subcontinent,



ghee and spices, and my tongue salivates on cue.

Of course, the idea of breakfast isn't just about taste, smell, sight, touch, and sound, it's also about the contents. The food itself is of paramount importance in the celebration, with the rest being necessary additions. The first time I heard *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*'s Charles Boyle discuss the 12 components of food satisfaction, I thought he was exaggerating. Then I came to realise firsthand that Boyle had a point, food can't just be enjoyed merely through the mechanical action of chewing and swallowing, there's a lot more to it.

I can always have some homemade *biri-yani* whenever I damn well please, but that won't even come close to having it piping hot straight out of a humongous "*dekchi*" at the legendary flagship outlet of Haji'r Biriyani at Old Dhaka. Having homemade *fuchka, bhelpuri* and *jhalmuri* might be a more hygienic option according to public health surveys, but the satisfaction of consuming those snacks in your own house is meagre at best when compared to munching on them by the roadside. Nothing like shoving into your mouth that first scoop

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even undergoing a British makeover during the colonial era as the Anglo-Indian "kedgeree". *Khichuri*'s ingredient composition, flavourings, consistency, etcetera is known to vary from region to region. While we Bengalis serve the iconic dish as dry yellow rice, South Indians and Biharis prefer to turn the rice and lentils into a mushy paste, the British prepare their "kedgeree" with smoked haddock, boiled eggs and parsley, and Fiji Island inhabitants have their *khichuri* like porridge.

The Bengali khichuri isn't the only iconic dish known to us that has been subjected to multicultural hybridisation. Amongst rice dishes, there are also biriyani and polao which have also received global attention, having attained popularity in countries beyond the Indian subcontinent, going over to the Philippines, the Middle East and the African continent as jollof rice, bringhe, and many other variations. Popular items such as the dumplings found all over Dhaka now that we know and love as "momos" are variations of the Chinese jiaozi, Korean mandu, and Japanese gyoza. Momos are believed to have originated from the Nepali and Tibetan communities in Southeast

Asia, and have been heavily hybridised in our country to suit the Bengali palate. This demand for fusion food is a concept that can bring culturally different communities together and help them bond over conversations on the multicultural similarities that they share through food.

The presence of food on social media has only boosted the aforementioned phenomenon, with the introduction of food being perceived as either a mode of communication, or an art form. The former has fared well in our country, courtesy of popular local food bloggers such as Fahrin Zannat Faiza (@khudalagse), couple Ridima Khan Ipsha and Rasif Shafique (@ petukcouple), all of whom have taken to blogging about the eating scene in Dhaka. Bangladeshi food bloggers haven't just introduced their audiences to underrated eateries throughout the country, but have also taken them on an entire journey of how strong a significance food has in our Bangladeshi heritage, from the alleyways of Old Dhaka to the posh neighbourhoods of Gulshan and Banani.

Calcuttan food bloggers Saptarshi Chakraborty and Insiya Poonawala (@ bongeats) upload recipes on their YouTube channel of all the traditional Bengali food that they have grown up eating, ranging from the classic "plastic er chutney" to the Tagore-family favourite "Chhana'r polao", with all the videos served with a side of soothing ASMR noises and a descriptive note highlighting the nostalgia surrounding each dish. To admire food as flawless works of art, look no further than the blogs of Sameera Wadood and Shababa Suzana Hossain (@fatduck21).

Food consultant and chef Sameera Wadood believes in the superiority of local

ingredients over imported ones, using the former to come up succulent fusion recipes termed SW Originals, such as the "Bilimbi Glazed sous vide Chicken Breast stuffed with spiced Binni Bhaat quenelle wrapped in Charred Kale" and "Pomelo Glazed confit Chicken served with sweet Beetroot Puree". For her blog's first anniversary, Wadood launched three new fusion recipes involving Bengali favourites Mymensingh black sticky rice, chitoi pitha, kalo jeera, Koral fish, and kalo jaam. Food stylist, photographer and chef Shababa Hossain is an expert in food photography, giving her followers a brilliantly-captured look into the true beauty of food, which one seldom pauses to appreciate. The Fat Duck's blog discusses the history behind different foods alongside personal anecdotes connected to them.

Having reached the end of the article, I imagine you're thinking that my obsession with food is seemingly boundless.

You're not wrong. My YouTube recommendations are overcrowded with notifications from 50 different food channels from Food Insider to Banglar Rannaghor. The happiest dreams I've ever had were always about me all by myself in a land of *jilapi*, *roshmalai*, rocky road ice cream, and edible cookie dough. I have 19 secret stashes of potato chips and candy bars all over the house that my parents know nothing about.

I don't think I have a problem. There's nothing in the world that can keep you from obsessing over food, it's simply the best thing ever.

The author meticulously plans out her 13 daily meals on a regular basis. Drop a 'good luck' note for her overworked digestive system at rasha.jameel@outlook.com

