

## PERCEPTION



# NO RESERVATIONS

YouTube is godsend! While going through past episodes of Anthony Bourdain's culinary adventures, I always feel this ceaseless urge to experiment and savour delights from exotic lands and countries. And I am sure I am not alone in this.

To be able to appreciate the culinary heritage of a nation is like taking up a language; appreciating the nuances of the dishes and methods used to prepare those, appreciating the 'kick' of the spices or lack thereof, the use of herbs and the condiments—it is like savouring art and culture and sipping poetry and novellas of another language. Just like verbal communication, foods are gateways to other societies and the whole perception of 'cooking' amongst the people of Bangladesh is changing, for good!

"I knew nothing of cooking or household chores when I got married. I picked up the skills as time went by. However, that meant I was on the receiving end of some scathing remarks from my in-laws," said Niloofar, now 60 and grandmother to two loving grandchildren.

Many of our parents also go through such societal pressure, although to us it may seem less common, at least to a large extent. Yet, cooking is one skill that can always come in handy – whether to alleviate midnight cravings or to 'please' your in-laws.

Strange it may seem that although culinary skills are expected from almost every girl (boys too are expected these days to learn some cooking or at least help in doing chores) most of our teenagers passed by without setting foot in the kitchen. Even for once!

"I would rather have my grandchildren spend the time studying than engaging in culinary experiments. It is more important for their academia and will help in their careers. Cooking is something they can pick up anytime," said Niloofar, with some confidence.

However, when these young boys and girls go abroad, move from different towns to bigger cities, or stay in dormitories and

students' messes, cooking skills are strongly missed.

Abrar Khan (21), a third year residential student of mechanical engineering at Islamic University of Technology (IUT), said, "We get good meals and much privileges here but as far as I know, students living in hostels of other universities face unappetising hostel food and cooking by themselves saves them from the watery daal, for example."

In a world where competition is fierce to get into good universities, young people are encouraged to take up hobbies or extracurricular activities that can augment their academic records.

However, what most students, and their parents, fail to understand that given the right attention, not only do culinary skills serve a practical purpose they can also open up new avenues.

While painting, music or sports is encouraged, cooking is frowned upon and often, looked down-upon by many parents.

Tabassum Anila (19), a CSE student from Bangladesh University of Business and Technology (BUBT), said, "Whenever I try to go to the kitchen to help my mother getting things ready, she chides my effort. When my relatives see my mother doing all the household work by herself in spite of having an old enough daughter, they question my respect for my mother."

Some mother finds their children's attempts to help in the kitchen, or cooking for themselves, a hassle and often, unsafe. However, one should bear in mind that despite the initial mess that is inevitable, learning to cook takes time, and more so if

you try to hone those skills to perfection, if someone gets the opportunity to try their hands at making a meal, soon enough their skills will elevate from 'edible' to 'yummilicious.'

Hassan Ahmed, 34, now working in the telecom sector, is single and lives with his mother. "When I was young, I used to enjoy cooking," he said. "I was barely six or seven, and possibly my family found my idea to become a professional chef as cute! But as I grew older my family started disliking my cooking efforts and at one point I was no longer allowed to cook and had to make other use of my spare time,"

Hassan said.

There are countless men like Hassan who were discouraged to take up cooking habits into their teens. "The biggest problem is, now that I do not help my mother in cooking or doing household chores, she complains. But I was never taught to help people do household chores, let alone cook dinner when I was growing up,"

Hassan said with some air of guilt.

Living in a time when we are trying to shun gender discrimination, it is clear that both men and women should participate in household chores. Boys in Bangladesh grow up into men without the faintest concept of helping their parents or wives, in the kitchen. "If we seriously want to make a change in this gender biased mindset, parents need to take careful decisions and impart these values in boys' minds" Hassan said.

Years of experience have turned our mothers into cooking experts; something they have been doing for decades. It is

understandable involving children in cooking does have a chance of making everything into a colossal mess; safety is another factor. Yet if done under their watchful eye, this can even become a weekend family event, which will not only allow families enjoy a nutritious meal but also forge stronger familial ties.

The consequence of keeping children away from the tasks at home and pushing towards more "acceptable" hobbies like singing, dancing, painting and such only, creates a chasm of indifference to the home in the child from the very young age. As grown-ups, it often translates to tiffs between couples, when they both come home from work, for the wife to enter the kitchen and the husband to relax on the couch. Often, many caring single men still have their elderly mothers cooking for them, not out of disrespect, but simply the lack of requisite skills.

That is where YouTube and the Internet can come in handy. With countless "how to" videos on every imaginable cuisine, and every imaginable level of expertise, it can be a lifesaver for those of us who feel hopelessly lost in the kitchen.

Maliha Ferdous (20) says, "I am a foodie interested in Chinese cuisine and I rely on YouTube and magazine cooking tutorials when it comes to collecting recipes. The ones for beginners facilitated my cooking and the easy methods actually encouraged me to step into the kitchen for my own tummy and family."

In a society that is moving faster than we can comprehend, and one that wants to break down the shackles of gender discrimination, both men and women should start the lessons of managing a household. Not only will it help in family life but also build a better tomorrow, and of course, put more delicious dishes on the table.

**By Nawshin Tabassum Binte Alim and Pothbhola**

**Photo: LS Archive/Photo: Sazzad Ibne Sayed**

