



COOKING FOR THE FIRST TIME

THE DEFINITIVE YOUTH MAGAZINE
SHOUT

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The wonderful people at SHOUT told me, who has never cooked anything in his whole life, to cook a meal for myself and share my experience. Obviously, I accepted the challenge because I'm a bit of a daredevil if I do say so myself. So, today I'm going to describe how I made the perfect Bangladeshi lunch: rice, dal and fried fish. Was this a great start to my culinary journey? You'll find out soon enough. The conditions for the challenge were: I couldn't just ask my mother to tell me how to make everything; I had to watch YouTube videos and figure it out for myself. Disclaimer: my mother did help me with certain things like readying the ingredients, and she's bound to give me some advice even if I didn't want them. So without further ado, let's start.

THE RICE

Who doesn't know how to cook rice? Making rice is so easy that it's hardly cooking. So, I took the rice out, one and a half cups. Since I didn't have access to a rice cooker, I put the rice in a big pot. Rice has to be washed to apparently get rid of dust and starch. I don't know man; the chef in the video told me. Some people told me that I won't be able to drain the rice and that it will fall out of the pot. The thing is they don't know me and the gift I was born with. I've ran through every adversity that has come in my life so far; rice has got nothing on me. I swirled the rice around and used my dextrous hands to drain it, not once, not twice, but three times. I looked down at the sink and saw less than 50 grains that made their way out of the pot. Suffice to say, I definitely showed them.

The video stated that the key to perfect rice is equal amounts of rice and water. I know that professionals don't need to measure everything; they just know what the right amount is. To hone my instincts, I decided to add the water without measuring. I wanted the rice to be al dente, just like pasta; I absolutely detest mushy rice. It has to have that oomph, it has to resist my biting power just for a bit before disintegrating.

After what seemed like 10 minutes, all the water disappeared. I went in to give it a good stir; to my surprise some of the rice got stuck to the pot. I tried to scrape it off but to no avail. At the same time there was a burning smell coming from it. I quickly turned the stove off. Mother came in and



commented, "Needed more water."

THE DAL

Okay, this is a slight step up from cooking rice; several ingredients are involved. You have to be an idiot to burn dal. The first thing I had to do was chop some garlic and onions. I already talked about my magical hands, so this should never be a problem. I watched a quick video and went into the kitchen. I folded my hands around the knife and started cutting partial slits across the onion. I stopped just before the root. As any skilled cook would know, this is an advanced technique not common in normal households and only talented

knife handlers know how to execute. After cutting slits I started chopping perpendicular to the slits. You should've seen it, the pieces of onion gracefully crumbled down like they want to be cut, like they have no power against my cooking katana. After the onions I cut the garlic and everything was ready for the perfect concoction. I put the dal in the pot and added loads of water alongside the onions and garlic. When it started to boil I added the turmeric, salt and chillies. It's worth mentioning that the amount of turmeric and salt I added was purely a chef's intuition. However, something was wrong. I put

the stove to low and I waited and waited but the dal wasn't boiling again. Maybe it was because of the extra water I added the first time it boiled? I was standing there for 20 minutes but it never boiled again. I finally called mother to know what went wrong. She told me to just check if the dal melted or not, if it did it's done. Also, she said that I added too much turmeric. **THE FISH** I love fish and that's why I chose this as my go-to protein. Any normal individual would've chosen *ilish* because it shows your status and your love for your country. I, however, chose

rui because I don't care about society and it breaks my heart every time people refer to *rui* as the B-grade fish. Also, it's cheaper. I took three pieces of fish and started marinating them with turmeric, red chilli powder and salt. The fish were beautifully covered with all the ingredients. After getting the right pan, I added the oil and turned the stove on. Now, this is where most people make a major mistake: they put the fish in the oil before it heats up. What happens as a result is the fish absorbs excess oil and nobody likes oily food, right? After waiting for the perfect time, I put the fish in. Due to the sizzling, I

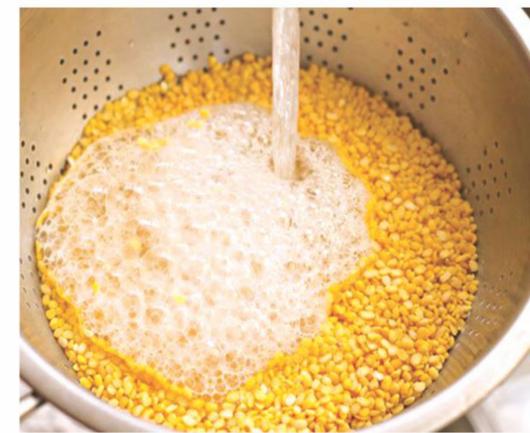
didn't want to get too close. One time when I was six, a drop of hot oil landed on my sister's hand and it looked painful. I still freak out when I think about that incident. The problem was that I had to flip them. I tried my best to flip them while staying a far as possible. I managed to do it. Mother came in and told me that the fish were burnt. Apparently, I set the fire too high. What she didn't know is that I like extra crispy fish and I did that on purpose. When will people understand me?

Finally, the time had come to taste my own creations. Mother put everything into dishes and served them with some cut limes. I put them into my mouth and I was shocked. Honestly, it wasn't bad at all, it tasted normal. The rice and dal had the desired consistency and the fish tasted just fine which is weird because I actually didn't measure any of the ingredients. Sure, a little bit more salt would've been better but I just added that while eating.

Overall this was a pleasant and rewarding experience. I learned a lot, like in life everything doesn't work out as planned and you have to make the best of it. I found out that there are a number of Bangladeshi cooking channels on YouTube; do check them out. Lastly, I'd like to thank SHOUT for giving me such an opportunity and helping me realise that I have what it takes to be a Michelin-starred chef.

Shoaib Ahmed Sayam tortures himself by watching fake sports and Vietnamese cartoons. Help him at fb.com/oribabamama

COOKING HACK: if you put too much water in your rice, toss a few phones in there



TYPICAL WATER TO RICE COOKING RATIOS

