

At the time of writing, October 12, Spain is celebrating the *Fiesta Nacional de España*—the anniversary of the day on which Christopher Columbus finally found land in a scurvy-addled state after having lied about being able to read maps. He went looking for India as we all know, but ended up in the Americas instead—but then again, if you too were long gone in syphilitic madness, you would not know the difference either. Columbus Day, as it is known in the US, is now regarded, much like every other holiday celebrated in the US, as a reminder of a racist past (because we all know that racism has been cancelled indefinitely since they elected a half-black President—but that it is in no way still a thing, stop saying it is, it's not). This day is about celebrating being Spanish, and the rich history of Spain.

doing so, they might as well be called Scotland. Secondly, half the Spanish national football team would be Catalan and in a World Cup year, that's not going to end well. The Catalan referendum was as messy as you would expect from the only country to be punished for being an Axis Power in World War II without being an Axis Power. They're like the anti-

independence goes. I too got one of these when I ran the wrong way during a foot race, and upon realising my mistake, slinked off hoping no one would notice. Everyone noticed. This Statute of Autonomy passed to the Constitutional Court in Spain where the judges laughed at it so hard and for so long, they wet their robes, just a little bit. Articles about an autonomous justice system, the status

of Catalan as an official language, and references to Catalunya as a nation were scrapped to absolutely no one's surprise. Three years later, Catalunya made the Declaration of the Ability of Catalans to Decide—which they did, in a referendum, but no one noticed and as a result, it was a massive waste of everyone's time. In 2015, they filed a Declaration of This Time We Will Actually Start Becoming Independent. It then took them a whole two years before convincing anyone to leave their homes to go cast a meaningless vote. That brings us to last week when those poor Catalans had to go outside in their perfect Spanish weather and vote to become independent for the 84th time.

CATALUNYA

THE FIRST NEW INDEPENDENT COUNTRY SINCE THE STARVING STATE OF SOUTH SUDAN?



People hold the pro-Catalan independence flag as Spanish police raid Catalonia's regional government economy headquarters in Barcelona.

God knows they need to celebrate history because the last few years haven't been too kind to them. This recent downturn was most recently compounded by a referendum held last week in the region of Catalunya to declare independence from Spain. This is bad news for a couple of reasons: firstly, the region of Catalunya appears to be the only part of Spain that can still function economically and has become the richest part of the country. Those bloodsuckers in Madrid need the Catalans to keep their country afloat. If they were to secede, all Spain would be left with are crippling levels of unemployment, a growth rate that's only positive because they had nowhere left to fall, debilitating austerity measures, and a bunch of farmers who are too lazy and too stuffed with *paella* to do anything productive. That and the Basques, another secessionist region but one so hapless at

Switzerland, a country whose famed neutrality was rewarded by getting to keep all the Nazi gold in their banks. It's around that time though when the beginnings of modern Catalan resentment began. Like any ethnic minority, they were brutally oppressed by a fascist dictator—the immaculately named Generalissimo Francisco Franco (or as he was affectionately known by his friends, Froo Froo). Catalunya was especially targeted—Catalan autonomy was repealed under Franco, all protests were quashed and between 1938 and 1953, 4,000 Catalonians were sent to bed without dinner, by which I mean they were massacred. Democracy was only restored in the 1970s when a by-then senile Franco finally kicked the bucket. In 2010, the Catalan parliament approved a new Statute of Autonomy, which is sort of like a participation medal as far as secession and

This time, however, because there was nothing else going on in the world (except for a genocide in Myanmar, an assembly line of hurricanes in the Caribbean, a man in Las Vegas going crazy, and Harvey Weinstein trying to out-sexually-assault Bill Cosby), the vote finally gained a little traction.

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A week after 93 percent of the 40 percent that could be bothered to vote voted for independence, we are still awaiting the official Declaration of Independence. The Spanish government has given them till next week to go back to their lives and continue carrying the rest of the country on their backs. The Catalan parliament has been trying to stall by sending various members to juggle while riding a unicycle; in the meantime, a group of Political Science majors from the University of Barcelona are busy trying to write a constitution in a dungeon under Camp Nou. Carles Puigdemont, the 130th President of Catalunya, a title equivalent to having your own meme page on Facebook, has said that it should be ready in a week or so. We will see what happens—whether we will have the first new independent country since the Starving State of South Sudan or whether this will end in utter and abject failure. All I know is, as a Poli Sci grad myself, it has never taken me longer than one night and performance-enhancing drugs to pull off any of my assignments, so I don't know what Catalunya's excuse is.

Bareesh Hasan Chowdhury is a recent Political Science graduate.

OPINION |

CROSSROAD



SARA ZAKER

FROM "LAU DIYE MOONG DAAL" TO ONLINE CATERING A HISTORY OF COOKING

When it comes to cooking, I am reminded of the early days of trying my hand at the stove. The earliest was probably when we were in our single digits and would have *bon-bhojon*, i.e. cooking in the front yard or backyard with a bit of help from the cook or an adult. The hardest was to keep the handmade earthen burner going. Desperately blowing through the pipe (the *phukni*) would always end up in producing more smoke rather than fire in the earthen stove. This would make our eyes water and usually our attempts to cook *khichuri* would almost halt at the intent. It never tasted the way we'd imagined when we set off.

Through the years I have learned that no matter how big a non-cooking person I am, I have to reconcile with the fact that "the way to a man's heart is through his stomach." Why a man? Even the way to a woman's heart follows the same route. Cooking, gardening and rearing pets, I believe are learned behaviours. So I would say is the habit of listening to music or watching TV or reading books. My mother was not the cooking kind. Although I must say, she would turn out the best *halwa* a Shab-e-Baraat. As an everyday chore, cooking was not her domain. I saw her mainly as a teacher in my childhood.

If *Amma* had any interest in the culinary arts, she would have given it a try on the weekends, at least. There is an explanation to this. My mother lost her own mother when she was a toddler. When she was 16, she was married off. My *Phupus* were great cooks, so was my *Dadi* and even my *Dada*. I have to say the daily *daal* and beef curry cooked at my *Phupu's* was the best in the world. I still savour the taste. After *Amma* went to her *shoshur baari*, she learned to sit before the mud stove and do the cooking. I understand she burnt many a saree in the process. In Quetta, *Abba* could not tolerate the idea of fish heads being thrown away as garbage. He would bring them home, buying them at a minimum price. I shudder at the thought of *Amma* handling the cooking of fish heads! In those days there were no cookbooks even.

Just as her time at her in-laws could not increase my mother's interest in cooking, my interest in the culinary arts was even harder to instil. My mother-in-law had passed away (a culinary legend in family memory) by the time I got married. She was indeed a great cook and made the likes of pineapple pudding, caramel custard (*jula putin* as hired cooks of those days would call it), Bombay pudding, and special beef *biriyani*. These are only a few items in the list of *Shashuri Amma's* list of specialities.



My mother-in-law had passed away (a culinary legend in the family memory) by the time I got married. My sister-in-law knew all her recipes and more, such as beef *vindaloo*, *moong daal* with *lau*, etc. However much I tried to grasp the methods, *Jhunu Apa*, my sister-in-law teasingly kept them to herself.

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say I will give the recipes to my brother's daughter (meaning my daughter) as a family secret. *Sriya*, my daughter, did not see her mother cook, nor her *Nani*, but maybe my *Shashuri Amma*, after who *Sriya* was named *Razia Begum* at her *akika*, blessed her from above with a unique culinary talent. Now when I give *Sriya* a surprise visit on weekends, I see her making Chinese-style chicken with sesame and Thai papaya salad. And the dip she prepares to have with tortillas and potato chips is out of this world. Dips without any high-fat mayonnaise or cream cheese, with yogurt and minced tuna fish as thickener instead—totally healthy!

Coming back to what we learned. *Amma* was into Scrabble and reading books and is still into crosswords. So letters haunt me, maybe not the way they haunt *Amma*, but they have become my mainstay instead of the spices that fill up the kitchen cabinet and the fish that fill up the fridge.

By the way, I did not cook up "Cookups". It's actually a very dependable online catering service set up by a brilliant person, Namira Hussain. Cookups enlists people who want to cater to people who wish to have homemade food. The Cookups team first does a hygiene check of the kitchen of

the aspirant caterer; after this, the team tastes their food—all to qualify a particular home kitchen to be enlisted online. Apparently, thousands are in the waitlist of Cookups.

Recently we have been hearing about the downside of the digital world. And talk of the Blue Whale Challenge has been making the rounds. I tend to count the blessings of the world we live in, instead of moping over the ills that affect us. The other good news about the digital world vis-à-vis Cookups is that it has become a big business—one of the most successful startups of recent years.

While I was just reminiscing about *Razia Taher* (my mother-in-law) and Professor Kazemuddin Ahmed (my *Dada*), I wondered how they would feel about the virtual reality of Cookups—inspiring people to make money from privately-owned *chula*. The only reason they would be offended, I presume, is that "doing business" itself did not sit well with them.

"That's something only the Marwaris do, not 'bhadrolak' like a professor or the wife of a bureaucrat," they might've said. In those days, entrepreneurship as an influential force was not a part of the genteel world.

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