



Recipe for change

My culinary experiments began at the tender age of seven, and involved puddings, singaras and vegetable rolls. I slowly learned the secrets of making a pudding richer and softer, the fillings of singaras and rolls tastier, and even attempted to bake cakes using stoves, an endeavour that did not turn out as I had expected. The times spent at the kitchen along with sous-chef Rahima, are some of the earliest recollections of my childhood, and a memory I still hold close to my heart.

My loving grandparents were the biggest fans of my cooking. Everyone else preferred to make reservations on days, or weekends, I decided to wear the chef's hat. "I want to be a chef when I grow up," I used to say with much conviction, but that was of course pushed aside by my later aspirations of becoming a traffic police!

SECRETS OF TRAVELS

For someone who hates to travel, perhaps the only thing that serves as an incentive to visit a foreign land is the food and their culinary heritage. Thus, early morning breakfast buffet sees me devour continental and lunch-time cravings are satiated by on-the-go snacks, but the evening dining is left exclusively for local delicacies.

Over the years, I have acquired the 'acquired taste' of sushis (I simply cannot have enough of fish), kimchis, even blue cheese. Yet, I cannot image the thought of passing stir-fried insects down my gullet. Even 'no reservations' have 'reservations'!

While I may be an exception, others are fast to catch up on cuisines they come across during their travels.

Mustabshara Tabir, a student of Economics at the Brac University, is an unabashed lover of everything Thai, and Italian too. "My father has a business in Bangkok, and we frequently visited the city. And that was the beginning of a love-affair

with essentially everything Thai! My passion for Italian cuisine also has a lot to do with my father's travels," she said.

Perhaps, this is not a new phenomenon. Long ago, travel and commerce brought the world closer. And as we are witnessing another surge in history when the globe is getting smaller still, it is no surprise that the exchange of food is in the forefront.

CHANGE IN THE GROCERY BAG

Tabir thinks no matter what, her love for 'desi' dishes will remain. She feels that the oily and greasy frenzy is inescapable, but that does not mean her grocery bag has not changed. "My father hails from West Bengal and my mother is Sylheti. So, our kitchen has always been a mix and blend of flavours. And as we added our travels into the equation, the diversity just multiplied.

I am really not much into Social media or TV, but I think this influences a lot of people. Masterchef Australia has been an influence on me, but not a significant one. My grocery now reflects my changing palate and 'our' love for seafood — cuttlefish, squids and octopuses are now in. And the best thing is they are now widely available in the kitchen markets!" she said.

Tabir finds it amazing that it is not only the kitchen and our food habit that is changing, the entire 'market' is changing and it is astonishing. While the country saw a boom in 'supershops' this attitude to change is now even visible even in traditional kitchen markets. From a wide range of vegetables that were not traditionally grown here, to an esoteric assembly of condiments that are either imported to produced on a trial basis, the whole concept of "food and diet" has changed.

MEN CAN COOK...

Meet Sadik Salih. In his mid-twenties and somewhat 'oven fresh' into the job market, he is seeking employment in the business

sector, while simultaneously managing a small enterprise initiated by his father. He is a foodie to the core, and someone who does not shy away from cooking adventures!

"As cliché as it may sound, professionally men always cooked. I really do not understand why the social stigma in men being cooking enthusiasts," he said, with a grin on his face.

"I started to cook as I began tweaking my mother's recipes to suit my palate," he continued. "Eggs are a breakfast staple. But I have shifted from the hardboiled to a softer version, with the boiling time now measured by the stopwatch! I really do not know about other families, but it is the simple things that have changed in our household.

I am more familiar with non-Bangladeshi cuisine, and that had somewhat changed my taste-buds; something that was difficult for my mother to master. Initially, it was just tweaking, now I take charge of the kitchen on weekends, and also on days when mum needs a rest."

And what does the Salih family have on weekends, you might wonder?

"My love for essentially everything Bengali remains. I am not really a health-conscious person. I am essentially a meat lover, and that means I love my spices and use them fully," he said. "But my style of cooking differs a lot from what I had traditionally eaten in our household," he added.

...SO CAN WOMEN

Habiba Karim Sanzida is a mother of two. Her days are spent taking care of her two young boys, balancing a job as a teacher, and running an online catering service. As a student, she decided to take cooking somewhat seriously and took lessons to learn baking and other dishes.

"Women have always cooked, but I always felt that we lacked improvisation. Along with the boom of the Internet every-

thing is becoming easier. I follow YouTube channels to learn more every day, but I always try to give it my own twist."

Sanzida is one of the new brand of mothers who attempts to juggle both the homefront and a career. She feels that her kitchen is now on the brink of a massive change. "We have seriously moved from 'bhaat'. My mother-in-law has kidney problems, and that meant changes in her diet. And as time went by, our entire family went through the dietary change rather voluntarily," says Sanzida.

What does her table spread look on an average day?

"Soups, salads and a single dish to complement. I prefer to have everything easy nowadays, and that means shying away from traditional dishes," she said.

ADIEU TO THE 'DA' AND THE 'BOTI' TOO

"I love my desi food, but I am open to ideas," said Suleiman Salam, a graphic designer working for a reputed advertising firm in the country. "As someone who spends long hours in front of the computer I have a fair idea of occupational hazards! When I go home, I try to help my wife with the kitchen chores as much as I can. But I cannot cook, and there is no shame in admitting that. I would rather leave that to the expert!" he said.

Salam feels that it is not the Bangladeshi kitchen that is witnessing a revolution. "I think the revolution is in the mindset. I never saw my father enter the kitchen. It was solely my mother's territory. My wife, who is also graphic designer, found it very difficult to attend to our cooking needs after a day of hard work. And I simply had to help, quite grudgingly at first.

Photo: LS Archive/Sazzad Ibne Sayed