

Student hostels for females: An inside story

Born and raised in Narayanganj, Farhana Zaman moved to Dhaka in 2003 in order to pursue a career in medicine. Her family had been permanent residents and having their business neatly settled in Narayanganj for generations, moving to Dhaka was simply not an option.

Farhana sought lodging at one of the private female hostels; an establishment not affiliated to the college, but one run exclusively for female students like herself. She thanks her parents till this day for respecting the decision of a naive 20-year-old to stay in a hostel rather than living with one of her family members residing in Dhaka.

"For me it was a matter of freedom more than anything else," Dr Zaman said while reminiscing about her four years of hostel life. "The authorities did not question my attitude towards life. As naive as they now seem, even to me, that post-teen carefree attitude could have been problematic had I stayed with relatives."

Traditionally, Bangladeshi parents never felt secure with their daughter opting to stay in a hostel; such apprehensions still abound. However, the reality is, every day, thousands of women are coming to Dhaka to seek higher studies. The proverbial 'roof over the head' is still a major concern, but not at the cost of giving up privacy, liberty, and individual freedom. More and more

women now prefer to stay on their own and to cater to this growing demand, hostels for women are now more in number.

Even a few years ago, private institutions were solely for the privileged class, but the situation has changed. Many students now enrol at private universities from various regions of the country and the universities are now focused on providing suitable accommodation for their students.

"I feel safe staying here" said Syeda Saima Sajida, currently an undergraduate student at one of the more reputed private institutions, now living in a hostel run by her alma mater. "The gates close at 10PM sharp, and no entry or exit is allowed after that, except in cases of emergency. Only registered family members are allowed to visit and that too through prior notice" she added.

According to Sajida, the hostel has two female supervisors who are in charge of all the resident students. Rules are strict, sometime even school-like, yet even she feels they are important in maintaining the standard of the facility.

"One of supervisors takes attendance at 10PM every night, and if we fail to report, she comes to our room to check on us. There is a registry book that we all must sign before leaving the hostel, and upon our arrival," said Saima.

For renowned places open to a wider

range of women seeking accommodation, the idea is to offer an environment that the female occupants can expect at their own homes, irrespective of where they are.

The monthly rent for lodging at the hostels vary depending on multiple factors starting from location, number of residents, the standard of the room, to the availability of Wi-Fi. Good facilities not only ensure safety, but also keep hygiene and cleanliness on their list of priorities. The menu they offer are also given due importance.

All residents pay on a monthly basis (some in advance), which includes rent, electricity, and water supply. Most hostels accommodate two females per room, although arrangements can often be made for single rooms. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner often come along with the package.

"The adda is what I remember most. And then there were midnight prank calls to unknown numbers. But there was always the fear of being bullied, snacks being devoured without asking, and valuables getting misplaced. Some of the girls were always more keen on who was dating who, rather than focusing on anything productive. And in an era when mobile phones were just becoming available to 20 year olds like me and social media non-existent, hostel rooms were fertile grounds for breeding rumours" she said, adding — "Much may not have changed" with a smirk!

"We had to grasp a barrage of medical jargons just to pass class tests, and sleepless nights of group study actually helped. Our classmates living with their families faced more difficulties in their study of medicine. But then there was always the dreaded 'chicken and chalkumra curry' to complain about, or the 'super soupy lentil' that was daal beyond recognition," said Dr Zaman.

In retrospect, Farhana believes that opting for the hostel was a water-shed moment in her life —

"It had rules we had to comply. Some were strict, and to be honest, back then, most of them felt unfair, unnecessary even; but they taught me discipline. The hostel experience imparted lessons in life which I carry till this very day as a professional, a wife, and as a mother.

Hostels, by their very nature, cater to people from all backgrounds. It can be viewed as an opportunity to meet new people, and a unique chance to decide on the direction for the river of life to flow. In a society now plagued with social maladies, it can be key to success.

More and more female hostels are now opening their doors. For those who are now temporary residents of the city, needless to say, these temporary solutions are a boon.

By Abu Aisha and Faiza Khondokar

IDEAS

Bonsais — even for the faint hearted!

Having a home nicely decorated with a touch of green vitality is almost every Dhakaite's dream; some go steps further and now consider it a necessity.

Selecting the perfect plant that can thrive easily inside your house with little water and almost no sunlight is not easy, but that is where bonsais can come as a boon.

The appeal of bonsais varies — some choose to harness peace and tranquility, others simply for its aesthetic appeal. No matter how you wish to see it, and how to make best use of them as an element of interior décor, know that this has a long cherished history in oriental cultures, and people still derive endless pleasure in growing bonsais as they did thousands of years ago.

Before making your first purchase, make sure you understand that bonsais are not just any plant to be placed indoors; they require special treatment. Some will go on to say, "It is not for the faint hearted!"

One must be committed to devote a fair amount of time, and spend considerable sums for their proper care — as far as bonsais are concerned, spending does not stop at the store you buy it from. Consider this, no matter when you start with your bonsai project, if taken care of, they just might outlive you! So, start off with something regular, not one from Tibet that just might break the bank.

POINTS TO PONDER Selecting the right plant

Puritans often claim that there cannot be indoor bonsais, and there is logic to such assertions. The interior of an apartment is not a natural habitat, but bonsais can be coaxed to suit the interior.



Another point that needs to be addressed at the very beginning — will the bonsai be part of the exterior, or a centerpiece of your interiors?

As bonsai require a lot of care and attention, it is best to go for indoor bonsais, while you are still learning. The controlled environment inside shall allow you to practice and learn how to take care of the plant, without exposing it to the harsh and changing outside weather.

SCHEDULED WATERING

Proper watering is a necessity. Bonsais are best kept at humid places in the house.

Make sure the container is small as the miniature plants tend to draw water from the trays fast. Spraying water on a regular basis is almost a necessity under such conditions.

PATIENCE AND CONSISTENCY

It goes without saying that one has to be patient with their bonsais. You have to let it grow, and at the same time, clip edges to contain its growth and to retain its shape; you have to ensure that it is watered on a regular basis, and placed under sunlight once in a while.

The plant often needs to be uprooted, its roots trimmed, and then re-potted. Maintaining a bonsai is not only an exercise in home gardening, it can be, and is, a lesson in patience.

SPEAKING OF NUTRIENTS

Indoor and outdoor bonsais have different requirements when it comes to fertilisers. Rather than leaving the matter for the future, talk to the seller even before making the purchase. They should be able to give tips on which fertilisers to use and which ones to avoid. They may also suggest how often one should apply them.

REFINING BONSAIS

The petite bonsai structure is maintained primarily by pruning its branches and leaves. However, those that are available in stores are already groomed to certain shapes, so the trouble of cutting the branches will be an exercise only to main-

tain that shape and not to create a new one.

As tranquil and peaceful as it may seem, too much trimming can result in a skeletal bonsai, devoid of its splendour.

THE KITCHEN

The kitchen is not the place one would normally associate as an idea position to place a bonsai. Placing one in front of a window in the kitchen can give the impression of looking at a large tree from afar, and make cooking a calming experience.

WORK SPACES

Small studies, home offices, or even your desk at work can use a change in appearance. These spaces tend to be stiff given the nature of their use and even a regular potted plant can bring in vitality, of course bonsais can do so much more.

THE PERFECT GIFT

Standing at the cross-roads of a time when people proclaim that it is 'only the thought that matters' and people expecting something totally out of the box, bonsais still have a place.

Surprise your friend, your colleague or even your husband. Maybe only to remind that only a trimmed and nurtured relationship can last beyond our existence, if not anything else.

And if you are lucky, s/he might just take up the hobby and become a fellow enthusiast.

**By Anisha Hassan
Photo: Collected**