

# The Adventures in Pitha Making

## FARNAZ FAWAD HASAN

The only time I don't mind getting up from my cosy bed on a chilly winter morning is when the sweet smell of *pitha* wakes me up. However, the fast pace of city life is slowly taking away such delights from us. To keep this tradition going, I tried my hand at learning the art of making these wonderful winter staples for a week.

## PATISHAPTA

Patishapta was fairly easy to make. This soft, sweet *kheer* filled delicacy certainly gives the French crêpes a run for their money. Making the batter was a breeze although it's quite tricky, a thin rice flour batter was beaten to form a slurry-like consistency. For the filling, I simmered down milk with some jaggery and rice flour till it became a delicious, milky concoction. The first two crêpes came out good but things went south on the third one. The batter stuck to the pan and the *pitha* broke in the middle while folding. But good for me because the broken ones ended up being my snacking *pithas*. Overall, *patishapta pithas* sure take the top place in being a quick, delicious snack. I'd rate it a 4.9 out of 10 on the difficulty scale.

## BHAPA PITHA

Who doesn't like a warm, steamy, *gur*-filled *bhapa pitha* on a chilly winter morning? Soft pillows made of rice flour topped with



ooey-goeyjaggery and coconut strands – sounds simple but is hard to perfect. Getting the dough right is the critical part. After adding water to the rice flour, it forms clusters which need to be sifted through a fine sieve. The sifted flour and water mixture is then moulded into the iconic *bhapa pitha* shape and filled with yummy

jaggery which, if done right, melts into a luscious syrupy goodness. I went a little overboard with the jaggery and freshly shredded coconut. Since I did not have any *pitha*-making tools lying around, I had to improvise in creating a makeshift steamer. Unfortunately, my excitement got the better of me and I packed the fillings

too snug which resulted in my *pithas* falling apart. After a couple of failed attempts and one changed vessel, I got the perfect *bhapa pitha*. If I had to rate it in terms of difficulty, I'd give it a 5 and a half.

## NAKSHI PITHA

For my final day I decided to take the bull by the horns and attempt to make the dreaded *nakshi pitha*. Making the base was a bit different from the last two *pithas* I made although the ingredients were almost the same. The rice flour had to be mixed with boiling hot water until it formed a soft yet firm dough. I used toothpicks to give the small discs of dough variegated 3D designs. This procedure was actually very calming and fun to do despite it being immensely time-consuming. Although the motifs lacked appeal, I proceeded to deep fry the ivory disks till they crisped up to a golden brown colour. The fried *pithas* were then soaked in a rich amber molasses syrup till all the crevices were well coated. Making this *pitha* took a lot of effort, which is why it gets a solid 9 in my book.

Perfecting *pithas* require expertise and shout-out to those who still do their part to keep the tradition alive.

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# For the Love of Poetry

## ADHORA AHMED

Poetry is a wonderful thing. As Shelley once said, it "lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world, and makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar". Sadly, other than academic purposes, I haven't explored poetry in depth on my own. Rarely do I spend lazy afternoons reading poems. Growing up, most of my peers weren't really into poems, hence there weren't many opportunities to develop an interest.

This led me to wonder if people just don't read poems that much these days. Talking to fellow bookworms, I was relieved to know that nothing could be further from the truth. Poetry still, as ever, moves people. For some, the enjoyment lies in the freedom of interpretation, while for others, it's a soothing balm for the soul.

However, I came to speculate that my lack of enthusiasm over poetry might have something to do with the way it was taught at school. Niloy Saha, a student of Dhaka University, concurs, "I was never introduced to poetry from an observational or emotional perspective. It was more like something I had to study for exams." Many of us can relate to memorising the summaries of poems in textbooks, only to regurgitate all that on an exam script. Indeed, it is an unappealing way to engage with literature in general.

"We used to hold a lot of recitals of old and traditional poems that were legends, epics and historical narratives. We really enjoyed poetry because it was a way of connecting literature and stories," Preyankari Devi Devyani, a pianist, shares. She spent some of her school

years abroad, an experience which helped her appreciate this literary form. "If things don't have an interesting story behind them, no one will actually want to learn about it. If you don't have good teachers to teach you about poetry and organise fun activities around it, it won't be fun."

Aside from the academic aspect, most fellow bookworms also concede that poetry perhaps isn't a popular choice for leisurely reading due to it being deeper and less accessible than prose. Mursalin Mosaddeque, a contributor for Daily Star Books, thinks otherwise, "I don't buy this myth that poetry is gradually becoming less popular. I don't see a time when it was more popular in history. It is essential to acknowledge that poetry has its root in the oral tradition. In that sense, it even precedes literacy. So, it's ironic that poetry has this association with a high-brow art or literary form."

As for poetry's apparent depth, Mursalin comments, "I don't think depth is the first thing that should come to anyone's mind while thinking or talking about poetry. What is essential and foremost is that we cherish poetry. I don't know how one can cherish anything at all, let alone poems, if all they are doing is digging depths with their analytical abilities. There is a time for it too, but that comes a lot later and only if one is eager to go to these lengths in the first place."

Perhaps more of us can take part in poetry's hidden beauty if we allow ourselves to feel more.

*Adhora Ahmed tries to make her two cats befriend each other, but in vain. Tell her to give up at [adhora.ahmed@gmail.com](mailto:adhora.ahmed@gmail.com)*

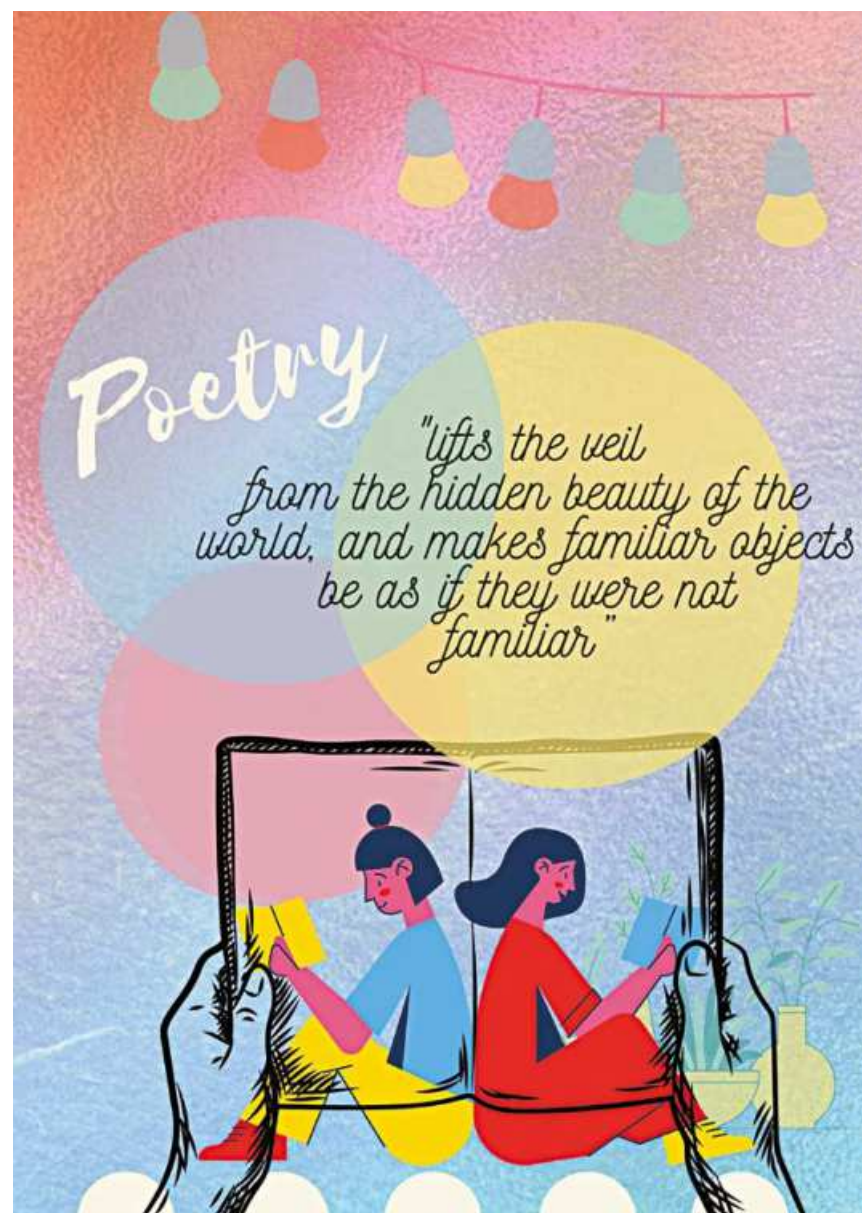


ILLUSTRATION: ALIZA RAHMAN

# THE ART OF PARENTING

## TASNIM ODRIKA

Growing up, I considered parenting to be an inheritable skill. You are automatically appointed to this job when you give birth and the skills just come naturally to you. You are supposed to magically understand every single want and need of your child.

"Our parents know what's best for us" is a phrase we have become accustomed to hearing. But, as I grew older, the edges of this line seemed to blur.

When I was younger, my parents would be the first person I would go to for learning anything new. To me, they seemed to know and understand everything. This perception changed with time. I was introduced to the internet and slowly I realised there were certain topics on which other people had slightly advanced knowledge than my parents. And that is completely fine. Having this feeling is not a form of disrespect in any way. It's just that my veil lifted from the idea that my parents know everything about everything. With this, I also encountered the harsh reality that maybe our parents, even with the best of intentions, do not always know what is best for us.

Sanjana Lamia, 23, and soon-to-be graduate, resonates with this sentiment. "It is not possible for our parents to know everything. For example, they don't and cannot know what career will be best for me. I, myself, can be the best judge of what will bring me happiness in life," says Sanjana. But in a lot of cases,

expression of such sentiments is not taken in a good way by our society or parents themselves.

As I started to near the parenting age myself, I looked for all the natural parenting skills I was supposed to magically acquire but they were nowhere to be found. It hit me that parenting is an art form and just like every art it requires practice and you learn through trial and error. But, you need to learn. That's the core part we seem to forget sometimes and hold this foolish idea that just by giving birth we will be indulged with the necessary skills required to raise a child and possess the skills to know what is right for that child.

"I became a mother at a very young age. At first, I was paranoid about my child getting hurt or falling sick and not being able to meet his needs. It got better gradually with time and parenthood became less intimidating after my second child was born," shares Chaman Afroz, a mother of two.

If we look at Bangladesh, from a young age, we are taught to be many things. We are taught to be good children, obedient students, and proper partners to our significant others. But, one thing we never care to learn is parenting. Movies and TV shows sometimes show us that when you hold a baby in your arms for the very first time, you magically acquire all the parental skills. This whole concept is harmful because when a lot of new parents feel helpless about parenting, they might think that there is some inherent fault within

them for not naturally knowing what to do, it might even deter them from seeking help. Sure, as you see your baby for the very first time, your parental instinct to protect the child kicks in. But, in this modern and complex world, that is just not enough anymore.

Unfortunately, although parenting is one of the most important jobs in the world, most of us are thrown into parenthood without much knowledge as to what to do. A lot of the time, we can take great care of a baby by always feeding them on time and getting them all the things they want. But, more often than not, the emotional needs of the child are kept out of this equation.

"Taking care of a baby takes a great toll on your physical health. I had to stay up nights feeding and changing diapers. But, to be honest, it seemed more straightforward than raising a teenager. I never know the right thing to do. I wish there was a book with all the guidelines as to what to do," comments \*Mehrin Akhter, another mother of two, with one of them being the aforementioned teenager.

Sadly, apart from the myriad of self-help books titled "Guide to Parenting", there is no one-stop solution containing all the required information to transform one into a "good parent". And, maybe it's time we steer clear from this idea of a "good" or "perfect" parent and start to see them as human beings who can make mistakes just like us. Only then can you create a room for

understanding each other.

Most of the parents I spoke to for writing this article did not have much prior knowledge about raising children. It was an art that they picked up along the way and got better at it with time. They also agreed that having some prior knowledge would have been of immense help on this journey. "If I was given some guidelines as to how to take care of a child, it would have definitely helped me communicate better with my daughter and lead to fewer disagreements between us," says \*Yasmin Begum, a mother of a graduating daughter.

With the increase in sexual violence towards women in Bangladesh, this issue of parenting becomes all the more important. Along with all the many important lessons our youths are provided with, they should also be made to realise the importance of being responsible for another human being so that they can also have the agency to decide if they want to take on such responsibility.

We have heard phrases such as "You will understand everything once you become a parent yourself" from our elders. But, for such an important job as parenting, can we afford to learn it on the spot?

*\*Names have been changed for privacy*

*Tasnim Odrika has only one personality trait and that is cats. Share ideas for new personality traits with her at [odriska\\_02@yahoo.com](mailto:odriska_02@yahoo.com)*

