

#PERSPECTIVE

RESTAURANT HYPE VS. REALITY:

Are we overspending?

Here is a question that hardly gets asked — a question for the breadwinners of families, for hardworking parents, for all those newly-married couples who are dreaming to one day live a lavish life, for fresh graduates who are excited that they are now earning and enjoying a bit of independence — how much do you spend on restaurants, and is it actually worth it?

The culinary scene of Dhaka has boomed beyond imagination, and if you think of it, we as customers have made that possible. Also, we have somehow decided collectively that recreation simply means eating out. Does leisure activity have to involve food? That's a tangent we will explore a little later.

Back to my question, what is your monthly expenditure on recreational eating? Or, what portion of your hard-earned income goes in the pockets of restaurants, and should you be okay with it?

Let's do a quick calculation. Consider a family of just two people: a financially stable but not necessarily a "rich" couple in Dhaka. This couple will likely visit a relatively posh fine-dining (sometimes a 5-star hotel's restaurant to avail a BOGO offer) once a month. The same couple will perhaps go to a decent, mid-range place in another week of the month, a budget-friendly eatery in a different week, and order in food twice a month.

Now, get your calculator out. For the fancy dine, an outflow of Tk 5000 for two people is quite commonplace. For decent or mid-range dining, consider Tk 3000. Let's say the economical meal for two costs Tk 1000, and finally, our couple spends Tk 2000 for food delivered to their home via any



delivery app.

However, the husband and wife will also individually — as in not as a couple — dine with their respective friends, colleagues, and cousins. Let's assume together they spend Tk 2000 on that in a month.

Add all these figures up, and you will see that this duo is spending Tk 13000 every month!

Therefore, one can say that, generally speaking, a financially-stable-but-not-rich family of just two people in Dhaka spends roughly Tk 10,000 to Tk 15,000 a month in restaurant bills. For bigger families, this figure is obviously much higher.



That's how much you spend. Now, is it worth it?

Going back to the tangent mentioned earlier, eating out has become synonymous with recreation. Imagine how much fun it would have been if you spent a portion of this money on other leisurely activities. Moreover, how about cultivating a hobby? How about saving a part of the expenditure or even investing?

Consumer behaviour is strange. We at times raise our eyebrows seeing the price of a suit from an upscale tailor, whilst we do not bat an eye at the food menu. We need to set our priorities straight.

Speaking of priorities, what about

travelling? If you can curb on restaurant bills and save Tk 5000 every month, you will accumulate Tk 60,000 in a year — an amount that is enough for a better-than-average to even upscale two-night trip anywhere in Bangladesh for a couple. Save more or save for two years, and you will have around Tk 1,20,000 — enough for airfare to a holiday abroad for one person or even two, at least in several countries.

Sure, travelling, hobbies, or fancy suits may not interest you. However, there is something or other you can do if only you become more conscious about your expenses.

Furthermore, are you always getting value for the money you spend on these culinary treats? Think in terms of quality, quantity, service, authenticity of cuisine, smartly done fusions, etc.

To make matters worse, a lot of people get bedazzled by hypes and fads, and they feel they must pay a visit to the newest place in town or try out an Instagrammable eatery because otherwise, how can you be trendy, right? How can you show off to your friends? What would you otherwise post on your TikTok or Facebook?

Last but not least, this is not to say that the culinary industry is evil in general, or that you should stop spending money in this sector. However, the next time you are planning to go to a restaurant or thinking of ordering in, look at our wallet first, think whether the expense is really needed, and then decide accordingly.

By M H Haider
Photo: Collected