

#FOOD &amp; RECIPES

# Are men really the better cooks?

The notion that "a man can cook" lands as angels singing hymns to the ears of whoever is in the vicinity, along with the enquirer. Earning brownie points from your friends, colleagues, girlfriend, or soon-to-be in-laws would be the least of your concerns if you have that skill up in your sleeve, trust me, I know. Incidentally, if you are well-versed or innately good at the art of gastronomy, the inevitable question arises from the surroundings, "Is he better than his wife?" To which many, but not all, respond with a quip, "Have you ever heard of a great woman chef?"

Which brings us to the focus of this article, "Are men really the better cooks?" Before we dive into the intricacies and complexities of such a loaded question, let's get one thing clear: knowing how to cook is not a virtue. Every capable and normally functioning adult should know how to cook regardless of their beliefs, religion, or gender. Which is why having the skill to cook does not make one a saint, just as not knowing it should not be mistaken for courageous defiance.

Cooking was a survival skill that was honed by *Homo Erectus* during the era of hunters and gatherers. And somewhere along the line between then and now, it somehow became the battle of the sexes. How? You, dear reader, might think. Here's how. The split started centuries ago, and the trend was prevalent across different monarchies across the world. But for the argument's sake, we shall focus on Europe. In the 17th and 18th centuries, French Monarchs

decided that cooking was not just about feeding people; it was about prestige.

For generations, women ran the kitchens, even in aristocratic homes. But once royal courts turned food into a symbol of sophisticated art form and status, the tide began to shift. Guilds like *Les Maîtres Queux* barred women from entry, and just like that, the art of cooking moved from the home to the public stage, putting men in the limelight. What was once survival became ceremonial. And with it, the idea quietly took root: cooking for the family was duty, cooking for the world was glory.



The first *brigade de cuisine* by Auguste Escoffier in the 19th century was a military-style kitchen with a hierarchy that included commis, chef de partie, sous-chef, and other positions. The two branches of male and female cooks grew further apart as a result of industrialisation. Men went out to work in hotels and restaurants, while women's reign of cooking was limited to the borders of their kitchen. Then came television, fame, and Michelin stars, and the



narrative solidified: male chefs as visionaries, female cooks as caretakers. When this system spread beyond Europe, it carried the same hierarchy with it. What began as a matter of structure became culture.

Chef Louis Diat, the celebrated head of the Ritz-Carlton kitchens, once said, "You must cook from the heart." Cooking begins with instinct and emotion that transcends skill, titles, or hierarchy. The truth is, it's hardly fair to compare men and women in this field. When a man chooses to cook, he often does so out of passion. For most women, cooking has never been positioned as a choice. It has been an expectation, a domestic responsibility inherited through generations.

Yet, when a woman loves to cook, she perfects it in ways that rival any professional. She will improvise with what's available,

balance flavours by instinct, and master consistency. The difference is not in capability, it's in conditioning.

I, for one, grew up in a home where both my parents cooked. We never had any gender-specific household chores. My father is a master chef when it comes to khichuri, and my mother never treated the kitchen like a prison. With no playgrounds to escape to and limited screen time (yes, that worked then), I'd often sit near the stove, watching my mother work, experiment, and make me taste and understand how everything gets better if you put a little bit of care into your craft. She cooked because it was her responsibility, yes, but also because getting enamoured by her food would send us to cloud nine.

Over time, I realised she wasn't just feeding us, she was shaping how I understood care, structure, and pride in small things. I inherited those instincts, and now I, too, cook for the people I love and allegedly I am good at it. Maybe not with her finesse, but with the same intention.

So, are males inherently better cooks? Most likely not, and neither are women. The art solely depends and varies on the skill, passion, curiosity and how much the individual cares, regardless of gender. Because at the end of the day, food does not care who's behind the stove; it only remembers who respected it enough to make it matter.

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Photo: Collected

