

Evolution of Food Consumption Patterns in Upper Middle- **Class Dhaka and How It Shaped Individuals and Their** **Relations to Others**

A thesis submitted to the Department of Anthropology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree with honors of Bachelor of Arts in Social Science

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Declaration

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my own original work while completing a degree at BRAC University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I have acknowledged all main sources of help.

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Abstract

Food is an integral part of human life. What once was a mere form of sustenance, now embodies cultural values, markers of class and status, identity, and the imprint of change and development. As the economy of Bangladesh thrived and the nation became largely industrialized with factories and office buildings popping up like mushrooms wherever there was a space to spare; a loss of open recreational spaces took place alongside. Spaces that once used to be a park or a playground have now been replaced by coffee shops or five-star restaurants, making '*pet-puja*' a prime form of entertainment for the millennials and so forth. The phrase '*pet-puja*' roughly translates to worshipping the stomach. This phrase is a clear demonstration of our obsession with feasting as a nation. However, over generations our ideas surrounding food consumption have taken many different forms. This thesis will primarily look into what these different forms of food obsessions are and exhibit how they came to be. The purpose of this thesis is to explore how consumption practices shape our lives and our relations with others in terms of hierarchy of age, gender, social position and class. This thesis will be an ethnographic account of what shifts took place and how they led to the changes that have taken place over time. This research will be conducted through focused group discussions and key person interviews to get an image of the differences that exist, which shall be further analyzed to see how they came to be. By the end of this research, I hope to highlight how various forms of consumption came to be and how it shapes our lives as individuals and as members of a community in this thesis. It is important to study this topic to understand food beyond culture and tradition and look at how it contributes to social construction.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

For a nation whose identity is signified by food, it is only natural for most of its social structure to be constructed around patterns of food consumption. Bengalis are known for their undying love for fish, rice, and sweets. However, the phrase “*machhe bhaate Bangali*” (fish and rice makes a Bangali) demonstrates more than just that emotion. It represents the middle-class sentiment and affordability, essentially forming a large aspect of the class identity. The geographical setup of the land allowed this love for food to grow. An abundance of fertile land and river is what transformed into this love for fish and rice. Surplus production of fish and rice is what made these two items readily available and very affordable. People’s taste for food has developed in the context of its relative scarcity or surplus and has been affected by the efforts of the dominant in society to appropriate certain foods in order to distinguish themselves from the dominated (Schilling, 2003, 113). It was a necessity that became a habit that later transformed into love. However, over time this love began to transform too.

As the borders have been increasingly diluted and a global market began to encroach, leading to the expansion of multinational companies and the industrialization in Bangladesh, the people of Bangladesh too became financially more independent. Post-independence as the country set course on a journey of development, during the early 80s to 90s Bangladesh took a neo-liberal approach and opened up its market to the rest of the globe. This led to an inflow of money as a result of direct foreign investment. This meant the country's financial capacities increased leading to higher income resulting in surplus money that people were now able to spend on luxury. As the average upper middle-class Bangladeshi

transformed into a financially capable individual, food consumption became a luxury from a mere necessity to satiate hunger. The surplus income facilitated this transformation that led to the evolution of a particular class into the modern upper middle-class Bangladeshis as we know of today. The modern upper middle-class Bangladeshi is cosmopolitan in not just thoughts and ideologies but in terms of consumption as well, and one of the key identifiers of this class is their aspiration to become cosmopolitan consumers who wish to consume in a manner that demonstrates their awareness of their surroundings.

These cosmopolitan aspirations of the upper middle class are entwined with the nuclearization of the families. Monogamy and nuclearization made husband and wife and their children are the core of the family unit. As the joint families were fragmented into smaller units, the breadwinners of the family became financially more solvent as they had fewer mouths to feed. This not only meant that their ability to spend on food increased but also that now they could afford relatively more luxurious and expensive items and explore new avenues. This also meant homemakers did not have to abide by the typical meal plans in a joint family structure; rather became free to experiment with their cooking too. This is a demonstration of the individual's ascension on the social class ladder.

This transformation of the nature of food paved the path for a total social transformation. It gave rise to a food industry in a place where food was once known to be scarce and a distinctive feature of the place was poverty and hunger. Bangladesh is now a place that has long forgotten its days of scarcity and now discusses food in terms of being an art form and not something that is limited in supply and the population is desperate for. Bengali food has always been known for its complex yet delicate and subtle tastes. Tastes that require years of learning to master and skills that are passed down generations. This not only keeps the cuisine alive but also connects one generation to the next. Over generations palate changes and each generation moves further away from their predecessors in terms of food preference, however, at the end of the day, the love for the classics remains unchanged. Each generation has its unique way of

connecting with food. Starting from consumption to imagining and reimagining food, each generation is unique. Looking at the history of food not only tells us about its evolution but also gives a picture of nostalgic memories. Even though food plays such an important role in shaping class identities, highlighting generational differences, and to a certain extent affecting kinship ties, there is barely any research on food and its relation to people in the context of Bangladesh. The purpose of this thesis is to i) explore how food consumption has changed over time, ii) significance of particular types of consumption to different generation (mainly focused on three different generations), iii) how relationships (kinship, age, gender and class) evolved as patterns of consumption transformed, iv) what led to these transformations of consumption and lastly v) how it affects individuals as members of an aspiring class i.e., the modern upper middle class. This research intends to get people to think about how our ways of consumption affects us. Moreover, this research is significant to understand the importance of food beyond being the bearer of culture and tradition, to see how various forms of consumption creates relations and hierarchies, essentially constructing the society around us.

In a patriarchal society like that of Bangladesh, discussions around food often misses to give credit to those who work behind the scenes. By definition, credits are due to those who exchange labor for something in return. The women of Bangali society, however, are considered different as their efforts get invisibilized due to patriarchal allocation of labor. Cooking and feeding the family is considered to be a part of their nature, hence no credits are due there. Yet, the most interesting thing is that it is the women who play a very crucial role in keeping the cuisine and traditions around it alive. Cooking and feeding, being a women-centric job is the prime reason the society overlooks their efforts and only sees the presented dish. Moreover, society also feels entitled to compare, critique and judge women based on their ability and knowledge of cooking. This ability is even used as a parameter to measure the ‘ideal’ women for the marriage market.

The efforts behind traditional cuisines, the nostalgia behind them, and their significance in our lives are further pushed into the darkness with the emergence of restaurants. As more restaurants pop up, people are straying further away from the food cooked at home and from the home itself. As people expose themselves to newer cuisines, they develop a more global palate. A palate that not only broadens their knowledge spectrum but also pulls them up the social class ladder making them superior to others (with lesser knowledge) and makes their position in society more desirable. An individual well versed in international cuisine with the ability to afford such cuisines at any given time is one of the many aspirations of the modern upper middle-class Bangladeshi.

Chapter 2

Theoretical Framework

My research is mainly based on everyday observation of how people around me eat, what they eat and how that alters and reproduces relations among people. A lot of it is also based on the experiences of my informants, some of my own, and some from stories I had heard of my parents' and grandparents' childhood.

The general objective of this thesis is to identify the difference in consumption patterns across generations, how food affects relationships, describing modern day public consumption, and the effect of our consumption pattern on our bodies and relations.

This thesis intends to discuss the changes that have taken place in consumption patterns and how that has led to certain social transformations. As I elaborate on each of the above-mentioned points, I would like to explore how upper-middle-class public and private social life is shaped in Bangladesh using the lens of food consumption. This thesis will be divided into three major categories; 1. Consumption in the domestic domain, 2. Consumption in the public domain and 3. Personal Consumption.

The first category will discuss the significance of home-cooked food and how domestic consumption has evolved over generations and with changes in the economy. It will also include how cooking and feeding is a very women-centric job and the labor behind it that gets invisibilized in the name of love. This category will further delve into the inner workings of the kitchen and the value it holds in a family. Lastly, it will discuss menu politics, elaborating on how menus are decided in a household and who gets precedence in terms of food preference. The second category will discuss the brief history of the

nuclearization of families that led to a shift in domestic ideologies. It will further discuss the cosmopolitan palate developed by people and the neo liberal trend they follow in terms of consumption. These issues will mainly be discussed in light of effects of the rise of restaurants on public and domestic consumption, food trends and the influence of social media on consumption. In the end, the third category will discuss the physical upper middle-class body, how it is presented and maintained, and the ideal body image. These will be discussed in terms of diet and nutrition, appropriation of taste, and presentation of the body. To conclude, this category will talk about the individual's participation in the cultural realm as an aware individual and an actor of the cultural awareness that one embodies through the process of learning about various cuisines.

Even though food is such an integral part of our culture, there is very little research done on it, especially in the context of Bangladesh. There wasn't much theoretical work available regarding how factors like the economy, urbanization, introduction of restaurants, social media, changes in family structure, and changes in interactions influenced patterns of consumption and vice versa in Bangladesh that I could base my work on. Most of the available work is based on revolutionized farming, food and nutrition, poverty and food scarcity. This made my work slightly difficult as I had very little resources set in Bangladesh to back my claims and arguments. Most of the work that I came across were set in the west and were based around western patterns of consumption which greatly differs from that of Bangladesh. Yet, I was able to employ some western concepts that I felt could be used to rationalize certain aspects of consumption patterns that seemed to align with those experienced in Bangladesh.

Food is understood as social and cultural. It binds people together and transcends personal desire or profit. Sharing food and table-commensality is an act and an occasion in which social and cultural values are lived and reproduced (Luetchford, 2013, 49). This is very evidently visible in Bangladeshi dining practices as the complexity of the act goes beyond just eating. Relationships to some extents are

shaped by the consumption practices within a household and by the differences in practices between households. In the Bangladeshi society, family is given great value and often holds a high position in people's list of priorities. One of the major factors that fuels this bonding is the act of eating together. Eating together holds great importance as it produces, reproduces and inculcates tradition among those sitting together. Peter Luetchford in his article 'Food and Consumption' mainly discusses how different types of economy (open and closed) affect consumption patterns. However, before he delves into that, he begins by discussing the importance of food in the lives of people as individuals and members of different socio-cultural groups, leading to how and why people's consumption choices are so intimately affected by what they are exposed to and the changes that occur around them. Even though his article is majorly set in the west, he provides a somewhat universal framework to understand how changes and exposure affect consumption patterns. I was able to employ this framework of his in the context of Bangladesh to analyze how consumption patterns evolved over time.

As mentioned earlier, in a family-oriented society like that of Bangladesh, the act of consumption plays a major role in determining relations between people and even gender roles. Cooking and feeding are largely considered a feminine job. The closest explanation to why gender roles are as such comes from Mrinalini Sinha's 'Gender and Nation'. Her article mainly discusses how nations shape gender and vice versa. Her key argument is that the nation is constituted in gender differences in the image of a heterosexual nuclear family, where men are the protectors while women are the producers and reproducers of culture and tradition. Since culture and tradition is largely understood through food, using Sinha's understanding of the constituted gender difference we can begin to comprehend the centrality of women when it comes to discussions of food and consumption. While there is little understanding of how it came to be this way, Tracey Deutsch's article 'Home, Cooking: Why Gender Matters to Food Politics' tries to provide an insight into how changing food systems impact gender relations and to some extent shape gender roles. Her article tries to explore the connection between how changing food systems affect the

lives of women and the vice versa. Since the idea of women being nurturers (feeders) is a universal and almost a timeless phenomenon, Deutsch's framework can be used to understand how Bangladeshi upper-middle class women relate to cooking and how that influences their position in their family. In the previous sentence, I used the word 'almost' because times are changing as the women of contemporary generations are prioritizing other/more things over/alongside family and we are yet to find how women's relation to their role of feeding will evolve, and timeless because yet many cultures, religions and tradition dictate/expect that at the end of the day nurturing is still a women's duty. Moreover, in order to understand how women navigate their everyday lives (as a social/working being not limited to their role as wives and mothers) around their role as a feeder, I employed Deniz Kandiyoti's concept of 'Bargaining with Patriarchy'. Her concept helps to better interpret and explain the strategies women employ to be able to both manage the kitchen and life outside of it.

Himani Bannerji's article 'Fashioning a Self' and Sonia Nishat Amin's 'The World of Muslim Women in Colonial Bengal' shed light on the lives of the women of past generations, especially those belonging to the early 1990s. Their articles provided imageries of the lives of women from the colonial period, and domestic gender roles and expectations of a feudal society that I used to understand the contrasting lives of the modern upper middle-class Bangladeshi women and how it came to be, highlighting what changes have taken place. To further understand the evolution of women's domestic role, Seuty Sabur's 'Marital Mobility in the Bangladeshi Middle Class' provides insight on how the transformation of family systems from joint to nuclear influenced the shift in women's roles as nurturers.

Lastly, I used Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of social, cultural and physical capital and Erving Goffman's concept of the 'performed self' to demonstrate how changing consumption patterns influence an individual's participation in social consumption both in public and private. Social capital is the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable

network. While there are many ways of forming and maintaining such networks, a major form of maintenance occurs over the act of consumption. Be it socializing over group dinner or hosting meetings at coffee shops, food plays an important role in forming and maintaining networks. Cultural capital refers to the social assets of a person (education, knowledge/intellect, style of speech, style of dress, etc.) that promote social mobility in a stratified society. In the context of this thesis, knowledge in terms of various cuisines and their corresponding cultures allows for upwards mobility in terms of social standing. Those with higher knowledge are considered superior to those with lesser knowledge. Lastly, physical capital refers to the social formation of bodies by individuals in ways which express a class location. Since this concept of Bourdieu locates an individual's class position by their body structure, he associates slim, lean and fit bodies with the upper middle class. The prime factor that influences the outcome of a body structure is eating habits. The upper middle-class also known as the aspiring class are known as such due to their constant aspiration of wanting to become better versions of themselves in terms of knowledge, awareness and self-presentation. Among the modern upper middle-class Bangladeshi, the most evident form of showcasing such knowledge and awareness is by engaging in acts or discussions revolving around food and consumption.

Chapter 3

Methodology

For this research, I gathered my information from three different groups of people belonging to the upper middle class residing in Dhaka. The first being five couples within the age group 50 to 60, from military background. Their current combined (from jobs and rent from inherited properties of both the spouses) income ranges between 10 to 15 lacs a year. Since I too grew up in the military, I have had the chance to see their lives since childhood, allowing me to see their daily practices intimately and how they evolved over time. This helped me to get a better picture of how their patterns of consumption transformed over time as I was able to compare a certain portion of their past with their present. Another reason for choosing them was that the husbands from these five couples belonged to the same military academic batch and became commissioned officers at the same time, meaning they all had a level start when they became earning adults and got married. Regardless of their ancestral wealth, being in the military required them to live a particular lifestyle which was the same for everyone, making it easier for me to compare the stages of their family evolution since my unit of comparison is majorly time and self-presentation not entirely wealth. This is the group I refer to as generation one as they lived through their young adulthood between 1980 and 1990s, and some of them have even become grandparents recently. These five couples are:

- **Mr. and Mrs. Hossain:**

Mr. Hossain is a retired army officer and his wife is a retired school teacher and currently a full-time homemaker. Their current source of income are rents from their various properties. They are parents to two children, both in their twenties and yet unmarried and unemployed. Due to both of their occupations this family has always lived as a nuclear

family till date. Even before marriage, both Mr. and Mrs. Hossain came from nuclear but large families.

- **Mr. and Mrs. Shafat:**

Mr. Shafat is a retired army officer and his wife is a currently school teacher. Their main source of income is Mrs. Shafat's earnings and rent from owned properties. They are parents to a single child who is married and has a child. Mr. Shafat too grew up in a large but nuclear family but his wife comes from a joint family. Their family was nuclear until the marriage of his child who decided to live with his parents along with his wife and kid post marriage.

- **Mr. and Mrs. Mujahid:**

Mr. Mujahid is a retired army officer who currently runs a company of his own while his wife has doesn't have any history of working outside the home and is a full-time homemaker. Their main source of income is Mr. Mujahid's earnings. Both of them grew up in joint families and are still living in a joint family. While Mr. Mujahid served in the army, they had a nuclear family due to certain occupational requirements, however post retirement they began living in a joint family again. They have two daughters who are both married and settled abroad with their husbands.

- **Mr. and Mrs. Mahbub:**

Mr. Mahbub is a retired army officer and his wife is a retired air hostess and currently a full-time homemaker. They have a married son who lives with them and their source of income are the earnings of their son and daughter in law. They both come from joint families and still living as a joint family.

- **Mr. and Mrs. Sadek:**

Mr. Sadek is a retired army officer currently employed at a security firm and his wife too has no history of working outside the home and is a full-time homemaker. They have two children, both aged in their 20s and neither of them are married or employed. Both Mr. and Mrs. Sadek come from joint families but are currently living as a nuclear family. Their source of income is Mr. Sadek's earnings and rent from owned properties.

The second group consisted of two married women, two of my aunts aged between mid-30s to mid-40s. Unfortunately, I was not able to interview their husbands due to their busy schedules. The reason behind interviewing them was to get a non-military perspective of the evolution of consumption within a

family, and if and how it was different without the perks that come with a military life. These women represent the second generation as they lived their early adulthood during the early 2000s. They are:

- **Mrs. Mahmood**, is in her late 30s and works at a bank. Their household runs on the income of both the husband and wife. They have toddler who recently entered school. They live in a semi joint family where the families of her husband's siblings all live in the same building but different floors. Both she and her husband come from large nuclear families.
- **Mrs. Tahmina** is in her mid-40s and is a retired school teacher, currently a full-time homemaker. She is a mother of three who are in their late teens to early 20s. Her husband comes full-time a large nuclear family while she is from a joint family, but their current family structure is nuclear. Their source of income is rents from owned properties.

Most of these seven women held jobs at some point in their lives, however most of them are currently either retired or on a break to take care of either their own children or their grandchildren. I chose such women to be able to highlight the contrast between their lives as working and non-working women, since their employment status greatly affects their role at home as the managers of consumption. Another aspect of choosing these informants was the fact that majority of them lived in joint families as children, while the others grew up in a communal setting. They are the transition generations that experienced the shift to nuclearization to a great extent, making them the ideal storytellers of the evolution. Lastly, I interviewed one male and two females aged between 18-25.

- **Ms. Zerine** is in her mid-20s, currently living with her parents in a nuclear family. She recently completed her undergrad studies and is currently employed and financially independent.

- **Ms. Choudhury** too is in her mid-20s and living with her parents in a nuclear family. She too recently finished her undergrad studies but is currently unemployed and financially dependent on her parents.
- **Mr. Islam** is in his late teens and hasn't graduated from school yet. He too lives with his parents in a nuclear family and is financially dependent on his parents.

I refer to this group as the third generation since they are currently living through the young adult phase of their lives in the 2020s. The purpose of interviewing this group was to get an idea of contemporary patterns of consumption, their views regarding it, and how it is different from the first and second generation. I chose such age ranges in order to get a clear picture of generational differences and how certain things have changed over time. All my informants come from well-educated upper middle-class families. I conducted focused group discussions as it allowed me to extract the most information out of my interviewees. As they discussed the answers of each of my questions while reminiscing memories of the past, I was able to extract maximum amount of information. Initially I had opted for key person interviews, however I was not able to draw out much information since the older generation (mostly the first generation) interviewees tended to answer each of my questions very briefly. This was either due to their lack of understanding the questions (they would skip over answering questions they did not understand) or their hesitance to share certain personal details of their lives with someone they considered too young to know such things. One major setback I faced was a negative attitude from the first-generation male interviewees, that I myself being a 'modern day kid' would not understand the significance of certain traditional practices surrounding consumption and hence they would dismiss some of my questions and end up vaguely answering my questions in a passive tone, while they spent majority of the time criticizing the questions themselves. An experience similar to that of Kirin Narayan's interaction with Swamiji who critiqued her process of questioning everything as mentioned in her article 'How Native is a "Native" Anthropologist?' (1993). As a last resort, I chose to create the environment of a gathering where from my

experience, people are more comfortable discussing personal aspects of their lives in greater detail with other people of their own age. Hence, I opted for focused group discussions, where I asked people to come over for a chat over some tea and snacks. Males and females were separated, especially for the first generation in order to ensure each group were able to freely express their views and stories without feeling awkward in the presence of their partners for sharing personal intimate emotions. They were made aware that this would be an interview for my academic purpose, yet it was conducted rather informally to reduce the level of awkwardness they felt discussing their internal family matters. Moreover, age was a factor that greatly affected their memories and some of the first- and second-generation interviewees had slight difficulty remembering certain things, however when they exchanged anecdotes of shared memories, they seemed to remember more things.

In this research my main unit of analysis was the home/family and individuals and their various forms of interaction with each other over and with food. This is an auto-ethnography since my data came largely from information and people I already knew in some way or the other. By definition, auto-ethnography is a research method and methodology which uses the researcher's personal experience as data to describe, analyze and understand cultural experience. The criteria for auto-ethnography must include some prior knowledge of the people, their culture, and language as well as the ability to be accepted to some degree or to “pass” as a native member (Lughod, 2000). Since I knew all these three groups very intimately, auto-ethnography seemed like the appropriate approach to understanding the significance of food beyond culture and tradition in society. My position as a native not only of the culture but of the class position as well made it easier to extract information and made their experiences more relatable. The study of one's own society involves an inverse process from the study of an alien one. Instead of learning conceptual categories and through fieldwork, finding contexts in which to apply them, those of us who study societies in which we have preexisting experience, absorb analytic categories that rename and reframe what is already known (Narayan, 1993).

Chapter 4

Consumption in the domestic domain

Any discussion revolving around food and transformation must begin at the smallest unit of change, the home. This is where the transformation begins as it shapes the palates of individuals and it is also where the transformation ends as we see the relations among the members evolve with the changing patterns of consumption. This chapter begins by looking at the most rudimentary form of consumption, the domestic consumption of home cooked food. Since the unit of change is the home, it is important to look at how consumption occurs inside the home, how it has evolved and the significance attributed to it to understand how the home plays the role of both the origin and the result of shifting consumption patterns. As I discuss domestic consumption it is also important to discuss women's role in keeping the wheels of domestic consumption turning. They are the patrons of domestic consumption; however, their efforts are often overlooked and are even used as criteria to judge their worthiness as mothers and wives. Lastly this section will discuss how shifting consumption patterns affect kinship relations within the family, and the whole family's relation with the women that have been made responsible for feeding the family and vice versa.

4.1: Significance of home-cooked food:

As infants as we taste our first “*phishphash*” (baby food) we begin to understand the tastes and palates of our households, which then goes on to shape our preferences of food. Each household has its unique palate that sets it apart from others. Even though the dishes cooked may be similar, it is the slightest

changes in spice amounts or cooking times that make the taste vary greatly. Analyzing these tiny details and slight variations reveal a great deal about each household. What remains constant however is the importance attributed to home-cooked food.

The first generation paid great attention to home-cooked food. Not only was the freshness of the food important, but so was the practice of the whole family sitting together and consuming a common meal. It was over this common meal that families strengthened their bond. All my interviewees reminisced how the dining table once held great value as a place of sharing. A place where they learned moral values, manners, family ideologies, and other such things. As everyone shared the same food, they learned who preferred what kind of food. The displayed meal which tried to include everyone's preferences was a display of affection of the preparer, the wives/mothers. They are directly involved in the preparation of everyday meals and this is something that remains unchanged through time regardless of what is being prepared. All my informants who are mothers aged between 35 to 60 unanimously agreed that it is a part of a woman's innate nature to care for her family, that is what makes them happy. The most visible way to display that care according to them is by cooking for the family. While the task of feeding the family has always been presented as a women's duty towards her family, women of the past generations have owned it as a way of displaying their attachment and commitment to the family. However, the sentiment behind this display is rather complex. Mrs. Hossain said,

"home-cooked meals visibilizes us within a family. You can easily recognize the men in the family as they go out to work, earn money, and are often the ones to handle where and how the money is spent. They are always in front of you, visible at all times but we are always hidden in the kitchen, out of sight. In a place like this, the only time you kids look at us mothers is when we present food on the table. Children mostly come to us when they are hungry".

This sentiment is complex in the sense that, even though they claim to get joy and happiness from feeding their family, it is also their strategy to mark their presence within a family. This somewhat explains why for the past several generations, women invested so much time in the kitchen cooking for their

families, presenting elaborate dishes and why this is a task they are very much possessive about (this particular portion will be further elaborated in Ch. 4.3). This was their way of being seen and heard in a family.

According to Mr. Mujahid, “home-cooked meals act as the glue that holds the family together. Up until the early 90s, it was mandatory, much like an unspoken rule, that every member of the family must be present during meal times. The only ones excused were those who were unavailable due to their jobs, but even they had to be present for at least one meal of the day with the family.” Sharing a common meal allowed the members of the families to get to know each other well. It also decreased the differences among members as different food was not served to different people. While eating or not eating was an individual’s choice, the menu was the same for everyone. Both my first- and second-generation informants reminisced how they lived in large families and often fought over food and this is what brought them closer. It was the act of sharing or bonding over food that was more important than the food itself.

The act of sharing food invokes a great extent of joy. Other than sharing food in terms of consumption, sharing also took place in terms of preparation of food. Children (especially girls) and women would often gather together and prepare evening snacks (this was more common till the mid-90s compared to now). Four of the first-generation women recalled community cooking being a very common activity up until the 90s among their neighbors and kin. This sharing happened in two forms, either women and children of their neighborhood would gather to make *pithas* (sweet or savory pastries) and snacks, or on certain occasions, if any household cooked anything special, it would be prepared in large quantities to be shared with friends, neighbors, and family. Sharing food with neighbors used to be a pretty common practice and it is still practiced by some families today. As some of my first-generation informants took a trip down memory lane, they each reminisced about how they learned to make new things from each other, shared recipes, and how they helped each other when there were any food-related crises.

Such activities of sharing food also allowed children to learn better communication and work in groups and also made them social as they familiarized themselves with their surroundings. These practices of preparing and consuming common meals also taught discipline in the family. As everyone had to be present at the table at specific times of the day, regardless of what they were doing, it made everyone very punctual, especially the children who learned by watching others and practicing themselves. Over this common meal, members of the family also learned manners and etiquettes, as starting from grandparents to children everyone sat together, and a certain level of respect was maintained. The shared food and a common dining space were also a place of gaining knowledge. From personal experience, I remember learning something new almost every day during meal times. It was a common practice in my family for my grandfathers to discuss history, current affairs, language skills, and formal and informal behaviors. Through these interactions, my sibling and I learned about the world that existed beyond academics, all this over a hearty home-cooked meal.

Lastly, home-cooked meals are held as the standard of healthy food. Home-cooked meals are always considered nutritious. They are said to be simple, fresh, and healthy as they are often made with natural, unadulterated ingredients and all aspects of it are balanced. Such is the view of the first-generation female informants. As mothers and culinarians responsible for feeding a family, they stated that no one has ever fallen sick from a home-cooked meal as they believe they buy fresh organic raw ingredients whose additives and preservatives can be washed off. They believe factory-processed and mass-produced food to be the root of many health-related issues. Moreover, the home-cooked meals are prepared by keeping everyone's illnesses and dietary restrictions in mind, which makes it easy and safe to consume for everyone, unlike restaurant food which is not quite as customizable. All my informants (especially the first and second generation) believe cooking meals at home also saves a lot of money. According to them, everything that can be found at restaurants can easily be recreated at home at a much cheaper price. These aspects made home-cooked meals much more desirable.

4.2: The shift in domestic consumption:

Up until the mid-90s to early 2000s (when fast food and pre-processed food were still relatively new to Bangladesh), eating home-cooked food at home was a very significant part of a Bangladeshi's daily life. One of my interviewees, Mrs. Mahbub remembered, "Almost two-thirds of our household income would be spent on food alone. In those days, when we were children, income in a middle-class family was relatively low and due to this reason, people were not very interested in materials such as cars, clothes, home appliances, and other such things." Post-independence, during the 70s and 80s, families used to be big in number including the various domestic help that worked in a single household. Hence, making sure so many mouths were properly fed was of greater importance, than other materialistic luxuries. People from the first generation and the generations before them, paid great attention to what they consumed. As mentioned earlier, the freshness of the food was of utmost importance. Fresh groceries would be bought every day and cooked the very same day and different food would be cooked for different meals of the day. Refrigerating/freezing food was not a common practice as refrigerators were not very common in middle-class houses until very recently. Owning a refrigerator was somewhat of a status symbol as it was mostly found in richer households and was considered a luxury item.

Moreover, it was a common practice among my grandfathers' generation to go on early morning walks and stop by the '*bazaar*' (market) on their way back to buy the fresh produce of the day for their wives to prepare the meals of the day. This made the first and second generation and their predecessors habituated to freshly cooked food. The men from the first generation of informants strongly believed that women staying at home and preparing fresh food for every meal is what kept the family bonded. Mr. Sadek said, "We as kids were very curious kids, we would go to the kitchen to see what our mother was cooking. As we tried to learn how to make that food, we would also spend time with our mothers. Kids nowadays barely enter the kitchen let alone spend time with their mothers in the kitchen. They are more

interested in the celebrity chef and the food on TV. They have little to no interest in the food their mother is cooking in the kitchen.” To this Mr. Shafat added, “when we were kids, our mother would present piping hot food, fresh out of the kitchen in front of us. Throughout the day she would be busy taking care of her family, cooking fresh food for every meal. Women back then used to work really hard but nowadays women seek an easy life. They no longer want to cook (or do other household chores), which has encouraged the rise of the fast-food industry. There used to be a time when we used to give time to our family, but nowadays they (modern adults, especially women) don't give time to their families, they spend that time online. I tell you, the more the fast-food industry expands, the more families will become detached”. This not only highlights a deeply internalized patriarchal notion of a woman's role in a family (more on this will be discussed in chapter 4.3) but also how cooking at home is declining, according to the first-generation informants. To elaborate on the matter, Mr. Mujahid emphasized, “we look for a homely taste in food, which we don't find in restaurant food. We prefer a personal touch in our food, such as mother’s cooking or wife’s cooking or a sister’s cooking. Even if they don’t taste good, there is a feeling of care and love in those foods”. For such reasons these men who are currently in their 50s and 60s have a great distaste towards any kind of food made outside the home.

However, if we shift our focus to the women of that very same generation, who used to make evening snacks from scratch during their teenage years, they are the same women who are now largely dependent on processed food. Even though they despise the idea of feeding their children food they have very little knowledge about, where, how, and with what it was made they still became dependent on it due to convenience. This shift not only illustrates a shift in the consumer culture, but if we look closely enough it also demonstrates a shift in family relations. Up until the 90s, women having formal jobs was not very common, hence they were able to stay home and cook for their families. However, as the country industrialized, the private sector expanded and urban life became expensive, more and more women

entered the formal job sector. This meant they were able to spend less time in the kitchen. To make life easy, they became dependent on processed food as they are quicker and easier to prepare.

This is true for the third generation and the following generations as well. Cooking is now either considered a time-consuming hassle or a hobby, but not a daily necessary activity as was considered by their predecessors. People nowadays would much rather spend their time working on improving themselves, gaining new skills or building their careers. What makes home cooking even more difficult is the lack of helping hands. Preparing a full meal from scratch, even for one person, all alone without any support can be very time-consuming. Hence, nowadays each person being responsible for their own food is a relatively common practice among the upper middle-class families of Dhaka. This has also led to the decline of the practice of the whole family dining together. All my first- and second-generation informants, both men and women, claimed that it is now near impossible for the whole family to be present during meal times. To some extent even though they do understand that this is due to the excessively busy lives people now live, however, they also blame the lack of discipline among the people of the younger generations. They believe that children nowadays have time for everything else except their families. The third generation of informants, in their defense, explained how a third of their day is spent in places of education (schools, universities, or coaching centers) or work, almost another third on the roads of Dhaka, and the remaining hours of the day where they do find themselves at home, they are busy completing homework or assignments. With so many hours of the day taken up by the above-mentioned factors, they eat whenever they feel they have some time to spare, however, this timing doesn't always match with the rest of the family. This has also contributed to the increased practice of most young adults and adults eating outside as they often reach home after evening. Ms. Zerin expressed, “As much as I’d like to eat at home, I can’t. For the past four years I have only had dinner at home. During the day I am at university. For me, due to either class timings or the short duration of breaks, it was pointless to go home for lunch as it would waste my time. So, I would just eat from the university canteen or nearby restaurants.” During

their busy day they are unable to go home for meals (as was somewhat possible back in the 70s and 80s) so it is just easier to eat outside.

The only thing that remains common throughout generations is the practice of having an elaborate meal with the family on the weekend. It is a common tradition for members of a family to be at home during the weekend and for everyone to have lunch together. It is a day that is looked forward to every week as all the family members know that there will be good food on the table and everyone will be present for that meal. Even though the practice remains the same to this day for many families if not all, slight changes have taken place in what is eaten on this day. The weekend lunch often includes *pulao*, *khichuri* or *biryani*, (rice dishes often eaten during celebrations) or other such dishes as opposed to plain white rice which is consumed on a more regular basis. The change that has taken place is that the first and second generations, during their childhood, would get the chance to have meat mostly on the weekend as it was more expensive compared to fish and vegetables during the 70s to 90s. Meat was not a part of their everyday meal and in order to make up for that, it would be eaten on weekends. Now meat is a common part of everyday meals, especially chicken. Beef or mutton is usually consumed on weekends

Along with the way domestic consumption has changed, what is commonly eaten at home has also changed. When the first and second generations were in their younger years breakfast consisted of ‘*atta rooti*’ or ‘*porota*’ (flat breads made of wheat) with vegetables or eggs. ‘*Pithas*’ (sweet or savory pastries), other fried foods such as ‘*pakor*as’ (fritters, mainly made of vegetables), ‘*muri*’ (puffed rice) or toast biscuits were regularly consumed during the evening tea time. Lunch and dinner consisted of fresh river fish and vegetables alongside rice and lentils. Most families even had vegetable gardens in their homes where they would grow their own vegetables (a practice that was fading but revived as people are once again interested in living healthy sustainable lives). Meat being on the slightly expensive side of the spectrum was eaten mostly on special occasions. Some families that could afford meat on a regular basis

would have it for dinner. They believed in the concept of eating light during the day and heavy at night, especially because that was the last meal of the day and the time when all the members of the family were able to eat together. The older generations exclaimed that their children refused to eat if meat was not served on the table. Mr. Hossain said, “Kids these days only want meat. They barely eat vegetables and if they see fish on the dinner table, they won’t even come to eat. They’ll order their fried chicken from outside, take it to their room, lock the door, and eat it by themselves.” They believe that their children are straying further away from the tradition of consuming fresh river fish day by day as they are becoming more exposed to international cuisines leading to them becoming very meat dependent.

This shift isn’t as simple as a whole generation simply refusing to eat fish. One of the causes of this shift can be attributed to the excessive consumption of fresh river fish at a point in time that has led to scarcity. Since it used to be widely available, it was cheaper to consume. However, over time as demand increased, supply couldn’t keep up and hence the price of fresh river fish increased as availability decreased. This led to meat (especially chicken) becoming relatively cheaper compared to fresh river fish. Farmed fishes are still cheaper compared to meat, but most people have a negative attitude towards them as they do not consider them fresh or natural. Mrs. Hossain said, “In our family we do not consume ‘*chaash-er machh*’ (farmed fish). They tend to smell odd and the texture of their flesh is also somewhat off putting.” Mrs. Mujahid added, “My husband will come back empty handed from the market but he will not buy farmed fish. It used to be common in my father’s house during my childhood but I stopped eating it after I got married. I can no longer eat farmed fish as I have become accustomed to fresh river fish.” Majority of the first- and second-generation informants complained that they didn’t like the smell of farmed fish and that they tend to have a muddy aftertaste. These aspects have led to the wider consumption of meat until it eventually became a norm in household consumption.

Moreover, (as I have repeatedly mentioned in this article) in the age of working women and lack of domestic help, cleaning, gutting, and preparing fish is considered a time-consuming hassle as they are not often sold pre-processed and pre-cleaned, unlike meat. This is because most people from the first and second generation consider pre-processed fish to be old, frozen, and not fresh and hence have an adverse attitude towards them. They prefer to buy live fish or fish that have been killed in front of them as that is the freshest fish. Fish being such a significant part of their childhood and Bangladeshi culture is what makes the older generations so particular about it. The third and the younger generations in their defense claimed that they are more inclined towards meat as it is regularly available and that it is consistent in taste compared to fish which comes in a wide variety, each differing in taste and texture. Since not everyone likes all kinds of fish, meat is the safer option to consume. Ms. Choudhury explained, “I only like to eat a select few fishes, mainly sea fishes. In general, I find fishes to be slimy and disgusting. I can only eat fish cooked by my mother.”

In the lives of the third generation, domestic consumption isn't as significant as it was in the lives of their parents and grandparents. Food to them is a form of entertainment and a means of sustenance. While they do respect the idea of food being a significant part of tradition, they don't attribute sentiments related to identity to food. According to them, what they consume does not affect their identity. They are not what they eat. This is an ideology that is not very well received by their parents, the first generation. Their parents believe consuming rice and fresh river fish is crucial to their Bangali identity and that the younger generations are deviating from tradition. Such contrasting opinions put the generations in conflicting positions. This conflict is the foundation of this thesis and is what highlights all the changes that have taken place over time.

Home is where our palate for consumption takes shape. Change within the home determines an individual's consumption behavior and vice versa. This has led to a shift of how domestic consumption is

viewed by the three generations. Moreover, the significance attributed to domestic consumption has transformed too over generations and aspects like urbanization, nuclearization of families, competitive lives play a major role in fueling these transformations.

Chapter 5

Love, Labor, Lost

Ideas surrounding food, feeding, cooking and related topic are often associated with women. Food being the bearer of culture and tradition and women being the upholders of culture and tradition, this relationship seems nothing but natural. However, reality suggests otherwise. Women's relationship with their role as feeders, nurturers and culinarians is rather complicated. These complications are the basis of this chapter as I discuss how cooking is constructed to be feminine in nature, gender relations and hierarchy in terms of cooking and location of cooking, the "naturalness" of women's participation in cooking and how that leads to overlooked efforts and lastly cooking and feeding as criteria to judge women in various aspects of their lives.

5.1: Women-centric job:

Since the beginning of human history, the responsibility of rearing and nurturing a family has mostly been on women, and since the discovery of cooking, that too has become a part of women's responsibilities in a family. There is barely any study on why this is a course history took since it is taken for granted that cooking has always been a woman's job. The only explanation we've been taught since childhood is that a man's physical structure gives him the necessary abilities required for hunting, gathering, and farming, while a woman's physical structure gives her the necessary abilities required to look after a family. This reasoning was followed by a comparison of men and women's physical strength, that men were 'stronger' hence 'physically labor-intensive' work was for them and that women were 'weaker' and more 'fragile' due to having comparatively lesser and weaker muscles compared to men hence they were responsible for less 'physically intensive' work. Such reasonings and explanations allowed men to be free from the grips of the home, making household work a choice for them. Since men

chose against household work, it inevitably fell on women to take on these works. At this point, it was no longer a choice, rather something they had to do in order to keep the system running. If men don't cook, women must (Deutsch, 2019, 213). For the longest time, cooking at home has been the job of women in Bangladesh, regardless of their class background. The cause of this phenomenon may range from the lack of allowance to participate in the workforce to the fear of having her womanhood questioned for not wanting to carry out what is conventionally considered her duty in society. All these fears and restraints have not only made cooking a woman's job but also a feminine job. It has been this way for so long that men couldn't take up this responsibility even if they wanted to, without being ridiculed for it. Men sharing household responsibilities with their wives was a practice that was looked down upon. One of my interviewees, Mrs. Mahbub shared,

"I remember once both my mother and mother-in-law got very upset and scolded me and my husband because my mother-in-law saw him working in the kitchen. What happened was, I had just become a mother then, my child was 2 or 3 months old. It was my husband's day off so he offered to make me the morning tea and take care of breakfast since I was tired from being up all night. Because of this I had to hear from my mother-in-law how I could let my husband work on his day off, and my husband had to hear how shameful it was for the family to have a husband work while the wife rests. Later that day I also had to hear from my mother that my mother-in-law complained to her that I did not learn how to manage a household. My mother too scolded me for making her dear son-in-law work and for tarnishing the reputation of my family."

Women from the first generation and especially their mother's generation very strongly believed that men belonged in the world outside the home, while for women, her world was her home. This is very aptly visible even in the language used to describe family and home. In the Bangla language, the word '*shonghsar*' is used to describe both these words. '*Shongshar*' is a Sanskrit word whose literal translation is 'the world' or 'the universe'. The use of this word is very contextual and appears mostly when talking in reference to women. While couples do start and build their '*shongshar*' together, the responsibility of maintaining and caring for that '*shongshar*' is on the women. An 'ideal' Bangladeshi woman, wife, or

mother must prioritize her '*shongshar*' over everything else. One of the major criteria to judge how well a woman looks after her '*shongshar*' is by looking at how well they feed their families. Another first-generation informant, Mrs. Mujahid expressed, "this was the only lifestyle choice ever presented to us. It is a woman's duty to cook for her family. This was the only way we knew to be worthy wives." In the context of Bangladesh, anything a woman does outside her 'real' role as wife and mother is considered supplementary (Sabur, 2014). For women, their contribution towards their family mostly counts if it is in the form of nurture. As mentioned earlier, the ideal wife or mother is judged by how well her family is fed. If they 'fail' to feed their family, they are subjected to mean comments such as "did your parents not teach you anything?", "if you don't know how to do household work then all your life's education is useless", "what do you do all day if you don't cook." These comments also appear in passive forms through their children. A very common critique of mothers in Bangladesh is that if a child is skinny his/her mother is ignorant and must not be feeding her children well. Regardless of how a woman supports her family, including nurturing and other forms of support such as financial, educational and so on, her worth seems to always be determined by her ability to feed her family and cooking is expected to be central to her entire existence.

However, on the contrary, my first- and second-generation female informants claimed that they were never quite explicitly taught how to cook for a family or look after one. Mrs. Mujahid further shared,

"When my husband was a serving army officer back in the late 80s, due to his profession he was posted outside Dhaka a week after we got married. I had to go along with him. This was the beginning of my own '*shongshar*' as now I had to be in charge of the household, except I didn't realize this until a few days later. I remember how for the first few days there would not be any breakfast served on the table after my husband and I woke up. Before marriage, in my father's house, finding breakfast already served on the table after waking up was something that was rather common. On the third day of not finding breakfast on the table, I confronted our domestic help. He told me that he didn't prepare any breakfast because I didn't instruct him to. That's when I realized that the reason there was no breakfast was that I did not plan the following day's menu and did not instruct the house help accordingly. Up until that moment I was completely unaware of how my mother managed our

household. I further realized that I have little to no idea regarding how to run a household. My mother did not teach me, but I have taught my daughters since their mid-teenage years to know how things work around a house so that they don't have to learn it the hard way by themselves like I had to."

To this Mrs. Sadek added, "it is a common belief in our society that it is part of a woman's nature to just know how to cook and look after a family, that women either have this knowledge inherently or they internalize this knowledge by watching their mothers. On the other hand, it is taken for granted that men have little to no knowledge of how households work and are not meant to do it at all." When women were stay-at-home wives (when they weren't exactly allowed to or didn't work outside) they were told by their mothers, grandmothers, and aunts that they must prepare meals for their husbands who came home tired from working all day. This system continued even after women began doing jobs because by then this had become an established system. Since it was a system that favored men, according to my married female informants, the majority of men took full advantage of the system and simply ignored household work. Taking advantage was not limited to just ignoring household work, but included demanding it be done, judging how well it was done, and even throwing tantrums if they deemed it was not done 'properly' or 'well enough'. What made these judgments even more 'normal' is the fact that they were passed by other women too such as mothers, mothers-in-law, aunts, sisters-in-law, and such. Since men had such choices in their hands, a common lesson taught by grandmothers or aunts was that men had the freedom to behave however they wished and it was the women's responsibility to ensure peace and avoid chaos in the family. Hence, they succumbed to doing household work, especially feeding their family as that is what seemed to keep them calm and satisfied. They must use every symbolic means at their disposal to signify that they continue to be worthy of protection (Kandiyoti, 1988).

However, according to the first-generation informants, they were taught by their mothers and grandmothers that it was completely normal for men to behave aggressively to a certain extent since working all day in an office can be tiring and frustrating and because men earned the money that put food

on the table. The first-generation female informants were made to believe by their grandmothers, mothers and aunts that women played little to no role in putting food on the table except preparing it. The effort that goes into cooking is considered negligible since without their husbands they would have nothing to cook and put on the table. However, the majority of them refused to believe and internalize this idea.

Moreover, cooking is considered second nature to women and three out of seven of my female interviewees even expressed how they like feeding their family and how it makes them happy. They believe it is an innate nature of women to think about others first. Cooking is central to what it means to be human, and gathering around the dinner table is essential to happiness. By this logic, resisting the call of kitchen work for whatever reason puts one's world at risk (Deutsch, 2019). This very accurately applies to Bangladeshi women who are often subjected to mean comments especially from their in-laws if they even slacked off the slightest bit in kitchen work. Refusal to do kitchen work has never been an option for most Bangladeshi women and neither is asking for help from their husbands or other male family members. They may keep as many domestic helps as they wish or take the help for other female family members, but asking their husbands, sons, or any other male family member would tantamount to blasphemy. As a consequence, they would be subjected to mental abuse where their worth as a woman, a wife, or a mother would be questioned. On occasions, some are even subjected to physical abuse.

There exists a certain level of romanticization of the history of women's participation in the kitchen that is often used as a benchmark of the ideal family woman (Deutsch, 2019). When interviewing the first generation of males, their answers echoed a similar tone when asked about their opinion on home-cooked food and the practice of cooking at home. They remembered the food they had during their childhood to taste great as it was prepared by the mothers and aunts. Regardless of how the food tasted, the fact that it was prepared by familiar hands and that those women spent a significant amount of their time in the kitchen to prepare fresh food is what made the said food so desirable and tasty. The hours these women put in the kitchen are masked as love towards her family, overlooking the difficulties that go into managing

a kitchen. Each of them described how their mothers would be pacing around the house all day doing one task or the other in between cooking meals. To them this was love, the fact that their mother would use up all her time making sure everyone in the family was well taken care of.

Mr. Mujahid said, “I have realized, in my house, food is no longer cooked twice a day. It has stopped. It used to be a mother’s duty to feed her children fresh food but it is no longer this way.” At this point in the discussion, I realized that these aspects are also used as standards by these men to judge the women of their contemporary generation and the following younger generations. Mr. Shafat claimed,

“When we were kids, we saw our mothers work all day. They used to work really hard, but women these days take life too easily. To make life easy they refuse to cook and because of this fast food has emerged. Thanks to the internet they now have more reasons to not want to cook since everything is available online. So, they prioritize other things over family, spending less time with their family as they are busy with their mobiles and that is the reason families are breaking down and are not as tight-knit as they used to be. Fast foods now exist to make life easy, but life was easy before when there weren't as many distractions and wives/mothers would dedicate their time to their families.”

They seemed to judge how good a woman is as a mother and as a wife by the criteria of how much and how hard she works throughout the day to cater to her family. This was evident as their vocal tone shifted from a tender tone when describing how their mothers were always busy around the house, especially for cooking fresh food for every meal, to a tone of antipathy when describing how the modern women refuse to work round the clock in a house as opposed to their mothers. While these five male interviewees claimed themselves to be strong supporters of female progress and empowerment, they also believe that in the name of empowerment women should not forget their role towards their families. In the Bangladeshi context, any woman who fails or refuses to cook for her family is considered a failed woman. For such reasons, the ability to cook and manage a kitchen is seen as an important criterion when looking for a bride in the marriage market. Girls who are more familiar with the kitchen and are more household-oriented are seen as more eligible brides over those who are more career-oriented. The modern-day ideal bride is one who can manage both. While some like to see this as a sign of progress these expectations

still hold women back to a great extent. Men are not subjected to similar standards and hence are able to invest more time in their profession while women are expected to expertly manage both the home and the office. What this leaves is an extremely exhausted woman at the end of the day. All these aspects bring me to the conclusion that not only is cooking a women-centric task, but the act of cooking itself is also almost central to a woman's life.

5.2: Skill v/s Art:

As mentioned earlier in the previous segment cooking is considered a woman's job however it does not exclude the participation of men in this task. The difference lies in how it's viewed. When women cook, it is seen as more of a skill, a skill that one must possess to be considered an ideal woman. For women, it is a necessity to know how to cook and to have the ability to feed large groups of people. Women are expected to know how to cater to the taste of everyone in a single household, to keep everyone's dietary restrictions and demands in mind while cooking, and simultaneously know how to cook nutritious food. Most magazines these days that share cooking tips are catered to women (Deutsch, 2019). These columns describe efficient ways of food shopping, maximizing the benefits of one's purchase, ways of keeping the family entertained with food, and other such advice that would make the woman a better wife and a mother by improving the way she feeds her family. For women cooking is a mandatory skill. On the other hand, it is not so rigid for men. For them, cooking can be a hobby or a career path. The key difference here is that men have the liberty to choose whether they wish to cook or how they wish to cook. They are not criticized as harshly on a general daily basis for what they cook and present. For men, cooking is more of an art form that they learn by training for years and years. When they cook for fulfilling their passion and for displaying, they have the liberty to alter the dish/recipe however they wish. While men mostly cook to show and rarely to run a household, women cook on a daily basis to look after the family.

Globally among chefs, about 77.4% are male chefs and nearly 22.6% are female chefs. In Bangladesh, there are only a few female cooks but they are not formally trained from culinary schools. One very common household name is Siddika Kabir. She is a nutritionist who became famous for her television cooking shows and her famous cookbook '*Ranna Khaddo Pushti*'. '*Ranna Khaddo Pushti*' is a guidebook to better cooking and nutritious cooking, a cookbook that mothers, grandmothers and why swear by. Her book has detailed descriptions of how to clean, prepare, cook, and preserve all kinds of food. It is the ultimate solution book to troubleshoot any cooking-related issue that has revolutionized women's cooking. Yet, she is not quite recognized as a chef in the same way her male contemporaries are regardless of her knowledge of food, due to her lack of formal training as a chef. Another celebrity that we often see on Bangladeshi television cooking shows is Keka Ferdousi. She too is a chef without much formal training. Ferdousi in contrast to Kabir isn't as celebrated because of her creative approach to food as is expected of a chef. While she hosts several cooking shows and has published many cookbooks, she is often a topic of discussion for her unconventional food combinations. Last but not the least, another famous female figure in the world of cooking is Alpana Habib, who is also recognized as a cook rather than a chef. She has several cooking shows and cookbooks under her belt. Most female figures in the world of Bangladeshi culinary arts are recognized as cooks rather than chefs. The difference between the two is that chefs create new recipes while cooks follow established recipes. While most of these female figures have revolutionized Bangladeshi cooking with their cookbooks, the aspect holding them back from being recognized as chefs is the fact that their cookbooks consist of existing recipes that they have improved and reinvented, and made easier and more accessible. They have not created their own new unique recipes. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, the fact that they are all women also leads to the belief that her being good at cooking is natural since it's a skill they must possess, hence, their cooking skills are not as laudable compared to those of her male counterparts who had to learn how to cook in a world where cooking is considered largely a feminine job. While there are a few more Bangladeshi female chefs that I could

name, they aren't quite relevant to how Bangladeshi women's cooking is viewed as they are born and/or raised abroad. On the other hand, there are many male chefs in Bangladesh who are known for creating their own unique dishes. Unlike the female chefs mentioned who actively worked to reinvent Bangladeshi cuisine, many of these male chefs are celebrated for their mere participation in the field of cooking. This contrasting attitude highlights the stark difference in how cooking is viewed as a skill for women and art for men. Even within households, regardless of how many varieties of dishes the women cook throughout the year, if a man cooks a dish even once a year the occasion is kept alive throughout the year as family members talk about it as a fun story. Even if the food cooked by them doesn't taste as good, or they missed key spices or seasonings, they are not subjected to mean comments or harsh criticisms as women are. Mrs. Hossain summarized this feeling that all my married female informants resonated with, “whenever there is a ‘*dawat*’ (social gathering) at home, the wives and mothers slave away in the kitchen making at least ten different dishes. My husband barely helps by making something as simple as a salad, that too after I get upset for not receiving any help. At the time of the ‘*dawat*’ I find my husband asking everyone how the salad is since he made it and somehow that becomes the talk of the night. How it tasted really good, how he is a caring husband who helps his wife and so on. He gets all the compliments after making a salad which is just chopped up vegetables with some salt. Anyone can do that. I on the other hand get criticisms like “this dish lacked salt”, “that dish is too spicy” and so on.” This lenient attitude stems from the fact that cooking is not at all expected from men hence whatever they do or however little they do is celebrated.

5.3: Invisible labor:

A common recurring tone throughout my article till now has been that women don't feel appreciated enough for all the kitchen work they put in to take care of their family, especially when it comes to cooking. As mothers and wives, they are often met with criticisms, tantrums, and fuss over the

food they put on the table that takes up the majority of their day to prepare. It is as if the family members are oblivious to the hours of work that goes into preparing the meals that they fuss about. What happens here is that since cooking is considered a woman's job, those around them assume that women are experts at it so it must be very easy for them and fail to view these efforts as work. Moreover, if the work is not visible, it is often not taken into account. The mothers that I interviewed, unanimously claimed to like cooking for their families as it makes them happy to see their family happy and satisfied, as mentioned earlier. This encourages them to cook even more, especially when their cooked food is praised. They even believe that they enjoy cooking as they feel they wouldn't be able to do it if they didn't enjoy it on some level. However, they also expressed feeling overlooked as they feel that they don't get back as much as they give. Mrs. Hossain expressed, "I always take care of everyone's needs in the house but at the end of the day, there is no one to take care of me." This is a feeling all the married women (especially those with children and their in-laws living with them) in the interview resonated with, that they manage to take care of everyone starting from the oldest to the youngest but they themselves are not taken care of by anyone. It is almost as if they are invisible. The explanation behind this lies in the way labor is divided between men and women. The home and the outside are viewed very differently. The home is seen as safe and a place of comfort where one can be relaxed whereas the outside is a rough and difficult place that is extremely harsh in nature. Hence, any household work isn't seen as laborious compared to office work. The addition of domestic help to this equation makes this work look easier. The family members hold this image that all that their mothers/wives do at home is order the help around and work gets done. To this Mrs. Mahbub added,

"They (her family members) often fail/miss to see the amount of time and energy it takes to get the work done on time. I have to show the domestic help how to cut the vegetables, what protein to prepare for the day, and so on. Even after giving the instructions, I have to stick around to make sure work gets done properly and on time. After all that I also have to cook the prepared food for the meal. By the time everyone is at the dining table, I have to be done with all my work to join

everyone for the meal. Once everyone is done eating, they leave but my work does not end there as after the meal I have to store each of the food in containers so that they can be put in the fridge and the cycle repeats for every meal of the day.”

A common general description of a day in the life of a married woman (especially ones with children) is as follows; she wakes up early in the morning before everyone else to prepare breakfast. Once breakfast ends, she begins to prepare for lunch. After lunch, she may or may not take some afternoon rest which may be just half an hour of lying in bed. Then she has to be active in the evening again to prepare tea and other snacks that are commonly consumed in almost every household in Bangladesh. This is followed by getting ready for dinner. Yet, after dinner, her work does not end. She must think about what to cook for the next day and how to manage her whole day’s routine. If she has any plans for the next day, she must prepare the meals beforehand so that the day can run smoothly for the rest of the members. It was visible during my interview that they got restless to go home at a certain point. They seemed to be expressing slight anxiety over the fact that they were not present at home. Mrs. Mahbub even stated, “no one acknowledges our presence when we are at home but the moment we leave, even after making sure everything has been taken care of, the whole family gets anxious and starts acting like everything is falling apart”. She further elaborated, “while some of this anxiety stems from worry most of it is rooted in the idea that the home system doesn’t run as smoothly in my absence which hinders the work of my other family members.” Another interviewee, Mrs. Hossain added, “my children on the other hand are self-sufficient but as a result also somewhat selfish. They are capable of preparing their own meals yet they rarely ever cooked anything for me or helped me cook. They only prepare food for me on occasions such as birthdays or Mother’s Day, occasions that only come once or twice a year. This makes me feel worse as I feel both unneeded and unappreciated as they take their own food to their rooms and eat by themselves. They also rarely eat what I cook, so my efforts seem even more futile.” Four out of five of the first-generation informants also expressed that if they ever complain about the burden of their work, they are asked who asked them to take so much trouble, to which they never have any answers. As mothers and

wives, these women don't really want to stop cooking, rather what they want is for their family members to recognize the efforts they put in and to help with work so that they can have some spare time for themselves. They understand that household work can never be converted to paid labor, they simply wish that for this reason, it won't go unnoticed either.

5.4: Good v/s Bad Mother:

In continuation to the previous segment, another way cooking and other kitchen work affect women especially mothers are by being used as a criterion to judge whether she is a good mother or a bad mother. This judgment is often made by society in general but also by children as well. If a mother feeds her child food that is conventionally considered healthy like proteins and vegetables prepared at home, then she is considered a good mother. In contrast, if they don't present fast food or other processed food to their children then they are considered bad mothers for not giving them what they wanted. This leaves them torn between these labels as they try to do both, raise healthy children and be a good mother. Mrs. Hossain shared, “my daughter refuses to eat if chicken is not served on the table and gets mad at me and accuses me of not loving her enough for not considering her preferences while preparing the meal.” The other mothers chimed in on how this behavior is common among younger and older children alike. Mrs. Mujahid also added, “children also get upset if we can't cook a particular dish/cuisine and even compare us with the mothers of other children.” All the mothers in the room sighed and expressed how they find these comments extremely upsetting, especially after spending the majority of the day in the kitchen trying to make sure they have prepared enough variety of food to cater to everyone's needs and choices. Another way society determines whether a mother is a good mother or a bad one is by judging how well she feeds her family. They judge how much time a mother invests in the kitchen, how fresh is the food that she feeds her family, and whether she prioritizes feeding her family over everything else or not (as mentioned in section 'a'). Some of these judgments even come from husbands who compare their wives to their own

mothers who they believed was a good mother for devoting her life to feeding and taking care of the family as opposed to their wives who express wishes to devote some of their time to other things as well such as a hobby or a career. In our society, a good mother is one who is selfless and will give up on all her interests and commit her entire life to her family. Contrarily, any woman who wishes to pursue a career, or is unable to invest as much time into feeding the family is considered selfish and a bad mother/wife. They are labeled as such regardless of how committed they are to their families. As mentioned earlier, if the work is not visible it is not taken into account. The idea of a 'good', 'ideal' mother lies in a romanticized history of women's involvement in the kitchen. However, upon hearing from my interviewees' accounts of their mother's lives, it became apparent that a lot of this history is imagined and over-exaggerated. Mrs. Hossain shared,

“My mother was actually a very social person who was a member of various social clubs and was always busy organizing various events and gatherings. I remember our household being taken care of by the various domestic helps we had and they often received the majority of the instructions about the daily tasks around the house from my father. I rarely remember my mother being caught up in the kitchen. She would mostly enter the kitchen if there was a '*dawat*' at home or there was something special to cook like birds that my father hunted or to cook special occasion (birthdays or anniversary) meals. Otherwise, she would just instruct the kitchen helps what to do and how to do it and then leave the kitchen. Over time she didn't even have to do that because the kitchen helps had become trained experts and they could manage the kitchen by themselves.”

Other first generation female informants also shared having similar memories where their mothers did not spend as much time in the kitchen as they themselves do now. People go even further to measure the degree of love of a mother towards her family using how much she does for her family as a parameter. How much a woman does for her family, how much time she gives her family, and how much she prioritizes her family over other things are used as indicators of how much he loves her family. Even though love towards one's family is an abstract concept and is subjective in terms of how that love is expressed, the patriarchal society that these women exist in likes to quantify this aspect and measure it in terms of action. This simply opens up one more criterion to judge and criticize women by.

Chapter 6

The Kitchen

In a discussion about how food consumption shapes our lives and relations, the kitchen plays a major role too. It is not merely a space where the food is prepared, rather it is one of the primary locations where certain relations and hierarchies are formed and enacted. The significance the kitchen the kitchen holds, who owns and commands the kitchen, and how the kitchen operates to produce and reproduce hierarchies are the core discussions of this chapter.

6.1: The Sacred Domain:

In this thesis that is majorly about food, the kitchen cannot be left undiscussed. It is where all the food is prepared. Even though it is an inanimate space, the significance it holds, the role it plays goes beyond the idea of the kitchen being a mere space. It almost has a life of its own that shapes and affects relations between people. First and foremost, it is considered a sacred domain by those who own it and work in it. Mrs. Hossain compares her kitchen to an office room. She described, “just like how to a man his office room is his personal space, where it is his rules and everything is organized according to his preference, in the same way the kitchen holds the same value to a woman.” Being given the value equivalent to an office space, the kitchen operates in a similar fashion by establishing hierarchies. These hierarchies are maintained in three categories; age, relation, and class. In nuclear families it is simple, the kitchen is owned and run by the wife in the pair that owns the house. Here I would like to introduce the term ‘kitchen owner’ to describe the person who owns and is in charge of the kitchen. The one who owns the house does not necessarily own the kitchen unless the house is owned by a woman (because in

patriarchal Bangladesh it is more common for men to own houses as opposed to women). The home kitchen being a feminine space (restaurant kitchens are considered masculine space due to the large number of men working in it and the difficult working condition), it is commonly owned and run by women. Things are a little more complicated in houses with joint families. In joint families, the kitchen first belongs to and is run on the instructions of the oldest female member of the house. If she is too old or sick to run the kitchen, the next in command is the '*boro bou*' (wife of the eldest son). Regardless of her age, she holds a higher position since her husband is in a higher position compared to his siblings. Lastly, who can run the kitchen is determined by looking at whose husband handles the majority of the finances. Even if the group of siblings has one or more sisters the kitchen is rarely under their command. This only happens if their mother is too old or sick to run the kitchen and the brothers are yet to be married. Marriage is a key factor here since up until that point, females are seen as girls dependent on their parents. However, after marriage, this imagery changes as females are then viewed as grown and capable adult women who are ready to take on responsibilities. Lastly, the kitchen is run by whoever is in the higher-class position as they command the kitchen helps who belong to the lower-class positions. Here another level of invisibilization occurs. More often than not the works of domestic helps are overlooked even though they do most of the kitchen work. Regardless of whether they are commanding the kitchen or not, it is their work that keeps the kitchen running smoothly. However, this invisibilization is different from that of the kitchen owners' invisibilized work. Domestic helpers work in return for payment. They have very little attachment to the family or any reason to be committed to the family, meaning they are not bound to the family by anything hence are not obligated to work for them. Cooking and kitchen work for them is a choice and one they get paid for. Other than the payment they have no reason to ensure that the family is fed. By logic, such work cannot be overlooked even if we want to. Yet it happens on the basis of class difference. Since the domestic help does not often prepare the final dish that is presented on the table their work is rarely recognized. If the dish turns out tasty, they are not given any credit since they

merely chop and clean the vegetables and proteins, and prepare the spices. Even though they carry out some of the most crucial steps of cooking, it is not recognized as such. A good analogy to explain this would be how when a house is built, it is the architect and the development company that gets the credit instead of the workers who laid the bricks and the cement. Similarly, the women running the kitchen get the credit for the final dish, because she was the one to produce the final product which allows people to overlook the foundation. Other factors that lead to overlooking include the fact that the kitchen owners paid for the work, the main planning and giving the instructions is done by the kitchen owner and lastly whatever work the domestic help does was originally taught to them by the kitchen owner. Hence, domestic helps are viewed as nothing more than mere laborers who simply follow orders and do nothing of their own accord for which they can be given any credit.

6.2: Kitchen Ethics:

As mentioned earlier, the kitchen is a sacred place that has an owner that decides how the kitchen will look and function. This brings me to my point of how due to the existence of ownership there are certain kitchen ethics that are maintained. Even though these ethics are largely socially constructed, they have been in place for so long that they have transformed into established unspoken rules. These rules dictate who can command the kitchen, who can enter and who can't, who decides how the utensils would be organized and used, and other such aspects. While to an average person the kitchen may look like a simple place to the naked eye, it is a very complex space with everything organized in a particular order that only those familiar with the kitchen are aware of. Everything down to the smallest spoon is organized strategically according to the preference of the kitchen owner. Even if something small is misplaced, displaced or misused, the kitchen owners find it deeply upsetting as it throws off the balance of the place for them. As previously mentioned, Mrs. Hossain compared the kitchen as equivalent to an office workspace. According to her, "it is my sacred workspace and I have a greater degree of attachment to it

compared to my other family members for whom the kitchen is merely a means to their ends.” Attachment can often be seen as protectiveness. Women tend to be very particular about how the kitchen is organized, how it functions, how it is preserved, and other such factors. Just like the office workspace must be kept organized in a particular order, Mrs. Hossain believes, “the kitchen should be maintained in a particular manner that suits me and with similar respect as an office space since that is my workspace.” This leads to the factor of only specific people being allowed to work in the kitchen. Mrs. Mujahid shared, “I got to enter my mother-in laws kitchen only twice in my life and never again, because in those two days I misplaced some things and ‘wrongly’ (as determined by the kitchen owner, it is a subjective matter) used some things. I finally understood my mother in law's sentiment behind banning me from the kitchen when I became a kitchen owner myself. It is infuriating when I see my kitchen is not in order.” All the married female informants shared similar stories of being banned from or not being allowed in certain kitchens and of them not allowing certain people in their kitchens. Who is allowed in the kitchen is not a random matter, but rather decided very systematically. First and foremost, mostly women are allowed in the kitchen. Children are kept at a slight distance due to safety reasons, however, younger girls are allowed and even encouraged to enter for the purposes of observation and learning, but they are not allowed to work in the kitchen until they're old enough (in their late teenage years when they are closer to being of marriageable age). Men are often not allowed in the kitchen since they are not very familiar with the place and due to the patriarchal society we live in neither are they allowed to familiarize themselves with the place. Lastly people who are not in close relation to the kitchen owner except the house help, are not allowed in the kitchen. In summary, anyone who the kitchen owner deems has the potential to leave the kitchen disorganized, is not allowed to work in the kitchen, and on occasions, some are not even allowed to enter the kitchen. From my family experience, my mother lets me use the kitchen whenever I like and even has a corner dedicated to my things. However, I had to earn it by learning and following all her rules and leaving the kitchen organized the way she likes after I finish working. On the flip side of the coin, she

doesn't like it if my father or brother enters the kitchen because they are messy when they work and don't leave it cleaned the way she likes it. When such incidents occurred, she would often remind the whole family of how my paternal grandmother too would get upset if my mother broke any of my grandmother's kitchen rules. This brought me to the realization that women also tend to be very possessive about their kitchens because the previous generation did not allow them much liberty in the kitchen space. My mother's generation picked up and continued that behavior when they were able to have their own kitchens. Such behavior of possessiveness over a particular space can be understood to have evolved from the mindset of the women of feudal societies. During the feudal era of Bangladesh, the generation of my great grandmother and their female kins could exercise varying levels of authority based on an age and kinship hierarchy inside the house in a space known as the '*andarmahal*'. '*Andarmahal*' (inner quarters) indicates a (private) social domain under women's care which is the constant inhabitant of women, children, domestic servants and the nocturnal habitat of adult males (Banerjee, 1991, 53). Eventually this physical architectural space evolved into the '*griho*' (home/household) as the feudal system declined and families shrank too. Banerjee describes '*griho*' in contrast to '*andarmahal*' as more of an abstract imagined space rather than a physical space. The '*griho*' is conceived more in terms of emotional and normal privatisation than of a physical privatisation. '*Griho*' represents a state of mind, an ideological venture propounding a conscious moral and social being rather than a functional place on earth (Banerjee, 1991, 53). As women lost their physical domain within a household as families nuclearised and houses shrank due to the decline of feudalism and onset of industrialisation, the kitchen I believe filled up the vacuum left behind from the loss of the '*andarmahal*'. The kitchen became the new feminine private space in a household. Lastly, kitchen ownership can be transferred, and often it is transferred to the daughters-in-law. This is because of the patrilocal marriage system that is followed in Bangladesh. This transfer may either occur if the mother-in-law is too old or sick to run the kitchen or in the event of her death. This is usually a big moment for whoever receives the kitchen as it marks the beginning of her '*shongshar*'.

Regardless of being inanimate, the kitchen plays a significant role in connecting women of different generations and classes.

6.3: Menu Politics:

Just like fingerprints, each individual has a unique palate and this can be attributed to various reasons such as exposure, dietary restrictions, health related reasons and so on. In order to make sure everyone eats in the family, mothers must prepare meal menus that cater to every member of the family. This menu is prepared in a systematic manner. First the preference of the old and the sick members get precedence. This is because they have dietary restrictions and not maintaining them could be dangerous to their health. Next the preference of the men in the family gets precedence. This is due to various reasons such as their higher social position over women in a patriarchal society, their financial contribution to the family, their status as office goers which leaves them tired, and so on. Next in line is the preference of the children. Since they tend to be fussy eaters, in order to make sure that they eat, their preference is also taken into account. The one person whose preference is rarely on the menu is the one who prepares the menu. The preference of the women in the families often gets the least precedence. Precedence is given based on hierarchy of age and gender. The order is as follows; grandparents, father (and uncles if it is a joint family), children, and lastly the mother (and aunts if it is a joint family). Mothers often don't even express their preference as they believe theirs to be of least importance. All my married female interviewees regardless of age believe that it is an innate nature of women to think about others first. However, they also wish someone would think about them too, especially their husbands but that rarely happens. Men are not taught to prioritise others over themselves, or rather women are made aware of their subordinated position in society from a very early age. By the time they become adults capable of running their own households, they have already internalized this hierarchy and it impacts their actions

on a subconscious level. This affects kinship relations as the women of the family feel unnoticed and it affects the interaction with others. Mrs. Hossain shared, “I feel like I am expected to give up and ignore all my desires so that my family members can have what they want. I often even pretend to like certain things and overtime I became accustomed to consuming certain things that I previously disliked. I also stopped eating certain things as they were not well received by the rest of my family members. It is as if they think just because I am a mother I have to sacrifice all my likings and desires.” All my married female informants shared such similar experiences of having to learn to eat new things and having to let go of older habits of liking certain things after getting married and moving into a different household. However, I had no anecdotes of such experiences from the husbands of these women. This goes to show how patriarchy seeps into food consumption as well making it a gendered activity. Women (especially married ones) are expected to be adaptable since their location of residence is not as steady as compared to their male counterparts. Even though both embody different kinds of roles over their lifetime, women’s relation to each of their roles as daughter, wife and mother impact their entire existence as they are expected to adapt to each of these roles according to the expectations of the house she is in. Men on the other hand aren’t expected to be as adaptable due to their higher power position in the couple giving them the deciding power to dictate how the household will run. Women are expected to abide by these dictations depending on whether it’s her father’s house, her father-in-law’s house or her husband’s house. These expectations even determine something as insignificant (as compared to the other responsibilities of her role) as eating and that often is the first demonstration of subservience.

Chapter: 7

Public Consumption:

The home is largely influenced by phenomenon that occur outside of it and consumption is no different from religious, cultural, traditional or social practices that evolve with time. Similarly, practices learned from within the home reflect in one's participation in the public sphere. The home and the outside inter-affect an individual's and thus a family/community's consumption practices. This chapter focuses on how the shift towards outside food occurred and how various forms of consumption adds to one's capitals.

7.1: Brief history (shift towards outside food):

As mentioned earlier, the practice of eating home-cooked food at home is rapidly fading. While there are many issues that have led to this phenomenon, the prime reason seems to be the nuclearisation of families. As Bangladesh industrialized and Dhaka urbanized, many people broke away from their extended families and moved to Dhaka in search of better job opportunities and a more luxurious life. With industries filling up the outskirts of Dhaka, Dhaka itself became the housing facility that kept workers close to their workplaces. As more people moved towards Dhaka, it quickly transformed into a city that had everything to offer from luxurious homes to elaborate hospitals to grocery shops and restaurants, all just minutes away from one's home. One would only have more reasons to move to Dhaka and very few reasons to leave. As more and more people desired urban life, the price of living in Dhaka increased too. It became an increasingly expensive city to live in. Dhaka was no longer a suitable city for

large families to live in, especially large upper middle-class families with very few earners compared to the size of the family. The large difference in the ratio of earners to the number of mouths to feed made it difficult to sustain such large families. This was another reason families broke up into smaller units. This meant there was less load on the earners. However, over time, this too became insufficient. As Dhaka became the bustling city center, life in Dhaka became exponentially expensive. One earner per nuclear family was barely enough. This pushed both the parental figures in a family to earn in order to be able to live a comfortable life, giving rise to dual-income families. As a result, families began to have surplus income as the difference in the ratio of earners to the number of mouths to feed greatly decreased. Previously large families had barely one or two earning figures in a family of 8 to 10 family members and on top of that multiple domestic helps. Now, the families are smaller with 4 to 5 members per family out of which two are earning figures. Majority of my informants were dual earning couples for a major portion of their lives. However, their memories of their childhood household are contrasting in nature to the household they run now. Mrs. Mahbub remembers, “when we were young, we didn’t see our mothers having jobs. My mother was highly educated but she never worked outside the house. Most of her friends were like that too. Back during the 1950s women working outside the house was not as common as it is now. The house would run on whatever my father and older brother earned. That was enough for us because back then we didn’t pay much attention to things like class, status and image as people do these days. As long as our basic needs were met and there was food on the table, we were happy.” This decrease in the ratio has resulted in surplus income as one earning figure earns just enough but with two earning figures there is surplus money left to spend after one has paid off all the necessary expenses. The availability of this surplus amount allowed families to spend on luxuries. One such luxury would be eating at/from restaurants. For the first generation informants, eating at restaurants was a rare, once or twice a year, occasion. Stories of the occasion would be shared throughout the year. It was that big of a deal. Back in those days, even most celebrations such as weddings, achievements, anniversaries took place at home.

Usually, birthdays would be celebrated at restaurants and they would celebrate multiple birthdays at once as it was too expensive to go to restaurants for each birthday separately.

The ability to celebrate at restaurants during the mid-1900s was considered a status symbol and therefore somewhat a privilege. The availability of restaurants was also an issue since they were not very common prior to the mid 1990s. Before the 1990s there were very few restaurants and the choice of cuisine was limited to a localized version of Chinese food. Bakeries, sweet shops (also referred to as cabins) and canteens were more common back then. They can be compared to modern-day coffee shops, a place where people would meet for the occasional ‘*adda*’ (conversation among a group of individuals, often friends). The modern-day (western) fast food hadn’t yet arrived in Bangladesh, however, the concept of fast food existed in the form of common deshi snacks such as *shingara/somocha* (deep-fried pastries filled with meat or vegetables), *pakora/bora/piyaju* (kinds of fritters) and many other such snacks that were quick and easy to prepare and eat along with a cup of tea. *Addas* were incomplete without these. These however were the most common choices available everywhere. The lack of variety and choice is what kept the first generation bound to home-cooked food.

As Dhaka transitioned into the city it is today, lives got busier. Always cooking at home became difficult, especially for working women. As they too became busy with not just raising children and looking after their homes, but a job as well, they were able to invest less time in the kitchen. Mrs. Mujahid pointed out, “the consumption of outside food began with bringing food from outside when guests showed up on short notice. To manage such situations when neither there was enough time to cook nor was there enough food at home to feed the guests, my husband would bring food from outside. Now with the swipe of a finger you can order any kind of food whenever and the availability of an array of restaurants made it all the easier. But during the early 2000s ‘*naan*’ and ‘*kababs*’ were more common. If there wasn’t any food at home, or I didn’t feel like cooking, we would just get those. Over time this became a more frequent practice.” As more restaurants, pre-cooked and frozen foods became available, families strayed further

away from home-cooked food. These readily available foods greatly reduced the pressure from the shoulders of (married) women who, as Mrs. Hossain claimed, “barely got the chance to rest after having to look after everyone in the house, the house itself, and their jobs.” Another aspect the informants pointed out was that when they were younger, they grew up with an elaborate team of domestic helps who would each look after a particular aspect of household care (such as cleaning, laundry, gardening etc.), leaving their mothers free to handle the issue of deciding, managing and preparing everyday meals. Even with that they had helpers supporting them by preparing the ingredients and having everything ready to be cooked and cleaning up the kitchen afterwards. This made their lives easier in comparison to the lives of the women of the 21st century. For such reasons, women from the early 1900s never quite had the need for pre-processed food and since there was little to no demand there wasn’t any market for processed food during the 1900s.

Over time as more low income jobs became available, especially those in the RMG sector, mechanics, *mudir doka*n (small scale grocery shops) and other such jobs that the working class people began to feel was more dignifying compared to domestic work, it became increasingly difficult to find domestic help. They started to think of domestic work as degrading as it meant working under someone and allowed very little freedom for what they now consider very low pay. This made life for upper middle-class women difficult, especially wives and mothers with jobs. They had now had to juggle between home and work all by themselves. They do not have much support to whom they can distribute the workload. To make their lives easier, the one variable they had control over was their responsibility to feed their family. Outsourcing the responsibility of cooking to corporations allowed women to focus on their careers (Deutsch, 2019). To reduce their workload, they became dependent on food that was pre-processed outside the home and was easy to cook without all the hassle of peeling, chopping, cleaning and other such work that consume too much time. First and second generation women have a somewhat paradoxical relationship with any food processed outside the house. While they are heavily dependent on them due to

convenience, they also highly despise the idea of mass produced food. This is due to their belief that such foods lack nutrition and are prepared in unhealthy and unsanitary environments. Dependency on pre-processed food became even more prominent among the third and their succeeding generations. The world for the third and the following generations is extremely fast and competitive. With work, studies, extracurricular activities and so forth, the current generation of young adults are busy throughout the day. They no longer have free time to prepare home-cooked meals or to even sit with their families. For them it is easier to eat foods that can be prepared and consumed fast. To summarise, the busy life of Dhaka has transformed something as simple as eating home cooked food at home into somewhat of a luxury that not many can afford. Considering ‘time is money’, cooking at home can be very time consuming, time which can be invested elsewhere. Hence, it is relatively cheaper to eat food processed outside the home as it saves a lot of time.

7.2: Food Trends:

A major aspect that affects public consumption is the ever shifting food trends. In order to stay with the flow and present oneself as up to date one must always follow the ongoing trends. It started with fast food, then there was the trend of adding ‘Naga’ (a kind of chilli) flavor to all kinds of food, followed by a shift towards Asian food and so on. There has been a Sushi wave, a dumpling wave, and currently there is an ongoing Korean food wave. While these waves arrived via food, they are not limited to that. When I look around, I see people learning the Korean language, using chopsticks, watching Korean entertainment, and even cooking Korean food, and this is just one of the examples of the various international cultures individuals have embodied through the act of consumption. In the age of the internet, food trends don’t just occur across restaurants. Waves of food trends occur online as well as in everyday lives where the third generation middle and upper-middle class purchase food items their parents have never even heard of. This phenomenon is not new, however it was especially visible during the beginning

of the pandemic as almost everyone in Dhaka began to share their versions of particular dishes and tried their hands at cooking various cuisines over the internet. The internet was swept with pictures of *jilapi*, *mishti*, dalgona coffee, and so on as everyone became quarantine chefs. Apps like TikTok, Instagram, Facebook made these trends spread like wildfire. These apps were also where these trends took birth. These trends affected how people presented themselves in the public. The more they knew about current food trends the richer they looked in terms of their cultural capital and the more they were able to connect with people, increasing their social capital. Food is a very common topic that is discussed often regardless of place, time, and company. One of my interviewees, Ms. Zerin stated, “subconsciously people wish to be part of the hype and that reflects in their actions. Majority in some ways or the other participate in the hype and that is how trends take place. To be in trend and with the crowd is one way of upward mobility.” The occurrence of trends is not entirely new, however as the internet became more common and globalization became easier as people had all sorts of information at the palm of their hands, people’s desire to become cosmopolitan only ever increased and the process happened at an accelerated rate. During the early 1900s (before fast food and internet) trends took place, however they occurred at a much slower rate and larger scale. Some examples of it are the introduction of Chinese food (now known as Bangla Chinese) that came with the Chinese immigrants, earlier Mughal occupation introduced kebabs and biryani and other such food, introduction of American fast food during the mid 1990s and so on. These occurrences are rarely viewed as trends as they are not as short lived as the ones that have occurred more recently. The arrival of each of these trends marks further globalization of Dhaka and for the upper middle class who aspire to be global citizens, it is important that they always stay on top of trends. Having knowledge of various cultures and the ability to use these knowledge to build connections increases their social and cultural capital, accelerating their ascension up the social ladder.

7.3: Social Media Competition:

Food consumption is no longer limited to the act of going to a restaurant and enjoying good food with good company. The expansion of social media with apps like Instagram, Facebook and Snapchat, that are mainly photo sharing apps, has led to food consumption entering the realm of the internet. People are now serious followers of the phrase, 'pics or it didn't happen'. As they photograph their every meal and share it with their friends, family, acquaintances and any and every one on their contact list on these sites over the internet. What began as simply sharing a photo, overtime evolved into a sort of competition of who had the better food, who went to the expensive buffet, whose food looks nicer, who is expert at what kind of cuisine, and so on. The better one's social media page looks in terms of which restaurant they went to and what food they had, the more competent and successful the individual looks in the eyes of his/her audience for being able to afford the experience. This competition slowly spread from customer individuals to bigger restaurant corporations. restaurants are always in competition regarding the quality and quantity of food, the pricing, the size of their customer base and so on as well. There was a time when consumers were unaware of these competitions. Now all of it is visible to consumers as restaurants compete publicly on the internet. Social media are such powerful tools, that they have the ability to make or break reputations. The social media competition is not just limited to who has better looking food or better deals, but also how their reviews are. The rating of the restaurant an individual goes to, the price range of that place, the food quality, everything can be found out from the internet. The more knowledge people have of these, the higher their cultural capital is considered. These competitions have given rise to certain phenomena such as the rise of cloud kitchens, food vlogging, and the act of eating and drinking as entertainment being normalised.

Cloud kitchens are restaurant-like establishments that have no storefront. Ordering and payment happens online and the food gets delivered to the customers location of choice. Cloud kitchens are mainly run by home cooks and they deliver food from their homes. The cloud kitchens have been around for a while. The pandemic has caused this business to boom as the people staying at home realised their

potential to cook, wished to showcase it, and make a profit out of it. The cloud kitchen business is a very competitive one since these entrepreneurs have to compete with established restaurants and other cloud kitchens. However, what makes it easier for them to remain in competition is peoples' constant want for newer cuisines and tastes. Majority of these cloud kitchens run with the help of social media where they can reach out to potential customers. One of the reasons cloud kitchens are very popular is because they provide homemade food. Upper-middle class Bangladeshis, especially those from the first and second generation have a major affinity towards home cooked food, but due to the recent shortage of domestic help, cooking at home has become somewhat of a difficult task. Cloud kitchens have made it easier to obtain home-cooked food that has been prepared outside the home, making everyday life much easier.

Another social media trend on the rise is food vlogging. In the age of technology such as portable cameras that can shoot high quality videos, and the internet that can transmit information over great distances in matters of seconds, food vlogging is no longer limited to television screens hosted by renowned food critics. Anyone with these tools available to them has the potential to become food vloggers. The trend started with a few millennials who were frequent restaurant goers that one day decided to film themselves reviewing the food they consumed and upload it on social media. The major criteria that qualified them to be judging food is that they had eaten at various restaurants. Soon enough many others started to follow suit and before people knew it, almost every friend circle had at least one individual who claimed to have very good knowledge of a particular cuisine. Ms. Islam expressed, “due to the nature of my work I have to socialise a lot. Regardless of the group I am with, there is always at least one person who knows where you will get what kind of food and whether that place serves authentic food or not and so on. Now more than ever, the number of such people is on the rise. It's like everyone knows about what lies beyond the presented dish, such as its place of origin, what it is supposed to taste like, whether it is close to being authentic or not, and all this without ever even having had the original authentic food. People can now be divided into three groups, ones that keep commenting on the food and have excessive

knowledge of it, second that recreate dishes at home and the last group that simply wish to eat and enjoy the food.” Food vlogging is seen as a way for an individual to put on display their knowledge of food. People no longer need to visit other countries or regions to learn about different foods. It is made easier due to the various restaurants available that provide cuisines from around the world and the wide availability of information online. Simply by consuming these foods they not only learn about the particular cuisine but also about the cultural food originates from, the traditions that accompany the food, the history behind it and so on. This they believe puts them in a higher social position compared to those who know little about other cuisines. In order to display that an individual is more knowledgeable about various cuisines compared to others, one often participates in food vlogging.

Since the social media competition occurs largely through photos people have begun to prioritise aesthetics over taste. It is more important for the food to look good than to taste good. The better, prettier and fancier and expensive the food looks, the better it makes the individual’s social media page look. It creates an image of the consumer living a fancy life. Since people can't taste the food through social media it becomes a secondary factor in determining whether the food is good or not. Nowadays a major marketing strategy is to make food visually appealing and aesthetically pleasing for it to sell better. Even though the taste will always remain the main selling point and is what will keep the customers coming back, making the food photo worthy is what spreads the name of the restaurant faster as people share the photograph on social media. Social media is a form of social capital. The more attractive one’s social media page looks, the more desirable their life looks. Through these pages they are able to connect with more like-minded people, expanding their network. One example would be the emergence of food review pages that spread across social media in the past five years. Pre-social media age, exchange of information about food and restaurants occurred by word of mouth. People would ask their relatives or acquaintances for reviews about particular restaurants and they trusted those reviews as they came from reliable sources, people they were already familiar with. In contrast to that, people now rely on the reviews of complete

strangers who determine whether a restaurant is worth going to or not with the simple act of posting on social media about the restaurant. This has made knowing about different kinds of food, opening of new restaurants, the new trends very easy, allowing for quicker acquisition of social and cultural capital.

Lastly social media is normalising eating and drinking for the purpose of entertainment. Those that often post photos of restaurant food and alcohol, and frequent gatherings are believed to have very fun lives. Almost every day some person or the other can be seen posting photos of their food ventures, of themselves attending parties/gatherings, or of them celebrating occasions at restaurants. A large portion of entertainment nowadays occurs over food. Mr. Islam shared, “whenever I open Facebook or Instagram, I always see people posting photos of food that they either made or ate at a restaurant or a party/gathering. It is as if food is everything these days. Looking at everyone’s food photos makes me hungry even if I have just finished a meal. It also makes me sad to see people having yummy food while I have to eat plain rice at home.” One of the major aspirations of upper-middle class third generation is to be able to afford and consume outside food at any given time. Everyone wishes for the fun and expensive life they see other people living on the social media. Hence, they post more and more photos of what they consume demonstrating their ability to afford such a lifestyle. These photos inspire others who wish for similar lives, to consume restaurant food and alcohol, to be considered a part of that higher class position. Food and alcohol (especially the expensive kind) has become symbolic to social status. The higher one’s ability to afford such consumption on a relatively regular basis, the higher social position they are believed to belong to. As more and more people participate in such consumption and share photos of these the more these things become normalized.

Chapter: 8

Personal Consumption:

Lastly, in this chapter I discuss how all the changes and practices acquired through consumption within the house and outside the house, shape our individual/personal ideas of consumption that affects both our ideologies and corporeal bodies. This chapter focuses on the embodiment of various cultures and knowledge through consumption, ideas surrounding and the maintenance of the ideal body and lastly the enactment of all the ideologies, practices, social/hierarchy (gender/age) position accumulated through various forms of consumption at the appropriate setting.

8.1: Body hexis:

As the saying goes, we truly are what we eat. According to Bourdieu's theory of body hexis individuals tend to present their bodies in certain manners in accordance to the ideologies they embody. This applies in the case of consumption as well. One relevant example of this would be how recently due to the influence of various east Asian cuisine, many have familiarised themselves with chopsticks. Most restaurants in Dhaka serving east Asian cuisine can also be seen to provide a set of chopsticks along the basic fork, knife and spoon. They are even sold in various shops and seem to be more easily available compared to just 5 years ago. Out of the 10 households that I looked into for this research, about 8 of them had at least one pair of chopsticks. The usage of chopsticks displays one's knowledge and understanding of east Asian eating etiquettes. This is important as it presents the individual as someone who is intelligent

enough to know the appropriate ways of consuming such food. Ms. Chowdhury expressed, “eating things like ramen, dumplings and especially sushi without chopsticks just feels inappropriate. Moreover, it is also slightly awkward if you are the only one in the group not using a pair of chopsticks while everyone else is.” There is an interrelationship between the development of the body and people’s social location, and the management of the body as central to the acquisition of status and distinction (Schilling, 2003, 111). As mentioned earlier the greater knowledge one has about various cuisines and cultures the more significant and desirable the individual's position in society looks. In order to display the knowledge and to demonstrate the awareness of other cultures, individuals pick up on various mannerisms from various cultures. Examples include knowing how to eat different kinds of sushi, knowing when, where, and how to use different cutlery and using them appropriately, wearing the appropriate attire in accordance to the place they are visiting and other such aspects that an individual embodies as they consume different cultures through food.

8.2: Middle class body:

There is an interrelationship between the development of the body and people’s social location, and the management of the body as central to the acquisition of status and distinction. Indeed, Bourdieu's use of the term 'body hexis', closely related to his concept habitus, is used to signify the relative intractability of corporeal habits and customs. (Schilling, 2003, 116). The middle and upper class are often very body conscious as they are always in a state of performing their identities in public. One visible way of doing that is by presenting their body in a certain manner. The dominant classes tend not to be overly concerned with producing a large, strong body, but with a slim body better suited to a world in which economic practice is constituted more strongly by the presentation of the self' (Wilkes, 1990: 118). Present day upper middle-class Bangladeshis give great importance to following a healthy lifestyle. This automatically affects what one consumes. The means of managing the self have become increasingly tied

up with consumer goods (in this case food), and the achievement of social and economic success hinges crucially on the presentation of an 'acceptable' self image (Schilling, 2003, 81). Nowadays people are more inclined towards steamed food, foods rich in vegetables and proteins, and foods that have less oil in them. They consume such foods both publicly and privately, firstly in order to maintain their body, and secondly to demonstrate that they care for their body. One of my interviewees, Mrs. Mahmood shared, "I love deshi food, however, I had to reduce my consumption of such food since I gained weight during my pregnancy. In order to bring my body back to shape, I started consuming healthy foods that are not too rich and oily. Foods like salads, baked proteins, and steamed food." Ms. Islam added, "having a healthy lifestyle is good for the long run as well. Following a diet is not just about achieving the ideal body but also about having a healthy body. However, maintaining a healthy lifestyle can be difficult for people like me who often eat outside. Even then I try to maintain it as I often order salads or other steamed or baked foods. This also affects consumption at home as salad-like food is not readily available at home." Even though traditional home cooked food is considered nutritious, many do not consider it entirely healthy due to all the oil and spices used in them. The ideal healthy body is an important factor for the middle-class since that too is an indicator of their social position. Members of the upper middle class believe they have more control over their own health; control which can be exercised by choosing an appropriate 'lifestyle' (Calnan, 1987: 83). While the upper middle class can afford to choose what kind of body they want they also feel obligated to have a body that is slim and healthy. Having to maintain such a body affects what they consume.

8.3: Performing the taste:

The last aspect of personal consumption in this article is the performance of taste. This performance occurs when individuals go out to eat. It is a performance of their class position, financial capacity, and knowledge of food. Individuals engaged in encounters constantly display information as a

consequence of their embodiment (Schilling, 2003, 75). Often when people go out to eat, they subconsciously consider certain factors like the location of the restaurant, the cuisine served, appropriate attire and such before choosing a restaurant or ordering food. The location of their choice indicates their economic status since restaurants can be divided into three categories on the basis of the average price of the food i.e., high end, mid-end, and low end. People with higher economic status tend to choose restaurants in rich neighborhoods where the average price of food is higher. The choice of food indicates the knowledge of the cuisine and culture. Appropriate attire indicates their awareness regarding the particular culture. The wider their range of choice is, the greater knowledge they are believed to have of various cuisines.

A single individual can perform differently depending on their company. They perform a certain way with friends, colleagues, family, and various other groups. The performance is also determined by the company. Individuals align their performance with those they are in company of in order to not stand out too much. Individuals usually have the ability to control and monitor their bodily performances in order to facilitate social interaction (Schilling, 2003, 72). People put on these performances so that they can fit in better. The body is central to the most basic units of interaction. If people are to appear convincing in their roles, they need to observe corporeal rules which govern particular encounters (Schilling, 2003). In order to ensure smooth and seamless performances people employ various gestures, postures, vocal tone and other such bodily alterations. For example, not talking too loud at restaurants, or knowing the appropriate attire, practice cuisine/location/company appropriate eating etiquettes and so on. According to Goffman, stigma describes the situation of the individual who is disqualified from full social acceptance. 'Inappropriate' behaviour, as determined by various factors such as gender, class, age, company, location and so on can disqualify a person from their social location hence, Goffman's analysis of stigma suggests we tend to perceive our bodies as if looking into a mirror which offers a reflection framed in terms of societies views and prejudices (Schilling, 2003). This is why individuals perform

appropriate roles in accordance to the expectations or their surroundings and their habitus that they built for themselves. These performances also indicate inequalities. As mentioned earlier, those with higher knowledge of food and the ability to afford certain kinds of foods hold a higher social position over those with lesser knowledge and affordability. These inequalities are visibilized by the ways individuals act. The form these relations of inequality take are carried via the positioning of the body even into the gentlest, most loving moments without apparently causing strain (Schilling, 2003).

Chapter: 9

Conclusion:

The purpose of this thesis has been to explore how food and certain patterns of consumption impact our public and private social lives. In this article I have tried to highlight how each aspect of our lives, our relations with others, our relation with ourselves, and our social position are shaped by food. While this is not a concrete description, I hope this thesis gets the discussion surrounding how food shapes our lives and the society as a whole, started. This research has been an auto-ethnography where I tried to understand how those around me interacted with food. Food being the core of our corporeal existence, its effects range from our interaction with ourselves to our interaction with the society we live in. The effects begin at home where it determines our development as individuals as a large portion of interaction at home occurs over food. Manners, etiquettes, traditions, hierarchies are all internalised through and over what is consumed at home. It even influences an individual's relations with others and their position in the family. Consumption patterns inside and outside the home inter-affect each other. Our ever-changing social surroundings influence what and how we consume at home while what we grew up eating at home shapes our palette for our preference of food both inside and outside the home. Moreover, our personal preferences and knowledge of food influences how we interact with others and ourselves. Different

patterns of consumption highlight various levels of hierarchies and inequalities within and between different social groups. In the context of Bangladesh, food is majorly given significance as the bearer of culture and tradition. However, how, when, where and with whom we consume food signifies a large portion of our existence as it highlights the ideologies, the cultural awareness, the social position and everything else we embody. Hence, it is important to look into consumption patterns and address concerns regarding how it affects each aspect of our lives in order to understand how societies produce and reproduce their systems, ideologies and traditions.

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