

Breaking Gender Stereotypes in Culinary Arts: Insights from Sanjeev Kapoor and Suresh Pillai

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Abstract: Historically, the kitchen served as a primary space for women. They prepared meals to nourish their families. Expectations around home cooking drew heavily from these gender roles. Women acted as homemakers. Men focused on earning income outside the house. Still, these patterns evolved gradually. Social shifts reshaped them over the years. Women began entering professional work in great numbers. At the same time, men started taking on more cooking tasks at home. Such changes softened the old boundaries between roles. Evidence from cultural studies points to this gradual blurring. It appears that broader societal rhythms played a key role in the transformation.

Even so, an interesting split developed between cooking at home and cooking for a living. Women faced pressure to get good at preparing meals in their own kitchens. Yet the world of professional chefs tended to come across as belonging to men. Much like the kitchen on a ship or the dining setup in the military, this space turned into one full of strong male energy. The way power worked there showed a kind of tough guy attitude.

This paper examines the common gender roles with a special focus on culinary skills. It also throws light upon the stories of Sanjeev Kapoor and Suresh Pillai as these individuals climbed to top levels of success with their talents in the kitchen. The paper ends with checking if chefs from other genders receive as much recognition in this area

Index Terms: Culinary skills, gender disparity, gender roles, gender stereotypes, kitchen.

Women continue their pursuit to seek recognition and equal opportunities within their workplaces, but then a powerful question that often comes up is why women are still excluded or overlooked in the professional kitchens. Gender disparity is a glaring issue in the culinary industry. This gender division has been attributed to the perpetuation of male and female domestic roles, a fact reached through the analysis of the data available on kitchen workplace cultures and by interviewing women chefs.

Cooking has been confined to being a duty for women while for men, it is a job that even provides them with descent pay. Research shows that men make up for 80-90% of chefs while women hold only 10% of executive chef positions, earning nearly 22% less as against their male counterparts. As a result, the stereotypical male-dominated kitchen culture has led to females pursuing alternative career choices.

The majority of students in cooking classes are girls, yet very few can be found in industry roles. This needs to change and more women need to be empowered to take up this line of work professionally and not just be restricted to their home kitchens. Though the number of women is gradually rising in the cooking industry, there is still a lot left for betterment. There needs to be a focus on support and empowerment of the fairer sex, not only for the sake of the future generation of women chefs but for cooking and baking to move forward as an emerging industry. As long as women are confined to the kitchen and continue to serve food as part of their duty in their homes, the present scenario will not change, and the industry will never be able to introduce diversity in the field. Very few female chefs manage to create their own niche in the high-end Indian hotels, restaurants, and chefs due to the work environment dominated by men. Women deserve real support as they move from home cooks to full professional chefs. They should get the chance to build their skills and show what they can do, just like men already do in the field.

Surveys suggest that women generally prefer sweet dishes like chocolates, pastries, cakes, candies, and tarts. Men are taken to prefer cosy food, such as non-vegetarian meals, pasta, and beverages as well. Women are often connected to femininity and foods like salads and desserts. On the other hand, men are associated with masculinity - with meats. This concept of associating genders with specific foods tends to further perpetuate the gender division in the culinary roles.

Women handle cooking, caregiving, child rearing, and looking after the whole household. They do it all without getting paid for any of it. That makes sense in a way, since it is their everyday role. Everyone expects them to meet those family standards no matter what. Pressure from home builds up, and work rules do not help either. Long hours on the job make it tough. That is why only few women end up as chefs. They need encouragement to reach their full potential. A better setting at work can help them grow and thrive.

Societal expectations shape what people think men and women should do in terms of behaviours, roles, and duties. These ideas about gender roles change a lot depending on the culture or the era. Basically, gender roles come from how individuals, groups, and whole societies expect certain things from people just because of their biological sex. All this ties back to each society's core values and beliefs around gender. In a way, these roles emerge from the back and forth between people and their surroundings.

In order to grasp gender roles fully, one needs to get the idea of gender itself. The word gender often gets mixed up with sex, but they mean separate things. Gender acts as a social label, while sex points to biology. Sex gets defined by a person's main physical traits at birth. Gender involves the ideas, worth, and qualities that folks attach to being male or female. Ann Oakley back in 1972 helped clarify this split as one of the early social scientists doing so. She explained that gender mirrors the natural split into male and female, yet it adds layers of how society splits and values traits like masculinity or femininity. Put differently, people build

gender through social means, in their dealings with each other and the world around them. Still, it draws strongly from real biological gaps between males and females. Since society crafts gender this way, experts call it a social construction. This shows up clearly when you see how groups assign specific qualities, positions, or importance to someone solely due to their sex. Those assignments shift from one culture to another, or even change over years in the same place.

Considering the historical contexts, various societies designated particular duties for women within the realm of food preparation. Gender norms typically positioned them as the main caretakers of cooking and home management. This linkage between women and kitchen expertise became embedded in cultural practices and social expectations. Women were generally required to handle household chores like family meals. Such patterns fostered the belief that they possess an innate aptitude for culinary activities. Norms and traditions strengthened the notion that women ought to master home-based work, particularly cooking. Socialization often begins early, teaching girls these skills as core to their future positions. Contemporary homes still reflect this tendency. Girls receive instruction aimed at preparing them as effective spouses or family members later on. Malayalam movies such as *Jo and Jo* or *The Great Indian Kitchen*, highlight these elements through ironic lenses.

Recipes and cooking methods transmit from mothers and grandmothers to their daughters across numerous cultures. This process carries a sense of honour in many cases. Yet passing such heritage to sons rarely enters consideration. Knowledge transfer across generations tends to remain exclusive to female lines. Women have consistently held key positions in communal gatherings and social functions centred on meals. Food making forms a vital part there. These roles have deepened the connection drawn between women and proficiency in the kitchen.

Traditional ties linking women to cooking abilities represent constructed social patterns. They have faced questioning and shift throughout history. Women contributed substantially to food customs in diverse communities. Still, acknowledging varied personal aptitudes, preferences, and professional paths proves crucial, irrespective of gender. As views in society progress, greater recognition emerges for dismantling restrictive stereotypes based on sex.

Culinary skills now form a respected profession with broad diversity in roles and paths. This field blends art and science in food preparation. Professionals find openings across food and beverage sectors. Those passionate about food encounter varied chances. The industry keeps changing with fresh trends, tech advances, and worldwide touches. It stays lively and appealing for anyone entering culinary arts.

Diversity in gender brings fresh views and ways to the field. It boosts creative sparks, new ideas, and better food experiences overall. Attention turns from gender to real skill and talent. Pros and places honour merit no matter the gender. Still, hurdles linger like pay gaps, harassment at work, and lacking family support rules. Fixing these matters for true openness. Progress happens, but more effort needs doing for fair chances and treatment across genders. Ongoing pushes against old views, plus guidance and fixing deep problems, will build a fuller, varied industry.

There are few names that stand out as beacons of gastronomic excellence in this world that tantalizes our taste buds with culinary wonders. One among those culinary wonders, Chef Sanjeev Kapoor needs no introduction and has become a household name. With his captivating television presence, iconic recipes, and a zest for innovation, Kapoor has not only won the hearts of millions but has built a large fortune with his exceptional talents that places him among the wealthiest chefs globally.

Born and raised in a humble household in Ambala, India, Sanjeev Kapoor's journey began with the aroma of spices wafting through his family's kitchen. His fascination with flavours and textures sparked a deep-rooted passion for cooking, leading him to enrol in the prestigious Institute of Hotel Management in Pusa, New Delhi. Armed with a diploma in Hotel Management, Kapoor ventured into the world of culinary arts, where he would leave an indelible mark.

Kapoor's breakthrough moment came when he was chosen to host the immensely popular cooking show, "Khana Khazana." His captivating screen presence, coupled with his ability to demystify complex recipes, made him an instant hit with viewers across India. Kapoor's warm and accessible style of presenting not only made cooking enjoyable but also ignited a passion for culinary exploration in households across the nation.

Sanjeev Kapoor's entrepreneurial spirit took flight beyond the television screen. He established his own production company, "Turmeric Vision Pvt. Ltd.," which gave birth to an array of successful cooking shows. These shows propelled Kapoor's popularity to new heights and laid the foundation for a culinary empire that would redefine the industry.

Sanjeev Kapoor's entrepreneurial journey did not stop at television. He expanded his horizons to encompass various ventures that reflected his unwavering dedication to culinary excellence. Kapoor launched his line of cookware, "Wonderchef," which quickly became a household name, catering to the needs of both professional and home chefs. Additionally, he established "Sanjeev Kapoor Restaurants," a chain of fine dining establishments spanning the globe, each offering a symphony of flavours crafted by the maestro himself.

Sanjeev Kapoor's remarkable journey from a small-town boy with a passion for cooking to becoming one of the richest chefs in the world is a testament to the power of dedication, creativity, and an unwavering pursuit of excellence. Kapoor's ability to captivate audiences with his unique blend of culinary expertise and relatable charm has transformed him into a global icon, leaving an indelible mark on the culinary world.

Chef Suresh Pillai is the grandmaster of the 64 squares, if cooking was a game of chess. This is the saga of a small-time cook who chased his dreams and made the right moves to stamp his authority on the culinary world. Chef Suresh Pillai, today's special ambassador of Kerala cuisine to the world and Super Master Chef to over 1.7 million of his social media followers, has not lost that simplicity of an Island boy from the banks of the Ashtamudi lake in Kollam, Kerala. The life journey of Suresh Pillai, who has studied only up to class X, is an inspiration to all to face challenges head on with grit and determination. From being a hotel waiter, Suresh Pillai climbed the gastronomical ladder with elegance and his genuineness took him to the popular MasterChef cookery show of BBC and to the University of the Bahamas to give an insight into the cuisines of

Kerala. He currently runs multiple restaurants and has a large number of social media followers who swear by his delectable meals. However, he came from a humble background and worked odd jobs to get to where he is today, as do many successful people.

Chef Pillai's entrepreneurial journey began in sixth or seventh grade when he discovered a pomelo tree at home, which quickly became his favorite childhood fruit. In order to earn some pocket money, he would wake up at 5 a.m. to pluck pomelos and sell them at the market for 25 paise per piece, or 4/5 for a rupee. The sight of a few one-rupee notes brought him immense joy and a sense of accomplishment. As we trace his childhood, memories of going to the Panakkattodil Devi Temple for the festival surfaced. What started as a simple visit soon turned into another source of pocket money. He began selling roasted, whole groundnuts during the festival. He would take the government ferry to Kollam town, purchase 2 to 3 kilograms of raw groundnuts, roast them in sand, and sell them for a rupee each. To attract more customers, he strategically positioned himself near the fireworks, musical performances, and drama stage. This burning desire to do business, earn money, and achieve success led Chef Pillai to seize every opportunity that came his way.

Most of the celebrated chefs will not share the secret behind their signature dishes, though they have thousands of followers. But Suresh Pillai had no qualms while disclosing the magic behind his trump dish, 'Fish nirvana', and many, including non-Keralites, have successfully prepared the rich dish. When all were confined to their homes during the Covid 19 pandemic, chef Suresh Pillai and his preparations have, to borrow a term from filmdom, become blockbuster hits, that too hands down.

Suresh Pillai's secret to success is undoubtedly hard work and the resolve to chase dreams, and he has been doing this for the past 30 years, day in, day out. The celebrity chef is an inspiration in these trying times as he showed how to create opportunities out of crises. Lakhs of people are falling for the flavoursome 'fish nirvana' including many celebrities such as Team Indian player Virat Kohli and West Indies player Chris Gayle, and the stars of Bollywood.

Chef Pillai, like every Chef's dream of opening his very own restaurant, did this with astounding appreciation and feedback in Bengaluru, India's garden city and tech capital. Later Restaurant Chef Pillai or RCP extended its horizons to many prominent cities of India as well as abroad.

Chef Pillai's journey from being a catering boy to his present self serves as a testament to the power of perseverance and the willingness to seize opportunities. He emphasises the importance of starting, as everything will eventually work out.

Both Sanjeev Kapoor and Chef Suresh Pillai stand out as prominent Indian chefs. Evidence suggests that they may have encountered certain advantages in their careers simply because they are men. Still, success in the culinary field appears to depend on a mix of talent, skills, hard work, and available opportunities. Gender alone does not determine outcomes. Several factors could explain aspects of Sanjeev Kapoor's rise in the profession. Cultural norms play a role in some settings. Traditional expectations or biases might favour male chefs in particular societies. That said, this pattern does not hold everywhere. Female chefs have reached impressive heights around the world. When examining the backgrounds of Chef Sanjeev Kapoor and Chef Suresh Pillai, it becomes clear they grew up in male-dominated environments. The patriarchal structures around them likely offered strong support for pursuing a culinary career. Networking chances have historically tilted towards men in the field. Male chefs often gained better access to mentorship and collaborations early on. For Sanjeev Kapoor and Suresh Pillai, this meant valuable guidance during their starting years. Perceptions of leadership could also factor in. Stereotypes sometimes link such qualities more to men. This bias might provide an edge in professional scenarios. Those common views helped lay the groundwork for their advancements in cooking. Media coverage has tended to spotlight male chefs more in the past. Such attention boosts visibility and opens doors. The spotlight on Sanjeev Kapoor or Chef Pillai often exceeds what many female counterparts receive. Things are changing, though. The industry grows more inclusive over time. Traditional roles add another layer. In certain societies, home cooking falls to women. Yet professional kitchens have long been led by men. For example, a boy cooking at home draws praise from all. A girl doing the same often gets overlooked as routine. This tendency could position male chefs like Sanjeev Kapoor to challenge gender norms in fresh ways. These advantages remain tied to specific contexts. They do not apply in every case. The culinary world evolves steadily. More women now overcome obstacles and earn acclaim for their expertise. Talent, innovation, and commitment matter most for any success. Gender fades as the key element.

Visibility for people identifying as third gender in cooking remains low, much like in other areas. That group covers non-binary folks, genderqueer identities, and similar non-conforming ones. Challenges around acceptance and recognition hit hard in industries like this. Growing recognition of varied genders is pushing things forward. Efforts aim to build more welcoming spaces in professions, including food work. Certain culinary programs and groups push diversity hard. Inclusivity gets real focus there. Third gender individuals still run into specific hurdles, like biases from society or fixed ideas about roles. No one from that group has gained fame on the level of Sanjeev Kapoor or Suresh Pillai yet.

Considering recent years, a noticeable positive change has emerged in the culinary field. Recognition of chefs' talents and skills seems to cut across gender lines more than before. Efforts aimed at questioning old gender norms have pushed for wider inclusivity overall. Visibility for female and non-binary chefs keeps rising in places like media outlets, television programs, and food related publications. Such greater presence works to question long held stereotypes. It plays a part in eroding those gender related obstacles too. Still, even with these steps forward, traces of bias and outdated views could hang on in some areas. Lingering ideas about what women or non-binary people should do in busy professional kitchens might surface now and then. Men have long filled most top leadership spots in this industry. That pattern held strong for quite a while. Now though, awareness grows around the strong leadership skills that chefs of different genders bring to the table. Steps continue to open up fair chances for everyone to move up the ranks. Groups and people across the sector push hard for more diversity and open doors. Specific programs step in to back chefs no matter their gender. They offer things like guidance from mentors, chances to connect with others, and practical tools to build real success.

Experiences in the culinary field can differ quite a bit from one person to another. Plenty of successful chefs who are female or non-binary earn real respect in their work. The industry seems to be moving toward greater inclusion over time. It recognizes that skill

and enthusiasm for cooking do not belong to just one gender. Efforts continue to push back against old stereotypes. These same efforts build diversity in meaningful ways. All of this helps form a fairer space. That space supports chefs no matter their gender.

Society often sees women as primary nurturers and caretakers, no matter their other roles. This view makes it hard for them to gain acceptance in the male-dominated field of professional cooking. Employers, customers, colleagues, and even the women chefs themselves struggle to recognize female talent as equal, or sometimes superior, in such a fast-paced and competitive environment. Media portrayals that favour male chefs as superior continue to sideline women. This does harm not just to those female professionals but to the entire culinary industry. Evidence clearly shows how media, through articles, television programs, and award events, reinforces outdated gender stereotypes. To tackle this problem and achieve real equality and fairness in kitchens, addressing media influence stands as an essential starting point. Advertisements on Indian television often depict men complaining about their wives cooking without taking action themselves. Meanwhile, male celebrities receive praise for similar efforts. Such patterns have become deeply ingrained in cultural norms. These norms must shift now. Skills like cooking ought not to divide along gender lines. Everyone deserves encouragement to learn cooking basics, beyond just girls. Not every dish needs to mimic a lavish five-star menu with multiple courses. Grasping fundamentals, following recipes, and showing willingness to improve suffice well enough.

Instead of praising men lavishly for cooking, a task viewed simply as a practical skill, while demanding it routinely from women, a balanced approach seems necessary. All genders should gain proficiency in cooking and household duties alike. Promoting kitchen involvement for every child proves acceptable and beneficial. Treating cooking as a core life skill requires urgent societal adjustment. The kitchen forms no isolated bubble. It connects deeply with broader social elements, including race and class dynamics. Examining intersectionality reveals intricate layers. Cultural traditions, economic backgrounds, and gender norms all converge to shape experiences in culinary settings.

Looking ahead, gender balance in kitchens appears more promising than before. Ongoing efforts toward diversity and inclusion will likely prevail. These changes prioritize talent and dedication over traditional biases. Professional spaces may evolve into equitable arenas. Home cooking could likewise escape old stereotypes, promoting responsibility across households.

Gender roles in the kitchen have transformed dramatically over time. This history includes moments of bold change and steadfast endurance. The story remains unfinished. Each prepared meal reflects shifting societal patterns. Continued efforts will help craft a future where kitchens welcome all participants, free from gender constraints.

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