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Cooking Across Generations: Food, Respectability and Shared Housing in Sylhet

Priya Narayanan, Mei Lin Tan, Imran Siddiqui, Maliha Islam
University of Hyderabad, India; National University of Singapore, Singapore; Quaid-i-Azam University, Pakistan; University of Rajshahi, Bangladesh

Abstract

Shared kitchens are important sites where changing household arrangements become visible in everyday life. This ethnographic study explores how three generations negotiate food preparation and respectability in shared houses in Sylhet. Fieldwork involved repeated visits to 18 households over eleven months, 47 life-history interviews, and participant observation during shopping, cooking, and religious celebrations. Thematic analysis traced disagreements over meal timing, purchased ingredients, and the allocation of kitchen labour. Younger women used paid work schedules to negotiate shorter cooking routines, while older relatives treated some collective meals as evidence of household continuity. Men increasingly purchased prepared food but rarely assumed responsibility for planning daily meals. These negotiations produced partial changes in authority without a uniform decline in intergenerational dependence. The analysis shows how domestic cooperation can accommodate contested expectations of appropriate behaviour. Access through women household members made some private disagreements among men less visible. Housing and care research should therefore attend to the kitchen as a shared space in which time, recognition, and obligations are continually renegotiated.

Keywords: food practices, intergenerational relations, domestic labour, shared housing, Sylhet

1. Introduction

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2. Methods

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