

Getting down to Brass tacks

The emptied loft and other fads or fallacies

Sometimes, between staying contemporary, not treasuring the traditional and an innate, obsessive need to belong to ever changing times and trends leaves our lofts emptied of treasures. And lives bereft of beauty. How many of us or the generation just before us, plead guilty of having proudly discarded beautiful old traditional brass, bronze, copper and tin cookware, favouring the new invaders - plastics, expensive plastics, branded but same old plastics; teflons, non-sticks, light metal woks and all things as far removed as possible from our tradition? You too? Come, let's meet and whine together. It's time now to pay ten times more to get the same stuff back home. Yes. It's all trending, now, you see!

Why did we throw away good stuff? Same reason we stopped all healthy practices. To ape the alien and save time. In other words, live at ease. Who had the time, energy or inclination to scrub brass pots and pans with scouring sand, tamarind or lime with rock salt? And weren't scientists and the developed countries talking about the toxic effects of most of what we've done for ages?

Times have changed again. Full circle. Brass is back. and, well costs it's value now. It's time to bring out the old or ring in the new. Let's take a look at what's haute and happening on the kitchen shelves now.



Distinct shapes, styles, alloys and utility — to the north and south of the Vindhyas

Spotting the difference isn't hard. Traditional cuisine across our vast country varies. Any wonder that our utensils can hardly be identical? Needless to state, of course, just as our diverse food conforms to our land and its seasons, our utensils are crafted to suit the myriad cooking styles and cultures that make up the food fabric of India. These, traditionally handcrafted with skill and love of the craft, slowly went the mass produced route. It is our blessing, however, there exist in every state of India, proud crafts persons that have handed over their ancestral knowledge and skill to a few. These diminishing numbers of artisans make the products more precious. And, we pay the price.



Ladles, scoops, spoons and strainers. What's cooking today? Slide it off a pan or griddle, sauté gently in a skillet, stir with gusto in an Indian wok... and when you're done, clean and hang to dry on an ornate scoop stand.

Vessels too in many a shape and size, vie for show space. Each pot or pan has a story or more to say - of heirlooms and heritage; traditions, customs, rituals and yes, rules too. There are ways to use, wash, dry and store. These are not use and throw. O no. On hindsight, thankfully, these are now keepsakes and collectibles.

There's the functional. And then there's the decorative. Neither can be ignored!

Who doesn't want to brag about grandma's elegant pitcher that houses a plant or exotic flower stalks today? Or the Uruli once used to condense milk or make offerings fit for the Gods, now artistically displaying fresh flowers in aromatic water? Plates, trays and tall 'lotas. Use as utensils. Or as decor. Coming down to Brass tacks, these lovelies are back. And here to stay. If you have heirlooms, lucky you. Don't discard them at whim. If you don't, acquire and write your own story. It will get richer with time.



Degree Kapi — or filter coffee, pressed fresh the Tamil way.

Lovingly roasted coffee seeds, heated to the right degree precariously close to the brink of browned and burnt, ground to the right degree of graininess to allow the best flavour to seep into the boiling hot water (yes, at a !00 degrees) as a decoction that flows drop by drop by earthy -rich -brown drop, through the unique coffee filter - the great south Indian coffee press — to make the most flavourful degree Kapi in the world. (Now you know why we stressed on the many 'degrees' that pay a part in this process.)

The divine decoction is mixed with hot milk and just the right amount of sugar (an option) and poured in and out of the 'dabara tumbler' - our practical version of the cup and saucer- to get a gentle foam and the right temperature to linger and relish that divine potion. The South Indian ready mixed coffee - the degree Kapi par excellence.

