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## A MODERN FAMILY BUSINESS

By [currylife](https://www.currylife.uk/author/currylife/) (https://www.currylife.uk/author/currylife/) September 11, 2023

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**Bombay restaurant is run by a father and daughter team and there are ambitious plans for the**



Bombay Tandoori Restaurant in Leamington Spa is one of the longest-serving Indian restaurants in the town, having first opened its doors back in 1980. Despite the number of years it has been in business, it's not your typical, traditional curry house however, as it's currently managed by a woman – Iftahara Nisa Ahmed.

Moreover, as Iftahara says, the fact that she wears a hijab and works in a restaurant that serves alcohol, makes a different situation even more unusual. She only joined the business just under six years ago (it was originally opened by her uncle and then run by other family members), and she now works alongside her father, who is the restaurant chef.



## Girl power

“In the beginning, my dad was a bit hesitant, because I’m the first woman in my entire family from the fourth generation to ever work in a restaurant,” explains Iftahara. “My dad has quite a modern outlook though – he said I could try working there for two days a week and it will be fun, and I’m still here nearly six years later.”

Iftahara believes there should be more women working in the industry – Bombay employs three other women – one in the kitchen and two in front of house, and Iftahara says customers are often commenting on how it’s refreshing to see women working in an Indian restaurant.

“People like it – Indian restaurants [in the UK] have been around for so many years and you hardly see any women working in them,” says Iftahara. “We’ve got a traditional restaurant but it also has a progressive, modern outlook and we have quite a few family and friends with restaurants, and their daughters are working there too. I couldn’t actually imagine myself anywhere else – I’m very invested in the business. If you ask my colleagues, they’ll tell you how passionate I am about the restaurant.”

## A warm welcome

This passion extends not just to the food, service and smooth running of the restaurant, but to each and every customer. Bombay wants diners to feel welcomed from the moment they walk into the restaurant, as if they are part of one big family.





“We always want them to see a friendly face – our customers say it is like walking into someone’s home,” says Iftahara. “Even when we have new staff joining, we tell them to go and speak to the customers and be friendly. We have so many customers who have been coming in since the 1980s.”

Restaurant staff are very knowledgeable when it comes to the regulars' food and drink orders, to the point that they enjoy a bit of conversation before serving customers' favourite dishes.

"Knowing the customer's drinks order or whether they want papadums – it's a simple thing really but customers are really happy and receptive that we've remembered these details," adds Iftahara. "Our client base is so loyal that they help to spread our name around and strengthen our reputation. We've had diners from Cambridge and Oxford who tell us the restaurant has been recommended to them."

In an industry that is facing some of its toughest challenges yet, with increased costs having led to many closures in the curry house sector, it's these customers who keep Iftahara motivated day in and day out.

"The loyal diners and the fact that we are busy on Fridays and Saturdays – this is when all the adrenaline kicks in – we've also got a great team," she acknowledges. "Without our customers, we wouldn't have the business we have today. It's because of them that we are still here 45 years later."

## Family support

Much of Bombay's success is also down to Iftahara's father – the restaurant went through some tough times in 2016, when her father decided to take over the running of the business.

"Everyone is amazed at where he has taken the business in the last six years," says Iftahara. "Before 2016, Bombay had reached a low point, it was starting to lose business. There is around a 10-year age gap between my uncle and my father and he came to the restaurant with an open mind and fresh ideas."

As an added bonus, Iftahara's father is also a decorator and painter, which enabled him to give the restaurant a much-needed makeover. In fact, he still does a refresh every few months, keenly aware of the benefits to the business. Both father and daughter have also made quite a few changes since joining, not all of which have been easy decisions to make.

They tackled the menu – not straight away however, but gradually, reducing the number of dishes, refining existing ones and adding new ones. They continue to revise the menu on a regular basis while retaining the classic dishes that customers love, as Iftahara says, 'diners will get bored otherwise'.

"Over the last six years, we've dealt with a number of issues, such as price increases – when I first started, the menu was quite cheap, now it is more reasonably-priced, but we did lose some customers," she says. "And there will always be others who still see the prices as expensive, particularly post-Covid and with the continued cost of living crisis."

While Iftahara does enjoy cooking, she leaves this part of the business to her father, who has been a skilled chef for more than two decades. He actually learnt the trade at Bombay in the 1990s, before moving on to another Indian restaurant, and then returning to Bombay. The restaurant's signature dishes include Chicken Tikka Akbari, featuring diced chicken tikka with mince meat in a hot scotch bonnet sauce, and Pasmishali Naga Special, chicken tikka prepared in a hot Naga sauce and garnished with potato straws and coriander. Iftahara does take a great interest in how the food tastes and looks, believing that food presentation and flavours are just as important as the cooking side.

## Ongoing challenges

"Many of the staff at Indian restaurants are from the same family, and it's a lot harder to recruit staff now than before," says Iftahara. "Family members are choosing to go into different sectors, they're doing graduate jobs – anything but working in a restaurant and attracting them is one of the biggest hurdles we

face. My dad has plenty of friends involved in restaurants and they all agree on this – most people seem to want to work from home or have a 9-5 job.”

Many of Bombay’s staff members are relatively new, having been there for between six months to a year, and retaining them is another challenge – Iftahara is all too aware that young people are keen to move onto new things on a regular basis.

For the present time, however, Iftahara has no plans to move on – in fact she is keen to take over the running of the business from her father and expand, with ambitions to open new branches of Bombay in the not too distant future.

### **Bombay Restaurant**

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[www.bombayleamington.co.uk](http://www.bombayleamington.co.uk)



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