Cooking and Baking Facilities

All cooking, baking and heating was done by firewood. All burned wood which was not reduced to ashes was saved for use as charcoal for making the Sammovar. For cooking and baking there was an oven, and for heating there were build-in warming places.

The oven was built into one side of the kitchen. The size of this kitchen was approximately 12 feet by 16 feet. The oven was approximately 4 feet in width, 8 feet in depth, and about 9 feet in height from the floor to ceiling. The six parts of this box-like oven can be described as follows: the floor and the ceiling of the box were 4 feet wide and about 8 feet deep and were on a level with the floor and ceiling of the kitchen. The front and back of the box were 4 feet wide and about 9 feet high. The back of the box was the rear of the oven, which rear was part of that wall of the kitchen which separated it from the dining room. The front of the box faced the kitchen. The two sides of the box were about 8 feet deep and 9 feet high. One of these sides was part of the 16 foot partition wall, and the other was opposite it in about one-third the kitchen width.

The front of this box had two openings, one at the very bottom, which was 3 feet in width and about 18 inches in height. The other opening began at about 4 feet from the kitchen floor and was of the same size as the lower opening. On a level with the opening which began about 4 feet from the kitchen floor was a floor in the oven built of brick or sheet iron. This floor was 4 feet wide and about 8 feet deep. Both openings reach into the entire depth of the oven.

The upper opening was partitioned into two compartments. The front compartment was about 2 feet deep and, of course, 4 feet wide. This part had the chimney to the roof. The other compartment was about 6 feet deep, 4 feet wide, and about 18 inches high. The two compartments were separated by a brick wall 4 feet wide. The front side of this wall was the chimney and the side inside the oven was about 18 inches high to the ceiling of the oven. This wall had an open arch in the center. An iron door sealed off the arch and separated the two compartments completely. The front compartment was used for daily cooking and the rear and larger compartment was used for baking.

I would heat the deeper compartment with wood until a very high temperature was reached. After that, I would remove all the coal and ashes from the deeper part of the oven with a long tool in the form of a rake or hoe. To make sure that the oven was sufficiently hot for baking, I would throw in a fresh piece of wood. If this flared up immediately (as was usually the case) I announced that the right temperature had been reached. My mother depended upon me for this.

To prevent the bread from burning or sticking to the floor of the oven, a long tool with a flat shovel in the front was dusted by mother with flour. On this flat part, which was oval, she placed a loaf of dough, and with this tool she shoved the bread into the deepest part of the oven. This she repeated until all the loaves were placed in the oven in rows. To make sure that the loaves were placed sufficiently apart from each other, mother would, from time to time, insert a candlestick holder with a burning candle into the oven so that by its light she could see that the loaves were properly spaced. After all the loaves had been shoved into the oven, the open arch between the front and rear compartments was sealed off to keep the heat from escaping.

Since the baking part of the oven was only about 18 inches high from the brick or iron floor bottom of the oven, there remained a space over the oven about 4 feet wide, 4 feet high, and 6 feet long. The remaining 2 feet of the length was taken up by the chimney in the front. This space was used as a bunk. To get to this bunk an opening about 3 feet wide to the ceiling of the oven was cut in the kitchen side of the oven wall and was used for sleeping in the winter and storing purposes in the summer. To get into this bunk the little children would be picked up and placed in it; the older children would either use a stool, which was available for this purpose, or would climb into and out of it.

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