# Inventing an Empire: The Role of Migration in the Fabrication of Curry in Colonial India and Legacies of Food Colonization

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**Introduction**

> They colonized us. Britain colonized us. We hated that. But now we have colonized them with our food. So, we paid them back." ---Madhur Jaffrey

A famous quip on the blandness of British food jokes that England conquered half the world for spices but has the audacity not to use any of them. While this might be true of traditional British cuisine, the cross-cultural exchanges caused by colonialism have heavily influenced the modern food culture in the United Kingdom. European colonization ushered in an unprecedented level of migration, as explorers, exiles, enslaved peoples, laborers, immigrants, and conquerors crossed geographical and cultural boundaries to engage in and escape colonialism. When people traveled to new places due to colonialism, whether willingly or unwillingly, they brought their cultures with them. In this complex process of cross-cultural exchange, both native people and outsiders imposed, incorporated, and adopted elements of each other's cultures. The result of this two-way exchange of colonialism was significant transformations to the culture of both the colonized and the colonizer.

This paper contends that the "curry culture" in the UK today is a result of Indian food culture being exported in various forms by both British colonizers and the Indian people they colonized. Before the British East India Company, India's first British Colonizers, arrived, there was no such thing as curry or Indian food; there were only varying regional cuisines and local recipes.[1] The East India Company invented India as a political entity and, in the process, created Indian food as a category that could be exported along with the rest of India's commodities. These migrating British officers' initial

[1] Rohit Varman, "Curry," *Consumption Markets & Culture* 20, no. 4 (July 4, 2017): 350–1.

homogenization of regional food into Indian food shaped and defined future understandings of and modifications to cuisine from the subcontinent.[2] After the British Crown took over direct rule from the Company, another mass migration to India by white British women, known as *memsahibs,* resulted in the Anglicization of Indian food.[3] By combining their culinary knowledge with recipes from the subcontinent and the homogenized version of Indian food already fabricated by the Company, these women further adapted Indian food to meet a British/Anglican palate. After the end of colonialism and the chaos of independence, many Indians living in former British territories across South Asia and East Africa migrated to the United Kingdom. When Indian women immigrants saw the homogenized and Anglicized version of Indian food eaten in the UK, they resisted these colonial transformations by re-authenticating British Indian cuisine. This paper argues that the result of these waves of homogenization, Anglicization, and re-authentication was neither British nor Indian but a unique hybridized cuisine.

An examination of these three waves of migration reveals that the accompanying transformations to Indian food resulted from colonialism and a combination of the colonizer's notions of cultural superiority and the colonized's resistance to those beliefs. Informing the East India Company and *memsahib's* fabrication of curry and colonialism more broadly was the British belief that they were the epitome of civilization. They justified their modifications to local cultures by arguing that, as the most advanced country, it was their right and responsibility to bring civility and modernity to the savage and uncivilized peoples of the world. British colonial rule in India imposed societal values and hierarchies that positioned white, affluent British men at the top while relegating Indian women, lower-caste communities, and impoverished populations to the margins, reinforcing racial, gender, and class inequalities within the colonial structure. Within this hierarchy, Indian people were seen as inferior to British people and as needing help from their supposed betters. Theories of Social Darwinism and the origins of an Aryan race gave scientific and historical justifications for British and Aryan supremacy, which contributed to the British dismissal of Indians and their

[2] Varman, "Curry," 354.

[3] Barbara D. Metcalf and Thomas R. Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India* (New York, United States: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 100-2.

culture.[4] In this environment, they felt justified in modifying Indian food into its "best" form.[5] Because they believed North Indians and the British had common Aryan ancestors from the Middle East, the British began to favor the generally lighter people and Middle Eastern-influenced food from northwest India.

This paper explores how these colonial hierarchies and race theories informed the EIC and *memsahib's* favoritism towards foods of the northwest region and their homogenization of Indian food based upon their "superior" British palates. Mirroring their homogenization of the various native cultures, lands, and languages of the subcontinent, their transformation of Indian food served as proof of colonialism's civilizing effects. They argued that they had unified the subcontinent into India in the same way they combined all saucy foods of the subcontinent into curry. The EIC's exportation of curry and curry powder as a commercial good proved that they had turned an uncivilized cultural element into something profitable and digestible. An examination of the specific food modifications by the EIC shows that the economic and cultural goals of the British Empire relied on these supremacist notions of civilization, modernity, and progress.[6] *Memsahibs*, who were usually British officers' wives, further reinforced these supremacist ideals of colonialism in their cookbooks by solidifying curry recipes and making their own modifications. Because their husbands and British society expected *memsahibs* to uphold British class, race, and gender hierarchies while in India, they felt empowered to control the domestic sphere.[7] These women had agency in deciding which elements of Indian cuisine to allow into their homes and how they would modify the dishes for their cookbooks. While they continued to favor northwestern Indian food, they also incorporated more English elements into the cuisine than the EIC members had and were responsible for much of the Anglicization of Indian food. Upon their return to England, *memsahibs* combined English ingredients with the modified Indian recipes from their colonial experience to create a new cuisine known as Anglo-Indian. The East India Company and *memsahib's* fabrication of curry and the invention of Anglo-Indian cuisine provided evidence for the "fixing" of subcontinent food, which reinforced the belief that the colonial enterprise was a positive civilizing force.

In the post-colonial era, women Indian immigrants to the United Kingdom resisted British society's dominant colonial narratives and their manifestation in Anglo-Indian cuisine and curry culture. These women came directly from the Indian subcontinent or other former British

[4] Romila Thapar, "The Theory of Aryan Race and India: History and Politics," *Social Scientist* 24, no. 1/3 (1996): 4.
[5] Joan Leopold, "British Applications of the Aryan Theory of Race to India, 1850-1870," *The English Historical Review* 89, no. 352 (1974): 594-5.
[6] Leopold, "British Applications of the Aryan Theory of Race to India, 1850-1870," 599.
[7] Alison Blunt, "Imperial Geographies of Home: British Domesticity in India, 1886-1925," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 24, no. 4 (1999): 426.

colonies in East Africa. During the height of colonialism, these women migrated throughout the colonial empire with their families in hope of better opportunities, but no matter where they went in the empire, colonial beliefs of superiority still relegated them to positions as second-class citizens.[8] These colonial legacies were apparent in the northwestern and Anglicized version of Indian food that was common across the UK.[9] However, this paper argues that instead of being passive victims of colonialism or ignoring the prejudices Indian people faced, Indian women actively sought to resist colonial legacies in food by reshaping and re-authenticating the Indian food people ate in the UK. This paper further attests that by publishing their own cookbooks, these immigrants highlighted the diversity of food from across the subcontinent and showed the essential seasonings, cooking techniques, and ingredients that made up Indian food. By showing what authentic Indian food was and reaffirming its cultural importance, they worked to disprove the notion that the creation of curry and Anglo-Indian food was a positive effect of colonialism. The reshaping of the British and globalized understandings of authentic Indian food by women Indian immigrants in the post-colonial era disrupted the colonial narratives that centered the domination of the "civilized" over the "savage" and the "modern" over the "traditional." Today, Indian food in the UK is an amalgamation of the homogenized northwestern and Anglicized version created by the British colonizers and the authentic version Indian women immigrants re-introduced in the post-colonial era.

[8] Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, *The Settler's Cookbook: A Memoir of Love, Migration, and Food* (London: Granta Publications, 2012), 80.

[9] Madhur Jaffrey, *An Invitation to Indian Cooking* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), xvii

**Background**

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Figure 1: India States and Union Territories Map

The British homogenization of the Indian subcontinent's diverse cultures, lands, and languages was part of their process of administrative categorization that sought to

[10] India States and Union Territories Map (Geology.com, 2018). This is a contemporary map of the current political divisions of India.

reframe the existing forms of pre-colonial political and social control in a racialized manner. The various pre-colonial Hindu, Turkish, Afghan, and Mughal rulers of the subcontinent combined their cultural influence with that of the locals for thousands of years and through pragmatic power-sharing, localized governance structures, and alliances, a high degree of diversity was allowed to exist.[11] The last rulers of the subcontinent before British colonialism were the Mughals, a group of Muslim conquerors who had migrated from the Middle East and entered India from the gap between the Hindu Kush and Himalayan mountains.[12] The Mughal rulers in the 13th through 17th centuries ruled almost the entire subcontinent from their seat of power in Delhi while maintaining the cultural diversity that the interactions between previous conquerors and native peoples had created. The level of direct influence from Muslim rulers on local cultures varied by region, with those in the northwest having the most direct contact due to their proximity to the capital. The diversity of the subcontinent was enabled by the style of Mughal rule whereby a "king of kings" (known as a Shah or Emperor) was the head of the Empire and ruled via a hierarchy of local governors.[13] These governors were in charge of their regional kingdoms but owed allegiance to the Emperor and paid them taxes. Because the Mughals allowed many established regional powers to maintain elements of independent rule, this system resulted in an ethnically and religiously diverse ruling class united by their loyalty to the Emperor. However this system of pluralism was often hierarchical, with systems like caste classifications, religious stratification, and regional power dynamics shaping the extent to which diversity was genuinely embraced as opposed to merely tolerated for administrative convenience. When the British first arrived on the subcontinent, their understanding of Indian culture was complicated by the internal diversity of Mughal society and the challenges of learning how to interact with people from a wide variety of religious, linguistic, and regional cultures.[14] In order to effectively govern, they responded to this diversity by entrenching many social categories such as caste and religion, while continuing the existing processes of political centralization, albeit with greater institutional rigidity and racialized hierarchies.

British conceptions of race and their own superiority informed how they viewed the diverse Mughal society and the peoples of the Indian subcontinent. Social Darwinism emerged as the leading theory in the late 19th century that explained the differing levels of "civilization" between races. While Darwin's theory focused on biological evolution, Social Darwinists

[11] Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, 17.
[12] Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, 16.
[13] Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, 17.
[14] Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, 25.

misappropriated his ideas to justify racial hierarchies, colonialism, and imperial domination. Because of the broader historical evolution influenced by these emerging schools of thought, religious prejudices and economic motives, the theory that darker races had evolved less than the lighter ones and were scientifically and genetically inferior was compelling.[15] This belief was reinforced by European colonialism because they saw their conquests of "lesser races" as further proof that Europeans were superior. Aryan race theory connected these conceptions of scientific race with historical interpretation and linguistics. The basis of this theory was that there was originally an Aryan homeland in Central Asia where they spoke the first of the Indo-European languages that was the common ancestor to Sanskrit and Greek. Over the centuries, these Aryans migrated in two directions: one towards Europe and the other to modern-day Iran. In a second split, some of the Aryans in Iran entered into and settled in the northwest area of the Indian subcontinent and developed Sanskrit.[16] These British scholars were careful to explain that this shared Aryan ancestry did not make Indians equal to them because the native tribes of the subcontinent had corrupted the culture of Asian Aryans. They argued that the blood, societies, and non-Indo-European languages of the darker non-Aryans on the subcontinent overtook that of the pure Aryans and infected them with barbarism and superstition. They also blamed the physical environment and excessive heat of the subcontinent for the darkening of Asian Aryan skin and their supposedly stagnant, unhistorical, and introspective societies.[17]

The British government justified their conquest and occupation of India with the Aryan race theory by arguing that they were bringing civilization back to the Aryans who had lost it. Samuel Laing, a British lawyer and member of Parliament, highlighted the connection between Aryan race theory and colonialism in his Lecture on the Indo-European Languages and Races given in Calcutta in 1862:

> "After centuries of civil wars and utterly alien Turkish and Mogul dynasties, India is at length reunited into a great empire, under a sovereign of the purest Arian[18] blood.... What, then, can the most patriotic Hindoo wish for better than that his country should, at any rate, for several generations, until its education as a nation is further advanced, continue part of the greatest and most glorious of Arian empires, under the benevolent rule

[15] Thapar, "The Theory of Aryan Race and India," 4.
[16] Thapar, "The Theory of Aryan Race and India," 5.
[17] Leopold, "British Applications of the Aryan Theory of Race to India, 1850-1870," 594-5.
[18] "Arian" is the older English spelling of "Aryan"

> of the best of living Sovereigns and her illustrious descendants."[19]

Laing held the predominant belief among British officials that colonizing India was their prerogative and that this modernity "was destined to be spread by Great Britain, the most progressive, most imperialistic and therefore most Aryan nation."[20] This idea that the British were the most advanced, seeped into every aspect of their colonization plan and informed their interactions with peoples and cultures of the subcontinent.

The British also applied the hierarchy of Aryan race theory to Indian food, which impacted their preferences for particular regional cuisines. The vast diversity of food cultures across the subcontinent meant that the British had to choose which elements of Indian cuisine to export. In her cookbook, *A Taste of India*, Madhur Jaffrey described the unique diversity of Indian cuisine that was unable to be replicated in the West:

> "From childhood onwards, an Indian is exposed to more combinations of flavors and seasonings than perhaps anyone else in the world. Our cuisine is based on this variety, which, in flavors, encompasses hot-and-sour, hot-and-nutty, sweet-and-hot, bitter-and-hot, bitter-and-sour, and salty-and-sweet; in seasonings, it stretches from the freshness and sweetness of highly aromatic curry leaves to the dark pungency of the resin asafetida, whose earthly aroma tends to startle westerners just as much as the smell of a strong, ripe cheese does Indians."[21]

The ingredients and flavor profiles in the food that the British East India Company officers ate were often determined by the region they were in and who they were eating with. Their preferences for foods from certain regions were informed by both the Aryan race theory and where the centers of power were in colonial India. An examination of the distinct cuisines of the subcontinent from the northwest, northeast, central west, and southern tip regions indicates the diversity of Indian cuisine and which region's foods were preferred by the British.[22]

The British preferred the food of the northwest more than the other three regions because its cuisine was seen as familiar and had the most Middle Eastern and perceived Aryan influence. The major states of the northwest region included Kashmir in the far north, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Madhya Pradesh, with the main culinary center being the former

[19] Samuel Laing, "Lecture on the Indo-European Languages and Races" (Calcutta, I862), 21.
[20] Leopold, "British Applications of the Aryan Theory of Race to India, 1850-1870," 599.
[21] Madhur Jaffrey, *A Taste of India* (London: Pavilion, 1985), 10-11.
[22] Due to the frequently changing borders in this period I will be using the contemporary divisions and names of India states.

Mughal capital of Delhi. Dishes in this region incorporated Turkish, Afghan, and Mughal cooking techniques and flavor profiles brought by previous Indian conquerors. For example, *samosas* filled with peas and potatoes were derived from Middle Eastern pastries that originally contained lamb, nuts, and dried fruit.[23] Food in this region was also quite hearty and often contained cream or dairy, whole nuts, and dried fruits. *Kormas* were a typical Mughlai-style dish in this region that contained a creamy, aromatic sauce with nuts. These creamy and meat heavy dishes appealed to the European diet and were often readily accessible due to the prevalence of colonial administrative centers in the region. The staple breads of this region also included some of the most internationally well-known oven-baked Indian breads such as *naan* (a leavened wheat bread made with yeast) and *roti* (a non-leavened bread).[24] Because the British preferred northwest Indian food due to these practical, cultural, and racial factors, they based much of their homogenized version of Indian food on these dishes.

To a lesser extent, the British also incorporated some culinary traditions from northeast India because Bengal contained the capital of British Raj's India, Calcutta (now Kolkata). This region also included states east of Uttar Pradesh and the Ganges River Delta area. One of the essential elements of this region's cuisine was freshwater fish from the Ganges. The type and quality of fish were as crucial as the style of preparation and whether the fish was "steamed, fired, smoked, made into balls and patties, or even studded into creamy green coconuts and baked."[25] The food in this region also tended to be less spicy, which the British and their sensitive palates appreciated. However, this did not mean these dishes were devoid of spices; as a staple in many Bengali dishes, mustard seeds were required "to do triple duty- as an oil; as a popped, nutty seed; and as a fiery seed paste."[26] The ability to extract distinct flavors from the same spice using different techniques was one of the cornerstones of Indian cookery and was often overlooked by the British people seeking to replicate these dishes.

Food from further south in the central-west region was not incorporated into Anglo-Indian cuisine by the British because it was seen as unappealing, unfamiliar, and having too much influence from the darker-skinned people of the subcontinent. The central-west region encompassed the states of Gujarat and Maharashtra along the coast of the Arabian Sea and was centered in the city of Mumbai/Bombay. Middle Eastern-style wheat breads were less prevalent in this region compared to rice and millet-based breads. Food from this region also tended to be sweeter and sourer than in other regions. One popular preparation of *dhal* involved

[23] Jaffrey, *A Taste of India*, 21.
[24] Jaffrey, *A Taste of India*, 34.
[25] Jaffrey, *A Taste of India*, 148.
[26] Jaffrey, *A Taste of India*, 150.

adding in jaggery (an unprocessed sugar made from pressed sugarcane) for sweetness and the rind of mangosteen-like fruit for sourness.[27] This sweet-sour flavor profile was a key element of many central-west dishes, an uncommon combination among the British and something they avoided incorporating into Anglo-Indian food.

The British overwhelmingly dismissed the unique culinary traditions of the southern tip of India because it was considered India's poorest, least developed, and least educated region. The negative perceptions of darker Indians and southern Indian cultures due to the belief that they corrupted Asian Aryans with their barbarism, along with the unfamiliarity of many of their dishes, meant that food from the states of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Kerala rarely made it into Anglo-Indian cuisine. In this region, heavily spiced and hot, fiery dishes were popular. The tropical environment meant that curry leaves, mangos, coconut (milk and flesh), and banana leaves were widely available and included in many of the region's signature dishes.[28] The people of this region also preferred rice and split peas over wheat breads. By expertly "grinding, pounding, fermenting, steaming, poaching and frying, these humble basic grains and split peas" can be turned into a wide variety of luxurious and delicious dishes.[29] In particular, the use of fermentation in many of the southern tip's dishes set it apart from the other regions. For example, *dosas* are a popular street food where you put different toppings into a fermented chickpea pancake. Other popular recipes include *idil*, a batter of fermented ground rice and split peas, and *appam*, a fermented rice flour pancake with a thick center and crispy edges.[30] Fermentation was seen as especially unhygienic and widely dismissed by the culinarily conservative Brits. The British viewpoint that the food culture in this region was too foreign, inferior, and "poor man's food" contributed heavily to their exclusion of fermentation and lentils/split peas from Anglo-Indian cuisine. Overall, British colonial preferences for Indian cuisine were shaped by a combination of familiarity, accessibility, and racial/cultural biases. Mughal-influenced northern dishes, which emphasized meat and mild spices, aligned more closely with British tastes and perceptions of refinement. In contrast, regional cuisines from southern and western India—often vegetarian, heavily spiced, or featuring unfamiliar ingredients—were less frequently incorporated into Anglo-Indian cuisine. Together racial prejudices, culinary conservatism, practical limitations, and class-based interactions with Indian elites resulted in a preference for North Indian food over South Indian food.

The British Crown justified its colonizing and administrative actions in India by framing them

[27] Jaffrey, *A Taste of India*, 83.
[28] Jaffrey, *A Taste of India*, 214.
[29] Jaffrey, *A Taste of India*, 193.
[30] Jaffrey, *A Taste of India*, 192.

through notions of British racial and cultural superiority, which were later reinforced by misinterpretations of Aryan race theory. While economic motives—such as resource extraction and trade dominance—were central to colonization, British officials increasingly framed their presence as a "civilizing mission" aimed at uplifting and modernizing the subcontinent. This narrative positioned British rule as a benevolent force bringing progress and order. The adaptation and simplification of Indian food into an exportable form, particularly through the creation of Anglo-Indian cuisine, became one way the British highlighted the supposed "benefits" of colonialism. By presenting Indian culinary traditions in a form palatable to European tastes, they reinforced their narrative of bringing modernity and refinement to India while simultaneously shaping global perceptions of Indian culture to align with colonial interests.

**Homogenization: The East India Company Setting the Stage (1600s- 1858)**

The first British imperialists who engaged in food and territorial homogenization were British East India Company officers who arrived on the subcontinent during the height of Mughal rule in the mid-17th century. The Company was a joint stock venture whereby they shared decision-making power with a 24-member "court of directors" and profits with other private investors, namely the British Crown.[31] The EIC was a mutually beneficial partnership because it allowed for shared responsibility and mitigated each party's risk. Because of the power of the Mughal Empire, the EIC had no hope of directly conquering and homogenizing territory and was forced to work within the established power structures. The EIC officers entered the Mughal courts and established personal and business relationships with powerful aristocrats and businessmen. By leveraging these relationships, "the Company's imports from India to Europe, worth some £ 360,000 in 1670, tripled in value over the subsequent thirty years and then doubled again to reach nearly 2 million pounds by 1740."[32]

As they got a taste for the level of profit that could be achieved, the Company began to shift from a trade role into a political one and used its position within the Mughal courts to expand its trading networks and territory. One way they advanced their economic goals was by securing the right to free trade in Bengal from the Mughal Emperor and using political and military pressure to gain revenue-collecting rights for the provinces of Bengal, Orissa, and Bihar in 1765.[33] By inserting themselves into the established systems of the Mughal Empire and gaining an official license to govern, the EIC was able to legitimize their exploitation of these territories.[34] By

[31] Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, 45.

[32] Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, 45.

[33] Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, 53.

[34] Amar Farooqui, "Governance, Corporate Interest, and Colonialism: The Case of the East India Company," *Social Scientist* 35, no. 9/10 (2007): 47.

leveraging this legitimacy, the Company expanded its influence and gained complete control of the Bengal Presidency, with East India Company employee Robert Clive serving as the first Governor-General from the capital of Calcutta. The economic benefit of the EIC's territorial consolidation and homogenization of the various regions of the Mughal empire into India was evidenced by their increased spice trade in the subsequent years. For example, in 1820, there were only 8,678 pounds of turmeric imported to England from India, but by 1841, that number had reached 26,468 pounds.[35]

Informing this drive for economic supremacy and homogenization were the Orientalist scholars, whose study of India's past helped create the Aryan race theory. The first scholars of Indian history in the West were British thinkers who studied ancient Sanskrit texts to determine the connections between this ancient ancestor and modern Indo-European languages, such as Hindi. Initially these scholars, known as Orientalists because they studied the East or "Orient," were mostly people fascinated by India's ancient civilizations. The Aryan migration theory emerged from these early Orientalists' linguistic studies, particularly around the recognition of shared roots between Sanskrit and European languages. The racialized interpretation of this theory developed later, especially in the 19th century, as European racial science and social Darwinism became more prominent. The notion of British superiority became more pronounced in this period as colonial governance solidified and British attitudes shifted toward portraying Indian culture as stagnant or inferior. This viewpoint reduced the people of the East into popular fictional representations that emphasized their exotic, primitive, uncivilized, irrational, and thus inferior nature. By positioning itself in contrast to this inferior image of the East, Western culture gained strength and identity around being modern, civilized, and rational.[36]

David Arnold, one of the founders of the Subaltern Studies Collective (a group of historians in the mid-20th century who worked to dismantle the colonist version of Indian history), coined the concept of the Orientalist "triptych" of Indian history and argued that this was the basis for the Orientalist outlook and Aryan race theory. The first part of the Orientalist's interpretation of Indian history claimed that the Aryans who migrated from Iran founded the once-great Hindu Indus Valley civilization that ruled the northwest region of the subcontinent between 4000-2000 BC, which was the height of Indian society.[37] The second part of this argument was that, after Islamic rulers came to the subcontinent, political life gave way to despotism and created a cultural, religious, and linguistic gap between 'native'

[35] Nupur Chaudhuri, "Shawls, Jewelry, Curry, and Rice in Victorian Britain," in *Western Women and Imperialism : Complicity and Resistance*, ed. Margaret Strobel and Nupur Chaudhuri (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 238.

[36] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, 1st Vintage Books ed (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 3.

[37] Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, xxvii.

Hindus and the invading Muslims. Finally, British colonial rule ushered in an end to the corrupt rule of the Mughals and brought enlightened leaders, modernity, and progress back to the subcontinent.[38] Arnold argues that this perspective emphasized a romanticized view of ancient Hindu civilization as the epitome of culture in the subcontinent and thus framed all history after that as a decline from Aryan greatness until the British intervened. In combination with Aryan race theory, this Orientalist viewpoint created an imagined version of Indian history that served to legitimize British colonization on the basis of their superiority and civilizing mission.

Because the Orientalist view of India emphasized the superiority of Western influence, the East India Company felt that its homogenization of Indian food into curry was part of the positive effects of colonialism. The EIC's creation of the term "curry" to mean all saucy foods from the subcontinent was a prime example of the homogenizing effects of British categorization driven by their economic goals and notions of superiority. The word "curry" itself was a British invention inspired by the Portuguese word *caril,* which referred to the broths that Indians made, and similar words in native languages such as *karee* (leaves used for seasoning) or *karhi* (a yogurt and gram flour dish).[39] "Europeans transformed these Indian words into curry and used it as a generic descriptor for all saucy Indian dishes. Such use of curry was considered a gross simplification, if not a downright degradation, of the variety of spices that Indians added to their foods."[40] Indians in India never ate any dish called curry at this time, so when the East India Company officers would eat curry, it was always a modified version of a local dish that their Indian cooks created to cater to the British palate. Disregarding the individual differences between dishes they were served and the broad diversity between the different regions' saucy dishes, the EIC officers continued to use the phrase curry and rice to describe the majority of dishes they were presented.[41] The homogenization of these regionally and culinarily diverse foods into the category of curry showed how the British attempted to organize concepts they didn't understand based on an Orientalist understanding of Indian history and culture.

In addition to the EIC's homogenization of saucy foods into curry, it fabricated curry powder to further the empire's economic goals and show its civilizing effect on Indian culture. The British needed a moniker to export their mix of spices, and so with the recent creation of curry in their minds, they used the term "curry powder" to describe any Indian spice mixture they exported. While the spices in curry powder varied widely,

[38] Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, 2-3.
[39] Varman, "Curry," 350.
[40] Varman, "Curry," 351.
[41] Stephanie R. Maroney, "'To Make a Curry the India Way': Tracking the Meaning of Curry Across Eighteenth-Century Communities," *Food and Foodways* 19, no. 1–2 (February 9, 2011): 125.

the majority contained at least turmeric, coriander, and cumin. Because the mixture was so inconsistent in this period, the exact compositions and amounts of each spice added were not well recorded by the EIC. One of the earliest known recipes for curry powder was written down in 1791 by Stephana Malcolm in her personal recipe book, likely due to the influence of her ten brothers, who all served as British officers. Her recipe contained the three staple spices of turmeric, ground coriander, and ground cumin, along with fenugreek seeds and cayenne pepper.[42] The variations in curry powder recipes indicated that the EIC was "incorporating not Indian food, but their own 'invention' of curry powder; a pattern not too different from the way in which India itself was ingested into Empire--for India as a contemporary political entity was fabricated through British rule, which replaced the masala of the Mughal empire and assorted princely states with the unitary signifier 'India,' much as British curry powder replaced local masalas."[43] This process of simultaneous cultural and political incorporation into the Empire was a prominent feature of the British style of colonization.

Another example of how these new dishes evolved from Indian food based on colonial British culinary preferences was the creation of mulligatawny soup. When the British East India Company members in Madras insisted on a "soup course" to start the meal, something that was not typical in India, their Tamil hosts decided to serve them *milagu tanni* or pepper water. Over time, Indian cooks fleshed out what was colloquially known as "curry soup," which contained a variety of vegetables and meats to accommodate British tastes. As this modified version of *milagu tanni* grew in popularity, the Englishmen's repeated mispronounced requests for it resulted in the soup's official name becoming mulligatawny.[44] The creation of mulligatawny soup demonstrated how Indian and British cultures interacted under colonialism to create dishes that were combinations of local cuisines and British tastes. The men of the East India Company became used to having their meals expertly cooked and modified to their specific preferences by Indian chefs. When they returned to England upon the completion of their service, they were left with a longing for dishes like mulligatawny soup but not the knowledge of how to cook them. This meant it was now up to their wives, sisters, and mothers to accommodate their newly expanded palates and cook them "Indian" dishes.[45] While the soup was originally invented by Tamil people on the southeast coast of India trying to appeal to British tastes, the actual recipe was solidified in cookbooks by women back in England.

[42] Stephana Malcolm, *Burnfoot House Recipe Book of Stephana Malcolm*, (Unpublished, 1791), 20.
[43] Uma Narayan, "Eating Cultures: Incorporation, Identity and Indian Food," *Social Identities* 1, no. 1 (February 1995): 63–86.
[44] Modhumita Roy, "Some Like It Hot: Class, Gender and Empire in the Making of Mulligatawny Soup," *Economic and Political Weekly* 45, no. 32 (2010): 66.
[45] Roy, "Some Like It Hot," 67.

As British women began solidifying these recipes, mulligatawny soup and curry became a signature dish of this exported version of Indian cuisine. The earliest recipe for mulligatawny or "currie soup" was also written down by Stephana Malcolm in 1791 in her personal recipe book. Like with her curry powder recipe, she likely fused the tastes of her British officer brothers with her own culinary knowledge.[46] This recipe was a simple one and included veal or beef boiled in a light broth that contained curry powder.[47]

The colonialist and Orientalist beliefs in British cultural supremacy worked in tandem with economic motivations to inform the modifications the British made to Indian food to create a version that could easily be exported to the West. The British East India Company was able to point to the invention of curry, curry powder, and mulligatawny soup as examples of the positive effects of colonization. During the EIC's tenure in India, they not only created new "exotic" but palatable dishes but also created a desire for "Indian" cuisine that was picked up by British women back in England. The simplification of Indian cuisine into exportable forms, such as curry powder, reflected broader colonial attitudes of categorizing and controlling complexity. This meant "the ideological function of curry under colonialism was to serve as a sign that was domesticated by Britons, commodified, and returned to India as a gift of its civilizer."[48] The creation of these dishes and their exportation back to England helped the British Empire prove that civilizing Indian food and India itself would result in a better version of both.

**Anglicization: The Memsahib Takeover in the British Raj Era (1858-1947)**

The remainder of the British East India Company's tenure governing India was a time of continued territorial and political expansion. As the Company, with the backing of the British Crown, exerted more direct control on the subcontinent, there was more resistance from Indians who felt oppressed by colonialism. These tensions culminated in what was known by the British as the Sepoy Revolt or Mutiny of 1857 and by Indians as the First War of Independence.[49] The revolution spread quickly beyond the Indians hired as soldiers or *sepoys* to inspire resistance in various groups across India. As revolts spun out of control, it became clear that the Company had outgrown its usefulness as a middleman and was incapable of governing the subcontinent. By the end of 1858, the British government had subdued all rebels, granted amnesty to anyone not involved in murder, and officially declared the start of direct rule via the British Raj.[50] The Mutiny heightened the fears the British already

[46] Roy, "Some Like It Hot," 67.
[47] Malcolm, *Burnfoot House Recipe Book of Stephana Malcolm*, 56.
[48] Varman, "Curry," 354.
[49] The British viewed these rebellions as mutinies against their rightful authority, while Indians saw the events of 1857 as the first attempt at a revolution to gain India's independence.
[50] Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, 100-2.

had concerning the uncivilized and unrestrained masses of people living in India. Over the rest of the 19th century, the British government and Crown focused on solidifying their regional control and expanding colonial India into their principal colony.

The colonial process of reconfiguring Indian society involved ensuring that the British maintained the proper distance from the people they ruled. The colonial government wanted a stable society in which the British abroad maintained their identity and culture so that they wouldn't become corrupted in the same way that their Aryan ancestors who settled in India were. One of the main ways British men were being "corrupted" was through their domestic and sexual relationships with Indian women. "In the mid-eighteenth century, up to 90 percent of British men in India were married to Indians or Anglo-Indians," many of whom had mixed-race children, known as Anglo-Indians.[51] As scholars developed the Aryan race theory in the mid-19th century, this miscegenation came to be considered a danger to British culture. To the British of this period, these Anglo-Indian children represented the corruption of whiteness and their Aryan identity by an uncivilized and inferior culture.

To help prevent miscegenation and preserve British culture in the domestic realm, the British government encouraged officers and civil service workers to marry British women and bring their wives with them to India. The government told women that it was their duty as wives and as Aryans to help the empire abroad and replicate the class and racial hierarchies of British society. These white women became known as *memsahibs*, a term originating from the combination of the honorific *sahib* and ma'am. In 1810, around 250 European women lived in India, but by 1872, nearly 5000 lived in the northwestern provinces alone. By 1901, there were upwards of 42,000 white women living in the British Raj's India.[52] By appealing to the national and marital duties women were expected to adhere to, the British Raj-era government successfully increased the number of *memsahibs* in India.

The relationship of *memsahibs* to the colonial project in India showed the ways in which women actively engaged in colonization. Much postcolonial scholarship examining the role of the *memsahibs* did not seek to understand their point of view but instead blamed them for the increased separation between British and Indian cultures. Prominent subaltern scholar Ashis Nandy attributed the increased cultural distance in this period to the controlling and jealous nature of the *memsahibs*, who wanted to enforce moral structures of domesticity and morality upon their men. He argued that "the white women in India were generally more exclusive and racist" due to their concepts of gender and not the expectations

[51] Blunt, "Imperial Geographies of Home," 426.

[52] Blunt, "Imperial Geographies of Home," 427.

of the colonial system.[53] Feminist subaltern scholars examined *memsahibs* more holistically and explored how gendered expectations of British domesticity and colonial standards for women affected how they acted. To see the agency women had and truly understand why they chose to reinforce the colonial system, it was essential to "lay to rest the popular image of the colonial woman as an unthinking *memsahib*," a "frivolous, snobbish and selfish creature."[54] In reality, *memsahibs* were acting well within the expectations that they had been consciously and subconsciously conditioned to accept by the colonial system and their husbands. It was made clear to them by British society, that in order "to protect their status as rulers and defend British culture in India," they should "choose racial exclusiveness and altogether reject Indian goods and dishes."[55]

As part of the imperial project, British women were expected to recreate homes in India that reflected the proper gender, class, and racial hierarchies of British society. Because these women were told by both their husbands and the wider British society that their place was in the home, they felt empowered within the domestic sphere since that was the one place they were in charge. Household guides and cookbooks from this period "both assumed and reiterated feminized discourses of domesticity, the appropriate behavior of women as housekeepers, wives and mothers, and their central importance in establishing and maintaining imperial power relations."[56]

*Memsahibs* worked to maintain these hierarchies in their relationships with their Indian servants. In terms of physical separation, they would keep the servants in separate living quarters or bungalows with those of the lowest caste, known as untouchables, furthest from the house.[57] The hierarchy of servants was based on caste and their specific responsibilities, which was similar to the hierarchy of servants back in England. In both domestic realms, women enforced a hierarchy of servants, with their ladies' maids at the top and the sweepers or manual laborers at the bottom. They also tended to view servants almost like children or pets who needed to be "trained" to do things properly. In *The Indian Cookery Book: A Practical Handbook to the Kitchen in India,* the *memsahib* author emphasized the care women must take in sending servants to markets as "the order is frequently misunderstood by the servant, who procures an article widely different from that ordered, or he returns empty-handed."[58] This cookbook emphasized the importance of a white lady overseeing the kitchen to combat the lack of

[53] Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy*, 9.
[54] Susan Zlotnick, "Domesticating Imperialism: Curry and Cookbooks in Victorian England," *Frontiers* 16, no. 2–3 (1996): 1.
[55] Chaudhuri, "Shawls, Jewelry, Curry, and Rice in Victorian Britain," 232.
[56] Blunt, "Imperial Geographies of Home," 438.
[57] Blunt, "Imperial Geographies of Home," 429.
[58] A Thirty-Five Years' Resident, *The Indian Cookery Book: A Practical Handbook to the Kitchen in India* (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink and Co, 1880), 5.

knowledge and laziness among Indian servants. It was the duty of women as household managers to ensure the success of servants by doling out punishment and praise where necessary. The idea was that, via these methods, they could transform servants into devoted slaves who would automatically adhere to British domesticity and hierarchies.[59]

To maintain distance between the rulers and the ruled, British *memsahibs* in the colonial environment rejected most Indian food and selectively incorporated food from the northwest region of India into their diets. Cookbooks written by and for *memsahibs* in India focused more on how to properly cook English cuisine while abroad than how to cook local Indian food. The title of the cookbook, *Dainty Dishes for Indian Tables*, indicates the impression among *memsahibs* that English cuisine was fancier and that cooking it was a way to retain a higher class status than Indians.[60] By writing this in a cookbook designed for other *memsahibs*, the author reinforced the idea that European food was preferable to local Indian fare. In this way, the author was actively perpetuating the colonial belief in the supremacy of Europe, its culture, and its food amongst the next generation of *memsahibs*.

This dismissal of Indian food in the colonial environment in favor of British fare and the Anglicization of Indian food demonstrated the rise of the liberal school of thought and its biased understanding of pre-colonial India. The Liberals mostly agreed with the Orientalists' version of Indian history but went even further to say that the British were the subcontinent's first and only civilized rulers. After the British defeated Napoleon in 1815, they grew more confident in their political and military prowess and had a renewed belief in their ultimate supremacy over other cultures. They argued that the Hindu period was not a true civilization by Western standards and was actually a backward and savage society. They disagreed with the Orientalists that there was anything worth recreating in ancient Hindu times and believed that Indians had always been lacking in genuine civilization until the British arrived.[61] Thomas Macaulay, a prominent British historian and politician, revealed the level of derision members of the Liberal school had towards Indian history and culture in his 1835 *Minute on Education*. In this essay, he attempted to convince the governor-general of India that only the British style of schooling and instruction in English was helpful for Indians. He argued that "a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia" and that the goal of educating Indians should be to create "a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in

[59] Blunt, "Imperial Geographies of Home," 432.
[60] Unknown, *Dainty Dishes for Indian Tables*, v.
[61] Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, 82-3.

opinions, in morals, and in intellect."[62] Macualy's belief in the superiority of the English language and British culture embodied the core of the Liberal philosophy that they needed to make Indians more British in order to "fix" and ultimately save them. The devaluation of Indian culture more broadly by Liberals influenced the separation and dismissal of Indian food that predominated the colonial environment.

The combination of dismissal and modification of Indian food by *memsahibs* indicated the rise of Liberalism and the growing disdain for Indian culture during the Raj. As the head of the domestic realm, it was up to a woman's discretion what food was "acceptable" to be served in their homes; because of the notions of British superiority that Liberalism and Orientalism espoused, they only allowed Indian food into their homes in modified forms. Because they still operated on the belief that Middle Eastern culture, while inferior to British, was superior to native Indian cultures, the food *memsahibs* allowed into their homes to be modified was primarily from the northwest. In both *Dainty Dishes for Indian Tables* and *The Indian Cookery Book: A Practical Handbook to the Kitchen in India,* the "Indian" recipes they included were mainly northwest-style cream-based curries and wheat-based breads. In "An Indian Recipe for Bread," they included *atta* or whole wheat flour, along with buttermilk, salt, and baking soda.[63] This being the only Indian bread recipe included is indicative of the favoring of this region that came out of the Aryan race theory and Orientalism. We can also see the dismissal of the food of the southern tip and the notion that it was low class in the erasure of fermented food, dhal, and lentils from these cookbooks. The one inclusion of lentils was in the recipe for "Economical Soup," the title of which indicates the author's impression of southern ingredients as cheap.[64] Despite these ingredients being staples across much of India, their bias against South Indian food and culture meant they didn't include them even in books claiming to be guides to Indian cookery. To *memsahibs,* proper Indian food meant recipes from the northwest, not the cheap dishes everyday Indians across the south ate.

The *memsahibs'* favoritism towards northwestern foods also influenced their reinforcement and solidification of curry as a homogenous category. For example, the recipe for curried fish was not modeled after any specific Indian dish; it was just curry powder added to a fish sauteed in oil.[65] It was common for *memsahibs* to describe any dish with curry powder as "curried," regardless of whether it contained any other Indian ingredients. The *memsahibs'* rejection of the majority of Indian cuisine and cooking it at home in a heavily modified version showed their desire for cultural

[62] Lord Thomas Babbington Macaulay, "Macaulay's Minute on Indian Education" (General Committee of Public Instruction, February 2, 1835), 3, 8.

[63] Unknown, *Dainty Dishes for Indian Tables,* 386.
[64] Unknown, *Dainty Dishes for Indian Tables,* 41.
[65] Unknown, *Dainty Dishes for Indian Tables,* 52-3.

separation and control. By allowing only certain 'Indian' foods into the domestic sphere, women became the ones to decide whether a particular cultural element was acceptable or not. In this way, the *memsahibs* became the ones to set the rules on what was too Indian and what was Westernized (or northwestern) enough to be embraced. Because *memsahibs'* positions were based on their husbands' jobs as British officers, when their husbands' terms ended, they returned back to Britain, now armed with the cookery and domestic experience of running a house and kitchen in India.

Upon their return to Britain, *memsahibs* had more freedom to interact with Indian food and were responsible for the creation of Anglo-Indian cuisine, taken from the name for mixed Indian and British children. When there wasn't pressure from the colonial government to keep distance between the rulers and the ruled, British women were able to interact with Indian food how they wanted.[66] *Memsahibs* often fed into the popular Orientalist view of India as a place of exotic mystery and intrigue, which helped increase the interest in Indian culture and goods. By claiming expertise in Indian cuisine, some returned *memsahibs* capitalized on this interest and released their own cookbooks in England, effectively introducing the homogenized and northwestern versions of Indian food into British society. In *Anglo-Indian Cookery at Home: A Short Treatise for Returned Exiles*, the author claimed she was qualified as someone who "resided in various parts of India" and was in a "position to strike a fair average, whereby my wrinkles and recipes may be acceptable to those whose" exiles spanned the subcontinent.[67] By asserting themselves as experts on Indian food, *memsahibs* legitimized the modified recipes they originally ate back in India. They also helped increase the popularity of Indian food in British homes by presenting curry and curry powder as a way to spice up leftover meats and vegetables. By appealing to the middle-class value of frugalness, they were able to spread curry into wider British society.[68]

By simultaneously reshaping Indian food to fit British palates while still claiming authenticity, they managed to popularize and reinforce a colonized version of Indian food. Adapting the already modified recipes into cookbooks for people living in Britain was based primarily on the availability of ingredients. "Apples replaced mangoes; lemon juice was substituted for tamarinds; cucumbers for bitter gourds, and butter instead of ghee."[69] One example of this Anglicization of Indian food can be seen in the *Anglo Indian Cookery's* "mulligatawny soup" recipe that replaced tamarind with vinegar. The rest of the recipe was also simpler than the

[66] Chaudhuri, "Shawls, Jewelry, Curry, and Rice in Victorian Britain," 232.
[67] The wife of a retired Indian officer [i.e. H.A. Hervey], *Anglo-Indian Cookery at Home: A Short Treatise for Returned Exiles* (London: Horace Cox, 1895), vii.
[68] Varman, "Curry," 353.
[69] Maroney, "To Make a Curry the India Way," 128.

versions cooked back in India and only included the addition of curry powder, a coconut, chicken, butter or ghee, and an onion.[70] "Over time, the English ingredients became regarded as components for a good curry rather than a substitution for the ingredients in Indian cookery."[71] The idea that these ingredient modifications and the use of fabricated curry powders were improvements, not just substitutes for authenticity, highlighted the widespread belief in British cultural superiority and their positive civilizing effect. The exportation of Indian food into English society by *memsahibs* in its homogenized and Anglicized version indicated the "larger importance of women as agents of cultural exchange between colonizers and the colonized."[72] The returned *memsahibs*' replication of colonial and Orientalist beliefs via modifications to Indian food and their creation of Anglo-Indian cuisine showed how they were an active and important part of the colonizing project.

**Reauthentication: Indian Women Immigrants in the United Kingdom (1947-1990s)**

During the height of British colonialism, migrating British officers and *memsahibs* were joined by colonized peoples who traveled and settled across the Empire. While some Indians in the 18th and 19th centuries migrated voluntarily to pursue education or economic opportunities, a significant portion were indentured laborers. After the British Parliament abolished slavery in 1834, the Empire faced a labor shortage in colonies like the Caribbean, East Africa, Mauritius, and Fiji. To fill this gap, the British expanded the recruitment of Indian indentured laborers—many of whom were driven by worsening poverty and famine, exacerbated by the mismanagement of colonial affairs and economic policies that prioritized cash crops, imposed heavy taxation, and disrupted traditional agrarian systems.[73] "Rising colonial taxation regimes and years of famine often increased the burden on agricultural laborers who had to either borrow greater sums or enter new debt contracts to survive an increasingly precarious rural economy."[74] Indians with outstanding debts would be told they could enter contracts, usually ranging from 5-10 years, as an agricultural or manual laborer; though framed as voluntary contracts, many indentured laborers faced coercion, misinformation, and the manipulation of their contracts.[75] Their experiences, while distinct from enslaved labor, often involved harsh conditions, limited rights, and racial discrimination, reflecting the broader injustices of British colonial rule. Overall, this system allowed for the exploitation of Indians as a cheap labor source to develop other British

[70] The wife of a retired Indian officer, *Anglo-Indian Cookery at Home,* 4.
[71] Maroney, "To Make a Curry the India Way," 128.
[72] Chaudhuri, "Shawls, Jewelry, Curry, and Rice in Victorian Britain," 232.
[73] Mishal Khan, "The Indebted Among the 'Free': Producing Indian Labor Through the Layers of Racial Capitalism," in *Histories of Racial Capitalism*, ed. Justin Leroy and Destin Jenkins (Columbia University Press, 2021), 97
[74] Khan, "The Indebted Among the 'Free,'" 98.
[75] Khan, "The Indebted Among the 'Free,'" 101.

colonial holdings and facilitated a massive cross-colonial migration.

In many colonies, notably East Africa, Indian indentured servants often remained after their contracts expired in order to work in the rapidly developing agricultural and business sectors. The British East African colonies were a major destination for these Indian indentured servants, often called "coolies," because the British were working on expanding the agricultural industry and developing colonial infrastructure.[76] The largest of these projects was building the Ugandan railway to transport goods out of the interior of these colonies back to Britain, and so upon its completion, Uganda, in particular, had a significant population of free Indian laborers.[77] As these laborers established communities and businesses in East Africa, they also brought over their families and women to marry. Over time, diasporic Indians started to adopt some elements of African culture and created new identities around being simultaneously African, Indian, and citizens of the British Empire. As we have seen with other migrations, when women with culinary knowledge traveled to different parts of the Empire, they brought along their food culture while incorporating local elements. In East Africa, this mainly involved adapting Indian recipes to the local ingredients by incorporating things like plantains and cassava.[78] The hybridized Indian food in East Africa still maintained much of its authenticity because it was a result of Indians modifying their own food and not an outward imposition by East Africans or the British. However, these modifications were still a result of colonialism and the British Empire's forced movement of Indians throughout the Empire.

While the colonial era saw the mass migration of Indians to other colonial holdings, it was only in the aftermath of World War II and colonialism's downfall that Indians finally made it to Great Britain in significant numbers. During the War, a devastating food shortage hit Bengal and "was allowed to worsen into a crisis by the government's decision to divert grain from the countryside to the city in order to make available ample food supplies for the military."[79] Famine, coupled with growing nationalist sentiment and the rise of influential independence leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, and Jawaharlal Nehru, led to massive resistance against colonial rule. Even though they were "victorious in the war, Britain had suffered immensely in the struggle" and "simply did not possess the manpower or the economic resources required to coerce a restive India."[80] Because of Britain's economic plight and anger at being rejected by its subjects, it engaged in a rapid

[76] Margret Frenz, "Migration, Identity, and Post-Colonial Change in Uganda: A Goan Perspective," *Immigrants & Minorities* 31, no. 1 (March 2013): 51.
[77] Frenz, "Migration, Identity and Post-Colonial Change in Uganda," 52.
[78] Alibhai-Brown, *The Settler's Cookbook*, 62, 49.
[79] Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, 209.
[80] Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, 212.

transfer of power to successor governments. In 1947, the departing British hastily drew border lines dividing the Raj into the independent states of India under Prime Minister Nehru and Pakistan (with a geologically divided East and West wing) under Prime Minister Jinnah. The subsequent years of violence and uncertainty caused by the chaos of partition and the subcontinent's territorial division were responsible for the displacement of over 12.5 million people across the Indian subcontinent.[81] Furthermore, wars over the independence of West Pakistan and the formation of Bangladesh, and between India and Pakistan over Kashmir, left millions more fleeing over these new borders. This was also a period when there was an increase in immigration to the United Kingdom by people facing uncertainty on the subcontinent, particularly those from the conflict regions near the Pakistani and Bangladeshi borders. As the Indian diaspora spread beyond the colonial world, they also brought their knowledge of Indian food with them.[82]

Even as Indians, Pakistanis, and Bangladeshis on the subcontinent struggled to make sense of their post-colonial identities and where they belonged, so did the members of the Indian diaspora in East Africa. After generations of living, working, and creating communities in East Africa, Indians felt strongly that their ethnicity didn't preclude them from being nationally, politically, and geographically African. However, when the colonies of East Africa, most notably Uganda and Kenya, began decolonizing around ethnonationalist ideas that tied being ethnically African to being nationally African, these Indian immigrants became a problem. The message from the newly decolonized nations was that anyone who wasn't indigenous to Africa did not belong and should return to where they were from, Asians and Europeans alike. The Kenyan and Ugandan governments saw Indians in their countries as legacies of colonialism and as tying their nations to the British. After a violent military coup in Uganda, new president Idi Amin ordered the expulsion of all Ugandan Asians who still held foreign citizenship; they had until November 8th, 1972, to leave, only three months after the declaration. Because most Indians still held passports from the British Empire, they were seen not only as foreign but also as allying themselves with their former colonial masters. After the order, approximately 75,000 Asians, or 2% of the Ugandan population, relocated to other countries, mainly Canada, the UK, and India.[83] For those expelled, the question of where they belonged plagued their minds; forced from the place they considered home, they had to reconcile their Indian, British, and African identities. This identity struggle was faced by Indians across the

[81] Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, 222.
[82] Buettner, "'Going for an Indian': South Asian Restaurants and the Limits of Multiculturalism in Britain," 116.
[83] Frenz, "Migration, Identity and Post-Colonial Change in Uganda," 54.

diaspora who were forced out of their homes by the chaos of decolonization and the disdain of their former British colonizers.

Despite many of these expelled and displaced Indians still holding British passports, instead of welcoming their former subjects, the British government fed the anti-immigrant sentiments within their populace and enacted strict immigration restrictions. No matter where they went, "Asians were in a pernicious trap with no escape. If they did well, poisonous envy was raised against them; if they were poor, they were accused of being a drain on a poor country."[84] These biases colored the political and social atmosphere in the United Kingdom, and "racial discrimination was rife in the job and housing markets, and in the provision of goods and services."[85] These prejudices were evident in the British government's policy towards Indian immigrants from both East Africa and the Indian subcontinent. The 1968 immigration laws passed by British Parliament established quotas for East African Asian immigrants and decreed that only people with British ancestry had the right to immigrate/enter freely.[86] The 1960s and '70s were notable for this shift from a paternalistic attitude towards Indians to a vengeful and angry one that sought to keep former British subjects from corrupting their nation.

Indians who managed to immigrate to the UK, either from East Africa or directly from the Indian subcontinent, were faced with a society based around the same colonial mindset that the British had espoused in India; in British society, the psychological legacies of colonialism were replicated and reinforced. Alibhai-Brown, an Indian Immigrant from Uganda, said, "We got the point. White was great, white was in charge; we submitted to this. And even when we grew up and became anti-colonialists, post-colonialists, anti-new-colonialists, that reverence remained for our mother imperial."[87] These legacies were also evident within the academic realm, even among historians who claimed to combat them. In the 1960s, the belief that colonization (while not an inherently good process) had positive effects on India by bringing modernity and civilization persisted in academia through the post-colonial Cambridge school of thought.[88] The racism and xenophobia in British society in the '60s and '70s were a reflection of these colonial legacies and the enduring belief in British supremacy that academics didn't thoroughly refute.

The emergence of the subaltern school of thought in the 80s argued that, since the West informed previous postcolonial interpretations of colonialism, it replicated colonialism even in those who sought to combat it. Both post-colonial Indian and British politicians have repeated the narratives of these early schools of thought in a way that allows the West to remain the colonizers of people's minds.[89] Subaltern scholars sought to

[84] Alibhai-Brown, *The Settler's Cookbook*, 80.
[85] Alibhai-Brown, *The Settler's Cookbook*, 309.
[86] "Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1968," § 9 (1968).
[87] Alibhai-Brown, *The Settler's Cookbook*, 163-4.
[88] Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy,* vii.
[89] Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy,* xii.

move beyond the binary dichotomies of colonizer and colonized that early post-colonial scholars had emphasized. To combat the influence of colonial legacies on historical interpretations of colonialism, subaltern scholars centered the narratives of non-players or the subaltern, ordinary Indians who didn't have a political role in colonization. Homi Bhabha's theory of cultural hybridity also helped dispute the traditional binary of colonial studies by highlighting the in-between space where cultural collisions and interchanges resulted in an ongoing process of identity formation.[90] This "Third Space" redefined traditional notions of identity and representation by providing a place for cultural negotiation and resistance that challenged colonialism's binary categorizations.[91]

Viewing women Indian immigrants as subalterns and their interactions with Anglo-Indian food as a "Third Space" helps escape this dichotomy that centered on rigid perpetrator-victim and colonizer-colonized relationships. This concept emphasizes how cultural identities are constructed in hybrid spaces where different cultures meet, clash, and negotiate new meanings.[92] Indian women's kitchens were a space in which cultural hybridity became a site of agency and where Indian women could assert their identities within a postcolonial context. Examining Indian women immigrants' relationships with "Indian food" in the UK helps fight the universalism in academia that tried to frame colonized people's interactions with the West as monolithic. Indian women immigrants' modifications to and re-authentication of Indian food in the UK is one way they resisted the narratives, both current and historical, centering on their inferiority and victimhood. This cultural negotiation allowed them to create new forms of identity and belonging that transcended the rigid dichotomies that were the cornerstones of British colonialism.

When Indian women immigrants first arrived in the UK in the '60s and '70s, the homogenized, northwestern, and Anglicized version of Indian food popularized by *memsahibs* was still what people ate in their homes and in the few Indian restaurants or "curry houses" that existed. The British people who consumed Anglo-Indian food were mostly returned British officials and people in the lower classes who used curry powder to 'spice up' leftover meats and vegetables. The majority of Indian restaurants at the time "offered dishes from the northern part of the subcontinent prepared cheaply by taking shortcuts and omitting ingredients," resulting in the different curries they offered being nearly identical versions of the same saucy dish."[93] In the first cookbook published by famous food writer and actress Madhur Jaffrey, she became one of the few

[90] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2004), 111.
[91] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 37-8.
[92] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 105-111.
[93] Elizabeth Buettner, "'Going for an Indian': South Asian Restaurants and the Limits of Multiculturalism in Britain," in *Curried Cultures: Globalization, Food, and South Asia*, ed. Krishnendu Ray and Tulasi Srinivas (Berkeley, United States: University of California Press, 2012), 123.

dissenters who criticized the Westernized and inauthentic nature of Indian food served in the UK. She said that "instead of specializing in food from a particular state or district," these restaurants served "generalized Indian food from no specific area whatsoever."[94] These dishes usually came either "mild, medium, or hot, an indication that the food [was] not being cooked with the spices as it should be but that something is being ladled on. The result of all this [was] that the sauces in such eating places inevitably ha[d] the same color, taste, and consistency."[95] These generic non-specific curries were often served with the "wheat-based unleavened breads" "common to Pakistani and North Indian cuisines," while neglecting to serve southern tip breads made "from fermented rice and lentil paste."[96] Indian restaurant culture in the UK replicated the homogenization of saucy dishes into curry and the preferential treatment that British colonizers gave northwestern Indian foods.

Cookbooks written by female Indian immigrants in the '70s and '80s fought back against the homogenization that restaurants in this period continued to perpetuate and demonstrated their active role in combating the cultural/psychological legacies of colonialism. While this viewpoint was starting to be contested by critics of empire, such as British abolitionists and anti-colonialists, the popular opinion of British society at the time was that, while colonialism had its downsides, there were many positive outcomes, including the colonizers' adaptation of Indian food into curry. Madhur Jaffrey not only criticized the lack of authenticity in the UK's Indian food but also actively worked to educate the British public on what genuine Indian food was via her cookbooks.[97] She began her cookbooks with an introduction detailing her personal relationship with Indian food and life growing up in the cosmopolitan city of New Delhi. The street food or *chaat* of her childhood and her mother's cooking heavily influenced her view of Indian food and the connection between food and location.[98] In *A Taste of India,* she continued this narrative style in her detailed descriptions of the connection between food and culture in each distinct food region of India, including Delhi with Punjab and Haryana, Uttar Pradesh with Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Kashmir, Bengal, Hyderabad, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka, and Kerala.[99] By dividing the cookbook into specific regions, she actively combated the impression that Indian food was homogeneous and that northwestern-style food was the best/only cuisine the subcontinent had to offer.

[94] Jaffrey, *An Invitation to Indian Cooking*, xviii.
[95] Jaffrey, *An Invitation to Indian Cooking*, xviii.
[96] Narayan, "Eating Cultures."
[97] Buettner, "'Going for an Indian': South Asian Restaurants and the Limits of Multiculturalism in Britain," 123.
[98] Madhur Jaffrey, *Indian Cookery* (London: British Broadcasting Corp., 1982), 9.
[99] Jaffrey, *A Taste of India*.

Indian women's emphasis on spices and reintroduction of masalas in these cookbooks as an alternative to curry powder was one way they actively replaced the products of the empire with authentic ones. Because the use and variety of spices were such a crucial part of Indian cooking that united all regions of the subcontinent, the homogenization of these spices into curry powder was particularly offensive. With that in mind, Jaffrey took the time in both *An Invitation to Indian Cooking* and *Indian Cookery* to highlight the various staple spices of the subcontinent and the ways they can be prepared to achieve different flavors. *Indian Cookery* had a comprehensive list of 39 essential spices/seasonings, what each looked like, their flavor, and what types of dishes they were used in. She also differentiated between the different preparations of spices; for example, this section included cumin seeds whole, ground, whole roasted, and ground roasted.[100] These details on the importance of how you prepare a spice provided a stark contrast to the standard ground and prepackaged spices in the typical British curry powder. Jaffrey also made it clear that an authentic Indian kitchen would never have curry powder; instead of a curry powder recipe, she included one for *garam masala*. She described it as "an aromatic mixture that generally incorporate[d] spices which are supposed to heat the body."[101] Similar to curry powder, *garam masala* had no standardized recipe, so the exact spices used varied by region and family. Jaffrey's recipe called for cardamom seeds, a cinnamon stick, black cumin seeds, whole cloves, black peppercorns, and nutmeg to be put in a coffee grinder until finely ground.[102] This recipe provided an important authentic alternative to curry powder and was a way Indian women immigrants challenged the continued colonial dominance of curry powder. By showing that curry powder was a pointless creation, these women helped disprove the narrative that this invention was one of the positive outcomes of colonialism.

These Indian immigrants also refused to include recipes for "curry" or "curried" dishes in their cookbooks and instead concentrated on the authentic kormas, masalas, vindaloos, and varieties of meat and vegetable dishes cooked across the subcontinent. In contrast to the "curried fish" recipes that *memsahib* cookbooks were fond of, Jaffrey provided five different fish recipes that were used in India. Her recipe for *timatar wali macchi,* or cod steaks in a spicy tomato sauce, included fish baked with salt, cayenne, ground turmeric, fennel seeds, mustard seeds, onions, garlic, ground cumin, tomatoes, and garam masala.[103] Alibhai-Brown's recipe for *fish masala* in *The Settler's Cookbook: A Memoir of Love, Migration, and Food* was another dish that would have simply been called curry by the British. In this recipe, she recommended using a

[100] Jaffrey, *Indian Cookery*, 18.
[101] Jaffrey, *Indian Cookery*, 18.
[102] Jaffrey, *Indian Cookery*, 19.
[103] Jaffrey, *Indian Cookery*, 19.

whole fish, which was then covered in a masala paste made of tomato puree, chili powder, coriander powder, garlic, ginger, turmeric, garam masala, cumin, and lime juice.[104] After the fish was marinated, it needed to be cooked in oil on a wok or *cheena chatt*i (pot from China), which was a cooking style typical to the southern tip region of Kerala because of Chinese influence there during the height of the spice trade.[105] These fish recipes contrasted the homogenized "curried fish" and "fish curries" in cookbooks written by *memsahibs*; they also provided authentic alternatives with that Keralan influence that was so often excluded from Indian food in the West.

Women Indian immigrants further disrupted the emphasis on northwestern Indian food by modifying the EIC's invention, mulligatawny soup, into truly Indian dishes. Alibhai-Brown called her recipe for mulligatawny soup an "invention of defiance" and included red lentils and sweet potatoes as the base with ginger, cardamom, and *jeera* (cumin) as seasonings.[106] The inclusion of lentils was a crucial part of this defiance since it was so often dismissed as poor man's food and as a lower-class dish of the southern tip. Following suit, Jaffery also included pureed red lentils in her recipe for chicken mulligatawny soup.[107] Indian women's reclamation of this soup was an important way that they disrupted the narrative that the British created the best and most "digestible" forms of culture for the globalized West. By modifying a quintessentially Anglo-Indian dish into a purely Indian one, they showed that their authentic version of Indian food was just as digestible and acceptable as the one the British originally invented.

Some of these Indian women immigrants went further and modified traditional British dishes to be more Indian, which actively resisted the colonial belief that only the colonizers impacted the colonized and that framed Indians as victims. Alibhai-Brown took inspiration from her mother in the recipe "Jena's shepherd's pie," which her mom called the "fixed" version of the traditional British recipe. The meat filling in this recipe was spiced up with the addition of fresh coriander, green chiles, garam masala, lime, fresh ginger, mint sauce, crushed garlic, and paprika. This was paired with the mashed potato portion, which contained garlic and paprika for additional flavor.[108] For many women Indian immigrants, British food was plain, bland, and flavorless, so they would experiment by adding different Indian ingredients and spices to British cuisine. In addition to using different ingredients than the original British recipes, Indian women immigrants would use traditional Indian cooking techniques. Alibhai-Brown's recipe for a chili steak beef Wellington used a yogurt marinade similar to the one used in her *fish masala* recipe and in traditional *tandoori* marinades. Her recipe

[104] Alibhai-Brown, *The Settler's Cookbook*, 84.
[105] Jaffrey, *A Taste of India*, 217.
[106] Alibhai-Brown, *The Settler's Cookbook*, 84.
[107] Jaffrey, *Indian Cookery*, 179.
[108] Alibhai-Brown, *The Settler's Cookbook*, 165.

consisted of a steak covered in yogurt, ginger, garlic, green chilies, fresh coriander, malt vinegar, and tomato puree, which, after resting, was wrapped in puff pastry and baked.[109] The application of Indian ingredients and cooking techniques served to flip the narrative of Indian women from passive victims to active participants in the struggle against colonialism and its legacies. Indian women's swapping of these roles by adapting British food to fit an Indian palate showed that colonialism wasn't one-sided and that colonized peoples could affect the culture of their colonizer. Indian women immigrants' resistance to the dominant Anglo-Indian food culture in the UK was an important part of the fight to remove the colonial legacies that informed British and Western societies' relationship with Indian food and culture.

**Conclusion**

In 2001, Britain's Foreign Secretary Robert Cook proclaimed chicken tikka masala to be England's national dish. In his speech praising multiculturalism in the country, he claimed chicken tikka masala was "a true British national dish, not only because it is the most popular, but because it is a perfect illustration of the way Britain absorbs and adapts external influences."[110] This framing of the creation of curry as Britain simply reacting to external cultural influence highlighted the disconnect that British society continues to have with the realities of colonialism. This speech was just one example of the broader cultural amnesia about how colonial histories have fundamentally shaped "British" identity and cuisine. Curry was not just an accidental byproduct of Britain's interaction with other cultures but the result of the active homogenizing the British did in India as part of their "civilizing" mission. The invention of curry mirrored that of the country of India; the British homogenized and absorbed the various cultures and regions of the subcontinent into India just as they did the many spices and sauces of the subcontinent into curry powder and curry. By portraying Britain's culinary adaptation as a passive, benign process, rather than actively shaped by histories of exploitation and power, Cook obscured the colonial realities that led to the creation of tikka masala and British culture more broadly.

The "curry culture" in the UK today allows the British to focus on the "positives" of colonialism and celebrate multiculturalism while ignoring the lived realities of their Indian neighbors. "The contemporary popularity of curry in Britain masks long periods of racial prejudices and negative perceptions that stemmed from colonialism."[111] Staff at restaurants still face racism for being Indian and are often mistreated by British people who feel superior. The broader racism and xenophobia against brown people and Muslims in the UK has grown alongside the

[109] Alibhai-Brown, *The Settler's Cookbook*, 198-9.
[110] Robin Cook, *Robin Cook's Chicken Tikka Masala Speech*, 2001.
[111] Varman, "Curry," 113.

popularity of Indian food.[112] Despite Indian women's efforts to reauthenticate Indian cuisine in the UK—preserving and adapting culinary traditions as a form of resistance to colonial narratives—Indian communities continue to face systemic marginalization. The enduring legacies of colonialism are evident in the stark disconnect between the West's growing appreciation for "authentic" Indian food and its broader disdain for brown people and immigrants. While Indian cuisine is celebrated in mainstream culinary spaces, the communities behind these traditions often remain subject to racialized stereotypes, exclusion, and discrimination. This dynamic reflects the historical patterns of colonial exploitation, where cultural products were commodified and embraced, even as the people and histories behind them were marginalized. The acceptance of Indian food without corresponding respect for Indian communities illustrates how colonial hierarchies persist, shaping which aspects of immigrant culture are welcomed and which are denied legitimacy.

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