Downton Abbey and a Culinary Travelogy: Histories of Anglo-Indian Imperial Cooking

Arup K. Chatterjee

Abstract
This paper explores recent trends in culinary representations in British television, and global food biographies, going back to Victorian or Edwardian Raj, i.e., the popular imperial television saga, Downton Abbey (2010-15), and two histories on the Curry, by Lizzie Collingham (2006) and Colleen Taylor Sen (2008). Just as Bengali or other subregional specializations in Indian cuisines could not entirely disavow nineteenth-century European influences, the British too could not entirely retreat from their culinary miscegenation, which they later sought to refine and reify into their own culture, in a brand of food described herein as currigatawny. While historians like Susan Zlotnick, Sharmila Sen, Modhumita Roy, and others contend that British imperial politics was closely linked to the domain of food, Collingham and this paper argue that the culinary domain was not consequential but indeed fundamental to British imperialism. In doing so, the paper offers a travelogy of the curry, in imperial and contemporary Britain, which has recently seen the shutting down of over one thousand curry-houses, since the time of the Brexit-leave-campaign (November, 2016). The paper ends with a comparative perspective into the place of the curry in contemporary Britain, and in the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars (1815)—a phase marked by industrial revolution, growing middle-class literacy, print cultures, and a subsequent rise in the publication of Victorian cookbooks, that are beginning to be fetishized today.

Keywords
Downton Abbey, Imperialism, South Asian Cuisine, Travelogy, London, Curry
Considering that a fair amount of British history deals with its colonization of British India, it’s no surprise that mulligatawny soup, with its Indian roots, became a part of the British culinary scene. Mulligatawny, or ‘Millagu Thanni,’ literally means ‘pepper water,’ and is a spicier option for one of the two soups served and enjoyed at a dinner, fancy or not. Considering Lady Mary’s spicy personality, there’s no doubt she’d enjoy this soup while in the midst of a fiery debate with Matthew!

So begins a recipe, hybridized as “Lady Mary’s Spicy Mulligatawny Soup,” in *The Unofficial Downton Abbey Cookbook*. This somewhat endearing and domestic appellation for a cuisine of Indian origin, camouflages the politics and ideology of the mulligatawny, and several other recipes, that the British assimilated into their daily lives, throughout the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. In recent times, television has seen robust representations of British domestic life in the Raj, or even back home in England—with all its colonial

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1 Emily Ansara Baines, *The Unofficial Downton Abbey Cookbook: From Lady Mary's Crab Canapes to Mrs. Patmore's Christmas Pudding* (Massachusetts: Adams Media, 2012) p. 48
paraphernalia of sartorial perfection, domestic hierarchies, armies of butlers and cooks, and dinner soirees, peppered with administrative jargon or snippets of current affairs—such as in Downton Abbey (2010-15) or Indian Summers (2015-16). Even Mark Corrigan, from the series, Peep Show is frequently seen toying with his proud though contrary curry recipes.²

Downton Abbey has been especially popular in the context of food. In one of the first scenes of the pilot, when Lord Grantham reads the news of his cousins, James and Patrick Crawley, feared dead on the Titanic, downstairs Mrs. Patmore is seen ordering Daisy to hand the kedgeree to William, to take it to the breakfast table. Kedgeree happens to be one of the numerous Anglicized nomenclatures for dishes that the returning Anglo-Indian colonials took into their gastronomical dictionaries. Made primarily of rice, lentils and beans, the first known recipe of khichari, or kedgeree, is said to have appeared in The Laird’s Kitchen (1791), written by Stephana Malcolm of Dumfriesshire, Scotland.

Meanwhile, the Downton saga has inspired twenty-first century epicureans to revisit country estates tucked away in places like the Sherwood Forest to convalesce in their Edwardian nostalgia.³ Anglophilia, today, recounts dinner as

an excuse to marry off Lady Mary, or to exhibit a storehouse of furniture, tableware, crystal lamps, cutlery and linen, or people to hunger for British trifles from the time of the Great War, rather than mourn the lives lost aboard the Titanic or the Somme. Bob Batz Jr. of the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette reports: “[b]y presenting lavish depictions of foods and cooking and dining in upscale England in the early 1900s, the popular Downton Abbey has fueled appetites for that sort of thing, inspiring other people to serve it up, too.”

For many consumers of television stories, the natural consequence is to become consumers of the food featured in those stories. This is how the semiotics of television soaps is inherently accessible to a semiotics of food. A cuisine is hardly ever consumed for the first time, or the only time, in the restaurant alone. It is preconceived and preconsumed as if in a great urban folklore, or as Arjun Appadurai describes, “with the vicarious pleasures of the literature of the senses.” For what he writes of cookbooks is equally true of food on television and of written histories of food, which are perhaps only more animated examples of the tradition of recipes. In addition to being merely instructions, televised or biographical illustrations of food help fabricate the theaters


of a cultural imagination to stage the past, present and future—the politics, preparation and partaking—of a culinary ritual. With greater efficacy than cookbooks themselves, these culinary representations “appear to belong to the literature of exile, of nostalgia and loss…The nostalgia for the glow of empire, in which recipes are a largely Proustian device.”

They seek to recolonize the decolonized geographies of the mind, with a less forsworn and oppressive dramatization of the past.

As Margot Finn points out, the trend of delving into Anglo-Indian family histories owes a lot to Marxist and Feminist studies and disagreements over the fundamental relations between imperial capitalist modernity and the place of domestic relations and hierarchies within the empire. This latter category of hierarchies and kinships, as Finn notes, has also been recently highlighted for its role in “shaping the conflicted modernities of the British empire.” The works of Durba Ghosh, Indrani Chatterjee and Christopher Hawes, adds Finn, have given a great deal of insight into the history of nineteenth-century miscegenation in India, and the

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8 Durba Ghosh, Sex and the Family in Colonial India (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Indrani Chatterjee, Gender, Slavery and Law in Colonial India (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999); Christopher Hawes, Poor Relations: The Making of a Eurasian Community in British India (1773-1833) (Richmond: Psychology Press, 1996).
challenging place of mixed-race members in the family and the empire. Finn’s own study, on the trajectory of imperial kinships—in the family of Glibert Elliot, or the first Earl of Minto, the governor general of India after Warren Hastings and Robert Cornwallis—seeks to offset the dominant history of imperial métissage or miscegenation in the Raj. Embedded in the arena of domestic imperial politics is the question of food. This paper seeks to discuss how that very métissage—in a culinary miscegenation—was dressed up as authentic and legitimately imperial in the domain of the culinary arts, whence Indian cuisine was emancipated to an imperial commodity in the decorum and pedagogy with which it was reproduced as a British tradition.

Histories of imperial Britain and India seem more relevant and lucrative than ever before. This is partly due to the respective political situations of the two nations. The road to Brexit has led to the shutdown of hundreds of curry-houses in Britain, as the multibillion dollar curry industry prepares to sink or swim, courtesy tax-hikes for immigrant labourers. And the rise of right wing nativism in India, with special emphasis on language and food politics, has coerced its people into rejecting much of its own mainstream cosmopolitanism, let alone safeguarding its heretical nostalgia for British rule. In such a context, it is interesting to note the rise of imperial histories, especially food histories, that have been rewriting the biographies of British India and colonial Britain.

This article further studies the politics and ideologies of food and food histories in two such contemporary works on colonial Indian cuisine: Lizzie Collingham’s *Curry: A Tale of Cooks and Conquerors* (2006) and Colleen Taylor Sen’s *Curry: A Global History* (2009). Although both these texts cover the background histories of imperial food politics, in this article they will be studied as the primary literature, while examples from recent scholarship, nineteenth-century cookbooks, representations of food in popular culture, and recent political events will be called upon to validate or critique the works of Collingham and Sen. In doing so, the article will define and discuss the *travelogy* (domesticating power)¹⁰ of food items in colonial and contemporary Britain, exploring in them the hidden motifs and metaphors of domestic imperial hierarchies. Finally, by branding these dishes as an archive of *currigatawny* foods, the paper looks at the role of cooks and household women who built this brand while serving as the backbone of the British empire, even at the cost of the depredation of the Indian economy.

*Decentering the Curry*

Culinary historians have taken the imperial discourse away from the centre-stage of male British administrators. Victorian memsahibs, claims Susan Zlotnick, domesticated imperialism, in the Raj, while domesticating the dreaded or hybridized other—the Indian—into the food cultures of

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metropolitan Britain.¹¹ Like Appadurai, Suzanne Daly and Ross G. Forman, have highlighted the rise of literacy and print culture as the major cornerstones of the rise of the nineteenth-century cookbooks.

the rise of the middle classes and the expansion of literacy and publishing led to the birth of the cookbook in its modern form as a kind of text in many ways linked...to the preeminent object of Victorian studies, the novel. Food production and consumption also became a touchstone for emerging models of domesticity, both in gender and class terms, as well as for the scientific ordering of this brave new world, from kitchens to cultural hierarchies.¹²

They also point out how especially in nineteenth-century imperial manners, dining was an “index of cultural difference,” and food writers such as Eliza Acton tried to invoke the metaphor of racial otherness in the curry, which was then tamed in the kitchen by British culinary experts, assimilated and perhaps even improved upon, to make racial difference a benign and consumable product.¹³ Moreover, despite the resistance from the Company or its officials, one standard premise worked in many of the colonial texts of health and medicine, between 1770 and 1858, was the specificity of the new Indian climate, and the diseases

¹³ Ibid. p. 367.
regularly inflicting colonists demanded “a fundamental reappraisal of European medical knowledge in the light of these new circumstances.” A lot of this reappraisal was recommended in styles of food, by British surgeons, such as Charles Curtis and Adam Burt, in the 1780s. As a consequence, science, which came with its own hierarchical advantage over common beliefs and ideologies, too began to overturn the perceived effeminacy and luxuriant attitudes of the subject population. Curtis, as Jayanta Sengupta points out, held the dominant British attitude to be “false bravado.” An overall scientific and political reckoning of the native suitability of Indian food—as well as curry entrepreneurs who claimed to recreate aromatic healing powers in their blends—perhaps led to espousing the same effeneses and luxuriance in the making of the Company nabobs, that was earlier reviled against. The health discourse was soon to be imbibed into the discourse of domestic economy—a realm of either women, or household staff among aristocratic families. It was no surprise to see Maria Eliza Rundell’s Domestic Economy, and Cookery, for Rich and Poor (1806), explain that “[t]he mulakatanies and curries of India; the sweet pillaus, yahourt, and cold soups of Persia; the cubbubs, sweet yaughs and sherbets of Egypt [which were all part of the Mughal Indian cuisine by then]...have been inserted with a view of introducing a less expensive and more wholesome and a more delicate mode of cookery.”


Among others who have studied race and gender hierarchies in the creation of an enduring Anglo-Indian cuisine, throughout the nineteenth-century, are Sharmila Sen and Modhumita Roy. As argued by both, although British palates certainly underwent a great change after 1857, curries and mulligatawnies never went out of their favor, unlike what some historians have pointed. At the same time, Indian tastes also began getting regionalized or differentiated from European styles of cooking. And much like their European counterparts who could not renounce their dak-bungalow curries, Indians could not disavow hybrid inventions like “Murgir French malpoa” (French chicken pancake).

Lord Macaulay’s ‘Minute on Education’ (1835) and Lord Dalhousie’s ‘Minute on the Railways’ (1853), led to paradigm shifts in Indian education, communication, culture, careers and locomotion. Chief British settlements, such as Bengal, witnessed a cultural renaissance, and the rise of a class of the comprador bourgeoisie, whose interests colluded with the company’s economic interests in steamships, the railways, and other joint stock companies. One of the chief business aides of the Company in the railway project was Dwarkanauth Tagore, the grandfather of Rabindranath Tagore. Dwarkanauth Tagore was the founder of the Carr Tagore & Company. Along with the efforts of Rowland MacDonald Stephenson, the Director of the East Indian Railway Company, Dwarkanauth Tagore helped broker the

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first railway plans in Bengal. As business interests of the Bengali upper middle-classes coincided with that of the British, its effects must have been felt in food as well. The household of the Tagores—or the Thakurbari—introduced assimilative practices in food, whereby European cuisine was no more alien in the domestic kitchen. That changed however during the time of Rabindranath Tagore. In his thoughts as well as in practice, the “use of gastronomic tropes was at odds with his theory of internationalism,” as the reemergence of indigenous cuisine in the Thakurbari saw a rewriting of the “positive biases,” and differentiating the Indian identity from the European.

Tithi Bhattacharya writes that the formation of new social classes in nineteenth-century Bengal prized education and pedantry over economic success. After the 1860s, in Bengal, and even elsewhere in India, came a turn among the self-fashioning compradors of going back to their roots. This happened as, what Utsa Ray calls, “subregional specializations” in cooking. Bengal, Maharashtra and the South, began to look inwards, for peasant-oriented recipes to outweigh the shadow of European culinary inflexions that had seeped into their cultures, in the first half of the century. These subregional forms—such as indigenous Bengali cuisine, never assumed the place of French haute cuisine—or

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even North Indian Punjabi cuisine, owing to the fact that the former was consciously anti-commercial, designed to be domestically confined. Although British techniques such as stewing were preserved in Bengali cooking culture, they were tried to be given a distinctly regional flavor through the use of ghee, cumin, turmeric and other regional spices.\textsuperscript{21} These specializations were attempted mostly after Bengali entrepreneurs fell out with the British companies. After the Mutiny, and the transfer of government from the Company to the Crown, British companies began acquiring local expertise, thanks to the more advanced apparatus of the empire. They no longer needed the local compradors, who, as a consequence, went consciously anticlonial, even in their eating habits, notwithstanding a new middle-class that began running fast-food outlets, with European names, such as Café-de-Monico.\textsuperscript{22} The latter obviously catered to young locals who were more interested in chops, cutlets, fries and stews that the hybrid colonials had been leaving behind as the byproducts of imperial trade.

The larger question is, how much could Anglo-Indian or regional cuisines change, after all, given that colonialism had led to such a largescale miscegenation of ingredients and spices. Sub-regionalization or re-Anglicization of food could only have been possible in the way styles of cooking were branded and served. But mixed-race recipes could not be ruled out entirely. This is where Lizzie Collingham’s \textit{Curry} makes a deep impact. Television and much of popular food history has attempted to create an artificial centre of food exchanges, between Britain and India. Chronologically, that

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid. p. 2.
centre appears to be fixed around the time of the Mutiny. For British food culture before 1857, there is a triumphant intermixing and assimilation of the tastes of the Indian subject. Closer to the turn of the century, the new systems of governance seem to have demanded a demure retreat from the flavors of the Orient, which however could not be entirely enacted. But *Curry* decentres that narrative. It is an amicable reminder that colonialism in India—and therefore hybridity in food cultures—did not start with the British East India Company. Even before the Portuguese, Dutch or French arrived in India, there were the Mughals. Collingham begins globally, at Manhattan’s Curry Row, and with Britain’s foreign minister, Robin Cook’s controversial claim, from 2001, that chicken tikka masala was the British national dish. But she is quick to usher in the Portuguese and Dutch influence on Indian cooking, which brought in tomatoes, potatoes, chilies, French beans, cauliflowers and so on. It is also unique to see a discussion of khichari through French records, and not English travelers, in this case, a jeweler Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, about four hundred years before Mrs. Patmore ruled the roost in Downton’s kitchen. In sixteenth- and seventeenth-century India, khichari happened to be the staple food, made of lentils and rice, at times chickpeas or millets replacing the lentils. According to Tavernier, “Indian soldiers made the meal more luxurious by dipping their fingers in a bowl of melted ghee (clarified butter) as they ate. Pickles or salt fish also went well with khichari.”

23 Records of travelers to India around this time, as well as records from Ayurveda texts, elicit the contentious thesis that

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Hindus practiced beef eating, not merely as aberrations. The seventeenth-century Venetian traveler, Niccolao Manucci, who worked in the employ of Dara Shikoh, Shah Alam, and Raja Jai Singh, among others, has noted that beef eating was considered a sinful and defiling thing. Such a passionate classification of beef by Hindus presupposes the notion that they had indeed tasted the bovine flesh. Also, Ayurveda texts that described cow-meat as difficult to digest, advised caution while eating it, but did not forbid it altogether. Beef broth was a therapeutic recipe in ancient India, and beef was a regular feature of Indian meals until the first century AD, including the Mahabharata, featuring scenes of Brahmins relishing beef curries. Ironically, it was by the time of Babur that beef eating was zealously guarded against by the Hindus. Later Akbar renounced cow-meat and even requested his citizens to avoid the use of onions and garlic, in respect of the supposedly ancient faiths of Hindustan. Of the things the Mughals gave or found in India, kebabs and biriyani probably reign supreme, the latter being something for which even the very pious Aurangzeb had been frustrated to find a decent cook, after his son refused to send Sulaiman—one of the esteemed architects of the dish—to the imperial kitchen.

The Mughals made India their home. It was not surprising that they took to Indian habits. But the case of the Portuguese is especially interesting for they were probably the first colonials to adopt Indian manners, along with Indian food habits. As Collingham observes, they gave up their tight knee-length hoses, for breeches known as “Candales,” they

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24 Collingham, *Curry*, p. 22.
26 Ibid. p. 39.
turned exceptionally clean and changed their underclothes regularly, bathed once or twice each day, drank water and beverages without their lips touching the rim of the glasses (after the Hindu technique), their women observed Purdah, chewed betel and treated “themselves with sweet-smelling perfumes and sandalwood.”27 The seeds of Anglo-Indian hybrid cooking—nay imperial manners—were sown by the Portuguese.

The European spice trade provided a steady supply of important flavorings such as black pepper, cloves, and cinnamon. And, after Columbus’s voyage of 1492, Spain and Portugal were supplied with curious new ingredients from the Americas, such as tomatoes, potatoes, maize, cashew nuts, and turkeys. A stew of chicken simmered with cloves, cinnamon, black pepper, saffron, and a little vinegar and thickened with ground almonds was standard Portuguese fare during the sixteenth century.28

In seventeenth-century Goa, the College of St. Paul provided Christian, Portuguese, Latin, musical and culinary education to Indian converts to Christianity. Meats and fishes, Florentines and Marchpains (marzipans), were passed on to Indian cooks and wives, along with tutelage in confection. It was the Portuguese who first made Bengal dexterous in colonial cooking styles, beginning with the Moghs, who later became proficient confectioners in British Bengal.

Even vindaloo, which was a Portuguese-Indian invention went seamlessly into British receipts, after 1797, when they invaded Goa. Interestingly, the name of the dish

28 Ibid. p. 59.
gave England’s unofficial song in the FIFA World Cup, in 1998:

Me and me mum and me dad and me gran
We’re off to Waterloo,
Me and me mum and me dad and me gran
With a bucket of vindaloo.
Vindaloo, unofficial song of England

The British owed a great debt to the Portuguese for ushering Catholic cooks in India who had no qualms about cooking beef and pork, without fears of losing caste or religion, unlike the Hindus and Muslims. Its earliest preparation comprised a concoction of cinnamon, cloves, pepper and chillies, along with a sauce of garlic, toddy vinegar and tamarind paste. Vindaloo originally came from carne de vinho e alhos, meaning “meat cooked in white-vinegar and garlic.” Toddy-vinegar and tamarind replaced white-vinegar, before the British assimilated this dish, as well. They also adopted the Portuguese words “caril” or “careee,” which they had picked up from Kannada (kari) or Malayalam (karil) to describe vegetables or meats sautéed in spices. Blunt as the British were in their understanding of subregional differences, they used the cluster term “curry” to refer to almost any sauce- or gravy-based dish from India, including the Mughlai kormas, yakhniis, dapiazas, and roghan josh. Thus Bengal became the field of the soupy fish and vegetable curries, Bombay for sea fish curries, and Madras for the fiery red hot curries, tempered with tamarind pulp and, at times, coconut milk.

29 Unofficial Song of the English Team, FIFA 1998,
The curry recipes Collingham refers to come from *The Indian Cookery Book* (1880), W.H. Dawe’s *The Wife’s Help to Indian Cookery* (1888), and Edward Palmer’s *Indian Cookery* (1936). Palmer was also the founder of the E.P. Veeraswamy & Co. which imported curry paste and powder from India and sold them under the brand, “Nizams,” as well as of the Indian restaurant, Veeraswamy—the oldest one running in Britain—in London’s Regent Street. In doing so, he succeeded Sake Dean Mahomed’s Hindostanee Coffee House, which was opened in 1811, in Portman Square. It was the first Indian-owned restaurant, and perhaps the first home delivery outlet, in Britain, which predated the first fish and chips shop in the country by at least fifty years—which was opened in London’s east end, by Joseph Mailin, a Jewish immigrant, in 1860. Apart from curries, Mahomed also sought to make available the choicest hookahs to young English gentleman of the Regency. Rather than service the needs or choices of the Indian diaspora, Mahomed was more interested in integrating himself and his talents into British culture, for as Troy Bickham contends, his “upmarket establishment in the wealthy district surrounding Portman Square targeted London’s white population with a taste for India rather than the poor South Asian community of several thousand sailors and labourers.”

**A Culinary Conquest**

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There were many more writers and travelers who refined and mythicized the unsophisticated and generic methods of Anglo-Indian cooking. Among the most notable of their writings are Hannah Glasse’s *Art of Cookery* (1747), William Kitchiner’s *The Cook’s Oracle* (1818), Eliza Acton’s *Modern Cookery* (1845), Alexis Soyer’s *Modern Housewife or Manager* (1849), Elizabeth Hammond’s *Modern Domestic Cookery* (1850), George Francklin Atkinson’s *Curry and Rice on Forty Plates* (1859), Isabella Beeton’s *The Book of Household Management* (1861), Charles Elme Francatelli’s *The Cook’s Guide and the Housekeeper’s and Butler’s Assistant* (1863), Arthur Robert Kenney-Herbert’s *Culinary Jottings for Madras* (1878), the anonymous *Dainty Dishes for Indian Tables* (1879), Olivia Fitzgerald’s *Indian Cookery* (1887), Flora Annie Steel and Grace Gardiner’s *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook* (1898) and E. A. M. Franklin’s *The Wife’s Cookery Book* (1906). Not least due to this outburst of (largely) Victorian culinary literature, Anglo-Indian cooking became, as Collingham describes, the “first truly pan-Indian cuisine.”

Besides the preponderance of female authors engaged in refining the art of household management in Britain and India, the curry was incentivized by British entrepreneurs who had been supplying it to British consumers since 1773, from the Norris Street Coffee House or the Jerusalem Coffee House, as well as trading in curry powders, late eighteenth-century onwards. As the curry powder became a popular item in Victorian periodicals, especially in the women’s sections, one of the entrants for a curry powder recipe claimed to have “learned the secret for preparing ‘Genuine Madras Curry Powder’ from the butler to one of the sons of the infamous
Tipoo Sahib.” By 1860s, the British conquest over the culinary geography of India was complete, insomuch as even the most mobile items of food from the times, such as cold meats and tea, remind vestigial colonials of both the nations of the glories of the Raj, until today. It was only natural then to find Edward Palmer’s very recipe of the Edwardian kedgeree, garnished with onions, eggs and fish, served up by Mrs. Patmore, while an April morning in pre-war England greeted the Lord of Grantham with the news of the death of his heirs, on the Atlantic. Even in the face of abject loss, imperials had their good old roasts and curries to look back upon, as signifiers of the savage lands they had domesticated.

Collingham eventually leads the tale of curry to the imperial centre, which is the late Victorian and early Edwardian phases, when although the British in India are said to have been expected to maintain strict distance from Indian cultural etiquettes, back in Britain they were happy sharing their culinary exploits trafficked from the Raj. Sen’s history is hot on heels of that of Collingham’s. Very little detail or fact appears to have been lost in her retelling of Collingham’s fifty pages on the curry in Victorian Britain, in merely fifteen. An anecdote common to both is the Duke of Norfolk’s irritation at the growing consumerism around the curry, in 1840s’ Britain. Edmund White, the proprietor of Selim’s Curry products advertised his goods in a pamphlet titled “Curries: their Healthful and Medicinal Qualities; their Importance in a Domestic, Commercial, and National Point of View.” Herein he argued that his “True Indian Curry Paste” could cure indigestion and invigorate blood circulation, even save lives, such as that of Mr. Harper, of the Jerusalem Coffee

31 Collingham, Curry, p. 135.
House, who was cured by Selim’s aromatic curry paste.\textsuperscript{32} Such philistine advertisements provoked the Duke to advise Irish peasants—during the Great Famine (1845-52)—to substitute potatoes with a pinch of curry powder, for apparently curry was to India what potatoes were to Ireland. In a lampooning passage, The Times wrote that “the noble cuisinnier [sic] will go down to posterity with a pinch of curry powder in his hand.”\textsuperscript{33}

Thanks to these similarities, Sen’s history may seem to belong with the same ideology as Collingham’s—that of recreating the British fascination for and opposition to Indian dishes. However, Collingham tries to negotiate a distinct place for imperial cooks and entrepreneurs, not just in the creation of an imperial culinary tradition but imperialism itself, especially in the domestic spaces. She argues about the importance of complex imperial hybridity and hierarchies being staged in the homes of East India Company officials and retirees, who if they “were unable to afford the expense of bringing an Indian cook home with them, and could not find an Indian in Britain, old India hands employed women like Sarah Shade, who had learned to make curries in India.” Shade had the distinction of cooking Indian cuisine for English families in Britain, as early as the 1780s. Before that, she also got to cook for the Sultan of Mysore, when she was held captive during the Anglo-Mysore war. Despite being wounded in her face and an arm, she survived miraculously thanks to her Indian culinary and linguistic talents “picked

\textsuperscript{32} Collingham, \textit{Curry}, p. 136.
up...among the Indian and Eurasian wives of the other soldiers.”

Sen, on the contrary, affords uncomplicated autonomy to the curry itself, which then appears to have travelled to places far and wide, pleasing or scandalizing the orthodoxy, along with trafficking human characters, settlements, races and memories. The emergence of tandoor recipes in post-1960s’ Britain, and new restaurants after the fashion of London’s Veeraswamy or New Delhi’s Moti Mahal (opened in 1948) seems to stage a conquest itself over metropolitan British spaces. Such restaurants include, Bombay Brasserie in Kensington (1982), Red Fort, in Soho (1984), Chutney Mary, in Chelsea (1990), and Café Spice Namaste (1991). The fact that in 2008, five very upmarket Indian restaurants in London—Amaya, Benares, Quilon, Rasoi Vineet Bhatia and Tamarind—were awarded a Michelin star each, comes as “the ultimate proof of how deeply Indian food has become integrated into British life.” Even when Sen chronicles the adventures of the curry or mulligatawny in the United States, one cannot help but read it as a sociopolitical compulsion from outside, to secure cultural ground—through recipes brought by Indian or Anglo-Indian immigrants; bestselling books such as Eliza Leslie’s *Direction for Cookery in its Various Branches* (1840) or *Catherine Beecher’s Domestic Receipt Book* (1846); President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s fascination for captain chicken curry; and the institutionalization of the dish by the likes of food academic, James Beard, and writer, Cecily Brownstone, in the American academia and press,

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34 Collingham, *Curry*, p. 132.
respectively.36 There are almost no instances of the sociopolitical acceptance or assimilation of the curry within the personal space, as if there are no economic or cultural tensions between those party to its tasting and its gainsayers.

Sen’s work is interesting in terms of the anecdotes it offers. Hers is not invested in unweaving the deeply intermeshed strands of domestic imperial politics, which shaped sociopolitical and colonial or neocolonial administration. From the point of view popular history, this may not necessarily be an adverse thing. For instance, her account of Ranji Smile is particularly informative. Smile, the “first Indian chef in North America,” was brought from London’s Savoy Hotel, to New York, in 1899, by the American restaurateur, Richard Sherry, at his place, the Sherry’s, on the Fifth Avenue. While the Los Angeles Times spoke of him as having possessed everyone who had tasted his curries, the Harper’s Bazaar noted that women went wild over him. A native of Karachi, with experiences of cooking in Calcutta and Bombay, Smile went on to claim to be “the fourth son of the Emir of Baluchistan, a graduate of Cambridge University and a personal friend of King Edward VII [before marrying] succession of ever-younger American women.” After he left New York for Delhi, in 1913, his plans of establishing an Indian restaurant in the city were not heard of again. Even after his vanishing act, the New York of 1920s boasted of several Indian eateries, such as Rajah, on 44th Street, and Ceylon India Inn, on the 49th.

Henceforth, the American fortunes of the curry appear driven by sociopsychological obligations—a fear of missing out driven by postwar capitalist modernity and liberal

36 Ibid. p. 55.
attitudes—rather than tried, tested and domesticated culinary virtues. With the exceptional villain, Smiley, now gone, the curry-flurry seems to carry on as predicted. Smiley’s departure is followed by Punjabi settlers in the Sacramento Valley in California through marriages with Mexican women, Florence Brobeck’s successful venture as a food writer in *Cooking with Curry* (1951), Bengali seamen settling in post-World War II Harlem as butchers and marrying Puerto Rican or African American women, the World Fair in New York (1964), bestselling cookery books by Madhur Jaffrey and Julie Sahni, in the 1970s-80s, and the simultaneous proliferation of Indian restaurants and shopping rows in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles and Houston—all of which helped carry forward the legacy of the curry in the States. None of these, however, resemble the inner workings of Anglo-Indian imperial families which sought to rediscover, refine, rewrite—at times repudiate or redoubt, and at times rescind or reaffirm—the place of the curry as a quasi-administrative tool in the hands of cooks, housewives, and guiders of household management, to warrant the imperishability of British political control.

Throughout the travels of the curry in Canada, Australia, the Indian diaspora in Fiji, Caribbean, Mauritius, Sri Lanka, or among the natives of Africa, Indonesia, Japan and Vietnam, Sen provides a depersonalized—although remarkably summarized—account of the cuisine. The only deterministic categories as to the variations of the curries in various parts of the world are, according to her, macropolitical events such as colonial settlements, imperial trade, geographical specificities (such as in Jamaica, Trinidad & Tobago or Guinea and Madagascar) or diversity of ingredients (such as in Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos). The
literary or anecdotal nature of the chronicles progressively diminish as one moves from Collingham’s to Sen’s history of the curry, and from the Anglo-Indian to the Southeast Asian sections of the latter.

*A Travelogy of Curry*

Curry is a culinary territory that—especially the more decolonized it becomes—remains ever so colonial, even unbeknownst to the erstwhile colonizer. For as Claudia Roden describes in her article on London’s mongrel culinary culture, “[f]ood seems to be the part of a culture that immigrants hold on to longest—when they have abandoned the traditional dress, the language, the music,” or even more interestingly, “Indian food [in London] is a uniquely British experience.”37 Which is why whether it is Bangladeshis, Pakistanis or Indians who prepare or serve it, even fast food seems to belong in the great British imperial tradition, to consumers who are indeed oblivious to the political and cultural dehumanization of India that colonial rule effected. An argument in favour of how the curry has been decolonized is that in places like America, Australia or Southeast Asia, it is simply another cog in the wheel of a utilitarian culinary capitalist postmodernity, where the curry that pleases the greatest number will last the longest, regardless of its individual or regional appurtenances. Nor is the consumption of curry, even in Britain, a crash course in colonial history. Cooks and vendors of Balti, butter chicken,

or chicken tikka masala, have willingly foregone their contested Asian histories on the way to becoming cosmopolitan British, and part of a £4.2 billion curry industry, and a 100,000-people-workforce.

But this seemingly multicultural phenomenon which began in the late 1960s, is only conditionally so. “Multiculturalism,” writes Elizabeth Buettner, “has never indisputably been deemed ‘a positive force’ for Britain—far more commonly, it has been imagined either as a problem or as a means of tackling a problem.” Unlike South Asian food, South Asian people were never quite an acceptable part of the British multicultural population. The Chinese, Italian or Afro-Caribbean immigrants never really occupied the centre-stage of British immigrant population; it was always the Indians, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, who ran the most successful or the most number of non-British restaurants, thus ensconcing themselves “within Britain’s culinary landscape.”

From approximately 300 curry restaurants in 1960, Britain went on to accommodate 1200 by the 1970s, 3000 by 1980, and almost 7000 by the beginning of 1990s. Today, the Asian Catering Federation (ACF), which represents Asian restaurants and food chains in Britain, has about 35,000 restaurants under its wing, from the South Asian, Chinese, Malayan and other Southeast Asian communities. In February, 2017, Yawar Khan, the chairman of the ACF, predicted that about 17,000 curry-houses would

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shut down in Britain, by 2027. Britain currently has 12,000 Indian or South Asian curry-houses, that outnumber its 10,500 fish and chips outlets. This means that most of them would either be naturally wiped out by the end of the decade, or such is the ideology with which the ACF representatives are working. The reasons cited for this by Khan, were the inability of restaurateurs to adapt to the culinary needs of the British society, inability to service customers according to their changing tastes, lifestyles and the turn towards healthy eating, ignoring modern technology and social media, and so on. Striking a woefully nostalgic chord, he questioned, “[l]ooking at drinks menus, you would never know that they grow tea in India—where are the green, oolong and white teas. Where's the Darjeeling, Assam, Dooar, and Travancore?” He was backed in his claim by his co-chairman, Thomas Chan, who is also Chairman of the Chinese Takeaway Association, in Britain. Taking this as an example of a Bangladeshi-Chinese nexus in a foreign continent, opens up a whole new dimension of culinary and—more interestingly—political economy.

The more serious issue skirted by Khan and Chan, is Brexit. More than 1000 curry-houses had shut down in

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Britain, by November, 2016, as the leave-campaign was in full swing. The clampdown on immigrants came as a heavy blow to curry-house owners who would now have to pay an annual tax of £2000 instead of the previous £1000, to secure skilled immigrant labourers. Priti Patel, the International Development Secretary, and a Leave campaigner, had assured that curry-houses would be able to hire more easily after the Brexit verdict. When the clampdown began, betrayal was writ large on the faces of Sanjay Shah\(^42\) or Oli Khan,\(^43\) major London-based restauranteurs. In 2016, itself, the number of licensed curry restaurants had declined by 13 percent.\(^44\)

It is essential to understand in this context what Appadurai calls “political economy of taste.” The problem of the institution of curry in Britain today is not that it is not authentic or pleasing, nor that it has not necessarily been able to keep up with changing times and ideology. In fact, the problem is that the curry is truly authentic and dynamic—but not exclusive enough. In Britain, curry can only either be a signifier of luxury or one that haemorrhages luxury—a proxy-air of aristocracy—over time. The agency of multiculturalism


\(^44\) Ibid.
is denied to the producers of curry, for it is a monopoly of the consumer, or the erstwhile imperial. Consider the curry as a luxury commodity, especially in the context of *Downton Abbey* or Collingham’s historiography, and then what Appadurai writes:

> with luxury commodities...as the distance between consumers and producers is shrunk, so the issue of *exclusivity* gives way to the issue of *authenticity*. That is, under premodern conditions, the long-distance movement of precious commodities entailed costs that made the acquisition of them *in itself* a marker of exclusivity and an instrument of sumptuary distinction. Where the control of such objects was not directly subject to state regulation, it was indirectly regulated by the cost of acquisition, so that they stayed within the hands of the few. As technology changes, the reproduction of these objects on a mass basis becomes possible, the dialogue between consumers and the original source becomes more direct, and middle-class consumers become capable (legally and economically) of vying for these objects. The only way to preserve the function of these commodities in the prestige economies of the modern West is to complicate the idea of authenticity. The very complicated competition and collaboration between “experts,”...dealers, producers, scholars, and consumers, is part of the political economy of taste in the contemporary West.\(^{45}\)

It is this competition and collaboration that we see in contemporary Britain between Khan and Chan, on the one

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hand, and the consumers of curry with their growing demands for lighter recipes and depleting curry-houses on the other. Authenticity is performed as a quest for reaffirming the ambiguous surplus that a certain commodity or its varieties—such as the curry—become. It must therefore be disowned, in favour of a technologically and tastefully superior variety of the same, engineered by another ethnic group or community—such as the Sino-Malayan in this case. In this game of battling authenticities and ethnicities, *The Guardian* plaintively asks, “[w]ho killed the great British curry-house,” while *The Economist* reports, in a review of Collingham’s next book, *The Taste of Empire*:

> food was not an adjunct to Britain’s imperial might but fundamental to it... *The Englishwoman in India*, a handbook dating from 1864, instructed its readers to bring out with them not only clothes but also table linen, Wedgwood china, cutlery and crystal glasses. The idea was to mirror the ‘best regulated establishments’ at home and show the ‘natives’ how to do it. Dinner was less a meal than a statement of imperial intent.

It is that “authentic” imperial spirit—not the recipes—that the postcolonial South Asian curry-makers, in general, have failed to live up to. While Collingham and this paper would

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argue that the British made the curry their own, South Asian immigrants are today perceived by Brexeters as attempting to make themselves British, in the name of curry.

The journey of curry in Britain is thus amenable to a travelogy: defined as “the ideology of travel—where the traveller is not just a consumer but also a producer…also a measure of how much home the traveller constructs and what modes he adopts in the process: coercion, negotiation, memory, exile, emigration, expatriation, colonialism, and so forth.” This would precondition an intentionality or consciousness of the curry. Arguably, this intentionality or consciousness of domesticating itself as a product of the imperial home (in colonial Britain) and then repeating its patterns of alternating exclusivity or authenticity (in a postcolonial marketplace) also places the curry in a very strong gender discourse. The determinism of something as domestic as cooking and dining in imperial politics may be an untenable argument to most consumers of curry, but that does not make it any less valid. Also, Collingham’s thesis has powerful precedents, one of them being Anne McClintock’s *Imperial Leather* (1995) which goes on to articulate the triadic crisis in domestic imperial commodities, in the order of, “undervaluation of women’s work in the domestic realm, the overvaluation of the commodity in the industrial market, and the disavowal of colonized economies in the arena of empire.”

It is one thing for Asian curry-houses to get marginalized in the politics of consumption of curry. It is quite another for British women characters to be sidelined in

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the curry’s imperial legacy. Obviously it is unfair to see the culinary domestic army of cooks, stewardesses, governesses and butlers—for instance in the context of Downton Abbey—as being women, entirely. Rather this infantry belongs in the realm of the feminine or the female, which ordered, refined, resuscitated and reiterated Englishness as a virtue of progressive and inaccessible difference. In that, the troops that we see downstairs at Downton, recreating recipes from Mrs. Beeton’s age, do not differ vastly from the troops that are sent to the Somme. The intermediary casualties of the latter lead to the enduring exile and regeneration of the quasi-warfare techniques among the household troops at Downton. As McClintock illuminates, in what seems like an upscaled passage straight out of Julian Fellowes notes from the sets of Downton:

Household arrangements...took shape around a geometry of extreme separation and specialization that came to discipline every aspect of daily life. Domestic space was mapped as a hierarchy of specialized and distinct boundaries that needed constant and scrupulous policing.

By the mid-nineteenth century...[a] ‘sensual pleasure in classification’ ruled the domestic space—in the labeling of bottles, the careful marking of sheets and clothes, the scrupulous keeping of visitors’ books, the regular accounting of stocks, the meticulous measuring of food, the strict keeping of account books. Specialized utensils, technologies and timetables were developed for different stages of cooking and eating. The fetish for rational measurement led to an increased use of weights and measures. Food was served in obedience to rigid timetables, announced by the ringing of bells. Unlike the medley of sweet and savoury, hot and cold courses served all at once in earlier times, meals now followed strict
sequential rules, one course following the other with the proper decorum of rational, linear progress.\textsuperscript{49}

Immediately, the capers of Mrs. Patmore and Daisy (with their blurry calendar of food supplies), Carson and Mrs. Hughes (with their discussions on the traditions the war will overrule), William and Thomas (who also serve in the war not without great personal sacrifice, for good or for bad), and Anna and Bates (with their working-class romantic struggles) flash, as embodiments of the structures that construct not only Downton, but imperial manners in faraway continents. It is in fact that travelogy—of domesticating the goods of the other, and transforming it into a White Man’s luxury, masquerading as a burden—that the curry has disavowed in contemporary Britain.

Lord Grantham’s reiterations of Downton being his “life’s work” and in the same vein dedicating it to the services of others—the contrarian and feebly patronizing efforts to conceal the tyranny of the civilized—are what gave Britain its brand of \textit{currigatawny} foods.\textsuperscript{50} In fact, \textit{Downton Abbey}, far from being an embarrassing display of Anglophilia, underscores that very tyranny. Except that it is masked by one (eventually) nontreatraining economic setback after another, in the Crawley household. Any attempt to conceal the catastrophe that each morsel of imperial dining marked on the Indian economy, would mean total amnesia and racial superfluity. \textit{Downton Abbey} does not do so. It makes clear that the curry

\textsuperscript{49} McClintock, \textit{Imperial Leather}, p. 168.

became less and less Indian, in its travelogy, but not necessarily more and more British. It was always supposed to remain a hybrid brand of cuisine: a *currigatawny*—curried in the bleeding Indian cottage industries destroyed by the industrial revolution and the railways, and made *tawny* in the wars that the British fought or sponsored with the East India Company’s loots in India, such as the subsidizing the Russian and Prussian armies in the Napoleonic Wars (1793-1815), when supplies of food-stock, spices and battle-gears went hand in hand. British historian, Roger Knight, in his book *Britain Against Napoleon*, records that between 1792 and 1815 (the year of Waterloo), the value of cotton textile exports back to India grew by six times. “The ‘Honorable’ East India Company,” he adds,

as it was called, exported great quantities of goods from Britain, sending them out to India and China, after 1800, at an average annual rate of forty-two large ships, full of textiles, copper, iron, muskets, ordnance and general merchandise. The help given by the Company to the War effort was immense…Grain and rice were brought back from India to Britain, as were the vital and steadily increasing cargoes of saltpetre for the manufacture of gunpowder…The second contribution of the Company was to swell the [British] government’s coffers through payment of high duties on Asian imports…The East India Company and the state had a complicated, many-faceted relationship and, unsurprisingly, the final accounts between the Company and the government for the war years were not settled until 1822.51

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More than the complicity between the cooks and conquerors of the British empire, the thesis of this paper has been to explain the complex nexus of British imperialism in warfronts or politics and imperial domestic manners. The domestic—which was the real space of creative, filial, sexual or culinary imperial explorations and a psychosocial alchemy of the items of use by the other—has often been ignored in Britain’s imperial history. With the French, Portuguese and the Dutch depleted in India, and Napoleon taken captive at Waterloo, there was no stopping the British to substitute the possibilities of a French haute cuisine in India, with their own mongrel *curri gatawny*. That is precisely what they did. It is no surprise, therefore, that besides Glass’s *Art of Cookery*, all the other examples of Anglo-Indian recipes and cookery books come after 1815, to mask the *métissage* of Anglo-Indian food consumption in the Raj. Today, Mass-British responses to the curry, korma, Balti, tikka masala, and so on, may not essentially governed by the nuances of each of these recipes but rather the portmanteau experience of simply “going for an Indian,” constituted simultaneously by racial intolerance and the triumph of multiculturalism. It is this dichotomy that demands the portmanteau of the *curri gatawny*, just as it is eaten, devoid of the differences between the curry or the mulligatawny, but purely as a sign of essential difference from the white culture of the British consumer.

Despite being the rulers, the British could not pronounce Indian names. Mulligatawny or kedgeree thus became metaphors of their inability to use Indian proper nouns, as well as an imperial politics that sought to

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52 Buettener, “Going for an Indian,” p. 869.
bowdlerize Indian nomenclatures. *Currigatawny* may also be understood as a continuing practice in that trend, besides a metaphor of Britain’s step-brotherly relations with the curry industry.