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The Rise of the Curry

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Mankind, like Tennyson's Ulysses, has always roamed with a "hungry heart" (12), unable to endure the dullness that accompanies the "pause" (12), but the life of a wayfarer is often strewn with moments of homesickness. Therefore, whenever man navigated through the antique, uncharted territories to expand the horizons of his knowledge and reach, he brought with him flavours, spices, and recipes as a little memorabilia of the home and the self he had left behind. Since the familiar flavour and aroma of his native cuisine, in a land of new flavours, was potent enough to unleash a plethora of memories that would cocoon him in the warmth and comfort reminiscent of home. Like a water bearer's cracked pot, whose dripping water leaves a wet trail along the path he travels, the food, a traveller brings with him, also leaves a similar trail—the drifting aroma of his recipes permeates all the indigenous cuisines and cultures it encounters. Simultaneously, the exotic cuisines impact his palate; an impact he carries all the way back to his homeland. The curry too underwent similarly exciting adventures and experiences of culinary exchanges before it finally took its present shape and form.

What is a Curry?

Being an Indian, it is difficult to be a stranger to curry, since at some point of our lives we have all enjoyed a good mutton, chicken, egg or even vegetable curry. But the home-made dish with a gravy that we refer to as a curry is distinctly different from what someone from the British Isles would consider to be a curry. The reasons behind the inconsistency being the divergent evolutionary trajectories taken by the curry in the two regions due to the disparity in flavour palates as well as the unavailability of various ingredients. However, it doesn't stop there; there is also a larger colonial machinery working silently behind this disparity.

Although "curry" sounds Indian, it is a British coinage. The etymology of the term "curry" is shrouded in controversies which make its etymological history problematic. There are two dominant theories regarding the origin of the eponymous term. According to some, "curry" became a part of the English language around the sixteenth century as a corrupted version of the Tamil *kari* ("a sauce or relish to be eaten with rice"), that the British travel writers stumbled across. While others staunchly believe that it was borrowed from the Portuguese *caree* or *caril* which, according to Pietro Della Valle, in *The Travels of Pietra Della Valle in India*, was a rich and fragrant broth or sauce eaten with rice (Collingham 115). Based on the contradictory accounts of the etymological origin of the curry it may be concluded that "curry" isn't simply a term; it is a concept constructed by the British and the European narratives—"Curry as a signifier of Indian food was invented in British colonial narratives and shaped by commercial interests and racial prejudices" (Varman). The British discourse on curry is significant because the moment they talk about curry, they are speaking for India and not of it. This allows the Brits to establish and reinforce stereotypes and racial prejudices regarding India; to control the perspective through which a colony, such as India, is to be perceived; and to impose their preconceived notions of India's inferiority on not just their countrymen but also the rest of the world.

India is famous for its diverse cultures, and its culinary diversity is equally baffling. In such a confusing scenario the British coined the generic term "curry" in order to simplify the regionally diverse and variegated Indian cuisine into a coherent spread. The British "curry," therefore, refers to any kind of spiced stew of meat, fish or vegetable (Narayan 164). However, this monolithic concept of curry not only disregards India's rich culinary history, it also serves as a tool for homogenising a diverse country such as India; thereby creating a façade of a unified India whose signifier is curry. According to Sucharita Kanjilal, "It [curry] takes a country, obscures it and creates an imagined community on the coloniser's own terms."

Interestingly, 'curry' was not just a British attempt to linguistically simplify the regional heterogeneity of the Indian cuisine; it also sought to mellow down the complex flavours of the Indian cuisine in order to make them more suited for the British palate. In this process they were aided by their Indian cooks who diluted the gastronomically intricate Indian recipes to accommodate the English tastes. Curry, therefore, evolved from an umbrella term which was conceptualised to make the unfamiliar Indian stews and ragouts comprehensible, into a unique dish which was the perfect blend of the British concept of food, and the Indian recipes. For Susan Zlotnick this is comparable to the process of assimilating the Other into the self, but on the terms dictated by the self (55-56). Uma Narayan notes that, this homogenization of the Indian cuisine under "this "fabricated" entity" (164) called "curry," and the incorporation of the same into the British cuisine is "a pattern not too different from the way in which India itself was ingested into the Empire—for India as a modern political entity was "fabricated" through the intervention of British rule, which replaced the *masala*[1] of *Moghul* empire[2] and various kingdoms and princely states with the unitary signifier "India," much as British curry powder replaced local masalas" (165).

Foundation Years

Like its recipe, the story of the curry begins with spices—the same spices on whose quest Columbus accidentally discovered America, and which inspired Vasco Da Gama to brave the malevolent seas, and sail for years through an unknown route. Back in the days spice was a lucrative trade since spices were worth ship-full of gold, bronze, and silver in the West. In fact, the Roman Caesars treasured them so much that they were locked in the treasury with other precious gems and metals (Collingham 48). The same spices led the English to the Indian shores around seventeenth century, even though the Portuguese and the Dutch had the upper hand, having started earlier than the British.

As the British became evermore resolute to consolidate their position in India, the extent of their invasion into the Indian subcontinent increased; thereby intensifying the frequency of their interaction with the Indian culture. By the end of the seventeenth century they had established settlements in Bombay, Madras, and Calcutta; the foundation for the Raj was thus laid. In the initial stages, therefore, since the British and the Indian cultures were compelled to share the same space, the British and the Indian culinary traditions clashed. Interestingly, instead of battling for supremacy they reached a state of compromise, thereby engendering a hybrid Anglo-Indian cuisine that was situated at the cross-roads of the movement towards recreating the British cuisine in India, and the movement towards adapting the Indian cuisine for the British palate. However, this simple trade assumed the monstrous form of a colonial endeavour, followed by the establishment of the British Raj, and the relations between the two nations were redefined. Therefore, what started out as a simple power-play to dominate the world trade, ended up laying the foundation of the British Raj in India.

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[1] *Editor's Note (herein after called Ed.N.):* combination of spices.

[2] *Ed. N.:* Mughal or Mogul empire was an empire in Indian subcontinent (early sixteenth century to mid nineteenth century).

The rise of curry is inextricably linked with the establishment of the British Raj in India because the culinary exchange that precipitated its rise wouldn't have happened without the extensive migration occasioned by the Raj. As their trading activities progressed, the company officials were getting increasingly involved in the Indian politics, and the desire for profit intertwined with the benefit of acquiring territory. Within a century, that is, from the beginning of the eighteenth century till the early nineteenth century, the East India Company had not only established their dominion over large tracts of Indian territories but had also become their *de facto* rulers. Ruling such a vast territory required huge manpower; as a result, hundreds of civil servants and thousands of soldiers from Britain were employed. Initially the British men who settled in India were usually single because of the absence of the Suez Canal which made the journey to India not only long and tedious, but also rife with diseases (Collingham 85-86), thereby, making it difficult for people, especially women, to travel. Scarcity of women in the new land drove the British men into the arms of Indian mistresses and wives (Monroe 51). These inter-marriages had two significant outcomes—because of these marriages the cultural differences between the two countries became more readily acceptable (Monroe 51), and these "sleeping dictionaries" (Sen 24), as the Indian wives were called, taught the British merchants the local languages, and the Indian way of dining.

Even though the East India Company had overthrown most of the Indian rulers, British traders could not compete with the majestic Indian emperors in wealth and grandeur. In fact, to their Indian subjects they appeared to be nothing more than lowly traders. The assertion of their status as the ruling elite, therefore, needed to be more symbolic than political. An important aspect of power-play in India was the establishment of the culinary and artistic superiority. To establish their status as the new ruling class the British traders, therefore, were required to behave like the aristocratic emperors, and an integral part of that was leading a sumptuous lifestyle. Perhaps the best way to display wealth was through extravagant *burra khanas* or big dinners. The idea was to cover the table cloth with so much food that even an inch of it should not be visible. Such a grand feast demanded a huge number of cooks, and even though some French and English cooks were available in India most of the cooks were of Indian heritage, and they were called *khansamans*. After vigorous training and ceaseless instructions these *khansamans* became skilled in British and French cooking techniques. But the employment of these *khansamans* yielded some interesting results. They were so used to the Indian flavour palate that even though they could master the Western cooking, plating, and serving techniques, they were all given an Indian twist. For example the French omelette was enlivened with a dash of curry powder and was fried in ghee, while the shepherd's pie was laced with cumin, sesame seeds, and ginger (Monroe 55–56). Since to these *khansamans* high-class dishes were usually the ones enjoyed by the previous ruling class, the *Mughals*, they started recreating the *Mughlai*[3] dishes with a European twist for the *burra khanas*. That is how the curry came to be featured along with other hybrids of *Mughlai* delicacies during this exercise of displaying wealth on the dining table. Out of all the dishes curry became a staple because of its ability to jazz up the insipid flavours of the roasted and boiled meat with minimal effort. The extent of the curry's invasion into the food culture of the British in India can be best exemplified through the observation made by Henry Edward Fane, in 1842, in *Five Years in India*: "the eternal curry and rice, which neither breakfast nor dinner in this country [India] is complete without" (29). It must be pointed out that, sixteen years before the official inauguration of the Raj in India, curry's dominance over the British palate was so strong that their everyday life seemed to be incomplete without it. Therefore, the same circumstances which led to the rise of the Raj were also responsible for the rise of the curry. However, Zlotnick contends that Indian food was never adopted by the colonial masters; they invented the curry and the curry powder in order to "ingest India into their system" (Varman), all the while maintaining the façade inter-country cultural and culinary exchange.

In the beginning of British Raj in the nineteenth century, when curry reached the British shores, the scenario got complicated—while the graph of curry's rise in Britain paralleled the rise of Raj in India, curry's importance in India declined. This difference in the British reaction towards curry in Britain and in India is the basis of the ambiguous relationship between British people and the curry.

Curry Reaches Britain

Curry landed in Britain a few decades before the beginning of the reign of Queen Victoria. The earliest channel was the letters written by the company officials to quench the bubbling curiosity and fascination for the orient of their family members living in Britain. They not only described their lives in the antique land, but also gave detailed instructions on how to recreate some of the exotic recipes. This reinforced the idea of India as an exotic land because its "allure was necessary to provoke an imperial interest in incorporating this Jewel into the British crown" (Narayan 165).

The second route was through the British wives, who, while in India, dutifully recorded some of the recipes, and carried them back to Britain, either after their husbands' retirement or on a leave. They gave these recipes to their British cooks, and made them privy to the secret tips on making the best curry. Just the way Jos Sedley's mother, in Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, instructs the cook to make some curry for her son as he is very fond of it (20). Even these housewives played a crucial role in the imperial project. As Zlotnick observes:

> When utilitarians like Macaulay and James Mill were busily trying to assimilate India into the British Empire and Anglicizing it through educational and legal reforms, British women undertook an analogous task. They incorporated Indian food, which functioned metonymically for India, into the national diet and made it culturally British. (52)

Sometimes, those who had returned from India were averse to the idea of employing British housemaids, having been too used to the easy subservience of the Indian servants, so they brought them along. These Indian servants were of course the masters of whipping up the perfect curry, and their presence in Britain enriched the British curry-scene.

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[3] *Ed. N.:* pertaining to the Mogul era.

The Reasons behind the Rise of the Curry in Britain

Since the initial aim of the East India Company officials was to amass as much wealth as they could for the company as well as themselves; they were able to retire very early, and return to their homeland. Their tendency to live like the Indian aristocracy earned them the epithet of “nabobs,” and like true Indian *nawabs*[4] they brought their love for curry home in order to recreate their life in the Raj—they were plagued by what Tulasi Srinivas refers to as “gastro-nostalgia” (qtd. in Varman). Though some could afford to bring cooks from India, others had to be content with the coffee house curries. It was to cater to these “nabobs” that new restaurants sprung up, and the old ones modified their menus to include curry. Norris Street Coffee House located in Haymarket was the first one to serve curry in 1773, and the first exclusively Indian restaurant was Sake Dean Mohammad’s Hindoostanee Coffee House which was established in 1809. It must be pointed out that Sake Dean Mohammad’s endeavour was a failure even though curry was such a hot-favourite. It is possible that his Coffee-House faced a whole-hearted rejection because the British populace didn’t want a native to guide them on the path of the great Indian culinary journey as that would undermine their position of dominance. However, by the middle of the nineteenth century restaurants were fighting about the authenticity of their curries. This “widespread consumption of curry,” according to Varman, was “a reminder of Britain’s position as a master nation.”

Interestingly enough, these *nawabs* weren’t the reason behind the curry’s growing popularity in Britain, even though they were the ones to bring the legacy of the Raj to Britain. During the Victorian era different curry powder manufacturers began to compete among themselves to capture the market; a side effect of the Industrial revolution. In order to do that they employed several sales gimmick. Those who had returned from India were used to the flavour of the curry, but for the native British populace it was a Herculean task to enjoy its strong taste and overwhelming aroma. That is so because with the commencement of the neo-classical age Britain went back to the classical world, and along with its art and architecture it also adopted the combination of salt and acid of the classical cooking (Collingham 134). At the same time contemporary scientific theories regarding digestion created distrust for pungent smelling spices and vegetables, consequently the British food became bland (Collingham 135). Therefore, for the Victorian English the flavour of the curry must have been very shocking. As a result, the Victorian England had to be convinced to try the exotic spice mix called curry powder. In order to do that the manufacturers hailed the health and gastronomic benefits of the curry, and fed the Victorian England stories about the healing powers of the miraculous curry. In 1844, the enterprising Edmund White, the manufacturer of Selim’s Curry products, in the true Victorian fashion of advertising, wrote a pamphlet entitled “Curries: their Healthful and Medicinal Qualities; their Importance in a Domestic, Commercial, and National Point of View,” where he presented curry as a stimulant of digestion as well as that of a sluggish mind (Collingham 136). While Sorlie’s Perfumery and Warehouse advertised that curry “contributes most of any food to an increase in the Human Race” (qtd. in Sen 39). Some of the most preposterous claims made by the sellers were that curry could save lives, and is as potent as any medicine.

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[4] *Ed. N.:* a native governor during the time of the Mogul empire.

These tales about the curry powder incited people to include recipes of curry in their cookbooks. The earliest example would be that of Hannah Glasse's *The Art of Cookery* published in 1747. The growing demand for recipes involving curry powder flooded the market with cookbooks—initially containing chapters on curry, and later completely dedicated to curry. Curry became ubiquitous since anything could be turned into a curry. As Lizzie Collingham remarks, "there was virtually nothing that the British would not stew in curry sauce, from ordinary cuts of meat to calf's feet, ox palates, sheep's heads, lobsters, and periwinkles" (138). Also, curry was an excellent way of re-using leftover meat. In fact, in *Mrs. Beeton's Book of Household Management*, Mrs. Beeton notes that curries were suitable for "cold meat cookery" (qtd. in Collingham 138).While the commercial interest in curry and curry powder increased the consumption of curry, the cookbooks brought it into the domestic realm—"On the one hand, this allowed the tropes of plurality, openness, and hybridity to prevail to justify cultural exchanges that marked colonialism. On the other hand, domesticating Indian food through curry helped to incorporate the colonized as a natural part of the colonizer" (Varman). Despite such hue and cry it is interesting to note that even around 1815 curry hadn't achieved the expected precedence. This becomes apparent in Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* where Becky Sharp, unaware of the nature of the curry, having never tasted it before, decides to taste it as "everything must be good that comes from there [India]" only to suffer "tortures with the cayenne pepper" (20). Her lack of knowledge is suggestive of the fact that even around 1815, the time period of the novel, curry was not very well known except amongst the British *nawabs*.

Queen Victoria

As it has been mentioned before, Britain's tryst with curry began quite early. But the British love for curry simmered away till Queen Victoria declared her unflinching and undying loyalty and love towards the curry, and brought it to a rolling boil. Interestingly, her love for curry is so well known that no representation of her in modern and popular fiction is thought to be complete, if she is not shown to be an admirer and a connoisseur of curry.

Initially, the curry was rejected by the masses because it was rumoured to be a lower-class way of reusing cold meat. Even though the competition to sell the most authentic curry and curry powder had set the stage, the Victorians were still unable to overcome their racial prejudice towards the pungent curry. It was Queen Victoria's patronage that made curry cool and brought it in vogue. Queen Victoria was fascinated by India and everything Indian; she not only tried to learn Hindi and Urdu but had also redecorated one of the wings at the Osborne house as the Durbar Room. This was a symbolic gesture—by incorporating India into her Osborne house, the Queen was symbolically making India a part of her Empire and re-asserting her dominion over it. Shrabani Basu in the Introduction to *Victoria and Abdul* reflects, "The [Durbar] room spoke to me of the Queen's love for India, the country she knew she could never visit, but which fascinated and intrigued her. If the Queen could not travel to India, then she would bring India to Osborne. The marble ceilings, the intricate carvings, the balconies with their Indian-style *jali*[5] work were the Queen's Indian haven. Here she sat as the Empress of that faraway land to sense its atmosphere" (21–22). Here, it must be noted that there is not only a desire to possess India, Britain's quintessential other, but also to assimilate it—""imperialism is a form of cannibalism," and always lurking behind the desire for incorporation is the fear of being incorporated, which can rightly be read as a response to the culture's own "desire to assimilate and possess what is external to the self"" (Zlotnick

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[5] *Ed. N.:* intricate ornamental openwork in wood, metal, stone, etc.

56). In fact, her dear Munshi, Abdul Karim, who was responsible for intensifying her fondness for India, was a jubilee present to satiate the same desire. Her love for curry was, therefore, an extension of her desire for India.

She, being a gourmet, was fond of beautiful and exquisite dishes, and the golden curries well complemented the colourful jellies and the elaborate French dishes. So she not only ordered her Indian staff make curry for her every day, it was also served at her dinner parties and banquets. This maniacal consumption of curry has, according to Narayan, a symbolic function—"eating curry was in a sense eating India" (qtd. in Varman). Be it the result of the desire to follow the raging food trend or to show their loyalty to the Queen Victoria, after Victoria's ascension to the throne, the love for curry trickled down from the nobles to the lowest of the social classes in Britain. As the anonymous author of *Modern Domestic Cookery*, published in 1851, notes, "Curry, which was formerly a dish almost exclusively for the table of those who had made a long residence in India, is now so completely naturalized that few dinner parties are thought complete unless one is on the table" (qtd. in Sen 40). But this concept of curry as a naturalized dish is problematic, as "it ignores the origin of curry in Indian—not Anglo-Indian—culture" (Zlotnick 60). It was during this time that the markets were beginning to be flooded by cookbooks exclusively dedicated to curries. Even Queen Victoria's personal chef, Charles Elmé Francatelli, included curry recipes in his cookbook *A Plain Cookery Book for the Working Classes* (Sen 42-43). Curry had become such an integral part of the British diet that Thackeray was inspired to commemorate the Victorians' love for curry in his "Ode to Curry," which appeared in *Punch's Poetical Cookery-Book*:

> Three pounds of veal my darling girl prepares
> And chops it nicely into little squares
> Five onions next prepares the little minx
> The biggest are the best her Samiwel thinks
> And Epping butter, nearly half a pound
> And stews them in a pan until there brown'd
> What's next my dexterous little girl will do?
> She pops the meat into the savory stew
> With curry powder, tablespoons full three
> And milk a pint (the richest that may be)
> And when the dish has stewed for half an hour
> A lemon's ready juice she'll o'er it pour
> Then, bless her, then she gives the luscious pot
> A very gentle boil – and serves quite hot
> P.S. Beef, mutton rabbit, if you wish
> Lobsters, or prawns, or any kind of fish
> Are fit to make A CURRY.'Tis when done
> A dish for emperors to feed upon. (qtd. in Sen 43)

It must be highlighted here that the recipe described in this poem was the basic template used in Britain for the preparation of curry. There was a repeated attempt to domesticate the curry because the "desire for the Other, and the fear of hybridity it unleashes, could be deactivated only through the metaphors of domestication" (Zlotnick 54). Once "a hybrid like curry, the mongrelized offspring of England's union with India" is brought into the realm of the home, it is possible "through the ideological effect of domesticating it, erase its foreign origins and represent it as purely English" (Zlotnick 54).

By the time Queen Victoria was declared the Empress of India, in 1876, the invasion of the Indian curry into the British foodscape was so completely thorough that the same Brits who abhorred the idea of their houses smelling like curry now took pride in the authenticity of their curries. Some even claimed to have learned the secret of making the perfect curry from the butler of Tipoo Sultan's son. Even Richard Terry, the author of *Indian Cookery* and the chef at Oriental Club, felt the need to stress on the authenticity of his recipes, which he claims were "gathered, not only from my own knowledge of Cookery, but from Native Cooks" (qtd. in Collingham 139). However, this invasion is a fallacy because the Brits had not only erased its Indian heritage but also had assimilated it in their culture so thoroughly that it wasn't an Indian dish anymore; it was a tool of domination and subordination—"Despite its iconic status, curry is a signifier of domination and global hierarchy" (Varman). At the same time, by emphasising the "Indian-ness" of a British "fabrication" it sought to strengthen the stereotypes associated with India because colonization relies on an asymmetric power relationship based on stereotypes.

The Complicated Relationship between Curry and India

Even though there was a raging passion for curry in Britain, the scenario in India during the Raj was completely different. Following the Sepoy Mutiny in 1857, the East India Company was abolished, and the era of the British Raj in India commenced. Since the Brits were now the rulers of India they were required to distance themselves from the people they were governing. To reinforce this insulation between the ruler and the ruled, the Indianized company men were looked down upon and the new officials were banned from following Indian food and clothing habits. As Nupur Chaudhuri notes:

> To protect their status as rulers and defend British culture in India, the Anglo-Indians during the nineteenth century chose racial exclusiveness and altogether rejected Indian goods and dishes.…Thus even when the Victorians at home decorated their homes with Indian decorative objects and started to eat curry, nineteenth-century memsahibs, to create a British lifestyle in the Indian subcontinent, seem to have collectively rejected Indian objects in their colonial homes and refused Indian dishes in their diets. (231-232)

In 1869, after the opening of the Suez Canal, the journey from Britain to India became shorter and more comfortable, because of which the British women could finally accompany their husbands to India. These women knew little about the food and life in India, and they were helped in their process of acquaintance with the culture and customs of the new land by domestic handbooks written by British people with an imperial experience. An intriguing feature of these handbooks was their attitude towards Indian dishes—they all referred to the Indian dishes in derogatory terms. For example, Flora Annie Steel, in one of her handbooks, grudgingly included only a handful of Indian recipes, noting that "most native recipes are inordinately greasy and sweet" (qtd. in Crane, and Johnston 174). Similarly, *The Indian Cookery Book* published in Calcutta, considers the Indian dishes to be "so entirely of an Asian character and taste that no European will ever be persuaded to partake of them". In the same handbook korma is referred to as "one of the richest of Hindoostanee curries … but quite unsuited to European taste" (qtd. in Sen 31). Even though a substantial portion of *The Englishwoman in India* was dedicated to the Indian cuisine it only consisted of English recipes modified according to the availability of Indian ingredients (Crane, and Johnston 174). At the same time, since shipping had become easier and faster, European staples became easily procurable, and the Brits in India could finally indulge in proper European fare with fancy French names, as the intake of Indian dishes was prohibited. Thus, curry in imperial India "lost-caste," to quote Colonel Kenney-Herbert (qtd. in Sen 30).

It is, therefore, apparent that there was a huge gap between the treatment of curry in India and in Britain. The Victorian English were mesmerised by the delectable taste and the tantalising aroma of the spicy curry, but the British officials in India were perpetually haunted by the fear of losing race if they were to love it. As Narayan explains:

> The culinary product of the colonies had different symbolic meaning at dinner tables in England than they did at English dinner tables in the colonies. Making curry part of native British cuisine in England did not expose British curry eaters to the risk of "going native." Incorporating things Indian was an easier task for those resident in England, who did not have to work at distinguishing themselves from their colonial subjects. Their counterparts in India, however, confronted with the proximity of Indians, had to keep their distance, one that was necessary to maintain their belief in their "civilizing" mission. (165-166)

This love-hate relationship is perhaps best demonstrated by Joe Monroe in the *Star of India: Spicy Adventures of Curry* where highlighting "the almost pathological affection Brits have for curry" she says, "we love it, we are comforted and challenged by it and somehow, for some reason, we also feel a sense of ownership over it" (2). The phrase "comforted and challenged" underlines the ambiguous relationship between the British society and the Indian curry; while the indecisive "somehow, for some reason" unconsciously reveals the resultant dilemma the Brits suffer from. Nupur Chaudhuri attributes this dilemma to the Brits' "antipodal view toward Indian material and gastronomic cultures" (232).

Modification and Globalisation of Curry

While the British Raj was busy being true to its English heritage, the Victorian English had already become curry-experts, to the extent that they were now able to experiment with it. Sometimes the curry was thickened with roux, sometimes lemon juice substituted tamarind pulp, or the sweetness of the apples was used to replace the sweetness from the mangoes, and sometimes European herbs such as thyme and marjoram were added to the curry to give it a layer of complexity. Once they were done experimenting with the flavours and textures of curry, they decided to carry it along to their other colonies. As a result, the food habits of these colonies were incorporated into the curry recipe thereby making it a truly global dish. The reason being, as Joe Monroe observes, "Indian cooking has always been endlessly adaptable to available ingredients and local palates and this characteristic must go some way towards explaining its international success" (57). Coleen Taylor Sen lists some of the variants of curry found all over the world, "the elegant *gaengs* of Thailand; the exuberant curries of the Caribbean; *kariraisu*, Japan's favourite comfort food; Indonesian *gulais*; Malaysia's delicious *Nonya* cuisine; South African bunny chowand bobotie; Mauritian *vindaille*; and Singapore's fiery street foods" (8). So while we Indians were nationalizing our banks, mines, and industries, the British internationalized our cuisine. Curry, therefore, under the Raj became a tool of subjugation, as imperial domination begins with cultural and culinary domination. Curry was, therefore, "deployed in a variety of mutually constructing and conflicting ways to preserve and protect the always fragile, always fictional imperial state, and its even more vulnerable imperial subject," to quote Zlotnick.

Curry Beyond the Victorian Era

The lasting impact of curry can be owed to its infinite ability to adapt itself to the changing palates as well as times. With the increasing pace of the human life, the demand for ready-made food increased, and curry evolved from the “archetypal” British dish to “the default take-away meal” (Sen 36). But to consider the curry as simply a part of the British cuisine would be wrong. It is also became a part of British lifestyle. Around 1970s it was almost a British tradition to have curry after a night of heavy drinking (Sen 47).

What is really intriguing about the evolution of curry was its transformation from a British staple to a measure of masculinity. As the British populace became more open to other Indian dishes, *balti*[6] and *tandoori*[7] cuisines became a part of their everyday life, and curry became hotter. Eating a hot curry, therefore, became a sign of manliness, and curry was endowed with macho connotations. Since *Vindaloo* was a particularly hot variety of curry, the ones who ate it were considered to be the epitome of masculinity. As a result, the unofficial anthem of England for the 1998 World Cup was titled “*Vindaloo*.” The basic idea of the song is that since all the English people love *Vindaloo* they will, therefore, “score one more.”

In 2001, the arc of curry’s indigenization was complete when the British foreign secretary proclaimed the *Chicken Tikka Masala*[8], a variant of curry, ‘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’ (qtd. in Sen 36). The celebration of the rise of the curry in Britain is a manifestation of the post-colonial desire to displace the master. The rise of the curry is merely an illusion; a result of its ever increasing assimilation into the British culture. Thus, the Bangladeshi ambassador, A. H. Mohammad’s statement, “you [the Brits] conquered us with gunpowder, now we have conquered you with curry” (qtd. in Varman) is ironic because there is nothing Indian about a curry anymore.

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[6] *Ed. N.:* a spicy dish cooked in a small two-handled pan known as a karahi.

[7] *Ed. N.:* denoting or relating to a style of Indian cooking based on the use of a tandoor.

[8] *Ed. N.:* it is a dish of chunks of roasted marinated chicken in a spiced curry sauce.

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