

## 19th Century Anglo-Indian Cuisine: Negotiations of Cultural Identities

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### **Abstract**

*The discourse of colonialism involves construction of specific images of both the colonizers and the colonized and more often than not, both the groups internalize these images. This process of knowledge formation helps the colonizers to perform the role of the self-appointed guardians and control their territories. Food has always been one of the most prominent indicators of cultural markers. Thus, any change in the identity of an individual or a group gets reflected in the food habits. Similarly, the effect of the process of colonization can be seen in the food habits and if we can identify these changes, we will be able to find out the colonial discourses which are working behind their implementation. This paper attempts to locate not only those discourses but also the changes in those discourses over a period of time. With reference to 'Indian Outfits and Establishments', written by "an Anglo-Indian", this paper attempts to find out through a close examination of the Anglo-Indian foods and recipes, why and how the identities of the colonizers and colonized in India were created and maintained and how, eventually, they negotiated towards a culture where their identities were no longer concrete but fluid.*

**Keywords:** Guidebooks, colonialism, Anglo-Indian food, politics, fluidity of identity

### **Introduction**

The process of colonialism involves the formation of a colony, a settlement of a group of people, in a new land. On and from 14<sup>th</sup> Century, especially after Renaissance in the European countries, the world saw the rise of various European powers and formation of colonies throughout the world. This gave rise to two separate groups, one of the colonizers and the other, of the colonized, and over the time, two completely different, rather opposite images was constructed to represent these two groups. The people of the colonizer's group were also termed as 'White' or 'European' whereas the people of the colonized's group also went by the names of 'native' or 'blackey'. According to the constructed images of these groups the Orient is a mystical place as opposed to the rational West; the oriental male is effeminate and the oriental female is sexually promiscuous as opposed to the Western notion of strong manhood and passive femininity. In other words, these two groups are binary opposites in racial, geographical, sexual, biological and several others markers of difference in the socio-political discourse. This process of knowledge formation helped the European nations to perform the role of the self-appointed guardians and control their territories. Thus, the maintenance of these images was very important to the Europeans. To achieve these, they gave more focus on their own culture, own language and own religion. In this paper, I want to find out, with reference to *Indian Outfits and Establishments*, written by "an Anglo-Indian", how the English maintained their Englishness and how far they were successful in doing so.

## Indian Outfits and Establishments, 1882

In the Preface the author writes the intention behind writing this book:

THIS book, compiled from articles which have been recently inserted in the columns of The Bazaar, will, it is hoped, be found of considerable service to English people, more especially young married couples, going to India for the first time. Though there are books already published on the subject of housekeeping in India, still, as numerous questions are constantly appearing in various papers asking for information respecting Indian life, it is only reasonable to suppose that a book, treating in detail of outfits, voyage and necessaries required for it, railway travelling, bungalow choosing, furnishing, management of native servants and their duties, the kitchen and recipes for various dishes, the garden and its produce, the stable and general treatment of live stock, combined with hints and suggestions on the manner of living and social customs, will help to supply an acknowledged want, and so be of use to those contemplating a sojourn in India.

First of all, here we have yet another example of a guidebook for the Englishmen (the other one being Gardiner and Steel's *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook*) detailing the articles which should be taken out, and the requirements of home life and management there beside all the travel guidebooks. The travel guidebooks provided information on various routes to the colonized countries, on dress, diet, health, the best season for a visit, weights and measures, and a few important Hindi words, phrases, and sentences which were important in everyday life. But *Indian Outfits and Establishments*, addressed to the English people, guides them on how to maintain their Englishness or rather the image of the White in the colonized country.

### Maintenance of the Image of an English



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3

Source: *Indian Outfits and Establishments*, Page No. 3, 4, 140 respectively

The book, *Indian Outfits and Establishments* (henceforth IOE), by “an Anglo-Indian” was published in 1882. By this time many English people had already been to India. In fact, the writer herself had been to India and wrote the book after she returned back to India. India had been a colony for a long period of time and thus, by the late-nineteenth century various businesses had set up to cater to the needs of the Englishmen and women who travelled or were to travel to India. A journey to India did not remain an adventure as such. Besides, there were the travellers’ umpteen number of tales about the once unknown

country along with their travelogues, memoirs, sketch, diaries, photographs, paintings, and guidebooks. In fact, the advent of the railways brought in a paradigm shift in the way the country was seen. No longer were the descriptions of the country given by an individual only; the descriptions were mass-produced: hence, the once subjective experience gave way to the objective outlook. Thus, much before the travellers set their foot in the country, they knew about it, its historical and geographical conditions and hence, they came with all the preparations. Figure 1 shows the advertisement of a shop which manufactured “Gauze, Flannels, Tweeds, Serges, Oxford Shirtings, Pajamas, Merinos, General Hosiery, and Woollen Goods, Portable Furniture” ; besides, they also made uniforms for the army, navy, and civil services. Figure 2 shows the advertisements of the shop which prepared “clothing, cabin furniture, bedding, deck chairs, trunks, boxes, firearms, ammunition”; besides, they also “received, packed, and shipped” passengers’ baggage and goods of all kinds in all parts of the world and, that too, with secured passages. Along with these there were separate shops for only ladies. The question that arises is, were there no shops in India who manufactured all these things as the English had been here for many years? The author provides us the answer: “ ...bear in mind, that, though you can get all these things in India in the larger stations at Parsee shops, or from the cupra-wallahs and box-wallahs who travel about from bungalow to bungalow --- you will certainly be charged more than double the usual price, and get very inferior articles even then” (IOE 12-13). The author goes on to say that “the Indian durzee is a very clever worker, good at imitating, but bad at originating”; he is a “trifle slow” and “had a wonderful faculty for breaking good English needles” which, according to the author, was “a trick peculiar to the class” (IOE 13). Was it just poor craftsmanship and some age-old prejudices or whether there was also a desire for authentication? Goods should be manufactured and shipped from the parent country because it guaranteed, above everything else, an authentication as these things have been built by their *own* people. Moreover these shops also manufactured uniforms for the army, navy, and civil services. In other words, these shops not only guaranteed quality products but their neat workmanship helped the English to maintain and further build up the image that they had created and imposed. In this connection we can cite an example from the 1971 Mrinal Sen classic, *Interview*. The film shows the pursuit of a young man for a western-styled suit for an interview and how he fails to acquire that; besides, the film also shows how he gets rejected for appearing in the said interview in the traditional dhoti-kurta, thereby highlighting how the only qualification for a job was the image of an English man but not his/her educational qualification or intelligence.

### **Created Image of the Natives**

As opposed to this image of an Englishman, the natives are shown as obtrusive who often take part in forgeries. In this connection, we should remember that the first encounter of the English people happened with the Indian servants as no sooner they landed on the port than they were beset with native servants. About the servants, the author is of the opinion that “they are scamps who make this proceeding their business, and they try to take in all new comers in the same way” (IOE 46). According to her “too many masters and mistresses treat servants in an improper way, speak to them as if they were beneath notice, except for fault finding, keep them hard at work, grudge them any little pleasure, refuse them all sympathy, and then expect faithful service, and consider themselves ill-used when, after a brief stay, they are quitted” (IOE 46). Though she writes that one should not trust the hearsay that “natives are everything that is bad and cannot be trusted”, did she herself trust them and see them as individuals? The author, being an agent of the colonizers, did not *see* the natives; they were seen through, not as citizens but as problems to be solved or confined or taken over. They are grouped under the category of ‘natives’ and all the popular verbal tales along with their written records took the shape of a scientific truth which led to the concept that the natives were morally degraded people.

## The Third Space, the Hybrid Culture and the Birth of Anglo-Indian Cuisine

However, the notion that these two cultures or identity of the colonizer and colonized is pure or essential is highly disputable. Any form of culture cannot be totally rigid and thus lacks a stable identity; it is always under a process of change. Here comes the concepts of hybridity and the formation of the third space. When two different cultures come together, then their interaction gives rise to a third space which includes some of the characteristics of both the cultures and also some unique characteristics which have evolved due to their interaction. This space is intrinsically critical of essentialist positions of identity and concept of originality of any culture. Basically, it provides a spatial politics of inclusion rather than exclusion that “initiates new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation” (<https://www.everettsd.org/cms/lib07/WA01920133/Centricity/Domain/965/Meredith.pdf>). In *Indian*

*Outfits and Establishments*, this third space can be seen in some Anglo-Indian cuisine that developed during the British Raj in India. During the British rule in India, local British officials began mixing Indian dishes with their British palates and created Anglo-Indian dishes such as mulligatawny, kedgeree and Worcestershire sauce which are all products of the Raj. In Parashuram’s short story *Ratarati* we come across an Anglo-Moghlay hotel that excels in some innovative Anglo-Indian delicacies like ‘Murgir French malpoa’ and ‘Double Dimer Radhaballavi.’ Keeping the humour aside, the innovative dishes symbolize the culinary changes that were taking place not only in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Bengal but also in the whole country.

It was not the Indian cuisine only that was influenced by the British culinary practices; it was a two-way process- the British cuisine also went through some changes and innovation. For instance, Kegeree is a rice-and-bean or rice-and-lentil dish of Indian origin and which is considered to be a variation of Khichdi but the recipe that the author produces in the book shows how the staple Indian food has been adapted to the English taste. The author writes, “Kegeree is another excellent dish. It is composed of the remains of cold fish; all the bones are extracted, and it is mixed with well boiled rice (about a cupful), two soft boiled eggs, salt and pepper to taste, half a teaspoonful of mustard, and one ounce of butter. These are all mixed together, made very hot, and served as quickly as possible” (IOE 79). Another example of such hybrid cuisine is kofta. Kofta is a variation of meatball which came to India with the Mughals. To the English “Konftas are small round cakes made of the remains of any cold meat, minced and mixed with butter, yolk of egg, and spice ; they are fried” (IOE 79). Similarly, dumpoke is the Anglo-Indian version of Dum Pukht which means to cook over low heat in a utensil which has been sealed tightly. This recipe is also an import of the Mughals as it is of Persian origin. Moreover, in India, this dish is served either in lunch or in dinner. But in the hands of the English Dumpoke, which “is a boned chicken, stuffed with rice, chillies, and various ingredients, and served cold or hot,” becomes “a good breakfast dish” (IOE 78). The famous Anglo-Indian Mulligatawny Soup is originally from South India and was traditionally made with lentils and vegetables and spiced with curry leaves. However, the author’s recipe is:

Slice four or five onions very thin, put them, with four cloves of garlic and lb. of butter, into a stewpan. Take a fowl or a rabbit, and divide as if for fricassee; season with white pepper. Put the meat some people put a little beef and mutton besides the chicken into the stewpan on the onions, cover the pan, and simmer the contents for half an hour. Prepare beforehand a paste made of the following ingredients:

Salt - 1 Tola.  
Black pepper - 1 Tola.  
Turmeric - 1 Tola.  
Coriander seeds - 4 Tolahs.  
Fenugreek - 1 Tola.  
Cayenne - 1 Masaa.

Kodianum leaves (4) [curry leaves] to be added while boiling.

All these ingredients, except the leaves, must be well pounded in a mortar, and, when quite fine, mixed into a paste with a little clear gravy. Then add the paste and two quarts of clear gravy to the contents of the stewpan, and allow the whole to simmer gently for half an hour, add (about five minutes before taking off the fire) the juice of a lime and a little arrowroot.

This recipe is a result of the fact that at first the Indian cooks prepared the soup with just pepper and water to please the taste buds of their English master and later on started adding meat chunks to it. Gradually, the ingredients of the soup and the process of its preparation changed to the given one.

The variations in the Indian and English dishes got reflected in the menus of the parties as well. Previously the idea was that “in India you should set before your guests as many English dishes as possible” but over the years Indian fruits, vegetables, fish and various adaptations of Indian dishes acquired a place on the table. While writing about such a party, the author writes a menu for a small party which “is more Indian in its character” (IOE 92):

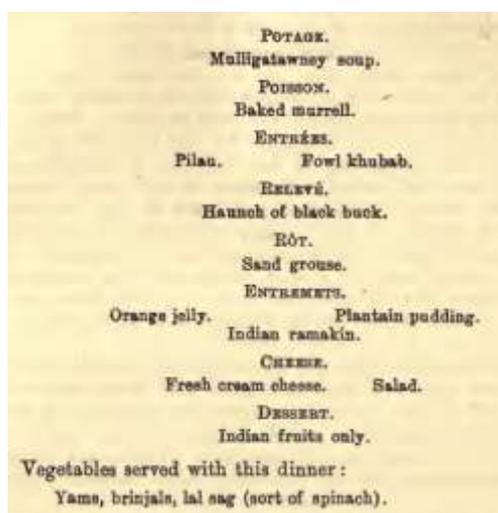


Figure 3. Source: *Indian Outfits and Establishments*, Page No. 93

The book lists not only the Anglo-Indian dishes but also Indian fruits and especially preserves like mango jelly, mango pickle, mango chutney, mango chutney (Colonel Skinner's recipe), mango sauce (Dr. Riddell's recipe), date paste, fig jam, guava jelly, tamarind preserve, tamarind water, and pomegranate water.

## Conclusion

Thus we can see how the third space consists of a hybrid culture which liberates its subject from any hierarchical notion of subjectivity and from any stereotypical image. We know that the identity of any individual or group depends on the separateness of that individual or group from the others. The whole concept of Self and Other depends on ‘difference’. But the English, living in another country and trying to adapt their cuisine, one of the most prominent indicators of cultural markers, challenges and undermines the clear distinction between center and periphery and proves, once again, how both the colonizers and the colonized lack stable identities. As the lines of distinction between center and periphery begin to fade, there emerges a new culture with its own uniqueness that challenges the authority’s intention to fix the identity of its subjects.

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