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Food Culture in Colonial Asia: A Taste of Empire

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Food Culture in Colonial Asia: A Taste of Empire

Abstract

Presenting a social history of colonial food practices in India, Malaysia and Singapore, this book discusses the contribution that Asian domestic servants made towards the development of this cuisine between 1858 and 1963. Domestic cookbooks, household management manuals, memoirs, diaries and travelogues are used to investigate the culinary practices in the colonial household, as well as in clubs, hill stations, hotels and restaurants. Challenging accepted ideas about colonial cuisine, the book argues that a distinctive cuisine emerged as a result of negotiation and collaboration between the expatriate British and local people, and included dishes such as curries, mulligatawny, kedgeree, country captain and pish pash. The cuisine evolved over time, with the indigenous servants consuming both local and European foods. The book highlights both the role and representation of domestic servants in the colonies. It is an important contribution for students and scholars of food history and colonial history, as well as Asian Studies

Keywords

food, taste, asia, colonial, culture, empire

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Introduction

*'We do not wish to advocate an unholy haughtiness; but an Indian household can no more be governed peacefully, without dignity and prestige, than an Indian Empire.'*¹

The subject of this book is the cuisine associated with the British expatriates who governed, worked and settled in India, Malaysia and Singapore between 1858 and 1963. This colonial food was a unique hybrid; it was distinct and different from the food practices of Britain and Asia, but at the same time incorporated dietary components of British culinary traditions and embraced indigenous ingredients and practices from the colonies. In this respect it can be seen as one of the precursors of contemporary fusion food. In examining the development of this cuisine, this book advances two central, interrelated arguments. The first of these is that this food was developed largely through the dependence of British colonists on indigenous domestic servants for food preparation; and that this dependence has a wider significance in terms of the development of colonial culture. In making this argument, this book disagrees with much of the current historical scholarship on colonial food that suggests British colonists consumed a totally different diet to local peoples in a deliberate attempt to differentiate themselves as rulers from the ruled. The evidence presented in the following pages will show that there was no clear-cut colonial divide between the two opposing sides and that in relation to food production a close relationship existed between British colonizers and their subjects.

The second, closely related argument put forward here is that British colonists did not control nor direct many of the domestic tasks, including food production, that were central to the functioning of colonial homes and recreational venues; nor were these spaces as segregated as colonial rhetorical imagery would suggest. The reality and practicality of settling in lands vastly different from Britain, along with colonists' dependence on the local inhabitants, necessitated negotiation and collaboration, especially between mistresses and servants. This dependence resulted in colonists seeking to maintain social distance in ways that were contradictory and paradoxical. The local servants were seen as dirty and carriers of disease but were intimately involved in the preparation of food; the hill stations were established as refuges from the local people and the unhealthy tropical lowlands but relied upon domestic servants

¹ F.A. Steel and G. Gardiner, *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook: Giving the Duties of Mistress and Servants the General Management of the House and Practical Recipes for Cooking in All Its Branches*, London, William Heinemann, 1898, p9.

to provide essential services; clubs were an extension of the white colonial home but were staffed by armies of local servants. In this regard this book builds on the scant extant histories of domestic service in the British colonies and highlights the importance of the role of local servants in the colonial household. The image perpetuated by colonists and other Europeans of incapable, dirty and dishonest servants under their employ was quite different from their role of feeding their colonial masters. I argue that domestic servants were fundamental to the well-being of Europeans in the colonies; they were responsible for performing the physical tasks of maintaining the home, the hill stations, rest-houses and clubs; leaving the *memsahib* (a European woman in the British colonies) ample time for leisure and for promoting and maintaining the image of European colonial prestige. Furthermore, native servants, particularly cooks, were instrumental in the development of the colonial cuisine that is the subject of this study. Their knowledge of local ingredients and where to source them from; their cooking skills; their resourcefulness; and the cheapness of their labour together contributed to the development of a uniquely hybrid style of food.

India is the primary focus of this study because, in its 200 years of being the ‘jewel in the crown’, the Raj served as both an inspiration and a benchmark for British colonial culture. Civil servants and soldiers; entrepreneurs, missionaries and adventurers; the British men and women known generically as *sahibs* (a European man in British India) and *memsahibs* all attempted to uphold the image of empire through their codes of duty and responsibility. This study also includes an analysis of Malaysia and Singapore, not as a comparison to India but rather to illustrate that colonial culture in the form of food and patterns of domestic service was transplanted to, or replicated in other colonies in Asia. This wider examination is in keeping with American historian Thomas R. Metcalf’s notion that ‘ways of thinking formed during the Indian colonial experience found expression, as the British struggled to come to terms with their new colonial subjects, in comparable, if different forms of knowledge elsewhere’.² Some of these practices took hold and evolved around local conditions while others were discarded. If scholarly work on food history and domestic service is rather thin on the ground for India, the situation for Malaysia and Singapore is even more dire. I have considered Malaysia and Singapore together in this book because for the purposes of this book, the two societies were and are socially and culturally similar.

² Thomas R. Metcalf, *Imperial Connections: India in the Indian Ocean Arena, 1860-1920*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2007, p47.

Cookbooks and other alternative sources as historical documents

Historical narratives traditionally do not portray a sense of the day to day routine chores and tasks colonials engaged in, particularly those of the women in the colonies. This book employs cookbooks, household management guides, memoirs, diaries and travelogues as well as a questionnaire for ex-colonists as primary sources. These sources provide important insights into the daily activities of colonial life.

There are two contrasting views of memsahibs portrayed in colonial literature and cookbooks and household guides of the era. First, in colonial fiction, there is the Kiplingesque observation that memsahibs led frivolous lives, flitting between tennis and bridge parties. Second, colonial household guides prescribed in meticulous detail how to maintain and showcase the white, pristine household in the colonized land. In this book nineteenth and early twentieth century cookbooks, household management manuals, diaries, personal and official accounts and travelogues written for the colonies are examined for insights into British colonial food practices and the role of domestic servants in their households. As the wives of civil servants and others under colonial rule had no formal official role to play, no archival records of their presence existed. As Mary Procida points out, the work of the historian, in 'recovering the lived experiences of women in the empire, therefore necessitates the investigation of alternative sources such as diaries, letters, memoirs, and oral interviews'.³

Cookbooks teem with instructions (in prefaces or after the recipe pages) on topics ranging from managing servants, to cleanliness in kitchens and home remedies. I argue that within these parameters, my examination of the cookbooks, household guides, personal accounts and responses to my questionnaire demonstrates that memsahibs, as nurturers and gatekeepers of the imperial home, helped to devise, through the services of domestic servants, a cuisine that was peculiarly colonial. Cookbooks and household guides of the colonial era, besides providing specific instructions on how to run a household, manage servants and prepare and serve food, can also be seen as instruments for perpetuating the values and representations of empire. Between the 1880s and 1920s the number of cookery and household guides published increased significantly as a

³ Mary A. Procida, *Married to the Empire: Gender, Politics and Imperialism in India, 1883-1947*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2002, p4.

result of the growing numbers of British women travelling to India.⁴ These were the second generation of middle-class British women who resided in India after the uprising of 1857.⁵ The prescriptive nature of the manuals conveys with the unmistakable message that memsahibs were expected to follow the appropriate code of behaviour that was becoming of colonising women.

Increasingly, cultural and social historians have employed household manuals and cookbooks as texts on domesticity and commensality.⁶ Just as fiction, diaries and biographies do not totally mirror lived events, conduct guides and cookbooks and other different genres, examined together, add nuance and significance to the historian's conception of the mistress-servant relationship. These publications reinforced the unequal relationships between the memsahibs and their servants; their instructions on maintaining scrupulous cleanliness and meticulous storekeeping reiterated the perceived inferiority of the domestics.

The early Indian cookery books first published in Britain from the 1830s were collections of original recipes⁷ and were developed into anglicised versions of Indian cookery for English cooks in England while other publications were specifically written for memsahibs in Anglo-India. The number of Anglo-Indian cookbooks far outnumber those published for the Malayan and Singaporean markets as evidenced by the bibliography in this book. However, personal accounts in diaries, journals and travelogues and official accounts in government handbooks and annual reports are mines of information on colonial food practices and domestic service in these two colonies. It is through the medium of cookbooks that recipes of colonial dishes were made popular and accessible to the memsahib community. Even though the memsahibs were not directly involved in cooking the colonial dishes, the documentation of the recipes provides a permanent record of the existence of such dishes.

⁴ Wayne E. Franits, *Paragon of Virtue: Women and Domesticity in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993, p66.

⁵ Alison Blunt, 'Imperial Geographies of Home: British Domesticity in India, 1886-1925', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, vol.24, no.4, 1999, p422.

⁶ See Nicola Humble, *Culinary Pleasures: Cookbooks and the Transformation of British Food*, London, Faber and Faber, 2005; Alison Light, *Mrs Woolf and the Servants*, London, Penguin Books, 2008; Lucy Delap, *Domestic Service in Twentieth Century Britain: Culture, Memory, Emotions*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010 (forthcoming); Eileen White, 'First Things First: The Great British Breakfast', in C. Anne Wilson (ed.), *Eating with the Victorians*, Stroud, Sutton Publishing, 2004.

⁷ Elizabeth Driver, *A Bibliography of Cookery Books Published in Britain 1875-1914*, London, Prospect Books, 1989, p31.

I also sent out forty questionnaires and received thirty-one responses to British expatriates who lived in the three colonies in the period covered and are now resident in various parts of the world. The questionnaire, designed with open-ended questions, attempted to elicit comments on types of dishes consumed, ingredients associated with colonial food, the significance of curry, meal times and types, the relationship between master or mistress and servant, the role that servants played, the kitchen, language used with servants, and the purchase of food. The questionnaire is reproduced in Appendix A. These sources provide important insights into the daily activities of colonial life.

Scope

The time period chosen for this book, from 1858 to 1963, is extensive, primarily due to the different colonial periods of the countries discussed. The individual chapters deal with selected themes and regions and are deliberately designed such that there is no strict chronological order in the conventional sense of narrative history. Thus, topics are discussed backwards and forwards in time within the century-long time-frame. Each broad theme of the five core chapters discussed is intertwined with analysis of the complex mistress-servant relationship.

The starting point of this book, 1858, denotes the beginning of Crown colonial rule of India. This period, which ended when India attained independence in 1947 is known as the Raj. Present-day Malaysia and Singapore are the successor states to the former British colonies and protectorates.⁸ Malaysia today consists of thirteen states, eleven on the Malay Peninsula and two in Borneo: Sabah and Sarawak. Sabah was known as British North Borneo during British rule. The Malay states became independent of British rule in 1957 and were known as the Federation of Malaya. Sabah and Sarawak joined the other states, forming the Federation of Malaysia in 1963.

Although British interests in Malaya first dated to the founding of Penang in 1786, the English East India Company took control of Penang, Province Wellesley, Melaka and Singapore under the presidency government of the Straits Settlements in 1826, with headquarters in Penang. British interests in Singapore were further cemented in 1819 when Thomas Stamford Raffles signed a treaty with the *temenggung* (minister in charge

⁸ C. Mary Turnbull, *A History of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei*, London, Allen & Unwin, 1989, p xv.

of defence, justice and palace affairs),⁹ of Riau-Johor, and obtained rights to start a factory on the island.¹⁰ In 1830, facing financial difficulties the settlements were downgraded to a residency and became part of the Bengal presidency.¹¹ Although the European population was small in the Straits Settlements – in 1860 there were 466 in Singapore, 316 in Penang and a few officials in Melaka – it was forthright and clamoured for independent rule from Calcutta. In 1867 the Straits Settlements became a crown colony.¹²

British interests in North Borneo date back to 1763 when Alexander Dalrymple of the East India Company planted the EIC flag on Balambangan, an island off the northernmost part of Borneo. It did not become the flourishing trading post the British company had envisaged and was abandoned in 1805. Labuan, an island off the west coast of Borneo, was another strategic point coveted by the British and in 1846 the island was ceded to Britain by the Sultan of Brunei. In 1881 when a royal charter was granted to a private company, the British North Borneo Company, it was given sovereign rights to run the state.¹³ Labuan was added to the territory when British North Borneo became a crown colony in 1946. In 1841 James Brooke, a cavalry officer in the Indian army, became the self-styled raja of Sarawak and established the capital, Kuching on the western central coast of Borneo. He started a dynasty of ‘White Rajas’ ruling Sarawak until the Second World War.¹⁴ In 1888, North Borneo and Sarawak (also Brunei) became British protectorates. This book does not discuss food consumption among the British who were interned during the Japanese Occupation of Malaya, Singapore and the Borneo states as the period is seen as ‘out of the ordinary’ years.

I have used ‘Malaya’, ‘British North Borneo’, ‘Sarawak’ and ‘Singapore’ in their historical context interchangeably with Malaysia and Singapore, for convenience, although there was no such entity as ‘Malaya’ in the nineteenth century. ‘Anglo-Indians’ cited throughout this book refer to British men and women resident in India and not the present-day meaning of Eurasians, that is, people of mixed racial origins.

⁹ Barbara Watson Andaya and Leonard Y. Andaya, *A History of Malaysia*, Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press, 2001, p375.

¹⁰ Andaya and Andaya, *A History of Malaysia*, p114.

¹¹ Turnbull, *A History of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei*, pp98-99.

¹² Turnbull, *A History of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei*, p106.

¹³ Cecilia Leong, *Sabah: The First 100 Years*, Kuala Lumpur, Percetakan Nan Yang Muda Sdn. Bhd., 1982, p45.

¹⁴ Andaya and Andaya, *A History of Malaysia*, p129.

The terms *sahib* and *memsahib* were first used in India to address the white man and white married woman respectively.¹⁵ In Malaysia and Singapore the white man was addressed by the local population as *tuan* (mister or sir) while the white married woman was addressed as *mem* and never *memsahib*. The term ‘Malayan’ was used by the British to describe the people of Malaya and those of long residence, sometimes even including Europeans,¹⁶ not dissimilar to the term ‘Indian’ as used by some Britons who had lived for many years in India.

India is geographically separated from the Peninsular Malaysian states by the Indian Ocean while the Borneo States of Malaysia are separated from the peninsula by the South China Sea. In spite of the separation by ocean and sea of the dozens of disparate states within India, Malaysia, and Singapore, during colonial rule there were more distinct links than there were differences in culinary practices and domestic service. In colonial India, Malaysia and Singapore, the complete dependence of the British on their servants, and the ingestion of local foods illustrate the irony of concerns about separation and hygiene.

Within each chapter I discuss the historiography of colonial foodways (practices associated with food and eating), mistress-servant relationships (race, gender, caste and ethnicity) and cookbooks as historical documents. In the last few decades the culture of colonial societies has become increasingly important in world historical analysis and the concept of ‘foodways’ – the customs of a group of people concerning food and eating – is seen as one way of examining the ritualized patterns of colonial life. Foodways is used in this book to examine imperial domesticity and the role and image of domestic servants in India, Malaysia and Singapore. Foodways is one way of looking at the porous boundaries of colonialism in areas of race and domestic relationships.¹⁷ It gives testimony to one aspect of colonialism: the close relations that existed between colonizers and the colonized as domestic servants were wholly responsible for providing sustenance to their colonial masters. European colonial society delegated to

¹⁵ Henry Yule and A.C. Burnell, *Hobson-Jobson: The Anglo-Indian Dictionary: A Spice-Box of Etymological Curiosities and Colourful Expressions*, Hertfordshire, Wordsworth Editions Ltd, 1996, (first published in 1886). According to Yule and Burnell, the hybrid term ‘memsahib’ is a respectful designation of a European married woman, with the first part of the word representing ma’am.

¹⁶ John G. Butcher, *The British in Malaya, 1880-1941: The Social History of a European Community in Colonial South-East Asia*, Kuala Lumpur, Oxford University Press, 1979, p3.

¹⁷ Ann Stoler, ‘Making Empire Respectable: The Politics of Race and Sexual Morality in 20th-Century Colonial Cultures’, in Jan Breman (ed.), *Imperial Monkey Business: Racial Supremacy in Social Darwinist Theory and Colonial Practice*, Amsterdam, VU University Press, 1990, pp36-37.

its women the role of enacting rituals that marked the boundaries between the rulers and the ruled. In analysing the emergence of the colonial cuisine, it is necessary to establish what constitutes a cuisine. Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu discusses the theory that the food consumption patterns of different social classes are determined by their experiences. Bourdieu contends that food tastes are not acquired individually but collectively and are derived through interaction from different social classes.¹⁸ Stephen Mennell, goes one step further and examines the reasons why a particular social group embraces certain food practices and whether social and cultural mores play any part in this.¹⁹ Pierre L. van den Berghe's study on ethnic cuisine suggests that a community strengthens its social connections through food sharing both in the home and in the public sphere.²⁰ This is relevant in discussing the development of the colonial cuisine in relation to the cohesiveness of the colonial community. Among the current scholars who discuss the relationship between colonizer and colonized in the context of foodways are E.M. Collingham, Nupur Chaudhuri, Uma Narayan and Susan Zlotnick.²¹ These scholars contend that British colonizers followed a British diet and rejected Indian dishes in order to differentiate themselves from their subjects, a notion challenged by this book.

Cookbooks and household guides form an important part of the methodology of this book and I have looked at literature in the field that either support or reject these publications as historical documents. While Edward Higgs²² and Edith Horander²³ dismiss the use of recipe books as historical documents, others like Karen Hess²⁴ stress that analysing cookbooks is the best methodology for studying food history. This book

¹⁸ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, London, Routledge, 1989, p79.

¹⁹ Stephen Mennell, *All Manners of Food: Eating and Taste in England and France from the Middle Ages to the Present*, Oxford, B. Blackwell, 1985.

²⁰ Pierre L. van den Berghe, 'Ethnic Cuisine: Culture in Nature', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol.7, no.3, 1984, p390.

²¹ See E.M. Collingham, *Imperial Bodies: The Physical Experience of the Raj, c.1800-1947*, Cambridge, Polity, 2001; Nupur Chaudhuri, 'Memsahibs and Motherhood in Nineteenth-Century Colonial India', *Victorian Studies*, vol.31, no.4, 1988; Uma Narayan, *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions, and Third-World Feminism*, New York, Routledge, 1997; and Susan Zlotnick, 'Domesticating Imperialism: Curry and Cookbooks in Victorian England', *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, vol.16, no.2-3, 1996.

²² Edward Higgs, 'Domestic Service and Household Production', in Angela V. John (ed.), *Unequal Opportunities. Women's Employment in England 1800-1918*, Oxford, B. Blackwell, 1986, pp126-127.

²³ Edith Horander, 'The Recipe Book as a Cultural and Socio-historical Document: On the Value of Manuscript Recipe Books as Sources', *Food in Perspective*, (Proceedings of the Third International Conference on Ethnological Food Research, Cardiff, Wales, 1977), Edinburgh, John Donald Publishers Ltd, 1981, p119.

²⁴ Karen Hess, *The Digest, A Newsletter for the Interdisciplinary Study of Food*, vol.1, no.1, November 1977, p4.

takes the middle ground, that a combination of the use of cookbooks, household guides, diaries, memoirs and travelogues can establish clearly defined patterns of colonial food practices. Mary Procida suggests that Anglo-Indian cookbooks help the historian to understand the domestic sphere of British colonialism in India, particular on gender in empire. Procida adds that Anglo-Indian cookbooks should be examined beyond their instructive and prescriptive function because they were an important source for spreading the word and work of empire.²⁵ Arjun Appadurai in his study of contemporary India, notes that while some of these cookbooks are written for the Indian diaspora many others are written to reminisce and reconstruct Indian food of the colonial era, with curry as the master trope and as of colonial origin.²⁶

The mistress-servant relationship in the colonial household encompasses racial and gender roles, class and caste in India, and ethnicity in Malaysia and Singapore. Ann Stoler suggests that the perennial European anxieties about servants in the colonies existed because domestic service pervaded both the private and public spheres.²⁷ Procida disagrees with those historians who suggest that the imperial home was designated as a feminized space, separate from the public sphere where the man of the house conducted the work of empire. Instead, she argues that the Anglo-Indian domestic sphere was a site of cultural interactions and interchange where ‘the home was an arena for political discussion and administrative action’²⁸ with servants, the majority of whom were males. Using household guides in her study of domesticity in India, Alison Blunt concludes that the unequal relationship between British women and their Indian servants reproduced imperial power relations on a domestic scale.²⁹ Swapna M. Banerjee’s work on domestic service in colonial Bengal looks at how the caste-class and, ethnic, prejudices in Singapore and Malaysia of the employers influenced the selection of and treatment of the servants.³⁰ Banerjee also raises the issue of food and servants, from the different kinds of servants working in the kitchens of European and Indian aristocratic households to those of middle-class families in colonial Bengal. As

²⁵ Procida, *Married to the Empire*, p87.

²⁶ Arjun Appadurai, ‘How to Make a National Cuisine: Cookbooks in Contemporary India’, *Journal of the Society for the Comparative Study of Society and History*, vol.30, no.1, 1988, p18.

²⁷ Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2002, p136.

²⁸ Procida, *Married to the Empire*, pp57-58.

²⁹ Blunt, ‘Imperial Geographies of Home’, p429.

³⁰ Swapna M. Banerjee, *Men, Women, and Domesticity Articulating Middle-Class Identity in Colonial Bengal*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2004.

maintained throughout this book, foodways were indistinguishably linked with the contribution made by domestic servants in the colonial household.

Chapter One demonstrates that the colonial table neither featured dishes that were only British or European nor comprised only local dishes but that the salient characteristics of the hybrid colonial cuisine were evident. This is in spite of the diverse backgrounds of British colonists; they were from the armed forces, the administration and commerce, all coming from different classes, with different dietary habits. The diets of the colonized Asians were just as different; Indians were from different castes and while there was no caste system in Malaya, Singapore and the Borneo there were numerous racial and ethnic groups with varying dietary practices.

The types of meals consumed by the British colonial community of the three colonies certainly fit the criteria laid out by anthropologist Sydney Mintz's definition of what constitutes a 'cuisine'.³¹ Mintz regards a cuisine as legitimate when the community claims ownership of it through knowledge of, and familiarity with, the dishes.³² This ties in with sociologist Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson's assertion that 'culinary preparations become a cuisine when, and only when, the preparations are articulated and formalized, and enter the public domain'.³³ Thus, the collection of a number of hybrid dishes of countless types of curries, mulligatawny, kedgeree, chicken chop, pish pash and the inimitable meal of tiffin, do constitute a cuisine. Sahibs and memsahibs claimed ownership of their dishes by consuming them at certain times and occasions, they wrote about them, exchanged their recipes and critiqued them.

No other colonial dish was more consumed, debated and critiqued than curry. *Chapter Two* analyses curry as the signature dish of British colonial cuisine and traces its origin and development. This book integrates the notion, prevalent in the existing scholarship, that curry powder was 'fabricated' by the British in India and commodified it for British taste, thereby fulfilling an ideological function of empire. Instead, I argue that colonists did not deliberately choose curry to domesticate in the colonial project but appropriated and modified it in numerous dishes to enhance and transform poor quality chicken, fish and meat. Even when the colonial dinner party table was overladen with large roasts of

³¹ Sidney W. Mintz, *Tasting Food, Tasting Freedom: Excursions into Eating, Culture, and the Past*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1996, p96.

³² Mintz, *Tasting Food, Tasting Freedom*, p96.

³³ Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson, *Accounting for Taste: The Triumph of French Cuisine*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2006, p19.

mutton and beef, turkey, chicken, and so on, curry and rice and other colonial dishes were nevertheless part of the menu.

The British adopted curry from the earliest days of colonial rule. In fact, its popularity reached its height in the days of the East India Company from the seventeenth century to the mid-nineteenth century. Its history was influenced by the availability of local ingredients, the culinary skills of the colonial cook and the tastes of the British in a particular location. It developed both temporally and geographically and was the perfect example of food appropriation. Each Indian presidency's curry was subtly different and it differed even from household to household. Its popularity spread to other colonies from its home in India. While Lizzie Collingham sees Anglo-Indian cookery as the first pan-Indian cuisine,³⁴ curry is clearly the single most important dish that defined the culinary history of British imperialism. Although it has obscure beginnings, curry's legitimacy is reinforced by the contest for ownership of it by the different communities. This claiming of ownership and the questioning of its authenticity occurred both in the colonial era as well as in postcolonial times. I have drawn from Anglo-Indian, Malayan, Singaporean and British North Borneo cookbooks, memoirs, diaries and travelogues to demonstrate that curry evolved as a hybrid and practical dish. In the British household it was often made from leftover meat and poultry and incorporated spice ingredients specifically selected for their preservative and nutritious qualities, according to the prevailing medical thinking of the time. The commercialisation of curry powders from the nineteenth century has contributed to the diverse range of curries that were subsequently developed, and indeed, curry can be seen as one of the British Empire's enduring legacies. In appropriating curry, Britons debated the merits of the dish and judged the authenticity of different curries by district, region or presidency. While a household could lay claim to the superiority of its own curry, and a club could become renowned for its curries (such as the Madras Club, which became famous for its prawn curry) it was always the indigenous cook who was responsible for preparing the curry.

The cook formed part of the large coterie of servants who were responsible for the well-being of Europeans both at home and at other colonial institutions. *Chapter Three* examines the role of domestic servants and the representation of servants by colonizers. Histories on domestic servants working in the colonial household, particularly in connection with the preparation of food, have long been neglected. Writers of popular

³⁴ Lizzie Collingham, *Curry: A Biography*, London, Chatto & Windus, 2005, p118.

literature, cookbooks, household guides, diaries and travelogues have, for the most part, disparaged servants in the colonial household, questioning their honesty and loyalty. There are countless anecdotes of servants' stupidity and dirty habits (several are cited in this book) that contributed to the mirth at colonial gatherings as well as making it into print. For all their poor standards of hygiene and ostensibly low intellect, however, servants were involved in food preparation and other personal tasks for the colonial family. This book examines the role and image of servants who were engaged in the purchasing, preparation and serving of food in the colonial household. While the memsahib holds the supervisory role of head of the household it was the physical contribution of the domestic servants that enabled her to fulfill this function. The large number of servants employed meant that she was able to facilitate the colonial home seamlessly between the private domain of home and operate as the official venue for empire's tasks. That the memsahib was able to extend hospitality in the form of meals and accommodation to European travellers was due largely to the work of her servants. Domestic servants did more than just the menial and physical work. It was the servants' local knowledge on where to procure food (even if they were usually suspected by their employers of being cheated on food purchases) that contributed to the emergence of the colonial cuisine. The cooks wielded far more influence on the diet of the British than what has been acknowledged. Many of the hybrid colonial dishes had origins from local dishes and were adapted for what servants thought were more to European tastes.

Servants also performed other intimate tasks, including serving early morning breakfast to their colonial employers in bed as well as feeding and looking after their children. The negative image of servants perpetuated by their masters and mistresses was symptomatic of the contradictions of colonial life. As labour was cheap in the colonies, particularly in India, the colonial household could afford to have large numbers of servants. If servants cheated their employers one could speculate that if they had been paid more they might not have had to resort to stealing food in the kitchen.

The mission of keeping the home pristine fell to the memsahib but as the kitchen was the focal point for food preparation and as native servants were in charge it seemed like a losing battle. By most accounts, the memsahib chose not to improve the working conditions of the kitchen where servants were employed. Paradoxically she relied on and yet mistrusted her servants to maintain cleanliness in the kitchen. Instead of equipping the kitchen properly and providing clean water and proper disposal of waste

water, most memsahibs were content to associate their servants and the kitchen with dirt. It was not for lack of knowledge of local conditions that the memsahib or indeed, the sahib, was reticent in taking a more proactive stance in the kitchen. The household guides and cookery books that were present in most homes and clubs gave detailed instructions on equipping and maintaining the tropical kitchen. Many of these household guides recommended the morning parade of inspecting the cleanliness of kitchen premises and equipment stores and disbursing of supplies. Because the kitchen was some distance away memsahibs would have found it too hot and tiresome to get there and inspect its cleanliness.

One of the reasons Europeans in the colonies sought refuge in hill stations was to escape to the 'clean' and cool climate of the highlands, away from the dirt and disease of the tropical lowlands and the local inhabitants. *Chapter Four* investigates the colonial creations of hill stations, rest-houses, *dak* bungalows (rest-house for travellers), clubs, hotels or restaurants that were exclusive enclaves built for leisure and recuperation. The existence and maintenance of these institutions were dependant on the colonized people, significantly, for food preparation. In India, Malaya and the Borneo colonies rest-houses were colonial government-owned dwellings maintained in every town for the accommodation of travelling government personnel.³⁵ Fully-furnished, these brick-built buildings were smaller than hotels and meals were prepared by the rest-house cook. Rest-houses were most likely to have originated from the *dak* bungalows of India. The services provided for the rest and recreation of the colonials were dependant on the local inhabitants and not the least for food preparation. Dane Kennedy points out the irony that the British, by isolating themselves in the hill stations, in efforts to get away from the Indians, in fact depended on their services for life in the hills.³⁶

European ideas for devising places for rest and recreation in the tropical colonies were largely derived from nineteenth-century notions of race, of the need to isolate themselves from the colonized, of the home leave policies of the colonial administration and of a nostalgic longing for the home country. The three institutions of hill stations, clubs and rest-houses, with their customs and codes of conduct, reinforced those of the carefully guarded colonial home – against the encroachment of the colonized

³⁵ Cuthbert Woodville Harrison, *An Illustrated Guide to the Federated Malay States*, 4th edn., London, The Malay States Information Agency, 1911³⁶ Dane Kennedy, *The Magic Mountains: Hill Stations and the British Raj*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1996.

³⁶ Dane Kennedy, *The Magic Mountains: Hill Stations and the British Raj*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1996.

environment and its people. Western medical thinking at the time conceived that Europeans, particularly women and children were not to live for long periods of time in the tropics. It decreed that women and children were at greater risk in the harsh rigours of the tropics than their male counterparts and hill stations became important places for refuge and respite from the tropical lowlands.

Some hill stations became centres of government for several months of the year. In addition, the Indian population, comprising those engaged in commerce, service and administration swelled to large numbers.³⁷ The bazaars became overcrowded and due to lack of toilets, typhoid fever, cholera and other diseases were rampant in the later half of the nineteenth century. There were no toilet facilities in the servants' quarters as the British left the Indians to their own devices (as was generally the case in the lowlands). The colonizers initially ignored the sanitation problems in the bazaars but eventually the problems spilled dangerously close to the colonial enclaves. It was only when the spread of these diseases threatened the British population in the hill stations that authorities paid attention.³⁸

Chapter Five examines the fear and anxiety of colonizers who believed that indigenous people were inherently dirty and were seen as carriers of diseases. Such anxieties were supported by medical thinking from the eighteenth century – that diseases were rife in India and were attributed to the tropical heat and humidity.³⁹ This book examines the contradiction between the discourses of dirt and disease and the reality of dependence of the Europeans on their indigenous servants. The high mortality rate of Europeans in India and the other colonies (due to malaria and other infectious diseases) added to the apprehension. The increasing numbers of British women who went to the colonies from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries was heralded with the gendered role imposed on them as gatekeepers of empire. The memsahib was responsible for creating a pure and pristine imperial household, both for display and as a barrier against the colonized environment and its inhabitants. As maintained throughout this book, cookbooks and household manuals were the medium to which the memsahib could refer for instructions on how to manage her household, including maintaining cleanliness in

³⁷ Kennedy, *The Magic Mountains*, p191.

³⁸ Kennedy, *The Magic Mountains*, p191.

³⁹ David Arnold, *The Tropics and the Traveling Gaze: India, Landscape and Science 1800-1856*, Delhi, Permanent Black, 2005.

the home. These publications also contained advice on medical aid and hygiene rules.⁴⁰ Domestic servants were the ordinary colonized people that British housewives were the most likely to come into daily contact. The omnipresence of cooks, bearers and other servants, who on one hand were seen as carriers of disease, was a constant, uncomfortable and yet necessary presence in the personal space of the home.

From the eighteenth century until the 1870s, when modern germ theory emerged, medical thinking attributed epidemic disease transmission to contamination and not to contagion. European medical thought at the time was based on the humoral understanding of disease, that sickness occurred from the noxious air or miasmas produced in humid and unhealthy places. In particular, colonial ideology situated colonized areas of the world as dirty and impure and European knowledge and skills as being able to cleanse and purify these places and people.⁴¹ At the same time early nineteenth-century thought held that tropical diseases affected Europeans differently than the local people. Sanitation ideas were similarly developed in other colonies. In his study on the bubonic plague and urban native policy in South Africa in the early 1900s, Maynard W. Swanson refers to the ‘sanitation syndrome’ when medical officials and other authorities associated the imagery of infectious diseases as a ‘societal metaphor’.⁴² He states that disease was both a biological fact and a social metaphor.⁴³ This metaphor became so powerful that it influenced British and South African racial attitudes and paved the way towards segregation, culminating in the creation of urban apartheid.⁴⁴ In India and the Southeast Asian colonies the segregation of the colonial community from the colonized subjects were due both to imperial prestige and anxieties about dirt and disease associated with the indigenous peoples.

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Chapter One August 2, 2010 16,436words

What Empire Builders Ate

‘With the curry – mutton, chicken, fish, prawns, or hardboiled ducks’ eggs– came a dozen different side-dishes and savouries, some of them calculated to make the curry even hotter that it was already. As well as one or two

⁴⁰ See for example, Steel and Gardiner, *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook*. Chapter XV is titled ‘Simple hints on the preservation of health and simple remedies’, pp171-188.

⁴¹ Alan Bewell, *Romanticism and Colonial Disease*, Baltimore, The John Hopkins University Press, 1999, p42.

⁴² Maynard W. Swanson, ‘The Sanitation Syndrome: Bubonic Plague and Urban Native Policy in the Cape Colony’, *Journal of African History*, vol.XVIII, no.3, 1977, p387.

⁴³ Swanson, ‘The Sanitation Syndrome’, p408.

⁴⁴ Swanson, ‘The Sanitation Syndrome’, p387.

*dishes of curried vegetables, there would be an assortment of little dishes containing mango chutney from India, ikan bilis (tiny dried fish), red chilli sauce, a salty relish called "Bombay duck", shredded coconut, fried peanuts, chopped-up tomato and white onion, sliced banana, cucumber, and other bits and pieces... . The curry was always followed in the old Straits tradition by a local sweet called Gula Melaka.'*⁴⁵

The fundamentally hybrid character of the colonial cuisine derived from a multiplicity of influences, including the food practices of the Britons who ruled India, Malaysia and Singapore and the food traditions of the indigenous peoples from these colonies. The development of this distinct and separate hybrid cuisine among Britons can arguably be seen as the precursor of fusion food. Significantly, this cuisine developed largely through the reliance of colonizers on their domestic servants for food preparation. Among the handful of scholars to have considered food history and imperialism, some assume that consumption of certain types of foods became markers in distinguishing the colonials from the colonized. This school of thought contends that British colonizers consumed only British types of food in order to differentiate themselves from the colonized.⁴⁶ This chapter, in contrast, argues that the British did not eat only British foods but foods strongly influenced by Asian cuisines. Indeed, it demonstrates that the food practices of the British in Asia constitute a recognizable and legitimate cuisine with distinctive features. Furthermore, this colonial cuisine evolved over time and was not a deliberate act of imposing imperialistic designs but involved a process of combining local and European ingredients and dishes through the efforts of the indigenous servants, under the broad direction of their memsahibs. In departing from what other scholars maintain, this book contends that a distinct colonial cuisine emerged as a result of negotiation and collaboration between the expatriate British and local people. Nevertheless, within this relationship there was space for social distance and separation. This chapter reconstructs the emergence of the colonial cuisine by examining Anglo-Indian and other colonial cookbooks, personal accounts from my questionnaire, diaries, autobiographies and travelogues.

⁴⁵ Description of the Sunday curry tiffin in Singapore in the years under British rule in George L. Peet, *Rickshaw Reporter*, Singapore, Eastern Universities Press Sdn Bhd, 1985, p51.

⁴⁶ See E.M. Collingham, *Imperial Bodies: The Physical Experience of the Raj, c.1800-1947*, Cambridge, Polity, 2001, p159; and Nupur Chaudhuri, 'Shawls, Jewelry, Curry, and Rice in Victorian Britain, in Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel (eds), *Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance*, Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1992, p232.

In food production and consumption, there was no clear-cut colonial divide between two opposing sides. I have examined whether certain foods consumed by the colonizer were peculiar to each colony. This study argues that the colonial experience was a fluid enterprise and foods eaten by colonizers in each colony made geographical leaps to other colonies, and in the process, post-colonial societies adopted and adapted to 'colonial foods'. Anglo-Indians came from different occupational backgrounds: from the armed forces, the administration and in commerce, and different classes with different dietary habits. The colonized in India were from different castes and classes, again with different dietary practices, and these influenced the food practices of Anglo-Indians. Thus, the colonial cuisine was a hybrid cuisine with some elements of British foodways and components of foodways from the colonies.

The cuisine that was adopted by the majority of the British in India, Malaya and Singapore was replete with peculiarities and idiosyncracies that evolved over decades and were influenced by various factors, such as the availability of Western and local food, cooking facilities, input by domestic servants and traditions from the home country as well as the colonies. This was in spite of the diverse groups of British colonizers that came under varied backgrounds, from among the government sector were the administrators, health professionals, educators, military personnel; in the private sector were the importers and exporters, the retailers, those working on agricultural plantations and still others engaged in missionary work. Each group adopted food practices peculiar to their social standing and their professional status. Within India there were differences in foodways in the presidencies, districts, hill stations and urban centres. In colonial Malaysia and Singapore dietary habits differed between those who lived in urban centres and those in rural environments. Differences also existed temporally – food habits were markedly different from the time when colonial rule first began to the period immediately preceding independence. In addition, the groups from which domestic servants in the colonies came were just as disparate groups. The diversity of the groups that were in differing castes, ethnicity, races and religions added their peculiar influences to food and food preparation. The colonial cuisine with its hybrid dishes of countless types of curries, mulligatawny, kedgeree, chicken chop, pish pash and the inimitable meal of *tiffin* (light lunch or snacks, the Sunday curry tiffin is discussed in more detail in Chapter Three) was familiar and recognizable to the colonial community and only absent in the grand banquets at Government House. The colonial cuisine persisted well beyond the end of colonial rule

for both ex-colonizers and postcolonial societies and has survived in some of the clubs, hotels, restaurants and rest-houses in the colonies as well as in the homes of former colonials spread across the globe. Respondents to my questionnaire indicate that they re-visit their favourite dishes of the colonial era at home. At the same time there seems to be a following among the elite in postcolonial societies who frequent those clubs and hotels where the cuisine survives.

Victorian meal times and food practices in Britain and its Asian colonies

In nineteenth century Britain new dietary practices were evolving in this period of rapid social transformation. The choice and preparation of foods, meal times and order of service were socially important and defined class demarcation. As the preparation and consumption of food became the focus of Victorian life, this task became a housewifely responsibility.⁴⁷ This gendered role was transplanted to the colonies where the memsahib's role as homemaker became even more important, to be elevated where possible, as the exemplary imperial household. This section highlights the food habits of the affluent in the Victorian era, as it was the British upper classes in England that the Anglo-Indians and other colonials in Southeast Asia tried to emulate in their lifestyle. The increasing size and wealth of the middle classes in Victorian England from the 1850s contributed towards setting the trends in homes, dress, employment of servants and food.⁴⁸ Fruit orchards and vegetable gardens expanded and processed foods became popular. Food manufacturers processed new and exotic foods. Crosse & Blackwell manufactured about forty different pickles and sauces, Colman's mustard went on the market, curry powders were sold and 'Indian' sauce or Worcestershire sauce was invented.⁴⁹ The variety of foodstuffs increased even more as more produce from the colonies was brought back to Britain. As well, food distribution was made easier with the development of the railway system.⁵⁰ In the Edwardian era, the new monarch, as the leader of the fashionable elite, entertained with huge feasts. Johnston stated that King Edward, noted for his epicurean tastes, set the standards in *haute*

⁴⁷ Jenni Calder, *The Victorian Home*, London, B.T. Batsford Ltd, 1977, pp35-37.

⁴⁸ John Burnett, *Plenty & Want: A Social History of Diet in England from 1815 to the Present Day* London, Scolar Press, 1979, p78; James P. Johnston, *A Hundred Years Eating: Food, Drink and the Daily Diet in Britain since the Late Nineteenth Century*, Dublin, Gill and Macmillan, 1977, p1.

⁴⁹ Kate Colquhoun, *Taste: The Story of Britain through Its Cooking*, London, Bloomsbury, 2007, p276.

⁵⁰ C. Anne Wilson, 'Introduction: Meal Patterns and Food Supply in Victorian Britain', in C. Anne Wilson (ed.), *Eating with the Victorians*, Stroud, Sutton Publishing, 2004, pxvi.

cuisine and this was imitated by those who could employ a first-class French chef and a large retinue of servants. Breakfast at Sandringham included haddock or bloater, poached eggs, bacon, chicken and woodcock. Luncheon and dinner were twelve-course affairs and the late night snack might consist of plovers' eggs, ptarmigan and salmon.⁵¹ As for the middle classes, their dinner parties consisted of eight to ten courses and displayed the 'culinary savoir faire of the mistress of the house as well as the economic well-being of the household'.⁵² In early nineteenth-century India, the same largesse was evident on dinner party tables that boasted a large turkey as the centerpiece, an enormous ham, a sirloin or round of beef, a saddle of mutton, boiled and roasted legs of mutton, chicken, geese, ducks, tongues, 'humps', pigeon pies, curry and rice, more mutton (chops) and chicken (cutlets).⁵³

The eating habits of returning East India Company merchants and officials had popularised curries in private homes and coffee houses in the eighteenth century. Curries featured regularly in breakfast menus in British cookbooks by the second half of the nineteenth century. *The Breakfast Book*, published in 1865, listed 'curries' among the eggs, preserved meats, steaks, chops, offal, fish and preserved fruit for breakfast.⁵⁴ Other breakfast recipe books also featured curried pigs' feet, dry curry of mutton and/or dry curry of salmon.⁵⁵

Seen as filling the gap between breakfast and dinner, lunch or luncheon in Britain was already an established meal by the time Queen Victoria came to the throne.⁵⁶ The working classes had their 'dinner' at midday and 'tea' in the evening while servants and children had lunch as the main meal of the day. Others considered lunch as 'the ladies meal' as it was seen as an indulgence⁵⁷ and were supplements to morning calls.⁵⁸ It is probable that in the colonies, particularly in Singapore and colonial Malaysia that the

⁵¹ Johnston, *A Hundred Years Eating*, p6.

⁵² Johnston, *A Hundred Years Eating*, p6.

⁵³ David Burton, *The Raj at Table. A Culinary History of the British in India*, London, Faber & Faber, 1993, p18.

⁵⁴ White, 'First Things First', pp6-7.

⁵⁵ See similar breakfast recipes in M.L. Allen's *Breakfast Dishes for Every Morning of Three Months* and A. Kenney Herbert's *Fifty Breakfasts*.

⁵⁶ C. Anne Wilson, 'Luncheon, Nuncheon and Related Meals', in C. Anne Wilson (ed.), *Eating with the Victorians*, Stroud, Sutton Publishing, 2004, p32.

⁵⁷ Kate Colquhoun, *Taste: The Story of Britain through Its Cooking*, London, Bloomsbury, 2007, p301.

⁵⁸ Leonore Davidoff, *The Best Circles: Society Etiquette and the Season*, London, Croom Helm 1973, p49.

Sunday curry tiffin developed into a leisurely lunch after the Victorian fashion. In the late eighteenth century it was fashionable to eat dinner at five or six o'clock but by the nineteenth century the dining hour was pushed to seven, eight or even ten in the evening.⁵⁹ Dining late in the evening was due partly to the development of gas lighting and office hours.⁶⁰ This change meant supper was either eliminated or replaced by tea or coffee and cakes (cold punch or wine for the men) served at nine-thirty or ten o'clock.⁶¹ In the eighteenth century, dinner was eaten before going to the theatre or public gardens but in the next century the meal became the highlight of the day.⁶² The *à la Russe* style of dinner presentation that emerged in the nineteenth century originated from the Russian nobility and was first introduced into France and later England.⁶³ Food was served on to guests' plates from a sideboard by servants, course by course, starting with soup, fish, meat, vegetables and dessert.⁶⁴ This meant there was space at the centre (contrasting with the *à la Française*, where the table would be laden with dishes of food) of the table for elaborate decorations of flowers and fruits.⁶⁵ Menus were handwritten in French or in French and English. Elaborate cutlery added to the crowded table; formal etiquette also contributed to define class and maintain social distance. While the *à la Russe* style was adopted by the upper classes, the suburban family could never afford nor manage this style of entertaining (with the average household having only one servant at the most).

It was in the colonies that the Victorian style of gargantuan feasts and extravagant table décor was replicated by the middle classes of Britons who became the 'new' elites. The majority of the colonials in Malaysia and Singapore were from middle-class Britain.⁶⁶ Three-fourths of the Indian Civil Service (ICS) personnel were also from the

⁵⁹ Colquhoun, *Taste*, p300.

⁶⁰ Colquhoun, *Taste*, p300.

⁶¹ J.C. Drummond and Anne Wilbraham, *The Englishman's Food: A History of Five Centuries of English Diet*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1939, p397.

⁶² Davidoff, *The Best Circles*, p47.

⁶³ Valerie Mars, 'A La Russe: The New Way of Dining', in C. Anne Wilson (ed.), *Eating with the Victorians*, Stroud, Sutton Publishing, 2004, p116. The upper classes in Britain dined in the *à la Française* manner prior to the advent of *à la Russe*. The *à la Française* style, dating from the feasts of the Middle Ages, involved all the dishes being placed on the table and diners helped themselves or other diners. This enabled displays of abundance and elaborate presentation.

⁶⁴ Colquhoun, *Taste*, p251.

⁶⁵ See Mars, 'A La Russe', p117 and Colquhoun, *Taste*, pp251-256.

⁶⁶ John G. Butcher, *The British in Malaya, 1880-1941: The Social History of a European Community in Colonial South-East Asia*, Kuala Lumpur, Oxford University Press, 1979, pp33-46.

professional middle classes between 1860-1874.⁶⁷ The domestic servants' contribution to food preparation was one of the most important influences in the development of colonial cuisine. The domestic servants' knowledge of local produce, how to source and prepare food and their willingness to work with primitive facilities were compelling factors. However this is not to say that the domestic servant was singularly responsible for what appeared on the colonial table. Jean Raybould, who spent eight years with her medical doctor husband in Sabah, acknowledges that it was the 'amahs, local people and shops' that were most influential in introducing local foods to the colonials.⁶⁸ Beryl Kearney, who accompanied her husband on two tours of duty in Malaya in the mid-twentieth century, credited the local cooks and Chinese and Malay businessmen with introducing them to local food.⁶⁹ As with other analyses of colonial discourses, there was no single predominant factor that precipitated a particular development. That is, it was not a case of the servants deciding that they would cook a certain dish and this becoming part of the colonial's cuisine.

In spite of the social distance between the colonizer and the colonized, there was room for manoeuvre as well as negotiation and none more so than in foodways. There were the distinctly hybrid dishes of curry, mulligatawny, kedgerree, pish pash, chicken country captain and some of the dishes of European origin such as caramel custard, chicken chop and others that became the mainstays of the colonial cuisine. In India, during the time of the Raj, the British continued to consume these colonial dishes, even though many British imported foodstuffs were available. While other scholars have pointed out that some colonial families ate only British-type food, they were not representative of the majority of this community. Far from it, instead this book uses evidence from cookbooks, household guides, diaries, travelogues and personal records to argue that in spite of the availability of European food in these colonies by the middle of the nineteenth century, most of the British continued to eat the hybrid dishes that their antecedents did before them. In adapting to local conditions, the British expatriates adopted not only local foods but consumed them in ways that were prepared differently from those they were used to. George Woodcock, in his social history of Malaya and Singapore wrote,

‘there were variations within this general pattern of feeding, depending on the

⁶⁷ Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society and Culture in Britain*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006, p40.

⁶⁸ Questionnaire response, Jean Raybould.

⁶⁹ Questionnaire response, Beryl Kearney.

kind of materials that were locally available. In Malaya the beef was tough and fit only for use in soup, but poultry was abundant and cheap, mutton usually excellent; ... In Malaya it was tropical fruits that gave an individual touch to every menu; they included plantains, ducoos, mangoes, rambutans, pomeloes and mangosteens'.⁷⁰

Although curry was the ubiquitous dish in the repertoire of colonial cuisine, *mulligatawny* soup was the next most important dish associated with the colonial table. The invention of mulligatawny soup is credited to the British settlers of Madras in Tamil Nadu and is a corruption of the Tamil words, 'milagu-tannir' meaning pepper water, a soup-like dish.⁷¹ The soup was so popular among the British in Madras that they were called 'Mulls', a contraction of 'mulligatawny'.⁷² Similarly, those resident in Bombay were nicknamed 'Ducks', as they were fond of the dried fish, *bummelo*, also known as Bombay Duck.⁷³ Chitrita Banerji, a writer on Bengali food, states that the transformation of pepper water into mulligatawny soup 'rests on the colonial need to replicate the Western meal that consisted of separate courses'. Banerji notes that there was nothing in the Indian cuisines that could be served as a soup with the exception of the Muslim shorba.⁷⁴ Mulligatawny is another dish that the British in India hybridized – by adopting a local dish and adding other ingredients to it to make it a colonial dish. Initially it would have been the East India Company men in the 1700s⁷⁵ who re-invented the peculiar-sounding soup and this dish, like other colonial dishes evolved over the years and was transported to colonial Malaysia and Singapore. The peppery soup was supplemented with pieces of meat or chicken, stock, fried onions and spices.⁷⁶ In fact, every cook or memsahib had his or her own mulligatawny soup recipe, and any kind of meat could be added. The Victorian explorer, Richard Burton, in his account of his journey to the Nilgiri mountains at the hill station of Ootacamund, wrote about hunting the 'Neilgherry Sambur' (*Cervus Aristotelis*) or elk and observed that the elk's

⁷⁰ George Woodcock, *The British in the Far East* London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969, p179.

⁷¹ See Chitrita Banerji, *Eating India: An Odyssey into the Food and Culture of the Land of Spices*, New Delhi, Penguin Books, 2007, p101; and Henry Yule and A.C. Burnell, *Hobson-Jobson: A Glossary of Colloquial Anglo-Indian Words and Phrases, and of Kindred Terms, Etymological, Historical, Geographical and Discursive*, Hertfordshire, Wordsworth Editions Ltd, 1996, p595.

⁷² Michael Edwardes, *The Sahibs and the Lotus: The British in India*, London, Constable, 1988, p67.

⁷³ Edwardes, *The Sahibs and the Lotus*, p67.

⁷⁴ Banerji, *Eating India*, p101.

⁷⁵ Yule and Burnell, *Hobson-Jobson*, p595.

⁷⁶ Banerji, *Eating India*, p101.

flesh was coarse but made excellent mulligatawny.⁷⁷ In his book on social life in British India between 1608 and 1937, Dennis Kincaid stated that lunch on Sundays always began with mulligatawny soup and this was ‘an unalterable rite’ in every household there.⁷⁸ A.R. Kenney-Herbert attempted to reverse the trend of serving mulligatawny soup as a starter to the luncheon party as his version of it was a substantial one and, ‘if properly made, the soup was a meal in itself’.⁷⁹ Kenney-Herbert clearly viewed the soup as a comfort food and declared that it should be enjoyed alone, at home, with rice and nothing else. He extolled the virtues of *mulligatunny*, stating that ‘there are so many condiments, spices and highly flavoured elements in its composition – not to mention the concomitant ladleful of rice which custom decrees – that he who partakes of it finds the delicate power of his palate vitiated ...’.⁸⁰

It was not just in the home or clubs and hotels that mulligatawny was served however. The Blue Train that began its three days’ journey from Bombay’s Victoria Rail Terminus to Calcutta served ‘lentil or mulligatawny soup, chicken curry or mutton, steamed sponge pudding or plum duff’.⁸¹ Travelling in the 1940s, Tony Orchard recounted that meals were ordered from a station menu, telegraphed to and served at the next station restaurant during a halt.⁸² Lurking in the trains and railway stations in India, however, was the popular Brown Windsor Soup, clearly one dish from the metropole (a soup omnipresent on the train menus of British Railways at the time). The original soup was not brown but white and was called Calves Feet Soup a la Windsor, created as a nutritious broth for Queen Victoria on the birth of her first child in November 1841.⁸³

In the early 1800s, dinner parties in Britain usually started with ‘brown’ soup, made up of hare, giblet, beef and ‘oleaginous ox rump’ and ‘white’ soup of almonds and sieved

⁷⁷ Richard F. Burton, *Goa, and the Blue Mountains; or, Six Months of Sick Leave*, Berkeley, University California Press, 1991, pp318-319.

⁷⁸ Dennis Kincaid, *British Social Life in India, 1608-1937*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974, p241.

⁷⁹ A.R. Kenney-Herbert, *Culinary Jottings for Madras, or a Treatise in Thirty Chapters on Reformed Cookery for Anglo-Indian Exiles*, Devon, Prospect Books, 1994, p186.

⁸⁰ Kenney-Herbert, *Culinary Jottings*, p186.

⁸¹ Laurence Fleming, *Last Children of the Raj: British Childhoods in India 1939-1950*, vol. II, London, Radcliffe Press, 2004, p42.

⁸² Fleming, *Last Children of the Raj*, vol. II, p42.

⁸³ Gladys Mann, *Traditional British Cooking for Pleasure*, London, Paul Hamlyn, 1967, p10.

chicken.⁸⁴ The new soup, mulligatawny, made its appearance with the return of merchants and administrators from India and other colonies. As in India, the soup was accompanied by rice and cut lemons. Daniel Santiago, a cook who was brought back to work in England by John London Shand, was perplexed that mulligatawny was not spelled as ‘mollagoo tanney’, asking, ‘[W]hy English people always spell this word wrong? Everybody knows this – Mollagoo, pepper; tanney, water. In proper Tamil the mollagoo tanney is pronounced ‘Mollagoo Neer’ and ‘Mollagoo Tannir’.⁸⁵ Santiago’s recipe included ingredients such as gravy of mutton or beef or chicken stock, rice powder, milk, coriander, onions, ginger, garlic, cumin, saffron, and, of course, pepper.⁸⁶

Another dish associated with British colonial cooking is kedgerie. Spelt variously as kitchery, kitchri or kichiri, Nigel Hankin defines it as an Anglicism of the Hindi word khichree, khichri or khichdi, a rice dish cooked with pulses.⁸⁷ Like other foods that the early settlers and later the Anglo-Indians adopted, recipes for kedgerie in India and in Britain were adjusted and improved. Peter Reeves’ study of kedgerie suggests that it started out as an Indian breakfast dish, dating back to the fourteenth century. The inclusion of mung dal also made it ideal as a recuperative dish for those who needed simple foods.⁸⁸ Colonials in India came to know of kedgerie first as a vegetarian dish but in time it developed into the hybrid dish of smoked fish and eggs.⁸⁹ Often served for breakfast at Anglo-Indian tables, kedgerie sometimes included fish although Yule and Burnell have stated that this was inaccurate as fish was frequently eaten with the dish but was not part of it.⁹⁰ It figured so prominently in British cuisine that Somerset Maugham is thought to have said that ‘to eat well in England, you should have a breakfast three times a day and with kedgerie in it’. Kenney-Herbert placed kedgerie under the chapter ‘*réchauffés*’ or reheating of leftover meals although he qualifies it as ‘Kedgerie of the English type’.⁹¹ Kenney-Herbert’s recipe consists of boiled rice, chopped hard-boiled egg, cold minced fish heated with pepper, salt, and herbs like

⁸⁴ Colquhoun, *Taste*, p265.

⁸⁵ Daniel Santiago, *The Curry Cook’s Assistant; or Curries, How to Make Them in England in Their Original Style*, London, Kegan Paul, Trench & Co, 1889, p51.

⁸⁶ Santiago, *The Curry Cook’s Assistant*, p51.

⁸⁷ Nigel Hankin, *Hanklyn-Janklin: A Stranger’s Rumble-Tumble Guide to Some Words, Customs and Guiddities Indian and Indo-British*, New Delhi, Tara Press, 2003, p259.

⁸⁸ Peter Reeves, *Hobgoblin Magazine*, issue 2, May 2000, pp3-5, 25.

⁸⁹ Nicola Humble, *Culinary Pleasures: Cookbooks and the Transformation of British Food*, London, Faber and Faber, 2005, p19.

⁹⁰ Yule and Burnell, *Hobson-Jobson*, p476.

⁹¹ Kenny-Herbert, *Culinary Jottings*, p171.

chives, parsley or marjoram. A kedgeree recipe of 1857, in a women's magazine used similar ingredients: fish, rice, butter, mustard, eggs, salt and cayenne pepper.⁹²

Kedgeree was one colonial dish that spawned another, the comfort food, pishpash, that was developed by Indian cooks for European children.⁹³ As a nursery food, pishpash which was a rice gruel cooked with small pieces of meat in it. 'Ketab', author of *Indian dishes for English tables*, had mutton in her pishpash recipe and instructed that the rice should be cooked to a mash and was suitable for children or 'invalids'.⁹⁴ Another pishpash recipe by 'A Thirty-five Year Resident' included rice, chicken, ginger, onions, peppercorns and 'hotspice' and instructed that the chicken should be cooked until tender and the rice 'quite pappy'. That recipe too, was recommended as a nutritious one for 'invalids'.⁹⁵ Rice was as permanent a fixture on the daily menu of the colonial as curry. 'A Thirty-five Year Resident' wrote that

'Rice is consumed by most European families at breakfast, tiffin, and dinner. It is eaten at breakfast with fried meat, fish, omelet, country captain, or some other curried dish, and, being invariably followed by toast and eggs, jams, fruit, &c., ... The rice at dinner is usually preceded by soup, fish, roast, and made dishes'.⁹⁶

Another dish that was altered and became a permanent favourite is the curry puff. Wendy Hutton attributes the origin of curry puffs to one of the Asian dishes that were modified to suit Western tastes. She explains that the Indian savoury stuffed pancake known as samosa, underwent modifications and became a 'curry puff' to suit English tastes. Lillian Allan Newton, who grew up in Singapore in the 1890s thought that curry puffs were 'the oriental cousin of our sausage rolls but much nicer! Cookie made curry puffs also and they were a stand-by for picnics and parties'.⁹⁷ Today, curry puffs are sold everywhere in Singapore and other parts of Southeast Asia and are eaten by people who have never heard of samosa.⁹⁸ A similar dish that developed from British and Singaporean origins is Roti John. Hutton notes that in the 1960s, a spicy minced meat stew served with sliced French bread (*Keema Roti*) was very popular among the British

⁹² *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*, 1857, vol.v, no.1, p128.

⁹³ See Hankin, *Hanklyn-Janklin*, p259; and Yule and Burnell, *Hobson-Jobson*, p715.

⁹⁴ Ketab, *Indian Dishes for English Tables*, London, Chapman and Hall, 1902, p8.

⁹⁵ A Thirty-Five years' Resident, *The Indian Cookery Book: A Practical Handbook to the Kitchen in India*, Calcutta, Wyman & Co., 1869, p35.

⁹⁶ A Thirty-Five years' Resident, *The Indian Cookery Book*, p9.

⁹⁷ Lillian Allan Newton, *More Exquisite When Past*, Manuscript, RCMS 108/2/1, Chapter VI, pp5-6.

⁹⁸ Wendy Hutton, *Singapore Food, a Treasury of More Than 200 Time-Tested Recipes*, Singapore, Time Books International, 1989, p12.

Armed Forces stationed in Changi. The combination then evolved into Roti John – bread spread with a layer of minced meat and eggs, then fried. Hutton explains that the name came about because in colonial days, every Englishman was nick-named ‘John’ by Singaporeans.⁹⁹

Government administrators in India and colonial Malaysia did an inordinate amount of travelling, visiting other stations under their jurisdiction and throughout the empire. In hot weather, travelling was done usually at night and the rest-house or dak bungalow at principal routes were often places of rest during the day. In the days of poor communication and difficult travelling conditions, arrival at rest-houses and dak bungalows would have been unannounced and it fell to the cook to come up with a meal unexpectedly. Chicken was usually the main dish as poultry was commonly reared in villages and as a meat it could be handled by both Muslim and Hindu cooks. **Chapter Four** describes the speed in which chickens could be caught, killed, curried and served by indigenous cooks for travelling colonials. This dish was also known as ‘country captain’ or ‘chicken country captain’.¹⁰⁰ Lizzie Collingham suggests that this well-known Anglo-Indian curry acquired its name as it was invented by the captain of a ‘country’ boat.¹⁰¹ Another hypothesis by Banerji is that it was the brainchild of a native captain of the *sepoys* or Indian troops working for the British.¹⁰² While Collingham notes that the freshly-killed chicken was flavoured with turmeric and chillies, Banerji states that the chicken, seasoned with ginger, chillies and pepper was fried in ghee and simmered in water.¹⁰³ Yet another explanation was given by a Singaporean cookery writer, describing Chicken Curry Captain ‘as a very mild dish created for Western tastes, supposedly by a Chinese cook who told his captain that the evening meal was going to be “Curry, Captain”’.¹⁰⁴ As Britons travelled through the Asian part of the empire, so did curry – the development of the dish is discussed comprehensively in the following chapter.

The two most familiar colonial desserts were caramel custard and *gula malacca* or sago pudding. As a Western dish originating from medieval times, caramel custard employs

⁹⁹ Hutton, *Singapore Food*, p173.

¹⁰⁰ Michael Edwardes, *Bound to Exile: The Victorians in India*, London, Sidgwick & Jackson, 1969, p173.

¹⁰¹ Lizzie Collingham, *Curry: A Biography*, London, Chatto & Windus, 2005, p124.

¹⁰² Banerji, *Eating India*, p103.

¹⁰³ Collingham, *Curry*, p124 and Banerji, *Eating India*, p103.

¹⁰⁴ Hutton, *Singapore Food*, p157.

the ingredients of eggs, milk and sugar.¹⁰⁵ Probably due to the ready availability of these ingredients caramel custard was the standby for most meals in colonial households.¹⁰⁶ As they featured so frequently on the colonial menu, the familiarity of this dish did on occasion breed contempt. Wendy Suart, a memsahib of many years in North Borneo wrote of her time at the Jesselton rest-house: '[A]fter lunch, consisting of scrawny water buffalo, stringy chicken or scraggy pork in strict rotation, followed by the eternal caramel custard or fresh fruit salad ...'¹⁰⁷ When Lionel Fielden, the first Controller of Broadcasting for All India Radio, recounted his lonely five years in India he complained of having to dine with the same twelve English officials and their wives in Delhi during his first winter there. He wrote, '[N]ot only were their houses and furniture identical – they were built and supplied to the same pattern – but also the food, the guests, and the conversation were identical. The dinner was always thin soup, wet fish, tasteless beef, and caramel custard'.¹⁰⁸

Another dish that was synonymous with colonial desserts, particularly in Malaya, the Borneo states and Singapore, was sago pudding.¹⁰⁹ The sago is made to a jelly consistency upon which a palm sugar syrup and coconut milk are poured. Usually served at the end of the Sunday curry tiffin, the sago pudding became a favourite among colonials but it was one dish that never became an enduring dessert in Britain. One memsahib described sago pudding as 'cooling and delicious' after a Malayan curry¹¹⁰ and an Australian tin miner, reminiscing on his time in Malaya, exclaimed, '[T]o eat this dainty is to forget one's troubles and to slide into a voluptuous dream of gastronomic joy'.¹¹¹ Margaret Shennan stated that '[A]ccording to hallowed tradition curry *makan* (meal) was followed by gula Malacca ... altogether an unforgettable

¹⁰⁵ Alan Davidson, *The Penguin Companion to Food*, London, Penguin Books, 2002, p285.

¹⁰⁶ Sir John Cotton, SOAS: OA1/18/1-6, 1930-1946, Political Officer, IPS, transcript 68 pp, 5 Sept 1973 – 1015-1330 H58x. Cotton noted that caramel custard featured in every meal in a military mess.

¹⁰⁷ Wendy Suart, *The Lingering Eye: Recollections of North Borneo*, Edinburgh, The Pentland Press Limited, 1993, p66.

¹⁰⁸ Lionel Fielden, *The Natural Bent*, London, Andre Deutsch, 1960, p179.

¹⁰⁹ Sago pudding is also known as *gula malacca*, or *gula melaka*: the Malay name refers to the palm sugar used as the sauce for the pudding. See Alan Davidson, *The Penguin Companion to Food*, p816 and Sylvia Tan, *Singapore Heritage Food: Yesterday's Recipes for Today's Cook*, Singapore, Landmark Books, 2008, p24.

¹¹⁰ Sim, *Malayan Landscape*, p140.

¹¹¹ Ambrose Pratt, *Magical Malaya*, Melbourne, Robertson & Mullens Ltd, 1931, p265.

experience'.¹¹² However a Malayan 'old hand' thought 'Gula Melaka was delicious, but it was far too rich a sweet to eat on top of a big plateful of curry and rice with all the trimmings'.¹¹³

The development of a discernible colonial cuisine

The types of food consumed by the British colonial community of the three states fit the criteria laid out by anthropologist Sydney Mintz' definition of what constitutes a 'cuisine'.¹¹⁴ Mintz's conception of a cuisine requires that a population consume particular foods frequently enough to consider itself knowledgeable about those foods. This community believes that they know what the cuisine consists of, how it is made and how it should taste. This makes the cuisine genuine and makes up the food of the community.¹¹⁵ Beyond that, sociology scholar Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson, in her study of French cuisine, states that 'the cornerstone of culinary discourse and the discipline that it represents is cuisine – the code that structures the practice of food and allows us to discuss and to represent taste'.¹¹⁶ Ferguson adds that 'culinary preparations become a cuisine when, and only when, the preparations are articulated and formalized, and enter the public domain'.¹¹⁷ It is fair to conclude then the food practices adopted by British colonisers certainly fit the criteria outlined by Ferguson.

It may be argued that, although food was prepared by indigenous servants, Europeans in the colonies would still be knowledgeable about each colonial dish, not the least on how they should taste. This would be true of any privileged group that relied on servants for food preparation and could claim to call a particular cuisine their own. In any case, Deborah Lupton asserts that food consumption habits are not just tied to biological needs but 'serve to mark boundaries between social classes, geographic regions, nations, cultures, genders, life-cycle states, religions and occupations, to distinguish rituals, traditions, festivals, seasons and times of day'.¹¹⁸ Pierre L. van den Berghe

¹¹² Margaret Shennan, *Out in the Midday Sun: The British in Malaya 1880-1960*, London, 2000, p206.

¹¹³ George L. Peet, *Rickshaw Reporter*, Singapore, Eastern Universities Press Sdn Bhd, 1985, p51.

¹¹⁴ Sidney W. Mintz, *Tasting Food, Tasting Freedom: Excursions into Eating, Culture, and the Past*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1996, p96.

¹¹⁵ Mintz, *Tasting Food, Tasting Freedom*, p96.

¹¹⁶ Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson, *Accounting for Taste: The Triumph of French Cuisine*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2006, p18.

¹¹⁷ Ferguson, *Accounting for Taste*, p19.

¹¹⁸ Deborah Lupton, *Food, the Body and the Self*, London, Sage Publications, 1996, p1.

concurr, stating that '[O]ur cuisine is the symbolic expression of our sociality, first in the intimate domestic sphere, and by extension with the larger group that shares our specific culinary complex: the inventory of food items, the repertoire of recipes, and the rituals of commensalism'.¹¹⁹ While van den Berghe discusses food practices of a specific group as a badge of ethnicity he could just as well be describing the culinary traditions of the British colonizers, be they at the colonial dinner party, the club meal or the Sunday tiffin. In this context, food differentiation does not necessarily depict a mark of racial superiority but a sense of belonging to a particular group.

The consumption of certain types of food can be seen as more than fulfilling a biological function. Helen Pike Bauer prescribes it to a form of security: 'consuming the familiar reinforces one's sense of a persistent personality and set of values'.¹²⁰ She asserts that Anglo-Indians found replicating an English diet and pattern of meals often proved both difficult and unhealthy. In my view, Anglo-Indians and other colonials did not singularly and actively devise food practices as the acquisition and adaptation of local food patterns into acceptable European food habits were performed by the local domestic servants. While the memsahib in her half-hour of morning consultation with the cook discussed the meals for the day, it was the cook and other support staff who went to the markets to purchase the ingredients and who were responsible for the cooking of them. Thus, I find Pike Bauer's statement that for the Anglo-Indians, '[F]ood became a means of both ethnographic education and self-definition'¹²¹ does not take account of the role that Indian servants played. Further, it is only a partial truth when Pike Bauer states that in the cookbooks, fiction and diaries of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that 'the struggles of Anglo-Indians to develop a knowledge of the indigenous culture and to maintain, [was] at the same time, a [struggle for] sense of self'.¹²² Jeffrey M. Pilcher states the obvious when he claims that 'colonial rulers often acquired a taste for the foods of their subjects. Indian curry and chutney, for example became mainstays of the British diet'.¹²³

¹¹⁹ Pierre L. van den Berghe, 'Ethnic Cuisine: Culture in Nature', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol.7, no.3, 1984, p392.

¹²⁰ Helen Pike Bauer, 'Eating in the Contact Zone: Food and Identity in Anglo-India', in Tamara S. Wagner and Narin Hassan (eds), *Consuming Culture in the Long Nineteenth Century: Narratives of Consumption, 1700-1900*, Lanham, Lexington Books, 2007, p95.

¹²¹ Pike Bauer, 'Consuming Culture', p95.

¹²² Pike Bauer, 'Consuming Culture', p95.

¹²³ Jeffrey M. Pilcher, *Food in World History*, London, Routledge, 2006, p52.

To a certain extent, servants decided what ingredients were acceptable for provision to the colonizer's palette and what dishes were fitting for presentation to the colonizer. For example, Daniel Santiago, a servant who had been a cook to English residents in India since the age of sixteen, in his recipe for mulligatawny, included mutton, beef or chicken. He explained that while the natives usually did not include meat but only 'plain curry stuffs' and tamarind, this was 'not worth[y] for Europeans'.¹²⁴ Collingham, in her biography of curry, relates incidents where servants in the Gwillim household in Madras refused to serve the hare that Elizabeth Gwillim obtained for dinner.¹²⁵ When asked for an explanation, the butler said that guests would laugh if a country hare was served for a grand dinner. The Gwillims' servants would also not serve the small fish that resemble whitebait, saying that white gentlemen could not eat that type of fish. Indian servants served the British with food similar to those consumed by the Mughal rulers – the Mughlai pilaus and 'dum poked' chickens – the high-status dishes which were familiar to the Muslim cooks employed by the Anglo-Indians.¹²⁶ Indian cooks also frequently modified recipes to suit what they thought were British tastes. Curries were made less aromatic with reduced spices like cloves and cardamom and the amount of ghee and yoghurt was also lessened.¹²⁷

Mintz takes the view that food preferences, once established, are usually deeply resistant to change; and adds that it is far more common to add new foods to one's diet than to give up old and familiar ones.¹²⁸ This certainly helps explain the practice of colonizers holding on to their roast beef and puddings or saddles of mutton alongside curry and rice, chutnies and sago pudding. Added to this is the notion of comfort food. Historian Donna R. Gabaccia refers to comfort food as that food which provides 'comfort, security, and love of childhood' and asserts that people turn to comfort foods when they must cope with stress.¹²⁹ Julie L. Locher *et al*, go further and contend that the meaning of comfort foods should not only be examined from the individual's perspective, but also from the larger, societal perspective. Locher and others cite C. Fischler that in consuming particular foods individuals can exercise 'control over the

¹²⁴ Santiago, *The Curry Cook's Assistant*, p51.

¹²⁵ Collingham, *Curry*, p114.

¹²⁶ Collingham, *Curry*, p114.

¹²⁷ Collingham, *Curry*, pp116-117.

¹²⁸ Mintz, *Tasting Food, Tasting Freedom*, p24.

¹²⁹ Donna R. Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat: Ethnic Food and the Making of Americans*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2000, p179.

body, the mind and therefore over identity...'¹³⁰ Closely related to comfort food is another idea of 'nostalgic foods'. Locher *et al*, state that nostalgic foods are those identified with a particular time and place in one's history. They argue that 'nostalgic longing and consumption of particular food items sustain one's sense of cultural, familial, and self-identity'.¹³¹ They state that 'when we are physically disconnected from a community, a family, or any primary group that defines who we are, our sense of self may become fractured. In these instances, consuming food items intimately linked with one's past may repair such fractures by maintaining a continuity of the self in unfamiliar surroundings'.¹³² This goes in some way to explain Britons' adherence to certain foods in the colonies when they found themselves in a strange land.

Cookbooks and household manuals

In Europe, domestic conduct books and cookery books first made their appearance in the early sixteenth century, with the former advocating roles and responsibilities for family members. Publication of both genres gathered pace at the end of the sixteenth century and into the seventeenth century.¹³³ Cookery books were among the earliest publications, and by the mid-sixteenth century cookery books had been printed in most of the languages of Western Europe.¹³⁴ However, it was in England at the turn of the seventeenth century that the most detailed domestic conduct books were published. These publications were uniform in their outlook, with clearly codified familial duties on household matters, appealing to the middle and upper classes.¹³⁵ The vast number of cookery books printed in Britain from the 1730s were cheap, costing between two and six shillings and were written for middle class women and their servants rather than professional chefs.¹³⁶ Gilly Lehmann estimates that 531,250 cookery books were

¹³⁰ Julie Locher et al., 'Comfort Foods: An Exploratory Journey into the Social and Emotional Significance of Food', *Food & Foodways: History & Culture of Human Nourishment*, no.273-297, 2005, p274.

¹³¹ Locher et al., 'Comfort Foods', p280.

¹³² Locher et al., 'Comfort Foods', p280

¹³³ Wayne E. Franits, *Paragon of Virtue: Women and Domesticity in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993, p66.

¹³⁴ Stephen Mennell, *All Manners of Food: Eating and Taste in England and France from the Middle Ages to the Present*, Oxford, B. Blackwell, 1985, p65.

¹³⁵ Franits, *Paragon of Virtue*, p66.

¹³⁶ Troy Bickham, 'Eating the Empire: Intersections of Food, Cookery and Imperialism in Eighteenth-Century Britain', *Past and Present*, vol.198, no.1, 2008, p97; see also Natalie Kapetanios Meir, "'A Fashionable Dinner Is Arranged as Follows": Victorian Dining Taxonomies', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, vol.33, 2005, p136.

published in Britain between 1700 and 1799.¹³⁷ Some cookbooks carried just recipes, others were a combination of a recipe book and household manual, as was the famous Isabella Beeton's *Beeton's Book of Household Management*. While cookery books can be seen as historical documents on food practices, Stephen Mennell advises that they should be interpreted with caution. Mennell refers to Elizabeth David's belief that there was a lag of about forty years between changes in practice taking place in the English kitchen and their appearance in cookery books in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.¹³⁸ The flood of cookery books published in Britain also allowed its readers to engage with other cultures, encouraging cooks to try foreign dishes, such as 'Indian pickle, curry, pilau and 'Mulligatawny, or Currie-Soup' and others.¹³⁹ An important factor to consider in determining whether a cookery book reflected what the readership cooked is whether the cookery book was written by a practicing cook for other cooks or if it was written to promote a fashion trend for the elite.¹⁴⁰

In Antoinette Burton's work on the postcolonial career of South Asian writer Santha Rama Rau, Burton examined Rau's *The Cooking of India* as a means of understanding the difficulties Rama Rau faced in 'introducing' India to the postwar American public.¹⁴¹ Rau's book includes '*imagining* a "national" cuisine¹⁴² for middle-class Western and diasporic Indian consumption, 'ended up being part autobiography, part travelogue, part social and cultural history, and part political platform.'¹⁴³ Thus, Rau, just as cookbook authors in colonial times, utilized the cookbook genre as a means of disseminating other ideas than just culinary ones.

It is quite clear that in colonial India, Malaysia and Singapore, cookery books were written for *sahibs* and *memsahibs*. Implicit in some of the instructions in the household management manuals for the colonies were prescribed codes of conduct that defined the boundaries between British rulers and the indigenous people. It also served as the reference manual on how to deal with native servants. Author W.E. Kinsey in the

¹³⁷ Gilly Lehmann, *The British Housewife: Cookery Books, Cooking and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, Devon, Prospect Books, 2003, p65.

¹³⁸ Mennell, *All Manners of Food*, p65.

¹³⁹ Bickham, 'Eating the Empire', p99.

¹⁴⁰ Mennell, *All Manners of Food*, p65.

¹⁴¹ Antoinette Burton, *The Postcolonial Careers of Santha Rama Rau*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2007.

¹⁴² Santha Rama Rau, *The Cooking of India*, New York, Time-Life Books, 1970, pp26-27.

¹⁴³ Burton, *The Postcolonial Careers of Santha Rama Rau*, pp110-111.

preface of her cookery book for Singapore, wrote ‘with the hope that it will generally assist to combat the pernicious policy of the native cooks who not only overcharge in the prices of local commodities, but generally will not produce them, or attempt to raise non-existent difficulties’.¹⁴⁴ *The Malayan Cookery Book*, published in 1930, ‘constitutes a serious attempt to aid the housewives of Malaya the art of cooking ... a representative list of the recipes handed from generation to generation of Malayan housewives will reflect the march of Malaysia’s history. There are first the dishes known to many generations of Indians’.¹⁴⁵ This cookery book typifies colonial notions of their own identity in the lands they occupied. The ‘housewives’ mentioned are the British or European, not the local women. Similarly, ‘Indians’ refer to the British in India and not the people of India.

One cookbook published in Singapore after the Japanese Occupation in the 1940s is P.C.B. Newington’s *Good Food*. Newington was interned in Singapore by Japanese forces between 1942 and 1945 and wrote that ‘it is an extraordinary thing how one’s thoughts turn to food when one is starving’.¹⁴⁶ Newington related that he started a ‘Gourmets’ Club outside his hut at the Sime Road Camp and fellow internees would meet once a week to discuss food preparation. Club members wrote down recipes; recipes were also obtained from the Women’s Camp.¹⁴⁷ Recipes in the cookbook are eclectic and include the standard colonial dishes of curries, mulligatawny, kedgeree and sago pudding. Significantly, Britons interned in wartime were not just thinking of British food but craved for Indian and Southeast Asian dishes, a powerful example of food appropriation. A.J.H. Dempster, the assistant food controller of Perak, in his foreword on this wartime cookbook, noted that ‘no epicure came to Malaya to live on roast beef’.¹⁴⁸

Memsahibs have been constructed and maligned in novels in colonial settings for their frivolous existence, their intolerance of Asian people and for their adulterous affairs.¹⁴⁹ However, cookbooks and household guides can be seen as a means to encourage

¹⁴⁴ W.E. Kinsey, *The ‘Mems’ Own Cookery Book*, Singapore, 1929, Preface.

¹⁴⁵ J. Hubbard, *The Malayan Cookery Book*, Singapore, Rickard Limited, 1930, Introduction.

¹⁴⁶ P.C.B. Newington, *Good Food*, Ipoh, Charles Grenier & Co. Ltd., 1947, pi.

¹⁴⁷ Newington, *Good Food*, ppi-ii.

¹⁴⁸ Newington, *Good Food*, Foreword.

¹⁴⁹ See, for example, Rudyard Kipling, *Plain Tales from the Hills*, London, MacMillan and Co., 1931.

behaviour that was representative of the ruling elite. These publications contained instructions on how to maintain the colonial household and on appropriate conduct. A manual published in 1909 in Madras by Mrs C. Lang was offered as ‘a help to many young inexperienced English girls starting housekeeping in India’.¹⁵⁰ In an obvious attempt to coach the memsahib to be a productive member of the imperial family, the first chapter titled ‘The Daily Routine’, advised on the daily meeting with the domestic servants, with the suggestion that ‘punctuality in seeing your servants after breakfast and trying to keep to the same hour daily, as a good housekeeper should show an example to her servants, in keeping to a good routine and method’.¹⁵¹ Lang instructed that after the morning’s meeting with the servants and inspection of the kitchen and stores the memsahib should do her accounts, engage in writing and in dressmaking, and making things for the house, such as curtains, cushion covers, lampshades. She admonished, ‘I have no patience with the woman who says she finds the days so long and has nothing to do. I am quite sure in the hot weather, if you are always busy at something, you do not notice the heat so much’.¹⁵²

Cookbooks in late eighteenth-century Britain that were written for middle and upper class women addressed another duty, that of encouraging servants to work from recipes given in cookery books.¹⁵³ The same encouragement was given to domestic servants in British India and British Malaysia and Singapore when recipes were translated into the local languages.¹⁵⁴ In Victorian times, even though knowledge of cookery and housewifery were seen as assets, earning money from writing cookbooks was not unacceptable and so many women authors wrote anonymously. An example is the book ‘[B]y a Lady’.¹⁵⁵ In India, author anonymity was represented by the following: ‘An Anglo-Indian’, ‘An Old Lady-Resident’, ‘A Lady Resident’, ‘The Englishwoman in India’, ‘A Thirty-five Years’ Resident’. Others simply used their initials, such as A.K.

¹⁵⁰ (Mrs) C. Lang, *‘Chota Mem’ the English Bride in India: Being Hints on Indian Housekeeping*, Madras, Higginbotham & Co., 1909.

¹⁵¹ Lang, *‘Chota Mem’*, p4.

¹⁵² Lang, *‘Chota Mem’*, pp5-6.

¹⁵³ Sandra Sherman, “‘The Whole Art and Mystery of Cooking’: What Cookbooks Taught Readers in the Eighteenth Century”, *Eighteenth-Century Life*, vol.28, no.1, 2004, p119.

¹⁵⁴ See Friend-in-Need Women’s Workshop, *A Friend in Need English-Tamil Cookery Book*, Madras, Friend-in-Need Women’s Workshop, 1950; Friend-in-Need Women’s Workshop, *Friend-in-Need Women, Hindustani Cookery Book*; Madras, 1939.

¹⁵⁵ Sarah Freeman, *Mutton and Oysters: The Victorians and Their Food*, London, Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1989, p156.

Even if the Anglo-Indians and the British in Malaysia and Singapore intended to follow a British diet, their environment ensured that they would become more amenable to local ingredients and cooking methods. Cookbooks written for these colonies more than merely provided recipes but became the standard bearer for the colonial culture that educated and advised their readers about the purchase, preparation, cooking and serving of food by their servants.¹⁵⁷ While the focus of the cookbooks was necessarily on food, the overt messages in the hints and tips on household management widened to disseminate ideas on class distinctions and race relations. Helen Pike Bauer asserts that Anglo-Indians who acquired knowledge of local material life could help to define themselves as different and superior. However, she also acknowledges the few Anglo-Indians who, in utilizing this knowledge to construct the Anglo-Indian diet, also created for themselves an Anglo-Indian identity.¹⁵⁸

In Britain, when new orders of service and other food practices became fashionable these ideas were not uniformly adopted due to lags in time before the ideas reached, and gained acceptance, in different geographical areas. Similarly, new trends set from Britain were picked up in the colonies at different times. Entertaining was much more formal and substantial in India in the years of the East India Company than in the 1860s.¹⁵⁹ Generally, entertaining was less formal in colonial Malaysia and Singapore. However, as the majority of the colonial elite was from the middle classes and as the tendency was to emulate the ethos of the upper classes of Britain some of the food practices of emerging trends from the home trickled down to the dining tables of the colonies. In parallel, there emerged in the colonies practices that were distinctly extracted from the local cultures. This book suggests that as the colonial cuisine

¹⁵⁶ Other publication titles for Anglo-India with author anonymity are: *An Anglo-Indian, Indian Cookery: 'Local' for Young House-Keepers*, Bombay, Imperial Press, 1883; Anonymous, *The Duties of Servants: A Practical Guide to the Routine of Domestic Service*, London, Frederick Warne & Co, London, Frederick Warne & Co., 1890; Anonymous, *Dainty Dishes for Indian Tables*, Calcutta, W. Newman & Co., 1879; G. V., *Dinners and Dinner-Parties or the Absurdities of Artificial Life*, London, Chapman and Hall, 1862; and G.L.R., *The Economical Cookery Book: Simple and Dainty Dishes (for India)*, Calcutta and Simla, Thacker, Spink & Co., 1920.

¹⁵⁷ See Pike Bauer, 'Eating in the Contact Zone', p95.

¹⁵⁸ Pike Bauer, 'Eating in the Contact Zone', pp95-96.

¹⁵⁹ A.R. Kenny-Herbert, *Culinary Jottings for Madras, or a Treatise in Thirty Chapters on Reformed Cookery for Anglo-Indian Exiles*, Devon, Prospect Books, 1994, p1-5.

developed, it became self-perpetuating: as food items or dishes became accepted in colonial circles, they were legitimised and perpetuated as recipes of these dishes were then shared and cookbooks included them.

Unquestionably, meal times were adapted from local customs, in part due to the tropical conditions. Collingham acknowledges that ‘traces of Indian influence were still to be found in patterns of food consumption’.¹⁶⁰ I contend that colonial food habits took more than ‘traces’ from local practices: the names, and times of meals were clearly of local origin. For instance, *chota hazri*, variously translated as ‘little breakfast’, ‘early morning tea’ or ‘bed tea’ was the first meal of the day for Anglo-Indians, consumed between 5.30 and 6am, consisting of tea, boiled or poached eggs, toast and fruit.¹⁶¹ *Hobson-Jobson* notes that the term was originally peculiar to the Bengal Presidency and in Madras this meal was known as ‘early tea’.¹⁶² A.R. Kenny-Herbert compares *chota hazri* to the Frenchman’s *café au lait*, with a roll.¹⁶³ The second or large breakfast or brunch or tiffin, was usually served with curry. Edward Wilkie, who served in the military in Malaya (ten years), Singapore (seven years) and India (two years), recalled that his *chota hazri* consisted of fruit and tea; he would then eat the later and larger breakfast of mulligatawny soup and kippers or eggs and bacon or porridge.¹⁶⁴

Food practices in India

Food in daily life in India is a complex subject that involves different customs and regulations, differences in religion, race, ethnicity, caste and a host of other considerations. Rau emphasises that ‘there is no major body of dishes and techniques of cooking that one can combine to call a “national cuisine”’.¹⁶⁵ Anthropologist Arjun Appadurai states that food is a focus of much taxonomic and moral thought because foods are regarded as important media of contact between human beings, in a society that rests on the regulation of such contact.¹⁶⁶ Appadurai goes on to say that cuisine is both highly developed and highly differentiated. For instance, he states that food

¹⁶⁰ Collingham, *Imperial Bodies*, pp156-157.

¹⁶¹ See J. Beames, *Memoirs of a Bengal Civilian*, London, Chatto & Windus, 1961, p81; Kincaid, *British Social Life in India*, p xv.

¹⁶² Yule and Burnell, *Hobson-Jobson*, p210.

¹⁶³ Kenny-Herbert, *Culinary Jottings*, p186.

¹⁶⁴ Questionnaire response, Edward Wilkie.

¹⁶⁵ Rama Rau, *The Cooking of India*, pp26-27.

¹⁶⁶ Arjun Appadurai, ‘Gastro-Politics in Hindu South Asia’, *American Ethnologist*, vol.8, no.3, 1981, p495.

avoidances, for different persons in different contexts, are developed to a remarkably high degree and can signal caste or sect affiliation, life-cycle stages, gender distinctions and aspirations toward higher status.¹⁶⁷

However scholars R.S. Khare and M.S.A. Rao believe that although the South Asian diversity is enormous it has an overlapping gastronomic culture with the Hindu, Islamic, tribal, and Western food systems all having influenced India's gastronomic culture. They cite the Ayurvedic schemes of food classification as being easily detected within the Muslim, Christian and tribal groups, as are the Unani and tribal influences among the Hindus.¹⁶⁸ Further, they state that 'the subcontinent carries not only a civilizational configuration of interpenetrating gastronomic schemes but ... also has had a Pan-Indian zone of influence'.¹⁶⁹ On setting up home in India, the memsahib was confronted with what was permitted on her dining table based on the caste or ethnic group that her domestic servants belonged to and the quality of the food supplies available. Agatha Florence James, writing in the late nineteenth century observed,

'Beef and mutton are very inferior in India, the former hardly eatable unless grain-fed. ... A boiled hump of beef is not by any means to be despised, and cured in the same way as hunter's beef, it makes a good cold dish for luncheon. Pork is rarely, if ever, eaten in India; the natives look on the pig as unclean, and your cook would probably leave your service rather than roast a joint of pork. You will most likely have to eat goat, without knowing it, unless you have a Khansaman who is really honest. It is so cheap that until you really know the taste of bakra, as it is called, you will have it palmed off on you as mutton. Fowl, the old familiar Moorghee, the abhorrence of all Anglo-Indians, eaten under certain conditions, that is when young and well-fatted, is by no means bad; but game is the great standby. Teal are delicious in whatever way they are cooked. Stuffed with tamarinds, with a well-made hot gravy, with a small wine-glass of good claret in it, they tempt the appetite even in the hot season. Sand grouse are also good, and the native partridge and pheasant are nice, but do not possess the gamey flavour of the English birds. Quails are another delicacy ... stuffed with green chillies and sent to table with green limes to squeeze over them, they make a dainty meal even for an invalid'.¹⁷⁰

One factor that has contributed to the development of a colonial cuisine in India was the limited public dining enterprises such as restaurants for public dining. Although the notion of eating away from homes in restaurants did not eventuate until the late eighteenth century in Europe, public eating places remained absent in India and the

¹⁶⁷ Appadurai, 'Gastro-Politics in Hindu South Asia', p495.

¹⁶⁸ Khare and Rao, 'Introduction', p3.

¹⁶⁹ Khare and Rao, 'Introduction', p3.

¹⁷⁰ Agatha Florence James, 'Indian Household Management', in *The Lady at Home and Abroad*, London, Abbott, Jones & Co. Ltd, 1898, pp376-377.

other colonies meant that European travellers or those travelling on business found it necessary to eat in the homes of other Europeans.¹⁷¹ Historian Frank F. Conlon gives several reasons why India has had no enduring tradition of restaurants or public dining, using Bombay as the locale of his study.¹⁷² He states that, within the Hindu and Muslim cultures, there was no motivation for commercial enterprises such as restaurants for public dining.¹⁷³ Commensality is a cardinal concept of Islam which stresses the obligation to share food with others.¹⁷⁴ Conlon states that ‘Hindu ideological concerns for commensality and purity’ had ‘contributed to anxiety regarding the provenance and purity for consumption – matters that are not subjects of inherent certainty in places of public dining’.¹⁷⁵ During Mughal rule, the introduction of the *caravanserai* (roadside accommodation for travellers and their animals) by medieval Islamic conquerors from Iran provided ‘food, wood, and pots for preparation of a meal’. Conlon states that where ‘culture cookshops’ and other facilities had sold food in the cities, they were not widespread nor permanent enterprises.¹⁷⁶ British rule too did not bring about an increase in restaurants and other eating places. Although there were four large hotels in Calcutta in 1843, Bombay’s first European-style hotel, Watson’s Hotel, was established only in the late 1860s. This hotel had a restaurant and a ‘dining saloon’ for European merchants and tradesmen of the city. During this time, ‘tiffins’ or luncheons were provided for men working in the central Fort district. Conlon mentions Jewanjee’s Exchange offering ‘Hot chops, Steaks and Oysters’ in their ‘First Class Tiffin’ and ‘Billiard Rooms’ and the ‘Jerusalem Tiffin and Billiard Rooms’.¹⁷⁷

In the countryside, Conlon states that Europeans obtained meals prepared by a dak bungalow cook and sometimes ate from wayside taverns or inns. They also carried their own tea, sugar, wine and bread.¹⁷⁸ Europeans in Bombay generally entertained at home or in the club and dining out in the late nineteenth century was limited to special

¹⁷¹ Amy B. Trubek, *Haute Cuisine: How the French Invented the Culinary Profession*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000, pp32-35.

¹⁷² Frank F. Conlon, ‘Dining out in Bombay’, in Carol Breckenbridge (ed.), *Consuming Modernity: Public Culture in a South Asian World*, Minnesota, University of Minnesota Press, 1995.

¹⁷³ Conlon, ‘Dining out in Bombay’, p92.

¹⁷⁴ K.T. Achaya, *A Historical Dictionary of Indian Food*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1998, p107.

¹⁷⁵ Conlon, ‘Dining out in Bombay’, p92.

¹⁷⁶ Conlon, ‘Dining out in Bombay’, p93.

¹⁷⁷ Conlon, ‘Dining out in Bombay’, p95.

¹⁷⁸ Conlon, ‘Dining out in Bombay’, p94.

occasion banquets for visiting royalty and other dignitaries. During the Raj, British officials and others offered hospitality to travelling colleagues before the building of dak or Public Works Department bungalows.¹⁷⁹

Entrepreneurs had little incentive to establish hotels and restaurants¹⁸⁰ as the British practice of offering hospitality, accommodation and meals to newcomers and travelling colleagues in India was legendary. This phenomenon of open house hospitality was made possible by the myriad domestic servants who coped with the additional labour of taking care of houseguests. As well, the idea of helping fellow Europeans in a 'foreign' country and the likelihood of needing accommodation at a future date from travellers reinforced this sense of hospitality. The 'duty' of being a gracious hostess fell to the memsahib, providing her home as a welcoming venue for the British or European community to socialize and particularly for the men to talk shop.¹⁸¹ Writing on daily life and work in India in the late nineteenth century, W. J. Wilkins noted,

'[I]t is a custom of the country coming down from the good old times when people kept almost open house, for an extra plate and knife and fork to be always placed on the dinner table. The servants do it without an order, so that if a guest comes in there is a chair ready for him'.¹⁸²

In his study of Anglo-Indian attitudes within the Indian Civil Service, Clive Dewey quoted Malcolm and Josie Darling's displeasure when they were not invited to stay with the deputy commissioner when they visited Multan, stating, 'There was an unwritten law that you show hospitality to members of your own service when they come to your district'.¹⁸³ In the more isolated stations the sense of solidarity building among the British was even more pronounced. Hospitality among Assam planters was exceptional, according to George M. Barker, as he recounted a tea planter offering accommodation to the European traveller, '[A]lthough an utter stranger, is he not a white man[?] and is it not probable that your present guest will at some future date act in the capacity of your host?'.¹⁸⁴

¹⁷⁹ Conlon, 'Dining out in Bombay', p90.

¹⁸⁰ Conlon, 'Dining out in Bombay', p94.

¹⁸¹ Beverley Gartrell, 'Colonial Wives: Villains or Victims?', in Hilary Callan & Shirley Ardener Callan (eds), *The Incorporated Wife*, London, Croom Helm, 1984. p170.

¹⁸² W.J. Wilkins, *Daily Life and Work in India*, London, T. Fisher Unwin, 1883, pp60-61.

¹⁸³ Clive Dewey, *Anglo-Indian Attitudes, the Mind of the Indian Civil Service*, London, The Hambleton Press, 1993, p156.

¹⁸⁴ George M. Barker, *A Tea Planter's Life in Assam*, Bombay, Thacker, Spink & Co., 1884, p101.

Playing hostess to European travellers was another of the memsahib's duties in addition to her role as homemaker and maintaining the household as a symbol of imperialism.¹⁸⁵

Being a gracious hostess was part and parcel of the ideal wife at whose home her husband's colleagues would gather for socialization and for business discussion.¹⁸⁶

G.L.R., a 1920s British author of a cook book for India, maintained that,

‘entertaining is one of the most wholesome forms which a housewife’s energies can take, provided she keeps it entirely subservient to her other home interests. To have a house of your own, and never to extend its hospitality to others is hiding under a bushel ...’¹⁸⁷

In fact spacious European houses in Calcutta and India were built because of the frequent need to entertain large numbers of people and also due to the shortage of hotels and recreation facilities.¹⁸⁸ Swati Chattopadhyay states the well-to-do British home in Calcutta in the late nineteenth century would often have fifteen people for breakfast and twenty-five would be at the dinner table. Chattopadhyay also notes that ‘even for casual visits, each person was accompanied by his or her retinue of servants, adding to the numbers already present in the household’.¹⁸⁹

The colonial cuisine in Malaysia and Singapore

Colonial households in Malaysia and Singapore also adopted this hospitality in welcoming European travellers and newcomers. In Singapore where the British population consisted of government officials, merchants, bankers, doctors and military officials, it was the merchants who hosted weekly ‘magnificent’ dinners for the European population.¹⁹⁰ Editor of *The Straits Times* in Singapore, John Cameron, wrote in 1865 that, ‘[I]t is wonderful how perfect too, is the knowledge possessed of the measure of the hospitality of each house, and how soon new arrivals and visitors become acquainted with the comparative degrees of excellence in this respect’.¹⁹¹

In defining the colonial life, rituals were seen as important and the niceties of social etiquette featured predominantly. The colonial dinner party stands out as the social

¹⁸⁵ Gartrell, ‘Colonial Wives: Villains or Victims?’, p170.

¹⁸⁶ Gartrell, ‘Colonial Wives: Villains or Victims?’, p170.

¹⁸⁷ G.L.R., *The Economical Cookery Book*, p262.

¹⁸⁸ Swati Chattopadhyay, *Representing Calcutta: Modernity, Nationalism, and the Colonial Uncanny*, London, Routledge, 2006, pp121-123.

¹⁸⁹ Chattopadhyay, *Representing Calcutta*, pp121-123.

¹⁹⁰ John Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions in Malayan India*, Kuala Lumpur, Oxford University Press, 1965, p287.

¹⁹¹ Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions*, p288.

function that involved the most distinctive characteristics and these were practiced from the earliest years of colonization right up to independence. Whether given in a bungalow in a rubber plantation in Malaya or hosted at Government House in British Borneo the dinner party followed set patterns of behaviour to which host and guest strictly adhered.

As Nancy Pence Britton recalled in her years spent in Singapore and Malaya,

‘The V.I.P.s who asked us to the dinner-party did so not because they liked us, or indeed had ever met us, but because we had signed the visitors’ book in the little kiosk by their front gates, and this signing of the book was, in turn, not an entirely free act on our part, as it was all laid down in a brochure on Colony etiquette.’¹⁹²

The dinner party at Government House undoubtedly surpassed all other dinners in formality and rituals. In Sandakan, ‘Government House was not only the international meeting ground but it is the promulgator of local social custom,’ wrote Agnes Keith.¹⁹³ Keith observed that functions at Government House were dignified and formal and guests were expected to dress accordingly. The governor and his wife, Keith wrote, ‘extend an unceasing hospitality to the Europeans of our community, a hospitality which we cannot return, as it is the accepted custom that the Governor should not dine away from Government House’.¹⁹⁴ It was the custom to ‘sign in the book’ belonging to the Governor and his wife held in the sentry box at the entrance to the grounds of Government House. This had to be done within twenty-four hours of dining at Government House; failure to do so meant not being invited again.¹⁹⁵ Suart, writing on North Borneo, stated that colonials were also expected to sign the Governor’s book on leaving the colony, on the King’s birthday as well as a note of thanks after receiving Government House hospitality. Suart also explained that the Governor and his wife could not be asked to dine away from Government House as a reciprocal gesture.¹⁹⁶ At a lower level, the Resident, as head of the Residency, and his wife followed the protocol too, of not accepting invitations to meals but had to do most of the entertaining themselves.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹² Nancy Pence Britton, *East of the Sun*, London, William Blackwood & Sons Ltd., 1956, p102.

¹⁹³ Agnes Keith, *Land Below the Wind*, Boston, Little, Brown and Company, 1939, p60.

¹⁹⁴ Keith, *Land Below the Wind*, p61.

¹⁹⁵ Keith, *Land Below the Wind*, p61.

¹⁹⁶ Suart, *The Lingering Eye*, p202.

¹⁹⁷ Jean Falconer, *Woodsmoke and Temple Flowers: Memories of Malaya*, Edinburgh, The Pentland Press Ltd, 1992, p108.

One overriding commonality in food practices among the colonial community was that it was the domestic servants who prepared and cooked the food. The colonial setting could be the civil servant and his family in a bungalow in Sandakan, the rubber planter in an isolated estate or the merchant and his wife residing in Singapore. In most cases procurement of food was also done by servants; it was more the norm than the exception that servants scoured the markets for food items, thereby playing a big role in deciding what the colonial family ate. Tina Rimmer, who was recruited to work in the education department under the British North Borneo government in 1949 stated that, ‘for my part, I almost always left it to cook to shop except for things like butter and cheese’.¹⁹⁸ Owen Rutter, colonial government officer and later a planter for several years in North Borneo in the early twentieth century remarked that

‘the resources of the Borneo larder are enough to cramp any cook’s style, and after about a month one recognizes that his various efforts come round in a cycle as unvarying as that of the planets themselves. Fowl, pork chop and French beans; “mincee,” buffalo kidney, anaemic scrambled eggs and a slab of beef from the local Indian’s kill ...’.¹⁹⁹

Rutter wrote that while the Europeans in the bigger towns like Jesselton or Sandakan had cold storage and incoming ships that brought in supplies of cheese, butter and legs of mutton, for those posted in the outstations the Borneo *ayam* (chicken) was omnipresent on the dining table.²⁰⁰ Similarly, K.R. Blackwell who worked in the Malayan Civil Service and was posted to various parts of Malaya wrote in his autobiography manuscript²⁰¹ that in the 1920s food in Kuala Lipis,²⁰² was ‘neither good nor varied’, complaining that the cattle and sheep were ‘poor scraggy beasts with flesh tough and tasteless’. Blackwell, like other Europeans looked forward to supplies from Cold Storage freighted once a week from the larger towns, in this case, Singapore.

Writing on the architectural history of residences and British life in Singapore between 1819-1939, Norman Edwards observed that ‘the purchase of food was very much the

¹⁹⁸ Questionnaire response, Tina Rimmer.

¹⁹⁹ Owen Rutter, *British North Borneo: An Account of Its History, Resources and Native Tribes*, London, Constable & Company, 1922, p379.

²⁰⁰ Rutter, *British North Borneo*, p379.

²⁰¹ K.R. Blackwell, *Malay Curry*, 1945, p25, MSS.Ind.Ocn.s.90, Rhodes Collection, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

²⁰² Kuala Lipis is a small town in the state of Pahang in Malaya and was Blackwell’s first posting.

cook's responsibility'.²⁰³ The cook was assisted by the 'head boy' who also helped with the cooking, serving and waiting at the table. Edwards added that sometimes the memsahib would accompany the cook to the markets to supervise the purchases. Although Singapore boasted three 'reputable' hotels by the middle of the nineteenth century, the most fashionable of which was the London Hotel, the town area was still small and surrounded by swamps.²⁰⁴ Emily Innes and her husband James spent two years in the 'godforsaken spot' of Kuala Langat in the state of Selangor in Malaya. On their three weeks' local leave in Singapore in mid-1877, they stayed at the Hotel de l'Europe and ate 'fresh beef and mutton instead of the eternal fowl'.²⁰⁵ The end of the local leave meant the return to Kuala Langat which Emily viewed as a 'butcherless, bakerless, tailorless, cobberless, doctorless, bookless, milkless, postless and altogether comfortless jungle'.²⁰⁶ At the time, meat in Malaya and Singapore was either local buffalo meat or imported from Thailand; pork was either from local, Chinese or Balinese supplies; milk and bread were sold by Bengali vendors; and, potatoes came from Java. For the European community the establishment of Cold Storage in 1905 along Orchard Road,²⁰⁷ Singapore's first Western-style shop stocking imported frozen meat, the discomforts of tropical life seemed considerably lessened. However it was not until 1909 that the retail store expanded with frozen meat and dairy products from Australia. Across the peninsula in the Malay states, large new rubber estates sprang up, and the increasing number of workers included Chinese, Indian and local workers.²⁰⁸ The European community was increasing in size too and a Cold Storage retail branch was opened in Kuala Lumpur in 1910.²⁰⁹ Cold Storage also started manufacturing ice in Singapore in 1916 and, as with its retail branches of frozen foods, ice factories too were set up in Malaya: in Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Taiping, Teluk Anson, Klang, Kampar, Seremban, Sungei Patani, Kota Bharu and Kuantan.²¹⁰

²⁰³ Norman Edwards, *The Singapore House and Residential Life: 1819-1939*, Singapore, Oxford University Press, 1990, p192.

²⁰⁴ C.M. Turnbull, *A History of Singapore: 1819-1975*, London, Oxford University Press, 1977, p47.

²⁰⁵ John Gullick, 'Emily Innes: Keeping up One's Standards in Malaya', in John Gullick (ed.), *Adventurous Women in South-East Asia: Six Lives*, Kuala Lumpur, Oxford University Press, 1995, p171.

²⁰⁶ Gullick, 'Emily Innes', p171.

²⁰⁷ K.G. Tregonning, *The Singapore Cold Storage: 1903-1966*, Singapore, Cold Storage Holdings Ltd., 1967, p5.

²⁰⁸ Tregonning, *The Singapore Cold Storage*, p10.

²⁰⁹ Tregonning, *The Singapore Cold Storage*, p13.

²¹⁰ Tregonning, *The Singapore Cold Storage*, pp14-15.

In the 1930s there were six markets in Singapore: at Tanglin Road, Orchard Beach Road, Serangoon Road, Market Street and Maxwell Road.²¹¹ In later years, when Cold Storage had established its premises in the colony, the memsahib would buy some items from the European-style shop while the cook went to the markets nearby (as for example, did Jean Falconer and her cook).²¹² Cold Storage was the first retail shop that stocked fresh dairy products and frozen foods in Malaya and Singapore. Other branches sprang up all over the two colonies, initially to cater for European communities. In British Borneo other 'cold storage' shops were established retailing butter and other dairy produce, frozen meat from Australia and other European goods. A.M. Findlay, who lived on a rubber estate in present-day Sabah, kept a monthly account with the Cold Storage store and purchased ham, bacon, beef steak, liver, kidney and alcoholic drinks there.²¹³ Robert Bruce Lockhart first went to Malaya in 1908 at the age of twenty-one to open up a rubber estate in a Malay district. Dinner for Lockhart at the time was stuffed eggs, tinned mulligatawny soup, *ikan merah* (red snapper) and 'scraggy chicken'. Lockhart returned twenty-years later and found that Cold Storage, electricity and the motor-car had 'entirely changed life in the tropics and have robbed it of nearly all its discomforts'.²¹⁴ By then, Lockhart found that Malaya and Singapore were getting fresh meat from Australia, fresh butter from New Zealand, swede turnips from Sumatra, potatoes from Palestine, tomatoes from Java, rhubarb from Australia, oranges from China, and cabbages, lettuces and salads from the Malayan hill-stations of Cameron Highlands.²¹⁵

In exploratory expeditions into the unchartered regions for agricultural or mining prospects in the early years of British settlement, explorers depended on local guides for the purchase and cooking of local foodstuff. In his diary outlining his account of a trip through North Borneo from 30 July 1882 to 17 January 1883, L.S. von Donop only made scarce mention of food and meal times.²¹⁶ This was not strictly an official nor scientific paper as von Donop wrote vividly of local life and his exploits.²¹⁷ Although the account of his exploratory journey was to present findings from the prospecting of

²¹¹ Edwards, *The Singapore House*, p193.

²¹² Falconer, *Woodsmoke and Temple Flowers*, p18.

²¹³ Questionnaire response, A.M. Findlay.

²¹⁴ Bruce R.H. Lockhart, *Return to Malaya*, London, Putnam, 1936, p86.

²¹⁵ Lockhart, *Return to Malaya*, p86.

²¹⁶ L.S. von Donop, *Diary of L.S. Von Donop, Travelling through North Borneo or 'New Ceylon'*, Ceylon Observer, Colombo, 1883, pp4-9.

²¹⁷ von Donop, *Diary of L.S. Von Donop*, p8.

suitable agricultural land for cash crops, the few references to food and meals are illuminating. The reticence in description or discussion of food by Donop and other explorers in the colonies could possibly be attributed to the peculiarly British attitude towards food. Roger Scruton asserts that 'the repression of the English extended into all those areas where pleasure might overwhelm discretion'. He states that they take their pleasures sceptically, anxious not to care more than they should, leading 'to one of their least celebrated triumphs – a cuisine in which ingredients were systematically deprived of their flavour, so that everything tasted roughly the same and manly stoicism prevailed over sensory enjoyment'.²¹⁸ K.P. Tabrett who went with his parents to North Borneo in 1947 as a fifteen-year old said that his family never took much interest in food, 'we just ate and got it over with, we were so much more interested in what goes on in the country'.²¹⁹

Public dining, even in its most rudimentary form, was limited in the nineteenth century and did not develop into a tradition until the arrival of immigrant groups in both colonial Malaysia and Singapore. These groups were brought in by British administrators in the early twentieth century to work on agricultural plantations, mines and to develop the hinterland. From 1786 to 1957 more than 4,250,000 Indians arrived in Malaysia and 3,000,000 departed. In 1940 the number of overseas Chinese in Malaya was 2,358,000.²²⁰ The indigenous people practised a slash and burn form of cultivation; and hunting and fishing helped supplement their diet. When British North Borneo, came under Chartered Company rule the British faced manpower shortages in two areas: Europeans preferred to work in India, Hong Kong or the Straits Settlements rather than in Borneo; and Asian labour in the plantation estates was scarce. Unlike the influx of Indian labourers to the estates in Malaya, the British were successful in recruiting Indians only to its administration, mainly in the police force.²²¹ Chinese merchants were already trading on the west coast when Labuan island (off the west coast of North Borneo) was ceded to the British in 1846. Most of these early traders were from the Straits Settlements of which Labuan was part of, but on the east coast the Chinese who

²¹⁸ Roger Scruton, *England: An Elegy*, London, Chatto & Windus, 2000, p51.

²¹⁹ Interview with K.P. Tabrett, 4 Dec 2006, Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia.

²²⁰ Peter J. Rimmer, Lenore Manderson and Colin Barlow, 'The Underside of Malaysian History', in Peter J. Rimmer and Lisa M. Allen (eds), *The Underside of Malaysian History: Pullers, Prostitutes, Plantation Workers ...*, Singapore, Singapore University Press, 1990, p7.

²²¹ Danny Tze Ken Wong, *Historical Sabah: Community and Society*, Kota Kinabalu, Natural History Publications, 2004, p121.

engaged in business were from Hong Kong and Guangdong.²²² In 1882, a year after British North Borneo came under Chartered Company rule, Sir Walter Medhurst, as commissioner for Chinese immigration went to China to recruit labourers and farmers for the colony.²²³ The first hotel in Sabah, the Sandakan Hotel, was established in 1885 by Wong Sow Chuan, a Cantonese, reputedly from Hong Kong. It provided its European clientele food and accommodation and was managed by a European.²²⁴ It was likely that the eating shops in the towns of the British North Borneo were first started by the early Chinese immigrants.

In Singapore, most nineteenth-century European visitors when dining out did so in the few tiffin and dining rooms of the European-style hotels, namely the Hotel de L'Europe, Adelphi Hotel and Hotel de la Paix, where British meals and Anglo-Indian curries were served.²²⁵ In private homes, meal times were similar to those adopted by Anglo-Indians. An early breakfast of tea or coffee and toast after five preceded the morning walk. In Singapore, Frederick William Burbridge, writing in 1877, reported strolling in the main thoroughfares, returning home about eight and having a second breakfast of '[B]eef-steaks and mutton-chops, one or two well-made curries and rice, eggs and bacon, cold ham, boiled eggs, salads, vegetables and plenty of fresh fruit'. This was followed by 'bottled Bass, claret, or Norwegian beer'.²²⁶ Lunch or tiffin at one o'clock, usually comprising curry and rice.²²⁷ Dinner was between half-past six to seven, starting with soup and fish; the 'substantials' of roast beef or mutton, turkey or capon; curry and rice; side dishes tongue, fowl, cutlets and vegetables; these were followed by pudding or preserve and local fruit. Drinks were sherry, bitters and beer.²²⁸

As in India, colonials in Malaysia and Singapore ate a mixture of local and European foods; fresh foods were bought locally while tinned and frozen foods were imported from Europe or Australia or New Zealand. Cyril Alliston's account of his missionary work in Jesselton in British North Borneo mentioned that his first cook prepared 'tough

²²² Wong, *Historical Sabah: Community and Society*, pp37, 45.

²²³ Cecilia Leong, *Sabah: The First 100 Years*, Kuala Lumpur, Percetakan Nan Yang Muda Sdn Bhd, 1982, p106 and K.G. Tregonning, *Under Chartered Company Rule (North Borneo 1881-1946)*, Singapore, University of Malaya Press, 1958, pp130-131.

²²⁴ Wong, *Historical Sabah: Community and Society*, p45.

²²⁵ Peter A. Knipp, *The Raffles Hotel Cookbook*, Singapore, Raffles Hotel, 2003, p14.

²²⁶ F.W. Burbridge, *The Gardens of the Sun: A Naturalist's Journal of Borneo and the Sulu Archipelago*, Singapore, Oxford University Press, 1991, p17.

²²⁷ Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions*, p297.

²²⁸ Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions*, pp300-302.

buffalo meat and pancakes like leather, helped on with bread and rice'.²²⁹ He also stated that 'imported meat is expensive in North Borneo and we would only have it occasionally, sometimes on a Sunday, instead of the immensely popular Sunday curry tiffin'.²³⁰

Alice Berry Hart's description of the primitive conditions of her kitchen on a Malayan rubber estate, where she set up home, also included reports of the local fruit and vegetables. In such an isolated posting it is plausible that the bananas, jackfruit, mangoes, guavas, pineapples, coconuts, pomeloes, brinjals and ladies' fingers that she described were included in her family's diet.²³¹ Isabella L. Bird, in her travels in the Malayan jungle in 1879, left no such ambiguity in enthusiastically eating local foods. She described 'blachang' as 'a Malay preparation much relished by European lovers of durian and decomposed cheese. It is made by trampling a mass of putrefying prawns and shrimps into a paste with bare feet. This is seasoned with salt. The smell is penetrating and lingering'.²³²

L.W.W. Gudgeon, as assistant manager of a tobacco plantation in Borneo, described how he had to try the 'strange dishes of a German "bludwurst," Dutch salted "girkins" [on a] new Eastern menu'. He stated that on 'the tobacco estates everything comes in to make a change in diet – Chinese "mee", Malay "nasi-goring", and a British steak and onions, all being served at breakfast, tiffin, and dinner indiscriminately'.²³³ Where other Europeans had described the taste of the durian fruit as 'a mixture of custard, onions, and bad eggs,' Gudgeon declared that this was 'a libel on a fine fruit. The flavour must be delicious, because after the first trial everyone likes it, and many old planters and Government officials, resident for a long time in Borneo, crave for this fruit with a craving that will take no denial. Far and wide they send to buy it'.²³⁴ Gudgeon also sang the praises of two other local fruits: the *rambutan* and *langsat* as

²²⁹ Cyril Alliston, *In the Shadow of Kinabalu*, London, The Adventurers Club, 1963, p33. Jesselton is the old name for the capital of present-day Sabah, Kota Kinabalu.

²³⁰ Alliston, *In the Shadow of Kinabalu*, p35.

²³¹ Alice Berry Hart, 'Housekeeping and Life in the Malayan Rubber', *Blackwood's Magazine*, no.CCXXI, 1927, p599.

²³² Isabella L. Bird, *The Golden Chersonese and the Way Thither*, London, Oxford University Press, 1967, p180.

²³³ L.W.W. Gudgeon, *Peeps at Many Lands: British North Borneo*, London, Adam and Charles Black, 1912, p57.

²³⁴ Gudgeon, *Peeps at Many Lands*, p28.

having ‘a delicious jelly-like pulp and bitter pips’.²³⁵

A spill over of colonial food practices from India to Malaysia and Singapore was the early breakfast, the chota hazri, as mentioned by Cuthbert Woodville Harrison²³⁶ While clearly enjoying some of the local produce he also listed certain foods to be avoided. He described coconut juice as ‘cool, sweet yet sub-acid water’ for quenching thirst and declared that there was ‘no better drink in all Malaya. Some people drop whisky into the nut and drink the sophisticated compound’.²³⁷ Harrison cautioned curry lovers to ‘shun the little dried prawns which appear so innocently amongst the sambals or little side dishes which accompany the main dish of curried fowl’ and claimed that they caused food poisoning, an ‘exceedingly painful, often dangerous’ experience.²³⁸ Harrison stated that little or no fruit was imported and was obviously familiar with the different kinds available locally, mentioning ‘the fierce joys of the durian’ the ‘tame’ jak fruit and the soursop; the grapelike duku, the delicate mangosteen, the mango, rambutan, jambu, lime, water melon, banana and pineapple.²³⁹

Grace Elizabeth Tidbury extolled the culinary skills of the Chinese women cooks in Sandakan, North Borneo, stating that her ‘Number One girl’, Ah Yeuk, ‘could give an afternoon tea, scones, fancy cakes with icing, or again a luncheon or late dinner fit for a prince or princess to eat’.²⁴⁰ Ah Yeuk could also provide ‘a varied menu such as chicken soup, fried fish delicately browned with quarters of lemon on top, roast fowl browned to a turn, potatoes baked and boiled, perhaps a cabinet pudding with white sauce, biscuits, cheese and coffee’. Tidbury remarked that all the meals were cooked on a stove of bricks built over a large iron with holes for saucepans on top.²⁴¹

Cameron gave a detailed account of the meals eaten by the colonials in Singapore in the mid-nineteenth century. Breakfast took about half an hour with a little fish, some curry and rice, and perhaps a couple of eggs, washed down with a tumbler or so of good

²³⁵ Gudgeon, *Peeps at Many Lands*, p29.

²³⁶ Cuthbert Woodville Harrison, *An Illustrated Guide to the Federated Malay States*, London, The Malay States Information Agency, 1923, p32.

²³⁷ Harrison, *An Illustrated Guide to the Federated Malay States*, p161.

²³⁸ Harrison, *An Illustrated Guide to the Federated Malay States*, p166.

²³⁹ Harrison, *An Illustrated Guide to the Federated Malay States*, pp185-186.

²⁴⁰ Grace Elizabeth Tidbury, *My Journey to British North Borneo and Twenty Months Sojourn Therein*, London, The Mitre Press, 1952, p30.

²⁴¹ Tidbury, *My Journey to British North Borneo*, p30.

claret.²⁴² He observed that tiffin was not an elaborate meal as in Java, for it usually consisted of a plate of curry and rice, some fruit or a biscuit, accompanied by a glass of beer or claret.²⁴³ Dinner was usually between half-past six to seven and was a substantial meal, with soup and fish usually preceding the ‘substantials’, consisting of roast beef or mutton, turkey or capon. These were supplemented by side dishes of tongue, fowl, or cutlets, accompanied by a variety of vegetables. According to Cameron, ‘the substantials are invariably followed by curry and rice which forms a characteristic feature of the tables of Singapore’.²⁴⁴ There were usually two or more different curries with accompanying side dishes of different side dishes of *sambals*.²⁴⁵ Beer or pale sherry was served during the main part of the meal.²⁴⁶ The abundance of year-round tropical fruit meant that dessert consisted of a colourful display of pineapple, plaintains, ducoos, mangoes, rambutans, pomelos and mangosteens.²⁴⁷

Another account of meals in the same period by John Turnbull Thomson shows similarly heavy meals for dinner: after the soup came fish, joints of Bengal mutton, Chinese capons, Kedah fowls, Sangora ducks, Yorkshire hams, Java potatoes, Malay *ubis* (either sweet potatoes or tapioca), curry and rice accompanied by *sambals* (spicy side dishes), Bombay duck, salted turtle eggs and omelettes. Pale ale was served with these dishes. Then desserts of macaroni pudding and custard were washed down by champagne, followed by a large cheese and finally a variety of tropical fruit finished the meal.²⁴⁸

The colonial cuisine in India

Cookbooks for the colonies can be seen as more than prescriptive and instructional manuals as they helped to establish and disseminate information on an emerging cuisine and accepted norms of behaviour for the ruling class. Recipes were exchanged among memsahibs and eventually these would end up in cookbooks either written for or by them. Cookbooks provide not only an insight into the ideals and ideas aspired to during

²⁴² Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions*, p295.

²⁴³ Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions*, p297.

²⁴⁴ Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions*, p300.

²⁴⁵ Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions*, p300.

²⁴⁶ Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions*, p301.

²⁴⁷ Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions*, p302.

²⁴⁸ Maya Jayapal, *Old Singapore*, Singapore, Oxford University Press, 1992, pp39-40: Jayapal citing John Turnbull Thomson in *Some Glimpses Into Life in Malayan Lands*, London, Richardson & Co., 1864.

the period but demonstrate the variety of foods consumed.

The cookbook that dispels beyond all doubt the myth that colonizers ate only British type foods in India is *What to tell the Cook; Or the Native Cook's Assistant, Being a Choice Collection of Receipts for Indian Cookery, Pastry, etc. etc.*²⁴⁹ Published in 1910 by an anonymous author it suggested Indian dishes for daily menu planning and aimed to make life easier for the memsahib by suggesting that the latter had only to point out a recipe in the book for the cook to prepare without further instruction. It provided 'family dinners for a month'; of the thirty-one menus for dinner only the meal for the twenty-sixth day did not feature a curry dish. Among the curry dishes listed were chicken, 'kabob', prawn, 'ball', sardine, 'toast' salt fish and egg, cutlet, mutton, fish, sheep's head, curry puffs, brain, Malay and gravy. Other Indian dishes were mulligatawny, sago pudding, mango fool, plaintain fritters, coconut pudding and Bombay pudding.

Indian dishes for English tables by 'Ketab' promised that the recipes were all 'genuine Indian recipes, collected by the compiler during many years' residence in India'. It featured more than twenty curry dishes, two khitchrees and pish-pash.²⁵⁰ Mrs John Gilpin's *Memsahib's guide to cookery in India* (1914) was written to help memsahibs as she had felt lost when newly arrived in India.²⁵¹ In the 'Complete Menus for Ninety Days' Mrs Gilpin declared that 'the object has been to use the materials at hand and not that of expensive tinned foods', thereby encouraging the use of local ingredients.²⁵² Her recipe for Bombay toast utilized minced anchovy or redfish while another breakfast dish was 'curry balls', consisting of rice cooked with curry powder, sugar and salt, chopped apple and onion, then rolled into balls with minced meat, parsley and egg and fried or baked. Her cookbook also featured a fish kitcheree recipe. Sheep's head was a regular dish in England and the recipe for curried sheep head was frequently included in Anglo-Indian cookbooks. Mrs Gilpin's sheep's head curry was cooked in coconut milk and curry powder and served with rice.²⁵³ In another cookbook on Anglo-Indian cookery,

²⁴⁹ *What to Tell the Cook; or the Native Cook's Assistant, Being a Choice Collection of Receipts for Indian Cookery, Pastry, Etc. Etc.*, Madras, Higginbothams Ltd., 1910.

²⁵⁰ Ketab, *Indian Dishes for English Tables*, London, Chapman and Hall, 1902.

²⁵¹ (Mrs) John Gilpin, *Memsahib's Guide to Cookery in India*, Bombay, A.J. Combridge & Co., 1914, p1.

²⁵² Gilpin, *Memsahib's Guide to Cookery in India*, p1.

²⁵³ Gilpin, *Memsahib's Guide to Cookery in India*, p40.

Constance E. Gordon's aim was 'to suggest a variety of dishes'.²⁵⁴ Indeed, the menus for breakfasts, tiffins and dinners were wide-ranging and included English fare intermingled with unmistakably Indian dishes. Some of the dishes itemized were 'breakfast brawn', fricassee of tripe, Irish stew, sea pie, Spanish stew, toad in a hole, lamb sauté, guinea fowl a la Francaise, kidney in onion, fried chicken, calf's brain a la St James, sweet-bread a la Savoy, chutnies, curries cold meat, hors d'oeuvres, fresh and tinned fish, toasts and savouries, puddings and sweets.²⁵⁵ Different types of curry mixtures were itemized for the following curry dishes: 'for cold meat, for paste for a quick curry, Bombay curry powder, Ceylon curry powder, Madras curry powder, Indian country captain, Indian kababs, moli, pallow, rice to boil, cocoanut rice, and chutnies for mango, potato, tamarind, mint, cucumber and tomato.'²⁵⁶ Where single men lived together in a household, known as a chummery, the head servant or khansamah took charge over the food preparation.²⁵⁷ Gordon ensured that the British single male was well-versed in household supplies, devoting a section on '[A] little aid to the bachelor's store list for the month'.²⁵⁸

Written specifically for the memsahib, Angela C. Spry's *The Mem Sahib's Book of Cookery* also shows evidence that Indian-type foods were consumed everyday.²⁵⁹ Published in 1894, it stated, '[C]urry is eaten in almost every household at least once daily, generally at breakfast or Bari Hazri'.²⁶⁰ Nicola Humble notes that until the 1870s the British ate little European food as Indian cooks had free rein in the kitchen and cooked mainly curries.²⁶¹ Humble believes that Isabella Beeton included a significant number of recipes in *Household Management* such as mulligatawny, curries, kedgeree and chutneys because they were familiar to British readers.²⁶²

Ironically, Spry blamed poor supervision by the memsahib when curry routinely became too bland as the cook, to make the dish cheaper, would add fewer spices.²⁶³ She

²⁵⁴ Constance E. Gordon, *Anglo-Indian Cuisine and Domestic Economy*, Calcutta and Simla, Thacker, Spink & Co., 1913.

²⁵⁵ Gordon, *Anglo-Indian Cuisine and Domestic Economy*, pp97-102.

²⁵⁶ Gordon, *Anglo-Indian Cuisine and Domestic Economy*, pp103-108.

²⁵⁷ Wilkins, *Daily Life and Work in India*, p110.

²⁵⁸ Gordon, *Anglo-Indian Cuisine and Domestic Economy*, p92.

²⁵⁹ Angela C. Spry, *The Mem Sahib's Book of Cookery*, 1894 (publisher unknown).

²⁶⁰ Spry, *The Mem Sahib's Book of Cookery*, p60.

²⁶¹ Humble, *Culinary Pleasures*, p19.

²⁶² Humble, *Culinary Pleasures*, p19.

²⁶³ Spry, *The Mem Sahib's Book of Cookery*, p60.

was satisfied though with the standard of rice cooking, saying, 'rice is always eaten with curries ... The natives prepare it to perfection, so that no remarks are necessary. Rice Kidgeree is much appreciated with curry'.²⁶⁴ Spry's menus for breakfast were substantial, with even the chota hazri including mullet a la Russe, fried fish to be eaten cold, fish a la Bretagne, pudding of fish, corquettes of fish, fish quenelles, fish a l'Espagnole, kedgeree, fish scallops, fish omelette, fish au parmesan, fish a l'Egyptienne, fish on toast, fish with spinach, dainty fish rolls, devilled shrimps and potted mullet. Recipes for breakfast or *bari bazri* included molynda, hautbegins, Turkish delight, queen's rissoles, French pie, Russian hash, china chilo, devilled sardines, stewed kidneys, roasted pigeons, gobbits, bubble and squeak, Irish stew and different types of curries. Other Indian recipes were for pickles and chutneys.

While readers may assume that the content of *Gems from the Culinary Art and a Ready Help to Every Wife in India* was aimed at the memsahib, most of the recipes were of European origin. The poultry used for dishes such as 'salmis' (a wine-based stew made with minced game birds and mushrooms or other vegetables) however, were local, and included as rock pigeons, quails, or teal.²⁶⁵ Following the tradition of Victorian cookbooks with special sections on foreign cookery, a separate chapter on Indian cooking listed recipes for mulligatawny, pilau, curried macaroni, prawn curry, chicken curry with tomatoes, dry mutton curry, toast curry, kubbab curry, pumpkin hulva and pemilo sweet meat (Indian sweets).²⁶⁶ Another cookbook with a title that implied recipes for Indian meals was *Dainty Dishes for Indian Tables*. The recipes were mostly European but included chutney and curries made of eggs, fish, fowl, rabbit and toast. There were also recipes for rice, sago pudding, mulligatawny and soojee pudding.

R. Riddell's *Indian Domestic Economy and Receipt Book* (1849) was aimed at targeting all Anglo-Indians in both government and the private sector. It listed numerous local Indian dishes with detailed notes and hints on how to cook them.²⁶⁷ For example, Riddell explained how curries were made,

'...the meat, fish or vegetable being first dressed until tender, to which are added ground spices, chillies and salt, both to the meat and gravy in certain proportions;

²⁶⁴ Spry, *The Mem Sahib's Book of Cookery*, p60.

²⁶⁵ Eleanor, *Gems from the Culinary Art and a Ready Help to Every Wife in India*, Madras, Printed by Hoe and Co. at the 'Premier Press', 1916, p33.

²⁶⁶ Eleanor, *Gems from the Culinary Art*, pp95-99.

²⁶⁷ R. Riddell, *Indian Domestic Economy and Receipt Book*, Bombay, Gentleman's Gazette Press, 1849.

which are served up dry, or in the gravy; in fact a curry may be made of almost any thing, its principal quality depending upon the spices being duly proportioned as to flavour, and the degree of warmth to be given by the chillies and ginger. The meat may be fried in butter, ghee, oil, or fat, to which is added gravy, tyre,(sic) milk, the juice of the cocoanut, or vegetables, &c'.²⁶⁸

Several curries and quormah were listed with local names. There were three recipes for mulligatawney soup, using chicken, rabbit, mutton or pea fowl. Two recipes were given for a particularly pungent dish, *ballachong*, which was consumed in colonial Malaysia and Singapore as well and there were seventeen recipes for chutnies.

Colesworth Grant, in writing on Anglo-Indian domestic life, berated his compatriots for eating too much ghee.²⁶⁹ Quoting Williamson, Grant wrote 'ghee and idleness cause one-half of the natives' ailings'.²⁷⁰ His following comment reiterates that Anglo-Indians did not keep strictly to British or European ingredients in their diet.

'Indeed Europeans themselves, almost unconsciously, consume this article (ghee) to a degree that cannot but be very unwholesome. Instead of being provided with food of that plain nature best suited to the climate, it seems to be the opinion of our Indian purveyors, when left to themselves, that nothing is so proper as that which is swimming in grease, or burning hot with chillies, ...'.²⁷¹

Contrary to the limited current scholarship on colonial food history, this chapter proves that the British colonists did not eat a totally different diet to the local people as a deliberate attempt to differentiate themselves as rulers from the ruled. This analysis of cookbooks, memoirs, travel guides and responses from my questionnaire demonstrates that British colonists enjoyed a peculiarly hybrid cuisine. This chapter has established that colonial foodways constituted a legitimate cuisine insofar as it meets the criteria of a cuisine: frequent consumption of the dishes, knowledge about preparation and taste of the foods, articulation and debate about the dishes.²⁷² The colonial cuisine retained elements of British food practices and at the same time incorporated ingredients and practices from the colonies. This cuisine was not wholly British nor was it totally Asian. At any given meal European dishes sat side by side with colonial dishes, that is dishes that has been adopted and adapted for British taste. The colonial table includes the

²⁶⁸ Riddell, *Indian Domestic Economy and Receipt Book*, pp304-305.

²⁶⁹ Colesworthy Grant, *Anglo-Indian Domestic Life. A Letter from an Artist in India to His Mother in England*, Calcutta, Thacker, Spink & Co., 1862.

²⁷⁰ Grant, *Anglo-Indian Domestic Life*, p62.

²⁷¹ Grant, *Anglo-Indian Domestic Life*, p63.

²⁷² Sidney W. Mintz, *Tasting Food, Tasting Freedom: Excursions into Eating, Culture, and the Past*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1996

uniquely colonial dishes of mulligatawny, country captain, kedgeree, pish pash, chicken chop, gula melaka (sago pudding) and innumerable kinds of curry, the last of which will be discussed in the next chapter.

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Chapter Two **3 August 2010 12,131 words**

The Colonial Appropriation of Curry

*First we had Mulligatawny soup,
Which made us all perspire,
For the cook, that obstinate nincompoop,
Had flavoured it hot as fire.*

*Next a tremendous fragmentary dish
Of salmon was carried in, --
The taste was rather of oil than fish,
With a palpable touch of tin.*

*Then, when the salmon was swept away,
We'd a ducky stew, with peas,
And the principal feature of that entree,
Was its circumambient grease.*

*Then came the pride of my small farm-yard, --
A magnificent Michaelmas goose:
Heavens! his breast was a trifle hard;
As for his leg, the deuce!*

*Last, we'd a curry of ancient fowl:
In terror a portion I took, --
Hot? -- I could hardly suppress a howl --
Curse that fiend of a cook.*

– ‘The Police-Wallah’s Little Dinner’²⁷³

Curry, a dish wholeheartedly embraced by the British both during and after the colonial era, evolved and mutated both in temporal and geographical terms. Its popularity peaked in the days of the East India Company when its employees embraced all things Indian. Even in its colonial heyday, curry was a dish that was the perfect example of food appropriation; it leapt from presidency to presidency in the sub-continent and across the colonies in the British Empire. Just as Anglo-Indian cookery was seen as the first pan-Indian cuisine,²⁷⁴ curry is the single most important dish that defines the culinary history of British imperialism. Specious claims of ownership and the

²⁷³ Hilton Brown, *The Sahibs: The Life and Ways of the British in India as Recorded by Themselves*, London, William Hodge & Co., 1948, p56.

²⁷⁴ Lizzie Collingham, *Curry: A Biography*, London, Chatto & Windus, 2005, p118.

authenticity of curry are contested and questioned by different communities. Curries were created, adapted and modified through the input of indigenous cooks, by the availability of ingredients in particular regions, by the social mores of the time and also by health and nutritional thinking of the nineteenth century. Drawing from Anglo-Indian, Malayan and Singaporean cookbooks, memoirs, diaries, travelogues and other primary sources I demonstrate in this chapter that curry evolved as a hybrid, practical dish that could be made from leftover meat and poultry and which incorporated spice ingredients specifically selected for their preservative and nutritious qualities. The diverse range of curries that were created, along with the commercialisation of curry powders in the nineteenth century, has made this food a stubborn relic of the Raj and a defining dish that helped to form culinary links between British colonies.

This chapter expands on one of the central arguments in this book, namely, that the British in India and Malaya and Singapore consumed local foods far more frequently than the existing literature suggests. In particular, it focuses on curry, the ubiquitous dish that appeared daily in most colonial households. Furthermore, this chapter takes issue with existing interpretations that simply characterise ‘curry’ as a colonial fabrication and the argument that the British deliberately set out to appropriate curry in order to domesticate the colonial environment. I argue in contrast that although curry was adopted and adapted by colonizers, it was not invented by them. Essentially, curry figured prominently in the colonial imagination, its culinary creation was a collective but haphazard effort of both the colonizer and the colonized. I will demonstrate that imperial ‘appropriation’, in particular of foodways, is a slippery concept. In the collaboration between memsahib and cook there was respect for Indian and Southeast Asian foodways. Undoubtedly curry has left its long-lasting taste, a legacy that survives into the postcolonial present. The popularity of curry today is a primary reason why the study of its history is significant.

The problem with curry: its definition and claims of ownership

While most scholars agree that ‘curry’ by itself is not a dish that had its genesis in India it is, for all intent and purposes, the most identifiable dish that has been associated with India. The word curry itself however is problematic, both etymologically and in its culinary origins. *Hobson-Jobson*, a historical dictionary of Anglo-Indian words and expressions used in languages from the ‘East’ from the sixteenth to the end of the nineteenth centuries, attempted not only to offer several definitions of it but also to

justify curry's existence. Its authors, Henry Yule and A.C. Burnell, first published *Hobson-Jobson* in 1886 and explained that 'curry' was a savoury dish made up of 'meat, fish, fruit or vegetables cooked with a quantity of bruised spices and turmeric' served to flavour the two staple foods of the east – bread and rice, both of which are bland dishes.²⁷⁵ This combination of dishes, using curry to flavour the starchy foods, the authors declared, was 'the proper office of curry in the native diet'.²⁷⁶ They stated that 'curry' was a corruption of the Tamil word 'kari', (meaning sauce), but also made clear that the Portuguese colonizers adopted the Kanarese (of Western India) form, 'karil', a term still in use in Goa today. The authors acknowledged that the kind of curry prepared by Europeans and Indians was not of purely Indian origin, but could have evolved from the spiced cookery of medieval Europe and Western Asia.²⁷⁷ Yule and Burnell added to the confusion as they mistook 'capsicum or red pepper' for chilli when they stated that it was brought to India by the Portuguese and observed that 'curry' dishes of the Sanskrit books of cookery did not include the pepper ingredient. They were in no doubt however that 'capsicum or red pepper' was introduced into India by the Portuguese and that 'this spice constitutes the most important ingredient in modern curries'. The authors stated unequivocally that Europeans understood 'curry' to have several incarnations: as 'savoury concoctions of analogous spicy character eaten with rice'; as a stew of meat, fish or vegetables; or "dry" curry'.²⁷⁸ The dictionary authors also claimed that the oldest indication of Indian curry was cited by Athenaeus from Megasthenes, who recorded that '[A]mong the Indians, at a banquet, a table is set before each individual and on the table is placed a golden dish on which they throw, first of all, boiled rice and then they add many sorts of meat dressed after the Indian fashion' [emphasis in the original]. However it is my opinion that Yule and Burnell could have erred by interpreting the 'golden dish' to be the yellow coloured curry dish. In fact, another account of this description of the golden dish refers to the gold vessel in which rice and other relishes were served. J.W. McCrindle's interpretation of Megasthenes' account of his second book on 'Indika', under the heading 'Of the Suppers of the Indians' states, 'when the Indians are at supper a table is placed before each person, this being like a tripod. There is placed upon it a golden bowl, into which they first put rice, boiled as one would boil barley, and then they add many dainties prepared according to

²⁷⁵ Henry Yule and A.C. Burnell, *Hobson-Jobson: A Glossary of Colloquial Anglo-Indian Words and Phrases*, Hertfordshire, Wordsworth Editions Ltd, 1996, p281.

²⁷⁶ Yule and Burnell, *Hobson-Jobson*, p281.

²⁷⁷ Yule and Burnell, *Hobson-Jobson*, p281.

²⁷⁸ Yule and Burnell, *Hobson-Jobson*, p282.

Indian receipts’.²⁷⁹

One of the earliest references to ‘cury’ is found in England’s oldest surviving cookery book, significantly in its title, *The Forme of Cury*, written around 1390 by King Richard II’s cook, Samuel Pegge.²⁸⁰ Pegge explained that ‘[C]ury, ... was ever reckoned a branch of the Art Medical; and here I add, that the verb _curare_ signifies equally to dress victuals, as to cure a distemper; that every body has heard of _Doctor Diet, kitchen physick_, &c....’ ‘Cury’ then meant food preparation, probably a derivative of the verb ‘cure’ in the sense of restoration and preservation of health. This definition ties in the thinking of the early modern period when diet occupied a prominent place in notions of health. Margaret Dorey in her study of food adulteration in the sixteenth century quotes Thomas Cogan’s work of 1584: ‘Meates and drinckes doe alter our bodies, and either temper them or distemper them greatly ... And no marvaile seeing that such as the food is, such is the blood; and such as the blood is, such is the flesh’.²⁸¹ A few centuries later Britons, as colonizers in India and Southeast Asia, made curry the most significant dish in their diet. In India these Britons used a variety of spices in the preparation of curry, in many instances to make the less than ideal chicken, beef or mutton more palatable and digestible and indeed, perhaps, as in earlier centuries less harmful.

Thus, there is no clear definition of curry, only various explanations of its earliest origins as a dish, or, in its efficacy as a health-restorative food from the early modern period to the twenty-first century. What is certain is that curry is a dish cooked with several spices with varying degrees of hotness, either as a stew or a ‘dry’ dish.

Collingham’s biography of curry states that,

‘[T]he idea of a curry is, in fact, a concept that the Europeans imposed on India’s food culture. Indians referred to their different dishes by specific names and their servants would have served the British with dishes which they called, for example, rogan josh, dopiaza or quarama. But the British lumped all these together under the heading of curry’.²⁸²

²⁷⁹ John Watson McCrindle, *McCrindle’s Ancient India, as Described by Megasthenes and Arrian*, New Delhi, Today & Tomorrow’s Publishers, 1972, p74, citing *Fragm.XXVIII Athen.iv.p153, Fragments of the Indika of Megasthenes*.

²⁸⁰ Samuel Pegge, *The Forme of Cury: A Roll of Ancient English Cookery Compiled, About A.D. 1390*, <http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/8102>, The Project Gutenberg Ebook, downloaded 2 February 2009.

²⁸¹ Margaret Dorey, ‘*Unwholesome for Man’s Body?*’ *English Concerns about Food Purity and Regulation c.1600-1740*, PhD Thesis in Progress, University of Western Australia, citing Thomas Cogan, *Haven of Health*, 1584.

²⁸² Collingham, *Curry*, p115.

Several scholars argue that although foods have ‘defining physical properties’, attempts to fix them ‘in essentialist terms’ become contentious in the context of cross-cultural consumption.²⁸³ John Thieme and Ira Raja quote examples such as ‘Hungarian goulash’ not being considered *Hungarian* goulash in Hungary and ‘English muffins’ not being considered *English* muffins in England. They cite Uma Narayan’s work in which she posits ‘curry’ as a colonial fabrication.²⁸⁴ David Burton notes that the Indian people who grind and mix fresh spices in appropriate proportions for each individual dish find the idea of using a generic ‘curry powder’ to cook meat, fish or other food items preposterous.²⁸⁵ Burton refers to Madhur Jaffrey who states that the word ‘curry’ is as degrading to India’s great cuisine as ‘chop suey’ was to China’s.²⁸⁶ However, Jaffrey still uses ‘curry’ in her cookbooks. Thieme and Raja contend that in contemporary parlance, curry is ‘a central part of a discourse of spice and exoticism, a form of Orientalism that pervades virtually all aspects of Western societies’.²⁸⁷ South Asian author, Santha Rama Rau, writing in 1969 bemoaned that Indian food ‘remains virtually unexplored, and a great and varied cuisine evolved from indigenous sources and outside cultures seems to have been reduced in Western minds (those that consider the matter at all) to the comprehensive and meaningless category “curry”. To most of them curry is simply a floury, yellow cream sauce that can be used indiscriminately with meat or fish or chicken, and served with rice. ... No Indian cook would ever use a prepared curry powder, because each dish must have its own distinct masala’.²⁸⁸ Rama Rau, of course, was writing forty years ago and many in the Western world today are knowledgeable about Indian cuisine.

Curry as the master trope of the colonial cuisine?

Scholarship on curry is scant but its ubiquity as a dish means that it has to some extent navigated its way into colonial discourse. However, various scholars have also added confusion and contradictions to what curry has come to symbolise. Unlike other scholars whom she describes as having a ‘rigid view of imperial culture’ Mary Procida states that the ‘peculiar Anglo-Indian style of culinary and domestic management

²⁸³ John Thieme and Ira Raja, *The Table Is Laid: The Oxford Anthology of South Asian Food Writing*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2007, pxx.

²⁸⁴ Uma Narayan, *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions, and Third-World Feminism*, New York, Routledge, 1997, p164.

²⁸⁵ David Burton, *The Raj at Table. A Culinary History of the British in India*, London, Faber & Faber, 1993, p73.

²⁸⁶ Burton, *The Raj at Table*, p73.

²⁸⁷ Thieme and Raja, *The Table Is Laid*, pxx.

²⁸⁸ Santha Rama Rau, *The Cooking of India*, New York, Time-Life Books, 1970, pp24-26.

resulted in cultural appropriation and interchange in Anglo-India cuisine and dining habits'.²⁸⁹ Procida does not agree with those historians who construe imperialism hegemonically by assuming that Anglo-Indians' eating habits were similar to those of Britons in Britain.²⁹⁰ This view, according to Procida, is that British women were 'unwilling to adopt the cultural attributes, including culinary tastes and habits'.²⁹¹ This book argues that the realities of Anglo-Indian life were such that while the British did not follow an all-Indian diet they adjusted to eating different foods in different circumstances. However, even as Anglo-Indians and the British in other colonies regularly ate local food they steadfastly maintained a British imperial identity in other respects. As discussed earlier, formal dinners or banquets did not usually feature local dishes, instead French food (or at least food with French names) was served. It can be established beyond doubt that curry formed an important part of the culinary repertoire of everyday life in British India. And yet the hierarchal nature of British society, and by extension, Anglo-Indian society, infiltrated into the food practices of the colonies. Procida cites the following story of 1913, illustrating the snobbery of Anglo-Indian society. The army officers and their wives of the British Army Regiment that was temporarily posted in India refused to eat the curry and rice served at the dinners hosted by the families of the Indian Army regiment (who were also British). Procida recounts that one day, a woman from the Indian Army contingent, on paying a surprise visit to the British Army camp, discovered the wife of a British Army officer,

'squatted on the sofa demolishing a plate of curry-and-rice! The curry was obviously fiery with chillies ... Then realising that she had been properly caught enjoying the very stuff for which she and her set evinced such contempt; stuff that "the servants eat and which never appeared on her table" – the wretched woman uttered a shriek of dismay and fled from the room!'²⁹²

In using foodways to depict the social distance created between the colonial elite and the colonized, some scholars have singled out curry as the dish that colonizers used to delineate themselves. Nupur Chaudhuri has examined the dialogue between memsahibs and British women at home on different ways of cooking curry and other Indian dishes through the various women's publications such as *Ladies' Own Paper*, *Queen*, *The Young Ladies Journal* and *The Ladies Companion*. Chaudhuri states that 'the

²⁸⁹ Mary Procida, 'Feeding the Imperial Appetite; Imperial Knowledge and Anglo-Indian Domesticity', *Journal of Women's History*, vol.15, no.2, 2003, p138.

²⁹⁰ Procida, 'Feeding the Imperial Appetite', p138.

²⁹¹ Procida, 'Feeding the Imperial Appetite', p138.

²⁹² Procida, 'Feeding the Imperial Appetite', p140.

memsahibs transformed as well as transmitted Indian culinary culture'.²⁹³ If Anglo-Indian families did not eat curry in India as Chaudhuri insists, it calls into question where memsahibs acquired the knowledge and taste of curry to impart the expertise. Chaudhuri reinforces this by saying, 'the publication by memsahibs of recipes and articles on cookery in women's periodicals helped infuse the cookery of the colonized into the dietary world of the dominant culture'.²⁹⁴ However Chaudhuri also states that authors of cookbooks that had curry recipes in them had probably never been to India.²⁹⁵ Chaudhuri acknowledges that curry became a familiar dish in England when officials of the East India Company started to return on home leave and popularised it. Chaudhuri's analysis is flawed on two counts. Firstly, Anglo-Indians (and Britons in the other colonies as well) ate a variety of food, both British and local dishes appeared on the dining table with curry being consumed on a daily basis, as illustrated in cookbooks and other instruction manuals of the time. For example, in Elizabeth Garrett's household management manual of 1887, which she dedicated 'To my countrywomen in India', she suggested that lunch was generally 'a light repast' of cold meat, pasty, curry, and so on.²⁹⁶ She also noted that fish curry was a favourite dish in the colony.²⁹⁷ G.L.R., author of an 'economical cookery book for India', suggested that as 'curries form an important part of an Anglo-Indian breakfast, and as there are such a nice variety, I have compiled them separately, so that the housewife will find no difficulty in the choice of one for breakfast'.²⁹⁸ W.J. Wilkins, writing on daily life in India was critical that Anglo-Indians in the second half of the nineteenth century ate too much, consuming three heavy meals a day, for example with lunch consisting of 'chops, steaks, curry and rice, puddings, &c'.²⁹⁹ Secondly, contrary to Chaudhuri's claims, the proliferation of cookbooks with curry and other Indian recipes in them in nineteenth-century Britain were not all written by a monolithic group of women who had never set foot in India. The cookbooks (published in Britain and in India) examined for this book were written by a diverse range of authors, including returning memsahibs, retired British Army officers, veteran cookery book writers, a Victorian palace cook and an

²⁹³ Chaudhuri, 'Shawls, Jewelry, Curry, and Rice in Victorian Britain' in Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel (eds), *Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance*, Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1992, p232.

²⁹⁴ Chaudhuri, 'Shawls, Jewelry, Curry, and Rice in Victorian Britain', p241.

²⁹⁵ Chaudhuri, 'Shawls, Jewelry, Curry, and Rice in Victorian Britain', p231.

²⁹⁶ Elizabeth Garrett, *Morning Hours in India, Practical Hints on Household Management, the Care and Training of Children, & C.*, London, Trubner & Co., 1887, p7.

²⁹⁷ Garrett, *Morning Hours in India*, p15.

²⁹⁸ G.L.R., *The Economical Cookery Book: Simple and Dainty Dishes (for India)*, Calcutta and Simla, Thacker, Spink & Co., 1920, p212.

²⁹⁹ W.J. Wilkins, *Daily Life and Work in India*, London, T. Fisher Unwin, 1883, p63.

Indian cook who was brought to work in Britain.

In her essay on the ideological work of gender, based upon her examination of Victorian domestic cookbooks and the curry recipes in them, Susan Zlotnick claims that to validate their domesticity, Victorian women in England attempted to neutralize the threat of the Other by naturalizing the products of foreign lands.³⁰⁰ One of these 'naturalized' products, Zlotnick states, was curry. Thus she argues that curry was first appropriated from India in the first half of the nineteenth century, later marketed in India as a commodity at the end of the century.³⁰¹ Zlotnick claims that curry powder was 'fabricated' by British colonials and that the commodification of it for British taste was linked to the notion of eating India itself.³⁰²

Zlotnick uses curry advertisements of the time to highlight its 'ideological function'. She refers to bottle and tin labels of curry powders, pastes and chutneys of 'The Empress' brand owned by J. Edmunds, proclaiming that '[t]he sun in her dominions never sets'.³⁰³ It is more likely however that curry powder was developed by the British to pander to the fondness for curry that the colonials had acquired in India. Returning colonials could eat curry at the numerous coffee houses in London, many of which featured curry on their menus. There were also those who were wealthy enough to have brought back Indian cooks which meant they could have curry at home. Indian cooks in England either pounded their own curry pastes or purchased a variety of curry powders on the market. Indian cooks, ayahs and manservants were brought back by both *nabobs* (wealthy Anglo-Indian businessman or retired East India Company official of the eighteenth century) and later Anglo-Indians to work for them in England.³⁰⁴ Others who craved for curry could have bought these curry powders and followed recipes in the large number of cookbooks that included curries. I would suggest therefore that merchants such as Edmunds were simply 'cashing in' on the idea of empire.

Narayan not only agrees with Zlotnick's theory about the fabrication and commercialisation of curry powder as an imperial design but acknowledges that her observations about the links between curry, colonialism and Indian identity were

³⁰⁰ Susan Zlotnick, 'Domesticating Imperialism: Curry and Cookbooks in Victorian England', *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, vol.16, no.2-3, 1996, p53.

³⁰¹ Zlotnick, 'Domesticating Imperialism', p64.

³⁰² See Zlotnick, 'Domesticating Imperialism', pp64-65, and Narayan, *Dislocating Cultures*, pp164-165.

³⁰³ Zlotnick, 'Domesticating Imperialism', pp64-65.

³⁰⁴ Collingham, *Curry*, p131.

inspired by Zlotnick's work.³⁰⁵ Narayan asserts that the fabrication of curry powder was part of the logic of colonial commerce, 'imposing a term that signified a particular type of dish onto a specific mixture of spices, which then became a fixed and familiar product'.³⁰⁶ Narayan supports Zlotnick's claims that the British did not incorporate Indian food but invented their own curry powder, similar to the way in which 'India itself was ingested into the empire'.³⁰⁷ Narayan argues that India as a modern political entity was 'fabricated' through the intervention of British rule, 'which replaced the masala of the Moghul empire and various kingdoms and princely states with the unitary signifier "India," much as British curry powder replaced local masalas'.³⁰⁸

While it is tempting to elevate curry as a master trope in colonial discourse a cautionary note is required here: it is hard to imagine that the memsahib and the native servant in poring over recipe books and stirring the curry pot on a primitive stove were consciously having imperial designs over the hybrid dish and culturally appropriating it for empire. Yet this is exactly what Susan Zlotnick suggests when she analyses how the Victorians naturalized and nationalized curry.³⁰⁹ She notes that in the Victorian era, curry was already part of the national cuisine; it was commonly served to guests in homes and in cookbooks curry recipes were found among British recipes.³¹⁰ Zlotnick's article addresses the ideological work performed by gender through the medium of Victorian domestic cookbooks and the curry recipes in them. Domestic in focus, her work examines 'the tangled relationship between the potent domestic ideology and imperialism in the first half of the nineteenth century by charting the domestication of curry, which, in the words of the Victorian cookery expert, had become a "completely naturalized" English food by mid-century'.³¹¹ Zlotnick states that colonialism's

'desire for the other, and the fear of hybridity it unleashes, could be deactivated through the metaphors of domestication. Middle-class women, as morally regenerative and utterly domestic figures, could take into their homes a hybrid like curry, the mongrelized offspring of England's union with India, and through the ideological effect of domesticating it, erase its foreign origins and represent it as purely English. So alongside the trope of hybridity (the self becoming Other) we can place the trope of incorporation (taking the Other and making it self) as one way early Victorian England imagined its relationship with India'.³¹²

³⁰⁵ Narayan, *Dislocating Cultures*, p163.

³⁰⁶ Narayan, *Dislocating Cultures*, p164.

³⁰⁷ Narayan, *Dislocating Cultures*, p165.

³⁰⁸ Narayan, *Dislocating Cultures*, p165.

³⁰⁹ Zlotnick, 'Domesticating Imperialism', p60.

³¹⁰ Zlotnick, 'Domesticating Imperialism', p60.

³¹¹ Zlotnick, 'Domesticating Imperialism', p60, citing Elizabeth Hammond's *Modern Domestic Cookery*, (1851), p311.

³¹² Zlotnick, 'Domesticating Imperialism', p54.

This passage reveals Zlotnick's assumption that British middle class women, either at home or in the colonies, formed both a monolithic and 'utterly domestic' group. Zlotnick assumes that all British women were middle class, and that all women in the colonial home were British. In the earlier part of the nineteenth century there were Eurasian and Indian women married to or in marriage-like relationships with British men. In Malaya, it was common practice for the colonial civil servants to keep Malayan mistresses until 1914, when the Secretary of State for the Colonies ruled against it.³¹³ Even then, practices often contravened policy; Somerset Maugham in a number of his short stories, depicted the main characters (European) as having Malayan mistresses.³¹⁴ I will argue that colonists did not deliberately pick curry as the dish of choice to domesticate in the colonial project but adopted it for its multifarious ways in which less than perfect meat, poultry or fish could be enhanced and transformed. Moreover, as the British Empire expanded, the ubiquitous curry dish on the Anglo-Indian dining table evolved and mutated with other dishes and ingredients in other colonies and settlements.

Curry in cookbooks

Increasingly, historians have taken up the study of recipe books as historical documents. Arjun Appadurai sees contemporary Indian cookbooks as 'literature of exile, of nostalgia and loss' as they are generally written by authors who live outside India. Others are written for Indians in the diaspora and there are still others written 'to recollect and reconstruct the colonial idea of Indian food, and in such cases their master trope is likely to be curry, a category of colonial origin'.³¹⁵ Appadurai further asserts that colonial cookbooks serve to capture the 'nostalgia for the glow of empire, in which recipes are largely a Proustian device'.³¹⁶ Jean Duruz, in her study of food and nostalgia, notes that 'when traditional meanings of "home" seem most under threat, it is not unusual to resort to comfort foods as embodiments of "homely" meanings'.³¹⁷ While cookbooks in general can be seen as prescriptive manuals and may not reflect meals cooked, those written for and in the colonies were certainly referred to in everyday life more frequently.

³¹³ Margaret Shennan, *Out in the Midday Sun: The British in Malaya 1880-1960*, London, John Murray, 2000, pp67-68.

³¹⁴ An example is Maugham's *The Force of Circumstance*, published in 1926.

³¹⁵ Arjun Appadurai, 'How to Make a National Cuisine: Cookbooks in Contemporary India', *Journal of the Society for the Comparative Study of Society and History*, vol.30, no.1, 1988, p18.

³¹⁶ Appadurai, 'How to Make a National Cuisine', p18. 'Proustian device' refers to Marcel Proust's concept of the 'involuntary memory' of recalling the past without conscious effort.

³¹⁷ Jean Duruz, 'Haunted Kitchens: Cooking and Remembering', *Gastronomica*, vol.4, no.1, 2004, p57.

East India Company officials in eighteenth century India lived as nabobs or Englishmen behaving like Indian princes – eating Indian meals, wearing comfortable loose Indian dress at home and smoking the hookah. However, two developments from the 1800s heralded new standards of social behaviour. First, from the first half of the nineteenth century there was a steady increase of British women arriving to the colony. Some of these women travelled to India to join their husbands while others hoped to find marriage partners there. The latter group was known as the ‘fishing fleet’. The chances of successfully finding husbands were high as the ratio of European men to European women was about three to one.³¹⁸ Improved travel technologies between Europe and India and the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 also meant that more women could travel to India. Secondly, when India became a Crown colony in 1858, Anglo-Indians adopted a different attitude towards the Indian population. Various known as The Indian Mutiny, The Indian Revolt of 1857 or The First War of Independence, the rebellion against British rule originated in Indian unhappiness over interferences by the British over Indian tradition and culture.³¹⁹ The ensuing violence and loss of lives on both sides hardened British feelings against the colonized Indians. Racial theories of the time and the legitimising of British rule encouraged distance between ruler and subjects, demonstrating British racial superiority.³²⁰ This distance took the form of denigrating domestic servants, isolating the colonial household from the local population through adopting the bungalow as a housing style and removing the household for long periods of time to the hill stations.³²¹ Nabobs in the days of the East India Company were said to have consumed substantially more Indian or Indian-influenced dishes than Anglo-Indians. In his 30-chapter treatise on Madras cuisine for the Anglo-Indian, A.R. Kenny-Herbert complained that ‘our dinners of to-day would indeed astonish our Anglo-Indian forefathers;’ noting that the tendency then was a preference for light wines and ‘a desire for delicate and artistic cookery’. By all accounts Anglo-Indians continued to consume local dishes on a daily basis and Kenny-Herbert himself stated that although curry or

³¹⁸ Margaret MacMillan, *Women of the Raj: The Mothers, Wives, and Daughters of the British Empire in India*, New York, Random House, 2007, pp3-4.

³¹⁹ See Niall Ferguson, *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World*, London, Penguin, 2004, pp145-153; and Michael Edwardes, *British India: 1772-1947, A Survey of the Nature and Effects of Alien Rule*, New Delhi, Rupa & Co., 2006, pp149-152.

³²⁰ For a discussion on the era of the *nabobs* in British India, see Michael Edwardes, *The Sahibs and the Lotus: The British in India*, London, Constable, 1988, ‘Nabobs and nautches’, pp42-52. For a discussion on Anglo-Indians in consuming fewer Indian meals than nabobs, see Kenny-Herbert, *Culinary Jottings for Madras*, p1.

³²¹ For a study on ideas of difference and of separation, see Thomas R. Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994, pp177-178.

mulligatunny were ‘very frequently given at breakfast or luncheon’, they no longer featured in the ‘dinner menu of establishments’.³²² One could suggest that the reason why curry and mulligatunny were not served in the more formal venues then was British effort to present a more British presence in dining establishments. Other cookery authors agreed that Anglo-Indians and other British colonials did consume local foods, particularly curry, on a daily basis. Angela C. Spry, author of a cookbook for memsahibs, stated in 1894 that ‘[C]urry is eaten in almost every household at least once daily, generally at breakfast or *Bari Hazri*’; she went on to advise that every memsahib should supervise the making of the daily curry.³²³ Another author, ‘GLR’, in his or her ‘economical’ cookery book for India wrote in 1920 that ‘curries form an important part of an Anglo-Indian breakfast, I have compiled them separately, so that the housewife will find no difficulty in the choice of one for breakfast’.³²⁴ Writing in the same vein for the Malayan market, J. Hubbard wrote in 1930 that, in Malaya, ‘the preparation of rice and curry is an important branch of cookery, though unfortunately much neglected, as a result of which many of the old tasty curries are forgotten or totally unknown to most of the present generation’.³²⁵

Curry as a tool and symbol of thrift and nutrition

Prior to the 1850s there was some resistance in Britain to curry, as it was viewed as a stew for the lower classes.³²⁶ It was only when the middle classes had developed into a powerful social and economic grouping in the 1850s that curry became familiar in British homes.³²⁷ In time curry became the dish that helped to stretch meals, this fitted in with the Victorian ideal of the woman of thrift. As Collingham has convincingly argued, the domestic ideology of the middle-classes elevated thrift into a mark of respectability by celebrating the virtuous housewife. Collingham observes that curries became ‘an excellent way of using up cold meat’.³²⁸ Importantly, Collingham also notes that Isabella Beeton’s most famous recipe book of the era placed all the beef and chicken curries under the ‘cold meat cookery’ category and not in the foreign cookery section. Collingham notes the irony of how most British consumers of curries were unaware that the consumption of leftovers was taboo among the majority of Hindus.³²⁹

³²² Kenny-Herbert, *Culinary Jottings for Madras*, pp1-2.

³²³ Angela C. Spry, *The Mem Sahib’s Book of Cookery*, 1894, p60.

³²⁴ G.L.R., *The Economical Cookery Book*, p212.

³²⁵ J. Hubbard, *The Malayan Cookery Book*, Singapore, Rickard Limited, 1930, p62.

³²⁶ Collingham, *Curry*, p138.

³²⁷ Collingham, *Curry*, p138.

³²⁸ Collingham, *Curry*, p138.

³²⁹ Collingham, *Curry*, p138.

Kate Colquhoun agrees that rehashing leftover meals was seen as a sign of frugality and curries became one way of using up yesterday's dinner.³³⁰ Similarly, Zlotnick argues along the same lines that, as figures of domesticity, British women 'helped incorporate Indian food into the national diet and India into the British Empire; and this process of incorporation remains etched on the pages of the domestic cookery books written by middle-class women like E Acton and I Beeton'.³³¹ Thus, Indian food, and more specifically, curry, though first consumed in colonial India soon became familiar in British homes and cookery books.

Just as curries were seen as an economical way of stretching family meals in Britain, this was even more essential in India, as quality meat and poultry were in short supply. But there were other compelling reasons for the popularity of curry, one of which was that, as servants were responsible for cooking in the colonial household, curry was one dish that needed no supervision from the memsahib. The following cookbook writers clearly demonstrate that curry was cooked in many ways to bring variety to meals, to stretch meals and to improve meat and poultry in the colonies and not for any particular imperial design. 'J.H.', author of a cookbook using tested recipes collected 'during 23 years' residence in India', stated that the popular vegetable curry soup of the time was made from the vegetable curry left from breakfast. Writing in 1902, J.H. advised placing 'what curry remains into the stock, oil well together, rub it through a coarse sieve and serve'.³³² The curried soup recipe in Marie de Joncourt's *Wholesome Cookery* was simple: she instructed to toss in some curry powder with onion fried in butter, add liquid, strain and add in cooked rice.³³³ E.G. Bradley's household book for 'tropical colonies' contained culinary advice aimed at helping the bachelor 'district officer, missionary, farmer, mining engineer, tinker, tailor, soldier'; wives – 'especially beginners'; and 'bachelor girls'; suggesting that any left-over beef, mutton, pork, chicken, game, fish (fresh or tinned) could be curried. He went further to say that if the 'meat or fish is not very promising, prolonged cooking in a thick hot, dry curry sauce will do wonders for it'.³³⁴ Another work that supported this view was R. Riddell's comprehensive cookery book of 1849, which promised wholesome cookery with 'Oriental' and English recipes, for families, messes and private individuals. Riddell

³³⁰ Kate Colquhoun, *Taste: The Story of Britain through Its Cooking*, London, Bloomsbury, 2007, p216.

³³¹ Zlotnick, 'Domesticating imperialism', p65.

³³² J.H., *Household Cookery. Tested Recipes Collected During 23 Years' Residence in India*, Allahabad, Pioneer Press, 1902, p2.

³³³ Marie De Joncourt, *Wholesome Cookery*, London, Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., 1885, p26.

³³⁴ E.G. Bradley, *A Household Book for Tropical Colonies*, London, Oxford University Press, 1948, p68.

declared that ‘in fact a curry may be made of almost anything,’ the key ingredients being the quality of the spices. He suggested that when prepared ‘in an artistical manner, and mixed in due proportions, [curries] form a savoury and nourishing repast, tempting to the organs of scent and taste’.³³⁵

Nupur Chaudhuri contends that curry was adopted by Britons not only for economy but also for its nutritious values. She states that curry was seen as useful for adding to leftover meats and fish curries were seen as a health food.³³⁶ Certainly that was a popular notion promoted in nineteenth century cookery books. In his introduction to a book by a native servant on curries John Loudon Shand asked rhetorically why ‘East Indians’ lived so long. The answer, he stated, was that because ‘so many of them are Curry eaters’. He continued, ‘all human nature requires to be occasionally stimulated, and a mild curry acts upon the torpid liver, reacts upon the digestive organs, and provides the necessary stimulant without injurious consequences’.³³⁷ Harvey Day, who wrote several recipe books devoted entirely to curry was of a similar mind, stating that the pungency of curries aided perspiration, one of nature’s ways of cooling the body and at the same time ridding it of toxins.³³⁸ He declared that in a curry,

‘[e]very spice used in their making is a preservative. All have some antiseptic value and many are carminatives: that is, they tend to reduce flatulence, as do dill and caraway, which are so innocuous that they are given to babies. The paprika and chilli families are extremely rich in vitamin C, an anti-scorbutic vitamin, which is good for the skin. This may be one reason why so many Indian women have such remarkably clear skins’.³³⁹

Day went on to list the health benefits as they were then understood of each ingredient used in a curry spice mixture. He noted that ginger had long been used as a medicine by both the Chinese and Indian people, and had been mentioned in Chinese medical books, in Sanskrit literature and the Talmud. He alluded to the aphrodisiacal qualities of ginger which had been highly regarded by Henry VIII. Turmeric, according to Day was widely used ‘in the East for skin diseases, healing bruises, leech-bites and as a carminative’. Calling garlic and onions ‘Nature’s medicines’, Day declared these two ingredients to be blood cleansers, containing vitamins B, C and D, and noted that in the First World

³³⁵ R. Riddell, *Indian Domestic Economy and Receipt Book*, Bombay, printed at the “Gentleman’s Gazette” Press, 1849, pp304-305.

³³⁶ Chaudhuri, ‘Shawls, Jewelry, Curry, and Rice in Victorian Britain’, pp240-241.

³³⁷ Daniel Santiogoe, *The Curry Cook’s Assistant; or Curries, How to Make Them in England in Their Original Style*, London, Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., 1889, px. Santiogoe’s book is rare in that it was written by a servant.

³³⁸ Harvey Day, *Curries of India*, London, Kaye & Ward Ltd., 1969, p8.

³³⁹ Day, *Curries of India*, p9.

War, distilled onion juice was given in blood transfusions. Day added that clove, cinnamon and coriander were powerful antiseptics and went on to state that nutmeg had properties that aided digestive problems as well as curing insomnia. Hay stated that black pepper helped to bring fever down while aniseed was eaten to promote appetite and as a cough cure. He also asserted the potency of fennel but did not state for what ailment.³⁴⁰

The appropriation of curry by the British

By the eighteenth century the British in India and the other colonies had become so enamoured with curry, they began currying all manner of animal flesh, including sheep's head, rabbit and calf's foot. There were curry connoisseurs, each with an expert opinion on what constituted the best curry. There was also rivalry over which presidency, colony or region cooked the finest curry.³⁴¹ The different ingredients used also highlighted the diverse range of curries cooked in the different regions. For example, a Madras curry was quite distinct from a Malay curry. For the latter, coriander and cumin were not used but coconut milk and lemon grass were added.³⁴²

Martha Careful's manual on household hints to 'young housewives' of 1853 advised that 'any meat that is well impregnated with the curry powder is designated a curry; white meats are usually selected; fowl, rabbit, turkey, veal, &c.'. ³⁴³ Careful also suggested that the jointed cuts could be stewed in a gravy and, when nearly done, curry powder mixed with flour, butter and cream added to the stew.³⁴⁴ In other recipes, a dusting of curry powder on or added to a substantial dish was sufficient to call it a curry dish. For example, Mrs John Gilpin's recipe for curried sheep's head suggested sprinkling a tablespoonful of curry powder to diced portions of a sheep's head.³⁴⁵ Another dish that made use of the obligatory tablespoonful of curry powder was a breakfast dish called curry balls which consisted of cooking rice with curry powder, salt, sugar, chopped apple and onion. The cooked rice mixture was then rolled into balls

³⁴⁰ Day, *Curries of India*, pp9-12.

³⁴¹ See rivalry over the finest or hottest curry in: Day, *Curries of India*, p7; John Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions in Malayan India*, Kuala Lumpur, Oxford University Press, 1965, p300; and Jean Chitty (ed), *Anna Chitty – Musings of a Memsahib: 1921-1933*, Hants, Belhaven, 1988, p56.

³⁴² See Denning, Margaret B., *Dainty Cookery for the Home: The Triple Cookery Book containing English, American and Indian Dishes*, Madras, M.E. Publishing House, 1899, p117; and G.L.R., *The Economical Cookery Book*, p226.

³⁴³ Martha Careful, *Household Hints to Young Housewives with the Arrangements and Receipts for Forty Dinners, &c.*, London, Dean and Son, 1853, p80.

³⁴⁴ Careful, *Household Hints to Young Housewives*, p80.

³⁴⁵ (Mrs) John Gilpin, *Memsahib's Guide to Cookery in India*, Bombay, A.J. Combridge & Co., 1914, p40.

with minced meat, parsley and egg, rolled in flour with a little curry powder and fried or baked.³⁴⁶

E.G. Bradley in his household manual for the colonies, gave a recipe for the ‘ordinary household curry’ typifying the quintessential British colonial curry that was eaten all over the colonies and is still popular today among ex-colonizers.³⁴⁷ It uses a mish-mash of ingredients – fresh or left over chicken, fish, prawn, beef, mutton or any other meat or seafood; the essential tablespoon of commercial curry powder and dried fruit or fruit relish that gives it the unmistakable sweet taste of the colonial curry. The tablespoon of curry powder is the mixture of spices that distinguishes curry from any other stew or casserole. Turmeric, a brilliant yellow root vegetable gives curry its distinctive golden colour; chillies are another ingredient that contribute to the uniqueness of curry – their spicy hot flavour is adjusted according to one’s threshold for hot food. The typical colonial curry, however, is mild. The foundation of this curry is the gravy, based on the roux sauce method. Bradley’s recipe was typical of the type of curry that was cooked by servants for colonial households in India, Malaysia and Singapore. Onions and raisins were first fried in fat, a tablespoonful each of flour and curry powder were then added and stirred until absorbed. Water or stock was poured in; then left over meat or chicken was added and cooked for more than an hour. Then more raisins, chutney, even jam or sweet pickle and a teaspoon of Worcester sauce were stirred in. Finally, when dished up, desiccated coconut or chopped hard-boiled egg was added.³⁴⁸

Sir John Cotton, who served as a political officer in India between 1930 and 1946, commented in his private papers on food availability. In many of the Indian states beef consumption was forbidden by the local Indian ruler so that he and his wife had to fall back on ‘very tough’ mutton, goat or chicken.³⁴⁹ Equally, where beef eating was allowed in non-Hindu communities, the beef was tough. Lady Cotton wrote that the tough meat or scraggy chicken were usually curried to make them tasty.³⁵⁰ An Anglican missionary in North Borneo, Cyril Alliston, complained about the tough buffalo meat cooked to a leather texture by his cook and stated that as imported meat was expensive

³⁴⁶ Gilpin, *Memsahib’s Guide to Cookery in India*, pp147-148.

³⁴⁷ The majority of the respondents to my questionnaire indicate that they remembered the curries they ate in the colonial era as being delicious and profess to continue eating them today.

³⁴⁸ Bradley, *A Household Book for Tropical Colonies*, p69.

³⁴⁹ John Sir Cotton’s manuscript, School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), London, OA1/18/1-61, 1930-1946, Political Officer, IPS, transcript 68pp 5 September 1973-1015-1330H58X.

³⁵⁰ Cotton’s manuscript, SOAS manuscript, OA1/18/1-61.

it was eaten occasionally, on a Sunday, 'instead of the immensely popular Sunday curry tiffin'.³⁵¹ The following incident related by Alliston, illustrates that the tendency to curry less than ideal foods was picked up by local servants. He described how once, when the Sunday joint was hauled away and torn apart by four or five dogs, his Chinese cook, Ah Kiew, suggested he would 'bikin cully' (make curry) of the mangled meat.³⁵² These anecdotes suggest curry as a way to make meat palatable so that the British did not have to subsist on poverty food, supporting British elite behaviour but using Indian techniques (in ways not approved by Indians for food purity reasons).

The fact that curry was eaten at least once daily according to many accounts, contradicts the notion that colonizers only ate British meals. In Singapore, curry was even more ubiquitous, consumed at every meal, as recounted by John Cameron, editor of the *Straits Times* in 1865.³⁵³ He asserted that curry made its appearance three times a day, starting with breakfast, with '[a] little fish, some curry and rice, and perhaps a couple of eggs, washed down with a tumbler or so of good claret,' forming 'a very fair foundation on which to begin the labours of the day.'³⁵⁴ Tiffin comprised 'a plate of curry and rice and some fruit or it may be a simple biscuit with a glass of beer or claret'.³⁵⁵ An everyday dinner in Singapore was a sizeable repast and was comparable to a special occasion dinner in Britain: starting with soup, then the 'substantials' of roast beef or mutton, turkey or capon, accompanied by side dishes of tongue, fowl, cutlets and a variety of vegetables. This course was followed by two or more different kinds of curry, rice and accompaniments of all manner of *sambals* (a spicy mixture served as a side dish) or native pickles and spices'.³⁵⁶ Curry was even jellied, served probably either as a starter or a savoury at the colonial dining table.³⁵⁷

The British had a penchant for giving French names to home-grown dishes. This can be seen as an effort to add prestige and sophistication to a menu. Formal dinners at Government House and European hotels in the colonies almost always featured menus in French. Curry dishes did not escape this practice, further demonstrating that the British, having appropriated curry as part of their culinary repertoire, went one step

³⁵¹ Cyril Alliston, *In the Shadow of Kinabalu*, London, The Adventurers Club, 1963, p35.

³⁵² Alliston, *In the Shadow of Kinabalu*, p35.

³⁵³ John Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions in Malayan India*, Kuala Lumpur, Oxford University Press, 1965, pp287-300. The first edition was published in 1865 by Smith, Elder and Co. in London.

³⁵⁴ Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions*, p295.

³⁵⁵ Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions*, p297.

³⁵⁶ Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions*, p300.

³⁵⁷ Grace Johnson, *An Anglo-Indian and Oriental Cookery*, London, W.H. Allen & Co., Ltd., 1893.

further and formally legitimised it, by giving the different curries French names.³⁵⁸ This was a deliberate attempt to elevate Indian food, particularly curry, to a high culinary art. Nancy Lake's book, published in the 1930s in Britain, instructed on how to order dinner and give the dishes their French names, as she believed that cooks 'are not generally gifted with fertile imaginations'.³⁵⁹ Further, she viewed that 'the French of cookery is a language of itself, and those who are not learned in it are often entirely at a loss when suddenly called on to write out a correct French menu with no other assistance than that of a dictionary'.³⁶⁰ She assisted her readers by giving French names to the following Indian dishes. *Kabobs à l'Indienne* are pieces of curried mutton on skewers with small whole onions and slices of tomatoes, served with rice and curry sauce.³⁶¹ *Poulet en kari* is chicken curry served with rice; when garnished with small heaps of grated coconut and sultanas it is *à la Simla*.³⁶² *Pilau de veau à la Madras* is veal dressed with curried rice, spice and raisins and garnished with rolls of fried bacon.³⁶³ *Kari de boeuf* or *Boeuf à l'Indienne* is curried beef, and when garnished with olives and gherkins it becomes *à l'Orient*.³⁶⁴

Curry connoisseurs: owners and judges of curry

From the days of the East India Company, curry as a dish had become familiar, known, and even omnipresent to the British across the colonies and colonizers began to view the dish as their own. British merchants and army officers had enthusiastically consumed Indian food, and curry in particular. When A.R. Kenney-Herbert arrived in India to join the Indian Army as a nineteen-year old in 1859, he was invited to tiffin parties where 'eight or nine varieties of curries' were included. Twenty years later Kenney-Herbert wrote the best-selling *Culinary Jottings for Madras* and attributed the fine curries of the pre-Raj era to the memsahibs in the 1840s who took special care in supervising their servants in curry making. He devoted a whole chapter to 'Our Curries' and the next 'Curries – continued, and Mulligatunny'.³⁶⁵ Kenney-Herbert complained that memsahibs in the 1870s were slack in this regard as they 'have ceased to be

³⁵⁸ John Burnett, *Plenty and Want: A Social History of Diet in England from 1815 to the Present Day*, London, Scolar Press, 1979, pp82-85, and Nicola Humble, *Culinary Pleasures: Cookbooks and the Transformation of British Food*, London, Faber and Faber, 2005, p18.

³⁵⁹ Nancy Lake, *Menus Made Easy, or, How to Order Dinner and Give the Dishes Their French Names*, Melbourne, E.W. Cole. This 25th edition does not give a publication year but one edition traced was published in 1939 by Frederick Warne.

³⁶⁰ Lake, *Menus Made Easy*, p9.

³⁶¹ Lake, *Menus Made Easy*, p76.

³⁶² Lake, *Menus Made Easy*, p90.

³⁶³ Lake, *Menus Made Easy*, p63.

³⁶⁴ Lake, *Menus Made Easy*, p55.

³⁶⁵ Kenny-Herbert, *Culinary Jottings*, pp285-313.

cumbered about this particular branch of their cook's work'.³⁶⁶ The 'alleged decay of the curry-making knack', according to Kenney-Herbert, was the 'want of care in the preparation of powders and pastes, and the loss of recipes'.³⁶⁷ Still, Kenney-Herbert observed that in the 1870s 'curries now-a-days are only licensed to be eaten at breakfast, at luncheon, and perhaps at the little home dinner, when they may, for a change, occasionally form the *pièce de résistance* of that cosy meal'.³⁶⁸ In Britain, curry made its way into its culinary consciousness when returning East India Company employees brought home Indian cooks and Indian restaurants. Curries were served at the Coffee House on the Haymarket, London, from 1773 and the customers at the Jerusalem Coffee House in Cornhill were East India Company merchants and officials.³⁶⁹ In 1811, Sake Dean Mahomed established the first curry house in Britain, the Hindostanee Coffee House, near Portman Square, London.³⁷⁰ Nothing signals knowledge of a product or service better than declaring ownership and critiquing it. Thus, there was no shortage of opinions on what made a good curry and accounting for taste in the colonial era. These discourses of expertise and taste are part of the British appropriation of curry – familiarity with, the ability to judge curry, even associating it with British, supposedly masculine traits, such as stamina. As befitting a dish that was both exotic and familiar, curry attracted its own legends of what constituted a good curry. One of these was that when the human body perspired from heat, the whole forehead dripped with sweat, while the curry eater always sweated just above the eyes and across the top of the nose.³⁷¹ Harvey Day recalled meeting an English guest at the Indian Gymkhana at Osterley in Middlesex, England in the 1950s who, on being served a curry, declared it to be 'very tasty, but of course, this is not the real stuff. I had some curry in Bombay in [19]42 which was so hot that it well nigh took the skin off my tongue. That was *real* curry'.³⁷² It seems that the individual or group first appropriated curry and then declared sole ownership of it, insisting there was only one way of making the ideal curry. While it was acknowledged that curry had become a dish known and loved by the British, colonizers were fiercely possessive about their version of it as consumed by their own community. Colonials were in the habit of comparing the authenticity and quality of curries across the colonies. In Singapore, Cameron, writing in 1865,

³⁶⁶ Kenney-Herbert, *Culinary Jottings*, p286.

³⁶⁷ Kenney-Herbert, *Culinary Jottings*, p286.

³⁶⁸ Kenney-Herbert, *Culinary Jottings*, pp286-287.

³⁶⁹ Collingham, *Curry*, pp130-131.

³⁷⁰ Collingham, *Curry*, p129.

³⁷¹ Chitty, *Anna Chitty*, p56.

³⁷² Day, *Curries of India*, p7.

commented proprietarily on the curries there, stating that ‘though Madras and Calcutta have been long famed for the quality of their curries, I nevertheless think that those of the Straits exceed any of them in excellence.’³⁷³ Wendy Suart, who spent four years in British North Borneo from 1949, agrees: ‘a Malay curry to my mind is far superior to Indian! It has fragrance, flavour and is not just hot. It is thickened with peanuts and coconut milk and is not watery’.³⁷⁴ Author Martha Careful insisted that curry ‘is always garnished with an edging of rice’.³⁷⁵

Often, when a social practice becomes popular or ubiquitous it invites much discussion in the public arena. ‘G.V.’, writing in 1862, was among the burgeoning cohort of cookery writers who not only helped popularise curries in the colonies but laid down pedantic rules on how they should be cooked. While curries were seen as an economic way of using up leftover food, he or she advised caution on the use of ingredients. He stated that ‘it is silly to suppose that any kind of meat will do for a curry; it is only the impostor dinner-giver that thinks so; a rabbit should not be used, it is in some seasons as strong in smell as a cat’.³⁷⁶ The author advised that white meats like chicken, pork and breast of veal were the best for curries. Further he stated that it was a mistake to boil the meat with the curry powder as the ingredients were ‘extremely volatile, and fly off’. Instead, he suggested that ten minutes before serving, the gravy should be poured out and mixed with two tablespoons of curry powder and a tablespoon of arrowroot. The mixture should be mixed well and added back to the curry pot and simmered. G.V. also suggested adding in the juice of half a lemon and a tablespoon of chutney.³⁷⁷

The Madras Club, open only to men, was reputed to have a curry so hot that even iced lemon barley water could not cool off the eater.³⁷⁸ Indeed, Harvey Day claimed that a ‘Madras curry may make a person unused to it imagine that his mouth is on fire; but curries elsewhere can be extremely mild and cause discomfort to none’.³⁷⁹ Henrietta A. Hervey’s 1895 Anglo-Indian curry cook book also praised Madras as ‘par excellence, the home of curry and rice, and where the ingredients are produced and blended to perfection. There is an *on dit* down there that when the Prince of Wales was on his

³⁷³ Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions*, p300.

³⁷⁴ Questionnaire response by Wendy Suart.

³⁷⁵ Careful, *Household Hints to Young Housewives*, p80.

³⁷⁶ G.V., *Dinners and Dinner-Parties or the Absurdities of Artificial Life*, London, Chapman and Hall, 1862, p74.

³⁷⁷ G.V., *Dinners and Dinner-Parties*, pp74-75.

³⁷⁸ Chitty, *Anna Chitty*, p56.

³⁷⁹ Day, *Curries of India*, p7.

Indian tour he was actuated into wishing to visit Madras solely by a desire of tasting a Madras prawn curry at our famous club'.³⁸⁰ Residents of Calcutta thought that their prawn curry was also exceptional. As Rummer Godden wrote in 1929, 'Sunday lunches were usually prawn curry – Calcutta's prawns were delectable'.³⁸¹

The commercialisation of curry powders

Curry powder, the spicy mixture that transformed leftover meals or added new dimensions to meat or poultry, was a distinct colonial invention. It was yet another way in which the British appropriated curry; they gathered the types of spices required for a curry, configured the proportions according to their ideals of a curry and called it their own. Irrespective of the rationale for the manufacture of curry powder, it is indisputable that this commodity effectively defined the curry eaten solely by the colonizers. While its ingredients were familiar to the servants who cooked the curries for the colonial family, the manufacturing and commodification of it had rendered curry powder less authentic and potent in the eyes of the indigenous populations. These servants would not have used generic curry powders for their own families and continued to pound their own different pastes for different dishes.

The processing of mixed spiced powders or 'kitchen pepper' in Britain dates back to the seventeenth century. A recipe of 1682 prescribed two ounces of ginger and an ounce each of powdered pepper, cloves, nutmegs and cinnamon, 'mingled with a further pound of pepper'.³⁸² While these early mixed spice powders may not closely resemble the curry powders of the Anglo-Indian variety, it seems likely that these were the forerunners of curry powder. Ready-mixed curry powders spread widely from the 1780s in Britain and were included in cookery books from this period.³⁸³ These spice mixtures were more potent than the spice powders of the early 1700s, when the highly regarded mace and nutmeg provided a subtler flavour.³⁸⁴ Although chilli was not in the early mixed spice powder recipes, pepper and ginger provided heat. However, chilli was not an unknown ingredient then as chilli peppers had made their way to London and

³⁸⁰ Henrietta A. Hervey, *Anglo-Indian Cookery at Home: A Short Treatise for Returned Exiles*, London, Horace Cox, 1895, p2.

³⁸¹ Laura Sykes, *Calcutta through British Eyes, 1690-1990*, Madras, Oxford University Press, 1992, p44.

³⁸² C. Anne Wilson, *Food and Drink in Britain from the Stone Age to Recent Times*, London, Constable, 1973, p294.

³⁸³ Colquhoun, *Taste*, p216. See also Wilson, *Food and Drink in Britain*, p294.

³⁸⁴ Colquhoun, *Taste*, p216.

Antwerp via Lisbon and Seville by the 1540s.³⁸⁵ To make curry, returned East India Company employees to Britain bought their curry spices – coriander and cumin seeds, cardamom pods and cinnamon sticks – from their local chemist. For example, G.V., in his book, on dinners and dinner parties published in 1862, recommended buying curry powder from the chemists, Hanburys, at Plough Court Lombard Street.³⁸⁶ The popularity of curry went further afield when, as at the 1889 Universal Paris Exhibition, the composition of curry powder was set by decree: 34g tamarind, 44g onions, 20g coriander, 5g chilli pepper, 3g turmeric, 2g cumin, 3g fenugreek, 2g pepper and 2g mustard.³⁸⁷

Curry and rice was cooked in the royal kitchens of Queen Victoria by two Indian cooks, ‘whose sole duty was to prepare the curry that was served each day at luncheon whether the guests partook of it or not’.³⁸⁸ G. Tschumi, a palace chef, in his memoir recounted that the Indian cooks refused to use the standard issue curry powder in the kitchen (although ‘it was of the best imported kind’, according to Tschumi) and special premises were allocated for the cooks to grind their own spices between two large round stones.³⁸⁹ Thus even in the kitchen of the highest echelon of British society curry was contested and debated.

Just as the British had appropriated curry to form part of the colonial cuisine, their manufacture of curry powder generated opinions and debate on the ideal curry powder. G.V. wrote that ‘Indian curry powder is mostly compounded by Jews, and of the worst materials, and when brought to England has lost its flavour and not worth using, and if much eaten will cause paralysis’.³⁹⁰ He suggested sealing bought curry powder in six or eight small bottles and keeping away from light in order to preserve its colour and quality.³⁹¹ An Indian cook brought to England by John Loudon Shand was not so dismissive of curry powders, declaring that the best curry powder was made of coriander seed, saffron, dry chillies, cumin seed, mustard seed and pepper corns.³⁹²

³⁸⁵ E.M. Collingham, *Imperial Bodies: The Physical Experience of the Raj, c.1800-1947*, Cambridge, Polity, 2001, pp52-54.

³⁸⁶ G.V., *Dinners and Dinner-Parties*, p107.

³⁸⁷ *The Concise Larousse Gastronomique: The World's Greatest Cookery Encyclopedia*, London, Hamlyn, 1998, p409.

³⁸⁸ G. Tschumi, *Royal Chef: Recollections of Life in Royal Households from Queen Victoria to Queen Mary London*, William Kimber, 1954, p195.

³⁸⁹ Tschumi, *Royal Chef*, p201.

³⁹⁰ G.V., *Dinners and Dinner-Parties*, p107.

³⁹¹ G.V., *Dinners and Dinner-Parties*, p107.

³⁹² Santiagoe, *The Curry Cook's Assistant*, pxii.

Henrietta Hervey, author of a cookbook for Anglo-Indians in Britain, found Crosse and Blackwell's 'the nearest approach to the real article in the way of curry powder'.³⁹³

Although she advised that curry powder and paste were best bought from Messrs. Spencer and Co., or Messrs. Oakes and Co., both of Mount Road, Madras, Hervey also gave recipes for Bombay curry powder, Bengal curry powder and Madras curry powder and paste.³⁹⁴

Curry and servants

While the British had embraced curry as a daily staple as well as other local dishes, the cooking of these, and indeed all their meals, were left to the servants as 'virtually no one in the Anglo-Indian community cooked'.³⁹⁵ Curry as the defining dish of the colonial cuisine was concocted daily in the colonial kitchen by native servants who were seen as dirty, unreliable and dishonest. It is highly probable that if servants were not responsible for cooking for the colonizers, then curry would not have emerged as such a significant dish from the colonial era. Until the 1870s, little attempt was made to introduce European food into British homes in India.³⁹⁶ Nicola Humble states that, instead, 'Indian cooks tended to be left to their own devices and produced a series of curries'.³⁹⁷ She adds that the British passed around recipes of dishes they particularly enjoyed, in both India and Britain, and in the process, these dishes became altered and modified. As an example of this process, she cites 'the development of kedgerree from a vegetarian dish of rice and lentils to one containing smoked fish and eggs'.³⁹⁸

British writers of cookery books and household manuals in the colonial era seemed to overlook the irony of teaching Indian servants how to cook curry. Two diverging views emerge from these manuals: first, that the native servant could not be trusted with a sophisticated palette for the authentic taste of curry; and, secondly, that he or she was not honest enough to use all the necessary spices for a curry. In her cookery book specifically written for memsahibs, A.C.S. lamented that the cooking of curry was often left entirely to the cook or *khansamah* (head servant) 'with the result that a very tasteless compound is served,' stating that the servant would have left out vital ingredients while still charging his mistress for them. A.C.S. declared, 'I would strongly

³⁹³ Hervey, *Anglo-Indian Cookery at Home*, p2.

³⁹⁴ Hervey, *Anglo-Indian Cookery at Home*, p2.

³⁹⁵ Mary Procida, 'Feeding the Imperial Appetite', p127.

³⁹⁶ Humble, *Culinary Pleasures*, p19.

³⁹⁷ Humble, *Culinary Pleasures*, p19.

³⁹⁸ Humble, *Culinary Pleasures*, p19.

advise every “memsaheb” to superintendent [sic] the making of the daily curry. If she cannot spare the time to watch the whole process or prepare the same herself on an oil cooking stove, let her cook or khansamah show her all the necessary condiments, which should be brought to her neatly arranged and pounded on a plate’.³⁹⁹ She added that rice was always eaten with curries and conceded however that the ‘natives prepare it to perfection, so that no remarks are necessary’.⁴⁰⁰ It is unclear whether Elizabeth Garrett was untrusting of her cook’s taste or honesty when she wrote that, with ‘curries, it is better to make your own powder, giving it out when required, than to trust to your cook’s taste in the matter’.⁴⁰¹ Margaret MacMillan highlights the irony that although few memsahibs knew it, Indian women thought the former were shockingly lax for buying their flour and their spices ready-ground as the good Indian housekeeper always ground her own.⁴⁰²

The Sunday curry tiffin: a colonial institution

Not only did curry become a signature dish on the colonial menu it also developed into the centrepiece of a uniquely colonial meal of its own, known as the ‘Indian tiffin’ on the subcontinent, or simply, the ‘Sunday tiffin’ in Borneo, Malaya and Singapore. *Hobson Jobson* suggests several versions of the origin of ‘tiffin’, ranging from the verb, to tiff – to take luncheon or the 1785 definition of eating or drinking out of meal times.⁴⁰³ The British in India referred to ‘tiffin’ as a light lunch and the Sunday tiffin was ‘an occasion for over-indulgence, with mulligatawny soup (always), curry and rice, roast beef and Yorkshire pudding washed down with a bottle of iced beer, and tapioca pudding’.⁴⁰⁴ Food writer, Chitrita Banerji recalled in 2007 the tiffin of her childhood as ‘a snack-like meal usually taken at midday’ and attributes this meal to the Anglo-Indian presence.⁴⁰⁵ Today, *tiffinwallahs*, also known as *dabbawalas*, meaning lunchbox men, are a group of five thousand Indians in Mumbai who deliver about 175,000 lunches daily from homes to offices and schools, using the local train network.⁴⁰⁶ There are different accounts of the first tiffin deliveries, one being that they were made by Mahadu Havji Bache in 1890, delivering home-cooked lunches among Indians in the

³⁹⁹ Spry, *The Mem Sahib’s Book of Cookery*, p60.

⁴⁰⁰ Spry, *The Mem Sahib’s Book of Cookery*, p61.

⁴⁰¹ Garrett, *Morning Hours in India*, p13.

⁴⁰² MacMillan, *Women of the Raj*, p163.

⁴⁰³ Yule and Burnell, *Hobson-Jobson*, pp919-920.

⁴⁰⁴ Burton, *The Raj at Table*, p90.

⁴⁰⁵ Chitrita Banerji, *Eating India: An Odyssey into the Food and Culture of the Land of Spices*, New Delhi Penguin Books, 2007, p102.

⁴⁰⁶ Gauri Sanjeev Pathak, ‘Delivering the Nation: The *Dabbawalas* of Mumbai’, *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, vol 33 no. 2, pp.235-257, p239.

employ of British administrators.⁴⁰⁷ The dabbawalas' services to workers, then as now, provided wholesome and cost-effective lunches that meet dietary restrictions related to caste, religion and hygiene considerations.⁴⁰⁸

The Great Eastern Hotel in colonial Calcutta served a tiffin of 'steak or chop, bread and vegetables' for one rupee to its Anglo-Indian clients.⁴⁰⁹ However, in Malaya, Singapore and the Borneo states, the magnificent 'curry tiffin' on a Sunday afternoon was a colonial institution. Responses to the questionnaire that I sent out to ex-colonials who had lived and worked in Malaya and Singapore now residing in various parts of the world all indicated that curry tiffin was a Sunday occurrence that was much looked forward to. Invariably the curry tiffin was a relaxed lunch held in private homes, a chance for friends and work associates to socialise. The verandah was a favourite part of the house to have the tiffin.⁴¹⁰ The party sat around a large table and food was passed around, or, servants were there to pass the dishes around. The curry tiffin in Malaysia and Singapore is similar to the Dutch colonial rijsttafel (or 'rice table') from the Indies, where numerous dishes are laid out buffet-style with the rice dish as the main dish. However in an account by Aldous Huxley on his travel to Java in the 1920s he described a rice table served in a hotel where individual dishes were presented by a long line of waiters, each offering a dish for the guest's plate.⁴¹¹ There is conjecture that the curry tiffin evolved from the rijsttafel as Indonesian cooks were recruited to work for British colonizers in Malaysia and Singapore.⁴¹² Indeed, Tony Lamb, one of the last technical officers (in agriculture) to be recruited by the Colonial Government in North Borneo, stated that the curries prepared by his cooks were of the Javanese style.⁴¹³ David Burton argues that the practice of placing all the dishes on the table was an Indian and Southeast Asian custom as the diner could pick and choose whatever took his or her fancy.⁴¹⁴ By all accounts, the curry tiffin comprised numerous dishes – several main dishes such as chicken, beef, mutton, prawn, fish or vegetable curry were accompanied by even more side dishes. These, loosely called *sambals*, could number as

⁴⁰⁷ Pathak, 'Delivering the Nation', p.236.

⁴⁰⁸ Pathak, 'Delivering the Nation', p.239 .

⁴⁰⁹ Banerji, *Eating India*, p102.

⁴¹⁰ Questionnaire response by 89-year old Tina Rimmer, 4 January 2007.

⁴¹¹ Aldous Huxley, *Jesting Pilate: The Diary of a Journey*, London, Chatto and Windus, 1936, pp184-185.

⁴¹² For a discussion on the *rijsttafel* in the Indies, see Susie Protschky, 'The Colonial Table: Food, Culture and Dutch Identity in Colonial Indonesia', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, vol.54, no.3, 2008, p350-352.

⁴¹³ Author's interview with Tony Lamb in Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia, on 5 December 2006.

⁴¹⁴ Burton, *The Raj at Table*, p27.

many as twenty.⁴¹⁵ Included among these were prawn crackers (*krupuk*), chopped egg, spirals of omelette, peanuts, cucumber in coconut milk, sliced onion, dried prawns, dried fish, ‘100-year old’ eggs (preserved duck eggs – a Chinese speciality, again showing how the British took to local foodways), green peppers, bananas, tomato, pineapple, papaya, mango, desiccated coconut, raisin and mango chutney.⁴¹⁶ The curry tiffin also always included plenty of rice. Sir Leonard Gammans and Lady Ann Gammans described having curry tiffin in the home of Benjamin Talallas: ‘great mounds of Chetty rice, parboiled and fried in Ghi’ were served with ‘curried fowl, and mutton and prawns and vegetables: sambals and garlic and chutney and pickles – a real feast’.⁴¹⁷

In his memoirs of his time in Malaya and Singapore, George L. Peet recounted a visit to a rubber estate carved from ‘virgin jungle’ in the Kluang district of Johore. On Sundays, planters from D.V. Byles’ estate and a neighbouring estate would gather in Byles’ bungalow for a curry tiffin. Peet wrote that there were four kinds of curry – pigeon, chicken, beef and hardboiled eggs, all prepared by his Indian cook.⁴¹⁸ Julian Davison remembers the Sunday curry tiffin in 1950s Singapore as ‘a grand feast’ with many guests.⁴¹⁹ Davison recalls feasting on chicken in coconut cream with potatoes, beef *rendang*, *assam* fish, a spicy fish Mornay, curried hardboiled eggs, ladies’ fingers, beansprouts with salted fish, coconut vegetable stew and long beans. Besides the relishes there would be little bowls of sliced bananas, chopped tomatoes, sliced cucumber, freshly grated coconut, peanuts, sultanas and anchovies fried in chilli and lime, various sambals and a selection of Anglo-Indian chutneys and pickles.⁴²⁰

Restaurants and clubs that Europeans frequented also served the Sunday curry tiffin. The Coliseum Cafe and Hotel in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, continued to serve this Sunday meal until 1991, decades after the British relinquished rule in Peninsular Malaysia. The Coliseum was the only European restaurant in Kuala Lumpur and the all-male cooks from the Chinese Hainanese clan made a special effort to lay out an impressive curry tiffin on Sunday. Served in imported English crockery, the tiffin

⁴¹⁵ Questionnaire response by Stuart.

⁴¹⁶ Questionnaire response by Stuart.

⁴¹⁷ Leonard Sir Gammans and Ann Lady Gammans’ manuscript, School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), London #174: Box 5 Vol 1, book 20, Sunday 15 April, 1934, pp5-7.

⁴¹⁸ George L. Peet, *Rickshaw Reporter*, Singapore, Eastern Universities Press Sdn Bhd, 1985, p172.

⁴¹⁹ Questionnaire response by Julian Davison on 15 February 2008.

⁴²⁰ Questionnaire response by Davison.

consisted of curry chicken with large chunks of chicken and potatoes and side-dishes of ladies' fingers, pineapple, cucumber, white rice and anchovies. Desserts included chocolate ice-cream and caramel custard.⁴²¹ K.P. Tabretts remembers well from British North Borneo, the Sunday tiffin curry, featuring curry chicken with side dishes of bacon, peanuts with anchovies, chopped banana, coconut, pineapple, cucumber, tomatoes and raisins. Again Tabretts compares the curry tiffin to the rijsttafel and mentions beer as the standard drink for this meal.⁴²² Even on the colonial's day of rest in Malaya and Singapore, curry featured prominently on the longest meal of the week, the Sunday curry tiffin.

The dish curry had ambiguous origins, its definition was contested, the ingredients to be used were debated and there was rivalry over which colony or region made the best curry. In culinary and historical terms, curry certainly stands as a dish that fits the term 'food appropriation'. In the colonial context the appropriation of curry has come about through the cooperation and negotiation between the colonizer and colonized. This chapter contends that curry was appropriated by British colonizers with respect and sympathy. It was particularly in curry that they ingested local ingredients, depended on the local cooks who prepared the dish and promoted and gave it due respect by calling the dish their own. This chapter has demonstrated that the widespread consumption of curry challenges the argument made by some recent scholars that British colonizers consumed different foods to the colonized in order to differentiate themselves from the ruled. In fact, eating curry on a daily basis (in combination with both local and European dishes) by many colonizers demonstrates the opposite. This is not to say that the British deliberately set out to appropriate curry as part of the colonial project. There were practical reasons why curry became a staple food among the British in the colonies as the spices in a curry helped to preserve meat that tended to putrefy in the tropical heat within twelve hours.⁴²³ This practice went back to the East India Company days, when the British lived as nabobs, adopting Indian dress and local customs and eating local foods. The eating of curry was part and parcel of nabob culture and survived the demise of the East India Company. This observation supports recent scholarship that suggests that, in the colonial period, the British had not entirely distanced themselves from Indian society. Indeed, to be Anglo-Indian meant to eat curry as part of one's diet.

⁴²¹ Author's interview with Janet Loi, manager of The Coliseum Café and Hotel, Kuala Lumpur, 23 November 2006.

⁴²² Author's interview with K.P. Tabrett, Kota Kinabalu, 4 December 2006.

⁴²³ Day, *Curries of India*, p8.

While memsahibs took pride in their particular curry that appeared on her dining table, it was the cooks and other servants who bought the ingredients and prepared the dish and domestic servants will be the subject of discussion in the next chapter.

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Chapter Three

Servants of Empire: The Role and Representation of Domestic Servants in the Colonial Household

*'A lady was inveighing to a friend against the whole race of Indian cooks as dirty, disorderly, and dishonest. She had managed to secure the services of a Chinese cook, and was much pleased with the contrast. Her friend did not altogether agree with her, and was sceptical about the immaculate Chinaman. "Put it to the test," said the lady; "just let us pay a visit to your kitchen, and then come and see mine." So they went together. What need to describe the Bobberjee-Khana? They glanced round, and hurried out, for it was too horrible to be endured long. When they went to the Chinaman's kitchen, the contrast was indeed striking. The pots and pans shone like silver; the table was positively sweet; everything was in its proper place, and Chang himself, sitting on his box, was washing his feet in the soup tureen!'*⁴²⁴

Edward Hamilton Aitken's account of life in India in the late nineteenth century is a typical representation by colonizers of domestic servants, Indian, in particular, in the British colonies as being filthy, dishonest, undisciplined and unintelligent. Colonizers' narratives on domestic servants frequently disparaged their characters and called into question their honesty, loyalty and hygiene; tales of inept and unintelligent behaviour were legendary. And yet for all their questionable standards of hygiene and supposedly low level intelligence the service provided by the diverse range of servants, ranging from cook, butler, waiter, sweeper, dog boy, water carrier, laundry washer and so on, held together the imperial household. In his study of European ruling elites and their patterns of food consumption, Marc Jason Gilbert observes 'the bitter racist diatribes directed against and also heartfelt tributes offered in recognition of the performance of the colonial kitchen staff. Nowhere else can one find the complexities of the relationship between Prospero and Caliban than in the kitchen'.⁴²⁵ This chapter will analyse the contradiction between widely held colonial stereotypes that cast servants as dirty and untrustworthy and the fact that they were entrusted with food preparation, a service that is intimate, vital and essential to health and wellbeing.

The study of work performed by domestic servants for the colonists is an area that has

⁴²⁴ Edward Hamilton Aitken, *Behind the Bungalow*, London, W. Thacker & Co., 1907, p52.

⁴²⁵ Marc Jason Gilbert, 'Eating Colonialism,' p14, a paper presented at the Center for South Asian Studies, the University of Hawaii, Manoa, October 30, 2006, cited with permission of the author.

long been neglected. This chapter shows that domestic chores, in food purchasing, preparation and serving were relegated to the local people. The memsahib as head of the household held a supervisory role, to impose the rituals and tasks that defined the colonial home as a bastion of white imperialism. It can be argued in contrast that it was the servants' local knowledge that procured food. Most kitchens were fashioned according to the requirements of the servants and the cooks did all the cooking, usually preparing local dishes. I will employ cookbooks and household manuals of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries from both Britain and the three colonies to investigate the representation of the memsahib-servant relationship. These publications not only typecast native servants as unworthy but attempted to teach colonizers how not to behave in ways that can be seen as inappropriate.

The physical nurturing of colonizers by the colonized underpins the most personal and intimate of colonial relations. European colonial society deployed specific female rituals to mark boundaries between the rulers and the ruled. Fae Dussart, in her study on servant/employer relationship in nineteenth-century England and India, argues that this relationship in colonial India 'was essential to the development of colonial domesticity'.⁴²⁶ Dussart stresses that the management of the colonial home was pivotal to the imperial civilizing project. The domestic sphere in colonial India, Dussart argues, was where memsahibs and servants together worked towards 'displaying the values of British civilization to servants and visitors, insisting on cleanliness, order and respect for the ruling race and/or class'.⁴²⁷ The numbers of Britons in the colonies increased after 1918 due to several reasons: the Colonial Office had started encouraging its officers in the colonies to marry, and improvements in tropical medicine, refrigeration and transport all contributed to a more comfortable lifestyle in the colonies.⁴²⁸ The memsahib in the colonial home became an omnipresent arbiter of manners. There was an understanding that the security of the white middle-class home derived from it being an oasis of civilized behaviour amidst alien surroundings and barbaric people. However, the memsahib could not single-handedly transform the colonial home into the symbol of British prestige without her domestic servants.

Just as the army of domestic servants were responsible for the smooth running of the

⁴²⁶ Fae C. Dussart, *The Servant/Employer Relationship in 19th-Century England and India*, London, University College London, 2005, p30.

⁴²⁷ Dussart, *The Servant/Employer Relationship*, p84.

⁴²⁸ Barbara Bush, 'Gender and Empire: The Twentieth Century', in Philippa Levine (ed.), *Gender and Empire*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004.

upper class home in the Victorian era, the native servants were largely accountable for the purchasing, preparation and cooking of food as well as the cleaning and maintaining of the colonial household. In Britain, the kitchen was seen as the province of the servants and not the mistress.⁴²⁹ This ideal was replicated in the colonies. As early as 1795, cookery books were written for servants working for the upper classes. An illustration in a household manual showed a mistress presenting her servant with a cookery book, with the caption, ‘A Lady presenting her Servant with the *Universal Family Cook* who diffident of her own knowledge has recourse to that Work for Information’.⁴³⁰ Although colonial cookbooks were written principally for the colonial housewife there were also a handful published with translation into local languages within the books for the use of local servants.⁴³¹ Gilly Lehmann’s work on the British housewife reinforces ‘the image of the lady of leisure, a consumer of others’ services’.⁴³² The employment and management of servants in the Victorian middle classes was not only about making home-life comfortable but it also meant ‘creating the kind of disciplined, deferential workforce which Britain needed if it was to maintain its position as the world’s premier nation’.⁴³³ In the colonial context, this was extended to ideas of promoting the white household as a prestigious enclave, that domestic menial work was the domain of the colonized while the memsahib ruled from within her domestic space.

The memsahib-servant relationship was fraught with tension – on the one hand the memsahib had to create a ‘Britain in the home’,⁴³⁴ and a model of bourgeois white domesticity⁴³⁵ – and on the other all this could only be achieved through the efforts of her servants who were frequently denigrated as useless, filthy and dishonest. R.C.H. McKie summed up how utterly dependent the European was on domestic service in Malaya and Singapore when he wrote,

‘the European has made himself so completely dependent on Asiatic service if all the boys in Malaya went on strike to-morrow he would be helpless ... No food would be cooked, no clothes washed, beds made, or floors cleaned, and most

⁴²⁹ Gilly Lehmann, *The British Housewife: Cookery Books, Cooking and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, Devon, Prospect Books, 2003, p132.

⁴³⁰ Lehmann, *The British Housewife*, p149.

⁴³¹ See Friend-in-Need Women’s Workshop, *A Friend in Need English-Tamil Cookery Book*, Madras, Friend-in-Need Women’s Workshop, 1950; Friend-in-Need Women’s Workshop, *Friend-in-Need Women, Hindustani Cookery Book*, Madras, 1939.

⁴³² Lehmann, *The British Housewife*, p132.

⁴³³ Kathryn Hughes, *The Short Life and Long Times of Mrs. Beeton*, London, Fourth Estate, 2005, p249.

⁴³⁴ Bush, ‘Gender and Empire: The Twentieth Century’, p91.

⁴³⁵ See Mary A. Procida, *Married to the Empire: Gender, Politics and Imperialism in India, 1883-1947* Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2002, pp50-51 and 57-59.

catastrophic, there would be no drinks served. ... It is a truism in Singapore that the European, however insignificant in education and background, does only those things for himself, like bathing, dressing, eating,⁴³⁶

'The servant problem'

Servants are inextricably linked to the preparation of food in the colonial kitchen. As Procida points out, 'the crucial mechanisms for running both home and empire were entrusted to Indians, with the British relegated to the role of symbolic, if authoritative, presence'.⁴³⁷ She goes on to say that in India, the burden was borne by Indian domestic servants and not Anglo-Indian wives. Indeed, this arrangement of presenting a symbolic, supervisory role over servants by Anglo-Indian wives was repeated in the colonies of Malaya and Singapore.

It is indisputable that the good relationship between servants and mistress was conducive to successful home management and the maintenance of health and well-being for the colonizers. Janice , in her study on memsahibs in colonial Malaya claims that servants were usually considered essential as, if a European woman were to do her own housework she would quickly become 'physically exhausted and dripping with sweat'.⁴³⁸ Moreover, due to custom and circumstances (she cites the use of wood fires and kerosene-tin stoves), mems were dependent on their servants' assistance for cooking and budgeting.⁴³⁹

Beverley Gartrell's reconnaissance paper on colonial wives was based on experiences in Uganda but deals with generic cultural patterns of colonial structures and therefore could be applicable to other colonies. Gartrell states that wives were not necessary for the physical care and feeding of officials as, after all, these tasks could be carried out by well-trained native servants. Instead, she argues that wives functioned as representatives of European culture and its moral standards.⁴⁴⁰ While most British wives in the colonies enjoyed the 'leisured life with many servants', it was becoming increasingly rare for households to have several domestic servants in Britain. Gartrell's own personal experience as a wife in Uganda for six years exposed her to the 'never-ending topic of

⁴³⁶ R.C.H. McKie, *This Was Singapore*, Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1942, pp19-20.

⁴³⁷ Procida, *Married to the Empire*, p82.

⁴³⁸ Janice Brownfoot, 'Memsahibs in Colonial Malaya: A Study of European Wives in a British Colony and Protectorate, 1900-1940', in Hilary Callan & Shirley Ardener (eds), *The Incorporated Wife*, London, Croom Helm, 1984, p196.

⁴³⁹ Brownfoot, 'Memsahibs in Colonial Malaya', p196.

⁴⁴⁰ Beverley Gartrell, 'Colonial Wives: Villains or Victims?', in Hilary Callan & Shirley Ardener (eds), *The Incorporated Wife*, London, Croom Helm, 1984, pp166-169.

conversation in the tropics': the 'servant problem'. She contends that 'some women needed inefficient service, and acted to ensure it, thus filling their time with the necessity of close supervision'.⁴⁴¹ Similarly, Charles van Onselen, in his study on domestic service in the Witwatersrand in South Africa, mentions that masters and mistresses in the colonies 'spent an endless amount of time talking about their servants' and many of these discussions were communicated to the press concerning the 'servant problem'.⁴⁴² However, the 'servant problem' was more than middle-class complaints about lower-class servants. In the second half of the nineteenth century the British middle-classes were faced with bourgeois anxieties as they took domestic servants from the working classes.⁴⁴³ Kathryn Hughes reasons that, as the female servants were trained in the ways and customs of the middle classes and adopted these fine points of behaviour themselves, they would marry well and thus 'spreading the civilizing mission of the middle classes even further down the social scale'.⁴⁴⁴ The latter were seen as expanding rapidly in numbers while middle-class families became smaller. In the colonies there were anxieties regarding servants too, but for different reasons, mainly about the disease-ridden servants and their dishonesty.

Servants in colonial cookbooks and household manuals

Nineteenth and early twentieth century cookbooks, household management manuals and newspaper and magazine articles for the colonies bristle with instructions on how to run a household, manage servants and prepare and serve food. These publications can be seen as instruments for perpetuating the values and representations of Empire. The number of cookery and household guides gained momentum between the 1880s and 1920s aimed at the second generation of middle-class British women who resided in India after the uprising of 1857.⁴⁴⁵ As Alison Blunt sees it, it was a time of 'the consolidation of imperial domesticity' and 'British confidence in imperial rule and its reproduction on a household scale'.⁴⁴⁶

Written by both men and women, these guides emphasised that it was the duty of British women to maintain imperial domestic relations. Among the recipes and

⁴⁴¹ Gartrell, 'Colonial Wives: Villains or Victims?' p176.

⁴⁴² Charles Van Onselen, *Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand 1886-1914*, New York, Longman, 1982, pp39-40.

⁴⁴³ Hughes, *The Short Life and Long Times of Mrs. Beeton*, p299.

⁴⁴⁴ Hughes, *The Short Life and Long Times of Mrs. Beeton*, pp299-300.

⁴⁴⁵ Alison Blunt, 'Imperial Geographies of Home: British Domesticity in India, 1886-1925', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, vol.24, no.4, 1999, p422.

⁴⁴⁶ Blunt, 'Imperial Geographies of Home', p422.

household hints were deliberate attempts at positioning native servants as ‘Other’ through race and class. The authors took it upon themselves to educate colonial householders on the unsavoury character of the native person and suggest appropriate behaviour to foil their dishonesty and unhygienic habits. Through the medium of these manuals, appropriate behaviour was also prescribed to memsahibs to uphold the highest standards. ‘An Anglo-Indian’ in his or her cookery book aimed at ‘young house-keepers’ in India declared that the mistress of her household would be admired by her servants if she could direct her home to run smoothly.⁴⁴⁷ The author suggested the mistress should have ‘the ability to govern and rule as well as train her domestics to greater perfection, by teaching them more improved methods’.⁴⁴⁸ Thus, readers of these publications were expected to aspire to the ideals published. As Steel and Gardiner stated, ‘the very possession of the book may be held to presuppose some desire on the part of the possessor to emulate the wife who does her husband good, and not evil, all the days of her life, by looking well to the ways of her household’.⁴⁴⁹ If messages were repeated often enough they became accepted as truth. Invariably the general household books of the nineteenth century included recipes.⁴⁵⁰ Prescriptive in nature, the household manuals recommended treating native servants as childlike, unworthy and needing discipline. Ostensibly strict moral and social values were replicated from Victorian Britain and elaborate shows of material wealth and entertainment were on display.⁴⁵¹ The notion of sisterhood was also promoted in these manuals, of helping the newly arrived or young memsahibs to manage servants in the colonies. Mrs John Gilpin wrote her ‘little manual’ to help others as she had ‘suffered myself from being planted in this country with no knowledge of the language or the customs, and recalling vividly how utterly forlorn I felt’.⁴⁵² A ‘press notice’ advertising the publication of a new manual stated that the ‘memsahib who has just attained wedded bliss, and realises that after the honeymoon is over mundane matters and the cook have to be faced, has half the battle won if she is armed with a copy of Constance Eve Gordon’s manual.’⁴⁵³ To a large extent, British social behaviour in the colonies was modelled on the fashion and

⁴⁴⁷ An Anglo-Indian, *Indian Cookery: ‘Local’ for Young House-Keepers*, Bombay, Imperial Press, 1883, Preface.

⁴⁴⁸ Anglo-Indian, *Indian Cookery: ‘Local’ for Young House-Keepers*, Preface.

⁴⁴⁹ F.A. Steel and G. Gardiner, *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook*, London, William Heinemann, 1898, ppix-x.

⁴⁵⁰ Margaret Beetham, *Of Recipe Books and Reading in the Nineteenth Century: Mrs Beeton and Her Cultural Consequences*, Hants, Ashgate, 2003.

⁴⁵¹ John Burnett, *Plenty and Want: A Social History of Diet in England from 1815 to the Present Day* London, Scolar Press, 1979, pp76-85.

⁴⁵² (Mrs) John Gilpin, *Memsahib’s Guide to Cookery in India*, Bombay, A.J. Combridge & Co., 1914, p1.

⁴⁵³ Constance E. Gordon, *Anglo-Indian Cuisine and Domestic Economy*, Calcutta and Simla, Thacker, Spink & Co., 1913, ‘press notice’ in manual.

fads of Britain. The cookbooks and household manuals for the colonies were themselves styled after the cookbooks and household handbooks of Britain, the most well-known of which is Isabella Beeton's.⁴⁵⁴

The supervisory nature of housekeeping in the colonies, like other aspects of everyday routines, had its origins from Britain. In Victorian Britain, housekeeping in affluent households involved the mistress 'giving instructions, perhaps unlocking store cupboards and measuring out the provisions of the day, ordering the meals'.⁴⁵⁵ As Alison Light puts it, for the British mistress in the metropole 'devising menus, ordering food, checking the state of the linen and gently breathing down the necks of her servants to make sure they were doing their jobs properly were all part of her supervisory role'.⁴⁵⁶ Steel and Gardiner advised the memsahib three things: 'smooth working, quick ordering and subsequent peace and leisure to the mistress'.⁴⁵⁷ While they gave detailed instructions on every aspect of running a household in India, it is evident that the memsahib's role was largely supervisory. For example, 'half-an-hour after breakfast should be sufficient for the whole arrangements for the day'.⁴⁵⁸ In this half hour the housekeeper should check the cook's ingredients for the day, order luncheon and dinner, and check the pantry, scullery and kitchen for cleanliness. In 1898 Agatha Florence James wrote,

'The usual daily round of duty for ladies who have housekeeping cares on their shoulders, is much the same in India as in England and elsewhere. The *khansamah* has to be interviewed after the second breakfast (the first meal, a light one, being taken before going for the early morning ride or drive), his bill checked off and paid, and his orders given. Then follows the visit to the store cupboards, known as "godowns" (warehouses), which are generally in the verandah, and the articles required by cook, bearer, *khitmutgar* (a servant who waits at table) and the *syces* (grooms, horse-keepers or chauffeurs) given out. It is necessary to keep all groceries, grain [corn] for the horses, goats and cows, under lock and key, and give them out daily as needed, otherwise they will disappear with alarming rapidity.'⁴⁵⁹

Ordering meals could be made even less onerous according to a publication whose object was 'not only to assist Native Cooks in preparing good dishes, but to save housekeepers the trouble of describing the *modus operandi*. The headings are in English, so a

⁴⁵⁴ Isabella Beeton, *Beeton's Book of Household Management*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1861.

⁴⁵⁵ Jenni Calder, *The Victorian Home*, London, B.T.Batford Ltd, 1977, p20.

⁴⁵⁶ Alison Light, *Mrs Woolf and the Servants*, London, Penguin Books, 2008, p25.

⁴⁵⁷ Steel and Gardiner, *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook*, pp5-8.

⁴⁵⁸ Steel and Gardiner, *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook*, p5.

⁴⁵⁹ Agatha Florence James, 'Indian Household Management', in *The Lady at Home and Abroad*, London, Abbott, Jones & Co. Ltd, 1898, pp379-380.

lady ordering a dinner has simply to mention the names of the various dishes and the Cook reads for himself in Tamil what is required'.⁴⁶⁰ The manual lists soups, main dishes and desserts for 'Family Dinners for a Month'.⁴⁶¹ Another cookbook, written by an 'Anonymous' Anglo-Indian, which provided a range of European and Asian recipes for 'Indian tables'; was also published in Urdu.⁴⁶² It can be deduced here that time saved from speaking to servants about recipes or meals for the day could be spent on other activities.

Steel and Gardiner also advised, 'never do work which an ordinarily good servant ought to be able to do. If the one you have will not or cannot do it, get another who can'.⁴⁶³ They further stated that 'we do not wish to advocate an unholy haughtiness; but an Indian household can no more be governed peacefully, without dignity and prestige, than an Indian Empire'.⁴⁶⁴ Similarly, J.K. Stanford wrote that

'no lady ever demeaned herself to visit the bazaar and buy her own food. She left that entirely to her native cook, for to enter and bargain in the meat or fish stall, quite apart from the smell, was "bad for prestige". Nor did they ever enter their back premises, the "cookhouses" in which their viands were prepared. ... people were satisfied if the cook produced, unwatched, edible food on a tiny charcoal fire and with a minimum of fuss. He could be relied on to cater, with an almost Biblical magic, for a host of unexpected guests at short notice.'⁴⁶⁵

The rationale for employing large numbers of servants was for ethnic and caste considerations and labour costs. One memsahib, Majorie Cashmore, justified employing several servants saying, 'in India of course the memsahib never did anything that the servants did, that really they would look down on you, if you attempted to dust or just sweep that was just too much'.⁴⁶⁶ War correspondent for *The Times* of London, William Howard Russell, in his diary of 1858 to 1859 observed that while in Simla he and 'Alison' had six servants in attendance at dinner and there were in total thirty servants for their household of two.⁴⁶⁷ In a chapter written specifically as 'Advice to the cook', Steel and Gardiner pointed out that,

⁴⁶⁰ *What to Tell the Cook; or the Native Cook's Assistant, Being a Choice Collection of Receipts for Indian Cookery, Pastry, Etc. Etc.*, Madras, Higginbothams Ltd., 1910, Publisher's note.

⁴⁶¹ *What to Tell the Cook*, Publisher's note.

⁴⁶² Anonymous, *Dainty Dishes for Indian Tables*, Calcutta, W. Newman & Co., 1879.

⁴⁶³ Steel and Gardiner, *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook*, pp5-6.

⁴⁶⁴ Steel and Gardiner, *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook*, p9.

⁴⁶⁵ J.K. Stanford, *Ladies in the Sun: The Mem sahib's India, 1790-1860*; London, The Gallery Press, 1962, p69.

⁴⁶⁶ Majorie Cashmore, (Wife of Missionary). Thomas Herbert Cashmore (Bishop), *The Raj*, 16 Oct 1973 1015-1245 – H58X: SOAS: OA1/14/1-2, 1919-1933.

⁴⁶⁷ William Howard Russell, *My Diary in India: In the Year 1858-9*, London, Routledge, Warne, and Routledge, 1860, p101.

‘Now as half the illness in the world comes from the stomach, for which it is your business to provide it, it stands to reason that a cook ought to do his best to do everything in the best possible way. And it lends to the comfort of the whole house; for if the dinner is badly cooked, your mistress will be angry, the master will have an indigestion, and be cross; everything will go wrong, and whose fault will it be? Yours.’⁴⁶⁸

While the authors of the household manuals were not reticent in advertising the faults and evils of native servants they were coy about punitive actions. There are references to both physical and verbal abuse as well as withholding salaries due to servants. R. Riddell stated that often servants left their employment in the colonial household suddenly as ‘the slightest fault of a native servant being often visited with blows and such abuse as no respectable man will bear, very often too for no other fault than that of not understanding what the master has said’.⁴⁶⁹ Colesworthy Grant also alluded to unfair treatment of servants when he described them as ‘patient, forbearing, generally speaking grave and quiet in their demeanour’ and employers could well gain their ‘respect, attention, and even attachment’, provided they were not subject to ‘personal violence, – irregular payment of wages’.⁴⁷⁰ Steel and Gardiner advised monetary ‘rewards and punishment’ and administering castor oil as punishment ‘for inability to learn or to remember’.⁴⁷¹ They claimed that an easy method was ‘to engage servants at the lowest rate and declare extra money as *buksheesh*, (payment as a tip or bribe conditional on good service) – for instance, a *khitmutgar* (a servant who waits at table) is engaged permanently on Rs.9 a month, but the additional rupee which makes the wage up to that usually demanded by good servants is a fluctuating assessment!’⁴⁷² The authors claim that fines could be levied on forgetfulness, lying and so on.⁴⁷³ Fining servants was another way of punishing them for ‘bad’ conduct – C. Lang in her manual on hints on Indian housekeeping, advised that ‘the only way of punishing them is to fine them. Also it is a good plan to withhold one rupee of the month’s wages and restore it at the end of the month, if conduct has improved’.⁴⁷⁴

Unlike India, where labour was cheap, servants were in limited supply in British North

⁴⁶⁸ Steel and Gardiner, *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook*, p227.

⁴⁶⁹ R. Riddell, *Indian Domestic Economy and Receipt Book*, Bombay, Gentleman’s Gazette, Press, 1849, p2.

⁴⁷⁰ Colesworthy Grant, *Anglo-Indian Domestic Life. A Letter from an Artist in India to His Mother in England*, Calcutta, Thacker, Spink & Co., 1862, p63.

⁴⁷¹ Steel and Gardiner, *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook*, p4.

⁴⁷² Steel and Gardiner, *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook*, p3.

⁴⁷³ Steel and Gardiner, *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook*, p3.

⁴⁷⁴ (Mrs) C. Lang, ‘Chota Mem’, *the English Bride in India: Being Hints on Indian Housekeeping*, Madras, Higginbotham & Co., 1909, p55.

Borneo. Agnes Keith claimed that ‘native servants will only work for the masters they are fond of, and if displeased with their employees they “resign” and return to their villages to live on their relatives’.⁴⁷⁵ The average colonial household in this colony employed a cook, one or two ‘boys’, a water carrier, a gardener and a *syce*, a relatively smaller number compared to the numerous servants in the employ of each family in India.⁴⁷⁶ The British were either pragmatic, sensitive to the indigenous culture or simply being realistic. Owen Rutter, who worked in North Borneo as a government officer and in later years as a planter, classified domestic servants according to racial and ethnic groups. He noted that the majority of the cooks and houseboys were Chinese Hainanese, from the island of Hainan. The best cooks in domestic service and restaurants were, in Rutter’s view, Hainanese men. Hainanese authorities forbade the emigration of their women until 1924.⁴⁷⁷ In Rutter’s opinion, ‘the Hylams [Hainanese] make excellent servants; they are clean, hardworking and (within the limits of an Oriental) honest. Most of them are what is known as “good plain cooks”’.⁴⁷⁸ Nevertheless, he also wrote that at first the ways of native servants may appall the memsahib, notably, ‘the morning skirmish with the Chinese cook’⁴⁷⁹ (the cook’s wages ranged from £2 10s to £3 15sh a month) and added that ‘a Chinese cannot make a curry as an Indian or Malay but he comes a very good third’.⁴⁸⁰ The Hainanese houseboy earned between £2 to £3 a month, and according to Rutter,

‘is usually clean and well mannered, and makes a good servant, particularly when he has the vigilant eye of a *Mem* upon him, but few Chinese can stand jungle work, and the outstation man as a rule keeps native boys who soon learn a little cooking, sufficient for their lord’s needs when he is on tour. If caught young, both Dusuns and Muruts make good house-boys; they are seldom as clean as Chinese but they are far more resourceful, and are often invaluable when travelling, the real test of a native servant’.⁴⁸¹

‘Native’ in British North Borneo was a respected term; native chiefs were the highest authority among the indigenous people. A.C. Brackman notes that ‘Borneo is one of the few places in the nonwhite world where the word “native” is honourable and is used in its original meaning and not as a reflection of the white man’s burden; indeed, the

⁴⁷⁵ Agnes Keith, *Land Below the Wind*, Boston, Little, Brown and Company, 1939, p34.

⁴⁷⁶ Owen Rutter, *British North Borneo: An Account of Its History, Resources and Native Tribes*, London, Constable & Company, 1922, p379.

⁴⁷⁷ Kenneth Gaw, *Superior Servants: The Legendary Cantonese Amahs of the Far East*, Singapore, Oxford University Press, 1991, p70.

⁴⁷⁸ Rutter, *British North Borneo: An Account of Its History*, p379.

⁴⁷⁹ Rutter, *British North Borneo: An Account of Its History*, p377.

⁴⁸⁰ Rutter, *British North Borneo: An Account of Its History*, p380.

⁴⁸¹ Rutter, *British North Borneo: An Account of Its History*, p380.

Natives of Borneo are not only proud of the term, but go to the other extreme and consider such words as aboriginal and indigenous insulting'.⁴⁸²

The Chinese were also employed as water carriers, wood choppers, sweepers, dish washers, and 'performers of any odd jobs outside the sphere of the "boy"'.⁴⁸³ In the hierarchy of the colonial household domestic service the water carrier stood at the lower end of the pecking order. He was at the beck and call of the other servants and blamed for any mishaps. To improve his prospects he could learn to cook in the kitchen and graduate to being a 'good plain' cook, earning £3, instead of £2 per month.

Further, Rutter claims that European children usually learnt Malay from their Javanese *babu* (nanny) or Chinese amah before they could speak English.⁴⁸⁴ The Chinese amahs were generally mature women as younger women tended to have love affairs with other staff members and 'are liable to upset the calm of an otherwise unruffled *ménage*'.⁴⁸⁵ Besides looking after the children, the *babu* or amah sewed, washed and ironed and were paid about £4 per month.⁴⁸⁶ The 'black and white amahs' (after their traditional attire of black trousers and white blouse) of Malaya, Singapore and the Borneo states were famed for their professionalism as cooks and child carers. These women travelled to Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaya and Borneo from Guangzhou and were well known for their independence.⁴⁸⁷ Julian Davison who, as a child, was looked after by a black and white amah, claims that these women servants can be compared to the renowned class in domestic service in Britain, the English butler.⁴⁸⁸ They arrived from China to the Straits Settlements and Malay states from the 1930s and were popular among the British and other European families.⁴⁸⁹

As in other European colonies, colonizers feared that their children being brought up 'in the East' were at risk of picking up customs and faults of the colonized people and thus becoming lesser Europeans. R.J.H. Sidney, a naval officer, wrote that in Malaya

⁴⁸² A.C. Brackman, *Southeast Asia's Second Front: The Power Struggle in the Malay Archipelago*, Pall Mall Press, London, 1966, p45. See also Margaret Clark Roff, *The Politics of Belonging*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1974, p77.

⁴⁸³ Rutter, *British North Borneo: An Account of Its History*, p380.

⁴⁸⁴ Rutter, *British North Borneo: An Account of Its History*, p378.

⁴⁸⁵ Rutter, *British North Borneo: An Account of Its History*, pp378-379.

⁴⁸⁶ Rutter, *British North Borneo: An Account of Its History*, pp378-379.

⁴⁸⁷ Julian Davison, *One for the Road and Other Stories*, Singapore, Topographica, 2001, p12.

⁴⁸⁸ Davison, *One for the Road*, p11.

⁴⁸⁹ Keat Gin Ooi, 'The Black and White Amahs of Malaya', *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol.65, no.Part 2, No. 263, 1992, p69. See also Norman Edwards, *The Singapore House and Residential Life: 1819-1939*, Singapore, Oxford University Press, 1990, pp181-182.

‘European children are apt to get the idea, partly because the servants will go out of their way to please them, that they really are little lords’.⁴⁹⁰ The gardeners and syces were paid £2 a month as well and were usually Javanese but the Bajau (an indigenous group of Sabah) ‘if carefully trained, looks after ponies well’.⁴⁹¹ Another servant category peculiar to Borneo was the ‘jungle boy’, whom described as

‘an ever-continuing miracle’, he was the ‘composite cook, butler and valet who attends on the peripatetic European in his trips through the wild lands of the East. He is always a native, because practically no Chinese have a jungle “sense,” though on one long trip, when there were four Europeans, we did have a Chinese cook.’⁴⁹²

The government official travelled frequently to visit outlying districts on administrative matters as well as on reconnaissance tours for opening up agricultural land. The role of the resident and district officer involved spending two-thirds of his time travelling through his ‘kingdom’. The jungle boy’s rural upbringing with his knowledge of cattle and ponies, ability to speak the native dialects and his simple diet made him an asset to the European traveller.⁴⁹³ The jungle boy’s tasks were arduous on a jungle trip, rising at four in the morning to start the fire over a tripod of stones and prepare breakfast. By five-thirty he had served breakfast to his employer and others, stripped and packed the bed, clothing and kitchen equipment and was ready for the day’s march. At about two the party would have reached camp and he had to serve tea immediately to the European and then to set up the bed and lay out clean clothing for him. The day’s clothes had to be washed and dinner had to be prepared. Outside his jungle duties and back ‘home’ he returned to his role as ‘houseboy’ but with support from the rest of the domestic staff.⁴⁹⁴

Native affairs and sleeping dictionaries

From the earliest years of British settlement in British North Borneo, European men outnumbered European women. When Ada Pryer arrived in the 1880s, there was only one other Englishwoman.⁴⁹⁵ In the 1891 census there were 122 British males and 38 British females; other European males totalled 70 while the number of females was 15. Accounts of relationships between British men and local women in Malaysia and Singapore are few in history books, a notable exception being John Butcher’s study on

⁴⁹⁰ R.J.H. Sidney, *Malay Land ‘Tanah Malayu’: Some Phases of Life in Modern British Malaya*, London, Cecil Palmer, 1926, p89.

⁴⁹¹ Rutter, *British North Borneo: An Account of Its History*, p380.

⁴⁹² Charles Bruce, *Twenty Years in Borneo*, London, Cassell and Company Ltd, 1924, p129.

⁴⁹³ Bruce, *Twenty Years in Borneo*, p129.

⁴⁹⁴ Bruce, *Twenty Years in Borneo*, p130-131.

⁴⁹⁵ Ada Pryer, *A Decade in Borneo* London, Leicester University Press, 2001, first published in 1893.

the social history of the British in Malaya.⁴⁹⁶ However, there are several fictionalised works, the most well-known ones by Somerset Maugham.⁴⁹⁷ It was not an uncommon practice for the European man to have a local woman living with him, the man could either be single or married with his European wife in Europe. Many men chose to live in Europe for part of, or the duration of their children's education there. So standard was this arrangement in North Borneo the local people had a term, *nyai*, for the local women who became mistresses of white men. The term *nyai* originated in Indonesia to describe Indonesian women who became concubines of Dutch colonials.⁴⁹⁸ In North Borneo these liaisons frequently started off with the local women being employed as servants in the European household. As the relationship became more than master/servant, the mutually accepted arrangement was made 'official' by the European paying a *sogit* (compensation) of one buffalo to her village to remove the shame. The *nyai* continued to work as a servant in the household but was not paid as a servant. Officially and publicly she still assumed the role of a servant, particularly at official functions.⁴⁹⁹ She was not allowed to meet guests as the official partner of the host. Children born of these relationships were educated in the English language mission schools; many of the daughters were brought up in the Catholic convents.⁵⁰⁰ R.C.H. McKie noted that Eurasians, people of mixed parentage were called *stengahs*, 'a Malay word which means half and is also used to name a small or half whisky'.⁵⁰¹ Keith, wife of a British civil servant in North Borneo who lived with her husband there for many years, observed,

'private interracial relations were more often determined in bed than in court in a back-door relationship which so long as it stayed at the back door was accepted by both races. This relationship, although supposedly initiated by the white man, was encouraged and cultivated by brown women.'⁵⁰²

In 1909 a sexual directive, to members of the Colonial Service, known as the Crewe Circular (1909), discouraged the taking of concubines, warning of severe penalties for transgressions.⁵⁰³ However, the circular banning interracial relationships was not sent

⁴⁹⁶ John G. Butcher, *The British in Malaya, 1880-1941: The Social History of a European Community in Colonial South-East Asia*, Kuala Lumpur, Oxford University Press, 1979.

⁴⁹⁷ Two of these titles are *The Force of Circumstance* and *The Letter*. *The Letter* was based on a shooting death in 1911 in Kuala Lumpur.

⁴⁹⁸ See Elsbeth Locher-Scholten, *Women and the Colonial State: Essays on Gender and Modernity in the Netherlands Indies, 1900-1942*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2000, p121.

⁴⁹⁹ Leong, *Sabah: The First 100 Years*, pp97-98.

⁵⁰⁰ Leong, *Sabah: The First 100 Years*, p98.

⁵⁰¹ McKie, *This Was Singapore*, p64.

⁵⁰² Agnes Keith, *White Man Returns*, Boston, Little, Brown & Co., 1951, p77.

⁵⁰³ Ronald Hyam, 'Concubinage and the Colonial Service: the Crewe Circular (1909)' *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, vol.XIV, 1986, pp170-186.

to North Borneo and Sarawak until the 1950s.⁵⁰⁴ Although these two states were under British control they only became formal colonies in 1946. As in Indonesia, local women in North Borneo who became mistresses of white men were derogatorily known as sleeping dictionaries or ‘bedbooks’ – to denote the woman’s provision of free tuition of the language and customs of local community to her European partner.⁵⁰⁵ On some agricultural estates, a local woman was allocated to a newly-arrived planter whether he was agreeable to the arrangement or not.⁵⁰⁶ The handing down of a mistress or concubine, like a commodity, was similar to the passing down of a cook to a newly-arrived family. Norman Edwards’ study of the design of the house and British colonial life in Singapore between 1819 to 1939, states,

‘European families often had to settle for the cook who had been passed on to them by their predecessors or choose from amongst those who happened to be available. For civil servants, there was often no choice at all; the cook came with the house.’⁵⁰⁷

Thus, a concubine, a cook or other servants were part and parcel of the colonial household inventory and could be conveniently handed over. Perhaps European employers believed the servant now trained in the ways of the European household, particularly in areas of hygiene, should be employed with another European family.

Spry called on memsahibs to have the kitchen ‘well under her surveillance, and though her too frequent presence in the kitchen is unnecessary, yet she should make a point of visiting it periodically to see that it is kept clean and orderly’.⁵⁰⁸ Expressing similar sentiments eleven years earlier, ‘An Anglo-Indian’, stated,

‘Servants are necessary to comfort everywhere, but in India they are a necessity, a cook especially in the heat of the climate, and the position of the kitchen, make it impossible for a housewife to visit it often. But it requires to be visited at short intervals, just to see that the place is swept and clean, the table and cooking utensils well scoured, and the water chatties and their contents clean and wholesome.’⁵⁰⁹

The constant advice on the need to keep the dirt and slovenliness of the servants at bay emphasised that British wives should not be passive agents of Empire. As Procida points out, metropolitan visitors to India often were concerned that Anglo-Indian

⁵⁰⁴ See Wendy Suart, *The Lingering Eye: Recollections of North Borneo*, Edinburgh, The Pentland Press Limited, 1993, p271.

⁵⁰⁵ See Locher-Scholten, *Women and the Colonial State: Essays on Gender and Modernity in the Netherlands Indies, 1900-1942*, p121; and Suart, *The Lingering Eye*, p271.

⁵⁰⁶ Suart, *The Lingering Eye*, p271.

⁵⁰⁷ Norman Edwards, *The Singapore House and Residential Life*, p192.

⁵⁰⁸ Spry, *The Mem Sahib’s Book of Cookery*, 1894, Introductory remarks.

⁵⁰⁹ Anglo-Indian, *Indian Cookery: ‘Local’ for Young House-Keepers*, Introduction.

women were not more involved in household management. She questions, 'if the Anglo-Indian woman was not a paragon of domesticity, then what exactly was her role in the home and, by extension, in the empire?'⁵¹⁰ Manuals helped memsahibs to define a role for themselves by repeatedly exhorting them to constantly guard against the filthy and deceitful ways of the servants. Gilpin asks, 'if you never go near your kitchen, how can you expect it to be kept approximately clean and in a state for the sanitary and seemly preparation of our food? A good deal of the reason why so many cooks are so unspeakably filthy in her habits is directly due to the mistresses taking no pains to keep them up to the mark'.⁵¹¹

While most of the household manuals for the British colonies decry the poor quality of the local domestic service, a few authors took householders to task for not taking more care with training their servants and not providing better facilities. Most notable of these was A.R. Kenney-Herbert, writing under the pseudonym, 'Wyvern'.⁵¹² His guide on cookery and household management for the Anglo-Indian women of Madras emerged from years of service in the Indian Army. Kenney-Herbert questioned why in India, 'the chamber set apart for the preparation of our food is, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, the foulest in our premises – and [we] are not ashamed?'⁵¹³ He lambasted his readers for complaining about 'native filthiness' when the carelessly constructed and smoke-filled kitchen was built far from the house, sparsely furnished with a small table and a shelf. He continued,

'Is it the cook's fault that in the absence of proper appliances he is forced to practise his native ingenuity, "curry-stone" for a mortar, his cloth for a sieve, and his fingers for a spoon or fork? Is it the cook's fault that, since no plates and dishes are included in his cook-room equipment, he has no alternative but to place meat, vegetables, &c., on his table; and that being without a mincing machine, or chopping board, he uses its surface in lieu of the latter?'⁵¹⁴

Kenny-Herbert described '[d]inners of sixteen or twenty, thoughtfully composed, are de rigueur; our tables are prettily decorated; and our menu cards discourse of dainty fare in its native French'. In fact Kenny-Herbert's book set out in detail thirty menus for dinner parties, all of the dishes being in French.⁵¹⁵

⁵¹⁰ Procida, *Married to the Empire*, p81.

⁵¹¹ Gilpin, *Memsahib's Guide to Cookery in India*, p2.

⁵¹² A.R. Kenney-Herbert, *Culinary Jottings for Madras*, Devon, Prospect Books, 1994.

⁵¹³ Kenney-Herbert, *Culinary Jottings*, p496.

⁵¹⁴ Kenney-Herbert, *Culinary Jottings*, p499.

⁵¹⁵ Kenney-Herbert, *Culinary Jottings*, pp453-494.

Another Anglo-Indian who blamed poor supervision was W.H. Dawe:

‘The faults and shortcomings of Indian servants – the Naukar-Chakar Log – appear to be a general source of complaint amongst all, both with the new-comer on his arrival and the long resident – the complaint is universal: laziness, falsehood, dishonesty, and innumerable other vices seem to be innate in them. The Fault, however, is not wholly on their side; the master and mistress – the Sahib and Mem-Sahib – are often much to blame.’⁵¹⁶

Dawe continued that

‘[E]very native servant (being more or less naturally indolent and careless) requires strict supervision to have your work satisfactorily performed. It is better to have as few servants as possible; the more you have the less work will be done, and the more will you be cheated and robbed. Never let servants see that you are too partial to them; they immediately jump to the conclusion that they are necessary to you, and that you cannot do without them, and, native like, they will at once show their ingratitude by robbing you and becoming careless and lazy, under the impression that they will not be suspected of dishonesty, and that their negligence will be viewed leniently.’⁵¹⁷

‘Laziness, dishonesty and falsehood’ are the three most commonly cited failings of native servants in cookbooks and household manuals written for the British colonies. Syed Alatas argues that the negative image of people subjugated by Western colonizers was not based on Orientalist scholarship. He asserts that observations of native people as ‘indolent, dull, treacherous, and childish were made by monks, civil servants, planters, sailors, soldiers, popular travel writers and tourists’.⁵¹⁸ The ‘infantilising’ of, and rendering colonized people by not attributing to them decent human qualities was an integral part of imperial race ideologies. Although Charles van Onselen’s study of colonial masters and mistresses’ attitudes towards servants focuses on South Africa, he expands analysis on racial and colonial attitudes to the colonized. Van Onselen characterizes colonial employers’ attitudes when he stated, ‘[T]he best way of dealing with a black servant was as with a “child” – firmly and fairly’. This remark is similar to sentiments expressed by authors of cookbooks and household manuals written for the colonies.⁵¹⁹ C. Lang’s manual to ‘young inexperienced English girls starting housekeeping in India’ suggested that Indian servants ‘must be treated like children, kindly but very firmly. Their brains are not properly developed and they cannot always

⁵¹⁶ W.H. Dawe, *The Wife’s Help to Indian Cookery: Being a Practical Manual for Housekeepers*, London, Elliot Stock, 1888, p4.

⁵¹⁷ Dawe, *The Wife’s Help to Indian Cookery*, p4.

⁵¹⁸ Syed Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native: A Study of the Image of the Malays, Filipinos and Javanese from the 16th to the 20th Century and Its Function in the Ideology of Colonial Capitalism*, London, Frank Cass, 1977, p112.

⁵¹⁹ Van Onselen, *Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand 1886-1914*, p40.

see things in the same light as we do'.⁵²⁰ Another colonial who compared the colonized people to children and emphasised the innate differences between the two races was Mabel Hunter, who maintained, 'it is best to treat them all like children who know no better, but ... they are proud of their lies and the innate goodness of the European is not understood by them'.⁵²¹ As Kincaid noted in his observation of 329 years of the social life of the British in India, 'the native population was submissive and devoted to their masters. Their ways were not, of course, Western ways'.⁵²²

Charles Bruce, a District Officer in British North Borneo in the early 1900s, noted, 'The mind of the average native is equivalent to that of a child of four ... So long as one remembers that the native is still essentially a child and treats him accordingly he is really tractable'.⁵²³ Jacklyn Cock's history of domestic service in South Africa argues that even in the best servant-employer relationships, the African was viewed as a child. The child analogy was a component of race, sex and class ideologies that denied equality.⁵²⁴ As Stoler observes, 'racialized Others have invariably been compared and equated with children, a representation that conveniently provided a moral justification for imperial policies of tutelage, discipline and specific paternalistic and materialistic strategies of custodial control'.⁵²⁵

Riddell, while criticising harshly the innate faults of servants, concedes that certain factors would have contributed to their failings, noting that native servants' vices could be attributed to the way they were brought up and to the fault of employers who took them on based only on written testimonials. Further, Riddell remarked that the native servants' 'principal vice, besides what I have already given, is an intolerable habit of lying'.⁵²⁶ At the same time he states, 'in the way of tea, sugar, bread, milk, paper and such like articles, they will frequently, like European servants, appropriate a little for themselves'.⁵²⁷ Finally Riddell declared that 'you have only to treat natives well and

⁵²⁰ Lang, 'Chota Mem', p55.

⁵²¹ Dennis Kincaid, *British Social Life in India, 1608-1937*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974, p226.

⁵²² Kincaid, *British Social Life in India*, p226.

⁵²³ Charles Bruce, *Twenty Years in Borneo*, London, Cassell and Company Ltd, 1924, pp243-245.

⁵²⁴ Jacklyn Cock, *Maids and Madams: A Study in the Politics of Exploitation*, Johannesburg, Ravan Press 1980, pp221-222.

⁵²⁵ Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things*, Durham, Duke University Press, 1995, p150.

⁵²⁶ Riddell, *Indian Domestic Economy and Receipt Book*, p6.

⁵²⁷ Riddell, *Indian Domestic Economy and Receipt Book*, p6.

kindly, and they will generally prove good servants to you'.⁵²⁸ Writing in 1935, Roland Braddell disagreed with the majority of other Europeans who reckoned the Hainanese among the best cooks and servants. He found that 'the Hailam [that is, Hainanese] servant, a most exasperating person ... has only one way of doing things, his own; he only cleans what he sees; he is very communistic, very stupid, and, as a cook, can be guaranteed to take all the taste out of anything, unless carefully supervised and trained. There are, doubtless, brilliant exceptions but through and by I have never found worse servants than the present-day Hailams'.⁵²⁹

Another writer who contradicted herself on the virtues of Indian servants is 'Eleanor'. She rejects the prevalent idea in England at the time that servants in India were cheap to employ and claimed that it required a larger number in the colony to do the work than 'at home'.⁵³⁰ She claimed that it was possible to have a good cook who

'should be able to send up a thoroughly well dressed dinner for any number of guests, including made dishes, jellies and confectionary. A native cook will often put to shame the performance of an English one, soups, cutlets and made dishes in particular, their abilities vary greatly'.⁵³¹

So even as native servants proved their worth as skilled service providers, they were viewed with contempt and disrespect. Scholars like Kenneth Ballhatchet and Simon Dagut attribute this disrespect to the notion of 'social distance'.⁵³² In the context of domestic service in the colonial household, when servants were engaged in the most intimate of chores such as food preparation, child care, laundering of clothes and house cleaning, colonizers attempted to put social distance between themselves and the colonized. Ballhatchet writes that the official elite in India regarded themselves as an aristocracy. As they were mainly recruited from a middle class who admired the lifestyle of the landed aristocracy in England they liked to imagine themselves implanted as the top echelon of Indian society, in which social distance was essential to establishing and perpetuating their authority.⁵³³

⁵²⁸ Riddell, *Indian Domestic Economy and Receipt Book*, p6.

⁵²⁹ Roland Braddell, *The Lights of Singapore*, London, Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1934, p25.

⁵³⁰ Eleanor, *Gems from the Culinary Art and a Ready Help to Every Wife in India*, Madras, Premier Press, 1916, p7.

⁵³¹ Eleanor, *Gems from the Culinary Art*, p8.

⁵³² See Kenneth Ballhatchet, *Race, Sex, and Class under the Raj: Imperial Attitudes and Policies and Their Critics, 1793-1905*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980; Simon Dagut, "'Paternalism and Social Distance: British Settlers' Racial Attitudes, 1850s-1890s'", *South African Historical Journal*, vol.37, 1997 and Simon Dagut, 'Gender, Colonial "Women's History" and the Construction of Social Distance: Middle-Class British Women in Late Nineteenth-Century South Africa', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, vol.26, no.3, 2000.

⁵³³ Ballhatchet, *Race, Sex and Class*, p164.

Steel and Gardiner berated those memsahibs who did not exert their authority on their servants: ‘they never go into their kitchens, for the simple reason that their appetite for breakfast might be marred by seeing the khitmutgâr using his toes as an efficient toast-rack; or their desire for dinner weakened by seeing the soup strained through a greasy *pugri* (cloth)’.⁵³⁴ They added that the Indian cook ‘often stands confounded before his own failures, unable to tell where he has gone wrong, or how; and if his mistress is a practical cook, he will give a smile of wonder and relief when she points out what he must have done to have caused that specific result’.⁵³⁵ Moving to the stereotype of the khitmutgar, Steel and Gardiner described this servant as a ‘a curious mixture of virtues and vices’. Although generally a ‘quick, quiet waiter and well up in all dining-room duties ... in the pantry and scullery his dirt and slovenliness are simply inconceivable to the new-comer in India’.⁵³⁶ They stated that the best of the khitmugars would use their personal clothing to wipe crockery or place new mustard on top of the old instead of cleaning out the pot. They attributed this slovenliness to heredity as ‘all Mahomedans of the lower classes being apparently blind to dirt’.⁵³⁷ Lang advised making random inspections of the ‘cook-house’ and cautioned that ‘I am afraid you will get some shocks, but it may make him have cleaner ways. It is their nature to be very dirty, and Europeans will never make them clean’.⁵³⁸

A recurring theme among authors of the cookbooks and household manuals is the dishonesty of servants. Colonial wife, Mrs John Gilpin, cautioned her readers that food safes:

‘should have locks and keys so that only the servant whose business it is to go to the safe will be able to get at the food. Even if the food is not actually made away with, an idle lower servant or a cook’s matey is very fond of picking over the food with dirty hands. There should be a separate cupboard or godown for all dry goods, which the mistress herself should give out every morning. It is not wise to leave these in charge of the best servant that you can imagine, for even if he does not let others steal it he will himself take a very large toll from it, which will increase almost imperceptibly until you suddenly awake to the fact that the bills are mounting up in an alarming manner.’⁵³⁹

⁵³⁴ Steel and Gardiner, *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook*, pp1-2.

⁵³⁵ Steel and Gardiner, *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook*, p71.

⁵³⁶ Steel and Gardiner, *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook*, p73.

⁵³⁷ Steel and Gardiner, *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook*, p73.

⁵³⁸ Lang, ‘*Chota Mem*’, p76.

⁵³⁹ Gilpin, *Memsahib’s Guide to Cookery in India*, p2.

Eleanor declared that native servants of all classes often cheat and pilfer their masters' rice, sugar, coffee and oil. She lamented that the mistress of a house needed to constantly supervise 'the most trifling details' lest more quantities of oil, wood or eggs would be needed.⁵⁴⁰ Writing in a similar vein, E.S.P., in her 'hints' section on food stores, commented,

'[I]f the housekeeper will take the trouble to keep all the stores, and give everything out daily, even to spices, and the smallest detail, including eggs, potatoes, and onions, she will find her bills considerably reduced, the things will be fresh and good, and she will be spared the constant differences with the cook over the accounts as to amounts used'.⁵⁴¹

Gilpin also advised against allowing a servant to handle the milk for the household and suggested bringing the cow to 'where you can see it milked and constantly inspect the utensil into which the man is to milk,' so that dirty water is not added to the milk.⁵⁴² Another manual presented the house-keeper's golden rule of always keeping the monthly purchase of consumables under lock and key and to ensure that what is taken out for daily use is done so in the memsahib's presence.⁵⁴³ It instructed its readers that if it had been their practice 'to put to put money into the hands of your servants to purchase your requirements, *discontinue it at once*, follow the above Golden Rule, and you will be surprised to find the difference in your Cash Balance at the end of a month'[emphasis in the original].⁵⁴⁴ Yet another manual claimed that 'with most cooks, lining their own pockets is to them a matter of far greater importance than the excellence of the dishes they are called on to make. One means of doing this, which find special favour in their eyes, is to use half the ingredients named in the recipes, and to write down the full amount in the bill'.⁵⁴⁵ The representation of the native people as inherently dishonest was also an expression of Orientalism. The memsahib's task of checking against cheating was one way of demonstrating difference. The provision cupboard had to be inspected daily, staples, spices and ingredients had to be weighed, even the level of alcohol bottles had to be marked.⁵⁴⁶

⁵⁴⁰ Eleanor, *Gems from the Culinary Art*, p10.

⁵⁴¹ E.S.P., 'What' and 'How' or What Shall We Have? And How Shall We Have It?, Calcutta and Simla, Thacker, Spink & Co., 1904, pvii.

⁵⁴² Gilpin, *Memsahib's Guide to Cookery in India*, p3.

⁵⁴³ Anonymous, *The Indian House-Keeper: Being a Complete Set of Accounts of Domestic Expenditure for the Year*, Allahabad, The Pioneer Press, 1894, p6.

⁵⁴⁴ Anonymous, *The Indian House-Keeper*, p6.

⁵⁴⁵ Anonymous, *Dainty Dishes*, Preface.

⁵⁴⁶ Michael Edwardes, *The Sahibs and the Lotus: The British in India*, London, Constable, 1988, pp109-110.

What stands out in accounts such as these is the notion that colonial racism was constructed between master/mistress (colonizer) versus native servant (colonized). Ann Stoler links colonial racism to reaction to ‘class tensions in the metropole’, and cites Benedict Anderson’s characterization of a ‘tropical gothic’, a ‘middle-class aristocracy’ cultivating the colonials’ differences from the colonized.⁵⁴⁷ Stoler further states that in the colonies of India, New Guinea, the Netherlands Indies, Cuba, Mexico and South Africa, ‘increasing knowledge, contact and familiarity led not to a diminution of racial discrimination but to an intensification of it over time, and to a rigidifying of boundaries’. Stoler claims that colonial racism provided a way ‘of creating the sense of colonial community and context that allows for colonial authority and for a set of relations of production and power’. Stoler refers to the obsession of colonizers protecting European women against assault by Asian and black men with racist ideology, fear of the other and preoccupation with white prestige.⁵⁴⁸ However, the stereotypical casting of native servants as lazy, filthy and dishonest can be seen as components of colonial racism. Other scholars have argued that colonising women were ‘more rigid and hostile’ towards colonised people than colonial men.⁵⁴⁹ It was felt that these hardened attitudes by colonial women arose from the pressures of patriarchal imperialism. Dagut refers to both Gartrell and Strobel’s work when he suggests that this external force imposed on women in their domesticity led them to ‘buttress their fragile and dependent self-images by obsessive demands for deference from servants and other subordinated people’.⁵⁵⁰

The social life of the colonizer, with its busy entertainment schedule, could only have been sustained by the armies of servants. As Maud Diver wrote in 1909,

‘India is the land of dinners, as England is the land of five o’clock teas. From the Colonels’ and Commissioners’ wives, who conscientiously “dine the station” every cold weather, the wives of subalterns and junior civilians – whose cheery informal little parties of six or eight are by no means to be despised by lovers of good company and simple fare – all Anglo-India is in a chronic state of giving and receiving this – the most delightful or the most excruciating form of hospitality.’⁵⁵¹

⁵⁴⁷ Ann Laura Stoler, ‘Rethinking Colonial Categories: European Communities and the Boundaries of Rule’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol.31, no.1, 1989, p137.

⁵⁴⁸ Stoler, ‘Rethinking Colonial Categories,’ p138.

⁵⁴⁹ Dagut, ‘Gender, Colonial “Women’s History”’, p559. Dagut also cites references to S. Bailey, *Women and the British Empire. An Annotated Guide to Sources*, New York, Garland,1983, p40; Helen Callaway, *Gender, Culture and Empire*, Macmillan, Oxford, 1987, p27; Gartrell, ‘Colonial Wives: Villains or Victims?’, pp180-181.

⁵⁵⁰ Dagut, ‘Gender, Colonial “Women’s History”’, p559.

⁵⁵¹ Kincaid, *British Social Life in India*, p272, citing Maud Diver’s *The Englishwoman in India*, Edinburgh, W. Blackwood, 1909.

In her work on domestic service in colonial Bengal, Swapna Banerjee contends that the British together with other Europeans, perceived Indians to be so different socially, culturally and morally, that they viewed Indian servants as a ‘crouching, sneaking, lazy homogeneous mass’.⁵⁵² Banerjee asserts that the British description of native servants reinforced the European notion of Indians as the ‘distant’ and the ‘other’ – the ‘other’ being primitive, dirty, lazy, physically and mentally inferior.⁵⁵³ Banerjee also discusses writings by Indian writers on the Bengali domestic service in which ‘dishonesty and unfaithfulness were inscribed as naturalized attributes of servants’.⁵⁵⁴ However, she points out that while British authors of memoirs, domestic guides and travelogues portrayed Indian servants with tones of distrust and disgust, indigenous writers’ complaints; although scathing and harsh, were ‘most of the time tempered with good humour and tolerance’.⁵⁵⁵ E.M. Collingham states that Britons saw Indians as potential carriers of disease and states that there was anxiety about ‘Indian dirt’ being ‘particularized onto individual servants as potential carriers of deadly germs into the household on their bodies’.⁵⁵⁶ She explains that this fear of infection, particularly with the bubonic plague in Bombay in 1896, had encouraged the building of servants’ quarters away from the bungalow.

It is tempting to suggest that separating the kitchen away from the living quarters of the colonial family was a deliberate act of segregation. Catherine Hall, in her work on gender and empire, attributed to this separation of European and Indian quarters to fears of pollution and contagion.⁵⁵⁷ However, the location of servants’ accommodation distant from the employer’s main house has its origins in Britain. For example, both the manor houses of eighteenth-century England and the Victorian suburban houses of the nineteenth century, the kitchen and servant rooms were separate from the house proper.⁵⁵⁸ Light, in her work on Virginia Woolf’s domestic servants explains that ‘in nineteenth-century urban culture, the topography of the house lent itself as an inevitable

⁵⁵² Swapna M. Banerjee, *Men, Women, and Domesticity Articulating Middle-Class Identity in Colonial Bengal*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2004, p94.

⁵⁵³ Banerjee, *Men, Women, and Domesticity*, p94.

⁵⁵⁴ Banerjee, *Men, Women, and Domesticity*, p166.

⁵⁵⁵ Banerjee, *Men, Women, and Domesticity*, pp166-167.

⁵⁵⁶ E.M. Collingham, *Imperial Bodies: The Physical Experience of the Raj, c.1800-1947*, Cambridge, Polity, 2001, p171.

⁵⁵⁷ Catherine Hall, ‘Of Gender and Empire: Reflections on the Nineteenth Century’, in Philippa Levine (ed.), *Gender and Empire*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004.

⁵⁵⁸ Norman Edwards, *The Singapore House and Residential Life*, p191. See also M. Girouard’s *Life in the English Country House. A Social and Architectural History*, London, Penguin, 1978.

metaphor for bourgeois identity, with the lower orders curtained off, relegated to the bottom of the house or to its extremities, like a symbolic ordering of the body'.⁵⁵⁹ Edwards contends though that the kitchen and servants' quarters being located in a separate building at the rear of the house and connected by a sheltered passage in colonial India and Singapore was not only to avoid the smell and sight of food being prepared but also to stress that servants occupy the low end of the household hierarchy.⁵⁶⁰

In the average colonial household, the kitchen as a place of food preparation for the family has frequently been depicted as a site of dirt and pollution. The main actors there were the colonised: the cooks and his or her helpers. It was the place banished to the back, separate from the living quarters of the family and where the servants congregated. Often the floors were dirty and damp as they were built low but for some servants the kitchen was a workplace by day and by night it was the place for sleep. Swati Chattopadhyay asserts that servants' spaces were an afterthought and that the kitchen and other service spaces were 'never an integral part of colonial houses in India because of the differing perception of servants' needs'.⁵⁶¹ Chattopadhyay adds that there was little interest, on the part of the colonist, to spend any more than the bare minimum for accommodation of servants.⁵⁶² To avoid the dampness and dirt of the kitchen floors the servants in India would sleep on boxes or on the kitchen table and sometimes on a mat thrown on the floor.⁵⁶³ The implication of permitting such degrading accommodation for the family's domestic servants could be seen as dehumanising the colonized people who were not worthy of being housed decently. This attitude was reflected in a letter dated 18 March 1838, written by Emily Eden, upon her arrival at the hill station of Mussoorie in the Himalayan foothills ('with a nice sharp wind blowing') where there were 'good fires burning' at Colonel G's bungalow.⁵⁶⁴ Eden's party found their Bengali servants, who had arrived the day before, 'very miserable' as they had slept in the open air 'and were starved with the cold, and were so afraid of the precipices that they could not even go to the bazaar to

⁵⁵⁹ Alison Light, *Mrs Woolf and the Servants*, p75.

⁵⁶⁰ Edwards, *The Singapore House and Residential Life*, p191.

⁵⁶¹ Swati Chattopadhyay, *Representing Calcutta: Modernity, Nationalism, and the Colonial Uncanny*, London, Routledge, 2006, p127.

⁵⁶² Chattopadhyay, *Representing Calcutta*, p127.

⁵⁶³ J. Bartley, *Indian Cookery, 'General' for Young House-Keepers, Containing Numerous Recipes, Both Useful and Original, Bombay, 1903*, Bombay, Thacker & Co., 1903, pv.

⁵⁶⁴ Emily Eden, *Up the Country: Letters Written to Her Sister from the Upper Provinces of India*, London, Curzon Press, 1978, p115.

buy food'.⁵⁶⁵ The most widely-read household manual for British India in its advice for what to permit servants to bring with them in the annual migration to the hill stations instructed that they should not bring 'mill-stones and bedstead'. It offered that servants 'will perch on carts, camels, and mules, much as birds of the air do'.⁵⁶⁶ In her diary entry of 23 January 1878, Mrs Robert Moss King, in describing their camp life, revealed that while the kitchen servants had a small tent to sleep in, the other servants slept where they could in the cold but no one dreamt of complaining as it was 'part of the natural order of things'.⁵⁶⁷ This description implies a hierarchy of sorts among the domestic service, the fact that the kitchen staff was allocated a tent could mean that they were seen as more important. The rationale, 'part of the natural order of things' was also used to justify journalist G.L. Peet's accommodation for his servants. The family ayah's (maid or nursemaid) middle room was surrounded on either side by rooms for the Chinese cook-boy and on the other by the Indian gardener. According to Peet, 'a Malay woman coming into such close proximity with persons of different races and of the opposite sex might be embarrassed, but this was far from the case'.⁵⁶⁸

Kitchen facilities

Colonial kitchens in Malaysia and Singapore in both clubs and homes were, as in India, by no means lavishly furnished but servants were expected to present dinners and banquets of a high standard. In the colony of British North Borneo, servants prepared meals in less than ideal conditions for British society on important days. Christmas dinner in 1886 for the British community was celebrated at the Sandakan Club and as the club had no kitchen, W.R. Flint, the Acting Chief Inspector of the Constabulary, 'kindly placed his establishment at "Sunningdale" at the disposal of the steward, with the present of a couple of turkeys'.⁵⁶⁹ Kitchens in the smallest clubs in the far flung outposts of empire were venues for preparing grand dinners. Festive dinners and banquets in British North Borneo were elaborate affairs, with toasts to the Queen and the Governor, and singing and dancing into the hours of the next morning. For example, description of a banquet for Governor E.W. Birch reported in 1904 that it was 'a brilliant gathering of 68 ladies and gentlemen, the largest number of Europeans that

⁵⁶⁵ Eden, *Up the Country*, p115.

⁵⁶⁶ Steel and Gardiner, *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook*, p196.

⁵⁶⁷ (Mrs) Robert Moss King, *The Diary of a Civilian's Wife in India, 1877-1882*, London, Richard Bentley & Son, 1884, p38.

⁵⁶⁸ G.L. Peet, *Malayan Exile*, Singapore, The Straits Times Press Ltd., 1934, p34.

⁵⁶⁹ *The British North Borneo Herald and Official Gazette*, 1 January 1887, p4.

have ever been mustered in one place in the history of British North Borneo'.⁵⁷⁰ Held in the Reading Room of the Sandakan Club, the menu illustrates that even in the outpost of Borneo, the local cook working in a club kitchen was able to help maintain empire's prestige through foodways. It included caviare, turtle soup, fish mayonnaise, salmi of pigeon, stuffed duck, asparagus, roast turkey and ham, Singaleila cake, meringues, anchovy toast, dessert and coffee.

Cooks in isolated stations too worked in primitive kitchens to produce nourishing meals. In her first week in a Malayan rubber estate Alice Berry Hart had no running water, sink or 'ice-box' in her bungalow.⁵⁷¹ Berry Hart described her kitchen as a shed with a brick altar in the middle where a pile of coconut shells was lit for cooking. An iron grill was placed over the flames to cook meals. She remarked that, after preparing a meal, the cook squatted over the gutter with a bucket of canal water and some coconut fibre for cleaning the insides of the cooking pans.⁵⁷² Lang, who claimed to be 'a help to many young inexperienced English girls starting housekeeping in India' wrote, 'as a rule, Indian cooks are excellent, and you will be surprised what nice dishes they make out of a little, and my first cook, although expensive, cooked beautifully, and it was extraordinary the few kitchen utensils he managed with'.⁵⁷³ She went on to say that her cook used a bottle for an egg whisk, bought spoons made out of coconut shells, a crude chopper and advised that 'it is no use providing them with the good things you would give an English cook, so it is best to let them cook in their own way, provided they are clean'.⁵⁷⁴ Evelyn Beeton, in her 'memoir' of a year's visit to India in 1912, wrote that:

'One of the greatest marvels is the way the natives cook. Not only does every native servant seem born with a remarkable talent for cooking, but they can serve you up a six-course dinner in the wilds of the wilderness, or up 14, 000 feet (4360 metres) in the snow. Wood and stones were carried by coolies, and eggs and chickens procured at the various villages passed lower down and the bearer requires only two large stones wherein the wood is placed and made to light if wet by fanning, and in this primitive way the most wonderful dinner is cooked and served beyond civilization, often beyond snow level'.⁵⁷⁵

Another memsahib who praised the resourcefulness of the Asian cook was Katherine Sim. Among her recollections of her years in Malaya in the 1940s; she remembered that

⁵⁷⁰ *The British North Borneo Herald*, 2 January 1904.

⁵⁷¹ Alice Berry Hart, 'Housekeeping and life in the Malayan Rubber', *Blackwood's Magazine*, London, 1927, pp598-599.

⁵⁷² Berry Hart, 'Housekeeping and life in the Malayan Rubber', p599.

⁵⁷³ Lang, 'Chota Mem', p72.

⁵⁷⁴ Lang, 'Chota Mem', p72.

⁵⁷⁵ Evelyn Beeton, *A Memoir of a Year's Visit to India by a Woman of Liberal Views Travelling Extensively in Northern India*, 1912, Beeton Paper, pp33-34.

‘if the cook-boy finds there is no oven in his new kitchen he will not be perturbed but will calmly roast a perfectly good joint in a kerosene tin thrust among the blazing logs of the fire’.⁵⁷⁶ The Viceroy’s residence in the hill station of Simla did not lack in manpower nor facilities though. A French chef and an Italian confectioner were recruited from Calcutta by the Lyttons and there were three hundred servants to cater for the cuisine and other services.⁵⁷⁷

Equipment and ingredients aside, there is also the question of how servants drawn from a vastly different culture to the colonizer’s learned to please their masters’ every whim. Aitken wondered how the Indian butler acquired ‘a sound practical knowledge of all our viands, their substance, and the mode of their preparation, their qualities, relationships and harmonies... [H]e knows all liquors also by name, with their places and times of appearing’.⁵⁷⁸

Aitken provided a striking description of the Indian cook’s workplace thus:

‘[H]is studio is fitted with half a dozen small fireplaces, and furnished with an assortment of copper pots, a chopper, two tin spoons – but he can do without these, -- a ladle made of half a cocoanut shell at the end of a stick, and a slab of stone with a stone roller on it; also a rickety table, a very gloomy and ominous looking table, whose undulating surface is chopped and hacked and scarred, begrimed, besmeared, smoked, oiled, stained with juices of many substances. On this table he minces meat, chops onions, rolls pastry and sleeps; a very useful table.’⁵⁷⁹

Aitken also claimed that the cook uses his fingers as a strainer for eggs.⁵⁸⁰ However he acknowledged that the Indian cook often worked under difficult conditions. For example, he praised his bearer, saying that ‘he gets up in the morning an hour before me, and eats his dinner after I have retired for the night. He gets no Saturday half-holiday, and my Sabbath is to him as the other days of the week’.⁵⁸¹

Just as the many rituals and patterns of behaviour among European colonizers were about prestige, having a certain type of servant was seen as enhancing one’s status. The Goanese servants who worked as cooks or butlers in India were seen as the cream of

⁵⁷⁶ Katherine Sim, *Malayan Landscape*, London, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1957, p15.

⁵⁷⁷ Pat Barr and Ray Desmond, *Simla: A Hill Station in British India*, London, The Scolar Press, 1978, p28.

⁵⁷⁸ Aitken, *Behind the Bungalow*, pp44-45.

⁵⁷⁹ Aitken, *Behind the Bungalow*, p48.

⁵⁸⁰ Aitken, *Behind the Bungalow*, p48.

⁵⁸¹ Aitken, *Behind the Bungalow*, p141.

domestic service. They spoke English and other languages and wore 'short-jacketed highly-starched white suits and more often than not blancoed plimsoles' and had names such as de Souza or de Mello.⁵⁸² They were renowned for their culinary skills and turned out impressive confectionery for dessert.⁵⁸³

Language and nicknames

To emphasise the poor quality of servants in their employ, colonizers often gave their servants nicknames. The objective was to depersonalise them so that the servant was only identified by their function.⁵⁸⁴ This practice originated from master-servant relationships in Britain⁵⁸⁵ where Thomas and Susan were the standardised names given to servants regardless of what their real names might be.⁵⁸⁶ Other servant names popular in mid to late nineteenth-century Britain in the grand houses were Abigail, Betty and Mary Jane and others were simply called Cook or Boots according to the work they performed.⁵⁸⁷ As well, if a servant had a name being the same as a family member, the servant's name was changed.⁵⁸⁸ The standard names and the uniforms servants were made to wear were to minimise their individuality and discourage them from 'putting themselves forward'. Light comments that employers at the time viewed 'the best servant was a kind of absent presence'.⁵⁸⁹ In the colonies servants were omnipresent however, mainly due to the design of bungalows and large numbers of them employed. The openness of the colonial home was a double-edge sword. While the memsahib felt a lack of privacy in her own home, it was open to the gaze of her servants and Indian visitors, ensuring the bungalow as another site for the display of British superiority.⁵⁹⁰ Lady Lucy Marguerite Thomas, wife of Sir Shenton Thomas, who served as the Governor of the Straits Settlements between 1934 and 1942 and 1945 to 1946, wrote that among her large domestic staff at Government House, were 'the Indians who waited at table and wore a very smart uniform scarlet and gold coats, and

⁵⁸² Evelyn Batty, *Costumes and Characters of the British Raj*, Exeter, Webb & Bower, 1982, p44.

⁵⁸³ Batty, *Costumes and Characters of the British Raj*, p44.

⁵⁸⁴ See Alain Corbin, *Time, Desire and Horror: Towards a History of the Senses*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1995, p67; and Lucy Delap, *Domestic Service in Twentieth Century Britain: Culture, Memory, Emotions*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, (forthcoming) 2010, under chapter on 'Mistresses and Authority'.

⁵⁸⁵ Delap, *Domestic Service in Twentieth Century Britain*, under chapter on 'Mistresses and Authority'.

⁵⁸⁶ Leonore Davidoff, *The Best Circles: Society Etiquette and the Season*, London, Croom Helm 1973, p88.

⁵⁸⁷ Light, *Mrs Woolf*, p1.

⁵⁸⁸ Delap, *Domestic Service in Twentieth Century Britain*.

⁵⁸⁹ Light, *Mrs Woolf*, p1.

⁵⁹⁰ Collingham, *Imperial Bodies*, p167.

flat red and gold hats which came from the old East India Company'.⁵⁹¹

In the colonies proper names were rarely used. In Africa, servants under European employ were given derogatory names such as 'whiskey', 'monkey', 'sardine', 'two-pence' and 'damn-fool' and the nicknames were also intended to provide amusement for Europeans.⁵⁹² Although they were responsible for the smooth running of the household the domestic servants were kept in the background and the cook in India was generally nicknamed Ramasamy and in Malaya, Singapore and the Borneo states he or she was known as cookie. Alice Berry Hart, writing on her life in a rubber estate in Malaya in the 1920s, complained about the water-carrier: 'because Balready was so slow and stupid, we called him, between ourselves, Ethelred the Unready,... [T]he truth is, that Balready is a savage, and dislikes civilisation'.⁵⁹³ Ada Pryer, wife of the founder of Sandakan, William Pryer, in her diary in 1893, even as she describes positively the ingenuity and resourcefulness of her Chinese cook, Lam Chong, finds it necessary to give him the nickname 'Lamb Chops'.⁵⁹⁴ In colonial Malaysia cooks were all universally called 'Cookie'; almost all respondents to my questionnaire state that their cooks were known as 'Cookie'. The practice was not restricted to British colonizers as in the Dutch Indies, cooks were generically known as *kokki*.⁵⁹⁵ Writing about her years spent in Malaya, Jean Falconer recalled having to make a sauce for prawn cocktails for a dinner party as 'Cookie (bone-head) didn't know how'.⁵⁹⁶ In colonial India, cooks all generally went by the name of Ramasamy, a corruption of Rama-swami. Other colonial employers simply called their cooks *bawarchi*, meaning 'cook'. This is illustrated in a dialogue between a husband and his newly arrived wife that Sara Jeannette Duncan created in her novel, set in India: 'Kali Bagh, cook – that's his name apparently, but you needn't remember it, he'll always answer to "bawarchi" – has been in my service eighteen months, and has generally given satisfaction'.⁵⁹⁷ L.W.W. Gudgeon states, 'every domestic servant that fetches and carries within the house is in Borneo called a

⁵⁹¹ Lucy Marguerite (Lady) Thomas, 'Reminiscences of life as wife of Sir Shenton Thomas, in the East Africa Protectorate, Uganda, Nigeria, the Gold Coast, Nyasaland and Singapore:1909-46', MSS. Brit. Emp. S. 492, p24.

⁵⁹² Dane Kennedy, *Islands of White: Settler Society and Culture in Kenya and Southern Rhodesia, 1890-1939*, Durham, Duke University Press, 1987, pp154-155.

⁵⁹³ Berry Hart, 'Housekeeping and life in the Malayan Rubber', p601.

⁵⁹⁴ Pryer, *A Decade in Borneo*, p138.

⁵⁹⁵ Locher-Scholten, 'Summer Dresses and Canned Food', pp143.

⁵⁹⁶ Jean Falconer, *Woodsmoke and Temple Flowers: Memories of Malaya*, Edinburgh, The Pentland Press Ltd, 1992, p6.

⁵⁹⁷ Sara Jeannette Duncan, *The Simple Adventures of a Memsahib*, London, Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1909, p94.

“boy”⁵⁹⁸ R.R. Tewson, a tea planter who moved into his new home in South India, on meeting his new ‘boy’ for the first time, thought: ‘some boy I thought, perhaps 50 years old?’⁵⁹⁹ Edward Hamilton Aitken, naturalist and essayist, writing in 1889, offered two suggestions on the origin of ‘boy’:

‘I have heard it traced to the Hindoostanee word *bhai*, a brother, but the usual attitude of the Anglo-Indian’s mind towards his domestics does not give sufficient support to this. I incline to the belief that the word is of a hybrid origin, having its roots in *bhoee*, a bearer, and drawing the tenderer shades of its meaning from the English word which it resembles.’⁶⁰⁰

While some colonials learnt a smattering of the local language, mainly to instruct their servants, one colonial in letters home to his mother, expressed disappointment that many of the servants of ‘opulent’ households spoke English. He claimed that the colonial employees then found it unnecessary to learn the local language and were ‘open to the most fertile source of deception and roguery, by being placed entirely at the mercy of their accomplished servants in all domestic monetary transactions’.⁶⁰¹ It appears that the aim of learning the local language was either to avoid being cheated by the servants or to bark out commands to them. Often, the language used between mistress and servant reflected their ambivalent relationship and this is succinctly portrayed in Jean Falconer’s book of her years in Malaya as a memsahib in the early twentieth century in the following dialogue:

“...at 7.00 the Boy brings tea to our bedroom – tea and fruit.”

“We get up at about 7.45.”

“At about 8.30 he (John Falconer, husband) calls ‘Boy!’ who answers ‘*Tuan!* (Master)’ John says ‘*Makan!*’ (food), Boy replies ‘*Baik, Tuan*’ (Right, Master). He announces when breakfast is ready, with ‘*Makan siap*’, and down we go.”⁶⁰²

Thus the servant entered the private space of the bedroom and gave the first sustenance of the day and waited for more orders. Falconer, in her memoir, even with the benefit of hindsight of later years, still used language steeped in colonial mistress/servant tone and style when she recalled that after breakfast, ‘the cook presents himself to be given instructions for the day’s lunch and dinner, and to submit his little cash book with an account for the previous day’s purchases’.⁶⁰³

⁵⁹⁸ L.W.W. Gudgeon, *Peeps at Many Lands: British North Borneo* London, Adam and Charles Black, 1912, p42.

⁵⁹⁹ R.R. Tewson, *Memoir, The Carefree Days of Planting*, Tewson Papers, Cambridge South Asian Centre. Tewson was a tea planter in South India between 1937 and 1967.

⁶⁰⁰ Edward Hamilton Aitken, *Behind the Bungalow*, London, W. Thacker & Co., 1907, p2.

⁶⁰¹ Grant, *Anglo-Indian Domestic Life*, p93.

⁶⁰² Falconer, *Woodsmoke and Temple Flowers*, pp2-3

⁶⁰³ Falconer, *Woodsmoke and Temple Flowers*, p3.

Even those who had some knowledge of the local language or whose servants spoke English resorted to ‘mongrel’ dialects when communicating with him or her. ‘Mongrel dialects’ incorporated a range of linguistic elements that were used between whites and blacks in Africa.⁶⁰⁴ A European settler in advising communication with servants suggested, ‘you master the names of as many common objects as possible, and a few useful words, such as *kwenda* (go), *kuja* (come) ... and string them together’. ‘Mongrel’ language was also employed in India, British Malaysia and Singapore. Following is a dialogue reproduced in a book with contributions by different authors and illustrates mangled language and a childlike tone.

‘Mrs Tracey, says: “Now, Khansama, for *Hazree*, we must have a nice *Hosenai Kabob*, do you understand?”

“Ah, Memsahib! You mean *Countree Koptan*.”

“Well, well, Country Captain or *Hoosenai Kabob*, mind we have a good one, and bring some good *Mutchee* (fish) -- nice Hilsa Mutchee, you know -- and tell *Bobertchy* to “*khoob bager kero*” (fry it well).”

“*Oure kootch?* (anything else)” says Emem Khan.

“Yes, we must have a *chigree* (prawn) curry,” and then continues “for Tiffin let there be a *Mulgo-tanee*, some veal *cotelettes* with tomatoes; and as it is now cool weather we can have the *tunda Buddock* (cold duck) left from today's *Khanna*”.

“Shall I go and order from Spence's a *Saklee Mutton?*” (His and the ordinary native way of saying “Saddle of Mutton”).⁶⁰⁵

Even where servants were conversant in English it was not unknown for British colonists to use ‘mongrel’ language.⁶⁰⁶ The colonizers’ sense of superiority and the view that the colonised were childlike meant that they had to ‘talk down’ in ‘mongrel’ language – a combination of almost baby-talk and pidgin. The poem below was published in a Singapore newspaper, the objective of which was unclear, perhaps to titillate, to show cleverness?

Malay, A Poem

*Amah, give anak his makan
Get the dhobi all sudah by three
Tell Tuan I've pergi'd to Tanglin
And I'll probably pulang for tea
Sapu lantai the rumah this morning
Don't siap the meja 'til eight*

*Amah, feed the child
Make sure the dhobi finishes by three
Tell Tuan I've gone to Tanglin
And I'll probably be back for tea
Sweep the floor this morning
Don't set the table until eight*

⁶⁰⁴ Kennedy, *Islands of White*, pp156-157

⁶⁰⁵ Laura Sykes, *Calcutta through British Eyes, 1690-1990*, Madras, Oxford University Press, 1992, p46.

⁶⁰⁶ Kennedy, *Islands of White*, pp156-157. Kennedy cites Edna Boddington in *The Call of Rhodesia*, Salisbury, Art Printing Works, 1937, in which the Rhodesian writer who ‘only discovered that her gardener could speak and even read English when he was drafted in a pinch to cook for her family, and prepared an excellent meal with the help of one of her cookbooks’, p238.

*Ask the saises to chuchi the kreta
 And be sure the kebun isn't late.
 Tid'apa the tiffin for anjing
 I'll give him his tulang tonight
 Make sure that the pintu's are tutup'd
 And see the kucing's all right.
 So, Amah, I'm pergi-ing scarang
 You nanti until I return
 Now I'm certain I've made myself clear
 For Malay is so easy to learn.⁶⁰⁷*

*Ask the drivers to wash the car
 And be sure the gardener isn't late.
 Don't worry about feeding the dog
 I'll give him his bone tonight
 Make sure that the windows are shut
 And see the cat's alright.
 So, Amah, I'm going now
 You wait until I return
 Now I'm certain I've made myself clear
 For Malay is so easy to learn.*

The colonial community in the Malay and Borneo states and Singapore were encouraged to learn 'kitchen' Malay with the publication of *Malay for Mems*.⁶⁰⁸ Author Maye Wood declares that the 'object of this little book is to place before newcomers, especially women, the most ordinary and necessary words and phrases required in household management'. Using her own personal experience, Wood included vocabulary and phrases that she deems are 'the most useful' and 'the most generally required'.⁶⁰⁹ The contents of this 'phrase book' are illuminating, the section which Wood entitles 'Easy sentences on ordinary themes' comprise mainly commands and imperatives. Here are some examples:

On cleaning⁶¹⁰:

Wash that	<i>Chuchi itu</i>
Make that clean	<i>Bikin beriseh itu</i>
This is dirty	<i>Ini kotur</i>
This is not clean	<i>Ini tidak beriseh</i>
Wash these plates	<i>Chuchi ini pingan</i>
Wash them again	<i>Chuchi lagi satu kali</i>
Wash it properly	<i>Chuchi betul</i>
Is this really clean?	<i>Ini b'tul beriseh?</i>

On cooking⁶¹¹:

Call the cook	<i>Panggil kuki</i>
Not cooked	<i>Tidak masak</i>
Not enough cooked	<i>Belu(n) chukup masak</i>
Too much cooked	<i>Tilalu banyak masak</i>
Tuan wants dinner	<i>Tuan mau maka</i>
Make some sandwiches	<i>Bikin s'dikit "sandwich"</i>
Put them on the dining-table	<i>Taruh meja makan</i>

⁶⁰⁷ *The Beam*, vol.2, no.1, April/May 1958.

⁶⁰⁸ Maye Wood, *Malay for Mems*, Singapore, Kelly & Walsh, 1949.

⁶⁰⁹ Wood, *Malay for Mems*, Introduction

⁶¹⁰ Wood, *Malay for Mems*, p9.

⁶¹¹ Wood, *Malay for Mems*, p12.

Cover them up properly *Tutup betul*

Conversation with the cook⁶¹²:

I want to inspect the kitchen to-day	<i>Ini hari, sahya mau pereksa dapur</i>
Tell the cook to come here	<i>Kasi tau kuki k'mari</i>
Choose the best fruit	<i>Pilih buah bagus</i>
Give us rice to-day	<i>Ini hari kasi nasi</i>
Cut up the meat in thick pieces	<i>Potong daging t'bal</i>
Fry it	<i>Goreng</i>
Use a hot oven	<i>Pakai tempat-panggang panas s'kali</i>
Throw that away	<i>Buang itu</i>
Is the meat good?	<i>Daging ada baik?</i>
This meat is tainted	<i>Daging bagus s'kali</i>

In a memsahib's guide for learning Hindi, A.K.D-H gave encouraging advice on memsahibs in trying out their Hindi on their servants, saying that it 'is rather wonderful how Indian servants do understand memsahib's Hindustani sometimes, and keep their countenances over the most laughable mistakes'.⁶¹³ The guide provides a list of orders to servants, a list that is both imperious and critical in tone:

'If you do not carry out orders you will be dismissed at once.
I want "chota hazri" at 6 o'clock.
Breakfast at ten o'clock sharp
Lunch at half past one.
Tea at four and dinner at eight o'clock.
This tea is too weak.
Take it away, and make fresh quickly.
Tell the cook there will be four more people to dinner.
Take care that there will be enough dinner.
Find out if you can get fresh fish, also some pigeons.
Yesterday's meat was very tough.
It ought to be more tender.
This vegetable is quite raw.
How badly you have washed this tray cloth, it is still all stained, clean it properly.
Brush my hair...'⁶¹⁴

There was hardly any significant mention of food and even more conspicuously absent were references to the servants who prepared the food on the numerous journeys of exploration in the early days of British settlement in British North Borneo. Several expeditions into the jungles of Borneo were carried out on behalf of the British North Borneo Chartered Company for mineral exploration and also to look at agricultural

⁶¹² Wood, *Malay for Mems*, pp18-19.

⁶¹³ A.K. D-H, *The Memsahib's Manual: Being an Easy Guide to Learning Hindustani, with Some Advice on Health and the Household*, Calcutta & Simla, Thacker, Spink & Co., 1914, piiv.

⁶¹⁴ D-H, *The Memsahib's Manual*, pp25-30.

potential.⁶¹⁵ A Captain Beeston, in his diary of his journey up the Segama River in 22 September 1887, made mention that ‘stores beginning to diminish as far as tinned soups and meats are concerned’. On 3 October his entry read, ‘[O]pened the last tin of flour’.⁶¹⁶ D.D. Daly, the assistant resident of Dent Province, noted in his diary while traveling in the Tenom area that he ‘bought 4 gantangs of red rice for 2 fathoms of cloth, worth 32 cents. ... 10 fresh eggs for cloth worth 5 cents, 100 cobs Indian corn for 1 fathom cloth worth 16 cents. Fowls for cloth from 5 to 10 cents each’.⁶¹⁷ In a diary entry of a group travelling in early January 1885 with the British Consul-General in headhunting country in Murut country, reference to food was even more cursory: ‘after dinner I went ashore to the long house, armed with three big bottles of gin and some Putatan Tobacco, to a head feast’.⁶¹⁸

The necessity of having servants as assistants for the travelling colonizer was highlighted by Evelyn Battye when she claimed that ‘because there were some chores neither sahibs, nor mem-sahibs, nor miss-sahibs could do for themselves in India, travellers of any standing took a personal servant with them’.⁶¹⁹ Among the tasks that her personal servant, a Pathan called Yakub Khan, did for her was to bring Battye food and drink or ‘conducted’ her to the restaurant car at station stops. At night Yakub Khan undid Battye’s bedding roll on the bunk, made it up with sheets and pillow case, and ‘all but tucked me in’.⁶²⁰ Another colonial woman who remembered from her childhood her ayah coming into her bedroom each morning ‘with freshly squeezed orange juice, which she put by my bed. I slept on. She went into the bathroom, fixed strips of sheeting to both taps to silently run my bath’.⁶²¹ The servants also carried out other intimate chores, from bringing their employers’ breakfast to the bedroom first thing in the morning to feeding and looking after their children.

It can thus be argued that had it not been for the servants’ input, the memsahibs would

⁶¹⁵ K.G. Tregonning, *Under Chartered Company Rule (North Borneo 1881-1946)*, Singapore, University of Malaya Press, 1959, p129. William Pryer, W. Pretyman, L.B.Von Donop, F.W. Burbidge and F. Witt were some of these who journeyed into the interior of North Borneo.

⁶¹⁶ ‘Mineral Exploration in British North Borneo’, *The British North Borneo Herald, and Official Gazette, Sandakan*, 1 May 1890, p129.

⁶¹⁷ ‘Extracts from the Diary of Mr D.D. Daly, the Assistant Resident of Dent Province’, *The British North Borneo Herald, and Official Gazette*, 1 December 1885, p2.

⁶¹⁸ ‘Diary of a Cruise with the British Consul-General up the Tamburong and Labu Rivers in Brunei Bay, on a Visit to the Head-Hunting Muruts, Now in Rebellion against the Brunei Government’, *The British North Borneo Herald, and Official Gazette, Sandakan*, 1 March 1885, p3.

⁶¹⁹ Battye, *Costumes and Characters of the British Raj*, p19.

⁶²⁰ Battye, *Costumes and Characters of the British Raj*, p19.

⁶²¹ Fleming, *Last Children of the Raj*, vol.II, pp56-57.

have had to work harder. As it was, their work not only saved white labour, it helped shape colonial culture, despite the Britons' best efforts to keep themselves socially distant. A pertinent question would be whether a colonial cuisine would have developed with such distinctive features without the benefit of the intimate aspect of native (though not necessarily indigenous) servants in British India, Malaya and Singapore. Cookbooks and other prescriptive manuals and writings on reminiscences became tools in articulating the identity of the good colonial wife and perpetuated racial prejudices against servants. The dominant pattern that emerged from these publications portrayed servants in the colonies as inherently dirty, unreliable and dishonest. This pejorative image of servants in the colonial home and the utter dependence of Europeans on their services was characteristic of the contradictions of colonial life. The dichotomy between image and reality of colonial attitude towards their servants extended beyond the home. Just as the venues for rest and recreation were extensions of the colonial home, the vital domestic services of Asian workers were replicated in clubs, rest-houses and hill stations, an aspect discussed in the next chapter.

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Chapter Four **15,485 words** **4 aug 2010**

Leisure and Segregation: Clubs, Hill stations and Rest-houses

*'So it is with life on the Nilgherries – a perfect anomaly. You dress like an Englishman, and lead a quiet gentlemanly life – doing nothing. Not being a determined health-hunter, you lie in bed because it passes the hours rationally and agreeably, and you really can enjoy a midday doze on the mountain-tops. ... your monthly bills for pale ale and hot curries, heavy tiffins, and numerous cheroots, tell you, as plainly as such mute inanimate things can, that you have not quite cast the slough of Anglo-Indian life.'*⁶²²

This chapter looks at the hill stations, clubs and rest-houses⁶²³ and dak bungalows that became the exclusive leisure and recuperation centres for British colonists in India, Malaya and Singapore. These three institutions with their customs and codes of conduct reinforced and replicated those of the carefully guarded colonial home against the encroachment of the colonized environment and its people. As in the home, the European in the hill stations, clubs and rest-houses depended entirely on domestic

⁶²² Richard F. Burton, *Goa, and the Blue Mountains; or, Six Months of Sick Leave*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1991, p289. Burton was in India between 1842-1849. 'The Nilgherries' refer to the Nilgiris in South India.

⁶²³ Rest-houses were colonial government-owned dwellings maintained in every town for the accommodation of travelling government personnel in Malaya and the Borneo colonies. Fully-furnished, these brick-built buildings were smaller than hotels and meals were prepared by the rest-house cook; see Cuthbert Woodville Harrison, *An Illustrated Guide to the Federated Malay States*, London, The Malay States Information Agency, 1911, pp 117-118.

servants to provide food and comfort. Colonial life on the hill stations, by dint of their isolation and the constructed surroundings to resemble the idyllic English countryside, was entirely dependent on the local indigenous servants. It was ironical that by segregating themselves in the hill station, in a deliberate attempt to get away from the local people, the British in reality depended on their services for day-to-day existence. The services provided by the local inhabitants ranged from administrative support to maintenance of homes and infrastructure. Similarly, the club, a veritable colonial institution was an extension of the imperial home and was the venue where Europeans spent their leisure hours. Rest-houses were simple accommodation dotted around the countryside for travelling government officials. Dak bungalows in India were not leisure and recuperation centres (aside from those in certain hill stations) but were utilitarian buildings originating from the Mughal period.⁶²⁴ Both the club and the rest-house could also be situated in the hill station. Evidence for this chapter is gathered from works written by the British from travelogues, biographies, autobiographies, diaries and cookbooks.

European dependence on the local people for sustenance was entrenched all over the colonies. At home, every meal was prepared by domestic servants and almost every drink was fetched by the 'boy'. This dependence also extended to the times when the colonial was on the move, particularly in areas where there were no European homes or hotels or where there were no wayside taverns or inns that provided meals.⁶²⁵ This book argues that the influence that domestic servants in the colonies wielded over the food practices of their colonial masters was of paramount significance. In the colonial home the memsahib presided over a home that was run by servants; while she might have issued the orders for the meals of the day, it was the cook, the cook's assistant and other servants who purchased, prepared and served the food. The vagaries of the food markets meant that it was not always possible that ingredients required for each dish could be guaranteed nor could the reliability or honesty (perceived or otherwise) of the cook be assured. The quality of the food that appeared on the colonial dining table would certainly be dependent on the cook and his assistants.

Hill Stations

⁶²⁴ Henry Yule and A.C. Burnell, *Hobson-Jobson: The Anglo-Indian Dictionary* Hertfordshire, Wordsworth Editions Ltd, 1996.

⁶²⁵ See Frank F. Conlon, 'Dining out in Bombay', in Carol Breckenbridge (ed.), *Consuming Modernity: Public Culture in a South Asian World*, Minnesota, University of Minnesota Press, 1995, p94.

European ideas for devising places for rest and recreation in the tropical colonies were largely derived from nineteenth century notions of race, of the need to isolate themselves as rulers from the colonized, the home leave policy of the colonial administration and a nostalgic longing for the home country. European thinking at the time perceived India as a land of poverty, disease and famine and those domiciled there and in other colonies took the opportunity to flee from the unbearably hot plains to the cool hills and mountains 'where nature reigned'.⁶²⁶

Rule and leisure from above

Hill stations were established in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as sites for sanatoria and military posts in the tropics by European colonizers. Although European colonization and mercantile empire building began in the sixteenth century, hill stations were created only in the nineteenth century because Europeans did not expand into interiors until then.⁶²⁷ Though the hill station has become most strongly associated with the British, they were not the first to use them, nor were they first developed in India. Nora Mitchell, in her geographical study of hill stations in India, states that the hill stations in the Netherlands Indies were developed earlier than the British ones in India.⁶²⁸ Penang Hill in Malaya became the first hill station in 1786 in the British colonies as the hill stations of India were established from 1819.⁶²⁹ The first house erected for a hill station in India was in 1819 in the Himalayas and that two years later another hill station was developed in the Nilgiris in South India, 2414km (1500 miles) away.⁶³⁰ The three major hill stations, Ootacamund, Darjeeling and Simla, were established by the middle of the 1830s. Initially, the hill stations were mainly used by British troops as convalescent retreats for the military. In 1865, Simla became the summer capital of British India.⁶³¹ By the end of the century, hill stations were established all over India, the majority of which were in the Himalayas.

Hill stations were also known as 'change-of-air-stations' or 'sanatoria' for civil

⁶²⁶ David Arnold, *The Tropics and the Traveling Gaze: India, Landscape and Science 1800-1856*, Delhi, Permanent Black, 2005, p136.

⁶²⁷ Barbara Crossette, *The Great Hill Stations of Asia*, Boulder, Westview Press, 1998, p7.

⁶²⁸ Nora Mitchell, *The Indian Hill-Station: Kodaikanal*, Chicago, University of Chicago, Department of Geography, 1972, p3.

⁶²⁹ S. Robert Aiken, 'Early Penang Hill Station', *Geographical Review*, vol.77, no.4, 1987, p425.

⁶³⁰ Mitchell, *The Indian Hill-Station*, p56.

⁶³¹ Thomas R. Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994, p182.

servants, planters and miners and they also served as strategic bases and cantonments.⁶³² S. Robert Aiken, in his study of Malaya hill stations, terms the hill resorts as generally small and isolated, ‘always defiantly out of place, they were insular little worlds that symbolized European power and exclusiveness’.⁶³³ Aiken uses the term ‘belvedere’ – a lofty place with a commanding view – to describe the hill station. He states that hill stations were perched invariably ‘on the ridges and flanks of mountain ranges,’ and that they were ‘the belvederes of empire. Simla was considered the British belvedere par excellence’.⁶³⁴ Interestingly, James Heitzman notes that Simla remained a seat of government after independence, and, when Himachal Pradesh became a separate state, it became its capital.⁶³⁵ Other hill stations in India also became administrative centres, leisure resorts for the upper and middle classes or educational institutes. Jan Morris also describes the hill station as a belvedere; specifically, ‘the belvedere of a ruling race, obedient to no precedent, subject to no qualm, from whose terraces as from some divine gazebo the British could look down from the cool heights to the expanses of their unimaginable empire below’.⁶³⁶ Further, Morris describes the hill station as ‘gloriously out of place – a figure of despotic privilege’.⁶³⁷

Ruling or relaxing from the elevated height of a hill station, British colonists were served by a community of local people transported from the plains. Mitchell observes:

‘Merchants and traders came up the hill with produce from the plains. Coolies came up to offer personal services. Cows were led up for a milk supply. Washermen came to collect laundry. Some of the servants were brought up by the elite, often sent in advance to prepare vegetable gardens and firewood on the compound. They lived in servants’ quarters tucked out of sight behind the main residence on the compound.’⁶³⁸

Dane Kennedy’s study of hill stations in India looks at the symbolic and socio-political functions served by those resorts during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and argues that these resorts were much more than centres of recreation. Kennedy surmises that hill stations served as both sites of refuge and as sites for surveillance; after 1857 hill stations served as political and military headquarters and cantonments for colonial

⁶³² S. Robert Aiken, *Imperial Belvederes: The Hill Stations of Malaya*, Kuala Lumpur, Oxford University Press, 1994, pvii.

⁶³³ Aiken, *Imperial Belvederes*, pvii.

⁶³⁴ Aiken, *Imperial Belvederes*, pvii.

⁶³⁵ James Heitzman, *The City in South Asia*, London, Routledge, 2008, p136.

⁶³⁶ Jan Morris, *Heaven’s Command: An Imperial Progress*, New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980, p271.

⁶³⁷ Morris, *Heaven’s Command*, p269.

⁶³⁸ Mitchell, *The Indian Hill-Station: Kodaikanal*, p7.

troops.⁶³⁹ Known today as The First War of Indian Independence, Indians revolted in 1857 against East India Company ‘reforms’ that had interfered with many areas of their lives. Kennedy also points out that the 1857 revolt heightened British insecurities about life on the plains and the hill stations became preferred sanctuaries.⁶⁴⁰ He observes that one of the paradoxes of the hill stations is that ‘their success as places where the British imagined it possible to get away from Indians depended on the contributions of Indians’.⁶⁴¹ A significant portion of these contributions was the procurement, preparation and serving of food. Hill stations, according to Kennedy, were ‘the heart of British effort to define and defend the boundaries that set them apart from Indians and that sustained their identity as agents of a superior culture’.⁶⁴² Similarly, Philippa Levine asserts that hill stations, serving as ‘havens of safety for the British’ were ‘a part of England and apart from India’ and that they were thought to be safe places for the reproduction of the race’.⁶⁴³ Levine notes that the hill stations reminded the British of England, with cool air, ‘children at home and at school, tennis parties, village greens, English-style churches and cottages. Here the standards of home could be maintained in what was experienced as a physically and morally corrupting land’.⁶⁴⁴

There were two reasons for the hill stations. First, these resorts were designed to ensure the physical well-being of the colonial in the tropics, and, secondly, relocating to the hill stations can be seen as a deliberate act of creating social distance between the colonizer and the colonized. Mitchell lists the contemporary medical reasons given for hill stations as curing the ills of tropical living. They included perceptions of ailments associated with ‘degeneracy’ – languor, irritability and depression;⁶⁴⁵ while the actual health hazards listed were cholera, malaria, smallpox, nematode diseases, typhoid and paratyphoid fevers and dysentery.⁶⁴⁶

By the late nineteenth century British hill stations in India had changed from their original function as a high-altitude health resort for military personnel and civil servants of the East India Company and became important as an administrative and social

⁶³⁹ Dane Kennedy, *The Magic Mountains: Hill Stations and the British Raj*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1996, p1.

⁶⁴⁰ Kennedy, *The Magic Mountains*, p14.

⁶⁴¹ Kennedy, *The Magic Mountains*, p175.

⁶⁴² Kennedy, *The Magic Mountains*, p226.

⁶⁴³ Philippa Levine, ‘Sexuality, Gender, and Empire’, in Philippa Levine (ed.), *Gender and Empire*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004., p74.

⁶⁴⁴ Levine, ‘Sexuality, Gender, and Empire’, p74.

⁶⁴⁵ Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, p182.

⁶⁴⁶ Mitchell, *The Indian Hill-Station*, pp13-53.

centre.⁶⁴⁷ The types of hill stations in India and Malaya varied and the most substantial ones seemed to be the multi-functional hill stations that were seasonal recreational centres with permanent barracks, hospitals, schools, agricultural estates and which also served as seats of government and military summer headquarters.⁶⁴⁸ From 1864 the British in India decided to rule the country from two capitals. Calcutta was the administrative centre for autumn and winter while Simla in the Himalayas, 1700km (1200 miles) away, became the spring and summer capital.⁶⁴⁹ There was a tripartite agreement in the case of Bombay – it was the administrative headquarters in winter, in the hot season it was Mahableshwar and in the monsoon season it was Poona.

There are conflicting figures on the number of hill stations that existed in colonial India; the main problem being the definition of what constituted a hill station. Mitchell's definition of the Indian hill station is broad, describing it as 'a high-altitude settlement originally established by the British in India to serve the needs of British civil servants and soldiers of the East India Company' and so lists about eighty hill stations during British rule.⁶⁵⁰ She includes Poona, at 549m (1800ft), and Alwaye, at a mere 183m (600ft).⁶⁵¹ Each of the main centres of Anglo-Indian life had at least one hill station.⁶⁵² Kennedy is stricter though and estimates there were only sixty-five bona fide hill stations in the colonial era and discounts those that 'never grew beyond a few bungalows, modest retreats for the few Europeans stationed in the immediate vicinity'.⁶⁵³ However, hill stations in Malaya were indeed modest affairs and were mainly small enclaves of bungalows situated in the highlands. Functioning as the four main Malayan highlands were Penang Hill, Maxwell's Hill, Fraser's Hill and Cameron Highlands.⁶⁵⁴

Developed earlier than the British ones in India the hill stations in the Netherlands Indies were created also as sites for military posts and sanatoria in the early nineteenth

⁶⁴⁷ Mitchell, *The Indian Hill-Station*, p58. See also Dane Kennedy, *The Magic Mountains: Hill Stations and the British Raj*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1996pp14-15.

⁶⁴⁸ Mitchell, *The Indian Hill-Station*, p59.

⁶⁴⁹ Vikram Bhatt, *Resorts of the Raj: Hill Stations of India*, Ahmedabad, Mapin Publishing Pvt Ltd, 1998, p18.

⁶⁵⁰ Mitchell, *The Indian Hill-Station*, pp1 and 87.

⁶⁵¹ Mitchell, *The Indian Hill-Station*, p87.

⁶⁵² Michael Edwardes, *Bound to Exile: The Victorians in India*, London, Sidgwick & Jackson, 1969, p86.

⁶⁵³ Kennedy, *The Magic Mountains*, p9-10.

⁶⁵⁴ Aiken, *Imperial Belvederes*, pvii.

century.⁶⁵⁵ Interestingly the British in Malaya and Singapore also took to the hills in the Indies for their holidays. George L. Peet, a journalist in Singapore from 1923 to 1942, mentioned in his memoir that Europeans visited the hill stations of Java or Brastagi in Sumatra, at least once in their careers.⁶⁵⁶ Margaret Shennan, writing of her years in Malaya, noted that while Fraser's Hill was the leading resort for government officials, executives of private companies and honeymooners, there were others who preferred a trip to Brastagi.⁶⁵⁷ After a particularly hot year in Malaya, Katherine Sim, wrote that she and her husband were 'hankering' for a break in Brastagi.⁶⁵⁸ No explanation was given why British colonials went to hill stations run by the Dutch and not to those by the British in India, distance probably being a reason. Shennan suggested that a change of government official atmosphere at Fraser's Hill and other towns was as important as a change of air in the hill stations. The hill stations under Dutch administration were similar establishments to their British counterparts administered in India and Malaya; they were built in the cool highlands, recreated with 'European-like' environments and were seen as resorts for providing cultural refuge and physical regeneration.⁶⁵⁹

Re-creating Britain in the tropics

Hill stations began to figure in ways other than combating the ills of day-to-day living in the tropics in the British imagination. Thomas Metcalf, in his study of the ideologies of the Raj, points out that the ideology of 'difference' can be read in the opposition of 'plains' and 'hills'.⁶⁶⁰ In the colonial context, the plains represented the hot and threatening, miasmatic lowlands with their uncivilized inhabitants. The hills were created as cool oases in which temperate flowers, fruit and vegetables grew, reminiscent of places in Britain where the British could, unfettered by native people, rule and recreate with their own kind. The British went to great lengths to create this idyllic and 'picturesque sanctuary'. Metcalf notes that outside the 'rolling hills of the Nilgiris', this was not an easy task, as the 'Himalayas, soaring dramatically to the eternal snows, bore no resemblance to British landscapes'.⁶⁶¹ This did not deter the British, however, from adopting different strategies 'to fit these mountains into the descriptive conventions of

⁶⁵⁵ Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2002, p67.

⁶⁵⁶ George L. Peet, *Rickshaw Reporter*, Singapore, Eastern Universities Press Sdn Bhd, 1985, p168.

⁶⁵⁷ Margaret Shennan, *Out in the Midday Sun: The British in Malaya 1880-1960*, London, John Murray, 2000, p128.

⁶⁵⁸ Katherine Sim, *Malayan Landscape*, London, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1957, p148.

⁶⁵⁹ Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*, p67.

⁶⁶⁰ Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, p183.

⁶⁶¹ Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, p183.

the picturesque', as Metcalf points out. One strategy was to reduce the mountains in size by referring to them as 'hills' and another, in writing and illustration, was to focus on the more 'tractable' Nilgiris.⁶⁶² A roaring fire in the hillside bungalow or clubhouse completed the picture of being transported to the homeland. As Mollie Panter-Downes in her book on Ootacamund hill station explains:

'It was not India; it was the little patch of England that each exile discovered it to be. Or, rather, it was an English dream made a shade delirious and out of the true by the thin, high air, combined with all that many a heart loved with passion in India -- the outdoor life, the horses, the wild animals, the early wakings in the Indian mornings, with their matchless dazzling purity that makes each day seem the first ever created. The lanes, the downs, the tumbling streams were all there, to be tamed and enjoyed as much as possible in the likeness of home.'⁶⁶³

The efforts made to make Britons feel 'at home' in the hills was successful, gauging by the remarks made by Sim:

'I experienced then that strange feeling, so strong up in all Malayan hill stations, of being, temporarily, utterly aloof from the ordinary life below, in an unreal world, not of the tropics nor of anywhere else. It was as cool as an English summer, the flowers were English and one had almost an English energy.'⁶⁶⁴

Even houses and hotels in the Indian hill stations were named to 'awaken early poetical memories' – such as 'Moss Grange', 'Ivy Glen'; other names included 'Eagle's Nest' and 'The Craggs'; 'The Highlands' made 'our spirit soars' while 'Sunny Bank' and 'The Dovecote' paint 'a vista of quiet restfulness'.⁶⁶⁵ On Fraser's Hill in Malaya 'the gardens show what can be done with cultivated flowers and turf. The lawns round "The Lodge" would rouse the envy of an English gardener'.⁶⁶⁶

The environment was transformed not just for aesthetic reasons but also for food consumption for the itinerant European hill population. While entire household furnishings and food supplies were carted up to the hills from the plains; fruit and vegetables, particularly those that grew customarily in the cooler climate, were cultivated for the colonial table. Strawberries, the fruit that seems to capture the essence of the English summer, were grown and consumed in many hill stations. The colonizers held strawberries in such high esteem that more than one location among the hill resorts

⁶⁶² Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, p183.

⁶⁶³ Mollie Panter-Downes, *Ooty Preserved: A Victorian Hill Station in India*, London, Hamish Hamilton, 1967, p8.

⁶⁶⁴ Sim, *Malayan Landscape*, p136.

⁶⁶⁵ F.A. Steel and G. Gardiner, *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook: Giving the Duties of Mistress and Servants the General Management of the House and Practical Recipes for Cooking in All Its Branches*, London, William Heinemann, 1898, p190.

⁶⁶⁶ J.B. Scrivenor, 'Recollections of Cameron's Highlands and Fraser's Hill', *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol.IX, Pt.I, 1931, p14.

was named 'Strawberry Hill'. The summit of Strawberry Hill in the Penang Hill Station in Malaya was 'graced by a shady and scented garden of roses and strawberries',⁶⁶⁷ while one of the finest houses in Simla was built on Strawberry Hill.⁶⁶⁸

The hill stations of Malaya did not feature as prominently in the European life of that colony as the hill stations in the Raj did in India. There was no annual setting up home in the hills for months and no administration centre was ever established in the highlands. They were used for short term respite and as reminders of Britain. While there was talk of turning the Cameron Highlands into an alternative seat of government from the late 1930s, similar to that of Simla, this did not materialize. Japan's growing expansionist interests and the subsequent occupation between 1942 to 1945 ended long term plans for transferring the administrative centre to the hill station. Simla became the object of nationalist agitation in India and it could be that the British wanted to exercise caution before establishing another administrative centre in a Malayan hill station.

Mohandas Gandhi referred to the expensive Simla colonial administrative centre as ruling from the 'five hundredth storey'.⁶⁶⁹ Another conjecture could be that the heat in Malaya and Singapore was not seen as debilitating as that in India (although with year-round equatorial climate); alternatively, perhaps the local population was far fewer in number than the teeming masses of India, and, accordingly colonizers felt less need to get away from the natives. The truth however could be the special 'charm' of Malaya under which many Britons fell, with the 'easy going' local people and natural beauty of the country. 'Old Malay hands' frequently wrote of the 'magic of the country'.⁶⁷⁰

Singapore in the 1920s also had its attractions for the European population; there were public gardens, good hotels, European shops, swimming clubs and other social clubs. Shennan points out that even within the confines of the island there were many temptations and choices for recreation and wrote of

'champagne and oysters, moonlight matinees or moonlight picnics, subscription concerts, and the Swimming Club – with five shining cocktail bars, terraces resplendent with sunny umbrellas, a perfect dance floorNo week was complete without a little outing or *makan angin*, east to the beaches beyond the Sea View Hotel or westward to the Singapore Gap'.⁶⁷¹

Still, British colonials in Malaya and Singapore went to the hill stations to 'enjoy

⁶⁶⁷ Aiken, 'Early Penang Hill Station', p429.

⁶⁶⁸ Edward J. Buck, *Simla: Past and Present*, Delhi, Sumit Publications, 1979, p112.

⁶⁶⁹ Kennedy, *The Magic Mountains*, p172, citing Gandhi, 'Five Hundredth Storey,' in *Collected Works*, vol.20, Delhi, 1966, p117.

⁶⁷⁰ Margaret Shennan, *Out in the Midday Sun: The British in Malaya 1880-1960*, London, John Murray, 2000, p109.

⁶⁷¹ Shennan, *Out in the Midday Sun*, p113.

looking at English flowers and eating strawberries with fresh cream' at a hotel built like an Elizabethan mansion in the Cameron Highlands in Malaya.⁶⁷² Other hotels in the Cameron Highlands were the Green Cow Tavern and the Smoke House Inn. The latter was a 1930s mock Tudor mansion, 'famous for its log fires and strawberry and cream teas'.⁶⁷³ Jean Falconer, a memsahib in Malaya, pointed out that it was delightful to have a 'cheery log fire burning in the sitting room' in hill station lodgings and although she conceded that a fire was not entirely necessary, 'it is the kind of luxury people expect in the hills'.⁶⁷⁴ At Fraser's Hill, Europeans in the 1930s could also refresh themselves at 'the only pub in Malaya, at Maxwell Arms, which served as the clubhouse for the nine-hole golf course'.⁶⁷⁵ Fraser's Hill, at 4100 ft (1250 metres above sea level) lies along the Malayan central mountain range.

In her work on the imperial architecture of India, Jan Morris observes that the British 'ruled in enclave, and their buildings almost always, even when ostentatiously Indianified, spoke of an alien and exclusive presence'.⁶⁷⁶ In her other work on India, Morris states that all over the trend was towards the 'aloof and the grandiloquent, ... Government Houses, for example became very grand indeed'.⁶⁷⁷ However, in Malaya, colonial architecture, like other aspects and institutions of colonialism, was scaled down. This is best illustrated by the official residence of the district office in the then new hill station at Cameron Highlands. In the 1930s, district officer Sir John Peel lived and administered in a tin-roofed wooden hut with no running water nor sanitation facilities.⁶⁷⁸

Regardless of the size of the hill station, the single most pertinent characteristic of the exclusive resort was the armies of local workers who were responsible for maintaining the hill station as a sanctuary for rest and recreation for the colonizers. All the rituals of colonial life in the plains were replicated in the hills. Domestic servants were included in the annual pilgrimage to the hill stations. As Aiken points out it was the 'porters, bearers, butlers, valets, tailors, cooks, ayahs, amahs, *dhobis* (washerwoman), water

⁶⁷² John G. Butcher, *The British in Malaya, 1880-1941: The Social History of a European Community in Colonial South-East Asia*, Kuala Lumpur, Oxford University Press, 1979, p164.

⁶⁷³ Butcher, *The British in Malaya*, p129.

⁶⁷⁴ Jean Falconer, *Woodsmoke and Temple Flowers: Memories of Malaya*, Edinburgh, The Pentland Press Ltd, 1992, p45.

⁶⁷⁵ Shennan, *Out in the Midday Sun*, p127.

⁶⁷⁶ Jan Morris, *Stones of Empire: The Buildings of the Raj*, London, Oxford University Press, 1983, p35.

⁶⁷⁷ Morris, *Heaven's Command*, p271.

⁶⁷⁸ Shennan, *Out in the Midday Sun*, p196.

carriers, lampmen, guards, footmen, gardeners, grass-cutters, and sweepers' who sustained the 'hill-station clientele ... drawn from a small but powerful dominant elite'.⁶⁷⁹

Escape from the unhealthy lowlands to the mountain air

In the Company era, Europeans doubted whether they could endure long periods in the tropics without serious mental and physical deterioration.⁶⁸⁰ As medical doctor G.M. Giles wrote in 1904, 'a hundred years ago a prolonged residence in the Tropics was regarded with well-founded horror. The best the white settler in the lands of the sun dared hope for was "a short life and a merry one," but too often the merriment was sadly lacking'.⁶⁸¹ It was then widely believed that European men should recuperate for six to eight months in a temperate climate after every three or four years of living in the tropics, and that women and children should spend an even shorter time in a tropical climate.⁶⁸² In a handbook to British Malaya it was suggested that children should be sent back to Britain as soon as they reached the age of six as they tended to become anaemic in the colony.⁶⁸³ Even within the medical profession, the prevailing view at the time was that females faced a greater risk to their health when they had to endure the unrelenting heat of summer and were strongly advised to retreat to the hills.⁶⁸⁴ Developed specifically by European colonialists, hill stations were originally designed for colonials to regain their health from the perceived ills contracted in the tropical lowlands.⁶⁸⁵ It is unclear what precisely the ailments were as a result of living in the tropics for a number of years but it was generally accepted that 'after three or four years in the tropics white men no longer displayed as much energy in their work and that many became nervous and irritable and found it difficult to concentrate and to remember recent events or even important appointments'.⁶⁸⁶ This malaise is attributed to two ideas of the time, originating from Greek thinking: miasmas or swamp airs caused disease, and, climate as affecting a person's energy and personality.⁶⁸⁷ In

⁶⁷⁹ Aiken, *Imperial Belvederes*, p8.

⁶⁸⁰ Robert R. Reed, 'The Colonial Genesis of Hill Stations: The Genting Exception', *Geographical Review*, vol.69, no.4, 1979, p463.

⁶⁸¹ G.M. Giles, *Climate and Health in Hot Countries and the Outlines of Tropical Climatology*, London, John Bale, Sons & Danielsson, Ltd, 1904, piii.

⁶⁸² Butcher, *The British in Malaya*, p160.

⁶⁸³ R.L. German, *Handbook to British Malaya*, London, Waterlow & Sons Limited, publication year unknown, p50.

⁶⁸⁴ Kennedy, *The Magic Mountains*, p120.

⁶⁸⁵ See J.E. Spencer and W.L. Thomas, 'The Hill Stations and Summer Resorts of the Orient', *Geographical Review*, vol.38, no.4, 1948, pp640-641.

⁶⁸⁶ Butcher, *The British in Malaya*, p158.

⁶⁸⁷ Mitchell, *The Indian Hill-Station*, p15.

Southeast Asia, the colonials called this syndrome ‘tropical neurasthenia’ or ‘Malayan head’ and Butcher cites several sources which indicated that the suicide rate among Europeans was high.⁶⁸⁸ Six years was considered too long a period to spend in the tropics but that was how long officials in the Malay States had to wait for a year’s leave.⁶⁸⁹ Butcher observes that doctors and laymen of the time claimed that apart from the heat and humidity, the monotony of the climate was ‘one of its most harmful aspects’. However Butcher notes that it was unclear ‘whether the nervous system was gradually damaged by a lack of stimulation from changing temperatures or simply that men who were used to marked seasons found the tropical climate boring’.⁶⁹⁰ Perhaps more importantly, Butcher notes that ‘beliefs about the long-term effects of the climate were often influenced by the attitudes Europeans had towards the peoples who inhabited the tropics. Arising from these attitudes was the fear that, over a period of several generations, if not sooner, Europeans might lose their superior vigour and degenerate into the lazy ways of the natives’.⁶⁹¹ A less costly alternative to the long journey for home leave in Britain was the establishment of the hill stations. Children could also be educated at hill schools that were under European administration and were a segregated environment, that is, they catered to only European children.⁶⁹² In Simla, although the British could educate their children at Bishop Cotton’s school (which was run on English lines), most of the parents still preferred to have their children’s education completed in England.⁶⁹³ Colonial government policy on leave, and distance to Britain, meant that a short break in the hill stations instead would restore their well-being with its cool climate.⁶⁹⁴ Aiken states that the East India Company usually did not allow its employees to go home on leave and this was the main reason for the popularity of local resorts.⁶⁹⁵ Later, employees under the colonial administration were able to return to England for home leave after eight years in India. Staff of the Indian Civil Service were entitled to different kinds of leave in the nineteenth century, ranging from privilege leave, special leave, leave on medical certificate and furlough.⁶⁹⁶ In addition, fast

⁶⁸⁸ Butcher refers to letter to editor of *British Medical Journal*, vol.1, 1926, p503, by Bishop of Singapore to editor; Kenneth Black, ‘Health and Climate with special Reference to Malaya’, *Malayan Medical Journal*, vol.7, 1932, pp103-4.

⁶⁸⁹ Butcher, *The British in Malaya*, p72.

⁶⁹⁰ Butcher, *The British in Malaya*, p158.

⁶⁹¹ Butcher, *The British in Malaya*, pp158-159.

⁶⁹² Butcher, *The British in Malaya*, p160.

⁶⁹³ Dennis Kincaid, *British Social Life in India, 1608-1937*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974, p251.

⁶⁹⁴ Butcher, *The British in Malaya*, p72.

⁶⁹⁵ Aiken, ‘Early Penang Hill Station’, p426.

⁶⁹⁶ See David Gilmour, *The Ruling Caste: Imperial Lives in the Victorian Raj*, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005, p273-277.

steamship travel did not become a serious option until the second half of the nineteenth century. With the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, technological impediments to frequent Europe-Asia travel were lessened.

‘When are you going to the hills?’, according to Steel and Gardiner, was the typical question when the month of April approached.⁶⁹⁷ While colonials viewed the sojourn to the hills as an annual pilgrimage to restore health and general well-being, there was also the perception that women and children were in far greater need of this respite from the tropics. Women and children were seen as more likely to succumb to the tropical climate and sending them to the hill stations was one way of ameliorating their stay in India.

It was considered memsahibs should set good examples to young girls to promote the British ideals of womanly refinement and civilized behaviour in order to counter the perceived threat of India.⁶⁹⁸ Anglo-Indians saw themselves as an aristocracy in India and they were keen to protect this reputation. Steel and Gardiner stated that a change in the hills was necessary when:

‘a woman cannot sleep at night her nervous system suffers, and failure to obtain a good night’s rest is one of the great drawbacks of a hot weather in the plains... the house is not sufficiently cool at night to enable us to sleep with any comfort, and sleepless nights in India predispose the system to disease, especially of a malarious kind.’⁶⁹⁹

Steel and Gardiner advocated the preference of going to the hills instead of taking leave to England. The yearly visit was viewed as ‘materially assisting in the maintenance of good health’ and one of the authors noted that ‘her own experience of its benefits was that, having brought up a large family during a residence of twenty years in India, she was never once invalided, and only went to England twice during that period, and then in the company of her husband and children’.⁷⁰⁰ This decision was not made without careful deliberation, however; the main consideration being weighing up the health benefits for herself and her responsibilities as the dutiful wife. Steel and Gardiner wrote:

‘Many wives, no doubt, cannot make up their minds to break up their homes and separate from their husbands, but if the choice lies between a few months’ absence from home yearly and visits to England lasting several years, surely the former is preferable. And a good wife can do much to keep her husband’s home in the plains comfortable during her annual visit to the hills: she can make wise

⁶⁹⁷ Steel and Gardiner, *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook*, p189.

⁶⁹⁸ Collingham, *Imperial Bodies*, p181.

⁶⁹⁹ Steel and Gardiner, *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook*, p189.

⁷⁰⁰ Steel and Gardiner, *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook*, p189.

arrangements before leaving, and can even send him weekly bills of fare, lists of servants' wages, &c.'⁷⁰¹

Not all medical opinion of the time was in agreement that hill stations were a panacea for the ills of the lowlands. Giles' text on climate and health in the tropics disputed this, stating that the health advantages of resorting to the hills were 'overrated' and that the hills had 'special dangers of their own'.⁷⁰² Giles claimed that during the rainy season hill stations could be particularly dangerous for children as typhoid fever was endemic in almost all hill stations. He observed,

'The amount of sickness, both of a serious and trifling character, on most hill stations is perfectly alarming, and there cannot be the least doubt that there are a great many stations in the plains that are far less unhealthy for Europeans the whole year round, so what is gained by resorting to the hills is, in most cases, not health, but personal comfort.'⁷⁰³

Giles noted that 'hill diarrhoea' was common in the Himalayas and advised prevention of this by filtering all water for drinking and cooking. He said that although the hills were free of malaria, the disease could be easily prevented in the lowlands by installing 'metallic gauze' to prevent entry of mosquitoes.⁷⁰⁴ He further stated that the climate of the hills, 'though pleasant enough, is during the rains even more treacherous than that of the plains – damp cold, alternating with warmth'.⁷⁰⁵ Kennedy also described the situation in the nineteenth century when, due to lack of toilet facilities for the thousands of servants who lived in the hill stations, diseases like typhoid fever and cholera frequently broke out. It was only when Indians posed a health threat to Europeans that sanitation facilities were improved.⁷⁰⁶

As fervent believers in the curative air of the hills, Steel and Gardiner devoted a whole chapter, titled 'On the hills', to making preparations for the hills in their manual on housekeeping and cookery in India.⁷⁰⁷ They praised the benefits of 'going to the hills' as a preventative measure against mental and physical ills. Preparations for the annual trip were formidable, and decisions had to be made on 'what to take and what to leave behind for the master of the house'.⁷⁰⁸ 'Taking to the hills' was a literal transplanting of the household – Steel and Gardiner suggested transporting the sitting room carpets,

⁷⁰¹ Steel and Gardiner, *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook*, p189.

⁷⁰² Giles, *Climate and Health in Hot Countries*, part 1, p80.

⁷⁰³ Giles, *Climate and Health in Hot Countries*, part 1, p81.

⁷⁰⁴ Giles, *Climate and Health in Hot Countries*, part 1, p80.

⁷⁰⁵ Giles, *Climate and Health in Hot Countries*, part 1, p150.

⁷⁰⁶ Kennedy, *The Magic Mountains*, p191-192.

⁷⁰⁷ Steel and Gardiner, *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook*, pp189-198.

⁷⁰⁸ Steel and Gardiner, *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook*, p189.

curtains, the piano, tables, chairs, ornaments, wall pictures, books, house linen, crockery and other 'kitchen and pantry gear'.⁷⁰⁹ Mrs Robert Moss King, a 'civilian's wife', writing of her years in India in the late 1800s, remarked that for the sojourn to Landour, 'fortunately men are plentiful in India, and we had quite fifteen at work ... Stores had to be packed, and wine, crockery, glass, plate, house-linen, books, clothes, a few pieces of furniture, and lastly the piano'.⁷¹⁰ Lavender Jamieson, born in 1914, described how, as a child, her family 'went annually to Coonoor in the Nilgiri Hills for the hot weather, traveling in great luxury in our own saloon – two carriages, one the day and sleeping carriage and the second for the kitchen, luggage and servants'.⁷¹¹

Although hill stations were not permanent fixtures on the calendar for the British in Malaya, live animals, servants and provisions were lugged up to the hill resorts. A Mrs Stratton-Brown on an 'expedition' to Bukit Kutu (or Treacher's Hill) in Selangor in the 1890s in Malaya recounted that two sheep were driven up, crates of fowls, ducks and tinned provisions in boxes were carried by coolies. Mrs Stratton-Brown stated that visitors generally took their houseboy, and amahs or ayahs for the children. She noted that it 'needed some 20 coolies for the baggage, so it became a minor mountaineering proposition'.⁷¹²

Re-creating the colonial cuisine in the hills

The degree to which Anglo-Indians tried to relocate their entire households to the hills was indicative of their desire to maintain their imperial lifestyle in the hills. The white middle-class household that they had so carefully created in the plains was transplanted to the hills, sometimes to hill stations that were inaccessible by roads. Just as the memsahib performed her wifely duties in maintaining prestige in the plains, she continued to operate in her private sphere in the hill stations. The native servants were responsible for the upheaval to the hills: first to pack the entire household, then to accompany the goods en route, set up the household and finally to work in a different setting. The whole exercise would have not been feasible without the part played by the domestic servants; indeed, it is doubtful whether the administrative centres of Simla, Ootacamund, Mahableshwar, Naini Tal and others could have existed without domestic

⁷⁰⁹ Steel and Gardiner, *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook*, p194.

⁷¹⁰ (Mrs) Robert Moss King, *The Diary of a Civilian's Wife in India, 1877-1882*, London, Richard Bentley & Son, 1884, p45.

⁷¹¹ Laurence Fleming, *Last Children of the Raj: British Childhoods in India 1919-1939*, vol.I, London, Radcliffe Press, 2004, p30.

⁷¹² Aiken, *Imperial Belvederes*, p34.

servants. It can perhaps be argued that hill stations in Malaya were not as developed as those in India, and that a fully functional administrative centre did not emerge in the Malayan hills owing to the significantly smaller number of servants and other workers available.

The annual excursion extended even to the cow (kept for milk in the plains) that was led up to the hills. Gardiner and Steel suggested that for households who did not keep cows, 'the next best thing is to hire them: they will then be brought morning and evening to be milked before you and into your own milk-can. However, should the cow accompany the trek to the hills, Steel and Gardiner suggested that the cow should be first be milked

'the night before the family; at the first halting-place the milk should be left ready for the family on arrival. The last day of the march the morning's milk should be taken on in bottles to be made into butter on arrival, and the cows should reach their destination in time to be milked there that evening'.⁷¹³

Where good hill pastures existed, such as in Mussoorie (at 6500ft or 2000 metres above sea level and created in 1826 as a hill station) milk and butter were available.⁷¹⁴ Some households kept goats for their milk too. Colonials based in Bombay first went to Poona but when it too became hot they made their way to Mahableshwar in October. There was also distrust of food in the trains cooked by unfamiliar Indians. Kincaid noted that the food in the restaurant car 'seldom inspired confidence, so that it was necessary to take all one's food with one, and if a child were travelling too, a goat would be tied in the guard's van and an orderly would hurry off to milk it when the train stopped at some station in the evening'.⁷¹⁵

Colonists certainly took seriously the idea that a holiday in the hills brought health or other benefits even though it was a costly and inconvenient exercise. On the annual trek to Mahableshwar, for example, Kincaid described how servants were sent ahead to set up tent and to unpack. As bungalows for rent were in short supply and expensive, it was not unusual for the British to pitch a tent in a friend's garden in Poona or to apply to the Superintendent for a plot in the jungle.⁷¹⁶ Kincaid painted a Somerset Maugham picture of the colonial at leisure thus, 'It was delicious in the evenings to sit outside the tents ...

⁷¹³ Steel and Gardiner, *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook*, pp196-197.

⁷¹⁴ Steel and Gardiner, *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook*, p63.

⁷¹⁵ Kincaid, *British Social Life in India*, pp282-284.

⁷¹⁶ Kincaid, *British Social Life in India*, p285.

Gentlemen lay back full length in basket-chairs, lit cigars and called for *chota pegs* (whisky or brandy). Ladies sipped lemonade and looked forward to a Strawberry Tea at the Club on Friday'.⁷¹⁷

There is no reason to believe that the colonials ate any differently to the meals they consumed in the plains, that is, a combination of local and European meals. It is another point of contradiction in British imperial culture that on the one hand, there was the desire for segregation, while on the other, there was the continuing reliance on local domestic service and Asian food. The colonial cuisine with signature dishes such as curries, mulligatawny, caramel custard was much in evidence. Barbara Crossette, in her study of hill stations in Asia, cites the following dishes served in the home of a wealthy planter on Penang Hill in the 1800s: 'a choice of soups, fish, joints of sweet Bengal mutton, Chinese capons, Keddah fowls, and Sangora ducks, Yorkshire hams, Java potatoes and Malay ubis, followed by a rice and curry course, cheese and fruit'.⁷¹⁸ Groceries included tinned food, local mutton, chicken and beef and vegetables grown in the hills specifically for the white population: cabbages, cauliflowers, turnips and peas.⁷¹⁹

Food supplies in the hills were more difficult to source than in the plains but Steel and Gardiner believed that it was possible to have plain but sufficient food. They preferred buying vegetables from a garden two or three times a week to buying from the bazaar. Although the former was more expensive the authors believed that eating vegetables from the bazaar were dangerous if washed in dirty or too little water.⁷²⁰ One of the authors had a thriving garden, supplying her family and friends with potatoes and other vegetables and flowers. In Mussoorie, the government encouraged the creation of hillside estates for the cultivation of European-type fruits and vegetables to cater to the European population.⁷²¹ John Lang recalled from his travels in India in the mid-nineteenth century having mulligatawny soup and rice, cold lamb and mint sauce with sherry and beer for tiffin at Jack Apsey's home in Mussorie.⁷²² While camping in the Upper Provinces, his party slept until ten in the morning and breakfasted on 'grilled

⁷¹⁷ Kincaid, *British Social Life in India*, p285.

⁷¹⁸ Crossette, *The Great Hill Stations of Asia*, pp168-169, citing John Turnbull Thomson's *Glimpses into Life in Malayan Lands*, first published 1864.

⁷¹⁹ Bhatt, *Resorts of the Raj*, p43.

⁷²⁰ Steel and Gardiner, *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook*, p191.

⁷²¹ Mitchell, *The Indian Hill-Station*, p63.

⁷²² John Lang, *Wanderings in India and Other Sketches of Life in Hindostan*, London, Routledge, Warne, and Routledge, 1859, p19.

fowl, curried fowl and eggs, with beer instead of tea'.⁷²³

Anglo-Indians were known for consuming large meals in India and they continued to do so in the hills. Lang described an army major breakfasting at the Himalaya Club in Mussoorie: after having just devoured two grilled thighs of turkey, was eating a pigeon pie and was enquiring about the Irish pie.⁷²⁴ Two medical doctors at the time advised moderation in the consumption of meat and advocated eating more of the Indian staples. Edward John Tilt, in a medical text in 1875, wrote,

‘When I say that Englishmen and women should imitate the Hindoo diet, I only mean that they should consume less meat and fat than in England, not that they should eat the enormous quantities of rice, to which their stomachs have not been gradually fitted. Greasy made dishes should be avoided, but curries commend themselves, as the result of a highly judicious conservative instinct’.⁷²⁵

Echoing similar sentiments in 1904, G.M. Giles, from the Indian Medical Services, suggested that ‘the introduction of pulses into our dietary as a partial substitute for meat would be advantageous, at any rate during the great heats’.⁷²⁶ In Malaya, Girl Guides were instructed that ‘Green salads and vegetables should take a prominent place in our daily diet’.⁷²⁷ The campaign for a reduced meat diet stemmed from the increasing numbers of British literary figures in the second half of the nineteenth century who converted to vegetarianism.⁷²⁸ The vegetarianism movement had originated in the age of Romanticism when Hinduism and the vegetarian diet were admired as a philosophy of universal sympathy and equality for all.⁷²⁹ Thus, up in the hill stations of the colonies a tension existed between British discourses on the healthy mountain air versus the leisurely lifestyle; and, health and frugality versus indulgence and hedonism.

By taking to the hill stations for several months of the year, with some memsahibs staying the best part of the year in the hills, the colonials had the best of two worlds. The British felt at home in the hills with cool temperatures, temperate flowers, fruit and vegetables; they were housed in cozy cottages and at the same time a coterie of servants

⁷²³ Lang, *Wanderings in India*, p150.

⁷²⁴ Lang, *Wanderings in India*, p4.

⁷²⁵ Edward John Tilt, *Health in India for British Women, and on the Prevention of Disease in Tropical Climates*, London, J. & A. Churchill, 1875, p, 72.

⁷²⁶ Giles, *Climate and Health in Hot Countries*, p60, part 1.

⁷²⁷ Shennan, *Out in the Midday Sun*, p127, citing Captain’s notebook, Miscellaneous papers on the Girl Guide movement, British Association of Malaya Papers, VI/2, Royal Commonwealth Society Records, Cambridge University Library.

⁷²⁸ Tristram Stuart, *The Bloodless Revolution: Radical Vegetarians the Discovery of India*, London, Harper Press, 2006, p423.

⁷²⁹ Stuart, *The Bloodless Revolution*, ppxxiv-xxv.

was at hand to serve them. All the rituals of the colonial way of life in the lowlands were replicated in the hills, including enjoying the colonial cuisine. Among the social institutions established by the British in the colonies were clubs.

Clubs

The origins of clubs

Clubs were found in every nook and cranny of the British Empire. It has been said that when two Englishmen meet they form a club, if there are three, they form a colony, and if four, an empire.⁷³⁰ In 1775 the word ‘clubbable’ was coined by Samuel Johnson, defining a club in his dictionary as ‘an assembly of good fellows meeting under certain conditions’.⁷³¹ Clubs became popular in the eighteenth century in Britain when members signed up as a group to seek a particular pleasure.

These early clubs proliferated according to every ‘pleasurable activity’ imaginable: for example, the Sublime Society of Beefsteaks was founded in 1735; another meat-eating club was the Rump-Steak Club.⁷³² The eighteenth century saw the development of gentlemen’s clubs as groups of men who met regularly, mostly in public places such as coffee houses, taverns, or inns for a specific aim of recreation, socializing, education, politics or a shared profession.⁷³³ The clubs had grown out of the coffee houses of the seventeenth century which were popular places where men gathered ‘to discuss business or politics or the latest poem or play, and to throw dice or play cards’.⁷³⁴ It was said that clubs were seen as an integral part of the civilizing process in Britain.

Amy Milne-Smith, in her study on the popularity of gentlemen’s clubs between 1889 and 1914 cites several reasons for this.⁷³⁵ As the upper class home also functioned as a venue for business, pleasure or politics with dinners, teas and ‘at home gatherings’; men sought privacy or intimacy in clubs. Milne-Smith noted the irony that for the elite men,

⁷³⁰ D.J.M. Tate, *The Lake Club, 1890-1990: The Pursuit of Excellence*, Kuala Lumpur, Oxford University Press, 1997, p1.

⁷³¹ Marie Mulvey Roberts, ‘Pleasures Engendered by Gender: Homosociality and the Club’, in Roy Porter and Marie Mulvey Roberts (eds), *Pleasure in the Eighteenth Century*, New York, New York University Press, 1996, p54.

⁷³² Roberts, ‘Pleasures Engendered by Gender’, p48-49.

⁷³³ Judith Flanders, *Consuming Passions: Leisure and Pleasure in Victorian Britain*, London, Harper Press, 2006, pp4-5.

⁷³⁴ Roberts, ‘Pleasures Engendered by Gender’, p49. In 1710 there were 2000 coffee houses in London and Westminster that catered exclusively to men.

⁷³⁵ Amy Milne-Smith, ‘A Flight to Domesticity? Making a Home in the Gentlemen’s Clubs of London, 1880-1914’, *Journal of British Studies*, vol.45, no.4, 2006.

the home might not have been able to provide intimacy or privacy.⁷³⁶ Men were also said to flee to the gentlemen's club from the feminized home because, as boys who attended all-male public schools, they had become used to homosocial spaces and the gentlemen's club provided a form of domesticity.⁷³⁷ Apart from providing a private space within London, the clubs usually had, on their premises, a dining hall, library, entertainment centre, sleeping areas, bathhouse and study.⁷³⁸

By the middle of the nineteenth century, club culture had spread to the middle class. Between 1851 and 1871, the middle class had tripled in size; with the increase in employment in the business world and the increasing movement to the suburbs, many men ate their midday and evening meals in clubs or the 'chop-houses'.⁷³⁹ A further erosion of the comforts of home was that of sustenance and nourishment and this was usurped by the club.

The notion of a club is based on exclusivity, and as Marie Mulvey Roberts points out, 'while the exclusivity of a club invited privacy, it remained, at the same time, public', for it allowed the club member to dine away from home.⁷⁴⁰ The middle class clubs were organised along the same structure and function and there was anxiety that clubs were no longer exclusive. These clubs were open to men only as their membership sought same-sex company, fellowship and a sense of camaraderie.⁷⁴¹ Another development of the clubs extended to those formed for men returning from the colonies, the most famous one of which was the Oriental Club.⁷⁴²

Colonial clubs and women

The clubs in British India and other colonies were replicated along the same patterns, the oldest of which was the Bengal Club, founded in Calcutta in 1827.⁷⁴³ The colonial clubs were particularly important to those men whose families were in Britain or to those who were bachelors, as the clubs served as places for socialization, dining venues and a sense of belonging to an essentially British institution. Historian Mrinalini Sinha

⁷³⁶ Milne-Smith, 'A Flight to Domesticity?' p797.

⁷³⁷ Milne-Smith, 'A Flight to Domesticity?' p798.

⁷³⁸ Milne-Smith, 'A Flight to Domesticity?' p798.

⁷³⁹ Nicola Humble, *Culinary Pleasures: Cookbooks and the Transformation of British Food*, London, Faber and Faber, 2005, pp13-14.

⁷⁴⁰ Roberts, 'Pleasures Engendered by Gender', p54.

⁷⁴¹ Roberts, 'Pleasures Engendered by Gender', p75.

⁷⁴² Milne-Smith, 'A Flight to Domesticity?' p816.

⁷⁴³ H.R. Panckridge, *A Short History of the Bengal Club, 1827-1927*, Calcutta, The Bengal Club, 1927, p1.

discusses the notion of clubbability and Britishness in British India, contending that the European social club in India was ‘a quintessentially imperial institution’.⁷⁴⁴ The colonial club was the venue where Europeans met as members or guests of members of the club. It represented a symbol of British culture; for the colonists, it reflected a microcosm of British society in the colonies. Sinha also views the colonial club as ‘a privileged site for mediating the contradictory logic of Eurocentrism in the creation of a distinctive colonial public sphere that the European social club acquires its centrality as an imperial institution in colonial India’.⁷⁴⁵ George Orwell’s quote in his classic novel *Burmese Days*, that ‘[I]n any town in India the European Club is the spiritual citadel, the real seat of the British power’, is often cited in works on colonial India.⁷⁴⁶ Butcher observed that, in Malaya, ‘as soon as even a few Europeans settled in a district it became possible to form a club’.⁷⁴⁷ In the early 1800s, when no social club in Kuala Lumpur existed for Europeans, the British would meet at a Chinese-owned sundries shop that sold ‘everything from champagne to boot-laces’.⁷⁴⁸ In the aftermath of World War II, when there was no clubhouse in Batu Gajah, a town in the state of Perak, Malaya, the Europeans would gather at the officers’ mess to meet and have drinks.⁷⁴⁹ Following the success of the Selangor Club several others were formed, both in and outside Kuala Lumpur.⁷⁵⁰

A significant difference between the clubs of Britain and those in the colonies was that women were welcome in most of the colonial clubs. The likely rationale for this was to help lessen the isolation of the memsahib in the colonies. As John Cotton, political officer in the Indian Police Service in 1930-1946 explained:

‘I think the club was very important to the womenfolk, ... the men spent long hours at the office and mightn’t get home until 6 and 7 at night and then bring work home with them which might occupy them after dinner well into early hours of the morning, and so the wife was either thrown to her own resources, or she might go and gather with the other wives, of the club and have a game of tennis, and it did fulfill, a very useful function.’⁷⁵¹

⁷⁴⁴ Mrinalini Sinha, ‘Britishness, Clubbability, and the Colonial Public Sphere’, in Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton (eds), *Bodies in Contact: Rethinking Colonial Encounters in World History*, London, Duke University Press, 2005, p184.

⁷⁴⁵ Sinha, ‘Britishness, Clubbability, and the Colonial Public Sphere’, p184.

⁷⁴⁶ George Orwell, *Burmese Days: A Novel*, London, Secker & Warburg, 1955, p17.

⁷⁴⁷ Butcher, *The British in Malaya*, p56.

⁷⁴⁸ Butcher, *The British in Malaya*, p59.

⁷⁴⁹ Falconer, *Woodsmoke and Temple Flowers*, p44.

⁷⁵⁰ See Butcher, *The British in Malaya*, pp63-67.

⁷⁵¹ Sir John Cotton, SOAS: OA1/18/1-6, 1930-1946, Political Officer, IPS, transcript 68 pp 5 Sept 1973 – 1015-1330 H58x.

Henry Berriff, born in 1927 in Simla, remembered that members of the Factory Club met for tennis, billiard, dances and played at the nine-hole golf course. Berriff also noted that women members played *mahjong* (a game of Chinese origin played by four persons using tiles) in the mornings and that the club also had a shop for groceries, a bar, a reading room and a library.⁷⁵²

The club was just as ubiquitous in the colonial landscape in Malaya, Singapore and the Borneo colonies. It was omnipresent in the smallest town in these colonies and even on rubber and tobacco estates.⁷⁵³ L.W.W. Gudgeon observed that the tobacco plantation in Borneo was ‘a little world of its own’ with its own telephone systems, sometimes its own railway, its own hospital, its own district magistrate, its own post, its own police-cell and its own club.⁷⁵⁴ K.R. Blackwell spent twenty-three years as a member of the Malayan Civil Service and recalled how the European Club on the mine at Klian Intan alleviated the loneliness of his time as an Assistant District Officer when he was posted to Kroh.⁷⁵⁵ In his first eleven years in Malaya, Blackwell was a member of nineteen clubs, many of them social clubs. He was the State Treasurer of Taiping for ten years. The town at the time boasted five main clubs.⁷⁵⁶

While clubs in the small towns or estates of Malaya and Borneo were centres of social activity for the Europeans, there was usually more than one club and members were admitted through their profession or a common interest in the towns with large numbers of Europeans. The three main clubs in Malaya were the Selangor Club, the Lake Club and the Selangor Golf Club.⁷⁵⁷ Victor Purcell, as a public servant, belonged to the Penang Club, the Swimming Club, the Golf Club, the Hunt Club and the Turf Club. He remembered the Penang Club as having ‘lofty rooms, polished floors, ample armchairs, servants moving about silently with trays full of drinks’.⁷⁵⁸ The Recreation Club of Labuan, one of the British Empire’s smallest acquisitions off the coast of Northern Borneo,⁷⁵⁹ was where colonial men played tennis, cricket and soccer. It stood on the sea

⁷⁵² Fleming, *Last Children of the Raj*, vol.I, pp230-231.

⁷⁵³ Butcher, *The British in Malaya*, p147.

⁷⁵⁴ L.W.W. Gudgeon, *Peeps at Many Lands: British North Borneo*, London, Adam and Charles Black, 1912, p47.

⁷⁵⁵ K.R. Blackwell, *Malay Curry*, pp 81-88, MSS.Ind.Ocn.s.90, K.R. Blackwell.

⁷⁵⁶ Blackwell, *Malay Curry*, pp94-95.

⁷⁵⁷ Butcher, *The British in Malaya*, p147.

⁷⁵⁸ Victor Purcell, *The Memoirs of a Malayan Official*, London, Cassell, 1965, p248.

⁷⁵⁹ Maxwell Hall, *Labuan Story: Memoirs of a Small Island near the Coast of North Borneo*, Kuala Lumpur Synergy Media, 2007, p96.

front, close to the wharf and European visitors were made welcome if they had an introduction.⁷⁶⁰

In British North Borneo, Charles Bruce, Resident of the Interior, wrote about the club as the meeting place for the British women: ‘the ladies are mostly invisible during the heat of the day but assemble after tea at the club, where they watch or take part in the tennis, and when night falls, retire to their own sanctum ...’.⁷⁶¹

The first club formed in Malaya in 1884 was the Selangor Club in Kuala Lumpur. Somewhat unusually, from its early years women were included. Another indication of women’s presence in the Selangor Club was that its nickname of the ‘Spotted Dog’ was supposedly named after a Mrs Syers’ dalmations which followed her as she rode in her carriage to the club.⁷⁶² However, women were excluded from the bar and were made to sit in the reading room or on the verandah. Throughout the Malay states European women were allowed to use club facilities.⁷⁶³

Presumably women frequented the clubs as spouses of members or as guests and were not outright members.⁷⁶⁴ For example, Butcher noted that in October 1892 the Selangor Club had 140 members and there were 115 European males in the April 1891 census in Kuala Lumpur, suggesting that many European men from outside Kuala Lumpur belonged to the club. So, outside the Anglo-Indian home, the club was the place to be: a home away from home where women were somewhat included. The club then was the place that integrated domestic and public life and demarcated the boundaries between colonizer and colonized.⁷⁶⁵

Class division in clubs

However, not all clubs in the colonies existed specifically to pander to imperial designs. There were practical reasons for colonials to frequent these establishments as accommodation for travellers and restaurants were in short supply. Hotels in India were described ‘as wretched places, affording but little accommodation, and abounding with

⁷⁶⁰ Maxwell Hall, *Labuan Story*, p47.

⁷⁶¹ Charles Bruce, *Twenty Years in Borneo*, London, Cassell and Company Ltd, 1924, p235.

⁷⁶² Butcher, *The British in Malaya*, pp61-12. There are several versions to the origin of the ‘Spotted Dog’, one of which was that non-Europeans (non-white) were members of the club.

⁷⁶³ Butcher, *The British in Malaya*, p62.

⁷⁶⁴ Butcher, *The British in Malaya*, p61.

⁷⁶⁵ Levine, ‘Sexuality, Gender, and Empire’, p74.

dirt, bad viands, and worse wines'.⁷⁶⁶ The British in India were well-known for their hospitality in putting up with travelling colleagues but where private homes were not available the club was the solution. While each particular club had its rules and criteria for membership, occupation usually defined the nature of each club, particularly in the early years of colonial rule. Pierre Bourdieu, in his study on theories of social stratification, observes that 'Smart clubs preserve their homogeneity by subjecting aspirants to very strict procedures – an act of candidature, a recommendation, sometimes presentation (in the literal sense) by sponsors who have themselves been members for a certain number of years, election by the membership or by a special committee, payment of sometimes very high initial subscriptions'.⁷⁶⁷

In British India the rivalry in class divisions was imported from Britain and was played out in the clubs. The class consciousness in club membership dated from the days of the East India Company when all Europeans in India except those employed by the company were seen as 'interlopers'.⁷⁶⁸ Pat Chapman observes that the British upper class had created a 'caste' system for themselves in India and 'it was impervious to change and was virtually impossible to infiltrate'.⁷⁶⁹ He outlines the hierarchy in colonial India, noting that next to the royal family and aristocrats were the civil servants headed by the viceroy and district commissioners. This top echelon of the most privileged was joined by the senior police officials, the judiciary and cavalry officers and other army officers and were members of exclusive clubs.⁷⁷⁰ The Indian Civil Service jobs were so sought after by the late nineteenth century that the few who were appointed were known as 'competition wallahs'.⁷⁷¹ Chapman lists the different occupations held by the British in India and their hierarchy in the imperial order and their club eligibility:

'Merchants and traders, however, were dismissed as "box wallahs", and no matter how wealthy they were, the clubs were not open to them. Neither were they open to upper-class Indians, not even to the maharajas. Shop owners were "counter jumpers", engineers "grease monkeys". Surveyors were called "jungle wallahs", whilst tea or indigo planters were treated with indifference, and at best looked down upon as self-made men (money, unless inherited, was nothing to be proud of), though jute planters, often Scots, were thought to be even more inferior.

⁷⁶⁶ Michael Edwardes, *The Sahibs and the Lotus: The British in India*, London, Constable, 1988, p81.

⁷⁶⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, London, Routledge, 1989, p162.

⁷⁶⁸ W.O. Horne, *Work and Sport in the Old I.C.S.*, London, William Blackwood & Sons Ltd., 1928, p19.

⁷⁶⁹ Pat Chapman, *Pat Chapman's Taste of the Raj: A Celebration of Anglo-Indian Cookery*, London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1997.

⁷⁷⁰ Chapman, *Pat Chapman's Taste of the Raj*, p14.

⁷⁷¹ Chapman, *Pat Chapman's Taste of the Raj*, p14.

Missionaries and the clergy were tolerated, but not encouraged. Creative people such as authors and artists were “brush wallahs” and, being normally impoverished, were regarded as curiosities but with a status lower than “box wallahs”. Almost without status came a huge mass of British men in minor governmental positions, the “office wallahs”, and the lowest of the low were the private soldiers in the Indian Army.⁷⁷²

In the early days of the Madras Club in the early 1830s, membership was restricted to the Indian Civil Service and the Army; British businessmen were not admitted. In time this restriction was relaxed although never entirely abandoned. For example, while partners of firms could become members their assistants could not and members who were merchants were not permitted to vote. It was an unwritten law that shopkeepers were not eligible for membership.⁷⁷³ The Madras Club was famed as an exclusive institution and member W.O. Horne, stated that, in the 1880s, no Indian had ever been admitted.⁷⁷⁴ The club was seen as the last bastion where the European could ‘get away’ from the Indians (and men of lower class). Horne wrote:

‘The retention of the Club as a purely British institution was easily defensible. The life and work of the members required them daily, and in an increasing degree, to mix with their Indian fellow-subjects, not only in work or business, but also socially, from Government House downwards, and it was surely not asking too much that a man might have, after his day’s work, a place where he could for an hour or two take his ease in the society of men of his own race, and those whose habits and customs were the same as his own.’⁷⁷⁵

Edwardes quotes J.H. Stocqueler that: ‘without insisting upon an aristocratic exclusiveness, [the club] is nevertheless strictly an asylum for gentlemen. It is well and liberally conducted, and the charges come within the means of most persons in the upper circle of society’.⁷⁷⁶ Later the Adyar Club was started in 1890 so that its members could get away ‘from the austerities’ of the Madras Club.

The Bengal Club first opened in Calcutta in 1827, occupying several houses in the middle of the city, later moving to other premises in 1845⁷⁷⁷ and 1911.⁷⁷⁸ Starting with a membership of five hundred at its inception, the Bengal Club had a coffee room, dining rooms, a reading room, a billiard room, card rooms and sleeping quarters for

⁷⁷² Chapman, *Pat Chapman’s Taste of the Raj*, p14.

⁷⁷³ Horne, *Work and Sport in the Old I.C.S.*, p20.

⁷⁷⁴ Horne, *Work and Sport in the Old I.C.S.*, p22.

⁷⁷⁵ Horne, *Work and Sport in the Old I.C.S.*, pp21-22.

⁷⁷⁶ Edwardes, *The Sahibs and the Lotus*, p81; Edwardes cites J.H. Stocqueler, *Handbook to India*, London, 1844, page number not listed.

⁷⁷⁷ Edwardes, *The Sahibs and the Lotus*, p92.

⁷⁷⁸ Panckridge, *A Short History of the Bengal Club*, p41.

members arriving from outside the city.⁷⁷⁹ Membership of the Bengal Club was aimed at those in the commercial world and an army officer would not be able to become a member.⁷⁸⁰ While the British colonials socialized in the racially exclusive clubs in the major cities of Calcutta, Madras and Bombay, their counterparts in the *mofussil* (rural areas or country stations) frequented ‘friendly little tennis clubs in small up-country stations’.⁷⁸¹ It was in the smaller centres that divisions in class or race were not as sharp for membership eligibility. Collingham observes that towards the end of the nineteenth century when clubs made their way to the smaller stations, the small number of Europeans present meant that class lines became blurred and planters and officials would be members of the same clubs.⁷⁸² E.A. Midgley, who was in the United Provinces between 1937 to 1947, described how he and the Superintendent of Police and the European staff of the tobacco factory, the paper mill and the Remount Depot would meet at the station club in Saharanpur,

‘together with those Indians who had adopted English social habits, for tennis, the occasional game of billiards, and of course the reviving chota peg. There is nothing like a long whisky and soda, thirst quenching, restorative, easy on the liver and inducing a mild intoxication as the evening proceeds for prompting social intercourse’.⁷⁸³

Similarly, E.F. Lydall who was in Assam from 1932 to 1935, stated that local government officials from the medical department socialized at the planter’s club.⁷⁸⁴ For the clubs that insisted on racial exclusivity and discrimination on membership the main objection voiced was that ‘if Indians joined, they would not bring their wives but hang around English ladies, for whom, it was well-known, Indians held lascivious yearnings’.⁷⁸⁵ Kuala Lumpur’s Selangor Club included a small number of non-European members from the outset. In fact, K. Tamboosamy Pillay, a Tamil, was a founding member of the club, and was famous for the curry tiffins he gave at his home on Batu Road.⁷⁸⁶

As former Secretary to the Governor of Bombay, David Symington said, ‘[C]lub life in India was a very important part of our daily existence, especially in the districts’.

⁷⁷⁹ Panckridge, *A Short History of the Bengal Club*, p64.

⁷⁸⁰ Edwardes, *The Sahibs and the Lotus*, p225.

⁷⁸¹ Roland Hunt and John Harrison, *The District Officer in India: 1930-1947*, London, Scolar Press, 1980, p126.

⁷⁸² Collingham, *Imperial Bodies*, p162.

⁷⁸³ Hunt and Harrison, *The District Officer in India: 1930-1947*, p127.

⁷⁸⁴ Hunt and Harrison, *The District Officer in India: 1930-1947*, p127.

⁷⁸⁵ See Sinha, ‘Britishness, Clubbability’, p187 and Edwardes, *The Sahibs and the Lotus*, p226.

⁷⁸⁶ Butcher, *The British in Malaya*, p61.

Symington noted that club members would go to the club at least five times a week in the districts.⁷⁸⁷ British men and their families working in mines and estates, could with the advent of the motor car and good roads, travel to their club where bridge, dancing and billiards were provided, forming a prominent feature of life in Malaya.⁷⁸⁸ Harry L. Foster in 1926 in his account of his time spent in Southeast Asia observed that the English builder,

‘having built his empire, he settles down at his club and talks cricket. Wherever he settles he builds a golf course; if there are two or more horses in the neighborhood he builds a race track; if there is one other Englishman within ten miles, he builds a club, and establishes a soda factory to supply the wherewithal for his whiskey-*stengah*’ (a half measure of whisky, mixed with one half soda).⁷⁸⁹

The colonial cuisine in clubs

Just as the running of hill stations depended on the labour of the colonized people, so the maintenance and provision of food and drink depended on the local people. The Hainanese Chinese men who were famed as good cooks in colonial homes, hotels and rest-houses were also responsible for turning out meals in the clubs in Malaya and Singapore. They worked as chefs, waiters and maître d’hôtels at the Cricket Club and the Tanglin Club in Singapore.⁷⁹⁰ Almost all the clubs had restaurants and bars that catered for club members. At the Bengal Club high standards of culinary skills and conduct were written into its club rules. Rule 8. – 7th states that

‘No provisions cooked in the Club House or Wines or other Liquors, are to be sent out of the house on any pretence whatsoever. Any defect that may be found with a Dinner, is to be written on the back of the bills, and signed by the Member complaining, which bill and fault will be considered on settling the weekly accounts; and any inattention, or improper conduct on the part of the servants, is to be stated in writing, to be laid before the Committee at their usual Meeting.’⁷⁹¹

As the colonial cuisine emerged it was the racially exclusive enclaves where colonials and other Europeans congregated that the peculiarly colonial dishes were served and made popular. Far from the myth that the British are not a people with a discerning culinary taste, in the colonial era they debated and critiqued which cook made a finer curry. Certain clubs or cooks acquired fame because of their culinary skills. Anna Chitty described the recipe for *nimbo pani* or lime and barley water at the Adyar Club as the best guarded secret of the khansama and ‘no amount of wheedling by various

⁷⁸⁷ David Symington and Anne Allen Symington, OA1/64/1-5 SOAS.

⁷⁸⁸ R.L. German, *Handbook to British Malaya*, p49.

⁷⁸⁹ Harry L. Foster, *A Beachcomber in the Orient*, New York, Dodd, Mead and Compay, 1926, p247.

⁷⁹⁰ Mui Teng Yap, ‘Hainanese in the Restaurant and Catering Business’, in Thomas T.W. Tan (ed.), *Chinese Dialect Groups: Traits and Trades*, Singapore, Opinion Books, pp78-90, p82.

⁷⁹¹ Panckridge, *A Short History of the Bengal Club*, p64.

memsahibs would get the recipe out of him'.⁷⁹² It was apparent that the British frequented clubs not just for camaraderie or conviviality but meal sharing, particularly the sharing of familiar dishes within the colonial community. William Russell, writing in 1876, mentioned tiffin at two and prawn curry and mutton curry for dinner (served with wine, champagne and sherry) at the Bengal Club.⁷⁹³ Berriff, as one of the 'last children of the Raj', recounted bearers carried potato chips with tomato sauce to each table when members played *housie-housie* (bingo) and bridge at the Factory Club in Simla.⁷⁹⁴

Roula Christou, married to an English officer of the Indian army, described the Mahabaleshwar Club as 'the British Raj in all its pomp and glory'.⁷⁹⁵ She wrote:

'The club building was in a magnificent example of colonial architecture, surrounded by wide covered terraces with deep cane chairs and low tables, and by magnificently maintained lawns and flower beds. It was built on a rise with steps sweeping down to the carriageway, flanked by tall Victorian gas lamps. There was married accommodation and servants' quarters. Meals were served in the grand manner. Waiters wore starched uniforms, *pugris* – elaborate turbans – and white gloves. The tables were set with white crockery, immaculate cutlery and glassware. The club had a reputation for the quality of the wines in its large cellar.'⁷⁹⁶

Collingham explains that the club was the most important site which 'daily reinforced collective identity'. She also notes that it was the place where newcomers to a town or station were 'initiated into the social code, or those who had been observed to stray from the narrow Anglo-Indian social path were chastised in a friendly manner for letting standards slip'.⁷⁹⁷ However this chapter maintains that the club as a venue was more than about providing a sense of solidarity between men of the same rank. It was also where men and women socialized, shared and propagated the colonial cuisine.

Dak bungalows and rest-houses: accommodating the colonial traveller

As British India expanded under the first few decades of Queen Victoria's reign from the late 1830s,⁷⁹⁸ the colony was administrated by a cohort of mobile rulers, forever on tour. Away from the major administrative and commercial centres were the remote

⁷⁹² Chitty, *Anna Chitty*, p56.

⁷⁹³ *Calcutta through British Eyes, 1690-1990*, Madras, Oxford University Press, 1972, p32.

⁷⁹⁴ Fleming, *Last Children of the Raj*, vol.I, p231.

⁷⁹⁵ Roula Christou, *The Last Memsahib: A Memoir*, Durham, Pentland Books, 2001, p88.

⁷⁹⁶ Christou, *The Last Memsahib: A Memoir*, pp87-88.

⁷⁹⁷ Collingham, *Imperial Bodies*, p162.

⁷⁹⁸ Gilmour, *The Ruling Caste*, pp7-8.

districts where a lone British official ruled over a large area. Public servants in the roles of accountants, tax inspectors, judges and medical officers traversed the colony, visiting the various administrative centres. In the years before the advent of railways the traveller could horse ride, walk or be carried on palanquin⁷⁹⁹ and travel was also done by river transport. The bulk of the travelling in hot weather was usually done at night and travellers needed places for rest. In these areas dak bungalows and rest-houses were places where cooks, waiters and other servants procured, prepared and cooked the colonials' meals. Dak bungalows were peculiar to British India and were also known as 'rest-houses'. They were built every 15 or 20 miles (24km or 32km) along main roads in the countryside, of about a day's march.⁸⁰⁰ They were built and maintained by the colonial government, usually under the direction of the local public works department. The dak bungalow comprised basic accommodation, usually of a single-storey building, a bed and table and a bathroom and a servant providing meals at a moderate cost. The kitchen was situated a short distance away.⁸⁰¹ While the accommodation and food catering was necessarily basic, the standard was variable as much depended on the person in charge.

Rest-houses in Malaya were run along the same lines and would almost definitely have developed from the dak bungalows in India. However, in Malaya, they were always known as 'rest-houses' and never as 'dak bungalows'. The rest-houses in Malaya and the two Borneo colonies were built soon after the British arrived. In the earliest years of British administration they were the only accommodation in many of the rural areas. Travelling from Simla on 15 October 1888, the Viceroy, the Marquess of Dufferin and Ava and his wife, Harriot, the Vicereine, 'to a little trip in the interior'. They stopped at the dak bungalow at Fagu.⁸⁰² As they

'wanted to make the change from home as great as possible, we brought no provisions with us, and resolved to leave everything to the man in charge of the bungalow ... The food provided by the man in charge is paid for separately, but it is not necessary to consider "the good of the house" and people often bring their own provisions with them.'⁸⁰³

⁷⁹⁹ Edwardes, *The Sahibs and the Lotus*, p102.

⁸⁰⁰ See Yule, H., and Burnell, A.C., *Hobson-Jobson: The Anglo-Indian Dictionary: A Spice-Box of Etymological Curiosities and Colourful Expressions*, Hertfordshire, Wordsworth Editions Ltd, 1996, under 'bungalow, dawlk'.

⁸⁰¹ Fleming, *Last Children of the Raj*, vol.I, p234.

⁸⁰² Harriot Dufferin, *Our Viceregal Life in India: Selections from My Journal 1884-1888*, London, John Murray, 1893, pp386-387.

⁸⁰³ Dufferin, *Our Viceregal Life in India*, p387.

Due to the shortage of accommodation in the mofussil there were rules in place to ensure that travellers did not abuse the facilities. Everyone had the right to spend twenty-four hours in a dak bungalow and the corresponding obligation to vacate the accommodation if there were new arrivals. If the bungalow was full, the rules were that half the house should be given to women and the other travellers 'who are absolute strangers often have to double up together'. The Viceroy and Vicereine found the dak bungalow at Fagu 'most comfortable, such good fires, and such a nice dinner'.⁸⁰⁴ The next day they walked and rode to Mattiana where they spent another night at the dak bungalow. The couple who had occupied the bungalow for fifteen days (and had not paid for the accommodation) had been turned out for the Viceroy and his wife and were subsequently camping in a tent.⁸⁰⁵

The colonial kitchen on the move

Cooks at dak bungalows and rest-houses were known for whipping up meals for travellers who turned up suddenly. As they had to rely on local ingredients, the dishes were often omelettes, roast chicken and chicken curry.⁸⁰⁶ Curried chicken seemed to be the dish that appeared most frequently in meals when colonials were travelling, presumably because chicken was easier to procure than other meat. George Otto Trevelyan, whose family members had been in India since the early nineteenth century serving variously as civil servants, authors and travellers, wrote a satirical play in the early 1860s titled *The Dawk [i.e. Dak] Bungalow, or Is His Appointment Pucka?*⁸⁰⁷ Trevelyan explained that the play took its name from 'the comfortless hostelries of India, in which the larder consists of a live fowl, and the accommodation of three rooms on the ground floor, less than half furnished even according to Oriental notions of furniture; the traveller being supposed to bring with him bread, beer, and bedding'.⁸⁰⁸ Conlon supports Trevelyan's evidence that European travellers carried their own tea, sugar, wine and bread on their journey to the mofussil.⁸⁰⁹ As Sir John Cotton, a political officer, noted, 'there was the Indian chicken which was very scraggy and always dished up in restaurant cars, in dak bungalows, that is to say the travellers' bungalows, or anywhere else where one happened to be on tour and one got sick to

⁸⁰⁴ Dufferin, *Our Viceregal Life in India*, p387.

⁸⁰⁵ Dufferin, *Our Viceregal Life in India*, p388.

⁸⁰⁶ Taylor Sen, *Food Culture in India*, p128.

⁸⁰⁷ Raleigh Trevelyan, *The Golden Oriole: Childhood, Family and Friends in India*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1988, p419.

⁸⁰⁸ Trevelyan, *The Golden Oriole*, p419.

⁸⁰⁹ Conlon, 'Dining out in Bombay', p94.

death of chicken whether curried or done in some other way designed to make it attractive'.⁸¹⁰ In describing Anglo-Indians traveling up the country Edwardes stated that in the dak bungalow, 'the menu invariably dwindled down to the elementary and universal "sudden death", which meant a wretchedly thin chicken, caught, decapitated, grilled, and served up within twenty minutes of the meal being ordered. At dinner, a variety was made by the chicken being curried, accompanied by an unlimited supply of rice and chutney'.⁸¹¹ Henry Berriff, born in 1927 in Simla, related how once, when they arrived late at a dak bungalow, the *chowdidar* (caretaker), who was also the cook, was worried as he had only some eggs but with which he turned out an excellent curry.⁸¹²

By all accounts the dak bungalow and rest-house was an informal and flexible kind of accommodation; some travelers brought their own cooks and other servants. The traveler could also cook his own meal. Berriff recalled 'another memorable meal, at Mandala dak bungalow, [of a] super stew that my father cooked from all the birds that had been shot. Green pigeon, a couple of ducks, a peafowl and the dove that I had shot myself with a pellet gun'.⁸¹³ Trevelyan reported that a fellow traveler, one sahib, 'a fat civil servant ... was travelling in most luxurious style, with a complete batterie de cuisine, and at least a dozen servants. He turned out to be a capital fellow, and provided me with a complete breakfast – tea, fish, steak and curry'.⁸¹⁴ While some travellers had complained about the monotony of dak bungalow meals the Marchioness' description of them left no doubt that they were substantial. For breakfast she and her husband had mutton chops, chicken cutlets, omelette, and 'chupatties' (flat bread); for lunch there was lamb with mint-sauce, cold chicken and biscuits and 'very good butter' to finish the meal. Dinner started with soup, followed by a joint of mutton, curry, roast chickens or pheasants, and pudding.⁸¹⁵

In Malaya, rest-houses were usually but not always bungalows and each hill station had at least one. As in India, they served as lodgings for traveling government officers. Sometimes travelers brought their own servants although most rest-houses had a cook, a water-carrier and a boy.⁸¹⁶ By the turn of the twentieth century there were modern

⁸¹⁰ Cotton, SOAS: OA1/18/1-6.

⁸¹¹ Edwardes, *The Sahibs and the Lotus*, pp103-104.

⁸¹² Fleming, *Last Children of the Raj*, vol.I, p234.

⁸¹³ Fleming, *Last Children of the Raj*, vol.I, p234.

⁸¹⁴ George Otto Trevelyan, *The Competition Wallah*, London, Macmillan and Co., 1907, p96.

⁸¹⁵ Dufferin, *Our Viceregal Life in India*, p390.

⁸¹⁶ Aiken, *Imperial Belvederes*, p53.

hotels in Kuala Lumpur and the major towns and every sizeable town had a rest-house that was fully furnished with meals provided by the colonial government. These rest-houses were noticeably different from the old dak bungalows of India in that they were brick-built, clean and comfortable and run on hotel lines.⁸¹⁷ The quality of the food supplied varied, depending on who was running the rest-house; as in India, sometimes 'surprisingly good and sometimes amazingly poor'.⁸¹⁸

When L.S. von Donop embarked on his journey into British North Borneo between 1882 and 1883 to prospect for suitable agricultural land for cash crops, there were few places to stop for meals or rest.⁸¹⁹ There was anxiety about obtaining rice, presumably both for himself and his local guides, according to his journal entries. Von Donop stated, 'I always like to have two if not three days' rice in hand, as one is then independent and can buy at a reasonable figure; but now, when we get to our next halting-place, Mumus, we shall have to buy at any price'. At one stage, in crossing a stream one of the buffaloes carrying the rice disappeared under the water but von Donop remarked that luckily little damage was done. On 22 September 1882 Donop reported that at their previous halting place they had to go to bed without any food.⁸²⁰ Donop noted though that there were now rest-houses in both Sandakan and Kudat and they appeared to be always full.⁸²¹ However outside the main towns of British North Borneo and Sarawak there were few rest-houses. It was not just crown colony officials who travelled vast distances but also those in the private sector who either worked in or made trips to the remote regions. Philip Arthur Watson Howe, employed by the Steel Brothers & Co. Ltd of Burma as a timber manager, travelled extensively in British North Borneo on behalf of the British Borneo Timber Company in from 1948. Howe reported sleeping at a Chinese logging camp in Bilit by the Kinabatangan River on the east coast of the colony on 19 May 1940.⁸²²

Writing about life in British Malaya, R.J.H. Sidney noted that there were more than fifty rest-houses in the Unfederated and Federated Malay states,

⁸¹⁷ Harrison, *An Illustrated Guide to the Federated Malay States*, p119.

⁸¹⁸ Harrison, *An Illustrated Guide to the Federated Malay States*, p120.

⁸¹⁹ L.S. von Donop, *Diary of L.S. Von Donop, Travelling through North Borneo or 'New Ceylon'*, Ceylon Observer, 1883.

⁸²⁰ von Donop, *Diary of L.S. Von Donop*, pp 6-9.

⁸²¹ von Donop, *Diary of L.S. Von Donop*, p12.

⁸²² Philip Arthur Watson Howe, Diaries, memoirs, photograph albums, and other papers of Philip Arthur Watson Howe (1908) illustrating his career with Steel Brothers & Co. Ltd as a timber manager chiefly in Burma 1929-48, also in North Borneo (Sabah), Brunei and Sarawak, and East Africa, 1948-50, Mss Eur D1223.

‘and they vary from a small six-roomed bungalow to a magnificent series of houses which is fully the equal of any first-class hotel. In them all, however, will be found similar characteristics. They are all managed by Chinese, and, as a rule, the management is very efficient. No warning is needed as to when the traveller is coming, nor is it necessary to say for how long the stay will be. ... – the promptness of the service, and the way in which entirely unexpected demands can so easily be met. A party may arrive at ten p.m. and be entirely unheralded, and yet within a quarter of an hour be having dinner and rooms prepared for them. We ourselves remember having informed the resthouse that we should be in for dinner at eight p.m., and not arriving finally until after eleven p.m., and then having an excellent meal, and going to bed as if this was quite the usual time.’⁸²³

Sidney noted that some travellers complained of the monotony of the rest-house meals but he stated that the rest-house was not meant to be a place of permanent residence and if a traveller intended to stay more than a few days he would be advised to employ his own cook.⁸²⁴

Hospitality among the colonials

Much has been written about the hospitality of the colonial community – of the generosity afforded to Europeans who had newly arrived to a colony or to those who were travelling within the colony. As Trevelyan remarked, ‘there is something stupendous in the hospitality of India. It appears to be the ordinary thing, five minutes after a first introduction, for people to ask you to come and spend a month with them’.⁸²⁵ However, this hospitality was only possible to a large extent because of the services of the domestic servants and to a lesser extent the supervisory role played by the memsahib in the colonial household. It was the servants who cooked and cleaned and the memsahibs who planned and supervised meals. In her analysis of the colonial wife’s role in the colonies, Gartrell observes that the ideal wife, in addition to being a gracious hostess, was expected to provide hospitality for European travelers, being ‘unpaid innkeepers’.⁸²⁶ This was one of the myriad roles that the memsahib was unofficially expected to fulfill and, as Gartrell puts it, ‘British wives were custodians of the health and psychological welfare of the officials.’⁸²⁷

W.J. Wilkins, a missionary in India in the early 1880s, agreed that hospitality shown to

⁸²³ R.J.H. Sidney, *Malay Land ‘Tanah Malayu’: Some Phases of Life in Modern British Malaya*, London, Cecil Palmer, 1926, pp132-133.

⁸²⁴ Sidney, *Malay Land*, p133.

⁸²⁵ Trevelyan, *The Competition Wallah*, p21.

⁸²⁶ Beverley Gartrell, ‘Colonial Wives: Villains or Victims?’ in Hilary Callan & Shirley Ardener (eds), *The Incorporated Wife*, London, Croom Helm, 1984., pp170-172.

⁸²⁷ Gartrell, ‘Colonial Wives: Villains or Victims?’ p170-172.

visitors in India was unique to the sub-continent and appreciated by the colonizers. He explained that when visitors arrived in India they would find out who to call on; within a week the visit was returned and within a month the visitor would be invited for dinner by those they called.⁸²⁸ Wilkins explained that Anglo-Indian hospitality originated from the 'good old times' when people kept almost open house, for an extra plate and knife and fork to be always place on the dinner table for the unexpected visitor and that servants did this as a matter of course.⁸²⁹ He stated that in country stations where there were no hotels a traveller would be recommended by a mutual friend to stay with a resident although the host and guest had never met before.⁸³⁰

George Barker a tea planter in India declared that 'a more hospitable set of men than Assam planters does not exist'.⁸³¹ Barker stated that a visitor was made to feel at home immediately on arrival, his host providing food and shelter. Here too hospitality was seen as a necessity as the lack of European-style accommodation had made colonials mutually dependent on each other. As well, in isolated locations the newcomer brought news from the towns or other districts. Barker stated that:

'It is considered a serious breach of etiquette to pass a man's bungalow, even though he be the veriest stranger, without calling in to exchange civilities. The distance from everywhere and the paucity of bungalows makes it equally agreeable to the dispenser of hospitality and the recipient, to meet and exchange views on matters touching the tea world.'⁸³²

Arthur Campbell writing on his experiences between 1950 to 1952, in the campaign in Malaya against what he termed the Communist terrorists, wrote of how his friend, Jameson, manager of the Saringgit Estate (a rubber estate) 'put his bungalow at our disposal. We squeezed fifty men into it, sleeping in rows on the stone and wooden floors. We pitched tents on the lawn for the others'.⁸³³ He continued:

'Often, when a patrol came in, he would ask the men up to his house to a meal and beer. Whenever he did so, he and his wife would put themselves out to entertain them ... The food, prepared by his Madrassi cook, was a welcome change both from the canned meat and biscuits which they had to put up with in the jungle, and from the large but tasteless dishes which they ate in camp'.⁸³⁴

⁸²⁸ W.J. Wilkins, *Daily Life and Work in India*, London, T. Fisher Unwin, 1883, p60.

⁸²⁹ Wilkins, *Daily Life and Work in India*, p60.

⁸³⁰ Wilkins, *Daily Life and Work in India*, pp60-61.

⁸³¹ George M. Barker, *A Tea Planter's Life in Assam*, Bombay, Thacker, Spink & Co., 1884, p100.

⁸³² Barker, *A Tea Planter's Life in Assam*, p102.

⁸³³ Arthur Campbell, *Jungle Green*, London, George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1953, p138.

⁸³⁴ Campbell, *Jungle Green*, p138.

The renowned hospitality displayed towards each other on their travels served to provide access to a white imperial home to the British traveller wherever he might find himself in a colony. Often, this hospitality was extended to other Europeans and reinforced white colonial solidarity. By devising codes of behaviour and replicating food practices from the colonial home, the British succeeded in establishing the institutions of colonialism: the hill stations, clubs and rest-houses or dak bungalows. Once again, Indian or Southeast Asian foods were served at these homes away from home, and that in many cases, the work of Asian servants supported colonists' itinerant ways. This contradicts the sense of racial solidarity and exclusivity that some of these venues were trying to create. These institutions were more than imperial symbolism. Intertwined with the notions of social distance and protecting the image of the ruling elite these institutions were bulwarks against the lingering fear and anxieties of dirt and disease in the colonies. These concerns that indigenous people were inherently dirty and carriers of diseases were manifested in the pages of cookbooks, household manuals, memoirs and travel guides. A more detailed discussion on colonial anxieties about the health and medical thinking of the time will be the subject of the next chapter.

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Chapter Five

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Dirt and Disease

*'A dirty kitchen is a disgrace, so let every mem-sahib have this part of her establishment well under her surveillance, and though her too frequent presence in the kitchen is unnecessary, yet she should make a point of visiting it periodically to see that it is kept clean and orderly.'*⁸³⁵

So wrote Angela C. Spry in her introductory remarks in an 1894 publication titled *The Mem Sahib's Book of Cookery*. The part of the colonial household that is of most concern to this book is the kitchen. While it was the heart of the colonial home, providing nourishment to the family, it was not embraced by those who lived in it. In fact, it would be no exaggeration to say that family members would rarely have stepped inside the kitchen from one day to the next. As discussed in Chapter Three, the colonial kitchen in Malaya, Singapore and the Borneo states was situated well away from the main house, usually about forty-five metres away.⁸³⁶ A covered gangway connected the

⁸³⁵ Angela C. Spry, *The Mem Sahib's Book of Cookery*, Calcutta, 1894.

⁸³⁶ See Colesworthy Grant, *Anglo-Indian Domestic Life. A Letter from an Artist in India to His Mother in England*, Calcutta, Thacker, Spink & Co., 1862, p33; and A.R. Kenny-Herbert, *Culinary Jottings for Madras*, Devon, Prospect Books, 1994, p497.

cookhouse and the bungalow to keep out the rain.⁸³⁷ In India, the cookhouse, as it was more commonly called, was also situated at the back of the house, sometimes, in a separate building, well away from the house, and, in some cases as part of the stables in the compound.

Like other authors of the cookbook and household manual genre, Spry attempted to convey several messages: that dirt was deplorable and shameful; that the memsahib was duty-bound to ensure that the kitchen was kept clean and in good order; and that the memsahib could keep a vigilant eye without expending too much time in the kitchen. Implicit in these instructions was the understanding that the memsahib's gendered role included helping to create a barrier between the clean and pure colonizer against the filthy and barbaric colonized. This chapter looks at European thinking on health and disease in the tropical colonial environment from the nineteenth century and how it influenced the daily domestic life of the European in the colonies. Household guides and cookbooks reveal how colonials viewed dirt and how they attempted to eliminate dirt within the household, particularly the kitchen. The mission of keeping the home pristine fell to the memsahib but, as the kitchen was the focal point for food preparation of which native servants were in charge, it was deemed to be a losing battle. Rather than physically taking over the kitchen, the memsahib made her retreat and instead relied on and yet mistrusted her servants to maintain cleanliness in the kitchen. Household guides recommended the morning parade of inspecting the cleanliness of kitchen premises and equipment stores and disbursing of supplies. It is clear that supplies were measured out for the day's requirements as the servants could not be trusted to have access to the food stores but memsahibs did not venture into the 'cookroom' often.

Dirt and disease: segregation of space

Dirt took on new dimensions in the colonies as it was seen as something inherent in the colonized people and that the dirt carried by the local people spread disease. Dirt was found not just on the native person alone however. Many in the medical profession situated India within the tropics and attributed every Indian disease to the effects of tropical heat and humidity.⁸³⁸ The memsahib's arrival to the colonies meant that she could contribute to empire-building by ensuring a clean household for their families. Both cookbooks and household manuals written for the colonies provided information

⁸³⁷ Charles Allen (ed.), *Plain Tales from the Raj*, London, Futura Publications, 1986, p86.

⁸³⁸ David Arnold, *The Tropics and the Traveling Gaze: India, Landscape and Science 1800-1856*, Delhi, Permanent Black, 2005

and tips on maintaining hygiene and how to instruct servants on the importance of cleanliness. Servants were the local people that British housewives were the most likely to come into daily contact with. British men, on the other hand, worked outside the home and might meet Indians on the job, as subordinate colleagues. This also helps explain the fact that the target market for the colonial cookbooks and household manuals was mainly for women.

It was the prevailing beliefs about the debilitating effects of the tropical climate that led to the annual ascension to the hill stations for respite. As discussed in Chapter Four, the hill stations were created by the British and other colonizers for Europeans to rest and recuperate from the heat of the lowlands. It was ironic that as the British fled to rest and recreate in the hill stations that were cultivated to remind them of Britain and to escape from the colonized people, a large number of native servants were required to maintain the lifestyle of the European. In addition, the Indian population comprising those engaged in commerce, service and administration swelled to large numbers.⁸³⁹ The bazaars became overcrowded and, due to lack of toilets, typhoid fever, cholera and other diseases were rampant in the latter half of the nineteenth century. There were no toilet facilities in the servants' quarters; the British left the Indians to their own devices as they generally did in the lowlands. The colonizers initially ignored the sanitation problems in the bazaars but eventually the problems spilled into the colonial enclaves. It was only when the spread of these diseases threatened the British population in the hill stations that authorities paid attention.⁸⁴⁰ From 1842 onwards, municipal councils were established in hill stations that had the authority to build public toilets and other sewerage systems as well as installing water supplies.⁸⁴¹

In his study on the bubonic plague and urban native policy in South Africa in the early 1900s, Maynard W. Swanson refers to the 'sanitation syndrome' as a broad description of the invidious process by which medical officials and other authorities associated the imagery of infectious diseases as a 'societal metaphor'.⁸⁴² He states that disease was both a biological fact and a social metaphor.⁸⁴³ This metaphor became so powerful that

⁸³⁹ Dane Kennedy, *The Magic Mountains: Hill Stations and the British Raj*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1996, p191.

⁸⁴⁰ Kennedy, *The Magic Mountains*, p191.

⁸⁴¹ Kennedy, *The Magic Mountains*, p192.

⁸⁴² Maynard W. Swanson, 'The Sanitation Syndrome: Bubonic Plague and Urban Native Policy in the Cape Colony', *Journal of African History*, vol.XVIII, no.3, 1977, p387.

⁸⁴³ Swanson, 'The Sanitation Syndrome', p408.

it influenced British and South African racial attitudes and paved the way towards segregation, culminating in the creation of urban apartheid.⁸⁴⁴ Disease and epidemiology became widespread societal metaphors during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century not only in South Africa but outside Africa as well.⁸⁴⁵

Modern scholars have suggested that nineteenth-century medical literature, travelogues and memoirs might reflect medical thinking of the time. Ann Laura Stoler asserts that in the nineteenth-century Europeans began to impose ideas on 'ethics of conduct', instructing people on 'how to live'.⁸⁴⁶ Stoler notes that colonial guides to European survival in the tropics, as prescriptive texts, instructed readers on what colonial life was supposed to be like and did not provide 'affirmations or distillations of what colonial ventures had secured and already become'.⁸⁴⁷ She explains that the texts were not derived from a commonly shared knowledge but had been constructed to impose ideas linking personal behaviour to 'racial survival, child neglect to racial degeneracy, the ill-management of servants to disastrous consequences for the character of rule'.⁸⁴⁸ The texts, according to Stoler, viewed how lack of discipline by the individual could impact on the colonial community. Stoler notes that the prescribing of medical and moral instructions for both adults and children, living in the comfort of a well-maintained home run by a 'modern white mother' with well-supervised native servants, they [the texts] promised to connect 'bourgeois domesticity to European identities and thus racial ordering to bourgeois rule'.⁸⁴⁹ Furthermore, Stoler stresses that the cloistered Europeans in the colonies existed in their white and middleclass world, secluded from the indigenous community. Stoler asserts that this deliberately isolated world of whiteness also served to create its own 'domestic arrangements and class distinctions among Europeans that produce cultural hybridities and sympathies that repeatedly transgressed these distinctions'.⁸⁵⁰ She suggests that nineteenth century household guides, medical manuals and pedagogic journals published in the Indies and the Netherlands reinforced European anxieties of dirt and disease in the colonies. Stoler notes that the dissemination of advice on contamination increased as germ theory and

⁸⁴⁴ Swanson, 'The Sanitation Syndrome', p387.

⁸⁴⁵ Swanson, 'The Sanitation Syndrome', p389.

⁸⁴⁶ Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things*, Durham, Duke University Press, 1995, p97.

⁸⁴⁷ Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire*, pp109-110.

⁸⁴⁸ Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire*, pp109-110.

⁸⁴⁹ Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire*, pp109-110.

⁸⁵⁰ Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire*, p112.

biomedicine developed.⁸⁵¹

Medical thinking from the eighteenth century understood epidemic disease transmission to be a process of contamination and not contagion until the emergence of modern germ theory in the 1870s. European medical thought was based on the humoral understanding of disease, when imbalance occurred in the blood, bile and other bodily fluids.⁸⁵² The thinking then was that people became sick from the noxious air or miasmas produced in the unhealthy places where they lived and the rationale was that it was places rather than people that required treatment.⁸⁵³ In Western Europe for over 2000 years, miasma was thought to cause disease.⁸⁵⁴ Alan Bewell argues that colonizers produced ‘a map of the world in which colonial spaces were largely perceived as dirty or unclean and European civilization was expected to cleanse or sanitize people and places’.⁸⁵⁵ This belief in miasma as the cause of disease was compounded by people’s instinctive disgust with associating miasma with ‘putrid, fetid, damp environments’.⁸⁵⁶ The early nineteenth-century medical profession in India viewed tropical diseases as affecting Europeans differently than the local people. They conducted studies on diseases in the tropics in relation to temperature changes, wind direction and topographical differences.⁸⁵⁷ The effects of the sun on decaying vegetation and other substances resulting in noxious exhalations were thought to cause diseases. Swati Chattopadhyay, in his historical study of colonial Calcutta, notes that by emphasizing ‘the effect of topography on disease, medical authorities made themselves indispensable to the colonial project of surveying, mapping, exploring, and controlling space’.⁸⁵⁸ Chattopadhyay claims that to emphasise the economic advantage of disease prevention, medical authorities advocated that hard physical labour had to be performed by the natives. He also contends that ‘disease became central in understanding the Indian environment, and one of the most frequently used tropes for describing Indian culture.’⁸⁵⁹

⁸⁵¹ Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire*, p112.

⁸⁵² Swati Chattopadhyay, *Representing Calcutta: Modernity, Nationalism, and the Colonial Uncanny*, London, Routledge, 2006, p62.

⁸⁵³ Alan Bewell, *Romanticism and Colonial Disease*, Baltimore, The John Hopkins University Press, 1999, p30.

⁸⁵⁴ Valerie A. Curtis, ‘Dirt, Disgust and Disease: A Natural History of Hygiene’, *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, vol.61, 2007, p662.

⁸⁵⁵ Bewell, *Romanticism and Colonial Disease*, p42.

⁸⁵⁶ Curtis, ‘Dirt, Disgust and Disease: A Natural History of Hygiene’, p662.

⁸⁵⁷ Chattopadhyay, *Representing Calcutta*, p62.

⁸⁵⁸ Chattopadhyay, *Representing Calcutta*, p62.

⁸⁵⁹ Chattopadhyay, *Representing Calcutta*, pp62-63.

Similarly, Alison Bashford states that the conflation of morality and physicality was underpinned by miasmatic theories of health and ill-health. She states that disease was understood to be a response to decomposing, putrefying matter in the environment, of human waste, accumulation of dirt, stagnant water and foul air. Foul air was seen as a medium of transmission of disease.⁸⁶⁰ From their earliest days in India the British considered the tropical heat as not only enervating but harmful to the health. Windows and doors were shut at night in the belief that bad air induced fever before it was known that mosquitoes spread malaria.⁸⁶¹

The miasmatic theories of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the tropical medicine of the late nineteenth century were both shaped by colonial conditions. India in the early nineteenth century was perceived by Europeans to be a place where disease was part of the landscape and where sickness rapidly resulted in death.⁸⁶² Colonial spaces in the nineteenth century were seen as dirty and in a state of disorder, with climate and dirt as distinctly important in colonial medicine and the mapping of pathogenic environments.⁸⁶³ Interestingly, there were observations at the time of miasmatic environments produced by the London poor as similar to those of the tropical colonies. The medical profession saw that the disease experience of urban poverty was as much caused by socioeconomic conditions as by climate.⁸⁶⁴ Between the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, European thinking on health and disease in the colonies centred on established views of a hostile and untamed tropical environment.⁸⁶⁵ David Arnold, in his work on disease, medicine and empire, states that Africa, Asia and the Americas were all seen to be riddled with fatal and debilitating disease and that only through the superior knowledge of European medicine it was possible to bring them under control.⁸⁶⁶

However, in the nineteenth century, medical thinking on infectious diseases was still in its infancy. Graeme D. Westlake, in his work on hill stations, wrote that medical opinion of the day mistook 'heavy consumption of wine, especially claret, was seen as a

⁸⁶⁰ Alison Bashford, *Purity and Pollution: Gender, Embodiment and Victorian Medicine*, London, MacMillan Press Ltd 1998, p5.

⁸⁶¹ Graeme D. Westlake, *An Introduction to the Hill Stations of India*, New Delhi, Indus/Harper Collins, 1993, p14.

⁸⁶² Arnold, *The Tropics and the Traveling Gaze*, p42.

⁸⁶³ Bewell, *Romanticism and Colonial Disease*, p42.

⁸⁶⁴ Bewell, *Romanticism and Colonial Disease*, p50.

⁸⁶⁵ David Arnold, 'Introduction: Disease, Medicine and Empire', in David Arnold (ed.), *Imperial Medicine and Indigenous Societies*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1988, p3.

⁸⁶⁶ Arnold, 'Introduction: Disease, Medicine and Empire', p3.

cure for various diseases, such as cholera, plague, smallpox, enteric, malaria and dysentery'.⁸⁶⁷ Malaria was one disease that was thought to have caused by miasma and it was not until the 1880s that it became known that it was caused by a parasite carried by mosquitoes. In 1894, Patrick Manson made the link between mosquitoes and malaria and in 1898 Ronald Ross proved this theory.⁸⁶⁸ Steel and Gardiner, among others, with an imperfect understanding of malaria in the 1890s wrote confidently of the disease being

‘an earth-and-water-born poison produced in soils not fully occupied in healthy work, and may be taken into the body through the skin, the lungs, and the stomach. In the first case it generally enters by inoculation from the bite of some insect which has been previously feeding on malarial poison.’⁸⁶⁹

Steel and Gardiner not only saw themselves as advisors on household hints and recipe writers but as dispensers of medical advice. In their chapter on preservation of health and simple remedies, they listed both home remedies and medicines for chronic ailments, including asthma, convulsions, hysteria, sunstroke, dysentery and rheumatism. The authors advised an acid treatment for cholera: one tablespoon of vinegar and one teaspoon of Worcester sauce. Steel and Gardiner also suggested other cures for cholera: diluted acetic acid and ‘sweet spirits of nitre’ as well as diluted sulphuric acid. These, they added could also be supplemented with ‘hand-rubbing, hot bottles, mustard, turpentine, everything should be tried’.⁸⁷⁰

In the Victorian era there was a concerted effort to study colonial or tropical medicine but, as Anil Kumar points out, there was hardly anything tropical about it, except that it operated in a tropical environment. He states that most of the so-called tropical diseases such as cholera, plague and smallpox had been found in Europe for centuries. Kumar cites the exception of scabies ringworm as a disease that thrives in a tropical climate. The difference with these diseases when they occurred in the tropics was their intensity and ferocity.⁸⁷¹ Indeed, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, heavy loss of life among Europeans due to cholera, malaria and dysentery in India particularly among British soldiers meant that colonizers saw themselves as being hounded by death.⁸⁷²

⁸⁶⁷ Westlake, *An Introduction to the Hill Stations of India*, p15.

⁸⁶⁸ John G. Butcher, *The British in Malaya, 1880-1941: The Social History of a European Community in Colonial South-East Asia*, Kuala Lumpur, Oxford University Press, 1979, p69.

⁸⁶⁹ Steel and Gardiner, p173.

⁸⁷⁰ Steel and Gardiner, *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook*, p178.

⁸⁷¹ Anil Kumar, *Medicine and the Raj: British Medical Policy in India, 1835-1911*, New Delhi, Sage Publications, 1998, p11.

⁸⁷² Arnold, *The Tropics and the Traveling Gaze*, pp42-42.

The high rate of mortality meant huge economic losses to the colonial administration both in terms of recruitment and replacement. A significant factor to take into account is that British newcomers died in greater numbers than Indians. Historian Philip D. Curtin observes that, while the fear of the native inhabitants was linked with hygienic concerns, the British found it hard to blame them as a source of infection.⁸⁷³ Instead, they claimed that the Indians had an inherent source of immunity.⁸⁷⁴ By the late nineteenth century, scientific breakthroughs in bacteriology and parasitology meant that huge gains were made in the improvement of European health. When the death rates of Indian and European troops were nearly equal in the 1870s, it then became possible to switch sides and to blame ‘native filth and disease’ for European illness.⁸⁷⁵ Curtin notes that the bazaars were particularly viewed with suspicion as places that could spread contaminated food and water and where prostitution and venereal disease was rampant.⁸⁷⁶ He adds that by the early 1900s there was another fear that food might be contaminated by native cooks.⁸⁷⁷

The old cities and native bazaars were seen as the areas most often linked with dirt and disease. The cholera epidemic that swept across the subcontinent between 1817 and 1821, the bubonic plague of 1896 and periodic outbreaks of typhoid and malaria had left the British population nervous.⁸⁷⁸ As the concept of disease vectors was still not fully understood, the colonial health authorities embarked on public sanitary health measures, including the quarantining of those who caught the diseases, washing of public buildings, house to house searches of plague cases and the summary demolition of unsanitary structures.⁸⁷⁹ The British only intervened with sanitary measures and public health infrastructure quite late and then always started with the white districts first.

Segregation in the domestic and public spheres

If servants were the human resources responsible for feeding the colonizers, then the kitchen was the engine room where all the meals were created. Yet this domestic space that fed empire builders was given little attention. Sometimes the kitchen was built separately, together with the servants’ accommodation; and at other times, behind the

⁸⁷³ Philip D. Curtin, *Death by Migration: Europe’s Encounter with the Tropical World in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989, p108.

⁸⁷⁴ Curtin, *Death by Migration*, p108.

⁸⁷⁵ Curtin, *Death by Migration*, p108.

⁸⁷⁶ Curtin, *Death by Migration*, p108.

⁸⁷⁷ Curtin, *Death by Migration*, pp108-109.

⁸⁷⁸ James Heitzman, *The City in South Asia*, London, Routledge, 2008, p131-132.

⁸⁷⁹ Heitzman, *The City in South Asia*, p132.

house but joined by a covered passageway. As in India, the kitchen was located at back of the house in Malaya, Singapore and the Borneo states. Recalling her time in Sandakan, Agnes Keith described the cookhouse as ‘standing slightly apart from our bungalow.’⁸⁸⁰ The majority of the responses to my questionnaire on the location of the kitchen was that it was situated some distance at the back of the house and a sheltered passage way connected it to the main house.⁸⁸¹ Where refrigerators were in use they were kerosene-run. There was always the mesh-covered wooden ‘meat safe’ that had its four legs standing in kerosene to keep out ants and other insects from the cupboard.

Swati Chattopadhyay, in his work on the spatial history of colonial Calcutta asserts that the kitchen and ancillary service spaces were never integrated as part of colonial houses in India due to differing perceptions of servants’ needs.⁸⁸² Chattopadhyay adds that the colonizers showed little interest in their servants’ accommodation as they were only prepared to spend the bare minimum on the servants.⁸⁸³ The missionary Cyril Alliston, in his account of his nine years in Jesselton, British North Borneo, during the 1950s described the rectory kitchen as ‘the funny little *dapur* (kitchen) that joined the house to the kitchen and servants’ rooms’.⁸⁸⁴ In spite of the European predilection for keeping up appearances in maintaining the pristine colonial household and the concern about dirt and disease, the kitchen generally remained out of sight and out of mind. Kenny-Herbert in condemning the grossly neglected kitchen, complained, ‘dinners of sixteen or twenty, thoughtfully composed, are *de rigueur*; our tables are prettily decorated; and our menu cards discourse of dainty fare in its native French’⁸⁸⁵ In fact, the memsahib was urged to stay away from the kitchen as the unspeakable filth of the kitchen and staff might alarm her. At the same time the European often marveled at the wonderful meals that could be turned out from such dirty and primitive kitchens. Tea planter George M. Barker, in his 1884 book wrote, ‘it is astonishing how a native with his limited supply of cooking utensils will contrive to turn out five or six courses for dinner: given three bricks, a pot, and fire, and an Indian will do wonders.’⁸⁸⁶

‘An Anglo-Indian’ wrote in 1883 that the hot climate and the position of the kitchen made it impossible for the memsahib to visit it regularly. Nevertheless, ‘An Anglo-

⁸⁸⁰ See Agnes Keith, *Land Below the Wind*, Boston, Little, Brown and Company, 1939, p30.

⁸⁸¹ Questionnaire responses.

⁸⁸² Chattopadhyay, *Representing Calcutta*, p127.

⁸⁸³ Chattopadhyay, *Representing Calcutta*, p127.

⁸⁸⁴ Cyril Alliston, *In the Shadow of Kinabalu*, London, Robert Hale Limited, 1961, p34.

⁸⁸⁵ Kenny-Herbert, *Culinary Jottings*, p507.

⁸⁸⁶ George M. Barker, *A Tea Planter's Life in Assam*, Bombay, Thacker, Spink & Co., 1884, p100.

Indian' insisted that inspections should be frequent, 'just to see that the place is swept and clean, the table and cooking utensils well scoured, and the water *chatties* (pots) and their contents clean and wholesome'.⁸⁸⁷ Of course, it was the European's choice that the kitchen was built away from the house as it was felt that the heat and smell of the cookroom was too much for European sensibilities. As Wilkins reasoned, 'a cook-room in a house where the doors leading to the different rooms are always open would be an intolerable nuisance'.⁸⁸⁸

The design and layout of the colonial home served more than aesthetic effects. Collingham suggests that the rebellion of 1857 'was an immensely traumatic bodily experience for the British in India'. She points out that instead of tightening barriers in the home the memsahib in fact sought to display the open nature of the bungalow 'using it as a site in which to display British prestige'.⁸⁸⁹ The Anglo-Indian home with its multiple doorways between them meant that it was also visible to the gaze of the multitude of household servants.⁸⁹⁰ This suited the official ideology of the time, as another site where British racial superiority could be admired.⁸⁹¹ However one could argue that servants were already intimately familiar with sahibs and their ways and the openness of the houses were built for better ventilation and were modeled after Indian houses. Catherine Hall points to the anger and bitterness that the British harboured against the Indians for the rebellion manifested into an even stronger barrier that separated the colonizer and the colonized.⁸⁹² Hall notes that among other measures, more British women were brought to the colony, their role as wives of the rulers, was to maintain the prestige of the British home. The colonial home became a public place for the white community, offering hospitality to European colleagues and visitors. Hall maintains that fears of pollution and contagion became more entrenched, and that, 'European and Indian quarters were separated'.⁸⁹³

Bungalows as residences for the European population were built along wide streets in

⁸⁸⁷ An Anglo-Indian, *Indian Cookery: 'Local' for Young House-Keepers*, Bombay, Imperial Press, 1883, preface.

⁸⁸⁸ W.J. Wilkins, *Daily Life and Work in India*, London, T. Fisher Unwin, 1883, p72.

⁸⁸⁹ E.M. Collingham, *Imperial Bodies: The Physical Experience of the Raj, c.1800-1947*, Cambridge, Polity, 2001, pp112-113.

⁸⁹⁰ See Swati Chattopadhyay, "'Goods, Chattels and Sundry Items': Constructing 19th-Century Anglo-Indian Domestic Life", *Journal of Material Culture*, vol.7, 2007, pp247-249.

⁸⁹¹ Collingham, *Imperial Bodies*, p167.

⁸⁹² Catherine Hall, 'Of Gender and Empire: Reflections on the Nineteenth Century', in Philippa Levine (ed.), *Gender and Empire*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004, p73.

⁸⁹³ Hall, 'Of Gender and Empire', p73.

large compounds.⁸⁹⁴ The servants' accommodation was built at the furthest edge of the compound, sometimes near store rooms or stables. The perceived view, according to Chattopadhyay, was that the 'inherently squalid, immoral and lazy' natives were used to the environment that was dirty and unhealthy. Chattopadhyay suggests that the environmental determinism of the British 'equated architectural and spatial order with morality'. This the British believed, would present their brand of 'transparent visual order' necessary for instilling truthfulness among the Indian population. Chattopadhyay asserts that the British thought ultimately it was this truthfulness that was 'necessary to British health and life'.⁸⁹⁵

Chattopadhyay refers to Steel and Gardiner, who instructed that the memsahib's role was to supervise the servants stringently and, for this reason, the servants should never be allowed to live in outside the compound. Steel and Gardiner stated that the memsahib

'should insist upon her servants living in their quarters, and not in the bazaar... it becomes the mistress's duty to see that they are decently housed, and have proper sanitary conveniences. The bearer should have strict orders to report any illness of any kind amongst the servants or their belongings; indeed, it is advisable for the mistress to inquire every day on this point, and as often as possible – once or twice a week at least – she should go a regular inspection round the compound, not forgetting the stables, fowl-houses, &c.'⁸⁹⁶

Collingham notes that new ideas about sanitation gave those in medical and government circles the authority to influence the domestic sphere.⁸⁹⁷ These ideas were propagated, among other means, through household manuals and even cookbooks, which argued that sanitation in the home was of importance not only for health reasons but also to maintain the prestige of empire.⁸⁹⁸

Measures were also taken to isolate the European community against crowded conditions, that is, proximity to the native population. The colonial authorities opted for racial segregation as a means of combating the spread of disease. From 1858, when India became a Crown possession, the British army in India became the largest single concentration of troops outside the United Kingdom. However, high mortality rates

⁸⁹⁴ See Anthony D. King, *The Bungalow: The Production of a Global Culture*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984.

⁸⁹⁵ Chattopadhyay, "Goods, Chattels and Sundry Items", p261.

⁸⁹⁶ Steel and Gardiner, *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook*, p4.

⁸⁹⁷ Collingham, *Imperial Bodies*, p166.

⁸⁹⁸ Collingham, *Imperial Bodies*, pp166-167.

from epidemic diseases like dysentery and cholera necessitated health measures.⁸⁹⁹ The Royal Sanitary Commission of 1859, using criteria of soil, water, air and elevation, developed district areas for European occupation and included the cantonment, 'civil lines' and hill stations.⁹⁰⁰ Vijay Prashad notes that, in Delhi, 'colonial officials lived in an enclave of sanitation to the north of the city, in the Civil Lines; only a few of their native allies of the "better class" reaped the harvest of municipal works'.⁹⁰¹ Indian press reports criticized the Delhi Municipal Corporation for building 'drains of minor importance' in White Town at great expense while ignoring sanitation infrastructure in the walled city.⁹⁰²

Concerns about mental and physical health in the tropics

The tropical environment was seen as damaging to mental health as well as to physical wellbeing. The colonial community in Singapore suggested a wide-ranging variety of factors that could contribute to poor mental health. The Bishop of Singapore, in a letter to the British Medical Journal in 1926, wrote that there had been two cases of 'insanity' or suicide each year from 1915 among Government servants and other white people.⁹⁰³ This letter provoked much discussion and correspondents to the journal suggested the following possible causes for 'mental deterioration' in too prolonged a residence in tropics:

'altitude, moisture, too much sunlight, heat, eye defects, monotony, lack of seasons, hyperaemia of the brain, north wind, barometric pressure, electrical content of the atmosphere, lack of essential vitamins, alcohol, smoking, constipation, native servants, masturbation, venery, sexual starvation, too great or too little secretion from the endocrine glands, loneliness and fear.'⁹⁰⁴

As late as the 1930s there were still some in the medical profession who attributed good health and longevity to climatic conditions. The professor of surgery at a medical college in Singapore, Kenneth Black, stated that 'man can live in any region where he can obtain food and water, but his physical and mental energy and his normal character reach their highest development only in a few strictly limited areas'.⁹⁰⁵ Black claimed

⁸⁹⁹ Radhika Ramasubban, 'Imperial Health in British India, 1857-1900', in Roy MacLeod and Milton Lewis (eds), *Disease, Medicine, and Empire - Perspectives on Western Medicine and the Experience of European Expansion*, London, Routledge, 1988, p38.

⁹⁰⁰ Ramasubban, 'Imperial Health in British India', pp40-41.

⁹⁰¹ Vijay Prashad, 'The Technology of Sanitation in Colonial Delhi', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol.35, no.1, 2001, p124.

⁹⁰² Prashad, 'The Technology of Sanitation in Colonial Delhi', p124.

⁹⁰³ Kenneth Black, 'Health and Climate with Special Reference to Malaya', *The Malayan Medical Journal*, vol.VII, December 1932, p104.

⁹⁰⁴ Black, 'Health and Climate with Special Reference to Malaya', p104.

⁹⁰⁵ Black, 'Health and Climate with Special Reference to Malaya', p99.

that England's climate came nearer the ideal than that of any other country in the world and that when 'people go from a country with a superior to one with an inferior climate, their power of sustained work deteriorates sooner or later, although sometimes at first it is stimulated by the change, especially if the change is to a "bracing" climate'.⁹⁰⁶

Black was not the only member of the medical fraternity who believed that residence in the tropics for the European had a debilitating effect on his health. On top of the standard instructions that four to five years was the maximum number of years for which Europeans should live in the tropics before returning to a cold climate, colonizers were cautioned to have a prudent lifestyle – 'plenty of rest, moderate exercise, sensible dress (flannel vests and hats against the tropical sun) and bathing only at advised times'.⁹⁰⁷ Although medical writing at the turn of the century acknowledged that illness was not transmitted through the environment according to miasmatic theory, prolonged residence in the tropics was nevertheless still thought harmful to health. Accordingly, it was still believed that Europeans residing in tropical climate had lower resistance to disease and infection.⁹⁰⁸

An eminent figure in tropical medicine weighed in on the debate of the dirty habits of cooks in the colonies, a topic addressed in numerous cookbooks and household guides. In advocating the consumption of more vegetables than meat, a surgeon from the East India Company, James Ranald Martin, suggested that the mere sight of the cook:

'...buttering our toast with the greasy wing of a fowl, or an old dirty piece of rag, will have more effect in restraining the consumption of the article than any didactic precept which can be laid down; and a picturesque sight of this kind may be procured any morning by taking a stroll into the purlieu of the kitchen.'⁹⁰⁹

Even as scientific breakthroughs on medical knowledge were made, prescriptions on how to lead wholesome lives in the tropics continued. Most of these were commonsense rules and preached moderation in food and drink replete with moral overtones.⁹¹⁰ It was standard advice from many in the medical profession to advise eating more fruit and vegetables and less meat and to drink in moderation. There was little evidence to show that this advice was adhered to. In the days of the East India Company era meals were

⁹⁰⁶ Black, 'Health and Climate with Special Reference to Malaya', pp99-101.

⁹⁰⁷ Lenore Manderson, 'Race, Colonial Mentality and Public Health in Early Twentieth Century Malaya', in Peter J. Rimmer and Lisa M. Allen (eds), *The Underside of Malaysian History: Pullers, Prostitutes, Plantation Workers...* Singapore, Singapore University Press, 1990, p196.

⁹⁰⁸ Manderson, 'Race, Colonial Mentality and Public Health', p196.

⁹⁰⁹ James Ranald Martin, *The Influence of Tropical Climates on European Constitutions*, London, John Churchill, 1856, p128.

⁹¹⁰ Curtin, *Death by Migration*, p42-43 and p107.

gargantuan, they became lighter in later years but were still substantial affairs. Meals in the 1880s were by no means 'lighter', W.J. Wilkins, a missionary in his sketches of life in Calcutta wrote disapprovingly of the three heavy meals consumed by Europeans in India:

'In a climate where temperance in both these respects is called for, and where there is an abundance of vegetables and fruit of many kinds, there is intemperance. It is my firm conviction that a great many who fall victims, as they think to the climate, really fall victims to their own foolishness. Many English people have three heavy meals in the day. At breakfast there is fish, chops, cutlets, omelets, eggs, toast, &c.; at tiffin (lunch) there are chops, steaks, curry and rice, puddings, &c.; at dinner in the evening a long course concludes the day's work. As to drinking, there is even greater foolishness. Many in the hot season take beer at breakfast and tiffin with pegs (i.e. brandy and soda-water) between, and in the evening, spirits, wine.'⁹¹¹

In his travel diary to India, Malaya and other countries in the 1920s, Aldous Huxley observed that 'with the possible exception of the Americans, the English are, I am afraid, the world's heaviest eaters'. Huxley claimed that the Italians called the English 'the Five Meal People'.⁹¹²

A favourite subject at Anglo-Indian social gatherings was patent medicine. It is unclear whether the interest was a bid for a healthier lifestyle or the rise of consumerism but supplements like 'Bemax', 'Energen', 'Vitalin' were added to some Anglo-Indians' daily intake.⁹¹³ Writing on British social life in India, Dennis Kincaid claimed that Anglo-Indians would ask each other 'Are you still on strychnine? I've gone on to arsenic', and 'Dr. Hay's famous slimming diet' was also heard in conversation among Anglo-Indians. Kincaid agreed with other observers that vast meals of nineteenth century Anglo-India were no longer popular and that even 'the more frugal, cold-storage fare now provided proved too much, in Bombay's climate, for twentieth-century digestions'.⁹¹⁴ Another topic of conversation was anxiety about food contamination and other health issues.

Fear of food contamination

The anxiety about consuming contaminated food and drink extended to native people beyond cooks and servants. The vegetable gardener was feared as a likely transmitter of

⁹¹¹ Wilkins, *Daily Life and Work in India*, pp63-64.

⁹¹² Aldous Huxley, *Jesting Pilate: The Diary of a Journey*, London, Chatto and Windus, 1936, p186.

⁹¹³ Dennis Kincaid, *British Social Life in India, 1608-1937*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974, p321.

⁹¹⁴ Kincaid, *British Social Life in India*, p321.

disease, through fertilizing his vegetables with human waste. This fear was indeed well founded as the colonial authorities had not installed a public water supply system nor were sanitation measures put in place in the nineteenth century. Historian James Francis Warren wrote that, at the time, in Singapore, ‘excreta was traditionally collected by Teochius [Chinese] for their market gardens’.⁹¹⁵ Cuthbert Woodville Francis Harrison, who lived in Malaya for a number of years, wrote,

‘most Europeans are extremely careful as to what vegetables they eat in the Malayan tropics, as the ingenious Chinese, renowned for his vegetable growing wherever he goes, owes that renown to his unpleasant practice of mulching his crops with crude sewage collected from the towns’⁹¹⁶

Thomas R. Metcalf argues that ideas of difference constructed by the British in India continued to hold sway even with the advent of a better understood medical theory.⁹¹⁷ Metcalf argues that at best there was a shift in emphasis from ‘to avoid not “miasmatic” fluxes, but Indian bodies, the filthy carriers of contagious disease’.⁹¹⁸ Metcalf asserts that, between the late nineteenth century and the first two decades of the twentieth century, the British fully elaborated on what he calls an ideology of ‘distance’ based on difference.⁹¹⁹ However, this distancing was only superficial as the British had to consume Indian water and food, breathe Indian air and had Indian servants in their homes. Metcalf thinks this ‘distance’ can be imagined as a set of nested boxes, each walled off from the larger Indian world outside and cites the bungalow residence, the civil lines or cantonment and the hill station as typical examples.⁹²⁰ Within the bungalow residence the memsahib’s domain was contained within the compound, usually enclosed by a wall and garden.⁹²¹

There was conjecture that the European in a tropical climate felt discomfort at every turn, from living amidst a native people to the bothersome insect life and other noisome living creatures. A.G. Price, in his study on the many types of white settlements in the tropics in the 1930s, also points out the relentlessly annoying natural environment that

⁹¹⁵ James Francis Warren, *A People’s History of Singapore (1880-1940)*, Singapore, Oxford University Press, 1986, pp259-260.

⁹¹⁶ Cuthbert Woodville Harrison, *An Illustrated Guide to the Federated Malay States*, London, The Malay States Information Agency, 1911, pp179-180.

⁹¹⁷ Thomas R. Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994, p177.

⁹¹⁸ Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, p177.

⁹¹⁹ Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, p177.

⁹²⁰ Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, p177.

⁹²¹ Charles Allen, *Plain Tales from the Raj*, London, Century Publishing, 1975, p86.

bothered the European.⁹²² He quotes Dr H.S. Stannus on how living in tropics affected the European,

‘Living amidst a native population causes him annoyance at every turn, because he has never troubled to understand its language and its psychology. From early morn till dewy eve he is in a state of unrest -- ants at breakfast, flies at lunch, and termites for dinner, with a new species of moth every evening in his coffee. Beset all day by a sodden heat, whence there is no escape, and the unceasing attentions of the voracious insect world, he is driven to bed by his lamp being extinguished by the hordes which fly by night, only to be kept awake by the reiterated cry of the brain-fever bird or the local chorus of frogs. Never at rest! Always an on-guardedness.’⁹²³

Price notes that tropical living then involved the ‘constant need of “on-guardedness” – the precautions against disease, the boiling of all water, the care of diet, and the tireless supervision of childish natives ...’.⁹²⁴

The care that needed to be taken on living in the tropics extended to travel and accommodation as discussed in the previous chapter on rest-houses and dak bungalows. Ambrose Pratt, in his 1931 book on his time spent in Malaya as a tin miner, cautioned that ‘European travellers are advised on no account to stay at any but European hotels and Government rest-houses’.⁹²⁵ He recommended The Europe Hotel in Singapore, The Empire Hotel in Kuala Lumpur, The Grand Hotel in Ipoh and The Runnymede Hotel in Penang. He added that that at all other towns in the Malay Peninsula government rest-houses were preferable to hotels. Pratt also reinforced the utmost care for personal hygiene, saying that ‘to walk about your bedroom or bathroom with bare feet is unsafe. The germs of poisonous tropical diseases are lurking everywhere, ready to attack any abrasion of the skin’.⁹²⁶

Civil servant J.F. McNair wrote in 1878 that Malaya on the whole was ‘salubrious’ and, with ‘due precaution’, the European should not suffer many of the ‘native ailments’.⁹²⁷ McNair noted that several of the diseases which the ‘natives’ suffered from were ‘brought on by their own defiance of the simplest sanitary laws; while, from his

⁹²² A. Grenfell Price, *White Settlers in the Tropics*, New York, American Geographical Society, 1939, p212.

⁹²³ Price, *White Settlers*, p212.

⁹²⁴ Price, *White Settlers*, p212.

⁹²⁵ Ambrose Pratt, *Magical Malaya*, Melbourne, Robertson & Mullens Ltd, 1931, p268.

⁹²⁶ Pratt, *Magical Malaya*, p268.

⁹²⁷ J. F. McNair, *Perak and the Malays*, Kuala Lumpur, Oxford University Press, 1972, pp416-417. The first edition was published in 1878.

superior knowledge of such matters, the European may go comparatively scathless'.⁹²⁸ However, he conceded that the white man was disadvantaged with his fair skin, noting that after vigorous exercise, 'the white skin cools very rapidly, and causes the chills, colds, rheumatic pains, and bowel complaints from which a European may suffer in the East ; while, when in the same heated state, the black or brown skin cools slowly, and the inflammation is averted'.⁹²⁹

Anxieties about food and health

The perception that dirt and disease were endemic in the tropics was frequently illustrated in colonial cookbooks and household manuals. These publications were the conduit for propagating a gendered role for the memsahib, as gatekeepers of British culture and as supporting the ideals of empire. The unstated rule was that white women would exert 'civilizing influences' to the colonies amid 'an alien, seemingly decadent tropical world of heat, luxuriant vegetation, diseases'.⁹³⁰ Even outside the home, British women continued to lend a helping hand in the imperial project by their mere presence in rest-houses, dak bungalows and clubs.⁹³¹

Similarly, Chattopadhyay states that '[t]he notion of the household as a barrier against the dirt and disease of India required that the mistress become the commander as well as medical officer'.⁹³² Indeed, the job description for the British mistress was spelt out in the various household manuals and cookbooks. Kenney-Herbert noted that the kitchen was the 'foulest' room in the Anglo-Indian home, its equipment inadequate and primitive, and yet the Indian servants were expected to turn out magnificent meals up to twenty-five guests. He outlined in detail the filthy conditions under which the servants worked and lambasted Anglo-Indians for not improving the standard of hygiene and providing suitable equipment in the kitchen but to joke of the barbarisms practised by the servants.⁹³³ The repetition of stories of disasters in the kitchen however was not only about humour but reinforcing the stereotype the natives' inferior mind and low standards of cleanliness. The following were not only told at dinner parties but were repeated in memoirs, cookbooks and manuals on household management:

⁹²⁸ McNair, *Perak and the Malays*, pp416-417.

⁹²⁹ McNair, *Perak and the Malays*, pp416-417.

⁹³⁰ Janice Brownfoot, 'Memsahibs in Colonial Malaya: A Study of European Wives in a British Colony and Protectorate, 1900-1940', in Hilary Callan & Shirley Ardener (eds), *The Incorporated Wife*, London, Croom Helm, 1984, p189.

⁹³¹ Brownfoot, 'Memsahibs in Colonial Malaya', p189.

⁹³² Chattopadhyay, *Representing Calcutta*, p261.

⁹³³ Kenny-Herbert, *Culinary Jottings*, p496.

‘Boy, how are the master's socks so dirty?’
‘I take, I make e'strain coffee.’
‘What, you dirty wretch, for coffee?’
‘Yes, missis: but never take master's clean e'sock.
‘Master done use, then I take.’⁹³⁴

Procida suggests that frequent recounting of anecdotes of the strange ways of the servants enabled the memsahib to stay well away from the kitchen so that she may not be confronted with dirty practices. She cites one of these stories:

‘There was a popular story of a memsahib whose cook made a particularly delicious pastry. She knew that he made it actually during the course of the meal so that it was really fresh and one day she and her guests decided to raid the kitchen and steal the secret. They discovered the cook in action – the pastry dough spread across his chest, beating it with his hands!’⁹³⁵

Kenney-Herbert criticized the situation of the kitchen away from the main house, usually as part of the block of *godowns* (store rooms) and near the stables. This meant that for the average memsahib close supervision of distant kitchen cleanliness was out of the question. The kitchen was constructed with little ventilation and light and, importantly, washing up facilities were non-existent. Kenney-Herbert wrote, ‘as there is no scullery, or place for washing up, &c., the ground in the immediate vicinity of the kitchen receives the foul liquid (as well as all refused matter) which is carelessly thrown out upon it.’⁹³⁶ Kenney-Herbert blamed the location and design of the colonial kitchen as being too inaccessible for the memsahib to supervise. Kenney-Herbert stated that apart from being difficult to maintain surveillance over the kitchen, it was difficult to monitor the ‘promiscuous gatherings of outsiders, – the friends, relations, and children (a fruitful source of dirtiness) of our servants’.⁹³⁷

Sara Jeannette Duncan, a memsahib in Calcutta in the 1890s, used her fictional work, *The Simple Adventures of a Memsahib*, to portray the filthy habits of the Indian cook. In her novel, Duncan wrote of her protagonist, Helen Frances Browne, of braving into the

⁹³⁴ David Burton, *The Raj at Table. A Culinary History of the British in India*, London, Faber & Faber, 1993, p65.

⁹³⁵ Mary A. Procida, *Married to the Empire: Gender, Politics and Imperialism in India, 1883-1947*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2002, pp93-94.

⁹³⁶ Kenney-Herbert, *Culinary Jottings*, p487.

⁹³⁷ Kenney-Herbert, *Culinary Jottings*, p497.

bawarchi khana (kitchen) located outside the main house.⁹³⁸ Browne observed that when she lifted saucepan lids she:

‘discovered within remains of concoctions three days old; she found the day’s milk in an erstwhile kerosene tin; she lifted a kettle, and intruded upon the privacy of a large family of cockroaches, any one of them as big as a five-shilling piece. Kali Bagh [the cook] would never have disturbed them. She found messes and mixtures, and herbs and spices, and sauces which she did not understand and could not approve. The day’s marketing lay in a flat basket under the table. Helen drew it forth and discovered a live pigeon indiscriminately near the mutton, with its wings twisted around one another at the joint.’⁹³⁹

While the colonist’s main task was to do the empire’s work of acquisition, expansion and administration, it fell upon the colonial mistress to ensure that the prestige and superiority of British rulers were upheld. What better way than to start with the colonial home: the dutiful memsahib’s task was to provide a clean and wholesome environment for the hardworking colonial to retire to at the end of the day. It was a supervisory role she played, never having to physically engage in the many household tasks. Still, it was no less onerous. As Joanna Trollope in her work on women of the British Empire, states, that the memsahib would have found the Indian environment oppressive, with its dirty, dampness and the omnipresent insects.⁹⁴⁰ In addition, the numerous servants, by dint of the caste system ensured that there were layer upon layer of servants with their strict social hierarchies.⁹⁴¹

Servants were primed to follow rules of hygiene, ensuring that the colonial’s health was not endangered and the daily rituals of European life were adhered to. Thus, British homes dotted around the colonial landscape were bastions of cleanliness and civilized behaviour and this too served as exemplary standards of housekeeping to the colonized. The experienced memsahib was also expected to pass on her knowledge to newly-arrived wives. In Annabel Venning’s book on the wives, daughters and mistresses of the British army in British India, she recounts Rosemary Montgomery’s daily experiences as a new bride to Cawnpore in 1931. When Montgomery first arrived, another officer’s wife tutored her ‘in the art of housekeeping in India’.⁹⁴² In a letter home to her mother, Montgomery wrote:

⁹³⁸ Sara Jeannette Duncan, *The Simple Adventures of a Mem Sahib*, London, Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1909, p106.

⁹³⁹ Duncan, *The Simple Adventures of a Mem Sahib*, p109.

⁹⁴⁰ Joanna Trollope, *Britannia’s Daughters: Women of the British Empire*, London, Hutchinson, 1983, p119.

⁹⁴¹ Trollope, *Britannia’s Daughters*, p119.

⁹⁴² Annabel Venning, *Following the Drum: The Lives of Army Wives and Daughters Past and Present*, London, Headline, 2005, p69.

‘you have to give out every single thing each morning, including dusters, etc, boil all your milk and water and inspect every corner to see that it is clean. She has been most kind and given me hours of advice and help and I think I’ll be able to manage more or less though I foresee that it will be hard work at first. It takes her two hours a morning and she’s had six years’ practice.’⁹⁴³

Montgomery did manage and outlined her morning routine. Once her husband left for the office after breakfast, she began the day

‘by visiting the kitchen and seeing a boiling “detchie” (an aluminium pan) of water. I consider coal and look to see whether there is permanganate of potash ready to soak the vegetables and whether the earthenware saucers on which the larders stand have been filled with water and disinfectant.’⁹⁴⁴

Battye relates a similar arrangement in her book on costumes and characters of Anglo-Indians:

‘Having handed out the daily stores – kept under padlock in the house – the *mem-sahib* proceeded to inspect her kitchen, empty except for the *khansama* (head servant). In one corner lay a pile of dirty *jharans* – thick cotton cloths – for the dhobi to collect, the *mem-sahib* handing out another twelve of these, the necessary daily quota for reasonable cleanliness. If, sensibly, she had no wish to raise her blood pressure, she did not go again into the kitchen until it was tidied up for her inspection next morning.’⁹⁴⁵

In anthropologist Mary Douglas’ premise that dirt equates disorder, she also maintains that ritual pollution or danger-beliefs served to maintain social categories and distinctions.⁹⁴⁶ Douglas gives examples of our notions of dirt: shoes are not dirty in themselves, but it is dirty to place them on the dining table; food is not dirty in itself, but it is dirty to leave cooking utensils in the bedroom; or food bespattered on clothing; or similarly, bathroom equipment in the drawing room.⁹⁴⁷ Thus, we can apply Douglas’ reasoning to British views that food and native servants as inherently dirty; and efforts by the memsahibs to improve the standards of hygiene can be seen as attempts to bring order to the colonial household. The notion of the fear of dirt goes beyond the practical (as of dirt causing illness) to the metaphorical. The colonial ruler saw it as her duty to eliminate dirt in her household, to bring order in a land of primitive cultures and of filth.

⁹⁴³ Venning, *Following the Drum*, p69.

⁹⁴⁴ Venning, *Following the Drum*, p69.

⁹⁴⁵ Evelyn Battye, *Costumes and Characters of the British Raj*, Exeter, Webb & Bower, 1982, p46.

⁹⁴⁶ See Jo Beall, ‘Dealing with Dirt and the Disorder of Development: Managing Rubbish in Urban Pakistan’, *Oxford Development Studies*, vol.34, no.1, p81. See also Mark Jenner’s unpublished thesis, *Early Modern English Conceptions of ‘Cleanliness’ and ‘Dirt’ as Reflected in the Environmental Regulation of London c.1530-c.1700*, Oxford University, 1995.

⁹⁴⁷ Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, p48.

As Metcalf puts it, 'the battle against dirt, disease, and depravity had to be fought within the home as well as outside'.⁹⁴⁸

The home as private and personal space originated from Victorian ideals and writers of popular literature have traditionally represented the colonial home as a feminized sphere where the memsahib led a quiet existence while her husband dealt with affairs of empire. Robin D. Jones, in his work on objects, space and identity in the colonies, observes that the British in India tried to physically distance themselves from the Indians by locating or choosing their homes away from local urban settlements or 'black towns'.⁹⁴⁹ However, Jones suggests that this policy was negated in the colonial home where domestic servants had unrestricted access to this domestic space.⁹⁵⁰

Mary Procida points out that the reality of the Anglo-Indian home was patently different to the representation of the colonial home in Victorian writings. She stresses that 'the trope of two irreconcilably separate spheres "of the home" and "the world" is inapposite to Anglo-India, where the public and the private merged seamlessly at the juncture of the home'.⁹⁵¹ Procida also asserts that the memsahib and her home were entrusted with 'the private functions of domesticity to the public demands of imperialism'.⁹⁵² The home was the venue for official and social events, and, frequently the seat of imperial power was also the home: as Government House or Residency. Furthermore, in running her household with servants under her supervision, the colonial wife, like her husband aspired to perform this task by 'instilling the habits of discipline in a potentially unruly population, by commanding respect from the colonized peoples and by setting an example of rational and "civilized" behaviour'.⁹⁵³

Metcalf's analysis of the bungalow and its compound, adopted as the choice of abode for the British colonial, served as a fortress 'in keeping its inhabitants away at a safe distance from the surrounding noise, dust, and disease of India'.⁹⁵⁴ Metcalf asserts that, in creating the bungalow as 'an island of Englishness, secure from a noxious India, the

⁹⁴⁸ Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, p179.

⁹⁴⁹ Robin D. Jones, *Interiors of Empire: Objects, Space and Identity Within the Indian Subcontinent, c.1800-1947*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2007, p80.

⁹⁵⁰ Jones, *Interiors of Empire*, p80.

⁹⁵¹ Procida, *Married to the Empire*, p57.

⁹⁵² Procida, *Married to the Empire*, p59.

⁹⁵³ Procida, *Married to the Empire*, p87.

⁹⁵⁴ Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, p178.

English woman, or memsahib played a critical role'.⁹⁵⁵ Far from being just a decorative figure symbolizing 'purity and domesticity', the memsahib's prescribed role was to create her home environment according to the ideals of 'cleanliness, order, and industry'.⁹⁵⁶ Further, Metcalf states that the memsahib in the British Indian household had to:

'take on the role her husband played outside: that of a masculine assertion of ordering rationality in the face of a feminized India where disease and disorder raged unchecked. The home might be, as in England, a female refuge, and a place where the man could find emotional sustenance, but it was also the front line of a battlefield whose commanding officer was its British mistress.'⁹⁵⁷

For example, in a 'Hindustani' language manual for memsahibs published in 1914, a memsahib manual author, A.K. D-H, offered hints to housekeepers and newcomers to India, declaring that

'[I]n tropical countries such as India where there are large collections of natives, one has to guard more against contagion than in European countries ... The lower class of native in India does not seem to realize the danger of contagion, or if he does, is too apathetic to take any precautions against it.'⁹⁵⁸

The author held exaggerated fears of dirt and the natives, stating that the three preventable diseases, cholera, dysentery and enteric fever, were common in India and to which newcomers were susceptible.⁹⁵⁹ Ignoring the conventional wisdom of not venturing into the kitchen with the knowledge that the kitchen was a filthy place (a cognitive dissonance known commonly as 'out of sight, out of mind'), D-H instructed his readers to inspect it at least once a day, ensuring that the cooking utensils were kept clean and that the kitchen floor should be washed out with disinfectant. He also suggested that window screens should be installed to keep out flies but allow ventilation. He further suggested that clean dusters should be given out everyday, that the cook should be given a gauze wire strainer for soup and another one for milk – otherwise the cook would 'use a dirty duster – or something worse'.⁹⁶⁰ In keeping with the immortalizing of improbable tales of stupid and dirty servants, D-H recounted the following in his manual:

'You have no doubt heard the old story about the Sahib who went to the kitchen with a stick in his hand to find out the reason for the long pause in dinner. On seeing him the cook took fright and ran off, with the plum pudding tied up in the

⁹⁵⁵ Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, 178.

⁹⁵⁶ Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, 178.

⁹⁵⁷ Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, pp178-179.

⁹⁵⁸ A.K. D-H, *The Memsahib's Manual: Being an Easy Guide to Learning Hindustani, with Some Advice on Health and the Household*, Calcutta & Simla, Thacker, Spink & Co., 1914, p54.

⁹⁵⁹ D-H, *The Memsahib's Manual*, p54.

⁹⁶⁰ D-H, *The Memsahib's Manual*, p55.

end of his “dhoti,” he had been boiling it in one end while the other end was wrapped round himself!’⁹⁶¹

The fear of disease was undoubtedly one of the most powerful reasons for creating distance between the Anglo-Indians and the Indian population and so the employment of the *dhaye* (wet nurse) seems a strange anomaly.⁹⁶² Surely breastmilk from a people of supposedly dirty habits would threaten the health of the European infant? As with other contradictory and illogical colonial stances, the British went through the elaborate motions of ensuring that the *dhaye* was spotlessly clean and in a healthy state before breastfeeding the baby. The *dhaye* was thoroughly examined for signs of illness and was told to bathe, put on clean clothes and often food was provided to her so that she produced good milk.⁹⁶³ However the issue of caste made the sharing of food a problem. Collingham cited the Stewart family of Cawnpore where they rejected the services of a *dhaye* because she refused to eat out of any plates not from her caste and any food cooked outside the kitchen of her caste.⁹⁶⁴

Gardiner and Steel, stressed the importance of having a clean ‘cook-room’ but asserted that even if the kitchen was kept clean, there was no guarantee that the ‘food will be cooked cleanly, and the mistress must always be on her guard against the dirty habits which are ingrained in the native cook’.⁹⁶⁵ In India, Muslims were generally engaged as cooks and servants who waited at table. As Hindus were not permitted to handle beef or most other foods consumed by Europeans, they were not engaged in food preparation. Wilkins, who lived for many years in India, offered a contrary view to the dirty Bengali: ‘as far as my observation goes, I do not know any people more cleanly in their habits. As a rule, the Hindus bathe every day of the year ... their cooking vessels and brass plates and dishes are scrupulously clean’.⁹⁶⁶ Wilkins went on to detail the scrupulous care Hindus took in preparing and consuming their food, according to strict food purity rules. Wilkins stated that when a Hindu servant was called when eating his food, he would send a message ‘I am eating my dinner’ and would not come at once. If it was an urgent matter and he was ordered to come, he would obey but the uneaten food was

⁹⁶¹ D-H, *The Memsahib's Manual*, p55.

⁹⁶² Collingham, *Imperial Bodies*, p95.

⁹⁶³ Collingham, *Imperial Bodies*, p95.

⁹⁶⁴ Collingham, *Imperial Bodies*, p96.

⁹⁶⁵ Steel and Gardiner, *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook*, p69.

⁹⁶⁶ Wilkins, *Daily Life and Work in India*, pp83-84.

thrown away, in case someone of another caste could have come near the food and defiled it. Thus Wilkins refuted the idea that Hindus were inherently dirty.⁹⁶⁷

The view by the British in India that domestic servants were essentially dirty was not just a racial prejudice but had its origins from the British notion of class where the lower classes were seen as having undesirable habits. The British upper class employer, while articulating the incompetent and dirty servants of the lower class, depended on them in the domestic chores. For example, V.G in 1862, declared that

‘servants were ‘wholly incompetent to prepare any food, even for a hog. How can it be otherwise? They are taken from the very dregs of society out of hovels and rookeries, probably from the workhouse. It is notorious that when these creatures enter your kitchen they know not the purpose of the different utensils, which they always misuse. These are not the class of women that are required; they are dirty in the extreme, and know not what cleanliness means.’⁹⁶⁸

Just as the British in Britain could not have people from their own class to work as servants for them, in India the colonizer could not always choose their labour, they had to take what was available.

The colonials could not avoid engaging the lower class or low caste Indians as domestic servants. At the same time, the Hindus and Muslims believed the British to be impure⁹⁶⁹ (as the British ate beef and pork). The Indians’ complex system of single task for each caste was unwittingly reinforced by the British when they designated castes and occupations in art and literature.⁹⁷⁰ Prior to this, the caste system and the occupations for each caste category were more fluid. The decline of the Moghul upper classes meant that as large numbers of servants were looking for employment it suited the Indians to have the system of single-task employment for each task; this meant that larger numbers of people would be deployed.⁹⁷¹ The cook was one of the more important servants and did not come from the Hindu Brahmin caste because handling of European food would have been polluting for them. In fact, high caste Indian servants who fell sick would not

⁹⁶⁷ Wilkins, *Daily Life and Work in India*, p86.

⁹⁶⁸ G.V., *Dinners and Dinner-Parties or the Absurdities of Artificial Life*, London, Chapman and Hall, 1862, p30.

⁹⁶⁹ Collingham, *Imperial Bodies*, p19.

⁹⁷⁰ Collingham, *Imperial Bodies*, p18.

⁹⁷¹ Collingham, *Imperial Bodies*, p18.

accept food, drink or medicines from the memsahib, an untouchable European.⁹⁷²

The discovery of pathogens in the late nineteenth century only heightened the memsahib's pathological fear of disease. On the one hand, she must ensure that servants scrupulously maintain cleanliness and on the other hand, she knew that they could not be trusted and had to be constantly on the watch for deviation from cleanliness. The colonials took great care in following established rules of hygiene peculiar to the colonies. Boiling drinking water was mandatory, as was the washing of fruit and vegetables with potassium permanganate, known in Anglo-Indian patois as 'pinkie' or 'pinkie pani'.⁹⁷³ Similarly, responses from my questionnaires show that many memsahibs in Malaya, Singapore and the Borneo also used a solution of potassium permanganate to wash their fruit and vegetables.⁹⁷⁴ There were exceptions to this, as Nicole Walby recalled her mother seeing the cook in the morning to plan the day's meals, 'she was very firm that lettuce etc. should only be washed in water, not "pinkie"', and felt that a little local dirt immunised one! None of us were ever ill'.⁹⁷⁵

Arnold notes that towards the end of the nineteenth century, when Europeans developed a scientific understanding of disease causation, they regarded the indigenous people of the colonies as being backward in their fatalistic and superstitious response to disease.⁹⁷⁶ He observes that disease became part of the condemnation of African and Asian 'backwardness', while medicine was held up with racial pride, underpinning the 'new imperialism' of the late nineteenth century. The medical fraternity's attitude was subjective, displaying its social and cultural prejudices while Christian missionaries in Africa used disease as proof of a moral and social sickness and as justification of their presence there.⁹⁷⁷

Similar concerns surfaced among the settler communities of Rhodesia and Kenya where the fear of the spread of disease resulted in the removal of Africans from urban areas.⁹⁷⁸

⁹⁷² Margaret MacMillan, *Women of the Raj: The Mothers, Wives, and Daughters of the British Empire in India*, New York, Random House, 2007, pp166, 174.

⁹⁷³ Laurence Fleming, *Last Children of the Raj: British Childhoods in India 1919-1939*, London, Radcliffe Press, 2004, p220.

⁹⁷⁴ Questionnaire responses.

⁹⁷⁵ Laurence Fleming, *Last Children of the Raj: British Childhoods in India 1939-1950*, vol. II, London, Radcliffe Press, 2004, pp4-5.

⁹⁷⁶ Arnold, 'Introduction: Disease, Medicine and Empire', p7.

⁹⁷⁷ Arnold, 'Introduction: Disease, Medicine and Empire', p.7.

⁹⁷⁸ Dane Kennedy, *Islands of White: Settler Society and Culture in Kenya and Southern Rhodesia, 1890-1939*, Durham, Duke University Press, 1987, p150.

Racial boundaries were erected to segregate Africans from Europeans particularly where public and commercial facilities were earmarked for the exclusive use of Europeans.⁹⁷⁹ Dane Kennedy notes that ‘contrived or capricious’ nature of European phobia of the transmission of disease by Africans did not preclude the employment of Africans as domestic servants in the colonial household.⁹⁸⁰ As domestic servants they handled food, clothing and other personal items of their white masters. Kennedy states that the settler household was the heart of the settlers’ presence in Africa and ironically it was ‘literally overrun with African employees’. As in line with domestic servants in other colonies, their duties included ‘waking their European masters with morning cups of tea, cooking and serving their meals, washing their clothes, drawing their baths, making their beds’.⁹⁸¹

So in spite of all the intimate chores and tasks involved with food preparation that were performed by their domestic servants the British colonizers still viewed them as inherently dirty. Through an examination of cookbooks, household guides, journals and autobiographies this chapter demonstrates that European concern for maintaining standards of hygiene and good health was an unresolved tension. Colonists made themselves dependent on their domestic servants, allegedly the very sources of disease. Distancing themselves from the kitchen and food preparation itself only hid the fact that Asians cooked European food. The kitchen as the focal point for food preparation was given cursory attention. Often, household manual authors of the time wrote in despair over how filthy kitchen premises and utensils were. Similarly, servants’ accommodation was built at the edge of the colonial compound; there was the need to house servants near enough for their services (to be conveniently and expeditiously provided) but also far enough for social distance. When local people migrated to the hill stations to provide various services to the European community their overcrowded homes and lack of sanitation were not a concern until the outbreaks of diseases like cholera, dysentery and typhoid threatened to spread to the Europeans.

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Conclusion

‘... in Malaya the servants were primarily for use and not, as in India, for ostentation, so that their numbers were proportionate to the work to be done and, unlike in India, they were expected not to be mere specialists, but,

⁹⁷⁹ Kennedy, *Islands of White*, pp150-152.

⁹⁸⁰ Kennedy, *Islands of White*, p150.

⁹⁸¹ Kennedy, *Islands of White*, pp152-153.

*within limits, interchangeable. The ingenuity of “Cookie” in improvising a meal for an extra six or eight persons at a few minutes’ notice, was a constant source of marvel.*⁹⁸²

The focus of this book has been two-fold: it has argued that the British constructed and consumed a distinctly colonial cuisine in India, Malaysia and Singapore, and that the emergence of this cuisine can be attributed largely to the local domestic servants and their interaction with their colonial masters. In doing so, this book has established two interdependent arguments. First, the British in the Asian colonies ate a combination of European and indigenous foods as well as several peculiarly hybrid dishes that were not found outside the colonial cuisine. Secondly, the indigenous servants in the colonial home played a far more crucial role, particularly in food preparation, than the negative image painted of them by the British as well as by many contemporary scholars. Furthermore, the colonial cuisine extended beyond the dining table of the colonial home, to the colonial institutions of hill stations, clubs and rest-houses. Individually, and collectively, foodways at home and at the venues for social interaction served to sustain and legitimise colonial cuisine. This book has argued that the British, despite segregating themselves in these institutions, continued to eat Asian food and rely on Asian labour, so the ideal colonial segregation was never realised, or was, at best, a façade.

Indeed, segregation failed most *notably* in foodways, and this book has challenged the assumption that Britons in India, Malaysia and Singapore used food as a means of differentiating themselves, as rulers, from the ruled.⁹⁸³ While other social structures and patterns of behaviour put in place in connection with the colonial enterprise clearly demarcated the differences between colonizer and colonized, this study shows that food remains one area where the British were less able to conform to rigid standards. E.M. Collingham states that the ‘perverse adherence to British food was one of the clearest indications that Anglo-Indians gave that they were unwilling to adapt to India’.⁹⁸⁴ However, Anglo-Indian, Singaporean and Victorian cookery and household management books, diaries and travelogues demonstrate otherwise.

⁹⁸² Victor Purcell, *The Memoirs of a Malayan Official*, London, Cassell, 1965, p248.

⁹⁸³ See for example, Nupur Chaudhuri, ‘Shawls, Jewelry, Curry, and Rice in Victorian Britain’, in Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel (eds), *Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance*, Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1992, pp231-232.

⁹⁸⁴ E.M. Collingham, *Imperial Bodies: The Physical Experience of the Raj, c.1800-1947*, Cambridge, Polity, 2001, p159.

While there is debate on the use of cookbooks and household guides as historical documents, the main criticism being their prescriptive nature (and therefore barely descriptive let alone analytical), colonial recipes and instructions were followed more arduously in the colonies than in Europe, especially for the memsahibs who were posted to the 'outstations' where a close circle of family or friends was not at hand for support or consultation. Even if cookbooks were prescriptive they do demonstrate ideals and values aspired to during the period. In fact the prescriptive nature of the publications reinforced the gendered role bestowed on the memsahibs, that is, in helping to uphold the prestige and image of empire. Both cookbooks and household guides of the era contained instructions on how to run the colonial household, and more pertinently, how to manage domestic servants. By reiterating the childlike nature of the colonized people, their diseased nature and their dishonesty, the manuals advised the memsahib to maintain the highest standards so that she could be admired by her servants.⁹⁸⁵ F.A. Steel and G. Gardiner boldly stated that the Indian colonial home should be governed much like Empire, with dignity and prestige.⁹⁸⁶ In reality, however, the British colonists' complete reliance on their servants for food preparation and other aspects of domestic life meant that the social distance they tried to impose between the colonizers and their subjects was unsuccessful.

The individual chapters have reviewed current scholarship on foodways, mistress-servant relationships and cookbooks as historical documents. Analysis of literature on foodways has established that the colonial cuisine was a legitimate cuisine; insofar as a cuisine is one that meets the criteria required by a community. The criteria includes consuming the meals frequently enough to be knowledgeable about them, to know how they are cooked and to know how they should taste.⁹⁸⁷ In addition a legitimate cuisine is one which consists of dishes that are 'articulated and formalized, and enter the public domain'.⁹⁸⁸ While the historiography of the colonial mistress-servant relationship

⁹⁸⁵ An Anglo-Indian, *Indian Cookery 'Local' for Young House-Keepers*, Bombay, Imperial Press, 1883, Preface.

⁹⁸⁶ F.A. Steel and G. Gardiner, *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook: Giving the Duties of Mistress and Servants the General Management of the House and Practical Recipes for Cooking in All Its Branches*, London, William Heinemann, 1898, p9.

⁹⁸⁷ Sidney W. Mintz, *Tasting Food, Tasting Freedom: Excursions into Eating, Culture, and the Past*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1996, p96.

⁹⁸⁸ Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson, *Accounting for Taste: The Triumph of French Cuisine*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2006, p19.

indicates that it was an unequal relationship, this book has focused on the important contribution domestic servants made towards the development of the colonial cuisine.

The hybrid dishes that became part of the colonial cuisine continued to be adjusted and modified and were passed on to succeeding generations of colonial families, as discussed in *Chapter One*. Essentially, colonial foodways included hybrid dishes that were neither European nor Asian but a combination that incorporated elements of both. Just as the fusion-type dishes of the colonial cuisine, such as the ubiquitous curry, mulligatawny, kedgeree, country captain, chicken chop, pish pash and sago pudding were consumed on a daily basis, they were similarly served in the clubs and restaurants frequented by the British. Recipes were discussed and exchanged through cookbooks, letters to editors of newspapers and magazines and at recreation enclaves such as clubs and rest-houses.

The clearest example of a dish that has been appropriated by the British and became the mainstay of the colonial cuisine is curry. *Chapter Two* has demonstrated that curry was the single most important dish that defined the culinary history of British imperialism. Spurious claims of ownership and the authenticity of curry were contested and debated by the colonial community. This book argues against existing scholarship that depicts 'curry' as a colonial fabrication, that is, that the British purposefully appropriated curry in order to domesticate the environment⁹⁸⁹ and that Anglo-Indians did not eat curry in India.⁹⁹⁰ As with other colonial dishes, curry was adopted and adapted by the colonizers, courtesy of the local cooks.

Chapter Three has demonstrated the significant contribution local domestic servants made towards this cuisine. While the discourse on Asian servants in cookbooks, household guides, travelogues and diaries reflect British representations of them, it is clear that it was the cook who purchased, prepared, cooked and served all the meals. Literature from servants themselves is negligible and it has therefore not been possible to include their voice in this book. The instructions in these publications were directed at the servants; some cookbooks had sections translated into the local language so that

⁹⁸⁹ Susan Zlotnick, 'Domesticating Imperialism: Curry and Cookbooks in Victorian England', *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, vol.16, no.2-3, 1996, pp64-65.

⁹⁹⁰ Chaudhuri, 'Shawls, Jewelry, Curry, and Rice', p238. See also Uma Narayan, *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions, and Third-World Feminism*, New York, Routledge, 1997, pp165-169.

the cook could follow the recipes with ease (assuming that if the cook was illiterate an interpreter would be called). In delegating authority, the British were depending on Asian subordinates. This is the core contradiction at the heart of the colonist-servant relationship – the colonists’ discourse of dirt and disease and the need for separation was at odds with their dependence on servants for the most intimate and important of needs. The near total dependence on Asians in the colonial home spilled into the institutions that provided rest and recreation in the hill stations, clubs and rest-houses. Alison Light’s remark that ‘servants are everywhere and nowhere in history’⁹⁹¹ of British histories of domestic service is also true of servants in the colonies.

Ironically, the significant contribution of domestic servants in the employ of the British colonizers did not match the negative image that the British had of them. Much of the image that the British painted of the servants had its origins in Britain, mirroring the attitudes of the upper and middle classes towards their servants in the nineteenth century. In the colonies British depictions of servants highlighted servants’ perceived dishonesty, their dirty habits, lack of diligence and low intelligence. Yet for all their failings, local servants were entrusted with food preparation, a service that is essential and personal. This supports Ann Laura Stoler’s observation that European anxieties about servants in the East existed *because* domestic service permeated into both the private and public spheres. She calls them ‘the subaltern gatekeepers of gender, class, [and] racial distinctions’.⁹⁹²

British colonizers took into account local practices when employing domestic servants in the colonies of India, Malaya and Singapore. In India, where labour was cheap and where caste regulations stipulated single task employment, the British employed large numbers of servants. In the Southeast Asian states too, the British categorized domestic servants according to racial and ethnic groups, for example, the majority of cooks and houseboys employed in Malaya and Singapore were Chinese Hainanese.⁹⁹³

⁹⁹¹ Alison Light, *Mrs Woolf and the Servants*, London, Penguin Books, 2008, p2.

⁹⁹² Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2002, p133.

⁹⁹³ Owen Rutter, *British North Borneo: An Account of Its History, Resources and Native Tribes*, London, Constable & Company, 1922, p379.

Chapter Three has thus confirmed Procida's view that Anglo-Indians relinquished control over the domestic space to the Indian domestic servants.⁹⁹⁴ It is in this domestic space, the colonial home, where the gendered role of the memsahib comes into prominence. The memsahib's role was largely supervisory and symbolic, and interdependent with and reliant on domestic servants. As supervisor of the household she relegated the physical work of cooking and cleaning to the retinue of servants while she devoted her time to imposing the rituals and tasks that defined the colonial home as a bastion of white imperialism. The prestigious white home was carefully guarded and displayed – servants can be seen as the conduit for dissemination of this exemplary household to the general populace – and only European guests were invited to enjoy the comfort of the colonial home and partake of food and drink. The famed 'open house' hospitality of providing accommodation and meals to white travellers or colleagues from other stations was possible only because of the availability of domestic help. While servants were seen as potential carriers of disease, colonials preferred to adopt the attitude 'out of sight, out of mind' towards food preparation and the kitchen.

The notion of social distance in the colonial context starting in the home was extended to the other institutions of empire. *Chapter Four* examined the hill stations, clubs, hotels and restaurants that identified colonizers in their unofficial and yet public lives. These were the extensions of the colonial home, as the colonials felt that even in leisure activities there was a need to preserve the dignity and prestige of the ruling class. British patronage and membership of these institutions defined boundaries, setting colonizers apart from the colonized. The hill station is one instrument and institution of British imperialism that perhaps surpasses all others in its extravagance (large ostentatious buildings for Government House for administrative offices) and excesses (transplanting whole households, including pianos and milk cattle for annual leave to the hill station); there the notion of isolation and segregation from the colonized people was more pronounced. Ironically, the idea of segregating themselves from the native people, that is, 'to get away from the natives' and to purify themselves in the cool high altitude air and disease-free highlands, was opposed to the actual practices of the British by entrusting their wellbeing and comfort to domestic servants that were transplanted from the plains. This chapter emphasizes the point that enforcing social distance on a large scale was always impossible. The fact that Europeans depended on Asians meant

⁹⁹⁴ Mary A. Procida, *Married to the Empire: Gender, Politics and Imperialism in India, 1883-1947*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2002.

that the concept of the hills as European spaces was always a fiction. Meals in the hills were prepared by the same servants from the household in the plains. Accommodation for the local population who provided service to the colonizers in the hill stations as well as in the plains lacked proper sanitation. As the hill stations in India grew, the bazaars that provisioned the white population became overcrowded. It was only when the lack of proper toilet facilities began to spread infectious diseases and the threat came closer to the white enclaves that colonial authorities decided to improve sanitation for the Indian population.⁹⁹⁵

The fear of dirt and disease in the colonies, as discussed in *Chapter Five*, arose from two fronts: the local people as potential carriers of disease and the tropical environment with damp and unhealthy vapours, harbouring contagious disease.⁹⁹⁶ This book has explored and supported Mary Douglas' argument that dirt is disorder and that to eliminate dirt is to organize the environment.⁹⁹⁷ Thus, complaints about dirty servants by memsahibs and seemingly futile attempts to instil cleanliness among the household staff can be seen as attempts to bring order to the colonial household. This book has also argued that the memsahib's fear of dirt and attempts to eliminate it stems from the desire to bring European order to the colonized environment. From the eighteenth century until the 1870s, medical thinking subscribed to the humoral theory that diseases were transmitted from noxious air or miasmas produced in unhealthy places. Many in the medical profession situated India within the tropics – as much a sociological construct as a geographical one – and attributed every Indian disease to the effects of tropical heat and humidity.⁹⁹⁸ It was this belief that rationalized the regular trips to the hills, for the healthy, bracing air of the highlands. Outside the kitchen of the home and hill stations, the fear of disease and the need for segregation was taken more seriously and can be seen with the situating of bungalows between wide streets in large compounds and servants' quarters built well away from the colonial home.⁹⁹⁹ While the British attempted to enforce distance between colonizers and the colonized, the fact

⁹⁹⁵ Dane Kennedy, *The Magic Mountains: Hill Stations and the British Raj*; Berkeley, University of California Press, 1996, p191.

⁹⁹⁶ See S. Robert Aiken, 'Early Penang Hill Station', *Geographical Review*, 1987, vol.77 no.4 pp. 421-439; and Ann Stoler, 'Making Empire Respectable: The Politics of Race and Sexual Morality in 20th-Century Colonial Cultures', in Jan Breman (ed.), *Imperial Monkey Business: Racial Supremacy in Social Darwinist Theory and Colonial Practice* Amsterdam, VU University Press, 1990.

⁹⁹⁷ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, London, Penguin, 1970, p12.

⁹⁹⁸ David Arnold, *The Tropics and the Traveling Gaze: India, Landscape and Science 1800-1856*, Delhi, Permanent Black, 2005.

⁹⁹⁹ Collingham, *Imperial Bodies*, p166.

remains that that distance was necessarily flexible. It was the domestic servants after all who penetrated the private and prestigious spaces of empire to ensure the functioning of colonial life.

Thus, through the negotiation and interaction between memsahib and the local servants, in particular, the cooks, a colonial cuisine emerged, not by imperial design but haphazardly within the complexity of the domestic domain. The culinary culture developed was so fluid that food boundaries became blurred, and evolved into the archetypical Anglo-Indian or colonial cuisine. At the same time, within this colonial cuisine were food practices that were peculiar to each colony. The collaboration between memsahib and cook indicates and acknowledges respect for Indian and Southeast Asian foodways. This book has emphasised how crucial the mistress-servant relationship was in colonial life and the contribution of domestic servants towards the sustenance of British colonizers, a notion seldom acknowledged.

Hall, M., *Labuan Story: Memoirs of a Small Island near the Coast of North Borneo*; Kuala Lumpur Synergy Media, 2007.

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