

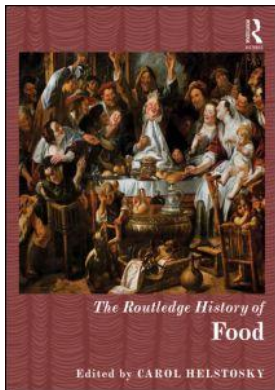
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SPREADING THE WORD

Using cookbooks and colonial memoirs to examine the foodways
of British colonials in Asia, 1850–1900*Cecilia Leong-Salobir*

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 ... Kitcherees are occasionally substituted for boiled rice at breakfast, and are eaten with fried fish, omelets, croquets, jhal freeze, &c.¹

Singapore breakfasts, though tolerably substantial and provided with a goodly array of dishes, are rarely dwelt over long ... A little fish, some curry and rice, and perhaps a couple of eggs, washed down with a tumbler or so of good claret ... Tiffin time ... a plate of curry and rice and some fruit or it may be a simple biscuit with a glass of beer or claret ... Dinner in Singapore ... Soup and fish generally both precede the substantial, which are of a solid nature, consisting of roast beef or mutton, turkey or capon, supplemented by side-dishes of tongue, fowl, cutlets, or such like, together with an abundant supply of vegetables, including potatoes ... The substantial are invariably followed by curry and rice which forms a characteristic feature of the tables of Singapore ... There are usually two or more different kinds [of curries] placed on the table, and accompanying them are all manner of sambals or native pickles and spices.²

The first passage from a cookbook, written by an anonymous author, is based on his or her culinary knowledge of thirty-five years of living in India. The cookbook is one of hundreds of cookbooks and household guides written for the Anglo-Indian mistress or her cook and was one of the ways in which the colonial hybrid cuisine spread. The second passage, authored by the editor of *The Straits Times* in Singapore (1861–81), was typical of colonial memoirs written by administrators, hunters, explorers, adventurers, scientists and missionaries who traversed the colonies. These two passages, depicting similar foods being consumed by colonials in India and Singapore, show that colonial culture in the form of food practices was transplanted to, or replicated in, other colonies of Asia. One of the ways in which this colonial culture was transmitted was through the medium of cookbooks.³

Introduction

The emergence of the British hybrid colonial cuisine in Asia came about as a result of negotiation and collaboration between colonizer and colonized. British hybrid colonial cuisine, comprising unique dishes such as countless varieties of curries, mulligatawny, kedgeree, country captain and *pish pash* evolved over time and was a combination of elements of British food practices and Asian foodways. The cuisine was not the result of a deliberate act of imposing imperialistic designs but involved a process of consuming local and European foods through the efforts of Asian servants.⁴ The memsahib's (memsahib is the form of address for a European woman in India. In Malaya, Singapore and the Borneo colonies the word memsahib was abbreviated to mem) supervisory role in the household, the servants' local knowledge, the lack of European foods and the availability of local ingredients all contributed toward colonial cuisine. Further, it was one of the paradoxes of the hierarchical relationships between the ruling elite and the ruled (domestic servants) that led to the development of colonial cuisine. Essentially, domestic servants in the colonies who were generally represented as dirty, dishonest and lacking in intelligence in colonial circles were responsible for the preparation of food for the family. Here lies the core contradiction at the heart of the colonial-servant relationship. The colonists' fear of dirt and disease and the need for separation and social distance was at odds with their dependence on servants for food preparation, a service that was both intimate and vital to health.

This chapter utilizes the genres of cookbooks and colonial memoirs to gain an understanding of the food history of British colonizers in Asia. Through foodways we are able to analyse the relationship between food practices and colonial engagement with the colonized populations of the colonies of India, Malaysia and Singapore. Cookbooks are printed records that suggest what a community might have consumed at a particular time. However, as other scholars have observed, cookbooks can be viewed as prescriptive texts and may not necessarily reflect the true food practices of a people. When analysed together with colonial memoirs, though, the two genres can convey a fuller picture of the food history of the colonial community in Asia. The first section of this chapter looks at those cookbooks that memsahibs or mems and their cooks used in the colonial homes, clubs, European-style hotels and hill stations. The second part of the chapter examines the descriptions of food practices in colonial memoirs that were written by a large range of British expatriates in the colonies, including retirees from the colonial administration, missionaries, adventurers and entrepreneurs. Colonial cookbooks and colonial memoirs clearly show that the British in colonial Asia did not strictly follow a British diet as a means to differentiate themselves from the colonized people. Existing scholarship on British colonialism supports the idea that, to set themselves apart as rulers, the British had to follow a lifestyle completely different from that of the local inhabitants, in dress, abode and food consumption.

British colonies in Asia

The nineteenth century was a time of rapid social change in Britain and its territorial expansions in the Far East by century's end included northern Borneo, Malaya, Singapore.⁵ British rule in India commenced with the East India Company assuming control from the second part of the eighteenth century. Between 1858 and 1947 India came under Crown colonial rule and this period was commonly known as the Raj.

From the mid 1800s there were increasing numbers of Britons arriving in India. By 1901 there were 154,691 Britons in India while the Indian population was 300 million.⁶ The British there included administrators, scientific explorers, entrepreneurs, missionaries, adventurers and their families. At the same time the Malayan civil service numbered 220 administrators to govern 3.2 million people.⁷

As the numbers of British women who went to the colonies steadily increased from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries, they were burdened with the gendered role of 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. Cookbooks and household manuals provided instructions on how to manage the household, how to maintain cleanliness in the home, and above all, how to feed a family and the perennial visiting colonials from other districts. These publications were self-help texts, written by women (and to a lesser extent, men) with practical experience on the ground. The earliest cookbooks pioneered the ways in which colonial foodways were introduced to the early and subsequent arrivals of colonials and their families. Cookbooks published in later generations added to the repertoire of dishes from other colonies as well as other food practices from other cultures. These publications can be seen as ideological tools as well. In the prefaces and dedication pages, authors boldly and proudly proclaimed the colonial woman's role in upholding the home as the white and ideal household in the colonized environment. The tone of the cookbooks and household guides was authoritative and sometimes imperious. Nowhere else was the connection made more explicit between linking household to empire than F.A. Steel and G. Gardiner's proclamation 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'.⁸

Other cookbook authors alluded to dutiful imperialism in promoting the household as a means to help empire-building in their prefaces and dedications. Elizabeth Garrett dedicated her household management manual of 1887, 'To my countrywomen in India'.⁹ Gardiner and Steel dedicated their influential household guide and cookery manual to 'The English girls to whom fate may assign the task of being house-mothers in "India's foreign strand"'.¹⁰ A.R. Kenney-Herbert's comprehensive cookery book for Madras was written for 'the Ladies of Madras – to whom, in all humility, I dedicate the first fruits of my labours – discover here and there a word of assistance when perplexed about their daily orders, I shall be bountifully rewarded'.¹¹ These publications also contained advice on medical aid and hygiene rules, with separate chapters devoted to invalid cookery, home cures and the like, similar to other cookbooks and household guides of the time.¹² Not all the cookbooks were written by patriotic authors or honest authors. Many would have been written with pecuniary motives and there were many instances of plagiarism in the supplementary notes to recipes and prescriptive texts.¹³ The bulk of cookbooks written for the British colonial community were published for the Indian colony as it was where the largest number of Britons were stationed.

In terms of relations between the British and Indians, there were two clear patterns of behaviour for the two periods of British rule. From the eighteenth century when India came under the East India Company, to the time when India became a Crown colony in 1858, Anglo-Indians,¹⁴ in efforts to engage pomp and ceremony to promote their ruling status, adopted outwardly Indian customs such as smoking the hookah, wearing Indian clothes and employing large numbers of servants. Anglo-Indians were known to consume

vast quantities of food, particularly meat.¹⁵ Further, colonizers came from the middle classes and they tried to emulate the British aristocracy in the colonies. This included partaking in substantial meals, a clear contrast to the comparatively light meals consumed by Asians. After the Indian Revolt of 1857 or the First War of Independence, the British hardened their attitudes towards the Indians and conspicuously started reducing outward consumption of Indian tradition, culture and food. The loss of lives on both sides, the emergence of racial theories and the legitimizing of British rule encouraged distance between ruler and subjects. Although the British colonial diet in Asia was hardly frugal in the second half of the nineteenth century, Kenney-Herbert wrote that ‘the molten curries and florid oriental compositions of the olden time – so fearfully and wonderfully made – have been gradually banished from our dinner tables’.¹⁶ Nevertheless Anglo-Indians continued to consume local dishes on a daily basis and Kenney-Herbert himself stated that although curry or mulligatawny were ‘very frequently given at breakfast or luncheon’, they no longer featured in the ‘dinner menu of establishments’.¹⁷ One could suggest that the reason why curry and mulligatawny were absent from the more formal venues then was British effort to present a more British or European presence in official settings. This shift in consumption practices was also true for the other colonies, as most menus from Government House formal dinners did not feature curry and other hybrid dishes popular among the British.

Cookbooks as a genre

There are different schools of thought on the role that cookery books can perform as historical documents. Some historians have argued against using cookbooks as a methodology for historical inquiry as they are seen as prescriptive and do not reflect actual practices of the time. Edith Horandner states that it is ‘exaggerated and imprudent to declare that food research could best be pursued by means of recipe books’.¹⁸ Historian Edward Higgs cautions against relying on the use of domestic manuals when writing about domestic service, comparing it to ‘reconstructing the average modern home from the pages of *Vogue*’.¹⁹ On the other hand, another scholar, Karen Hess, argues that the study of recipe books is the best method of historical food research.²⁰ This chapter takes the position that cookbooks and household guides, used in conjunction with another genre of writing, the colonial memoir, can ascertain the kinds of food the British ate in the colonies and how colonial cuisine developed.

In looking at nineteenth-century cookery in the colonies through cookbooks, it is necessary to examine foodways preceding that century in Britain and in the colonies. Domestic cookery was a perpetuation of the ways of at least two previous generations’ styles of cooking and eating, according to Valerie Mars.²¹ She observed that there are several books rooted in the eighteenth century, extending eighteenth-century culinary style through editions published in the nineteenth century. She adds that cooking techniques frequently have a much longer life than the life of the particular book in which they are written, existing outside of texts, for cookery is essentially a craft: ‘texts follow practice so that day-to-day cookery is not usually text-based’.²² In the uneven transition of cookbooks preceding or following food practices to reflect a more accurate account of the foodways of a community, it would be problematic to be able to neatly select a set number of cookbooks for a specific period. For example, *The Malayan Cookery Book* published in 1930 would have recipes similar to those followed by mems in the nineteenth century. In its introduction the

book claims that it ‘constitutes a serious attempt to aid the housewives (European) of Malaya the art of cooking ... a representative list of the recipes handed from generation to generation of Malayan (European) housewives ... There are first the dishes known to many generations of Indians’.²³ The bulk of colonial cookbooks were written for and by Anglo-Indians. Cookbooks targeting the Malaysian and Singaporean colonial readership number only a handful. The majority of mems in the two colonies would have referred to Anglo-Indian cookbooks and this was one way in which the colonial cuisine was replicated in the other colonies.

Cookbooks transmit knowledge and a recipe functions as part of a permanent record rather than as oral tradition passed from chef to apprentice.²⁴ Cookbooks and household guides were published in large numbers in Britain in the eighteenth century and helped men and women from the middle and upper classes in food purchases, preparation and presentation.²⁵

In her analysis of cookbooks, Janet Theophano describes them as ‘cooking manuscripts, intimate documents of daily life and kitchen artefacts’ and cautions the reader against thinking that all women ‘who wrote or contributed to one another’s books were social equals’.²⁶ Theophano draws a distinction between the household advice books and the personal recipe books of the nineteenth century. She points out that the former were aimed at educating middle-class women on how to treat and teach their servants while the latter indirectly discussed class, race and ethnicity.²⁷ These publications enabled women to reach beyond their family and friendship circles through the choice of language that was ‘as prosaic and nontechnical as they could muster to reach the widest possible audience’. Theophano observes that these cookbooks, aimed mainly at British readers and exported to the colonies, were ‘not simply a reflection of the social and occupational hierarchy of eighteenth century England and the gentry’s dependence on a servant class, but attempts to reach entire “communities of readers”’.²⁸

Originating from the United States at the time of the American Civil War,²⁹ compiled or contributed cookbooks are another type of cookbook that shed light on the food practices of a community. Their importance lies in the nature of their everyday, actual practices, as compared to more general cookbooks which can be seen as more static and less representative of daily food preparation and consumption routines. Lynne Ireland goes as far as to say that the ‘compiled cookbook’ can be viewed as autobiographical, that is, the recipes can be examined for insights into food preference.³⁰ Further, the compiled cookbook, also known as the fund-raising cookbook, has recipes that reflect what is eaten in the home in contrast to magazines and cookbooks of the popular press that set standards and attempt to influence consumption.³¹ They are compilations of favorite recipes of members of organizations with proceeds of sale of the cookbooks going to charity. Contributed cookbooks were published in colonial circles where there were sizeable numbers of British wives. Favorite recipes were collected from a charity or a communal organization with proceeds from sales donated to a particular cause.³² The ‘compiled cookbook’ can be used as a research guide for gauging preferred food through frequency of inclusion of the recipes.³³ This can certainly be applied to Anglo-Indian cookbooks where curry recipes are almost certain to be included in every volume.

By the late eighteenth century cookbooks in Britain appealed to middle- and upper-class women who were keen to relegate food preparation to the servants. Cookbooks were used as a medium to communicate with the servants on food preparation.³⁴ It was during the Victorian era and the expansion of empire that British writers started to include their

travel experiences in culinary writing. No book of the eighteenth century or earlier had a chapter dedicated to Indian cookery.³⁵ A century later, Alan Davidson cites an 1827 book, *Domestic Economy and Cookery* by 'A Lady', which includes 'the mullakatanies and curries of India'.³⁶ By the twentieth century, foreign recipes started making an appearance in European cookbooks. In her study on the recipe tradition in Germany, Cecilia Novero notes two main reasons why women tried out foreign recipes in the first half of the twentieth century.³⁷ First, cooking an exotic dish at home brought variety to the family's daily fare, and second, it evoked memories of the colonial experience, helped by the *Kolonialwaren* (imported groceries) available in the country.³⁸ Novero also states that German women travelers who cooked once back in Germany were 'useful collaborators in the colonial project, which for Germany was a civilizing one'.³⁹

Cookbooks for the colonies

While it is acknowledged that cookery books and household guides can be seen as prescriptive of ideals and aspirations, it is also argued that both the Victorian and colonial cookbooks were followed more closely by readers in the colonies for a number of reasons. First, colonial readers were too geographically distant from the metropole when trends or practices came into vogue; second, they were too isolated from family or friends for domestic advice;⁴⁰ and third, colonial cookbooks were reference texts for the memsahib and the domestic servant to refer to recipes for the emerging colonial cuisine. It would also be fair to say that cookbooks and household guides could be seen as terms of reference for the job description of maintaining the colonial household. The aspirational meals calling for sophisticated and prescriptive recipes such as turtle soup and French classical dishes were, in reality, for formal banquets in Government House. In her morning consultation with the cooks about the day's meals, the memsahib would point out the curries, mulligatawny and other dishes from the cookbooks to be prepared.

Caroline Lieffers states that a cookbook, as a printed reference guide, implies order, rationalization and demystification. The once-informal oral transfer of information, sometimes supplemented by the recording of an occasional recipe for personal use, became a process of official instruction as single authorities enforced a proper mode of cookery.⁴¹ Additionally, women continued to produce their own manuscript cookbooks, often containing recipes passed through generations and between families and exemplifying female community.⁴²

Cookbooks for the colonial mistress gave her a sense of reliability and consistency in her efforts to maintain the colonial home. A colonial mistress posted in a remote station would have felt acutely isolated and colonial cookbooks would have provided some sense of belonging to the wider colonial community. Alice Berry Hart reported that her kitchen in a Malayan rubber estate bungalow had no running water, sink or 'ice-box'.⁴³ Having in hand a cookbook such as Mrs C. Lang's would have been reassuring to Hart, not the least in her opinion of how local servants were quite competent. Lang claimed that her book would be

a help to many young inexperienced English girls starting housekeeping in India ... 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.⁴⁴

In his study on cookery-book illustrations in eighteenth-century England, Troy Bickham focuses on diagrams for table settings, portraits of the authors and kitchen scenes.⁴⁵ These illustrations informed mistresses of the ideal kitchen and of how guests would expect the meal to appear. Bickham notes that cookery book authors and social commentators placed great importance on these details as running an efficient kitchen ‘reflected the quality of the household and its mistress and master’.⁴⁶ Similarly, cookbooks for the colonies helped to set culinary standards, marking the colonial standing in the community, in the types of meals prescribed and on how dinner rituals were observed. They also hammer home the point that it was the colonial mistress’ duty to nourish the colonial family. Steel and Gardiner wrote:

a good mistress will remember the breadwinner requires blood-forming nourishment, and the children whose constitutions are being built up day by day, sickly or healthy, according to the food given them; and bear in mind the fact that, in India especially, half the comfort of life depends on clean, wholesome, digestible food.⁴⁷

There were some among the British officers who were not content with just administering the colonies but participated in coaching the colonial mistress to cope with household matters and who took to writing cookbooks and manuals. W.H. Dawe, the assistant-secretary to the Board of Revenue, North-Western Provinces, Allahabad, compiled a reference book with selected recipes on the ‘art of Indian cookery’ and its title explicitly targeted the colonial mistress, *The Wife’s Help to Indian Cookery: Being a Practical Manual for Housekeepers*.⁴⁸ Dawe wrote in the preface:

As the chief promoter of man’s happiness is woman, it should be in the hands of every Female Economist; the most enlightened will find some useful hints in its pages ... The recipes have been carefully selected, and have been compiled with the view of meeting the requirements not only of Residents in India but of English and Anglo-Indian Families at Home, who will find in it reminiscences of olden days. It teaches Habits of Economy, the way to turn everything in Household-affairs to the *best* account; these are among the things which every Mother should teach her Daughters.⁴⁹

The book promotes following a healthy diet in India, purifying water, and managing Indian servants, including the Indian cook. Other chapters touch on various methods of cooking, with recipes for entrees, soups, vegetables, omelettes, pastry, puddings, and notes on milk and cereals, drinks, and the preservation of health in India.

Anglo-Indian cookery books written for British residents in India and other Asian colonies contain not only recipes but information on diet, household hygiene, usually ending with chapters on medical advice and invalid cookery. Few books were restricted to recipes only. To help manage the imperial household, Anglo-Indians depended on the emerging genre of Anglo-Indian cookbooks and household management guides. The essence of these guides, states Mary Procida, was the ‘daily round’ (of deciding the day’s menus, sorting out the accounts for the previous day’s purchases, measuring out ingredients for the day’s meals), culinary hygiene and kitchen finances.⁵⁰ Procida’s observation that in ‘rethinking the purpose of the cookbook in a society where only the servants cooked’, one should not accept the view

that cookbooks were intended for a female audience only.⁵¹ She states that both the authorship and readership of Anglo-Indian cookbooks reveal the fluid nature of gender in the imperial household. Although most of these cookbooks were written by experienced memsahibs for new arrivals to the colony, other cookbooks were authored by male officials of the Raj.

Procida suggests that Anglo-Indian cookbooks served ‘many imperial purposes beyond the functions of simple didactic or prescriptive texts’.⁵² They helped to reconfigure the domestic sphere of the Raj, to construct new ideas about gender in the empire and to contribute to the dissemination of imperial knowledge. Further, she adds that the imperial ideal was the household with well-trained domestic staff requiring no managerial intervention.⁵³ While the cooks followed the orders for the types of meals to be cooked each day, they were responsible for the purchasing and preparation of these meals.

This tension between the mistress–servant relationship extended to the anxiety that the colonials felt was the undue closeness of the British child and the *ayah* or nursemaid. For many young and inexperienced memsahibs, the *ayah*, exercising immense control over childrearing, was the most important servant in the home.⁵⁴ This closeness of *ayah* and child resulted in the child tasting Asian foods at a young age. Steel and Gardiner complained that ‘it’s no unusual thing to see an English child eating his dinner off the floor, with his hands full of toys, while a posse of devoted attendants distract his attention, and the ayah feeds him with spoonfuls of *pish pash*’.⁵⁵ Included in every colonial cookbook, *pish pash* is a rice gruel, an Anglo-Indian nursery food, and it is also prepared for invalid cookery. ‘A Lady Resident’, in 1864, recommended broth, cutlets, mince, roast meat, chicken and plenty of bread for children from two-and-a-half to five years. She noted that while ‘many doctors highly disapprove of curry and mulligatawny for children, but I have known them refuse everything else for these dishes, and have myself given mulligatawny, made simply and not too hot’.⁵⁶ The author added that she had ‘always found that ordinary curries, made with proper meat and vegetables and all concomitants, have never failed to agree with and satisfy the *amah* (wet nurse) as well as the infant’.⁵⁷

Curry formed an important part of the culinary repertoire of everyday life in British India and in the other Asian colonies. It 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. Almost all cookbooks written for the colonies featured a diverse range of curries. Along with the commercialization of curry powders in the nineteenth century, curry became a defining dish of empire and it helped to form culinary links between British colonies.⁵⁸ While curries were seen as an economical way of stretching family meals in Britain, they were even more essential in India, as quality meat and poultry were in short supply. There were also other compelling reasons for the popularity of curry, one of which was that, as servants were responsible for cooking in the colonial household, it was one dish that needed no supervision from the memsahib. 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’.⁵⁹

In her work on curry and cookbooks in Victorian England, Susan Zlotnick examines the relationship between domestic ideology and imperialism in the early 1800s by ‘charting the domestication of curry’. However this chapter disagrees with Zlotnick’s argument that

'Victorian women neutralized the threat of the Other by naturalizing the products (such as curry) of foreign lands'.⁶⁰ Zlotnick maintains that through this process, Victorian women domesticated imperialism at both the symbolic and the practical level. 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.⁶¹ She uses curry advertisements of the time to highlight its 'ideological function'. It is more likely, however, that curry powder was developed by the British as they were genuinely fond of the taste of the combination of curry spices and that the local servants cooked it very well. Merchants flocked to sell curry spices, particularly when curries became popular both in India and Britain. It was highly unlikely that as the memsahib and local cook, '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'.⁶²

Angela C. Spry wrote in 1894 that 'curry is eaten in almost every household at least once daily, generally at breakfast or *Bari Hazri*'.⁶³ Spry complained however that too often the curry was 'tasteless' as the cooking was left entirely to the cook or khansamah who left out many of the necessary spices. She praised the cooks however on the cooking of rice; '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'.⁶⁴

The historical value of a cookbook lies also in the prefaces, acknowledgements, other notices and notes that accompany recipes. These supplementary notations offer more than glimpses of meal planning and recipes. They inform us of processes in which dishes were hybridized and emerged as part and parcel of the colonial cuisine. In describing the intricacies of the ideal curry, G.L.R. wrote:

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 ... The secret of a good curry lies in care taken to brown the curry stuffs till the raw smell disappears, and when cocoanut milk is added, as in some of the recipes, the pan should be left uncovered, as the milk will curdle. A careful seasoning of salt also is essential to a tasty curry.⁶⁵

Fish moolee, a dish of South Indian origin, was enjoyed by Anglo-Indians at the first meal of the day. G.L.R. noted that fish moolee:

is a breakfast dish, served with boiled rice or toast handed round, and is much appreciated. One pound of fish cut into squares and fried, a small tea-cup of thick cocoanut milk, the same quantity of gravy or stock made from trimmings and bones, two ounces ghee, two sliced onions, half an inch of turmeric ground, half a dozen very thin slices of ginger, two or three green chillies sliced, half a teaspoon of salt, one tablespoon vinegar or tamarind juice. Melt the ghee, fry half the onions in it to a light brown, add the turmeric, ginger and salt, gradually the cocoanut milk; cook for a few mins, add green chillies and the remainder of onions; stir, add your fish. Keep pan uncovered and simmer. Add vinegar or tamarind juice just before serving.⁶⁶

Books on Indian cookery were increasingly being published in Britain from the 1830s as the colonial administration in India expanded and consolidated.⁶⁷ Numerous Anglo-Indian

cookbooks were also published in India. In her bibliography of cookery books, Elizabeth Driver observes that the early books were collections of genuine recipes. Gradually both the authors and readership became more diverse with most writers presenting an Anglicized version of the cuisine. Retired Indian officers and their wives offered recipes for British women running households in India, adapting British cuisine to Indian conditions, but all included instructions for Indian dishes.⁶⁸

Cookbooks of the colonial era not only inform us of the hybrid dishes that colonials consumed but there were cookbooks published in Britain specifically for the returning East India Company employees and others who craved the colonial type meals. Henrietta Hervey, wife of a retired colonial officer, wrote *Anglo-Indian Cookery at Home* (1895) specifically 'for returned exiles'. The Oriental Club in London was founded in 1824 as a meeting place for returning officers from India and the other colonies. Richard Terry, chef de cuisine at the Oriental Club, composed a cookery book in 1861, listing colonial hybrid meals that Britons returning from their empire travels could once again enjoy. He supplied a comprehensive list of curry recipes, including dry mutton curry, mutton curry another way, mutton with vegetables, chicken curry, Bengal curry, rabbit curry, rabbit curry with vegetables, breast of mutton curry, breast of veal curry, calf's foot curry, sheep's head curry, beef curry, lark curry (using thirty-six larks), partridge curry, teal curry, curry of ox palates, nugal curry, Melay curry, lobster curry, oyster curry, fillet of sole curry, skate curry, crab curry and salmon curry.⁶⁹ Terry wrote in the preface that in the ten years as *chef de cuisine* at the Oriental Club he had also gathered information for his recipes not only from his own repertoire 'but from Native Cooks, the proper ingredients that are required in each Curry or Soup to give it that flavor which it should possess to make it a palatable dish'.⁷⁰ The 'native cooks' would have been those South Indians who worked in the numerous Indian restaurants or coffee houses from the 1770s.⁷¹ Sake Dean Mahomed established Britain's first curry house, the Hindostanee Coffee House, near Portman Square in London.⁷²

In her cookery guide to India for the memsahib Mrs John Gilpin explained why she had not given recipes for curries and other local dishes as these were part of the repertoire of dishes that any good cook would have. Still she slipped in recipes for curried sheep's head, curry balls (made of rice) and fish kitcheree among the menus for ninety days, catering to breakfast, luncheon and dinner. The menus consisted of a mixture of European and Indian dishes.

Arjun Appadurai promotes the idea that cookbooks, as the 'humble literature of complex civilizations', have unusual cultural tales to tell.⁷³ Cookbook writers in the colonies put their stamp on their commitment to the colonial project as the publications were testament to the particular hardships they faced. The ways in which hardships were overcome were written up and served as instruction guides to new and young memsahibs. Daniel Santiago was one 'native' servant who put pen to paper on recipes of the colonial cuisine. He had a small collection of recipes published when his colonial employers, John Loudoun Shand and a Mr Haldane, brought him to work for them in England. Just as the Oriental Club targeted returned nostalgic Britons for custom, Santiago's *The Curry Cook's Assistant* aimed at teaching those who had enjoyed colonial dishes to cook curries in Britain.⁷⁴

Cookbooks for the servants

Another category of cookery books published in both the metropole and the colonies were designed as manuals or handbooks for the servants. In Britain, cookery books were written

for servants working for the upper classes in the late eighteenth century. 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'.⁷⁵ In Asia, while 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.⁷⁶ *A Friend in Need English-Tamil Cookery Book* was published by Friend-In-Need Society, a charity organization founded in 1813 'to assist the deserving poor and to provide a Home for the aged, infirm and destitute' European and Anglo-Indian Christians of every denomination in Madras.⁷⁷ One cookery book was published wholly in 'Hindustani' in 1939.⁷⁸ Often, even in some of the cookbooks published in English, there were pages translated into the local language. The existence of cookbooks presupposes some degree of literacy;⁷⁹ if the cook were illiterate, however, it was his duty to look for someone who could read and translate the dishes to be cooked that day. It is only in the complex and peculiar colonial culture that a text was written for a target audience who could not read.

As common at the time, long titles of cookbooks in the nineteenth century served to spell out the objectives of the book. The title of R. Riddell's cookery and household manual promised 'numerous directions for plain wholesome cookery, both oriental and English; with much miscellaneous matter answering for all general purposes of reference connected with household affairs, likely to be immediately required by families, messes, and private individuals, residing at the presidencies or outstations'.⁸⁰ Clearly written for the memsahib's directions towards her servants, Riddell stated in the preface, '[T]he Receipts are rendered in as plain a manner as possible so that no difficulty may arise in their communication to Natives; the selects are such as are most easily attainable; and the means for their preparation generally procurable'.⁸¹ In chapter 28 on 'Oriental Cookery', Riddell listed, among other dishes, curries, three mulligatawny soups (using chicken, rabbit, mutton or pea fowl), two recipes for ballachong (a spicy side dish comprising dried prawns, chillies, salt, garlic, green ginger, tamarind juice, ghee, onions, limes or orange and fresh lime leaves) and seventeen chutney recipes.⁸² Riddell advised that:

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. All of these when prepared in an artistical manner, and mixed in due proportions, form a savoury and nourishing repast, tempting to the organs of scent and taste, but if carelessly prepared, are as equally disagreeable to the eye and stomach.⁸³

Riddell also included two recipes for mock turtle soup, a reinvented dish of the expensive turtle soup that in Victorian times was seen as a sophisticated and aspirational dish. Most mock turtle soup involved the use of calf's head and feet but Riddell suggested that two sheep's heads and eight feet would also 'make an excellent imitation mock turtle'.⁸⁴ In the colonies, turtle soup was served usually on formal occasions, such as banquets at Government House. For example, a description of a banquet for Governor E.W. Birch in 1904 included turtle soup served at 'a brilliant gathering of 68 ladies and gentlemen, the largest number of Europeans that have ever been mustered in one place in the history of British North Borneo'.⁸⁵

As its title explicitly proclaims, *What to Tell the Cook; or the Native Cook's Assistant, being a Choice Collection of Receipts for Indian Cookery, Pastry etc. etc.*, this cookbook aimed at assisting the mistress of the colonial home in getting more free time. Publisher Higginbothams wrote in the front of the book:

The object of this little work is not only to assist Native Cooks in preparing good dishes, but to save house-keepers the trouble of describing the *modus operandi*. The headings are in English, so a 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.⁸⁶

This cookbook is representative of the majority of the cookbooks for the colonies that inform us that British colonials consumed a mixed diet of European and Asian meals. In

Table 8.1 Modified from: Anonymous, *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 Ld., 1910

1 st day:	clear soup, roast leg mutton, harico, chicken curry, bread and butter pudding.
2 nd day:	mulligatawny, beefsteak pie, cutlets a la soubise, kabob curry, pancakes.
3 rd day:	vegetable soup, boiled fowls and tongue, mutton and cucumber stew, dry curry, custard pudding.
4 th day:	pea soup, a-la-mode beef, roast teal, prawn curry, sweet omelette.
5 th day:	ox-tail soup, boiled mutton and onion sauce, chicken cutlets, vegetable curry, plum pudding.
6 th day:	white soup, roast ducks, beefsteak, ball curry, sago pudding.
7 th day:	hare soup, roast kid and mint sauce, mutton pudding, sardine curry, mango fool.
8 th day:	turnip soup, roast fowls, irish stew, toast curry, arrowroot jelly.
9 th day:	rice soup, game pie, mutton cutlets, salt fish and egg curry, plantain fritters.
10 th day:	carrot soup, roast beef, minced mutton, cutlet curry, jam roll pudding.
11 th day:	mock turtle soup, mutton rolled and spiced, boiled chickens, mutton curry, blancmange.
12 th day:	gravy soup, boiled salt beef, stewed quails, fish curry, batter pudding.
13 th day:	mutton broth, roast venison, maintenon cutlets, sheep's head curry, cheese cakes.
14 th day:	tomato soup, jugged hare, debris pudding curry puffs, rice flummery.
15 th day:	giblet soup, roast goose, boiled mutton chops, brain curry, potato pudding.
16 th day:	Palestine soup, breast of veal and peas, wild ducks, malay curry, Thorpe pudding.
17 th day:	julienne soup, roast pork, chicken salad, egg curry, arrowroot pudding.
18 th day:	oyster soup, braised leg mutton, pigeons and peas, gravy curry, fair rosamond pudding.
19 th day:	partridge soup, spiced beef, fricasseed fowl, vegetable curry, george pudding.
20 th day:	potato soup, stewed ducks and turnips, beef persillade, kabob curry, rice pudding.
21 st day:	green pea soup, stewed shoulder veal, sheep's tongues, dry curry, imitation apple and rice edge.
22 nd day:	cucumber soup, chicken pie, sheep's head chartreuse, mutton curry, tipsy cake.
23 rd day:	pot-au-feu, rock pigeons, prawn curry, Snowden pudding.
24 th day:	gravy soup, roast fore-quarter mutton, sweetbreads, chicken curry, sago jelly.
25 th day:	mulligatawny, fowls a la Carlsfors, China Chilo, lemon suet pudding.
26 th day:	mock turtle soup, roast mutton, fowl and pillau, castle pudding.
27 th day:	white soup, roast filet of veal, boiled mutton chops, chicken curry, chocolate pudding.
28 th day:	clear soup, boiled ducks, rissoles, sheep's head curry, coconut pudding.
29 th day:	game soup, beefsteak pudding, mutton and tomato cutlets, brain curry, Adelaide pudding.
30 th day:	ox-tail soup, roast fowls and sausages, Breslau of beef, fish curry, Bombay pudding.
31 st day:	julienne soup, pigeon pie, roast lamb, vegetable curry, tart and custard.

the suggested meals for a month of dinners there was curry listed for every menu except for one day out of the thirty-one days.⁸⁷

Colonial memoirs as a genre

In discussing the autobiographies written by British men and women during the Raj, Mary Procida notes that those men and women presented their individual life stories as a mirror of the larger history of British imperialism in the subcontinent. These constructed autobiographical narratives linked the intimate personal events of their individual and family histories with the public, political questions of the empire.⁸⁸ While autobiographies of rulers and well-known personalities implicitly allude to the general public's interest in their life experiences – many colonial memoirs in India and the other colonies were written by the *Chota* (little) *Sahib* – as they believed that their colonial experiences warranted public interest and attention.⁸⁹ Many of the memoirs drew on professional work experiences, family history and personal anecdotes against the backdrop of imperial rule. Importantly for this chapter, many of the memoirs written by both men and women richly illustrated colonial foodways.

In the debate on the use of autobiographies and personal documents as historical texts, there are some historians who prefer letters and diaries to memoirs. This notion is based on 'the assumption that they are more reliable evidence of what their authors were thinking at the time of events than are texts written later', and these narratives 'seem more spontaneous and less governed by rules of genre or propriety'.⁹⁰ The dissenting view is that perspectives in letters and diaries, known collectively by the term 'ego-documents', should not be privileged over the retrospective view as hindsight could allow a clearer view of past experiences.⁹¹

Colonial memoirs published both in Britain and the colonies provide evidence of the hybrid cuisine enjoyed by the British in Asia. Right from the start when the British set foot on colonial outposts until the fall of empire, thousands of colonial officials and others published their memoirs and diaries. The British colonial was a prolific writer; meticulous reports were written up of his travels, work and recreation. For the food historian the pertinent question would be the accuracy of the accounts of food practices of the time. Undoubtedly, there would be exaggeration for difficult living conditions, difficulties in sourcing food supplies and the incompetence of domestic cooks. In writing about the colonial household, female authors had a fine balancing act to follow. It was important to illustrate the hardship of supervising large numbers of native servants in a household that was so different from the British family home. At the same time, authors had to express that, in the end, memsahibs would triumph against all odds. The colonial women had to be seen as doing empire's work, ensuring that the colonial household was run smoothly and their families and visiting administrators and others were well nourished. As for male writers, their memoirs usually focused on their work, frequently on travel to the hinterland as that was where hardship and the dangerous and impenetrable jungle could be depicted graphically.

Most of the memoirs published on Asian experiences were written by colonial officials or with official endorsement. The narrative typically starts with the author's family history, then moves on to the Colonial Office or private company interview, the voyage out, colonial life, travel to the untamed interior and ends with the voyage home. Most of the publications were generously illustrated and would have found a readership eager for

depictions of primitive living conditions in barbaric lands in the far-flung posts of the empire. These memoirs were written in the context of coping with hostile environments and unfamiliar inhabitants but, in the end, the colonial managed to contribute towards the colonial project. Detailed descriptions of foodways in the colonies were not confined to the colonial home but extended to other institutions of empire such as clubs, resthouses, hill stations and camps on jungle expeditions.

While countless memoirs were written by colonial women (wives, missionaries, travellers), men provided the bulk of adventure travel narratives in the hinterland, reinforcing the notion that colonization was a masculine undertaking. In any case colonial officers were exclusively male and they commanded the convoys of native men marching across the colonial landscape. Hunters, explorers, adventurers, scientists and missionaries traversed the interior of the colonies, to bring home trophies, civilize the indigenous peoples, discover 'new' fauna and flora, all of which were part of the colonial project. Many of these memoirs were published from travellers' and explorers' diaries or letters written home and added to the growing popularity of travel narratives in the nineteenth century.⁹² The memoirs illustrate colonial attitudes towards the guides and cooks who sustained the travellers and these attitudes ranged from being paternalistic and condescending to downright dislike and mistrust. Anecdotes from the memoirs confirm that Asian servants were responsible for food preparation. Sentiments on local cooks resonate with those expressed in cookbooks, that their dirty habits, dishonesty and ineptness were universal. By articulating these character flaws, colonizers reiterated the rhetoric that the natives needed to be managed and led.

Remembering the past from repasts

In scrutinizing descriptions of foodways in colonial memoirs, one could argue that these accounts would be less subject to exaggeration as compared to, for example, subjective descriptions of behaviours of domestic servants in the colonial home. A memoir author could lament about the distasteful chicken offered at the dinner table but the evidence, for the food historian's purpose, is that chicken was indeed eaten at a particular time and place. Colesworthy Grant, in a letter (published book-length) written in India to his mother in England, conveyed that foods consumed by the colonials were not confined to only cooked dishes but to the large variety of tropical fruits in India and the other Asian colonies. In describing life in India in 1862, Colesworthy Grant wrote of the 'cocoa-nut, or *Nariyul*', 'in its first state of perfection, and filled with about a pint and a half of sweet liquid' and that '[A]s it ripens, the nut becomes lined with a sweet pulp, sometimes eaten in that state, and sometimes cooked in curries, salads, patties and sweetmeats'.⁹³ Anglo-Indians so loved the mango that Grant noted that it was considered 'moderate' to eat twenty or thirty mangos in one sitting. He supported the popularity of the fruit in cooked dishes too, such as mango pickle, preserve and chutney, and these were clearly reflected in recipes in almost every Anglo-Indian cookbook.⁹⁴ The 'sweet-sop' or custard apple is considered 'a very favourite dish', 'containing a great quantity of seeds, covered by a soft rich pulp of exceedingly pleasant flavour ... and one of the finest fruits we possess'.⁹⁵ Grant wrote that the tamarind fruit was used to make 'sherbets, sirups and conserves'. Grant observed that the 'alligator or avocado pear' as 'a soft raw vegetable, which requires salt and pepper to make it palatable' and compared it to 'an English melon'.⁹⁶

According to Grant, after the early morning constitutional, the Briton in India would either retire back to bed to doze away an hour before breakfast at eight or nine o'clock.

He wrote, '[R]ice, kitchuree, fried, preserved, or tamarind fish, cold or fried meat, chops, curries, omelette, eggs, muffins, toast, fruit and "a variety of other entertainments," may sometimes be seen on the table at once, – the characteristic and almost invariable dishes being those of rice and fish'.⁹⁷ Tiffin was served at one or two o'clock. Grant, quoting Captain Mundy in 'Pen and Pencil Sketches': 'This subsidiary meal is a favourite midday pastime of both the ladies and men of the Presidency, and is the only repast at which appetite generally presides. A rich hash or hot curry, followed by a well cooled bottle of Claret or Hodgson's Pale Ale, with a variety of eastern fruit'.⁹⁸ The evening meal in India, 'being strictly English, offers no peculiarities', according to Grant.⁹⁹ Grant also berated his compatriots for eating too much ghee.¹⁰⁰

In the Southeast Asian colonies, 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'.¹⁰¹ Lunch or tiffin was served at one o'clock, usually consisting of curry and rice.¹⁰² Dinner was between half-past six and seven, starting with soup and fish; the 'substantials' of roast beef or mutton, turkey or capon; curry and rice; side dishes of tongue, fowl, cutlets and vegetables; these were followed by pudding or preserve and local fruit. Drinks were sherry, bitters and beer.¹⁰³ The large meals enjoyed by the colonials had parallels to the tradition of consuming roast beef and mutton by the English middle-to-upper class as a sign of good living.¹⁰⁴ By emulating the social mores of the upper classes, the Anglo-Indians styled themselves as the aristocracy in India. This was not replicated to any extent in the Southeast Asian colonies, due mainly to the far fewer numbers both in colonizers and the colonized. Thus, the bountiful dinner table was one way to display affluence and sophistication. In other colonial communities and settings it was not always possible to consume conspicuously. Even when the substantial meals described in the memoirs seem more British than hybrid, they were always supplemented by curry and rice and local side dishes. Thus the colonial hybrid cuisine was not only about consuming hybrid dishes, but including local dishes.

Chicken was much maligned, both in the home, in the kitchens of resthouses, hill stations and especially on jungle travel. The ubiquitous chicken on the jungle travel menu prompted Hatton to write this to a family member in Britain, 'I shall be with you, my dear – so expect me and order anything for dinner except fowl!'¹⁰⁵ Almost always available, chicken was usually the standby source of protein when the traveller's European supplies ran out. In a letter to his mother from Labuan, Hatton wrote that when travelling in the bush his dinner generally consisted of 'American meat (when there is any), biscuits, sweet potatoes and occasionally a "Dusun fowl"', followed by beer'.¹⁰⁶

Hatton also described an event, where, on reaching an area inhabited by the Bajau people, they managed to obtain

some fowls and cooked a breakfast – luckily having a tin of cocoa and milk left. I never relished a meal more, being desperately hungry – our dinner the evening before consisting of half a tin of sweet biscuits, washed down by some Hollands strong waters – not the sort of dinner one would order as a rule.¹⁰⁷

George M. Barker, in his memoir as a tea planter in Assam in the 1880s, also complained about the frequency of having to consume chicken. He wrote:

Day succeeds day, and the monotony of chicken meat remains unchanged: chicken in every form, chicken cutlets, steaks, minced, spatchcocked, rissoled, roasted, boiled, curried, in soup, on toast, fried, devilled, and many other ways. No man exists who has been in India and has not been compelled to sit down every day of his life to at least one meal in which chicken figured conspicuously in some form or another. These miserable fowls, a weak burlesque on their English prototypes, are procured by the *moorgie-wallah*, whose duty it is to start off every morning and scour the surrounding villages for the purpose of buying up all available chickens, ducks and eggs.¹⁰⁸

In the preface Barker explained that his book was about ‘the daily life of the Planter who toils in the jungle far from civilization to provide the civilized with their cheering beverage’.¹⁰⁹ Indeed, he lamented that his diet would have more variety if only he was ‘fortunate enough to live in the vicinity of three or four other planters [so that we] can form a sheep club, and kill once a month or once a fortnight’.¹¹⁰

An alternative to eating the eternal chicken was to rely on tinned provisions, but they were expensive to purchase for the assistant tea planter on 150 rupees a month.¹¹¹ Tinned foods, useful in emergencies, once opened could not be kept for any length of time. Barker noted:

curry is the only dish that can be taken with anything approaching to satisfaction ... curry can be made palatable by the addition of chutney, and we reluctantly eat the former in order to indulge in the latter ... Native curry is unlike the abomination that in England passes by that name as it is possible to imagine ... there is a delicacy of flavour that can never be attained away from the East – a blending of good things that makes it what it is – uncommonly palatable.¹¹²

While not attributing the delicious curry to the native cooks but to ‘the East’ he nevertheless noted, ‘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’.¹¹³

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.¹¹⁴

The dessert most often mentioned was sago pudding, or *Gula Melaka*, a local sweet. *Gula Melaka* is the Malay name for palm sugar but in colonial patois it referred to the combination of sago and the sugar syrup that was poured over it.¹¹⁵ One memsahib described sago pudding as ‘cooling and delicious’ after a Malayan curry¹¹⁶ 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’.¹¹⁷ Margaret Shennan stated that ‘[A]ccording to hallowed tradition curry *makan* (meal) was followed by gula Malacca ... altogether an unforgettable experience’.¹¹⁸ However another 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'.¹¹⁹

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 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.¹²⁰

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'.¹²¹ The end of the local leave meant the return to Kuala Langat which Emily viewed as a 'butcherless, bakerless, tailorless, cobblerless, doctorless, bookless, milkless, postless and altogether comfortless jungle'.¹²² 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.

As the number of British officers were so few in relation to the Indian population (this was also true of the other colonies but on a much smaller scale) this entailed constant travel from district to district, in the form of judges, policemen, health inspectors, agriculturalists and so on. As hotels and restaurants were far and few in between, the European travellers relied on staying in the homes of other Britons in the area. The hospitality was renowned, and served to provide access to a white imperial home to the British traveller and reinforced colonial solidarity. Needless to say, it was the Asian cooks who catered to the ever-expanding dining table. A ritual was put in place in Assam among the expatriate community where all meal times were fixed at the same time across all the British homes in Assam so that 'the frequency of stray visitors alighting unexpectedly at the bungalow' would know when the next meal was and 'his host shall not have all his domestic arrangements upset by his servants having to serve various meals at odd times'.¹²³

Jungle fare

Memoirs describing jungle travel in Southeast Asia show another kind of colonial cuisine – outside the setting of the colonial home. The depiction of the colonial's willingness and readiness to imbibe foods not generally consumed in the colonial home added to the notion of duty and endurance for empire. Charles Brooke was not enamoured of the turtle eggs he sampled when he visited the islands of Satang and Talang Talang in Sarawak, describing them as:

not disagreeable to the taste when mixed with curry, but when eaten without any condiments, possess a dry, sandy flavour, which somewhat resembles a stale fowl's-egg, but doubtless by the skill of a Soyer they would become very delicious.¹²⁴

In recounting his experiences in jungle travel to stamp out ‘insurgencies’ in Sarawak, Brooke noted, ‘[w]e were not well supplied with food, and the single fowl daily was scarce enough to keep four lusty Christians in condition’.¹²⁵ On another occasion he wrote, ‘[w]e cooked and dined in a tumble-down place, but it was better than a confined boat. Our dinner consisted of stew and vegetables’. Brooke chose to say ‘we’ when obviously it was the male servants (known as ‘boys’) who cooked.¹²⁶

On long travels in the interior when the magnificent colonial table could not be replicated, the British traveller had to eat what was available. At bleak times when even the ever-present jungle fowl was not to be found, travellers resorted to eating sago. Charles Brooke wrote, ‘[w]e had some wild sago-plant cooked for dinner; the taste is too bitter to be pleasant’.¹²⁷ European travellers recognized the importance of rice as the staple food of the indigenous people in the jungle trek, both for their sustenance each day and also as a standby that Europeans could fall back on when their own supplies ran out. It was the single most important food item to be included for jungle travel; it was relatively non-perishable, portable and easily cooked by local guides and boys. Hatton reported that on one boat travel trip they stopped three times to cook rice.¹²⁸

There were other Europeans who were not so accommodating when the usual colonial type meals were not replicated on jungle travel. On a hunting expedition, Frederick Boyle berated his boy, Paham, who had failed to organize meals for a two- to three-day journey among the Dayaks in Sarawak. Boyle stated, ‘I made frantic inquiries about the “country captains” (a chicken dish), and the curries, and the savoury meats, which should have been provided to alleviate our sojourn’.¹²⁹

The colonial home was the site where the memsahib had carefully constructed it to be the space of prestige and exclusion, guarding it against the encroachment of the colonized environment and its people. This also included particular standards of behaviour, marking the social distance between colonizer and colonized – in dress, home décor, employing large numbers of household servants and in food practices. The ‘relaxing’ of colonial standards of behaviour extended to consuming foods that ‘boys’ or other local people offered. At times when in the homes of local dignitaries, etiquette and protocol demanded that the British traveller had to partake of local foods. In their hunting expedition to Sarawak, brothers Frederick and Arthur Boyle claimed that they ‘had visited every fort and station of the Sarawak territory’.¹³⁰ Frederick Boyle described visiting an old chief’s home and, while he and the host chatted and dozed, the chief’s wife prepared the evening meal. He recounted:

The eatables which she produced consisted of a pig’s leg, and a quantity of rice, boiled in bamboos, and then thrust out in a mass, like the roly-polly pudding of our infancy. The pig’s leg was cured according to the Dyak fashion ... the meat is exactly like gelatine, surrounded an inch thick envelope of coke. I had already devoured the curry presented by the Tuan Mudah, and when Gasing invited me to partake of this dish I accepted with the greatest cordiality; the choice lay between this gelatinated pork and a roast fowl in the Dyak manner.¹³¹

Likewise, Isabella L. Bird, in her travels in the Malayan jungle in 1879, suggested that there were Europeans who were enthusiastic about imbibing local fare. Bird 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'.¹³²

The founder of Sandakan, in British North Borneo, William Pryer, and his wife Ada Pryer, were served rhinoceros for dinner by the local Lamag people while travelling in the Kinabatangan River area. William ate 'a cut of steak, which he accepted and ordered to be cooked for dinner, to my disgust. He protested that it was very good eating, and was something like pork and venison, but I declined to try it'.¹³³ The Pryers however rejected crocodile meat when offered it, with Mrs Pryer remarking, '[t]his culinary delicacy we politely declined'.¹³⁴ On the same trip, when food supplies ran out, the Pryers and their jungle boys resorted to trapping animals, catching only mousedeer, civet cat and monitor lizard.¹³⁵ Mrs Pryer wrote:

Our larder was so reduced that we were at last obliged to make our breakfast, tiffin, and dinner off sweet potatoes, and the men were almost as badly off as ourselves, for their rice was almost all finished.¹³⁶

Rest and recreation

Aside from the colonial home there were other enclaves of empire where Britons could congregate: hill stations, clubs, resthouses and dak bungalows. Hill stations were established in the British colonies in Asia, initially as convalescent retreats and later as rest and recreation bases for Europeans. Built in highland areas, they were seen as necessary enclaves for quarantining the European community from the native populations. John Lang recalled from his travels in India in the mid-nineteenth century of having mulligatawny soup and rice, cold lamb and mint sauce with sherry and beer for tiffin at Jack Apsey's home in Mussoorie.¹³⁷ While camping in the Upper Provinces, his party slept until ten in the morning and breakfasted on 'grilled fowl, curried fowl and eggs, with beer instead of tea'.¹³⁸ Lang observed that:

Simlah is a much more expensive place to spend the summer at than Mussoorie, in consequence of its great distance from the plains, whence almost every article of food and all descriptions of 'stores' are carried on men's shoulders. The mutton of the hill sheep is not equal to Welsh mutton; but when properly kept and dressed, it is very good eating. The hill cattle also afford tolerable beef; but the joints are very small.¹³⁹

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, he was eating a pigeon pie and enquiring about the Irish pie.¹⁴⁰

Clubs were important meeting places for the British in the colonies: they served as places for socializing, dining venues and a sense of belonging to an essentially British tradition. The club represented a symbol of British culture and food and drink served here were similar to those served in the colonial home. Certain clubs or club cooks acquired fame because of their signature curries or other dishes. 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 (male cook) and 'no amount of wheedling by various memsahibs

would get the recipe out of him'.¹⁴¹ The Madras Club was so well-known for its prawn curry that when the Prince of Wales visited India he made a tour to Madras specifically to taste this dish.¹⁴²

Local cooks at dak bungalows and rest-houses were well-known for whipping up meals for itinerant Britons who turned up suddenly. As the cooks had to rely on local ingredients, the dishes were often omelettes, roast chicken and chicken curry.¹⁴³ 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. 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.¹⁴⁴

Conclusion

Cultural artefacts of the home such as cookbooks are now seen as important contributions to historical inquiry. Cookbooks and household manuals are one genre that have become an important source as historical documents. Apart from illustrating the types of foods consumed, cooking methods used and types and frequency of meals eaten, cookbooks are insightful in providing details of the social mores of the time. Cookbooks and household guides were important manuals for the colonial mistress to refer to each day, in pointing out to the household cook which meals were to be ordered. It was through the medium of cookbooks that recipes of the colonial cuisine were made popular and accessible to the colonial community. In a sense, these publications also served as a tool of empire as they helped to strengthen the colonial community. The colonial home was seen as a bastion of white imperialism where the memsahib imposed the rituals and tasks that defined colonial culture. Some scholars have cautioned against using cookbooks as historical texts as they are seen as prescriptive and do not necessarily reflect the food practices of a community at a particular time. Colonial cookbooks however do not comprise recipes alone; prefaces, notes to accompany dishes, and other supplementary texts informed memsahibs of the uniquely hybrid colonial cuisine that emerged from the colonies. Cookery books in the colonies thus became the standard bearer of the colonial foodways and hold themselves up as 'the voice of authority' and recipes are 'the directions for detailed behaviour'.¹⁴⁵ In conjunction with cookbooks I have used colonial memoirs to provide a more nuanced understanding of the foodways of British colonizers in Asia. Colonial memoirs illustrate the large and heavy meals consumed by Britons; roast meats were supplemented by curries and rice and other hybrid dishes. Colonizers (who came from the middle classes) copied the Victorian style of gargantuan feasts and extravagant table décor to portray themselves as the new elites in the colonies. The genres of cookbooks and memoirs employed together can be seen as a way to confirm the historical veracity of food practices of a community. Colonial cookbooks carry a combination of European, Asian and hybridized (European and Asian) dishes – these are reflected in descriptions of meal times in the homes, hill stations and on jungle travel. In the colonial memoirs, 'food carried the flavor of memory, forging material continuities between past and present and connecting the personal to the collective'.¹⁴⁶

Notes

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