

# **The Complex Reality of British Multiculturalism: A Case Study of Indian Food**

Samantha Throup

Student number: 577533

samanthathroup@student.eur.nl

School of History, Culture and Communication, Erasmus University

Supervisor: Gijsbert Oonk

## **Abstract**

Indian food in the UK is surrounded by a paradox. On one hand it is praised by politicians and honoured in the form of awards ceremonies dedicated to finding the best curries. On the other hand it has long suffered derogatory treatment relating to its authenticity, quality and even décor of the restaurants. Food does not exist separately from social meaning, it has an unusually close relationship with identity and so when there is a tension in relation to food, there is something to be understood about the interplay of power and identities. Therefore, this relatively unexplored area of research provides an ideal case study into the workings of power and identity that make up modern Britain. By identifying and analysing themes and patterns using Critical Discourse Analysis, this research unpicks the paradox of the treatment and perception of Indian food in the UK. It traces it to the social, cultural and historical discourses embedded in British society, which in turn contributes to a better understanding of state of play when it comes to the sociocultural makeup of the UK.

It finds that Indian food has a firm position in British history, culture and politics, but that status is not as easily extended to the people who make up the Indian restaurant industry, with politicians stressing that they are in a process of integrating into British identity, despite the vast majority having lived and worked in the UK most of their lives and many all of their lives and despite political support for British multiculturalism. It highlights the power of representation when it comes to stereotypes and racially based assumptions, with British Bangladeshis and Pakistanis often only being represented in Parliament via debates on immigration, religion or ethnicity. In the media, it finds that even in the present day, colonial era stereotypes are still being reproduced through news articles and reader comments. Finally, it considers the much discussed topic of authenticity in relation to Indian food and, in published news articles as well as reader comments, finds that old cultural assumptions around purity and impurity are invoked to prove the value of one's own cultural identity in comparison to others in the competitive multicultural reality that is modern Britain.

Overall, this research shows that the rosy British multiculturalism often touted by politicians is far from a reality. In fact, it is deeply affected by historical power relations and hierarchical assumptions about the value of different cultural identities. However, uncovering these dynamics leads to an improved self-awareness of the sources of some of these issues. In other words, they are not a 'given' of human life, rather they are the result of specific historical developments, the contingent trajectory of culture and power. Therefore, research such as this, which provides an increased awareness of the cultural and historical context of present day struggles, supports Britain to forge a more equal future.

**Key words:** Multiculturalism, national identity, UK, Indian food, authenticity, colonialism, stereotypes, postcolonialism, gender.

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## Chapter 1. Introduction

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Although the consumption of food is essential for maintaining human life, that consumption is never simply taking on fuel. People do not ingest calories or protein: rather, they eat food, a form of material culture subject to almost unlimited possibilities for variation in terms of ingredients, techniques of preparation, patterns of association and exclusion, modes of serving and consumption, aesthetic evaluations, and so forth. Hence, it has an unusually close relationship to the person and to both the inculcation and the symbolization of concepts of identity.<sup>1</sup>

– Michael Dietler

There is no starting point to the phenomenon of Indian food in Britain. Some point to postcolonial migration from South Asia to the UK, others point to British imperialism or the East India Company's ventures in India, but the fact is, food - like culture itself – is a constant process of development. Due to its reproducibility, food is and has been constantly evolving and in reality has no beginning.<sup>2</sup> Even specific foods which we group under one term or concept such as 'pasta' all existed in some previous form, and the further back you go, the more removed you become from the present cultural meaning. In the case of pasta one might find themselves in 15<sup>th</sup> century China.<sup>3</sup> In a similar way, one might assume that chili is central to authentic Indian cooking, but it came from the New World and there existed a time when nobody on the Indian continent had eaten a chili pepper.<sup>4</sup> The association of food with culture is therefore to do with identity, and what we eat is a "learned, culturally patterned technique... that is expressive in a fundamental way of identity and difference". Hence, naming foods or food cultures is simply pointing to a step in the process of culture, it is describing the current social meaning of an edible substance or group of edible substances and as Sami Zubaida points out, the idea of Indian cuisine is itself a relatively modern concept.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Dietler, "Culinary Encounters: Food, Identity, and Colonialism. in the Archaeology of Food and Identity," in *The Archaeology of Food and Identity*, ed. Kathryn C. Twiss (Carbondale, IL: Center for Archaeological Investigations, Southern Illinois University, 2007)222

<sup>2</sup> Dietler, "Culinary Encounters,"224 - 225

<sup>3</sup> Jack Goody, *Cooking, Cuisine, and Class : A Study in Comparative Sociology*, (1982)36

<sup>4</sup> Jean Andrews, "The Peripatetic Chili Pepper: Diffusion of the Domesticated Capsicums since Columbus," *Chilies to Chocolate: Food the Americas Gave the World*, (1992)91

<sup>5</sup> Sami Zubaida, "The Idea of "Indian Food", between the Colonial and the Global," *Food and History* 7, no. 1 (2009), 191-209.

This conceptual understanding of food follows Stuart Hall's notion of culture itself as:

Various webs of codes that generate our sense of the world...[they] function like a map within which we naturally link some things, and naturally exclude others. The maps of meaning that are generated by a culture contain both the residual elements of previous cultures and histories as well as the emergent strains through which society comes to identify itself as modern and contemporary.<sup>6</sup>

Understanding culture and food in this way – as a process of contingent meanings affected by the forces of power, identity and geography and only partly based on physical substance – sets the tone for this research, which offers a demarcated window into the specific series of interconnected meanings that has resulted in the perception of Indian food in the UK.

This research's focus is to consider the idea of 'Indian food' over a twenty year period in British media and politics. It takes a broad view of the term 'Indian food' to mean dishes that are considered to be connected to cultures of the Indian sub-continent, especially India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. It also includes Indian foods considered to be European or other hybrids. This of course represents a huge range of dishes and ingredients, but generally this broad definition tends to be what people mean when they distinguish 'Indian food' from other food in the UK.<sup>7</sup>

It starts in 2001 with a significant event for Indian food culture in Britain, when, in a now famous speech, the foreign secretary Robin Cook described the popular Indian restaurant dish 'chicken tikka masala' as a symbol of British multiculturalism and a "true British national dish".<sup>8</sup> Indian food in the UK, especially in this period, presents a paradox. On one hand it is loved and praised, with Brits allegedly spending "over £30,000 on curry in their lifetime", institutions such as the National Curry Awards and Curry Capital of the UK celebrating its cultural value and 'chicken tikka masala' being largely considered a national dish.<sup>9</sup> However, this soar in popularity, which developed throughout the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, has played out alongside a number of negative themes particularly prevalent in the discussion on Indian food, such as heavy criticisms of inauthenticity and derogation of the

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<sup>6</sup> Helen Davis, *Understanding Stuart Hall* (Sage, 2004)82-83

<sup>7</sup> For example, the *Guardian's* "Indian Food and Drink" section includes all these varieties. "Indian Food and Drink," the *Guardian*, accessed 25.06.21, [www.theguardian.com/food/indian](http://www.theguardian.com/food/indian)

<sup>8</sup> Robin Cook, "Robin Cook's Chicken Tikka Masala Speech," *Guardian*, April 19, 2001, [www.theguardian.com/world/2001/apr/19/race.britishidentity](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/apr/19/race.britishidentity).

<sup>9</sup> Francesca Frawley, "Curry favour! Brits spend over £30,000 on Indian dish in their lifetime," *The Express*, October 10, 2016, [www.express.co.uk/life-style/food/719481/brits-spent-30-000-curry-lifetime-poll-sainsburys-national-curry-week](http://www.express.co.uk/life-style/food/719481/brits-spent-30-000-curry-lifetime-poll-sainsburys-national-curry-week)

Indian restaurant industry's quality, standardisation and décor.<sup>10</sup> A quick search of some current popular Indian cookbooks brings up some of the classic tropes, such as: "British palates, at least until recently, seemed to be geared up to reject anything that did not involve chunks of meat floating in a neon sauce", and: "Indian food in the UK was heavy, swimming in brown sauce and lacking in variety."<sup>11</sup> Considering food's close relationship with identity, when there is a tension or dispute relating to food it isn't illogical to assume it can probably tell us something about the interaction of cultural identities and power in society. Therefore, Indian food in the UK presents an excellent case study into the workings of power and identity in modern British multicultural society.

It's worth noting that the specific timespan of this research coincides with a period of significant political, social and cultural changes in society. It begins with a government pushing for a multicultural national identity alongside multiple and world changing terror attacks.<sup>12</sup> It continues through the rise of the UK Independence Party (UKIP), a political party often alleged to be ingrained with racism, a change from a Labour to a Conservative government, all developing alongside the rapid advancement of technology resulting in the rise of social media and punctured with a financial crisis.<sup>13</sup> It also signifies a period of a certain amount of normative change in relation to prejudice and discrimination, with the passing of the Equality Act 2010 which solidified equal legal protection against discrimination for nine different protected characteristics, and more recently, political activism movements aimed at more equal futures such as *Black Lives Matter* and *Me Too*. It also coincides with fake news and identity politics being discussed at length in the media and politics, not to mention the political chaos caused by Brexit and a worldwide pandemic. It cannot clearly be said in what direction the world has changed with so many significant and conflicting factors. But what can be said is that these factors represent pressures and forces that mould culture. They layer onto previous cultures and histories to effect how identities relate to each other and how power functions in society.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, it is important to use

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<sup>10</sup> Zubaida, "The Idea of 'Indian Food,'" 191-209.; Elizabeth Buettner, "'Going for an Indian': South Asian Restaurants and the Limits of Multiculturalism in Britain," *The Journal of Modern History* 80, no. 4 (2008), 865-901. doi:10.1086/591113. doi-org.eur.idm.oclc.org/10.1086/591113.

<sup>11</sup> Meera Sodha, *Fresh India: 130 Quick, Easy and Delicious Vegetarian Recipes for Every Day*, Penguin UK, (2016); Nisha Katona, *Mowgli Street Food: Stories and Recipes from the Mowgli Street Food Restaurants*, Watkins Media Limited, 2018).

<sup>12</sup> Tony Blair, "Tony Blair's Britain speech," *Guardian*, March 28, 2000, [www.theguardian.com/uk/2000/mar/28/britishidentity.tonyblair](http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2000/mar/28/britishidentity.tonyblair)

<sup>13</sup> "Farage: 'Grossly Unfair to Call UKIP Racist,'" *BBC News*, April 28, 2015, [www.bbc.com/news/av/election-2015-32503639](http://www.bbc.com/news/av/election-2015-32503639)

<sup>14</sup> Davis, *Understanding Stuart Hall*, 82-83

case studies, such as this, to dismantle the layers of assumptions and histories behind the current state of a society. This research unpicks the paradox of the treatment and perception of Indian food by tracing it to the social, cultural and historical discourses embedded in British society, which in turn contributes to a better understanding of state of play when it comes to the sociocultural makeup of the UK.



## **Historiography and Theoretical Framework**

The Western journey of Indian food has been the subject of a number of academic articles, books and studies which have tried to unpick its history and culture. The literature concerning the sociocultural journey of Indian food in Britain shares a number of thematic similarities, though varying disciplinary and methodological approaches, and differing conclusions can be seen. This section reviews a wealth of relevant literature about Indian food in Britain and the West from the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century onwards. It considers the key themes and theoretical concepts surrounding this topic such as food's relationship with identity, class and gender and sets out how they contribute to this thesis.

After comparing methods and disciplines, the first section will cover racism, Othering and the colonial legacy in relation to Indian food in Britain as this is a prominent theme amongst the findings of a number of publications. It also provides the theoretical framework for part of chapter two and chapter three which consider the links between stereotyping in relation to Indian food and British imperialism. The second section considers the concept of multiculturalism in relation to food and some efforts to test multiculturalism through analysis of food cultures in society. This section subsequently considers the usefulness of multiculturalism as an analytical concept in the context of this thesis. It provides theoretical framework for part of chapter two, which investigates Indian food in British politics and the roles of national history and multicultural identity. The third section takes a closer look at the broader research into food's relationship with (cultural) identity and transnationalism. For a well-rounded view, this includes anthropological studies as well as geographical and sociological takes on the matter, which provide theoretical framework for the findings in chapters three and four. Closely linked with matters of identity, the fourth section considers theories of demand and popularity in relation to food consumption. While this provides important context since this project considers the sociocultural journey of an especially popular cuisine in the UK, the scope of this thesis hasn't allowed an in depth investigation into the reasons behind the demand for Indian food in the UK, though it would present a valuable avenue for further research. The final section will cover culinary authenticity, class and gender in relation to modern Indian food culture in the West, another theme which links closely with identity and pervades the discourse on Indian food. Chapter four finds heavy evidence of these themes and this section provides analytical framework to interpret the findings. By dealing with the literature thematically, this historiography report is able to map

the academic development of the key concepts relevant for this thesis and considers them from various disciplinary perspectives.

### Sources, Methods and Disciplines

A variety of sources, methods and disciplines were used in the publications reviewed. The following examples represent the overall diversity. In the geography camp, Cook and Crang carry out an analysis in 1996 of a *Time Out* article along with secondary quotes from consumers and shoppers.<sup>15</sup> In a later study Cook, Crang and Thorpe conduct a case study of supermarket foods through conversational interviews with marketing professionals to analyse the internationalisation of the British diet.<sup>16</sup> Geographer Peter Jackson utilises the British Library's historical collection of interviews called 'National Life Stories' as well as conducting focus group research in both Mumbai and London of 9 and 6 people respectively for his analysis of food cultures in the UK and Mumbai.<sup>17</sup>

Newspaper and magazine articles are used to track the development of food cultures in the case of sociologist, Allison James in 1996 as well as in 2008 by historian Elizabeth Buettner and in 2015 by sociologist Ravi Palat, Buettner with the addition of interviews and cookbooks published in the UK.<sup>18</sup> In an article published a year later, Buettner relies entirely on recipe books for her sources.<sup>19</sup> Recipe books prove a popular choice of primary source with anthropologist Arjun Apparundai in 1988 and English studies professor Parama Roy in 2002 also focussing entirely on published cookbooks to support their theories.<sup>20</sup> Radha Hegde, a culture and communications professor based in the US takes a similar route (albeit

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<sup>15</sup> Ian Cook and Philip Crang, "The World on a Plate: Culinary Culture, Displacement and Geographical Knowledges," *Journal of Material Culture* 1, no. 2 (July 1, 1996), 131-153. doi.org/10.1177/135918359600100201.

<sup>16</sup> Ian Cook, Philip Crang and Mark Thorpe, "Regions to be Cheerful: Culinary Authenticity and its Geographies," in *Cultural Turns/Geographical Turns : Perspectives on Cultural Geography*, ed. Simon Naylor and others (London: Routledge, 2000), 109-139.

<sup>17</sup> Peter Jackson, "A Cultural Politics of Curry: The Transnational Spaces of Contemporary Commodity Culture," in *Hybrid Cultures - Nervous States : Britain and Germany in a (Post)Colonial World.*, ed. Ulrike Lindner and others (Kenilworth: Rodopi, 2011), 172-185.

<sup>18</sup> Allison James, "Cooking the Books: Global Or Local Identities in Contemporary British Food Cultures?" in *Cross-Cultural Consumption: Global Markets, Local Realities*, ed. David Howes (London; New York: Routledge, 1996), 77-92; Buettner, "'Going for an Indian,'" 865-901; Ravi Arvind Palat, "Empire, Food and the Diaspora: Indian Restaurants in Britain," *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 38, no. 2 (2015), 171-186. doi-org.eur.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/00856401.2015.1019603.

<sup>19</sup> Elizabeth Buettner, "Chicken Tikka Masala, Flock Wallpaper, and 'Real' Home Cooking: Assessing Britain's 'Indian' Restaurant Traditions," *Food and History* 7, no. 2 (2009), 203-229. doi-org.eur.idm.oclc.org/10.1484/J.FOOD.1.100656.

<sup>20</sup> Arjun Appadurai, "How to make a National Cuisine: Cookbooks in Contemporary India," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 30, no. 1 (1988), 3-24. www.jstor.org.eur.idm.oclc.org/stable/179020.; Parama Roy, "Reading Communities and Culinary Communities: The Gastropoetics of the South Asian Diaspora," *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 10, no. 2 (-07-01, 2002), 471-502. muse.jhu.edu/article/28014.

with an update of modern technology) with her analysis of food blogs of the South Asian diaspora published online.<sup>21</sup> Ben Highmore, a professor of cultural studies in the UK, reviews cookbooks, food guides as well as interviews with Bengali and Bangladeshi immigrants to Britain published in other academic literature to trace the history of Indian restaurant culture in the UK, noting himself that he is not adding to historical record but aiming to synthesise known information. Highmore also aims to combine the physical and representational elements of food culture as his primary sources because “materiality of culture includes both sites and cultural spaces where meaning is discussed”.<sup>22</sup> Finally, anthropologists Jack Goody and Sidney Mintz in their 1982 and 1997 works respectively draw on extensive anthropological field research to support their theories.<sup>23</sup>

Evidently, tracing the socio-cultural journey of food and the theoretical framework required for this sees many different disciplines and sources converge. This research utilises the theoretical framework provided by these varying disciplines while taking a primarily historical and cultural perspective, considering the historical context preceding the post-millennium era and the roles of the changing social and political contexts which coincide with this research’s time frame.

### **Racism, Othering and Colonial Legacy**

When it comes to understanding the continuing cultural effects of colonialism Edward Said is the first port of call. Said’s highly influential 1978 work *Orientalism* sets out many of the culturally embedded stereotypes which helped justify and maintain colonialism.<sup>24</sup> He explains this stemmed from the West’s desire to know and categorise the Other, but did so in a way that was far from objective and in reality the knowledge that was produced was the result of the West reflecting on itself and comparing the East in opposite terms to what it saw itself to be. Thus resulted an image of the East as mysterious, backwards, feminine, exotic, and degenerative.<sup>25</sup> All these stereotypes were binary, where the West represented the superior opposite.<sup>26</sup> Said demonstrates these stereotypes pervade all arenas of culture, from art to literature to everyday life. They result in a sense that the oriental Other can be known in

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<sup>21</sup> Radha S. Hegde, "Food Blogs and the Digital Reimagination of South Asian Diasporic Publics," *South Asian Diaspora* 6, no. 1 (2014), 89-103. doi-org.eur.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/19438192.2014.876172.

<sup>22</sup> Ben Highmore, "The Taj Mahal in the High Street," *Food, Culture & Society* 12, no. 2 (2009), 173-190. doi-org.eur.idm.oclc.org/10.2752/175174409X400729.

<sup>23</sup> Goody, *Cooking, Cuisine, and Class*, 1-9; Sidney W. Mintz, *Tasting Food, Tasting Freedom : Excursions into Eating, Culture, and the Past* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996).

<sup>24</sup> Edward Said *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978)

<sup>25</sup> Ibid; John McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020)50-56.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid

these terms prior to any true investigation, and therefore rob those who are perceived in these (negative) terms of their individuality.<sup>27</sup> Only in the more modern age is this understood as racism in an immoral sense. Chapter three utilises Said's work to consider colonial era stereotyping in the form of the representation of Indian food in the media.

Secondly, and to take a broader perspective, Michel Foucault's considerations on the production and reproduction of knowledge in society also guide this thesis. Sara Mills explains his concept of discourse to mean "all text or utterances which have meaning and some effect in the real world", as well "as individualizable groups of statements" when looking at particular structures within the discourse, which this thesis follows.<sup>28</sup> Stuart Hall summarises Foucault's notion of discourse as "a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – a way of representing the knowledge about – a particular topic at a particular historical moment ... Discourse is about the production of knowledge through language".<sup>29</sup> Hall picks up more strongly on Foucault's investigation of language which again is the general approach of this thesis. Foucault refuses to take knowledge as a transparent reflection of the world and instead considers the effect of struggling historical power relations on culture to understand the dominant knowledges in society.<sup>30</sup> Foucault's work is of great relevance when looking at how and why people speak about certain identities and cultures in specific ways as well as how this intersects with senses of morality, which this thesis considers in detail throughout. Like Foucault it looks to history of identity and power struggles to understand the present-day dominant knowledges demonstrated in relation to Indian food. Critical Discourse Analysis, which provides the methodological approach and is discussed further later in this chapter, is also heavily influenced and almost entirely dependent on Foucault's work, thus, his theoretical contribution permeates this thesis entirely.<sup>31</sup>

Overt racism as a central and overshadowing characteristic of the treatment of Indian restaurants and food in Britain is identified by Elizabeth Buettner, Ben Highmore and Ravi Palat.<sup>32</sup> Though the historical fact of racism is agreed upon, how it shaped and formed Indian

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Sara Mills, *Discourse* (United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis, 2004)16-22

<sup>29</sup> Stuart Hall, "The work of representation" in *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*, ed. Stuart Hall, Jessica Evans and Sean Nixon (Sage, 1997), 13-74

<sup>30</sup> Mills, *Discourse*, 16-22

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Buettner, "'Going for an Indian,'" 865-901 ; Buettner, "Chicken Tikka Masala, Flock Wallpaper, and "Real" Home Cooking," 203-229; Highmore, "The Taj Mahal in the High Street,"173-190; Palat, "Empire, Food and the Diaspora: Indian Restaurants in Britain,"171-186

food's role in relation to British culture and British identity, and how important other factors were, is argued in varying ways. Buettner asserts that Islamophobia powerfully shaped the response to Indian food and restaurants and this increased since the 9/11 and 7/7 terrorist attacks.<sup>33</sup> Palat traces the start of racially aggravated treatment to resentment caused by a decline in manufacturing in the 1980s, a decline which Stuart Hall points out in reality disproportionately impacted black and Asian groups more, whom he describes as "the engine of industry" and "consequently, also most vulnerable at times of economic slow-down and recession."<sup>34</sup> Palat also notes with Narayan that the relative low price of dishes reflects views that South Asian immigrants were socially inferior.<sup>35</sup> Highmore locates racism in relation to culture and power, arguing that the effects of racism aimed at Indian restaurants contributes to their mocked position within British popular culture, which he argues is moulded by forcefields of power relations.<sup>36</sup> However, it should be noted that Highmore's research considers only the cultural position of the high street Indian restaurant, which is highly specific and excludes wider Indian food culture in the UK. This research by contrast considers the broader idea of Indian food as a food culture within the UK, with physical restaurants making up a part of this broader concept. The term racism and what constitutes racism is debateable. Racism in the British legal context of racial discrimination is defined as subjecting another person to less favourable treatment based on their race.<sup>37</sup> However, this doesn't quite cover prejudice as a whole or the role of stereotyping. Therefore, this thesis has avoided using the term 'racism' and rather focusses on the actual content of statements made by politicians, the public and journalists and whether they reproduce colonial era or racialised stereotypes. It also points out when these are particularly derogatory.

Uma Narayan, though rarely mentioning race, focuses on the postcolonial power dynamic of eating 'ethnic' food.<sup>38</sup> She argues that the cuisine of Indian food itself was incorporated on British terms, which did not extend to the people it came from.<sup>39</sup> Narayan

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<sup>33</sup> Buettner, "Chicken Tikka Masala, Flock Wallpaper, and "Real" Home Cooking," 891-892

<sup>34</sup> Davis, *Understanding Stuart Hall*, 116

<sup>35</sup> Palat, "Empire, Food and the Diaspora: Indian Restaurants in Britain," 173, 182; Uma Narayan, "Eating Cultures: Incorporation, Identity and Indian Food," *Social Identities* 1, no. 1 (1995)77. doi-org.eur.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/13504630.1995.9959426.

<sup>36</sup> Highmore, "The Taj Mahal in the High Street," 188

<sup>37</sup> The Equality Act of 2010

<sup>38</sup> A label broadly referring to food defined as coming from 'non-Western' or sometimes just 'non-white' cultures, often Mexico, India, China & African countries. The term may be guilty of ethicising the Global South and perhaps because of this seems to be used less and less, regardless it is used throughout the older literature, and therefore throughout this report for the sake of representing the original texts.

<sup>39</sup> Narayan, "Eating Cultures: Incorporation, Identity and Indian Food," 63-86

theorises that a dual response of incorporating and demonising the Other in relation to the treatment of food is common and isn't unique to colonial and postcolonial contexts. She points out that the cultural and economic contributions of immigrants from former colonies are often ignored (due to an imagined history of state hand-outs). Narayan offers some proposed solutions to 'food colonialism' though warns that thoughtfulness in restaurants won't overcome the power structures left by the legacy of colonialism.<sup>40</sup> The consistent way racism and racialised power dynamics are addressed in the literature across a broad timescale illustrates the pervasiveness of racism in relation to Indian food in the West, be that the social legacy left by colonialism of behaviour towards 'ethnic' foods that Narayan speaks of, or the overt kind such as derogatory racial stereotyping and racial harassment in restaurants discussed by Palat, Buettner and Highmore. By positioning the nature of racialised treatment of Indian food in wider colonial and postcolonial discourses, these works provide valuable theoretical framework for this research. Building on this framework chapters two and three deal, amongst other matters, with the extent to which colonial and postcolonial stereotypes have continued from 2001 to the present day in the media and politics.

### **Multiculturalism**

Multiculturalism features as a continuous yet debated and elusive theme throughout the literature on this topic. The fact it is picked up by a number of authors in varying ways testifies if nothing else to its ubiquity as a concept in British and American society from the 1990s onwards. Parama Roy notes for example how multiculturalism actually shapes culture itself in the case of one of Madhur Jaffrey's later books, which she says played to the multicultural feeling in Britain at the time.<sup>41</sup> Tariq Modood defines multiculturalism as "the political accommodation by the state and/or a dominant group of all minority cultures defined first and foremost by reference to race or ethnicity... [as well as] religion".<sup>42</sup> Multiculturalism here is seen as a political or social ideal based on acceptance and celebration of cultural difference in a society, especially in relation to ethnic or immigrant minorities. The concept of multiculturalism therefore links closely with identity politics and racialised power relations and aims to overcome this. Multiculturalism in this sense also links closely with the concept of representation, something which when dealing with 'minority' identities in media and political sources as this research does, is important to consider.

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Roy, "Reading Communities and Culinary Communities," 484

<sup>42</sup> Tariq Modood, "Multiculturalism," *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology* (2007)1.

Stuart Hall has called for a new politics when it comes to British multiculturalism and national identity, where – when identity is understood as a construct rather than intrinsic or objective – ethnic concepts of national identity (supported by colonial past) could be replaced for heterogeneous multicultural ones.<sup>43</sup> Hall's proposal is deeply dependent on media representation of national identity and ethnicities, something which became a political/cultural project for him – to highlight and subvert racialised stereotyping of identity in the media under the guise of liberalism. For example, one way he did this was by highlighting in the government's Parekh report on race that Muslim or Asian identity was continuously associated with extremism or terrorism in the media.<sup>44</sup> Hall's assertion that representation is centrally relevant when it comes to true multicultural national identity is especially considered in chapter two of this thesis, which looks at the intersection of national identity, multiculturalism and representation, especially in politics.

Narayan maintains that eating 'ethnic' food can often act as the "superficial face of multiculturalism".<sup>45</sup> She also stresses an important perspective to the multiculturalism debate, which is that it should be understood not only as interactions between "mainstream whites" and "ethnic Others" but between groups within the "ethnic Other" category, as this has been the historical reality of multiculturalism, though not by name.<sup>46</sup> Stanley Fish's 1997 analysis of the concept is particularly influential in contrasting ways. Fish argues that "boutique multiculturalism" is exemplified in the experience of eating another culture's food.<sup>47</sup> Fish argues this is superficial multiculturalism as it stops short of accepting core values of the other culture - those which truly define it - when they generate an act that conflicts with the western liberal view of "civilised decency".<sup>48</sup>

Buettner uses Indian food in Britain as a case study for Fish's specific (lack of) multiculturalism. She aligns with Narayan and proposes Lisa Heldke's influential theory that eating 'ethnic' food in the West is far from sincere appreciation of culture, but actually a (distinctly colonial) culturally dislocated experience, considering it "food adventuring".<sup>49</sup> Buettner adds that tolerance did not extend beyond food in the case of Indian food

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<sup>43</sup> Davis, *Understanding Stuart Hall*, 2, 160-180

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, 188-191

<sup>45</sup> Narayan, "Eating Cultures: Incorporation, Identity and Indian Food," 77-78

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, 79-80

<sup>47</sup> Stanley Fish, "Boutique Multiculturalism, Or Why Liberals are Incapable of Thinking about Hate Speech," *Critical Inquiry* 23, no. 2 (1997)378-379. doi-org.eur.idm.oclc.org/10.1086/448833.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>49</sup> Lisa M. Heldke, *Exotic Appetites : Ruminations of a Food Adventurer* (New York: Routledge, 2003)9.

consumption in Britain, concluding that although the popularity of Indian food is often presented as evidence of multicultural success, the true nature of “race relations” is distinctly intolerant.<sup>50</sup> Fish, Heldke, Buettner and Narayan broadly align when it comes to eating ‘ethnic’ food in Western societies, bell hooks’ influential quote neatly sums up this strain of argument: “within commodity culture, ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture”.<sup>51</sup>

In contrast, sociologist Joanne Finkelstein argues that as parties follow specific social roles in a restaurant setting, the restaurant as an arena for measuring cultural meaning is misguided and societal power dynamics do not play out.<sup>52</sup> Highmore also approaches the topic of Indian food in Britain with deliberate avoidance of the multiculturalism debate. He instead employs Fish’s concept of multiculturalism as a demographic fact rather than a philosophical impossibility and asserts that viewing Indian food through standards of multiculturalism obscures study. Highmore proposes that study of Indian food in Britain is progressed when it is understood rather as a type of diasporic popular culture.<sup>53</sup> An unusual proposal when one considers that many of the customers at Indian restaurants are actually of white British origin.

This research tests the reception of varying Indian foods in Britain, considering whether they’re seen as culturally valuable, and what (identity) they represent. Therefore, Modood’s definition of multiculturalism based on acceptance is relevant and is incorporated in my analysis. There is some debate as to whether Indian food’s position in the West exemplifies multiculturalism – as claimed by Robin Cook – or exemplifies a lack of Multiculturalism as claimed by Buettner. Chapter two deals with instances where Indian food is discussed in conjunction with multiculturalism in the media and politics and finds that while multiculturalism is a positive ‘buzz word’, it’s use doesn’t always represent a break from racialised stereotypes or ethnic versions of national identity. In fact, what can be seen is that racializing of identity is often adapted to modern ‘hot’ topics such as immigration and Muslim religion despite support for multiculturalism.

While uncovering the true reality of multiculturalism is an important aspect to this thesis, it would be a leap to assume that negative treatment of a specific food culture always

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<sup>50</sup> Buettner, ““Going for an Indian,”” 869

<sup>51</sup> bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Taylor & Francis, 1992).

<sup>52</sup> Joanne Finkelstein, *Dining Out: A Sociology of Modern Manners*. (Polity Press, 1989).

<sup>53</sup> Highmore, “The Taj Mahal in the High Street,” 174, 187-188



equates to a lack or rejection of multiculturalism as a political concept. For this reason, I am cautious that it is not necessarily helpful to reduce cultural analysis of food to either a success or failure of multiculturalism, where failure equates to lack of interest in a dish's cultural heritage, for example, or adaptation of a dish from its original form to satisfy another culture's preferences. As we will see in the next section and in chapter 4, the treatment of food may contain more complex social reasons, and adaptation of dishes can represent new or creolising cultures, which this research is open to. However, multiculturalism is acknowledged as an important concept for this project by virtue of the fact that it is used by individuals and politicians to articulate their feelings and beliefs about what food represents to them. In other words, the strategic use of the terms will be analysed rather than simply testing objective evidence of multiculturalism.

### **Food, Identity and Transnationalism**

Chapter four unpicks the more complex associations between cultural identities and hybridity and their connection with concepts of purity and morality. This section gives some theoretical background on these concepts from an anthropological and sociological stance. If the multiculturalism debate is one approach to understanding the cultural meaning of Indian food in Britain, Jack Goody, Allison James, Peter Jackson and Michael Dietler take more nuanced approaches to understanding the process of incorporation or rejection of food between cultures. They broadly align in their support for evidence of creolisation.<sup>54</sup> Creolisation in culture can be defined as "participants selecting particular elements from incoming or inherited cultures, endowing these with meanings different from those they possessed in the original cultures, and then creatively merge these to create new varieties that supersede the prior forms".<sup>55</sup> The relationship between food and cultural identity may seem obvious on the face of it. However, the depth and nature of this relationship when it comes to globalisation and meeting of cultures is a matter of debate. James highlights the core interest in this area, which is the simultaneous facts that food and food practices are used to differentiate cultural identity, while at the same time, adoption of food between cultures constantly takes place.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Jackson, "A Cultural Politics of Curry: The Transnational Spaces of Contemporary Commodity Culture," 172-185; Dietler, "Culinary Encounters," 218-242; James, "Cooking the Books," 77-92

<sup>55</sup> Robin Cohen, "Creolization and Cultural Globalization: The Soft Sounds of Fugitive Power," *Globalizations* 4, no. 3 (2007)369.

<sup>56</sup> James, "Cooking the Books," 78

Dietler, an anthropologist, asserts it is the context of consumption rather than the fact of it which is significant.<sup>57</sup> He argues that cross cultural appropriation of food and drink are due to improvisations shaped by cultural frameworks and nuanced senses of identity, which cannot be simplified to ethnicity. He points out that once a new food is incorporated, the context of its consumption can actually reinforce boundaries of identity, supporting this with archaeological and contemporary examples. Dietler theorises (and answers James' paradox) that the constant evolution of these uneven interchanges shows us that while food is a marker of cultural identity, cultural identity itself should be understood as an "eternal project" of creolisation, rather than a static heritage.<sup>58</sup> James similarly notes from her research into contemporary food trends in England that consumption practices are flexible, not fixed, and constant markers of self and identity.<sup>59</sup> She does this by drawing on Hannerz's analysis of subtle differences within cosmopolitan culture.<sup>60</sup> Jack Goody's important and comprehensive 1982 work *Cooking, Cuisine and Class* also confutes any holistic or timeless view of culture.<sup>61</sup> These aligning findings on food culture as a process of creolisation are central to this thesis's theoretical framework. Chapter four builds on this, considering what eating certain kinds of Indian food means to people in terms of cultural identity, and how the concept of authenticity plays into this. This tracks who it divides and what certain dishes, ingredients or ways of eating represent for those respective identity groups.

Continuing in Dietler's vein, that the context of consumption is where the most insight is to be had, Jackson provides some interesting analysis specifically contributing to the place of Indian food in Britain. Jackson aligns with Dietler and Goody in his findings that the evidence of unique incorporations and rejections of food prove the depth of cultural creolisation.<sup>62</sup> Jackson's research links with Narayan's claim that colonialism has a complex and reciprocal effect on food culture.<sup>63</sup> He adds a new aspect to this discourse, showing the far reaching effect of transnationalism and hybridity. He argues in the case of British Indian food culture, food is adopted by working class, predominantly white Brits without culture being appropriated. Jackson argues the chicken tikka masala emerged through a complex transnational process of incorporation and rejection leading to a social culture of specific

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<sup>57</sup> Dietler, "Culinary Encounters," 218-242

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 224

<sup>59</sup> James, "Cooking the Books," 78

<sup>60</sup> Ulf Hannerz, *Cultural Complexity: Studies in the Social Organization of Meaning* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1992)237.

<sup>61</sup> Goody, *Cooking, Cuisine, and Class*, 36

<sup>62</sup> Jackson, "A Cultural Politics of Curry," 172-185

<sup>63</sup> Narayan, "Eating Cultures," 69; Jackson, "A Cultural Politics of Curry," 184

Britons consuming it, who have no connection to South Asian immigrants or India. His main argument is that food culture can be understood through complex hybridity and transnational spaces of contemporary commodity culture. He finds that eventually this leads to the cultural localisation which he calls “indigenisation” of foods, where the adopted food is given a unique local twist, fiercely disputing a simplified understanding of cultural appropriation in relation to food.<sup>64</sup> Jackson’s arguments contrast with the discussion around superficial multiculturalism in relation to food, he offers an alternative explanation about the forces behind Indian food culture in Britain.

Jackson, Dietler and Goody’s findings in particular render debates of authenticity telling (which will be dealt with in detail later in this section), as their research shows authenticity as an objective fact is meaningless, so it must instead be a social construction. With this in mind, this research considers the context and meaning of the authenticity debates that play out in relation to Indian food, especially considering societal power dynamics relating to gender and class for example, something which Jackson does not address directly but has been the subject of academic literature discussed in the final section of this report.

There is an interesting theme in James, Jackson and Dietler’s texts around the push and pull between local and global identity, James teases this out in her analysis of food trends in Britain, she asserts that while identity is constantly creolising, offering ways of incorporating Otherness, it is locally reaffirmed in the face of globalisation. She finds four varying “discourses of consumption” which are used to mark identity and finds they do so through different “evocation of authenticity”. I.e. different ideas of what authenticity means to them.<sup>65</sup> For example, one discourse she identifies is the emergence of a middle-class habit of buying British made products from the source. Another is again a middle-class obsession with discovering the secret authentic peasant food of various European nations.<sup>66</sup> In this sense, it is the variety in the conception of authenticity which marks difference and globalisation actually enhances this by providing access to local recipes allowing people to relate differently to authenticity.<sup>67</sup> This isn’t a far cry from Jackson’s (chronologically later) findings discussed above regarding localisation of creolised foods. Appadurai’s analysis of Indian cookbooks also leads to a similar result, which is that Indian as a national cuisine has emerged because of increased sharpening of regional food cultures. When it comes to

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<sup>64</sup> Jackson, "A Cultural Politics of Curry," 184-185

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> James, "Cooking the Books," 77-92

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

localisation in general, Appadurai's argument aligns with the idea that the sharing of food between cultures has not led to homogenisation.<sup>68</sup> So far it is broadly agreed that the idea that a simplified cultural 'melting pot' model in relation to food is a myth, and that is because of foods' role in asserting identity. However, Goody, James, Jackson and Dietler emphasise the role of creolisation within this process of asserting identity.

Diasporic and national identity are common themes, which have characterised the debate around Indian food in different ways. The role of food in diasporic identity is explained by Highmore, who argues its cultural value is especially high within the South Asian diaspora due to its portability and reproducibility when other aspects of culture cannot be reproduced outside the homeland.<sup>69</sup> Radha Hegde's 2014 analysis of food blogs of the South Asian diaspora further demonstrates the role of food in the grounding and evolution of immigrant identities. She argues the blogs build "transnational lines of connection" and reimagine diasporic identities by mediating between tradition and modernity.<sup>70</sup>

In the case of national identity, Narayan, Buettner, Palat and Highmore broadly agree that colonialism has a legacy on modern cultural identities specifically in relation to Indian food.<sup>71</sup> Narayan highlights that consuming food reveals collective identities particularly when it comes to relationship to Others.<sup>72</sup> There is clear consensus between Buettner, Palat and Highmore that especially in the 1980s, and in part due to the political effect of Thatcher's Britain, Indian restaurants represented a strong Raj nostalgia, through the décor, music and names chosen for the restaurants, which were all reminiscent of a romanticised India of the empire.<sup>73</sup> Indian food's relationship to British identity during this era is perfectly summarised by Salman Rushdie as a "cultural psychosis, in which [Britain] begins once again to strut and posture like a great power [akin to] phantom twitchings of an amputated limb".<sup>74</sup> Buettner argues this has evolved since the 80s where now 'curry culture' means British pride in the restaurant curry as representative of a multicultural Britain, superficial as it is.<sup>75</sup> My findings regarding Indian food's complex relationship with national identity is focussed on in chapter

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<sup>68</sup> Appadurai, "How to make a National Cuisine," 22

<sup>69</sup> Highmore, "The Taj Mahal in the High Street," 184

<sup>70</sup> Hegde, "Food Blogs and the Digital Reimagination of South Asian Diasporic Publics," 89

<sup>71</sup> Buettner, "'Going for an Indian,'" 872-874; Narayan, "Eating Cultures: Incorporation, Identity and Indian Food," 63-86; Palat, "Empire, Food and the Diaspora," 175; Highmore, "The Taj Mahal in the High Street," 176

<sup>72</sup> Narayan, "Eating Cultures," 64

<sup>73</sup> Buettner, "Chicken Tikka Masala, Flock Wallpaper, and "Real" Home Cooking," 224; Highmore, "The Taj Mahal in the High Street," 178; Palat, "Empire, Food and the Diaspora," 180

<sup>74</sup> Palat, "Empire, Food and the Diaspora," 180

<sup>75</sup> Buettner, "'Going for an Indian,'" 855

two and, especially in the political sphere, the findings align with Buettner's assertion that curry culture is a matter of national pride is supported. Though I attempt to go further in unpacking some of the subtleties behind that pride and its boundaries.

### **Demand and Popularity**

Dietler provides valuable theoretical framework for understanding the shape Indian food culture has developed in Britain, specifically when considering the ways it has been edited and adopted by particular social strata in British society, such as the working class. His comments on popularity and demand are especially valuable. He highlights not only the critical role of culturally relevant meaning, which a food must have to be incorporated into a culture, but also that demand is not a property or product of cultures, rather it is socially constructed and varies among groups due to a complex sociocultural framework.<sup>76</sup>

Finkelstein's comments on demand are very similar, arguing tastes are socially conditioned through public culture rather than originating within us.<sup>77</sup> In an interesting take on food preferences, Sidney Mintz sees tastes and demand through a duality of power structures, where outside power structures (economic, social and political structures) ultimately dictate what products and behaviours are possible, therefore, setting the parameters within which food cultures develop. Cultural meaning is then developed within these through the human habit of altering micro-conditions and allocating meanings to food practices.<sup>78</sup> This may go in part to explain the popularity of Indian food in the UK, and the development of food cultures which have incorporated elements of Indian cooking in the geographical and cultural context of the UK.

Another strain of research aims to unpick the meaning of 'ethnic' food in commodity culture by focussing on the spatial movements of foods and their connections to identity. Geographers Ian Cook and Philip Crang agree that food is always tied up to identity. However, rather than culturally claimed foods originating within a specific culture or location, their cultural significance and link to identity is dependent on "constructed geographical knowledges".<sup>79</sup> They propose a theory of displacement over creolisation when it comes to cultural incorporation of foods, arguing that foods become displaced from cultures and consumers are removed from the food's journey and production. They agree a food has to be culturally relevant to be incorporated, and they find that because of this, information is

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<sup>76</sup> Dietler, "Culinary Encounters," 226

<sup>77</sup> Finkelstein, *Dining Out: A Sociology of Modern Manners*. 113

<sup>78</sup> Mintz, *Tasting Food, Tasting Freedom*, 17-32

<sup>79</sup> Cook & Crang, "The World on a Plate," 140

constructed around the specific food product, which if done successfully, gives it economic value. This goes some way to explaining what contributes to popularity of foods in different cultures and further points to the connection between food and identity. Cook and Crang's concept of "geographical knowledges" provides theoretical framework for my analysis in chapter four which deals with authenticity. It consider the role of narratives which are shared and relayed through news articles as well as conflicting narratives discussed and disputed in the comments section. This attention to the power of narrative contributes to a better understanding of how narrative can relate to popularity of certain foods or dishes, one finding from this approach for example is that Keralan food is generally considered more 'authentic' or 'real' than other Indian foods.

### **Class, Authenticity and Gender**

Inextricably linked with matters of identity, class, authenticity and gender heavily saturate the historiography on Indian food as prominent themes. There are clear class distinctions identified within the fields of national and diasporic identity when it comes to Indian food culture in the West. In the case of the British class system, Buettner points out that often the meeting of cultures in the imagined multiculturalism portrayed through the popularity of Indian restaurants, was in actual fact the meeting of the white working class with restaurant staff. Buettner highlights the irony that racism was worst in the poor areas that were hailed the multicultural 'curry capitals'.<sup>80</sup> Palat supports this, linking prevalence of racism in restaurants with geographical location and thus class of clientele.<sup>81</sup> Stephen Fielding notes in a more positive light the fact that "many cities in Britain with large working-class populations have claimed [Indian food] as a civic identity" noting that Kingfisher (the Indian lager company) sponsored the UK's curry capital competition.<sup>82</sup>

Food as a distinguisher of class within the South Asian diasporic identity is focussed on heavily by Buettner, Highmore, Palat, Fielding and Parama Roy. It is agreed that class is highly pervasive throughout the South Asian diaspora and this regularly plays out in relation to food and specifically shaped Indian food's journey in Britain.<sup>83</sup> Buettner's findings show a new wave of restaurants was opened towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, often with owners

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<sup>80</sup> Buettner, "'Going for an Indian,'" 886

<sup>81</sup> Palat, "Empire, Food and the Diaspora," 177-178, 182

<sup>82</sup> S. A. Fielding, "Currying Flavor: Authenticity, Cultural Capital, and the Rise of Indian Food in the United Kingdom," in *The Paradox of Authenticity in a Globalized World*, ed. Russell Cobb (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014)41-42.

<sup>83</sup> Highmore, "The Taj Mahal in the High Street," 188-189

claiming cultural superiority through the authenticity of their food.<sup>84</sup> Buettner asserts that class based criticism was common from well off British Asians, often of Indian heritage who positioned themselves as superior to Bangladeshis.<sup>85</sup> Highmore, Buettner, and Palat agree that class bias is seen in recipe books where authors, especially Madhur Jaffrey who is heavily focussed on, often speak of restaurant food as inauthentic and staff as untrained.<sup>86</sup>

It is worth considering the cultural norms which may underpin this culinary distinction of class. For example, Sami Zubaida highlights how, historically, a restaurant culture in India was ruled out due to Hindu taboos and traditions surrounding food.<sup>87</sup> He argues Indian as a cuisine therefore emerged in part through British employment of Goan cooks in colonial times.<sup>88</sup> Appadurai argues that a national Indian cuisine was constructed through the postcolonial distribution of English language cookbooks to middle-class Indian housewives. Only where caste boundaries were loosened, regional recipes were shared.<sup>89</sup> Appadurai argues in the same way as Zubaida that the seeming relative lateness of this emergence is due to cooking in India being deeply embedded in moral and medical beliefs and social status.<sup>90</sup> Ashis Nandy demonstrates another way social traditions can help explain the type of Indian food served in modern Britain. He explains that it resembles a mixture of Mughal and Punjabi food, which is due to the Bengali concept of ceremonial and everyday food, Mughal food was ceremonial and served outside the home.<sup>91</sup> Conversely, Bengali everyday food was “decisively not a restaurant food”.<sup>92</sup> Therefore it can be seen that deep rooted social traditions structure the treatment of food in South Asia and no doubt go some way to explain the treatment of food in diasporic communities in Britain. A deeper understanding of this is needed when considering the class-based criticism that Buettner refers to and is taken into account in chapters three and four which in part deal with Indian food’s relationship with class.

Considering the roles of class and authenticity in Britain, Fielding argues that the research on restaurant culture carried out by Heldke and Finkelstein discussed earlier is

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<sup>84</sup> Buettner, ““Going for an Indian,”” 895

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 883; Buettner, "Chicken Tikka Masala, Flock Wallpaper, and “Real” Home Cooking," 220; Highmore, "The Taj Mahal in the High Street," 186; Palat, "Empire, Food and the Diaspora," 185

<sup>87</sup> Zubaida, "The Idea of 'Indian Food,'" 191-209.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 196.

<sup>89</sup> Appadurai, "How to make a National Cuisine," 3-24

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>91</sup> Ashis Nandy, "The Changing Popular Culture of Indian Food: Preliminary Notes," *South Asia Research* 24, no. 1 (May 1, 2004) 14-15. doi.org/10.1177/0262728004042760.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

limiting, as it excludes the wider food culture associated with cuisines outside of restaurants.<sup>93</sup> Using Pierre Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital as theoretical framework, he takes a similar line to Finkelstein and Dietler in his analysis of the case study of Indian food.<sup>94</sup> He argues its cultural position in the UK shows people are acculturated through their social position to develop certain likings or dispositions. However, Fielding focusses heavily on class, arguing Indian food in Britain fitted the features of working-class tastes (according to Bourdieu's framework) of being filling and inexpensive. This embedded position means South Asian cuisine, despite its popularity, has received minimal prestige.<sup>95</sup> Fielding links the British and South Asian arenas of class arguing that subsequent struggles to identify the authentic cuisine can be understood as a larger struggle to create social boundaries. So, authenticity is invoked to distinguish class (as well as a marketing tool which supported by Crook, Crang and Thorpe's earlier geographical research into marketing techniques of supermarkets).<sup>96</sup> Authenticity is defined in this sense as closer "ethnic and geographic proximity to the product".<sup>97</sup> For Fielding, Bourdieu's framework explains upscale Indian restaurant owners' push towards lighter, more expensive dishes as they are features used to distinguish middle-class and higher "cultural capital".<sup>98</sup> Overall he argues Indian food is inseparable from the class, ethnic, and racial backgrounds of those preparing and consuming it. While Fielding's argument regarding Indian food's inseparability from class and ethnic identity is promising, I would dispute his decision to base his analysis on a generalisation of 'working-class tastes', which is taken from a very specific study on an entirely different country and culture (Paris).

There is general consensus that the concept of authenticity in food is in fact completely subjective,<sup>99</sup> Highmore pointing out it is dependent on how far back one is willing to trace origins, and what role one thinks national and regional borders should have.<sup>100</sup> Buettner concludes the process of knowing authenticity is inherently privileged and differentiates one from ignorance associated with lower class.<sup>101</sup> Understood in this way,

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<sup>93</sup> Fielding, "Currying Flavor," 39.

<sup>94</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Harvard University Press, 1984)170.

<sup>95</sup> Fielding, "Currying Flavor," 38.

<sup>96</sup> Cook, "Regions to be Cheerful," 109-139.

<sup>97</sup> Fielding, "Currying Flavor," 47.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Palat, "Empire, Food and the Diaspora," 175.

<sup>100</sup> Highmore, "The Taj Mahal in the High Street," 185-187.

<sup>101</sup> Buettner, "'Going for an Indian,'" 883-884



authenticity's role, and connection with class, is as a source of power, and this is to some extent evident in chapter 4's findings.

Authenticity appears in two differing ways in the literature on Indian food, the first is in relation to class as discussed above and the second is in relation to gender. There is consensus in the findings of Narayan, James, Roy, Buettner, Hegde and Cook, Crang and Thorpe that concepts of culinary authenticity are highly gendered.<sup>102</sup> Roy provides a useful and well supported definition from her extensive analysis of the published career of Madhur Jaffrey, that authenticity is a "long memory of nonmodern and self-effacing line of female forebearers making sophisticated cuisine without aid of recipes, precise measurements or modern kitchen equipment".<sup>103</sup> By extension of gender, food is authenticated through a gospel connection to the arena of the home and specifically the maternal kitchen. Narayan picks this up in the negative sense, that women by virtue of being symbols of cultural purity, are more easily considered to be betrayers of culture than men if they fail to actively preserve cultural identity.<sup>104</sup> Narayan emphasises the force of this dynamic in South Asian immigrant communities in Britain, highlighting that men can uncontroversially serve foods they consider inauthentic in restaurants as it is outside the arena of female gender and home and therefore they are not bounded by the responsibility of preserving culture.<sup>105</sup>

A number of authors highlight the way authenticity's link with home and gender can be capitalised on through cookbooks. This is best exemplified by Roy, who highlights the consistent emphasises on the unreplicable, mythical and secret nature of the authentic maternal Indian kitchen.<sup>106</sup> It is also evident in the analysis of more recent publications like *Cooking with Mummyji*, where Buettner points out the book's selling point is it offers a helpful solutions to the assumed problem of British Asian women – that they're aim to make their way in individualistic British culture conflicts with their responsibility for preserving their culture in the home. The assumed problem here is clearly the most telling, that a British Asian women should feel conflicted in her responsibility when pursuing a professional career in Britain.<sup>107</sup> Hegde in her later study of food blogs finds an alternative view of gender

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<sup>102</sup> Narayan, "Eating Cultures: Incorporation, Identity and Indian Food," 74-78; James, "Cooking the Books," 80; Roy, "Reading Communities and Culinary Communities," 471-502; Buettner, "'Going for an Indian,'" 878; Buettner, "Chicken Tikka Masala, Flock Wallpaper, and 'Real' Home Cooking," 203-229; Cook, "Regions to be Cheerful," 124

<sup>103</sup> Roy, "Reading Communities and Culinary Communities," 486

<sup>104</sup> Narayan, "Eating Cultures: Incorporation, Identity and Indian Food," 74-75

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Roy, "Reading Communities and Culinary Communities," 478

<sup>107</sup> Buettner, "Chicken Tikka Masala, Flock Wallpaper, and 'Real' Home Cooking," 220-221

dynamics, that while the blog community is gendered, “a strong neoliberal ethos of individualism pervades the digital environment of food blogs in general”.<sup>108</sup> This is notable as it shows a move away from the structured and judgmental view of women’s responsibilities found in the earlier work. The fourth chapter of this thesis deals with authenticity’s close link to gender and the home and how the cultural assumptions surrounding this play out. A key aspect to this in relation to Indian food is the concept of food in exchange for money, which when combined with the female gender is considered unacceptable, thus ensuring the only legitimate place for women cooks is the home, regardless of skill level or ambition.

In conclusion, clear themes can be seen running through the academic discourse on Indian food culture in Britain, despite a wide variety in disciplines and sources. An embedded colonial legacy of racism and othering manifests itself regularly, and is intensified by terror attacks in the early 2000s due to the association of terrorism with Islam and Islam with South Asian communities and food in Britain. Concepts of multicultural living to combat prejudice for many academics such as Buettner and Fish remained purely conceptual and not a reality. However, judging cohesion and tolerance against an ideal concept is only one way of researching food culture, and other angles can yield valuable results for the theoretical framework of this thesis.

Dietler, Goody, Jackson and James' research offer insightful theories of identity, creolisation and transnationalism. They lay the theoretical groundwork for understanding themes such as the invocation of authenticity, by pointing to it's potential as an identity and power affirming devise. Dietler and Mintz's contributions in relation to demand and popularity suggest that the decisively popular status of Indian food must mean it holds a culturally relevant meaning. However, this seems to conflict with often documented criticism of Indian food. Therefore, with this framework this research thematically dismantles the specifics of culture and meaning that Indian food connects to in Britain to unravel its seemingly paradoxical popularity. Overall, it considers the themes identified in the historiography of race, colonial legacy, class, authenticity and gender, while also identifying nuances of these themes and their intersections. It combines the theoretical framework discussed in this section with the historical and political context in order to contribute a nuanced understanding of the social and cultural journey of Indian food in Britain, and

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<sup>108</sup> Hegde, "Food Blogs and the Digital Reimagination of South Asian Diasporic Publics," 90

importantly explain what specific dynamics of identity and power in society are at work that underpin it.

## Research Question

The crux of the tension which this research aims to address is the seeming paradox evident throughout the discourse on Indian food in Britain, which persists until the present day. For some, the British curry is the antithesis of culture, representing nothing more than an inauthentic superficial dish, and for others it is celebrated as representing an enriched regional or multicultural identity, to the extent where award ceremonies are held in its honour.<sup>109</sup> This research aims to dismantle some of the forces behind this paradox. It does so by assessing the varying perceptions of Indian foods in the UK, which add up to its perceived cultural value. It considers notions of difference between individuals and how they position themselves in relation to each other through commentary on Indian food. Ultimately, it investigates what these views tell us about the sociocultural landscape in Britain and its historical context. In order to achieve this, it asks the question: How can the treatment and perception of Indian food in Britain between 2001 and 2021 be characterised?

By investigating perception, this question considers what Indian food represents to people in the UK. By investigating treatment this question also considers the nature of behaviour towards this food, such as whether it is promotive or derogatory. This research has a historiographic and cultural approach, considering the historical and cultural contexts which are relevant to understanding specific perceptions or treatments. My research question is answered by mapping Indian food's cultural journey through the development of themes guided by the historiography on this topic. Therefore, my sub-questions are broken down as follows:

1. What is Indian food's connection to British national identity, and what are the boundaries of this?
2. To what extent are colonial or racialised stereotypes evident?
3. What does the invocation of authenticity reveal?

As indicated in the historiography report the themes of these questions structure this thesis, with the following three chapters each aimed at answering one sub-question.

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<sup>109</sup> Sodha, *Fresh India*; Katona, *Mowgli Street Food*; Fielding, "Currying Flavor," 41-42

## Sources

To successfully characterise representations of Indian food the data for this project is qualitative. Specifically, this research utilised the *Guardian* and the *BBC* archives, as they are two of the largest news outlets in the UK and the only two where full access to an archive is available.<sup>110</sup> The archive search includes all the publications from 2001 – 2021 with public comments sections included. A total of 131 news articles were considered for this thesis along with reader comments published alongside these articles. The majority of the articles used were categorised in the ‘Food and Drink’ section and comprise of restaurant industry news, recipes, news articles and opinion pieces.

The choice of story, tone and angle all reveal a news organisation’s values, perceptions of their audience and possibly their audience’s perception of themselves.<sup>111</sup> As the *Guardian* and the *BBC* have a vast readership in the UK, their stories indicate the general public’s interest in certain topics. The comments section reveals multiple individual viewpoints on the subject and angle of the article. Although, it is impossible to verify for individual cases, comments and article generally differ in terms of the amount of preparation or spontaneity and level of reciprocal conversation. This gives a more well-rounded approach to results.

Secondly, this research also utilises the Hansard public record of parliamentary speeches. These are included as speeches are essential for gauging public perception and treatment of a topic because (elected) MPs are considered to be the mouthpieces for their constituencies. The record represents a fully transcribed catalogue of every utterance from both the House of Lord and House of Commons. The transcriptions are impartial as they are not completed by the political parties but neutral civil servants.<sup>112</sup> Taking a look at political sources also supports a more well-rounded result as it avoids the assumption that the media is the only source of power when it comes to large scale dissemination of ideas and information. This results in a more accurate reading of the cultural pulse and hierarchy of importance of certain topics or ideas in society.

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<sup>110</sup> November 2020 statistics of website hits in the UK show [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) was the fifth most visited website and the *Guardian* was twentieth "Top Websites Ranking for all Categories in United Kingdom ," last modified November 01, accessed December 15, 2020, [www.similarweb.com/top-websites/united-kingdom/](http://www.similarweb.com/top-websites/united-kingdom/).

<sup>111</sup> Stephen Vella, “Newspapers,” in *Reading Primary Sources: The Interpretation of Texts from 19th and 20th Century History* ed. Miriam Dobson and Benjamin Ziemann (London: Routledge, 2020), 193

<sup>112</sup> “About Hansard Online,” Hansard, accessed 28.06.21, [www.hansard.parliament.uk/](http://www.hansard.parliament.uk/)

## Source Limitations

The main aspect to be aware of when it comes to news articles is they are often aligned with the values of the publisher to avoid reputational risk. Therefore, they are unreliable for an exact reflection of society, rather they show what was considered within the boundaries of acceptable for published media, which is of academic interest in itself. While commentators do choose a username, it's impossible to know the identity of the commentator, even when they claim a specific identity. However, considering that the articles sources are from a British newspaper and dealing with matters only in Britain it can be taken that the commentators represent Brits. Therefore, not knowing commentators individual identities doesn't necessarily take away from the general state of play in Britain when it comes to analysing the treatment and perception of Indian food.

It's also worth noting that the comments section on these sites is censored according to guidelines, however this focusses on extremely insulting language, leaving opinionated exchanges uncensored. Additionally, it must be acknowledged that these sources do not necessarily offer an even representation of Britain. While the *BBC* identifies itself as impartial, the *Guardian* identifies itself as a liberal newspaper and admits it's readership is a higher income, highly educated audience, who are most likely to fall into the 'white male' category and live in or around the capital.<sup>113</sup> Because of this the commentators are also unlikely to be completely representative. However, the extensive readership of the sites will give a window into a very large group in the UK.

In regard to Hansard, the limitation of considering politicians' opinions is much the same as considering those of journalists – they don't automatically represent public opinion, even if they say they do. More so with political sources, there are politically strategic reasons for taking specific stances on topics which are rarely self-evident in the speech itself. However, background strategy doesn't necessarily take away from the effect and fact of their words, and the purpose of this research is to contribute to an understanding of themes and

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<sup>113</sup> The *guardian* home page states "the world's leading liberal voice," the Guardian, accessed 25.06.21, [www.theguardian.com](http://www.theguardian.com); "The Guardian, Our Readers & Circulation," the Guardian, accessed 25.06.21 [www.theguardian.com/advertising/guardian-circulation-readership-statistics](http://www.theguardian.com/advertising/guardian-circulation-readership-statistics); The BBC's impartiality guidelines are published online, "Section 4: Impartiality," BBC, accessed 25.06.21, [www.bbc.co.uk/editorialguidelines/guidelines/impartiality/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/editorialguidelines/guidelines/impartiality/)

trends in identity and power dynamics in the UK, which political speeches provide a window to through their choices of words and position or even choice to speak on the topic at all.

## Methods

### Collection and Organisation of Data

In order to understand the characteristics and meanings of the treatment and perception of Indian food, this research takes a qualitative approach. Data was first collected from a key word search in the *BBC* and the *Guardian* archives. The key word search consisted of the following terms: ‘chicken tikka masala’, which is assumed to be the most popular British Indian dish; ‘curry’; ‘dhal’/ ‘dal’; ‘biryani’, because they are long considered two of the more popular dishes on the South Asian continent; ‘Indian food’ and ‘Indian restaurant(s)’.<sup>114</sup> The aim of using these terms is to retrieve articles that concern a reasonably representative range of foods considered to be South Asian. The first 30 articles from each search was collected, excluding any irrelevant ones where the term had been used to mean something else or where the vast majority of the article is about another kind of food. I also excluded duplicates (of which there were numerous). This data was then collated on the qualitative analysis software Atlas.ti and categorised firstly according to year published.

The initial approach of this research was to examine the data for features of the themes and patterns based on Atlas.ti’s text search function of common words (using a list of stop words), paying specific attention to themes which have been identified by previous researchers noted in chapter 1. These are: Race/ racism, colonial legacy, authenticity, female gender and class. As common words were looked into first, this starting point diminished bias and allowed an open minded approach to new themes. For example, while ‘home’ was not a key theme from the historiography of this topic, it was a common term in the sources and therefore was focussed on in the analysis. While the text search did yield some clear themes, in order to obtain a fuller picture, it was also necessary to read each article individually. This identified themes where a computerised text search was less reliable for results due to subtlety of the theme (meaning less specific linguistic associations), such as ‘colonial legacy’. Finally, common themes were recorded and coded and this formed the initial framework for this thesis.

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<sup>114</sup> Claire Hopley “Britain's favourite dish - let's go for a curry,” *British Heritage*, June 25, 2021, [www.britishheritage.com/food-drink/britains-favourite-dish-curry](http://www.britishheritage.com/food-drink/britains-favourite-dish-curry)



## Identity Focussed Critical Discourse Analysis

The analysis for this research is partly guided by Stephanie Taylor's definition of identity focussed discourse analysis:

Research... into discourses which distinguish particular groups and create identities, the ways in which discourse practices are acquired as part of the process of learning and becoming part of the group and the conflicts which different discourse practices may give rise to.<sup>115</sup>

My theoretical framework indicates that how we interact with food is tied to identity and ultimately power. Therefore, this method is an appropriate approach to unpick the thematic discourse around Indian food as it looks at how discourse practices relate to identity.<sup>116</sup> The approach of Critical Discourse Analysis based on Norman Fairclough's definition, focuses on underlying dynamics of power within societies being revealed through discourse.<sup>117</sup> I also incorporate this approach as the themes considered in this research are known to closely relate to power, such as race, gender and colonialism and postcolonialism. This research therefore considers what the themes identified in the discourse on Indian food reveal about identity and power.

Specifically, this research analyses the meaning behind segments of text by placing them within their social and political context. It especially considers linguistic aspects such as: Setting of terms and categories which become taken for granted (stereotypes) and framing and tone.<sup>118</sup> This qualitatively focussed method, which is grounded in my theoretical framework, is ultimately able to both characterise the treatment and perception of Indian food and reveal its possible meanings through looking at how specific representations connect with notions of identity and dynamics of power in society.

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<sup>115</sup> Stephanie Taylor, *What Is Discourse Analysis?* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013)21.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language* (Routledge, 2013)132-133.

<sup>118</sup> Taylor, *What Is Discourse Analysis?*14

## **Innovative Aspect**

The innovative aspects of this research are the sources used, methodology and specific timespan, as well as the focus and the angle of the research. This research analyses an extensive data set of online articles that have not previously been utilised for a project focussing on Indian food. The same goes for Hansard's record of parliamentary debates, which despite Indian food featuring semi-regularly, have not been utilised for academic research on this topic. Together these provide a unique and in-depth insight. These sources also stretch over a number of years that have not been considered together before in a project on Indian food in the UK, from 2001 – 2020. Additionally, it considers the public comments section of online newspapers which has never been done before. In all, it gives an entirely unique perspective and has not revealed before.

While admittedly Buettner, Highmore and Fielding have researched Indian food in modern Britain generally, this research uniquely focusses on how Britons interact with the idea of Indian food through treatment and perception of it online and contrasts this with political representations from Parliament. This research also uniquely takes an historically contextualised interdisciplinary understanding of identity and power as well as utilising sociological and anthropological theories of food.

## Chapter 2. A firm Position in British History, Culture and Politics

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In June 2001, New Labour's Tony Blair had just started his third term in power. His re-election for three consecutive terms was a testament to the continued popularity of his left wing policies to this point. Blair had been successful in introducing the Human Rights Act as well as the National Minimum Wage, and had other equality legislation, such as equal rights for same-sex unions, in the pipeline.<sup>119</sup> Labour's policies had been liberal, and that included a positive stance on immigration, which aligned with their ideology of a multicultural Britain.<sup>120</sup> At this time, Blair's Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook, made his now famous speech coined the 'chicken tikka masala speech', which captured the modern, progressive and multicultural Britain that Labour considered a reality, and central to British identity.<sup>121</sup>

After 9/11 in 2001 and London's 7/7 bombings in 2005, Britain experienced an increase in racism against those perceived to be either Asian or Muslim in the UK, which included the vast majority of Indian restaurant owners and staff.<sup>122</sup> The threat of terror and xenophobia subsequently took centre stage in politics, and the decline of Labour is reported to have been due to the increase of immigration into the UK and voters' feeling that Blair's intervention in Iraq increased the risk of terror attacks on home soil.<sup>123</sup> Tariq Modood convincingly argues that the UK in this period was experiencing a backlash to multiculturalism, mainly manifesting in anti-Muslim sentiment, such as allegations that

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<sup>119</sup> "Human Rights Act: What the articles say", *BBC*, September 29, 2000. [news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/946400.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/946400.stm)

<sup>120</sup> Blair, "Tony Blair's Britain speech,"

<sup>121</sup> Robin Cook's chicken tikka masala speech," *Guardian*, April 19, 2001, [www.theguardian.com/world/2001/apr/19/race.britishidentity](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/apr/19/race.britishidentity)

<sup>122</sup> Tahir Abbas, "After 9/11: British South Asian Muslims, Islamophobia, Multiculturalism, and the State," *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 21, 21, no. 3 (2004): 26–38.

<sup>123</sup> Erica Consterdine. "The huge political cost of Blair's decision to allow Eastern European migrants unfettered access to Britain," *The Conversation*, November 16, 2016, [theconversation.com/the-huge-political-cost-of-blairs-decision-to-allow-eastern-european-migrants-unfettered-access-to-britain-66077](http://theconversation.com/the-huge-political-cost-of-blairs-decision-to-allow-eastern-european-migrants-unfettered-access-to-britain-66077) ; Nicholas Watt and Patrick Wintour, "How immigration came to haunt Labour: the inside story," *Guardian*, March 24, 2015 [www.theguardian.com/news/2015/mar/24/how-immigration-came-to-haunt-labour-inside-story](http://www.theguardian.com/news/2015/mar/24/how-immigration-came-to-haunt-labour-inside-story); Julian Glover, "Tories open nine-point lead as Labour drops to 19-year low," August 22, 2006, *Guardian*, [www.theguardian.com/politics/2006/aug/22/uk.topstories3](http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2006/aug/22/uk.topstories3)

Muslim communities were segregated and extreme, and that the (British Asian) 7/7 bombers were products of multicultural Britain.<sup>124</sup>

In 2008, a points-based non-EEA immigration system was introduced, which inspired a negative reaction from the Indian restaurant industry.<sup>125</sup> Despite a change of Prime Minister in Gordon Brown in 2007, and following an economic recession, by 2010 David Cameron was forming a coalition government with the Liberal Democrats and the end of Labour's rein was confirmed, which has not been regained to press. From 2015 until present, the Conservatives held strong on their own. Their policies from the beginning of the coalition included a distinctly negative stance on immigration, calling for a reduction in the influx of immigrants, in the form of an annual cap.<sup>126</sup> Cameron's immigration policies aligned with his view – disclosed in a self-penned Guardian article – that there was a lack of integration in the UK, especially by the British Asian and Muslim community, stating “[t]he challenges of cohesion and integration are among the greatest we face” and that he felt both that there is a denial of the terrorist threat in the Muslim community and “many British Asians see a society that hardly inspires them to integrate”.<sup>127</sup>

Cook's 2001 speech and its notoriety since demonstrates that Indian food in the UK was more than merely a popular foodstuff. It had high political significance and, as politics progressed, it continued to be attached to differing social and cultural meanings for different people. From multiculturalism to immigration to Islam, as we will see it became the representative face of various aspects of Britain and British culture. These connotations and their meanings in the context of politics is unravelled in the following sections by way of identifying through Hansard's record of parliamentary speeches the dominant ways in which Indian food is discussed from the early days of Blair's third term, stretching to Labour's decline and terminating with a majority conservative government in 2020. From these political sources, Indian food's place in British identity and its contribution to British culture

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<sup>124</sup> Tariq Modood, A. Triandafyllidou, and R. Zapata-Barrero, “Multiculturalism, Citizenship and National Identity” in *Citizenship between Past and Future*, D.D. Engin F. Isin, Peter Nyers, Bryan S. Turner (Routledge, 2013) 113-122

<sup>125</sup> “The UK's points-based system for immigration,” UK Parliament, last edited July 09, 2018 [commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-7662/#:~:text=A%20%E2%80%9Cpoints%2Dbased%E2%80%9D%20system,points%2Dbased%20in%20name%20only;Mark%20Leftly,“Curry%20restaurants%20in%20crisis%20as%20immigration%20rules%20keep%20out%20chefs,”Guardian,2016,www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/apr/22/curry-restaurants-crisis-immigration-rules-chefs.”](https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-7662/#:~:text=A%20%E2%80%9Cpoints%2Dbased%E2%80%9D%20system,points%2Dbased%20in%20name%20only;Mark%20Leftly,“Curry%20restaurants%20in%20crisis%20as%20immigration%20rules%20keep%20out%20chefs,”Guardian,2016,www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/apr/22/curry-restaurants-crisis-immigration-rules-chefs.”)

<sup>126</sup> “Net migration up to 298,000 as Conservative target missed,” *BBC*, February 26, 2015, [www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-31638174](http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-31638174)

<sup>127</sup> David Cameron, “What I learnt from my stay with a Muslim family,” *Guardian*, May 13, 2007, [www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2007/may/13/comment.communities](http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2007/may/13/comment.communities)

and the economy as a whole overshadows all other references. While articles from the *Guardian* and *BBC* archives contain other clear varieties of representations (which are discussed at length in chapters three and four) Indian food's contribution to national identity and culture is also focussed on heavily.

### **A Success Story: Contribution to British History, Culture and Economy**

Indian food, Indian restaurants and 'curry culture' crop up not infrequently in The Hansard record of parliamentary speeches. In total there are 32 speeches between 2001 and the end of 2020 that reference the industry in one way or another. Clear themes can be seen throughout the speeches which seem to dominate the discourse on Indian food in parliament in this period. The most dominant theme that can be noted is that of the curry industry's extensive contribution to Britain, in terms of culture and the economy. The curry industry is portrayed as an historical success story in these spheres. The positive statements relating to culture and the economy are the rule, not the exception. No negative reference could be found in relation to Indian food's role in the economy or culture. In fact, barely any negative references to Indian food could be found in all of Hansard's record of debates.

It should first be noted that on all occasions where Indian food or Indian restaurants are mentioned, politicians are referring mainly to restaurants rather than home cooking or cookbooks, and specifically what I will call the 'old style' restaurants. That is, restaurants and takeaways that have achieved success over a number of decades serving versions of the traditional British favourite curries such as Chicken Tikka Masala or Chicken Korma. These are collectively referred to as the curry industry. On six occasions, the curry industry's general contribution to British culture as a whole is praised and emphasised. Its place in culture as generally significant and as a positive, valuable force is considered a fact. This is reflected in comments such as "South Asian cooking has come to occupy a progressively bigger role in British culture and life".<sup>128</sup> One debate secured by Conservative MP Anne Main in 2009 is entirely to discuss the curry industry's shortage of chefs. This alone speaks to its perceived societal significance. Though Ms Main complains of new immigration restrictions hitting the industry hard and indicates they should be altered, her ultimate focus (perhaps realising this is unlikely to be implemented) is to persuade Siôn Simon, the

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<sup>128</sup> Quote from Siôn Simon, "British Curry Industry. Volume 488: debated on Wednesday 4 March 2009," UK Parliament, accessed 25.06.21. [hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2009-03-04/debates/09030460000002/BritishCurryIndustry?highlight=%22south%20asian%20cooking%20has%20come%20to%20occupy%20a%20progressively%20bigger%20role%20in%20british%20culture%22#contribution-09030460000165](https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2009-03-04/debates/09030460000002/BritishCurryIndustry?highlight=%22south%20asian%20cooking%20has%20come%20to%20occupy%20a%20progressively%20bigger%20role%20in%20british%20culture%22#contribution-09030460000165)

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills, to support the creation of ‘curry colleges’ in Britain to plug this employment gap through home grown talent.<sup>129</sup> As can be seen in table 1, Ms Main points to the Indian restaurant industry’s cultural contribution – “changing British palates forever” – as one of her opening arguments.<sup>130</sup> This shows that she judges that this claim is something which is unlikely to be contested. She also draws on a particularly positive view of the history of the Indian restaurant sector as “one of the greatest immigration success stories of the past 40 years” to strengthen her argument.<sup>131</sup> Just as she expects, this is far from contested, in fact Siôn Simon makes a point of emphasising his agreement with this claim and himself describing the Indian restaurant industry’s rich and long history in Britain.<sup>132</sup> This mutual agreement on the historical and cultural contribution of the Indian restaurants industry across the two largest and opposing political parties in the UK speaks to a perceived strength and certainty of Indian food’s position in British culture and history.

In the House of Lords, Lord Bilimoria speaking in 2008 and 2010 also relies on Indian food’s cultural contribution as his main argument to support his cause. Unlike Ms Main, Bilimoria’s principle aim is to influence the government to relax immigration rules in order to staff the Indian restaurant industry.<sup>133</sup> While it should be noted that Lord Bilimoria has a personal interest in supporting the Indian restaurant industry – he is the founder of the successful lager company, Cobra, a drink intended to be eaten with Indian food – the significance is in his method of finding common ground with others to support this cause, which is to point to the curry industry’s cultural contribution.<sup>134</sup> Like Main, Lord Bilimoria also talks of a long history of Indian food in the UK and its immeasurable cultural contribution to strengthen his argument and gain common ground, and like Main he receives no challenge on these points.<sup>135</sup> This further shows that politicians feel secure enough that Indian food’s historical and cultural significance is a universal truth, and that it can be relied upon to support serious changes to law and policy.

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<sup>129</sup> “British Curry Industry,” UK Parliament.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> “British Curry Industry,” UK Parliament.

<sup>134</sup> “Biography,” Lord Bilimoria, accessed 26.06.21. [www.lordbilimoria.co.uk/](http://www.lordbilimoria.co.uk/)

<sup>135</sup> “Minority Ethnic and Religious Communities,” UK Parliament

Key:

 Culture  
 Economy

Table 1: Quotes asserting cultural and economic value in chronological order

Year	Debate	Speaker	Quote
2003	Small Businesses	Patricia Hewitt (Labour, Secretary of State for Trade and Industry)	“The reality is that whether it is Indian food, tourism, the creative industries or new technologies, our entrepreneurs are leading the way” <sup>136</sup>
2008	Visas: Performing Arts	Lord Bilimoria	“The ethnic restaurant industry has contributed a huge amount to this country, Indian food, for example, has become a way of life” <sup>137</sup>
2009	British Curry Industry	Siôn Simon (Labour, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills)	“I do not minimise the significance of this debate. Such matters are important both culturally and economically, and I do not underestimate our need or ability to assimilate in a multicultural society and turn such components into part of our national identity. Moreover, [the curry] industry is a growing economic and industrial phenomenon.” <sup>138</sup>
			“This year is the 200th anniversary of the opening of the first-ever Indian restaurant in London. In the intervening years, South Asian cooking has come to occupy a progressively bigger role in British culture and life” <sup>139</sup>

<sup>136</sup> Quote from Patricia Hewitt, "Small Businesses. Volume 408: debated on Wednesday 2 July 2003," UK Parliament, accessed 25.06.21. [hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2003-07-02/debates/3faee341-5756-46e9-80b0-9909d430ea56/SmallBusinesses?highlight=reality%20that%20whether%20indian%20food%20tourism%20creative%20industries%20new%20technologies%20entrepreneurs%20leading%20way#contribution-169f103b-92a5-4aae-b543-0ff083336a91](https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2003-07-02/debates/3faee341-5756-46e9-80b0-9909d430ea56/SmallBusinesses?highlight=reality%20that%20whether%20indian%20food%20tourism%20creative%20industries%20new%20technologies%20entrepreneurs%20leading%20way#contribution-169f103b-92a5-4aae-b543-0ff083336a91)

<sup>137</sup> Quote from Lord Bilimoria, "Visas: Performing Arts. Volume 702: debated on Monday 2 June 2008," UK Parliament, accessed 25.06.21 [hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2008-06-02/debates/0806024000010/VisasPerformingArts?highlight=ethnic%20restaurant%20industry%20contributed%20huge%20amount%20this%20country#contribution-0806024000091](https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2008-06-02/debates/0806024000010/VisasPerformingArts?highlight=ethnic%20restaurant%20industry%20contributed%20huge%20amount%20this%20country#contribution-0806024000091)

<sup>138</sup> Quote from Siôn Simon, "British Curry Industry. Volume 488: debated on Wednesday 4 March 2009," UK Parliament, accessed 25.06.21. [hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2009-03-04/debates/09030460000002/BritishCurryIndustry?highlight=%20south%20asian%20cooking%20has%20come%20to%20occupy%20a%20%20progressively%20bigger%20role%20in%20british%20culture%22#contribution-09030460000165](https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2009-03-04/debates/09030460000002/BritishCurryIndustry?highlight=%20south%20asian%20cooking%20has%20come%20to%20occupy%20a%20%20progressively%20bigger%20role%20in%20british%20culture%22#contribution-09030460000165)

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

2009	British Curry Industry	Anne Main (Conservative MP)	Quoting from and agreeing with an article from the <i>Independent</i> , “I think part of the problem is the government’s patronising attitude towards the curry industry, which is one of the greatest immigration success stories of the past 40 years, not only in changing the British palate forever but also contributing considerably to the Treasury coffers” <sup>140</sup>
			“[the curry industry] is enormously successful and offers many opportunities” <sup>141</sup>
			“It is, of course, important that Indian restaurants in this country retain their high standards.” <sup>142</sup>
			“[curry restaurants] contributing an estimated £3.5 billion to the British economy annually” <sup>143</sup>
2010	Immigration	Lord Bilimoria	“I have seen the curry restaurant industry make Indian food a way of life in this country” <sup>144</sup>
2012	Minority Ethnic and Religious Communities: Cultural and Economic Contribution		“[The curry] industry has been an inspiration to me. It is made up of pioneering entrepreneurs who have gone to every corner of Great Britain, opened up restaurants on every high street, won customers and made friends, put back into their local communities and made Indian food a part of the British way of life. They deserve our support and our gratitude” <sup>145</sup>

<sup>140</sup> Quote from Anne Main, "British Curry Industry," UK Parliament.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Quote from Lord Bilimoria, "Immigration. Volume 721: debated on Thursday 21 October 2010," UK Parliament, accessed 25.06.21. [hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2010-10-21/debates/10102148000677/Immigration?highlight=have%20seen%20curry%20restaurant%20industry%20make%20indian%20food%20way%20life%20this%20country#contribution-10102148000199](https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2010-10-21/debates/10102148000677/Immigration?highlight=have%20seen%20curry%20restaurant%20industry%20make%20indian%20food%20way%20life%20this%20country#contribution-10102148000199)

<sup>145</sup> Quote from Lord Bilimoria, "Minority Ethnic and Religious Communities: Cultural and Economic Contribution. Volume 737: debated on Thursday 24 May 2012," UK Parliament, accessed 25.06.21. [hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2012-05-24/debates/12052458000789/MinorityEthnicAndReligiousCommunitiesCulturalAndEconomicContribution?highlight=made%20up%20pioneering%20entrepreneurs%20have%20gone%20every%20corner%20great%20britain#contribution-12052458000058](https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2012-05-24/debates/12052458000789/MinorityEthnicAndReligiousCommunitiesCulturalAndEconomicContribution?highlight=made%20up%20pioneering%20entrepreneurs%20have%20gone%20every%20corner%20great%20britain#contribution-12052458000058)



Table 1 details 7 instances where the curry industry's economic contribution is discussed. On all of these occasions, it is discussed in positive terms. There is a clear consensus that the Indian restaurant industry's economic contribution has been significant, and that this is due to the entrepreneurship of restaurant owners. Combined with the knowledge that the industry was built by postcolonial immigrants, when the history of the industry is focussed on, the narrative often follows a 'rags to riches' immigrant success story. In the case of Siôn Simon, its perceived economic success is felt as surprising but very real. This is apparent from his choice to refer to the curry industry as a growing "economic and industrial *phenomenon*" (emphasis added) indicating some level of surprise at this success.<sup>146</sup> Regardless, the industry as a result seems to have gained status among politicians as respectable, they refer to its high standards, and to immigrant staff as "the best in the world" and shouldn't be changed for anything.<sup>147</sup> It's economic contribution, like it's cultural contribution is relied upon to justify proposing changes to legislation and government policy.

In the *Guardian* and the *BBC* archives, Indian food's place in national culture and identity is equally undisputed, it is frequently referred to as the UK's "favourite" in one way or another, whether that's chicken tikka masala being the nation's favourite dish or curry in general being described as the UK's favourite food.<sup>148</sup> Often descriptions of curry being the nation's favourite appear alongside an acknowledgement that it either isn't fully British in some way or isn't "authentic" cuisine. For example, in one headline it is described as "the UK's adopted national dish".<sup>149</sup> In another the "infamously inauthentic nation's number one" and another argues that it is *because* of its hybrid status as a "British/Bangladeshi creation" – and not authentic Indian – that makes it a British national dish.<sup>150</sup> Despite these caveats about

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<sup>146</sup> "British Curry Industry," UK Parliament.

<sup>147</sup> Quote from Lord Bilimoria, "Immigration. Volume 721: debated on Thursday 21 October 2010," UK Parliament, accessed 25.06.21. [hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2010-10-21/debates/10102148000677/Immigration?highlight=own%20business%20have%20seen%20curry%20restaurant%20industry%20make%20indian%20food%20way%20life%20this%20country#contribution-10102148000199](https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2010-10-21/debates/10102148000677/Immigration?highlight=own%20business%20have%20seen%20curry%20restaurant%20industry%20make%20indian%20food%20way%20life%20this%20country#contribution-10102148000199)

<sup>148</sup> Rebecca Smithers, "Fish and chips to curry: UK's favourite dishes at risk from climate change, research shows," *Guardian*, March 20, 2018, [www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/mar/20/fish-and-chips-to-curry-uks-favourite-dishes-at-risk-from-climate-change-research-shows#:~:text=3%20years%20old-,Fish%20and%20chips%20to%20curry%3A%20UK's%20favourite%20dishes%20at,from%20climate%20change%2C%20research%20shows&text=Some%20of%20the%20UK's%20best,a%20new%20report%20on%20Tuesday](http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/mar/20/fish-and-chips-to-curry-uks-favourite-dishes-at-risk-from-climate-change-research-shows#:~:text=3%20years%20old-,Fish%20and%20chips%20to%20curry%3A%20UK's%20favourite%20dishes%20at,from%20climate%20change%2C%20research%20shows&text=Some%20of%20the%20UK's%20best,a%20new%20report%20on%20Tuesday)

<sup>149</sup> Rosie Spinks, "Curry on cooking: how long will the UK's adopted national dish survive?" *Guardian*, July 8, 2005, [www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/2015/jul/08/uk-indian-restaurants-struggling-to-curry-on-lack-of-chefs](http://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/2015/jul/08/uk-indian-restaurants-struggling-to-curry-on-lack-of-chefs)

<sup>150</sup> Peter Carty, "Brick Lane to Bangladesh," *Guardian*, March 16, 2007, [www.theguardian.com/travel/2007/nov/16/bangladesh.travelfoodanddrink](http://www.theguardian.com/travel/2007/nov/16/bangladesh.travelfoodanddrink); Lauren Potts, "Dripping, apples and milk: Making curry the Victorian way," *BBC*, January 17, 2015, [www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-humber-30718727](http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-humber-30718727)

authenticity and belonging (which will be discussed at length in chapter four), it is clear that Indian food in general is considered to be a firm part of the national culture and identity, not one reference was found disputing this, even if sometimes it is acknowledged in a somewhat wry way.

Curry culture as national culture is on occasion celebrated and reinforced through fond reporting on “Curry Capital of the UK” competitions, where the strength of competition and pride in winning is emphasised.<sup>151</sup> It is also reinforced through linking it with established national culture. For example, it is linked to the ultimate national institution and object of nationalist pride – the British army – with one article reporting that curry is now being sent to the British army when overseas as a “taste of home”.<sup>152</sup> And while turkey curry is acknowledged as unlikely to be eaten in India, chef Felicity Cloake writes “in my family, the turkey curry is as much a part of Christmas as the big roast itself”.<sup>153</sup> These examples show curry’s strong link with British national pride and culture. While local pride and identity is also acknowledged in relation to curry, it is the national link that is emphasised the most and this is consistent throughout the twenty-year period this research covers.

The big question that follows from these findings is why, when anti-Muslim discrimination increases in the UK due to terror attacks and immigration anxiety, does Indian food – largely a product of Muslim immigration – still hold central to British identity in the eyes of politicians? This perhaps could be understood in part through the political focus on modern British multiculturalism which was gaining strength from the late 90s to the early 2000s, manifesting in events such as Robin Cook giving curry as an example of a specifically national dish.<sup>154</sup> Perhaps this stuck in liberal newspapers such as the *Guardian* through the following twenty years as it captured the so-called progressive and leftist political sentiment of multiculturalism in a tangible way. However, there are alternative ways to explain these findings. Stuart Hall describes national identity as “an historically located set of shared

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<sup>151</sup> “Glasgow wins title of Curry Capital of Britain,” *BBC*, December 10, 2010, [www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-glasgow-west-11968850#:~:text=Glasgow%20has%20been%20named%20Curry,entry%20with%20four%20local%20restaurants%20;Curry%20Capital%20Bradford%20takes%20title%20for%20fifth%20consecutive%20year,](http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-glasgow-west-11968850#:~:text=Glasgow%20has%20been%20named%20Curry,entry%20with%20four%20local%20restaurants%20;Curry%20Capital%20Bradford%20takes%20title%20for%20fifth%20consecutive%20year,) *BBC*, October 20, 2015, [www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-leeds-34586019#:~:text=Bradford%20has%20been%20named%20Curry,hygiene%20ratings%20and%20public%20votes.](http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-leeds-34586019#:~:text=Bradford%20has%20been%20named%20Curry,hygiene%20ratings%20and%20public%20votes.)

<sup>152</sup> Elizabeth Mahony, “Ruby Murray: The Secret Story of Curry,” *Guardian*, April 12, 2010, [www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2010/apr/12/ruby-murray-secret-history-of-curry](http://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2010/apr/12/ruby-murray-secret-history-of-curry)

<sup>153</sup> Felicity Cloake, “How to make the perfect turkey curry,” *Guardian*, December 23, 2019, [www.theguardian.com/food/2019/dec/23/how-make-perfect-turkey-curry-christmas--recipe-felicity-cloake](http://www.theguardian.com/food/2019/dec/23/how-make-perfect-turkey-curry-christmas--recipe-felicity-cloake)

<sup>154</sup> Cook, “chicken tikka masala speech”

experiences that need to be recovered in order to fulfil the desire to become one nation or one people.”<sup>155</sup> With this in mind, perhaps we can look to the national identity ‘tick boxes’ that glorifying Indian food achieves for politicians. Elizabeth Buettner discusses the Raj nostalgia of the 1980s, where pride in British history of empire resurged. Perhaps glorifying Indian food’s position in British history is a way to be proud of British imperial history without contradicting – and actually aligning with – present day multiculturalism. In other words, pride in British curry culture unites the history of colonialism (which curry is often considered to be a pleasant by-product of) with modern multiculturalism in a guaranteed popular parcel and uncontentious way. Perhaps this also exemplifies the “bitter irony of multiculturalism”, that;

Whatever else Empire might be, it is multicultural...all of the civic, assimilative signifiers upon which a multicultural British or for that matter English national identity could potentially draw from the existing historical-cultural matrix of myths and symbols are deeply implicated in the project of empire.<sup>156</sup>

Obviously this assumes a position on the politicians’ part that regards Indian colonialism as Britain giving India a civil service and India giving Britain curry in return. However, a recent survey of Brits on colonialism did find that 60% feel the British Empire is “something to be proud of” rather than ashamed of.<sup>157</sup> So, considering that politicians work is to unite voters under national identity and national history, theorising that politicians attempt to preserve the history of Empire in the national identity isn’t a far stretch, and neither is journalists capitalising on this too.

### **Multiculturalism and Integration**

Perhaps further proving the above point, one specific way the curry industry’s contribution is discussed in the parliamentary speeches is through its role in furthering a multicultural society. For example, Siôn Simon argues that its position in culture reflects Britons’ need and ability to create a multicultural society by incorporating the curry industry into British identity.<sup>158</sup> In one sense this is expected, as it aligns with Labour’s vision of Britain as a distinctly progressive and multicultural society.<sup>159</sup> However, it is telling that Mr Simon at this

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<sup>155</sup> Davis, *Understanding Stuart Hall*, 185

<sup>156</sup> Eva-Maria Asari, Daphne Halikiopoulou, and Steven Mock, “British National Identity and the Dilemmas of Multiculturalism,” *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 14, no. 1 (2008): 1-28, <https://doi-org.eur.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/13537110701872444>.

<sup>157</sup> Will Dahlgreen, “The British Empire is 'something to be proud of',” YouGov, [yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2014/07/26/britain-proud-its-empire](http://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2014/07/26/britain-proud-its-empire)

<sup>158</sup> “British Curry Industry,” UK Parliament.

<sup>159</sup> Blair, “Tony Blair's Britain speech,”

point in time (2009) sees Britain as being *in the process of* achieving multiculturalism through curry, rather than it already having been a fact for many years. This sense of Britain being in the process of reaching multiculturalism is also reflected in the following quote from Lord Mawson:

On our recent trip to Wales, we visited a church with an attached café. It was heavily subsidised by grants, a situation that is simply not going to be possible in the coming years. Over the road was a curry house, the winner of the Cardiff ‘Best Indian Restaurant’ award 2011. Did that restaurateur know anything about the culture of churches? Probably not, but did he know something about how to make a small food-based business work in the local area? Actually, yes, he did. However, the church people had no idea of his existence. He was outside the realm of their understanding even though he was a member of the local community, because they had not thought to cross the road to speak to him and learn from him.<sup>160</sup>

While this quote speaks of Indian restaurant owners’ entrepreneurial ability and local community contribution, what this and Mr Simon’s comments have in common is that this process of incorporation in society they refer to is not considered to be the responsibility of the restaurant owners and workers. It seems to be considered the responsibility of the assumed “native” group. On one hand, this could be understood in the positive sense that politicians are speaking positively about incorporating and including “outsiders” who the Indian restaurant industry represents. However, on the other hand it reveals the assumption that this group of people *are* “outside”, and it is in the power of the “native” group to include them – or not. This could be understood as a process of Othering, not just of immigrants but of British born people of a South Asian ethnic background. This is significant when you consider that, while official nationality or ethnicity figures for the Indian restaurant industry don’t exist, it is estimated that 80 – 90% of restaurateurs identify as Bangladeshi.<sup>161</sup> This becomes even more significant when you then consider that in the 2011 census, 84% of those who identified themselves as ethnically Bangladeshi reported their sense of national identity

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<sup>160</sup> Quote from Lord Mawson, "English Parish Churches. Volume 754: debated on Thursday 12 June 2014," UK Parliament, accessed 25.06.21, [hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2014-06-12/debates/14061242000654/EnglishParishChurches?highlight=recent%20trip%20wales%20visited%20church%20with%20attached%20caf%C3%A9#contribution-14061243000065](https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2014-06-12/debates/14061242000654/EnglishParishChurches?highlight=recent%20trip%20wales%20visited%20church%20with%20attached%20caf%C3%A9#contribution-14061243000065)

<sup>161</sup> Katy Gardner and Abdus Shukur, “‘I’m Bengali, I’m Asian, and I’m Living Here’: The Changing Identity of British Bengalis,” in *Desh Pardesh: The South Asian Presence in Britain*, ed. Roger Ballard (London, 1994), 142–64, 150–52

to be either British or of a specific British nation (English, Welsh, Irish or ‘other British’).<sup>162</sup>

In fact,

In 2011, the ethnic group that ranked highest (71 per cent, 319,000) in terms of association with the ‘British only’ identity was the ‘Asian/Asian British: Bangladeshi’ group. This was followed by the ‘Asian/Asian British: Pakistani’ group and ‘Asian/Asian British: Indian’ with 63 per cent, (705,000) and 58 per cent (818,000) of these ethnic groups associating with the ‘British only’ national identity respectively.<sup>163</sup>

These statistics throw into question the political stance that those who make up the Indian restaurant industry somehow need integrating into British identity. Which in turn perhaps suggests that politicians’ version of Britishness isn’t necessarily aligned with that of British Asians.

Considering the previous section’s findings about Indian food’s perceived centrality to Britishness, these findings seem to conflict. However, one way this can be understood is perhaps this shows politicians are in the process of negotiating the backlash to multiculturalism described by Tariq Modood.<sup>164</sup> How does one negotiate an industry and cultural product that has roots in Britain’s history and is statistically extremely popular, with a backlash against the very groups who produce it? One way is by carefully separating the two, and this is possibly what can be seen here – a separation of Indian food as British and the people who create it as still integrating and defined by their difference, especially in terms of ethnicity, immigration status and religion – which is discussed in more detail in the next section.

Stuart Hall argues that the experience of displacement, diaspora and migration is one of the largest influencers on the construction of contemporary identities.<sup>165</sup> With this in mind, perhaps what can be seen is an anxiety (in the form of Othering) about changes to national identity when national identity is claimed by ethnic Others born and raised in the former metropole. Barnor Hesse sums up this anxiety around British identity when it comes to British people in the following quote:

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<sup>162</sup> “2011 Census: Detailed Characteristics for England and Wales, March 2011,” Office For National Statistics, accessed 25.06.21, [www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/2011census/2013-05-16](http://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/2011census/2013-05-16)

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Tariq Modood, “A Defence of Multiculturalism,” *Soundings* 29, 29, no. 1 (2005): 62–71.

<sup>165</sup> Davis, *Understanding Stuart Hall*, 180

It might be possible to be Black-and-British or Asian-and-British (or even British and gay!) however the idea that everyone should have access to the processes by which such new forms of 'Britishness' are redefined, coupled with the loss of empire and decline as a world power, is literally driving some of its citizens crazy.<sup>166</sup>

Regardless, Perhaps one way to understand these findings is through Fish's "boutique multiculturalism" as they demonstrate that despite the love for Indian food professed, when it comes to understanding the people behind the Indian restaurant industry on their terms without stereotypes or assumptions, politics seems to be lacking.<sup>167</sup>

### **Ethnicity, Immigration and Religion**

It can't be ignored that much of the time when Indian food or restaurants are discussed it is often within the context of debates relating to ethnicity, immigration or religion. In fact, in the quotes relating to economy, culture and community, there is only one debate where the curry industry hasn't been related to ethnicity, immigration or religion. Out of 32 speeches which mention Indian food, Indian restaurants or curry, on 8 occasions the reference is in the context of immigration. After reports of an unprecedented influx of immigrants from 2004 onwards (albeit from EU countries) and plenty of negative press relating to this, one can see how immigration generally could begin to occupy politics more often.<sup>168</sup> In addition to this, it is reported that the introduction of a points based system in 2008 had a specific impact on restaurateurs who relied on importing chefs from South Asia.<sup>169</sup> Having said that, how these changes are dealt with and responded to in parliamentary debate is significant, and it can be noted that in the vast majority of instances politicians resist negativity towards the curry industry, at least when the Indian restaurant industry is referred to directly. One explanation for this could be that its central position in British culture and history – discussed in the first section of this chapter – meant it was understood by politicians to be relevant to national identity, something which all politicians are keen to represent. Perhaps this saved the Indian restaurant industry from negativity and derogatory comments in Parliament, though the same cannot necessarily be said for outside of Parliament which is dealt with in chapter three. This is certainly supported by the secondary literature on this topic, Stuart Hall for example points

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<sup>166</sup> Barnor Hesse, *Un/Settled Multiculturalisms: Diasporas, Entanglements, Transruptions* (Zed Books, 2000)238

<sup>167</sup> Fish, "Boutique Multiculturalism" 378-379

<sup>168</sup> Jamie Doward, "Eastern European immigration 'has hit low-paid Britons'," *Guardian*, January 17, 2010, [www.theguardian.com/uk/2010/jan/17/eastern-european-immigration-hits-wages](http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2010/jan/17/eastern-european-immigration-hits-wages) ; Polly Toynbee, "Immigration is now making the rich richer and the poor poorer," *Guardian*, August 11, 2006, [www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2006/aug/11/comment.politics](http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2006/aug/11/comment.politics)

<sup>169</sup> Leftly, "Curry restaurants in crisis as immigration rules keep out chefs,"

out that Britain's concept of national identity is still heavily reliant on positive views of colonial past which Indian food is closely linked to.<sup>170</sup> Narayan, Buettner, Palat and Highmore also argue that colonialism has a legacy on modern cultural identities in relation to Indian food, which in part is down to colonial nostalgia perpetuated by 1980s conservative politics.<sup>171</sup> These findings, being only 20-30 years later – with some politicians spanning the time – could demonstrate a continuation of this national sentiment that curry is close to the heart of Brits.

Regardless of whether references are positive or negative, the presence of the themes of immigration, ethnicity and religion seems to indicate the possible lens through which politicians view the Indian restaurant industry and what the people who make up the industry represent to them. That is their unbreakable association with these themes. For example, the use of the word 'ethnic' and phrases such as 'minority ethnic' are far from uncommon when discussing Indian restaurants or food. Indian restaurants seem to exist within a category of 'ethnic restaurants' and one politician even talks of going to an "ethnic chef summit" in relation to Indian cuisine in the UK.<sup>172</sup> The use of the word 'ethnic' to describe people or cultural objects from the global south has been criticised in academia from a postcolonial stand point. Heldke and Narayan both argue that eating 'ethnic food' is a shallow interest in exotic food and can be described as a form of food colonialism.<sup>173</sup> Catherine Nash in her 2003 discussion of cultural geography and anti-racism points out that one should be aware of the;

Apparently progressive approaches to culture, nationhood and ethnicity, as when multiculturalism means the consumerist commodification of 'exotic' ethnic cultures, while the geographies of segregation and racial privilege remain unchanged.<sup>174</sup>

The regular use of the catchall term 'ethnic food' for Indian foods puts it in an assumed category with all other non-white food as though they have something in common, that they are inherently 'ethnic'. This could therefore point to the exoticisation of food and indicate the superficial multiculturalism that Nash refers to.

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<sup>170</sup> Davis, *Understanding Stuart Hall*, 2, 160-180

<sup>171</sup> Buettner, "'Going for an Indian,'" 872-874; Narayan, "Eating Cultures: Incorporation, Identity and Indian Food," 63-86; Palat, "Empire, Food and the Diaspora," 175; Highmore, "The Taj Mahal in the High Street," 176

<sup>172</sup> "British Curry Industry," UK Parliament.

<sup>173</sup> Lisa M. Heldke, *Exotic Appetites*, 9; Narayan, "Eating Cultures," 63-86

<sup>174</sup> Nash quoted in Ian Cook, "Geographies of Food: Mixing," *Progress in Human Geography* 32, no. 6 (April 2016):824. doi.org/10.1177/0309132508090979

The following quote from Lord Bishop of Birmingham in a debate about Islam in 2013 provides an interesting example when considering the racial and religious association with Indian restaurants:

People who hitherto have not understood each other and not got on with each other are now able to say that they are proud to live in this country and proud to enjoy their diversity. They also are proud—as one Muslim waiter in an Indian restaurant in Birmingham seeks to do with his Bishop—to stand against those within their own community whom they feel, sadly, have become atheist.<sup>175</sup>

What is interesting about this quote is less the point that the Muslim and Christian came together to combat atheism, and more the fact that the Bishop considers the Muslim's job at an Indian restaurant relevant. This supports the idea that Indian restaurants struggle to avoid being considered first in terms of ethnicity, religion and difference in general.

Stuart Hall describes identity as an “arbitrary closure that creates a relatively fixed point at the intersection between the self and various often conflicting or competing histories or narratives.”<sup>176</sup> When considering ‘ethnic’ identities and representation in the UK, he argues “[w]ithin the narrative history of postcolonialism, being an ‘immigrant’ and being ‘black’ are two (often compounded) identities predicated on displacement and difference.”<sup>177</sup> This research shows that the same can be said for ‘Asian’, ‘Immigrant’, ‘Islam’ and ‘Indian food’. Possibly, the reproduction of these associations could be a barrier to a true multicultural national identity. Hall's assertion of the importance of representation when it comes to replacing ethnic concepts of national identity for a truly multicultural one is clear here.<sup>178</sup> One wonders if equal representation was achieved whether an inclusive multicultural concept of national identity might be more accepted in the political and public sphere.

### **Personal and Emotion Centred References**

MPs represent local communities, so it comes as no surprise that they are talking about their connections to their communities. However, the nature in which they talk about Indian restaurants – specifically considering the matters of local and personal pride – is not a given. As depicted in table 2, on 8 occasions MPs or (House of Lords) peers speak of their personal

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<sup>175</sup> Quote from Lord Bishop of Birmingham, "Islam. Volume 749: debated on Tuesday 19 November 2013," UK Parliament, accessed 25.06.21. [hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2013-11-19/debates/13111956000156/Islam?highlight=people%20hitherto%20have%20not%20understood%20each%20other#contribution-13111964000008](https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2013-11-19/debates/13111956000156/Islam?highlight=people%20hitherto%20have%20not%20understood%20each%20other#contribution-13111964000008)

<sup>176</sup> Davis, Understanding Stuart Hall, 179

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid, 160-180



experience or connection to Indian restaurants, most of which are unprovoked comments and unrelated to the purpose of the debate. In each case the comment is positive, whether that's happy memories of eating with colleagues after a long day canvassing, or fierce pride in a local restaurant's achievements in competitions. This positivity is emotion led, the statements revolve around feelings of community, family, pride, empathy and philanthropy. Matt Western, Labour MP, goes as far as claiming that a good range of Indian restaurants is a key attribute to the happiness of an area.<sup>179</sup>

*Table 2: Quotes asserting personal connection and appeal to emotion in chronological order*

Year	Debate	Speaker	Quote
2004	Welsh Affairs	Don Touhig (Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales)	Speaking of conservative MP Bill Wiggin: "I commend [Mr Wiggin's] website to my hon. Friends, which shows him posing with Labour Ministers—he also finds room for pictures of his hairdresser and of the owner of his local Indian restaurant" <sup>1</sup>
2007	Anti-Drug Awareness	Bob Spink (UKIP MP)	"[I] held for the church yet another charity event—the third in two years— to raise money to buy the kit. We had a curry night at the Tandoori Parlour, a superb Indian restaurant, on Hart road, and we raised £1,100 clear profit" <sup>1</sup>
2007	Education: 10 Year Strategy	Baroness Walmsley	"My husband and I will head up to Aboyne, a town in Scotland with an Indian takeaway where we often get our supper.... [story of money being raised for youth centre] No doubt we shall pass it next week when we go for our Indian takeaway." <sup>1</sup>
2009	The Curry Crisis	Anne Main	Competing over whose constituency has the most curry restaurants: "I have about 30 curry restaurants in St. Albans. Indeed, one was the runner-up in the Tiffin curry cup, so I ask the Minister to mind his words" <sup>1</sup>

<sup>179</sup> Quote from Matt Western, "Leaving the EU: Data Protection. Volume 629: debated on Thursday 12 October 2017," UK Parliament, accessed 25.06.21. /hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2017-10-12/debates/20F0DCC3-149D-470D-8AF0-2DE02400D4D0/LeavingTheEUDataProtection?highlight=constituency%20not%20only%20happiest%20place#contribution-F3631F7A-5BE8-47E3-88B2-0A56FE6CAFF4

		Sion Simon	“I myself have the privilege to represent a constituency in the city of Birmingham, in which I grew up. Birmingham is widely acknowledged as the curry capital of Christendom and the birthplace of balti.” <sup>1</sup>
<b>2016</b>	Easter Adjournment	Ian Blackford (Scottish National Party MP)	“Let me give three examples of how pensioners are affected. Abhik Bonnerjee, now 73, moved from India to Glasgow in 1960. He worked in the UK for 38 years, in shipbuilding, steel manufacture and the food industry. He also owned an Indian restaurant for six years.” <sup>1</sup>
<b>2017</b>	Leaving the EU: Data Protection	Matt Western (Labour MP)	“My constituency is not only the happiest place in the UK. Apparently, it was one of the first provincial towns in England to possess the other key attribute of happiness —a good range of Indian restaurants.”
<b>2017</b>	Leaving the EU & Data Protection	Rachel Maclean (Conservative MP)	“Imagine my pride when Mr Emdadul Hussain, the chef at Redolence Spice in Redditch, took the Tiffin cup—the most fiercely fought competition held in this place.”
<b>2020</b>	Commonwealth in 2020	Claudia Webbe (Labour MP)	“[There is] no better vegetarian curry house than in my constituency of Leicester East.”

The fact that MPs talk about their personal experiences of eating at these restaurants is significant. To eat someone’s food does not automatically reflect acceptance, but it does indicate a level of trust and the emotions contained in the language also reflect a sense of commonality with restaurant owners and staff. Something, which as we will see in chapter three, is far from the case in the *Guardian* publications and comments. However, another way to interpret these references on a political level is by considering the highly stratified class-based organisation of British society. As discussed in chapter one, the visit to the Indian restaurant has long been considered a working-class pastime.<sup>180</sup> In a 2017 study carried out by the Social Mobility Commission, it was found that 49% of Brits consider themselves working class.<sup>181</sup> Perhaps a simple reason for this emphasis on personal connection with Indian restaurants is politician’s age old attempt to identify with the working class, a group

<sup>180</sup> Buettner, ““Going for an Indian,”” 886; Fielding, “Currying Flavor,” 41-42.

<sup>181</sup> Social Mobility Commission, “Social Mobility Barometer,” June 2017, [assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/618627/Social\\_Mobility\\_Barometer.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/618627/Social_Mobility_Barometer.pdf)

that can struggle to identify with MPs due to class distinction (not least House of Lords peers who are traditionally seen as upper class).

In one interesting case, Ian Blackford, Scottish National Party MP, includes the fact that one of his constituents was, some years ago, an Indian restaurant owner when discussing his (much later and unrelated) injustice by the government in relation to his pension. This use of his history as an Indian restaurant owner seems to serve the purpose of gaining support for his plight as a former worker and good British citizen, who is being treated unjustly by the pension system.<sup>182</sup> This shows how someone's history as an Indian restaurant owner is used to increase empathy and solidarity and this use may be explained through the link between Indian restaurants and national identity discussed in section one of this chapter.

In conclusion, in answer to my research sub-question: What is Indian food's connection to British national identity, and where are the boundaries of this? Indian food has a secure position in national identity, perhaps due to its ability to bridge British colonial history with modern day multiculturalism in a subtle and seemingly non-contentious way. A politician's work in part is to draw on national histories that unite and get votes. Because of this it seems Indian food has become a politician's dream reference and that is reflected in the sheer number of references and the positive nature of them, as well as the personal anecdotes positioning politicians as personal friends of the Indian restaurant industry. Additionally, Indian food is possibly being used as a device to identify with the British working class generally, rather than specific British ethnic minorities. However, if you scratch the surface of many of these comments it can be said that in discrete and likely unintentional ways, old tropes and stereotypes show through. The idea that (white) Britain is in the process of incorporating ethnic Others comes through strongly and conflicts with statistical data on ethnicity and national identity. Likewise, the common and consistent connection of Indian food with religion, immigration and just 'ethnic' in general points to a postcolonial tendency to connect these concepts and identify them together, not dissimilar to what Stuart Hall had highlighted in the context of representation of black Britons.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Quote from Ian Blackford, "Easter Adjournment" UK Parliament

<sup>183</sup> Davis, *Understanding Stuart Hall*, 179

## Chapter 3. The Perpetuation of Colonial Era Stereotypes

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This chapter focusses on some excerpts from the 131 news articles considered for this thesis. Through discourse analysis it examines the tone and thematic similarities in comments as well as the general topic or title of the article. It looks at the more loaded discussions that link to stereotypes and identities rather than more simple content such as recipe lists. While the previous chapter dealt with the largely political praise of Indian restaurants due to their contribution to national culture, identity and the economy, this chapter deals with the denigration in the media of precisely the Indian restaurants that were responsible for Indian food's success in Britain. It finds some telling ways in which Indian restaurants are referred to in the media which connect closely with discourses of race, colonialism and class and is dedicated to dismantling the use of language and stereotypes to describe Indian restaurants against academic literature and historical context. It categorises the themes and trends in the types of comments made, which I argue amount to a strong stigmatisation of the traditional Indian restaurant in the UK, embedded in colonial history.

Specifically, it looks at the themes of deceit, lack of skill in cooking, the negative characterisation of the healthiness of Indian restaurant food, lack of hygiene in Indian kitchens and the characterisation of eating Indian food as a guilty pastime. It is true that there was also a lot of positivity in recipe articles promoting and describing various Indian foods, however, negative reader comments often overshadowed this, regularly describing Indian food as gloop or slop for example. It is worth noting that according to Atlas.ti's sentiment analysis, which analyses how many comments have either a positive, negative or neutral tone, the number of negative quotes were double that of the positive ones generally which warrants an in-depth analysis of what these comments relate to, and how they could potentially be explained.

### **Untrustworthiness**

Repeated characterisations of deceit and fakery of Bangladeshi restaurateurs can be seen in the *Guardian* sources in varying ways. For example, in a 2002 article aimed at discussing modern developments in Indian cuisine in the UK, *Guardian* journalist Geraldine Bedall

refers to dishes served in traditional Indian restaurants as “concoctions”,<sup>184</sup> a term that denotes not just something which is ‘made’ but ‘made up’ to suit a purpose.<sup>185</sup> She also uses the term “formula” to describe all Indian restaurateurs’ recipes, which becomes especially significant in the deceitful sense when it’s considered against the backdrop of the often perpetuated sentiment within Indian food culture that ‘real’ food is from the heart and family, and is unique to each home.<sup>186</sup> Hence, the use of a formula connotes a replicable shortcut method, in other words, betrayal of tradition. On top of this, she turns to Pat Chapman – a white British curry fan club founder – to reveal the secrets of the curry chef, which are:

The classic curry gravy will include taste enhancers, such as 'factory-bottled curry paste, garam masala, asafoetida, fenugreek seeds and even some chemicals, Monosodium glutamate enhances taste and thickens sauces. The restaurateur achieves his bright oranges, reds, yellows and brown colours using powdered food colouring and then there's tinned tomatoes and tomato puree and ketchup, and sweeteners such as sugar or even pureed mango chutney.<sup>187</sup>

Firstly, the choice to go to Pat Chapman specifically to reveal ‘the truth’ about Indian restaurant ingredients is significant. It indicates she considers that Chapman can be better trusted than any of the thousands of chefs who actually cook Indian food for a living. The main difference that cannot be ignored between Chapman and Bangladeshi chefs is ethnicity. This allegiance therefore points to distrust of a group that coincides with a particular ethnic group, a racial power and trust dynamic which reflects that of British Imperial history. Secondly, while they may sound scary, the vast majority of the ingredients quoted are completely natural (Monosodium glutamate, scaremongering of which has been linked to anti-Chinese racism; garam masala; fenugreek seeds and asafoetida, the last three essential ingredients in lots of Indian cooking) and the rest are completely safe, regularly eaten and utilised by chefs (ketchup, tomato puree, curry paste, food colouring, tinned tomatoes, sugar).<sup>188</sup> Therefore, Bedall’s linguistic framing of the use of these ingredients as a revelation becomes all the more meaningful, as it indicates prior deceit. Further emphasising doubt, Bedall directly asks the reader after listing these ingredients “Still fancy that chicken

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<sup>184</sup> Geraldine Bedall, “It’s Curry, But Not as We Know It,” *Guardian*, May 12, 2002, [www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2002/may/12/foodanddrink.shopping2](http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2002/may/12/foodanddrink.shopping2).

<sup>185</sup> “Concoction,” Oxford English Dictionary, accessed 30.03.21, [www.oed-com.eur.idm.oclc.org/view/Entry/38329?redirectedFrom=concoction#eid](http://www.oed-com.eur.idm.oclc.org/view/Entry/38329?redirectedFrom=concoction#eid).

<sup>186</sup> Parama Roy, “Reading Communities and Culinary Communities,” 471-502.

<sup>187</sup> Bedall, “It’s Curry,”

<sup>188</sup> Amanda Wahlstedt et al., “MSG Is A-OK: Exploring the Xenophobic History of and Best Practices for Consuming Monosodium Glutamate,” *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*, 2021.

madras?”<sup>189</sup> Considering that “language is not a neutral vehicle for knowledge to be transferred, as meaning is created and changed in the process”, the examples quoted in this section demonstrate that Bedall’s specific choice of words amount to the subtle attribution of deceit to the traditional Bangladeshi restaurateur.<sup>190</sup> This characterisation points to a moral discourse of truth and lying, which is embedded in the common colonial discourse of the oriental Other as slippery and untrustworthy.<sup>191</sup>

Further examples of deceit and untrustworthiness on the part of South Asian restaurateurs can be seen in both published articles and reader comments. For example, *Guardian* journalist Tony Naylor in his take on how to eat curry, in his regular column “How to Eat...” warns readers not to trust the Indian restaurant: “beware the award-winning Indian restaurant. There seem to be thousands, many touting gongs from unknown bodies, which date back years, if not decades.”<sup>192</sup> In response to various articles about Indian food, readers discuss in the open comments section how many of them have been “conned by being served poor quality generic meat-in-sauce dishes masquerading as Indian food from restaurants and takeaways that are little more than fronts for illegal immigration”.<sup>193</sup> They theorise that the restaurant descriptions of take-out dishes are assumed to be “copied from the labels on the tins of sauce,” because they are allegedly all identical.<sup>194</sup>

In 2007, Warren Murray now a US/UK/Asia political affairs editor responded in a published article to a reader comment regarding the fact that a lot of Indian restaurants are run by people of Bangladeshi origin. The reader suggests that in itself is deceit (due to the difference in nationality from the food they serve). Murray’s response doesn’t particularly challenge that notion: “‘Brits are so gullible - most of the Indian restaurants in the UK are run by Bangladeshis.’ Thank you, Ms Greer, but hmm, is that a sign of British gullibility or the restaurateurs’ own opportunism/dishonesty?”.<sup>195</sup> One commenter in a discussion about the classic Indian restaurant dish, the ‘balti’, similarly characterises the Indian restaurateur as crafty, and the British customer as innocent, naïvely falling for their tricks: “It always was a

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<sup>189</sup> Bedall, “It’s Curry,”

<sup>190</sup> Taylor, *What Is Discourse Analysis?* 18

<sup>191</sup> McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism*, 52-55

<sup>192</sup> Tony Naylor, “How to Eat: Curry,” *Guardian*, November 29, 2013, [www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/wordofmouth/2013/nov/29/how-to-eat-curry-take-away](http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/wordofmouth/2013/nov/29/how-to-eat-curry-take-away)

<sup>193</sup> Published reader comment, Tony Naylor, “Supermarket curries: second to naan?,” *Guardian*, May 21, 2013, [www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/wordofmouth/2013/may/21/supermarket-curries-taste-test](http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/wordofmouth/2013/may/21/supermarket-curries-taste-test)

<sup>194</sup> Published reader comment, Homa Khaleeli, “The Curry Crisis,” *Guardian*, January 8, 2012, [www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2012/jan/08/britains-curry-crisis-chefs-immigration](http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2012/jan/08/britains-curry-crisis-chefs-immigration)

<sup>195</sup> Warren Murray, “How do you cure your curry cravings?,” *Guardian*, July 19, 2007, [www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/wordofmouth/2007/jul/19/howdoyoucureyourcurrycra#comment-2640458](http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/wordofmouth/2007/jul/19/howdoyoucureyourcurrycra#comment-2640458)

garish mismatched mess of incompatible ingredients they couldn't find any way to sell otherwise, gobbled down by gullible punters. But we've all been tempted if we're honest".<sup>196</sup> Like in the case of Bedall these comments reflect the colonial stereotype of lying and deceit on the part of the colonial subject, who is assumed to be lacking integrity.<sup>197</sup> The last two quotes also especially exemplify a recurring character of the British customer, as innocently being seduced or fooled against their will. This could be considered an example of the West "fashioning an image of itself, by comparing itself beneficially to a worse counterpart", a binary dynamic which is understood to be central to colonial discourse.<sup>198</sup>

### **Standardisation, Unskilled Chefs and Poor Quality Ingredients**

A further iteration of the stigmatisation of Indian restaurants, and closely linked to that of deceit and untrustworthiness, is through the perpetuation of the idea that all Indian restaurant food is batch cooked by unskilled chefs and of poor quality. This sentiment is perfectly exemplified by Geraldine Bedall's article discussed in the previous section. It starts by referring to Indian restaurants as the "Balti Houses and Rajput Tandooris", she asserts that "each and every one of them has the same menu", that you can find "identical lamb pasandas and chicken vindaloos in Bradford and Brick Lane, Alderley Edge and Virginia Water" and "all available dishes were based on a couple of sauces".<sup>199</sup> She refers again to "the homogeneity of Indian food" and the recipes being a single "formula" and then moves on to determine that the reason for this is because the restaurateurs are mostly the same.<sup>200</sup> Bedall says "we all know why this happened, more than 90% of Indian restaurants in Britain are owned and run by Bangladeshis"<sup>201</sup>. What all these quotes have in common is they emphasise the sameness of Indian restaurant food, and then explain it as naturally flowing from the Bangladeshi identity of the restaurateurs. Bedall indicates that the given the "90% Bangladeshi" statistic we shouldn't be surprised that the food is poor quality and identical. In other words, the characteristics of the food flow from the people who make it. One explanation for the negative association specifically singling out Bangladeshis could be due

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<sup>196</sup> Published reader comment, "Is the 'classic' Balti curry dying out?," *Guardian*, October 12, 2014, [www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/shortcuts/2014/oct/12/is-the-balti-dying-out-birmingham-madhur-jaffrey](http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/shortcuts/2014/oct/12/is-the-balti-dying-out-birmingham-madhur-jaffrey)

<sup>197</sup> McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism*, 39

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> Bedall, "It's Curry,"

<sup>200</sup> Bedall, "It's Curry,"

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

to increased islamophobia against Pakistanis and Bangladeshis in the UK which seeped into the treatment of Indian food especially following the 9/11 terror attack.<sup>202</sup>

When discussing the start of the Indian restaurant boom in the UK, Bedall argues, “most of the would-be restaurateurs hadn’t been cooks at home, so it almost didn’t matter what food they made. (There is a theory that if the garment trade had remained more successful, there would have been no Indian restaurant explosion)”.<sup>203</sup> this comment characterises thousands of Bangladeshi immigrants, not as individuals but as the same, simple and predictable. It assumes, on the basis of their ethnicity, that they would all chose the same, purely circumstantial career direction. It undermines the agency and entrepreneurship of those who did open restaurants (and in turn created a new industry), and instead speculates on their previous credentials, indicating a lack of purpose and integrity in their work.

In the comments section to articles about Indian food, many other examples can be found that indicate sameness and poor quality of all or most Indian restaurants in the UK. The key here is that the critique is applied to all or most restaurants in the whole of the UK. Table 3 highlights some of the most overt examples:

*Table 3. Derogatory quotes regarding poor quality, skill and standardisation.*

Year	Article Title	Quote
2014	How to Make The Perfect Chicken Tikka Masala	“It will certainly be a lot nicer than the disgusting ‘one-pot-masala’ simmering away in the kitchens of most cheap British curry restaurants, waiting to have some tinned Carnation Milk added to it for tikka masala, or some chillies for chicken jalfrezi or some onions for lamb dopiaza, and which will go into every sauce, making everything taste the same. I find it hilarious that some posters here are actually recommending this horrible dodge, which is just a cost-cutting measure to avoid having to bother to cook the food properly.” <sup>204</sup>
2016	Curry Restaurants in Crisis as	“What you usually find in restaurants and takeaways are meals that all share the same base (a gravy if you like) sauce, giving most dishes a uniformity (also speeding up the process of delivering). This method

<sup>202</sup> Buettner, “Chicken Tikka Masala, Flock Wallpaper, and “Real” Home Cooking,”” 891-892

<sup>203</sup> Bedall, “It’s Curry,”

<sup>204</sup> Published reader comment, Felicity Cloake, “How to Make The Perfect Chicken Tikka Masala,” *Guardian*, April 24, 2014, [www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/wordofmouth/2014/apr/24/how-to-cook-perfect-chicken-tikka-masala](http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/wordofmouth/2014/apr/24/how-to-cook-perfect-chicken-tikka-masala)



	Immigration Rules Keep Out Chefs	requires little of the skill of creating and building spice blends and favours you'd more typically find in Asia. You need a decent chef for this.” <sup>205</sup>
		“British curry is indeed a thing that is made for us. It's basically the same base sauce with a few different bits thrown in per dish. It's just bright red stuff that's all very similar that we like to think is curry.” <sup>206</sup>
<b>2012</b>	The Curry Crisis	“Curry 'chefs', my ass. This must be the biggest insult ever to anyone who is a real chef. Pouring ready-made sauces over half-rotten meat can't be too difficult for the legions of un/underemployed Asian (or other) youths in this country.” <sup>207</sup>

There is some variety in these comments, but they all have a demeaning tone and mainly focus on lack of skill or ability to cook food ‘properly’, lack of authenticity and cheapness of ingredients, all resulting in an assumption of standardised and disgusting food in all Indian restaurants in the UK. It is worth mentioning that one lonely and anonymous commenter does challenge the veracity of these assumptions on a racial and colonial level:

Your intelligence-poor rant is racist. You offer no proof to back up your claim of sauces poured over half rotten meat as being confined to Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi restaurants. Exactly the same claim was used against the French of a time when the British referred to them as Johnny-foreigner. You are so nineteenth century.<sup>208</sup>

However, this is certainly an exception, and the comments in the table are the rule. By repeatedly asserting the sameness and one dimensionality of Indian food and (in the case of Bedall) explaining this through the sameness and one dimensionality of the individuals who run the restaurants, a one-dimensional and entirely knowable identity is constructed, applying to all Indian restaurants and restaurateurs in the UK. Especially in the case of Bedall, the line is often blurred between human and food product. In a similar sense the Indian restaurant waiter is also repeatedly characterised in the same way, as solemn and disapproving, giving “filthy looks” and being “miserable gits”.<sup>209</sup>

<sup>205</sup> Published reader comment, Leftly, “Curry restaurants in crisis as immigration rules keep out chefs,”

<sup>206</sup> Ibid, Published reader comment

<sup>207</sup> Published reader comment, Khaleeli, “The Curry Crisis,”

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

<sup>209</sup> Published reader comment, Naylor, “How to Eat: Curry,”; Jay Raynor, “We Wish You a Curry Christmas,” *Guardian*, December 8, 2002, [www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2002/dec/08/foodanddrink.shopping6](http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2002/dec/08/foodanddrink.shopping6) ;

One way these characterisations could be understood is as “manifest Orientalism”.<sup>210</sup> Edward Said points out that the “latent orientalist knowledge” of the general sameness of oriental characters – produced through centuries of colonial discourse – is a common stereotype, and robs the oriental subjects of individuality.<sup>211</sup> It could be argued, therefore, that orientalism manifests in these texts through the choice to focus only on the sameness and one-dimensionality of these individuals and establishments (who in reality comprise of thousands of individuals and restaurants). This is exacerbated by the added stereotype of deceit. Together these stereotypes paint a picture of Indian restaurateurs as deceitful, predictable people. When a person experiences a restaurant serving similarly named dishes or poor quality food this seems to only reinforce or prove the stereotype as it is immediately explained through characteristic untrustworthiness, rather than a plethora of other reasons any restaurateur might serve a dish that isn’t of the best quality.

Additionally, it’s worth considering that the given ‘truth’ of the poor quality and standardisation of Indian food – which Bedall asserts is common knowledge – in the context of Foucault’s knowledge/power concept. Foucault stresses we must understand discourse in terms of highlighting that knowledge isn’t just an expression of internal ideas.<sup>212</sup> His work shows that discourse produces knowledges that are neither neutral nor observant.<sup>213</sup> In this case the knowledge of the sameness of Indian food in the UK is very real but a way of thinking which has been formed within the specific context of postcolonial racism and colonial stereotypes.

While Bedall’s article was published in 2002, the rest of the comments found that match Bedall’s sentiment were actually written within the last 8 years. Less harsh critique relating to colonial stereotypes were found in published articles in recent years. Perhaps this can be explained through an increased awareness of racial stereotypes in recent years especially considering the *Black Lives Matter* critique on the depiction of racial stereotypes in popular media, which has far from been ignore by the press.<sup>214</sup> The *Guardian* markets itself

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Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, “Why The Future May Not Be Orange,” *Guardian*, July 13, 2001, [www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2001/jul/13/features11.g21](http://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2001/jul/13/features11.g21)

<sup>210</sup> McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism*, 51-52

<sup>211</sup> Ibid, 52-55

<sup>212</sup> Mills, *Discourse*, 20-24

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

<sup>214</sup> Elgar Johnson, “Why we need to work harder, faster and stronger to make stereotypes a thing of the past,” *GQ Magazine*, June 18, 2020, [www.gq-magazine.co.uk/politics/article/british-black-lives-matter](http://www.gq-magazine.co.uk/politics/article/british-black-lives-matter); Naga Munchetty, “Naga Munchetty: It’s time to talk about race,” *BBC*, March 8, 2021 [www.bbc.com/news/stories-56253480](http://www.bbc.com/news/stories-56253480);

as the world's leading liberal newspaper so perhaps anti-racism movements have led to a better understanding of racial stereotyping in recent years. But these findings show that a slightly increased sensitivity to colonial stereotypes in publishing in recent years has not gone too far in terms of changing the reader's tendency to resort to them to explain various phenomena in the curry industry.

### Health, Hygiene and Safety

Concerns over the healthiness of Indian restaurant food and the hygienic conditions in which it is produced generally gain attention from the media. The stories relating to health and hygiene can be categories in three ways. Either they concern revelations of poor hygiene conditions of kitchens, negligence regarding ingredients, or fears over salt and fat levels in dishes. Table 4 categorises the articles relating to health, hygiene and safety.

Table 4. Articles focussing on poor health, hygiene and safety

Year	Title of Article	Theme
2004	"Dangerous Dye Levels' Found in Tikka" <sup>215</sup>	Negligence regarding ingredients
2004	"The Colour of a Curry May Make it Look Better, But is it Good for You?" <sup>216</sup>	
2008	"Mouthful of Curry Kills Father of Four" <sup>217</sup>	
2011	"Pair in Hospital After Kismot 'Killer' Curry Contest" <sup>218</sup>	
2014	"Lamb curry or chicken? Could you Identify the Meat in an Indian Takeaway?" <sup>219</sup>	
2016	"Restaurant Owner Jailed for Six Years Over Death of Peanut Allergy Customer" <sup>220</sup>	

<sup>215</sup> Press Association, "'Dangerous dye levels' found in tikka," *Guardian*, March 23, 2004, [www.theguardian.com/uk/2004/mar/23/foodanddrink](http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2004/mar/23/foodanddrink)

<sup>216</sup> James Meikle, "The colour of a curry may make it look better - but is it good for you?," *Guardian*, March 24, 2004, [www.theguardian.com/uk/2004/mar/24/foodanddrink](http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2004/mar/24/foodanddrink)

<sup>217</sup> Press Association, "Mouthful of curry kills father of four," *Guardian*, November 20, 2008, [www.theguardian.com/uk/2008/nov/20/curry-kills-durham-man](http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2008/nov/20/curry-kills-durham-man)

<sup>218</sup> "Pair in hospital after Kismot 'killer' curry contest," *BBC*, October 5, 2011, [www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-edinburgh-east-fife-15183070](http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-edinburgh-east-fife-15183070)

<sup>219</sup> Felicity Cloake, "Lamb curry or chicken? Could you identify the meat in an Indian takeaway?," *Guardian*, April 17, 2014, [www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/wordofmouth/2014/apr/17/takeaway-curry-lamb-chicken-which-survey-meat](http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/wordofmouth/2014/apr/17/takeaway-curry-lamb-chicken-which-survey-meat)

<sup>220</sup> Press Association, "Restaurant owner jailed for six years over death of peanut allergy customer," *Guardian*, May 4, 2016, [www.theguardian.com/society/2016/may/23/restaurant-owner-mohammed-zaman-guilty-of-manslaughter-of-peanut-allergy-customer](http://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/may/23/restaurant-owner-mohammed-zaman-guilty-of-manslaughter-of-peanut-allergy-customer)

<b>2004</b>	“Cromer restaurant closed after cockroach found in curry” <sup>221</sup>	Hygiene issues
<b>2014</b>	“Bengal Spices curry house fined £10,000 over rat droppings” <sup>222</sup>	Hygiene issues
<b>2016</b>	“Spice gull: seabird turns orange after falling into vat of curry” <sup>223</sup>	
<b>2016</b>	“Shajan restaurant sues over 'mouse in curry' claim” <sup>224</sup>	
<b>2001</b>	“Alarm over salt levels in curry” <sup>225</sup>	Health fears
<b>2011</b>	“Two of the nation's favourite Indian and Chinese takeaway dishes can contain illegally high levels of certain colourings, a snapshot study suggests.” <sup>226</sup>	
<b>2011</b>	“Bradford restaurant in lower-fat curry bid” <sup>227</sup>	
<b>2020</b>	“South Shields Indian takeaway rejected over obesity fears” <sup>228</sup>	

In total, 15 articles focus negatively on the health, hygiene or safety of Indian food. That makes up 11.5% of the total sample of 131 articles concerning Indian food, and doesn't take into account the many individual points made within articles and reader comments on this topic. By contrast, only two headlines were found that portrayed Indian food in a positive light when it came to health, and these mainly concerned the ingredient of turmeric's health benefits. First in 2012 “Curry chemical's ability to fight cancer put to the test” and second in 2014 “Brain repair 'may be boosted by curry spice’”.<sup>229</sup> Lack of hygiene represents another

<sup>221</sup> “Cromer restaurant closed after cockroach found in curry,” *BBC*, January, 29, 2014, [www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-norfolk-25947473](http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-norfolk-25947473)

<sup>222</sup> “Bengal Spices curry house fined £10,000 over rat droppings,” *BBC*, April 2, 2014, [/www.bbc.com/news/uk-wales-mid-wales-26858064](http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-wales-mid-wales-26858064)

<sup>223</sup> Press Association, “Spice gull: seabird turns orange after falling into vat of curry,” *Guardian*, June 9, 2016, [www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/jun/09/seagull-turns-orange-after-falling-into-vat-of-chicken-tikka-masala](http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/jun/09/seagull-turns-orange-after-falling-into-vat-of-chicken-tikka-masala)

<sup>224</sup> “Shajan restaurant sues over 'mouse in curry' claim,” *BBC*, September 29, 2016, [www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-lancashire-37509230](http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-lancashire-37509230)

<sup>225</sup> Press Association, “Alarm over salt levels in curry,” *Guardian*, April 29, 2010, [www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2010/apr/29/alarm-salt-levels-curry](http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2010/apr/29/alarm-salt-levels-curry)

<sup>226</sup> “Takeaway dishes high in colourings, says study,” *Guardian*, September 3, 2011, [www.bbc.com/news/health-14768096](http://www.bbc.com/news/health-14768096)

<sup>227</sup> “Bradford restaurant in lower-fat curry bid,” *BBC*, August 15, 2011, [www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-leeds-14508720](http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-leeds-14508720)

<sup>228</sup> “South Shields Indian takeaway rejected over obesity fears,” *BBC*, December 24, 2020, [www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-tyne-55434985](http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-tyne-55434985)

<sup>229</sup> “Curry chemical's ability to fight cancer put to the test,” *BBC*, May 7, 2012, [www.bbc.com/news/health-17959521](http://www.bbc.com/news/health-17959521) ; Smitha Mundasad, “Brain repair 'may be boosted by curry spice',” *BBC*, September 26, 2014, [www.bbc.com/news/health-29361351](http://www.bbc.com/news/health-29361351)

colonial stereotype that has been identified previously by Edward Said as well as other academic articles dedicated to the analysis of colonial power dynamics.<sup>230</sup> The findings of this section simply demonstrates another cultural sphere in which this stereotype exists.

Positivity regarding the healthiness of Indian foods is focussed on more subtly within recipe articles and interviews pieces from celebrity British Asian chefs. For example in 2008 Anjum Anand, a middle-class British Indian TV chef and cookbook writer, stresses the healthiness of Indian food by pointing to a generational difference in cooking “I cook like someone of our generation. I lighten everything. I freshen everything”.<sup>231</sup> This sentiment is shared by Vicky Bhogal another Indian cookbook writer whose book *Cooking Like Mummyji* claims real Indian food cooked by British Asians is modern, light and healthy.<sup>232</sup> Bhogal stresses this point in her *Guardian* interview “[the Indian food] I was raised on is lighter, fresher and has a breadth of flavours, brought about by using different ingredients and cooking methods. We prefer to steam vegetables through with a chiffon-like whisper of aromatic spices”.<sup>233</sup> In another interview in 2013 Anjum Anand again stresses the healthiness of her food, by distancing herself from the anglicised version served mainly by Bangladeshis: “I’d realised that there were no fresh Indian sauces on the market. In Britain, people are used to Indian restaurant food, which uses a lot of ghee. Yet traditionally, Indian food is healthy and nutritious. I wanted to introduce an authentic range of fresh, rustic Punjabi sauces, and not anglicised at all”.<sup>234</sup>

One way to understand these comments is as a reaction to the negative press about Indian food discussed previously. Boghal and Anand prove the healthiness of their Indian food either by distinguishing it from the anglicised/Bangladeshi version or by stressing their modern approach. Perhaps they are aligning themselves with the new wave of modern Indian restaurants opened at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which catered to a middle-class clientele and stressed their Hindu origins and healthy dishes, distancing themselves from the largely Muslim Bangladeshi restaurants serving meat based curries which were regarded as

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<sup>230</sup> James Anthony Mangan, ed. *The Imperial curriculum: Racial images and education in the British colonial experience*. (Routledge, 2012), 30; Said, *Orientalism*, 167; Mohammad Ayub Jajja, “A Passage to India: The Colonial Discourse and The Representation of India and Indian as Stereotypes.” *Gomal University Journal of Research* 29, no. 1 (2013). 43-44

<sup>231</sup> Anita Sethi, “Indian made effortless,” *Guardian*, August 20, 2008, [www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2008/aug/20/foodanddrink.recipe](http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2008/aug/20/foodanddrink.recipe)

<sup>232</sup> Vicky Bhogal, “Behind closed doors,” *Guardian*, August 20, 2005, [www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2005/aug/20/foodanddrink.shopping](http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2005/aug/20/foodanddrink.shopping)

<sup>233</sup> Ibid

<sup>234</sup> Dale Berning, “This is what Indian food is supposed to taste like,” *Guardian*, February 23, 2013, [www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2013/feb/23/what-indian-food-is-supposed-to-taste-like](http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2013/feb/23/what-indian-food-is-supposed-to-taste-like)

anglicised.<sup>235</sup> This could also be understood through the historically highly class-based Indian society, where Indians of higher castes consider their status as superior to Muslim Bangladeshis and Pakistanis, and this is especially expressed through taboos and moral and medical beliefs relating to food.<sup>236</sup>

Regardless, the anglicisation of Indian food is categorised as the source of the unhealthy Indian food and stigmatised, and ‘real’ Indian food is separated and categorised as healthy and fresh. This is also reflected in the following comment which attempts to shift the stigma that Indian food has accumulated back onto Brits: “Indian food is usually dry, lightly spiced and based on seasonal pulses and vegetables. But most Brits would never go for that. Therefore British Indian food is a wet, rich, oily, highly spiced gravy with lumps of chicken or lamb in it”.<sup>237</sup> This connects closely to chapter four, which discusses the concept of authenticity in detail and its social meaning especially when considering hybrid cultures. For the purposes of this chapter, it is worth noting that there are two directly competing discourses, that is Indian food as unhealthy compared to British or ‘Western’ food, and Indian food as actually much more healthy than the British version of it.

### **Guilt, Temptation and Desire**

Possibly unsurprisingly, considering the previous sections of this chapter, positivity about the traditional ‘British Indian’ food that makes up the majority of Indian restaurants in the UK is limited, and it tends to come in the form of vocabulary that indicates ‘guilty pleasure’. The tone of guilt or seduction is used to describe the pull of British Indian restaurant food. On six occasions Britain's affinity for Indian food is described specifically as a “love affair” and similarly dishes are often described in vocabulary that hints at illicit seduction or guilty pleasure.<sup>238</sup> A classic example is that of novelist Howard Jacobson's *Guardian* article describing his visit to an upmarket modern Indian restaurant, longing for an old-fashioned curry: “The other day, at an Indian restaurant of the sort you wear a jacket to, a waiter dressed like Aladdin's genie positioned himself salaciously at my ear and in a low voice asked me to

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<sup>235</sup> Buettner, ““Going for an Indian,”” 895

<sup>236</sup> Zubaida, “The Idea of 'Indian Food,’” 191-209; Appadurai, “How to make a National Cuisine,” 5

<sup>237</sup> Published reader comment, Bee Wilson, “Who killed the great British curry house?,” *Guardian*, January 12, 2017, [www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2017/jan/12/who-killed-the-british-curry-house](http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2017/jan/12/who-killed-the-british-curry-house)

<sup>238</sup> Published reader comment, Felicity Cloake, “How to cook perfect dal,” *Guardian*, June 2, 2011, [www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2011/jun/02/how-to-cook-perfect-dal](http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2011/jun/02/how-to-cook-perfect-dal); Emma Featherstone, “Dishoom's co-founder on our love affair with Indian food,” *Guardian*, Jun 17, 2016, [www.theguardian.com/small-business-network/2016/jun/17/dishoom-cofounder-love-affair-indian-food](http://www.theguardian.com/small-business-network/2016/jun/17/dishoom-cofounder-love-affair-indian-food); “The best ever curries,” *Guardian*, August 20, 2006, [www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2006/aug/20/foodanddrink.features](http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2006/aug/20/foodanddrink.features); *BBC*, “Curry Capital: Bradford takes title for fifth consecutive year”; Bedall, “It's curry,”; Rayner “We wish you a curry Christmas”

confide my secret longings... This was not the first time the genie of contemporary Indian cuisine had whispered hotly in my neck”.<sup>239</sup> In another case the author suggests one can be forgiven for the misdemeanour of eating curry, especially because they have been innocently seduced by it in their moment of (drunk) weakness: “Though the food may be irresistible in its way, especially on a Saturday night after a few pints, it's not exactly of the highest quality”.<sup>240</sup> While this is another example of the British customer being characterised as the innocent victim, discussed in section one of this chapter, it also encompasses a sense of ‘guilty pleasure’ with a distinctively sexual tone, which again could be understood through colonial stereotypes.

The colonial stereotype of the oriental Other in sexual terms is not new. As identified by Parama Roy, even Madhur Jaffrey has capitalised on this stereotype, emphasising the seductiveness of Indian cuisine.<sup>241</sup> Edward Said argues a common orientalist stereotype is the Orient being characterised as feminine in comparison to the masculine West.<sup>242</sup> The way the Orient is feminised is through understanding male and female oriental characters as well as oriental culture as submissive, exotic and concerned with the physical body rather than the mind.<sup>243</sup> Said explains this as a projection based on what the West considers itself to be, which is rational, masculine and honest and as a result the Orient represents the opposite and what it desires and fears.<sup>244</sup> The quotes mentioned in this section certainly emanate a sense of desire, fantasy and fear. This is in the sense of risking the unknown in terms of quality and ingredients due to being ‘seduced’.

The focus on bodily pleasure over the superior mind is similarly reflected in animalistic description of eating Indian food, for example one journalist argues “Curry makes pigs of even the most self-disciplined diner. If, by the end of the meal, you still want to walk, rather than have someone cart you out in a wheelbarrow, then you really haven't got involved, have you?”.<sup>245</sup> Reader comments also occasionally express their distain about lack of quality by distinguishing it as non-human: “The one pot curry restaurants have become unfit for human habitation in recent years, mostly due to the appalling cheap produce they serve

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<sup>239</sup> Howard Jacobson, “Howard Jacobson: ‘Hyderabadi lobster jhinga? No thanks. Give me chicken balti any day’,” *Guardian*, August 5, 2017, [www.theguardian.com/books/2017/aug/05/howard-jacobson-on-curry-indian-food](http://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/aug/05/howard-jacobson-on-curry-indian-food)

<sup>240</sup> Bedall, “It’s Curry”

<sup>241</sup> Roy, “Reading Communities and Culinary Communities,” 484

<sup>242</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 138, 206, 220

<sup>243</sup> Ibid.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid.

<sup>245</sup> Naylor, “How to Eat: Curry”

up”.<sup>246</sup> These comments can be understood in the same context of Orientalist focus on the body, whether that is in a sexual sense or an animalistic sense.

This chapter has attempted to shine a light on the powers behind the derogation of Indian food and restaurants in the press through the historical context of colonialism. In answer to my research sub-question: To what extent are colonial or racialised stereotypes evident? This chapter has demonstrated there is clear and significant evidence of colonial era stereotyping. The stereotyping found is racialised because regardless of (often British) nationality, ethnicity of the restaurateur seems to dictate their assumed character. The overall result is the assumed character of the ethnic South Asian man is deceitful, unskilled and unhygienic. As a result the popularity or desire for Indian food, which appears confusing considering these assumed facts, is made sense of through guilt and temptation. There is a subtlety to this stereotyping, where negative experiences in restaurants are described through the assumed character of the restaurateur whose true personality in reality is rarely known or considered relevant. This shows the extent to which assumptions are engrained, they rarely need to be asserted because they are pre-assumed to be true, rather they are resorted to as a source of explanation for various everyday occurrences or subtly and possibly unconsciously recycled and reproduced in specific statements applying to all Indian restaurants such as describing all Indian waiters as “miserable gits”.<sup>247</sup>

Uma Narayan points out the seemingly conflicting process of incorporating and demonising the Other in relation to food. She argues this isn’t unique to (post)colonial contexts. However, this research shows the power of colonial stereotyping in ensuring it’s continuation.<sup>248</sup> Certainly the mocking of Indian restaurants as identified by Highmore can also be seen, and while he focusses on the power dynamic due to their position as being seen as popular or low culture in the UK, I would argue imperial history possibly has more to do with this. Perhaps the colonial stereotyping that is left over from empire could be responsible for Indian foods inability to be taken seriously that Highmore discusses. It could be that elements such as the low pricing of Indian food noticed by Narayan and others are in fact the result of the fundamental assumptions highlighted in this chapter.<sup>249</sup>

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<sup>246</sup> Published reader comment, Cloake, “How to Make The Perfect Chicken Tikka Masala”

<sup>247</sup> Raynor, “We Wish You A Curry Christmas”

<sup>248</sup> Narayan, “Eating Cultures,” 63-86

<sup>249</sup> Palat, “Empire, Food and the Diaspora,” 173, 182; Narayan, “Eating Cultures,” 77.



## Chapter 4. Authenticity

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To question the authenticity of somebody's heritage is generally regarded as equivalent to casting aspersions on their identity claims and usually too, on other qualities, such as their truthfulness. Disputes over the authenticity of heritage – which are often bound up with questions of what is worthy of conservation – are, thus, almost always simultaneously identity contests, battles over whose identity will be projected into the future.<sup>250</sup>

– Sharon Macdonald

Chapter three discussed the negative press regarding British Indian food culture and its colonial roots. This chapter considers a slightly different face of the discourse on Indian foods in the UK, which revolves around the concept of authenticity. As authenticity does not feature as a theme in political speeches that reference Indian food, this chapter only focusses on media articles and reader comments, where it features heavily. What is clear is authenticity is important to people when they are discussing food, this is not surprising considering it is defined in the Oxford dictionary as “the fact or quality of being true or in accordance with fact”.<sup>251</sup> However, how authenticity relates to culture is more accurately explained in the initial quote of this chapter, which highlights the connection between authenticity, cultural identity and value or worthiness. It is no surprise therefore that being recognised as authentic comes across as important in the articles and reader discussions analysed. However, what is most interesting is the constructed cultural assumptions which underpin what counts as authentic, and how morality and notions of legitimacy closely relate to this struggle. This chapter therefore focusses on how cultural assumptions about the meaning and value of authenticity contribute to a moral perception of food and identities. It considers how authenticity is claimed, tested and rejected, considering aspects such as authentication through ethnic identity of people, which possibly contributes to assumptions about legitimate and illegitimate identities. It also looks at the intersecting roles of class and gender within this discourse of authenticity and what the struggle for authenticity tells us about the reality of a multicultural society.

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<sup>250</sup> Sharon Macdonald, *Memorylands: Heritage and Identity in Europe Today*, (Routledge, 2013)119

<sup>251</sup> "Authenticity," Oxford English Dictionary, accessed 25.06.21. [www-oed-com.eur.idm.oclc.org/view/Entry/13325?redirectedFrom=authenticity#eid](http://www-oed-com.eur.idm.oclc.org/view/Entry/13325?redirectedFrom=authenticity#eid)

Despite its claim to objectivity, what is paradoxically revealed is a subjectivity when it comes to how the concept of authenticity functions in society. This subjectivity as well as the strategic use of authenticity for social status is also acknowledged by Highmore and Buettner who for this reason consider the term redundant when it comes to describing the complexities of food culture.<sup>252</sup> However, it is used constantly in the discussion on Indian food and people's use of the term proves a fruitful path of analysis when looking into the interplay of identity and power in society, precisely because of its subjectivity.

### **Food's Pure Cultural Home**

A common theme identified in the discussion on Indian food which is touched upon in the previous chapter is a dish or cuisine's worth being dependent upon it having a clear and identifiable pure cultural 'home'. This research has found that if food does not have a perceivably pure cultural origin – as is the case with many of the Indian foods served in the UK due to migration and cosmopolitanism which produce new dishes – it is described in culturally loaded negative terminology. Two of the more common words used to describe hybrid Indian foods are either 'bastardised' or 'adulterated'. On 15 occasions these particular words are used in the context of describing Indian food in the UK. With this terminology comes connotations of impurity, immorality and shame.<sup>253</sup> The Oxford dictionary specifically explains that the corruption or degeneration referred to within these terms is caused by "the introduction of incompatible elements".<sup>254</sup> This is exemplified by the way in which the term is used, normally with a negative tone indicating impurity and as a result immorality in eating adapted Indian food or serving it in a restaurant (even if it tastes good or is enjoyed).<sup>255</sup> It's often used when discussing either the so-called demise of the curry industry, which restaurants to avoid, or more generally just to point out the type of food one shouldn't eat. Essentially, hybrid Indian food equals bastardised and inauthentic, and this is assumed as reason enough to avoid it.

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<sup>252</sup> Highmore, "The Taj Mahal in the High Street," 185-187. Buettner, "'Going for an Indian,'" 883-884

<sup>253</sup> "Bastardize," Oxford English Dictionary, accessed 26.06.21 [www.oed-com.eur.idm.oclc.org/view/Entry/16052?redirectedFrom=bastardize#eid](http://www.oed-com.eur.idm.oclc.org/view/Entry/16052?redirectedFrom=bastardize#eid); "Adulterate," Oxford English Dictionary, accessed 26.06.21, [www.oed-com.eur.idm.oclc.org/view/Entry/2828?rskey=h6ZCOZ&result=2&isAdvanced=false#eid](http://www.oed-com.eur.idm.oclc.org/view/Entry/2828?rskey=h6ZCOZ&result=2&isAdvanced=false#eid)

<sup>254</sup> Ibid.

<sup>255</sup> Published reader comment, Wilson "Who Killed The British Curry House"; Naylor "How to Eat: Curry"; Felicity Cloak, "How to make the perfect saag paneer," *Guardian*, June 26, 2014, [www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/wordofmouth/2014/jun/26/how-make-perfect-saag-paner-vegetarian-indian](http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/wordofmouth/2014/jun/26/how-make-perfect-saag-paner-vegetarian-indian); Published reader comment, Leftly, "Curry restaurants in crisis as immigration rules keep out chefs,"; Cloake, "Lamb curry or chicken?"; Published reader comment, Wilson "Who Killed The British Curry House"; Nosheen Iqbal, "There's curry – and there's M&S curry: Indian food writers' outrage at meal kits," *Guardian*, August 12, 2018, [www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2018/aug/12/curry-marks-and-spencer-meal-kits-outrage](http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2018/aug/12/curry-marks-and-spencer-meal-kits-outrage)

In a couple of cases reader comments negotiate the inherent contradiction of calling hybrid food cultures bastardised or inauthentic: “If you want to make an authentic bastardized British takeaway ‘curry’ at home then the ‘The Curry Secret’ by Kris Dhillon is better than anything I’ve made from any other book. However, if authentic Indian regional cuisine is your thing then it’s quite useless”.<sup>256</sup> In this case, the commentor uses the word ‘authentic’ to describe both types of food cultures, however, in the former use it is also accompanied by ‘bastardized’ and the word ‘curry’ is placed in inverted commas, suggesting he doesn’t consider it to be ‘real’ curry despite calling it authentic. In a similar case, one commentor also negotiates the idea of tasty hybrid dishes against the concept of cultural betrayal: “From an Anglo-Indian background, sausages, dahl and rice is either the perfect comfort fusion food or a bastardized English/Indian concoction”.<sup>257</sup> One Pakistani chef in the face of criticism of inauthenticity aimed at his traditional British Indian curries, accuses the new wave of upmarket Indian restaurants (mainly run by British born ethnic Asians) of themselves being “bastards” and half castes:

Mr A Khan, a Lahori cook in Southall, west London, says (in Urdu): "These people are all rubbish. They are half castes, the bastard children who don't know their own fatherlands, think they know better than us because they speak English. Real food is here and it is cheap."<sup>258</sup>

These quotes demonstrate that language intended for social and cultural shame and betrayal is used to describe foods perceived to be cultural hybrids. They are met with suspicion of impurity and immorality. However, the variety of ways in which this shame is evoked and the seeming contradictoriness of some of the quotes attest to its subjectivity and reveals a more strategic level to this type of language. It shows that shaming on the basis of hybridity functions to undermine the validity of adapted Indian food as ‘real’ or having cultural value, and possibly in turn undermine the value or worth of hybrid identities. This subtle undermining doesn’t go over the head of some readers, who make a direct connection between hybrid food and their hybrid Anglo-Indian identity.

### **Degrees of Authenticity and Methods of Authenticating: Cultural Boundaries**

What is important to note is the comments analysed in the previous section rest on an assumption of bounded cultures. The morally negative language and suspicion over purity or cultural credentials is mainly seen where the hybridity of the dishes involves a mixture of

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<sup>256</sup> Published reader comment, Naylor, “How To Eat: Curry”

<sup>257</sup> Published reader comment, Cloake, “How to cook perfect dal,”

<sup>258</sup> Alibhai-Brown, “Why The Future May Not Be Orange,”

nationalities and specifically when it involves a perceived cultural mixture of East and West, which is the case for all the negative references in the previous section. Conversely, where food is described as having a long history in one bounded Indian culture, this adds a certain amount of worth to its perceived cultural value, or as a minimum it is described in a neutral and informative way.<sup>259</sup> In 2009, food author Simon Majumdar exemplifies this when discussing whether the chicken tikka masala can be said to have authentic Glaswegian status, he says: “I can sympathise with the inevitable counter-argument that chicken tikka masala is no more than an adaptation of a dish from another country”.<sup>260</sup> This demonstrates the perception that food which represents an East/West hybrid is considered to lack cultural depth or value. Therefore, the perceived cultural value of food is hierarchical, where culturally ‘pure’ food is considered authentic and most worthy or indisputable.

Within the *Guardian* and *BBC* discourse on Indian food in the UK, the perceived authenticity and as a result cultural value of a dish seems to depend on whether it can be traced to a specific region in India. Dishes from the region of South India tend to be considered the most authentic. For example, in a discussion about the best Indian restaurants, one commenter argues “South Indian places tend to be better because they're serving reasonably authentic regional food rather than a mixture of all regions which is then adapted for British tastes.”<sup>261</sup> Similarly another reader suggests what the so called problem is with Indian foods in the UK: “The problem is that 'many British Indian restaurant styles ' are hardly recognisable in any regional Indian cuisines”. Here we can see two assumptions, first, knowable and clear regional provenance equals more ‘real’, and second, this equals superior. The result of this logic is that dishes that are said to be eaten regionally in India become perceived as superior to ones that are perceived to be hybrid, adapted, or eaten by a wider range of mixed regions or nations. Speaking about Indian restaurants in the UK the following two reader quotes taken from various article comments further exemplify this in a slightly different way:

Encouraging signs: It's South Indian. This tends to mean it is actually Indian cooking. Many "Indian" restaurants/take-aways (at least round our way) are actually owned by

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<sup>259</sup> Published reader comment, Jay Raynor, “Lucknow 49, London: ‘Occasionally it knocks your socks off’ – restaurant review,” *Guardian*, June 16, 2019, [www.theguardian.com/food/2019/jun/16/lucknow-49-london-occasionally-knocks-your-socks-off-restaurant-review](http://www.theguardian.com/food/2019/jun/16/lucknow-49-london-occasionally-knocks-your-socks-off-restaurant-review); , Asma Khan, “Four easy Indian recipes,” *Guardian*, November, 3, [www.theguardian.com/food/2018/nov/03/asma-khan-easy-indian-recipes-raita-masala-omelette-drumstick-kebab](http://www.theguardian.com/food/2018/nov/03/asma-khan-easy-indian-recipes-raita-masala-omelette-drumstick-kebab)

<sup>260</sup> Simon Majumdar, “Is tikka masala Glaswegian?,” *Guardian*, July 7, 2009, [www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/wordofmouth/2009/jul/07/glaswegian-tikka-masala](http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/wordofmouth/2009/jul/07/glaswegian-tikka-masala)

<sup>261</sup> Published reader comment, Naylor, “How To Eat: Curry”

Pakistanis or Bengalis, and serve a confusing range of so called "Indian" food. Our local South Indian restaurant actually serves south Indian food, rather than trying to serve everything 'Indian';<sup>262</sup>

Most of these 'Indian' chefs originate from Bangladesh and a specific region called Sylhet and most of the 'curry houses' in the UK are a reflection of the cooking of that specific region. The food you get at a typical UK 'curry house' is NOT representative of REAL 'Indian' food.<sup>263</sup>

In these examples what can be seen is these commentators feel that Pakistani and Bangladeshi restaurateurs are being inauthentic by calling their food Indian, which, to the first commentator is made worse by not specialising in regionally specific dishes. This further goes to show that food with a mixed cultural history, in this case a history of migration and displacement, is perceived as impure and attracts moral criticism, which seems to coincide with a feeling that duality or complexity in identity is illegitimate or deceitful. It could also be that the "geographical knowledges" associated with South Indian food due to a perceived lack of hybridity or displacement have become easily knowable and understandable (and potentially enhanced by Kerala becoming a popular holiday destination unlike Pakistan or Bangladesh) and as a result more attractive to the consumer.<sup>264</sup> This view of authenticity is evidenced through the ethnic identity of the chef as the quotes in table 5 show. This demonstrates the link between moral assumptions about food and purity and how that leads to assumptions about people and purity.

*Table 5. Quotes regarding authenticity of food depends on ethnicity of chef*

Article Title	Year	Quote
Curry restaurants in crisis as immigration rules keep out chefs	2016	"The government is wrong, he adds, to insist that Indian restaurants should rely on domestic or EU labour. Ali points to a Slovakian he trained who, even after four and a half years, only had the skills to work in one area of the kitchen where he would marinate tandoori dishes and make bread." <sup>265</sup>
The Curry crisis	2012	"The company, he points out, could not use "curry college" chefs, because they only allow chefs to cook dishes from their home

<sup>262</sup> Naylor, "How to Eat: Curry"

<sup>263</sup> Published reader comment, Wilson, "Who Killed the Great British Curry House"

<sup>264</sup> Cook & Crang, "The World on a Plate," 140

<sup>265</sup> Published reader comment, Leftly, "Curry restaurants in crisis as immigration rules keep out chefs,"

		regions, he says, so they can offer their customers authentic Indian food.” <sup>266</sup>
Who Killed the Great British Curry House	2017	“Where I live there has recently been a boom in proper Indian restaurants, ones that don't adapt the food to British tastes for "predictable sauces". They are mostly run and staffed by South Asians, not "white Britons trying to reproduce authentic Indian recipes". <sup>267</sup>

Dietler, Goody and James especially stress the role of expressing one's identity when it comes to what we eat and what we don't eat, not just in the act of eating but also in the act of talking about what we eat. For example, Dietler gives an example of how two African communities help outsiders to differentiate them by identifying who eats caterpillars and who doesn't.<sup>268</sup> One aspect of these results is the same kind of identity differentiation through food. What is evident is people choose to point out what they consider an incorrect recipe or dish. They vocalise the fact they would not do it that way because to them it is inauthentic. This is one way of vocalising and legitimising one's own identity in comparison to others. While this may not always be conscious or intentional, the identities of individuals behind certain dishes is not ignored. For example, we have seen the automatic assumption that the authenticity of a dish will depend on the cultural identity of the cook.

In these cases when certain foods, recipes or dishes are rejected it doesn't necessarily equate to a rejection of multiculturalism as a whole. It would be a leap to assume so, and to assume that the individual who is disputing a recipe or type of food is doing so because they cannot tolerate a society with different cultures. Rather, and following from Dietler, Goody and James, it could be understood as asserting and legitimising one's own cultural identity in a society of multiple cultural identities all seeking to be considered legitimate and worthy.<sup>269</sup> This isn't a far cry from Stuart Hall's thoughts on multiculturalism, that it isn't simply defined by tolerance but naturally produces conflict, which in a truly multicultural society needs to be managed.<sup>270</sup> The quotes so far have shown that people's desire to be considered

<sup>266</sup> Published reader comment, Khaleeli, "The Curry Crisis,"

<sup>267</sup> Published reader comment, Wilson, "Who Killed the Great British Curry House"

<sup>268</sup> Dietler, "Culinary encounters," 224

<sup>269</sup> Ibid, 218-242; James, "Cooking the Books," 78; Goody, *Cooking, Cuisine, and Class*, 36

<sup>270</sup> Stuart Hall, "Conclusion: The Multicultural Question" *In Unsettled Multiculturalism: Diaspora, Entanglements, Transcriptions*, ed. Barnor Hesse (New York: Zed Books Ltd, 2000)209-240.

real, authentic, worthy is so extensive that they (possibly subconsciously) play into engrained cultural ideas of purity and impurity to position themselves above others. Along with the linguistically negative association of hybridity (half-caste, impure) perhaps this to some extent explains why adoptions of foods between cultures is rarely discussed in positive terms, despite the fact that anthropological studies demonstrate that it constantly takes place.<sup>271</sup>

If creolisation is understood in the way that Robin Cohen defines it, as “selecting particular elements from incoming or inherited cultures, endowing these with meanings different from those they possessed in the original cultures, and then creatively merge these to create new varieties that supersede the prior forms”, it is easy to see how when these adoptions and adaptations are witness by the 'legacy' culture, the individuals who identify with the 'legacy' culture feel that their culture is being threatened, taken away or misrepresented.<sup>272</sup> This would explain the feeling of constant competition for recognition of authenticity and to some extent the moral aspect of this found.

### **Authenticity and the Intersection of Class**

Superior class has long been linked to the idea of superior or refined knowledge, especially of culture. Authenticity is inherently linked to knowledge in the sense that it is knowing or discerning the true.<sup>273</sup> Demonstrating one's knowledge of the authentic then becomes a way to claim class status and distinguish oneself from a lower class.<sup>274</sup> Due to this, and especially considering the assumption that the working class are considered to be the main eaters of curry, class becomes a relevant factor to analyse when looking at the power dynamics behind the interplay of identities in the discourse on Indian food. The following paragraphs consider a trend in the discourse which seem to be based on assumptions around class.

Elizabeth Buettner points out the association of class amongst the new wave of Indian restaurants which opened from the early 2000s onwards.<sup>275</sup> These were mainly run by middle-class British Indians who wanted to distance themselves from the working-class association of traditional 'curry culture'.<sup>276</sup> This research has found a general assumption that those who eat hybrid or British curries must be doing so because of a lack of knowledge about authentic food or the correct way to eat. This seems to lead to a view that there's a

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<sup>271</sup> James, "Cooking the Books," 78; Dietler, "Culinary Encounters," 218-242

<sup>272</sup> Cohen, "Creolization and Cultural Globalization" 369

<sup>273</sup> "Authenticity," Oxford English Dictionary, accessed 27.06.21 [www-oed-com.eur.idm.oclc.org/view/Entry/13325?redirectedFrom=authenticity#eid](http://www.oed-com.eur.idm.oclc.org/view/Entry/13325?redirectedFrom=authenticity#eid)

<sup>274</sup> Buettner, "'Going for an Indian,'" 883-884

<sup>275</sup> Ibid, 895

<sup>276</sup> Ibid

requirement for these eaters to be ‘educated’. Sometimes this takes the form of a charitable willingness to ‘teach’ people about why what they are eating is incorrect, and other times people are simply described in terms such as “know-nowt” because of their choice of food. Table 5 sets out some of the most obvious examples of this when discussing British ‘curry culture’ (emphasis added in all):

Table 6. Quote’s relating to lack of knowledge

Theme	Quote
<b>Need to teach or educate eaters</b>	“Jalf Ali, who pioneered Indian street food in the UK, owns two restaurants in Newcastle and says <i>it took decades for the British palate to “mature”</i> . Restaurateurs then hired chefs skilled in more <i>sophisticated cuisine</i> .” <sup>277</sup>
	describing an Indian Chef in Cardiff, “hell bent on sticking to his campaign to <i>teach the people of Cardiff</i> what real Indian food is all about.” <sup>278</sup>
	An Indian restaurateur discussing what her response was when her food wasn’t popular in the UK, “I decided that <i>I had to educate the public about real food</i> before experimenting,” and later: “ <i>“There is no such dish as curry,”</i> says Panjabi. ‘It is a sauce, not a meal.’” <sup>279</sup>
<b>Eaters of adapted Indian food as unintelligent</b>	“Once upon a time in Britain there was just a thing called Indian food, <i>which existed oblivious to the fact that India is a country of 17 different states each with a distinct cuisine</i> (plus the separate cultures of Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka).” <sup>280</sup>
	“British curry is indeed a thing that is made for us. It's basically the same base sauce with a few different bits thrown in per dish. It's just bright red stuff that's all very similar that <i>we like to think is curry</i> .” <sup>281</sup>
	“I do not want to spoil your love for Indian dishes. I am from Indian subcontinent and I cook my meal sometimes eat in Indian restaurants as well. However some of the names that you guys are using for dishes are very new to me. <i>Are you guys sure that you are not been conned by mixing two dishes and giving it a new name?</i> ” <sup>282</sup>

<sup>277</sup> Leftly, “Curry restaurants in crisis as immigration rules keep out chefs”

<sup>278</sup> Hannah Waldram, “From Kerala to Cardiff: bringing a new type of Indian cuisine to the city,” *Guardian*, June 4, 2010, [www.theguardian.com/cardiff/2010/jun/04/mint-and-mustard-chai-street-anand-george-from-kerala-to-cardiff](http://www.theguardian.com/cardiff/2010/jun/04/mint-and-mustard-chai-street-anand-george-from-kerala-to-cardiff)

<sup>279</sup> Julie Bindel, “What we really eat in India,” *Guardian*, April 25, 2007, [www.theguardian.com/books/2007/apr/25/foodanddrink.restaurants](http://www.theguardian.com/books/2007/apr/25/foodanddrink.restaurants)

<sup>280</sup> Raynor, “We wish you a curry Christmas”

<sup>281</sup> Published reader comment, Leftly, “Curry restaurants in crisis as immigration rules keep out chefs”

<sup>282</sup> Published reader comment, Khaleeli, “The Curry Crisis”



<p>“Avoid: XXL naans; hot curry challenges; healthy emphasis on lean chicken breast; monomaniacal ghee reduction: all signs that a venue is – albeit in different ways – <i>pandering to a know-nowt British audience.</i>”<sup>283</sup></p>
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In the context of ‘curry culture’ being a working-class habit, these quotes demonstrate the common stereotype that the working-class are less intelligent or less capable of knowing.<sup>284</sup> What can be seen is these class-based assumptions being used to explain why people would eat ‘inauthentic’ food, which seems otherwise incomprehensible.

To consider one example in detail, before she dives into the critique of ‘curry culture’, Geraldine Bedall in her article discussing the rise of new upmarket Indian restaurants in the early 2000s first positions the practice of eating curry as a distinctly and predictably working-class habit. She does this by pointing out how in her opinion it was “entirely fitting that David Beckham celebrated scoring the goal that qualified England for the World Cup at Manchester's Shimla Pinks, with what we are told is 'his favourite' chicken korma”.<sup>285</sup> Her choice of Beckham is significant because at the time he was – and still is – known as the ultimate working-class hero.<sup>286</sup> He was the epitome of the working-class success story and known for his refusal to neglect his working-class roots, this particular national obsession is exemplified by more recent research actually aiming to confirm whether ‘Becks’ is getting ‘posher’.<sup>287</sup> With this in mind, Bedall’s use of inverted commas to emphasise the words ‘his favourite’ becomes significant when one reads on to find out that her view is that those who have a superior knowledge of food know that all Indian food in the UK is identical.<sup>288</sup> Bedall considers Beckham believing that he is able to distinguish quality or a favourite is a mistake on his part, due to a lack of knowledge on the topic of Indian food, hence the inverted commas. This aligns with the typical stereotype of the working-class person as less

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<sup>283</sup> Naylor, “How to Eat: Curry”

<sup>284</sup> Federica Durante, and Susan T. Fiske. "How social-class stereotypes maintain inequality." *Current opinion in psychology* 18 (2017): 43-48.

<sup>285</sup> Bedall, “It’s Curry”

<sup>286</sup> Ashleigh Rainbird “Don't go looking for a knighthood Beckham, be a working-class hero instead says director Ken Loach” *The Mirror*, Feb 13, 2017, [www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/dont-go-looking-knighthood-beckham-9812583](http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/dont-go-looking-knighthood-beckham-9812583)

<sup>287</sup> “David and Victoria Beckham 'getting posher', study finds,” *BBC*, April 17, 2013, [www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-22179969](http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-22179969)

<sup>288</sup> Bedall, “It’s Curry,”

intelligent, and less able to grasp complexities, especially in relation to culture.<sup>289</sup> A stereotype that David Beckham has long suffered despite his popularity.<sup>290</sup>

Class bias permeates Bedall's text in varying ways. When discussing how she thinks the Indian restaurant industry should be improved, she takes for granted that the entire Indian restaurant industry should actually want to change in order to cater to a middle-class clientele. This is clear from her discussion of Italian restaurants in comparison, which she argues "escaped" checked tablecloths for superior and "better understood" Italian restaurants and hopes that Indian restaurants achieve the same.<sup>291</sup> She explains that the restaurants that haven't been improved create "unwelcome baggage" for those chefs who are "trying to increase understanding of Indian food".<sup>292</sup> Her comments assume there is something to escape, and for her that something is an association with the ignorant working-class customer in favour of a more cultured, knowledgeable and refined middle-class one. The strong assumptions about authenticity, purity and morality discussed in the previous section seem to lead to the belief that people need to be corrected in terms of what they are eating. This section has shown that the class-based stereotype that the working class are less knowledgeable, along with the understanding that curry culture is a pastime of the working class, reinforces the idea that eaters require education to change their incorrect eating habits.

### **Authenticity, The Home and Female Gender**

Just as prominent as the cultural assumptions contained within authenticity debate, the additional concepts of home and female gender hold significant weight when it comes to the perceived authenticity or correctness of food. The following section will discuss how Indian mothers are considered the unquestionable authority on authentic cooking and are surrounded by a celestial elusiveness, where their abilities and recipes are shrouded in tantalising secrecy and they are talked about as if they are silent angels of the home. These female cooks are only ever discussed as cooking within their home, and cooking from the home is always considered superior. There is a sense of correctness, honesty and authority when food comes from an Indian mothers' home, which starkly contrasts with the sense of distrust and deceit relating to food cooked (by men) in restaurants discussed in chapter three. Their ability is

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<sup>289</sup> Mairead Dunne, and Louise Gazeley. "Teachers, social class and underachievement." *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 29, no. 5 (2008) 451-463.

<sup>290</sup> Oliver Duff, "Don't teach it like Beckham or you'll never pass at maths," *The Independent*, Feb 27, 2006, [www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/don-t-teach-it-like-beckham-or-you-ll-never-pass-at-maths-467868.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/don-t-teach-it-like-beckham-or-you-ll-never-pass-at-maths-467868.html)

<sup>291</sup> Bedall, "It's curry"

<sup>292</sup> Ibid.

talked about as though it is instinctive, natural and mysterious, and so cannot be learnt even with years of observation. Table 7 sets out some of the comments which exemplify this phenomenon.

Table 7. Quotes describing the Indian mother in terms of mystery and angelic ability

Theme	Quote
Angelic ability	<i>“As no measurements are used in our cooking, the only way to learn to cook used to be to help your mother for about 20 years and, with any luck, you might pick something up.”</i> <sup>293</sup>
	<i>“It takes me back to times with my mother doing the cooking, maybe four meals a day for at least five of us, three or four things at a go. A coal fire, no leftovers and no refrigeration. I didn’t think she was good when I was growing up but now I understand what an amazing cook she is, though she still won’t allow us in her kitchen.”</i> <sup>294</sup>
	<i>“I was recently in Sri Lanka and was in the kitchen with the chef showing me how to cook his special dishes and he said that despite all his training, he still uses twice as much spice as his mother does and yet her food always has a richer flavour”</i> <sup>295</sup>
Mysterious	<i>“Judy Cardoza is passionate about Indian cuisine. She has been cooking since the age of 14, when she would sneak into her mother's kitchen, which was strictly of limits”</i> <sup>296</sup>
	<i>“Proper, traditional (as opposed to modern "urban") Indian cooking is sophisticated, mysterious, intricate and, yes, can take hours of laborious preparation (there's no such thing as a "quick and easy 10 minute Indian"). I've been learning from my mother all my life and I still haven't mastered all the nuances.”</i> <sup>297</sup>
	<i>“My mum makes an amazing version of saag with spinach, methi and sprouts (!!!), smells awful when first cooking but then Punjabi mum alchemy takes over and I could eat it all the time.”</i> <sup>298</sup>

<sup>293</sup> Published reader comment, Bhogal, “Behind closed doors”

<sup>294</sup> Allan Jenkins, “Vivek Singh and the Indian dishes with stories to tell,” *Guardian*, February, 23, 2016, [www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2016/feb/23/vivek-singh-indian-dishes-with-stories-to-tell](http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2016/feb/23/vivek-singh-indian-dishes-with-stories-to-tell)

<sup>295</sup> Published reader comment, Cloake, “How to Make The Perfect Chicken Tikka Masala”

<sup>296</sup> Rachel Foster, “Ignore the recipe, cook with your heart,” *Guardian*, April 16, 2006, [www.theguardian.com/travel/2006/apr/16/india.travelfoodanddrink.foodanddrink](http://www.theguardian.com/travel/2006/apr/16/india.travelfoodanddrink.foodanddrink)

<sup>297</sup> Sejal Sukhadwala, “Calling time on the curry house,” *Guardian*, October 10, 2011, [www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/wordofmouth/2011/oct/10/calling-time-on-the-curry-house](http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/wordofmouth/2011/oct/10/calling-time-on-the-curry-house)

<sup>298</sup> Published reader comment, Cloak, “How to make the perfect saag paneer,”

	<p>“I know many Indians who happily use ready-made gharam masalas though <i>in my house my mum has a secret recipe she hasn’t shared with me yet.</i>”<sup>299</sup></p>
	<p>“My book, <i>Cooking Like Mummyji</i>, was written to <i>invite non-Asians into this secret world</i>, and also to encourage younger British Asians to <i>keep the recipes alive in their homes.</i>”<sup>300</sup></p>

The method of authenticating in this case is through family anecdotal evidence, the more reliant on word of mouth through generations of female family members, the more valid the recipe is. A dish’s authenticity is measured against what one’s mother or grandmother makes. For example, one commenter responds to a recipe article with simply: “Sorry, but this dish is virtually unrecognisable from the saag my grandmother used to make”, as though that is a self-explanatory criticism.<sup>301</sup> It seems to follow that authenticity in South Asian restaurants is perpetually lacking by comparison because of the non-home setting where the food is produced and because it is normally cooked by men, the two notions are held as binary - restaurant food cooked by men is impure and home food cooked by women is pure: “Curry house curries are usually Bangladeshi and the cooking is almost always done by men. In my family only the women cooked and passed recipes from mother to daughter... Curry house curry is often an evolution too far for my palate”.<sup>302</sup> When it comes to Indian cooking the consensus is women certainly know best, but that knowledge can’t be reproduced, sold or transferred to a restaurant setting. In fact, in the one instance where women working in a restaurant is discussed, in an interview with Indian business woman Camellia Panjabi who runs a number of upmarket Indian restaurants in London, it is admitted that she does not consider employing female chefs at all:

Young chefs coming from India to work for Panjabi in Europe are given accommodation in large apartments together, to counter the loneliness of being so far away from home. Panjabi admits, however, that she does not employ female chefs. "It

<sup>299</sup> Published reader comment, Henry Dimbleby and Jane Baxter, “The secret to making great curry,” *Guardian*, October 31, 2014, [www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2014/oct/31/how-to-make-curry-onion-ginger-garlic-mamta-gupta-back-to-basics-henry-dimbleby](http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2014/oct/31/how-to-make-curry-onion-ginger-garlic-mamta-gupta-back-to-basics-henry-dimbleby)

<sup>300</sup> Bhogal, “Behind closed doors”

<sup>301</sup> Published reader comment, Cloake, “How to make the perfect saag paneer”

<sup>302</sup> Published reader comment, Felicity Cloake, “How to cook the perfect chicken korma”, *Guardian*, April 9, 2015, [www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/wordofmouth/2015/apr/09/how-to-cook-perfect-chicken-korma-curry-recipe](http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/wordofmouth/2015/apr/09/how-to-cook-perfect-chicken-korma-curry-recipe)

is too much responsibility. It could be too complicated - how would she get home after midnight alone?<sup>303</sup>

One way this could be understood is through Hindu taboos and traditions surrounding food which for a long time ruled out a restaurant culture, so Indian as a national cuisine appeared through cookbooks being used by middle-class Indian housewives.<sup>304</sup> As discussed in chapter one, Parama Roy in her analysis of Madhur Jaffrey's TV cooking career points out that authenticity is a "long memory of nonmodern and self-effacing line of female forebearers making sophisticated cuisine without aid of recipes, precise measurements or modern kitchen equipment."<sup>305</sup> This research shows that this notion of authenticity is accurately mirrored in the discourse on Indian food in the media and reader comments and is persistent up until 2020. Uma Narayan explains the cultural context of this phenomenon from a feminist perspective, that women are considered symbols of cultural purity, and are therefore held more responsible for preserving cultural identity than men, especially in British Asian immigrant communities.<sup>306</sup> This could certainly explain the godlike terms South Asian mothers are described in when it comes to food and by comparison almost total absence of South Asian fathers in the discussion. However, It seems that despite their high level of skill and ability, women's requirement to be pure prevents them from applying these skills in a paid restaurant job. Considering Narayan's point, it's worth noting that this research did not find much in the way of shaming those who don't live up to the standard. One does wonder how the mothers and grandmothers fare who don't live up to this responsibility and whether there could be a certain amount of taboo in those cases resulting in less open discussion.

This chapter has analysed what 'authentic' means to people in the context of Indian foods and the factors, which turn out to be cultural and social, which affect the perceived degree of authenticity. Certainly creolisation and hybridity in relation to food is evident, just as Goody, James, Jackson and Dietler found too.<sup>307</sup> However, the more interesting aspect of this has turned out to be how the public and the media respond to this and understanding what could be involved in this response. In answer to my research sub-question: What does the invocation of authenticity reveal? This research shows first that it reveals people have clear perceptions of cultural boundaries. Singular bounded cultures are associated with the idea of

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<sup>303</sup> Bindel, "What we really eat in India,"

<sup>304</sup> Zubaida, "The Idea of 'Indian Food,'" 191-209; Appadurai, "How to make a National Cuisine," 3-24

<sup>305</sup> Roy, "Reading Communities and Culinary Communities," 486

<sup>306</sup> Narayan, "Eating Cultures: Incorporation, Identity and Indian Food," 74-75

<sup>307</sup> Jackson, "A Cultural Politics of Curry," 172-185; Dietler, "Culinary Encounters," 218-242; James, "Cooking the Books," 77-92

purity, a concept which has linguistically been associated with moral correctness for a long time as well as trueness and unmixed.<sup>308</sup> Secondly, people possibly consider the incorporation and adaptation of parts of their culture into new ones as a threat to their identity, a delegitimization of their legitimate culture. They react to this by stressing the incorrectness of different ways of cooking foods and compete for theirs to be considered the most authentic. Combined with a linguistically engrained assumption around purity and impurity, when hybridity and new cultures challenge theirs it can cause moral outrage and suspicion over their legitimacy. This forms the fundamental framework for the discourse of authenticity in Indian food. Certainly this shows that the melting pot is a myth, and rather creolising and hybrid cultures represent new identities to be competed with in a multicultural society.

The linguistic and cultural assumptions around purity and impurity result in continuous subtle reproduction of this 'knowledge' in varying ways, only reinforcing its trueness over time. Additionally, as Dietler also points out, the workings of food culture and identity can't simply be reduced to ethnicity.<sup>309</sup> In this case it's perceived cultural boundaries, class and gender that present influential forces. Class stereotypes guide how the assumed moral dilemmas of eating inauthentic food has come about and how it can be fixed, i.e. by educating eaters on 'correct' food. Considering the already prevalent cultural association of women with purity embedded in culture all over the world, it is no surprise that in this discourse on Indian food women are considered morally responsible for preserving their authentic culture through cooking, and that angel-like ability of women is only considered so in the context of the home, where no exchange of money can taint its purity.

What is considered proof of authenticity further supports this analysis. This research has shown that people's identities are always turned to, to prove authenticity of a dish. Restaurants, often unable to demonstrate a female presence, stress the ethnic identity of their chefs to legitimise their food as authentic, and home cooks sharing recipes turn to the traceable female, family identity to authenticate theirs. The possible human effect of this is a cultural tendency to think of identities in a hierarchy.

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<sup>308</sup> "Purity," Oxford English Dictionary, accessed 27.06.21, [www-oed-com.eur.idm.oclc.org/view/Entry/154916?redirectedFrom=purity#eid](http://www-oed-com.eur.idm.oclc.org/view/Entry/154916?redirectedFrom=purity#eid)

<sup>309</sup> Dietler, "Culinary Encounters," 224

## Chapter 5. Conclusion

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This research aimed to characterise the treatment and perception of Indian food in UK over an extensive 20 year period beginning with Robin Cook's 2001 'chicken tikka masala speech', which hailed the dish as a symbol of national multicultural identity "because it is a perfect illustration of the way Britain absorbs and adapts external influences".<sup>310</sup> It suspected that multiculturalism wasn't as simple and rosy as Cook indicated in his speech and aimed to investigate what was involved in the everyday reality of it. This research has therefore focussed on what the paradox surrounding Indian foods in the UK tells us about the workings of identity and power within British society. This was achieved by considering media articles, reader comments and political speeches about Indian food.

Chapter one demonstrated that Multiculturalism is a greatly debated concept. However, most accept its meaning relates in some way to existing in a society of heterogenous cultures. Understood in this most simple way, this research has critically examined the workings of identity and power within Britain's multicultural society. In order to do this, it has built on previous anthropological and archaeological work that have establish a strong connection between the treatment of food and identity.<sup>311</sup> Because food is so closely linked with identity, when there is a tension or dispute relating to food - of which many can be found in relation to Indian food in the UK - it's not illogical to assume it can probably tell us something about interacting cultural identities and power in society.

Of course, there are many different forms in which the concept of Indian food exists in the UK and because of this the project has been broad, spanning from representations of the Indian restaurant industry as a whole to reader discussions of online articles about Indian food. The methods used however have been specific, Critical Discourse Analysis has guided the analysis, concentrating on the use of language and what it reveals about cultural identity and power dynamics. Looking at how people relate to Indian foods proved a fruitful case study and uncovered new finding about ethnic representation in politics, the perpetuation of

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<sup>310</sup> Cook, "Robin Cook's Chicken Tikka Masala Speech,"

<sup>311</sup> Dietler, "Culinary Encounters," 222; James, "Cooking the Books," 77-92; Goody, *Cooking, Cuisine, and Class*, 36

colonial era stereotypes and embedded assumptions relating to cultural boundaries and hybridity, gender and class.

It can be concluded that Indian food generally holds a firm position in British national history and culture. It is a fact of British culture that is strategically useful for politicians because it brings together imperial history, postcolonial migration and multiculturalism in a reliably popular and uncontentious package, thus appealing to a wide range of voters. Curry culture's embeddedness in working-class culture specifically provides an opportunity for politicians to identify with the swathes of working-class which can sometimes be harder to reach politically. However, despite the positivity, politicians of all persuasions haven't broken free from perpetuating racialised stereotypes. In the political sphere, Indian food is regularly linked to the topics of immigration, religion and ethnicity in general. On top of this there is a general assumption that the people who the Indian restaurant industry represents are in the process of integrating, or being accepted into British identity, which directly conflicts with census data attesting that most citizens of Bangladeshi and Pakistani ethnicity – who make up the majority of the industry – consider their identity to be British. The result is that while Indian food is fully accepted into British identity, the people who the Indian restaurant industry represents are still suffering race-based stereotyping, with assumptions being made such as non-white ethnicity or Muslim religion of Brits positions them as outsiders.

Chapter three analysed the powers behind the derogation of Indian food in the media by considering historic colonialism. It found evidence in published articles and amongst reader comments of the continuation of typical colonial stereotypes. This came in the form of characterising the South Asian restaurateur as untrustworthy, lacking of quality or skill and unhygienic. Indian food's popularity was explained through the orientalist trope that it had illicitly tempted the innocent food adventurer in a feminised and sexual way. The overall result is that Indian food and restaurants are stigmatised and colonial assumptions about character are perpetuated. What should also be noted is the indirectness and subtlety to the stereotyping. Stereotypes of the ethnic South Asian man were so embedded that rather than them simply being claimed, their assumed fact is used to explain everyday experiences such as having a bad meal in a restaurant. Especially considering the *Guardian's* self-professed liberal ideology, this finding goes to show how powerful these stereotypes are and how they reproduce and reinforce themselves.



Chapter four looked at the powers behind claims of authenticity. It found that authenticity as a concept functions in culture in a way that undermines the legitimacy of hybrid foods and therefore hybrid identities. Mixing or hybridity of culture is subtly linguistically categorised as wrong and met with suspicion, undermining and moral outrage. This is based on an assumption that cultural purity exists and is superior. Mixing of East and West food cultures is therefore considered immoral and seen as betrayal especially when the product is sold for money. Class intersects with this when class-based stereotypes of the working-class being less intelligent provides an explanation for why one would eat culturally impure food, which the hybridity of British curry culture seems to represent. Women are considered the authority on authentic food and are responsible for preserving tradition, but can only do so in the purity of the home. Therefore, recipes passed down through female family members by word of mouth are considered the most authentic and respectable and despite their alleged skill, women are never discussed as working in restaurants. Chapter four also uncovered how these struggles for authenticity revolve around asserting and legitimising one's own cultural identity in a multicultural society that for some feels competitive.

Overall, the results show historic power dynamic of colonialism, and strong held cultural assumptions around purity and impurity (and women and class) permeate modern British multiculturalism. The result is an assumed hierarchy of identities is produced and those at the bottom are in constant struggle to be considered legitimate or without negative stereotyping. Chapter one discussed previous research done, which did highlight some of the legacies of colonialism in the context of Indian food in the UK. However, they tended to focus on individual incidents of overt racism in restaurants, often carried out by drunk football hooligans, relative low pricing of 'ethnic foods' or the colonial nostalgia of Thatcher's Britain in the 1980s.<sup>312</sup> This research by contrast demonstrates an institutionalisation in the media and politics of stereotyping as well as of assumptions about cultural identity superiority based on perceived purity. Considering that the British government recently published a report on institutional racism in the UK, finding that it did not exist, research such as this - uncovering the subtle but deeply embedded functioning of race-based power and its historical context - is essential for progress.<sup>313</sup> It demonstrates the

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<sup>312</sup> Buettner, "'Going for an Indian,'" 865-901 ; Buettner, "Chicken Tikka Masala, Flock Wallpaper, and 'Real' Home Cooking," 203-229; Highmore, "The Taj Mahal in the High Street," 173-190; Palat, "Empire, Food and the Diaspora: Indian Restaurants in Britain," 171-186, 180

<sup>313</sup> "The report of the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities," gov.uk, accessed 27.06.21, [www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-report-of-the-commission-on-race-and-ethnic-disparities/foreword-introduction-and-full-recommendations](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-report-of-the-commission-on-race-and-ethnic-disparities/foreword-introduction-and-full-recommendations)

struggles of living in a multicultural society with a history of colonialism but in doing so it leads to an improved self-awareness of the sources of some of these issues. In other words, while asserting cultural identity is very human, the unequal struggle is not a 'given' of human life, rather it is the result of specific historical developments, the contingent trajectory of culture and power. Therefore, research such as this, which provides an increased awareness of the cultural and historical context of present day struggles, supports Britain to forge a more equal future.

### **Limitations and Avenues for Further Research**

The findings of this project don't claim to represent the views of every individual in the UK. Rather they highlight cultural trends in assumed knowledges embedded in popular media outlets and politics. Due to the scope of the research it did not consider the role of aspects such as islamophobia which would constitute a projects in itself and, considering the findings of this project, would be a logical avenue for further enquiry. Additionally it did not consider why Indian food is so excessively popular in the UK compared to for example in other European countries. It would be a mistake to put this simply down to empire. As discussed in chapter one the incorporation of food into a culture can be revealing and the social, economic and cultural aspects of demand and popularity are not completely self-evident, especially considering factors such as consumerism, the British class system, geographical cultural variations and inequality. These factors could be considered in relation to postcolonial migration patterns and historic imperialism which would build on the culturally-based findings of this research to give a more comprehensive picture of food and identity in the UK. As well as this, this thesis has not attempted to tell the story of the Indian restaurant industry from the inside out, as the sources did not allow for that. The average restaurateur has not penned articles for the *Guardian* and *BBC* and is rarely interviewed for their view. While this is not necessarily a weakness as it didn't fit with this project's aim, it would provide further valuable insight into identity, power and multiculturalism in the UK especially considering the stark lack of working-class British Asian voices in the discourse, academic, media and political.

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