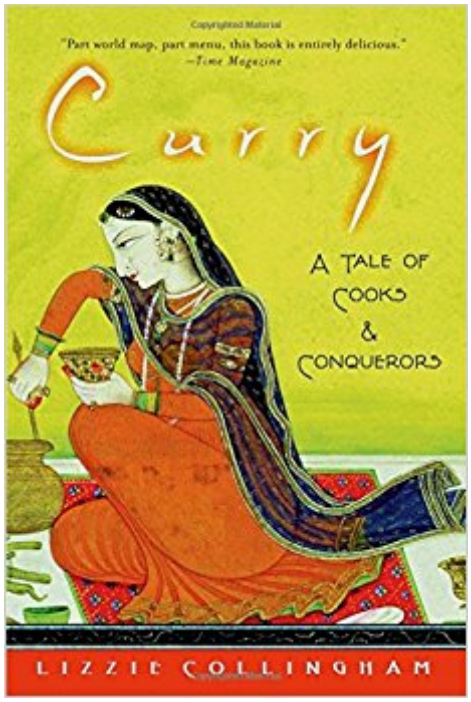
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Curry: A Tale Of Cooks And Conquerors



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Synopsis

Curry serves up a delectable history of Indian cuisine, ranging from the imperial kitchen of the Mughal invader Babur to the smoky cookhouse of the British Raj.In this fascinating volume, the first authoritative history of Indian food, Lizzie Collingham reveals that almost every well-known Indian dish is the product of a long history of invasion and the fusion of different food traditions. We see how, with the arrival of Portuguese explorers and the Mughal horde, the cooking styles and ingredients of central Asia, Persia, and Europe came to the subcontinent, where over the next four centuries they mixed with traditional Indian food to produce the popular cuisine that we know today. Portuguese spice merchants, for example, introduced vinegar marinades and the British contributed their passion for roast meat. When these new ingredients were mixed with native spices such as cardamom and black pepper, they gave birth to such popular dishes as biryani, jalfrezi, and vindaloo. In fact, vindaloo is an adaptation of the Portuguese dish "carne de vinho e alhos-"-the name "vindaloo" a garbled pronunciation of "vinho e alhos"--and even "curry" comes from the Portuguese pronunciation of an Indian word. Finally, Collingham describes how Indian food has spread around the world, from the curry houses of London to the railway stands of Tokyo, where "karee raisu" (curry rice) is a favorite Japanese comfort food. We even visit Madras Mahal, the first Kosher Indian restaurant, in Manhattan.Richly spiced with colorful anecdotes and curious historical facts, and attractively designed with 34 illustrations, 5 maps, and numerous recipes, Curry is vivid, entertaining, and delicious--a feast for food lovers everywhere.

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Customer Reviews

Starred Review. There’s nothing like trying to represent the food of India on a two-page menu to raise tricky questions about authenticity and mass taste. Isn’t curry really a British invention? Does chicken tikka masala have anything to do with Indian food? Fortunately, Cambridge-trained historian Collingham supplies a welcome corrective: the cuisine of the Indian subcontinent has always been in glorious flux, and the popularity of chicken vindaloo on London’s Brick Lane or New York’s Curry Row (and beyond) is no simple betrayal of the cuisine. (As far as charges of cultural imperialism go, if it weren’t for the Portuguese, the chilli pepper never would have had its massive impact on the region’s delicacies.) Easy stratifications wilt in the face of fact: Hindu and Muslim culinary traditions have been intertwined at least as far back as the 16th-century Mughal emperor Akbar, and even caste- and religion-derived gustatory restrictions are often overridden by traditions tied to subregion. Collingham’s mixed approach is a delight: it’s not every cookbook that incorporates an exhaustive (indeed, footnoted) culinary history, and few works of regional history lovingly explain how to make a delicious Lamb Korma. Collingham’s account is generous, embracing complexity to create a richer exploration of the "exotic casserole" that conquered the world. Illus., maps. (Jan.) Copyright Ã Â© Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Digital edition.

Like a fragrant biryani studded with bits of sweet and savory relishes, every page of this history of Indian cuisine offers some revelation about the origins of Indian food and its spread to the West. Historian Collingham traces how successive invasions of the subcontinent contributed new ingredients and novel cooking techniques that transformed indigenous cooking into what we now recognize as classic Indian cuisine. Early invasions from the northwest brought rice, and Persian pilau became Hindustani biryani. Portuguese sailors imported pork and Brazilian chili peppers to create vindaloo. Collingham describes how the regal courts of the various Indian states elaborated on all these foodstuffs to produce what may have been the most sumptuous banquets the world has ever known. Most surprising of all, Collingham’s ruminations address the role of tea in India. Although it is a commonplace that today’s India is the world’s leading producer and consumer of tea, Indians drank very little tea until the British introduced it scarcely a century ago. Recipes, both contemporary and antique, supplement the text. Mark KnoblauchCopyright Ã Â© American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to the Digital edition.

The title of this book is misleading. Collingham’s subject is much larger, in fact, than curry. She traces the evolution of Indian cuisine, its often bizarre cultural exchanges with the invading British

and its eventual export to the world outside. She roams geographically from the northwest frontier to the shores of Sri Lanka, and historically from the culinary innovations of the Mughals in the 15th century to the triumph of chicken tikka masala, which Robin Cook, the British foreign minister, hailed as the new British national dish in 2001. Along the way, she sometimes loses the narrative thread, but the byways and even the dead ends tend to be intriguing.

A lot of the non-fiction that I've been reading lately has been about food and "Curry: A Tale of Cooks and Conquerors" by Lizzie Collingham is the latest in that trend. It describes the history of Indian food and how it was influenced by various invaders and immigrants. Collingham makes the argument that "authentic" Indian food has never really existed and shows the evolution of various Indian cuisines, both in cooking styles and use of ingredients.I thought that this book would have a lot of speculation and conjecture, but it is actually meticulously researched - almost every paragraph contains a citation or two. Consequently, the book is a little bit prosaic, although it flows quite well and the wealth of information that it contains certainly makes the dryness excusable. The book starts off with a description of Indian cooking as described in early Ayurvedic texts, and then talks about how the Mughals, Portuguese and British, in particular, changed these methods.It's amazing to think about how many common Indian foods (potatoes, tomatoes, cauliflower, corn, custard apples, pineapples, chillies) are from the New World or Europe and were introduced to India in the seventeenth century or even later. I was especially surprised that chillies weren't always part of Indian cuisine (although apparently chillies were adopted by Indians so quickly, that by the time they spread to some parts of Europe - Germany, Hungary etc. - they were believed to be indigenous to India.)Another thing I found astonishing that the British had to set up a marketing campaign to get Indians to drink tea, given that India is currently the world's largest producer and consumer of tea. They set up an Indian Tea Association, that among other things, went door-to-door demonstrating the proper preparation of tea, and during the Second World War, had "tea-vans" that provided Indian soldiers with tea and letter writers to keep in touch with their families while at war.The book also details the culinary lives of the British living in India ("Anglo-Indians") and to a lesser extent, other cultures. I found the change in British fashions absolutely fascinating - from authentically prepared curry, to the excesses of burra khana, to tinned salmon. The influence of Indian food all over the world (the West Indies, Pacific Islands, Japan) was also something I didn't know much about, and I am glad it was included.A couple of minor nitpicks - the notion of not eating food prepared by (or even come into contact with) an "impure" person (i.e. of a lower caste/different religion) seems incredibly archaic to me, but seems to have been pretty prevalent, according to

Collingham. As an Indian, I would've liked it if she had been clearer that it is a relic of the past. Perhaps I'm just being too touchy, considering that this is a book dealing with history.I also found the mention of the British divide-and-rule policy annoying, since it was only talked about in one paragraph, and I would have liked to hear more about the "apparently benign acts of cultural accommodation" by the British with regards to segregating food service by religion.

The development of India cuisine, not unlike the evolution of the Indian nation is not without many twist, turns and unexpected developments. In "Curry: A Tale of Cooks and Conquerors: Lizzie Collingham begins with the premise that India developed a national cuisine that was warped beyond all recognition by western imitators and ends up with a totally different conclusion, that as a living thing, Indian food has evolved over the years, taking on new influences from the Persia, Central Asia, Portugal, the British (both in India and later in the United Kingdom) and finally America. Purists of all stripes maybe appalled at the central thesis, but proponents of the strength of pluralism will rejoice.To begin with there is no single type of food that typifies Indian cuisine. It is a country of serveral different climates, range of foods, and ethnic traditions. Food from Kashmir is different from that from the Punjab, from that of the Bengal region. In many respects, Indian food resembles in its range and array of influences, both foreign and domestic that of the United States. ,The first significant influence to affect Indian food came from the Mughals who brought a Central Asian palate and a Persian sensibility to food. While this influence had an affect on all aspects of Indian food, perhaps the greatest impact was in the attitude the Mughals had toward food, as a source of unalloyed pleasure.This attitude puzzled and shocked the next great influence on Indian food, the Portuguese, who from their trading port of Goa provided New World ingredients like chilies and tomatoes to the range of possibilities in Indian cooking. Vanderloos, long the staple of late night drinking sessions in the UK and elsewhere could not be possible without the range of ingredients provided from the Western Hemisphere.The impact of the British was both lasting and profound. First, during the period prior to the 1858 Indian Mutiny of 1858, the members of the East India Company tended to go native, take Indian mistresses, and adapt to local customs and local food. After 1858, when the British sought to demonstrate exceptionalism, the colonial officials tried desperately to pretend they were still in rural Kent or Suffolk or the Midlands by their actions and food choices. English food and especially tinned food was preferable because though tasteless, demonstrated the Britishness of the colonial officials who lived very separate lives from the native population. Some of these ingredients were incorporated into Indian cuisine. Back in Britain, an appetite for the exotic tastes and smells of the Raj influenced the way the British prepared food,

leading to the creation of Indian restaurants throughout the larger cities at first (mainly by people from what eventually became Bangladesh) until it became possible to buy curry in any local pub.While the impact of Indian food has been most profoundly felt in Britain, post World War II America, where other Bangladeshi immigrants brought the experience of Indian food to the United States.Ms. Collingham's book is both informative and entertaining and provides much in the way of understanding. She does include a number of recipes, some old and difficult to follow due to the arcane units of measurement employed. The lack of modern equivalents are one of this book's few faults, limiting the adventurous cook to roughly half the recipes listed. However the story told is an interesting one and the author does her best to keep her narrative both lively and fascinating.

A very interesting history of curry and where it came from.Lots of good recipes, of curries and other Anglo-Indian dishes.If you don't know much about curry you will find this an interesting and enlightening book.

This is an amazing history book - Ms. Collingham has succeeded in portraying the life during the Mughal and the British Raj times through the colored glass of food and drink. I grew up in small town Southern India in the 50s and 60s, I am so impressed that a lady from Britian has been able to capture the caste-nuances prevelant in India and explain to us the implications on Indian cuisine. Fantastic - thank you. I am a history buff, I think this book should be part of prescribed reading for college students of Indian history.

Curry is a group of different traditional Indian dishes that the British grouped together and classified as curry. Curry was created for British in India and exported throughout the world. The British especially love curry but the Japanese took to curry and use it on noodles. Americans now eat Indian food and curries are becoming more popular.

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