



Curry: A Tale of Cooks and Conquerors

By Lizzie Collingham

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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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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

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.)*

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From [Booklist](#)

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 Knoblauch*
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Review

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