

**FOOD FOR IMPERIAL THOUGHT: MILITARY
DIET, NUTRITION, AND IMPERIAL
IDEOLOGIES IN COLONIAL INDIA IN 18TH
AND 19TH CENTURY**

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Abstract

This article tries to explore the features of British imperial ideology, which sought to interact, incorporate and eventually influence the gastronomic sphere of its military machine and further argues that the periodic notions of non-interventionism, reformism, and racism could be found in the military authorities' policy regarding military diet and nutrition. The nutritive aspect of diet primarily influenced the authority to re-examine its policies, more specifically since the middle of the nineteenth century, but, not without hindrance. Colonial existence had been learning about the colonial culinary world at first for practical reasons and soon, with the growth of power, started to breed out an infused version of colonial cuisine to survive. On the other hand, learning from its operational experiences, the colonial military system incorporated local knowledge about food cultures to balance its multicultural native army and imbibed stereotypes into its knowledge system, which eventually influenced their other policies like recruitment. This article further argues that along with colonial reality, global influences, and independent initiatives, negative variables like indigenous rituals acted as predicaments which coexisted within the system. So, far from being a space of difference, the colonial state's keen eye to balance opposite interests, made the colonial military platter a space of hybridity.

Keywords: Military diet, Medicine, British-Indian army, Colonial State, Logistics, Sanitation

Introduction

Army marches “on its stomach”; this well-known dictum of Napoleon Bonaparte explains the very aspect of warfare that usually remains outside the immediate ambit of military history. Even culinary and cultural studies rarely get engaged with this particular matter; the issue of military food. While after the social turn in traditional military history, most of the scholars in Europe started to take an interest in this matter under the study of military logistics; In India, where new military history is still in its infancy, studies on military food is still a novelty.¹ Since the advent of the colonial military establishments, a burgeoning colonial state struggled to feed its growing multicultural army, while indigenous soldiers periodically exhibited unhappiness with culinary control, producing minor disruptions to large-scale crises like the 1857 revolt. So, military diet became an important concern of the colonial military establishment. Balancing native cultural interests and global imperial ideologies, the colonial state sought to shape the platter for recruits, which later shaped imperial notions of military recruitment. By the middle of the nineteenth century, new global-imperial concerns like sanitation and nutrition further transformed the dietary politics of the colonial military. Keeping this changing scenario of imperial objective in the background, this article tries to tell a tale of military diet in colonial army, which was about constant conflict, practical conciliation, and resultant transformation of imperial ideologies.

Hybrid Victuals: Acculturation of Food and Food-ways in South Asia

New overseas colonies quickly outgrew the recognized ecological space of the west, forcing authorities to examine their logistical apparatus. Different ecological situations need different culinary expertise based on scale and taste, especially concerning the feeding of an army unfamiliar with strange foods and environments. A second requirement for the overseas empire was to enlist a foreign native population whose culinary customs and preferences were not compatible with Western tastes. So, when imperial soldiers acquired and acculturated new territory, the army platter gradually included indigenous foods. The Western experience of Indian cuisine had preceded British imperial development. Therefore when the colonial army marched into the subcontinent as conquerors, the commanders were already aware of the palatable concerns. In the case of the Indian subcontinent, early Europeans used native materials before their conquest. This acculturation of foodstuffs began with early European visitors. The earliest voyages towards the East were themselves catalysed by palatable interest; the search for exotic spices for cooking the bland meat of the west. The

English East India Company was founded in 1599 by the merchants of the Levant Company when the successful Dutch trade of spices started to threaten their interests.² Apart from the allure of taste, since the middle-ages, the astounding growth of the spice trade was due to the prevailing belief in the existence of preventive and curative medicinal properties in oriental spices.³ The disruption of the spice trade due to the fall of Constantinople catalysed overseas voyages to the East. Edward Terry, an early traveller of those olden times, was amazed by the amount of food in India, especially the Indian technique of cooking meat. Terry described the process of making mutton stew with utmost interest;

“...they stew all their flesh... cut into snippets, slices, or little parts, to which they put onions, herbs, roots, and ginger and other spices, together with some butter, which ingredients when they are well proportioned, make a food that is exceedingly pleasing to all palates, at their first tasting thereof most savoury meat; happily that very dish which Jacob made for his father Issac, when he got the blessing.”⁴

Early Europeans experienced dilettante joy in the exotic delicacies, but soon such memoirs entries started to include practical considerations. For example, when John Fryer, a surgeon of the East India Company, lived near Rairee during the last quarter of the 17th century had experienced Indian delicacies like *cutchery*.⁵ However, Fryer found little meat in Hindu-dominated neighbourhoods. He said that the only supply of mutton could be seen from some Muslim butcher there and opined that the hot climate made European stomachs more agreeable to the local stewed meat rather than the usual roasted meat.⁶ Like Fryer, Captain Alexander Hamilton mentioned the nourishing character of the Indian dish called *Kitcheree* and the excellent quality of meats of Indian wild fowls.⁷ All these early travellers, some of whom were medical practitioners, more or less unanimously agreed on the necessity of adopting local items and cooking to survive in the tropical atmosphere. By the Eighteenth century, English powers in India were comparatively well aware of the local culinary, their nutritive advantages, and community-wise culinary rituals, which later on helped them to feed their multi-cultural army.

New researches challenged the previous conception that the British people enjoyed different kinds of food from the natives to express the unbridgeable character of difference. New scholars like Cecilia Leong-Salobir expressed the opinion that colonial food in India, like everywhere else, is nothing but intercultural fusion food.⁸ This fusion was a practical necessity, partially influenced by military needs. Even there

was a tendency of replicating colonial fusion-based culinary knowledge of one colony in another through cookbooks, and these used to contain matters related to hygiene, nutrition, and cooking for the sick and invalids.⁹ The abundance of food and diseases was the recurring theme in every colonial travelogue related to India, and the former was often seen as solace for the latter. Solace was often imagined repeatedly as a remedy. Good medical practitioners, as well as medicines, were rare in the colonies. At most, there were some ship-surgeons who were neither medical practitioners like the physicians nor quacks, but they were numerically scarce to the demand; as a result, they were pretty costly for commoners.¹⁰ Hence, European commoners to military institutions, all believed in preventing rather than curing and, therefore, a reciprocal relationship between good health and good food developed in the colonies.¹¹ Apart from the European necessities, the growing colonial state had to get more and more concerned about the indigenous subjects under service, who had alien culinary rituals. The army, where the colonial masters and various native subjects came into the closest contact, naturally became the most volatile space for conflict and contact regarding the platter. The cultural necessity of non-intervention and the practical necessity of control, these horns of dilemma structured the colonial policies regarding military diet.

Victual Orientalism: Continuity of Military Cuisine in Early Colonial India

Napoleon Bonaparte, whose concern regarding his armies' food supply I have already mentioned, was known to the European military as the harbinger of an army revolution on a continental scale before the age of total war. Carl von Clausewitz, the writer of the phenomenal treatise *On War*, mentions that food availability is an immediate need.¹² Bonaparte, the lord of war for Clausewitz, successfully maintained this matter until his Russian campaign. 'Iron Duke' Wellington, famed for defeating Napoleon also remarked during his Indian career that the success of the military operation depended on supply, and military victuals constitute its most important part.¹³ Feeding the military machine had been a challenge to all imperial establishments. Like small medieval European camps, the Mughul court moved around its incredible stretch of territory only because their armies were always provided with local food resources and long-distance logistical facilities. Wherever the imperial war machine had no option of living off the land, imperial *thanas* (mostly depots or magazines), *Banjara*¹⁴ suppliers and even imperial *nawara*¹⁵ were used to supply the army, just like in the case of campaigns in the North-Western and Bengal frontiers.¹⁶ These *Banjaras* would

continue to act as logistical support till the first quarter of the nineteenth century till the post-1820 British paramount state would try to stop these non-state alternatives of military logistics. Railways replaced the long caravans of pre-modern logistical enterprises like the *Banjaras*. The Marathas, the last competitors of the East India Company's bid for paramountcy, were not very much keen to supplying food to their horsemen. Instead, they believed in taking their horsemen to food. During the Third Anglo-Maratha War, also known as the *Pindari* War, the Company army faced rag-tag *Pindari* irregular soldiers who gathered their fodder by plunder. The only difference between the Company's military machine and the pre-modern military system was the well-organized supply system. The western concept of regularized ration and controlled logistics won against the raid-based Maratha army. Marathas were known for minimalist consumption while marching, but the Company army had a more systematic setup which kept on innovating. In 1811, the Company introduced a new pattern of the knapsack and haversacks for the particular use of carrying rice for their personal use, for which the use of earlier knapsacks was forbidden.¹⁷ Apart from this material side of the interrelation between food and soldiery, it had some ritualistic significance related to sovereignty and loyalty in India. When Dilawar Khan met Babur before the Battle of Panipat, the latter asked the cause of the former's desertion "whose family had so long eaten the salt of the Lodis".¹⁸ *Namak* or salt has been synonymous with loyalty in the subcontinent's military labour market, and the Company appropriated this overt ritual within its patron-client relationship within the army. So, where the loyalty flowed through the platter of the sepoy, it was obvious that the patron had to provide extra importance to such matters.

While rations and logistics were generally Western concepts, the colonial system was hybrid. The authorities used to specify the amount of money spent on food and drinks while the troops chose their meals. Initially, the authority frequently contracted out the army's logistical necessities. For example, some A. I. Cobham proposed for the contract of dieting troops of Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa in the year 1768, where he mentioned nothing more than the fact that provisions of food and arrack (Indian liquor) would be provided as specified on the orders of the honourable President and his Council at the cost of ten rupees per month.¹⁹ This case shows that the whole logistical enterprise had been contracted out to private investors. The company army's most interesting establishment, the *bazar* to supply and arrange for the military, was an Indian 'supporting structure' with European leadership.²⁰ These bazars were either situated near the cantonment or moved along with the troops resulting in many non-combatants as camp followers. Cumbersome

military bazars created problems for the movement of the army as the native opponents' massive irregular cavalry forces used to harass these logistical trains. Whenever the Company army lost control over inlands from which provisions were usually accumulated in times of war, they were compelled to rely on fortified magazines for storing food.²¹ In the Anglo-Mysore conflict, the Company army often experienced severe scarcity of food. The accounts frequently suggest that the native sepoys ate rice for several days without even salt, leading to partial blindness.²² So it could be easily assumed that the early Company army did not have enough material resources or structural establishments to think about *sepoys'* health or nutrition or control over military diet. The initial objective of the Company establishment was to accumulate food to save soldiers from starvation and in that process incorporated local substitutes. In the Company's early days, recruits from overseas in Madras generally fed themselves with local substitutes like fish due to the lack of meat.²³ Later on, Company arranged direct rationing for the European soldiers, whose nutritious composition was much like Europe, while the native sepoys, the majority of the army, still depended on the *bazar*. The Company provided the native sepoys with allowances for food.

Native autonomy regarding diet was another characteristic of the early Company army. The importance of caste rituals in the case of dining became a pressing concern for the Company when it recruited native soldiers. Due to the sensitive attitude of the Company towards the native sepoys, by the end of the Eighteenth-century military culinary practices in every regiment had set some interesting culinary rules. Brahmin, Bhumihar, and Rajput recruits dominated the Bengal Army, who belonged to high caste stature and were mainly strict vegetarians, not even accepting vegetables like potatoes, aborigines, radishes, onions, garlic, and leeks.²⁴ So, while preserving native culinary rites and accepting native soldiery's culinary autonomy, early institutions could not afford a centralised cooking system. Before the revolt of 1857, local soldiers frequently warned officials about caste or religious purity, even in trifling matters. In his journal regarding army marches, John Lang, a law practitioner in India, mentioned such a case. While on the march, one Lieutenant was shooting squirrels with a pellet bow during the break. One Brahmin sepoy approached the Lieutenant and threatened that such behaviour of wanton destruction of animal life before the Hindus who were preparing their meal nearby, was improper and was against the general order of respecting the religious feelings of the Hindus.²⁵ Such cases were widespread till the 1857 mutiny. While Company authorities were sensitive to sepoys' caste-related preconceptions, it was widely believed that sepoys often blackmailed superior officers over trivial

matters. There were other factors outside the non-interference policy with native soldiers' lives. On the other hand, military officers' profiteering interest kept the bazar system going. The colonial army was full of hardships and drawbacks, but the profit potential to yield from commercial operations within the army made administrators corrupt. Aside from war loot or prize money, allowances like the bazar fund constituted opportunity for profiteering. Bazar fund was 'a tax on the transactions in the bazars that supplied and victualed the Indian army in cantonments and on the march', due to which the business growth in the bazar meant lucrative income for the corresponding official. To increase revenue, the officials often encouraged soldiers to consume more, particularly alcohol, leading to the further spread of alcoholism within the army. Cornwallis tried to stop this system, and his army reform caused the disappearance of 'the venality and buccaneering spirit that characterized the British in eighteenth century India'.²⁶ Such things were barriers to standardization in the sphere of organization and maintenance.

Apart from that, prices of foodstuffs were different along the subcontinent. The British-Indian Army developed three port cities into three centres of presidential armies. The Bengal army was high-caste Hindu-dominated, while the Bombay army was made of low caste and Eurasians. The Madras army soldiers were known as *Telenga* soldiers, coming from lower strata of the society. Due to the difference in caste compositions and availability of local foodstuffs, there were a few similarities regarding the culinary activities and proportion of ration allowed daily. For suppose a soldier of the Bengal infantry received 2 lbs of rice and the same quantity of meat, while in the case of Madras, that allowance was only 1 ½ lb of each.²⁷ Differing prices of grain usually caused such disparity. Previously the military authorities tried to incorporate soldiers from Bengal to furnish a well-built army in the south. This plan failed because the cost of rice was comparatively high in the south, and flour had been relatively rare; recruits from eastern UP and western Bihar usually lived on *chapattis*, their staple food, and due to this, they disliked recruitment in the south.²⁸ There was some problem regarding the price of rice also, for which uniform payment was impossible. In Bengal, one sepoy could procure rice weighing thirty to forty *seers* (27.99 to 37.32 kg) for a rupee, but in coastal areas like South India, the amount could reduce to 18 *seers* (16.79 kg) per rupee.²⁹ That is why the authority always had to consider the minute victual necessities before every campaign. Another problem was the soldiers' occasional discontent regarding the food provided to them; a constant trend continued until the end of British rule. In 1883, the Sikh Gun *Lashkars* of Hong Kong expressed dissatisfaction regarding the type of flour and ghee

supplied to them. When the inquiry took place, it became evident that the ration was good in quality and plentiful, but the men preferred another kind of flour than the rations'.³⁰ Initial problems regarding logistics and soldiers' dietary preferences barred any chances of centralisation or control.

Eating beyond *Kalapani*: Indian Sepoys Overseas and the Problem of Food

This bazar system usually worked perfectly within the subcontinent, but since the Company started to utilize Indian human resources for controlling other overseas colonies, victualing these men in unfavourable environs became a challenge. From 1762 to 1900, nearly 131,094 native soldiers participated in various overseas campaigns.³¹ While the Company authority tried to keep the culinary ritual of the sepoys intact as much as possible but often faced problems impossible to surmount, the most preliminary problem was during transport. Onboard the ship, provisions were usually limited, and due to fear of diseases, authorities' main concern was to keep the soldiers healthy. Apart from various sanitary measures like the use of tarpaulins to cover hatches, disinfecting the ship regularly with Doctor Smyth's Nitric acid³²; particular importance was given to the diet on board. To combat scurvy, the sailors' disease mostly, authorities took initiatives like stocking lemon juice. In 1753, James Lind, a chief physician of Haslar Hospital, Portsmouth, described lemon juice as the simple antidote for scurvy, and this cheap remedy had been included in the Royal Navy. Soon these remedies were included in the Company ships or *East Indiamen*. On the advice of Surgeon Ives, lemons were supplied to the first East Indian fleet in 1757; under the command of Admiral Watson.³³ For having lime juice on board, all *East Indiamen* were pet-named *limejuicers*.³⁴ Ships carrying sepoys were also provisioned for lemons before a voyage. In her journey to East India, Lady Nugent mentioned lime juice in rationed liquor for the soldiers.³⁵

Spirit	Biscuits	Count ry Beef	European Pork	Flour	Raisin	Peas	Rice	Dhall
½ pint	1 lb	1lb	¼ / ¾ lb alternately	1lb (¼ lb on Wednesday)	1 oz	½ lb	½ lb	¼ lb

Table 1: Ration on board (European soldiers and non-commissioned officers, 1806-7)³⁶

In the case of food items supplied to the Hindu and Muslim recruits on board (Table 2), the list had been more or less the same, except for a few things. Europeans used to eat beef and pork (Table 1) as they usually board on separate ships. Biscuits, often double-baked bread, have usually served as preserved stock of carbohydrates since the early days. By 1833, Thomas Grant of the Victualing Office had invented mechanised production of these sea biscuits and thus industrialised the British biscuit industry.³⁷ It was a cheap and long-lasting alternative food on which the British overseas empire rested. Muslims were provided with rice while Hindus with flour for making *roti* or *chapattis*. Apart from garlic, none of the illegal food items according to Hindu rituals were kept on board. Hindu recruits were provisioned with two extra things; *chana* or chickpeas and gram. As most Hindu recruits came from Bihar and Upper Province, where chickpeas gram was used as a morning drink, army establishments included such items. Most of the *purbiyas* were *sattu*-drinker or regular drinkers of chickpeas gram sherbet, for which Durgadas, a Bengali low tier military scribe in his memoirs of the 1857s mutiny, stereotyped them as *sattu*-drinking cowards.³⁸ *Chura* (parched rice) and *sattu* (parched and ground gram) constitute the favoured food for peasants on the move in the Gangetic plains, for which it was apparent that the pre-mutiny soldiers were coming from high-caste peasant backgrounds brought the culinary choice of that particular class with them.

Food Items	Hindu	Muslim
Rice	--	8 ch ³⁹
Flour	5 ch	--
Chana	5 ch	--
Dal	--	3 ch
Gram	4 ch	1 ch
Ghee	1 ½ ch	1 ½ ch
Salt	1 ½ ch	1 ½ ch
Tobacco	1 ½ ch	1 ½ ch
Sugar	2 ch	2 ch
Chilly	¼ ch	¼ ch
Garlic	--	¼ ch
Tamarind	2 ch	2 ch
Turmeric	--	¼ ch
Water	1 gall	1 gall
Fire Wood	1 seer ⁴⁰	1 seer

Table 2: Ration on board for sepoy (1806)⁴¹

Early colonial masters were very much partial to such native relish. Even when emigrant labours from such class and territorial backgrounds migrated overseas, A.C. Campbell, the deputy commissioner on emigration steamers, particularly emphasised the importance of *sattu* and *chura* for being highly nutritious and cheap.⁴² These things became the native alternative to British biscuits. By comparing the list of food given to the indentured labours and native soldiers on board, it can be said that there were very few differences, but the colonial authorities in both cases gave much thought to the culinary tastes the labours and soldiers.

Beef and pork were not allowed on the native ships because of sepoys from Hindu and Muslim communities. Apart from that betel leaf, betel nuts were also provided on board. Later on, food items increased, and by the time of the Java and Mauritius (1810-11) or Burma (1824-26) campaigns, more spices like pepper, coriander seed, cumin, and salted fish were included. After landing onshore, native troops had to remain satisfied with the everyday food items like rice, dal, ghee, turmeric, tobacco, and salt. These incorporations show the special care for the soldiers' diet on board was due to the practical concern of keeping them healthy till the shore. However, blunders happen sometimes. In 1789, when a detachment of Bengal Native Infantry was sent to Sumatra, most of the sepoys fell sick during their return voyage. A large portion of the detachment was affected with night-blindness, "probably to be ascribed to their very bad food" because many resorted to eating nothing but parched peas or rice while on board.⁴³ The culinary rituals of high-caste sepoys often caused such problems during overseas campaigns.

Sometimes lack of foresight caused a terrible logistical crisis for the troops overseas. In particular, during the expedition to Burma in 1824, the military authorities thought that Burma had a good supply of food, due to which supplies from Bengal would not be needed.⁴⁴ Despite an early victory, the stationed army was trapped in the monsoon hit, swamp-laden marshes without much food in their belly. Dysentery and acute malnourishment led to death. In this situation, stewed fresh meat was the only relief, but lack of provisions made it impossible. The military hospitals had only the provisions for a liquid mixture of pulses and corn beef. A few tried to forage foods by hunting birds from local forests or gathering wild and raw pineapples, but such things led to other fatal outcomes. Provisions were scanty and salted beef, pork, and biscuits decomposed in humid and damp weather.

Victual Racism: 'Martial Race' and Food in the late Nineteenth century

After the rising of 1857, racial attitudes became gradually prevalent in the case of military recruitment. However, suppose the day-to-day operation of the colonial Indian army is considered to continue on the earlier philosophy of non-interference. In that case, the continuity of previous policies like not interfering with native sepoys' cultural rituals 'especially those associated with the preparation of food' shows the caste-based background of the martial race theory.⁴⁵ But it does not mean that the centrality of native culinary rituals in the composition of the army had been reduced. It continued in a different mode. After 1857, every military unit was mixed in nature to displace caste supremacy. Martial race, a post-mutiny change in recruitment policy, was based partially on a dietary taxonomy. According to this new racial taxonomic view, rice-eating populations were less militarised than the wheat-eating population. This victual determinism in the 'martial race' idea had a background story. Major General Sydenham, Senior Officer of Artillery, reported in 1798 that the Hindus as 'always discontented, and constantly averse to the expedition by the sea'. Sydenham further pointed out that the well-built Moorish-cum-mixed Portuguese origin people who were seafaring, beef eaters, and of living in the region of Chittagong were more eligible as recruits.⁴⁶ There is a prevalent idea that the meat-eating population is more martial than vegetarians, and this preconception transformed into a well-believed notion influencing policymakers later on. In the post-1857 period, Punjab became the main pool of military recruitment. Tony Ballantyne argued that the nineteenth century Punjab was different in many aspects. The administrators found there a population whose central communities valorised martial values and filled with many 'stout' meat eaters rather than 'weak' vegetarians compared to South India.⁴⁷ This change in the ideology of the policymakers is an exciting shift from the times of Sitaram and his contemporaries. Sitaram, who had appeared in the early Nineteenth-century army, showed immense disgust for the foods like eggs or meats consumed daily within the Company cantonments. The pre-mutiny high-caste Bengal army was filled with men like Sitaram, but after the mutiny, the pool of military labour moved from the high-caste *purbiya* heartland of Upper Provinces and Bihar to the meat-eating Punjabi heartland, the military platter changed.

The whole dining ritual in western discourse has been a space of masculinity. The relationship between food and gender disposition constitutes an integral part of British and colonial daily life. As traits like dominance, rationality, violence, sexual prowess comprise the critical elements of western hegemonic masculinity, meat-eating symbolically

accentuates these traits within the male self-image and feeds "into the patriarchal structure of human-male supremacy, celebrating a primitive masculinity and normalizing aggressive characteristics by tying them to male, gendered ('natural') behaviours".⁴⁸ When this victual masculinity became a vital part of colonial discourse, the 'Orient' subject lost its power to counter that hegemony. As Edward Said remarked, due to 'Orientalism', "the Orient was not (and is not) a free subject of thought or action".⁴⁹ The colonial justification of their rule continued to emphasize the femininity of the Hindu subjects due to vegetarianism and meat-consuming Muslims as the oppressive other from whom the colonial authority saves the feminine Hindu issues. This perception continued to echo through the words of colonial administrators.⁵⁰ This initial prevailing idea influenced the later racial taxonomies like the martial race. British concept of martiality/masculinity became noticeable only by the characteristics like meat consumption.

The racial taxonomies encouraged the compilation of caste handbooks for the Indian army. Such manuals for recruitment focused on the food habits of the potential recruits from those communities. For example, in the handbook related to Kumaonis, it is stated that millet and cockscomb, occasionally varied with rice, form the staple diet for the poorer class while the better-offs usually have rice & *dal* or chapattis & vegetables. However, what is interesting is, that the handbook eagerly noted that meat 'with the exception of that which is forbidden by religion, such as tame fowls and the flesh of carnivorous animals, is eaten readily by most classes'.⁵¹ This readiness shows the positive bias of the military authorities towards the Kumaonis as martial. Previously due to the high-caste character of the native regiments, the messing system had been impossible. Such handbooks particularly pointed out these practical culinary problems. Just like the handbook of Hindusthani Musalmans points out that a Muslim "can have no religious scruples to eat with a Christian as long as the food eaten is a lawful kind".⁵² While in the same manner, the handbook on Brahmins specifically points out that "wearisome formalities" hampers the Brahmin daily life, and due to this, "messing is practically impossible" in a Brahmin regiment.⁵³ Apart from this, meat consumption and martiality were often equated in most of the pages of such handbooks. As per the handbook, the Brahmin recruits of the late nineteenth century were less prejudiced than the pre-mutiny high-caste army. For example, the Sarwariya branch of Brahmins had objections regarding meat consumption in the regiment, but as per the report of the Commanding Officer of the 1st Bengal Native Infantry, such complaints no longer exist as they learned to coexist with such things.⁵⁴

One such handbook regarding the Gurkhas directly compared food habits to martial nature. It says,

‘The Magars and Gurungs have already been referred to as being of the Tartar race...they are square-built, sturdy men, with fine, muscular and large chest and limb development... They are a merry-hearted race, eat animal food, and in Nepal drink a kind of beer made from rice called *jaūr* and a kind of spirit called ‘*raksi*’. In our battalions, they will drink any English wine, spirits, or beer. They are intensely fond of soldiering. They are very proud and sensitive... They are very obstinate, very independent, very vain... They are intensely loyal to each other and their officers in time of trouble or danger.’⁵⁵

What Ballantyne argued in the case of the Punjabis seems to be similar to the case of other martial races also, whose character of meat and alcohol consumption had been equated with martiality and other masculine traits. These military subjects created the binary opposite of the feminine majority like the Bengalis.

Once the idea of meat consumption and martiality became synonymous, even the natives who previously bragged about their vegetarian purity started to advocate meat-eating. The Bengali intelligentsia, since the 1870s, began to ask for reform in their day-to-day culinary culture, and by the early decades of the 20th century, 'scientific' explanation and propagation of a high-protein diet gained momentum.⁵⁶ Chunnilal Bose, a Chemistry Professor at the Medical College, in his book, mentioned that a few generations ago, the martial Bengalis were used to nourishing foods like fish and milk, but now the carbohydrate-rich but protein-deficient diet caused a decline in national health.⁵⁷ Mahatma Gandhi who advocated vegetarianism and non-violence throughout his life consumed meat and drinks in his early years. Later on, during his vegetarian life in England, he found that vegetarianism would be equally conducive to physical strength.⁵⁸ Gandhi's experiments with food was an exceptional case but by the end of the nineteenth century with the growth of physical culture to counter colonial discourse of native femininity, accepted the very traits of western definitions of masculine dietary choices. So, the consensus of the ruler and the ruled somehow intermingled regarding meat consumption and masculinity.

Victual Reformism: Dietary and Nutritive control in the Camps and Military Hospitals

The concept of nutrition as an essential character for an ideal military diet emerged when the empire felt confident enough to indulge in such cases. David Arnold argued that the colonial government paid minute attention to military diets before the 1890s.⁵⁹ Arnold's periodization is not proper because various reports started to fill the bureaucratic tables by the 1870s. Probably this trend became a global-imperial phenomenon due to two things: Florence Nightingale's book *Directions for Cooking by Troops in Camp and Hospital*⁶⁰ after the Crimean War and various dietary-sanitary reforms during the Civil War in America. From 1863 to 1874, Nightingale wrote three books related to the topic of military diet and acted as an "exemplary change agent".⁶¹ In her book *Observations on the sanitary state of the army in India* (1863), she, for the first time, laid emphasis on regular diet in different seasons for the soldiers because India is "the one where men cannot be dieted the whole year round by the same rule without mischief".⁶² She favoured Sir John Lawrence's observation of including more vegetables in the diet and complained that the food had been imperfectly cooked or served up in a way that destroys the digestive organs in a tropical climate which was partly due to unhealthy cooking areas.⁶³ All the doctors started to emphasise the need for a healthy diet and atmosphere for the healthy stature of a soldier. Many nutritionists talked about sanitation, diet, and health, but Florence Nightingale's voice surpassed them. The cause of her success was her accomplishments as a social statistician. When she put forward her graphic tabulation of the morbidity and mortality statistics of the British Army to the public in January 1858, she pointed out the mortality rate in the hospitals during the Crimean war and the rate of mortality at home with particular reference to India.⁶⁴ Florence Nightingale's book *Notes on matters affecting the health, efficiency, and hospital administration of the British army*, particularly drew attention to the crude mortality rate (69 out of every 1000 per year) of army personnel in India in the middle of the nineteenth century. Denying the prevalent idea of the unhealthy climate of India as the cause of high mortality, Nightingale, for the first time, blamed things like bad sanitary and dietary conditions for such morbid outcomes. Nightingale's emphasis led to the appointment of the Royal Commission, and much of the work of that endeavour was her handiwork. This statistical turn was vital for the positive reinforcement that energized the sanitary and nutritive reforms within the army.

Army hospitals, particularly the European Military Hospitals, became an area for conducting nutrition-related control or order. In 1865, a General Order of the Government (G.O.G) no. 422 of 1865 shows that they were replacing the experimental diet chart for the European Military Hospitals at Madras, as ordered in a previous G.O.G no. 149 dated 1st May 1863. Health drinks like barley water, rice water, lemonade, eggs and boneless meats, draught beer, and milk were prescribed with particular amounts for patients.⁶⁵ Such experimentation with the military diet dates back to 1857 but gained momentum since Nightingale's sanitary and dietary reforms campaign. Honourable Sidney Herbert's Committee had drawn up a diet chart which continued till the end of the nineteenth century with minute alterations.⁶⁶ Such alterations and criticism continued because a group of nutritionists found those charts unfavourable. At this time, the debate was regarding the inclusion of native food and following tropical norms. People like Herbert Greene, even in 1878, continued to say that such diet charts constitute animal food unsuitable for tropical climates. So there was a trend of discussion within the colony regarding military diet, which got an external push from Nightingale. As Florence Nightingale pointed out that improvement in diet and sanitation, particularly in tropical climates, could reduce the mortality rate, the earlier tendencies of transforming dietary habits of the military got encouragement. However, the fear of native conservatism regarding diet was also there. That is why experimentation started with the European hospitals. The most crucial characteristic of these diet charts was that the quantities of food supplements were regularised according to patients' physical and medicinal needs, which was pretty much new to the colonial army of India.

Moreover, the dietary chart encouraged further discussions on nutrition and health in the military. So, if we consider regularisation as well as standardization of dietary as well as sanitary aspects of the military as a reformist tendency of the Victorian Empire, we must consider the other side of the same coin. The continuous differentiation between climates somehow continued innate racism within the martial diet. In another G.O.G dated 26 June 1857, a revised diet chart was placed for European patients in all military hospitals at three Presidencies. This diet chart shows that the Colonial Authority has been taking soldiers' health seriously since the middle of the nineteenth century. However, the focus was on the European troops only. The primary ideological catalyst behind sanitary modernisation was impetus to 'guard the sons of empire' from the landscape filled with native diseases. This ideological backdrop made the advisors and policymakers focus on the Europeans first.⁶⁷ This

type of experimentation with military hospital diet was an effect imported from outside.

Meal	Full diet	Half diet	Low diet	Spoon or Fever diet	Milk diet
Breakfast	Tea- ½ oz Bread- 1 lb Butter- 1 oz Sugar- ¾ oz	Tea- ½ oz Bread- 1 lb Butter- ½ oz Sugar- ¾ oz	Tea- ½ oz Bread- 8 oz Sugar- ¾ oz	Tea- ¼ oz Sugar- ¾ oz	Tea- ½ oz Bread- 1 lb Butter- ½ oz Sugar- ¾ oz
Dinner	A pint of broth with barley greens and onions, and 1lb of meat, either mutton or beef	A pint of broth with rice, barley, greens, or onions, and 8 oz of mutton of good and edible quality, or a pint of chicken soup, with vegetables; a chicken or half a fowl, weighing when ready for being dressed, not less than 8 oz.	A pint of mutton or chicken broth.	Bread ½ lb., to be made to panado or pudding, or 4 oz of sago, with ¾ oz of sugar.	A pint of milk (new) or a pint of rice and milk with 3 oz of sugar.
Supper	A pint of rice gruel with ¾ oz of sugar, seasoned ginger or nutmeg, and a glassful of wine, should any be allowed him.	Ditto	Ditto	The same as at Breakfast	The same as at dinner

Table 3: Diet Chart for the Hospitals of European Troops (1857)⁶⁸

The military hospital system had much improved in America since the Civil War, and military diet became a concern for the quartermasters. In 1863, a circular from the Surgeon General’s Office of the Confederate States of America shows that the surgeon was directed to go through the diet roll of the patients every morning during the inspection.⁶⁹ The exciting thing is that the diet chart given in the circular of the Confederate Surgeons has some similarities with the diet chart put forward by the Madras department. Apart from some local vegetables like okra and maize, the overall dietary supplement mentioned in the Confederate diet chart had exciting similarities with the chart in India. The only difference is the amount of meat prescribed for the patient, probably due to environmental differences. Throughout the Nineteenth century, we would see that the colonial authorities became increasingly concerned with the diet of the armed forces in an alien environment. For example, the colonial administration in the Caribbean debated the consumption of salted beef by the armed forces and advocated for a local fresh diet.⁷⁰ But a controlled diet chart prescribed and regularized from the top first arrived in the military hospitals this time.

Due to the Queen’s intervention, the authority took immediate action because, in her report regarding the mortality in the Crimean War, Nightingale concluded that the crisis in the Crimean War was a ‘mere trifle’ compared to the scope of problems among the British forces in the Indian subcontinent.⁷¹ In 1861, due to her drive for reducing the mortality rate in Indian military establishments and push for proper documentation of the reports related to sanitation and diet in barracks and army hospitals, enquiry forms were distributed.⁷² The report of the Second Royal Commission on the Sanitary State of the Army in India (1864) became the second push for the drive towards modernising sanitation and health in the army. Diet became an essential part of such reports. The report of the Second Royal Commission on the Sanitary State of the Army in India gave a list of the average diet of the British soldier;

Meat	Bread	Vegetables	Rice	Sugar	Tea	Coffee	Salt	Firewood
1 lb	1 lb	1 lb	4 oz	2 ½ oz	5/7 oz	1 3/7 oz	1 oz	3 lbs

Table 4: Average diet of a British Soldier in India, 1850s-60s⁷³

The conclusive observation was that the diet ‘would be amply sufficient for the sustenance of men engaged in out-door toil in a cold climate,’ but the exhaustion produced by the hot climate made ‘the present ration apparently no more than sufficient’.⁷⁴ Nevertheless,

consuming meat and liquor in a hot climate with the general sedentary and idle lifestyle at the barracks often led to digestive and biliary diseases like dysentery. As a result, the reduction of the quantity of animal food in the diet and supplementing with vegetables and fruits were recommended. Some even recommended eating less in tropical climates. However, this point has also been criticised differently. Charles Alexander Gordon, a member of the sanitary commission of Bengal, wrote a book named *Army Hygiene*, where he particularly mentioned the difference between Asiatic and western climates. Due to the increased emission of carbon (8 to 10 ounces) in the Asiatic climate, he advised the requirement of more food per soldier while supporting less meat-eating. He pointed out that the military diet in colonial India was deficient in vegetables supplemented with albumen content ground lentils, compared to the American army.⁷⁵ Gordon's comparison shows that in the case of the military diet, the policymakers started to climatically differentiate between East and West and tried to compare the diet with the American army. Somehow since the middle of the nineteenth century, the standards of military diet started to get an international stage of comparison. On the other hand, the dichotomy of East and West continued. Gordon, in particular, criticised the prevalent idea that the colonial army needed to be fed in lesser quantities due to tropical conditions. By pointing out Dr Parkes' table of alimentary constituents of military food, he showed that the platter of the Indian colonial army lacked enough nutrients compared to Europe.

Constituents	At home (in oz)	In India (in oz)
Water	38.88	30.07
Nitrogenous substances	3.86	4.36
Fat	1.30	1.38
Carbo-Hydrates	17.35	14.47
Salts	0.80	1.54
Total	62.10	51.82

Table 5: Dr Parkes' Table of Alimentary Constituents⁷⁶

The sign was pretty clear that the policymakers and advisers like Gordon were very much concerned with the nutrition of the colonial Indian army since the middle of the nineteenth century.

The government never tried to tamper with native soldiers' diet since the 1857's rebellion. Florence Nightingale mentioned in her *Observations* that in the Native hospitals, the patients 'diet themselves'.⁷⁷ However, things started to change in the last quarter of the nineteenth

century. In 1875's sanitary commission report of the Bengal Native Army said that an improper and insufficient diet was the leading cause of deterioration of health.⁷⁸ Interestingly, animal food and liquor had been advised to improve health. Military officials started a debate regarding the inclusion of meat in the native soldiers' diet only because the meat ration would be confined to sheep, goats, or fowl.⁷⁹ Articles like sugar, condensed milk, and lime juice gradually became part of it because there was no chance for religious complications arising from these items. (Table 6).

Detail of Food	British	Native
Brandy	3 dozens	1½ dozens
Taragonna wine	6 --	3 --
Rum	As required, from the field commissariat	
Lime-juice	6 --	3 --
Tea	--	100 lb
Sugar	150 lb	300 lb
Sago	50 --	100 --
Arrowroot	50 --	50 --
Barley	50 --	30 --
Rice	To be supplied locally as required	
Extract of beef	25 lb	--
Essence of beef	25 --	--
Condensed milk	50 --	50 --
Whitehead's concentrated soups	25	--
Preserved potatoes	50	--
Compressed vegetables	50 --	--

Table 6: Diet Chart for the Hospitals of European and Native Troops (1883)⁸⁰

It was a significant shift from a centralized nutritional point of view. However, differentiating between British and native bodies continued, and charts were made for the different diets. Interestingly along with precooked meat, other materials like potatoes, compressed vegetables, precooked concentrated soup, and other community-wise improper materials were kept away from the native soldiers' diet chart. This inclusion of the native soldiers in the controlling sphere of military diet shows that despite the continuity of nativity in the military platter, the colonial state gradually moved towards standardisation. On the other hand, native choice of food in contact with their colonial masters started to change. This dual process of acculturation finally made way for conciliation. It does not mean that the native soldiers stopped their

expression of dissent regarding food. During the First World War, Indian regiments often expressed their dissatisfaction regarding the food served to them and the colonial authorities always tried to meet their demands as much as possible.

The local soldiers' nutrition began to be regularised, although the rationing discrepancy was noticeable. This attempt was adopted to balance traditional food practices and racial discrimination.

Conclusion:

The British imperial authorities steadily endeavoured to manage the army's gastronomic realm, although the periodic nature and objectives changed with the colonial state's transforming character. The nutritive aspect of the diet was the only line of defence between oriental extremity and British health, which served as the authorities' key concern. Colonial India's culinary culture grew from pre-modern and European understanding, and even amid change, there were continuities. Since the overseas campaigns, the authorities harmonised the structure's logistical needs with the sepoy's individual cultural needs while maintaining basic non-intervention. After 1857, the sepoy dietary habits were used to determine racial recruitment; early knowledge made way for later stereotypes. At the same time, due to the global and imperial need for sanitised governance, the state controlled the diets of Europeans and later tried to control native soldiers' diets cautiously. Sanitizing European platters while very slightly altering native foods demonstrates the persistence of prior non-interventionism even during the age of sanitary reformism. These colonial anxieties regarding platter were the microcosmic representation of the colonial state whose periodic ideologies reflected in how it tried to change minute things like military diet.

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Notes and References

- ¹For example, Roy, "Feeding the Leviathan," 144-161; Wasi, "Cook Servants in the Indian Army," 569-576.
- ²Chaudhuri, *The English East India Company*.
- ³Freedman, "Health, wellness and the allure of spices," 47-53.
- ⁴Terry, *A Voyage to East India*, 87, 122, 195.
- ⁵Fried flour cakes stuffed with *dal* (pulses) are a popular Indian snack today.
- ⁶Crooke, ed., *A New Account of East India*, vol. 1, 209-10.
- ⁷Hamilton, *A New Account of the East-Indies*, vol. 1, 161.
- ⁸Leong-Salobir, *A Food Culture in Colonial Asia*, 1.
- ⁹Leong-Salobir, "Spreading the Word," 131-133.
- ¹⁰Bruijn, *Ship's Surgeons of the Dutch East India Company*, 19; Marshall, "The White Town of Calcutta," 314.
- ¹¹Goodman, "Unpalatable Truths," 210.
- ¹²Clausewitz, *On War*, 343.
- ¹³Quoted in John Keegan, *A History of Warfare*, 304.
- ¹⁴Choudhury, *Trade, Transport and Tanda*, 1-18.
- ¹⁵Roy, "Naval Strategy of the Mughals," 170-175.
- ¹⁶Gommans, *Mughal Warfare*, 104.
- ¹⁷Wilson, *History of the Madras Army*, vol. 3, 388.
- ¹⁸Beveridge, *The Bābur-nāma*, vol. 1, 440.
- ¹⁹National Archives of India (hereafter NAI), New Delhi, Mr. A.I. Cobham's Proposals for the Contract, Home Department, Public Branch, Year 1768, O.C. 18th January, No. 1 (b)
- ²⁰Callahan, *The East India Company*, 8.
- ²¹Bryant, "British Logistics and the Conduct of the Carnatic War," 282.
- ²²Wilks, *Historical Sketches of the South India*, 229.
- ²³Dodwell, ed., *Calendar of the Madras Dispatches*, 348-349.
- ²⁴Alavi, *The Sepoys and the Company: Tradition and Transition in Northern India 1770-1830*, 76-77.
- ²⁵Lang, *Wanderings in India*, 130.
- ²⁶Callahan, "Cornwallis and the India Army," 95.
- ²⁷Wilson, *History of the Madras Army*, vol. 3, 255.
- ²⁸Bandyopadhyay, *Sepoys in the British Overseas Expeditions*, vol.1, 29.
- ²⁹Wilson, *History of the Madras Army*, vol. 3, 88-89
- ³⁰NAI, New Delhi, Letter from Lieut. Col. A. G. Ross, 2nd in Command and Wing Commander, 1st Sikh Infantry, Punjab Frontier Force on Special duty, to Lieut. Col. O.R. Newmarch, Offg. Secretary of the Government of India, Military Department, Military Department Proceedings, Progs. May 1884, No. 580, para 6
- ³¹Bandyopadhyay, *Sepoys in the British Overseas*, vol.1, 2
- ³²Since 1780, Dr. Smyth's nitric acid solution was used for disinfecting ships, but as nitric acid is more dangerous than contagious diseases, William Cruickshank introduced chlorine-based disinfectant in 1795. Nevertheless, the Company ships continued to use Smyth's solution even in 1806. See Neild, "William Cruickshank (FRS—1802)," 1887.
- ³³Blane, *Select Dissertations*, 69.
- ³⁴Lloyd, "The Introduction of Lemon Juice," 131.
- ³⁵Cohen, *Lady Nugent's*, 12.
- ³⁶Bandyopadhyay, *Sepoys in the British Overseas*, vol.1, 311.
- ³⁷Goody, "Industrial Food," 73.
- ³⁸Banerjee, *Amar Jivana-Charit*, 321.

- ³⁹Chatak is an Indian mode of measurement which is roughly equivalent to sixty gram.
- ⁴⁰Seer is another indigenous measurement, equivalent to 933.10 gram or roughly 1 kg.
- ⁴¹Bandyopadhyay, *Sepoys in the British Overseas*, vol. 1, 311.
- ⁴²Kumar, "Feeding the Girmitya," 43.
- ⁴³Williams, *An Historical Account*, 222.
- ⁴⁴Wilson, *Narrative of the Burmese War*, 264.
- ⁴⁵Rand, "'Martial Races' and 'Imperial Subjects'", 6.
- ⁴⁶General Sydenham's Report on the Defective state of Corps of Artillery, quoted in Bandyopadhyay, *Sepoys in the British Overseas*, vol.1, 25.
- ⁴⁷Ballantyne, *Between Colonialism and Diaspora*, 34-5.
- ⁴⁸Calvert, "You are What You (M)eat," 19.
- ⁴⁹Said, "Orientalism", 88.
- ⁵⁰Roy, "A Dietetics of Virile Emergency", 256-259.
- ⁵¹Latham, *Handbooks for the Indian Army: Kumaonis*, 24-25.
- ⁵²Fitz & Bourne, *Handbooks for the Indian Army: Hindustani Musalmans and Musalmans of the Eastern Punjab*, 13.
- ⁵³Bingley & Nicholls, *Caste Handbooks for the Indian Army: Brahmans*, 42.
- ⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 15.
- ⁵⁵Vansittart, *Handbooks for the Indian Army: Gurkhas*, 77.
- ⁵⁶Sengupta, "Nation on a Platter," 87-89.
- ⁵⁷Bose, *Food*, 109.
- ⁵⁸Mishra, "Sergeant-Major Gandhi," 692-3.
- ⁵⁹Arnold, "The 'discovery' of malnutrition", 10.
- ⁶⁰Nightingale, *Directions for Cooking*.
- ⁶¹Hays, "Florence Nightingale," 154.
- ⁶²Nightingale, *Observations*, 37.
- ⁶³*Ibid.*, 38-39.
- ⁶⁴Kopf, "Florence Nightingale," 404.
- ⁶⁵NAI, New Delhi, General Orders by His Excellency the Governor in Council, dated 5th December 1865, Department Military Government of Madras, Branch General Orders, 2nd December 1865, p-283
- ⁶⁶Green, "Diet in Indian Military Hospitals," 298.
- ⁶⁷Halvorson & Wescoat Jr., "Guarding the Sons of Empire" 1-5.
- ⁶⁸NAI, New Delhi, List of revised scale of hospital diet for European Troops at Three Presidencies, Military Government of Madras Department, Branch General Orders, Progs. 27th June 1857, Page No. 420
- ⁶⁹National Library of Medicine, United States of America, Circular signed by Samuel Preston Moore, Confederate States of America, Surgeon-General's Office, Richmond, Virginia, MARCXML, dated 6th July, 1863, p. 2
- ⁷⁰Berti, "'Salt meat [...] is prejudicial to the health of the troops'," 1-10.
- ⁷¹Nightingale, *How People may live*, 367.
- ⁷²Hays, "Florence Nightingale", 152.
- ⁷³*Report of the Commissioners appointed to inquire into the Sanitary State of the Army in India*, 84.
- ⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 85.
- ⁷⁵Gordon, *Army Hygiene*, 35, 39.
- ⁷⁶*Ibid.*, 42.
- ⁷⁷Nightingale, *Observations*, 65.
- ⁷⁸*Medical and Sanitary Report of the Native Army of Bengal for the Year 1875*, xii.
- ⁷⁹NAI, New Delhi, Letter from Lieut. Col. H. Collett to Col. G. Chesney, Secretary of the Govt. of India, Military Department Proceedings, August 1883, No. 560.
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