

# SAKSHI ARYA

## Dining with the Despot:

### Consumption of postcolonial disorders in contemporary culinary experience

#### ABSTRACT

By taking the example of two cafes in Khan Market of Delhi, India, this paper establishes how the (interminable) effects of colonialism are not just subjects of scholarship in the social sciences but are also used as strategic attributes of capitalist marketing. Through a philosophical analysis of the neoliberal marketplace, this paper also draws attention to the marginalisation and othering of (Indian) natives (of all cultures) and addresses how it can take place as a result of commodity fetishism. In particular, this paper suggests ways in which cafe businesses (in Delhi, in this regard) adopt a trivialised view of the decolonisation discourse. This metaphoric invasion of the discourse seeks to promote decolonisation of national identity by associating consumables and spaces with eroticised and parodic significations that only end up re/constructing the colonial agency they are set to dismantle. Using postcolonial theory and Pierre Bourdieu's ideas on taste and domination, this analysis is structured as a parodic café experience— a device central to the construction of postcolonial dining: from entering the space, to consumption of goods, to paying for the experience at the end.

#### KEYWORDS

decolonisation; metaphor; othering; commodity fetishism; domination; postcolonial; gendered space; mimicry; eroticism; hybridisation; syntax; philosophy

#### BIO

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## Dining with the Despot

### Consumption of postcolonial disorders in contemporary culinary experience

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by *Sakshi Arya*

“Discover a delicious amalgamation of British and Indian cuisine at the all-new Anglow, where the only Colonial hangover worth celebrating is served hot, on plates.”<sup>1</sup>

“Before British Raj coffee was born out of the idea of decolonising the history of coffee in the Indian subcontinent and bringing to the fore its Indianess.”<sup>2</sup>

Taken from the public domain, these statements are descriptions of Anglow and Before British Raj Coffee respectively, both of which are establishments located in the upscale Khan Market of Delhi, India. Before British Raj Coffee, however, has gained prominence as a recognised coffee retailer with an online store delivering across India, and flagship stores and partnerships in different locations around Delhi.<sup>3</sup>

With their attempts of celebrating a ‘colonial hangover’ and ‘decolonising the history of coffee’, both of these cafes clearly seem to promise more than just nutrition or a good time, and aim to reform the national identity by denying colonial superiority despite being haunted by the very figure which they are trying to dismantle. Their descriptions are paradigmatic of the “complexities that cannot be served under the single rubric of postcolonialism.”<sup>4</sup> This paper establishes how Anglow and Before British Raj Coffee remain defeated in resisting colonial superiority because they

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<sup>1</sup> Because I was unable to find direct statements made by the founders of Anglow Cafe, I used quotes from popular reviewing websites instead. See, <https://www.travelandleisureindia.in/dining/anglow-khan-market/>  
I understand that the use of reviews may present a limitation, because it cannot be assessed if the restaurateurs of Anglow have any association with these reviews.

<sup>2</sup> Taken from the LinkedIn Profile of Before British Raj Coffee’s co-founder Anoushka Ghonkrokta, which can be found here: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/anoushka-ghonkrokta-8b2840186?originalSubdomain=in>

I have also refrained from correcting the spelling to Indianness which Anoushka writes as ‘Indianess’.

<sup>3</sup> BBR Coffee Locations. <https://beforebritishraj.com/blogs/bbr-coffee-by-before-british-raj/bbr-coffee>

<sup>4</sup> Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), P.13.

emblazon the major governing themes of imperialism: the transmission of male power through control of colonized women; the emergence of a new order of disciplinary knowledge; and the imperialist command of commodity capital.<sup>5</sup> These circulating themes are central to this paper also for understanding how the refusal of colonial authority by making use of these cafes can also introduce new metaphorical frames and figures of domestic colonialism.

If, as the review states, Anglow offers an “amalgamation” of Indian and British food, why advertise the need for celebrating a “colonial hangover”? Should Before British Raj Coffee’s<sup>6</sup> “decolonised coffee” not be affordable for every Indian?— otherwise the said “Indianness” which is being brought to “the fore” for normalising “*coffee pe charcha*”<sup>7</sup> (translation: discussions over coffee) seems customised only for the elite or economically sound and hence is bogus in its mention of universalised Indianness as it simply disregards or deliberately excludes many categories of natives<sup>8</sup>. Moreover, is the swapping of decolonisation as a synonym for social improvement not the re/institution of oppressive strategies?

The nomenclature used for branding, aesthetical representation, and even the syntax of menus in Anglow and BBRC mimes the dominant hierarchies similar to the ones set by the male colonisers during the era of their rulership in India. The presence of such paradoxes in the overall branding, which will be further discussed as the argument develops, appears to resurrect the same spirit of dominance which is supposedly being resisted. The outcome expected from ‘celebration’ of ‘Indianness’ becomes bathetic and quite perverse. These facts remain neglected with women at the forefront of this representation. This is not to say that women do not or must not possess the authority to make career choices for themselves, but that as entrepreneurs (Gathika Chhabra<sup>9</sup> and Anoushka Ghonkrokta, co-founders of BBRC) and stylists (Parvati Mohanakrishnan<sup>10</sup>, responsible for the decor inside of Anglow) they seem to (somewhat) passivise their feminist empowerment and Other themselves and their fellow Indians by taking pride as reproducers of structures such as

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<sup>5</sup> Anne McClintock makes a similar argument in her pioneering work *Imperial Leather* which has shaped my understanding of symbolic representation of gender for this paper. See, McClintock, P. 3.

<sup>6</sup> From now on the acronym BBRC will be used for referring to Before British Raj Coffee.

<sup>7</sup> See Anoushka Ghonkrokta’s description about BBRC on her LinkedIn profile.

<sup>8</sup> In this paper I mention all Indian natives interchangeably as native/s or genders or gendered body in an attempt to avoid privileging normativity (heteronormativity), which is a factor of the generalised branding strategies of both the cafes in reference. Additionally, I acknowledge that the category of the ‘Indian native’ is not uniform and based on different impacts of colonisation of different groups, nationality may be viewed differently. The aim here is simply to show that the trivialization of colonisation or the decolonisation discourse is unfair and has its own problems- which may be applicable to any group when viewed through a philosophical analysis.

<sup>9</sup> Gathika Chhabra’s LinkedIn Profile confirms her as the Founder of BBRC: [https://www.linkedin.com/in/gathika-chhabra-9372481b?trk=public\\_profile\\_browsemap&originalSubdomain=in](https://www.linkedin.com/in/gathika-chhabra-9372481b?trk=public_profile_browsemap&originalSubdomain=in)

<sup>10</sup> The <https://www.travelandleisureindia.in/dining/anglow-khan-market/> link verifies Parvati Mohanakrishnan as the incharge of decor for Anglow.

Anglow and BBRC, which emulate masculine hierarchies that unconsciously control women. In this way, the use of terminology merely as semantics may attract attention and impact the growth of the Indian marketplace but also exacerbates the largely unacknowledged marginalization of genders.

The primary focus of this paper is to identify how commodification devalues history and defeats colonial resistance, symbolically masculinises spaces and edibles, and marginalises or Others the natives due to the metonymic use of decolonisation for alleged social justice. For better analyses of the proposed claims, this paper is divided into three sections sardonically representing the hierarchy of going out in order to dine.

### **The right space**

Far from the necessities of biological reproduction, with Anglow and BBRC modern Indian women have created platonically intimate spaces which symbolically determine the whole natural (heteronormative) and social order. Such an arbitrary re/construction of ‘the female vision of the male vision’<sup>11</sup> has given a natural foundation to androcentrism. However, it is not because women have created them that masculinises these spaces; how they are created does. This section draws attention to how the aesthetic properties and nomenclature of spaces masculinises them and contributes to the creation of a new order of social dynamics and the Othering of native bodies within it. Also, though the significance behind this section lies in showing that (certain) modern spaces and their designing is gender coded, it does not imply that an(y) individual’s gender plays any role in their decision to visit these places.

The voice of the colonial subject (Anglow and BBRC in this context), Mrinalini Sinha asserts, is not always gendered and is also mediated through the discourses of empires and nations.<sup>12</sup> Even so, the voice of such imperialist apparitions is echoed through gender (the feminist<sup>13</sup> creators of Anglow and BBRC and the consumers using their services), subtly marking the native of colonized

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<sup>11</sup> Grateful for Bourdieu’s titular conception. Pierre Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, (Cambridge and Malden: Polity Press, 2007), p.69.

<sup>12</sup> Mrinalini Sinha, ‘Reading *Mother India*: Empire, Nation, and the Female Voice’, *Journal of Women’s History*, Volume 6, Number 2, Summer 1994, pp. 6-44 (P. 6)

<sup>13</sup> The use of the word feminist(s) in reference to the entrepreneur women who have created these cafes is made with the prominent understanding of feminism as an inversion of male superiority, for promoting women’s interests and gender equality, in the Indian subcontinent.

growth (consumers) as one in need of protection from its own kind (creators).<sup>14</sup> This need of protection of a native from its own kind may not be permanent and suggest repression only when a native subject is placed in spaces that use imperialist structures as signifiers of growth.

Anglow and BBRC must be understood as social realities which, while confirming a representation of the British dominance in India, are created in order to justify domination.<sup>15</sup> What differentiates them from emulating British dominance entirely, however, is that the fetishized configuration of these cafes 'Others' not only the Indian native, by replacing the colonies to their original position, but also the despot who, despite being resuscitated to haunt the public sphere, is simultaneously accepted and rejected as a frivolous commodity. Perhaps this sets the foundation for understanding why the symbolism in these spaces triggers the emergence of domestic colonialism.

Before going any further, it is imperative that aesthetics of the two cafes be introduced briefly: Anglow, designed proudly by Parvati Mohanakrishnan to resemble a "Gentleman's Club, sans the cigar smoke, but doused generously in scotch"<sup>16</sup>, is adorned with differently decorated corners, all of which enunciate Victorian characteristics. Some corners use heavy and angular furniture in dark colours; some use pastel-coloured upholsteries. Petit plates with floral patterns are hung on the walls as a feature of the British spaces. Among the many portraits displayed for enhancing the colonial spirit, there are quite a few of Winston Churchill and of the Queens, Victoria, and Elizabeth II. In one of the portraits, the Queen mimics David Bowie's popular flash-painted face.<sup>17</sup> BBRC, on the other hand, occupies a confined space and is decorated with simplistic furniture. One of its walls brandishes a massive temporary flex with the BBRC logo and is surrounded by all the flavours and categories of coffee packaged under its label.

The trivialising adoption of the decolonisation discourse as a metaphor, Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang assert, only leads to the effortless reproduction of the tropes of colonialism.<sup>18</sup> The resurrected imperial spirit masqueraded as a coalescence of harmony among the British and Indian may blind victims of this symbolic domination to their Othering within and because of these spaces. This reckless historical connection to the resurrection of the despotic spirit is not based on the contiguity of events but on the unsettling temporality of repetition which, as Homi Bhabha suggests, may

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<sup>14</sup> This is my interpretation of what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak explains in terms of a woman in need of protection from her own kind in her pioneering essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', P. 94.

<sup>15</sup> Many thanks to Bourdieu's explanation of 'female intuition' and 'the embodiment of domination' for this analogy. See Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, P.32.

<sup>16</sup> Description by: <https://www.travelandleisureindia.in/dining/anglow-khan-market/>

<sup>17</sup> Few Images of Anglow can be seen through: <https://magicpin.in/blog/anglow-khan-market-new-restaurant/>

<sup>18</sup> Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, 'Decolonization is not a Metaphor', *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2012, pp. 1-40, (pp. 1-3).

trigger insurgence.<sup>19</sup> On the one hand, the mimetic reproduction of one the most masculine structures of imperialist gatherings during the Raj— a Gentleman’s Club— confirms a symbolic celebration of dominant power. On the other hand, in subjecting the colonial spirit, trapped in photographic representation, and the native to face each other, this recreation replicates strictures of fetishisation on them both. Though this observation does not mean to imply that the marginalising vision of colonial mimicry represents castration, it proposes that the native can be said to continually be Othered as an “almost the same but not quite”<sup>20</sup> body sent on a mission to be civilised in going to this Gentlemen’s Club.

As a typical feature of any bar or club of the Anglo-Indian world, this recreation, with its “heavy, dark, angular furniture depicts hardness and manly toughness, and pastel shades, or lace, ribbon, floral upholstery that suggest fragility and frivolity portray the ‘female’ spaces,”<sup>21</sup> re/constitutes masculine and feminine elements which risk the re/compartimentalization of gender values as decided by societies. Such simultaneous symbolic existence of the opposing masculine and feminine worlds inside Anglow does not signify a welcoming change because contrary to the slogan of ‘amalgamation’, the British and Indian native and cultures are marked, not positively in this fused representation but by an obligatory, retrospective connection to history.<sup>22</sup> In fact, trivialisation of colonialism, merely as “not the best thing which happened to India,”<sup>23</sup> inculcates a new order of commodification that sees no harm in devaluing history for celebrating colonialism as a ‘hangover.’ Such dressing up of the language of colonialism is not offensive, but it limits and domesticates social change.<sup>24</sup> Since a(ny) native is welcome to enjoy in (these) café spaces, they also experience reformation of history as a slippage between the acquisition of enjoyment and that of colonial appropriation. The targeted celebration, hence, forms another factor of domestic Othering where the identities of the native consumer as well as the native creator assume new roles as the colonised and the coloniser respectively. Moreover, the fact that the native creator presumes an identity of the imperialist, Others and reduces their position to the colonised again— as one who cannot be detached from the shadow of the British coloniser. In this way, the “physiognomy inscribed in the environment” of Anglow “feliculously performs the subaltern or subordinate tasks that are assigned to their virtues of submission, gentleness, docility, devotion and self-denial.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, (New York: Routledge Classics, 2004), p.285.

<sup>20</sup> Bhabha, Pp. 122-123.

<sup>21</sup> Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, P.57.

<sup>22</sup> McClintock, P.11.

<sup>23</sup> <https://magicpin.in/blog/anglow-khan-market-new-restaurant/>

<sup>24</sup> Tuck and Yang, P. 3.

<sup>25</sup> Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, P.57.

However, even the subaltern performance is multifaceted: those who speak (as creators of politicised spaces like Anglow and BBRC); those who do not want to speak and perhaps just have a good time by moving away from colonial scars; those who do not know if they have to or if they can speak. Though the latter categories are particular features of the consumer, they may also be elemental to the feminist creators' psychology of visualising cafes displaying colonial power as signifiers of contemporary growth.

Regardless, the attempt that the subaltern native (creator) has made to finally find a voice by capturing the British colonizer in frames and adorning them with shapes, sizes, transgressive makeup must not be overlooked either. In commodifying not just the British coloniser's undertakings but also their personifications, even if it comes at the stake of Othering the self, the new native coloniser enjoys mockery in replacing its predecessor.

The ridicule and rejection of the British colonizer are magnified in BBRC. Even though their decor is independent of colonial paraphernalia, their branding is clearly not. BBRC blatantly uses 'British Raj' to market their label and in doing so paradoxically confirms the inadequacy of national identity, one which their label claims to 'bring to the fore' by decolonising the history of coffee. At the same time, the prefixed 'Before' flings the 'British Raj' into a void. There is no intimation, within the labelling that is, of how prior the 'Before' goes to establish the 'fore', and the British colonizer, despite being verily accepted, is also rejected. Perhaps some vindictiveness seems to underlie BBRC's attempt of 'decolonising the history of coffee and bringing to the fore its Indianness', since their brand labelling itself falsifies the reasoning behind it. The colonial attribute of gaining power, prominence, and authority marginalises and Others all the bodies associated in this barter: the native consumer as a mere asset; the native creator as the beneficiary of the commodity capital; the British (ex-)colonizer as a futile epithet.

While fetishising the British coloniser in enacting their role and simultaneously rejecting their presence by using 'Before', the creators of BBRC, on the one hand, claim to establish a universalised Indianness; on the other hand, they impose strictures of a bourgeois imperial enterprise, seemingly by using the privileges of their class, money, authority but by also disregarding several social categories who are not economically sound, and thereby confirm the establishment of what Gayatri Spivak calls a "utilitarian-hegemony."<sup>26</sup> The mawkish refusal of the British coloniser, when their spirit clearly lingers in the nomenclature, to promise an institution of Indianness acts as an unrecognisable repression of the native.

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<sup>26</sup> Spivak, P.77.

If, as Homi K. Bhabha suggests, “the effect of colonial power is seen to be the production of hybridisation rather than the noisy command of colonialist authority or the silent repression of native traditions,”<sup>27</sup> then these new colonisers (the creators of these café spaces) may have the leverage for excusing themselves as prisoners of colonial trauma, plausibly lured into “narcissistic authority, as a desire for universal authorisation in the face of a process of cultural differentiation which makes it problematic to fix the native objects of colonial power as moralised ‘others’ of truth.”<sup>28</sup> However, because Bhabha also calls “hybridity a problematic of colonial representation,” and attempts to nullify all necessity for postcolonial critique in relation to hybridity by deeming cultural differences with a status “beyond moral contemplation,”<sup>29</sup> his antithetical and ambivalent concept of hybridisation functions as a safety net disguising, yet allowing the re/constitution of hierarchies of masculine dominance. In bringing attention to metaphors as critical sites of analysis, T.L. Cowan and Jas Rault too argue that since the power of metaphor goes both ways, simultaneously confirming and denying the ongoing legacies of injustice and violence, there is a need to take the ambivalent potential of metaphor seriously and refuse its dematerialising pull.<sup>30</sup> This is not to say that metaphoric re/constitutions are not important to frame experiences, but the approach to metaphorization of the colonial discourse requires sorting the complex structures of influence that mostly tap into pre-existing hierarchies and get in the way of meaningful change.

Because the concept of hybridity aids the symbolic complex structures of colonial influence in the referred café spaces, the women (who have created these cafes) and indirectly also their ideas prevent change and rather seem to reconcile with the colonial conflict.

In following the hierarchies set by the ex-coloniser the modern women get Othered within their own empowered positionality, that transforms from the ex-colonised to the domestic coloniser, who now benefits from commodity capital. This imperial modernity saturates the status of women who have reproduced symbolic masculinity with binary opposition: from feminist entrepreneurs (postcolonial) to reproducers of imperialism (colonial). The shaping up of such sociocultural relationships results in domestication of individuals while they are absorbed by animated rhetorics such as necessitating the ‘decolonisation of coffee’ or ‘celebration of colonial hangover.’ To analyse properly what domestication institutes, it is essential to discuss the impact of metaphorisation of

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<sup>27</sup> Bhabha, P.160.

<sup>28</sup> Bhabha, p. 142.

<sup>29</sup> Bhabha, p.162-163.

<sup>30</sup> T.L. Cowan and Jas Rault, ‘Metaphor as Meaning and Method in Technoculture’, *Catalyst: Feminism, Theory, Technoscience* 8 (2), (pp. 1–23), P. 4.



the edibles served and its unacknowledged impact on those who serve and those who consume these edibles.

### **On my plate, In my body**

The edibles ordered and consumed inside the presumably hybridised Anglow and BBRC cafes slyly symbolise that enjoying food from another cultures “does not necessarily mean “consuming” the Other but sometimes letting oneself be engulfed by Otherness.”<sup>31</sup> This symbolism too takes strategic help from the catachrestic cheapening of history which extends beyond the nomenclature of Anglow and BBRC to the syntax of their menus. To justify this claim, certain edibles referenced throughout this section of the paper require mention: the Mughal Mocha and Peshwa Pomelo coffee blends from BBRC;<sup>32</sup> the European adaptations of Nargisi Kofta and Khichdi called Devil Eggs and Kedgerree respectively,<sup>33</sup> from Anglow. This section establishes how syntax of edibles in the menu of BBRC and Anglow uses dominance for redefining national identity, because of which choosing from edibles levied with such sociopolitical burden can eroticise and challenge how a body perceives and is perceived. How syntactical exploitation caters to the cult of domesticity—this idea of domestication or the cult of domesticity signifies the use of historical dynamics of power and authority to cultivate naturally and universally acceptable relations of domination and subjugation—by forming a new order of knowledge, is also analysed.

While it is not uncommon for coffee labels to mention the notes (such as chocolatey, fruity, nutty) or the level of roast (dark, medium, light), it does seem preposterous to endorse power structures of dominance for describing coffee. Going beyond the apparent syntactic dominance observable from the names of coffee blends offered by BBRC, descriptions of Mughal Empire or the prominent kings who then reigned over India are used to signify the notes and level of roast of a coffee. For instance, as a mixture of aromas taking from the strength of the Empire and its ability to “become a melting pot of myriad cultures and traditions,” The Mughal Mocha is best suited for those who prefer minimum bitterness in their coffee. The Peshwa Pomelo blend, on the other

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<sup>31</sup> Daniela Rogobete, ‘Sweet Taste of India: Food Metaphors in Contemporary Indian fiction in English’, *Mapping Appetite: Essays on Food, Fiction and Culture* ed. by Jopi Nyman and Pere Gallardo (Newcastle,UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), P. 36.

<sup>32</sup> Catalogue, <https://beforebritishraj.com/>

<sup>33</sup> Anglow is serving Indian Delicacies inspired by The Age-Old Recipes, <https://www.travelandleisureindia.in/dining/anglow-khan-market/>

hand, is “best suited for those who rely on their morning coffee to energise them as this aromatic blend is a welcome jolt to the senses, akin to warfare tactics and strength offensives mounted by the mighty Peshwas.”<sup>34</sup> Appending another layer of despotic spirit and reviving the Mughal Empire in the simple act of coffee drinking further invisibly embitters the relationship between the native body and their once lived barbarous realities. On the one hand, drinking coffee chosen from such descriptions is undeniably complicated without absolutely overlooking the reasoning behind them. On the other hand, once these coffees are consumed, either by neglecting entirely or by observing the embellished masculinity, a symbolic devotion to masculine domination germinates and the consuming body genuflects to eroticised dominance.

If, as Bourdieu explains symbolic consecration, the thoughts and perceptions of a gendered body are structured in accordance with the very structures of the relation of domination that is imposed on them, their acts of cognition are inevitably acts of recognised submission.<sup>35</sup> Deriving strength from the prerogatives of the ruling male elite in the act of consuming coffee similarly symbolically abrogates the consuming body of its power and authority and provokes perception of their physical inadequacy. Additionally, a body that energises itself with ‘warfare tactics’ of the Peshwa also receives a subtle validation in its symbolic eroticised militarisation. Coffee as a means of pleasing and charming the social bodies is evocative of the paradoxical combination of restraint and seduction, which condemns the masculine and feminine bodies both, to be perceived by the verdict of a haunting male gaze. In choosing from either the less bitter ‘strength of the Empire’ or being ‘jolted by the mighty Peshwas’, the “institution of masculinity par excellence”<sup>36</sup> constitutes an eroticised dominance which reifies the masculine desire of power and possession, and the feminine desire as an encouragement for the desire of masculine domination.

This analogy, with its heterosexual expression of social structures, runs the risk of being reduced to phallic desire and coming across as a flattened perspective of the hierarchies of social difference. Contrary to such interpretation, the significance of eroticised dominance, here, is to sketch the pathetic use of fetishistic nostalgia of the barbaric origins of masculine domination for bringing Indianness to the fore. In being presented through a link between power and sexuality, as a habitually consumed edible, coffee here represents “socialisation, education, and an enforced domestic discipline.”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> ‘Kingdoms of India’ under the Catalogue section, <https://beforebritishraj.com/collections/kingdoms-of-india>

<sup>35</sup> Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, P.13.

<sup>36</sup> Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, P.25.

<sup>37</sup> Mariam López-Rodríguez, ‘Writing the Recipe for Subversion: The creation of patriarchy-defying communities by means of cookery’, *Mapping Appetite: Essays on Food, Fiction and Culture* ed. by Jopi Nyman and Pere Gallardo (Newcastle,UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), P. 70.

Following a shift from British colonisation to economic independence, capitalist commodities are used to re/invent gendered hierarchies in neoliberal India, while the aim is to recover and perhaps appear more inclusive about the discourses of the past.<sup>38</sup> The cultivation of a new consciousness allows people to equivocate contradictory desires of decolonisation and turn them into an empty signifier to be filled by any track towards liberation.<sup>39</sup> In addition to this, such sociopolitical metamorphoses mimic the imperial spectacle of the cult of domesticity of which gender is only an abiding dimension alongside space.<sup>40</sup> The praxis of such domination or of submissive demeanor is charged by ‘memory work’, which aims to evoke memories of collective interpretation.<sup>41</sup> Permeation of this permanent or haunting memory in contemporary spaces identifies as a crisis that further causes Othering and fetishism.<sup>42</sup>

Excluded from the games of power and disposed to the labour of domination in the past, neoliberal women are replacing men’s autocracy while still admiring the charm and seductive power of masculinity which has resulted in fetishism of masculine power as an edible commodity (evident in the case of coffee at BBRC particularly). Far from essentializing the masculine or feminine nature (as decided by social structures), this analogical observation only hopes to address how such (unconscious) gendered essentialism is the manner in which modern commercialization is being instituted (in the particular case of the cafes in discussion).

While the edibles offered are marketed by a similar imperial spectacle here too, Anglow adds another variable to this cult of domesticity by contradicting their concept of ‘amalgamation’ and combining “autobiographical anecdotes and culinary explanations”<sup>43</sup> for remapping the authenticity of recipes, despite using traditional names of the Anglo-Indian food they offer.

“Deviled eggs,” for instance, are marketed as an “adaptation of the Nargisi Kofta; Kedgerree, an inspiration of that plain old Khichdi”— the ingredients of Kedgerree are also ‘demystified’: fish, rice, parsley, hard-boiled eggs, curry powder, and butter or cream.<sup>44</sup> The subversion of the adapted dishes to their Indian names for resisting cultural erasure, and indirectly also colonialism, “becomes the circulating signs of an ‘English’ panic.”<sup>45</sup> In an eagerness to authenticate food as Indian, the foods of the Anglo-Indian culture are proudly marketed as a commonly available attribute of the

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<sup>38</sup> Clare Midgley, ‘Introduction’, *Gender and Imperialism*, (Manchester, UK and New York: Manchester University Press, 1998), P. 2.

<sup>39</sup> Tuck and Yang, P. 7.

<sup>40</sup> McClintock, pp.34-35.

<sup>41</sup> Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, P. 28.

<sup>42</sup> McClintock. P. 150.

<sup>43</sup> Diana Rogobete, P. 33.

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.travelandleisureindia.in/dining/anglow-khan-market/>

<sup>45</sup> Bhabha, P. 296.

household kitchen (example Khichdi). This characterises “culinary counter-colonialism,”<sup>46</sup> wherein, by assimilating yet commodifying the coloniser’s culinary habits as indigenous, the Indian native hopes to erase the coloniser “by means of a cannibalistic metaphor” of eating.<sup>47</sup> The appropriation of food variants, at the same time, also seems to Other the “multi-ethnic Indian society and its eclectic cultures”<sup>48</sup> where people may actually prepare their food as an adaptation contrary to its mainstream origin. Most importantly, the sovereignty and futurity of the indigenous people’s eating habits are certainly at stake because of the idea of refusing colonial authority and decolonising the past applies and is accountable most to them.<sup>49</sup> Such paradox in the recreation of a masculine Gentleman’s Club only for the sake of authenticating the fusion dishes as being readily available at home, represents “a repetition of partial presence,”<sup>50</sup> that articulates the simultaneous desires for cultural differentiation and narcissistic demand for colonial authority. Since food is “connected with ethnicity, trustworthiness, and family background,”<sup>51</sup> generalizing the dishes that are prepared and called differently in different cultures, or by taking them from one bludgeoning Empire (European Deviled Eggs) and handing them to the other (Mughal Nargisi Kofta), cultivates a new order of disciplinary knowledge that only oversimplifies the implied notion that natives belonging to different cultures perceive their identities because of the food that enters their bodies. The dissension in the contradicting significations of the simultaneous inclusion and exclusion, amalgamated and homemade, European and Indian, causes a flux where natives<sup>52</sup> of all the cultures involved are betrayed as foreign.

### **A hefty cheque of betrayals**

Pierre Bourdieu explains the process of dehistoricizing (or, in this case, decolonizing) as the continuous re/creation of the objective and subjective structures of domination which only reproduces masculine order and hierarchical dispositions that lead women to participate in their

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<sup>46</sup> Rogobete, P.30.

<sup>47</sup> Rogobete, P.36-37.

<sup>48</sup> Rogobete, P.29.

<sup>49</sup> Tuck and Yang, P. 35.

<sup>50</sup> Bhabha, P. 126.

<sup>51</sup> López-Rodríguez, P.79.

<sup>52</sup> It is necessary to note that the reference to ‘natives of all cultures’ refers to the people who are involved in the exchange within these café structures, in any form, and in similar structures which mis/use the discourse of decolonisation merely as a metonym for social or national change.

own (eventual) exclusion.<sup>53</sup> In a similar way, the modern establishments in discussion (Anglow and BBRC) are structures established with a view of re/inventing the national identity (by decolonizing the commodities available in them), but only by talking about men and their (astonishing) dominant conducts as the major subjects of this process of decolonizing. The commitment to symbolic transgression and revolutionary aestheticism is a profound antithesis of moralism which renders the cafes and their commodities receptive to eroticisation.<sup>54</sup> Reflected first in the aesthetics and nomenclature of these cafes, and then in their menu, the temporal jumping back and forth by means of fetishised commodification of domestic edibles through their appeal to imperial jingoism does not allow the native subjects availing these spaces to acquire stability or a genuine independence from the colonialist gaze. By using edible commodities as the metaphoric weapons of rebellion against the British colonizer the Indian native initiates an antagonistic politics of agency which ends up inculcating a ceaseless, disciplinary order of 'othered' identities among the natives: feminist entrepreneurs become colonisers of commodity capital and dominate the fellow natives; the fellow native (customers, and even working staff) accepts this universalised normality of capitalist hierarchies and are domestically colonised. However, the marketer (entrepreneur), the consumer, and the working staff natives are all also subjected to the fetishised gaze of the eroticised haunting male power that they are attempting to transmit.

The only achievable hybridisation due to such problematised projections is the production of an unacknowledged betrayal between the (new) colonizing (creators of both Anglow and BBRC) and the colonized native (consumer and working staff) where the latter fails or refuses to notice this new dominance and the former imposes homogenised structures of colonial haunting while claiming to dismantle them. The process of cultural differentiation, marked by a desire for self-authorisation through self-negation, "fixes the native bodies of colonial power as moralised 'others' of truth."<sup>55</sup> In this way, such binaries peddle a neocolonial era and run the risk of inverting rather than overturning the dominant notions of power.<sup>56</sup> Perhaps these re/invented gender dynamics would be less magnified and could perhaps be overlooked if ghosts of colonialism were not annexed to nomenclature of cafes just for alluring customers. Since it is not the case, the neoliberal social dynamics stand problematised and complicated.

While miming the dominant hierarchies of British colonialism, Anglow and BBRC are branded to be, both, syncretic with and impervious to colonial authority. The native mimics the colonial, to

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<sup>53</sup> Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, pp.82-83.

<sup>54</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction*, (London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2010), P. 40.

<sup>55</sup> Bhabha, P. 142.

<sup>56</sup> McClintock, P. 17.

some extent, as a weapon of passive resistance which they believe, after appropriating the “vocabularies of power,” to work in their favour.<sup>57</sup> However, the only result is a construction of an alternative history of imperialism. In writing these “palimpsestic narratives of Imperialism,” the subaltern native who has found a rebellious voice to speak (creators of cafes), does not lose sight of the main ingredient which is the rigid determination to resist colonialism, but by doing so they create subjugated knowledge which undeniably disregards vital historic facts and initiates a “disciplinary order of epistemic identities.”<sup>58</sup>

BBRC’s attempt of ‘decolonising the Indian coffee’ is such a palimpsest, which disregards that it was the British who, despite pilfering the Indian subcontinent and profiting off it, regarded the origin of that coffee, which was grown in Chikmagalur district of Karnataka after being brought from Yemen,<sup>59</sup> as being Indian. Anglow uses the tropes of relativism and epistemological essentialism to ‘authentically’ rewrite the Indianness of the gastronomic realm adapted by the European colonisers. This activates a disciplinary narcissism that aims to legitimise the multi-ethnic Indian cuisine as a unidimensional aspect of every home-kitchen, and contrary to their branding of ‘amalgamation’ either focus too much on imperialism or treat the vividness of culinary fusion as vicissitudinous.

Because there is no unique Indian cuisine, this interminable quest for Indian authenticity ‘Others’ the identities and choices, while also deciding the mnemonic dimensions, of the Indians spread across the globe.

## **Conclusion**

The Indian native has meandered a long way into the establishment of the venture(s) of commodification. However, a lingering complication in the face of (an unacknowledged) self-negation and repression seems to be elaborating the hegemonic re/organisation of imperial order. This analysis hopes to have decoded such a (subtle) creation of alternate metaphoric empires in the neoliberal marketplace of Delhi by using Anglow and BBRC as examples. Because entrepreneurial independence is thought to be a revolutionary step towards overcoming the handicap of domination, gender dynamics are prerequisite to this study of the re/construction of imperialism

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<sup>57</sup> Rogobete, P. 36.

<sup>58</sup> Spivak, P. 76.

<sup>59</sup> Coffee Production in India, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coffee\\_production\\_in\\_India](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coffee_production_in_India)

as a masculine enterprise by the modern native. This is certainly not to say that the creators of either of these cafes are signifiers of colonial dis/loyalty. The dependency of domestic identity through the viewpoint of despotic nostalgia has in fact deepened competition for commodifying colonial resistance among the teeming domestic colonisers (at least) in the neoliberal marketplace of Delhi.

Even though the construction of palimpsestic histories from the perspectives of the previously colonised native bodies (creators of Anglow and BBRC, consumers, working staff) has opened up possibilities for rendering visible the past experiences of all genders involved in the hierarchal formation of any empire,<sup>60</sup> the establishment of economic independence is not sufficient to free them from “the constraints of the dominant model, which may continue to haunt the masculine and feminine habitus.”<sup>61</sup> How the symbolic trivialisation of sociocultural relations and power structures operate beyond their simple project of development also cannot be overlooked. What results from this new order of discipline is a totalising power that only reifies the hegemony of the resisted colonial discourse. This elevates the importance of studying the impact of autonomy and strength in the allegedly resisted reinstitution of colonial enterprise such as the one examined through Anglow and BBRC.

At this point it is necessary to clarify that the intention of this paper is not to domesticate anyone’s choice of going to Anglow and BBRC and consuming the edibles offered by both or either, but to cultivate a knowledge about their underlying fascination of reforming national identity by trivially adopting the decolonisation discourse, and thus re/producing the aspects central to masculine domination that was central to the imperial era.

Alongside the scope of examining the experiences of the workforce within these or similar establishments focused around colonial discourse, this paper also presents the limitation of not knowing the exact intention, from resisting cultural erasure and free-market capitalism, behind the creation of these cafes. This analysis only hopes to have addressed that even if histories of imperialism are being re/constructed for capitalist benefit, it is important to avoid legitimising one-dimensional accounts of relativism. The appropriation of such trivialized view of the imperial knowledge and histories, as identified in both Anglow and BBRC, tends to invoke a similar reformatory social order which governed the colonial era. Hence, problematic inscriptions of social and gendered hierarchies remain etched as a result of commodified trivialization and an unrecognized reverse colonialism. Additionally, avoiding sociopolitical descriptions in the context

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<sup>60</sup> Midgley, P. 6.

<sup>61</sup> Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, P. 107.

of edibles can perhaps be a significant step towards the aim of offering a casually enjoyable culinary experience.

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**Commentary**

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by *Leandro Wallace*

Sakshi Arya's work "Dinning with the Despot: consumption of postcolonial disorders in contemporary culinary experience" is a well written, engaging piece about the commodification of food and the reproduction of colonial tropes. The papers easy to read writing does not take away from a clear analysis on a not so often spoken occurrence: the re-enactment of hierarchies and colonial imaginary emerging from postcolonial action, as well as its relationship with the creation and distribution of food.

At the centre of their research, the author positions two Delhi cafes that start from different perspectives and ideas, and how this initial difference gets easily blurred by their own positioning and action. The structure of the work recreates, with its structure, the "going out" experience and allows for a questioning of the different aspects of said process of decision making. It starts by revising the perspectives of someone seeking for a place to dine and what are the first elements they might notice. It is important to highlight how the relevance is not in the final look and decoration of the places analysed, but on the decisions made and the thought process put into it by the owners of the cafes. Following this, the author dwells into the experiences the guests might have once they have sat down and are ready to order. Finally, and using a very engaging subtitle, comes the hour of the check, when we come face to face with the real issues with the perspectives used by the cafes and their owners, relating to processes of re-colonization. A central point made by the author, that crosses all three stages, is the recreation of patriarchal hierarchies parallel to the previously mentioned practice.

The present work is an interesting discussion surrounding the construction of hierarchies and the reproduction of colonialities of being, by looking into the processes of food selling and distribution. I would recommend the author to expand on the perspectives presented in this paper to be able to see how this works in other food-selling spaces. In turn, it will allow for a deeper perspective into how the processes of re-colonization and reaffirmation of patriarchal hierarchies by turning away from postcolonial perspectives, while sometimes discursively using them. Thus, allowing for an even broader understanding of how these transformations and co-option's occur.