

Just adding curry powder does not a South Asian dish make: 50 years of the Australian Women's Weekly's culinary engagement with South Asian cuisines.

Introduction

Lately I have become interested in how recipes published in cookery print media - columns and feature articles in newspapers and magazines, cookery books – shaped Australians' understanding of South Asian cuisines – Indian, Sri Lankan, Pakistani, Bangladeshi. My interest is as an Australian food historian from a Sri Lankan Burgher background.

I have written about how Sri Lankan cookbooks in Australia developed an understanding of Sri Lankan cuisine.¹ During my research for that paper I came across recipes for South Asian dishes in the *Australian Women's Weekly* (the *Weekly* from here on). Freida Moran has described the *Weekly* as 'a recognised cultural mediator with popular impact.'² Writing about the food editors at the *Weekly* Lauren Samuelsson says 'The wide reach of women's magazines amplified the food writers [in this case the food editors] social and cultural influence.'³ In 1947 the *Weekly* claimed it sold over 700,000 copies each week.⁴ 1977 the Audit Bureau of Circulation found that the *Weekly* had a circulation of over 850,000 and that an average issue was read by 3,444,000 people aged 14 and over.⁵ The *Weekly* was then well-placed to shape Australians' understanding of South Asian cuisines. Samuelsson also wrote 'While historians have acknowledged the influence of the *Weekly* on Australian domestic food culture, there has yet to be an in depth study of the way the *Weekly* constructed and communicated food culture to its readers.'⁶ This paper skirts the edges of this for South Asian cuisine.

My primary source was the *Weekly* as digitised in *Trove*, the online depository for newspapers, magazine and journals. *Trove* has digitised every issue from the first, June 1933, to the last, January 1982. My research is consequently bounded by those years also, which just happens to be one year shy of 50 years. I reviewed all recipes with the terms curry, chutney, pilaf/pilau and kedgeree as culinary terms used to categorise South Asian dishes. I also reviewed recipes for South Asian dishes with which I am familiar like kofta, kebab, sambal, vindaloo and biryani. I discounted any curry recipes that in their title ascribed them to countries other than those in South Asia – Malaysian, Thai, Burmese, Singaporean mainly – where the term 'curry' has been adopted as the name of some dishes in the cuisine bearing little relationship to South Asian curries. I ruled out mulligatawny as an entirely British invention having no parallel in South Asian cuisines.

I also looked at South Asian recipes in four *Weekly* cookery books:

- The Australian Women's Weekly Cookery Book (1955?)⁷
- Cookery in colour: a picture encyclopedia for every occasion (1960)⁸

¹ van Reyk, Paul, 'Tackle anything and taste everything: The Australian home cook and Sri Lankan cuisine in newspapers, magazines, cookery books and restaurant guides 1895 – 2023' compost.sydney 2024

² Moran, Freida, 'Ordinary and Exotic: A cultural history of curry in Australia' A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts with Honours in History November 2017 p.4

³ Samuelsson, Lauren, 'From nutrition to glamour: The *Australian Women's Weekly's* editors 1933-1970.' History Australia, 2022 Vol. 19, No. 2, 230-246 p.231.

⁴ 'Covert Page', The *Australian Women's Weekly* January 1947

⁵ Buttrose, Ita, 'At My Desk', The *Australian Women's Weekly* 6 July 1977 p.1

⁶ Samuelsson ... Nutrition to Glamour p.231

⁷ 'The Australian Women's Weekly Cookery Book', The *Australian Women's Weekly* Consolidated Press 1955?

⁸ 'Cookery in colour: a picture encyclopedia for every occasion', The *Australian Women's Weekly* Paul Hamlyn 1960

- The Australian Women's Weekly Cookbook (1970)⁹
- The Australian Women's Weekly New Cookbook (1978)¹⁰

Curry

The overwhelming majority of recipes I found were for curries of one kind or another. There was significant change in the recipes over 1933-1982

Curry 1933 -1963

Curry had been in Australia from least 1810 when Governor Macquarie served duck curry to dinner guests.¹¹ This is likely to have been what Lizzie Collingham in *Curry: a biography* characterises as British curry. She described how British curry was formed.

Indians referred to their different dishes by specific names and their servants would have served the British with dishes which they called, for example, rogan josh, dopiaza or quarama. But the British lumped all these together under the heading of curry ... a generic term for any spicy dish with a thick sauce or gravy in every part of India'.¹² Curry became not just a term which the British used to describe unfamiliar set of Indian stews and ragouts, but a dish in its own right created for the British in India.'¹³

Most British cooks .. had to rely on lemon juice (and sometimes sour gooseberries) as a substitute for unobtainable tamarinds. Lemon juice, added at the end of the cooking process, became a standard ingredient in British curry. Apples were often used to replace mangoes, cucumbers and marrows to replace bitter gourds, which were essential ingredients in Bengali cuisine. Sultanas, that were sometimes added to Mughlai pilaus, also found their way into curries. They added a touch of the exotic end perhaps it was thought they complemented the apples. After time, these ingredients were no longer viewed as substitutes for more authentic ingredients but instead as *essential components* of a good curry.¹⁴

Freda Moran wrote 'Early in 19th century, curry arrived in the Australian colonies, rapidly establishing its place in an emerging culinary culture.'¹⁵ Ian Simpson has argued that over the years curry in Australia became a hybrid curry.¹⁶ Moran argues that 'Anglo-Indians played a role in introducing and consolidating the place of curry in Australian culinary culture, and thus, that it was not necessarily a taste brought from the British "centre" of empire.'¹⁷ Nonetheless, my review of curry recipes in the *Weekly* found the tendencies that Collingham describes to be true of the majority of recipes for curry in Australia between 1933 - 1963. (I explain why this date below.) South Asian dishes were lumped under the generic term curry. Substitute ingredients which, if not essential, were commonly used as ingredients in curries - apples, sultanas, chutney, coconut (fresh

⁹ 'The Australian Women's Weekly Cookbook', The *Australian Women's Weekly* Golden Press, 1970

¹⁰ 'The New Australian Women's Weekly Cookbook', The *Australian Women's Weekly* Golden Press, 1978

¹¹ Newling, Jacqui, *Eat Your History. Stories and recipes from Australian Kitchens*, Sydney Living Museums, The Mint and NewSouth, 2015 p.210

¹² Collingham, Lizzie, *Curry: A biography*, Chatto & Windus, London 2005 p.115

¹³ Collingham, Lizzie, *Curry: A biography*, Chatto & Windus, London 2005 p.118

¹⁴ Collingham, Lizzie, *Curry: A biography*, Chatto & Windus, London 2005 p.144

¹⁵ Moran, Freida, 'Ordinary and Exotic p.14

¹⁶ Simpson, Ian, 'The opening chapter in the story of the globalisation of curry and its life in Australia took the form of its invention; the second, its physical migration, to Britain and the colonies, and the third, the process of adaptation it experienced after arrival, whereby an interleaving of cultural practices combined to produce a new hybrid form'. *The Many Meanings of Curry. Australian Constructions of Indian Food.* *Locale: The Australasian-Pacific Journal of Regional Food Studies* Number 5, 2015 p.109

¹⁷ Moran, Freida, 'Ordinary and Exotic p.19

and desiccated) and lemon juice. This was the pattern for all the recipes published by the *Weekly* in its 1936 compilation 'Know How to Make Delicious Curries ... Before Bleak Winter Comes'.¹⁸ As some of these ingredients are distinct from British curry as described by Collingham I call the localised hybrid version 'Australian curry' from here on, using British curry where it is appropriate.

A third of recipes 1933 – 1963 with curry in their title did not use any fruit or dried fruits. However, their claim to being a curry appears to have been solely because they used curry powder. These also, I argue, were not South Asian.

There were also recipes whose title claimed them for a city or region in India. For example Madras Curry (1933), Bengal Chicken Curry (1938), Bombay Curry (1944), and Karachi Curry (1960). They were indistinguishable from Australian curry.

Of 163 recipes none asked for chilli and just nine asked for cayenne. On the other hand, out of 73 recipe for chutney 1/3 used chilli (one even asking for birdseye chillies), 1/3 used cayenne and 1/3 used neither. I think this was because the *Weekly* judged, accurately I think, that its readers generally would not take on curry dishes that were too 'hot'. Curry powder was instead used to give a curry heat. But even this had to be handled carefully. 'Some think that a curry to be good must be "hot." Nothing of the kind. Indiscriminate use of curry powder in inexperienced hands has been responsible for many a spoilt dish—and life-long aversions. The object of using curry, like all other spices, is to bring out the flavor of other ingredients and to blend them—not to kill them.'¹⁹

There were in the *Weekly* a handful of recipes between 1933 – 1961 that bucked these trends. In July 1938, the *Weekly* published a recipe for 'Kofta Curry' which didn't call for apples or other fresh fruit, for dried fruit, or curry powder.²⁰ It did call for green chilli, green ginger and garlic, closer to South Indian spicing. It reversed the generalising of all 'spicy dish(es) with a thick sauce or gravy' as 'curry' using the vernacular name of the dish - kofta, albeit it adds 'curry'. It is partnered with a recipe for Chuppatties (chapatis) which also is unusual, most of the recipes 1933 -1962 calling for rice to accompany and not a flatbread.²¹ In 1938 the *Weekly* published a recipe for 'Cabab Roti' (identified as a Mohammedan Dish) which gave instructions for making roti flatbread and for cooking spice marinated steak cubes on skewers – cababs/kebabs.²² As we will see, this continued to happen: articles on curries were places at which other elements of South Asian cuisine could be introduced.²³

These recipes did offer the reader alternative models for curries other than Australian curry, as did the recipe for 'Indian Kebabs' (1960).²⁴ Disappointingly, recipes for neither kofta, nor chapatis were published again in the *Weekly* until 1962.

The *Weekly* had a practice of putting together 'Menus' - listing three or four dishes as part of a set of dishes for a particular meal. In 1937 'Curried Sardines' appeared as one of three dishes in 'Half Hour

¹⁸ 'Curried Rabbit' Know How to Make Delicious Curries ... Before Bleak Winter Comes, *The Australian Women's Weekly* 90 May 1936 p. 51

¹⁹ 'Know How to Make Delicious Curries' *The Australian Women's Weekly* 9 May 1936 p.51

²⁰ In May 1938 'Kofta' was in a list of curries but no recipe was given. 'Some Real Indian Curry Recipes', *The Sun News Pictorial* 9 May 1938 p.46

²¹ 'Chuppatties', Four Curry Specials, *The Australian Women's Weekly* 30 July 1938 p.8 The sole recipe for chapatis I found prior to this 1938 one was in 1899 - 'Chapatis' Home Recipes *Daily Telegraph* 5 August 1899 p.2. I think it is reasonable to assume that no one reading the *Weekly* in 1938 will have come across it.

²² 'Cabab Roti' These Dishes Have a Foreign Flavour, *The Australian Women's Weekly* 24 December 1938 p.8

²³ 'Indian Kebabs' Herbs and Spices, *The Australian Women's Weekly* 12 October 1960 p.47

²⁴ 'Indian Kebabs' Herbs and Spices, *The Australian Women's Weekly* 12 October 1960 p.47

Luncheon Menus for Two'.²⁵ In 1944 'Bombay Curry' was the first dish in a menu for a Family Dinner.²⁶ In 1963 the *Weekly* suggested 'For a big buffet party, serve an Indian curry dinner' the dishes for which were Moglai Biriani, Pillau Rice, Beef Vindaloo, Cold Curried Chicken and Saffron Rice.²⁷ Arguably these instances evidence the integration of curry into the Australian table, what I take Moran to mean when she writes of curry 'sometimes occupying the space of a commonplace Australian dish'.²⁸ It is no longer just one dish of several in a recipe column, nor a themed set of various recipes, nor is it a 'speciality' dish.

In her paper on the role of the *Weekly's* food editors Samuelsson wrote: '(The food editors) regularly championed the practical, nutritious, and economical recipes that were the hallmarks of domestic science.'²⁹ This can be seen in their introductory comments to curry features.³⁰ Margaret Shepherd, the first the *Weekly* food editors wrote about rice in the 1933 feature 'These Curries are Delicious and Economical': The rice plays a very important part in the appearance and the flavor of the dish. Brown or unpolished rice is preferable to white rice. It takes about 10 minutes longer to cook, as the husk, which contains vitamin B, has not been removed as in the polished or white variety.³¹

The title of the 1933 feature promises that the recipes will be 'economical'. Furst in 'Know How ...' writes '...use only the best brand of curry (powder). It may be expensive, but will be the cheapest in the end'. 'Curry was offered as way of using up leftover meat, with "Cold Meat" sections presenting at least one curry recipe.'³²

Samuelsson also wrote that the food editors in the early years 'encouraged housewives to remember that food should look good. This was a hallmark of scientific cookery (a characteristic the four early editors had in common) proponents of which fixated on the appetite and believed that attractive appearance of food could activate the salivary glands.'³³ This may well have been why Ruth Furst, who was food editor in 1936, wrote in 'Know How to Make Delicious Curries': 'Curry surrounded by a ring of boiled rice can be most attractive', starting a veritable archipelago of curry islands surrounded by seas of boiled white rice across tables of Australia.³⁴

'Curries' 1961

In June 1961, the *Weekly* published a one page feature article – 'Curries'.³⁵ Six curries are given only one of which, Pear-Nut Curry, calls for apples and sultanas. None of the recipes used cayenne or chilli.

The article is the first substantial discussion of curry powders and their use and usefulness published in the *Weekly*, 30 years after it began publishing recipes for curries that used powder. 'To make a perfect curry,' wrote Leila C. Howard, the 'Food and Cookery Expert' for the *Weekly* wrote, 'spiced to the degree which suits your family takes a lot of practice'.³⁶ Curry powders, she wrote, vary so much

²⁵ 'Curried Sardines' Half Hour Luncheon Menus for Two, *The Australian Women's Weekly* 10 July 1957 p.11

²⁶ 'Bombay Curry' More Family Dinners, *The Australian Women's Weekly* 28 October 1944 p.26.

²⁷ 'Large Buffet Party', *The Australian Women's Weekly* 27 November 1963 p.48

²⁸ Moran, Freida, 'Ordinary and Exotic' p.26

²⁹ Samuelsson ... Nutrition to Glamour p.236

³⁰ Samuelsson ... Nutrition to Glamour p.236

³¹ 'These Curries are Delicious and Economical' *The Australian Women's Weekly* 9 September 1933 p.35

³² Moran, Freida, 'Ordinary and Exotic' p.31

³³ Samuelsson ... Nutrition to Glamour p.237

³⁴ 'Know How to Make Delicious Curries' *The Australian Women's Weekly* May 1936 p.51

³⁵ Curries, *The Australian Women's Weekly* 14 June 1963 p.45

³⁶ 'Lisa Howard' was 'a façade, a constructed image designed by ACP (Australian Consolidated Press)'. Samuelsson ... Nutrition to Glamour p.240. I will continue in this paper to treat Howard as a living individual.

it was hard to judge how much of them to use and they could be affected by age. The solution to the former, she suggested was to try a range of prepared curry powders to find one that suited the family's taste. Curry powders had been sold in Australia from at least 1813³⁷. All the recipes in the *Weekly* in 1961 including those in the feature article use curry powder, as do most curry recipes to that date. To ameliorate the effect of age she suggests buying curry powders in small amounts and storing them in a well-sealed jar or tin.

She goes on to give a recipe for curry powder for 'the more ambitious cook who wishes to make her own' the ingredients of which are coriander seeds, caraway seeds, turmeric, cumin seeds, black peppercorns, cinnamon, ginger, cloves, cardamom, fenugreek, mace and chilli powder.³⁸ They are similar to the ingredients in the first Australian recipe for curry powder published by Edward Abbott in 1864³⁹ and in subsequent published recipes.⁴⁰ They also are similar to the ingredients for the local brand, Keen's Curry Powder which had been available since 1844 and for the imported brand Vencatachellum's Peacock Brand Madras' Curry Powder which had been in Australia since 1874.⁴¹ She also gives a recipe for Curry Sauce. This uses the same ingredients as the curry powder but adds dry mustard, 'a pinch of chilli', garlic, turmeric, lemon juice, vegetable oil, sugar and vinegar.

Samuelsson wrote that 'food writers are "activists", influencing the food choices and culinary practices of their readers'.⁴² I think publishing these recipes is an example of attempting to influence culinary practice. It is continued in following curry features and recipes in the *Weekly*. One measure of the success of the intervention is changes to recipes from readers. Of the 12 winning curry recipes in the 1968 Curry and Rice recipe contest half use curry powder and the other half don't. In 1980 among the 17 recipes from winners of the *Weekly's* Curry and Rice Competition five used curry paste and 10 did not.

'How to be a Specialist Cook' 1963

Just two years later in 1963 the *Weekly* published another single page on curry as part of its feature article 'How to be a Specialist Cook'.⁴³ This took further the directions in the 1961 article 'Curries'.

It itemised the spices that are used in curry powder and assured the home cook that 'all herbs and spices mentioned are obtainable in Australia' without saying where.⁴⁴ Appendix 1 lists South Asian spices and herbs with the year they were first mentioned in *Trove*.

The article declared that 'Rice is essential to a curry meal', introducing cooks to Patna rice, 'a long-grained rice ... generally used'. It did not discuss how best to cook rice - boiling it up in plenty of water was the common practice previously described in the 1933 feature 'These Curries are Delicious and Economical'⁴⁵ and subsequent recipes for rice such as Mary Forbes' 1939 'To Cook Rice'.⁴⁶ 'How to be a Specialist Cook' described ways rice could be presented: 'plain white and fluffy, enriched with melted butter, with green peas or chopped up green or red peppers folded through it ... served in a

³⁷ 'Curry Powder' *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser* 4 December 1813 p.2

³⁸ Curries, *The Australian Women's Weekly* 14 June 1963 p.46

³⁹ Abbott, Edward, *The English and Australian Cookery Book: Cookery for the Many, as well as the Upper Ten Thousand - by an Australian Aristologist*, Sampson Low, Son, and Marston, London, 1864 p.210

⁴⁰ For a near contemporary example see 'What Makes Curry Powder', *The Courier Mail* 11 November 1953 p.13

⁴¹ Vencatachellum original Madras Curry Powder, *The Herald* 12 May 1937 p.47.

⁴² Samuelsson ... Nutrition to Glamour p.232.

⁴³ 'How to be a Specialist Cook ... Curries' *The Australian Women's Weekly* 22 May 1963 p.44

⁴⁴ Spices could be bought from health food stores and delicatessens.

⁴⁵ 'These Curries are Delicious and Economical'. *The Australian Women's Weekly* 9 September 1933 p.35

⁴⁶ 'To Cook Rice' *The Australian Women's Weekly* 11 November 1939 p.9

large separate bowl ... or while hot spooned into shallow bowls to make individual servings. This gives rice a prominence that it hadn't had and makes a welcome break from rice rings.

It continued to reverse the practice of using the generic 'curry'. Recipes given were for 'Murgai Curry (Chicken Curry)', 'Jinga (Prawn Curry)', Bhoonee Machi (Baked Fish Curry), and 'Rogan Jaush (Lamb Curry with Tomatoes). None of these recipes asked for fresh or dried fruits. Despite giving a recipe for it, none called for curry powder, the spice mix being made of individual ingredients. This is the first time chilli is added as an ingredient. Moran wrote 'the 20th century witnessed an increasingly diverse array of ingredients in curry, and ways it was used'.⁴⁷ It is here I think that the *Weekly* first shows this and arguably commits itself to continuing to do so in future recipes.

It took two further steps toward South Asian cuisines. The first described how to eat curry with one's fingers and gave a recipe for Puri (Indian Bread) described as a 'pusher', an aid to scooping up rice and curry with the fingers. This was the first embodying of a cultural practice with recipes.

The second was an introduction to 'sambals' as 'side dishes' to the rice and curry which could be prepared beforehand. 'a choice can be made from any of the following: plumped raisins, chopped chives, pickled walnuts, crumbled potato chips, cumquats, chopped lemon peel, shallots, chopped egg-yolk, pickled onions, crumbled bacon, lemon pickle, peeled sliced bananas, marinated cube cucumber in coconut milk, fillets of anchovy, diced pineapple, chopped almonds or peanuts, toasted or plain coconut, chutneys'. It advised that 'at a genuine Indian dinner usually only two or three are served...'. Again she is giving the reader direction on culturally appropriate culinary behaviour.

The article gave a recipe for Indian Lemon Pickle which used the traditional Indian technique of drying the pickle in the sun to cure it, a different method to the general run of pickle recipes published in the *Weekly* boiling spices, fruit, sugar and vinegar together.

In 1966, readers were introduced to rasam, the light spiced sauce typical of southern Indian cuisine. Also in 1966, the *Weekly* published its first recipe for dahl, somewhat surprisingly given its key part in South Asian cuisines.

'The World's Best Curries' 1967

In 1967 the *Weekly* published 'The World's Best Curries' a compendium of curry recipes from India, Pakistan, Ceylon, Burma Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia. 'Most of the great curries of the world,' Howard wrote, 'come from South East Asia'. This was the first such collection published in Australia.

It is a welcome introduction to the breadth of South Asian cuisines. Of the countries in South Asia, Pakistan was represented by a Biriani; West Pakistan (sic) by Kurma Curry, Chicken Curry; Ceylon by Beef Badun, Prawn and Tomato Curry, Fruit Curry, and Vegetable Curry; India by Madras Dry Curry, Goanese Pork Vindaloo (the first recipe for which was contribute by a reader in 1965⁴⁸), Kashmir Curry, Pineapple Kofta Curry, Prawn and Potato Curry, Chicken Pulao, Potato Chahkee, Bengal Aubergine Curry, Bean Foogath, Aloo Matta, and Egg Curry.

This redressed to some extent the lack of recipes from Ceylon and Pakistan to date giving a rounder view of South Asian cuisines. There had been two recipes ascribed to Ceylonese cuisine published in the *Weekly* since its first issue in 1933, one in 1960 for 'Ceylon Chicken Pie'⁴⁹ and one in 1961 for

⁴⁷ Moran, Freida, 'Ordinary and Exotic p.29

⁴⁸ 'Vindaloo of Pork' Pork makes savoury dish, *The Australian Women's Weekly* 23 June 1965 p.52)

⁴⁹ 'Ceylon Chicken Pie' Prizewinners in Mustard Contest, *Australian Women's Weekly* 4 May 1960 p.58

'Ceylon Soup'.⁵⁰ There was just one ascribed to Pakistani cuisine for 'Curried Peanuts' in 1960.⁵¹ Both cuisines had been ill served by the recipes.

The supplement begins with descriptions from Mr. A. E. (Tiger) Ady, 'an authority on Asian spices' on how curries varied 'according to their country of origin'. This is undoubtedly the first time *Weekly* readers thought about this at all. Also for a cuisine so heavily meat dependent like Australian cuisine it would have come as a surprise to read how much fish and vegetables were used in South Asian cuisines. Recipes for vegetable curries had been few and far between in the *Weekly* till now.

None of the recipes call for curry powder. All of them use individual spices. Readers are told: 'Commercial curry powder can be used as a "starter" in making a curry. You can supplement it with several of the spices that go into most blends of curry powder (cumin, coriander, ground or fresh green ginger, cardamom etc.), adding or subtracting until you have the blend which suits you best.' So it's no longer only the 'ambitious women' who are being encouraged to make their own curry powders.⁵² There is a section on curry Ingredients which assured readers that all mentioned in the book can be obtained in Australia again without saying where.⁵³ It gives methods for making ghee, coconut milk or cream, and tamarind sauce. If tamarinds are not available the reader is told that jam and lemon juice can be used.⁵⁴ This again can be seen as the food editor, Howard in this case, attempting to influence culinary practice, 'to encourage experimentation'.⁵⁵ From here the *Weekly's* recipes increasingly asked for separate ingredients rather than, or sometimes in addition to, curry powder.

[The introduction says that the booklet includes 'side dishes' and 'some delicious fruit-flavoured desserts'. Unfortunately, the edition available on *Trove* has not scanned these pages and I have been unable to locate a copy.]

In April 1979, the magazine's 'Weekly Cooking Class' gave recipes for sambals.⁵⁶ Included here for the first time were papadums with instructions on how to cook them.

Heightened sophistication

These changes to curry recipe-making are at least partly the result of what Moran wrote was 'The heightened sophistication of curries occurred in the context of broader cultural, economic and political change in Australia during the second half of the 20th century'.⁵⁷

I have discussed this in my companion article to this one looking at the construction of Sri Lankan cuisine in Australia.⁵⁸ The material has been updated here to include Indian migrants.

The two books (Doris Ady's *Curries from the Sultan's Kitchen* and Charmaine Solomon's *Complete Asian Cookbook*) were published within a sociopolitical context of increasing connection between Australia and South/East Asia due to four factors. The first was the dismantling of the 'White Australia Policy', legislation introduced in 1910 to exclude

⁵⁰ 'Ceylon Soup' Cut Down Cook's Work, *Australian Women's Weekly* 4 January 1961 p.32.

⁵¹ 'Curried Peanuts', International Party Food, *Australian Women's Weekly* 7 December 1960 p.49

⁵² The World's Best Curries, *The Australian Women's Weekly* 8 March 1967 p.2

⁵³ By 1967 spices were available from health food stores and delicatessens.

⁵⁴ World's Best Curries p.2

⁵⁵ Samuelsson ... Nutrition to Glamour p.232.

⁵⁶ 'Sambals' Weekly Cooking Class, *The Australian Women's Weekly* 25 April 1979 p.85

⁵⁷ Moran, Freida, 'Ordinary and Exotic p.43

⁵⁸ van Reyk, Paul, 'Tackle anything and taste everything: The Australian home cook and Sri Lankan cuisine in newspapers, magazines, cookery books and restaurant guides 1895 – 2023' *compost.sydney* 2024 p.6

migration of Chinese in particular but other nationalities as well including Ceylonese and Indian.⁵⁹ From 1900 – 1950 there had been limited family migration of mainly Sinhalese to Australia.⁶⁰ The second was a new wave of migration from 1950 – 1980 with an influx of Sri Lankan Burghers (descendants of Dutch and Portuguese) migrating under the impact on them of Sri Lankan nationalism.⁶¹ For Indians there was new migration after its independence in 1947. The easing of immigration restrictions in the late 1960s saw an increase in non-European Indians migrating to Australia. By 1981, the India-born population reached 41,657.⁶²

The third factor was students who had studied in Australia under the Colomba Plan, a multi-Commonwealth nations scheme to provide opportunities for individuals from the signatory countries through a scholarship system which facilitated interaction between the students and Australian citizens. In 1960 Alison (PDF) Health Foods wrote an advertorial in *Tharunka*, the magazine of the University of New South Wales titled 'Our Changing Eating Habits':

Over the last decade the eating habits of the Average Australian have undergone considerable changes. With the influx of immigrants from European Countries, many unknown and unusual dishes now» are part of our way of life. The next stage to the alteration of the general eating habits of Australians is taking place with the constant arrival of students from our Eastern neighbours — India, 'Pakistan, Burma, etc. These Students bring with them the Hot Spicy dishes of the East, with their tantalizing piquant flavours.⁶³

By 1964 there had been 12, 000 students who had studied in Australia under the program.⁶⁴

The fourth was the growth in tourism from Australia to South East Asia as economic growth in Australia and the introduction of affordable air fares to these destinations. Another group of Australian travelers were young Australians who in the late 1960s and early 1970s travelled overland from Asia to Europe, through Bali, Thailand Nepal, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, and Turkey on 'the hippie trail'. When they returned to Australia they sought out restaurants at which they could explore further the cuisines they encountered.⁶⁵

'Meanwhile, those who remained at home engaged with exotic places through food,' Moran wrote, 'in restaurants, on the television, and in their own homes. Amidst this diversification, curry performed well. Knowledge of exotic foods such as complex curries was assisted by influential cultural mediators such as the *AWW* (Australian Women's Weekly) and Charmaine Solomon. These communicators constructed the rules around Australian conceptions of curry, asserting what was appropriate, and what was not.'⁶⁶

Curry: The South Asian voice 1968-1979

⁵⁹ Van Reyk, Paul, *The Land 2021* pp.178 - 179

⁶⁰ Hugo, Graeme, and Dissanayake, Lakshman, *The Process of Sri Lankan Migration to Australian Focussing on Irregular Migrants Seeking Asylum*, Department of Immigration and Border Protection 2014 p.8

⁶¹ Graeme and Dissanayake 2014 p.8

⁶² 'India-born Community Information Summary', Department of Foreign Affairs. Commonwealth of Australia 2018

⁶³ 'Our Eating Habits' *Tharunka* 29 February 1960 p.4 [29 Feb 1960 - Our Eating Habits - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](https://trove.nla.gov.au)

⁶⁴ Van Reyk, Paul, *The Land 2021* p,181

⁶⁵ Van Reyk, Paul, *The Land 2021* p,181

⁶⁶ Moran, Freida, 'Ordinary and Exotic p.44

In 1968 the *Weekly* published a 16 page supplement the 'Indian Curry and Rice Book' from a book written by Mrs. Jane Nutta Singh, 'an expert and creative cook'.⁶⁷ Nutta Singh had come to the attention of the *Weekly* when she won its Pineapple (recipes) Contest in 1962 with a recipe for Pineapple Kofta Curry. Nutta Singh and her husband had opened an Indian restaurant - the Taj Mahal - in Queensland which had closed by the time she wrote for the *Weekly*. It isn't clear who approached who to produce the supplement and why. This introduction of Nutta Singh can be read as addressing the question of authenticity Moran⁶⁸ and Simpson⁶⁹ identify as one of the features of curry recipe making.

The book contained 43 recipes 'including for meat, chicken, fish and vegetarian curries, plus many ideas for sambals, the savoury accompaniments to curry. There is also a section on rice cookery - 'without which no curry would be complete'.⁷⁰

The book is something of a summation of the way South Asian cuisine had been increasingly described in the *Weekly* over the preceding years. But the book also takes some further steps toward advancing the understanding of South Asian cuisine.

Howard assures her readers that 'Indian food is not difficult to prepare. Although different ingredients are used for different dishes, they are cooked by the same general processes.' This assuages another concern the readers may have had about taking on curries.

Nutta Singh began the recipes with a section on ways to cook and use rice: Chawal (plain boiled rice); Boiled Rice (Australian Method-Fluffy); Steamed "Pearly" Rice; Oven-Streamed Rice; Indian Fried Rice - Methods 1 and 2; Green Pillau; Yellow Pillau'. The reader likely had not come across the idea of doing anything with rice other than boiling it. She gives recipes for two sweet dishes made with rice - Rice Balls (rice, milk, nutmeg, cinnamon and vanilla) and Ekna Zarda (baked sweetened rice).

[I include all the dishes here and below to show the range of South Asian dishes the *Weekly* readers were exposed to.]

She introduced new South Asian meat preparations - Quoorma, Molee, Doh Peeazah, and Keema. Here again is the reversal of all-encompassing British curry, the dishes particularised by using their vernacular name.

Many of Nutta Singh's curries used chilli and she advised those who want a milder dish to use red peppers. For those who wanted to use chillies she provided advice about their treatment: 'The hotness of the curry will depend, therefore, on the number of chillies, and their size, For a curry with medium "heat" you might like to use a combination of pepper and a small chilli or half a chilli. Always

⁶⁷ Nutta Singh, Jane, 'Indian Curry and Rice Book', *The Australian Women's Weekly* 1 May 1968 p1 - 16

⁶⁸ Moran, Freida, 'Ordinary and Exotic' p.34. 'Complaints (about the quality of curries in Australia) were usually framed by a discourse of "authenticity", speaking to the manner in which curry generated dual meanings of familiar and exotic. Common motifs were the establishment of an authors' legitimacy as an arbitrator of this cultural knowledge.'

⁶⁹ Simpson 'The Many Meanings of Curry' p.113 'Nevertheless, cookbook authors, food journalists and contributors to newspaper columns on food constantly insisted their recipes were authentic, as in the case of one Perth resident who asserted that her recipe for "mutton curry" was made in "the real Indian fashion" (*Sunday Times*, 28 July 1907). Correspondents asserted that their recipes had been obtained directly from "the black khansamah"(cook or head of the kitchen) or from "my Indian cook-boy", but often the source was "a resident in India" (*Western Mail (Perth)*, 26 June 1906; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 September 1917),

⁷⁰ Nutta Singh *Indian Curry* 1968 p2

make sure the seeds are removed from the chilli before using. They are every hot and most unpleasant to bite into.’⁷¹

She gives four recipes for sambals and advises how to use them within the meal: ‘These side dishes can be sharp, pungent, sweet, salty, or tart; when choosing from them, put just a small quantity on the plate. Eat the dishes intermittently by taking a little of one, then another, mixing each with a spoonful of curry and rice.’⁷² Like the earlier advice on eating with one’s fingers this advice tells the reader of the appropriate cultural culinary practice within which the meal is eaten. Engagement with South Asian cuisine is not only about the dishes.

This was the first time a South Asian had written recipes for the *Weekly*. The South Asian voice is also heard in 1973’s ‘Curries ... with authentic flavor’⁷³ Mrs. Qamar Malik contributed Pakistani recipes for Kofta Curry, Meat and Cauliflower Curry, Pulao, Chicken Curry, Fish Curry, Paratha and Carrot Halwa.⁷⁴ Mrs. Lalini Fernando contributed Sri Lankan recipes for Beef or Chicken Curry (including a recipe for curry powder), Devilled Potatoes, Seeni Sambal, Mixed Pickles, Spiced Banana Chillies, Yellow Rice and Fish Ambul Thiyal.⁷⁵

In the 1979 ‘Curry Cookbook’⁷⁶ four South Asian women contributed recipes: Mrs Rashida Moten, from Pakistan, who had a shop in Sydney, the Asian Spice Centre, contributed a recipe for Korma Curry; Doris Ady contributed Madras Prawn Curry⁷⁷; Mrs Mallika de Silva sister to the Sri Lankan Consul contributed recipes for Beef Curry, Fried Brinjal Pickle and Tempered Boiled Potatoes; and Mrs Neelam Sahay wife of the Indian Consul contributed Butter Chicken, Cabbage Kofta Curry, Cauliflower Curry with Peas, Curry Paste, Yellow Rice, Yoghurt Salad, Tomato Chutney and Carrot Halwa.

Also in 1979 Mrs. Pauline Joseph won 2nd prize in the Australian Women’s’ Weekly/ Breville⁷⁸ Best Cook in Australia competition for her menu: Chicken Curry, Beef Satay, Buriyani Rice, Potato Curry, Cucumber in Yoghurt, Fried Pappadums, Fresh Fruit Salad and Cream.⁷⁹

Ellen Sinclair’s introduction to the ‘Curry Cookbook’ signals a change that has come in the years since it was only health food stores and delicatessens from which spices could be bought. ‘Almost all the ingredients mentioned in the recipes,’ she writes, ‘are easily available from supermarkets or large food stores.’⁸⁰ Some, – such as powdered Maldivian fish and dried sprats – are available at speciality Asian spice stores’.⁸¹

⁷¹ Nutta Indian Curry 1968 p5

⁷² Nutta Indian Curry 1968 p.14

⁷³ ‘Curries ... with authentic flavor’, *The Australian Women’s Weekly* 29 August 1973 pp. 69-73

⁷⁴ ‘Pakistan’ Curries ... with authentic flavor, *Australian Women’s Weekly* 29 August 1973 p.69

⁷⁵ ‘Sri Lanka’ Curries ... with authentic flavor, *Australian Women’s Weekly* 29 August 1973 pp.71 - 73

⁷⁶ ‘Curry Cookbook’, *The Australian Women’s Weekly* 25 April 1979 pp.75-83

⁷⁷ In 1968 Ady had published *Curries from the Sultan’s Kitchen. Recipes from India, Pakistan, Burma & Sri Lanka*, A.A. & A. W. Reid, 1968

⁷⁸ Breville is an Australian manufacturer of kitchen appliances founded in 1932. [Breville | Australia | A World Leader in Kitchen Appliances](#)

⁷⁹ ‘Five Prize-Winning Menus – Second, *The Australian Women’s Weekly* 18 July 1979 pp.79-81

⁸⁰ Two of the brands on offer in the supermarkets and large stores in 1979 were McCormick and Master Foods. McCormick advertised that it had over 100 spices and seasonings ‘in your favourite food store’ including ones to ‘add a touch of the exotic to your curries and casseroles.’ *Australian Women’s Weekly* 26 April 1967 p.73 ; Master Foods brought to the pantry ‘Australia’s largest range of herbs and spices’ including saffron, cardamom, chillies (dried), cinnamon, cloves, coriander, cummin (sic), ginger and turmeric. *Australian Women’s Weekly* 1 February 1967 p. 16

⁸¹ ‘Curry Cookbook’ ... p.85

Spanning 11 years though these do, bringing South Asian voices to the Australian table through a magazine with a reach of 3,444,000 in 1977 was a significant achievement for the *Weekly*.

The achievement was perhaps overshadowed at the time by the publication in 1976 of Charmaine Solomon's *Complete Asian Cookbook*.⁸² It had 108 Indian and Pakistani recipes and 91 Sri Lankan recipes. But while it was an instant best-seller, the price for such a hefty book probably put it out of reach for most readers of the *Weekly* and it had nothing like the reach of the *Weekly*, some 3,444,000 readers in 1977.

'Vegetarian Dishes Indian Style' 1980⁸³

Recipes for vegetable dishes in South Asian cuisine had been few and far from the first issue of the *Weekly* in 1933. This five page article went some way to redressing the lacks. There were vegetable versions of known dishes – Kela Kofta (Banana balls) and Bhoona Kheera (Cucumber) – and new ones for the cook's South Asian repertoire – Phul Gobi Dahl (Cauliflower cooked in yoghurt) and Gobhi Bhagi (Spiced Cabbage).

Reader's Recipes 1933 - 1982

Between 1933 and 1982 there were 113 recipes contributed by readers all of which won a prize in the magazine's weekly competition. Of these 65 were for chutneys, 57 for curries and 9 for various other uses of curry powder.⁸⁴ In the early sixties readers followed the lead of the *Weekly* and began to drop apples and sultanas and also use less curry powder.

Chutney

Recipes for chutney showed no substantial differences over 1933 – 1982. They were all variations of the British version of chutney which was already distant from Indian chatni. British chutney was a condiment made from fruits or vegetables that have been finely chopped or pulverised, mixed with spices, a sweetener - sugar mainly these days – and dried fruits – raisins and sultanas commonly but dates also – then boiled to the consistency of jam. For example, this was the spicing for the 12 chutneys in the 1937 article 'Home-Made Fruit Chutneys'.⁸⁵ These chutneys were meant to last for some time. Often the recipe says they will last 'indefinitely'. South Asian chatni, on the other hand, were fresh ground.⁸⁶

In short, readers of the *Weekly* while they may have thought of chutney as Indian/South Asian did not come to know South Asian chatni.

Kedgeriee

Recipes for kedgeriee showed little difference over 1933 – 1982. They, too, were variations of the British dish which again was already distant from the Indian khichdi/khirciri. The Indian dish was a combination of rice and dhal cooked with ghee and spices.⁸⁷ The British version was a dish of rice, fish, boiled eggs and herbs and spices. Some added curry powder or curry sauce.⁸⁸ As with chutneys readers of the *Weekly* while they may have thought of kedgeriee as Indian/South Asian, they did not come to know South Asian khirciri.

⁸² Solomon, Charmaine, *The Complete Asian Cookbook*, Paul Hamlyn 1976

⁸³ 'Vegetarian Dishes Indian Style' *The Australian Women's Weekly* 2 July 1980 pp.86-90

⁸⁴ Food editors, on the other hand, contributed onl

⁸⁵ 'Home-Made Fruit Chutneys' *The Australian Women's Weekly* 3 April 1937 p.39

⁸⁶ 'Chutney', Achaya A. T. *A Historical Dictionary of Indian Food* Oxford India Paperbacks p.45

⁸⁷ Achaya.. *Dictionary* p.45

⁸⁸ For example, 'Breakfast Kedgeriee', *For Breakfast Cheats*, *The Australian Women's Weekly* 6 July 1977 p.70

Pilaf/pilau

There were few recipes published for this in the *Weekly* 1933 – 1982. There was a move toward more spice ingredients by the 1950s and so toward the pilaf/pilau in South Asian cuisines.

South Asian cuisines at the Australian table.

Over the first 49 years of its life the *Australian Women's Weekly* regularly engaged with South Asian cuisines through its recipe pages, feature articles and cookbooks. Beginning with publishing recipes that were hybridised versions of British curry, and so twice removed from South Asian cuisines, from 1961 it moved toward a deeper engagement directly with South Asian cuisines. This was particularly so from 1968 – 1979 with high community profile South Asian women writing recipes for the *Weekly*. While the *Weekly* is often portrayed as the repository of traditional Australian cuisine, what I have shown is the significant role the *Weekly* played through its mass circulation in the South Asianisation of the Australian table.

Appendix 1. List of ingredients for recipes and their first appearance in publications

Pepper – 1803
Cloves – 1806
Chilli – 1806
Chilli powder – at least by 1960
Tamarind - 1808
Mace - 1813
Ginger – 1816
Cinnamon - 1816
Coriander - 1821
Cayenne – 1822
Mustard seed – 1823
Garlic – 1823
Turmeric – 1824
Cardamom - 1825
Cumin - 1826
Fennel - 1832
Chillies dried - 1838
Paprika - 1882
Desiccated coconut – 1876
Lemongrass – 1880
Maldivian fish (dried and smoked skipjack tuna) - 1913
Curry leaves – 1964
Creamed coconut - 1969
Dried *rampe* (pandanus) leaf - 1976