

## The Portuguese Influence on Bengali Cuisine

*Food on the Move*

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*“Aquas do Gange, e a terra de Bengala  
Fertil de sort que outra não lhe iguala”*

*“Here by the mouths, where hallowed Ganges ends  
Bengal’s beauteous Eden wide extends”*

***Camões, Os Lusíadas, Canto VII, Stanza XX<sup>1</sup> (1)***

### I. INTRODUCTION

The Portuguese conquests of the 15th and 16th centuries are a remarkable chapter in the history of empire. Throughout the 16th century the Portuguese retained a dominant position in the maritime trade of the Indian Ocean and an important share of the trade east of the Strait of Malacca. At the heart of this mercantile empire, was India, with its wealth of cloth, luxury goods, and spices. The Portuguese even used the expression *Estado da Índia* (State of India) to describe their conquests between the Cape of Good Hope and the Persian Gulf on one side of Asia, and Japan and Timor on the other. At its height, *Estado da Índia* comprised a chain of more than 40 forts and factories (bandars) extending from Brazil to Japan (Figure 1). Portuguese was the lingua franca of this far-flung empire.

The products traded included gold from Guinea, South-East Africa, and Sumatra; sugar from Madeira, Sao Tome, and Brazil; pepper from Malabar and Indonesia; mace and nutmegs from Banda; cloves from the Spice Islands; cinnamon from Ceylon; gold, silks, and porcelain from China; silver from Japan; horses from Persia and Arabia; and cotton textiles from Gujarat, the Malabar Coast, and Bengal. The merchandise was bartered in the interport trade of Asia or taken round the Cape of Good Hope to Lisbon and Antwerp, a major distribution center for Asian spices and other goods.

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Joaquim Joseph A. Campos, *History of the Portuguese in Bengal*. Calcutta, London: Butterworth, 1919. Published in 1572, this great Portuguese epic celebrates the Portuguese encounters with the East, starting with Vasco da Gama’s voyage to India. Camões himself spent part of his life in India.

This vast empire was launched in 1415 when a fleet of 59 galleons and 50,000 men attacked the Arab stronghold of Ceuta on the African side of the Straits of Gibraltar. By 1515, the great conqueror Albuquerque had seized the three most important centers of the spice trade: Malacca, Ormuz, and Goa, wresting control of this trade away from the Arabs. However, the glory days of the empire lasted little more than a century. The task of maintaining such an extensive empire was too great for a small nation of around 1 million population. Sufficient sailors could not be found to man their fleets, so that convicts and outlaws were recruited. The Portuguese system of administering the spice trade was also inefficient, if not obstructive.<sup>2</sup>

In 1580, the crowns of Spain and Portugal were united under Philip II of Spain, who treated Portugal as a conquered country. The real blow came when Portuguese ports were closed against the rebellious Dutch. Forced to get an empire of their own, the Dutch wrested much of the trade in Southeast Asia, Ceylon, and India from the Portuguese. The French, English, and other European powers followed. By the middle of the 17th century the Portuguese role as the dominant mercantile power in Asia was virtually over (although they left Goa only in 1961 and will leave Macau in 1998).

## II. THE PORTUGUESE IN INDIA

On the Indian subcontinent, the Portuguese established trading posts in three areas: along the Malabar coast at Calicut, Cochin, Goa, and other towns; on the island of Ceylon (Sri Lanka); and in Bengal in the northeast. Goa was the capital of the Portuguese empire in the east and a central clearing house for merchants from Arabia, Siam, Java, Malacca, Persia, China, Japan, even America. So great was Portuguese influence that at one point, it looked as if King Sebastian (1557-78) might occupy the throne of the Great Moghuls.

According to legend, when Vasco da Gama reached Calicut in 1498, a Moor from Tunis asked him in Castilian “May the devil take you. What brought you here?” His answer was “We have come to seek Christians and spices.” The conversion of local people was always a major Portuguese objective and was accompanied by widespread intermarriage with local inhabitants at all levels of society. Today, the major Portuguese legacies in India, especially on the West Coast, are the Catholic religion and churches, the Portuguese language, and the prevalence of such surnames as (Da) Souza, Castro, Cruz, Dias, Fernandes, Gonsalves, Fonseca, Pereira, Rodrigues, (Da) Silva, (Da) Souza, Correa, etc. Because of internal migration, these names are also found in Calcutta and other Indian cities.

Gastronomically, the Portuguese legacy was widespread, profound, and enduring. Their main heritage was, of course, the fruits and vegetables brought from the Western Hemisphere, Africa,

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<sup>2</sup> See Anthony R. Disney, *Twilight of the Pepper Empire: Portuguese Trade in Southwest India in the Early 17th Century*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978. Factors contributing to the decline of the Portuguese spice trade included undercapitalization; a deteriorating global market for pepper; and lack of support and even outright hostility on the part of the governments in Lisbon and Goa. The Viceroy in Goa and his advisors had an “aristocratic disdain for merchants”, many of whom were converted Jews, and even turned some over to the Inquisition in India.

the Philippines, and China and Southeast Asia which were rapidly and thoroughly integrated into local cuisines. Another was the creation of Goan cuisine, which combined Portuguese techniques and dishes with Indian spices.

### III. THE PORTUGUESE IN BENGAL

The Portuguese first visited Bengal in 1517, just 33 years after Bartholomew Diaz landed at Calicut on the East coast. Bengal was an independent kingdom under the Muslim Lodi dynasty, which was replaced by the Moghuls in 1576. Bengal was then an extremely wealthy land known far and wide as “the Paradise of India.” Rich in rice, cotton, and other agricultural products, it had long been the center of a luxury trade in spices and cloth. The famous muslins of Dacca, much sought after by Roman women, were exported in large quantities to Provence, Italy, and Lanquedoc in the 17th century. The chief port was Chittagong (“Chatigam” on the map in Figure 2) and the capital was Gaur. Kalikatta, which was to become Calcutta, was an insignificant village on the left bank of the Hooghly River.

In 1580 Akbar granted the Portuguese a charter to settle in a village on the banks of the Hooghly River 25 miles upstream from the site of present-day Calcutta. Called Hooghly or Porto Pequeno, it became the common emporium for vessels from other parts of India, China, Malacca, and The Philippines. Merchants took advantage of the cheapness of goods in Bengal and sold them at an enormous price in their numerous ports in the east. At first the Portuguese traders would remain there in the rainy season buying and selling goods and return to Goa when the rains were over, but eventually they formed permanent settlements.

In the 1670s, there were said to be at least 20,000 Portuguese and their descendants in Bengal, although only about 300 were pure Portuguese. About half lived in Hooghly, the rest in Satgaon (Porto Grande), Chittagong, Banja, Dacca and other ports. They lived in great luxury, dressed in the style of the local nawabs, and “made merry with dancing slave girls, seamstresses, cooks and confectioners.”<sup>3</sup> Slavery was widespread, so that households often had dozens of domestics. One of their specialties was the preparation of sweetmeats from mangoes, oranges, lemons, ginger, and pickles. Portuguese bakers were also known for their bread, cakes, and other forms of pastries, filled and flavored for various occasions.

The Bengali settlements were under the authority of the government in Ceylon, not the viceroy in Goa because of difficulties with communications. However, in reality, neither this government nor the home government in Lisbon had much to do with them, especially after the merger with Spain. Authority was weak, and adventurers tried to set up independent kingdoms, often in alliance with local rulers. Their men, convicts and outlaws, became plunderers and pirates in alliance with the Arakanese and Moghs, a semi-tribal Buddhist people who lived around Chittagong. Known as Feringhi (from the Arab word “Frank”, once applied to the Crusaders), these brigands reaped a reign of terror over the rivers and swamps of eastern Bengal.

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<sup>3</sup> Minakshie Das Gupta, Bunny Gupta, and Jaya Chaliha. *The Calcutta Cookbook*. New Delhi, Penguin, 1995. p. 148.

These Moghs were to play an interesting role in culinary history. For centuries they had worked as deckhands and cooks on Arab ships trading with Southeast Asia. The Portuguese continued this tradition by employing the Moghs as cooks and they quickly learned the culinary arts of their masters, becoming skilled confectioners and bakers. The British likewise had high regard for Mogh and Goan cooks, and today both are encountered running Indian restaurants around the world.<sup>4</sup>

Meanwhile, the first Dutch ships arrived in Bengal in 1615 and were given permission by the Moghuls to trade here. A struggle ensued and over the next century, Portuguese trading posts in the Moluccas, Ceylon, and India gradually passed into Dutch hands. In 1651 the English built their first trading post in Bengal and in 1690 Job Charnock founded Calcutta. The Moghuls eventually subdued the pirates and conquered Chittagong and Hooghly. By the 18th century the Portuguese presence had almost disappeared.

In contrast to Western India, in Bengal there are only a few physical vestiges of the Portuguese presence: a few churches and some ruins. Some geographical place names remain: the Dom Manik Islands, Point Palmyras on the Orissa Coast, the town of Bandel, and Feringhi Bazaar in Dacca. But the Portuguese influence lives on in other ways. Many people living around Chittagong in East Bengal have fair skins and blue eyes and are popularly considered to be descendants of the Portuguese. A fair number of Bengalis have Portuguese surnames. They fall into several categories: Luso-Indians (descendants of the offspring of mixed unions between Portuguese and local women), descendants of Christian converts, descendants of Goans who migrated to Bengal for economic reasons in the early 19th century, and others who for various reasons adopted Portuguese surnames, including Anglo-Indians.<sup>5</sup> There has also been a merging of the Anglo-Indian and Luso-Indian communities in Calcutta and other metropolises.

The Portuguese language remained a *lingua franca* in Bengal at late as the 18th century. Clive, who could never give an order in any native language, was said to speak fluent Portuguese. The first three books printed in the Bengali language were printed in Latin characters in Lisbon in 1743, and it was a Portuguese who composed the first Bengali prose work and the first Bengali grammar and dictionary. In Modern Bengali, articles of common use, items used in Christian services, and plants often go by their Portuguese names; e.g., *ag-bent* (holy water), *alpin* (pin), *altar* (altar), *ananas* (pineapple), *balti* (bucket), *bispa* (bishop), *botel* (bottle), *spanj* (sponge), *girja* (church), *tamak* (tobacco), *piyara* (pear), *ata* (custard apple), *veranda*, etc. Other Portuguese words have passed into the English language, including caste, peon, padre, papaya, plantain, cobra, mosquito, pomfret, and palmyra.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Several years ago the head chef at the Gymkhana Club in New Delhi was a Mogh, as was the owner of a Bangladeshi restaurant I met in New York City in the 1970s.

<sup>5</sup> Campos, *History of the Portuguese*, pp 177-188.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 204-220. Also Sir Jadu-Nath Sarkar, *The History of Bengal. Muslim Period 1200-1757*. Patna: Janaki Prakashan, 1977, pp 368-370.

## IV. THE EVOLUTION OF BENGALI CUISINE

### 1. PRE-EUROPEAN BENGALI FOOD

Before the arrival of Europeans in the early 16th century, the staple of Bengali cuisine was locally grown rice, as it is today. A Portuguese traveler wrote "The rice here is far better than the European one, especially the scented variety, for besides being very fine and of a most agreeable flavour, it has after being cooked a nice smell which one would think a blending of several scents."<sup>7</sup> Other dietary staples were wheat, fruits, vegetables, and milk, milk products such as yogurt, and clarified butter (ghee.) The basic diet of poor people was rice with a little salt and green vegetables. However, according to one source, Bengali texts make no mention of lentils or methods of preparing them until well into the 15th century and even today, most of the dals consumed in Bengal are grown outside the state.<sup>8</sup>

One reason may be that fish and even some kinds of meat were readily available and widely eaten in Bengal, even by Brahmins, who were strict vegetarians in other parts of India. However, like Orthodox Hindus in other parts of India, they avoided onions, garlic and mushrooms. There were also restrictions on what kind of fish was to be eaten and when. According to one text, a Brahmin could eat fish that are white and have scales but not those that had ugly shapes or heads like snakes or lived in holes. Venison and other kinds of wild game were allowed and, in ayurvedic medicine, recommended for certain medical conditions. Snails, crabs, fowls, both domestic and wild, cranes, ducks, camels, boars, and, of course, beef were prohibited to Brahmins.<sup>9</sup>

In the 9th and 10th century, there were over 40 varieties of rice, 60 kinds of fruits and more than 120 varieties of vegetables in Bengal. Vegetables included cucumber, carrot, various kinds of gourds, garlic, fenugreek, radish, lotus root, mushroom, eggplant, and green leafy vegetables. Among the fruits eaten were peaches, water melon, banana, mango, amalaka, lime (nimbu), grapes, oranges (imported from China or Indochina around the beginning of the Christian era), pear (also introduced by the Chinese), jujube, almond, walnuts, coconut, pomegranates, bananas, and many fruits with no Western equivalent.

Until the 12th century, spices used in Bengali cooking were limited to turmeric, ginger, mustard seed, long pepper, poppy seeds, asafoetida, and sour lemon. Long pepper was replaced first by black peppercorns brought from the west coast of India and later by the cheaper chili, which thrived in Bengali soil. Spice traders also brought cinnamon, cardamon, and cloves. Various methods of preparation were used, including frying in both shallow and deep fat. Cooking media included ghee by those who could afford it, mustard oil, still popular today in Bengal, and sesame oil.

The Bengali love of sweets goes back into the Middle Ages. Sugar has been grown in Bengal and India since ancient times, as indicated by its Sanskrit name, *sharkara*, which passed into

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<sup>7</sup> Atul Chandra Roy. *History of Bengal. Mughal Period*. Calcutta: Nababharat Publishers, n.d. p. 478.

<sup>8</sup> Chitrita Banerji. *Life and Food in Bengal*. New Delhi: Rupa & Co., 1993. p. 9.

<sup>9</sup> K.T. Achaya, *Indian Food: A Historical Companion*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994, pp 128-133.

other languages (except, ironically, in Bengali where it is known as “Chini” from the word for China.) Texts dating back to the 12th and 13th century texts describe a number of dishes based on milk, partly thickened milk, and milk solids.

## **2. THE INTRODUCTION OF NEW-WORLD INGREDIENTS AND TECHNIQUES**

Table 1 lists the most important plants and foods introduced by the Portuguese into Bengal, with some comments about their history and their role in Bengali cuisine. Today, it is impossible to imagine a Bengali meal without potatoes, tomatoes, and chilies, so thoroughly have they been integrated into the cuisine. “Next to the Irish, Bengalis are probably the largest potato-eaters in the world,” says one writer.<sup>10</sup> Other common fruits and vegetables include okra, sweet potato, eggplant, guava, and papaya.

At the same time, the role of the “imports” is somewhat less visible than on India’s West coast. In Bengal, for example, peanuts and cashews are eaten mainly as snacks and do not generally form part of main dishes, as they do in Maharashtra (roasted potatoes with peanuts) or Kerala (shrimp with cashews.) In fact, the Marathi word for potato is the Portuguese “batata.” Gujaratis prepare bread from corn flour and Maharashtrians make a corn curry from the kernels. The only way Bengalis eat corn is on the cob, perhaps smeared with a little oil and chili, and purchased from a street vendor.

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<sup>10</sup> Banerji, *Life and Food in Bengal*, p. 122.

**Table 1****Some Plants Introduced by the Portuguese in Bengal and Their Use in Bengali Cuisine**

English name (Botanical Name)	Bengali name	Comments	Use in Bengali cuisine
Cashew (Anacardium occidentale)	Kaju, hijli badam	Native of s.e. Brazil, introduced on west coast of India to check erosion. Today India is the world leader in production. "Kaju" is Port. corruption of Brazilian "acajau." "Hijli" is a coastal region in Bengal where the cashew is grown.	Snack
Pineapple (Ananas Sativa)	Ananas	Introduced in Bengal in 1594 from Brazil. Tupi Indian name is nana	Fresh in chutney
Peanut (Arachis Hypogaea)	Chinar badam	Introduced from America, perhaps via Africa. The Bengali name means "Chinese nut" which indicates it could have arrived via Manila or China. However, "Chinese" is also an adjective used by Bengalis to denote anything foreign.	Snacks
Papaya (Carica Papaya)	Papaya	Orig. in C. America. Came to India via Philippines (where the Spanish took it) and Malaysia.	Unripe as vegetable. Paste used as meat tenderizer.
Mangosteen (Garcinia Mangostana)	Mangustan	Brought from Malacca	
Sweet Potato (Ipomoea Batatas)	Ranga alu, chine alu	Introduced from Africa or Brazil. Bengali name means "red potato"	Vegetable dishes, shrimp dishes
Potato (Solanum tuberosum)	Alu; vilayati alu ("European potato")	Spanish took first potatoes to Europe in 1570. On the west coast of India, called batata (sweet potato). In 1780, a basket of potatoes was presented to Sir Warren Hastings in Calcutta. Grown in the foothills of the Himalayas in 1830. By 1860, potatoes had become popular in Calcutta, although orthodox people avoided them until this century.	Vegetable dishes, dried and with gravy; i.e., shukto, poshto. In curries with meat and seafood. Filling for samosas.
Tomato (Lycopersicon Lycopersicum)	Vilayati begoon ("European eggplant")	Orig. in Mexico or Peru. Came via England in late 18th C.	Chutney. Flavoring for dals.

English name (Botanical Name)	Bengali name	Comments	Use in Bengali cuisine
Chilies (Capsicum frutescens)	Lanka	The Bengali name indicates it may have come via Sri Lanka. Orig. in C. America, chili in all its forms spread like rapidly in India as substitute for long or black pepper. By the mid-16th C. Europeans were calling it "Calcutta pepper."	Fresh, dried, and powdered. Used as flavoring and decoration.
Custard Apple (Anona Squamosa)	Ata	Native to S. America, came to India from West Indies via Cape of Good Hope or The Philippines. Well naturalized in Bengal.	
Tobacco (Nicotiana Tabacum)	Tamak	Introduced into South India by Port. in the early 16th C. <sup>11</sup>	
Guava (Psidium guayava)	Peyara	May have orig. in Peru. Known in Eastern India as early as 1550. Widely grown in Bengal.	Eaten as fruit. Also Guava cheese, jelly
Corn or Maize (Zea Maya)	Bhutta	Originated in Central America. Achaya notes temple carvings from 12th C. A.D. showing what he claims are corn cobs.	Roasted and eaten on the cob, usually purchased from street sellers.
Sapodilla (Manilkara achras)	Chiku	The bark of the tree yields chicle used by Aztecs for chewing; hence Bengali "chiku". Brought from Mozambique to Goa or Phillipines to Malaysia, and then to east coast.	
Litchi (Niphelium litcvhi)	Lichi	Native to southern China. Portuguese brought to Bengal at end of late 19th century.	Eaten as fruit. Goans make litchi wine
Okra, Lady's Fingers (Abnelmoschus esculentus)	Bhindi	Probably from Africa	Popular vegetable. Fried, cooked in stews

Sources: Campos, *History of the Portuguese*, pp 253-258 ; Achaya, *Indian Food: A Historical Companion*. esp. pp 218-238; M. Toussaint-Samat, *History of Food*. Trans. Anthea Bell. Cambridge, Ma.: Blackwell, 1992.; pp. and Henry Yule, Henry, and A. C. Burnell. *Hobson-Jobson: A Glossary of Colloquial Anglo-Indian Words and Phrases*. 2nd edition. London and New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986, esp. pp 284-286.

<sup>11</sup> Indians might have taken quite naturally and quickly to tobacco because of a long tradition of smoking. In ancient times Indians smoked a form of cigar call dhumavartis, which was said to have medicinal value. One version was made of cardamon, saffron, sandal wood, aloewood, resin and thinly cut bark of trees like the banyan and pipal, which burn quickly and have fragrance. The mixture was finely ground, made into a paste, and coated on a hollow reed 6 inches long. The reed was removed when dry and the "cigar" was smeared with ghee and lit.

Many virtues were ascribed to smoking: It was said to soothe the nerves, put the smoker in a cheerful mood, strengthen his teeth and hair, sweeten his breath, and cure many diseases. However, one medical writer found it necessary to state that smoking indulged in excessively could lead to ill health. Om Prakash, *Food and Drinks in Ancient India*, New Delhi: Munshi Ram Manohar, La., 1961, pp 254-257.



To show how these ingredients are incorporated into the cuisine, let us examine a typical Bengali meal. It starts with *shukto*, a bitter dish intended to simulate the appetite. *Shukto* is a mixture of diced vegetables, such as white radish, potatoes, beans, and bitter gourd or karela, a vegetable also used in Chinese cuisine (though apparently indigenous to India). The vegetables are lightly sautéed in ginger, mustard seed, and cumin, and then cooked with milk and water. Potatoes are almost always a component of *shukto*.

*Shukto* is followed by rice and dal (spiced lentil soup), accompanied by one or more fried, boiled, and sautéed vegetable dishes. Cut and sautéed tomatoes are often added as a flavoring to dal. *Poshto* is a mixture of potatoes and other vegetables cooked in a paste made of white poppy seeds. *Chheshki* consists of julienned root vegetables, usually potatoes, and onions stir-fried in a little oil with chili, mustard seed, and cumin seed. In a nonvegetarian household, fish and meat would now be served, cooked in a light gravy and perhaps accompanied by one or two vegetable dishes in gravy, a rice pullao and bread. Typical seafood dishes are *lau chingri*, prawns cooked with marrow, said to be of Portuguese origin; *maccher jhol*, a pungent fish stew; and malai curry made with coconut milk. Plain boiled rice accompanies every course. If bread is served, it could be *luchhi*, unique to Bengal in that it is made of white flour, not wheat flour— perhaps another legacy of the Portuguese bakers.

The next-to-last course is a sweet and sour chutney made with tomatoes, apples, mangos, pineapples, or other fruits. This quintessentially Bengali dish may also reflect the influence of the Portuguese preserve and pickle makers. Chutney plays the role of sorbet in European cuisine: It is intended to clear the palate for the piece de resistance: the sweet or dessert course.

Bengalis are famous for their love of sweets, which borders on an addiction. In Calcutta there is a sweet shop on almost every corner. In homes, sweets are served at the end of meals (not throughout a meal, as in Western India) and with afternoon tea. Tea is an important meal since dinner is traditionally eaten very late (10:00 p.m. or even later in some Calcutta households) Tea also includes salty and fried snacks, Western-style cake, delicate cucumber and tomato sandwiches, and, of course, tea, served English-style with milk and sugar (never with spices.) Sweets are also eaten as snacks throughout the day; in the old days, very rich landowners were said to have lived on a diet of sweets alone.

The two basic ingredients of Bengali sweets are sugar and milk. The milk is thickened either by boiling it down to make a thick liquid called *khoa*, or by curdling it with lemon juice or yogurt to produce curds, called *channa*. There is some debate as to whether the latter was a traditional technique or a Portuguese contribution. Portuguese cheesemakers in Bengal used to produce curds by breaking milk with acidic materials. One of their products was a salted smoked cheese called Bandel Cheese, which is still made and sold in Calcutta. According to Achaya,<sup>12</sup> this routine may have lifted an Aryan taboo on deliberate milk curdling and given the traditional Bengali sweetmaker a new raw material. While some historic texts seem to indicate that curds

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<sup>12</sup> Achaya, *Indian Food*, pp 132-33.

were used in Indian sweets in the Middle Ages, Achaya argues that these texts are ambivalent and that what was actually used was *khoa*.

It is a fact that the extensive use of channa by Calcutta sweetmakers began in the mid-19th century when they greatly expanded their repertoire by inventing new varieties, often with fanciful names. The most famous include *rasgolla*, a light spongy white ball of channa served in sugar syrup; a dark-colored fried version called *ledikeni*, named after Lady Canning, the wife of the first Viceroy of India; *cham-cham*, small patties dipped in thickened milk and sprinkled with grated *khoa*; *ras malai*, *khoa* and sugar balls floating in cardamon-flavored cream; *pantua*, sausage-shaped spheres fried to a golden brown and dropped in sugar syrup; and the most exquisite of all, *sandesh*. *Sandesh* (the word means "message" in Bengali, perhaps because it was once sent as a gift) is basically *channa* mixed with sugar, fried in a little clarified butter, and pressed into pretty molds shaped like flowers, fruit, or shells. Like all good Bengali sweets, *sandesh* has a delicate, subtle flavor that must be carefully savored. Connoisseurs debate the virtues of their favorite variety and manufacturer with the passion and expertise of a French oenophile.

### 3. NEW DISHES

Bengali cuisine is one of most eclectic of Indian regional cuisines and has been the most open to foreign influences for a number of reasons. Throughout history, caste has always been much weaker in Bengal than in other regions of India. Until 1947, Calcutta was an extremely cosmopolitan city, with large communities of Jews, Armenians, Chinese, Anglo-Indians Moreover, the British had a presence there for 350 years and until 1911 Calcutta was the capital of the Indian empire and the second city of the British empire after London., Tibetans, and people from all parts of India. From the mid-19th century a westernized Bengali middle class emerged who studied in British universities, sent their sons and daughters to English-language schools, belonged to English-style clubs, adopted Western political ideas, and were not adverse to exploring other cuisines. Rich people in Calcutta used to have houses with three or four separate kitchens for preparing Muslim, Western, Hindu, and Hindu vegetarian dishes. In the first half of the 20th century, Calcutta social life centered around the English clubs, the Great Eastern Hotel, and fashionable restaurants like Firpos and Fleuries, founded by Europeans and serving Continental cuisine.

In Bengali middle-class homes, breakfast tends to be Western-style: fruit or juice, toast, porridge, and perhaps a spicy omelette cooked with chilies, onions, and tomatoes. Lunch includes dishes such as cutlets and chops, recreated in forms totally unlike their English originals. Chops are a spiced round or oval potato cake filled with ground fish, meat or vegetables, dipped in egg and breadcrumbs, and fried. Cutlets are long, flat, oval patties made from ground fish, meat, or vegetables mixed with eggs, spices, and perhaps fresh herbs, coated with breadcrumbs and fried until golden brown. Common household desserts include such western dishes as soufflé, caramel custard, jello, rice pudding, and trifle.

Portuguese-Goan dishes also found their way into Bengali menus. *The Indian Cookery Book* written in the last century by an anonymous "Thirty-five year Resident of Calcutta" contains a

recipe for vindaloo, which it calls “this well known Portuguese curry.” This hot and sour pork dish made with vinegar and red chilies is derived from the Portuguese “Carne de Vinho e Alhos”, or pork with wine and garlic, a Madeira specialty made with vinegar and dry white wine.

More recently, the *Calcutta Cookbook* (1995) includes recipes for buffath (a beef or duck and vegetable stew); temperado (prawns cooked in coconut milk); chicken xacuti (hot and sour chicken in coconut milk); sorpotel (a very spicy stew made from beef and pig offal); and vindaloo. Table 2 lists some Goan dishes and their ingredients. Generally, Goan cuisine is characterized by a strong rather than subtle flavoring that comes from a liberal and, to some tastes, rather indiscriminate use of spices, including cardamoms, cloves, cinnamon, nutmeg, ginger, garlic, ginger, chilies, cumin, perhaps poppy seeds, mustard seeds, fenugreek, and coconut. In Bengal, these dishes may be made with mustard oil.

In Calcutta, Goan cuisine has merged with the cuisine of the Anglo-Indians, who are a distinct and legally recognized minority community. Under the British, places in schools and certain professions were reserved for Anglo-Indians, but after Independence, many left for Canada, Australia, and Britain. Today the once flourishing community in Calcutta is small. A cookbook published in Calcutta in the 1950s, *Anglo-Indian and Portuguese Dishes*, is an interesting compendium of several cuisines:

**Table 2**  
**Some Goan Recipes Found In Bengali Cookbooks**

Goan Dish	Ingredients	Spices
<b>Buffath, Buffado</b>	Beef, potatoes, carrots, radishes, green onions, vinegar	Ginger, garlic, turmeric, chilies, mustard seeds, cumin coriander seeds
<b>Buffath II</b>	Duck, potatoes, onions, coconut milk vinegar, lime juice	Cloves, green cardamoms, cinnamon, coriander, green chilies
<b>Temperado</b>	Prawns, gourd or pumpkin, coconut milk	Kashmiri chili powder, green chilies, cloves, cardamoms, cinnamon, sugar
<b>Chicken Xacuti</b>	chicken, coconut milk, onion, tamarind pulp  Marinade: lime juice, ginger, garlic, chilies, coriander leaves	Grated coconut, green chilies, nutmeg, garlic, coriander, cumin, pepper, aniseed, poppy seeds, mustard seeds, fenugreek, green cardamon, caraway seeds

<b>Goan Dish</b>	<b>Ingredients</b>	<b>Spices</b>
<b>Sorpotel</b>	Pork, pork liver, pork kidneys, ox tongue, beef heart, vinegar, onions,	Garlic, ginger, cumin seeds, cloves, green cardamoms, cinnamon, black pepper, dry red chilies
<b>Pork Vindaloo</b>	Pork.  Marinade: vinegar, ginger, garlic, and spices  Mustard oil for frying	Red chilies, coriander, cumin, cloves, green cardamoms, cinnamon
<b>Kuziddo (Mutton curry)</b>	Mutton, white radish, onion, lime, water.  Cooking medium ghee	Ginger, garlic, green chilies
<b>Richadoo (Baked crab)</b>	Crab, onions, lime, butter. Crab is boiled, minced with other ingredients, put in shells and baked	Fresh herbs, pepper
<b>Bolo du Portugal</b>	Semolina, ground sugar, butter, eggs, almonds, rose water, brandy	
<b>Bole Comadree</b>	Grated coconuts, cardamoms, rice flour, cinnamon, lemon essence, eggs, butter, milk	
<b>Bole de Amandrue Pudding</b>	Eggs, sugar, chana (curd), sliced almonds, bread soaked in milk	
<b>Bibingka (Coconut pudding)</b>	Coconut milk, sugar syrup, rice flour	

Sources: Minakshie Das Gupta, Bunny Gupta, and Jaya Chaliha. *The Calcutta Cookbook*. New Delhi, Penguin, 1995; Limond, (Late) Mrs. Dora. *Anglo-Indian and Portuguese Dishes*, Calcutta: L.O.H. de Silva, n.d.

- **British:** e.g., tongue stew, roast goose, roast chicken, baked mutton breast, roast mutton, sardine toast, Irish stew, Yorkshire pudding; sausage rolls, fish pie, shrewsbury biscuits, ox-tail soup, Indian Worster (sic) sauce
- **North Indian/Moghlai:** tandoori chicken, kabob, pilaus, burfee, firni,
- **Bengali:** steamed hilsa fish, moong dhal, cutlets, chops, rasgoolahs, chutney, rasgoolahs, Lady Canning
- **Goan:** vindaloo, kuziddo, buffado, richadoo, baradoo, prawn temperadoo, fish vindaloo, prawn curry with cocoanut milk (10)
- **Portuguese:** Bebin Ka Lacy, Bole Memosoo, Bole de Leithe, Bole Comadree, Bole de Amandrue Pudding, guava cheese

By far the largest chapter is “Cakes, Portuguese Sweets, Halwa, Custard Puddings Marmalades, Toffees, Ice Creams, Bread, and Biscuits”, which includes cakes and pastries with Portuguese names. The very first recipe is for a lavish Christmas Cake, made with almonds, raisins, dried and candied fruits, cream, cardamom, cinnamon, and nutmeg and impressive quantities of eggs and butter. Rum is usually an ingredient, though omitted in this recipe. The ingredients are handed over to the local baker several weeks before Christmas and the cakes given as gifts to family and friends. An obvious precedent is the Portuguese Bolo-Rei (King’s Cake), a Christmas cake made with raisins, nuts, candied fruits, and port. Another intriguing recipe in this cookbook is for guava cheese, a kind of paste made from boiled and mashed guavas, lime juice, sugar and butter that is cooked, poured into a mold, and cooled.

## V. CONCLUSION

The gastronomical legacy of the Portuguese was widespread, profound, and enduring. Their farflung trading posts were the hubs of a global exchange of fruits and vegetables between the Western Hemisphere, Africa, Oceania, Asia, and India. The Portuguese brought potatoes, tomatoes, chilies, okra (ladies fingers), corn, papayas, pineapples, cashews, peanuts, guavas, and tobacco to India, and these products were thoroughly assimilated into the regional cuisines. In Bengal, the Portuguese may have introduced the technique of curdling milk that became the basis of the famous Bengali sweet industry. Goan dishes such as vindaloo, buffath, and Chicken xacuti also became part of Calcutta’s cosmopolitan cuisine.

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