

Title- The Management of the English Colonial Home: Keeping Up with the Indigenous Domestic

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The Management of the English Colonial Home: Keeping Up with the Indigenous Domestics

Introduction

the trials of Indian Housekeepers does not consist in the lack of suitable furniture, food, and dress, so much as in the deceit and dishonesty of the people. (Dulles, John Welsh. *Life in India; or Madras, the Neilgherries, and Calcutta*, Philadelphia, 1855, pp. 116-117.)

The above quote (1855) familiarised the Anglo-Indian¹ expatriates about the intrinsic qualities of indigenous servants and warned them about the trials of raising English homes in the colony. This essay examines the ‘Servant Problem’ of the English household and the ways of managing the ‘problem’ as laid out in the contemporary colonial household management guides and conduct books. Indeed, the management of servants was the central focus of almost all household compendiums. In this context, this article then proposes to examine how the boundary of Anglo-Indian domesticity was redefined in colonial context which demanded control as prescribed by the conduct books and household management compendiums, newspapers, travelogues, memoirs, that were being popularised from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. In the colonial context master-servant relation took a multidimensional dialectics. The classic ruler and the ruled paradigm were replete with class dimensions and received another shed of complexity when influenced by the caste and religious dimension of indigenous society. This was an area which experienced a strange convergence of racial hierarchy, native subjectivity and class distinction all at once, where the gendered relation between the mistress and her servants had a more complicated angularity. Power over the ‘racially inferior’ Indians became the order of things. Particularly after 1858 with strengthening of racial overtones, the British grew more accustomed and attached to that power. The bungalow, after all was a microcosm of the British empire and its governance reflected the ideal way, i.e., the British way of administration. The colonisers had to ensure that these servants were properly trained along English lines so that just as imperial rule had, according to the colonialists, brought order and unity to the tumultuous South Asian subcontinent, so too, British

¹ The term “Anglo-Indian” has been used to refer to the members of the civil service posted in the subcontinent who constituted the official English community. They should not be confused with the present-day Anglo-Indian descendants of the British and Indian parentage, residing in India or abroad.

housekeeping principles would introduce efficiency and discipline among domestic servants. However, it should be pointed out that not all classes of British imperialists could afford to maintain such elaborate lifestyle and hence this essay shall focus only on the ruling elites of the Indian civil servants, who could maintain separate bungalow for themselves. In this context this paper shall highlight the precarious bond between master and servant relationship, where the discourses of race, gender and class interacted with each other in structuring imperial societal relations and how the English ruling class asserted their control over the servitudes as well as over the domestic establishment. The colonial home and the native servants emerged as the central symbols of imperial ruling practices where concepts of service, class and gender were redefined in keeping with the notions of imperial race relations.

A 'Herd' of Servants.

A typically Anglo-Indian family employed at a time an array of servants. The tally of servants was also dependent on the size of the bungalow and extent of the household. As pointed out by Edward Braddon (1882),

In a larger household, the domestic machinery is still more complicated. To put a dinner on the table it is necessary to have (1) a *Khansamah*, or butler, to superintend generally; (2) a cook, with, perhaps, (3) a mate or assistant; (4) a *kitmutgar*, to assist the *khansamah* in pretending to wait at table; and (5) a *mussalchee*, to wash the plates and dishes, and clean the knives and forks. Children require something like one female attendant (aiyah) per head, to insure approximate cleanliness and reasonable immunity from broken limbs. If there is a garden, a *mahlee*(gardener) must be entertained for every hundred square yards. Every additional horse involves the necessity of keeping two additional men to look after it. Every *punkah* that is kept continually working calls in the services of its own special menial triumvirate. Two or three bearers are required to perform, as far as possible, the duties of one housemaid, and one is employed to attend upon the children. Two or three tailors(*durzees*) are fully engaged in repairing the havoc done to the linen by the washerman, and in making such new garments as, for economical considerations, it is inexpedient to order from a milliner or haberdasher. Then there will probably be from one to half a dozen *chuprassies*, whose duties consist of sleeping in the verandah, carrying *chits*

(notes) about, and holding the powder and shot when the master goes out shooting. And there are, of course, the indispensable sweeper, water-carrier, and washerman, possibly in duplicate.²

The innumerable service providers were an integral part of British colonial culture. As pointed out by Fae Dussart, domestic service in colonial India employed more than two million people at the time of 1881 Census of British India.³ The number of servants was exemplary of the status and position of the officials of the company; higher position demanded a greater show of luxury and abundance. However, the onus was invariably put on the indigenous religious and caste restrictions along with the extremities of the tropical climate as the *prima facie* cause for employing the host of servants. Managing the abundance of domestics with their peculiarities was regarded as the most important challenge to the novice memsahib⁴ and there was no dearth of advice regarding it, in the contemporary colonial literature. However, the household manuals almost invariably portrayed the native servants in negative light. *The Wife's Help to Indian Cookery* (1888) for example warned the readers about the misgivings on Indian servants through a poem.⁵

Indian Domestic Troubles

‘WHO, when I’ve found a friend to dine,
Declares we drank both flasks of win,
Though half, I know, was left in mine?
My Khidmatgar.

Who evermore to fool me tries,
And tells my wife a pack of lies,

² Braddon, Edward. *Life in India*, Longmans, Green and Co, London, 1882, pp. 116-117.

³ Dussart, Fae. ‘Strictly Legal Means: Assault, Abuse and the Limits of Acceptable Behavior in Servant-Employer Relationship in Metropole and Colony 1850-1890’, in Victoria K. Haskins & Claire Lowrie, eds, *Colonization and Domestic Service: Historical Perspectives*, Routledge, New York, 2015, p. 157.

⁴ The terms Sahib and Memsahib have been used extensively to denote white man and married white woman respectively. The meaning of the word “Memsahib” as found in Oxford dictionary is a married white or upper-class woman, often used as a respectful form of address by non-whites. For details, see URL:<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/memsahib>, accessed June 5, 2016. While a “Sahib” is used when addressing or speaking to a European of some social or official status by the native inhabitants of colonial India, URL:www.meriam-webster.com/dictionary/sahib, accessed on May 7, 2017.

⁵ Dawe, W.H. (ed), *The Wife's help to Indian Cookery*, Elliot Stock, London, 1888, pp. x-xi.

And charges *twice* for all he buys?
My Khansamah.

Who smokes my food and cribs my tea,
Or sends the *second* brew to me,
And cooks in *fat* instead of Ghee?
My Bawarchi.

Who takes good care no stranger tries
To cheat me of a single pice,
Yet steals himself before my eyes?
My Behra.

Who sits and claims each joint of bone
That leaves my table as his own,
And fat and lazy now has grown?
My Mehtar.

Who beats my shirts to ribbons fine,
And changes (why, I can't divine,)
O Jones's trashy things for mine?
My Dhobi.

Who with my horses' Gram makes free,
Deducts one seer from every three,
And sells the balance back to me?
My Sais.

Who wakes me from my slumbers deep,
As bawling loud, the house he'll creep,
To tell all thieves that Sahib's asleep?

My Chokidar.

Who bathes me every day, full well,
In soap obnoxious to the smell,
And Marks me so, my chin can tell?
My Hajjam.’

Who try me fifty times a day,
Till wrath and passion get their way,
And what I’d do- ‘tis hard to say?
My servants.

Source, W.H. Dawe(ed), *The Wife’s help to Indian Cookery*, Elliot Stock, London, 1888, pp. x-xi.

The negative representation of the servants was a crucial part in the creation of ‘difference’ between ruler and the ruled. The indigenous servants were ideally and typically constructed as the Orientalist ‘other’ in sharp contrast to the white ‘superior’ master race. Almost all the journals, travelogues and domestic manuals alerted their readers about the nature of the local helps. Diverse and various examples were furnished by the manuals. R. Riddell, in his *Indian Domestic Economy and Receipt Book* (1860), cautioned his readers about ‘the misdeeds’ of Indian servants:

The misdeeds of Indian servants appear to be a general and unfailling source of complaint amongst all ... the complaint of them is universal—laziness, falsehood, with a host of other vices, seem to be inherent in them.⁶

Nearly all the household manuals habitually projected the domestic servants as indolent, avaricious, deceitful and stealing something now and then. Edmund C. P. Hull (1871) corroborated, ‘[Servant] is not strictly honest or truth-loving...’⁷ There was no dearth of examples about the servants and their lack of ignorance and utter disregard for hygiene or ‘proper’ conduct of doing work. To the sahib and memsahib all native people seemed alike and this categorisation was based on observing their household servants and this impression was etched on to the psyche

⁶ Riddell, R. *Indian Domestic Economy and Receipt Book*, fifth edition, Society for promoting Christian Knowledge, Madras, 1860, p. 1.

⁷ Hull, E.C.P. *The European in India or Anglo-India’s Vade Mecum*, Henry S. King & Co, London, 1871, p. 99.

of other members of the ruling class and other prospective memsahibs. Servants became the measure of India's image that was being reflected in contemporary writings about India and was also being percolated to the Metropole. So, the European, who never ever tasted life in the colony beforehand, was already being acquainted with the subject population in the pages of these books. Their minds were already constituted about the ruinous and archaic India and her 'lazy', 'greedy', 'dishonest' people. The authoritative overtone, as a reflection of the colonial governance, both at public and private sphere, had grown further after the experience of events of 1857. Racial difference between the ruler and master was permanently established.

As to cheating, a certain amount always goes on, and you must just give in to it if you want a quiet life. . . there seems no use in setting out to make the native world come up to our standard of propriety.⁸

Indeed, any new comers to the colonies quickly adapted to the ways of the colonials and became educated about how to treat their servants, as Mrs. Carol Hyde, wife of a civil servant found out. Writing in the 1930s, Mrs. Hyde freshly arrived from England was at first astonished to find the way of Indian servants' doing things, without taking a break. She mentioned a hard-working bearer who was taking care of all their belongings and luggage while they were on tour through Raipur. She recollected how the bearer sat himself with the luggage throughout the journey without excusing himself even for minimum necessities.

...how he stuck out the whole journey I don't know -we never gave him any food or drink and God knows where he slept at night after getting out our bedding and hanging up our mosquito nets.⁹

Interestingly Mrs. Hyde soon became acquainted with the ruler's way of behaving with the native servants and eventually got 'cured' of treating the servitude as 'human beings'.

I kept wanting to treat him like a human being but I'm cured now. Edgar [her husband] says they only have two meals a day - rice early in the morning and again at night, and they just lie down and go to sleep anywhere, in the garden, on the verandah or even by the roadside if its convenient.¹⁰

⁸ Murray, Mitchell, Mrs. *In India: Sketches of Indian Life and Travel from Letters and Journals*, T. Nelson and sons, London, 1876, pp. 72-73.

⁹ Hyde papers, 1932-1933 Centre of South Asian Studies, Cambridge University, UK, p. 9.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Yet the native servants formed the crux of the English households in the colonies around whom the lives of the colonial masters evolved. Everyday existence was at jeopardy without the contribution of native servants in Anglo-Indian homes. An Anglo-Indian household was inconceivable without the Indian domestic class. The Europeans depended completely on the services rendered by the native attendants. The pomp, luxury and comfort of the English ruling class were based on the service provided by the indigenous servants. The servants were the fulcrum of British domestic life in the colonies. The domestic life of the European ruling class was based on exploiting the labour and service of the servant class. English homes in the colony also became a part of colonialism and its forms of manipulation and oppression.

Caste Card in Play

The authors of the manuals were unanimous regarding the abundance of servants required and employed in the Anglo-Indian households. Fanny Parks (1850) was clear on the necessity of the number of servants essential to run the households in the colony.

It is impossible to do with a few servants, you must have many; their customs and prejudices are inviolable; a servant will do such and such things, and nothing more. They are great plagues; much more troublesome than English servants.¹¹

Caste system was seen as the chief reason which compelled the English households to employ such multiplicity of Indian servants. As argued by ECP Hull (1871), 'Caste has, no doubt, a good deal to do with it, and as the prejudices which it authorizes in this case are on the side of an excessive subdivision of labour, without any simultaneous reduction of emolument, they are of course all the more tenaciously held to.'¹² The prevalent caste system and its corollary appendages of traditions and customs was often interpreted in terms of refusal of a servant to perform other's duties. As pointed out by Hull,

It might have been supposed, that when once a caste native was permitted to undertake domestic service under Europeans, it would matter little whether he dusted the table, or swept the floor; put the family dinner on the table, or lit the evening lamp; handed round a

¹¹ Parks, Fanny, *Wanderings of a Pilgrim in the Search of the Picturesque*, vol I, Pelham Richardson, London, 1850, p. 26.

¹² Hull, *The European in India*, 1871, p. 129.

full dish, or washed an empty plate ...for a while a servant will look upon the one as his proper duty, he will consider himself dishonoured in performing the other.¹³

He further clarified as to how this stipulated job distribution had created a mindset for the servants and they often refused to go beyond their fixed course of duties. As he stated with a little sarcasm, 'Ask your butler to wash a plate or dust the table, and in nine cases out of ten, he will politely but firmly reply . . . That not my custom'.¹⁴ Edward Braddon (1882), pointed out that the absence of caste system in England rendered fewer servants to be hired. Whereas in Indian colony the caste restrictions forced a European employer to hire more servants.

The household that in England would be conducted with the aid of one maid of all work an occasional char-woman (check quote), is at a dead-lock in India with less than a dozen or twenty servants. . . Mrs. Dhalbat (the wife of a highly paid civilian) ... finds it absolutely necessary to keep fifty. And the reason of this is that the [Caste] or custom forbids that the Indian servant should make himself generally useful and live in the esteem of his fellow men, and so he is generally useless.¹⁵

An incident illustrating this was recorded by Barbara Wingfield- Stratford (1922)

Indeed, the lower the caste, the more scrupulous its members will be in the carrying out of their own particular rules. . . One day, however, when requested to attach a chain to the dog's collar [syce] refused, respectfully but firmly. He could touch the dog, but not the chain of the dog, he explained, for the chain symbolized 'dog-service', which is always left to sweepers. Not, he added naively, that he would object to oblige us were he sure none of his caste-brothers were near, but should one of them catch sight of him it would mean a fine of at least a rupee.¹⁶

Contemporary colonial literature convinced its readers that caste obligations were widespread among the native servants. Adherence to respective class and caste strictures definitely created divisions and tensions among the domestics. It often led to difference of behaviour and attitude within the domestic class. This might have caused problems inside the household, particularly when relatively important member of the service staff hailed from a comparatively 'low' status.

¹³ Ibid, p. 134

¹⁴ Hull, *The European in India*, 1871, pp. 134-135.

¹⁵ Braddon, Edward. *Life in India*, Longmans, Green and Co, London, 1882, p. 113.

¹⁶ Wingfield- Stratford, Barbara. *India and the English*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1922, p. 181.

The *ayah* for example, was rather prominent among the household staff, because of her proximity to the memsahib; she however often hailed from ‘low-caste’ of sweepers. Chota Mem cautioned (1909), ‘see that your Ayah is treated with respect by the other servants, even if she be the sweeper caste, and make them understand that you hold her to be equal to the others.’¹⁷

Lady Anne Wilson recorded in her *Letters from India* (1911), how caste system made it almost impossible for her to understand the exact nature of the servant’s duties.

We have thirteen servants, including groom, waterman, sweeper, milkman, and house-servants; but . . . the exact amount of work that should be performed by each without infringing on their caste distinctions. . . [means that] if one wants a thing one must do it one’s self, or . . . superintend its being done; that one must . . . see to the milk, the feeding of cows, sheep and poultry, the making of butter . . . to the careful trimming of the lamps, to the dusting of books, pictures, furniture, to the tinning of pots and pans. . . . So I have at present visions of attaining professional skill as head-housemaid, dairymaid and shepherd!¹⁸

Indira Ghose, however argued that the existence of countless number of servants was a ‘classic strategy of native resistance against exploitation.’¹⁹ Caste and class prejudice certainly was an escape route adopted by the native servants against exploitation and overwork. A memoir (1919) written by the wife of a Finnish minister’s wife recorded the excitement of the servants regarding the purchase of domestic appliances. ‘Then the Chef announced, with glittering eyes: An electric stove would change everything; if I could get one kitchen would soon be clean.’²⁰

Modern appliances would have definitely reduced the work load of the servants and the job would be finished with much less arduous effort. Lessening of work load was certainly a major incentive for the domestic class and they were even ready to forgo their caste obligations and perform other types of chores as well. The prospect of installing labour saving devices was greeted with positive response from the servants. ‘If I could get a refrigerator, I [footman] could always serve iced drinks to the guests and to the Master and Madame.’²¹ The advantage of modern domestic appliances,

¹⁷ Chota Mem, *English Bride in India: Being Hints on Indian Housekeeping*, second edition, Higginbotham & Co., London, 1909, p. 64.

¹⁸ Wilson, Lady Anne. *Letters from India*, W. Blackwood and sons, Edinburgh, 1911, pp. 9-10.

¹⁹ Ghose, Indira. (ed), *Memsahib’s Abroad*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1998, p. 184.

²⁰ Valvanne, Birgitte. (translated) Silvi Bateson, *In love with India*, George Allen & Unwin Ltd, London, 1919, p. 21.

²¹ *Ibid*, pp. 21-22.

however, was not affordable to each and every other colonial household and they had to depend on their servants and on their manual service. This was more so the case before the advent of electricity in the 1880s. There was undoubtedly a lot of work to be performed in the colonial domesticity, which could not be managed by two or three servants. The domestics always had to be on their toes and constantly heed to the inconsiderate demands of their employers. This would not have been possible without vast retinues of servants.

...cooks accommodate themselves to having meals ready at all kinds of irregular hours, and the manner in which all servants submit to the querulousness produced by the climate in Europeans.²²

They had to be always present at their master's disposal. The punkah puller had to work not only throughout the day but have to be stark awake during the night also. Their workload increased even more during the summers. If he had to discharge other duties as well, he would have been exhausted beyond repair. Thus, caste-based value system was often the only ploy the domestic class had in their disposal to avoid excessive chores and further exploitation. Caste certainly was one of the primary reasons which compelled the English residents to employ number of servants for stipulated work assignments. It should be, however, pointed out that to ensure employment for their next of kin, the servants often pushed for a relative to come as 'learning boy' to obtain some knowledge. This not only guaranteed the continuation of service in the same family as well as eradicated the chance of being displaced from the servant's quarters. The lineage of service rendered, ensured a good recommendation, if the employer shifted or was transferred to a new place. It could be another reason that the Indian servants on the pretext of customs and traditions secured the employment for their relatives and acquaintances, as they were never without troops of relative dependent on them, some of whom may have come from similar caste background.

The custom of caste system was involuntarily accepted by the English masters and they were not free from the prejudices of the system. Steel and Gardiner (1909) highlighted the memsahib's reluctance to employ a 'low-caste woman' as an *ayah*.²³

It is interesting as well as intriguing to find how western women also blindly accepted the caste structure in the job distribution of their so called 'European' model households. The colonizers

²² A Lady Resident, *The Englishwoman in India*, Smith Elder & Co, London, 1864, p. 61.

²³ Steel, F.A. & Gardiner, Grace. *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook*, seventh edition, William Heinemann, London, 1909, p. 84.

supported the continuation of the rigidity of the caste affiliations as long as they benefitted from it. The innumerable number of servants helped the ruling class to maintain a congenial and leisurely life unthinkable in the Metropole. In fact, not all of the English colonial settlers were wealthy and belonged to the privileged class. Several came from a less affluent socio-cultural and economic background, many of whom had found employment as domestic staff back home. For them the colonies provided an excellent opportunity to live in prosperous and comfortable conditions not affordable in the metropole. The numerous indigenous domestics were an indulgence, difficult to overcome. Moreover, being the rulers, the colonizers had a 'legitimate' claim on the service of the subject population. The servant class belonging to various classes, caste and creed collectively served the European rulers. The colonizers never objected to the necessity of the number of servants to run the English households in India. Unless they were extremely wealthy, few in England could afford to employ the same number of servants that the typical Anglo-Indian family employed. Mrs. Robert King (1884) explained, 'For this cost you could hardly keep five servants at home, and, however good those five might be, their goodness would not extend to being in thirty-two places at once. So that on the whole you get far more comfort from your Indian than from your English servants.'²⁴

They were often perplexed by the number of servants but once accustomed to their service, the Europeans never tried to reduce their numbers. In fact, the colonizers often internalised the caste system and limitations attached to it. The persistence of domestic comfort and privilege was perhaps the primary concern for the Sahibs and Memsahibs and they never disapproved the discriminatory caste system. Caste based restrictions was not only internalised, colonial household helped to reinforce them further. An apparent example of the internalization of the prevalent caste system by the Memsahibs could be found in the Anonymous, *Indian Outfits and Establishment* published in 1882. The author recalled how during the Kuka movement (1872) in the absence of her husband her bearer used to sleep outside her door to protect her and she was convinced that 'had occasion arisen, [he would] have defended my life with his own.'²⁵ The author argued that this was beyond the purview of the duties of the bearer and he did it because of his values which he inherited from his high caste birth. 'He was one of the old high caste Hindoos, and I am certain

²⁴ King, Mrs. Robert Moss. *The Diary of a Civilian's Wife in India, 1877-1882*, Vol. I, Richard Bentley & Son, London, 1884, p. 130.

²⁵ An Anglo-Indian, *Indian Outfits and Establishment*, L. Upcott Gill, London, 1882, p. 48.

would never prove false to his salt.'²⁶ The thought that any other servant would have done the same out of his own concern and loyalty to the employer's family, did not occur to the author. The preconceived notion of supposedly moral principles of 'high' caste affiliations and 'low' birth degeneracy had percolated even among the alien rulers. It is also significant that the position of the bearer was often occupied by a high caste born Hindu, particularly so when he acted as the head or *Sirdar* bearer. It was believed due to the high caste status of the bearer, other servants under his supervision would be respectful and be compliant with his orders. As a result, order and discipline would be maintained in the household. That the indigenous servants regarded the safety of their employers as their own responsibility and it had nothing to do with caste or religious affiliation became clear in a letter written by Mrs. Hyde to her family back in England. She narrated that one day she was all by herself in the bungalow as her husband was away and she was rather uncomfortable being alone in the bungalow only with the servants. She however soon fell at ease with the servants around, who gave them a sense of being safe.

...there was I in a lonely bungalow with about half a dozen Indian servants to look after me - and all rather murderous looking! But they were so kind, Maduray [the bearer] came and said goodnight, . . .and quietly placed an electric torch on the table beside me and then went round bolting all the doors and windows - although usually they are all left open. I was very touched, as I never told them to. And when I went to bed I found all the bedroom doors had been bolted too, ...So I was quite safe -incidentally that was the first night Edgar and I had spent apart since marriage!²⁷

Native Christian Servants: An Anathema of Colonial Household.

The advisers of the household compendiums also encouraged certain stereotypes regarding the native Christians or converted Christians as a servant class. 'If any tell you they are Christians, then be careful they are not the sweeper class.'²⁸ This again is another example of the 'internalisation of the caste system', whereby the Anglo-Indians were convinced that a 'lower'

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Hyde papers, 1932-1933, Centre of South Asian Studies, University of Cambridge, UK, p. 20.

²⁸ Chota Mem, *English Bride in India*, 1909, p. 59.

caste of sweeper occupation would naturally be 'corrupt'. The author (1909) was certain that even though a person might have accepted Christianity, the characteristic traits of his 'low' caste affiliations remained with him. The biased views about native servants were often stemmed from the British conceptions about 'the lower order' from where the British supposed their servants hailed from. In their opinion indigenous 'lower class' was rather dreadful and had repulsive habits. The household compendiums were full of cautionary tales about the so-called 'misdeeds' of converted Christian servants.

The missionary's wife here recommends me to be very careful, as she has little faith in native Christians: she has tried them in every way, and has had nearly twenty years' experience. It is a sad conclusion to arrive at, but all to whom I have ever spoken on the subject have been of opinion that a native Christian rarely, are as trustworthy or honest as a Hindu or Mahomedan.²⁹

The author of *The Englishwoman in India* (1864), warned not to employ anyone to be of "master's caste".³⁰ The author declared,

secure for your servants a set of unmitigated heathens. Converts are usually arrant humbugs; Catholics little better; indeed, the domestics who have robbed and cheated us during our sojourn in India, have with one exception been Christians.³¹

The 'religious equality' achieved by the converted Christians made it difficult for the Europeans' to employ them. There were fears and insecurities that servants sharing the same religion with their white masters would undermine the master's authority. Christian servants were said to give themselves superior airs over the other servants. The religious exclusivity was broken and the common religion threatened to challenge the undisputed 'superiority' of the master class. The Europeans were also suspicious of the motives of the converted Christians. They were often convinced that the conversion to Christianity was often not out of love for the religion, rather the primary intention was to gain undue advantages from their employers with identical religious standing. Mrs. Handley opined,

²⁹ King, *The Diary of a Civilian's wife*, Vol. II, 1884, p. 145.

³⁰ Lady Resident, *The Englishwoman in India*, 1864, p. 55.

³¹ Ibid.

Heathen' were far and away above the level of the ordinary native, or 'biscuit' Christian convert. The term 'biscuit', as thus used, explain itself, implying that a man has become a Christian only for what he can get by it.³²

Mrs. Handley (1911) then further explained how the converted Christian servant would boast about his religion when inquired, 'Same like master', in order to ingratiate himself, having already found out of what 'like' religion the proposed master is.³³ The master and servant relationship in the colony was redefined by race and religious considerations. The religious affinity of the native Christians with their employers emboldened them to show attitude and undermined the authority of the employers. Converted Christian domestics were not so popular with European employers. The same attitude could be seen regarding the employment of English-speaking servants. 'Give preference to those servants who do not speak much English - they will be found much better, as a rule, than those who do.'³⁴

They were regarded as untrustworthy. The European employers were apprehensive that the English-speaking servants might divulge any confidential information that they had overheard. The English-speaking servants,

they can generally make out what their masters say, and do not hesitate to repeat in the *bazaar* anything of a particularly confidential characters that they may have overheard their master or his friends give utterance to in the dining-room.³⁵

The servants were the only ones who had the direct access to the inner domain of the ruling class. The servants were the witnesses to the inner most secrets of the British lives. It was very difficult for the English families to avoid the scrutinizing gaze of the servants. In order to maintain one's position in the hierarchy of the Raj, Anglo-Indians had to maintain their propriety, at least in presence of the servants. The language was a barrier which acted as a buffer between the master and the servant, so much so that the British attempted to limit scandalous talk about themselves by hiring servants who understood little or no English. For this reason, the advice books also recommended to steer clear from English speaking servants.

Managing the Gendered Domain

³² Handley, Mrs. M. A. *Roughing it in Southern India*, Edward Arnold, London, 1911, pp. 80-81.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Anglo-Indian, *Indian Outfits*, 1882, p. 54.

³⁵ Braddon, *Life in India*, 1872, p. 118.

Master-domestics dynamics in the colonial homes witnessed an ensemble of racial conceit, native subordination and class differentiation. Gender however was a more complex matter. The servants were mostly male, female servants being fewer. It forced the mistress to be in direct contact with the native men. For the memsahib this was an unfamiliar terrain. The memsahibs who were brought up with the notions of assertive masculinity and feminine diffidence was rather conflicted when it came to deal with the male indigenous domestic class. That's why there was so much emphasis on the analogy between the empire and household in the prescriptive manuals, which tried to glorify domesticity as an extension of the authority of the British Raj. The memsahib had to establish a chain of commands over the colonised men in order to maintain her influence in the household. Her position as the member of the ruling class, no doubt gave her an advantage over the subjugated indigenous domestics. The household manuals also lend a hand by prescribing instructions to retain her authority over her servants and domesticity. Yet, there were occasions when gender bias intervened and threatened her jurisdiction. Gendered outlook on part of the native servants often undermined the memsahib's position. A very interesting incident in this regard is worth mentioning,

... the frequency with which they disregard the comfort and convenience of ladies, often their express orders unless most strictly enforced by the master. Their general opinion is that nothing can be too good for him, while anything does for *missis*. I know an instance in which a boy remonstrated with his mistress at breakfast upon her taking a particular egg, 'that our fowl egg that for master; other bazaar eggs, they good for *missis*.'³⁶

The servant had stronger commitment to the master because of his official status and his gender, hence home-grown egg for the master, while the ordinary egg from the market for the lady. Though a very trivial incidence, the mention of it by the memsahib implied the hidden underpinning of the status consciousness of these ladies while dealing with their subjects (servants). Therefore, household management was also not free from patriarchal norms. Such treatment however only strengthened the prevailing Anglo-Indian notion about Indian men's lack of respect for women generally.³⁷ John Beames (1896) elaborated in his memoir how his wife was embarrassed by her

³⁶ Lady Resident, *Englishwoman In India*, 1864, pp. 60 -61.

³⁷ Procida, Mary A., *Married to the Empire: Gender, Politics & Imperialism in India 1883-1947*, Manchester University Press, UK, 2002, p. 89.

khansaman, when he consciously served tea to Lady Canning, in an old worn out tea-pot while preserving the new one for the men.

. . . the Khansamah sent in [tea in] . . . battered old Britannia metal teapot, reserving my wife's handsome new silver one for the gentlemen, it being unnatural from a native point of view to provide for women in preference to men.³⁸

The English household was gendered territory, and undermining memsahibs' authority jeopardized the imperial prestige. The memsahib had to often invoke her husband's positional hierarchy in order to assert her dominance over the servants. Mrs. Handley (1911) cited one incident where a servant failed to answer to the repeated call of the memsahib, however the same servant responded with alacrity when summoned by the sahib. After enquiry the servant revealed that the fear of getting a thrashing from the sahib forced him to respond immediately. 'Why didn't you answer the mistress when she called three times? You answered me, the master, immediately.' The servant replied trembling, 'Missus plenty talkee only, Master beatee.'³⁹

This also demonstrated apart from the fact that the English household was a gendered domain, violence against servants was regularly resorted to. Gender played an important role in the Anglo-Indian household. It at times destabilised the authoritarian control in the English homes in the colony. The servants were quite aware that in English community it was the sahib's professional position which decided the social status and even the memsahib was not immune to it. The memsahib-servant relationship was intricate and stressful; on the one hand the memsahib had to represent her domain as the embodiment of order and prestige, while on the other, this could be achieved only through the efforts of the servants, who needed to be managed. The manuals advocated authoritarian influence over the servants to uphold the control. There were of course, other non-violent ways to get things done from the servants. Emphasis therefore was put on 'Learning Hindustani', whereby the servants, taking advantage of memsahib's ignorance could not undermine her dominance in household matters. Steel and Gardiner favoured communicating in indigenous language for more efficient and coherent way of giving order. 'The first duty of a mistress is, of course, to be to give intelligible orders to her servants; therefore it is necessary she

³⁸ Beames, John. *Memoirs of A Bengal Civilian*, first published 1896, reprint, Manohar, Delhi, New Delhi, 1984, pp. 114-115.

³⁹ Handley, *Roughing it Up in South India*, 1911, p. 7.

should learn to speak Hindustani.’⁴⁰ It should be pointed out that most of the language manuals harped on taking on an imperative and commanding tone when dealing with servants.⁴¹

Example of verbal communication between master-servant

English	Hindi
butler! tell this man that we want the <i>little breakfast</i> early every day, at seven o'clock, <i>breakfast</i> at eleven, <i>tiffin</i> at three, and <i>dinner</i> , in the evening, at eight o'clock,	<i>Khansaman! ise bata-do ki sawere roz sat baje (chhoti haziri), gyarah baje (bari haziri), tin baje [tifiyan), aur sham ko ath baje (khana)ham mangte hain.</i>
bring a <i>roasting fowl</i> and some chickens,	(kababi murghi) <i>aur kuchh chikan la'o</i>
nurse! bring baby; the master is going out, and wants to kiss it,	(aya!) <i>baba ko la'o sahib bahar jata hai, (kisi dena) mangta,</i>
groom! bring the horse quickly,	<i>Sais! ghora jaldi la'o.</i>
shoe the horse,	ghore ke (na'l laga'o).
sweeper! sweep the place,	(mihtar!) <i>jharu do.</i>
where is the fan-puller gone? tell him to pull the fan.	(<i>pankhe-wala</i>) <i>kahan gaya</i> <i>bolo pankha khinche.</i>

Source, Duncan Forbes, *The Hindustani Manual*, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Company Ltd, London,1903, pp. 90-93.

A glance at *Every Memsahib's Daily Account Book's* (1940-1941) description of useful verbs and sentences would confirm that the real aim of the authors of the prescriptive manuals, was to enlighten the prospective memsahib in the ways of commanding the servants:

USEFUL VERBS

	Infinitive	Imperative
To answer	Jawab dena	Jawab do.
bring	Lana	Lao

⁴⁰ Steel and Gardiner, *Complete Indian Housekeeper*, 1909, p. 2.

⁴¹ Forbes, Duncan. *The Hindustani Manual*, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner and Company Ltd, London,1903, pp. 90-93.

call	Bulana	Bulao
clean	Saf Karna	Saf Karo
come	Ana	Ao
cut	Katna	Kato
do	Karna	Karo
drink	Pina	Pio
finish	Pura karna	Pura karo
Get ready	Taiyar Karna	Taiyar karo
give	Dena	Do
go	Jana	Jao
Go back	Wapas Jana	Wapas Jao
Make (or do)	Banana	Banao
mix	Milana	Milao
obey	Hukm manna	Hukm mano
see	Dekhna	Dekho
send	Bhejna	Bhejo
sew	Sina	Sio
show	Dikhana	Dikhao
speak	Bolna	Bolo
wait	Thairna	Thairo
wash	Dhona	Dho
want	Mangna (Chahna)	Mango (Chaho)
work	Kam Karna	Kam Karo
write	Likhna	Likho.

Source, MSS EUR F 657/A:1940-1941, Vera Brooke Cheverton, *Every Memsahib's Daily Account Book*, p 7, British Library, London.

The list of useful sentences also had a dominating tone, underlining the actual objective of the English ruling class was to order their servants. So, it seemed that the memsahibs were encouraged to learn the native tongue only to maintain their hierarchical disposition in the household. The following table of 'useful sentences' hence focused on the directive speech mode only.

Useful Sentences for communication with the Servants

Bring me the.....hamare pas le-ao.
Take it away....	Le jao.
Be quiet	Chup raho.
Wait	Thairo.
Where is the kahan hai.
Call the.....ko bulao.
Clean it Properly	Barabar (thik thik) saf karo.
Be careful.....	Khabardar.
Do you understand.....	Samajhte ho.
Don't forget	Mat bhulo.
Listen....	Suno.
Shut the door.....	Darwaza band karo.
Open the window.....	Khirki kholo.
Mind your own business.....	Apna kam karo.
Have things done properly.....	Achchha bandobast karo.
Don't trouble me...	Diqq mat karo.
Do what I tell you....	Jo ham kahte hain wuh karo.
Tell him to come in.....	Usko bolo andar ae
Nurse see what the baby is doing	Ayah dekho baba sahib kya karte hain.
Don't go yet...	Abhi mat jao.
Hold this.....	Isko pakro.
Put it there.....	Yahan rakkho.
Don't move	Mat hilo.

Source, MSS EUR F 657/A:1940-1941, Vera Brooke Cheverton, *Every Memsahib's Daily Account Book*, p 8, British Library, London.

So, it seems command over language was necessary as long as the ordering could be performed without a glitch. Cecilia Leong-Salobir further extended this issue and argued that even where the servants could communicate in English the English resorted to 'mongrel dialects' which was used

between the whites and the blacks in Africa.⁴² In this tongue the British adopted a childlike tone, thereby belittling the servants. They assumed that the indigenous servants were more like children and in order to get through them a ‘toned down’ version of language should be spoken. This tongue however was imbued with a commandeering tone meant only to snap instructions.

Conclusion

Master-servant dynamics is generally based on hierarchical positioning and social stature across human categories. One should not be oblivious of the fact that this hierarchy and power equation was omnipresent in every society from very ancient days, the Eastern colony was not an exception. Yet, the same hierarchical relationship between master-servant received a much further complicated dimension in case of colonial households as it was based on the self-righteous claim of superior racial conceit. The rationale applied by the colonial rulers was linked with their broader ideological framework of racial arrogance and contempt. It was therefore understandable that colonial attitude, behaviour and justification would be based on their notion of racial hierarchy and imperiousness in their dealings with the native servants. The vast numbers of domestics were not only a symbol of being the ruling elite; they were an indispensable part of the English colonial home. In a manner of speaking, it was the servants who sustained the British empire and it was upon their service the British depended to continue their rule as colonial masters. No attempt was made to eradicate the vice of the caste system; rather it became a convenient excuse to employ a battalion of servants for their services. The actual hard work was put forth by the domestics. Yet, the utter dependence on the vast retinue of servants had been consciously covered up by the projection of superiority and knowledge about household by the British expatriates. The presence of the servants in such overwhelming numbers were a matter of apprehension and astonishment to many initially, however eventually the English ruling class got addicted to the service provided by the indigenous servants and consequently became accustomed to this comfortable style of living. Hence, the multiple number of servants should be seen as demonstrating the social standing of the sahibs and memsahibs. The authoritative overtone, as a reflection of the colonial governance, both at public and private sphere, had grown further after the experience of events of 1857.

⁴² Leong-Salobir, Cecilia. *Food culture in Colonial Asia: A Taste of Empire*, Routledge, Oxon, 2011, p. 82.

The imperial homes gave an opportunity for the memsahibs to transfer all domestic chores on to the Indian servants. As pointed out by Swati Chattopadhyay, ‘The objective was to inculcate the value of labor among the native population, in order for the English men and women to enjoy conspicuous leisure’.⁴³ The objective was to ‘secure three things - smooth working, quick ordering, and subsequent peace and leisure to the mistress’.⁴⁴ This in the views of the most the manual authors, helped to keep the servants in control and at the same time espoused the superiority of the colonial rulers. It is the proper conduct expected of the rulers. Consequently, the guide books advised the memsahibs only to preside over the daily chores and never to take up the job at their own hands. ‘Never do work which an ordinarily good servant ought to be able to do.’⁴⁵ The servant- master relation in the colony was based on uneven terms. The bungalow was a microcosm of the colony, with its varying degrees of tensions and anxieties. The domestic servitude in the Eastern colony was sought after but their personhood was ignored. The negative image as portrayed in the contemporary colonial literature was a conscious attempt to nullify the status of the servants as a fellow human being. It was therefore understandable that colonial attitude, behaviour and justification would be based on their notion of racial hierarchy and imperiousness in their dealings with the native servants.

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⁴³ Swati Chattopadhyay ‘Goods, Chattels and Sundry Items’ in *Journal of Material Culture*, Vol. 7(3): 243–271, p. 260.

⁴⁴ Steel and Gardiner, *Complete Indian Housekeeper*, 1909, p. 18.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

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