



When I think of turmeric, I don't see a spice. I see warmth, comfort, and home. The golden colour reminds me of my mom's hands, stained yellow from cooking, and the soft aroma that filled our kitchen long before dinner was ready. Turmeric has always been more than a spice. It's how love is shown in my family. It's stirred into lentils, mixed into milk when someone's sick, or dabbed on a cut as a quick remedy. Even now, when I open a jar of turmeric, that familiar scent connects me to my culture. It reminds me that identity isn't abstract but found in the small, everyday things that make us feel grounded and whole.

THE GOLDEN ROOT OF TIME:

Turmeric is a distinct golden-yellow spice derived from the rhizomes of *Curcuma longa* and is commonly used in Southeast Asian and Indian Cuisine. It's known for adding colours to curries, cheeses, butter, and mustard (Nataly 2019).



THREADS OF TRADITION:

Turmeric has been used for nearly 4,000 years, dating back to the Vedic culture in India where it held culinary and religious importance. Ancient Ayurvedic texts like *Susruta's Compendium* from 250 BC describe it as a remedy for inflammation, pain, and wounds. Over time, it spread to China, East Africa, and eventually worldwide (Prasad & Aggarwal 2011). Despite its journey, turmeric remains deeply rooted in South Asian identity, known as *haldi* in the North and *manjal* in the South (Jagganth 2020).

In my home, turmeric is the first thing added to the pan when cooking. Its scent fills the kitchen and reminds us of where we come from. I watched my mother use it for everything, from soothing sore throats to preparing for ceremonies. She said turmeric was sacred and symbolized purity and good fortune. It appears in nearly every important moment in life, from birth to weddings. I remember my cousin's *haldi* ceremony, when we applied turmeric paste to her skin and laughed as it stained our hands and clothes. These traditions show that ethnicity is not only where we come from but also the shared practices that keep our culture alive through small acts of care.

WHAT GLOWS WITHIN:

Turmeric is known as one of the first natural cosmetics, traditionally used to reduce facial hair, clear acne, and brighten the skin (Gopinath & Karthikeyan 2018). Every Sunday my mom mixed turmeric with milk to make a golden paste. She gently spread it over my face and arms, saying it would make my skin glow. I remember waiting for it to dry, the yellow tint staining my skin and the scent lingering long after I washed it off. Back then, I did not realize those small rituals carried deep meaning.

Over time, turmeric has been reshaped in ways that feel distant from its meaning. I see it sold in cafés as "turmeric lattes" and promoted by wellness influencers as a superfood (Paleker 2023). Part of me feels proud that something from my culture is recognized globally, but another part feels uneasy. It is strange to see something so personal turned into a trend that often forgets its roots. What was once part of our daily lives and identity is now rebranded and sold without acknowledgment of its origins.



SPICE, POWER, AN POSSESSION:

When I think about turmeric and the spice trade, I feel the weight of how colonialism shaped the way people like me experience our culture. Before Europeans arrived, Arab, Indian, and Southeast Asian traders controlled the routes that carried spices across the world. When Portuguese explorers found new sea routes to India in the late 1400s, they began to take control. By the 1600s, the Dutch East India Company used force to dominate spice production, displacing communities and destroying local economies. Spices like turmeric, once grown and used with care for thousands of years, were turned into commodities and stripped of their stories (Tripathi 2024).

I often think about how the same golden powder that colours my mom's food was part of a system built on exploitation. That history still lingers in how our cultures are celebrated for their "exotic" flavours but rarely respected for their origin. When I use turmeric now, I focus on reclaiming that narrative and honouring the hands that cultivated it long before colonial powers took control. In that small act, I feel like I am taking back something that was never meant to be taken.



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