



Ceramic Pot, Stoneware, Kolkata, c.a. 1850-1890

This vessel, more precisely ‘chutney’ pot as inscribed, is crafted from salt-glazed stoneware, a pottery technique known for its durable, non-porous body and distinctive glassy finish created by introducing salt into the kiln during firing. The pot features a unique cylindrical shape with a slightly tapering neck and broad shoulders, while its wide mouth allows for easy filling of chutney. The jar showcases a monochromatic design with tones of brown, depicting a village scene where men are gathered around a roaring fire, diligently preparing chutney or similar preparation in large quantities. On the opposite side, boxes labelled “INDIAN CHUTNEY”, while one man is seen assembling jars. Near the rim of the jar, the word “chutney” is inscribed in three different scripts: Arabic, Bengali, and Devanagari. This multilingual inscription reflects the rich tapestry of linguistic diversity prevalent in Indian communities and highlights the localised branding that often accompanies even industrially manufactured colonial products.

With the arrival of British, specially after 1857 AD, these containers gained popularity by becoming more elaborate and enhancing the aesthetics of British dining tables. However, there is no evidence that chutney jars were made in India; they were produced outside probably and exported for storage. Crosse and Blackwell, a food manufacturing company from the Victorian era, specialised in making these kinds of pots. In 1840, they dispatched their first shipment to present day Kolkata.

When the British first arrived in the Indian subcontinent as part of the East India Company, their primary interest was in spices and food. Over time, they evolved from traders to colonial rulers, which likely influenced the production of condiments and the design of food storage jars. By the nineteenth century, these containers gained popularity among British families, becoming more elaborate and enhancing their dining tables.

However, there is no evidence that chutney jars were made in India; they were produced outside and exported for storage. Crosse and Blackwell, a food manufacturing company from the Victorian era, specialised in canned and bottled products like jams, pickles, and chutneys.¹ When the East India Company sent its first troops to India, they included a representative from Crosse and Blackwell. In 1840, they dispatched their first shipment to Calcutta (now known as Kolkata). This marked the beginning of a profitable export trade that transformed them into a multinational brand. By 1845, Abdool Fygo's Chutney (named after the person for branding purposes) was added to their offerings, an early evidence of the reverence.²

In the Victoria and Albert Museum in London (an image has been attached, LEFT)³, there is pottery that is believed to be a storage jar for pickles, manufactured by a company called Samuel Moore and Co., which evokes a sense of familiarity and reverence. Additionally, another reference on the Redeemed Vintage website features a vintage Victorian chutney jar (an image has been attached, RIGHT)⁴ from around 1890, showcasing remnants of Indian scenes.



¹Divya A, "London's Victorian-Era Pottery Find Unearths Tale of How Indian Food Became Popular in Britain," Indian Express, January 17, 2017, <https://indianexpress.com/article/research/londons-victorian-era-pottery-find-unearths-tale-of-how-indian-food-became-popular-in-britain-4480423/>.

²Peter J. Atkins, "Vinegar and Sugar: The Early History of Factory-Made Jams, Pickles and Sauces in Britain," accessed July 26, 2025, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/236848458_Vinegar_and_sugar_The_early_history_of_factory-made_jams_pickles_and_sauces_in_Britain.

³Victoria and Albert Museum, London, <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O150989/mustard-jar-wear-pottery-samuel/>.

⁴Very Rare Victorian Advertising Chutney Pot c.1890, Redeemed Vintage, accessed July 26, 2025, <https://redeemedvintage.com/product/very-rare-victorian-advertising-chutney-pot-c-1890/>.

This chutney pot is crafted from salt-glazed stoneware, a pottery technique known for its durable, non-porous body and distinctive glassy finish created by introducing salt into the kiln during firing.

The pot features a unique cylindrical shape with a slightly tapering neck and broad shoulders, while its wide mouth allows for easy filling of chutney, making it both functional and aesthetically pleasing.

The jar showcases a monochromatic design with tones of brown, depicting a village scene where men are gathered around a roaring fire, diligently preparing chutney in large quantities. On the opposite side, boxes labelled “INDIAN CHUTNEY” hint at pride in local production, while one man is seen assembling jars. The figures exhibit indigenous features and attire, emphasising artisanal craftsmanship and cultural narrative.

Near the rim of the jar, the word “chutney” is inscribed in three different scripts: Arabic, Bengali, and Devanagari. This multilingual inscription reflects the rich tapestry of linguistic diversity prevalent in Indian communities and highlights the localised branding that often accompanies even industrially manufactured colonial products. This chutney pot not only serves as a functional item but also as a testament to the cultural heritage and craftsmanship that define its origins.