

# Food rituals in hinduism

Religion



Hindu Traditions: Food and Purification Ashley LeBlanc Introduction to Eastern Religions Dr. Patricia Campbell November 16, 2010 LeBlanc 2 Hinduism is a religion that originated in India and is still practiced by most of the Natives as well as the people who have migrated from India to other parts of the world. Statistically there are over seven hundred million Hindus, mainly in Bangladesh, India and Nepal.

Approximately eighty percent of the population in India is Hindu (Encyclopaedia Britannica n. d. ). The word Hindu comes from an ancient Sanskrit term meaning " dwellers by the Indus River," referring to the location of India's earliest known civilization, the Indus Valley. The religion suggests commitment to or respect for an ideal way of life known as Dharma. Hinduism absorbs foreign ideas and beliefs making it have a wide variety of beliefs and practices. This has given it a character of social and doctrinal system that extends to every aspect of life.

One of the most important aspects of the Hindu tradition is the food and purification process. Not only is the concept of purity and food seen in sacred texts, but also is a daily practice within Hindu practitioners. According to the Bhagavad Gita, " All beings come into existence from food. Food comes from rains. Rains originate from the performance of sacrifices. And sacrifice is born out of doing prescribed duties" (3: 13). Therefore, food is verily an aspect of Brahman, which according to Jeffery Brodd is " the eternal, unchanging, infinite, immanent, and transcendent reality which is the Divine Ground of all matter, energy, time, space, being, and everything beyond in this Universe" (Brodd 2003, 17).

Since the food is a gift from the gods, it should be treated with respect. Also in the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna states that there are three types of sacrifices, along with austerity and charity. Sattvic (cold) food is one that increases longevity, purity, strength, happiness, and taste; these foods are usually juicy or oily. These types of foods are allowed, and mostly recommended as offerings to the gods. Rajasic (or hot) includes foods that are bitter, sour, hot, spicy, and salty which is believed to lead to disease, unhappiness, and sorrow. When a LeBlanc person eats these foods without sacrifice, it is believed that they will develop the qualities they convey and act upon them (Michaels 2004, 183-184). When it comes to preparing food, the person preparing it is closely speculated.

Purity is the goal during preparation. Chants and purification rituals with incense and offerings are done before, and sometimes after every meal. In the Hindu tradition, purification is not only an expression of external status, but also make one pure internally and morally. For example, a butcher or a farmer's products would be considered impure for the fact that they are harming innocent living creatures for sustenance, whereas bakers and milkmen are reaping products without harm (Arthur M. Sackler Gallery 1996). The age, status, and sex of the person cooking and serving the food are also taken into account. Hindus also believe food that has been purified can be re-polluted by touching or even looking at it.

Because of this, women who are menstruating cannot prepare or serve food for the fear of pollution. At the same time, many sacrifices and offerings are performed based on reciprocity. Another method in Hindu tradition to keep food pure during consumption is to eat with the right hand, as the left hand

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is seen to be impure since it is used for cleaning after defecation. 3 Another aspect that is closely looked at is who may accept cooked food from whom. The usual custom goes that the young can accept food from the elder, the inferior rank from the superior, the wife from the husband, and so on. The only exception in Hindu tradition is in weddings. In this circumstance, the bride's family cooks for the usually higher-ranking groom and his family.

Another example noted in Michael's book is when " Brahman cooks, when hired by higher ranking Brahmans; or temple feedings, when the food is seen as leftovers of the gods and thus all believers stand at the same level and eat next to one another" (2004, 183). Also in terms of leftovers, it is seen as an act of respect if the wife consumes the leftovers of her LeBlanc 4 husband, or eats after him from his plate. This is deliberate pollution as the pure food has already been consumed and any leftovers have been touched by human hands, and thus impure. Food to Hindus is a lifelong religious and social concern; it stands at the core of religion and society. Some even say that "[food] shapes family life, caste-and-marriage rules, and religious and spiritual values" (Khare 2004, 415). There are many taboos, ritual exclusions, preferences and prescriptions concerning the conception of ' vegetarianism' and ' nonvegetariansim'. This taboo creates four separate areas of India that practice either vegetarianism or nonvegeratianism differently; The north constitutes Kashmir and Punjab to Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh; the ' western' includes Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Maharashtra, the ' eastern' region Bihar, Bengal, Assam, Orissa, and other northeastern states, and the ' southern' includes Kannada, Talminadu, Kerala, and Andhra Pradesh (Khare 2004, 415).

Customary ways in these areas are passed on from generation to generation, and are practiced religiously. Food taboos are a historically complicated subject for Hindus. For example, the beef taboo creates ecological and political conflicts. According to Khare, “ Brahmanical deification of cow played a crucial role long-term vis-a-vis Buddhism, producing a prologned religious, historical, and regional tussel, yielding, in the process, changing definitons of both nonviolence and vegetariansim” (2004, 416). Today, followers of Vishnu are most often vegetarians and practice right-handed rituals, whereas worshippers of the goddess justify meat eating, drinking, and left-handed rituals. Therefore, more modern interpretations of Hinduism in relation to dietary practices can still differ. In terms of prasada , or ‘ blessed food’, are primarily vegetarian when being offered to gods such as Vishnu, Rama, Krishna, and Ganesh.

One must also remember that not all goddess worshipers are meat-eaters, some still practice vegetarianism. (Khare 2004, 417). LeBlanc In terms of the actual ritual of purification, it differs from each practitioner. Hindus constantly practice the methods of obtaining control and exercising restraint methods of purification and of cultivation of positive moral qualities. Food in Hinduism, as previously mentioned, is one of the most celebrated rituals. For example, a child’s first feeding is celebrated as a samskara ( celebration at a stage of life). The ritual first begins with a clean 5 surrounding.

When food is served, water is sprinkled around it. This is meant to purify the foods and make it worthy for sacrifice. Then, food is offered to five pranas (breath- one of the five organs of vitality or sensation) (Widgery 1930, 235); The five pranas, along with their explanation are as follows: Prana is <https://assignbuster.com/food-rituals-in-hinduism/>

responsible for the beating of the heart and breathing. Prana enters the body through the breath and is sent to every cell through the circulatory system. Apana is responsible for the elimination of waste products from the body through the lungs and excretory systems. Udana produces sounds through the vocal apparatus, as in speaking, singing, laughing, and crying. Also it represents the conscious energy required to produce the vocal sounds corresponding to the intent of the being.

Hence Samyama on udana gives the higher centers total control over the body. Samana controls the digestion of food and cell metabolism (i. e. the repair and manufacture of new cells and growth). Samana also includes the heat regulating processes of the body. Auras are projections of this current. By meditational practices one can see auras of light around every being.

Yogis who do special practise on samana can produce a blazing aura at will. Vyana is responsible for the expansion and contraction processes of the body, e. g. the voluntary muscular system (Prana 2010). LeBlanc 6 In conclusion, we can see through Hindu rituals and practices that food and purity plays an important role in everyday life. The importance of purity when consuming sacrificed foods or foods offered to a chosen deity is great. Hinduism thrives despite numerous reforms and shortcuts through gradual modernization and urbanization of Indian life. Thus, Hinduism, which sustained India through centuries of foreign occupation and internal disruption, continues to serve a vital function by giving passionate meaning and supportive form to the lives of Hindus today.