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MODERNIZED HINDUISM: DOMESTIC RELIGIOUS LIFE AND WOMEN

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By
Monique M. Sadarangani

Thesis Committee:

Ramdas Lamb, Chairperson
Helen Baroni
Anne Shovic

Preface

Eating is an essential function of all living organisms and the top priority of human beings next to breathing. It is no wonder, then, that food is so greatly intertwined with the social functioning of humans. Food is often associated with the creation and maintenance of social relationships.¹ Eating and sharing food brings people together in such a way that allows for the sharing of stories and information, thus enhancing relationships and building social bonds.

Food preparation and consumption was the major aspect of Indian culture to which I was exposed in my upbringing. It played a pivotal role in the development of my cultural identity. In India, food is a large part of the religious culture and is known for being made with unique blends of spices. My longing to look further into Indian food and its relationship to Indian culture, and specifically Hinduism, as well as the role it plays in the daily religious lives of Hindu practitioners, is what drove me to begin my research.

The primary location of research for this paper was Bombay, where I had the opportunity to see different variations of Hinduism interacting collectively. Here I was able to live amongst the women whom I was surveying, thus being able to observe their daily domestic rituals and cooking routine. For four months I was kept in close proximity of all religious festivals, rituals, and cooking conducted both inside and outside of the home. Bombay also gave me the chance to see effects of urbanization and modernization on religious food-ways. Furthermore, prior to arriving in Bombay, my understanding of Hinduism was that many of the rituals are done either in temples or in the home. I chose

¹ Sidney W. Mintz and Christine M. Du Bois, "The Anthropology of Food and Eating," *The Annual review of Anthropology*, 31 (2002): 109.

to focus my study on those practices done in the home, as that would get me closest to the cooking and food, and allow me to reach the core of my study.

Through my experiences with the women I became aware that, not only are the majority of the religious practices done in the home, but the women of the home are the ones who perform them. In Bombay, the women I came across were versatile, having many gifts and attributes that separated them from the women I was accustomed to meeting in the United States. Strong and self-sufficient, many of them had full-time careers, took care of the entire family single-handedly, maintained the home, and most importantly, carried on the religious tradition. This picture of Indian women made me want to study them further, but I did not want to give up on my initial topic of food's importance in the Hindu religious tradition.

I soon found that I could easily do both topics simultaneously. Women are not only the ones who carry on the religious tradition in Bombay through teaching and guiding their children and family members. They also conduct the *pujas* and ceremonies in the home, preparing the setting and the food that goes with this ceremony. It is the women who know how to prepare food in specific ways for the Divinities, what foods to use for the *pujas*, and what needs to be made on festivals. They are the cooks and the feeders, not only for their families, but for the deities as well. Thus, I would be able to look at women in the domestic sphere, and how their importance in the home allows women to carry on the Hindu religious tradition in a city such as Bombay.

Introduction

The land of India itself reflects the variety within the country, not only in terms of the culture and religion, but in the food as well. Diversity is found by traveling throughout the various regions of India. The climates of the various regions of India help diversify the food: in the mountains of Kashmir Indians mainly eat meat as that is what is available in the harsh climate, while people in areas such as Kerala and Bengal, which are coastal regions on the Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal, eat a lot of fish. India's large land area enables it to encompass a variety of climates and varying seasonal cycles. Its landscapes maintain differences through separation and the abundance or lack of certain resources, and these may be reasons why India has numerous ethnicities and religions. It is almost as though there are many nations within one.¹

Differences in foods among the various regions are important to the study of domestic practices, as these ultimately influence religious practices related to food. Major differences in foods can be seen by separating the North from the South, as the Northern regions generally have wheat as a staple, while the South depends on rice. Then again, regions in desert lands like Gujarat and Rajasthan utilize more corn and millet.² Each region has its own distinct style of cooking and flavor, along with different ideas regarding food.

Like some other groups in India, Bengalis traditionally serve their food in separate courses. This order is based on Ayurvedic beliefs relating to digestion. This order in the eating of meals begins with bitter gourd served first, then rice, dal, chutney,

¹ Wendy Hutton, ed., *The Food of India: Authentic Recipes from the Spicy Subcontinent* (Boston: Periplus Editions, Ltd, 2000), 5.

² Ibid., 6.

and finally fish.³ Another unique aspect of the Bengali's food habits are that while the majority of them state they are vegetarian, to them this usually includes the consumption of fish and other seafood.⁴

In the Southern regions of India, rice is the staple and it is consumed in many different forms. Idlis and dosas are two different types of bread-like eatables made from a rice paste. Coconut is also commonly used in South Indian cooking. The region of Gujarat is known for its intricate and art-like snacks and is also known for its pure vegetarian cooking.

These major differences in cooking, staples, and ideas surrounding food reflect a great deal about the people who come from these regions. Therefore, gaining a sample of Indians from each of these areas of India was fundamental in order to discover symbolism and key aspects of food's relationship to the Hindu religious tradition and again, to the domestic sphere and women.

The interactions between people and food are not just related to the basic human needs of satisfying hunger and providing nutrition. People use food for many different areas of their lives. Eating in and of itself is a religious act, as it nourishes and sustains the body, allowing it to function for the purpose of living a life of goodness devoted to the Divine. Throughout history, religious traditions utilized various means, such as prayer and ritual, to get a desired outcome. This is evident in agricultural societies, where some type of religion was necessary to give hope to the people during dry seasons or floods and to ensure for rainfall and an abundance of crops. The perpetuation of the

³ Ibid., 7

⁴ Ibid., 8.

growth cycle of plants and eatables is also related to the growth of the human being, be it physical growth and well-being or spiritual growth.

Religion is related to food on two levels: primarily, religion was used to regulate cycles of agricultural and human growth through prayer and offerings; secondly, religion gives one a vehicle in which maturation of the soul can take place—in other words, spiritual growth. Feeding the body and the soul become extremely important acts, and this becomes obvious in the Hindu religious tradition, where religion and food form a symbiosis.

In India, women maintain the home and, more importantly, the kitchen. They are the caregivers of the children, and they establish consistency and well-being for their entire family. In the Hindu home, however, there are the deities to take care of as well. Women have the responsibility of ensuring that the needs of these deities are met. They feed them, bathe them, and clothe them regularly in order to make them happy. The importance of these types of religious practices are especially important in Bombay—a diverse and urbanized setting. Families do not have the time to visit temples or maintain their religious practices as is done in villages or less fast-paced areas. So, the majority of a family's religion is practiced in the home. The domestic practices become the acts that keep the family linked to its religion. While this may be different outside of the home, as in a temple setting, within the home women maintain the religious order. They do this in three forms: *pujas* and prayer, preparing and offering *prasada*, and fasting.

In Chapter, one I will discuss the importance of the home for Hindus in Bombay and why this is so. Among my sample of Bombay Indian women, the majority believed the home is the domain of the woman. This means it is the woman's responsibility to

keep the house in order. The home as the woman's realm also means that it is her responsibility to make sure the people living in this area with her are happy. Ensuring the happiness of her family means keeping them healthy as well, which requires her to feed them not only tasty, but nutritious foods. Thus, food is introduced in this chapter, and, cooking is shown to be, in a big way, a woman's duty.

Chapter two goes more in depth into rituals performed in the home by women. A background of how rituals used to be conducted, especially those by Brahmin priests, as well as how the shift took place to women being those who conducted the rituals and them taking place within the confines of the home is explained. Also, food usage in ritual is extremely important, and I will explain the meanings behind certain food items that are utilized regularly during ritual performance. Overall, the role of the woman in the conduction of these rituals, both for holidays and everyday, is critical in understanding the importance of the woman in modern Hindu society. Therefore, issues of women and the power that they hold in society are brought to the surface here.

The practice of the fast has been one done by ascetics from a very early period in Indian cultural and religious history. While early on, the fast took on an ascetic appeal, in more modern times, all kinds of people have taken on some form of fast in order to express their devotion to the Hindu deities and people alike. In Chapter three, I will briefly discuss the history of the fast, talking about how ascetics and monks have utilized fasting, as well as how the concept of fasting has developed throughout the years. This chapter will also look at the different types of fasts that were conducted by the women in Bombay, as well as how fasting is used by them today. Furthermore, a look at how urbanization and modern influences may have had an effect on the fasting habits of the

younger generations, as well as how this is affecting the overall religious attitude in Bombay is looked at.

The health of a society is extremely important, and nutritional information and advice, as well as medicines available are crucial to their survival. In Chapter four, I look at the nutrition and health of the Hindus in Bombay and look at how much of their diet is influenced by religion. A look at the types of foods eaten by the majority of people on religious holidays, along with what foods are considered pure and impure takes place in this chapter. Furthermore, modernization in Bombay is taken into consideration as having both positive and negative effects on the eating habits of its population. This chapter also deals with medicine as a continuation of health and nutrition, and, so, the ancient Indian medical system, known as Ayurveda, is discussed. The ways which Ayurveda were used in the past, as well as to what extent it is utilized today are communicated. Furthermore, women as having the knowledge of cultural history in the areas of treatments and Ayurveda are put into perspective.

Chapter five is a brief look into the Oahu Diaspora community. This chapter gives an understanding of the overall differences that occur in Diaspora. A general comparison of ritual domestic practices and other religious exercises between the people surveyed in Bombay and those surveyed in Hawaii is set forth with the emphasis on woman's role. Additionally, analysis and commentary on why differences occur between the two modern communities is done in this chapter.

Each chapter comes together as they look at how women play a role in each of the different aspects discussed. With this said, the aim is to show how the responsibilities of Hindu women have grown drastically with the coming of modernization. This increase in

the amount of “work,” so to speak, is not seen by all as a negative aspect. As women take on more, especially in the area of Religious practice and knowledge, they also gain more respect and have a greater presence in society, as well as the home. Therefore, my aim is to show through each aspect discussed that because of the role that women have played in the past, as caregiver, cook, and maintainer of the home, along with the shift to a faced-paced lifestyle and lack of time, thus gearing religion to have to be maintained within the home, has led to women having a greater presence in Hindu culture and society.

Methodology

I composed a survey consisting of fifteen questions relating to religion and food (Appendix A). Attached to this survey, I also had additional questions relating to nutrition. I took a sample of 50 women in Bombay. The only criterion for selecting the women to be surveyed was that they had to be married or be the only woman in her family. Therefore, I ended up surveying women in their early twenties to early sixties. The mean of the womens’ ages surveyed was thirty-nine years.

Out of the 50 women surveyed, there were six women with whom I lived on a long-term basis and observed more critically. In this way, I was able to see their specific religious practices more in-depth. I was also allowed to view religious practices that related to the domestic practices, such as *puja*, but that took place outside of the home. These women were all in the middle-class bracket, but I surveyed women from poverty level to upper-middle class. The long-term study of the women was easier to conduct with the middle-class, for they had the space and money available to accommodate me.

The women surveyed were from all types of religious backgrounds and different regions in India. The goal in surveying women from different regions and Hindu backgrounds was to get a wide spectrum of varying practices.

Demographics of Bombay

Bombay has been said to be the “first Indian town to experience the economic, technological, and social changes associated with the growth of capitalism.”⁵ However, despite all of the advances the people of Bombay have experienced, more than half of the city’s ten million inhabitants are living in slum areas or are homeless.⁶ There are only a small group of people living in the city who have incomes that allow for a comfortable lifestyle.⁷

The extreme poverty level and way of life does not deter people from migrating to Bombay from other areas, however. The “burgeoning economic activities of the city” have attracted people first from surrounding rural districts, and more recently, from the entire country.⁸ The city of Bombay is viewed as a mecca for the poor, downtrodden, and oppressed, in a manner comparable to the view Europeans and Asians had of America in the early 1900s. The city encompasses that same promise of liberation for people who have experienced the traditional oppressions of caste, class, or ethnicity.⁹

The move to the city from rural areas changes many aspects of the Indian’s life. The change from the joint-family to that of the nuclear family is almost inevitable, as

⁵ Sujata Patel and Alice Thorner, *Bombay: Metaphor for Modern India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996) xiii.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., xv.

⁹ Ibid., 12.

there is a problem of space in the city. There is also improvement in women's status and more ways for women to exercise individuality. While these two aspects of change due to city life may be welcoming, there are other, more toilsome facets of city life, including lack of privacy and de-personalized space.¹⁰

Women are affected by the modernity of Bombay in ways which Indian men are not. There are many opportunities for women in the city, especially those in the middle and upper middle classes. I have seen that the majority of younger women (aged 19 to 30) have, or are seeking, advanced degrees at accredited colleges or universities, and many more women (ages ranging from early 20's to mid-50's) holding full-time jobs. Daily movement by going to school or work gives women the prospect of meeting new people and gaining insightful experiences. Women are, thus, given the chance to move beyond the limitations of the domestic sphere and monotonous duties that are associated with the Hindu woman's role. For younger generations, these new experiences make for newly developed and changing attitudes among women in this area of India. Therefore, self-sufficient, independent women have arisen in this atmosphere; many with the attitude that the most important thing in life is education and a career, rather than marriage and starting a family. However, many older women, most of whom have relocated to Bombay from other areas of India, wish to retain older Hindu customs. They feel this way even though they experience a similar atmosphere and climate in the city. These customs include putting the utmost importance into the caring and nurturing of their family, whether it is a joint-family or a single family.

Cooking inside of the home is related to women, although it is different in the outer sphere, such as in restaurants and hotels, where men are predominately employed as

¹⁰ Ibid., 15.

cooks. A more recent phenomenon is of women getting jobs outside of the home and having opportunities in the cities, especially Bombay. The women with whom I spoke in Bombay, while starting to adapt to the changing atmosphere, if nothing else, related cooking to traditional “women’s duties.” These women continue to do most or all of the cooking in the home.

To these women, cooking is not only a way to please their families, but a way of producing something they themselves enjoy. The common phrase heard from these women was, ‘If I let my husband cook, not only would he make a mess in the kitchen, but I would not be eating food that I found tasty.’ Taking pride and pleasure from one’s own work is very important to these women, as well as things in the kitchen being done in a structured and ordered manner which the men were not expected to maintain. I was told that men continue to make a mess in the kitchen, which the women must then clean up. Also, making sure things are not contaminated is important in the Hindu kitchen. Certain vessels are set aside for making foods for the deities and preparing foods that have meat in them. Because the kitchen is predominately the woman’s domain, men usually are unaware of which vessels are set aside for what purpose. An example of a man disturbing the order in the kitchen occurred while I was in Bombay. At the time I was staying with Janki Kripalani. Their family was predominately vegetarian. Janki’s husband and son, however, would eat meat and eggs on Wednesdays and Sundays. On these days, her husband would often want to cook his own mutton. It was on one of these days that I heard shouting coming from the kitchen when Janki realized that he had used one of the Divinities’ vessels to cook the mutton. She began crying and immediately went to pray. Her husband, on the other hand, thought that she was overreacting and

making a fuss over something insignificant. Using this occurrence as an example, one can see how someone who is not familiar with the workings of the kitchen can greatly disturb the order of a Hindu family.

When I asked the Bombay women if cooking was more of a duty or a pleasure, the majority of them said both feelings applied. While duty is a term that comes to mind when describing cooking to these women, it is a pleasurable duty. The two are interchangeable for most of the women. Producing something both full of taste and nutrition, making others happy through this creation, and knowing they hold the secrets and the knowledge to make the food the best gives these women extreme pleasure...so much so that cooking is no longer a burdensome duty.

The production of food items as a pleasurable duty, especially in Hindu households, holds even greater truth. In the Hindu home, the person who prepares the food is not only cooking for the family, she/he is cooking for the deities as well. In every religious tradition where offerings are made, it is those who actually give the offerings directly to the Divinities who will receive the most splendors from them in return. This direct interaction creates closeness, a relationship so to speak, between the person and the deities. As is so in worldly relationships: the closer you are to a person, the more you get from that person, whether it is in the form of physical gifts, friendship, time, or emotional well-being. If you do not know a person well, you are not going to put as much time into helping them or being there for them in times of need. This concept appears to be the same with the deities. The more you do for them, the more they do for you. Therefore, if you are a Hindu woman, it is an honor to cook, for you are preparing the food for the deities in your home as well as your family and yourself.

Chapter 1

Consolidating Hinduism into a Religion of the Home

Bombay is such a fast-paced city that many families hardly have the time to add a religious ritual to their daily routine. In many households, both the husband and wife go to work six days a week. Even if the wife does not have a job of her own, going in to the office with her husband to help him with tasks is quite common. The work day can begin as early as 7:00 am, and may not end until 10:00 pm. Long hours and only one day off from work a week gives the average Bombay dweller very little personal time.

A lack of time means many things to Hindu practitioners: less time to go to temple, less time to attend *yajnas*¹, and less time to take part in religious festivities. For women in Bombay, the deficiency means something else, as well: not enough time to care for the family, cook, and maintain the home. The women in the Indian Hindu tradition are the keepers of the home, and their primary “job” is to make sure that things are running smoothly and efficiently. However, an added responsibility for women is keeping the religious tradition alive within their families. Therefore, the shortness of time for religion becomes a problem which, in most cases, women take into their own hands.

In Bombay, reconciliation between keeping the Hindu tradition alive and dealing with the lack of time occurs through the religious tradition. Women keep Hinduism alive within the home, doing so on their own time. In this way, they are able to teach their children about the practices they grew up with, feel good about the fact that they have not lost touch with their religious and cultural roots, as well as keep the Divinities happy.

¹ Rituals where offerings are made to the various forms of the Divine.

The home as a place of worship is not a new concept. People from all religious traditions use the home as a place for prayer and worship. Most often, these practices in the home are additional to visiting temples or attending group services. However, for Hindus living in Bombay, the home is a primary place for religious practice. Often times, it is the only place these religious practices can take place. While there are many Hindu temples throughout Bombay, and all of these temples are visited by residents of the city, most people do not have the time for regular attendance. A trip to a temple may occur only on religious holidays or when one happens to have unexpected free time. By the time the family is done with work and household duties, the temples are already closed off to the public, or religious services performed by Brahmins are not being performed. Many times Brahmins are only available at certain times, making it difficult for families to hire them for *yajnas* at their convenience. For these reasons, the home becomes a sanctuary both familial and religious.

The women, wanting to keep religion alive in a city where it is difficult to do so, utilize their space (their home) to preserve their religious heritage. In this sense, women are the ones in the home who have the most active knowledge of their religious tradition. The women are the ones who teach the religion to their children, who keep their husbands informed about religious activities, and who care for the deities in the home.

This may warrant an explanation given that the Hindu religious tradition is seemingly patriarchal. Yet, one can see through earlier religious traditions that women have always had a sort of power, if not control over religion. This is evident through Mother Goddess cults and other religions, old and new, that focus on the woman as the giver of life, thus being the one who has power.

In a description of a living Goddess tradition of the Aborigines at Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory, Peggy Grove shows how early rock art in the shape of females depict the first creation myths. These myths surrounded the biological process of the female, mainly giving birth, as well as seasonal changes that are related to the female body. These associations between female processes and the earth lead the author to believe that the female was the creator of both the land and the people.² Another author who studied Goddess cults states that “worship of the Goddess’s life-giving aspects has survived, though primarily in women’s worship,”³ which shows the importance of the Goddess tradition to women as they have a religious figure who they can relate with.

Religion, especially Hinduism, is a method of nurturing and caring for the deities in hopes that they will care for you back, and throughout history women have commonly been viewed as caregivers. This relationship puts women at the center of the religious practices.

Navaratri is a commonly practiced festival, which I observed, that is for the female aspect of the Divine in all her forms. It has strong associations with women and femininity. As Mary Hancock put it in her observations on the festival, “the moral value of feminine beauty and adornments, domesticity, hospitality, and fecundity were underscored through associations with the Goddess.”⁴ This festival was mainly done for women and children (young girls), as they were the ones who acted as the hosts and the guests. The focus was on the women for nine days.

² Peggy Grove, *Myths, Glyphs, and Rituals of a Living Goddess Tradition* (ReVision; Winter99, Vol. 21 Issue 3) p. 6, 9p, 7bw.

³ Mary R. Lefkowitz, *The New Cults of the Goddess* (Scholar 00030937, Spring93, Vol. 62, Issue 2), p.4.

⁴ Mary Elizabeth Hancock, 4.

I was told that in each family, it is the girl of the home who is given the task of handling the money. Whenever money is brought into the home, it is given to the girl in the household so that she can put it away in a safe or its proper place. A young girl in the home is lucky for money, as she is seen as symbolic of the Goddess Laxsmi.⁵ Giving her the money to handle is said to get the family more money.

The most important religious practice in Hinduism is caring for the deities, or making them happy. In the domestic setting, the women are the ones who care for their entire family, which includes any of the Divinities who are kept in their home. In every practicing Hindu family's home that I visited, I noticed a *mandir*⁶ holding the images of the chosen deities worshipped regularly. While some *mandirs* were fancier than others, they all held the same purpose: to allow the family to pray, do *puja*, and carry on their religious practices in their home on their own schedules.

Among the families whom I visited, there were a few who were extremely concerned about their *mandirs* and the deities within them. The women in these families, after bathing in the morning, clean the entire, taking out each and every Divinity and wiping it down with a clean cloth (usually these cloths are kept aside specifically for cleaning the deities and are not used for any other purposes). They then wipe down the inside of the *mandir* and end the cleaning process by carefully placing each deity back in their specific spot, which is, of course memorized. The *mandir* is comparative to the home of the Divinities, and the women clean this home as they would clean their own on a daily basis. Daily offerings are placed on the *mandirs* for the deities. The most

⁵ Laxsmi is the feminine form of the Divine primarily worshipped for wealth.

⁶ A *mandir* is a structure that is in the form of a house, temple, or box where the images of the deities are kept. In most cases, these images were small to large statues, however, pictures and symbols to represent the Gods were also kept in some s. A *mandir* can contain one deity or many.

common offerings are freshly bought fruits and flower garlands. The fruits are often eaten as *prasada* after being offered to the deities.

Mrs. Shetty, a South Indian with whom I spent a considerable amount of time, would place a freshly made flower garland in front of her *mandir* daily, which consisted of all the deities she worshipped, including a picture of Jesus and the Mother Mary. Along with the flowers offered to the deities, she would give them fruits as well. Mrs. Shetty said she would generally give any fruits that were sold close-by to her apartment building, but they had to be fresh and in season. Usually, the fruits would consist of bananas or apples. However, during certain seasons, such as summer, mangoes are more readily available, and so those would be offered instead. On special occasions and festival days, however, coconuts were necessary to use as offerings. Mrs. Shetty explained that the coconut, being more expensive and harder to acquire regularly and near to her home, was not possible to give as an offering everyday. Yet, on certain days, in order to make the Divinities happy, she had to go out of her way in order to get this auspicious fruit.

In conducting my studies, I have found that fruits are the most widely used food forms, whether in the public or private sphere of ritual and religious practices. To discover the reasons why these foods are more popular than others some consideration is required. One woman who I ran into that answered this question for me rather well. Jotsra Anand Halve, a 46-year-old woman who lives in the Colaba side of Bombay, married into a Brahmin family. While Mrs. Halve comes from a lower caste than her husband, I was told that she was very beautiful as a young girl. Because of her beauty, the family approved of the marriage. The status acquired by Mrs. Halve because of her

marriage into a Brahmin family requires her to have more knowledge of the Hindu religion than most people have. Mrs. Halve, therefore, was able to give me a great deal of information, including why certain fruits are used over others during religious ceremonies and how they gained their status among food items. Her need to learn about the tradition, due to her marriage, made her even more aware of the tradition.

According to Mrs. Halve, there are two plants that are considered very auspicious in the Hindu tradition and in India as a whole. These plants are the coconut and the banana tree. These two plants are versatile, as almost all parts of the plants can be, and are, used by Indians. Bananas, which grow readily in almost any environment, are available everywhere in India. Also, bananas flower all year round, giving Hindus a plant that is consistently available. Consistency is very important for any ritual, as the word ritual literally signifies a custom that is done in the same way repeatedly. Moreover, bananas can both be eaten as a food, while the leaves of the fruit can be used as plates because they are both large, sturdy, and leak-proof. The coconut is also a very useful fruit. It has both tender meat and liquid for drinking. The liquid of the coconut is recommended to Indian women who are pregnant, as it is supposed to give strength and nutrition to both the mother and the unborn child.⁷ The coconut is also used a great deal in South Indian cooking and many dessert dishes. It adapts well to sweet, sour, salty, and spicy dishes alike.

Feeding others before feeding oneself, especially when one is feeding the Divinities, is a religious practice in Hinduism. However, there are other rituals of feeding that take place in the Hindu tradition, as well. These rituals include feeding pandits,

⁷ This fact was told to me while I was in India by Janki Kripalani, whom I stayed with for over two weeks in Andheri, Mumbai.

crows, and cows before the family can eat. As a ritual that appears to be common in Bombay, one is supposed to feed crows a bit of the first food that is cooked for the day. In the Uttara Ramayana, a story is told that explains why the crow has the right to eat offerings of rice to the deities. The story states that at one time a king named Marutta was performing a ritual, which Indra and other Divinities attended. The evil Ravana heard about this and decided to go as well, frightening the deities. They fled as different forms of birds. The God Yama escaped as a crow. After this, Yama was especially delighted with crows, and he gave a sanction that in the future when people worship Divinities by offering rice, the crows also have the right to eat the offering.⁸ Crows are also seen as messengers to the spirit world. So, food is often laid outside to them in order to satisfy spirits—both good and bad in Bombay.

Besides crows, cows are very significant in the Hindu tradition, and they are often given the first item of food that is prepared for the day. Feeding a cow and offering it water is considered a pious activity because cows are the most important of all animals for Hindus. The cow gives the Hindus many important things: milk, ghee, butter, cheese, curd, yoghurt, cream, and ice cream. These dairy products are commonly eaten or used by Indians. The ghee especially, which is made from the milk of the cow, is used frequently in *yajnas*,⁹ giving the cow ritual significance. The cow is also viewed as an important animal for Hindus due to the great affection they have for their calves. The cow is a symbol of a mother, and its milk that of motherly love, for one drinks a cow's milk all throughout one's life, just as when babies, our mothers nourish us with their

⁸ www.dharmakshetra.com/article/. February 26, 2005.

⁹ Rituals done for the Gods that are performed by Brahmins

milk.¹⁰ It is also important to note that the color of milk is white, which stands for purity, truth, and knowledge.

Cow dung is also very useful to Indians, and it is said to have anti-bacterial properties. In villages, Indians plaster their walls with the cow dung in order to protect the inhabitants from bacteria.¹¹ Cow dung is burned and used as fuel for cooking and heating.

The ideas related to cows are also traits of the sacred Vedas, and therefore, the cow often has been used as a symbol of the Vedas, the source of all Hindu knowledge and wisdom.¹² People living in Bombay may have a difficult time finding a cow to give food, and so crows are more commonly fed. The majority of those living in the city would, as a ritual, put out food for the crows every morning.

As common as the feeding of animals is, the feeding of people is equally widespread. Many times, food will be brought to pandits. This is considered similar to feeding the deities, as the pandit is a vehicle that works for the Divinities. Besides pandits, beggars are also fed. One could often observe women buying food for a beggar sitting by the side of the road in a busy marketplace or setting aside a small bit of food that was cooked for dinner to be brought downstairs to give to a beggar outside of the family dwelling. Giving and offering food is a large part of the Hindu faith, and those living in Bombay have many outlets for expressing this aspect of the religion. Charity is a way for one to build one's good karma, as well as please the Divinities.

Women are often represented as the cooks and the feeders in society, and this is no less the case in the Hindu culture. Women often are the ones who bring the portions

¹⁰ Vishal Agarwal, www.tc.umn.edu/~hssumn/sacred_cow.html. February 26, 2005.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

of food to the pandit, beggar, or animals. If they do not do it themselves, it is the women who ask their husbands to go down from their building at night to offer food to beggars on the corners of the street. The women reflect the kindness and altruistic natures that are expected of religious devotees.

Serving others, whether they are deities, family members, or people entering into your home for the first time, is a concept that is central to Hindu practices. Treating others as you would like to be treated and honoring and respecting others in the Hindu tradition may have a lot to do with the notion of karma. If one shows reverence to others, they will most likely increase their good fortune, helpful for a future life. With this in mind, we will look at the how others are treated when they step into another's home. Before arriving in India, I had often heard the term "in India, the guest is God." I will explore this notion and how it relates to feeding others, as well as the acceptance of food.

As a newcomer to India living among different families and constantly meeting new people, I was able to experience first hand the exemplary treatment of the guest in the Indian home.

In Bombay, and throughout India, any person who enters into your home who is not a part of the family is a guest. The concept of guest, however, is quite different from the guest we think about in America. A guest is never considered a burden. It is supposed to be seen as an honor to have anyone enter into your home. Therefore, people dropping by unexpectedly at a bad time will be treated with the same care and consideration as those people arriving at a planned get together. A guest in the home is treated like a deity who comes to visit.

Food comes into play as a key element in going with the guest as God concept. Women, being the major preparers and planners of meals and snacks, as stated previously, are the people in the home who cater to the guests. Feeding others who come into your home is necessary, and typically food is offered to the guest many times throughout the visit.

As I experienced being a guest in many different homes during my stay in Bombay, I was able to observe the treatment of myself and others by the women and other family members present in the home. One thing I noticed is that women hardly ever answer the door to the home if someone else is in the house. If a guest is expected to arrive, one can be sure to find the wife of the household in the kitchen finishing preparations for the visit. When someone arrives without warning, the wife or woman of the house will immediately run into the kitchen to find something to put together. Offering food to the guest, just as she would offer food to the deities daily is critical. I was told by a few of the women that if food, snacks, or beverages are not offered to guests when they arrive they may become angry with you, and this would be a bad reflection on yourself. The Divinities may then get angry with you, too. Therefore, the belief that how you make others feel in your home reflects back on you and your relationship with the Divine is an important one.

One thing I noticed about the foods served when a guest in someone's home is that they are almost always fried. These snacks included samosas,¹³ dried fried lentil snacks, or tikkis.¹⁴ All of these snack dishes are fried. The element of the foods being

¹³ *Samosas* are a dough made of white flour pastry which is commonly filled with spices, potato, peas, and sometimes other vegetables and fried. They are a favorite snack of Indians.

¹⁴ *Tikkis* are patties made with potato, sometimes vegetables, bread, and spices. They are fried and eaten plain or with bread.

fried may have something to do with the Hindu concept of making foods pure for the Divine.

In accordance with purity rules, the treatment of the food in Indian cooking may alter its natural state, making it either *kacha* or *pakka*.¹⁵ *Pakka* foods are considered to be superior to *kacha* foods because they are fried in ghee, commonly known as clarified butter. *Kacha* foods are prepared through roasting or boiling. Indians see both of these cooking methods as easily susceptible to pollution, for they are techniques that are said to absorb contamination.¹⁶ These types of food are usually eaten at home, rather than at religious festivals and ceremonies. *Pakka* foods are considered to be much less susceptible to ritual pollution, and are, therefore, the likely food for Indians to take with them on the road as lunch or a snack.¹⁷ In a strict Hindu household, *kacha* food types must be cooked fresh for every meal, as any left-over or stale food is considered polluted.¹⁸ More recently, these terms have broadened, and *pakka* foods, thus pure foods, go beyond those fried in ghee to include any vegetarian dish.¹⁹

The numerous techniques and concepts developed for ritual and domestic cooking purposes in India show the unique place food has in this culture. It is clearly a very functional resource, as it plays a role, not only in the nutritional sense, but as a way of worshipping and ranking in society.²⁰

Ritual and everyday cooking both reflect ideas of culture and religious tradition in India. Both of these types of cooking show how women in the Hindu culture hold a rank

¹⁵ *Kacha* translates as "unripe", "not well made", or "imperfectly cooked", while *pakka* is the exact opposite of this. However, both are fully cooked foods in the modern sense. K.T. Achaya, 62.

¹⁶ Carik E. Henderson, 104.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ K.T. Achaya, 62.

¹⁹ R.S. Khare, *The Hindu Hearth and Home* (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 1976), 57.

all of their own that has not been easily defined in the past. However, the areas discussed about guests, cooking, and serving food leads us one step further in the direction of defining the importance of women in this society. Women have always been known as the nurturers in almost every society. However, this caring nature has almost always been shown in relationship to the family, and especially children.

The Hindu culture, by bringing the caring for the guest into the picture, shows women as nurturing in another respect. Taking care of a guest in the home is equated to taking care of one's family or the deities. Being the primary caregivers allows women to claim an even greater status as nurturer. As the role of the woman moves from not only caring for the family members, but "outsiders," as well, in the form of the guest, the two worlds of inside and outside come together. The women, therefore, is not merely a spectator of the outside realm that has been seen as the "man's world." She becomes a true player in this world.

The *mandir* and the kitchen are both inner spaces. Akam, a Brahmin term that describes a dwelling that falls in the most interior space, can also be used to describe a house, mind, self, or the earth. This term shows how culturally defined interior space and the home is in the Hindu tradition.²¹ Interior spaces, especially the home, are usually linked with females, and things that occur within these areas, such as eating, bathing, dressing, and sexual relations²² are thus related to domesticity. All of these aspects of life are definers of one's personhood, which makes domesticity highly valuable and honorable.

²¹ Mary Elizabeth Hancock, 83.

²² Ibid.

In India, women have very little space in the public arena, as their tasks are taken up in the privacy of the home. As this has changed in recent years with many urban women getting an education or career, village women remain unchanged by this modernization. Overall, the general expectation for women in India is to stay at home, take care of their family, clean, cook, and serve the other family members. The young girls in the home learn these things from their mothers at a very early age.

Cooking, being a tradition passed down from mothers to daughters in Indian and in many other countries, is a task that provides a clear social division between men and women. In many Indian households where women, whether it is a mother, daughter, or servant-girl, prepare the meals, it is unheard of for men to lift a finger in the kitchen. It is the duty of the women to serve the men of the household, and this is especially the case in regards to meals.

While studies have shown that in India men eat first, the most, and the best,²³ the control of food obviously lies with women. In many cultures, women exercise their power and control over men by their rule over the planning of meals and the cooking.²⁴ In the past, women have utilized this supremacy of food by refusing to cook for their husbands or controlling which types of foods they prepare for them. These acts allow women to exercise a degree of influence in a predominately patriarchal societal structure. By claiming this role around food, women are also able to define their femininity.²⁵

In all societies, women are the givers and sustainers of life. We get our first meals from our mothers, and women have long had the role of the cook and feeder.

²³ Steven L. Kaplan and Carole M. Counihan, *Food and Gender: Identity and Power* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1998), 2.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

Through this role, women have not only maintained a place for themselves in society, they have preserved a hierarchy for women. As women pass down their traditional cooking methods to their daughters and female family members, they maintain their customs and practices in the kitchen.

Religion is the cornerstone of identity for it allows people to “sustain loyalties freely pledged in spite of the inevitable contradictions of value systems.”²⁶ This fidelity is encouraged by the religious tradition through its elders, laws, and rites of passage. In the Hindu tradition, a large part of the ritual functioning and practice is displayed through food, and the purity of that food. Most cultures also encompass at least some food taboos that are defined by their religion.²⁷ These taboos restrict ways food is prepared, where food can be obtained, and who may handle it. Because religion is linked to, and, in some cases, defines the culture’s food tradition, it is understandable how food itself could be connected to identity even if the obvious aspects of religion are not present. The Hindu religious tradition, with the customs of feeding the Divinities, purity rules, and order of eating at festivals (with the Brahmin priests eating first), has its rules manifest through Indian culture as a whole. Therefore, for Indians, re-creating Indian cuisine in the home, away from India could give them an experience of Indian food, which is part of a larger religious tradition.

Food provides an ideal means for expressing the vagueness and oppositions that are inherent in the practice of religion. When using food in offerings or exchanges during religious rituals, one is constantly in need of interpretation of the principles and meanings behind its use—while this is necessary in just about every aspect of religion, food is the

²⁶ As quoted by psychologist Erik Erikson in Dinesh Bhugra and others, “Cultural identity and its measurement: a questionnaire for Asians,” *International Review of Psychiatry* 11 (1999), 245.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 246.

only area in which these types of problems are dealt with.²⁸ Food is readily and easily available and can be transformed with little effort. Through its use in religious practice, food is able to accumulate various meanings and provide significance through its cultural affiliation.

²⁸ Steven L. Kaplan and Carole M. Counihan, 95.

Chapter 2

Ritual, Women, and Power

The notion of needing to feed the Divinities in Hinduism has been a concept that has carried on since the inception of the tradition. The *yajna*, or ritual sacrifice, is a representation of feeding the deities through a ritual fire. This process is performed by the Brahmin priests and allows for *agni*, the fire, to consume the offerings in its flames, bringing them to the Divine above in the rising smoke. *Agni*, who burns up the offerings, is often referred to as the digestive fire, for he breaks down the food and sends it to the deities for their nourishment. This process of feeding and eating is an important part of the Hindu religious system.

Because the *yajna* is mainly performed by the Brahmin priests, lay people who cannot afford to pay Brahmins for their services, or who do not have the time, are at a great disadvantage, prohibiting them from taking part in a vital part of the Hindu religious tradition. However, this issue is resolved through the *puja*. This is essentially the *yajna* performed in the domestic sphere. *Puja* allows for members of a household to offer gifts to the deities in the home. These gifts are often food items.

The *puja*, in one form or another, is the most widely performed ritual by Bombay women. Different types of this ritual are performed by the women in Bombay depending on the situation and circumstances. Holidays and festivals are the most common times for women to perform *pujas*, however, there are women who do them on a regular schedule, and some even do them daily. Of course, a *puja* done daily is less complex than one done on a festival day.

Based on my research, the number of these domestic rituals carried out is ultimately dependent on the amount of time the women have, how important a day is, and how often rituals were performed in the home where they grew up. Carrying on a family tradition of ritual performance is extremely important to the women doing the *pujas*. Ultimately, however, the women in Bombay are caught between wanting to keep their religious tradition alive and finding enough time in the day to do so. Especially for the women who work full-time, regular s are just not possible. Yet, these Bombay women, wanting to retain the religion they grew up with, find ways to reconcile the lack of time, shortening the *puja* into a routine they are capable of doing every day if they wish.

The daily *puja*, as performed by the women in Bombay, took no longer than five minutes. This is a much shorter version of the *puja* that is performed by the women on festival days, as well as those conducted on a regular basis by people in village areas of India. The ritual is quite simple, and I was able to observe it on many occasions, as it is done in a similar manner among all the women I came across. The daily *puja* is always conducted or guided by the woman of the home—most of the time it is the eldest woman, rather than a daughter. Then again, sometimes, the daughter-in-law,¹ if it was a joint-family, would be responsible for it.

The woman would always begin by washing. It is not necessary in the condensed version of the ritual to wash the entire *mandir*, or the Divine's area every day, but there would be some schedule for washing this region. The woman herself also makes sure she is clean before beginning the *puja*, which means the ritual is done immediately after she takes a bath in the morning. The importance of cleanliness is evident during the woman's

¹ The responsibilities of the woman of the home are often pushed off onto the daughter-in-law if the mother-in-law does not have time. The daughter-in-law, in some cases, takes orders and responds to what she is told to do by her mother-in-law.

menstrual cycle. She is rendered unfit to perform rituals at this time because the bleeding is considered unclean. Thus, it would not be proper for her to perform any ritual for the Divinities.

The next step in the daily *puja* is the lighting of the *aagarbatis*² and/or *diyas*.³ After this is done, the actual ceremonial portion begins. The woman closes her eyes and slightly bows her head, while placing her hands together, as is commonly done when one prays. She then says a memorized script that is either taken from writings for one of the Divinities, or a general one that she herself has made up for her daily practice. The type of prayer is usually a combination of thanking the deities and asking for the well-being of her family. Finally, the daily *puja* ends with an offering to the Divinities. This offering is in the form of fruits or flowers. However, fruits are the more common item offered.

It is necessary to point out that it was only the woman of the home who would do this ritual and interact with the deities in this way. The other members of the family, if involved at all, would be guided by the woman and would usually take part in lighting a *diya* of their own and placing it by the deities, or saying a short prayer of their own. However, their participation did not go far beyond this in any of the households I visited. The lack of participation among the children of the families is somewhat obvious—they are younger and less experienced than their elders. Children look up to their mother and father for instruction and guidance in every society. It would be unnatural for a child to lead a ceremony or ritual unless they were instructed to do so by an adult. However, the

² *s* are incense that are usually of the sandalwood or rose scent and are used for cleansing the ritual area using the smoke and scent.

³ *Diyas* are candles, now made of wax, but are also used in the traditional style of a small, rounded clay pot or dish with oil or ghee added and a thick string. These are lit and kept around the area where the ritual is going to be performed, but they are also lit and placed in front of the Gods for their pleasure.

reasons why the men in most of the families played such a small role in the daily rituals are somewhat more ambiguous.

The men are the “leaders” of the family so to speak. They give instructions on how things should be done, and in many cases give orders to their wife and children. This may be different in village areas, especially when it comes to the kitchen area. In most Indian households, the father or husband is treated with the utmost respect and is given the authority. Yet, when it comes to rituals that take place in the confines of the home, many men are willing to submit to the influences of the women in their family.

Two things are taking place here. One reason for this passivity could be the urbanized and fast-paced setting where these practitioners live. In village areas of India, men and women alike have more time to spend on religious practices. Yet, in the city, as stated before, time is restricted, and the person who does not work outside of the home has more time to concentrate on domestic practices. The submissiveness of the male during domestic rituals, therefore, could be due to his lack of knowledge and practice at such things. Secondly, and also coinciding with the previous statement, the man’s need to do the ritual correctly is more important than him dominating this situation, for he must know that if an aspect of the ritual is inaccurate, the deities may become unhappy with the family.

On festivals, holidays, or days that hold meaning for a caste or region in India, the *puja* that takes place in the home is usually much more complex and longer than the ones done daily or more regularly. At each festival or highly significant day, a more elaborate ceremony or ritual is conducted. During the four months I lived in Bombay amongst the women and their daily domestic practices, I was able to witness and take part in the

majority of Hindu holidays and festivals that are observed. Ceremonies I partook in included Diwali, Maha Laxsmi, Satnarayan, and Tulsi vivah. A comparison of these four ceremonies conducted in the homes of women is necessary to show similarities among castes, as well as comparable aspects in food use.

Diwali is one of the more known festival days among non-Hindus. Before traveling to India, I thought I knew about this festival. I knew of Diwali as a festival day for the Goddess Laxsmi⁴, and I understood that on this day people pray to Laxsmi for prosperity for the coming year and lights are put up everywhere, be it village or city.

Diwali celebrates the God Ram's homecoming after he was away from his kingdom for fourteen years. For this reason, lights are strung up and the *diyas* are lit in order to welcome him home. It is believed that on this day, Laxsmi, a consort of the God Vishnu, comes to the earth in order to greet Ram and welcome him home. Therefore, people take advantage of Laxsmi's visit and carry out a ceremony on her behalf.

While I have found that the more general aspects of the holiday (those taught in textbooks) have truth to them, there are more ritualistic aspects surrounding the holiday which are not discussed. The rituals that are performed on Diwali appear to be the most important aspect of this day and need to be talked about as the key component of this holiday.

Hindus actually celebrate Diwali for a period of three days. The main day, known as Diwali itself, falls on Amavasya, which is the dark night before the new moon comes, and this falls in the Hindu month Kartik⁵. On this day, Hindus perform the *puja* for Maha, or mother, Laxsmi—this aspect of the holiday being the most important. Women

⁴ Laxsmi is a Goddess in the Hindu tradition who is said to represent wealth above all else.

⁵ This is a month in the Hindu calendar. Sometimes *Diwali* falls in October, while at other times it occurs in the months of November.

perform a *puja* on this important day that is very similar in many respects to the daily *puja* . For example, they light *diyas* during Diwali, only they light them in every room of the house and keep them lit until 12:00 am. At least one *diya* must be kept lit for all three days of the festival period. The lighting of the *diyas* is important to this festival, as Diwali is the “festival of lights”. Keeping lights lit shows respect for the God Ram, as well as for the Goddess Laxmi.

Women also prepare for Diwali in a manner similar to their preparations for daily rituals. Case in point is the cleaning that is done to prepare for the day. Yet, instead of cleaning a small area of the home, prior to the *puja* done on Diwali, women clean the entire house or apartment from top to bottom. This means that cabinets, cupboards, floors, walls, utensils, and windows are all cleaned thoroughly. Items are taken out, areas are cleaned, and things are rearranged in an organized fashion. Cleaning is also shown as especially important on the actual day of Diwali, as women take a bath before the actual *puja* is performed. Therefore, before the *puja* , which always occurs sometime after sunset, at around 5:00 pm, the women take their bath and proceed to make any final preparations in their home before they begin the . Final preparations differ among households. However, generally speaking, these entail putting up new or clean curtains in the home and changing the pillow covers, bed sheets, and any other linens in the home. All of these steps taken on Diwali are to signify rebirth and a new era of one’s life. The purchasing of new things, cleaning, and change are metaphors for the coming of the new year and change.

Another aspect of the *puja* that is given special attention is the time which it begins. Doing things at the right time is a very important aspect of any ceremony.

Hindus are especially particular about timing, as depending on the moon, stars, and other factors, certain times of the day or night may be seen as more auspicious than others. Conducting a *puja* at the right time will give the desired results. Therefore, while it is said that the Diwali should take place in the early evening, after sunset, the exact time will be given by a Pandit. In Bombay, as I observed, not all of the women conducting a *puja* will go to visit with a Pandit to get the auspicious time.⁶ It is more likely that one woman will go and ask the time of the Pandit, and then she will inform all her friends and relatives. In this way, Bombay women are able to save their time, and take turns venturing out.

Of course, food items are an important aspect of Diwali itself, as many people associate the holiday with the offering and eating of sweets. Yet, with the current concerns for health and nutrition in Bombay patterned after America's diet obsession, many families have cut down on their sweet intake. Still, sweets are bought and used for the *puja* itself, if not given out as gifts to others. These sweets are typical "Indian" sweets, milk being the base ingredient.

Milk is extremely important in the *puja*, as is shown when the actual ceremony begins. The area where the ritual is going to take place, already clean and set properly with a large sheet or mat, is set with *diyas*, *aagarbatis*, and silver and gold items.⁷ Many people have silver cups in which they place these silver and gold items, which are anything from coins or statues of Laxmi passed down through the family, to chains, rings, and bangles. Silver is the most common metal used during ceremonies because of

⁶ *Muhurat* is the official name for the auspicious time. Women do not necessarily have to pay the *Pandit* for this particular service, however, many women will give some type of offering whenever going to visit a *Pandit*, whether this is in the form of fruits, flowers, or money.

⁷ Laxmi, being the Goddess of wealth, likes silver and gold, as they are precious metals.

its stability. The durability of the silver also means that there is less of a tendency for foods to “absorb any elements from their containers that could affect the eater adversely,”⁸ as stated by Mary Hancock who observed domestic rituals among a group of South Indians.

For the Bombay women I observed, when all the items have been placed in the cup, milk is then poured over them. The milk is used similarly to that of the *aagarbatis*, in that it cleanses the items for the Goddess. The ceremony continues by placing dry rice and fresh flowers before the Goddess as offerings. Finally, the *aarti*⁹ is done, which includes singing a song(s) for the Goddess Laxmi and lighting the *diya* that is placed directly in front of the Goddess. The sweets, which were kept in front of Laxmi during the entire ritual, are then broken and a piece of each is offered to Laxmi. It is important to give the Goddess a taste of every sweet, for it might upset her if she does not get to eat the one she wanted. A bite of a sweet is then given to everyone present at the *puja*, this sweet now being *prasada*, or the divine offerings blessed by the Divinities. Finally, to end the ritual, tilak is placed on the forehead of the statue of the Goddess, as well as anyone present at the, both men and women.¹⁰ The tilak is a red powder (*sindoor*) mixed with water to form a paste which is used at temples or during rituals. It is rubbed on the forehead between the eyes, and signifies marriage. Thus in rituals, it signifies marriage or unification with the Divine.

⁸ Mary Elizabeth Hancock, *Womanhood in the Making: Domestic Ritual and Public Culture in Urban South India* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1999), 98.

⁹ The *aarti* is a Hindu ritual in which the fire or light is offered to the deities. The fire usually comes from wicks that have been soaked in ghee and placed in small clay pots. Many times this ritual is accompanied by songs for the God(s) or Goddess(es).

¹⁰ The ritual described is specific to what was observed while in Bombay. The ritual was conducted by a specific group of women, and is likely to differ among people and areas of India.

Another type of *puja* that was done at the beginning of October was Maha Laxmi Sagra, the holy day for a specific caste of Indians, known as Sindhis. This day is comparable to other holy days in which women fast for the long life and well being of their husbands. The day centers around food entirely, for women fast, prepare a specific type of food for the ceremony, and lastly feed this food to the men in their family.

On this day, importance is given again to cleanliness and structure while preparing the food for the ceremony. The food cannot be prepared before the entire area is cleaned. In fact, the woman with whom I was staying at the time of this ceremony, Janki Kripalani, delayed the preparation of the *prasada* because her servant arrived late to clean the kitchen. Cleanliness is so important that Janki took a second bath before beginning to prepare the *prasada* because of the delay in the kitchen cleaning. She told me that she felt the two hours she spent waiting for the servant to arrive made her impure, and therefore, a second bath was necessary in order to rid her of the pollution.

The *prasada* itself was made out of basic ingredients which are staples in most peoples' diets: white and wheat flour, sugar, and water. The simplicity of the food adds to its purity for the *puja*. The ingredients were formed into thick, sweet dough, which was rolled out into thin, pancake-like rounds. The interesting part of the preparation of this *prasada* was that Janki poked sixteen holes into the surface of the dough before frying it in ghee.¹¹ This has something to do with the day, but Janki was unable to tell me its significance—only that this is how she learned to make the *prasada* for this particular day. Out of the dough there were also two pieces that were not shaped in the form of

¹¹ Ghee is clarified butter, and it is used whenever Hindus wish to make ritually pure food. While it used to be used more often in everyday cooking, due to health reasons, people have switched to sunflower and other types of oils for cooking and frying. However, in the case of special ceremonies, festivals, and rituals, where food is being cooked for a specific purpose or the Gods, ghee remains a necessity.

round pancakes, but as a square and ball shape combined. These shapes were supposed to represent the Shiva *linga* and yoni.¹² These last shapes were specifically meant for the husband of the woman who prepared them.

After the *prasada* was prepared, the Sindhi women would need to get it blessed by a Pandit. The importance of Pandits remains intact, especially when needing things blessed on the behalf of a husband. The Pandit recites a *kattha*, or story, related to the specific day at hand in Hindi. This story is necessary for the blessing of the *prasada*. The Pandit is also offered gifts by the women in return for performing this service for them. The most common gift—food. Gifts of fruits, biscuits, and sweets are brought to the Pandit for performing the ceremony, which the Sindhi women would not be able to perform with such exactness on their own. The Pandit gives a parting gift to the women who attend the ceremony performed by the Pandit. This gift is received in the form of an apple or banana, which happen to be the most common fruits given to the Pandit. However, these returned pieces of fruit are blessed, and eating them gives one rewards from the deities.

Additionally, Satyanarayan is an important day that occurs every month on the full moon. It is another occasion for a *puja* to be done in the home. I was only able to observe one Satyanarayan *puja* during the course of my four month stay, for any auspicious sign or day that the full moon falls on will deem it a bad time to hold this ritual. There are many aspects governing the ceremony. For instance, it could not be held in October due to the solar eclipse. Therefore, the one *puja* of this kind which I was able to observe was held on November 26, 2004.

¹² The *linga* represents the male genitalia and the yoni the female genitalia. Together, they are meant to represent fertility and procreation, but are also seen to be the God Shiva and his consort in a different form.

I was told by Janki Kripalani that Sindhis, Marathis, and some Gujuratis partake in this *puja*, and it is typically done for health, wealth, and prosperity. It is done on behalf of the God Vishnu and the Goddess Laxsmi, and the full ceremony takes place in the confines of the home.

This ritualized ceremony is quite similar to the two described earlier, in that it deals with cleanliness and the distribution of food items in the same way. However, unlike the Maha Laxsmi Sagra, Pandits are not necessary, as the women who perform the ritual do so more frequently and do not need outside help to get the exactness of the practice.

Food is also made for this occasion using the same ingredients as before: sugar, ghee, and wheat flour (white flour is excluded this time). For this the ingredients are cooked for a long period of time over slow heat until the flour becomes slightly brown, but it remains dry, and it is not fried.

The cooking of specific types of foods on certain days has more to do with the family and the traditions they have passed down through generations than anything else. While there had to have been significance behind each dish, much of the information has been lost or blurred throughout the years. Custom and ritual are more important aspects, and as all of the women said, 'My mother and grandmother did it this way, and that is why I do it.' The typical fruits, such as coconut, banana, and any other available market fruits are offered to Vishnu and Laxsmi on this occasion during the *puja*.

The *puja* itself involved more ingredients, so to speak, than the others whom I had observed. It was done in the manner which I had seen in temples, or those conducted by priests or pandits. A mixture of different ingredients was used to bathe the deities, rather

than just one or two: milk, honey, curd, sugar, and tulsi leaves. Water was then poured over them afterward to clean them of this mixture. The deities who are bathed are statues (murtis), and they represent the Divinities themselves. They are actually thought to have the Divine inside of them, and this is why they are cared for in such a careful manner. The deities are then dressed in new clothing. After this is finished, a *diya* and the *aagarbatis* are lit for the aarti. The Satyanarayan Kattha (story) is read by the woman of the house, and then the aarti is complete. All the fruits along with the dish that was made as *prasada*, are offered to the Divinities. After this is done, the food offered is taken, the fruits are cut and the *prasada* is divided for the members of the household, while some is set aside to give to friends or neighbors.

In Bombay, because people live so closely together in flats, high-rises, or slum areas, the neighbors become very close with one another, and *prasada* is often distributed to a close neighbor as it would be to an extended family member. Sharing and offering the divine food items shows a real closeness and bond between neighbors. Yet, this exists mainly between women, rather than men, for women are the ones who are sharing the *prasada*.

Each person is given an equal share, and all must be eaten. The family I stayed with also set aside *prasada* for the sweeper and press wala (man who presses the clothing). It is a common thing for people to bring over *prasada* for you.¹³

Cooking food, as well as the utilization of food items for *puja*, is a very important aspect of Hinduism. This aspect can be shown especially through one type of *puja* that is for a plant. Many Indians keep a tulsi plant in their home because of their auspicious

¹³ *Prasada* is very important and is meant to be divine offerings. The giving of *prasada* to another person means that you are looking out for their well-being and want the best for them in life and health. It is as if you are giving the blessings of the Gods to another person by offering them *prasada*.

reputations and medicinal properties.¹⁴ They are viewed as a protector and healer of the home, and many Indians see the plant as the “mother” of the house. In order to worship the tulsi plant and thank her, on Ekadashi¹⁵ in the Kartik month, those who keep a tulsi plant in their home perform the Tulsi Vivah, or wedding ceremony of the tulsi plant.

The wedding ceremony takes place in the home of the family. I attended the event at the home of Hema Shetty on November 23, 2004. Hema, being South Indian, did a full for the tulsi plant, but other women, mainly those who were not South Indian, with whom I spoke informed me that most women do not make such an elaborate display.

Hema decorated the plant with bangles, a mangal sutra¹⁶, and an orni¹⁷, all of them being items to prepare the tulsi plant for a marriage ceremony. The marriage ceremony itself is the *puja*. After the dressing of the plant, many *diyas* are lit and the aarti is done. Fruits and sweets are offered to the tulsi plant last, as this is the custom to feed the bride and groom on their wedding day. While the tulsi plant is supposed to represent the bride in the ceremony, there is nothing present to represent the groom. The ritual is conducted to show respect for the plant as a mother, and thus focuses on the female figure, the bride.

Hema had prepared a special *prasada* for the wedding ceremony of the tulsi plant. This *prasada* was made with five different ingredients: coconut, poha, jagery, cardamom powder, and a sweet white grain/rice called fulla. Different people use different combinations, but these five items are very popular when preparing *prasada*. The number five, especially when preparing food, is thought to be auspicious, also.

¹⁴ The tulsi plant has healing properties, and it is often taken as a medicine for sore throat, cold, etc.

¹⁵ Ekadeshi is the 11th day of the Hindu month.

¹⁶ A necklace that some groups of Indian women wear to show they are married.

¹⁷ A *dupatta*, or head covering worn by women getting married

Puja, seen as the interaction between people and deities personified, allows the worshipper to show her devotion to the Divinities and give them the attention they require on a regular basis. In conducting a *puja*, it was necessary to eliminate all pollutants before beginning, thus creating a space with the absence of decay and mutability that is coupled with everyday life. The offerings given to the deities (jewelry, fruits, flowers, and the light from the *diyas* and scent from the *aagarbatis*) are all metaphors of femininity or the property of the female in the Hindu culture. In addition, the performer of the *puja* lights the *diyas* to begin the ritual, which makes her take on a subordinate (and stereotypically feminine) role with respect to the Divine.¹⁸

The practicing of these daily and more complex rituals gives women a power in the home that is rarely visibly present on a daily basis. These practices give women a type of agency, which helps them take control in society, especially among the men in their lives. While having knowledge of religious practices, as well as conducting them regularly in the home, gives women an upper-hand so to speak, when Bombay women were asked if they believed they had “power” in their family because of these things, most of them answered “no”. Power and agency are obviously two separate arenas, but these two often get mixed or confused when discussing women, men, and power relationships.

Women in India typically appear to play the role of homemaker, wife, mother, and daughter-in-law. While in more recent times women, especially those in the cities, have begun moving their way steadily into the workforce, women in Bombay continue to do the majority of the household duties. “Westerners” many times, when observing the roles that Asian women, and in this case, Indian women play in society generally label

¹⁸ Mary Elizabeth Hancock, 91.

these women as oppressed. The oppression appears to stem from a male-dominated society; one which gives women little or no voice. Women are often seen to be those who are made to do all of the domestic tasks, take care of the children, care for their husbands, and, in some cases, answer to every one of their whims, as well as have careers. They are viewed as a group of people with no power or voice, rather than individuals with specific situations who deal with oppression in their own ways. However, while living among these women, I was able to find many different cases. I found that these women who are seemingly oppressed by their male counterparts are resisting and holding power in some way or another. Two of the ways that women are able to “fight back” against oppression are through food and religion.

Feminist discourse has focused a great deal on power relationships between men and women. These relationships vary from intimate ones to those in the public sphere. In the past, feminists have looked at power and oppression through two different models. One of these models has focused on the oppressed as powerless victims, completely under the control of their oppressor. The second model has been one of power reversal. This model views the oppressed as fighting back in many different ways.¹⁹ This model looks for areas of the lives of the oppressed which show them resisting their oppressors. While both of these models show different aspects of oppressor/oppressed relationships, they also take extreme stances on them. One model focuses on the victim status, and the other makes it seem that because of such resistance these power structures are not working in the real world. This is just not the case, and as writer and researcher Nicole

¹⁹ Nicole Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong: Stories of Filipina Workers* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), ch.1.

Constable believes, this model “romanticizes resistance.”²⁰ Constable herself, while studying Filipina domestic workers in Hong Kong, developed her own model in order to study their relationship and power structure with their Chinese employers. In Constable’s model, she focuses on a variety of different sources of domination that occur in the lives of the Filipina domestic workers. Domination from the employers, employment agencies, the state and government, as well as self-inflicting domination by the domestic workers themselves are all analyzed by Constable in order to get a complete view of the oppressor/oppressed relationship. Also, Constable focuses on many types of resistance utilized by the workers. Rather than just giving attention to obvious resistance, she also looks a great deal at methods of accommodation, acquiescence, and workers participation in their own oppression.²¹ This model that Constable has developed, along with her idea that stating women are oppressed as a group is wrong, relates the situation of women in Bombay.

When talking about the women of Bombay and their “power” when it comes to the control and knowledge of food and ritual, care must be taken not to suggest that power relationships that already exist in India are completely reversed. What one can and should do is look at how the power relationships are both constructed and deconstructed on individual basis. While food and domestic religious practices are just two areas where these power relationships are deconstructed, they give some insight into the overall picture of authority in this modern area of India.

There are many different ways to resist oppression. Collective and discursive resistances are two ways to defy oppressors. Besides these two forms, there are also

²⁰ Ibid., 178-179.

²¹ Ibid., Ch. 1.

things that Indian women can do daily in the home to counteract any repression from others around them. Food, as I have already stated, is a powerful mechanism for religion. Indian women have the majority of control over the food in almost every Indian family in Bombay. The women are the ones who decide what is going to be cooked daily and what times the meals will be prepared and eaten. They also make the decisions as to what food items are going to be purchased, often sending off their husband or children to the market to do the buying. The large amount of control that the women exhibit over the area of food also gives them a handle over other areas of their lives that do not have anything to do with food or eating. For example, some women informed me that if they were angry with their husbands, instead of arguing with them (which is usually unacceptable) the women would cook something for dinner that their husbands did not like. Some women would purposely make foods spicier or milder, doing the opposite of what their husband enjoys.

There was one extreme incident which I encountered during my stay in India where a woman was angry at her husband for forgetting to bring home a certain item she was in need of from the doctor. She had called her husband before he returned from work that day to make sure he had remembered the item. However, her husband was already on the train on his way home when she called, and he did not have what she needed. I watched this woman seemingly without anger or showing any emotion, take the meal that was prepared for dinner that evening and give it to a neighbor, telling them she had made too much food for that night. Yet, she gave away the entire meal. When her husband came home, she informed him that she was unable to cook that night because she was having stomach aches all day. Nothing was said about the item that was

forgotten, no emotions were expressed from either party. The husband did not get angry at his wife for not having dinner prepared because she was sick, yet, he knew that he was being punished for his forgetfulness. In this case, the woman was able to show her anger through non-combatant forms of punishment towards her husband.

Emotions were also exhibited through food during times of happiness. A woman might make a special desert for her children or husband if they did something good for her. Food, therefore, is used by a woman as both reward and punishment for the deeds of the rest of her family.

The rituals that women perform not only bring the Hindu tradition into the home, thus making it more intimate as it is closer to the family, but they also help keep the tradition alive in an area where people's time is limited. The different types of *pujas* that are performed, though conducted by the women, are beneficial to the entire family. Women take the role as the religious leaders during these rituals, as they carry on the Hindu tradition through their knowledge and understanding of the workings of the rituals, as well as the ways in which food items are cooked, utilized, and offered. While women do have a great deal of responsibility in regards to their religious duties, these are honorable responsibilities. The women are the ones who are constantly looked to by the rest of the family for instruction and advice on religious matters, especially those concerning food and ritual in the home. In this sense, the knowledge that the women hold gives them a power over the religious tradition as well as the home.

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Chapter 3

The Dying Tradition of the Fast

The Indian culture has been preserved and handed over to progenies through oral preachings. The main aim and objective of this practice was to inculcate in people eternal values like chastity, truthfulness, donation to the needy, helping and serving the elders, good family relations, respect for women, kindness towards all creatures-big or small, preserving nature and natural objects, accepting the nature's gifts as boons, fair dealing with all, devotion or bhakti, shedding hatred, pride, jealousy, anger, etc. This was attained through observing fasts and leading a disciplined life and controlling diet and food habits.¹

As described by Kaushik, fasting is not only used to show devotion, it is a method in order to accept and act in the manner ascribed by the Hindu tradition. A background of the tradition of fasting, the ways in which ordinary Hindu practitioners fast, why they do so, and how fasting has changed in modern society are analyzed in this chapter.

Fasts, or vratas, are common vows taken up by Hindu ascetics and yogis. There are five vrata categories: vara, fasts on weekdays; tithivratas, fasts on certain days of the lunar months; masavratas, fasts that occur within certain months; and samvataras, fasts that could extend an entire year.² The duration of the fast may differ from person to person, however the goals are the same—liberation and the gaining of yogic powers.³

¹ J.N. Kaushik, *Fasts of the Hindus Around the Week* (Delhi: Books for All, 1992), 3.

² K.T. Achaya, *Indian Food: A Historical Companion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 68-69.

³ Ramdas Lamb, "Monastic Vows And The Ramananda Sampraday," 5.

Vratas usually have fluctuating degrees of restrictiveness, but usually do not entail a complete absence of food.⁴ The various types of food restrictions, such as abstaining from all solid foods or a particular type of food, or consuming only one type of food, are all forms of vratas. Acknowledged categories of dietary restriction include anahar, or grain consumption, phalahari, one who eats fruit, dudhahar, consumption of milk or milk products, and nirahar, strictly water intake.⁵ A phalahari, as an example, will limit his/her digestion to fruit, but may also eat nuts, milk products, most vegetables, and some settled-on grain-like seeds, such as buckwheat.⁶ There are more restrictions placed on what foods are acceptable to take in the body as one goes from anahar to nirahar, and therefore, each level takes greater control and the increasing ability to transcend desire.

Hindu yogis classify food into three categories based on their qualities: sattwik, rajastic, and tamasic. A sattwik diet is purely vegetarian, and it includes purity in all forms: body, mind, and conduct.⁷ Yogis follow this diet. Inner silence is perfected only when a sattvik state is achieved.⁸ Rajastic foods are often bitter, sour, salty, pungent, dry, and burning.⁹ A diet that consists of these types of foods is said to highly stimulate the body and the mind. These foods are unsuitable for a yogi or ascetic whose chief aim is to control the senses and the mind. They are also said to cause restlessness, and, in many cases, are seen as stimulants of sexual desires.

⁴ K.T. Achaya, 70.

⁵ Ramdas Lamb, 15-16.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Swami Satyananda Sarawati, Taming the Kundalini (Bombay: Tata Press Limited, 1982), 15.

⁸ Ibid., 48.

⁹ K.T. Achaya, 77.

The tama diet, or one of meat is to be avoided, for yogis and ascetics typically follow a vegetarian diet. Sattwic foods are, in essence, pure foods and reflect the state the yogi needs to achieve. Some foods, although vegetarian, such as onions, garlic, and root vegetables, as well as mushrooms and eggplant for their meat-like consistencies, are not considered sattwic. Yogis must avoid them for this quality, even though these foods remain a part of the normal Hindu vegetarian diet.¹⁰ As a rule, there is said to be a direct relationship seen between the taste or texture of a substance and the action it produces.

Yogis follow a system comparable to the heat and cold producing food and drink in the Ayurvedic system. The production of too much heat or coldness will affect the movements of the physical body, which in turn disturb the Kundalini Shakti.¹¹ If a yogi were to eat an abundance of cold-producing foods, the body's movements would become dull. This droning occurs for, as the Shakti becomes dull from the cold, it relays this dullness to the mind. In this state, the mind ultimately alters the actions of the body, and drowsiness takes over. If too much heat is absorbed through the food consumed, the Shakti becomes heated, and it activates the mind, causing restlessness, irritation, and desires.¹² Hence, diet affects the very nature of yogic activity, and, for this reason, a balance is often sought to maintain a conscious, clear mind and a neutral body.

“There is no prayer without fasting,” was a statement made by Mohandas K. Gandhi in his book, *Food For the Soul*, thus verifying the importance of “subduing the flesh” for the growth of the soul.¹³ Gandhi became an expert of fasts, as he himself used them for both health and political purposes on numerous occasions during his life. When

¹⁰ Ramdas Lamb, 16.

¹¹ Swami Narayanananda, The Primal Power in Man or The Kundalini Shakti (Rishikesh: Messrs. N. K. Prasad and Company, 1950), 91.

¹² Ibid., 92.

¹³ M.K. Gandhi, Food For the Soul (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1962), 94-95.

asked to keep a log during his fasts, Gandhi wrote the effects fasting had on his body, as well as his ideas relating fasting to the mind and soul. Gandhi believed that during a fast the body gains an increased vitality, as the body is ridding itself of impurities. His writings relate how fasting should be done if one is constipated, anemic, feverish, plagued with indigestion or headaches, depressed, or even over-joyed,¹⁴ showing that both medical issues and emotions can be controlled through what is or is not consumed. Gandhi relates that the restriction of diet is also useful to attain moral effects, such as bodily co-operation with the mind,¹⁵ and concludes that the best diet to partake in, which is also the “natural diet of man,” is that of fresh fruits and nuts.¹⁶ It is not a coincidence that this is the diet frequently used in the monastic traditions.

Fasting, in the forms taken on by yogis and ascetics, is also commonly taken on by everyday people. The women in Bombay with whom I spoke were very much dedicated to fasting on different occasions. Thirty of the fifty women surveyed participated in some form of fasting. There were also six women who used to fast, but were forced to discontinue for health reasons. Concerns for health, imported from other countries, such as America, have had a significant impact on the Indians in Bombay and have led to many women stopping Hindu practices. One of these practices was fasting, for it caused many women discomfort and doctors decided that it may be dangerous for some women. The health consciousness has the most affect on women in their fifties and sixties. The majority of the women who never or rarely fasted were in their early to mid-twenties. Logical reasons for this have to do with the influences of urbanization on the younger generations. These younger women have strayed away from the traditions with

¹⁴ M.K. Gandhi, The Health Guide (Trumansburg: The Crossing Press, 1965), 125.

¹⁵ Ibid., 127.

¹⁶ Ibid., 134.

the coming of modernization, or, because they are not married, they are not required to fast for their husbands.

The fact that more people are stopping their tradition of fasting, for whatever reasons they give, shows the decline in the importance of this ritual related to food. There are many factors that could be playing into the abating of the practice. One theory which has been played into already is that influences from other nations that have helped modernize India have made fasting seem as a practice that is more harmful than helpful. The most common excuse for not fasting or stopping the practice of fasting was that they were experiencing pain or discomfort and their doctors told them to stop. I often asked these women what types of discomfort they were talking about, and if it was related to a more serious illness. Most of the women spoke of stomach upset or faintness, which are common reactions when one cuts food out completely. However, there are many different types of fasts, and taking absolutely nothing is very rarely done, especially among common practitioners of Hinduism. Ascetics are more likely to perform rigorous fasts which exclude all foods and liquids. The fasts that are most commonly executed by the women in Bombay are actually healthy for one's body, such as fruit and liquid fasts, which include fresh juices and lots of water. There is obviously something else going on with these Bombay women.

Seemingly, the outside influences have given them other options to their usual Hindu practices and customs. Popular food culture in Bombay may also have something to do with the decline in fasting among the younger generations. As fast food chains from the United States have pushed their way into India, more and more options have become available to Indians. Bombay has everything from McDonalds to Pizza Hut and

Dominos to high end coffee houses. These eateries have made it easy for youngsters to walk out of their homes where their mothers are fasting to get a bite to eat. Temptation is also strong, as commercials and media advertisements focus on fast food and snacks.

Many of the younger generation Hindus whom I spoke with in Bombay informed me that they still practiced Hinduism and considered themselves Hindu, however, they do not follow all of the practices as do the elder members of their family. The belief that one can pick and choose the practices related to the religion that they wish to follow, while excluding other practices, is a trait that is common among these younger generations. While this may have something to do with the outside influences that have entered into India over the years, it also has a lot to do with modernization in general. Technology, capitalism, and other advances that have become central to the Bombay economy have their influence on other areas of life. These areas noticeably differ from the agricultural and traditional Hindu society that predominates throughout India. Bombay is not typical India, and those who grow up in this urban setting differ in culture, dress, and thinking than many of their other Hindu counterparts. These differences can also be seen in the ways religion is practiced. Among these differences is the choosing of certain religious practices over others in order to maintain some religious culture and tradition.

Of the different types of fasts practiced by ascetics, the women I interviewed in Bombay fasted in the following different ways: nothing at all; water only; fruits only; liquids only; vegetarian foods only; or one meal in the day of the fast. The most popular type of fast performed by the women was one meal a day, while the fruit only, or phalahari, fast was the second most widely practiced. While the fasting done by the

Bombay women is much more subdued to that of ascetics or monks, it is still adhered to in a similar manner.

In compliance with the fasting done in Bombay, certain days were observed in which meat and meat products were not allowed. For example, Mondays were reserved for Shiva worship, Tuesdays for Ganesh, Thursdays for Sai Baba, Friday for the feminine form of the Divine, and Saturday for Hanuman. Wednesdays and Sundays were days in which it was okay for a family to eat meat if her family was not vegetarian. Not all families observe all of the days by eating only vegetarian foods. Depending on what deities are more important for their household, different days are observed for eating vegetarian foods. If these days are set aside, the entire family will eat only vegetarian foods. However, there were many cases where family members would not want to observe certain days, and it was the women of the household who would stick to the vegetarian routine on the behalf of the Divinities and the rest of the family. In these instances, a woman might cook meat for her family, while eating a vegetarian meal herself, or the family would order outside food.

The women in Bombay did not stick to only one type of fast for all occasions. Most women would utilize different fasts or combine fasts for reasons of variation or comfort. An example of this is how some women would say they fasted by taking only fruits, but on some days while fasting they would take fruits and one meal in the evening. The meal would be eaten if there was too much discomfort during the day, or if they felt weak due to the lack of food in their system. A stress on health concerns and feeling comfortable is, thus, of great importance to these Bombay women.

Women who had a weekly schedule of fasting, such as on Monday for Shiva, would then fast again on specific religious holy days. When fasting for a special day, the women would take their weekly fast one step beyond that of their routine fast. This meant that if every Monday they would fast by consuming only liquids, then on a holy day or special fasting day the women would cut out liquids and take in nothing for the day. If on a weekly fast day a woman would eat one meal, then on a special fasting day she might take only fruits throughout the day. The fast being taken on a step further demonstrates the extraordinariness of that particular day.

Different castes fast for different occasions or deities. Of the women surveyed, the majority of women from the Sindhi caste fasted weekly on Tuesdays for Ganesh. Gujuratis fasted on Fridays for the feminine form of the Divine. South Indians fasted on a variety of different days weekly, and Marathis and those from Uttar Pradesh on Mondays for Shiva. As each different region in India stresses importance on a particular deity, each caste of Hindus who are from a particular region concentrate their worship on that form of the Divine from their homeland. However, Sindhis, originally coming from the region Sindh, which is currently within Pakistan, have had both Islamic and Hindu influences. Initially, Sindhis were mostly Sikhs and worshipped in Gurudwaras. However, after the partition of India and Pakistan, and the displacement of many Sindhis from their homeland, Sindhis have adopted different Hindu practices. For this reason, in Bombay, the majority of Sindhis fast on the behalf of Ganesh, as he is the most popular deity in the Maharastra region. Gujuratis, on the other hand, mainly worship all forms of the feminine form of the Divine. Therefore, most Gujuratis will make sure they fast on Fridays if any day at all.

While most castes of Hindus fast for the similar reasons on special fasting days, each group has a different name for the day. A type of fast that most married women are expected to take part in is for the health, wealth, and overall well-being of their husband. All of the Hindus have a fast that is for this purpose, however, they each call it by a different name. Teeja is the Punjabi name for the fast for a husband, while others call this Karvachauth or Sandhi, as the Sindhis name this particular day.

The younger generations, and even older Hindu practitioners, who have given up aspects of the tradition that define “order” for it have not necessarily lost all respect for the religious culture. There are many different areas of Hinduism in which those who choose not to fast, for whatever reason, can delve into in order to maintain their religious practices. Many of the younger generation Bombay Hindus have found ways to make up, so to speak, for the aspects of Hinduism that they have decided not to take part in. These younger generations, who have more time to get away from the city take advantage of this in ways that show their devotion to Hinduism. Eight hour journeys to Shiirdi in order to visit the Sai Baba temple, or even a full day journey to the Golden Temple in Amritsar are common for the younger generation. The idea of the pilgrimage has been kept alive by these younger generations in Bombay as a means for religious salvation and awakening. In this way, they are able to reconnect with their religious culture, even while giving up other aspects that are viewed as more important in traditional Hinduism. The pilgrimage and long journeys for a religious purpose also show that these youngsters are religiously motivated, and have order in their lives. Giving up a great deal of time in order to show devotion to their religion and the Divine gives these devotees a rare experience and connection to the tradition. The pilgrimage is an experience that the

older, working generations are no longer capable of experiencing due to the busy schedules and lack of time. Also, when questioned about future fasting, these individuals who did not begin fasting while still young stated they will most likely not take up the ritual of fasting when they get older either. Subsequently, while some retain the order that comes with fasting, others take on different aspects of Hinduism that give them a different connection with the tradition.

Yet, the pilgrimage that these younger generations take is much different from the original concept of the pilgrimage. Pilgrimages, much like fasting, were done alone and caused physical pain due to walking long distances to arrive at the holy place. The pilgrimages that are taken today by the youngsters in Bombay are fun group activities, and, therefore, do not allow for the same spiritual experience that arrives when strain is placed on the body.

Chapter 4

Nutrition and Medicine in the Modern Hindu World

Nutrition

The main part of the typical Indian meal is rarely the meat or vegetable. Accompaniments, such as breads or rice, chutneys, pickles, yoghurt, and dal are, for the most part, served along with the entrée. Each portion of the meal has its distinct role: the yoghurt cools the palate when consuming spicy foods; the breads or rice often act as the utensils and sop up the juices or liquids that usually accompany the masala dish; pickles add extra flavor to certain foods; chutneys act as sauces for drier foods; and dals are necessary for protein (especially for vegetarians) and as a liquid base for vegetables or meats cooked in a dry fashion. Diets appear to be balanced when using the United States Department of Agriculture Food Guide Pyramid as a guide, there is little doubt that the average Hindu gets his or her full serving of vegetables and dairy products in his or her daily diets.¹ The use of milk products, whether in tea or desserts, as well as the yogurt eaten with almost every meal, typically gives the average Indian five servings of dairy per day. However, there are other things to consider when looking at nutrition. One of these things is how the foods are cooked.

In general, Indians cook with a large amount of oil, the most common type currently used in Bombay is sunflower oil. The practice of cooking foods in oil, and especially frying one's food, goes back to making things pure when cooking for the Divinities. While oil has typically replaced the use of ghee in cooking, leaning to a healthier alternative, deep frying and using oil for just about every dish prepared is not

¹ <http://www.mypyramid.gov/downloads/miniposter.pdf>. June 27, 2005.

the healthiest for one's body. A diet that consists of a great deal of fried, and thus fatty, foods increases one's risk for high blood cholesterol and heart disease.² The typical snack foods consumed by Indian men, women, and children are also fried. Therefore, generally speaking, the typical Indian consumes a large amount of fattening agents in his or her daily diet.

The Hindu tradition's emphasis on making foods pure for the deities by frying them or using ghee, or clarified butter, has fostered unhealthy eating patterns. Ghee traces its roots of being associated with purity back to the Aryan civilization in India and the Vedas³ (roughly 1700-1500 B.C.).⁴ Many of the Hindu food practices that exist to this day can be traced back to the Aryans, as they had much influence over the tradition. These food traditions, while beginning in the Northern areas of India, eventually spread throughout the country.⁵ To the Aryans, food was not merely something to sustain the body; food was a part of the cosmic circle. Harmony had to exist between the "food that man eats and his universe."⁶ With this said, to the Aryans, food gave way to three products: things which needed to be expelled; things that were absorbed into the body; and things that were transformed into the functions of the mind.⁷ Prasad falls under this last type of product, which supposedly leaves no sign of being consumed and maintains one's spirituality.

² Bobby Hasselbring, How Do Fried Foods Effect My Risk?, http://www.health.discovery.com/centers/articles/articles.html?chrome=c14&article=LC_25¢er=p05, July 2001.

³ The Vedas are ancient and historical texts that set a good part of the structure for what is known as the Hindu culture. The civilization of the Aryans (nomadic tribes from the areas North of India) is recorded in the Vedas.

⁴ Wendy Hutton, ed., *The Food of India: Authentic Recipes from the Spicy Subcontinent* (Boston: Periplus Editions Ltd., 2000), 13.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

The eating of certain types of foods is not only encouraged, but it is emphasized as the best for the Divine. It was obvious that all of the women most commonly prepared something fried or something sweet when cooking specifically for a *puja* or for a festival. Often, sweet dishes that were prepared were also fried, as is the case for many sweet wheat or white flour-based dishes.

On festival days and other special holy days when these sweet or fried dishes are prepared, it is necessary to eat them. When foods are prepared and offered to the deities, and subsequently become divine offerings, it is necessary not to waste these foods. Consuming them is essential to gain the blessings and favors of the Divinities, and eating these foods that are blessed allows for this to occur. Dieting or eating healthy, while being a part of many of the Bombay women's lifestyle, often stops when festivals or *pujas* roll around, as within the Hindu tradition, eating these types of foods is an essential element.

Apparent is the number of people in Bombay who have diabetes but continue to eat sweets frequently. More commonly observed were men going against orders from doctors to stay away from sugars. The wives of these men would often have at least some control over the diets of their husbands. However, when a festival season arrived where sweets were often made for religious purposes, the wives would encourage the men to eat them. Dietary restrictions are discarded in exchange for benefits and loyalty to the religious tradition.

Similarly, men or women with high cholesterol, who were supposed to stay away from greasy or fried foods, would do so, until a festival or holiday arrived. Medical advice and everyday dietary restrictions are hardly observed if this means one's religious

tradition is put in jeopardy. The irony of this is that, while most of the Hindus are praying for a long life, good health, and happiness, the eating of these foods when there are health problems present deteriorates one's health further, actually pushing one in the opposite direction of what is asked of the Divinities.

In accordance with the survey on domestic religious practices, I asked women questions regarding nutrition and eating patterns (Appendix 1). From this survey I was able to get an idea of the types of meals, snacks, and desserts the Bombay women whom I questioned were eating—this also was in order to gain some perspective of what the majority of middle-class women in this area consume on a regular basis. The majority of the women surveyed admitted to taking snacks at least once a day. Many times, this snack was taken with tea in the afternoon. Tea was also something that was consumed more regularly by most of the women. Tea was drunk in the morning upon waking or with breakfast and in the afternoon. Some women would even have a third cup of tea in the evening, while others would consume four or five cups of tea a day. However, on average, tea was consumed two times per day.

None of the women interviewed answered yes to drinking alcoholic beverages regularly or at all. Both the young and older women stated that they do not consume alcohol. There are two possible reasons for why this response was given by all the women: one could be that it is not completely suitable, even in modern Bombay, for women to drink; the other is that Indian women really do not drink. From what I observed while I was there, very few of the older generation women drink, but their husbands often do. While I did observe younger generation Indian women consuming alcoholic beverages at times, this was not acceptable to be discussed, especially among

elders or outsiders. My being an outsider coming into the homes and lives of these women allowed me to view the best behavior of many of the Indian women and of the men, for that matter.

Many of the answers to the questions can be viewed as invalid in this respect, for if women were informing me of what they thought to be appropriate answers, rather than honest ones it no longer gives me legitimate conclusions on the eating patterns and health of the Indian women.

Ayurveda

Ayurveda is the healing science of India and is the oldest continually practiced medical system in the world. Having its roots in the sub-continent over 5,000 years ago, it is believed to be the parent of most medical systems, including Oriental, Greek, and even Western medicine.⁸ Consequently, Ayurvedic medicine is often referred to as the “Mother of All Healing.” Many have come to view Ayurvedic medicine as “the science of life,”⁹ and the Samhitas, known as the totality of natural law according to Vedic literature, contains much of its medical knowledge.¹⁰ Ayurvedic medicine is not a new concept, as herbs have been used for medical purposes from the antiquity period. The Chinese, Sumerians, and Egyptians have all utilized plants for their healing properties,

⁸ Linda and Scott Treadway, Ph.D., Ayurveda & Immortality (Berkeley: Celestial Arts, 1986), 4.

⁹ Dr. Vasant Lad, “Ayurveda: A Brief Introduction and Guide” (Albuquerque: The Ayurvedic Institute, 2003), 1.

¹⁰ Linda and Scott Treadway, xiii.

and the Chinese have a book on herbs that is dated around 2700 B.C., and it lists over 300 plants with their medicinal uses.¹¹

Ayurveda is currently practiced by physicians not only in India, but in other areas of the world as well. Indian doctors have brought their knowledge of Ayurveda to America, using the ancient medical theories to help with problems, such as obesity, through rigorous dietary restrictions. Similarly, these types of restrictions were often practiced by ascetics with spiritual goals. These goals were often realized through strict rules and regulations governing ascetic lifestyle, with emphasis frequently placed on foods that either were or were not suitable to eat. Consumption of certain foods and restriction of others became a central practice of monks wishing to gain spiritual liberation or elevation. The adherence to particular dietary practices has carried over throughout the years in the monastic orders. Various rituals of consumption have gained popularity in the modern world. Consequentially, an understanding of the unique role food had in ancient medical and monastic practices alike is necessary to comprehend the importance of diet for the body's physical and spiritual well-being.

There are two primary Ayurvedic texts traditionally considered authoritative by the system's adherents: the *Charaka Samhita*, a vedic treatise on general medicine, and the *Sushruta Samhita*, a vedic treatise on surgery and toxicology.¹² These two appear to be the only complete sources that remain of an original six Ayurvedic Samhitas known to have existed. The *Charaka Samhita* is of greater concern for the lay person, as it deals with the functions of the human body and the art of healing it through everyday action.

¹¹ Jehthro Kloss, *Back to Eden, Second Edition*, Twin Lakes: Lotus Press, 2002, 54.

¹² *Ibid.*, xiv.

The *Charaka Samhita* tells of an assembly of sages gathered in the Himalayas at the end of the Vedic Period to discuss diseases affecting the population and interfering with religious rituals, observances, and obligations.¹³ Of the sages, Bhardwaja, the God most often identified with medicine and knowledge of cures, is assigned to go to Indra to gain knowledge in the ways of medicine for the achievement of a disease-free state.¹⁴ Indra receives medical knowledge from the heavenly physicians, or Ashwins, who had their teachings from Brahma, the Lord of Creation.¹⁵ When Bhardwaja masters his studies, he shares his knowledge with the other sages and the world. One of the sages then compiles the *Agnivesha Samhita*, which becomes the authoritative text of Ayurveda. Although this text is no longer available, it was recompiled in the *Charaka Samhita*, which is today considered the most authentic text of the ancient system.¹⁶

The *Charaka Samhita* includes the chemistry of rejuvenation and the science of increasing virility. While the date is uncertain, scholars have generally placed the compilation of the *Charaka Samhita* in the first and second century C.E.¹⁷ The text's opening lines assert its view of the relationship between the physical and the spiritual aspects of life. They state, "the root of liberation is a healthy body,"¹⁸ though there have been other interpretations that translate the lines as "a body free from disease is essential to the realization of life's tasks, including the spiritual."¹⁹ Both translations mutually illustrate the connectedness between diet and attaining spiritual goals.

¹³ Prakash N. Desai, *Health and Medicine in the Hindu Tradition* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1989), 74.

¹⁴ Ibid., 75.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ http://www.wrc.net/phyto/AyurL1_0.html

¹⁷ Prakash N. Desai, 76.

¹⁸ Ramdas Lamb, 4 March 2004.

¹⁹ Ibid., 75.

The principle theory of Ayurveda, known as tridosha, embraces the belief that every aspect of creation is made from five basic elements: earth, air, fire, water, and space.²⁰ These fundamental elements, or bhutas, naturally combine into three governing factors known as vata, pitta, and kapha. These governing agents are seen as energy types said to be present in everyone and everything and are called dhatus.²¹ Vata, the energy of movement forms with the combination of air and space; pitta, the energy of digestion comes into being with the chemical fire of the digestive juices, thus the elements water and fire; and kapha, the energy of lubrication and structure, combines earth and water.²² While all three types of energy are present in every living thing, some have an abundance of one, with the other types lacking. Kapha is often linked with courage and valour, but in practice it is often expressed as indifferent, ignorant, or having mechanical-like responses.²³ Pitta is often expressed by intelligence and sobriety, as well as pleasure, which can be achieved through knowledge.²⁴ Vata is seen to be visible in enthusiasm, energy, and any excited action.²⁵ The dhatus themselves reflect personality characteristics that are apparent in human beings. Yet, these characteristics are also within foods, and according to the Ayurvedic tradition, they engender themselves when ingested.²⁶ Ayurveda states that when vata, pitta, and kapha, are balanced, there is health.²⁷ Conversely, diseases originate from an imbalance of the three.

Ayurvedic medicine blames poor nutrition as one of the primary causes of disease and health problems. Thus, the proper use of food and spices is seen as intrinsic to the

²⁰ Linda and Scott Treadway, Ph.D., 19.

²¹ K.T. Achaya, *Indian Food: A Historical Companion* (Oxford University Press, 1994), 77.

²² Linda and Scott Treadway, Ph.D., 19.

²³ K.T. Achaya, 77.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Prakash N. Desai, 49.

Ayurvedic approach to healing and health. Ayurvedic knowledge—correct use of food stuffs, spices, and herbs with a positive mental attitude—can bring about a balance of mind, body, and consciousness.²⁸

For those who practice and study Ayurvedic medicine, the combinations of foods put into the body make up one of the most basic concepts presented in the tradition. Proper food consumption is the key to keeping one's vata, pitta, and kapha in balance. The Ayurvedic rules of balanced eating are a great deal more complicated than the modern conception of a balanced diet. Eating healthy takes on a whole new meaning in the tradition: what foods and spices one is supposed to consume are based on one's individual physical condition and makeup. For example, one who has an excess of kapha must eat different foods than one who lacks kapha. Thus, proper food consumption must be understood and practiced for health to be obtained or maintained, and illness to be prevented. It is in this very basic idea of stopping the illness before it develops that appears to be neglected in modern medical practices.

In accordance with the understanding of the role of diet in maintaining good health, Indian doctors almost always offer proper dietary advice to their patients in conjunction with any medicine prescribed.²⁹ Another interesting aspect of Indian medicine is the practice of combining pills with compatible fluids. Just about every pill given to a patient is prescribed to be swallowed with a certain liquid, such as water, milk, or honey. According to Prakash N. Desai, a doctor who has dealt with medical ethics, the

²⁸ Dr. Vasant Lad, 1.

²⁹ Prakash N. Desai, 75.

compounding of mixtures appears to be a necessary skill of practitioners in India, for medicine in the liquid form seems to be more acceptable to most Indian patients.³⁰

In determining the correct diet for a patient, the Ayurvedic physician will use the tridosha theory, which allows them to determine the patient's individual body type and constitution. Ayurvedic physicians have extensive questionnaires and charts that are meant to establish whether the person is essentially of kapha, pitta, or vata type. Once one's type is ascertained, the physician is able to give the patient a list of vegetables, spices, fruits, grains, legumes, dairy products, meats, condiments, nuts, seeds, oils, beverages, sweeteners, and supplements that should either be favored or avoided.³¹

Along with a list of foods that should be eaten or avoided according to one's kapha, pitta, or vata type, there are more general food rules that one should follow to aid digestion. Dr. Vasant Lad of the Ayurvedic Institute in Albuquerque, New Mexico, recommends eating a ½ teaspoon of freshly grated ginger with a pinch of rock salt before each meal to stimulate agni, or digestive fire, or taking small sips of warm water during the meal to aid in digestion and to help absorb the food.³² Dr. Vasant Lad also gives a list of incompatible food combinations to avoid. The list recommends that beans not be eaten with fruit, cheese, eggs, fish, milk, meat, or yogurt; grains should not be mixed with fruit or tapioca; hot beverages should not be combined with mangoes, cheese, fish, meat, starch, or yogurt; and if taking milk, such things as bananas, cherries, melons, sour fruits, breads containing yeast, fish, meat, yogurt, and kichardi should be avoided.³³ There appears, however, to be no current peer-reviewed nutritional or medical research to

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Dr. Vasant Lad, "Food Guidelines for Basic Constitutional Types" (The Ayurvedic Institute, 2002), 1-6.

³² Usha & Dr. Vasant Lad, "Food Combining," Ayurvedic Cooking for Self-Healing. (The Ayurvedic Institute, Albuquerque, 1997), 2.

³³ Ibid.

support the benefits of these food combinations. Other suggestions to aid digestion that appear to be more commonly known, such as chewing food properly and drinking a beverage at the end of the meal in order to wash it down.

More in conjunction with the traditional Ayurveda system are the medicinal effects of certain spices on particular diseases, ailments, cuts, and burns. Tumeric, or haldi, for example, is said to subside kapha and vata because it is hot and pitta because of its bitter taste. Tumeric is widely believed to have positive effects on one's complexion, and has purifying qualities.³⁴ There are other medical claims for tumeric including remedying jaundice, helping with the treatment of asthma and eczema and athlete's foot, and it has recently been confirmed to restore the function of the liver.³⁵ Tumeric has also come to be known as an anti-inflammatory, and recently it has been tested to work better than the modern drug hydrocortisone.³⁶ Dr. Vora also recommends tumeric for cuts or burns, as it is an antiseptic and will heal them most sufficiently. It is also used for more serious ailments, such as tonsillitis, as a paste which should be concocted from the tumeric powder and glycerine tanic acid. This solution is then massaged onto the tonsils with the finger tip, followed by the gargling of lukewarm salt water for two to three days.³⁷ Other Ayurvedic uses of tumeric include helping "faster contraction of the ovaries and inner parts" if it is given to the mother after delivery with milk, taking it with mango powder for helping with diabetes, and using the powder in a face mask for radiant

³⁴ Dr. Chandrashedkar G. Thakkur, *Ayurveda: The Indian Art & Science of Medicine* (New York: ASI Publishers Inc., 1974), 74.

³⁵ Frena Gray-Davidson, *Ayurvedic Healing* (New York: Keats Publishing, 2002), 69.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Dr. Devendra Vora, *Health in Your Hands* (Ahmadabad: Navneet Publications, 2001), 122.

skin.³⁸ Medical research has substantiated some of the claims that turmeric has great healing properties. Animal studies and research conducted by Linda B. White, M.D. and Steven Foster, herbalist, have shown turmeric to be useful for the treatment of arthritis because it inhibits the production of prostaglandins. The anti-inflammatory property of turmeric allows for it to relieve pain when taken in food or topically applied to the joint as a poultice.³⁹ With turmeric as an example, one is able to discern the various uses of spices in Ayurvedic medicine. And, with spices being both available and relatively inexpensive, it is a wonder why Ayurvedic medicine has not gained as much or more of a following as modern medicine in recent years. Medical research, such as that conducted at the National Institute of Nutrition in India, has found that turmeric contains compounds that may aid in preventing cancer. This research has proved hopeful, so much so that India's National Cancer Institute proposed a public educational campaign in order to promote the use of turmeric.⁴⁰

While Ayurveda is still widely practiced as a medical art today in India, modern Westernized medicine has come to replace many of the traditional medical practices. Similarly, restrictive dietary practices were, and still are, common among Hindu, Buddhist, and Christian monks, ascetics, and yogis alike, and appear to be much like Ayurvedic practices. Although they do not follow a particular diet because of concerns for health, they do see diet as beneficial to the well-being of the body in other ways.

³⁸ Ibid., 123. The book does not state how turmeric combined with milk works to make contraction of the ovaries quicken or why this would be helpful. Other sources were also not given to supplement the medical information provided in this book. The information is strictly related to Ayurvedic principles and is a part of the Ayurvedic tradition.

³⁹ Linda B. White, M.D. and Steven Foster, *The Herbal Drugstore*, Rodale, Inc., 2001, 99.

⁴⁰ Selene Yeager and the Editors of Prevention Health Books, *The Doctors Book of Food Remedies*, Rodale, Inc., 1998, 496-497.

Yogis follow a system comparable to the heat and cold producing food and drink in the Ayurvedic system. The production of too much heat or coldness will affect the movements of the physical body, which in turn disturb the *Kundalini Shakti*.⁴¹ If a yogi were to eat an abundance of cold-producing foods, the body's movements would become dull. This droning occurs for, as the shakti becomes dull from the cold, it relays this dullness to the mind. In this state, the mind ultimately alters the actions of the body, and drowsiness takes over. If too much heat is absorbed through the food consumed, the shakti becomes heated, and it activates the mind, causing restlessness, irritation, and desires.⁴² Hence, diet affects the very nature of yogic activity, and, for this reason, a balance is often sought to maintain a conscious, clear mind and a neutral body.

In the medical tradition, diet is employed for the promotion of good health, which is believed to strengthen both the body and the soul. Similarly in the monastic traditions, the consumption or restriction of food items is understood as an important means for spiritual growth and the ultimate liberation of the soul. These beliefs and practices, which continue up to present day, can also be seen, albeit subtly, in contemporary Indian culinary practices. Thus, Indian cooking provides a constant medium through which Indians living outside of their homeland can experience aspects of their religious and cultural traditions in whichever geographical environment they happen to live.

The Indian home is an area that has maintained the ancient Ayurvedic and monastic dietary traditions in a very contemporary form. The cooks, in most cases the women of the household, regularly prepare the meals for the family with detail and care while following many of the same food rules that are stipulated in the ancient Indian

⁴¹ Swami Narayananda, 91.

⁴² Ibid., 92.

medical tradition. For example, Ayurveda asserts that certain spices create interactions with the properties of particular vegetables, lentils, meats, and fish, and in turn, generate reactions in the body. Indians, therefore, have developed an intricate system of cooking that leaves the eater perfectly balanced. For example, gaseous lentils or vegetables are counteracted by adding asafetida, cinnamon, and cumin.⁴³ Also, some spices are only used with meats with the reasoning that certain spices would overpower more delicate foods, such as vegetables and seafood.⁴⁴ Spices, a key component for cooking in just about every Indian household, and their uses in Indian cooking reflect back on the medical tradition and are not used only for the enhanced flavor they give to the dish.

While living among some of the women of Bombay, I came to understand how important Ayurvedic practices are to the average modernized Indian. While disciplined processes or Ayurveda, as described above, are hardly practiced in the homes of the families, many of the concepts deriving from the Ayurvedic tradition are still in effect. Turmeric, which is known to have healing properties, is often used on the skin's surface to treat acne.⁴⁵ This, mixed with rose extract and milk, is recommended by these women to enhance one's complexion, clear up acne, and smooth out uneven skin tone, while also

⁴³ Wendy Hutton, ed., 16.

⁴⁴ Kong Foong Ling, *The Food of Asia* (Boston: Periplus Editions Ltd., 1998), 45.

⁴⁵ *Turmeric, the new active cosmetic ingredient*, <http://www.cosmeticsdesign.com/news/news-ng.asp?n=56987-turmeric-the-new>, December 22, 2004. Turmeric is said to contain a bio-active compound known as curcuminoids, as well as active compounds called *tetrahydrocurcuminoids* (THC). THC is derived from curcuminoids. "The compound is colourless, unlike the yellow curcuminoids, which would allow it to be used in colour-free products that now employ conventional synthetic antioxidants. As well as skin lightening and antioxidant applications, THC could also be used as a cosmetic remedy for inflammatory skin conditions."

Jethro Kloss, *Back to Eden*, 131-134. Turmeric root has been utilized in ancient herbal medicine for open sores, inflammation, exzema, ringworm, erysipelas, or any other skin disease.

softening the surface. Other natural skin regimens include lemon juice and honey as a face mask in order to clear up acne while giving one an evened-out complexion.

As far as consumption is concerned, women and men alike follow many rules that relate back to Ayurveda. Janki Kripalani would constantly be reprimanding me for eating certain things after drinking milk. Anything that was citric was absolutely not to be eaten after taking in milk or milk products. If a food item was cooked in milk, then citrus items were also to be avoided. This was due to the notion that when milk and citrus are combined they naturally curdle, and thus, the same process occurs in one's stomach. Therefore, if I wanted to eat a piece of orange after drinking tea with milk in it, I would first have to wait at least an hour before doing so. I was often told by many of the Bombay women that if I did not wait long enough before mixing the dairy and citrus, I might develop white blotches all over my body. Similarly, if nimboo, or lime, is squeezed over one's dinner in order to add bitterness to the food, milk before bed is not allowed.

Many Indians can be seen to have uneven pigmentation of the skin, which is attributed to not watching what one eats. While some people are said to have certain blood types that can handle such combinations, others react negatively to unbalanced food combinations, and therefore, everyone must follow these types of rules in order to avoid a visible reaction. I was told that certain people who do not pay attention to this rule may not develop the pigmentation until age fifty or later. Because one never knows when reactions may occur in one's body as it goes through changes, it is wise for everyone to pay attention to these rules throughout their lives.

Rules concerning hot and cold consumption are widely practiced among the people in Bombay as well. While Ayurveda dictates many such rules in connection to hot and cold eating in relationship to the weather, time of day, and one's body type, I found that the people I spoke with were mostly concerned with the mixing of hot and cold food and beverage items with one another, as well as not taking in cold items, such as cold drinks and ice creams when having a cold virus. Other rules that were stipulated included not drinking water or liquids until the very end of the meal, or eating yogurt while having tea. The yogurt and tea mixture taboo goes back to mixing hot and cold items together and it upsetting the body. I was told that water and other beverages are generally not consumed until after all the eating is completed because the water is used to wash down the palate. Taking it in between bites of food while only fill up the stomach with water, thus causing one to be full faster without eating a proper meal.

While the explanations for the rules given by the Bombay women may not be exactly what were originally stipulated by Ayurvedic literature, they do represent the modern Indian's need to hold onto aspects of this tradition. The efforts made to retain rules and regulations surrounding food also show that the traditions that are not so much religious, but connected to Hinduism in many ways, are still alive and well in urbanized areas where modern medicine appears to have, but has not fully, taken over.

Furthermore, the treatments and guidelines given to me while I was staying in Bombay all came from the women of the household. The women held this valuable knowledge and were able to give me advice on what types of foods would be beneficial to me or what to use to help my skin. Furthermore, it was the women who would also instruct their children and husbands as to what food combinations are good for them to eat, and

what herbs to use for aches and pain, as well as skin problems. This is further evidence that women are the ones who have the knowledge of the tradition in this urbanized setting and pass on the information to future generations, and, in my case, to outsiders as well.

The eating habits of the Indians in Bombay show how both tradition and modernity have influenced the people. While many aspects of the Hindu tradition have made it so unhealthy eating patterns are taking place among these Indians, other traditional systems, such as Ayurveda, have controlled eating in a more positive way. Also, more modern influences from other countries have put pressure on these Indians to try new dieting and exercising methods that are beneficial to one's health. Then again, modern influences, along the lines of fast foods, such as McDonalds, which have made their way into the city of Bombay, are not the healthiest alternatives to traditional Indian cooking when eaten on a regular basis.⁴⁶ These influences from both traditional and modern must be taken into consideration when looking at the overall health of the individual.

The fast foods that are readily available to people in Bombay may be viewed as unhealthy eating alternatives, but the concerns for health and the abundance of western nutritional information may be a balance for this. However, western medicine and nutritional guidelines becomes an issue when speaking of the religious tradition. For, when having to choose between one's health and spirituality, health is quite often disregarded. Janki Kripalani, who has both high cholesterol and high blood pressure, was specifically instructed by her doctor not to eat anything fried. Yet, on holy days where

⁴⁶ G. Jill Davies and Jennifer L. Smith, "Fast Food: dietary perspectives", *Nutrition and Food Science*, Vol. 34, 2, 2004, 80-82.

"Why Fast Food Makes You Fat," BBC News, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/3210750.stm>, October 22, 2003.

prasad was offered, she would always eat these fried foods blessed by the deities.

Myself, knowing of her condition, would scold her for eating foods she knows she is not supposed to. Janki's response to my scolding would always be the same, "I have done all of this for the Gods. They are not going to let me die today." The same appeared to be the case with many of the other women I talked to, for when health concerns came into conflict with religious concerns, religion almost always took precedence.

Chapter 5

Diaspora and Change in Religious Tradition

In looking at the Hindu community in Hawaii, specifically on the island of Oahu, I found that many differences exist between those Hindu practitioners within India and those who live in Diaspora communities. While there are many reasons behind why differences exist, one primary explanation has to do with the distance, in and of itself, from the native country. This distance allows for a curb in traditional practices. Also, while Bombay is extremely modern, the primary religion and culture is still Hinduism. Hawaii's Hindu community is an extreme minority, while other cultures and religions are dominant. This minority status for the Hindus in this particular community makes it more difficult to function according to the set customs and practices set in place by the religious tradition.

In order to discover differences that exist regarding my topic on domestic practices and food relationships and how this affects women, I interviewed a group of Hindu women on the island of Oahu. The ages of the women varied, ranging from 22 through 65 years. The average age of the women surveyed was 45. These women were not only Indian Hindus, but also included a group of Nepali Hindus, as well as one Hindu woman from Singapore. The women were chosen primarily because of their availability, and the fact that they allowed me to interview them. Difficulties arose in getting a variety of participants. However, in the end, I made due with the ones who were willing to give their time.

While conducting my research in Hawaii, I ran into many problems. While I was able to meet a lot of women upfront, I found it difficult to schedule a time to sit down

with the women and interview them or observe their domestic religious practices.

Looking into the many possibilities of why information was so easily obtained in Bombay, but not in Hawaii, led me to draw some conclusions about the differences between the places and the people with whom I was dealing.

First off, in Hinduism, the guest is treated as a deity. If a family has someone come into their home, not only is the guest supposed to treat them with the utmost respect and care, they are given whatever they desire in terms of food or beverage. The host's goal is to make the guest feel happy and at ease in their home. In Bombay, people were much more willing to allow me into their homes as a stranger. My being a foreigner interested in their religion helped me a great deal. They enjoyed telling me of their practices and even went beyond my questions and led me into further discussions of topics. It seemed that, many times, making a good impression on me precisely because I was from another country was their goal. Boasting about the Hindu culture and how wonderful India is was a topic that came up a great deal. My asking the Bombay women and family members if I could observe their practices and take their interviews was a golden opportunity for them that had to be grasped. They wanted to glorify the country they love to this stranger. However, this need seems to be lost to the Hindus in Diaspora. Leaving the country, while still keeping it in their hearts, separates these Hindu practitioners in a sense, alienating them from the bond one has with their homeland. They do not feel the need to show me how wonderful their culture is because they see me more on their level—an American, or, in this case, a person who resides in Hawaii, as well as a fellow Indian-American.

Another aspect to consider is the difference in atmosphere. Bombay is so overly populated that seeing, interacting with, and being close to strangers are common acts. There is a trust of others that has to be present at all times, otherwise, daily routine would be impossible. Hawaii, on the other hand, is a completely different atmosphere. It acts more so as a closely knit family, and no matter where you go, you are bound to run into someone whom you know or recognize. This major difference in atmosphere may make the Bombay Hindus more likely to trust me and allow me to readily step into their lives. In Hawaii, if I am not recognized, I may be viewed as an outsider.

Another major difficulty that I encountered while conducting my research in Hawaii but not in Bombay, was observing domestic practices. In Bombay, I was living with different families. I was able to wake up in the mornings with them when they were ready to bathe, prepare food, and make offerings to the deities. As a guest in their home, I was invited to attend all the festivals, *pujas*, and everyday rituals. I lived among them and was able to observe and ask questions when necessary, as well as interview them from the questions I prepared. Because the daily rituals are mostly done in the mornings, as well as the fact that the majority of Hindu holidays and festivals are from September through December, I had a great difficulty in finding the time to observe rituals in the homes of the women in Hawaii. Therefore, while I was able to utilize two different types of research methods while in Bombay, in Hawaii, I had to rely on mere questions and answers.

I was, however, allowed to attend outside religious activities in Hawaii with the Hindu practitioners. While these rituals involved both men and women, and they took place outside of the domestic realm, I was able to use the information and observations as

critical data. Utilizing this material allowed me to draw further conclusions as to the differences between the inside sphere of the home and the woman as well as that of the outside world of the man in relation to Hindu practices.

The ritual service that I attended on Oahu was in Wahiawa at the Shiva Temple, which is also a Hawaiian healing stone, which the Hindu community has claimed as a Shiva *linga*. This service, as most Hindu services that are held outside of the home, was conducted by a male priest. The ritual is held for the Hindu community once a month. Men, women, and children all attend the ceremony, but I noticed it was the women who came bearing gifts for the deities (flowers, fruits, cooked foods). The gifts were placed in the front by the entrance to the Healing Stone. The priest carried out the ceremony from inside the enclosed area where the Healing Stone was situated. A woman, whom I later found out is a Brahmin herself, helped the priest with the ceremony, handing him necessary items and guiding the other women as to where to place the gifts for the Divinities, as well as when to begin cutting the fruits for *prasada* and lighting *diyas*. This woman obviously played a very important role and appeared to be in charge of the overall ceremony, however, she did nothing concerning the ritual itself—this was done exclusively by the priest. The ceremony itself was very similar to those I was able to observe in Bombay. The main difference that I noticed was the lengthiness of the ritual, which lasted almost four hours. This was a great deal longer than any Hindu ritual I had attended while in Bombay. Also, the entire group of Hindus sang various songs for the deities throughout the entire ceremony. It was only when the main ritual began—that is when the priest began pouring the offerings over the healing stone—did the singing pause for a short period. Otherwise, the entire group continued to sing songs repetitively.

The one aspect of the ceremony at Wahiawa that was very similar to those in Bombay was the importance placed on the food. Food, as stated earlier, was brought by the women in order to be given to the Divinities. At the end, after these fruits and sweets were blessed, thus turning them into *prasada*, people quickly stood up and eagerly gathered to receive the offerings. *Prasada*, I have come to realize, is one of the most important aspects of any Hindu ritual. People are not only enthusiastic to receive this food, but they are often impatient and pushy when it comes to the receiving of *prasada*. In Bombay, at one particular Durga *puja* I was able to see the extremity of what I am talking about. People were pushing and shoving others in a large group in order to receive the food first. There was not a concern for the food running out, as there was plenty, even after everyone had received their share. However, it seems that Hindus, overtaken by the ritual and the spirituality of the situation, want to be the first to receive the blessings of the Divine within themselves.

Eating food in and of itself materialized into a significant feature of the gathering at Wahiawa. The female attendees each bring an Indian dish to the ceremony which the group indulges in at the end of the ceremony at a nearby park. This feature of the ceremony appears to be just as much of the tradition at Wahiawa and an event that the participants get excited about every month. The Hindu practitioners sit, talk, and eat—it is this final step that ends the ritual process at the Shiva Temple.

The routine of eating together as an Indian community after the ceremony is a way for the group to display their culture and express themselves as Indians. As shown previously, food is a very strong agent. Food brings people together, can be a definer of a culture or an agent in controlling others and exercising one's power. Food, as utilized in

the ceremony, reflects the need for cultures to express a portion of their tradition and culture.

According to author Ji-Yeon Yuh, because the United States has such a wide variety of cultures, races, and ethnicities, “food is a signifier of difference and identity.” It is an area where “ethnicity is contested, denigrated, and affirmed.” Yuh also states that food can create a struggle between the need to Americanize oneself or adhere to the ways of one’s native culture.¹ In Hawaii, there are very few Indian restaurants and stores where Indians are able to purchase authentic foods and food items. This lack of a presence of Indian food is a push towards Americanization in and of itself. Therefore, the act of bringing food to the ritual/gathering of the Hindu community in Hawaii not only becomes a way of further identifying with an aspect of their culture but also a method of being true to their native culture and defying Americanization.

The Hindu practitioners in Hawaii appear to be more traditional than those Hindus living in Bombay in some regards. While questioning the women on their domestic religious practices and attitudes since coming to Hawaii, five of the women made blatant comments that their religious activities and practices have increased drastically since they have moved to Hawaii. The reasoning behind this being that the culture back home is missed and more is done in order to retain whatever one can of that culture. The passing down of one’s culture and tradition from one generation to the next also comes into play here. The women emphasize religious practices both in and outside of the home so that their children are able to learn, understand, and embrace the culture that is not present in their immediate surroundings, such as at school and other public areas. Eight of the

¹ Ji-Yeon Yuh, *Beyond the Shadow of Camptown: Korean Military Brides in America* (New York University Press, 2002), 126.

women stated that no change took place in their religious practices in coming to Hawaii from their native lands. However, these women also stated that they were very particular about following religious customs at home as well as at the present time.

While there was a similar trend in the lessening of the fast with the women in Hawaii, only three of the women stated they contribute more to religious practices and have more knowledge of the religion than the other family members. Two of these women were Indian Hindus, and one was Nepali Hindu. The majority of the women believe that their entire family plays a role in their household religious (as well as outside religious) practices. Women commented to me on how the entire family will wake up in the mornings to do *puja* and prayer. One Indian Hindu told me that she sits with her children every evening before bed and teaches them Hindu tales and stories, which she makes them repeat to her to make sure they know and understand them. She told me that the Indians who have migrated to the U.S. have to cultivate their culture here by teaching the young children. She said that the Indians in India take their religious culture for granted, and that her children know more than the children living in India because she makes it a point to teach them things daily.

Another major difference between the customs in Bombay and Hawaii is directly related to cooking. In Bombay, I only observed one man cook during my entire stay. Furthermore, he was only cooking because he was forced to if he wanted to eat meat in his home. His wife was a strict vegetarian and refused to touch the meat. In Hawaii, this appears to be much different, as about half of the women's husbands whom I surveyed helped equally with the cooking. With this said, though the men in Hawaii have introduced themselves into the role that the Hindu women usually take, I was told by the

women that their husbands, though they do cook, do not cook as well as they do. The women, therefore, still believe that they have the true control over the kitchen and food knowledge.

In Diaspora communities, such as in Hawaii, the group who is trying to retain their culture needs to focus on various means and methods to accomplish their goal. With this said, many things are taken into consideration: food, outside and group rituals, domestic practices, and religious education. By utilizing more than one area, the native culture that was physically left behind is able to be emotionally preserved. The outside rituals and group activities, however, appear to be more important practices to Diaspora communities. Not only do group religious and cultural functions allow the Hindu community in Hawaii to preserve their tradition, they also allow for them to gather and communicate with people who are very much like themselves. While the people in Bombay are able to interact with Indians in their community on a daily basis, living outside of one's native country and far from one's tradition and culture creates a need for these kinds of group interactions.

Conclusion

Bombay is a city that has endured the influences of modern life, while still remaining loyal to the Hindu religious tradition. The people of Bombay have learned to acknowledge their tradition and, at the same time, alter their lifestyle to the form that best fits with the fast-paced environment surrounding them. As shown, women have played an immense role in maintaining and re-working Hinduism in order to fit with the needs of themselves and their families. The role that these women in Bombay have taken on, primarily as those who pass down religious knowledge to family members and conduct rituals in the home, can be seen to have its roots in the daily duties that have traditionally been assigned as women's tasks. These tasks include cooking, serving, caring and nurturing family members.

As shown, the importance of food can be used to elevate one to different levels of importance. The women in Bombay have been able to rise to a position in religious society because of their knowledge of food. The process of cooking and preparing food items for all different types of people, animals, birds, and especially, the Divinities, has allowed for women to be primary caregivers, as well as experts on the Hindu tradition.

Women have, for as long as we can remember, held the role as the housewife, feeder, and caregiver, in the Indian cultural tradition. However, the city of Bombay has brought about changes that have strengthened women; giving them opportunities to go beyond the domestic realm. Many women in Bombay have gotten themselves employed at large companies and have started careers for themselves which have allowed them a way out of the normal womanly routine of domestic life. However, other women have embraced the way of life that has allowed them to find a husband, settle down, and start a

family. Either way, the women in Bombay have been able to take on new roles in the Hindu tradition.

As exemplified by the domestic rituals performed, both small and large scale, women are the ones who have retained and given back the most of the Hindu tradition to younger generations and family members. Knowledge of rituals, cooking for the deities, and thus pleasing the Divinities in various ways, has given these women an authority over the Hindu tradition that has not been recognized by scholars or many of the Hindu practitioners, for that matter. Women usually go unnoticed and pass by without getting the recognition they so deserve. Without these women, the men who live in the hustle and bustle of the city would most likely forget about their great tradition. For, the women, even though busy themselves, be it with outside work or household chores, still find the time and energy to give to everyone else around them. They find the time in their lives to fulfill their duty as a mother, a wife, and a devotee. These women in Bombay have done something wonderful, as they have carried on the great Hindu religious tradition and have preserved it for the generations to come.

Women have also taken on aspects of the Hindu tradition that were primarily practiced by ascetics. Fasting is one of these devotional tasks that women have practiced for the well-being of their husband, the deities, or the family. The fact that women hardly ever fast for personal reasons shows the extreme selflessness they have made a part of their daily lives. This benevolent nature allows for women to have the natural task of fulfilling other goals that are associated with Hinduism, such as caring for the Divine. The fasting of the woman for her husband and her family, rather than vice-versa, tells us something about power relationships that exist in Bombay between men and women.

The women are, in most cases, expected to succumb to the will of their husband and family members. Still, it is through other areas, such as being the conductors of religious rituals in the home, as well as the bearers of religious knowledge for their family members, where women in Bombay are able to exercise authority.

Fasting, however, is a dying tradition in Bombay. While lay people adopted the practice quite a while back, in Bombay today, many of the younger generations have discontinued this practice. Instead, they have managed to incorporate other aspects of the Hindu culture into their lives, such as frequent religious pilgrimages. The fact that many of the younger generations are no longer fasting can also be seen as defying these power relationships that exist in the Hindu culture between men and women. However, this is a topic that requires more research and further discussion.

Finally, in looking at the Hindu community in Honolulu, both similarities and differences can be seen regarding religious practice and concern. Both in Bombay and Honolulu there is a concern present that one may lose one's religious tradition due to lack of resources and other influences that are present. In Bombay, this anxiety derives primarily from the lack of time and the influences of modernization and urbanization present. In Honolulu, however, the fear of losing one's culture can be seen as coming predominantly from the lack of resources and people who would share in their tradition. These main differences provide for the reasoning behind the major disparities with ritual practice that can be clearly seen between the two groups of people. While the people of Bombay reconcile their issues with religious practice by taking those practices into their home, those in Honolulu deal with the issues by focusing on gatherings and rituals performed outside of the home. These outside rituals are performed by male priests,

while those conducted in Bombay are done mostly by the woman of the home.

Consequently, differences are obvious between Bombay Hindu culture and Honolulu Hindu culture in terms of the amount of influence women have.

Overall, the knowledge that women hold of cooking has allowed for them to gain authority in Bombay's Hindu society. While this has not been as obvious in the Diaspora community in Honolulu, this can be explained through the differences in atmosphere and what is needed by each group in order to retain the religious tradition. While the roles of the Hindu woman have not changed drastically due to the adjustment to city life, many of the roles have been tweaked in order to fit with the modernization that is synonymous with the Bombay city life. The women of Bombay have exercised their influence in many areas of life. They have used their knowledge of cooking to their advantage with their husbands and have been able to show emotions through their cooking. Women have also been able to provide for others, including their family members, Divinities, and guests. The role that women in Bombay have been able to play has given them fulfillment. As many might view the added work that the women do as a burdensome duty, they do not. The tasks of caring for all of the important people, animals, and deities in their lives are taken on as ones of importance. Finally, the status that Bombay women have gained due to their added responsibilities has allowed for them to exercise a great deal of control over their lives, giving them a sense of value within the Hindu framework.

Appendix

Appendix A

Survey on Food, Nutrition, and Religion in Bombay

Survey on Nutrition, Food, Religion, and Domestic Life in Bombay

Date:

Name:

Address:

Age:

Class/Caste/Wealth:

1. How many family members live in your home? Is it a single family or a joint-family?
2. Who prepares the food in your home? Who purchases the groceries? Who plans the meals?
3. What religion do you believe in or practice?
4. Do you fast? If yes, how often and for what reasons?
5. Are there certain days that you are required to eat certain types of foods or sweets due to festivals or holidays? What are these days, and what foods do you prepare?
6. What foods are prepared regularly in your home? Are there certain foods that are a must with every meal?
7. Do you worship God(s) or pray regularly? If yes, do you do this in the home or outside of the home?

8. Are there certain rituals that you do before preparing food, before eating, or after eating?
9. Do you feel that women have an advantage in the home because they do the cooking? Why or why not?
10. Are you more concerned with preparing foods because of their taste, nutritional value, or for religious reasons? Why?
11. Do you feel that women usually prepare the meals out of duty or because they take pleasure in doing it? Why do you feel this way?
12. Do you feel that living in this city has changed or influenced the types of foods you eat regularly? If yes, how?
13. Do you feel that living in this city has changed or influenced your religious beliefs or practices? If yes, how and why?
14. What types of appliances do you use in cooking (blenders, etc.)
15. Do you feel that urbanization and city life has helped the status of women in the home? How and why?

Nutrition Survey:

1. What is your height and weight?
2. What is your ideal weight?
3. Have you gained or lost weight in the last year? Why?
4. Does anyone in your family have any health problems? (food allergies, anemia, diabetes, heart disease, hypertension, cancer, kidney disease)
5. Do you have a problem related to eating? (sour mouth, chewing, diarrhea, choking, swallowing, salivation, constipation, nausea, vomiting, change in taste, food aversion, other)
6. Do you smoke? If yes, how much/day?

7. Have you tried special diets in the past? If yes, what kinds?
8. Do you take vitamins or minerals? If yes, list:
9. Do you take medications? If yes, list:
10. Is your appetite usually better, normal, or worse than now?
11. How many meals do you eat in one day? What times do you take meals?
12. Do you ever skip meals?
13. How many meals do you eat out in one week? What types of foods do you eat when you eat out?
14. How long does it take you to eat one meal?
15. Do you snack between meals? If yes, what kinds of snacks?
16. Do you have any major food dislikes? If yes, what are they and why?
17. Do you add salt while cooking or at the table?
18. How many cups of tea, coffee do you take in one day?

19. How many alcoholic drinks do you drink in one day?
20. Explain any concerns you have about nutrition.
21. Do you exercise? What kind? How many hours or minutes/day or week?
22. What types of activities do you like?

Appendix B

Hawaii/Diaspora Survey

Food, Religion, and Domestic Life in Hawaii

Date:

Name:

Address:

Age:

Caste:

Place of Birth:

1. How many family members live in your home? Is it a single family or a joint-family?
2. Who prepares the food in your home? Who purchases the groceries? Who plans the meals?
3. What religion do you believe in or practice? Please describe the extent of your religious practices.
4. Do you fast? If yes, how often and for what reasons?
5. Are there certain days that you are required to eat certain types of foods or sweets due to festivals or holidays? What are these days, and what foods do you prepare?
6. What foods are prepared regularly in your home? Are there certain foods that are a must with every meal?
7. Do you worship God(s) or pray regularly? If yes, do you do this in the home or outside of the home?
8. Are there certain rituals that you do before preparing food, before eating, or after eating?
9. Do you feel that women have an advantage in the home because they do the cooking? Why or why not?
10. Are you more concerned with preparing foods because of their taste, nutritional value, or for religious reasons? Why?

11. Do you feel that women usually prepare the meals out of duty or because they take pleasure in doing it? Why do you feel this way?

12. Do you feel that living in Hawaii has changed or influenced the types of foods you eat regularly? If yes, how?

13. Do you feel that living in Hawaii has changed or influenced your religious beliefs or practices? If yes, how and why?

14. Compare your contribution to any domestic religious practices to that of the other members of your family.

Glossary

Names and terms have been simplified throughout the paper at the expense of the pronunciation and transliteration. This glossary includes the standard diacritics to help with pronunciation.

agnī. Literally means fire. Also the name of the God which is in the form of fire.

aagarbatis. Scented sticks that give off smoke (incense), meant to purify a ritual area for God(s).

dīya. Originally small clay pots with oil and a string for lighting before God(s).
However, regular candles used for this same purpose are also called this.

linga. The sign or symbol associated with the God Shiva, which his followers worship as the deity himself. It is in the form of the male genitalia.

mandir. An area kept to house God(s) and worship.

prasāda. Food or other offering that is offered before God(s) and returned to the offerer as food that has been transformed.

pūjā. Worship of God(s), person, or object that represents something sacred. It often takes place in the form of a ritual or ceremony.

yajña. Ritual sacrifice, usually of Vedic priests, or Brahmins.

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