



A CONCEPTUAL REVIEW OF EATING PRACTICES DERIVED FROM THE SRIMAD BHAGWAD GITA

Ashish Ranjan

Research Scholar, Department of Tourism & Hotel Management
Kurukshetra University, Kurukshetra, Haryana-136119

Yogesh Dahiya*

Research Scholar, Department of Tourism & Hotel Management
Kurukshetra University, Kurukshetra, Haryana-136119 *Corresponding
Author

ABSTRACT

This research paper explores sustainable food practices, focusing on the Bhagavad Gita, an ancient Indian scripture. Sustainable food practices promote environmentally responsible, socially equitable, and health-conscious approaches to food production and consumption. The Bhagavad Gita, a 700-verse Hindu scripture, is a foundational source of knowledge for sustainable food practices. It emphasizes vegetarianism, eating in sync with the sun, and spiritualizing food through offerings to God. The study uses a mixed-methods approach, incorporating qualitative and secondary data sources. The findings reveal that food is not just a source of physical nourishment but a means to connect with divine consciousness. The principles of maintaining a vegetarian diet, aligning meal timings with the sun, and spiritualizing food through offerings to God are fundamental principles. These principles are relevant for health and the well-being of spiritual tourists, and the concept of intermittent fasting, known as "vrata," aligns with modern recommendations for healthy living. The findings provide valuable insights for the tourism and hospitality industries, emphasizing the importance of catering to the unique dietary needs of spiritual tourists.

KEYWORDS : Bhagwad Gita, Food habits, Principles of Food, Hindu

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable food practices, encompassing activities that promote environmentally responsible, socially equitable, and health-conscious approaches to food production, distribution, and consumption (Hawkes, 2008; Lang et al., 2009), have garnered increasing attention. These practices strive to mitigate environmental issues by reducing food waste (Parfitt et al., 2010), endorsing local and organic farming (Pretty et al., 2005), and implementing sustainable agricultural techniques (Gomiero et al., 2011). They also prioritize social sustainability through fair trade (Mendoza & Bastiaensen, 2003) and food justice initiatives (Gottlieb & Joshi, 2010). Health and nutrition are emphasized, promoting nutrient-dense diets (Willett et al., 2019) and advocating for reduced consumption of processed foods (Monteiro et al., 2017). However, challenges such as industrial agriculture dominance (Foley et al., 2011), economic pressures (Clapp & Fuchs, 2009), and consumer behavior (Vermeir & Verbeke, 2006) persist. Effective governance through government policies (Hawkes, 2008) and community-driven efforts (Hinrichs & Kremer, 2002) plays a crucial role. The future holds promise with technology and innovation (Godfray et al., 2010) and increased education and awareness (Tilman et al., 2011) offering avenues to advance sustainable food practices, fostering a more resilient and equitable global food system.

Food acts as a conduit via which we interact with the outside world. In addition to meeting our metabolic requirements, we also eat to meet the requirements of our community (Stiles, 1998). In plenty of other words, it implies that we choose dietary choices based on prevailing societal viewpoints on nature, religion, and health advantages (Tibere (2013)). The culture in which we were nurtured is to blame for this presumption. Tourists visiting a location for leisure or religious reasons could act differently than those travelling there for business or other obligations. An ethnographer studying how a person's culture and religion affects their food patterns would be extremely interested in this transformation in eating habits. According to Shi, F., Dedeoğlu, B. B., & Okumus, B. (2022), only an ethnologist may attempt to understand a culture through engaging with it. The majority of studies on food consumption focus on identifying the components of various food consumption behaviours, such as like, preference, and intake (Verbeke, W., & López, G. P. (2005)) go

on to say that there is a close connection between our dietary preferences and cultural and religious impacts, socio-demographic variables, personality traits connected to food, past experience, and other elements that motivate travel. Looking back at the literature, not enough research has been done on how tourists behave based on their dietary preferences and religious affiliations. Since tourism and hospitality businesses may interact with this set of visitors and offer customised services, this research gap needs to be filled.

Bhagwad Gita- The Lifestyle Guide

The Bhagavad Gita, often referred to simply as the Gita, is a 700-verse Hindu scripture that is part of the Indian epic Mahabharata (Mahabharata, Ancient Indian Epic). It is a sacred text of the Hindu religion and is considered one of the most important spiritual classics of all time. The Bhagavad Gita is written in the form of a dialogue between Prince Arjuna and the god Krishna, who serves as his charioteer. The conversation takes place on the battlefield just before the Kurukshetra War, where Arjuna is filled with doubt and moral dilemma about fighting in the war. In response to Arjuna's questions and concerns, Krishna imparts spiritual wisdom, guidance, and teachings on various aspects of life, duty (dharma), righteousness, and the path to spiritual realization (Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 2). The Gita covers a wide range of philosophical and ethical topics, including concepts of duty, righteousness, devotion, and the paths to spiritual liberation. It is divided into 18 chapters, each dealing with different aspects of life and spirituality (Bhagavad Gita, Chapter Structure). The Bhagavad Gita has had a profound influence on Hindu philosophy and has also been studied and respected by scholars and philosophers from various backgrounds around the world. Its teachings have been interpreted in different ways, and it continues to be a source of inspiration and guidance for those seeking spiritual insight and a deeper understanding of life's fundamental questions (Easwaran, Eknath. "The Bhagavad Gita").

Literature Review

Food holds a pivotal role in tourism, influencing both communities and tourists, as reflected in several research findings. Shi, Dedeoğlu, and Okumus (2022) assert that food is intertwined with the community's identity, with tourists expressing their interests through their quest for familiar

staple diets, turning this culinary exploration into a tourist attraction. D'Sylva and Beagan (2011) further stress that food transcends mere physiological necessity; it also provides a sense of mental comfort and becomes synonymous with the identity and memories of certain places. Cohen and Avieli (2004) have demonstrated that food not only nourishes the body but also shapes tourists' perceptions, influencing their overall experience and impacting future visits. For some travelers, like pilgrims, as noted by Tibere (2013), eating and drinking assume top priority, defining the core purpose of their journey. Verbeke and López (2005) suggest that understanding the ethnic and cultural dimensions of eating habits is essential for a comprehensive understanding of tourist behavior. Moreover, the influence of food on tourism extends beyond individual experiences; A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada's founding of the Hare Krishna vegetarian religious movement (Brooks, 1989, 1992) underscores how food can be deeply rooted in religious and cultural practices, influencing not only dietary choices but also broader lifestyle aspects. This sect's abstinence from meat, alcohol, gambling, and extramarital sex (Rochford, 1995; Judah, 1974) shapes their environmental interactions and expectations in profound ways. In essence, food transcends its nutritional role to become a lens through which tourists and communities interact, connect, and define their experiences in the realm of tourism.

Research Methodology

Keeping the objectives as the core of methodology, mixed methods were practiced to attain propounding and validating results. The core methodology applied was Qualitative in nature. The first hand or primary data were gathered through covert and overt observation method. A crucial part of primary data was assembled by thoroughly interviewing Temple officials, administrative staff, temple catering staff, Vaishnavjan (community who are in service of deity), and the Pujā Pandas (priests). Other data were secondary and were obtained were various Hindu texts and scriptures.

Objective 1: To identify the food practices principles from Bhagwad Gita

The data collected was driven by the core of knowledge to understand the food pattern and why it is derived in the global movement of Hare Krishna movement. In the study it was found that in ISKCON food is not only about science but also about soul and consciousness which nourish the ultimate energy driven human body. The food is offered to God not only as ritual but to connect and learn consciousness from the almighty. In Bhagwad Gita it is entirely advocated that Ayurveda is ultimate source for the science of body metabolism and food nutrition. ISKCON derives their food habits from these vedas only. From the data few patterns are common.

Vegetarianism is the soul of cooking

ISKCON disciples believe in vegetarianism and every year they run campaigns for the same. In order to have satva in food it is the satvik food which is advocated. The satvik food not only matters for healthy lifestyle but provide positive energy to disciples. There are various ethical, environmental, spiritual and healthy reasons for being vegetarians. Sometimes referred to as the "kitchen religion," ISKCON, or the Hare Krishna Movement, believes the art of cooking is a sacred experience. The preparation and eating of food should be based on principles of compassion, non-violence and balanced living. Thus, Krishna devotees advocate a lacto-vegetarian diet, strictly avoiding meat, fish and eggs.

Eating with ultimate source of energy- the sun

*Im vivasvate yogam proktavanhamvayyam.
Vivasvanmanve prach manurikshwakvebravit
(Srimad Bhagavatam 4:11)*

In the above verse Krishna says Sun is the ultimate guide for truthful lifestyle. Meal timings are very crucial for the disciples to maintain proper enthusiasm and regular metabolism. ISKCON starts their meals from rising sun and end up with sunset. It is believed by community that sun is the best guide for their daily routine diet and this habit removes all chances of disease

Spiritualizing food

*Ayuh-sattva-balarogya-sukha-priti-vivardhanah
Rasyah snigdham sthira hradya ahara-sattvika-priyah
(Srimad Bhagwad Gita 17.10.8)*

Following the practice of Bhakti yoga, the meals are prepared consciously cooked - based on principles of purity, non-violence and balanced living. The food is first offered to God which is after called as PRASADAM. The food is refrained from being in terms of any *rajasic* and *tamasic* *gunas* which are very much bad for spiritualism. The *satvik* (goodness) used in temples of ISKCON are very much conducive for spiritual and mental calmness of disciples. Food is just expression of devotion and dedication and not only to fill stomach.

Mithara ((Maintaining freshness of food)

*Yata-yamam gata-rasam puti paryasitam ca yat
Ucchistam api camehdyam bhojanam tamasa priyam
(Srimad Bhagwad Gita 17.10.10)*

According to this verse food prepared more than three hours before being eaten, food that is foul, tasteless and is rancid in nature is dear to those living beings which love to be in dark and leads to demise of good health.

Vrat - Concept of intermittent fasting

According to the Ayurveda, fasting strengthens both will power and bodily health. An occasional fast gives the digestive system a rest and refreshes the senses, mind, and consciousness. Most of members fast every fortnight - on Ekadasi, the eleventh day after the full moon and the eleventh day after the new moon, by abstaining from grains, peas, and beans.

Objective 2: To study evidence of food habit as per Bhagavad Gita and its effects on daily robustness of spiritual tourists.

"You are what you eat" is an old saying. This is a teaching from our shastras, which include the Patanjali Yoga Sutras, the Bhagwad Gita, and several Upanishads. One has to lead a balanced life in order to achieve health and happiness. Usually, this is taken from Bhagwad Gita chapter 6 verses 17, when Krishna addresses Arjuna

*"Yuktachestasya karmasu, yakaharaviharasya.
Yoga bhavati duhkaha Yuktasvapnavabodhasya "
(Bhagwad Gita 17:6)*

It means "the destroyer of pain or misery is the one, whose food and movements are balanced, whose activities are correct, whose hours of sleeping and waking up are regular, and who follows the road of meditation." The message is still applicable today, as evidenced by current scientific study and data analysis.

*Nehabhikramnaashoesti Pratyavayo na Vidyate.
Swalpampyasya Dharmasya Trayate Mahato Bhayat
(Srimad Bhagavad Gita 2.40)*

In this endeavour of offering service to Lord Krishna, you get eternal credit, and a little service offer to Lord Krishna can protect one from the most dangerous type of fear.
*Falivkiyani tas chutdhankardayam.
Falairpoorayadratai: Falbhanampoor Ch*

(Srimad Bhagavatam 10.11.11)

While Krishna was going to the fruit vendor very hastily, most of the grains He was holding fell. Nonetheless, the fruit vendor filled Krishna's hands with fruits, and her fruit basket was immediately filled with jewels and gold.

Etavajjanmasatilyam dehinamih dehisu.
Pranairarthrdhiya Vacha Shreyacharan always
(Srimad Bhagavatam 10.22.35)

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

In the study it is very much expressed that eating habits not only impact physiology of human anatomy but also consciousness of brain. Spiritual tourists' needs more pure form of diet in order to attain that level of energy so that they can be in state of divine intimation. Satvik aahaar, i.e., food which are away from any form of junk and are energy providing are best for human being. Vedas, Upanishads and other religious books are source of great consciousness when it comes to nutrition and food. In the present scenario it's very important to refer these great texts and indulge them in our regular eating habits. If we study chapter 17 of Bhagwad Gita we find very confining verses which are very much scientific. Nutrition is the science and our vedas are having very close confinement to these daily substantial needs. In the present scenario, where every individual is fighting from one or other health problem it becomes very crucial to emphasize on pure eating and satvikta in food will play a major role. Bhagwad gita emphasize on the fact that you are what you eat. The concept of intermittent fasting which is being now recommended by medical experts have been known to our saints from antiquity. Intermittent fasting (vrat) is form of cleansing digestive track for better functioning. An individual's thought process is very dependent on food and nutrition he is into. To connect with that divine energy it's important to be away from every item which are junk in nature and focus on pure eating habits. Moreover timings of meals have been disturbed due to globalisation and in rat race of this corporate era. Again nature has given us Sun to go through our daily routine. Eating must be in order to gain energy not to have tamas. Energy required for spiritual tourists are almost 2500-3000 calories which are high and it is tough to make it a balance diet without meat and fats. So it becomes important to understand concept of satvik diet because our holy scriptures combine all forms of energy giving food and they will act as guiding force in coming ages.

REFERENCES

- Shi, F., Dedeoğlu, B. B., & Okumus, B. (2022). Will diners be enticed to be travelers? The role of ethnic food consumption and its antecedents. *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, 23, 100685.
- D'Sylva, A., & Beagan, B. L. (2011). 'Food is culture, but it's also power': the role of food in ethnic and gender identity construction among Goan Canadian women. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 20(3), 279-289.
- Kittler, P. G., Sucher, K. P., & Nelms, M. (2016). *Food and culture*. Cengage Learning.
- Zeller, B. E. (2012). Food practices, culture, and social dynamics in the Hare Krishna movement. In *Handbook of New Religions and Cultural Production* (pp. 681-702). Brill.
- Verbeke, W., & López, G. P. (2005). Ethnic food attitudes and behaviour among Belgians and Hispanics living in Belgium. *British food journal*, 107(11), 823-840.
- Verbeke, W., & López, G. P. (2005). Ethnic food attitudes and behaviour among Belgians and Hispanics living in Belgium. *British food journal*, 107(11), 823-840.
- Counihan, C., & Van Esterik, P. (1997). Food and culture. *A reader*, 2027.
- Kumanyika, S. K. (2008). Environmental influences on childhood obesity: ethnic and cultural influences in context. *Physiology & behavior*, 94(1), 61-70.
- Zhang, Y., Xu, X. H., Lee, T. J., & Li, Z. X. (2022). Assessing the impact of perceptions of hygiene on tourists' attitudinal loyalty to ethnic food. *British Food Journal*.
- DEWAN, M. (2020). An ethnographic inquiry towards 'hare-rama hare-krishna' religious tourists food consumption habits while on a holiday in India. *Journal of Gastronomy Hospitality and Travel*, 3(1), 30-41.
- Filimonau, V., Nghiem, V. N., & Wang, L. E. (2021). Food waste management in ethnic food restaurants. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 92,

- 102731.
- Bessiere, J., & Tibere, L. (2013). Traditional food and tourism: French tourist experience and food heritage in rural spaces. *Journal of the Science of Food and Agriculture*, 93(14), 3420-3425.
- Brooks, C. R. (1989). *The Hare Krishnas in India*. Princeton University Press: Princeton, New Jersey. Brooks, C. R. (1992). 'Gaudiya Vaisnavism in the modern world' in Rosen, S. J. (ed.) *vaisnavism: Contemporary scholars discuss the Gaudiya tradition*. Folk Books: New York.
- Dewan, M. (2018). Understanding Ethnography: An 'Exotic' Ethnographer's Perspective. In: Mura P, Khoo- Lattimore C. (eds) *Asian Qualitative Research in Tourism. Perspectives on Asian Tourism*. (1st ed.) (pp.185-203), Springer, Singapore
- Flood, G. D. (1996). *An introduction to Hinduism*. Cambridge University Press.
- Godfrey, K., & Clarke, J. (2000). *The tourism development handbook: a practical approach to planning and marketing*. Burns & Oates.
- Guba, E. G. (1996). What happened to me on the way to Damascus. In L. Heshusius & K. Ballard (Eds.), *From*
- Japur, C. C., Penaforte, F. R., Chiarello, P. G., Monteiro, J. P., Vieira, M. N., & Basile-Filho, A. (2009). Harris-Benedict equation for critically ill patients: are there differences with indirect calorimetry?. *Journal of critical care*, 24(4), 628-e1.
- Roza, A. M., & Shizgal, H. M. (1984). The Harris Benedict equation reevaluated: resting energy requirements and the body cell mass. *The American journal of clinical nutrition*, 40(1), 168-182.
- Kalra, B., Agrawal, N., & Unnikrishnan, A. (2013). Nutrition and the Bhagavad Gita. *Journal of Medical Nutrition and Nutraceuticals*, 2(1), 3-3.
- Reddy, N., Mashelkar, T., & Kalra, S. (2014). Nutrition and Bhagavad Gita: The scientific evidence. *Journal of Medical Nutrition and Nutraceuticals*, 3(2), 226-226.