ABHAKŠYA AND ABHOJYA: AN EXPLORATION IN DIETARY LANGUAGE

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This paper focuses on two terms relating to food proscriptions in the dharma literature, abhakṣya and abhojya, two words that underwent significant semantic developments and assumed technical meanings. A close reading of the literature permits us to draw the following conclusions. Abhakṣya refers to items of food, both animals and vegetables, that are completely forbidden; generally the term refers to food sources rather than cooked food served at a meal. Abhojya, on the other hand, refers to food that is normally permitted but due to some supervening circumstances has become unfit to be eaten. This term takes on a secondary meaning referring not directly to food but to a person whose food one is not permitted to eat.

If the way to a person’s heart is through the stomach, then the way to the soul of a civilization may be through its dietary practices. Examining the food habits of a people has been a staple among anthropologists, some of whom, like Mary Douglas (1966) in her piece on Jewish dietary laws “The Abominations of Levites,” have ventured into interpreting the food taboos and dietary restrictions encoded in ancient texts. The ancient Indian literature on dharma devotes considerable attention to matters of food: what kinds of animals and vegetables may or may not be eaten, from what sorts of people one may or may not receive food, what types of conditions make food unfit for consumption, and so on. Such practices have drawn considerable attention among scholars; what has been ignored, however, is the vocabulary used to indicate food prohibitions, a vocabulary that may give us new insights into the ancient Indian world. And that is the focus of this paper.

The dharma vocabulary of food proscriptions contains four words: abhakṣya, abhojya, anādyā, and aṣaye. In this paper I will focus on the first two, abhakṣya and abhojya, which alone underwent significant semantic developments and assumed technical meanings. Aṣaye is restricted to liquids, principally milk. Anādyā is, relatively speaking, the most frequent term in the Vedic literature, occurring a total of nine times, often in the metaphorical sense that the Brāhmaṇa should not be eaten by the king: brāhmaṇo nādyāḥ. This term occurs with some frequency in the dharma literature, but it did not develop the kind of technical meaning that the other two did.

Abhakṣya and abhojya are, of course, the negative forms of bhakṣya and bhūjya. The positive forms of the words have been studied in detail by Toru Yagi (1994). I will only mention that these two terms, even though they are gerundives, for the most part lack any prescriptive or permissive meaning; they do not mean “what should be eaten” or “what may be eaten” but are simply types of food.

It is within the context of the negative forms, abhakṣya and abhojya, that the terms assumed a strong prescriptive, or more precisely prescriptive, meaning. Of the two, abhakṣya occurs only once in the Vedic literature in a somewhat obscure passage in the Kāṭhaka Sanhitā (35.16), and abhojya occurs twice, once in the Sāmavīḍhāna Brāhmaṇa (1.5.13) and once in the Gopatha (1.3.19). The emergence of these forms and their semantic development occur principally within the context of lists containing items of foods that are either totally

as Brāhmaṇas and cows, as well as things that are simply inedible, such as clay and stone. On the metaphorical use of “food” and “eating” to express power relationships, see Smith 1990.

Anādyā occurs in ApDh 1.17.17; 1.19.14; Gdā 25.7; BrDh 4.1.6; 4.2.13, 14; VāDh 1.45 [= SB 5.4.2.3]; MDh 11.57, 146, 162. The term does not occur in VīDh or YDh.

The Kāṭhaka instructs the priest to put abhakṣyaṇīya into the holes over which the Soma is crushed: prayāpacayā svāhiety abhakṣyaṇīyam uparave se avancait. The Sāmavīḍhāna gives a purification for eating abhojya; and Gopatha says that before the Soma has been purchased, the man consecrated for the sacrifice (dikṣita) is abhojyaṇīya, which has the same meaning given to abhojya in the dharma texts.
forbidden or for some reason have become unfit for consumption. These lists are absent in the Vedic literature and in the Śrauta and Gṛhya Sūtras. They make their first appearance in the Dharmaśūtras. These lists must have become sufficiently standard by Patañjali’s time (2nd cent. B.C.) for him to use a stock example repeatedly: "abhakṣya grāmyakukkuto bhasya grāmyasūkaraḥ"—"it is forbidden to eat a village cock; it is forbidden to eat a village pig" (1.1.1 [5:16]; 1.1.1 [8:10]; 7.3.14 [320:22]).

A close reading of these lists in the dharma literature and the use of the two terms within them permit us to draw the following conclusions:

A) Abhakṣya refers to items of food, both animals and vegetables, that are completely forbidden; they cannot be eaten except under the most dire circumstances. Generally, these lists refer to food sources rather than cooked food served at a meal. Thus, carnivorous animals, web-footed birds, garlic, red resins of trees are all abhakṣya. I translate abhakṣya as "forbidden food."

B-i) Abhajyā, on the other hand, refers to food that is normally permitted but due to some supervening circumstances has become unfit to be eaten. These lists contain not food sources but food that is actually served at a meal. Thus, food contaminated by hair or insects, food touched by an impure man or woman, food given by a person from whom food cannot be accepted, food that has turned sour or stale are all abhajyā. I translate abhajyā as "unfit food."

B-ii) Abhajyā takes on a secondary meaning referring not directly to food but to "a person whose food one is not permitted to eat." This meaning is sometimes very clear and explicit; sometimes, as in the common compound abhajyānam, the meaning is ambiguous, especially in cases other than the nominative where the masculine marks the compound as a bahuvrihi. Thus, the statement abhajyānam nāsiyāt may, as a karmadhāraya, mean: "He should not eat unfit food," or, as a tatpuruṣa, "He should not eat the food of a man whose food one is not permitted to eat." The latter, I think, is the meaning in most instances.

An examination of the dharmaśāstric lists of forbidden and unfit foods, I believe, supports these conclusions.

Gautama

Gautama is the most clear and systematic. He begins his discussion of food (Gṛhasthā 17.1–8) with a list of people from whom food and other articles may be accepted:

17.1 prastātināṁ svakarmān avijātām brāhmaṇo bhujito.

A Brahmin may eat food given by twice-born men renowned for their devotion to their respective duties.

Note the use of bhuj. He goes on to say:

17.6–7 pāsupālakṣetraḥ gṛhatān gṛhayajñipitānicarakaḥ bhujyānāṁ vajik caśātipi

A man who looks after his animals or plows his fields, a friend of the family, his barber, and his personal servant—these are people whose food he may eat, as also a merchant who is not an artisan.

Bhujyā for Gautama is a person whose food one may eat; and conversely abhujyā means the opposite. Gautama concludes the discussion with stūra 8, where abhujyā has the primary meaning of food that is not to be eaten.

17.8 nityam abhujyam

Their food is not fit to be eaten everyday.

In the next twelve stūras (Gṛhasthā 17.9–21) Gautama lists items of food that should not be eaten due to some circumstance.

Food into which hair or an insect has fallen; what has been touched by a menstruating woman, a black bird, or someone’s foot; what has been looked at by an abortionist or smelt by a cow; food that looks revolting; food that has turned sour, except curd; recooked food; food that has become stale, except vegetables, chewy or greasy foods, meat, and honey; food given by someone who has been disowned by his parents, a harlot, a heinous sinner, a hermaphrodite, a law enforcement agent, a carpenter, a miser, a jailer, a physician, a man who hunts without using the bow or eats the leftovers of others, a group of people, or an enemy, as also by those listed before a bald man as people who defile those alongside whom they eat; food prepared to no avail; a meal during which people sip water or get up against the rules, or at which different sorts of homage is paid to people of equal stature and the same homage is paid to people of different stature; and food that is given disrespectfully.

5 The likelihood is high that even though we encounter them for the first time in the Dharmaśūtras, these lists, at least in informal ways, must have existed before them. Stephanie Jamison (1991: 212–21; 1996: 197–200) has argued for the existence of law codes in fixed verbal form in Vedic times.

6 Manu (MDh 10.104–8) permits a man facing starvation to eat anything at all, giving the examples of Ajījātra, Vāmadeva, Bharadvāja, and Viśvāmitra. This falls within Manu’s description of āpaddharma, rules for times of adversity.

7 See Gṛhasthā 15.16–18.
There is no verb or verbal equivalent in this list, and it is clear that the term abhojyam of sūtra 8 is carried over into these sūtras (anavrtti), especially since most of these items have neuter singular endings. This is confirmed by both Haradatta and Maskarin, who comment: abhojyam iti sarvatārūpye ("the term abhojyam is supplied everywhere from the previous sūtra."). This list contains, on the one hand, food that has been spoilt for a variety of reasons and, on the other, food that is unfit because it was given or touched by the wrong individual.

The next five sūtras (GĐh 17.22–26) deal with milk:

The milk of a cow, a goat, or a buffalo, during the first ten days after it gives birth; the milk of sheep, camels, and one-hoofed animals under any circumstances; the milk of an animal from whose udders milk flows spontaneously or of an animal that has borne twins, gives milk while pregnant, or has lost her calf.

These sūtras, likewise, lack a verb or verbal equivalent. In other texts, the term apeya ("not to be drunk") would be found within such a list. We must assume that here the anavrtti of abhojyam in sūtra 8 continues. Note that Gautama here deals both with animals whose milk can normally be drunk and those, such as sheep, camels, and one-hoofed animals, whose milk is completely forbidden. Lists of drinks, especially milk, tend to include both unfit and forbidden milk; apeya appears to cover both categories. Most lists treat milk in a somewhat different way than food.

Then Gautama (GĐh 17.27–34) turns to forbidden foods. Here the term abhakṣyāḥ comes at the very end of the list; but it is clear that it governs the entire list:

Animals with five nails, with the exception of the hedgehog, hare, porcupine, Godhā monitor lizard, rhinoceros, and tortoise;8 animals with teeth in both jaws, with a lot of hair, or without hair; one-hoofed animals; Kalaviṅkā sparrows; Plava herons; Cukravāka geese; Hamsa geese; crows; Kaṅka herons; vultures; falcons; water birds; red-footed and red-beaked birds; village cocks and pigs; milch-cows and oxen; meat of animals whose milk-teeth have not fallen and of animals that are sick or wanonly killed; young shoots; mushrooms; garlic; resins; red juices flowing from incisions on trees; woodpeckers; Baka egrets; Balāka ibis; parrots; Mad-gu cormorants; Tiṭṭhāa sandpipers; Mādhāa flying foxes; and night birds—these are forbidden foods (abhakṣyāḥ).

In this list we can see very clearly the distinction between abhakṣyāḥ food items given previously and abhakṣyāḥ items. On the one hand, abhakṣyāḥ foods are forbidden because of their very nature; on the other, as one can see from the list, the reference is to food sources—animals and plants—and not to prepared food items presented at a meal. Abhakṣyāḥ, on the contrary, refers to prepared food, and frequently the term annam is used, a term that generally refers to cooked food, especially rice.

Finally, Gautama (GĐh 17.35–37) turns to food sources that are permitted, using the term bhakṣyāḥ to refer to them. The last word in the previous list (GĐh 17.34) is abhakṣyāḥ; and Gautama presents a deliberate contrast by beginning the next list with bhakṣyāḥ:

bhakṣyāḥ pratudaviśkārājañāpādāḥ | matyāś cāvikṛtāḥ |
vadhyāś ca dharmārthe |

These may be eaten: birds that feed by thrusting their beaks or scratching with their feet and that do not have webbed feet, fish that are not grotesque, and animals that have to be killed for the sake of the Law.

Here we have an interesting usage of bhakṣyāḥ not in the normal positive sense of "food," as studied by Toru Yagi (1994), but as the opposite of abhakṣyāḥ; that is, foods that are permitted to be eaten, paralleling the use of bhajya to refer to a person whose food may be eaten (GĐh 17.6). This meaning of bhakṣyāḥ, moreover, falls within the Mīmāṃsā definition of pariṣaṁkhya-vādi, that is, positive injunctions whose principal aims is to prohibit what is not enumerated. Thus, one is not obliged to eat the listed animals, but one is forbidden to eat animals that are not listed. This meaning is also evident in Patañjali (1.1.1 [5:14–17]), who says that when some things are called abhakṣyāḥ it implies that the opposite is bhakṣyāḥ, and vice versa. Thus, the prohibition of village cocks and pigs implicitly permits the eating of wild cocks and pigs; and the permitting of the five-five-nailed animals implicitly forbids the eating of five-nailed animals other than those listed:

bhakṣyāyanāmabhakṣyapratīṣedho gūmyate | paśca paśca-
nakā bhakṣyā ity utte gūmyate etad aito 'nye 'bhakṣyā iti |
abhakṣyapratīṣedhena vā bhakṣyāyanām yad yathā | abha-
kyo grūmyakkuksa 'bhakṣyo grīmasya nibbha ity utte gūmyate 
etad aito bhakṣyo dharmā iti | Patañjali (1.1.1 [5:14–17])

By specifying the bhakṣyāḥ the prohibition of the abhakṣyāḥ is understood. When it is said, "The five five-nailed animals are bhakṣyāḥ," it is understood that animals other than these are abhakṣyāḥ. Alternatively, by prohibiting the abhakṣyāḥ, the bhakṣyāḥ is specified. So, when it is said, "the village cock is abhakṣyāḥ; the village pig is abhakṣyāḥ," it is understood that a wild one is bhakṣyāḥ.

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8 For a detailed discussion of these exceptions to the prohibition against eating animals with five nails or claws, see Jamison 1998.
The usage of abhakṣya and abhojya in other dharma texts supports the very clear distinction established by Gautama. Āpastamba, in my estimation the author of the oldest Dhammaśāstra (Olivelle 2000: 4–10), is much less consistent in his terms for prohibited food items, using anādyam (ApDh 1.17.17; 1.19.14) as a synonym of abhojya, or simply saying aśīnyāt (ApDh 1.17.14). Nevertheless, it is clear that he too sees abhojya and abhakṣya as technical terms referring to two distinct classes of proscribed foods. He begins his list of unfit food (ApDh 1.16.16–32) with the term abhojya. At one point (ApDh 1.16.21), however, he makes the interesting distinction between food that is aprayata (“unclean”) and food that is abhojya (“unfit to be eaten”); the former can be purified and then eaten, whereas abhojya food cannot be eaten at all.

1.16.16 kipārthasrēṇasām māṃsām chīnōm abhojyaṃ. Meat cut with a slaughtering knife is abhojya.

1.16.21 aprayatopahatam annam aprayataṇaṇaḥ na te abhojyaṃ. Food that has been touched by an impure person becomes impure but is not rendered abhojya.

Āpastamba next turns to rules about eating utensils for eating (ApDh 1.16.33; 17.1–13), and only then turns to forbidden foods (ApDh 1.17.14–39); but this is a sundry list containing a variety of items, from food bought in the market or turned sour to forbidden animals and plants. He begins with the phrase na aśīnyāt (“he must not eat”), and uses the terms akhāḍya, apeya, anādyam, and abhakṣya. Āpastamba uses abhojya once with respect to a forbidden food: kṣāvy abhojyam iti hi brāhmaṇyam (“Mushrooms should not be eaten”, so states a Brāhmaṇa,” ApDh 1.17.28), but here it may be simply a citation of an older text. It appears, nevertheless, that the vocabulary is still somewhat non-technical in Āpastamba. A little later (ApDh 1.17.30), however, he used bhakṣyaṃ as permitted food: adevanamaññakor bhakṣyaṃ, “It is permitted to eat the meat of milch cows and oxen.”

He devotes two chapters (ApDh 1.18–19) to the issue of people from whom food may or may not be accepted. Here we find the term bhajya, bhoktavya, and abhojya used with consistency. At 1.26.7, furthermore, Āpastamba distinguishes three categories of food in the expression abhakṣyaḥ bhoktāyaḥ aprāśīyaḥ. Bühler translates this as “(He who has been guilty of) eating or drinking things forbidden,” thus reducing the three categories to two and taking abhakṣya and abhojya as synonyms. Āpastamba is here signaling the three kinds of food that should not be eaten: forbidden (abhakṣya), unfit (abhojya), and, significantly, what should not be drunk (apeya); this category generally includes milk of certain forbidden animals (broadly falling within the abhakṣya category), as well as milk that has become contaminated or in some other way (e.g., first ten days after giving birth) made unfit.

BAUDHĀYANA

Baudhāyana begins his list of forbidden animals and plants (Bṛdh 1.12.1–15) with the word abhakṣyaḥ, which governs the rest of the paragraph (anuvṛtti).

1.12.1 abhakṣyāḥ paśāva grāmyāḥ
It is forbidden to eat village animals.

Immediately after this list of forbidden foods, Baudhāyana, just like Gautama, gives a list of permitted foods, again beginning this list with the word bhakṣyaḥ:

1.12.5 bhakṣyaḥ ścevitṛ godāḥ sākaśyakṣyakacchapakahudāḥ
khadavajrāḥ paśe pañcanakāhāḥ
It is permissible to eat the following: porcupine, Godā monitor lizard, hare, hedgehog, tortoise, and the rhinoceroses—these, excluding the rhinoceroses, are the five five-nailed animals.

Baudhāyana has no list of abhojya foods. Nevertheless, at 1.9.8 he uses abhojya in the sense of a “person whose food one may not eat”.

9 Baudhāyana’s text was subjected to more tampering and interpolations than perhaps any other early dharma text. The lack of a list of abhojya foods, therefore, does not permit us to make any general conclusions regarding the original sūtra. See Kane I: 42–44; Olivelle 2000: 191. Baudhāyana (4.1.6) specifies a penance for abhakṣyaḥ bhoktāyaḥ aprāśīyaḥ. It is unclear what the distinction here is between anādyam and the other terms; perhaps in this interpolated chapter the author is covering all his bases and listing every term for proscribed food and drink.
khalakṣetreṣu yad dhāryaṁ kūpavāpam yaj jalam abhoyāyā apī taḥ bhoyajam yaḥ ca gaṇghataraṁ pavaḥ

Grain from a threshing floor and water from a well or reservoir, as also milk from a dairy farm—these may be consumed even if they are given by someone whose food one is not allowed to eat.

VASIŚṬHA

Vasiṣṭha, the author of the last Dharmaśūtra, begins his discussion of unfit food (VaDh 14.1–32) with the statement:

14.1 athāto bhoyābhoyajam ca varṇyaśvāmāḥ

Next we will describe food that is fit and food that is unfit to be eaten.

He then lists people from whom food may not be accepted (aṇnam abhoyam), people from whom food may be accepted, and finally foods that have become spilt by contact or gone stale. All this is just what we would have expected under abhoyja food.

Immediately after his discussion of bhoyābhoyaja food, he turns to forbidden foods (VaDh 14.33–48). The very first sūtra lists forbidden foods indirectly by indicating the penance for eating them:

14.33 laśunapalaṇḍakaśūgrījanasūryaṁkṣatkaśvānir-
yāṣṇaloṁkānavacarnasūryavākapāvalaṁsūkatrocheṣāṁabhajanasya
utkṛṣṇam

For eating garlic, onions, mushrooms, Gṛ̣jana onions, Śleṣmāntaka fruits, tree resins, red juices flowing from incisions on tree bark, anything licked by a dog or a crow, or the leftovers of a Śūdra, he should perform the very arduous penance.

We should have expected bhakṣaṇa here rather than bhoyajana. This usage may indicate that, as in any specialized use of words, technical terms continue to be employed with a broader meaning. However, this passage begins with abhakṣaṇa types of food (garlic, etc.) but concludes with abhoyajana types (licked by a dog, etc.). I think the use of bhoyajana here may have been influenced by the abhoyajana items at the end of the list.

When Vasiṣṭha turns to listing forbidden foods in 14.34–38, the governing verb he uses is varjyataḥ (“he should avoid”). In sūtra 39, however, he does use bhakṣaṇa regarding permitted animals in the common list of the five five-nailed animals. Next, Vasiṣṭha gives a list of forbidden animals (sūtras 40–45) without any verb or verbal equivalent to indicate whether they are forbidden or not. They are forbidden only by implication. Sūtra 46 begins with bhakṣaṇa with reference to the milk cow and draft ox (dhvaneṣu dhvaneṣu), thus bracketing the abhakṣaṇa animals between two lists of bhakṣaṇa animals (see above n. 9). The long list of thirty-six forbidden animals contained in the last sūtra (48) of this section, likewise, has no verb or verbal equivalent; these are also forbidden only by implication.

It is clear, however, that Vasiṣṭha recognized the two categories of food represented by abhoyja and abhakṣaṇa, as evident in the following verse (VaDh 27.10) given within the context of remedies when one suspects that one has eaten such food:

ṣaṅkāstheṣe samputpanne abhoyābhakṣyaśaṃsajñihaṃ
dhaṃ... when a doubt has arisen bearing the name “unfit to be eaten” or “forbidden to be eaten”

Here also Bühler translates “whether it may be called fit to be eaten or not,” thus eliminating the distinction between the two terms.

MANU

The use of the two terms by Manu, the author of the first dharma text composed completely in verse, also demonstrates their continued employment as technical terms for the two broad categories of proscribed food. At the end of the first chapter of Manu there is a table of contents.11 It lists bhakṣaṇa as one topic, and Manu deals with this topic at 5.4–26. At the very beginning of this list, Manu uses abhakṣaṇa to refer to the forbidden foods.

laśunam gṛ̣janaṁ caiva palaṇḍakaśūgrījanan ca
dhvaṁśeṣu dhvaneṣu amedhvaṁśu bhakṣyaṁ ca

Garlic, leeks, onions, and mushrooms are foods forbidden to twice-born persons; and so is anything growing in an impure medium.

This long list of forbidden food does not contain any item that would fall under abhoyja, such as contaminated food. All items are sources of food rather than food in

11 As I have worked on the critical edition of Manu for the past several years, it has become more and more clear that this table of contents, as well as a large chunk of the first chapter, is a later interpolation. This interpolation must have been made quite early in the life of the text, because it is found in every manuscript and is noted by all the commentators.
the sense of cooked food served at a meal. Three times in this list (MDh 5.17, 18, 23) bhaksya is used with reference to permitted food. Manu concludes this section with a “transition verse” (MDh 5.26) introducing the next topic; significantly, this verse refers to the two categories of food dealt with in the previous section as bhaksyābhaksya:

etad ukam dvijaśāṇām bhaksyābhaksyām aṣṭātoḥ
māγyāyayaḥ pravakṣyāmi viṁśata bhaksyaśvarjanē
do

I have described above everything that the twice-born may and may not eat. I will now explain the rule on eating and avoiding meat.

Manu does not deal with the abhajoja type of foods at all in chapter five; he does so in chapter four (MDh 4.205–24) under rules for a snātaka. Manu’s rules on abhajoja deal mostly with people whose food should not be eaten. He begins the lists (MDh 4.205) with the expression na bhujīta and repeats it at the beginning of his long list (MDh 4.207–17) containing a motley collection of people who are all abhajoja:

He must also never eat (na bhujīta) the following: food given by drunkards, the quick-tempered, or the sickly; food contaminated with hair or insects, touched deliberately with the feet, looked at by a murderer of a Brahmin, touched by a menstruating woman, pecked by a bird, or touched by a dog; food smelled by a cow; especially, food given after a public announcement; food given by a group or by a prostitute; food that is despised by learned men; food given by a thief, a musician, a carpenter, an usurer, a man consecrated for a sacrifice, a miser, a prisoner, a shackled man, a heinous sinner, a eunuch, a promiscuous woman, or a hypocrite; food that has turned sour or is stale; leftovers of a Śūdra; food given by a physician, a hunter, a cruel man, someone who eats leftovers, or an Ugra; food of a woman impure by reason of childbirth; food served at a meal where someone sips water during the meal; food given during the ten days of impurity resulting from a birth; food given without respect; meat prepared for a funeral reason; food given by a woman without a husband, an enemy, a city dweller, or an outcaste; food someone has sneezed upon; food given by a slanderer, a liar, a ritual merchant, an actor, a tailor, an ingrate, a blacksmith, a Niṣāda, a theatrical performer, a goldsmith, a basket-weaver, an arms merchant, those who raise dogs, liquor merchants, a washerman, a dyer, a heartless man, someone who lets his wife’s paramour live in his house or who condones a paramour, or someone who is bossed by his wife; food of persons during the first ten days after a death in their family; and unappetizing food.

towards the end of his discussion on unfit food (MDh 4.221), Manu calls these people abhojyānāṁ, people whose food should not be eaten, and at MDh 4.253 lists some Śūdras who are bhjojyānāṁ, that is, persons whose food may be eaten.

ārdikāh kulamitraṁ ca gopaḥ dāsanāpitarā
ete śūreṣu bhjojyānāṁ yaś cātmānāṁ nivedayet

A sharecropper, a friend of the family, and one’s cowherd, slave, and barber are the Śūdras whose food is fit to be eaten, as also a person who has presented himself.

Nowhere in this entire discussion on unfit food are the words bhaksya or abhaksya used.

VIŚṆU

The Viṣṇu Dharmaśāstra, although it lacks the sustained treatment of food found in other dharma texts, contains interesting and significant uses of abhaksya and abhajoja that support my thesis. At Viṣṇu 37.7 and 44.11 he uses an identical expression clearly establishing the distinction between the two terms:

37.7 abhojyānāḥabhaksyaabhakaṣaṇaṁ.

Eating forbidden food or the food of someone whose food one is forbidden to eat.

44.11 abhojyānāḥbhaksyaḥ kr̥mīḥ.

A man who eats forbidden food or the food of someone whose food one is forbidden to eat becomes a worm.

The first (Viṣṇu 37.7) is part of a long list of sins for which the Cāndrayana (lunar) penance is prescribed. It is noteworthy that the first bahuvrihi compound abhojyānāna contains the word anna, which refers generally to cooked food. In a section (Viṣṇu 57.1–5) dealing with people who should be abandoned or avoided (iyāyāḥ), we have again the use of abhojyāna in its technical meaning:

57.5 sarva eva abhojyāya ca pratigrāhyāḥ.

All (these) are people whose food one is forbidden to eat and from whom one is forbidden to accept gifts.

At Viṣṇu 57.16, on the other hand, in a verse identical to MDh 4.253, Viṣṇu lists certain types of Śūdras, such as a friend of the family and the barber, whose food may be eaten, calling them bhjojyānāna. Clearly, abhojyāna and abhojyānāna are synonymous terms.
Visṣu also reserves *abhakṣya* to refer to foodstuffs that are forbidden. In his extensive discussion on crimes, he (ViDh 5.98) imposes a fine of sixteen Suvarṇas (gold coins) on a man who taints a Brāhmaṇa by feeding him *abhakṣya* food (*abhakṣyeṇa brāhmaṇasya duṣṭayita*). Jolly glosses *abhakṣya* as “uneatable food such as excrements and the like, or forbidden food, such as garlic.” I think this is unwarranted; in Visṣu, as in other Dharma-sūtras, the term refers to forbidden foods. This meaning is quite evident at ViDh 5.175 (in Jolly 5.174), where the highest fine is imposed on a group of offenders, including *abhakṣyavikrayi* “a man who sells *abhakṣya* food”; and here Jolly correctly translates it as “he who sells forbidden food.” Visṣu makes an interesting distinction within the *abhakṣya* class of foods. After sūtra 5.98 cited above, which deals with tainting a Brāhmaṇa with *abhakṣya* food, he goes on to impose a larger fine of one hundred Suvarṇas if that food was *jāyapahārīn* “causing a man to lose his caste.” A similar class of *abhakṣya* food is referred to later in the same section of crimes (5.174; in Jolly 5.173):

5.174 *jāyapahārīn: sābhakṣya* bhusayati vīvāzyah
A man who makes someone eat food that causes loss of caste should be sent into exile.

Given the extreme nature of the punishment, something not imposed even on a man who destroys a boundary marker or breaks an idol, it appears that this class of *abhakṣya* must be foods that are at the top of the list of forbidden foods. Jolly translates *bhakṣayitā* in this sūtra as “he who eats”; I think we are justifi ed in seeing here the causative of *bhāyak*, given the serious nature of the crime and its parallel with ViDh 5.98, which also deals with feeding rather than eating *abhakṣya* food.

In two sūtras (ViDh 66.12–13), Visṣu juxtaposes *abhakṣya* and *bhakṣya* as opposing categories.12

66.12 nābbhakṣyam naivedyārthe
He should not give forbidden food for use at a divine offering.

66.13 na bhakṣye *py ajāmaṁśaṁśe*
Nor the milk of a goat or buffalo, even though it is a permitted food.

The milk of goats and buffaloes can ordinarily be consumed, but they are excluded from a *naiveṇya*. This is the only occasion to my knowledge that *bhakṣya* is used in this literature with reference to milk of forbidden animals.

YĀJNAVALKYA

The last Dharmaśāstra that I will investigate is Yājñavalkya.13 He devotes six verses (YDh 1.161–66) to unif food,14 seven and a half verses (YDh 1.170–78ab) to forbidden foods, and another three and a half (YDh 1.178cd–181) to meat. Significantly this section is prefaced by the commentator Aparāditya with the words *ādhaunā bhajojaṁ bhajojyabhakṣyābhakṣyaprakāraṇam ārahyate / viṣayābhojaṃ āha, “Now, he begins the topic of fit and unfit foods, and permitted and forbidden foods. Of these, he lists (first) unfit food.”

After enumerating the usual types of *abhjoja* persons, Yājñavalkya concludes (YDh 1.165): *eyañ anmaṇ na bhaktojyam, “The food of these should not be eaten.” The next verse (YDh 1.166)—nearly identical to MDh 4.253 and ViDh 57.16 cited above—specifies certain types of Śādās who are called *bhājyaśāh* “persons whose food may be eaten.” Stale food, which is normally *abhjoja*, is said to be *bhājya* (YDh 1.169) when it is mixed with ghee.

In his section on forbidden food, Yājñavalkya does not use the term *abhakṣya* probably because the first part of the list (YDh 1.175) ends with the appropriate penance for eating such food (*jagdhvā sopavāsas tryabham varet*), and the second part (YDh 1.176) with another penance (*jagdhvā caṇḍāvam caturṇam caret*). The section ends (YDh 1.177) with the by now familiar refrain about the five five-nailed animals that are permitted to be eaten (*bhakṣyāh*).

Finally, in his chapter on law (vyasa-hārakaṇḍa, YDh 2.296), Yājñavalkya has a provision identical with that of ViDh 5.98: anyone who taints a Brāhmaṇa by feeding him *abhakṣya* food is subject to the highest fine (*abhakṣyeṇa dvijam duṣyo dantya utmasābhasam*).

12 The term *bhakṣya* in its technical meaning is also used by Viṣṇu (ViDh 22.20) with reference to the well-known category of the five five-nailed animals (*pañca pauṇaśakāh*).

13 Other texts (mūlasūtras) continued to be composed, but we have only fragmentary evidence of them. The texts of Nārada, Bṛhaspati, and Kātyāyana, on the other hand, deal exclusively with law and legal procedure.

14 The section actually begins, according to Aparāditya, at YDh 1.160cd.

15 The very first verse of this section (YDh 1.170) dealing with milk contains the term *varjyayi* (“he should avoid”).
MAHĀBHĀRATA

In the Mahābhārata, a list of proscribed foods occurs, as far as I know, only once; it is in the Rājadharmakānda 12.37.1–26. The discussion begins with the question (2): kiṃ bhakṣyaṃ kim abhakṣyaṃ ca (“What is permitted to be eaten and what is forbidden?”). The list proper begins at verse 16; in this and in the next verse forbidden items and animals are called abhakṣya. At verse 21 begins a list of unfit foods which are called abhajoja. Likewise, the food of people whose food cannot be eaten is called abhajojam annam (22). The list ends in a somewhat unclear verse (26): pāyaṣaṃ kṛṣaṇaṁ māṁśaṃ api pāś ca vṛtha kṛtāḥ / abhajojaś cāpy abhakṣyaś ca bṛhmaṇaṁ gṛhamedhibhiḥ. I am unsure whether the reading here is accurate, but one thing is clear: the list concludes with the two types of foods listed above—the unfit or abhajoja and the forbidden or abhakṣya.

An interesting light is thrown on the distinctive meanings of abhakṣya and abhajoja by a story recorded in the Mahābhārata (1.166.1–32). King Kalmāśapāda tells his cook to prepare a meat dish for a Brahmāna guest. The cook is unable to find meat, and the furious king orders him to get human flesh, which the cook does. The Brahmāna’s powerful vision permits him to recognize the dish in front of him as human flesh, and he exclaims: abhajojaṃ idam (“this is abhajoja”). Here, interestingly, human flesh which should be abhakṣya is called abhajoja; I believe the usage here is proper because the term refers not to human flesh in general but to the food set before him, which significantly is called annam, a term that, as we have seen, is used for food that is cooked and ready to be eaten.

As the types of food that one should avoid became the focus of an expert tradition, they were bound to be classified and re-classified. Bhakṣya and bhajoja represent one of the earliest and clearly the broadest of such classifications. Vijñānabhaṣya, in his Mitākṣarā commentary on Yājñavalkya (YDh 3.289), elaborates this twofold classification into an elevenfold classificatory system.

1) jñāduṣṭa: examples: onions and milk of cow in heat.
2) svabhāva-duṣṭa: forbidden animals.
3) aśucisamsasprṣṭa: food touched by a crow or dog, or leftovers of a Śūdra.
4) aśucinidravyasamsprṣṭa: food contaminated with hair or insects.
5) bhāvaduṣṭa: revolving by reason of color, shape, etc.
6) kādudhuṣṭa: stale food, milk during first ten days after birth of the calf.
7) guṇaduṣṭa: šukta-food gone sour or acidic; food of bad people.
8) hastādamādikriyāduṣṭaḥbhajoja: food given by hand, ghee dripping from nails.
9) parigrahaḥbhajoja: given by wrong kind of individual: eunuchs, thieves, etc.
10) āśucaparigrhītānna: given by people during a time of impurity caused by death, etc.
11) apuraṭānna: from people without children, Brahmācarins, and ascetics.

Within its elaborate structure, however, we still detect our two basic categories. The first two fall into the category of abhakṣya (with milk, as usual, being an exception), and the remaining nine belong to the category of abhajoja, both in the sense of food that is unfit (e.g., with hair or insect in it) and in the sense of persons whose food is not to be eaten.

A significant point to note finally is how the specialization of meaning of the negatives abhakṣya and abhajoja influenced the meaning of their positive counterparts. The terms bhakṣya and bhajoja, often in the compound form bhakṣyabhoja, refer to food in general, often demarcating a distinction between hard and soft, or basic food and delicacies. But within the semantics of abhakṣya and abhajoja, the positives begin to connote the types of food sources (vegetables and meats) that are permitted and the types of "served food" that may be eaten and types of persons from whom it may be accepted.

CONCLUSION

It appears to me incontrovertible that a specialized linguistic usage indicates an underlying intellectual structure or ideology. The larger question, which must await a longer and more detailed study of ancient Indian food prohibitions, is what bearing this distinction at the linguistic level has on the way ancient Indians in general, and more specifically Brahmānas, viewed and constructed their world and society. I agree with Mary Douglass that a bearing it must have.

As a preliminary guide, let me propose the following thumbnail sketch. The category of abhakṣya, within whose purview I have not seen the pure/impure play any significant role, refers to the physical and biological world—

16 I use "world" here as a shorthand for the way humans understand themselves and their experiences within the physical and the social world. I use it with the meaning given to it by Berger and Luckmann 1967, and Berger 1969.
the cosmology—constructed by ancient Brāhmaṇas. In the classification of abhaksiya animals, we see the distinctions between atmosphere, earth, and water; between village and wilderness (grāma/āranya); between cloven-hoofed farm animals based on the paradigmatic cow and the unclown work animals (horse); between paradigmatic birds that live up in the air and those that live and feed in water (web-footed); between carnivores and herbivores.

The category of abhajiya, on the other hand, is closely connected with social boundaries and with the pure/impure distinctions governing social relationships. Much of the anthropological work on food prohibitions in modern India has focused on food transactions—the bhajya-abhajya: from whom can food be accepted, and what types of food can be accepted from which types of people? This brings us to the very heart of the construction of Indian society, a society based on an intricate web of internal boundaries, the most prominent of which is caste; boundaries, however, that are much more complex than simply caste. Consider, on the one hand, the provision that allows a Brāhmaṇa to eat food from his barber or a Śūdra who is a family friend, and on the other, the one that forbids him from eating food given by a Brāhmaṇa without children, a relative whose son has died, or his own wife during her menstrual period.

Watching the CBS Morning News one lazy Sunday morning, I was struck by the sheer beauty of the creations made with flowers, leaves, and twigs by the noted Belgian florist Daniel Ost. But something this man, who probably had never even heard of Lévi-Strauss, said struck me even more. "Once a flower or a leaf is taken out of its natural habitat, it becomes an object of thought; it becomes a medium of expression." Human food, likewise, is a cultural construct and a medium of thought and expression for individuals and cultures. Food, like animals, is good to think with—and the categories of bhakṣya / abhakṣya and bhajiya / abhajiya represent one example of the ways ancient Indians thought with food.

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This is the most we can say, because all our sources come exclusively from Brāhmaṇas. Given their leading role in the intellectual life of ancient India, however, we must assume that at least some features of the world they constructed were shared by others.

On the meanings of the terms for "pure/impure" and their connection to social boundaries, see Olivelle 1998. On the issue of caste and purity, see Dumont 1966; Quigley 1993.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

ĀpDh Āpastamba Dharmasāstra, in Bühler 1879–82 and Olivelle 2000.

AV Aitareya Veda.

BDh Baudhāyana Dharmasāstra, in Bühler 1879–82 and Olivelle 2000.


*RV* Ṛg Veda.

*SB* Satapatha Brāhmaṇa.


*TB* Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa.

*TS* Taittirīya Saṃhitā.

*VaDh* Vaiśūṣha Dharmasūtra, in Bühler 1879–82 and Olivelle 2000.

