Notes

1. The following editions were used for this paper:
   Ādhyātma-kāvatā, ed. J. N. S. Chakravarty, Poona 1965;
   Kālīśīyā Aṭṭhadhātu, ed. R. P. Kangle, Bombay, 1960;
   Mahābhārata, ed. V. S. Sasthurkar, Poona 1933-39;
   Manu-sūtra, ed. G. K. Shirgadekar, Baroda 1939;
   Nītīśa, ed. T. Narasapati Sāstī, Trivandrum 1912;
   Rāgavardhāna, ed. W. L. Š. Panikkar, Bombay 1929;
   Rāmāyana, ed. G. H. Bhat et al., Baroda 1960-75;
   Śaṅkara-bhāṣya, ed. M. M. Haraprasāda Shastri, Calcutta 1910;

2. An important publication on this subject is Alster 1941, also see Scharf 1968: 291-7.

3. For a lucid study of this episode, see Śrīsūra 1984. He examines the dharmic aspects of Vāsudeva’s slaying in the Rāmāyana (1984: i, 116 ff); in the Tamil version, Kamba (pp. 214 ff); in the Rāmacaritāṅga of Tullida (pp. 219 ff); and in Subrahmanya’s completion of Bhaṭavīlāra’s Mahāvīraśāstra (pp. 238 ff).

4. See Lüders 1948:175 ff. Lüders does not mention the Rāmāyaṇa, but gives interesting instances of this rule in other texts.

5. Manu acknowledges a list of eighteen yātras as well as one of seven. In the first list, ten yātras spring from desire (VII:47) and eight from anger (VII:48). In the second list, four yātras spring from desire (VII:53) and three from anger (VII:52). The second list is discussed in Anubodha VIII:2, and then the yātras are given in a different order.

6. The debates in the Aṭṭhadhātu are fictitious but they may well reflect authentic views. See Wilhelm 1940.


8. See Wilhelm 1946:22.


10. That Sūkha’s treatise comprises five vīraṅkās (units of twenty chapters). The fourth vīraṅka discusses twenty amusements (vinoda). While the 12th chapter of the fourth vīraṅka deals with various forms of hunting (including the cīheta hunt nūgāta nūgapi), bowling and angling are the subjects of separate chapters of that fourth vīraṅka. The amusement of hunting (nūgāta nūgapi) is discussed in the 11th chapter, the amusement of angling (nūgapi) in the 12th.

From Feast to Fast: Food and the Indian Ascetic*

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Food as a cultural construct

Food for humans is more than a mere biological necessity. It is also a cultural construct, and cultural meanings underlie all aspects of the human relationship to food: production, preparation, exchange, and consumption (Lévi-Strauss 1969; Douglas 1975). The cultural construction of food, furthermore, is part of the broader social construction of reality (Luckman and Berger 1966; Berger 1967). Cultural ideas and norms relating to food are thus linked to other significant aspects of culture such as kinship, parity, ritual, ethical values, and social stratification. As Khare (1976) has argued convincingly, no aspect of food can be studied adequately except within the broader cultural system to which it belongs.

This paper presents a preliminary sketch of the roles food plays in defining types of ascetical ideology and levels of ascetical practice in India. Even within the context of asceticism, however, food needs to be studied within the broader cultural system of India, in spite of — one might indeed argue precisely because of — the fact that the Indian ascetical ideology is deeply anti-cultural, rejecting most social and cultural products and categories (see Olivelle 1975: 75-83).

The role of food in the Indian socio-cosmic order

It will be useful, therefore, to examine briefly at the outset the place food occupies in the Indian cultural system. I shall here principally with what Khare calls the primordial level of food circulation, namely, the role food plays in Indian cosmological speculations.1 In this context, food is not merely an edible object but a category of thought.

Once the food is considered in such a context, it is primarily a universalized abstract category of thought, following the characteristics the Hindu ideology typically awards it. Hence, food is not bound by specific limitations of time and space, and social and individual relationships. It becomes identified with some primary principles and their organization for explaining the Hindu conception of the cosmos. In this highly expanded and inclusive perspective, therefore, the food acquires a cosmological significance. (Khare 1976:131)
As a cosmological principle, food plays a central role in several creation myths of ancient India (see Lincoln 1986:65-86). Prajápati, the creator god of the Brāhmaṇas, is often portrayed both as the creator and as the food of his creatures. Indeed, the production of food immediately follows the creation of the first beings; without it, both creator and creatures are threatened by death. In the following myth, the very name of the first-born of creation, Agni, is said to mean 'food-eater'.

Prajápati alone, indeed, existed here in the beginning. He considered, 'How may I be reproduced?' He toiled and performed acts of penance. He generated Agni [fire] from his mouth; and because he generated him from his mouth, therefore Agni is a consumer of food; and, verily, he who thus knows Agni to be a consumer of food, becomes himself a consumer of food . . .

Prajápati then considered, 'In that Agni I have generated a food-eater for myself; but, indeed, there is no other food here but myself, whom, surely, he would not eat.' At that time this earth had, indeed, been rendered quite bald; there were neither plants nor trees. This, then, weighed on his mind.

Thereupon Agni turned towards him with open mouth; and he (Prajápati) being terrified, his own greatness departed from him. Now his own greatness is his speech: that speech of his departed from him. He desired an offering in his own self, and rubbed (his hands); and because he rubbed (his hands), therefore both this and this (palm) are hairless. He then obtained either a butter-offering or a milk-offering; — but, indeed, they are both milk.

This (offering), however, did not satisfy him, because it had hairs mixed with it. He poured it away (into the fire), saying, 'Drink, while burning (śavaṁ dhūyati)!' From it plants sprang: hence their name 'plants' (esa dhārayah). He rubbed (his hands) a second time, and thereby obtained another offering, either a butter-offering or a milk-offering; — but, indeed, they are both milk.

This (offering) then satisfied him . . . . Thereupon that burning one (viz. the sun) rose; and then that blowing one (viz. the wind) sprang up; whereupon, indeed, Agni turned away.

And Prajápati, having performed offering, reproduced himself, and saved himself from Agni, Death, as he was about to devour him . . . (Śat. Br.II 2.4.1-7; Eggeling's translation)

In another myth, Prajápati is exhausted after his creative endeavours and falls down in a swoon (Śat. Br. VII.1.2-1.8). From the eye of the fallen Prajápati, food flowed forth. Indeed the myth identifies Prajápati with food. The gods thus tell Agni: 'This Prajápati is food; with thee for our mouth we will eat that food, and he (Prajápati) shall be food for us.' 'Food,' the Prajñaparāśād (1.14) echoes, 'is verily Prajápati. From this, verily, is semen. From this creatures here are born.'

These and other creation myths of the Brāhmaṇas make a clear connection between creation, food, and sacrifice. In fact, the Brāhmaṇas narrate these myths in order to explain the significance of various aspects of Vedic sacrifices. Sacrifices re-enact the creative acts and thereby assure the continuance of food. The sacrificial literature clearly defines the causal chain: sacrifice, rain, plants, food, procreation.

He sprinkles (the sacrificial victim) with, 'For the water—these, for the plants!' whereby it (the victim) exists, whereby he thus makes it sacrificially pure. For when it rains, then plants are produced here on earth; and by eating plants and drinking water that sap originates, and from sap seed, and from seed beasts . . . (Śat. Br. III.7.4.4)

Manu III.76 puts it succinctly: 'An oblation duly thrown into the fire reaches the sun; from the sun comes rain, and from rain food, and therefrom the living creatures (derive their subsistence)' (see also Maitrīyaparāśād VI.37).

The Taittirīyaparāśād contains some of the boldest statements regarding food and creation:

From this Self, verily, space arose; from space, wind; from wind, fire; from fire, water; from water, the earth; from the earth, herbs; from herbs, food; from food, semen; from semen, the person.

This, verily, is the person that consists of the essence of food. This, indeed, is his head; this, the right side; this, the left side; this, the body; this, the lower part, the foundation. As to that there is also this verse:

From food, verily creatures are produced.

Whosoever creatures dwell on the earth.

Moreover by food, in truth, they live.
Moreover into it also they finally pass.
For truly, food is the chief of beings;
Therefore it is called a panacea.
Veil, they obtain all food
Who worship Brahma as food.
For truly, food is the chief of beings;
Therefore it is called a panacea.
From food created things are born.
By food, when born, do they grow up.
It both is eaten and eats things.
Because of that it is called food. (Tait. Up. II.1-2)

In the next chapter, the same Upanishad expands on the cosmic significance of food:

One should not speak ill of food. That is the rule.

Breath, verily, is food. The body is an eater of food. The body is established on breath; breath is established on the body. So food is established on food.

He who knows that food which is established on food, becomes established. He becomes an eater of food, possessing food. He becomes great in offspring, in cattle, in the splendor of sacred knowledge, great in fame.

One should not speak ill of food. That is the rule.

Water, verily, is food. Light is an eater of food. Light is established on water; water is established on light. So food is established on food.

He who knows that food which is established on food, becomes established. He becomes an eater of food, possessing food. He becomes great in offspring, in cattle, in the splendor of sacred knowledge, great in fame.

One should make for himself much food. That is the rule.

The earth, verily, is food. Space is an eater of food. Space is established on the earth; the earth is established on space. So food is established on food.

He who knows that food which is established on food, becomes established. He becomes an eater of food, possessing food. He becomes great in offspring, in cattle, in the splendor of sacred knowledge, great in fame. (Tait. Up. III.7-9)

These Upanishadic passages establish a correlation between food and eater. Conceptually, one cannot exist without the other. Physically, one becomes transformed into the other. A one-time eater is now the food of another eater which, in its turn, will become the food of a third. Beings eat and are eaten. The whole of creation, therefore, is a vast food chain; it contains food and eaters of food:

Oh, wonderful! Oh, wonderful! Oh, wonderful!
I am food! I am food! I am food!
I am an eater of food! I am an eater of food! I am an eater of food! (Tait. Up. III.10.6)

Food is not only the central element of creation; it is also said to be the source of immortality. In the dining ritual, for example, food is called anna (the immortal or ambrosia). Before eating, a person sips some water, saying: 'Thou art the seat of anna', and after eating he sips, saying: 'Thou art the cover of anna' (Kane, 2nd edn., vol. II, pp. 763).

The ritual use of food underscores both its centrality at the social and cosmic levels and its inherently transactional nature. Food is the central element of a cosmic transaction that maintains both the social and the physical cosmos. Food becomes plentiful only when it is shared (Tait. Up. III.10.1). The dharma literature admonishes people not to cook for themselves alone; such food becomes poison (Baudh. II.5.18). Indian food transactions include all known beings. Food is offered to the gods at sacrifices, to the forefathers at śraddhas, to various beings (bhūta) at bhūta, and to other humans at hospitality rites and as alms. Indeed, of the five daily duties called Great Sacrifices (mahāyajña), four involve the transaction of food. The interdependence of all beings with regard to food is expressed well in the Bhagavadgītā (III.10-15); in the beginning, humans and the sacrifice were created together so that humans would sustain the gods through sacrifice; and gods, in their turn, would sustain them by providing rain that produces food. 'From food do beings derive, food derives from rain, and rain derives from sacrifice' (Bhagavadgītā III.14). The interdependence of all beings is expressed in this socio-cosmic food transaction. The cosmos represents a giant food cycle.

Food, therefore, should be worshipped. One source prescribes that when a person sees food he should fold his hands, bow to it, and say
'May this always be ours.' It goes on to say that whoever honours food honours thereby Viṣṇu. The conclusions of Khare's study of food within the broader cultural system of India accords with this positive evaluation of food.

This attitude and behaviour towards food is not restricted to the elite or brahmanical tradition. Several recent anthropological studies confirm that similar attitudes and behaviour patterns exist at all levels of Indian society (Khare and Rao 1986; Apte and Katona-Apte 1981; Rösel 1983).

The Hindu cosmological model handles food as a necessary precondition for the creation. There is a belief that is widely held even by the illiterate contemporary Hindu: 'before God creates life on the earth, He takes care of the question how He is going to feed them'. This idea, a crucial moral axiom, is in-built in Hindu cosmology. (Khare 1976:132)

Historical and textual studies as well as substantial ethnographic research show that Hindu culture in India has preserved, throughout its history, a set of core cultural assumptions concerning the link between human society, food transactions, and divinity. These assumptions are: that the interdependence of men and gods depends on ritual transactions of food between them; that the distinctiveness of various groups in Hindu society as well as the relationship between such groups is ritually constructed in such food transactions with the gods; and lastly, that the ritual concentration and redistribution of food is a critical mechanism for the formation of social groups and the articulation of leadership. (Breckenridge 1986:24, original italics)

Food, therefore, plays a central role in the socio-cultural construction of reality in India. Indian culture has formulated elaborate rules, prohibitions, and classifications with regard to food. Rules of proper and improper food provide a clear cultural definition of food. Rules regarding food transactions constitute a social code that strengthens the hierarchical organization of society and demarcates the boundaries of purity. The rules that surround all aspects of food in Indian society can be seen as constituting an elaborate food code. 4

One of the keys to deciphering that code is found in the role food plays in the cultural understanding of the socio-physical world, an understanding expressed verbally in creation myths. If food is a code for the created universe, both physical and social, as it appears to be, then one's behaviour with regard to food is a code for one's behaviour towards the cosmos. In the above discussion of food within the social world of Hinduism, we saw a remarkably positive attitude towards food and, therefore, towards the cosmos. Abiding by cultural norms regarding food translated into intentions and activities that upheld the socio-cosmic order.

Fear of food in Indian ascetical traditions

But Indian culture also displays a startlingly different attitude towards food: food is dangerous. The perceived danger of food may have several different ideological roots. In this paper, I shall focus on the ascetical ideologies5 that both provided a sharp contrast to the views discussed above and contributed significantly to the evolution of Hindu attitudes towards food.

The fear of food is nowhere more evident than in the ascetical traditions of India. One of the central features of Indian asceticism — indeed, a defining feature of ascetical life in general and of the various classifications of such lifestyles — concerns food: how one procures it, how one stores it, how one prepares it, and whether and how one eats it.

The Indian tradition generally acknowledges two somewhat overlapping types of asceticism: the itinerant mendicant (world renouncer) and the sedentary forest hermit. Food habits play a central role both in the definition of these ascetic types and in their further classifications. I shall first examine these food habits. Then I shall attempt to uncover the general patterns and attitudes that underlie these habits. Finally, with the help of a few creation myths, I shall explore the role food plays in the world view that is at the heart of Indian asceticism and, within that context, attempt to decipher the ascetical food codes.

A world renouncer's behaviour towards food is simple and poignant: he is not permitted to produce, to store, or even to prepare food. As he is not a food producer, he obtains his food by begging; hence his common epithet, bhikṣu (mendicant). A renouncer rejects the use of fire and, consequently, does not cook. He begs food that is already cooked or otherwise prepared by householders. He is not permitted to store food, and, therefore, he is required to beg for his food every day. The proper time for begging is after the householders have completed their evening meal. Thus, in effect, he eats their left-overs. 6

The subclasses of renouncers also have distinctive methods of begging; indeed, these methods appear to be the defining characteristics of several of these subclasses. The most common classification contains four divisions. The begging of a kuticaka, the lowest class, is nominal. He begs, or, more accurately, eats at the house of his son or relative. A
bāhūdaka avoids the houses of relatives and begs his food from seven houses. A hārṣa is associated not with a distinct style of begging but with specific forms of fasting.

Most sources consider the paramahārṣa as not only the highest but also the archetypal renouncer. A paramahārṣa's method of begging is called mādhukara (bee-method): as a bee gathers nectar randomly from many flowers, so a renouncer begs randomly just as the bee gathers from many houses. He does not choose the houses; there is no forethought. Some sources identify two even higher classes: turiyātīta and avadhūtā. A food habit of the former goes under the name govata, the 'cow-vow', whereby the ascetic imitates a cow and eats the food directly from the ground using only his mouth. One must assume that the donor throws the food on the ground as one would when one gives food to animals. An avadhūta is associated with the ajagārvatī, the python's lifestyle. Here the ascetic does not actively seek food but passively waits for someone to give him food without being asked, just as a python lies in wait for his prey to come to it. Two categories that overlap somewhat with the above classes are pāṇipāra and udanapāra. The former does not use a begging bowl but receives his alms-food in his hands and eats it immediately upon receiving it. The latter does not even use his hands and eats with his mouth directly from the ground. The latter practice appears to be the same as the govata. Similar divisions of renouncers based on their begging methods are also found in non-Hindu traditions.7 Begging cooked food from randomly chosen houses and imitating the eating habits of animals also show a disregard for purity that is at the heart of Hindu food practices.

Renouncers do not engage in any form of food transaction. Theirs is a one-way relationship: they receive but do not give. They do not give food to other human beings. They do not offer food to the gods. As the Laghuasyaśopaniṣad observes: 'He eats what he begs; so he should not give alms' (Schrader 1912:21). Having abandoned all rites, they stand outside the food cycle that is at the centre of Hindu social and religious activities.

A somewhat different set of concerns underlies the food habits of forest hermits. The hallmark of their food practices, as of other elements of their lifestyle, is the fact that they are not mediated by culture. Their food is wild and uncultivated. They eat fruits, roots, leaves, and the like that grow naturally in the forest, and they are forbidden to eat anything that is cultivated or that grows in a village. 'He shall not step on plowed land; he shall not enter a village': this is the recurrent injunction directed at hermits (Gaut. III.52-3; Baudh. II.6.11.15).

There are numerous classifications of hermits given in different sources. These classifications are much more elaborate than those of renouncers. Food habits, nevertheless, play an importance role in all of them. The loci classicus is found in the Baudhāyanadhamrastātra. Baudhāyana divides hermits into two broad categories: those who cook their food and those who do not. Each is subdivided into five subclasses, some of which contain further subdivisions.

The five classes of hermits who cook are: 1) those who eat anything in the forest; 2) those who eat only unhusked wild grain; 3) those who eat only bulbs and roots; 4) those who eat only fruit; 5) those who eat only vegetables. The first group is further subdivided into: a) those who eat only vegetable products, and b) those who eat the flesh of animals killed by carnivorous beasts (in other words, those who eat carrion).

The five classes of hermits who do not cook are: 1) those who collect and prepare their food without the use of iron or stone implements; 2) those who use only their hands to eat food that they happen to find by chance; 3) those who use only their mouths to gather and to eat food in imitation of animals; 4) those who subsist only on water; 5) those who subsist only on air.

I cite this long passage because it typifies a common feature of Indian ascetical literature: an obsessive concern with regard to food.

Now the hermits in the wood belong to two classes: those who cook and those who do not cook.

Among them, those who cook are divided into five subdivisions: 1) those who eat everything which the forest contains, those who live on unhusked (wild-growing) grain, those who eat bulbs and roots, those who eat fruit, and those who eat pastures.

Those who eat everything that the forest produces are, again, of two kinds: they either subsist on forest-produce generated by Indra, or on that which has been generated from semen. Among these, that which has been generated by Indra (is the produce) of lianas, shrubs, creepers, and trees. Fetching and cooking it, they offer the Agnihotra in the evening and in the morning, give (food) to ascetics, guests, and students, and eat the remainder. That which is generated from semen is the flesh (of animals) slain by tigers, wolves, falcons, and others, or by one of them. Fetching and cooking it, they offer the Agnihotra in the evening and in the morning, give some to ascetics, guests, and students, and eat the remainder.
Those who eat unhusked grain only, fetch rice, avoiding (husked) corn, boil it, offer the Agnihotra both in the evening and in the morning, give some to ascetics, guests, and students, and eat the remainder.

Those who eat bulbs and roots, or fruit, or pot-herbs, (act) exactly in the same manner.

Those who do not cook are divided into five classes: Unmäjjakas, Pravṛtta-s, Mukhenādiyas, Toyāhāras, and Vāyubhakṣas.

Among these, the Unmäjjakas (collect and prepare their food), avoiding iron and stone implements. The Pravṛtta-s take it with the hand, the Mukhenādiyas take it with the mouth, the Toyāhāras subsist on water only, and the Vāyubhakṣas (air-eaters) eat nothing.

In this manner ten (different) initiations are prescribed for hermits who follow the rule of Viśhṇas. (Bandh. III.31-15; Bühler 1882 translation)

The Viśhṇasaṅgadharmaśāstra also divides hermits into two broad categories depending on whether they are with or without a wife. There are four classes of hermits with wives: 1) the aśvakara, who subsists on uncultivated herbs, fruits, and roots; 2) the vaisśeṣa, who gathers wild food from the direction he happens to face when he gets up in the morning; 3) the bālakiya, who throws away all his stored food on the full-moon day of Kārttika (October-November), i.e. at the end of the rainy season; and 4) the perna, who lives on fruits and leaves that have fallen to the ground naturally (I.7). The Viśhṇasaṅgadharmaśāstra also gives numerous classes of hermits without wives. Many of these have distinctive food habits, such as those who use a stone for grinding; those who use their teeth as a masher; those who subsist by gleaners; those who live in the manner of doves or deer; those who eat what has been dried by the sun; and those who subsist on yellow leaves (I.8). Several passages of the Mahābhārata also contain similar classifications (e.g. Mbh. XII.17.10; XII.268.12; XIII.129.35-35). One is particularly interesting because the principle of classification is the length of food storage. Some store food for twelve years, some for one year, others for a month, and still others do not store at all but gather their food each day (Mbh. XII.268.8-9). The last are called sadāyaprkṣākā: they clean the pot immediately after eating because they leave nothing for the morrow. This lifestyle is also called atvāstavaśītha — the ‘no-tomorrow rule’ — and appears to be the same as the ‘pigeon vow’ (kāpotavāśītha), namely, gleaning one’s food daily in the manner of a pigeon.

The ascetic food code

The use of descriptions of ascetic practices and classifications of ascetic lifestyles for historical purposes poses serious problems. These descriptions and classifications are found principally in normative literature such as the epics and dharmaśāstra. It is impossible to determine their correspondence to the reality of ascetic life in any given area or sect, or at any given period of Indian history. My purpose here, however, is not to construct an historically accurate description of Indian ascetical practices. Rather, I am attempting to uncover the role of food within the ascetical world view and to decipher the meaning of food codes embedded in food habits enjoined on ascetics, even though these rules may not have corresponded exactly to historical practices at any given time and place. For this purpose, the connection between precept and practice is not a crucial point. Like stories in mythic accounts, these descriptions may not give us accurate historical information; they nevertheless provide us with useful insights into the ascetical world and its relationship to social values and mores.

The first task in the process of deciphering the ascetic food code is to uncover any basic patterns that may underlie the diversity of ascetical food habits, patterns that would allow us to make some useful generalizations regarding food within the context of the ascetical world view.

It appears to me that there are four distinct areas of the human relationship to food that play significant roles in the ascetical food practices: production or procurement, storage, preparation, and consumption. In each of these areas, humans expend enormous effort and energy, which I shall call the human ‘food effort’. The sustained and life-long effort to procure sufficient food is a biological impulse common to humans and animals. Humans, however, are able collectively to anticipate the future, to discover the laws of nature, and to develop technologies of production and storage in ways far superior to those of animals. The human food effort thus becomes a social and cultural enterprise, determining many of the social, political, and economic structures that constitute human society. Among humans, the food effort is culturally mediated also at the levels of preparation and consumption. Cooking and the entire culinary art, as well as the rules and customs that regulate the process of eating, are culturally defined. Moreover, most cultures, including the Indian, invoke rules of ritual purity and impurity with reference to all aspects of food.
The major pattern that emerges from the ascetical food practices that we have discussed is the minimization and, at some levels, even the elimination of the human food effort in each of the four areas: production, storage, preparation, and consumption.

At the level of production, ascetical behaviour demonstrates a progressive lessening of effort directed towards procuring food, culminating in its total elimination. All types of ascetics abandon cultural mediation in food production; this, indeed, appears to be a hallmark of Indian asceticism. Hermits are food gatherers. They obtain food from sources that have not been mediated by culture, eliminating all forms of technology and planning inherent in agriculture and animal husbandry. Not only are they forbidden to eat anything grown on ploughed land, they are even forbidden to eat fruit from cultivated trees and milk from domestic cows. As we move higher in the classification of hermits, we see a lessening of effort directed towards food procurement; the highest classes do not procure food at all, living on water or air. Renouncers are food gatherers of a different sort; they gather or, more precisely, beg food that has already been prepared by others. The significant difference is that their food procurement, unlike that of hermits, is dependent on another's generosity. They do not own food. The highest types do not direct any effort towards procuring food; they remain still like a python awaiting what they may receive by chance.

We have seen that although some types of hermits do store food, their advancement in asceticism is marked by a decrease in the length of such storage. The most advanced hermits, like all renouncers, do not store at all; they procure their food day by day. A central feature of ascetic food production and storage appears to be the progressive elimination of forethought and planning. Some hermits, for example, go in the direction they happen to face when they get up in the morning in order to gather food. Renouncers are expected not to choose houses beforehand but to visit them at random. At the highest level, everything is left to chance. The imitation of animals — cow, deer, pigeon, python — also points to the gradual but certain elimination of planning, a feature which sets humans apart and which is the basis of human economic activities.

In the preparation of food, likewise, ascetics avoid cultural mediation. Although food may be prepared without the use of fire, cooking is nevertheless the basic method of making it fit for human consumption. Renouncers possess no fire and do not participate in food preparation; they beg food that is already prepared. Hermits are divided into those who cook and those who do not; in all classifications, the latter group is considered more advanced in asceticism. Not cooking appears to be another hallmark of Indian asceticism.

Ascetics also abandon the normal rules of etiquette in relation to the eating of food. This is apparent especially in the higher classes of ascetics who possess no utensils. They eat with their hands or pick up food with their mouths straight from the ground, imitating thereby the eating habits of animals. The absence of a permanent symbol of the food-effort (such as a begging bowl), moreover, symbolizes their lack of concern or forethought with regard to food. This lack of concern for food is illustrated in the command that an ascetic should remain the same both when he receives alms-food and when he does not (Manu VI.57). He is also expected to eat just enough to sustain life; he takes food as he would take medicine, not because he enjoys it but because it is necessary (Kathāsūtrasyupāniddh, Schrader 1912:33; Baudh. II.10.18.10).

When the minimization of the food-effort is taken to its logical conclusion, an ascetic would not even make the effort to take food into his mouth or to swallow it. This is religious suicide by fasting, a well-known and respected way of ending life in numerous Hindu and non-Hindu traditions (Dvādasas 1985:161-98).

The cosmic role of food in the ascetic ideology

If minimizing the food effort is a major principle behind ascetical food practices, what is the ideology or world view which would sustain that principle? To answer this, I shall turn once again to the creation myths, but this time to the myths that portray a decadent and progressively decaying universe. In the first part of this paper, we dealt with the cosmic role of food as represented in one stream of the tradition that goes back to the Vedic period, a stream that regards creation as a positive act. If, however, creation is regarded as a fall from a more perfect state, then the same cosmic role of food would undoubtedly impart a negative value to food. This is precisely what happened within the context of the samsāric view of creation shared by all ascetical traditions. Here I would like to discuss two significant creation myths, one Buddhist and the other Hindu.

The Buddhist myth is found in the Aggaṇṭa Sutta of the Dīgha Nikāya. In the beginning, the myth goes, people lived in a world of radiance. They were made of mind, feeding on rapture, self-luminous, and glorious. The world then was characterized by the absence of all distinctions:
Now at that time, all had become one world of water, dark, and of darkness that maketh blind. No moon nor sun appeared, no stars were seen, nor constellations, neither was light manifest nor day, neither months nor half-months, neither years nor seasons, neither female nor male. Beings were reckoned just as beings only.

This state, viewed as chaos in other myths, is considered here as the paradisiacal time of the beginning. On this cosmic water, the earth began to take shape in the form of a floating scum. It tasted like honey. One of these beings tasted that 'savory earth' and others followed his example. As they ate, they became filled with craving. Thereupon, their inner luminosity faded away and, outside, there appeared the sun, the moon, and the stars.

As those beings continued to feed on the 'savory earth', their bodies became more and more solid and distinctions began to appear between them. Some became more beautiful than others. The Mahāvastu version adds the interesting detail that those who ate more became ugly, whereas those who ate less became handsome. The handsome ones, however, were filled with pride, vanity, and conceit, and they began to despise the others. As a result, the savoury earth disappeared and the beings lamented its loss.

After the disappearance of the savoury earth, outgrowths appeared on the soil; they sprang up spontaneously like mushrooms. They had the golden hue of fine ghee and tasted like the best honey. The beings then began to feast on those mushrooms. As they did so, their bodies became increasingly solid and greater distinctions appeared between them. The superior and more handsome ones were filled with pride and despised the inferior ones. And while they, through pride in their beauty, thus became vain and conceited, these outgrowths of the soil disappeared.

The outgrowths were replaced by creepers and the beings began to feast on them. As they ate, the distinctions between them became more pronounced, and their pride, vanity, and conceit increased. The creepers then disappeared and they were replaced by rice. This primordial rice was without the husk or brown powder that today covers the grain. It did not have to be cultivated and it could be eaten as it was plucked. As the beings continued to eat the rice, there arose the final differentiation: some became men and others became women. Lust and passion entered the hearts of those sexually differentiated beings and they began to have sexual intercourse with each other.

The event that finally destroyed that early paradisiacal state was the act of food storage. Until now rice had grown spontaneously in a form that needed no preparation and was ready to be eaten. When one crop had been gathered, another appeared the next day. But some of those early people were lazy and did not want to go out each morning and afternoon to gather rice. They began to fetch enough rice for more than one day.

Now from the time that those beings began to feed on boarded rice, powder enveloped the clean grain, and husk enveloped the grain, and the reaped or cut stems did not grow again.

Rice now had to be cultivated and prepared before it could be eaten. People then set boundaries around rice paddies giving rise to ownership and private property. Private ownership in turn gave rise to stealing, to violence, and finally to the need for government and social structures. That is the origin of the world and society as we know it.

In this myth, the crucial act that precipitated the fall from the paradisiacal state was eating. It was also responsible for the origin of the cardinal vices of Buddhism: greed, pride, and lust. As eating gave rise to individual vices, hoarding food was the source of social ills and created the need for social structures.

The second myth comes from the Liṅgāpurāṇa (I.39). It is narrated within the context of the description of the gradual deterioration of the universe associated with the doctrine of yugas. The scholastic explanation of the yugas, and of their respective characteristics within which this myth is embedded, has undoubtedly altered some features of the myth. But its broad thrust is still discernible.

The first of the four yugas was the krita, during which people were totally blissful. They were not differentiated into superior and inferior; without fixed abodes, they lived on mountains and in the ocean; and they moved about at will, always finding delight in their own minds. The last two yugas, dvāpara and kali, do not play a significant part in the myth as narrated in the Liṅgāpurāṇa. The major events of the myth take place in the second yuga, teṣa. As the kṛṣṇa age came to an end, clouds formed in the sky and rain began to fall on the earth. When the earth came into contact with the rain, a special kind of tree called kuṇḍapīṣa appeared. These trees produced spontaneously everything that the people needed: clothes, fruits, ornaments, and honey, as well as shelter.

Greed, however, took hold of them, and they began to cut the trees and to take the honey from them forcibly. The trees disappeared. The people began to be harassed by heat and cold, by hunger and thirst. So they had to build houses. Meanwhile, rain produced rivers and lakes, and a variety of vegetation appeared. This vegetation continued to provide food for the people without the need for cultivation. Out of greed, again,
people began to take trees and herbs by force. They in turn disappeared. Thereafter, people had to obtain their food through cultivation. Violence then set in, and the kṣatriya race— in other words, the governmental apparatus— was created to bring order to society.

This myth differs from the previous one on several major points. For example, eating itself is not identified here as a cause of the fall. But it is portrayed as one step in the gradual deterioration of the cosmos, because in the very beginning there was neither food nor the need for eating, and because greed is portrayed as an outcome of eating. In the Buddhist myth, moreover, the cause of the deterioration is clearly identified: deliberate human actions. In the Purānic myth, however, there is some ambivalence. Human actions clearly play a role, but there is also the automatic functioning of the time cycle represented by the yugas.

Both myths, however, portray the ideal world as one in which nature provides everything humans need. So long as they take only what they need each day, this condition continues. Taking more than one needs, hoarding for the future, creation of ownership: these results of greed are the basic causes for the world's deterioration. The downward spiral is something like this: eating, a progressive addiction to and dependence on food, a progressive difficulty in obtaining food, an increasing effort towards procuring food, the hoarding of food, the disappearance of spontaneous food, and finally the need for food cultivation and for social, economic, and political constructs.

The ascetic's withdrawal from food

These myths establish an important correlation between four factors: 1) food, 2) cardinal vices, 3) the development of the physical universe, and 4) the creation of socio-political structures. The Vedic myths had already established the correlation between food and the creation of the physical universe. Within that context, however, food and creation have the positive connotations of fostering life and fertility. In the latter myths, the correlation is maintained and intensified but the context has changed dramatically. Human life as we experience it is no longer seen as a positive thing; it is defined as a state of bondage and suffering. Creation is not a positive act but a fall from, or a deterioration of, a more perfect eternal condition.

Two central concepts govern the post-Vedic conception of reality: pravṛtti and nivṛtti. Pravṛtti signifies the emergence, the evolution or growth, and the sustained existence of the cosmos. It connotes action, especially ritual action. Nivṛtti signifies the opposite, namely, the reversal of the cosmic progress, and the final cessation of the cosmos. It connotes non-action and total quietude. Although these concepts parallel the more common saṃsāra-mokṣa dichotomy, they have a broader semantic compass than the latter and indicate not only the states of saṃsāra and mokṣa but also the processes that lead to and sustain these states. In most Indian systems of salvation, therefore, pravṛtti is the way of the world and includes much of what passes as dharma, whereas nivṛtti is the way to liberation.

As the myths portray and ascetical behaviour appears to assume, food, and in particular the human food effort, is an integral and even a central element of pravṛtti, and therefore of the miserable condition of our present existence. Food and eating are insidious. The more you eat the more you become entangled in and dependent on food and the food effort. Food is the major source of the cardinal vices: greed, pride, and lust. Indeed, the myths assign a secondary role to sex. Sexual differentiation and sexual activity are the result of food. Food is also the major way in which humans relate to and become part of the physical world. It is also the vehicle through which the physical world reacts to the human involvement in it. Thus the more people eat the more difficult the world makes it for humans to procure food. This difficulty gives rise to the private ownership of the means of production (represented by the boundaries drawn around paddy fields), to the culturally mediated production of food, to social vices such as theft and violence, and finally to the socio-political structures of present-day society.

Given this correlation between food and creation, it appears that attitudes and behaviour towards food can be a code for a person's relationship to the created universe. This, I believe, is true with respect to the ascetical food practices of India. It is significant that the way in which humans lived and obtained food during the early period of creation parallels the way ascetics are expected to live and to obtain their food.

The food code of ascetics appears to have both a cosmological and a soteriological dimension and meaning. The progression of ascetical withdrawal from the food effort is a mirror image of the progression of cosmic evolution, an evolution produced precisely by the human involvement in the food effort. In their attempt to become disentangled from the universe, ascetics seek to separate themselves from that food effort.

Ascetical behaviour with regard to food begins where the creative process ends: ownership of food combined with the culturally mediated production of food. All types of Indian ascetics, as we have seen, abjure the ownership and production of food. All Indian ascetics are food gatherers, as all humans were at the beginning of creation. Renouncers gather food produced and prepared by others, whereas hermits gather raw food from sources not culturally mediated. This relationship to food appears to be a sine qua non of Indian asceticism.
In the myths, food production was necessitated by the disappearance of spontaneous food, whose disappearance in turn was caused by food storage. Storing food and securing its availability for the future are the central concerns of human economic activity that asceticism seeks to eliminate. Indefinite storage of food is forbidden in all forms of asceticism. Definite time limits are set for various types of ascetics. Indeed, the ascent in asceticism is related in all cases to the decrease and finally the elimination of food storage. The highest ascetics, whether they be renouncers or hermits, do not plan for the future; they do not prepare for tomorrow (aitisthana; see Mbh. XII.159.11; XII.236.8-9).

Food preparation is another area in which ascetics seek to minimize their food effort. Many classes of hermits are distinguished by their refusal to use artificial implements to prepare food. Some give up the use of iron and stone implements, while others use only their teeth to grind their food. The major cultural tool in human food preparation, however, is fire, and cooking is the chief means of making food fit for human consumption. The myths tell us that, in the beginning, nature produced food that was ready for immediate consumption; artificial preparations became necessary only when cultivation was required to produce food. Fire and cooking, the symbols of cultural mediation in food preparation, are given up by all renouncers and by the higher classes of hermits. Hermits eat raw food, food, as the sources say, that has been cooked by time (Manu VI.17). Renouncers receive food that has been cooked by others.

The final stage in the ascetical withdrawal from the food effort occurs when ascetics suspend all positive acts aimed at the procurement of food. At the highest levels of ascetic endeavor, ascetics become totally passive. They eat only what they obtain by chance or what is given to them unasked. A good example of this passivity is the python vow (āgāraṇyās) of renouncers. The last step in the withdrawal from the food effort should logically be the elimination of eating. We find examples of this in many ascetical traditions of India, even though suicide by fasting or by other means is not countenanced in several traditions. That this final and logical conclusion is not drawn in all traditions does not argue against our claim that ascetical behavior towards food is marked by the minimization of the food effort. Clearly social reality does not always follow logical paths. The very bodily condition of humans places natural limits on ascetical behavior, even though theoretical justifications are often offered for those limits.

**Conclusions**

The ascetical attitudes towards food, therefore, present a sharp contrast to the system of values embodied in Vedic myths and in later Hindu rituals. In India, however, these two viewpoints did not exist in isolation. They influenced each other to such a degree that what we find on the ground is often a hybrid with complex and often contradictory attitudes towards food. In food, as in other areas, the Hindu world is complex and composite. It values and devalues food. Food is life and death, happiness and suffering. Food is to be worshipped as a god and to be shunned like a demon. It nourishes and it entraps. This very ambivalence towards food and towards the social and physical universe is a hallmark of the Hindu world.
The *dharma* of marriage and the possibility of failure

The purposes of marriage in classical India were three: fulfilment of the obligation to perform sacrifices (*dharmaṣaṃpatti*), birth of sons (*pujā*), and sexual pleasure (*yājñī*).1

The fulfilment of these purposes was dependent on both the husband and the wife being willing and able to fulfil their roles. It is important to remember that these were not merely desirable options for members of Hindu society, rather, marriage and its attendant duties were obligations that had to be met. If a man chose to end his studendthood and chose not to become a *sannyāsin*, then he had no other choice but to become a householder. It was his *dharma* to marry and, with his marriage partner, to fulfill the three purposes.

When a marriage in classical India was a failure, this meant that neither party could fulfill his or her *dharma*. Something had to be done to rectify this situation. Since divorce *viaticus* was not possible due to the nature of the *saṃskāra*, a second marriage was necessitated. A second marriage was prescribed only for the party who was not 'at fault' for the failure of the marriage. The majority of writers in the *dharmaśāstra* tradition make this remedy available only to the husband, but there is a notable tradition which also extends it to the wife.

The *saṃskāra* of marriage was, like every *saṃskāra*, eternal.2 Once married, always married. The selection of a marriage partner was therefore a serious religious matter. Both the boy and the girl came in for careful examination and evaluation according to the canons of marital eligibility set forth in *sūtra* texts.3 Nevertheless, wrong choices were inevitably made. Sometimes, the wrong choice was made due to fraud or the concealment of flaws;4 in other instances, there were physical or emotional changes in the marriage partners or changes in their circumstances which prevented them from fulfilling their *dharma*.5 In these cases, some remedy had to be provided.

**Superession as the remedy**

The remedy available to men is well known: when one wife is unsatisfactory, he may take another. Many texts list those flaws in a woman which render her an unsatisfactory spouse. All of these flaws would prevent the man either from having sons or from performing sacrifices.

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1. The translation of the Sanskrit term *yājñī* as 'sexual pleasure' is a matter of some debate. Some scholars have argued that it should be translated as 'sexual activity' or 'sexual skill', while others have suggested that it refers to the act of giving sexual pleasure to the partner.
2. The word *eternal* is used here in its traditional sense, to mean 'permanent' or 'unending', rather than 'timeless'.
3. The *sūtra* texts are a collection of institutionalized teachings that were passed down orally and later written down. They are the primary source of knowledge on the *dharma*.
4. Fraud or concealment of flaws could refer to a variety of things, such as a woman's lack of virtue or a man's inability to provide for the family.
5. The *dharma* is a complex concept in Hinduism, referring to one's duty or righteousness, and is often associated with the concept of *karma*.