
Book Reviews

Anna- daan, Food Charity in India: Preaching and Practice, Edited by K.V. Raju and S. Manasi, Routledge India (open access [https://doi.org/ 10.4324/97810033639962024](https://doi.org/10.4324/97810033639962024)). Pp. xvi +672.

Daan is considered more than just giving; it involves the sharing of resources with others, whether wealth, food, or other things. Of all the charitable acts, providing food (anna daan) is considered paramount as it addresses the fundamental needs of the impoverished. The book discussed all the religious practices and preachings in terms of formal definition of food security that is all people, at all times have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their food preferences and dietary needs for an active and healthy life. Hunger free society and Right to Food are symbols of civilised world and incorporated as one of the main objectives of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In India, all religions practices anna daan in one form or other. But there is no proper documentation of the history and spiritual roots and practices.

Anna-daan, Food Charity in India is first of its kind book which documented and illustrated preachings and practices of food charity across all the religions in India. Food charity is universally referred to as Anna-Daan across all Indian languages. By adopting the title "Anna-Daan" for the book, the main emphasis is placed on preserving Indian culture, as it underscores the central ideas of the text.

This book is divided into two parts. Part One containing eight chapters provide a structured framework and critical analysis drawing from a variety of religious sources. These include Hindu texts such as the Vedas and Upanishads, the Old and New Testaments for Christianity, and the Quran and Hadith for Islam. Each religion is explored separately in a dedicated chapter, encompassing Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Christianity, and Islam. The authors extensively reference the scriptures of each tradition to elucidate the perception of food charity. Additionally, they provide data and comparative analysis derived from various case studies conducted across India in contemporary times in part two. In Part II, there are 78 case studies meticulously documenting the real-world implementation of anna-daan across various religious traditions. The Hinduism case studies cover temples and religious sites practicing anna-daan in multiple states, while the case studies of other religions concentrate on the five most renowned pilgrimage destinations where anna-daan is practiced.

Historically, the precursor to anna-daan is food sharing, a concept preached and practiced across all religions. The book meticulously documents various scriptures from different religious traditions, tracing the cultural and historical roots of food sharing and anna-daan back to ancient texts such as the Puranas and Rigveda.

In Hindu tradition, earliest reference to daan was in Rig Veda, there is also references in Bhagvat Gita and Upanishad. Bhagavad Gita says that it is a sin to cook and eat for oneself; food must be shared. Food should first be served to guests and then eaten by oneself. The chapter on Hinduism probes into the concept of daan (giving), which is considered an integral aspect of one's dharma (religious duty). Within Hindu philosophy, every individual holds responsibilities towards their family, society, the world, and all living beings. Dharma is contextualized within the traditional extended Hindu family structure, which functions akin to a welfare state. The accumulation of wealth is viewed not solely for personal gain but for the collective welfare of the extended family and beyond. Moreover, the chapter emphasizes that any act of giving motivated by selfish intentions diminishes its spiritual significance. The chapter on Hinduism is followed by chapters on Jainism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Christianity, and Islam.

In Jainism, daan is described as a virtue and duty. It is considered an act of compassion and must be done with no desire for material gain. According to Jain philosophy, the tradition of offering food and receiving food is associated with karma. It means that every living being will get food based on its karma, and those who have good karma are entitled to food. Hence, it has been enjoined upon the householders to follow the practice of giving daan, i.e., religious gifts or charity and to organise welfare activities with the help of charities for the benefit of the weaker sections of society, as well as for other living beings like animals, birds, etc.

Buddhists believe that giving without seeking anything in return leads to greater spiritual wealth. Traditionally, Buddhists have long practised the giving of alms, food, medicines, and clothes to monks and to monasteries in exchange for teachings and merit. This relationship is seen to be a sacred mutual dependence, and merit is shared on both sides for the benefit of all.

Guru Nanak had an interesting perspective on charitable giving and provided the Sikhs with a new ethical framework in which people who are fit to work are required to earn a living through honest means while sharing the fruits of their earnings with sections of society that are needy and vulnerable, even including animals and plants. Sikhs have established langars (community kitchens) in and around their communities. At the langar vegetarian meals are served to all free of charge, regardless of religion, caste, gender, economic status, or ethnicity and people eat together. The kitchen is maintained and serviced by Sikh volunteers.

The Christian mandate to feed the hungry goes back to Jesus himself, who identified himself with the hungry. Christianity has different types of theological beliefs and indigenous or local practices associated with the Christian tradition of freely feeding the hungry, viz., the notion that in feeding the hungry one feeds Jesus himself. Indian Christians have adopted the Indian culinary menu (including sambar, drum stick, lettuce, and coriander leaves). They have maintained a balance between vegetarian and non-vegetarian items depending on the beneficiary's need and the availability of resources.

The chapter of *anna-daan* in Islam is drawn from Islamic scriptures defining its aims and objectives of almsgiving and charity, and the philosophy that motivates people to engage in charity and captures the variants of almsgiving and how they were occasioned. Charity and justice were the two fundamental cornerstones for bringing about solidarity in a society badly fragmented by the pride of lineage, tribal divisions, competition, and conflicts over scarce resources and command and control of the holy precinct in Makkah. While charity was the emotional glue applied to society racked by all kinds of divisions, justice was considered integral to any attempt to bring about social equilibrium in a society fraught with inequalities and protect it by punishing those who are out to disturb it. Broadly, Islam desires people to engage in charity or welfare totally without any selfish motives. It ought to be for the sake of the pleasure of Allah, should have no strings attached, should focus on helping the poor and the needy out of distress, rehabilitate them in the society, and should inflict no harm to the dignity of the recipients. Under no circumstance should the charity be for publicity, propaganda, and showing off.

The book offers detailed documentation of *anna-daan* practices both within and outside temples, churches, gurdwaras and mosques, as well as by various charitable societies and other organizations. It explores how *anna-daan* is practiced in temples on regular days, contrasting it with the variations observed during festivals and other days of religious significance.

Additionally, the book meticulously documented the philosophical underpinnings of *anna-daan*, that there is no discrimination in serving food based on caste, religion, or other socio-economic conditions such as wealth and income. This assertion is supported by examples drawn from various religious places across India. Furthermore, there is a distinct emphasis on serving the poor, destitute, and disabled, reflecting a deep sense of empathy within the practice of *anna-daan*, which was particularly visible during the COVID period, wherein migrant workers across India were served well by almost all the religious institutions.

In Part II, the case studies encompassed a diverse array of institutions which preach and practice *anna daan* across India, ranging from religious and charitable groups, both small and large, sophisticated and ordinary. Each case study provided a comprehensive overview of the institution's location, highlighting the spiritual aspects of *anna-daan* within the temple or charitable organisations setting. It probes into the rituals and prayers conducted before, during, and after the *anna-daan*, as well as detailing the number of devotees served on regular days and during auspicious occasions. In detail, examined what are the problems faced during the peak and rush hours. Furthermore, the case studies examined the quality and variety of food prepared, along with the time taken for food preparation, serving, and cleaning between batches. Nutritional content, hygiene standards, and infrastructure such as dining halls, utensils, refrigerated facilities, and kitchen equipment were meticulously documented. Human resources and management strategies for day-to-day operations were also discussed, including the procurement and handling of raw materials, as well as opportunities for

modernising cooking, dining, and service facilities. Use of modern technologies like CCTV surveillance, hot water for washing utensils and vegetables, and insulated vessels for food preservation were explored. Additionally, the case studies addressed waste management practices, including recycling for animal feed or manure. A dedicated section focused on the financial and management structures of each organization, covering sources of funding, sustainability planning, budgeting, expenditure transparency, and management responsibilities. One section in each case study deals with peoples view about the case study, which gives a overview how the practice of anna-daan contributing to the daily life of the people who takes food from it. Another important section is how anna-daan evolved to cater to the much wider population during the COVID lock down and then after.

Certain temples, such as Tirupati Tirumala Devasthanam (TTD), stand as vast edifices, drawing in a steady stream of devotees, ranging from 50,000 to 100,000 daily. During festivals or auspicious occasions, this number swells to an impressive 500,000. Embracing the principle of Annam Parabrahma Swaroopam, which venerates food as divine, TTD initiated the noble tradition of food distribution in 1985. This daily practice, grounded in the belief that those partaking in anna-daan receive divine blessings, has since become an integral part of their ethos. In contrast, numerous temples and charitable organizations operate on a smaller or medium scale, extending their services not only to worshippers but also to the impoverished in their vicinity. These institutions, while steadfast in their mission, often grapple with financial constraints, necessitating external support for their sustenance and expansion.

Most religious and charitable institutions adhere to standard meal plans for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. These typically consist of a variety of items such as rice, chapati, dal, mixed vegetables, sambar or rasam, curd, buttermilk, and sweets, with minor adjustments based on religious and local preferences. Regardless of these variations, all meals are prepared fresh and adhere to strict hygiene standards. Leftovers are never served, ensuring the quality and safety of the food provided. Field studies conducted by the authors have found no instances of devotees falling ill due to food consumption at any location. While there are regional differences in culinary traditions, such as the preference for wheat-based foods with sweets in northern temples compared to the prevalence of rice with curd and sambar or rasam in South and eastern India, the commitment to providing nourishing and hygienic meals remains consistent across religious and charitable institutions.

The majority of funding for food distribution and anna-daan initiatives stems from religious and philanthropic donations, often supplemented by significant contributions from ordinary individuals. Donations are commonly made in both monetary form and in-kind, with staples such as rice, wheat, pulses, and oilseeds sometimes arriving from locations as far as 500 kilometers away.

At the end in the conclusion chapter, authors suggested some improvements to the existing systems of food sharing and anna-daan. Like dash board for financial management and to display donors to enhance transparency and trust, use of modern

technology in all aspects from procurement to the serving and waste disposal. Modernisation of kitchens and also dining halls for cleanliness, speed and operational efficiency and to increase scale by crowd sourcing of the finances and donations.

In essence, the book offers a comprehensive examination of the principles and implementations of anna daan across various religions, along with contemporary practices and opportunities for enhancement. It provides valuable insights for policymakers, academics, and practitioners alike who aim to incorporate the concept of anna daan into the broader framework of universal food security.

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