

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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Farmer Producer Companies in India: Road Map to Ensure Sustainability, Srivastava,
U.K. and Srivastava, Pramila, Notion Press Platform, 2024. Pp. 374. Rs.500.00.

Producer Companies (PCs) are being seen as an important innovative form of organization and the government at various levels has also adopted this form of producer collectivisation and many of its agencies are promoting these entities after the law was enacted in 2002, and especially during the last 15 years.

There have been many studies on this entity across India during the last 15 years including many articles and a book by this reviewer. It is important to examine the practice of formation, governance and management of these entities besides assessing their physical and financial performance as public money is being invested besides the investment of producer member owned equity. There are many concerns about the way these entities are being set up, managed, and governed depending on the type of promotor. In this context, the book under review could have made a valuable contribution as it deals with the sustainability of these enterprises. It has two chapters on the context of agricultural markets and value chains and the concept and policy guidelines for such companies. The second part has eleven case studies of individual PCs. The next part of the book deals with the ground reality of working of these entities with just one chapter followed by part four with another chapter on monitoring and evaluation of such entities. The last part concludes the book with a way forward. Anyone would be interested in going through such a timely publication on a current topic of policy and practical relevance. However, this is where the book disappoints as it has not only many spelling mistakes but also repetition of words in the preface itself as well as across many chapters.

The first chapter gives a detailed history of the evaluation of agricultural market regulation beginning with the 1960's and details out the various provisions of model APMC Act of 2003, model APLM Act, 2017 and the model Contract Farming Act, 2018. It even summarises very briefly the now repealed 2020 Union Acts on Agricultural Markets and Contract Farming besides the amendment to the Essential

Commodities Act (ECA). It states that these historic farm laws would have opened a strategic opportunity for creating integrated value chains for a win-win situation for all stakeholders and accelerating the growth of agro-food processing industry. It even summarizes the recommendations of the Supreme Court appointed Committee to examine these farm laws without finding any loopholes or problems with any of the laws or the Committee's recommendations. Thereafter, the chapter goes into the issues of sustainability of PCs and quotes a statement of the then Minister of Agriculture without giving any source of it. Immediately after, it points out the problems which need to be resolved to make PCs sustainable and lists out parameters of maturity and sustainability of the PCs. It is quite unusual that the outline of the book is also mostly presented as a chapter-wise table listing the names and locations of the case study PCs. Chapter 2 gives a quick overview of the role of PCs in farmer livelihoods and compares a PC with a cooperative society based on frequently asked questions from NABARD website. It gives the basic details about the legal formation of the PCs and the central schemes for promotion of 10,000 Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs). Surprisingly, it does not differentiate between the concepts of the FPO and the FPC and even lists credit guarantee support and matching equity grant as part of the financial support in the first year, even though these entities generally get these grants after 2 to 3 years. It ends the chapter with status of the PCs over the years in India and in major states in terms of age, membership, and paid-up capital. It then presents an impact assessment framework based on stakeholder discussion which assigns scores to different aspects like statutory compliance, credit and market linkages, managerial/professional team, and turnover, profits, and benefits to members as part of the results delivered.

The 11 case studies in the next part of the book are no more than stating the profiles of Directors of the case study PCs, share capital details and various business activities like input supply, procurement of output, value addition and technical support to farmer members. It ends with a statement of problems faced by each of the PCs as stated by their management and assigns an impact assessment score out of 100. In most of the case studies, profit and loss statement and balance sheet are given though in some cases, it is only for one or two years which is not adequate to assess the sustainability of the PC. In some cases, the business plans of the PCs are given without any analysis.

In most of the case studies, the names of directors are listed, which doesn't add any value. Further, landholdings of the member farmers are given in absolute numbers for different categories without even percentage share of each category being worked out. Only in two case studies, the key financial ratios for 5 years have been given. Therefore, most of the case studies have plenty of information in the form of profile of the PC rather than performance or sustainability analysis. The goat PC has been studied by other scholars earlier (Singh, 2021; Prasad et al, 2023) but there is no acknowledgement of such case studies or analysis.

In one of the case studies in part two of the book (8), in the details about the villages, all villages have same average land holding which is unbelievable. Further, it

is given as a range though titled as average. One PC was set up in late 2021 and it is difficult to understand how this entity receives any equity grant within this short span of its life. Its profit and loss account and balance sheet are only for one year and the rest are only projections. With this kind of information what kind of performance analysis can be carried out is not clear. In another case, in Uttarakhand, the average landholding of different villages is shown to be ranging from 6 ha. to 16 ha. which is unlikely in a hill state, that too in Pithoragarh district. On the other hand, the average land holding of Directors is reported to be in the range of 0.4 to 1.2 acres each. This is the only PC which is less than two years old at the time of the case study and therefore, only a single year profit and loss account and balance sheet is given. In fact, the PCs for case studies should have been chosen keeping in view the minimum age of the PCs. Surprisingly, in another case study, the names of the employees along with designations are also listed besides the name of Directors. In case study 12, the details of the promoter and the number of PCs it has promoted are listed which really doesn't fit there. This case study has interesting details about the procurement arrangement with NAFED and minimum eligibility conditions for such an engagement. Case study 13 gives unnecessary details about the villages including village population and number of households while the average land per farmer is given only for the entire set of villages, not for each village. Though this PC has been in existence since 2015, there is not much analysis of its performance even though there are balance sheets and profit and loss details for four years given in the annexure.

Part 3 of the book deals with assessing the ground reality and operational problems of the PCs but no examples are given while stating various operational problems or challenges. It is stated that a uniform scheme of FPOs for all states is not relevant and this is highlighted by comparing Punjab and Haryana with the rest of the states, but no citations are given for the data used for this comparison. The chapter on monitoring and evaluation is very general and most of the time discusses operational guidelines and it is concluded that no effort is made to perform management control functions to bring the defaulting PCs (FPOs) back to health and performance. This chapter also highlights the need for data availability to perform management control tasks. The evaluation of the FPO scheme relies on a study by another agency and ends with a quote from that agency's report but without any details of the exact citation.

The concluding chapter asked some questions like how many FPOs are sustainable, how involved the shareholders are in the activities of these agencies, how farmer centric are these agencies in practice and what kind of benefits farmer members have received. It points out that there is a mismatch between the objectives of the 10,000 FPO scheme and the ground reality. It also cites the reviewers' study (Singh and Singh 2014 or Singh, 2021) without exact reference), about 30% members not being aware that the entities are owned by them. It makes many observations about the malpractices in the setting up and operations of such entities but without any evidence. It also questions that many of the Cluster-Based Business Organisations (CBBOs) are not qualified to carry out the task and many of them violate the governance principles

of PCs by appointing their own staff as Chief Executive Officers. It is also stated that most of the monitoring is more about process variables and not result or outcome variables. Most of the time, either there are no business plans, or they are very unrealistic. There is also a lack of professional management and capacity-building efforts and most of the scheme funds remain unutilized as a very miniscule percentage of PCs have obtained equity grant or credit guarantee support. Some of it is so because the processes to obtain such support are complex. Most importantly, the market linkages of such entities are weak, and they also do not have adequate value addition facilities. The roadmap suggested includes focus on results rather than the process, accountability of the CBBOs and funding agencies, and innovative market linkages.

The book would have added more value if it was published with more care as it does not even mention the year of publication and there are typos and other mistakes throughout the book. Further, major cases study collections (Singh, 2021 and Prasad et al, 2023) have been missed out in reviewing the existing knowledge in this domain and in planning the case study research.

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