



## Review Article

## Traditional Indian way of eating – an overview

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## ARTICLE INFO

## Article history:

Received 18 January 2018

Received in revised form

1 February 2018

Accepted 2 February 2018

Available online 13 February 2018

## Keywords:

Hands

Leaves

Meal on the floor

Vessels

Way of eating

## ABSTRACT

Eating (also known as consuming) is the ingestion of food, typically to provide a heterotrophic organism with energy and to allow for growth. Hands are most vital for cooking sustenance and for eating. Many individuals find eating with hands unhygienic, primitive, and nauseating; however, eating food with hands is associated with not just the body but also the psyche and soul. There is rationality behind the Indian routine of eating with fingers. Different types of vessels are used as needed to set up the sustenance. In Indian families, distinctive leaves such as banana leaf and jerk teak leaf are used for serving food. While eating in abundance, one must use hands to feel the food. Eating with a spoon or fork is often the current practice and is considered clean and advantageous; however, the vast majority of people do not understand that there is reasoning behind eating sustenance with hands. Eating by sitting on the floor has multitudinous advantages and is yet to be popularized in different regions across Asia.

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## 1. Introduction

Nowadays, in many Indian families, the act of eating sustenance with hands has been substituted with the use of cutlery such as spoons, blades, or forks, depending on the dish. Many individuals find eating with hands unhygienic, primitive, and disturbing; however, eating sustenance with hands is associated with not just the body but also the psyche and soul (Kamat, 2014). There is logic behind the Indian routine of eating with fingers. Eating with hands gives both physical and mental health and gives satisfaction. Eating with spoons or forks is often the current practice and is considered sterile and advantageous; however, the vast majority of people do not understand that there is reasoning behind eating food with hands. Numerous Indian families use different leaves for eating food [1]. Food is served on leaves such as banana leaf and jerk teak leaf in various nature reserve. Eating by sitting on the floor has many advantages and is yet to be popularized in different regions across Asia. The idea is that one should appreciate the eating process with the maximum number of senses such as taste, smell, sight, and touch. This is an example of features of Indian culture that may appear to be peculiar and unordinary at the first look, but can be extremely shocking and lead to a large amount of learning when analyzed critically. Some call eating by hands "primal" because it was in practice in times before utensils were first made (Kamat, 2014).

## 1.1. Hands and sustenance

Hands are the basic tool to cook the sustenance. Hands are required in every process of cooking, from washing the vegetables, cutting to blending. One can mix the ingredients perfectly using hands, for example, blending flour for making *chapati*, *paratha*, and so forth. According to the Vedas, our fingers and toes correspond to the *pancha mahabhoota* (five components). The thumb is related to *agni* (fire), the forefinger to *vayu* (air), the middle finger to *akasha* (ether), the ring finger to *prithvi* (earth), and the little finger to *jala* (water) (Kamat, 2014).

Indian foods are so different in shape and structure that no combination of cutlery (eg, blades, spoons, forks) would truly do the entire job. One needs to use all the fingers to handle the sustenance. The type of cutlery used is chosen based on the type of food that we eat. Indian sustenance tastes best when eaten with fingers and is intended to be eaten by hand. *Chapaties*, *parathas*, and *dosas* are to be torn and wrapped around the side dish. Rice is usually mixed with curries, so every sizable chunk is one of a kind. When one eats off a leaf (plate), endeavoring to use a blade and fork would tear the plate (Kamat, 2014).

## 1.2. Meals on the floor

When individuals sit on the floor (regardless of whether it is *vajrasana*, *sukhasana*, or some other yoga posture) [1], a significant number of muscles are used compared with when one sits on a

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seat. When one's feet are beneath the heart (as in a position when sitting on a seat), the blood flow is directed to feet, whereas when one sits with folded legs on the floor, the heart gets the advantage of better dissemination. Sitting on the floor strengthens the lumbar region of the body, reducing torment and distress. The hips are open, making the pelvis and legs more adaptable. Central muscles are reinforced, and the lower legs additionally get delicately extended. When the individual sits to eat in an appropriate position, digestion-related juices are secreted in the stomach, which gets ready for processing the food. The vagus nerve (the principle nerve that transmits signals from the stomach to the cerebrum) sends signals to the brain as the individual eats, regardless of whether the person is satisfied. When the individual sits on the floor, the nerve performs better and transmits all signals effectively; furthermore, the stomach and cerebrum get time to relate the signs of feeling full (Sampath, 2014). As a result, sitting on the floor and eating has a huge weight reduction advantage

### 1.3. Leaves

Leaves are the prime plates used for serving food. Since the time humans lived in forests, leaves have been used for various reasons, such as eating food off leaves. Many nature reserve even now serve food on leaves. Eating on leaves is savvy, and cleaning the mess after eating is simple. In Indian culture, different varieties of leaves are used for serving sustenance. Generally, water is sprinkled on banana leaves before use as a demonstration of cleansing. The use of banana leaves to serve food dates back to a period before the use of metals became the backbone of cutlery. Using fresh leaves was considered more sterile and expendable than using wooden utensils. Banana leaves are inexhaustible, huge, thick, and not easily punctured. Banana leaves contain a lot of polyphenols, a characteristic cancer-preventing agent found in many plant-based foods. The banana leaf additionally imparts a smell to the sustenance and improves the taste. While serving sustenance, the banana leaf is placed in a specific way: the tip of the leaf should be on the left side. Sages opine that the development of universe occurred on the left side and obliteration occurs on the right side. Therefore, the tip of leaf should be on the left side to indicate development and advancement. This demonstrates the useful effect of leaf on development of the body. Sages encourage using the tipped leaf for

**Table 1**  
Leaves and their benefits [2]

Name of the leaf	Benefits
Plantain leaf	Cordial, aphrodisiac, strengthening, improves taste, stimulates the digestive fire, useful in the treatment of toxicity, tiredness, and gout.
Bastard teak leaf	Alleviates <i>vata</i> and <i>kapha</i> , treats ascites and abdominal tumor, cures dyspnea, improves taste, and promotes health.
<i>Ricinus communis</i> leaf	Alleviates <i>kapha</i> , kills worms, and treats fever.
<i>Calotropis</i> leaf	Treats abdominal tumor, pain, poisoning, dyspnea, anemia, and skin diseases but aggravates <i>pitta</i> .
Castor leaf	Greatly beneficial for eyes and light to digest. Stimulates the digestive fire and alleviates <i>vata</i>
Secrete milky sap leaf	Helps to overcome thirst, burning sensation, and bleeding disorder.
Lotus petals	Aphrodisiac, removes weariness, and is recommended for travelers.
Tahitian screwpine leaf	Treats all types of glandular swellings and is beneficial to the eyes.
<i>Stereospermum suaveolens</i> leaf	Cures anemia, inflammatory swelling, dyspnea, and sexual disorders [2].



**Fig. 1.** Food served on a banana leaf.

eating food because they compared it to the spinal line [1]. The jackfruit leaf is also used to serve the sustenance. However, storing foods for long periods in this leaf causes acid reflux. Sages prefer the lotus leaf, which is restricted to household use. The explanation for this is that lotus leaf never adheres to the water droplets even though it is always in water. Shree Rangamahaguru explains that a greasy layer present on the lotus leaf repels water. Likewise, sages do not get attached to the extravagant matter of outside world because of the inner power. Along these lines, the sages prompted the usage of lotus leaf to serve *prasad* as the blossom is viewed as sacrosanct and unadulterated [1] (Table 1 and Figs. 1–4).

### 1.4. Vessels

Vessels are called *paatra*, which means the object that protects the food from falling [1]. In the kitchen, one can see varieties of vessels made of aluminum, copper, precious stones, and so on. Each type has its own advantage to ensure the sustenance. According to Acharya Sushruta, ghee should be kept in iron vessels; fruits and all eatables (snacks) in vessels made of leaves; *parishuska* (cooked meat), *pradigdha* (cooked meat soaked in milk), and drinks in silver vessels; sour food items (eg. sauces, cooked buttermilk, and so on) in vessels made of stone; water well boiled and then cooled in copper vessels; syrups and wine in vessels made of mud, glass, or rock crystal (stone) (which makes them cold and decorative); and *raga*, *sadava*, and *sattaka* in vessels of gems and precious stones (Acharya) (see Table 2 and Figs. 5–10).

## 2. Discussion

Eating by using hands and sitting on the floor with crossed legs was the customary method. Each finger helps in the change of



**Fig. 2.** Food served on a lotus leaf.

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