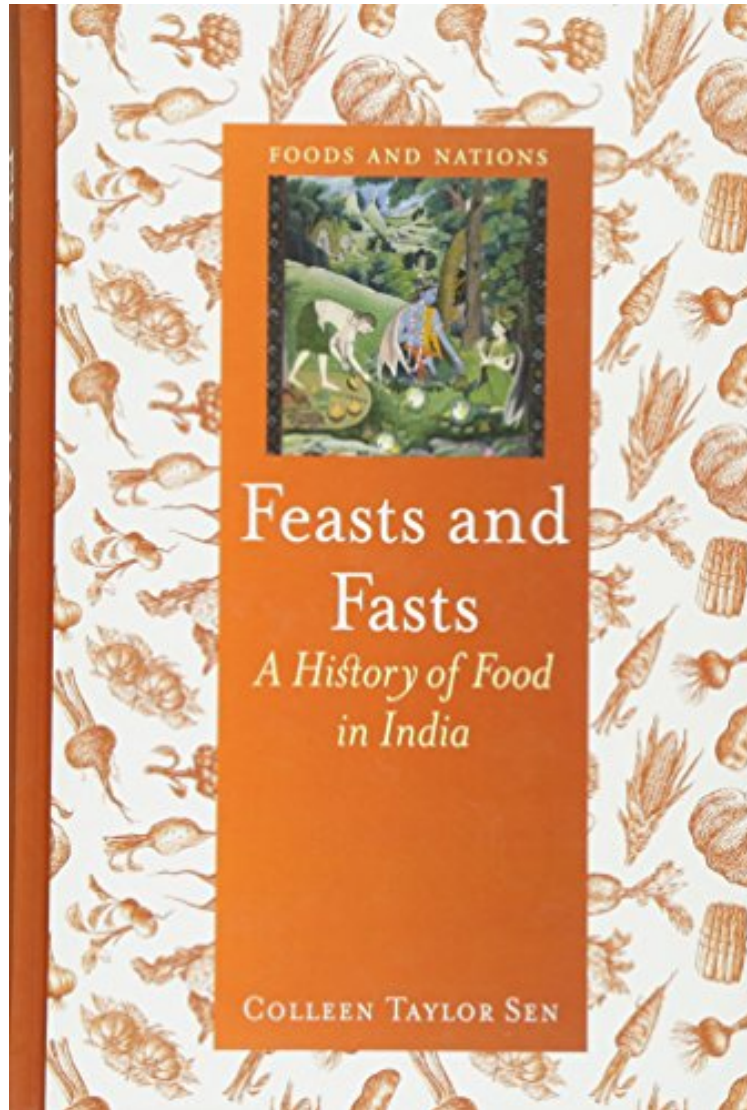


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Feasts and Fasts: A History of Food in India (Foods and Nations)

Colleen Taylor Sen

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Colleen Taylor Sen : Feasts and Fasts: A History of Food in India (Foods and Nations) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Feasts and Fasts: A History of Food in India (Foods and Nations):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. India and its many culinary culturesBy Dr. JSHFeasts and Fasts: A History of Food in India (Foods and Nations)I'm not a big fan of Indian food so I had some reservations about this book. I happened to open the book in the chapter about Goa, a colony that Portugal clung to long after the United Kingdom and France withdrew their sovereignty over Indian territory. From 1947 to 1961, India and Portugal shared

the sub-continent -- not happily, to say the least. But Goa had been Portugal's (de facto) for about 450 years, and saying goodbye to a centuries-old exclave wasn't easy for a past world power. Being Portuguese myself, "A History of Food in India" immediately caught my attention, beginning with Goa but then expanding to the rest of the book. The author's writing style is very approachable and not at all "academese" or jargon-filled. Nor does she water-down her text to cater to the stereotype of foodies. Highly recommended. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Absorbing! By Niv Mani For a non fiction book, this volume is simply magnificent in terms of how interesting and informative the content is, an absolutely essential addition to any culinary buffs library 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. A brilliant synthesis of foodways and history. Food and religion, ethnicity, Indian diaspora, empire, and more. By lyndonbrecht It took me forever to get around to reading this book, but I'm glad I finally did. This is a brilliant book with a huge amount of detail about the history of food and cuisine in India (it includes what are now Pakistan and Bangladesh. It's also a good introduction to the history of India generally because each migrating group and each invader brought in their own foodways--Greek, Persian, Mongol, Portuguese, British and more. The book details some of the distinctive foods of different religions, including Jain, Buddhist, Hindu (in many variations), Sikh, Muslim, and in doing so is an excellent introduction to religions in India. The matter of caste is discussed well--it has a strong impact on food. There are lots of little-known details that may stick with readers. Indian food sees a very close connection between food and health, and also ethnic identity. Milk is important in Northern India, where a sizable majority do not have lactose intolerance. The chapters are largely chronological. A reader would not have to read the whole book. Individual chapters may interest some readers who are not interested in all of it. Chapter 6 for example, covers food and Indian doctors, in depth on Ayurveda. This is deeply mixed with foods and is extremely elaborate. There's also a Muslim system of medicine called Unani, descending from the Greek texts of Galen and Hippocrates. Both systems are alive and well in contemporary India. The chapter on festivals and feasts is fascinating not only for food but for festival practices. Chapter 1 is general background on food in India and can serve as an intor to Indian history. Chapter 2 discusses ritual and other matters 1700-1100 BCE (and this is a duller chapter than others). Chapter 4 describes India 300 BCE to 500 CE and considers the elaboration of Hinduism and important Indian empires, and trade. Chapter 5 looks at the period 500 to 1000 CE; titled Feasting and Fasting, it's an informative and lively read. Chapter 7 examines 600 to 1300 CE, including some writers from that era on foods. Chapter 8 examines the Delhi Sultanate, and several centuries of Muslim rule in India, including the beginnings of melded traditions and the introduction of new vegetables and foods from outside India. These are largely of Persian and Turkish origin. Chapter 9 looks at the Mughal dynasty in excellent detail. Chapter 10 examines the European era, including the Portuguese (important cultural influences from Goa, a Portuguese enclave for more than 400 years), Dutch, French and British. The Dutch influence is small save in Sri Lanka. Taken together, though, the influence has been huge, not least the "Columbian Exchange" that brought to India maize (which Americans like me call "corn"), chiles (the British spelling is chillies), okra, papaya, cashews, pineapple, guavas, tomatoes and tobacco. Chapter 11 is one that could be read on its own, an overview of Indian food, including brief descriptions of important regional cuisines. It distills much of the rest of the book without the extensive context. Chapter 12 discusses new trends in Indian food (including the Green Revolution and the relative current prosperity). Chapter 13 discusses foods of the Indian diaspora (30 million people from Indian, Bangladesh and Pakistan). This has produced some intriguing cuisines in places such as Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, South Africa, Malaysia and elsewhere--and in Britain. The book uses the word "pulses" which is meaningless to an American--for peas, lentils and the like. There are things to remember. A third of India's people live on US\$ 1.25 a day and another third on less than US\$ 2.00 a day. The prosperity and much of the cuisine is therefore a distinct if large in number, minority. Sen does from time to time address what the poorer people eat. And despite stereotypes, only about a third of people in India are vegetarian, although it varies quite sharply from region to region. Modernity is eroding many traditions, including those of caste and religion. India is the world's largest producer of milk, the second largest producer of rice, and one of the largest producers of wheat. It is also the number 1 importer of whiskey.

From dal to samosas, paneer to vindaloo, dosa to naan, Indian food is diverse and wide-ranging—unsurprising when you consider India's incredible range of climates, languages, religions, tribes, and customs. Its cuisine differs from north to south, yet what is it that makes Indian food recognizably Indian, and how did it get that way? To answer those questions, Colleen Taylor Sen examines the diet of the Indian subcontinent for thousands of years, describing the country's cuisine in the context of its religious, moral, social, and philosophical development. Exploring the ancient indigenous plants such as lentils, eggplants, and peppers that are central to the Indian diet, Sen depicts the country's agricultural bounty and the fascination it has long held for foreign visitors. She illuminates how India's place at the center of a vast network of land and sea trade routes led it to become a conduit for plants, dishes, and cooking techniques to and from the rest of the world. She shows the influence of the British and Portuguese during the colonial period, and she addresses India's dietary prescriptions and proscriptions, the origins of vegetarianism, its culinary borrowings and innovations, and the links between diet, health, and medicine. She also offers a taste of Indian cooking itself—especially its use of spices, from chili pepper, cardamom, and cumin

to turmeric, ginger, and coriander—and outlines how the country's cuisine varies throughout its many regions. Lavishly illustrated with one hundred images, *Feasts and Fasts* is a mouthwatering tour of Indian food full of fascinating anecdotes and delicious recipes that will have readers devouring its pages.

“An irresistible edition to your kitchen shelf, the history inside is richer than any Indian dish you've ever tasted.”