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## **Religion and Vegetarianism: A Comparison between Hinduism and the Seventh-Day Adventist Christians**

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### **Abstract:**

*The issue of vegetarianism is a widely spoken, but less practiced one. Religion in some way has influenced our way of eating. This study looks into the Hindu and the Seventh-day Adventist Christians and how they have influenced vegetarianism among their members. This study will not look in detail the controversial issues regarding their teachings; the concern here is to understand vegetarianism within their circle of membership. This study explains who in the Hinduism is a vegetarian and In the SDA as well. The motivating factors that prompts the vegetarians from the two religions. This article also examines the dangers of intake of flesh foods in respect to the perspective of the two religions.*

*The study strikes a code that confirms the phrase unity in diversity between the Hindus and the SDA Christians. What are some of the points that show their similarities? Vegetarianism is thought by the two religions but yet, there can be differences in their ideology and philosophy of their doctrines. This study as well has underlined some of the important differences of the two religions despite the fact that they agree in this teaching of vegetarianism.*

**Keywords:** *Vegetarianism, Hinduism, Seventh-day Adventist Christians.*

### **1. Introduction**

Life is full of do's and don'ts. In the area of food, everyone seems to eat what they want to eat or what pleases them. Food habits are a way of live regulated by hygiene, culture, geographical set up, and religious believes among other factors. The present contemporary issue is the question if you are or you are not a vegetarian, vegan, or non-vegetarian/both. What are the factors that make one a vegetarian and the other a non vegetarian? I see many hotels and motels in India having both the options; Veg. and Non Veg. Is this something that one has to be forced to be either of the two?

There are many foods that are not edible because they are dirty and full of bacteria. Some of the foods are not edible because they are believed to be poisonous, and still others are a prohibition due to cultural differences. For example, some cultures in Kenya will not eat, crabs, snake, pigs, and dog, among many others. While as, this are edible foods in many parts of the world. May be because of the geographical set up, hence that may be the only readily available food of that area. It is also true that some people choose food because of its taste, how it looks, considering its smell, or simply guided by their senses. The youth choose meet especially because it is tastier compared to vegetarian food. For those that go for GYM or physical exercise, their argument is that meat helps their bones to be strong. Well, everybody can give reasons for what they do, but the big concern is: how many times do we ask ourselves what nutrients the particular food is going to supply our body with?

This issue of what to eat or what not to eat is widely spoken of by many people and professionals including the medical doctors. However, religion is not left out on the issue of what to eat and what not to eat. Some religions have many limitations to the intakes of specific foods. This study is dedicated to looking at one particular food; meat eating. We are taking a religious perspective on meat eating among the Hindus and the Seventh-day Adventist Christians.

### **2. Historical Background of Vegetarianism**

Vegetarianism is a way of life influenced by many factors. Ethical and cultural values, Choice of a person, geographical set up and the availability of food in that area, and religious values among many factors have been in the front line to influence the choice of vegetarianism or non- vegetarianism. A brief history ratter is varied to see how from time past this issue has been understood.

Vegetarianism was a common practice in India as early as the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC. Hinduism preached that it is ideal diet for spiritual progress and this is supported by many Hindu scriptures. Jainism enjoined their followers to be vegetarians and the Buddhists monks of the Mahayana school also practiced vegetarianism. In Europe, vegetarianism is associated to “Pythagoras” who abstained from meat eating in 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. They reasoned out that it was because of nutritional and ethical values that they were stopped flesh foods. Pythagoras said, “as long as man continues to be the ruthless destroyer of lower living beings, he will never know health or peace. For as long as men massacre animals, they will kill each other. Indeed, he who sows the seed of murder and pain cannot reap joy and love.”<sup>1</sup>

Answering the question why are most of Hindu Brahmins vegetarian: Is it because of the belief in Reincarnation and that one day an animal could be human? Viswanathan (2013) responds that, in Hinduism, the Brahmins were expected to be vegetarians and even today; just because of spiritual reasons. Brahmins are required to spend a lot of time meditating and the act of killing any animal (*himsa*) can disturb the mind during the meditation. It can bring both guilt and violence in the mind. Apart from avoiding meat, Brahmins were also barred from warfare and any other kind of aggression that can disturb the mind.<sup>2</sup> During the ancient Vedic period, eating meat was allowed by their laws, although vegetarianism was encouraged. The Manusmriti law book states that there is no sin in eating meat... but abstention brings great reward.<sup>3</sup>

### 2.1. Hinduism

Hinduism is the largest religion with 828 million members which is 80.5% of India’s population.<sup>4</sup> Vegetarianism is practiced especially in most schools of Hinduism. Approximately 20% to 30% of all Hindus are vegetarians. The main principle of motivation to vegetarianism is that of nonviolence applied to animals with the connected intention to avoid negative “Karmic” influences. In modern Indian, the food habits vary according to their community, caste, and regional traditions. Hindu vegetarians usually eschew egg but consume milk and dairy products. According to the survey of 2006, vegetarianism is weak in the coastal states and strong in landlocked northern and western states among Brahmins in general, 55% of whom are vegetarians. However, Hindus who eat meat are encouraged to eat “Jhatka” meat (animal sacrifice).

In some traditions especially within the Vaishnavism, it is essential that devotees offer all their food to their chosen deity before eating it as Prasad. This rule is observed strictly by the disciples of the school of Bhakti yoga, especially the Gaudiya Vaishnavas. They worship Visnu or Krishna and according to the scriptural injunctions they obey; only vegetarian food is acceptable as Prasad. Vegetarianism is also mandatory for the practitioner of Hatha Yoga. They follow the advice of scriptures such as the Bhagavad Gita to eat only high-quality food, because they are convinced that food shapes the personality, mood and mind. They believe that vegetarian diet promotes desirable qualities essential for spiritual progress.<sup>5</sup> All Hindus universally avoid beef because they consider a cow as sacred the fact even the Greek philosophers like Socrates, Plato, and Pythagoras agreed. Sir, Isaac Newton was another brilliant fellow who knew the benefits of being a vegetarian.<sup>6</sup>

Meat eating is a hindrance to greater spiritual progress. The great spiritual teachers and spiritual masters of Hinduism have always taught that the consumption of meat has a deadening, heaving, detrimental effect on the inner system and spiritual capabilities of man and also that alcohol has the same effect, which is one reason why many Hindus also refrain from drinking alcohol. Not only do the “vibrations” of the fear and suffering of the slaughtered animal enter into our own system through its flesh but the consumption of meat has the effect of keeping many of our spiritual faculties “locked up” and unable to even begin to function, due to the impurity and pollution of our system from eating corpses, which is exactly what meat eating is. Not only do we need to be living our lives focused and established in ahimsa if we want to be developing and advancing spiritually but we should also be living as purely, cleanly, and healthily as possible.<sup>7</sup>

### 2.2. Seventh-day Adventist Christians

Seventh-day Adventist church is a movement that originated from the Millerite movement in the 1844 which resulted to a great disappointment on the return of Jesus whom they were waiting. This church emerged from some of them and was then organized and given this name in 1863. "The figures on Christian movements in this report were commissioned by the Pew Forum from the Center for the Study of Global Christianity (CSGC) at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in South Hamilton, Mass. CSGC researchers

<sup>1</sup> Simha, A. N. *A brief History about Vegetarianism*, (online), available, [www.Animal liberationfront.com](http://www.animal liberationfront.com).  
<http://www.animal liberationfront.com/Practical/Health/BriefHistoryofVegetarianism.htm>, 12/01/2016.

<sup>2</sup> Balaji, V. (2013), *Why are most hindu Brahmins Vegetarian?* (online), available, <https://www.quora.com/Why-are-most-Hindu-Brahmins-vegetarian>, 12/01/2016.

<sup>3</sup> Wikipedia, (14/02/2016) History of Vegetarianism, (Online) available, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_vegetarianism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_vegetarianism) 14/02/2016.

<sup>4</sup> Government of India, (census 2011.) drop in article, 04, Distribution by religion, (online), available, [http://www.censusindia.gov.in/Ad\\_Campaign/drop\\_in\\_articles/04-Distribution\\_by\\_Religion.pdf](http://www.censusindia.gov.in/Ad_Campaign/drop_in_articles/04-Distribution_by_Religion.pdf), 19/02/2016.

<sup>5</sup> Wikipedia, (16/02/2016) Vegetarianism and religion, (Online) available [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vegetarianism\\_and\\_religion](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vegetarianism_and_religion), 18/02/2016.

<sup>6</sup> Lam, V., Tobiasen, L., Nayar, T. & Agarwal, S. Go Vegetarian! (online), available, <http://www.pages.drexel.edu/~soa29/Religious%20Issues.htm>, 19/02/2016.

<sup>7</sup> Secret D., September 30, 2012, Bliss of Hinduism, Hinduism and Vegetarianism (online). Available <https://blissofhinduism.wordpress.com/2012/09/30/hinduism-and-vegetarianism/> 12/02/2016.

generated their estimates based in large part on figures provided by Christian denominations and organizations around the world. CSGC has obtained denominational membership information from about 41,000 organizations worldwide." *Seventh day Adventist is a Protestant Christian denomination which is distinguished by its observance of Saturday as the day of rest according to the original Seventh day Sabbath of the Judeo – Christians.* Among the protestant denominations, seventh day Adventists is seventh largest denomination with 2.7 percent population of all the Protestants. It has a missionary presence in over 200 countries and territories and is ethnically and culturally diverse. The church operates numerous schools, hospitals and health care centers, food industries, media centers and publishing houses worldwide, as well as a humanitarian organization known as the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA).<sup>8</sup>

Their teaching about vegetarianism is traced back to Genesis 2:16 where they argue that the original plan of God was that man eats fruits. They further tell that meat was given to man because man had fallen in sin. However, the primary voice promoting vegetarianism in the SDA church is spirit of prophecy by the prophetess Ellen G. White. She says that, "It was at the house of Brother A. Hilliard, at Otsego, Michigan, June 6, 1863, that the great subject of health Reform was opened before me in vision. ... The Lord presented a general plan before me. I was shown that God would give to His commandment-keeping people a reform diet."<sup>9</sup> So since the 1860s until date, the Seventh-day Adventists have been claiming and proclaiming the message of vegetarianism.

Research has shown that there is a connection between longevity and vegetarianism in the Seventh-day Adventist believers. The research funded by the U.S. National Institutes of Health has shown that the average Adventist in California lives 4 to 10 years longer than the average Californian. The research, as cited by the cover story of the November 2005 issue of National Geographic, asserts that Adventist live longer because they do not smoke or drink alcohol, have a day of rest every week, and maintain a healthy, low – fat vegetarian diet that is rich in nuts and beans. The cohesiveness of Adventists' social networks has also been put forward as an explanation for their extended lifespan. The emphasis on health, diet, and Sabbath keeping are the primary factors for Adventist longevity. An estimated 35% of Adventists practice vegetarianism, according to a 2002 worldwide survey of local church leaders.<sup>10</sup>

### 3. Statement of the Problem

Vegetarianism is an issue of the current world of high technology. Most of the food is genetically modified making it hard to find organic food. Is there a need for vegetarianism when even the vegetables alone are not safe due to the chemicals used to spray them? Both vegetarians and non vegetarians have evidences why they are and why they must not be otherwise. Religions tend to promote the issue but their members tend to contradict what the religion stands for. A part of the members are vegetarians and others are not, hence bringing a false interpretation to those who don't understand the reasons behind vegetarianism. This leaves a gap which needs to be studied to find out the reasons of vegetarianism between the Hindus and the Seventh day Adventist Christians.

#### 3.1. Significance of the study

To study about religion and vegetarianism is worthy it due to its multiple benefits that it brings along with it. Talking of some of the importance of the study, the researcher has found out the main reasons why religion should study or promote vegetarianism. It is with this reasons that this study assumes the significance of the study as follows:

1. This study helps people to understand the reasons behind vegetarianism in Hinduism and the Seventh-day Adventist Christians.
2. This study helps to realize the secret behind longevity and having a good health, hence calls the society to practice the same.
3. This study encourages religious leaders to embrace the message of vegetarianism in their religious group and giving it a careful study about it.
4. This study reveals the main similarities and differences between Hindus and the Seventh-day Adventist Christians regarding their teaching of vegetarianism.

#### 3.2. Objectives of the Study

Every task worth of doing has the aims why it must be done. The study discovered various objectives which prompted for this particular task. Below are the main intentions of the study:

1. To find out if all the members of Hinduism and the Seventh-day Adventists Christians are practicing vegetarianism.
2. To find out the motivating factor of the teaching of vegetarianism in Hinduism and the Seventh- day Adventist Christians.
3. To understand the similarities between the two regarding their teaching about vegetarianism.
4. To find out the differences that exists between Hindus and Seventh-day Adventist Christians regarding their teaching on vegetarianism.

<sup>8</sup> Fatih, A. (December 2011), The Pew Research Center on Religion & Public Life, Global Christianity: A Report on the size and distribution of the world's Christian population. (Online), available, [http://www.academia.edu/2008769/Global\\_Christianity\\_A\\_Report\\_on\\_the\\_Size\\_and\\_Distribution\\_of\\_the\\_World\\_s\\_Christian\\_Population](http://www.academia.edu/2008769/Global_Christianity_A_Report_on_the_Size_and_Distribution_of_the_World_s_Christian_Population), 116/02/2016.

<sup>9</sup> White, E.G (1938) *Counsels on Diet and Foods*, Review and Herald Publishing Association, Washington: D.C, 481.

<sup>10</sup> Wikipedia, Seventh-day Adventist Church (online), available, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seventh-day\\_Adventist\\_Church](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seventh-day_Adventist_Church)15/02/2016.

### 3.3. Hypothesis

Without correct evidences, our assumptions and judgments regarding something are not varied. Therefore, this study was proving the presuppositions that existed before the study was conducted. These assumptions are such as:

1. All members of Hinduism and Seventh-day Adventists are vegetarians.
2. The teaching of vegetarianism in Hinduism is the same with that of the Seventh-day Adventist Christians.
3. The Hindus and Seventh-day Adventist Christians force their members to be vegetarians.
4. The Hindus and Seventh-day Adventist Christians fear the outcomes of eating meat thus they decide to be vegetarian.
5. People become vegetarians because of their responsibilities, or caste in their religion. e.g. the pastors and the Brahmins.

### 3.4. Research Design

This study is a comparative study between Hinduism and the Seventh-day Adventist. It uses descriptive, historical, observation, and case study methods to arrive to its answers. The study uses the available secondary data to prove the hypothesis. The secondary data will be acquired from the books, journals, internet, encyclopedia and their holy scriptures. The scope of the study is limited between Hinduism and the Seventh-day Adventist Christians.

### 3.5. Advantages of Vegetarian Diet According to Hinduism

Rao (2014)<sup>11</sup> encourages people to be vegetarians by showing the advantages of vegetarian diet. In the other side, showing the advantages of the vegetarian diet; the writer talks only of the points that if they are turned around, their opposite will be the disadvantages of Non-Vegetarian diet. The following are the main reasons why one should be a vegetarian according to him and the Hindus believe:

1. Vegetarian food lowers risks of diseases like lung, heart, prostate, liver, intestines, and colorectal cancer, type 2 diabetes, and blood pressure, among many diseases.
2. Vegetarian food promotes a healthy skin.
3. Vegetarian food is free from chemicals.
4. It is free from hormones and antibiotics.
5. It is free from parasites.
6. It increases energy level of the body since the body spends less time to digest vegetarian food than animal products.
7. Vegetarian food improves digestion.
8. Vegetarian food is toxin free food.
9. There are healthy amino acids supplied by the vegetables.
10. There is low or no saturated fats in vegetarian food.
11. There is a healthy cholesterol levels from vegetarian diet.
12. Vegetarian food doesn't require violence to get it as in the case of non-vegetarian food.
13. Those who take vegetarian food have an increased life span.

### 3.6. Disadvantages of Meat Eating According to SDA

In the issue of vegetarianism, we talk more of the disadvantages of eating fresh foods and the advantages of being a vegetarian. This is because those who are non-vegetarian already eat both vegetarian and non-vegetarian. The book, "Counsels on Diet and Foods," is attributed to this fact of showing the dangers of eating fresh foods and encouraging vegetarianism. This book has shown many reasons why the Seventh-day Adventists are and should practice vegetarianism. The following are the prophetess' argument on the main reasons why we should discard fresh foods.

1. Flesh foods cloud the brain of an individual.
2. Meat eating benumbs the intellect
3. Enfeebles and deadens the moral nature of a person.
4. Flesh weakens the higher powers.
5. Flesh eating lessens spirituality.
6. Renders mind incapable of understanding truth.
7. It causes insubordination.
8. They stimulate lustful propensities.
9. Strengthens the lower passions.
10. Animalizes you, strengthens the animal appetites.
11. It interferes with the religious life.
12. Causes you to miss out on companionship with heavenly angels.
13. Causes sickness and diseases
14. Endangers physical, mental, and spiritual health of a person.

<sup>11</sup>. Rao, Rama U. (2014), Be a Vegetarian, *Health: A journal Devoted to Healthful Living*, Vol 92, No: 1, January, Lakshmi Publications, Madurai: TM, 14.

No	Hinduism	SDA
1.	Some meet is considered sacred hence preventing some from eating it. e.g. Beef.	No meet is considered sacred despite the fact that they don't advocate meet eating.
2.	To observe the "Karma" requirements they need to respect all the animals.	They don't believe in re-birth. The state of the death teaches that man once they die, they know nothing.
3.	Vegetarianism is mandatory for some group of people and liberal to others, e.g. the practitioner of Hatha Yoga are vegetarians.	No specific group among the Adventists is forced to be vegetarians may be because of their calling. Even among the pastors, some are veg. while others are not but yet they are in the same ministry.
4.	The Hindu scriptures are in support regarding the issue and they cause no contradictions.	The Bible is in support for both which leaves many contradicted. The clarity comes from the spirit of prophecy which is also believed to be a lesser light guiding the believers to the greater light which is the Bible.
5.	Meat offered to the gods through sacrificial system is allowed to be edible even by the vegetarian Hindus.	SDA don't practice animal sacrifices hence never esteem any meat as special. Even fish which many claim that Jesus eat, the vegetarian SDA never touches it.
6.	According to survey, the Hindus who practice vegetarianism are between 20% to 30%	Estimate of 35% of the Adventist believers are practicing vegetarianism.

Table 1: Differences between the Teachings of Hinduism and SDA Church About Vegetarianism

### 3.7. Similarities of the Two Religions Regarding Vegetarianism

There are clear evidences that despite the fact that the two religions are diverse, yet they claim the similarities in this issue of vegetarianism.

- The principle of non-violence.* Both of the two religions acknowledge that violence is involved in the issue of being non vegetarians.

The Hindus could say that from the one who gives it for slaughter to the one who is selling the meat, they are all violent. This means that it is not only the one slaughtering that is worst killer; it is both including the one who eats it.

The Christians could imagine it this way, what would Jesus feel if he was standing to watch while you killing the creatures he gave you to be a steward, could he be happy or sad?<sup>12</sup>
- The fact of Longevity.* Both of them agree that vegetarianism promotes living long (longevity). Research has proved that the life span of a vegetarian is increased little more that of a non-vegetarian.

Searing (2013), published in Washington post the study that links vegetarian diets and longevity. This study included 73,308 adults, most in their mid- to upper-50s and with no diagnosis of cancer or cardiovascular disease at the start of the study. Vegetarians comprised roughly half of the group and included vegans (who eat only plant-based foods), lacto-ovo vegetarians (who also consume eggs and dairy products), pesco-vegetarians (who also eat fish and seafood), and semi-vegetarians (who do not eat red meat but may eat chicken or fish, dairy products and eggs). Vegetarians had followed their eating pattern for an average of 19 to 39 years, depending on the type. In about a six-year span, 2,570 of the participants died. Overall, vegetarians were 12 percent less likely to have died in that time than were non-vegetarians. Mortality rates were lowest for vegans, lacto-ovo vegetarians and pesco-vegetarians. Male vegetarians were somewhat less likely to have died than female vegetarians.<sup>13</sup>
- Meat as a causative agent of some diseases.* Both the religions agree that meat eating causes diseases. Some of these diseases may be caused due to hormones, antibiotics and chemicals, parasites in the meat or poor cooking of the meat.

A lot of diseases have been named above that are related to meat eating. Both vegetarians in the two religions are doing it simply because they care for their lives. They are capable of eating meet too, but because they want to live a healthy life, they thus practice vegetarianism.
- Flesh food benumbs the brain; the frontal robe.* Both agree that meat eating affects the physical, mental, social, and the spirituality of a person.

White (1938) says that man ought to be awake to the danger of meat eating, those who are still eating the flesh of animals, are endangering the physical, mental, and spiritual health.<sup>14</sup> This point can summarize many more other pints like, lessens spirituality, benumbs the intellect, changes the moods and stimulates the lustful propensities among many points that were listed above.

## 4. Conclusion and Recommendations

The two religions are different despite the fact that they stand for the same truth. The reason for their teaching on vegetarianism showed that they are motivated by different believes. But it is also true to say that this is a common point of interest between the

<sup>12</sup>Secret D., September 30, 2012, Bliss ofHinduism, Hinduism and Vegetarianism (online).

Available<https://blissofhinduism.wordpress.com/2012/09/30/hinduism-and-vegetarianism/> 12/02/2016.

<sup>13</sup> Linda Searching (07/06/2013), Health and Science: Study Links Vegetarian diets and Longevity, (online) available, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/study-links-vegetarian-diets-and-longevity/2013/06/07/1bc9b382-ce0f-11e2-9f1a-1a7cdee20287\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/study-links-vegetarian-diets-and-longevity/2013/06/07/1bc9b382-ce0f-11e2-9f1a-1a7cdee20287_story.html), 10/01/2016.

<sup>14</sup>Ellen G. White, (1938) *Counsels on Diet and Foods*, Review and Herald Publishing Association, Washington: D.C, 382

Hindus and the seventh-day Adventists. This is the point that brings the two religions to share what they believe to the community. Despite the fact that not all of their members are vegetarians by default, the two religions have shown that they have room for anyone to be a vegetarian without being forced. Their reasoning is logical and can convince someone within and without their religions, given that they do more studies together with the person in order to explain many doubts of the individuals.

The estimated figures of vegetarians both in the Seventh –day Adventist church and in Hinduism are below average. At least talking above 50% would have shown some strength to claim that either of the two is a vegetarian religion. Therefore, we can't fully say either of them is totally a vegetarian congregation but can conclude that they proclaim the message of vegetarianism. However, recommendations can be given to the two religions. They need to teach more about the importance of vegetarianism and also to devise other methods of presenting vegetarianism message among their believers.

It is no doubt that both Hinduism and Adventist have facts to support their stand regarding the issue of vegetarianism. It is true that flesh eating can cause all the dangers we have seen in this study, but still more studies need to be done to prove some facts in dept. how much dangerous it is? What are the possible solutions for the genetically modified vegetarian foods like tissue culture bananas and vegetables? Do they have also some diseases or the vegetarians are totally safe irrespective of what kind of vegetarian foods they eat?

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