

The background of the page features a woman's profile on the left side, partially obscured by a large, dark brown puzzle piece. The rest of the background is a light, blurred image of a kitchen with a white plate and a glass. Several yellow puzzle pieces are scattered at the top, and black puzzle pieces are scattered at the bottom.

**ARRAY101**  
Never Stop Learning

# ORIGIN

## CASTE ON THE MENU

**WORKSHEET AND ACTIVITY**

EXPLORING THE INTERSECTION OF  
CASTE AND CUISINE IN INDIA

DOWNLOAD AND PRINT

## ACTIVITY

# CASTE ON THE MENU: EXPLORING THE INTERSECTION OF CASTE AND CUISINE IN INDIA



“What social media fails to understand is that caste is ingrained in our taste buds and eating habits. Food snobbery is a part of India and the food that belongs to upper castes has always been more celebrated.”

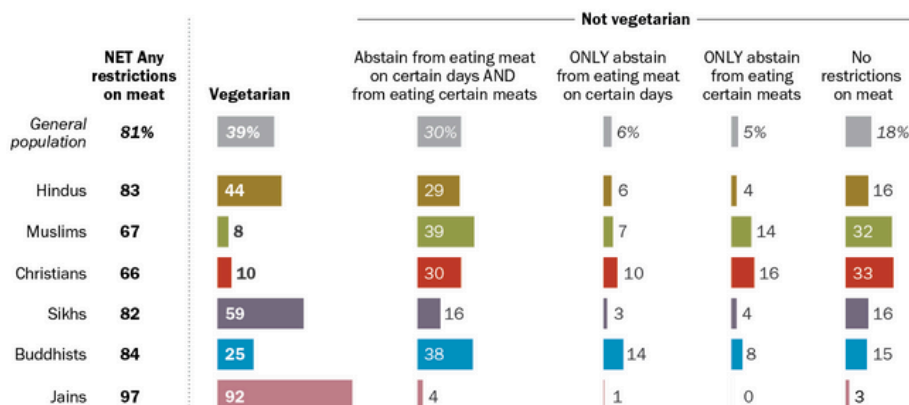
— [Parul Agrawal, The Quint](#)

Food has been one of the most visible facets of the manifestations of hierarchy and power in India. “The food hierarchy, as Dalit icon B.R. Ambedkar said, segregates people into three different identities: Those who do not eat flesh (at the top), those who eat non-vegetarian food other than beef (in the middle) and those who eat beef (at the bottom),” [writes Ashwaq Masoodi, a Nieman Fellow at Harvard University](#). “Contemporary memories of Dalit cuisine are linked inextricably to the caste system.”

**According to Pew Research Center, 39% of the adult Indian population describes themselves as being vegetarian.**

### Majorities in all of India’s religious groups follow at least some restrictions on meat in their diet

% of Indian adults who say they are ...



The widespread belief that Indian cuisine is predominantly vegetarian is shaped, in part, by the cultural influence of dominant castes that traditionally favor non-meat diets. Drawing from notions of purity and pollution inherent to caste, vegetarian diets came to be associated with purity, relegating meat-heavy diets to a status of impurity and using that to justify segregating public spaces.



*“It was used to assume a higher position in the caste hierarchy by citing the reason of “purity” based on one’s diet. The notion being “satvik” or vegetarian diets (mostly consumed by upper castes) were associated with purity and harmony, while Dalits, Muslims and other marginalised groups that consumed meat were inferior, polluted and impure.”*

— **Dr. Bijaya Biswal, Public Health Researcher**

Culinary traditions among the Dalit and Bahujan communities emerged as a mode of survival out of economic necessity since dominant caste groups controlled access to land, resources and access to food.

# ACTIVITY PROMPT

In this next activity, take on the role of a local news station reporter who also happens to be a food enthusiast.

You have been reading about the caste system of India and you are interested in how caste and cuisine intersect and connect. A burning question you have is this: How does caste influence food choices?" Your assignment is to research, write and produce a three- to seven-minute news story segment that explores the concept of "Pure Veg" and how it determines who eats what in India.

## PROCEDURE

**BEGIN** by watching [this clip](#). Trace India's food journey back thousands of years.



[Culture 'Shauk' | What History Reveals About Indian Food Culture](#)

**READ** "[Psychology of Food Choices: Many Factors Affect What You Select.](#)" and "[The Story of Culinary Apartheid.](#)"



**RESEARCH** Conduct online research to find menus from five Indian restaurants (these can be in your community or elsewhere). Begin by reading two articles, [“The Differences Between Northern & Southern Indian Food,”](#) and [“Indian Food 101: Your Guide to an Indian Restaurant Menu.”](#) Make a special note if any restaurants use the term “pure vegetarian.”

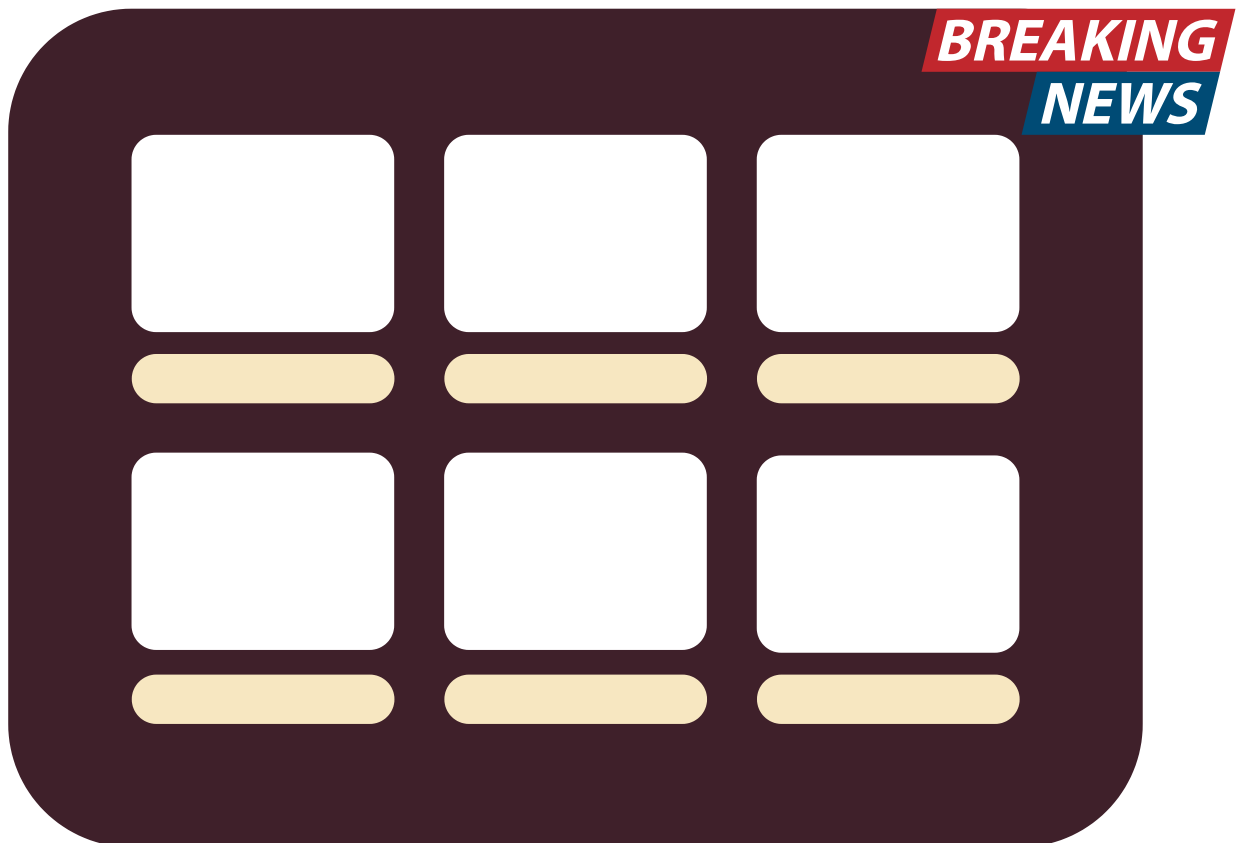
Restaurant Name and Location	Menu Observation	Northern or Southern Style ✓	Meat Dishes ✓	Seafood Dishes ✓	Vegetarian Dishes ✓	Pure Veg ✓



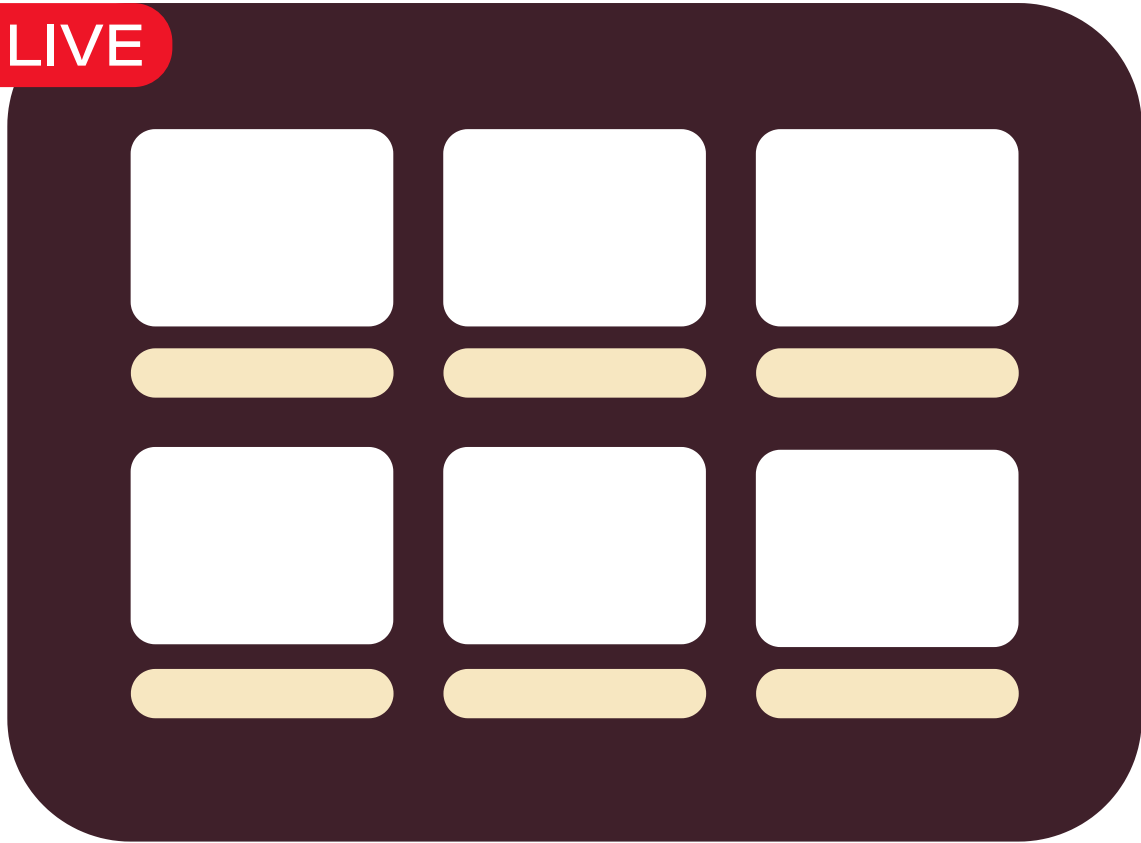
**BRAINSTORM** your three- to seven-minute news story segment that explores the concept of “Pure Veg” and how it determines who eats what in India. You may cite interesting or informative statistics or highlight a few local restaurants. You may decide to present a couple of Indian recipes that disrupt traditional food choices—and even prepare a dish or two.

*Use the space below to brainstorm:*

**CREATE** a storyboard for your three- to seven-minute news story segment.



 **LIVE**



**SHARE** your news story segment, brainstorm or storyboard with a team of people and collect their feedback.

**Feedback:**

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## **CONCLUSION**

What new information did you learn about caste and food choices?

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