History of Langar

Langar is originally a Persian word, meaning 'an almshouse', 'an asylum for the poor and the destitute' and later came into Urdu and Punjabi from it, and in Bengali as longor. Some scholars trace the word langar to Sanskrit analgrh (cooking place).

Hindu History of Langar

Hindu temples of the Gupta Empire era in 4th Century (319-467 CE) had attached kitchens and almshouses called "dharma-shala" or "dharma-sattra" to feed travelers and the poor.

Buddhist History of Langar

The Chinese Buddhist pilgrim I Ching (7th century CE) wrote about monasteries with such volunteer-run kitchens.

Sufi History of Langar

Langar, the practice and institution, was first started by Baba Farid, a Muslim of the Chishti Sufi order. The institution of the langar was already popular in the 12th and 13th century among Sufis of the Indian subcontinent. The practice grew and is documented in the Jawahir al-Faridi compiled in 1623 CE. It was later, both the institution and term, adopted by Sikhs.

Sikh History of Langar

As per Guru Nanak's teachings around 1500 CE: Kirat karo, naam jappo, te vand chhako (work honestly, meditate, and share), are considered the three pillars of the religion, which set the foundation of serving humanity and serving community meals that have now spread worldwide as "Langar".

The second Guru of Sikhism, Guru Angad Dev Ji, systemized the institution of Langar in all Sikh Gurdwara premises where visitors from near and far got a free, simple meal with equal seating. He also set rules and a training method for volunteers (sevadars), who operated the kitchen, placing emphasis on treating it as a place of rest and refuge, and for always being polite and hospitable to all visitors.

The Third Guru of Sikhism, Guru Angad Dev Ji, established Langar as a prominent institution where people ate together irrespective of their caste, class, religion, and gender.

Contemporary Practices

Langars are held in gurdwaras all over the world, where volunteers feed all people without any discrimination, alongside the Sikh devotees who gather. All gurdwaras operate Langars where local communities, sometimes consisting of hundreds or thousands of visitors, cook and come together for a simple vegetarian meal.