

Chapter 15 Primary Source Activity

The coming of rival French and British traders in India in the 1700s (textbook pages 385–386) brought a meeting of several cultures. Ananda Ranga Pillai was a Hindu merchant who was the chief agent for the French trading colony at Pondicherry in the 1740s and 1750s and kept a detailed diary. In this excerpt, Ananda Ranga writes disapprovingly about a feast given by a rival merchant who had become a convert to Christianity. ♦ *As you read, note the different customs observed at this dinner party. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions that follow.*

An Unusual Dinner Party

This day, there was an event worthy of record. In the village . . . a church has been constructed by Kanakaraya Mudali, and he has placed some images therein. In honor of this, he invited without distinction, all the Brahmans, Vellazhas, Komuttis, Chettis [different castes], goldsmiths, weavers, oil-mongers, and people of other castes; and all Europeans and Christians, and entertained them with a feast at Ozhukarai. [Hostels] and gardens were allotted for the preparation of food by Brahman cooks. . . . All the arrangements were made in strict conformity with the religious scruples of each caste, and the people who attended received every attention. Meals for Europeans were prepared at Pondichery and brought over to Ozhukarai. Tables were procured for them to dine at, and every comfort was provided for them. . . . All the people of Pondichery who went to Ozhukarai enjoyed themselves, and proceeded homewards in the evening.

Neither in the arrangements which Kanakaraya Mudali made, nor in the supplies which he procured, was there anything wanting. Nevertheless, despite the heavy cost of the entertainment, and the

elaborate nature of the preparations, there was something which detracted from the splendor, grace, and excellence of the hospitalities. Persons of every persuasion should abide by the rules prescribed for them: their conduct so regulated would look consistent. Although of a different persuasion [Christian], he followed the practice of a Hindu; assembled people of that religion; and gave them a treat which afforded room for dispraise and derision. . . .

If he wished to conform to the rules of his church, and the commands of his scriptures, he should have entertained only the Europeans, native Christians, pariahs, and such others; whose

associations brought them in touch with his religion. Even this would be considered derogatory to one of his position and reputation. . . . If a man who has forsaken his religion, and joined another, reverts to the manners and customs of his former belief, he must inevitably draw upon himself contempt.

Source: *Sources of Indian Tradition*, compiled by W. T. de Bary et al. (Columbia University Press, 1958).

“Persons of every persuasion should abide by the rules prescribed for them.”

Questions to Think About

- Who were some of the different groups of people that the host invited to his dinner?
- According to Ananda Ranga Pillai, what was wrong with this dinner party? Whom does he think should have been invited?
- Recognizing Bias** What is Ananda Ranga Pillai's attitude toward mixing people of different cultures and religions? What does this tell you about his own beliefs and his feelings about the man who converted?
- Activity** Accepting and appreciating other cultures is often a problem when different peoples meet. Make a list of some of the different cultures represented in your school. What might make it hard for people from these different groups to get along?