

FOOD OFFERED TO IDOLS

Hindus, partaking of the food and the *kunkumam* was part of the worship of an idol. Rajasekaran did not want to harm his relationship with Mani, but he also did not want to compromise his Christian witness. He saw Mani hold out the platter of food, and he. . . .

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Food Offered to Idols Simon P. David

Rajasekaran looked across the room at the large picture of the blue-faced god Krishna, heavily garlanded with marigolds and tinsel, and then at the printing-press workers gathered around the small shrine set up before the god. It was Friday, and Rajasekaran realized that he had arrived just at the completion of weekly prayers to Krishna, the patron god of the press. Like many businessmen in this city in South India, the proprietor provided money to purchase coconuts, bananas, and sugar to offer to the deity at the weekly *puja*. He believed that the prosperity of his shop was due to the blessing of the god for his faithful offerings.

As assistant editor of a Christian magazine, it was Rajasekaran's responsibility to work with the press workers in order to make certain that the publication was properly printed on schedule. Today there had been some urgent matters to take care of, so he had come earlier than usual. He had hurried into the room, and Mani, the press foreman, had seen him before he realized that the *puja* ceremonies were still going on.

Over the past months, Mani and the editor had developed a close friendship as they worked together. Rajasekaran hoped someday to win his friend to Christ, but right now Mani was pulling him by the hand toward the group receiving the food that had been offered to Krishna and having *kunkumam* (colored powder) placed as spots on their foreheads to signify that they had been purified by eating the leftovers of the god. Rajasekaran knew that for many Hindus, including Mani, eating the food offered to a god was a sign of goodwill, much like receiving a Christmas present. But he also knew that for orthodox