

View of Fasting in Islam and Hinduism: A comparative study

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Abstract

Fasting plays a key role in spiritual purity and self-discipline in both Islam and Hinduism. In Islam, Sawm follows strict rules, benefiting all followers physically and spiritually during Ramadan to boost God-consciousness and morals. Hinduism's Upavasa is more flexible, tied to lunar cycles, emphasizing detoxing and inner spiritual focus. Although both highlight honesty, self-restraint, and charity, their fasting rules and associated festivities differ quite significantly. This project dives into where these practices meet, looking at how different time, food, and behavior guidelines help people grow spiritually, improve their health, and strengthen social bonds. By mixing what scriptures say with today's medical insights, the study shows how religious fasting in Islam and Hinduism pushes humans towards higher states of mind and body in their unique ways. The results show that although there are considerable differences in ritual patterns, diet restrictions, and time frames, both religions use fasting as a multidimensional tool for moral improvement, self-discipline, social cohesion, and spiritual elevation. Moreover, there is medical evidence that fasting is beneficial to health in terms of such aspects as metabolism regulation, increased insulin sensitivity, and decreased inflammation response. Thus, it can be concluded that fasting serves as a holistic process which combines spirituality, ethics, mental stability, and physical condition.

Keywords: Fasting Frameworks; Religious Fasting; Spiritual Purification; Comparative Religion; Behavioral Discipline

1. Introduction

Fasting is where biology meets spiritual thought, bridging history from ancient times to now. In many cultures, people choose to stop eating temporarily, not because they have to, but to better themselves (Longo & Mattson, 2014; Patterson & Sears, 2017). When we skip meals on purpose, we enter what's called a "liminal" state, kind of in-between place. Here, daily impulses calm down, giving way to reflection and a clearer mind. So it's more than just skipping food; it's a tool for cleansing and thinking deeply (Turner, 1969).

This research monograph looks at fasting through both Islamic Sawm and Hindu Upavasa. Despite their differences, both see fasting as key to reaching spiritual goals, Taqwa (God-consciousness) in Islam and Moksha (liberation) in Hinduism (Esposito, 2011; Flood, 1996). Yet, their methods differ greatly. Islam sticks to a strict, community-led structure as told in the Qur'an. It builds group unity and moral strength. On the other hand, Hindu practices are more personal. They follow Vratas, focusing on inner balance, cleansing the body, and syncing with moon cycles (Flood, 1996). So, each religion finds its unique way to make fasting meaningful for spiritual growth.

This study combines theological teachings, like the Islamic mandate for Taqwa in Surah Al-Baqarah (2:183), and the Hindu practice of Upavasa from the Mahabharata, with current medical findings on metabolic autophagy and reducing inflammation (Longo & Mattson, 2014). It shows how these different traditions use abstinence to align the body with

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the mind spiritually. Whether methods are uniform and communal or personal and based on individual cycles, the goal is always the same, improving the human condition by valuing self-restraint.

2. Literature review

2.1. Fasting as Religious Structure and Meaning

The act of fasting is a combination of religion, ritual practices, and bio-medicine. Various theologians have defined fasting as a structured discipline for the body as well as for the soul or the spirituality of a person within religions. Research within comparative religion demonstrates that fasting is not an exception but a key process for the development of morality, identity formation, and community bonding among many other religious traditions including Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, and Christianity. Fasting is considered by Armstrong to be part of the human quest for disciplined transcendence in general (Armstrong, 2010).

The Islamic practice of fasting (Sawm) is part of the Five Pillars and is considered an act of worship governed by the laws of Shariah. Fasting is traditionally practiced according to a series of juridical rules of abstention, intention, and timed observance from sunrise to sunset based on the directives of the Qur'an and the Sunnah (Esposito, 2011; Hallaq, 2009; Surah Al-Baqarah 2:183–185). The ethics of fasting are also outlined in hadith literature, which underscores sincerity, temperance, and spiritual exclusiveness of reward (Sahih al-Bukhari 1904; Sahih Muslim 1151e). Religious rites such as Suhoor, Iftar, Tarawih, and I'tikaf make fasting into a month-long system (Pew Research Center, 2012).

Hindu fasting (Upavasa/Vrata) works in another way. Rather than being a duty imposed by law, fasting depends on flexible ritual calendars linked with the lunar calendar (Klostermaier, 2010). The term Upavasa means "staying close to God," which focuses on the individual's spiritual closeness with God rather than the juridical imposition of the fast (Flood, 1996). Hindu scriptures like Bhagavad Gita, Mahabharata, Puranas, and Vedas portray fasting as a method of purification and karmic cleansing (BG 3.13; Anushasana Parva 103; Doniger, 2009; Rig Veda 10.117).

2.2. Health, Nutritional, and Physiological Perspectives of Fasting

Contemporary scholarship increasingly examines fasting beyond its religious significance by exploring its physiological, nutritional, and health-related implications. Studies on fasting indicate that temporary abstinence from food can influence metabolic processes, insulin sensitivity, lipid regulation, and inflammatory responses (Longo & Mattson, 2014; Patterson & Sears, 2017). Research on religious fasting, particularly Ramadan fasting, demonstrates adaptations in circadian rhythms, energy metabolism, and eating behaviors that contribute to broader physiological changes (Roky et al., 2004; Bahamman, 2003). The nutritional dimension of fasting is equally important. Islamic fasting practices traditionally involve foods such as dates, which provide readily available carbohydrates, dietary fiber, and essential micronutrients that support metabolic recovery after prolonged fasting periods (Al-Farsi & Lee, 2008). In Hindu fasting traditions, foods such as buckwheat (Kuttu), fruits, dairy products, and other Satvik dietary items are commonly consumed. These foods are often associated with digestive balance, nutritional adequacy, and antioxidant properties within Ayurvedic dietary frameworks (Lad, 2002; Gokani, 2014). Although religious motivations differ, existing literature suggests that both Islamic and Hindu fasting practices intersect with broader discussions on nutrition, metabolic regulation, and overall well-being. Consequently, fasting can be understood not only as a spiritual discipline but also as a practice that produces measurable physiological and dietary effects.

2.3. Ethical and Psychological Dimensions

Fasting is not only a matter of dietary practices but also one of controlling behavior. The Islamic and Hindu disciplines place significant importance on controlling the use of language, emotions, and desire. For example, Islamic fasting involves a total ban on gossip, rage, and misconduct within the time of fasting (Esposito, 2011). In Hindu traditions of fasting known as Vrata, the disciplines include Indriya Nigraha (control of senses), honesty, non-violence, and mental purity (Klostermaier, 2010; Fuller, 2018). According to anthropologists, fasting can be termed a liminal activity that facilitates introspection and transformation.

2.4. Social and Communal Function

In addition to being an aspect of personal purification, fasting acts as a form of social integration as well. For instance, in Islamic society, the practice of Iftar as a collective process, as well as Tarawih in the mosques and Zakat al-Fitr in the observance of Eid al-Fitr redistributes resources and promotes equality among members of the society (Esposito, 2011; Pew Research Center, 2012). On the other hand, the practice of fasting ends up with collective activities like Kanya Puja, Vijayadashami, and others (Doniger, 2009; Fuller, 2018).

2.5. Research Gap

The studies that have been done concerning fasting can be classified into three distinct categories: religious studies, biomedical science, and comparative studies. Religious studies interpret the significance and procedures without providing an explanation on the health implications. Biomedical studies explain the health benefits without considering the religious significance. This creates a clear gap, no integrated framework links Islamic Sawm and Hindu Upavasa as both spiritual systems and measurable metabolic interventions at the same time.

3. Methodology

This study uses qualitative comparative methodology to explore fasting in Islam and Hinduism. The research methodology used is one that involves the use of thematic analysis of religious texts and scholarly articles to explore fasting from the perspectives of religion, ethics, social, and physiology of fasting in the two religions. Instead of using quantitative measures for fasting, the research will compare Islamic Sawm with Hindu Upavasa.

3.1. Research Design

The research is descriptive and comparative in nature. It analyzes fasting as a multidimensional practice that encompasses spirituality, morality, behavior, health, and social responsibility. Through systematic comparison, the study evaluates how Islam and Hinduism conceptualize fasting, regulate its observance, and connect it to broader religious objectives.

3.2. Data Sources

The study relies on both primary and secondary sources.

Primary Sources: The primary Islamic sources include the Holy Qur'an and authentic Hadith collections, particularly Sahih al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslim. Relevant Qur'anic verses and prophetic traditions concerning fasting, self-discipline, charity, and spiritual purification are examined. The primary Hindu sources include the Bhagavad Gita, Mahabharata (Anushasana Parva), Rig Veda, Srimad Bhagavatam, Vishnu Purana, and Agni Purana. These texts are analyzed to understand the theological foundations, objectives, and ritual practices associated with Upavasa and Vrata traditions.

Secondary Sources: Secondary sources consist of peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and scholarly publications related to comparative religion, Hindu studies, Islamic studies, nutrition, physiology, and fasting research. These sources provide historical context, theological interpretations, and contemporary scientific perspectives on fasting.

3.3. Method of Analysis

The study applies thematic analysis to examine the collected data. Religious texts and scholarly literature are carefully reviewed and categorized into major themes. These themes include spiritual objectives, ritual structure, behavioral discipline, dietary regulations, social functions, and physiological effects. After identifying these themes, the fasting practices of Islam and Hinduism are compared to determine areas of convergence and divergence. Similarities and differences are interpreted within their respective religious and cultural contexts.

3.4. Comparative Framework

The comparative framework is based on four major dimensions:

- Spiritual purpose and theological foundations
- Ritual procedures and fasting regulations
- Ethical and behavioral discipline
- Social and physiological implications

Each dimension is analyzed separately before being compared across the two traditions to develop a comprehensive understanding of fasting as a religious practice.

3.5. Inclusion Criteria for Literature

Only reliable and academically credible references have been utilized. This involves scholarly books published by Oxford University Press, Cambridge University Press, Routledge, and Princeton University Press. Scholarly articles

related to fasting in the fields of religion, nutrition, and physiology are included if they deal with issues of fasting metabolism or behavior. Only authentic translations of religious texts have been utilized for textual accuracy purposes.

3.6. Ethical Consideration

The study maintains academic neutrality and respects both religious traditions equally. The purpose of the research is not to evaluate the superiority of one practice over another but to understand how fasting functions within different religious frameworks. Interpretations are based on textual evidence and scholarly analysis while remaining sensitive to the beliefs and practices of both faith communities.

4. Analysis and findings

4.1. Fasting in Islam (Sawm)

The practice of fasting in Islam is fundamentally known as Sawm, with its plural form being Siyam. The term originates from the Arabic root word: S (Saa) – W (Waw) – M (Meem), which translates to "to abstain," "to refrain," "to curb," or "to stand still" (Esposito, 2011). In Islamic jurisprudence (Shariah), Sawm is defined as the intentional and absolute abstinence from food, drink, smoking, and marital relations from the break of dawn (Subh-as-Sadiq) until sunset (Maghrib), all for the sake of Allah (Hughes, 1995). It's the third main pillar of Islam, making fasting during Ramadan's holy month mandatory for all grown-up Muslims who are healthy and sane. This fast helps with developing spiritually, mentally, and morally too (Patterson & Sears, 2017). The Holy Qur'an lays out the requirement to fast. The term Sawm appears 14 times, stressing its religious significance. It's mentioned directly in the text, showing how important it is theologically (Yusuf Ali, 2012).

The primary legislative decree commanding the believers to fast is found in Surah Al-Baqarah, Verse 183, where Allah states: "O you who believe! Fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you so that you may ward off (evil)". This law says fasting is key for building Taqwa, which protects believers from losing their God-consciousness and slipping into bad behaviors. As explicitly stated in the phrase "as it was prescribed for those before you," fasting is not an innovation exclusive to the Ummah of the Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (SM). Instead, it's an ancient form of worship that got systematically enforced on previous nations and generations (Yusuf Ali, 2012). The noble prophets, from Hazrat Adam (AS) to Hazrat Nuh (AS), Hazrat Ibrahim (AS), Hazrat Musa (AS), and Hazrat Isa (AS), along with their followers, all did specified fasting periods as part of their divine laws (Esposito, 2011). While the methods, number of days, and exact rules changed some across different times, the spiritual heart of fasting stayed the same. This shows that the Muslim fast we do now is part of a long line of prophetic traditions. It links modern believers with the old history of monotheistic devotion.

Fasting's inner spiritual workings, sacredness, and top standing are backed by the Prophet Hazrat Muhammad's (SM) traditions. A famous Hadith Qudsi, found in Sahih Al-Bukhari (1904) and Sahih Muslim (1151), shows this. The Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (SM) shares direct words from Allah, not in the Quran, he states: "Allah, the Mighty and Sublime, said: Every deed of the son of Adam is for him, except for fasting. It is for Me and I alone shall reward for it". This remarkable statement shows that unlike prayer or giving to charity, which can be seen by others and sometimes done for attention, fasting is different. Fasting is private; only the person and God know about it. Because of this secrecy, it guarantees true honesty of intention. That's why, according to Allah, it becomes His special claim and will get an exceptional reward, not subject to regular measurements.

4.2. Fasting in Hinduism (Upavasa)

In Hinduism, fasting is known as Upavasa, which means more than just going without food. The word actually tells a story about getting closer to the divine. It breaks down into two parts: "Upa," meaning "near," and "Vasa," meaning "to stay." So when Hindus fast, they're really trying to "stay near the Lord" or be closer to the divine, not just abstaining physically but seeking spiritual nearness too. In Sanatana Dharma's classic texts, not eating and abstaining from sensory stuff is seen as key for directing the mind within. This lets people connect undisturbed with the Supreme Spirit. Such practices are vital for Tapasya and Sadhana, that's spiritual hard work and disciplined practice. These help achieve self-control, clean one's karma, and move closer to Moksha, which is ultimate liberation (Klostermaier, 2010; Flood, 1996).

Theological support for Upavasa in Hinduism appears in many texts like the Vedas, Puranas, and Epics. According to the Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 3, Verse 13, Sri Krishna says that people who make food just for themselves and their senses end up eating sin. He warns that one should eat with purity and detachment instead. In the Rig Veda (Book 10, Hymn 117), there's also a clear condemnation of being too selfish with food. It says that people who eat alone without sharing or acknowledging the divine in the world gather "absolute sin". Additionally, the Purana literature dives into lots of

detail about fasting rituals, so it's not just about feasting or feuding. For example, the Srimad Bhagavatam says to combine studying scriptures with certain monthly fasting days. According to Canto 12, Chapter 12, Verse 60, reading or listening to holy texts while fasting on Ekadashi or Dvadasi cleanses one of sins. So, following these days' fasting purifies the seeker more systematically, building up their devotion and purity.

Upavasa isn't a new religious fad; it's an ancient practice dating back to the earliest days of humanity and even the beginning of the cosmos. Before there were organized ritual calendars, Vedic seers, sages, and great historic figures often did long fasts to boost their spiritual power, sharpen their minds, and see ultimate truths during deep meditations. The importance of this tradition is shown beautifully in the Mahabharata's Anushasana Parva, Section 103. There, Bhishma shares wisdom on righteous living with King Yudhishtira in his final teachings. Bhishma explicitly advises that "there is no penance that is superior to abstention from food," instructing the monarch to steadfastly practice the vow of fasting as an unrivaled path of superior merit.

The Puranas sort these vows into specialized forms called Vratas. These involve physical fasting along with strict moral and psychological rules. According to ancient scripts, there are three types: Kayika-Vrata, which is about physical austerity through fasting; Vachika-Vrata, which focuses on the austerity of speech by stressing truth and scripture reading; and Manasa-Vrata, aimed at ridding the mind of harmful emotions like anger and bias. Based on a person's health and cosmic timing, fasting methods vary. Options go from Phalahar (only specific fruits and liquids) to something stricter, like Nirjala-Vrata, a tough waterless fast done on key religious days such as Nirjala Ekadashi or Maha Shivaratri. This ultimate practice aims for total cleansing, both bodily and spiritually (Flood, 1996).

4.3. Classification and Typologies of Fasting

4.3.1. Islamic Typologies (Foroz, Sunnah, and Nafl Fasts)

Within Islamic jurisprudence (Shariah), fasting is structured into a precise hierarchy, starting with the absolute obligation of Foroz (obligatory) fasts, followed by Sunnah (prophetic traditions), and Nafl (voluntary) observances. Ramadan is the required month-long fast for all Muslims. It's a mandatory part of their faith, the third pillar of Islam. Any mature, sane, and able-bodied Muslim must do it by law. Apart from Ramadan, fasting can also become Foroz under specific legal circumstances, such as Qadha (making up for missed Ramadan fasts), Kaffarah (expiation fasts required as a penalty for deliberately breaking a fast), and Nazr (fasts that a believer explicitly vows to perform before Allah) (Hallaq, 2009). Beyond the realm of obligatory fasts, the Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (SM) established and recommended several Sunnah and Nafl fasts throughout the lunar year to gain additional spiritual closeness to the Creator:

- **Fasting on the Day of Arafah (Yoom al-Arafah):** This highly recommended fast is observed on the 9th day of Dhul-Hijjah for Muslims who are not performing the Hajj pilgrimage (Sahih Muslim, Book 13, Hadith 260). The Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (SM) noted that this fast expiates the sins of both the preceding and upcoming year (Sahih Muslim, Book 13, Hadith 260).
- **Fasting in the Month of Sha'ban:** The month of Sha'ban comes right before Ramadan and was favored by Prophet Muhammad (SM) for extra voluntary fasting. He'd do most of it during Sha'ban, as certified by Hazrat Aisha (RA) in Sahih al-Bukhari (Book 30, Hadith 1969).
- **The White Days (Ayyam al-Bidh):** These days fall on the 13th, 14th, and 15th of each Islamic lunar month, hitting around the full moon. The Prophet Muhammad (SM) really pushed for fasting then too, saying the rewards are like having fasted your whole life (Sunan al-Tirmidhi, Book 8, Hadith 761). So people believe these good deeds multiply tenfold.
- **Periodic and Historical Fast(s):** This category covers regular fasting on Mondays and Thursdays, when human actions are reported to God, and the historical Ashura fast on the 10th of Muharram. On Ashura, it commemorates how Hazrat Musa (AS), along with his folks, was saved from Pharaoh, according to Sahih al-Bukhari, Book 30, Hadith 2004.

4.3.2. Hindu Typologies (Vratas and Periodic Austerities)

Just like in Islam, Hinduism includes lots of fasting too. These are called Vratas (religious vows), and Hindus do them based on moon phases, sun cycles, and specific god worship described in the Puranas:

- **Ekadashi Vrat:** Ekadashi is seen as one of the most spiritual fasts in Sanatana Dharma. It happens twice monthly during the 11th lunar day of the waxing (Shukla Paksha) and waning (Krishna Paksha) moons. Folks observe this for Lord Vishnu solely. The fast helps clean bad karma and boost mental clarity too.

- **Pradosh Vrat:** Kept on the 13th day of each lunar fortnight (Trayodashi), this fast is for Lord Shiva and Mata Parvati. Folks do it during twilight to cleanse themselves and bring peace home. The Agni Purana, Chapter 178, says it removes inner impurities too.
- **Maha Shivaratri Fast:** This intense, annual night-and-day fast is undertaken by devotees of Lord Shiva to master physical desires, burn internal vices like anger and attachment, and establish a profound meditative connection with the Supreme Divine (Klostermaier, 2010).
- **Navratri Vrat:** The fast lasts nine nights and ten days, happening several times a year, but most importantly during the seasonal transitions in Chaitra and Ashwin. Followers change how they live by eating a strict vegetarian, or Satvik diet. This is to call upon Shakti, the cosmic energy through Goddess Durga, for pure bodies and minds (Klostermaier, 2010).
- **Spousal and Parental Vratas:** This includes very strict fasting, such as the waterless (Nirjala) type, including Karwa Chauth and Vat Savitri Vrat. Married women usually do these for their husbands' safety and long life. Also, parents often observe other fasts like Santan Saptami and Sheetala Ashtami to wish for their children's good health and mental well-being (Fuller, 2018).

4.4. Regulations, Prohibitions, and Temporal Boundaries of Fasting

4.4.1. Islamic Regulations and Temporal Boundaries

Islamic fasting follows a strict timeline that's the same worldwide. Fasting happens from true dawn (Subh-as-Sadiq) till sunset (Maghrib), with no room for personal changes. During this time, you can't change what actions you must avoid and which are allowed. So, the rules stay fixed from sunrise to sunset, everywhere.

- **Prohibited Acts (Mufsidat al-Siyam):** Fasting is instantly broken by eating, drinking, or taking oral meds, as well as smoking, throwing up on purpose, or masturbating during fasting hours (Sahih al-Bukhari, Book 30, Hadith 1904). Engaging in marital sexual intercourse during the daily fast is classified as a severe transgression, not only nullifying the fast but requiring an immediate expiation (Kaffarah) of fasting for sixty consecutive days or feeding sixty impoverished individuals.
- **Permissible Acts:** People can swim, shower, or submerge themselves in water as long as they don't swallow any. They're allowed to use external perfumes, wear contacts, and use eye drops too. Getting non-nutritional shots, having blood tests, and brushing teeth with miswak or a toothbrush without swallowing paste is fine and doesn't break the fast. If someone has an involuntary wet dream and needs to do a ritual bath (Ghusl), their fast still counts as valid (Hallaq, 2009).
- **Exemptions and Compensations:** The strict fasting rules are balanced by some legal exceptions. While it's mandatory for sane adults, people with temporary illnesses or those who are traveling long distances can skip their fasts. The same goes for women during their periods or post-childbirth bleeding (nifas). They have to make up those days later on (Qadha) (Qur'an, 2:184–185). For folks with chronic illnesses or older adults who are extremely weak, permanent exemptions apply but at a cost. Instead of fasting, they must provide meals to someone in need for each day skipped. This practice is known as Fidyah and covers both missed fasts and the make-up days.

4.4.2. Hindu Regulations and Temporal Boundaries

Unlike Islam's single time structure, Hindu Upavasa has very flexible time frames. They depend on the type of vow, local traditions, and moon-based lunar days (Tithis) from the scriptural calendar. Generally, a full-day fast in Hinduism starts at sunrise and ends either when the moon comes out that night, or it carries on till the next sunrise, like in the Ekadashi 24 hour fast. Still, within these flexible limits, there are separate scriptural rules to follow.

- **Prohibited Acts:** In Absolute Complete Fasting, or Upavasa, a person can't eat meals or grains at all. During Navratri and other ritual periods, people don't consume cereal grains, regular salt, heavy spices, onions, garlic, non-veg food, or alcohol. This keeps the body pure, according to the Agni Purana, Chapter 175. The Vishnu Purana also lays down rules, stating no daytime naps, chewing tobacco, haircuts, nail trimming, stealing, or lying while fasting. They totally ban marital relations too, to maintain celibacy (Brahmacharya) and focus on spiritual stuff.
- **Permissible Acts:** Based on how severe the vow is, practitioners can often do partial fasting instead. They can have pure milk, fresh fruit juice, water, and certain non-grain roots. During festivals like Navratri, using rock salt and things like tapioca (Sabudana) or buckwheat (Kuttu) flour is okay too. People who fast wake up early, take a bath for purification, and put on clean clothes. Then, they spend their day doing Puja (veneration), chanting mantras, and helping others in good ways (Fuller, 2018).

- **Exemptions and Compensations:** Upavasa has a very personal structure and isn't mandatory. Young kids, really old folks, pregnant or nursing women, and those with serious health issues don't have to fast. If someone breaks their vow on accident or just can't keep it, they can get back on track with instructions from Hindu texts. They might read certain prayers, give charity, or feed others in the community to regain their spiritual peace (Flood, 1996).

4.5. Dietary Patterns, Nutritional Profiles, and Restrictions

4.5.1. Islamic Dietary Patterns and Nutritional Profiles

Islamic fasting follows a cycle centered around Suhoor and Iftar – the pre-dawn and sunset meals. Iftar marks the end of the daily fast at sundown. Following the prophetic tradition (Sunnah), people traditionally break their fast with an odd number of dates and water, before praying formally (Sahih Al-Bukhari, 1904 & 1997). From a health viewpoint, dates work great cause they have natural sugars, fiber, and vital minerals such as potassium (Al-Farsi & Lee, 2008). These provide quick energy that boosts blood glucose, yet they're easy on the system after all that time without eating. So, dates help instantly but gently, making them perfect for breaking a fast. Following the initial breaking of the fast, a healthy Iftar menu emphasizes nutrient-dense, balanced whole foods:

- **Nutritional Selections:** Medical studies on Islamic fasting find that eating complex carbs like oats and whole grains, along with high-quality proteins, keeps energy up and muscle mass preserved (Trepanowski & Bloomer, 2010). In clinical trials, a planned approach to eating during the dark hours improves blood lipids by lowering LDL cholesterol and bettering metabolic markers. Staying hydrated is easy too; just munch on water-rich fruits and slurp clear veggie soups to keep electrolytes balanced (Patterson & Sears, 2017).
- **Meat Regulations:** Islam strictly forbids eating pork and its derivatives in all cases. It's completely haram. For beef, though, it's halal if the slaughtering follows the required Islamic ritual methods, known as Zabiha. So, while pork is always off-limits, beef can be eaten as long as it meets those conditions (Esposito, 2011).

4.5.2. Hindu Dietary Patterns and Nutritional Profiles

In Hindu tradition, the meal that wraps up or keeps a fast going is known as Vrat ka Khana or Farali food. When you finish a one-day or multi-day vow, breaking the fast is called Parana. During a fast, scriptures and Ayurveda say you should ditch normal grains for a simpler diet, termed Satvik (pure). This means eating pure, calming foods that don't tax digestion and promote cell repair through autophagy (Gokani, 2014).

To honor these guidelines, devotees follow explicit food rules and preparation mechanics backed by modern nutraceutical data:

- **Nutritional Selections:** Standard table salt gets swapped out for Sendha Namak, which is unprocessed rock salt. Also, common grains like wheat and white rice aren't allowed at all. Instead, folks use alternative starch sources such as Sabudana, which are tapioca pearls, and Kuttu ka Atta, or buckwheat flour. Buckwheat does really well here because it's packed with high-quality plant proteins, fiber, and important minerals like iron, magnesium, and zinc. Researchers even say it's great for fasting since it has these awesome flavonoids that work as antioxidants and help your heart. Plus, it has a low glycemic index, keeping blood sugar steady and saving your muscles during fasting. To stay healthy, people munch on dairy products like milk, fresh yogurt, and paneer alongside some fresh fruit and roasted makhana, or fox nuts. All of this helps keep their metabolism humming and ensures they get enough nutrients (Gokani, 2014).
- **Meat Regulations:** During fasting periods in Hinduism, folks have to strictly avoid eating any meat, fish, or eggs (Varjit) to maintain the core principles of non-violence (Ahimsa) and purity. Beef, in particular, is off-limits in mainstream Hindu communities, not just during fasts but pretty much always, because cows are seen as symbols of maternal grace and life. The rules on pork are different though; it's not covered by a blanket religious ban like beef is, even though it's cut out of the strict vegetarian Satvik diet needed for fasting. Additionally, followers must stay away from onions and garlic during this time, since those are labeled Tamasic (inducing lethargy or mental agitation), meaning they might induce laziness or restlessness (Flood, 1996; Klostermaier, 2010).

4.6. Devotional Practices, Ritual Activities, and Communal Celebrations

4.6.1. Islamic Spiritual Activities and the Culmination of Ramadan

During Ramadan, Muslims ramp up their spiritual game through group prayers, personal devotion, and organized giving. This boosts their spirituality during the holy month, which is full of blessings. The entire month functions as a collective spiritual revival, characterized by specific communal and private activities:

- **Tarawih and Tahajjud Prayers:** Fasting in Islam is closely connected to a stepped-up schedule of worship, both individually and as a community, along with giving to charity more than usual. All of these are meant to boost spiritual growth during Ramadan. Each night throughout Ramadan, right after the required Isha prayer, people join together for extra group prayers called Tarawih. These happen in mosques and include stunning recitations of the Quran. It's done at a rhythm that lets folks complete all thirty parts of the Quran by the end of the month. As Ramadan wraps up, believers often start their days very early, way before dawn, to offer additional personal prayers known as Tahajjud. They hope to catch the powerful Laylat al-Qadr, or the Night of Decree. The Quran says this night is worth a thousand regular nights of praying and worship (The Qur'an, 97:1–5; Esposito, 2011).
- **I'tikaf (Spiritual Seclusion):** During Ramadan's last ten days, lots of adult Muslim men do I'tikaf. This means staying in the mosque around the clock, avoiding all worldly chitchat and housework. They focus solely on praying, reading the Quran, and doing Dhikr. Women can do something similar at home in a special spot set aside for this purpose (Esposito, 2011; Hallaq, 2009).
- **Communal Iftar and Suhoor:** Starting fasting by Suhoor and breaking it at Iftar are very communal. Families, neighbors, and whole communities get together for meals. Mosques also hand out free food to those in need – travelers, students, and the poor. This boosts everyone's bond and empathy, cutting across all income levels (Pew Research Center, 2012).
- **The Culmination of Celebration (Eid-ul-Fitr):** At the end of the month-long fast, comes the joyous celebration of Eid-ul-Fitr. This festival shows appreciation for the self-control shown during Ramadan. Families must pay Zakat-al-Fitr before the big outdoor Eid prayer; it's a required charity that lets the less fortunate enjoy the festivities too. People wear new clothes and visit extended family on this day. Sweet treats and gifts are shared to spread the joy. Overall, it transforms a personal victory into a huge community celebration (Esposito, 2011; Hallaq, 2009).

4.6.2. Hindu Devotional Activities, Spiritual Practices, and Festival Coincidences

Hinduism lacks a unified annual fest like Eid, but it has Upavasa embedded in its yearly rituals. These include vibrant celebrations, artistic worship, and big family get-togethers for various gods, so the traditions are rich and varied all year long:

- **Pujas, Bhajans, and Jagran (All-Night Spiritual Vigils):** During big fasting days like Maha Shivaratri or Krishna Janmashtami, people skip meals and stay up all night in what's called Jagran. At temples or home shrines, they sing Bhajan songs, chant together, and listen to scriptures from the Puranas. This helps them overcome their drowsiness and keeps their minds on God instead (Klostermaier, 2010; Flood, 1996).
- **Abhishekam and Elaborate Spiritual Offerings:** Fasting days have very strict rituals. During Pradosh Vrat or Maha Shivaratri, people bathe the Shiva Lingam with things like milk and honey while reciting mantras. The same goes for Navratri; along with fasting, folks set up a Ghatasthapana to invite cosmic energy into a holy pot. They then offer special vegetarian dishes to the deity. Later, this Bhog is shared as Prasad, a blessed treat for all to enjoy (Fuller, 2018; Klostermaier, 2010).
- **Kanya Puja and Altruistic Charity:** During Navratri, after major fasting vows, the spiritual cycle ends with Kanya Puja. People break their fasts by inviting nine young, pre-pubescent girls to their homes. They wash the girls' feet, give them new clothes and sweet treats, and see them as incarnations of Goddess Durga. Plus, they do lots of charitable giving, providing food, grains, and money to priests and those in need to round out the spiritual meaning of their vow (Fuller, 2018; Klostermaier, 2010).
- **Grand Post-Fast Celebrations:** Hindu fasts are tied to big mythological events, making their end super exciting for massive celebrations. During Navratri, people go through tough fasting that leads up to Vijayadashami (Dussehra). On this day, giant Ravana effigies get torched to mark the triumph of good over evil. Likewise, after the stringent Janmashtami fast, there's the adrenaline-fueled Dahi Handi. Crowds build human pyramids to smash hanging pots of curd, mimicking Lord Krishna's youthful pranks. This event infuses society with glee and culture, energizing everyone around (Doniger, 2009).

4.7. Lifestyle and Behavioral Adjustments During Fasting

Fasting totally changes how we live each day, affecting sleep, concentration, social life, and bodily rhythms. Although both traditions strive for self-discipline and spiritual cleansing, the actual way these changes are carried out is pretty different.

4.7.1. Islamic Lifestyle Shifts (*The Behavioral Ecosystem of Ramadan*)

During the month of Ramadan, the lifestyle of a practicing Muslim is systematically re-calibrated around a collective, community-wide schedule that alters sleep, biological clocks, and psychological responses:

- **Pre-Dawn Awakening (Suhoor):** As night deepens, before the sun rises, families wake up to eat Suhoor together. This early meal is vital, needing lots of self-discipline to get out of bed, physically and spiritually preparing for the day ahead.
- **Neuro-Cognitive Training and Speech Regulation:** Ramadan demands strict rules on how people communicate and behave. Participants must avoid arguments, lies, gossip, and idle chatter, sticking instead to the truth and keeping their emotions in check (Sahih al-Bukhari, Book 30, Hadith 1904). They also cut down on worldly distractions, slowing their day-to-day activities. This lets them concentrate on inner reflection, making sincere prayers, and reading the Holy Qur'an methodically.
- **Sleep Fragmentation and Biphasic Patterns:** Daily routines disrupt normal sleep, causing fragmentation. People wake for Suhoor and stay up late for Tarawih. To fight daytime drowsiness, they shift to taking afternoon naps, making their sleep pattern biphasic to keep up with the long days (Bahamman, 2003; Roky et al., 2004)).
- **Somatic Adaptation and Habit Control:** The behavioral shift acts as a practical stepping stone for breaking negative lifestyle patterns, such as smoking or excessive caffeine reliance, since these stimulants are completely prohibited during the long daylight hours (Trepanowski & Bloomer, 2010).

4.7.2. Hindu Lifestyle Shifts (*The Individualized Discipline of Upavasa*)

In contrast to the month-long communal framework of Ramadan, the lifestyle adjustments during Hindu Upavasa or Vrata are highly periodic, individualized, and centered around internal detoxification (Ama Shodhana) and strict scriptural codes of conduct:

- **Brahma Muhurta and Early Morning Purification:** For fasting days, people get up really early, preferably just before dawn. Then comes a strict routine: a purifying head wash, changing into fresh clothes, and making a formal resolution or vow called Sankalpa to pledge their commitment to the whole day of fasting (Fuller, 2018; Klostermaier, 2010).
- **Sattvic Conduct, Truthfulness, and Mental Control:** In Hinduism, just like in Islam, fasting isn't just about abstaining physically. The Puranas outline rules that make a fast valid. You've got to stick to the truth and dodge anger, lies, and violence (Ahimsa). Along with giving up food, followers need to cut out sensual thoughts, practice celibacy (Brahmacharya), and distance their minds from daily worldly stuff to find inner calm (Klostermaier, 2010; Flood, 1996).
- **Channeling Energy into Religious Activity:** People trade their daily work and meal times for intentional religious duties. They divide their day between detailed house and temple god worship (Puja), chanting stuff like Vishnu or Shiva mantras, and singing devotional songs (Bhajans). So that's what they do all day, pray and chant instead of working or just binge eating (Fuller, 2018; Klostermaier, 2010).
- **Adhering to Sacred Time Windows:** Hindu fasting follows strict astronomical time rules called Tithis, or lunar days. Fasters need to watch the precise scriptural times from the calendar closely. They must keep the fast for the exact hours and end it during the set post-fast time, known as Parana (Doniger, 2009).

4.8. Social Harmony Through Shared Traditions

Both the fasting of Islam and that of Hinduism form a link to community solidarity by creating an environment in which spiritual exercises can go beyond the barriers of religion. It is not just about personal worship but a way of building a sense of community through respect, celebration, and charitable works. The spirit of Ramadan has served as a catalyst for fostering relationships between different faiths in many South Asian societies. The Muslims observe the Iftar ceremony for their non-Muslim friends, and through a symbolic show of empathy, their friends avoid eating in front of them till the Adhan (prayer call) marks the end of the fast for the day. This mutual respect establishes a culture of inclusivity that continues into other major festivals, such as Eid and Puja. During these times, the social fabric is strengthened as neighbors engage in shared experiences such as shopping for festive attire, and visiting one another's homes to exchange greetings and food. In addition to this, the Muslim belief in Zakat and Fitra usually goes beyond

aiding people from their own religion but can include aiding disadvantaged community members from any religion, contributing towards economic stability, while stressing on the fact that although faith is individual, celebration should be for everyone (Masud et al., 2025).

Table 1 Inter-faith Harmony and Social Interaction between Islam and Hinduism

Activity	Islamic Context (<i>Actions for Hindu neighbors</i>)	Hindu Context (<i>Actions for Muslim neighbors</i>)
Dining	Hosting Iftar/Eid meals for Hindu neighbors.	Sharing festive food and sweets during celebrations among Muslim neighbors.
Preparation	Inviting Hindu friends for Eid shopping & mehendi (henna).	Inviting Muslim friends for Puja shopping & alpona (floor art).
Socializing	Visiting the homes of Hindu neighbors and traveling together.	Inviting Muslim friends to experience Puja events.
Inclusivity	Providing Zakat/Fitra to people in need, regardless of whether they are Muslim or non-Muslim.	Promoting the "festivals for all" ethos.

4.9. Key Differences in Fasting: Islam (Sawm) and Hinduism (Upavasa)

To provide a precise overview of the structural and conceptual divergences between these two traditions, the following comparison highlights the fundamental differences in their practices, philosophies, and regulatory frameworks. While both faiths share the overarching goal of spiritual elevation, their methods of observance reflect unique theological requirements and historical traditions. The table below encapsulates these distinct approaches to fasting, demonstrating how Islamic Sawm and Hindu Upavasa maintain their specific identities through differing ritual, dietary, and temporal structures.

Table 2 Structural and Conceptual Differences between Islamic Sawm and Hindu Upavasa

Feature	Islam (Sawm)	Hinduism (Upavasa)
Temporal Framework	Fixed & Uniform: Strictly bounded by solar transit (dawn to sunset), following a set lunar month.	Variable & Cyclical: Governed by lunar Tithis and specific vow durations (e.g., sunrise to moonrise or 24-hour cycles).
Dietary Flexibility	Binary: Total abstinence during the fasting window; no restrictions on ingredients post-fast.	Spectral: Ranges from waterless (Nirjala) to partial (Phalahar) diets consisting of specific Satvik items.
Prohibited Substances	Pork is strictly Haram; Beef is permissible if ritually slaughtered (Halal).	All meat, fish, and eggs are prohibited during fasts; Beef is generally taboo/restricted across the tradition.
Communal Structure	Highly Synchronized: Community-wide observance with mandatory communal nightly prayers (Tarawih).	Highly Individualized: Focused on personal Vrata (vows) and individual or family-based deity worship.
Culminating Event	Eid-ul-Fitr: A mandatory, socially uniform festival marked by specific charitable duties (Zakat-al-Fitr).	Diverse Festivals: Varies based on the specific deity/vow (e.g., Dussehra after Navratri, or Dahi Handi after Janmashtami).
Preparation Rules	No specific purification ritual required beyond the state of ritual purity (Wudu) for prayer.	Requires formal internal purification, ritual bathing, and a solemn Sankalpa (vow/resolution) to commence the fast.

This table highlights that while both practices serve as vehicles for self-restraint, Islam emphasizes uniform communal compliance, whereas Hinduism emphasizes individualized ritual discipline and specific dietary detoxification.

5. Discussions

The comparison between Islamic Sawm and Hindu Upavasa highlights how each religion implements fasting in its own unique way but for similar spiritual results. Sawm involves communal aspects and is obligatory for all followers of Islam. People all over the world follow fasting during Ramadan together, and thus develop discipline, harmony, and awareness of God. However, Upavasa is based on different principles. This religious activity is determined by the lunar calendar and individual vows, implying higher flexibility and less collective participation of people in this process. The meaning of Upavasa includes the notion of staying close to God (Esposito, 2011; Klostermaier, 2010).

However, despite the aforementioned differences, there is a certain parallel between both practices regarding their impact on physical health. Islam fasting can be compared to the practice of time-restricted feeding because prolonged fasting periods promote metabolic adaptation and increased fat utilization. Scientific studies on fasting have proven positive outcomes for metabolic regulation, improved insulin sensitivity, and reduced inflammatory responses. Similarly, in Upavasa of Hinduism, food restrictions often result in avoiding heavy cereals and focusing on consuming light Satvik (pure) foods, including buckwheat and fruits. Although direct clinical evidence on Upavasa remains limited, these dietary practices correspond to physiological mechanisms observed in broader studies of caloric restriction and autophagy (Longo & Mattson, 2014; Patterson & Sears, 2017).

In addition to diet control, both religions impose behavioral and mental discipline on their members. Fasting in the month of Ramadan involves restraining from eating, drinking, as well as engaging in activities such as gossiping and expressing anger. This helps foster good behavior and control of emotions during the period of fasting. Similarly, the fasting rituals in Hinduism involve restraining thoughts, words, and emotions for the sake of cultivating a sense of serenity, honesty, and mental control. Both religions utilize spiritual disciplines such as reading the Quran, praying, and chanting mantras in order to avoid impulsive actions (Hallaq, 2009; Flood, 1996).

From a social perspective, fasting assumes even more significance because of its common role within both religions. While Islam uses fasting periods such as Eid-ul-Fitr and Zakat-al-Fitr to make fasting socially oriented by providing sustenance and funds to needy people, fasting in Hindu culture leads up to charitable activities and big community festivals like Vijayadashami and Dahi Handi. Thus, fasting takes on new meaning in both traditions, not only as an exercise in self-discipline but also a means of promoting social cohesion, sharing, and festivity (Doniger, 2009).

A notable finding of this study is that fasting cannot be adequately understood through a purely theological or biomedical lens. Rather, it operates as an integrated system that simultaneously influences spirituality, ethics, psychology, physiology, and social relationships. While Islamic fasting emphasizes uniformity, collective participation, and legal obligation, Hindu fasting highlights personal choice, ritual diversity, and individualized spiritual commitment. These distinctions demonstrate how different religious traditions can employ contrasting methods to achieve comparable objectives of self-restraint, purification, and transcendence. The comparative analysis further suggests that fasting remains relevant in contemporary society because it addresses both spiritual and practical human concerns. Beyond religious devotion, fasting encourages moderation, self-regulation, empathy toward the less fortunate and healthier lifestyle practices. Consequently, the continued observance of fasting across diverse religious traditions reflects its enduring significance as a mechanism for personal transformation and community development.

6. Conclusion

This paper compared Islamic Sawm and Hindu Upavasa as two fasting traditions that share common features such as discipline, self-control, and spiritual development. The main difference between these two fasting practices lies in the fact that the former is an obligatory and communal practice in Islamic tradition while Hindu fasting is more flexible and individualized. Despite these differences, both fasting traditions promote self-discipline, behavioral regulation, and beneficial physiological adaptations. Contemporary scientific studies also support several of these physiological effects. This research shows that while Islam and Hinduism are different when it comes to theology, rituals, fasting practices, and diet, they both agree on the significance of fasting as a tool that is critical for developing one's spirituality and morality. In both Sawm and Upavasa, fasting extends beyond abstaining from food and drink to include the regulation of thoughts, behavior, and moral conduct. The findings also suggest that fasting strengthens social harmony through charitable activities, communal celebrations, and shared religious practices. Modern scientific literature also supports the physiological benefits of fasting; including improved metabolic regulation and reduced inflammatory responses. Overall, fasting should be understood not merely as a religious obligation or ritual practice but as a holistic process that integrates spiritual, psychological, social, and physiological dimensions of human life.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

This research maintains strict academic neutrality, respects both religious traditions, and utilizes only peer-reviewed sources. The authors declare no conflicts of interest, and because the study is limited to textual analysis, no clinical ethical approval is required.

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