

Bhakti Club Dinners

by Khadeejah Bari

Has Hewitt food got you down? Tired of the same kind of thing every day? It happens to the best of us, don't worry. Here's what you do. At 7 on a Wednesday night, take a stroll to Lerner. Go inside the Piano Lounge and to your left you will see a pair of glass doors (the Game Room). Enter those doors, and you will be rewarded with a free cooking class and dinner. Welcome to the Bhakti Club.

Only last week, I found myself engaged in conversation with the instructor of these cooking classes: Gadadhara Pandit Das, Columbia's Krishna chaplain. Even though the Bhakti Club's acceptance of members is independent of religious affiliation, the club does have a religious basis, and for about an hour, Pandit indulged my curiosity about this. The word "bhakti" means "devotion to God" and, as Pandit explained, he is a Gaudiya Vaisnava (or "Hare Krishna" monk).

I have the Holly/Bolly-wood image of Hinduism and have never studied it formally, so this conversation was especially fascinating. Gaudiya Vaisnavism is a sect of Hinduism. Its followers are monotheistic, follow the laws of vegetarianism, and take Bhagavad Gita as their primary religious text. The club's weekly dinners consist of mouth-watering vegetarian dishes while the weekly study group explores the Gita through open discussion that welcomes anyone regardless of prior experience with the text.

The Bhakti Club provides fantastic food and food for thought, but what sets it apart from other groups (religious based or not), is how open it is to the community. Many clubs seem insular, but the Bhakti Club resists the temptation of being clique-ish. Students from other schools in addition to Columbia students of all religious and cultural backgrounds can be found at these dinners and study groups. Most people who attend are not Indian or Hindu; many are students of other faiths and cultures who are curious, and this diversity of attendees

improves the quality of the discussion. One idea that Pandit conveyed was that people of different faiths should be understanding of and comfortable with discussing each other's beliefs. The Bhakti Club creates an environment where this understanding and discussion can occur and provides free food plus recipes- you can't a better deal than that. So next Wednesday night, expand your mind and your palate, and pay the Bhakti Club a visit.