

Acceptance or Tolerance?

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<https://www.ndtv.com/feature/video-indian-woman-eats-rice-with-bare-hands-on-london-tube-divides-internet-8530127>

Introduction

One of the most pressing dilemmas currently facing Londoners is whether it is acceptable to eat on the London Underground trains. This issue arose when a video surfaced of an Indian-origin woman eating curry and rice with her hands aboard a London Tube. While she was eating with her hands, she was also talking loudly on her phone. This has sparked a fierce online debate about cultural differences and public etiquette, eliciting a wide range of reactions.

About thirty years ago, during my maiden trip to the UK, as I was travelling on the Tube, I noticed a seemingly mildly spastic young person making himself a sandwich on the go, putting his meat, salad, ketchup, mayonnaise, mustard, and the rest on his bread. His tremors and poorly coordinated hand movements were obvious. Bits of crumbs and other contents, along with juice, seemed to smear the whole area—the seat and the floor. Fellow curious passengers were observing from the corners of their eyes but said nothing. In my mind, his act was a public nuisance; dirtying the place and making it inconvenient for the next person to occupy it. It was also my first lesson in personal space and liberty. It only became a problem when my space invaded yours. For that, we have rules and laws to sort it out.

I also thought that eating on public transport was forbidden. Or it is a Malaysian thing, not wanting to bring non-halal food into the public sphere. According to London.gov.uk and tfl.gov.uk, food and drink are currently permitted on the London Underground. However, it is mindful to ensure that food does not emit a pungent odour that would inconvenience fellow commuters.

Then there is the matter of preserving public peace. Perhaps due to tradition or the unavailability of a clear telephone connection, Asians have a peculiar habit of shouting on the phone, as if we are

still using STD (Subscriber Trunk Dialling) calls. For people in the UK, seeing a person savouring her finger-licking good Dhall and rice while yelling instructions at the top of her voice to her subordinates was too much to stomach. Hence, there is a call for some kind of social etiquette for train travellers.

When in Rome, do as the Romans do, but beggars cannot be choosers either.



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