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Food beliefs and taboos among nomadic tribes of North Karnataka

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Abstract

Nomads are the group of communities who travel from place to place for their livelihood. They do not have a fix settlement. Study was conducted with an objective to know the food habits of nomadic tribes. Sample size of 30 families from 6 districts of North Karnataka have been taken. Information regarding food habits was collected by structured questionnaire. Common breakfast foods were roti with sabji, paratha and poha. The nomadic tribes follow an interesting food habits, they include a wide range of foods in their diet.

Keywords: Food beliefs, taboos among, nomadic tribes

Introduction

Nomads are known as a group of communities who travel from place to place for their livelihood. Some are salt traders, fortune-tellers, conjurers, ayurvedic healers, jugglers, acrobatss, story tellers, snake charmers, animal doctors, tattooists, grindstone makers, or basketmakers.

Food taboos are known from virtually all human societies. Most religions declare certain food items fit and others unfit for human consumption. Dietary rules and regulations may govern particular phases of the human life cycle and may be associated with special events such as menstrual period, pregnancy, childbirth, lactation, and-in traditional societies-preparation for the hunt, battle, wedding, funeral, etc. On a comparative basis many food taboos seem to make no sense at all, as to what may be declared unfit by one group may be perfectly acceptable to another. On the other hand, food taboos have a long history and one ought to expect a sound explanation for the existence (and persistence) of certain dietary customs in a given culture.

Methodology

Information about the food habit of 30 nomadic families was collected by using pretested questionnaire. Information was collected by personal interview technique. The schedule included questions on following aspects:

- Common foods consumed during different meals.
- Food beliefs and taboos.

Results and Discussion

List of common food consumption throughout the day is presented in Table 1. Common breakfast foods were roti with *sabji*, *paratha* and *poha*. In lunch *roti* with *sabji*, rice and dal was more common. For evening snacks biscuits, rusk and bread was consumed. For dinner most of them consumed *roti* with *sabji* (*Sabji* namely *bhindi*, *toori*, *methi*, *aloo*).

Food beliefs and taboos is shown in table 2. There were several foods which were not given to family members at different phases of life. The beliefs and taboos were strongly embedded to the tribe which had strong cultural base. Banana (47.30 percent), curd (23.67 percent) and buttermilk (64 percent) were not given to infants as weaning food as they presumed it to cause cold and cough in infants.

Spices (70.53 percent), chilli (85.20 percent) and garlic (15 percent) were not given during lactation and they believe consumption of these leads to diarrhea, garlic consumption leads to bad smelling milk. Papaya (49 percent), egg (33.33 percent), pepper (12 percent), sesame (10 percent) were avoided during pregnancy. They believe papaya, pepper and sesame are hot foods and leads to abortion, egg leads to birth of bald baby.

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Curd (34 percent) and raw onion (26.5 percent) were not consumed during menstruation cycle in girls. It is believed that consumption of these foods will cause bad odour of menstrual blood.

Banana (24.67 percent), oil (60.5 percent), curd (35.77 percent) were not given during times of sickness like fever, cough and cold. They believe banana and curd increases cold, oil causes indigestion. Tamarind (30.6) is said to cause delay in wound healing (Table 2).

Foods given during different physiological conditions is presented in Table 3. Coconut laddu (28.10 percent) and gum laddu (32.85 percent) were given during menarche, these were said to provide strength to the girls. Fruits (48.85 percent), coconut laddu (12.35 percent), light food (39.75 percent), craving foods (84.45 percent), organ meats (36.20 percent) and goat bone soup (12.11 percent) are given during pregnancy. Light foods are given because they are easily digestible, fruits, laddu and organ meats to increase blood in women, bone soup to provide strength to bones.

Methi leave (78.00 percent), raw egg (3.67 percent), wheat *lapsi* with milk (17.80 percent), bone soup (15.40 percent) and ghee (18.79 percent) are given during lactation. They say methi leaves increases milk secretion, raw egg relieves pain, ghee provides strength and bone soup makes leg bone stronger.

Mashed rice (29.45 percent), mashed banana (35.30 percent),

rice and dal (48.40 percent), dal kichdi (53.70 percent), biscuit with milk (22.40 percent) and cow milk with sugar (35.80 percent) are the weaning foods fed to the infants. These are simply given as they are easy to digest and are soft foods. Soft foods (75.44 percent), *lapsi* (24.46 percent) and *ganji* (15 percent) are given during oldage, reason given was these foods can be eaten even without teeth as they are soft and are easy to digest.

When suffering from cough they consume *Adrak kadha* (23.12 percent), Honey with ginger (17.30 percent) and Garlic cloves (5.70 percent), these are said to be relieves throat irritation. When suffering from cold *Jeera kadha* (32.33 percent), Chicken broath (37.50 percent), *Adrak kadha* (46.67 percent) are consumed believing to cure cold. During fever soft liquid foods (56.33 percent), non-spicy foods (44.21 percent) are consumed which are said to be easy to digest. *Jalebi* (10.00 percent), biscuit (8.56 percent) and *gulab jamun* (12.40 percent) are consumed during diarrhea, these are believed to stop diarrhea.

Table 1: List of common food consumption throughout the day N=30

Meal of the day	Food items
Breakfast	Roti sabji/paratha/poha
Lunch	Roti sabji/dal/rice
Snacks	Biscuit/rusk/bread
Dinner	Roti/sabji

Table 2: Food beliefs and taboos N=30

	Foods avoided	n	%	Reasons given
1. During weaning	Banana	14	46.66	Cold and cough
	Curd	7	23.33	
	Buttermilk	19	63.33	
2. During lactation	Spices	21	70.00	Diarrhea
	Chillie	25	83.33	Diarrhea
	Garlic	4	13.33	Bad odour of Milk
3. During pregnancy	Papaya	15	50.00	Abortion
	Egg	11	36.67	Baby born bald
	Pepper	5	16.67	Heat
	Sesame	3	10.00	Heat, causes abortion
4. Women during menstruation	Curd	11	36.67	Bad odour of blood
	Raw onion	8	26.67	Bad odour of blood
5. Sickness: Fever Cold Cough	Banana	8	26.67	Cold increases
	Oil	19	63.33	Indigestion
	Curd	11	36.67	Cold
Wound	Tamarind	9	30.00	Delay in wound healing

Table 3: Foods given during different physiological conditions N=30

Physiological condition	Foods given	n	%	Reasons
Menarch	Coconut laddu	8	26.67	Provides strength to the girls.
	Gum laddu	11	33.33	
Pregnancy	Craving foods	26	86.67	Easy digestible foods. Increases blood. Legs become strong.
	Fruits	14	46.67	
	Light foods	11	36.67	
	Coconut Laddu	4	13.33	
	Organ meat	11	36.67	
	Bone soup of goat	3	10.00	
Lactation	Methi leave	23	76.67	Increases milk. Relieves pain. Legs become strong. Provides strength.
	Raw egg	1	3.33	
	Bone soup	4	13.33	
	Ghee	5	16.67	
Infancy (weaning)	Wheat <i>lapsi</i> with milk	5	16.67	Easy to digest. No teeth so soft to eat.
	Mashed rice	9	30.00	
	Mashed banana	11	36.67	
	Rice and dal	14	46.67	
	Kichdi	16	53.33	

	Biscuit with milk	7	23.33	
	Cow milk with sugar	11	36.67	
Oldage	Soft foods	23	76.67	Easy to eat No teeth so can be easily swallowed
	Lapsi	7	23.33	
	Ganji	5	16.67	
Sickness				
Cough	Adrak kadha	7	23.33	Relieves throat
	Honey with ginger	5	16.67	
	Garlic cloves	2	6.67	
Cold	Jeera kadha	10	33.33	Cures cold
	Chicken soup	11	36.67	
	Adrak kadha	14	46.67	
Fever	Soft/liquid foods	17	56.67	Easy to digest
	Non-spicy food	14	46.67	
Diarrhea	Jalebi	3	10.00	Stops diarrhea
	Gulab jamun	2	6.67	
	Biscuit	4	13.33	

Conclusion

The origins and evolution of taste are quite complex and have a big impact on cultures and regions. Anthropologists and sociologists have studied about food habits and beliefs in different cultures of the world. Certain food habits and customs including specific food habits are associated with particular culture. These food taboos were handed down from the ancestors from generation to generation with the belief tested by time that the abstinence of certain food items by the people can prevent them from various harmful effect caused by its consumption.

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