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Food habits of nomadic tribes

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Abstract

Nomads are the a 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. Majority of them were non vegetarian. Common breakfast foods were roti with sabji, paratha and poha. Cow milk, mashed rice, rava ganji with sugar and biscuit were the supplementary foods given to the child. The nomadic tribes follow an interesting food habits, they include a wide range of foods in their diet.

Keywords: Nomads, food habits, food beliefs

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, acrobats, story tellers, snake charmers, animal doctors, tattooists, grindstone makers, or basketmakers.

Understanding the food and dietary patterns of indigenous populations often poses unique challenges. The tribes in India represent a good example of the vast diversity in indigenous culture, tradition and environment that particularly influences their food systems, food practices and nutritional status. Hence this study was carried out with an objective to know food habits of nomadic tribes.

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.
- Frequency of consumption of different foods.
- Food beliefs and taboos.
- Special foods consumed during pregnancy, lactation, puberty and oldage.
- Foods given during illnesses.

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*).

Frequency of different foods from different food groups consumed is showed in Table 2. All the families consumed cereals daily (100 percent). Pulses was consumed daily by 36.67 percent, weekly by 43.33 percent and monthly by 20 percent of the families. GLV's were consumed daily by 10 percent, weekly by 33.33 percent, monthly by 20 percent, occasionally by 23.33 percent and 13.33 percent never consumed. Roots and tubers was consumed daily by 20 percent, weekly by 50 percent, monthly by 13.33 percent, occasionally by 13.33 percent and 3.33 percent of them never consumed. Other vegetables were consumed daily by 36.67 percent, weekly by 46.67 percent and monthly b 16.67 percent. Fats and oils and sugar and jaggery was consumed daily by 100 percent of the population. Deep fried foods were consumed weekly by 6.67 percent, monthly by 30 percent and occasionally by 63.33 percent. Fruits were consumed monthly by 40 percent, occasionally by 50 percent and never consumed by 10 percent. Non-vegetarian foods were consumed weekly by 26.67 percent, monthly by 43.33 percent, occasionally by 16.67 percent and never consumed by 13.33 percent.

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egg was consumed weekly by 53.33 percent, monthly by 23.33 percent, occasionally by 10 percent and never consumed by 13.33 percent. Nuts was consumed weekly by 20 percent, monthly by 16.67 percent, occasionally by 40 percent and never consumed by 23.33 percent. tinned or junk foods are consumed daily by 14.29 percent, weekly by 53.58 percent, monthly by 14.29 percent, occasionally by 14.29 percent and never consumed by 10.71 percent.

Consumption of type of foods from different food groups is denoted in Table 3. 100 percent of the population were consuming wheat under cereal category. *Tur dal* (93.33 percent) was the most commonly consumed pulse, followed by Bengal gram dal (90 percent), and least was rajma (16.67 percent). 100 percent of the population consumed potato, followed by carrot (80 percent). Palak was most commonly consumed green leafy vegetable eaten by 90 percent of the population, followed by methi leave (76.67 percent). 100 percent of the population consumed chilli, cucumber and onion. Palm oil (53.33 percent) was the most commonly used oil. Banana (90 percent) was the most commonly consumed fruit, followed by apple (70 percent) and ber fruit (70 percent). Mutton (92.31 percent) was the most commonly consumed flesh food, followed by chicken (67.67 percent) and egg (86.67 percent) least was beef (7.70 percent) Nuts like groundnut (100 percent) and cashew nut (40 percent) were consumed. Bakery foods like biscuit (90 percent), bread (100 percent) and rusk (46.67 percent) were consumed.

Food beliefs and taboos is shown in table 4. 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.

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 4).

Foods given during different physiological conditions is presented in Table 5. 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: Frequency of consumption of different foods N=30

Food groups	Frequency of consumption									
	Daily		Weekly		Monthly		Occasionally		Never	
	N	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Cereals	30	100	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Pulses	11	36.67	13	43.33	6	20.00	-	-	-	-
Green leafy vegetables's	3	10.00	10	33.33	6	20.00	7	23.33	4	13.33
Roots and tubers	6	20.00	15	50	4	13.33	4	13.33	1	3.33
Other vegetables	11	36.67	14	46.67	5	16.67	-	-	-	-
Fats and oils	30	100	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Sugar and jaggery	30	100	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Deep fried foods	-	-	2	6.67	9	30	19	63.33	-	-
Fruits	-	-	-	-	12	40	15	50.00	3	10.00
Non-veg items	-	-	8	26.67	13	43.33	5	16.67	4	13.33
Egg	-	-	16	53.33	7	23.33	3	10.00	4	13.33
Nuts	-	-	6	20.00	5	16.67	12	40.00	7	23.33
Tinned/junk foods	4	13.33	15	50.00	4	13.33	4	13.33	3	10.00

Table 3: Consumption of type of foods from different food groups N=30

Foods	No. of families	%
Cereal		
Wheat	30	100
Rice	17	56.67
Maize	7	23.33
Jowar	4	13.33
Pulse		
Greengram	23	76.67
Tur dal	28	93.33
Bengal gram	27	90.00
Masor dal	18	60.00
Rajma	5	16.67
Green leafy vegetables's		
Methi	23	76.67
Palak	27	90.00
Dil	18	60.00
Raddish leaves	7	23.33
Roots and tubers		
Raddish	18	60.00
Carrot	24	80.00
Potato	30	100
Sweet potato	10	33.33
Other vegetables		
Ladies finger	23	76.67
Brinjal	28	93.33
Capsicum	26	86.67
Cucumber	30	100
Onion	30	100
Chillie	30	100
Ridge gourd	25	83.33
Bottle gourd	21	70.00
Bitter gourd	17	56.67
Fats and oils		
Sunflower oil	3	10.00
Groundnut oil	4	13.33
Castor oil	7	23.33
Palm oil	16	53.33
Fruits		
Mango	16	53.33
Apple	21	70.00
Papaya	17	56.67
Banana	27	90.00
Ber	21	70.00
Non-veg foods		
Mutton	24	92.31
Chicken	26	86.67
Egg	26	86.67
Beef	2	7.70
Nuts		
Groundnut	30	100
Cashew nut	12	40.00
Tinned/junk foods		
Bread	27	90.00
Biscuit	30	100
Rusk	14	46.67

Table 4: 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	Banana	8	26.67	Cold increases
Cold	Oil	19	63.33	Indigestion
Cough	Curd	11	36.67	Cold
Wound	Tamarind	9	30.00	Delay in wound healing

Table 5: 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	
Lactation	Bone soup of goat	3	10.00	Increases milk. Relieves pain. Legs become strong. Provides strength.
	Methi leave	23	76.67	
	Raw egg	1	3.33	
	Bone soup	4	13.33	
	Ghee	5	16.67	
Infancy (weaning)	Wheat lapsi 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	
Oldage	Cow milk with sugar	11	36.67	Easy to eat No teeth so can be easily swallowed
	Soft foods	23	76.67	
	Lapsi	7	23.33	
Sickness	Ganji	5	16.67	Relieves throat
	Cough			
	Adrak kadha	7	23.33	
Cold	Honey with ginger	5	16.67	Cures cold
	Garlic cloves	2	6.67	
	Jeera kadha	10	33.33	
Fever	Chicken soup	11	36.67	Easy to digest
	Adrak kadha	14	46.67	
	Soft/liquid foods	17	56.67	
Diarrhea	Non spicy food	14	46.67	Stops diarrhea
	Jalebi	3	10.00	
	Gulab jamun	2	6.67	
	Biscuit	4	13.33	



Fig 1: Women preparing rottis in tent



Fig 2: Women preparing rottis outdoor



Fig 3: Stored drinking water

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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.