

FOOD HABITS OF INHABITANTS OF PARTS OF ARID-REGION IN WESTERN RAJASTHAN, INDIA

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Accepted : September, 2007

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ABSTRACT

A survey was conducted with objectives to study food habits, problems and contributing factors to those habits of infants and under-six children, pregnant women, lactating mothers and aged women alongwith their traditional cloths in Meghwal community in parts of arid region of Rajasthan. Factors affecting food habits were recorded. Suggestions were made to strengthen natural resources conservation programmes.

Key words : Food habits, Inhabitants, Children, Women, Meghwal community, Arid -region.

Though India is a food grain exporting country, a high proportion of the people living in arid region of Rajasthan in this country still face malnutrition problems (Gaur and Gaur, 1999) particularly young children, pregnant and lactating mothers and aged women. This situation becomes pronounced during the drought periods (Bhandari, 1974). Food habits and food beliefs are the major determinants in nutritional problems. Increasing income or producing more nutritious foods does not guarantee a better and sustained nutritional status of the people. Clean understanding of people's food habits, both desirable and undesirable, will facilitate the design of activities aimed at the promotion of desirable habits and the modification of undersirable habits (Gaur and Guar, 1999). Impact of the new economic policy on the food habits and decisive role market forces play in the production of food grains can be seen in the remote villages of the desert. Knowledge about food habits helps in the formulation of more precise nutritional plans. Present study deals with record of food habits, problems and contributing factors to those habits of inhabitants of arid-region in parts of Western Rajasthan.

METHODOLOGY

During the period of 2005-2006 and 2006-2007, the survey of nine villages that is Balesar, Bawerli, Belwa, Chaba, Chanchalwa, Khirjan, Shergarh, Tena and

Utamber of Shergarh Tehsil of Jodhpur district was carried out with the aim to analyse and identify food habits and explore the reasons or associated factors related to those habits in the target population of Meghwal community, a scheduled caste community. The target population consisted of pregnant and lactating women and their families, infants, pre-school children (under 6 years of age) and aged women (above 65 year of age). However, the primary aim of the study was to assess available natural resources, its utilization and to find out contribution of local dwellers.

Quantitative data collection :

Information on the communities and target populations was collected by using questionnaires and record forms. The variables included demography, village profiles, household characteristics and socio-economic status and food availability.

Qualitative data collection :

The data were collected through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, informal talk and observations. Informations were recorded and summarized in order to reasonably explain, describe the nature, causes and effects of certain behaviour. The technique is called participatory observation which emphasizes the study of the community level, focusing on people as member of village environment. In this study the women, old aged persons and grown up children were interviewed. The discussions with key informants were conducted by using