

Expression of different religions and castes in determining food habits of adolescents

■ **Albha Tiwari**

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■ **ABSTRACT** : Differences in adolescent's food habits were observed in India as a consequence of religious and caste. Hindu caste had nutritious diet predominantly; whereas, boys of Sikh and Muslim religion had fast food. In 16-18 yrs age, boys and girls of Hindu caste had nutritious diet and fast food habit in boys and girls of Muslim and Sikh religion predominantly. Highly significant differences were found among nutritional and fast food habits in girls in both age group (13-15 and 16-18 yrs). Among high caste boys' and girl adolescents of 13-15 and 16-18 yrs showed maximum consumption of fast food than nutritious food. Whereas, in backward castes; adolescent boys (13-15 yrs) predominantly to have nutritious food as compare to other age group. In schedule caste group, adolescent boys' and girls' of all age group intake fast food more frequently than nutritious food. In other castes, fast food intake was more than nutritious food among boys adolescents of 13-15 and 16-18 yrs age group. The t-test indicates that there is non-significant difference between nutritional and fast food habit of boy adolescents of 13-15 yrs.

■ **KEY WORDS**: Adolescents, Food habits, Age, Religion, Caste

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Author for correspondence:

Albha Tiwari

Department of Home Science,
V.R.G. Girls Postgraduate
College, Morar, Gwalior (M.P)
India
Email : albha23@rediffmail.com

Indian food consumption is framed by a position of social, religious and caste system among adolescents. Although, India's population is predominantly Hindu, there are significant minority religious communities namely; Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains. Religion has a key task to participate in the prohibiting and addition of foods in India. Each religious category has its dietary limitations. It is significant to note that dietary practices of the different communities follow distinct rules and are guided by regional culinary styles.

Caste determined right to use; to control and freedom; it also acting a part in dietary rules. The caste

structure divides society into number groups (Dumont, 1972). Each of these groups is distinct, but is connected by chain of command, which ranks groups as being relatively superior or relatively inferior to one another. The Brahmins, usually priests and scholars; have the strictest proscriptions and rules regarding food and commensality. The Kshatriyas comes second to the Brahmins, and includes those that provide leadership and courage, such as political rulers and soldiers. They are followed by the Vaishyas, a category that includes farmers and merchants. The other category namely; Shudras, their role is service, make up another category

of labourers and servants. People of other religions are in the main outside the caste system, as are tribal groups and Dalits (Dube, 2001). The upper caste compels restrictions on its members for diet and caste members are bounded by laws for food habits. These rules also determine access to food, and play a role in contributing to the nutritional quality of diets. In this study, the role of different religion and caste in determining adolescents food habits has been assessed.

■ RESEARCH METHODS

This study was conducted in 400 adolescent boys and girls of 13 to 15 years and 16 to 18 years of age were selected randomly from Gwalior, Morar and Laskhar for conducting this research work which represents the whole Gwalior City.

Variables:

The independent variable (Age, Religion and Caste) and dependent variable (dietary pattern) were used in samples under study in order to determine the adolescent's food habits.

Independent variable:

Age:

All adolescents were listed according to age groups.

Religions:

Major religions in India are Hindu, Muslim, Jain, Budish, Sikh and Christian.

Castes:

Major castes in India are High caste, backward class, Schedule caste, Schedule tribe and other castes.

Nutrient intake:

Nutrient intake may be considered in two general headings *i.e.* nutritional adequate or balance diet, which maintains and promote health. Secondly, fast food, which based on all types of fast foods which contains excessive amount of sodium and calories.

Data collection:

All the 400 respondents were inclusively approaches by the researcher. By personal contact, all the respondents were contacted with the help of the structured schedule developed for the study. The statistical analysis was performed to calculate percentage, t-test, Arithmetic Mean and Standard deviation (Panse and Sukkhatme, 1954).

■ RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Boy adolescents (13-15 and 16-18 yrs) of Hindu families had predominantly nutritious food intake than fast food. Similar trend was noticed in adolescents of Jain families. Whereas opposite trend was apparent in adolescents of Muslims, Sikhs and Baddish family. Interestingly, adolescents of Christian families were much tends to have fast food. Girl adolescents (13-15 and 16-18 yrs) also had nutritious food habit than fast food in adolescents of Hindu, Jain and Baddish and 13-15 yrs adolescents of Christian families (Table 1).

The t-test indicates that there is a non-significant difference between nutritional and fast food diet in boy adolescents of 13-15 and 16-18 yrs age groups. On the other hand, highly significant differences was found among nutritional and fast food habits in girls in both age group (13-15 and 16-18) (Table 2 and 3). Table 4 indicated the caste influences on the food habits of adolescents. Among high caste boys' and girls' adolescent of 13-15

Table 1 : Analysis of adolescents on the basis of religion in determining food consumption									
Sr. No.	Religion	Age group							
		Boys				Girls			
		13-15 yrs		16-18 yrs		13-15 yrs		16-18 yrs	
NF	FF	NF	FF	NF	FF	NF	FF		
1.	Hindu	17	13	18	7	14	8	10	5
2.	Muslim	3	18	2	20	3	18	2	16
3.	Jain	14	2	13	5	12	5	11	6
4.	Budish	2	3	2	8	4	3	3	4
5.	Sikh	6	20	4	19	3	22	4	19
6.	Christian	-	2	-	2	10	8	3	7
Total		42	58	39	60	46	64	33	57

Table 2: Statistical analysis of adolescents (13-15 years) on the basis of religion in determining food consumption

Sr. No.	Adolescent	Age group				t value	df	Significance
		13-15yrs						
		Nutritional food		Fast food				
Mean	Standard deviation	Mean	Standard deviation					
1.	Boys	8.4	6.73	9.67	8.35	0.81	98	NS
2.	Girls	7.67	4.92	10.67	7.58	2.35	108	HS

HS: denote highly significant at 0.01 level; NS=Non-significant at 0.05 level

Table 3 : Statistical analysis of adolescents (16-18 years) on the basis of religion in determining food consumption

Sr. No.	Adolescent	Age group				t value	df	Significance
		16-18 yrs						
		Nutritional food		Fast food				
Mean	Standard deviation	Mean	Standard deviation					
1.	Boys	7.80	7.29	10.17	7.52	1.56	98	NS
2.	Girls	5.5	3.93	9.5	6.35	3.27	88	HS

HS: denote highly significant at 0.01 level; NS=Non-significant at 0.05 level

and 16-18 yrs showed maximum consumption of fast food than nutritious food. Whereas, in backward caste adolescent boys of 13-15 yrs showed to have nutritious food as compare to other age group. In schedule caste group, adolescent boys' and girls' of all age group intake fast food more frequently than nutritious food. Whereas, schedule tribe fast food consumption was more in adolescent boys of 13-15 yrs age group and in adolescent girls of age group 16-18 yrs. Nutritious food consumption was slightly more in adolescent girls of 13-15 yrs group. Whereas, at par in boys and girls for both food consumption in the age group of 13-15 yrs and 16-18 yrs, respectively.

In other castes fast food intake was more than nutritious food among boy adolescents of 13-15 and 16-18 yrs (boys) age group whereas at par among girl adolescents of 13-15 yrs. Girl adolescents of 16-18 yrs intake more nutritious food than fast food. The t-test (Table 5 and 6) indicates that there is non-significant difference between nutritional and fast food habit of boy adolescents of 13-15 yrs with mean and SD 8.40±5.94 and 11.60±9.28. On the contrary, highly significant difference was observed in above food habits in girls of 13-15 yrs with mean and SD 9.20±6.72 and 12.8±9.68; whereas, boys and girl adolescents of 16-18 yrs have highly significant difference in both food habits. Eating

Table 4 : Analysis of adolescents on the basis of caste in determining food consumption

Sr. No.	Caste	Age group							
		Boys				Girls			
		13-15 yrs		16-18 yrs		13-15 yrs		16-18 yrs	
N F	F F	N F	F F	N F	F F	N F	F F		
1.	High caste	18	23	10	21	11	25	7	27
2.	Backward	5	3	2	5	3	3	2	3
3.	Schedule caste	3	4	6	12	7	12	1	5
4.	Schedule tribe	6	8	3	3	5	4	3	7
5.	Other	10	20	18	20	20	20	20	15
Total		42	58	39	61	46	64	33	57

Table 5 : Statistical analysis of adolescents (13-15 years) on the basis of caste in determining food consumption

Sr. No.	Adolescent	Age Group				t value	df	Significance
		13-15 yrs						
		Nutritional food		Fast Food				
Mean	Standard deviation	Mean	Standard deviation					
1.	Boys	8.40	5.94	11.6	9.28	1.96	98	NS
2.	Girls	9.2	6.72	12.8	9.68	2.17	108	HS

HS=Highly significant at 0.01 level; NS=Non-significant at 0.05 level

Table 6 : Statistical analysis of adolescents (16-18 years) on the basis of caste in determining food consumption

Sr. No.	Adolescent	Age group				t value	df	Significance
		16-18 yrs						
		Nutritional food		Fast food				
Mean	Standard deviation	Mean	Standard deviation					
1.	Boys	7.8	6.41	12.2	8.28	2.82	98	HS
2.	Girls	6.6	7.82	11.4	9.83	2.34	88	HS

HS=Highly significant at 0.01 level

habits based on their religion and caste system and the high significance of diet for the Indian population is confirmed by Kakar and Kakar (2007). The Hindu, April 21 (2000) supported the present findings that diet is associated with religion and caste. In higher caste food diet is less than the low caste adolescents.

In Hinduism, food is so significantly important and is considered to be part of God, as it nourishes the entire physical, mental, and emotional aspects of a human being. The “Satvic” people eat natural food which promotes longevity, intelligence, vigor, health, happiness and cheerfulness. On contrary to this, present finding indicated that trend is changing boys and girl adolescents were found to eat more fast food than nutritional food in spite to belonging to any religion except Hindu, Jain, Budish this is purely religious believe. Further, inclination towards fast food consumption could also due to the advertisement of fast food through various advertising media and its influence on adolescents because in this age; adolescents are more influenced by society and social media as compare to the fact.

Analysis of results across social groups shows significant caste differences in food intake pattern. The likelihood of consuming all food items is lower among Scheduled tribes and scheduled caste households compared with ‘other social group’ category. This is an analysis at the level of broad caste group is not enough to bring out the touch of caste as an important determinant of food consumption pattern. Religion is another significant variable affecting food consumption pattern. Muslims have lower probability of consuming all food items; except meat compared with the Hindu adolescents. Our results show that type of caste also affects food consumption pattern in India. Consumption of all food items is lower among Scheduled caste and Schedule tribe households than the others that include the so-called higher caste groups (Gupta and Mishra, 2014).

Religion is another important variable affecting food consumption pattern. Our study confirms that Muslims

have lower probability of consumption of all food items except meat than the Hindu families, even within the same expenditure classes. Sometimes regional factor determines level of food security across caste and religion groups. Muslims relative to Hindus are calorie deficient in India. Hindus are relatively worse off in terms of calorie consumption. Similar conditions of scheduled caste and scheduled tribes vary with regions (Mahadevan and Suardi, 2013).

Another group of people are the Dalits. Their low status in society does not consider them as members of the caste system. “Untouchability” has been negated officially in 1950. Nevertheless the study of Shah (2006) showed that it is still part of daily life especially in rural India. Indians belonging to lower castes are less likely to be a vegetarian whereas adolescents living in the slums of big cities are less likely to be vegetarians than adolescents living in no-slum areas (Arnold *et al.*, 2009). People become a caste member from birth on. Each caste has definite rules, which determine activities during their whole life. This also states food allowed to eat (Kakar and Kakar, 2007). Furthermore, the caste directs in which style the food has to be eaten and with whom it is allowed to be eaten (Molony, 2004).

The Indian caste system is strongly related to Hinduism and it is difficult to trace their roots exactly to either religion or the caste system. Thus, the food habits of adolescents are strongly influenced by the religion and caste.

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