

## **Impact of Public Distribution System on Traditional Food Habits of Rural People**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Rapid dietary changes among rural people worldwide are posing threats to the food pattern and the traditional knowledge was essentially required for maintenance of traditional food habit. This study was conducted to know the potential reasons for change in the traditional food habit in villages. It was conducted in a typical Indian village in Shimoga district of Karnataka State in South India. Results indicated that though increase in income was a major reason for change in the food habit, people changed their food habits even without any significant increase in income. This change was attributed to the introduction of Public Distribution System. The Public Distribution System was a critical resource for the food security of the poor people. The results of this study would help to add new dimensions to Public.

Diversified traditional food habit exists in most of the villages in our country. The traditional food habit of rural people is defined as diet composed of food items from the local and natural environments that are culturally accepted. Rapid dietary change in rural people all over the world is posing a great threat to the traditional food and the traditional knowledge required for maintenance of traditional food system (Kuhnlein and Rechevenur, 1996). A traditional Indian food system is diversified and comprised use of wide range of items in their diet. This in turn gradually reduces the use of few crops in our daily. This was evident in the world food production statistics. In India, out of 189.4 Mt of major food crop production, nearly 86 per cent was contributed by three major crops i.e. rice, wheat, and maize. This trend of consumption of few major crops was not a healthy sign as per world food security (Kumaraswamy, 1995). Though there are several reasons for this change in food habits, one of the main reasons being increase in income levels of the individuals (Anon., 1995). It was also reported by Shashidhar (2000) that, the food grains distributed through Public Distribution System (PDS) was not in accordance with the people's choice and studies on dietary change are concentrated around the vicinity of specific major cities in India. The information on indigenous people's dietary pattern and its change over a period of time is meager in India. Keeping this

in view, the present study was conducted to know the impact of PDS on traditional food habit and to generate the reasons for change in traditional food habit in the Indian villages.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The study was conducted in Thamadihalli village of Shimoga district, Karnataka State, India. Geographically, Shimoga district is located between 13° 17' and 14° 29' N latitude and 74° 38' to 76° 04' E longitude. Thamadihalli village in the Shimoga district is located in the foothills of westernghats representing a typical agriculture village. As per the objectives of this study, the relevant data were collected by participant observation and also by using pre-tested structured schedules and analysed by employing frequency and percentage.

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **Profile of the selected village**

Thamadihalli is a small village having 148 families (Table 1), Majority of the population is dependent on agriculture for their livelihood. Annual per capita income was below the national average of Rs. 19, 536 (Table 2). The village is having minimum basic infrastructure facilities, except, health centre.

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**Table 1 : Profile of the selected village**

Details	Farmers	Farmers who also work as labourers	Farmers who are also involved in other profession	Agriculture labourers	Agriculture labourers involved in other works	Total
Number of families	34	60	36	17	1	148
Female population	91	142	93	45	2	373
Male Population	102	175	99	36	3	415
Total	193	317	192	81	5	788
Female labours	-	60	18	25	1	93
Male labours	-	88	14	15	1	117
Total	-	148	32	40	2	210

**Table 2: Annual per capita income and per capita expenditure on food, health and education.**

Category of farmers	Per capita income (Rs.)	Per capita expenditure on food, health, and education (Rs.)
Big farmers	10,802	5,667
Medium farmers	10,296	5,368
Average Medium farmers	5,800	4,528
Small farmers	4,277	4,127
Very small farmers	4,382	3,247
Labourers	3,423	2,288

**Change in the food habits among low income and high income groups**

Rapid dietary change of rural people is a common phenomenon that is being observed in recent days throughout the world. Similar trend was observed in the present study area also. The data presented in the Table -3 indicates that the change in the food habit was observed among the low-income working group and 79.4 per cent among high income group. Several researchers earlier observed the effect of income growth on dietary composition. People with high-income are also not exceptional to this rapid change in the dietary system. It was also evident that the high income group started consuming more and more of protein-based food, besides fruits and vegetables. Nearly, 58.8 per cent of high income group had agreed for the change in dietary system and this was mainly attributed to the increased income, whereas only 0.1 per cent of low income group people supported this view. Among the low-income group, majority (80.1%) of the people attributed dietary change was due to PDS. The reasons for this opinion was, prior to the introduction of PDS, finger millet was

the main starch source or staple food, and after the introduction of PDS, the majority of them shifted from finger millet to rice and wheat based food habits. Majority of the farmers even though produce finger millet in their own lands, they sell their entire produce in the market and purchase rice for their consumption from the PDS. The main reason for this shift in the food habit was attributed to the higher price of the finger millet in the market as compared to the lower price of rice in the PDS.

**Table 3 : Change in food habit among low and high income groups**

Sl. No.	Statements	High income farmers (N=34)%	Low income farmers (N=114)%
1.	There is significant change in the food habit in my family	79.4	100.0
2.	Change in food habit is due to increase in income	58.8	0.1
3.	Change in food habit is due to availability of diversified food	0.1	0.0
4.	Change in food habit due to PDS	0.1	80.1

**Opinion of the rural people about the performance of Public Distribution System**

One of the major economic development challenges in India is to reduce poverty. The country has introduced a wide range of economic reforms, including a direct anti-poverty programme and the PDS. At present, there are nearly 4,62,000 fair price shops catering to the needs of the poor people in India. Indian planning commission estimates that 160 million families purchase commodities from PDS ration shops every

year. All the villagers, irrespective of the income groups, appreciated this, even though the majority of people in the selected village (67.8%) (Table-4) were not happy with the present functioning of the PDS ration shops. 60 per cent of People in the selected village expressed unsuitable working timings of ration shops. During the discussion, the Villagers have expressed that, this problem can be solved at their own level. They believe that to solve this problem, government intervention was not required and only the local administration can solve it. However, this problem till today remains unsolved.

As many as 46.6 per cent of the people expressed the selling of food items by the PDS shop owners through unfair means and it was also in conformity with the reports of similar such study in India (Anne 2002). Apart from these problems, villagers also suggested to include the traditional food grains of the villages in the PDS. Majority of the people (51%) in the village expressed inclusion of finger millet in the PDS. Even the greater proportion of population (79.7%) expressed to include personal care and health/sanitary items i.e. soaps, paste, detergents etc. in the PDS. During discussion with the villagers, the villagers opined that food grains for public distribution should be procured and stored locally to keep the quality of food grains for public distribution should be procured and stored locally to keep the quality of food grain as well as to reduce the cost of transportation and wastage. If we consider the economics of present PDS i.e. to distribute one rupee worth food grains the present PDS is spending nearly five rupees. This immediately warrants for the change in the PDS operation and maintenance.

**Table 4 : Opinion of people on the performance of public distribution system** (N=148)

Sl.No.	Opinion statements	% of people
1.	PDS was not efficient	67.8
2.	Ration shop owners sell the materials through unfair means (black market)	46.6
3.	Duration of Distribution in a month is not sufficient	51.0
4.	Shop opening time is not suitable	60.4
5.	Quality of material is not up to the mark	53.7
6.	Instead of wheat finger millet should be supplied through PDS	51.0
7.	Along with wheat, finger millet should be supplied in PDS	20.1
8.	Soaps, paste and other personal care material should be supplied through PDS	79.7

### Opinion of village workers on Traditional food habit and health

Traditionally, the Tamadihalli villager's staple food was finger millet and during the study period it was observed that the food consumption pattern had got changed from finger millet to rice. The Table-5 reveals that, labour class was not happy with the change in their food habits. Nearly 47 per cent of the hard working labour group opined that their health condition was much better with traditional finger millet based food habit. It was also observed that majority (61.4%) of the working class were of strong opinion that, was only two-third of the finger millet consumption was sufficient out of the 100 per cent of rice requirement for family food requirement. Villagers also expressed that the finger millet consumption, compared to that of rice kept them less hunger condition for a long time. Even though, 80 per cent of them have changed from finger millet to rice consumption, only 61.4 per cent expressed that, they were inclined to reversing towards traditional finger millet based diet, if the price of finger millet is equal to or less than the rate of the public distributed rice.

**Table 5: Opinion of village workers on traditional food and health** (N=114)

Sl.No.	Items	Percentage of Respondent
1.	We were healthier; when we were eating traditional finger millet (ragi) based diet	47.3
2.	When we use finger millet, only, 2/3 <sup>rd</sup> of rice quantity is sufficient to cater to the need of our family food requirement	61.4
3.	The traditional food is having slow digestibility, we can increase the gap between two meals	59.6
4.	Though we grow finger millet we sell and purchase rice in PDS for family use, because PDS rice was cheaper than finger millet	80.1
5.	If the rate of finger millet is same as that of rice we purchase finger millet	61.4

## CONCLUSION

Public distribution system is an essential element of a multi-pronged strategy to ensure food security and reduce poverty. This study clearly indicated the increase in income was a major reason for change in food habit among low-income groups, the reason for changes in traditional food habits was due to the selling of rice and wheat in PDS at lower prices instead of finger millet and other locally grown food grains. The results of this study also indicated how to make the PDS more efficient to the rural people to keep up their traditional food habits and to ensure food and nutritional security. The following conclusions from the study would help to add new dimensions to PDS, keeping the rural people's food consumption pattern.

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## Nomenclature

*Kilsa* - Traditional sweet from finger millet

*Ougu* - Traditional sweet from rice flour

*Mudde* - Traditional staple food prepared from finger millet

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