



Cultural and dietary habits of Siddi tribals of north Karnataka

Renuka Meti

Department of Food Processing and Nutrition, Akkamahadevi Women University, Vijayapur, Karnataka, India

Abstract

Tribals are vivid in their life style and are different from common population in any country. Hence, an investigation was carried out on food habits and nutritional status of Siddis a popular tribe of Karnataka. Interview schedule was used to collect the data from siddi tribes. The salient findings reveals that poverty seems to be rampant in Siddi community, hence every member of the family tries to engage themselves in income generating activities such as collecting fuel wood apart from being agricultural labourers. Siddis are culturally united specially with respect to living conditions, performing festivals, rituals and other religious ceremonies. The Siddis celebrate almost all the festivals of Karnataka region. They eat generally available flesh of animals such as goat, sheep, chicken, egg, fish and rabbit. Fleshy food enjoys the highest social value and hence, forms an important and integral item during festivals, rituals such as funerals, agricultural operations and religious ceremonies. Restriction of cold foods and other spicy foods during lactation period was also seen in the tribes. Generally, no foods were restricted to old people. No special attention is paid by Siddi during pregnancy with respect to food except increasing the intake of foods which they usually consume.

Keywords: poverty, rituals, festival foods

1. Introduction

In this land of cultural diversity along with the general population, people belonging to unprivileged sections of the society including scheduled castes and scheduled tribes have contributed a lot for the national heritage by their unique style of performing certain jobs and festivals. Of the several such communities, 'Siddi' community is the one who have distributed all over the world, India, Karnataka in particular densely in the northern part.

India has the second largest concentration of tribal population in the world next to Africa. It constitutes about eight per cent of the total population in India, with varying proportions in different states (Rao *et al.* 2006a). In Karnataka, tribal population is six per cent of the total population. They are Siddi tribes, Mopatribals, Andaman Nicobar tribes, Toda tribes, Jenu Kuruba, Bedar, Sholaga *etc.*

Concentrated settlements of the Siddis are found mainly in the Western Ghats of the North Canara district and also in some part of Belgaum and Dharwad districts of Karnataka state, India. The Siddis can be identified as distinct group totally different in features from the rest of the people living in the area. The Siddis have come from different countries of East Africa and most of them were brought as slaves and few came as traders and their occupations are either agricultural labour or farming. Very few do private business or are employed in service. The dietary pattern and living condition of the tribals is different from the general population. Bose and Chakravarthy 2005 have suggested that there is need to study different tribes located in different parts of country to evaluate their dietary habits and nutritional status, tribals are vivid in their life style and are different from common population in any country. As the government is converging their effort to

bring tribals in the main stream by number of interventions, it is no doubt that it may create an imbalance in terms of life style of tribals. This interference may affect their food habits, which inturn perhaps affect the nutritional status. Hence, an investigation was carried out on food habits and festivals food of Siddis tribe of Karnataka.

Hence, the study has been designed with the following objectives.

1. To study the dietary profile of tribe community.
2. To study the food consumed during special condition like pregnancy and lactation, infancy to old age.
3. To investigate the foods consumed by the population during different occasions such as festivals and other rituals.
4. To assess the nutritional status of Siddi tribes by anthropometry and clinical observation

2. Methodology

Mavinakoppa is a village situated near Dharwad district was selected by purposive sampling technique for the present study. The village which is relatively and easily accessible by roads for data collection. A survey was carried out on 40 households of Siddis. The following information was collected by personal interview technique using a pre-tested structured proforma. The interview schedule was prepared, pretested, revised and used for collection of data. The data for the present study has been collected from 40 households. The schedule included questions on following aspects, such as demographic information, food habits, number of meals per day, food likes and dislikes, food consumption pattern of Siddi tribes, special foods consumed during pregnancy, lactation,

infants, during puberty, illness condition, for children, adolescents, adult, old-age, foods prepared during festivals, and general observation. The anthropometrical measurements of each member of house-holds (the weight and height) were analyzed and the indices such as Body Mass Index for persons above 16 years and weight for age and body mass index (BMI) has been computed as $\text{weight}/(\text{height in mt})^2$, dietary survey was carried out and they were screened for clinical signs and symptoms by the physician and these were recorded.

3. Results and Discussion

About a century ago Siddis were nomadic transporters and petty traders. Today, they lead mostly a settled life, they have switched their roles from traveling tradesman to farmers and living on the outskirts of villages and attending to their own plot lands because of changes that have occurred in their traditional economy since their nomadic days. As a result of these changes in economic profile, the other aspects of their life have also undergone tremendous changes.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of selected Sidditribals of Dharwad

Category		Number	Percentage
1. Age of the Siddi tribe	18-25 years	14	35
	30-45 years	16	40
	Above 60 years	10	25
2. Gender of the Siddi tribe	Male	10	25
	Female	30	75
3. Education of the Siddi tribe	Illiterate	28	70
	Primary	12	30
4. Family type of Siddi tribe	Nuclear	24	60
	Joint	16	40
5. Mean height and mean weight of Siddi tribe	Number of respondents	40	-
	Mean height (cms)	154.8	-
	Mean weight (kgs)	49.25	-
	Mean BMI	20.58	-
6. Body mass index of the Siddi tribe	Under weight	10	25
	Normal	28	70
	Over weight	02	5

Table 1 depicts the demographic characteristics of selected Sidditribals. About 40 per cent of respondents are under middle age, 35 per cent were under young age and 25 per cent of the respondents come under the category of old age. Seventy five per cent of the respondents come under female and 25 per cent of the respondents were under male category. There were 70 per cent of the respondents illiterate and 30 per cent were educated upto primary level education. All of them

belong to low income group. Sixty percent of the respondents were from nuclear family and 40 per cent of the respondents were from joint family. Mean height of Siddi tribe is 154.8 cm, mean weight is 49.25kg and mean BMI is 20.58. Five percent respondents come under overweight and 70 percent come under normal category and 25 percent respondents were consume underweight (<18.5).

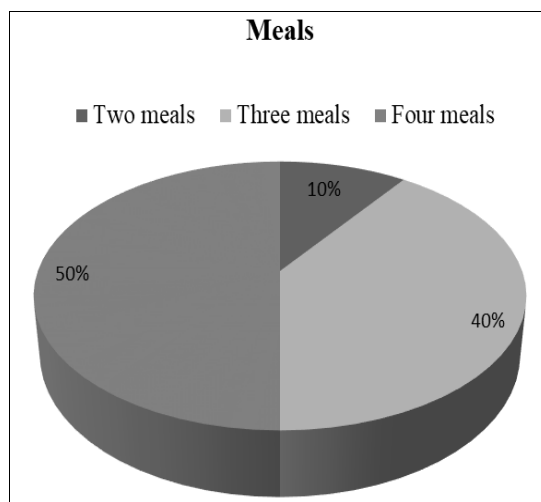


Fig 1: Meal pattern of Siddi tribes

4. Food pattern

The Fig. 1 shows all of them were non-vegetarian. Fifty per cent of the respondents take three meals and about 40 and 10 per cent of the respondents take two meals and four meals,

respectively. They eat generally available flesh of animals such as goat, sheep, chicken, egg, fish and rabbit. Fleshy food enjoys the highest social value and hence, forms an important and integral item during festivals, rituals such as funerals,

agricultural operations and religious ceremonies. As the guests are considered with great respect they are essentially treated with fleshy foods and the guests also get the most precious part of the animals like thigh portion of chicken, head of fish,

tendons *etc.* Siddis are basically non-vegetarians. Siddi tribes take locally available foods like tea, rice, tomato sambar, tur dal sambar in morning. Afternoon, they take roti, tur dal sambar, rice and in night roti, tur dal sambar and rice.

Table 2: Food taken during special conditions by Siddi tribes

Sl. No.	Conditions	Foods preferred	Foods avoided
1.	During pregnancy	Roti, rice, chapatti, shepu, tur dal, sambar	Papaya, banana, cheese, jackfruit, coconut, watermelon
2.	During lactation	Vermicelli-payasa, sajjak, semolina, upama, chapatti, rice, tur dal, sambar	Brinjal, potato, horsegram, fish-sambar, cold foods,
3.	Infancy period	Rice ganji, wet biscuits	Hard foods
4.	During puberty	Sajjaka, upama, vermicelli, kheer	Chilli, brinjal
5.	During illness	Rice ganji	Riceflakes, Puffed rice
6.	During childhood	Roti, chapatti, rice, brinjal, potato	-

Table 2 reveals the data on foods taken during special conditions like pregnancy, foods preferred are usually locally available and foods avoided were papaya, banana, cheese etc, during lactation brinjal, potato, horsegram were avoided. For infants hard foods were avoided. During puberty brinjal, chillis were not given. While during illness puffed rice, rice flakes were avoided. During childhood no foods were avoided. The food beliefs and taboos followed by Siddis during pregnancy to restrict 'hot foods' such as papaya, sesame, pepper, ginger and coconut khara has also been seen in lambas of Katchvadi hills and Irulas of Attipadi hills (Chandrashekar *et al.*, 2001).^[5] On the contrary, such restrictions were not observed among Jatapu, Savara, Kondadora and Gadaba tribes of Andhra Pradesh (Rahyalaxmi and Geervani, 2005). Restriction of cold foods and other spicy foods during lactation period was also seen in the tribes of Andhra Pradesh (Rajyalaxmi and Geervani, 2008)^[10] and Pande and Rohinidevi (1990)^[8] in Gond, Andh, Pardhan tribes of Marathawada. Breast feeding was universal in Siddi tribe. The children were breast fed atleast to the age of 2-3

years along with other food supplementation and also found that mashed cereals, vegetable and fruits were used as weaning foods. Generally, no foods were restricted to old people. The notion being as old people have less time to live, they were given all the foods to please them. No special attention is paid by Siddi during pregnancy with respect to food except increasing the intake of foods which they usually consume and to give food according to their preference so that it will satisfy urge of pregnant women. The people strongly believe if the urge is not satisfied, the child may be born with abnormalities. Special foods given during puberty and lactation (coconut khara, green leafy vegetables, vermicelli payasa) are considered as 'hot foods' which supply high calories, fat and iron to repair the lost tissues. Similar findings were also observed by Chandrashekar and Chitra (2001).^[5] Though, woman is the bread earner in most of the instances, she eats last, after feeding all the family members. The male hierarchy seems to be very highly obvious in this tribe. While, the birth of male child is much a rejoicing situation, the birth of female children is never celebrated.

Table 3: Foods prepared during different festivals by Siddi tribes

S No.	Name of the festival	Foods prepared during festival
1.	Shivarathri	Fruits like kazzur, grapes, sajjaka*
2.	Yugadi	Sajjakaholige*, vermicelli payasa, rice and sambar
3.	Vijayadashami	Payasa, rice, sambar, chapatti
4.	Deepavali	Sevia, payasa, chapatti, curry, rice, sambar
5.	Ganesh Chaturthi	Kajjaya*, holige*, rice, sambar
6.	Ramjan	Mutton, vermicelli, payasa, rice, chicken, biriyani
7.	Bakridh	Non-veg biriyani
8.	Moharam	Chonge*, rice and sambar
9.	Shaban	Sajjaka, chapatti, rice, biriyani
10.	Id-Miladh	Mutton, rice, biriyani, sajjaka*

Table 3 depicts foods prepared during different festivals like Shivaratri, they take fruits like kazzur, grapes, sajjaka. During Yugadi, Vijayadashami, Deepavali festivals they prefer to have payasa (sevia). In Ganesh Chaturthi, they prepare

Kajjaya, holige *etc.* In Ramjan, Bakridh and Id-Milad festivals, they prefer to take non-vegetarian foods like mutton, chicken, fish *etc.* during Mohram and Shaban, they take chapatti, chonge, sajjaka (sweet preparation) *etc.*

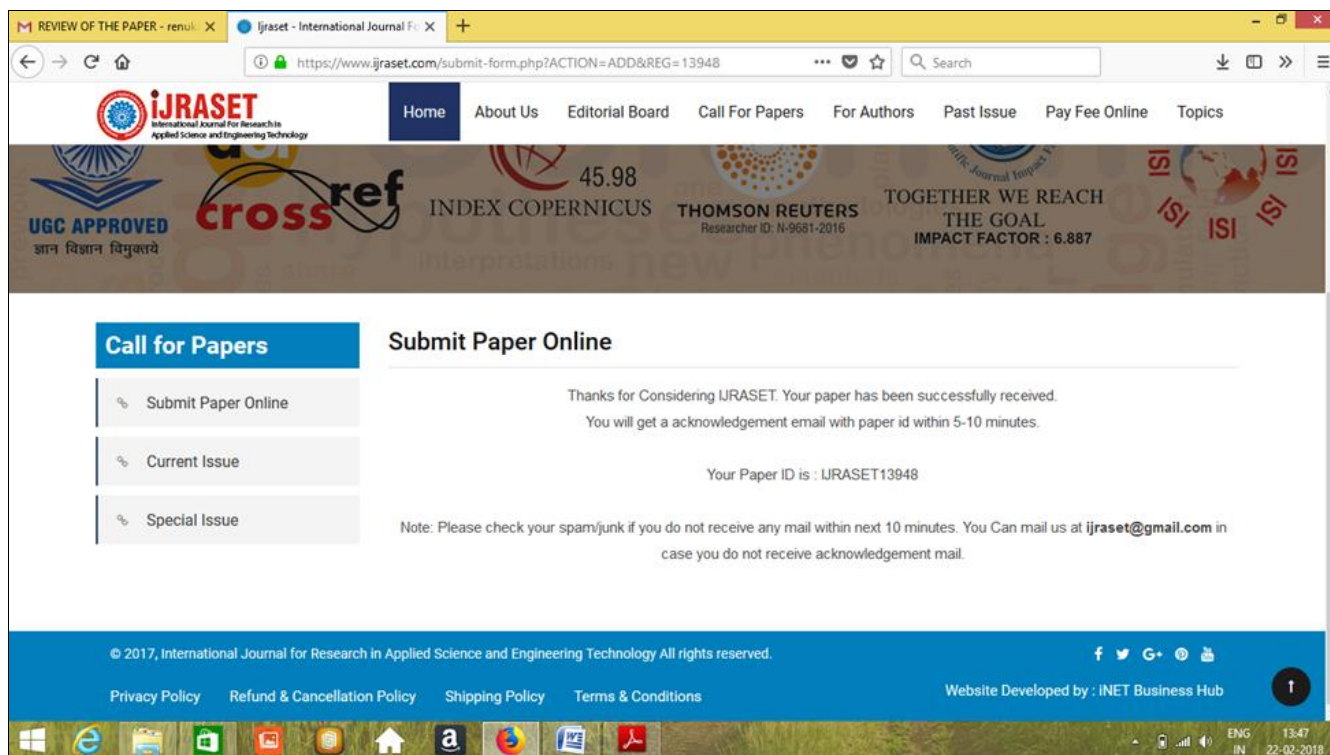
Table 4 Clinical symptoms of Siddi tribes

Sl. No.	Particulars	Symptoms present		Symptoms absent	
		Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
1.	Poor musculature with gross muscular wasting	16	40	24	60
2.	Conjunctive pallor (visible anaemia)	8	20	32	80
3.	Dry or rough skin	36	90	4	10
4.	Deficient subcutaneous fat	-	-	40	100
5.	Discoloration of hair	8	20	32	80
6.	Thin and weak hair	10	25	30	75
7.	Red or magenta tongue	30	75	10	25
8.	Angular stomatitis	32	80	8	20
9.	Nutritional oedema	-	-	40	100
10.	Bitot's spots	8	20	32	80

Table 4 shows that, 40 per cent of the respondents had poor musculature with gross muscular wasting, 20 per cent of the respondents had conjunctiva pallor (visible anemia), nearly (90%) per cent of the respondents had dry or rough skin. Twenty per cent of the respondents had discoloration of hair, 25 per cent of the respondents had thin and weak hair, 25 per cent of the respondents had red or raw tongue, 80 per cent of the respondents had angular stomatitis. None of the respondents had nutritional oedema, 20 per cent of the respondents had Bitot's spots.

Poverty seems to be rampant in Siddi community, hence every member of the family tries to engage themselves in income generating activities such as collecting fuel wood apart from being agricultural labourers. Importance given to education is generally negligible.

Siddis are culturally united specially with respect to living conditions, performing festivals, rituals and other religious ceremonies. The Siddis celebrate almost all the festivals of Karnataka region.



5. Conclusions

There is scope for more research in this tribe were not much work on nutrition has been directed by scientists. Though, Siddi community spread all over the world, they have strong and deep rooted cultural heritage is still prevalent, which definitely has an impact on health and nutrition aspects of the people. As there is a shift in their occupation and thereby their economical status leading to betterment in quality of life, indepth studies are required to understand the impact of these

changing phases on the nutritional status of other vulnerable groups of the tribe such as adolescents, pregnant and lacting moths. A study can also be conducted on the quality of life and its impact on the nutritional status of the Siddi community.

6. References

1. Anonymous Dietary. Habits and nutritional status of Mopas – A tribal group in NEFA, National Research

- Laboratories, Annual Report, ICMR. 2001, 35-36.
2. Bamji. Nutrient Requirements and Recommended Dietary Allowances for Indians, NIN, ICMR, Hyderabad. 1990.
 3. Bose K, Chakraborty F. Anthropometric characteristics and nutritional status based on body mass. 2005.
 4. Index of adult Bathudis: A tribal population of Keonjhar District, Orissa, India. *Asia Pacific Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, 2005; 14(1):80-82.
 5. Chandrashekar V Chitra. Diet Profiles and Nutritive Value of Selected Foods Eaten by the Kota and Kadar Tribes. 2001.
 6. Chibe SS. Northeastern India Caste, Tribes and Culture of India, ESS Publications. 1999, 89-92.
 7. Pramila B, Mishra BK. Anthropometric profile and nutritional status of selected orontribals in around sambalapur town Orissa. *Stud Tribes Tribals*. 2011; 9(1):1-9.
 8. Pande V Rohinidevi. Food habits and consumption pattern of tribal families. *Maharashtra J. Extn. Edn.* 1990; 10:106-110.
 9. Pore MS. Diet Survey of Adivasi in Maharashtra State. *Indian J. Nutr. Diet.* 2005; 22:360-364.
 10. Rajyalaxmi, Geervani. Tribal people; Traditions, customs and attitudes related to food and dietary practices – A study of Vijianagaram district, Andhra Pradesh. *Indian J. Soci.Work.* 2008; 49:46-50.
 11. Ramaswamy DS. A study an alcoholism in Banjra tribe of Kolartanda in Muddebihaltaluka. MA. Dissertation Karnatak University, Dharwad. 2008.
 12. Rao KM, Kumar RH, Venkaiah K, Brahman GNV. Nutritional status of Saharia- Aprimitive tribe of Rajasthan. *J Hum Ecol. Roy JK and Rao R F* 1972. Diets of some tribes. 2006; 19:117-123.
 13. *Indian J. Med. Res.* 50, 905-915.
 14. Roy JK, Roy BC. Food sources, dietary habits and nutrient intake of Nicobaries of great Nicobar. *Indian J. Med. Res.* 1979; 57:958-961.
 15. Sunderlal. Tribal life in social welfare. *Social Welfare.* 1965; 1:120-121.
 16. Vujaya laxmi, Rao CK. Assessment of nutritional status of tribal children (0-12 years) of Maredumilli block by anthropometry. *Indian J. Nutr.Diet.* 2001; 25:182-186.
 17. Vincent B. Emancipating the Waral itribals. *Social Welfare.* 1998; 30:1-4.