



Perceptions, Behaviors and Food habits of Young Generation in Brahman Community: A Case Study from Kathmandu Valley

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Abstract

Eating behavior is strongly influence by social setting, time convenience, norms, values and personal preferences as well. Age is the most important determinant factors of food choice. So in this paper I have discussed about food choices of young generation among Brahmans social group. information was collected during my fieldwork of MPhil dissertation in 2014 by using ethnographic methodology. I have used qualitative data only. During my fieldwork, most of the young generation told that they do not believe on cast-based food ideology but at home they follow the minimum rules related to food.

Keywords: *Brahmans, Caste Ideology, Food Choice, Young Generation*

Overview About Food

Food is first and most fundamental need of human beings which binds us to our families in powerful and pervasive ways. By eating together and sharing foods we express love, comfort, and hope and we forge new relationship and strength old bonds. Food reaffirms not only our humanity but the joy of being alive. For human, food is considered as part of his/her biological inheritance. But, the definition of food and its ways of consumption is essentially determined by cultural conditions and contexts. Food habits are affected by several factors such as population, social traditions, religions, belief, social positions, gender roles, and aesthetic, among others (Ember, et al, 2002). Food is essential aspects of every human's daily life, unlike other animals; food fulfills both biological and psychological needs. Socialization process, environment, availability of food, social status and culture determine the food habits and behaviors. Therefore, much of the food we choose to eat or not to eat is embedded with symbolic meanings (Gift, Washbon and Harrison, 1972). As one grows older, one is able to make independent choices, and therefore beliefs and attitudes towards food may change over time (Lupton 1996; Ogden 2003). This process of change continues throughout the human life cycles, food choices and eating habits of adult reflect their cultural background, age, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, lifestyles, identity and sense of taste (Curtin 1992. Lentz 1999, Lupton 1996, Caplan 1997).

Young generations always give preferences to their group choices. During childhood, children start to identify and classify foods according to their cultural norms, but when took steps to young age they

give preferences to their personal choices (M, Regmi 2017). Nepal is multi-cultural, multi linguistic country, different caste and ethnic groups have different food cultures. The few studies have done in food but rarely include the food habits of different social groups. So, in this paper I will highlight the food habits of young generations who belongs to Brahmans social group

Why Food Studies?

Food is one of the most important sources of connection and meaning in all our lives. It causes controversies and questions about identity, culture, religion and justice. Food studies touch every aspect of human culture. It gives us broad knowledge to know the behaviors and eating habits and how different social group gives symbolic meanings to food. The eating habits of different age group is different. so, in this article I have highlighted the food habits of young generations of Brahmans social group.

Although food is considered as one of the important topics in Anthropology, but in Nepal there is nominal studies on this. Linda Stone (1978), 'Food Symbolism in Hindu Nepal highlighted the symbolic meaning of food in Brahman everyday life. Gray Jones (2009), *Where Truth Happens: The Nepali House as Mandala* has discussed the internal structure of house and its sacred aspect in terms of food. Mark Liechty (2008), *Suitable Modern: Making Middle class Culture in Kathmandu*, has done ethnographic study in Kathmandu valley and illustrated that because of modernization and easy availability of food the middle-class Brahman has changing their caste-based food habits in urban area. Despite the general study on food especially focusing on symbolic meanings of food and its purity in domestic level, there is still lack of a detail ethnographic study which exclusively focus on food habits of different age groups in urban context. So, this ethnographic study will help to further research in Anthropology of food.

Methodology

this is qualitative research. Information's for this study were collected while doing fieldwork for my MPhil dissertation in Kathmandu valley. I had conducted this research in three sites of Kathmandu city namely Koteshwor, Baneshwor and Samakhusi. Twenty-eight participants from 18 years to 25 were selected from different status group (age, gender, education, occupation etc.) by Using structured and non-structured interview methods on their natural settings, working place and café. Sometimes general discussion is also suitable for qualitative data collection.

Results

Social Setting: Home and Outside

Home is a center place, where we all eat food comfortably. At home in terms of food include cooking, food provisioning, distribution and consumption, meal patterns, diet, gender roles, and power relations in the house (Counihan and Kaplan, 2004). In home food related activities are performed in a systematized way. There are rules and value system related to food in every home. The food eating behaviors is directly impacted where you are.

In case of food behaviors, Brahmans in general and young generation of Brahmans social group in particular has some changes. At home, even young generation perform minimum rules of family in their everyday practice but in outside they consume whatever they like. Habits and preferences are different in different social settings. In my interview, most of the young generation (both male and female) agree with this social setting. They can easily consume those foods which never cook in their own kitchen at home.

“My foods and my habits depend upon where I am, at home or at outside or with whom. At home I follow the minimum rules of my family, but when I am outside with my friends, I forget all that cast based habits. I never believe that cast is important in every place, the food which is comfortable I can take easily.” (Rohan 23 yrs.).

Although the majority of food is eaten at home, an increasing proposition is eaten outside the home, e.g., school, at work, and at restaurants, the venue in which food is eaten can affect! food choice, particularly in terms of ‘what foods are in offer’ The person with whom is also important; family member (father, mother, grandfather, brother, sister.....) also is equally important in food consumption. Mostly informants (18 out of 28) agree that they can be more flexible with their colleagues but not with family and relatives even in out of home.

Time and Convenience

Lack of time is frequently mentioned for changing eating food habits particularly by the young and well educated. Young people who are living alone seek at convenience foods rather than cooking. On the other hand, time seems to be very precious issue when talking about young generation. Most of the young generations are out of home for different purposes., in such a case they choose affordable and available foods in their nearby area. In such a case it is not possible to follow their Brahman’s food practices in everyday life. Dinesh (21, a college student) stated that

“Because I am out of home; in morning I have no time so I always have something else to do instead of cooking, I forget my caste-based identity, it is not possible all the time. I should change me to adjust in changing environment” if I feel comfort to eat anything I consume easily because cost affordability is also important for us”.

The study shows that the main meal (Bihana beluka ko khana) is regular. If they are with their family, they generally eat what their mother prepares but when they are far from home they cook themselves, on such case they do not follow the norms and value system of family.

Awareness and Personal Discipline

Most of the young age people are independent in their own choice because they become self-dependent. In many cases awareness (especially what to eat and not eat) is personal matter, it is not necessary to eat everything in urban area. Many of my informants (12 out of 28) agree that, they have not given up their parental food habits either with their parents or not. This case is more reliable when a person is vegetarian because it is mostly same preferences, most of the informants agree that what to eat or not is one’s own choice. It is not necessary to eat everything to become more compatible. Personal

awareness and discipline; what to eat or not eat depends upon personal choice. In many cases, the foods which anyone consumes in his/her socialization process cannot avoid, in this ethnographic study, I found that many young generations do not avoid those foods which they are consuming in their socialization process. One of my informants who was growing in traditional Brahman family told that-

Except mutton, other meat items were not permitted in my parent's kitchen, so I consumed mutton when I was growing, even today I don't like to eat other meat than mutton because I think to follow the rules of my parents is nice to me" (Basumbada 25, an ayurvedic dr.). Same type of perception was also describing by a young man, Amod (20, shopkeeper) stated that,

"I never consume those things which are prohibited at our home, I follow the rule of Brahmanism, I never consume chicken, buff meat and pork although I have friends of different social groups, they never insist me to share those foods, it depends upon how you are socialized"

Values, Norms, and Belief (Ethical Mind)

Food perception and preferences are not fixed but are subject to transformation and multiple influences. In urban context there are more options. If we do not like to eat rice we can easily eat others alternative food. Eating habits change over lifespan and across generation. We like certain foods when we are children (milk and rice was my favorite), in young age we almost are attracted with delicious and spicy foods, this age-based taste definitely changes when someone reached in adult age.

From an early age taste and familiarities influence behaviors toward foods. A liking for sweetness and dislike for bitterness are considered innate human traits from birth (Steiner, 1977). Taste preferences and food aversions develop through experiences and are influence by our attitudes; belief and experience (Clark 1998) this case exists in Brahman community as well. Some young generations do not like to taste different foods which are unfamiliar from their childhood but at the same time others want to taste different foods which are available in market especially in public sphere. Bourdieu give the different term incorporated cultural capital, for this habits according to him "the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body", entails socialization, personal efforts, and the time investment, and becomes a part of the individuals habitus (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 47). Some habits which we practicing since long time we cannot give up easily it becomes a part of our everyday life, consciously unconsciously we follow that. Many of my informants were agree that they cannot break their ethical mind so still following the rules of their family's tradition and norms. Two of my participants (Rasmila 19 yrs. and Dinesh 24 years, student) stated that

"We belong to Brahman family our Father is Purohit, purity of body and purity of food is strict in our house so we cannot break these rules when we are out of home and far from family. Our body resist all those things which we never eat in our growing period so we do not think that it is necessary to taste everything, it depends upon you and your personal belief system."

Conclusion

In the recent situation, among young generation there is not any distinction in food with other caste at public sphere they even do not like to show their Brahman ideology of food. In many cases home is

central focal place where they maintain their cast-based ideology. Dual food habits are common among young generations, at home they follow the minimum rules of Brahmanism but in selected form at outside home it depends their own belief system some are flexible and others are habitual on their home base food habits. So, food habits is always a personal realization and contextual socialization process, family, peer groups, environment and the personal belief system impact upon food related behaviors especially in young generation. In young age an individual searches new taste and wants some changes. Despite this, home, food and Brahman ideology are interrelated even in young generation.

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