

Intra-Household Food Sharing in a Selected Semi Urban Area in Matale District: A Case Study

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Abstract

Food is one of the basic needs of human beings. According to the biological approach food can be defined as a combination of organic and inorganic elements which need to nurture the human body; Further, food is a cause variable of hungry as hunger is fulfilled by food. When we consider the food consumption in a sociological approach, it is revealed that people get food not only to fill up the hungry but also to fulfill various social needs. It is an appropriate field for researchers. The culture formulated based on selecting, preparing, eating and sharing foods, is called a food culture. Food culture is associated with the customs and values which are established by the Sinhala community. As one aspects of the food behaviour, Intra-household food sharing is important to study. Intra-household food sharing can be defined as the way which people share foods within household. There are many courses that affect for formulation and function of Intra-household food sharing; such as gender and Educational background of the housewives. The semi urban sector of Sri Lanka which possesses both urban and rural characteristics is vastly expanded including most of the geographical territories. The major objective of this research was to identify the patterns of food sharing within households. Other two specific objectives were to identify factors which effect to Intra-Household Food Sharing in selected semi urban area and to identify fallouts of existing ways of sharing food within households. The ethnographic research methodology was applied basically based on ten case studies in the Aluvuhare Grama Niladaree Division of the Matale District of Central Province and observations were used as a research instrument to protect the reliability and validity of data. Since food behaviour can be considered as latent function observations had been affected to maintain the reliability of data. Accordingly, basics facts as gender, education, class relations and axiom of amity, Caste etc had been identified as causes which affect the Intra-Household Food Sharing in selected semi urban area. Especially gender played major role in this content with related to the education level of the housewife and the influence of the ancestral family. As fallouts gender discriminations and some health issues etc. had been identified. In this component caste had been identified as a significant fact as people belongs to castes which considered as high castes attempt to follow traditional practices in sharing foods within the household such as '*mudhun batha*'

Keywords: *Food behavior, Intra-household, Food Sharing, Gender, Semi Urban Sector; Matale District*

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Introduction

Food can be defined as a combination of organic and inorganic elements which is needed to nurture the human body; also food is a cause variable of hungry in the biological approach, In the consideration of food consumption according the sociological approach, it is noticeable that people consume food not only to have the abdomen failed, but also to accomplish various social needs in day to day life. As mentioned by Doshi in his book ‘Anthropology of food and Nutrition’, “Food is a bio - chemical process and products which sustain life. But it is not merely the source of bio – chemical needs; it also has a cultural dimension which helps a person to determine his food and nutrition habits and choices” (Doshi, 1995: 11). According to the opinion of Doshi, biological and cultural dimension of food is emphasized. The culture which has been created around the South Asian region; it is called Rice Culture. Most of the cultural attributes within these countries are based on the customs and values associated with paddy cultivation and rice is the staple food among all the South Asians despite their race, caste and colour. The food behavior is a significant concept in this research and there is a special attention driven on the phenomenon of food sharing among others in the neighborhoods or community, as an important element of social behavior of people. The concept of food behavior is significantly addressed in this research. There are differences identifiable among communities regarding the methods of food preparation for consumption and food eating habits. Food sharing is identifiable as occurring in two ways: sharing food within the household and sharing food among the individuals in the community. Sharing of food within the community is the major consideration of this research study. In contemporary Sri Lanka, which is on the top level of south Asian society, even a casual visitor also become impressed by the importance of food in daily life and daily conversation. Food is considered as important medium of keeping contact among individuals. In a society that rests on the regulation of such contact, food is a focus of much taxonomic and moral thought.

Therefore, in this research the topic is taken as ‘Intra-household food sharing in a selected semi urban sector in Sri Lanka’. Thus, the identified research problem for this research is; how people share food within the households in the semi urban sector? Subsequently this research had contemplated to study sharing food within the household, which can be easily identified as gastro politics. ‘While features of both Urban and Village areas have been mixed in some given area that can defined as a semi urban area’ (Educational Publishers Department, 1998:110). There was a general objective and there were other two specific objectives. Those are as follows: the general objective is to identify the patterns of food sharing within households. Specific objectives are to identify factors which effect for sharing food within households and to identify fallouts of existing ways of sharing food within households. Ethnographic research methodology had been applied since the topic is sensitive and with the aim of overcoming the ethical issues of collecting data as the food behavior is a latent day routing for some extent in every household. Therefore, ten case studies have been done and those ten households were selected by using random sampling technique from the research area. Further, both observations and twenty-four-hour

recalling methods had used to diminish the shortcomings of the data analyses. Analyses had been done in qualitatively and basically the cultural, ecological and economical factors was taken as independent variables. 'Aluwihare' Grama Niladari Division has been selected as the Research area to conduct this research. It is in Matale divisional secretariat division in the Matale district of the Central Province in Sri Lanka. Most of the people in this area are employed in both governmental and non-governmental (Private) sectors and there are newly settled people who are from the rural areas in the Matale district.

Results and discussion

Factors Influence on Gastro Politics and Fallouts of Intra-Household Food Sharing

How people share food within household is a very personal fact in each household. But in any house, there is a routine behavioral practice on Intra-household food sharing and many reasons are been affected to formulate and function of that practice. In the present study, it is essential to study about how housewives select and prepare food for their family consumption. Basically, gender has affected the Intra-Household Food Sharing they concern about the gender and gender relations of their family members when they share foods among themselves.

When we consider about effects of the gender to Intra-household food sharing, it is essential to study about how housewives select and prepare food for their family consumption, for premise all housewives prepare the list of dry and other food which should buy from the market weekly and monthly. Normally when they prepare the list they have a prior discussion with other family members of their own family to ask their preferential foods without considering about own flavor. As they believe it is their responsibility and they do that without any hesitation. Because those believes had been internalized them by varies socialization agents of the patriarchal society. For example,

“My favorite food is pumpkin. But I can't even remind a date which I eat pumpkin or brought pumpkin to the home. Why because nobody likes to eat pumpkin in our home. Therefore, I never bring pumpkin” (but her husband knows her favorite food is pumpkin. very rarely he goes to market and buys pumpkin for his wife”)

(Field study)

Gender is an important fact which influence the Intra-household food sharing and it had been proven through the above statement of the housewife. As present research deserves to study gastro politics, according to folklorist Mr. K.B. Manawa. He pointed out the concept called “*mudun batha*”. According to him *mudun batha* means, after cooking the rice each housewife used to reserve the top and first share of the rice for husbands, whether husband is at home or not this practice is used it as a routine habit. Though it is called *mudun batha*, housewives used to reserve anything whatever they prep

.are at the household including sweets and other types of foods. In the present research it is identified that *mudun batha* concept is still practicing and it is valid furthermore even in the semi urban sector of Sri Lanka. Also, we realized that the effect of gender in gastro politics. As maintained above women do those kinds of a practices unconsciously. This is because from the beginning of the socialization process of our society even in the semi urban sector ideology of differentials between the roles of males and females are internalized to the children to maintain patriarchal traits of this society.

As a post graduate qualified teacher; the house wife plays the subdominant role in each situation including sharing food within household though her husband is not qualified even in the ordinary level examination. Especially when she was eighteen years old, she had faced a heart surgery (Hole in the heart) and because of these reasons her parents arrange that kind of a marriage and she believes that she should respect her husband for the dedication made by her husband to marry a patient like her. But today she is leading a normal with her seven years old daughter and her husband who is elder than her by about ten years without rely on medicine or any other medical treatment. But she is strictly stigmatized by her family and the community as a heart patient. Consequently, she had not been able to come out from those believes and she accepts what others response her as a heart patient. Therefore, she uses gastro politics to admire her husband while maintaining her gender statuses.

“The husband’s relatives always rank higher and are hence accorded precedence in the serving and eating of food. Conversely, the wife’s relatives are treated as somewhat lower in rank under ceremonial circumstances” (Appadurei,1991). As appadurei had pointed out in his research the south Indians treat husband’s relatives firstly. But as identified in present study we could not see a kind of a practice in semi urban sector of Sri Lanka.

A special case was reported about a housewife who never considers about her family member’s interests when she selects, prepares and shares or eats food in any meal. Further, when she selects or prepares food, she does it as she wishes without any concern about the family members. Her husband is a Grama Niladaree and she has three children. Even at the time of eating food she doesn’t think whether her husband or children are eating or not. She is an advanced level qualified Clerk. Because of such behaviour and attitudes, relatives and neighbors have identified her as an abnormal patient. Besides, her husband is now fully addicted to alcohol. Her husband and the community blame her for negligence in caring her family members and many believe that there is a relationship between the ill-treatment and her husband’s addiction to alcohol. It is evident that, even in the semi urban sector still society expects women to give priority for food preferences of their family members. That is why the neighbors and relatives identify the women as an abnormal character. The situation in the above-mentioned case can be understood regarding the influence of ancestral family. That housewife’s mother had never concerned about her husband flavour even though she was an unemployed housewife. Therefore, such characteristics may have intermixed to form her daughter’s personality. As we discussed with the above

examples extracted from the data gathered from the research sample. It is proven that gender is a crucial factor that affects intra-household food sharing, even in all other cases it is demonstrated irrespective of the caste, income or level of education.

Economy or income of the family affects the Intra-household food sharing as it is very important in any case. Especially when they select food, all housewives whether they are employed or not employed, strictly concern about the income of their family. That is because as they are settled in semi urban sector; they must entirely depend on the market for their food requirements. Because of the problem of lack of space in their gardens and the busy life style nobody involves in home gardening. Though some housewives are unemployed they too lead a busy life with the household works and duties. Consequently, they have to consider about the income of their families when they buy food. Especially unemployed housewives strictly concern about the income of the family as those families must entirely depend on husbands' wage and they would have to manage all works with that sufficient or in sufficient amount. People's life style and social class are also specially depending on the factor of income. Especially the high-class people in the present sample try to maintain their status even through the food behavior. As reported in a one case study, a businessman though he has not succeeded on his business and he used to go for dinner out or bring dinner to home from standard hotels where his business colleagues' families used to come for dinner, at least once per week. The thing what can be realized in this case is he does it just for showing off consumption for maintain his status among his business colleagues.

Although eight house wives are employed in the sample of the present research, as observed unemployed housewives pay more attention on her family members' preferential foods and health than others. Employed housewives must consider about the easiness of access and preparing specially in working days as they must struggle with time. In some households the employed husbands come home during the weekend since they are working in remote areas from home. In such cases housewives must pay attention on the husband's food preferences only during the weekends when he is at home. On the other days they normally give priority to children's preferential foods and they feed them first. With the effects of urban sector and as employed ladies are influenced by their modern colleagues though these husbands and mother in law expects them to treat husband first. But some of them try to ignore those ideas for some extent. As some of them are also in a new mind set on demanding same rights and, status as same as males try to challenge these kinds of traditions.

Moreover, women's or housewife's education level and the education level of the husbands are also affected in selecting food in Intra-household food sharing; especially the housewives' education. Because based on their educational level and the general knowledge, they specially concern about the health of each member of their families when they select foods and preparing food. In one case study, the housewife is unemployed. She is Ordinary Level qualified and as observed she used her leisure time

for reading and watching TV programme which are useful to improve her knowledge on nurturing her family members. For that reason, she is aware about her husband's sickness and genetical tendency in transmitting the same disease for her children. This is an important example to emphasize the relevance of Housewife's educational background in selecting food;

“If there is an only one egg available at home, when I prepare food parcels for all, I used to put that egg to my eldest daughter's parcel. Because now she is seventeen years old teenage and she will have to be pregnant after getting married in near future. Therefore, I have to broadly think about her health. Otherwise one day her mother-in-law or husband will blame me.”

(Field study)

The housewife who stated the above mentioned statement is an advanced level qualified unemployed housewife in the science stream and her educational back ground has positively affected for Intra-household food sharing. Above housewife's mother has three daughters, her mother had always concerned about their health, since they would have to deliver babies in future. It is like the practice of Intuits food sharing pattern arctic zone. Their main food is seal fish and after they brought the hunted seal fish to the middle of the housing cluster, head or leader of the community, cuts the seal fish. When he does that, he collects fresh blood to his both hands and feeds it to all the small girls in their community. Because they specially concern about girl's health as they are important in reproduction process. Even though Intuits are being identified as a hunting and gathering community by various anthropologists, advanced Intra-household food sharing practices are being practiced by Intuits in their community. As discussed above according to the housewife's knowledge some positive fallout had been occurred specially in girls' health in reproduction. Also, tendency of acquireing non-commutable diseases might be controlled for some extent. Consequently, education level also caused to shape the Intra-household food sharing in the semi urban sector had been demonstrated.

Number of the members in a family is another important variable that influences for the Intra-household food sharing. Especially in the extended families, the income is an important fact that greatly influence the determination of what to consume. If they don't have enough food to share among all the members in the family, a big quantum of food is given only for selected family members to whom that food is suitable to be given. The income of the family is highly

affected the Intra-household food sharing and it is also identified through the present research. As identified in the study, if there is a pregnant woman in the house, all the food selections and consumption of the household is fulfiller based on her requirement and interests in each meal. Not only the meals but also snacks are also prepared in a way she wants. In this kind of a situation we can realize that; axiom of amity also affects Intra-household food sharing. Especially if there is a child with special needs or adult or even a small kid, housewife or another woman of those families tend to serve food at the outset to those kinds of individuals based on axiom of amity. That is basically depending on humanitarian qualities such as love, generous and kindness. Also, in each household they serve a large quantity of special food to kids, based on the axiom of amity which discussed above. Seeing that an act with axiom of amity could be considered as an emotional factor it is being strongly affected for gastro politics in the semi urban sector of Sri Lanka.

In India the caste plays a significant role in food culture. Though the caste is a latent function of the Sri Lankan contemporary society, the caste is also affecting to shape the food behavior. Especially in the percent communities when those household share foods within the community they strictly consider about caste. Further, the high caste people refuse to sit for the meals at a same table with low caste individuals, even in special occasions such as weddings. As a special case was reported, a retired principal who belongs to the radala group of high caste which is in the sample of the present research, had come back home without having lunch after he saw a radawa man (washman) at the wedding which was held in a hotel in Matale town. Although the caste is a latent function, in the present research had identified the caste of each household. As Matale is belonging to Kandyan Region, Kandyan govi caste people ranked themselves as higher than low country govi caste people in the hierarchy. The kandyan radala families are inflexible for some extent and strictly concern about all kinds of traditional practices. It could be observed that they serve food for males in the family first comparing to the people belonging to lower caste families. Absolutely these practices were becoming less important according to the caste hierarchy. That would be because of low caste people do not concern about such traditions as much as high caste people in the semi urban sector of Sri Lanka. Because those radala families which live in the research area; might want and try to keep their statues by following these types of traditional practices of Intra-Household Food Sharing. These traditional practices could be seen for some extent among govigama caste in the present research. But in low caste families they are not much interested to follow traditions. Therefore, we could not see a difference or special feature of food distribution within household in low caste families like Radala and Govigama castes.

When considering the patterns of Intra-Household Food Sharing, basically we paid special attention on serving hierarchy of foods in present study The Sri Lankan society can be identified as patriarchal

society and males of the communities play a dominant role while women play the subordinate role in each situation. But due to the modernization and urbanization some changes were occurred in these gender relations related to gender roles and responsibilities. For an example both two spouses involve in preparing food especially for breakfast seeing that both are employed and struggle with time. Therefore, it is important to study about the pattern of sharing food within household in semi urban sector in Sri Lanka. When we discuss about the patterns of Intra-household food sharing it is essential to study about serving order as well, method of serving and quantity of serving, in order to understand the pattern of gastro politics in semi urban sector.

“.... In the service of food infants and children are served first before anybody takes food. The second in the hierarchy comes the male members of the family. The females take the last turn. The daughter-in-law if there is one in a family takes her foods in the last”(Doshi, 1995:113). Studying what Doshi mentioned in his book on Anthropology of food and nutrition, a hierarchical pattern had been identified in the present research. In the present study as most of the families have small children, children are at the top of priority in the serving order irrespective of the gender. It is not like what Intuits do as explained previously. Based on the axiom of amity they are served first. Also, when considering the age range all children who are served firstly are below ten years old. But two special cases were reported; in a household though they have small children who are below to ten years old, top priority is given to the adult male in that family. Even though they are educated they are practicing and continuing the ‘*Mudun Batha*’ and they do not try to change this practice, as they believe that as traditional family custom. They are from a kandyan radala caste and it was observed that they are inflexible in a certain extent than others.

In some instances, the housewife does not concern about her husband’s or children’s preferential food and she is accustomed to serve herself first. With the influence of such habits some problems also arise in the household and sometimes the outsiders also intervene in solving those family matters. Other than because of the Intra-household food sharing within their family members that family is very instable now. As realized, this point emphasizes the importance Intra-Household Food Sharing in establishment of structure and stability of a family.

Second priority is given to male adults automatically. Also, in the household which does not have small children; the top priority of serving has gone to adult males. Furthermore, it was especially identified that housewives and elderly women serve themselves at last after serving food for all in the household. As the Sri Lankans are enjoying and interested in hospitality, they habitually invite even unexpected

visitors to have meal with them. Especially they serve male servant as visitors. But when they get the support of female servant that kind of a serving customs could not be identified. The thing what we could realize from this is; serving for male and female servant is also based on gender relations. Furthermore, when there is a patient or pregnant woman below mentioned hierarchy may change and top priority will be given to them based on the axiom of amity. That is also caused by the cultural norms and values regarding pregnancy because that is also identified as an illness in the Sri Lankan context. In the European society it is just biological stage of a woman. But the Sri Lankans are identified that pregnant woman as 'leda' meaning a patient. Therefore, pregnant woman and other patients are served first when they share food in each meal.

Similarly, as discussed, the top priority of serving food is given gone to the small children, mostly because axiom of amity. When serving the small children, the gender is not a face considered by housewives. But the second priority of the hierarchy has given to the adult males. Husbands, young sons, fathers, fathers-in-law and sons-in-law are included for this category in the present research. When there are no any small children in the household the top priority is given to elderly males. The third stage of hierarchy has gone to youths and the gender is considered for some extent. Most of the times male youths were served by housewives prior to the female youths. Most of the housewives even try to emphasize that there is a fair manner in this serving eventually gender has become more significant in food serving among youth males and females. In the stage of elderly children in the hierarchy, the situation is same as youths. Serving method refers to that how food is offered by someone in a household. In the sense it is very important in the present research as it is compelling to study Intra-household food sharing of Semi urban sector. Especially following factors should be considered when discussing in serving method and quantity as well. Those are,

- What is the food served and to whom it is served?
- How much of each food is served and to whom the large portion is served?
- How each individual is served?

Though the Sri Lankan society is identified as a patriarchal society where males are the dominants of family, latently wives take the decisions regarding food behavior. Therefore, in each household of present study of semi urban sector, wives serve food for others in the family in each meal. Since most of the wives and husbands are employed, they have no opportunity to normally get breakfast at their residence on working days, especially during weekdays.

Not only in weekdays but also the situation is same in weekends in most of the families due to their children's tuition classes, dhamma schools and husbands works (As some husbands who are working as security officers or police officers etc., must work in weekends). When they have to make parcels of food, normally wives do it and some husbands assist for that task. But when they are having meals

together they follow two ways. One is, seating at one table and the second way is, serving food in kitchen and eating while watching Television in TV room or living room. Under both two ways which mentioned above housewives used to offer food by her own hand for each household except a special situation like she is in not good health condition. These housewives like to engage in this practice and, they enjoy this practice and satisfied with this practice. By experience each housewife knows about preferential food of each family member and how much they usually eat from those preferential foods. Therefore, when they serve food portion, it is done based on each member's requirement specially. Moreover, it is based on the portion which had been prepared by her. As observed because of females normally use to have small quantity and male are served larger quantity of food by housewives specially flesh foods (non-vegetarian). But when there are leaves or leafy vegetables house wives try to offer large quantity to small children and teenage girls because of the health as mentioned above.

Different serving methods can be identified as follows in the present research,

- Serving food without asking from whom the food served.
- The person who needs food asks for food from server.
- Server asks whether the person would like food.
- Self serving.

Gittelsohn (1991) had also identified five serving methods including above four methods. The fifth one which had not been identified in present research is breast feeding. That is especially because of there was no any case which breast feeding was reported in the sample of present study. As present research is from semi urban sector, due to the busy life style of most of the housewives; normally they use to serve food specially lunch and breakfast from the kitchen. Also, especially in each household, the duty of serving food is done by housewife of each household except the special case which had been reported before. But normally in most of the household's family members are seating together at the dinner table especially in weekends. Even who does not have such a facility. They also arrange their dishes in two or three small stools in living room and eat together. This practice could be observed in every household where small children were there. As housewives selected and understood food. It is no need to ask for serve them. But normally when woman serves food in the dinner table or at the kitchen, they ask from all adult males for taking some more food. But when there are other adult women in the household the serving woman does not ask for some more foods as the way she normally asks from adult males. Nevertheless, she serves foods based on those women's request. Through that fact; under the gastro politics serving methods also based on gender is proven and generalized.

Conclusion

When Intra-Household Food Sharing could be identified as the dependant variable of the present study and many independent variables, which can be considered as causes of formulation and functioning of gastro politics, were identified. Those factors could be determined under the socio economic and socio-cultural traits as well. As Sri Lanka can be identified as patriarchal society masculine and feminine traits are being internalized to everyone in Sri Lankan society through the socialization process. Therefore, males are identified as dominant group they are given priority in each phenomenon. Food behaviour or food culture is also influenced by gender. The Present research under the Intra-Household Food Sharing practices from the beginning of selecting the list of foods to sharing or serving foods, gender plays a major role. In the present research even when many housewives prepare the list they have totally neglected themselves. Also Income, caste, axiom of amity, number of the family members, educational level of the house wife, ancestral family and health had been identified as major factors which affect to the Intra-household food sharing in semi selected semi urban village. Social stigma has identified as one of the major fallouts of the Intra-household food sharing. Since Intra-household food sharing has identified as importance for stability of family relations and health of the family it is essential to make aware policy makers about the findings of the present research.

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