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# “PERSONAL FACTORS AND TRADITIONAL FOOD BEHAVIOR”- AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDY IN BATTICALOA DISTRICT, SRI LANKA

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**ABSTRACT** - Sri Lankans are experiencing many non-communicable diseases and health problems for years since they were away from traditional food habits and traditional agriculture. The patterns of food consumption vary from time to time, according to various ethnic groups living in the country. Their culture, job category, income, and internal migration situation are other factors affecting food consumption. This paper aims to examine the impact of personal factors which directs to return to traditional food consumption within the study area. The data was gathered through an in-depth interview method and Questionnaire from 100 individuals from the Open University of Sri Lanka, Batticaloa District. The research findings demonstrated that food is the best medicine which helps human to be healthy, therefore, extending organic food consumption would be a healthier solution that prevents diseases. This study indicates the personal factors which drive people to return a healthier food behavior pattern.

**Keywords:** personal factors, traditional food, Food behavior, health

## I. INTRODUCTION

Food is part of the culture and the diets developed over time in different localities are influenced by many factors and complex interactions. Actual food availability may vary by region and season. Socio-economic level and income, prices, individual preferences, beliefs, and cultural traditions shape dietary consumption patterns. Asian people including Sri Lankans are generally keen on cooking food items in their households. Sri Lanka is rich in many healthy foods like jak, breadfruit, domestic tuber roots, pulses, legumes, and fruits, these food crops are free from applied chemicals, and not harmful to the human body. (R.L.N. Jayatissa W.D. Wickramasinghe Chandrani Piyasena, 2014)

It is understandable that on the other hand, growing knowledge and adoption of western culture bring a

modification in food consumption patterns among Sri Lankan families. Numerous factors are influencing on food consumption patterns, namely the growing contribution of women in the workforce, long time working days, increasing household income, a declining number of family, greater marketing facilities with urbanization, development in the tourism industry, extended life expectancy, growing level of education in consumers, rising per capita income, way of socializing, fun and entertaining, promotion activities by fast-food restaurants, distribution network, and marketing system. (Perera, N, 1998). These are important factors that change food habits and subsequently the food demand.

However, it can be seen that people nowadays tend to consume their main meals at traditional food courts such as Helabojun (traditional food shop), clay pot cooking shops, and so on. There may be many reasons today's people aware of their food behavior comparing with the mid-90s. This research mainly focuses on what personal factors made people's minds into traditional food consumption.

According to William Applebaum (1951), Personal Factors are defined as a set of individual qualities combined together in terms of sex, age group, color, economic and educational status, occupation, religion, nationality origin, etc. This study basically proposes that these Personal Factors can have impacts on food consumption since the health perspectives endorse that these individual characteristics influence food behavior on consuming.

Therefore, this research attempts to investigate how Personal Factors influencing traditional food consumption in Batticaloa District.

The specific research question of this study is:

***“What Personal Factors guide People to return their traditional food patterns now a days***

***In Batticaloa Divisional District, Sri Lanka”***



It is a lack of literature in Sri Lanka to examine the relationship between Personal Factors and Traditional food consumption. Thus, there exists a clear empirical gap with respect to the influences of personal factors on traditional food consumption within the context of the Sri Lankan food behavior contemporarily. This empirical gap becomes a problem to know how personal factors play a role to keep people healthy in their own food behavior. Indeed, there is a need to evaluate to what extent the stimuli influenced traditional food consumption in this fast-moving world. Therefore, the primary objective of this study is to examine the role of Personal Factors that influencing traditional food consumption among people in the context of traditional food behavior in Batticaloa city.

## II. INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH AREA

Eastern province is one of the nine provinces in Sri Lanka and Batticaloa District is located in the Eastern part of the country, it includes 345 GN divisions and 14 DS divisions. Batticaloa district is one of the ancient cities, which is predominantly an Agricultural and Fisheries area. The main economic activities are agriculture, Fisheries, and agriculturally based industries. The majority of the people are continually dependent on the agriculture and fisheries sector.

Most of the people in the division fulfill their needs with the traditional paddy cultivation. Even today, these people use environment-friendly traditional methods in their livelihoods. Somehow with the open economic approach in the country, people are looking for more earnings from little input. Source: (Department of census and statistics, 2019).

Batticaloa Open University is one of the six regional centers in Sri Lanka, there are 25 staff work and around 2000 students from 6 faculties follow their courses. This Regional center is one of the main open distance learning institutions in Sri Lanka.

## III. METHODOLOGY

The type of research is descriptive and variables are measured with qualitative analysis. Primary data will be collected through in-depth interview and case studies with closed statements measured with Likert's scale (1-5 as strongly disagree, reasonably disagree, Neutral, reasonably agree, and strongly agree) based on Batticaloa district, using the Convenient Sampling Technique, 100 samples will be identified in the research area. (See Table 1).

Table 1: Sampling Framework

All respondents are working people and belong to different sectors, age, race, religion, region, ethnicity, and educational level.

Study Setting	Customers in Batticaloa District
Unit of Analysis	Batticaloa District
Sample Size	100 people
Sample Method	Convenient Sampling Technique

## IV. GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

The main goal of this research is to identify the personal factors which lead people to consume traditional food

And the Objectives are:

- To find out the reasons for people's food behavior changes
- To discover the people's knowledge concerning health and food behaviors patterns
- Finally, to enhance the knowledge and importance of Food behavior patterns related to health.

## V. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the personal factors influences on people's food behavior?
2. What reasons have led people to return to their traditional food patterns from fast food consumption?
3. Whether Sri Lankan traditional foods play a role as a medicine too? If so how?

## VI. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Food is a tool for good health. Humans need to obtain nutrients from foods in order to survive and be healthy. The requirements of energy and nutrients are different due to differences in age, sex, race, and physical activity level. When people eat, the process can be influenced by economic, politics, culture, and many other factors.

Accordingly, in the recent decades, People consume traditional food because of their personal purposes. The following table describes the respondent's

personal reasons why they want to return to traditional food consumption.

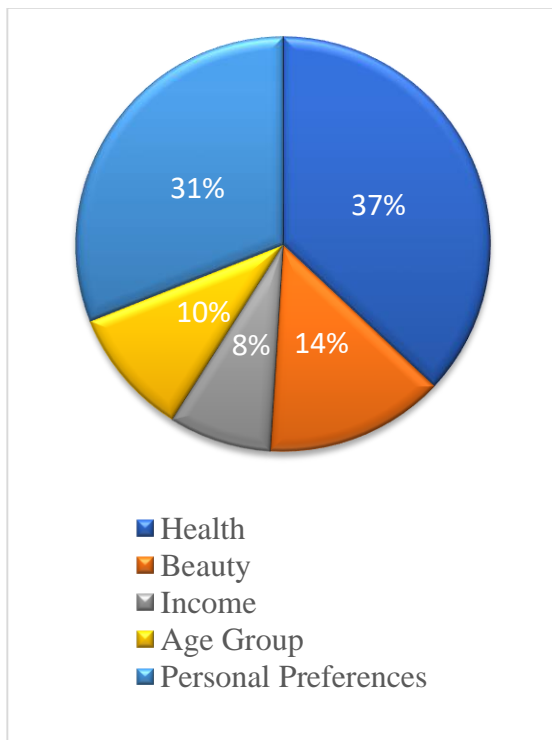
**Table-1: Personal factor that led to return traditional food consumption**

Personal factors	Percent (%)
Health	37
Beauty	14
Income	8
Age Group	10
Individual Preferences	31
	100

(Source: Survey Data-2020)

According to this table, Personal factors such as Health, Beauty, Income, Age Group and Individual Preferences are led people to choose their healthier food behavior and diet patterns. Out of 100 respondents, 37% of people consume traditional food concerning their personal health. And also, nearly 31% of people prefer to have traditional food as their main meals. (see figure 1).

**Figure:1 – Personal factors that led people to return traditional food consumption**



(Source: Survey Data, 2020)

Sri Lankan traditional foods are mainly made by rice flour or rice and those are easily digestible. They have enough calories and they do not have side effects.

Secondly, the ingredients such as pepper, cumin, ginger, garlic, cinnamon, and so on are playing a role as medicine to maintain the body healthy as evacuate cholesterol, easier digestion, and abdominal distension.

Hence, it is clear that now a day's people are more concerned about their food behavior and have awareness of food consumption. Especially in Sri Lanka, people cook traditional food for elder people, patients, children, and pregnant ladies, because of its medical characteristics, and also, they suggest not eating outside shops.

Traditional food contains numerous ingredients that have specific functions. This means that some cure diseases and some prevents diseases. Ingredients such as cumin, pepper, turmeric, Ginger, garlic, onion, curry leaves, and so on not only give a specific taste but also play a role as a particular medicine.

## VII. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study refers that the people have clear awareness about their food behavior and dietary patterns. They prefer to consume traditional food as their main meal because of their individual reasons. Accordingly, they have indicated that Sri Lankan traditional food is a very healthier nourishment pattern and it sometimes acts as medicine too.

In conclusion, spreading traditional food consumption is a sound and sustainable solution for the environmental and health problems that prevails in Sri Lanka at present. Policymakers need to draw special attention to improving awareness levels and promote the specific health benefits of organic food in order to stimulate people's traditional food consuming behavior. Research findings highlighted the connection between personal factors and changing traditional food behavior among the selected study area.

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