

Dietary Habits in Ancient India: An Assessment through Dental Attrition

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ABSTRACT This study is an attempt to assess the dietary habits of the ancient Indians with the aid of dental attrition. Evidences suggest that there exist a high correlation between the rate of dental attrition and the physical consistency of diet. Attrition rate of the earlier population belonging to different cultures from 2300-300 B.C., viz., the Neolithic, Harappan, Chalcolithic, Megalithic and the Early Historic may be tested by comparing the artistic rules of the Modern Indians with known dietary habits. For such a comparison individual age plays a vital role, which is rather hard to estimate accurately in the ancient skeletal remains. Differences in intermolar attrition gradients within individuals provide an age independent method for comparing attrition rates. Employing this method, when the ancient specimens are compared with the modern population from Eastern India, no significant differences in attrition gradients could be detected. This perhaps, implies that diets of similar consistency were utilised by both the ancient and modern Indians. Low incidence of oral diseases, again, indicates no gross change in food habits of the ancient Indians and their foodstuff were mostly free from high carbohydrates diet, sand and silicus particles. Furthermore, the nature of tarter deposition suggests softer food habit of the ancient Indians. The ancient Indians belong basically to a mixed economic group, used to softer food and had the knowledge of cooking.