

FOOD PRACTICES AND NUTRITIONAL CONDITIONS OF TRIBAL WOMEN – A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Tribal people they are considered as the aboriginal people in our country. They are away from our mainstream of the society. Most of them they are living in the forest and they are doing their work related with the natural environment. Like that their food practices are mainly related with their forest products. Among most of the tribal community they are still using various types of millets to their food consumption. They used to take wild fruits, tubers, leafy vegetables of forest and also the wild grains for their food consumption. The richness of the food practices vary from one tribal to another tribal group. This makes them very strong in their nutritional status. In some places the tribes are working in the farms, by that income they used to get their accessories. That is not enough to their family and in the aspect of good health condition. With this view the researcher select this title to study the food practices and the nutritional condition which determines the health status of the tribes in our society. This research reveals that the unique food practices of the tribes are supporting the nutritional conditions of the tribes. In some places their own and natural environment which support their food production has been encroached as well as they are threatened by the land mafias. This makes them the economically vulnerable and it affect the health too. Apart from that they are having richness in their food culture that supports their better nutritional status. In some places their orthodox values and culture and poor economic status gives the negative impact, this also affects their nutritional conditions.

Key Words: Tribes, Food practices, Nutritional conditions

Introduction

Tribes they are being considered as god's child. They are living in the natural settings which make them different from other group of people. In India there are 705 ethnic groups of tribes as per government reports. They are literally called as Adivasis which means indigenous people. Though they are being called as tribes, they used to be away from the social life of the

other people. Their cultural practices, religion norms, orthodox beliefs and gathering social life are makes them strong as a group. The limited population of the tribes makes them unity between them as well as focusing weakness in front of other groups.

In north-east there are more tribes, they used to have power on their own natural environment and autonomy in all aspects like social, economical also in political where as in Tamilnadu there is only least level of population of tribal, also diversified groups. They do not have any forest rights, living away from plain people, migrated from their own place and limited numbers of population makes them vulnerable in all aspects. Where there is disturbance in the social life, it shall affect all forms of their existing orthodox practices including food culture too.

Food culture of the tribes

The food culture of the tribes is totally different from others. They used to have affiliation of many herbs, plants and the trees in their food culture. This food culture makes them strong as well as the nutritional one. Most of the tribes they are following the concepts of the food is medicine. They are very aware about the functions and the benefits of the plants, herbs and other eatables which provides more energy as well as nutritional one. The tribes they are having immense knowledge than the other groups of the people. Living with the natural environment makes them to understand the utilization of the food and other plants for their survival as well as preference of medicine.

Materials and Methods:

To find out the present food practices and their nutritional status of the tribes in our society the secondary sources have been used. The tribal research studies, unpublished project reports, thesis report and the government data's are being used to expose the condition of the tribes. This research based on descriptive nature and it explains all the details of the tribes food culture and their present nutritional health status.

Studies about the tribal food practices

Sathish (2020) stated that the Pulaiyar a tribal group those who are living in the Western Ghat of Udumalaipettai range, they are having enormous knowledge about the utilization of food related with the nutrition supplements. The green leaf called 'Black night shade' collected by tribal women and boiled in water. It is one of the nutrient-dense vegetables. They used to collect this leaf in every morning and evening for the purpose of cooking.

Pumpkin leaves, Gherkins leaves, Amaranthus viridis. Goldern lettuce, drumstick leaves and green mustard gabbage are the main vegetables which used for the purpose of cooking among the Pulaiyar tribes. Obviously it looks like normal leafs like others, but when we deepen analyze the nutritional values of the above said items, all are amazing in its qualities. The above said leafs are covering the nutritional qualities of Vitamin A,B,C, Calcium, fat, minerals along with magnesium, folic acid, Vitamin k. They are also acting as the crusaders for the malnutrition conditions among the Pulaiyar tribes. Many diseases and lack of nutrition's are being cured by the intake of the food items of the Pulaiyar tribes. They used to follow the food is medicine, which makes their life as a healthy one without any complications.

Priyadharshini (2022) conducted a research among the kolagur tribal women in yercaud hills, the measurements of BMI,MWC and MHC were conducted among the respondents. The results of the study indicated that 25 per cent were underweight, 20 per cent were obese and 17 per cent were overweight. Interestingly the prevalence of anemia level of the tribal women were only 26 per cent. The reason behind that is every day the tribal women used to take green leafy vegetables. Here the food practices are directly correlated with the anemia condition of the women. It is found that milk and its allied products, nuts, fruits and vegetables were utilized in a least level among the respondents. The socio-economic conditions and the employment level are highly influenced the food as well as the nutritional level of the tribal women in kolagur at yercaud. Due to that the scarcity of micronutrients like calcium, zinc and beta-carotene was very lesser among the respondents. The conclusion of the study delivers that the nutritional conditions of the tribal women is in the state of alarming. It shall be noted and the needful actions to be taken with the support of government to uplift the socio-economic conditions as well as the health mechanisms of the tribal women.

Charles pon ruban et.al., (2019) conducted a research among the tribal people to find out the food practices and their nutritional status in the place of Jawadhu hills which covered the districts of Vellore and Thiruvannamalai. The findings of the research show that nearly half of the respondents were malnourished. They were involved the labour works in the unorganized sector and there socio-economic status was very poor. They were very deficit in the intake of energy, macronutrients as well as the micronutrients. Also the remarkable per cent of the male tribes were having the practice of alcohol and the tobacco usage. In the study area there were less level of utilization of the vegetables and the fruits. Through the public distribution system they used to have polished rice for their usage. It is the only stable food for them and having carbohydrates and proteins. Horse gram was the poplar pulse among the respondents, it is having

limited proteins whereas due to less intake of beef, goat meat, eggs and chicken they are in the condition of Undernutrition. Due to their poor socio-economic condition they do not have the chance to maintain the balanced foods.

Davidson Sargunam et.al., (2012) conducted a research in the title of Mushrooms in the food culture of the Kani tribes of Kanyakumari district. In this study it is concluded that mushrooms offer a rich diet to the kani tribes, it includes proteins, vitamins, potassium, sodium, phosphorous with low fat contents. Though it is a seasonal plant, in their food culture it is having the dominant places which provide much of combinations of the balanced diet among the kani tribes. Their stable food is rice and they also used the rare variety of karainel paddy to their cooking purpose. It is a seasonal one. Kani tribes they are very aware about their eco-system. They pick the right natural things from the right reason for their domestic purpose they stated.

Suparna Ghosh et.al., (2021) conducted a research on factors affecting consumption of indigenous food among tribes in Jharkhand among Munda tribes. Indigenous foods are directly derived from the natural eco-systems. The respondents shows that presently they are cultivating the rice in their agricultural fields, but previously they have had the pearl millet, finger millet, little millet and sorghum in their fields. This study finds that loss of coarse cereals like millets from Indian diet makes much of iron scarcity among the Indian tribal population. The cultivation of high-yielding hybrid varieties makes a big change among the Munda tribal agricultural system. The changes in the agricultural practices of Munda tribes are not only creating the issues towards the eco-system as well as the balanced diet of the tribes too.

Conclusion

The tribal food culture is always associated with the high level of nutrients and the betterment of the healthy life. The rich combination of the protein and minerals in their food practices makes the equal and balanced diet system. but due to the shift of agricultural practices, climate changes, migration from origin land, displacement activities among the tribes makes them vulnerable in all aspects especially social and economical. Facing the above happendings also promote the consequences in their food practices too. In the contemporary days the tribes they are in the condition of physically vulnerable even though they are aware very much than the plain people. At the same time we can not refuse that in some places till today the tribes they are having their standard food culture which offers the rich content of nutrients among its people. With the efforts of the governments and the support of the other group people, we can retain the

traditional food cultural and practices of the tribe, that's make our society as a strong one in the aspects of physical as well as nutritional.

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