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Changes in food consumption patterns of tribal households in Covid-19 pandemic

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Abstract
The disruptions in economic crisis and the food supply triggered by the Covid-19 virus brought millions into food-insecure conditions and indebtedness. The situation of tribals worsened because of disruptions in food supply chains, loss of livelihoods and earnings, and fluctuations in food price. A study was conducted in Visakhapatnam district with an objective to study the changes in food consumption pattern of tribals in COVID-19 pandemic. The data was obtained utilising a schedule from a sample of twenty tribal respondents from six villages in two mandals of Visakhapatnam district. Results indicated that more than half (62.50%) of the respondents were male belonged to middle age group (67.50%), illiterate (54.17%), and nuclear family type (70.83%). More than half (60.00%) of the respondents had medium socio-economic status with livelihood systems agriculture + wage work + Non Timber Forest Products (51.67%), belonged to low annual income (67.50%) and don't have any official position in socio-political organizations (68.33%). With regard to shifting cultivation, great portion of the respondents were with marginal farm size (52.50%) while in normal cultivation majority (50.00%) of the tribal respondents had small farm size. In terms of farming experience, half (50.00%) of the tribals had medium farming experience in shifting cultivation and normal cultivation (48.33%). The results showed that consumption of protein foods like meat, milk & milk products and eggs and also green leafy vegetables were slightly increased during lockdown period. Another observation made in the diet pattern of tribals was incorporation of millets in the tribal daily diets.

Keywords: profile, tribals and food consumption pattern

Introduction
In India tribal population shows a massive diversity of groups, though they constitute a meagre portion of the population. Tribal people are boon to the nature as their livelihoods and culture are wholly interconnected with their surrounding ecosystem. They are ethnic and folkloric people of the world, who are habituated to survive in most hostile and isolated environmental condition throughout the universe.

There are various social & cultural groups that shares combined ancestral ties who are totally depend on natural and land resources which are associated to their identities, livelihoods, cultures as well as their spiritual & physical wellbeing. They maintain a language which is discrete from the languages of the area in which they reside. Indigenous people safeguard 80% of the worlds remaining biodiversity. They acquire experience & expertise on how to adopt, mitigate and decrease disaster and climate risks. Many governments identify only a small part of the land occupied by tribals belonging to them. It leads to conflicts, environmental degradation and weak economic social development of the tribals.

Tribal communities live in close proximity to forests which is rich in biodiversity, landscapes, from which they have progressed local community based indigenous knowledge into their novel livelihood strategies. Elders and old aged tribal generation are the knowledge hubs in transmitting indigenous technology and played a key role in conserving and sustainable use of biodiversity through generations. Historically, tribal people with very poor access to transport, health, medical care and educational facilities depend on native resources for their surveillance.

It is self-evident that the food problems and habits of various tribes will differ. Food is necessary for maintaining excellent health, proper growth and body balance. A person's eating preferences are closely linked to his/her lifestyle. However, there is a large difference in eating patterns. Food habits are influenced by socio-cultural boundaries, religion, education and economic factors.

The food consumption patterns of the tribals are unique based on the nature, crops grown and availability of the food materials. The tribal people consume cereals and pulses followed by forest based roots & tubers and fruits & nuts. They were utilizing locally available vegetables and pulses but their cooking method was not appropriate.

Vegetables were cut into large amount of water and then drained off which might result into leaching and loss of valuable vitamins and antioxidants. They were depend on flora & fauna which are available in the forests. The pandemic has impact on the food consumption patterns of people throughout the world. But the tribals are remained as same and followed the old methods of cooking and consumption patterns. Hence, a study was conducted with an objective to study the food consumption patterns of tribal respondents.

Material and Methods

The present study was conducted in Visakhapatnam district of Andhra Pradesh. Two mandals and three villages from each mandal were selected from the district. Twenty respondents from each village were selected thus making a total sample of one twenty respondents from six villages for the study.

In order to study the profile characteristics and changes in food consumption patterns the schedule was developed and the respondents were interviewed individually by using the schedule which elicited profile characteristics such as age, education, socio-economic status, farm size, farming experience and family type The changes in food consumption patterns included before and during lockdown food consumption patterns of tribals. The frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation and class interval techniques were used for analysis of the data.

Results and Discussion

1. Age

It was measured as the number of years completed at the time of investigation

Table 1: Distribution of tribal respondents based on the age (n=120)

S. No	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1.	Young age (Below 35 years)	22	18.33
2.	Middle age (35 to 55 years)	81	67.50
3.	Old age (Above 55 years)	17	14.17
Total		120	100.00

It can be observed that more than half (67.50%) of the respondents were in the middle age group (35-55 years) followed by young age (18.33%) i.e., below 35 years and old age (14.17%) with more than 55 years.

The more number of middle age to young age group respondents might be the reason that, middle and young age people actively participate and possess social participation and decision making abilities when compared to old age people. The findings are appropriate to the present study as it is focussed on livelihood activities with an objective to identify the viable tribal livelihood systems when old age people role is very negligible in gender. These findings are in similar with results reported by Singal (2020).

2. Sex

Sex is a biological identity of the tribal members who responded at the time of investigation.

Table 2: Distribution of tribal respondents based on their sex (n=120)

S. No	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Male	75	62.50
2	Female	45	37.50
Total		120	100.00

From the above findings, majority (62.50%) of respondents were male followed by female (37.50%).

It was evident that great portion of the tribals were male, which could be related to the fact that our Indian society is a male dominated society in which women are viewed as dependents of males. The other reason might be due to more involvement of male respondents in the livelihood and other social activities when compared to female respondents in the tribal society. The findings are in line with Jayakumar (2016) [3].

3. Education

Education is operationally defined as person's ability to write and read and the amount of formal education received by the respondents.

Table 3: Distribution of tribal respondents based on the education (n=120)

S. No	Education	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1.	Illiterate	65	54.17
2.	Primary school	21	17.50
3.	Secondary school	14	11.67
4.	High school	11	9.16
5.	Intermediate	5	4.17
6.	Graduation	4	3.33

It is observed from the results that, the vast majority of tribal respondents were illiterates (54.17%) followed by primary school (17.50%), secondary school (11.67%), high school (9.16%), intermediate (4.17%) and graduation (3.33%) education categories.

From the above results it is noticed that greater part of tribals were illiterates. It could be related to their low socioeconomic situation and a lack of or limited awareness of the value of education. Majority did not go for higher education because of location of schools and poor educational facilities.

The government made enormous efforts for educational empowerment of the weaker sections of the society especially tribals by providing free boarding, education and all other necessities in the tribal areas. Along with all these efforts, tribal needs special educational strategies to create awareness and trigger their behaviour towards a positive move. Hence there is a requirement to educate and mobilise the tribals through culture based awareness campaigns and programmes by government and NGOs. These findings are in similar with Swathi (2018) [7, 8].

4. Occupation

It is operationalized as the main livelihood activities chosen by the tribal respondent as their major source of income and the survival.

Table 4: Distribution of tribal respondents based on the occupation (n=120)

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Agriculture	6	5.00
Agriculture + Wage work	23	19.17
Agriculture + Wage work + Non Timber Forest Products (NTFP)	62	51.67
Agriculture + Wage work + Non Timber Forest Products (NTFP) + Business	9	7.50
Agriculture + Livestock	7	5.83
Agriculture+ Livestock+ Wage work	10	8.33
Agriculture+ Livestock+ Wage work+ Non Timber Forest Products (NTFP) + Business	3	2.50
Total	120	100.00

It could be observed that nearly half (51.67%) of the respondents pursue their living based on the combination of three activities i.e. Agriculture + Wage work + Non Timber Forest Products (NTFP) followed by Agriculture + Wage work (19.17%). Few respondents were have occupations like Agriculture + Livestock + Wage work (8.33%) followed by Agriculture + Wage work + Non Timber Forest Products (NTFP) + Business (7.50%), Agriculture + Livestock (5.83%), Agriculture (5.00%) and Agriculture+ Livestock+ Wage work+ Non Timber Forest Products + Business (2.50%).

Historically, the tribals depend on agriculture, animal husbandry and sale of Forest Produce for their living which are very common activities among tribals. Besides, they also involve in wage works like laying of roads, and other works taken up by the government under MGNREGA scheme and some private works offered nearby their villages. From the above results it is evident that the industrialisation and mechanisation have impact on agriculture which resulted in tribal occupational changes due to which the ethnic tribals have started engaging themselves in wage works of organised and unorganised sectors. The results are in accordance with Swathi (2016) [7, 8].

5. Annual income

It was operationalised as the income received by the tribal respondents family in a year by all means. Based on the respondents annual income, the tribals were classified into three categories: low, medium and high.

Table 5: Distribution of tribal respondents based on the annual income (n=120)

S. No	Category	Frequency	Percentage
1	Low (Below Rs.60,000)	81	67.50
2	Medium (Rs.60,000-Rs.1,20,000)	33	27.50
3	High (Above Rs.1,20,000)	6	5.00
Total		120	100.00

The Table 5 showed that great part (67.50%) of the respondents belonged to low annual income with an annual income of below Rs.60,000 followed by medium (27.50%) with an annual income range between Rs.60,000 - Rs.1, 20,000 and high (5.00%) with an annual income of above Rs.1,20,000.

The reason for low to medium annual income categories of tribal respondents might be the dependency on traditional occupations like agriculture, collection of Non Timber Forest Produce (NTFP), livestock and wage works. They are also preferred to follow traditional and indigenous practices in cultivation and production processes due to low exposure to advanced technologies and low cosmopolitans which lead to poverty. The interference of middlemen, low remunerative prices and poor marketing facilities in tribal areas are the reasons that affect their annual revenue. Hence, there is a requirement to create awareness and facilities among the tribals on marketing prices and government operated markets like GCCs for right price for their produce. The results are in accordance with Swathi (2018) [7, 8].

6. Material possession

It is operationalised as tribal respondent's possession of farm power, animal power, machinery and equipments, comforts and gadgets at both farm and home which indicate his/her standard of living.

Table 6: Distribution of tribal respondents based on the material possession (n=120)

S. No	Materials	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Land	114	95.00
2	Farm Animals	64	53.33
3	Bicycle	17	14.17
4	Furniture	36	30.00
5	Bullock cart	28	23.33
6	Radio	11	9.17
7	Improved farm implements	39	32.50
8	Newspaper	14	11.67
9	Electricity	109	90.83
10	Pump set	36	30.00
11	Mobiles	116	96.67
12	Tractor	14	11.67
13	Automobiles	69	57.50
14	Television	102	85.00

The results presented in the above Table 6 revealed that a great part of the respondents possessed land (95.00%) followed by electricity (90.83%) and farm animals (53.33%). Some of the tribals possessed improved farm implements (32.50%), pump set, furniture (30.00%), bullock cart (23.33%), bicycle (14.17%) and tractor (11.67%).

Very few respondents possessed radio (9.17%). The above results could be related that the vast majority of tribal respondents came from agrarian backgrounds. Farm implements such as bullock cart, pump set were used for the agriculture operations and these implements were provided on subsidy basis to the tribals by the government organizations like ITDA and DWMA under different schemes. The results indicated the use and possession of electricity, electronic gadgets like mobiles, television and automobiles by the remote tribes which indicate the improved communication and commutation facilities at the tribal areas. Low level of radio possession by the tribal respondents indicated the technological transformation from conventional to contemporary media.

7. Socio-political participation

It was operationally defined as the degree to which tribal

respondents participated in socio-political organizations as office bearer or members.

Table 7: Distribution of tribal respondents based on the socio-political participation (n=120)

S. No	Level of Participation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Official position in social and political committee	6	5.00
2	Active office bearer	4	3.33
3	Official position in one or more organizations	7	5.83
4	Financial contribution for raising fund for common work	10	8.33
5	Involvement in community work	11	9.17
6	No official position in socio-political organization	82	68.34
Total		120	100.00

The Table 7 indicated that majority (68.33%) of the respondents don't having any official position in socio-political organization followed by involvement in community work (9.17%), financial contribution for raising fund for common work (8.33%), official position in one or more organizations (5.83%), official position in social and political committee (5.00%) and active office bearer (3.33%).
From the above results, only a small percentage of tribal respondents have held official roles in social and political organizations. The reason for this may be the tribal respondents prioritized involvement in their own activities over socio-political participation, as majority of respondents were breadwinners and focused on their livelihood activities for their families. The other reasons might be due to lack of socio-political awareness due to ignorance and illiteracy among the tribals.

8. Socio - economic status

The respondents socio-economic position was assessed using four factors: occupation, annual income, material possession and socio-political participation of selected tribals.

Table 8: Distribution of tribal respondents based on the socio - economic status (n=120)

S. No	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Low (5-11)	36	30.00
2	Medium (12-18)	72	60.00
3	High (19-25)	12	10.00
Total		120	100.00

It is showed that more than half (60.00%) of the tribals had medium socio-economic status followed by low (30.00%) and high (10.00%) socio-economic status. The reason might be the variable socio-economic status included sub variables like occupation, material possession and sociopolitical participation in which, vast majority of tribal respondents fell under medium category. The similar results were generated by Swathi (2018) [7, 8].

9. Farm size

It is operationally defined as the standard acres possessed by the respondents under normal cultivation and shifting cultivation during investigation.

Table 9: Distribution of tribal respondents based on the farm size (n =120)

S. No	Category	Shifting cultivation		Normal cultivation	
		F	Percentage (%)	F	Percentage (%)
1	Landless	6	5.00	-	-
2	Marginal	63	52.50	48	40.00
3	Small	31	25.83	60	50.00
4	Medium	15	12.50	7	5.83
5	Large	5	4.17	5	4.17

The results indicated that under shifting cultivation more than half (52.50%) of the tribals were comes under marginal farm size followed by small (25.83%), medium (12.50%) and large (4.17%) farm size. Very few respondents were fell under landless (5.00%) farm size category. The reason might be due to migration of people from one place to another place for shifting cultivation. Shifting cultivation is the age old practice of the tribal's which means cultivating a land for a temporary period of time and then leaving. It consists of burning the bushes and fallen trees and broadcasting the seed in the soil. The reason for vast majority of the tribals possessed less area of shifting cultivation could be because of government restrictions on shifting cultivation. The results are in accordance with Swathi (2018) [7, 8].
The results also showed that in normal cultivation half of the tribals were comes under small farm size category followed by marginal farm (40.00%), medium farm (5.83%), landless (5.00%) and large (4.17%) farm size. The government had taken actions to conserve the forests by assigning the plain area land for tribals to promote the normal cultivation. The same outcomes have also been recorded by Swathi (2016) [7, 8].

10. Farming experience

It is operationalised as the number of years completed by tribal respondents in both shifting cultivation and normal cultivation at the time of study.

Table 10: Distribution of tribal respondents based on the farming experience (n=120)

Category	Shifting cultivation		Normal cultivation	
	F	Percentage (%)	F	Percentage (%)
Low (10-17 years)	19	15.83	20	16.67
Medium (17-24 years)	60	50.00	58	48.33
High (24-31 years)	41	34.17	42	35.00
Total	120	100.00	120	100.00

The results indicated that in shifting cultivation half of the respondents were comes under medium category with 17-24 years followed by high (34.17%) with 24-31years and low (15.83%) category with 10-17 years in farming experience. In normal cultivation 48.33% of the tribals comes under medium farming experience with 17-24 years followed by high (35.00%) with 24-31 years and low (16.67%) category with 10-17 years of farming experience.
Agriculture and allied sectors are the main source of livelihoods for tribals. This might be the reason for medium to high farming experience among tribal's both in shifting and normal cultivation. The other reason might be due to their dependence on traditional knowledge which tribals have and pass from generation to generation which continue their participation with full or partial involvement. The above

results also evident the existing poor alternative sources of income to tribals for their livelihoods. Similar results were reported by Senthil (2013) [5].

11. Family type

Family type is operationalised as groups of persons united by the blood, marriage or adoption and residing together as family.

Table 11: Distribution of tribal respondents based on the family type (n=120)

S. No	Family type	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Nuclear family	85	70.83
2	Joint family	35	29.17
Total		120	100.00

Majority (70.83%) of the tribals are following nuclear family rather than joint (29.17%) family system.

Family is the fundamental unit and social structure of various tribal groups. It can be observed from the findings that the advantage of joint family system is not being followed and slowly declining even in tribal areas. The main reasons might be the increased migration, decreased land holdings and low purchasing power of the tribals. Considering all the reasons the tribal's were preferring nuclear family system over joint family system. The findings are regular with Sathyanarayan findings (2010) [4].

12. Changes in food consumption patterns

It is operationalised as the type of food consumption pattern followed by the tribal people both before and during lockdown periods of COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 12.1: Food consumption pattern of tribal respondents before lockdown period (n=120)

S. No	Food group	Before lockdown					
		Daily	Once in a week	Twice in a week	Thrice in a week	Fortnightly (once in 15 days)	Once in a month
		F	F	F	F	F	F
1	Cereals and pulses	95 (79.17)	2 (1.67)	4 3.33	19 (15.83)	-	-
2	Green leafy vegetables	6 (5.00)	27 (22.50)	28 (23.33)	46 (38.33)	8 (6.67)	5 (4.17)
3	Vegetables	54 (45.00)	12 (10.00)	22 (18.33)	30 (25.00)	2 (1.67)	-
4	Milk & milk products	3 (2.50)	4 (3.33)	13 (10.83)	9 (7.50)	39 (32.50)	26 (21.67)
5	Eggs	4 (3.33)	9 (7.50)	25 (20.83)	11 (9.17)	17 (14.17)	19 (15.83)
6	Meat	2 (1.67)	31 (25.83)	26 (21.67)	14 (11.67)	4 (3.33)	-
7	Millets	42 (35.00)	15 (12.50)	17 (14.17)	25 (20.83)	12 (10.00)	9 (7.50)
8	Roots & tubers	38 (31.67)	12 (10.00)	26 (21.67)	39 (32.50)	5 (4.17)	-

Figures in parenthesis indicate percentage

Before Lockdown

Results revealed that, majority (79.17%) of the tribals respondents had consumed cereals and pulses daily followed by vegetables (45.00%), millets (35.00%), roots & tubers (31.67%), milk & milk products (2.50%), eggs (3.33%), green leafy vegetables (5.00%) and meat (1.67%) before lockdown.

It is showed that one fourth of the tribals consumed meat followed by green leafy vegetables (22.50%), millets (12.50%), and an equal amount (10.00%) of the tribals consumed vegetables, roots & tubers, eggs (7.50%) and cereals & pulses (1.67%) once in a week.

The respondents consumed green leafy vegetables (23%) followed by similar percentage (21.67%) of the tribals had consumed roots & tubers and meat, eggs (20.83%), vegetables (18.33%), millets (14.17%), milk & milk products (10.83%) and cereals and pulses (3.33%) twice in a week.

Majority (38.33%) of the tribals consumed green leafy vegetables thrice in a week followed by roots & tubers (32.50%), vegetables (25.00%), millets (20.83%), cereals and pulses (15.83%), meat (11.67%), eggs (9.17%) and milk & milk products (7.50%) before lockdown.

The respondents consumed milk & milk products (32.50%) fortnightly followed by eggs (14.17%), millets (10.00%), green leafy vegetables (6.67%), roots & tubers (4.17%), meat (3.33%), vegetables (1.67%) and there are no respondents from cereals and pulses group before lockdown.

Majority (21.67%) of the tribals consumed milk & milk products followed by eggs (15.83%), millets (7.50%), green leafy vegetables (4.17%) and there are no respondents from cereals and pulses, vegetables, meat and roots & tubers group before lockdown once in a month.

Table 12.2: Food consumption pattern of tribal respondents during lockdown period (n=120)

S. No	Food group	During lockdown					
		Daily	Once in a week	Twice in a week	Thrice in a week	Fortnightly (once in 15 days)	Once in a month
		F	F	F	F	F	F
1	Cereals and pulses	95 (79.17)	2 (1.67)	4 3.33	19 (15.83)	-	-
2	Green leafy vegetables	9 (7.50)	28 (23.33)	31 (25.83)	49 (40.83)	10 (8.33)	7 (5.83)
3	Vegetables	54 (45.00)	12 (10.00)	22 (18.33)	30 (25.00)	2 (1.67)	-
4	Milk & milk product	9 (7.50)	4 (3.33)	17 (14.17)	10 (8.33)	49 (40.83)	31 (25.83)
5	Eggs	7 (5.83)	10 (8.33)	32 (26.67)	17 (14.17)	28 (23.33)	26 (21.67)
6	Meat	2 (1.67)	58 (48.33)	32 (26.67)	21 (17.50)	7 (5.83)	-
7	Millets	42 (35.00)	15 (12.50)	17 (14.17)	25 (20.83)	12 (10.00)	9 (7.50)
8	Roots & tubers	38 (31.67)	12 (10.00)	26 (21.67)	39 (32.50)	5 (4.17)	-

Figures in parenthesis indicate percentage

During lockdown

Results revealed that, majority (79.17%) of the tribals had consumed cereals and pulses daily followed by vegetables (45.00%), millets (35.00%), roots & tubers (31.67%), milk & milk products (7.50%), green leafy vegetables (7.50%), eggs (5.83%), and meat (1.67%) during lockdown.

Nearly half (48.33%) of the tribals consumed meat followed by green leafy vegetables (23.33%), millets (12.50%), and an equal amount (10.00%) of the tribals consumed vegetables, roots & tubers, eggs (8.33%) and cereals & pulses (1.67%) once in a week.

Similar percentage (26.67%) of respondents consumed eggs and meat followed by green leafy vegetables (25.83%), roots & tubers (21.67%), vegetables (18.33%), and an equal amount (14.17%) of the tribals consumed millets, milk & milk products and cereals & pulses (3.33%) twice in a week.

Majority (40.83%) of the tribals consumed green leafy vegetables thrice in a week followed by roots & tubers (32.50%), vegetables (25.00%), millets (20.83%), meat (17.50%), cereals and pulses (15.83%), eggs (14.17%) and milk & milk products (8.33%) during lockdown.

Majority (40.84%) of the tribals consumed milk & milk products fortnightly followed by eggs (23.33%), millets (10.00%), green leafy vegetables (8.33%), meat (5.83%), roots & tubers (4.17%), vegetables (1.67%) and there are no respondents from cereals and pulses group during lockdown.

Majority (25.83%) of the tribals consumed milk & milk products followed by eggs (21.67%), millets (7.50%), green leafy vegetables (5.83%) and there are no respondents from cereals and pulses, vegetables, meat and roots & tubers group during lockdown once in a month.

Major changes in food consumption patterns

Before lockdown only 5.00% of the respondents used to consume green leafy vegetables daily which was increased to 7.50% during lockdown period. Similar findings were noticed with regard to before lockdown 2.50% of the tribals used to consume milk & milk products daily which was increased to 7.50% during lockdown period. Before lockdown only 3.33% of the tribals used to consume eggs daily which was increased to 5.83% during lockdown period. The results were noticed with regard to before lockdown 25.83% of the tribals had consumed meat once in a week, twice in a week (21.67%), thrice in a week (11.67%) and fortnightly (3.33) which was increased to 48.33% of the tribals consumed meat once in a week, twice in a week (26.67%), thrice in a week (17.50%) and fortnightly (5.83%).

The results indicated that consumption of protein foods like meat, eggs, milk & milk products, green leafy vegetables were slightly increased during lockdown period. Could be because of the protein foods are very recommended for preventing and controlling COVID -19 pandemic.

Another observation made in the diet pattern of tribals was incorporation of millets in the tribal daily diets which might be the result of traditional food practices followed through generations.

Conclusion

Tribals were coming from poor socio-economic background. Most of them were illiterates. Their income level was very low and they have poor nutrition status. Results concluded that consumption of protein foods like meat, eggs, milk & milk products, green leafy vegetables were slightly increased during lockdown period. This could be because of the protein foods are highly recommended for preventing and controlling COVID -19 pandemic. Another observation made in the diet pattern of tribals was incorporation of millets in the tribal daily diets which might be the result of traditional food practices followed through generations. Their food consumption pattern was not good. Even during pandemic period they did not added immunity boosting foods when the whole world was worried about and took necessary when to diet with COVID-19. Their diet was balanced to compensate their heavy physical work. Intake of fruits was very less which may result in micro nutrient deficiency disorder.

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