Chapter - I

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We know that tribe consists of a group of people claiming a common ancestry usually sharing a common culture and language. In India tribal constitute about 8% of the total population. India, next to Africa has the largest tribal population in the world. There are 425 pockets of scheduled tribes in India. The aggregation of the scheduled tribes or group of “Tribes” notified comes to 573. Their numbers however vary from state to state. Among the smaller states like Manipur, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh and Tripura, tribals constitute more than 75 percent of their population and in larger states like Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan etc., tribals account for more than 20 percent of the total population. There are various ways in which the tribal can be described viz. (i) by region (ii) by language (iii) by race (iv) by their level of integration with rural folk to which they are connected (v) by their economy (vi) by their cultural pattern as a whole and (vii) by the level of education. The classical classification of Adam Smith and the more recent classification of Turunwald and Henskovits have been applied throughout the world in classifying tribes on the basis of their economic life (Hasain, 1986). The scheme presented by Thurunwald is considered as the most acceptable in the Indian context. Both, the geography of India and tribal demography permit a regional grouping and a zonal classification of the tribal people. In India three tribal zones were demarcated by Guha (1951, 1985), which include (i) the northern and north eastern zone, (ii) the central belt and (iii) the southern zone. The areas of northern and northeastern zone include Jammu Kashmir, Himanchal Pradesh, tarai area of Uttar Pradesh and Northeastern region, which are full of different tribes. The central or middle zone includes West Bengal, Bihar, Southern Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Orrisa, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Maharashtra. In area and number of states, it is the largest of the three tribal zones. Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamilnadu fall within the third zone. There are also tribal communities in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, which are constituents of southern zone.
This sector of population with different dialect, cultural homogeneity and unifying social organization has survived over the centuries while living in forest ecosystem. They are equipped with scientific and technological assets that are not fully known though the process of documentation is continuing. Because of the scheduled living of the groups, their way of living, food habits, dietary practices and attitude to various aspects of life in general differs from non-tribal population. Baseline information on the tribal population which includes demographic, geographic, cultural, agricultural, and socio-economic characteristics, is an important feature as it helps to shed some light on the constraints and prospects for the development of tribal community.

Numerous studies have shown cultural isolation due to their geographic remoteness. The literacy rate among the majority of the tribal group ranges between 5-15%. The Onges of little Andamans and Shompens of great Nicobar are totally illiterate. In contrast, the literacy rate among the Angamis of Nagaland and Thangkuls of Manipur is about 60%, which is more than the country’s average. The habitat of the tribes has conferred certain advantages. Some tribals of northeast like Angamis and Thankuls and of Nicobar are protected from exploitation by non-tribals, who are prohibited by law since long, to enter their territories. This enables them to enjoy the right over their lands, cultivate them and reap economic benefits. The advent of Christianity in these areas promoted literacy levels and social development of these groups. Even the tribals inhabiting the remote and secluded areas like the great Nicobar Islands, depend exclusively on natural forest and sea resources and are not affected by exploitation from the non-tribals. The rest of the tribal groups living in the plains and close to the rural non-tribal people are exposed to various degrees of exploitation.

The occupation pattern of the tribals varies considerably from state to state and tribe to tribe. The tribals are generally engaged in hunting, forest food gathering, shifting cultivation, terrace cultivation, settled agriculture or agriculture labour depending on the surrounding environment. The most primitive tribes like Jarwas and Sentinelese of the Andaman islands, Abujhmarias of Bastar in Chhattisgarh are still unapproachable to either
administrators or any research personnel, and hence little is known about them. Among others, the Shompens of great Nicobar are hunters and food gatherers. The Onges of little Andaman were also in a similar situation till they were settled at Dugong Creek and Hut Bay areas of the Island. The Chenchus are mostly hunters and gatherers with elementary agriculture. The Savaras, Jatapus, Koya Doras, Konda Reddis of Andhra Pradesh, Marrings of Manipur, Konyaks of Nagaland and Gonds of Bhamaragad in Maharashtra are basically engaged in shifting cultivation (penda). On the other hand the Gonds of Bastar and Sarguja in Madhya Pradesh are settled agriculturists. The Angami nagas of Nagaland and the Thangkuls of Manipur are experts in terrace cultivation. The Nicobarese of Car Nicobar is a settled cultivator of horticultural crops like coconut and areca nut on a commercial scale. The Jenu Kurubas of Mysore, living in the neighbourhoods of rural people, subsist on agricultural labour.

In Chhattisgarh state major concentration of the scheduled tribe population was observed in Bilaspur, Raipur and Bastar Divisions, which account for over 32.40 percent of the total tribal population in the state, and Abujhmarias are also amongst them (Directorate of Economics and statistics 2002). The tribal communities, which were still at an early stage of economic development, were identified and categorized as Primitive tribal communities. Bastar district of Chhattisgarh has eight to nine such primitive tribal communities like Dorlas, Gonds, Bhatras, Dhurba, Halwas, Murias, and Marias etc. The most important criteria for their identification as primitive tribes were a low agricultural economy. The other criteria were the backwardness of general economy, low level of literacy, greater degree of isolation and nearly stagnant population.

Among primitive tribes “Abujhmarias” are the most primitive tribe of Bastar in Chhattisgarh. Abujmar tribal region is the remotest and the most backward region in Bastar. The entirely hilly surface of this region provides an isolated environment for its inhabitants, thereby retarding cultural advancement and secondly the accessibility of this region keep the Abujhmaria people practically isolated from outside world. Marias of Bastar may be categorized in two main divisions, viz, Hill Marias and Bisonhorn Marias. Hill Marias lives in
jungles and hills of Abujhmar in small villages. These villages have traditional well-marked boundaries and there is a small no mans land between two villages. The villages have generally a common dormitory and a row of granaries for storing grains. Pigstys is found behind each row of houses.

A misconception prevails, about foods, food habits and nutrition quality of tribal population with general belief that this sector of population is under nourished. Studies on various aspects of food and nourishment amongst the tribal community indicate that in natural habitation, with availability of variety of food items and typical dietary preparations not only provide adequate nourishment but there are cases where the diets are rich in a manner to be more than the required level (Rawtani and Verma, 1989 and Singh, 1996). Such reports dispel the notion of inadequacy in nutrient intake by the tribal people. However population increase in recent times does have impact in terms of over exploitation of natural forest produced food ingredients that are declining. This process has compelled the tribes to adopt cultivation of some of the important staple food ingredients (crops). Traditionally world wide, shifting cultivation is widely practiced system by the tribes. In Chhattisgarh, this practice is known as *Penda*. Variety of crop seeds are broadcasted / dibbled over cleared (through slash and burn process) hill slopes with the onset of monsoon and the produce is used in synonymy with the natural forest food items (harvested as and when they mature). Domestication of birds and animals with this change has also taken place. In the process of tribal development, the planners had vision and advocated on this sector of population to quote “people should develop along the lines of their own genius and we should avoid imposing anything on them. We should try to encourage in every way their own traditional arts and culture” (Hasan, 1982).

Nutrition is the focal point for health and well being of the human beings. Their health is not only an indicator to the socioeconomic status and standard of living of the country but also reflects the values and beliefs of society. It is often said that healthier the people healthier is the nation and health could be
Fig. 1.1 Typical house of Abujhmaria

Fig. 1.2 Storage hut for storing grains
an index of prosperity. Proper nutrition is therefore contingent for maintenance of good health. No doubt issues of health and nutrition are considered as important goals of national objectives, besides being recognized as basic human needs and rights. In order to promote such issues there has to be holistic approach globally and the problem should be viewed from various angles and tackled at grass root levels by extending logistic support by the state. Free and independent India needs all round development of all categories of its people to keep pace with the developed countries and to maintain its entity in the world. Special attention is required in the case of development of the most backward areas and backward people, neglected in all respects since ages. India has achieved political freedom in 1947, but economically it is still lagging behind even after half a century of its freedom despite a number of efforts through various plans. In spite of various actions taken by the state and central governments the number of people below the poverty line has not been reduced. To raise the standard of living of the people extra special and honest efforts are imperative. The task is not easy for the country where the population is very large. Unemployment is great and large number of people is illiterate and ill fed.

The recent researches reflect satisfactory picture of nutrition level amongst the tribes, which may be at par with non-tribal population and the general condition prevailing in the country. This is also a fact that the present knowledge on ground realities prevailing in tribal societies is inadequate. The basic fact in their way of living is the dependence on local natural resource base with appropriate ways evolved through indigenous wisdom and ingenuity. The food sector of their living is well developed based on experience and local belief in which all possible care for health are taken in their own way. In depth consideration of natural aspect may put this sector of population at advantageous position due to availability of pollution free fresh food items, and adequate physical engagement in performing their daily routines. The problem that needs to be addressed is to know, the factual status of their food habits and nutrition through field studies without preconceived notions / ideas and plan for realistic development. One of the major factors determining nutritional
status in any community is not only the food consumption pattern but the ingredients that are influenced by a wide range of factors like agro–climatic situation, food crops grown, and their availability to different classes of the people. Beliefs, customs, and traditions influence the general pattern of living in the tribal community (Randall and Sanjur, 1981, Cherian, 1981 and Onuoha, 1982). Some of the traditions followed blindly by the tribals may be good and needs to be protected. Information about the tribals with regard to their attitudes, traditional food and dietary practices, in specific physiological conditions, is essential for planning appropriate nutrition and health education programme for them.

Knowledge of available food resources used by man has enabled him to survive in adverse climate. Tribals living as part of nature exploit the edible forest flora and fauna to meet their food and nutrition requirements. Some of their foods are uncommon to us, which may be nutritionally rich and can be selectively used for developing superior food packages. Therefore, evaluation of nutrient content of the local foods and additional food processes adopted by the tribal proved an important tool for assessing actual nutrient status of their diets. Most of the dietary intake studies available are based on calculations made from general food nutrient composition table. In spite of good deal of work done on the food cultivated and consumed by Indian tribal population, the information is scanty. Some of their foods are uncommon to us, which may be nutritionally rich and can be selectively used for developing superior food packages. Therefore, evaluation of nutrient of the local foods and traditional food process adopted by the tribals may prove an important tool for assessing actual nutrient status of their diets.

Considering the above state of knowledge on nutritional aspects of tribal diets, the present study has been conducted on the Abujhreria tribe living in Orchha block of Bastar (Chhattisgarh) to know about their food consumption pattern, typical foods consumed by the tribes and their nutritive evaluation. The study was conducted with the following objectives;

(i) To review the status of knowledge based on food, nutrition and health of Abujhreria tribe.
(ii) To study food consumption pattern and nutrient intake by Abujhmaria tribe.

(iii) To study the status of food and nutrition of Abujhmaria tribe in relation to optimum standard requirements (RDA).

(iv) To assess the knowledge of Abujhmaria tribe on nutritional and health care practices.

(v) Nutrient analysis of food samples collected from the tribal households in terms of proteins, fats, carbohydrates, minerals, vitamin C, ash, crude fiber and moisture.

(vi) To evaluate the potential of available forest food ingredients as a source of nutrition.

(vii) To assess the socio-economic scenario of Abujhmaria tribe

(viii) To suggest appropriate approach of research for developing forest produced based food and nutrition programme.

**Limitations of the study**

The following are the constraints experienced during the course of present investigation.

(i) Due to administrative accessibility problem, the study was limited only to Orchha block of Narainpur Tehsil in district Bastar.

(ii) Due to communication constraints, only 300 Abujhmaria families were selected for the present study.

(iii) There is inadequacy of previous work on food and nutritional aspect of Abujhmaria tribe.

(iv) Nutrient evaluation of alcoholic beverages consumed by them like salphi, landa, chhind juice etc., was not possible due to resource and time constraints.

(v) Due to time constraint and scope of study traditional method of herbal medicine preparation could not be documented.