
FOOD PRACTICES IN A POST CRISIS SCENARIO IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Food practices play a vital role to stop and prevent the spreading of hazardous viruses within individuals. "Eating practices which involve everyday aspects such as what one wishes to eat, his choices, the way of preparation and consumption and even the place where one has its meals, display sociocultural aspects as the cultural identity, the social condition and family memory, which turns food and nutritional education to promote more health-friendly choices into complex processes" (**Garcia RWD, 2005**). "Maintaining a healthy diet is an important aspect for all the human beings as it makes the nervous system strong to fight back with all types of bacteria and viruses present in the environment. The social nature of eating is closely related to diet quality, state of health and lifestyle, performing an important role in the quality of human life" (**Holm L, Lund TB, Niya M., 2015**). "The food practices always begin at home. The Bhagavad Gita proscribes certain dietary practices" (**Bhagavad-Gita**). "All etiquettes and eating habits are learnt by the child at home from his/her parents and the religion & culture. The choice of food practices can be influenced by one's identity in many societies, but has mostly been evaluated in light of the maintenance of cultural identity in migrant populations" (**Reddy Geeta, Rob M.van Dam, 2020**). "To protect from pandemic diseases, one should follow the food safety practices for healthy eating and handling of food. The risk of getting sick with COVID-19 from eating or handling food (including frozen food and produce) and food packages is considered very low" (**CDC, 2019a**). The main objectives of this study A) to identify the various food practices pre-covid crisis and post-covid crisis, launched by the government and their implementation in India. B) the role of charitable trusts and the cloud kitchen for providing food facilities among mass. C) to identify how the consumers are managing to order food from hotels and restaurants in this pandemic. "Hotels and Restaurants have started seeing a drop in footfall, weeks after business appeared to pick up in the first few weeks of the year"

(**Express News Service, 2021**).

KEY WORDS: CRISIS, FOOD, EATING HABBITS, FOOD PRACTICES, FOOD SAFETY, COVID, INDIA

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of life of humans, they live on the various food items which are categorised into two categories i.e., vegetables & fruits and flesh of meats. This has led to established a new community among the people. Now those people who survive on vegetables, they are known as vegetarians, and those who live on vegetables and flesh of meats. They are called non-vegetarians.

If we look into history deeply, “we found that up until about 10,000 years ago, all human beings were hunter-gatherers, and therefore they used to move from place to place to find food. History denotes ‘how the food people notices that the seeds in pieces of fruits and vegetables can grow which had been thrown away’” (**Food History/www.kidcyber.com.au**). “The discovery of fire made a drastic change in food habits, as the primitive man used to eat raw foods. 2.5 -1.8 million years ago, the discovery of the fire took place and the invention of cooking took place. 170,000 years ago, some fossils of cooked starchy roots and tubers were found in Africa. There was some genetic evidence published in the proceedings of the national academy of sciences of the United States of America (PNAS) that shows “all forms of Asian rice, both indica and japonica, spring from a single domestication that occurred 8,200 – 13,500. Years ago, in China of the wild rice *Oryza rufipogon*” (**Timeline of food, Wikipedia**). “In medieval cuisine (western Europe – 5th -15th century), did not change rapidly. The cereals remained the most important staple during the early Middle Ages. The cereals like barley, oats and rye were eaten by the poor people. Bread, porridge, and gruel, used to come into standard foods. Meat was expensive, game was common on the tables of landowners. All types of meat: pork, chicken and other domestic fowl, and beef were main part of meal. In 19th century: milk and cheese were seldom in the diet. The new dishes were introduced like pizza, spaghetti which were used to serve with meatballs. After world war I, the 1920s saw the introduction of new food stuffs which were packed in jars or containers and new equipment were invented for storage like electric refrigerators and ice boxes. The green revolution took place in 1950s and a new technological breakthrough originated in plant production in 1960s that increased the agricultural production worldwide” (**Food History/Wikipedia**). “Religions (Christianity, Buddhism, and Islam) had also developed their own distinct recipes, cultures and practices around food. All three religions follow two main principles around food: a) theory of the culinary cosmos, b) the principle of hierarchy” (**Laudan, 2013**). “Then there is ‘a third principle involved that is sacrifice. Over the years, religions and societal views on killing living things for religious purposes have changed but it is not considered as a major principle” (**Carr, Karen, 2017**).

India is the only single nations where many different cultures exist. That’s why the eating habits and food practices varies and it is not necessary that all these habits may be practiced by all the cultures of India. There are many types of cuisines which denotes the specialty of the regions, its local culture, geographical location and economics. The Middle Eastern and Central Asian influences have occurred on north Indian cuisine from the past years of Mughal rule. Indian food is delicious and rich in flavour. The spices play a vital role to create a signature dish, which also help to cool and warm the body during hot or cold weather. A variety of meats are used in Indian cuisines, but chicken and mutton are the most common consumed meats. The food practices of the Indian culture are based on the culinary practices. “Many Indians are vegetarians, therefore eating habits are often based on a diet that excludes are meat dishes. The majority of the Indian population is Hindu, so the flesh of beef and pork are often excluded from Indian dishes due to religious requirements” (**May Malar Win, 2018**).

2. FOOD PRACTICES PRE-COVID CRISIS AND POST-COVID CRISIS

Earlier mankind had faced various pandemics and effect of these pandemics hit economy and services all over the world badly. “The recent pandemic Covid -19 massively hit one of the important sectors of economy i.e., Food supply chain from the production, processing, distribution to demand” (**Serpil Aday and Mehmet Seekin Aday, 2020**). “There was a need arise to revise a food system chart at global, national, regional and local scale in order to achieve a vision for sustainable and ethical food futures during Pre-pandemic” (**Kaiser, M., Goldson, S., Buklijas, T. et al., 2021**). During Covid -19 Pandemic mostly hotels, restaurants, and cafeterias didn't allow to provide service to more than three customers at a single table. As per government protocol Staff members have to take proper precautions to ensure that food was cooked at proper temperatures, to work with reputed suppliers and sterilisation of equipment etc. Before Covid -19 situations was different as customers were not paying much attention on how meal was cooked and served. It has been noticed that near about 15-42% people change their consumption frequency during this pandemic. During lockdown, the people focused on collecting and storing frozen foods, canned foods and cake, biscuits. There was an extreme reduction in the consumption of fresh foods, but an increase in the non-perishable foods as they are easy to store. Thus, the pandemic had drastically impacted on people's lifestyles and their eating patterns.

Factors that changed the food practices:

- Closure of shopping malls, food industries & outlets, schools and other institutions, canteens and work places.
- Changes in household's grocery shopping frequency.
- Loss of jobs
- Decrease in salaries
- Fear of contamination

“Even in low disease risk areas, people were stressed as the number of coronavirus infected patients were increasing. Such people were trying to cope up through eating and drinking to make themselves feel better under stress” (**Conway TL, Vickers RR Jr, 1981 & Laitinen J, 2002**). “In Italy, people increased their consumption of processed “comfort foods,” such as chocolate, chips, and snacks” (**Bracale R, & Scarmozzino F, 2020**). In India, People started drinking herbed tea, giloy juice, turmeric milk and other immunity boosters etc. Citric fruits like orange, lemon, Kiwi, & Kinnu, etc.) and green leafy vegetables consumption were increased. “The people focused more on eating immunity boosting items due to anxiety” (**Di Renzo L & Gualtieri P, 2020**). “Due to fear of getting infected, people more focused on foods, according to a study, in Denmark, it had been observed a higher degree of emotional eating during the lockdown, i.e., increased consumption of pastries and alcohol” (**Giacalone D, Frøst MB, 2020**). “The risk perception may influence the people to change their purchasing pattern and consumption behaviour” (**Bemanian M, Mæland S, Blomhoff R, Rabben ÅK, Arnesen EK, Skogen JC, et al, 2021**). “The lockdown almost restricted the outdoor physical activity like purchasing fresh foods and drinks. The people were compelled to spend more time inside and have limited their physical activities. But actually, more time started spending in kitchen that resulted a positive habit to cook healthy food and to release stress” (**Mattioli AV, Sciomer S, Cocchi C, 2020**).

Post Covid the fear of pandemic will stay longer in the minds of people, various nations after unlock still ensuring restaurants to take food safety measures like repeatedly washing hands with soap and water before preparing or eating food, keeping perishable foods separate from other foods, and to cook them

foods at right temperature to kill harmful germs. Recently WHO and The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) had advised all food businesses regarding food safety. The role of government along with food ventures to disseminate food safety information is utmost important in reducing consumer panic. “As per (CDC, 2020 b) due to long working hours and interaction of food workers with internal and external people they are at high risk of infection and infected workers could transmit COVID-19 by touching food or food packets, and by touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes”. Many food processing plants suffered from COVID -19 crises not in terms of economy but also from humans. According to the United Foods and Commercial Worker union 13 meat packing workers died from COVID-19 which led to shut down of plant. Many food processing plants, hotels and restaurants reopened by implementing physical barriers and making their employees wearing personal protective equipment. To manage corona virus in the food industry a response plan was developed to provide guidance to food workers regarding continuity of operations in food processing facilities. During Covid -19 pandemic all the food companies faced a major concern of protecting employee’s health and maintaining sufficient staff. The success of any nation lies in maintaining the proper food supply chain during Covid -19 crisis along with the contribution of various supply chain actors from producers, distributors to end consumer. To prevent panic buying among customers some stores started free delivery services on orders and some stores put limit on the entry of people. Government and nations implementing new normal in all businesses to make situation favourable, though till there is no evidence available that Covid-19 transmitted via food or food packaging. There is now an urgent need for the food industry to ensure all measures will be taken to protect food workers from COVID-19. The measure can be:

- a) To provide refresher training to all employees on food hygiene principles.
- b) To reduce the spread of virus employees should be well acquainted with gloves, mask.
- c) Physical distancing, strict sanitisation measures and reminding employees again and again about effective hand washing.
- d) Written instructions should be provided within food premises to ensure all employees following it.
- e) Staff who have symptoms of Covid -19 and unwell should not be allowed to work and proper guidance should be provided to him /her about treatment.
- f) Gloves used by employees must be changed frequently.

Good staff hygiene practices must be implemented in the premises to deliver the highest hygiene standards in line with establishment FSMS. This includes:

- Proper hand hygiene – washing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds (follow WHO advice)
- Frequent use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers;
- Good respiratory hygiene (cover mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing; dispose of tissues and wash hands);
- Frequent cleaning/disinfection of work surfaces and touch points such as door handles;
- Avoiding close contact with anyone showing symptoms of respiratory illness such as coughing and sneezing

“Food safety is the basic priority of every individual. Due to covid pandemic, the major concern is to keep the food properly cooked, handle with precautions, store the food items at an appropriate

temperature. Owing to the highly transmissible nature of Virus, hygiene standards and safety measurements have become the top priority in list” (Sandipan Mitra, 2020).

2.1.THE VARIOUS STEPS IMPLEMENTED BY THE FOOD COMPANIES FOR THEIR EMPLOYEES TO KEEP THEM SAFE AND HYGIENIC:

- **Imparting Training to the Staff:** All food industries already follow the guidelines of FSSAI & HACCP to maintain hygiene in their premises. They pasted banners in their hotels corner to wash their hands, process of hand washing, wearing gloves during handling foods, applying proper chemicals to kill the bacteria, virus or other pathogenic germs on the surface. But now it has become more important to provide ample protection, and training to the employees who handle the food items in any way, like cooking, packaging and delivery. Those who serves the food directly to the customers in branded outlets, restaurants & hotels, they are now offering WHO-prescribed training to their employees to handle the food and wearing sufficient safety gear such as Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). As of now, each and every individual has awareness, how to protect themselves from Virus, they keep pocket sanitizers with them and apply on their hands time to time to prevent contaminations.
- **Use of Tech-Driven Solutions:** Neither employees & management nor Customers are allowed to enter the premised before their health inspection. This is the major concern of safety in hospitality industry, they are using tech-based safety measures such as live body temperature trackers on their mobile apps, which help to satisfy the customers as well as the employees that no one is contaminated with virus.
- **Modification In Menu:** those who have strong immunity, there are less chances of getting infected. Therefore, every individual has focused on food supplements those increase the body immunity such as garlic, turmeric, ginger and lime water. The food industries have updated their menu with immunity booster foods and drinks.

3. ROLE OF CHARITABLE TRUSTS AND THE CLOUD KITCHEN FOR PROVIDING FOOD FACILITIES AMONG MASS:

3.1. CHERITABLE TRUSTS & THEIR ROLE IN COVID -19:

There are so many charitable trusts which come under non-governmental organisations (NGOs). They are actively involved in fighting against challenges related to the environment, education, health and other related issues. “They have been instrumental in supporting the governmental to identify the coronavirus hotspots and to provide the medical facilities to the needy people. The NGOs played a vital role to spread the preventive measures and restriction information among rural and urban populations” (TOI, 2020). “84.26 lakh people have been provided meals across the country during the first and second lockdown, of which nearly 37% people were fed by NGOs. In Gujarat, NGOs fed 93% of the people who were provided meals, while in Andhra the figure was 92%. In Punjab state, Gurudwara committees are offering food to the needy people”, (India Today, 2020). “When the first lockdown in march 2020 was announced in India, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had called the NGOs to help the government- by facilitating basic necessities to the underprivileged, by supplying medical and protective gears, by launching awareness campaigns on social distancing” (Pooja Marwaha, 2020). “The NGOs came forward to help the migrant workers by providing water, food

and transportation facilities. The supreme court applauded the contribution of NGOs during this pandemic” (KS Narayanan, 2020)

3.2. CLOUD KITCHEN

Gone are the days, when people were fearless to dine outside. Being a social animal, people always look after dining places to enjoy their time during meal. The locations (QSRs, Fine or Casual Dining, Cafes, Pubs & Bars, Dessert stations and Ice cream parlour) provided the third place outside of home and working places to meet, interact and socialize. Due to covid pandemic this is not possible. There is an inherent fear for people to step out and get together the same way as they did earlier.

COVID -19 pandemic has not just impacted our lives but it has disrupted in various aspects which include food as well. Cloud kitchens a.k.a. Virtual or Restaurant- as a service has witnessed accelerated growth and development amidst the pandemic. “The gross value of India’s Cloud Kitchen market had been estimated at US\$400 million in 2019 and is expected to grow at a CAGR of 35% i.e., worth US\$2 billion in 2024. As per report by BCG and Google states that the influence of food-tech aggregators has grown 6 times from 2017 to 2019” (Deepak bhawanani, 2021), there are so many big companies have declared to open cloud kitchens it includes:

- American fast-food company “The Wendy’s Company” declared that the company will open near about 250 cloud kitchens in India, in collaboration with “Rebel Foods”.
- Ola foods has launched 3 new brands in 2020 in addition to its network which include 40+ Cloud kitchen in 6 cities and have few more projects for future.
- Amazon company took part in this field as well, the company has launched “Amazon Food,” in Bengaluru only.
- The Lite Bite company has launched 4 new Cloud Kitchen brands with its own delivery app “FOOGO”, plant to open 36 cloud kitchens across 5 cities by 2023.

Few hospitality associations have launched a campaign i.e. order straight from hotels and restaurants. This aims to support the hospitality industry that is being impacted from the second wave of COVID-19 pandemic.

ROLE OF CLOUD KITCHENS:

- To provide the best quality food to the customers at their door steps.
- To follow the SOPs to tackle with poor management or lack of control on operations.
- To provide prompt services by optimization of delivery, which could be accelerate the faster deliveries of freshly cooked food.

In the pandemic, the main focus is on to ensure hygiene, at a time when people may be more worry to collect the food from outside.

METHODOLOGY

Almost 70 numbers of research papers and articles have been gone through for compiling this research paper. Many websites were viewed to collect an accurate data and only 31 were found appropriate for this study. The study was totally based on secondary data of best quality content from reputed articles, journals, websites and online literatures. All articles and research papers were analysed several times before drafting the review and to find out the conclusion.

CONCLUSION

Coronavirus is a pathogenic virus that is having a major impact on the eating & drinking habits of consumers. Now the people are looking to be more health conscious, they are focusing over the old remedies to make their immunity strong. "The people are becoming more concerned about the environment and are seeking moments of comfort, both of which will shape eating habits" (**Mike Hughes, 2020**). Instead of food, people are focusing on physical exercises, yoga sessions, and meditation, to boost their immunity and relaxation.

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