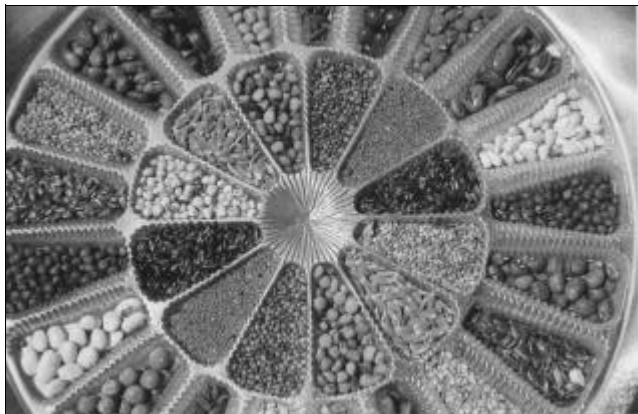


Nutrition and vital energy



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The science of nutrition has many facets. Over the years new information on the relationship between food and human health has been put forward. We can draw from both traditional Indian wisdom, like Ayurvedic science, and from alternative Western science to get unique viewpoints. In some cases, Western science also adds to the understanding of the relation between food and healing.

In the ancient Indian texts food is put in a religious context. For example the ancient Upanishad scriptures state: 'From food are born all creatures which live upon food and after death return to food'. The knowledge of food and its role in healing have been part and parcel of Indian peoples' lives for thousands of years. Some of this knowledge is recorded in the so-called codified, or classical Indian knowledge systems, like Ayurveda.

According to the Ayurvedic concept of health, all living beings exist in a state of continual vibration. All matter is energy, from the densest to the subtlest level of vibration. Healthy food helps the body to maintain an equilibrium between *Vatha*, *Pitha* and *Kapha*, the three vital energies in Ayurveda (see also article CIKS, p. 30). In Ayurvedic philosophy and science the subtle processes of life are identified. These life processes are not studied in mainstream Western medical science.

From celebration to merchandise

Traditionally, in Indian culture, food production was a ritual and a celebration to the blessings of the Divine. Food itself was attributed to these divine blessings, manifested as the five states of matter, or *panchamahabootas*: earth, water, fire, air and ether. As a result, food was worshipped in many ways. Rooted in a value system that ensured a judicious use of nature, traditional agriculture supplied safe and nutritious food to the people. Native diets are healthy, as they are fresh, wholesome and organically produced, without commercial processing.

Today, food is a merchandise, a commodity that no longer symbolises the sacred. It has been reduced to mere chemicals, to broken pieces of genes, that are shifted from one place to the other, cloned, recombined, and ultimately exploited for greater production, larger profits and monopoly control. Apart from the remote areas, many rural and city people have no choice but to buy and consume these chemically grown and processed foods.

Traditional varieties

At the same time, however, people in India do seek special food as an important part of their offerings and festivals, regardless of living in urban or rural areas. Women in rural areas conserve the traditional varieties associated with special occasions, while their men blatantly opt for commercial cash crops. Women's contribution to seed conservation is the silver line that guides the work of Green Foundation.

In recent years the Green Foundation has worked closely with farmers in Thalli, a semi-arid area. To promote safe nutrition for the people, several varieties of indigenous crops with high nutritious value, have been revived. At the same time sustainable agricultural practices, such as mixed cropping, have been revived and promoted. Farmers grow a combination of finger millets, fox tail millets, sorghum, field beans, pigeon peas and herbs in one field. In this way they can feed themselves and their animals, as well as repel pests and attract natural predators. It is an insurance against crop failure, while it guarantees a diverse diet.

Radiation and anti-oxidants

The concept of food as an organism with 'radiation', is now accepted by some Western researchers. Physicists have been able to design instruments that can measure the amount of light radiated from living organisms. This radiation, or luminescence, is caused by 'biophotonics', and as such can be quantified. Experiments show that crops grown with large amounts of fertiliser, or food treated artificially to extend its keeping properties, expose lower radiation than fresh foods (Belousov and Popp, 1994).

Healthy foods restore a balance in the body by supporting an optimal immune function. Ayurvedic texts predicted that air, water, earth and food would degenerate and cause epidemics. As a result, a whole branch of Ayurvedic medicine aims to strengthen the basic immune functions of people, to counter the stress of modern

life style.

It is now known that certain factors that cause stress in modern life, such as environmental pollution, radiation, pesticides and even some medications, overburden the body with so-called 'oxygen free radicals'. These are associated with different forms of cancer. Western research has now confirmed that the medicinal activity of several vitamins, minerals, and plants is related to their 'anti-oxidant' properties (Verbach, 1996).

Redefining nutrition

Food can be a health provider, healer and nourisher; yet at the same time when consumed irrationally, it can do more harm than good. A redefinition of nutrition is important to put our health in perspective. Nutrition is the understanding of how our body works, what it needs, and what it does. Nutrition is in fact 'the philosophy of life and healthy living', and not merely the knowledge of food, as this is commonly understood.

The Compass initiative attempts to rediscover the philosophy and knowledge embedded in different cultures. In attaching status to indigenous science, philosophies and practices, we can draw from various sources: indigenous science, alternative science and modern Western science. Until we have developed relevant tools, we do not have a choice but accept traditional practices. Should we reject time-tested wisdom, simply for lack of tools to objectively proof them?

References

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