

Utilisation of neglected species

During the past 40 – 50 years, humanity underwent a lot of changes in cultural aspects, lifestyles, clothing and even food habits in the name of modern civilization. Change is inevitable and also necessary to some extent, on a limited scale, like using a vehicle for easy transport, a motorized pump to lift water, a mill to process food grains etc. But many people have adapted to or have become totally dependent on unwanted amenities. Similarly, modern lifestyles have imposed a few food habits, resulting in accepting only wheat and rice as main cereal food grains, only one or two crops like beans, cabbage, cauliflower, potato, tomato, peas as vegetables. Infact, these expensive food items have become a symbol of status. I have a very good friend, who is a bank executive, who has employed a maidservant to wash kitchen vessels. All their utensils are given for washing except one vessel in which they cook ragi balls. My friend's wife hides this particular vessel from the maidservant, fearing that she would spread the news of their consuming ragi among their neighbours. Anybody can imagine the state of false prestige we have developed by ourselves. These days most of us are living to please others but not for ourselves. Similarly, till recently, University of Agriculture Sciences, Bangalore, which has a bakery training unit, was teaching to make bakery products only from wheat flour, since the aid was coming from Wheat Association of America. Thanks to the efforts of many, now preparation of bakery products from ragi and rice have also been included.

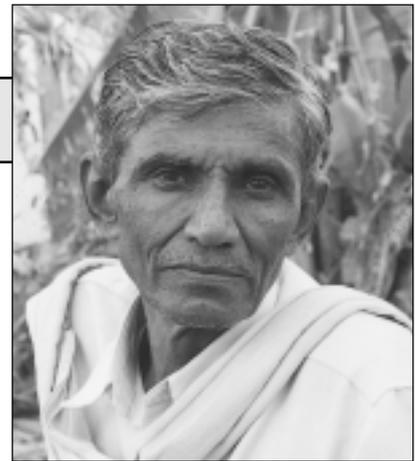
We have around 15 species of cereals, 8 species of legumes, 6 species of oil seeds, 10 species of cucurbits, 10 species of cultivated greens and innumerable species of greens without a name, atleast 15 species of tubers, 50 species of uncultivated fruits and berries, which have been narrowed down to only a few species.

Whenever I think of potato, a very popular and prestigious vegetable, I just cannot understand the importance given to it. So much trouble is taken in preserving and transporting seed material from either Himachal Pradesh or Punjab to Karnataka or Tamil Nadu. Besides, the

amount of resources and efforts invested in various aspects of crop cultivation are enormous. For instance, land preparation, use of expensive manures and chemicals to treat the soil against nematodes and other soil borne diseases, and the pest control measures to protect the crop, even to the extent of spraying a very bad systemic chemical like Rudomil and coating mercury based Cerason etc., on seed tubers while sowing. Post harvest storage in cold storage warehouses consumes lot of electricity and causes green house effect on the environment. Instead, growing tapioca is very easy and eco-friendly and better in taste and of higher caloric value. The only reason why more people consume potato is because of its glorified propaganda.

Wheat cultivation is very expensive compared to cereals like Sorghum, Bajra, Ragi, Fox tail and many other minor millets. These can be grown with very little manuring, water and virtually without using any plant protection chemicals, unlike wheat and rice. There is no reason why we have to grow wheat and rice by consuming about 120 centimeter acre water to produce 15 quintals of grains. With the same amount of water, we could grow atleast 45 quintals of ragi or other minor millets. With steep fall of water table, it is advisable that we popularize minor millets, which are more drought and pest resistant and can be grown even on poorer soils, since more than 65 % of our farmers are depending on rain fed cultivation.

It is high time we give more importance for drought resistant oil seeds like safflower, niger, gingelly, mustard etc., than giving prominence to groundnut and sunflower, which are more susceptible to pests and drought situations. Similarly, we have to give more importance to cultivation of cowpea and horse gram instead of only red gram, which needs a lot of chemical pesticides. Better we forget cabbage, cauliflower, capsicum consumption and



also their cultivation, and go for indigenous vegetables like ridge gourd, ash gourd, pumpkin, bottle gourd, bhendi and other local vegetables which do not require more chemical fertilizers and pesticides.

The use of weedicides in crop cultivation has also destroyed many species of greens among our crops, which were not only providing food security but also had medicinal values and other mineral requirements for both humans and livestock as well. It is the imposition through publicity by multinational seed, fertilizer and pesticide companies that popularized a few cereals, beans (legumes), vegetables and also fruits. Both growers and the consumers get into the trap of dependency for seeds, fertilizers and pesticides by loosing their valuable traditional knowledge and species.

During these years of repeated droughts and water scarcity, we have to popularize many tuber crops from tribal areas, which can be cultivated very easily with little inputs like the cost of seed, manure, plant protection, water and even post harvest storage, since most of the tubers can be harvested till the beginning of monsoon.

L. Narayana Reddy

Srinivasapura, Via Maralenaahalli
Doddaballapura Taluk, Hanabe – 561 203
Ph : 080 7651360

