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Connecting PLATE and planet

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Over the years, the way our food is grown has changed. Today, we have technology to help us get higher yields and make more profits. But what is the toll this takes on nature?



FARMING:Traditional method.Photo: Sathyamoorthy

Have you ever tried to solve a mystery called food?

I can hear some of you mumbling, "Food? The only mystery there seems to be of why I have to eat *aalu-baingan* or *karela* ? Or when will I have my next chocolate? What else can be interesting about food?"

A lot, actually. For example, do you know that India used to have more than 1,00,000 varieties of rice? Or that if it wasn't for people coming in from other lands, our food would not have potatoes, tomatoes, chillies, tea or coffee? Or that pepper was what brought the British to India? Or that food is one of the best kind of medicines?

Mysteries of food

And it gets curiouser and curiouser! The way we get our food has been constantly changing. Food was not always gotten through farming. In fact, if we break human life on earth into 150 steps, farming has been present for only the last 12 steps. Before that, people used to just eat left-overs, hunt, fish and gather wild berries and roots. Even now, there are many groups of people who depend on wild foods for taste and nourishment.

Farming itself has changed so much, with more machines, water-pumps and chemicals entering the scene. Only two or three generations ago, most of us spent our lives on farms whereas now so many of us, especially in the cities, have never plucked a fruit straight from a tree or a radish right out of the soil.

And there are questions of a sadder sort too. Like, how is it that while some people have money to buy extra food that goes to waste, there are others who die of hunger everyday? Or for how long can humans keep on extracting these delicious gifts from nature, at the same time destroying it for human greed?

So you see, the way our plate of food is connected to the planet, where it comes from, how it is grown and by whom, are important questions.

What we can do

Eat food that is grown not too far away

Food that is grown in an environment-friendly manner - organically.

Grow greens in pots at home.

Find home-made cures for fever, cough and cold from grandparents.

Little by little, maybe the mystery will start solving itself.

After all, can any of us live without food?

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