

Fiji Time: 9:25 AM on Monday 9 October

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Power in a flour

Sashi Kiran
Sunday, October 08, 2017

WORKING hard on sugarcane farms from dawn to dusk surviving on a handful laddoo.

Hard to believe, isn't it? Yet that is the power of high-protein, gluten-free, wholesome, locally grown multigrain flour known as satwa. Indentured labourers and their farm descendants used to sing about this superfood that is little known now.

Growing up in rural settlement, we had abundance of pulses and often enjoyed the toasted smell and taste of delicious satwa laddoo.

Lentils were key to any farming household as a high-protein diet.

Over the generations pulses have been a favourite crop rotation option that revitalised the soil and are a well-known nitrogen fixer. So every farming household always had a range of dhal or pulses. Farmers often separated seeds for next season's planting and stored it well while surplus dhal used to be well dried, roasted and kept for soups and curry options.

At a recent function, the elders of the family were reminiscing the about the good old days! My 86-year-old dadi, Bimla Wati, from Lautoka shared that family of farmers like ours used to grow their food collectively. Men and women worked the farms and family was self-sufficient with all their food needs.

Conversation turned to favourite foods of old times and satwa, a favourite ingredient in a range of dishes, was mentioned.

To make all-time favourite cereals — satwa — surplus pulses were roasted at low heat and ground gently in stone grinders or wooden grinders known as dhaki. These grains included maize, cow pea, pigeon pea, sorghum, black gram (urdi), green gram (mung) and homegrown rice.

Dadi shared the women of the household used drums to par oil home-grown rice. Portion of the parboiled rice would be roasted, ground then added to the cereal.

Satwa (saat) means seven — so seven types of grains are often used for the mix and stored for long periods of time. However depending on family and land terrain, any number of grains that were grown could have been used. Imagine the nutrient content of so many grains in one meal!

Foundation for Rural Integrated Enterprises & Development (FRIEND) a homegrown NGO headquartered at Tuvu, Lautoka has been focused on encouraging the use of local healthy foods as it works on sustainable livelihoods and holistic health in its fight against non-communicable diseases.

At FRIEND, we have been exploring locally grown health foods from various traditions. Over time we have realised our ancestors had the key to sustainable health practices and our foods of ancient times were indeed chemical-free superfoods, even when they were processed! The processing methods were drying, toasting or smoking — all without the use of chemicals and additives.

Looking at my ancestral food, satwa, was an obvious choice to share. This product range has given farmers a direct market for their pulses and grains which otherwise would have to compete with imported ranges. And for people like us who don't grow and roast our own grains, a perfect high energy cereal!

The product has been very well received especially by those who know the goodness of this superfood. In a recent conversation Dr RK Reddy, a well-known general practitioner based in Nausori, quipped he ate FRIEND's Fiji style satwa every day with yogurt, honey or with his cereal.

More and more youths are now using satwa in their high protein diet, either with milk, yoghurt, juices, shakes or in place of cereals.

In the olden days, satwa could be used for all sorts of meals. Simple laddoo could be made by adding sugar and water (or milk and honey) and rolled into balls (laddoo), an easy meal for farmers going far.

Satwa flour was used for various types of roti mix as well as for stuffing in some dishes.

Nowadays, satwa smoothie is popular among health fanatics as a high protein drink. The gentle roast helps retain the aroma and taste for days.

Satwa provides a great alternative to gluten intolerants as a natural high fibre flour that could be used in roti, muffins, cakes as well as for crisping dumplings.

Satwa makes for a great preservative free cereal! Just mix few tablespoons of satwa with milk and honey or water and sugar.

The heavy proteins is very filling and sustains ones hunger for longer period assisting with weight management for those health freaks.

Satwa also makes quick and easy Diwali or any occasion sweet. Simply mix satwa with sugar/jaggery or honey to taste, add water or milk and some cardamon, ensure it has dough consistency and you can roll into laddoo or set and cut as barfi and serve.

For lovers of this healthy superfood, satwa is now readily available in supermarkets brought to you by our distributors Motibhai and Company Ltd, a company that has believed in the vision and work of FRIEND.



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