

## **Prof. Sirimal Premakumara's posting on "toxin-free" eco-agriculture.**

I was interested to read Prof. Sirimal Premakumara's posting. I sympathize very much with his wish to "get the best out of bio-diversity that is nature's gift to us".

However, I must humbly disagree with most of what he has said, because the way to get rid of toxins is to concentrate first on **the major sources of toxins** which happen to be NOT of agrochemical origin.

I think it was the Buddha who said that the devotee who came to hear a sermon from him must be fed first.

Let us consider one of his key statements:

**So in essence, application of synthetic fertilizers, pesticides and other non eco friendly inputs are detrimental to soil-microbial dynamics that existed millennia in our gifted soils.** If not now, we will lose our edge for all our produce forever and will only be eating rubbish just to get rid of hunger and also our traditional medicines will be of no use as there won't be the curative phytochemistry in the medicinal herbs used in the formulations.

*"we will lose our edge for all our produce forever and will only be eating rubbish just to get rid of hunger"*

Food grown using agrochemicals have not been shown to be lacking in any nutrients. Populations eating such food have become healthier and nearly doubled their life expectancy.

So, when Prof. Sirimal Premakumara says such food to be *rubbish*, he is thinking of the more subtle qualities like aroma and bouquet, texture and temper, and all those things that we read when we look up, say, a French "Guide de Gastronomie"



But Hunger with a capital H has been the most important problem for the vast majority of humans from time immemorial. Even today, this is the reality for many people, and what they eat is in fact "mere rubbish" to the elite classes who are not looking for food, but **demand even a right to choose their food**, even if the poor go hungry.

So, must we eat cake even if "they" have no bread?

Even in 1950 the life expectancy of Sri Lanka's was about 48-52 years, and the main malady was mal- nutrition.

The "edge" we have in, say "Ceylon cinnamon" can perhaps be accommodated in some type of niche agriculture but we cannot let the present situation become even worse, where today some 15-30 % (depending on whose statistics you use) of young school children come to school hungry with *not even rubbish* to eat.

In ancient times (say, even prior to the fall of the Kandyan kingdom to the British) traditional agriculture where no external inputs except water was used prevailed.

We have a good record of the methods of that agriculture in Captain Robert Percival's book published in 1803.

So, people at that time had "the biodiversity and the gift of nature" that Prof. Premakumara mentions.

This bio-diverse gift also involved various mosquito diseases like malaria, dengue, filaria, etc, also amoeba, shigella, ring worm, tape worm, round worm etc., and then measles, diphtheria, leprosy, mumps, whooping cough, tuberculosis, typhoid, chicken pox, small pox, the plague and any many more that we can add, in addition to

rampant malnutrition due to droughts and frequent crop failure. We can read of the droughts from the rings of old trees and even fossilized trunks of trees. Ayurveda has no answer to any of those major diseases.

Life expectancy was low except for the aristocrats and monks.

So, those days when biodiversity was there, the majority of people could not enjoy it any way, and the gifts of nature are always two-edged.

The French aristocracy also prided itself in the good things of life. The nobleman (Le Marquis) lived in his chateau which had its own flower garden, vegetable garden, fruit garden, vineyard, medicinal herb garden, cereal fields, livestock, stone quarry, bakery for fresh bread, pottery, fish ponds, hot houses even for spices, a large private forest where the noble men and women could hunt, and where succulent wild mushrooms and berries grew "naturally". Grapes grown on virgin soil must have produced wines with a perfume and bouquet that Prof. Sirimal P would have appreciated.

The family of the nobleman had many servants and surfs who worked the land and grew food with no external inputs. They thought it was toxin-free.

About 300 people working many hectares and a vast expanse of forest land fed the noble family that may have been about a dozen, as well as the servants, surfs, horses, cows, dogs etc. The 12 members of the noble family would have been in entire agreement with Prof. Sirimal P about biodiversity.

Then there was the French revolution, and a charming way of life vanished.

Do the toxin-free militants detest the French revolution?

In any case, the toxin free people do detest the green revolution for sure. Yet, 80% of their bodies are made up of nitrogen made from the Harber-Bosch process.

I have written how the toxin-free movement will bring back a two-tier food system that will increasingly look after the elite, while the poor will eat *rubbish*, in line with what Prof. Sirimal Premakumara has said.

I invite you to click the following link.

<https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/public-fears-about-modern-agriculture-pesticides-the-emergence-of-the-two-tier-food-market/>

In the above article I point out that the **main threats to the ecosystem** are from pollutants and toxins brought in from burning of fossil fuels by motor vehicles, acid

rain, garbage, e-waste, plastics, pharmaceuticals released via human rights oil, indoor fumigation and sub-micron dust, smoking, sugar and alcohol consumption etc.

I also gave details of Prof. Bandara's experiments comparing organic farming and scientific agriculture in a Peradeniya field trial. Please read that article from 2015 for more details.

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