

# Vethathiri Maharishi's Ideas of Reforms in Food Tradition

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**Abstract:** For any living being the primal needs are food and water. Good quality of food along with pure water, form the basis of good health. Food is vital to generate energy for the physical functions of the body, for the growth of cells in the body and for the healthy functioning of the body. More than nutritious food, food that is easily digestible is more ideal food for the body. Early age man survived by eating raw leaves, vegetables and fruits. Man then got used to cooking them and eating cooked food. With civilization, the preparation of food started depending on taste. These days we cite lack of time as a reason, and go for fast foods which are equivalent to poisoned food. In the name of genetic modification people have given up natural ways and resorted to artificial ways of developing farm produce. To live healthily under these circumstances what we need most is healthy food.

**Keywords:** Reforms In Food Tradition, raw leaves, vegetables and fruits.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Food plays an important role in human life. Anything cannot be supplemented for food. All the human beings and animals feel the hunger. Hunger occurs due to the exhaustion of the energy in our body. Food builds the human body. Therefore it is very essential to limit and maintain a method in the consumption of the food. This is an attempt to study the ideas of Vethathiri Maharishi on food habits.

The paper explores some of the ideas of Vethathiri Maharishi on food like the below:

1. Healthy eating
2. Traditional food
3. Present day food habits
4. The way of eating food
5. 12 ways of eating cited by ancient Tamil wisdom
6. Sainthood in eating
7. The right food
8. Food and temperament
9. Conclusion

### 1. HEALTHY EATING

Healthy eating doesn't imply that the food we eat abounds in at least one or more nutrients. Having food that has the sufficient nutrition for the functioning of the body, in just the necessary quantity, is what is ideally healthy. The food that we like the most can be made healthier by increasing or decreasing one or more ingredients in them. Healthy food is one

which preserves the natural colour, aroma and taste of its ingredients as well as the essential vitamins and minerals that are naturally present in them. There are three fundamental qualities of healthy food.

1. It should suit our health
2. It should have the essential nutrients
3. It should be had in right portions or within limits

## 2. TRADITIONAL FOOD

When it comes to healthy food, our traditional food has a major role to play. Every species has identities of food, indigenous to the land. Mankind has based food habits depending on the place of living, environmental conditions and natural resources. Each of the societal groups which were formed had its own way of cooking, way of serving and way of eating food. But when speaking of culture, areas such as language, art, attire and bravery received far more attention and significance than food. Our ancestors had the habit of having a fluid diet in the morning to begin their day of farming. Their lunch mostly comprised of a meal made with millets and their supper used to be over before dusk. Since their work and their food habits were disciplined, they lived healthy lives. Chemical fertilizers and pesticides had not been used for the produce of crops which were a part of the traditional food. Millets and traditional variants of rice are some of the traditional food that is highly nutritious.

## 3. PRESENT DAY FOOD HABITS

In the societal set-up we currently live in, we opt for foods that are not easily digestible, deep fried food, foods with chemical additives and soft drinks. By these choices we accumulate unwanted waste largely in our bodies resulting in situations where we are faced with a lot many diseases and new medical conditions.

## 4. THE WAY OF EATING FOOD

Healthy eating doesn't stop with making healthy food choices alone. Most importantly it includes the way of eating as well. Not skipping meals, eating only when the appetite is felt and eating within the digestive capacity, are all significant ways of healthy eating. Our ancestors have recorded that by regulating the way of eating itself we can avoid a lot many medical conditions.

*“For a body that takes food only when the previous meal digests there is no need for medicine”<sup>1</sup>*

The kural above translates to convey the following: It is a healthy practice to have food only when we sense that the previous meal has been completely digested and choose to have the next meal within limits. When we adopt this practice regularly, there is no need for an external medicine to heal the body.

We have three meals in a day during the morning, noon and night. After the mid-day meal, if we intend to have the day's dinner at 8 pm, we should regulate the quantity of the mid-day meal in such a way that we feel the appetite for food at 7 pm itself. This can be called the right quantity. If we don't feel the appetite in such a way on a given day, we should reduce the quantity of intake the next day. The idea is to eat only when hunger strikes.

Our ancestors followed the habit of eating using their hands. When the hand was used for eating, the flow of bio-magnetism into the food was enabled which enhanced the quality of the food they ate. They also sat on floor upon floor mats while eating. This helped them to restrain from eating beyond limits as one can feel satiety at the right time by following this method. But today the practice of having food while seated in dining tables has increased.

## 5. 12 WAYS OF EATING CITED BY ANCIENT TAMIL WISDOM

1. The act of having in small quantities
2. The act of eating till the hunger is appeased
3. The act of sucking fluids as with a drinking straw
4. The act of drinking fluids till hunger is appeased

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5. The act of eating savouries
6. The act of indulging in food happily
7. The act of licking with the tongue
8. The act of drinking in a single gulp
9. The act of drinking fluids in small serving
10. The act of hurried eating or drinking due to hunger
11. The act of grinding hard food with the teeth
12. The act of swallowing

### 6. SAINTHOOD IN EATING

Even when the food that is being taken is very delicious, stopping the act of eating when the limit is reached or when the hunger is appeased can be called true sainthood in eating. The same has been put forth by Vethathiri Maharishi in a tamil verse which conveys the following.

*“The act of denying or over-indulging in food, work, rest, sex and thinking implies ignoring the importance of the body”<sup>2</sup>*

Since our physical body itself is a result of the food we eat, we have to eat in order to live this life. When we transgress the limits by eating beyond the digestive capacity, the food itself eats into the body. Hence it is important to observe limits in eating.

Vethathiri maharishi iterates this message through the verse which is as below:

*“Since the physical body is a transformation of food,  
Food can be considered indispensable for life.  
But when the limits of intake are modified or transgressed,  
Won't the food start feeding on the body?”<sup>3</sup>*

### 7. THE RIGHT FOOD

Just as how important it is to adhere to the right way of eating and the right quantity of intake, it is equally important to focus on choosing the right kind of food for the body.

*“It is ideal to begin the day with millet broth and coconut,  
After the day's work, have a noon meal with rice and curry varieties  
And for supper to have wheat flour based food with vegetables.  
While milk can be had plain along with some sugar,  
It is advisable to avoid beverages like coffee and tea”<sup>4</sup>*

### 8. FOOD AND TEMPERAMENT

The food that we eat has a major role in deciding our temperament. There are three kinds of food, Saatvik, Rajas and Tamas types which give peace, happiness and distress respectively. These three types of food are the ones that give man the three kinds of temperament which are divine nature, human nature and beastly nature.

*“When the soul realizes its truth it is Saatvik,  
When the soul raves towards indulgence, it is Rajas,*

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*When the soul loses direction having bad aspirations, it is Tamas,*

*When the soul realizes these three characters, it is wisdom”<sup>5</sup>*

Food can be classified into two as acceptable food and unacceptable food. Our temperament largely depends on the food we eat. In order to become an individual of Saatvik nature, one must adapt the body to relevant food habits that promote it. Grains, vegetables, greens and fruits are Saatvik foods. They promote patience, kindness, compassion and tolerance. These foods are best suited for aspirants of yoga since they promote peace.

## 9. CONCLUSION

Those who don't pay with the body(through exercise and healthy eating), end up paying with their lives with the above verse Thirumoolar insists that maintaining a healthy body has a remarkable impact on the longevity. Hence to preserve good health it is important that we adopt healthy eating practices. Owing to the magnitude of proper physical work during early years, our ancestors were able to enjoy proper physical wellness. With the advancement of science in the present day, we should take even better care of our health by following ways of healthy eating. By not disregarding food, having food within the limits and by avoiding food that is inappropriate for our health we can choose to eat healthy.

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