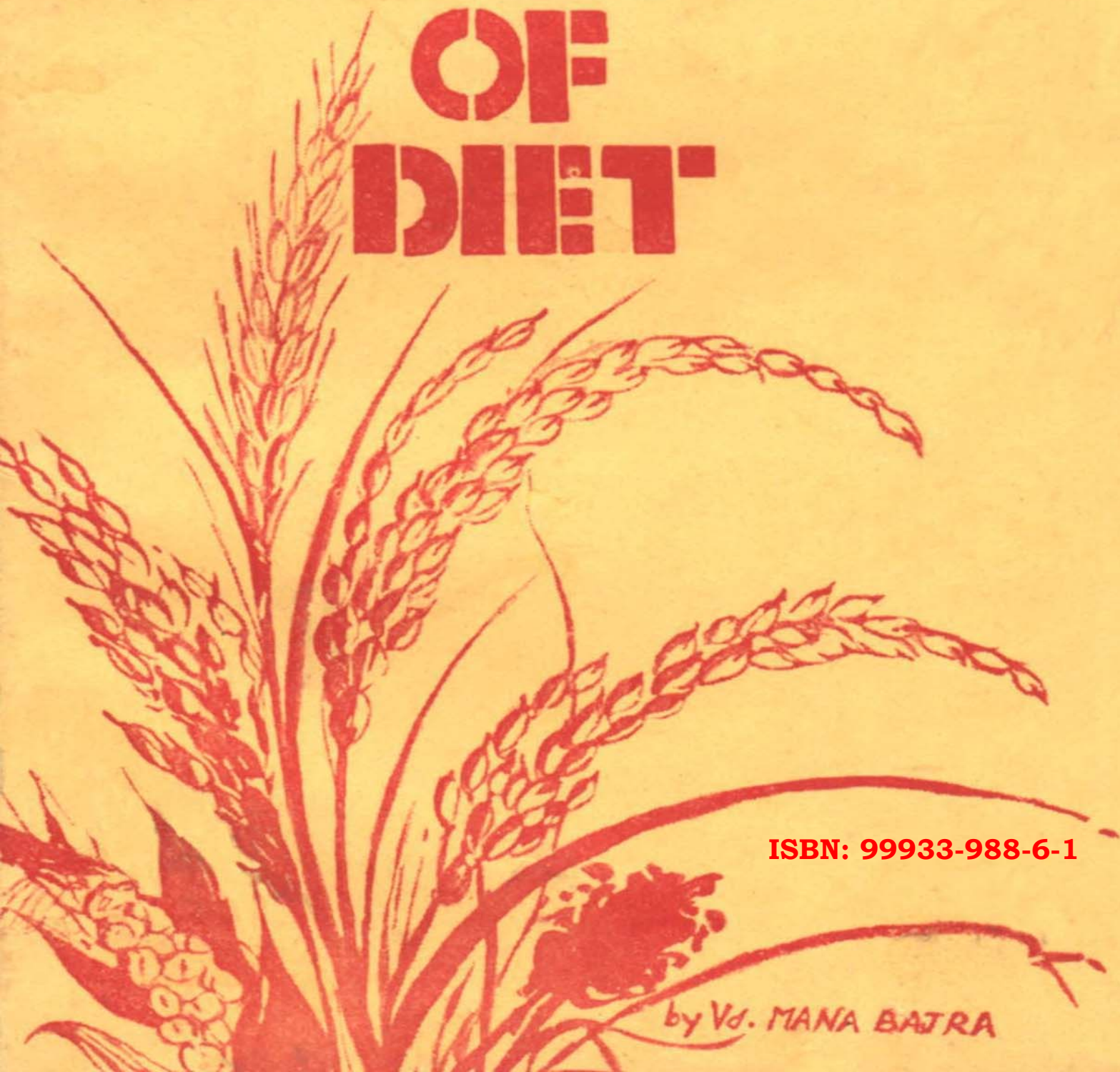


THE EASTERN THEORY OF DIET



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by Vd. MANA BATRA

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CHAPTER 1

1. Introduction

1.1. The General Theory of Balanced Diet

A proper balanced diet is, of course, the basic underlying concept in most, if not all, theories and systems of nutrition and health. As a part of an ancient, yet living science of life, the Ayurvedic concept of nutritional balance presents, in a well-ordered and scientific manner, an eastern approach towards the understanding of the relationship between the human body and diet.

The fundamental principle of this theory is the proper combination of the tastes; Sweet, Sour, Salty, Bitter, Pungent and Astringent. Because foodstuffs are composed of different combinations of these six tastes, and therefore have different properties and effects upon the body. The diet must be arranged according to certain principles. Most western nutritional theories acknowledge that there is no any perfect diet for all people and that diet must be varied according to individual needs and differences. Carrying this idea a bit further, the eastern Ayurvedic theory of diet takes into consideration such important factors as the time of meals, the amount and proportion of foods, the seasonal effects, the complementary and contradictory foods, the individual nature of different people and their corresponding needs, the effects of spices, and so on.

The second basic principle, according to this eastern scientific theory is the division of the human body into five basic elements. These are figuratively called Water, Earth, Fire, Wind, and Sky. Literally, of course, these terms do not make sense. But in the water element, blood, fat, lymph, fluid, serum, mucous secretions, bile, and urine are included. Similarly the components of the other elements are as follows; earth consisting bone, teeth, nails, flesh, stool, skin, hair, tendons and nerves; fire consisting of body heat; wind consisting of respiration and sky consisting of body space and size. In order to maintain good health and nourishment, these elements must be well balanced by providing the proper foods in proper quantities. As a general rule : sweet foods maintain the water elements of the body; sour foods maintain the fire and earth elements; salty foods maintain the wind and the fire elements; bitter foods maintain the wind and sky elements; and astringent foods maintain the wind and the earth elements.

The word “Sweet” has a different and more comprehensive meaning in the eastern system in that it includes not only the sweetness of sugar and fruits, but also the sweetness of meat, grains, beans, meat products and vegetables etc.