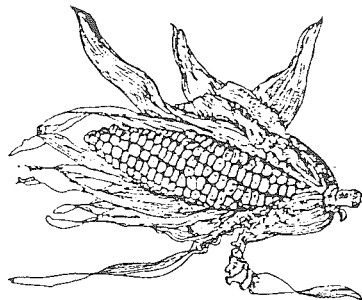


INDIGENOUS SEEDS

The interrelationship of all living things is seen in the renewal of the seasons and through the cultivation of seeds that are nurtured to become plants, providing sustenance for people and for animals. Caring for the earth, for the gifts from the earth, and for one another is an interdependent pattern that has sustained life for generations past and for those to come in the future. For many Indian people who have an intimate reliance on and knowledge of plants, the cycle of renewal, based on spiritual principles and lived daily, is the essence of survival of individuals, of communities, and of peoples. Genocide and ethnocide can come in many forms and in seemingly small or insignificant ways.



In the Americas, prior to the European invasion, there were thousands of plant varieties, many cultivated, others wild, that were used for food, medicinal purposes, clothing, and in many other ways. These ancient varieties are open pollinating in contrast to modern hybrid varieties. Food crops raised for thousands of years by Indians in the Americas have qualities that are suited to the particular environment of an area, often including extremely high levels of tolerance to drought, heat, salinity, rodents, and diseases. Some varieties have very high protein and mineral contents, making them concentrated sources of nutrition.

Population expansion, invasion, destruction of agricultural land, and more recently, the development and spread of the use of hybrid seeds have had a profound impact on Indian communities, as well as everyone living in this hemisphere. Hybrid seeds dependent on an artificial environment of chemical fertilizers and pesticides are often promoted by multi-nationals, nation states, and development projects. A system of planting hybrid seed may mean profit for these entities but disaster for the self-sufficient indigenous farmer. Hardy native varieties of seeds are replaced by hybrids often without the capacity to withstand local conditions and which produce plants with poor nutritional value. As indigenous varieties are not planted, they may cease to exist, and the resulting genetic uniformity invites catastrophe. Also, community self-sufficiency is lost through the development of a local dependency for survival on a national economy that creates the need to purchase seed, fertilizer, and pesticides. Because of these and other factors the cycle of renewal that is essential to sustain this earth and those on the earth becomes more difficult . . . but always necessary.

Some organizations have begun to search out, save, and encourage the replanting of indigenous seeds. Native Seeds (3950 West New York Drive, Tucson, AZ 85745) makes avail-

able indigenous seed samples to those who want to maintain diversity in their gardens. For example, 58 varieties of native corn from the Southwest are available. All proceeds from the sale of seeds go toward the conservation of native crops and their wild relatives.

The Talavaya Center (P.O. Box 9289, Santa Fe, NM, 87504) also works to preserve genetic diversity through encouraging the cultivation of indigenous plants, including Hopi corn and South American grains such as amaranth and quinoa.

—S. Lobo

