

# Food – Consciousness – Food Security: Connecting the Dots

Jyoti Gogia<sup>1</sup> and Neha Sikarwar<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Associate Professor,<sup>2</sup>Research Scholar, Department of Economics, Faculty of Social Sciences, Dayalbagh Educational Institute (Deemed University), Agra, Uttar Pradesh-282005, India  
jgogia07@gmail.com<sup>1</sup>, bk.neha@hotmail.com<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

**Background:** Food security is a dynamic concept; it has been changing to integrate new ideas over the years since it was established. Mankind's future ability to feed itself is reducing due to growing population, uncertain economic conditions, rising prices of agricultural products, increasing inequalities and adverse climatic conditions. The earth is capable of producing enough food in a sustainable way but unlocking that potential and ensuring all of humanity benefits will require major transformations. Therefore, more coherent and conscious system of governance of food security is required.

**Methods:** The paper is qualitative in nature. It seeks to highlight the linkages among food, consciousness and food security through secondary data sources.

**Findings:** The paper reveals that food, consciousness and food security are interconnected. Food choices and preferences have power to affect the level of consciousness. Conscious mind leads to right path; therefore, it assists to transform human behavior to take wise decisions. The paper further expresses the conscious behavioral approach to comprehend the way to accomplish a food secure world.

**Applications:** The government and policy makers can develop conscious food system through conscious behavioral approach to attain food and nutrition security.

**Keywords:** Food, Consciousness, Food Security, Spirituality.

## Introduction

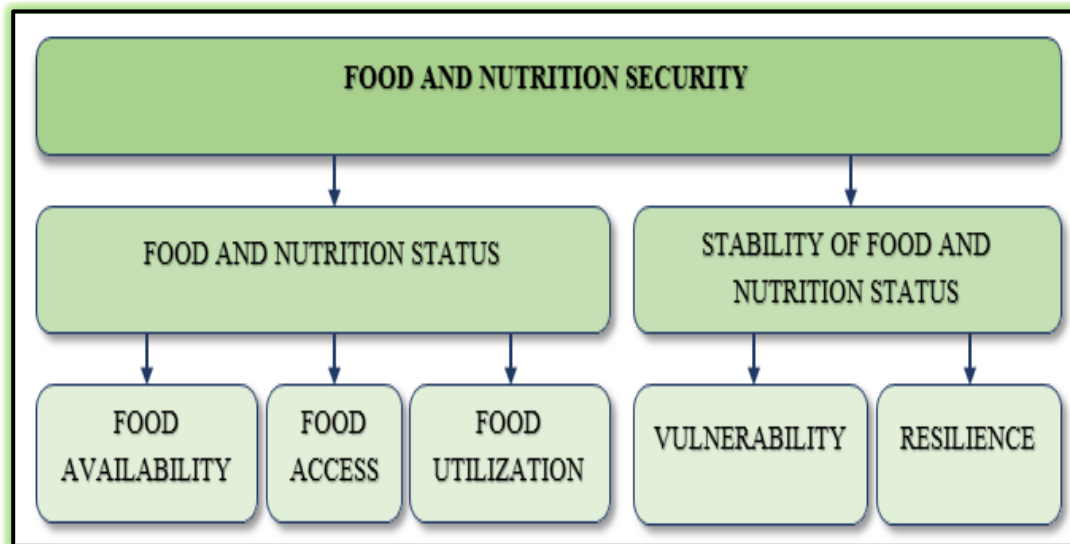
*The wonderful thing about food is you get three votes a day. Every one of them has the potential to change the world* - Michael Pollan. Hours in a day, money in one's pocket, water we drink, food we eat and similarly other resources are limited in their existence and holding. We live in a world of scarcity, the fundamental economic problem, where wants are ever increasing but resources to satisfy them are scarce. In addition to scarcity, the unequal distribution of resources is an even larger problem. Some people enjoy luxury whereas some are deprived of even basic needs. Food is one of the commonly accepted scarce and unequally distributed resources. Food is vital for life as well as a symbol of luxury. Its scarcity can result in hunger and malnutrition whereas excess food consumption leads to obesity. One billion people remain hungry every day [1-2]. By 2050, we further need to feed two billion more people [3]. India has one-third of the world's poor [4], and 21.9 per cent citizens of India fall below its official poverty line [5]. India is home to a quarter of the undernourished people in the world [6], and 194.6 million people bear hunger pangs every day [7]. Malnutrition is a serious problem hindering the development of India [8]. In such critical conditions, proper food becomes nightmare for poor. Food supply has been considered inadequate in comparison with its demand. Does this demand- supply gap really exist? At the one hand, people are dying due to hunger [6]; paradoxically, over two and a half billion people (globally) are consuming too much [9-10]. Worldwide, enough food is produced to feed the entire human population but there are certain factors responsible for existing demand-supply gap. Therefore, supply of safe, nutritious and affordable high-quality food for all to lead a healthy life is a global issue to be handled.

## Food security: a challenge

The earth provides enough to satisfy every man's needs, but not enough for every man's greed - Mahatma Gandhi. Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life [11]. Figure 1 exhibits that Food and Nutrition Security reflects two key dimensions: the

food and nutrition *status* and the *stability* of food and nutrition status. Food and nutrition status can be achieved when there is availability of sufficient quantities of food of appropriate quality; individuals are able to access adequate resources for acquiring appropriate food; and utilization of food through adequate diet to reach a state of nutritional well-being. Stability of food and nutrition status depends on vulnerability and resilience. Therefore, by reducing the magnitude of expected welfare loss and enhancing the ability to recover from such a welfare loss the stability dimension can be achieved.

Figure 1. Dimensions of Food and Nutrition Security [12]



The utmost challenges in achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are to eradicate poverty and hunger in order to maintain sustainable food security for all. The International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (1966) stressed ‘the right of everyone to adequate food’ and specified ‘the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger’. The right to adequate food was formally adopted by the World Food Summit in 1996. Despite the global acceptance of an individual’s right to adequate food and nutrition, people around the world are still chronically malnourished.

There has been a great emphasis on increasing the supply of food for achieving the goal of food security. The challenge of feeding the world’s population, estimated to exceed 9 billion by 2050 [13], in the face of changing consumption patterns, increasing non-food demand for agricultural products, declining growth in agricultural productivity, uncertainties stemming from changing weather patterns and poor governance has received a lot of attention recently.

Food security is a multi-dimensional concept and extends beyond the production and availability of food according to its demand [12]. Unequal food distribution is an issue which explains both poverty and obesity. It can be visualized as some people have food in abundance including costly items, some have enough to be nourished and rest have limited access to sufficient food. People, who can easily afford, sometimes eat abruptly without considering those who are deprived of single meal. Such kind of unconscious behavioral approach of affluent societies makes the goal of food security indistinct.

It must be one’s moral duty to make life saving goods such as food and water available to all on equity basis. By controlling greed and reducing wastages; one can help many to survive. Therefore, collective understanding and conscious behavioral approach of citizens can help to visualize the food secure world.

### Food – consciousness – food security: linkages

Food consumption is always a choice-constrained condition. People generally make unconscious decisions due to their uncontrolled desires. Consciousness is the light of awareness of an inner psychological or spiritual fact. It is an intuitively perceived knowledge. In the midst of too many (often conflicting) choices; the voice of our intuitive selves, the part of us that is innately connected to our

deepest truth and always attuned to what we need in body, mind, and soul, helps to differentiate between our needs and desires[14].

On a physical level, food may provide energy to work; on an emotional level, it could satisfy feelings of fulfillment and contentment; on a mental level, it could provide energy to concentrate better. Overall, the essence of food interacts with the spiritual level [15]. Religiously, the body is the temple of the spirit; therefore, proper diet is imperative for the spiritual growth. In a well-known quote from Consuming Passions: The Anthropology of Eating, authors Peter Farb and George Armelagos say, "Food to a large extent is what holds a society together, and eating is closely linked to deep spiritual experiences." The quality of one's action, attitude and behavior depends on the quality of his mind. Since the growth of mind depends on food, the quality of one's mind is significantly influenced by the quality of the food one consumed. In other words, the mind feeds on the food consumed [16].

At a spiritual level the Universe is made up of the three subtle basic components (*trigunās*) namely *Sattva*, *Raja* and *Tama*. Table 1 describes the characteristics of each of these components.

Table 1. Subtle Basic Components

Components	Characteristics	Adjectives	Examples
Sattva	Purity and knowledge	Sāttvik	Sāttvik man – lives in service of society with no expectation of recognition or reward or any ulterior motive
Raja	Action and passion	Rājasik	Rājasik man – lives more for personal gain and achievement
Tama	Ignorance and inertia	Tāmasik	Tāmasik man – has no problem about stepping on other's toes to get ahead or harming society

Source: Spiritual Science Research Foundation [17]

The subtle basic *Sattva* component is nearest to divinity. Hence, its predominance in a person is characterized by happiness, satisfaction, virtues like patience, perseverance, ability to forgive, spiritual yearning etc. The predominance of the subtle basic *Tama* component in a person is reflected by laziness, greed, attachment to worldly matters etc. and the subtle basic *Raja* component provides fuel to the other two, i.e. brings about the action. So depending on whether a person is predominantly *sāttvik* or *tāmasik* the subtle basic *Raja* component will bring about actions pertaining to *Sattva* or *Tama*. Therefore, people's reactions in different situations, decisions and choices have influenced by the relative predominance of the three components [17].

Food choices primarily affect the predominance of the subtle components. When we consume spiritually pure items, we absorb positive energy which benefits us in our daily lives and in spiritual practices. On the other hand, when we consume spiritually negative foods, we imbibe black energy which has a strong negative impact on all aspects of our life [18]. Therefore, if one would like to be social, eco friendly and spiritual then it is required to increase the level of *Sattva* component. Having meat as a part of meal does not support by some religions. Apart from spiritual angle, eating animals is also one of the reasons for food insecurity. The massive increase in meat consumption in recent decades has led to spikes in the price of grain, used for animal feed, as well as leading to widespread deforestation and pressure on agricultural land, and has contributed to the obesity epidemic. Moreover, Carnivorous diets add extra pressure on water resource as it takes 20-50 times the amount of water to produce one kilogram of meat than one kilogram of vegetables [19]. By avoiding meat even for a day or two each week, people could help to ease some of these pressures. The increase in meat eating is one of

many factors underlying the global food crises. By adopting a vegetarian diet, even for just a few meals a week is something that most people could manage easily with positive health impacts [20].

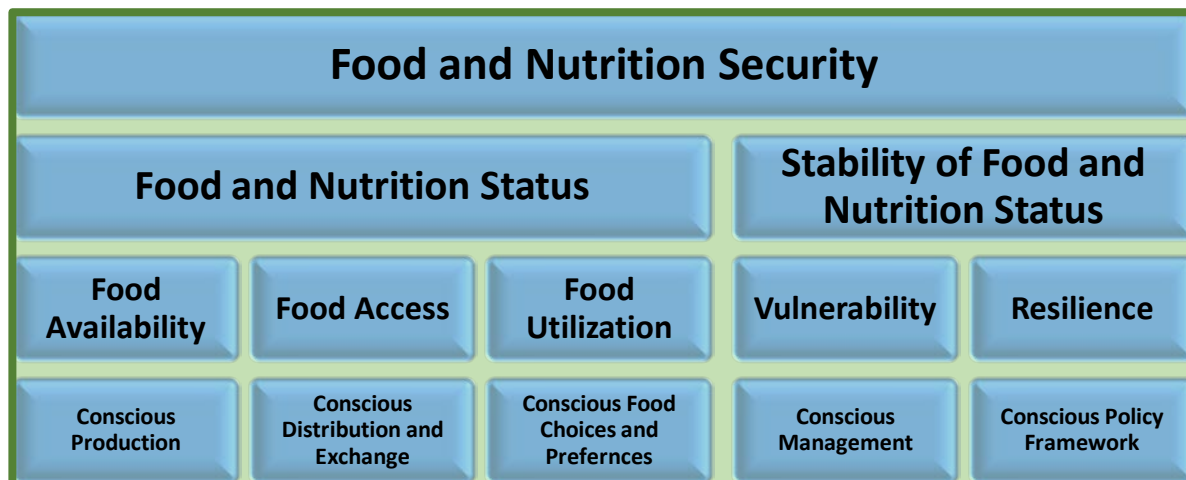
Religiously, the motive of life is to elevate oneself from materialism to spiritualism. From a spiritual perspective, the purpose of a human birth is to attain God-Realization. The key difference between human beings and animals is that only human beings have developed minds and intellects that can be channeled towards *sattvik* activities to propel themselves towards God-Realization. Accordingly, it is spiritually recommended that people do not copy what carnivorous animals do and eat [21]. Conscious behavior guides to take wise food choices. Conversely, food choices help to raise the level of consciousness. Finally, wise food choices and high level of consciousness collectively facilitate to accomplish the desired level of food security.

### Conscious behavior: an approach towards a food secure world

Even though the world food production has increased, it has not necessarily translated into food security across the world. Therefore, to tackle the issue of food security, conscious behavioral approach is required. Behavior-based interventions can be much more cost-effective. Citizens must display greater restraint and understand the impact of their behavior on themselves, economy, society and environment [22].

Figure 2 exhibits the conscious behavioral approach to attain food and nutrition security. Food security starts with the *conscious production* which makes sure the adequate availability of food for all. It is vital to satisfy the rising global demand for food in a sustainable manner. This is an essential rather than a sufficient condition for food security. In addition, people need enough resources to feed themselves or they need sufficient income to purchase food they cannot grow. Finally, the food production must be conducted in a way that sustains the environment it depends upon [23-24].

Figure 2. A Conscious Behavioral Approach for Food and Nutrition Security



The major change in cropping pattern that has been observed is the substantial shift from the cultivation of food grain to cash crops. It is believed that cash crops help to increase the level of income of farmers and consequently the food security. But, there is a significant negative relationship between the extent of household’s cash crops farming and measures of food access, availability, and utilization [25]. Therefore, conscious decisions have to be taken while determining what crops should be grown, the area to be allocated to different crops, and deciding cropping sequences.

A growing interest in healthy and nutritious food is reflected in the increasing consumer trend of organic food purchases. Genetically Modified (GM) crops are being appreciated by many consumers and producers. There are three possible pathways how GM crops could impact food security. First, GM crops could contribute to increase food production, and thus improve the availability of food at global and local levels. Second, GM crops could affect food safety and food quality. Third, GM crops could influence

the farmers' economic access to food [26]. Therefore, conscious efforts of producers, consumers and policy makers are vital to attain self - sufficiency in food production.

It has been observed that hunger has been caused by improper food distribution rather than by insufficient food production. Providing sufficient income to people to access food is as important as increasing the overall supply of food. Access to income-generating activities is a major determinant of the ability of households to purchase food [12]. Overall, there is enough food for all, but unequal distribution of resources makes few to live in abundance and many to be deprived of their basic food requirements. Resources need to be *allocated in a conscious way* i.e. more efficiently, equitably, and with less waste. Food preferences depend on desires, status, culture, religion and many other factors. Thorstein Veblen (1899) in his work '*Conspicuous Consumption*' noted that food connotes class and privilege. Food has become a parameter to magistrate societal supremacy and eminent affairs, it acts as an eating code that defines an individual's place within society and aids in maintaining and improving it [27]. Learning the doctrine of eating is necessary for spiritual growth.

Spiritually sound nutrition aims to make one live with a conscious awareness of the unity of all life and to feel happy, healthy, and in harmony with all beings. Therefore, *conscious food choices* (voluntary simplicity) can establish the balance between individual's satisfaction and food sustainability. *Conscious exchange* can also help in this direction. Wendell Berry wrote, "Eating is an agricultural act". With approximately 800 million people suffering from food insecurity, one out of every three people burdened with some form of malnutrition, and a saddled global food system, the view that "eating is also an ethical act" resonates well [28]. The people must realize the sense of social responsibility. Giving up one conspicuously desired item can possibly feed a person, and facilitate to step towards more even distribution.

Lavishness somehow results in dearth. According to Global Food report, 30 per cent to 50 per cent of food produced around the world never makes it on to a plate. In the UK, as much as 30 per cent of vegetables are not harvested due to their failure to meet retailers' exacting standards on physical appearance while up to half of the food that is bought in Europe and the US is thrown away by consumers. The phenomenon of food waste is very complex and unfortunately reveals a growing trend. The food that has been wasted and lost can be used if *consciously managed* to feed the world's growing population as well as for those who are living in hunger and starvation. In this regard, the subjective as well as collective behaviors – both conscious and sustainable – assume a decisive importance in the maintenance of a safe and adequate diet for the population as a whole [29]. While eating food is characterized by a complexity of habits and rituals; the wastage of food is largely invisible. Moreover, food waste strikes many consumers and stakeholders as an inequitable and unjust "luxury" that humanity cannot afford in light of the challenge to provide food for more people with less and more stressed resources. Wasting food is an unconscious decision therefore; reducing waste is one of the necessary actions for more sustainable food security [30].

By returning to the question "Do we have enough resources to feed the earth's human population?" The answer is "It depends on how we manage these resources. If we demand higher calorie meat-based diets, allow fertile land to degrade, release excessive amounts of nutrients and pesticides into the environment, overdraft groundwater, waste valuable food, and promote unsustainable irrigation projects, we are likely to hit critical resource limits [23]. A *conscious policy framework*, starting from the farm to fork, is required to achieve the goal of food security that includes training to farmers, developing efficient markets for distribution, educating consumers, empowering women, managing resources sustainably and promoting risk preventing and risk coping strategies. Ultimately, the issue of food security is as much about people as about finite resources.

## Conclusion

It can be mockery to tell someone they have the right to food when there is nobody with the duty to provide them with food - Onora O' Neill. The world's human population is growing and it is predicted to keep growing. More people means we will need more resources to sustain. The food is one of the most attention-getting issues in our society today, spanning the continuum from underfed, starving

populations and famine relief, to the race to find a solution for the obesity epidemic [15]. Food, the basis for our survival, interconnects us with all of life- physical, intellectual and spiritual.

The unconscious food choices result in health disturbances, economic instability, social inequality, environment degradation and food insecurity. Food security has turned out as a prime task in every country's agenda. Food is present in sufficient quantity but unconscious behavior at different levels is making food security issue more complex to manage. An individual has power to control lifestyle choices. Thus, a conscious revolution is needed to move towards a food secure world.

## References

1. V.B. Athreya, R. Rukmani, R.V. Bhavani, G. Anuradha, R. Gopinath, A.S. Velan. Report on the state of food insecurity in urban India. *World Food Programmed*. 2010, 1-214.
2. World Population Day: A Connection between Global Warming and Overpopulation. <http://www.huffingtonpost.in/entry/world-population-dayhigh>. Date Accessed: 11/07/2011.
3. J. Cribb. The Coming Famine: The global food crisis and what we can do to avoid it. *CSIRO*. 2010
4. The State of the Poor: Where are the Poor and where they are Poorest? [http://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/document/State\\_of\\_the\\_poor\\_paper\\_April17.pdf](http://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/document/State_of_the_poor_paper_April17.pdf). Date accessed: 01/10/2013.
5. Government of India. *Poverty Estimates for 2011-12*. New Delhi: Planning Commission. 2013, 1-10.
6. Food and agriculture organization of the United Nations. *The State of Food Insecurity in the World*. 2015.
7. India food banking. *Hunger in India*. 2016.
8. P. Kaur. Food security in India-some issues and challenges. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Management Studies*. 2014; 4(11), 12-22.
9. Environmental change institute. *Food Research*. ECI, University of Oxford. 2016.
10. A. Mukherjee. Food insecurity: a growing threat in Asia. *UNESCAP-Asian and Pacific Centre for Agricultural Engineering and Machinery*. 2008, 1-11.
11. Food and agriculture organization of the United Nations. Rome. 1996.
12. H. Pieters, A. Guariso, A. Vandeplass. Conceptual framework for the analysis of the determinants of food and nutrition security. *Food Secure*. 2013, 1-51.
13. World population projected to reach 9.7 billion by 2050. *United Nations: Department of Economic and Social Affairs*. 2015.
14. D. Cyndi. Spiritual nutrition: how the foods you eat affects your mind, body and spirit? *Conscious Lifestyle Magazine*. 2017.
15. Food energy and consciousness. <http://foodandspirit.com/food-energy-and-consciousness/>. Date accessed: 30/11/2008.
16. You Are What You Eat: My Tips for Making Conscious Food Choices. <http://colettebaronreid.com/2010/06/25/you-are-what-you-eat-my-tips-for-making-conscious-food-choices/>. Date accessed: 25/06/2010.
17. Spiritual Science Research Foundation. <http://www.spiritualresearchfoundation.org/spiritual-research/the-universe/sattva-rajata-ma>. Date accessed: 10/04/2012.
18. Spiritual Science Research Foundation. *How do food and drinks affect us?* <http://www.spiritualresearchfoundation.org/spiritual-living/health-effects-of-food-and-drinks/>. Date accessed: 08/06/2017.
19. Food waste. [www.theguardian.com/environment/2013/nov/11/food-waste-ban-landfill-campaign](http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2013/nov/11/food-waste-ban-landfill-campaign). Date accessed: 20/11/2014.
20. International development select committee. *Global Food Security*. 2013, 1-167.
21. Spiritual Science Research Foundation. *Non-Vegetarian Vs Vegetarian Diet*. <http://www.spiritualresearchfoundation.org/spiritual-living/health-effects-of-food-and-drinks/veg-or-non-veg-diets/>. Date accessed: 11/06/2017.
22. Magdy A. Hefny. Changing behavior as a policy tool for enhancing food security. 2012, 1-15.
23. D. McLaughlin, W. Kinzelbach. Food security and sustainable resource management. *Water Resource Research an AGU*. 2015; 51(7), 4966-4985.

24. Can food production be sustainably increased? *The Geography Magazine*. <https://www.aber.ac.uk/en/media/departmental/caa/food.indd.pdf>. Date accessed: 10/06/ 2017.
25. Anderman Tal Lee, Roseline Remans, Stephen A. Wood, Kyle DeRosa, Ruth S. DeFries. Synergies and tradeoffs between cash crop production and food security: A case study in rural Ghana. *Food Security*. 2014; 6(4), 541-554.
26. Q. Matin, K. Shahzad. Genetically modified crops and food security. PLOS One Published online 2013.
27. T. Veblen. The theory of the leisure class: an economic study of institutions. New York: Random House. 1899.
28. Jassica Fanzo. Ethical issues for human nutrition in the context of global food security and sustainable development. *Global Food Security*. 2015; 7, pp- 15-23.
29. Guglielmo Bonaccorsi. Food and human behavior: consumption waste and sustainability. *Journal of Public Health Research*. 2015; 4(2), 606.
30. Jessica Aschemann-Witzel, Ilona de Hooge, Pegah Amani, Tino Bech-Larsen, Marije Oostindje. Consumer-related food waste: causes and potential for action. *Sustainability*. 2015; 7(6), 6457-6477.

*The Publication fee is defrayed by Indian Society for Education and Environment (www.iseeadyar.org)*

**Cite this article as:**

Jyoti Gogia and Neha Sikarwar. Food – consciousness – food security: connecting the dots. Indian Journal of Economics and Development. Vol 5 (5), May 2017.