

INTRODUCTION

India is known the world over as The Home of Spices. Spices constitute an important group of agricultural commodities which are virtually indispensable in the culinary art. They also play a significant role in our national economy and so also in the national economies of several spice producing exporting and importing countries. For instance, during the year 1996 97 India earned foreign exchange to the tune of over Rs. 1180 crores through the export of about 219 400 mt of different spices. Besides huge quantities of spices are also being consumed within the country for flavouring foods and are also used in medicine pharmaceutical perfumery cosmetics and several other industries. According to the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) there is no clear cut division between spices and condiments and as such they have been clubbed together. The term spices and condiments applies to such natural plant or vegetable products or mixtures thereof in whole or ground form as are used for imparting flavour aroma and piquancy to and for seasoning of foods.



There are over 80 spices grown in different parts of the world and 50 spices are grown in India. Spices may comprise different plant components or parts such as Spices are well known as appetisers and are considered essential in the culinary

art all over the world. They add tang and flavour to otherwise insipid foods. Some of them also possess antioxidant properties while others are used as preservatives in some foods like pickles and chutneys etc. Some spices also possess strong antimicrobial and antibiotic activities.

Many of them possess medicinal properties and have a profound effect on human health since they affect many functional processes. For instance, spices intensify salivary flow and the secretion of amylase neuraminic acid and hexosamines. They favour the cleansing of the oral cavity from food adhesion and bacteria they help to check infection and caries and protect the mucous membrane against thermic mechanical and chemical irritation. Spices increase the secretion of saliva rich in ptyalin which facilitates starch digestion in the stomach rendering the meals which are rich in carbohydrates more digestible.