



Millets in the Right Context

Everything that was once made with maida – biscuits, cakes, breads, noodles, etc., is now being made with millets so that more profit can be made by positioning it as healthy. But as we now know, good health isn't about replacing x with y, it is about understanding the context and then if needed reintroducing it in our daily diets.

Sometimes, we begin a reintroduction of all things ancient in our diet without a context. Millets have gone through something like that. I could write a whole book on their goodness but there's a good chance that you may already know it all – they are rich in micronutrients, they are dense in fibre, they can help regulate blood sugars, blood

pressure and even help with weight loss. And with that information, millets are the new, and breaks my heart to say this, maida. Everything that was once made with maida – biscuits, cakes, breads, noodles, etc., is now being made with millets so that more profit can be made by positioning it as healthy. But as we now know, good health isn't about replacing x with y, it is



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Season	Millets	How & when	Heritage dishes
Winter	Bajra (Pearl millet)	a. Khichadi - Lunch or Dinner b. Puri/Chakli - Evening snack c. Laddoo - Evening snack	• Kadaboli (Chakli) - mix of jowar & bajra flour • Bajra lasan laddoo
	Raajgira (Amaranth)	a. Thalipeeth - Breakfast b. Laddoo - Evening snack	• Thalipeeth (Amaranth & Banyard millet)
	Kuttu (Buckwheat)	a. Puri - Breakfast b. Halwa - Breakfast or Evening snack	
Summer	Jowar	a. Bhakri - Lunch or Dinner b. Thalipeeth - Breakfast	• Red pumpkin spicy gharje (Jowar flour) • Thalipeeth (Jowar & Rice)
	Samoke chawal (Banyard millet)	a. Upma - Breakfast b. Khandvi - Evening snacks	• Khandvi (Samo)
	Kangni (Foxtail millet)	a. Khichadi - Lunch or Dinner b. Upma - Breakfast	
Monsoon	Ragi	a. Sattva - Breakfast b. Dosa - Breakfast or Dinner c. Laddoo - Evening snacks	• Ragi laddoo • Vadi (Ragi flour) • Ragi dosa

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As a Maharashtrian, I have grown up eating *bhakri* or millet roti for one meal daily. In the farming communities, it is *bhakri* for lunch. In working Marathi households, it's typically *bhakri* for dinner as they taste nicer when consumed hotter. Also, because we now lack the skill or competence that is required to make them in a way where they taste great even when they are no longer hot.

This is a practical, sensible adaptation. One rooted in ground reality. Adaptations of all good things have to be thought through or else they are #epicfail. Anyone who works in policy making understands the 'glocal' concept. Just because it's a great policy that worked wonders somewhere, doesn't mean you can pick it up and dump it here. You will have to make revisions or adapt only a part of it, so that the outcomes are as you desired.

If the outcome you wish out of millets is – lean body, great figure, better Hb levels, lower blood sugar, blood pressure, etc., then replacing all things maida with it, won't help. Nor will it help that you now have your *gauc* with millet chips, your stew with millet noodles or your veggies with millet pasta or the lettuce with pearl millet.

It means that you must learn how to roll a *bhakri* and have it with your *sabzi*. Or you pick on an

easier recipe and make a ragi dosa instead. Or you could make the easy lassi, *kheers* or *laddoos* with it. The problem is that we want the millets without the baggage they come with – the labour, the sugar, the ghee, the pulses, etc. Only because these other ingredients are not the flavour of the month. But that's not how digestion works. This baggage that it comes with is actually agents that make it easier for your body to assimilate the goodness of millets. Without this, it is just another trend that is waiting to get replaced by another.

Practical Guide to Eating Millets the Right Way

Eating seasonal not only ensures easy availability of the nutrients at just the time they are needed, but it also ties in beautifully with farming practices and crop cycles.

Eat millets with the right food combinations

Combining millets with pulses, spices, fats, etc., ensures that limiting amino acids are compensated for, protein quality/ digestibility is improved and the effect of anti-nutrients is reduced. Millets which are particularly hard to digest, like bajra, even come with rules – always have with a dollop of *makhan* or a teaspoon extra of ghee and never without jaggery. One can't but marvel at *dadis* and *nanis ke gharelu nuskhe* and *saral, sasta* and *sundar* methods of turning every meal into a joy, long after it's been consumed.

Small Grain, Huge Impact

Little Millet Benefits



Eat millets in all forms

The diversity in the ways we can consume millets is staggering. The germination and fermentation for satva, kheer or porridge, the soaking and heating for *khichdis*, *bhakris* and *laddoos*, also ensured that there is no taste fatigue or boredom while eating nutritious, healthy food.

Don't replace all grains with millets

Lastly, know that millets are not a replacement for rice and wheat. At least not a complete replacement. Again, it comes to sustainability and common sense. So, continue with the rice and/or wheat for normal

consumption but don't forget the weekly *bhakri*, and the seasonal *laddoos* and porridge.

The magic is in the process

Nostalgia, like memory, is a funny thing. It can hyper focus on one aspect and miss out on the big picture. We can forget how this one detail fitted into the big scheme of things. A bit like that has happened to not just millets but all things "ancient", be it the food - seeds, spices, etc., or practices like fasting, *kriyas*, etc. And when we forget how it fits in the larger scheme of things, we reduce it to what it is not, a miracle molecule or worse, a miracle cure.

Basically, if you have something to say *jo dil ko chhoo jaye*, you have to say it right. Similarly, the *tareeka* or method or style or process is as critical for the individual ingredients too, to deliver the promise of health and happiness. And that's why cooking or cuisine is the mainstay of all ancient foods and practices. It teaches you a step-by-step guide to using the ingredient to its full potential, both in terms of taste and efficacy. Culture teaches you how frequently to eat it, celebration or routine, and even guides you what to mix it with, ghee, milk, jaggery or rice, based on the occasion. Climate teaches you how to store it and what time of the day to eat it. Essentially, it is difficult to separate culture, climate, cuisine from one another and without fully utilising them, you stand to only lose from all things ancient. □

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