

## FOLKLORE AND MILLETS: A CULTURAL CONNECTION

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**Abstract:**

*Millets are staple crops grown and consumed across the world. But in the wake of industrialization and green revolution millets production have been decreased. Wheat and maize have taken its place by pushing it into the backstage. But it is found that millets have the capacity to handle the critical challenges in the future such as food, fuel, malnutrition, health, and climate change. there is a growing awareness of the need to move to healthier, more accessible, and inexpensive diets that include millets. This paper investigates the cultural connection between the millets and folklores. It is seen that millets are integral part of celebrating harvest festival. It further explores the festivals and folklores which celebrates the bountiful harvest in different regions of India. By celebrating these festivals it tells the historicity of millets as mentioned in the different religions and will enlighten the present societies . This paper explains folklores and its cultural bond with millet and its importance.*

**Keywords:** *Millets, cultural connection, folklores, harvest*

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India is an agricultural country because two-thirds of its population is engaged in agricultural activities. Agriculture is a primary activity, which produces most of the food for people hence India is a global agricultural powerhouse. Agriculture is the foundation of the Indian economy. The major population of India mostly depends on agriculture for their livelihood and agriculture contributes to 40 percent of the total GDP of the country. India's food security depends on producing cereal crops, as well as increasing its production of fruits, vegetables to meet the demands of a growing population with rising incomes. If we trace back the history, we understand that three to five decades ago millets were major crop produced and consumed in India. Millets were the main food on the plate. But according to 2014 National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) report, the plate share of millets has declined significantly in favour of wheat, rice, and processed foods. The cultivation area of millets has been decreased as compared to other produce like wheat and rice.

It is found that millets have the capacity to handle the critical challenges in the future such as food, fuel, malnutrition, health, and climate change. With India's growing malnutrition problem, awareness of the need, to move to healthier, more accessible, and inexpensive diet is increased. It is acknowledged that our own product, millets can prevent people from numerous non-communicable lifestyle diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, and cardiovascular diseases. The Government of India recognised its need and has launched several initiatives to promote

the cultivation of millets, such as the National Food Security Mission (NFSM) and the Millets Mission. As proposed by India to the Food and Agriculture Organization, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution declaring 2023 as the International Year of Millets. The main purpose of this mission is to raise public awareness of the health benefits of millets.

For centuries, millets were the staple crops in India and in many other countries worldwide, including India, China, and Nigeria grown in semiarid tropics, as other food crops cannot be cultivated in that terrain due to low rainfall and poor soil fertility. They have higher nutrient content as compared to major cereal crops and ensure food and nutrition security. Moreover, they are tolerant to extreme geographical (weather) conditions. It is environmentally sustainable and can improve biodiversity. Millet has played an important role in Indian agriculture and society for thousands of years. Indian farmers have been growing and consuming millets which are rich source of protein, fatty acids, fibre, and vitamin B.

Folklore is oral history which is shared and preserved by the people of the nation. This includes music, stories, history, legends, and myths, they are usually passed through generations to generations. This encapsulates the traditional beliefs, customs and stories of communities which enlighten us about their lifestyle. Folklores have been essential part of our cultural and societal life. In a same way millets have been core food for many communities across the world. In many societies, millets are linked with folklores and myths of the people. There are traditions in several areas of celebrating some rituals and festivals at the time of sowing, harvesting, and processing of millets. These rituals are meant to pray to God and seek His blessings and ensure a good harvest. In some African communities' millets are believed to have magical properties and they celebrate its harvest. It is assumed that it can bring good luck and prosperity. There is a famous African folktale about a farmer who tames the snake who was destroying his millet crop. (web)

Bharat cherishes the culture of festival and embraces the religious enthusiasm in its society. If we go back to history, Indians festivals are most ancient. Indians believes in thanking the bountiful nature for offering different crops and millets in our lives and feels blessed. All Indians are nature worshippers and lovers, so the harvest festival is celebrated in all the 29 states in different local languages with different names. Makar Sankranti is the oldest festival celebrated in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Haryana, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, West Bengal and North-East states. People cook millet-based dishes and offering a new crop harvest with dance and music or bhajans. In Punjab and Haryana people celebrate Lohri, they dance and sing around the fire and thank God for abundant harvest.

Millet is the central theme in varied folk culture. "Bajre Da Sitta" is a famous Punjabi folk song sung at traditional weddings. The theme of song is the harvest which praises the abundance of the crop of millets (bajra). It expresses gratitude for the ample harvest and hope for a good harvest in the future. In the Indian state of Kerala, 'Kuthiyottam' festival related to millet is celebrated in honour of Lord Vishnu. While celebration young boys dance and

offerings made to the deity prepared out of millet.

In Sacorda the women of Udhalashe have been thanking stars (God) for protecting their millet crop. This tradition is going on from their ancestors till date. They express their gratitude in the form of 'katyo' dance and nature theme folk songs. While describing songs sung at the festival, Tulshi Kalekar a folklorist said, 'The songs describe floral blooms as well as the natural grace of the area in front of the secret pedestal that holds the holy basil. Our songs also praise folk deities, requesting them to take part in the performance'(Web TOI, City Goa).

These folklores showcase not only the importance of the millet crop in our life, but its rich nutritious values required for the growth of our young generation. The songs highlight millets historical and cultural significance and its role in nourishing the strong generations worldwide. These folklores always remind us of our intelligent ancestors and our cultural heritage. They help us to understand the rituals and the history of communities. These folklores play very crucial role in narrating the stories about the harvest and various crops which are healthy and necessary for our lives. Through the folklores it tries to make the people aware about the culture, traditions, customs and our food items.

### **Conclusion:**

Millets have always been important ingredient of Indian culture and tradition. Millet is intertwined with many cultural festivals and religion. The rich history of our traditional millet is narrated through folklores and appeal the listeners to make use of millet for better and balanced life. Hence the cultural connection between the folklores and millet is very old but now we need to understand it for good health and sustainable development for our future generation.

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