

Original Article

SHIRIDHANYA MILLETS IN INDIAN LITERATURE AND THEIR RELEVANCE TO SUSTAINABLE NUTRITION SCIENCE

Aaysha Tahera Khan ¹ 

¹ Assistant Professor, Government MLB Girls PG College, Kila Bhawan, Indore, India



ABSTRACT

In India, the traditional concept of food is related to the basis of health, moral life, and economic goodwill rather than a biological need. Ved, Ayurveda, Puran and traditional folk, all Indian traditional literature, mention millets such as barley, foxtail millets, barnyard millets, and finger millet. These grains were precious for their unique qualities, such as a good nutritional profile, being environmentally friendly and their support in maintaining population health in adverse conditions. The term shiridhanya is used in the context of traditional Indian agriculture as a specific category of grains that are nutrition-rich and good for health. The word shiridhanya is a Sanskrit word made up of the word shiri and dhanya, where “shiri” means prosperity/wealth and “dhanya” means grain. These grains were precious for their unique qualities, such as a good nutritional profile, being environmentally friendly and their support in maintaining population health in adverse conditions. In the present scenario, worldwide issues related to altered climate, drop in dietary diversity, micronutrient deficiency as well as lifestyle-related disease have revealed the importance and significance of traditional food. Nutrition science continuously focuses on millets as climate tolerant crops, nutritional rich such as: high fiber, high micronutrients and bioactive compounds as well as their fewer utilization of natural resources than dominant serial crops. The present paper focuses on millets as traditional Indian food and their contemporary relation to modern nutrition science.

Keywords: Shiridhanya, Millets, Indian, Literature, Relevance

INTRODUCTION

Indian traditional culture continuously focuses on the inter relationship of food, health, society, and natural environment. If we talk about philosophical and medical books, diet is considered as necessary for physical, mental and social wellbeing. Traditional Indian diet is closely related to regional ecology which was mostly the locally cultivated grains like millet. Those scenarios were changed and the refined cereal has taken off its place. The modern culture in which the use of refined cereal increases, contributes to nutritional imbalance and environment degradation. Due to increased prevalence of non communicable disease and climate related agriculture stress has demanded renewed scientific engagement with the traditional food system. In this context millets, which is repeatedly referenced in Indian literature, provide valuable insights for contemporary sustainable nutrition discourse.

Millets are ancient grain; it has been a main part of the staple diet of many communities in the world. Millets are found in works of art from several eras and regions, including religious compositions, folk songs, sculptures, and paintings. Millets are small seeds, nutritionally they are considered cereals. In Indian culture millet is the indigenous and staple food crop. However, their cultivation

*Corresponding Author:

Email address: Aaysha Tahera Khan (aayshatkhan@gmail.com)

Received: 22 December 2025; **Accepted:** 20 January 2026; **Published** 28 February 2026

DOI: [10.29121/granthaalayah.v14.i2SCE.2026.6767](https://doi.org/10.29121/granthaalayah.v14.i2SCE.2026.6767)

Page Number: 185-187

Journal Title: International Journal of Research -GRANTHAALAYAH

Journal Abbreviation: Int. J. Res. Granthaalayah

Online ISSN: 2350-0530, **Print ISSN:** 2394-3629

Publisher: Granthaalayah Publications and Printers, India

Conflict of Interests: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Authors' Contributions: Each author made an equal contribution to the conception and design of the study. All authors have reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript for publication.

Transparency: The authors affirm that this manuscript presents an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study. All essential aspects have been included, and any deviations from the original study plan have been clearly explained. The writing process strictly adhered to established ethical standards.

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and utilisation in India have gradually declined over the past three decades because of various reasons like the green revolution and wheat and rice replaced them.

Shridhanya millets: Grains are categorized into three groups, namely Positive, Neutral, and Negative. The Millet variety of grains falls under the Positive and Neutral categories. The Positive Millet Grains, which possess a dietary fiber content ranging from 8% to 12.5%, include Foxtail (Navane), Barnyard (Oodalu), Araka (Kodo), Little (Samai), and Brown Top (Korale). On the other hand, Pearl (Sajje), Finger (Ragi), Proso (Baragu), Great Millet (White Jowar), and Corn are classified as neutral grains, with a slightly lower fiber content and fewer nutrients. The consumption of positive millet foods is often considered miraculous, so they are called "Siri Dhanya" millets.

Foxtail millets (Kakum): The consumption of foxtail millets is associated with a high dietary fiber intake, as well as significant amounts of iron and copper. Additionally, it has been shown to reduce levels of bad cholesterol and strengthen the immune system.

Browntop Millets (Andu korralu): Browntop millets possess an alkaline nature, which contributes to their ease of digestion. Furthermore, they exhibit hydrating properties and act as prebiotic feeding microflora. Magnesium content in these millets reduces the risk of heart attacks, while also preventing cardiovascular disease. In addition, they are both gluten-free and non-allergenic, with high protein content.

Little Millets (Kutki): Little millets are a rich source of B-vitamins, as well as minerals such as calcium, iron, zinc, and potassium. These millets have been shown to facilitate weight loss and are an ideal component of dishes such as Pongal or Kheer.

Kodo Millets: Kodo millets are known for their easy digestibility and their rich phytochemical and antioxidant content. Consumption of these millets has been linked to a lower incidence of lifestyle diseases.

Barnyard Millets (Sanwa): Barnyard millets are high-fibre millets that are ideal for those looking to lose weight. Additionally, they are a rich source of calcium and phosphorus, and exhibit a good antioxidant profile.

REPRESENTATION OF MILLETS IN INDIAN LITERATURE

Indian traditional literature represents millets, for example, in Vedic literature, barley (Yava) as primary grain used for nourishment, in ayurvedic literature such as charaka samhita and sushruta samhita described millets as Trundhanya (grains which produced from grass like plant), Kudhanya (grain which have less value in grow), Kshudra (small/not important), Tucchadhanya (grains which are not staple food and used for pet animal). Chakra Samhita represents koradusah (kodo millets), shyamakah (barnyard millets) as sweet in taste, light to digest, increases Vata, reduces kapha and pitta. Vagbhatt also represents millets as a cooling and light grain.

NUTRITIONAL SIGNIFICANCE OF MILLETS: CONTEMPORARY EVIDENCE

Modern nutritional Science research confirms the health benefits described in traditional literature about millets. Millets are rich in dietary fibre and minerals such as iron, calcium, and magnesium. They have a low glycaemic index, making them suitable for the prevention and management of diabetes (ICMR). Research and studies indicate that regular consumption of millets reduces the risk of heart disease, obesity, and metabolic disorders.

SUSTAINABLE NUTRITION SCIENCE AND MILLETS

Sustainable nutrition science covers two goals of the United Nations sustainable development goal that is zero hunger and climate action. Millets have the quality of promoting the health of human beings by their unique nutritional composition, and on the other hand it also promote the health of the environment because millets are climate-friendly crops; they require too little water for growth, and they can thrive on low-fertility soil and have no requirement for chemicals.

INTEGRATING TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE WITH MODERN SCIENCE

The current revival of millets demonstrates the relevance of Indian wisdom in the modern era. In today's sustainable science, eating less, meaning a balanced diet, eating seasonally, and living in harmony with nature, is fully aligned with ancient Indian wisdom. Combining the experiences described in the Indian knowledge tradition with the latest research offers a powerful solution to future problems like food shortages.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that traditional Indian knowledge emphasises the connection between health, diet and nature, in which millets play an important role. The dietary benefits described in traditional knowledge are now being validated by modern science. The benefits and qualities of millets have made it increasingly important to promote millets, which are beneficial for human health

as well as the environment. If we combine old knowledge and new science to create a food system that is in keeping with our traditions and protects our future.

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