

MILLETS - The Miracle Grains

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Gods Own Crops, as they are called in the Deccan Development Society, millets are truly miracle grains. India cultivates a total of 143 million hectares of farmland of which 92 million ha is rainfed, forming nearly 65% of all arable land in the country. They are the mainstay of agriculture, diet and cultural systems of these regions. These rainfed crops which are mainly millets support 40% of the country's population. They contribute an incredible 44% of the total foodgrains produced in the country. More than two thirds of the country's livestock live in millet regions.

Most millet fields are inherently biodiverse. The famous Baranaja cropping systems of the Himalayas, Saat Dhan in Rajasthan and the Pannendu Pantalu of the Deccan are living examples of the vibrant biodiversity that surrounds millet farming. Since much of millet farming is ecological, it generates a unique phenomenon called 'uncultivated foods' which shores up the food and nutritional security for the poor. The recent analysis of millets of farming systems has come to the amazing conclusion that millet farming saves nearly six million litres of water per acre, a bonanza for the water starved times we are living in. They can stand up to the most modern crisis of them all, the climate change. Seen from any angle, millets shine forth as miracle grains.

The film Millets, the Miracle Grains, made by the dalit peasant women filmmakers of the DDS Community Media Trust is an eloquent video tribute to millets, undermined by the dominant grains and the politics that surround them. This film is unique in the sense that the farmers who made it are themselves cultivators and consumers of millets. Therefore, from their authentic understanding of the role of millets in food and nutrition sovereignty, the film-makers pan across the millet landscape to press home the point that the humble millets are not so humble after all. Millets show us the way out of our food, fodder, nutrition and water crisis, because they are sturdy enough to grow on the poorest lands of the very poor people. They alone can withstand the harshest of climates in the arid and semi arid regions, and continue to offer food and fodder security for the multitudes of our population.