

New Era for Indian Sports Millets: A Sustainable Ancient Superfood for the Modern Society

The launch of Khelo Bharat Niti-2025 marks a significant milestone in India's sporting journey. As the nation steadily rises on the global sports stage, this policy serves as a much-needed roadmap for fostering a sports-centric culture across all sections of society. It reflects the government's commitment to not just creating medal-winning athletes but building a nation that embraces sports as a tool for discipline, health, unity, and national pride.

At its core, Khelo Bharat Niti-2025 emphasizes grassroots development, recognizing that world-class athletes are not built overnight but nurtured from the ground up. One of the most notable features of the policy is its integration of sports into school curricula, making physical education a mainstream subject. This is a progressive move, aiming to shift the narrative that academics and athletics must compete for attention. Instead, they can co-exist and support the holistic development of the youth.

The policy also focuses on identifying and grooming talent from rural and underrepresented regions. Historically, some of India's finest athletes have come from villages and small towns, often with limited access to training or infrastructure. Khelo Bharat Niti-2025 proposes talent scouting programs, mobile coaching units, and district-level competitions to ensure that talent does not remain hidden due to lack of opportunity.

Infrastructure is another critical area addressed. The policy outlines the development and upgradation of sports facilities at block and district levels, with a particular focus on inclusivity. It promotes gender equality in sports, encouraging greater female participation and providing a safer, more supportive environment for girls to pursue athletics.

Equally important is the attention given to the well-being of athletes. The Niti introduces initiatives for sports science support, nutrition, psychological counselling, and injury management-an acknowledgment that mental and physical fitness are both essential for peak performance. Furthermore, it ensures career guidance and post-retirement plans for athletes, treating them as national assets, not just for the duration of their active years but throughout their lives.

A striking aspect of the policy is its embrace of technology and innovation. From digital fitness monitoring in schools to the use of AI in performance analysis, Khelo Bharat Niti-2025 sets the stage for modernizing Indian sports. It also promotes the inclusion of para-sports and indigenous games, ensuring that no segment of society is left behind.

Of course, the success of this ambitious policy will depend on its implementation. Timely funding, coordination between state and central authorities, and transparency in selection and evaluation will be key.

Khelo Bharat Niti-2025 is not just a sports policy-it is a nation-building blueprint. It seeks to create a fitter, more confident, and united India, where sports are not an exception but a way of life. If implemented with sincerity and vision, this policy could transform India into a true sporting superpower in the years to come.

■ DR. BANARSI LAL

Millets also known as nutri-cereals have garnered renewed global interest due to their numerous health benefits. Millets have rich nutritional composition and have resilience to extreme climatic conditions. They are the group of small-seeded annual grasses that are grown as grain crops primarily on marginal land in temperate, sub-tropical and tropical regions. They are highly nutritious, rich in vitamins and minerals and recently have gained a great attention due to their potential to address global food security and climatic challenges. This article provides an overview of millets, their nutritional benefits, environmental challenges, and their importance in sustainable agriculture. They belong to Poaceae family and are known because of their environmental conditions making them essential crops in the areas with limited water resources and changing climate. They are one of the ancient foods dating back to the Indus Valley Civilization around 3000BC.

Millets are categorised in three categories 1. Major millets: Sorghum (Jowar), Pearl Millet (Bajra), Finger Millet (Ragi/Mandua), 2. Minor Millets: Foxtail Millet (Kangani/Kakun), Kodo Millet, Proso Millet (Cheena), Barnyard Millet (Sawa/Sanwa/Jhangora) and Little Millet (Kutki), 3. Pseudo Millets: Buckwheat (Kuttu) and Amaranthus (Chaulai). Top millets producing states in India are Rajasthan, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and Haryana. Millets have been the part of the Indian diet for many years. Prior to Green Revolution they have been used as the staple diet in most of the households. They have been ingrained in our food system, culture and traditions. They are also observed in the various Indian texts and in various Indian practices. Our elders always highlight the millets in the older times. Millets are also used during the fasting days. During ancient times, songs were sung during the sowing and harvesting of millets in India. In many communities they were used to bless the bride and groom during the marriage ceremonies. But with the passage of time millets presence in our food plate reduced due to many reasons. With the passage of time millets were discouraged from cultivation. But the post COVID-19 era, the interest for the millets is increasing. Recently there has been upswing in the interest and conversation on millets. Traditionally millets are considered as the poor man's food. Millets possess several morphological, physiological & biological characters and thus can be grown even in dry areas. They can be grown even in the worst lands. Millets are considered as the superfood and there is need to popularize 'Shree Anna', the mother of all grains to mitigate the malnutrition. Millets are high in protein, dietary fibre and antioxidants. They are gluten free and contain low glycemic index (GI) which is good to manage diabetes. Millets are capable of mitigating both the climatic disorders and ailments associated with the sedentary life. They are known as the storehouse of nutrition as they are good sources of calcium, zinc, copper, vitamin, iron, antioxidants, phytochemicals etc. The income of small and marginal farmers can be augmented through the millets as millets are climate friendly and can be grown with less water and other resources. Farmers should grow millets to mitigate the challenges of nutritional security and they can generate more farm returns by growing them. There is need to work towards increasing the share of nutri-cereals in the national food baskets. Emphasis should be given on the value addition in millets for more farm returns and farmers need to be guided on the marketing potential and branding of millets. There is need on the area expansion in millets. There is a significant need to work on awareness and consumption of millets across the globe. Mission mode campaigns on millets are required to encourage the people. Startups, hotels, chefs etc. can also play the role to promote the millets. After the announcement of International Year of Millets 2023 many people are coming forward to join the millets movement. To strengthen this movement production of millets also needs to be increased. Presently we have limited production of millets because they are grown in certain pockets of the country. Value addition in millets is also very limited which also needs to be increased. The supply of minor millets is erratic thereby discouraging in value addition and consumption. Production and processing of millets need to be encouraged in different states and Union Territories of the country. This will help to keep balance between production and consumption of millets. This will also help to check the prices of millets. The health-packed millets hold special significance in today's times when people are gravitating to healthier options. After many years of negligence, millets are making strong comeback in India. Most of the millets are grown in India and India is the leading producer of millets in the world. They are also known as the superfoods and are gluten free. The United Nations General Assembly declared the year 2023 as the International Year of Millets with the support from more than 70 countries across the world. The celebration of International Year of Millets was a matter of pride for all of us and in particular for the farming community. It helped in creating awareness across the globe about the important role of millets and their benefits as the smart super food. India is the largest producer of millets in the world and can be considered as the hub of millets with the production of more than 170 lakh tonnes which is about 20 per cent of global production and 80 per cent Asia's production. India's average yield of millets (1239 kg/ha) is also higher than global yield of 1229 kg/ha. Millets are grown in about 131 countries across the globe. Millets are the traditional food for about 60 Crore people in Asia and Africa. The International Year of Millets stands to provide a unique opportunity to increase global production, consumption, efficient processing etc. There is need to highlight the benefits of promoting the sustainable cultivation and consumption of millets. Food is still a concern for the planet. Climate change can also impact food availability. At such a time, global movement related to millets is an important step as they are very easy to grow, drought and climate resistant. They are well-adapted to low-input farming systems and can thrive in poor soils with minimal water requirements. They have short growth cycle, reducing the need of extensive water and chemicals. They are less susceptible to insects-pests and diseases. They are good for the producers, consumers and environment. They are good source of balanced nutrition. They need less water and compatible with the natural ways of farming. They can be grown in arid conditions with the minimal inputs and maintenance. They are disease and insect-pest resistant. They are resistant to climate shocks than other cereals. Major millets grown in India are-Pearl millet(Bajra)-61 %, Sorghum (Jowar)-27 % and Finger Millet (Mandua/Ragi)-10 %. Millets are the part of our traditions and cultures and their relevance are cited in the Vedas and Puranas. There is need of new innovations, research and start-ups in millets. Millets are helpful in reducing the incidence of malnutrition as well as metabolic disorders. They are excellent source of proteins and amino acids. Millets contain large amount of vitamins such as B and E and minerals such as calcium, magnesium and iron. growers should be encouraged by linking them to the markets. Through the revival of traditional methods and increased facilities for the post-harvesting, we can increase the millets production. Traditionally, the minor millets were hand pounded, but now we have specialised machines that can easily de-hull the millets. It will bring down the drudgery and cost associated with it. It will also increase the quality of grains. Gluten free value added products from the millets can be exported. New start-ups can play a major role in this direction. It is also a right food for the vegetarians as millets have high nutritional values. It has observed through studies that consumption of millets reduces hyperlipidemia and hence hypertension and raises the level of HDL-C(good cholesterol) which is helpful to manage the risk of atherosclerotic cardiovascular diseases. Millets are also helpful to reduce anaemia caused due to iron deficiency. They are helpful to reduce the incidence of cancer, obesity and diabetes. Millets will now re-enter the food platters both nationally and internationally. But behavioural change requires time. It has taken many years to forget eating millets so it will take some time to bring back the habit of eating the millets. For that purpose concerted and sincere efforts are needed by all the concerned actors in the system. Creating awareness among the producers and consumers and enabling environment for the millets industry and start-ups are the key to the future of millets. Already number of steps are taken by the government in this direction. There is need to establish Centres of Excellence on millets across the nation and link industries with these centres. In Angadwadi Centres also millets need to be incorporated to increase the nutritional value of food for the children. We need to grab the opportunity to increase the production, processing and promote the consumption of millets. Consistent research and development programmes for enhancing the production and processing of millets are needed. These wonder grains really play the significant role in day-to-day diet as an essential nutrient, especially in underdeveloped and developing nations. Their ability to grow in diverse agroecological zones promotes biodiversity and reduces monoculture farming practices. They are the invaluable resource in the quest for sustainable agriculture, improved nutrition and food security.

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Silence falls on a Young Life: How a lost Sound Processor stilled Numaan's world

■ MOHAMMAD HANIEF

Father's Diary

In the serene beauty of Harwan Garden, where the laughter of children usually mingles with the rustle of trees, a sudden silence descended for ten-year-old Mohammad Numaan. A Class 3rd student at Legends School of Education, Sadrehal, Numaan lost the sound processor of his cochlear implant during a school picnic at Harwan garden in Srinagar - an incident that, in an instant, stripped him of the voices, music, and everyday sounds that had once filled his world. What for others might seem like a misplaced gadget has, for him, become a profound loss, affecting not just his hearing but his education, friendships, and daily life.

For most people, sound is a constant backdrop - the call of a parent, the greetings of friends, the clatter of a busy street. For Numaan, born with profound hearing loss, these sounds became part of his life only through the marvel of modern medicine. His cochlear implant - a combination of an internal surgical component and an external sound processor - serves as his bridge to the world of sound.

The internal implant rests securely beneath his skin, but the sound processor, worn externally, is the lifeline that captures noises, processes them, and transmits them to the internal component. Without it, there is only silence. On that afternoon in Harwan Garden, as he ran and played among the flowers and pathways, this vital link somehow came loose and vanished.

From that moment, the lively soundscape that accompanied his life was gone. Where there had been birdsong, children's laughter, and the voices of his family, there was now stillness. Communication shifted instantly to a world of lip-reading, gestures, and guesswork. Even at home, where surroundings are familiar, the absence of sound can feel isolating and disorienting.

The loss has hit his education particularly hard. In a primary school classroom, learning is built on listening - following the teacher's explanations, joining discussions, and responding to spoken instructions.

Without his sound processor, Numaan cannot participate fully in oral lessons. Teachers at Legends School of Education have stepped in to adapt, using written instructions, visual aids, and extra one-on-one time. But the natural rhythm of interactive learning is interrupted.

There are social challenges too. During breaks, children chatter; call each other to games, and share jokes. Many games depend on sound - clapping patterns, calling out in hide-and-seek, or reacting to a shouted instruction. Without hearing these cues, Numaan is at risk of missing out. His classmates, aware of the situation, are making efforts to include him through visual signals and gestures, but the spontaneity of play is harder to maintain.

For a child who has been hearing with assistance for years, sudden silence is not something the brain adjusts to easily. It can lead to moments of confusion, frustration, and sadness. For Numaan, the change has meant extra effort to keep up with lessons, more concentration to read

lips, and an increased need for support from both teachers and family. These adjustments, while necessary, are physically and mentally tiring for a child.

The effects extend beyond the classroom and playground. At home, casual conversation now requires eye contact and slower, clearer speech. Everyday background noises - the clang of utensils, the hum of appliances, the call to dinner - no longer reach him. Safety awareness is also affected, as he cannot hear approaching vehicles, alarms, or other warning sounds.

Therapy sessions, which play a crucial role in the development of speech and listening skills for cochlear implant users, have also been disrupted. These sessions rely heavily on hearing exercises and auditory feedback, which are impossible without the processor. While therapists can still focus on visual and speech articulation exercises, the progress made through regular auditory practice is paused.

The loss of the processor also highlights the vulnerability of such assistive technology. It is a device no bigger than a small matchbox, yet it carries the weight of a child's access to spoken language, learning, and social interaction. One accidental loss can bring life to a standstill in ways that those without hearing challenges may never imagine.

In response to the incident, teachers, classmates, and family members have rallied to ensure that Numaan does not feel left out. In class, peers sit beside him to help with written notes. Teachers adapt their methods to include more visual demonstrations. Friends on the playground use hand signals and facial expressions to invite him to join games. This collective support has softened the blow, showing that communication can transcend spoken words when necessary.

Even so, the days without sound have been a reminder of the central role hearing plays in a child's sense of belonging and confidence.

For Numaan, regaining his processor will mean more than just hearing again - it will be the return of his independence in learning, his ease in conversations, and his full participation in the joyful noise of childhood.

Until that moment arrives, the world remains quieter for him. But within that quiet, there is also resilience - the resilience of a young boy adjusting to challenges, of teachers and classmates adapting their communication, and of a family ensuring he stays connected to the life he loves. The incident at Harwan Garden may have stilled his world for now, but the bonds of understanding and support around him ensure that silence does not mean isolation.

In the end, Numaan's story is not just about the loss of a device. It is about the fragile but profound link between technology and the human experience, about the ways in which sound shapes learning and relationships, and about the compassion that emerges when a community comes together to bridge the gap left by silence. For those who know him, the hope is simple and strong - that soon, the gentle click of a new sound processor will bring back the voices, laughter, and music that make his young life complete.

Bacch Dua: A Dogra Festival Celebrating Sacred Mother-Child Bond

■ DR SONIA VERMA

Nestled in the heart of Jammu's vibrant cultural tapestry, Bacch Dua stands as a poignant testament to the enduring bond between mothers and their children. This centuries-old Dogra festival, steeped in folklore and agrarian reverence, weaves together devotion, community, and tradition in a celebration that resonates deeply across generations.

The Essence of Bacch Dua

Bacch Dua is primarily a mother's ode to her child-a day marked by fasting, prayer, and symbolic offerings. Rooted in Dogra Hinduism, the festival emphasizes the mother-son relationship while honoring the sanctity of cows, revered as divine beings in local lore. Mothers observe a stringent fast, abstaining from cow milk and fried foods, and gather at temples to offer Rutt (sweet rotis) and soaked black grams, symbolizing prosperity and longevity for their sons. The festival's name, "Bacch Dua," literally translates to "calf blessing," further underscoring the significance of bovine creatures in this cultural observance.

Legends That Shape the Rituals

Two compelling legends anchor Bacch Dua's rituals, providing a narrative framework that enriches the festival's meaning:

The Tale of Bacch and Mach: This legend narrates a tale of mistaken identity and divine intervention. A daughter-in-law, facing a domestic misunderstanding, mistakenly cooks a calf (Bacch) instead of fish (Mach). Overwhelmed with remorse and fearing the consequences of her actions, she fervently prays for forgiveness and redemption. Miraculously, her prayers are answered, and the calf is restored to life. This legend serves as a powerful allegory for maternal devotion and the potential for divine grace to overcome even the most dire circumstances. It underscores the importance of repentance and the boundless compassion of the divine.

Beyond its spiritual core, Bacch Dua thrives as a communal event, fostering social cohesion and reinforcing Dogra values. Temples transform into vibrant hubs of activity, buzzing with collective prayers, shared meals, and storytelling sessions. Women, adorned in traditional Dogra attire, gather to exchange stories, sing devotional songs, and perform age-old rituals. This collective participation reinforces a sense of shared identity and strengthens the bonds of kinship within the community. The communal meals, often prepared using traditional recipes passed down through generations, serve as a culinary link to the past, preserving Dogra culinary heritage.

For the Dogra community, the festival is more than just a religious observance; it is a living archive, preserving oral histories, agrarian ethics, and matriarchal roles in ritual spaces. The stories, songs, and rituals associated with Bacch Dua are passed down from mothers to daughters, ensuring the continuity of cultural traditions. The festival also serves as a platform for inter-generational dialogue, allowing younger generations to learn about their heritage from their elders. In this way, Bacch Dua acts as a vital cultural bridge, connecting the past with the present and ensuring the vibrancy of Dogra culture for generations to come.

Why Bacch Dua Matters Today

In an era of rapid urbanization and globalization, Bacch Dua offers a touchstone to Jammu's rural heritage, reminding people of the values and traditions that have shaped their identity. It underscores the universality of maternal love, a theme that resonates across cultures and transcends geographical boundaries, while simultaneously celebrating the region's unique cultural identity. The festival serves as a reminder of the importance of family, community, and the enduring power of tradition in a rapidly changing world.

Scholars have noted its role in sustaining Dogra folklore, with parallels to other Himalayan pastoral traditions. Bacch Dua shares similarities with other festivals celebrated in the Himalayan region that also focus on themes of motherhood, fertility, and the reverence for nature. These parallels highlight the interconnectedness of cultures in the Himalayan region and the shared values that bind them together. By studying Bacch Dua in comparison to other regional festivals, scholars can gain a deeper understanding of the cultural dynamics of the Himalayas and the ways in which traditions are adapted and transformed across different communities.

A Call to Witness

For travelers and culture enthusiasts seeking an authentic and immersive experience, Bacch Dua provides a window into Jammu's soul. During the festival, temples like Raghunath Mandir or Bawey Wali Mata transform into hubs of devotion and joy, offering visitors a unique opportunity to witness Dogra culture firsthand. The vibrant colors, the melodic chants, and the palpable sense of community create an atmosphere that is both captivating and enriching. Visitors can participate in the festivities, observe the rituals, and interact with local residents, gaining a deeper appreciation for Dogra culture and hospitality.

As Dogra elders pass down legends to younger generations, Bacch Dua remains not just a ritual, but a bridge between the past and present, ensuring the continuity of cultural traditions and fostering a sense of pride in Dogra heritage. The act of storytelling is central to the festival, as elders recount the legends associated with Bacch Dua, passing down the wisdom and values of their ancestors. This intergenerational transmission of knowledge ensures that the traditions of Bacch

Dua remain alive and relevant for future generations.

In Reflection

Bacch Dua's beauty lies in its simplicity-a mother's prayer, a community's solidarity, and a culture's resilience. It reminds us that some bonds, like those between mother and child, are both timeless and sacred, transcending the boundaries of time and space. The festival serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of cherishing these bonds and celebrating the values that unite us as human beings.

The festival also highlights the importance of preserving cultural traditions in a rapidly changing world. By celebrating Bacch Dua, the Dogra community is not only honoring its past but also ensuring its future. The festival provides a platform for cultural expression, allowing Dogra people to showcase their unique heritage and share it with the world.

Bacch Dua is more than just a festival; it is a symbol of hope, resilience, and the enduring power of the human spirit. It is a celebration of life, love, and the bonds that connect us all.

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