



Research Paper

## Awareness and preference or non preference of Ragi as a substitute of conventional cereals

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### Abstract

There are many conventional cereals like wheat which were considered good for health. But in recent studies, it has been found that they contain Gluten, which is harmful if taken in excess quantity. Many of these studies were during the Covid time, when maximum people have fallen ill due to Covid infection. To top it, there is new health concern in many people, including diabetic and obese people, which have led to finding out new and better substitutes over conventional substitutes.

One such substitute is Ragi, which is grown in South India and it is very popular there. But as we move to other parts of India, it is not very much popular. This paper has been written to find out the reasons of ragi not being popular and to suggest things to make ragi very popular.

**Keywords:** Gluten, Millet, Ragi

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### I. Introduction

This whole concept of writing paper started when elder sister of author visited him at Varanasi few months back. She is a senior doctor at Delhi. In one very fine evening, we all went out to have dinner. But there, author's sister refused to have Chapattis (bread). When we asked her the reasons, she told us that these breads were made up of flour, which is either the wheat flour or refined wheat flour. Both of these things are quite dangerous for health, particularly for those people who are motivated to shed their excess weight. The dangerous thing is gluten, which is found in both the flour.

Then the author searched for gluten on various internet sites and found some very shocking things. Gluten is type of protein found in many cereals, leading among them is wheat. When their flour is mixed with water, gluten protein forms a sticky network, quite similar to glue. This makes the flour elastic and gives it a chewy and satisfying texture.

Maximum people are gluten tolerant with no side effects. But this situation changes when we see people who are either obese, or who have some underlying disease problems like Celiac disease, irritable bowel syndrome or wheat allergy. They have sensitive eating those cereals which have sufficient portion of gluten.

Therefore arises the need for finding out those cereals which are gluten free. After lot of research, many cereals have been found out which are gluten free like rice, oats, quinoa, flax, millet, sorghum, tapioca, buckwheat, arrowroot, amaranth etc. All the cereals are considered good for health because they are gluten free. But they pose another problem. Maximum of them don't belong to Indian, and if they do, none of the common people know about it. But Ragi is an exception. Many people know about it and it is widely grown in Southern parts of India. So, ragi can be considered as substitute for those cereals which have loads of gluten in them.

### Benefits of consuming Ragi

When we are talking about ragi, it should have some benefits. So, a person, who consumes ragi will gain from it in following ways:

1. Ragi has high protein

The protein helps prevent malnutrition and is considered to be a healthy source of protein for vegetarians. It is gluten free, the harmful protein. To top it, ragi cannot be polished like other cereals because it is too tiny. Thus, ragi is consumed in pure form and not in polished form.

2. Ragi is natural weight loss mechanism

This is so because ragi contains high amounts of fibre that keeps persons stomach full. So, unwanted cravings are not there and further, it helps in weight loss. It contains Tryptophan, which reduces the appetite resulting in weight loss.

3. Ragi prevents skin from ageing

Ragi is a natural anti-ageing cereal. Amino acids like Methionine and Lysine are present in abundance in ragi that protects your skin from ill effects of ageing. Ragi rejuvenates the skin cells and thus making a person look fresh and healthy. Furthermore, ragi also has Vitamin E, which is very much essential for your skin.

4. Ragi is booster for Hair

Ragi is rich in proteins and prevents hair loss. A person hair requires a lot of protein because hair itself is made of protein named Keratin. If a person begins consuming ragi, it will strengthen hair and reduce hair fall. Ragi also prevent premature greying of hair and increases blood circulation in your body that helps in hair growth.

5. Ragi has lots of Calcium necessary for the bone growth

There is no cereal except ragi that provides lot of. Is is needed for human bones to develop and prevents osteoporosis.

6. Led to increase in production of mother's milk

Lactating women should eat ragi as it increases hemoglobin levels which further increase the production of milk. And everybody knows that mother's milk is best for the child.

7. Prevents Diabetes which is most common now a days

Diabetes is most common disease these days. Regular consumption of ragi can help the risk of diabetes. Ragi has huge amounts of fibre as compared to other cereals. Ragi acts as an absorbent and it absorbs starch.

8. Good Digestion

The dietary fibre present in ragi helps intestines digest food fastly and smoothly. Ragi is a highly nutritional cereal and helps maintain good health.

9. Keeps a person relaxed

The most amazing benefit of eating ragi is that it acts as a natural relaxant for body. It helps in fighting anxiety, insomnia and depression.

10. Ragi prevents Colon Cancer

Ragi prevents colon cancer because it contains fiber and phytonutrients that prevent the risk of this type of disease. And also helps women from the risk of having breast cancer.

These and many others are benefits of eating ragi. But still now, ragi is not popular in other parts of India except the Southern part. So, there has to be some particular reasons for this discrepancy theory. Author will discuss these parts from his experience and try to verify it from primary data collected from survey.

**Why ragi is not popular from author's point of view?**

From Covid times, there is constant talk about gluten free cereals. But still, they have not gained mass acceptance among the people. According to author, these are some points which are guilty of not making ragi popular among the masses:

1. Not aware of ragi

Maximum people from India, except South India, don't know about ragi. At the most, they know about wheat, barley, maize etc. They switch over these cereals only to bring some changes in their diet.

2. Very difficult to differentiate ragi

If we look at ragi, it seems very similar to mustard seeds. Thus, any person, living in those areas apart from South India, will find it very difficult to differentiate ragi from mustrad seeds. Both of them look exactly the same.

3. Not aware of benefits of eating ragi

If some people know about ragi, then most probably, they are unaware of the benefits of consuming ragi. Thus, they prefer to buy conventional cereals rather than go for ragi.

4. Not knowing the various dishes that can be prepared from ragi

If they know about the benefits of eating ragi, then also, people shy away from buying it because they don't know about various dishes that can be prepared from ragi.

5. Too much costly

The author himself eat bread made from ragi flour and is very much satisfied from it. But, the author feels that ragi flour is very much costly as compared to other flours. Ragi flour costs minimum than other flour cost. So, the cost is biggest inhbitor in using ragi flour, or in general ragi.

These are some points which the author feels inhibit ragi from becoming a cereal which is acceptable to masses.

### Research done to verify the points mentioned above

The author's point of view cannot be taken as a general statement, since it is the point of view belonging to one person only. Therefore, author has decided to go for research to verify the points mentioned in previous section. But one thing is true; **Ragi is not a cereal acceptable to the masses**. And this becomes the *research problem*.

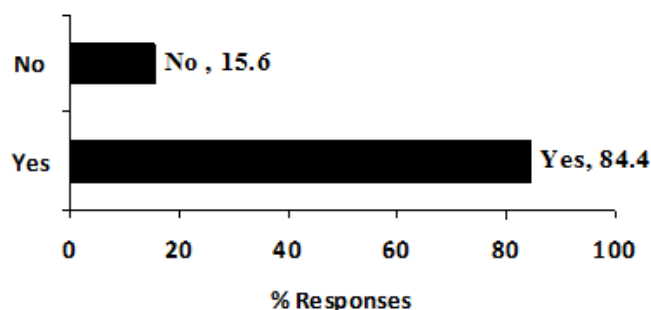
Now the *research objective* can be formulated, which are as follows:

1. Knowing the awareness of ragi among the masses.
2. Benefits of eating ragi among the masses.
3. Frequency of respondents who eat ragi on regular basis and the reasons behind the same.
4. Frequency of respondents who do not eat ragi on regular basis and the reasons behind the same.
5. Awareness about gluten and to know to know perception of respondents whether it is good or harmful for the health.
6. Expectation of respondents towards the firms marketing ragi to make it more popular.

On this basis, *research methodology* has been formulated, which is *Descriptive* in nature and it is conducted in city of Mirzapur, with population 246,920 (as per census as given in website <https://www.census2011.co.in/census/city/154-mirzapur-and-vindhyachal.html#futurepop>). Out of these, 45 were taken as *sample size*, on *convinces sampling basis* and the *questionnaire* was given to them to fill up using *Google form*. All the samples were known to author, and consisted of his students, fellow teachers and students who have become entrepreneurs or are in job. The data has been collected and presented in *chart forms* to make it more clear and understandable. On this basis, some *conclusions* and *suggestion* drawn and the same are being presented in this paper to with a hope to make ragi “cereal of masses”.

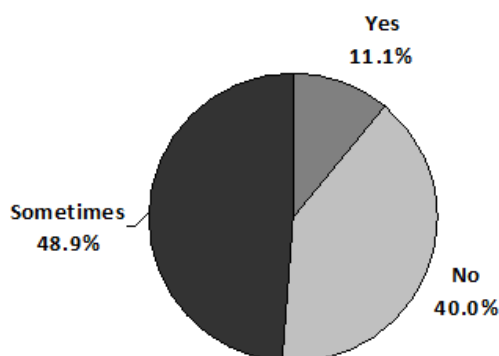
## II. Data Analyzes

The first question asked was about awareness of ragi cereals and the responses were quite encouraging: Maximum respondents were knowing about ragi.

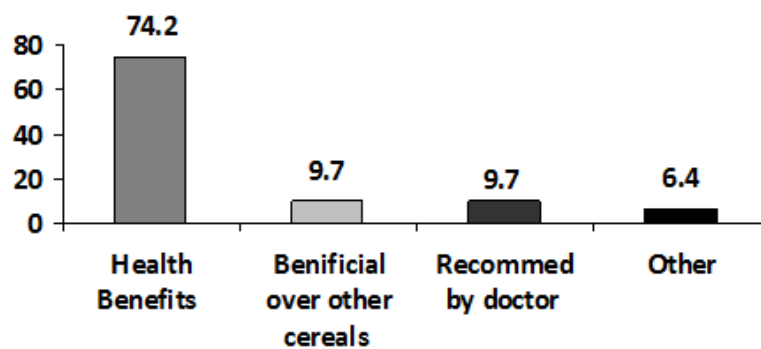


When asked about the salient features of ragi, which was an open ended question, the responses were a lot ranging from rich in calcium, easy digestible, it's called Bajra, it is a highly nutritious and healthy cereal, antioxidants, antimicrobial and anti diabetes, it is more nutritious in some aspects as compared to normal cereals, high protein and mineral content, controls diabetes, helps lower cholesterol level, helps in weight loss, low glycemic index, prevents ageing etc.

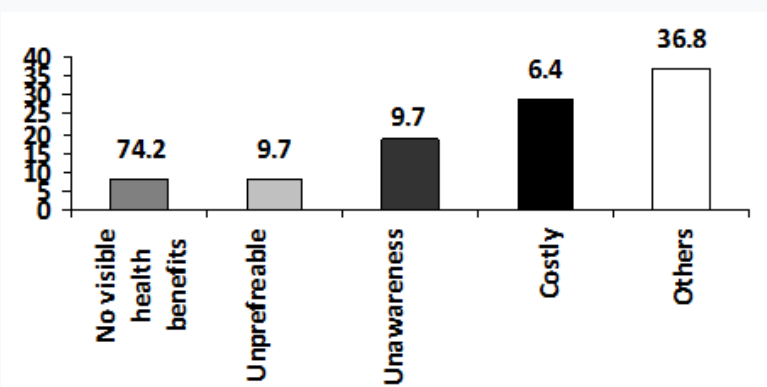
But some responses were also somewhat negative since they said that “I heard but don't have specific knowledge about it”, confectionery which is not true at all etc.



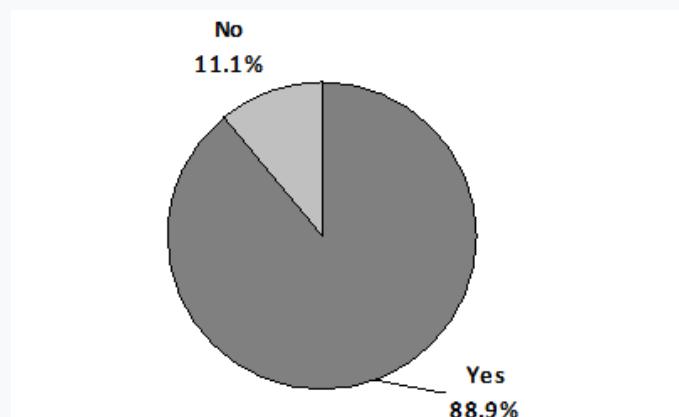
When asked the frequency of consuming ragi, the responses were quite varied. There was approximately equal percentage of people eating ragi sometimes and not eating ragi at all. The people who were consuming ragi were quite less. This shows that ragi is not the mass accepted cereal.



When asked about the reasons why the respondents consume ragi frequently, maximum responses where related to health benefits which confirm the usefulness of ragi from medical point of view.

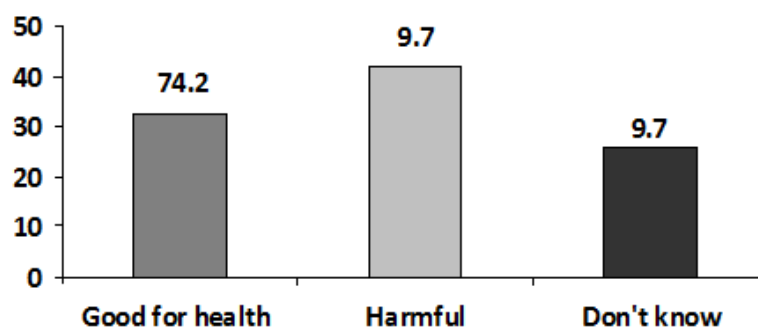


The research would be incomplete if the reasons are not unearthed for those people who do not eat ragi. And the findings show that ragi seems much costlier to the respondents over other cereals. So, the mass is deprived from this super cereal because of its high cost.

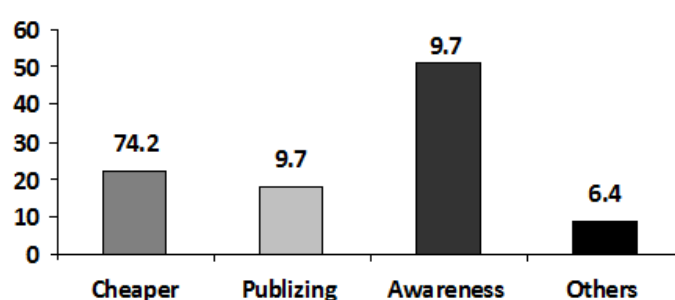


Not came the testing of respondents about the components adding nutritional value or decreasing it. When asked about awareness regarding gluten, the responses were quite favorable with maximum people knowing about gluten.

But, another question raised the doubts again. When asked whether gluten was harming the health or otherwise, many responses said that it is good for heath and some responses where quite unaware of effects of gluten on health.



When asked about their expectation from companies marketing ragi, maximum responses were focused on telling the mass about the benefits of eating ragi followed by making ragi little bit cheaper.



In the end, suggestions were asked from respondents who gave lot of suggestions like best health benefits, food companies need to promote ragi based ready to eat food products, most of the new generations do not include traditional diet in food habits and are motivated to fast food which needs to be changed, publicity of ragi 's benefits is necessary in India, use the mass media for the popularization of ragi, should be more cheaper through increase in production in India, ragi should be available in the local market, ease of cooking., some snacks options may be introduced with ragi for health conscious people etc.

So, it can be inferred that ragi is known to majority of people and they also know about its benefits. But due to very high cost and non availability of ragi at maximum stores in India, except South India, it has not become popular. So, the next and last portion of this paper deals with suggestions aimed at making useful ragi popular among the masses.

### III. Suggestions

Ragi is a useful eatable which has got many benefits ranging from diabetes control to weight loss. Further it is gluten free which makes it more nutritious than conventional cereals. But, as mentioned earlier, due to very high cost, non availability in maximum stores and lack of awareness among the masses, it has failed to become cereals of masses.

Therefore, some suggestions are given in this regard, which are as follow:

1. There should be mechanism to reduce the cost of ragi all over India. The cultivation of ragi can be promoted in every parts of India, if the conditions are suitable for it.
2. One very good suggestion received was that food companies should promote 'ready to eat' foods prepared from ragi. This will make ragi very popular among all the age groups.
3. There should be mass awareness of ragi as a healthy food through publicity. This can be achieved both by private food companies and through initiative by the government.
4. Mass communication can be used for publicizing ragi. The government is already promoting many things through mass media and they have been very successful. So, the same can be applied for ragi.
5. At the end, some dishes of ragi can also be publicized since, at present, maximum people know only about the beer made from ragi. There are lots of tasty dishes which can be made from ragi, and they have to be told to masses.

If these things are followed to full extent, then ragi has got chances to win the race of being a 'cereals of masses'.

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