

# THE MAGIC OF MULTIGRAIN



**Multiplicity:** Quinoa, Jowar and Munakka Tehri at The Indian Accent, The Manor.

Amaranth 'rotis', oat 'poha' and barley risotto—for urban India there should be more to multigrain than the token biscuit or bread

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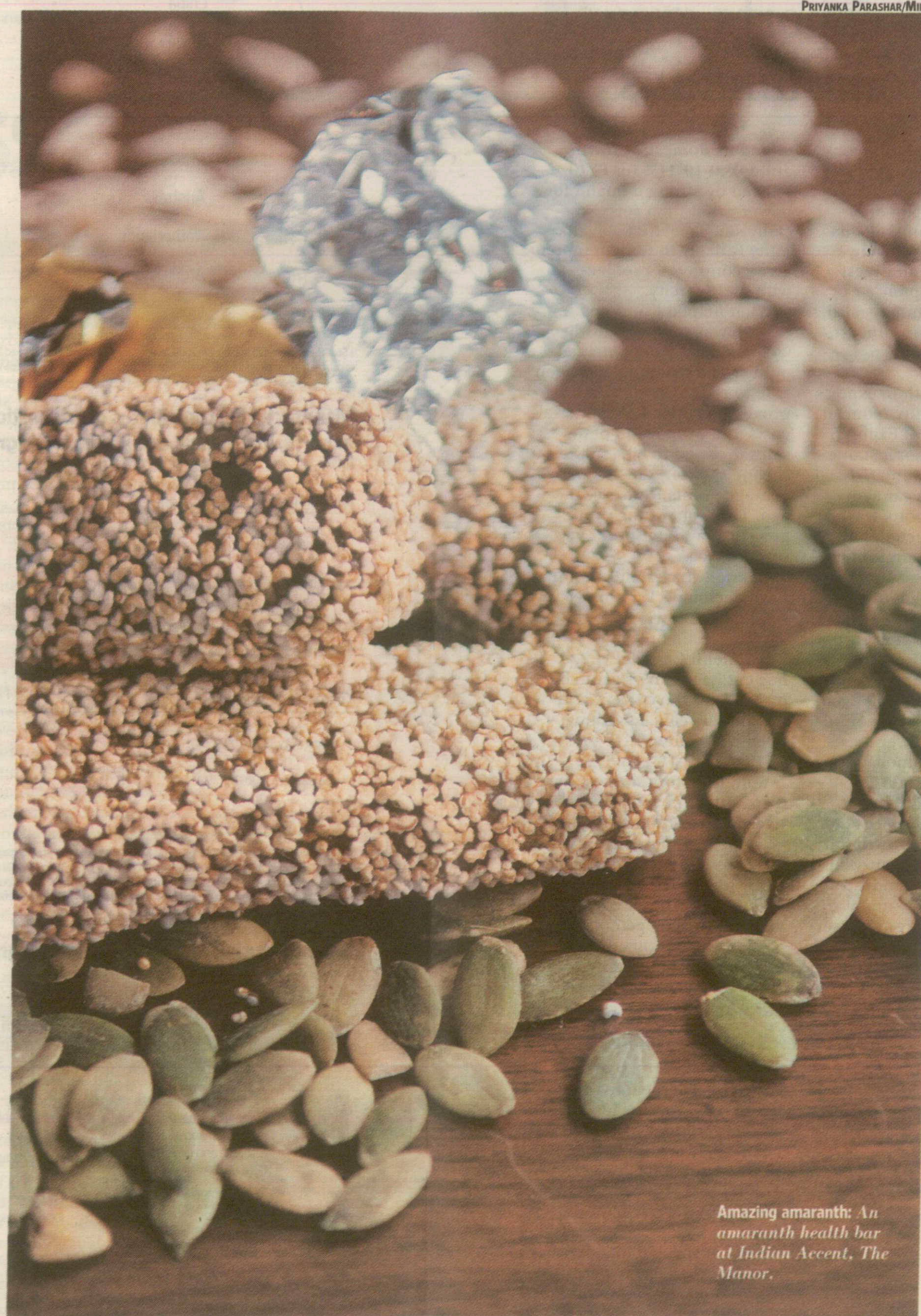
Wheat and rice—and their refined versions—have become such an overwhelming part of the urban diet over the last few decades, elbowing out other grains, that nutritionists say we should be worried.

"Refined grains (like white rice or refined flour) are stripped of all the nutritional benefits of whole-grains, they are essentially sugar. And eating refined grains and their products (such as cakes, cookies, and most forms of bakery you would buy from outside) only fuels lifestyle-related illnesses like diabetes, heart disease and joint pains in your body—whereas whole-grains do the exact opposite. They regulate your sugar levels, prevent you from craving high-calorie food and are nutrient-rich," says Shikha Sharma, Delhi-based medical doctor and wellness consultant.

Biodiversity is essential for the human body too, so while whole-grain versions of wheat and rice are beneficial, they're not enough. The body also needs grains like barley, oats, buckwheat (commonly known as *kuttu ka atta* in north India), amaranth (*ramdana*), the South American quinoa, and millets like *jowar* (sorghum), *bajra* (pearl millet) and *ragi* (finger millet). But these are on the decline; millets, in fact, began disappearing after the green revolution of the 1960s and 1970s.

## Changing agricultural practices

Agriculturalists say crop patterns changed visibly from the 1980s. Till then, the cultivation of wheat alternated with crops like *jowar*, *bajra*, *ragi* and barley. Now, wheat alternates with more monetarily-viable options like maize and soyabean, says P.S. Vijay Shankar, a founding member and director of research of Samaj Pragati Sahayog (SPS), an agri-research non-profit based out of Madhya Pradesh.



Amazing amaranth: An amaranth health bar at Indian Accent, The Manor.

PRIYANKA PARASHAR/MINT

taken a hit," says Shankar.

"Soil and grain are both getting nutritionally deficient, and so are we," agrees Dr Sharma. "Just like the overuse of one crop (and underuse of others) depletes nutrients in the soil, in the same way, overconsumption of one and avoiding others means our body is missing out on some key nutrients," adds Khosla.

## Multigrain, multiple forms

Yet millets are a predominantly fibre-rich and mineral-rich cereal group. "For instance, *ragi* is rich in calcium and important for growing children, women with osteoporosis, pregnant women. Wheat or rice does not have that kind of calcium," says Dr Sharma. "Likewise, *bajra* has low GI, and is excellent for people with water retention. *Jowar* is good for people trying to lose weight," she adds. Amaranth is good for diabetics (flour for diabetics is made of amaranth) and has low GI, while barley is a very good source of both soluble and insoluble fibre and selenium.

So it's important to try and include some of this in the diet. In parts of Maharashtra and Rajasthan, they make flat bread with *jowar* flour, called *bhakri*. Likewise, *rotis* of amaranth, pink and soft, are popular in Uttarakhand. Amaranth is also popular all over north India in its *ramdana laddoo* avatar. *Ragi* has been popular in Tamil Nadu, where they make *dosas* out of it, and also *khichdi*, says Manish Mehrotra, executive chef—Pan Asian Cuisine, Old World Hospitality Pvt. Ltd.

He suggests ways in which millets can be used. "Most of these grains can be consumed in ways that you have rice or wheat: Barley can be eaten—apart from being ground with wheat to be consumed as a *roti*—also as *khichdi*, *tehr* or risotto. Amaranth can be used in desserts, salads; we make a nutribar with amaranth and dry fruits. You can make popcorn with *jowar*. You can also make a *tehr*, mixing *jowar*, quinoa and some *munakka* (raisins)."

## Quinoa, Jowar and Munakka Tehri

Serves 2

**Ingredients**  
75g *jowar*, boiled  
40g quinoa, steamed  
10g *munakka*  
10g *desi ghee*  
2 tsp ginger, chopped  
1 tsp green chillies, chopped  
½ tsp turmeric powder  
Salt to taste  
1 tsp chaat masala  
3ml lemon juice  
2 tsp coriander, chopped  
½ tsp garam masala

## Method

Heat *ghee* in a pan and sauté chopped ginger and green chillies. Add turmeric powder followed by quinoa and *jowar*, toss well. Now add *munakka*, salt, chaat masala and garam masala, mix well and adjust seasoning to taste. Finish with chopped coriander and a dash of lemon juice.

—Manish Mehrotra, executive chef—Pan Asian Cuisine, Old World Hospitality Pvt. Ltd.

## Amaranth Health Bar

Serves 2

**Ingredients**  
30g dates, pitted  
30g dried figs  
30g walnuts, roasted and shelled  
25g pumpkin seeds  
25g almonds  
30g popped amaranth seeds

## Method

Wash figs and finely chop them. Chop dates. Blitz the dates and figs in a blender to make a coarse paste. Remove in a large mixing bowl. Mix

in chopped walnuts, almonds and pumpkin seeds. Add popped amaranth seeds and mix well.

Spread this mixture on a clean tray, 2cm thick, and leave to set like *barfi* in a refrigerator. When set and firm, cut into strips, wrap in butter paper and serve.

—Manish Mehrotra

## Seasonal Vegetables and Barley Broth

Serves 2

**Ingredients**  
1¼ cups barley  
1 tbsp olive oil  
2 tbsp onion, chopped  
1 tsp garlic, chopped  
½ tsp ginger, chopped  
2 tbsp celery, chopped  
2 tsp coriander seeds

1 tsp cumin seeds  
½ tsp black pepper, pounded  
¼ tsp turmeric  
¼ cup carrot, chopped  
¼ cup broccoli, florets  
¼ cup zucchini, diced  
¼ cup tomato, chopped  
1 tbsp parsley, chopped  
Salt to taste

## Method

First, wash and soak the barley for 2-3 hours. To prepare the vegetables, peel, wash and chop onion, ginger, garlic, celery. Next pound the coriander and cumin seeds into a powder. Once the prep is done, heat oil in a pan, add onion, ginger, garlic and celery and sauté for a minute. Add the cumin and coriander powder along with turmeric and black pepper and stir for a few seconds. Add barley and stir well, bring to boil and simmer for 5-7 minutes until the barley is almost cooked. Add the remaining vegetables, bring to boil and simmer until cooked. Adjust seasoning and garnish with parsley.

—Surendra Singh, executive sous chef, The Oberoi, New Delhi.



Beautiful barley: Seasonal Vegetables and Barley Broth at The Oberoi, New Delhi.

"(Earlier), even when it came to consumption, wheat and barley were often ground together and consumed in the same *roti*," says Delhi-based nutritionist Ishi Khosla. "Not only was this biodiversity benefiting the soil, it was also benefiting the consumers of that mixed flour: The high-glycaemic index (GI) wheat was balanced by the low GI

barley (high GI causes blood glucose to rise rapidly, whereas low GI releases it slowly)."

Once irrigation technology reached even the driest of regions, like the interiors of Madhya Pradesh, many farmers started focusing on crops that gave them the best commercial returns, like rice, wheat, and in smaller quantities,

maize and soyabean, says Shankar. Rice and wheat are procured by the government for the public distribution system. "Traditional dry-soil crops like millets, which were at one time the primary crops in dry regions given their resilience, are fast disappearing. Given their high nutritious value—to the soil as well as to human beings—biodiversity has