

Bamboo rice or Mulayari

Humans have an ingrained urge of exploiting natural resources found at their fingertips. Because, that allowed them to save their energy instead of walking for miles in pursuance for food. Apart from the domesticated grass species, such as rice, millets, wheat, barley or oat, a wide variety of grass or forb species have been exploited for their seeds, these energy-dense pre-cereal grains were a good source of nutrition. They often demanded a processing followed by harvest and were mostly made into sumptuous porridge or bread to satiate their stomach. However, from a rich repertoire of plant species consumed by our prehistoric forefather only a handful were able to made their permanent place as global staple. And, most were left out in this race falling short to meet the human need. Many remained localized, hidden in a forest or under-recognized in the waterbodies, or mixed with their domesticated brothers. Some still find their way to the connoisseurs' palate as occasional cuisine for special events or festivals.



Such an example is bamboo rice or Mulayari (in Malayalam) or Moongil arisi (in Tamil) which is locally famous in parts of the southern India. Tribal known as Kani or Kanikaran or Kanikars (agriculturist tribes living in forests of Kanyakumari and adjoining Kerala forests) dwelling around the Western Ghats possess a vast knowledge harvesting the seeds of bamboos (mostly Bambusa bamboos). Indigenous throughout India (except the northern part) from the hills upto 915 m and in the plains, this is the quiet abundant species of bamboo in the region (Moongil in Tamil) can attain a height 30 m and a diameter of 18 cm. The green culms turn to a straw-yellow color on drying. The bamboo can be easily identified by thorns and large yellow culm-sheaths. Commonly, it flowers gregariously though at long intervals, produces seeds for next generation to come up, and finally dies down. To collect the mature seeds, the Kanis clean the ground around the plant and patch the floor with cow dung; it follows the collection of the fallen seeds mostly by the women and the children from the cleaned floor every morning and evening. Kani people used to set a traditional rat trap called Elipori to catch unwelcome rodents sharing their resources. Excesses are sold in the adjoining forest areas which perhaps arrives at the urban markets after passing through many hands and when price soars up to almost rupees two to three hundred a kilo or even more.

The nutritive value of bamboo seed is higher than that of rice or wheat as it contains minerals such as Ca, P, Fe, Mg and vitamins such as vit B1, nicotinic acid, riboflavin and carotene. It is

believed to possess medicinal properties and a healthy food for diabetics. Delicacies like payasam are prepared during festive seasons or on special occasions and are well a part of traditional food lives.

Photo source: 1- Kavitha, A., N. Deepthi, R. Ganesan, S. C. Gladwin Joseph, India Biodiversity Portal
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