

Youngster sets up zero-budget millet hotel, says should return to older eating habits

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Abhishek at his brainchild, Millet Mama, where sustainability is the key to his successful venture

BENGALURU: Abhishek B did not have an inheritance waiting for him, yet, the 26-year-old has successfully managed to set up a zero-budget food business — a hotel and catering service based purely on millets, called [Millet Mama](#). From furniture to spoons, the youngster made use of hand-me-downs and donations to set up his business. Started only seven months ago, Abhishek feels having no investments was what made it possible for him to make the food affordable. "In KR Market, vendors bathe in public bathing spaces, where chairs or tables are used as firewood. I just picked those up second-hand for ₹75. Discarded wood crates were got for free from fruit markets and turned into book shelves. Jute gunny bags are used as pillow covers. I got bamboo baskets made by rural artisans from Tumkur and turned them over to use as lamp shades," he says. The fact that he takes the word sustainability seriously is understood when he says that mass produced goods in factories consume electricity unlike hand-crafted ones. "All industry goods are duplicates. Here, each basket made by the artisan is different. There are imperfections to each of the goods, and that is the beauty of it. As for steel vessels and other cutlery, friends and family made donations," he says, adding that he borrows plates from NGO Adanya Chetana on a refundable deposit. Ask him why he chose millets, and he says he was introduced to them when he joined [Aikyam Community for Sustainable Living](#) in Bengaluru. A native of Mandya and brought up in Basavangudi, he went back to his district and learnt of how millets are more environment and farmer-friendly. "Millet needs less water and live on whatever rainwater they receive. Regions such as Mandya, Bengaluru and Mysuru were millet-eating regions traditionally. It was building of the KRS dam that caused all the trouble. Farmers switched to growing water-dependant crops like rice. The dam failed when we ran out of water, leading to the Cauvery dispute and more importantly, farmer suicides," says Abhishek. He uses catering for functions and events as a tool to spread awareness on several varieties of millets, and the benefits of reversing our eating habits to what they were 70 years ago. "The hotel is for people who are aware of the health benefits of millets. When I cater for large parties, unaware customers realise they can eat everything from millet pongal, vadas, laddoos, sambar, rasam, palya (fried or sautéed vegetables) and more," says the founder who is "100 per cent confident" that all rice and wheat food can be replaced with these grains. **Women innovators**

Women from poor families are the chefs here. "These women are the innovators of all the millet-based meals. My mother joined us recently, and is my business partner now," says Abhishek. Interestingly, his family was against him setting up this business. Though his mother is not entirely convinced, she has come on board to experiment with food. While he claims to have managed to break even, everything he earns goes back into his endeavour. Millet Mama is located in South End Circle, and also organises millet cooking workshops.

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