

Seed is better preserved this way

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Traditional method: Atram Laxmibai, a woman farmer, displaying the airtight basket with seed inside meant to preserve them over a longer period, at Seetagondi village in Sirpur (U) mandal of Adilabad district.— Photo: S. Harpal Singh

The simple yet effective procedure of Adivasis to preserve seed for cultivating millets needs to be popularised

One of the important aspects of biodiversity conservation is seed preservation but, this area is perhaps the least bothered about in the gamut. While the non-tribal farming communities have jettisoned seed preservation technique completely after taking to foodgrain hybrids, the Adivasis in Adilabad district find no use for it despite the instance of cultivating desi or indigenous varieties. As there is a sort of revival of the tradition of cultivating local varieties of millets by the aboriginal tribe farmers in the interior and far flung areas in the tribal belt, the need to revive the seed preservation technique has become imperative. Preserving seed could also help farmers in reducing their investment, according to agriculture experts. “We are cultivating local variety millets in a limited extent which does not require us to preserve seeds beyond a few months. The little quantity of seeds which we get in one season is used up in the ensuing season,” explained Atram Madhav Rao, a Gond Adivasi farmer from Seetagondi village in Sirpur (U) mandal. “I have some quantity of sama (little millet) and bhadi (barnyard millet) from 12 years back,” revealed Laxmibai, Madhav Rao’s mother. “Using this technique I can preserve seeds for longer even,” she added. The technique which Laxmibai talked about is simple yet effective going by its potential to preserve seed. The seed which are needed to be preserved are stored in an airtight bamboo basket. The basket, its size varying with the quantum of seeds to be stored, is first lined with a thick layer of neem leaves from the inside. A thick layer of ordinary ash is covered over it and the seeds are placed over it. After closing the lid of the basket, it is smeared with clay mixed cow dung to make it air tight. “This mixture ensures that the seed remain without decaying or losing their potency to germinate over a long period,” Laxmibai stated. The Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA), Utnoor, will now take up awareness programmes aimed at reintroduction of the simple seed preservation technique among the Adivasis where it is promoting cultivation of desi varieties of millets. “We need to do so, so that farmers who are cultivating the local varieties get self-sufficient in terms of seeds at the earliest,” observed ITDA Project Officer R.V. Karnan. The ITDA is promoting cultivation of indigenous millets under the Vanabandhu Kalyan Yojana. It has procured seed from Adivasi farmers and distributed in areas where the tradition had been lost.

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