

# Indigenous crops help Adivasis curb pest attack

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Kolam tribe farmer Kodapa Maruthi displays an immature cob of the indigenous *pela jonna* at Gattapalli in Adilabad district. | Photo Credit: S HarpalSingh

## Gattepalli Kolam tribals cultivate *pela jonna* as trap crop for cotton

The joy of discovering what their ancestors cultivated, and how they did it, is what is being experienced by the small community of aboriginal Kolam farmers of Gattapalli hamlet in Indervelli mandal this agriculture season. They have sown some of the familiar varieties of indigenous millets and the *pela jonna*, a rare variety of jowar or sorghum used in olden days only to make pop corn for religious purposes.

It is not only the religious importance of this variety that has fascinated the farmers but they are equally impressed with its function of being a trap crop for cotton and the varieties of millets that form part of their regular diet. The tall plants of the pop corn jowar, the leaves of which spread to about 2 ft, prevent winged insects from reaching the shorter cotton crop and cause pestilence.

"I am happy to learn that our forefathers used different crops to their advantage. The good health of my crop, especially the organically cultivated cotton shows the benefits of using this jowar besides ladies finger and castor as trap crops," observed Kodapa Maruthi, a Kolam farmer.

### *Good result*

The two-month-old cotton crop is into the boll formation stage at present. Every plant has at least 30 bolls which, production-wise is considered good according to the farmers, though the actual yield will be known later in the season.

NGO Ekalayva Foundation, which is working on watersheds in the tribal areas of Adilabad has made it possible to introduce the *pela jonna*, and other indigenous crops to the poor Kolam farmers. "We collected the pop corn jowar and other seeds from Narnoor mandal so that more of these seeds are produced and introduced in other farms in the district in the coming seasons," B. Vijay of the NGO disclosed as he talked of the efforts of Ekalayva Foundation.

Gattapalli has 18 families who together cultivate 115 acres of land. The NGO has facilitated organic cultivation of millets like foxtail, bajra and jowar in 110 acres of it.

### **Organic cultivation**

"We gave seeds and training in organic cultivation to these farmers under our Sendriya Mitra programme. As this cultivation is aimed at producing food grains for their own consumption as well as production of seeds we will launch marketing help only in later years," Mr. Vijay told about the prospective plans.

The NGO is also keeping a track of the expenditure being incurred, especially on cotton crop by way of use of bio pesticides. "The ethnic farmers are more curious about the expenditure part as it will determine their preference for organic cultivation in future," the NGO functionary added.

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