

18.02.2017

THE HINDU

Tucked away in a tiny village, 154 paddy variants



Deva Rao of Mittabagilu in Karnataka has grown traditional and hybrid varieties for over three decades

B.K. Deva Rao has dedicated five acres of his agricultural land in the serene Mittabagilu village of coastal Karnataka to just one purpose — preserving different varieties of paddy.

The varieties he preserves have grown over a period of three-and-a-half decades to 154. In his village, about 16 km from Ujire in Dakshina Kannada, Mr. Deva Rao is among a few in the country to take up conservation on such a large scale.

No chemical manure

A septuagenarian, he is proud that he grows paddy on 42 small plots without using any chemical manure and sprays. Among his collections are traditional and hybrid varieties.

“I grow paddy and conserve them for my satisfaction. The government support for farming is certainly not enough,” says Mr. Deva Rao.

Mr. Deva Rao cultivates paddy in two seasons. About 125-130 varieties are cultivated in the first season of May-June and the rest — 25-30 varieties — are sown in the second season of October. This way, all varieties are saved every year. His son, B.K. Parameshwar Rao, an electrical engineer who quit BHEL, Bengaluru, is also a farmer.

He says: “Paddy seeds can be saved up to eight months. Then they gradually lose the germination power. If a variety is to be conserved, it should be grown every year. There are short, medium and long term crops.”

Till 1979, Mr. Deva Rao grew 40 varieties of paddy. It was from then that he started using chemical fertilizers till 1988 as the government introduced hybrid varieties.

Rich stock

As the focus shifted to hybrid varieties, traditional ones lagged. The stock came down to nine. During this time, he observed that the soil had turned hard due to the use of chemical fertilizers. He switched to natural farming and, after 2000, started collecting varieties that he had lost — and the ones which were not in his possession — from other parts.

“Many varieties grown elsewhere in the country can also grow in Dakshina Kannada,” says Mr. Parameshwar Rao.

Pointing to a Manipuri variety, he says the grain is light blue in colour.

A doctor gave him a Thailand variety called “Jasmine,” he says. The JB 1 variety, from which “tasty kadubu” is made, is no longer available. “Kulenji pille,” large and strong, and “samunga,” the best for making flattened rice, are also not available any more, according to him.

Some of the varieties he has preserved are “Meese Bhatta”, “Kalame”, “Atikaya”, “Raja Kayame”, “Suggi Kayame”, “Tonnur”, “Navara”, “Gandhasale”, “Aden Kelte”, “Gidda Bhatta” and “Shasthitka.”

Sridevi Jakkeral, scientist and paddy breeder at the All India Co-ordinated Research Project on Rice at Zonal Agricultural and Horticultural Research Station, Brahmavar, Udupi, said there were 1,000 government notified paddy varieties in the country. In addition, farmers had other varieties which had not been notified.