

YOUNG WORLD

LEAVES of bounty



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FEBRUARY 17, 2017 00:00 IST

UPDATED: FEBRUARY 17, 2017 04:32 IST

It provides a livelihood for the people and has medicinal properties. But, besides this, the Kendu is revered by the tribals of Keonjhar.

On a pleasant evening in March, I was taking a stroll through the daily market of Keonjhar, a district of the East Indian state of Odisha neighbouring Jharkhand. While I admired the market for offering a place for villagers and forest dwellers to sell their produce directly to the consumer, I almost went past two women selling small, over-ripe berry-like fruits in bowls made of Sal leaves. I took a couple of steps back and came before the women. Sensing my curiosity, they asked if I wanted to taste the fruit, Kendu.

THE HINDU

Twisted version of original Kenda. Juna in Odia means a stream. So, literally means a stream originating from the base of the tree of Kendu. Such a small fruit and so much glory attached to it that an entire district is named after it! I instantly knew I had to dig further and explore its benefits and uses.

Kendu is a non-timber forest product. Kendu, in Odiya or Bangla, is called Tendu in Hindi. Tendu leaves are wrapped around tobacco to make the *beedi*. Thousands of tribals living in remote forests, pluck the leaves and sell them in the market to earn their livelihood. In peak summers, when employment opportunities are scarce, collection of tendu leaves give local people a source of income. But, this is not its only claim to fame. Traditional medical practitioners use these tiny fruits to treat malaria, diarrhoea and dysentery. Due to their antimicrobial properties, the leaves are applied on cuts and bruises as well.

Sustainable use

Tribals of Keonjhar use the tree for domestic and commercial use, but they also value the tree. Through their customary rules, they ensure that the tree is used in a sustainable manner. There are territories marked for households from where only a certain number of families can pluck leaves. Only mature leaves are collected, and are picked one at a time to ensure that stems are not stripped off the trees, and pruning is done only for small branches – major branches are not cut. These rules prevent over-harvesting.

Like Kendu, tribals of Keonjhar use non-timber products of mango, mahua and sal trees too. They revere these trees, respect the rules and follow them to ensure that these trees and their livelihoods thrive.

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