

## Doon Watch Nature Series for Dehradun Live Hindustan Times by Sanjay Sondhi

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### Bakain-The The Bead Tree

During my frequent visits to the village of Jardhargaon in the Garhwal Himalayas near Narendranagar, I always stay at a village home. In the courtyard of the house, is a large Bakain tree (*Melia azedarach*). During a recent visit in February, I noticed that the tree was leafless, and was fruiting.

On one occasion, as I stood under the tree, gazing aimlessly at the peaks in the distance, a small yellow drupe plopped onto my head! Looking up, I observed that a bird, the Black bulbul was feeding on Bakain fruit. A cluster of yellowish drupes hung from the tree, daintily silhouetted against the bluish-grey sky. The bulbul swallows the entire fruit, so perhaps the bird was dropping a few down for me to gorge on. Not wanting to disappoint the bulbul, I picked up a fallen drupe from the ground; if the bulbuls could eat it, so could I! Popping the drupe into my mouth, I discovered that it was not fleshy nor tasty. Though edible, it was bitter-sweet; wonder why the bulbuls relish the fruit?



The Bakain, also called the Persian Lilac or the Bead Tree, superficially resembles the Neem tree. Neem has similar looking leaves, but can be differentiated from the Bakain with experience. Another clue is that Neem flowers are white, while Bakain has white and lilac flowers. In the months of January and February, the tree is

largely leafless. As spring approaches, fresh reddish leaves will begin to emerge. In March and April, white flowers, tinged with lilac will blossom. The flowers grow in loose, upward facing clusters. The fruit will ripen by September-October and will remain on the tree till February.

The stone inside the fruit of the Bakain has a natural through-hole, hence, it can be beaded to make ornamental necklaces. This gives it its common name-the Bead Tree. In fact it is believed that the Bakain fruit is a narcotic-is that why the bulbuls enjoy it so! I ate it too, and it did not have any effect on me-maybe I did not eat enough! The fruit is used as an insect repellent and has other medicinal uses as well. The bark of the tree and its leaves are used to knock out fish in water!

The Bakain is a common tree that grows in gardens and along roads throughout India. While some people believe that the tree is native to India, others believe that it is from west Asia. In Dehradun, the tree grows on Sahasthradhara road as well as other parts of the city, providing shade and oxygen to humans, fruits to the birds, and shelter to numerous other insects and living creatures.

Despite trees being beneficial to man and animal alike, we do not hesitate to chop them down ruthlessly, as our development needs burgeon. Stop and think-what would Dehradun be like without any tree cover?

Feedback on this column is welcome at [sanjay.sondhi1@gmail.com](mailto:sanjay.sondhi1@gmail.com)

Making a difference: If you care, raise your voice against the indiscriminate tree felling that is happening in Dehradun. The fewer trees we cut, the more trees we transplant (yes, this is a solution, too; grown trees can be transplanted, instead of cutting down) and the more trees we plant will ensure Dehradun retains a semblance of green cover. Its your voice-make it count!

Photograph caption: Bakain fruits

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