



# LEAF LITTER

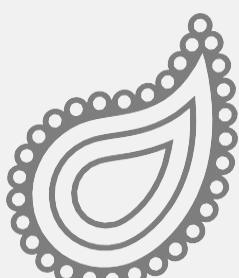
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Cover photo: leaves and fruit of *Ficus  
glomerata*, (dumar, atthi), a species found  
commonly in India



# Revisiting Our Common Future

Whether with energy or agriculture, or technology and growth in general, the one factor that seems to be missing is *limit*. All these sectors mentioned above are expanding and growing, taking over – literally swallowing – any smaller ‘fish’ in their proximity as, apparently, that is what survival means. We see it in our own neighbourhoods with the small grocery shops, tailors, and eateries being taken over by the larger, slicker, and less personal but more expensive new-comers. There is little chance of conversations here. Instead, what is on offer are polite responses to queries, and abounding stereotyped personalities.

Almost all this growth is unsustainable. The surplus in agricultural economies, as highlighted in the article about Dutch agriculture in this issue, has hidden costs. Costs that, when the math is done taking environmental and other costs into account, leaves a deficit! Similarly, the matter of single-use plastics, so convenient and ubiquitous, come at an unimaginable cost: in India, it’s a calculated cost to the health, environment and climate that exceeds the GDP of the country!

Much of renewable energy depends on materials that are extracted or produced at high costs – and demand enormous quantities of water, and have to be transported long distances from their places of origin – and wreak havoc in the environment. Most of these critical minerals, such as lithium, cobalt and rare earth elements, are also the reason for

conflicts and war in the world. Russia in Ukraine and the involvement of the US; China in Latin America, southeast Asia and Africa; the ongoing violence in the DRC and Rwanda; and the conflicts in the Philippines over nickel are all linked to the dominance in the energy sector.

Almost three decades ago we had the Brundtland report (*Our Common Future*, 1987) which emphasised the limits to growth. It said that all development was essentially ‘social development’ – focusing on the health, wealth and education of the community – and supported by economic development. In addition, it added that sustainable development was a special type of development that took note of the carrying capacity of the planet, and that the impacts of development on the environment needed to be taken into account. In many senses, it was a visionary document, which led to the formulation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In essence, the report was concerned about the long-term impacts of contemporary human activities.

But we have taken little heed of the report. It seems that only the name of the game changes, as for instance from fossil fuels to renewables in the energy sector. Behind this renewable façade, the same extractive businesses operate and, in fact, the world order – or disorder – is governed by who wins the energy race! We already have the signs indicating that planetary limits have been breached. Degraded habitats, dramatic climate phenomena, extremely stressed ecosystems, and widespread poverty combined with migrations have all become so common that they no longer even alarm us. Nor is there a serious plan for change that is evident from any collective human decision leading to implementation that

attempts to avert the poly-crises that we are faced with.

The Brundtland report also led to the UN Agenda 21, which was adopted by 178 countries at the UN Conference for Environment and Development (UNCED) in 1992 at the Earth Summit at Rio de Janeiro. It will be a beginning if these countries revisit the Agenda and take stock of what they actually adopted, and take some steps to fulfilling their promises and intentions.

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# The Hidden Costs of Dutch Agriculture

*Paul Wolvekamp*

Dutch agriculture is world-renowned for its productivity and innovation, making the Netherlands the second-largest agricultural exporter.<sup>1</sup> The Netherlands would fit inside India roughly 78 times,<sup>2</sup> and is an extremely densely populated country where most people live in urban centers, even within rural areas. Key agricultural sectors include ornamental horticulture, dairy and eggs, meat, vegetables, and fruit. The country exports over €100 billion in agri-food products annually. Around 66% of Dutch land is used for agriculture, supporting approximately 51,000 farms with an average size of 32 hectares.

The Netherlands is also a significant exporter of agricultural techniques and expertise.<sup>3</sup> It shares knowledge in areas like greenhouse technology, precision farming, water management, and sustainable production. Dutch expertise is offered through training, consultancy, and partnerships with other countries, including India, aimed to increase efficiency and productivity. Its approach integrates crop management, resource use, and logistics, making Dutch agritech widely recognized internationally.

Yet the recent report “The Hidden Bill”, by Deloitte – one of the world’s leading

accountancy cum consultancy firms - commissioned by the Robin Food and Transition Food Coalitions, adds crucial context to the debate on the sector's future.<sup>4</sup>

### *European agricultural policy*

Dutch agriculture and the European Union are strongly interlinked. The foundations of the European Union's present agricultural policy were designed by Sicco Mansholt, a Dutch farmer, and resistance member during World War II, and later a prominent politician (first post-war Dutch minister of agriculture) who became one of the architects of European integration. As the European Commissioner for Agriculture from 1958 to 1972, he shaped the early Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) of the European Economic Community. Mansholt believed that Europe needed stable food supplies, higher farmer incomes, and coordinated markets to prevent shortages like those experienced during the war.<sup>5</sup>

Under his leadership, the CAP introduced guaranteed prices, intervention buying, and common market rules to support farmers and modernize agriculture across member states. Although the policy succeeded in boosting production and ensuring food security, it also led to surpluses and high budget costs. Recognizing these problems, Mansholt later proposed the "Mansholt Plan," which encouraged structural reforms, larger farms, and reduced overproduction. His influence established agriculture as a cornerstone of early European cooperation and shaped EU agricultural policy for decades.

Later in life, after his retirement, Sicco Mansholt underwent a notable intellectual and political "u-turn." After championing a "productivist" Common Agricultural Policy focused on higher yields, larger farms, and guaranteed prices, he came to recognize the ecological and social costs of this model. By the early 1970s—especially after reading the Limits to Growth report—Mansholt warned that unchecked growth, industrialized farming, and chemical-intensive production were environmentally unsustainable.

He acknowledged that the CAP had contributed to overproduction, pollution, biodiversity loss, and the marginalization of small farmers. Mansholt began advocating for a radical reorientation of European agriculture: fewer inputs, protection of soil and water systems, support for smaller and more diversified farms, and limits to economic growth itself. He argued that European policy should prioritize ecological balance, rural communities, and long-term sustainability over sheer productivity. This shift made him an early voice for environmental consciousness within European policymaking.

### *The less visible side of the Dutch agricultural success story.*

The study by Deloitte quantifies what Sicco Mansholt cautioned in a later stage in his life, a dimension which has long been discussed but rarely measured: the external environmental and social costs of farming in The Netherlands. While Dutch agriculture generates €13.3 billion in value annually, Deloitte calculates the hidden damages to soil, water, nature, climate, and

health to total €18.6 billion. In short, ecological and societal losses exceed economic gains by €5.3 billion. These costs include soil degradation, biodiversity loss, nitrogen emissions, and health effects related to air quality and diet.

Deloitte does not blame the Dutch farmers but stresses that the system is under strain. Continuing unchanged will deepen long-term risks. Transitioning to circular or nature-inclusive farming, efficient resource use, and fairer value distribution offers opportunity, not decline. Farmers leading in sustainable practices already show greater resilience.

Organizations like LTO Nederland (the Dutch federation for Agriculture and Horticulture) – which is the main business and lobbying association for Dutch farmers and horticulturists - and Caroline van der Plas's political party Farmer-Citizen Movement (BBB) were quick to criticize the report. BBB rightly notes that farmers manage over half of Dutch land and sustain rural economies. Yet it ignores the fact that many farmers face shrinking margins, high costs, and low prices—symptoms of an unequal supply chain where processors and retailers capture most of the value. A fair solution requires these companies to share sustainability costs instead of leaving them to farmers.<sup>6</sup>

Rather than improving farmers' bargaining power, BBB has focused on exemptions and opposed curbing supermarket price cuts. Agribusiness influence, particularly from the agrochemical and feed sectors, continues to shape the debate. Despite holding key portfolios in government, BBB

has achieved little structural progress. Arguably, LTO Nederland has failed over the last 3 decades to offer its members and society a new, viable, perspective on farming.

Claims that Deloitte's recommendations threaten food security are misleading. The Netherlands produces about 2.4 times its domestic food needs. Even under a biological model, it could still feed 1.7 times its population, though food prices might rise by 30%.

#### *International footprint and the future of Dutch farming*

Dutch intensive farming also carries a major international footprint, relying on soy imports driving deforestation and land conflicts in South America. World Resources Institute, Both ENDS, Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency (PBL), and the World Economic Forum identify soy as a key driver of deforestation and emissions.

Since the 1950s, mechanization, rationalization, consolidation and the shift of labour to industry and services — largely after the post-war reconstruction and industrial expansion — greatly reduced the need for labour in agriculture. As farms merged and got larger and more capital-intensive, fewer people were needed per farm. Whereas decades ago a notable share of Dutch workers engaged in farming, today agriculture represents well under 2 % of employment. Moreover, many Dutch farmers feel a lack of long-term prospects. Each year, existing farms close without a successor to continue them. At the same

time, there is growing interest among young professionals to enter the agricultural sector, particularly through sustainable farming pathways.

The new Dutch Parliament and the to be formed coalition government must heed Deloitte's message: reform agriculture to balance productivity, the environment and better rewards for farmers—so nature, farmers and future generations can all thrive.

*Paul Wolvekamp is with Both ENDS and based in The Netherlands.*

- (1) <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/interactive/2022/netherlands-agriculture-technology/>
- (2) The Netherlands is about 41,850 km<sup>2</sup> in size, whereas India is about 3,287,263 km<sup>2</sup>.
- (3) See: 'Perils of Dutch agriculture model', by Pandurang Hegde, Deccan Herald, 7<sup>th</sup> March 2024: Read more at: <https://www.deccanherald.com/opinion/perils-of-dutch-agriculture-model-3010855>
- (4) <https://www.deloitte.com/nl/en/Industries/consumer/research/the-hidden-bill-report.html>
- (5) [https://europa.eu/principles-countries-history/history-eu/eu-pioneers/sicco-mansholt\\_en](https://europa.eu/principles-countries-history/history-eu/eu-pioneers/sicco-mansholt_en)
- (6) Sources: NRC, BBB-website, LTO-website

# Plastic Pollution: Garbage Café as a fake solution

*Pandurang Hegde*

In his monthly radio broadcast, Man ki Baat, the Prime Minister praised the efforts of the Garbage Café in controlling plastic pollution in Ambikapur town in Chhattisgarh. The café provides free meals in exchange of one kilogram of plastic and snacks for half a kilogram of plastics.

This enterprise has received praise at national and international levels, claiming that this novel initiative has tried to address the issue of plastic pollution and urban hunger.

It is also in tune with the concept of One Nation, One Mission, to put an end to the plastic pollution that has been part of the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, which is celebrating its tenth anniversary. Our PM emphasized that his government will give special attention to plastic waste management and will reduce single use plastics, micro plastic pollution for sustainable development along with a prospering biodiversity.

This rhetoric fades into thin air when we look at the ground reality.

According to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), India mismanages 85% of its plastic waste. It said what we witness every day, that single use plastics are burnt along roadsides, or

dumped into open drains that eventually reach the ocean through the rivers. It is also one of the main reasons for causing floods in urban areas. From its production, to its use and disposal, single use plastics contribute to the degradation of the environment across the entire country.

The financial costs of such degradation are staggering. According to a study conducted by the World Wildlife Fund, the economic and environmental costs of “plastics produced in 2019 is at least 3.7 trillion dollars. This is more than the GDP of India”. This includes the cost for managing the waste that has incurred due to the loss of ecosystems, the costs on health, and what is spent on mitigation measures.

According to *Nature*, an international journal, India is the largest polluter of plastics in the world, contributing almost one fifth of global plastic pollution. India produces 9.3 million tons of plastics annually, of which 5.8 million tons are burnt and 3.5 million tons are dumped as waste debris. This reveals the extreme inefficiency of the collection, disposal and management of waste.

Despite stringent regulations of plastic waste management rules, and Extended Producer Responsibility frameworks, we have failed to implement them. Single use and multi layer plastics, that constitute 42 % of the plastic waste, are dumped or burned.

Having failed miserably to tackle the crisis of managing plastics, India is in the forefront of scuttling the global plastic treaty to restrict production of virgin plastics. The main contention is that as a developing country India needs plastics to

achieve economic growth and to secure livelihoods of poor people.

India has argued that it is not essential to address the life cycle of plastics; instead it proposed that a proper waste management and recycling would solve the plastic crisis.

But the ground reality shows that the country has paid a heavy economic, social and ecological prize. Instead of securing the livelihoods of poor people, it has destroyed their resources enabling the plastic industry to make a profit.

Plastics are intricately linked to the global petro-chemical industry that assists the corporate sector to reap the profits without taking responsibility for the plastic disposal. The lack of global consensus on limiting the production of virgin plastics has helped the oil companies to invest heavily in developing the petro-chemical complex that leaves a trail of destruction at production sites, polluting the surface and the ground water, and stresses the ecosystems that impoverish local communities like farmers and fisher folk.

Soil, water and air, are the three basic capitals of humankind. This is poisoned by plastic pollution impacting the survival of all life forms on Earth. The macro and micro level impacts of the life-cycle of plastics pose a very serious threat to the survival of humanity.

Rwanda, an East African country with a weak economy has successfully phased out plastic waste in both urban and rural areas. This was successful as there was political will to address plastic waste from its entire life cycle, from manufacturing to waste management.

In contrast : the Indian Prime Minister wants to tackle the problem through recycling and waste management. He is oblivious of the increasing production of virgin plastics that brings profits to some corporates sectors at the cost of environment and livelihoods.

It is high time that our leaders stop giving sermons and praising fake solutions instead of addressing the real issues.

The plastic bomb has already exploded, but our leaders and common people are in the denial mode, claiming that it is not a serious issue.

Coming back to the Garbage Café, I called a friend in Ambikapur to find out how it is functioning. He told me “It was launched in 2019 by the town municipality. It functioned for a few months but was closed down as there were hardly any takers.” Subsequently it was closed down, and even when the PM was praising this initiative, it was not functioning!

Instead of fake solutions that make one feel good, it is high time for Indians to take control and find real solutions that address the impact of the plastic bomb.

*Pandurang Hegde is with Prakruti and based in Sirsi in Uttara Kanada*

# Restoring coastal biodiversity: the Tamil Nadu experience

*Muthusamy Palanivel*

The tsunami that struck the coasts of the Indian Ocean in December 2004 not only exposed how vulnerable coastal communities were to the killer wave but also the dearth of natural barriers that stood there for ages. The coasts devoid of mangroves were vulnerable to the tsunami which destroyed both humans and animals, and their habitats. Though the tsunami was a natural disaster the pernicious aftermath that people suffered was a man-made disaster. Many NGOs, government agencies, volunteers and philanthropists rushed instantly to save the victims of the killer wave. Many of them provided food, shelter, attire and medicines to people. And, many of them, after knowing the causative factor of the disaster, got involved in the restoration and reinstating of the mangrove forests along the coasts and along the estuaries.

SEEDS Trust began restoring mangroves through a pilot project at Pandyar estuary in Kanniyakumari district in the immediate post-tsunami period. The mission was under the ‘**Green Coast Project**’, which was supported by Both ENDS, an organisation in The Netherlands. The pilot project began in 2006 on 10 hectares and it was to plant 45,000 mangrove saplings. Over the years, the planted saplings have

grown into a dense mangrove forest, sheltering bats, birds, squirrels and aquatic animals below their roots.

Seeing the success of the project, SEEDS Trust extended its mangrove planting programme from 2019 to 2022 with the support of Maison du Monde Foundation and planted 180,000 saplings on 40 hectares along the eroded banks of Pandiyar River and on sand dunes.

### **A Post-Tsunami Awakening:**

Actually, the tsunami that struck in 2004 was a wake-up call to the leaders and the common people about environmental protection in India. Scientists pointed out that those regions that were covered by mangroves and coastal vegetation were less damaged by tsunami. Villages that had green buffers were intact and incurred a minimal loss of lives and less damage to property. However, these natural barriers were destroyed in most places along the

coasts in Kanyakumari district because of the widespread deforestation that took place for several decades in the past. Hence, restoring the degraded coastal habitats in collaboration with the local communities and the government is the long-term action plan of SEEDS Trust.

### **Community Participation:**

The participation of the local communities in the programme was remarkable and they showed much enthusiasm in planting saplings and in protecting them till they attained maturity. There were 300 households and the organisation provided five saplings to each of them according to their preference from a select ten native species. People planted the saplings in the spaces available around their houses and in their farms. They identified their personal interest with the ecological wellbeing: “We save trees and they save us in return; with trees around us, we feel oneness with nature” said a local woman.



### **Monitoring and Maintenance:**

Mere planting of saplings is not an end in itself. We have to protect them until they grow to a stage of survival on their own. Therefore, plant-guards were installed around the planted material and a fence was erected around the planting area to prevent the entry of cattle. In addition, SEEDS Trust formed “watch” committees with local people to ensure community participation in protecting the saplings. Sapling loss was compensated with casualty planting. “Planting saplings is easy but guarding them and ensuring their survival until they grow into trees is a responsible task” said a Forest Range Officer.

### **Outcome of the project: Climatic, Economic, Social and Environmental:**

Besides the number of saplings planted and the increase in vegetation, there are socio-

economic, environmental and climatic benefits.

#### **Environmental benefits:**

- Casuarina trees and other native species of trees play a vital role in carbon sequestration that contributes a lot to climate change mitigation in the long run;
- The fertility of the soil in the riparian areas is enhanced and as a result, agricultural productivity is getting enhanced;
- The biodiversity is rejuvenated: different species of birds including migratory birds are frequently found in the mangrove forest.

#### **Social benefits:**

- The attitude of the local communities has changed and they care and protect natural resources



- and keep the environment clean and green;
- Women and youth have turned out to be the key players in keeping surveillance over the saplings planted;
- Every one of the surrounding villages assumes environmental stewardship.

#### **Economic Benefits:**

- Soil erosion on the riparian area is checked;
- Bird watching turns into an additional feature of eco-tourism;
- Fruit yielding trees and oxygen generating trees are beneficial to people.

#### **Climate Resilience:**

- Sand dunes replenished with trees act as the shield against cyclones, gales and big waves;
- The green cover helps in reducing the temperature and in drawing rains.

Muthusamy Palanivel, the Founder of SEEDS Trust reminds us that “Nature has taught us such a painful lesson to safeguard the natural barriers along the coasts. The idea of building dykes along the human inhabited coastal lines is entirely inappropriate for the concrete walls may tumble down at any point of time and they will not allow the inflow of sea water into the fields and human inhabitations return to the sea. This will degrade the fertility of the soil and contaminate the groundwater. But mangroves and sand dunes have the natural toughness to withstand the power of a tsunami and the resilience to let the seawater flow into the sea. Therefore,

restoration of mangroves is not just a desire but an urgent mission.”

#### **Conclusion**

The above-said summary about Rajakamangalam Coastal Regeneration Project is not just one more success story but a roadmap of contributing something concrete towards climate change mitigation, community empowerment and livelihood promotion. With the planting of 225,000 mangrove tree saplings, the coast of Kanyakumari looks greener and remains a mighty natural barrier against tsunamis.

*Muthusamy Palnivel is with SEEDS Trust and based in Dindigul, Tamil Nadu.*

# A forest festival: *Nawa khai* among the Baiga

Maneesh Yadav & Krishna Paraste

To understand this story, we must first travel to its setting. Deep in the heart of the Maikal range in Chhattisgarh in the state's northwestern stretch of Kabirdham district, there are some Baiga villages.

Tucked away in these hills is the village of Bansatola. Perched a thousand feet above the plains, it is suspended between earth and sky. Hills, jungles, and winding rivers wrap around it like a natural fortress. To the north and south rise the Aamkhodra and Khandheli hills, standing guard over the settlement. To the east and west flow the gentle Kanhaiya and Dogar rivers, marking the village's boundaries with their shimmering paths.



This is the world where our story begins.

About **435 families** live here, forming a close-knit community shaped by the land that surrounds them. The village's isolation makes it difficult for outsiders to reach. Yet for the Baiga people, this rugged terrain is not a barrier but a lifeline.



The forest provides the Baiga people with everything: wild game, fruit, medicine, timber and fuel. The rivers offer fish that have fed their families for generations.



The village's name, **Bansatola**, carries its own story. It comes from the abundance of *baans*—bamboo—that grows in the region. Tall, green, and swaying with the wind, the bamboo forests stand as a testament to the land's natural wealth and the tribe's deep connection to it.

This is the world the Baiga people have lived in for centuries—self-reliant, resilient, and intertwined with the rhythms of the forest.



**Devli Nawakhai** is more than just a festival—it is a living blend of rituals, beliefs, and gratitude. In Bansatola, it stands as one of the most cherished celebrations of the Baiga community. Each year, the tribe gathers to honor Mother Nature, seeking her blessings for bountiful harvests and the continued abundance of the resources that sustain their lives.

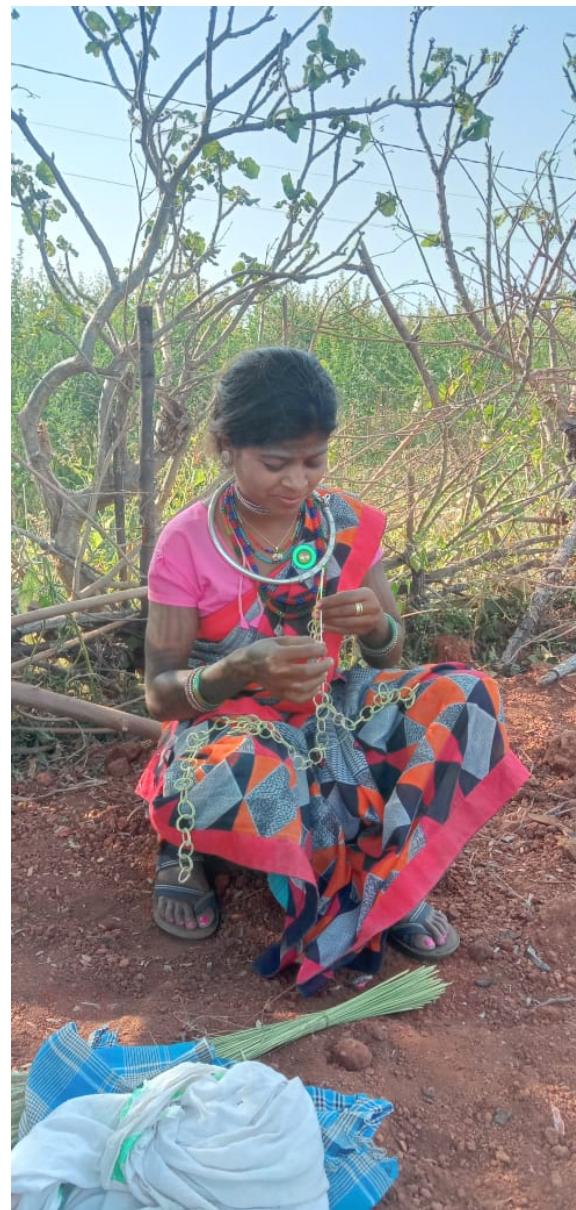


The festival is their way of asking for fertile fields, steady rains, plentiful forest produce, and flowing rivers. But it is also a moment of reflection and thankfulness—a heartfelt gesture to acknowledge the gifts of the past year. Through songs, offerings, and sacred rituals, the community expresses its deep gratitude for the forests that feed them, the

waters that nourish them, and the land that supports them.

Devli Nawakhai is, at its heart, a celebration of the eternal bond between the Baiga people and the natural world that surrounds them.

The festival occurs during the monsoon season, when the rains drape the land in shades of green and the air carries the scent of wet earth—usually between July and August. As Devli Nawakhai approaches, the village begins its preparations. The traditional leader, the **Patel**, calls a meeting



beneath the open sky or under the shade of an old tree. Here, the elders and families gather to discuss and decide the most auspicious day for the celebration. Every voice is heard, and together the community settles on a date that honours both tradition and the rhythm of the season.

During this gathering, another important decision is made: choosing which **Guniya**—the spiritual healer and ritual specialist—they will invite from neighboring villages. Once the people agree, a small group of men set out on foot to deliver the invitation. Carrying with them a traditional offering of **five bottles of mahua**, they travel through forest paths and muddy monsoon trails until they reach the Guniya's home.



There, with respect and ceremony, they present the offering and deliver the message: *“On this date, we celebrate Nawakhai. Please come to our village and lead the rituals.”*

With the invitation accepted, the heart of the festival begins to take shape.

A second village meeting is held as the chosen day for Devli Nawakhai draws near. This gathering serves as a reminder and a reaffirmation—the date has been set, and every member of the community is expected to take part in the celebration. The Patel and the elders emphasize the importance of unity, for the festival is not only a ritual but a shared expression of gratitude and togetherness.





During this meeting, an important decision is announced: on the day of the festival, **no one will cook in their own homes**. Instead, the entire village will come together for a grand communal feast at the sacred **Thakur Devta** shrine. To make this possible, each household agrees to contribute its share—**one kilogram of rice, a generous measure of pulses and vegetables, twenty rupees, and a bottle of mahua**.



With these offerings, the feast becomes a collective creation, shaped by the hands and hearts of the entire community. The arrangements mark not only preparation for a festival but the strengthening of the bonds that hold the village together.

On the appointed day, the entire village—tribe members, traditional leaders, the Patel, and the invited Guniya from



neighboring villages—gathers beneath the sacred **saja** tree, where the shrine of **Thakur Dev** rests. Before the rituals begin, an announcement echoes through the crowd: everyone must arrive **clean**, having bathed and purified themselves. The idea of *śuddhi*, or ritual purity, is deeply rooted in their tradition, and it is understood that women experiencing their menstrual cycle will refrain from participating in the rituals.

The first task is to prepare the sacred space. Men and women together clear the ground, removing weeds and wild grass. Clean water is then sprinkled, and a layer of cow dung is spread across the floor—an ancient practice believed to purify and sanctify the

earth. A delicate rangoli, drawn with wheat flour, takes shape at the center, and a lit diya is placed upon it, marking the beginning of the sacred proceedings.

After this, the villagers return to their farmlands and bring back the **first harvest of the season**—millets, corn, fresh vegetables. Alongside these, they gather forest treasures: edible herbs, medicinal roots, flowers, leaves, tubers, and tender bamboo shoots (karil). These offerings, symbols of nature's generosity, are placed at the feet of Thakur Dev.



The Guniya from each village then steps forward to perform the rituals. Clean water drawn from the well or river is brought to the shrine. Payers are offered, weaving through the air like an ancient song, and the water is blessed.

During the rituals, the Thakur Dev is invoked with prayers for abundant crops, plentiful forest resources, safety for women, protection from diseases, and security from wild animals that roam the hills.



Once the rituals are complete, the communal meal begins to take shape. Using the ingredients gathered earlier, food is cooked near the sajā tree. When the preparations are finished, blessings are sought, and **mahua** is distributed to everyone, from the youngest child to the elders. It is served in leaves folded into small cups.

After the mahua, the entire group proceeds to the second sacred site, **Khairoodai**. Here too, the place is cleaned, the ground is coated with cow dung, and a portion of the collected offerings is placed before the deity. Another ritual begins, this time involving the **sacrifice of a chicken**, a practice believed to ward off misfortune and ensure protection.

With these rituals completed, the villagers return once more to the first sacred site beneath the sajā tree. There, the feast awaits. Side by side, as one community, the

Baiga people eat, drink mahua, and celebrate, their laughter rising into the forested hills. The day becomes not only a festival but a reaffirmation of their unity, their traditions, and their timeless bond with nature.

*Maneesh Yadav and Krishna Paraste are with Margdarshak Sewa Sansthan, Chhattisgarh.*

# **The Demarcation of Community Forest Rights (CFR) Lands in Yavatmal**

*Shrikant Lodham*

## **Introduction**

The Gramin Samasya Mukti Trust (GSMT), Yavatmal has been implementing the “Ensuring Ecological and Livelihood Security Program covering nearly 220 villages across nine Blocks. The Program aims to enable effective implementation of Community Forest Rights (CFR), ensure sustainable conservation of forest resources, and promote environmentally secure livelihood opportunities.

Under this initiative, awareness campaigns and capacity-building activities were carried out in 200 CFR recognised villages. GSMT established a network of 40 trained Community Youth Fellows who work closely with Community Forest Rights Management Committees (CFRMCs) across all the villages. All 220 Gram Sabhas



formally submitted letters to the Forest Department requesting geographical demarcation of their CFR land. GSMT continuously coordinated with government departments to initiate the process.

To accelerate progress, GSMT teams also held meetings with key public representatives, including the Hon.Tribal Development Minister Dr. Ashok Uike, MLA Raju Todsam, MLA Balasaheb Mangulkar, and Member of Parliament Sanjay Deshmukh. During these engagements, trained fellows presented updates, highlighted issues in boundary demarcation, and sought administrative support for the smooth implementation of Conservation and Management Plans (CMPs).

### **Administrative Action and Field Intervention**

Initially, the Forest Department did not respond to the Gram Sabha requests. However, due to persistent follow-up by GSMT, the efforts yielded results.

On 15 May 2025, the Sub-Divisional Officer (SDO) issued a directive to the Forest Department to start the demarcation of CFR lands in Kelapur block. Similar directives were subsequently issued for other village clusters across divisions.

The demarcation process further gained momentum with the field visit of District Collector Mr. Vikas Meena, accompanied by SDO Mr Amit Ranjan. The officials interacted with Gram Sabha representatives and reviewed implementation needs directly from the field. Through this process, communities received clarity about their forest boundaries, strengthening legal ownership and enabling better forest protection and resource planning.

Demarcation documents and maps generated during this phase now serve as official evidence for the Gram Sabhas before government departments and related institutions. Hence, demarcation is not just an administrative formality but a crucial step toward long-term community-led forest governance.

### **Mission-Mode Execution in 16 Villages**

Following directives from the Assistant Collector and SDO, Kelapur, demarcation work in 16 villages was undertaken on a mission mode under the Forest Rights Act, 2006, Rules 2008, and Amended Rules 2012. This ensured a rightful legal implementation for Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (OTFDs).



### **Objectives of Demarcation**

1. To physically implement the Community Forest Rights granted under FRA.
2. To provide clarity of forest boundaries to local tribal and forest-dependent communities, preventing encroachments and disputes.
3. To geographically mark and record the legal extent of community forest areas for each Gram Sabha.
4. To support community-led forest

protection, planning, and sustainable resource management.

## Participating Institutions and Members

- Gram Sevak (Village Development Officer)
- Talathi (Revenue Officer)
- Forest Guard
- Sarpanch & Deputy Sarpanch
- Gram Panchayat Members
- Gram Sabha Representatives
- CFRMC Members
- Gramin Samasya Mukti Trust (GSMT) Team
- Block-level Fellows & Social Workers
- Local residents with traditional forest knowledge

## Demarcation Methodology

### 1. Preliminary Gram Sabha and Committee Meeting

- Orientation meetings were conducted;
- Historical and traditional forest use patterns were recorded;
- Local tribal elders helped identify natural boundaries.

### 2. Field Visit and Actual Measurement

- GPS technology was used for accurate measurement;
- Natural markers such as rivers, hills, and large trees were recorded;
- The entire boundary was verified by conducting a “boundary walk”.

### 3. Mapping and Documentation

- Measurements were transferred onto official government maps;
- Any disputed zones or overlapping claims were separately documented.

### 4. Coordination with Neighbouring Villages

- Joint discussions were held in case of overlapping boundaries;
- Disputes were resolved through consensus at Gram Sabha level.

### 5. Final Approval by Gram Sabha

- Draft maps were presented in Gram Sabha;
- Final documents were signed by Gram Sabha President, Committee Members, and senior officials.

## Implementation Measures

To ensure transparency and accountability, the following steps were systematically implemented:

*Physical Marking of Boundaries:* Boundary points were visibly marked using stones, painted markers, and mounds to prevent future disputes.

*Photographic Documentation:* Every marked boundary was photographed as evidence. These photographs are annexed to official reports.

*Use of KML Files:* A KML file containing GPS-linked locations of all 16 CFR villages was generated for precise mapping and verification. These files support future monitoring and digital record-keeping.



## Conclusion

The demarcation of Community Forest

Rights in Yavatmal is a landmark achievement resulting from persistent grassroots mobilization, administrative engagement, and legal action under the Forest Rights Act, 2006.

This process strengthens the legal recognition of the Gram Sabha forest ownership, ensures clarity of jurisdiction, prevents illegal encroachment, empowers communities to protect and sustainably manage forests, and supports livelihood-based conservation.

Ultimately, the successful initiation of demarcation marks a major step toward ecological security, tribal empowerment, and long-term decentralised forest governance in Yavatmal district.

*Srikant Lodham is with Gramin Samasya Mukthi Trust, Maharashtra.*

## ***Sowing Seeds of Change: training programme on organic farming***

*Murali Sivanarayana Pillai*

In the foothills of the Palni region, farmers are learning practical ways to adopt organic methods and improve their lands sustainably. As part of the Azim Premji Foundation (APF) Programme, the Palni Hills Conservation Council (PHCC) organized a training programme on organic farming and distributed saplings to encourage environmentally friendly cultivation practices.

The initiative covered seven villages, of which four (Sambalkadu Colony, Thanmarai Kulam, Pala Malai, and Kaduguthadi) had suitable cultivable land for plantation. From each of these villages, 15 farmers were selected, forming a group of 60 participants. The programme aimed to



promote organic farming and improve local green cover through plantation.

Before saplings were distributed, PHCC organized a hands-on training session for all 60 farmers. The session included:

- Basic principles of organic farming;
- Soil preparation and composting methods;
- Use of natural bio-inputs;
- Planting and maintenance techniques.

The training also provided space for participants to share their own farming experiences and discuss challenges in moving toward organic methods.

Following the training, saplings of useful species were distributed to the farmers. The varieties included:

- Avocado
- Lime
- Citrus
- Jackfruit
- Custard Apple
- Pepper
- Silver Oak (for timber)

Each farmer received a selection of fruit bearing and timber saplings suitable for local conditions.

On 15th October 2025, the plantation drive was inaugurated by PHCC President, Mark Antrobus. Farmers planted the saplings in their respective plots with guidance from PHCC staff. GPS coordinates were recorded for all planting sites to facilitate follow-up monitoring and care.

All saplings were supplied by the PHCC Nursery at Patlankadu, about 60 kilometers from the project area. The nursery provided well grown, locally adapted plants suited to the regional environment.

The programme reflects PHCC's ongoing efforts to promote sustainable agriculture

and community based ecological restoration. Through this initiative, 60 farmers gained practical knowledge in organic cultivation and contributed to improving local bio-diversity. The activity marks another step toward developing environmentally responsible farming in the Palni region.

*Murali Sivanarayana Pillai is a member of the Palni Hills Conservation Council is based in Tamil Nadu.*



# An evening in Colombo

*Satheesh Muthu Gopal*

While travelling from India to Singapore, I had some spare time during the transit in Colombo. I searched the internet for a birding spot near Colombo city and found a bird park called Diyasaru; it is not officially declared as a bird sanctuary. I reached the place in the late afternoon and there was no queue at the ticket counter. I asked the ticket agent about the park and, knowing where I come from, he spoke to me in Tamil and showed me how to navigate this park.

The weather was hot and the sky was clear. I entered the park after carefully studying the map and the list of bird species posted at the entrance. There were some Common Mynas, Spotted Doves, and Yellow-billed Babblers foraging in the ground beneath the tree. A crow was cawing from a branch above. A male koel was singing at a distance. The pelage of the Indian Palm Squirrel was shining in the bright sunlight. I used to see and experience the same in my street in Palani and the circumstances in Palani and here were quite alike.



*Swamphen*

Though the weather was hot, the shade of the trees on both sides of the path made walking more comfortable. There were swamps covered with aquatic plants and White-breasted Waterhens were spotted on the bund and the walking path. Unlike the ones we see in India, these seemed fearless of human proximity. Grey-headed Swampens were perched on the branches of the bushes just above the water surface and, due to their weight, the thin branches bent towards the water.

I climbed to the top of the watchtower to get a clearer view of the park and to find more birds, even if they were perched or flying at a distance. There was a swamp just below, where the water level was very low and the swampens walked through the aquatic plants. There were clumps of bamboo, reeds, shrubberies, tall trees, and a few coconut palms all around the swamp.

A massive Purple Heron came out of nowhere and passed through the swamp. As time passed, the birds' activities increased as they had to complete their foraging and return to roost. The sky was still clear. I was looking for a raptor and, after some time, I saw a bird flying in the distance. A huge tree between us obscured the view, but as the bird circled and soared, I could catch a glimpse of it. It was a Red-backed Kite!

As expected, as dusk approached, the sky filled with parties of Rose-ringed Parakeets and Egrets. A white-bellied Drongo was perched unobscured straight ahead of me, hopping off from the perch to catch its prey, and returning to the same tree. A flock of Green Imperial Pigeons and a lone Black-hooded Oriole were all perched on the barren branches of the trees above the canopy.

The board at the entrance stated that the park has Fishing cats. While observing the habitat from the watchtower, I did not find

the information misleading. Though I couldn't see this elusive cat, I'm glad to know their habitat remains intact close to the busiest city in Sri Lanka. In India, they are found in mangrove habitats, particularly in the Sundarbans. Naturalists have also recorded their presence in the Western Ghats. Probably, wherever the swamps in the hills are still untouched, the water quality is good, and the fish are abundant, there must be a habitat for fishing cats. As far as I know, there is no record of Fishing Cats in the Palani hills. But I would recommend researching Kookal Lake for fishing cats and otters.

Coming back to Diyasaru, I came down from the watchtower and went back to the entrance. A Greater Coucal was sitting gracefully on the leaf sheath of a coconut tree, but it disappeared after I noticed it. A little bird calling its mate was a Plain Prinia hopping around a nest built in the fork of branches. A cup nest may not belong to this bird but I couldn't see any other tree birds around. I had to move as it was getting dark and the park was about to close.

I came out of the park, and the light was better as it was an open lawn. A number of Jungle crows was sitting around a small pond in the yard. I have read that crows occasionally fish by setting their foot into the water. A red-wattled Lapwing was sitting on the lawn, and its red marks couldn't go unnoticed on such a green lawn. A little boy approached it closely and the bird didn't want to move away. It closed its wings and sat comfortably in the hollow on the ground.

I reached the highway when there was still a little light. The silhouette of a White-throated Kingfisher sitting on a power line grabbed my attention. Across me there was a lake with trees where water birds roosted. As the light diminished, the dotted egrets

and storks on the trees appeared like stars in the dark sky. I walked along the lake's shore and crossed a bridge to a café built on the lake. When I took the first sip of my coffee, I saw a Darter that was on its way back to roost!

*Satheesh Muthu Gopal is an independent writer and environmentalist.*

# The Biwala returns to the forest: a native plant revival story from the Northern Western Ghats

*Vijay Sambare*

About twenty years ago, I joined Lok Panchayat, a nonprofit organization. Working on projects promoting sustainable farming, the conservation of indigenous seeds and organic farming experiments brought me immense joy. Gradually, a bond developed with the farmers—both men and women—of small villages nestled in the foothills of the Sahyadri mountain ranges. Through them, I began to understand the intricate patterns of traditional agriculture. It was also a wonderful opportunity to study the bio-cultural relationship between women and native seeds.

Around the same time, a Pune-based organization, Econet, had launched a study project with adivasi communities of the northern Sahyadris. The aim was to understand the current relationship between forests and the adivasis, and to strengthen livelihoods based on Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs). The work began in ten villages across the Kalsubai-Harishchandragad landscape, inhabited primarily by the Mahadev Koli and Thakar adivasis. The initiative grew from dialogue to action—communication to community-

led implementation.

Personally, I have been fascinated by the Sahyadris since my school days—its forts, forests, and sacred groves (devrais). Talking with the local people during my wanderings became a lifelong passion. At the time, I often heard traditional herders lament the mortality rate of the famous Dangi cattle breed. It was evident that to sustain the agricultural systems of the Sahyadris, the region's grasslands and forest ecosystems had to be protected—and that such conservation could succeed only through local adivasi communities and their leadership.



Hence, it was decided to document the traditional ecological knowledge and skills of the forest-dwelling communities. Under the Maharashtra NTFP Forum, various institutions and field practitioners joined hands, supported by Keystone Foundation from the Nilgiri Hills, Tamil Nadu and NTFP Exchange Programme Network, which provided both financial and technical assistance.

One day, in the village of Ambit (Kalasubai-Harishchandragad landscape), while sitting in a grove of old mango trees, we were engaged in conversations with local people and noting down various useful plants—how they benefited people, livestock, and the forest ecosystem. We identified medicinal plants, timbers suitable for houses, cowsheds, carts, and agricultural tools. This was essentially a community-led ethno-botanical survey. We also discussed which species were becoming rare, endangered, or extinct, and how to conserve and revive them in the future.

Among the disappearing species was a tree called biwala (*Pterocarpus marsupium*), which people said was no longer found in the area. A young villager, Sahebrao Bharmal, observed that earlier, when either humans or Dangi cattle were injured, villagers would burn the biwala bark to prepare the ash for treating wounds—but this practice had vanished. So, the villagers decided to start a nursery to reintroduce such valuable plants into the forest. A suitable site was found near the Ambit dam. The village women's group took charge of the nursery, with Sahebrao's leadership. He volunteered to collect seeds of more than thirty native plant species from nearby

forests. Through this initial ethnobotanical effort, a list of key plants—important for local ecology, wildlife, livestock, and human use—was prepared. For the lost species, seed collection and nursery development began.

On my next visit to Ambit, I found Sahebrao and the women's group diligently collecting seeds from the wild. They had found almost everything—except biwala. Where could they get its seeds? The search began. They contacted forest nurseries, traders who supplied seeds to the Forest Department, and eventually reached out to organizations in the NTFP EP Network. Finally, Madhu Ramnath from the Palani Hills Conservation Council (PHCC) in Kodaikanal, Tamil Nadu, informed us that they had biwala seeds. We requested him to send a kilogram of the seeds and he immediately shipped it by air courier.

In April 2010, the precious parcel traveled from Kodaikanal → Madurai → Pune → finally to the Lokpanchayat office in Sangamner. Everyone was thrilled and amazed that the seeds had come from such a distant region!

The seeds were quickly transported to Ambit, where the nursery was ready. They were sown in seed bags, and germination was excellent—110 biwala saplings grew successfully. However, since the nursery was by the roadside, some 20–25 saplings were “stolen” by curious locals who valued their importance. Sahebrao was both annoyed and secretly happy—it showed that people still remembered the plant and valued it!

Later, Sahebrao and young volunteers from nearby villages planted the remaining saplings across forests and farmlands in

Ambit and five neighboring villages. Today, those trees are thriving, and locals continue to protect them as useful native species.

Biwala, also known as Bija or Malabar Kino, grows naturally in the semi-evergreen and deciduous forests of the Sahyadris. It belongs to the Fabaceae family and is valued for its medicinal and timber properties. In Ayurveda and Naturopathy, biwala holds a special place—its wood is traditionally used for making bullock-cart wheels, wooden utensils, and agricultural tools. However, due to over-harvesting and its growing use in herbal diabetes treatment, biwala populations declined rapidly. Although the Forest Department once encouraged adivasis to make and sell utensils from biwala wood, the lack of local plantation traditions has led to the disappearance of such species.

For nearly two and half decades now, through the NTFP Exchange Program, community-centered forest management and conservation have been promoted across India and Southeast Asia. Through knowledge exchange among organizations, practitioners, and indigenous peoples, many lesser-known but ecologically vital plants—like Biwala—are being restored to their native ecosystems. This revival of forgotten native flora offers a hopeful glimpse of harmony between people, forests, and traditional knowledge.

*Vijay Sambare is an independent environmentalist associated with the NTFP India Networking Forum.*

# एनटीएफपी बाजार के बारे में अधिक जानने के लिए नीमच मंडी का दौरा

हमने 30 अक्टूबर 2025 को मंडी का दौरा किया। हमने मंडी के कई व्यापारियों और एजेंटों से मुलाकात की। हमारी मुलाकात महाराष्ट्र के एक व्यापारी से भी हुई। मंडी की कार्य प्रणाली बहुत अच्छी है, कोई गडबड़ी नहीं होती। सभी उत्पादों को बेचने के लिए अलग-अलग जगह उपलब्ध है। सभी विक्रेताओं के लिए खाद्य सामग्री भी नाममात्र दरों पर उपलब्ध है। उपज की बिक्री के बाद नकद भुगतान किया जाता है। व्यापारियों और विक्रेताओं को जोड़ने वाले एजेंट 2% कमीशन लेते हैं। हमें मंडी में शारीरिक रूप से जाने की ज़रूरत नहीं है, हम व्यापारियों और एजेंटों के साथ ईमानदारी से संबंध बनाकर अपनी उपज परिवहन द्वारा भेज सकते हैं।

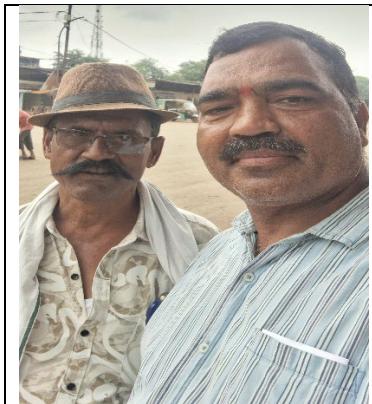
- नीमच औषधीय मंडी भारत में जड़ी-बूटियों का एक प्रमुख व्यापार केंद्र है, जो दुनिया भर में अश्वगंधा जैसी औषधीय फसलों के व्यापार के लिए मशहूर है। इस मंडी में 500 से अधिक प्रकार की जड़ी-बूटियाँ बेची जाती हैं, जिनमें मिट्टी, फूल, पत्तियाँ और पत्थर भी शामिल हैं, जिनमें औषधीय गुण होते हैं। मंडी में सिर्फ फसलें ही नहीं, बल्कि धूल, मिट्टी, फूल, पत्ते और पत्थर जैसी वस्तुएँ भी बिकती हैं, जिनकी प्राकृतिक औषधीय उपयोगिता होती है।
- यह भारत में जड़ी-बूटियों का एक प्रमुख व्यापार केंद्र है।
- यह दुनिया भर में अश्वगंधा जैसी औषधीय फसलों के व्यापार के लिए प्रसिद्ध है।
- यहां 500 से अधिक प्रकार की जड़ी-बूटियाँ बेची जाती हैं।
- मंडी में अनाज, मसाले, दालें, और तिलहन जैसी अन्य कृषि वस्तुओं का भी व्यापार होता है।
- नीमच की कृषि उपज मंडी को एशिया की सबसे बड़ी कृषि उपज मंडी माना जाता है।

औषधीय फसलों की बिक्री के मामले में नीमच की मंडी देश की बड़ी मंडी बनकर उभर रही है। यहां आंध्रप्रदेश, कर्नाटक, राजस्थान, मध्यप्रदेश सहित कई राज्यों के व्यापारी औषधीय फसल बेचने आते हैं। यहां ईसबगोल, अश्वगंधा, नीम की पत्ती और फुहाड़िया सहित 32 प्रकार की उपज बिकने आती हैं।

नीमच कृषि मंडी में 73 प्रकार की उपज देशभर से बिकने आती हैं। इनमें से 32 तो औषधीय उपजें शामिल हैं। पिछले साल यहां 248 क्विंटल तो सिर्फ नीम की पत्ती ही बिक गई थी। इस साल अभी तक 90 क्विंटल पत्ती बिकने आ चुकी है। इसी तरह पिछले साल 36 क्विंटल निंबोली बिकी थी। इस साल 4 क्विंटल आ चुके हैं। इस साल अभी फुहाड़िया आने की शुरुआत नहीं हुई। पिछले साल यहां 1 लाख 43 हजार 578 क्विंटल औषधीय फसल मंडी में बिकने आई थी। वहीं इस साल अभी तक 74 हजार 478 क्विंटल तक आ चुकी है। मंडी टैक्स के बाद भी आते हैं- राजस्थान में औषधीय उपज बेचने पर मध्यप्रदेश की तरह दो

फीसदी टैक्स नहीं लगता। बावजूद अन्य राज्यों से औषधीय फसल उत्पादक और व्यापारी यहां सौदे के लिए आते हैं। यहां से वैद्यनाथ, झंडू, सांडू, डाबर व पतंजलि, अत्तार, वैद्य, सरकारी आयुर्वेदिक दवा कारखानों में माल सप्लाई होता है।

S.No	Product	Rate per 100 Kg
1	Tilli	10250
2	Urad	7000
3	Sarso	6200
4	Kalonji	25600
5	Isabgol	10500
6	Gehu	2650
7	Lal Kinowa	5000
8	Chiya seed	23900
9	Akarkara ( Irani )	27000
10	Safed Musli	150000
11	Shatawari	30000
12	Ashwagandha Patta	1100
13	Chirayata ( Kalmeg)	6900
14	Tulsi patta	9300
15	Amla Sukha	8850
16	Methi dana	5500
17	Jo ( Jav )	2300
18	Deshi Chana	8000
19	Ashwagandha Jad	29500
20	Dana Post	134000
21	Moong Hara	75
22	Mal Kangni	37500
23	Punwad	2100
24	Dhaniya Sabut	8000
25	Alasi	5500
26	Tilli safed	10000
27	Tulsi Panchag	500
28	Pathar ( Stone )	500
29	Anaar Dana	4000
30	Anar Chilka	4500
31	Genda Fool pankhudi	3000
32	Neem Pati	2500
33	Sahajan Patti	4000
34	Ashwgandha seed	200
35	Mungfali	6000



Kamlendra Singh Rathore

Samarthak Samiti Udaipur

# nature notes



06.04.2025 16:42

*Holarrhena antidysenterica*

Hin: kurchi; Tam: kodaga palei; bark an effective cure for amoebic dysentery.



06.04.2025 16:36

*Ochna squarrosa*

Sans: kanakchampa; Tam: chilanti; wood used for walking-sticks, bark and leaf medicinal



06.04.2025 17:03

*Naringi crenulata*

Hin: beli; Tam: nayvila; wood strong, used for axles of carts, rice pounders, tool handles



06.04.2025 15:19

*Linociera ramiflora*

Hin: baat seona; Tam: porumbalu; wood strong, used for implements



# NON-TIMBER FOREST PRODUCTS EXCHANGE PROGRAM NETWORKING FORUM, INDIA

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INDIA



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