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Popular Article**Kendu Leaves (*Diospyros melanoxylon*): A means of Livelihood Security for tribal communities in Jharkhand****Kalyan Mandi^{1*}, Rajeev Kumar², Rohit Kumar Singh³ and Debashish Kumar⁴**¹Assistant Professor cum Junior Scientist, Dept. of Agricultural Extension Education, Agriculture College Garhwa, Birsa Agricultural University, Ranchi²Assistant Professor cum Junior Scientist, Dept. of Agricultural Statistics & Computer Application, Agriculture College Garhwa, Birsa Agricultural University, Ranchi³Assistant Professor cum Junior Scientist, Dept. of Horticulture, Agriculture College Garhwa, Birsa Agricultural University, Ranchi⁴Assistant Professor cum Junior Scientist, Dept. of Agricultural Economics, Agriculture College Garhwa, Birsa Agricultural University, Ranchi*Corresponding author: kalyan.mandi@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Kendu leaves (*Diospyros melanoxylon*), also known as 'Green Gold', are a valuable minor forest produce (MFP) providing a vital seasonal income source for tribal communities in Jharkhand. Forests in the state are deeply woven into the economic, cultural, and social fabric, supporting rural livelihoods and contributing to food security. Tribal populations living in and around Jharkhand's forest areas increasingly rely on Non-Wood Forest Products (NWFPs) such as Kendu leaves to sustain their way of life. The main and most economically important use of Kendu leaves is as a natural wrapping for rolling bidis—traditional, hand-rolled Indian cigarettes. As such, Kendu leaves present a promising income-generating opportunity for resource-limited, forest-dependent tribal communities aiming for sustainable livelihoods.

Keywords: Kendu leaves, tribal, livelihood**INTRODUCTION**

Jharkhand is one of India's top producers of Kendu leaves (*Diospyros melanoxylon*), yielding around 1.16 million standard bags (52,000 metric tons) each year. Harvested in the summer, these leaves serve as an important Non-Timber Forest Produce (NTFP), offering seasonal income to many thousands of families who live in forests and belong to tribal communities. The forest plays a key role in shaping the socio-economic and cultural development of tribal societies. It offers every source of large and minor products, making it the repository of vast resources (Kala, 2013). Kendu leaves,

which come from Kendu (*Diospyrus melanoxylon Roxb*), are a key source of livelihood for rural communities, especially tribal populations residing near forests in Central India and surrounding states. Approximately 30 to 40 million people from economically disadvantaged groups in the region depend on these leaves for both collection and the production of bidis (traditional hand-rolled cigarettes) (Kumar and Choudhary, 2016). Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Karnataka, and Uttar Pradesh are the states where Kendu trees are most found growing naturally. India produces over 6 lakh tonnes of Kendu leaves annually. According to Kerketta *et al.* (2018), Jharkhand produces 4,74,900 standard bags (One standard bag of Kendu leaves comprises of 1000 bundles of 50 leaves each) of Kendu leaves annually on an average. Additionally, it makes a substantial contribution to the creation of jobs for their respective states' government employees.



Fig 1 a. Kendu tree b. Kendu leaves c. Kendu seedling d. Fruits of Kendu

Some of the alternative use of Kendu tree:

1. Leaf plates from Kendu leaves: making leaf plates from Kendu leaves could be promoted which will help these tribal families to secure their income. In future, there will be surge in use of biodegradable dining plates thus leaf plate making is good alternate option.

2. Kendu fruit as nutraceutical product: Kendu fruit is edible and has been proved to be rich in essential mineral and vitamins content and an antioxidant (Jamil *et al.*, 2019). The fruit on value addition can be converted into commercial products like dried powder, like jam, jelly, fruit wine and pickle.

3. Raising quality planting stock of Kendu tree: due to over exploitation and unscientific harvesting of Kendu tree for bidi making, the population of Kendu is declining in some states. In this regard, local people can be involved in the raising nurseries of Kendu seedlings and in taking up planting of Kendu trees in the forests and degraded lands for restoring the forests, creating carbon sinks and bringing back the greenery.



Fig 2. Rolling bidis traditionally with hand using Kendu leaves

Kendu (*D. melanoxylon* Roxb.) is a highly important Non-Wood Forest Product (NTFP) commonly found across Jharkhand. Its leaves are dried and used for rolling bidis, an inexpensive local tobacco product. For many tribal communities in the state, collecting kendu leaves is not only a means of subsistence but also a financial mainstay. This collection is carried out under the rights granted to them by the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 (FRA). Kendu leaf collection plays a key role in supporting rural livelihoods and generating revenue for the state of Jharkhand.

Kendu leaves being an economic resource and livelihood source for the poor, particularly the tribal; it is largely collected and sold for income. Bidi manufacturing is labour intensive, and bidi rolling, which employs the majority of the workforce, is done in almost all major states of India (International Labour Organization, 2001). The industry produces between 750 billion and 1.2 trillion bidi sticks per year (Sunley, 2008). It is estimated that kendu leaf plucking alone generates about six weeks employment for about 7.5 million people particularly during off-peak agricultural season (Arnold, 1995) while rolling bidis engages nearly 4.4 million women and children (Ministry of Labour, 2000) resulting in production of 600 billion to one trillion bidis every year in the country (Lal and Wilson, 2012). World Bank (2006) reported that kendu leave provides 106 million person-days of employment in collecting activities and 675 million person-days in secondary processing. A study by Jharkhand State Forest Development Corporation (JSFDC) has been nominated as the sole agency for trade in Kendu leaves in the state. It accounts for 75–80% of the total revenue from the forests (Kerketta *et al.*, 2018). In Jharkhand, JSFDC is responsible for collection and trading of kendu leaves in systematic and organized manner. For this purpose, the whole forest area of the state is divided into 300 units called lots. Major producing zones include forest divisions in Latehar, Daltonganj (Palamu region), Garhwa, Hazaribagh and Giridih. Kendu leaves are plucked by the tribal and the 'Munshi' supervises the drying of the leaves. The process of drying takes around 9–10 days after which standard bags are made, each consisting of 1000 bundles. These lots are auctioned to the contractors prior to the collection season. The corporation pays collection prices to the rural people (primary collectors) at a fixed rate every year. Kendu leaves have contributed between 70– 80% revenue to the forest department where the economic contribution from kendu leaves to the household is estimated only 2.2–2.7% of the total annual income for the poor (Bahuguna, 2000). In such a context, kendu leaf collection rather can be viewed as poverty reduction enterprise (Verma

and Rehan, 2005; Rasul *et al.*, 2008). Haque Committee appointed by the Union Ministry of Environment and Forest (2011) recommends to give minimum support price for kendu. Despite immense potential of revenue generation and socio-economic upliftment of rural population residing in forest fringe areas limited efforts have been taken up to systematically assess kendu leaf production and impact of silvicultural practices therein (Kerketta *et al.*, 2018).

CONCLUSION

Rising human and livestock populations increases the demand for forest products and land, as per capita land availability declines sharply. In Jharkhand, indigenous communities with poor socioeconomic conditions can enhance their well-being by making efficient use of available resources, traditional knowledge, and skills. Non-timber forest products (NTFPs), such as Kendu leaves, are crucial to the rural economy and the livelihoods of tribal people in the state. Therefore, promoting employment through value-added industries based on Kendu leaves, along with organized marketing systems, can significantly support income generation and sustainable living for Jharkhand's tribal farmers. The diverse applications of Kendu leaves create substantial market demand across various industries. However, due to inconsistent market regulations and price volatility, tribal communities face economic difficulties, with a large portion of profits captured by middlemen. Consequently, the government and other institutions should provide technical and financial support to tribal communities as an alternative pathway to secure their livelihoods.

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