

Siali Leaves:

Siali leaf (*Bauhinia Vahlia*) is an important NTFP of central and southern Orissa. The leaf is mostly used locally by the grocery shops, petty hotels etc as plates and packing material. In the local market it is more precious than the sal leaf. In the rural areas of Ganjam, Gajapati and Phulbani the plates made of siali leaf is largely being used during the community feasts. The leaf has a fairly good market in Vizag, Srikakulam and Vizianagaram districts of Andhra Pradesh. After the NTFP policy of March 2000, its management has been transferred to Gram Panchayats. The importance of the leaf in the socio-economic life of poor tribal is evident from the following narration.

"I have been stitching Siali leaves since I was a kid when my mother was involved in collecting, stitching and selling Siali leaves for sustenance", says Mamata Pradhan, 18-year Kondh girl of Kandabada village, Raikia GP of Raikia block, Phulbani district. She recollects how she learnt the art of collecting Siali leaves from forest and stitched them as a young trainee. As a kid, I remember getting up early in the morning to accompany my mother for Siali leaf collection. We start around 4 AM in the morning and since Siali trees are only available in the relatively dense areas of the forest, we mostly travel 15 to 20 kms to Kuasor parbat in Daringibadi area for a greener and thicker patch where collection of leaves is easier because of availability. This process of leaf collection goes on throughout the year except during paddy sowing i.e. July - August.

The whole process of Siali leaf plate making takes around 3-4 days and fetch per individual, i.e. one head load is around 10 chakis (leaf equivalent). Drying takes one day provided there is sun and the weather is not cloudy. Normally on the 3rd day, stitching starts and one adult can stitch around 2 chakis a day. In a week, one family on an average can stitch 10 chakis of Siali plates, which means an income of Rs. 60/- per week and Rs. 240/- per family per month from Siali leaf plate making (the State Government rate is Rs. 6/- per chaki).

Apart from the difficulties we face because of large-scale forest depletion, many a time we are unnecessarily harassed by AMCS counter at Raikia (it is to be noted here that now AMCS has defunct because of several reasons). Though we have hardly any complains as regards payment of declared rates but we face a lot of difficulties due to their arbitrary decision about the quality of the plates. Our problem is that we cannot approach anyone for our grievances.

Whatever they say about the quality of the plates is sacrosanct. We are also cheated in the counting of chakis that is corroborated by the local NGOs like Vikash Bharati. According to them since when AMCS started appointing (unofficially) Kumutis from Berhampur as sublease agents, this problem of cheating in counting has started.

Following figure gives the trade channel of Siali leaf from Kandhamal, one of the major districts producing the leaf. Tadapalligudam in AP is one of the important destinations from Kandhamal. This gives an indication of the extent of spread of Siali leaf trade, Chennai being one of the primary users of the leaf from Orissa.

Fig.14 - Trade route of Siali leaf plates from Kandhamal dist.

