



The Industrial Perspective of Non-timber Forest Products in India

1. *NTFPs as industrial raw materials:*

Indian industries have been sourcing their raw materials from the rich & diverse non-timber forest product resources of the country since long. As detailed below they use either one or more of these products and are in some cases almost exclusively or critically dependent on the same:

- Paper industry: Bamboo(critical), sabai grass
- Bidi industry: Tendu leaf(critical)
- Lac processing industries: Lac(critical)
- Leather industry: Chebulic myrobalan and some other natural tan-stuff from forest
- Pharmaceuticals: Wide range of NTFPs used(critical in some cases, like *Boswellia serrata* cream produced by CIPLA)
- Cosmetics: Wide range of NTFPs used(critical in some cases)
- Agarbatti industry: bamboo stick, glutinous bark, sal resin, guggul, etc.(critical)
- Vanaspati industry: mahua oil, sal seed oil, etc.
- Bio-fuel industry: karanj seed, etc.

The confectionary industry uses or can also use various NTFPs like chironjee, and the chocolate industry would be able to use sal seed butter and other cocoa butter equivalents produced from NTFPs once the Food Adulteration Act is amended to that effect.

Besides there are a number of cottage industries depending upon NTFPs. They produce natural dyes, and decorative items, etc..

2. *Role of the corporate sector in NTFP development:*

While the corporate sector has been keen on ensuring supply of NTFPs that are critical to it, it has rather taken a defensive position so far utilization of the vast potential of the NTFP sector is concerned. That is to say, it has remained dependent on the clues known to it or made available to it through R&D, and has not done much on its own to develop this sector. However, now that the Planning Commission has decided to focus on Natural Resource Development alongwith NTFPs, there is a strong scope for the corporate sector to contribute to this national initiative so as to promote an alternative source of employment & livelihood in lieu of harnessing the potential of the growing natural products market in the world.

The corporate sector can invest in developing the NTFP sector for and in the following areas:

- **Securing existing raw material supply:** For instance insecure supply of glutinous bark(producing *jigat* powder, a binding agent) for agarbatti industry has been a matter of concern since many years. In July 2000 the Federation of Indian Export Organizations openly shared this.

- **Developing new products through R&D:** Intensive & well-conceived R&D activities can discover how the inherent properties of natural products can be utilized for the benefit of humanity. Further, it can also invent mechanisms to give new dimensions to the material properties. And such type of focused, well-targeted and dynamic R&D work is more expected from the corporate sector.
- **Using NTFPs for low-cost & eco-friendly pollution control measures under Clean Development Mechanism(CDM):** Studies have shown that natural products can provide low-cost, eco-friendly solutions to pollution, particularly for treatment of industrial effluents. Recently one such mechanism was adopted by TATA in its Sukinda Mines to treat effluents toxic with hexavalent chromium using harda(*Terminalia chebula*).
- **As a part of corporate social responsibility (CSR):** Whereas most of the industries & mines are established in forest areas, and the deforestation caused for this purpose can't simple be compensated by a calculation based on timber value because loss to the ecosystem & the socio-economic system dependent on that go much beyond the physical loss in terms of tree cutting, CSR activities should include regeneration, conservation & protection of available forest resources, and also providing support like value addition units for NTFPs, capacity building, microgrants to NTFP collectors, etc..

R&D that revolutionized NTFP sector

In 1950s Jagdish Lath a timber merchant of Sambalpur, Odisha by chance got a taste of tribal cake prepared with sal seed oil. He sent the oil samples to various industries which confirmed that sal fat can be used as cocoa butter equivalent in chocolate making. Lath then started commercial collection of sal seed which gradually spread over to other states. Millions of poor people could now earn from a forest produce that was hitherto wasted. This revolutionized the NTFP trade in India and gradually more items followed this line.

As such, the Confederation of Indian Industries , ASSOCHEM, CHEMOXIL and other such organizations that can be direct stakeholders in this matter should now start focusing on fulfilling their potential role in the development of NTFP sector for a green GDP.