



WILD EDIBLE FRUITS: A VALUABLE NON-TIMBER FOREST PRODUCE TO PROTECT LIVELIHOODS AND NUTRITION OF FOREST DWELLERS

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ABSTRACT: Widening food basket diversity is imperative to ensure food and nutritional security. Neglected or underutilized fruits appear to hold promise to overcome the situation. Tropical and subtropical regions of the world have a wide range of fruit that are neglected or underutilised seem to provide hope for improvement. These wild edible fruits provide staple food for indigenous people, serve as a complementary food for non-indigenous people, and offer an alternative source of cash income. In many floristic works on the Indian sub-continent, there has been documentation of the minor fruits and wild edible fruits. Despite being highly nutritive with medicinal attributes and their ability to grow under adverse soil and climatic conditions, underutilized or minor fruits are not as widely cultivated, and their consumption and trade tend to be more limited, geographically and quantitatively, than those of the major fruits. Out of 7000 species of wild edible plants documented worldwide, only a few are widely cultivated. Lack of knowledge, inadequate grasp of taxonomy, biology, and multiplication of these species are limiting their use and improvement. Various international research organizations have been established to focus on R and D on underutilized crops. Undervaluation, underutilization, rapid population increase, and modern development that has resulted in deforestation have resulted in a loss of diversity among wild edible fruit species. Additionally, they are being taken from the wild without any ex-situ conservation efforts or attempts at their reproduction. To encourage farmers to grow wild fruits for consumption or for sale, the government must implement incentives. Promoting and domesticating these wild fruit species not only will improve nutritional status and improve livelihood of the local communities but also protect them from losing from the wild and well-being of environment. Besides nutritional and social security, hitherto untapped export potential, underutilized fruit crops have a vast potential for production of value-added products, with high therapeutic, medicinal values and antioxidant properties on one hand and free from the residue of toxic chemicals on the other as such crops are grown with minimum inputs. This review summarizes different aspects such as importance, diversity, constraints, and finally strategies to promote cultivation of these underutilized NTFPs.

Keywords: *Conservation, diversity, domestication, promotion, underutilized, wild edible*

Abbreviation: NTFP: Non-Timber Forest Produce, WEF: Wild Edible Fruit, GFU: Global Facilitation Unit, RTS: Ready To Serve

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INTRODUCTION

Nature has provided us with various life forms that have met our necessities for survival on this planet. Plant biodiversity is the primary source of food, feed, shelter, medicines, and a variety of other things, as well as making many lives on the planet possible and enjoyable. In pre-history, in various regions of the world, our forefathers domesticated a few hundred

species from thousands of accessible and changed them to agricultural plants by intentional and unconscious selection. Indeed, several historically ignored crops are now internationally significant crops with the ability to contribute to food security, nutrition, dietary and gastronomic diversification, health, and income generation (Hammer *et al.*, 2001). Just three crops- rice, maize, and wheat account for about 40