

interpreters. The Union Ministry of Tourism and Culture also adopted the village under its Green Project and Khonoma now has some good roads and solar energy.

While biodiversity and wildlife have definitely returned with the effort, the livelihood issue is a bit more complicated. Some are of the opinion that the experiment in Khonoma is a complete success and Khonoma can become a role model for community-based conservation and livelihood security, while others feel that the livelihood benefits have been only at the individual level. Payments are made to guides, performers at cultural programmes and to individual families but the village as a whole has not benefited much.

**Source:** Amarjyoti Borah, 'Welcome to Khonoma Eco-tourism; A Success in a Nagaland Village', Down to Earth, March 2008

## Orissa

### Sal and Siali

A few months before the festival of Lord Jagannath (*Jagannath Utsav*) in Majhiakhand village in Nayagarh District of Orissa, the village women get together to knead a mixture of ant hill clay, cow dung and cow urine into egg shaped balls and seeds of siali are preserved within them. The dried balls will be broken open during the the bathing festival of the Lord Jagannath (*Snan Ucchab*) and the preserved seeds of siali taken out, sown along with prayers for their health and well being.

The ecological jargon ascribed to the festivities of the day, is not known to the colourfully dressed village women but environmentalists say that this is a traditional method of preserving an important part of the biodiversity of the area. Siali (*Bauhinia vahili*) and sal (*Shorea robusta*) leaves are a major source of sustenance and livelihood generation for people in the predominantly tribal districts in Orissa and trade in these leaves has often saved people in the area from starvation deaths.

An individual collects between a 1000 and 2000 leaves per day, which can be made into about 200 plates; the sale of which in turn fetches about Rs.60. Trade is unorganised but according to conservative estimates, Orissa does Rs. 400 crores of business in siali and sal leaves every year. There is some dispute regarding the matter of whether local people get a fair price or not. Forest Department officials say that the prices are fixed by the State Government and traders cannot cheat the collectors, however collectors do not agree. They say that there are no storage facilities in the village and transportation costs are high and this forces the villagers to sell the leaves off at a lower price.

Some environmentalists say that in the process of collecting the leaves, the branches are wrenched out by local people, causing irreparable damage to the trees. However Pushpanjali Satpathy of the NGO Vasundhara says, "people take good care of the trees since they are critical to their livelihoods, besides government allows collection of leaves for only four to six months, allowing the trees sufficient time to regenerate."

**Source:** Panchanan Sahu, 'Earning for their Plate', Down to Earth, February 2008

**Contact:** Y. Giri Rao, Senior Programme Officer, Vasundhara, Plot no. 15, Shahid Nagar, Bhubaneswar 751007, Orissa. Phone: 0674-2542011, Cell: 94371 10915, Email: ygiri.rao@gmail.com

### Bat Haven

45% of the bat species of the world are endangered, threatened or near threatened and their numbers continue to decline. But the scene is different in the village of Kural in Nayagarh District of Orissa. In this village, the bats have found a safe haven and the local community proactively works to protect them from harm.

No one in the village knows exactly when the conservation efforts began. Village seniors date it back to the pre-independence era when hundreds of bats took shelter in a banyan (*Ficus bengalensis*) and ashoka tree (*Saraca indica*) near a pond close to the village temple. Gradually, as the population