

(IV)

WALLICHIA DISTICHA T. ANDERS. – A MULTIPURPOSE PALM OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH**Introduction**

Wallichia disticha T. Anders. (vern. Tesa, in Arunachal Pradesh), a handsome palm is found in the outer Himalayas in Sikkim, West Bengal, Assam and in Arunachal Pradesh at an altitude of 600m (Brandis, 1921; Anon, 1976). It is 4-7m high with leaves 2.5m x 3.0m in length, arranged in two opposite rows, giving a striking appearance to the tree. The upper portion of the trunk remains covered with the fibrous leaf bases. Folk tales of Arunachal Pradesh reveal that people saved their lives by eating tesa during the heavy famine which occurred around Sewa circle in the distant past. It was in great demand at that time and people were ready to part with their valuable ornaments for a handful of edible tesa. The present communication gives an account of some of the traditional products of this wonderful palm including tesa which is still used as staple food by the Sullung tribe and other locals of East Kameng District in Arunachal Pradesh.

Different products of *Wallichia disticha*

Almost each and every household of the Sullung tribe has their own palm plantation area. These plantations are raised in places where agriculture can not be practised. This palm is adapted to different climatic conditions. It acts as a

very good soil binder and helps in checking soil erosion. The followings are some of the important products obtained from this palm :

(a) *Edible food products*

(i) *Tesa* : It is one of the most important edible products and exclusive to the Sullung tribe of East Kameng District in Arunachal Pradesh. Tesa preparation is an art and the Sullung tribe has got the expertise for this preparation. For preparing this edible product, the mature trees without flowering are preferred as the flowering trees have less sugar and water content. The selected trees are felled and cut into small pieces. These are debarked and skinned. The fibrous material thus obtained is converted into powder form by beating and crushing. It is then mixed with water and filtered through the Maring (woven bamboo container used for filtration) and then collected over the Saphyu (condensely woven mat of bamboo) for further solidification which takes few hours to dry. After solidification, it can be eaten as such or with meat or vegetables in different ways.

(ii) *Chips for pigs and poultry* : The chips are obtained by cutting the debarked trunk into thin slices and used as feed for pigs. Contrary to tesa preparation, chips can be prepared from flowering trees or trees which have already flowered. These are

further crushed into powdered form and used as feed for poultry.

(iii) *Additive in Apong (Rice-beer)*

Preparation : It is a well known local additive used in the preparation of rice beer locally known as 'Apong'. It increases the sweetness of the product and also inhibits decay.

(b) *Substitute for match sticks*

In remote villages, people use dried hairy growth from the trunk as ignition material in place of match sticks. These dried hair are skinned out from the trunk, mixed with ash and water and properly dried over bamboo mats. A small spark produced with stone and iron striker is sufficient for igniting this materials.

(c) *Thatching material*

The mature fibrous material obtained from the leaf bases is one a most durable and water resistant thatching material. It

is used in the construction of local houses and to prepare covers which are used by local people against rain.

(d) *Brooms*

The veins of the leaflets of mature trees are used for making brooms which are hard, flexible and more durable than any other broom material.

Constaints

Though *Wallichia disticha* is a multi-purpose palm, its plantations and products are confined to villages due to the following constraints :

- (a) Lack of technical knowledge about extraction of tesa;
- (b) Lack of communication and marketing facility;
- (c) Lack of awareness about its nutritive value; and
- (d) Non-availability of any agency/organisation to promote its cultivation and trade.

References

- Anon. (1976). *The Wealth of Inda : A dictionary of Indian raw and industrial products*, Vol. X. Publication and Information Directorate, CSIR, New Delhi. pp. 591.
- Brandis, D. (1921). *Indian Trees*. International Book Distributors, Dehra Dun (repr. edn). pp.767.

Department of Forestry,
NERIST,
Nirjuli (Arunachal Pradesh).

C.L. Sharma,
M. Sharma,
T. Pao
and
K. Lego