

Encouraging plantations of sandalwood and agar

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Investment in plantation teak began in the post-independence era in India and large areas of mixed forests were clear felled for planting teak.

Because the forest was cleared the stock of trees used for medicinal purposes as well as those for production of gums and resins dwindled. In addition, forest biodiversity suffered. These developments have been subject of debate in India and proposals have been made to address biodiversity loss.

In addition to widespread forest clearing, illegal felling and smuggling of high value woods such as sandalwood (*Santalum alba*) red sanders (*Pterocarpus santalinus*) and Agar wood (*Aquilaria agallocha*) decimated stocks of these timbers.

During the 1950's sandalwood sold by government departments was available at Rs.6 per kg but now the timber fetches over Rs.10,000 per kg. Similarly, good quality Agar wood (also known as Oud-al-Gharqui) is now so rare that a kilo can cost as much as Rs.50,000.

State governments where these valuable timbers once thrived have formulated policies encouraging their propagation. Some states have announced subsidies to encourage farmers to take up planting.

Village forest committees have been formed to revive and protect the resource and industries using these woods are entering into production and sales agreements with farmers and communities. Individually also people are anxiously going for their plantations, as they are lucrative.

As past legal restrictions on plantations have been removed investments are flowing into plantation establishment.

Agar wood does well as a shade tree alongside tea, coffee, cardamom, areca nut and coconut plantations and is replacing other shade trees such as silky oak, and pongamia as agar yields a high value timber.

Concurrently, with the establishment of sandal wood and Agar plantations a variety of medicinal plants are being raised commercially.

Source: http://www.ihb.de/wood/news/India_plantations_sandal_wood_agar_42665.html