

Sandalwood forests face extinction Posted in Feature, State by Arindam Ganguly On April 16, 2015.

Post News Network



Jeypore: Even as the state has earned a special distinction for its sandalwood forests, especially the ones found in Koraput district, several rackets active in the area are reportedly smuggling the precious timber out of the district. If such illegal activities continue unabated, the timber species will soon become a thing of past. The inter-state racketeers have virtually made a corridor stretching through neighbouring Andhra Pradesh and Chhattisgarh to carry out their illegal trade. According to reports, Koraput meets a sizeable chunk of the state's sandalwood requirement as its soil is conducive for growth of the tree. A king of the erstwhile princely state of Jeypore had brought sandalwood saplings from Mysore, Karnataka and planted them in the peripheral regions of present day Jeypore, locals said. Later, saplings were planted in Nandapur, Balada, Semiliguda, Koraput, Lamtaput, Kundura and Kotpad areas of the district and saw significant growth in its numbers. At present, sandalwood trees can be found in about 100 hectare of land under Jeypore, Balada, Semiliguda and Koraput forest divisions with each hectare having 2,500 trees. It takes at least 30 years for a tree to generate the aroma of sandal, sources said, adding, birds play a major role in natural proliferation of sandalwood trees in the area. Sandalwood logs are often requisitioned by the Sri Jagannath Temple Administration (SJTA), Puri. But, the fragrance of sandal would soon disappear unless measures are taken to curb smuggling, environmentalists rued. A good number of sandalwood logs are sent to Puri Srimandir and this has been a practice for the past several decades. The state government asked the forest department to supply about five quintal of sandalwood for the Nabakalebara-2015. Meanwhile, at least a

quintal of sandalwood has already been sent to Puri in the first phase, sources said. However, the invaluable treasure of the district is under threat from timber mafia. They don't hesitate to fell unseasoned trunks along with the seasoned trees from sandalwood forests. Worse, the smugglers are adventurous in breaching any security cover, thanks to the apathy of the forest department, the sources said. Moreover, absence of timely raids by the officials concerned also makes the task easier for mafia groups. Arrest of only two sandalwood smugglers in last three years aptly presents the sorry tale of government apathy over the issue, a source said. Reports said the peripheral areas of Jeypore town including Penangi, Nakiti Dangar, Balia, Danganchhinchi and Mahaliaput hill had thick cover of sandalwood trees. But, the mafia managed to loot them with the help of some locals. Timber smugglers have now set their eyes on Ghataghumar forest under Jeypore range. The unscrupulous sandalwood traders of the state, on the other hand, transport the wood to cities like Bhubaneswar, Cuttack and Berhampur. The trees on the premises of various government offices, residential quarters, colleges and even at the residential quarters of judges are also being felled by the mafia. Sandalwood trees were stolen from the HAL Township area in Sunabeda in 2007 and from the premises of the district court and residential quarters of various judges in the last two years. Besides, miscreants had stolen five sandalwood trees from the residential quarters of the sub-divisional judicial magistrate, the district judge and the family court judge February 27. They even fearlessly entered the residential quarters of the district judge again March 22 to collect the roots and left out wood of the trees which they had stolen earlier. Regrettably, forest officials have kept their actions restricted to only lodging complaints against smugglers, sources said. The duty of the department ends with the production of the accused in courts, locals said adding the officials don't bother to interrogate the accused or investigate the matter further.

Source:

<http://www.orissapost.com/sandalwood-forests-face-extinction/#sthash.1IaMlfdm.dpuf>