Indian J. Pl. Genet.Resources 6(2): 159-162, 1993
Short Communication

GORAKH IMLI (*ADANSONIA DIGITATA* L.) — A LITTLE KNOWN EDIBLE PLANT

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Key words : Gorakh imli, Baohab/Monkey bread, *Adansonia digitata*, economic uses

The introduction of plants from one country to another have played a great role in changing the economy of a nation. Some have deserved the rank of plants of commercial importance due to complete change in eating habits of native people, for example, introduction of oranges from china; chillies, wheat and potato from the New World.

Adansonia digitata L. (Baobab, Cork tree, Monkey bread, Sour gourd tree), a native of Africa is not truly wild in India. The other species *A.gregorii* is from Australia. Both the species are cultivated in many warmer parts of the world including India. Of 10 species, two are cultivated in India and they are age old introductions. *Adansonia digitata* is more important.Its cultivation goes back to introduction by Arab Traders (who called it *habhabu*), probably during Moghal period (Desmond, 1992). The baobab occurs in its natural habitat in Senegal and Abyssinia, also on wet coastal region of Africa, extending to Angola. Villages in West Africa are often have around one or more giant baobab trees. It is an important tree to the Negros. *Adansonia digitata* commonly sold under the name **Gorakh Imli** in North Indian markets (Fig. 1), belongs to family Bombacaceae. It is a tree with a short trunk, very widely spreading branches from a mushroom-shaped head, leaves digitate, pubescent beneath when young, glabrous, deciduous, flowers axillary, solitary, with long peduncle, bark smooth, calyx cup shaped, leathery, 5 cleft, petals 5, exceeding reniform with thick testa, embedded in pink pulp.

It is cultivated in various parts of India. Natural regeneration occurs only under high humid condition. For artificial regeneration, 1-2 year old seedling, grown in a well irrigated nursery, may be transplanted during August-September. The tree is chiefly available in the coastal area around Bombay. The abondoned capital Mandoo near Indore (Madhya Pradesh) is

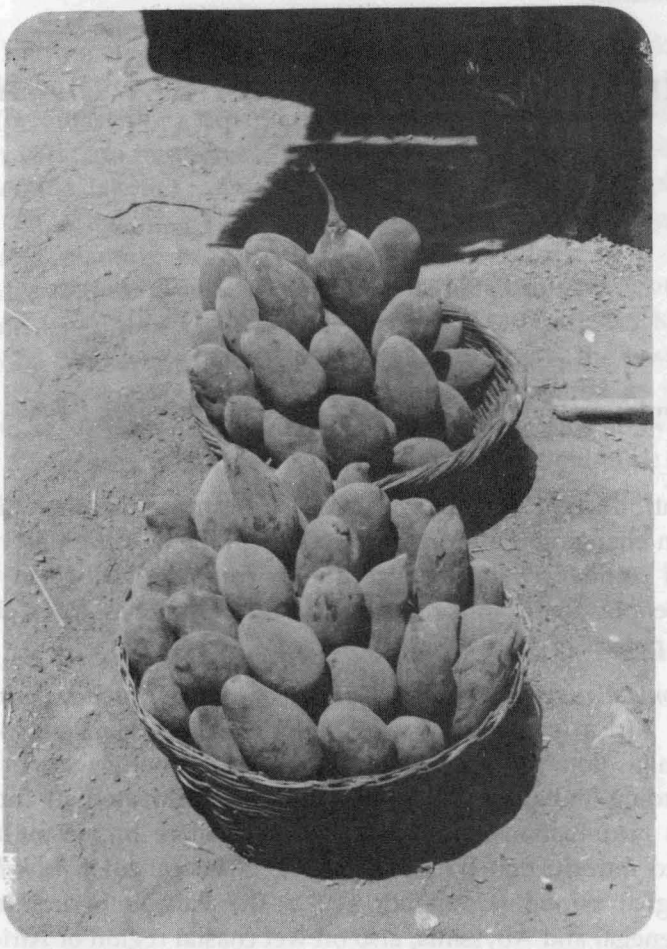

Fig. 1. Gorakh imli (*Adansonia digitata* L.) fruits

over run with *Adansonia* trees. A few plant population could be seen beyond the coast of Coramandal, Bengal and adjacent areas. In Rajasthan, rare plantations in open forests (Ajmer, Chittorgarh and Pratapgarh) are also available. Types cultivated in different agro-climatic areas need to be thoroughly screened for extending its cultivation in other areas (Uphof, 1968; Wlth India, 1985).

Edible produce and usage

Gorakh imli is an invaluable source of food, fodder, medicines,shades, shelter and utensils such as baskets.Its hollw holes also serves as a storage tank for water, bark as cordage and thread. In Senegal, the Negros use the pounded bark and leaves as condiments. The leaves are cooked with other food to serve as a cooling agent. Fruit pulp tastes like ginger bread having pleasant acidic flavour. Acidic beverages are prepared at the local level. The

fruit having dry and acidic lemon flavour has pleasant taste. The seeds are embedded compactly in pulp. The dried pulp is rich source of Calcium and Vitamin B_1. It is used as food seasoner and an appetiser. A refrigerant drink is prepared from the pulp after boiling in water. The dry pulp with water gives relief from chronic bronchial asthma. In coastal areas of India, dry flowers are used as floats for fishing nets; bark yields a strong fibre used in cordage. Owing to its value as a rich source of vitamins and food, its utility is considered as a substitute for tamarind (Table 1). High variability in fruit size and shape ranging from a foot long to the size of a small lemon, or gourd shaped, is available. In coastal region of Gujarat, the fishermen eat the leaves a leafy vegetable. Dry fruits are very light weight and are used as floats by the fishermens. Hedoriek, 1981. It deserves extended cultivation in India for its exploitation.

Table 1. Chemical analysis of fruits of Gorakh imli (*A.digitata*) and tamarind (*Tamarindus indica*) L. (in % in wet fruit)*

Major constituents	*A.digitata*	*T.indica*
Moisture	17.90-33.8	20.9
Protein	1.44-2.15	3.1
Lipids	0.06-0.69	0.1
Calcium	15.60-33.5	17.0
Phosphorus	6.00-36.1	11.0
Vitamin C	3.80-20.1	0.3

* Wlth India. 1985

Some general considerations

The **Gorakh Imli** has not drawn attention of the user community leading to selection of better types for the Indian region. Uses too are less-known among the general population. Considering its importance and utility in its native land (Africa), cultivation of this plant can be identified for this region. Suitable selections are required to be made out of the cultivated population in India. If required desired types may be introduced from its native region. **Gorakh Imli** is predominantly cultivated in India for domestic use only to substitute for sour/acidic items. In land of it origin, it is known for its multipurpose uses. Its cultivation on larger scale would enable us to use it as an additional source of food.

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