



Minor Fruits, Major Opportunities: Hidden Treasures of Indian Horticulture

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In rural and tribal India, the trees of jamun, bael, phalsa, karonda, ber and many others silently prosper in the corners, overlooked by the mainstream markets. These “minor” or underutilized fruits have been part of traditional food systems and folk medicine over the centuries. Today, though, they are inching into the spotlight. As consumers tastes swing towards a demand for natural, functional and nutrient loaded food, a push for the development and integration of these indigenous fruits in the diet is slowly beginning to open up as an opportunity for health and livelihood opportunities they offer.

Scope and importance

Minor fruits perform well in rainfed, drought-prone, and degraded marginal lands even under input-constrained farming. For farmers in marginal or tribal regions, these crops are not just supplementary income, they are the source of resilience. These fruit trees will bear even during dry spell and are of low maintenance. In addition to this, their cultivation preserves species diversity and support sustainable farming practices (Meena et al., 2022). Their growing relevance in modern food markets is even more exciting. With proper support, the fruits of these have the potential to move from village markets to retail shelves. Their versatility, cultural importance and growing popularity make them as an exciting area for future growth.

These fruits are packed with nutrients. Aonla, for instance, is one of the richest natural sources of vitamin C, supporting immunity and skin health (Avinash et al., 2024). Jamun is known for its role in managing blood sugar levels and best natural remedy for diabetics (Kumar et al., 2025a). Bael soothes digestive ailments, while phalsa cools the body during hot summers (Sahu and Tiwari, 2024). Karonda is rich source of iron and has traditionally been used to fight anemia (Kumar et al., 2025b). These aren't just folk beliefs, scientific studies also confirm the nutritional and medicinal benefits of these fruits (Sofi et al., 2025). Including them in daily diets can help to combat hidden hunger or micronutrient deficiencies, especially among vulnerable populations.



Government Initiatives

To encourage the production, processing, and sale of small fruits, the Indian government has implemented a number of initiatives. Farmers are given financial assistance for the establishment of orchards and post-harvest infrastructure through the Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture (MIDH). Tribal communities are empowered through the Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India's (TRIFED) Van Dhan Yojana, which promotes the collection, processing, and selling of forest products, including wild fruits. To improve their market identity and command higher prices, a number of regional minor fruits are being marketed under GI tags and ethnic branding. For instance, GI-tagged jamun from specific Indian locations.

In order to establish market identity and boost demand, the One District One Product (ODOP) campaign also promotes fruits unique to a certain region. The promotion of Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) aims to enhance market accessibility, stimulate value chain growth, and fortify communal farming. The National Horticulture Board (NHB) has initiated programs that help with cold chain development, grading, and packaging in order to reduce losses and guarantee higher profits for growers.

Market trends

Domestically, there is a growing demand for natural supplements that are healthier than synthetic ones. Juices, candies, teas, powders, and health snacks created from fruits like jamun, aonla, and bael are what urban customers are searching for. Phalsa coolers, ber jams, and karonda pickles are examples of specialty products that local startups and self-help groups (SHG) are investigating because of their appealing flavors and nostalgic appeal. Bypassing conventional middlemen, farmers are now able to sell directly to niche consumers through digital platforms and farm-to-table e-commerce models. This is particularly important for seasonal or perishable minor fruits. These fruits are increasingly being featured in agro-tourism hubs and farmer markets, raising awareness and giving growers direct access to markets.

Globally, traditional Indian fruits are becoming more and more popular around the world, especially those that are thought to provide therapeutic or medicinal benefits. In North American and European wellness markets, dried bael, aonla powder, and jamun seed extract are becoming more popular. As consumers seek chemical-free produce, minor fruits grown on marginal lands or forest sites are being marketed under the organic or wild-harvested category. Large-scale export potential is nevertheless hampered by issues including uneven quality, poor branding, and ignorance.

Conclusion and way forward

Given their nutritional significance, ability to withstand climatic change, and rising consumer demand, minor fruits are gradually making their way from the agricultural periphery into the mainstream. They are now being acknowledged for their ability to sustain rural livelihoods, particularly in rainfed and tribal communities. To truly achieve this potential, though, decentralized processing facilities must be funded, FPOs must be strengthened, and local branding and marketing initiatives must be supported. It will also be essential to provide farmers with post-harvest management training, establish quality standards, and promote creative product creation. Minor fruits have the potential to significantly contribute to better nutrition, rural employment, and sustainable agriculture in the years to come with coordinated efforts from the government, academic institutions, and private stakeholders.

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