

Palaquium ellipticum

[Synonyms : *Dichopsis elliptica*]

INDIAN PERCHA TREE is a tree. Native to India it has reddish-brown heartwood

It is also known as Gutta-percha, *Halganne* (Hindi), Indian gutta percha tree, *Kattu-illupei* (Tamil), Nyatoh, and *Panchoti* (Hindi and Marathi).

Latex from this tree is known as Indian gutta-percha or Pala gum. (The primary commercial source of gutta-percha however is the Malayan species, *Palaquium guttata*.)

The tree is considered to be threatened in the wild.

Ellipticum means ‘elliptic (curved sides longer than wide and broadest in the middle) or oval’ usually with reference to leaf shape.

The fleshy fruit are eaten locally.

Indian gutta-percha has provided an adulterant for the rubber extracted from *Hevea* species. It has also been used in its own right for waterproofing.

Seeds yield an oil that has been used locally for lighting, and for soap manufacture.

For south-eastern Asian specialists Indian percha tree is primarily a timber tree for that region.

Its fairly hard and durable wood has not only been used for housebuilding and shingling, and manufacturing boarding, but also for making cart frames, mining equipment, masts, spars, barrels, cheap furniture and chests.

The Silent Valley hydro-electric project in the Western Ghats (the western mountain range towards the southern tip of India) offers an example of the kind of threat that has been faced by this particular species (as well as other plant and animal species near it). This Project has long been facing opposition from environmental campaigners. They raised objections initially around the 1970s and more recently at the beginning of the 21st Century. On the one hand campaigners (supported by several well known international bodies) are reported now as arguing that, despite dramatic depletion of the many plant and animal species in the area during the last decades of the 20th Century from loggers’ and miners’ legal and illegal activities and the encroachment of human habitation, the flooding of the Valley should not go ahead and that the remainder of the various species threatened with extinction should be protected. On the other hand promoters of the Project (also encouraged by external international pressure) declare that these demands are not practicable, and that the protesters have not argued with the same vigour against other projects which could be viewed as far more contentious.