

BIRTHPLACE OF DASHEHARI MANGO

Introduction Brief on Dashehari Mango



Photo: Dr. Bhuwon Ratna Sthapit

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'Dashehari' is one of the most popular mango varieties of North India widely acclaimed for its exquisite taste and pleasant aroma. It is also my favourite. Naturally, I was excited to visit the Dashehari Village in Malihabad¹ where the 200 year-old mother tree of the variety, a cultural heritage of the community, is still thriving.

It is believed that 80% of all mango varieties in Malihabad is covered by Dashehari and they can be genetically traced back to this very tree. The heritage is exciting but the risks resulting from massive uniformity of orchards and lack of home gardens harbouring other interesting seedling types of mango are terrifying.

Legend has it that a Pathan of Khalispur village of Malihabad Tehsil transporting choicest mangoes for trade happened to halt for rest in a hut of a poor Momedian, a monk. Momedian patronized travellers by offering water and shelter and the travellers reciprocated with ripe mangoes.

¹ Kakori block of Malihabad Tehsil, District Lucknow, U.P. The place is situated at 26.87°N Latitude and 80.78°E Longitude and 120m asl at about 28 Km from Lucknow city on Lucknow –Hardoi state Highway No. 25. The Dashehari village is about 1.5 Km across this state highway towards South.

At the time of departure, the Pathan and the monk had an argument. In a fit of rage, the Pathan shoved one of his choicest ripe mangoes into the soil instead of gifting it to the monk, who maintained utmost calm and restraint. In the ensuing rainy season, a mango sapling from the spot emerged which was duly nurtured to a robust tree by Momedian. After about 12 years, the tree profusely flowered and yielded fruits of excellent quality.

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The tree is still very healthy and impressive which is about 10m tall having a mean canopy spread of 21.0 m and a trunk circumference at the chest height of about 3.0 m (see picture 1). The trunk is robust with 12 main scaffolding branches originating and radiating at 1.5 m height, almost parallel to the ground (see picture 2). The tree has spreading canopy with impressive fruiting at the time of our visit completely overshadowing neighbouring trees.

Scientist from Central Institute of Sub-tropical Horticulture (CISH), Lucknow told me that fruits of this Dashehari tree are oblong, elliptical and medium

size (13 x 8 cm) weighing 130 to 260 g (see picture 3). It has attractive yellow pulp cadmium, firm and non-fibrous with very sweet taste (researchers told me that it has °Brix score of 21 to 23 as measure of sweetness in fruits) and pleasant aroma. CISH had collected scion of the tree for clonal propagation in 1977 and thereafter elite clones spread to Northern Indian farmers from a network of private and government nurseries. This cultural heritage tree was belonged to great grandfather (Mr Ishtida Hussain) of a 30-year old farmer Mr Shamir Zaidi who has named his house -Dashehari Kothi. Mr Kamil Khan, 87 years old progressive orchardist of small hamlet, Kakori (close by to Dusseheri village) of Malihabad Tehsil shared legends with visitors. He told us that the tree under natural care found free from stem borer and termites attacks- a common problem of mangoes. It is also found free from *Loranthus* infestation. This tree yields about 80 to 190 kg (average of last eight years) with moderate biennial bearing habit.

In September 2009, the area was registered into Geographical Indications No 125 in the name of “Mango Malihabad Dusseheri” by the Geographical Indication Registry.

The communities around the mother tree have been selected for the UNEP/GEF Project, “Conservation and sustainable use of wild and cultivated fruit tree diversity: Prompting sustainable livelihoods, Food security and Ecosystems services” in Malihabad, Lucknow. Communities such as Sarsanda, Kasmandi Kalam and Mohammad Nagar Talukedari have varietal richness of 7 to 29 cultivated varieties. They are also blessed by rich seedling mango trees with estimated population of 3000 to 5000 mango seedling trees. Almost all current commercial mango varieties in India are selected from the seedling population. Potentially from the extant diversity, research can identify many more mango varieties based on preferences of consumers and farmers and innovative farmers can work together with researchers and nurserymen to identify select and popularize the elite materials from existing farmer’s orchards. The project aims to empower farming communities and local institutions for identifying unique varieties from the orchards and scaling up genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge for sharing wider benefits to farmers and consumers.

Almost all orchards in Malihabad are dominated by Dasheheri (80%) with over 10-20 varieties of other cultivated types with few trees. Around the orchards farmers maintain many seedling types and all of these trees produce diverse fruits with diverse shape, size, colour and taste, and thereby there is scope for market diversity by sharing information to consumers

in urban areas so that the process creates demand for other varieties thereby minimizing the risks posed by uniformity of the single variety besides providing livelihood security for mango growers.

(Compiled by Bhuwon Sthapit with inputs from Drs H. Ravishankar, BMC Reddy, S Rajan and farmers)

Pictures:



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Further information

Dr. Bhuwon Ratna Sthapit

Email: b.sthapit@cgiar.org