

## Betel Leaf: The Neglected Green Gold of India

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**ABSTRACT** The fresh leaves of betel vine are popularly known as *Paan* in India, which are consumed by about 15-20 million people in the country. It is cultivated following the traditional methods in India on about 55,000 ha with an annual production worth about Rs 9000 million. On an average about 66% of such production is contributed by the state of West Bengal where it is cultivated on about 20,000 ha encompassing about 4-5 lakh *Boroj* employing about the same number of agricultural families. There is a menacing wastage of the leaves during storage, transportation and the glut season. Moreover, the surplus leaves, if not disposed off properly may cause environmental pollution and health hazards. Such wastage may be minimized by various ways and means including extraction of essential oil from the surplus betel leaves. This oil may be used as an industrial raw material for manufacturing medicines, perfumes, mouth fresheners, tonics, food additives etc. The leaves are nutritive and contain anticarcinogens showing promise for manufacturing of a blood cancer drug. Some disputed reports also claim that chewing betel leaves excessively may cause oral cancer. The agricultural, industrial, economic, medicinal and allied potentialities of the crop are discussed.