

Mayurbhanj's 'ant chutney'

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In news- Scientists are now fine-tuning their research to make a presentation for the geographical indications (GI) registry of Kai Chutney/ant Chutney from Odisha's Mayurbhanj district.

About ant Chutney-

- It is made of Weaver ants that are popular in Odisha's Mayurbhanj district among the people, mostly tribals, for the mouth-watering food item that is made out of it.
- **Larval and adult stages of the ants are preferred** and are **either eaten raw or turned into "chutney"** by mixing them with spicy ingredients.
- The chutney is prepared by mixing and grinding salt, ginger, garlic and chilly and is sold by tribals in rural markets.
- **The chutney is rich in valuable proteins, calcium, zinc, vitamin B-12, iron, magnesium, potassium, sodium, copper, fiber and 18 amino acids, is known to boost the immune system and keep diseases at bay.**
- **The tribes of Mayurbhanj consume Kai chutney or soup to get rid of flu, common cold, whooping cough, to increase appetite,** enhance vision and eyesight naturally without corrective eye wear and to treat joints pain, stomach diseases, essentials for the development of a healthy brain and the nervous system.
- The tribal healers also prepare **medicinal oil by dipping the collected Kais in pure mustard oil.**
- After 30 days, this oil is **used as baby oil and externally used to cure rheumatism, gout,** ringworm and other skin diseases.
- **Applied under food category, the GI tag** would help develop a structured hygiene protocol in the preparation of Kai Chutney for standard wider use.
- GI labels enhance the reputation and value of local products and support local businesses.

Red Weaver Ant-

- **Weaver ants, scientifically called *Oecophylla smaragdina*, are abundantly found in Mayurbhanj throughout the year.**
- The “Kai” (Red Weaver Ant) **family consists of three category members – workers, major workers and queens.** Workers and major workers are mostly orange-colored.
- **Kais feed on small insects** and other invertebrates, their prey being mainly beetles, flies and hymenopterans.
- **They construct nests with leaves of host trees.** When required, leafy nests of ants are plucked from their host trees and collected in a bucket of water before sorting and separation from leaves and debris.
- They are **aggressive and prey on most arthropods entering their territory.**
- **Due to their predatory habit, Kais are recognized as biological control agents in tropical crops** as they are able to **protect a variety of crops** against many different insect pests.
- In this way, they are utilized indirectly as an alternative to the chemical insecticides.