

Beli Mal: A Refreshing Respite

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By Chamindra Warusawitharane | Photography by Menaka Aravinda

Clumps of aromatic Bael flowers adorn branchlets with their delicately curved greenish white petals. Their healing fragrance sends an enticing invitation to unravel the story of ‘Beli mal’. A sacred tree to the Hindus, all parts of the Bael tree is revered for their Ayurvedic properties. Stout Bael trees grow up to eight to ten meters in height and bear thick-shelled yellowish green fruit. Sri Lankans use its flowers to brew a honey coloured herbal tisane dubbed ‘*Beli mal wathura*’. Responding to the call of the flowers we set out to discover the story of ‘Beli mal’.



Shaded by the green foliage of enormous trees along the Colombo – Kurunegala road a cluster of small shops offer ‘Beli mal’ to the thirsty traveller. Sitting on wooden benches under the shade travellers can enjoy half a coconut shell full of this special brew with a piece of brown jaggery. Beli mal drinking is an experience to savour and indulge in. Before the British introduced the art of tea drinking, ‘beli mal wathura’ ranked as one of the favourite beverages amongst Sri Lankans for centuries. It was customary to offer guests a refresh-ing drink of ‘beli mal’ or some other herbal brew. Thus, drinking ‘beli mal’ tea can be an encounter be-tween this age – old practice and the relatively new practice of herbal tea drinking. Throughout the Island small shops and herbal tea centers offer brewed ‘beli mal’ tea and dried bael flowers to brew your own tea. During the ‘vesak’ and ‘poson’ celebrations temporary stalls offer free ‘beli mal wathura’ to passers by. A warm sip of this soothing tisane with a tasty crunch of jaggery triggers a cooling effect throughout the body stimulating its natural defense system. The mere aroma of ‘Beli mal is renowned for its healing powers and the drink is used to cure a number of ailments starting from heart-burn, indigestion to chronic constipation. Nevertheless, the most

appealing characteristic of 'beli mal wathura' is the promise of a golden glow to your complex-ion and fresh breath. Habitual consumption of this soothing wonder ensures long – term benefits. As are all good things in life, the preparation of 'beli mal wathura' compels patience and time. Bael trees thrive in the dry zone of the Island but you can also find the odd bael tree in other areas of the country. Sri Lankans use dried bael flowers to make this herbal tea. To collect bael flowers, mats are laid out under the light grey trees. Once a considerable amount of flowers fall on to the mat they are laid out to dry under the sun.



These flowers turn slightly brown once a shower of sun's rays touches them. Afterwards, dried bael flowers are distributed throughout the Island. Gabo lane in Colombo is home to medicinal herbs amidst which dried bael flowers are found in abundance. To brew a glass of 'beli mal' tea you need to boil 50 grams of dried beli mal for about forty minutes preferably in a clay pot. To maximise the healing powers of 'beli mal' let the tea boil for nearly an hour. When the infusion turns a clear honey brown and emits an aromatic fragrance the 'beli mal' tea is ready. Before drinking the tea must be sieved. To savour the authentic 'beli mal' experience bite into a piece of jaggery before taking a sip, close your eyes let peace envelop you.



