



## Nakshatra Vanam

### Uttara-bhadrapada (Uthirattadhi)

#### Neem Tree



**M. Subramanian**  
**Project Officer**  
**C.P.R. Environmental Education Centre**

<b>Botanical Name:</b>	<i>Azadiracta indica</i>
<b>Tamil Name:</b>	Vembu
<b>Sanskrit Name:</b>	Nimba
<b>English Name:</b>	Neem Tree

#### Habitat

The neem is one of the most common trees found in India and Burma. It is also the state tree of Andhra Pradesh. Neem is a fast growing tree that can reach a height of 15-20 m and rarely to 35-40 m. It is evergreen, but under severe drought it may shed most or nearly all of its leaves. The branches are wide spread. The fairly dense crown is roundish or oval and may reach a diameter of 15-20 m in old, free-standing specimens. The leaves are 20-40 cm long, with 20-31 medium to dark green leaflets. The flowers are small and white in colour. It has a straight trunk. Its bark is hard, rough and scaly and fissured even in small trees. The colour of the bark is brown-grayish. The leaves are alternate and consist of several leaflets with serrated edges. The olive like edible fruit is oval, round and thin skinned. *Azadirachta indica* is the scientific name and is a sacred tree.

#### Temples associated with the neem tree

District	Village/Town	Temple	Deity
Nagappatinam	Pullirukuvelur	Vaidhyanathar	Shiva
Tiruchirapalli	Samayapuram	Mariyamman	Amman
Karur	Tiruvaatpokki	Rathnagiriswarar	Shiva

#### Medicinal Uses

All the parts of this sacred tree have been used in India for well over two millennia. The parts of the neem tree are used as anthelmintic, anti-fungal, anti-diabetic, antibacterial, antiviral, contraceptive and sedative. The neem tree is very useful in the treatment of many medical conditions like skin diseases, healthy hair, improve liver function, detoxify the blood, pest and disease control, fever reduction, dental treatments, cough, asthma, ulcers, piles, intestinal worms, urinary diseases, etc.





**Neem Seed**



**Neem Flower**

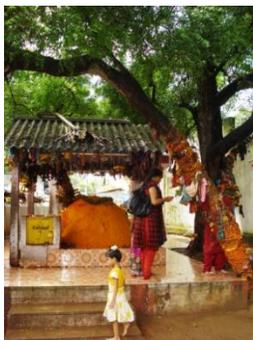


**Neem Oil**

The seed of the tree is used in the manufacture of neem oil. The neem oil is used in soap, shampoo, balms and creams as well as toothpaste. In India, the practice of using twigs of the neem as a toothbrush is very common. Neem oil is also useful in the treatment of acne and keeping skin elasticity. Neem oil is also an effective mosquito repellent. The gum of the tree is used as a bulking agent and also used as a special food for diabetic patients.

The paste of the leaf is used in the treatment of acne and also useful in the treatment of measles and chicken-pox and the patient are recommended to sleep on neem leaves. A decoction prepared from neem roots is taken to relieve fever.

### **Religious Association**



**The neem is one of the trees held sacred by the Hindus** (Ramji Lal, 1993). It is also associated with the goddess Sitala (W.Crooke, 1993). Even if there is no temple, the tree is worshipped since it is believed that a deity resides in it (Oudh Gazetter, I, 355,517 and Tod, Annals-II 75). Seals excavated at Mohenjodaro and Harappa have revealed that this tree was worshipped during that period. (Naveen Patnaik, 1993). The Padma Purana states that planting this tree increases longevity (Sacred Trees of Tamil Nadu, 2005). Neem trees are also associated in the science of astrology under the constellation *Uthirattadhi*.

### **Mythology/ Folklore**

The neem tree is considered to be male. Since women in purda do not show their faces to strange men, women in Rajasthan cover their face with a veil on passing a neem tree. The neem leaves are laid on the floor of the room, particularly under the bed of a person affected by measles, mumps or chicken pox. Neem leaves are hung on the doorway to announce Sitala's presence in the house. She is one of the seven sisters and her presence means that someone is afflicted by small pox. Incidence of small pox is never mentioned derogatorily lest the victim is struck dead by Sitala, but referred to as Maidaya or Mother's kindness, or as maikhela, i.e. Mother's play. The leaves are used in the feast connected with the last rites of death by certain tribes of Odisha (Gupta, 1991). Among the Govardhan Brahmin women of Pune, when a child is born, neem

leaves are hung at the front and back door of the house. The Jogis, a criminal tribe in Madras, revere it and brand their dogs with a representation of the tree (Mullaly, Notes on Madras Criminal Tribes, 20).

Today, the Neem is valued more for its capacity to exorcise demons than the spirits of the dead, and an image of the folk goddess Sithala can often be seen suspended from a margosa branch where she guards against small pox. Bathing in an infusion of margosa leaves clears away scars, and marks the ritual termination of an attack of chicken pox or measles. Renowned for its antiseptic and disinfectant properties, the tree is thought to be particularly protective of women and children (Naveen Patnaik, 1993).

## Conclusion

The neem is one of the most ubiquitous and versatile of trees found in south Asia. Almost every village and town boasts of a tall, spreading neem tree. Every part of tree can be used in some way, especially in the treatment of various medical conditions. Hence it is very essential that the tree is planted in every home, village and town. This will reduce the pollution as well as provide welcome shade to the passers-by. It is also necessary to educate the younger generation about the benefits of the neem tree.

