



Nakshatra Vanam

Sanskrit: Jyeshtha, Tamil: Kettai

Paraai tree

M. Subramanian

Project Officer

C.P.R. Environmental Education Centre
Chennai

Botanical Name	:	<i>Streblus asper</i> Lour.
Tamil Name	:	Paraai
Sanskrit Name	:	Sakhota
English Name	:	Sandpaper Tree

Habitat:

It is an evergreen tree with a highly variable crown and small wedge shaped leaves. It is found throughout the tropical forests in the moist regions of the country.

The sand paper tree is a rigid and densely branched tree growing from 4 - 10 m in height. The leaves are oblong-obovate to sub-rhomboid, 4 - 12 cm long, very rough on both sides, with a finely toothed margin, the tip blunt or tapering to a point and the base narrowed. The male flowers are in rounded heads, short peduncled, greenish-yellow, or nearly white. The female flowers are stalked, usually in pairs, green; the sepals become larger after flowering and nearly enclose the fruit. The fruit is ovoid, long, pale yellow and the pericarp is soft and fleshy. The seed is ovoid and long. True to its name, the leaves of the sand paper tree are rough and are utilized for cleaning cooking utensils and as a substitute for sandpaper.



Temples associated with the Sandpaper tree:

<i>District</i>	<i>Village/Town</i>	<i>Temple</i>	<i>Deity</i>
Tiruchirapalli	Tirupparaaithurai	Dharukavaneswarar	Shiva

(Source – Sacred Trees of Tamil Nadu – 2005 by M. Amirthalingam)

Religious Association:

Sandpaper trees are also associated in the science of astrology under the constellation *Kettai*. The tree is also associated with Lord Dharukavaneswarar at Tirupparaithurai, Tamil Nadu. It is believed that the Lord emerged in the form of a *swayambu* lingam under this tree.

Medicinal Use:

The roasted resin of the leaves are mixed and ground with ghee, palmyra palm and sugar and is consumed thrice a day to control dysentery. The latex heals cracks in the hands and heels (Shanmugham, 1989). The bark extract is used to treat red-urine disease. The decoction of the bark taken with warm water cures stomach pain. The latex is applied to the chest and also taken internally to ease swelling of the lungs. It is also applied around sore eyes. Fruits and flowers are crushed and used as a wash for eye infections (Trivedi and Sudarshan, 1994).

Other Uses:

The leaf of the plant possesses anti-bacterial properties. The wood from the tree is used to make cart-wheels. The dry leaves of the tree can be used like sandpaper to rub and clean woodwork. The bark is used for making paper and the twigs are used as tooth brushes (Bir and Chatha, 1988). The fruits are sweet and edible (Krishnamurthy, 1993).

Conclusion:

The sand paper tree is a comparatively rare tree found in the tropical forests in India. It is a heritage tree and lives for a longer period of time. This tree can be planted in the temples dedicated to the *kuladeivatha*. This tree is very useful both economically and medicinally. The fruit of this tree can be consumed by various animals such as birds and beetles. Since the tree is linked to astrological science, it is essential to plant as many trees as possible, especially in temples and other places.

