



## Rasi Vanam

### Mesha (Meshan) Red Sandal Wood Tree



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**Botanical Name:** *Pterocarpus santalinus* L.f.

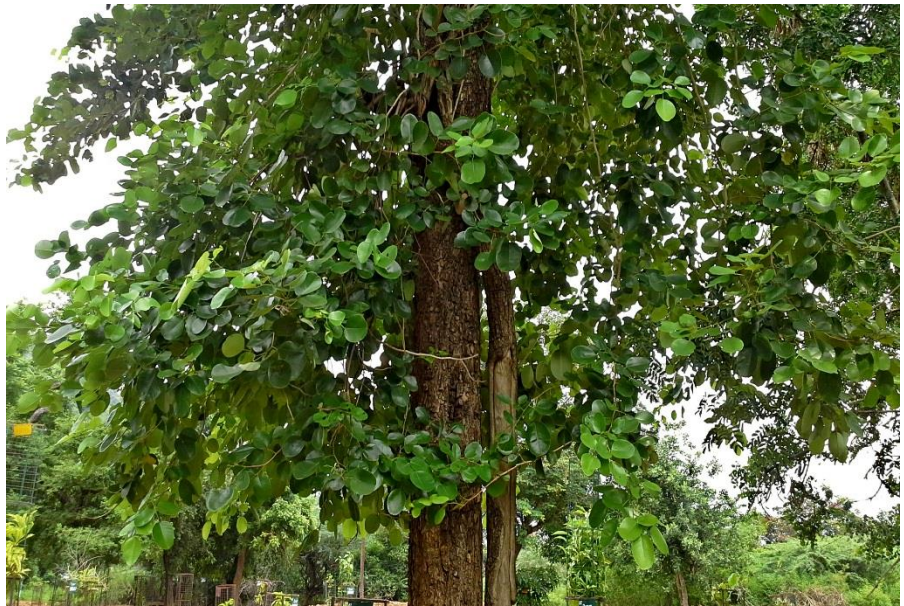
**Tamil Name:** Semmaram

**Sanskrit Name:** Raktha chandanam

**English Name:** Red sandal wood

### Habitat

A small to medium-sized, deciduous tree up to 11-meter tall with a dense, rounded crown; bark blackish-brown, deeply cut into rectangular plates, yielding a deep red latex when cut; heartwood extremely hard, dark purple. Leaves usually imparipinnate, 10-18 cm long; leaflets 3, rarely 4-5, 3.8-7.6 cm long, broadly ovate or orbicular, coriaceous, apex obtuse, slightly emarginate, undersurface



pale and clothed with fine grey hairs. Flowers yellow, borne a few together in simple or sparingly branched racemes; pedicels c. 5 mm long; calyx 5-6 mm long, teeth minute, deltoid. Fruits (pods) obliquely orbicular, 3.8-5 cm in dia including the wing, base narrowed into a short, concavely curved stipe 8 mm long, woolly. Seeds 1-2, reddish-brown, smooth, leathery, 1-1.5 cm long (India Biodiversity Portal.com).

### Religious Association

The Red sandal wood tree has long been associated with the subject of astrology under the constellation *Mesha (Mesham)*.

## Medicinal uses and other benefits

The red sandar tree (*Pterocarpus santalinus*) is very useful in the treatment of conditions like antipyretic, anti-inflammatory, anthelmintic, tonic, hemorrhage, dysentery, aphrodisiac, anti-hyperglycemic and diaphoretic (wikipedia.org). This tree has numerous medical uses: for example, the wood gives cooling effect when applied externally for inflammations, headache, bilious affection, skin diseases, fever, boils, scorpion sting and to improve eyesight.

## Other uses

This red sandalwood is also used for making bridge and neck of the musical instruments called (*Shamisen* 1870). There is heavy demand for this wood in China, Japan, Myanmar and other countries of south-east Asia. Also, it has many commercial uses for its timber for extraction of dye, cosmetics and medicine. According to the Indian Journal of Applied Research, it is a good source of santaline dye which has many uses in colouring foodstuff and pharmaceuticals. The tree bark is used in several medicinal preparations. (A.Bhagyaraj, Research scholar and D.V.Ramana, professor, Department of Management Studies, Sri Venkateswra University, Tirupati).



## Conclusion

Red sandal wood is native and endemic to India and it grows profusely in the southern region of the Eastern Ghats. However, it is an endangered species declared by the IUCN. This tree grows well in its natural habitat; but it has been overexploited illegally for its timber in India. The forest department should permit free growth of this valuable tree by distributing free samplings. It is advisable to increase the acreage of this tree as it has many socio-economic values. It is even used to reduce radiation from nuclear reactors.

