Nakshatra Vanam

Anuradha

Spanish Cherry

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Botanical Name: *Mimusops elengi* L.
Tamil Name: Maghizham
Sanskrit Name: Bakula
English Name: Spanish cherry
Family Name: Sapotaceae

Habitat

Mimusops elengi is spread all over South India and in the Andaman Islands. It is a medium-sized evergreen tree with a regular globular, spreading crown and attains a height of 10 m. to 16 m. It is native to India and grows in all regions with a tropical climate, except in water-logged areas.

Medicinal uses and benefits

The flowers are Pleasant smelling and full of nectar. A lotion prepared from the flowers is used to clear wounds and ulcers. A secretion of the bark helps in shrinking of the tissues, controls bleeding and cures excessive secretion of mucous from the bladder and urethra. It is also used to treat fevers and also as a mouthwash to protect gums and teeth. A paste of roots mixed with vinegar is applied to swellings on the face and a paste made with water is applied to pustule eruptions of the skin (Dastur, 1962). Regular chewing of tender fruits strengthens the teeth. The seeds are used in the preparation of eye drops and to treat bowel disorders. The oil extracted from the seed is applied to swellings of the joints (Shanmugham, 1989).

Religious Association

Maghizham (Bakula) is sacred to Hindus, Buddhists and Jains. In Hindu tradition, it is sacred to Lord Shiva. It is one of the many sacred trees mentioned in the Hindu religious texts, according to which the bakula (*Mimusops elengi*) is sacred to Lord Trimurthi (Bidwood, 1986: Gupta, 1971: Tiwari, 1989). Bakula or Vakula, one of the names of Shiva, is identified with a *yaksha*

named Chandramukha who is said to live in the tree (Stutley, 1985). It is also associated with Anusham, which is one of the twenty seven constellations (Singaravelu Mudaliar, 1983). Maghizham tree with flowers are depicted in the reliefs of the Sanchi and Amaravati *stupas*. According to Fergusson (1971), it is said to be one of the seven sacred trees associated with Buddha. It is also sacred to the Jain tradition as it is a symbol of Neminatha, a Jain Tirthankara. Although he is associated with the blue lotus, he attained enlightenment under the shade of this tree (Bhattacharya, 1974).

Temples associated with the Maghizham tree:

District	Village/Town	Temple	Deity
Kanchipuram	Tiruporur	Sri Kandhaswamy	Muruga
Madurai	Poombaarai	Sri Kulandhaivel	Muruga
Madurai	Tiruvadhavur	Tirumurainayakar	Shiva
Nagapapatinam	Tiuvidaikali	Kumara Shivam	Muruga
Perambalur	Udaiyarpalayam	Payaraneeswarar	Shiva
Tiruvallur	Tiruvotriyur	Aadhipureeswarar	Shiva
Tirunelveli	Ilanji	Iruvaluganadhar	Shiva
Tiruvhirapalli	Oottathur	Sunddharathneswarar	Shiva
Tiruvannamalai	Tiruvannamalai	Arunachaleswarar	Shiva
Tiruvarur	Tirukannamangai	Bhaktaraavi Perumal	Vishnu
Tiruvarur	Tirukannangudi	Shyamalameni	Vishnu Perumal
Tanjavur	Nachiyar koil	Srinivasa Perumal	Vishnu

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

Mythology/ Folklore

According to the *Sthala Purana* of the Arunachaleswarar temple at Tiruvannamalai, the word mahilam means mangalam, ie., auspicious, because it increases prosperity. Subramania Pillai (1948) states that it is believed that this tree is influenced by certain actions of women. If a woman dines under the shade of the *maghizham,* it is known to blossom, while Monier-Williams (1981) adds that it also blossoms when sprinkled with nectar from the mouths of lovely women.

Conclusion

According to a local folk-tale, anyone who sits under this tree will get rid of their sins and diseases after worshipping Lord Arunachaleswara. It is believed that if women circumambulate the sacred tree and tie a cradle to it, they will be blessed with a male child. Even today, we can find many cradles hanging on the branches of the sacred tree. *Mimusops elengi*, a native Indian plant has got high potential medicinal value. All parts of plant namely, leaf, flower, fruit, root, seed and bark are useful in curing various diseases.