



## Nature's guardians: Exploring the sacred trees of India

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### Abstract

India is a land of ancient wisdom, where nature has always been revered and protected. Trees, in particular, have played a sacred role in Indian culture for centuries. They are considered to be guardians of nature and are worshipped as such. India's sacred trees have been mentioned in many ancient texts and have been the subject of countless myths and legends. They are an integral part of the Indian way of life and continue to play an important role in the country's culture and traditions. In this paper, we will be exploring some of India's most sacred trees, their significance in Indian culture, and why they are so important to the people of India. From the banyan tree to the peepal tree and many more, read on to learn more about these amazing trees and their role in India's history and culture.

**Keywords:** Indian culture, sacred trees, worshipped, banyan and peepal

### Introduction

#### Introduction to India's sacred trees and their cultural significance

India, a land of ancient traditions and spiritual practices, is home to a rich tapestry of sacred trees that hold deep cultural significance. These majestic guardians of nature have stood tall for centuries, respected and revered by generations of people. In Indian mythology and folklore, trees hold a sacred place, believed to be the abode of gods and goddesses or even their physical manifestations. Each tree is associated with a specific deity or divine entity, and worshipped with profound reverence. These sacred trees are not mere symbols of beauty and life; they represent a connection between the earthly and the divine. One such revered tree is the banyan tree, known as the "Kalpavriksha" or the wish-fulfilling tree<sup>[1, 2]</sup>. Its sprawling branches and aerial roots symbolize fertility, longevity, and prosperity. Often found near temples and sacred sites, the banyan tree is believed to possess immense spiritual energy, attracting devotees who seek blessings and enlightenment. Another sacred tree is the peepal tree, also known as the "Bodhi tree." It holds great significance in Buddhism as it is believed to be the tree under which Lord Buddha attained enlightenment<sup>[3, 4]</sup>. Pilgrims and seekers of spiritual awakening flock to these trees, meditating and offering prayers in their serene shade. The various parts of plant has been used as a source of medicine by man from ancient to modern era<sup>[5, 6, 7]</sup>. The neem tree, with its bitter leaves and medicinal properties, is considered a divine healer in Indian culture. It is worshipped as a symbol of good health and protection from diseases. Neem leaves are often used in traditional remedies, and the tree is celebrated during festivals like Neem Devasam, dedicated to its benevolent qualities. These sacred trees not only hold religious and spiritual importance but also contribute to the ecological well-being of their surroundings. They provide shade, support diverse ecosystems, and act as carbon sinks, purifying the air we breathe. Their presence reminds us of the interconnectedness of all living beings and the need to protect and preserve nature.

In this paper we understand deeper into the enchanting world of India's sacred trees, unraveling their legends, exploring their healing properties, and their role in Indian culture and spirituality. There are many trees which are considered sacred sum of the sacred are as follows:

#### The Banyan Tree: Symbol of wisdom, longevity, and shelter

##### Botanical name: *Ficus benghalensis* (Family: Moraceae)

The Banyan Tree symbolizes the Trimurti-Lord Vishnu, Lord Shiva and Lord Brahma. It is often regarded as the "Kalpavriksha" or the wish-fulfilling tree, believed to possess mystical and divine powers<sup>8</sup>. This majestic tree is not just an emblem of wisdom, longevity, and shelter, but also a symbol of strength and resilience. The Great Banyan in the Indian Botanic Garden, Howrah, is to be the largest tree in the world. The banyan tree is characterized by its extensive canopy, which spreads wide and provides shade to those seeking refuge from the scorching Indian sun. Its intricate network of aerial roots, which hang down from the branches and eventually reach the ground, gives it a unique and captivating appearance. Often, these roots grow to such an extent that they envelop the whole tree, creating a mesmerizing spectacle that leaves onlookers awestruck. The leaves of the banyan tree yield ficusin and bergaptene<sup>[9, 10]</sup>. The fruit exercises a soothing effect and also nutritious. The buds soaked in water overnight and taken as infusion is used in the treatment of diarrhea and dysentery

In Hindu mythology, the banyan tree is associated with Lord Shiva and Goddess Kali. It is believed that Lord Shiva meditated under the cool shade of this tree, seeking enlightenment and wisdom<sup>[11, 12]</sup>. The tree's branches are considered sacred, and devotees tie threads around them, making wishes or seeking blessings. Apart from its religious significance, the banyan tree also plays a vital ecological role. Its expansive canopy provides a habitat for a diverse range of flora and fauna. Birds, squirrels, and several other creatures find refuge amidst its branches, contributing to the overall biodiversity of the region. Moreover, the banyan tree acts as a natural air purifier, releasing oxygen and filtering pollutants from the atmosphere.

In many Indian villages, the banyan tree holds a central position, often found near temples or village squares. It serves as a meeting point for the community, a place for discussions, storytelling, and celebrations. Its immense size and the sense of grandeur it exudes make it a natural focal point, attracting people from all walks of life. The banyan tree's significance goes beyond its physical presence. It embodies the essence of nature's guardianship, reminding us of the importance of respecting and preserving the environment. As we explore the sacred trees of India, the banyan trees stand tall and proud, a testament to the rich cultural heritage and deep-rooted connection between humans and nature.

### **The Peepal Tree: Sacred tree associated with enlightenment and spiritual awakening**

#### **Botanical Name: *Ficus religiosa* (Family: Moraceae)**

The Sacred fig tree is also known as Bodhi tree, peepal or ashvatta tree holds immense cultural and spiritual significance in India. According to legend, Siddhartha Gautama, the historical Buddha, sought enlightenment under a Bodhi tree in Bodhi Gaya, India<sup>[13]</sup>. After meditating for 49 days, he finally achieved enlightenment and became the Buddha, or the awakened one. Since then, the sacred fig tree has been considered an embodiment of spiritual awakening and enlightenment. This plant holds a significant place in the cultural and spiritual landscape of India. Revered for centuries, this majestic tree is considered sacred and is often associated with enlightenment and spiritual awakening<sup>[14]</sup>. Standing tall and majestic with its wide-spreading branches, the Peepal tree has been mentioned in ancient scriptures and texts, including the Bhagavad Gita and the Ramayana<sup>[15]</sup>. According to Hindu mythology, Lord Buddha attained enlightenment under the shade of a Peepal tree in Bodhi Gaya, making it an important symbol of spiritual awakening and transcendence. The Peepal tree is believed to possess divine qualities and is worshipped by many as a manifestation of various deities. It is common to find Peepal trees adorned with colorful threads, sacred threads, and holy offerings, as devotees seek blessings and solace in its presence<sup>[16]</sup>.

Apart from its spiritual significance, the Peepal tree also holds ecological importance. Its large, heart-shaped leaves provide ample shade, making it a popular spot for people to seek respite from the scorching Indian sun. The tree's dense foliage also offers a sanctuary for various birds, insects, and animals, contributing to the biodiversity of the surrounding ecosystem. In addition to its spiritual and ecological significance, there is a saying that it gives more oxygen than any other trees. It is an important host plant for the summer brood of lac insect<sup>[17]</sup>. Peepal tree is of great medicinal value in Ayurveda<sup>[18]</sup>. Different parts of the tree, including its leaves, bark, and roots, are used in herbal remedies to treat various diseases. Its leaves serve as a wonderful laxative as well as tonic for the body. It is especially useful for patients suffering from Jaundice<sup>[19]</sup>. The juice of its leaves extracted by holding them near the fire can be used as the ear drop, Peepal balance climatic conditions, control soil erosion, improve soil structure and its fertility, It is also dust and sound absorbent. Peepal tree is also known as a pollution indicator. In recent studies, researchers have observed that pollutants such as sulphur dioxide, nitrous oxide and dust choke the roots, stem, flowers and fruits of peepal and particularly leaves are sensitive to pollution. Its

bark has been used to heal the wounds for years. The leaf of a peepal plant is also considered valuable in the treatment of various kinds of skin disorders. Its serene aura and cultural significance make it a powerful symbol of enlightenment, spirituality, and the intricate connection between humans and nature. Take a moment to sit under the shade of this divine tree, feel its energy, and embrace the tranquility it offers.

### **The Neem Tree: Known for its medicinal properties and protection against evil spirits**

#### **Botanical name: *Azadirachta indica* (Family: Meliaceae)**

One of the most revered trees in India is the Neem tree, known for its remarkable medicinal properties and its association with protection against evil spirits. Native to the Indian subcontinent, the Neem tree is an evergreen tree that can be found in abundance across the country. The Neem tree has been an integral part of Indian culture and traditions for centuries. Its leaves, bark, and seeds are used in various Ayurvedic remedies due to their powerful healing properties. Neem leaves are known for their antibacterial, antiviral, and antifungal properties, making them a popular natural remedy for skin ailments, digestive issues, and even dental problems<sup>[20, 21]</sup>. In addition to its medicinal uses, the Neem tree holds great significance in the spiritual realm. It is believed to possess protective qualities against evil spirits and negative energies. In many Indian households, Neem leaves are hung on doors and windows during festivals and auspicious occasions to ward off evil influences and bring positivity. The Neem tree is also deeply connected to Indian mythology and folklore. It is often associated with deities like Lord Shiva and Goddess Durga, who are believed to have a special affinity for this sacred tree. It is not uncommon to find Neem trees near temples and shrines, symbolizing purity and divine presence. The beauty of the Neem tree lies not only in its physical appearance but also in its multifaceted significance. Whether it is sought after for its medicinal properties or revered for its spiritual symbolism, the Neem tree continues to be a cherished guardian of nature in India. Its presence serves as a reminder of the rich cultural heritage and the deep-rooted connection between humans and the natural world.

### **The Ashoka Tree: Symbol of love and compassion, often found in ancient Indian literature and art**

#### **Botanical name: *Saraca indica* (Family: Fabaceae)**

The Ashoka tree, with its majestic stature and graceful branches, holds a significant place in the rich cultural tapestry of India. Revered for its symbolism of love and compassion, this tree has found its way into the heart of ancient Indian literature, art, and religious practices. According to mythology, it is believed that the Ashoka tree was born from a divine intervention to alleviate the suffering of humanity. Its name "Ashoka" translates to "without sorrow," signifying its ability to bring solace and comfort to those in need. The Ashoka tree is often associated with the Hindu goddess Sita, known for her purity, devotion, and unwavering love for Lord Rama. In ancient Indian literature and epics like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, the Ashoka tree is described as a symbol of hope, enlightenment, and eternal love<sup>[22]</sup>. Its beautiful flowers, which bloom in vibrant shades of orange and yellow, are said to attract celestial beings and fill the air with a divine fragrance. Artists throughout history have

been captivated by the enchanting beauty of the Ashoka tree, depicting it in intricate paintings, sculptures, and tapestries. Its presence in art not only adds visual allure but also serves as a reminder of the values it represents – love, compassion, and the eternal cycle of life. Beyond its cultural and artistic significance, the Ashoka tree holds medicinal properties and is used in traditional Ayurvedic medicine<sup>[23]</sup>. Its bark, leaves, and seeds are believed to possess healing properties that can treat various ailments and promote overall well-being.

Today, the Ashoka tree continues to be cherished and protected, with efforts made to conserve and propagate its presence across the Indian subcontinent. It serves as a gentle reminder for humanity to embrace love, compassion, and kindness in all aspects of life. As you embark on your journey to explore the sacred trees of India, the Ashoka tree stands as a testament to the deep-rooted connection between nature and spirituality. Its presence in ancient texts, art, and the collective consciousness of the Indian people highlights the profound impact trees can have on our lives and the wisdom they hold as nature's guardians.

### **The Rudraksha Tree: Known for its powerful and spiritually significant seeds**

**Botanical name:** *Elaeocarpus ganitrus* (Family: **Elaeocarpaceae**)

The Rudraksha Tree holds a special place in Indian culture and spirituality. It is revered for its powerful and spiritually significant seeds, known as Rudraksha beads. These beads have been used for centuries by sages, yogis, and spiritual seekers as a means to connect with the divine. The Rudraksha beads are believed to carry immense positive energy and have healing properties. They are often worn as a necklace or bracelet, and each bead is said to possess unique qualities and vibrations that can influence various aspects of one's life. It is believed that Rudraksha beads can enhance concentration, reduce stress, improve overall well-being, and even provide protection against negative energies<sup>24</sup>. The Rudraksha Tree itself is a magnificent sight to behold. It is an evergreen tree with broad leaves and small, white flowers that bloom during the monsoon season. The tree can grow up to 50 feet tall and is found in the foothills of the Himalayas and other regions of India.

In Hindu mythology, the Rudraksha Tree is associated with Lord Shiva, the destroyer and transformer in the Hindu trinity. Legend has it that Lord Shiva meditated for thousands of years under the shade of the Rudraksha Tree, and as a result, the tree became sacred and its seeds were blessed with divine energy. Today, the Rudraksha Tree is not only revered for its spiritual significance but also for its ecological importance<sup>25</sup>. It plays a vital role in maintaining the balance of the ecosystem by providing shelter and food for various birds, insects, and animals. The tree also helps in preventing soil erosion, conserving water, and purifying the surrounding air. It is a reminder of the deep connection between humans and the natural world, and the profound wisdom that can be gleaned from ancient traditions<sup>[26]</sup>.

### **Amla: God's place of residence**

**Botanical name:** *Phyllanthus emblica* (Family: **Euphorbiaceae**)

Amla is also called as Indian gooseberry and amalaki has been regarded as the secretary in India it stimulate spiritual purity. According to Puranas Amla originated from the

tears/saliva of Brahma. As per Skanda and Padma Puranas Vishnu is believed to stay at the roots of the tree, different Gods and sages in the branches and joints and the ancestors are supposed to reside at the top of the tree. Its fruit and flowers are used in worship it is believed that Amla tree was the first tree to manifest itself on the earth and hence it is also known as Adiroha (pre eminent tree). Eating the fruits of Amla is very nutritious for the body. Taking bath by the water mixed with the juice of Amla fruit has great curative values. The Fruit is the richest source of Vitamin C and is a diuretic, laxative and hair dyes. It cures insomnia and is healthy for hair<sup>27</sup>. Amla is also used to treat constipation and is used as a cooling agent to reduce the effects of sun strokes and sun burns. It is the main ingredient used in the shampoo. Amla is used in sauces, candy, dried chips, pickle, jellies and powder. It has main use in the dyeing industry. The extracts are popularly used in ink. Amla wood makes excellent charcoal.

### **Bael: associated with lord shiva**

**Botanical name:** *Aegle marmelos* (Family: **Rutaceae**)

Bael, also known as *Aegle marmelos*, is a sacred tree that holds immense significance in various cultures and religions. Found primarily in India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Thailand, this tree is highly regarded for its spiritual and medicinal properties. In Hindu mythology, the bael tree is considered sacred and is associated with Lord Shiva. It is believed to be his favorite tree, and devotees often offer its leaves, fruits, and flowers during worship ceremonies. The bael tree is also considered significant in Ayurveda, the ancient Indian system of medicine, where its various parts are used for their therapeutic properties. The bael tree is a medium-sized deciduous tree with a dense canopy of leaves. Its fruit, the bael fruit or wood apple, is round and green when unripe, and turns yellow when ripe. The fruit is hard and has a tough outer shell that needs to be cracked open to reveal the aromatic and fleshy pulp inside. The pulp is commonly used in traditional Indian cuisine, especially as a base for refreshing summer drinks.

Apart from its religious and cultural significance, the bael tree also has various medicinal properties. It is known for its digestive benefits and is often used to relieve gastrointestinal issues like constipation, diarrhea, and dysentery. The pulp of the bael fruit is often consumed as a natural remedy for these ailments. It is also believed to have anti-inflammatory, antibacterial, and antiviral properties, making it a popular choice for boosting the immune system and treating respiratory infections. In addition to its medicinal uses, the bael tree has other practical applications. Its leaves are used for making traditional handicrafts, and the wood is highly valued for its durability and resistance to termites. The bael tree is also known for its ability to withstand drought and harsh weather conditions, making it a popular choice for landscaping in arid regions. Planting these trees around home or temple is Sanctifying. Bael is an ingredient in many Ayurvedic and Siddha formulations. Bael tree is native to India and a sacred plant to Hindus<sup>[28]</sup>. The Bael fruit is bitter in taste and used in Ayurvedic medicine to cure Vatha and Rapha disturbances in the body and the fully ripened fruit is not much used in medicines. The half ripe fruits are mostly used in medicine. It stimulates production of bile. It is a restorative and increases body's resistance and immunity. Bael improves digestion and ripened fruits are used in the preparation of Sharbhat.

**Bamboo: a symbol of strength, simplicity and prosperity****Botanical name: *Bambusa vulgaris* (Family: Poaceae)**

Bamboo, often referred to as the "sacred tree," holds a significant place in various cultures and traditions worldwide. It is a versatile plant that has been used for centuries for its numerous benefits. From construction and culinary use to medicinal properties and ecological importance, bamboo is truly a remarkable resource. In many Asian countries, such as China, Japan, and India, bamboo is considered a sacred tree due to its symbolism and cultural significance [29]. It is often associated with strength, flexibility, and resilience. The straight and upright nature of bamboo represents integrity, while its ability to bend without breaking symbolizes adaptability and endurance. In traditional Chinese culture, bamboo is regarded as a symbol of longevity and prosperity. It is often incorporated into art, literature, and poetry, depicting the beauty and grace of this plant. The hollow stem of bamboo is believed to possess spiritual qualities, allowing positive energy to flow freely. Apart from its symbolic meaning, bamboo has practical uses that contribute to its sacred status [30]. Its fast growth rate and sustainable nature make it an ideal resource for various industries. Bamboo is used in construction for making furniture, flooring, and even entire buildings. Its strength and durability rival that of steel, making it a popular choice in earthquake-prone areas. Bamboo shoots, the edible young sprouts of the plant, are a staple ingredient in many Asian cuisines. They are considered a delicacy and are known for their crisp texture and unique flavor. Bamboo shoots are also rich in nutrients, low in calories, and have been used in traditional medicine to treat various ailments [31, 32].

From an ecological perspective, bamboo plays a crucial role in maintaining a healthy environment. It is one of the fastest-growing plants on the planet, with some species capable of growing up to 1 meter per day. This rapid growth helps in soil erosion prevention, as bamboo roots hold the soil together, preventing landslides and protecting riverbanks [33]. Bamboo, called as the "the wise man timber" can be grown without pesticides or chemicals because of its own anti-bacterial properties. The leaves of bamboo tree are aromatic, used as Stimulant, and tonic. The leaves are beneficial in the treatment of stomach troubles. Pickled or cooked, they serve as an appetizer. In many parts of India, the leaves of the tree are used in the form of decoction to treat diarrhea. Bamboo shoots are used as food in various ways. They are used in preparation such as bamboo candy, chutney and canning of bamboo in syrups. Another bamboo product is bamboo charcoal. Besides, bamboo consumes carbon dioxide and returns 30% more oxygen to the atmosphere than trees. Bamboo provides environmental benefits and also poorer countries gain a place in the world market by farming bamboo. Research is in progress to test the ability of bamboo to absorb harmful chemicals and to purify water. Some bamboo sequester up to 12 tons of carbon dioxide from the air per hectare [34, 35].

**Mango: symbolizes the potential for enlightenment****Botanical name: *Mangifera indica* (Family: Anacardiaceae)**

Mango is considered a sacred tree in many cultures around the world. With its distinct flavor, vibrant color, and sweet aroma, the mango tree holds a special place in the hearts and traditions of people in tropical regions. Let's explore why this tree is considered sacred and the significance it holds in

different cultures. In Hinduism, the mango tree is regarded as a symbol of love and fertility. It is associated with Lord Ganesha, the elephant-headed deity who is known as the remover of obstacles. It is believed that Ganesha was born under a mango tree, making it a sacred tree associated with good fortune and new beginnings. Hindus also believe that hanging fresh mango leaves at the entrance of their homes can ward off negative energies and bring prosperity [36]. Adorning and Adoring: The Sacred Trees of India. *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature, Culture*, 12(3). In Buddhism, the mango tree is revered as a symbol of enlightenment. It is believed that Lord Buddha meditated under the shade of a mango tree, known as the "Bodhi tree," when he attained spiritual awakening. The mango tree represents tranquility, wisdom, and spiritual growth in Buddhism.

In some African cultures, the mango tree is considered sacred and is associated with ancestral spirits. It is believed that the mango tree has a direct connection to the spiritual realm and serves as a meeting point between the living and the dead. Mango trees are often planted near graveyards or in sacred groves to honor and communicate with ancestors. Apart from its religious and cultural significance, the mango tree holds immense ecological value. It is a native tree to tropical regions and provides shelter and food for various animal species. The mango fruit itself is highly nutritious and is rich in vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants. It is not only enjoyed as a sweet treat but is also used in culinary dishes, beverages, and even skincare products.

The mango as a fruit is a symbol of love and fertility. On various auspicious occasions, mango leaves are used to adorn entrances to signify good fortune. The tartaric acid, malic acid, and a trace of citric acid found in the Fruits to maintain the alkali reserve of the body. Extracts of leaves, bark stem and unripe mangoes are believed to possess antibacterial properties against some microorganisms. The stone of the mango fruit is used widely in Ayurvedic medicines for treatment of different ailments. Some of the flavonoids present in the fruit are believed to strengthen the immune system of human body [37].

**Red Sandalwood: symbol of purity and divinity****Botanical name: *Pterocarpus santalinus***

Red sandalwood, scientifically known as *Pterocarpus santalinus*, is a rare and valuable tree species that holds significant cultural and religious importance in many parts of the world. It is commonly referred to as "sacred wood" due to its revered status and various spiritual associations. One of the reasons why red sandalwood is considered sacred is its use in religious rituals and ceremonies. In Hinduism, it is believed to be associated with deities like Lord Ganesha and Lord Shiva, and is often used in the creation of sacred idols and temples. The wood is also used in the construction of meditation beads, or "rudraksha malas," which are believed to enhance spiritual practices and promote inner peace. In addition to its religious significance, red sandalwood is highly valued for its medicinal properties. It has been used in traditional Ayurvedic medicine for centuries to treat various ailments, including skin disorders, inflammation, and digestive issues. The wood is also believed to possess cooling and calming properties, making it a popular ingredient in herbal remedies and natural beauty products. Due to its scarcity and increasing demand, red sandalwood has also become an important trade commodity.

It is highly prized in the production of high-quality furniture, handicrafts, and fine arts. The distinctive red color and rich grain pattern of the wood make it aesthetically appealing and sought after by artisans and collectors' alike [38, 39]. However, the sacred status of red sandalwood has led to illegal logging and smuggling activities, resulting in the depletion of its natural habitat and population. As a result, the tree is now protected under various international regulations and conservation efforts are being made to preserve and sustainably manage its resources.

The red sandalwood tree is considered to be a sacred tree. This tree is believed to purify air from toxic substances. To cure digestive problems drinking of water which is stored in red sandalwood tumblers or cups is beneficial. External application helps in inflammations and provides relief in headaches and fevers.

### **Sandalwood: A Sacred Tree with Profound Significance**

**Botanical name:** *Santalum album* (Family: Santalaceae)

Sandalwood, also known as Chandana, is a tree that holds immense sacred and cultural significance in various parts of the world. Revered for its aromatic qualities and unique properties, sandalwood has been used for centuries in religious rituals, traditional medicine, and perfumery. Let us delve into the fascinating world of sandalwood and explore why it is considered a sacred tree. In many ancient civilizations, sandalwood has been considered a sacred tree with a deep spiritual connection. In Hinduism, sandalwood paste, known as chandan, is widely used in religious ceremonies and rituals. It is believed to purify the mind, enhance concentration, and create a soothing atmosphere. Sandalwood paste is often applied to deities, idols, and devotees as a mark of respect and devotion<sup>40</sup>. Furthermore, sandalwood plays a vital role in various religious practices. The fragrance emitted by burning sandalwood incense is believed to attract positive energy and dispel negative forces. It is also used in the creation of sacred spaces and meditation rooms to promote tranquility and serenity. Sandalwood has been an integral part of traditional medicine systems, particularly Ayurveda, for centuries. The oil extracted from sandalwood is renowned for its therapeutic properties. It is used to treat numerous ailments such as skin conditions, inflammation, anxiety, and insomnia. Sandalwood oil is also believed to have a cooling effect on the body and is often used to alleviate fevers and heat-related disorders. Its antimicrobial and antiseptic properties make it an essential ingredient in skincare products, helping to soothe and heal various skin conditions. Sandal wood, its paste and oil are important in worship of gods. The Sandal tree is highly regarded in the vedas, and the heartwood is considered to be sacred. It is said that chandana, or Indra's Sandalwood tree, scents the whole of paradise with its fragrance. Sandalwood is considered the epitome of excellence, imparting fragrance even to the axe that cuts it. For this reason anything that is excellent is referred to as chandana. It is used in sacred ceremonies and to purify holy places. Sandalwood is used in Ayurveda for treating skin problems such as acne, poisonous stings and external bleeding. It is used in massage oils and as a blood purifier. Sandalwood is also considered to be a digestive aid which can help to reduce heartburn, nausea, diarrhea and vomiting. Due to its moisturizing properties it acts as an astringent and anti-septic. Planting sandalwood provides

environmental as well as economic benefits. Sandalwood trees absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and thus contribute to the reduction in greenhouse gases. Thus the tradition of planting these trees in temples, public places and homes sowed for environmental, healthy and curative purposes. Trees were considered as lungs in an ecosystem. Hence, the plantings of these trees should be taken up in a planned manner in urban and rural areas to promote a healthy environment. They also add income by providing the bio-products. They are centers of integrative health and wellness. It provides an integrated health benefit combining indigenous, complementary and conventional therapies. The mission of the sacred trees is to create a feeling of well being and a renewed freshness in mind. Noise pollution can also be reduced. Sacred trees sequester carbon dioxide from the air, convert and store it in the form of wood. A healthy tree use about 500 pounds of carbon dioxide per year. For every ton of wood produced, about 1.8 tons of carbon dioxide is removed from the air. A large tree will store the same amount of carbon dioxide as is released by three cars driven 15,000 miles. These trees cool the surrounding environment by reducing smog levels and ozone pollutions by 6%.

**Harshringar tree: believed to bring peace and prosperity.**

**Botanical name:** *Nyctanthes arbor-tristis*

The Harshringar tree, also known as the Night-flowering Jasmine or Parijat tree, holds great significance in various cultures and is considered sacred in many parts of the world. This beautiful tree with its delicate white flowers and captivating fragrance has long been revered for its spiritual and medicinal properties<sup>[41]</sup>. In Hindu mythology, the Harshringar tree is believed to have originated from the celestial realms. According to a popular legend, the tree was brought to Earth by Lord Krishna's wife, Satyabhama, from Indra's heavenly garden. As a result, it is believed to be a celestial tree that represents the divine connection between heaven and earth<sup>42, 43</sup>. The flowers of the Harshringar tree are highly revered and are often used in religious ceremonies and rituals. They are considered sacred offerings to various deities, especially Lord Krishna and Goddess Radha. The fragrant flowers are also used to make garlands and decorate temples during festive occasions. Apart from its religious significance, the Harshringar tree has medicinal properties that have been recognized for centuries. Its leaves, flowers, and bark are used in traditional medicine to treat various ailments. The tree is known for its anti-inflammatory, analgesic, and antibacterial properties. The flowers are often used to make herbal tea, which is believed to have calming and stress-relieving effects.

In addition to its spiritual and medicinal uses, the Harshringar tree is also admired for its aesthetic appeal. Its delicate white flowers bloom at night and emit a sweet fragrance, making it a popular choice for gardens and landscaping. The tree adds beauty and tranquility to any outdoor space and is often planted near temples and sacred sites<sup>[44]</sup>. The Harshringar tree holds great significance in various cultures as a sacred tree. Its beauty, fragrance, and spiritual and medicinal properties have made it a revered tree for centuries.

**Kadamb tree: it symbolizes love, beauty and devotion****Botanical name: *Neolamarckia cadamba***

Kadamb trees are indeed considered sacred in various cultures and religions. These trees hold significant importance and are revered for their beauty, medicinal properties, and association with divine entities. Let's explore the sacredness of kadamb trees in more detail. Scientifically known as *Neolamarckia cadamba*, kadamb trees are native to the Indian subcontinent and can also be found in Southeast Asia. They are characterized by their large, glossy leaves, yellowish-orange flowers, and round, green fruits [45]. In Hindu mythology, the kadamb tree is closely associated with Lord Krishna. It is believed that Lord Krishna used to play his flute under the shade of a kadamb tree, attracting humans and animals alike with his enchanting music. Hence, the tree holds a special place in the hearts of Krishna devotees, and many temples dedicated to Lord Krishna have kadamb trees planted within their premises.

Apart from its association with Lord Krishna, the kadamb tree is also considered sacred in other religious traditions. In Buddhism, it is believed that Lord Buddha attained enlightenment while meditating under a kadamb tree. As a result, the tree is often depicted in Buddhist art and is considered a symbol of spiritual awakening. In addition to its religious significance, kadamb trees have several practical uses as well. The leaves and flowers of the tree have medicinal properties and are used in traditional Ayurvedic medicine to treat various ailments like fever, cough, and skin diseases. The timber of the kadamb tree is also used for making furniture, while the fruits are consumed by birds and animals. Due to its cultural and ecological importance, efforts have been made to preserve and protect kadamb trees. Various organizations and communities have taken initiatives to plant kadamb trees in public spaces and sacred sites, contributing to their conservation [46].

**Conservation efforts and challenges facing India's sacred trees**

Conservation efforts and the challenges facing India's sacred trees have become increasingly important in recent years. These trees hold immense cultural and religious significance for the people of India, and their preservation is crucial for maintaining the country's biodiversity and ecological balance. Numerous organizations and individuals have taken up the cause of protecting these sacred trees. They work tirelessly to raise awareness about their importance and implement strategies to conserve them. One such organization is the Sacred Grove Conservation Network, which focuses on preserving the sacred groves that house these revered trees. Challenges, however, persist in the conservation of India's sacred trees. Urbanization and industrialization have resulted in rampant deforestation, with many sacred forests being destroyed to make way for development projects. The encroachment of human settlements and agricultural activities also poses a threat to the survival of these trees. Additionally, the lack of proper legal protection and enforcement further exacerbates the challenges faced in preserving these sacred trees. While some states in India have recognized the importance of safeguarding these trees and have enacted legislation for their protection, implementation and enforcement remain inconsistent.

Climate change is another significant challenge that affects the survival of sacred trees. Rising temperatures, erratic rainfall patterns, and increased frequency of extreme weather events pose a threat to the growth and health of these trees, making them more vulnerable to diseases and pests. To overcome these challenges, a holistic approach is needed. Efforts should focus on raising awareness among local communities about the ecological importance of sacred trees and the need for their conservation. Collaborations between government agencies, NGOs, and local communities can help develop sustainable management plans for sacred groves and ensure their long-term protection. Furthermore, there is a need for stronger legal frameworks and stricter enforcement measures to safeguard these trees from illegal logging and encroachment. Investing in research and scientific studies on the ecological and cultural significance of these trees can provide valuable insights for their conservation. India's sacred trees are not just a part of its natural heritage but also an integral aspect of its cultural identity. Preserving them is a shared responsibility that requires collective action and a deep understanding of their ecological and spiritual significance. By addressing the conservation challenges and working together, we can ensure that these guardians of nature continue to thrive for generations to come.

**Conclusion**

Sacred trees serve as a natural habitat and provide support to a variety of flora and fauna. They remove excessive amounts of carbon dioxide and air pollutants present in the atmosphere, viz. sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxide, and carbon dioxide produced by automobiles, power plants, and factories. In return, they give us oxygen, so sacred trees are very important to improve the quality of air and help to reduce the ozone layer in urban cities. They manage the climate by moderating the effect of sun, wind, and rains; they moderate summer temperatures by providing shade and act as windbreaks. Trees reduce soil erosion and help to improve the fertility of soil. According to recent studies, trees also provide evaporative cooling benefits. The sacred trees of India play a crucial role in preserving the rich cultural heritage of this diverse nation. These trees are not just symbols of spirituality and religious beliefs but are also deeply intertwined with the daily lives of millions of people. India's cultural heritage is a treasure trove that needs to be protected and celebrated. The sacred trees serve as living monuments, reminding us of our ancient traditions and connecting us to our roots. They are a testament to the wisdom and reverence that our ancestors had for nature. Preserving these sacred trees is not just about conservation; it is about safeguarding the intangible aspects of our heritage. It is about ensuring that future generations can experience the same sense of awe and wonder that we feel when standing in the presence of these majestic trees. Furthermore, the preservation of these sacred trees is closely linked to environmental conservation. Many of these trees are home to diverse ecosystems and provide habitat for numerous species of flora and fauna. By protecting these trees, we are also protecting the delicate balance of nature and contributing to the overall well-being of our planet. It is our collective responsibility to ensure the survival of these sacred trees. This can be achieved through various means such as implementing stricter laws to prevent illegal logging, promoting awareness, and education about the

cultural significance of these trees, and actively participating in conservation efforts. By doing so, we not only preserve India's cultural heritage but also contribute to a sustainable future. Let us be the guardians of nature and the custodians of our cultural legacy. Together, we can ensure that these sacred trees continue to inspire and nourish generations to come. By delving into the rich history and symbolism behind these sacred trees, we gain a deeper understanding of the deep-rooted connection between humans and nature in India. As you continue your journey, take a moment to appreciate and protect these sacred trees, for they are not only treasures of the past but also vital guardians of our present and future.

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