



Nakshatra Vanam

Punarpusam

Bamboo Tree



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Botanical Name: *Bambusa bambos* (L.) Voss

Tamil Name: Moongil

Sanskrit Name: Amupah

English Name: Bamboo

Habitat

Culms from a thick stoloniferous rhizome, erect, 10-20 cm across; culm sheaths broadly triangular, densely brownish-hairy within, and scattered hairy without. Leaves 20 cm long; sheaths 12 x .2 cm, linear, glabrous; ligule short, entire; petiole short. Inflorescence a compound panicle with the spikelets in heads. Spikelets 1-many-flowered, 0.8-2 cm long, oblong, terete. Bracts glume-like. Glumes 1-3, to 5.5 mm, broadly ovate, mucronate. Lemmas to 6.5 mm, lanceolate, mucronate, coriaceous, glabrous. Paleas to 7 mm, 2-keeled, ciliate. Stamens 6. Style 1; stigmas 3. Caryopsis linearly cylindrical (India Biodiversity Portal).



Religious Association

The tree is sacred to Shiva and Vishnu. According to Stutley (1985), it is an emblem of Venugopala, Krishna and Rajagopala. The bamboo tree has been depicted in the bas-reliefs of the stupas and in some Buddhist sculptures (Birdwood, 1979). The tree has also been associated with the subject of astrology under the constellation *Punarpusam*.

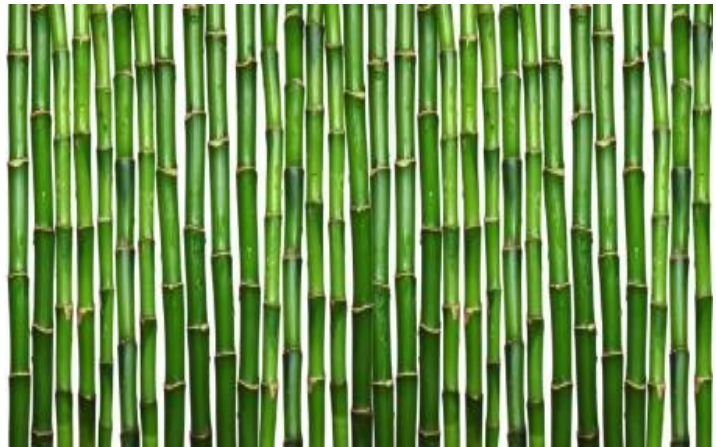
Temples associated with the Bamboo Tree:

<i>District</i>	<i>Village/Town</i>	<i>Temple</i>	<i>Deity</i>
Cuddalore	Tiruvetkalam	Venuvananadhar	Shiva
Cuddalore	Tiruvennainallur	Kirubhapureeswar	Shiva
Nagappattinam	Sirkali	Bramapureeswarar	Shiva
Tirunelveli	Tirunelveli	Nellaiyappar	Shiva
Vellore	Tirupachur	Pasuranathur	Shiva

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

Medicinal uses and other benefits

The decoction of the leaves can be used in the treatment of gas problems and stomach ache. It is also used in the treatment of menstrual disorders and pains, and to eliminate intestinal worms. The leaf buds can be used for treating thread worms. The leaf juice can be added to aromatics to stop vomiting of blood. The cooked tender shoot can be used to help indigestion. A decoction of the stem helps menstruation and also abortions. The decoction can be useful in relieving pain of swelling joints. The silicious crystalline secretion found in the female plant is used as expectorant to reduce fever, protect the mucous membrane and in the treatment of asthma and paralysis (Dastur, 1962). The grains of the plant are very useful in the treatment of fever, eye disorder, biliousness and sugar in urine (Shanmugam, 1989).



The plant has been used in making temporary roads and bridges during floods in India. In China, it is used in the building of the bridges. It is so strong that it can support trucks of up to 16 tons' weight. Furniture such as beds, chairs and tables can be made from the bamboo. In China, Myanmar, Thailand and India, the pulp is used in making paper for printing and writing. The bamboo is such a useful plant that even cups, saucers, spoons and ladles and window blinds can be manufactured from it. Other items that can be manufactured include musical instruments, fishing rods, bicycles, helmets, toys, etc. (Econation).



Mythology/ Folklore

According to Sarkar (1972), during *Ahora puja*, after worshipping Hara-Parvarti, the performance of *homam* (casting of clarified butter into the sacred fire as an offering to the Gods) is followed by feeding of the Brahmanas and virgins. On this day, a branch of the bamboo is planted on one side of the *pandal*, along with mango leaves and a banana tree with flowers and worshipped by all.



According to the *Sthala Purana* of Venuvananadhar temple at Tiruvelkalam, sage Kannvar performed penance in this sacred place for many years and he was covered by a termite mound on which the *moongil* started to grow. Seeing this, Brahma split the bamboo bush and made it into three bows and named *Pasupadha*, *Saranga* and *Gandeepa* and gave it to Shiva, Vishnu and Chandra. Arjuna came here and started his penance. To test his *bakthi*, he was disturbed by a hunter who was none other than Shiva. Arjuna got angry and fought with him until Lord Shiva appeared and gave the *Pasupadha* to Arjuna. This story has been depicted in a sculpture in the temple.

According to Kandasami Gurukkal, who is the priest of the temple, *puja* is being performed by the Shivachariyars hereditarily. Originally, this temple was maintained by Vanniyars and Nayanars. During the Koothandavar Tiruvila (festival) one would act like Shiva in the form of Vedava, Arjuna and Varaga. The age old bamboo culm is only used for temple needs. In the Nellaiyappar temple at Tiruunelveli, the devotees after worshipping the Lord Nellaiyappar, worship the bamboo tree, which is just behind the *garbhagriha*, and women hang cradles on the tree to be blessed with children, wealth and prosperity. Even today, one can see many cradles hanging on the bamboo tree (Sacred Trees of Tamil Nadu – 2005 by M. Amirthalingam)

Conclusion

It is a hardy and versatile plant. There are as many as 1000 varieties of bamboo in the world. It flourishes in tropical and temperate climates. It does not need pesticides to grow. This plant is very easy to grow and can mature within a period of 3 to 5 years. Therefore, the government should take up cultivation of this plant in a big way. Farmers can be taught the cultivation techniques of the plant and also the economic benefits that can be derived from it. Women's self-help groups can easily take up the manufacture of various craft items from this plant as an income generation activity. It is also noted that this plant acts as a balance of oxygen and carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. It is also an excellent soil erosion inhibitor.

