



## Nakshatra Vanam

### Revathi

#### Indian Butter Tree



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<b>Botanical Name:</b>	<i>Madhuca indica</i>
<b>Tamil Name:</b>	<i>Iluppai</i>
<b>Sanskrit Name:</b>	Madhuka
<b>English Name:</b>	Indian Butter Tree
<b>Family Name:</b>	Sapotaceae

#### Habitat

A deciduous tree, tall and with a spreading, dense, round, shady canopy. The bark is rough, brown in colour, slightly cracked and fissured, the inner bark is red, exudes white and milky sap when cut. The leaves are elliptic, tip pointed, base angled, texture thick, hairy beneath, the nerves are strong, about 12 pairs, the tertiary nerves are oblique, and margin entire but may be wavy. The stalk is reddish. The flowers are available in bunches at the end of the branches. They are white, 2 cm long, pointed, sweet scented and fleshy. The fruits are ovoid, fleshy, 2- 4 cm across, greenish and 1- 4 seeded. The seeds elongate and are 2 cm long; brown and shining. The tree grows on a wide variety of soils but prefers sandy soil and alluvial soil.



## Medicinal uses and benefits

The flowering season extends from February to April. There is heavy fall of succulent, corollas on the ground. It is rich in sugar (73%) and next to cane molasses constitute the most important raw material for alcohol fermentation. The yield of 95% alcohol is 405 liters from one tone of dried flowers.

The matured fruits fall on the ground in May to July in north India and August and September in south India. The orange brown ripe fleshy berry is 2.5 to 5 cm long and contains one to four shining seeds. The seeds can be separated from the fruit wall by pressing. Drying and decortications yield 70% kernels on the weight of seeds.

The leaf cures wounds, anti burns and bone fracture. The oil is good for treatment of emollient, skin disease, rheumatism, headache, laxative, piles, hemorrhoids, emetics, anti earth worm. The fruit is useful for treatment of aphrodisiac, tonic, dipsica, bronchitis, astringent, anti ulcer, acute and chronic tonsillitis and pharyngitis.



The flower is used as an expectorant to increase the production of milk in women, as a stimulant, as diuretics, as anthelmentic, as strangury, as verminosis, as hepatoprotective and in the treatment of gastropathy. The flowers are used as a vegetable, for making cake, liquor; the flower juice is used in the treatment of enlargement of axillary gland, neurotic disorder and taken with cow's milk as an aphrodisiac, and in cough and bronchitis. The liquor derived from the fermentation of flowers is considered to be a tonic and nutritive.



White mahua fat is in the production of washing soaps. It also has utility as virgin fat in toilet soap. The cake is cheap and effective wormicide to maintain the turf, lawn and golf ground, free from earth worms.

Seed paste is applied to cure muscle fatigue and relieve pain in the muscles and joints to improve the texture and vigour of skin. The bark decoction is used in curing bleeding gums and ulcers. The fodder is used to feed the goat and sheep.

The seed cake is also fed to cattle. The timber is used for house construction, naves and felloes of cartwheels, door and window frames. Mahua has a large spreading superficial root system that holds soil together. It also provides shade to both man and beast.



### Religious Association

It is associated with Lord Shiva. Madhuka is one of the names of Lord Shiva. The temple has been praised in song by the Thevaram trio. Madhuka trees are also associated in the science of astrology under the constellation Revathi.

### Temples associated with the Madhuka tree

District	Village/Town	Temple	Deity
Cuddalore	Irumpai Maahalam	Mahaleswarar	Shiva
Erode	Kodimada	Ardhanareeswarar	Shiva
Nagappattinam	Iluppaipattu	Padikarainadhar	Shiva
Ramanathapuram	Iluppaikudi	Dhanthontreesar	Shiva
Salem	Tiruchengode	Ardhanareeswarar	Shiva

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

### Mythology/ Folklore

According to the Sthala Purana of the Neelakandeswarar temple at Palamannipadikarai, the Lord instructed the tree to grow on the south eastern side which the tree obeyed. The tree in turn requested the Lord that its oil be used daily in lighting the temple lamps. Thereby the Lord is pleased and blesses the devotees. The tree requested the Lord that it should be found throughout the Chola country and was blessed accordingly. Thus, the sthala is named Iluppaipattu or Madhugavanam. Another legend says that the sage Romasa advised the Pandavas to visit this sthala and light lamps with iluppai oil and get the blessings of the Lord.

*“Karputtha viruppaivana viruppaivana menappurivon.....”*

Sthala Purana

Its virtue is celebrated in numerous folk songs from Central to Eastern India (Randhawa, 1983). In ancient times, people derived their food and intoxicants and sugar from the flower of this tree, which is evident by the following proverb:

*“inipilla oorukku illuppaipoo sakkarai”*

It is also believed that demons and evil spirits avoid this tree.

## **Conclusion**

It is one of the single largest indigenous trees that may not need deliberate conservation efforts due to its assimilation in cultural identity. In the tribal belt, the centre of the village is usually adorned with a huge Mahua tree, beneath which all the village meetings are held. Regeneration is plentiful. The tree is rarely cut due to its economic importance and religious taboos threatening wrath of the spirits upon cutting the trees.

Mahua is planted on wasteland with nitrogen fixing: Vesicular-arbuscular mycorrhizal associations and root colonization have been observed in mahua. The seed cake can be used as fertilizer. The cake has export value. The mahua tree can be planted along the highways and also to mark boundaries of fields. It is thus useful in providing welcome shade to the passers- by and also provides clean fresh air. It is also home to various birds and other small animals.

