



Nakshatra Vanam

Mṛgaśiraṣa (Mirugaseerisam) Indian Ebony Tree



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Botanical Name: *Diospyros ebenum* J.Koenig ex Retz.

Tamil Name: Vellathovarai (Karingali)

Sanskrit Name: Tumbi

English Name: Indian Ebony

Habitat:



Evergreen dioecious trees, to 15 m high, bark black or grey-black, rough, peeling off in small rectangular pieces, fissured, brittle; blaze yellow; branch-lets slender, apical part sparsely minutely ad-pressed pilose or glabrous. Leaves simple, alternate, estipulate; petiole 4-10 mm long, slender, glabrous; lamina 4.5-15 x 4-7 cm, elliptic-oblong, oblong, oblong-lanceolate, obovate or obovate-oblong, base cuneate or acute, apex obtuse, emarginated or subacute, margin entire, glabrous, coriaceous;

lateral nerves 5-11 pairs, pinnate, prominent, basal pairs opposite, inter-costae reticulate, prominent, pellucid. Flowers unisexual, subsessile, greenish-yellow; male flowers: 3-15 in short, axillary, umbellate clusters; peduncle densely tomentose; pedicel 3 mm; calyx cupular, glabrous; lobes 4, ovate, spreading, margin ciliate; corolla 7 mm long, 1 cm across, tubular to salver-shaped; lobes 4, ovate-oblong, 6 mm long; stamens 6-12, unequal, in uneven groups; filaments 1.5-3.5 mm long; anthers linear, connectives crested, apiculate; pistillode linear to 2 mm; female flowers: solitary, axillary, pedicel to 3 mm; calyx cupular, mouth densely tomentose; lobes 4, ovate, spreading, subacute; corolla 3 mm across, tubular; tube 6 mm; lobes 4, each 6 mm, acute, reflexed; staminodes 8 with double anthers; ovary superior, 4.5 x 4 mm, globose, 8-celled, ovules 1-in each cell; styles 4; stigma capitellate. Fruit a berry, 2 x 1.8 cm, sub-globose, with short apical beak; calyx enlarged and forming a shallow wooden cup; reflexed; seeds 3-8, black; endosperm equable. (India Biodiversity Portal.com).

Religious Association:

The Indian Ebony tree has long been associated with the subject of astrology under the constellation *Mirugaseerisam*.

Medicinal uses and other benefits:



The bark of the tree has many uses. It gives stamina to the body and has a cooling effect and also strengthens teeth and gums. The bark of the tree is having both bitter and astringent effects. The root of the tree should be cleaned, boiled in water and filtered and then taken. This will cure ulcers, worms and cholesterol. If taken twice a day morning and evening, the filtered water will control diabetics, pitta, and improve the iron content in the blood. The gum of the tree should be dried and powdered and then mixed with milk and taken. This will increase the immunity of the body, improve the sperm level, cure nervous disorders and sexual problems. The wood of the tree can be soaked in water and one can bathe in it after the water changes colour to cure body pain (Owshadham, 2017). The leaf of the tree can be crushed and applied

externally to reduce blisters (S. Karthick et.al, 2017)

Other uses:

The wood is very hard, heavy and durable. It is also highly resistant to insect attack and fungi. The heart wood is very useful to make sports goods, musical and mathematical instruments, ornamental carvings, piano keys, chess sets, rulers, brushes and ornaments (www.preservearticles.com). The tribal people of the Kalrayan and Shervarayan hills of Tamil Nadu use the wood of this tree to make tools, handles etc. (K. Kadavul et.al, 2009).

Conclusion:

The Indian ebony tree is found in Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka. It is a tropical dry evergreen tree species. There is also the practice of putting pieces of the wood of this tree on the *kalasam* of the temple during the time of *kumbhabhishekam*. It is believed that this will protect the temple and surrounding places from thunder and lightning (Owshadham, 2017). In olden times, this tree was very prevalent since the people of those times used it for medicinal purposes. However, in recent times due to degradation of the groves, this species is gradually dwindling. This species has been reported in 1998 as a threatened species as per The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Therefore, it is necessary to take immediate action to further publicize this tree through tissue culture and seed disposal. It is also necessary to teach and explain the importance and value of the culture of growing trees among our children and other groups. Karingali tree objectives, conservation techniques and knowledge of the indigenous community can be successfully used and also promoted.

