

Prosopis cineraria

[Synonyms : *Prosopis spicigera*]

SACRED TREE is a deciduous tree. Native from Iran to India it has greenish-yellow flowers. It is also known as *Chaunkra* (Hindi), *Ghaf* (Arabic), *Jammi* (Telugu), *Jand* (Punjabi), *Jhand* (Hindi), *Kalisam* (Tamil), *Khijdo* (Gujerati), *Parampu* (Malayalam), Sami tree, and *Shami* (Bengali and Sanskrit).

The bark yields a fibre known as ‘Savindal’.

Cineraria is derived from the genus name *Cineraria* meaning ‘like plants in that genus’.

Although some authorities report that the floury fruit pods are eaten locally, others suggest they are poisonous. As emergency rations the sweetish-tasting bark is already claimed to have proved its worth. Records indicate that from 1868-1869 during a renowned famine in India this bark was ground into flour and baked into cakes which are believed to have saved many many lives.

In parts of India camels, cattle and sheep are led to browse on the tree and are said to enjoy the fruit pods particularly. It is also harvested and dried for fodder.

The tree is sacred for Hindus in India and is worshipped to bring success and prosperity.

Indian and Pakistani farmers also hold the tree in high regard because of the increased fertility of the ground shaded by the tree’s canopy.

Galls on the leaves and bark have been used for tanning.

Gum from the trunk is held by some to be reminiscent of gum arabic (*Acacia senegal*).

Within its native range the hard, purplish-brown wood is said to be preferred beyond all others for heating and cooking. This wood has also been used locally for houebuilding and boatbuilding, as well as for making wagons, agricultural implements, tool handles and furniture. It yields a high quality charcoal and as already indicated has been burnt as fuel.

South-eastern Asian experts believe sacred tree is primarily a source of fuel and charcoal in that region, and that in a secondary capacity it offers a source of vegetable, animal feed, tannin and gum.

Sacred tree has been valued by environmentalists for inclusion in afforestation projects in extremely dry areas.

Locally in India plant ashes have served as a depilatory as they have been rubbed over the skin (human) to remove hair.

Medicinally, on the recommendation of Indian herbalists pounded and sweetened flowers have been eaten to prevent miscarriage, and in central India particularly the bark has been used for treating rheumatism, snake bites and scorpion stings. The bark has also been chosen in treatments for lung disorders, dysentery, leprosy, nervous problems, muscle spasms and piles. Smoke from the leaves has been used for easing eye ailments.