

Sacrificially Important Trees Revealed in the *Kṛṣṇa Yajurveda Saṃhitā* – Their Description and Uses

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Abstract

The *r̄sis* in *Kṛṣṇa Yajurveda* (KYV) *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* (TS) have offered respects and prostrations to the trees (1-3-5; 1-3-6; 1-8-13; 4-5-2, 4-5-8) saying that it is not possible to imagine life without trees. The *Śukla Yajurveda* (SYV) *Vājasaneyī Saṃhitā* (VS) (16-20-20) also show respect towards the trees and say one should have reverence and devotion towards all eatables, grains, forests, medicinal herbs, trees and vegetation.

All *mantrās* of KYV-TS describe a detailed account of how to perform various *yajñas* or sacrifices. To perform any *yajña* flawlessly, only specific implements made from the wood of distinctive trees and vessels should be used, which are collectively called ‘*yajñāyudha*’ (meaning, ‘the weapons used in *yajña*’). The entire 7th *anuvāka* of the 5th *prapāthaka* of the 3rd *kāṇḍa* of the KYV-TS clearly reveals the names of different trees. There is no detailed published information available as to which tree wood is applicable for making a specific *yajña* implement. The 8th *anuvāka* of the 4th *prapāthaka* of the 3rd *kāṇḍa* of the KYV-TS provides the names of different trees that should be used as *samidhas* (faggots) in the *yajña* / *homa*. This paper lists and explains about the woody trees used to make these *yajñāyudha* and the *samidhas*.

Key words: *Aśvattha, Audumbara, Faggots, Kindling wood, Khādira, Kṛṣṇa Yajur Veda, Māndhuka, Naiyagrōdha, Parṇa, Plākṣa, Śami, Samidha, Taittirīya Saṃhitā, Vikaṅgkata, Yajña, Yajñāyudha, Yajña* implements

1. INTRODUCTION

The *vedas* are sacred texts that originated in ancient India. They were the beginning of our spiritual knowledge. These *Śruti vedas* were codified and classified into writing by the great sage, *Vedavyāsa*, as: *R̄gveda* - wisdom verses; *Yajurveda* – wisdom of sacrificial formula; *Sāmaveda* – wisdom chanting and *Atharvaveda* – wisdom of Atharvan *r̄sis*. Initially, the *Śruti vedas* consisted of four collections of *mantras* called *saṃhitās*, each associated with a particular *r̄si*/s or aspect of ritual. Over centuries, three kinds of additional literature were attached to each of the *saṃhitās*: the *brāhmaṇas* (discussions of the ritual), the *āraṇyakas* (manuscripts recited in the

forests) and the *upaniṣads* (the philosophical writings) (Bloomfield, 1908, Witzel, 2003, pp. 68-101).

The *R̄gveda*, the earliest of the *vedas*, describes in detail the natural law or order called *rta* as the governing principle of the universe and its events. Even the vedic gods were not exempt from this law (Ramachandra Rao, 1991, p.3). The *Yajurveda* (YV – a *tatpuruṣa* compound of *yajus* ‘sacrificial formula’ and *veda* ‘knowledge’, i.e. ‘the knowledge of sacrifice’) is the next of the four canonical texts of the *vedas*. It contains the knowledge of principles and methods of performing *yajña* and *yāgas* as spiritual and scientific experiments for global welfare.

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Estimated to have been mostly composed prior to 1000 BC, the *YV Saṃhita* contains the liturgy (*mantras*) needed to perform the *Vedic*. The best known and best preserved of these recessions is the *Taittirīya Saṃhita* (*TS*), named after Tittiri (partridges or birds), a pupil of Yakṣa (first teacher of the *Taittirīya* School of the *KYV*) and an authority according to Pāṇini (John, 1879, p.228). The *KYV-TS* consists of seven (07) *kāṇḍas*, subdivided into chapters or *prapāṭhakas*, and each chapter is further sub-divided into individual sections or *anuvākas*. Some individual hymns in the *TS* that have gained particular importance are the *Rudra Namakam* (*TS* 4-5) and *Rudra Camakam* (*TS* 4-7) which constitute the *Satarudrīyam* or the Śrī *Rudram*, while the *Mahā Mrtyunjaya mantra* is preserved in the *TS* 1-8-6.1.

The *vrksam* (tree) is the symbol of life and growth. It stands for eternity and selfless well-being. Trees are considered as *devatās* (deities). *Devatā* means one who keeps giving incessantly. Trees have always been beneficial to us and they possess the divine qualities that qualify them to be addressed as *devatās*. Trees in Indian mythology and folklore are widely considered as sacred and worshipped across the country for their benevolence. Indians believed that certain trees are the abode of gods and goddesses. The worship of trees in India can be traced to the Indus Valley Civilization, as clearly indicated in the Indus Valley seals. The hymns of the Vedas also contain references to such sacred trees and plants on account of their being associated with certain deities and also because of their potent medicinal properties (Dymock, Warden and Hooper, 1893, pp. 5-6). Trees and plants on land (*sthala vrkṣas*) are the direct object of invocation in both *RV* and *YV*. *RV* extols trees and says that trees blossom and bear fruit because of *uṣmā*, *urjā* and *megha* (Kashyap and Sadagopan, 2005). They offer all that they have for others and for the environment. It is said in the *RV* 7-4-5 that medicinal herbs, trees and earth possess an infinite treasure-house

of energy that never diminishes – ‘*Tamoṣadhiśca vaninaśca garbham bhūmiśca viśvadhayasam bibharti*’.

All *mantrās* of *KYV-TS* describe a detailed account of how to perform various *yajñas* or sacrifices. *Yajña* is the subject matter of the entire *Veda*. Usage of proper *yajña* implements is the important factor of *yajña / homa*. The *KYV-TS* 3-5-7 clearly reveals the names of different trees and further, it instructs that only the wood from the specified trees should be used for the sole purpose of making the *yajña* implements and vessels (Krishnamurthi Sastry, 1989). Also, the *KYV-TS* 3-4-8 provide the names of different trees that should be used as *samidhās* (faggots) in the *yajña / homa*. There is no detailed published information available as to which tree wood is applicable for making a specific *yajña* implement and for the *samidhas*. Hence, in this article, the authors list and explain about these woody trees that are used to make these *yajñāyudha* and the *samidhas*.

1.1 *Yajña*

The word *Yajña*, is derived from the root word ‘*yaja*’, meaning ‘worship or sacrifice’ which is key to understand the *Yajur Veda*. In *SYV Saṃhitā* (18-1, 18-2 and 18-6) there is a detailed account of the various benefits that result from the performance of a sacrifice (*yajñena kalpantām*). Among such benefits are abundance of food (*vāja*), wealth (*prasava*), efficiency in work (*prayati*), mental acuity (*dhiti*), enlightenment (*jyoti*), physical vigour (*ojas*), longevity (*dirghāyu*), health (*anāmaya*), tranquility (*śarma*), fearlessness (*abhaya*), friendship (*anamitram*), and sound sleep (*sukham śayanam*). The sacrificer prays that his life may become fulfilled by the sacrifice that he performs (Personal communication with Sri Pandit Ram Sivan, New South Wales, Australia).

Yāga means a sacrificial rite where offerings are made (*‘ijyate havir dīyate atra’*).

1.2 *Yajña Agni*

The *agni* (fire) for the *yajña* is produced by churning (*agni-manthana* – the kindling of the sacred Fire), using the fire sticks (*aranī*) made from trees like *śami* and *aśvattha* (peepal) tree (*Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa*, 1;1;9;1.) (Fig. 1). Veda states that *agni*, assuming the form of horse, once left the *devas* and went and stayed in the *aśvattha* tree. That is why the tree itself is named as *aśvattha*. ‘*aśva*’ means horse; the tree in which the horse (*agni*) stayed. Here, an ordinary *aśvattha* tree will not suffice. It should be the *aśvattha* tree growing out of a *śami* tree. *Śami* tree is known for being *śāntayoni* and its womb has a pacifying nature. Therefore, it is called *śami* as it pacifies the destructive nature of *agni*. Hence, an *aśvattha* tree growing out of the womb of a *śami* tree should be chosen for making *aranī*, the pair of wood used to churn *Agni*¹. One *aranī* is placed above the other and churned by using a rope (*rasanā*). The lower *aranī* (*ādhāra-arani*) is called *Urvāśī* (a nymph) and the stick which is on top (*uttara-arani*) is

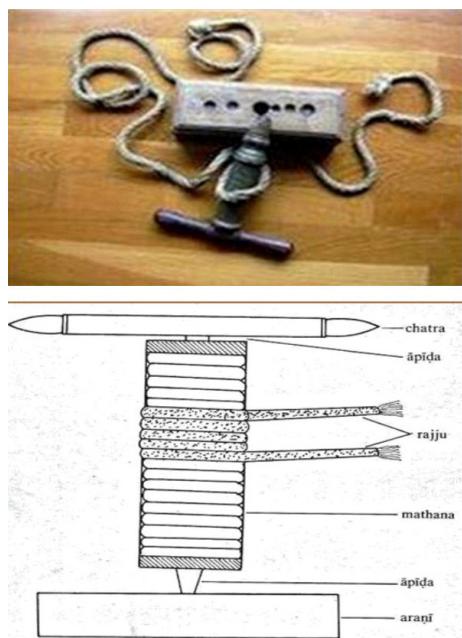


Fig. 1. Instrument used for production of *yajña agni*

called *Purūravas* (Indra) (Personal communication with Sri Pandit Ram Sivan, New South Wales, Australia).

2. DISCUSSION

2.1 Important Trees for making *Yajñāyudha*

To perform any *yajña* flawlessly, only specific implements and vessels should be used, which are collectively called ‘*yajñāyudha*’ (meaning, ‘the weapons used in *yajña*’). These are made from the wood of distinctive trees. In the *KYV-TS* 3-5-7, the names of the important trees and their qualities are clearly revealed and described (Kashyap, and Sadagopan, 2005). These trees are exclusively used for the sole purpose of manufacturing the *yajña* implements and vessels.

2.1.1 *Yajñāyudha* Trees

1- वषट्कारो वै गायत्रिये शिरो अच्छन्नत तस्यै रसः परा
अपतत स पृथिवीम् प्राविसत स खदिरो अभवद यस्य
खादिरः सुवो भवति छन्दसां एव रसेनाव द्यति सरसा
अस्य आहुतयो भवन्ति

KYV-TS 3.5.7

*vaṣṭakārō vai gāyatriyai śira acchinat tasyai rasah
parā apatat sa pṛthivīm prāviśat sa khadiro
abhavad yasya khādirah sruvō bhavati
chandasāmeva rasenāva dyati sarasā asya āhutayo
bhavanti*

The *Vaṣṭakār devatā* due to enmity with Goddess *Gāyatrī* decapitated Her. Then the sap that oozed out of the beheaded part fell on the earth and gave birth to the *Khādira* tree. If the host performing the *yajña* (*yajamāna*) uses the *sruva* made of *khādira* wood, it is equivalent to an oblation with sap of meters. These oblations by the performer of *yajña* would become cheerful. Hence, it is mandatory for the *sruva* to be made out of only *khādira* wood.

2- तृतियस्यं इतो दिवि सोम असित तं गायत्र्यं अहरत्
तस्य पर्णं अच्छदसत तत् पर्णो अभवत् तत् पर्णस्य

¹ *Aśvattha* is also used in a different context during war. Here, the *aśvattha* tree used is born out of (sprouting from) a *Khādira* tree (known to be a male plant because of the sap). *Khādira* enhances the valour of *Agni* (Personal communication with Sri Ramaswamy Sastry and Sri Vighnesh Ghanapadi, Mumbai, India).

पर्णत्वं यस्य पर्णमयी जुहूर् भवति सौम्या अस्य आहुतयो
भवन्ति जुषन्ते अस्य देवा अहुतिर्देवा वै ब्रह्मन् अवदन्त
तत् पर्ण उपासृणोत् सुश्रवा वै नाम यस्य पर्णमयी जुहूर्
भवति न पापग्रं श्लोकगुम् श्रुणोति ब्रह्म वै पर्णः

*trīyasyām itō divi sōma āśīt tam gāyatryā aharat
tasya parṇān acchidiyata tat parṇō abhavat tat
parṇasya parṇatvam yasya parṇamayī juhūr
bhavati saumyā asyā āhutayō bhavanti jucante
asya devā āhūtīrdevā vai brahman avadanta tat
parṇa upāśr̄ñota suśravā vai nāma yasya
parṇamayī juhūr bhavanti na pāpagg ślōkam
śruṇōti brahma vai parṇah*

The *soma* creeper was present in the third world from the earth, called the *dyuloka*. Once, when Goddess *Gāyatrī* was bringing the *soma* creeper, a leaf from that creeper fell on the earth and became the *Parṇa* tree. *Parṇa* in Sanskrit means ‘leaf’ and hence the tree is named so. The oblations of the performer of the *yajña*, when performed with the ladle (*juhu*) made from the *parṇa* wood, are delightfully accepted with love by the Gods. Once when *devatās* were having a secret discussion regarding the holy power (*brahma*) under the *parṇa* tree, the *devatā* in the *parṇa* tree overheard it. Hence, the *parṇa* tree is also called as ‘*Suśravas*’ (meaning ‘one who heard the good’). Therefore, he who performs *yajña* using a ladle (*juhu*) made of *parṇa* wood neither hears any evil nor faces any accusations. Thus the *parṇa* tree is praised here.

3- विष्मरुतो अन्नं विष्मारुतो अश्वत्थो यस्य पर्णमयी
जुहूर् भवति आश्वत्थी उपभृद् ब्रह्मण् इव अन्नं अवरुन्द्धे
अथो ब्रह्मैव विश्यथि ऊहति राष्ट्रं वै पर्णो विद् अश्वत्थो
यत् पर्णमयी जुहूर् भवति आश्वत्थी उपभृद् राष्ट्रमेव
विश्यथि ऊहति

*viñmaruto annam viñmaruto aśvat'tho yasya
parṇamayī juhūr bhavati āśvat'thī upabhṛd
brahmaṇa iva annam avarund'dhe athō brahmaiva
viśyadhi ūhati rāṣṭram vai parṇo vi aśvat'tho yat
parṇamayī juhūr bhavati āśvat'thī upabhṛd
rāṣṭrameva viśyadhi ūhati*

As the *parṇa* tree overheard the secret discussions of *devatās*, it is regarded as the holy power (*Brahma* himself). The Maruts are class of people associated with trade. As the food is earned by the hard working traders, the food is also the people. The *parṇa* tree symbolizes the royalty while the *aśvattha* tree symbolizes the people. The performer

of *yajña*, who uses the *juhu* (ladle) made out of the *parṇa* wood, should use the *upabhṛt* (another type of ladle) made from the wood of *aśvattha* tree. Performing *yajñain* this manner brings royalty to the land and to the people.

4- प्रजापतिर्वा अजुहोत् सा यत्र आहुतिः प्रत्यतिशर्तत
ततो विकड्गकत उदतिष्ठत ततः प्रजा असृजत यस्य
वैकड्गकती ध्रुवा भवति प्रत्येवास्य आहुतयः तिष्ठन्ति
अथो प्रैव जायत एतदैव सुचागुं रूपम् यस्यैवगुं रूपाः
सुचो भवन्ति सर्वाणि एवैनगुं रूपाणि पशूनाम् उप तिष्ठन्ते
न अस्य अपरूपम् आत्मन्यजायते

*prajāpatirvā ajuhōt sā yatra āhutiḥ
pratyatichmhata tatō vikaṅgkata udatiṣṭhata tataḥ
prajā asṛjata yasya vaikangkati dhruvā bhavati
pratyevāsyā āhutayaḥ tiṣṭhanti athō praiva jāyata
etadvai sr̄cāgumi rūpam yasyaivagum rūpāḥ sruco
bhavanti sarvāṇi evainagum rūpāṇi paśūnām upa
tiṣṭhante na asya aparūpam ātmanjāyate*

When Prajapati ('lord of creatures') performed a sacrifice, from the place where the oblations fell, a *vikaṅgkata* tree emerged. Prajapati created people from this *vikaṅgkata* tree. Therefore, the *yajña* implement *dhruba* made from the wood of *vikaṅgkata* tree, when used by the *yajña* performer, his oblations are eternal and can truly propagated. This *mantra* portrays the relation between the *yajña* implement '*dhruba*' and the '*vikaṅgkata*' tree. The offering spoons (*sruva*, *sruk*, *juhu*, *upabhṛt*, *dhruba*) have the characteristic features of the *khādira*, *parṇa*, *aśvattha* and *vikaṅgkata* trees².

Using these implements to perform *yajña*, the performer can certainly obtain any form of cattle. He will be blessed with hale and healthy off-springs.

2.1.2 Description of Woody *Yajña* Implements

2.1.2.1 *Sruk*

Sruk is made of a sacrificial woody tree, *parṇa* (*Butea monosperma*). *Sruk* is a long ladle, a *bāhu* (36 *āngulas*), an *aratni* (24 *āngulas*) or a *prādeśa* (12 *āngulas*) in length. It has a bowl or depression (*puṣkara*) on top of it at one end with a beak (shaped like elephant's lips or swan's beak) for the liquid to be poured out (*prasecanā*); the tail portion of the ladle (or handle) will be in the

² Characteristic features are: *Khādira* – oblations of sap of meters, cheerful; *Parṇa* – no evil, no accusations; *Aśvattha* – symbolizes the people; *Vikaṅgkata* – eternal oblations

form of crow's tail (*vāyasapuchha*). The *Sruk* represents the female principle or *Prakrti* (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. *Sruk*

2.1.2.2 *Sruva*

Sruva is made of a sacrificial woody tree, *khādira* (*Acacia catechu*). *Sruva* is used to collect the ghee, and offer it to fire at different times during the *yajña* ceremony. It is the most widely used spoon over the *homa*. *Sruva* is divided into two parts, one representing the sun is *Sūrya*, *Soma* and the other, is the moon. Like *Sruk*, *Sruva* spoons are made with very precise measurements. It is an *aratri* (24 *aṅgulas*) in length, and the bowl (*puskara*) is a small one, its diameter being not more than the tip of the thumb of the sacrificer's hand. The *Sruva* represents *puruṣa* or the male principle (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3. *Sruva*

2.1.2.3 *Juhu*

The *juhu* ladle is made from *parṇa* wood (*Butea monosperma*) (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4. *Juhu*

2.1.2.4 *Upabhṛt*

The *upabhṛt* ladle is made from *aśvattha* wood (*Ficus religiosa*). This is generally held under the *juhu* implement while performing *yajña* (Fig 5).



Fig. 5. *Upabhṛt*

2.1.2.5 *Dhruva*

The *dhruva* implement is made from *vikanḍkata* wood (*Flacourtie sapida*) (Fig. 6).



Fig. 6. *Dhruva*

2.1.3 Miscellaneous Woody *Yajña* Implements

2.1.3.1 *Vasodhārā*

A variety of ladle (which means 'the flow of wealth') used in *agni-chāyana* and is meant for continuous and uninterrupted offering of melted clarified butter (*ājya*) into the fire for a specific duration (represented by the chanting of the *mantrās*). It is made from *audumbara* wood (*Ficus racemosa*) (Fig. 7).



Fig. 7. *Vasodhārā*

2.1.3.2 *Sphya*

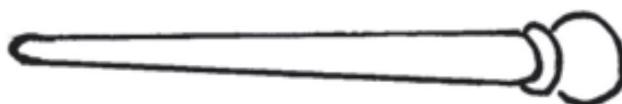
A sword made from *khādira* wood (*Acacia catechu*). It is used for cutting the *darbha*-grass to the required size, for marking the lines in the sacrificial ground and for stirring the boiled oblations, removing the surface soil viz. removing the upper layer of mud, digging the earth and marking the area of the altar (Fig. 8).



Fig. 8. *Sphya*

2.1.3.3 *Śamyā*

A wooden peg or stick or staff, shaped like a mace (Fig. 9). It is a measuring device used along with *sphya*.

Fig. 9. *Samyā*

2.1.3.4 *Ulūkhala and Musala*

A wooden mortar and pestle used for pounding the grains or crushing *soma* shoots. The *ulūkhala* (mortar) and *musala* (pestle) are to be made of very hard wood, viz. both of *varṇa* wood (*Crateva magna*), or the mortar of *palāśa* wood (*Butea monosperma*) and the pestle of *khādira* wood (*Acacia catechu*) (Fig 10). The former is to be of the height of the knee and the latter three *aratnis* (cubits) long (Kashyap, 2003). In KYV-TS 5-2-8, it is mentioned that the *agni* started without a centre (*apanābhi*) causes harm to the sacrificer. For this reason, the *ulūkhala* is placed as navel (centre point) for initiating the *yajña agni*. Here, the *ulūkhala* (mortar) is made of *audumbara* (*Ficus racemosa*) wood (described in section 2.2.1.3).

Fig. 10. *Ulūkhala and Musala*

2.1.3.5 *Drona-Kalaśa*

This is a large vessel made of strong and hard wood like *vikanigkata* (*Flacourtie sapida*) or *varṇa* (*Crateva magna*) for storing the *soma* juice; it is a trough (*drona*), square or circular in shape, with a handle (*dana-yuta*). It may alternately be shaped like a boat (*naukākāra*).

2.1.3.6 *Prāśitraharaṇa*

It is a special set of spoons of the *brahma* priest, made from the *khādira* wood (*Acacia catechu*) (Fig. 11). They are made shaped as a cow's ear, a peepal leaf, a lotus bud and a square. The *purodaśas* offered to *agni* and *soma* are cut to remove a small piece that is placed on these spoons and brought to the *brahmā* (covered by a wooden lid) eats from these spoons.

Fig. 11. *Prāśitraharaṇa*

2.1.3.7 *Mekṣana*

This is a rice-stirring spatula also used for offering oblations to the manes. It is made of *aśvattha* wood (*Ficus religiosa*) (Fig. 12).

Fig. 12. *Mekṣana*

2.1.3.8 *Piṣṭodpapamī*

This is made from *varṇa* wood (*Crateva magna*) or clay. The length is 20 *āngulas*, depth 6 *āngulas* and breadth 6½ *āngulas*. Vaikhanasas alone specify their vessel to have a circular rim at the end away from the handle. Used to offer *piṣṭa*.

or mix the flour with water to make the *purodaśa* dough.

2.1.3.9 *Pranīta*

The *pranīta* is a vessel made from *aśvattha* wood (*Ficus religiosa*) in which consecrated water is kept. While making *purodāśas*, water from this vessel is mixed with the flour. The vessel is also meant to store *soma*-juice. The vessel is square in shape (Fig. 13).

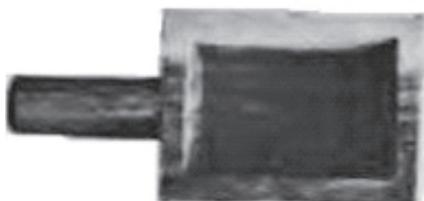


Fig. 13. *Pranīta*

2.1.3.10 *Upaveśa*

The sacrificial fire is stoked by a wooden stick, one *prādeśa* (viz. 12 *angulas*) or one *aratni* (24 *angulas*) long, and the head of which is shaped like an extended palm (*hastākṛti*). It is called *upaveśa* or *dhrṣṭi*. This is made from *parṇa* wood (*Butea monosperma*) (Fig. 14).



Fig 14. *Upaveśa*

2.1.4 Descriptions of woody trees used for making Yajña Implements

Here below is the description of woody trees that are used in making *yajña* implements. These trees are the *Khādira*, *Parṇa*, *Aśvattha* and *Vikaṅgata*.

2.1.4.1 *Khādira* (Sanskrit) –*Acacia catechu* (L. f.) Willd.

Family: Fabaceae (Mimosoideae) – Other common names: *khair*, *supari*, *sundra*, *cachu*, *koir*, *tallatuma* (Hindi); betel-nut palm, black cutch,

catechu tree, cutch tree, heartwood (English); *Sandra* (Telugu); *karungali*, *kamugu*, *paku*, *baga* (Tamil); *sha* (Burmese); *khair*, *khaira* (Nepali); *acacie au cachou* (French); *pinang* (Malay); *sache*, *seesiat*, *seesiat nua*, *sisiat-nua* (Thai); *khersal*, *katha*, *kath*, cutch tree, *pegu* cutch (Trade name) (Fig. 15).



Fig. 15. *Khādira* tree: a. Mature tree b. Tree wood c. Flowering stage d. Fruiting stage

The generic name, ‘*Acacia*’, comes from the Greek word ‘*akis*’, meaning a point or a barb. The species name comes from ‘*cutch*’, a tanning extract isolated from its heartwood.

Documented Species Distribution: Native range India, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Thailand while Exotic to Indonesia, Kenya, Mozambique

Botanical Description: *Acacia catechu* (L. f.) Willd. is a small or medium-sized, thorny tree, grows up to 15 m tall. Wood is dark grey or greyish-brown, peeling off in long strips, or sometimes in narrow rectangular plates, brown or red inside. Branches are slender, with 2 curved, 8-mm prickles at the base of each petiole. Leaves are bipinnately compound, leaflets 16-50 pairs,

oblong-linear, 2-6 mm long, glabrous or pubescent. Flowers in axillary spikes, white to pale yellow, with a campanulate calyx, and corolla 2.5-3.0 mm long; stamens are numerous, with white or yellowish-white filaments. Fruit a strap-shaped pod, flat, tapering at both ends, shiny, brown, dehiscent, 3-10 seeded. Seeds are broadly ovoid.

Medicinal Properties: Khersal, a crystalline form of cutch sometimes found deposited in cavities of the wood are used medicinally for the treatment of coughs and sore throat. The bark is said to be effective against dysentery, diarrhoea and in healing of wounds. The seeds have been reported to have an antibacterial action.

2.1.4.2 *Parna* (Sanskrit) – *Butea monosperma* (Lam.) Kuntze (Syn. *Butea frondosa*)

Family: Fabaceae (Papilioideae) – Other common names: *Brahmopādapa*, *Lakṣataru* (Sanskrit); Flame of the Forest, Parrot Tree (English); *Palāś* (Hindi); *Moduga*, *Palasamu* (Telugu); *Muttuga* (Kannada); *Porasum*, *Parasu* (Tamil); *Palasin Samat*, *plash* (Malayalam); *Palāsh* (Marathi); *Palashpapra* (Urdu); *Kinshuk*, *Polash*, *Polashi* (Bengali); *Palash* (Oriya); *Pauk* (Burmese); *Polash* (Assamese); *Khakda* (Gujrathi); *Kela* (Sinhalese); *Ploso* (Javanese) (Fig. 16).

Parna, the flame of the forest, is considered sacred, because it has fulfilled the needs of mankind since ancient time. It is said that the tree is a form of *Agni deva*, the God of Fire. It was a punishment given to Him by Goddess Pārvati for disturbing Her and Lord Śiva's privacy.

Documented Species Distribution: Exotic range: India, Cambodia, Indonesia, Japan, Laos, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Vietnam; Native range: China, Papua New Guinea

Botanical Description: *Butea monosperma* (Lam.) Kuntze is a small to medium-sized deciduous tree, 15- 20 m tall. Trunk is usually crooked and tortuous, with rough grayish-brown,



Fig. 16. *Parna* tree: a. Mature tree, b. Tree wood, c. Flowering stage, d. Fruiting stage

fibrous bark showing a reddish exudates; branchlets densely pubescent. Leaves are trifoliate; long petioles with small stipules; leaflets more or less leathery, lateral ones obliquely ovate, terminal one rhomboid-obovate. Flowers are in racemes, near the top on usually leafless branch-lets; calyx with campanulate tube and 4 short lobes; corolla 5-7 cm long, standard, wings and keel re-curved, bright orange-red, very densely pubescent. Fruit is an indehiscent pod, stalked, covered with short brown hairs, pale yellowish-brown or grey when ripe, in the lower part flat, with a single seed near the apex. Seeds are ellipsoid and flattened.

Medicinal Properties: The flowers are useful in the treatment of liver disorders and seeds act as an anthelmintic. An astringent gum oozing from the cut stem has medicinal properties as a powerful astringent and is applied in cases of diarrhoea.

2.1.4.3 *Asvattha* (Sanskrit) – *Ficus religiosa* Linn.

Family: Moraceae – Other common names: *Asvattha* (Bengali); Wisdom tree, Sacred Ficus, Sacred tree, Peepal, Bodhi tree (English);

Pipal (Hindi); *Raavi chettu* (Telugu); *Drasi, Avasi* (Tamil); *Arali mara* (Kannada); *Arayal* (Malayalam); *Pimpal* (Marathi); *Pipal* (Nepali); *Easthu* (Sinhalese); *Peepal* (Urdu) (Fig. 17).



Fig. 17. *Asvattha* tree. a. Mature tree, b. Tree wood, c. Flowering stage, d. Fruiting stage

The specific epithet ‘*religiosa*’ alludes to the religious significance attached to this tree. Prince Siddhārtha is said to have sat and meditated under this tree and there found enlightenment from which time he became ‘The Buddha’. The tree is therefore sacred to Buddhists and is planted beside temples.

Documented Species Distribution: Exotic range: India, Chad, Nepal, Thailand; Native range: Israel, United States of America (USA)

Botanical Description: *Ficus religiosa* L. is an evergreen or deciduous tree, 20 m tall, irregularly-shaped, with wide-spreading branches and without aerial roots from the branches. The trunk is regularly shaped, often with low buttresses. Bark is grey with brownish specks, smooth, exfoliating in irregular rounded flakes. Leaves are alternate,

spirally arranged and broadly ovate, glossy, coriaceous (leathery), dark green leaves. Petioles are slender. Galls are found on leaves. Flowers are axillary sessile and unisexual. Figs are in pairs, rounded, flat-topped green, axillary, sessile, smooth, ripen to purple with red dots. Seeds when dropped on other trees, they germinate. The seedlings rely on the host plant only for anchorage as *F. religiosa* does not parasitize on other plants. They derive their nutrition from the air and rainfall, until the roots reach the ground.

Medicinal Properties: The ripe fruit is cooling and relieves foul taste, thirst, biliousness, diseases of blood and heart; it is a laxative and helps digestion. It is used for medicinal purposes, such as toothaches. Dried fruit cure asthma; seeds are useful in urinary discharge; young bark is an astringent.

2.1.4.4 *Vikaṅkata* (Sanskrit) – *Flacourtie sapida* Roxb. (Syn. *Flacourtie remontchi* (L) Herit., *Flacourtie indica* (Burm. f.) Merr.)

Family: Flacourtiaceae – Other common names: *bilangra, kakein, katai, kukai* (Hindi); *tambat, benchi, katai, baichi* (Bengali); Madagascar plum, batoka plum, flacourtie, governor’s plum, Indian plum, Mauritius plum (English); *kakoa, kandie, kangu* (Punjabi); *kankot* (Gujrathi); *boniso, potnaboniso* (Orissa); *bonta kandregu, kanaregu, putikatada* (Telugu); *malukkarai, mulanninchil, sottaikala, kutukali* (Tamil) – (Fig. 18).

Documented Species Distribution: Native range: Botswana, Burundi, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, India, Kenya, Malawi, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zanzibar, Zimbabwe: Exotic range: Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, China, Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Indonesia, Jamaica, Madagascar, Malaysia, Puerto Rico, Seychelles, Sri Lanka, St. Kitts.

Botanical Description: *Flacourtie sapida* Roxb. is a tree or shrub usually 3-5 m tall, sometimes



Fig. 18. *Vikanikata* tree: a. Mature tree, b. Tree wood, c. Flowering stage, d. Fruiting stage

10 m. Bark is usually pale, grey, powdery, may become brown to dark grey and flaking, revealing pale orange patches. Vegetative parts vary from glabrous to densely pubescent. Leaves are red or pink when young, variable in size, oval to round, edge toothed, becoming leathery; stalk to 2 cm. Flowers are unisexual or occasionally bisexual. Male and female flowers are separate. Fruits are globular, reddish to reddish-black or purple when ripe, fleshy, with persistent styles, up to 10-seeded. Seeds are 5-8 in number, testa rugose and pale brown.

Medicinal Properties: The fruits of *Flacourtie sapida* Roxb. are appetizing and digestive. They are given in jaundice and enlarged spleen. Seeds are ground to powder with turmeric and rubbed all over the mother's body to prevent rheumatic pains owing to exposure after the birth of a child. The bark is applied to the body, along with the bark of *Albizia*, intervals of a day or so during intermittent fevers. The leaf is carminative, astringent and used as a tonic, an expectorant and for asthma, pain relief and gynaecological complaints.

2.2 *Samidhās* (Faggots or Kindling wood)

A bundle of sticks bound together to be used as fuel is *samidhā*. It used to be a matter of course for the *r̄ṣis* of yore to kindle the sacrificial fire while reciting the *vedic mantrās*. They fed it with fuel called *samidhā*. It was for this purpose that a preceptor of learning and practice was approached by disciples with loads of faggots in their hands to gain knowledge of self. *Samidhā* is therefore symbolic of gaining knowledge of self. The KYV-TS 3-4-8 discusses about (i) obtaining of kingdom; (ii) *rāṣṭrabhṛt*; (iii) oblations of him whose realm is not in order; (iv) varieties of kindling wood and (v) the effect of harshness of speech and reveals the names of different trees that should be used as *samidhās* (Kashyap, 2003; Kashyap and Sadagopan, 2005).

In the context of this paper, we deal with only the different types of kindling wood or *samidhās* (faggots) that are extensively used in the *yajña / homa*. The names of different trees that are used as the *samidhās* are listed and explained.

1- आहुतयो वा एतस्य अकल्पुता यस्य राष्ट्रं न कल्पते स्वरथस्य दक्षिणं चक्रम् प्रवृद्धा नाडीमभि जुहुयाद् आहुतीर् एवास्य कल्पयति ता अस्य कल्पमाना राष्ट्रं अनु कल्पते संग्रामे सम्यते होतव्या राष्ट्रं वै राष्ट्रभूतो राष्ट्रे खलु वा एते व्यायच्छन्ते ये सङ्ग्रामगुम् संयन्ति यस्य पूर्वस्य जुह्वति स एव भवति जयति तगुम् संग्रामं मान्युक इधमः

KYV-TS – 3-4-8.3

āhutayō vā etasya aklyptā yasya rāṣṭram na kalpate svarathasya dakṣiṇam cakram pravr̄hya nāḍīmabhi juhuyād āhūtīr evāsyā kalpayati tā asya kalpamānā rāṣṭram anu kalpate saṅgrāme samyatte hōtavyā rāṣṭram vai rāṣṭrabhṛtō rāṣṭre khalu vā ete vy āyachante ye saṅgrāmamgum samyanti yasya pūrvasya juhvati sa eva bhavati jayati taigum saṅgrāmān māndhuka idhmah

The oblations of the king, whose kingdom is not in order, are disordered. He should take off the right wheel of his chariot and hover it over the sacrificial fire. The *homa* should be performed through the axle of the wheel. Then his oblations will become ordered. The kingdom too comes into order, in accordance with the oblations. When the

battle starts, *homa* should be performed by chanting the *Rāstrābhṛt* hymns, as the *rāstrābhṛts* go into the battle and fight for the kingdom. He, who offers his oblations first in the *homa*, prospers and wins the battle. It is of utmost importance to stroke the sacrificial fire using the wood of the *Māndhuka* tree as a *samidha* for this *homa*.

2- भवति अङ्गारा एव प्रतिवेष्टमाना अमित्राणामस्य सेनां प्रति वेष्ट्यन्ति य उन्मादयेत तस्मै होतव्या गन्धर्वाप्सरसो वा एतं उन्मादयन्ति य उन्मादयति एते खलु वै गन्धर्वाप्सरसों यद्राष्ट्रभृतह तस्मै स्वाहा तात्प्रयः स्वाहेति जुहोति तेन एव एनान् छमयति नैयग्रोध औदुम्बर आशवत्तः प्लाक्ष इतीधो भवति एते वै गन्धर्वाप्सरसां ग्रहाः स्व एवैनं आयतने शमयति

KYV-TS – 3-4-8.4

bhavati aṅgārā eva prativeṣṭamānā amitṛāñāmasya senām prati vecmayanti ya unmādyeta tasmai hōtavyā gandharvāpsarasō vā enan unamādayanti ya unmādyati ete khalu vai gandharvāpsarasō yadrāṣṭrabhr̥taḥ tasmai svāhā tābhyaḥ svāheti juhōti tena eva etān śamayati naiyagrōdha audumbara āśvat̥thah plākca itidhmō bhavati ete vai gandharvāpsarasām grhāḥ sva evainam āyatane śamayati

The coals from the fire alter rise-up and engulf the performer's foe. Then the foe will either be affected due to the fire or will suffer from fever. For the purpose of the curing a person with madness, *homa* should be performed by chanting the *Rāstrabhr̥t* hymns. The reason for the madness is the *gandharvās* and *apsarās*. The *Rāstrabhr̥ts* are none other than the forms of *gandharvas* and *apsarasas*. Hence, the *homa* should be performed by invoking those *gandharvās* and *apsarās*. By doing this, he appeases them. The *samidhās* that are to be used in this *homa* are mandated here. Any one of the 'naiyagrōdha samidhas' – namely, *naiyagrōdha*, *audumbara*, *āśvattha* or *plāksa* – can be used to kindle the sacrificial fire and perform *homa*. The above mentioned *naiyagrōdha* family of trees are abode of the *gandharvās* and *apsarās*. Therefore, the usage of the 'naiyagrō-dhasamidhas' symbolizes the appeasing of the *gandharvas* and *apsarasas* in their own dwellings.

There are many other instances in the *KYV-TS* where the use of specific woods as a *samidha* in various *yajnas* is mentioned. They are the *audumbara* (5-1-10, 5-4-6 and 5-4-7); the

vikaṅgkata (5-1-9, 5-1-10 and 5-4-7); the *śami* (5-1-9, 5-1-10 and 5-4-7); the *krumuka* (5-1-9) and the *āśvattha* (5-1-10).

2.2.1 Descriptions of woody trees used as *Samidhā* in *Yajña / Homa*

Here below is the description of woody trees that are used as *samidhā* in various *yajña / homa*. These trees are the *Māndhuka*, *Naiyagrōdha*, *Audumbara*, *Āśvattha* and *Plāksa*.

2.2.1.1 *Māndhuka* (*Sanskrit*) – *Madhuca longifolia* (*J. Konig ex L.*) Macbr. (*Syn. Madhuca indica J. F. Gmel.; Bassia latifolia Roxb. Madhuca latifolia (Roxb.) J. F. Macbr.*):

Family: Sapotaceae – Other common names: Honey tree, Butter tree (English); *Mahva*, *Mohva* (Hindi); *Ippa* (Telugu); *Hippe mara*, *Ippi*, *Erappe* (Kannada); *Iluppa* (Malayalam); *Moha*, *Mahuwa* (Marathi); *Iluppai*, *Natu Iluppai* (Tamil) – (Fig. 19).



Fig. 19. *Māndhuka* tree. a. Mature tree, b. Tree wood, c. Flowering stage, d. Fruiting stage

Documented Species Distribution: Native: India (warmer parts and tropical Himalayas); Exotic: Peninsular India and Sri Lanka.

Botanical Description: *Madhuca latifolia* is a large, much branched deciduous tree up to 18 m high. Bark is about 1 cm thick, rough, brownish-grey with many vertical furrows, peeling-off into about 5 mm thick flakes, exuding white sticky thick latex. Blaze is reddish pink, wood red and close-grained. Bole short, crown rounded, bark grey to black with vertical cracks, exfoliating in thin scales. Leaves oblong-shaped, rigid, clustered at the end of branches, thick and firm, exuding a milky sap when broken. Young leaves pinkish and wooly underneath. Flowers are bisexual, axillary and solitary, with prominent stalk; corolla sub-fleshy, with 2 rows of petals, cream-coloured and fragrant. Fruits are ovoid, fleshy, greenish, 3-5 cm long, 1-4 seeded. Fleshy fruits resemble sapota and they are often eaten by bats. Seeds are large, 3-4 cm long, elliptical, flattened on one side.

Medicinal Properties: Bark is used for treatment of rheumatic disease, fever, itching, diarrhea, haemorrhage, ulcers and boils. A poultice of this plant is used for treatment of eczema, ulcers and swellings. Hot poultice of leaves is used to relieve sprains and fractures. Flowers are used to quench thirst and prevent cough. Baked flowers and sesamum seeds are used to treat cough and cold. Seed oil is used in the treatment of skin diseases.

2.2.1.2 *Naiyagrōdha* (*Sanskrit*) – *Ficus benghalensis* L. (synonym - *Ficus indica* L.)

Family: Moraceae – Other common names: Banyan tree (English); *Bargad*, *Barh* (Hindi); *Bar* (Bengali); *Vad* (Gujarati); *Ala* (Kannada); *Ala*, *Vatam* (Malyalam); *Vada* (Marathi); *Al* (Tamil); *Peddamarri* (Telugu); *Var, bar* (Nepali); *Bodha* (Punjabi) (Fig. 20).

Ficus bengalensis is the National tree of the Republic of India. Notable specimens include the Great Banyan tree located in Acharya Jagadish Chandra Bose Indian Botanic Garden, Howrah, Kolkata, India, and the Big Banyan Tree (Doddā Alada Mara) is a 400 year old giant tree, located in the village of Kettohalli in the Bangalore Urban district of Karnataka, India.

Documented Species Distribution: Native: Native to a wide area of Asia, from India through Myanmar (Burma), Thailand, Southeast Asia, southern China, and Malaysia; Exotic: The tree is cultivated in parks and botanical gardens throughout the tropical regions of the world.

Botanical Description: *Ficus benghalensis* is a large, evergreen to deciduous tree, up to 20 m tall, with wide leafy crown and branches spreading up to 100 m or more with pillar-like prop roots and accessory trunks. Trunk massive, fluted, bark grey, smooth, young softly white puberulous. Leaves are simple, with 2-6 cm long, stout, hairy petiole; lamina coriaceous, ovate, glabrous above, finely pubescent beneath, with coriaceous stipules. Hypanthodia sessile, in axillary pairs on young



Fig. 20. *Naiyagrōdha* tree: a. Mature tree, b. Tree wood, c. Fruiting stage

depressed-globose, Flowers lie inside its fruits and are enveloped by a thick layer of fruit flesh. So they cannot be seen from outside. When cutting open a banyan fruit, many pink bits can be seen that are its flowers. Male flowers are numerous ostiolar, shortly pedicellate; sepals 2-3; stamen solitary, with shortly mucronate anther. Female flowers are sessile, mixed with gall flowers; sepals 34, small; ovary with an elongated style. Gall flowers numerous, pedicellate; sepal as in female ovary with a short style. Figs are globose to depressed-globose, 15-2.5 cm in diameter, pinkish-red, hairy.

Medicinal Properties: According to Ayurveda, it is astringent to bowels; useful in treatment of biliousness, ulcers, erysipelas, vomiting, vaginal complains, fever, inflammations, leprosy. According to Unani system of medicine, its latex is aphrodisiac, tonic, vulnerary, maturant, lessens inflammations; useful in piles, nose-diseases, gonorrhea etc. The aerial root is styptic, useful in syphilis, biliousness, dysentery, inflammation of liver etc.

2.2.1.3 *Audumbara* (Sanskrit) – *Ficus racemosa* Linn. (syn. *Ficus glomerata* Roxb.)

Family: Moraceae – Other common names: Cluster fig, Goolar fig (English); *Gular* (Hindi); *Jagna Dimaru* (Assamese); *atti* (Kannada); *Medi Pandu* (Telugu); *Attikka* (Sinhala); *Malaiyin munivan*; *Aththi* (Tamil); *Aththi* (Malayalam); *Umbar, Audumbar* (Marathi); *Jogdumur* (Bengali); *Dumri* (Nepal) (Fig. 21).

Documented Species Distribution: Native: Australia, India, South East Asia and Malaysia; Exotic: Few countries an ornamental tree.

Botanical Description: *Ficus racemosa* Linn. is a tree and up to 18m high. The tree is without aerial roots unlike its many family members. Leaves are ovate, apex acute, base obtuse, margin smooth or crenate, upper surface glabrous, oil dots very small, and stipules sheathing the terminal bud. Petioles and twigs produce a milky exudate. Flowers are cauliflorous, tepals are glabrous, lobed or lacinate-denticulate in the female flowers, entire in the male. Male flowers produced around the ostiole. Bracts are at the base of the fig, three, persistent in ripe fruits. Lateral bracts not present on the outside of the fig body. Fruits are figs and produced on special shoots from the trunk and main branches. Figs are born in large clusters, on short, leafless branches emerging from the trunk and the main branches (pedunculate). Figs are sub-globose or depressed pyriform. Orifice closed by interlocking and inflexed bracts, red when ripe.

Medicinal Properties: The bark of *Audumbar / udumbar* tree is said to have healing power. In India, the bark is rubbed on a stone with water to make a paste and the paste is applied over the skin which is afflicted by boils or mosquito bites. Allow the paste to dry on the skin and reapply after a few hours. This is a very simple home remedy for people whose skin is especially sensitive to insect bites.



Fig. 21. *Audumbara* tree: a. Mature tree b. Tree wood c. Fruiting stage

2.2.1.4 *Aśvattha* (Sanskrit) – *Ficus religiosa* Linn.

Family: Moraceae and the species is described in section 2.1.4.iii and also see (Fig. 22).

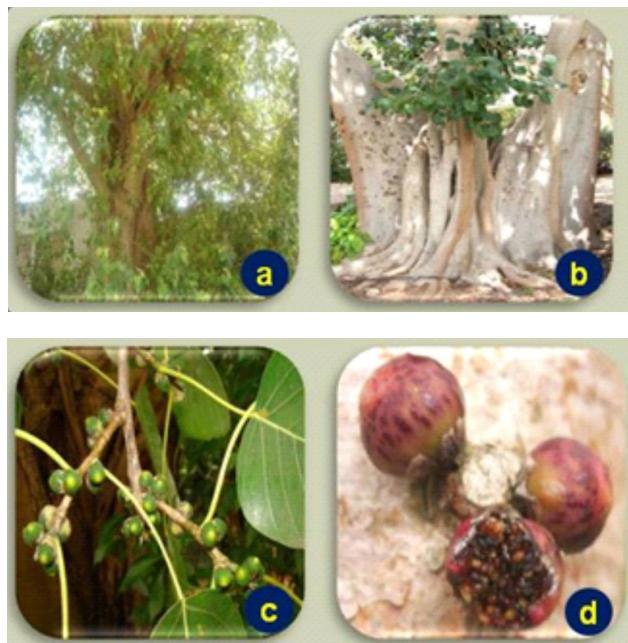


Fig. 22. *Aśvattha* tree. a. Mature tree, b. Tree wood, c. Flowering stage, d. Fruiting stage

2.2.1.5 *Plākṣa* (Sanskrit) – *Ficus microcarpa* Linn.f. (Syn. *Ficus nitida* Thunb.; *F. retusa* L.; *F. benjamina*):

Family: Moraceae – Other common names: Indian Laurel, Laurel fig, Laurel rubber, Chinese Banyan, Malayan Banyan, Taiwan Banyan, Curtain fig (English); Chilkan (Hindi) – (Fig. 23).

Documented Species Distribution: Native: Sri Lanka to India, Taiwan, the Malay Archipelago, the Ryukyu Islands, Australia, and New Caledonia; Exotic: The tree is cultivated in parks and botanical gardens throughout the tropical regions of the world.

Botanical Description: *Ficus microcarpa* is an evergreen tree up to 15 m in height, with a rounded dense crown. Bark is smooth, gray, with milky sap. Aerial roots are long, thin and dangling. Leaves are variable, coriaceous, alternate, simple, leathery, oblong, elliptic to broadly elliptic or



Fig. 23. *Plākṣa* tree a. Mature tree b. Tree wood c. Fruiting stage

obovate, usually 5-8 cm long, 3-5 cm wide, glabrous, with short pointed, ridged tips, margins entire, petioles 0.6-2 cm long. Flowers tiny, unisexual, numerous, hidden within the “fig”, a fleshy, specialized receptacle that develops into a multiple fruit (syconium). This is green turning to yellow or dark red when ripe, sessile, in pairs at leaf axils, small, up to 1 cm in diameter. Seeds minute, less than 1 mm in size.

Medicinal Properties: *Ficus Microcarpa* L. is a medicinal plant used for the treatment of various body pains in India traditionally. It is useful in conditions such as diabetes, ulcers, burning sensations, haemorrhages, leprosy, itching, liver disease, and toothache. The extract were reported to have cytotoxic, antifungal, antidiabetic, antibacterial flavonoids, triterpenoids, acyclic compounds and steroids are the main components found in the leaves.

3. CONCLUSION

The study of trees mentioned in the Holy Scriptures of different nations is a fascinating subject. Mythological significance of these trees is certainly not without reason and relevance,

Table 1. Wood used for making *Yajña* Implements

S.No.	Name of the wood/tree	Name of the <i>Yajña</i> implement
1.	<i>Khādira</i> (<i>Acacia catechu</i>)	<i>Sruva</i> <i>Sphya Musla</i> <i>Praśitraharaṇa</i>
2.	<i>Parṇa</i> (<i>Butea monosperma</i>)	<i>Sruk</i> <i>Juhu</i> <i>Ulūkhala</i> <i>Upaveṣa</i>
3.	<i>Aśvattha</i> (<i>Ficus religiosa</i>)	<i>Arani</i> <i>Upabhṛt</i> <i>Mekṣana</i> <i>Pranita</i>
4.	<i>Vikangkata</i> (<i>Flacourtie sapida</i>)	<i>Dhruva</i> <i>Drona-Kalaśa</i>
5.	<i>Audumbara</i> (<i>Ficus racemosa</i>)	<i>Vasordhārā</i> <i>Ulūkhala</i>
6.	<i>Varna</i> (<i>Crateva magna</i>)	<i>Piṣṭūdpapani</i>

though this relevance might have undergone a number of transformations over the centuries. As old civilizations give place to new, many ideas and ideologies change. But in case of tree / plant life and its myriad forms, few have been chosen for prominence in religious observances and they seem to have survived over the centuries and are still looked upon with awe and reverence (Bhatla, Mukherjee and Singh, 1984).

All *mantrās* of *KYV Taittirīya Samhita* (*TS*) describe in detail on how to perform various *yajñas* or sacrifices. *Yajña* in itself is to be seen as the very essence of Veda. To perform any *yajña* flawlessly, implements and vessels which are collectively called ‘*yajñāyudha*’ (meaning, ‘the weapons used in *yajña*’) are to be specifically used. These are mostly made from the wood of distinctive trees. The names of different trees that are revealed in the *KYV-TS* 3-5-7 are discussed here. These trees are given importance due to the various special qualities they possess. Therefore, it is instructed that the wood from these specified

trees should be used in making of the *yajña* implements and vessels. The woody trees that are used to make the *yajñāyudha* are listed in the Table 01. Similarly, the *KYV-TS* 3-4-8 provide the names of different trees that should be used as *samidhas* (Faggots) in the *yajña* / *homa*.

Nowadays, *yajñas* are being performed all over the world and the *yajña* implements are available commercially. We are not sure of the authenticity of the wood and make. Therefore, the *yajña* performer must pay attention and check that the implements are made from the respective wood as specified in the *KYV-TS* 3-5-7.

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