

Most Amazing Trees of African Continent Vis A Vis Traditional Values of Sacred Indian Trees

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The African continent have diverse climatic conditions and so has diversity of trees. It is well said that “nature finds its way to perish”. These trees are full of amazing utilities including medicinal values. No wonder since ancient times the tribal people have been using those trees for their survival and health benefits. This is the revelation of the secret and toughness of the tribals is revealed. Let’s have a brief of the ten most amazing trees of Africa.

Baobab (Adansonia)



Figure 1

Baobab (*Adansonia*) has the botanical name “*Adansonia digitata* L. (Malvaceae)” (Fig.1).

The baobab is a central a decorative icon in African mythology, and popularly known as the ‘tree of life’. Sadly enough, this towering African icon, which measures up to 30m in height, is at risk of extinction. South African part. The Baobab trees are best grown in Limpopo Province of South Africa. In Limpopo province, eight different locations have rich growth of Baobab. Province. They are well grown in parts of Kruger and Botswana.

The baobab is a great source of “vitamin C” and it is considered as a superfood ingredient in many beverages and foods. Almost every part of Baobab tree is edible. The nutrient and medicinal values have been proven scientifically.

They are great storage of water also. The roots and trunk of the Baobab trees absorb plenty of water during rainy season and retain them in the barks. During the time of water scarcity, the inhabitants survive (Fig.2 & Fig.3).



Figure 2



Figure 3

This is the reason, it is known as “tree of life”, that provides food, nutrients, and water during adverse times. The below video link will give an idea about water storage in the Baobab tree. This interesting video is from Meda (in Ampotaka, Madagascar).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PuP2EsF9Avc>

Spiritually, Baobab signals a time of returning to wholeness or beginning to sense our ‘oneness’ with all of life. where we can rest, rejuvenate, and celebrate.

The baobab trees attain a diameter of 26 feet and can reach a height of about 75 feet and. Interestingly enough, the “Sunland Big Baobab” of the Sunland farm was a popular bar and wine cellar created within its (Fig.4).

Mandu, Dhar district of Madhya Pradesh, India has abundant growth with an estimated 1,000 trees in the periphery of Mandu town. Apart from Mandu where it is most abundant, baobab trees have been recorded in Prayagraj, in Uttar Pradesh, Wai in Maharashtra, and some places in Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh.

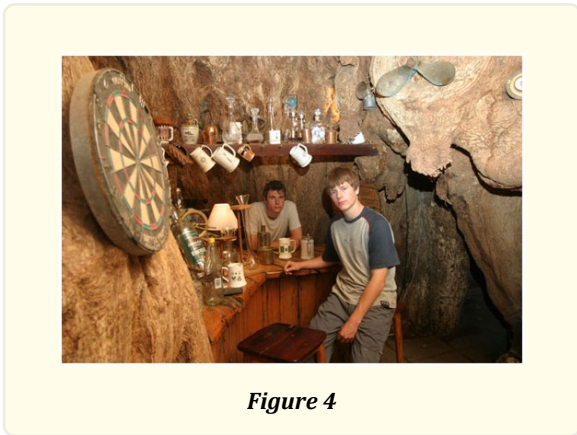


Figure 4

The Indian variant of Baobab in Maharashtra is known as ‘Gorakh chinch’ in respect of the great Natha Saint Gorakhnath.

Quiver tree (*Aloidendron dichotomum*)

The Queer tree is also known as the “Kokerboom” in Afrikaans. The quiver tree is so named because its sharp leaves point upwards towards the sky like a quiver holding arrows (Fig.5). The indigenous San / bushmen were making quivers from Quiver tree to keep and carry their arrows. It’s amongst the biggest aloe plants, found in the Northern Cape (Keetmanshoop), South Africa, Namibia and Botswana.

There is a superstition and traditional belief in the “Nama tribe” of Namibia that the spirit of a dead person will go live in the tree if their body is not buried. Nutritive uses of the leaves are for medicinal purposes only. The very bitter leaves can serve as a traditional medicine for diabetes.

The succulent leaves, trunks and branches do conserve the desert’s precious water and save the human in the period of scarcity. The Latin name for the Quiver tree is *Aloidendron dichotomum*.

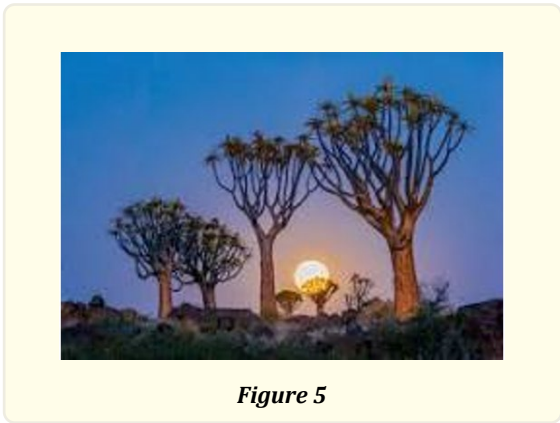


Figure 5

The quiver tree or *Aloidendron dichotomum* is probably the best known aloe found in South Africa and Namibia.

Marula (*Sclerocarya birrea*)

Cercariae birrea, popularly known as the marula, is a medium-sized deciduous fruit-bearing tree, indigenous to the miombo woodlands of Southern African continent (Fig.6).

Common names given in the different parts of Africa. Some are- cat thorn, morula, marula, maroola nut/plum, maroela, jelly plum, cider tree in different parts of Africa.

Marula is indigenous to the Miombo woodlands of Southern Africa. It is a mid-size, fruit-bearing deciduous tree.

This fruitful tree is what many of us associate with the creamy liqueur, Amarula.



Figure 6

Marula trees are supposed to have 800 % more Vitamin C than oranges . Their nut-like seeds are used in cooking. Locally, it is also used as a substitute to coffee.



Figure 7

Amarula is a cream liqueur from South Africa, made with sugar, cream and the fruit of the African marula tree (*Sclerocarya birrea*). It is locally called the "elephant tree" or the "marriage tree". Morula has a higher alcohol content of around 20% that is almost four times concentrated than the average beers. Amarula is a very popular brand amongst alcoholic liquors in Africa.

I guess everyone has watched the funniest video about the elephants getting drunk after eating the fermented Morula fruits and creating a lot of dramatic scenes.

Marula oil makes it an effective moisturizer for dry or aging skin as it is lightweight, and it absorbs easily. It may be especially useful for smoothing and softening fine lines, preventing stretch marks, and keeping skin hydrated and well-nourished.

These oil leaves are also good for hairs as they render the hairs soft, smooth, and manageable with no greasiness. It also has hair nutrients. Marula oil contains many fatty acids, which help to maintain the appearance of thick, healthy hair, and visibly improve hair growth and scalp conditions.

Mopane (Colophospermum mopane)

Colophospermum mopane, belongs to the legume family (Fabaceae). popularly known as butterfly tree, or turpentine tree, mopani, balsam tree.

This tree has a few other names due to its different qualities. It is called balsam tree turpentine tree, for its fragrant smell, butterfly tree, for the wing shaped leaves. Its hardness and termite-resistant quality makes it perfect for making woodwind instruments and furniture.(Fig.8).



Figure 8

Mopane moths house their larvae on the tree. Wild animals love to eat its aromatic leaves. Mopane trees are mostly found in hot and dry areas of Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Malawi, Botswana Namibia, South Africa, southwestern Angola, Eswatini and Zambia.

Mopane worms are considered very nutritious owing to the fact that they contain 18 % crude fat, 11 % minerals and 71 % crude protein. They are an abundant source of protein. People all over Africa cherish the Mopane worms as a delicacy (Fig.9).



Figure 9

Sausage (Kigelia africana)



Figure 10

Sausage tree is tropical tree found in South Africa, Chad, Senegal, Namibia, and Eritrea. Similar variants are also found in north India (Fig.10).

It is so named because the fruits of the tree really look just like sausages. Fresh fruit is harmful to eat and causes severe dysentery. However, dried, or fermented fruit, is safely eatable. The roasted seeds are extraordinarily rich nutritional and energy resource as they contain essential fatty acids.

The bloomed flowers are pretty and red. Sausage tree by-products include a fermented A popular alcoholic drink is made with the fermented fruit in Kenya. The tree can protect against malaria too, and many products derived from this tree are good skin nourishers. Afrikaners also call it the “worsboom” because of the fruit’s sausage-like appearance.

Sausage tree is considered as an important African herbal medicinal plant. The plant has been traditionally used as a medicine for wounds healing, diarrhea, stomach ailments rheumatism and psoriasis.

Guess what are the benefits of sausage tree for men? The fruit, roots and leaves of this tree have well been used for attaining sexual power and fertility.

Whistling Thorn (Vachellia/Acacia drepanolobium)

This tree of the acacia family is so named because it produces a pitchy, whistling sound when the wind blows. (Fig.11).



Figure 11

The bulbous base of the thick thorns contains a sweet nectar that protects the tree from large herbivores. The gum of the whistle-thorn tree is used to make glue.

Native to the savannas of Africa and commonly found in the Serengeti, the whistling thorn tree *Vachellia drepanolobium* is a tall (up to eighteen feet), swollen-thorn acacia. By virtue of its hard, termite-proof wood it popular for make tool handles and fencing.

This tree has its own mechanism to conserve moisture during extreme heat. Their leaves produce many tiny leaflets (pinnae). These pinnae absorb or avoid sunlight, and effectively reduce evapotranspiration. The numerous leaflets are also beneficial for grazing animals.

Elephants love to eat *Acacia drepanolobium*, when the branches are ant less.

The variants of the *Acacia auriculiformis*, are also found in India. They are variously known as Aakashmani in West Bengal, as Auri, Karuvel in Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu.

The physiological adaptations of the acacia tree are immense. It's long deep reaching tap roots connects to ground water sources, that helps the tree to survive severe droughts. It also has a fire resistant quality.

Fever Tree (Vachellia xanthophloea)

The name *xanthophloea* is derived from Greek and means “yellow bark” (Fig.12). This subtropical tree is also known as the “*koorsboom*” (Fig.13). The name fever trees come from the false belief that they cause the spread of malaria in warmer climes and swampy regions.



(Trunk with Yellow bark)

Figure 12

The current day scientific knowledge proved that myth to be wrong. European settlers in the region noted that malarial fever was contracted in areas with these trees. It is now well known that malarial fever is caused by mosquitos living in the swampy areas and not by the tree itself.

Animals and birds enjoy its leaves. This tree is found in South Africa (Northern Province, Mpumalanga, KwaZulu-Natal) as eSwatini to Mozambique to Zimbabwe, Malawi, and Botswana.



Figure 13

This tree is typical of African landscapes. A unique feature of fever tree is that it photosynthesizes through its bark, unlike the leaves as in most plants.

The trees grow to a height of 149–82 ft. The bark is powdery, smooth, and greenish yellow. Straight, white spines always grow in pairs.

Fever trees are fast growing and short lived. Their short liveliness is variously attributed to elephants, water tables, and synchronous senescence. Senescence is a process in which cells reach permanent growth arrest without the death of cells as the whole cell division process comes to a halt.

The leaves and pods are good food for livestock and animals like zebras, elephants, giraffe, and vervet monkeys.

The flowers are used for foraging by bees and bird-nests. Importantly, it improves soil fertility through nitrogen fixation. The Senegal bushbaby (*Galago senegalensis*) use its gum as an especial diet.

Vachellia xanthophloea plantation controls soil erosion. So, it is planted next to dams and streams on farms. Apart from that they are planted for shade and shelter. In addition, they are used for firewood and to make poles and posts.

In Queensland, Australia, this plant is protected under the Biosecurity Act 2014, and it cannot be cut or sold without an environment permit.

Rudyard Kipling has made this tree a big fame in one of his stories, “The Elephant’s Child”, in which these trees are referred to as “the great grey-green, greasy Limpopo River.

This tree holds a spiritual and religious value among African tribes for ages. A potion made of its bark along with four other herbs including ‘*Silene capensis*’ (African dream root) and *Synaptolepis kirkii*, are used to induce lucid dreams, called “white paths”. The belief is that the unanswered questions and problems of life get an answer in those induced dreams. The roots and a powder made from bark are used as an anti-malaria emetic.

Spekboom (Portulacaria afra)

Spekboom (*Portulacaria Afra*) is a pulpy and juicy plant found in South Africa. It is indigenous to the Eastern Cape province. It is also known as the miracle plant. Spekboom grows in arid conditions. They are richly found in Camdeboo National Park, South Africa. Shamwari Private Game Reserve” is the well-known habitat for Spekboom.

Spekbooms grow as shrubs. Its small, pulpy, and juicy green leaves are edible. Their lemony taste makes it a good ingredient for salad (Fig.14). Its other common names are Porkbush and Elephant.



Figure 14

Populate. Also, a Spekboom in full bloom is a delight for photographers to capture.

Spekboom has multiple uses. Leaves are edible and interestingly, the taste of spekboom leaves is pleasant but changes during the period from sunrise to sunset. During the first half of the day leaves have a more lemony and acidic taste and in the second half of the day they become less acidic or less lemony. These tasty green leaves are the favorite food for wild animals.

This plant is a favorite elephant's food and so named elephant bush. elephants love it most as part of their vast diet. Due to the similarity with 'bacon tree', it is also called 'porkbush'.

Apart from the medicinal values, Spekboom is also used in traditional home construction. The most popular traditional and contemporary uses of Spekboom leaves are listed below:

- a) Sucking this leaf treats exhaustion, dehydration, and heatstroke.
- b) Crushed leaves provide relief for blisters.
- c) Chewing leaves cures throat and mouth infections.
- d) Leaves are used to help in skin ailments and help in getting rid of insect stings and sunburn, pimples, rashes.
- e) In some parts of Africa, dried stems are used as thatch for roofs of the huts/homes.
- f) Spekboom leaves induce the milk supply for breastfeeding mothers in Mozambique.
- g) Spekboom leaves serves as the life savior food during famine in the Zulu tribe.
- h) The Spekboom flowers provide rich- nectar for endangered bees.
- i) The larvae of the Duadem butterfly also feed on the Spekboom.

The leaves of the Spekboom (*Portulacaria afra*) resembles with the AJWAIN(*Carum copticum*), also called bishops weed, is a herb which is a spice and a major ingredient in different types of medicines especially in India.

Spekboom is a part of South Africa's national tree (Fig.15).

Yellowwood (Podocarpus latifolius)

The Yellowwood is a large evergreen tree which can attain a height of 100 feet. Its growth is slower than other trees, but it develops into a very excellent wood quality tree (Fig.15).

Yellowwoods have rich growth along the Garden Route between the Western- and Eastern Cape. Some of these dates back to 500-600 years. Apart from South Africa, they are also abundant in Botswana, and Zimbabwe.

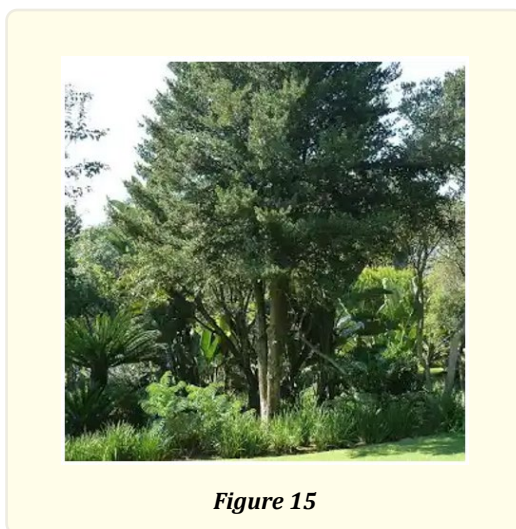


Figure 15

The American variant of yellowwood tree is found in Missouri, Mississippi, Oklahoma, North Carolina, Kentucky, Tennessee, Illinois, Indiana, Alabama, and Arkansas. Yellowwood has on average a height of 50 feet with an average spread of 40 feet and has a rounded crown.

Podocarpus latifolius has a lot of uses including medicinal uses. It is useful in cattle diseases (in East Africa) as well as human diseases. It is used to treat gall sickness in cattle and distemper in dogs. The bark is also used as a traditional medicine to treat human stomachache. as well as Studies indicate the plant has genuine pharmacological activities.

In America, it is used the wood in building and carvings. Its lighter weight wood is used to make gunstocks. In the southern Appalachians region, the root bark of yellowwood was used as a dye ingredient in the past. It is also used to make decorative souvenir items.

The wood, often called podo or yellowwood, is good for construction, particularly shipbuilding. Yellowwood is also used to make plywood and many other products such as- including furniture, boxes, vats, toys, farm implements, musical instruments, and railroad ties.

Acacia (Acacia s.l.)

Acacia s.l. also known as Mimosa, acacia, wattle, or thorn tree, is a mixed breed of shrubs and trees and belongs to the Mimosoideae subfamily of the family Fabaceae (Fig.16).

There are 28 species of *Acacia* in Southern Africa only, but *Acacia* is also found in Kenya, Ethiopia, Niger, Senegal, Nigeria, and Egypt.

Giraffes love to eat this a lot as their tough black tongues can withstand the large thorns.



Figure 16

Acacias fiber has multiple uses. It produces useful gum and is also used to make perfume and weight management.

In the Aboriginal ethnic groups of Australia and Egypt were using acacia for treating hemorrhoids.

Acacia fibre is believed to improve cardio metabolism.

They have ecological significance also. They nourish the soil by fixing nitrogen and restoring fertility. They give shelter and shade to farmers and animals, while producing Acacia Gum (Fig.17).



Figure 17

Their harvest increases productivity of other cultivations and prevents desertification.

Values of Traditional Plants in India

Our country has been the pioneer in using the traditional plants, herbs, and flowers for multiple uses. Moreover, they have wisely given a religious angle to protect biodiversity in order to protect the environment and preserve its pristine nature.

Tree of Life or Kalpavriksha (*Ficus benghalensis*)

The Hindu belief in the “Tree of Life”, or “Kalpavriksha” (Fig.18), is a mythical tree that is said to grant wishes and fulfill desires. As

per firm Hindu belief its roots reach deep into the earth and branches reach up to the heavens.

Medicinal values of neem are uncountable in the true sense. Its significance as the cure for diabetes, blood purifier and detoxing agent, are well known.

Neem Tree (Azadirachta indica)

The neem tree is the highest oxygen producing tree. It is considered a natural pesticide. The importance of the Neem tree was well known to our ancestors (Fig.19).



Figure 18



Figure 19

Neem tree is very much useful for treatment of Acne, as an anti-inflammatory, skin nourisher, treatment of fungal infections, as detoxifier, as immunity booster, as insect & mosquito repellent, for prevention of gastrointestinal diseases and treatment of wounds.

Peepal Tree (Ficus religiosa)

Peepal tree also known as “Bodhi Satva Vriksha” is a sacred tree that holds a major religious, spiritual significance (Fig.20). Lord Buddha attained “Nirvan” under a peepal tree in Bodhi Gaya. Since Vedic times, Peepal is well known for its therapeutic properties. Every part of this tree - bark, roots, leaves, fruits of this wonder tree are used extensively in Ayurveda for treating lung disorders, skin conditions, various digestive issues, Asthma, stomach pain, eczema and itching, brighter complexion, for cracked heels, for toothache and for eye pain.



Figure 20

Tulsi - Ocimum sanctum

Tulsi or Holy Basil, Tulsi is considered as the most sacred in Hindus since vedic times. The sacred values are added to Tulsi to ensure respect and protection for this plant. As per widespread belief, Goddess Lakshmi resides in the Tulsi plant.

According to Hindu belief, worshiping Tulsi daily, makes Goddess Lakshmi happy and it brings happiness and prosperity in the house. Every Hindu household is incomplete without a plant of Tulsi, and it is offered water every morning as a respect.



Figure 21

Research-Backed Benefits of Tulsi are:

- a) Natural Immunity Booster.
- b) Reduces Fever (antipyretic) & Pain(analgesic).
- c) Reduces Cold, Cough & Other Respiratory Disorders.
- d) Reduces Stress & Blood Pressure.
- e) Anti-cancer Properties.
- f) Good for Heart Health.
- g) Good for Diabetes Patients.
- h) Good of curing Gouty Arthritis & Kidney Stones.

The medicinal values of herbs and plants have been described in detail in ancient texts such as 'Charka Samhita' (100–800 B.C), 'Sushruta Samhita' (800–700 B.C), 'Rigved' (1400–1800 B.C) and 'Atharva-ved' (4500–2500 B.C).

Similarly, in different parts of the world the human brain has learned and explored the values of natural plants and trees in one way or other, for their survival in adverse conditions.

It is worth mentioning that the way “nature finds its way to perish,” human also find its way to survive in the toughest of conditions.

Acknowledgement

The author expresses his gratitude towards following for the useful web based information gathered from the webpages:

- <https://www.getaway.co.za/travel/nature-and-conservation/10-of-the-most-iconic-african-trees/>
- <https://www.shamwari.com/5-amazing-facts-about-spekboom/>

Declaration

This article is a combined effort of personal field information and internet resources, with an aim to introduce the world about amazing plants.

Web Resources

1. <https://www.alamy.com>
2. <https://apps.worldagroforestry.org>
3. <https://create.vista.com>
4. <https://www.dreamstime.com>
5. <https://frankiekayfotos.wordpress.com>
6. <https://www.gettyimages.in>
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