# Palash

*Butea monosperma*

**Code:** TREE-94A769803C889CC **Location:** XIM University Campus **Local / Vernacular name:** ଲୋଶ

## Botanical Details

Leaf habit: Deciduous Flowers / Fruits: spectacular bright orange-red, parrot-beak shaped flowers that bloom in clusters on leafless branches; fruit is a flat, woody, single-seeded pod covered in fine silky hair. Native range: Native to the Indian subcontinent (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka) and Southeast Asia (Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Indonesia).

## Uses & Importance

**Ecological:** Butea monosperma is a cornerstone of the tropical dry deciduous forest, famously nicknamed the " Flame of the Forest" for its brilliant orange blooms that appear when the landscape is otherwise parched. Ecologically , it is a pioneer species capable of growing in extremely saline, alkaline, and waterlogged soils where few other trees can survive. As a nitrogen-fixing legume, it restores soil fertility by converting atmospheric nitrogen into a form accessible to plants, significantly aiding in the reclamation of degraded lands. Its deep taproot system acts as a natural stabilizer, preventing soil erosion in drought-prone areas. During the peak of summer, its nectar-rich flowers provide a critical lifeline for a wide variety of birds (such as sunbirds and mynas), bees, and butterflies. The tree also serves as a primary host for the lac insect (Laccifer lacca), which is essential for the natural production of shellac. By providing dense shade during the monsoon and a massive influx of organic mulch through its large leaves, it creates a hospitable microclimate that fosters the growth of diverse understory flora and fauna.

**Medicinal:** Every part of the Palash tree—bark, flowers, seeds, and gum—is utilized in Ayurveda and Unani medicine for its potent astringent, anthelmintic, and anti-inflammatory properties. The seeds contain palasonin, a compound highly effective in treating intestinal worms and parasitic infections. The brilliant orange flowers are soaked to create a cooling infusion used to treat sunstroke, skin rashes, and burning sensations during the summer. The red resin, known as "Bengal Kino" or Kamarkas, is a powerful astringent used to treat chronic diarrhea and is traditionally administered to women as a tonic to strengthen the pelvic muscles after childbirth. Modern pharmacological research has highlighted the tree’s potential as an antidiabetic and antioxidant agent, with extracts showing the ability to lower blood glucose and protect the liver from oxidative stress. Additionally, the bark is used to treat bone fractures and snake bites in various tribal medical traditions. This wide-ranging therapeutic profile makes the Palash a "living dispensary" for rural communities, providing natural solutions for both common ailments and complex metabolic disorders.

**Cultural:** The Palash holds a majestic place in Indian culture, literature, and spirituality. It is sacred to Agni (the God of Fire) due to its flame-like flowers, and its trifoliate leaves— representing the Hindu Trinity of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva—are used in religious rituals and fire sacrifices (Homa). Culturally, it is the herald of the spring festival, Holi; traditionally, the flowers are boiled to produce a natural, vibrant yellow-orange dye used as the original "Gulal" to celebrate the season. In poetry and literature, from the works of Kalidasa to Rabindranath Tagore, the Palash is a symbol of passionate love and the fierce beauty of the Indian summer. In many tribal communities, particularly the Santhals, the tree is revered as a symbol of their heritage and is central to their folklore and spring dances. Beyond its spiritual roles, the large, leathery leaves are traditionally stitched together to make biodegradable plates and bowls (Patravalli), symbolizing a sustainable way of life. Whether as a source of color for a festival or as a sacred element in a wedding mandap, the Palash remains an enduring icon of the Indian landscape's spiritual and artistic soul.

## Location

GPS: 20.15860192, 85.76535449

Directions: https://www.google.com/maps/dir/?api=1&travelmode=walking&destination=20.15860192%2C85.76535449