

## [Sacred Plants Resort](#)

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## Sacred Plants Resort

Choodie Shivaram, Bangalore

During my childhood at temples, I recall priests reciting in Sanskrit the names of exotic flowers and leaves that they were supposed to be offering the deity. Instead, they offered marigolds and jasmines, easily available. I assumed the exotic ones were just a part of our mythology. But recently, on my way to Mysore, 40 kilometers outside Bangalore, I bumped into the "Sacred Plants Resort," and learned otherwise. Behind an arched gate, a sparkling sea of greenery and flora beckoned me. I carried on to Mysore that day, but returned two weeks later.

I arrived again at the little nowhere town of Ramanagaram, made famous as the shooting site for the blockbuster film Sholay. I parked and approached the gate. A board in Kannada said, "Pay obeisance first with folded hands and then enter--this is a sacred plants resort, the Kashi [Benaras] of the plant kingdom." How nice, I thought, a pilgrimage spot for plants! And humans welcome, too.

A guide board explained the layout of the garden. Plants sacred to the various Gods and Goddesses are cultivated in

different locations. There was Narasimha vana(forest), Sankashta Chaturti vana, Vara Lakshmi vrata vana, Ashoka vana, Navagraha (nine planets) vana, Kanva vana--about 25 such designated areas. Each spot is designed in a way to represent, enhance or reflect the nature, religious background and sacred aspect of each plant. For example, the Raasi vana, pertaining to the 12 zodiacal signs, is arranged so the shadow of the sun falls on a particular plant or flower during the movement of the sun in one zodiacal sign. In the Shivapanchayata vana, a Sivalinga rests atop a massive, multi-tiered Sri Chakra yantrawith trees sacred to Shiva encircling it--Bilwas, Ashwatta, Ashoka and Shanku Pushpa.

This fairytale 20-acre sacred plant/temple is the creation of Dr. Yellappa Reddy, Environment Secretary of Karnataka. It took him a year to research ancient texts and correlate the plants' ancient Sanskrit names with modern botanical names. Finding the plants and trees took another year and a half. "I had planned to distribute small packets of seeds, even saplings, free of cost," he told me. "But that idea failed. Still, I'm not discouraged," he smiles contentedly. "I've done a small service in a humble way."

#### Sidebar: Vedic Botanist

Dr. Yellappa Reddy, now Environment Secretary of Karnataka, master-minded the Sacred Plants Resort. This is just the beginning of his bigger mission to rekindle a greater love of Hinduism's sacred plants, especially among the youth.

Hinduism Today:What inspired you to get so involved with

## Puranic plants?

Dr. Yellappa Reddy: Back when I was the conservator of forests, I visited the Shiva temple at Kokarna, a pilgrim center in Karnataka. The pundits were complaining that they were unable to get bilva leaves for pujas. I reflected that if we could not meet some simple demands of our people for worship of our deities, it was a crime. We talk so much about afforestation. Now here is a Shiva temple without any bilva leaves. My wife asked me, why, as a forest officer, didn't I do something to locate these flowers to make them available for pujas. It was she who put the idea into my head!

HT: Have you discovered why certain plants have become more sacred than others?

DYR: I determined that whoever originally had included these flowers as part of worship, had done so with scientific insight. For example, I found that when we gently press the petals of these flowers, the glands will burst and it will produce certain volatile oils. This will generate certain chemicals which enrich the atmosphere and becomes beneficial to humans, creating an environment that induces the mind to greater concentration. Additionally, these plants have various medicinal healing properties long established by ayurveda.

HT: What difficulties did you encounter in creating the Sacred Plants Resort?

DYR: The greatest difficulty was in identifying the plants. Their Sanskrit names each had about ten synonyms. I had to consult many scholars. As far as locating them physically, God was kind to me. I found almost all, bar only two or three.

Interestingly, some of them were very common, everyday plants we are very familiar with. For instance, Sage Valmiki mentions about 48 varieties of plants in describing the Ashoka forest, including the shimshuka tree on which Maruti sat. It turns out, this is actually the well-known rosewood!

HT: How does your project benefit people?

DYR: This sacred plants resort is one of the strongest weapons to motivate people to develop respect toward forests and plants. We spend crores of rupees on the cement and stone for a new temple. Why not spend one hundredth of that to landscape a sacred plants garden around it? [Kauai Aadheenam, home of Hinduism Today, also maintains a collection of sacred plants and is willing to help temples in the West create such a garden.] This will make the atmosphere more conducive for worship by following our scriptures and preserving the environment. I also encourage people to create sacred gardens at home.

HT: What are your future plans?

YR: We want to create a Brihat Panchavati so parents can show their children the forest where Shakuntala lived or Sita spent her final days. There will also be a hillock where people can meditate. Plans are also afoot to create a Saptaswara forest,

pertaining to different ragas in music. We have found that certain plants react in a particular way to different ragas. So in such a forest, when a musician performs certain ragas, the plants will react in such a manner that it will benefit the audience, the musician and the whole environment. The other idea is an eco-park for children. On celebrations, like birthdays, parents can invest 200 rupees and plant a sapling of a tree representing the child's birth star. The plant will carry the child's name. When the child grows up and sees the tree and then shows it to their children and explains to them that this tree provides oxygen to about 200 people, imagine what an impact it will have on the young minds? This is the only way we can protect the planet.