

The Nativity Tree Of Prince Siddhartha

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Abstract :

This article is an effort to identify and correlate various forest types, tree species and plants associated with the life and activities of Lord Buddha, as continuation on my article "Forests and Trees Associated with Lord Buddha" published in Ancient Nepal (No. 139, 1996) by Department of Archaeology, HMG Kathmandu, Nepal.

This article specifically analyses, in an effort to identify, the species of trees under which Prince Siddhartha was born as referred to in various travellers accounts. Buddhist literatures and the sculptural representations and paintings of different schools of art.

Introduction :

The association between trees and human beings is an integral one in Buddhism. The basic concept entailed is that trees, plants and vegetation, in short, the entire environment, is our friend. Nature is the sustaining source and prerequisite for life on Earth. Thus, Buddha always stressed that care and good-

will should be showered on trees and plants. There are beliefs that plants have supernatural powers to merit and is associated with peace, health, wealth, happiness and the abundance of grain.

From the early period to the present day trees have had an important role to play in human civilization. During the Vedic period various gods had their identity symbolically represented by trees. It was common practice in this period to worship mostly flower bearing trees, shade-providing trees and trees with medicinal properties, and this accordingly provided great religious merit.

The Ramayana and Mahabharata reveal that this practice was even more popular during their time. The entire story of the Ramayana tells us various gardens, forests, trees and plants being worshipped. The story of the Mahabharata is also full of forests, trees and plants, among which the childhood of Lord Krishna was spent playing with his friends. In this period the adoration and glorification of trees was understood as an act of religious virtue.

The buddhist period seems to be a turning point in tree management, when the planting of trees and conservation of forests truly commenced. There are various forest types and different species of trees which are directly or indirectly associated with Lord Buddha. Garden were commonly laid out next to monasteries and stupas. Travellers' accounts, Buddhist scriptures and the sculptural panels and paintings of different schools of art bear witness to the different types of forests and the tree species associated with Lord Buddha at the time of his birth, enlightenment and teaching of the Dharma and when he eventually passes away into Parinirvana.

A. The Nativity tree :

As for the nativity tree, there are at least, and probably more than, five different species of tree mentioned in various references. These trees species are Plaksha tree (*Ficus lacor*). Apa tree (*Manginiferera indica*), Pipal tree (*Ficus religiosa*), Sal tree (*Shorea robusta*) and Asoka (*Saraca indica*).

The following provides a detailed account of each of the aforementioned tree species, describing each of their botanical and religious aspects.

1. Plaksha, (Locally known as Pakada or Kavro) tree :

The Plaksha tree is a large deciduous glabrous leaved tree of the subtropical regiond belonging to the family Moraceae. The leaves are thin, ovate or oblong-ovate, acuminate their base rounded and margins entire. The leaves also make excellent fodder, especially for elephants. The bark is used for certain medicines, and rope can be made from its fibers (Storrs, 126 : 1984). The flowers are not visible in this species. The branches begin at a height of 3-4 meters above the ground.

This plant is associated with Vedic religion. In

various acts of worship and Yajaya (sacrificial fire), five types of leaves are used, of which one is the leaf of this tree. During death ceremonies and small leaf-cup made of the leaves of this tree is used to offer to the manes. The wood of this tree and small sticks are also used in other ceremonies (Majupuria & Joshi, 206 : 1998).

There are various Buddhist Sutras which support the notion that Prince Siddhartha was born under the Plaksha tree.

The Abhinishramana-Sutra describes that "When the time came for the perfect Buddha, the Blessed one to be born in Lumbini Garden, his mother stretched up and held the branch of a tree with her hands-what kind of tree was it ? It was a Plaksha tree" (Gyatso, 24 : 1986).

The Buddhavatamsaka-Sutra states the following "O, son of a good family (i.e. Mani bhadra), when the mother Mahamaya devi arrived at the site of the Plaksha tree, the bodies as well as all the masses of offering of all thoes who were intent upon presenting offerings to the great Bodhisativa....." (gyatso, 24 : 1986).

The Aryaupayakau salyamahayana-Sutra states the following :

Question : "Why was the Bodhisattva born while his mother was standing up right and turned, holding the limb of a Plaksha tree ? "

Reply : "He was born easily in order to remove the kind of doubt that....." (gyatso, 36 : 1986).

A.K. Coomaraswamy on the basis of Lalitavistara identified the nativity tree as the Plaksha tree (Mishra, 5 : 1996).

There is not a single sculptural representation which depicts the Plaksha tree as the nativity tree, and no travellers mentioned this tree in their accounts.

2. Apa or Mango tree :

The mango tree is a large subtropical evergreen tree belonging to the family Anacardiaceae. This tree has dense, dark green foliage with a well-rounded crown. The leaves are arranged alternately and tend to crowd towards the end of branches. They are quite large, oblong or oblongly lance-shaped, leather, dark green and glabrous. The bark is thick, rough and dark grey. The flowers, which appear between February and March and strongly scented. The branches begin at a height of between two and four metres. The fruit is of an oval shape, having a protuberance on one side close to the tip. The flesh is yellowish, flavorsome and juicy. The fruits ripen between May and July. The leaves, fruits, seeds and bark are used in the preparation of various medicines (Storrs 1978 : 1996). The wood is used for planks, boxes and occasionally for cheap furniture.

The twigs of a mango tree are used in sacrificial rites. Some oblations are offered only in the fire led from this wood. A funeral pyre consisting of mango wood is considered to be very sacred and holy. The leaves and wood of this tree are used during almost every auspicious ceremony of the Hindu religion, particularly marriage and birth ceremonies (Majumdar & Joshi, 1993 : 1998).

No piece of Buddhist literature or travel account records this tree as the nativity tree of Prince Siddhartha. But there are many references in such literature to the mango tree which are directly or indirectly associated with Lord Buddha.

It is interesting to note here that there is a

sculptural panel which depicts Prince Siddhartha being born under a mango tree. The relief sculpture of blue-grey line stone titled "The Birth of Sakyamuni" was discovered at the Sundhara fountain, Deo Patan, Kathmandu, and dates to the early Lichhavi period. This relief displays Sakyamuni immediately after his miraculous birth from the right side of his mother, Queen Maya. She conforms in posture to the type of tree spirit (Yakshini) noted on early stupas. It was probably the typical stance of the Yashini that suggested the unusual manner of birth, when the child was born, two streams of water fell from the sky, one cold and one hot, with which the washing of mother and child was performed (Snellgrove, 1976 : 1978). In this relief Maya is supporting herself by holding on to the branch of a mango tree with dense leafage and three mango fruits.

3. Pipal Tree :

In Nepal the Pipal tree occurs mostly in the subtropical and lower parts of the temperate regions; from the plain of the Terai to an elevation of 2000 meters. Botanically, this belongs to the Moraceae family and is noted for its large size as well as for its long life span. It grows to a height of 30 to 40 metres. Majumdar & Joshi mention that Bo (Pipal) trees are very long-lived. The famous Bo tree in Ceylon, according to popular belief, was planted in 288 B.C. (Majumdar & Joshi, 1974 : 1988) But according to Sri Lankan legend it was planted in the year 300 B.C. (Storrs, 1927 : 1984).

Pipal trees are fascinating, "They do not have visible flowers like other trees: instead the male and female flowers are very small and are borne on the inside of a hollow, fleshy body, the receptacle, which eventually matures to form fruit" (Storrs 1927 : 1984). The branches are fragile and are unable to bear a load.

In the Hindu tradition the Pipal tree holds a prominent position. The Hindu trinity-Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh are supposed to live on it (Majupuria & Joshi, 72 : 1988).

In Buddhism this tree is regarded the holiest tree. There are Buddhist literatures, traveller's accounts, sculptures and paintings represent Prince Siddhartha being enlightened whilst sitting beneath one such tree. This enlightenment event is beautifully represented in sculptural form on the Sanchi stupa in Madhya Pradesh, India. The title image is "The Enlightenment". It was carved in stone on the East Gate of Stupa no.1 in the first century B.C. The Enlightenment is represented, in the usual manner of the early tradition, as occurring under a bodhi tree (P.D. 276 : 1956 : PI. 70).

Lalitavistara, a general compilation in the form of Mahayana Sutra, dating to the first/second century A.D. mentions that Prince Siddhartha was born under a Pipal tree was the nativity tree (Watters, 15 : 1973).

However, there is no single sculptural panel showing this tree as the nativity tree.

4. Sal tree :

The Sal tree is very common in the Terai region and in lowland valleys below 800 metres. This is Nepal's most valuable timber source and once formed a continuous forest along the foothills of the western Himalayas (Mierow & Shrestha 187 : 1978).

Botanically the Sal tree belongs to the family dipterocarpaceae. This is a large, conspicuous and attractive tree, growing to 40 metres on occasion. It is a deciduous tree but seldom becomes leafless. The leaves are alternately arranged, being oval to oblong in shape, pointed and varying between 10 to 30

centimeters in length. The flowers are pale yellow in colour and emerge during March/April. The flowers are borne in hanging bunches either from the end of twigs or from the leaf axils. The fruit is small, having five wings, each about 6 centimeters long, which are broad at the top and pointed at the base. The hanging bunches of brown fruit can be seen in the month of June. The branches begin at a height of 6 to 7 metres.

The bark of the young tree is smooth, grey-brown and speckled. The old bark is dark-brown, rough and deeply fissured.

The wood of this tree is potentially valuable. It is believed that the name of Kathmandu, the capital city of Nepal, owes its name to a temple built from the single trunk of a tree of this type. (Called 'Kasthamandapa').

This tree is associated with various Hindu gods. Tribal people have a special regard for it as a symbol of the Hindu god, Indra. It is sometimes worshipped for a good harvest, victory in battle and success and happiness (Storrs, 266 : 1984). The epic Ramayana also mentions forests of this tree species.

There are some Buddhist works which lead one to believe that the nativity tree of Prince Siddhartha was a Sal tree. The Achhariya Sutra (No. 123), the Ariyapariyesana Sutra (both in the Majjima Nikaya) and the Nidanakatha state that Gautama was born under a Sal tree (Mishra 4 : 1996) "The authorities used by Hardy and Bigandet call it a Sal. One Chinese translation merely has Lin-pi (Lumbi) Tree, and under one of these the Pusa is born" (Watters, 16 ; 1973).

Bhadanta Kausalyayna, on the basis of Jataka story mentions the followings: "There was a pleasure

gorve of Sal Trees called Lumbini Chittalata grove in Indra's paradise and going to the foot of the Sal tree holds one of its branches fast hold of the Sal tree branch (Kausalyayana, 66 : 1985). The famous Buddhist scholar Rahul Sankrityayana holds the same opinio concerning the Sal tree (Sankrityayana, 3 : 1995). The book "The way of the Buddha" published by the publication division, New Delhi, reproduces some sculptural penals of the nativity scene of Prince siddhartha depicitning the Sal tree. One of the sculptures in this book is from Nagarjunakonda, Andra Pradesh, India, is titled "The Birth of Buddha and the Seven Steps" and was made of lime stone in the third century A.D. On one half of this panel Maya can be seen holding he branch of a sal tree (P.D. 294 : 1956 PI 23).

Huntington shares the opinion that Prince Siddhartha was born under a Sal tree. She, too, Published a photograph of the sculpture from the Kushana period, titled "Birth of Siddhartha" (Sakyamuni Buddha), found at Guides Mess, Mardan, Pakistan, now in the National Museum, Karachi, the Sculpture is a typical representation of the birth of Siddhartha showing his mother, Queen Maya, grasping a Sal tree, with the child emerging from her side (Huntington, 140 : 1985 PI : 17).

The religious significance of this tree for Buddhism is heightened by fact the Lord Buddha passed away between two such trees at Kusinara, present Kushinagarm Uttar Pradesh, India.

There is a beautiful descripton in the Mahaparinirvana Sutra of Digha Nikaya of how Lord Buddha arrived at Kusinara wishing to take his last breadth there. It states that the Bhagava said to the Venerable Ananda, "come Ananda, let us go. We will go to the Sal grove of the Malla princes at the bank of

the Hirannavati River." Ananda responded with a lare company of bikkus arrived at this Sal grove of the Malla princes, Lord Buddha said to Ananda," Ananda set out the couch, with the head to the north between the pair of Sal trees I am weary, Ananada, I shall lie down."

Ananda saying, "Very well, Venerable sir", Set out the couch, with the head to the north, between the pair of Sal trees, Then the Bhagava lay down on his right side nobly like a lion placing his left foot on and a little beyond out over his right foot, in a state of mindfulness and high intent.

At that time the twin Sal trees completely blossomed forth though it was not the season of flowering. And in reverence to the Tathagata, these trees showered blossoms, scattering, strewing and continuously spreading them all over the body of the Tathagata (Samdhong, 268-69 : 1987).

This event is depicted in various schools of art. One of the panels from the Gandhara region, (now Indian Museum, Calcutta) a photograph of which was published by D. Mitra, is titled "The Great Decease". In it the Buddha is seen lying on his right side with one leg resting over the other on a couch spread between two Sal trees. Only one tree is seen on the slab, the other having presumably been carved on othe slab in continuation of the seen. This second slab probably also contained the figures of the monks, including Ananda as well as the tree (Mitra 259 : 1980 : PI. 19).

Another stone sculpture is from one of the Ajanta cave: cave no. 16 (c. 6th century A.D.) (a photograph of it has been published by the Publication division), titled the "Mahaparinirvana". It depicts the Buddha lying on a couch between two Sal trees,

with his eyes closed and his head resting on a pillow. Monks and nuns surround him, mourning. Indra and other gods, are seen descending from the sky to welcome the Great Being to Heaven (P.D. 305 : 1956 : Pl. 65).

5 Asoka tree :

The Asoka tree belongs to the family Leguminosae and is found in the Terai region and low valleys of Nepal. This tree is usually evergreen, growing to a moderate or sometimes large size, and has a fairly dense rounded crown.

The tree's height may reach 15 metres or more (Viswam, 79 : 1996) though Majupuria & Joshi describe it as a small tree, only four metres or more in height with thick bark (Majupuria & Joshi, 108 : 1988). The Asoka trees in Lumbini boast heights of ten metres or more.

The bark of the tree is dark brownish, vaguely furrowed and broken up into irregularly shaped scales. The bark green leaves whose stalks are arranged opposite each other along the twigs, have bases that are slightly heart-shaped. The leaves grow very close together and overlap somewhat. The leaves themselves are quite large about 12 to 18 centimeter long of wavy shape and with pointed tips. The leaves generally hang towards the ground, so water never comes to rest on them.

The numerous, attractive flowers appear in May/June. They are greenish-yellow in colour and borne in large bunches. "The flowers are very fascinating and attractive. It is believed that the tree gets flowers only after the touch of a beautiful girl by her sole" (Viswam, 79 : 1996).

The lower branches of this begin at a height of

1.5 metres and when mature can support a heavy weight.

This tree is also associated with various Hindu gods of religious import. 'Many Hindu literatures such as Bhavishya Purana, Ramayana, Rahgavamasa, Kumara Sambhava associate this tree with Lord Krishna, Shiva, Sita, Parvati. It is also mentioned in the religious books that Kamadeva (Gods of eros) had in his bow flowers of five trees were Asoka, Mango, Nava Mallika (*Ixora perviflora*). Pink lotus (*Nilumbo mucifera*) and Blue lotus (*Nymphaea stellata*) (Majupuria & Joshi, 106-7 : 1988).

There are many references by the early travellers and pilgrims who visited Lumbini during different periods mention to the Asoka tree being the tree under which Prince Siddhartha was born.

The Divyavadana, (containing a minute account of northern Buddhist traditions regarding the Mauryan emperor Asoka (Przyluski, i : 1967) mentions that when king Asoka visited Lumbini he saw the actual Asoka tree under which prince Siddhartha was born conversed with its guardian genius (Watters, 15 : 1973).

After Emperor Asoka's visit in Lumbini, there is a reference in one Chinese Text The Shui-ching-chu (commentary on the Water Classic), traditionally attributed to the Han dynasty but probably written during the Three Kingdoms Period (220-265) mentions that "The marvelous tree, which the excellent queen grasped when the Buddha came to life is called hsu/ko (Asoka)" (Petech, 35 : 1950).

Additionally, the Shui-Ching-Chu notes the following about Lumbini :-

a. The Asoka tree gripped by Mayadevi at the

- time of Siddhartha's birth was still living.
- b. An image of Maya devi gripping the Asoka tree was placed beneath the tree.
 - c. Devotees used to offer flowers and sweets at spot marking where Siddhartha's feet first touched the earth.
 - d. King Asoka shielded the Siddhartha's footprints with stones, (Ven. Sudarsana, 2 : 1996).

The Shui-Ching-Chu further mentions that "He the old tree (Asoka had no more offshoots, all the Sramana took the old trunk and planted it, and over and over again it continued itself till the present time". (Petech 35 : 1950).

Fa-hsien, another Chinese pilgrim who came to Lumbini in the early part of fifth century A.D. mentioned that he saw this Asoka tree still alive (Watters, 15 : 1973). Yuan Chwang, another important pilgrim from central China, visited Lumbini in the seventh century A.D. He states that "to the north of this (bathing tank of the Sakyas) 24 or 25 paces there is an Asoka flower tree, which is now decayed, this is the place where Bodhisattva was born (Beal, 24 : 1983).

It seems that the tradition of replanting sections of the same tree in the vicinity of the dead tree as mentioned by the Shui-Ching-Chu, may have been discontinued by the time of Yuan Chawang's visit.

There are some early Buddhist writings which refer to the Asoka tree as being the Nativity tree of Prince Siddhartha. It is stated in the Vinayavastu the "Then, when she (Maya devi) went to the Lumbini Garden she saw an Asoka tree, with extremely wide flowers. She wished to give birth there, and while she was there holding that tree (Gyatso, 24 : 1986).

The Sarvatavinaya, Asokavadana and Asokaraj-Sutra also identify the Asoka tree as the nativity of Prince Siddhartha (Mishra 4 : 1996).

Some modern literature also supports the Asoka tree as the nativity tree of Prince Siddhartha. A very famous book The Teaching of Buddha, mentions that "All about her were Asoka blossoms and in delight she reached out her right arm to pluck a branch and as she did so prince was born (Ven. Kyokai. 3 : 1989).

Ven. Do Moon from South Korea in his "Dharma Talk" in Lumbini also expressed the same opinion that the Asoka tree should be considered the nativity tree of Prince Siddhartha (Do Moon, 12 : 1995).

Cowen, in his book Flowering Trees and Shrubs in India also supports his hypothesis to the Asoka tree (Cowen, 5 : 1984).

Ven. Hanh in his book Old Path White Cloud describes the birth scene in the following way : "Admiring an ashok tree in full bloom, the queen walked towards it, when suddenly, feeling unsteady. She grabbed a branch of the ashok tree to support her. Just a moment later, still holding the branch, queen Mahamaya gave birth to a radiant son" (Hanh, 42 : 1997).

In the Terai region of Nepal, there are three different species of Asoka tree. They are known as Sita Asoka (*Saraca indica*) Desi or common Asoka (*Polyalthia longifolia*) and Pendulum Asoka (*Betula pendula*?). Both the Sita and Desi Asoka are flowering trees and bloom at the same season of the year. The height and size are very similar. The only different

between them is the arrangement of the leaves and the colour of the flowers. The flower of the Desi Asoka are light red, and the leaves are set opposite to one another. The Sita Asoka has yellow green flowers, and the arrangement of its leaves are alternate. The tips of the Sita Asoka leaf are pointed, and those of Desi Asoka rounded, Pendulum Asoka is a slim, tall tree without branches, commonly planted in gardens or along roadsides. Thus, it can not be considered the birth tree.

The above-mentioned species of trees, have their separate features and characteristics. Though the process of analysis of each of the species attributes one may attempt to identify the nativity tree of Prince Siddhartha, as the one which corresponds to the descriptions given in the historical accounts of the birth scene.

B. Sculptural representation:

There have not been any sculptural panels which depict the Plaksha or Pipal tree as the nativity tree of Prince Siddhartha. There is only one panel discovered to date showing the birth scene of Prince Siddhartha in which the Apa (Mango) is featured. The major debate on the nativity tree is over two trees, Sal and Asoka.

The Sculpture from Nagarjunakonda with the scene "The Birth of Buddha and the Steps" (third century A.D.) clearly shows the Asoka tree as the tree Maya is holding. The leaves and the branches are very similar to those of an Asoka tree. The leaves are elongated and pointed at the tip. However, the book The way of the Buddha states that "It is a Sai tree" (P.D. 291 : 1956, PI. 23). Perhaps the compilers did not closely observe the leaves and branches.

The sculpture "The Birth of the Buddha and the

Seven steps" found at Gandhara, dated to the 3rd/4th century A.D. and now in the Indian Museum in Calcutta is described in the following way: "The Bodhisattva emerges from the right side of this moter as she stands holding the branch of a Sal tree" (P.D. 291 : 1956 : PI. 24).

But the branches and the leaves are very much similar to an Asoka tree.

A Tibetan banner probably from the 18th century A.D. now in the Musee Guimet in Paris shows the same nativity scheme as in the "The Birth of the Buddha and the seven steps". The following is mentioned. "The atmosphere of the Sala tree is vividly represented here. The seven Lotuses symbolise the steps taken by Buddha immediately after his birth" (P.D. 291 : 1956 : PI. 27). In this banner the tree is shown almost of the same height as Maya, so that she is easily holding the branch. The tree here, does not have flowers. It is more likely, given the height of the tree and the appearance of the leaves, given the Asoka tree is being represented.

The beautiful sculptural panel. Possibly from Guides Mess, Mardan, Pakistan, that has been dated to the Kushana period and is now in the National Museum in Karachi depicts the birth of Siddhartha (Sakyamunii Buddha). The panel is described by Huntington "A typical representation of the birth of Siddhartha shows his mother, queen (Maya devi) grasping a Sal tree" (Huntington, 140 : 1985 : PI. 8-17).

In this panel the leaves are not of a Sal tree but identical with Asoka leaves. The arrangement of the leaves is alternate. The leaves are long and wary and pointed at the tip and they drop towards the ground. The height of the tree also suggests an Asoka tree. Thus Huntington's observation of this panel cannot

be considered as faithful to the original.

Lumbini: A forest or a garden ?

All of the Buddhist literature available agree on the existence of the Sala vana (Sal Forest) Lumbini vana (Lumbini forest) and Mahavana (great forest) of Kapilavastu. In these vana the majority of trees were Sal trees. Even today, Sal trees is the main forest of Nepal's Terai.

The Buddhist literature also mentions that the Lumbini Garden was jointly mentained by the Sakyas of Kapilavastu and the Koliyas of Devadaha. The garden of Lumbini is called Lumbini Kanana, Lumbini Vatika, Lumbini Upavana and Lumbini Chittalatavana in earlier scriptures. The garden was renowned for the beauty of its shady grove of Sal trees and different kinds of colourful flowers.

The Buddhist literature mentions, both the word "Forest" and "Garden" in the context of Lumbini. A forest is a large area of land thickly covered with trees, bushes etc, and a garden is a piece of private ground used for growing flowers, fruits, vegetables etc, typically with a lawn or other open space for recreation.

Thus, the Lumbini garden was within the Lumbini forest offering leisure to people who travelled through Lumbini. It can be assumed that in the garden verious types of flower bearing trees, shade trees and trees with medicinal properties were planted. The Asoka tree has all these properties alike being a shady, flowering bearing, evergreen with medicinal qualities, and may well have been planted in the Lumbini garden.

DISCUSSION:

The following discusses the claim each of the

tree species has to being the tree beneath which Prince Siddhartha was born. The botanical features of each species will be correlated with the observations made of the nativity tree in the historical accounts.

The botanical characteristics drawn upon in each tree species are: the branching habits of each species (i.e., if indeed the branches in question could be reached and support a women in Mayadevi's situation), and secondly, the flowering period of each tree species (i.e., if this season correlates with the season of Prince Siddhartha's birth).

The Buddhist literature agree that the month in which the birth took place was the month of Vaishakha, which occurs during April/May.

THE VALIDITY OF NATIVITY TREE CANDIDATES:

1. The Plaksha Tree (*Ficus lacor*):

Various Buddhist Sutras identify the Plaksha tree as being the nativity tree beneath which lord Buddha was born.

The flowering of the Plaksha tree does not correlate with the observations made that nativity tree was in full bloom at the time of the birth.

Further branching the Plaksha tree would not have made it possible for a women in Mayadevi's situation to support herself. The branches of this tree begin at a height of 3 to 4 metres above the surface of the ground.

Hence, given this information, one may reject the Plaksha tree as the nativity tree.

2. The Mango tree (*Mangifera indica*):

The only historical evidence which support the

mango tree as the nativity tree is the sculptural panel from Sundhara Fountain, Deo Patan, Kathmandu, now in the National Museum, Kathmandu, there is no historical records in the literature of the mango tree serving this function

Further the flowering of this species not fall within the time of the year the birth took place. Additionally the branches begin at a height too high for a human to reach.

Given this information, It is highly unlikely that mango tree is the nativity tree.

3. The Pinal tree (*Ficus religiosa*):

The only written account referring to the Pinal Tree as the nativity tree is found in the Lalitavistara. There are no other historical accounts. There is no school of art which displays this tree as the nativity tree. As far as the flowers are concerned, this tree does not have visible flowers during the month of April/May at which time the tree is covered with new leaves. Further, the lower branches of the Pinal tree do not lend themselves to being useful human support.

Therefore, with this information, one may reject the Pinal tree as being the nativity tree.

4. The Sal tree (*Shorea robusta*):

As discussed previously in section 4 there are many Buddhist scholars and many pieces of Buddhist literature which mention the Prince Siddhartha was born beneath a Sal tree.

However, the branching habit of this tree makes it impossible for a human to reach the lower branches. Secondly the flowers of this tree appear in the month of March and April.

So, one may reject this tree as the nativity tree, based on this information.

5. The Asoka Tree (*Saraca Indica*):

As mentioned in section 5, there are many accounts in the literature and many works of art and travel records that testify to the Asoka tree as the nativity tree of Prince Siddhartha.

The branching habit of this tree is such that a human can reach the lower branches easily. These branches occur at heights of 1.5 to 2 metres, and hence would have been able to support Mayadevi.

The flowers appear in the month of may and June, the time when Prince Siddhartha was born.

CONCLUSION:

Based on the information as available and researched above, it may be concluded that the Asoka tree (*Saraca India*) is the nativity tree of the Lord Buddha.

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