

The Esala month of blooming Esala flowers

Posted on



The striking yellow Ehela blooms beautifully.

Esala flowers bloom in July (Esala másaya in Sinhala), while Erabadu flowers bloom in April (Bak māsaya in Sinhala), blessing each month in a similar manner.

Both months have been named after relevant flowers. The biological name for Esala, Ahala, or Ehela is *Cassia fistula*, which is known for its striking, clear yellow color and typically features four or five flower petals, stamens, and carpels. A single bunch may contain between five and fifteen flowers. However, I am not sure about its fragrance.

If we look at the Wikipedia article on the Esala flower, we can find valuable information. *Cassia fistula*, also known as the golden shower, *purging cassia*, *Indian laburnum*, *kani konna*, or pudding-pipe tree, is a flowering plant in the *Fabaceae* family. This species is native to the Indian subcontinent and adjacent regions of Southeast Asia. It is recognized as the official state flower of Kerala and the National Capital Territory of Delhi in India, as well as Thailand's national tree and flower. Additionally, it is a popular ornamental plant used in herbal medicine.

Wikipedia lists various names for the flower in different languages. In Hindi, it is called Amaltas; in Sanskrit, Aragvadha; in Tamil, Konrai; in Urdu, Amaltas; and in Sinhalese, it is referred to as Ehela, which is also spelled Esala (weye< fyda wei<).

On the other hand, if we view this subject from a religious perspective, we can identify many events associated with it. In Kerala, India, these flowers are traditionally used during the Vishu festival, and some people even incorporate them into their meals. Additionally, the leaves are commonly used to supplement the diets of cattle, sheep, and goats that are fed low-quality forages.

In Laos, the flowers, known locally as ‘dok khoun,’ are linked to the Lao New Year. People use these flowers as offerings at temples and hang them in their homes during the New Year, believing that they will bring happiness and good luck.

In Sri Lanka, the Esala tree is cultivated in Buddhist temples, where it is referred to by its Sinhala name, Ehela. It is also widely considered the provincial tree of the North Central Province in Sri Lanka.

This strong and durable tree has been used as a pillar called ‘Ehela Kanuwa’ along the path to the top of Siri Pāda (a sacred mountain in Sri Lanka). That’s why it is mentioned in an old Sinhala song that, ‘Ehela Kanuwa langa newatī piruwata Endalā’. So, how does this sweet song start?

“Munī nandana Siri Pāda vandim Samanala kandē vihidena mōha sugandē... Ehela Kanuwa langa nevatī piruwata andalā. Ahas Gawwa pasukaramin sādu kiyālā...” – (Here, ‘Ehela Kanuwa langa nevatī piruwata andalā’ ... means, before one reached to Ahas gawwa, he has to wear white clothes at the ‘Ehela Kanuwa or Ehela pillar.’)

Today, we observe Esala as a religious festival, known as the “rainy season retreat ceremony” or the Vas observation ceremony. In July, Esala flowers bloom abundantly, especially in rural areas of Sri Lanka.



Listen to the full song – ‘Muni Nandana Siripada Wadim’ – Wasantha Sandanayaka’, (sung by Greta Janet de Silva & party, copy: U.D. Perera.)

In addition to its religious and social significance, the Ehela tree also has medical value.

In Ayurvedic medicine, the golden shower tree, known as Ehela, is referred to as ‘aragvadha,’ which translates to ‘disease killer.’ According to Wikipedia, “The fruit pulp is considered a purgative,” and it is strongly advised against using it without medical supervision, as stated in Ayurvedic texts. Although it has been utilized in herbalism for thousands of years, there has been little research conducted in modern times. Nevertheless, it is an ingredient found in some commercially produced herbal laxatives.

The term “Esala” is very ancient, and numerous Esala festivals were celebrated in ancient India, with the participation of kings, ministers, and the common people, as recorded in Indian history.

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These flowers serve as an additional decoration for the Vas observation ceremony, which Buddhist monks worldwide celebrate in a serene atmosphere during the rainy season.

As the Buddha completed the first sermon at Isipathana, in India, the rainy season began. Regardless of the discomfort in the rainy season, He continued the work on the Dhamma preaching. A few years later, when the Buddhist monks began to grow, He declared that all Bhikkhus should practice the rainy retreat or observe Vassa for this reason. This practice coincided with the monsoon in North India. So, it was a period when the monks ceased traveling to teach the Dhamma. However, while indoors, the monks continue to practice, preach Dhamma, and teach meditation to people in all communities. It is crucial for all communities to focus on developing their own spirituality during this important period. Especially today, it is said that most of young people live with inconvenience or dissatisfaction. Because, they aren't used to looking into their mind or their annoying thoughts, they face many unfortunate troubles, even as social troubles, and suicides.

To lead a fulfilling life, individuals can engage in psychological Dharma practice and meditation during this season.

The laypeople who generously support the needs of the monks during this period of seclusion do so with great dedication. However, there is no strict requirement for the laity to invite monks to observe the Vas retreat. Regardless of whether they are invited, monks have been observing Vas since ancient times. The rain-retreat tradition is a voluntary practice for the monks. Whether or not the monks receive an invitation, the act is performed by a Buddhist monk and is done in solitude. The Vas period is relatively short, lasting only three months. Following this period, there is the Cheewara month, or Robe Offering month, for monks who observe the Vas continuously, in accordance with the rules of Vas observation. This Robe Offering ceremony is known as the Kathina ceremony, which is considered to be more auspicious than other religious ceremonies.

As a result, many devotees take great joy in participating in the Vas or Kathina ceremony, which occurs at only one temple once a year during this month. The rainy season is essential for religious practices and agriculture; without rain, rice fields and water reservoirs would dry up. Ultimately, the rainy season is crucial for both the environment and the well-being of humanity.

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