

## ***Bombax ceiba* Linn.**

### **Systematic Position**

Kingdom: Plantae

Phylum: Tracheophyta

Class: Equisetopsida

Order: Malvales

Family: Malvaceae

Genus: *Bombax*

Species: *Bombax ceiba*



**Popular names:** Silk cotton tree, Red silk cotton, Semul, Sanar, Shevri, Leptan, Shembal, Pagun, Rakat-senbal.

**Nature:** Tree

**Flowering time:** February to April

**Fruiting time:** April to June

**Plant distribution:** It is widespread in India (avoiding the most arid areas), in the sub-Himalayan tract, in dry teak and mixed deciduous forests in peninsular India and in moist forests on the west coast. Beyond India it extends from Myanmar to South China and throughout tropical South East Asia to Northern Australia.

### **Gardening notes:**

1. **Light:** It grows well in full to partial sun.

2. **Water:** It requires water freely during the growing season but sparingly in winter.
3. **Propagation:** By seeds.

**Economic importance:**

1. The floss is used for stuffing pillows and is excellent for making surgical dressings.
2. The wood is used for making match boxes and packing cases.
3. The gum, which is obtained from the trunk, is called mocha-ras and is used as medicine and for book binding.
4. The flowers, along with their green calyx are eaten as vegetables.
5. Semal bark and roots are a tonic and stimulant.
6. A gummy exudation from the stem is used in traditional medicine to prepare an aphrodisiac and to treat stomach disorders.

**Plant description:** A lofty fast growing deciduous tree reaching to a height of 40 feet with a buttressed base;

**Root-** Tap root, branched; **Stem-** Aerial, erect, branched, branches grow in tiers radiating from trunk like the ribs of an umbrella, cylindrical, solid, woody, wider at base, bark- silver grey, relatively smooth above, hard conical prickles at base when young, vertical fissures and prickles become blunt and finally drop off as tree gets older;

**Leaf-** Green, palmately compound, 5-7 leaflets on short stalks of their own radiating from the end of a long common leaf stalk, petiolate, petiole- 10-15 cm long, green, pulvinus at base, leaflets 7-9 cm long, 4-6 cm wide, ovate-lanceolate, acuminate apex, entire margins, unicostate reticulate venation, prominent midrib.

**Inflorescence-** Cymose.

**Flower-** Large, red, regular, bisexual, actinomorphic, hypogynous, showy, pedicellate, pedicel- small, 1-2 cm long, green, ; Sepals- 5, gamosepalous, with ends free, green, smooth outside, white silky within, valvate, cup shaped, inferior; Petals – 5, polypetalous, reddish, thick, oblong, inferior, curved ends, imbricate aestivation; Stamens –many, distinct, united at base to form staminal tube, in five or six bundles one of which is around the style, polyadelphous, inferior, anthers- brownish black, one celled, longitudinal dehiscence, filaments 3-5 cm long, yellowish base and reddish upper surface; Carpels – 2, connate in a superior 5 loculed ovary, with two to many anatropous ovules in each locule, axile placentation, style 1, 5-lobed at the apex, stigma- pentafid, united at base, superior.

**Fruit-** A loculicidal woody capsule, up to 18 cm long, ovoid, 5-angled, short stalked, brown, many seeds, white silky and cottony fibre present inside (problem for asthmatics), splits open along 5 sutures, releasing masses of silky fibre along with the seeds; Seed- Small, innumerable, embedded in silky cotton dispersed by wind brown, rounded, rough surface.



**Close up views of plant parts**





Flora of KCHA