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PLANTS USED IN GATHERING HONEY BY THE JARAWAS OF ANDAMAN ISLANDS

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Honey and the larvae of honey bees are eaten with great relish by all the tribes of the Andaman & Nicobar Islands (Sangal, 1971). The use of th sap of the leaves of various plants by the aborigines of these islands to drive away the bees while gathering honey has been a subject of interest since long (Chakrabarty & Balakrishnan, 2003). Man (1883) reported the use of a species of *Alpinia* (Zingiberaceae) by the Andamanese for this purpose and the name of the species was subsequently found to be *Alpinia manii* King ex Baker (Rao & Chakrabarty, 1985). Thothathri (1966) recorded the use of *Orophea katschallica* Kurz (Annonaceae) for collecting honey by the Onge tribe of the Little Andaman Island. Dutta *&al.* (1985) established the utility of *Amomum aculeatum* Roxb. of Zingiberaceae for tranquillizing the giant rock bee. The use of *A. fenzlii* Kurz [= *Hornstedtia fenzlii* (Kurz) K. Schum.] by the Shompens of Great Nicobar while collecting honey was brought out by Rao & Chakrabarty (1985).

The Jarawas are occupying about 647 sq. km of forest area between South Andamans (western part), throught the Middle Straits to the southern portion of the Middle Andamans. Their territory is now declared as 'Jarawa Reserve' They belong to the Negrito stock and are nomadic, food-gatherers and hunters, numbering less than 300 individuals now. They live in small groups in dense interior of forests and along the west coast. Almost nothing was known about them due to their hostile nature. It is probably due to the opening of the Andaman Trunk Road, passing through the heart of the Jarawa-land, the friendly contacts and confidence-building exercise started, since 1997.

During the course of the present ethnobotanical studies, it is found that every Jarawa becomes happy when the dipterocarps start flowering as it indicates the advent of the honey-gathering season. The Jarawas use three plants while gathering honey, called in their language as *Uiyaw, Taopa-aath* and *Hoomal*. While the *Uiyaw* is identified to be *Ammomum aculeatum* Roxb., the *Taopa-aath* represents *Orophea katschallica* Kurz (Annonaceae) and the *Hoomal* is found to be *Pseudouvaria prainii* (King) Merr. (Annonaceae). Both the plants of Annonaceae are endemic to the Andaman & Nicobar Islands. Plants of *A. aculeatum* grow luxuriantly on hill slopes in open sunny places in the interior forests. Tall trees of *Orophea katschallica* as well

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as *Pseudouvaria prainii* also grow abundantly in the coastal forests and inland hill forests of the Jarawa Reserve at low altitudes. The mode of collection of honey is the same as the other tribes of the islands. While collecting honey they chew leaves and/or stems of the above mentioned plants, whichever is available nearby. On reaching the comb they spit the juice from mouth as a spray on the honey comb, causing the bees to fly out of the comb and spread out. then the honeycombs are collected in pieces and placed in the honey tubs they carry with them. This way the honey bees never bite the honey thives. The honey tubs are made by scooping out the wooden blocks from the trees of *Oroxylum indicum* (L.) Kurz, *Pajanelia longifolia* (Willd.) K. Schum. (both Bignoniaceae) and *Sterculia villosa* Roxb. (Sterculiacae).

The above bee-repellent plant may eventually serve as natural insecticides or insect repellents and hytochemical studies on these plants are therefore desirable.

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