

Salai-Pathi (*Licuala peltata* Roxb.—Arecaceae), an Essential Plant for Jarawa Tribe of Andamans

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The paper provides information on the uses of *Licuala peltata* Roxb. ('Salai-pathi') by the Jarawa tribe of Andamans. Their population is known to be marginalised due to the encroachment and poaching activities by the outsiders.

Keywords: Salai-pathi, *Licuala peltata*, Jarawa tribe, Andamans

Introduction

The Jarawa, a primitive Nigrito tribe of about 200 people, inhabit the tribal reserve of 642 sq km forest area in the western coast of Middle and South Andamans. They are the classic hunter-gatherers and maintain complete harmony with nature. Because of their unfriendly stance towards outsiders, very little is known about their ethnobiology (Sarkar 1999). After launching the pilot project to study the various aspects of Jarawa tribe by the Andaman Adim Janjati Vikas Samiti, Andaman and Nicobar Administration since April 1996, five contact expeditions were undertaken. The author represented the Zoological Survey of India for the ethnobiological studies. Information was collected through direct interaction and observations on their habitat. A part of the information is presented in this communication.

Licuala peltata Roxb. (Arecaceae), commonly known as 'Salai-pathi' or 'Mota-pathi', is a moderate-sized evergreen palm distributed throughout the tropical region, including Andamans. It is an ornamental plant with stem rough and leaves fan-shaped divided to the base into numerous wedge-shaped segments. Leaves are extensively used for thatching, and for making hats and umbrellas in other parts of the country; but here it is considered as an indispensable plant, which supports the life system of Jarawa tribe.

Enumeration of Uses

For making huts

They usually make three types of huts: temporary, medium-sized and community huts, depending upon their duration of stay and numbers in group. All these huts are mainly thatched with *Licuala peltata* leaves and sometimes intermixed with a few 'dani' leaves (*Nipa fruticans*).

For making ornaments

Head bands: The peculiar head band mostly worn by the women is characteristic of Jarawa tribe. It is an important ornament generally made of tender leaves of *L. peltata*. Usually, 3-5 veins of the leaf, 20-25 cm long, are cut and then this portion is cut very finely from vein to vein horizontally. These veins are finely cropped from the bottom. Two parts of the same types are tied at both ends to give round shape and these two joints are also bunched with fine leaf tassels, one end of which is allowed to hang.

Necklaces: Jarawa tribe people are fond of adorning themselves with different types of necklaces (Chandra 1996). They prepare a simple type of necklace from leaf of this palm.

Armlets: The armlets are prepared in the same way as head bands, but are smaller and devoid of tassels. These are worn by both men and women.

Waist girdles: These are worn only by women. Leaves of the size of circumference of waste are selected and large number of fine hanging leaf tassels are arranged in bunches all around the waist girdle.

For making torches

The Jarawa tribe use an indigenous torch, particularly during the hunting activities. The torch is made of 'salai-pathi' and white 'dhup'. The resin of white 'dhup' is broken into small pieces which are uniformly wrapped inside bunches of palm leaves and tied with cane stripes.

In addition, the leaves are extensively used for various other purposes like utensils for keeping the food material, as lid for covering the wooden basket and for wrapping wild pig before roasting.

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