

A PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION ON TRADITIONAL TAPPING METHODS OF 'KITUL' OR THE FISH-TAIL PALM (*Caryota urens* L.)

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Rural survival depends largely on the wealth of the natural environment. "Kitul" or the Fish-tail palm is one of the important species which has been exploited from the wild by the villagers from the ancient past. Tapping the inflorescence of the Kitul tree for collecting the phloem sap for producing jaggary, treacle and toddy has been generating practices, among the rural folk in some villages particularly those abutting the natural forests. The tapping process makes direct use of the transport mechanism of the tree in which the assimilates are moved to the developing organs. The method of tapping differs from place to place. Usually tappers use plant extracts for seasoning the inflorescence before tapping. The purpose of using these various plant extracts is the arresting of the maturation of the inflorescence and the increasing of the sap flow. The knowledge of these indigenous tapping practices are not being handed down the generations and therefore being gradually lost. This paper presents the results of a preliminary investigation the traditional tapping methods of Kitul by the people in villages abutting the Sinharaja forest and the Knuckles ranges.