

**ETHNOGRAPHIC NOTES ON THE USE OF JUREM A (MIMOSA TENUIFLORA)
(WILLD.) POIR. BY THE PANKARARE INDIANS (NORTHEAST BRAZIL).**

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The Pankarare Indians are located in one of the richest areas of biodiversity in the northeastern state of Bahia in Brazil, located within the region known as the Raso da Catarina, in a quadrilateral bounded by the cities of Paulo Afonso, Jeremoabo, Canudos and Macururé. This is one of the driest regions of the state, where the caatinga (savanna) and the basins of the San Francisco and Vaza-Barris rivers served as the stage for the Cangaço (social banditry in northeast Brazil), the Canudos Revolt and the development of the hydro-based energy industry. The climate is semi-arid and the vegetation predominantly caatinga (savanna), with deciduous woody vegetation dominated by prickly seagrass, especially cacti and bromeliads (Costa Neto, 1999). More precisely, this indigenous group is found concentrated in Brejo do Burgo, 40 km from Paulo Afonso, on the northern border of Raso. A small portion of the indigenous people inhabit the Serrota (6 km south of Brejo), below Chico (Bandeira, 2003). Currently the Pankarare total a population of more than 1356 indigenous people (FUNASA, 2010). This work aims to understand how the indigenous Pankarare of Raso da Catarina, use Jurema (Mimosa tenuiflora (Willd.). Poir.) in their sacred rituals, particularly the Ciência do Índio (Indian

Knowledge) and the Amaro Festival, and to compare data with other indigenous groups in the region.

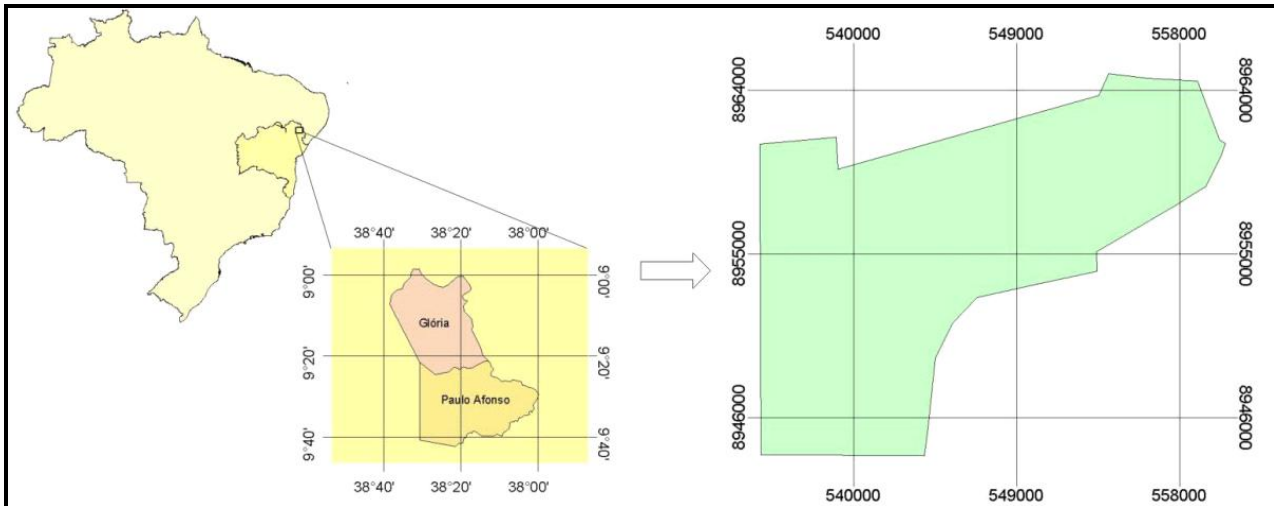


Figure 1: Map of the area occupied by the indigenous Pankarare population (Bandeira, 2003).

Jurema has a very important symbolic value to indigenous peoples of the Northeast being a plant seen as "an enchanted, a Gift, the force of nature". Several people of this region worship this plant in their sacred rituals, such as the Amaro Festival among the Panakararé Indians, and the root of this species produces a drink called "Wine of Jurema" that for them, its ingestion allows a connection to the kingdom of the Enchanted, which will reveal the secrets of their ancestors, teachings, counseling and healing of the body and soul (Marques, 2006).

Fieldwork was conducted from October 2008 to October 2009, through information compiled from community residents. Ethnobotanical information was obtained regarding the use of Jurema for medicinal and sacred rituals. The study of Jurema was carried out by direct observations of *Ciência do Índio*, the Festival of Amaro and in the *Torés* (ritual

dances). Ethnographic information regarding sacred rituals and their secrets were obtained as related by the chief of the tribe who is considered the major spiritual leader.

There is a symbiotic relationship between the Pankarare and the region of Raso da Catarina, for one simple reason: for these people nature is sacred. As stated by the Chief Afonso: "here everything is sacred. Every stick, every animal has a gift, which is the protector of the forest".

It is this sacred dimension of the traditions of the indigenous Pankarare that Jurema (*Mimosa tenuiflora*) is found. They are exhaustive in differentiating the species of White Jurema (*Mimosa Sandy*): "White Jurema is not used in our traditions because it is from *Umbanda* and it is in this tradition that they use the wine of it "(Pankarare Afonso, personal communication).

The Pankarare do not perceive Jurema simply as a plant, in the way we look at it in Botany. For these people, this plant has a very strong symbolic value and is considered one of the most sacred caatinga species, since it is also revered as one of the enchanted (the guardians of nature) to whom is assigned the force of one of the entities that is considered the strongest in the indigenous traditions: Mestre Juremeira. To feel nature in a deep way, to respect and preserve. The "enchanted" are part of the cosmology of the indigenous people. They are sacred forces, usually related to nature such as trees, seeds, animals, spirits of the incarnated elders or of ancient origins, of which Mestre Juremeira is one of these spirits, an enchanted Indian who within the rituals, guides the indigenous people, and promotes healing, etc (Marques, 2007).

For the indigenous people nature has feelings, the forests cry, shout and dress. We can infer that one of the characteristics of the traditions lived by the Pankarare is to put them in constant contact with nature. It is to listen to it, and heal themselves using this guidance. This connection takes place in what Indians call "Ciência do Índio", a secret ritual, accessible only to the natives, where incorporated entities are received in the body of one of the people that participate in the tradition; and through the body this entity speaks, assumes a certain 'materiality' and does the healing rituals. Another tradition where the force of Jurema is very strong is the "Festival of Amaro" (a ritual done by Indians every year in the Caatinga, in the forests, where the reunion of the collective indigenous community is celebrated and rituals carried out that bear the mark of christianization and the cult of the enchanted Praiás (ritual/costumed dancers), the latter essentially linked to the indigenous tradition where the wine of Jurema is produced. In the preparation of the wine, only men initiated in the science participate in the root extraction. The collection region has to be positioned toward sunrise, because it is the direction of the birth of the science. In the cosmology of the Pankarare science, rituals are born at sunset and close at sunset. It is the mythical dimension.

The wine is placed in an earthenware bowl (aribé) "on an altar" in the large courtyard of the Amaro, where they evoke the songs of the forests and waters. It is a moment that only men participate in. For indigenous people, it is the Jurema that will give strength and bring revelation. We can say that the ritual with Jurema is what allows contact for the indigenous with the enchanted world. The enchanted leave the forests and the Caatinga, dressed as Praiás. The Praiás are also their ritual masks made by the Indians themselves with fiber

from caroá (*Neoglaziovia variegata*), a species typical of the caatinga, and with this they dance all night to the sound of tones drawn out by the *Mestre de Cabeceira* (who is at the "head" of the line that draws out the songs for the enchanted). At the Festival of Amaro, in a large courtyard, songs are sung to the enchanted and for the Praiás, and these songs are pulled out by an authority, the *Mestre de Cabeceira*. Today, D. Edézia is the spiritual leadership of the village (Marques, 2007).

In Pankarare rituals the indigenous people work together, with specific functions. The tasks are distributed among the participants forming a Pankarare ethnoecological system, where everyone gives a share of contribution as stated (Bandeira, 2008).

There is a similarity in the Jurema cult among the various indigenous peoples of the Northeast, and the relationship that exists in the cosmology of these tribal groups is likely the social and cultural product of the secular interaction established between them, in this sector of the northeast Brazilian that, by showing these characteristics, configures itself with the character of an indigenous socio-cultural area (Sampaio, 1997).

In the context of Brazilian Afro-Amerindian syncretism, the presence or absence of Jurema as a sacred element of worship establishes the main difference between the practices of umbanda and catimbó. Today, Jurema is not just a botanical species designation, but also of a deity and its sacred abode, the celestial region (Jurema), from where the enchanted come when invoked to attend the ritual space (Albuquerque, 1997).

For the Kariri-Xocó, who live by the San Francisco River, and are represented by various tribal groups from the Northeast, they celebrate, even today, one of the sacred ceremonies called Ouricuri where Jurema is the origin of life and serves as a renovation/self-affirmation of the condition of the indian. As such, Jurema assists in the transformation of a self aware colonized individual (and prejudiced), into awareness of the social group that benefits from the secret ritual, and “above all, Jurema is a tree that signifies the creative principle, such that the extracted substance from the roots brings a message of sounds, the Creator "(Mota 2007). It was also emphasized that the function of Jurema is to provide visions and dreams of another world, but without the person leaving their normal state of consciousness. For them Jurema is the deity formed by the group who drink the Jurema, for which they look for meaning in their lives, and what it means to be a Kariri and a Xocó. Jurema teaches them to live through this sacred discourse, and is used to cleanse the body to get rid of evil spirits.

For the Geripancó, Jurema also fulfills this role of bodily and spiritual purification. It is also used by the ethnic Xucuru Kariri Indians together with White Jurema (*Mimosa verrucosa*) for medical and religious reasons, such that the bark is used for medicinal purposes and the bark of the root is the part of plant used in religious ceremonies because it possesses the major part of the psychoactive alkaloids (Mota, 2007).

For the Tuxás, the ingestion of Jurema is the condition for evidence of the enchanted. It is evident that all these people who use and worship Jurema have common goals, heal the sick, keep evil away and to receive advice from the ancestors and reach the spiritual plane (Sampaio, 1997). The Atikum-Umã Indians in Pernambuco denominate the preparation of

the Sacred Jurema as a way of connecting with the Divine. Within the Indian tradition we find the use of Jurema the mark of opposition - of distinction - in relation to the "civilized part." Jurema, also used in the work of Anjúca, represents the Mestre de toré, "the blood of Christ" and for them toré is the sign that guarantees the indigenous status, and that people must be in the same regimens to be considered for it. The toré represents their tradition, their union and their religion; and this sense of social and cosmic identity was learned in the communion that Jurema provided them. Therefore, to be Indian one must retain the Indian regime and, to the extent possible, the science of the Indian is understood here as a dynamic body of knowledge upon which is based the secret of the tribe. They are of sacred character, with restricted access and prohibited to non-Indians or Indians from other ethnic groups (Grunewald, 2005).

From this sacred tree they extract something that links them to the symbolic, sacred and spiritual dimension, that they call "wine of Jurema, an entheogen. Chemically, Jurema (*Mimosa tenuiflora*) is a tryptamine alkaloid in the family of indolic hallucinogens (Carlini & Masur, 1989; Graeff, 1984). But the magnitude of the sacredness of its use bypasses the biochemical description of its effects and both are incompatible and true in their own way. On the one hand, it is not always the dosages and modes of ritual consumption that would be able to explain the changes of consciousness caused by them. On the other hand, when examining Jurema by a strictly symbolic perspective, it is discovered that the alleged universal symbols involved, are actually significant coming from very specific procedures and ritual actions, and neurophysiologically efficient.

According to Mota (2007), the wine of Jurema was determined as a substance with hallucinogenic effect, whose principle active agent is DMT (N,N-Dimethyltryptamine). However, if the preparation is done and the plant is ingested orally, DMT becomes inactive in the digestive tract. The way in which Jurema is taken as a drink is not clear if other substances may be present in the drink to block the inactivation of the DMT. Only by considering the scientific validity of the descriptions of the indigenous people, which differ in many of the academic interpretations, is it possible to describe the symbolic and sacred nature of Jurema in the indigenous rituals herein. Several studies on the *wine of Jurema* and the pharmacological activity of the botanical species that give support to this drink, have been developed by authors such as: Albuquerque (1997, 2002), Campbell (2002), Lewis & Elvin-Lewis (1977), Lima (1975), and Schultes (undated), among others.

In general the indigenous peoples of the northeast who practice sacred rituals in this context reaffirm their identity, in a way that their shared secrets give necessary meaning to the experience of being indigenous.

The Koiupanká do not differ much from other indigenous groups in northeastern Brazil who were long persecuted due to the expansion of domination by the colonizers. Kinship and the cultural and religious matrix are directly linked to the Pankararu/PE. According to Medeiros (2006), from the anthropological research, it was found that the cosmological identity of the Koiupanká originated from the Pankarare people, from the municipality of Nova Gloria, the interior (sertão) of Bahia. Such ritualistic forms present in the Koiupanká reiterate what was said previously about the importance of these sacred indigenous rituals, throughout the process of ethnic recognition that has always been very present among the

Indians of the Northeast, this differential mark is the ritualistic practice that differentiates from national society. The Pankararu, in Brejo dos Padres, Tacaratu, Jatobá and Petrolândia, in the State of Pernambuco, is the center for the cultural matrix of indigenous groups. One of the remaining groups being the Kalanki, who currently number about 70 families, totaling approximately 390 individuals and who live in the interior of Alagoas.

Thus, both elements, Toré and Jurema equally, are sacred and, just as ritual occupies non-indigenous spaces, these constitute indicators, affirmations and presence delimiters, including spiritual, for indigenous people in Brazilian society. The structure of this worship shares with other rites of Northeastern indigenous peoples a ritual language, which is called by anthropologists a complex ritual of Jurema. This complex shows, in turn, the existence of a specifically indigenous religious field, which includes a set of representations in which the presence of Jurema also incorporates existing conceptions around this plant, like belief and healing systems, botanical classification systems, representation and epistemology.

A secret involves the indigenous Jurema, from preparation to their communion, especially in relation to indigenous groups in northeastern Brazil. And if contemporary authors arrived at a common point, namely that while the sacred drink Jurema has "many faces", supporters of Afro-Brazilian religiousness, as well as indigenous people perceive and interpret the spread of Jurema a common element in various forms of cults, giving new meaning and singling out the use of this plant. The indigenous people seem to be unanimous in attributing themselves as the traditional carriers of the culture of Jurema, exclusively as northeastern indigenous knowledge.

Jurema, a tree rooted in the Indian culture and the current inhabitants of the Northeast region, could become a keystone species for forest restoration of areas badly devastated, to recover the soil as quickly as possible and to help the growth of other plants, including hardwood trees. In less degraded areas, it can be used in sustainable management as a source of timber, firewood and charcoal, fodder, bee food and medicine. With the expanding market for natural products, including cleaning products and cosmetics, Jurema can serve as a supplier of raw material for such products, creating additional income in the times between harvests for the inhabitants of the interior.

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