

# Ants: Bio-Indicators and Metaphors

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ANT is an insect which has a role in the life of a traditional Malay society. This insect serves as a guidance to determine the seasons and gives the overall picture of the behavioural patterns of the members of its community.

When ants of various types and colours move in large numbers, sometimes in the form of a long line, usually they are heading towards higher grounds. Sometimes they climb trees such as the kapok (*Ceiba pentandra* (L.) Gaertn.) tree and others. When this happens, it indicates that flood will take place. The kapok fruit, when ripe and dry, will crack

open and fly away in the wind. Ants remain in the kapok while eating the kapok seeds and they do not have to struggle to crawl down. Research also confirms that ants can detect an earthquake by manifesting restless reactions by leaving their nests.

The Malay proverb states; *mati semut kerana gula* (ants die because of sugar) which means humans fall victim to wheedles. *Semut dipijak tidak mati, antan dilanda patah tiga* (Stepping on ants does not kill them, crashing into a huge pestle breaks it into three) shows the gait of a perfect woman. *Semut dipijak tidak mati, gajah diharung bergelimpangan* (Stepping on ants does not kill them, crashing into elephants, all fall down) which means someone may look weak but his/her actions and language may be harsh. *Semut mempersembahkan peha belalang kepada raja* (The ant presents the thigh of the grasshopper to the king) which means what is offered may seem small, but has great value.

Folklore illustrates that elephants respect ants. Elephants would normally avoid stepping on anthills and scatter ants on the ground. The story behind this is that a herd of elephants were battling a colony of ants because their anthills were often trampled upon by the elephants. The elephants lost the battle as a result of the ants entering their ears, trunks and eyes, making them unable to fight. Mighty people may not always win, and weak people may not always lose.

The ant may be small but it plays a huge role in our expansive life.

