

# AN INDIGENOUS HONEY ODYSSEY

**Thousands of Indigenous Peoples from across the world, living in the most pristine ecosystems are in contact with hundreds of wild bees.**



Beyond *Apis mellifera*, the most common honey producing bee species, 20,000 species of bees exist. Some of them are one inch long while others are almost invisible. Some especially prefer one plant to forage that if this plant disappears, the bee disappears too, making them flying barometers of the health of the ecosystems in which they thrive. None of the honeys produced by wild bees are allowed on the international food market. They are simply not recognized as honeys in the Codex Alimentarius if they are not made by *Apis mellifera* bees! However, Indigenous Peoples know and care about the wonders of wild bees since way longer than the creation of the Codex Alimentarius and other international food market structures.



The indigenous communities of the Nilgiris Biosphere Reserve are renowned for their knowledge of honey from various honey bee species. The region itself has major honey-producing zones, with massive honey cliffs or 'bee nesting' trees present in large numbers. Geographically adjacent groups have formed specialized niches that differentiate one from the other, resulting in 'honey territories' and specialized techniques and traditions, mastered as per one's own needs - whether as tradition or as a livelihood activity.



The Alu Kurumbas in the eastern and southern parts of the Nilgiris and in Attapadi are renowned for scaling cliffs more than 500 feet in height while the Irulas are adept in harvesting large quantities from giant trees. The Kattunaickens are expert hunters in and around Mudumalai and Muthanga forests just as the Jenu Kurumbas are famous in Nagarhole and Mysore regions. There are also the Cholanaickens, renowned for their legendary skills in New Amarambalam region using basic equipments to scale high trees and cliffs.

*Then, Jenu, Madhu, Melit, Mitsu, Mil*, in whatever language honey is called, is an essential part of *adivasi* life since antiquity.