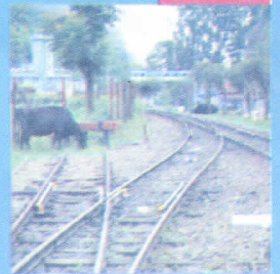


Exclusive  
travel section inside

**Potato:** Farming this unassuming tuber was a tradition, until recently. A review on p 10, 11

**Alcoholism:** upto 20% of alcohol drinkers become alcoholics. A perspective from a social worker, p 4

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Next issue: Heritage abused  
The small paper with a big view



# The Local

A UNIQUE PERSPECTIVE OF THE NILGIRIS

## Honey Hunters.

*The Local Correspondent*

The Kurumbas have been traditionally forest dwellers. Their skills at honey hunting have been globally renowned but their's is an uphill challenge.

pic. courtesy: Keystone Foundation



World Indigenous People's Day is observed on Aug 9, every year.

In full colour centrespread  
**Inside**  
Honey hunting



pics, courtesy: Keystone Foundation

## Faceless. Fearless.

Indigenous communities have displayed a great synergy with their natural habitats, where a harmonious interplay exists. Honey hunting by the forest dwellers is one such fascinating example.

**Hunter-gatherers** in tropical forests have been harvesting honey from the wild, using traditional skills and techniques perfected by several generations. But their lifestyle is threatened as they face pressure from the modern world. Deforestation, changes in land use (such as monoculturing) and loss of bee habitat have affected honey gathering. In South and South-East Asia, honey is collected from the wild, from the nests of the 'Apis dorsata' or giant Honeybee. It can produce upto 20kgs of honey in a year. Apis dorsata are found in and near forests. A colony of bees can build a comb measuring upto 1.5 metres hanging from a rock face or branches of tall trees.

In India and Thailand 'bee trees' can host over 100 colonies, 10-20 colonies per tree are quite common. In Indonesia, Vietnam and parts of India like in the Sunderbans of West Bengal, the government, through forest departments controls honey hunting by issuing collection permits. In the Nilgiris, Kurumbas Irulas, even Todas and others collect honey with no encumbrance. Honey cropping in most places is done at night when the bee is less active and less inclined to attack. The Alu Kurumbas, like their counterparts in Southern Vietnam and the Melaleuca forests collect honey by day. The bees are smoked out of their hive and the comb is removed by slicing it off, leaving behind sufficient brood comb to allow the returning bees to rebuild their nests, thus ensuring a better harvest the next summer. *Information courtesy: Ms Rose Pereira & Ms Harsha Bellie*

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### Honey hunting - a tradition.

The Kurumba honey hunters form a team before setting out on the honey-hunting expedition. The chief hunter fasts and prays beforehand. He is mainly assisted by his brother-in-law who secures a vine ladder to a tree or a peg. It is believed that he would not harm the chief hunter by cutting the vine or letting go as this would make his sister a widow. One member of the team positions himself halfway down the cliff face, to secure or steady the swinging vine ladder. The men below build a fire; the smouldering smoke chases the bees away from the hive. As the chief hunter descends, he sings the honey song, invoking the bees as his sister-in-law or mother-in-law, imploring them not to sting or bite him, their 'brother-in-law'. He slices through the honey comb, mainly the lower or middle portion which falls into a container that he deftly holds below it.