

## **Blossom Honey**

Kong Iba Blah, mother of two, has dared to venture into beekeeping. A free beekeeping course conducted by the Meghalaya Institute of Entrepreneurship (MIE), under Meghalaya Basin Development Authority (MBDA), nurtured the idea of starting her own venture. After a one-week training all the trainees were given five bee-boxes each, plus a couple of more equipment, to help them start-off with beekeeping.

She began her venture in December 2015, with 10 bee boxes, soon discovering that beekeeping isn't exactly a cakewalk. One year on and she is yet to get her first harvest. But tenacity, passion and unwavering desire for success are Kong Iba's strong points. While other co-trainees have given up, she stuck on. Why does she choose beekeeping over other ventures? She's fascinated with nature, the environment and its preservation she says. The bees, she emphasizes, are one of nature's own preserving and enrichment agents. She loves the amber fluid that drips goodness, which can be harvested so peacefully!

She is working on establishing brand visibility first; so even though she hasn't harvested her own, she 'aggregates', as she puts it, procuring from other producers, to position her brand. She does it professionally,

10 colonies is too small. 50 colonies would make her at least a 'medium-sized' producer, a more viable option. She wants to introduce Italian bees, *Apis mellifera*, which yield about 35 kgs per annum per colony. The Indian bees, *Apis cerana indica* that she presently rears, yield only about 6 kgs per year. But all this requires financial investment, and governmental assistance/subsidies are painfully slow.

Honey is called the Nectar of the Gods, and is everyone's favourite. It is a natural food with invaluable medicinal value, the health benefits of which are science-backed. It is used in traditional medicine for coughs, concussions and infections. An important component in many anti-cough, antiseptic and anti-inflammatory medicinal preparations, honey finds mention in Ayurveda, Unani and Homeopathy. It is used in beauty treatments and beauty products, and is great for weight loss. Every chef's favourite, honey can be paired, infused, cooked, and brushed with almost every creation in the kitchen. Honey tastes as good by itself as it does in salads, dips etc. One cannot discount the magic of honey, Kong Iba stressed.

Northeast with its vast natural flora brings the best organic honey, Kong Iba believes. Purity and taste are the main reason for the popularity of Meghalaya honey she says. 18. Meghalaya is home to many flora, both alpine and temperate, supplying pollen and nectar. Minimal use of pesticides in this region provides a good environment for the bees to flourish.

Meghalaya honey is obtained largely from small farmers whose bees forage from forest flora or orange orchards (hence the term 'orange honey' with its signature tangy taste). Nectar sources are largely grown free of pesticides and chemicals, making the honey as organic as could be.

Apiculture can play a vital role in the livelihood promotion of the farmers in Meghalaya. In order to intensify the production of honey in the state, the Government

of Meghalaya, launched the State Apiculture Mission under the Integrated Basin Development and Livelihood Promotion Program (IBDLP)