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Honeycomb from *Apis cerana* shared by the family

People, Bees, and Rural Development

Rural development aims to help people manage their livelihoods better through sustainable use of the available resources. It provides them with greater social and economic power by offering them opportunities to work in line with their capacity, without hampering the eco-services provided by their environment.

Beekeeping and honey hunting have been practised by different societies since ancient times and have always been linked to development. ‘Honey hunting’ – collecting honey from wild bee colonies – is an ancient practice as shown, for example, in cave paintings dating back to 11,000 BC found in Madhya Pradesh, India (Suryanarayan 2002), and in Ancient Egyptian drawings and paintings (Crane 1999). The history of beekeeping is rooted in and linked to honey hunting and associated practices. As settled farming became common, so too did the idea of keeping bees in hives, but beekeeping complemented rather than replaced wild collection. Gathering wild honey is still a common practice in many parts of the world; in India it is estimated that 22,000 tonnes of wild honey is collected by honey hunters annually – twice the amount of honey produced by the managed beekeeping sector (Wakhle and Pal 2000).

Different societies in Asia, Europe, and North America have evolved their own beekeeping methods, investing in such diverse areas as bee genetics, hive design, management operations, managed pollination, and honey processing and marketing. *Apis mellifera* is a particularly fortunate bee species among hive bees. Scientists and development workers have studied it for more than 150 years; continuous selection and breeding have improved the bee’s genetics; and Langstroth’s hive design which is based on optimising bee space (the space required for the movement of bees) in the hive has helped beekeepers and bee enterprises to produce more honey in a sustainable manner.



Farooq Ahmad

An apiary of *Apis cerana*

The mass introduction of Langstroth's hive coincided with the start of large-scale application of pesticides in North American agriculture. This phenomenal shift in agricultural husbandry reduced pollinator diversity considerably, and farmers now felt the need to use honeybees as a source of pollination rather than just as a honey producer. Introduction of Langstroth's hive also facilitated the large-scale transportation of bee colonies for managed pollination, honey production, mass queen rearing and overall management of apiaries.

Beekeeping has thus contributed to rural development through the centuries by supporting agricultural production, providing honey, wax, and other products for home use, and by providing income for both farmers and the landless.