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PP-527 [Beekeeping for Rural Development]

From Honey Hunting to Beekeeping:

A Journey of Transformation in Tamil Nadu

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01. How it was?

For generations, indigenous communities in Tamil Nadu depended on honey hunting from wild colonies deep in the forests. This tradition carried immense skill and courage, but also exposed hunters to severe risks, including falls, stings, and wild animal encounters. Knowledge of bee behaviour and seasonal cycles was inherited and kept the practice alive.

02. Why change was needed?

Honey hunting became increasingly unsafe and unsustainable. Lengthy forest treks and smoke-driven harvests damaged habitats and stressed wild bee populations. Families remained trapped in poverty, with little money for education, especially for girls, leading to early marriages and lost opportunities

03. Seeds of Change

SEEDS Trust introduced beekeeping as a safer, sustainable livelihood alternative. Training sessions helped families learn hive management with *Apis cerana* bees, building on their traditional knowledge. Community-run nurseries and women's participation strengthened conservation and income opportunities.

04. How life changed?

Beekeeping reduced risks and offered a steady source of income throughout the year. Families could invest in their children's schooling, while women gained stronger roles in household decisions and local organizations. Managed pollination improved crop yields, linking livelihoods with healthier farming systems.

05. Where we are now?

Today, communities benefit from safer honey production, stronger household incomes, and a reduction in poverty-related problems. Children, especially girls, have better access to education, and families are less vulnerable to hardship. At the same time, forests and native pollinators are better protected.

06. Building resilience

Beekeeping is now spreading across Tamil Nadu as a model of sustainable rural development. This approach empowers communities to balance economic needs with conservation goals. The journey shows that when local knowledge is combined with innovation, both people and nature can thrive.

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From honey hunting to beekeeping - Tamil Nadu, India

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Indigenous communities in Tamil Nadu, India, have traditionally practiced honey hunting as a key livelihood. However, increasing government-driven settlement policies and environmental concerns have prompted the need for a more sustainable alternative. This study examines the transition from honey hunting to beekeeping as a safer and more viable livelihood option for forest-dependent communities. Given their existing knowledge of honeybee behavior and seasonality, these communities can adapt to beekeeping with greater ease and success.

Honey hunting from wild colonies poses significant risks to both people and biodiversity. Lengthy forest treks, hazardous harvesting conditions, and habitat destruction endanger both honey hunters and native pollinators. Additionally, economic hardships limit access to education, particularly for girls, increasing the risk of child marriages. A safer, more sustainable source of income is needed to address these challenges.

SEEDS Trust, an NGO dedicated to nature conservation and sustainable rural development, has introduced beekeeping as an alternative livelihood. Their initiative promotes the domestication of “Apis cerana”, supports community-run tree nurseries, and actively involves women in sustainable practices. These efforts not only provide economic opportunities but also contribute to environmental conservation.

Beekeeping offers a safer and more efficient method of honey production compared to traditional honey hunting. It reduces physical risks, provides a stable income, and enhances food security. The financial benefits enable families to invest in education and reduce poverty related problems. Furthermore, pollination by managed bees boosts organic crop yields, benefiting local agriculture.

By integrating beekeeping with conservation efforts, communities can achieve both economic stability and biodiversity preservation. The domestication of “Apis cerana” ensures sustainable honey production while supporting forest ecosystems, empowering rural communities—especially women—to build long-term social and environmental resilience.