



paradise lost ... almost

Sudhendar Sharma


## Ever busy

Honeybees are a busy species in the tropical forests of Western Ghats, helping conserve the biodiversity of the region. Not only do these humming fliers pollinate commercial crops these help in pollination of wild species too, thereby maintaining the succession of plants and animal life in the tropical forests. For the forest dwellers, honey in the form of cash & employment is on offer. The wild Rock Bees (*Apis dorsata*) and the wild Indian honeybee (*Apis cerana*) have become integral part of forests in the Western Ghats. *Apis florae*, a small sized bee, and Stingless Bee known for medicinal value are also found in the region.



been evident in varying degrees across the Western Ghats.

Saving the honey bees may please David Pimental, a distinguished professor of agricultural science at the Cornell University, who has been the first to suggest that honey bee represent the most efficient energy production system on this planet. It may also interest Mandyam Srinivasan, a professor of biological sciences at the Australian National University, who has studied and applied flight skills of honeybees in developing robotic aircrafts. However, social action limits the scope of its activity to myopic vision of enhancing community's income with the broader vision (often hidden from local groups) of protecting the yet-to-be-valued ecosystem services of honey bees. At the community level the focus remains around sustaining honey harvests at pre-determined levels.



The existence of honeybees has been threatened by a diversity of factors: increased pesticide usage; destruction of native forests; and spread of viral epidemic. The Thai Sack Brood virus has seemingly come through the reckless introduction of exotic *Apis mellifera* bee into southern state, especially Kerala. However, thanks to the emergence of disease resistant strains of honeybee in the wild the virus spread has been contained for the present.

Save Honey Bees Campaign was launched in 1992 to conserve the indigenous honeybees in the Western Ghats; to discourage the introduction of exotic species; and to create awareness and lobbying with the government. The honey collected by the traditional forest dwellers is one of the major avenues for income generation. The Keystone Foundation in Kotagiri in the Nilgiri Hills is not only helping preserve this traditional art of honey collection from rock cliffs but is creating a market for the same sans middlemen. The Green Shop outlet of the Keystone Foundation has become one-stop shop for several non-timber forest products providing vertical linkage between producer and the consumer.



Unless the scope of intervention gets expanded, the value of any activity will remain limited. Community will be at a liberty to eject out of the system as soon as it's (limited) interests get fulfilled. To expect the communities to remain glued to help the protagonists' fulfill their wider goals will remain utopian, to say