

Oriental Honey Bee: Total dedication for common progress

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The Oriental Honey Bee or the Asiatic Honey Bee, as we are generally referred to, reflects our distribution over a geographical area which includes Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, China, Bangladesh, Thailand, Cambodia, Myanmar, Vietnam, Korea, Philippines, Indonesia, Java, Taiwan, Japan and Papua New Guinea.

This natural spread in an area inhabited by more than one third of the entire human population has ensured our continued survival over the ages. Also known as Apis Cerana, we have two subspecies in India, Apis Cerana-Indica and Apis Cerana-Cerana.

We can survive, thrive and perform in highly marginal environment and create possibilities of cross pollination and the finest honey in different geographical regions with varied climatic conditions, from coastal areas to snow capped terrain.

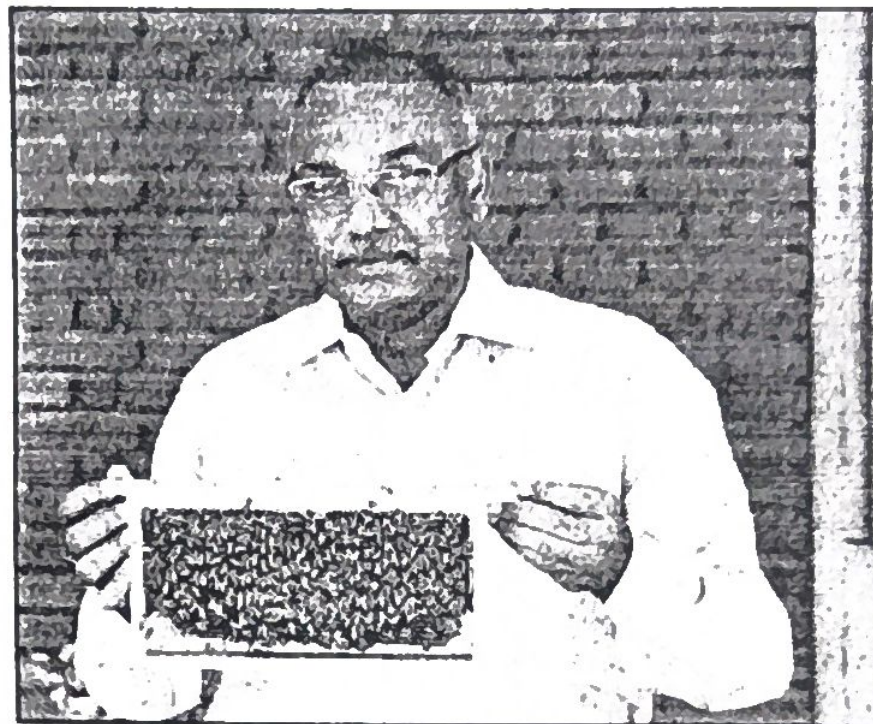
Humans are generally guided by extraneous considerations and usually err in taking correct decisions. We always have a perfect understanding of the circumstances and respond remarkably well to even complex situations.

Here are two instances to demonstrate our instincts evolved to perfection. The mother Queen is our de-jure and de-facto sovereign. In our self governed society she controls everything, our thoughts and all our actions. She directs all the activities towards the progress of the colony.

Supported by an excellent information system, she has an indomitable will and enormous capacity to take accurate decisions at the appropriate time. And these decisions involve a perfect understanding and synthesis of many variables like the weather conditions, the stored resources, the inflow of pollen and nectar, our numerical strength and our potential.

We, as workers also execute the entrusted age-defined functions with all our capacity, day in and day out. Any of us who cannot contribute with full efficiency leaves the colony of his own volition. None is allowed to be a burden on others and nobody flutters away from responsibility.

Total commitment is necessary. Even one percent less is not acceptable. However, our absolute loyalty to the Queen is only for the continued advancement of the colony. Any act of the Queen indicating weakness or a flaw is instantly taken



note of and communicated to everyone.

Immediately, a series of time bound actions are initiated to create a capable successor. Not a moment is wasted and there is no resistance either. Even the faltering Queen creates perfect situations for this change of the guard.

Humans can learn an unusual lesson in 'total dedication for common progress' and the significance of time from this complex mix of actions perfectly executed.

This one is also equally remarkable. The entire colony comprising of a Queen, thousands of female workers and a few drones is one biological unit. United in thought and action we are actually su-

per-organism. We collectively follow unwritten conventions.

Humans have to experience the amazing aspects of our regulated and controlled behavior. Even in crisis, when the resources are low, we work as a cohesive unit. Our queen is perhaps the first to understand the gravity of the situation, but we are also intelligent enough to realize the predicament. A despotic attitude, wherein few strong bees may take control of the resources and deprive others of the same is absent.

The possessions are used collectively and cooperatively. Even the last drop of nectar is shared and then we all face the consequences together. A great lesson in coexistence and

another instance of our inspiring response, one which has an extremely significant message for humans; that even in calamity there is no animosity, no antagonism, no dissent, only sagacity prevails.

If permitted, we can continue to enumerate numerous such simple lessons in managerial excellence and collective responsibility. Please try to understand our nature, our needs and our responses. Learn the amazing art of bee-keeping to appreciate us better. Become an urban beekeeper to explore new perspectives and new reasons to relax. Together, let us create and enjoy an eternal relationship of trust. We are prepared, but are you?

(Rakesh Gupta, a professional beekeeper and an expert trainer, is actively associated with Golden Hive Foundation, an organization dedicated to creating awareness about some amazing aspects of honey bees relevant to humans and the necessity of their conservation.)