



THE PLACE

Echoes of the Hive

Rakesh Gupta



***No living creature, not even man, has achieved
in the centre of his sphere, what the bee has achieved.***

—Maurice Maeterlinck in *The Life of the Bee* (1901)

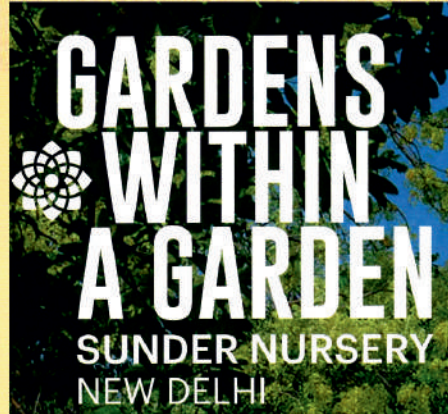
Bees are perfect indicators of a balanced environment, critical for a healthy ecosystem, and indispensable for the continuation of the human race. They are silent and meaningful pollinators, enhancing crop productivity and ensuring rural prosperity.

Now, devastated by our recklessness and restricted by environmental degradation, bees are swiftly fading away from the face of the earth. Bees are an endangered insect—globally it is estimated that about 15 per cent of the bee species are already extinct, and about 40 per cent of the remaining are vulnerable to extinction. Insensitive approaches to deforestation and human-induced climate changes have created major conservation issues. Bees are now desperately in need of an improved environment, better sensitivity, and immediate support.

Recognizing the need to move beyond indifference toward these vital pollinators, AKTC set out to create a deeper awareness and appreciation of their role at Sunder Nursery.

It should no longer be a fleeting glance on the flowers. It should be all about observation—trying to locate flora for the bees, bees on flowers, and bee hives in their natural habitats.

Since 2020, along with Golden Hive Foundation, AKTC has carried out sustained efforts towards not only develop plantation which would favour the bee population, but also use the park as a platform to create awareness for bee conservation. Following these efforts now one can easily observe social bees like *Apis dorsata* (the rock bee), *Apis cerana* (the eastern honey bee), and *Apis florea* (the dwarf bee) along with *Apis mellifera* (the European bee) happily buzzing on the vibrant flowers at Sunder Nursery. All of them are true native





bees that can survive, thrive, and perform in highly marginal environments and create possibilities of cross-pollination and the finest honey. Over the years, the project team has consciously created resources for all the species of bees to coexist in harmony with each other.

Solitary bees like the carpenter bee, blue-banded bee, cuckoo bee, leafcutter bee, bumble bee, resin bee, sweat bee, and others also find a secure abode at Sunder Nursery. One of the most important interventions here is with the stingless bee—a tiny bee of which only 17 species and subspecies have been documented in India.

The awareness initiatives about these native pollinators started in the year 2020 following which a systematic plantation plan was formulated with special focus on plants like *nirgundi*, *savani*, *jamun*, canna, coral vine, moringa, madar, lemon, basil, and poppy which provide sustainable resources and for them to propagate and multiply naturally. In the last count, there were more than 50 colonies of stingless bees within Sunder Nursery residing in cavities in enclosure walls and the trees, all adding to the biodiversity. Geared towards generating awareness for bees among visitors, the Wilderness Zone also houses exhibitions and bee boxes, which are regularly monitored by the team.

In addition, many workshops specially for schoolchildren are organized regularly at Sunder Nursery to sensitize the younger generations towards bees and insects. These workshops are aimed at deconstructing the misplaced phobia about the aggressive temperament of bees and resolve issues of human-bee conflict through greater awareness of the simple nature and the great role the bees play in a balanced ecosystem.

The variety of plantations at Sunder Nursery like trees, plants, vines—perennial, annual, and seasonal—provides for a sustained resource base, and caters to the needs of the multiple species/subspecies of bees coexisting at Sunder Nursery. Some of the species planted here are fruit plants like lime, *kinnow*, *aamla*, *anar*, jujube, *jamun*, and *jungle jalebi*, moringa, adusa, *kachnaar*, tucoma, trumpet vine, coral vine, etc. Additionally, herbs like basil, lucerne, mint, sunflower, curry leaves, fennel, coriander, mustard, pearl millet, and corn, and ornamental flower beds of zinnia, aster, cosmos, portulac, canna, gazania, daisy, and lily which provide the much-desired resources to the bees are also planted. The vegetable garden with bitter gourd, sponge gourd, bottle gourd, pumpkin, okra, tomato, chilli, etc. also adds to the resource base, especially during the critical summer season.

The bees have been on this planet for more than 100 million years. They are part of our cultural heritage and at Sunder Nursery there is a sincere attempt to conserve this important element of our biodiversity so that the divine association between the bee, the flora and humans continues undisturbed.

