

Inside India's Beekeeping Revival

By [Suprita Mitter](#) May 20, 2025

(Excerpts)

As bee populations shrink, rural and urban communities across India need to adopt sustainable beekeeping to revive ecosystems and a centuries-old relationship.



Bees are vital pollinators, responsible for helping about 75% of the world's food crops reproduce. Fruits, vegetables, grains, and even the plants that livestock graze on all depend on the pollination bees provide. Without them, our plates and supermarket shelves would look alarmingly empty. But over recent decades, bee populations have been steadily declining. Habitat loss, environmental changes, pesticides, and a lack of awareness have all contributed.

Rakesh gupta, a veteran beekeeper from Lucknow, believes that many factors leading to the extinction of bees are human-induced. "There is ignorance, indifference, and insensitivity on our part," he points out. As part of the Golden Hive Foundation, a women-led initiative that works across India — rural Gujarat, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and even in Delhi's urban green spaces, Gupta runs awareness workshops for colleges and local communities to promote ethical and empathetic beekeeping.

"Our fear of bees can be quite a hurdle. Many of us grew up associating bees with stings and danger. Often, we don't even know the difference between a honeybee and a wasp," says Gupta. "But bees only sting in self-defense." He believes creating year-round foraging opportunities and nesting habitats for different bee species not only keeps them healthy but also keeps them occupied and less likely to cross paths with humans.

Climate change can't be ignored either. "The weather and climate are changing way too fast for bees to keep up. What used to take a hundred years in terms of temperature rise has now happened in just the last 15. Bees simply don't have enough time to adapt the way they used to."





The Honey Factor



So what can we, as individuals, do?

Bees give us **honey**, which has long been prized in healing remedies and beauty treatments. Whether it's soothing a sore throat or nourishing skin, honey has quietly earned its place as a natural wellness staple.

While honey often takes the spotlight, it's just one part of the story. Gupta wants us to widen our lens. "Most people only associate bees with honey. Pollination would be second, and perhaps limited to those with some academic interest. Even farmers often don't know enough about the benefits of pollination," Gupta points out. "But only about 3% of bee species produce honey. The rest, which are often solitary, are still powerful pollinators. Yet their contributions go unseen and underappreciated.

These lesser-known species, crucial to local ecosystems, are also facing extinction due to habitat loss, monocropping (only one crop is planted in thousands of acres, which leaves no nectar or pollen for them in crops like rice or wheat. "So, you have depleted the resource base of the bees) and urbanisation. The bees, especially the ones that can't be migrated, have nowhere to go," he explains.

Broadly speaking, there are two types of bees: social bees and solitary bees. Social bees are the ones you often see in large hives, where thousands live and work together. Some of these species can be managed by humans, like in beekeeping, but others can't.

"In cities, the challenge is that they aren't really resource-rich for bees. Sure, there might be greenery, but not all greenery is useful. Just because there are trees doesn't mean they're feeding the bees, or butterflies, or even birds." Urban landscapes, dominated by ornamental plants and mono-species trees, often fail to support pollinators. But there's hope in rethinking what we plant.

"We could create small green pockets that are actually beneficial for pollinators. In many urban sectors, we're focusing on stingless bees. These bees don't have stingers, so there's no fear factor, and they're perfect for urban beekeeping."

'Bee' The Change

When Gupta started beekeeping in 2004, he realises that most newcomers lacked access to foundational knowledge. "People jump in without understanding basic principles. Bees get exploited, overworked, and undernourished, and the honey gets compromised," he says.

The great thing is that the science and methods for managing certain bee species have been around for a long time, like 200 to 300 years. The early beekeepers did the hard work: they studied, documented, tested, and passed down a wealth of knowledge. It's all laid out for us, like receiving a manual on a platter. It just needs to be applied.

- Support ethical beekeepers and beekeeping
- Buy real, seasonal honey, which is preferably raw, unprocessed, and locally sourced.
- Avoid chemical fertilisers and pesticides in your gardens and homes.
- Plant more native flowers and allow wild areas to thrive.
- Support pollinator-friendly urban planning that includes green rooftops, native tree planting, and mud-walled architecture. Because in saving the bees, we're not just protecting our food supply, we're helping restore a balance that's been quietly holding up the natural world all along.