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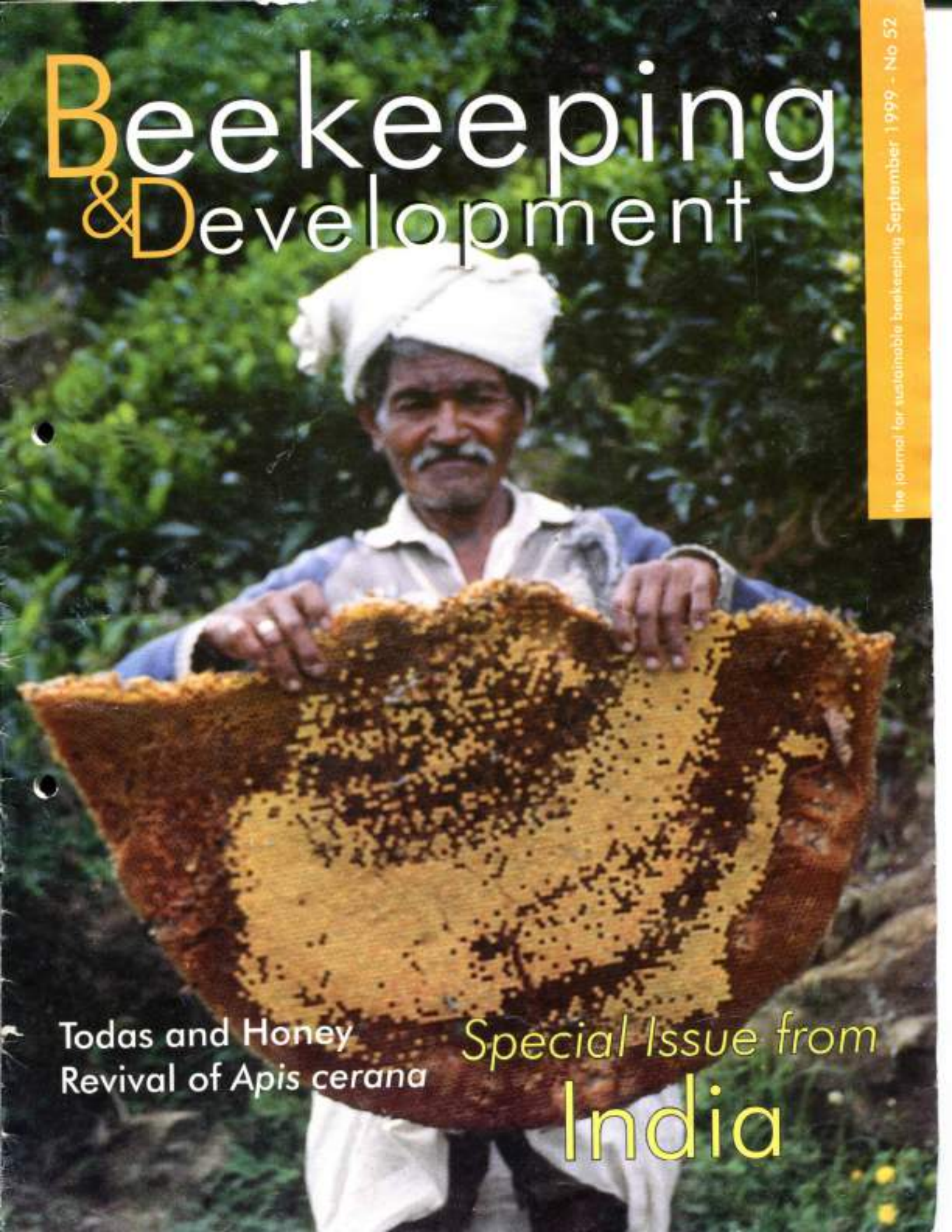

Todas and Honey
Revival of *Apis cerana*

Special Issue from
India

revival of *apis cerana* in south india

by Keystone

Beekeeping in Southern India has been a traditional activity with large groups of beekeepers earning their living from the indigenous Indian hive bee, *Apis cerana*. The Western tracts of this region provide plenty of floral sources from the tropical forests of the Western Ghats. However, during the early 90s, the situation changed completely with the attack of the Thai Sac Brood Virus (TSBV). It virtually wiped out the entire industry. This virus, which attacks colonies at the larval stage, even affected natural colonies of *Apis cerana* in the forests.

The first signs of the disease were apparent in 1990-91. However, it was still believed that the disease would be overcome with manipulations and better management methods. Several methods were tried - from Ribavirin, a verazide, recommended for paediatric use to traditional recipes of tobacco and neem mixtures. Intensive migratory beekeeping by beekeepers of Kanyakumari district was also responsible for the quick spread of the disease in large areas of Tamil Nadu.

According to information available from the Khadi Village Industries Board (KVIB), YMCA and Marthandam Beekeepers Cooperative Society (MBCS), about two hundred fifty thousand colonies were lost due to TSBV, of which two hundred thousand colonies belonged to migratory beekeepers. However, the following example of beekeepers shows how through sheer determination and better management techniques they have been able to recover from this loss and today, it is again a thriving industry in many southern districts.

Over 10,000 beekeepers were working full time with *Apis cerana* bees during the early 90's in Kanyakumari district of Tamil Nadu. The onset of the TSBV disease destroyed all their hives. Some beekeepers committed suicide, some mortgaged their land and house to purchase mellifera boxes. Officials and scientists from Central Bee Research and Training Institute, Pune as well as other institutions could not provide much of an input. Local beekeepers tried treating with herbal plants, neem, turmeric, etc. in the hope of finding a remedy. Requeening was also tried but it was effective only for a short period.

However, some of the small beekeepers and farmers did not give up hope and started again with the remaining colonies that had survived the attack. Today, 5-6 years later, the *Apis cerana* beekeeping is thriving, with a good amount of honey production. The figures given relate to one particular society - MBCS but this is just an indication of the rapid revival of beekeeping. There are a number of private honey traders too, who collect from beekeepers in the district.

Year	No. of Beekeepers	Honey Extracted (in kgs)	Wax Collected (in kgs)
1988-89	1,842	152,186	data not available
1989-90	1,842	127,451	" "
1990-91	1,842	129,083	" "
1991-92	1,842	72,265	" "
1992-93	1,842	19,189	" "
1993-94	1,842	598	26.00
1994-95	1,842	nil	nil
1995-96	1,842	90,480	864
1996-97	1,263	103,672	1,546
1997-98	1,263	149,255	4,072
1998-99	1,351	290,910	2,630

Given below is a sample of beekeepers in the district of Kanyakumari and details of their beekeeping:

Beekeepers	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
No. of bee boxes	300	400	150	110	250	250	1200
Working	190	350	125	110	210	160	1200
Not working	110	50	25		40	90	800
In working hives:							
Diseased colonies	8	50	50	2	30	60	120
Swarming boxes per year		10	5	0	8	2	100
Absconding boxes per year	24	20	8	5	20	20	300
Honey produced per year	400	1500	650	510	790	500	6000
Colonies getting new queens every year	190	350	125	90	198	160	1200

An interesting information is that the hives are made to local specifications which are different from the normal Indian Newton Hive. At the moment, very few diseased larvae are found in these hives and do not seem to pose a problem. Most probably, due to a cyclical behaviour of the disease, there has also been a natural break in the spread. Also, since beekeeping continued and expanded with the colonies that had survived, they might have developed a certain resistance to the virus. However, all this does not detract from the abilities of the beekeepers who carried on.

According to Mr. Suryanarayana of the All India Beekeepers Association, Pune, in 1996, "There is every chance that *Apis cerana* would revive and soon all the presently empty hives would be housed with bees. The beekeepers themselves were eager to start afresh and rebuild their beekeeping enterprise....

"While in Karnataka, we learnt that the Food and Agriculture Organization of United Nations was considering grant of a project to the State Government to revive beekeeping mostly with the indigenous bees. That surely was good news! "Revival of *Apis cerana* Beekeeping in Karnataka - A Tour Report" - M.C. Suryanarayana, *Indian Bee Journal* 58(1) :25-30: 1996.

The *Indian Bee Journal* 58(4) again, in its editorial, mentions that there is an increase in migration practices contributing to the revival of beekeeping with *Apis cerana* in Tamil Nadu.

In Andhra Pradesh, *Apis cerana* beekeeping continues to thrive in local districts. In TSBV affected areas of Srikakulam and Vishakhapatnam districts, the colonies showed revival and beekeepers reestablished apiaries.

Similar information from different packets, show that there is a slow but steady recovery of *Apis cerana* beekeeping.

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A Marthandam Hive (left) and Newton Hive