A number of dimensions of structural violence against women and their rights were touched upon during a discourse conducted ahead of the International Women’s Day. Violence against women has its manifestation in several forms. Apart from the direct violence like rape, murder and other which we can see, there are several forms of violence ingrained in our social system and a woman has no option but to suffer silently. Women, who constitute half of the population, constantly fight for their rights and dignity.

Rural women, most of whom, depend on natural resources for sustenance, are the worst sufferers of structural violence. The rapid urbanisation and the wave of the so-called development jeopardize their lives by squeezing their livelihood options. Noted speakers who represent various sectors ranging from social to academia shed light on the less-discussed form of violence that is widespread and deprives a significant portion of the population from their basic needs.

Apart from agriculture, collection and selling of minor forest produce have been the major source of livelihood for rural women. Most of these women had their remarkable contribution towards enriching and protecting the natural forests, which went a long way in attaining sustainability in their livelihood. They have never demanded a penny from the government or any agencies for their service to Mother Nature. This unwritten agreement between the Nature and the rural and tribal women which has been continuing since time immemorial is being interrupted constantly due to numerous interventions. These unwanted interventions not only have their negative impacts on the production of forest and uncultivated food, it breaches the natural stability created by the interdependence of human and the nature.

Here are a couple of flaws in our legal system which finds its expression in the form of violence against women.
In several instances, natural forest environment is ruined due to unjust plantations under various schemes. Creepers, shrubs and bushes are cleared from forest land on the plea of ensuring healthy growth of huge trees. Species like teak, acacia and chakunda are planted in the place. All these destroy the natural habitat and create a surrounding that is harmful not only for the human beings and animals, but for the environment too. This harmful practice reduces the production of varieties of uncultivated foods like mushrooms, greens, roots, fruits and berries and thus negatively impacts the food security of the tribals. Women are the worst victims of this practice as they are the primary gatherers of the forest produce. As the grazing land of wild animals gets ruined due to this practice, they are forced to stray into human habitations – the reason behind human-animal conflict.

The irony is that while plantation is being adopted for expansion of forest cover, the forest department under its working plan is continuing the practice of coupe felling. Even though they justify this measure as helpful for forest regeneration, a sapling is not equivalent to a grown-up tree, which enriches the nature with its flowers, fruits, roots, shades and many other things. Further, nature has its own regeneration potential to create a balanced environment maintaining its diversity to cater to the needs of wild animals and forest-dwellers. Tribal women feel secured in the lap of the Nature as all her necessities like food, shelter, clothing and even medicines get fulfilled. Apart from food security, the forest produce also makes them economically sound and thus provides a sense of social security. But practices like CAMPA and coupe felling not only have an adverse impact on women, it creates the ground to make them prone to be the victim of violence. The human interference through CAMPA plantation and forest department’s working plan destroys the valuable natural resources.

In the run for development, sustainability has taken a backseat. The glitz of ephemeral development seems to allure even the responsible citizens. Displacement comes up as a major problem during the implementation of developmental projects. Getting displaced from one’s native place and settling in an alien land without basic facilities makes the forest-dwellers insecure and the women are the worst sufferers. Even the government’s system of compensation is discriminatory so far as gender is concerned.
Women's marital status and age are counted as the parameters of their eligibility to avail compensation. While they are regarded as weak and vulnerable in our social system, the government, instead of taking initiatives to strengthen their position, makes the women even more helpless through its various provisions. It is unfortunate that gender bias is even ingrained in the government law.

Just recently, two villages were displaced from Debrigarh sanctuary in Bargarh district. Instead of rehabilitating them as per the rules, each family was given a compensation of Rs 10 lakh. While the rules have it that compensation should be given to each person aged above 18 years, it has imposed conditions in the case of women – the women eligible to get compensation need to be single. After the issue was raised, the male persons aged above 18 years were given compensation as per the rules. However, at least 18 girls of these two villages are yet to get the compensation amount. In a social system, girls are more vulnerable so far as their educational qualification and level of awareness is concerned. In such a situation, while the government system should prioritize the interests of women, it is unfortunate that the benefits elude them. Such discrimination is a form of structural violence.

In the current scenario, when issues like gender bias and degradation of natural resources are making headlines, it is high time we joined hands to restore our natural resources and bridge the gaps to attain gender equality.

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Cultural Disintegration; Tribes at receiving end

By Umakant Dash

Old gets replaced by the advent of new. This is very apt when we talk about culture. There has been a huge transformation in the culture, language, attire and lifestyles of the Indians thanks to the British who were able to rule the subcontinent directly.

The English-educated layer of the Indian society and even others absorbed the values, notions, culture and lifestyle of the Britishers. They remained Indian only in their physical appearance and colour, but became Europeans in their thoughts. They are considered as progressive – who tend to accept changes. The Indian consciousness has taken a certain form so far their inclination to accept changes in concerned. But the people in a number of regions, failed to adapt to the wave of the so-called progress and accept transformation. The Britishers created the impression that they need to be educated in order to adapt to the wave of ‘progress’.

If we look into the tribes of India, they have been residing inside the forests for generations with very little interaction with the outside world. However, they have their special presence in the history of Indian civilization. They found significant mentions in Indian mythology. They are treated with utmost respect and given a dignified place. Our great epics ‘Ramayana’ and ‘Mahabharata’ have mentions of tribes like Kirata, Nishada, Shabar and many others.

While Ramayana has the mention of Shabar king Guhaka, it also talks about Shabari, a destitute woman of Shabar community, who fed King Ramachandra with her left-over wild berries. Pandav brothers Bhima and Arjun’s marital alliance with forest dwellers and fighting between Arjun and Ekalabya, a Shabar boy, are glorified in ‘Mahabharata’. Thus the forest dwellers are a significant part of the Indian culture since time immemorial.

If we see the tribes from the prospective of their transformation following colonial exploitation, the colonial consciousness has least impact on their lives, lifestyles and culture. Even though acceptance to British culture was regarded as synonymous to progress and the society was ready to accept the new wave of European thoughts, the primitive tribes of India prefer to cling to their originality. But in due course of time, the tribes too absorbed the colonial thoughts.

If we look at the tribes in America, Africa and Australia, the aboriginal inhabitants were tortured and slain by the Europeans on the excuse of making them civilized and bringing them to the mainstream. Those who survived the torture, had no option but adopted a transformed culture, language and system imposed upon them by their oppressors. The surviving communities are now talking in European language and adopted their religion. Fortunately, the Europeans who had come to
India to establish a trade relationship with the country being attracted by its prosperity, rich civilization, culture and traditions, did not dare to do the same in India.

They had tried their best to infuse the European language, religion and thoughts in the indigenous language, culture and traditions of the tribals, but failed. They used terms like 'tribes', 'tribal' for the aboriginals of America, Australia and Africa. By these terms they mean a community inferior from Europeans, savage, black and hateful. Though they used the same terms – 'tribes' and 'tribal' – for the aboriginals of India, they did not mean to indicate them as inferiors or mean it in an insulting way. They used it to categorize them as different from other communities. Later, the Constitution of India adopted the word with an Indian synonym of 'Adivasi' which is a reflection of respect for the community. Now-a-days, words like 'Vanabasi' and 'Janajati' are also frequently used. The constitution also marked some groups of Janajati as scheduled category. Post-independence, a number of steps are being taken and crores of rupees are being pumped in to bring the community to the mainstream but the results are not as expected.

A major part – North-East, South and Central India – is dominated by tribals and Odisha is special state so far as the population of tribal people is concerned. At least 62 scheduled caste communities reside in the state. The tribals constitute 23.22 per cent of the total population of the state. While the tribals exist in every district, their number is centralised in the districts like Sundargarh, Mayurbhanj, Kandhamal, Koraput and Ganjam. The development of the state depends on the development of these tribes who are lagging behind so far as their socio-economic status is concerned. It is the responsibility of the whole nation to educate the communities.

While the diversity in culture, religion and other aspects have unified India, the diversity is regarded as one of the unique characteristics of the country. The difference on the basis of geography is also the highest in the country. So far as geography concerned, the tribals reside in forests and hilly terrains – they take birth there, grow there and perish there. They practice agriculture, collect forest produce to meet their needs of food and other necessities, live, sing, dance and observe their religious rituals on the lap of the nature. Their culture, religious beliefs, festivals, social systems and economy are based on nature and forests. They cannot imagine their lives without forests. Apart from trees, minerals, and rich natural resources, the tribal people coexist with wild animals and this is their way of life. While the forests are on the verge of extinction, they are also under tremendous pressure of mining extraction, road construction, industrialisation and electricity production. This pressure on the nature, puts terrific burden on the tribal way of living. They are at the receiving end of all these processes of the so called development. The happy dwellers of forests are not only displaced, their livelihood also undergoes massive change. It puts survival and development of the tribals in jeopardy.

As their culture is complementary to their lifestyle and livelihood, the destruction of forests and their habitat it is a major bolt to their culture. The tribal community lack potential do not have the potential. Though efforts are being made by
the government to check the disintegration of their culture, all its attempts have proved futile as these are aimed at making them adopt a non-tribal lifestyle and culture. The government has its logic behind it – bringing the so-called backward section of society to the mainstream. But, it is a wrong strategy adopted by the government.

Now let’s take a look at the valiant Kondhs and how the British left no stone unturned to disintegrate their cultural and social identity. A number of tribes reside in districts like Koraput, Kandhamal and Sundargarh. Kandhamal is the original place of Kondhs – a race that is regarded as indomitable and heroic. During British rule, they were ruled by Ghumusar kings. Later, they declared their fights against the British under Bhanja king Krushna Chandra Bhanja.

The victory of British during Palasi war in 1757, laid the foundation of British rule in India. Ten years later, when the British managed to enter Odisha and were in their attempt to strengthen their roots in the state, the Kondhs started their rebellion. During the Paik Rebellion (Paika Bidroha) in Odisha in 1817, around 400 Kondhs from Ghumusar marched to Khurda to extend their support to the Paiks in their fight against the British. They entered Banapur and raided the police station. The British was in constant terror of this aggressive community. The Paik rebellion was strengthened after the Kondhs joined it. The revolt of Kondhs of Ghumusar area also spread to Boudh, Dasapalla and Nayagarh – the areas which are dominated by Kondhs. The British rulers took a pledge to defeat the warrior race as they were sure that without defeating the race, it will be impossible for them to spread their empire. To take a stock of the situation and devise a strategy to defeat the tribal community, the rulers deputed George Edward Russel from Madras to Ghumusar. The cunning Russel took a stock of the situation and sent a report to the government regarding the situation in Kandhamal.

The report suggested two strategies to keep the Kondhs in grip – first: Entry of British military force into the Kondh-dominated area on the excuse of checking human sacrifice (Meria), the practice that was rampant at that time; second: Identifying the forts of the indomitable Kondhs and destroying those. The British military force entered Kandhamal and started attacking the Kondhs mercilessly. The cunning leader succeeded in creating an impression that it is the responsibility of the British to bring an uncivilized and barbaric race into the fold of civilization. The heroic race succumbed to the torture and wrath of the British. Other tribes in the state too faced the same fate.
The valiant struggle of the Kondhs, however, failed to get a proper place in the history. In December, 1837, Ghumusar went under the rule of the East India Company and later it came under the direct rule of the Ganjam district collector. In 1848, the rebellion of Kondhs spread to Boudh, Sonepur, Angul, Kalahandi and Jeypore.

Even in the United States of America, which is regarded to be in the peak so far as development is concerned, the aboriginals existed at the time when the Europeans reached there. They have been residing there for ages according to their own norms. They have their own rich culture, but the Europeans termed them barbarians and savages. They took all possible measures to defeat them on their own land and succeeded in their mission to a great extent. They managed to exterminate a majority of them.

A lot of communities from across reached the newly-discovered piece of land and started their civilization there. They used the aboriginals as animals and engaged them in agriculture and other menial work. The freedom-loving race was engaged as slaves in industries. They also imported people from African countries to use them as slaves. Gradually, the original inhabitants of America became aliens in their own land. At a point of time, they lost their existence. They remained the same in colour and physical structure, but their costumes, cuisines, religious beliefs, thought process, and views on life changed. They adapted to everything that is European – lifestyle, language, religion, food habits, education system and thought. After losing all their history and identity, currently, the next generation began searching for their identity. The same is going on in Africa too. It indicates that advent of a new culture and its hostility slays the original one and unfortunately we accept the new culture as an intervention for progress.

Suppression of scheduled tribe people is going on everywhere and unfortunately the government remains on the forefront. It is the government employees, money lenders and traders, who exploit the tribal people and inflict subhuman treatment to them.

Recently, during a conference, of which I was a part, four scheduled tribe community members from north Orissa were expressing their anguish maintaining that they are being destroyed in the name of development. “They (the government) took away our forest, our land, minerals and later displace us from our own land. We lost our language, belief, culture, our free laugh, spontaneous song, and graceful dance. We lost the rhythm of life in the name of education and development. We lost our identity, our belief and contribution to the great Indian culture. While some of us embrace Hinduism, some others Christianity and others Islam, but
where is the tribal culture, our unique system of marriage and other things.

They continued, “The non-tribals, though accepted the wave of development, a foreign language, customs, costumes and cuisine, they have not left their original thoughts. They are writing books after books on Bible, Bhashyas on Veda and conduct researches on several issues, but the tribals have shed everything their original. A number of so-called scholars have come up to research on tribals but there is no reflection of their original culture and lifestyle. Their literature is devoid of the feel and vibration of the tribals.

A tribal’s identity is not necessarily in his appearance and clothing, it lies in the vastness of his thoughts, his simplicity, community feeling, empathy and brotherhood. Like a river, a tribal knows how to sacrifice for others. His truthfulness and love for justice are his identity.”

“While on one hand we are being exploited, on the other we are shown sympathy kindness. Even when a tribal suffers from utmost poverty, he never feel impoverished. Because, a tribal has indomitable faith on Mother Earth and he knows that she will never disappoint him.”

They further added, “Whatever his clothing may be, whatever his education or occupation may be, but his consciousness should be a tribal’s consciousness – vastness and generosity. But in the current system of development, there is little chance of revival of the tribal’s identity.”

The four tribal youth ended their conversation with a line from Nehru’s Panchsheel Treaty (Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence): The tribals should be allowed to progress in their own way.

We should think over it. The intellectuals and those who research on tribals should spare a good thought on this before planning strategies for tribal development.
Environmental Thoughts of Gandhi for a Green Future

By Sasikala A.S.
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Abstract: The environmental concern as we understand today was not there at the time of Gandhi, but his ideas on development, technology, self-sufficiency, village Swaraj etc. disclose his environmental concern. Different streams of environmental philosophy have paid their indebtedness to Gandhi.

Introduction

We live in a world in which science, technology and development play important roles in changing human destiny. However, over-exploitation of natural resources for the purpose of development leads to serious environmental hazards. In fact, the idea of development is itself controversial in the present situation as in the name of development, we are unethically plundering natural resources. It is true that a science that does not respect nature’s needs and a development which does not respect people’s needs threatens human survival. The green thoughts of Gandhi give us a new vision to harmonise nature with the needs of people.

Gandhi was not an environmentalist in the modern sense. Although he did not create a green philosophy or write nature poems, he is often described as an “apostle of applied human ecology.”1 It is a fact that environmental concerns were minimal in Gandhi’s time; but eminent environmental writers like Ramachandra Guha consider him an early Environmentalist.2 His views on nature are scattered throughout his writings. His ideas relating to Satyagraha based on truth and non-violence, simple life style, and development reveal how sustainable development is possible without doing any harm to nature and our fellow beings. His idea that “nature has enough to satisfy every one’s needs, but not to satisfy anybody’s greed” became one line ethic to modern environmentalism.

Gandhi considered the earth a living organism. His ideas were expressed in terms of two fundamental laws: Cosmic law and the Law of Species. Cosmic Law views the entire universe as a single entity. Nothing could malfunction outside the threshold limits built into the grand system that includes both living and non-living phenomena.3 He believed that “the universe was structured and informed by the cosmic spirit, that all men, all life and indeed all creation were one.”4 He wrote: “I believe in the advaita (non-duality), I believe in the” essential unity of man and for that matter, of all that lives. Therefore, I believe that if one man gains spiritually, the world gains with him and if one man fails, the whole world fails to that extent.”5

Regarding the law of species Gandhi believed...
that without the cooperation and sacrifice of both human and non-human beings evolution is not possible. Being rational human beings, we are the custodians of the rest of creation and should respect their rights and cherish the diversity. It is for this reason that taking more than the required resources is seen as theft. Gandhi evolved these principles from his vast readings and understandings of religious traditions of Hinduism, Jainism, Christianity and Islam. His social, economic and political ideas were framed on the understanding of interdependence of the whole universe.

**Truth, Non-violence and Satyagraha**

Truth and Non-violence are the fundamentals of Gandhian Philosophy. Non-violence or Ahimsa means non-injury, but to Gandhi non-violence was much more than the absence of violence. He used it to mean non-injury in thought, word and deed. Ahimsa, Satyagraha and Tapasya were the basic principles that guided his life. Truth and Ahimsa are intertwined terms. To Gandhi truth is that “which determines the spirit in which one lives or the religious and ethical criteria which governs the way in which he thinks and acts.” He believed that truth can be achieved only by means of non-violence. It affords the fullest protection to one’s self-respect and sense of honor. If truth is the highest law, then non-violence is the highest duty. Gandhi claimed that truth was the most correct and fully significant term that could be used for God. To practice Ahimsa is to realize truth and to realize truth is to practice Ahimsa. The concept Satyagraha gave practical expression to the religious and ethical ideals of truth and non-violence. Tapasya or self-sacrifice is necessary to achieve the highest truth. It involves freedom from fear and a willingness to die. Gandhi believed that Satyagraha is nothing but tapasya for the truth. The suffering that has to be undergone in Satyagraha is tapasya in its fullest form. Gandhi explained his concept of non-violence in the following terms.

1. Non-violence is the law of the human race and is infinitely greater than and superior to brute force.

2. Non-violence affords the fullest protection to one's self-respect and sense of honor.

3. Individuals and nations who practice non-violence must be prepared to sacrifice everything for the welfare of the whole world.

4. Non-violence is a power which can be wielded equally by all - children, young men and women or grown up people, provided they have a living faith in the God of love and therefore have equal love for all mankind. When non-violence is accepted as the law of life it must pervade the whole being and not merely applied to isolated acts.

5. It is a profound error to suppose that whilst the law is good enough for individuals it is not for masses of mankind.

Satyagraha is an active form of non-violence. Gandhi considered it as truth force or soul force. Satyagraha is based on the idea that the moral appeal to the heart or conscience is
more effective than an appeal based on the threat or bodily pain or violence. Satyagraha itself originates from the belief that while violence to persons and property diverts the minds of the parties concerned from the real issues involved, non-violent action invites the parties to a dialogue about the issues themselves.

The ecological scope of non-violence is unlimited. Gandhi’s faith in non-violence and vegetarianism made him a votary of conservation of all diversity including all forms of life, societies, cultures, religions, and traditions. Arne Naess, the pioneer of deep ecology argued that ecological preservation is non-violent in nature. Naess introduced and Thomas Weber systematized the relation between non-violence, self-realization and mutual interdependence of all living beings in the following points.

1. Self-realization presupposes a search for truth
2. All living beings are one
3. Himsa (violence) against oneself makes self-realization impossible.
4. Himsa against a living being is himsa against oneself
5. Himsa against a living being makes complete self-realization impossible

Naess used these principles to evolve a broader philosophy of environmentalism i.e., deep ecology. He believed that Gandhi’s Utopia is one of the few that shows ecological balance. As Gandhi envisaged, non-violence has the power to solve all our problems, including ecological crisis. Many thinkers considered the Indian Environmental Movements like Chipko movement, Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) etc. as the living example of Gandhian Environmentalism and they consider Gandhi as a “man with deep ecological view of life, a view much too deep even for deep ecology.” The key agenda of the Chipko movement was that carrying forward the “vision of Gandhi’s mobilization for a new society, where neither man nor nature is exploited and destroyed, which was the civilization response to a threat to human survival.” All these together made Gandhi an exponent of Indian environmentalism.

Gandhi’s Critique of Modern Civilization

Modern industrial civilization has had a huge impact on human kind as well as on the environment. It made a small part of the population wealthy at the cost of exploiting the world’s natural resources. Gandhi believed that it propagates nothing other than the hunger for wealth and the greedy pursuit of worldly pleasures. Hind Swaraj, published in 1909, criticized the modern civilization as “‘satanic’. He observed that ‘machinery is the chief symbol of modern civilization; it represents a great sin. It is machinery that has impoverished India.’

The distinguishing characteristic of modern civilization is an indefinite multiplicity of wants, whereas ancient civilizations were marked by an imperative restriction upon, and a strict regulating of these wants. Gandhi believed that the ancient civilizations were religious in nature which would surely limit worldly ambitions.

Gandhi believed that true civilizational values are not present in modern civilization. In Hind
Swaraj Gandhi argued that what we think as 'civilization' today is an illusion, and that any civilization that ill treated outsiders could hardly avoid ill treating its own people. Gandhi’s critique of western civilization and science emanates from his dissatisfaction with the divorce of science and progress from morality. He was not against the technology, but the technologism which creates a hierarchical relationship among men as well as between men and nature. Gandhi believed that the greatest achievements of modern civilization have been weapons of mass destruction, the awful growth of anarchism, the frightful disputes between capital and labor and cruelty inflicted on innocent, dumb, living animals in the name of science and technology. He believed a science to be science only if it afforded the fullest scope for satisfying the hunger of body, mind and soul.

Modern civilization involved an egregious amount of violence against nature which was largely seen as man’s property. This undermined man’s unity with his environment and fellowmen and destroyed stable and long established communities. Natural resources were ruthlessly exploited and their rhythm and balance disturbed while animals were killed or tortured for human needs. Gandhi believed that villages would soon disappear due to the urbanization which is part of modern civilization, and of which environmental degradation is a product.

While the western environmentalists spread the message of “going back to the nature” Gandhi spread the message of “going back to the villages”. He believed that the “the blood of the village is the cement with which the edifice of the cities is built.”

**Ecological Economics of Gandhi**

Modern economy is “propelled by a frenzy of greed and indulges in an orgy of envy.” It makes man more materialistic at the risk of majority and the environment. Gandhi asserted that “true economics stands for social justice; it promotes the good of all equally, including the weakest and is indispensable for decent life.” Dr. J C Kumarappa summed up Gandhian economic ideas as constituting philosophy that sought to create an “economy of permanence”. All nature is dovetailed together in a common cause”. Kumarappa argued that “when this interconnection works out harmoniously and violence does not break the chain, we have an economy of permanence.” He identified different types of economies and realized that the highest form of economy is the economy of service which Gandhi suggests. Gandhian economic concepts like swadeshi, trusteeship, bread labouretc received attention and acceptance from the whole world.

The swadeshi spirit encourages us to consume commodities made from our own villages, thus promoting small scale industries which help ordinary farmers and weavers to live happily. Limitation of wants is another important aspect in Gandhian economics. Gandhi urged us to minimize our wants to minimize the consumption and thus reduce the burden on nature by avoiding hazardous wastes. Our civilization, culture and swaraj depend on the restriction of wants. Gandhi realized that the modern civilization and the market economies have a tendency to multiply the wants and needs of common people. Bread labour is another important economic concept of Gandhi. He valued bodily labor saying “the rains come not through intellectual feats, but through sheer
bodily labor. It is a well established scientific fact that where forests are denuded of trees, rains cease, where trees are planted rains are attracted and the volume of water received increases with the increase of vegetation.  

The Gandhian concept of bread labor encourages the use of human hands and body instead of machines to produce essential items like vegetables, cloth etc.

The economic ideas of Gandhi differed from conventional economics and bore close resemblances with ecological economics. The term sustainable development was not much discussed at Gandhi’s time, but his ideal vision of the world known as Sarvodaya safeguard the rights of future generations, through the welfare of all. The following table shows the difference between conventional economics and Gandhian economics and reveals how it contributes to environmental sustainability.

**Gandhian Conflict Resolution and Environment**

Conflict resolution is an emerging branch of social science which deals with the techniques to resolve conflicts between nations or between individuals. It can also be applied to address environmental issues.

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**Table 1: Differences between Conventional and Gandhian Economics**

<table>
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<th>Economics</th>
<th>Conventional</th>
<th>Gandhian Economics</th>
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<tr>
<td>World View</td>
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<td>Macro Aim</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Nature of production</td>
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<td>Nature of Power</td>
<td>Power vested in the industrial nations or the corporate (centralization of power and resources)</td>
<td>Power belongs to people (decentralization of power and resources)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcome</td>
<td>Urbanization, environmental crisis, resource depletion and natural calamities.</td>
<td>Village swaraj, and environmental sustainability</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Whenever there is a mismatch between different interests, conflicts arise. Gandhian non-violence or Satyagraha is accepted by many as an effective technique of conflict resolution. Gandhi never used the word ‘conflict resolution’; instead he use terms like mediation and ‘negotiation’. He never considered conflicts as problems, father, they were opportunities for moral growth and transformation.

‘The contribution of Gandhi in conflict resolution was his “working hypothesis that the non-violent resolution of group conflict was a practical goal.”26 His philosophy of truth and nonviolence contribute to the theory of conflict resolution. Gandhi believed that truth is one and different individuals perceive it differently. Nobody can claim that their perception is correct. If we are not sure about the supreme truth there is no need of violence or conflict. In order to realize truth one should have to realize God. Self realization is the way to realize God. Self realization will lead us to refrain from violence against other beings.

So far as the Indian environmental movements are concerned, the conflict is often between different interest groups or between the state and people, and are often led by peasant groups or tribal people. It is often in the form of struggle for the protection of livelihood control over resources or some form of self-determination.

Environmental injustice, and marginalization are considered as instances of structural violence. As Gandhi believed violence and counter violence will never help to resolve conflicts, he considered Satyagraha as the “only force of universal application be that of Ahimsa or love” to fight these kinds of problems.27 It is entirely different from mere passive resistance, where there is no scope for mutual love. In passive resistance, Gandhi believed “there is a scope for hatred” but “Satyagraha may be offered to one’s nearest and dearest.”28

Environmental movements in India used Satyagraha as the moral equivalent of war. Forest Satyagraha was first used effectively in Chipko movement to protest against deforestation. Gandhian techniques like padayatras were conducted to save nature. Conflict resolution techniques based on non-violence and self sacrifice were used by environmental activists like Chandi Prasad Bhatt, Baba Amte, SunderlalBahuguna, MedhaPatker and others.

**Conclusion**

Several decades before the rise of environmental movements, Gandhi picked up fundamental environmental issues like over-
consumption, violence to man and nature and so on. There are several movements in different parts of the globe fighting against environmental injustice. Some of them are violent in nature, but in India environmental movements have been forged by Gandhian traditions of non-cooperation and non-violence. The Gandhian definition of non-violence is far more than mere passive resistance, rather “it is a way of life, which affects everything /from what a person eats through to how they relate to the world around them”\textsuperscript{29}. Gandhian Satyagraha often functions as a conflict resolution technique. Gandhi wrote much about the colonial power, its impudence, and the heinous destiny it has imposed on the country. He criticized modernization and industrialization for its lethal effects on the society. He believed that “the economic imperialism of a single tiny island kingdom (England) is today keeping the world in chains. If an entire nation of 300 million took to similar economic exploitation, it would strip the world bare like locusts.”\textsuperscript{30} He observed that the Indian situation demanded a new vision on economics which is centered on agriculture and village industries. He conceptualized a new economic order based on ecological balance. The village romanticism of Gandhi has been considered as central to his environmental philosophy. However, going back to the thoughts of Gandhi is essential to build up a green future, where there is no place for human greed.

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Our endangered biosphere
It’s time to stop mindless exploitation of nature

By Nadiyachand Kanungo

March 23 is observed as the “World Meteorological Day.” It holds immense significance as it implies our growing concern over climate change and environmental degradation.

March has been chosen by the climatologists as the month to generate awareness about global warming and climate change as it is the month when winter completes its term and the summer starts its course. The earth witnesses a rise in temperature combined with water scarcity.

Water, air flow, soil and temperature are very important factors of our biosphere and a balance of these factors contributes to a healthy biosphere. An increase or decrease of any of these factors is responsible for climate change. Nature accords a certain standard to each of these factors and other elements which constitutes it. If the standard of any of these factors is violated, natural disaster occurs and such disasters are now occurring more frequently. Concerned citizens across the globe have now come together to discuss about climate change and how to mitigate its impacts.

Now a days, the term eco-system is widely being used. The term eco-system means a community made up of living organisms and nonliving components such as air, water and soil. Ecosystems include interactions among organisms, and between organisms and their environment. Human interference has a very negative impact on the ecosystems throughout the world and this results in climate change. Several species of plants and animals and birds have faced extinction from the planet due to human interference and a lot more are on the verge of extinction.

Ecosystems are diseased throughout the world. If we see the ecosystem in the context of Odisha, the state was rich with dense forests comprised of various native species of plants, birds, animals and mineral resources. It has degraded considerably with depletion of green cover and vanishing of a number of plant and animal species.

A major portion of the area, which belongs to the nine princely states (Gadajata) of yester years, is dominated tribes. The area was once rich with natural resources and was peacefully inhabited by as many as 62 tribes, who were solely dependent on nature and natural resources. Their peaceful existence was thrown into winds with the extensive mining extraction.

These nine-tribal dominated districts are situated on the Eastern Ghats and the hill range used to be their sole means of sustenance. The extensive mining extraction in the serene hills not only negatively affected the ecosystem, it also had its negative impacts on the tribals and their way of living.

A healthy climate is closely related to serene hills, the source of rivers, lakes, streams and other
water resources. Existence of these pristine water resources cannot be thought of without hills. The hills too are the parents of a number of tribes. These nine tribal-dominated districts – Keonjhar, Mayurbhanj, Sundargarh, Kandhamal, Kalahandi, Gajapati, Koraput, Malkangiri and Nabarangpur – are parts of Eastern Ghats and act like watersheds.

These mineral-rich districts have enough land to set up industries and another advantage is that the government faces least protest from the inhabitants against the mining and industrialisation initiatives. The government intends to implement its development initiatives in these areas through an agency and the shape of development is still unclear.

Apart from the Eastern Ghats, the mother of all water resources, there is no room in other areas to set up industry. If any industry comes up on the upper catchment and that too at the source itself, pollution is an inevitable outcome. Polluted rivers are the reasons behind sea pollution. Air pollution is also a natural outcome of all industrial activities. It does not happen in our state only, the whole world is a victim of extensive and unmindful industrialisation. The water and the air have a certain capacity to bear pollution. If it exceeds the limit, the whole planet will be a bundle of toxic material.

While the forest cover has reduced considerably due to industrialisation and urbanization has taken its toll on the green cover, the matter of concern is that the Odisha Forest Development Corporation (OFDC) is engaged in unmindful felling of innumerable trees under several excuses. The whole universe has to face the wrath of climate change in its worst form if rampant felling of trees goes on unabated by the OFDC.

If we look at the season system, we used to experience six seasons earlier. But the number has been reduced to three – rainy, winter and summer. And gradually, summer has begun its sway over other seasons. Unprecedented heat – as high as 40 degrees Celsius – is recorded in March and that too in coastal region.

Too much of carbon dioxide (CO2) in the atmosphere acts as a blanket trapping heat and warming the planet. In the absence of green cover to sink carbon, the planet has to bear the brunt of global warming and the resulting climate change.

Excessive use of fossil fuels like coal, oil and natural gas for energy and burning of forests results in excessive carbon accumulation which overloads our atmosphere. It devoid the atmosphere of its life force and results in depletion of ozone layer. The density of the layer is reducing and the holes are growing bigger, thanks to the excessive use of fridges, air conditioners and other such appliances. Degradation of the layer which checks the hazardous ultraviolet ray of the sun from entering the earth, is a matter of concern.

Every country tries to achieve a prosperous economy. But economy should be sustainable. However, the current economic policy which exploits the natural resources is destructive not
only for a particular region or the country, but for the whole universe.

The growth in the world population has put the ability of earth to feed mankind in jeopardy. Excessive application of chemical fertilizers and pesticides has polluted the soil. It is high time we switched over to application of organic fertilizers and pesticides. But it takes time to prepare fertilizers and it seems we are not able to afford so much time for it.

If we continue such exploitation of water, air, natural forests and soil, it will increase the pace of destruction resulted by climate change.

**Plantation initiatives can never be a substitute of the natural forests.** Recently, our Chief Minister announced that the state records creation of 8000 sqkm of forests. However, ‘forests’ is a wrong terminology used in this case, it can be termed as ‘tree cultivation’ instead.

It is high time, we protected our natural forests from smuggling, fire outbreak, and clearing it for marijuana plantation and at the same time conserved our water resources and soil.

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**Tale of a Forest Hamlet**

*Puspanjali Satpathy*

The reasons behind the formation of hundreds of human settlements inside the forest which are yet to be accorded revenue village status are not only diverse but their history too is very interesting. According to census-2011, the number of such villages stands at 613. Besides, there are several such villages which have not been included in government records and they are yet to be identified. Though the names of the villagers have been merged with one revenue village or the other in an urgency to give them voting rights, they are yet to get the right to their land and caste status as per the government rule. They also don’t get the basic amenity of a human being. Though the timing and reason behind the establishment of the human colonies is different, one common factor among them is all the villages still wait to get revenue village status. Even as The Forests Rights Act (FRA) has all the provision to accord them the status, not a single forest village and unsurveyed village of the state has accorded such status even after a decade of enforcement of the Act.

**Provisions under the Forests Right Act**

Forest human settlements have got a mention in Section 3(1) (h) of the FRA. All the forest villages, old human settlements whether they are recorded or not, unsurveyed villages and other villages inside the forests are entitled to be converted and settled as revenue villages. To make the conversion process clear, details explanations were made in FRA’s amended law of 2012. On the identification of such colonies and merger with revenue villages, Section 2(A) says “The list of unrecorded, unsurveyed, unsettled forest villages would be prepared and passed in a resolution through the Gram Sabha following which it would be submitted to a sub-divisional level committee”.

The process of conversion would progress after the list is submitted by the sub-divisional
committee to a district-level committee. Further, a guideline was laid by Union Tribal Affair ministry to convert the unsurveyed villages into revenue villages. All stages of conversion are clearly mentioned there in the guidelines. Despite all these measures and several letters from State Scheduled Tribe Development Department to the district collectors, there is no headway in this direction. To expedite the conversion of unsurveyed villages into revenue villages, the state revenue department has issued a fresh guideline on February 2, 2017 marking clearly the work and responsibility of the collectors, sub-divisional level committees, revenue officials and state board of revenue after several number of discussion at state-level review committee. Besides, if the village is established before its identification on the basis of the census, it can be accorded to revenue status. The list of such villages has been sent to the respective collectors.

According to the information collected by the locals, the number of unsurveyed villages is more than the number shown in government record. The government rule 2(A) says the list available at panchayat, sub-division, district levels should be sent to state level monitoring committee (SLMC). However, no move has been made so far in this direction. Information on a few villages of Sambalpur district has been produced before the district welfare officer. The collector should notify every village on that basis. This is the preliminary process of conversion of an unsurveyed village into a revenue village.

**Status of unsurveyed villages in Sambalpur district**

There are seven unsurveyed villages in Sambalpur district, according to last census report. However, locals claim there are 11 such villages of which Survejal and Guruapada are the colonies for the people displaced by Rengali dam. Each family of both the villages has got 6 acres and 50 decimal of land each as compensation. They now live under the jurisdiction of demarcated protected forest and got their lands there. However, these two villages are yet to be given the status of revenue villages. The administration has begun the preliminary process for conversion. Many dam outstees living in DPF are still struggling with their demand for four revenue villages in Deogarh district.

Questions are raised over the interest, transparency and responsibility of the officials as the enforcement of law, clear provision under the law, required guidelines and most importantly frequent reprimand by the higher officials are yet to bear any result. Forget about making the forest dwellers aware on the law, conscious common citizens are also not aware on the subject. In view of this, Vasundhara has made an attempt to assist the government and administration to convert the unsurveyed villages into revenue villages. Meanwhile, a few unsurveyed villages have been included in the drive while several others are yet to be touched. After Survejal, Guguapada, Sahajbahal and Dangateka, Vasundhara recently touched Khuntiamba.

**Unsurveyed village Khuntiamba**

The village is located at the heart of Badarama sanctuary under Jamankira block of Kuchinda sub-division. There are 23 to 24 families in the village and most of them belong to tribal Kondh, Ganda and Kishan communities. There is no road connectivity to the village due to the
presence of a canal. The village is surrounded by green paddy fields followed by the boundary wall of the sanctuary. Only two hamlets with some tile and thatched houses comprise the village. While the crops in nearby areas were hit by planthoppers (chakada poka), they were unaffected in Khuntiamba village. The nearby forest enhances the fertility of the soil. Evidently, the paddy growers use less fertilisers in their cultivation. Vasundhara came to know about the history of the village after speaking to few residents.

The government launched a drive to cleanse part of reserved forest to rehabilitate the oustees of Hirakuda dam project during 1954-55. Some people of nearby Dungapal, Ledimal and Pandibahal areas were engaged to level the land by felling the trees and removing their roots. At that time the forest was dense and there were many wild animals in the area. The displaced people had been dropped here in two vehicles. However, they didn't dare to stay here and went back out of fear. So, the landless workers engaged in the levelling of the land started living here and made it suitable for living and cultivation. Now, every family owns three to four acres of cultivable land. Apart from cultivation, they manage to earn a bit from forest resources and by working as daily labourers. While the entire state witnesses bonded labourer system, the youths of Khuntiamba claim none of them ever migrate to other states in search of work. The age of Khuntiamba is as old as the Hirakuda dam project i.e. about six decades. As regards the Hirakuda oustees, the Khuntiamba villagers are not aware about their place of rehabilitation. It is unlikely that the government has kept track of them. According to the villagers, the people evicted by Rengali dam also came to Khuntiamba in a vehicle but had to go back after seeing the settled human habitation here. While it is the prime duty of the government to ensure proper rehabilitation of the oustees, the administration is least bothered about them. The fact came to light when Vasundhara spotted some villages where the displaced people have rehabilitated themselves but the villages are yet to get the status of revenue villages. Apart from bearing the pain of displacement, they are leading lives sans any rights. There are examples where the evicted people have got provisional pattas – DC Patta for Hirakud displaced and K pattas for Rengali displaced – those never provide them the rights. Further, the forest department also forcibly plant saplings on their lands undermining their rights. It is relevant to discuss about the displaced people and the residents of unsurveyed villages since their problems are similar.

The residents of Khuntiamba never put forth their demand to convert their village into a revenue village. They are in dilemma as to how they can seek such rights after getting settled down on government land without any rights even as six decades have passed since they moved to the forest. They are also ignorant about revenue laws meant for the landless persons. Then their dwelling place is located in the middle of Badarama sanctuary. They are not aware that there are chances of settlement of the land in their favour since they know nothing about FRA-2006. When asked whether they ever approached the government for revenue village rights, one of the villagers said they didn't know about it. The level of awareness is such even after 10 years of enforcement of the Act. The reason is the department officials have never taken initiative to make people aware. This is not
only surprising, this is the reality of administrative system.

Apart from their residential houses and farmland, no other basic amenities are made available to the residents of Khuntiamba. The nearest Anganwadi centre at Kurulukhman village is two km away while the nearest school at Pandibahal is three km from Khuntiamba. The village comes under Chakuliabahal panchayat and people have to travel nine km to collect rations under PDS while the nearest health centre is at Fasimal, 10 km from the village. They didn't have electricity facility even after half a century of this village coming into existence. The village was given the facility only in 2013. There is a cremation ground at one end of the village but no pasture land. Moreover, they have to meet the need of other villages. Explaining their plight, the villagers said they cannot raise rabi crops in their land following paddy cultivation as the nearby villagers leave their cattle in the paddy fields of Khuntiamba. Though they raise maize by putting up fence around the field, it becomes increasingly difficult for them to keep elephants away from their crops. They are only trying to save paddy giving their best.

It is clearly mentioned in FRA guidelines that during conversion of unsurveyed villages into revenue villages, the residents can identify lands for their houses, school, hospital, playground, grazing land, cremation ground, place of worship, community centre and water bodies and other infrastructural development. But there is no land in Khuntiamba village to develop such facilities while the forest is next to the village boundary. The forest activists expressed their apprehension about the status as there were chances of the villagers cutting down the forest. There is provision in law to meet the basic needs of the people once a village is declared a revenue village and the law doesn't permit to chop the forest. The villagers said apart from the area given to them, they haven't touched any tree of the forest. Moreover, they have engaged themselves in the protection of the forest. They are dependent upon the forest for their food and other things. So, they can't even think of destroying it.

A family of Khuntiamba has recently shifted to Baribandh of Kuchinda sub-division and has given a written submission not to return to the village. The family cultivating about eight acres of land is still lying unoccupied. They have given a proposal to the villagers to use the land for the cause of community.

There are certainly problems with the people but the solution lies with them only. It can be done taking them into confidence. However, the efforts seem missing in this direction.

It is really a great challenge to meet the needs of the people with maintaining the splendour of forest and environment.

The administration can lay emphasis on the mass participation in proper execution of
government laws. Settlement of forest villages and preparation of their maps would not only ensure the rights of the forest dwellers, illegally entry into the village can also be checked in later stage. This would streamline and protect the forest resources.

Meanwhile, the residents of Khuntiamba village are gradually becoming aware of government law and sending the resolutions passed in Gram Sabhas in the presence of sarpanch to the sub-divisional committee. Their effort to get the rights, meant for all Indian citizens, would definitely bear fruits. However, the commitment of the political leaders, panchayat representatives, administration carries a great significance.

Machhakunda Displaced left in the Lurch

By NrusinghanandaPanigrahi

Machhakunda, despite being the first hydroelectric project of Odisha, has not been able to address the woes of the people who have sacrificed their lives’ best for the venture. A number of people are still living under sub-human conditions inside forests and cutoff areas, thanks to the indifferent attitude of the government.

Even though a major part of the project belongs to the state, Odisha claims ownership over 30% of the electricity produced from the project, while Andhra Pradesh enjoys a lion share – 70% of the total electricity produced. So far as employment is concerned, the project engages 30% of the total manpower, while the remaining 70% man power belongs to Andhra. It is a historical injustice meted out to Odisha. Attempts have been made since 2002 to make a 50:50 share, but due to lack of political will, there has been no headway.

Construction of the project was started in 1950 and the first phase work got completed in 1957, when three out the six units were made functional. Like in every major hydel projects, the problem of displacement and rehabilitation posed a major roadblock in the completion of the Machhakunda project. At that time, there was no rule to rehabilitate and compensate the project displaced. Due to lack of land settlement, the people too did not possess land records, for which, the displaced people were deprived of compensation.

Though the government has no proper and detailed record regarding land acquisition and the displaced people, some information collected from old files maintained that total 24,000 acres of land was acquired for the water reservoir. While 18,200 acres of land belongs to Odisha, 5800 acres belongs to Andhra Pradesh. Out of
the total 238 villages which were submerged in water, 156 belong to Odisha and 82 belong to Andhra Pradesh. Besides, the Power Generation Centre at Jalaput, the Diversion Dam, Valve House and Winch House were also situated in Odisha.

Here are the problems of the submerged area:

**Problems due to lack of land record:** As the residents did not possess land records due to lack of settlement, they failed to get the compensation for displacement and other benefits. At that time no leader or private organisation was there to fight for the rights of the project-affected people. The inhabitants dispersed into nearby forests and high lands and the tribal community people were badly affected due to this.

**Basic facility eludes:** Basic facilities elude them in their new settlements as they do not possess land records. Most of them were settled down at Malkangiri.

**Problems to get caste certificate:** The displaced people had to run from pillar to posts to get caste certificates as they did not have land pattas. The tribals and scheduled caste communities were deprived of all the benefits meant for them.

**Miserable rehabilitation colonies:** The rehabilitation colonies have been running in a very miserable condition. There was no facility for education, road communication, electricity, health and drinking water.

**Double displacement:** Most of the residents displaced for Machhakunda project were earlier displaced from Dandakaranya of Malkangiri. In none of these cases, measures were taken for their rehabilitation.

**Social problem:** Most of the displaced people belonging to Paraja, Gadaba, Rana, Mali and Kondadora communities, were settled at places which were inhabited by Koya, Bonda and Bidayi communities. The displaced people faced social problems. They faced difficulties in getting brides or grooms for marriage and other issues related to clash in customs and traditions. The original inhabitants of the place look the newly settled people as inferior to them.

**Problems of cutoff areas:** There are some places inside the reservoir which are situated in a comparatively high land and inhabited by the original residents. Even though they did not have to get displaced, they remained cutoff from the rest of the world. They had to face several problems, some of them are as follows:

- Most part of their homestead and agricultural land got submerged in water, but they failed to get compensation. They were also not rehabilitated.
- Even 50 years after their displacement, they lack very basic facilities like communication (in water route as that is their sole means of communication), electricity, drinking water, education and healthcare.
All government facilities elude them as they lack land records

Both Odisha and Andhra Pradesh governments claim their ownership over some villages and the families residing in the cutoff areas are at the receiving end.

A brief note on the displaced families and submerged area:

Out of the 24,000 acres of land submerged in water, 18,200 acres of lands come under Odisha and the rest 5800 acres belong to Andhra Pradesh

Out of total 238 submerged villages, 156 comes under Odisha and 82 under Andhra Pradesh

There are total 2406 affected families in Odisha, of which, 232 families belong to scheduled caste community and 1309 belong to scheduled tribe community

The submerged villages in Odisha include Nilaram, Sitamuddha, Petalgua, Banadhalapadar, Sanatalapadar, Ratanpadar, Panaspadar, Palaspadar, Tambaguda, Gunagarh, Kharakonda, Suban, Kanta, Pandarikonda, Tingaliputa, Lali, Sikarpur, Kataraguda and Arapilam.

A total of 70 villages were acquired for the project and the Government of Odisha acquired 20,794 acres. The private land acquisition amounts to 13,600 acres and it includes 7,210 acres acquired from STs and 749 acres from SCs

While Rs 48,1, 490 was given to the affected families as compensation, a total of 2015 families including 1089 tribal families were rehabilitated.

These families were rehabilitated in 28 villages including Tarala, Kota, Sadashibapaur, Kenduguda, Somanathpur, Pilokusumi, Atana, Mala, Maheswarpur, Uttarpadar, Jedimba, Janmarai, Diagudi and Arsi.

The total number of displaced people is 16,000 including 8200 scheduled tribe and 1700 scheduled caste community members.

The project-affected gram panchayats include Jalaput, Atanda, Paraja, Badapada, Polur, Kularsinga and Padua.

There is no information regarding Machhakunda displaced anywhere, not even in the office of the hydro-electricity project. The writer, had collected some information while he was the Chief Engineer.

A number of private organisations are fighting for the rights of the displaced people of Hirakud, Rengali, Upper Kolab, Ang, Indravati, HNL plant and other projects. However, not a single organisation has come up to present the problems of the Machhakunda displaced before the appropriate authority. The hapless people have resigned to their fates.
Mountain and river, river and valley, valley and civilisation, civilisation and culture, it is as if I have been trying to find my place in these elements of nature. I have got the opportunity to read several poems and novels, history and philosophy, autobiographies and travelogues written based on rivers. I have also seen the creations on the rivers by the painters and tried to delve deep into their feelings. The attraction of a flowing river is eternal. The zest for life of a boatman in the river is incredible. I have spent many moonlit nights sitting on the banks of river, flipped through pages of Geography to understand the rivers and their distributaries. There is a deep link between the origination of rivers and at the end their confluence with the sea. While science says it is a water cycle, according to philosophy the riverbeds are much like the life’s journey of a human being and changes at every turn. It has to surpass the hill and make gorges, lakes and waterfalls. All are beautiful and full of colour. Man has always tried to stop the flow of river to create dams, anicuts and canals but has he succeeded. This is an inspiration to start introspection. This is also a guiding force to discover one’s self and attain fulfilment. All our lives are like that. The river is flowing beneath the earth and it would find its way somewhere. Similarly, man cannot hide himself. He faces several hurdles, instability and stability in the journey of life. We all have to tread the path and no one can deviate from it. We have to walk on it for eternity and keep discovering it every moment. Is it not fascinating, the fragrance of life? River joins the sea and loses its characteristics. Similarly, the soul joins the super soul and that is the journey of life. All the spiritual definition and query lead to this path. Whether you believe it or not, the river that originates from a drop of water has taught the human being to discover himself again and again. River is the recitation of Satya (Truth), Shiva (Good) and Sundaram (Beauty). This is the reason, human settlements as well as the places of worships have developed near the river bank only. River Ganges is an example. River is our mother and we cannot deny it.

Our city is on the bank of a river. The thoughts and emotion of childhood seem to have evolved after walking to the school on the road along the river. The tie of friendship has begun from the river bank.
Someone or the other has rescued me at least thrice while I was learning the nuances of swimming. However, I am yet to learn the skill. If a moment of madness drives me to end life, the thrilling idea of jumping into the deep water strikes my mind. While travelling in the boats of fishermen, the reflection of the cloud on the dark blue water has often given shapes to my queries. The idea of becoming a boatman to operate the boat has often crossed my mind. There is a large gorge at my grandpa’s village and the fishermen rush near due to their occupational compulsion. They catch varieties of fish and the memory is still fresh in my mind. The boatmen at the upstream of the river use boat made from bamboo and wood. I ask them about their lifestyle. How long they spend on the boat and how they cook and do other things. They continue to catch fish day in and day out. I often propose to accompany them but they just smile and don’t let me join saying I was too young to go for such activities. I fell in love of river before reading ‘Mahanadire Jyotsna Vihar’ by poet Mayadhar Mansingh, Mark Twain’s ‘Huckleberry Finn’, Hermann Hesse’s ‘Siddhartha’, Naipaul’s ‘A bend in the river’, Marquez ‘Love in the time of Cholera’. My love has today crossed all limits as river for me is not only a philosophy. It is a science and a key ingredient of environment. This is also a cultural festival. River not only contains water, it is also a home to countless insects, fishes, frogs, plants and other animals. River has contributed to the growth of human habitation, language and music. It has also created politics, war and animosity. However, the river has been polluted and carries bad name on countless instances. Bigger dam projects have left many families homeless while fish population is on the wane. The river water is no more suitable for human utility. The river has turned a commodity for business and commerce. While some riverbeds remain dry across the year, flood waters of a few other rivers wash away everything one year after another. The meaning of spiritualism has lost forever. Man has converted the river into a drain for its narrow interests. Some rivers have turned lifeless and the poets have stopped churning out heart-touching lines on rivers.

However, I have not lost hope. I continue to love the river, be it as a boatman or a pedestrian along the river bank. I want to go through the world literature written on rivers. It is said that Nobel laureate poet Rabindranath Tagore used to get inspiration to pen his lines on the banks of Kopai River and he has created many characters there. Even today people frequent the banks of Kopai to get the feel of the great poet. It is true that the landscape has changed but the legends continue to mesmerise people. World famous poet Gabriel Garcia Marquez in his book ‘The river of our life’ says if he can get back his childhood days again, he would like to have a boat journey in Magdalena river. People, who have never been to this river, can’t get the charm. Marquez was taking boat rides twice a year when he was at school. He has learnt more from these journeys than from studying in the school. It takes five days’ of river voyage from his birth place to reach Columbia capital Bagota. In case of flood, it can take up to three weeks to...
arrive. Though pace of travelling on a boat is slow, the passengers spend time feasting their eyes with the mind-blowing sceneries. Crocodiles taking rest on the river bank, flock of cranes hovering in the sky, shoaling fishes make the day of the travellers. However, the stink generated from the rotten carcass of floating cattle with vultures sitting on it becomes unbearable. The screaming of a pack of monkeys often wakes the travellers from their sleeps while the chirping of the parrots makes the atmosphere noisy.

But these days air travelling has taken away the charm of journey through water routes. The travelling in river creates a bond between the passengers and they even go on to plan their next trip. Most importantly, the longer the journey, more pleasurable it becomes.

Unfortunately, Magdalena river is almost dead these days. The water has turned toxic killing most of the aquatic animals.

But there is a silver lining with efforts being made to make the river alive after some journalists brought Magdalena river's sorry state to the fore. Trees are being planted along the bank in crores of numbers. Sometimes such initiatives also face hurdles as the lands along the river are found under the possession of individuals. It cannot be assured always whether they would allow plantation on their lands. The river has turned a dump yard due to the wastes released by the cities and industrial units. Making the matter worse, plans are afoot to narrow the width of the river which has triggered a row in Columbia. People living along Magdalena bank can pick up a new president who would bring solution to the problem regarding the river.

Though the river flowing near my city has turned toxic like Magdalena, it can be brought back to life and conserved with political will. Let's wait for that day.
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