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## **Dams of Sundarban Areas of West Bengal: A Ground Reality with urgency of Need-based Plan**

*\*Jayanta Kumar Sarkar<sup>1</sup>, Prof. Dr. Tapati Basu<sup>2</sup>*

<sup>1</sup>PhD. Research Scholar, University of Calcutta, Dept. of Journalism and Mass Communication, 87/1, College Street, Kolkata-700073

<sup>2</sup>Ex-HOD (Journalism) and Ex Dean (Journalism and Mass Communication, Education, Library and Information Science), University of Calcutta

### **ABSTRACT**

There is no doubt that the Sundarbans as a settlement is the product of some unplanned thinking. Those who have settled in this region or have been living for a long time, they live with the natural disasters of the Sundarbans. You have to fight with the dangerous environment at every moment, you live with this mentality. The refined form of the present Sundarbans that we see can be considered as the beginning of the year 1770. According to the agreement of the British East India Company with Mirza Jafar before the Battle of Palashi in 1757, the British East India Company got the zamindari of Calcutta as a reward when Mir Jafar became emperor. At the time of Murshid Quli Khan, it belonged to Chakla-Hughli. After the battle of Palashi, Nawab Mir Jafar's treaty was signed with the English company on 15 July 1757. Although they are residents of the Sundarbans region, it is safe to say that new boys and girls have almost no idea about the dam. They never think about it. In the case of dams, to solve the land problem, a realistic package has to be given without making unreasonable false promises. Now there is no big landowner anywhere in the Sundarbans. There is no doubt that the Sundarbans as a settlement is the product of some unplanned thinking. Those who have settled in this region or have been living for a long time, they live with the natural disasters of the Sundarbans. It is not possible to prevent the loss of any family for more than 6 months from the income of the maximum amount of land owned by the individual. So, just as land is an emotion, not being land-dependent is now a reality. It is the responsibility of not only the people of the Sundarbans but also the people of the city to save the people of the Sundarbans. But without solving the immediate problem, I am not unknowingly making the people of the Sundarbans sympathetic.

**Keywords:** Sundarban, Dam, Environment, British, Land problem, Disaster.

### **1. Historical Background**

The refined form of the present Sundarbans that we see can be considered as the beginning of the year 1770. Lord Russell, the Collector General of the 24 Parganas, and later in 1781, the first Judge and Magistrate of Jessore and the Superintendent of the Sundarbans, Mr. Tillman Henkel hastened. According to the agreement of the British East India Company with Mirza Jafar before the Battle of Palashi in 1757, the British East India Company got the zamindari of Calcutta as a reward when Mir Jafar became emperor. At that time 24 parganas (24 mahals) were included in Calcutta. Two years later, in 1759, he received a gift of 24 parganas from Mir Jafar in return for help in the desert of Palashi. Clive's zamindari was given from Calcutta to Kulpi. At that time in the lower part of 24 Parganas the Sundarbans was depopulated. The Badaban started 10 km south of Kolkata and extended as far as Khulna city. When Clive committed suicide in 1774 AD, 24 parganas were returned to the East India Company. Warren Hastings of 1771 separated the 24 Parganas, including the Sundarbans, from Calcutta and gave them the status of independent districts. So the history of the district called 24 Parganas started from the time of the company. Sundarbans is one of the parts of 24 Parganas district. However, the region was previously known by another name.

\* Corresponding author. Mobile No: +91 98302 45869

E-mail address: [jayantakumarsarkar1973@gmail.com](mailto:jayantakumarsarkar1973@gmail.com)

During the reign of Emperor Akbar (1582) the territories of 24 Parganas were under the government. At the time of Murshid Quli Khan, it belonged to Chakla-Hughli. After the battle of Palashi, Nawab Mir Jafar's treaty was signed with the English company on 15 July 1757. This article or section needs sources or references that appear in credible, third-party publications. the revenue to be paid by them (the company) in the same manner with other zemindars'. According to the treaty, the Nawab's warrant was issued on 20 December 1757.

Although there were 24 parganas mentioned in the warrant, not all of them were full parganas. Some parts were partial.

DERUBAST PARGANA		KISMAT PARGANA	
1. Magura	7. South Sea	1. God	7. Shahpur
2. Khaspur	8. Muragacha / Munragacha	2. Calcutta	8. Shahnagar
3. Medini Mall	9. Five porters	3. Paikan / Paithan	9. Amirpur
4. Iktiyarpur	10. Melang Mahal	4. Manpur	10. Akbarpur
5. Baridhati	11. Hatia house	5. Amirabad	11. Baliya
6. Chalk	12. Flour	6. Azimabad	12. Basundi

Mr Russell cleared some parts of the Sundarbans between 1780 and 1783 and leased land privately to some people to cultivate and live there. The condition was that no rent should be paid for the first seven years. Twelve, eight and six annas of rent will have to be paid per bigha from eight years. Newly planted additional land every 10 years will be included in this settlement. This was the first survey conducted by Russell in the Sundarbans, Commissioner Parjitar has mentioned twenty fallow-cultivable talukas. But this initiative was not successful either. As a result of the company's civil gain, the company's legal rights over all the lands of Bengal were established. Warren Hastings removed the veil of Nawabi rule and established direct rule of the English Company in Bangladesh. In 1781 Mr. Tillman Henkel became the first judge and magistrate of Jessore and the superintendent of the Sundarbans. He then sought to improve agriculture and the prosperity of trade. At that time Kolkata was connected to different parts of Bangladesh by water through this Sundarbans. In this way from 1782 to 1783 he established three ganj or bazaar in Kachua, Chandkhali and Henkelganj. He then planted land in the Sundarbans, divided it into small plots and devised a project to distribute it among the people. It was sent to the Governor-General of India, Warren Hastings, on 21 December 1783 for approval of the projects.

## 2. Further Development of Dams

The proposals in Project included delimitation of projects, leasing of land, taxation to increase revenue, conservation of forests, setting up of outposts for security in the administrative system, etc. Henkel's proposal is known in the history of land revenue as the 'Sundarbans-Plan'. This is the first initiative to reform the government-controlled land system in the Sundarbans. It was approved on February 8, 1784. Henkel demarcates the Sundarbans in this way - Haringhata river in the east, Raymangal river in the west, Dhulianpur, Chingrikhali, Dhaki canal, Kachua village, Kabarak (Kopotaksh) and Baleshwar rivers in the north and Bay of Bengal in the south. Kachua Thana Sadar, Paikgachha Thana Chandkhali and Hingalganj set up three outposts to govern the entire taluk and collect taxes. At the junction of the Ichhamati Jamuna, on the east bank of the Ichhamati, on the opposite side of the zamindari of Pratapaditya's father Basanta Roy, on the west bank of the Ichhamati, he established a city by clearing the abandoned forested middle and guard outpost of the Pratapaditya kingdom. Gradually the jungles of the islands of this region began to be cleared. His subordinate Sandel-Wood-Bill assisted in this endeavor. Sandel-Wood Saheb (after whom the village of Sanderlebill) is responsible for clearing the forest from the mouth of Rayamangal to Hasnabad (now Par Hasnabad), Dansa, Kalagachhi, Ichhamati, Kalindi rivers. At that time the present Gaureshwar and Saheb were not empty rivers. These two later cut canals gradually cleared the jungles of the adjoining islands and created 18 talukdars. Henkelganj or Hingalganj is what we know today after the name of Aminnagar Henkel of that time.



*Dams of Sundarbans after Aila. Renovation going on.*

From 1829 to 30, Commissioner Dampier and Surveyor Hodges surveyed the Sundarbans lands east of the Jamuna River. These two are remembered through the Dampier and Hughes lines, recognized as the northern boundary of the Sundarbans. The zamindars of Taki have not been able to complete even a 99-year lease from the company to cultivate a large part of Khulna district in the southeastern part of the Sundarbans. They established Merelganj by cultivating only 6,000 bighas of land. Today we will discuss about the problem of river dam in Hingalganj established by Mr. Henkel. As an inquisitive reader and resident of Sundarbans, our aim will be to discuss how river dam is being maintained in the administrative system. We already know that in the pre-independence period, the Sundarbans was seen as a place to enjoy some hobbies. The interest in it is a bit like a morning visit of a zamindar. There is no doubt that the different thinking about the Sundarbans, after independence, gained momentum.

### 3. Sundarban: A settlement of unplanned thinking

There is no doubt that the Sundarbans as a settlement is the product of some unplanned thinking. Those who have settled in this region or have been living for a long time, they live with the natural disasters of the Sundarbans. You have to fight with the dangerous environment at every moment, you live with this mentality. As time went on, the idea of the Sundarbans gradually spread. Even in the 21st century, after becoming a 'World Heritage Site', there is a need for in-depth research into the strange turning point in the life of the Sundarbans, an Indian continent of 45-46 million people. We, the residents of Bangladesh-Lagoa Hingalganj, can see the dam built by the company along the rivers of Bangladesh. Apple dam remains intact even in case of water-logging or strong storm. We have bright examples in front of our eyes. So there is some lack of planning. Aila did not break a single hair in the next time as much as planned. It is not always the case that the government does not have goodwill. At least in the late eighties or early 90's some good initiatives were noticed. There is no doubt that one of the reasons for the land problem. But another reason is that the lack of timely targets is even more noticeable in the minimum infrastructure as far as the limited capacity is concerned.

The work that we have seen through the Irrigation SDO, at least in the Hingalganj block, showed a great lack of coordination among the local administrations to implement the plan. During the monsoon season, river dams were constructed which is not advisable. Moreover, there is a lack of immediate planning on the extent of erosion under the river embankment and in the embankment area, soil quality judgment, and how much water has flowed into the paddy field from under the embankment.



*Sealing of mangrove afforestation with carbon finance to create significant impact on the biodiversity*

When we were children, we used to see Beldar reaching the river embankment at dawn with a spade on his neck. They could have easily solved the little problem of the small snail, the sluice gate of the river. Where there are cracks in the dam, where it can break in high tide, where there is insufficiency of soil was at their fingertips. In a word, just as the head of the panchayat used to look at the village through the eyes of the Dafadars, the people in the Irrigation Department used to look at the dam with their own eyes. As long as the Beldars were temporary workers, the supervision work went well. As

soon as it became permanent, the job remained but the spade in the neck did not remain. He was then a great-grandfather. As a result, compassion for work decreased. Of course, this does not apply to all Beldars. Some of them still worked with compassion. They are still appreciated in the area. Although they are residents of the Sundarbans region, it is safe to say that new boys and girls have almost no idea about the dam. They never think about it.

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#### 4. Urgency of need-based plan

The conservation of Hingaljanj river embankment can be discussed in this way.

1. Characteristic variation of area especially soil. Somewhere clay soil, somewhere sandy soil, somewhere crumbly soil --- caution is needed in the construction of dams.
2. Creation of artificial barrier for siltation in the area between Ring Dam and East Dam
3. In case of construction of dam, it is necessary to go up by sloping (it will not work if it is steep) and there is a need to build another dam behind the main dam.
4. In case of planting mangroves, the character of the soil, regular monitoring of the tides should be kept in mind. Accordingly, it is necessary to plant a mangrove knowing how many meters of water level it will be able to survive in its own strength. This is because not all species of mangrove forests have the same salinity tolerance.
5. The water of the river is flowing like an interstellar stream somewhere in the distance of some part of the land through the river embankment. It is important to call experts to find out how far the flow is. Otherwise the construction of the dam is in vain.
6. Someone needs to be hired from the Rose-based 100-day project to monitor and preserve the tree after it is planted. Otherwise the purpose of the tree planting process fails due to lack of proper supervision.
7. A full-time observer is needed to determine the navigability of the river and its fluctuations. For this, one has to be a part of the long-term plan not from Calcutta but from the Sundarbans. Those who are suitable for these plans, they see the Sundarbans from afar. Near the ground, never tried to get closer to life in the Sundarbans.
8. The delay in the work of the irrigation department has to be removed. Not in the rainy season, but in the dry season, the work of the dam should be completed by identifying the dangerous places.
9. In case of land problem, housing for those whose houses or lands are being damaged on the embankment can be constructed within the village at the government's expense through the Prime Minister's Housing Scheme or any other project. There is information that the number of houses built in the government project is, in fact, if so many houses are built, there will be very few or no houses in the Sundarbans.
10. Continuous dredging is required where the navigability of the river is reduced. If politics does not look into the matter impartially, only money will be wasted and the overall development of the Sundarbans will not happen.
11. Modern initiatives have to be taken to make the newly developed pastures habitable and establish new settlements.
12. In the case of dams, to solve the land problem, a realistic package has to be given without making unreasonable false promises. Now there is no big landowner anywhere in the Sundarbans. It is not possible to prevent the loss of any family for more than 6 months from the income of the maximum amount of land owned by the individual. So, just as land is an emotion, not being land-dependent is now a reality.

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#### 5. Conclusion

The beautiful forest dwellers are now perplexed to think of the Sundarbans as a safe land. The profession of the ancestors is no longer respected by the northern generation. And people are lost even after falling into the threshing floor of the Sundarbans, the hobby of the city dwellers. There has been a lot of practice in the Sundarbans to collect information banks and write on paper. Let's practice daily life. If Amphan had not disrupted the lives of the people of Kolkata, it is doubtful whether the so-called propaganda about the Sundarbans is now being carried out in various media. This is the first time that the Sundarbans has come so ruthlessly to the people of Calcutta because of the realization of the pain of their own lives. The magnitude of the cyclone is impossible for anyone other than the victim to feel. The amount of publicity centered on post-Amphan relief does not mean that the main problem is lost. Unplanned and illegal brick kilns, fish flocks (in the local language, jalkar) are seen growing everywhere. There is no doubt that the tendency to change the character of the river due to the erosion of the river due to storms and floods, along with the profit and greed of the people, will make the people of the Sundarbans more endangered. In fact, it is the responsibility of not only the people of the Sundarbans but also the people of the city to save the people of the Sundarbans. But without solving the immediate problem, I am not unknowingly making the people of the Sundarbans sympathetic.

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