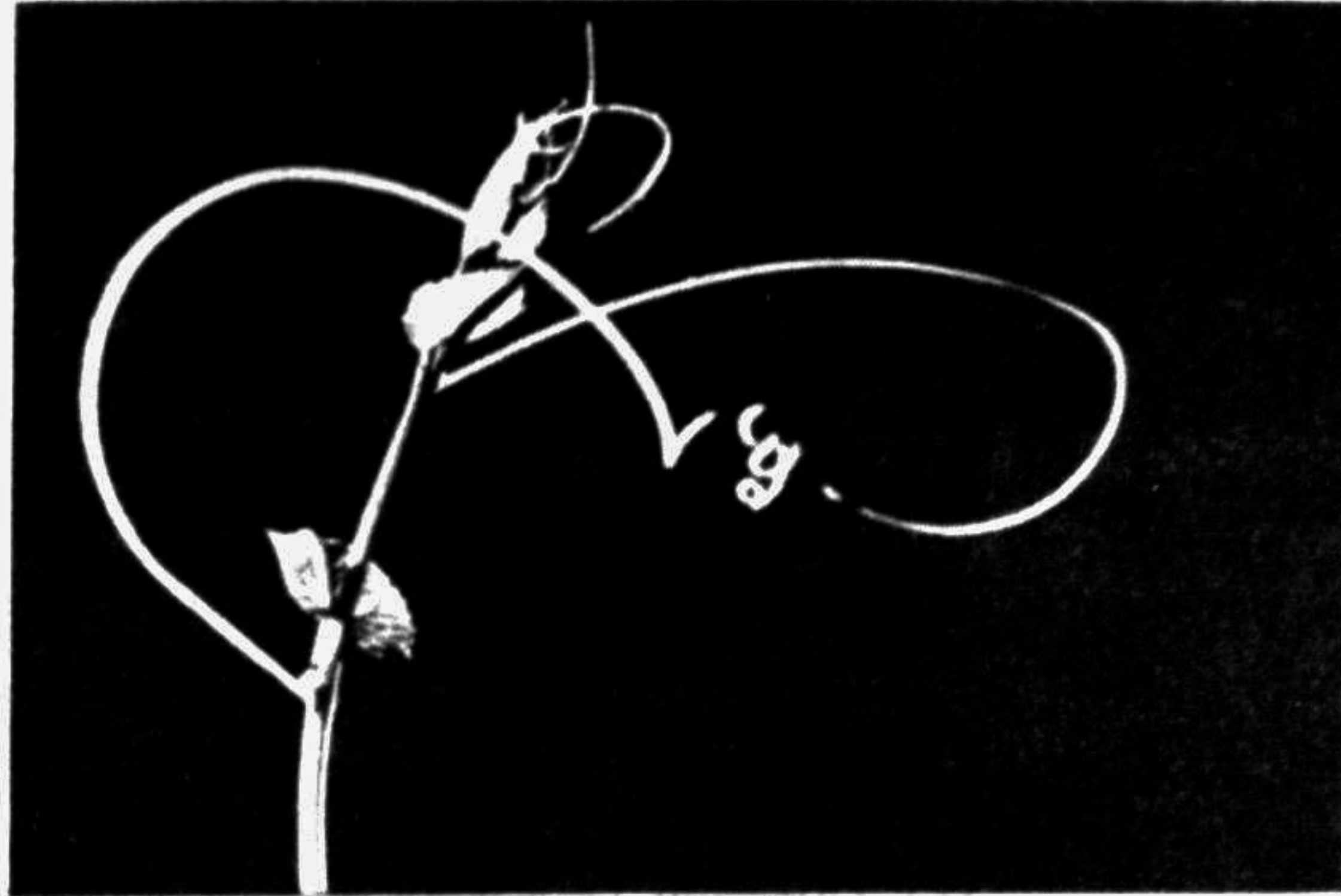




Special Feature on Environment



The Marvel of Trees

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THE tree is a peculiar organism of unlimited kindness and benevolence that makes no demands for its sustenance and extends generously the products of its life activity; it affords protection to all beings, offering shade even to the axeman who destroys it.

— Gautama Buddha

Life without plants is impossible. Plants are the form of life on which all other living things depend — the earth's basic foodstuff. Every living thing on this planet is fueled by the energy that arrives as light from the sun, but animals cannot use sunlight itself as fuel. First it must be transformed to usable energy, and plants are the transformers. They are able to capture the sun's energy and transform it into a form of fuel we call food. Besides, food, the value of plant for timber, wildlife, water, recreation, erosion control, and aesthetics has long been recognized. Plants also screen dust from air, suppress loud noises, produce atmospheric oxygen, reduce atmospheric pollutants, and temper the climate. Plants, as a consequence, are a very important part of man's environment.

Of their many contributions, we may illustrate a few beneficial effects of trees as examples here. Tree is nature's air conditioning unit that reduces the temperature of biosphere considerably. In a year, an average tree inhales or purify 26 pounds of carbon dioxide — the amount emitted by an automobile during an 11,500 mile trip. It has been computed that for every ton of wood grown, trees consume 1.47 tons of carbon dioxide and release 1.07 tons of oxygen. Trees, as wind breaks,

can reduced the wind velocity by about 80 per cent close to the planting and reduce about 20 per cent even at a distance of 20 times the height of the wind breaks. Trees or forest can have a marked effect on the soil erosion. The average sedimentation yield rate measured by the US department of Agriculture in pounds/day/square mile was 8000 from bare land, 2200 from cultivated land, 1800 from pasture land and only 360 from forest land.

Consequently, whenever a forested watershed or tree-stand is cleared for housing or farm use, significant increase in soil erosion is expected.

From the dawn of civilization, trees have been a very important part of man's biological and cultural environment.

They have always supplied many of man's basic needs — materials, aesthetic and spiritual. Tree was worshipped in ancient Egypt along with God Osiris. Plants were revered as life saving drug and source of inspiration by the Vedic sages, the Lord Buddha. The Bible and Chinese traditions are also all praise for trees. Many trees are venerated by Indian and Chinese customs particularly the Banyan and its close relations. The Banyan tree, whose scientific name is *Ficus Banglensis*, is the longest-branched tree in the world. A



Thailand, Vietnam, Philippines, Nepal and Bangladesh. Annual destruction of forest in Asia is about 4.2 million hectare. Each day about 2.5 million trees are lost. This loss is not only of trees and the habitat for an enormous variety of species that the tree cover provides, but also the relatively poor soils beneath it, which often compact, laterise, or erode when the tree cover has gone.

One good example of the marvel of trees you can see right in our Dhaka metropolis. Others day I asked a fitness conscious friend of mine, where does he take his long walk in the afternoon?

"If it is a sunny day I walk in the Ramna Park because it is cooler there. If it is a dull day and cool I walk in the neighbouring Suhrawardy Udyan." My friend's experience is a lesson for us. Ramna Park has more matured tree with good canopy of leaves which makes it cooler in a hot sunny day. On the other hand, trees of the Udyan are still young and could not make a good canopy. So it is warmer under sunlight.

At any rate, tree is perhaps the most important antidote for our sick environment. In essence, trees give us shelter, beauty and the air we breathe. It is high time together we planted trees and boldly said: "Axe-off from the trees".

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550-year-old banyan near Gutibayalu, India covers 5.2 acres.

Another 200-year-old tree in Bangladesh known as "World Banyan" commands over 5 acres of land. Greek historians reported that an entire regiment of Alexander the Great (327 BC) shelter from scorching heat under a banyan tree in the Punjab. It is a wonder that plants are the longest lived organism of all creatures. Life span of many big pine and small lichen may extend up to five thousand years. Whereas life expectancy of longest lived animal, Gaint green turtle is only 160 years.

For centuries trees have been a creative inspiration for poets, painters, musicians and spiritualists. Indian and Chinese sages used to meditate under the trees since about four thousand years. Ivan Turgenev experienced a deep emotion in a tour in the forest: The dark unchanging pine forest keeps sullen silence or is filled with a dull roar and at the sight of it sinks into man's heart more deeply, more irresistibly.

The sense of his own nothingness. Rabindranath

Tagore hears the primeval hum of music in trees around him. Elementary and immaculate music of life fountains out of their branches, leaves and flowers.

For thousands of years trees flourished and bestowed all the wonderful, eventful blessing. They survived from drought, diseases, avalanches, and a thousand straining, leveling tempest and floods; but they cannot be saved from fools.

Much of what is left of our primeval forests or trees is about to vanish in a rampage of greed.

Today, for the name of development in every minute 100 acres of tropical rain forest are felled, a kill rate that every year destroys 27 million acres of jungle and enormous number of homestead trees.

Destruction of trees and forest is massive in south and south east Asia since the Second World War, over the past decade, land conversion and deforestation in the region have accelerated dramatically.

Of the world destruction, a significant portion is shared by Asia. This destruction is particularly high in India, Burma,

