

Impact of Flood on Women

by Tahera Jabeen

The struggle for survival of our brave women during the recent floods is a proof that with organised efforts and proper guidance they can work wonders. Special efforts should, therefore, be made to inculcate hazard awareness in them. Capable women should be associated with disaster readiness programme, right from the planning stage down to its implementation.

boat or raft to fetch drinking water finding no men around to help.

Leaving aside cleanliness, merely finding space for toilets is a huge problem that women face in their day to day life during the floods. They are not being able to respond to the call of nature because of lack of privacy. As a consequence, they have to wait till nighttime.

Another great ordeal faced by women, especially those in low-lying areas, is giving birth during a severe flood while trying to observe purdah. Many babies are born in bamboo shafts, on boat or on rafts made of banana plants, fitted inside half-submerged houses. Having such private affairs exposed to public view must aggravate women's sense of shame.

Since all or most of the women of female-headed households have to manage for better or worse on their own during floods, they have to depend on their own social and economic resources. Moreover, if they are already poor, their risk becomes destitute in such a crisis. For example, if they belong to the landless and marginal farmers' households, their loss of resources is likely to have an adverse effect on the already low nutritional and health status of the adults and children of these households. Despite their own sickness and other activities, they also tried their best to cure sick family members themselves in order to avoid the cost of modern treatment. Furthermore, poorer women take risks to collect medical herb from distant places during the floods.

Kitchen utensils, jewelry, livestock, poultry, trees and other household items, which usually belong to women, are their only assets that are often considered 'non-productive'. However, these assets are particularly vulnerable to flood. Reports from the rural areas reveal that the women coming mostly from poor female-headed households were forced to sell their non-productive assets at distress prices to meet the immediate needs of the households during and after the floods where men's assets are kept in the open.

Women's behaviour and actions are more governed by social rules and norms than that of men. Society expects women to be passive and gentle. As a result, women lose out in the race

for receiving relief goods where men are aggressive, making sure that they absolutely get their due share. If in anyway they are able to stand in the queue they are like to come last. The only way children can get relief is through their mothers. When mothers are among the last people standing in a relief queue, they not only miss out on their share of relief goods, they also deprive their children of these goods.

"Once, flood water swept away most of our clothes, and my mother and I were left with only one saree between us. So, when relief officials came to distribute food, my mother went out but I had to stay indoors for fear of the men," says Mariam, 27, of Kalubari village in Tangail. If she had gone outside in anything less than a saree, she says, she would have received abuse, not help.

When women are completely helpless without any source of income and shelter, they usually move out to non-affected areas. However, this migration does not make their lives any easier. In their new homes, being migrants, they lose the physical and social security they had in their native villages. Many of the younger women refugees have to remain unmarried due to their parents' inability to provide the kind of dowry customarily needed for their marriage. This, in turn, has other kinds of adverse social consequences. For example, younger women are often lured away into prostitution in towns within the country, or even abroad by professional gangs and pimps with promises of jobs elsewhere. Young girls living on embankment or in shelter camps are also in constant danger of rape or assault.

To prevent rape cases in some shelter camps, women are seen to form groups to protect each other. They have even set up vigilance group to keep guard and prevent violence against young girls.

These coping strategies are vital for the survival of the poor households and are only adopted by women. And it is women who have also the main responsibility for flood protection work. After the floods, reconstruction of their houses, by both the affected men and women, involves more laborious activities than during flood free time. Women need to play a major part in the post-flood reconstruction, spending most of their time working in muddy and slippery condition.

Coping with Flood
Leaving with Floods reports that despite the massive relief effort launched after the 1988 flood by government and NGOs and supported by international agencies, relief aid reached only 20 per cent of affected people. This raises the question, how did the other 80 per cent survive? These figures, while not an argument against the provision of relief aid in emergencies, do underscore the importance of supporting and strengthening women's own survival strategies, developed on the basis of long experience. Women have devised various

strategies to cope with the frequent inundation.

Different case studies in some pocket areas exhibit that women prepare themselves for floods long before it starts. They dry firewood in transportable earthen cookers and during floods, cook only once a day. The rest of the time, they eat dry food prepared beforehand, such as puffed rice or roasted wheat. Other foods that women might stock up for the flood include balls made of flattened rice or puffed rice, molasses and shredded coconut. In addition, instead of raising chickens, which would drown in floodwater, they raise ducks that provide an excellent source of floating food. For water purification, as well as using alum to cleanse polluted water, women mix it with roasted betel nut and charcoal to make toothpaste that helps control gum infection. During floods, when diseases and infections increase, this mixture is widely used. Women also use dried neem leaves to treat boils and skin diseases, mix honey with tulsi leaves to control coughs and fevers, and apply dried grass to cuts and insect bites.

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A Few Suggestions Related to Relief Operation
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Information Technology Cracks Social Interface

by A M M Aabid

The scientists have found out that spending hours and days on the Internet and e-mail could impair a person's sociability rating, and introduce social distortions. He becomes insulated from the society, and facing the human beings face to face in the normal manner in daily life brings up subtle problems.

THE research laboratories of the West, enveloped by the euphoria of the march of science, are always late with analysing the impact of applications of latest technologies. The information technology (IT) has been hailed as a boon to mankind restricted by communicative devices out of the earshot.

Distance disappeared when the Internet appeared, overtaking the telephone with recorded messages to unrestricted browsers. Today it is the hottest going to turn professional, played by tens of millions from all the corners of the globe, breaking down all the social barriers (except the physical proximity). Social intercourse became invisible, visible only on the computer screen. The global village is squeaking.

Imagine that the books in the libraries could talk. How long this platonic conversation could be sustained? Now the scientists have found out that spending hours and days on the Internet and e-mail could impair a person's sociability rating, and introduce social distortions. He becomes insulated from the society, and facing the human beings face to face in the normal manner in daily life brings up subtle problems. Virtual reality takes its toll, and new technology extracts its price. Nothing in life is free, except the good things: the sun, the air, the water, and human company.

The conception of society remains struck between the pages of the text books, and the social rating of a person thus imprisoned by the electronic

media becomes disoriented. The solution is the old grandmother's cure: come out and meet the people, mix and mingle with them, all in real time and three dimensions. Face to face contact is the norm.

That means use the telephone more for information and less for human communication (the telephone is superior to the e-mail in the presence of the audio voice and its nuances to make the personal-ity glitter. Of course the voice and video mails are also coming up, but these are in 2-dimensions. Even 3D is not enough. The 4th dimension, namely, time, must be real. The orthodox mind chuckles at the thought of the created trying to improve upon the Creator.

Any temporary improvement must be compensated for in the philosophical perspective. Take the case of the mother and her baby communicating from a distance. Where hugging disappears, and what is its effect on both? Touching is an important mode of emotional discharge or outlet. The same goes for eating, and enjoying good food in good company.

The Bengalees would feel miserable without the *adda*; and the latter cannot be replaced by the mighty and superfast Internet. The laughter can be heard, but what about the smile, and the light that lies in the eyes? Real-time interface and interaction are essential components of life. What is life if there is no time to stand and stare, instead of being imprisoned by a 14-inch screen?

The Internet is a big convenience, but what about the

small pleasures of life? Note the most important nuance, the intervention of the machine between two human beings (computer, keyboard, learning, training, and the boring technical details).

Some writers write the first draft by hand, just to get the feel of the moving fingers writing (interactive mode with constant feedback), and lose their rhythm when using a typewriter or a computer. Perhaps that is why we eat with our fingers and do not use the fork and the spoon. The philosophy is to keep the system simple (like using the *loongi, gerji, and the gamcha*, and drinking ure, simple water). The advertisements of the famous Volkswagen (VW) car carried the slogan "We make it simple."

Quiz: What is your first choice in life — Supplementary or Complementary? Economics is more formal with the three categories of want: essential, necessary, and luxury. The human body is basically impervious to style, fashion, and the modern conveniences (two thirds of the world's population face this reality every day). The mind can be trained and polarized. Acquire or discard?

This is not a sermon against modernity and enjoying the benefits of science and technology. What is wrong with the golden mean? Moderation solves more problems than it creates. The more the desires, the more the wants. We are faced with the ageless philosophy: Plain living and high thinking.

PS: Take a break once in a while. I am not that ascetic!

Pachyderm Predicament

by Jitendra Verma

"Between 1966 to 1976, nearly a third of the nation's elephant habitat was replaced by eucalyptus and other fast-growing species. Similarly, conversion of natural sal forests into teak forests in some parts of eastern India has affected the elephant habitats."

As the harvesting season approaches, the people of Nopam, a tiny village near Tezpur in northern Assam, steal themselves for the worst. For the last 10 years, they have witnessed herds of hungry wild elephants raid their crops; crops that they had grown through a year's hard work and care.

So, between September and January, when the fields are harvested, the villagers, together with a few poorly-equipped forest guards, play a risky hide-and-seek game with the marauding animals in their attempts to chase them away.

These animals," agrees Vivek Menon, a wildlife conservationist and senior technical consultant at the Asian Elephant Research and Conservation Centre, Bangalore. "And since elephants need a much larger home range than any other land animal, they are usually the first to suffer the consequences of habitat fragmentation or destruction," he adds.

A recent study conducted by the Dehradun-based Wildlife Institute of India, reveals that a herd of 25 elephants needs an area of at least 450 sq km during

the wild elephant population is controlled and a balance is maintained between the pachyderm population and their habitat. The captured elephants — whose population would be controlled — could then be domesticated and used as beasts of burden.

A K Chaddha, divisional forest officer, Bhubaneswar, suggests: "A new forest reserve force should be developed to monitor the activity." Both short and long term measures are needed to reduce the conflict. Managed elephant reserves, shared by people, should be established.

One of the many difficulties of resolving this issue, according to Rishi, is that the animals, being migratory in nature, often cross over to different states with no regard for the interstate boundaries. However, when it comes to tackling the conflicts, there is minimal interaction or collaboration be-

between these states. "There is a less-than-desired interstate dialogue and collaboration as far as resolving the problems of elephant management and conservation are concerned," he says.

In 1992, the MEF launched Project Elephant — an ambitious plan to conserve the country's elephant population and encourage their growth. But this plan failed.

Rishi, former director of the project, accepts these failures but says that the projects are only five years old and one cannot expect it to show spectacular results in such a short period. "It is the changing pattern of the human behaviour and land use practices which were not taken care earlier as they were not prevalent at that time," he adds.

How do the villagers perceive the entire issue? They are doubtful of both the forest officials and conservationists. They do not want "outsiders" telling them what to do.

"These people (forest officials and conservationists) are obstructing our way of life and we do not want to take instructions from them about how to live with the elephants," says Santosh Orang from village Baguri near Kaziranga national park, Assam. "For centuries we have been living in their company," says another.

This is the only way to ensure that the elephants will survive in the wild and won't interfere with man," says Bist Rishi, a forest official who supports the theory of increased participation from the villagers as suggested by the conservationists.

Dinesh Choudhary, an expert on elephants and a licensed hunter based in Assam, thinks that the ban on capturing elephants in the state should be lifted. Instead a certain number of wild elephants should be captured from the forests so that

'Ideal' Mothers Keep Ambitions Bottled Up

Prangtip Daorueng writes from Bangkok

ASIAN mothers are masters of multi-tasking, managing to look serene while performing a host of various roles as wife, mother, career professional and household manager-worker.

But these women are simmering within, says new research by an international advertising agency.

It is not resentment, though, that they are keeping bottled inside, says a research team of Ogilvy and Mather, which did the study.

Indeed, the team says in "Simmering: Within Asian Mothers and Their Rising Expectations", Asian women go through each day with sadness and dissatisfaction, conscious that life could be better.

The research was conducted in the first quarter of this year as an attempt to understand Asian mothers as a marketing target group, but the study also contains useful insights into the thoughts and ambitions of women across the region.

One woman in the Indian capital of New Delhi is quoted as saying, "I don't want to be born as a man. I want to be born as the husband of my husband!"

The Ogilvy and Mather researchers say the women's situation and attitudes are reflections of the double standard widely practised in Asian societies.

"Across the region, Asian societies continue to favour

other things aside from mothering chores and emotionally stretching her roles.

This 'ideal mother' is also organised, in control and resourceful. And while she may have others to share her household burdens, she is not blamed as neglecting her motherly duties. She maintains a close relationship with her children while her devotion to others is appreciated.

According to the researchers, Asian mothers are all too willing to sacrifice their own identity in anticipation of rewards that come in the form of family togetherness, their children's academic and career successes and their husbands' achievements in work.

But not only do the women feel that they have little opportunity for their personal fulfilment, they also think their accomplishments and their contributions to family and society are unappreciated and not acknowledged enough.

For instance, Thai working mother Watcharee Muthasatharn is kept busy cooking, dressing up and feeding her children and sending them to school during the morning, before she rushes off to her nine-to-five job at a bank.

After work, the 38-year-old has to go to the market, cook dinner and wash the dishes. During weekends, there is laundry to do for her husband and children, more cooking and dishwashing, as well as the obligatory visits to relatives.

men in many respects, from schooling to salaries to sexual misbehaviour," they noted. "Society expects women to be quiet and submissive, although less so in places like Hong Kong and the Philippines).

"Mothers themselves know that to satisfy the demand of their roles, they must make numerous sacrifices," the researchers added.

Yet while the dictates of tradition make it easier for the women to accept their myriad of responsibilities without much complaint, this does not mean they do not have hidden desires and their own ambitions.

At one point in the research, participants were shown pictures from which they were made to choose one that they thought communicated happiness. Majority picked images related to more freedom, space and independence, report the researchers.

While most Asian mothers are unwilling to sacrifice family independence, the researchers say a greater sense of self-esteem can already be found among the most "elite" group: the professional working women.

This group of women, they say, believes they can survive alone if they have to. In contrast to the traditional attitude that men are supposed to be the breadwinners in the family.

"I love my two kids more than anything else," said Watcharee. "But sometimes I just wish I [could go] somewhere, leaving everything behind and be only with myself."

One Japanese mother told the researchers: "I want the courage to be able to say I want something for myself."

Even mothers in the Philippines — who the researchers note as having a very positive view of themselves, their opportunities and their situation at home — convey similar frustrations and fears as the women in the other Asian countries.

Still, there are signs that some changes are taking place. While most Asian mothers are unwilling to sacrifice family independence, the researchers say a greater sense of self-esteem can already be found among the most "elite" group: the professional working women.

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One Bangkok working mother told the researchers that she never thought of "leaning" on her husband for financial support. She said: "I must be able to make a living for myself."

— IPS/APB

They do everything — light fires, burst firecrackers, even scream, to ward off the herds, but to no avail.

Nopam, suffering extensive damage to crops, life and property each year, is not alone. The scene repeats itself all over the country, wherever human habitation and agricultural lands exist on the fringes of elephant-populated forests.

Last year, for instance, 36 people in Assam and 51 in West Bengal died in elephant raids. According to figures released by the Project Elephant report, 1993, of the ministry of environment and forests (MEF) about 250 people and over 50 elephants are killed every year in this conflict.

In the last century, states such as Punjab, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh, once boasting of pachyderm populations, have witnessed their disappearance.

Elephant count had been shrinking for quite some time but became very noticeable in the mid-70s with conversion of forests into agricultural lands and the practice of monoculture. The pachyderms were left with no choice but to come out of the dwindling forests looking for food, which the nearby agricultural fields supplied in abundance.

"Fragmentation of habitat and loss of forest has resulted in tremendous pressure on

ing the year as compared to 1,185 sq km in the harvest season. It is around this time that the beasts come in search of food, forcing them to turn into ravaging demons.

According to Vinod Rishi, former director of Project Elephant and currently the chief conservator of forest, north Bengal, conversion of natural forest to commercial timber or pulpwood monoculture plantations of trees such as teak and silver oak has reduced elephant habitat by at least 10 per cent in south India.

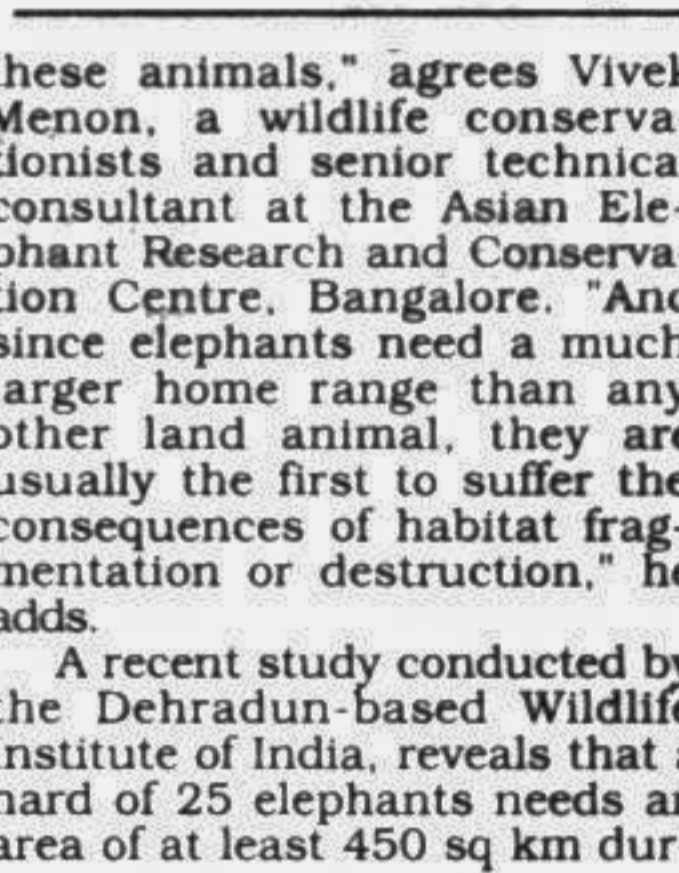
Between 1966 to 1976, nearly a third of the nation's elephant habitat was replaced by eucalyptus and other fast-growing species. Similarly, conversion of natural sal forests into teak forests in some parts of eastern India has affected the elephant habitats," he says.

Teak trees, he says, form a canopy and prevent growth of plants on the forest floor which are food for the elephants. The resultant shortage of food, according to him, has been responsible for pushing the beasts out into the agricultural fields where they come in contact with humans.

In Arunachal Pradesh, forest officials point out, the habitat available to elephants is shrinking every year due to construction of roads and establishment of human settlements in the foot hills and the

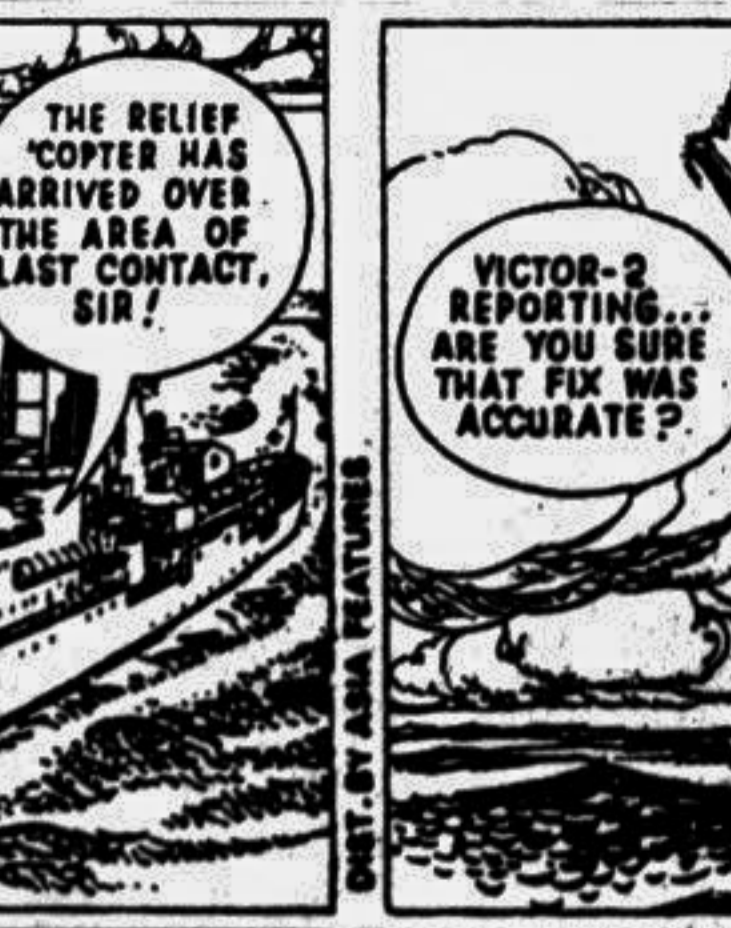
Nationwide distribution of the current elephant population

Problematic elephant population in each state

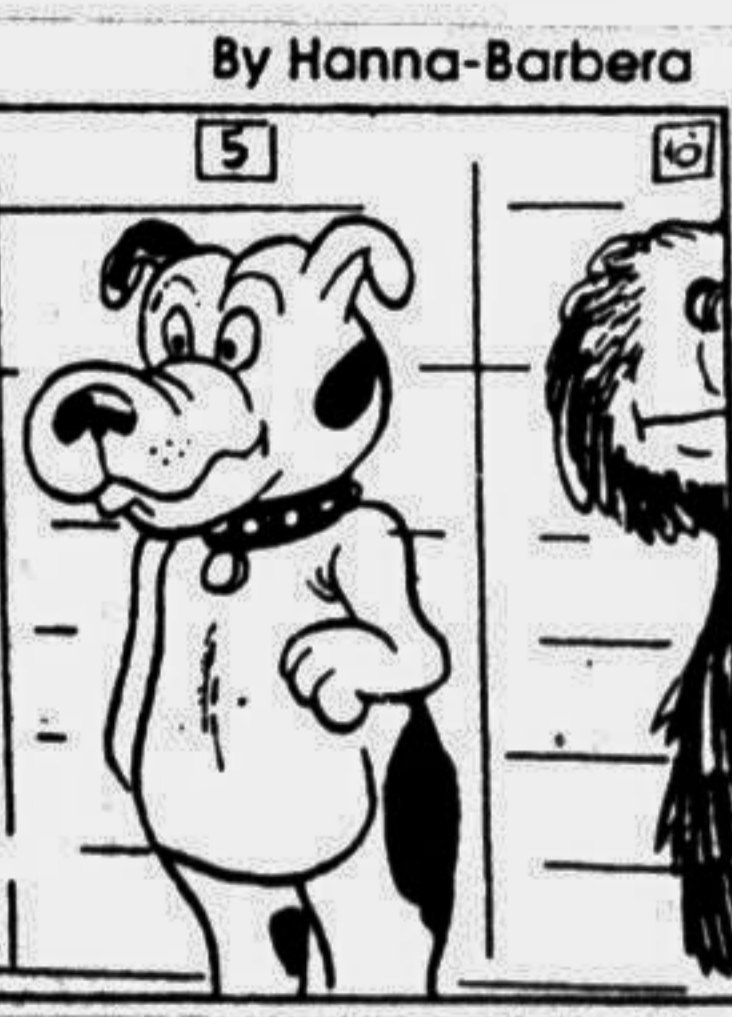


STATE	DISTRICT	NO OF ELEPHANTS
Assam	Sibsagar	16
	Darang	100
	Kamrup	20
	Guwahati	25
Arunachal Pradesh	Lower Sukanshri	20
	Doimukh	20
	Siang Labhanbali	25
	West Siang Pasighat, Ruksin	35
	Debagong, Shantipur	40
Nagaland	Lohit Namsai	40
	Baghty valley	30
West Bengal	Jalpaiguri - Darjeeling (west of Torsa)	75
	East Midnapur	50
	(migrants from Bihar)	50
Meghalaya	Nokrek, Dadengiri	25
Madhya Pradesh	North Sarguja, Jashpur	25
	Chandka	72
Orissa	Kotgarh, Mahagiri, Kalaht	300

James Bond
BY IAN FLEMING
DRAWING BY MORAK



TOM & JERRY
BY VAN FLEMMING



By Hanna-Barbera