

Documentary

The Sunderbans: a bounteous treasure island

A premiere on the Sunderbans and life in and around it

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World's largest mangrove forest, the Sunderbans is located in the estuary of the Ganges river in the southwest of Bangladesh and spanning to the southeastern portion of the state of West Bengal in India.

It encompasses southern parts of Satkhira, Khulna and Patuakhali districts holding a majestic look by the Bay of Bengal. A vibrant magnificence of this forest surpasses one's imagination. In recognition of its vastness of biotic and eco-diversity, it has of late been declared a World Heritage Site by the UNESCO. A bounteous resourcefulness has given this forest a role of treasure island in the country's national economy.

Hundreds of species of birds and animals have found their natural abode here. The Royal Bengal Tigers, as their name suggests with their majestic look and enormous strength, assume a representative position in the Sunderbans. It is they who are considered the flag bearers of Bangladesh in the world's notable zoos.

The Sunderbans has earned fame as the natural habitat for the Royal Bengal Tigers. Diverse species of wildlife get sustenance in the thick forest and canopied waterways in the Sunderbans. It offers a

large-scale employment opportunities with its multifarious resources. This forest is the single largest source of the forest products in the country.

But the suicidal fact is that the country's lone mangrove forest suffers a lethal blow of deforestation and sheer negligence towards eco-friendly management. In absence of proper conservation management, its very existence and sustenance has already been threatened. Mindless damage done to ecosystem has meanwhile resulted in injurious aftermath causing repetitive environmental disaster.

Members of the civil society, several bodies and non-governmental organisations are presently showing their concern over the deforestation and forest mismanagement.

A documentary film, titled "Sunderbaner Lokaloye Deen Raatri" has of late been made by Dharti Production a communication and media consultants agency. Based on the bounteousness of the forest and the lives of people who live in and around Sunderbans and make a living extracting the forest resources, the documentary was premiered on January 27 in the late afternoon at the British Council Auditorium, Dhaka.

The film is precisely a documentation of tales of the people living in the areas surrounding the

Sunderbans. It recounts with much compassion tale of their struggling up with jubilation and mirth. Believers from far off regions come

to the forest to collect raw materials. Khulna Newspaper Mills, lone such mill in the country, is supplied with the kind of tree called 'Gaoa' as its raw materials. The Sunderbans has been named after a tree called 'Sundari' commonly found in this forest.

The documentary mainly projects three kinds of professional people who live in and around the Sunderbans and make use of the forest resources. They are 'bawali' or wood cutter; fishermen who fish in the forest's interior waterways and nearby sea-shore; and third the 'mowal' or honey collectors who collect honey from the deep jungle at the risk of own life. The film is mostly an exposure of the fishing season, which coincides with the Dublar Char Mela the Hindu Krishna Lila Puja held and celebrated on one of the fishing islands in the Sunderbans; the other fishing which is unique in the world; the timber cutting and the famous Sunderbans honey collections. It covers a seasonal cycle beginning with October and ending in July, with the advent of the monsoon.

Nearly fifty thousand people extract resource from this forest everyday, according to the director and producer of the film Razia Quadir.

The Sunderbans is unique in a

number of ways. About five to the forest's fragile ecosystem.

centuries ago the forest was recog-

nized as an important resource base and actual scientific management of the forest was initiated over

time, voices a fervent call to con-

sider this World Heritage Site.

It is regrettable that concerned



The fishermen with their boats in a casual mood at the shore.

lives against the adverse nature. It portrays how marginalised these people are and how enterprising they are in undertaking the challenges posed by the nature. Their livelihood comes out of a tag of war with nature. These abjectly poor people depend on the forest, its waterways and offshore sea. This is where they toil in searching for their living and at the same time here they meet their tragic end of life being devoured by ferocious man-eaters like tiger. Alongside this dismal aspect of life they have a glimpse of joy on some occasion like Raash Purnima in this nearby locality of the Sunderbans. During this Hindu religious occasion the surrounding villages wear a festive look and the inhabitants wake

and gather at the 'Dublar Chaar' with offerings for the god Krishna and long for spiritual wellbeing and purgation. They perform with due solemnity, 'Ganga Snan' or bathing in the holy water of the Ganges. "Raash Mela" a fair on the occasion, draw people to cheer and enjoy themselves forgetting at least momentarily the hardships of their lives.

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