

An Ode to the SUNDARBANS



MITHI CHOWDHURY

"Thank God man cannot fly, and lay waste the sky as well as the earth." Somewhat of an anthem against ecosystem destruction, Henry Thoreau's words resonate truer by the day. As generations witness a growing *green revolution* in popular culture, art, and writing - a world where Princess Mononoke, Bambi, Wall-E, and countless other poster children warn of our own imminent dystopian future - environment conservation seems to be humanity's greatest farce. With the very breath we sing 'Go Green', we herald gross defilements of nature.

In his 1981 novel *Midnight's Children*, Salman Rushdie describes the Sundarbans, the largest mangrove forest in the world, as 'so thick that history has hardly ever found the way in.' Perhaps, this is the most fitting account of her unyielding longevity. Straddling the south-western edge of Bangladesh, she has been a safe haven for the majestic Bengal Tigers for generations. For woodcutters, fishermen and honey hunters, she's the purveyor of infinite treasures that ensure their survival.

She has protected riverine settlers from the devastation brought forth by cyclones - a sacrifice that has diminished

her, bit by bit, year after year. Her shaded streams and gloomy thickets are teeming with unusual wildlife. If you listen closely, you can hear the distant squawks of the rose-ringed parakeets, punctuating the still afternoon air. Her unforgiving wilderness is daunting to outsiders, but carefully protects her cradled inhabitants with a stern, motherly affection. During monsoon, her shallow banks disappear, the wind tasting of sea. The mangrove trees shelters us from harsh temperatures, mitigating the omnipresent reality of global warming.

As construction is about to begin on the Rampal power plant, we are on the eve of losing the Sundarbans to 'development' - development that snatches away our right to a sustainable future. We are not just about to lose an invaluable national and global heritage, but we've also been reminded, once again, that our voices don't matter. No matter how loudly we scream or protest, there will always be barricades, batons and tear shells to subdue us.

Today, we do not deserve to sing praises for the green revolution; this is not the birth of an eco-friendly human civilisation. Today, we witness



Mother Nature on death row.

It is unlikely we will ever apologise for the hypocrisy of our environment consciousness. It is unlikely for a host of united voices to drown out the powerful whispers of a select few lobbyists. It has always been so, and alas, it will be long after your bountiful reserves of flora and fauna fall prey to time and 'civilisation'.

E. O. Wilson once said, "Destroying a rainforest is like burning a Renaissance painting to cook a meal." In all our

progress, we fail to grasp such a simple analogy. In our relentless pursuit for crude, inefficient energy, we plow through the most miraculous gifts of nature.

Sadly, deserts are much easier to create than forests.

Mithi Chowdhury is a dog-loving-movie-watching-mediocrity-fearing normal person. Either that or a penguin. Find out at mithichy612@gmail.com

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