
Bangladesh: The struggle to protect the Sundarbans

On Nov. 7, 1990, Koronamoyee Sardar was killed by an armed gang of hired thugs whose aim was to set up a shrimp farm at Horinkhola Polder 22. The local villagers, led by Koronamoyee, resisted this invasive force. On that fateful day, Koronamoyee became a martyr for her cause, and in the eyes of her people she remains their heroine in their decade long ongoing struggle against the surrounding oppressor.

The supreme sacrifice of Koronamoyee is not forgotten. Every year, on Nov. 7th, there is a great celebration at Polder 22, where thousands of resisters peacefully gather to commemorate this brave woman who led a successful movement of the people against a powerful, unscrupulous industry. Today, Horinkhola Polder 22 is the only remaining shrimp farm-free village in the shrimp farming district of Khulna. A great battle was won, but the war continues.

When Mangrove Action Project's Director visited the Sundarban region last month during the recent Steering Committee meeting of ISA Net, he was especially impressed with two things: the dwindling extent of the largest remaining mangrove forest in the world and the great courage of the farming community of Horinkhola Polder 22 whose stalwart members have been resisting for over a decade the unruly insurgence of the shrimp farming industry surrounding their community. Polder 22 is like a war zone --an island of steadfast resistance in a tumultuous sea of industrial greed and corruption. Polder 22 is that last bastion of brave combatants who will fight to the very last soldier in this winless war upon our Mother Earth.

Horinkhola Polder 22 is both an inspiration and a blessing in this earthly existence we call life. Without such resistance against such open tyranny, what worth is there in future? In the study of biology, three of the chief factors defining if something is alive are growth, movement and the survival instinct. At Horinkhola Polder 22, we happily witnessed a growing movement whose very existence will determine whether this community survives or not. Though the resistance is strong at Polder 22, the shrimp aquaculture industry is also determined to inundate this last vestige of traditional farmland.

The question remains: how long can they resist, and how long will we remember their struggle burning like a fire among many fires?

Quote from Khushi Kabir of Nijera Kori in Bangladesh, May 2001 "In Horinkhola polder 22, the shrimp thugs under the instigation of the local MP beat up three of my colleagues. There are armed thugs in the area and we are under severe pressure and threat. The local people, including farmers, even though they support us, are terrified to come out in open support. Luckily the landless groups and our staff are courageously remaining in the polder and ensuring the polder does not become a shrimp field..."

