

THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN CONSERVATION OF RIVER DISANG

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Nature is a vivid representation of the most utopian dreams of man, what is heaven if the realm is bereft of nature? What is nature, if not the opposite of purgatory?

One of the prominent rivers that embellishes the glorious scenery of Assam is The Disang River, a tributary of the Buri Dihing River, which originates in the mighty Patkai Range in Arunachal Pradesh and meanders through the Assam valley as it flows into The Brahmaputra at Disangmukh, Sivsagar. A River adorned with a rich and vibrant history to complement its scenic allure, it has endured and witnessed the evolution and transformation of the Assamese culture and society.

However, the beguiling beauty of the river is often tainted with a gratuitously unjust exploitation of its waters. Humans have always exploited their environment in order to sustain their lives and fulfil their needs and extract essential resources, but often times it verges on the side of impunity and it is imperative to curb this malpractice with forcefulness and conviction.

A conscious and cognizant community is essential for preservation of our water bodies. A conscientious and aware community goes a long way towards reinforcing the efforts of the government. It is pointless to reproach the authorities when the people are not sincere in their efforts and ignorant towards their environment; pollution and exploitation in a way subtly insinuates that people are ignorant and negligent. However, it is also important to take efforts to foster consciousness and awareness among the people and to inculcate the feeling of identification with their environs.

Instilling awareness and consciousness is one thing, but that will have to be further complemented by a dedicated dispensation of resources towards the protection of the river, deployment of financial resourcefulness will positively reinforce the efforts undertaken to further the cause.

Sand Mining is often done near the banks of the Disang River, it is in no way a nascent practice but it often happens without regulation or scrutiny which at times, leads to exploitation and pollution, on many occasions it is done by local citizens who seek to pursue their selfish needs, along with stringent monitoring it is also paramount that the local populace curbs their proclivity to exploit in order to accomplish their selfish pursuits. There should be fastidious inspections conducted to ensure that the miners are adhering to the rules and regulations. It should also be noted that mining is also a contributing factor to soil erosion, thus injudicious mining eventually creates a rather perplexing situation which demands persistent and sincere efforts in order to construct a solution.

It is not uncommon to witness several elusive cases of desecration and vandalism along the river banks, it is imperative that authorities take strict actions and remain in a state of constant vigilance, it is important that the local populace is watchful of such unscrupulousness and report the perpetrators to the concerned authorities. There should also be a system of strict irrevocable punishment for pollution and desecration, and for that the people must assent and offer their sincere support towards the cause. Locations like Disangmukh are popular picnic spots and it is not uncommon to find packets and food carelessly thrown around which sullies the environment, thus disturbing its purity and tainting its allure. It is of paramount importance that the area is constantly patrolled and any perpetrators are duly apprehended. There should also be some sort of limitation imposed upon how many people can have a picnic in that area at one particular time and for that it is important to set up ticketing counters and establishing provisions for proper dustbins and waste disposal, not only will this play a critical role in preserving the river but will also, in a way, generate employment thus uplifting a certain section of people, however this has to be complemented with passion and enthusiasm on the people's part.

The areas surrounding the river banks offer a lot of potential for development of tourism and recreation. Through proper utilisation of available resources, we can unleash this dormant potential which will facilitate the development of the areas surrounding the river. This, however, would require substantial investment and incentives from the government to abet the development and beautification of the location. Not only would it be financially profitable but it would also garner a lot of attention and exponentially increase the interest people have in that particular location. This, in turn, will lead to greater emphasis on protection of the river and improvement of its surrounding areas and will strongly uplift the community thus increasing identification and attachment towards their environs. An influx of people would have to be complemented by an injection of resources towards more efficient management of housing and waste disposal near the river, which would demand compliance and proactivity from the local community.

A lot of people have already attached a significant sentimental value to the river, it is where they were born, in the banks of it they were raised and received water from its sacred waters; hence there is a sect of people who are vociferous in their appeals towards conservation of the rivers; therefore identifying these people and reinforcing their aspirations with sustainable action will go a long way towards protection and reinvigoration of the river's waters. Assimilation of such people into the cause will strengthen the potential of the conservation drive.

The river banks near Sivsagar are abundantly populated and littered with unplanned and haphazard housing which creates an unfavourable scenario which abets the relentless and careless treatment of the river. It is imperative that the residents are distributed into societies which take conscious efforts to ensure that there isn't any unsustainable or excessive exploitation of rivers. These societies should be proactive in their functioning and ensure that there are no violations or unscrupulous elements that disrupt the sanctity of the water body, any violations of the law should also be expeditiously reported to the concerned authorities who may intervene to control the situation.

Rivers are an integral part of our identity and uniqueness as a region and enriches the allure of a particular place, their preservation is paramount to the protection of the identity and scenery of a region. And it is none other than the local communities who would have to take the initiative to protect the rivers that are such an integral and inseparable part of their unique, change has to be brought from the most fundamental levels in the grassroots, and the responsibility has to be shouldered by the people who would have to champion this noble cause and take it further.

