**Paradise Lost**

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A long time ago, my ‘Baba’ and I went travelling in the fields on a bullock cart. During our journey, we saw a fish flapping on the brink of the canal. It had swooped out of the canal and landed on the bank.

My ‘Baba’ hastily came down, picked up the fish, and placed it in the cart. He used to tell me that in the times of yore, once they threw nets in the canal, they would be bursting with fish. Not only that, but during summer, rice fields would be plentiful with fish.

I also have had the experience of catching fish from the rice fields during my childhood. After returning from school, we would go to the fields to catch fish and bring home buckets and containers full of them. Besides this, there was a canal (Kamaro Wah) near our village where I remember catching fish with hooks and giving them to my mother. During that time, fish was a common food in the coastal regions, and it still is, but not to the same extent.

My ‘Baba’ used to say that lands, fields, and uncultivated areas in our village were extremely fertile, lush and productive. There were no challenges like sea-level rise, sea intrusion, salinity and waterlogging. During the monsoon season, when it rained, deserted fields, plains, and areas would become vibrant and beautiful. Naturally, there used to be tall grass (now extinct) that, when fed to cattle, would result in rich and abundant milk.

At that time, all people in rural areas were dependent on agriculture and livestock for their livelihoods. Agricultural lands were healthy and strong. The use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides was minimal. Organic farming was predominantly practiced. Natural water channels existed, and there were no artificial drains.

This was a time when forests, jungles and woodlands were widespread. Every path, patch and crossing would be beautified with various trees, plants and vines. My ‘Baba’ used to say that besides farming and taking care of livestock, he also used to cut wood and supply it to the nearby city, which would then be transported to other cities by rail. Speaking of jungles, vast areas were covered with forests, especially Acacia trees. Other trees like neem, peepal, berry, and wild Capparis trees were also abundant.

The birds, insects, and their beautiful and melodious sounds associated with these trees and forests would captivate the heart, which have now faded away. In my childhood, there was a huge peepal tree near our village, where we spent our childhood under its shade. In the evenings, flocks of birds, especially parrots, would gather in that tree. Today, the parrot population in our area has almost disappeared. Not only parrots, but sparrows, doves and kites are also near extinction, and vultures have completely vanished.

Climate change has not only disturbed ecological, environmental and economic systems but also substantially affected social and communal fabrics. The love, patience, social connection, cooperation, and tolerance that used to exist once have almost vanished. Climate change has altered human behaviours as well.

Previously, evening gatherings were regular events. Arrangements for weddings or any kind of celebration would start 20 days in advance, and everyone in the village would participate equally. Simplicity prevailed; money was sparse, but life was pleasant and happy. Brotherhood, unity and social bonds were the essential elements of peace and love.

In days gone by, climate was remarkably rich, but in the present, due to human meddling, natural environments are being overthrown. The use of chemicals, fertilizers and pesticides in crops and other agricultural fields has resulted in the absence of fish in rice fields and the extinction of other natural life forms. Frogs, which were plentiful during the rice season, have considerably reduced in number.

Numerous summer birds that used to hand aground the rice fields have also declined. Local trees, plants and vines are facing extinction due to human unkindness. Today, the sun is so angry that it seems to be spitting fire because of unwanted human behaviour towards nature.

Capitalism, during the past two centuries, has made substantial material progress globally. But the damage it has done to the economy, society, humanity, natural environment and ecology is permanent. Undoubtedly, during the last two centuries, progress has been made, but the cost has been enormous, and deprived countries have been bearing the brunt for years. Capitalism is a system driven by greed and selfishness, which can never be satisfied. It has now rooted itself so deeply that abolishing or controlling is impossible. Therefore, to protect our climate and future generations from extreme weather and natural disasters, we must take self-help measures and adopt ways that ensure their safety.

A poet has beautifully said:

“I had a squirrel and a sparrow, Both left me one day...

I thought, Why not bring them back?

I planted a tree in my house, And a vine at the door,

First the squirrel, and then the sparrow returned.”

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