



Why they suffer?

“Sir please save my mother, I don’t have anyone in this world except her.”, 21 year old Kartik Biswas (Village: Uttarahirgachhi, Post: Nakasipara, District Nadia, West Bengal, India) pleaded before me breaking down in tears, almost one and half years back. His mother Dulali had symptoms of arsenic toxicity all over her body. She had an ulcer on palm, I suspected cancer. Kartik, himself also had mild arsenical skin lesions. I took them to a known arsenic expert from Kolkata Medical College, Dr. S.C.Mukherjee, he got Dulali admitted immediately. After almost one and half months in hospital Dulali went back home; doctors carried out a skin-grafting on her wound. However they did not diagnose cancer that time. Kartik was studying Geography Honors in Krishnanagar College then. Their economic condition was pathetic. His father, who had severe arsenical skin lesions died in 1991 from blood cancer. Widowed mother raised him up despite the financial constraints. Almost all his family members (11 in number) had arsenic skin lesions on body. His uncle died of ascites in 1982, aunt died in 2002 from cancer. Both of them had severe arsenical skin lesions. Although in eighties many of his family members had similar kind of symptoms, only in 2002 Kartik’s mother was the first one diagnosed to be suffering from arsenocosis and high arsenic concentration was detected in her and neighboring tubewells.

During last one and half year Kartik often used to visit our laboratory for arsenic analysis of his neighboring villages. He volunteered to inform people about arsenic status of their tubewells. A few of the wells have been analysed to be

arsenic safe and Kartik urges people to drink from those ones. He seems determined, “No other mother should suffer of arsenocosis like mine.” Kartik often requests me to arrange for an arsenic-free water supply in their village. I could not promise him. Last few years I wrote to the authority apprising them of the pathetic arsenic situation in many villages like Kartik’s. Alas they did not bother to reply my letters let alone taking action. Sometimes I received pledges of support, but no concrete action was taken. Heaps of letters accumulated without effects. So I gave up trying. We try to do our best amidst limited monetary resources, but that is too little compared to massive requirement.

As usual Kartik comes to our laboratory for analysis. Few months back he told me, his mothers’ ulcer has again appeared, he looked worried over it. About two months back he came again and informed that he has graduated in first class, but his mother’s condition has worsened; Kartik broke down in tears. I called up Dr. Mukherjee again and got her admitted. His mother’s ulcer has much aggravated and, now the doctors diagnosed it to be cancer. Today 24/08/05 Dulali was operated upon. For last few days Kartik spent night in the hospital corridor.

For last 18 years I have witnessed among arsenic sufferers hundreds of mothers losing their children and hundreds of sons their mother. Today my tears have dried up. I just question almighty why it happens. Why??

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A Painful Incident – Harsh Reality

The School of Environmental Studies (SOES) witnessed an undesirable yet established fact through a bizarre mishap.

That the strong torments the weak is a fact known to us since times immemorial.

The balcony and one room of SOES are adorned with a wide spectrum of potted plants (**Figure 1&2**). It is like a jungle in a miniature form and lures birds, butterflies, bees and hordes of other insects.



Figure 1



Figure 2

At the inception of April 2008, we found much to our surprise that an eastern song thrush bird (Bulbul) has set up a nest (**Figure 3& 4**) and settled in one of the colossal plants of our balcony. It was a moment of an inexplicable excitement for all of our SOES members. Normally the bird does not reside in a potted plant but it must have come as our laboratory jungle mimics a real one and sensed her security, away from the cruel world.



Figure 3



Figure 4

Our curiosity increased manifold when the bird laid three eggs over a span of three days from the 17th to the 19th of April (**Figure 5-7**). In no time, SOES conducted a meeting to discuss the welfare of the bird and her eggs. A forest officer was consulted regarding her food of choice during and after hatching.



Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7

One day we noticed that a crow was keeping a strict vigil on Bulbuli's movements and activities (**Figure 8**). We sensed a danger and alarmed our members. Our premonition translated into reality when one fine morning we saw, to our dismay, that the bird's haven has been eradicated completely with the broken shell pieces of her eggs lying helter-skelter on the floor below. The hapless bird was nowhere to be seen.

It was tragic and heart breaking for all SOES members. **However, we accepted the harsh reality that not only birds, animals, humans but also countries, have had to bear the brunt of the torture inflicted upon them by the strong and the superior.** The omnipotent continues to survive. The downtrodden will be eliminated from the canvas of life.



Figure 8

An arsenic patient

The Figure shows an arsenic patient, Bipasha Bhowmik, and her 10-year-old son Chintu. She is from a village in Sonarpur near Kolkata. Her husband left her when the symptoms of arsenic poisoning became visible on her skin. She used to work as a maidservant but cannot find employment any more due to her skin lesions. Now she has lost her ability to work, and the SOES helps her by providing a monthly aid for her son's studies, and their living.

