



The portrayal of the east Kolkata wetlands in the regional language newspaper of Kolkata

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Abstract

Lying in the eastern part of Kolkata, a group of water bodies called the East Kolkata Wetlands supports the natural balance of a vast area including the Kolkata metropolitan, the suburbs of Kolkata, North and South 24 Parganas and Howrah. As stated by the researchers and environmentalists, this 125 sq. km area can play a special role in countering international global warming and climate change. But since the last few decades, the East Kolkata Wetlands is facing the problem of urbanization, especially illegal urbanization, negligence from environmental experts and lack of general awareness. As the result, the natural ecosystem of this region is suffering and it is going to heavily affect the Kolkatans in an indirect manner. In the near future, the deterioration of this natural water body can emerge as one of the main causes behind the annihilation of Kolkata city. This research study is a modest attempt to examine that how all of these problems are getting focused through the mass media especially the regional language newspapers to aware masses. The summaries of the news reports from 'The Telegraph' (English) and 'Ei Samay' (Bengali) are also featured in the article.

Keywords: East Kolkata wetlands, deterioration, regional language newspaper, news, awareness

1. Introduction

East Kolkata Wetlands, which is often described as the Kidney of the City of Joy ^[1], is one of the most unique ecosystems of West Bengal. It is like a fragrant flower in the concrete jungles of Kolkata much like the Hooghly River, Chintamani Kar bird sanctuary, Rabindra Sarobar and Maidan. In 2002, this 125 sq. km ^[2] area got international importance ^[3] under the Ramsar Convention. From then till now, the East Kolkata Wetlands area is the sole Ramsar site ^[4] in Bengal; though the Government of India will apply to the Ramsar Convention Secretariat to include the Sundarbans for the same prestigious significance.

East Kolkata Wetlands is also considered as the world's largest natural organic sewage treatment system ^[5], where the sewage is recycled for pisciculture and agriculture. In the national newspaper 'The Hindu', Aseem Srivastava wrote, "Moreover, after nature's organic treatment, the sewage that drains into the wetlands results in 55,000 tonnes of vegetables and paddy and 10,000 tonnes of fish annually, giving a community of 100,000 people a livelihood" ^[6]. Ecologist Dhrubajyoti Ghosh, who coined the term ^[7] 'East Kolkata Wetlands', has said, these wetlands make Kolkata an 'ecologically subsidized' city ^[8]. He was the man who first tried to bring out the economically wise use of the wetlands ^[9] with the help of Govt. of West Bengal. It is mentioned in a research article of Dhrubajyoti Ghosh and Susmita Sen ^[10] that these low-lying wetlands are ideal for fish like Rohu (Labeo rohita), Catla (Catla catla), Mrigal (Cirrhinus cirrhosis), Silver Carp (Hypophthalmichthys molitrix), Tilapia (Oreochromis niloticus). East Kolkata Wetlands is also home of the marsh mongoose and small Indian mongoose. The Zoological Survey of India has studied a total of 248 bird species (90 aquatic in which 50% is migratory, 11 semi aquatic and 147 terrestrial species) in it ^[11]. This Ramsar Site, also known for its natural beauty, is inhabited by a variety of flora.

The total area of EKWL (East Kolkata Wetlands) exists

between latitudes 22°25' to 22°40' north and longitudes 88°20' to 88°35' east ^[12] approximately. However, for continuous growth of population, the map of Kolkata metropolitan is quickly increasing day by day which is indirectly called organised urbanisation. Due to this, the surrounding areas among which EKWL is a part, has also been included. As the outcome, around half of the wetlands were taken and their ponds filled in so that a smart new suburb, Salt Lake City, could be built. Not only urbanisation but illegal landfills, global warming, greenhouse gas, heavy metals, pollution, increasing local temperature and population ^[13] are also the main cause for degradation of East Kolkata Wetlands. As a fatal consequence of the above-mentioned issues, the Kolkata metropolitan can face a very trouble-ridden future. Thus, if we want to save the capital of Bengal in this situation, then our first and foremost step should be to make the Kolkatans aware. Vir Bala Aggarwal and V.S. Gupta say in their book named 'Handbook of Journalism' ^[14], in a developing country like India, there is an urgent need for dissemination of knowledge in various subjects where mass media can achieve progress in national development. They have also mentioned that media should promote socio-economic development of the country. Ecology, deforestation and conservation-based news can be dubbed in major regional languages in our country to inform the masses. Keeping this theory in mind, this study is a modest attempt to examine how all of these issues are treated or reflected in the regional language newspapers, since mass media is such a medium that is capable of waking up the masses and show the way to solve any problem indisputably.

2. Discussion about the East Kolkata Wetland in the regional language newspaper of Bengal

In the post globalisation era, the Fourth Pillar of Indian democracy ^[15], the mass media, has become the centre of life. The traditional media like newspaper, radio, television, film is able to continually influence the daily life of most of the

Indian people. Today internet and mobile media viz. social media websites like Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, Google+, Snapchat etc. are adding a new dimension to it. Though in the preliminary stage, all of these media impact a particular group of the people in the society. According to the Two Step Flow Theory of Paul Lazarsfeld, this group of people is called Opinion Leader [16]. Opinion leaders are those who are initially exposed to a specific media content and who interpret it based on their own opinion. This person can be an entertainment or movie personality, athlete, artist or any other well-known person. Slowly they influence the whole society in many aspects. Thus, in continuance to last paragraph of the introductory part, it can be stated that mass media, especially the regional language newspapers, can take the beginning steps to wake up the opinion leader group, so that they can make the masses conscious about the importance of the ‘kidney of the city of joy’ as soon as possible.

The newspaper ‘The Telegraph’ (English) and ‘Ei Samay’ (Bengali) are going to be mainly in focus. Regarding EKWL, five news have been received from both newspapers separately. Mainly the qualitative analysis, i.e. the quality of the news is going to be analysed in this article.

Table 1: News about East Kolkata Wetlands in the ‘Ei Samay’ (Bengali) Newspaper

Date	Headline
21/02/2017	Keen on development, State notifies Ramsar expert
14/05/2017	Realtors say no to proposals regarding construction on wetlands, Demands arise
13/02/2018	Wetlands are shrinking, the city in danger, the citizen detached
15/06/2018	Fear for East Kolkata, Tomorrow is Wetland Day
15/06/2018	Should the importance of wetlands be expressed through high prices?

Table 2: News about East Kolkata Wetlands in the ‘The Telegraph’ (English) Newspaper

Date	Headline
15/05/2017	Save wetland plea to architects
20/05/2017	School children turn wetland warriors
23/02/2018	Wetland warrior death put bheris at risk
22/06/2018	Celsius link to wetlands
29/10/2018	Plea to regularise East Calcutta Wetlands road

3. Analysis and Discussion

Prior to analysing the news about the world’s largest natural organic sewage treatment system, it can be said that the East Kolkata Wetlands has been getting priority in the regional language newspapers for a long time. Notably, this topic has been published in ‘The Telegraph’, since the last few decades, mainly the news referring to the degradation of EKWL. Although in this research study, selective news has been taken from 2017 and 2018 for the qualitative analysis. This article is going to discuss those angles which have been highlighted in the newspapers.

a) Unbridled urbanisation

The maximum number of news about East Kolkata Wetlands is related to the extension of Kolkata metropolitan. Mainly Illegal construction of promoters on wetland area, flyover construction from Eastern Metropolitan Bypass to Dum Dum airport, development of this city, roads cutting through bheris in that region-these topics are getting importance again and

again. It has also been highlighted that illegal construction here is being attempted to be changed to legal as a ‘special case’. Very surprisingly, the environment department is connected with this initiative. In a news appearing in ‘The Telegraph’ dated 23/02/2018 it had been clearly said, that illegal work is going on behind the facade of “Special development in public interest”.

b) Negligence of state and central government

The lack of consciousness in the behaviour of the government regarding this issue has been depicted directly in the news. The limitation of knowledge of the wetland experts, usage of wetland area without proper plan has also been highlighted. In a news of ‘Ei Samay’, it is published that a renowned politician of state claimed that the central government submitted the name of East Kolkata Wetlands to the Ramsar convention without informing the Calcutta Municipality, which has become a big issue hurting the development of the Kolkata city today. Now, the most terrifying thing is central and state government blaming each other about this Ramsar, while they act friendly over an issue like the construction of a flyover over the same wetlands which necessitates 192 pillars be built.

c) Increase public awareness

Dhrubajyoti Ghosh, the pioneer of EKWL, has repeatedly said that the East Kolkata Wetlands is not a problem, rather it can act as a solution against global warming. This is why proper promotion through billboards, hoarding etc. is needed to wake up Kolkatans about the “only Ramsar of Bengal”. Making the future generation aware is also essential. The main objective of the awareness is to educate the masses about the wetland which helps Kolkata to prevent flooding. We should also realise that this area is one of the main sources of food supply and place of work for the poor.

d) Absence of Dhrubajyoti Ghosh

Not only the above-mentioned newspapers, but the environmentalists, ecologists and also the people from various other sectors have said that the absence of Dhrubajyoti Ghosh can have a negative impact on the East Kolkata Wetlands. This is because he was the man who was not only interested to protect the wetlands but also took some bold steps. Nobody has come forward to shoulder the responsibility since his demise.

4. Conclusion

This research paper- ‘The Portrayal of the East Kolkata Wetlands in The Regional Language Newspaper of Kolkata’ mainly focuses on how this natural water body can be saved. From the above discussion, the main thing that can be noticed is that the future and well-being of wetland was heavily dependent on ecologist Dhrubajyoti Ghosh. Most of the wetlands related news was written by Mr. Ghosh and his interviews also carried a lot of weightage. Secondly, these reports are mostly incident based, that is to say, they are based on the occurrences of a problem or on special days like Wetland day and Environment day. Apart from those incidents or days, no photojournalism or regular features were published, although the main condition of journalism is continuity and consistency. Mass media can play a special role here as awareness is vital in this regard not only in Kolkata, the suburbs but the people of West Bengal, including as well as the whole country. But this awareness

cannot be created in one day. With the help of Opinion Leaders, it is expected that mass media can create environment consciousness in the society gradually.

5. Acknowledgement

I would like to thank the Department of Journalism & Mass Communication of University of Calcutta. I would extend my gratitude to my parents and friends for helping me repeatedly to edit this publication.

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