



our old folks had fields here

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© an informal farming settlement on the west bank of the Yamuna River
alongside Majnu Ka Tilla, the New Aruna Nagar Colony / Samyeling,
North Delhi, India

This publication is a selection of photographs and fragments of conversations with Delhi farmers from the years 2022 and 2023.

It provides a space for those whose voices do not make it into the public media, which they do not trust anyway – they do not want their faces to be seen and their names to be published. But they are happy to be asked how they live.

Improvised shacks lean against the concrete flood barrier that separates a narrow strip of fields from the Tibetan colony Majnu Ka Tilla. Sewage from factories and home sanitation systems, which people from the shacks have never had, runs directly into the Yamuna through open drains. The river flows quietly under the smog-shrouded sun. Dogs play and cows lie on the banks.

People no longer remember when they came here. They don't believe they have a choice, and have long since given up on the idea of a future. They cultivate the sandy soil mixed with rubbish by hand, not by machine. Then they sell the vegetables tainted with heavy metals and chemicals in the Delhi markets to them, whose waste is turning the river into a toxic zone.

The effect finds itself back on the doorstep of the cause.

Veronika Resslerová, Delhi, June 2023



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Ye baarh ke baad hai na, jab baarh me geeli mitti hoti hai na, usme beech beech se na aise hi haath se hi mila dete hai. Saare kaam haath se, ham machine se koi kaam nahi. Thoda geela hota hain na to usme doodh daalke wo haath se mila dete. To ye dekho na paudha nikal raha hai.

After the floods, when the soil is wet, we mix it like this by hand. We do it all by hand. No machines. When it's wet, we add some milk and mix it by hand. See this plant sprouting?



Ye triptlog hai. Ye gandh aata hai, naali ka pani aur bathroom ka paani.
Nadi ka paani gandhe naale ka aata hai, abb safai ho rahi hai.

This is a triptlog (dial. word). Filth, sewage and also toilet water comes with it.

The river water gets dirty from the sewage, but they are cleaning it up now.



Yeh jo aapne lakdiyan daal rakhi hain yeh kisiye daalte ho?
Baingan bhoora, isko sukha ke isko jalate hain hum.

Toh abhi yeh kheton pe kyun daal rakhi hain?

Yeh kuttein ... inko saara vo kr dete hain. Yeh isiliye toh daalte hain jhamba (dial. word) kaatein si lakdi daalte. Kuttein isko aise aise gaddha khodte hain yaha pe. Kahin ku bhi hum isko daalte hain. Bohut door se sir pe dhar ke latein hain.

The branches that you have laid there, what is the reason for doing that?
Brinjal bhoora, we dry it first and then we burn it.

But then why have you laid them on the fields?

There are these dogs ... They ruin it. That is why we make jhamba (dial. word) using branches with thorns. Dogs dig holes here. We just put these branches everywhere. We have to carry them on our heads. We have to walk for miles to get them.



Haan ye naao hai. Ye hamlog na, jaise vo cartoon hai na, jo daalke bori me se naao banaata hai, phir usse us paar jaate hain. Jaise ghar banaane ka lakdi ho gya, chulhe me jalaane ka lakdi ho gya, ye sab laate hain isse.

Jamna se. Yahaan kahan milega. Idhar (incomprehensible) Udhar jangal hai na, udhar se hi kaatke laana padta hai. Udhar sookhi lakdi milti hain na, ped aise hi gir jaata ya pada hota hai, tuta vala, vo ham utha late hain. Phir jab hamaare paas...

Ye paani hai na, kakdi bote hain na, to isme baithe paar hoke wahaan pe isme kakdi bote hain.

Baas se chalaate hain, dande se. Us paar kakdi tori-vori lagaate hain, to isse leke aate hain.

This is a boat. Like in those cartoons he makes a boat out of a sack. We cross the river with it. We get wood to make our huts and firewood. Across the Yamuna. It cannot be found on this side. There is a jungle there. We cut it over there if we find some dry wood from dead trees, and so on.

We grow cucumbers on that side, so we cross with this to reach there.

We row it with a bamboo stick. We grow cucumbers and gourds on that side, so we cross the river with this.



Ham log khet to saaf karte hain, ve nhi saaf karenge phir kaise kheti hoga, pura hamlog saaf karte hain isko, kuda uthaate hain. Ye gandhi naali hai na, ganda naala hai na wahaan se aata hai. Vaise to abhi to aapko kuda nahi dikhega, kyunki Jamna me safaai chalni hai.

Ab to nhi aapko nhi dekhne milega. Kuch to ganda naala udhar se bhi aata hai, phir aise bhi phekte rehte hain kude. Flyover se to waise bhi fekte rehte hai, koi pooja ka samaan ho gaya, ya waise ho gya, gaadi se aate hain daalke chale jaate hain.

Hamko kheti se pehle to saaf karna hai, Kyaa hai ki panni wanni hogi, kachda hoga to kheti kaise hogi. Wo hamein sab ek-ek uthaana padta hai, phir usko ek jagah lejaake jalaa dena padta hai. Abhi dekho aap khet me kaheen, aapko kachda nahin milega jahaan tak hamaara khet hai.

We clean the fields. If we don't clean them, how're we going to farm? We clean the whole field and pick up all garbage. There's a dirty sewer, a big dirty sewer, right? That's where it comes from. But you won't find any garbage right now. The Yamuna's being cleaned.

So you can't see any garbage now. Some of it comes from that big sewer, and then people throw trash out here, too. They throw some off the bridge also. Like ritual stuff or normal garbage that they just dump out the car window.

We have to clean before we farm. If there're plastic bags everywhere or garbage, how will we farm? So we have to pick it all up, collect it in one place and burn it. If you look at the farm now, you won't find any trash.

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A river is always running away and its channel is the trail of its flight

Aleš Čermák

*Nothing here is real.
This is not a river.
But still it is everything.*

Here, on the right bank, there is a vast area like a field, which protects a part of the city from flooding and separates it from the river. This morning the city awoke to a haze, rain had fallen, and mist and a particular sewer smell were hanging all around. People say that looking at a river instantly soothes away any pain. But is this always true?

Once there was a park full of trees. It spread out next to the riverbank and the turning current exposed many roots alongside. Sometimes when the floods came, the roots would be submerged and the trunks surrounded by water. But it was the wind that finally uprooted the trees, during the great storm that swept through the park. No tree stands forever. If the wind doesn't knock it down, the mushrooms will eat it from within and the woodpeckers will dig through its rotting mass to feed on the insects that live inside.

Life pervades everything, propagates throughout rock, the ozone layer, glaciers. Life proceeds from ocean to solid ground, moves from north to south, like the breeze, in all directions. Life exists as the transition between the planetary living organism and an immaterial dimension. Rather than imagining that the organism of the Earth breathes, which is quite difficult, we imagine life as seeping through mountains, glaciers, rivers, forests. Life has been devalued, people don't even know what it is, and they think it is just a word. We think that the word „life“ might exist in the same way as the words „wind“, „fire“ or „water“.

On a map, rivers are usually represented as blue lines. But rivers are much more than that: they are sites of ecological disasters, transport systems for minerals and human goods, political boundaries, sources of energy, recreational areas and much more. A river is a complex and diverse system of relationships across space and time, which remains invisible in conventional representations. At the same time, during the Anthropocene, humans have directly and indirectly massively altered and continue to alter rivers and river systems.

This is a large river with vast floodplains. It is also an inexhaustible example of the ways in which human beings and nature have shaped each other and how they are intertwined.

UNDERSTANDING THE CONDITIONS

The incomprehensibility of water can teach us a lot about both our struggle to understand this element of which we also consist, and about knowledge in general. Is it possible that water can teach us to know, not necessarily simply more or more exquisitely, but rather more thoroughly or more sensitively?

Note from diary: Understanding conditions heightens our ability to deal with the ever-changing conditions of the environment.

Certain questions circulate where water and knowledge commingle. Understanding this relationship also seems to be a problem rooted in the conflict between different types of knowledge. Knowledge that commodifies and colonizes. Knowledge that provokes needed anger and action. Knowledge that heals.



Ladies kaam krte hain mard bhi krte hain. Poora ghar nahi. Hamare bache chhote hain. Hamare aadmi ka kaam main krti hoon iss time ka ab. Aur labour lagate hain kaam krne main. Subah subah thand thand main krte hain. Iss time nahin krte ab kaam. Subah saag kata tha, baingan tode, tori todi hain, yeh sb tod ke bazaar gaye hain, bacha bechne gya hain. Sham ko toh bs yaha pe bona jotna karenge. Ab palak bovenge, (*dial. word*) bovenge, (*dial. word*) bovenge, ye bote hain. Mix sab.

Both women and men work here. Not everyone in my family works. My kids are too young to work. Now I also do my husband's work. We also hire labourers to work for us. We work early mornings as it is not too hot yet and it is cool. We do not work at this hour (*since it's too hot*). In the morning we collected some vegetables from the field, we had spinach, brinjal (*eggplant*) and squash. We collected them and went to the bazaar (*market*). My son went to sell them. In the evening we will plant new seeds and plough the field. We will plant spinach, (*dial. word for some vegetable*), yes, we sow such vegetables. Everything all together.

Colophon

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