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Mark Smith University of South Carolina, Columbia

Steve Smith All Souls College, Oxford

Eric Tagliacozzo Cornell University

Dr. Prolay Mondal, Ph.D, Department of Geography, Raiganj University, Raiganj, Uttar Dinajpur, West Bengal, India

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HISTORY OF HUMAN SETTLEMENT IN THE INDIAN SUNDARBANS, WEST BENGAL: A HISTORICAL BACKGROUND Arabindu Sardar

Assistant Professor in History, Sarat Centenary College, Dhaniakhali, Hooghly & Ph.D Research Scholar of The University of Burdwan.

Abstract:

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The Sundarbans, world's largest active delta, are unique in its nature. Its own The Sundarbails, worker and a star of smaller deltas, innumerable islands, estuarine system, intricate coastlines, clusters of smaller deltas, innumerable islands, estuarine system, introduce construction of the system, criss-crossed by numerous distributaries, provides great diversity to the eco-system, I want to reconstruct the early settlement history of the Sundarbans. The Sundarbans was known as 'Bhati' or 'Bhati desh' in the medieval texts. Somewhere again it is called 'Athorro vattir desh'. During the Colonial Rule pull factors and push factors had played important role in the settlement of the migrants in the Sundarbans in India, especially in the process of execution of Tilman Henckell's "Sundarban's Plan". The colonial governments leased the reclaimed land of the Sundarbans to the zamindars (land lords), those who paid the highest price in the auction. During colonial period, the entire Sundarbans region was divided into 167 lots and 12 plots. However, the zamindars to avoid paying enhanced revenue, started large scale encroachment of the forest adjacent to their estates. The lotdars/zamindars of the Sundarbans hired in different ethnic groups from neighbouring states and districts as labourers who are known as 'Abadkari'.

Key Words: Sundarbans, Migration, Environmental Change, Settlement

Sundarbans, the largest delta in the world, is formed on the extreme downstream of the Ganges River. The region is spread across the southern part of West Bengal a provincial state of the Indian Union and the neighbouring country of Bangladesh. The Indian part of Sundarbans is demarcated by the river Hooghly on the West, the Bay of Bengal on the South, the Ichhamati, Kalindi and Raimangal rivers on the East and Damphere-Hodges line on the North. The entire mangroves forest, which is covers approximately 9630 square kilometres, is known for extraordinary wildlife bio-diversity including numerous threatened species such as the Royal Bengal tiger, estuarine crocodile, Indian python and several species of river dolphin. According to Sir William Wilson Hunter the Sundarbans as a tangled region of estuaries, rivers, and watercourses, enclosing a vast number of islands of various shapes and sizes.¹

This largest single stretch eco-region forest lies 60% located in the Nation state of Bangladesh and the remaining 40% rests with India. The entire Sundarbans area of India is spread over the districts of North 24 Parganas and South 24 Parganas, covering 19 administrative blocks. It comprises 102 islands among which 54 islands are inhabited by men, where more than 4.5 million people live in the rest part of the km² of non-forested area (inhabited portion of the Sundarbans). In a deltaic terrain, the most characteristic geomorphological feature is the pan-shaped interfluves.

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