

Refugees of the Kosi Embankments

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Barh Mukti Abhiyan Bihar

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The Kosi River

The Kosi is one of the most vibrant rivers of North Bihar. The Kosi starts its journey at a height of about 7000 meters(m) in the Himalayan range and its upper catchment is located in Nepal and Tibet. The highest summits of the Everest and Kanchanjunga ranges form a part of the Kosi's watershed. The river is also called the Sapta (seven) Kosi in Nepal, because of its seven tributaries — Indravati, Sun Kosi or Bhot Kosi, Tamba Kosi, Likshu Kosi, Doodh Kosi, Arun Kosi, and Tamar Kosi. The first five rivers join to form the Sun Kosi that flows from west to east. These rivers descend from the Gauri Shankar and the Makalu ranges. The sixth stream is called the Arun Kosi and Sagarmatha (Mount Everest) is located in its catchment. The seventh stream, Tamar Kosi, flows from east to west and brings the Kanchanjunga waters with its flow. The Sun Kosi, Arun Kosi and Tamar Kosi join at Triveni in Dhankutta district of Nepal and assume the names Sapta Kosi, Maha Kosi or the Kosi.

After entering the plains, the bed of the Kosi widens drastically and it spreads over 6 to 10 km. After traversing a distance of about 50 km in Nepal, it enters Indian territory at Bhim Nagar. Hanuman Nagar, located on the west bank of the Kosi, is in Nepal while on the east bank, Bhim Nagar lies in the Indian district of Supaul. From Bhim Nagar the river flows in a southwesterly direction for about 100 km till it reaches Mahishi in Saharsa district of Bihar. From Mahishi, it turns southeast and after flowing another 33 km, it crosses the Saharsa–Mansi rail line, south of Kopadia railway station, and joins the Ganga near Kursela in Katihar district.

The total catchment area of the Kosi is 74,030 sq.km., not including the catchment areas of its two important tributaries, the Kamla (7,232 sq.km.) and the Bagmati (14,384 sq.km.). These tributaries of the Kosi are important in themselves and are generally dealt with separately. Out of the total catchment of the Kosi, only 11,410 sq.km. is located in India and the rest 62,620 sq.km. lie in Nepal or Tibet. Its catchment area at Triveni is 59,550 sq.km.

In 1953 the Government of India gave formal approval to the Kosi Project which led to the construction of 125km long embankments on the eastern bank of the Kosi, from Birpur to Kopadia and 126km long, from Bhardah in Nepal to Ghonghepur in Saharsa, on the western bank. This work was almost completed by 1959. The embankments were supposed to protect 214,000ha of land from the recurring floods of the Kosi. A barrage across the river was also constructed near Birpur in 1963 to facilitate irrigation of 712,000ha, through the Eastern Kosi Main Canal. Another canal, called the Western Kosi Canal, the foundation stone of which was laid in 1957, is also being constructed to irrigate some 325,000ha of crop land on the western side of the barrage. The work on this canal is still in progress. Because of the construction of these embankments, some 380 villages spread over 13 blocks and 4 districts are entrapped between them.

The Flood Debate goes Public

Before we get into the flood debate, it is essential to recall that when a heavily silt laden river is embanked, the sediment gets trapped within the embankments, lifting the bed level successively upwards and necessitating the raising of the embankments. There is a practical limit to which the embankments can be raised and maintained. The river water seeps through these embankments and causes water logging in the countryside. The countryside is deprived of the nutritious silt that it would have got if the river was allowed to flow freely. The embankments prevent the flow of the tributaries from getting into the main river and sluice gates have to be constructed to allow the tributary water to flow into the main river. These sluice gates cannot be opened during the rainy season because there is a possibility of the main river water entering the tributary and flooding newer areas hitherto free from flooding. The tributaries, on their own, may start flowing parallel to the main river outside, again flooding new areas. It can then be suggested that the tributaries also be embanked, trapping the rainwater between the embankments of the main river and the tributary. The only route for this water to escape is through evaporation or seeping into the ground. Or else, it may have to be pumped into either of the streams. Should any of the embankments breach, then the people residing between the two embankments will meet a watery grave. No embankment can be guaranteed against breaching, not even in the USA or China. The cost of relief and rehabilitation would offset all the

benefits that have accrued over the years in the event of a single major breach. It was for these reasons that the British never repeated the Damodar mistake for the remainder of their rule in India.

Seeking flood protection through embankments amounts to falling into a trap from which it is very difficult to escape. A section of engineers, however, believes that if a given amount of water passes through a reduced area, its velocity increases and so does its capacity to erode. When embankments are built along any river, the velocity of flow increases and the river water can erode the banks and dredge the bottom of the river thereby increasing the waterway of the river. More waterways would mean a greater capacity to carry discharge and hence the floods would be reduced. There is, however, no factual evidence from India, China or the USA to support this argument. The debate whether embankments increase the floods or decrease them, is yet to be resolved amongst the engineers. They also avoid any public debate by saying that every river has its own special characteristics and should be dealt with separately. They recommend or reject embanking scheme depending upon the social or political pressure brought on them. The arguments favouring or against the embankments are apparently technically so sound that nobody can point a finger at them. The fact, however, is that the benefit of this inconclusive debate goes to the politicians who take the decisions on embanking rivers, or otherwise, and the engineers only play a subservient role.

The Kosi Project was technological quick-fix to a government's political compulsion. Hundreds of thousands of unsuspecting villagers, desiring a way out of the annual trauma of floods, saw their lives become an endless nightmare. The government's response to their perils can only be described as callous. Even today, no official and reliable information is available about the number of people — or even the number of villages — within the Kosi embankments. There is a Rehabilitation Office at the district headquarters of Supaul but even there no reliable information about the rehabilitation status of the embankment's victims is available.

The issue has been debated in the Bihar Vidhan Sabha and a list of villages trapped within the Kosi embankments was placed on the table of the House on December 18, 1958. This list is incomplete and

misleading as it contains the names of villages that are completely outside the embankments. In 1992 the Government of Bihar asked the Collectors of Darbhanga, Saharsa, Madhubani and Supaul to submit a list of villages trapped within the embankments. This list too is incorrect. A list of villages provided by the Rehabilitation Office at Supaul contains 285 villages, which is also incorrect. Thus the information about the embankment victims differs from source to source. In this chapter, we attempt to prepare a list of such villages depending on the maps of the affected blocks, maps of the polling booths prepared by the Election Commission and the Census Report of 2001. This list has been verified at different stages and it is hoped that it is correct.

It is unofficially stated that about 800,000 persons are living within the embankments. These are the people who face the onslaughts of floods on an annual basis. The people who have sacrificed their interests for the common good of the society have only received neglect in return and no one seems to have the time to look into their grievances.

The official callousness was highlighted by the intervention of Rasik Lal Yadav, while speaking on the Bihar Appropriation Bill 1959 in the Bihar Vidhan Sabha, on March 20, 1959. He said, "The situation with the revenue department is such that its Circle Officers chase the people and extract revenue from them while their houses are submerged in water. They even chase those who grow only cucumbers to meet their ends. Those who live in the countryside of the embankments are told to go within the embankments for their agriculture. When they go within the embankments, the boatmen managing the ghats chase them for ferrying costs. The Kosi Project was taken up to protect the people and not for chasing them away."¹ Forty-nine years later the situation remains the same in the Kosi basin except that most of the people who were rehabilitated outside the embankments have gone back to their villages within the embankments.

1. Seeking Rehabilitation

The first reference to any rehabilitation plan was made by Rai Bahadur A.N. Khosla, then Chairman of the Central Board of Irrigation and Power, in 1947, in the context of the proposal for the Barahkshetra Dam on the Kosi River. He said, "It is desirable that the sacrifices and benefits be uniformly distributed. In case where no new areas are

available for resettlement, this can be achieved by the owners of the areas benefited by irrigation being asked to part with a percentage of their land corresponding to the ratio which the submerged area bears to the total area benefited, subject to the condition that no holding shall be reduced below a minimum economic holding... The problem of compensation and resettlement has to be faced with vision and sympathy. Compensation should as far as possible be land for land. Model villages with modern amenities should be set up in the new lands in place of old dwellings which will be submerged."²

This was a general statement on rehabilitation. As far as the Barahkshetra Dam was concerned, it was not a matter of local concern as almost all the displacement and rehabilitation was going to take place in Nepal. The embankments on the Kosi were not in any reckoning then.

The recommendations of Kanwar Sain and Dr K.L. Rao, following their visit to the Hwang Ho Basin in China, became the base line for the rehabilitation in the Kosi Project (1953) where a sizable population was going to get trapped between the embankments. They had written about rehabilitation in such river schemes, "There were 240,000 persons in the detention basin. About 80,000 of them have been rehabilitated outside the basin in other areas. The remaining 160,000 will continue to remain in the basin and cultivate the land there. As the basin is likely to be submerged only once in 10 to 15 years, there will be some inconvenience and loss caused to them only at such long intervals. Their places of habitation have been shifted to higher spots and have been protected by local dykes against the highest water level. In fact the productivity of the farmland will be somewhat higher. Whenever any loss to crop actually takes place, the land tax will be remitted and suitable compensation will be paid for such loss."³

This suggestion of Dr K.L. Rao and Kanwar Sain paved the way for solving the rehabilitation problem of the Kosi embankments. Those who were going to be trapped within the embankments were a worried lot as their future was at stake. The statement of Lalit Narayan Mishra on December 2, 1954 in Patna and the findings of the Poona Hydraulic Laboratory helped to temporarily convince the people that their lives within the embankments would not be threatened. (See : "Trapped Between the Devil and Deep Waters".)

Long term rehabilitation

To start with, long-term rehabilitation was a non-issue in the Kosi Project. Stray voices were heard after it began and these too were limited to encourage those likely to be trapped to sacrifice their lands for the larger interests of the society and for the building of a new nation. Flood victims of the Kosi Basin were repeatedly told that the proposed embanking of the Kosi was a great plan mooted to protect them from devastating floods in the river. It was aimed at converting the bane of the river into a boon. It was a very costly scheme to tame the river and provide succor to the people. The people were told to be prepared to readily make some sacrifices to achieve these great targets. The Administrator of the Kosi Project, T.P. Singh, reported in 1955 that, "Fair compensation will be paid for the land likely to be trapped within the embankments at the soonest. People will not have to run for this. The embankments will not bifurcate any village nor would any house be destroyed because of the alignment of the embankments. Should any house be demolished, immediate solution to the problem will be found out and staff scarcity will not come in the way."⁴ Mahi Narayan Jha, Public Relations Officer of the project added, "although no decision has yet been taken regarding the situation of those living within the embankments, the results of the experiments from the Poona Laboratory are encouraging and it is being understood that they will not be inconvenienced much."⁵

The issue of compensation, rehabilitation, and well-being of those living within the embankments remained unaddressed for a long time even after the start of the construction work and nobody knew what was in store for the people who would become hapless victims of the Project.

On March 2, 1956, the Kosi Control Board met in Patna to discuss the issues of compensation and rehabilitation. It is reported that the members of the Central Water and Power Commission were opposed to paying any compensation to the embankment victims. But Ram Charittar Singh, then Irrigation Minister in Bihar, and T. P. Singh prevailed upon their views. The Chief Minister also, supported the views of the latter. The Chairman of the Central Water and Power Commission was reported to be of the view that payment of

compensation in one project would set a wrong precedence and people would start demanding rehabilitation in all such projects in the future.⁶

Lalit Narayan Mishra demands rehabilitation

A public meeting of BSS workers at Ghoghardiha on June 11, 1956 concluded, "This conference invites the attention of the Government of India and the Government of Bihar towards the sad plight of the people trapped between the river and the embankments. The villages of Karhara, Loukahi, Dhanchhea, Bagewa, Aloula, Hatni, Nighma, Shatrupatti, Saharawa, Naua Bakhar (Phul Paras *Thana*) and Bishunpur, Tardiha, Sikaria, Mahisam and Mataras along the western Kosi embankment are greatly distressed. The villages located within two or three kilometers of the embankment will face the wrath of the river. These villages will be the first to get submerged and their crops will be lost. Their future is bleak and there is no hope that they will ever get respite from the floods of the Kosi."⁷ It also demanded that wherever possible, the villages be protected by ring bunds, flood victims be resettled, proper arrangements be made for providing employment to embankment victims and certificates be issued to them for waiving land revenue and recovery of loans.

Lalit Narayan Mishra, who had said on December 2, 1954 that the problem of rehabilitation was not very serious and there would be a further rise of only four inches in the flood levels, proposed this resolution. It was seconded by Rasik Lal Yadav. Following this, people kept on demanding rehabilitation and the officials kept on harping about the details that would come from the Poona Laboratory. These findings became an object of ridicule during the floods of 1956. (Since Mishraji had already given a forecast that the flood levels would rise by only four inches, there was no need to wait for the reports of the Poona Laboratory.)

Where is the much promised relief?

T. P. Singh told media persons on June 11, 1956 that a vast tract of Saharsa district was safe from floods because an embankment had been built. The area that once resembled an ocean had been turned into lush green fields. He maintained that it was not possible to protect the people living within the embankments from floods and

that arrangements were being made to shift them to safer places.⁸

These views were officially nurtured but the reality within the embankments was entirely different. In the Bihar Vidhan Sabha, Janaki Nandan Singh, MLA narrated the peoples' sufferings, "I have traveled through that area in a boat and the pathetic condition of the people that I have seen in those places will make anybody cry. They do not have a dry piece of land even for answering nature's call. There is no crop and they are face-to-face with death. Relief could probably have saved them from this disaster but it has been suspended for some days.... You claim to be a welfare state and on the other hand thousands of people are facing starvation.... It is a pity that you say that there is no money. Then what is the government for?"⁹

Agitation for rehabilitation

People's dissent simmered slowly as they began to understand the impact of the embankments. Braja Nandan Azad wrote that a movement was launched under the leadership of Bhushan Gupta, Chairman of the Saharsa District Board in the middle of 1956. He took up the cause of the people whose houses and lands were trapped within the embankments because it was certain by then that they would face the devastating currents of the river for all times to come after the river was embanked. He baulked at the various official assurances that nothing untoward would happen.¹⁰

The assurance that 'nothing untoward will happen' raises many crucial questions. One can understand that the common masses are illiterate and simple and do not understand engineering and that they cannot understand the benefits of the Project but it is amazing to note that even the leaders did not know that after the river was embanked, all the water of the Kosi that was flowing through its various channels would flow within the embankments. Did they not know that the flood problem, which the entire Kosi belt faced, would become exclusive to the unfortunate victims within the embankments? Did the experts not know what had happened in case of the Hwang Ho River in China or the Mississippi in the USA? Did they not know that the Chinese people were sick of the embankments on their rivers and they had already invited Russian engineers to suggest a solution to their problem much before our experts visited China? Did the

engineers at the Poona Hydraulics Laboratory not know that the land within the embankments sloped towards the west and that the river water would not follow the law of averages, or that it would not flow smoothly with an added depth of 10 centimeters? What sort of model had they created in the Poona Hydraulic Laboratory that did not resemble the field conditions and the villagers had to educate them that the land within the embankments was tilting towards the west? Did the leaders of Bharat Sevak Samaj, who had the mandate of 'breaking and shaking mountains', not know that the people would have to be shifted from their villages?

The answer is, they all knew it. According to Braja Nandan Azad, "At the earlier stages this issue was not allowed to be pressed because the cost of the Project would go up and the Project itself might be threatened with rejection. That fear is over. It should now be possible for the authorities concerned to plan evacuation." ¹¹ His views were reinforced by M M Prasad (MLA) who wrote, "Bihar is entitled to ask and does ask if the Bihar Government realizes even now that they as well as the Union Government have been less than fair, have been, in fact, callous towards the fate and fortune of a population ...in exact figures of 1.91 lakhs; 45,291 houses of which 2528 are pucca and cultivated area of 46,331 hectares over half of which is paddy producing. ...It is admitted by the chief of the Central Water, Power and Irrigation Commission, that even a flood of 2 lakh cusecs(5,670 cumecs) overtops the banks and it may so happen that in the absence of relief generally available from the spread of floodwaters...the consequent inundation may endanger both life and property and create an intolerable situation...If the people concerned are to be left to the tender mercies of demonstrations in the Poona Institute, their future can be well imagined."¹²

The Poona Hydraulic Laboratory was held in high esteem in 1957 and T.P. Singh, defended its findings saying, "In the model tests silt conditions cannot be reproduced. That is why unexpected deterioration in the condition of several villages within the embankments has been witnessed, 20 villages found to be badly submerged in a low flood of 190,000cusecs in 1956 are shown as unaffected in the test at Poona with 900,000cusecs. In the current season, with 266,000cusecs, nearly two dozen villages have become unlivable.

Some villages close to the embankments have been eroded. The place of attack will keep on shifting from year to year. In this background, the public demand that some ameliorative measures should be immediately taken in hand cannot be disputed."¹³

MM Prasad, raised other concerns also. He said, "I would invite the attention of Irrigation Minister to the problem of the Kosi that confronts a population of 1.5 lakhs. It cannot be solved in the research laboratory at Poona. Kosi is a meandering river and the excessive discharge of water causes great difficulty to the people. Sir, the sooner the problem is tackled, the better it will be for the people and the government. In spite of the efforts that you have made the problem remains where it was."¹⁴

In a letter to the editor of Aryavarta, Lahtan Chaudhary, Kamta Prasad Gupta, Bholu Sardar and Khub Lal Mahato wrote in September 1956, "Lakhs of people trapped between the two embankments of the Kosi curse their fate and suffer from a fear complex. The Government, instead of alleviating the sufferings of the people, has added fuel to the fire. The concerned officials (have) never bothered to inform the people that a danger looms large over them and that they should be prepared to shift any moment. The people left most of their land, on which they could have grown some crops, fallow... The relief distribution has also been stopped. Many villages, located outside the embankments have become pools and their plight has become even worse."¹⁵

It is unbelievable that these acclaimed leaders of their times did not guess the impact of the embankments. As leaders they actually should have been aware of the uncertainty, at the very least, but they chose to keep quiet. Why were such conditions created that a large number of people had to curse their fate subsequent to the construction of embankments in the Kosi Project?

Lahtan Chaudhary demands rehabilitation

After the second general elections were over in 1957, the leaders found some time to show sympathy to the embankment victims. Referring to the views of the agitators who were demanding rehabilitation, Lahtan Chaudhary, among other things, suggested that.¹⁶

(1) The government should immediately announce that it would assume the responsibility of the well-being of the people likely to be trapped within the embankments.

(2) Survey parties, in good numbers, should be sent to assess the details of the houses and agricultural fields of every family so that they are properly compensated for, in the time of their need. This should be completed before June because the floods will hamper the work after that. In addition, the position of the land also changes after the floods.

(3) The villages that are likely to be hit by floods first, should be relocated before the rains and they should be informed about this decision.

(4) Those who do not want to move or those the government feels need not shift, should get waivers on government loans, land revenue, and other taxes. Proper arrangements for providing them with relief should be ensured and a separate officer appointed to avoid delays.

2. The Government Proposes a Deflated Rehabilitation Package

In July 1957, it was water everywhere, both inside and outside the embankments. It was inside the embankments because that was the route the flowing river could take. It was outside the embankments because the tributaries could not empty their waters into the main river. Even a blind person could foresee what would happen on the ground and it is hard to believe that the politicians and the planners could not foresee the coming events. They deliberately kept people in the dark and, many a times, they took refuge in the technical study being done at the Poona Laboratory.

The people mounted pressure on the government for relocation but not enough land was available for such massive rehabilitation. It was never anticipated that people would be so organized in the years to come, that they would remind their leaders of their obligations to the embankment victims. If that was known earlier, the government would have been ready with a rehabilitation package. It realized that if the total value of all the assets had been accounted for it would have to pay something to the tune of Rs. 10cr to Rs. 11.5cr. This amount would have disproportionately increased the cost of the project that

was estimated to be Rs 37cr.

The state government conducted a survey of the villages trapped within the embankments and found out that this land was about 260,108 acres (105,307ha). If it chose to compensate agricultural, habitation and orchards land @ Rs 500/- per acre, uncultivated agricultural land @ Rs. 200/ per acre and fallow land @ Rs. 100/- per acre, it would have to incur the following costs,

Agricultural land	Rs. 7,26,91,000/-
Non – agricultural land	Rs. 1,13,47,800/-
Orchards	Rs. 4,56,000/-
Land unfit for cultivation	Rs. 50,49,200/-
Habitations	Rs. 32,91,500/-
Total	Rs. 9,28,35,500/-

Similarly, if houses with *pucca* roof were compensated @Rs. 5/- per sq. ft., tiled roof houses with *pucca* walls @Rs. 3/- per sq.ft., *kuchcha* houses @Rs 2.50/- per sq. ft., *kuchcha* houses with tiled roofing @Rs. 2/- per sq. ft. and *kuchcha* thatched houses @Rs. 0.75/- per sq. ft.; and their total value depreciated between 10 to 60 per cent, the government would have to spend the following amounts:

House Construction	Rs. 65,94,904/-
Tanks	Rs. 27,92,325/-
Wells	Rs. 5,16,573/-
Trees/ Plants	Rs. 8,44,888/-
Total	Rs. 1,07,48,690/-

Thus, the total compensation cost was valued at Rs. 10,35,84,190/- . Adding to this the cost of necessary acquisition @16 per cent, the total rehabilitation package would be somewhere around Rs. 11.90cr.

The government knew very well that even after paying such high rates for acquiring land, it would not be available. The only solution it saw was in adjusting the agricultural pattern and crop cycle. It also realized that if the entire property worth Rs 10 to 11.50cr had to be compensated for, then the estimated cost of the Project would balloon and the Project itself would have to be shelved.¹⁷

It was then decided that the houses would be relocated outside

the embankments and the farmers would till their ancestral land to make their living. Such an important decision about the fate of the persons displaced by the embankments was taken without any consultation and agreement with the concerned people. It was done exactly in the manner of arranged marriages in our society. It is the parents alone who know what is in the best interest of their daughter, but she has no say in making a decision about her future. When it was confirmed that such a decision would alienate people from their ancestral land, the government further decided that it would provide a tank valued at Rs 10,000/- for every 2000 population and a tube well @Rs 500/- for every 100 persons. A boat, valued at Rs 250/- each, was proposed to be given for a population of 50 to facilitate travel to their agricultural land within the embankments and the land was proposed to be acquired @Rs 800/- per acre. Providing for 15 per cent as the acquisition cost, the revised rehabilitation package read as under:

Land for housing	Rs. 75,64,400/-
House construction	Rs. 1,14,22,990/-
Tanks	Rs. 5,70,000/-
Wells	Rs. 5,70,000/-
Boats	Rs. 5,70,000/-
Total	Rs. 2,12,67,390/-

In his memorandum to the council of ministers, the Administrator, T. P. Singh, suggested that since the displaced persons of the Kosi embankments were not yet compensated, their case should be sympathetically looked at.¹⁸

The government had a feeling that after giving some doles to the embankment victims, they would all get busy snatching the alms. If the decisions were left to the engineers of the Central Water Commission, they would not have allowed even this much relief. They had made their intentions very clear in the meeting of the Kosi Control Board on March 2, 1956. It is customary to stitch caps to fit on to the head but what was happening here on rehabilitation issue in the Kosi Project was exactly the opposite.

In reply to a question of Parmeshwar Kunwar in 1958, the then Chief Minister of Bihar suggested, "It will not be correct to say that

all the villages located within the embankments will be swept away. Some villages may face this problem. It is also not possible that all the land located within the embankments will be rendered unfit for cultivation. It is quite likely that while some of the lands may become infertile, at the same time, the fertility of some lands may improve....It cannot be said with certainty that all the people residing within the embankments will have to move outside, but it is a fact that people residing in those areas fear that such a situation may arise. The state government has approved a scheme for the permanent rehabilitation of the people in the concerned area."¹⁹

After their return from China, Kanwar Sain and Dr. K.L.Rao had used the same language but was the line of action taken by the government adequate? If a farmer's land improves because of fresh silt on his land, he would be a gainer; but in case of a farmer whose land is eroded, waterlogged or sand cast his interests would suffer. Erosion, waterlogging or sand casting are problems that keep on changing location as well as magnitude.

After a lot of persuasion, Dip Narayan Singh, replying on behalf of the government in the Bihar Vidhan Sabha, on December 3, 1958 assured the House that the government would provide for:

1. An equivalent area of homestead land at a reasonable distance from the embankments on the outside so that the villagers might live as close as possible to their cultivable land within the embankments.
2. Additional land for community services like schools, roads, etc.
3. Water supply at the rehabilitation sites with the help of tanks, tube wells and wells.
4. Grants for building houses.
5. Boats to be used as means of transport to and from the agricultural lands lying inside the embankment.

On February 15, 1960 when the Bihar Vidhan Sabha was debating the annual budget, the House was told that 70 out of 304 villages had been rehabilitated in the Kosi project and efforts were on to rehabilitate the remaining population. Ramanand Tiwari, MLA, passed a scathing remark on the Government's rehabilitation performance. He said, "If

you have resettled 70 villages in two years time and keep the same pace to resettle people, you are going to take another nine years to complete the job. Do you expect me to pat you on your back for this achievement?" Ramanand Tiwari had no inkling that the job was not going to be completed even in nine years.

Payment schedule defined

It was not possible for the government to provide compensation for land or give 'land for land' but it decided to compensate for the houses. In 1963 Debesh Mookerjea, Chief Engineer of the Kosi Project, suggested that the scheme of permanent rehabilitation would include house building grants equivalent to the full value of the house left on the river side, without making any deduction on account of these houses which would be left with the displaced persons. It was decided to pay the house building grants in installments as indicated below:

- (1) for a value of Rs. 200 and less, the payment shall be made in two equal installments;
- (2) For a value between Rs. 200 to Rs. 5,000/- in three installments;
- (3) For a value above Rs. 5,000 in four installments.

The first installment would be paid as soon as the plot of land acquired by the government was allotted. A scale of expenditure to be incurred on construction of houses, out of the total amount received as the value of the existing houses, was then fixed as below:

- (i) 75% must be spent out of the amount valued up to Rs. 1000.
- (ii) 60% for amounts between Rs.1000 to Rs. 5000.
- (iii) 50% for amounts between Rs.5000 to Rs. 15000.
- (iv) 33% for amounts between Rs.10000 to Rs. 15000.
- (v) 25% for valuation above Rs. 15000.

According to Mukherjea, "(The) state government has, however, undertaken a livelihood cause and compilation of data for small-scale and cottage industries in order to plan out suitable schemes for the economic uplift of the rehabilitated population."²⁰

3. Crawling Performance of Rehabilitation Schemes

Promises from the politicians and officials notwithstanding, the actual work of rehabilitation on the ground was in a very poor shape. Baidya Nath Mehta (MLA) made a fervent appeal to the government

in 1966. He said, "When you can arrange for the people who have come from Pakistan, why cannot you rehabilitate these people who are suffering mainly due to your own doing. They had cooperated with you and not only did they cooperate, they offered *shramdan* and made this embankment without charging any wages while they knew that they would suffer in the future because of this embankment ... You reach them only when the elections are due, make tall promises and ask for their vote. You promise that you will waive the rent, will solve the land problem and build house for house. Once the elections are over, you set yourself into reverse gear."²¹

By 1970, some 6650 families were relocated outside the embankments. This meant that over 38,000 families still lived inside them. The government faced difficulties in land acquisition while the people had their own set of problems. The rehabilitation sites were far away from their fields and commuting was a major problem because one had to cross various channels of the Kosi. Politicians had promised that boats would be provided but they were not made available. The major problem with rehabilitation, it was argued, was that people were attached to the lands of their ancestors, and were unwilling to stay away.

Parmeshwar Kunwar (MLA), however, blasted this argument in 1968. Referring to his own village Tarahi, located within the embankments, he said, "The rehabilitation problem is not yet sorted out there. They have been left to the mercy of God. They are told to settle down 4 to 5 miles in the west in Darbhanga district where they do not want to go.... Today if the people go to the officials, they tell them to go to the minister and when they contact the minister, he says go and talk to the officials. There are 1200 bighas of land that have been acquired for resettlement and the people are willing to go there but they are not permitted to get on to this patch of land. The people are in trouble and the government says that the people are too attached to their ancestral land."²² Later, the lands on which rehabilitation sites were provided slowly became waterlogged and unfit for living.

According to a Public Accounts Committee Report to the Bihar Vidhan Sabha, between 1958 and 1962, some 12,084 families were allotted homestead land outside the embankments and Rs. 16.73 lakhs were granted to them as the first installment. When there was no progress in the work, the Project authorities decided to persuade

people to shift to new locations and if they did not agree to move, the committee recommended that recovery proceedings be initiated against them.²³

Another committee of the Bihar Vidhan Sabha reviewed this problem from a different angle. It said that the people, whose interests had been totally sacrificed in building the embankments on the Kosi, spent a nomadic life for four to five months a year. "It is a pathetic situation. Every year thousands of people are appointed to the Project and the contractors swindle lakhs of rupees. But the affected people neither get the jobs nor any preference in the award of contracts. They are ignored. Their number is negligible in work charge appointments let alone the permanent jobs in the Project. This situation should not be taken lightly. It can assume serious proportions any time and may lead to a law and order problem... The rehabilitation scheme in progress is totally inadequate. The farmers and the labourers are given only homestead land. They are not given any land for their livelihood. No industry is being opened in the area. All that the people receive is about 4 decimals of land and some grant to build thatched houses for themselves. Most of this money is spent on collecting the grant."²⁴ According to this report, till 1972-73, a sum of Rs 1,75,28,392/- of the total allocation of Rs. 2,12,67,390/- had been spent on rehabilitation. At that point 32,540 families had been given the grants of which only 10,580 were given the second installment. Nobody had qualified for the third and final grant since none of the houses were complete. A major constraint to building houses was that the rehabilitation was looked after by the Rehabilitation Department while the Kosi Project carried out the measurements. People had to run after officials at two places many times.

4. Displaced Profiles

Not much has changed since Rasik Lal Yadav charged the government with mismanaging the Kosi Project except that most people who were given sites for rehabilitation outside the embankments, have returned to their old villages within the embankments. The first reason for their return was they did not want to walk daily to their fields from the sites where they had been rehabilitated. As the spacing of the embankments was about 10 kilometers, they had to walk a long distance everyday and agriculture became unmanageable. It so happened that the villages that were close to the embankments got

rehabilitation sites just outside the embankment. As the distance of the village to be rehabilitated on the riverside increased from the embankment, its rehabilitation site also went farther from the embankment on the countryside, with the result that the village that was farthest from the embankment, was resettled at the farthest point outside the embankment. This caused immense hardships to the people. Secondly, the rehabilitation sites subsequently became waterlogged because the embankments blocked the drainage of the country. Thirdly, the people were emotionally attached to their ancestral lands. When people returned to their old villages, their rehabilitation files were closed as the government felt that they were not interested in rehabilitation and wanted to live closer to their ancestral land.

Table 8.1 gives an idea of the number of villages and the population (2001) trapped within the Kosi embankments. It must be clarified here that,

- (a) It is widely accepted by those concerned about the Kosi problems that 304 villages are trapped within its embankments. Officials at the Rehabilitation Office at Supaul too accept this figure during conversations but their official list contains only 285 villages. Similarly, no authentic information is available about the number of people residing within the embankments and this figure ranges from 0.8 to 1.6 million. We have tried to end this speculation and have found that there are 380 revenue villages spread over four districts and 13 blocks and the population of these villages is about 9.88 lakhs (2001 census).
- (b) The western Kosi embankment terminates at Ghonghepur in Mahishi block of Saharsa district. South of Mahishi, are Simri-Bakhtiyarpur and Salkhua blocks of the same district. The Kosi Project identified only those villages of these two blocks as affected by the embankment that were located within the eastern embankment and the river, when the eastern embankment was being constructed. The villages that were located on the west of the river in these two blocks (See Fig.3.5), were not counted as displaced villages and hence were not entitled to any rehabilitation. Kabiradharpur village of Salkhua block is an example of this discrimination. Its condition is equally bad, if not worse, as compared to the other villages defined by the Project as villages entrapped within the embankments. Floodwaters of the Kosi are

pushed toward this village because of the eastern Kosi embankment and the situation there is no less alarming than the corresponding villages within the embankments. We have included Kabiradhap and other such villages in our list.

(c) Some villages, like Mahishi of Saharsa district are included in the list although most of its population, barring Kothia Tola, lives outside the eastern embankment. The reasons for its inclusion are: (i) Most of the agricultural land of the village is located within the embankments, (ii) the embankment is built on the land of this village, (iii) a sizable amount of land of this village has been acquired for rehabilitation, and (iv) the remaining land of the village is now waterlogged. All this has happened because of the embankments and hence the village is included in the list.

(d) It would have been in the fitness of things that all those villages of Khagaria district that suffer floods because the eastern embankment of the Kosi pushes floodwaters toward them were included in the list. The same thing holds good for Singhia block of Samastipur district and many eastern blocks of Darbhanga district. The flood events south and west of Ghonghepur should be dealt with separately and suggest more studies in that region. We shall restrict ourselves to the districts of Saharsa, Supaul, Madhubani and Darbhanga, for the present.

(e) Only revenue villages have been listed. If the hamlets are to be numbered, the figure will go well over a thousand. The population of the villages, although taken from the Census, is also only approximate since no one knows who is located where within the embankments. Frequent erosion uproots people and they go off to unknown destinations. It does not take much time to turn a thickly populated village into a deserted village.

(f) There is some confusion due to the reorganization of Panchayats. For example, Nima village with many hamlets is spread over Madhepur block of Madhubani and Kiratpur block of Darbhanga districts. Interestingly, Nima is not a revenue village. Likewise, Simri Panchayat was a part of Jhagarua Panchayat not many years ago. To tackle such problems, we have taken 1981 Census maps for reference and the location of embankments within

them, as provided by the block office and the election office, to decide whether a village is located on the countryside or riverside of the embankment.

The literacy figures in Table 1 are quite shocking. The literacy level of Saharsa district was only 39.28 per cent (Male 52.04 and female 25.31) according to the 2001 Census). In the same Census, the literacy figure for Bihar state is 47.53 per cent (Male 60.32 and female 33.57) while at the national level the corresponding figures are 65.38 per cent (Male 75.85 and female 54.16). Bihar was the only state in the country with a literacy level of less than 50 per cent in 2001. Within Bihar, four districts in the Kosi basin Supaul, Saharsa, Madhubani and Darbhanga; occupy the 7th, 9th, 13th and 16th position from the bottom.

It is a fact that education has collapsed in the state but it becomes very easy to find excuses for such unfortunate occurring within the embankments. The area that we are referring to here, located within the Kosi embankments, has a female literacy percentage of only 14.39. At the national level, this was the female literacy rate way back in 1951 and the same must have existed in Bihar in 1982. Female literacy levels in Marauna block of Supaul district and Simri-Bakhtiyarpur block of Saharsa district are less than 10 per cent. Male literacy levels are no different either. The male literacy percentage of 38.79 (2001) within the Kosi embankments existed at the national level in 1960 and in Bihar this figure may have existed around 1982. The overall literacy percentage of 30.11 (2001) within the Kosi embankments existed at the national level in 1963 and at the state level in 1984. This clearly signifies that those living within the Kosi embankments are 40 years behind rest of India and 20 years behind the rest of Bihar as far education is concerned. Bihar itself occupies the lowest position within the country in education.

The literacy level is a guide to the living standards of the people. Thus, if the people living here resolve today that they will remove the stigma of illiteracy from their midst, they will have to cover a forty-year backlog as far as the rest of India is concerned. It is also a fact that no concerns are shown anywhere, from the Panchayat level to Delhi or even Patna about the prevailing illiteracy. When education

Table 1 : Block wise demographic details of villages trapped within the Kosi Embankments

District	Block	No. of Villages	Total Pop	Male	Female	Total SC Pop	Male	Female	Total Literates	Male	Female	Total Literacy %	Male Literacy %	Female Literacy %
Madhubani	Laukahi	12	4749	2497	2272	521	274	2487	1480	1089	391	29.69	44.49	13.6
	Ghoghardiha	19	54289	27865	26424	3649	1868	1781	16874	12162	4712	31.08	43.64	17.83
	Madhepur	42	96679	50029	46650	17953	9196	8757	29538	17663	6295	24.78	35.3	13.49
	Basantpur	26	24520	12998	11522	4124	2139	1985	8347	5935	2412	34.04	45.6	20.93
Supaul	Nirmali	40	76403	39552	36851	9157	4652	4505	23308	18018	5290	30.5	45.55	14.35
	Bhaptiahi	32	100409	51939	48470	13831	7124	6707	28592	21753	6839	28.4	41.88	14.1
	Kishanpur	37	113192	58359	54833	13305	6783	6522	28310	23200	5110	25.01	39.75	9.31
	Marauna	27	64563	33876	30687	9888	4912	4476	17020	12970	4060	26.36	38.28	13.19
	Supaul	43	112849	58519	54330	15334	7965	7349	32589	23193	9396	28.87	39.63	17.29
Saharsa	Navhatta	51	133694	69642	64052	28369	14583	13786	38275	26238	12037	28.63	37.68	18.79
	Simri	8	37886	19226	17960	8287	4274	4013	6852	5322	1530	18.08	26.7	8.51
	Bakhtiyarpur	34	72604	38201	34403	16251	8380	7871	14472	10971	3601	19.93	28.71	10.17
Darbhanga	Salkhua	9	53311	27529	25782	12367	6367	6000	14710	10645	4065	27.59	38.66	15.76
	Kiratpur	380	987818	513132	474686	157226	80967	76259	267387	199059	68328	30.11	38.79	14.39
	Total													
	Bihar 2001											47.53	60.32	33.57
	India 2001											65.38	75.85	54.16

Source: Census Report 2001, Block Maps and Election Office Maps

is in such shambles one can very easily imagine the state of other civic amenities here. If that is the average situation, the problems of the dalits and the other downtrodden communities of the area can only be much worse.

Sufferers' stories

Ram Sagar, former Mukhiya of Belwara Panchayat in Simri-Bakhtiyarpur block says, "We were provided housing sites in Belwara Punarwas. Ninety percent of the people are now back in the original village because of waterlogging at the rehabilitation site. The government has since annually allocated this land to those who will do some farming. It does not belong to us anymore. The original village is exposed to the onslaughts of the floods and erosion. Our village has eroded 14 times in the past 42 years and each time we have built a new house. There is no option for us because our agricultural land is located inside the embankments. We move on to the eastern embankment during the rains and go back after the floods subside. Some families, who do not have any other place to go are settled permanently on the embankment itself."

Thus most people are compelled to get closer to their ancestral villages and fields but farther from basic civic amenities because they remain trapped within the two embankments. The block, sub-division and district collector's offices, are all located outside the embankments.



Most reliable transport system in flooded areas

Education, health services, legal aid, administrative facilities, banks, employment opportunities and so on, exist only outside the embankments. "The river used to flow in 16 known channels prior to embanking and to minimize the miseries of the people, the river was jacketed. But now the problems that once spread over a large area have become exclusive to those trapped within the Kosi embankments. ... we need to pay the boatman Rs17 to go to the block headquarters at Mahishi and an equal amount is needed to come back. Those who live outside the embankments do not have to pay this penalty at least. It is also not possible to return the same day because of the distances and one must be prepared to spend a night outside. One should have some friends or relatives in the villages around to access facilities at the block headquarters. Reaching the sub-division or the district headquarters becomes a nightmare for us. Once in 1995-96 we offered *satyagrah* opposite the Collector's office in support of our demands and gave him a memorandum. The Collector called us and asked why it took us 40 long years to come out of hibernation. We had no answer to that question and came back home," says Bindeshwari Paswan of Pachbhinda village in Mahishi block of Saharsa district.

The Collector could ridicule the protesters for pleading their case after a lapse of 40 years but he himself forgot that the Government had been asleep for 30 years after constructing the embankments, when it constituted the Kosi Pirit Vikas Pradhikar (Kosi Sufferers Development Authority) in 1987. The embankment victims waited for 8-9 years to watch the non-performance of the Pradhikar and then came out in protest. Was this not wrong? The establishment decides our destiny for it obviously does not belong to us.

Kedar Mishra of Mahishi laments, "The Kosi belt is now a mini Chambal. One dare not go to the area within the embankments or to region west of the western embankment. We were promised that we would be compensated land for land, house for house, a link road to the embankment, a job to one person in every family and free boats. Where are these promises? Nobody knows where the people from Devan Ban or Bhakua have gone. There is nothing that has not been provided in the Kosi Pirit Vikas Pradhikar document but where is the Kosi Pirit Vikas Pradhikar and what does it do? Will somebody tell us its address? Mahishi police station is located at the rehabilitation

site in Mahishi and that has been occupied by force. The villagers of Lilja were resettled in Jalle where one reaches only after crossing five streams. In 2004, massive silt deposition took place near Lilja because of the Kamla River and the village has emerged out of water. What will happen to it in the coming seasons, nobody knows. A single boat trip to the block headquarter of Mahishi costs Rs. 25/-. People naturally remain confined to their villages. The literacy rate within the embankments is less than 10 per cent and medical facilities there are non-existent. That is the rehabilitation we have received."

Actually, the plight of the people living west of the western embankment of the Kosi, in Mahishi block of Saharsa district, is worse than the people trapped between the Kosi embankments. These villages like Jalai, Manuar, Sankarthua, Ghonghepur, Pachbhinda, Samani, Garaul, Bhanthi, and Nawada, etc. suffer the wrath of the rivers because of drainage congestion between the Kamla and the Kosi. Waters of the Bagmati adds insult to injury in this zone. The plight of the people here cannot be believed without seeing the place. The situation in Biraul, Singhia, Kiratpur, Kusheshwar Asthan and Ghanshyampur blocks is no better.

5. Kosi Pirit Vikas Pradhikar (Kosi Sufferers Development Authority)

While most people returned to their villages, the ghost of rehabilitation, continued to haunt the area. T.P. Singh, while speaking at a meeting organized by the Kosi Samiti at Patna, on December 15, 1954 said that the government was well aware of its obligations towards those who would live between the proposed embankments and thereby face flood hazards of the Kosi and also those who are facing floods. It would neither dilute the demands made for compensation nor shirk its responsibilities towards the people.²⁵ Something similar was said by Bindeshwari Dubey, then Chief Minister of Bihar, at Ghoghardiha, on November 8, 1986.²⁶ This lack of concern of successive governments over a span of 32 years is mind-numbing.

Actually it was almost certain that the government could give a house in lieu of a house, but it was never possible to acquire land on that massive scale for cultivation. It was never given in writing that the government would provide land for land nor was it ever said in writing that it would provide a job to one person in a family in the

Kosi Project, although every elderly person in the area asserts with confidence that some leader or a senior officer of the Project had given such assurances. Their list includes Jawahar Lal Nehru, Gulzari Lal Nanda, Lalit Narayan Mishra, T.P. Singh and Sachin Datta. Collector George Jacob of Darbhanga is often quoted in this regard that he had given these assurances in writing but the letters are missing. This may be due to time lapse or due to floods in the area when it is difficult to save documents. Assurances on economic rehabilitation of the embankment victims are, however, available. It seems, Dr Shrikrishna Sinha had surely some vision about rehabilitating the embankment victims. Staunch critics of the government like Parmeshwar Kunwar and Baidya Nath Mehta used to compliment Dr Sinha for his efforts to resettle the embankment victims during the debates in the Bihar Vidhan Sabha. Krishna Ballabh Sahay, who was the Chief Minister of Bihar (October 1963 to March 1967), had once announced in the Bihar Vidhan Sabha (February 12, 1966) that a 'C' type industrial set up would be opened in Mahishi which would benefit the embankment victims. A similar unit was to be established in Bihta in Shahabad district also implying that it was a routine development programme of the government and was not a special package for the Kosi Sufferers.

Committee galore

The Government of Bihar had, in fact, constituted a committee in 1962 to plan and execute programmes on agriculture, health, revenue collection, extension and cooperatives. The Land Development Commissioner, Development Commissioner and the Chief Administrator of the River Valley Projects were the members of this committee. It proved to be ineffective. In 1967 another committee was constituted under the chairmanship of the Kosi Area Development Commissioner to prepare plans on agriculture, industry, cooperatives and economic rehabilitation of the embankment victims. This committee too repeated the non-performance of the earlier committee.

The government was not prepared to handle the rehabilitation issue in the Kosi Project and there was considerable indifference from the Kosi Project authorities on this issue. In 1966, Baidya Nath Mehta (MLA) narrated the callousness on rehabilitation in the Bihar Vidhan Sabha, "Has the government ever bothered to look into the grievances of the people trapped between the Kosi embankments, the people on whose dead bodies you erected the structures?... There are nearly 1.75

lakh people living within the Kosi embankments. For them it is a question of life and death and that question is placed before us now. Our minister makes no reference about their plight. Whenever the issue of those living within the embankments comes for discussions, he shuts his eyes. When the embankment was being built, I had raised the point of their well-being but the leaders within the state and those in the centre had assured that there would be no adverse impact on them." 27

After a lot of persuasion the state government appointed a committee in 1981 to look into the possibilities of economic rehabilitation of the victims of the embankments under the Chairmanship of Chandra Kishore Pathak, then Chairman of the Saharsa District Board. This committee submitted its report in February 1982. It remained under active consideration of the government till January 1987 when it finally seemed to accept the report's recommendations. Bindeshwari Dubey might have considered accepting the report when he said that the government would do something for the victims.

The Chandra Kishore Pathak Committee elaborately discussed the possibilities of developing agriculture, animal husbandry, industry, public health, education, awareness building and land development within the Kosi embankments.

As far as agriculture was concerned, the report stated that the topography within the embankments was not stable and kept changing with time. It refrained from giving any general recommendation in such cases but split the area into four major blocks, i.e., the areas that remain free from floods, the areas that are submerged for about three months in a year, areas that are submerged for about six months in a year and the areas that remain under water round-the-year. The Committee recommended different and alternative cropping patterns for all the four categories so that (i) The crops could be harvested before the floods set in, (ii) paddy varieties that could tolerate prolonged submergence be promoted in permanently waterlogged areas and (iii) areas where irrigation was possible be provided with lift irrigation or bamboo borings.

Cattle rearing is a major livelihood source in the Kosi belt and there are immense possibilities for developing livestock. The report elaborated extensively on pig rearing, goatary, sheep rearing, and

poultry farming. It emphasized the need for establishing artificial insemination and animal husbandry centers. Small scale industry and cottage industry found special mention in the report along with the development of fisheries. It touched upon issues of public health, education, social studies and awareness building in its recommendations.

It also suggested that in order to promote scientific farming, extension work, farm demonstration, development of financial sources like banks, etc. and formation of cooperatives, also be promoted.

The Pathak Committee recommended 15 per cent reservation in Class 3 and Class 4 services of the state government in the districts of Saharsa, Supaul, Madhepura, Araria, Purnea, Katihar, Darbhanga and Madhubani that were directly benefited by the construction of the Kosi embankments.

The Government of Bihar accepted these recommendations at a meeting held on January 30, 1987. This long overdue gesture of the Government came after a lapse of about 30 years of completion of the Kosi embankments and passage of one generation while the population trapped between the embankments had risen from 1,92,000 to about 4,50,000. Though late, the gesture was certainly a welcome one.



Life on the embankment

Following these recommendations, the government constituted a Kosi Pirit Vikas Pradhikar on April 14, 1987 and appointed a 19-member committee, under the chairmanship of Lahtan Chaudhary, to look after the affairs of the Pradhikar. Lahtan Chaudhary had once said about the embankment victims, "They had dug their own graves with a hope that the government would extricate them from the grave but it is painful to note that there is nobody to shed tears for them."²⁸ Chief Minister Bindeshwari Dubey, in a message about the Pradhikar said, "Lakhs of people have suffered untold miseries since the construction of the Kosi embankments. There can hardly be a place in any part of the country where so many people are exposed to the currents of the river. Chased by their misfortunes, these people had lost all hopes.... The government is determined for the overall development of these sufferers and an authority has been constituted. It aims to bring happiness to these people once again."²⁹ That is the sum total of developments 32 years after work on the project began.

But this Pradhikar is a defunct body and it is of no use to the embankment victims. Twenty years have passed since the Bihar Government accepted the proposal for an institution that would ameliorate the problems of the Kosi sufferers. There may be a Chairman of the Pradhikar enjoying privileges of a cabinet minister and other members who might meet occasionally at public expense, but the embankment victims remain where they were some 50 years ago. It has no building or an office of its own, no vehicles, no permanent staff and no budget that it could call its own. For all practical purposes, it can call itself an advisory body that suggests what other departments can do to help the people living within the Kosi embankments. Whether that advice is taken at all by anybody is altogether a different matter. It has a base in the Vikas Bhawan at Saharsa with nobody to represent and it is really very hard to find where the Pradhikar is located. Most of the Government officers in Saharsa, where the Pradhikar is located, do not know that such a body exists.

It had taken decisions, way back in 1989, to do away with the 'ghat system' on the banks of the Kosi and provide free ferrying facilities to those living inside the embankments. But it could not get even this done. It wrote to the Relief and Rehabilitation Department to ply free boats during the flood season but without any success. It

wanted to construct a road from Baluaha Ghat to Baghwa village and Bheja to Bakaur with the provision of a pontoon bridge. That is still in the proposal stage. The Pradhikar, which has not even got its own building till now, wants the schools within the embankments to have their own buildings — when most of the schools do not even have a roof. Health services do not function. There was a provision for 15 per cent reservation in Class 3 and Class 4 jobs in the Bihar government for these people and it did not cost anything to implement. Nothing has been done so far. People on deputation from other departments staff the Pradhikar and it is reported that most of them are not the Kosi victims.

There are no colleges, no banks, no cinema halls, no roads, no electricity, no hospitals and nothing that can be linked to modern living. Should one need to shoot a film of the days of, say, the Maurya or the Gupta dynasties, one can shoot it without much preparation there.

Rehabilitation and Pradhikar have become a political issue now. In every election, politicians promise that if they are voted into power, they will revive the Pradhikar. Elections have been held after the Pradhikar was constituted and many people have won elections from there. Many of them were part of the ruling party but nothing improved. People also say that unless the Pradhikar is revived, their fate is sealed. The Pradhikar, however, is a case of still birth and hence the question of its revival is moot.

Says Ram Prasad Roshan of Telwa village in Mahishi block, 'We were given rehabilitateion sites in Jalle, which was four kilometers west of the western embankment. My village was 1.5 kilometer inside the embankment. The Kosi embankment terminated at Ghonghepur and the backwaters of the Kosi used to hit Jalle. We demanded protection from the waters of the Kosi and the project constructed a T-spur to prevent the back-flow of the Kosi. The spur did the job but it also prevented the Balan waters from emptying into the Kosi. Thus we were saved from the Kosi but got drowned in the Balan waters. We then shifted from Jalle on to the western Kosi embankment at 49.5 km with all our families and cattle. Living permanently on the embankment was difficult and we were forced to move back to our original village.

Nobody lives in Jalle now. There were 10 hectares of rehabilitation land in Jalle and 35 hectares in Saharawa where people from Chhora, Jhakhara, Jhara, Karahara, Sugaroul, Lachhminia, and Majorahi had settled. They have all gone back to their respective villages... We are living in primitive conditions, which must be seen to be believed. Kosi Pirit Vikas Pradhikar was started at our behest but we do not know what it does and where it is located. This is all a farce."

Rehabilitation in the Kosi project was just a formality and the entire episode was grossly mismanaged. (See Box: No Rules or Regulations)



No Rules or Regulations

"My village Bela Goth was located within the Kosi embankments at *Thana* No: 142, Kishanpur Block of Supaul district. We were five brothers and our house was built over an area of 36 decimals. All that is lost to the Kosi embankments. We were given a rehabilitation site in Mahua where the government had acquired 21 acres of land. Of this, 14 acres was meant for the people of Bela Goth

and its plotting was done in 1959. Apart from the housing requirements, another 40 per cent land was acquired for services like roads, tanks, playgrounds, cremation grounds and a grave yard, etc. Other than Bela Goth, the villages of Suratipatti, Begamganj, and Pachgachhia were also given rehabilitation sites there. The land that was given to us in Mahua was too small for us to settle on and we surrendered that piece of land. It was not possible to build a house on 2 or 3 decimals of land. I was employed with the Rehabilitation Office and I managed to get the land allotted to us in Mahua to here in Kharail Malhad where I am now settled. I could manage this because I knew which land was vacant and where, because of my position in the office. This land is allotted in my name.

I had some experience of working in the Rehabilitation Office of Chhota Nagpur. It was customary there to assume a family size

of 5. Every family was entitled for a piece of 25 decimals of land and every married person was treated as a separate unit. I wrote about all that to the Supaul Rehabilitation Office but that was ignored.

There were 304 villages to be rehabilitated in the Kosi project. For this, 54 rehabilitation sites were acquired west of the western Kosi embankment and 74 locations were acquired east of the eastern Kosi embankment. Some 111.78 acres were acquired here in Kharail Malhad where people from Khokhnaha, Sukaila, Bela Parasbanni, Balwa, Karnapatti and Fakirana were to be resettled. But, there must be people from at least 18 or 20 villages living here. Some of them may be authorized and there may be many who are unauthorized. It is very difficult to ascertain which displaced village is relocated at which resettlement site. Who will confess that he is living here in an unauthorized way as his own rehabilitation plot is located in some other village. There was no acquisition of rehabilitation sites for Ghivak, Ghuran, Nirmali, Sukumarpur, Dighia, Dubiahi and Mainaha. Most of the residents of these villages are living in their ancestral villages. Some of them may be living on the embankments. It is also possible that they may be living in some other village or rehabilitation site.

We got compensation for the land over which the embankment was built. We were compensated for the standing crop on our land and wherever land was acquired for constructing a canal, we were paid for it. Be it a pittance, but we got compensated for the trees that were standing on our land. If all this is right, why on earth, were we not compensated for the land or given land in lieu of that which got trapped within the embankments? We are fighting for our legitimate rights through the Kosi Mukti Sangharsh Samiti and will continue our struggle till the time we get justice. Our biggest handicap is that those who could have helped us in our struggle, our able bodied youth, have all migrated to distant places throughout the country in search of employment."

— Narrated by Ramesh Chandra Jha
Ward No:1 Kosi Punarwas, Supaul:

Dr. Abdul Ghafoor (MLA), until recently the Chairman of the Kosi Pirit Vikas Pradhikar, had his own set of problems. Theoretically he was a powerful person enjoying the privileges of a cabinet rank

minister, but was not in a position to deliver results. (See Box: An Embankment Victim First and the Chairman of the Pradhikar Later, page 146)

An Embankment Victim First And The Chairman of The Pradhikar Later



“According to the original design, the eastern embankment had to pass through Dhemura Dhar in the east, near Bangaon, and the western embankment was to be constructed up to Jhamta. So much was the distance between the two embankments and see what is constructed? In the east, Mahishi is out of the eastern embankment and Ghonghepur and Bhanthi, are both outside the western embankment. There was 18kilometers of designed spacing between the two, but the actual distance is just 8 kilometers. In this situation, those who are living within the embankments are destined to doom.

This was known since the time of construction of the embankments. Then started the cover-up operation and tall promises were made — house for house, land for land, a job for one person per family, arrangement of boats, a plot measuring 2 to 5 decimals at a rehabilitation site, etc. That marked the beginning of the problems.

Whosoever designed the rehabilitation package, did not know that life in towns and villages differ. I can live on a plot of five decimals but who will tell the chickens and ducks not to stray? Where will my goats and cows go for grazing? Where will we go for defecation? The fields are 7 to 8 km away from our homes. One has to go to the fields every day with bullocks and plough and then return in the evening. Women and children normally carry food to the fields. They also travel the same distance everyday. Then the rehabilitation sites got waterlogged and ninety percent of the families returned to the original village. That was the end of rehabilitation. The government auctions the rehabilitation sites for farming, on an annual basis and keeps the money with it. It turned into a *zamindar* after people vacated the rehabilitation sites. Brokers have also come up in these deals. They bid for the land every year and sublet the same to others.

I am the third Chairman of the Kosi Pirit Vikas Pradhikar. Lahtan Chaudhary was the first and I succeeded Vinayak Prasad Yadav. No work was done in anybody's tenure. The Authority does not get any money from anywhere. Lahtan Chaudhary could just

publish a booklet about the Pradhikar, which you might have seen and that was all the expenditure incurred by the Pradhikar so far. No work was done during the tenure of Vinayak Babu nor is done in mine. Shankar Prasad Tekriwal, former finance minister of the state, hailed from Saharsa and had sanctioned Rs. 5 crores for the Pradhikar but the process of transfer of money to any department is so tedious in this state that the money did not come to the Pradhikar account. That was the end of sanctioning money to Pradhikar. It was neither received then, nor will we receive any more in the future.

The problem of the Kosi and its embankments was unique at one stage, but now embankments are built on all the rivers and people live within those embankments. They suffer the same kind of hardships there as we do here and the Kosi no more enjoys the distinguished position it once did. If you have money to spend, why should that be spent on the Kosi alone when there are so many people suffering the same fate elsewhere? What mistake have the people living within the embankments of the Gandak, Burhi Gandak, Bagmati, Kamla, or the Mahananda, committed that they will not get any priority? If any money is spent on the Kosi now, there will be turmoil within the government. There was some hope earlier but now, there is no money to do anything. Who bothers about the victims then and what is the Pradhikar for?

Eighty Panchayats are located within the Kosi embankments, from Birpur to Kopadia. This is a very densely populated area and even if there are 10,000 people per Panchayat, the population within the embankments may not be less than 8,00,000. Go and have a look at their living conditions. They pray to God for death but that is not in any body's hands. One needs a boat to go from one house to the other, one needs it for offering *puja* or *namaz*. Boats are also needed for answering nature's call. Come sometimes during the rainy season and see for yourself how we survive.

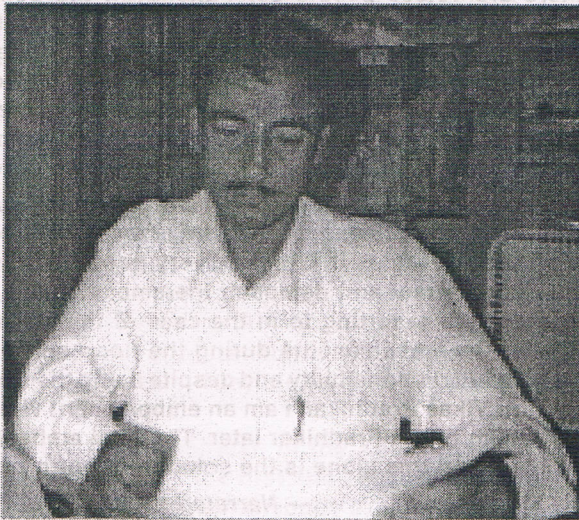
There is no solution to the problems faced by the sufferers of the Kosi embankments except that the embankment be done away with. If the river does it, it will be very good otherwise the people will rise one day and demolish the embankment. This is what the people are resorting to in the case of the other rivers where they cut the embankments during the flood season. I am saying this with full responsibility and despite being the Chairman of the Kosi Pirit Vikas Pradhikar. I am an embankment victim first and the Chairman of the Pradhikar later. The Kosi embankments are our problem and this alone is the solution of our problems."

— Narrated by Dr. Abdul Ghafoor
Vill. & PO. Bhelahi via Mahishi, Dist. Saharsa.

6. Nepal has 34 Villages Entrapped within the Kosi Embankments

The Kosi embankments not only trap Indian villages but 12 Nepali villages south of the Kosi barrage and 22 villages north of the Kosi barrage that fall within them. Says Dev Narayan Yadav of Rampura village in Saptari district in Nepal, "The land over which the Kosi was flowing those days and the land that was acquired for rehabilitation was compensated for. For example, Lilja village had a total of 1430 bighas of land and the Kosi project acquired 317 bighas of that land. The balance land remained with the owners. When the barrage and the embankments were completed and water was released from the barrage then erosion set in, upstream as well as downstream of the barrage. The river started shifting its course within the embankment and nearly 1113 bighas in Lilja were eroded. No compensation was paid to us for such losses. This erosion has now extended to 61 villages in Nepal.

"South of the barrage, 3185 bighas of our land are under submergence and 7093 bighas are submerged upstream of the barrage bringing the total to 10,278 bighas. This was paid for by the government. Some 1100 bighas of land was given to India on goodwill, at some reduced rates. Thus, we were paid for land measuring 11,378 bighas.



Dev Narayan Yadav

But our land is much more and the river continues to meander at will on this land. Somebody must take care of us in that case since we are facing all these problems because of the construction of the embankments and the barrage on the Kosi, which was constructed mainly to protect the areas affected by floods in the river in India. Even if we ignore the money part of it, the situation in the rehabilitation sites is not good. Narha village was rehabilitated in Bhandabari where nobody shifted from Narha because there was no source of livelihood there. The rehabilitation site at Dalwa is waterlogged and is unfit for human settlement. How can one live there?"

While there is so much resentment over rehabilitation in Nepal, the Indian counterparts are no less unhappy. Says Yuvraj, "(For) the land that was acquired in Nepal, a price of eleven hundred rupees per acre was paid to them but the same land was purchased for Rs. 250 to 300 here." ³⁰ Actually, the rehabilitation scenario in the Kosi project in Nepal is in no way different than that of the Indian scene. The only difference is that if there is any resentment over there regarding rehabilitation, it can be indicated to India through Kathmandu only. Direct dialogue or direct expression of dissent is not possible. This is also true for the villages on the Indian side. The resentment of the villagers turns into anger, sometimes. We have seen a glimpse of it in the case of the Joginia breach in 1991.

7. Administration, Politics and Non-Governmental Organizations

The district administration at times refuses to provide relief to the flood victims within the embankments on the plea that the people residing there have been given rehabilitation sites and that they are living in places where they should not be living. The administration would surely have given them relief if they had stayed back at the rehabilitation sites even though they were waterlogged. That the rehabilitation sites are waterlogged and the floods within the embankments know no bounds does not concern these administrators.

There was an interesting debate in the Bihar Vidhan Sabha about the plight of those trapped within the embankments. Vinayak Prasad Yadav (MLA) pointed out that the condition of Bela, Singar Moti and Dhobiahi villages had become precarious because the Kosi was on the verge of eroding them. He wanted to know the government's plans to protect these villages. Rameshwar Prasad Singh replied on behalf of the Government of Bihar saying, "These villages are located

within the Kosi embankments and Bela Dhar is a stream of the Kosi. When water comes in that stream, the villages are threatened with erosion but it is not the job of the government to protect such villages. The villagers have been paid compensation and they should vacate the place. The land within the embankment is meant for agriculture and not for dwelling purposes. The government does not spend money for protecting the villages."³¹ This was a policy statement of the Government to which it still confirms. This means that the government exonerates itself of any obligation to the people living within the embankments of any river. It is impossible, however, to tell the river that the people have been compensated for their houses and the river could erode them but the land has not been compensated for and hence the river should spare the land. If the embankments are secure, then life within them becomes insecure because of the rising flood levels. But the Water Resources Department views it as a sacred duty to keep the embankments intact. How far is this mission achieved is anybody's guess.

The Water Resources Department is also unhappy that people throng on to the embankments themselves during the flood season and many of them have made the embankments their permanent abode. This makes movement of vehicular traffic and maintenance of the embankments difficult. Embankments breach for want of proper maintenance and their repair becomes even more difficult when the people camp on them. The government issues notice to the embankment dwellers but they do not vacate it. The engineers believe that there is lack of political will for vacating the embankments. Most of the people who live on the embankments are from the weaker sections of the society and are very useful to politicians. The government and political parties do not want to rub shoulders with them because they not only occupy the embankment's space but are voters also and this every political party understands. If they are dislodged during the regime of one party, the other parties will make political capital out of it. No one wants to run that risk. From Civil Sub Divisional Officer to the Commissioner, everybody has got a list of the embankment dwellers but no action is taken against these 'illegal occupants'. There was a deadline to get the embankments vacated by December 2002 but no action was taken at the field level. Internally, even the engineers do not want the embankments to be vacated and they do not want to use

any force in eviction. The simple reason is that it is the engineers, from a Junior Engineer to Chief Engineer, who have to visit the embankments and that too without any protection or judicial powers. All the anger of the masses against the administration has to be faced by them alone.

In 1997-98, the district administration of Madhubani once tried to evict the 'illegal occupation' of the Kamla and the Kosi embankments. But neither the administration was concerned nor the hapless victims of police atrocities were aware where they could go after being chased by the administration. The latter had its orders to be complied with but those camping on the embankment were already chased by calamities — erosion of village land, waterlogging of the villages or surges of river water due to a breach in the embankment, etc. — before they decided to live there. Not a single family was residing on the embankments for fun or for a picnic. None of them enjoyed living at a place that was surrounded by water on all sides with only one escape route and that was the embankment itself. They were there with a feeling of insecurity and the grief of losing their home and hearth. This is especially true for the *doab* of the Kosi and the Kamla. Ignoring all these reasons and exercising its brutal power, the government evicted the people from the embankments. Many of these victims may have voted the same government to power to look after their well-being.

It is a necessary that the crest of the embankments be clear of any obstruction to the movement of vehicles but it is no less necessary that the administration should tell the people where they can reside safely. In most cases, if the people are forced to occupy the embankments, the government alone is to blame for it and it should not behave like an ostrich. When the people were chased away from the embankments in Madhubani district they had no other place to live, at the peak of rainy season. Land prices sky-rocketed overnight and most of the families were compelled to live on the alleys of fields as that was the only common land available to them.

These issues concerning the people living within the embankments are not on the agenda of any political party. The responsibility of a good number of NGOs working in those areas ends with providing some relief to the flood victims. The issue of floods and waterlogging is a matter of concern to them but looking for a permanent solution

to the problems of the people is something that they are not interested in. Their role is limited to raising funds for relief operations, holding seminars and conferences on environmental degradation, livelihoods and the so-called right's approach. They close their eyes to the systematic cheating of the people, breach of trust, betrayal by the administrative, political and technical machinery of the state and chant the disaster mantra starting with preparedness, mitigation and ending with long-term rehabilitation. They also recite catchy phrases like equitable relief, empowerment and 'living with floods', etc. in the same fashion as students in the village primary schools recite their tables before their teachers. The teacher derives satisfaction that the students remember the tables and the students' morale remains high that the teacher is happy. Running away from the real issues is their inherent compulsion for survival.

8. People's Viewpoints

Ram Chandra Khan of Musaharia village, in Darbhanga — and a former Inspector General of Police — laments, "What sort of science is this which doesn't care about the results? Instead of solving a problem, it transports it elsewhere. Why does science not take cognizance



Ram Chandra Khan

of the local culture? If people in deserts have a lifestyle of their own, the same values cannot be thrust upon the people in the flooded areas. We used to wait for the floods every year. All our agricultural operations were linked to floods. We had paddy varieties to suit every depth of flooding and stagnation of water. Fresh silt and fresh water used to rejuvenate our fields leading to bumper crops. Fish were in a b u n d a n c e . Communication used to remain undisturbed with

the help of boats. The beating of drums during Durga Puja was an announcement of the end of the flood season.

Because of misuse of science, we have lost all our rivers, fields, agriculture, flora and fauna, habitat, temples and mosques and culture because of these embankments. Water remains here for eight months and floods enter our villages before the land has dried after the last flood. What sort of science or engineering is this? The Kosi used to flow in its various channels, the flood levels were low, and we had our traditional variety of paddy that used to grow in this area. The waters of the Kosi and the Kamla used to mix with each other to make the land very fertile...Floods stay now virtually round-the-year...If we ask for rehabilitation now, the government cannot concede the demand. Once it proposed to give economic rehabilitation to the embankment victims but it could not deliver. Can it drain the water out from here at least, so that we can demand roads, schools, health services, market places, banks and other civic amenities here that the people elsewhere demand from their leaders. We are not in a position to demand even that because of the stagnating pool that has been created here. We have lost everything and the only solution to our problem is the return of our rivers back to us lock, stock and barrel and in their pristine glory... I would not like to demolish the embankments or settle for the Barakhshetra Dam. I want my rivers back."

The situation is best summed up by Dina Nath Patel of Kabira Dhap (in Saharsa district), "You are asking me what I will ask if God appeared before me. Don't you see that my village is getting eroded right before our eyes? And do you think God never came to us. He did so many times. Anybody, who comes here, poses like God. He systematically cheats us and then disappears. You may also be one of them. The best we can do is to tell the God to prove his credentials first."

Says Parmeshwar Kunwar, "I was arrested for showing a black flag to Dr Rajendra Prasad when he came to Saharsa to lay the foundation stone of the eastern Kosi embankment in 1955. Rajendra Babu knew me and when he came to know of the incident, he asked the authorities to release me. Kumar Kaushalendra Singh prepared a detailed report about the people trapped within the Kosi embankments and we raised our voices on their behalf. I had all these papers with me till the emergency but the police confiscated my library and never

returned it back to me. We had prepared a memorandum of 20 pages and given it to Dr. Shrikrishna Sinha, the Chief Minister of Bihar. The reply came from T.P. Singh. We gathered some 15 to 20 thousand people and demonstrated here in Saharsa. Suraj Narayan Singh, Basawan Singh, Ramanand Tiwari, Karpoori Thakur and Bahadur Khan Sharma sat on *dharna* many a times demanding rehabilitation for the embankment victims... but you cannot fight a determined state, which has all the powers to crush a movement. I am now an old man and don't have that energy in me...but still feel that the embankment should be demolished in the dry season and let the Kosi go to Purnea, if it so wishes. The river will do that sometimes on its own in the future anyway."



Parmeshwar Kunwar

9. The Struggle Continues

Earlier leaders like Baidya Nath Mehta, Janaki Nandan Singh, Bauku Mahato, Kunwar Kaushalendra Narayan Singh, Khushi Lal Kamat, Jaidev Salhaita, Bahadur Khan Sharma and Parmeshwar Kunwar are no more with us but the struggle continues. The contribution of Shivanand Bhai after the embankment breach at Navhatta in 1984 was quite significant (See : "Trapped Between the Devil and Deep Waters".)

In the new generation, Advocate Dev Kumar Singh of Kosi Mukti Sangharsh Samiti (KMSS), Supaul district has taken the wand from the elders and sustained the voice of the embankment victims over the past 15 years. He has raised the issue before the Chief Secretary of the state to the President of the country. When nothing worked, he wrote to the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) on May 30, 1998 with a request to intervene. KMSS placed its 15-points demand before the NHRC and sought compensation for the loss of all the crops till



Advocate Dev Kumar Singh

then on the land within the embankments. It demanded the resumption of train services between Nirmali and Bhaptiahi besides construction of the proposed high dam on the Kosi at Barahkshetra in Nepal.

KMSS also demanded fulfillment of the provisions of the Kosi Pirit Vikas Pradhikar, reservation in the state services for embankment victims, their rehabilitation and construction of *pucca* houses for them in protected areas, remission of all kinds of cess upon them, an enquiry

into fake appointments in the name of embankment victims, reservation for students in ITIs, vacation of illegal encroachment of rehabilitation sites, surveys of land within the embankments for ownership and establishment of big industries in the area to create employment for the Kosi sufferers.

NHRC, through its letter No. 2294/4/97-98 dated August 12, 1998 asked the Chief Secretary of Bihar about the status of these demands. When there was no reply from the Government of Bihar, the NHRC once again wrote to it on March 22, 1999 to explain its position over the issue. The GoB replied on October 11, 2001 to clarify its stand. It said, "The people who lived between the embankments have been rehabilitated as per the provisions of the Rehabilitation Scheme 1957. Following the rains and after the flood season, agriculture, fisheries and other economic activities became very lucrative and then the rehabilitated persons, at their own will, stay within or outside of the embankments and make use of their land and enjoy other economic benefits within the embankments." The Rehabilitation Scheme of 1957 is the same plan of Rs. 2.12cr that was discussed in Section 8.2 of this chapter. About the Barahkshetra Dam, the GoB informs the NHRC in the same letter that, "There will be progress in the direction of construction of this dam only after an agreement is reached between India and Nepal. The flow of the river will be stabilized fully after the construction of this dam and deposition of silt will not create any problem then."

The GoB also suggested in the letter that, "(of) the said

(rehabilitation) plan, 136 rehabilitation sites have been developed and a sum of Rs. 1.17cr has been spent on grants for house construction. A sum of Rs. 1.10cr have been spent on the development of civic amenities. Thus, the Project has spent more than what was provided for and has rehabilitated 39,527 families." The report further adds that the affected families use the rehabilitation sites as an alternative dwelling during the flood season. They are not prepared to leave their ancestral homes and that is the reason that about 1400 acres of land are lying vacant at the rehabilitation sites. These vacant sites are auctioned annually so that they (affected persons) are benefited the most. Many people keep shuttling between their houses in the original villages and the ones in the rehabilitation sites, which, gives outsiders an opportunity to encroach upon their lands at the rehabilitation sites. The government assured that such illegal encroachers were being identified and they would be compelled to vacate the sites. The district administration was put on the job, the report said. The government had initiated enquiries against 81 persons who were suspected of getting jobs on false pretexts and 31 of them were removed from their jobs.

Regarding the other demands of the KMSS, the Water Resources Department (WRD) wrote that they did not concern their department and hence it was not in a position to respond to them. The issue is that the NHRC had asked an explanation from the Chief Secretary of the state and not the WRD. It was the responsibility of the Chief Secretary to seek replies from all the concerned departments and write back to the NHRC. That never happened.

A list of the villages where rehabilitation sites were acquired by the Kosi Project and rehabilitation provided to embankment victims is given in Table 8.2. WRD has given a list of 136 such villages to NHRC but the list of rehabilitated villages is missing. It has also not mentioned which village has been rehabilitated where. According to Ramesh Chandra Jha no such list is available because no such record has been kept in the Rehabilitation Office. The rehabilitation office at Supaul has released a list of its Amins who look after the rehabilitation sites and according to that list the number of rehabilitation sites is 134. Of this, 60 locations lie east of the eastern embankment and the remaining 74 are on the west of the western embankment. About 1400 acres (570ha) are officially stated to be vacant, while 1200ha (3000 acres) were actually acquired for the rehabilitation sites. This means, according to the Government's own confession that nearly half of the

rehabilitation sites are lying vacant. There are 110 villages with some vacant land (58 are west of the western embankment and 52 are east of the eastern embankment). In the list of the rehabilitation sites, Nakuch village is listed as Nakuch (Col.2) but in Table 8.2 where vacant lands are shown, there are two sites as Nakuch A and Nakuch B. If we treat them as one, then partially vacant rehabilitation sites (Col.4) reduce to 109. If the information given by the Rehabilitation Department (Col.2 & 3) and the list submitted by WRD to NHRC (Col.4) are correct, then there are 25 rehabilitation site about which nothing has been said. This prompts one to think that there are at least 25 locations that are fully occupied. These 25 locations are starred in Table 2.

Table 2 : Details of locations where Kosi Embankment victims were rehabilitated

S. No.	Rehabilitation Sites	Total Land Aquaired for Rehabilition. Ha	Vacant Land in Rehabilition Sites. Ha
1	Bhim Nagar*	3.39	-
2	Saheban	9.51	0.4
3	Piparahi Baijnathpur	8.14	2.43
4	Baijnathpur	0.93	0.3
5	Basawan Patti	12.47	3.04
6	Piprahi Goth/Lalman Patti	2.88	1.42
7	Narpat Patti/Satan Patti	7.37	2.43
8	Narpat Patti/Gopalpur	5.8	2.43
9	Korhali Gopalpur	8.55	0.4
10	Nonpar	13.36	2.43
11	Sadanand Pur/Kalyan Pur	7.78	1.62
12	Bisanpur/Bhaptiahi	10.4	3.24
13	Pipra Khurd/ Bhaptiahi	8.5	1.21
14	Chandpipar North*	4.6	-
15	Chandpipar South*	7.95	-
16	Malarh	15.14	7.29
17	Tharbitta East	15.35	10.47
18	Tharbitta Colony	7.59	3.59
19	Kishanpur	12.67	7.29
20	Abhuar Khakhai	8.7	1.16

21	Dabhari*	4	-
22	Mahua*	8.43	-
23	Bairia Manch	5.69	2.67
24	Kharail Malhad	45.26	0.58
25	Kharail Parsa Karnapur	37	5.9
26	Pipra Khurd	7.3	0.61
27	Parsa	6.03	3.88
28	Simra Malhani	7.22	1.42
29	Lalchand Patti/Lalman Patti	4.94	3.55
30	Nemua Rampur*	8.58	-
31	Basbitti	4.89	0.53
32	Dumaria	19.64	1.21
33	Barahi Bijalpur	38.89	19.43
34	Dumra	16.04	2.43
35	Dharmaput Trikhutti/Chaukhutti	14.79	8.91
36	Dharpur/Trikhutti	18.85	4.86
37	Navhatta/Hempur	19.35	6.07
38	Navhatta/Navlakhkha	6.68	5.05
39	Navhatta/Sahpur	12.47	0.95
40	Kumharauli*	10.19	-
41	Mohanpur*	15.25	-
42	Auria Ramauti	4.94	3.24
43	Enaetpur	5.07	0.81
44	Chandrain	41.31	16.19
45	Khiraho Teghara	7.34	2.43
46	Mahishi Uttarwari	9.85	3.64
47	Mahishi Tilabhag*	2.58	-
48	Mahishi Jamunbari	13.37	3.64
49	Mahishi Mahpura	1.82	1.62
50	Gamaraho	12.91	7.29
51	Nakuch A & B	7.64	4.45
52	Tilathi	11.28	11.28
53	Sataras	29.04	9.31
54	Kathghara	12.67	2.43
55	Gordah	16.45	12.51
56	Bhelwa	8.18	6.88
57	Utesara Inside	1.72	1.72
58	Salkhua Situahi	5.43	4.26
59	Salkhua	8.95	7.84
60	Utesara Outer	13.81	6.07
61	Kunauli North	1.83	1.38
62	Kunauli South	6.3	1.78

63	Haripur	2.46	0.87
64	Haripur Kamalpur	10	1.57
65	Kamalpur	3.04	1.34
66	Jiroga Mahadeo Math	6.33	6.19
67	Jiroga B	3.7	3.48
68	Kulaharia	4.21	3.64
69	Dharhara A*	1.85	-
70	Dharhara B*	8.9	-
71	Dagmara*	12.38	-
72	Mathahi	3.98	3.74
73	Mahadeo Math Belhi Gidarahi	2.01	0.61
74	Baruar Rajaram Patti	4.89	4.86
75	Nemua Baruar	8.72	7.1
76	Auraha Mahdeva	8.03	6.52
77	Jiroga Narendrapur	9.9	7.94
78	Chhajna Baluaha	4.89	1.01
79	Chhajna Jhitki	2.87	2.24
80	Chhajna Lachhminia	2.31	1.62
81	Nirmali Lachhminia*	9.45	-
82	Belhi Poola	2.24	2.06
83	Belhi Parsa	11.1	4.35
84	Belha Brahmapur	10.54	8.1
85	Inarwa*	2.79	-
86	Rajuahi Pirojgarh	21.6	16.76
87	Mataras	10.22	0.57
88	Biraul	2.08	2.08
89	Pauni Chapram	19.8	11.54
90	Az Rakbe Pauni	4.95	4.85
91	Marauna Agargarha North	12.47	5.92
92	Marauna Agargarha South	-	5.04
93	Marauna Sarauni North	11.58	9.28
94	Maruna Sarauni South	5.92	4.45
95	Bangama Piparahi	11.22	4.05
96	Kalikapur	4.68	4.54
97	Deorh*	1.02	-
98	Tardiha Bochahi	2.99	0.81
99	Sarauni North	9.08	8.1
100	Sarauni South	9.22	9.09
101	Bhumpur	9.17	8.1
102	Nawada	5.42	5.36
103	Bhakharain*	7.6	-
104	Bhakharain Ratuar Rahua	14.51 ¹	21.01

105	Kharik Madhu Sangram	4.74	4.46
106	Bheja*	0.73	-
107	Jhagarua North	6.74	3.31
108	Tarwara Kubaul	5.3	3.25
109	Balthi Khajuri Parsauni	22.13	17
110	Rasiyari Parwalpur	6.1	5.83
111	Rasiyari Kalyan*	4.42	-
112	Rasiyari Bakunia	8.2	2.02
113	Jhagarua South	14.4	8.12
114	Tetari East*	1.59	-
115	Tetari Middle*	0.98	-
116	Tetari West Danka	2.44	2.44
117	Tetari Jakso Bhubaul	18.4	14.68
118	Bhubaul*	-	-
119	Jamalpur North	6.05	2.45
120	Jamalpur South	9.92	5.5
121	Akhatwara North	4.65	3.85
122	Akhatwara South	4.2	2.83
123	Amahi Khaisa*	2.83	-
124	Amahi North*	4.24	-
125	Amahi South	3.07	3.07
126	Bahrampur	8.7	6.48
127	Punach Gandaul	12.06	8.82
128	Mallai Garaul Baghawa	2.39	2.39
129	Jallai East	12.34	8.5
130	Jallai Middle	4.08	1.55
131	Jallai West	36.85	23.77
132	Tarwara*	0.68	-
133	Brahmapur*	3.36	-
134	Ghonghepur Saharawa	25.37	21.18
Total (Approx.)		1229.67²	554.29

Source

- (i) Col.2 and 3, Rehabilitation Department of the Kosi Project, Supaul.
 - (ii) Col.4 is adapted from the information given to NHRC by WRD.
 - (iii) Where no information is furnished about the vacant land at the rehabilitation site, it is assumed that such sites are fully occupied.
1. This area should be more than 21.01ha.
 2. Due to discrepancies in the areas of the rehabilitation sites, 'approximate' is used.

According to this table there is no vacant land at the rehabilitation sites of Bhim Nagar, Chandpipar North, Chandpipar South, Dabhari, Mahua, Nemua Rampur, Kamharauli, Mohanpur and Mahishi Tilabhag. This implies that all those who were resettled at these locations should be there. One such rehabilitation site is in Mohanpur village, which is located on either side of the road linking Mahishi to Navhatta. Two hamlets of Garhia Kundah revenue village, namely Fakirahi and Parasbanna, and two hamlets of revenue village Mohammadpur, namely Misiraulia and Mohammadpur, were rehabilitated at these locations. The river started eroding these villages immediately after the embankment was completed in 1957. For 2 or 3 years, they made some make-shift arrangement within the embankments but were compelled to shift to the rehabilitation site in 1960.

The plot for Misiraulia was at the highest elevation in the rehabilitation site and its residents were the first to come there. The plots for Fakirahi and Parasbanna were to the middle and the lowest land fell in Mohammadpur. It was also a strange coincidence that the land of Mohammadpur, within the embankments, was eroded last and they had to move from there but by that time, there was waist deep water at the rehabilitation plots allotted to them. They decided to shift to the eastern embankment and continue to be there in 2008.

Only a part of the population in Fakirahi, Parasbanna and Misiraulia resides at the rehabilitation site. Hafiz Ainul Haq of Fakirahi says, "Only those who are thoroughly mauled by the circumstances remain here at the rehabilitation site. We became paupers because of this embankment. Our land within the embankment was either consumed by the river or is covered under a thick bed of sand. There is not a single person in Mohanpur who still possesses even 10 katthas of land. Our rehabilitation site is shown on the survey map but within that the location of our plots is not shown. We do not have any papers of the land yet. Whatever land one has occupied, it belongs to him. Our names are there in the *khatiyān* of the Rehabilitation Office in Supaul and that is all. Thus this rehabilitation is temporary. The Rehabilitation Office is also temporary, that everybody knows. We do not know how many of our fellow villagers have gone from here and at the same time there is no count of how many outsiders came and settled on this land. Despite that, no villager here is designated as being below the poverty line (BPL) but those having tractors and

motor cycles are there in the list.... There was one Basudev Mehta from Kedli Punarwas, where the embankment had breached in 1984, who wanted to contest the rehabilitation issue in the Supreme Court of India. He had appointed an advocate also but the advocate told him that it would cost, at least, Rs 80,000 to contest the case. We are poor people. Where could we get this money from? This also happened long back and it is a long time since Mehta died. If you still say that Mohanpur is fully occupied by persons displaced by the embankments, what can I say?"

Similarly, there are 16 locations west of the western Kosi embankment where no land is reported to be vacant. These sites are Dharhara A, Dharhara B, Dagmara, Nirmali Lachhminia, Inarwa, Deorh, Bhakhra, Bheja, Rasiyari Kalyan, Tetari East, Tetari Middle, Bhubaul, Amahi Khaisa, Amahi North, Tarwara, and Brahmapur. A visit to Inarwa in Ghoghardiha block and Nirmali Lachhminia in Nirmali block is revealing.

The villagers in Inarwa say that some 2.79ha (6.85 acres) of land were acquired in Inarwa to rehabilitate displaced persons from Basuari, Harri and Baskhora. There is nobody left in the village to authentically say whose lands were acquired for the purpose, but as a guess they suggest that the land belonged to Munilal Mukhiya, Chunnilal Yadav, Munilal Yadav, Ramlakhan Yadav, Bilal Yadav of Inarwa and Tarini Singhdev of Deorh. It was around 1961-62 that the oustees came to settle here. Most of them were from Basuari, a village that was 4km east of Inarwa and trapped between the river and the western embankment of the Kosi. They came here and also built their houses but the distance between their original village and this place was such that it was impossible for them to look after their fields. They all went back shortly thereafter. Says Sukh Dev Yadav (62) of Inarwa, "Only four persons including me were left at the Inarwa rehabilitation site. I was a government servant and had relations in Nighma village within the embankments and we were given a rehabilitation site in Mujaulia Tol. Using my contacts in the government, I got my rehabilitation site shifted to Inarwa and started staying here ever since. Other than me, Lakshmi Mukhiya got rehabilitation in Inarwa due to the connections of his in-laws. Two other persons, Rasik Lal Yadav of Harri and Kavi Pundit of Sanghee were also rehabilitated here. All the rest came and went back."

When a rehabilitation site is vacated, others start occupying that land. Some build houses and others start cultivating it. This occupation is directly linked to the muscle power of the occupant and this occupation cannot be vacated. The Rehabilitation Office at Nirmali and Supaul tried to get possession of such land but failed. As long as the Rehabilitation Office was located in Nirmali, the vacant land used to be leased out to farmers. This too is now suspended. Should one travel from Ghoghardiha to Inarwa, there is a Vishwakarma temple just at the periphery of the village on the left of the road. The land opposite this temple is the rehabilitation plot acquired in Inarwa and is open to encroachment. No person of Basuari lives on it but the details submitted to NHRC by the Water Resources Department suggest that there is no vacant land in Inarwa.

Let us now consider Basuari. The elders in the village believe that there were about 300-325 families in the village in the 1950s; that number may have grown to about 1600 these days. When they were asked to move out from within the embankments, about 300 families were dispatched to Belha and the remaining 25 families had to resettle in Inarwa. Because of the distances, those shifting to Inarwa returned almost immediately from there. Altogether, four persons of Basuari, namely Nathuni Mahato, Ram Sevak Saw, Phanik Lal Mahato and Ananda Mandal are still living in Belha with their families. Says Jaikrishna Yadav of Basuari that the generation of his father had built houses in Belha but most of the money that they were entitled to was swindled by the brokers. When they did not get any facility at the new location, most of the people salvaged whatever they could from the houses and shifted back to Basuari. Rehabilitation, thus, went with the wind.

The story of Nirmali Lachhminia is not much different. Here the entire rehabilitation site is said to be occupied. Families from Manohar Patti (Barhara) and Pachgachhia — both in Marauna block — were rehabilitated here. Barhara was 7km from the location and hence the people just came here and went back. About 1.26ha of land of this site houses Nirmali College and the land is now settled in its name. Yet it is claimed that the rehabilitation site is fully occupied. It is true that some families of Barhara and Pachgachhia still live on this land but many of the residents of the site are simply illegal occupants. The successors of Bhushan Gupta, former Chairman of Saharsa District

Board, were also rehabilitated at this site and some of them still live there. Most of the other families have gone back to the original village.

Officials at the Rehabilitation Office at Supaul maintain that there is no vacant land at the rehabilitation sites and even if there is some, it is leased out annually to the farmers for agriculture. A list of the villages trapped within the embankments or the ones intercepted by the embankments in the Kosi Project is given in Annexure-1 at the end of this chapter.

The overall rehabilitation situation in the Kosi Project is in a very bad shape. There is no clarity about which village is rehabilitated where. There is some trace of those who migrated to distant places in search of employment after moving to the rehabilitation sites and have maintained links with their village, but those who left for good are untraced. Even their relatives do not know anything about them. There is no record of those who have settled at various rehabilitation sites without valid authorization and at the same time there is no record of those who had the authority to live at a particular place but have gone elsewhere. People only move back to their villages within the embankments because of livelihood compulsions. If their land is not eroded, sand cast or water logged, they can at least farm it in the rabi season.

In 1956, MM Prasad had quoted a figure of 45,291 families likely to be trapped within the embankments, and the WRD of GoB says, in 2001, that it has rehabilitated 39,527 families from within the Kosi embankments. By its own admission then, some 6,000 families are yet to be rehabilitated. Also when MM Prasad gave his figure in the Bihar Vidhan Sabha, the eastern embankment of the Kosi was to be extended only up to Mahishi and the western embankment was to terminate at Bhanthi. Only 304 villages were expected to be entrapped by then. But the eastern embankment was extended to Koparia and the western embankment to Ghonghepur bringing another 76 villages within them. Adding these families to the list, further swells the number of families to be rehabilitated. As a crude guess, there should be at least 10,000 additional families. Further, when Phase-1 of the Kosi Project was completed in 1985, it was reported that a sum of Rs. 180cr was spent on the Project till then. This was more than four times its original estimate. When the prices of men and material escalated many fold, why was the same increase not reflected in the rehabilitation

costs, that it had risen only marginally to Rs. 2.27cr against the original estimate of Rs. 2.12cr? It must be noted that land for rehabilitation sites for many villages is yet to be acquired. Ramesh Chandra Jha, in his statement, has cited the names of many such villages.

NHRC forwarded the reply of the WRD of GoB to Kosi Mukti Sangharsh Samiti (13th May 2004) to seek its opinion over the matter. In response to the letter of WRD of GoB, Kosi Mukti Sangharsh Samiti raised the issue of equality of all citizens before law and requested that the NHRC reconsidered the whole issue afresh. The positions are very clear. As a rule, fights break out in villages if rainwater from one's roof flows over a neighbour's plot. If that be the case, how the government can create a situation by which the waters of a river like the Kosi flood a village so that all sources of livelihoods are destroyed? What sort of justice is this? Why should Government employees of Block Office determine whether any development work is possible there or not? Why are villages within the embankments painted differently on the block maps? Why can't we demand a road or a school in our village from their leaders? Why should we be termed as 'relief seekers' or '*reliefkhor*' (one who survives only on relief) when we could make our living through our hard work?

NHRC forwarded the letter written by Kosi Mukti Sangharsh Samiti to the Government of Bihar" for further necessary action as deemed proper, in the light of the suggestions made by the opposite party" and closed the case on the December 10, 2004. It must be noted that there was no visit made by NHRC to the area before it reached the decision to dispose off the case nor did NHRC remind GoB to furnish all the information that it had asked for on March 22, 1999. The final letter from NHRC is attached (Annexure-2).

This, sometimes, gives an impression that those living in the protected countryside can raise such demands. But if one says this to the people living within in the protected countryside between the western Kosi and eastern Kamla embankments, they would pity him. To see the foolish and mischievous deployment of technology, one should take a trip to the *doab* of the Kamla and the Kosi.³²

What choice do the people, or any organization like the Kosi Mukti Sangharsh Samiti, have to express their frustration against the

apathy of the Government towards their genuine problems ? They can go in for sit-in strikes, processions, demonstrations, *gherao*, or, at best, boycott the elections. Even that was resorted to by the people under the banner of the Kosi Mukti Sangharsh Samiti in the 1999 elections of the Lok Sabha and 2000 election to the Bihar Vidhan Sabha. Politicians want votes and they know very well how to appease people by making false promises. They played the trick on both the occasions and that was all.

The NHRC, in its wisdom, has chosen not to provide succor to the hapless embankment victims. Now their last hope is to appeal to the Supreme Court of India. Should that plea fail too, they can only knock on the doors of the Society For Prevention Of Cruelty To Animals (SPCA). This is what the Kosi embankments have done to nearly a million people.

10. Dwindling Choices for the Embankment Victims

People's welfare depends to a large extent on the will power of governments. Successive governments in Bihar took a very casual view of the problems faced by the embankment victims resulting in their pauperization. Their sacrifices would have served some purpose if the intended benefits of the Kosi Project had accrued to the people in the countryside. Almost all the political parties of the country have ruled the country and the state at some point or the other and except for some individual efforts none of them have raised the issue except at the time of elections. Proposals for dams on the Kosi at Barahkshetra, on the Bagmati at Nunthar and on the Kamla at Chisa Pani have been aired for a long time but nobody knows when these dams will become a reality. Doubts exist already whether these dams will serve any useful purpose as far as floods are concerned.

Whenever any serious initiative is taken on these proposed dams, then and then only, will the embankment victims get an opportunity that they will be able to impress upon the Government and the financial institutions who will finance these dams to include the cost of their rehabilitation in the estimates of the project and ensure implementation of the promises made to them. They will get an opportunity to assert that unless the promises made to them are fulfilled first, they will not allow the promoters to build the dams. The construction of the Kosi High Dam at Barahkshetra should be subject to the condition of rehabilitation of the embankment victims.

It is a fact that the promises of land for land or house for house and a job to one person in the family made to the people were all false. There was neither any intention to fulfill these commitments nor was it possible. Politicians cheated the people wholesale. But the provisions of the Chandra Kishore Pathak Committee can still be fulfilled. Reservation in government jobs, which were endorsed by the Pathak Committee, would not cost anything extra to the exchequer. They should be given to the embankment victims.

A rail-cum-road bridge is being constructed to connect Dagmara to Bhaptiahi. This is a welcome move by the government. A couple of more bridges built on the Kosi will provide better connectivity to the area with the outside world. The Gandak River already has four such bridges at Valmikinagar, Motihari, Reva Ghat and Hajipur. Similar demands for the Kosi should also be met. It must be ensured, however, that proper waterway is provided under these bridges failing which massive erosion and sand casting, upstream and downstream of the bridges, will take place in the future and the people will be further inconvenienced.

Says Satya Narayan Prasad of Simrahi village in Raghapur block of Supaul district, "My ancestral village, Bhulia, was located within the river and the Kosi embankment. Some villagers were resettled in Pipra village. These families went to settle in Pipra but soon returned to Bhulia. Erosion of our village and sand casting of our lands is our fate and we do not remember how many times our village was eroded. Forget about our condition within the embankments, the situation in the protected areas is not encouraging either. We have the eastern



Satya Narayan Prasad

Kosi embankment, Gamharia sub-branch canal of the Kosi project, a road connecting Saharsa to Birpur and the rail line linking Saharsa to Jogbani here. This gives an impression that our area must be reasonably well-off. But there is massive waterlogging due to the eastern embankment and the Gamharia sub-branch canal. Our land has become a swamp. We can only raise summer crops and the irrigation for them is provided by pumps and

not by the Gamharia canal. A rabi crop is possible only on the uplands but that area is very small. Kharif crops are ruled out. The road is such that if you board a bus, your head will collide with your fellow passenger at least ten times and on equal occasions you will dash against the front seat... The Government is building a bridge connecting Dagmara to Bhaptiahi in our area. The embankments on the Kosi are separated by 8-9 kilometers here but the waterway provided in the said bridge is reported to be only 2 kilometers. This difference is unbelievable. With the consequent rise in the water level upstream of the bridge, more villages will remain submerged for a longer time every year and there will be heavy erosion of land south of the bridge. People on either side of the bridge will be uprooted. We have approached the authorities many times to provide extra waterway under the bridge but without any success. Construction of the bridge and improving communication is a good thing but how many times more must we be uprooted?"

The embankment victims must continue their struggle to get economic rehabilitation as per the provisions of Pathak Committee, strive to get additional bridges and impress upon the government to clear waterlogging from within the Kosi embankments and outside them. They will get an opportunity to press their demands when the proposed dam at Barakhshetra is to be built. If they miss that opportunity and start celebrating that the government has at last accepted their suggestion for a dam at Barakhshetra, then there will be no redemption for them thereafter.

The embankment victims have one more option open to them. That is to elect such persons to represent them in proper forums who will look after their interests and struggle for their rights. This opportunity comes at least one day in five years, if not earlier. That is when people are free to choose their rulers. One day prior to that event and one day after it, they become subjects of their chosen ones. Democracy provides that unique opportunity and if it is lost in the name of caste, religion, language, region, affiliations and false promises, the responsibility then lies exclusively with the people. The pity is that so far, the people have not been able to rise above these narrow considerations and have been repeatedly taken for a ride by unscrupulous elements. It takes a lot of wisdom to develop such consciousness.

11. Realigning the Block Boundaries

There is a need to reorganize the district and block boundaries. Ideally, a district needs to be carved out for the area trapped within the Kosi embankments with its headquarters somewhere just in the middle, adjacent to Supaul. That is the only way to educate the administration about the problems faced by the people living within the Kosi embankments.

There is no sense in including villages that are located west of the western Kosi embankment in Mahishi block, as at present. The predicament of many villages in Madhubani district that are located at the tail end of the Kamla embankments is similar. Their markets are in Darbhanga and not in Madhubani. Why should they be a part of Madhubani? What is the justification for running the administration of Marauna block from Belha? These obvious and essential changes never get the attention of the politicians. nor is a demand ever raised by the public in an organized manner, to that affect. These changes should, however, receive priority.

12. Conclusions

The politicians were under oath to serve the people but they did not mind giving false assurances to them. Then, there were engineers who should have been guided by the ethics of their profession, which is often identified with the legendary Bhagirath and Vishwakarma. The politicians had an excuse that they did not understand the basics of engineering and technical matters and only followed the advice of engineers. The latter hid behind the embankments, saying that they were needed for providing immediate relief to the people who could not wait for 15 long years for the Barahkshetra Dam to be constructed. They have another excuse, which is never made public, i.e., that they are not free to take any decision independently and have to defend all the decisions taken by politicians. This complementary back-scratching never ends. It is not necessary that political decisions, however popular they may be, be technically sound, but once taken they get political legitimacy as the engineering community maintains silence over the issue. It is a practical difficulty that an engineer, even though he is a celebrity in his field, hesitates to give the right advice to politicians. There is no solution to such a problem.

This chapter highlights the plight of the people who have lived

and continue to live within the Kosi embankments. In the name of development, hundreds of thousands of people were uprooted and injustice was meted out to them. People who live outside of north Bihar may wonder how so many people have continued to suffer for such a long time, why then they do not raise voices against the injustice.? The fact is that the people have become resigned to their fate. They have lost the will to assert themselves. Instead of putting up a fight, they prefer to migrate to Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, Gujarat or Maharashtra.

There is a flip side to this question and that is, if the people suffered to such an extent, what was the government doing? Successive governments have never considered rehabilitation seriously. Today they have closed the files. Almost all the nation's political parties have now ruled the state and the country and no party can point an accusing fingers at the others. Non-government organizations distribute relief and advocate that flood disasters be managed. Correcting the wrongs done to the people is not on their agenda either. The injustice wrought on unsuspecting people by technological hubris has been largely forgotten in the march toward modern development. Similar situation exists not only in the plains of the Kosi River but also along the embankments of the Mahananda, Kamla, Gandak, Bagmati, and Burhi Gandak rivers in north Bihar.

In the meantime, within embankments and the waterlogged regions, hapless people wait for some Messiah to emerge and rescue them. The tragedy is that there is none.

Annexure 1

District and block wise list of villages trapped within Kosi Embankments or bisected by them

District Saharsa	9	Barhara	19	Mohammadpur
Navhatta Block	10	Mahua	20	Kumharauli
1 Devka	11	Chhatwan	21	Mohanpur
2 Hati	12	Majhaul	22	Enaetpur
3 Kathuar Eraji	13	Shahpur	23	Chandrain
4 Bariyari	14	Govindpur	24	Ekarh
5 Navhatta	15	Darhar	25	Rasulpur
6 Rampur	16	Bhelahi	26	Naula
7 Partaha	17	Garhia Lohar	27	Birjain
8 Bakunia	18	Bhakua	28	Narga

29	Narayanpur	27	Bihna	8	Baldehi	
30	Lalpur	28	Rakhati	9	Tajpur	
31	Sattaar	29	Dharmapur	10	Raiginia	
32	Murli	30	Dhanauj	11	Alani	
33	Garhia	31	Rajhanpur	12	Sahuriya	
34	Dharmapur	32	Birwar	13	Basahi	
35	Kedalipatti	33	Sirwar	14	Shahgaon	
36	Trikhutti	34	Maina	15	Gordah	
37	Barahi	35	Baghaur-1	16	Kamara	
38	Purushottampur	36	Baghaur-2	17	Gauri	
39	Paharpur	37	Balia	18	Bhelawa	
40	Asanahipatti	38	Kundah	19	Situaha	
41	Kaithwar	39	Arapatti	20	Utesara	
42	Katiyahi	40	Angsir	21	Kotwalia	
43	Brahmapur	41	Baghawa Hat Abad	22	Chhachhua	
Mahishi Block		42	Chataria	23	Samhar Khurd	
1	Kudgaon	43	Dhamwara	24	Samhar Kalan	
2	Bhelahi Kalan	44	Gandaul	25	Kachaut	
	Khurd	45	Mahishi	26	Chanan	
3	Birgaon	46	Teghara	27	Khochardeva	
4	Amahi	47	Maina Arazi	28	Kathghara	
5	Tarahi	48	Baghaur-3	29	Matihani	
6	Saharwa	49	Sarauni	30	Sevati	
7	Samani	50	Sarauni Khurd	31	Murla	
8	Bhanthi	51	Pachbhinda	32	Mian Jagir	
9	Nawada	Simri Bakhtiyarpur			33	Salkhua
10	Dumari	Block			34	Bangawan
11	Supaul	1	Ghoghsam	District Supaul		
12	Dhapari	2	Sukhasan	Basantpur Block		
13	Telwa	3	Kathdumar	1	Bhim Nagar	
14	Thanwar	4	Agar	2	Dubiyahi	
15	Pranpur	5	Belwara	3	Madhura	
16	Semar	6	Dhanupara	4	Raniganj	
17	Nonia	7	Paharpur	5	Dumari Millik	
18	Mahisaraho	8	Tilathi	6	Piparahi Patti	
19	Parewa	Salkhua Block			7	Dharha
20	Aina Sohagpur	1	Kabira	8	Chhitauni	
21	Aina	2	Sahuri	9	Dharhapatti Az	
22	Mangarauni	3	Chiraiya		Rakbe Chaudeep	
23	Karhara	4	Bhirakhi		23/1	
24	Ghonghepur	5	Khajurbanna	10	Dharhapatti Az	
25	Jhara	6	Sauthi		Rakbe Chaudeep	
26	Sisauna	7	Kabirpur		23/2	

11 Dharhapatti Az	20 Mahua	19 Panchgachhia
Rakbe Chhitauni-24	21 Hariyahi	20 Sukumarpur
12 Dharhapatti Az	22 Jarauli	21 Dubiyahi
Rakbe Chhitauni-	23 Harpur	22 Dighia
24/1	24 Laukaha	23 Bela
13 Dharhapatti Az	25 Bahuarawa	24 Abhuar
Rakbe Chhitauni - 23	26 Ugripatti	25 Kishanpur
14 Dharhapatti - 23	27 Siyani	26 Chandpipar
15 Bahadurganj	28 Karhara	27 Kulipatti
16 Saranpur	29 Kabiyahi	28 Saraigarh
17 Parsahi - 1	30 Takia	29 Itahari
18 Parsahi - 2	31 Bajdari Chakla	30 Sanpataha
19 Parsahi - 3	32 Gopalpur	31 Aurahi
20 Narpatpatti	33 Baisa	32 Banainia
21 Bhatania/Satanpatti	34 Kalyanpur	Supaul Block
22 Piprahi Goth	35 Gidhni	1 Sukaila
23 Saheban	36 Bhiliya	2 Bela Parsauni
24 Lakshampur	37 Kataiya Bhuliya	3 Nirmali
25 Panchpadaria	38 Baltharawa	4 Surtipatti
26 Bhagwanpur	39 Dharhi	5 Dabhari
Nirmali/ Bhaptiyahi	40 Nirmali (only one	6 Ghivak
Block	hamlet)	7 Ghuran
1 Kunauli	Kishanpur Block	8 Mugrar
2 Kamalpur	1 Kalimugara	9 Dumaria
3 Dagmara	2 Dinajpur	10 Fakirana
4 Bathanaha	3 Lachhminia	11 Karnapatti
5 Bilandi	4 Khakhai	12 Balwa
6 Dharhara	5 Shivpuri	13 Narahia
7 Banainia	6 Tharbittia	14 Pipra Khurd
8 Rupauli	7 Nauabakhar	15 Bairiya
9 Simri	8 Kamldaha	16 Basbitti
10 Sikarhatta	9 Arraha	17 Gopalpur Sire
11 Dudhaila	10 Gadahawa	18 Gopalpur Khurd
12 Dighia	11 Sonbarasa	19 Chandail
13 Bela	12 Parsa Madho	20 Maricha
14 Maura	13 Asanpur Kupaha	21 Parsauni
15 Reharua	14 Bauraha	22 Rampur
16 Tharia	15 Sujanpur	23 Nemua
17 Majhari	16 Maujaha	24 Bijalpur
18 Jhahura	17 Siswa	25 Bakaur
19 Lagunia	18 Begamganj	26 Telwa
		27 Piprahari

Marauna Block	3	Gidarahi	12	Narhi
1 Sisauni	4	Mahathaur Goth		Jagannathpur
2 Rasuar	5	Dhanchheya	13	Karhara
3 Dhabghat	6	Hardwar Laukaha	14	Dwalakh
4 Kadmaha	7	Kaurihar Laukaha	15	Kharik
5 Gotarahi	8	Baruar	16	Bheja
6 Kataiya	9	Narahi	17	Parsauni
7 Lalmania	10	Bangama	18	Balthi
8 Belhi	11	Mahathaur	19	Bakua
9 Maheshpur	12	Rajarampatti	20	Bhargawan
10 Gamharia		Ghoghardiha Block	21	Mani Mahpatia
11 Padari	1	Basuari	22	Lilja
12 Mahuahi	2	Pipra Kamalpur	23	Parsauni
13 Kulharia	3	Alaula	24	Mahpatia
14 Saroja Bela	4	Hadari	25	Chhatauni
15 Koni Inamat	5	Mainahi	26	Mehsha
16 Panchgachhia	6	Banarjhula	27	Bhawanipur
17 Manoharpatti	7	Amahi	28	Bagewa
18 Barahara	8	Devnathpatti	29	Rampur
19 Jobaha	9	Sarauti	30	Mainahi
20 Ghogkariya	10	Nighma	31	Pariyahi
21 Parikoch	11	Nauabakhar	32	Gobargarha
22 Baskhoraha	12	Dhanpat Barhi	33	Asurgarh
23 Hadari	13	Hatni	34	Garhgaon
24 Badurahi	14	Rajuahi	35	Basipatti
25 Pachlehra	15	Saharwa	36	Goahi
26 Khorman	16	Dhabghat	37	Bhagta
27 Chandergarh	17	Ghoghardiha	38	Darah
28 Kamrail	18	Kisunipatti	39	Bela
29 Marauna	19	Deorh	40	Harsankari
30 Kusmaul		Madhepur Block	41	Khajuri
31 Janardanpur	1	Kalikapur	42	Tengraha
32 Rataho	2	Mataras		District Darbhanga
33 Ganaura	3	Bishunpur		Kiratpur Block
34 Parsauni	4	Pauni	1	Rasiyari
35 Mugarihal	5	Ratuar	2	Jhagarua
36 Khokhnaha	6	Luchbani	3	Tarwara
37 Kuraon	7	Tengari	4	Jamalpur
District Madhubani	8	Rupauli	5	Narkatia
Laukahi Block	9	Tardiha	6	Bhubaul
1 Narendrapur	10	Chunni	7	Bhandaria
2 Mahadeo Math	11	Nawada	8	Kadwara
			9	Birdipur

Annexure 2

National Human Rights Commission

(Law Division)

Sardar Patel Bhawan

Sansad Marg, New Delhi 110001

Case No: 746/4/98-99

Dated 10-16/12/2004

To

Mr DEV KUMAR SINGH

KOSI MUKTI SANGHARSH SAMITI

DISTT SUPAUL

BIHAR

Sir/Madam,

With reference to your complaint dated, I am directed to say that the matter was considered by the commission on 7/12/2004. The commission has made the following directions.

A complaint was received from Kosi Mukti Sangharsh Samiti, Supaul, Bihar, alleging that due to construction of embankments of river Kosi, residents of the area residing between two embankments are suffering as their land have submerged in water. The complaint was prayed for intervention by the Commission and justice.

The Commission took cognizance and wide proceedings dated 12.2.1999 issued notice to the Chief Secretary, Government of Bihar calling for a report in four weeks.

A report dated 11.10.2001 received from the Government of Bihar states that the Government had undertaken to rehabilitate the people inhabiting the area lying between embankments and provisions were made to provide sites for their house, falling between the embankments as per the scheme. A sum of Rs. 2.12 Crores was sanctioned by the Government for rehabilitation of villagers.

The Commission, after considering the report, wide proceedings dated 25.2.2002, directed the Government of Bihar to intimate the

progress made in the rehabilitation of the displaced persons together with the plan for completing the process of rehabilitation.

A report dated 1.11.2002 has been received from the Government of Bihar stating that the Government have tried to solve the problem and difficulties of the people within the two Kosi embankments as far as possible. The details of the work done has been given as follows,

- i) An area equivalent to the area of homestead lands of each evacuee was provided outside the embankments as close to the cultural lands as possible.
- ii) An additional area equal to 40 % of the total area of the homestead lands was provided for common facilities, such as roads, schools, tanks, wells, community halls, etc. The entire expenditure of providing these amenities was met by the Government. Moreover, wherever necessary, boats were also provided at the cost of the Government.
- iii) House building grants equal to the value of the house within the embankments without making any deduction, whatsoever, for depreciation were paid in each case and the houses within the embankments were also left with the owners, to enable them to utilize the same for the purposes of carrying on their cultivation from there.
- iv) People had the option to construct houses on their own lands away from the rehabilitation sites but in those cases price of homestead lands was not paid to them nor any common facility were provided at Government cost at such places. They were, of course, paid house building grants, on the usual basis.
- v) It is rather interesting to note that in 1968 more than nine lakh cusecs of water flowed down the river Kosi, the highest flood level recorded in the last several decades. As a result, the people within the embankments have not found it so difficult to continue to live in their old homes and hearths. In fact, many families which had been rehabilitated outside the embankments have, after getting final payment for their new house, gone back to their old homes and hearths. In other words, while Government have sanctioned a scheme for rehabilitating these people at places of greater safety, for one reason or the other, these people continue to live in their

old homes and hearths.

A gist of the report was forwarded to the complainant for its comment, if any, wide proceedings dated 6.5.2004.

The complainant Kosi Mukti Sangharsh Samiti in reply dated 14.6.2004 has stated that,

- i) Government of Bihar mooted a number of projects for the rehabilitation of persons displaced from Kosi embankments, but none of them was brought to reality. The displaced persons continued to have problems of earning their livelihood and are forced to migrate to Punjab and other places.
- ii) That without any concrete, financial package, the problem of rehabilitation cannot be permanently solved. Most of the displaced persons have not been provided with land. Even those, who have been allotted land and are not able to cultivate the same as the land allotted to them is 'banjar' and uncultivable. A number of villages at Supaul, Darbhanga and Madhubani have been partly submerged between the two embankments but the villagers have not received any compensation.
- iii) The report of the Government that industry and pisciculture were being developed in the area is false. Pisciculture is not possible between the two embankments. The report submitted by Government of Bihar is exaggerated and false. The residents of the area are still living a miserable life.
- iv) That no arrangement for any medical facilities have been made by the Government in the area. No hospital has been established. People are suffering from various contagious diseases.

A copy of the response received from the Kosi Mukti Sangharsh Samiti be transmitted to the Government of Bihar for further necessary action as deemed proper, in the light of suggestions made by the opposite party. With these observations the case is closed.

Yours faithfully,

ASSISTANT REGISTRAR(LAW)

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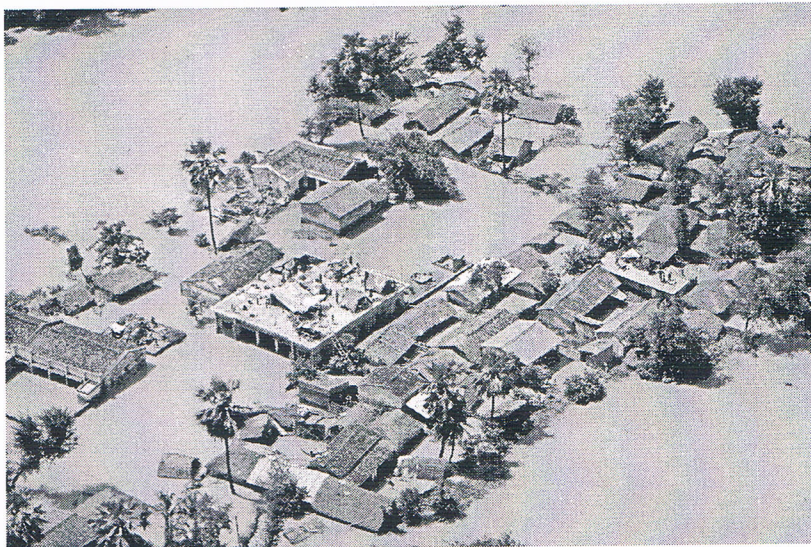
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THE
STORY
OF
BIHAR'S
KOSI
RIVER

TRAPPED!

Between
the **Devil** and
Deep Waters

Dinesh Kumar Mishra



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With the completion of embankments on the Kosi in 1963, a population of nearly 192,000 were trapped within 304 villages between the two embankments of the Kosi. This number has now swollen to 9,88,000 (2001 Census) and the number of villages gone to 380 because of the extension of embankments. This population is scattered over 4 districts and 13 blocks. Rehabilitation of these unfortunate people was not incorporated in the original plan of the project when the approval of the project was given in 1953. The rehabilitation issue of these entrapped people came for discussion only in 1956 after the construction started in 1955.

They are living in primitive conditions ever since and their plight cannot be understood without physically seeing their living conditions. Passage of the river waters of the Kosi over these villages is an annual feature. Whenever involuntary displacement in projects comes for discussion, the flood control projects are often ignored and it is really astonishing how these people survive braving the flood waters every year. They were the people who sacrificed their interest in larger context of the society and got only indifference in return. Nobody cares about the hapless victims of the developmental project like the one on the Kosi. This booklet peeps into many such questions and systematic denial of the rights of the people. It also looks into the avenues still open for a possible solution. Barh Mukti Abhiyan (Freedom from Floods Campaign) hopes for an open debate, accountability and action from the responsible quarters over the issue.



**Freedom From
Floods Campaign**

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