

# Water Wars

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March 31, 2019

- **Climate-Smart Agriculture**

The Gates Foundation and the fertilizer and biotech industry—the Exxons of agriculture—joined hands at the Paris climate summit to push the false solution of climate-smart agriculture. The Gates Foundation, along with the other biotech evangelists of our times, have it completely wrong—climate-smart agriculture and “One Agriculture,” packaged in a PR bubble, will starve the world and worsen the refugee crisis, which is already spiraling out of control. The Gates Foundation, pretending to feed the world, is proselytizing the very model of agriculture that has contributed to half of the climate problem as a solution.

(p. xxv)

- **Biopiracy of Climate Resilient Crops**

The delusional corporations have not “invented” climate-resilient traits in seeds. They have simply pirated the traits from farmers’ varieties. Fifteen hundred patents on climate-resilient crops have been taken out by big biotech. Navdanya/Research Foundation for Science, Technology, and Ecology, have published the list in the report “Biopiracy of Climate Resilient Crops: Gene Giants Steal Farmers Innovation.” With these very broad patents, corporations like Monsanto can prevent access to climate-resilient seeds in the aftermath of climate disasters through patents—which grant an exclusive right to produce, distribute, sell the patented product. Climate-resilient traits are not created through genetic engineering, they are pirated from seeds farmers have evolved over generations. For thousands of years, farmers, especially women, have evolved and bred seed freely in partnership with each other and with nature, to further increase the diversity of that which nature has given us and adapt it to the needs of different cultures.

(p. xxv-xxvi)

- **Displaced Environmental Migrants**

The convergence of financial, food, climate, and energy crises impacts soils and peoples in many ways. Coupled with wars, these translate into waves of internally and externally displaced persons. Uprooted people are vulnerable to other exploitations, and the soils that they once knew and defended are open for appropriation, despoliation, and general harm. In rural areas where people depend on scarce productive land resources, land degradation is a driver of forced migration. An estimated 42 percent of households intensify their seasonal mobility in the event of poor harvests, while 17 percent migrate when there is crop destruction, and 13 percent leave in the case of strong climatic events such as extreme droughts. By 2050, 200 million people may be permanently displaced environmental migrants.

(p. xxvii)

- **Water Wars Mutate into Culture and Religious Wars**

The massive influx of refugees has destabilized Europe politically and culturally, creating divisions between countries and within societies. The displacement of Syria, which is

rooted in drought, is erased from public mind by blaming religion for the upheaval. This is how water wars mutate into culture wars and religious conflicts.

In Nigeria, Boko Haram is presented as an extremist religious movement. However, as Luc Gnacadja, the former head of the UNCCD has attested, “the depletion of Lake Chad helped create the conditions for conflict. In much of northern Nigeria, Muslim herders are in competition with Christian farmers for dwindling water supplies. The so-called religious fight is actually about access to vital resources.

(p. xxix-xxx)

- **We Need to Make Peace with Water and with the Earth to Combat the Rise of Terrorism**

As people are displaced and insecurities grow, identity is transformed and destroyed. Among these vulnerable cultures and identities, terrorism, extremism, and xenophobia take virulent forms. Vicious cycles of violence and exclusion—cultural, political, and economic—predominate.

These are the roots of the rise of the new terrorism and extremism. This is the new face of Water Wars.

These vicious cycles of violence begin with violence against the Earth, violence against water, and violence against the rights of communities, which are all sustained by water.

To make peace, we need to make peace with water and with the Earth. We need to cultivate our deeper identities as earthlings and as water beings. We need to remember that we are water, soil, seed, and earth.

(p. xxxi)

April 16 2019

- **Our History Gives Meaning to Our Lives**

In 1982, Ganga Ram Kalundia, the leader of the tribal anti-dam movement, was shot and killed by the police. Even after his death, Kalundia’s fellow tribals continued the struggle [against the Narmada Valley Dam financed by the World Bank].

Our links with our ancestors are the basis of our society and of the reproduction of our society. Our children grow up playing around the stones which mark the burial sites of our ancestors. ... Without relating to our ancestors, our lives lose all meaning. They talk of compensation. How can they compensate us for the loss of the very meaning of our lives if they bury these burial stones under the dam? They talk of rehabilitation. Can they ever rehabilitate the sacred sites they have violated?

(p. 67)

April 21 2019

- **The Great Thirst**

In the maquiladoras of Mexico, drinking water is so scarce that babies and children drink Coca-Cola and Pepsi. Coca-Cola’s products sell in 195 countries, generating a revenue of

\$16 billion. Water scarcity is clearly a source of corporate profits. In an annual report, Coca-Cola proclaims:

All of us in the Coca-Cola family wake up each morning knowing that every single one of the world's 5.6 billion people will get thirsty that day. If we make it impossible for these 5.6 billion people to escape Coca-Cola, then we assure our future success for many years to come. Doing anything else is not an option.

Companies like Coca-Cola are fully aware that water is the real thirst quencher and are jumping into the bottled water business.

(p. 99)

- **Ecological Disasters: The Tragedy of the Aral Sea**

In 1990, economist Vasily Selyunin commented on the Aral Sea: "The root of the problem is over irrigation, on a scale so vast that it has washed all the humus out of the soil. The loss has to be made good with shock doses of fertilizers. As a result, the earth has become like a junkie, unable to function without its fix." Fishing ports now lie 40 to 50 kilometers from the Aral shores, and the fish catch has collapsed from 25,000 tons a year to zero. Half of the population of the nearby city of Aralsk, Kazakhstan, has migrated. Unfortunately, as the Uzbek poet Muhammed Salikh points out, "You cannot fill the Aral with tears."

(p. 112)

July 6, 2019

- **Canals of Blood**

In 1985, 1,000 peasants participated in a march and pressed their demands. They also organized a conference on drought eradication that year. At the conference, the chairman of the Maharashtra State Drought Relief and Eradication Committee argued that if sugarcane cultivation were abandoned, 250,000 hectares of land could be irrigated, instead of the proposed 90,000 hectares. However, the sugar barons fiercely opposed the diversion of water away from cash-crop production. One politician's words reflect the sentiment of the sugar barons: "We will not give one drop of water from sugarcane; instead a canal of blood will flow. Cane and sugar factories are the glory of Maharashtra."

(p. 125)

- **Water is Sacred**

The Ganges does not merely possess the purifying qualities of water; it is saturated with antiseptic minerals that kill bacteria.

Modern bacteriological research has confirmed that cholera germs die in Ganges water. Dr. F.C. Harrison writes:

A peculiar fact, which has never been satisfactorily explained, is the quick death, in three to five hours, of the *Cholera vibrio* in the waters of Ganga. When one remembers sewage by numerous corpses of natives, often cholera casualties, and by the bathing of thousands of natives, it seems remarkable that the belief of the Hindus, that the water of this river is pure and cannot be defiled and that they can safely drink it and bathe in it, should be confirmed by means of modern bacteriological research.

It is no wonder that the Indian people hold the Ganges and other rivers dearly and believe they possess mysterious powers. It is not surprising that despite the colonization of India by Coca-Cola and McDonald's, millions of people feel drawn to the Ganges on the occasion of Kumbh Mela.

(p. 133-134)

- **Giving “Value” to Water**

The proposal to give market values to all resources as a solution to the ecological crisis is like offering the disease as the cure. With the arrival of the industrial revolution, all value became synonymous with commercial value, and the spiritual, ecological, cultural, and social significance of resources was eroded. Forests were no longer living communities; they were reduced to timber mines. Minerals were no longer veins of the earth; they were merely raw material. We are now witnessing the commodification of two vital resources—biodiversity and water—which, for a long time, were beyond the reach of forest industrialization. Biodiversity is now a mere genetic mine and water a commodity.

(p. 137-138)

- **Myths and Stories, Beliefs and Devotion, Culture and Celebration  
Water that Liberates and Gives Us Life**

Sacred waters carry us beyond the marketplace into a world charged with myths and stories, beliefs and devotion, culture and celebration. These are the worlds that enable us to save and share water, and convert scarcity into abundance. We are all Sagar's children, thirsting for waters that liberate and give us life—organically and spiritually. The struggle over the kumbh, between gods and demons, between those who protect and those who destroy, between those who nurture and those who exploit is ongoing. Each of us has a role in shaping the creation story of the future. Each of us is responsible for the kumbh—the sacred water pot.

(p. 139)