

Nodi Baithak
Manu River, Tripura, India
17 December, 2021

Manu River originates from the Kahoisib peak of the Sakkanklang range located in the hills of Tripura (India) and for some distance passes through various narrow gorges with escarpments of naked rock rising often 30m and more; cutting into deep and clear pools. As it descends into the more level plain near Kailashahar, it becomes a broad sluggish stream with a meander course. Its flows northwards until it reaches the Sylhet plains in Bangladesh.

Kailasahar, the main town area being the sink of the basin while the surrounding peripheries are like elevated edges. Even the Manu River is like a raised drain, the riverbed being almost at equal altitude with that of the township area. Therefore, the whole Kailasahar town had to be protected by constructing 16 numbers of earthen embankments having a total length of more than 60 kms surrounding it.

The purpose of re-visiting the river in December was to understand the character of the river after the monsoon period and the hurdles faced by the indigenous community during the monsoon period. Though the issues and hurdles raised by the people remained the same.

Key Issues and Challenges:

✚ **Shift in the mode of transportation from waterways to roadways** – Transportation through means of waterways using River Manu was conventionally used in the earlier decades of 1960s and 70s. Infact, the name ‘Kailashahar’ was commonly known as ‘*Panichowki'r Baazar*’, augmenting the fact that baazars (local markets) were established along the banks of river Manu in the heart of the location. An improved connectivity with the state capital of Agartala through better roads has, however, shifted the mode of transportation focus from waterways to roadways over the last few decades. All markets and village haats has gradually shifted beside the road locations as almost all goods and commodities are now being transported through roads.

✚ **Impact of changing character of the river Manu** –

- In recent times, bank erosion and sedimentation are common phenomena in the lower Manu which has adversely affected the navigation of the channel.
- Due to bank shifting, State Highway has come under the grip of the channel at Sonaimuri, Tarapur etc. Some villages like Asrampalli, Teghari etc are partially demolished.
- Due to bank shifting and erosion, families have to move out without any assistance.
- Land use pattern, location of settlements, occupational structure and culture have been changed and at large scale total socio- cultural environment has been affected. e.g., fishermen and boatmen are now rare in this area, though once upon a time Manu was an important inland waterway in this part of Tripura.

- Due to change in channel character the riverine ecosystem has also been affected. Different varieties of flora and fauna are now become extinct.

✚ **Loss in livelihoods** - Bank erosion tremendously affects cultivable lands and settlements near to the river Manu. Over the years, change in the course of the river has changed the socio-economic conditions of the neighboring settlements across the river, creating pathetic conditions to some by eroding away their living places and agricultural lands. People, on either banks of the river have decided to work as laborers and wage earners in outside states. During the monsoon periods, the water level rises causing loss of agricultural land. Owing to the construction of dam in 82 Mile, Tripura, the villagers in the downstream face water scarcity and scarcity in fish supply. As a consequence of this, the number of fishermen has also decreased over a period of time. It has also been noted that although the state Government has taken recent initiatives of releasing fish eggs in the river for twice a year, benefits of which are being yielded by the downstream dwellers. Furthermore, the downstream villagers do not receive any prior information regarding water sharing or charging from the local administration before the lock gates are open. The force of the gushing water has led to loss of land and shelter for numerous families.

Key Entry Points towards Sustainability:

✚ **Embankments across the banks of river Manu** – Local communities stated that flood has been duly controlled after completion of concrete embankments in most of the river banks of Manu, in and around Kailashahar. However, there are still many families dwelling beyond the concrete fencing on either banks of river Manu, who are in higher risks of losing their houses during heavy monsoon floods.

✚ **Practicing Community-based ecological restoration strategies** like restoration of fish and replant eroding river banks with native trees to stabilise the soil and improve the quality of river as a whole. Also, appropriate measures and actions need to be taken against some of the local communities, who fishes in the river water through unusual and unfair techniques by diffusing poisons, thereby polluting the environment and ecology.

✚ **Working pumping stations for drawing river water to agriculture fields** – Pump sets, which are installed in parts of the river banks for the purpose of winter crop irrigation, are helping farmers in Kailashahar. As river Manu holds enough water throughout the year, working pumpsets proves to be a blessing for local cultivators in North Tripura.

✚ **Increase in the Scope of fishing** – Primitive practices of using handmade fishing nets can be thought off an alternative discourse instead of fishing with machine-made nets. This is owing to the fact that small fishes get caught in the mechanised fishing nets which has smaller pours/holes in those, which has minimum market value/rates. Community driven initiatives should be ideated by the state Government in this regard. Unfair means of using toxic chemical substances in river water for means of fishing by tribal

communities should be regularly monitored and stopped in and around the Kailashahar district to restore fishes in river Manu.

✚ **Proposals of using river water for drinking purposes** - There have been serious concerns of drinking water in this region of Tripura, as the generally used ground water has high iron content, and is hazardous to health. Infact, most of the water treatment plants of the region are prone to higher rates of depreciation owing to this issue. Given this, local communities have been lauding to use the river water for drinking purposes through proper means of treatment, as, for them, the quality of river water is better as compared to the former.

✚ **Creation of job opportunities** – The families' dwelling in the downstream of the Manu river find it difficult to sustain life due to lack of job opportunities. The industries are established in Agartala. Women work during the seasonal paddy crop cultivation period, which happens twice a year. The women of this region are willing to work provided they are trained. Women here can make incense sticks, labelling work in factories and also poultry farming.