

**Samsāra: a phenomenological notion of environment from the Sundarbans islanders' perspective****Author: Kalpita Bhar Paul<sup>1</sup>**

The Sundarbans, the world largest single block halophytic mangrove forest, which is spread over India and Bangladesh, has become a global concern in the era of climate crisis due to its vulnerability to climate change. The Sundarbans is a cluster of islands that have been formed by river Ganga, Padma, and the Brahmaputra. Over the last decade, several WWF (World Wild Foundation) India reports, CSE (Centre for Science and Environment) reports, or even the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) reports have repeatedly pointed out the increasing vulnerability of the Sundarbans ecoregion due to climate change. The primary concern in this regard is the possibility of submergence of these islands due to sea level rise and the risk of wide-scale devastation due to erratic cyclones and floods. The world-wide predictions of increased frequency of various natural calamities due to climate change, have made the Sundarbans a point of global concern as this really magnificent mangrove forest foster rich biodiversity, along with it is the home for some charismatic species. Not only that, the Indian Sundarbans region consists of 102 islands, and out of that, 54 islands are heavily populated with human settlements. In India, the average population density in the Sundarbans region is 925/km<sup>2</sup>, which is more than the average population density of West Bengal.<sup>2</sup> In this context, on the one hand, the Sundarbans being an ecoregion and a biodiversity hotspot of India has widely attracted attention of ecologists to protect this region from climate change to plausibly save its biodiversity; on the other, to protect the human settlements from natural calamities, there is a constant drive for so called developmental activities that can possibly enable the islanders to cope with various environmental changes induced by climate change. To protect and conserve these islands and its biodiversity as well as its human settlement multiple implementation projects are taking place at present in the Sundarbans.

Acknowledging the vulnerability of the Sundarbans, this essay will explore the phenomenological understanding of what is the meaning of environment for the inhabitants who dwell on these islands and witness multiple changes in the land and the environment, in

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<sup>2</sup> Anamitra Anurag Danda, Gayathri Sriskanthan, Asish Ghosh, Jayanta Bandopadhyay, and Sugata Hazra, *Indian Sundarbans Delta: A Vision*, (New Delhi, World Wide Fund for Nature-India, 2011), p 29.

their everyday life. I argue that, phenomenological knowledge about the Sundarbans environment provides a different notion of this environment, which is completely distinct from the conventional idea of environment. Islanders' narratives actually emphasize on the relationship between individual and environment, rather than environment as a separate entity. To capture the nuances of this relationship, I have borrowed the Indian philosophical concept of Samsāra and argued that Samsāra, has a potential to capture the nuances of human—environment relationship found in these islands. In this regard, I have primarily, borrowed from Matilal and David Loy's scholarly works to explicating the concept of samsāra for the hermeneutical analysis of the term. I would also highlight the manner in which this hermeneutical analysis will bring some fresh insights in the discourse of the Sundarbans protection and conservation, and its significance to build an ethic that can really uphold the true essence of the Sundarbans's environment. The everyday experiences of islanders possibly would provide an insider's understanding of the Sundarbans's environment. This exploration could lead us to reveal the perceptual gap between insider's and outsider's understanding of the Sundarbans's environment. Along with that, this insider's perspective might also offer some novel ethical insights to the discourse of sustainability of the Sundarbans, and to the broader discourse of the environmental ethics.

**Methodology:**

To capture the islander's perspective of the environment and environmental change, I conducted a phenomenological study in the G-plot island of the Sundarbans, India. Taking all the geological features of the Sundarbans into consideration, I have chosen G-plot to conduct this field study. The G-plot is one of the last islands in West Bengal into the Bay of Bengal. Primarily, due to its geographical location, this island is quite vulnerable to natural calamities<sup>3</sup> as well as various environmental changes are quite commonly encountered phenomena here. For these reasons, G-plot as an island was my first choice for conducting the field study. This island consists of nine villages. Predominantly, these villagers engage in fishing, boat driving, and honey gathering from nearby mangrove forests, along with seasonal farming.

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<sup>3</sup> As per the recent study by Sandipan Chakraborty and Manjira Adhikary "Vulnerability and Risk Assessment of Environmental Hazards –A Case Study of Patharpratima Block, (Sundarban Delta Region) South 24 Parganas, West Bengal, India" IOSR Journal of Environmental Science, Toxicology and Food Technology 9, 2014, G-plot is one of the high risk Gram Panchayat (GP) for cyclone and flood and at the same time it is most vulnerable GP as locate among 6 waterbodies including Bay of Bengal.

I have employed Interpretive Phenomenological Research methodology<sup>4</sup> to capture the everyday experience of these islanders. For the field study, I have followed purposive snowball sampling technique to choose interviewees. I have chosen interviewees who have prolonged engagement with a particular livelihood from the aforementioned ones. This has helped me to comprehend how over time islanders have noticed changes in the environment while engaging with a particular livelihood. Here, I would provide some extract from these phenomenological narratives to demonstrate the distinct understanding of the islander's relation to the environment. From these narratives, one could derive that the narrators have mentioned about dynamicity of environmental entities and relational existence of environment in reference to their day-to-day experiences. While describing environmental changes of that region, these unique features associated with their conception of environment, repeatedly get reflected in these narratives.

In the following, a few excerpts of those narratives will help us to understand their notion of environment:

*"Now there is a huge sand dune on the river-bund of south G-plot. However, no one can ensure anything, maybe within a day, this sand dune can get completely abolished. It is just like a magic. It is difficult to assume that how the river would flow." [FLDN]*

*"Easterly wind is the most dangerous one. Commonly, we know that during spring tides the water will be full, and the river will go far away during neap tides. But no one can ensure anything, easterly wind becomes the deciding factor. Two major floods, 82's flood and 2010's Aila, nevertheless, did not occur during spring tide. These occurred during neap tide when water level is usually very low. In this kind of situations, easterly wind becomes the deciding element, so we call it 'the king'" [FLDN]*

*"I cannot count how many times in a day I go to the river. The river is just beside; even you can say that the land of this house also few years back was in the river. ... During the low-pressure time, the sound of river wave is so alarming that you would think that the river is going to grasp you." [FLDN]*

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<sup>4</sup> For more details about this methodology and its relevance in environmental humanities see Baidr, Meera and Kalpita Bhar Paul. "Mapping the Observer in the Observation in Anthropocene: A Methodological Exploration" *Humanities Circle*, Volume 3 Issue 2. 61-81.

*“As a resident of the Sundarbans, flood is not a new phenomenon for us. It is not something that we feel scared of. During flood we will not get food, we cannot do farming—that’s all, but no one will die due to that. The tide will bring the flood and after that during ebb water will drain out—that is the feature of this river-bounded place. It is like those red crabs, stay at the beaches. Whenever the tide comes they will go deep into sand holes, again come out during ebb. People in G-plot live exactly like that.” [FLDN]*

What does it mean to be in the midst of the environment? The residents of the G-plot, as per their geographic location, live their life surrounded by rivers and the Bay of Bengal. Massive distance from the mainland, separates the islanders and makes them feel confined within the water boundary. Living a life by accepting these realities always seems challenging from an outsider’s perspective. The above narratives clearly depict that the way islanders conceptualize the environment is quite different from the outsider’s conception of it.

To illuminate the cause behind the difference between insider’s and outsider’s perceptions of the environment of a particular place, Tuan (1975) argues how experiences play an important role to make a place a center of meaning. Tuan (1991) also elaborates that narrative-descriptive approach is important to grasp insider’s experience and how for an insider, place becomes the centre of meaning. Tuan elaborates that narratives help to grasp a place that is ‘deeply humanized world’ and narratives also capture the process through which experience turn a place into the centre of meaning. He says:

Outsiders say "nature," because the environment seems barely touched. Insiders see "homeplace" -an environment that is familiar to them, not because they have materially transformed it but because they have named it. It is their place-their world-through the casting of a linguistic net.<sup>5</sup>

In this regard, aforementioned experiential accounts or narratives-descriptive of the islanders would also guide us to grasp the embodied experience of the Sundarbans environment. It also shows that for the islanders, the Sundarbans as the ‘homeplace’ becomes the centre of meaning through their experiential understanding of these islands. From these narratives, it is visible that for the islanders there is hardly any static conception of change in environment, instead they preserve a unique conception of the Sundarbans environment. This unique conception of the environment on one hand, holds the dynamicity of the environmental entity, on the other hand, elucidates the relational existence of the environment. For the narrators, environment is

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<sup>5</sup> Yi-fu-Tuan, “Language and the Making of Place: A Narrative-Descriptive Approach,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 81, No. 4 (Dec., 1991), p 686.

not only an aggregation of biotic and abiotic components. The dynamicity and the relational presence of environment are the essence of their understanding about the relation between environment and human. Living the life in the midst of the environment enables them to appreciate the dynamicity and relational existence of environment. With this insight, I feel it is necessary to ask the same question again, what is environment? And how it is possible to translate the very different notion of environment.

**The existing terms: A brief analysis**

This section would revolve around evaluating various existing terms to denote the notion of environment in English as well as the translated version of those terms in Bengali. The purpose of this evaluation is to see how far these existing terms can grasp the notion articulated by the narrators.

The word environment, following etymological roots, has been derived from the word ‘environ’. ‘Environ’ means what is surrounding us. Extending the word ‘environ’, environment denotes ‘state of being environed’. The word ‘environment’ precisely defines the condition in which a person or a thing lives or placed. From this point of view, environment is nothing but the aggregation of the components which are environing us. Similarly, the Bengali word ‘paribesh’, a common translation of the environment, can also be traced back to the word ‘paribeston’. ‘Paribeston’ means environ or what is surrounding us. Following that, paribesh can be considered as the word that aptly describes the components that are surrounding us. Thus, both the words, environment and paribesh, describe the elements and the surroundings within which an individual is placed in. These terminologies, however, capture neither the dynamicity nor the relational reality of the environment that are depicted in the narratives. Instead, the terms seem to indicate a certain static condition, a stable outside that sustains human and other things inside.

In this regard, one obvious suggestion could be to use the word ‘ecology’, as it is also a widely-accepted word that can denote the surroundings of an individual. If we closely see the word ‘ecology’, it defines the study (logy) of habitat (eco). Instead of asking ‘what is environment’ if one asks ‘what is ecology’, it precisely explains the “relationship of living things to their environment”. Marshall (1992) emphasizes that ‘ecology’ and its major concepts to grasp the natural world, deal with organisms and their environment as an integrated whole. Ecology puts a special emphasis on living entities and studies how a living entity relates to nonliving things as well as other living entities. In a way, ecology as a term focuses on relational existence. In this regard, in Bengali vocabulary, ecology has been translated as ‘bastabya bidya’. In Bengali, ‘bastabya’ originates from the word ‘bastu’ which denotes the

dwelling place and 'bidya' refers to knowledge. Hence, 'bastu bidya' literally refers to knowledge about the place of dwelling. As a translation of ecology, 'bastabya bidya' also refers to the knowledge of the relation between living entities with their environment. In Bengali vocabulary, however, 'bastabya bidya' as a translation of ecology, remains rather confined to textual references. Whereas, in common usage of this term in Bengali, *bastu bidya* or *bastu shastra* refers to the traditional Hindu system of designing architecture in such a way that a building follows the law of nature and becomes an ideal place for inhabitation. One can find very restricted usage of the word indicating ecology, more often, it is commonly used to refer the knowledge of housing or architecture. Hence, on one hand, though ecology as a word according to English dictionary is capable of capturing the relational existence of human beings and the environment, it falls short to grasp the dynamicity in the surroundings, mentioned by the narrators. On the other hand, the translation of ecology in Bengali is quite limited to textual references and its common usage fails to capture the semantic space of the word ecology.

At this juncture, one might evoke the term nature as a possible translation. First of all, this term is loaded with various definitions and has been often found to be over-used in the different discourses. Secondly, in this regard, generally nature points towards a transcendental realm, and also it refers to the cosmological order. For both these reasons, nature becomes a problematic term to refer to<sup>6</sup>. In Bengali, the translation of nature is 'prakriti' or 'nisarga'. Both the words point towards some supreme realm that is also transcendental. I found in the interviews that quite often narrators equate 'nature' with 'universe'. Here, one could say that nature provides an entirety and holistic sense. The common notion about 'nature' or 'prakriti' is that it is incomprehensible. And thus it is easily equated with the super realm or God. Hence, though the concept of nature is capable of capturing the dynamicity, it is difficult to articulate the relational reality through the word 'nature'.

Thorough examination of the most commonly used terms 'environment', 'ecology' and 'nature' reveals that these three in some manner falls short to capture the nuances of the explanations about the ambience or the surrounding what repeatedly pointed by the narrators. Along with it, neither in Bengali vocabulary nor in English, is there any comprehensive term exists that can capture these nuances. Particularly due to this, whenever I listen to narrators' description about their surroundings and reflect on the manner they express it, I always wonder how to articulate these while translation. I really felt that any existing terms that describe the human being's relationship with her surroundings or ambience will not be enough to portray

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<sup>6</sup> See Soper (1995) and Baidur (2015) for an elaborate account of the term 'nature'.

their views on it. The relational reality and acknowledgement of the dynamicity is the specialty that the narrators have repeatedly pointed out at various points of time. To capture all of these attributes, a frequently referred Bengali term by the narrators comes to my mind and that is 'saṃsāra'. In the following, I will show why saṃsāra could be an appropriate term to capture the attributes pointed out narrators at various points of time.

### **Hermeneutic of the concept Saṃsāra**

To carry out the hermeneutical analysis of saṃsāra, I will, first of all, borrow the methodology from Cameron (2014)<sup>7</sup>. Cameron extends Gadamer's (1991)<sup>8</sup> hermeneutics, which reveals the connection between language and world, in the context of environmental hermeneutics. Cameron in his essay establishes the importance of this connection, as it offers how a concept like nature can be a living concept, instead of a static one, and constantly, gets transformed by incorporating various worldly experiences. He points out that the creation of a concept is based on receiving feedback from worldly experiences. Once a concept gets created, it gets embedded in the language and subsequently, begins to structure our experiences. Furthermore, Cameron highlights Gadamer's critique of human nature of hypostatizing world and concepts. Due to this nature of hypostatizing, human beings are prone to refrain themselves to critically scrutinize expectations that are conceptually constituted to comprehend the world. Consequently, a disappointment might arise due to the divergence between expectations and real-world experiences, which creates illusions. A thorough evaluation of this disappointment can bring forth a shift in the expectation by extending or reinterpreting the concepts, while taking account of our actual worldly experiences. Otherwise, the concepts remain the same and the disappointment will persist. In this regard, Cameron elaborates that Gadamer proposes to transcend this illusion by "revealing the continuous, dynamic, historical, and hermeneutic interaction of concept and world in concrete experiences"<sup>9</sup>. Borrowing from Gadamer's hermeneutic, Cameron also provides emphasis on demonstrating that the relationship between concept and world is a dynamic one, and he explains it through the three steps hermeneutic process. Here, it is important to highlight that in Indian ethics saṃsāra is a well-known concept, which has its own connotation, particularly, in the Indian philosophical tradition. In the next a

<sup>7</sup> W.S.K. Cameron. "Must Environmental Philosophy Relinquish the Concept of Nature? A Hermeneutic Reply to Steven Vogel" in *Interpreting Nature: The Emerging Field of Environmental Hermeneutics*, eds. Forrest Clingerman *et al.* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014): 102-120.

<sup>8</sup> See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, (2<sup>nd</sup> Rev. Ed., Trans. W. Glean-Deopel, ed. J. Cumming and G. Barden, rev. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshal (New York: Crossroads Pres, 1991).

<sup>9</sup> W.S.K. Cameron. "Must Environmental Philosophy Relinquish the Concept of Nature? A Hermeneutic Reply to Steven Vogel," p 112.

few paragraphs, following the methodology set by Cameron, I will try to give a hermeneutic understanding of the concept ‘Samsāra’ to show how this term can rightly capture the narrator’s sense of the environment as a dynamic entity and as possessing a relational reality, whereas the other similar terms such as environment, ecology, and nature completely fall short in this regard.

The first step is to explore the ‘inherited presupposition’ about the concept. Samsāra, as a concept has been introduced for the first time in the Upanishad in 600BC<sup>10</sup>. It is one of the primary concepts of Vedic and Buddhist philosophy. Samsāra is basically a Sanskrit word, and in these traditions, samsāra is closely associated with the concept of the ‘cycle of birth and rebirth’. The concept of samsāra is an upshot of the notion that there is only one reality, the world. Although the world is considered as the only reality, the world is experienced in two different ways, samsāra and nirvāṇa. Samsāra is the relative world that is experienced by each and every individual differently. Here, one could possibly ask what does this ‘relative world’ indicate? Relative world is the experience in which, an individual from a first person point of view, distinctly perceives the world as an aggregation of objects that interact causally in space and time<sup>11</sup>. According to its conception, samsāra is the dependent world that appears differently for each individual. As indicated, it is the opposite of another kind of experience of the world, nirvāṇa. Nirvāṇa is the world that transcends any kind of dependence. It denotes the world in its true form. In this regard, the traditional Indian philosophical thought indicates that avidyā (ignorance) is the root cause that eventually leads one to create this dependent world or samsāra. Due to the ignorance or avidyā, an individual gets engrossed in the everyday world and remains trapped in the samsāric realm. In Vedic philosophy, as Ryan (1999)<sup>12</sup> clearly points out, karma (action) becomes the deciding factor, as karma of an individual decides whether it is going to be possible for the individual to transcend this realm of the dependent world or to go beyond samsāra to attain nirvāṇa, or not. In Buddhist philosophy, as Loy (1983)<sup>13</sup> aptly describes, craving, conceptualizing, and causality are the three factors that together decide whether an individual can go beyond the realm of samsāra to attain nirvāṇa or not. Hence, it can be concluded that samsāra in every tradition has been conceptualised as that relational reality of the world which comprises of all the attributes that impede one to attain

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<sup>10</sup> Michael P Ryan. “Samasa and Samsara: Suffering, Death and rebirth in “The metamorphosis””. *The German Quarterly* 72, (2), 1999: 133.

<sup>11</sup> David Loy. “The difference between Samsāra and “Nirvāṇa.” *Philosophy of East and West* 33, (4) 1983, p 355.

<sup>12</sup> Michael P Ryan. “Samasa and Samsara: Suffering, Death and rebirth in “The metamorphosis””. *The German Quarterly* 72, (2), 1999: 133–152.

<sup>13</sup> David Loy. The difference between Samsāra and “Nirvāṇa.



nirvāṇa and, therefore, it is considered as an obnoxious realm to dwell in. Due to different reasons put forth by various traditions, an individual fails to realise the ultimate reality of the world and falls into this wheel of saṃsāra, which is the cycle of birth and re-birth.

In Indian philosophical tradition the concept of suffering is integrally connected to the concept of Samsāra. Matilal in his essay Holy Men<sup>14</sup> describes life experience for human beings in the realm of saṃsāra is equal to pain and anguish. He shows how pain or duḥkha becomes the central issue in Indian philosophical schools. These schools attempt to demonstrate that “our earthly existence, our profane life, our everyday routine, is not to be regarded as final.”<sup>15</sup> Indeed, these schools strive to establish that there is a sacred existence which is beyond this mundane one that exist for human beings to attain to. To attain this sacred existence, one needs to overcome duḥkha. Matilal also explains that, duḥkha is neither a physical suffering nor a mental agony. Rather, duḥkha can be translated as a combination of hedonistic pain, short lasting physical and mental pleasure, and the pervasive and abstract types of unhappiness that comes through the realization of conditioned existence of human being. In the realm of Samsāra, as Matilal would say, human existence is caught up in a conditioned state where one cannot access her free will, though human beings are a free agent. Whereas, nirvāṇa, in contrast to saṃsāra, is an “unconditioned state of freedom.”<sup>16</sup> Until one realizes the essence of duḥkha, the individual gets caught in the cyclic order of birth and rebirth in Samsāra. Thus saṃsāra becomes the repetitive implementation of life events, which Danto<sup>17</sup> has mentioned as ‘despair of life’. Borrowing from Danto’s argument that this despair of life makes Indian philosophy endeavor for moksha, nirvāṇa or the otherworldly life, Matilal establishes that Buddhist idea of duḥkha=Samsāra, is actually not only restricted in Buddhist first noble truth but also perpetuated in other Hindu philosophical traditions as well. Hence, it can be concluded that where nirvana is a blissful experience of human existence, and a transcendental reality of human’s free will or unconditioned existence, saṃsāra consists of the everyday reality encumbered with duḥkha or pain.

In the second step of the hermeneutical analysis, Cameron shows<sup>18</sup> that how Gadamer includes phenomenological reflection to explain the relation between the world and the

<sup>14</sup> B.K. Matilal, “Duhkha, Nirvana and Holy Men,” *The collected Essay of Bimal Krishna Matilal: Philosophy, Culture and Religion: Ethics and Epics*, ed Jonardan Ganeri, (New Delhi: OUP, 2002): 369-381.

<sup>15</sup> B.K. Matilal, “Duhkha, Nirvana and Holy Men,” p 373.

<sup>16</sup> B.K. Matilal, “Duhkha, Nirvana and Holy Men,” p 371.

<sup>17</sup> A.C. Danto, *Mysticism and Morality*. New York, 1972.

<sup>18</sup> W.S.K Cameron. “Must Environmental Philosophy Relinquish the Concept of Nature? A Hermeneutic Reply to Steven Vogel,”

concept. In Bengali vocabulary, *saṃsāra* is quite a common term and is being used to denote family affairs and day to day endeavor. However, the philosophical concept of *saṃsāra* and its negative undertone do not prevalently exist with the term in its colloquial usage. I think, here it is worth to explore the experience of *Saṃsāra* which is phenomenological in nature. In a day to day life, individual refers to the word *saṃsāra* to explain about their relationship, liabilities, and the constant need for adapting to changing situation. Not only the proximate relationship, but people also refer to a distant relationship or universal connection with other human and non-human beings by the term ‘*Jagat Saṃsāra*’. Where ‘*Jagat*’ means universe and ‘*Saṃsāra*’ literally means family. In general conversation with islanders, many people often bring the idea that ‘*Saṃsāra* is a play or a drama’. No one has the choice to decide whether to take part in this *saṃsāric* realm or not; rather everyone by default is an actor of this play. The word is also attached with the connotation that in *saṃsāra* pain and pleasure come in a cyclic order and thus, nothing is permanent in *saṃsāra*. Therefore, everyone will experience pain as well as pleasure, or happiness and sorrow. In Bengali the proverb “*Sukh Duhkha Pala Kore Ase*” which means the same, joy and sorrow comes in turn. Through this notion of cyclic order, *saṃsāra* creates a ‘cyclic world’ where nothing is static or permanent and it also points out the repetitive occurrence of life events. As *saṃsāra* is metaphorically compared to a performance or a play, it is also a common notion that every individual executes her role differently and gets attached with other humans and non-human beings in her own way while being in the realm of *Saṃsāra*; but, there is no escape from *Saṃsāra*. In its common colloquial usage, *saṃsāra* refers to the mundane existence. It denotes the relationship with other human beings and life forms for every individual. Another English translation of a Bengali proverb in this regard says ‘the family is like the forest: if you are outside, it is dense; if you are inside, you see that each tree has its own position.’ In this proverb family, actually refers to *saṃsāra*, and the proverb tries to communicate that though from outside it seems that *samsāric* realm is complex and full of liabilities to maintain relationships and responsibilities associated with it, but an insider can realize that each individual and entity in the *saṃsāra*, has one’s own position and responsibility. One’s position and responsibility actually define one’s association with others. For that reason *saṃsāra* is different for each individual. It also echoes the concept of a relative world, where the world has been experienced by every individual differently. By considering this articulation of *saṃsāra*, one could argue that there are subtle but definite differences between *saṃsāra* as a philosophical concept and *saṃsāra* as a phenomenological experience. In an everyday world, the phenomenological experience of *saṃsāra* and its articulation elucidate that the experience of *saṃsāra* is not same for everyone, each individual creates one’s own *saṃsāra* through one

relation with other human beings, lifeforms and worldly entities. Thus, for each of us *samsāra* refers to certain relationships, entities, responsibility, and emotive experiences. This articulation and understanding of *samsāra* take us to Cameron's argument that on one hand, this subtle difference between experiences and concept can induce a 'disappointment of our expectation', on the other hand, it is also necessary to acknowledge the limitation of experience. Cameron shows<sup>19</sup> the manner in which Gadamer's philosophy distinctly points out that experience cannot lead to full comprehension of a concept, rather it ultimately reveals the 'limits of humanity' to explore a concept in its full potential on the basis of lived-experiences. In other words, it is hard to experience the horizon of a concept, rather, experiences make us realize our finitude in grasping this horizon.

The disappointment between this 'inherited presupposition' and experience leads towards the third point where borrowing from Gadamer, Cameron argues against hypostatization of any concepts. Instead of carrying the concept just like a dead one, it is necessary to reconstitute it by taking the account of disjunction between concept and experience. The disappointment created from the experiences, therefore, leads towards the reinterpretation of the concept. This dynamic relationship between concept and the worldly experience can only make a concept a living one. At this juncture, this reinterpretation is necessary for the concept *samsāra*. As discussed above, there is a subtle difference between *samsāra* as an inherited predisposition and *samsāra* as experienced in the everyday world. *Samsāra* as a philosophical concept defines a realm where everyone is caught up in her own condition, however, phenomenological experience of *samsāra* illustrates that human life and life events, the relational reality of each person with surrounded living and non-living entities. It also shows that how a change in outside, initiate a change in one's inside and defines the rule of life which is change; as in one Bengali proverb denotes '*Paribartan e jiboner niyom*'. Thus, the dynamicity in outside as well as inside moves our lives and the realm of *samsāra*. Here, I think, it would not be wrong to pose that, in this sense, *samsāra* indeed a relational reality to one's surrounding which constantly gets modified by outer changes and inner motives. Hence, instead of the environment, ecology, or nature, introducing the concept *samsāra* to articulate and comprehend the dynamic and relational reality of our surrounding or ambience will not be an inappropriate attempt. For that matter, *samsāra* appropriately provides the opportunity to grasp the perspectives that are

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<sup>19</sup> W.S.K Cameron. "Must Environmental Philosophy Relinquish the Concept of Nature? A Hermeneutic Reply to Steven Vogel," p 113.

captured in the narratives. In the everyday world, our relationship with our surroundings is actually like dwelling in *saṃsāra*. Human beings with the very special attributes create this relational reality of *saṃsāra*. Therefore, the realm of *saṃsāra* has a very special association to each and every human beings according to their own lived-experiences.

If one accepts the term *saṃsāra* instead of the environment, ecology, or nature to put forth one's relations with one's surroundings, then it is obvious that one's purposes of life denote one's relations with one surrounding and it also accepts changes that occurs in one surroundings. The acceptance of the term *saṃsāra* in turn also indicates the necessity to restrict oneself to modify the surroundings or control the change occurs in it. Hence, I think accepting the term *saṃsāra* offers a new way to comprehend human—environment relationship. It helps to phenomenologically approach the relationship rather than get caught into a theoretical understanding of the environment and ecology. In one word, it can be said that *saṃsāra* is a term that defines the phenomenological relationship of one individual to one's surroundings.

### **Conclusion**

During my field study, the core realization regarding new dimensions of environment has moved me a lot, made me rethink the very notion of the environment. From the field narratives, I realized that there is hardly any uniform conception of the environment that exists in the context of human—environment relationship. To capture, the dynamicity and relational reality explained by the islanders, in this essay, I have attempted to find a new term to explicate the same. This also provides an account of how translating a term like environment could be difficult if one tries to capture the experiential meaning associate to it. I have shown why there is a necessity to generate a new term to express the existing relationship that the islanders possess with their environment. And definitely this different comprehension can provide a fresh outlook to rethink the conventional articulation of human—environment relationship. Through this analysis my sole purpose was to explicate the complexity of translation as well as elucidate the nuances of human—environment relationship that I apprehended in my field study. *Saṃsāra*, aptly captures this relationship with all its nuances. Now the question arises if one accepts this new term *Saṃsāra* to ascribe one relation to her surroundings, then there is a need to reconsider how environmental ethics predominantly approaches this human—environment relationship. In the context of the Sundarbans's environment conventional environmental protection and conservation measures function with the universally defined principles to mitigate environmental change and preserve a static idea of the 'environment'. This essay clearly demonstrate that instead of focussing on the static notion of 'environment' or theoretical

understanding of 'ecology', it is far more important to protect the essence of the Sundarbans. As we have seen that in these islands the concept of static environment is itself an alien one, preserving and conserving the same idea of the environment also seems outlandish for the islanders. Hence, here is an urgent need to bring an ethic that can uphold this dynamicity and relational reality of the environment or can preserve this notion of saṃsāra. Through gaining insights from the islanders' phenomenological experiences, a pluralistic ethic can be developed to endorse the notion of saṃsāra or to preserve the Sundarbans in its true sense.

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