

Paris, Peace, And Humanity On The Precipice

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Land, water and agriculture-related conflicts are deliberately mutated into religious conflicts to protect the militarised agriculture model which has unleashed a global war against people.

Humanity stands at a precipice. Merely 200 years of the age of fossil fuel has driven species and biodiversity to extinction, destroyed our soils, depleted and polluted our water and destabilised our entire climate system. Five hundred years of colonialism have driven cultures, languages, peoples to extinction and left a legacy of violence as the basis of production and governance.

The November 13 Paris attacks have led to an escalation of violence in our way of speaking and thinking while dealing with a conflict. Paris has emerged as the epicentre of the planetary ecological crisis and the global cultural crisis. From November 30 to December 11, movements and governments will converge in Paris for COP21 — 21st Conference of Parties on the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. COP21 is not just about climate change; it is about our modes of production and consumption which are destroying the ecosystems that support life on this planet.

There is a deep and intimate connection between the events of November 13 and the ecological devastation unleashed by the fossil fuel era of human history. The same processes that contribute to climate change also contribute towards growing violence amongst people. Both are results of a war against the Earth.

Industrial agriculture is a fossil fuel-based system which contributes more than 40 per cent of the greenhouse gases leading to climate change. Along with the globalised food system, industrial agriculture is to be blamed for at least 50 per cent of the global warming.

Synthetic nitrogen fertilisers are based on fossil fuels and use the same chemical processes used to make explosives and ammunition. Manufacturing one kilogram of nitrogen fertiliser requires the energy equivalent to two litres of diesel. Energy used during fertiliser manufacture was equivalent to 191 billion litres of diesel in 2000 and is projected to rise to 277 billion in 2030. Synthetic fertiliser, used for industrial agriculture, is a major contributor to climate change — it starts destroying the planet long before it reaches a field. Yet the dominant narrative is that synthetic fertilisers feed us and without them people will starve. The fertiliser industry says that “they produce bread from air”. This is incorrect.

Nature and humans have evolved many non-violent, effective and sustainable ways to provide nitrogen to soil and plants. For example, pulses and beans are nitrogen-fixing crops. Bacteria named rhizobia, which exists in the nodules of their roots, converts atmospheric nitrogen into ammonia and then into organic compounds to be used by the plant for growth.

Intercropping or rotating pulses with cereals has been an ancient practice in India. We also use green manures which can fix nitrogen.

Returning organic matter to the soil builds up soil nitrogen. Organic farming can increase nitrogen content of soil between 44-144 per cent, depending on the crops that are grown. Organic farming not only avoids the emissions that come from industrial agriculture, it transforms carbon in the air through photosynthesis and builds it up in the soil, thus contributing to higher soil fertility, higher food production and nutrition and a sustainable, zero-cost technology for addressing climate change.

Ecologically non-sustainable models of agriculture, dependent on fossil fuels, have been imposed through “aid” and “development” projects in the name of Green Revolution. As soil and water are destroyed, ecosystems that produced food and supported livelihoods can no longer sustain societies. As a result, there’s anger, discontent, frustration, protests and conflicts. However, land, water and agriculture-related conflicts are repeatedly and deliberately mutated into religious conflicts to protect the militarised agriculture model, which has unleashed a global war against the earth and people.

I witnessed this in Punjab while I was doing research for my book, *The Violence of the Green Revolution*, on the violence of 1984. We are witnessing this today, as conflicts which begin because of land degradation and water crises — induced by non-sustainable farming systems — are given the colour of religious conflicts.

Since 2009, we heard of Boko Haram while we missed the news about the disappearance of Lake Chad. Lake Chad supported 30 million people in four countries — Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon and Niger. Intensive irrigation for industrial agriculture increased four-fold from 1983 to 1994. Fifty per cent of the disappearance of Lake Chad is attributed to the building of dams and intensive irrigation for industrial agriculture.

As the water disappeared, conflicts between Muslim pastoralists and settled Christian farmers over the dwindling water resources led to unrest. As Luc Gnacadja, the former secretary-general of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification, states about the violence in Nigeria, “The so-called religious fight is actually about access to vital resources”.

The story of Syria is similar. In 2009, a severe drought uprooted a million farmers who were forced to move into the city for livelihood. Structural adjustment measures, imposed by global financial institutions and trade rules, prevented the government from responding to the plight of Syria’s farmers. The farmers’ protests intensified. By 2011, the world’s military powers were in Syria, selling more arms and diverting the narrative from the story of the soil and farmers to religion. Today, half of Syria is in refugee camps, the war is escalating and the root causes of the violence continue to be actively disguised as religion.

Haber, the inventor of Zyklon B — a poisonous gas used in 1915 to kill more than a million Jews in concentration camps — was given a Nobel Prize in chemistry. American biologist Norman Borlaug received a Nobel Prize for Peace for the chemical-based Green Revolution that has only left a legacy of violence.

For me, COP21 is a pilgrimage of peace — to remember all the innocent victims of the wars against the land and people; to develop the capacity to reimagine that we are one and refuse to be divided by race and religion; to see the connections between ecological destruction, growing violence and wars that are engulfing our societies. We must remember

that there will be no peace between people if we do not make peace with the Earth.

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