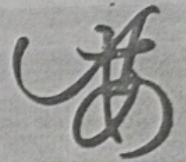
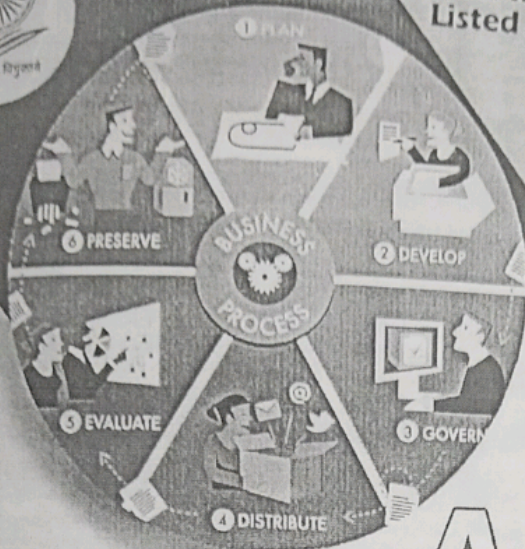




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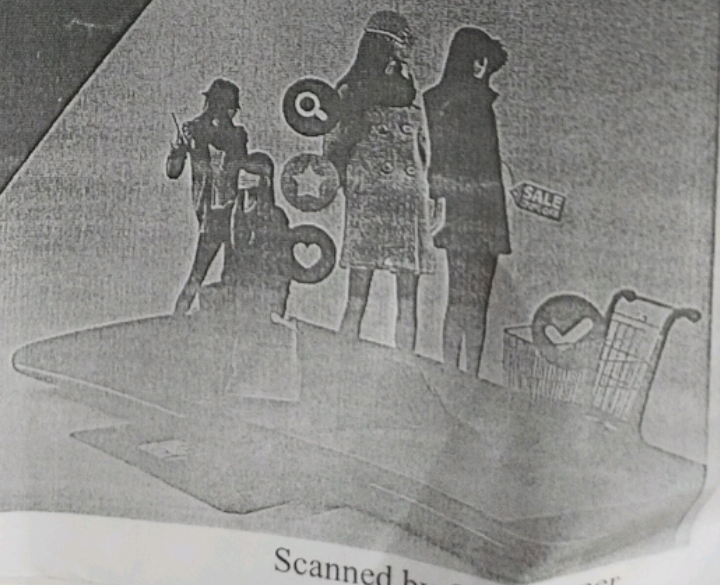
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22. Ecology, Biodiversity and the Sunderbans

Dr. Avinash Badgujar

Dept of English, JDMVP'S A S C College, Jalgaon.

The ecosystem of the Sunderbans, its landscape is known for the flora and the fauna. The Sunderbans has a typical history, nature and landscape. It is half water and half land that had been alternately inhabited and deserted. The landscape of the Sunderbans is constantly threatened by cyclones, tidal waves, lack of fresh water, tigers, crocodiles and poisonous snakes. The place is also known for Royal Bengal Tigers where the tigers are confirmed man-eaters. The natural and geographical boundary between river and sea, a land and water have broken down to this place. The world of archipelago is known as the Sunderbans which means, "The beautiful forest." Some people believe that the word the 'Sunderbans' to be derived from the common species of mangrove- the sundari tree, *Heriteria minor* that had first originated in the record books of the Mughal emperors. As the island is surrounded by the diurnal process of tide and ebb of the sea, the island is called as the bhatir desh, the tide country. The tide country is the land of six islands and eight estuaries first discovered by the Portuguese during the time of Emperor Jahangir on the Mughal throne and Chaitanya Mahaprabhu.

In the colonial regime, when the British gained the power over Calcutta, this place was severely hit by the cyclone. In this period the people of India were travelling to Burma, Malaya, Fizi and Trinidad by boat. The first settlers came to these islands from east Bengal, north Orissa and Santhal Paranganas. Famine was a chronic plague of nineteenth century India, and the Sunderbans became a source of food grains for distressed areas. The area could successfully accommodate displaced people in times of crisis, natural calamities or economic stress. The Sunderbans thus provided a kind of solace against unexpected downturns.

In the early days of the Magh incursion, it was the custom of the immigrants in the Bakarganj Sunderbans to seek out some little creek leading into the heart of the forest, where they could establish a settlement, clear the jungle and cultivate the land. They were not only the sheltered people from Magh incursions, but these people also welcomed many other immigrants. One of such settlements was established by Sir Daniel Hamilton, a visionary Scotsman. Hamilton purchased ten thousand acres of land from the British government to establish dream