



CREATING AN OCEAN OF DESOLATION

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The Pale Blue Dot – an apt appellation given to Earth by the amazingly erudite scientist and philosopher – Carl Sagan, indicates the vastness of the oceans, which covers most of the surface area of Earth. It is almost impossible to imagine that thousands of species who used to thrive in the waters before the technological advancement have been wiped out. It had been estimated that out of 600 marine ‘stocks’ of fishes, more than three-quarters are fully exploited, overexploited or depleted; accounting as many as 2.7 trillion individual animals caught annually (an admittedly conservative estimate). Projections point out that we could be seeing a mostly fish-less oceans in a couple of decades in a model of ‘business as usual’(some estimates as close as three decades).To add salt to injury, millions of other animals die as ‘by-catch’ or non-targeted catch. Scientists estimate as many as 6,50,000 whales, dolphins and seals are killed every year by fishing vessels as by-catch. Add to this, 40-50 million sharks killed in fishing lines and nets. The amount of by-catch in the shrimp trawling industry is staggering, ranging in between three to fifteen for every shrimp caught! Fishing is not the only problem: ocean acidification due to global warming, spread of invasive species, oil spills, plastics, toxic effluent release into the ocean and many more haunt our ancestral cousins living in the oceans.

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These facts are quite alarming and yet, there is little to no attention given by the masses towards this issue. While there are some tribes or ethnic groups who cannot survive without subsistence fishing, the vast majority do not require them as a basic necessity. Most of the fishes and other ‘fish food’ is captured by large fleets of fishing boats or the ginormous nets of trawlers, which scrape up the depth of oceans and leave behind devastation. It is saddening to know that a public opinion survey in Europe, found that 48% of the respondents agreed that “consumer tastes will always come before environmental concerns”. If we are to end or atleast slow down this tragedy, we have to take measures that are uncomfortable, yet the most sensible – to stop eating these species, and to not bring more of our own.

A conservationist is not necessarily an altruist but they have the potential to be one. The first step towards that would be to recognize the overwhelming human privilege and dominance over this planet, and then dismantle them. Only altruism can cure the anthroparchial rot. This means that we fight the evolutionary instincts to leave behind our progeny in a world already overwhelmed with the sickening human presence. It’s time for us to step up and do the right thing...or easier – to not do the wrong thing. Sometimes rightful inaction is better than wrongful action.