

COMMENT

'Silent Spring'

ALL ARE CONCERNED ABOUT WAR in Afghanistan or the prospects of an imminent war in Iran. And the persons in authority in India are more concerned about the maoist guerilla war in central India. But nobody is talking about war against nature. And a war against Nature is, in reality, a war against the humanity.

Almost 50 years have passed since the first publication of *Silent Spring*, igniting a firestorm of controversy that raged in both the print and television media.

Silent Spring was published in the United Kingdom. And it was eventually translated into more than 15 languages, becoming a worldwide publishing phenomenon. In the half-century since its first publication the title has never gone out of print and the debate inspired by its contents has never gone away. Why did this happen? How did *Silent Spring* seize its moment in history and capture the attention of the world?

The answer is to be found in the character and commitment of its author, Rachel Carson, a visionary scientist and lyrical writer who was able, as no one before her, to express the ecological view of life and to bring that view, of the membership of humanity in the living world, into the minds and hearts of her readers. Prior to the writing and publication of *Silent Spring*, Carson was already a famous, best-selling author, and a well-known public figure.

In the fullness of time, after decades of contemplation and description of the wholeness of the natural world, she became aware of the accelerating assault upon the planet in the name of pest control and intensive agriculture. As few in her time did, she understood that a war was being waged against Nature, a war that could never be won, for it operated in ignorance of the structure and function of Nature. A commitment stirred within that she must speak out; she must present the true costs and failures of pesticide use. *Silent Spring* was the result.

So many things have been written, broadcast and spoken of since *Silent Spring* was first published: charges and countercharges, information and misinformation, a veritable tempest of invective and adulation. So, what did the book actually say?

Silent Spring focused on the issue of environmental contamination with toxic chemicals, specifically pesticides and herbicides. In clear, expository prose, the book detailed the consequences of releasing these poisons into the natural world.

Nearer home hundreds of villagers in the Kasaragod district of Kerala, have been worst hit by *Endosulfin* poisoning. It is being used to control insects threatening cashew nut and other crops. Already banned in over 80 countries *Endosulfin* is causing havoc in Kerala and

neighbouring Karnataka. And yet no permanent ban on *Endosulfin* in India is in sight. Then biologists like Rachel Carson are not the final words in pesticide poisoning, it is big business that matters in certifying a poison harmless. And they spend billions of dollars every year as revealed recently by De Smog Blog to show the world that 'humankind is safe' despite increased climate change and pesticide poisoning. □

[contributed]