

**'LAKES OF ODISHA' SERIES-2**



# RAPID STATUS APPRAISAL: TAMPARA LAKE



**Bikash Rath**

30 December 2024

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*30 December 2024*

**NIRMAN**

**An Initiative for  
Sustainable Development**

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## ***A Note from NIRMAN***

As a part of our '***Lakes of Odisha***' series, we are now e-publishing our second paper in the series on the Tampara lake. NIRMAN has been interested in wetlands conservation, and has initiated studies on lakes, mangroves, and salt marshes of Odisha. The present series is an outcome of our studies on the lakes of the state, and we hope to publish more in this series soon.

Our observations are constructive as we understand the complex nature of the larger socio-ecological systems and hence believe that no single stakeholder can be made accountable/responsible for the overall situation of the larger concern. However, in case of Tampara lake this complexity seems much less than in Chilika or Anshupa.

Our consultant Mr. Bikash Rath has his own ways of conducting credible socio-ecological studies, and this series shall chiefly contain reports based on his rapid assessments as in-depth appraisals require a lot of resources & time which we can't afford at present because of our limitations and want of sponsorship for this work. While accepting the limitations of this paper, we are however sure that Mr. Rath has sincerely attempted to produce an authentic document for all stakeholders.

We look forward to constructive feedback and collaborations for some more concrete achievements in wetland conservation in the state.

**Prasant Mohanty**

**Executive Director**

# STATUS APPRAISAL: TAMPARA LAKE

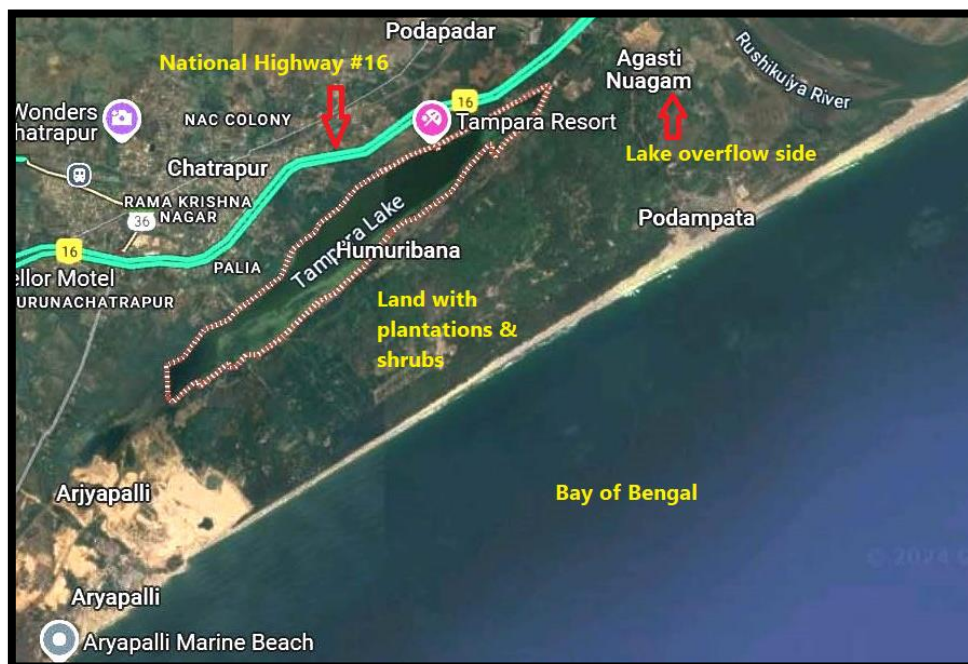
## 1. Introduction to the lake:

Tampara, otherwise known as Humuri Tampara, is a freshwater lake close to the Chhatrapur town in the Ganjam district of Odisha. The location is almost by the side of the National Highway, and access is very easy. The lake has two major approach roads: one for the tourist park and another for the water sports facility.

The location coordinates are 84° 58' 23" to 85° 1' 32" East longitudes and 19° 19' 33" to 19° 21' 58" North latitudes. However, this partly man-made lake is not as famous as Anshupa or Chilika, and is comparatively of a recent origin. Its name is said to have been derived from the English word 'Tamp' which implies to a "pack (a blast hole) full of clay or sand to concentrate the force of the explosion"<sup>1</sup>. Historical information suggests that when the British East India company took possession of Ganjam district from the French in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the explosives used created a large depression that was eventually filled up with rain water, and was hence termed as a 'Tamp' by the British which has been modified in the local language as 'Tampara'<sup>2</sup>.

The British also dredged a narrow channel linking this lake with nearby river Rushikulya for transportation purposes, and this channel helped the lake received flood water from the river. The wetland is also linked with the Haripur creek near Gopalpur<sup>3</sup>.

The lake area is about 300 hectares. It was designated as a RAMSAR site in 2021.



*Tampara lake on Google maps with explanatory marks by the author*

<sup>1</sup> Vide Google dictionary, 'derived from Oxford languages'

<sup>2</sup> Ramsar Site Information Service(2022). **RIS for Site no. 2489, Tampara Lake, India;** <https://rsis Ramsar.org/ris/2489>

<sup>3</sup> Ramsar Site Information Service(2022). *Op.cit.*



Photo by Bikash Rath for NIRMAN ([www.nirmanodisha.org](http://www.nirmanodisha.org)).

*Tampara lake tourist facilities on the park side*

## 2. Appraisal methodology:

This series is based on a rapid appraisal of the lakes following the methodologies mentioned below:

- Study of literature (like management plan, if any; media reports; other relevant documents, etc.)
- On spot-appraisal on 25<sup>th</sup> November 2024 including interaction with various stakeholders (like the DFO, Berhampur) and where feasible/possible a boating for understanding some of the marked realities of the lake.

## 3. Conservation concern:

The lake has diverse importance. It is an important wetland of the locality with a good scope of tourism. As detailed in the Ramsar Information Sheet on Tampara:

“The wetland supports at least 60 species of birds, 46 species of fishes, at least 48 species of phytoplanktons, and more than seven species of terrestrial plants and macrophytes. xxx. With an estimated average fish yield of 12 tonnes per year, the wetland is an important source of livelihood for the local communities. Along with fishes the wetland also provides provisioning services like water for agriculture, and domestic use and is a well-known tourism and recreation site. xxxx

The wetland supports several IUCN red-listed threatened species. The notable vulnerable species are common pochard (*Aythya ferina*), river tern (*Sterna aurantia*) and Amur carp (*Cyprinus carpio*).

Tampara Lake sustains spectacular congregation of water birds and waders within the Eastern Coast. This wetland supports significant populations of species like black-headed ibis (*Threskiornis melanocephalus*), common pochard (*Aythya ferina*), painted stork (*Mycteria leucocephala*), red-crested pochard (*Netta rufina*), white-bellied sea eagle (*Haliaeetus leucogaster*), river tern (*Sterna aurantia*) and ruddy shelduck (*Tadorna ferruginea*), which is representative and significantly helps in maintaining the biodiversity of the region owing to the large variety of ecological functions performed by the abovementioned diverse range of species. xxx

The wetland supports many species of fishes. The notable fish species include *Amblypharyngodon mola*, *Cirrhinus mrigala*, *Cyprinus carpio*, *Labeo bata*, *Labeo calbasu*, *Labeo rohita*, *Megalops cyprinoides*, *Notopterus notopterus*, *Osteobrama vigorsii*, and *Salmostoma bacaila*. Interaction of the fish species can be considered representative of the wetland ecosystem benefits at two levels. Firstly, it establishes an interaction of fish species with piscivorous waterbirds benefitting the food chains which involve fish-eating waterbirds. Secondly, fishes are beneficial to local fringe communities for economic and livelihood gains.

The majority of these species spend their entire life cycle within the wetland. xxx

The wetland serves as a major source of food and a significant spawning ground for species like *Salmostoma bacaila*, *Osteobrama vigorsii*, and *Labeo bata*. Xxx”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ramsar Site Information Service(2022). *Op.cit.*



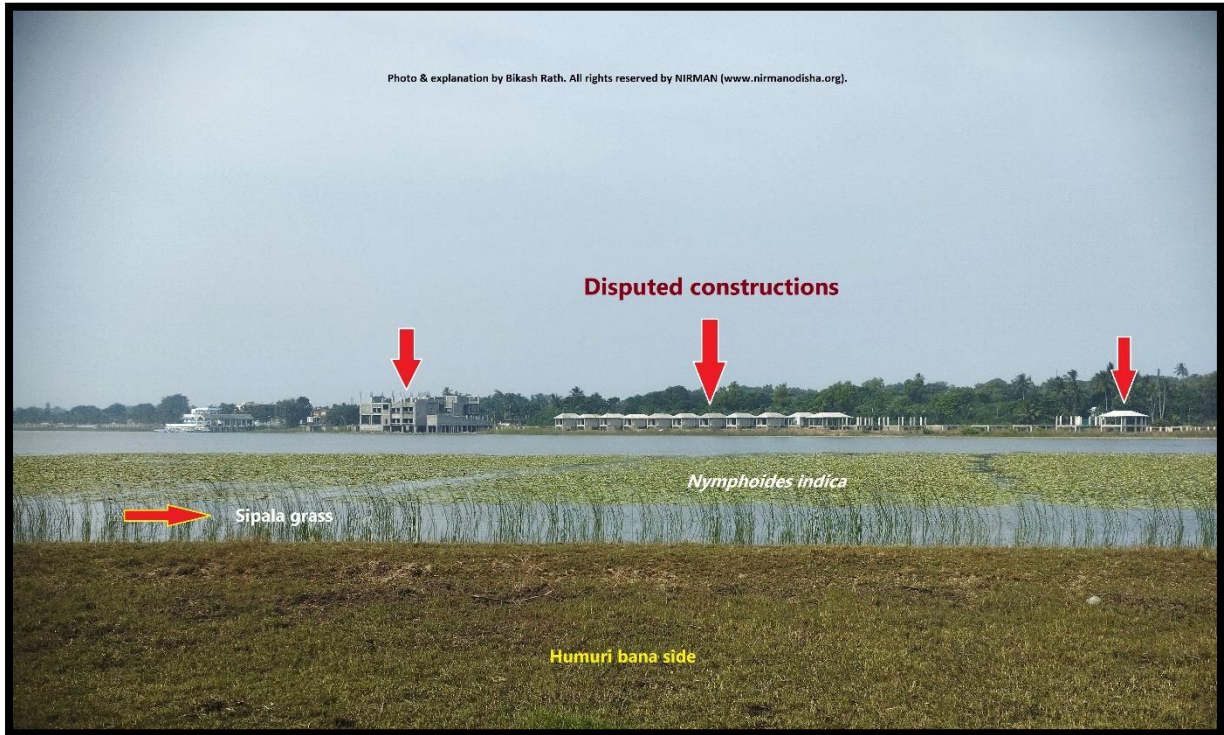
Boards displaying some important species of the lake near the main entrance gate, courtesy Berhampur Forest Division

The major conservation concern however is hydrological. The lake hydrology is critically dependent on the catchment run-off and monsoon precipitation, and when these sources are unable to ensure the requisite supply, the lake water level recedes significantly, sometimes almost getting dried up.

Unlike Anshupa or Chilika, macrophyte infestation is not a major issue in Tampara although aquatic vegetations of different kinds such as the Sipala grass (*Schoenoplectus litoralis*) of economic value (the commercial use is practiced in some parts of Chilika area, if not here) are observed more particularly in the fringe areas whereas Pani shiuli (*Nymphoides indica*) is found covering the water particularly to the left side(northern part) beyond the water sports area of the lake. It was observed during our visit that the employees of the agency managing water sports activities in this lake were clearing the *Nymphoides indica* growth in the water sports area, and they said they do it at regular intervals. This

helps maintain the lake water clear and weed-free in the lake area accessible for the tourists, i.e. the central part. However, the southern part has some complexity in this regard:

“In the southern part, along with these two species, other species such as *Typha angustata*, and *Saccharum spontaneum*<sup>5</sup> were present. The central part of the lake was apparently devoid of submerged vegetation while the western and southern ends were choked with profuse growth of vegetation<sup>6</sup>.”



The western (approach) side of the lake has the economic plantations of *kia* (*Pandanus odorifer*) and other miscellaneous trees whereas *Humuri bana*<sup>7</sup>, the land bridging the lake with the sea on the eastern side, has miscellaneous plantations of Cashew, Casuarina, and other plant species. This patch of land is said to have both private and government plots without any village. And it is on this land that wild boars, deer, peacock, and other wild animals are said to be found under prohibition on hunting<sup>8</sup>.

Preserving & improving the ecological sanctity of *Humuri bana* as an integral part of the Tampara lake is a matter of concern because differential land ownership here has created a lot of inconsistency in the vegetation cover (particularly the grown species many of which are not indigenous). Unless this is regulated (with due honour to the right holders) in the larger ecological interest of the lake area, the situation may deteriorate further.

The Divisional Forest Officer, Berhampur told us that the management plan of Tampara lake (as a RAMSAR site) was being developed by the Chilika Development Authority, and that consideration of

<sup>5</sup> Odia name: Tandi or Kashatandi grass which has many uses earlier, like thatching.

<sup>6</sup> **Flora of the Tampara Lake,**

[https://rsis Ramsar.org/RISapp/files/31513985/documents/IN2489\\_taxo220426.pdf](https://rsis Ramsar.org/RISapp/files/31513985/documents/IN2489_taxo220426.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Humuri is a reference village of the area. 'Bana' implies to jungle or forest.

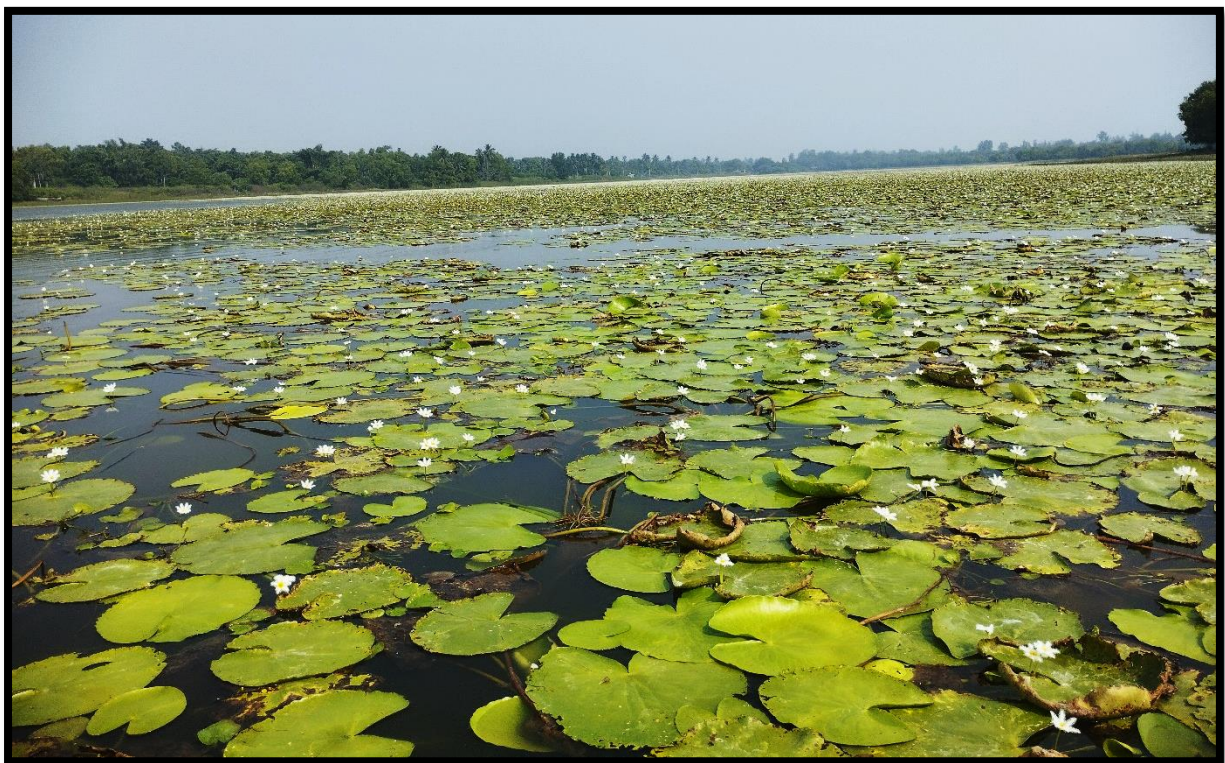
<sup>8</sup> Personal interaction with Umakant Adhikari, Tourist Boat driver at Tampara



the *Humuri bana* issue was also being made. On the other hand, the vulnerability of this land to be used for mining for rare earth minerals continues.



*Vegetation in Humuri bana. Feral cattle is visible in the upper image.*



*Cover of Nymphoides indica in the lake*

### **Intervention of the National Green Tribunal on allegation of illegal constructions**

As per the Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2017 encroachment, establishment and growth of industries, and discharge of untreated wastes and effluents from businesses are prohibited in the designated wetlands. However, the state government sponsored construction of tourist facilities (like cottages) of permanent nature on the lake side (as per its decision in 2013 with follow up in 2020) covering a considerable area of its shoreline particularly on the western side, against which the Wildlife Society of Odisha, an NGO, approached the hon'ble National Green Tribunal (NGT) alleging that the constructions were being done within 50 metres of the lake area in sheer violation of the law. The NGT then issued order in August 2023 to immediately suspend the alleged construction activities which stopped the constructions, leaving them incomplete. The NGT sought for appropriate response from the government on this alleged violation, but the District Collector of Ganjam (whom the NGT had directed on July 16, 2024 to file an affidavit within four weeks showing what action has been taken for removal of the concrete structures in the lake) submitted to the Tribunal that the construction was sponsored under the 'Swadesh Darshan' scheme of the Ministry of Tourism, Govt of India (the approval is said to have been received in 2016, i.e. much before the lake got the RAMSAR tag) and that since it was done in public interest that too in a way which would not cause any major damage to the wetland, hence it should be allowed, otherwise "the govt may suffer irreparable and irretrievable losses". However, since the Collector stated in his submission that the construction proposal was sent by the State Wetland Authority to the National Wetlands Authority for approval which was still pending, hence the NGT has directed the central government to clarify its stand in the matter. (Vide *Times of India*, 6<sup>th</sup> March 2013, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/bhubaneswar/tampara-to-be-developed-into-a-tourist-attraction/articleshow/18824922.cms>; *Devdiscourse*, 17 January 2020, <https://www.devdiscourse.com/article/national/834805-facelift-for-tampara-lake-in-odisha>; *Hindustan Times*, 12 August 2023, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/others/ngt-orders-immediate-suspension-of-construction-in-protected-odisha-lake-investigation-committee-formed-101691814430079.html>; *Times of India*, 4<sup>th</sup> September 2024; <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/cuttack/ngt-seeks-answers-on-tampara-lake-structures/articleshow/113045060.cms>; *Times of India*, 17 December 2024; <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/bhubaneswar/ngt-demands-action-on-tampara-lake-structures-orders-centre-for-affidavit/articleshow/116403656.cms> ).

While the matter was subjudice and we have no updates as yet on the final outcomes of the same, it appears to be not so surprising question arises as to why such a large scale construction of permanent nature to develop tourist facilities in the lake was planned despite the hydrological vulnerabilities and other limitations of this lake; and also why the work was allowed upto an advanced phase when the proposal was pending with the National Wetlands Authority. In fact, the legal ground of objecting to this construction is so strong that even the local apprehension of the indirect hand of vested interest (particularly & allegedly of the private resort whose business is likely to be affected in case this government facility is developed) behind this issue can hardly stand on its own. At the same time, a similar question may be asked as to why the legal intervention was not sought in 2013-14 when the development of tourism facilities was announced (and reported in the media) because we know that concerns were expressed by environmentalists in February 2023 (vide *The New Indian Express*, 8 February 2023, <https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/odisha/2023/Feb/08/mindless-constructions-pose-threat-to-tampara-lake-in-odisha-2545471.html>) followed by the legal action in August 2023. However, the Court of Law is the final authority to decide the matter.

#### 4. Socio-ecological concern:

The major socio-ecological concern seems to be the conservation of the water level in the lake because it is alleged that there is wastage of the lake water by the Agasti Nuagan people who take this water for irrigation purpose<sup>9</sup>. Fisher Daka Behera observes that while irrigational use is bonafide, judicious or regulated use of the outflow is necessary as (given the hydrological vulnerability of the lake) wastage of the lake water is not wise.

A lesser concern is the growing population of feral cattle in the *Humuri bana* area. These cattle may attack a stranger if he/she is alone although normally they prefer to retreat into the jungle by seeing the strangers arriving on this land.

#### 5. Socio-economic concern:

The major socio-economic concern relates to traditional fishing as about 2000 fisher households are said to be dependent on fishery-based livelihood in this lake. The two important fisher villages are Umbara(Humbar) and Tarei-Patapur<sup>10</sup>. There seems a conflict of interest between the fisherfolk and the lake authorities as the former allege facing restrictions chiefly because of tourism activities.

*Rohi, bhakura, sheula, gadisha, and kerandi*<sup>11</sup> are said to be the major fish varieties caught; and small fishes dominate the catch<sup>12</sup>. However, fishery is no more supposed to be viable<sup>13</sup> enough here compelling fishers for distress migration.

The NGT stay is said to have impacted the tourism considerably as because of this the construction of tourism facilities in the lake remained incomplete and hence not is use for any economic activity. It is supposed to have hurt the reputation of Tampara as a tourist site.

#### 6. Scopes in tourism:

M/S ABC Watersports is providing both basic & advanced water sports services in the lake as authorized by the Odisha Tourism Development Corporation, and the facility seems to be appreciable and quite distinguished of its kind in Odisha. There are good tourist boats also operated by OTDC. However, certain motorized water sports facilities like sofa boating appears to be a bit riskier for the unacquainted tourists.

Both local and outsiders visit the lake. There is a private resort close to the water sports facility, but the government initiated the construction of tourist complex including a number of cottages on the lake side which became disputed under law.

The scopes for improving the tourism opportunities are definitely high here, but balance between tourism & conservation is becoming a matter of concern here as excess & ecologically unregulated tourist activity can harm the local ecosystem in many ways<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> This allegation is however could not be verified during our field visit.

<sup>10</sup> Personal interaction with Umakant Adhikari

<sup>11</sup> *Rohi-Rohu, bhakura-Catla, sheula- Striped snakehead, gadisha- Spotted snakehead, kerandi- Gilled lungfish*

<sup>12</sup> Personal interaction with Daka Behera of Umbar

<sup>13</sup> The lack of this viability is not caused by a single factor like reduced production of fishes, but there are simultaneous other factors like changing life style and socio-economic needs, etc..

<sup>14</sup> Vide, for example, **TAMPARA LAKE'S FRAGILE ECOSYSTEM UNDER THREAT**, *Brahmapur Post*, 16<sup>th</sup> December 2024, [https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=520240201043519&id=100091726293007&\\_rdr](https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=520240201043519&id=100091726293007&_rdr)



Photo by Bikash Rath for NIRMAN ([www.nirmanodisha.org](http://www.nirmanodisha.org)).



*Facilities on the resort side of the lake*



*Some water sports facilities at Tampara*

#### **7. Recommendations:**

- The management plan of Tampara lake should be made on a truly participatory mode and be released as soon as possible. The authorities must work in a coordinated manner and should make all efforts of the release of necessary funds. In case fund release from the government sources is delayed, they should earnestly try to mobilize CSR funds from the industries of the Gopalpur area.
- All species of conservation concern and economic importance must be prioritized in the action plan, the local people should be made aware of each of them, and conservation initiatives must be effectively participatory.
- The present water sports facility is confined to a relatively small area, and this should be extended.
- Adequate tourist facility should be developed in the *Humuri bana* area while considering the risk from feral cattle.
- Considering the heavy financial loss as well as environmental damage (apart from the impact of tourism) in case of the removal/demolition of the disputed tourist complex, the hon'ble NGT may be humbly requested to suggest the best possible alternative in the larger interest. At the same time, this case should serve as a good lesson for the concerned authorities who must be careful about not repeating any such mistake in future.

***The author is thankful to all the persons and/or organization(s) whose direct or indirect support was helpful in this study.***

***Cover page template courtesy canva.com.***