

**ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE AND LAND PRESSURE:
BANGLADESHI MIGRATION AND CONFLICT IN INDIA**

*Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the award of the degree of*

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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This is to certify that the dissertation entitled "**Environmental Change and Land Pressure: Bangladeshi Migration and Conflict in India**", submitted by **Ran Vijay** in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** is his original work and has not been submitted for the award of any other degree of this or any other university.

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To
My Parents

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The change in the global environment has turned out to be a major challenge to human society. A paucity of resources is another important factor which might lead to the eruption of conflicts. Environmentally induced coercive or non coercive migration of population has led to conflicts in some parts of the world.

Environmental degradation not only poses a threat to many people but has also challenged the conventional understanding of national security. The study of the link between environmental degradation and conflict has become important with frequent or endemic civil strife occurring in countries beset by environmental scarcity or degradation of renewable natural resources. Indeed, these have become issues of conflict between and among states. Fresh water resources are an example of renewable resources that has been the direct cause of potentially violent international conflicts. The effects of environmental degradation on the economy in terms of poverty and food insecurity, diseases and health hazards are quite obvious. Impoverishment due to environmental degradation in one society may force people to move to a neighbouring country where they can survive for food. The migration of a large population can disrupt the economic, political and social life of the receiving state,

which in turn could lead to inter-state conflict or conflict between various ethnic groups.

To establish a causal link between environment and conflict we have taken the Ganges basin region as a case study. India and Bangladesh, have been embroiled in a dispute over the sharing of the waters of the river Ganges. In 1975, India diverted most of the dry season flow of the river to one of its internal rivers before it could reach Bangladesh. The water diversion of Farakka introduced a new ecological system against the usual course of nature. It has highly affected the south western part of Bangladesh both ecologically and economically.

Farakka led environmental destruction in the south west region of Bangladesh has led to the loss of agricultural and industrial production. Another economic activity which had been much affected is fishing. Bangladesh being a territorially small country faced with a huge population explosion is a typical example of a third world society struggling to feed its millions. Bangladesh boasts of a population of around 115 million which had been growing at a breakneck speed of between 2.2 and 3 percent per year.¹ Ecological destruction and the lack of renewable resources along with high population growth have resulted in the displacement of a large number of the Bangladeshis in

¹Verghese, B.G., *Waters of hope*, (New Delhi: Oxford and IBH Publishing Company, 1991), p. 402.

the south western region of the country and have necessitated their migration in the pursuit of survival.

Over the past 40 years, millions of people have migrated from Bangladesh to neighbouring Assam, West Bengal, Delhi and Mumbai in India, though the Bangladesh Government is reluctant to admit that there is significant out migration. The enormous flux of migrants has resulted in socio-economic disruption in India (mainly in Assam). The Nellie massacre in 1983 was the result of native-migrant conflict and claimed nearly 1,700 Muslim lives. Other parts of India have also faced problems caused by Bangladeshi migrants.

The growing number of migrants in Mumbai gave a communal colour to the 1993 Bombay riots when mass scale killings of these migrants took place. In Delhi, there is a strong presence of Bangladesh Muslim migrants in the slum colonies of the Trans Yamuna area. In September 1992, when the Government of India took the decision of deporting some of the Bangladeshi migrants, its police force had gone to one of the city's slum colonies, Seema Puri, to pick up 132 migrants for deportation . This action of the police was promptly retaliated to by migrants.

To test the hypothesis "environmental degradation may cause population pressure on land leading to population displacement,

which in turn could lead to various types of conflict” we have to answer three questions. The first question relates to how environmental degradation leads to conflict . In the second chapter “Environmental degradation as a cause of conflict: A conceptual framework” , we have tried to find answer to the question. Though a number of researchers have started to refer to the relationship between environmental destruction and social conflicts, Thomas Homer-Dixon’s² pioneering article remains the best effort in this regard.

The second question is, to what extent has destruction of natural ecology and population pressure on land in Bangladesh resulted in trans-border migration into India? To answer this question, in the third chapter we have tried to explore the impact of Farakka withdrawal by India on environmental destruction of the natural ecology of Bangladesh. At the same time, high population density of the region added pressure on the degraded land resulting in trans-border migration into India.

The last question we consider is: what are the conflicts that could potentially arise due to Bangladeshi migration into India? The population migration from the South Western part of Bangladesh to

² Homer-Dixon , Thomas F. , “On the Threshold : Environmental Changes as Causes of Acute Conflict,” *International Security*, vol. 16, no.2, 1991 , pp. 76-116

neighbouring states of India, which has caused conflicts in the receiving area.

In the conclusion we have fixed major three types of conflict has been occurred in India: state vs state, state vs migrants and migrants vs native.

Objective of the study is to examine how environmental degradation can lead to conflict. The study have seek to analyse the particular case of environmental degradation in Bangladesh and its consequent transborder implications in different parts of India. It has attempted to address the various conflict dynamics in the region.

The proposed study is based on inductive method. Homer Dixon's theoretical framework on environment and conflict has been used as a basic tool for the study. Relevant information and data on Bangladesh and India has been interpreted. As far as primary sources is concerned, the reports and survey, conducted by various organisations, and government census, reports, documents have been used. As secondary sources, existing literature and established journals have been consulted.

CHAPTER II
ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION AS A CAUSE OF
CONFLICT: A CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

CHAPTER II

ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION AS A CAUSE OF CONFLICT: A CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

The study of the link between environment and conflict can be followed in two distinct ways. One is where environmental destruction takes place as a result of conflict. The other is where environmental destruction may itself bring about conflict within a society. According to the traditional analysis, destruction of the environment can be seen as the product of conflict or conflict-induced migration. Most research carried out in the post war period on the relationship between conflict and environment has focused on the environmental consequences of warfare.¹ Besides the direct adverse effects of conflict over the environment, it is also observed that in some cases environmental change is the deliberate objective in conflict rather than being an unwanted by-product.² Even in times of peace, military preparedness greatly contributes to resource depletion and environmental destruction.

Refugees are the direct product of political conflicts with consequences that extend beyond the actors involved in the conflict.

¹ Swain, Ashok, "Displacing the Conflict: Environmental Destruction in Bangladesh and Ethnic Conflict in India", *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 33, no. 2, 1996, p. 189.

² Gleick, Peter H., "Water and Conflict", *International Security*, vol. 18, no. 1, Summer 1993, pp. 79-112.

The pressure created by the presence of refugees in the receiving country can be considerable. Aside from the potential threat to the social, economic and political fabric of the host state and society, refugees can also be a major source of environmental destruction in the area of their resettlement. Three types of environmental destruction are mainly associated with refugees: deforestation, land degradation and water pollution.³

However, in the last few years, a substantial amount of research has been devoted to establishing the other side of linkage, i.e. that environmental destruction itself may become the cause of conflict. As result of anthropogenic environmental destruction, the world is witnessing a sharp reduction in the availability of cultivable land, green-forest, fresh water, clean air and fish resources.⁴ The adverse effects of this reduction of resources is becoming more acute owing to increasing demand which in turn is due to population growth, urbanization, conspicuous consumption and development activities. In this perspective, it is the responsibility of all social actors to be comfortable with the present situation, or prospects for future scarcities of these resources. Purposeful action undertaken by these actors in their own self-interest might eventually destroy the

³ Jacobson, Karen, *The Impact of Refugees on the Environment: A Review of the Evidence*, (Washington DC: Refugee Policy Group).

⁴ World Resource Institute, *Commission on Global Governance: Our Global Neighbourhood*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

established resource-sharing arrangements in society and lead to social conflict.

How might environmental change lead to acute conflict? Some scholars propose that environmental change may shift the balance of power between states either regionally or globally, producing instability that could lead to war.⁵ Global environmental damage increases the disparity between North and South, poor nations may militarily confront the rich for a greater share of the world's wealth.⁶ Bulging populations and land stress may produce waves of environmental refugees⁷ that spill across borders with destabilizing effects on the recipient's domestic order and on international stability. Countries may fight over dwindling supplies of water and the effects of upstream pollution.⁸ In developing countries, a sharp drop in food crop production could lead to internal strife across urban rural and nomadic-sedentary cleavages.⁹ Food also may be used as a weapons by the exporters if environmental degradation makes food supply increasingly tight.¹⁰ Environmental change could ultimately cause

⁵ See Wirth, David, "Climate Chaos", *Foreign Policy*, no. 74, Spring 1989, p. 10.

⁶ Heilbrunn, Robert, *An Inquiry into the Human Prospects* (New York: Norton, 1980), pp. 39 and 95.

⁷ Jacobson, Jodi, *Environmental Refugees: A Yardstick of Habitability*, *World Watch Paper No. 86*, (Washington DC: World Watch Institute, 1988).

⁸ Falkenmark, Malin, "Fresh Waters as a Factor in Strategic Policy and Action", in Arthur H. Westing (ed.), *Global Resources and International Conflict*, (Oxford, New York, 1986), pp. 85-113.

⁹ Walensteen, Peter, "Food Crops as a Factor in Strategic Policy and Action", in Arthur H. Westing, op cit., pp. 151-155.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 146-151.

the gradual impoverishment of societies in both the North and the South, which could aggravate class and ethnic cleavages, undermine liberal regimes, and spawn insurgencies.

Developing countries are more vulnerable to environmental change than rich countries. By definition, the former do not have the financial material, or intellectual resources of the developed world; furthermore, their social and political institutions tend to be fragile and riven with discord. It is probable, therefore, that developing societies will be less able to apprehend or respond to environmental disruption.¹¹

According to Thomas Homer Dixon seven major environmental problems might plausibly contribute to conflict within and among developing countries: greenhouse warming, stratospheric ozone depletion, acid diposition, deforestation, degradation of agricultural land, overuse and pollution of water supplies, and depletion of fish stock.¹² These problems can also be characterized as large scale human-induced problems. They vary greatly in spatial scale. The first two involve genuinely global physical processes while the last five involve regional physical processes, although they may appear in locales all other the planet. Some of these problems, like,

¹¹ Gurr, Ted. Robert, "On the Political Consequences of Scarcity and Economic Decline", *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 29, no. 1, March 1985, pp. 51-75.

¹² Homer-Dixon, Thomas F., "On the Threshold: Environmental Changes as Causes of Acute Conflict", *International Security*, vol. 16, no. 2, Fall 1996, pp 88-89.

deforestation and degradation of water supplies, are much more advanced than others such as greenhouse warming and ozone depletion, and are already producing serious social disruption. There is uncertainty about the severity of these problems. The uncertainties surrounding greenhouse warming, for example, are thus far greater than those concerning deforestation. Many of these problems are causally inter-related. For example, acid deposition damages agricultural land, fisheries, and forests. Greenhouse warming may contribute to deforestation by moving northward the optimal temperature and precipitation zone for many tree species, by increasing the severity of windstorms and wildfires, and by expanding the range of pests and diseases.¹³ The release of carbon from these dying forests would reinforce the greenhouse effect. The increased incidence of ultraviolet radiation due to the depletion of the ozone layer will probably damage trees and crops, and it may also damage the phytoplankton at the bottom of the ocean food chain.

While the last decade has seen increasing environmental damage around the globe, for the most part this change has progressed incrementally rather than abruptly, with the waning of the ideological and military confrontation, the international community has given attention to the environmental issue. During the last decade

¹³. World Resource Institute, op. cit. 1990-91, p. 111.

there has been a genuine shift in the scientific community's perception of global environmental problems. A paradigm shattering example of complex environmental system was the discovery of the Antarctic ozone hole in the mid-1980s. The hole has startling evidence of the instability of the environmental system in response to human inputs, of the capacity of humankind to significantly affect the ecosystem on the global scale, and of our inability to predict exactly how the system could change.

Recent research on environmental change and conflict

Although a number of researchers in recent times have started to refer to the relationship between environmental destruction and acute social conflict, unfortunately very few have exhibited conceptual clarity on this issue. However, Homer-Dixon's¹⁴ article is a serious effort in this regard. In his work he has elaborated on the four major social effects of the environmental destruction – decreased agricultural production, economic decline, population displacement, and disruption of legitimated and authoritative institutions and social relations – on the basis of which he has developed his three theoretical perspectives on environmentally induced conflict. These are simple scarcity conflict, group identity conflict and relative deprivation conflict. The other useful work in this field has been done

¹⁴ Homer-Dixon, op.cit. pp. 76-116.

by Peter Wallensteen, in which, while developing a research design, he has elucidated the linkage between environmental destruction and social conflicts through the help of conflict theory.¹⁵

In addition to this recent research on environment and conflict, there exists an earlier literature, which is also indirectly relevant. William Durham¹⁶ shows how land scarcity induced migration from El-Salvador to Honduras in 1969 led to the 'soccer war'. The author has succinctly assessed and attributed this development to the various demographic and environmental pressures faced by El-Salvador. He shows the most powerful inducement behind the migration were changes in agricultural practices and land distribution. The process of competitive exclusion created land security problems for the small farmers and they were increasingly pushed off the land by large land owners.

Arther H. Westing¹⁷ has focused upon the impact of regional deficiencies, degradation of natural resources and skewed distribution of raw materials on the creation of national rivalries, temporary selfish alliances leading to war. This literature analyses the key components of environment, those especially likely to lead to future interstate

¹⁵ Wallensteen, Peter, "Environmental Destruction and Serious Conflict: Developing a Research Design" PRIO Report, no. 3, May 1992, pp. 47-54.

¹⁶ Durham, William H., *Security and Survival in Central America: Ecological Origin of the Soccer War*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1979).

¹⁷ Westing, Arthur H., *Global Resources and International Conflict*, (Oxford: New York, 1986).

disputes and conflicts. Disputes can arise over oil and natural gas, minerals, fresh waters, ocean fisheries and food crops. Human populations further exacerbate environmental problems as they relate to international conflict. The conceptual question is how to ensure access to global resources in a way that will avoid international conflict. While recognizing these challenges, the study concludes with an expanded, environmentally based concept of international security.

In addition some literature is available on the Ganges water dispute and on the consequences of environmental degradation in Bangladesh. M.G. Rehman¹⁸ has done a commendable study with proper analysis on environmental destruction, particularly in the agricultural sector in the Ganges basin due to Farakka withdrawal.

Sanjoy Hazarika¹⁹ has analyzed high population pressure on the land in Bangladesh. The population growth is very high, the country's population density of 785 per square kilometer is world's highest.²⁰ The growth in population has led to a situation where the average farm holding is less than one hectare (or less than 2 acres).

¹⁸ Rahman, M.G., "Reducing the Flow of the Ganges: The Consequences for Agriculture in Bangladesh" in E. Goldsmith and N. Hildyard (ed.), *The Social and Environmental Effects of Large Dams*, (England: Camelford Wadebridge, 1984).

¹⁹ Hazarika, Sanjoy, "Bangladesh and Assam: Land Pressures, Migration and Ethnic Conflict", This paper was prepared for the workshop on *Environmental Change, Population Displacement, and Acute Conflict*, held at the Institute for Research on Public Policy in Ottawa In June 1991.

²⁰ Verghese, B.G., *Waters of Hope*, (New Delhi: Oxford and IBH Publishing Company, 1991), p. 402.

Causes and effects of environmental change

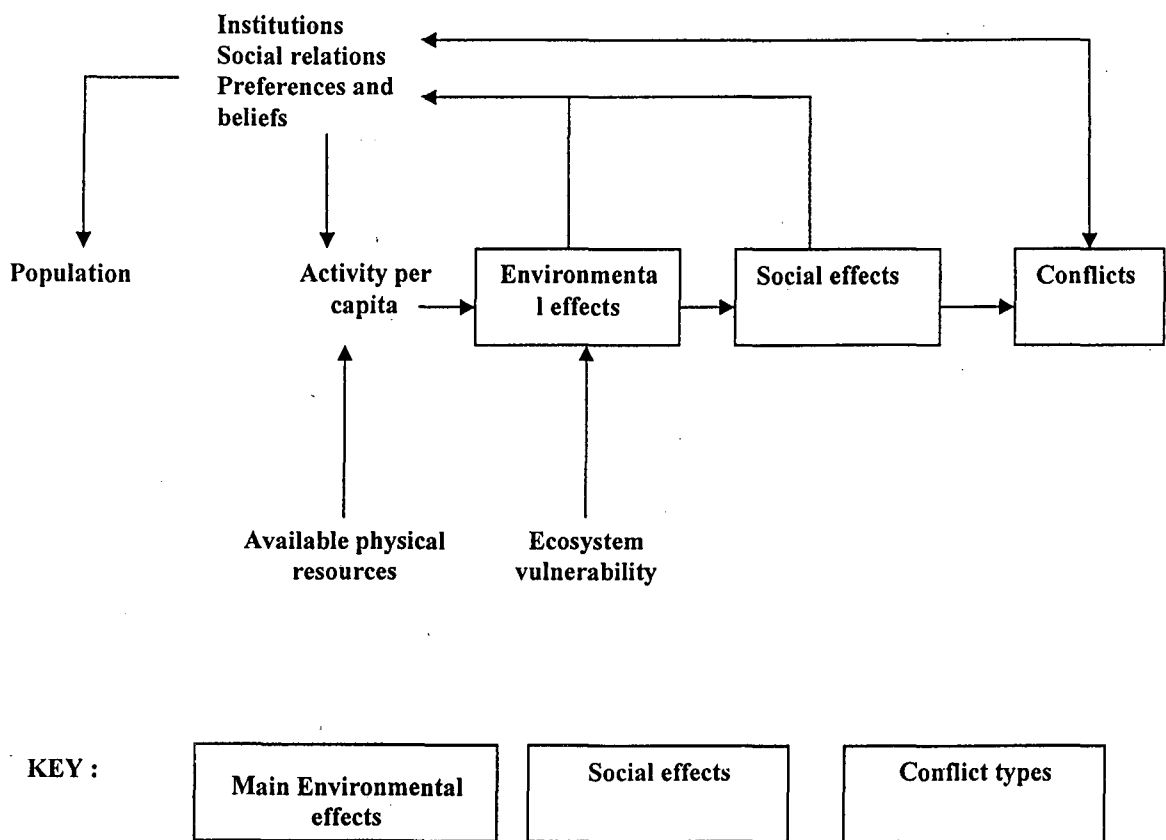
According to Homer-Dixon the total effect of human activity on the environment in a particular ecological region is mainly a function of two variables. First, the product of total population in the region and physical activity per capita, and second, the vulnerability of the ecosystem in the region to those particular activities. Activity per capita in turn is a function of available physical resources (which include non renewable resources such as water, forests and agricultural land) and ideational factors, including institutions, social relations, preferences and beliefs.²¹ Environmental effect may cause social effects that in turn could lead to conflict. For example, the degradation of agricultural land might produce large scale migration, which could create ethnic conflicts as migratory groups clash with indigenous population. There are important feedback loops from social effects and conflicts to the ideational factors and thence back to activity per capita and population. Thus ethnic clashes arising from migration could alter the operation of a society's markets and thereby its economic activity.

The complex linkage between environmental change and a social conflict can be understood by the following diagram which has been proposed by Homer-Dixon.²²

²¹ Homer- Dixon, op.cit. p. 85.

²² Ibid, p. 86.

Environmental change and acute conflict:



To understand how environmental change would lead to social conflict we can focus on two important questions, what are the important social effects of environmental change? What types of acute conflict, if any, are most likely to result from these social effects? Homer-Dixon²³ has tried to show that there is a causal linkage between environmental effects and social effects. According to him environmental effects causes social effects and social effects further cause social conflicts.

These two causal linkage do not diminish the importance of the other variables and linkages. Another variables include population growth, demographic structure, and patterns of population distribution and effects of ideational factors all of which also play an important role.

Homer-Dixon²⁴ hypothesizes that four principal social effects: decreased agricultural production, economic decline, population displacement and disruption of legitimized and authoritative institutions and social relations, may either singly or in combination substantially increase the probability of conflict in developing countries. These effects will often be causally interlinked, sometimes with reinforcing relationships. For example, population displacement

²³ Ibid,

²⁴ Ibid, p. 87.

resulting from a decrease in agricultural production may further disrupt agricultural production. Or economic decline may lead to the flight of people with wealth and education, which in turn could eviscerate universities, courts and institutions of economic management, all of which are crucial to a healthy economy.

Decreased agricultural production

Environmental degradation has a direct impact on agricultural production. Environmental destruction may accelerate erosion, change the regional hydrological cycle and precipitation patterns and decrease the land's ability to retain water during rainy periods. The Philippines provide a good illustration of the impact of deforestation.²⁵ Bangladesh is also facing the problem of soil erosion and land degradation which has ultimately resulted in population displacement. Green house warming and climate change may also have some effect on agricultural production. Coastal cropland in countries such as Bangladesh and Egypt is extremely vulnerable to storm surges.

Economic decline

Economic productivity may be influenced directly by environmental disruption, or indirectly via other social effects such as decreased agricultural production. Increased ultra violet radiation

²⁵ Ibid, p. 91

caused by ozone depletion is likely to raise the rate of disease in humans and livestock, which could have serious economic results. logging for export markets may produce short-term economic gain for the country's elite, but increased run off can damage roads, bridges, and other valuable infrastructure, while the extra siltation reduces the transport and hydroelectric capacity of rivers. As forests are destroyed, wood becomes scarcer and more expensive, and it occupies an increasing share of the household budget for poor families who use it for fuel.

Population displacement

One of the consequences of the environmental scarcity of resources, whether human or nature induced, is the migration of people from one region to another within a state, or from one state to a neighbouring states. Usually, environmental disruption is only one of many interacting physical and social variables, including agricultural and economic decline, that ultimately force people from their homelands. For example, over the last three decades, millions of people have migrated from Bangladesh to neighbouring West Bengal and Assam in India. While detailed data are scarce (in part because the Bangladeshi government is reluctant to admit there is significant out-migration), many specialists believe this movement is a result, at

least in part, of shortages, of adequately fertile land due to a rapidly growing population.²⁶

Disrupted institutions and social relations

The fourth social effect especially relevant to the connection between environmental change and acute conflict is the disruption of institutions and of legitimized, accepted, and authoritative social relations²⁷. In many developing societies, the three social effects described above are likely to tear the fabric of custom and habitual behaviour. A drop in agricultural output may weaken rural communities by causing malnutrition and disease, and by encouraging people to leave; economic decline may corrode confidence in the national purpose, weaken the tax base, and undermine financial, legal and political institutions; and mass migrations of people into a region may disrupt labour markets, shift class relations, and upset the traditional balance of economic and political authority between ethnic groups.

Types of conflict

Homer Dixon²⁸ suggests three causes of conflicts. First is the frustration aggression theory. This theory uses individual psychology

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid, p. 97.

²⁸ Ibid .

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to explain civil strife, including strikes, riots, coups, revolutions and guerilla wars. It suggests that individuals become aggressive when they feel frustrated by something or someone they believe is blocking them from fulfilling a strong desire. An important subset of these theories suggest that this frustration and aggression can be caused by relative deprivation, when people perceive – a widening gap between the level of satisfaction they have actually achieved (often defined in economic terms) and the level they believe they deserve.²⁹ Homer-Dixon's³⁰ second theory of conflicts are the group identity theories which uses social conflicts involving nationalism, ethnicity, and religion. Groups reinforce their identity as “we” and “they”. Individuals may have a need for a sense of “we-ness” that can be satisfied in a group when it discriminates against or attacks another groups. By attacking outside groups, leaders may try to exploit these needs in order to increase their political power within their own groups.

The third theory hypothesized by Homer-Dixon³¹ are structural theories, which are often grounded on the assumption of microeconomics and game theory, explains conflicts that arise from the rational calculations of actors in the face of perceived external

²⁹ Ibid, p. 104.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid, p. 106.

constraints. General theories suggest that external constraints can encourage or even compel actors to engage in conflict.

Drawing on these theories Homer-Dixon³² hypothesizes that severe environmental degradation will produce three principal types of conflict: simple scarcity conflict, group identity conflict, and relative deprivation conflict. He considered these conflicts as ideal type, they will rarely, if ever, be found in pure form in the real world.

Simple scarcity conflict

Environmental change causes scarcity of natural resources which in turn could lead to various different types of conflicts.

State vs. state conflict

State vs. state conflicts arise due to simple scarcity of resources. Simple scarcity conflicts are explained and predicted by general structural theories. They are the conflicts we would expect when state actors rationally calculate their interests in a zero-sum or negative sum situation such as might arise from resources scarcity³³. Most states depend greatly on natural resources – agricultural land, water and fisheries that sustain much of their economic activity. When one among of them works for development by acquiring or

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

exploiting more than its usual share, it affects the interests of the other states. Subsequent action of the affected parties to protect their interest may lead to conflict. The conflict over the share of the Ganges water is a good illustration of simple scarcity conflict.

State vs. group

The scarcity of natural resources may breed a conflict between the state and the group. When the state exploits natural resources of particular area or a region, it might be perceived by the local population that they are getting exploited for the interest of others. It might activate to form environmental groups to challenge the action of the state. If the affected people belong to an ethnic minority group or/and the disputed resource has any historical or religious significance, then the probability of this type of conflict is very high. In Bangladesh resources have been exploited in favour of non-tribal people at the cost of the tribal groups of CHT (Chittagong Hill Tract). The government settled, cyclone and disaster prone and affected people in the CHT outnumber the tribals and cause economic deprivation. The Katpai hydro electricity project was also constructed for the benefit of the urban non-tribal people at the cost of the tribals. Hence group vs. group dimensions assumes a group vs. state dimension, as the state always tends to support the non-tribals in

their clashes with tribals.³⁴ In 1972 the conflict got a political edge when the CHT tribals demanded autonomy and a ban on the influx of non tribal people into their areas. The rejection of these demands by the Bangladesh government lead to the formation of the Parbatya Chattagram Gana Sanghati Samiti (PCGSS), a political front and Shanti Bahini, a military front, to fight for autonomy from the state. In response to this, the Bangladesh government mounted a military offensive on the tribals inflaming their insurgency and forcing them to flow to Indian states, viz. Assam and Tripura, as refugees to escape the police brutalities.³⁵

Group vs. group

Scarcity of natural resources may cause conflict among groups in a society. The competition over water, land, forest, minerals or other resources may potentially create conflicting groups in a society following religious, linguistic, regional or other lines. In Bangladesh the government resettled environmental refugees from the plain area in the CHT. This mounted extra-pressure on the existing resources in CHT. Due to decreasing food production on tiny plots, the tribals started to lose their lands. During situations, of scarcity and crop

³⁴ Gaan, Narrottam, "Environment and Conflict: Linkage in Indo-Bangladesh Relations" in S.R. Chakravorty, (ed.), *Foreign Policy of Bangladesh*, (Har-Anand Publications ,1994).p.183.

³⁵ Ibid.

failure, when the small marginal plots were inadequate to feed them, they were forced to mortgage their lands to get the money to buy food. They thus fell into debt to the Bengalis, who then foreclosed and took away their land. A series of clashes, violence and conflicts between these groups over resources took place.³⁶

Environmental destruction causes less agricultural production, less industrial production (mainly based on agricultural raw material) and economic decline. It lowers individual income. Developing countries are less capable to face the problems created by environmental destruction, because they are technologically less developed. Low economic productivity in one area induces people to move to another. Population displacement from one area to another creates different types of problems in the host society which leads to social conflict.

Group identity conflict

Group identity conflict are explained and predicted by group-identity theories.³⁷ Group identity conflicts are likely to arise from the large-scale movements of populations brought about by environmental degradation. When different ethnic and cultural groups are propelled together under circumstances of deprivation and stress, there could be inter group hostility in which a group would emphasize

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Homer-Dixon ,op.cit. p. 108.

its own identity while denegrating, discriminating and attacking outsiders. The situation in the Bangladesh – Assam region may be a good example of this process; Assam's ethnic strike over the last decade has apparently been provoked by migration from Bangladesh.

State vs migrants

Agricultural economies are more vulnerable to economic decline. When the ecosystem of a region which supports the rural economy, fails it might force villagers to migrate to a nearby urban area. The environmentally affected people may organize themselves against the ruling regime whom they perceive as the cause of their misery. The declining productivity of agricultural land and increasing deforestation forced a large number of Indian peasants of Guatemala's northern forest area to migrate in the 1970s to the urban centers of the country. Their increased number in the cities helped them to organize themselves and their growing strength was reflected in a series of successful urban strikes in 1976-77 which brought the return of trade unionism in Guatemala.³⁸ With the support from the migrants, a newly formed peasant organization, Committee for Campesino Unity (CUC) transformed the protest of the migrants against the state. The guerrilla organisation (EGP) expanded their operation to the cities with the help of the migrant community and the

³⁸ Fried , Jonathan L., and others , *Guatemala in Rebellion: Unfinished Story*, (New York: Grove Press, 1983).

worried state authorities managed to suppress these anti-government activities with a violent army crack down from 1981 to 1983..

State vs. State conflict

The decreased production in the agricultural and industrial sector in the environmentally affected region might force local small and marginal farmers and labourers to flee their homeland in large numbers in search of other areas for survival. Where the environmental degradation is more severe and widespread and the prospects of survival in the near by urban areas are quite bleak, this situation might force large scale migration from the degraded areas to better placed regions. These migrations can transfer inter-state boundaries, culminating in massive trans-border migration. The large scale trans-border environmental migration has several conflict inducing dimensions between the receiver and the sender state. The environmental destruction in Bangladesh due to the Farakka withdrawal caused the deprived economy of Bangladesh. The decreased agricultural production could not feed the Bangladesh population. So the poor landless rural people of Bangladesh not only migrated to urban areas in Bangladesh, but also to the neighbouring Indian states of Assam and West Bengal. The influx of Muslim Bengalis into these Indian states and the Indian attempts to stem the tide, which have included erecting a fence along parts of the border

and forced repatriation of refugees at any point on the border, have caused friction with Bangladesh.

Relative deprivation conflict

According to Homer-Dixon “as developing countries produce less wealth because of environmental problems, their citizens will probably become increasingly discontented by the widening gap between their actual level of economic achievement and the level they feel, they deserve”.³⁹ A principal social effects of environmental change in developing countries is likely to be the disruption of institutions and of regular and legitimized social relations. Thus environmental problems may not only increase the frustration and anger within developing societies (by increasing relative deprivation) but by disrupting institutions and social relations, they may also open up structural opportunities for challenger groups to act on their grievances and overthrow existing authority. Relative deprivation conflicts are dependent on the domestic structure of the society. Severe civil strife is likely when: (I) There are clearly defined and organized groups in society, (ii) some of these groups regard their level of economic achievement, and in turn the broader political and economic system, as wholly unfair; and (iii) These same groups believe

³⁹ Ibid, p.109.

that all peaceful opportunities for overthrowing authority in society⁴⁰ Homer-Dixon hypothesizes that decreased economic productivity and disrupted institutions will jointly contribute to relative deprivation conflicts.⁴¹ The arrival of refugees in an area, even if the event does not reduce total economic productivity will probably result in a dilution of existing resources and aggravate a sense of deprivation in the indigenous population. This stress may also manifest itself as inter-ethnic tension.

The theoretical perspective on civil strife can be applied to the Filipino situation. The insurgency is motivated by the relative deprivation of the landless agricultural labourers and poor farmers displaced to the uplands where they try to eke out a living from the failing land; it exploits the structural opportunities provided by the crumbling of the control government's authority in the country's hinterland; and it is facilitated by the creative leadership of the cadres of the New People's Army (NPA) and the National Democratic Front (NDF). These revolutionary groups shape the peasants' understanding of their situations focus their discontent and assist them in extracting concessions from land lords. Gary Haves point out that the rationality of Filipino peasants must be understood within their own world of meaning, which includes a strong commitment to family and

⁴⁰ Lichbach, Mark, "An Evaluation of 'does Economic Inequality Breed Political Conflict Studies'", *World Politics*, Vol. 41, no. 4, July 1989, pp. 431-470.

⁴¹ Homer-Dixon, op.cit. p. 110.

community. The NDF has sought to build on this world of meaning to create “a national community linked not by kinship, but by something analogous, a commitment to a vision of a better future for all those who are exploited”.⁴²

We have discussed above the causal relation between environmental degradation and conflict. There may be different types of conflict dynamics, but the three major types are resource scarcity conflict, population displacement and conflict and relative deprivation conflict.

In the following chapter we will see how environmental destruction and high population density of south western part of Bangladesh has exerted population pressure on land, which led to population displacement from this region to India.

⁴² Ibid.

CHAPTER III
ENVIRONMENTAL DESTRUCTION, LAND PRESSURE AND
POPULATION DISPLACEMENT IN BANGLADESH

CHAPTER III

ENVIRONMENTAL DESTRUCTION, LAND PRESSURE AND POPULATION DISPLACEMENT IN BANGLADESH

In the previous chapter, we have discussed how environmental destruction causes acute conflict. In this chapter we will assess the adverse environmental consequences of the Farakka diversion over the Ganges dependent region of Bangladesh and the resultant population pressure and migration into India.

While assessing the adverse environmental effects of the Farakka withdrawal this, study relies on the existing research work available on this subject. Most of the studies have been conducted or funded by the Bangladesh Government. However, some of them have also been done by UN agencies and independent researchers.

In September 1976, the Government of Bangladesh brought out a report, entitled *White Paper on Ganges Water Dispute*, to highlight the adverse effects of the Farakka barrage.¹ At the same time, the Government of India also published *The Farakka Barrage* in an attempt to deny or minimise the extent of the damage.² However, these two publications were mainly propaganda papers of their

¹ *White Paper on the Ganges Water Disputes*, Government of People's Republic of Bangladesh, September, 1976.

² *The Farakka Barrage*, External Publishing Division, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, undated.

respective governments. In 1977, to assess the damages of Farakka on its territory the Bangladesh Government in a serious and systematic effort conducted a joint study with International Engineering Company Ltd. of USA. This World Bank Funded study, known as Special Studies, came out in September 1977 and gave a detailed account of agricultural industrial and ecological losses in Bangladesh as a result of India's water diversion.³ But in 1995 Ben Crow has challenged the extent of some of the assessments of Special Studies on technical grounds.⁴ The adverse effects of Farakka have multiplied in the last two decades due to massive population growth in the Ganges dependent basin and the resultant increased demand for water for agricultural and industrial production.

Today, nearly one third of the total area and about 35 million people of Bangladesh are directly dependent on the Ganges basin for their livelihood. The water diversion at Farakka was bound to have an impact as it introduced a new ecological system against the usual course of nature. Building a barrage is clearly an intervention into the natural process to which people have traditionally adopted themselves. The massive withdrawal of Ganges river water at Farakka has reportedly brought a lot of misery and hardship to the people of

³ *Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB), International Engineering Co. Ltd. (IECO San Francisco & Dhaka) and Special Studies Directorate of the DWDB, Special Studies, People's Republic of Bangladesh, September, 1977.*

⁴ See the chapter 5 of Crow, Ben and others, *Sharing the Ganges: The Politics and Technology of River Development*, (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1995).

the affected southwestern part of Bangladesh. The water diversion has disrupted fishing and navigation, brought unwanted salt deposits into rich farming soil, affected agricultural and industrial production, changed the hydraulic character of the rivers and caused changes in the ecology of the delta.

Agriculture

The strongest repercussion of the reduced water availability in the dry seasons has been on the agricultural sector. It was reduced Bangladesh's capacity to irrigate its own land, particularly in the south west region (the whole pre-1993 Khulna Division and the southern part of Rajshahi Division) and at the same time has worked against the planning of non-irrigated crops, which depend upon the residual moisture of the soils. The Farakka withdrawal has also delayed the planting of crops, shortened the growing period and affected the planting and productivity of subsequent crops.

The uncertainty of water availability of the Ganges has been a serious concern for a large number of farmers in the southwestern region, which also includes the Ganges Kabadak (GK) project area, as farmers cannot plan their irrigation programme in the dry season. After India withdrew water from the Farakka barrage, the irrigation water that was being provided by the G K project has been adversely affected since the 1960s.

As a result of the sharp and steady decline in the water level, all the irrigation facilities that were being provided from this project had to be suspended during 1993 dry-season.⁵ This condition continued the following year also.⁶

The lack of any assured supply from India has also hindered the prospect of other irrigation schemes, like the proposed Ganges barrage in Bangladesh. Degraded quality of ground water due to increased concentration of total dissolved solids affects agricultural, industrial domestic and municipal water supply and the soil itself over a large area. A survey conducted on the status of ground water level in 1992 in 3300 unions of Bangladesh shows that the water table dropped down below 9 meters from the pre-diversion levels: by 100 percent in Rajshahi, 80 percent in Pabna and 64 percent in Faridpur.⁷ There has been a stronger increase recently in using shallow tube-well (STW) in Khulna Division than in the other regions of the country. That explains the regions growing dependence on the groundwater due to the reduced availability of the surface water. Due to lack of water in the river, the ground water is again depleting in the region, which is affecting the prowess of tube wells. A major

⁵ *The Bangladesh Observer* (Dhaka), 30 March 1993.

⁶ *Ibid*, 4 July 1994.

⁷ *Impact on Bangladesh due to withdrawal of Farakka of dry season Ganges flows*, a report received from Farooq Shobhan, Foreign Secretary of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 30 October 1995. cited in Gaan Narrotam, *Environmental Degradation and conflict : The Case of Bangladesh - India*, (New Delhi : South Asian Press, 1988), p.29.

percentage of the tube wells have become ineffective due to the decline in the groundwater level.⁸ The higher cost factor and the limited availability of deep underground fresh water in south western Bangladesh do not make deep tube wells (DTWs) suitable alternatives. Even in upper parts of the south western region, the deep tubewells are getting ineffective due to serious depletion of the groundwater level.⁹

Salinity

Due to the reduced flow of the Ganges in the dry season, salt-water intrusion from the Bay of Bengal has become a pressing problem in the southwestern region of Bangladesh. Several studies and reports have pointed out that since mid 1970's salinity intrusion, concentration and duration in the south-west region of Bangladesh depends mostly upon the quantity and duration of the upland flow received on the area from the Ganges through the Gorai-Madhumati system.¹⁰ Due to the decreasing trend of dry season flow in the Ganges, the Gorai-Madhumati, a distributory, is getting a very low discharge limit is penetrating inland. Salt-water normally use to entrench 300 kilometers inland before the withdrawal at Farakka but afterwards the saltwater has started entrenching 460 kilometers

⁸ *The Daily Star* (Dhaka), 11 December 1993.

⁹ *The Bangladesh Observer* (Dhaka), 21 March 1993.

¹⁰ Nishat, Ainun and Shahjahan Kabir Chowdhury, "Water Quality: Problems and Needs for Integrated Control in Bangladesh", in Ali, Mohammed and others (ed.), *Water Resource Policy for Asia*, (Rotterdam: A.A. Balkema, 1987), pp. 349-362.

inland.¹¹ The increasing level of salt-water entrenchment has also increased the salinity level in all time high of 17,000 micro mhos in April 1983 at Khulna.¹² The high level of water salinity has severely affected the quality of water supply, which has badly affected the health conditions of the population. Due to the reduced water flow and salinisation, the mangrove forests in the coastal areas face the problem of regeneration along with the possible extinction of wildlife, aquatic habitats and various species of plants and trees.

Industries

Water is essential not only for human survival but also for other activities like urban and industrial development, energy production, plant and fish production, navigation and recreation. Because of the unprecedented rise in the salinity of the river water, the industry of southwestern region of Bangladesh, which use fresh water from the rivers for production purposes, are under serious threat. The country's only news print mill at Khulna and the largest thermal power plant of western Bangladesh have already been affected by the salinity hazard. The paper mill at Pakshi was forced to

¹¹ Rahman M.G., "Reducing the Flow of the Ganges: The Consequences for Agriculture in Bangladesh" in E. Goldsmith and N. Hildyard (ed.), *The Social and Environmental Effects of Large Dams*, (Edinburgh: Camelford Wedebridge, 1984), p. 270.

¹² Nishat, Ainun and Chowdhury Shahjahan Kabir, *Water Quality: Problems and Need for Integrated Control in Bangladesh*, paper presented at a Regional Seminar on Water Resources Policy in Agro-Social Economic Development, 4-8 August 1985, Dhaka.

close down due to increasing salinity of the river water.¹³ The losses increased by the industrial sector are ultimately increasing every year threatening their existence in the area.

Forest

Constant increase in the salinity level has severely hit the agricultural productivity as well as the quality of domestic water supply.¹⁴ The increase in salinity and the encroachment of saline water has affected soil and plant nutrients, resulted in large scale dying of Sundari (*Heritiera fomes*) trees. The Sunderbans, in the southwestern region of Bangladesh, is the largest natural mangrove forest in the world in one patch and covers a total area of 571,508 hectares.¹⁵ The increasing river water salinity has greatly affected the greenery of the Sunderbans and about half of the Sundri and Geva trees have been destroyed.¹⁶ Along with the forests, the increasing level of salinity has also affected the health conditions of the Royal Bengal Tigers.¹⁷ The Forest Department of Bangladesh estimates, "Sundarbans is losing the timbers worth of about USD 20 millions every year and there is a possibility that if the existing situation

¹³ *Dhaka Courier* (Dhaka), 9 April 1993, p. 15.

¹⁴ Shahajahan, M, "Dividing the Ganges", *The Bangladesh Observer*, (Dhaka), 20 December 1993.

¹⁵ *Coastal Environmental Management Plan for Bangladesh*, vol. 1 (Bangkok: United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific), ST/ESCAP/618.

¹⁶ *Dhaka Courier* (Dhaka), 9 April 1993, p. 15.

¹⁷ *The Daily Star* (Dhaka), 9 January, 1995.

continues then Sunderbans will be transformed into a desert."¹⁸ This mangrove forest being the major supplier of the country's timber, the timber production of Bangladesh as a whole has been badly affected.

Fisheries

Bangladesh's gangetic water system supports a large variety of aquatic life, which includes a large variety of fishes and prawns.¹⁹ But the reduced flow of the Ganges is unable to wash out decomposing weeds, insecticides and industrial debries that are emptied into the river. Due to stagnation of water in the dry-seasons, aquatic organisms have been impeded and the increased water temperatures have resulted in shortage of oxygen, creating unfavourable conditions for the riverine fishery. In the very first year of the operation of Farakka barrage, at three landing points of Bangladesh, Khulna, Goalmunda and Chandpur, the percentage of reduction in the landing of the fish during February to June 1976 compared to the corresponding period of previous years was 75 percent, 34 percent and 46 percent respectively.²⁰ As fish are the staple food of poor Bangladeshis, the deterioration of the situation in almost successive has posed a serious nutritional problem in the country. Whatever amount of animal proteins Bangladeshis consume, about 80 percent

¹⁸ Salinity Survey in the Sunderban, *The Forest Department of Government of People's Republic of Bangladesh*, (Dhaka, 1992).

¹⁹ Rahman, M.G., op. cit., p. 273.

²⁰ *White Paper on the Ganges Water Dispute*, Government of People's Republic of Bangladesh, September, 1976.

of it comes from fish and fish products. Per capita fish consumption rate in Bangladesh appears to have decreased from 11.7 kilogram in the year 1972 to 7.5 kilograms in 1988.²¹ According to the census of 1989-90, a total of 3.6 percent of national production and more than 13.09 percent export income comes from fish resources in Bangladesh. The fisheries sector also holds the second position in respect of national export income.²² Most importantly, a large population of Bangladeshis directly or indirectly earns their livelihood from fisheries, so this loss of fish production has adversely affected the occupation of a large part of the population in Bangladesh.

Navigation

In Bangladesh inland water navigation mostly depends upon the Ganges flow. But the reduced flow of the Ganges in the dry season has seriously affected the waterways. The Ganges and its distributaries, which were navigable to large steamers in the pre-diversion period, are now only negotiable by small boats during the dry months. As the Prime Minister of Bangladesh describes it, "it is unfortunate but true that the water ways have threatened due to blocking of the normal flow across the border"²³ A report of the Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA), pointed out in

²¹ Mowhood-ur-Rasheed, "Bangladesh Fisheries", *Bangladesh Quarterly*, vol. 14, no. 1, September 1993, pp. 30-34.

²² *The Bangladesh Observer* (Dhaka), 15 May, 1994.

²³ *The Daily Star*, (Dhaka), 21 December, 1994.

the mid 1970's that, the inland water transportation in Bangladesh reduced by 11 million because of the negative effect of slashed flow²⁴ According to these surveys, the total water ways for mechanically propelled vessels like motorized launches, steamers, wasters etc; have shrunk to 5,896 kilometers in 1990-91 from the 25,000 kilometers, before the Farakka project. This dissipation in navigation has led to the loss of jobs of thousands who were earning their livelihood from this profession.

High floods

The decreased dry-season flow has caused excessive riverbed siltation in Bangladesh, with consequent reduction in the conveyance capacities of the river channels. It has resulted in frequent changes of the river regime and devastating floods during the Monsoons. India diverts a major share of water in the dry season and never hesitates to discharge excess Monsoon water at Farakka.

While in the dry season, the Farakka barrage barely leaves 10,000 cusecs of water for Bangladesh in the Monsoon. Its built-in capacity for flood discharge is up to 2.7 million cusec²⁵ The sudden discharge of Monsoon water into the heavily silted river system substantially contributes to the rising number of high floods in Bangladesh. According to the Dacca University Research Centre, the occurrence of

²⁴ Rahman, M.G., *op. cit.*, p. 273.

²⁵ Y.K. Murthi, *Souveir: Farakka Barrage Project*, (Calcutta, 1975).

high floods was three times in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s but increased to four times in the 1980s.²⁶ In August and September 1988, the devastating flood brought threefourths of Bangladesh under water. Bangladesh openly criticised India for the disaster, describing it as a "man made curse".²⁷

River bank erosion

River bank erosion is the most important cause of land loss and degradation, which have increased due to decreased river depth. Every year a large area along the riverbanks erodes during the Monsoons creating environmental imbalance in terms of physical and social aspects. When water but not sediment is diverted at an upstream point, downstream goes through severe morphological imbalances. It leads to the siltation of riverbed and then shifting of the channel. When rivers carry additional loads of silt or water in the Monsoon season inspite of their own limited capacity, they start erosion of banks. Generally, shifting is a natural process in an alluvial river. However, man-made changes such as an up stream withdrawal can have aggravating affects on bankline movement in the downstream areas. This phenomenon has been observed in the Ganges.

²⁶ *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 2 February, 1989.

²⁷ *Keesing's Contemporary Archives*, November 1988, 36288.

In Bangladesh the shifting of rivers is a dominant problem and the major trade of its destruction is very high. This phenomenon is one of the main causes of making people landless in Bangladesh. An environmental impact study by Mahfuzullah, Nayan Bhowmick and Fajlul Bari , have shown that the river bank erosion has severely effected a major percentage of the slum dwellers in the cities of Bangladesh.²⁸ The river bank erosion has also adversely effected the greater Patuakhali district of the pre-1993 Khulna Division and two small townships namely Kakchira and Dholia are merely on the verge of extinction.²⁹ In another neighbouring district, Barguna, riverbank erosion has mainly been responsible for making 50 per cent of the farmers landless in the area.³⁰ It is due to the riverbank erosion that a large number of rural people became homeless and has been forced to migrate and also this has adversely affected the agriculture of the region.³¹

The Farakka-led environmental destruction in the south-west region of Bangladesh has resulted in loss of agriculture, closure of industries and navigation facilities, drop in fish catchers dying of valuable forest resources, disappearance of land due to river bank

²⁸ *The Bangladesh Observer* (Dhaka), 4 August, 1992.

²⁹ *The Morning Sun* (Dhaka), 24 November, 1993.

³⁰ Maudood, Elahi K. & John R. Rogge, *Riverbank Erosion, Flood and Population Displacement in Bangladesh: A Report on the Riverbank Erosion Impact Study*, (Dhaka: Jahangir Nagar University, October, 1990).

³¹ Hossein, Mahabab, *Briefing Paper: Bangladesh*, (London: Overseas Development Institute 1990), p. 1.

erosion and devastating floods. A large number of agricultural labourers and the small landowners have been seriously affected due to losses in the agricultural sector, resulting in the loss of their source of livelihood. Fishermen have also been affected to the same extent. Most of the fishing villages in the Khustia district of Khulna Division have virtually disappeared in recent years. Besides the agricultural and fishing sectors, the drop in the production of forest products and the closure of industries and navigation routes have also led to the direct loss of livelihood of the dependent people. Moreover, the increasing number of high floods and riverbank erosion, for whose occurrence the Farakka withdrawal is significantly responsible, has resulted in displacing a large populace in Khulna from their homeland.

Population pressure on land in Bangladesh

Environmental degradation, along with other social factors like overpopulation may cause environmental migration within the state or across state borders.

Though having a fertile basin the Ganges is not able to feed its vast population. "The economic viability of Bangladesh has long been in question because of its over population, poor natural resource base, vulnerability to natural disasters and undiversified economy dependent on the production of two crops, rice and jute",

says Dr. Mahabab Hossein, one of Bangladesh's most prominent development economists who heads the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies in Dhaka.³²

In numerous respects, "Bangladesh represents the Malthusian nightmare, to many mouths to feed and too little food, or too many people on too little land".³³ The population of 115 million continues to grow at an estimated pace of between 2.2 and 3 per cent per year. It has doubled in the past thirty years. The country's population density of 785 per square kilometer is the world's highest.³⁴ It is projected by the United Nations that Bangladesh's current population of 120 million will nearly double to 235 million by the year 2025³⁵ This increase in population is certainly going to put tremendous impact on the agricultural land in the country by the year 2025³⁶ With each passing generation land becomes scarcer by being subdivided into fragments. Land, which is the most fertile and the main source of sustenance, is no longer able to support the growing population. The growth of population has led to a situation where the average farm holding is less than one hectare (or less than 2 acre).

³² Ibid.

³³ Hazarika, Sanjoy, "Bangladesh and Assam: Land Pressures, Migration and Ethnic Conflict", *Occasional Paper Series of the Project on Environmental Change and Acute Conflict*, no. 3, March, 1993, p. 46.

³⁴ Hossein, Mahabab, op.cit., p.1.

³⁵ Sadik, Nafis, *The State of World Population*, (New York: United Nation Population Fund, 1991), p. 43.

³⁶ Homer Dixon, Thomas F., "Environmental Scarcities and Violent Conflict: Evidence from Cases", *International Security*, vol. 19, no. 1, Summer 1994, p. 21.

The high population pressure on land has caused population displacement in Bangladesh. Sanjoy Hazarika³⁷ has interviewed Mugha-ul-Khand a former village headman who gives a clear example of migration of population due to growing scarcity of cropland and the lack of new frontiers. A bearded old patriarch, ul-Khand lies in the village of Modhupur 90 miles north of Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh. Hazarika visited Modhupur in 1991 and saw parched fields surrounded Ul-Khand's small enclave. The normal times, these fields would have been abuzz with the hum of diesel pumps pouring water across the wheat fields. But now they were quiet because of a diesel shortage caused by the Gulf war. His family land usually grows barely enough what, rice and vegetables to satisfy household needs. A small surplus of cereal is sold in the village market or to traders from the city when he visited during harvest time.

Ul-Khand said his family had lived on this land for at least three to four generations. He asked: "What will be have left one or two generations for now? Perhaps nothing. For us, it is a question of survival. We will go anywhere because every year our land holding is shrinking, our families are growing. My father had twenty-four bighas of land; now my four sons have two bighas each (one bigha equals approximately 0.35 acre of 0.15 hectares). What can you grow on two

³⁷ Hazarika, Sanjoy, op.cit., p. 46.

bighas? In the future, we may have nothing. Yes, we will be prepared to go anywhere. To Assam, if necessary, if we can get land and live with dignity. But will the Assamese have us? There are man made frontiers and prejudices. The younger Ul-Khand said "we live by our wits in the country, for the land despite of its richness, cannot feed us any longer". Debts grow; families grow, but incomes from land holding and the buying power of the Bangladesh taka shrink. Thus population pressure in conjunction with other social factors contributes to population displacement.

Displacement of Population

One of the consequences of the scarcity of resources, whether human or nature-induced, is the migration of people from one region to another within a state, or from one state to neighbouring states. Environmental refugees, have a destabilizing effect on both domestic order and international stability.³⁸ Among a complex web of factors responsible for migration, environmental degradation may act as a precipitating event that 'disrupts the normal functioning of the system and thus destroys the capacity of a population to survive under the prevailing conditions.'³⁹ Environmental degradation in the natural process by human activities may collapse the very social

³⁸ Myers, Norman, "Environment and Security", *Foreign Policy*, no. 81, 1991.

³⁹ Richmond, Antony H., "Reactive Migration: Sociological Perspective on Refugee Movements", *Journal of Refugee Studies*, vol. 6 no. 1, 1993, p. 16.

system, which provides people with an ongoing sense of ontological security.

In Bangladesh, due to water withdrawal by India, millions of people have lost their seasonal work. Most of these millions cannot find sufficient surface and ground water to sustain their livelihood during the dry season. Apart from the farmers, the fishermen have suffered a lot due to reduce catches boatmen have lost their livelihood as navigability of the river system has been seriously affected. This had resulted in increased unemployment and poverty among the poor people.⁴⁰ The poorest eventually leave for urban centers, or hill slopes, or neighbouring Indian states.

The *Far Eastern Economic Review* for the first time reported in 1983, that the southwestern part of Bangladesh as a major source of illegal migrants entering through the West Bengal border.⁴¹ This migration was confirmed in academic research works,⁴² further, corroborated through extensive field studied done by Ashok Swain⁴³ in various parts of India and Bangladesh from 1993 to 1995. Out of 52 Bangladeshi migrants whom Swain was able to locate and interview in India in 1992 and 1994, 43 traced their origin to that

⁴⁰ *Impact of Bangladesh due to Withdrawal at Farakka of dry season Ganges flow*, op.cit.

⁴¹ *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 15 December, 1983.

⁴² Swain, Ashok, "Conflicts over water: The Ganges Water Disputes", *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 24, no. 4, December 1993, pp. 429-439.

⁴³ Swain, Ashok, *The Environmental Trap: the Ganges River Diversion, Bangladeshi Migration and Conflict in India*, Report no. 41, Department of Peace Conflict Research Uppsala University, Sweden.

particular region of Bangladesh. Prafulla K. Mahanta, the former chief Minister of Assam, the Indian state which is in turmoil due to anti-migration movements, admits that the people from the Khulna region of Bangladesh are coming in large numbers to his state after crossing the West Bengal border.⁴⁴

There is a scarcity of sources of illegal migration from Bangladesh to India. Nevertheless, studies of illegal migration in the Ganges basin region include the writing of Sharifa Begum, Marcus Franda and Sanjay Hazarika.

A significant study by Sharifa Begum, of the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies in Dhaka, represents the first semi-official acknowledgement by Dhaka of the size of the migration problem. The study by Sharifa Begum⁴⁵ who pointed out that between 1951-1961, about 3.15-3.5 million people migrated from East Pakistan to India. Between 1961 and 1974, another 1.5 million migrated. But this migration of population was not due to environmental degradation. Begum also pointed out that due to large-scale migration and famine from 1974-1981, Bangladesh lost a

⁴⁴ The Interview with Mr. P.K. Mahanta the then chief minister of Assam and the most well known leader of anti-foreigner movement in India, was taken by Dr. Ashok Swain on 25 December, 1993, quoted in Swain Ashok, cited in Swain, Ashok (1996), op. cit.81.

⁴⁵ Begum, Sharifa, *Birth Rate and Death Rate in Bangladesh, 1951-74*, (Dhaka: Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, 1997).

substantial proportion of its population.⁴⁶ Marcus Franda, the South Asian Scholar now with University of Maryland suggests that the rate of out-migration from Bangladesh actually increased in the 1970s. Franda noted in 1981 that Indian government sources believed that the number of immigrants into Assam was more than 600000; in to Meghalaya more than 300000; into Tripura more than 200000. By early 1979, he found that more than half the total population of 3000000 of the Nadia district in West Bengal was refugees from Bangladesh.⁴⁷

But Ashok Swain of Uppsala University Department of Peace and Conflict Research have given an analytical framework on the illegal migration from Bangladesh to Indian states.⁴⁸ Though Bangladeshi government has been reluctant to accept Bangladeshi migration into India, findings from their own census reports proves otherwise.

According to Bangladesh census reports, comparison with other divisions of Bangladesh in Khulna Division population growth rate is low. But low growth rate in Khulna Division did not happen due to development in literacy rate and family planning facility. Following table will give a clear picture.

⁴⁶ Begum, Sharifa, *Population, Birth, Death and Growth Rates in Bangladesh: Census Estimates*, (Dhaka: Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, 1990), p.56.

⁴⁷ Franda, Marcus, *The First Decade*, (New Delhi, South asian Publishers, 1981) p. 235.

⁴⁸ Swain, Ashok, op.cit.

Table A: The number of population in Each Division of Bangladesh

Division (Pre 1993)	1961	1974	1981	1991
Chittagong	14620000	20082000	23584000	28811446
Dhaka	16399000	23040000	27479000	33593103
Khulna	10699000	15305000	17894000	20804515
Rajshahi	12713000	18604000	22047000	2667913

Table B: Yearly population increase in Each Division of Bangladesh

Division pre-1993	1961-74	1974-81	1981-91
Chittagong	2.87%	2.48%	2.22%
Dhaka	3.11%	2.75%	2.22%
Khulna*	4.10%	2.41%	1.62%
Rajshahi	3.56%	2.64%	2.09%
Bangladesh	3.21%	2.57%	2.03%

* From January 1993, Khulna Division has been divided into two administrative divisions. One is Khulna and the other is Barisal Division.

Source: Statistical Yearbook of Bangladesh 1992 (Dhaka: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (1993).

According to tables A and B, the growth of population in Khulna Division has dropped drastically in the last two decades. From 1981 to 1991, the population growth in Khulna division has been only 1.62% while in the rest country; it is well above the 2% mark. Historically, the population growth in Khulna Division has always been higher than the national average.

The literary rate of Bangladesh in 1991 was 24.82 per cent, while in Khulna it was only 20.47 per cent. Bangladesh government has been projecting that it has adopted effective population control measures to reduce the population growth in the country. But the available data do not support this view. In the 1980s while 653 family planning facilities were available in Khulna Division (average one for 31602 persons) and, 962 in Rajshahi Divisions (average one for 27721 persons).⁴⁹ So the literacy rate data and family planning facilities in Khulna Division would suggest that these two factors have by themselves not reduced the rate of population growth in the division.

The number of passports issued by the Bangladesh government in Khulna Division is also comparatively less than some other division. That shows that the lower growth of population in the division is not due to legal migration to other countries. For example, in 1991, the Bangladesh Department of Passport and Immigration

⁴⁹ *Directorate of Population Control and Family Planning; The Government of Bangladesh, Dhaka.*

issued 265823 passports in Chittagong Division, 380431 passports in Dhaka Division, 19829 passports in Rajshahi Division and 53484 passports in Khulna Division for both international and India travel purposes.⁵⁰ The statistics over the rates of fertility and life expectancy in the four divisions suggest there is no relative drop in the population growth in the Khulna Division. According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics⁵¹ pattern the crude birth rate (CBR) in 1982 per thousand population in Chittagong was 38.08, in Dhaka 34.56, in Khulna 33.72 and in Rajshahi 33.89. Though data show that Khulna Division is slightly behind others in CBR rate, but at the same time it also has lower mortality rate. According to Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics⁵² the crude death rate (CDR) in 1987 per thousand population in Chittagong was 11.9 in Dhaka 11.0, in Khulna 10.0 and in Rajshahi 11.9.

The life expectancy of Khulna Division is also relatively high than other divisions. In 1988, in Khulna life expectancy was 59.6 while it was 55.15 in Chittagong 56.3 in Dhaka and 54.7 in Rajshahi.⁵³ Available evidence points out that the population growth of Khulna division has not dropped since 1974 in comparison to other

⁵⁰ *Department of Passport and Immigration, The Government of Bangladesh, Dhaka*

⁵¹ Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, *Patterns, Levels and Trends in Fertility in Bangladesh: Evidence from Demographic Sample Survey, 1982.*

⁵² Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, *Patterns, Levels and Trends in Mortality and Regional Life Tables for Bangladesh: Evidence from Sample Vital Registration System, 1981-1988.*

⁵³ Ibid.

divisions. Going by this account it is sufficient to presume that a major chunk of the Bangladeshi population has just disappear from their own government census. Occasionally it is also debated that frequent disasters like cyclonic storms and tidal surges might be responsible for Khulna region's recently decreased population growth. This argument does not hold much ground, since these types of natural disasters and are not at all a new phenomenon to this region of Bangladesh. The people of this area have been surviving for centuries by adapting these natural diasters. Khulna region is not the only region in Bangladesh to face these natural diasters. The southeastern part of Bangladesh, the Chittagong region, is equally affected by natural calamities.

There is a causal relationship between the Farakka barrage and the decline in population growth of Khulna Division. The Farakka barrage causes environmental stress in the region, which in effect exerts pressure on the local population, which in turn led to population migration from south western part of Bangladesh to India, thereby causing a decline in population growth of the region. It has also been realized that census reports of the other districts of Indian states do not give a consistent account of population growth in comparison with other parts of India. Quoting the 1981 Indian census report, Partha S. Ghose reveals that, "in the eight border districts of Indian states in West Bengal, the population has grown over 30 per

cent between 1971 and 1981, where as in the rest of districts the reported growth rate was below 20 per cent".⁵⁴

Although migration into India was taking place even prior to the formation of Bangladesh, nearly all the migrants were Hindus who were forced to leave their homes due to perceived religious persecution in Islamic East Pakistan. But from the late 1970s illegal migration took on a serious nature. The number of illegal migrants sent back to Bangladesh by the Indian border police in 1977 was 1140. In 1978, the figure almost doubled to 2180 and the number increased again to 4170 in 1979.⁵⁵ The Chief Minister of the Indian State of West Bengal in the State Assembly that in the first six months of 1991, two of the 39055 Bangladeshis intercepted at the point of cross in the border as many as 28000 were Muslims.⁵⁶ Ashok Swain has interviewed 52 Bangladeshi migrants in different parts of India. According to him, out of the 43 migrants originally from Khulna region, 41 left their homeland due to environmental problems, 13 due to loss of agriculture, 10 due to reduced fish catch, 11 because of riverbank erosion and 7 because of flood related damages. Out of 4140 had migrated after Farakka Barrage being commissioned and 37

⁵⁴ Ghosh, Partha S., "India's Relations with its Neighbours: The Ethnic Factor" in K.M. de Silva and R.J. May, (ed.), *Internationalisation of Ethnic Conflict*, (London: Pinter Publisher, 1991), p.27.

⁵⁵ *The Times of India* (New Delhi), 31 August 1980.

⁵⁶ Shouri, Arun, *A Secular Agenda*, (New Delhi: ASA, 1993), p.273.

are Muslims.⁵⁷ According to these migrants, they were forced to leave their homeland with their families after their traditional source of sustenance had dried up. The lack of availability of any other survival alternatives in nearer localities forced them to cross the border and settle in India.

The problem of Bangladeshi migration reached a critical stage in the adjoining state of Assam, which was comparatively more attractive for the migrants because of its demand for manual labourers.

There has been a spate of data controversy over the exact number of illegal migrants from Bangladesh residing in Assam.⁵⁸ Estimates indicate that Assam's population increased from 14.6 million to 22.9 million during the 1970s. This increase of 65.6 per cent in one decade cannot be attributed to natural population growth alone, especially when the rest of India showed an increase of 24.7 per cent during the same period.⁵⁹

Based on the 1951 growth rate, the state of Assam should have a population of about 15 million. It has more than 7 million extra,

⁵⁷ Swain Ashok, op. cit. p.88

⁵⁸ Begam, Sharifa, op.cit. p.56.

⁵⁹ Kumar, Amiya Das, *Assam's Agony: a Socio-Economic and Political Analysis*, (1982), p.38, cited in Gosselink, Robert G, "Minority Rights and Ethnic Conflict in Assam, India" *Boston College Third World Journal*, vol. XIV, Winter 1994, p.97.

according to the 1991 census.⁶⁰ Provisional data for the 1991 Census puts the overall population of Assam at 22.29 million and the growth rate of 2.23 per cent per year, a sharp drop from the 1971 figure of around 3.4 per cent. After the rise of the anti-alien movement in 1979 in Assam, there has been a steady fall in the migration from Bangladesh to Assam.⁶¹ Consideration of all the above arguments makes it easier to assume that the fall in population growth in Khulna region of Bangladesh and the simultaneous rise in the population of Assam and West Bengal shows the out migration from Bangladesh to Indian states.

The socio-economic climate in Assam has diverted the migration route of Bangladeshi Muslims towards other states. They are now moving to the northern and western part of India as distant as Mumbai, Delhi and Rajasthan.⁶² Large numbers of Muslim Bangladeshis are living in different slum clusters in Delhi, namely, Simapuri, Jahangirpuri, Minto Road, and Sanjay Amar Colony. Two reporters of a Bangladeshi weekly magazine have reported that in 1991 thousands of their companions were in slum clusters of Delhi, like Sanjay Amar Colony. This report pointed out that the main reason behind the migration from the districts of Khulna, Barisal and

⁶⁰ *Census of India*, 1991.

⁶¹ Hazarika, Sanjoy, op.cit. p.54

⁶² *Indian Express* (New Delhi), 20 September 1992.

Bagerhat has been large-scale land erosion, floods and poverty.⁶³ In the next chapter we will see the various types of conflict in different parts of India caused by environmental migrants from the south western part of Bangladesh.

⁶³ *Dhaka Courier*, 6-12, September 1991.

CHAPTER IV
BANGLADESHI MIGRATION AND CONFLICTS IN INDIA

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In the previous chapter we have seen how India's Ganges River water diversion at Farakka has caused various environmental stresses and strains in the south-western part of Bangladesh. The environmental destruction has led to the displacement of a large number of people from that area and their eventual migration to India. Wherever the migrants settle, they add to local demand for food, and other necessities. They also flood the labour market. This puts new burdens on the receiving society. It is not easy for any society to assimilate migrants when large scale migration takes place to a developing country and multi-ethnic society like India, the situation has all the potential to get conflict prone. The resulting scarcity of resources and jobs could easily generate strong feeling of nativism among the original inhabitants of the area. Myron Weiner defined nativism as a claim by a group of people that by virtue of this indigenous character rooted in historical claims, it has rights upon land, employment, political power and cultural hegemony that are greater than those people who are indigenous.¹

To protect their interests, the indigenous people in a migrant receiving society might organise themselves as a group on the

¹ Weiner, Myron, "Peoples and States in a New Ethnic Orders?" *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 13, no.1, 1992, p.319.

notion that they as people exist in one country, while the newcomers have other homes to which they can return. The newcomers are viewed as competitors for scarce resources such as land and employment and they might emotionally and cognitively be excluded.

Mass migration may enter into the power equation among the elites in the receiving society. To safeguard their own interest elites can actively build up a strong group identity within their own community and provoke them to take action, which in turn could result into group identity conflict.

In this chapter we shall see the various types of conflict in different parts of India caused by environmental migrants from the south western part of Bangladesh. Violent conflict on this issue can be seen in Assam, West Bengal, Delhi and Mumbai.

Assam

The state of Assam, which was the initial target of arriving Muslim migrants from Bangladesh, became the first place to witness migrant induced conflict. This persistent influx of environmental migrants has increased the population upto 13 million and some analysts claim that the Bangladeshi government is pursuing the principle of "Lebensraum in north east India".² The Assamese people however reluctantly accepted these migrants as long as the later were

² Ganguli, Amulya, "Bangladesh Lebensraum", *Times of India*, 13 July 1992.

willing to be more labourers. Social tensions and violent conflict soon began to erupt when the migrant made serious inroads into their local economy and began to exert demand pressures on existing resource base. Apart from these economic factors, the Assamese fear of being reduced to a minority within their own homeland due to the extinction of their culture and identity, accentuated the problem.

These legitimate Assamese fears and discontentment and lowered standard of living was accompanied by the failure of both central and state governments to stem the flow of Bangladeshi migrants, who instead were actively counted by them for their votes³ This led to the first popular movement by All Assam Students Union (AASU) against the illegal immigration. AASU's demands were mainly the detention of foreign nationals on the basis of the 1951 National Register of Citizens, their disenfranchisement and deportation. Strikes, demonstration, blockade, civil disobedience and boycott of elections paralyzed the region.

In 1980, the Congress party formed a new government in Assam led by an Assamese Muslim, Anawara Taimur. This brought further confrontation among native Assamese Hindu and migrant Muslim Bangladeshi groups. The increasing violence forced the fall of

³ Hazarika, Sanjoy, "India Admits Failure to cut Bangladesh Influx", *New York Times*, 16 December 1992.

the Taimur government and central rule was imposed in Assam in June 1981.

To limit the damage, an ethnic Assamese Hindu, Keshav Gogoi, was appointed as Chief Minister in 1982 but his reign did not survive more than two months. Once again, from March 1982, Assam came under direct central rule. It was reported that by the beginning of 1983, Guwahati and most of the townships in the Brahmaputra valley were turned into virtual armed camp. Due to this crisis the government sought the help of the Paramilitary forces from other parts of India.⁴

From 1981 to 1983, illegal migrants swelled in numbers in Assam from Bangladesh, resulting in a number of communal clash and riots killing hundred and thousands of people. In February 1983, though the atmosphere in Assam was explosive, the ruling Congress Party at the centre opted for the state legislature elections with the intention of winning the contest with the support of migrants. The native organisations called for a boycott and resisted the election.

The situation became worse when a few days before the election more than 8,000 native Hindu Assamese surrounded a village called Nellie and systematically killed the Bangladeshi Muslim migrants. The toll of that systematic annihilatation of the Bangladeshi

⁴ Baruah, Sanjib, "Immigration, Ethnic Conflict, and Political Turmoil - Assam, 1979-1985", *Asian Survey*, vol.26, no.11, November 1986, p.1198.

muslim migrants went upto 1,700.⁵ Rajiv Gandhi, the Prime Minister of India accepted the demands of the Assam movement leaders, while signing an accord with them in August 1985. In this accord it was agreed to disenfranchise and expel the migrants who had arrived in 1970s. Later on, the leaders of Assam movement formed a political party, called Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) to fight the next election⁶ Bangladeshi Muslim migrants in Assam, feeling betrayed by the Congress Party and in order to resist the onslaught of the AGP, formed a political organisation under the banner of United Minorities Front (UMF) to fight the elections in 1985.⁷ Their withdrawal of support from Congress led to the defeat of Congress Party. The AGP captured the power in Assam. But the AGP could not sustain its government for long. In the 1990 elections the Congress came back to power. This time the Congress followed a two-pronged strategy, to defame the AGP on the one hand and to win back the Muslim migrants, on the other. The Congress Chief Minister, Hiteswar Saikia, acknowledged in the Budget session of the State Assembly on 10 April 1992 that the large scale illegal migration from foreign lands to his state had taken place. This charge of tone again brought the

⁵ Hazarika, Sanjoy, "Bangladesh and Assam: Land Pressures, Migration and Ethnic Conflict", *Occasional Paper Series of the Project on Environmental Change and Acute Conflict*, no.3, March 1993, pp.56-60.

⁶ Hazarika, Niru, 'Asom Gana Parishad', *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, vol. 49, no.1, January- March 1988, p.95.

⁷ Anderson, Walterk, "Multiethnic Conflict and Peacemaking: The Case of Assam", in Joseph V. Montville (ed.), *Conflict and Peacemaking in Multi-ethnic Societies*, (New York, Lexington Books, 1991), p.336.

migrants together and in May 1992 they floated a new organisation, Muslim United Forum (MUF), which in its first convention at Guwahati issued political threats to the Chief Minister. The political power of migrants in Assam can be gauged from the fact that the Chief Minister decided to withdraw his statement. In a public meeting in the migrant dominated district of Nagaon on 7 June 1992, Saikia said that "there were no illegal migrants in Assam".⁸ Continuing with the policy of minority appeasement the Congress government of Assam further denounced the Tejpur Army Headquarters Press Release which had expressed its concern over the rise of muslim fundamentalism amongst the migrants.⁹

In the uncertain atmosphere for the Muslim migrants this Moderate Organisation (MUF) was not sufficient to protect them. A purely militant group with recruits from amongst fresh migrants, named the Assam Minority Liberation Army (AMLA) came into operation with its head office at Kharupetia in the early 1992. During the post -Ayodhya communal riots the Muslim migrants under AMLA engineered a mass annihilation of Hindu residents in order to drive them out of their land.¹⁰ It brought national attention to Assam.

Serious violence again occurred in Assam in July 1994, when militants from the native Assamese Bodo tribal group clashed with

⁸ *Economic and Political Weekly* (Bombay), 25 July 1992, p.1593

⁹ *Indian Express* (New Delhi), 16 February 1994.

¹⁰ *The Hindustan Times* (New Delhi), 20 December 1992.

Bangladeshi Muslim migrants in the Barpeta area. This violent clash between the two groups affected a large number of migrants and many of them were compelled to take shelter in relief camps.¹¹ Despite the presence of the Chief Minister in the troubled area, the Bodo militants managed to attack a relief camp in Bansbari massacred about 60 Muslim migrants in the mid-night of 23 July 1994.¹² The Indian Army was then called into restore the situation.

The failure of the AGP, the pro-migrant policies of the Congress and the increasing strength of Muslim migrants provided opportunities for the right wing Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) to organise the Hindu Community on the migration issue. The slogan "Bring BJP, Save Assam" was to be seen almost in every corner of Assam, but the party was mainly focussed in the migrant dominated areas with a view to attract the support of the native Hindu Assamese.¹³ The commencement of this native - migrant conflict in 1979 as a result of the sudden increase of migration in the previous three years clearly supports the hypothesis of causal relationship between the large scale migration from the Farakka affected region and the native - migrant conflicts in Assam.

The native-migrant conflict is not only confined to the state of Assam, it can also be felt in some other parts in north eastern

¹¹ *Indian Express* (New Delhi), 23 July 1994.

¹² *Indian Express* (New Delhi), 25 July 1994.

¹³ The Press Release of Bhartiya Janata Party, Assam Pradesh, 9 November 1993.

India. The small hill state of Tripura, is also affected by Bangladeshi Chakma migrants. The failure of the administrative agencies to curb the migration has united the student community of this region. They have formed the north east students organisation, taking a cue from their Assamese colleagues. Agitating against the large scale Bangladeshi migration this student organisation observed a strike on Independence Day of India in 1994.¹⁴

It is alleged that some of the migrants have been included in the voters list too. Meghalaya's main opposition party, the Hill People's Union, in legislature, has put forth the demand of deleting the name "foreigners" from its state electoral rolls.¹⁵

West Bengal

Though the conflict between native and migrant communities has been violent in Assam, the state of West Bengal, which is a landing point as well as the major recipient of migrants, has yet not witnessed the same intensity of friction. The reason might be the cultural, linguistic as well as historical similarity between the migrants and the receiving community. The people of West Bengal are in no danger of being swamped by the migrants, but for the Assamese there is a fear that their very identity will be lost. However, the

¹⁴ Indian Express (New Delhi), 15 August 1994.

¹⁵ *The Statesman* (Calcutta), 16 March 1995.

situation in West Bengal might not be as amicable for the Bangladeshi migrants as it used to be.

The political reality of West Bengal is different from Assam. The inclusion of the Bangladeshi migrants into the voters list has not been so swift in West Bengal as it was in Assam. In Assam, the Congress Party plays a dominant role in enlisting migrants as voters. However, the political reality of Bengal has forced the party to have a different approach. Bangladeshi migrants have a tendency to support the ruling communists for their own safety and security. Thus unlike Assam, the migrant strength boosts the political fortune of the leftist coalition, which has been ruling West Bengal since 1977. Due to the opposition of a powerful opposition party, the Congress, and also because the election process is under the control of the Congress ruled center, the ruling party in West Bengal has adopted a gradual process of migrant conversion. First, the Left government provides ration cards to the migrants, which somewhat legalizes their presence in the states and after some years the migrants are brought into the electoral rolls. A survey conducted in 1986 in Arjunpur, reports that , while this small township had 7,000 legal population, the number of ration cards issued was about 9,000!¹⁶ This is the long term strategy of West Bengal's communist government: to enroll the Bangladeshi migrants as voters which pays at election time. There

¹⁶ *Economic and Political Weekly* (Bombay), 7 June 1986.

have been recent reports of abnormal increase in the size of the electorate in many West Bengal constituencies bordering Bangladesh.¹⁷ As a report in *The Economist* remarks: "No one knows the exact number, but locals claim that every border district of West Bengal has now a Muslim majority-which tend to vote marxist."¹⁸

The continuous growing support of the Bangladeshi Muslim migrants to the Communist Party alarmed the Congress Party in the state. To devise a way out, the Congress unit began organising training camps of its workers and started threatening to observe mass protest in this regard. Pradeep Bhattacharjee, the Congress Party General Secretary in the State of West Bengal, described his party's view: "we feel that without full-proof voter list it is well high impossible to dislodge the left front from power."¹⁹ The migration issue was utilised by the BJP and RSS in order to expand their support base within the state.²⁰

While the political parties in West Bengal were squabbling over their electoral losses and gain, the growing migrant community was organising itself. Mostly, the migrants were concerned about their safety and security because of the tussle among the political parties. The Indian government's attempt to deport some Bangladeshi

¹⁷ *Indian Express* (New Delhi), 8 January 1993.

¹⁸ *The Economist*, 13 June 1992

¹⁹ *The Assam Tribune* (Guwahati), 21 December 1993.

²⁰ *The Hindu* (New Delhi), 18 August 1992.

migrants back to Bangladesh in 1992 had further added to this apprehension. The increasing number of muslim migrants in the West Bengal districts of Murshidabad, Malda and Cooch Behar have started to feel quite insecure. This led them to demand for a separate homeland for themselves, which they call Swadeshi Muslim Banga Bhoomi (Independent Muslim-Bengali Land).²¹

The volatile situation in Assam and the saturation in West Bengal compelled the Bangladeshi Muslim migrants to go to other parts of India. Purnea, an administrative district in Bihar, which is separated from Bangladesh by a very thin strip of West Bengal territory, received some of this migration. Rajiv Gandhi visited this area in May 1989, and publicly acknowledged this fact and directed the state concerned to take adequate step to prevent the settlement of further migrants from Bangladesh.²² According to Baljit Rai, the Purnia district of Bihar has become a "mini Bangladesh in India."²³

Delhi

There is a strong presence of Bangladeshi migrants in the slum colonies of the Trans Yamuna area in Delhi. In September 1992, when the Government of India took the decision of deporting some of the Bangladeshi migrants, its police force had gone to one of the city's

²¹ *Indian Express* (New Delhi), 23 September 1989.

²² *Hindustan Times* (New Delhi), 22 May 1989.

²³ Rai, Baljit, *Demographic Aggression Against India: Muslim Avalanche from Bangladesh*, (Chandigarh: B.S. Publishers, 1993).

slum colonies, Seemapuri to pick up 132 migrants for the deportation. These actions of the police were promptly retaliated to by the migrants on 1 October 1992, when they organised an attack on the patrolling police officials. This violent clash between migrants and the police left five persons injured.²⁴ The growing strength of the Bangladeshi Muslim migrant community in Delhi brought the expected reaction in January 1993. A few months before the first ever Assembly elections for the state of Delhi, the state unit of the BJP gave the call for an agitation against the alleged encroachment on the government land on the banks of Yamuna River by growing numbers of Bangladeshi migrants.²⁵ After a few days, a senior leader of the BJP claimed that about three lakhs Bangladeshis have illegally migrated to Delhi and stressed upon his party's stance to delete their names from the electoral rolls.²⁶ This stand of BJP resulted in the deletion of one lakh Bangladeshi migrants' names from Delhi's electoral rolls in March 1993.²⁷ In the 1993, Delhi state assembly elections, the BJP used the Bangladeshi migration as a major electoral issue, winning with an absolute majority. The Muslim migrants were very apprehensive about their future due to the victory of BJP in the State Assembly election.

²⁴ *Indian Express* (New Delhi), 2 October 1992.

²⁵ *Indian Express* (New Delhi), 9 January 1993.

²⁶ *Indian Express* (New Delhi), 23 January 1993.

²⁷ *Indian Express* (New Delhi), 25 March 1993.

Mumbai

The ever-expanding urban centre of Mumbai has become major destination for fleeing Bangladeshi migrants. They are very much evident in the Mumbai port area and in the slums of Bangalipura. Their increasing strength and lower wage demands have become a source of irritation to the native Hindu labour force. The communal carnage of early 1993 in Mumbai resulted in the mass annihilation of these migrants by Hindus.²⁸ The situation has reached such a point that one of India's Hindu leaders, the "supremo" of the Shiv Sena (The Army of Shivaji) Bal Thackeray is propagating among his followers in Bombay to "Kick Bangladeshi Muslim out" or even if a Hindu is giving shelter to them, to shoot them dead".²⁹

Shiv Sena, in alliance with the BJP, came into power in March 1995 in State of Maharashtra. The new government threatened to expel all the Bangladeshi migrants from the state.³⁰ Bal Thackeray ordered his supporters on 28 March 1995, to throw out all the Muslim migrants from Mumbai within 15 days. This call was immediately responded to by his fanatic Hindu followers who started harassing Bangladeshi Muslims living in Hindu dominated areas.³¹ Under this volatile circumstance, the Shiv-Sena mouth-piece, *Samana*, received

²⁸ *Indian Express* (New Delhi), 19 January 1993.

²⁹ *International Herald Tribune*, 14-15 August 1993.

³⁰ *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 30 March 1991

³¹ *Agence France Presse*, 10 April 1995.

anonymous threats from Bangladeshi Muslim migrants to assassinate Bal Thackeray for his decision of expelling all illegal migrants³² To this Thackeray responded "in that case, the community of the assassins will be wiped out."³³ Thackeray's threat received prompt condemnation from various Indian political parties, including the Congress, Communists and Muslim Organisations, and that forced him to temporarily halt his programme. However, the threat itself was enough for some of the Bangladeshi Muslim migrants to leave the city and move towards West Bengal again. A reporter of India's largest circulated daily, *The Indian Express* found these migrants crowded into unreserved compartments of Kolkata-bound train while carrying their meager goods.³⁴

³² *Reuters World Service*, 29 March, 1995.

³³ *Agence Presse*, 30 March 1995.

³⁴ *Indian Express* (New Delhi), 4 April 1995.

CHAPTER V
CONCLUSION

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CONCLUSION

The objective of the proposed research was to establish the relationship between environmental degradation and social conflict in society. It has been hypothesized that environmental degradation and land pressure may cause population displacement, which in turn could lead to social conflicts. For testing the hypothesis we have taken Ganges basin region as a case study.

India and Bangladesh already have a dispute over the sharing of Ganges water, which falls into the category of resource scarcity conflict. But it is not a serious dispute between them on scarce water resources. There is more to the picture. The Farakka caused environmental destruction as well as high population pressure on land in this region has caused population migration from the south western part of Bangladesh to Indian states, which has caused various types of conflicts in receiving area.

In the second chapter of this research work, we have analysed the possible types of conflicts which could arise due to environmental destruction. But in the proposed research, we can find three types of conflicts which have arisen due to environmental migration from the

south western part of Bangladesh to various parts of India. These conflicts are state vs state, group vs group and migrant vs native.

India has tried to stop the flow of migrants and worked towards deporting the existing migrants back to the sender state. But Bangladesh reacted against the deportation and refused to accept the deportees. India is now facing a serious dispute with Bangladesh over the migration issue. This can be considered as state vs state conflict.

We have seen that the migrants are very conscious about their identity and have organised themselves to resist deportation by the authorities. In a few instances, bloody clashes have taken place between migrants and the police force. The conflict in this form can be seen mainly in Delhi, however a few other instances have been also seen in Assam, West Bengal and Mumbai. This type of conflict can fall into the category of state vs group conflict.

The large scale environmental migration has brought ethnic conflicts to the receiving society. The local inhabitants as well as the migrants have organised themselves on various social issues which has helped to develop a strong group identity. Assam has been facing violent conflict among the two groups since the late 1970s. The Bombay riots are an example of native-migrant conflict.

We can now conclude that environmental degradation could cause various types of conflict in any society, but developing societies are more vulnerable. The conflict is not confined to national boundaries but has international implication.

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