


# Chapter 15

## Understanding Disasters, Vulnerabilities, and the Resilience: Impact of River Bank Erosion on Riparian Communities

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### ABSTRACT

*Rivers have historically served as lifelines for civilizations, providing essential resources and opportunities for livelihood. However, they also present significant challenges, particularly when turned into disaster propelled by human interventions. The very qualities that make rivers indispensable to the dependent communities also render them vulnerable in many ways. Among the myriad challenges facing riverine communities, river bank erosion stands out as a particularly pressing issue, with far-reaching social, economic, and environmental implications. In recent time, well-being of riparian people in West Bengal, India, is seriously threatened by river bank erosion in the Ganges river basin, especially in parts of Malda and Murshidabad districts have [un]intentionally gotten worse since the Farakka Barrage was built in 1972. The article emphasises how these elements are interrelated and have consequences for the welfare of communities by looking at them through the lenses of geopolitics, feminism, and human rights.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Rivers have historically served as lifelines for civilizations, providing essential resources and opportunities for livelihood. However, they also present significant challenges, particularly when turned into disaster propelled by human interventions. The very qualities that make rivers indispensable to the dependent communities also render them vulnerable in many ways. Among the myriad challenges facing riverine communities, river bank erosion stands out as a particularly pressing issue, with far-reaching social, economic, and environmental implications. In recent times, the well-being of riparian people in West Bengal, India, has been seriously threatened by river bank erosion in the Ganges river basin, especially in parts of Malda and Murshidabad districts has [un]intentionally been worsening since the ‘Farakka Barrage’ was built in 1972. The barrage was meant to control water flow and make navigation easier. However, now it seems to juxtapose the reason it was built as the river changed its natural course and repository capacities. Another additional factor, among many others, contributing to the ecosystem's instability is the growth of sand mining ‘mafias’ who dug out sand illegally along riverbeds, hence increasing erosion rates and jeopardising nearby ecosystems.

Against this backdrop, it becomes essential to examine the intricate dynamics of disaster and its profound impact on riparian communities. This study is trying to unfold the fundamentals of river bank erosion and its disproportionate effects on nearby communities, making them vulnerable, especially women and children, leading to displacement, child marriage, and human trafficking. Poor governance, inadequate policies, and the influence of syndicate systems further contribute to the perpetuation of these challenges. Amidst this adversity, there are also signs of active resilience, as evidenced by the emerging civil society movements as well as community-led initiatives aimed at providing support and assistance for those who have lost their minimum means of livelihood. By adopting an intersectional approach that considers the interplay of gender, socio-economic status, and political factors, we can gain deeper insights into the differential impacts of river bank erosion and the pathways to resilience.

This work explores the complexity of disaster and resilience in impacted communities by using original data that draws attention to the ways that gender, socioeconomic position, and political processes interact to influence how vulnerable people feel and how resilient they can be. The article emphasises how these elements are interrelated and have consequences for the welfare of communities by looking at them through the lenses of geopolitics, feminism, and human rights. Recognizing the intricacies of disaster and resilience is essential for developing effective strategies to address the broader consequences of environmental disasters. By understanding the intersecting factors that shape individuals' experiences, policymakers

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