

**Migration of People From Panchanandapur, Malda to South
Palashgachhi, Jharkhand- Caused By The Ganges-bank
Erosion: A Case Study of 1960- 2000**

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***Abstract:**The Ganges-bank erosion in Malda district is an environmental hazard that has a history of disturbing the life and livelihood of the population of the riverine areas. From 12th Century onwards, in the region of Malda, river Ganges started shifting its courses that took much more severe form in the late 20th Century and the consequent river-bank erosion got much more intensified in course of time. This phenomenon, by grasping the land of the inhabitants affected their life and livelihood to a great extent. The present study is focused on the Ganges-bank erosion in Malda and the resultant migration of the people to the char or sand-shoal. How from 1960s, the people started shifting from one place to another adjusting with the dynamic nature of the Ganges shows the inter-relation between the river-bank erosion and migration of people. This persistent river-bank erosion in connection with various forces working within the socio-economic structure of the area, compels these people to migrate to other states as labours affecting their life as well as the regional development.*

***Keywords:**Environmental hazard Ganges-bank Erosion,Migration, Regional development etc.*

Date of Submission:27.02.2026

Date of Acceptance: 05.03.2026

Introduction

Environment brings human being into direct interaction with the nature, thus it is obvious that any disturbances or degradation in the environment would create danger in their life. Environmental degradations are of various forms- land degradation, climate change, flood and riverbank erosion, tsunamis, landslides, earthquakes etc. which are often referred to as natural disasters. Globally, natural hazards claim on an average 60,000 human lives every year and India witnesses numerous natural hazards every year, which works as a very important factor in population migration.¹

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Among various natural hazards, floods and river-bank erosion are the most frequent hazards in India, specifically in the deltaic regions.² River-bank erosion destroys the existing mode of production³. Lands get eroded immeasurably affecting the life of the people largely. This results in forced migration of the people⁴ or environmental refugee⁵. In every disaster, other than earthquake, people lose their household structure at best but riverbank erosion causes people lose their land, making them homeless⁶. Having lost the foothold, these displaced people have to migrate to other places. They have to adapt to the changing conditions of many socio-political, economic and cultural strategies in order to survive and face of the problems'. Forced migration' is a concept of social science that incorporates the category of people displaced by environmental disasters, man-made disasters and development projects. Environmental or natural disasters force a large number of people to migrate throughout the world. This is undoubtedly detrimental to a civilization as it destroys the growth of a particular region. According to the source of the UNO, natural disasters had claimed about 3 million lives worldwide and adversely affected lives of 800 million people (during the period between 1967 and 1987)⁸

Migration can either depopulate or overpopulate an area, depending upon the level of economic activities and is an important process of urbanization and social change⁹. However, it varies from region to region on the basis of socio-economic structure and the various forces working within it. In India. the states of Bihar and Assam are highly affected by flood and riverbank erosion (NDMA, 2014).¹⁰ Another state which have been being affected by the river-bank erosion of the Ganges leading to the migration of people over years, is West Bengal. In Malda district of West Bengal, the Ganges-bank erosion is a unique example of natural disaster that has exterminated the people from their root and compelled them to migrate. It is the case of sustained displacement of population, spanning over a very long-period of time.

The population living in the river-adjacent areas here, being very much vulnerable to the bank-erosion, have been affected by it. By 'vulnerability' we mean the characteristics of a person or group and their situation that influence their capacity to anticipate, cope with, resist and recover from the impact of a natural hazard (an extreme natural event or process)¹¹. This suggests that the sufferings caused by a natural hazard have some other aspects also, situated within the inner circumstances. For example, in our neighbour country Bangladesh, the people and resources of the country has experienced the threat of riverbank erosion due to its geographical and geological settings resulting in the migration of population.¹²

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In case of the Malda, it cannot be discarded that the riverine inhabitants belong mainly to agricultural families of poor economic background. However, their loss of land is best attributed to the environmental hazard of Ganes-bank erosion, which compelled them to migrate in order to survive.

A brief history of the shifting courses of the Ganges: the loss of people

The Ganges-bank is carrying the essence of the saga of ancient Bengal capitals being shifted time and again, as a result of the changing river-courses. From mid-12th Century the Ganges (which then used to flow below English bazar of Malda) started shifting westward. This compelled the ruler Lakshansena to shift the capital from Lakshmanawati to Nudeeyah. Later also, the unstable flow of the river continued to occur at various point of time and consequently the capital of Bengal was moved by Alauddin Ali Shah in 1342, even after 1555 the Prominent place like Gaur faced decline. Like wise the Tandah region after being declined in 1586, Mansingh (the then subahdar of Bengal) built a new capital in Rajmahal in 1595. When Mir Jumla (Mughal subahdar of Bengal) transferred the headquarter of the subah to Dhaka in 1660, the river had shifted more than 4 km away from the city, leaving Rajmahal as a mere relic city.¹³ This whole chronology of shifting courses of the Ganges reflects how the inhabitants of the adjacent areas had to move from one place to another in accordance with the random movement of the river. The population along with the whole structure of the concerned society got affected so much by the shifting water-flow of the river, that a capital lost its existence and became debris.

From the maps provided by various cartographers and geographers of early colonial period such as De Barro, Gastaldi, Major James Rennell-it is evident that the Ganges went through further changes in its course in 17th -18th centuries¹⁴.The river in first half of the 19th Century, after rounding the Rajmahal hills, came against the island char of Bhutni Diara, followed the eastern channel instead of the western. This resulted in considerable erosion on the Malda bank.¹⁵ However, this Ganges-bank erosion took much more dangerous form after the construction of the Farakka Barrage in 1962. The hydraulic control through this barrage induced a profound impact on its upstream and downstream areas¹⁶. It intensified the river-bank erosion resulting in huge loss of land and migration of people.

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Official records about the land erosion of the district are available since 1931. It is observed that total 19,684 hectares of fertile land has been eroded from the left bank of the river between the years 1931 to 2005 in Malda.¹⁷ According to the report of the Committee set up by Planning Commission (1996) and Irrigation and Waterways Department of West Bengal Government, nearly 4.5 lakhs of people had lost their homes due to left bank erosion in Malda between till 1999.¹⁸ Out of this huge population, more than two lakhs people migrated to different chars and the rest settled at different places in the mainland. Needless to explain, that land is the ultimate refuge of a person. Therefore, people losing their land and consequently migrating to the char, have to bear with several difficulties.

Among the five most erosion- affected blocks of Malda-only Kaliachak II had lost 30 mouzas till 2000, including the Palashgachhi mouza where the survey of this study was conducted. The list of these mouzas is given below along with the areas submerged :-

List of Eroded Mouzas Under Kaliachak II Block of Malda¹⁹

Sl No	Mouza Name	Status of Erosion	Area(SqKm)
1	PALASH GACHHI	Fully	594
2	PYARPUR	Fully	551
3	K.B.JHAUBONA	Fully	2739
4	RAZZAKPUR	Fully	51
5	KAMALUDDINPUR	Fully	176
6	DARI DYARA	Fully	211
7	MAHADEBPUR	Fully	535
8	JOT KASTURI	Partly	288
9	SUKURULLAPUR	Partly	Not Known
10	BIRODHI	Partly	Not Known
11	PANCHANANDAPUR	Partly	Not Known

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12	DARI JAIRAMPUR	Fully	111
13	DAS KATHIYA	Fully	56
14	ISLAMPUR	Fully	122
15	HAMIDPUR	Partly	Not Known
16	NITYANANDAPUR	Fully	354
17	JITNAGAR	Fully	399
18	PARANPUR	Fully	1033
19	RATANLALPUR	Fully	85
20	SHRIGHAR	Fully	926
21	KACHI JADUPUR	Fully	75
22	BEEGAMGUNJ	Fully	219
23	HAKIMABAD	Fully	62
24	MANGATPUR	Fully	120
25	HOSENABAD	Fully	290
26	DOGACHHI	Fully	476
27	GAJIYA PUR	Fully	466
28	CHAR BABUPUR	Partly	513
29	NAYAGRAM	Partly	Not Known
30	SHRIPUR	Partly	Not Known

It is worth mentioning here that one significant change regarding the land-ownership of the people of char took place in 2000, when Government of West Bengal introduced section no. 12 in the Act of Land Reforms and Land Revenue Department. According to it, the newly emerged char or island (after erosion of the land) will be owned by the Government. Earlier, according to 11 (2) no. section -if a farmer loses his land into river or sea, and it re-emerges within 20 years (not more), the land ownership-right would belong to the farmer, who has lost it. But the new concept of 'Khas land' denied this right²⁰ to these people.

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Apart from this, the migrants of the chars in general have to undergo various crisis for their survival. They have to suffer huge loss of agricultural lands submerged in the Ganges, houses, schools, places of worship i.e Mandir, Masjid, roads devastated, livelihood disrupted forcing them to live a life in an utterly inhuman condition.

The field survey and its result: Discussion

The field survey of this study has been carried out at the South Palashgachhi char/river-island, Sansad No.20. It is under the administrative control of South Palashgachhi GP of Udhwa block, Sahebganj district of Jharkhand. It shifted its jurisdiction under the state of Jharkhand after its formation as a separate state in 2000. During the survey, out of approximate 200 families in total, 60% families i.e 120 families were selected for the purpose of the study. Those who faced migration due to the Ganges-bank erosion between 1960-2000, have been considered for this field survey.

Each family has 5/6 members on an average and the total population of this area is 1200 approx. Originally these families lived in Panchanandapur GP of Kaliachak-II block. Due to the Ganges-bank erosion, migrating through various places at various point of time, they had come to South Palashgachhi between 1960-2000 and have been living here till date.

A detailed discussion on the basis of the study area and the selected time-period have been given below.

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**Table 1-
Year-wise growth of migrants in general and respective percentage**

The years of their migration	Number of migrants (in general)	Percentage of migrants
1960	58	8
1970	87	12
1980	177	25

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1990	195	27
2000	203	28

The migration scenario had various dimensions. The people who migrated, were of three different types-

- i) Those who had financial capacities, migrated to the district town and nearby areas.
- ii) Those who were less capable, migrated to block-headquarter or ganj-areas.
- iii) Those who had no capacity to migrate, started living on the embankment, highland, Khas land, roadside areas.

The illustrations are given below :

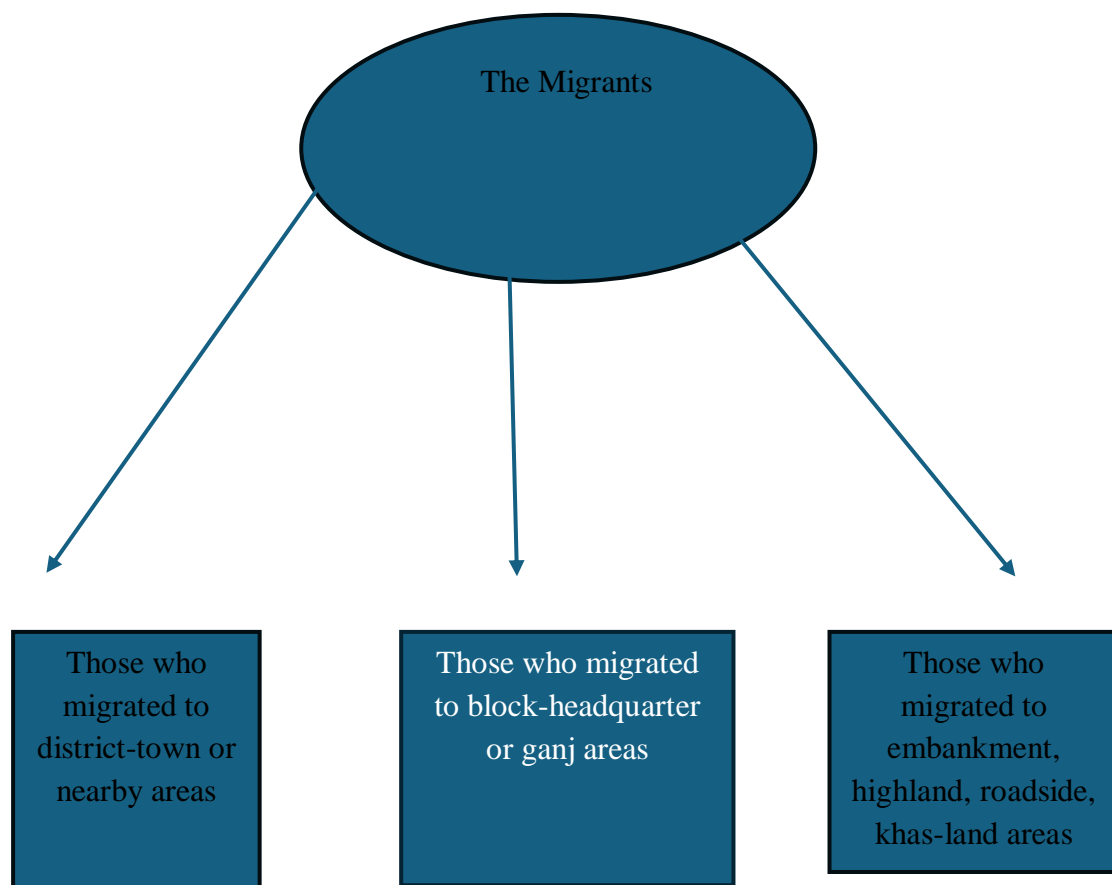


Fig. 1- The categories of migrants on the basis of their settlement.

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First two categories of migrants can be termed as ‘Intra-district Migrants’. Those belonging to the third category, made temporary huts to live and engaged themselves in different livelihood-activities such as- agricultural labour, fish-vending, cattle-rearing, tailoring etc. Few of them started small grocery shops, small trading. After five-seven years when the char was re-emerged on the other side of the river, most of them migrated there and started living there in a new way.

Again, second phase of migration started taking place among these third category of people, in search of livelihood. The able male -members belonging to the age-group of 20-60 further migrated to different states outside West Bengal traditionally, particularly to the state of Maharashtra, Gujarat, Kerala etc. They sent money to their family on regular basis. Generally, these migrant-labours used to return home occasionally on the eve of festivals- such as Eid, Puja, or events like election etc. for a few days/ months. They worked in those states mainly as wage-labourers in various factories/industries on small or medium scale, and mostly in construction sectors.

Thus, among the migrant-labours, there are further two categories-

- i. Those who worked outside the state and now have returned home permanently due to age-issues.
- ii. Those who are still working.

Among the migrant-labours, it is found that a good number had settled permanently in their work-places.

Table 2

Type of the Migrants and their percentage

Type of Migrants	Percentage
Permanent migrants	10
Other migrants	90

Table 3

The age-group wise distribution of the migrant labours

Age group of the migrant labours	Percentage
61-70	15

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41-60	40
20-40	45

It was observed during the survey that majority of these labours migrated to Maharashtra (more or less 60%), the rest migrated to Gujarat (more or less 30 %) and Kerala (more or less 10%).

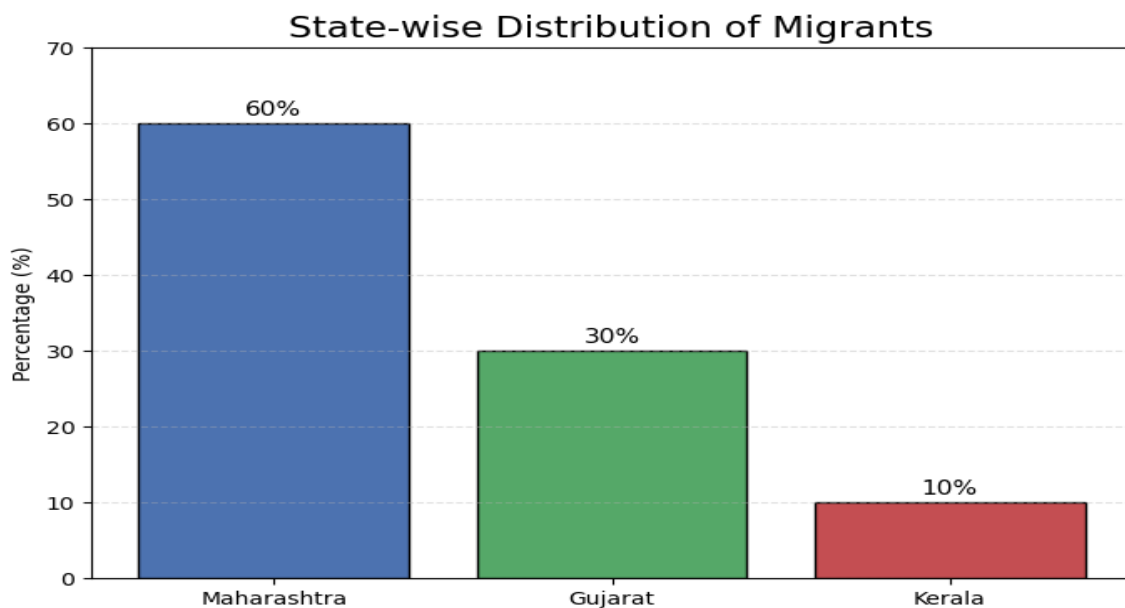


Fig. 2

As has been mentioned earlier, the migrant-labours mostly belonged to agricultural families. Under the changed circumstances, they had to shift to other livelihood-activities. They had to adapt with the new work, ambience, food, language and culture in the different states and obviously different kind of new skills.

Table 4

Variation in the yearly per capita income of migrant labour over various time-period

Percentage of migrant labours	1960-61	2000-2001
60%	400	7000

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40%	Below 400	Below 7000
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Among the residents of the char, the main livelihood activities remained farming, fishing, boating, rearing cattle, small trading, carrying tea-shops etc. A sizeable number were engaged as agricultural labours in the land of the local people. From around 1973, a Government Primary School and one Anganwari Centre were established, where two Para-Teachers and three workers respectively were engaged from the migrated people.

Conclusion

The Ganges-bank erosion in Malda is thus, the case of environment induced migration or 'Forced Migration'. The natural hazard of river-bank erosion here has affected the life and livelihood of the people over years and forced them to migrate to other places. This persistent erosion has harmed the regional stability and jeopardized the sustainable development.

This migration had many-fold dimensions which impacted the pattern of their life largely. The mighty river grasped their land and home overnight. After losing practically everything, they migrated to the char, where without a permanent land-ownership they had to survive in an uncertain condition of living and identity crisis. These people having been migrated to the char, located in Jharkhand were not recognized as the residents of West Bengal anymore. In the year

1972, during Electoral Summary Revision in Bihar , the name of these migrated people got incorporated in the Voter list of the state, but they could not get the residential certificate from the Jharkhand Government and became recognized as 'temporary resident'. For getting the residential status - people needed to submit land records of Bihar from 1985 which was beyond their capacity, since the lands were recorded in West Bengal. On the other hand, since they migrated to other side of the river, their name were deleted from the voter list of West Bengal and the Ration Cards got cancelled or became invalid. In this strange situation without a 'statehood', they could not even demand the due rights and privileges. This condition of the people has not changed till the present day. Under these adversities and helplessness in every aspect of life, they suffer from insecurity and mental trauma. They are not provided any constructive arrangement of land-ownership or proper living condition yet.

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Therefore, this issue of environmental migration in Malda need to be addressed highlighting various aspects- such as the franchise of adult population, belonging to statehood, control of Administrative-Judicial-Revenue Districts, issues of Panchayat/ Assembly/ Parliamentary constituency. Initiatives should be taken to resolve this issue at the national level, since different states are involved in this case. Along with the erosion-preventive measures and arrangement of rehabilitation of these people, these burning problems also should be paid due attention.

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