Executive Summary of the Resource Pack

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Tagore, in his play 'Muktodhara' (Flow Unbound) had tried to grapple with the contentious issue of sharing water between the people of upper riparian and lower riparian regions. Almost one century has gone by since the play was first published, yet the issue is not only very much alive, but has become a major flash point in the growing embittered relation between neighbouring countries and regions within the countries. The unresolved issue of river water sharing between India and Bangladesh, or the controversy over the issue of sharing of Kaveri water between Tamil Nadu and Karnataka are two such instances. Although there exists a number of international covenants as to how the issue can best be resolved amicably between the stakeholder countries, the contemporary history of South Asia is marked by a partisan approach taken by the States, leading into an impasse.

However, it is also true that given a will to act this seemingly insurmountable barrier can be overcome with sincere and persistent dialogue between the stakeholder countries. Two such success stories of South Asia are Ganga Water Sharing Treaty (1996) between Bangladesh and India, and Indus Water Treaty (1960) between Pakistan and India. Indus Water Treaty has been viewed by many experts as a model for the peaceful resolution of international water disputes. The negotiations prior to the conclusion of the Indus River Treaty took eight long years (from 1952 to 1960) as the Partition of India played havoc in the Indus River basin. Because of the Partition, the British-designed canal system was broken up and formed into two separate networks, most of the canals and land under irrigation went to Pakistan but the headwaters of all five of the Punjab's tributaries, along with the upper reaches of Indus itself, were left to India. Thus, India became the 'upstream' riparian with respect to Pakistan.[1] Despite this complexity at the ground level, and the tension at the political level, and not withstanding the tension between the two countries, the accord was finally reached between the two countries because both countries approached the problem with a will to resolve it amicably.

This resource pack is primarily meant for the working journalists. The idea was to prepare a compendium on the subject of Ecosystem of life in the Ganga –Brahmaputra- Meghna basin so that the journalists can access to a whole lot of information, analysis and experts' opinions on a subject that is not readily available to them. Contrary to the commonly held view that fresh water is available in abundance, sadly the supply of fresh water is finite. With the growing population worldwide, and the rapid urbanization that is taking place, demand on fresh water is growing more and more. Estimates indicate that of the total fresh water available to us, while 65-70% water is claimed by the agriculture, another 20-25% goes to meet the need of industry, and households and municipality needs account for 10%. [2]

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[1] Michael T. Klare. *Resource Wars: The New Landscape of Global Conflict* (New York: Henry Holt and Co, 2002)

[2] See, Maude Barlow and Tony Clarke. *Blue Gold: The Fight to Stop the Corporate Theft of the World's Water* (Left World, 2004).

With the over exploitation of river water (both in terms of extraction and dumping of industrial waste and pesticide and chemical fertilizer) major river systems are now under severe strain. On the other hand, large scale tapping of groundwater for the purposes of both drinking and irrigation is causing severe depletion of water aquifer. As the extraction of groundwater is not being compensated by proportionate recharge, it is playing havoc on the quality of water itself. Thus, it comes not as a surprise that level of presence of arsenic in groundwater in a large area of deltaic Bengal is growing alarmingly up. Repeated initiatives to cleanse the Ganga water from all these pollutants have not yielded the desired result.

The issues of ecology and sustainability are almost coterminous. Conservation of nature is crucial for tackling climate change, achieving sustainable development, guaranteeing secure livelihoods for the poor and building a green economy. The Ganga, Brahmaputra and Meghna (GBM) basin comprises a huge system, coming second only to that of the Amazon River, and is made up of a catchment area of 1.75 million square kilometre, stretching across five countries— China, India, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal.[3] The Ganga, Brahmaputra and Meghna rivers play pivotal roles in sustaining life and environment and the Ganga-Brahmaputra-Meghna basin is the site of constant struggles and negotiations. According to a 2010 report 'Water Security for India: The External Dynamics': 'India is facing a serious water resource problem and as trends suggest, it is expected to become 'water stressed' by 2025 and 'water scarce' by 2050.'[4] Thus, living and negotiating with nature is part of the everyday struggle for people living in this region.

The environment today is increasingly becoming a contested terrain. A rise in population has resulted in the shrinking of natural resources, which has given rise to disputes over natural resources in many parts of the world. Water as a resource is essential to all daily human activities and hence, is an important commodity. But the problem being that the scarcity of water has triggered desperation in several parts of the world that already have little access to water, let alone reliable water supplies. The truth is that the people who are heavily dependent on natural resources like forests, rivers or lakes, for their livelihood (be it fishing, agriculture etc.) are people residing in the lowest rung of the society. To make things worse, water in general and freshwater resources in particular are unevenly distributed. Thus, the issues of survival of regions and that of rivers are the two sides of the same coin.

In post partition South Asia, big dams, highways and a self-sustaining agricultural sector were seen to be important. However, in order to be a fully self-sufficient economy, the business and the industrial sectors were also to be promoted. The process still continues and the countries of South Asia, on a spree to 'develop', continue to raise high dams, clear forests, build more highways, industries, gated communities, clear slum areas in order to "beautify" cities etc. Thus, millions of people worldwide are forcefully evicted. In the last two decades, the ratio of refugees to internally displaced persons, referring to the forced migrants, who physically remain in their own countries, has seen a 'dramatic reversal'. 25 million people have been displaced by wars in some 40 countries and a similar or even greater number were displaced by natural disasters and development projects.[5]

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[3] Q.K Ahmad et al eds. *Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna Region: A Framework for Sustainable Development* (Dhaka: the University Press Limited, 2001).

[4] Government of India, Ministry of Water Resources. 2012. National Water Policy (2012). http://wrmin.nic.in/writereaddata/linkimages/NWP2012Eng6495132651.pdf (last accessed November 01, 2013)

[5] Thomas G. Weiss and David A. Korn, eds. *Internal Displacement: conceptualization and its consequences* (Oxon: Routedge, 2006) 1-5.

The trend is much worse in India. According to Walter Fernandes, a noted social scientist who works on the issue of internal displacement, at least 60 million people have displaced between 1947and 2004 when their lands were acquired/ taken away by the State for public purposes,such as mining, irrigation, railways etc. A total of 25 million hectare land was acquired during that period, that includes 7 million ha of forest land and 6 million ha of other Common Property Resources (CPR). Citing the figures of Dr. Fernandes, a Planning Commission report observed that 'whereas the tribals constitute8.08% of country's population, they are 40% of the total displaced/affected persons by the projects. Similarly, at least 20% of the displaced/affected are Dalits and another 20% are OBCs'. [6]

Today, many scholars are increasingly using the term 'sustainable development', presuming that this might help to halt the process of onslaught on nature. The Brundtland Report, published in 1987, defined 'sustainable development' as 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'. But Amartya Sen's solution to the problem of environmental crisis is 'constructive human intervention'. He is of the opinion that it is within human power to enhance and improve the environment in which we live. He clarified his position by citing the example of small pox. The eradication of small pox, he held, due to human intervention, cannot be viewed as impoverishment of nature. Thus, to him, sustainability can be achieved, by enhancing the process of development, which will include spread of education, improving communication system etc. He strongly believes that development is 'fundamentally an empowering process and this power can be used to preserve and enrich the environment, and not only to decimate it'.[7]

This discourse on ecology is not new, though it has gained momentum in the latter half of the 20th century. Karl Marx had talked about ecology, while employing the concept of "metabolism", to define the labour process between man and nature. He observed, that Man, through his own actions, mediates, regulates and controls the metabolism, between himself and nature. However, an irreparable rift had emerged in this metabolism as a result of capitalist relation of production and the antagonistic separation of town and country. Marx had argued that it is an obligation of human beings to preserve the ecological preconditions of human life for future generations. He wrote, 'Even a whole society, a nation, or even all simultaneously existing societies taken together, are not the owners of the globe. They are only the possessors…they must hand it down to succeeding generations in an improved condition'.[8]

The worst part is that the people who have acted since time immemorial as the caretakers of the nature and environment are becoming targets. States in order to promote development or to protect the environment are throwing people out of their lands and their rights over natural resources are categorically violated. In India, the Chotanagpur Tenancy Agreement of 1908 made an effort to recognize the right of the indigenous population over their lands, forests and other resources vis a vis the State, landlords and the 'outsiders'. After independence, a series of amendments have successively curbed the rights of the Adivasis. In 1996, the phrase 'public

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[6] 'Development Challenges in Extremists Affected Areas' Report of an Expert Group to Planning Commission, GOI, 2008, at http://planningcommission.gov.in/reports/publications/rep_dce.pdf, last accessed 29 August 2014.

[7] Amartya Sen. *The Idea of Justice.* (London: Penguin, 2009) 248-252.

[8] See, Tapan Kumar Chattopadhyay. *India and the Ecology Question: Confrontation And Reconstruction* (Calcutta: Ekushe, 1999) 60-64.

purpose' was redefined in Section 49, to allow transfer of lands for 'any industrial purpose' or for mining and for subsidiary purpose as decided by the state government, with the consent of the deputy commissioner, providing 'adequate compensation'.[9]
The issues of ecology, climate change, including rise in temperature and water levels, drought , due to shortage of water supply, monsoon variability and more extreme weather events are of serious concern for all the countries of south Asia . In the three South Asian countries, India , Bangladesh and Pakistan , approximately 130, million people live in Low Elevation Coastal Zone (LECZ), which goes onto comprise the region which is less than 10 meters above average sea level. Any further change in the water level will render these people homeless.[10] In the past two decades, four islands in the Sundarbans -- Lohachara, Kabasgadi and Suparibhanga and Bedford - have got immersed, displacing 6,000 families (about 35000 to 40000 people). Two other islands - Ghoramara and Mousuni - are fast going under, threatening another 40,000 people with displacement.[11] In 2009, the government of Maldives held a cabinet meeting underwater to highlight the threat of global warming. President Mohamed Nasheed and his team signed a document calling for worldwide cuts in carbon emissions. If things are not mended small islands of Maldives would be a thing of the past.

Significantly enough, the media also by and large restrict their role to reflecting the respective countries' positions, mostly they put their effort into what Noam Chomsky has defined as 'Manufacturing Consent', thus turning the issue into one which could only be negotiated and resolved (if and when possible) exclusively by the contesting countries' governments only. Once the exclusivist perception was established, the issue becomes a prisoner of the States, leaving out the end users, the common people, the citizenry and the non-state experts. As a result of that when the governments initiate dialogue, engage themselves into grappling with the contentious problem, the voice of the original stakeholder, the end-users' remain either muzzled or at best muted.

But, Why this study?

The title of the report (Ecosystems for Life: A Bangladesh-India Initiative—Ecology, Politics, Resources in deltaic Bengali and Northeast) indicates that here we are trying to understand the intricacy of the relation between the man and river in its entire gamut. The need for this kind of study arises from the prevailing situation where sharing of water of a trans-boundary river often becomes an issue of conflict. Also, it draws our attention to a much neglected but crucial issue—the issue of the growing destruction of the river systems.

The purpose of preparing this present volume as a Media Reader is to help the media persons understand the issues at stake in a broader context so that the people at large can take part in the debate equipped with more information. In today's world of "breaking news" where primacy is given to chaos over credibility, a balanced understanding of the situation or realities is of utmost important. An overemphasis on the scientific findings like reports, test analysis has to be

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[9] Sabyasachi Basu Ray Chaudhury and Ishita Dey, eds. *Sustainability of Rights after Globalisation* (New Delhi: Sage, 2011) 5-14.

[10] Sudhir Chella Rajan. Report of Greenpeace: March 2008, at http://www.greenpeace.at/uploads/media/blue-alert-report_web.pdf, accessed on 6.6.2012.

[11] Subir Bhaumik. 'Fears rise for sinking Sundarbans,' BBC Online, at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/3102948.stm, accessed on 12.02.12

complimented with voices of the affected people, existing ground realities and other contradicting reports, for even reports and figures are manipulated for gains of a certain section of the population. For instance, the claim that bauxite mining improves water run-off , though false, was propagated through a report on Niyamgiri, commissioned by the Supreme Court from the Central Mining Planning and Design Institute (Ranchi), which stated that during mining, micro-cracks are formed on the sides of mountains that facilitate run-off and improve ground water. Felix Padel and Samarendra Das have rubbished it as pseudo –science and concluded that this report reflected what the funders wanted, without holistic or even rational awareness.[12]

The resource pack is broadly divided into two parts—India & Bangladesh. Two separate team of researchers in India and Bangladesh have separately approached the subject. Calcutta Research Group has done the Indian part of the research work and Development Media Ltd. did the same for Bangladesh part. From their works, it would be evident that their approach and methodology are also somewhat different, but are complimentary to each other. While Bangladesh team paid more attention in collating facts about the rivers in both the countries under Ganga-Brahmaputra-Meghna river systems (GBM), existing water sharing treaties, laws, protocols and agreements on waters, convention on the protection and use of trans boundary water courses etc. the Indian counterpart have gone more into analyzing that, putting the available data and information into context, thus making us understand the big picture. The field survey conducted by the researchers in northeast India and West Bengal has also brought in the human side of the problem. Thus the collective research have successfully been able place the complex issue of the GBM river systems in the proper perspective where the relation between man and nature (river) is not to be seen as that of a mere conflict, but a relation of inter-dependency.

Bangladesh Chapter

In the Bangladesh section, while giving a brief description of the three major river systems (GBM) a list of all 57 trans-boundary rivers in the area has been provided. As the media persons often come across the issues related to these rivers between India and Bangladesh, this inclusion of the brief description of all 57 rivers is relevant. Issues of sharing water of trans- boundary rivers have justifiably been highlighted in Bangladesh part of the report. It has provided us with a brief history of the genesis of the Indo-Bangladesh Joint Rivers Commission (JRC) and it also gives a brief overview of how through negotiations stretched over a period of more than a decade, India and Bangladesh could conclude the Ganges Water Sharing Treaty in 1996, and Bangladesh was ensured a fair share of the water from the river during the lean period. Also, it did not forget to mention briefly the outline of the ongoing negotiation on sharing water of Teesta between the two countries.

It is only natural that Bangladesh with its existing navigable waterways (5968 km during monsoon period and 3865 km in dry season) will be heavily depended on it for transportation of goods and traffic. The extent of the dependence on it could be gauged from the mere fact that as many as 87.80 million passengers and 0.58 million ton cargo are being transported annually by the waterways. Also, it is important to understand that many of these waterways are integrated into an international grid where India and Bangladesh use that for transportation of goods between the two countries. The Protocol on Inland Water Transit and Trade between Bangladesh and India, and the list of the 'Ports of Call', the protocol- recognized eight routes, have been included here also underscores the point that both the countries have stakes in preservation of the river systems.

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[12] Padel and Das quoted in Felix Padel, Ajay Dandekar and Jeemol Unni, *Ecology Economy: Quest for a Socially Informed Connection* (New Delhi: Orient Black Swan, 2013)

The case of Mekong River Commission, as brief mention of that made here, is not without relevance. Mekong Commission is perhaps unique in the sense that it has all the stakeholder four countries (Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam) on board. The suggestion is latent in its mention that similar initiative might bear fruit if China, India and Bangladesh are involved in the case of Brahmaputra river management.

To remind us that the issue of sharing of water between the two countries has a direct correlation with the concerns of common people, some media news reports have been incorporated here. There are three reports on Teesta water issue and one report on issues related to Brahmaputra. Also, there are two case studies on how Teesta's depleting water flow is impacting adversely the daily life and livelihood of people depended on it. Besides that, a number of articles (in Bangla) on the issues of flood control, setting up of hydroelectric power projects and popular protests etc. have been included here. These are taken from various publications.

The journalists, who are interested in studying the water sharing issue between the two countries will find that some of the important treaties, statutes, acts have been included here. Of these, the treaty between the government of Bangladesh and India on sharing of the Ganga water at Farakka is perhaps most important one. The treaty that was signed by both the Prime Ministers Sheikh Hasina and H D Deve Gowda in 1996 was later considered as the high watermark in the bilateral relation between the two countries. Another bilateral agreement concerning the demarcation of the land boundary between the two countries has its relevance in the present context. The agreement which was reached between the two countries in 1974, and popularly known as Indira-Mujib pact, has taken a big step forward in demarcating the land boundary between the two countries. Four Indian states (viz. Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram) having common boundary with Bangladesh, and in more than one instances, the demarcation would be made along the course of the river (more specifically, midstream of the river). Also, in the same agreement both the countries agreed to complete the exchange of enclaves expeditiously. It might be not inappropriate to mention here that the agreement was subject to its ratification by the respective parliaments of the two countries. But, while the Bangladesh parliament got it ratified it in 1975, the government of India is yet to place the agreement before the parliament for ratification. Consequently, the exchange of enclaves could not be completed as yet.

Protection and use of trans-boundary watercourses and international lakes are important and urgent tasks. The effective accomplishment of which can only be ensured by enhanced cooperation. 'The Convention on the Protection and Use of Trans boundary Watercourses and International Lakes' under the aegis of United Nations was first adopted in 1992 and it came into force in 1996. At that time it was restricted to the member states of United Nations Economic Commission. In 2003 with further amendment of the Convention it allowed all member countries of UN to accede to it. The various articles, statutes ad provisions made into the Convention makes an ideal template for the cooperation, mutual assistance and dispute resolution in a peaceful manner. The full text of the Convention has also been made available here. Another United Nation Convention that has been included here is related to the Law of the Non-navigational Uses of International Watercourses.

Indian Chapter

While the issue of sharing common resources (here, water) has largely been viewed mostly from the point of harnessing the nature by the man and the disputes arising over the question of controlling that, a major concern is overlooked, that of the issue of the nature itself (in this case,

the river). It is generally assumed that the natural resources are a given thing, and it is also available in abundance. So, it is just there for the man to exploit it. Since in modern days, the State has appropriated the role of arbitrator between the man and nature, the exploitation of natural resources has become sole preserve of the governments. And the exploitative philosophy of the State looks at the river water as an exploitable commodity. From this point of view, the huge of mass water that the rivers like Ganga, Brahmaputra, Meghna etc. regularly discharge into Bay of Bengal is a waste, and that should be better managed.

Thus, the idea of managing 'surplus' water to meet the need of water deficit area was born. In India , in early '90s (during the P V Narshima Rao government) it was proposed that Ganga and Brahmaputra were to be connected by digging a canal between Dhubri (in Assam) and Farakka (in West Bengal). As most of the part of its hundreds of kilometers of its length the canal was to traverse through Bangladesh land, it required Bangladesh government's assent. The project, though it got initial approval for funding by the World Bank, had to be abandoned, as the Bangladesh government did not give its consent to it. Later, during the time of Atal Bihari Vajpayee government (1999-2004) the 'River Linking' project was conceived in much bigger scale. This time, not only Ganga-Brahmaputra, but also a whole lot of rivers were planned to bring into an integrated grid by linking them with huge canals. The project cost was estimated at Rs.5,67,000 crore at that time. Despite the Supreme Court's favourable prodding, the project could not be started as the new government that came to power (in 2004) did not show enthusiasm for it. But, now again, after a gap of 10 years, the present government has indicated that it would like to have a re-look at it.

It has to be kept in mind that environmental challenges and related displacements are some of the major concerns of contemporary development discourse. Forced migration due to resource crisis caused by climate change and environmental degradation is a serious impediment to attaining the basic normative goal of equity, participation and development. In the Brahmaputra valley, displacement is not only induced by floods but also by erosion. While floods lead to inundation of a certain area for a period of time displacing people temporarily from their homes, erosion displaces people permanently from their land. And it is not only the mighty Brahmaputra but also various small- and medium-sized rivers that cause havoc in the Brahmaputra valley. For media persons and researchers, the ground realities along with the everyday lived-in experiences of the people, hailing from various communities, who are dependent on the Brahmaputra system, or, for that matter any other river system, for their life and livelihood, become important. In a democracy like ours, it is important that a healthy debate takes place involving various sections of the society, especially the stakeholders about the pros and cons of any major government initiative that may have serious impact on the river system.

Further, one's understanding of river systems would be incomplete, if traditions, cultures and social sensibilities or the world views at the grass-root level, thriving along the rivers, are marginalized. Various communities have all developed their own systems for understanding, managing, and valuing natural resources, systems which are, to varying degrees, interdependent. The usefulness of rivers as life sustaining systems has been reflected through various cultural resources like literature, music, films, art etc. Any study of river as a living system would be inadequate if we cannot fathom the importance of river beyond socio-economic-national needs.
The Calcutta Research Group has been working on the issues like development, ecology, justice, migration, displacement, governance, peace and conflict, democracy, resource crises, food security, borders, gender question and labour, to name a few. Media has also been a part of our several studies. The Calcutta Research group, has time and again, published reports and books like Subir Bhaumik (ed), Counter-Gaze: Media, Migrants, Minorities (2010), Nilanjan Dutta (ed), Forced Migration in North East India: A Media Reader (2012) and Sibaji Pratim Basu (ed)

Forced Migration and Media Mirrors(2014). How the media perceives and reports different complex realities, become important, as, in today's world, strong ideas/opinions get formed with a click of the mouse or with the pressing of a TV remote control. Responsible, objective and sensitive reporting is needed now, more than anything else.

The study was divided into two legs: the **Deltaic Bengal** and the **Northeast India**. In Bengal, the Sunderbans has been approached as a contested space. Its fragile state clubbed with the issues of resource crisis, migration, resource sharing have to be taken into consideration in order to have a clear picture of this region. While making a number of trips to the hinterland, namely, Hingalganj, Sagar Islands and some other areas, the author of The Sundarbans saw for himself how the people there were trying to cope with life there in the post Aila situation. Even after five years after the area was devastated by cyclone 'Aila', people there are still finding difficulty in accessing to potable water. The entry of sea water into a large tract of paddy field rendered that uncultivable, forcing them to look for alternative sources of livelihood. It is not surprising that ever since Aila, the outward trend of migration of the able bodied males of Sundarbans to other parts of the state as well as of the country is on the rise.

The three districts Nadia, Murshidabad and Malda become important because of Ganga (Bhagirathi), Jalongi , Ganga and Churni. Be it the clay-toy industry of Ghurni, brick kilns along the river Bhagirathi or the brass utensils of Matiari, the Nadia district is seen to be full of life. One important aspect of the field studies in these three districts is to record the lives of the people living in the Char lands. The report 'Non-existing Population in the Char lands of Malda' highlights the point that with the amendment of a section in The West Bengal Land Reform Act, 1955 in 2000, led the people and their property in the char lands as 'illegal' in the eyes of law. Also, it informs us that the people there, are still fighting the case against it in the Calcutta High Court.

In the three districts of Nadia, Murshidabad and Malda besides the livelihood issues, everyday life in the border areas, char lands, issues of trafficking, *bhangan* or river bank erosion, migration have been dealt with in detail. 'Of Lives and Rivers: Realities in Murshidabad' deals in detail with the livelihood issues of people living in such Char lands as in Char Paraspur and Char Bhadra, and people living on the erosion prone river bank of Padma at Lalgola and Akheriganj.
A separate write-up on the recent flood cased by the Kosi rivers also forms a part of this section of the report.

The second leg of the study focuses on Northeast India. Starting off with Assam , livelihood issues, issues of migration, displacement, ecology were integral part of the study. 'Brahmaputra River Basin: Looking at Past, Present and Future' puts the issues like migration of people to the Char lands, land arrangements and legal status of it, in their historic context. Also, the issue of periodic flood river bank erosion and its consequent impact on the lives of the dwellers of the chars have been dealt in it. Here also, as we witnessed in the case of Malda, we are confronted with experience of having people whose identity is being questioned by the state administration. The char dwellers are the major victims of arbitrary categorization of Doubtful Voter or D voters. This becomes significant if we recall that the detection of "illegal immigrants" has been a major political issue in Assam since 1980s.

From its source at Nagaland hills to the Indo-Bangladesh border Barak River flows for 564 km, traversing through Manipur and part of southern Assam. After flowing through the plains of Cachar and Karimganj districts of Assam it reaches Bangladesh border where it gets bifurcated into two rivers: Surma and Kusiyara. Later on, these two rivers rejoin in Kishorganj district of Bangladesh and becomes known as Meghna River. So, Barak river and its 12 tributaries is an

important addition to the study, without which a complete understanding of the Ganga-Brahmaputra-Meghna river system would have been incomplete. A special feature
of this study is the natural drainage system of the Barak River: the Haor and Bil (big water bodies).The conditions and functionalities of nine major Haor or Bil related to Barak river system have been looked into in this study. The questions of livelihood and development have also duly come up. The construction of 1500 MW Tipaimukh dam, and the controversy n has not been ignored.

Further, as a success story, in terms of sharing of resources across international boundaries, the case of Tripura has been highlighted in the study. The Indian state Tripura comes under the Meghna basin. The major rivers of this state end their journey after meeting Meghna. About 40 km from Tripura's state capital Agartala, there is Ashuganj, a river port on Meghna inside Bangladesh. That river port and the Meghna river way is now being regularly used by both Tripura and Bangladesh for transporting goods.

The issue of rights have been looked into with regard to protest movements in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. The title of the article 'The Golden River Subansiri: A Valley of Death' is self-evident. Here, we get to hear the voice of the people against the government's bid to construct a series of large and medium size dams on Subansiri River, a major tributary to Brahmaputra. The report cautions that once built, the dams would cause havoc on the lives of the people living in the Subansiri valley; their life and livelihood would be adversely affected.

Two more articles, that throw light on the role of Women as active agents in the peace process, democracy and anti-dam protest movements in the Brahmaputra valley and Subansiri valley form a crucial part of the study. In 'Gender,Rights and Livelihood Concerns in the Brahmaputra Valley' we get to hear the voices of the women. Women in Majuli, the largest river island, (on Brahmaputra), narrates their experience of living in the time of flood and soil erosion. While a large section of the men go out of the island to work, the women have to stay back home and take care of the children and the elderly people. Also, we hear the voice of those women who took active role in the protest movement against Subansiri dam project.

The next part of the study comprises a brief study as to how the media, especially, the print media, reports in the deltaic Bengal and Northeast India on the issues emanating from these three river basins. Our findings are, not surprisingly, consistent with the recent trend and practices in the Indian mainstream media, that reflect more in cohort with the corporate-government perspective of the development process. While most of the reports are focused on the disasters like massive flood that take place periodically in Ganga and Brahmaputra river basins on a regular basis, there are very few serious reporting that look into the root causes of that emerging phenomenon. The stress is more on the number: the number of villages inundated with flood water, the number of people affected, the number of lives lost, the total quantity of crop lost etc., making the reports more like a government press release. The topic of climate change rarely gets mentioned in the mainstream newspapers. However, the vernacular newspapers, since they are more rooted to the ground, often try to look beyond climate change, they try to show how the cumulative effect of climate change impacts the lives of the people and their livelihood. The resource pack has also incorporated different literature, music, films, folklores that have evolved and have developed in these two regions (Ganga and Brahmaputra river basins).

To encourage a more informed debate in the media, an effort has been made to include the existing water sharing treaties in this volume. The article 'Non-navigational Water Sharing of States under International Law and Treaties' has tried to explain the characteristics of international water sharing treatise and also the codification of the UN Convention. Also, it discusses and analyses some of the important water sharing treaties of this region to make us understand the current trend of South Asian water sharing model. Tables and maps are also an integral part of this report.