From Rural to Urban: Climate-Induced Migration and the Reshaping of Dhaka's Ethnic, Political, and Religious Identity

A Thesis in Behavioral Science

By

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of Bachelor in Arts

With Specialized Honors in Behavioral Science

May 2025

Abstract

Migration reshapes social, ethnic, and religious dynamics, challenging the boundaries between nature and culture as rural practices integrate into urban environments. This thesis investigates the multifaceted relationship between environmental crises, migration, and cultural transformation in Bangladesh, a nation at the forefront of climate change's most profound impacts. Rising sea levels, saltwater intrusion, and extreme weather events dismantle traditional lifestyles, forcing rural and coastal populations to migrate to urban centers like Dhaka. These migrations are not merely movements of people but transformations of culture, economy, and identity, reshaping urban spaces and testing the resilience of social systems. The transformation of Dhaka into a megacity provides a critical lens through which to understand Bangladesh's socio-environmental evolution. This study contextualizes these changes within the country's historical relationship with its geography and economy, examining the interplay between ecological vulnerabilities, agricultural practices, and industrialization. The analysis delves into how migration catalyzes shifts in Dhaka's ethnic, political, and religious fabric, offering a broader perspective on the changing dynamics of urban life in the Global South. Moreover, this research underscores the urgent need for policies holistically addressing migration's environmental and cultural dimensions. The study highlights the complex interdependencies between human communities and their environments by integrating historical, ecological, and sociological perspectives. It seeks to contribute to global discussions on climate-induced displacement, offering insights that extend beyond Bangladesh to inform strategies for managing migration and urbanization in the face of global climate crises.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Bangladesh is at the crossroads of a global crisis, where climate change and human migration converge. As one of the most climate-vulnerable nations in the world, it has a geographical and socio-political landscape that uniquely highlights the intersection of environmental degradation, cultural shifts, and urbanization. The country is confronting a critical situation characterized by rising sea levels, frequent floods and droughts, and saltwater intrusion (Castellano, Dolšak, Prakash 2021). These environmental challenges are displacing millions of individuals from rural and coastal areas. These migration patterns lead to urban centers like Dhaka, effectively reshaping the physical geography and the ethnic, political, and religious dynamics. Dhaka is the most densely populated city in the world, with a population of 18 million, which is expected to increase to about 50 million by 2050 (McPherson 2015). The conditions in Dhaka are expected to worsen as climate change forces more migrants North to Dhaka.
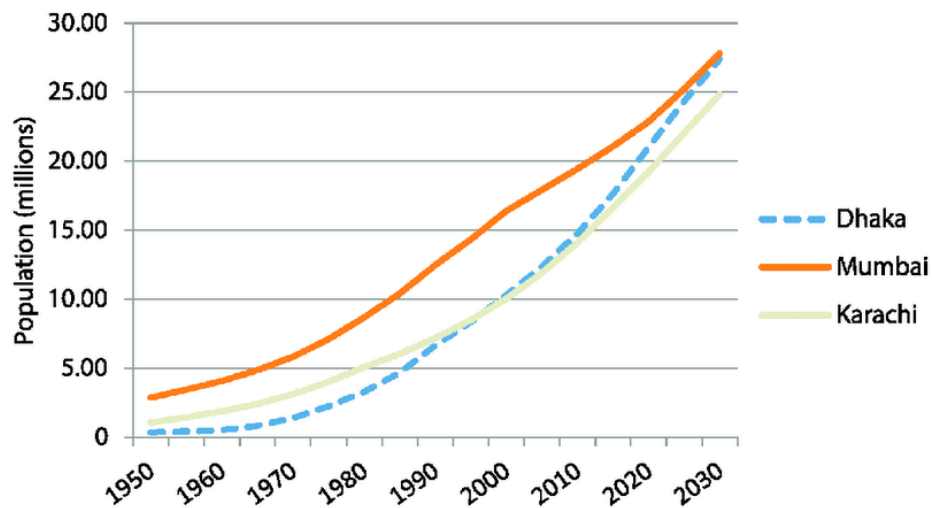
The projected growth of Dhaka city compared with Mumbai and Karachi, 1950-2030.

The crisis is profoundly multifaceted. Bangladesh, with its low-lying topography, is particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. About 70% of the country's land area is less than one meter above sea level, making it highly susceptible to sea-level rise and storm surges (Ahmed, 2020). Coupled with the country stretching across three of the largest river systems in the world, the Ganges, Brahmaputra, and Meghna, the risks of flooding and erosion are exponentially higher. Nearly 26% of Bangladesh's landmass experiences flooding yearly, with catastrophic events in 1988, 1998, 2004, and 2007 displacing millions and causing billions of dollars in damages (Huq et al., 2019). These environmental disruptions have far-reaching implications, not just for the economy and infrastructure but also for the cultural and social fabric of the nation. The human cost of this crisis is staggering. By 2050, it is estimated that one in every seven Bangladeshis will be displaced due to climate change, amounting to approximately 20 million climate refugees (Islam & Winkel, 2017). These displacements involve physical relocations and profound psychological, social, and cultural upheavals. For instance, rural communities forced to migrate lose their homes and ancestral lands, livelihoods, and community networks. These losses often result in a deep sense of identity erosion and cultural disconnect, exacerbating integration challenges in urban environments. The urban migration induced by climate change is particularly evident in Dhaka, which absorbs nearly 400,000 migrants annually (UNDP, 2021). This rapid urbanization has led to increasing informal settlements or slums, where living conditions are dire. Overcrowding, lack of sanitation, and limited access to clean water and healthcare are commonplace. Moreover, the influx of migrants has strained Dhaka's already inadequate infrastructure, leading to traffic congestion, air and water pollution, and an increased risk of disease outbreaks. These conditions highlight the physical and infrastructural challenges climate change poses and underscore the socio-economic inequalities exacerbated by this crisis. From a cultural perspective, the migration from rural to urban areas has led to significant shifts in social norms, values, and practices. Rural migrants bring traditional agricultural knowledge, community-based living arrangements, and deeply rooted religious and cultural practices. However, the transition to urban life often requires renegotiating these identities. For example, traditional gender roles may be challenged as women enter the workforce in urban areas. At the same time, younger

generations may adopt more modern lifestyles and values, creating generational tensions within families. These cultural transformations are not merely byproducts of climate migration but are intrinsic to the broader structural changes occurring within Bangladeshi society. Thus, Bangladesh is a tragic case study for understanding the complex interplay between climate change, migration, and cultural transformation. The country's unique vulnerabilities and resilience strategies offer valuable insights into how societies can navigate the challenges of climate change. By examining these issues through the lens of Claude Lévi-Strauss's structuralist framework, this thesis aims to illuminate how environmental disruptions reshape cultural identities, social structures, and urban landscapes in Bangladesh. This approach not only underscores the relevance of Lévi-Strauss's ideas in contemporary contexts but also highlights the urgent need for policies integrating ecological sustainability with social and cultural resilience.
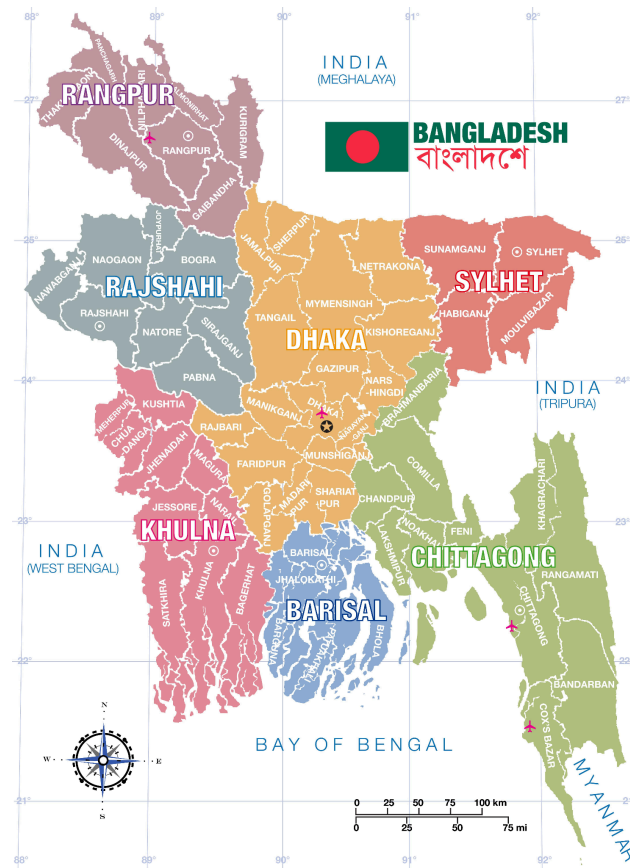
The eight administrative divisions of Bangladesh, with Dhaka at the center and key climate-vulnerable coastal regions like Khulna, Barisal, and Chittagong in the south.

This thesis examines the multifaceted impact of climate disasters in Bangladesh, focusing on how they exacerbate existing scarcities of food and land while simultaneously intensifying religious and ethnic conflict. By investigating the ecological history of Bangladesh, the patterns of contemporary migration, and the socio-political shifts in urban centers like Dhaka, this study seeks to illuminate the intricate relationship between climate-induced migration and societal change. The questions of interest for this research include: How have climate disasters and migration patterns influenced the socio-political landscape of Bangladesh? What role does religious radicalism and ethnic tension play in shaping responses to these crises? How is Dhaka, a rapidly growing urban city, transforming under the weight of migration? The aim is to demonstrate that climate-induced migration in Bangladesh is not merely a response to environmental crises but a transformative sociopolitical force that reshapes urban landscapes, reconfigures cultural and religious identities, and exacerbates existing inequalities, ultimately challenging the nation's capacity for social cohesion, inclusive governance, and sustainable development. Bangladesh is an example of how climate migration challenges the boundaries between nature and culture. Furthermore, it underscores the urgency for addressing these crises to prevent more enormous catastrophes.

Ecological History of Bangladesh

The geographical location of Bangladesh has dramatically influenced its ecological history. Situated in the floodplains of the Ganges, Brahmaputra, and Meghna rivers and bordered by the Bay of Bengal, the country has long been characterized by its fertile soils, abundant waterways, and extensive coastline. This geographic advantage has historically supported agriculture and fishing, which are the backbones of the economy. Staples like rice and jute flourish in this region, while the Bay of Bengal provides a rich fishing culture that has sustained coastal communities for years. While Bangladesh's geography sustains livelihood for its inhabitants, it also renders them vulnerable to the adverse effects of ecological disturbances. Estimates indicate that sea-level rise alone could displace millions, potentially up to 13 million Bangladeshis, from their usual residence by 2050 (Ahsan et al. 2024). Seasonal monsoons and cyclones originating in the Bay of Bengal frequently damage coastal areas, causing devastating floods

that lead to displacement. Between 1970 and 2020, Bangladesh faced more than 200 natural disasters, with cyclones causing extensive damage and affecting an estimated 3.90 million people in 11 coastal districts (Uddin 2024). Over time, the impacts of climate change have exacerbated these environmental tragedies. Rising sea levels induced by global warming have begun to submerge low-lying coastal areas, significantly impacting communities reliant on agriculture and fishing. Saltwater intrusion has significantly disrupted rural livelihoods, particularly agriculture and aquaculture, by reducing arable land and crop yields. Although these changes are pushing locals to adapt by diversifying their farming and fishing practices, these adaptations come with socioeconomic trade-offs (Bhowmick, Uddin, and Rahman 2019). Salinization has caused food insecurity and economic hardships, pushing many rural and coastal communities to abandon their homes and migrate to urban areas like Dhaka.

Similarly, Bangladesh's industrial growth, particularly in the garment sector, has been a major driver of economic development but has also led to significant environmental challenges. The ready-made garment (RMG) industry, one of the world's largest and fastest-growing, accounts for 84% of the country's total exports and employs millions (Nazrul and Rahman 2021). However, this growing garment industry has come at a tremendous ecological cost. The garment sector is responsible for significant water pollution, with factories discharging industrial waste into rivers, turning the water black during the dry season (Saha, Ahkter, Hassan 2021). These pollutants have serious consequences for both aquatic ecosystems and public health. The RMG and textile sectors also contributed 32.2% and 67.8% of greenhouse gas emissions, respectively (Biswas et al. 2024). The environmental impacts of industrialization in Bangladesh are beyond water and waste management. The pressure of urban migration compounds these environmental strains as the rural populations move to cities like Dhaka in search of work. Often, they end up in these industries where employment opportunities are plentiful and earning money is easy, creating a cycle of environmental degradation and socio-economic instability. Efforts are emerging to address these challenges, but they remain limited in scope and face significant hurdles, including inadequate infrastructure for waste management and the growing demand for fast fashion.

Without more widespread and comprehensive policy changes, industrialization's environmental impacts will likely continue to challenge Bangladesh's long-term sustainability.

Contemporary Migration

Climate migration in Bangladesh has emerged as a defining challenge of the 21st century. As mentioned, the interplay of environmental degradation and economic instability drives much of the migration within Bangladesh. Rising sea levels, frequent cyclones, saltwater intrusion, and riverbank erosion are among the factors responsible for communities abandoning their rural homes. Estimates suggest that by 2050, nearly 13 million Bangladeshis could be displaced due to climate change, representing approximately 7.5% of the country's projected population of 170 million (World Bank 2018). Agricultural instability worsens this trend, forcing many to seek alternative opportunities for housing and work. Ultimately, most people from rural areas migrate to cities like Dhaka, which is already densely populated. The rapid influx of people due to growing environmental challenges has created significant pressure on the city's infrastructure, housing, and public services. Informal settlements, or slums, are expanding at an alarming rate, housing an estimated 40% of the city's population (Islam et al. 2014). These slums lack access to clean water, sanitation, and healthcare, leading to inadequate living conditions and heightened public health risks. The city's social fabric is also changing as tensions rise between long-term residents and migrants over scarce resources. The overwhelming rate of migration has outpaced urban planning efforts. Although the government has launched initiatives like the Bangladesh Delta Plan 2100 (BDP2100) to address long-term climate adaptation and migration, implementation remains inconsistent due to financial and logistical constraints. A study in the Water Policy journal claims that the governmental institutions and stakeholders involved in the implementation process lack effective communication; consequently, issues go unnoticed, and costs rise (Kabir et al. 2022). Strategies like flood-proof infrastructure and inclusive housing policies are critical but remain underdeveloped. Additionally, the informal labor market absorbs a majority of climate migrants, increasing their vulnerability to exploitative conditions and further expanding the cycle of poverty. Contemporary migration and urbanization in Bangladesh underscore the urgent need for integrated policies that address

rural displacement while ensuring sustainable urban development. As the impacts of climate change continue to advance, Bangladesh's experience offers crucial lessons for other nations facing similar challenges.

Religious and Ethnic Dynamics Amid Migration

The intersection of climate migration with Bangladesh's religious and ethnic landscape is a critical yet underexplored dimension of contemporary migration studies. With environmental pressures forcing migration, new shifts in interethnic and inter-religious dynamics lay the foundation for conflict. Religious minorities, including Hindus, Buddhists, and Christians, and ethnic groups like the Chakma and Marma, face disproportionate challenges in the context of climate migration. Many minority communities reside in vulnerable regions such as the Chittagong Hill Tracts, coastal zones, and chars - islands formed by accumulated river sediments over time. According to Concern Worldwide, an international humanitarian organization, around 6 million people live in Chars, almost 5% of Bangladesh's population (2021). Dhaka's social and cultural landscape has been reshaped by migration, a once relatively small city turned into the second fastest-growing megacity in the world. The Centre for Urban Studies estimated that the total population of Dhaka's slums more than doubled between 1996 and 2005, from 1.5 to 3.4 million people. As in most cases, displacement amplifies existing inequalities. For example, minority groups displaced from rural areas may encounter discrimination in the city, thus limiting their access to housing, education, and employment. The rapid development of megacities is accompanied by a decline in effective governance due to weak political structures. Furthermore, health and social services are frequently inadequate or nonexistent, while the housing sector struggles to meet the overwhelming demand generated by mass migration (Gruebner et al. 2014). While urban migration has the potential to foster intergroup interactions through shared hardship and the necessity for collaboration, these instances are often overshadowed by systematic discrimination and societal fragmentation. Aside from living conditions, migration also alters religious practices and identities. Minority groups may face pressure to assimilate or conceal their identities to avoid discrimination. For instance, rural migrants often adapt their

faith traditions to align with the socio-religious norms of the urban areas. There is a shift in Muslim populations, particularly migrants of already Islamic backgrounds, adopting more purist practices.

Nature-Culture Boundary

In exploring the nature-culture boundary through the lens of Lévi-Strauss's structuralist framework, we can better understand how Bangladesh's environmental and cultural transformations reflect the complex interplay between the natural world and human societal structures. Lévi-Strauss proposed that the division between nature and culture is a fundamental organizing principle in human thought, marked by binaries such as raw/cooked, wild/domesticated, and natural/artificial (1969). This boundary reflects how societies impose structure (culture) on the unstructured world of nature to create meaning. Climate change challenges the stability of this nature-culture dichotomy by demonstrating how deeply intertwined the two are. For instance, rising sea levels, saltwater intrusion, and frequent flooding are natural phenomena, yet their impacts - migration, urbanization, and shifts in ethno-religious practices- are cultural. In Lévi-Strauss's terms, migrants from rural areas bring "raw" elements that challenge the "cooked" structures of urban living. The stories and experiences of those displaced by climate change in Bangladesh are narratives that help communities integrate the dissonance between environmental realities and cultural identity. These stories act as a way to connect the old way of life with the new, showing how people find meaning and resilience in the face of uncertainty. The Lévi-Straussian perspective is essential when creating policies addressing climate migration. It advocates for recognizing the symbolic and structural significance of the nature-culture boundary. Policies and initiatives need to address practical needs like housing and infrastructure, and respect the cultural systems migrants bring with them. The climate crisis in Bangladesh is not simply an environmental phenomenon but a profound social and cultural transformation. Displacement of this degree shows us how the boundaries between nature and culture become increasingly blurred. By applying Lévi-Strauss's structuralist framework, we can examine how environmental disruptions reshape cultural identities, social structures, and urban landscapes in Bangladesh. Lévi-Strauss is relevant to contemporary issues, such as how structural transformations

triggered by climate migration reflect a deeper tension between moderation, tradition, and environmental adaptation.

Lévi-Strauss famously argued that human societies construct cultural frameworks to impose order on nature. However, in Bangladesh, climate change has made this distinction unstable. The sea, responsible for feeding the country and arguably giving it life, is now destroying it. Rising sea levels, salinity intrusion, and extreme weather events disrupt traditional lifestyles, forcing rural communities to move to Dhaka. As a Bangladesh native who often frequents the city of Dhaka and the villages of Chittagong, I've seen the effects of this crisis firsthand. While the villages are becoming progressively desolate, Dhaka is becoming more overcrowded than ever. This displacement of people represents a physical movement and a transformation in identity and social organization. As Albert Doja highlights, Lévi-Strauss's critique of Western dualism, such as the rigid separation of nature and culture, resonates strongly in contexts where environmental change challenges long-standing societal structures (2020, p.45). One of the most visible manifestations of this blurring of lines is the migration of rural populations who bring traditional agricultural practices into the urban setting. These displaced communities must navigate a new social order where industrial labor replaces agricultural life, reshaping their cultural practices and interactions. The myth-making process, a key concept in Lévi-Straussian thought, becomes a tool for migrants to reconcile their past and present, forging new narratives that link their environmental displacement to broader cultural shifts. Not to mention, many migrants are moving because of the possibility of income; otherwise, their limited skills and social networks are coupled with negative perceptions of cities. Furthermore, as Bangladesh struggles with the loss of arable land due to climate change, adaptation strategies of displaced populations reflect a fusion of nature and culture. Some communities are developing innovative farming techniques in urban areas, such as hydroponic farms and terrace gardens, that preserve their agricultural roots while integrating into the industrial economy. Dhaps, or baira, are floating vegetable gardens that rise and fall with the flood. These raft-like structures are planted with seedlings and placed in flooded areas. They are as common as having a small terrace garden in the city (Sunder 2020). This adaptive process illustrates how environmental changes necessitate

cultural reinvention, reinforcing Lévi-Strauss's notion that culture continually reorganizes itself in response to external pressures. Lévi-Strauss asserts that anthropology is, of course, "about" all human culture, but rural and, especially, foraging societies such as the coastal fisherfolk under examination here, have a special place in it, in that their relative organizational complexity—or lack thereof—allows the constructional principles of all human societies to be deduced. This is because their myths, traditions and beliefs have been less completely "cooked" (transmuted) than the mythology of "complex" urban societies (1966). Thus, as we examine the process of urban migration from the coastal rural areas, we are able to witness the process of transformation in the reflections upon the nature-culture divide as they are happening. Lévi-Strauss sees all human culture as an intellectual/symbolic reflection on the Nature-Culture boundary. That is, as migrants move further away from their lives embraced by the natural world and its symbols into the urban milieu, we see the process of more 'raw' or less cooked artefacts of culture becoming ever more processed.

As a rapidly growing megacity, Dhaka serves as a case study for the impact of climate migration on urban social structures. According to Doja, Lévi-Strauss's concept of cultural transformation through external pressure is crucial for understanding how migration reshapes urban life (2020, p. 52). Rural migrants arriving in Dhaka do not just assimilate; they change the city's social fabric by introducing their ideas of economics, religion, and social networks. However, this integration is not seamless. Many migrants face discrimination, economic marginalization, and inadequate living conditions. This structuralist perspective allows us to see the tensions within the country as part of a broader pattern of adaptation when traditional cultural forms are reconfigured to fit new environmental and economic realities. This reconfiguration matches Lévi-Strauss's notion that societies do not discard old structures entirely but transform them in response to external change. In Dhaka, this transformation can be seen in the informal labor market, where migrants take jobs in the garment industry, construction, and domestic work sectors that become cultural mediators between rural traditions and urban modernity. Additionally, the expansion of informal settlements due to climate migration has led to a new spatial reconfiguration within Dhaka. As a result, there are distinct cultural sanctuaries where rural traditions persist alongside

urban influences. These neighborhoods function as transitional spaces where migrants can negotiate new social norms while maintaining their cultures. This further exemplifies Lévi-Strauss's assertion that cultures adapt by blending, not through abrupt separations.

One of Lévi-Strauss's key contributions to anthropology is his understanding of myth as a way for societies to make sense of contradictions. In Bangladesh, narratives of climate displacement function as contemporary myths that bridge the divide between the past and present. These stories often frame migration as both a loss and an opportunity. While displaced individuals mourn the loss of their previous lifestyles and lands, they simultaneously create new identities in their newly found urban environment. This duality reflects Lévi-Strauss's argument that myths mediate between opposing forces, helping societies process change. The role of religious and ethnic minorities in this transformation is particularly significant. Lévi-Strauss was concerned with how cultural systems adapt under external pressure (Doja 2020, p.60). In Bangladesh, Hindu, Buddhist, and indigenous communities often experience climate displacement in ways that further marginalize them within the dominant Sunni Muslim communities. Their migration, resilience, and adaptation narratives contribute to the evolving mythologies of climate change, reinforcing the idea that cultural identity is "raw" material that can be "cooked" by external forces. Moreover, myths about environmental justice and divine retribution have become prevalent in some displaced communities. Many interpret climate-induced displacement as a spiritual trial, drawing on religious and folkloric traditions to explain suffering. Religion, specifically, has caused much turmoil, as Islamic purists use environmental disasters as a sign to convert Bangladesh into an Islamic state. This is problematic for minority groups like Bengali Hindus and Buddhists, who bear the brunt of climate change. Although these mythological frameworks help communities contextualize their experiences, issues such as Islamic radicalism have been on the rise and are currently at an all-time high.

The climate crisis in Bangladesh exemplifies Lévi-Strauss's argument that the boundary between nature and culture is not fixed but constantly shifting in response to external pressure. Environmental displacement is a matter of physical displacement and the reconstruction of cultural identities, social hierarchies, and urban landscapes. As Dhaka absorbs increasing numbers of climate migrants, the city

becomes a site where rural and urban, tradition and modernity, and nature and culture intersect in new and complex ways. Applying a Lévi-Straussian structuralist framework to Bangladesh's climate crisis allows us to analyze how environmental disruption triggers broader cultural transformations. Lévi-Strauss's anthropological framework lies in its ability to explain how societies navigate change – "it is possible for a society to change without substituting one culture for another" (Doja 2020, p.15). In Bangladesh, the myths, narratives, and social adaptations showcase how communities contextualize their experiences within a larger cultural and historical context, underscoring the need for policies that integrate ecological sustainability and cultural resistance.

Chapter 2: The Roots of Environmental Vulnerability

Bangladesh's ecological history is deeply tied to its unique geographical landscape as one of the world's largest and most dynamic delta regions. The country's location at the junction of the Ganges, Brahmaputra, and Meghna rivers, combined with its extensive coastline along the Bay of Bengal, has shaped its historical development, subsistence strategies, and environmental challenges. For years, human societies in this region have adapted to seasonal flooding, shifting river courses, and soil fertility, creating a rich agriculture, fishing, and trade tradition. However, as Camelia Dewan (2021) highlights in *Misreading the Bengal Delta*, contemporary climate change narratives often oversimplify and misinterpret the delta's complex environmental dynamics by framing the region solely as a site of climate vulnerability and ecological crisis. This perspective ignored the historically adaptive strategies developed by local communities, such as seasonal mobility, crop diversification, and water management practices, that have enabled them to live with and respond to the delta's naturally shifting landscape for generations. As a result, climate policies based on these misreadings risk imposing top-down interventions that overlook local knowledge systems and, in doing so, may undermine the very resilience they aim to enhance. The interplay between human settlements and the changing environment also defines the ecological history of Bangladesh. The monsoon climate and annual flooding, often seen as destructive forces, have historically replenished the soil and sustained biodiversity. Traditional knowledge systems developed in response to these environmental patterns, shaping land management strategies prioritizing sustainability. However, these long-standing adaptations are increasingly under threat with rapid industrialization, population growth, and climate change. As a result, understanding Bangladesh's ecological history is crucial for developing sustainable policies that align with environmental and social realities.

Early Settlement and Subsistence Strategies

The earliest human settlements in the Bengal Delta date back to the Neolithic period, when communities took advantage of the region's fertile soils and abundant water resources. Evidence from archaeological sites such as Mahasthangarh and Wari-Bateshwar suggests that early settlers practiced

mixed subsistence strategies, combining agriculture, fishing, and foraging to sustain their livelihoods (Lahiri, 1991; Chakrabarti, 2001). The presence of rice husks in excavation sites indicates that rice cultivation emerged as a central component of agricultural practices as early as 2000 BCE, supported by indigenous irrigation techniques such as floodplain farming and embankment construction (Habib, 1982). Fishing played a crucial role in subsistence, with communities utilizing bamboo traps, cast nets, and fishponds to harness the vast aquatic resources of the delta. The availability of freshwater and coastal fisheries allowed for a diverse diet, supplementing agricultural production. Archaeological evidence suggests that fish preservation methods, such as drying and fermenting, were practiced to ensure food security during seasonal shortages. As Sultana (2016) notes, traditional fishing methods were adapted to the seasonal nature of flooding, ensuring a stable food supply even during environmental variability. These techniques provided a reliable food source and supported local economies through trade.

Trade and commerce flourished as riverine and coastal routes connected the region to broader networks in South Asia and beyond. The Bengal Delta's accessibility to inland and maritime trade routes facilitated the exchange of goods such as rice, fish, spices, and textiles, contributing to the region's prosperity. Over time, the development of port cities allowed Bengal to become an essential hub for trade, attracting merchants from areas as far as the Middle East and Southeast Asia. By the medieval period, Bengal had become a major center of textile production and grain exports, further integrating its ecological wealth into global economic systems (Chaudhuri, 1990). The region's muslin fabric, known for its fine quality, was highly valued in international markets, particularly Europe and the Mughal Empire. Additionally, advancements in agricultural techniques, such as crop rotation and using natural fertilizers, further enhanced agricultural output, ensuring a stable food supply for growing urban populations.

Agricultural and Environmental Practices

Agriculture in ancient Bangladesh was deeply intertwined with the region's flood-dependent ecology. Farmers relied on the seasonal monsoon cycle, which replenished the land with nutrient-rich silt, naturally fertilizing the soil and reducing the need for artificial supplements. To adapt to the frequent flooding, communities developed floating rice varieties that could thrive in submerged conditions, while

the construction of irrigation canals and reservoirs enabled year-round farming (Ludden, 1999). These adaptations allowed for a stable food supply despite the environmental challenges posed by the delta landscape. The connection between agriculture and culture was equally important. Traditional festivals such as *Nabanna*, which marks the end of the harvest season, celebrate the agricultural cycle and reinforce the deep-rooted ties between farming and Bengali identity. The term Nabanna translates to "fresh food" and is derived from nabo (fresh) and anna (food). It is observed at the onset of winter in both Bangladesh and West Bengal, India. As Hasan (2021) notes, this festival" stands as a testament to the enduring spirit of the farmers of Bangladesh, a cherished tradition that promises to continue enriching the cultural tapestry of the nation for generations to come." Despite modern agricultural transformations, such traditions continue to reflect the historical silence and significance of farming in Bengali society.

Beyond its cultural significance, agriculture in Bengal was characterized by sustainable land use practices that preserved soil fertility and ensured long-term food security. Farmers employed sophisticated crop rotation techniques, integrating legumes and pulses to replenish nutrients naturally. The widespread use of organic fertilizers, such as cow dung and composted plant matter, maintained soil productivity without synthetic chemicals (Chakraborty 2023). These eco-friendly practices sustained agricultural output for generations while minimizing environmental degradation. In addition to rice, Jute emerged as one of Bengal's most valuable crops, having been used for a long time to make rope and woven garments, and its sticks used as firewood (Zamir 2024). Known for its durability and versatility, jute became a key economic driver and a significant export commodity. Its cultivation required abundant water, making it well-suited to Bengal's wetland ecosystem. The integration of rice and jute farming exemplifies how ancient agricultural systems harmonized with the region's natural environment, ensuring economic prosperity while maintaining ecological balance. These historical practices highlight the ingenuity of Bengal's early agrarian communities in adapting to their surroundings and sustaining a thriving agricultural economy.

Colonial and Post-Colonial Transformations

British colonial rule fundamentally disrupted the ecological balance of Bangladesh, laying the groundwork for many environmental vulnerabilities the country faces today. The arrival of European colonial powers, particularly the British in the 18th century, marked a significant turning point in the ecological history of Bangladesh. The Permanent Settlement Act of 1793 fundamentally altered land tenure systems, prioritizing revenue collection over sustainable resource management. This act shifted control over vast tracts of land to 'zamindars' (landlords) who focused more on extracting revenue than maintaining the ecological balance. As a result, large-scale deforestation and wetland drainage were undertaken to expand agricultural production, disrupting traditional land use practices and exacerbating the impacts of flooding and soil erosion (Richards, 1995). The indigo plantations of the 19th century further illustrate the colonial exploitation of Bengal's ecology. British planters forced local farmers to cultivate indigo instead of food crops, leading to widespread economic hardship and environmental degradation. Indigo cultivation exhausted soil fertility and required intensive irrigation, reducing land productivity in the long run. Violent uprisings, such as the Indigo Revolt of 1859, highlighted the tensions between ecological sustainability and colonial economic policies (Das, 2022). Similarly, expanding tea plantations in Sylhet and the Chittagong Hill Tracts led to massive deforestation, permanently altering biodiversity in these regions. In addition to agricultural transformations, British colonial infrastructure projects significantly impacted Bangladesh's ecological landscape. The construction of railways, roads, and ports to facilitate resource extraction often ignored the delta's natural hydrological systems. Embankments and drainage canals were built to control water flow, but these interventions usually led to unintended consequences, such as increased waterlogging in some areas and desertification in others. The British government's focus on commercial interests rather than environmental sustainability resulted in long-term ecological instability, making many areas more susceptible to natural disasters.

Following independence from Pakistan in 1971, Bangladesh faced new ecological challenges as it sought to modernize its economy. Post-independence policies in the 20th century continued to reshape Bangladesh's ecological landscape with many initiatives aimed at controlling river courses through

embankments and flood control measures. However, these government-led interventions often failed to account for the natural variability of the deltaic environment, leading to increased vulnerability to floods and waterlogging. The Green Revolution, introduced in the 1970s and 1980s, significantly increased agricultural productivity by using high-yield variety (HYV) seeds, chemical fertilizers, and irrigation infrastructure. While this shift helped address food shortages, it also had severe ecological consequences. The widespread use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides contributed to soil degradation and water contamination. Excessive groundwater extraction for irrigation depleted aquifers, causing long-term disruptions to water availability and contributing to arsenic contamination in drinking water (Ahmed et al., 2018). Rapid urban expansion and industrialization in the late 20th and early 21st centuries further accelerated deforestation, increased air and water pollution, and displaced rural populations. Unregulated urbanization in cities like Dhaka and Chittagong led to the destruction of wetlands, which historically served as natural flood regulators. The conversion of agricultural land into industrial zones, coupled with the unchecked growth of brick kilns and textile factories, further degraded air and water quality, making environmental sustainability an increasingly pressing issue (Haque & Rahman, 2020).

While Bangladesh has made strides in implementing environmental regulations, enforcement remains a challenge. The Environmental Conservation Act of 1995 and subsequent policies were introduced to regulate industrial pollution and protect biodiversity, but weak governance and corruption often hinder effective implementation. Additionally, climate change continues to exacerbate the historical environmental challenges created by colonial and post-independence policies.

Industrialization and Its Environmental Consequences

Since the late 20th century, industrialization has transformed Bangladesh's economy, particularly through the rapid expansion of the ready-made garment (RMG) sector. This growth has come at a significant environmental cost. Textile factories discharge untreated wastewater into rivers, leading to severe water pollution. Studies indicate that the Buriganga River, once a vital waterway for trade and fishing, is now heavily contaminated with toxic dyes and industrial effluents (Hossain & Islam, 2020). The demand for land for industrial zones has also led to deforestation and the conversion of wetlands into

urban areas. This has disrupted local ecosystems, reduced biodiversity, and increased the frequency of urban flooding. Additionally, air pollution from brick kilns and vehicle emissions has become a primary environmental concern in cities like Dhaka (Rahman et al., 2018). Poor waste management practices, including the unregulated disposal of industrial byproducts, have further exacerbated water and soil contamination, threatening public health and agricultural productivity.

One of the most alarming consequences of industrialization is water pollution. Textile factories, tanneries, and chemical plants discharge untreated wastewater into major rivers, notably the Buriganga, Shitalakshya, and Turag rivers. Studies indicate that the Buriganga River, once a vital waterway for trade and fishing, is now heavily contaminated with toxic dyes, heavy metals, and industrial effluents, rendering its water unfit for human consumption or aquatic life (Hossain & Islam, 2020). Air pollution has also worsened due to industrialization, particularly from brick kilns, which are responsible for approximately 58% of Dhaka's air pollution (World Bank, 2018). Low-quality coal in these kilns emits harmful particulates and greenhouse gases, significantly deteriorating air quality. Vehicular emissions and unregulated construction activities further contribute to the toxic air pollution levels, increasing the prevalence of respiratory diseases among urban populations (Rahman et al., 2018).

Additionally, the expansion of industrial zones and urbanization has resulted in widespread deforestation and the destruction of wetlands. Industrial parks, highways, and unregulated land development have led to the conversion of ecologically sensitive areas into commercial and residential sites. The destruction of wetlands in and around Dhaka and Chittagong has reduced the region's natural flood absorption capacity, exacerbating urban flooding during monsoon seasons (Khan & Akter, 2021). Furthermore, deforestation in rural and peri-urban areas has led to soil degradation, loss of biodiversity, and increased vulnerability to climate-induced disasters such as cyclones and droughts. Another significant concern is the shipbreaking industry, which is concentrated in Chittagong. Bangladesh is one of the largest shipbreaking hubs in the world, where old vessels are dismantled for scrap metal. This industry is notorious for its unsafe labor conditions and environmental hazards. Shipbreaking releases asbestos, heavy metals, and oil residues into coastal waters, severely impacting marine ecosystems and

local fishing communities (Islam & Hossain, 2019). The lack of proper waste management in this sector has led to soil and water contamination, affecting both human settlements and biodiversity along the coast. Waste mismanagement is another pressing issue exacerbated by industrialization. Many urban and industrial areas lack proper waste disposal and recycling facilities, leading to open dumping of hazardous materials. E-waste from discarded electronics, along with plastic and industrial byproducts, often accumulates in landfills or is burned, releasing toxic fumes and pollutants into the air and groundwater (Chowdhury et al., 2020).

While industrialization has contributed to Bangladesh's economic progress, the environmental consequences remain severe. The lack of enforcement of environmental regulations and rapid urban expansion has intensified pollution, deforestation, and land degradation. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive policies that balance economic growth with environmental sustainability. Strengthening regulatory frameworks, investing in green technology, and implementing stricter waste management and pollution control measures are essential to mitigating the adverse effects of industrialization on Bangladesh's ecology.

Climate Change and Contemporary Challenges

Bangladesh is at the forefront of climate change's most pressing impacts today. Rising sea levels, saltwater intrusion, and extreme weather events threaten the livelihoods of millions, particularly in coastal regions. Up to 13 million Bangladeshis could be displaced by climate-induced environmental changes by 2050 (Iqbal & Roy 2015). The increasing frequency of tropical cyclones, storm surges, and erratic monsoon patterns exacerbates food insecurity and disrupts traditional agrarian livelihoods. Coastal erosion has accelerated, forcing entire villages to relocate further inland. At the same time, the Sundarbans mangrove forest—one of the country's most critical ecological buffers—faces significant degradation due to rising salinity levels and human encroachment (Sen 2023). Climate change is also intensifying water scarcity and contamination. The intrusion of saltwater into freshwater sources is making irrigation more difficult, reducing crop yields, and forcing farmers to rely on less nutritious, saline-tolerant crops. The spread of waterborne diseases, exacerbated by flooding and poor sanitation

infrastructure, further threatens public health in both rural and urban areas. In cities like Dhaka and Chittagong, rising temperatures and increased humidity have led to more frequent heat waves, putting additional strain on energy and healthcare systems (Shahrujjaman et al., 2025). Despite these challenges, Bangladesh has a long history of adaptation to environmental stress. As Dewan (2021) emphasizes, international climate discourse often overlooks the agency of local populations in mitigating these challenges. Traditional ecological knowledge and innovative adaptation strategies continue to play a crucial role in rural resilience. Tidal river management (TRM), an indigenous flood control technique, has been successfully employed in the southwest to restore silted river channels and improve drainage systems (Hossain et al. 2015). Furthermore, local farmers have selectively bred flood-resistant rice varieties that thrive in submerged conditions, ensuring continued agricultural productivity despite rising water levels. The government of Bangladesh, along with international organizations, has taken several initiatives to combat climate change. Large-scale projects, such as the Bangladesh Delta Plan 2100 (BDP2100), aim to enhance flood control, promote climate-resilient agriculture, and integrate sustainable urban planning (MoEFCC, 2021). However, challenges remain in ensuring equitable implementation, as marginalized communities such as the landless poor and indigenous groups often face barriers to accessing adaptation resources and financial assistance. As Bangladesh continues to navigate the complexities of climate change, a balance between modern technological interventions and traditional knowledge systems is essential. Strengthening community-led adaptation efforts, investing in sustainable infrastructure, and promoting global climate justice initiatives are crucial for safeguarding Bangladesh's environmental and human landscapes.

The ecological history of Bangladesh reveals a complex interplay between natural forces and human adaptation. While climate change presents new and urgent threats, historical evidence suggests that Bangladeshi communities have long demonstrated resilience in the face of environmental fluctuations. As Dewan (2021) argues, recognizing and incorporating indigenous knowledge systems into policy frameworks is essential for crafting sustainable solutions that align with the realities of the deltaic environment. Moving forward, an integrated approach that balances ecological preservation with

economic and social development will be critical in ensuring the long-term viability of Bangladesh's environmental and human landscapes. Moreover, addressing Bangladesh's ecological challenges requires collaborative efforts between policymakers, scientists, and local communities. Adaptive governance strategies prioritizing sustainable land and water management can help mitigate the negative impacts of climate change and industrialization. Strengthening legal frameworks for environmental protection, investing in renewable energy sources, and promoting sustainable agricultural practices will be crucial steps toward building resilience. Ultimately, the future of Bangladesh's ecological sustainability lies in a comprehensive and inclusive approach that integrates traditional wisdom, scientific innovation, and equitable policymaking. By fostering resilience at the community level and prioritizing sustainable development, Bangladesh can continue to adapt to its evolving environmental landscape while ensuring the well-being of its people for generations to come.

Chapter 3: Climate Migration and Urbanization

The relentless environmental pressures across Bangladesh's rural and coastal areas, including rising sea levels, saltwater intrusion, river bank erosion, and increasingly frequent extreme weather events, compel many people to abandon their homes and livelihoods. This internal displacement overwhelmingly flows toward the nation's capital, Dhaka. While rural-to-urban migration in Bangladesh stems from a complex web of factors, including long-standing economic distress independent of recent climate shifts, a significant and intensifying wave is driven directly by climate change impacts. Distinguishing purely 'economic' migrants from 'climate' migrants on the ground is often tricky, as climate change is a primary driver of economic hardship by destroying agricultural land, fishing grounds, and other assets. However, migration induced or accelerated by climate change often carries specific characteristics, such as its potential suddenness following disasters, the irreversible loss of habitable land, and a disruption tied directly to environmental collapse. This combined pressure contributes to Dhaka absorbing an estimated 400,000 new arrivals annually (World Bank, 2021). This staggering influx fundamentally restructures the city's physical, social, and cultural landscape, presenting immense challenges to urban sustainability and governance. The most immediate consequence is the dramatic expansion of informal settlements, or slums. These densely packed neighborhoods, often on marginal land, become the primary destination for migrants lacking affordable formal housing options. Such settlements house a significant portion of the city's population, potentially up to 40 percent (Islam et al., 2014). Conditions within slums like Korail, Duaripara, and Chalantika are typically characterized by inadequate sanitation, limited access to clean drinking water, precarious housing, and the threat of eviction, creating a challenging environment for adaptation (Ayeb Karlsson et al., 2020).

A Structuralist Analysis of Climate Migration

Levi Strauss's structuralist framework helps illuminate how climate migration disrupts Bangladesh's traditional boundaries between nature and culture. According to him, societies impose cultural order in the natural world to generate meaning, a process symbolized by transitioning from the

"raw" to the "cooked." In Dhaka, climate-induced migration from rural areas brings with it agrarian lifestyles and survival strategies that clash with the industrialized, urban "cooked" environment. These migrants challenge dominant cultural norms and urban hierarchies, forcing the city to renegotiate its social and spatial organization. In this way, climate migration becomes a demographic shift and a cultural collision that reshapes the urban fabric. The influx of displaced populations does not just create logistical challenges but also redefines cultural identities. As Levi Strauss argued, societies adapt to external pressures by integrating and transforming existing structures rather than replacing them entirely (Doja, 2020). This can be seen in Dhaka, where informal settlements (slums) become manifestations of rural Bangladesh, preserving agricultural techniques, religious practices, and social norms even within the urban setting.

One of the most visible manifestations of this cultural adaptation is the rise of urban agriculture, where migrants use rooftop gardens, floating vegetable farms, and hydroponic systems to maintain traditional agrarian practices within the city (Chowdhury, 2017). This reinvention aligns with Levi Strauss's belief that culture continuously reorganizes itself in response to external changes rather than disappearing altogether. Furthermore, Levi Strauss's critique of Western dualism, particularly the strict separation between nature and culture, resonates strongly in Bangladesh, where the ecological crisis demonstrates their deep interconnectedness. The Bay of Bengal, which has historically been a source of livelihood, is now a force of destruction. Rural migrants, many of whom are fishers or farmers, must navigate a landscape where their traditional knowledge systems no longer exist in their new environment. This shift forces a restructuring of cultural identity, reinforcing Levi Strauss's notion that myths and narratives help societies mediate transitions (Doja, 2020). A key example of this transformation is the myth-making process among displaced communities. Climate migrants often frame their displacement within religious or folklore narratives that help them explain suffering and adaptation.

In some cases, environmental disasters are interpreted as divine retribution or trials of faith, reinforcing existing religious structures while adapting them to new urban realities (Sony et al., 2023). This cultural process aligns with Levi Strauss's idea that myths mediate contradictions between past and

present, tradition and modernity (1969). For instance, in many rural communities, flooding is seen as a curse and a test. Some religious leaders preach that rising waters are a form of divine punishment for societal sins, urging communities to embrace stricter religious practices to prevent further catastrophes. This belief has led to an increase in conservative interpretations of Islam, particularly among displaced migrants who see adherence to religious doctrine as a means of restoring social and environmental balance. In urban areas, these interpretations sometimes clash with Dhaka's more secular and cosmopolitan outlook, leading to social tensions (Hasan, 2017). Similarly, in Hindu and Buddhist communities, myths about the Ganges and the Yamuna rivers as sacred entities have taken on new meanings in displacement. Some displaced Hindu communities forced to migrate see it as part of the karmic cycle, reinforcing resilience and adaptation as spiritual imperatives (Chowdhury, 2022). In Buddhist villages across the Chittagong Hill Tracts, there are stories of guardian spirits abandoning sinking lands, prompting villagers to seek refuge elsewhere (Mohsin 2002). These myths serve not only to explain environmental hardships but also help communities psychologically cope with their losses by embedding them within a broader spiritual framework.

Folkloric adaptations also emerge in urban environments, where climate migrants craft new narratives to make sense of their shifting realities. Some migrants describe Dhaka as a "land of trials," where survival requires economic perseverance and moral and cultural adaptation. New urban legends circulate about individuals who have defied their fate by embracing modernity, while others warn of the consequences of abandoning traditional values (Hassan, 2012). These myths reinforce the tension between rural traditions and urban modernity, reflecting Levi Strauss's argument that myths help societies negotiate change. Ultimately, the climate crisis in Bangladesh exemplifies how environmental disruptions force societies to renegotiate their foundational structures. The breakdown of the nature-culture boundary highlights the fluidity of cultural identity, demonstrating that human societies continuously adapt in response to external pressures. By applying Levi Strauss's framework to Bangladesh's climate crisis, we can better understand how migration reshapes urban landscapes, social hierarchies, and cultural practices in profound and lasting ways.

The New Economics of Labor Migration (NELM) Perspective on Climate Migration

The NELM framework provides a broader perspective on climate migration, emphasizing that migration is often a household strategy rather than an individual decision. Unlike classical migration theories focusing solely on wage differentials, NELM argues that families send migrants to cities like Dhaka to diversify income sources, mitigate risks, and access better opportunities (Stark & Bloom, 1985). Climate-induced migration in Bangladesh aligns with this theory as rural households facing environmental degradation and economic uncertainty send members to urban centers to secure alternative livelihoods and financial stability. The rapid influx of migrants has led to the expansion of slums such as Korail, Duaripara, and Chalantika. These slums face chronic issues like inadequate sanitation, lack of clean drinking water, and frequent eviction threats (Ayeb-Karlsson et al., 2020). Since many of the migrants don't have educational backgrounds, they become trapped in the informal economy, perpetuating cycles of poverty. Most migrants work as rickshaw pullers (leading to oversaturation), garment factory workers, or street vendors, jobs that provide low wages and little job security.

Consequently, there is competition for low-wage jobs, which increases economic inequalities and exacerbates social tensions between long-term residents and newcomers (Rahman et al. 2020). Moreover, climate migration affects family structures, as many rural households strategically send one or two family members to cities to earn and remit money back home. This aligns with the NELM theory, which posits that migration is a collective family investment rather than an individualistic pursuit (Taylor, 1999). However, while remittances provide crucial financial support to rural communities, they often come at the cost of social fragmentation. Migrant laborers frequently experience exploitative working conditions, as Dhaka's labor market lacks regulatory oversight to protect vulnerable workers (Rahman et al. 2020). The influx of migrants puts a strain on infrastructure and services. The unplanned urbanization of Dhaka has led to severe congestion, water shortages, and inadequate waste management. Public services such as healthcare and education struggle to accommodate the growing population, further marginalizing climate migrants. Overcrowding in low-income neighborhoods has led to public health crises, with rising waterborne diseases and respiratory illnesses due to poor sanitation and air pollution (Rahaman et al.,

2023). Many migrant families live in makeshift housing, lacking proper legal recognition or tenancy rights, which leaves them vulnerable to forced evictions and displacement by private developers and government-led urban renewal projects. In addition to economic and infrastructural struggles, social mobility for climate migrants remains constrained. Due to their status as newcomers, many migrants face discrimination in accessing stable jobs and housing. Employers often prefer hiring individuals with established urban networks, leaving rural migrants reliant on informal labor markets with precarious wages. Women migrants, in particular, encounter additional barriers, as they are disproportionately employed in exploitative garment factories with unsafe working conditions (Kabeer & Mahmud, 2004). Despite their contributions to Dhaka's economy, migrants remain politically underrepresented, with little access to social protections or labor rights enforcement mechanisms.

Case Studies of Migrant Settlements

The expansion of informal settlements due to climate migration has created distinct neighborhoods where rural traditions persist alongside urban influences. These settlements serve as transitional spaces where migrants attempt to reconcile their past ways of life with the demands of city living. The following case studies illustrate how climate migrants adapt culturally, socially, and economically to their new environments. The Korail Slum, one of Dhaka's largest informal settlements, is home to thousands of climate migrants, primarily from Barisal and Bhola. The settlement has developed its internal economy, with small businesses, local markets, and communal support systems that reflect rural village structures (Banks et al., 2019). Migrants have preserved agricultural knowledge through small-scale gardening, and religious institutions such as mosques and madrasas (Islamic schools) play a central role in community cohesion. Chalantika and Duaripara house many migrants from the coastal Sundarbans, an area heavily affected by rising sea levels and saltwater intrusion. Many residents continue traditional fishing practices in Dhaka's canals despite worsening water pollution (Haque et al., 2021). The economic pressures of urban life have led to the rise of informal labor networks where migrants assist each other in securing work in garment factories, construction, and street vending. Located on the banks

of the Buriganga River, Kamrangirchar is a densely populated slum where many migrants engage in waste recycling and leather tanning industries. This settlement illustrates the intersection of environmental degradation and economic adaptation, as migrants exploit urban resources for survival despite health hazards (Sultana et al. 2019). The Bhashantek and Geneva Camp settlements highlight the experiences of climate migrants alongside long-term displaced communities, including Bihari refugees. Cross-cultural exchanges have influenced food practices, language use, and hybrid religious traditions that merge rural and urban elements. These settlements demonstrate how migrants reshape urban spaces, creating new cultural and economic systems while struggling against structural inequalities. To further illustrate the lived experiences of climate migrants, firsthand narratives from research studies provide insight into their struggles and adaptation strategies. Belkis, a 41-year-old resident of Bhola Slum in Dhaka, shares her family's journey from Bhola Island to the capital. Her family faced multiple hardships, including losing their home to river erosion and enduring health challenges due to poor living conditions in the slum. Belkis was married at the age of 12 due to economic pressures and had to resort to begging to support her family after her brother's death. She reflects on her life, stating:

> "[When we moved to Dhaka] my father couldn't work because he was too old, so my brother would support us economically. … After he died my parents suffered, and I had to start begging from door to door. … [If we would have stayed] I would have been able to take care of my health. We would have had our land to cultivate so our living conditions would be better. We used to have our own land so we didn't have to run after people. The way of living there was good." (Ayeb-Karlsson, 2016)

Muzaffar, facing drought and economic hardships in his village, left his wife and eight children to seek work in Dhaka. He worked as a day laborer in the harbor in the capital, carrying sand and stones. Unable to afford proper housing, he lived in a shared tin shed, enduring challenging living conditions. His story highlights the struggles of rural inhabitants adapting to urban life due to environmental pressures (Ayeb-Karlsson, 2020). Shirin Begum and her family migrated to Dhaka after environmental challenges made rural life unsustainable. They now reside in a sweltering single-room dwelling made of corrugated metal in the Korail slum. Shirin reflects on the difficulties they face in the city, emphasizing the stark contrast to their previous rural life (Llana & Freeman, 2023). These testimonies underscore the stark

economic and social adjustments that climate migrants must undergo, revealing the profound physical and emotional toll of displacement.

The Changing Ethnic, Political, and Religious Landscape of Dhaka

Migration has led to blending rural and urban cultural identities, yet social divisions persist. Rural migrants often face discrimination from established urban residents, reinforcing class and regional inequalities. Many long-term city dwellers perceive rural migrants as economic burdens, leading to exclusionary practices in employment and housing. So, while the urban elites can get good, high-paying jobs and proper housing, the rural newcomers are left working menial jobs and living in slums. This divide is further reinforced by deep-rooted stereotypes that portray rural migrants as uneducated, unskilled, and a strain on the city's limited resources (Rahman et al. 2020). Linguistic and cultural differences between migrants and established urban communities contribute to social exclusion. Bengali identity is deeply tied to language, and proficiency in "Shuddho" Bangla, or "correct" Bangla, is often used as a social class and education marker. Rural migrants, who may speak regional dialects such as Sylheti, Chatgaya, or Noakhali, are frequently perceived as uneducated or inferior, limiting their social mobility and acceptance in Dhaka's urban fabric. This linguistic divide reinforces existing economic and social hierarchies, creating barriers to full integration into city life.

Additionally, rural migrants bring their cultural traditions, religious practices, and community structures to the city, which can sometimes clash with Dhaka's more cosmopolitan urban culture. Festivals, folk traditions, and religious customs central to rural life are sometimes looked down upon by the urban elite, further alienating migrants from mainstream society (Sultana, 2021). However, in some cases, migrants have also influenced urban culture, bringing regional cuisines, music, and traditions into the city's evolving social fabric. Street food vendors selling regional delicacies, folk musicians performing in urban centers, and rural artisans selling handcrafted goods have enriched Dhaka's cultural landscape (Hossain, 2020). Despite these cultural exchanges, economic disparities and social prejudices persist. Many rural migrants struggle to access quality education, perpetuating poverty cycles and limiting upward mobility (Kabeer & Mahmud, 2004). The informal nature of migrant labor also means that many

workers lack social protections, legal recognition, or pathways to permanent residency in urban centers (Siddiqui, 2012). Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach that includes inclusive urban policies, anti-discrimination measures, and programs to bridge linguistic and cultural divides, ensuring that migrants have equal economic and social participation opportunities in Dhaka. The demographic shift in Dhaka has also influenced local politics, with migrant communities emerging as new political constituencies. Political parties increasingly engage with these groups, promising housing and employment reforms (Hossain, 2020). However, these engagements are often opportunistic, as migrants are frequently mobilized as vote banks without receiving tangible benefits. Many migrants remain politically marginalized, lacking formal representation in policy-making. Additionally, electoral processes in Bangladesh have been frequently criticized for irregularities, including voter suppression, ballot stuffing, and intimidation tactics that disproportionately affect marginalized communities (Widdus, 2006). Climate migrants, who often lack proper documentation or legal recognition, are particularly vulnerable to disenfranchisement. As political elites seek to consolidate power, vote rigging and manipulation undermine democratic representation, further alienating migrant communities from the political landscape. The recent student-led protests in Dhaka have brought national attention to systemic political grievances, including electoral corruption, government accountability, and the rights of marginalized groups (Martelli and Garalytė, 2019). These protests, driven mainly by university students and youth activists, reflect broader frustrations over the lack of democratic freedoms and economic opportunities. Many migrant families, particularly second-generation migrants who have grown up in urban slums, have joined these movements to secure better representation and social mobility. The intersection of climate migration and political activism underscores the growing demand for structural reforms addressing environmental and economic injustices. Moreover, political instability exacerbates the struggles of climate migrants. Frequent general strikes (hartals), political violence, and shifting party alliances disrupt economic activities and create additional hardships for vulnerable migrant workers (Siddiqui, 2012). Without long-term policy interventions that focus on equitable urban development and migrant rights, the

disenfranchisement of these communities will continue to fuel social unrest and deepen political divisions.

Dhaka has historically been a melting pot of religious traditions, with mosques, mandirs, and churches in close proximity. However, the influx of rural migrants, many from conservative backgrounds, is reshaping religious practices. This shift has led to tensions between progressive and conservative groups over issues such as women's rights, education, and public religious expression. The rise of Islamic purism and radicalism has intensified in recent years, with groups advocating for the implementation of Sharia law and the formal recognition of Bangladesh as an Islamic state (Mostofa, 2021). Islamist movements such as Hefazat-e-Islam have gained influence by mobilizing support for conservative policies, including restrictions on women's rights and changes to the secular education curriculum. These trends have led to increased polarization between progressive and conservative factions, with tensions spilling into public demonstrations, political discourse, and violent clashes (Huq, 2021). Radical elements have also exploited socio-economic grievances among rural migrants, using religious rhetoric to recruit disenfranchised youth into extremist networks. Many young men, frustrated by economic marginalization and lack of opportunity, are drawn to organizations that offer a sense of purpose, community, and financial support (Martelli and Garalytė, 2019). This ideological divide over Bangladesh's national identity—whether it should remain a secular democracy or shift toward Islamic governance—continues to shape political and social dynamics in Dhaka. The government has attempted to curb extremist activities through counterterrorism measures, but ideological conflicts persist, particularly in lower-income and migrant-dense neighborhoods (Bashar, 2017).

The rapid influx of climate migrants is not merely a demographic shift but a fundamental restructuring of Dhaka's urban environment. As climate-induced displacement continues, the city must develop adaptive strategies to support these new populations while maintaining stability. Sustainable urban planning, investment in climate-resilient infrastructure, and inclusive policies will be critical in mitigating the pressures of rapid urbanization. Moreover, addressing the socio-political marginalization of migrants is crucial to ensuring long-term stability. Without political representation and economic

empowerment, climate migrants risk remaining in cycles of poverty and social exclusion. Grassroots organizations, NGOs, and international actors must collaborate with local governments to create long-term solutions that integrate migrants into the social and economic fabric of the city. Beyond Dhaka, Bangladesh's experience with climate migration serves as a critical case study for other nations facing similar challenges. As climate change accelerates, displacement will become a global issue, requiring international cooperation and policy frameworks prioritizing human security and sustainable development. By acknowledging the resilience and agency of climate migrants and addressing systemic barriers, Bangladesh can move toward a more equitable and climate-adaptive future. Ultimately, the future of Dhaka and its climate migrants depends on proactive governance, sustainable policies, and societal efforts to foster inclusion. With strategic planning and international support, Bangladesh has the potential to transform the challenges of climate migration into opportunities for resilience and growth.

Policy & Government Response

The Bangladeshi government has implemented several policies to address climate-induced displacement, the most prominent being the Bangladesh Delta Plan 2100. This long-term development strategy aims to enhance climate resilience by improving flood control infrastructure, investing in sustainable urbanization, and promoting adaptive agricultural techniques (MoEFCC, 2021). However, the plan primarily focuses on macro-level infrastructural solutions such as embankments, irrigation projects, and land reclamation initiatives, often overlooking the immediate needs of displaced populations in urban centers like Dhaka. In contrast, informal networks and grassroots organizations are crucial in providing immediate relief and adaptation support for climate migrants. Community-led initiatives, such as cooperative housing projects, microfinance programs, and informal labor networks, have emerged as vital mechanisms for survival (Banks et al., 2019). For instance, slum-based organizations in Korail and Kamrangirchar provide basic services like water access, waste management, and legal assistance to migrants without official documentation. These informal systems often operate outside government regulations, making them more adaptable to the rapidly changing urban landscape and more vulnerable to

eviction and policy crackdowns. The tension between top-down governmental strategies and bottom-up community responses highlights a significant gap in climate governance. While state-led policies focus on large-scale infrastructural resilience, they often fail to integrate localized knowledge and adaptive strategies developed by displaced populations. Bridging this divide requires a more inclusive governance approach, recognizing informal networks as legitimate stakeholders in climate adaptation efforts.

Bangladesh's urban migration crisis is not unique; similar patterns can be observed in other climate-vulnerable cities such as Jakarta, Indonesia, and Manila, Philippines. In both cases, unplanned urbanization driven by climate displacement has resulted in severe overcrowding, informal settlements, and socio-political instability. The Indonesian capital, Jakarta, faces extreme land subsidence due to excessive groundwater extraction, compounded by rising sea levels (Othering and Belonging Institute). In response, the Indonesian government launched a controversial plan to relocate the capital to Borneo, leaving millions of urban poor behind in environmentally precarious conditions. Informal communities in North Jakarta, much like those in Dhaka's Korail slum, rely on self-organized labor networks and communal resilience to cope with displacement. In the Philippines, recurrent typhoons and rising sea levels push rural populations into Metro Manila's already congested informal settlements (Othering and Belonging Institute). The government's relocation programs have met resistance due to poor living conditions in resettlement areas, mirroring the struggles faced by climate migrants in Dhaka's low-income housing projects. Grassroots movements advocating for climate justice and equitable urban planning have emerged in both Manila and Dhaka, emphasizing the need for participatory governance. By comparing these cities, it becomes evident that climate migration requires integrated policy responses that combine state interventions with community-driven solutions. Lessons from Jakarta and Manila highlight the importance of investing in climate-resilient housing, legal protection for informal settlers, and decentralized governance models that empower local actors. For Dhaka, this means shifting from eviction-based slum management toward inclusive urban planning that recognizes migrants as contributors to the city's economic and cultural fabric.

Climate migration is profoundly reshaping Dhaka's demographic, economic, and socio-political landscapes. While migrants adapt to their new urban realities, overcrowding, resource scarcity, and social integration remain pressing issues. Incorporating the New Economics of Labor Migration theory alongside structuralist perspectives helps explain the economic motivations behind migration and the systemic barriers migrants face. Lévi-Strauss's framework allows us to understand these changes beyond economic and logistical terms: climate migration fundamentally transforms cultural identities and social structures. The blurring of the nature-culture boundary in Bangladesh highlights how environmental disruptions alter landscapes and force societies to renegotiate cultural frameworks. As traditional livelihoods are uprooted, new myths, social practices, and adaptations emerge, demonstrating that cultural evolution is not linear but deeply interconnected with environmental change. Addressing these challenges requires sustainable urban policies, investment in climate-resilient infrastructure, and an acknowledgment of the cultural dimensions of migration. Without policies that integrate ecological sustainability with cultural adaptation, Dhaka will continue to struggle under unplanned urbanization and socio-political instability pressures. By bridging the gap between nature and culture, Bangladesh can develop solutions that reflect the environmental and human dimensions of climate migration.

Chapter 4: Religious and Political Tensions in a Changing Landscape

Bangladesh is undergoing a significant transformation as climate-induced migration, rapid urbanization, and shifting socio-political dynamics reshape the country's cultural and religious landscape. Once defined by its religious pluralism and heterodox traditions, Bangladesh is now experiencing heightened tensions as an influx of rural migrants, many from conservative backgrounds, contributes to a growing divide between progressive and purist interpretations of Islam (Riaz, 2020). As the epicenter of this transformation, Dhaka has seen an increasing push toward religious conservatism, with mosques and madrasas exerting more significant influence on social and political life (Hajjaj, 2024). The expansion of Islamic purism, often supported by foreign funding and transnational ideological networks, has led to the marginalization of traditional religious practices, creating friction between reformist movements and those seeking to preserve Bangladesh's historically inclusive approach to Islam (Islam & Rahman, 2020).

Religious tensions are further compounded by the ongoing humanitarian and political crisis surrounding the Rohingya refugees. The arrival of over one million Rohingya Muslims from Myanmar has intensified nationalist rhetoric and territorial anxieties, as native Bangladeshis fear economic displacement, security threats, and demographic shifts (Adnan & Dastidar, 2011). Political leaders have capitalized on these fears, using anti-Rohingya sentiment to bolster nationalist agendas, further polarizing the country's religious and ethnic communities (Bashar, 2017). Meanwhile, as the government struggles to balance domestic stability with international pressure, grassroots organizations and religious institutions have taken an increasingly prominent role in addressing the needs of both migrants and refugees, often reinforcing existing ideological divides in the process (Cons, 2021).

At the heart of these transformations lies a broader struggle over identity, governance, and the role of religion in public life. The growing influence of Islamic purist movements has placed pressure on Bangladesh's secular foundations, with demands for Sharia-based governance clashing against the country's constitutional commitment to religious pluralism (Islam & Saidul, 2020). This tension has fueled ideological battles over education, gender rights, and freedom of expression, leading to frequent

clashes between progressive activists and conservative factions (Jahan, 2023). The rise of radicalism, alongside the weakening of religious tolerance, signals a fundamental shift in the nation's sociopolitical fabric, with long-term implications for governance, civil liberties, and interfaith relations. Understanding these complexities requires examining how migration, religious radicalism, and territorial disputes intersect to shape Bangladesh's evolving sociopolitical landscape.

Migration and Religious Shifts

The mass movement of people from rural areas to urban centers has contributed to a shift in religious expression. While rural migrants are often perceived as coming from more religiously conservative backgrounds, this does not always translate into political or ideological conservatism. In fact, rural religiosity is frequently rooted in local customs, heterodox Islamic traditions, and Suf practices that differ markedly from the more politicized forms of Islam gaining traction in urban areas (Riaz 2011). In contrast, urban centers, particularly Dhaka, while historically more cosmopolitan and religiously diverse, hosting communities of Hindus, Buddhists, and Christians alongside the Muslim majority, have also seen a rise in conservative activism. Some scholars argue that urban environments, especially among the urban poor, can serve as fertile ground for mobilization by religious political organizations due to socioeconomic grievances and institutional neglect (Hasan 2017). As migrants settle in informal settlements and slums, makeshift mosques and prayer halls have proliferated, often funded by private donors or international religious organizations. These spaces provide spiritual and cultural familiarity but also contribute to the formation of parallel religious networks that operate outside traditional urban religious institutions, leading to increased fragmentation and sometimes more rigid interpretations of Islam (Chowdhury & Ahmed 2021). This convergence of rural religious practices with urban conservative movements reflects a more complex interplay of class, identity, and belief that defies simple binaries.

In many cases, these new religious spaces serve practical functions beyond worship. Many migrants turn to religious institutions for social and economic support, strengthening the influence of conservative Islamic networks in urban areas (Riaz, 2020). Mosques, madrasas, and Islamic charities provide essential services such as housing, education, and employment assistance, often filling gaps left

by government programs. However, these institutions also serve as platforms for religious mobilization, reinforcing conservative values that may clash with the more secular or heterodox traditions of urban Bangladesh. As one community leader in Dhaka stated, "For many migrants, the mosque is not just a place of prayer; it's a lifeline, a place where they can find work, food, and shelter" (Mohsin, 2020).

The growing presence of conservative preachers in urban mosques, many of whom have migrated from rural areas, has contributed to the spread of stricter interpretations of Islamic law. Moreover, urban migration is leading to the transformation of religious practices. Many traditional village customs incorporating folk rituals and Sufi influences are being replaced by more rigid, standardized forms of Islamic practice. For instance, Sufi shrines, which were once important centers for religious and social life, are increasingly viewed with suspicion by purist Islamic groups who see them as sites of un-Islamic innovation (bid'ah) (Hasan, 2017). This has led to a decline in public celebrations of Sufi festivals and growing ideological divides between traditionalists and reformists within Bangladesh's Muslim communities. Urban religious leaders have attempted to regulate social behaviors in line with conservative Islamic norms, affecting women's rights, dress codes, and the visibility of non-Muslim religious practices.

Economic struggles also play a crucial role in shaping religious behaviors among migrants. Many migrants face financial insecurity and precarious working conditions, leading them to seek solidarity through their religious affiliations. Friday prayers and religious study groups provide spiritual guidance and networking opportunities for employment and social assistance. This reliance on religious institutions for economic survival has made faith a more visible and integral part of public life in urban areas. "Faith is not just a belief here—it's how we survive," explained a migrant worker in a Dhaka garment factory (Riaz, 2020). At the same time, migration has fostered new forms of religious hybridity. While conservative practices are reinforced among some migrant communities, others have adapted to the urban religious landscape by blending traditional rural customs with urban religiosity. In specific neighborhoods, rural migrants continue to practice shrine-based devotion despite criticism from orthodox religious factions. This demonstrates the fluidity of religious expression in Bangladesh, where

urbanization does not necessarily lead to uniformity but creates complex interactions between different

traditions and beliefs (Chowdhury & Ahmed, 2021). The increased visibility of religious practices in

urban settings has also reshaped interfaith relations. While Dhaka has historically been home to religious

pluralism, migration has intensified demographic shifts, leading to the marginalization of Hindu,

Buddhist, and Christian communities. In some areas, the construction of new mosques has coincided with

the displacement of non-Muslim religious sites, fueling tensions over space and cultural heritage.

Non-Muslim communities have reported increased pressure to conform to dominant religious norms,

including restrictions on public festivals and heightened scrutiny of their religious activities (Mohsin,

2020). Many Hindus in Dhaka, for example, have stopped celebrating Durga Puja in public spaces due to

fears of violence or social backlash. Moreover, religious shifts in urban areas have influenced gender

norms and public behavior. Women in some migrant-heavy neighborhoods report increased pressure to

dress modestly and limit their public presence. While urban centers were once spaces where women had

relatively greater freedom compared to rural areas, the influx of conservative migrants has led to renewed

debates over women's rights, education, and employment opportunities (Riaz, 2020). The role of madrasa

education in shaping social attitudes is particularly significant. Many lower-income migrant families,

struggling to afford formal schooling, send their children to madrasas, where curricula emphasize

religious teachings over secular education. This has long-term implications for social mobility and

workforce participation, reinforcing cycles of economic marginalization.

The presence of different religious interpretations in Dhaka has also created political divisions.

Islamist groups have gained increasing influence in electoral politics by capitalizing on the grievances of

newly arrived migrants, who often struggle with poverty and social exclusion (Ahmed, 2020). By offering

financial aid, social services, and a sense of communal belonging, Islamist organizations have built strong

support bases among urban migrants. These groups have used their influence to push for legal reforms

that align with conservative Islamic principles, such as restricting women's rights and increasing

censorship of secular or critical viewpoints (Crabtree, 2022). Ultimately, migration has made religion a

more visible and contested aspect of urban identity in Bangladesh. As cities like Dhaka continue to absorb

large numbers of rural migrants, the intersection of faith, social organization, and economic survival will remain central to the evolving dynamics of urban religious life. Without policies that promote interfaith dialogue and cultural inclusivity, the religious shifts driven by migration may further polarize communities, deepening divisions between different faith groups and within the Muslim majority itself. The challenge moving forward will be balancing religious diversity and social cohesion while ensuring that urbanization does not erode Bangladesh's historically pluralistic traditions.

The Rise of Islamic Purism and Radicalism

Islamic radicalism in Bangladesh has intensified over the past few decades, with groups advocating for the formal recognition of Bangladesh as an Islamic state governed by Sharia law. Organizations such as Hefazat-e-Islam have pushed for conservative policies, such as gender segregation and the removal of secular content from the educational curriculum (Hajjaj, 2024). The spread of radical ideologies has been exacerbated by economic insecurity and disenfranchisement among rural migrants, particularly young men, who often find solace in extremist narratives that promise stability and purpose (Karim, 2022). Many of these men, facing unemployment or exclusion from mainstream society, are drawn to extremist networks that provide a sense of identity and community.

The rise of Islamic purism is also linked to transnational influences. Wahhabi and Salafi doctrines, which originated in the Arabian Peninsula, emphasize a strict, literal interpretation of Islam and advocate for the purification of religious practices by eliminating perceived innovations. The rise of the Wahhabi and Salafi movements must be understood in their global and political context. These movements emphasize a return to early Islamic practices, rejecting heterodox and localized traditions such as saint veneration and Sufi rituals. In Bangladesh, their growing influence, often supported by foreign funding, has led to the establishment of madrasas that serve as recruitment grounds for conservative and, in some cases, extremist movements, shaping the ideological landscape of the younger generation. The rapid expansion of Saudi-funded madrasas in Bangladesh, particularly in rural and impoverished areas, has been instrumental in spreading these ideologies, gradually displacing the historically heterodox and pluralistic practices of Bengali Islam (Mohsin, 2020). The Wahhabi and Salafi

doctrines emphasize a stricter interpretation of religious texts, advocating for gender segregation, conservative dress codes, and the elimination of heterodox religious practices that have historically been part of Bengali Islam (Mohsin, 2020). The rise of these movements has increased restrictions on women's participation in public life, with growing pressure for gender segregation in workplaces and educational institutions. In some areas, madrasa education has gained prominence over secular schooling, particularly among lower-income migrant families who view religious education as a means of social mobility (Karin et al.,2020).

Radicalization is not limited to educational institutions; social media platforms have become key tools for spreading purist ideologies and mobilizing support for Islamist causes. Online radical preachers target disenfranchised youth, offering a version of Islam that frames political grievances as religious duty. In some cases, these narratives have led to violent incidents, including attacks on secular activities and religious minorities (Jahan, 2023). This growing divide between traditional and conservative Islamic factions has also shaped political dynamics. Islamist and conservative Islamic factions have also shaped political dynamics. Islamist groups have gained increasing influence in electoral politics by capitalizing on the grievances of newly arrived migrants, who often struggle with poverty and social exclusion (Ahmed, 2020). By offering financial support, social services, and a sense of belonging, Islamist organizations have built strong support bases among urban migrants. These groups have used their influence to push for legal reforms that align with conservative Islamic principles, such as restricting women's rights and increasing censorship of secular or critical viewpoints (Crabtree, 2022). Furthermore, the influx of conservative rural migrants has contributed to a growing intolerance toward non-Muslim communities in urban centers. Hindu and Buddhist minorities have reported increasing incidents of discrimination, with attacks on temples and restrictions on non-Muslim festivals becoming more frequent (Mohsin, 2020). Many members of these minority groups have been forced to relocate or conceal their religious identities due to fears of persecution.

While Bangladesh's constitution upholds secularism, the rising influence of religious conservatism threatens to erode protections for religious minorities. Social restrictions are not limited to

religious minorities, Muslim women have also been affected by the rise of purist Islamic influences in urban spaces, in some areas, women are increasingly pressured to wear complete body covering, and participation is coeducational institutions or mixed gender workplaces has been discouraged (Karin et al., 2020). These societal changes reflect a broader struggle over national identity, with tensions between those who advocate for a secular and pluralistic Bangladesh and those who seek to establish a more conservative Islamic society. These ideological conflicts will likely intensify as migration reshapes Bangladesh's urban and religious landscapes. The continuous influx of climate migrants increases the physical population density of cities like Dhaka and deepens the ideological rifts within urban communities. The migration introduced diverse cultural practices from rural regions, where long-standing traditions often differ significantly from those that have evolved in metropolitan settings. For example, displaced populations bring conservative social norms and religious interpretations that may contrast sharply with the more pluralistic values historically characterized Dhaka's urban fabric (Chowdhury and Ahmed 2021). Over time, the cumulative effect of successive waves of migrants, each chapped by the pressure of environmental degradation and local socioeconomic conditions, has led to new strains on intercommunal relations. Such dynamics exacerbate existing ideological tensions, particularly as conservative forces mobilize to assert a more rigid public order and resist the erosion of traditional values.

The migration process itself is multifaceted. Climate-induced displacement from coastal and rural areas is driven not only by environmental calamities like cyclones and saltwater intrusion but also by the failure of local economies to support traditional livelihoods (World Bank 2018). As millions migrate to urban centers, they bring with them expectations of integration and support, which are often met with systemic challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, limited access to formal employment, and the persistent stigma associated with being labeled as "migrants." This grouping further deepens the divide between those who advocate for religious tolerance and pluralistic governance and those who lean towards conservatism to preserve cultural identity amidst change. Moreover, the rapid urban migration disrupts traditional community structures that once served as buffers against ideological polarization. In rural areas, communal bonds and shared cultural rituals provided a cohesive force that mitigated internal

conflicts. However, in overcrowded urban settings, these bonds are weakened or lost entirely, leaving migrants isolated and more susceptible to radicalization and divisive rhetoric. The absence of integrated social support networks creates a vacuum where political and religious ideologies compete for influence over a struggling and diverse urban populace. As one observer noted, urban migration creates not only demographic but also "cultural dissonance," with each new group layering its traditions and conflicts upon those existing in the urban core (Riaz 2020). As these fractures widen, the environment becomes increasingly fertile for radical elements to take root. Urban migrants, already facing economic precarity and social isolation, encounter many challenges in adapting to new cityscapes that further exacerbate their vulnerabilities. In the absence of robust community structures, extremist narratives gain traction, and the resulting cultural dissonance paves the way for intensified ideological conflicts.

The Bangladeshi government has responded with counterterrorism measures, shutting down radical madrasas and arresting extremist leaders. Still, such efforts often face resistance from Islamist organizations that accuse the state of repressing religious expression (Hasan, 2017). The challenge for policymakers is to combat radicalization while ensuring that counterterrorism efforts do not alienate mainstream religious groups, which could lead to further polarization (Mohsin, 2020). The ideological struggle between purist and heterodox forms of Islam in Bangladesh reflects broader global trends in religious politics. While Wahhabi and Salafi movements seek to homogenize Islamic practices and eliminate regional religious diversity, heterodox traditions continue to resist complete erasure (Riaz, 2020). The future of Bangladesh's religious landscape will depend on how these competing forces shape public policy, religious discourse, and the everyday lives of its people. In urban centers, where migrants have become a substantial part of the population, state efforts to stem radicalization are intricately linked to migration dynamics. The competition for limited resources, coupled with the breakdown of traditional support systems, creates a context in which extremist organizations can exploit grievances and mobilize discontent. Urban migration and religious radicalism reinforce domestic tensions and influence regional geopolitics.

Additionally, the rise of Islamic purism has affected regional geopolitics, with Bangladesh facing increased scrutiny from international counterterrorism organizations. The presence of radicalized elements within the country has led to closer monitoring from global intelligence agencies, further complicating Bangladesh's diplomatic relationships with Western allies (Bashar, 2017). Islamist groups have also leveraged grievances related to foreign intervention and Western policies toward Muslim-majority countries to further their narratives, recruiting individuals who perceive Bangladesh's secular policies as aligned with global anti-Islamic forces. Thus, urban migration is not only a demographic challenge but a catalyst for deepening ideological divides that shape public perceptions and state policies. As displaced populations cluster in urban areas, the pressures on infrastructure and public services intensify, providing radical groups with both a platform and a constituency. Counterterrorism initiatives, therefore, must be intricately calibrated to address the socioeconomic roots of extremism among migrants rather than relying solely on repressive measures.

Efforts to de-radicalize youth through educational reforms and community engagement programs have seen mixed results, as purist movements continue to hold significant influence over local religious institutions. The resilience of Bangladesh's historically pluralistic religious landscape will depend on the ability of policymakers, spiritual leaders, and civil society to push back against growing conservatism while ensuring that counterterrorism strategies do not further alienate vulnerable populations. Without inclusive policies that promote religious tolerance and protect pluralistic traditions, the widening divide between progressive and conservative forces will impact governance, civil liberties, and interfaith relations nationwide. Urban policymakers must grapple with the challenge of ensuring that the rights of climate migrants are safeguarded while also fostering environments that allow multiple religious and cultural identities to coexist harmoniously. Ensuring legal protections and expanding access to inclusive services, such as affordable housing, education, and healthcare, are essential to mitigating these conflicts. Furthermore, integrating community voices into urban planning processes is crucial, as it enables the development of governance models that acknowledge and address the distinct challenges presented by

climate migration. In doing so, Bangladesh could transform these migration-induced tensions into opportunities for cultural renewal and more resilient urban governance.

The transformative power of migration is thus a double-edged sword. While it brings fresh energy and a multiplicity of cultural expressions to urban centers, it also risks deepening societal divisions if not managed through inclusive and forward-thinking policies. The lived realities of climate migrants, characterized by economic vulnerability social isolation, and exposure to radical ideologies, underscore the urgency for reforming urban policies to create safe, integrated, and sustainable living environments As migrant communities continue to shape and redefine the urban and religious landscapes, the stakes for national unity and social cohesion grow even higher, making it imperative that governmental and civil society actors work together to bridge the widening ideological divide. Ultimately, the future trajectory of Bangladesh will depend significantly on its ability to construct policies that not only accommodate the physical influx of migrants but also address the complex, multifaceted cultural and ideological shifts accompanying migration. By fostering an environment of interfaith dialogue, ensuring robust social protections, and promoting sustainable urban development, Bangladesh can mitigate the disruptive impact of migration on its social fabric and pave the way for a more inclusive and resilient society.

Territorial Assertion on Rohingya Refugees

The arrival of over one million Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh since 2017 has significantly reshaped the socio-political and economic landscape of the country, particularly in Cox's Bazar, where the majority of refugee camps are located. While Bangladesh initially responded with humanitarian assistance, tensions have risen between the Rohingya and native Bangladeshi communities due to resource competition, economic strain, and security concerns (Ahmed, 2020). The prolonged presence of the Rohingya has fueled nationalist anxieties, leading to territorial assertions by Bangladeshi natives who view the refugees as a long-term demographic and economic threat (Mohsin, 2020). The economic impact of the Rohingya refugee crisis has been a key point of contention. The rapid influx of refugees has placed additional pressure on employment opportunities, leading to claims that the Rohingya are depressing local wages by working illegally for lower pay (Karin et al., 2020). Bangladeshi laborers, particularly in the

fishing and agricultural sectors, argue that they are losing job opportunities to refugee workers willing to work for minimal compensation. According to a study on the economic impact of the Rohingya crisis, the exodus has increased living costs and strained essential services in the host communities, worsening poverty among local Bangladeshis (Yılmaz & Talukder, 2019). In addition to economic concerns, there has been growing frustration over the use of local resources, including land, water, and food supplies. The conversion of vast areas of forestland to accommodate refugee camps has led to significant environmental degradation. Deforestation in Cox's Bazar has worsened soil erosion, increased landslide risks, and contributed to biodiversity loss, further exacerbating tensions between the Rohingya and residents (International Crisis Group, 2019). These environmental consequences have intensified nationalist rhetoric that demands the relocation or repatriation of the Rohingya population.

The Rohingya crisis has also been weaponized in political discourse, with nationalist factions in Bangladesh portraying the refugees as a threat to national sovereignty and stability. Politicians have capitalized on anti-Rohingya sentiment to mobilize support for stricter immigration policies and reinforce territorial assertions (Hossain, 2020). Calls for repatriation have become central to government rhetoric, though diplomatic efforts with Myanmar have yielded little progress. The perception of the Rohingya as an economic and security burden has fueled demands for stricter restrictions on their movement and employment. Government policies have confined the Rohingya to designated refugee camps, preventing them from integrating into local communities or accessing formal employment. These restrictions have left the Rohingya population highly dependent on humanitarian aid, further straining relations with native Bangladeshis who believe their tax money is being used to support a group that will never be fully repatriated (Crabtree, 2022). Another major factor driving territorial anxieties is the rising security risk associated with the Rohingya crisis. Reports of arms smuggling, drug trafficking, and human trafficking in the refugee camps have increased, with some criminal networks allegedly using the camps as operational hubs (Roul, 2023). Additionally, growing radicalization among segments of the Rohingya youth population has raised fears that extremist groups could exploit their grievances to recruit members and destabilize the region (Momen, 2021). The government has responded by increasing security

measures, including military patrols and surveillance in and around the camps. However, these measures have led to frequent clashes between security forces and Rohingya refugees, fueling further resentment. Reports indicate that some Rohingya leaders have been targeted for assassination by rival factions within the camps, highlighting the growing instability within these settlements (Mohsin, 2020).

Several case studies illustrate the intensifying territorial assertions by Bangladeshi natives against the Rohingya. One of the most prominent examples is the increasing hostility in Cox's Bazar, where local protests have erupted over the continued presence of Rohingya refugees. In 2021, thousands of Bangladeshis marched to demand stricter restrictions on Rohingya movement and called for their immediate repatriation (International Crisis Group, 2019). Protesters argued that the economic burden of hosting refugees had become unsustainable and that local businesses were suffering due to competition from informal Rohingya labor. Additionally, violent clashes between Rohingya and Bangladeshi locals have escalated in recent years. Reports from law enforcement agencies indicate that disputes over land encroachment and access to public services have frequently led to altercations. In several instances, groups of Bangladeshi villagers have forcibly removed Rohingya families from settlements outside the designated refugee camps, citing illegal land occupation (Mohsin, 2020). Another case study highlights the situation in Teknaf, a subdistrict bordering Myanmar, where local resentment has been particularly pronounced. Here, residents have accused Rohingya refugees of being involved in illicit drug trafficking, particularly in the smuggling of 'yaba' (methamphetamine pills) from Myanmar (Roul, 2023). This perception has fueled calls for more aggressive law enforcement crackdowns, with some community leaders advocating for immediate deportation of suspected traffickers without trial. These sentiments have been amplified by local politicians who leverage anti-Rohingya rhetoric to gain electoral support, further entrenching hostilities (Ahmed, 2020).

Despite international pressure to find a long-term solution, repatriation efforts remain stalled due to Myanmar's unwillingness to guarantee safety and citizenship rights for returning Rohingya (Sullivan 2022). In response, the Bangladeshi government has pursued alternative policies, such as relocating refugees to Bhasan Char, a remote island in the Bay of Bengal. While the government argues that this

initiative reduces pressure on Cox's Bazar and provides a more controlled environment, human rights organizations have criticized the move, citing inadequate living conditions and concerns over forced relocation (Karin et al., 2020). The future of the Rohingya in Bangladesh remains uncertain as territorial anxieties and political exploitation continue to shape the national discourse. Without a sustainable resolution, tensions between the Rohingya and native Bangladeshi communities are likely to escalate, further complicating efforts to balance humanitarian obligations with domestic stability. The government's challenge lies in addressing the legitimate concerns of local communities while ensuring that the rights and dignity of the Rohingya are upheld within the constraints of Bangladesh's sociopolitical landscape.

Chapter 5: Loss, Trauma, and Adaptation

Climate-induced displacement in Bangladesh transcends economic or environmental concerns, manifesting as a profound psychosocial crisis that disrupts mental health, social cohesion, and cultural continuity. As millions are forced to abandon ancestral homes due to rising sea levels, cyclones, and recurrent flooding, the emotional and social toll of this migration becomes increasingly apparent. The dismantling of long-established support networks intensifies the psychological burden, as individuals struggle to adapt to unfamiliar environments where overcrowding, economic insecurity, and cultural dislocation prevail (Ayeb-Karlsson, Kniveton, and Cannon 2020). This immense toll, particularly evident as traditional support systems are shattered by the pressures of urban life in centers like Dhaka, amplifies feelings of insecurity and loss. Consequently, scholars have documented mental health struggles in displaced individuals—ranging from heightened anxiety and depression to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)—that are deeply intertwined with their ability to rebuild lives in new urban settings.

Moreover, the fragmentation of social networks, particularly the absence in urban contexts of traditional mutual aid and community solidarity systems crucial for rural buffering against environmental stresses, leaves migrants with few avenues for emotional support. The lack of these mechanisms deepens psychological distress, creating a vicious cycle of social isolation and economic vulnerability. As migrants strive to rebuild, cumulative stress hampers their adaptation and poses long-term risks to public mental health, transforming individual struggles into broader public health concerns with implications for urban stability and development. The capacity to overcome trauma and re-establish belonging is critical for the long-term resilience of urban communities. Addressing these psychosocial impacts thus necessitates integrated strategies combining mental health support, comprehensive social services, and sustainable urban planning.

The Psychological Toll of Forced Migration

Research indicates that the abrupt loss of home and disruption of established social networks give rise to "ecological grief"—a profound emotional suffering from the loss of ancestral lands and erosion of

cultural practices central to personal identity (Hayward and Ayeb-Karlsson 2021). This non-transient grief often manifests as persistent sorrow, as displaced individuals struggle with the disappearance of a way of life that provided meaning and stability. The emotional burden of ecological grief is compounded by the need to adapt to unfamiliar urban settings. Migrants from rural homelands frequently inhabit informal settlements with harsh, markedly different conditions, where overcrowding, poor sanitation, and limited basic services create chronic stress, exacerbating mental health challenges. Studies reveal many climate migrants experience ongoing anxiety, depression, and uncertainty linked to economic instability and social alienation (Kabir et al. 2024). Lévi-Strauss's insights into myth and symbolic mediation between nature and culture suggest ecological grief is more than personal sadness; it disrupts deeply embedded cultural narratives connecting individuals to ancestral environments. He argues myths reconcile tensions between nature's "raw" forces and society's ordered "cooked" constructs (Lévi-Strauss 1969). Ecological grief can thus be viewed as a shared, collective mourning for an irrevocably lost connection to cultural roots, underscoring that climate migrants' loss is both physical and symbolic, affecting communities' historical self-understanding.

Moreover, displacement disrupts physical habitats and the entire social and cultural framework individuals rely on to understand their world. This sudden severing of community ties means migrants lose vital support networks—the tapestry of shared tradition, mutual aid, and collective memory that once provided belonging and security. The collapse of these networks can lead to deep physiological distress and significantly decline overall well-being. Communities impacted by sea-level rise experience marked mental health deteriorations, particularly post-monsoon when environmental stressors peak (Kabir et al. 2024). The cumulative effect of economic instability, social isolation, and persistent exposure to adverse conditions creates a vicious cycle of psychological distress, undermining individual resilience and eroding the social cohesion vital for community recovery. Trapped in chronic stress, displaced individuals may find minor setbacks magnified, further impeding their efforts to rebuild.

Beyond these psychological challenges, numerous qualitative studies document that many displaced individuals exhibit physical symptoms directly associated with prolonged stress, such as insomnia,

significant appetite loss, chronic headaches, and gastrointestinal issues. These somatic complaints indicate severe mental distress and act as recovery barriers, as physical health problems can limit a migrant's capacity to work and rebuild. The harsh conditions of urban informal settlements—inadequate sanitation, overcrowded living quarters, and limited quality healthcare access—amplify these physical symptoms. Without sufficient support or mental health services, the combined emotional and physical distress can persist for years, leaving a community-wide legacy of trauma.

Furthermore, the psychological toll of forced migration extends beyond individual experiences to impact broader public health. Prevalent chronic stress among displaced populations challenges urban stability. This mental health crisis among climate migrants is not a collection of isolated cases but a public health concern undermining the social fabric of dense urban areas like Dhaka, often resulting in increased substance abuse, social withdrawal, and declining community wellbeing—factors contributing to social unrest and impeding long-term recovery. In summary, forced migration's psychological toll in Bangladesh is multifaceted and entrenched. From ecological grief's acute pain to chronic stress from urban conditions, climate migrants face profound mental health challenges. This distress, magnified by lost traditional support networks and physical stress manifestations, creates a cycle potentially persisting across generations. Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive, integrated mental health approach recognizing the links between emotional well-being, social cohesion, and environmental stability.

Generational Trauma and Intergenerational Adaptation

The trauma of forced migration often extends beyond firsthand experiences, transmitting from one generation to the next. Children in families uprooted by climate events face disruptions like interrupted education, early poverty exposure, and the breakdown of traditional support systems, contributing to persistent intergenerational trauma. Torres and Casey (2017), for instance, document higher emotional distress and behavioral changes in displaced children. These young individuals often struggle to develop a stable identity, crucial for healthy emotional and cognitive growth. The abrupt rupture from familiar rural environments means children lose their sense of place and the comforting

rituals and narratives that once secured their identity foundation. Lacking these anchors, many experience alienation and diminished belonging, leading to long-term psychological consequences.

The disruption of familial and communal bonds significantly contributes to these challenges. When parents, overwhelmed by displacement trauma and ongoing economic hardship, cannot provide a consistent, nurturing environment, the resulting instability makes young migrants more susceptible to chronic stress. Kabir (2018) emphasizes that this bond loss affects immediate emotional well-being and undermines self-esteem and resilience development. In urban informal settlements with often fragmented community support, children frequently lack the guidance and care traditional village life offered. This absence of stable support reinforces psychological vulnerability, perpetuating intergenerational trauma. Moreover, lost cultural continuity exacerbates these effects, as displaced children often feel disconnected from ancestral traditions and practices that once provided security and identity. Traditional rituals like communal festivals, religious ceremonies, and local storytelling, critical for reinforcing collective memory and identity in rural areas, are disrupted by urban migration. Consequently, children may struggle to internalize cultural values, leading to identity fragmentation, internal conflicts, and long-term emotional instability, which has been linked to lower academic performance, behavioral issues, and diminished social mobility prospects.

The cumulative effect of disrupted education, lost familial bonds, economic hardship, and cultural disintegration creates a profound, enduring legacy of generational trauma. Children in such environments inherit their parents' psychological scars and face added challenges adapting to complex urban life. Transitioning into adulthood, ongoing stressors like poverty, discrimination, and inadequate schooling continue to impact their mental health and limit upward mobility (Kabir 2018). This persistent trauma seriously implicates community resilience and social cohesion, as the psychological burden impedes rebuilding stable, supportive networks (Torres and Casey 2017). Addressing generational trauma thus requires targeted, culturally sensitive interventions like school-based counseling, trauma-informed education, and community support groups, essential tools for breaking the intergenerational stress cycle (Hayward and Ayeb-Karlsson 2021). These interventions help children process experiences, build

resilience, and form a more secure identity. Additionally, parental mental health support and parenting programs can empower families to create more nurturing environments, mitigating trauma transmission to future generations. Ultimately, intergenerational trauma transmission underscores the urgent need for comprehensive policies integrating mental health care into disaster recovery and migration management. By focusing on displaced children's immediate psychological needs and long-term developmental prospects, policymakers can help ensure forced migration's scars catalyze transformative change, not a permanent burden. This holistic approach is critical for fostering resilience, restoring social cohesion, and promoting cultural renewal among Bangladesh's displaced communities.

Adaptive Strategies and the Reformation of Cultural Identity

Facing severe adversity, climate-displaced communities in Bangladesh employ adaptive strategies, showcasing survival capacity and actively reshaping cultural identity. Despite significant hardships, they develop multifaceted mechanisms to reconstruct and preserve cultural heritage, fostering individual and collective resilience. A central strategy is reliance on local religious and community institutions like mosques, madrasas, and community centers, which offer spiritual solace and practical support (food, shelter, education) where government aid is limited (Riaz 2020). These institutions often act as critical nodes for re-establishing social networks that provided rural stability. Such centers frequently function as places of worship and communal hubs where support and solidarity are renewed, enabling migrants to reconnect with traditional practices and draw strength from shared cultural values.

Lévi-Strauss's structuralist perspective enriches this understanding by suggesting that myths and narrative practices mediate between the contrasting elements of human experience (Lévi-Strauss 1969). In this context, oral traditions and storytelling are indispensable. Displaced families have revived age-old narrative practices to make sense of their experiences. These narratives allow individuals to contextualize personal and collective losses, transforming the trauma of displacement into stories of resilience and perseverance. As scholars have noted, such narrative practices help forge a collective identity that bridges the gap between a rural past and an urban present (Mukkadim and Hossain 2024). Community-based cultural programs in Dhaka, such as storytelling workshops and cultural festivals, foster a sense of

belonging and collective resilience, enabling migrants to negotiate their identities amid rapid urban change (Uddin 2024).

Economic adaptation strategies further reinforce cultural resilience. Many migrants engage in informal entrepreneurship, leveraging traditional skills like handicrafts, culinary arts, and small-scale agriculture. These enterprises provide crucial income absent formal employment, helping preserve cultural practices potentially lost in urban environments. Huq and Shafique (2023) argue such activities bolster agency and self-reliance, allowing migrants to maintain cultural heritage links while adapting to urban life. For instance, preparing traditional foods or producing handcrafted goods helps transmit cultural knowledge to younger generations, interweaving adaptation with cultural continuity. Beyond institutional and economic adaptations, displaced communities also engage in social activism and grassroots organization for cultural reformation. Local groups and cooperatives advocate for improved living conditions, equitable service access, and migrant rights protection. These grassroots movements offer practical support and empower migrants by giving them a voice in urban governance. Forming such groups is crucial for securing better resource access and resisting marginalization. This collective agency resonates with Lévi-Strauss's idea that myths and communal narratives help societies integrate contrasting experiences into a coherent whole (Lévi-Strauss 1969).

Furthermore, cultural adaptation is evident in how displaced communities reimagine traditional practices for new urban realities. Innovative approaches—urban gardening, rooftop farming, floating vegetable gardens—draw on traditional agricultural knowledge for new food and income sources. These initiatives serve as economic coping mechanisms and cultural statements, reinforcing heritage's capacity to evolve and thrive under different conditions. Such practices exemplify how environmental disruptions can catalyze cultural identity reorganization, where traditional practices are transformed, not abandoned, to meet new challenges. These adaptive strategies highlight the interplay of economic necessity, cultural preservation, and social resilience, illustrating that climate migrants' cultural identity reformation is dynamic, involving tradition's reinterpretation and reshaping to navigate rapid urbanization and environmental change. By leveraging institutional support, economic ingenuity, and grassroots activism,

Bangladesh's displaced communities are not just surviving but actively redefining resilience in an era of climate crisis.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Bangladesh confronts a critical crossroads, defined by the intertwined forces of climate-induced migration, urbanization, religious transformations, and political tensions, all testing its historical resilience amidst shifting demographics and ideological divides. Dhaka's rapid urbanization, fueled by climate migration and economic necessity, has profoundly altered its social fabric, intensifying competition for resources and services (Sultana, 2020). The influx of rural migrants, introducing their cultural and religious practices, challenges longstanding traditions and forges new social hierarchies, tying these demographic shifts to broader questions of national identity and governance (Riaz, 2020). Exacerbating this transformation is the severe strain on Dhaka's infrastructure and environment, as one of the world's most densely populated cities struggles with unplanned expansion, overburdened systems, and inadequate services (Rahman et al., 2021). Climate migration further intensifies overcrowding and socioeconomic disparities, particularly in informal settlements with limited basic services. With a governmental response often reactive rather than proactive and focused on short-term relief (Alamgir & Turton, 2013), addressing these urban challenges necessitates a shift toward comprehensive planning that integrates climate resilience with socioeconomic development.

Psychosocial Impacts of Climate Displacement

Beyond structural and economic consequences, the psychological toll of climate displacement on migrants is profound, often entailing the loss of home, community, and identity, and leading to heightened anxiety, depression, and PTSD (Chowdhury, 2021). This dislocation fosters generational trauma, transmitting experiences of displacement, lost cultural continuity, and socioeconomic hardship across generations (Hossain, 2022). Children, in particular, often struggle with fractured belonging and cultural dissonance between parental rural traditions and new urban expectations, increasing stress and identity conflicts (Rahman & Sultana, 2020). In urban centers like Dhaka, migrants navigate marginalizing social structures and are frequently viewed as economic burdens, facing discrimination that exacerbates mental health struggles. Women experience heightened vulnerability due to their social positioning, reporting

increased domestic violence, economic dependency, and restricted mobility, which intensify feelings of isolation and powerlessness (Ahmed, 2020; Karin et al., 2020).

Despite these adversities, displaced communities show remarkable resilience, adapting through collective support networks and cultural reinvention. Migrants often re-establish community bonds via religious institutions, local markets, and informal associations, crucial for emotional and material support (Mohsin, 2020). These spaces preserve cultural traditions and facilitate hybrid identities blending rural and urban life, underscoring displaced populations' agency beyond victimhood (Islam & Rahman, 2020). This adaptation, however, is complicated by the erosion of historically syncretic religious traditions by purist ideologies. The growing influence of Wahhabi and Salafi doctrines signifies a departure from Bangladesh's pluralistic Islamic heritage, fueling tensions between progressive and conservative factions, especially in urban areas (Riaz, 2020). Here, conservative Islamic interpretations increasingly shape social norms, from dress codes to gender roles. Concurrently, the government struggles to balance counterterrorism with upholding democratic freedoms and religious pluralism, often conflicting with both radical and moderate religious groups (Mohsin, 2020).

The Impact of Rohingya Refugees on Bangladesh's Socio-Political Landscape

The arrival of over a million Rohingya refugees introduces further complexity to Bangladesh's sociopolitical environment, with native communities expressing growing resentment over economic competition, resource depletion, and security concerns. Governmental efforts to manage the crisis, from encampment to relocation initiatives, face domestic and international scrutiny (Ahmed, 2020). Nationalist rhetoric surrounding the Rohingya issue fuels territorial anxieties, reinforces exclusionary policies, and deepens societal divides. Consequently, the long-term sustainability of Bangladesh's refugee policies is uncertain, particularly as diplomatic negotiations with Myanmar stall and internal pressures to curtail refugee rights intensify (Mohsin, 2020). Security concerns, including potential radicalization and organized crime within refugee camps, exacerbate fears of destabilization, prompting further restrictions on refugee movement and rights (Crabtree, 2022). Reports of organized crime like drug and human smuggling contribute to the perception of Rohingyas as a security threat (Momen, 2021), justifying

increased military surveillance, mobility restrictions, and harsher encampment enforcement. While argued as necessary for national security, these measures also fuel alienation within the refugee community, complicating long-term integration or repatriation (Sullivan, 2022).

Policy Implications and the Role of International Collaboration

Bangladesh's political landscape is shaped by the intersection of migration, economic instability, and ideological struggles, with migrant community mobilization influencing electoral outcomes and governance. Political factions are divided, some leveraging religious conservatism for support, others advocating for secularism and pluralism against rising radicalization. Systemic issues like corruption, vote rigging, and suppressed dissent exacerbate public frustration, leading to protests (Jahan, 2023). Yet, Bangladesh's history of cultural adaptation and resilience offers hope. The coexistence of diverse religious traditions, migrant adaptability, and potential for policy reforms present avenues to mitigate conflict and foster social cohesion. Addressing root economic and social disparities is crucial for stability, with policies improving urban infrastructure, educational access, and economic opportunities for all populations key to bridging divides (Islam & Rahman, 2020).

Tackling forced migration's complex impacts in Bangladesh demands a comprehensive, integrated policy response encompassing mental health, social protection, sustainable urban planning, and international collaboration. Such a multifaceted strategy is vital for supporting displaced communities by alleviating immediate distress and fostering long-term resilience and cultural preservation. Integrating community-based mental health services into disaster response frameworks is an essential policy component. Early intervention via targeted mental health programs—like trauma-informed counseling, peer support, and school-based initiatives—can significantly reduce chronic stress and psychological distress from forced migration, providing immediate relief and preventing long-term damage (Kabir et al. 2024). Embedding these services within existing community institutions (mosques, madrasas, community centers) can help policymakers restore disrupted social networks and foster continuity and hope.

Equally essential is strengthening social safety nets. Investments in affordable housing, accessible healthcare, and quality education mitigate economic instability—a mental distress exacerbator—and

promote social inclusion. Policies improving living conditions and social protection can bridge divides between displaced populations and mainstream urban society (Hajjaj 2024); for example, upgrading informal settlements with better sanitation, electricity, and healthcare can reduce stressors. This comprehensive approach is key to breaking climate migrants' cycle of chronic distress and economic vulnerability. Sustainable urban development forms a cornerstone of effective policy.

While the Bangladesh Delta Plan 2100 offers a long-term vision for climate adaptation, its success hinges on integration with psychosocial support. Urban planning must prioritize resilient infrastructure and community spaces fostering social interaction and cultural preservation; incorporating trauma-informed centers and artistic expression spaces into redevelopment can ease transitions and restore belonging. International collaboration is crucial for mobilizing resources, expertise, and policy guidance for these intertwined challenges. Partnerships facilitate best-practice exchange and resource pooling for comprehensive adaptation programs, bridging local governance gaps to ensure sustainable, culturally sensitive policies (Hossain et al. 2022). UN and regional body collaborations can integrate mental health services into disaster response, improving urban resilience. Critically, fostering grassroots involvement by incorporating displaced communities' intimate local knowledge and innovative solutions into participatory planning and governance yields more effective, culturally appropriate interventions. Community consultations, interfaith dialogues, and collaborative forums with diverse stakeholders ensure policies meet real needs. Empowering grassroots networks, as Huq and Shafique (2023) note, enhances adaptation ownership and promotes collective agency, vital for long-term social cohesion.

Close integration of economic and psychosocial interventions is also paramount. Economic development initiatives like vocational training and microfinance should align with mental health support to alleviate material and emotional stress. Since migrants often rely on informal entrepreneurship, programs formalizing these activities and offering social protections can significantly boost mental well-being. Holistic approaches ensure economic growth and psychological health are mutually reinforcing, creating a more resilient urban environment. In sum, addressing forced migration's psychosocial impacts in Bangladesh necessitates an integrated strategy combining community-based

mental health services, strengthened social safety nets, sustainable urban development, and robust international collaboration. Promoting interfaith dialogue, protecting minority rights, and incorporating grassroots insights into policy design can help Bangladesh foster a more inclusive, resilient society. The nation's future ultimately hinges on its capacity to transform climate-induced displacement challenges into opportunities for sustainable growth and social renewal.

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