

Naveeda Khan  
Department of Anthropology, Johns Hopkins University

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Project Title: Movement as a Way of Life: Understanding Climate Change in Riparian Bangladesh

Abstract:

The 2009 United Nations Climate Change Conference provided less developed nations such as Bangladesh with a forum to publicize the threats of climate change and to demand that industrialized nations take responsibility. Among the adverse effects to which the state of Bangladesh called urgent attention was the possibility that it might lose one third of its territory to coastal waters by the year 2050 producing 10-15 million climate refugees. While such urgency is not misplaced, the questions informing this research project are, how did the international discourse of climate change come to acquire priority within Bangladesh long preoccupied with problems of grave proportions, such as natural disasters, endemic poverty and the weaknesses of its political structures? And how do local communities accommodate this discourse, specifically those communities whose existence is already premised upon radical shifts in the natural environment and subsequent displacements? I focus in my research on a loosely defined community of *chauras*, so called for living on temporary silt islands or *chars* within the river system in northern Bangladesh, which originated in a westward shift of the Jamuna River starting in the 1930s. My effort is to understand how the discourse of climate change is being assimilated by *chauras* towards understanding what threats climactic changes poses for them and how their historical experiences of displacement by water and present day itinerant way of life may contribute to accommodating such changes.