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In the political vocabulary of the twentieth century, there has been an unprecedented and major drift in the semantic meaning of Water -- from a "core human facility" to be provided for, to a "universal problem" to be arbitrated upon. In our times the world may be fighting for oil, but in not so distant a future it will struggle for water unless steps are taken to counteract and ward off the problematics involved in the situation. In reality water has become a "power" in International Relations, though this fact has not been fully realised. It is a vital input into all forms of economic activity and development. Without it the elan vital of life itself may fizzle into nothingness. For humanity both its scarcity and abundance creates problems. Rivers provide the largest amount of fresh water, but when a political boundary cuts them across, relationships tend to be jeopardised, and difficulties are experienced in cross-country water resources. Joyce R. Starr in a seminal study on water (See "Water Wars" Foreign Policy, No.82, Spring 1991, PP.17ff) states that 40,000 children in the world, and a majority of them in the African continent are dying daily for hunger or diseases caused by the lack of water or due to contaminated water. At the turn of the century, he goes on to add, around forty per cent of the African
population will be at the risk of death or diseases caused by water scarcity or contaminations. These are "tragic statistics" on human toll related to pathological problems ingrained in a situation, when water is not fresh and even not adequate. Days after signing the historic peace treaty with Israel, Egypt's President Anwar Sadat declared in the Spring of 1979, that the only matter that might take Egypt into war would be water hereafter. This time, however, the war-thrust was not directed at Israel, but at "Ethiopia, that upstream neighbour that controls eighty five per cent of the headwaters of Egypt's life-line, the Nile River". In 1990 Jordan's King Hussein issued similar war-like declaration. Soon after the partition, India and Pakistan got embroiled in the water dispute over the Indus. Pakistan at one point of time gave a call for Jehad (religious war) on water. The dispute which got world-wide publicity and even at times overshadowed the Kashmir issue ended in 1960 with the signing of the Indus Waters Treaty after a protracted wrangling and acrimony. In the same perspective the relationship between India and Bangladesh has also undergone critical turns in spite of the fact that in the liberation of Bangladesh, India had played a vital role. The initial honey-moon between India and Bangladesh soon turned sour for a few cusecs of water. To salvage her important riverine port-city of Calcutta, on the recommendation of world-standing Engineers India had undertaken a diversion project at Farakka on the Ganges to resuscitate the moribund river channel. The work had begun when Bangladesh was East Pakistan and completed after the birth of Bangladesh. On a note of understanding and good will
the water relations between the two countries began. The leaders of these two riparian countries, in the prevailing atmosphere of mutual trust and confidence, agreed upon certain premises by recognising the geo-political compulsions of the region with an eagerness to augur in a new era of cooperation particularly in the matter of common-river-water management. Socio-political factors played their part in polluting the early zeal in Indo-Bangla relations and subsequently jeopardising the prospects on fresh water. Farakka still remains the greatest irritant in Indo-Bangla relations, while water relations between the two countries are not limited to Farakka alone. South Asia being a developing region and Bangladesh a Least Developed Country (LDC), afflicted by endemic water calamity, the fresh water disputes call for an early resolution in order to pave the way for accelerating economic development and social welfare. The present study is a modest attempt at identifying and understanding the issues involved in the fresh waters of the Ganges and other Indo-Bangla common rivers. In a framework of historical and analytical approach, it tries to discern the politics that is inextricably mixed in these water disputes.

The study draws heavily from the available secondary sources like books, learned journals, news paper reports and articles. The primary sources like the official documents of the Governments of India and Bangladesh, the U.N. Documents, the Lok Sabha Debates of India have also been consulted. The author had the privilege of talking to Bangladeshi students and scholars informally and taken
due note of their views and perspectives. Similarly, ideas have
also been exchanged with some Indian officials and scholars. The
exercise is expected to facilitate an understanding of the problems
involved in making an integrated and fuller use of the river water
for the benefit of South Asian region as a whole.

The study is divided into five chapters. Chapter I, while
highlighting the importance of the subject, analyses the nature of
the fresh water disputes in the context of South Asia. Indus, the
first major international water dispute between India and Pakistan
and Ravi-Beas, the most complex and complicated domestic Water
dispute of India, find treatment in this chapter with a discerning
study of their linkages.

Chapter II describes the Ganges water dispute which forms
the central concern of this thesis. The outstanding irritant in Indo-
Bangla Relations, Farakka has been eluding a solution for years.
The course of fresh water diplomacy between the two has been traced
while analysing each development.

Chapter III examines the rules of international law, if any,
that could be applied to the dispute at hand. The claims and counter-
claims of both the parties are also examined on their legal merits.
The different issues involved in such water rows and theories of
riparian rights are analysed from a legal point of view.

Chapter IV makes an attempt at an in-depth study of two
contending themes of Indo-Bangladesh diplomacy in general and fresh
water diplomacy in particular, that is, Bilateralism and Multilateralism.
Chapter V is the concluding Chapter that sums up the whole exercise with findings and suggestions while bringing the issues into sharp focus, which, I suppose, will help in finding a solution to the problems.

I shall fail in my duty if I don't express my heart-felt gratitude

to Professor K.P. Misra, Centre for International Politics, Organisation & Disarmament, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi for supervising this work with intellectual acumen and perspicacity,

to the University Grants Commission, India for the fiscal grants (Minor Research Project) in my favour,

to the Librarian and Staff of the Kanika Library, Ravenshaw College (Cuttack), the Parija Library, Utkal University (Bhubaneswar), the Jawaharlal Nehru University Library (New Delhi), Library of the Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA, New Delhi), the Nehru Memorial and Museum Library (New Delhi), the Library of the Ministry of Irrigation, Government of India (New Delhi), the National Library (Calcutta), for extending many a courtesy and assistance,

to my teachers and colleagues, Professor B.C. Rout, Head P.G. Department of Political Science, Ravenshaw College (Cuttack), Professor Harihar Rath, Director of I.A.S. Coaching Centre, Ravenshaw College (Cuttack), Professor Rabindra Kumar Mishra, Head, P.G. Department of Political Science, Rajendra College (Bolangir) for encouraging me,

to my friends, Mr. Radhakant Barik, Mr. Bijoya Bohidar, Mr. Abhiram Biswal, my elder brother Dr. Srikant Barik, my brother-in-law Mr. Dhurandhar Biswal for their concern in my work,

to those friends of Bangladesh and India who discussed the water problem with me,
to Kunmama, Kunmini (my two sweet little daughters) for innocence and simplicity with which they viewed my research,

and last but not the least to my wife Kiran who inspired me all along to complete this work which made me struggle for a number of years with sleepless nights in an endless euphoria of intellectual trance.

(Niranjan Barik)