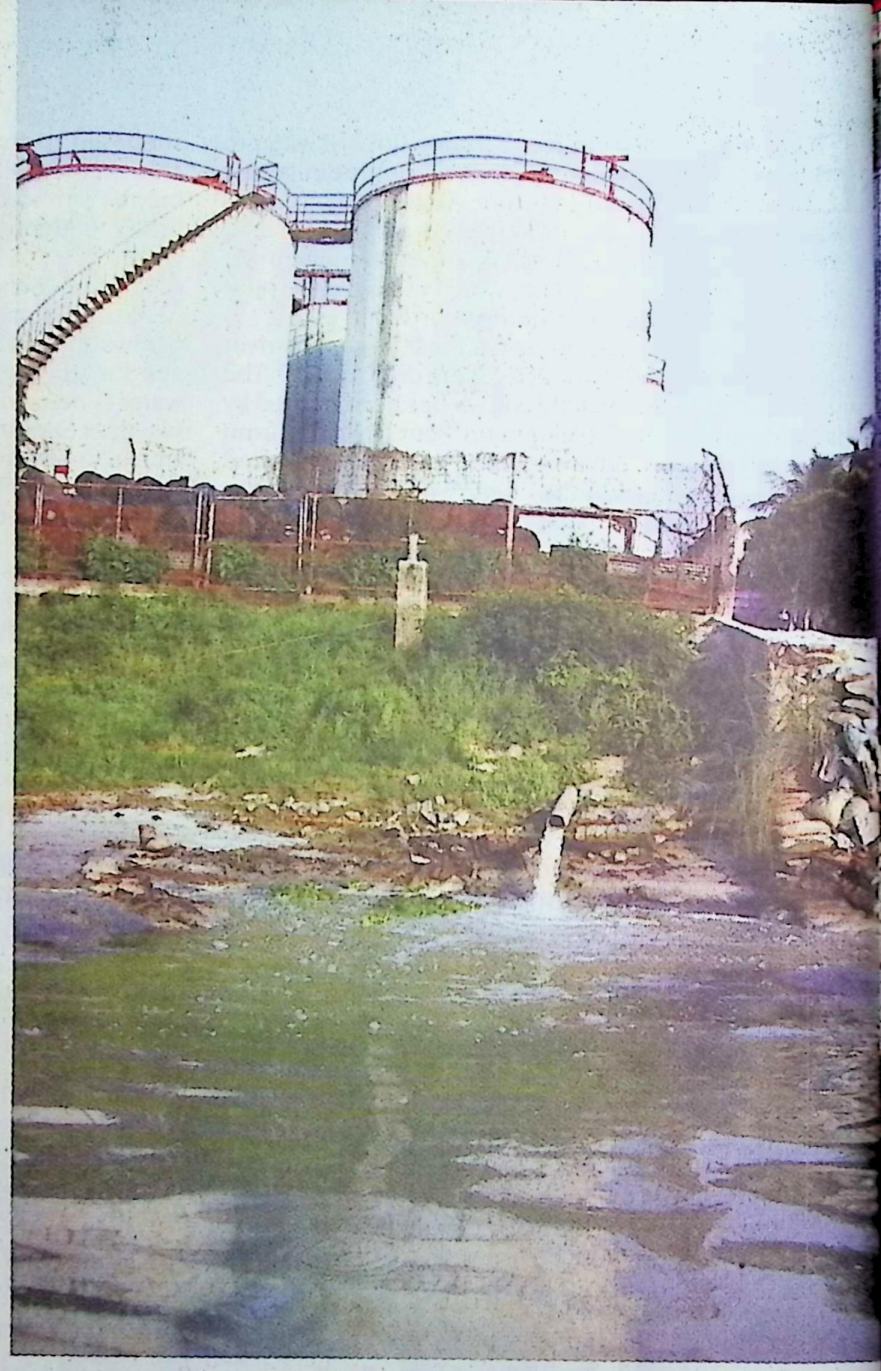
The risk to health has been clearly stated by a World Bank report on environmental and water resource of greater Dhaka. Published in March 2008 the report states that community members reported to having contracted stomach diseases. Communities that are more directly dependent on natural resources have also been sufferers. The report also mentions that 63 percent of farming households reported a gradual decline in Boro rice production for the ongoing pollution at the periphery areas of Dhaka. The report also states that there appears to be no fishing activity whatsoever in the dry season in the rivers and canals in greater Dhaka.

In fact, this lively river has become biologically dead making it dangerous for human and livestock use. Clearly, the people and the economy are paying a high price for the degraded environment in the catchments of the river. Once, the Shitalakkhya was a rich source of several indigenous species of fish such as *ritha*, *bowal* and *chital*, now there is no fishing at all during the dry season in river water. Even during the wet season, fishing is not possible on commercial basis in the river, informs sources at the Department of Fisheries. Which is why fishermen are switching to other professions. Those who are still hanging on to family tradition, continue to suffer.

"During the dry season we have to take our boats seven miles downstream. We collect snails from the Dhaleswari River near Munshiganj, since we don't get any fish or other aquatic animals in Shitalakkhya. We sell these snails to the poultry farmers", says Nironjon Das, an ageing fisherman of Rushki, a village on the bank of river Shitalakkhya in Rupganj, Narayanganj.

"Even in the wet season we get only a few *puti* fish from the river now, but a variety of fish like *foli*, *chital*, *bailla*, *ritha* and *bowal* were available in the Shitalakkhya before", he adds.

A recent incident shows just how badly fish and other aquatic life have been affected. A few days ago, the Water Development Board had supplied water from the Shitalakkhya through DND canal for irrigation at Shimlail area near Narayanganj, where there are many fisheries. "Just within an hour all the fish died in the firms those used such contaminated water", informs a high official of Bangladesh Water Development Board on condition of anonymity.



Many edible oil mills discharge untreated effluentes in the river water.

Explaining the reason behind this fisheries experts, hydrologists and environmental experts say that the dumped effluents from domestic and industrial sources in the river water deplete the oxygen level in the water to a point where no creature can survive.

Corrosive elements in the water have led to skin diseases in people for whom the river is the only place where they can wash and bathe. The World Bank report states that skin disease, jaundice, diarrhoea and dysentery are correlated to water pollution. Residents of the area complain that they cannot use the polluted river water for household chores either.