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Lived Experiences from  
Indian Sundarbans Amidst  
Climate Change and Migration**



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**Those Who Stay Behind:  
Lived Experiences from Indian Sundarbans  
Amidst Climate Change and Migration**

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and  
Upasona Ghosh**

**2022**



# Those Who Stay Behind: Lived Experiences from Indian Sundarbans Amidst Climate Change and Migration

Debojyoti Das and Upasona Ghosh \*

## Introduction

Climate change is frighteningly real. The global discourse on climate change has turned increasingly towards understanding vulnerability as a priority for research and policy. We define vulnerability, following Neil Adger (1999), as the exposure of individuals or groups to livelihood stress because of the impacts of environmental change. For example, cyclone Aila triggered socio-economic hardship caused by soil and aquaculture salinization that has pushed people out of their homes as ‘environmental refugees’ and adversely affected their health and wellbeing in littoral South Asia (Ghosh, Bose and Bramachari 2018). At a time when all major climate change debates picture migration as an inevitable coping strategy, our research looks at both mobility and immobility in the Sundarbans delta. We examine it through the lenses of various stakeholders’ women, men and children’s who are part of the migration journey triggered not only by climate change induced natural disasters but also shaped by their agency, social capital, and networks of interdependence based on kinship ties and informal labour contractors. These are further nested in the remittance economy, seasonal labour migration, food and water scarcity sparked by unprecedented environmental change and seasonal disruptions to livelihood and household income in Sundarbans. The paper thus focuses not only on the conventional situation of migration but also of immobility those who stay behind.

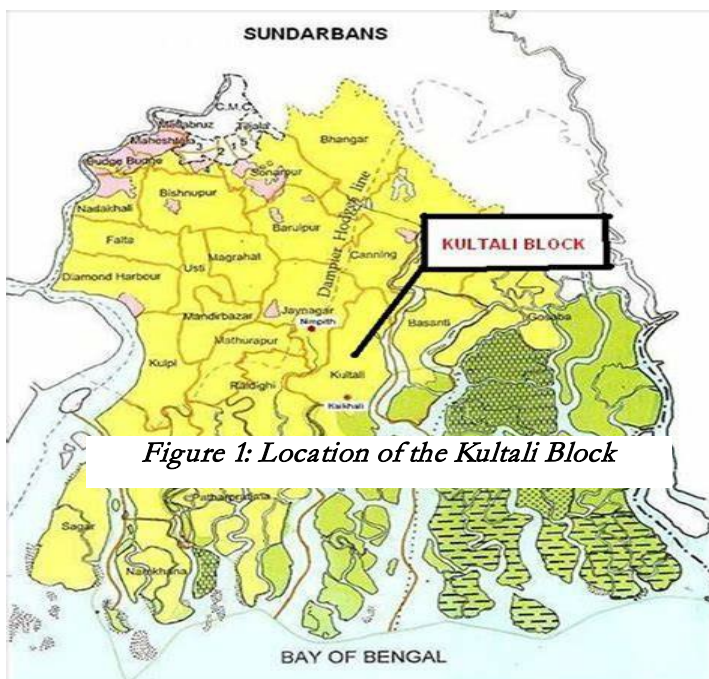
## Background of the Study

Indian Sundarbans study attempts to unravel using qualitative and visual methods in capturing complex social dynamics, between out-migrants from the archipelago, their family who are left behind and how climate change and geography affects their life choices. It also hints at how, in the context of cascading uncertainty due to COVID and climate shocks, image-taking and narratives can complement more conventional qualitative data and methodologies. Women of Sundarbans, living in a hostile environment are sensitive towards short term and long-term impacts of the climatic uncertainties. Impacts like frequent flooding, cyclones, and sea level rise and salinity intrusion are

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responsible for the uncertain productivity of the agricultural land as well as depleting fish catch. Rapid loss of agricultural lands and fishponds due to land erosion is making the situation worst. As a coping strategy, the male folk of the islands are out-migrating in search of alternatives leaving the women and children behind in most cases. The women, who were engaged in the traditional livelihoods such as sweet water fishing and agriculture, are now facing uncertain production and bound to search the sparsely available alternatives within the island. Most of them are opting wage labouring within the village as they must take care of the children and elderly. More so, the women who were not previously engaged in



*Figure 1: Location of the Kultali Block*

any kind of livelihoods now must join the marginal workforce to sustain their families. This has increased the work pressure of the women within the traditional socio-cultural and political context. The uncertainty of livelihood is internally imposing certain psycho-social barriers and challenges on the women which have led them towards unsustainable coping like school dropout, early marriage, and domestic violence and so on. These barriers are making the women more sensitive and vulnerable towards future climatic uncertainties. However, the vicious cycle of vulnerability and uncertainty are not equally strong among all sections of the society and vary across the class fabric-economic, caste and religious intersections. The policy context—both policy framing and implementation, at the other hand seems to have little connect with the women of Sundarbans and showing intersectional bias as of coping and adaptation strategies are concerned. Hence, the case of Indian Sundarbans explores the gaps in understanding how women located at different intersections within a given context, experience, perceive and act to deal with climatic changes.

## Methodology

### Study Settings

The study was conducted in two villages namely Purbo gurguria and Deulbari of the Indian Sundarbans, which are administratively under Kultali Block of South 24 Paraganas District. Blocks like Kultali, have been at the epicentre of impacts of climatic change and extreme climatic events owing to their proximity to the ocean as well as reserve forest. In 2020 and 2021, the region faced the tropical cyclone Amphan and Yass respectively, that rendered thousands of people homeless and displaced and there were huge losses of agriculture and food stock. The total population of Kultali is 229,053 as per the Census 2011. Out of which 117,562 are males while 111,491 are females. In 2011 there were total 45,099 families residing in Kultali Block. The Average Sex Ratio of Kultali Block is

948. As per Census 2011, there are total '0' families under Kultali Block living in urban areas while 0 families are living within rural areas. Thus around 0% of total population of Kultali Block lives in urban areas while 100% lives under rural areas. Population of children (0 - 6 years) in urban region is 0 while that in rural region is 35,727.

## **Approaches and Techniques**

As the study deals with perceptions of the different actors within the context of climatic changes in the Sundarbans; qualitative design was seen as the suitable method for the present research. The set of respondents was the women who with migrated husbands, who can express their experience of climate change impacts on various aspects of their life. A maximum variation principal technique was employed to select the women from the following possible intersections of the society:

- i) Agricultural households
- ii) Fishing households
- iii) Migrant households
- iv) Women headed households
- v) Schedule caste households
- vi) Muslim households
- vii) Crab collector households
- viii) Household situated in island pockets
- ix) Household situated on the embankments

The study also combined community-generated visuals and narratives with participant observation or other qualitative methods in order to enhance the contextual knowledge for understanding migration. Discourse and narratives of the photos and narratives have been done to synthesise and arrive at the findings.

## **Findings and Analysis**

### ***Outmigration as a Maladaptation:***

The findings display the maladaptation of migrants in a setting where livelihood is in a state of flux and describes the circumstances and terms under which movement of the islanders takes place, how migration provides the young generation an opportunity to realise their aspirations, both men and women.

The general pattern of the people who are likely to migrate in the study villages showed a propensity for interstate migration over inter-district and intra-district migration. A huge number of distressed people were forced to move out of the Sundarban, especially interstate migration through the intermediaries. Individual preferences for destination show that Kolkata is still the preferred permanent destination while Southern states and Delhi are other preferred mode of migrating out. Wage rate differences and job opportunities at the place of destinations are the major pull factors for interstate migration.

Circular migration was found out to be the preferred mode where both the departure and return may be either permanent or temporary, in other words the migrants of Sundarbans neither permanently migrates from the Sundarban nor permanently returns. They return home only to migrate again. In most cases, migrants are seen to permanently return within 2 years still a lot of them were of the view that they do not know when they will permanently return, but they are very sure that they will not stay at the destination permanently. However, there are trade-offs to contend with

for migrants. Most of them say they are troubled by crowded living conditions, poor sanitation, problems stemming from a lack of fresh water and irregular food habits due to workloads and working conditions.

An over the years pattern shows that COVID and repeated climate shocks has transformed a mainly self-sufficient agricultural society into a market-based one, but without the tools needed to survive the change. One of the respondents stated that

“Our brothers and their families who are still living on the river banks and have no place to go are potentially climate refugees whose rights go completely missing.”  
Women’s experience while living in the island:

The Samanta household encapsulates the precarity of a typical family in a climate sensitive zone of the Sundarbans – a mix of decision making to try and minimise risks, yearning to get back, to settle down, youth aspirations, and living with uncertainty across generations.

Samanta’s had been a household who once had lush green fields and a family pond and had a satisfied and self-sustaining existence. Much before cyclone Aila, the Samanta’s agricultural land and their pond got inundated during the disastrous floods of 1997. The older Samanta was forced to migrate (intra state) to take jobs, first as a brick kiln worker and then as an agricultural field hand in the neighbouring district of Burdwan. He left the women and elderly in his family behind and went to work. He came back in 2006 with enough money to buy land and settled down to agriculture, which has been the mainstay of the family for ages. He married his daughter off outside of Sundarbans to a place near Kolkata. His son-in-law is a mason. Cyclone Aila in 2009 flooded his agricultural land once again. He again went back to Burdwan leaving his family behind. On his return in 2019, he bought land and a pond a bit away from the periphery of island. Then COVID, cyclone Amphan and Yash happened. After the lockdown, his three sons (all educated till class XII) went away – two to Burdwan and one to Delhi. This time instead of working as manual labours they went to work in the informal service sectors. His youngest son took his wife and children with him. He says that he may not return to Sundarbans for work but only to see parents during occasions. He works in a hospital canteen.

While men are coping with livelihood uncertainties mainly through seasonal out migration, women are coping with whatever available livelihood options they find within the island. However, women migration is also not an uncommon thing within the islands. According to our respondents few families had gone out of the island in search of alternative livelihoods while their children are here in the island in care of neighbours or relatives. Women those who have to stay back in the island, wage labouring has come up probably the most adapted alternatives for them. The women are opting different type of wage labouring options within the island and nearby towns like manual work under government schemes, agricultural labour, net threading and embroidery work. However, as per the respondents this kind of wage labouring is uncertain due to remote location of the studied islands and lack of proper skills.

“Manual labouring from the Government schemes is mainly the work of repairing embankments. Previously it was exclusively a men’s job. Now mainly due to lack of able men in the island, we are getting the opportunities. But still it is scanty as per the requirement is concern”- stated by respondent no 10.

### ***Coping and Adaptation for Livelihood Uncertainties:***

Households face many economic and physical hardships due to the changing climate. The effect on households’ financial assets is particularly damaging as they expend their savings or sell household assets like land, pond, poultry and livestock to repair financial loss. These methods of coping from



climatic events leave poor families in further impoverishment. Along with relying on existing assets, households also borrow money from money lenders and extended family members at high to moderate rates of interest. These hardships place considerable financial burden on families not only to secure income for sustenance but also for restoring the loss from recurrent climatic events. Respondents collectively observed that the livelihood uncertainty has made them phobic, and they are desperate to do any kind of jobs which can guarantee the basic maintenance of the household. All most every household we visited had at least one out-migrated male family member for restoration of livelihood that they have lost in previous year. However, it is a time taking and painful process to provide the requisite remittance to the family back in Sundarbans. Hence, the women of the family had to borrow money from the local moneylenders to maintain the family along with getting engaged in limited livelihood options. The livelihood regeneration process took time. Unfortunately, by that time another disaster struck, and they had to start the process from the beginning.

“We all are facing the same poverty-stricken condition except a few families that still have some land. Others have to migrate to maintain the family expenses, schooling of the children, medical issues. But that is not enough. You may end up with taking loan to maintain any of the cost. You may be able to collect money for the meals through your migration but the residual debts are just going on year after year as we don’t have any fixed and certain option of livelihood”- *stated by respondent no 5.*

### ***Changing Social Pattern and Women’s Vulnerabilities:***

Livelihood uncertainties and related poverty have brought significant changes in the social pattern of the community. The changes have a mixed impact on the overall vulnerabilities of the women islanders. The findings revealed there are changes like 1) increasing domestic violence 2) early marriage and 3) breaking of families.

### **Increasing Domestic Violence:**

If we take the first change- domestic violence, it was prevail in the patriarchal social structure of the Sundarbans for long. However, according to the respondents its gradual increase is positively correlated with the growing livelihood uncertainties and consequent poverty. Respondents stated, the men, after losing their traditional livelihood are become anxious about the future and get irritated easily. While quarrelling is a daily affair, wife beating is not uncommon according to our interviewed female respondents. Situation is even worse for those women, who have to work for livelihood restoration. As being working, they have to spend a lot of time outside the home. While return, they have to do all the household chores including childcare. That most of the time invoke outrage with the husband and with the in-laws.

“If there is scarcity in daily household resources, there is no peace. We used to quarrel a lot than the previous. In this village, there is no work. How many days we can stay here, there is no guarantee”.

All the time my husband has one thought-how will we survive, where can we go. In this state if say anything, he obviously get furious”-stated by respondent no 24.

### **Early Marriage of Girls:**

In the traditional society of Sundarbans, marriage at early age, especially for girls is a practicing custom. However, it was generally popular among the religious minorities and schedule caste population. The findings of the recent study indicate the community irrespective of their position in the social strata, especially who are living in the climatically vulnerable region like Kultali are

practicing this early marriage custom as a coping strategy to deal with the climate change impacts. All respondents were agreed to a point that they want their girls getting married outside the island, preferably in mainland area. According to the respondents, the main reason behind this practice is to get a shelter during the climatic emergency or in loss of homestead due to erosion. Respondents also stated about material and monetary helps they usually get from the in-laws of the girls at the time of emergencies. However, one positive side of this practice is that, according to the demand of the prospective mainland grooms, the islanders educate their girls at least up to the secondary level. According to the respondents, in many cases, the girls continue their schooling even after their marriage as mainland region have higher education facilities.

“In the island, educational facilities are up to secondary level. Most people don’t have financial capacity to send their girls outside Sundarbans. Boys have to migrate that parent knows for sure. They think if they can educate the girls, they will get married to a well-to-do family in the mainland who in turn help them during emergencies”-stated by respondent no 8.

### **Breaking of Joint Families:**

The study revealed that the increasing livelihood uncertainties and economic burden is leading towards breaking of joint families in the Sundarbans. According to the respondents, nuclear families are preferable now days, as household resources are scarce. According to the respondents, the women islanders who have migrant husband are specially in favour of breaking out from their in-laws. Their day long engagement in livelihood restoration creates tension with their in-laws around household chores. In a joint family they are expected to do most of the chores even after coming back from a strenuous labour in the respective livelihood fields. They enjoy much freedom in a nuclear family where they manage the household chores just for herself and her children with the help of female neighbour. Respondents also agreed that being in a nuclear family they are now enjoying economic freedom also.

“Thousands of chores in a big family and as a daughter-in-law you would be expecting to do all the work. Your in-laws won’t think that you are also going out to earn money for the family. If you get let in the morning chores or return let form the work at the evening, they won’t spare you from the verbal abuse”- stated by respondent 21

### **Future Aspiration:**

The respondents while dealing with climate change impacts through various long and short term strategies, have different aspiration and future plans. In this regard the societal intersection played an important role. Respondents who belong to agriculture are interested to buy plot of lands at a secure place, whereas the respondents who are doing manual labour, wish to buy a safe shelter outside the island. Interestingly, according to these particular set of respondents they are breaking the stereotype while doing a ‘man’s job’. Another interesting trend reflected by the respondents who were housewife and have just started earning money after the family faced livelihood uncertainty due to climatic adversities. They indicate as they have started going out of the boundary of the household, they are enjoying economic independence; started meeting new people and learning about the world outside the islands. These young, mostly educated (secondary level) women are now aspiring to develop new livelihood skills like home-based cottage industries, so that they can take care of the family while earning money.

## **Perspectives of the Civil Societies through Photo Voice**

Key opinion leaders and local civil society feel the spotlight beyond shorter-term outlook towards dedicated policy focus on medium to longer-term approaches needs to take up to address the growing trend in migration and their identity and well-being. Instead of fostering more dependence on government-sanctioned relief and aid from NGOs for rural communities sending migrants to urban areas, policies uplifting such communities to become economically self-reliant can go a long way in supporting the process of response and recovery. Self-reliance can be envisioned here as enhanced employability and livelihood options for people in the community, along with flexible and transferrable skill development. This would also include self-employed people with access to resources such as credit, and information through digital literacy, as well as connectivity through embeddedness in social networks at multiple locations.

## **Perspectives of Young Migrants**

Substantial portion of the young migrants feel that social media and the virtual space can both act as a platform for dissemination of informal sector opportunities. There is potential to effectively mobilise social media by contractors and employers who can use it to hire labourers as well. To augment reach at regional scale, a vernacular data bank can be created that ideally will include not only a database of migrant workers through the process of registration as reiterated in the recent labour laws, but also a database for the migrants. Such a data bank may combine the process of data gathering with data sharing, providing migrant workers with access to critical information about potential employment opportunities in destination regions, reliable agents and contractors, locations of subsidised facilities and more, thereby facilitating informed decision-making. By removing dependence on employers and intermediaries for labour market information and connections, access to this data through digital and other platforms can help enhance resilience of the migrant workers.

## **Migration and Immobility**

While migration is a dominant feature of the Sundarbans today with male heads moving out to earn a living, mobility is closely attached to people returning to their natal home. Even people who have permanently moved out return to the natal village annual, seasonally, and intermittently over several years. But there is another interesting twist to the story of male migration that I learned from three male migrant interlocutors who have returned back home for good. The first migrant narrates in his interview that he had moved to Andaman and Nicobar Islands where he used to earn decent money. He started his long-distance migration journey soon after the 2009 *Aila* cyclone, and before that he used to visit Birbhum and Hooghly for sowing and harvesting of paddy. Few years back when he got married and had a family it became difficult to stay away from his family home in the Sundarbans. Therefore, he returned to support his family. He cited that the government job card which offers 100 days of employment as a financial support generated enough income for him to survive in the village during the lean season. He regularly got job card employment as their village was remotely situated, and the condition of embankments was very poor which meant authorities had to employ local people to work and it made more sense for contractors to use human power than machines in these remote islands where it was very difficult to move heavy machinery. The second male migrant whom we interviewed has now set up a hardware shop in the village. He was previously travelling to Chennai for cantering work at a construction site which he described as backbreaking and involved

immense risk and posed health and safety issues. Many of his peers were badly injured and some died while working in multistoried building sites. Now he resides in Dayapur village with his wife and children. He saved up money to start his small business. The third male informant we met during our trip to Bali Island had travelled to Chennai, Tamil Nadu to work as an electrician and worked there for several years when he was an unmarried man and earned good amount of money. Soon after his marriage he established a family and had two children. This required him to stay back in the village to look after and take care of his family. With the help of his wife, he had decided up a grocery shop in the island main market. Initially they had a brisk business, and the couple was very content working together in the shop serving office goers from local banks in the island and the police station until Covid-19 lockdown started and their sales dipped. Post Covid-19, he has not been able to recover from the financial loss that his business has suffered because of the lockdown. He also cited that after Covid-19, many new small businesses have come up in the villages surrounding Gosaba and villagers don't find it costly to come to the main market to buy goods. Despite these uncertainties of business in the island, he is determined to stay back in the village. These stories of immobility caused by obligation towards spouse and children in the household reaffirm that climate change affects different sections of the society and households differently. Climate migration is a far more complex phenomenon and the paradox for refugeehood is also embedded to people's attachment to the land and kinship networks in villages. Migration, as I realised, is often the last port of call even for families who have been displaced by embankment breaches where their houses have been relocated to embankment sites.

During my sojourn in Gasabo Island, I interviewed members of Tagore Society for Rural Development (TSRD), an NGO that has been working with "left-behind" female householders in Gosaba and Rangabelia and are also subject to abuse from the male members of the family and victims of domestic violence. TSRDs Self-Help Group women leader observed in her interview that they have been working with women in the villages to be self-reliant by training them in tailoring work, embroidery work and engaging in organic farming of lintels, chillies and other spices which are sold through their village NGO outlet shop. The NGO workers also sensitize women on child marriage, trafficking, and domestic violence. Some of the project trainees have now build capacity to earn a decent living. They also cited the example of a TSRD volunteer whose husband passed away recently, and her economic situation became precarious. The women were forced to migrate to Ahmadabad for work. However, TSRD's training helped the widow get a job in Ahmadabad in the embroidery and textile industry which has helped to support her young child and family. TSRD informants presented her case as a successful example of women empowerment. To champion local knowledge and indigenous management of mangrove species in the Sundarbans, the TSRD also introduced a programme of mangrove inter-planation across several villages in the Sundarbans Delta. The programme has been founded on community participation with female heads nominated as chairman of the project from the Gram Sabha. The focus of the programme has been both promoting indigenous knowledge on mangrove conservation as well as empowering women who have been left behind in the village by their husband. Such projects evidently focus on mainstreaming gender into project goals so that they attend to the specific livelihood challenges faced by women in the delta who are less mobile compared to male heads of households because of gender norms and familial responsibilities as discussed in the preceding paragraphs.

The story of migration, therefore, can be better understood as different forms of mobilities, both short-term and long-term that are underlined by a common denominator that migration is



Image showing people displaced by cyclone and bank erosion in the Sundarbans delta.  
Photo credit, Debojyoti Das.

defined by close affinity with one's native place of origin. The 2009 cyclone *Aila* turned out to be a watershed moment in Sundarbans' long history of population mobility. For the first time, people migrated in mass too far off places for work as the agricultural fields were destroyed by saline water that were rendered infertile. Even today, the impact can be witnessed in the mono cropping of rice while chilies and pulses cultivation has vanished from the islands. Both socially and economically, it broke the back of many families.

Many families now move for work outside the state. The movement of parents has had a detrimental impact on children's wellbeing. The lack of guardianship and neglect with childcare was a key factor behind the children's lack of motivation to attend school regularly. Many students whose parents lived away from them were depressed and anxious. Often, these children's get into bad company and move away from the mainstream circle of kinship as narrated by the head teacher of an NGO run boarding school. Children's regularly complained about homesickness and lack of support from parents to meet their everyday necessities both at school and home. In one family that we visited during our stay in Gosaba, children reported that they were underfed by their mother who was suffering from mental health condition. Single parent students deprived of parental love also suffer from psychosocial disorders such as depression and move out of the school after some time and often become recluse. The boarding schoolteacher observed that it was one of the main challenges faced by the teaching staff in the school as the proportion of migrating labourers' children's increase in each class.

While none of the respondents directly made a causal link between climate change and global warming as a cause behind individuals' choice to migrate, it was evident from the individual's narrative of the prevailing conditions. For instance, a fruit vendor was himself a migrant few year back observed during our conversation that the level of precarity people are in and what pushes them to migrate, are asynchronously linked with the uncertainties caused by changing rainfall pattern, failed

monsoon, drought and excrement weather that is hard to predict for farmers to time sowing of crops and harvest. This has resulted in bad harvest in the past that has forced people to migrate in search of work. He complained that in 2020 *Amphan* led to embankment breaches in many islands across the delta. This was followed by flood in 2021 where most of the standing crop was lost to water. By 2022 the monsoon was delayed by several months leading to the declaration of drought and an insufficient relief package announced by the state government. These natural calamities have produced an added layer of uncertainty for young (male) adults, heads of household who are forced to move out of the village for work and to support their family. The people who are left behind are not only women but young children who suffer from the burden of being left alone in the village with single parents and often with their grandparents and distant kin's. Staying alone producers its own challenges that affects their education, social and mental wellbeing.

## Discussion

This study conducted during Omicron strain of the covid virus was rampaging through the Sundarbans islands and in the aftermath of cyclone Amphan and Yash- had the ramifications of the cascading uncertainties and the exacerbating precarity implicit in the responses and visual narratives. Migration as a response to climate change from a coastal eco-region like the Indian Sundarbans cannot be entirely separated from the process of irregular labour migration from this region which has for decades been witnessing circular patterns of seasonal and longer-term movement of internal migrants. Still, it is the male members of the family who migrate to urban destinations for work, alone or with others of their kin, with the plan to send remittances back to their families. Together with the push from rural areas associated with waning traditional livelihoods, there is the pull from informal labour markets in other states that promise relatively higher wages. The study offered a window to view the costs and consequences of migration from this climate-vulnerable region that could otherwise remain absent in public understanding and policy considerations.

The ability to move out of the delta region in response to disastrous events such as cyclones, storm surges, and associated saltwater intrusion have over the last one decade is seen as a boon. Still, towards the beginning of the study period, the intersection of covid 19 and Amphan as two hazardous events has resulted in a paradoxical interplay between mobility and immobility. Spatial mobility (whether temporary, over shorter distance, or longer-term) would have been an expected strategic response for coping with an event like cyclone Amphan and the more gradual impacts of anthropogenic climate change. However, its coincidence with a global pandemic has presented a peculiar situation where immobility is expected, even enforced, as the norm. This inverted outcome, along with the cascading effects for return migrants, have culminated in an on-going livelihood crisis for migrants for the Sundarbans region—a situation also faced by many other rural communities across India.

A lot of migrants felt that the way forward could be in the form of similar welfare schemes for other states, with incentives for employers and contractors to comply with the process of registration that helps them to avail of rations, welfare and health schemes. And there needs to be an extensive database can then be used in times of climate crisis to assess risks and ensure survival for those experiencing compounded vulnerabilities. However, according to another section of the migrants there are caveats in creating and maintaining such a database, including concerns around data confidentiality, so that migrant workers, who are already marginalised, may not be further marginalised in the process of implementation of labour welfare laws. In the context of the present crises, a critical discussion of the Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act (ISMWA), 1979 opens a window

for imagining plausible interventions in the policy landscape, with the potential to be translated into effective praxis.

As the migrants, desperate to survive, have no other option but to return to one of the most climate-vulnerable regions in the world it presents a need to evaluate the existing policy regime around the nexus between climate change and mobility. Relevant to this discussion is Paprocki's work on adaptation regime and possible climate futures that poses a vital question: does imagining climate resilient urban futures entail "devaluation of rural lives and livelihoods" and ultimately the "demise of rural futures"? One needs to challenge the assumption that in-situ adaptation and mass migration are mutually exclusive responses to climate change. The lesson is that ecosystem and community-based in-situ adaptation strategies may foster migration by reducing a community's vulnerability, enabling better access to socio-economic resources, and empowering them in decision-making around when and where to relocate. Similarly, migration comes with its own challenges as people who have been left behind reported psychosomatic stress disorder living distant from their spouse and parents. This resulted in enormous hardship and challenges for people who have been left behind.

The voices that are missed in this perspective, lie in articulating alternative climate futures imagined by disaster-affected communities, school children with whom we interacted, women left behind in the household and grandparents who mostly remain 'immobile', while at the same time men who have returned home and have no intention to migrate. The conception of 'environmental refugeehood', therefore must be understood from the perspective of migrants themselves. Attention to Sundarbans' peasant visions of the future and restitution of their livelihood can only be imagined from their narratives and motivations of migration. By linking mobility with bio-physical factors and environmental uncertainty would lead to romanticism unless we disentangle the overlapping linkages between climate uncertainty with unequal social relational and power dynamics within societies. Often techno managerialism is employed to find solution to such problem, whereas the problems lie at the interface of state, society, and economy. Therefore, it is important to understand the challenges faced by environmental refugees across the Bay of Bengal from multiple lenses.

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