

Observing the Gendered Pattern of Migration from the Sunderbans through a Photo Story

I am a final year Master's student in Media and Cultural Studies at TISS (Mumbai). I was born and brought up in Kolkata and am currently based in the city. As a media and journalism student, I have been trained in qualitative research, journalistic and analytical writing as well as audio-visual documentation. I have experience in making short documentaries, writing long-form analytical pieces and doing research on a given topic. I am passionate about writing, photography and videography and have been interested in doing some work related to climate change for a while.

For the purpose of the investigative piece, I would like to do a photo story on the gendered pattern of migration from the Sunderbans. Owing to habitat loss, incessant flooding, and the unavailability of other livelihood opportunities, the island dwellers have been compelled to migrate to nearby towns and cities in search of a more stable life. What has been observed in previous studies is that there is distinct gender parity in the trend of migration from the islands where nearly 80% of the people migrating are men while only 20% are women. Usually, the men of the families migrate to nearby states in search of jobs and livelihood opportunities while the women are left behind to take care of the household. I would like to focus on two to three such women who have been left behind to manage their households, agricultural fields (if any) and respective families. I would engage in conversations with them about the struggles they have to endure regularly, particularly focusing on what their daily lives are like. The aim of the investigative piece would be to explore the everyday reality of climate-induced migration and how that plays out in the daily routine of these women. I would ideally like to visit and spend time with the participants for 4 to 5 days, establishing familiarity and a working relationship with them where they feel comfortable sharing their daily routine with me and talking about their experiences. Through the photographs, I would like to capture the domestic quotidian lives of these women, along with the emotions attached (such as longing, desire, loneliness, exhaustion, despair, joy, aspiration, hope, expectations etc). I know someone who has worked in the Sunderbans previously and I am hoping that they would be able to get me in touch with some people there. Depending on my access and the participants' comfort, I would like to accompany them as they go about their day from morning to evening, observe and capture candid moments. A core focus would also be on their relationship to the islands and how that has changed over the years owing to climate change, especially how it is weaved into their day-to-day lives, be it through the work they do in their fields, the kind of food they eat, or the items of belonging they possess. I would attempt to reflect on this transition by capturing the passage of time wherever possible - be it in previous embankments that may have washed away in floods, fields that they used to own, or makeshift homes that they had to build after losing their houses in cyclone or flood. If conversations bring about the need to get in touch with the men who have migrated to nearby cities/towns, and the photo story demands and allows the space to include their presence, then I would consider reaching out to them as well (depending on their location, accessibility and

their permission) and cover a parallel thread on their daily struggles and everyday way of life away from home. I would write my analytical piece by drawing upon the photographs and conversations with the women (and men, if required) where I would contextualize their individual experiences against the larger political, social and environmental aspects of inland migration. I would also explore the gender aspect that shapes the social fabric of a region as vulnerable as the Sunderbans, the effect of unplanned migration in determining the cultural geography of a region and the various ways through which the people of this region are negotiating with these challenges. By focusing on two to three women particularly and drawing upon their respective experiences, the analytical piece would attempt to humanize the large data statistics that we often come across when it comes to climate change-related instances. The idea is to explore the multifaceted nature of climate change-induced consequences, how women are disproportionately affected by them and how they can seep into the fabric of one's daily mundane realities without any forewarning or preparation.