

## **The Gendered Nature of Migration in Southwestern Bangladesh: Lessons for a Climate Change Policy**

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*South western Bangladesh is a region of great bio-diversity, hosting as it does one of the largest mangrove forests in the world, the Sundarbans. It is one also one of the most endangered. The reasons are natural, economic and socio-political. Bordering the coastal plains of Bangladesh it is one of the most vulnerable from a climate change perspective. The people of the area have had to pay a double price in bearing the negative impact of the policies taken up by the Government in past years to encourage saline water shrimp farming which has upset the ecological balance in the region and driven out many stable sources of livelihood. The results have been a steady stream of economic migrants across the border to India as well as to other parts of the Bangladesh. Some of the untold stories of this migration come from women as (migrants or homesteaders) who have had to bear the brunt of such displacement. This paper wishes to unpack some of the core components of this gendered pattern of migration so as to draw lessons for future climate change policies.*

### **Introduction**

The southwestern region of Bangladesh consists of the southern lowlands of the current districts of Bagerhat, Khulna and Satkhira. It is a coastal area constituted by fresh waters of the innumerable rivers and distributaries, which end up in the saline waters of the Bay of Bengal. It is a region, which house part of the world's largest mangrove forests, the Sundarbans. According to the Gazette of 1978 the area covered by the Sundarbans were recorded as 2,316 square miles.

This tidal plain with mangrove forests is the most complex ecosystem with the highest biological productivity in the world. The intricate intertwining of the environment and peoples' lives and livelihood is a noticeable feature in this region or rather it was until the influence of the mono-culture of shrimp cultivation began to disarticulate this organic link between people and environment.

Shrimp became a major export earning industry by the mid 1980s. Currently Bangladesh produces 2.5% of the global production of shrimp and is the 7<sup>th</sup> largest exporter of shrimps to Japan and USA. There are 6, 00,000 people employed in the shrimp sector generating 301 million USD annually (GOB, 2002). Initially, shrimp farming was

conducted in the coastal areas, particularly in Khulna and Cox's Bazaar. Approximately 3,75,000 acres of land in the coastal region had been brought under saline water shrimp fishing and the Greater Khulna district contributes to about half of the total area for shrimp cultivation.

In this particular study three Upazilas (sub-district) in the Greater Khulna area has been taken as the field of study. One of the first evidence of the change and transformations taking place is to be found in the pattern of land usage. According to the data provided by satellite it was estimated that in the three upazilas under study (Shyamnagar, Kaliganj and Fakirhat) the total percentage of change in land uses averaged 15.62% of the total land in the area. The maximum change was recorded in Kaliganj Upazila (32.54%), second came Fakirhat Upazila (21.05%) and finally Shyamnagar Upazila, 11.508%). The change in land use in an area traditionally rich in agriculture and fishing has important and serious repercussions for lives and livelihood.

Although the impact of the shrimp industry on the economy and environment of the area is visible and easily noticed, its effect on gender relations and in the domain of the family and personal relationships has been more disguised. Yet since the family and household are intricately interwoven in the sustenance of a peasant society, the very delinking of the peasant economy from subsistence agriculture to an export oriented agro-based shrimp industry necessitates change in gender relations as well. But since this change is part and parcel of the structural transformation taking place in both production and production relations in the area, I will first try to understand these changes from a theoretical perspective and then look at processes taking place in gender relations in actual practice.

### **The Inscription of Women into the World Capitalist Economy**

Third world women workers occupy a specific social location in the international division of labor, which illuminates and explains crucial features of the capitalist processes of exploitation and domination. (Alexander and Mohanty, 1997) These are features of the social world which are usually mystified in discourses about progress and development e.g. creation of jobs for poor, women's economic and social advancement. Interconnections between gender, and ethnicity and the ideologies of work locate women in particular exploitative contexts. In the case of women either living or dwelling

in the localities of the shrimp industry it is easy to see how contemporary global capitalism positions women workers in ways which effectively both reproduces and transforms locally specific hierarchies.

Maria Mies in her seminal work on the Lace Makers of Narsapur (Mies, 1982) studied Indian housewives who were producing lace for the world market. She points out that ideologies of seclusion and the domestication of women are clearly sexual, drawing as they do on masculine and feminine notion of protectionism and property. They are also heterosexual ideologies based on the normative definitions of women as wives, sisters and mothers – always in relation to conjugal marriage and the family. Domestication works into the capitalist mould through the persistence and legitimacy of the ideology of the housewife, which defines women in terms of their place within the home, conjugal marriage and heterosexuality. It defines women as non-workers and consequently trivializes women's labor. Their definition as housewives makes possible the definition of men as breadwinners. Here class and gender proletarianization through the development of capitalist relations of production, and the integration of women into the world market is possible because of the history and transformation of indigenous caste/class and sexual ideologies. What this means is that although production for the world market may throw open opportunities for women to enter the market as wage laborers, capitalism may very well work with the patriarchal culture of the region to devalue women's work in the market and simultaneously extol ideologies of domestication. Hence instead of a classical case of capitalism freeing women's labor, we see the onset of a capitalist patriarchal culture which eulogizes the domestic sphere and hence keeps women from joining the workforce in greater numbers.

Although the above propositions relate to a very different context, but there are important lessons that can be learnt in the context of the current study, since here too is a situation where subsistence economy based on household production and consumption is undergoing structural transformation, where women have to confront the dual exploitation of capital and patriarchal hegemony in their struggle to adapt to changing realities. But before we take up the subject of gender relations it will be appropriate to first gauge some of the structural transformations taking place in the region.

### **Structural Transformations in Class Relations**

Structural transformation is evident in changing class hierarchies within the region. For example, during and after the Partition of 1947, the area was mostly Hindu dominated with the Hindu zamindars controlling the lion's share of the landholding. It was also an area, which had yielded a great variety of crops along with the staple rice and where the adjunct Sundarban forests and the intertwining of the multitudinal rivers provided wide ranging employment opportunities. Hence a stratified system of caste-specific hierarchies was also predominant which evolved round particular occupations, for example, *kolus*, (those who ground oil from mustard seeds), *rishis*, (trading in leather and leather products), *moualis* and *bawalis* ( thriving from the forests) and weavers and fishermen. Traditional subsistence agriculture also included subsidiary activities like cattle rearing and poultry farming, all of which are endangered with the environmental degradation resulting from shrimp cultivation. All these activities as well as the position of those whose subsistence depended on these activities are undergoing change. For some the cash economy being introduced with the advent of the shrimp industry has proved to be a blessing, especially those who could adapt their skills to the changing scenario. For example those landless laborers who could switch to fishing for fries in the rivers could be assured of a steady income which was no longer haunted by the scourges of *Mora Kartik* (the lean season of Bengal when specters of famine loom large). Or even those like the *Kolus* who used to grind mustard seeds to produce oil for the market have merely changed into petty traders buying from the oil mills and selling the oil in the local bazaars, thus transforming a productive community into a trading one. The caste-oriented professional boundaries are also undergoing change. Previously, many of these communities were looked down on as their work was not considered clean by the upper caste Hindus. Interestingly even with the exodus of the upper caste Hindus to India, the influential propertied Muslims also held the same taboos as their predecessors. I was told by the coordinator of a local NGO that he learnt to treat the *Rishis* as their equal from a Christian Missionary. (*Rishis* were traditionally not allowed to enter the households of rich Hindus or Muslims and were given food in banana leaves outside the house).

But currently many of these professions which prove lucrative are being taken over by peasants and landless laborers outside the traditional caste boundaries. The injection of

the cash economy therefore is eroding traditional caste boundaries and in certain cases a certain upward mobility among the poor can be noticed. For example those who catch shrimp' fries mention they can get 50 to 60 taka (Bangladeshi currency) per day for an average catch. This is ready cash in hand, whilst as day laborers, cash payment would be uncertain and their payment would partially be in kind, e.g. one meal a day. Also in the words of a rich Hindu landlord whose wealth has visibly diminished, some of his previous workers often ask him whether he needs work!!

But there is another side to the picture. Not everyone is benefiting from these transformations. Many among the poor still hold onto their lands and are used to tilling the land. They somehow do not possess the aptitude to do any other kind of work. They are the ones who feel intimidated by the changes taking place. They also feel that the shrimp industry is aggravating the difference between the rich and the poor.

Thus we see that structural changes are taking place in two ways. First, those who have lots of land are benefiting from a windfall gain in profits reaped from leasing their land to shrimp farms. This is turning a class of hardworking farmers into a rural-based intermediate class. However, they admit that there is a certain degree of risk involved since the payments promised may not be as forthcoming from the *gher (farm)* owner if a virus affects the crop. Second, it is also creating a class of poor who are not left with any other alternative work except to work for the industry through collecting and selling fries or work in the farms or leasing their lands to them. Environmental degradation has succeeded in displacing agricultural and agriculture related work and activities like rearing of cattle and poultry. It has also proletarianized a class who previously could depend on the economy of a stable agricultural household. Now everything is bought and sold in the market. There is no stock of rice available for handouts in the lean season anymore. Two features characterize the emergence of this class of poor laborers no longer dependent on the land. First, the daily payment in cash for their annual catch or work is a welcome change from the delaying tactics of their former landholding masters. Second, the change in the relations of production has brought about certain starkness in the confrontation between the rich and the poor. Many of the older norms of society or *shomaj*, which used to bind together a village society no longer exists. Thus class relations are more prone to violence and the poor find themselves defenseless

against the representatives of a predatory state bent on pocketing the lion's share of profit from the industry.

### **Gender Relations**

In the back drop of the above structural transformation taking place in the region I will now discuss gender relations in the following contexts.

1. The household economy
2. Women, shrimp industry and environmental risks
3. The role of the state
4. Women's resistance

#### **1. The Household Economy**

In a subsistence peasant economy, women had an important role to play in the production process, although this role hardly ever got acknowledged in public documents like the census. The staple crop of a subsistence agricultural household was rice, and the core of women's work began after the rice was harvested. Her tasks involved, threshing, husking, and parboiling. In certain regions she was also in charge of looking after and preserving the seeds for the next season. Depending on the size of the household, a woman would either find herself doing all these works or have several paid helping hands. An agricultural household had its own time cycle and work rhythm. There would be lean seasons like *Mora Kartik* (literally meaning the deadly month of Kartik) and peak seasons of harvest marked by heightened social activities and festivities. Land-based livelihoods also provided its own opportunities for subsidiary activities like cattle-rearing, poultry farming or kitchen gardening which worked in synergy with agricultural production. One of the prime consequences of the disarticulation of the peasantry resulting from the growth of shrimp monoculture was felt in the displacement of women from the sphere of agricultural production. Women who gained from leasing their land off to *gher* owners, expressed relief from the back breaking work they had to undergo when they had to till their own land. But others lamented the displacement. Among them were two categories. First there were poor women who had depended on working for the richer households as sustenance. But those who had found more lucrative work in catching shrimp fries felt that they were now in a less oppressive environment where they had guaranteed cash. But in terms of labor and security the risks were high. This will be discussed in the next section. But some poor women

claimed that previously they received help from those agricultural households who always had some grains in stock, especially during the lean season. Now since everyone had to buy from the market, they too were not in a position to help them. Second, women in middle-income households also felt the same way. Previously they could consume their own produce or sell them in the market. They retained a certain amount of control over their produce. But now, even assuming that they had enough cash in hand, the market dictated their consumption pattern. Savings too were in cash and had to be put into banks. Gone were the days when women could save by taking “ek mutho chal” (a fistful of rice) from current consumption and store them away for some activity like buying school books for her children, or buying herself some ornaments. Forms of saving now took place largely as credit schemes of NGOs or where possible through poultry raising or kitchen gardening.

Women in middle and rich income households were still largely dictated by the ideology of domestication, which accompanied their conjugal status in the households as wives and mothers. Thus many women claimed that it was not proper for them to go out and work as wage labor. Many wanted to work within the home given the opportunity. But most of them relied on raising poultry and cattle rearing as a means of earning an extra income. Conjuality therefore was an important determining factor in deciding whether women should work for wages or not. It was therefore mostly in the lower income household and those women who were without a male guardian that wage labor took predominance.

## **2. Women, the Shrimp Industry and Environmental Risks**

Poor landless women and women without a male guardian were especially drawn to the only economic activity that was left to them in the region that is collecting shrimp fries in the rivers. This they have to do in knee-deep water pulling their nets behind them. The rivers being very near to the coast also respond to tides of the sea. When the water is warm, sharks and crocodiles also find their way upstream and accidents are not infrequent. Some reported that one of their fellow member's legs had been torn apart by a shark. Another told of the time she had been abducted by robbers in the Sunderbans who demanded ten thousand takas in ransom. Her brother's family who was too poor to

pay the sum in full had to sell her fishing net the only source of her income to gain her release! What a vicious circle if ever there was one!

Shrimp cultivation is expanding so fast that it is taking up not only agricultural lands in the area, but also much of the khas or government land by the roadsides, which by law, is to be distributed by the local government to the landless. Many women feel deprived of their rights to this land, and therefore feel the need to put pressure on the government. But this is not easy, given the fact that many of those who own the shrimp farms are not only members of the local power structure but also involved in national politics at the highest level.

Another important deprivation is the loss of grazing land. The Union of Kaliganj is situated in a slightly higher plane than Munshiganj (Shyamnagar thana) in the south, which skirts the fringes of the Sunderbans. Traditionally, farmers of Kaliganj area used to send their cattle to graze for the season down to the lowlands where poor families often earned an income by looking after the livestock. But from Kaliganj to Munshiganj, an hour-long drive, all along on one side one looks at a bleak landscape of shrimp farms, without trees, without vegetation in fact without a single scrap of grass in sight. On the other side of the road in contrast green fields interweave gracefully with full flowing rivers, the edges of its banks adorned with the leafy branches of the Sundari trees. But it is not only cattle-rearing that is affected. Lack of fodder also prevents poor people from raising goats and poultry as income-generation activities. This has often left only one opening for income generation in the area and that is fishing for small fish fries in the numerous rivers of the locality.

Women of the area particularly are victims of the socio-economic transformation described above. When I visited a local group of 18 women who were members of local NGO, Sushilan, they all turned out to be married but without husbands. Only three were widowed, their husbands killed by tigers in the forests while foraging for their living. The rest of the women were either divorced or deserted by their husbands who due to lack of agricultural land, could not find any work as laborers and hence not being able to cope with managing a family either crossed the border or migrated elsewhere looking for jobs! Yet we are told that the more we integrate with the world-economy the more our

chances of full employment! Shrimp cultivators do not use local labor for their farms. Moreover, their work is seasonal for which they bring in laborers from another region. As a double curse for the destitute and deserted women, many of these men enter into relationship and marry them only to desert them again when the season is over. The women are left to fend for themselves and their children, for of course the men do not take the children with them!

### 3. The Role of the State

The picture portrayed above implies that the shrimp farm areas or *ghers* as they are locally known are areas of social conflict and tension. The common source of these conflicts has been over the issue of land usage since shrimp cultivation has brought radical changes in land use patterns (Ghafur, Kamal et. al., 1999). The state manifests itself in these conflicts at different levels. The Government of Bangladesh support shrimp cultivation since it is supposed to bring in much coveted foreign exchange into the economy. Processed shrimp they maintain comprises the largest export commodity of these generated employment opportunities. Since the 1980s the Government of Bangladesh has been offering incentives to businessmen based in cities to enter into this profitable business. It has extended support by way of administrative backup and bank loans. There were also regulations mentioned such as the condition that voluntary consent of 85% of local landowners must be had before taking over land for shrimp cultivation. But the entry point of businessmen who were outsiders to the area had been ensured through the use of locally hired musclemen together with the political support especially by local authorities. As case after case showed it is this configuration which has been at the root of most of violence in the area.

In a report on the socio-economic and environmental impact of shrimp culture in south-western Bangladesh by Ghafur et al (1999), the authors list the principal sources of social conflict in the *gher (farm)* areas:

- a. forced or false contractual agreement on leasing of land
- b. non or partial payment of lease-money called Hari.
- c. Dispute over *khas* land
- d. Insecurity owing to physical torture and molestation of women
- e. Fear generated by environmental impact
- f. Semi-intensive mode of shrimp culture

- g. Deteriorating health
- h. State patronization for farm-owners

Some of the violence took the form of murder or attempted murder, grievous bodily harm or infliction of deliberate injuries. Abductions also take place in connection with shrimp related controversies. Setting ablaze the farms have also been known to happen to put pressure on the opponent. Implicating opponents in false cases is a very common tactic. In all this the state mechanism plays a vital role. The government policy, law and its implementation all go in favor of the rich shrimp farmer and turn a blind eye to the interest of the landless peasant and marginal farmer. Social tension arises from the insecurity of food and lack of work opportunities for a large number of coastal people. Shrimp cultivation brings in rich and powerful outsiders who often control the areas at gun-point, and their hired hooligans play havoc in the areas (Ghafur, 1999:52).

Local authorities especially play an intermediary role in this situation. Charges against hooligans and musclemen are often not framed and the labyrinth of time-consuming legal procedures more often than not deters victims from seeking justice. Even when a case is being tried, local musclemen are active in preventing any eyewitnesses from giving evidence in court as well as the bribing of local level officials so that they ignore or twist that evidence. In one case where a criminal case has been filed against hooligans who beat up a poor farmer, it was reported that the officer in charge of the relevant police station had dropped the names of the main accused from the charge sheet. The trial was still on but the local people were skeptical of its outcome or effectiveness. In another case of double murder, allegation of partiality was brought against the Assistant Police super of C.I.D. Khulna who after long investigation was going to submit a charge sheet regarding the double murder over the control of Bidyar Bahan Gher. C.I.D. Headquarters rejected the memo of evidence and the case was transferred to the Jessore zone (Ghafur et. al. 1999:60). In other incidents where cases have been filed by the 'shrimp lords' themselves, especially against poor landless farmers, the police were quick in their arrests, and their hyperactivity came under suspicion (Ghafur et. al., 1999, 64).

Poor women in the shrimp areas were concerned primarily of their security. In many cases they were held hostage to the tyranny of the shrimp lords. Their insecurity was

enhanced by the fact that they did not feel that the local authorities were there to protect them but rather added to their worries. Poor landless women told of various instances when they were allegedly apprehended by the police and charged of smuggling saris across the border. Women once caught by the police were often trafficked across the border to be sold as housemaids and prostitutes in India, Pakistan and the Middle East. Therefore women are always on the alert not to fall into such a trap. Among the most common types of insecurity which faced women in these areas were rape, threat, false cases, cattle lifting, and physical torture. Verbal abuse, forced marriages, fear of theft, dacoity and terrorism were also not uncommon. The triggering condition for all insecurities however was the scarcity of food and cash. (Ghafur et. al., 1999: 87)

#### **4. Women's Resistance**

With the state playing such a restrictive and negative role for the poor in general and women in particular, it is not surprising therefore to witness the outburst of many resistance movement in the area and the active participation of women. One of the more popular stories of resistance is around the killing of Karunamayee Sarder in polder 22.

Karunamayee Sarder of village of Bigordana under the Deluti Union of Paikgacha thana was a leader of landless women's group and member of the Bittyahin Shamabai Samity. The local people and Karunamayee's family alleged that mercenaries of the shrimp lord Wazed Ali Biswas killed her ruthlessly.

Wazed was planning to set up a shrimp farm forcefully and illegally over two thousand *bighas* of land in the village of Horinkhola of Polder 22. For this, he wanted to get a lease agreement from a few absentee owners. But most of the inhabitants, mainly landless and marginal peasants were strongly opposed to shrimp farming because of the hazards it brought with it. From the experience of neighboring polders they were alerted that the whole area may be affected by salinity and the ecosystem would be destroyed. Health hazards accompanied the salinity and land would then be unfit for cattle grazing.

Polder 22 covers an area inhabited by ten thousand people from 14 villages. The area consists of about 11 thousand *bighas*. A 17 km. long embankment was made to protect the crop from saline water. Under financial assistance from the government of

Netherlands, a project was undertaken to ensure the development of the polder area agriculturally and socially. A NGO called Nijera Kori and the subsequently formed local Bittyahin Shamabai Samiti was given responsibility for this project. So the movement was spearheaded by these organizations.

On 7<sup>th</sup> November 1990 at about 10.00 am five trawlers carrying cadres of Wazed Ali came to Horinkhola to cut the embankment in order to set up a shrimp farm. Hearing the news, members of the *Bittyahin Shamabai Samity* (Landless Cooperative Society) brought out a peaceful procession, chanting slogans in protest of the shrimp-farm. Wazed's men attacked the innocent people ruthlessly with fatal arms like guns, bombs and sharp instruments. Karunamoyee who was leading the procession died instantly, part of her skull severed from her body. Twenty more people were seriously wounded. The 7<sup>th</sup> of November is observed every year in memory of the late Karunamoyee, who is till today regarded as a martyr in the locality. (Ghafur et. al, 1999:63-64)

The death of Zahida Bibi and the movement, which accompanied it, was yet another event, which caused much uproar in the area. The year was 1998. Here too the root cause were a group of influential and powerful people who in collaboration with local government officials and the police sought to forcefully evict thousands of landless families and acquire several hundred acres of land for shrimp farming. It was illegally done through the bribing of local officials and producing false documents. The landless then organized themselves together and starting petitioning the local leaders and MPs. Despite the mobilization when the District magistrate ordered the police to occupy the land in question, the landless organized a protest march and confronted the police. It was at this time when Zahida Bibi a landless woman carrying a child in one arm and a broom in another as a symbol of her protest at being made homeless, broke through the police barricade and marched towards the District Magistrate. This took the officials by surprise and they gave the order to shoot. Zahida Bibi and her child were mowed to the ground by bullets. Many people were injured. It took several hundred angry demonstrators to keep the pressure on the government to take effective measures against the officials (Mridha, 1998).

The above incidents indicate the nature and intensity of mobilization taking place in the region. This mobilization has been spearheaded by left organizations like the Communist Party as well as by local level NGOs like Nijera Kori, Sushilan, and Prodipon. They have been able to organize landless men and women and give them a voice against the shrimp farmers and local level authorities. Even apart from major incidents like the ones narrated above, the day to day life of women and men in these areas has been one of struggle and resistance.

Women group members of Sushilan narrated stories of resistance when they occupied a *khas* land and built a structure for their very needy group member in the face of opposition from very powerful people. The law and order authorities had to comply in the face of their solidarity. The poor women driven to a corner had therefore found their own answer to their problem: resistance! But how strong are they in the face of a predatory state with high stakes in pocketing the lion's share of foreign exchange earning industries!

### **Gendered Nature of Migration Patterns**

The transformation processes described above has caused specific migration pattern from this area that are both internal as well as external. Internal migration flows consist of migration to urban centers as well as to other parts of the rural countryside. External migrations consist of illegal migration and trafficking across the adjoining Indo-Bangladesh border to the state of West Bengal and beyond. Economic migration has been increasing over the years, a phenomena that is officially denied by both the governments of Bangladesh and India.

Both forms of migrations are caused by the natural, economic and socio-political processes set up by the transformations mentioned above. Natural factors consists of both the traditional forms of river erosion caused by the fast flowing tidal rivers that intertwine this deltaic land and has preceded the physical transformation brought about by the cultivation of shrimps in saline water. Displacement through river erosion however is not specific to this part of the country. Studies on urban migration have found that people in slums have been forced to migrate as many as ten times in their lives due to river erosion. This is because, that since rivers are known not only to take away land but

also to bring up new land and there is a particular law in the country which says that reclamation of land lost in the river is possible if it can be proven within a given number of years that the land is in a position originally belonging to the family, the family tends never to move faraway from their original position. As such there is every likelihood that their newly settled land gets carried away by the river too.

In addition to the loss of land through river erosion, the extensive environmental degradation caused by saline water shrimp farming has caused the scale of migration to grow in the area. In this latter case it is not only land they lose but also their traditional livelihood. The loss of livelihood leads to large scale out-migration to both urban areas in search for employment in tertiary sectors such as rickshaw pulling as well as labor migration across the border where agricultural wage rates are higher.

It was mentioned at first that the area has a high proportion of religious minorities, who after the Partition of 1947 have been subject to continuous state-repression and social violence first within the state of Pakistan and then as a result of intermittent violence within the state of Bangladesh who have been forced to flee into India (Guhathakurta, forthcoming). The people tended to follow the same migratory route as in the past, and the borders adjoining the south western region of Bangladesh has been a particular hotspot of illicit border crossing (Ahmed, unpublished).

The gendered pattern of migration can also be noted. Women as homesteaders in a subsistence economy enjoys some space in production and work e.g. in processing and manufacturing of food products, which gives her a certain status. When the economy is monetized and the product enters the market, she often loses control over household income, since the market remains a male dominant space; domestic ideological notions prevent women from entering it on an equal footing. Hence the dislocation of the subsistence economy also disempowers displaced women who are open to the market forces that are not in their control or dispossessed of their status as co-producers of a household economy.

Deljan Bibi of Sachibunia village for example was displaced thrice in her lifetime due to river erosion, the first time before her marriage and twice after her marriage. After her

marriage, she with her husband had migrated briefly to Rangamati in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (a hilly region in the south-east) with some of their neighbors, but failing to adapt to changed circumstances, they returned. For a while they lived in Kumkhali village in Goruikhali union in the southwest of Bangladesh her husband and son working other people's agricultural land or lending their boat to transport agricultural products. Her son also got involved in the fisheries business while studying. But they could not live in peace there because they got involved in land related problems with the local people. These problems continued till they sold their property in Goruikhali. When a shrimp cultivation farm was built in the land beside their house in 2002, their problems reached a peak. All their sources of income were lost. Her eldest son made an orchard of fruit trees around the house, but after the shrimp cultivation started all the trees were ruined due to salinity. The boats they used to hire out could not be used and it eventually was destroyed and sank into the river. They had to migrate to another village.

Sachibunia, their current village is a peri-urban village near Khulna town and therefore they do get some services from the state. Besides, communication is much better. However women, children and the elderly people in the family do not get any special care. Deljan Bibi does household chores all day long and has no time to take care of their health. Psychologically they also bear the brunt of displacement from their prior settlement. She says, " I was so hurt when I saw the trees that I planted with my own hands get destroyed in front of my very eyes.' She was also attacked by opposing factions in the new village where they settled. They have to trek long distances in the rainy season to collect drinking water and hence become vulnerable to such attacks. The loss of their previous settlement and livelihood has destabilized their domestic foundation and has left them more vulnerable than before.

As a result where women do enter the market, they do so as day laborers in the brickfields in areas adjacent to towns or as shrimp fry catchers in the shrimp farms. In both cases their daily wages are lower than that of their male counterparts even though their work load maybe equal. This lowers the status of women working in the public domain and simultaneously strengthens the ideological construct of domesticity. The reverse may also be true in areas where conservatism reigns, the ideological

construction of domesticity may influence unequal wage rates among poor women laborers. It is a vicious circle that encompasses women's lives in such circumstances.

The story of Deljan Bibi above has many variations but is typical in many homesteads across the region and even among those who have to migrate even further across the border.

### **Lessons for a Climate Change Policy**

We have much to learn from the above with regard to climate migration and policies of adaptation to climate change. Patterns of migration as a result of climate change as well as policies that help in adaptation to climate change are usually perceived at a macro-level. But regional or local perspectives help to contextualize and operationalize such policies and guide them towards greater policy impact and efficacy. Some of the lessons learnt from the above scenario are elaborated below.

1. A specific geographical location will have certain predispositions for climate migration depending on past and present patterns of migration in that area in general. Hence the south western regions of Bangladesh being adjacent to border areas of West Bengal have experienced population movements especially among minority populations over the years due to socio-political factors. It is therefore not surprising that current economic migrants from that area also use the same migratory routes as a result of environmental degradation. Trafficking routes (of both humans and goods) also tend to follow the same trajectory. Any comprehensive policy on climate migration and adaptation must take account of such factors.
2. In regions or areas that are vulnerable to climate change, past policies that have caused environmental degradation such as saline water shrimp cultivation must be revisited and alternative strategies sought before it reaches a point of no return. We have seen how in the southwestern region of Bangladesh saline water shrimp cultivation has aggravated inherent natural factors of dislocation and displacement like river erosion or natural disasters like cyclones thus making both internal and external migration imperative. Here intersectional analysis of

the region with national development strategies is a must for formulating climate change strategies.

3. Mostly what comes through in the above scenario is that the gendered dimensions of migration have so far been neglected. Here it is not only important to pay attention to the special needs of women during natural disasters, and environmental degradation but also to observe and analyze how the very pattern of migration maybe influenced due to the variable impact of environmental degradation and climate change on men and women. This occurs through prevalent notions of conjugality and domesticity. Thus push and pull factors may create male economic migrants who leaves their wives and children behind to fend for themselves, and simultaneously it may strengthen conservatism in society, where women are increasingly kept within domestic spaces. On the other hand the same factors maybe responsible for driving women into the labor market where their work is structurally undervalued and their dignity compromised. This may also lead to trafficking of women across international borders as well as having women play a part in trafficking.
4. As a corollary of the above point, it becomes imperative to unpack at the local level ideological constructs of domesticity and conjugality and their specific impact. It is how such ideologies affect gender relations within and outside the household that helps us to understand how women and men are variably impacted on by climate migration or have differential impact on the economy, society and decisions to migrate. Policies of climate change must therefore not only be conceived in terms of ecological and environmental resources, but also in terms of human relations and resources. In short, a feminist analysis can help us to critique and at the same time inform climate change policies through a gendered lens. At the same time the intersectional character of gender and class must also be borne in mind.

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