

Proposal

Neha* had little idea what will follow when she left her home in Rajasthan's Banswara district for Ahmedabad in neighbouring Gujarat. What followed was a harrowing time when she negotiated predatory advances from the sub-contractor who had promised her work at a construction site in Ahmedabad. Steeped in stigma, and not having the heart to return home, she continued on her journey. On reaching Ahmedabad, she realised the cracks through which women migrating slip into the invisibility of the labour market in urban areas.

Neha's situation is not an anomaly in the region. Unsafe migration remains rampant with rising distress in the district, shows interviews with a range of grassroots activist, experts and secondary research. Data available with non-profit Ajeevika Bureau which has worked extensively in the area shows 35 percent of workers migrating from Banswara are women. With work barely available in the area which houses a sizable the tribal population living on the fringes of a fragile economy, most workers head to the neighbouring state of Gujarat. Women, many of them minors, are sexually assaulted in transit while a significant number of migrant women face unsafe work circumstances once they reach the destination state. Their living and work conditions remain deplorable, show preliminary interviews.

Community policing remains rampant in Banswara, and registration of cases before the police remains lean. Subsequently, women reconcile with their fate with justice remaining an elusive concept in the region. Speaking out comes at the cost of social ostracisation. Exacerbating climatic conditions and severe water distress are added stressors for the population there.

I am proposing a longform piece where I will investigate the conditions of unsafe migration of women from the source and destination states of Rajasthan and Gujarat respectively. The ground coverage will be embedded in the bigger context of distress migration in India, the lack of social welfare schemes, and how the migration crisis is unfolding in the post-lockdown period. Data points at the national and local level would substantiate the anecdotal evidence gathered from the ground.

For the story, I would travel to Banswara, Surat and Ahmedabad to join the missing links of poverty, distress migration, slow and rapid onset of climatic events, lack of livelihood opportunities at the source states, hunger, and the invisible labour force in cities. I would also be travelling with at least a couple of women while they are in transit from the source to the destination state in order to trace their journeys and etch out the granular details of the distress of women migrating.

Told through a cross-sectional lens, the piece will break ground in highlighting an under-reported topic while also holding the state accountable.

Previously, I have reported on trafficking, missing children, climate refugees, climate injustice, hunger through an intersectional lens. I believe if given an opportunity, I would bring the undocumented stories to the fore.

*This name has been changed to protect identity of the woman. Disclosure: This is also based on extensive interviews with grassroots activists who have handled specific case

studies, and not on first-hand interview with the women. The interviews will be conducted during the ground reportage