

A MIGRATION STORY

End of a Dream

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The police handcuffed Moja Majhi and hustled him into a waiting police van. A crowd of over a hundred people looked on in disbelief. "He is an innocent man, Moja Majhi has not done it," shouted someone from the crowd. It was the day of *haat* at the small bazaar on the bank of the river Meghna. More and more people joined the crowd. They all knew Moja for as long as they could remember. Moja has been a boatman on the same river since his early childhood when he started helping his father with an oar. At 55, Moja Majhi continued to hang on to the only trade he had ever learnt.

For Moja the day had started well. At the bazaar ghat early morning he picked up Alam, son of his childhood friend who had just arrived from Abu Dhabi. Alam was generous to Moja for ferrying him, for he knew Moja since his childhood and respected him like his own father. Later Moja picked up a bridal party and sailed to another village. He was rewarded heftily again.

As the wind picked up on his way back to the bazaar ghat, Moja set the sail and lit a *bidi* steering the boat with the heavy wooden oar. He dreamt of good days ahead. His son was preparing for the SSC exams and he had married off his only daughter to a well-to-do farmer in the neighbouring village. His wife Marzina was a member of the village handicrafts cooperative where she weaved floor mats. With both their earnings, Marzina and Moja recently were able to pay back the mortgage on their small piece of land on which they lived.

Thinking about good days, Moja was unmindful to the river around him. Suddenly he woke up from his thoughts. He saw something floating towards his boat. As he steered sharply to see what it was, he was horrified. Clad in a red sari, it was the body of a light-skinned young woman. She was gagged and her hands were tied. She must have suffered this terrible death a day or two ago for her body was slightly bloated. Moja looked around for help. There was no one nearby. Then without thinking, Moja tied the body to his boat and kept steering towards the bazaar ghat.

At the ghat a large number of villagers gathered to watch Moja moor his boat with a floating female body tied to its keel. The news spread fast. The more Moja tried to explain, the more people got frightened at the prospect of unknown consequences. Many left the ghat after a glance at the body. Moja asked for help to get the body out of the water. Nobody among the large crowd budged.

"Where did you find this body?" asked an elderly man in a stern voice.

"She was floating down the river and I thought I could bury her," replied Moja innocently.

The elderly man was joined by the Chairman of the area. "This is a gruesome murder," said the Chairman after examining the body. "We need to call the police. Why would you get into such a trouble, Moja?" asked the Chairman.

At this point Moja realised he was in trouble. The police took half an hour to arrive at the ghat. Moja was nervous. He had never had trouble with police. The police wrapped the body in a large mat and put it on the back of the van.

"What's the matter? Why did you do this?" asked the Sub-inspector looking at Moja.

"Sir, it was floating down the river I just thought I could do a good thing by burying the body, believe me sir I do not know her or do not know how she died. You ask anyone here during our lib