

THE LIVED  
EXPERIENCE OF  
CLIMATE CHANGE  
A STORY OF  
**ONE PIECE**  
OF  
**LAND IN DHAKA**

পট-গান "জল-দুয়ারী"

Venue Partner



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#GDIpotgan



## THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF CLIMATE CHANGE

### Dr Joanne Jordan

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**The Lived Experience of Climate Change: A Story of One Piece of Land in Dhaka** forms part of the Global Development Institute's programme of research on climate resilience, adaptation and land tenure. The urban poor show significant capacity to develop strategies to improve their resilience to climate change. However, these strategies can be affected by land tenure rights; insecure tenure can reduce the incentive for people to invest scarce resources in risk reduction. This study set out to understand how land tenure influences climate change impacts and in turn how land tenure can influence strategies for enhancing climate resilience in a slum in Dhaka.

The University of Manchester's Global Development Institute, in collaboration with the Department of Theatre and Performance Studies, University of Dhaka, decided to embark on an exciting initiative, using traditional forms of civic education and entertainment in Bangladesh known as Pot Gans. These performances are used to build awareness of how climate change affects the lives of those living in the project field site. This Pot Gan performance is based on a questionnaire survey, in-depth interviews and focus groups with over 600 people in a slum in Dhaka. Joanne Jordan spent several months talking face-to-face with people in their homes, work places, local teashops and on street corners, and this performance is based on some of the stories they shared with her.



The performance is a tale of how climate change is linked to many other problems experienced in the 'everyday' life of slums in Dhaka. It brings together the realities of exclusion and poverty and also highlights the points at which it is important to intervene to make people more resilient to the effects of climate change. Climate change intensifies the exclusion suffered by the poorest, in this performance, we are all encouraged to think about what needs to be done to support the people of Bangladesh to respond to one of the biggest environmental and development challenges of the 21st century.

**We hope you enjoy the performance of Pot Gan 'Jol-Duari' The Lived Experience of Climate Change: The Story of One Piece of Land in Dhaka.**

আমরা আশা করি আপনারা সবাই জলবায়ু পরিবর্তনকে উপজীব্য করে নির্মিত "জল-দুয়ারী"- জলবায়ু পরিবর্তন এর বাস্তব অভিজ্ঞতাঃ ঢাকার একখন্ড জমির গল্প পটগানটি উপভোগ করেছেন।



## THE STORY

### Song

In a village named Ilsha on the shores of Meghna River  
A few hundred thousand people lived there  
Four thousand people lived there in three hundred rooms  
There you will find rays of sunshine twinkle off the waters  
There you will find 13 festivals and various fairs all 12 months of the year  
There you will find Rahim Mia, a fisherman by trade  
At home he has a beautiful wife, whose name is Sharna  
People say that the river hosts the soul of a hujur (priest)  
In ill events or wrongdoing, it will destroy the riverbanks and houses  
Women and girls are not allowed to go to the river  
And with that fear will any of them ever go close to the river?  
No one knows what he had done to meet such an ill fate  
Because the river had washed away Rahim Mia's home

### Narrative

**Singer/Narrator:** The cultivated land left behind by his father and grandfathers had long been destroyed by Meghna River. The last place he lived saw no mercy from the Meghna River and it devoured everything.

Nothing was left after that – neither livelihoods nor the certainty of income. Last night hot rice was served with fried *koi* fish but in the morning, there was no sign of any fish. This image of devastation was true not only for Rahim but also for thousands of families who live on the shores of the Meghna River.

This story is about Rahim, who had lost everything to the all-consuming Meghna. In a village nearby lives Nazrul Miah who lost his inherited ancestral home. He did not lose his home to the Meghna, but rather to the hands of an educated, but greedy lawyer.

Timber dealer, Mohammad Hafiz pursued this occupation as it is traditional for his family to do this for several generations. Also, it is a respectable way for him to earn a living. He supplied his timber to a brick-kiln. Then suddenly, he no longer made an earning from that as he was not paid what was owed to him. Despite having no income, Hafiz could not take up another occupation as he feared it would dishonour his family and their inherited occupation. And so he decided to leave his village. People want to survive. And just like everyone else he sought out a new destination to pursue his livelihood.

This is true not only for Rahim, Nazrul and Hafiz. There are so many others who for



the sake of a stable source of income and livelihood, for the sake of educating their children, for the sake of freeing themselves from the curse of having no livelihood and for the sake of a better life, they leave their homes for a new destination. But what is this new destination that they will go to?

## Popular Song

*Now that I have arrived in Dhaka city... My hopes and dreams will come true...*

## Song

Neon lights, big buildings and houses, motors and cars  
There is a village in the middle of the city called Jol Duari  
Beside that lake is a village called Rupnagar  
Surrounded by trees and greenery, it is a beautiful village  
You will find mud-built houses, of several sizes and bushes all around  
You will find fireflies light up the evening and foxes howl at night  
To the people this lake is no less than the sea  
To the people this lake gave them various types of fish  
And on this lake the boats would ride with their sails hoisted high  
These are the stories that are fun to hear  
Of the number of people who live and stay together in harmony  
And with each day the numbers keep growing over the years

## Narrative

**Singer/Narrator:** The Jol Duari you see today was not made in a day. Many, many fate-searching low-income people made their homes here. Once upon a time this region was filled with ponds, bushes and nature.

But many people have cleared these spaces up so that they may live there and build houses. They have taken the land to build houses and have rented them out to others. Since the land was not overly valuable many people decided to buy the land there. It was cheap to rent here. And so many people, with dreams of living in the city have made their homes here. The people filled up the low-land so that they could build houses on top of it. Yet for the lack of legal ownership and documents to support them, several people were evicted and removed from these lands. And so in the process of consistent wrongful land acquisitions, squatting and evictions, large groups of homeless and landless people emerge.

## Scene A

[A family arrives at Jol Duari with the intent to live there. The dealer/intermediary makes an assessment of the land with the Housing Manager.]

**Kashem:** Brother Mokbul, O Brother Mokbul.

**Mokbul:** Yes, Kashem.

**Kashem:** Peace be upon you, Brother.

**Mokbul:** Peace be upon you too.

**Kashem:** I mentioned a family to you. They have arrived.

**Mokbul:** Oh, yeah. Where? Call them over.

**Kashem:** Hey you, come here. Give your regards to the elder Brother.

**Halim:** Peace be upon you.

**Mokbul:** Peace be upon you too.

**Kashem:** Brother, they have come here from a village near my hometown. The river destroyed their homes. Please help them find a place to live.

**Mokbul:** Ok, I will try to make arrangements. Did you tell them the rules and norms?

**Kashem:** Yes, I have told them everything.

**Mokbul:** Ok. Make sure there is not any trouble.

**Kashem:** Brother, do not say that. Do you not trust me? We have been working together for so long, you have no reason to worry.

**Mokbul:** Alright. Come here. I have decided on a piece of land for them near to the Nama (the low-land).

**Kashem:** Near to Nama (the low-land)! Alright fine.

**Mokbul:** Have you taken the money?

**Kashem:** Yes, I have half of the total now and will get the rest after we give them the land.

**Mokbul:** Alright then. Measure 10 yards from this pillar.

**Halim:** Is it not possible to give them higher land?

**Kashem:** Listen, this is more than fine. Do you not have faith in me?

**Mokbul:** Hurry, measure the land.

**Halim:** One... Two... Brother, what about the water facilities?

**Kashem:** For now just use the facilities of this hostel. We will figure out the rest later.

**Halim:** Three... Four...

**Joschna** (Wife of Halim): Hey listen... [She whispers something to her husband]

**Halim:** Brother, what about the toilet facilities?

**Kashem:** Why do you worry so much? You will have to do it the way everyone here does. Finish measuring!

**Mokbul:** Kashem, come over to the office in the evening with the rest of the money. I will be off.

**Kashem:** Alright, peace be upon you. (To Halim) How many yards now?

**Halim:** 8 yards.

**Kashem:** Just take the 10 yards worth. Not more. And meet me in the evening with the rest of the money. I am trying to figure out a job for you.

**Halim:** Ok.

**Joschna:** Think of what we imagined and look at what we got. How can we live like this? We were much better off in our village.

**Halim:** What would you rather do now? Tell me...

## **Narrative**

Over time, this Jol Duari has given many helpless people like us a place to live. The number of people in a family has steadily increased; just as the standard of living for us all has decreased. Nevertheless the desire to keep living has given us all the strength to fight against the odds and the hostility. After all we are human

beings. We must live on.

The scorching heat in the month of Chaitra (mid March to mid April) is unbearable. People wait for this month to end and for Bhadroto (mid August to mid September) to begin. The hand-fan in a mother's hand is constantly at work so she can ensure her children's sleep is not ruined, especially when the power and electricity is gone. The odour from our own bodies can make you feel like you are sleeping in a cow-shed. There was a cold breeze and the shade of trees back in the village. But here, you will see the trees and the bushes only on posters on the walls or on the screen of a television.

The long awaited rain is also a cause for deep distress. The arrival of the rain means reduced heat but it also means the need to increase the height of all the furniture in the house. It means piling bricks on top of bricks to ensure that the bed is higher and away from the reach of water on the ground. Alas, the increased height of these beds had no impact on the people's standard of living. This life is somewhat like the moment when you suddenly have a punctured tire and are stranded in the rain for 2-3 hours. We survive despite how damp and muddy our lives become. Because of the terrible odours of the garbage surrounding us, it is almost impossible to find one satisfactory breathe of fresh air. This garbage filled water seeps into the soles of our feet and we know this could cause disease and infections, yet we come out walking on the same ground because we must go out. What difference is there between living in our homes and living outdoors when the floor of our homes is filled with water?

This disappointment and despair is somehow our blessing as well. We continue to pursue our dreams from our little tinsel cling on petty glue. We catch a glimpse of our children wrapped in a bright red saree and think ahead for what is to come in our future.

## Scene B

[Mother (Jharna) is searching for her child]

**Mother:** Bablu... Oh Bablu...

**Narrator:** What has happened?

**Mother:** Brother, have you seen my son?

**Narrator:** He was sitting right there. (To chorus) Was he not?

**Chorus:** He was sitting right here.

**Chorus:** He left here a while ago.

[Enter a man from the audience, yelling]



**Man:** 'Aunty, your Bablu has been found at the end of the lake. Come, hurry! He may not make it!'

[The mother screams, cries and exits the stage.]

## Narrative

Though the supply of water has stopped, we do not feel the urge to wash the colours and signs of the festival. As per usual we continue to struggle for our survival and this constant struggle keeps us moving forward. Though to people this place may be a slum, to us it is the pasture of dream, Jol Duari! (sarcasm)

## Song

Neon lights, big buildings and houses, motors and cars  
There is a village in the middle of the city called Jol Duari

## Scene 1

[Hajera's house is on the high land of Jol Duari. She is working on her handiwork (sequinning a saree) and talking to Jharna.]

**Hajera:** Is it even possible to work with these hands? I have to cook, run the household and earn a living.

**Jharna:** Hajera Apa, what do I do with my baby? For the last couple of days, he will not sleep, he will not eat but he will just keep crying.

**Hajera:** Let's see. Has he got a fever? Have you taken him to the doctor?

**Jharna:** Not yet. Hajera Apa, Did you hear Amena Apa's son was found dead?

**Hajera:** Yes I heard, but how?

**Jharna:** He fell into the water. I fear for my own children. Where are your two children? I do not see them around.

**Hajera:** They are in school. It is only for their education that I am still here. If I had been working in the garments factory, I would barely be able to look after my two children.

**Jharna:** Yes. But at least you know how to do this handiwork and are pursuing it. But I cannot work anymore.

**Hajera:** Oh do not say that! In fact for the last few days my hands and legs have been acting up! Because of all the itching and irritation I cannot seem to do any work with them.

**Jharna:** Let me see. [Hajera shows her hand to Jharna] They look infected. Have you seen a doctor yet?

**Hajera:** No. But I think you are right. So what we raised the heights of our house, but the roads are still so low. And I cannot even sit in the house all day. I think the stagnant water caused my hands to become infected.

[In the meantime, Shilpi arrives with saree materials for an order]

**Shilpi:** How are you Hajera Apa?

**Hajera:** Oh Apa, you are here!

**Jharna:** Hajera Apa, I will be off then.

**Hajera:** Ok.

**Shilpi:** Here is your new lot. Give me the previous lot.

**Hajera:** Apa, the previous lot is not complete yet. I am still working on it.

**Shilpi:** Not done yet? Eid (religious festival) is almost here. You need to hurry up. And since you have not finished the old lot, I cannot give you the new lot.

**Hajera:** Do not do this, Apa. My hands have become infected and the disease has been causing the delay in my work. I will do them all. Leave the new lot with me.

**Shilpi:** What are you saying? I do not think you can do these then.

**Hajera:** No Apa. I can definitely do these.

**Shilpi:** Alright, have all of these done properly. Bye.

[Enter Hajera's husband. He is searching for an address in his notebook.]

**Hajera:** [To her husband] What are you looking for?

**Kashem:** Hanif Miah, from our village is coming to Dhaka. I am looking for his mobile number.

**Hajera:** You do not do anything for a living. How long will you keep up this fraudulent

hustling business? What about taking me to the doctor's?

**Kashem:** Talk to those Kabiraj (traditional healer). You do not need a doctor. [He dials the number and says] Hanif Bhai, do you plan to arrive next week? I have arranged everything. I have already talked to the community elders and the manager of the area.

**Kashem:** (To Hajera he says) I will be back after visiting my party office (political office).

**Hajera:** The kids are done with school by now. Go get them.

[Hajera's husband shakes his head. He leaves. In the meantime Hajera's children arrive outside calling out 'Mother, mother!' Hajera goes outside to meet them.]

## Scene 2

[Jharna's house is flooded knee deep with water. Jharna is clearing the water at the front door.]

**Jharna:** How many times have I asked him to raise the floor of the house? But no, he will not listen. He will say, 'Well it is not our house so why should we invest money in fixing it?' As it is we have spent money to raise the entry of the doorway. And we suffered so much already. Now we have a child, now we have a future. I am trying to get rid of all this water for nothing! It is raining again anyway. The house will be flooded again. I will not bother anymore.

[Sound of a child crying. Jharna is seen washing her feet with a mug of water. She is feeding her child. Enter Jharna's husband – Mahbub.]

**Mahbub:** Jharna, Jharna. Is Babu (the baby) asleep?

**Jharna:** Oh you are back. Have you brought any drinking water?

**Mahbub:** No. They said there was constant power outage and load-shedding last night. They could not get the pump to start.

**Jharna:** But every month they will take the money from us – there is no excuse for us not to pay. In the summer there is no electricity, in the monsoon there is no water. Can I really say there is no water? Here's all the water! It seems like we live in a water ditch (sarcasm).

**Mahbub:** Will you keep talking to me, or serve me food?

**Jharna:** [Gestures] The baby could not sleep all night and did not let me sleep either.



I must try to put the baby to sleep and try to get some sleep myself. Give me the string, will you?

**Mahbub:** Here it is. [Jharna ties the baby's ankle to the bed]

**Jharna:** Father of Babu, the rain seems to have stopped. Will you please go get some drinking water? There is not a single drop of drinking water here.

**Mahbub:** Alright I will go. Since the rain has stopped you and Babu can come along and we can go see the doctor.

**Jharna:** Yes it has stopped raining. Now untie the string.

**Mahbub:** I do not know who taught you about this string [to tie the baby's ankle to the bed]

**Jharna:** What happens if the baby falls into the water? What then?

**Mahbub:** Where is the water?

**Jharna:** Can you not see? There is so much water. Let's just go.

### Scene 3

[At Hajera's house. Kabiraj (traditional healer) is applying an ointment to Hajera's hands.]

**Kashem:** Oh Kabiraj (traditional healer). Have a look at the fingers. (To Hajera) Show him your feet.

**Kabiraj** (traditional healer): Oh dear, look at the state of these hands. How long has it been like this?

**Hajera:** Over a week.

**Kabiraj** (traditional healer): Put your hands into the pot. Mix this water with hot water and Neem (leaves) then wash your hands with it twice a day. Have this medicine in the morning and in the afternoon.

**Kashem:** Make sure you understood all of this.

**Hajera:** I think this is because of the dirty water.

**Kabiraj** (traditional healer): If it is because of the dirty water, why has it not happened

to anyone else? I think your wife is haunted by evil spirits.

**Kashem:** Why do you talk much about things that you do not understand?

**Kabiraj** (traditional healer): Take this. Tie it onto her hand. This one is for under the bed. This one should be hung above the stove. Everything will be fine. Allah is The Almighty.

**Mokbul:** Kashem, Kashem...

**Kashem:** You are here! I am coming. Clean this place up. I have to go speak to the Housing Manager.

**Hajera:** Yes, I am stupid. But when you sit in your meetings, why do you not say anything about cleaning the drains?

**Kashem:** The more you clean it, the more dirty water there will be. Where do you think all of Dhaka's dirty water and the dirty water from those big houses go? You should learn to talk less.

[The Housing Manager calls out. Hajera's husband goes out to meet him.]

**Mokbul:** Listen the mobile court will come by tomorrow. There will be no water and electricity tomorrow.

**Kashem:** What have you done with the water and power lines?

**Mokbul:** There is a problem. In the digital mapping this area is marked as Khas land [government owned land]. It will not be easy getting power and a water supply line here.

**Kashem:** Take help from the community leader for this.

**Mokbul:** This will take time. Anyway, what is the news of your party (political party)?

**Kashem:** Do not worry they will arrive tomorrow.

**Mokbul:** Well let's do something; I will put my people to it. Make sure to bring them there directly and start to do the work. We need to finish this work by tomorrow. It is good that tomorrow is a government holiday and no one will be around. Let's have a cup of tea now.

[Shilpi arrives.]

**Shilpi:** Apa, how are you? Have you finished the work I gave you?

[Hajera hesitates.]

**Hajera:** Apa, have a seat. Do let me get you some tea. Sohel's father, can you hear me? Bring some tea, will you? I have not been able to do any work lately. My arms and legs are suffering from great irritation.

**Shilpi:** That means none of the work has been finished. You are going to ruin me. Well... whatever you have completed hand those pieces over. Hand over the rest. Someone else will have to finish the rest.

**Hajera:** Just give me a few more days' time. If I do not work, how will I support my family?

**Shilpi:** Just as you have your struggles, I also have my struggles. Do you understand? I have to submit my work as well.

[Shilpi packs up and takes the sequin saree materials. Trying to convince her otherwise, Hajera also follows her outside.]

#### Scene 4

[It is night time at Jharna's house. The baby's ankle is tied to the bed. Jharna and the baby are both lying on the bed. The lantern is on the bed. Jharna's husband is eating rice on the bed.]

**Jharna:** Babu's father, babu's father! Where are you? Come here! Hurry!

**Mahbub:** Let me help you. I will lift the bed up and you put the bricks under the bed.

[Jharna unties the baby from the bed and raises the bed with bricks].

**Jharna:** Ok, do it, hurry.

**Mahbub:** Put them here.

**Jharna:** Check if the rain drops from here; if it does put a bucket under the leak.

**Mahbub:** Ok I will do that.

**Jharna:** This is not any way to live life! There is water on the floors and there is water pouring in from the roof. Anyway, let me put the baby to sleep, it is very late.

**Mahbub:** Yes, put the baby to sleep and you try to get some sleep too. I am dimming the light of the lamp so you can sleep.

**Jharna:** No. Do not turn down the light. What will we do if the baby wakes up?



Just lower the flame of the lamp.

**Mahbub:** Ok I will be off to sleep too.

[Both of them fall asleep. Suddenly the baby falls into the water. She shouts.]

**Jharna:** Babu... Babu... Babu has fallen into the water!

**Mahbub:** What?! Just take the clothes off the baby. You stay calm. Let me see. Why did you not tie the string to the baby? And you have been sound asleep all along. Leave him. Let me see.

**Jharna:** Please do something.

**Mahbub:** Just keep quiet! I will look into it. You do not have to do anything. Let's go to a doctor.

## Scene 5

[The Housing Manager and some people are trying to block the drain. Hajera's husband is standing there with the newly arrived family.]

**Mokbul:** Hurry now. Yes, fill it in there. Drop it on that end.

**Kashem:** Bhai, these are the people I was talking about. They are from my home village. You can call them my relatives.

**Mokbul:** Have you told them all the rules and norms? There should not be any trouble.

**Kashem:** Yes I have told them everything.

**Mokbul:** They can stay near the end, the lower part. When the paperwork comes through then we can reevaluate. We will try to include them in the housing rehabilitation program.

[Hajera comes in running to speak to her husband.]

**Hajera:** How can you do this? Whatever water was going down that drain will not drain out any more! Do you not know that because of the state of my hands I have lost the work I had!

**Mokbul:** Where else will these helpless people live? They are from your hometown after all.

**Hajera:** You are an intelligent person, how could you do this?

**Mokbul:** I do not have any gain from this; I am helping these people. (To Kashem) Why are you not saying anything to her?

**Kashem:** Go home now, do not lecture us anymore. Go home.

**Hajera:** No I am going to call everyone. Jharna, Fatema, Amina's mother, come here and see. Look at what these people are doing!

[Jharna comes rushing over with her child.]

**Jharna:** Housing Manager, stop this now. The water will stagnate even more. A terrible tragedy was avoided last night. You do not even know! I will not let you block the drain as long as I am alive.

[Jharna gives her child to the other person and tries to stop the labourers from blocking the drain. The Manager yells and scolds her. Chaos commences. In the meantime Kashem pushes Jharna. Jharna falls down. And stands up again...]

### Interaction with the audience

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# A

Pot Gan 'Jol-Duari' designed and supervised by Mr Ahasan Khan and presented by students of the University of Dhaka's Department of Theatre and Performance Studies.

## Cast and Production

Mr S. M. Jumman Sadiq  
Ms Nipa Sarkar  
Ms Umme Hane  
Ms Tania Akther  
Mr Mahbob Alam Sarker  
Ms Suraya Khatun  
Mr Sanwarul Haque  
Mr Abdur Razzak  
Mr Rafi Hasan Rahman  
Ms Ummay Somaiya  
Ms Faria Rahman  
Mr Tanmay Paul  
Mr Shongkar Kumer Biswas  
Ms Farzana Habib Labannya  
Mr Roney Das  
Ms Israt Jahan Moutusi  
Mr Shakhawat Islam  
Ms Atoshi Amin  
Ms Shuvra Goswami

Project Coordinator Dr Joanne Jordan  
Pot Gan Director Mr Ahasan Khan  
Research Assistant Ms Tahitun Mariam  
Project Photographer Dr Joanne Jordan  
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Documentary Filmmaker Mr Ehsan Kabir  
Event Photographer Mr Jashim Salam





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## Global Development Institute

The University of Manchester has been at the forefront of development studies for over 60 years.

The Global Development Institute addresses global inequalities in order to promote a socially-just world in which all people, including future generations, are able to enjoy a decent life.

We are the largest dedicated global poverty and inequality research and teaching institute in Europe. Development studies at The University of Manchester are ranked third in the QS World University Rankings. The results of the most recent Research Excellence Framework ranked GDI first for impact ranking in Development Studies in the UK, with many of our researchers deemed to be 'world leading'.

### Further Information

This performance forms part of a documentary to be screened to both international and national audiences.

For further information contact:

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