

# Climate Refugees in Animation: Exploring the Story of 'Wade'

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## Abstract

*A growing amount of attention has been paid in recent years to the relationship between environmental degradation and human migration not only in academic and policy circles but also in the media and storytelling. An animated documentary is a cutting-edge and powerful format for examining these intricate relationships. Animation documentaries provide a distinctive perspective on the complex dynamics of migration prompted by environmental concerns by fusing factual narrative with artistic vision. The present paper focuses on Wade, directed by Upamanyu Bhattacharyya and Kalp Sanghvi, which delves into examining the intersection of environmental issues and migration. It discusses the broader implications of climate-induced displacement, drawing parallels between the fictional portrayal in "Wade" and real-world scenarios.*

**Keywords:** Animation, Climate change, Documentary, Environmental degradation, Migration

## Introduction:

Human movement has existed since the dawn of civilization; thus, this is not a novel issue. Improved living circumstances, protection from animal assaults, and other factors are among the several causes for this. Even in the twenty-first century, there has been a rise in human dissatisfaction with the amenities now in place as a result of their avaricious minds. Owing to the advantages these wealthy countries offer, the rate of migration among these groups is often greater. Apart from migrating for work or better economic opportunities, global catastrophes, ranging from extreme weather to warfare, also contribute to the waves of migration from one nation to another.

## Climate Change and Climate Migration: A Look at India:

Climate migration is the term used to describe the movement of an individual or groups of individuals who, primarily as a result of abrupt or gradual changes in the environment brought about by climate change, are required to leave their usual place of residence or voluntarily choose to do

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so, either temporarily or permanently, within a State or across a border. A specific kind of environmental migration, when the change in the environment is caused by climate change, is defined as climate migration. As a subclass of environmental migration, climate migration designates a specific kind of movement in which the cause of the environmental change is climate change.

As a developing country, India is currently the third-largest greenhouse gas emitter in the world following decades of economic growth and population expansion. India's emphasis on agriculture and its geographical location makes it one of the nation's most vulnerable to climate change. Every year, a number of natural catastrophes that affect the Indian subcontinent, such as floods, storms, droughts, cyclones, and intense rains, cause significant displacement. It constantly appears in the list of nations with the greatest rates of displacement. By the end of the century, water availability and agricultural output throughout India will be impacted by predictions of severe losses in crop productivity, especially under high concentrations of greenhouse gases.

India introduced National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) which is mainly focus on climate change adaptation and mitigation measures. The nation should begin preparing to evaluate the current institutional and policy frameworks at the national and regional levels in order to address the needs of contexts that are vulnerable to climate change and comprehend institutions' capacity and preparedness to respond to climatic disasters. This is because the frequency and intensity of extreme events, such as floods, droughts, and cyclones, are increasing (Nelson 2023).

Coastal areas that are low lying will be the first in the world to feel the effects of fast climate change, according to some experts. With its extensive coastline, India stands to suffer the most, with numerous low-lying places like the Sundarbans being the most severely affected. Millions of people might be adversely affected by this, particularly the local populations that depend on this delicate delta habitat. Some projections imply that by 2050, climate change may cause a substantial exodus of up to 45 million people from India. Climate migration has emerged as a major concern in India, particularly in West Bengal and the Sundarbans, where populations are compelled to shift as a result of frequent cyclones, growing salinities, and rising sea levels (Chakraborty et al 2014).

### **Sundarbans: On the Verge of Danger**

One UNESCO World Heritage Site that is especially vulnerable is the Sundarbans, which are known for their rich biodiversity and mangrove forests. The world's biggest delta, the Sundarbans, spans 4250 square kilometers and is located on India's eastern coast. Among the most taxonomically

varied and biologically protective habitats on the Indian Subcontinent is the Sundarban environment. This whole region is made up of around 102 different river systems, streams, and islands. Of these, 48 are covered with forests while the remaining 54 are inhabited. The *Heritiera fomes* tree, which is referred to locally as *Sundari* and is one of the most abundantly growing mangrove trees, is said to be the source of the term Sundarbans

A vast mangrove forest shared by India and Bangladesh, the Sundarbans, is particularly susceptible due to its low-lying geography. Land is becoming submerged owing to rising sea levels brought on by climate change, which is causing habitat loss and agricultural land loss. Severe cyclones often strike the area, displacing people and inflicting significant damage. Many islands and embankments are being swept away due to coastal erosion, which is a recurrent issue that has forced populations to migrate. The salty water that seeps into freshwater sources and agricultural fields makes farming challenging and decreases the amount of drinkable water available, which causes health problems and food shortages. Due to environmental challenges, residents are compelled to relocate to metropolitan regions in pursuit of opportunity. Whole villages in West Bengal are being uprooted, which is leading to a discernible change in migratory patterns and creating socioeconomic difficulties for the areas that are receiving the change. Those who are left behind hail from underprivileged backgrounds (Das and Ghosh 2022; Greenfield 2022).

In pursuit of greater possibilities, a large number of individuals relocate to adjacent cities like Kolkata. Poor living conditions and informal settlements are frequently the outcome of this. Some move seasonally, going back home when things get better or as jobs in agriculture become available. In severe circumstances, whole families or villages permanently move to different areas, causing social unrest and cultural disturbances. When populations are uprooted from their native lands, migration can result in the loss of cultural legacy and traditional knowledge. Social networks and community ties, which are essential for resiliency and crisis assistance, are frequently shattered by displacement. For many, the Sundarbans are an essential component of who they are and not merely a place to live. Losing this sense of belonging might occur as a result of migration

### **Climate Activism in India Through Media**

As India's well-known environmental activist Sunita Narain posits in an interview to Marcello Rossi, she replied, 'in India, breakneck development is colliding with the dire effects of rising temperatures and changing weather patterns, and putting the country in an awkward position. For a large developing country like India, climate change is a non-zero sum game. As the national economy keeps growing, so do carbon emissions contributing to global warming' (Rossi 2017).

Since the climate change problem is a cultural crisis, Indian climate activists are attempting to comprehend the cultural practices that are having an impact on the environment. In India, climate activists are actively fighting a complex war against the environmental threats that climate change poses. They are exploring the intricate interactions between culture and the environment rather than only concentrating on the scientific components of this dilemma. One new trend is the use of popular media, especially regional film, as a powerful instrument for raising awareness of environmental issues and spurring action. These environmentally conscious films, which frequently draw inspiration from the local cultures they depict, are becoming more and more well-known for their skill at bringing environmental concerns to life via gripping storylines (Durand-Delacre 2022).

Over the course of the twenty-first century, there has been a global shift in the prominence of using celluloid to depict and express environmental crises. Movies that are often known as ‘green cinemas’ aim to depict the several kinds of human-caused disruptions that are severely disrupting the environment by creating an extreme ecological imbalance. Indian filmmakers, both mainstream and independent, are attempting to utilise the visual medium to spark action at the local, national, and international levels and to increase public awareness. Not only mainstream movies, a lot of documentaries were releasing every year which discusses on the seriousness of this sensational issue.

Documentaries such as *The Elephant Whisperers*’ that won the 95th Academy Awards in 2022 for Best Documentary Short Film or animation films, short films *Shores of Silence* (2000) by Mike Pandey, *The Weeping Apple* (2005) by Vijay S. Jodha, and *Char... The No-Man's Island* (2012) by Sourav Sarangi, *An Insignificant Man* (2016) by Khusboo Ranka and Vinay Shukla, *The Man Who Speaks Nature* (2018) by Dhritiman Kakati and Raktim Hazarika, *The Boy Who Saw More* (2019) by Shaktim Jadeja and Pankaj Singhji, and *All That Breathes* (2022) by Shaunak Sen – all of them address the reality of ecological degradation, the plight of climate refugees, impact on wildlife and so on.

On the other hand, a lot of experiments could be seen in the world of media itself, and one such is animated documentaries, i.e., a fusion of animation as an artistic medium with the factual narration of a documentary. This gives filmmakers the ability to use animation to creatively depict real occurrences. Visuals that are difficult to portray through traditional live-action cinematography are sometimes employed to visualise intimate experiences, complex concepts, or historical events. provides a means for individuals to observe emotions and events that are hard to portray through traditional documentary methods. Through these amalgamation, it offers a creative way to aid

viewers—especially younger ones—in understanding complex or sensitive themes (Durand-Delacre 2022).

To convey the complex and heartbreaking aspects of environmental displacement, the animated documentaries make advantage of the storytelling power of imagery. It helps to engage viewers and highlight the human aspect of climate change, use dynamic images and factual facts. This technique also draw attention to how climate change affects individuals, use factual storytelling in conjunction with creative vision. By bringing environmental challenges to people's attention, it stresses the need for immediate action, and inspire compassion. Their unique and engaging perspective on one of the most pressing challenges of our day is achieved via the fusion of animation and documentary film making.

Comparing to other genres, India is seeing growth in its animation sector. Despite the fact that it is typically associated with fun, several notable initiatives have addressed significant issues like climate change and migration. In spite of the dearth of Indian animated documentaries that specifically address climate migration, there are relevant initiatives and *Wade, Song of the Earth*, is a notable example of an Indian animated film that addresses the issue of relocation brought on by climate change (Satapathy and Bhattacharya 2024).

### ***Wade: An In-depth Analysis***

*Wade* is an impactful short animated 2D film from India, penned and directed by Kalp Sanghvi and Upamanyu Bhattacharyya. Known as a ‘horror tale about climate change,’ this critically acclaimed action animation set in a post-apocalyptic society devastated by rising sea levels, widespread migration, global warming, and ecological destruction. Being produced in Kolkata by Ghost Animation, it made a big impression on viewers and won the City of Annecy Award at the 2020 Annecy International Animation Festival.

The film transports audiences to a dystopian Kolkata where the city's landscape has been severely affected by rising water levels and global warming, forcing a mass exodus of its citizens. It is a thought-provoking voyage. The surviving inhabitants in this altered habitat must deal with the stunning cohabitation of displaced animals, especially Royal Bengal Tigers, as both humans and the animals attempt to adjust to their new circumstances.

The narrative centres on a group of human refugees who are having difficulty surviving in Kolkata's flooded streets. They come upon a band of tigers when they are foraging for food and

looking for cover, which results in violent and perhaps fatal encounters. The movie highlights the hardship of the tigers, who are also relocated and fighting for survival, while also movingly capturing the desperation and resiliency of the human characters as they try to adjust to their dramatically changed reality. The conflict between the tigers and the humans intensifies throughout the movie, leading to a dramatic and intense struggle. This fight is a potent allegory for the more general problems of environmental damage, climate change, and the often-ignored effects on animal and human populations.

*Wade* fully engages viewers in the struggle between the efforts of humans to adapt and the struggle of these great predators to survive in a changing ecosystem. Touching topics like climate change, conflicts between humans and wildlife, and the precarious balance between environment and civilization are all explored in this video. It emphasises the critical need for concerted efforts to address the serious environmental concerns of our day through its captivating storyline and outstanding visual storytelling, which serve as a call to action for climate consciousness.

One of *Wade*'s main themes is the occurrence of 'climate change-induced displacement'. In order to illustrate how climate change may make cities untenable and drive people to migrate and adapt to new, sometimes hostile circumstances, the movie depicts refugees in Kolkata, successfully demonstrating this real-world issue. It opens as a depressing reflection on living in a post-disaster scenario, set in a futuristic Kolkata that has been left uninhabitable by climate change. However, it quickly transforms into a violent action-thriller. The film, despite its inclusion of fantasy, goes beyond simple narrative to present a complex picture of the social dynamics among the group of evacuees as well as an in-depth account of their flooded surroundings. The movie's main action is the pivotal fight with the tigers, but *Wade* counterbalances this high-concept action with painstaking attention to detail and an ambiguous, thought-provoking climax. This combination gives the movie a higher quality and adds a lot to the conversation about climate change and how it affects animals and people alike (Satapathy and Bhattacharya 2024).

The protagonist, a 12-year-old girl in 'the Girl on the raft,' is left to confront a dangerous tiger after it kills her closest friend and drives the other members of the group to take cover in the closest structure. She is blind, even though she is young, and her only method of transportation is a raft made of plastic bottles. She uses this improvised boat, which is paradoxically made of elements that are bad for the environment, as her ark, bringing to light the unexpected repercussions and sharp contrasts in our interactions with the natural world. She is the epitome of helplessness; a moving representation of how vulnerable mankind is to climate change. The insignificance of her weapon

against such a deadly predator, highlights both her desperate situation and the larger existential issues we confront in a world that is changing quickly.

The Girl on the Raft's companion is the Sickie Woman, who always has her plastic lifeboat with her. She uses a sickle as her primary weapon and is passionately protective of the small girl. It seems that the primary scout is the Man in the Mask. To deter tigers from attacking from behind, he puts a mask behind his head that gives the impression that it is being watched. reminds me of the Indian miners of the 19th century who were frequently attacked by tigers from behind while they were at work.

The organization's brains, the Old Lady, is revered by everybody. Her primary responsibility is food rationing; to that end, she is frequently spotted at her boti, a vertical butchering blade, expertly slicing food into uniform quantities. She accessorizes her authoritative appearance with finding sunglasses. A member of the gang with strength is the Vest Man. Not only is he the group's sole healthy member, but he also has the responsibility of obtaining food.

Companion figures that join the group a bit later are the Old Man and the Teenage Girl. While the other has eyes that are always wide and shocked, the old man has sunken eyes that are covered by a headscarf. They attempted to depict the consequences of starvation, water logging, and many, many destructive years spent living on the brink of survival in all of the human characters.

Tigers ended up prospering when the earth flooded because they were adapted to dwelling in pools of water. So did their swimming prowess. They resemble jaguars more today. essentially navigating by using the water. There have been cases of tigers cooperating in the wild as well. like dads tending to their pups. Rarely, male tigers may even allow their newborn pups to eat. And because of the difficulties they faced from their surroundings, tigers developed their compassion and essentially created family units.

The tigress is a kind mother who can walk on water; she is practically a goddess. From her colour to her pattern of stripes, from her structure to little things like her upswept mane (all the other tigers' manes droop, heavy with water), she had to stand out from the other tigers. The infant represented change and adaptation. Although the orange tiger that killed the blind child's mother and attempted to kill the cub may have served as a metaphor for how some people refuse to change or adapt even when it is obvious that they must, the larger mother tiger had to make her presence known to the orange tiger, which not only went after a large amount of food alone but also tried to ward off other



tigers to keep it. The paws of the orange tiger become more human-like, and its strips are almost liquid-like to blend with the water. a display of selfishness and avarice rather than cooperation and sticking with the group.

Regarding the strange miraculous child, it may have been the outcome of reincarnation. Little did the drowning baby know how short its life was, and thus its souls went straight to the tiger cub upon its death, giving rise to human hands. Regarding the enchanted tiger girl, this narrative has a fanciful twist, nothing more. A blind tiger has evolved to walk on the water, and because of this, the blind little girl can see that too. However, life contains death, and the blind tiger must pass on to the next generation of evolved Tigers. The village moves on and keeps adapting to the best of its abilities, such as processing the tiger meat for its people. In a turbulent flood world caused by climate change, an Indian city must adapt and evolve to overcome the obstacles just as the Tigers do.

*Wade* explores a number of important subjects, chief among them the devastation caused by climate change. A sobering warning of what can happen if present environmental tendencies go unchecked is provided by the inundated Kolkata. The film emphasises the interconnectedness of all living forms and the precarious balance of ecosystems by showing a world in which people and animals compete with one another for existence. The tigers, who were formerly the dominant predators in the Sundarbans, are now homeless and in a terrible situation, signifying the wider effects of environmental deterioration on wildlife. The demarcation between natural and urban areas is obscured by their incursion into the metropolis, underscoring the extensive consequences of climate change.

Resilience and adaptation are some topics that the movie focuses on. Human tenacity in the face of misfortune is reflected in the characters' capacity to survive and navigate the submerged metropolis. It also calls into question the extent of adaptation as well as the irreparable harm that results from disregarding the environment. The visual aesthetic of *Wade* is arresting and powerful. The animators create a rich, immersive universe by combining digital and hand-drawn approaches. The tale gains depth and texture via the intricate surroundings, which include deteriorating buildings and murky rivers. The colour scheme, which is mostly composed of blue and grey tones, adds to the gloomy and unsettling ambiance.

The plot is enhanced by the use of subdued soundscapes and ambient noises in the equally powerful sound design. The lack of communication causes the audience to concentrate more on the body language and facial expressions of the characters, which increases their awareness of the aural and



visual clues. The sounds of the ocean, far-off animal cries, and the sporadic creaks of falling structures add to the suspense and feeling of immersion. *Wade* has received high appreciation for both its visual vision and its use of animation to effectively communicate a strong message. It has received several accolades and been screened at numerous international film festivals. The movie asks audiences to consider the effects of climate change and the pressing need for sustainable behaviours, acting as both a work of art and a call to action.

## Conclusion

Climate migration and how it is portrayed in Indian animated films provide a moving story that combines the region's rich cultural heritage with the pressing environmental challenges of the day. These films not only show the ecological and socioeconomic difficulties that communities forced to migrate due to climate change confront, but they also demonstrate the human spirit's flexibility and tenacity. Filmmakers may successfully spread awareness of climate migration and encourage action towards sustainable solutions by utilising the emotional and visual power of animation. This makes the subject matter relevant and important for viewers of all ages. By means of captivating narratives, these films foster a more comprehensive comprehension and compassion for the impacted individuals, advocating for a joint endeavour to tackle the underlying factors contributing to climate change. One such example is an animated short film *Wade*.

*Wade* is a moving and striking visual reminder of the difficult reality of climate migration. The short emphasises the critical need for global awareness and action to address the growing implications of climate change via its moving animation and narration. It reminds us of the human cost of environmental negligence by bringing the brutal reality of climate migration to light through its gripping narrative and breathtaking imagery. As towns are uprooted by catastrophic weather and increasing sea levels, the short film emphasizes the human cost of environmental carelessness and the resiliency of those forced to adapt. It urges compassion, changes in laws, and environmentally friendly behaviors to lessen the consequences of climate change and assist the millions of people that migrate due to it every year. The film works well as a teaching aid as well. Through its powerful story and striking images, difficult subjects become more approachable and emotionally stirring, encouraging a greater comprehension and dedication to combating climate change. In the end, the film is a clear appeal for shared responsibility and a sustainable future, not merely a story about survival.

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