From Kitchen Utensil to Sewing Machine: Women’s internal migration and gender dynamics in rural Bangladesh

Md. Mahan Ul Hoque
Mohammed Kamruzzaman
From Kitchen Utensil to Sewing Machine: Women’s internal migration and gender dynamics in rural Bangladesh

Md. Mahan Ul Hoque
Mohammed Kamruzzaman
From Kitchen Utensil to Sewing Machine:
Women's internal migration and gender dynamics in rural Bangladesh

By
Md. Mahan Ul Hoque,
Research Associate, BIGD, BRAC University
Mohammed Kamruzzaman,
Senior Manager-Knowledge Management, Gender Justice and Diversity, BRAC

© 2016 BIGD, BRAC University

Disclaimer
The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD), BRAC University. This volume is a product of the BIGD, BRAC University. The findings, interpretations and conclusions presented in this document do not necessarily reflect the views of BRAC University authorities.

Terms of use
All rights reserved. This book or any portion thereof may not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever without the expressed written permission of the publisher except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

BDT 50
USD 5
Cover: Md. Parvej

Published by

BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD)
BRAC University
SK Centre (Basement, 3rd - 7th & 9th Floor), GP, JA-4, TB Gate
Mohakhali, Dhaka 1212, Bangladesh
Tel  : (+88 02) 5881 0306, 5881 0326, 5881 0320, 883 5303
Fax  : (+88 02) 883 2542
Email  : info@bigd.bracu.ac.bd
Website: bigd.bracu.ac.bd
This paper is based on primary data generated by a research titled “Study on Internal Women Migrants in Bangladesh”, commissioned out by BRAC to BRAC Development Institute (BDI), the earlier name of BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD). The authors would like to acknowledge both BRAC and BIGD for their support. The opinions expressed here are solely of the authors and not necessarily represent either of the organizations.
Abstract

The paper focuses on poorer women’s internal migration in different socio-economic contexts in Bangladesh and explores gender relational dynamics associated with such migration. Women’s internal migration is important, it helps them accessing outside paid employments as well as incomes. Thus, the poorer women find migration as survival option. The option, however, becomes complex for cultural reasons. The paper argues that women's migration in Bangladesh is embedded into a patriarchal practice exists in society. Despite of women’s incomes as well as an improved economic condition in family, their choices remain blocked into patriarchal ideologies. Such migration rarely ensures women’s position in family. The migrant women get engaged in such work which is gendered in nature. Because of various challenges and frustrations, many migrant women return back to villages where they have only option of doing conventional “women’s work”; thus, their future aspiration also is gendered.

Key Words:

Women, Internal Migration, Empowerment, Gender Dynamics
1. Introduction

The Bangladeshi society is identified as ‘patriarchal’ in nature, which defines a set of rules for women and men in line with gendered norms and values (Rouf 2013). Traditionally men become the household head and take major decisions on family matters, incomes and expenditures in particular. This patriarchal discourse confines women, mostly in rural areas, to carry out household chores including rearing children and limits their (women) access to material resources and incomes; also puts a barrier into mobility to public place on their own choice (Parveen 2008). These pictures, however, are changing and women are increasingly accessing to paid work outside homes (World Bank 2008). These are because of many factors including out-migration for various purposes. ‘Out-migration’ is a form and process of migration which in this paper refers to rural people’s temporarily move to towns or cities for a work.

While ‘migration’ has been a strong discourse in Bangladesh’s development, the discussions on it, in many cases, tend to involve international migration; therefore, the term ‘migration’ is often understood as ‘international migration’ (Deshingkar and Natali 2008). There is plenty of literature on women’s international migration, for example Siddiqui (2003) who extensively explored women’s migration, to the Middle East and the Gulf Countries in particular. Dannecker and Sieveking focus on female migration from a transnational perspective (Dannecker and Sieveking 2009). ‘International Organization for Migration’ (IOM) has a long tradition to bring about the issue exploring opportunities and challenges women face during the migration period (IOM 2013).

The issue of ‘internal migration’ is becoming significant in line with the fast rate of urbanization, and rising migration to cities, which involves both risks and opportunities for the migrants, communities and governments concerned (IOM 2015). Deshingkar and Natali argue that internal migration is actually far more important both in terms of the numbers of people involved and the resulting flow of remittances (Deshingkar and Natali 2008). In the case of Bangladesh, rural to urban migration is one of the most important aspects of the economy of the state (Farhana, Mrachi and Rahman 2010).

Internal migration has a long history in Bangladesh and the rate is one of the highest in the world (UNDP 2013). However, Rashid (2013) identifies a lack of accurate figures by union or sub-district (Rashid 2013).

Afsar (2003) referring data of the United Nations, the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics explored that all types of migration had increased significantly. Citing Rahman et. al. (1996) she mentions that rural-urban migration consisted of about two-thirds of out-migration from rural areas (Afsar 2003). Not the figure or volume only, but also its nature and pattern are complex regarding composition, destination and duration (Deshingkar and Natali 2008).

Many of studies on women’s internal migration tend to heavily concentrate on women’s ‘benefits’ along with ‘challenges’ or ‘losses’ with the migration processes. Momsen (1999) explores that such migration offers education and career opportunities for women; it includes the opportunities for getting domestic work in other households for an income rather than to be an unpaid domestic in their own household (Momsen 1999).
The World Migration Report 2015 explores that migrating to cities can produce vulnerability i.e. informal employment, decent housing, and the basic services needed for a decent life; the migrants face various legal, cultural and social barriers, and obstacles to accessing the full range of resources, services and opportunities in cities (IOM 2015). Carling (2005) focuses on remittances, saying that migration as a transforming experience can improve or worsen the position of women in families and society (Carling 2005). In the context of growing urbanization in Bangladesh, Afsar reveals that female migrants are also major victims of the increasing lawlessness and human rights abuse (Afsar 2003).

Despite of range of vulnerabilities, women’s internal migration is important from women’s empowerment perspective. Migration takes them to outside paid work for pursuing incomes, the opportunity which is identified as one of important pathways of their empowerment (Kabeer, Mahmud and Tasneem 2011). Women in Bangladesh have progressed a lot over the years. Data reveals that female participation in national labour force was 4.1% only in 1974 while increased at 39.4% in 2010. Women’s participation in economic activities has doubled in last seven years. About 35% are females out of total in small and medium enterprises (SME) in the country. More than four million workers, of which about 90% are women, are working in the readymade garments’ (RMG) sector (BBS 2011). It is argued that women’s such engagements in RMG sector could be crucial for their empowerment (Hossain 2012).

But there are critical questions also which have been considered in this paper. To what extent the women, who are earning and mobile, have been able to choose their own ways of lives? Is there any significant progress in terms of gender equality when women face multifaceted discrimination with the simultaneous rise in their income levels? These questions are also relevant to the global concerns and debates around inclusive macroeconomic framework, women’s economic empowerment for sustainable development and pro-poor growth (OECD 2011), relationship between gender equality and growth (Kabeer 2012, Kabeer and Natali 2013).

While women’s out-migration and their engagements in outside paid work are increasing, critiques have been there to see whether these have improved women’s condition or position or both. A recent evaluation on women’s economic empowerment project reveals ‘women’s’ limited ownership to livestock, poor decision making in household budgeting and decreased power over self income in spite of making intensive development supports as well as transferred assets to them (Das et. al. 2013). Nazneen, Hossain and Sultan argue the same—in spite of increasing household level income, discrimination may exist even intensify (Nazneen, Hossain and Sultan 2011). They emphasize that power dynamics and social relationships are much important than delivering resources only with an assumption that it benefits them (ibid). A recent World Bank report explores non-economic critical factors saying that in case of South Asia religious institutions and norms across the region reinforces unequal gender relations (Solotaroff and Pande 2014).

**Objectives**

The paper intends to explore the following inquiries:

(i) What are the contextual factors that push or pull rural women to migrate to cities/towns?
(ii) What are the positive changes they experience with their internal migration? and
(iii) How does women’s internal migration help improve their individual condition and position with in the family?
2. Methodology, sampling and timeline

Data of this paper comes from a research work carried out in 2014 by BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD) in Bangladesh. The research adopted a mixed method approach, applying both qualitative and quantitative methodologies in collecting, assessing and analysing data. It considered both ‘origin’ and ‘destination’ in selecting the study sites across the country. The paper here focuses on qualitative data only—In-depth Interview (II), Key Informant Interview (KII) and Focus Group Discussion (FGD). A total of 44 IIs, 24 KIIs and 40 FGDs (on 320 females) were conducted at several locations with attendance of diversified occupational groups.

The following table gives a summary of the samples by tool and location:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Tool</th>
<th>Destination</th>
<th>Quality by location</th>
<th>Origin</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dhaka</td>
<td>Chittagong</td>
<td>Bhairab</td>
<td>Narayanganj</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>KII</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>FDG</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Women’s out-migration: the pre-dominant poverty framework

As same to other studies, for example, Afsar 2003, this paper also explores that ‘poverty’, here refers to income poverty is a key factor that pushes many women to be migrants to search a work for pursuing their livelihoods. This (poverty) is the primary reason for women’s migration and the data give a general sense that very low level of incomes of rural households associated with unemployment, river erosion etc. make the households vulnerable and they, both men and women, cope with the vulnerability through out-migration.

The following about Rahima illustrates how she copes with her poverty situation when her husband left:

Rahima Begum (35) migrated from Sakhipur sub-district in 2007 when her husband left away as she gave birth of a daughter. Then she faced a terrible situation and had nothing to survive. Finding no any alternative, she came back to her father’s house and took a shelter with the new born baby. Rahima’s father was an agricultural day labour, a very poor person and couldn’t manage his family expenses well. Rahima’s situations appeared as burdened to him. Then she (Rahima) thought to migrate to Dhaka city to seek a job in garments to survive. Rahima hoped that such migration would enable her to cope with worst situations.

(Source: FGD with garments worker, Dhaka, 2 May, 2014)
Having husband in family provides a symbolic value to many rural women in Bangladesh. Women had been used to carry out non-paid work such as household chores as husband, being the perceived bread winner, took responsibility to earn. This happened to Rahima in the above case. But having husband only is not enough. The value of husband depends on his capability—to what extent he can manage running the family he heads. If a husband becomes unable to run his family, then it creates a financial crisis in the family. The following is about such situations. It explores how poverty is worsened, at the same time developed a woman’s coping pattern also, due to her husband’s sickness:

Aleya (40) migrated to Dhaka from Mymensingh. Her husband was a day labourer and somehow could manage the family expenses. But he failed to work when became sick. Not only stopped his incomes, the sickness forced them to sale out three decimals of land for supporting treatment costs. They sold all pieces of land for treatment purpose and became extremely helpless. Then Aleya started day labouring work in a neighbouring farmer’s house. She did paddy hasking and drying work that was available in particular season only. It was not enough to support her family expenses. Saleha received food, rice and paddy as wage instead of cash. Finding no any better way she along with her husband migrated to Dhaka for earning as well as supporting husband’s treatment.

(Source: FGD with domestic worker, Dhaka, 6 May, 2014)

But this poverty framework is not enough to understand women’s out-migration in recent Bangladesh. While lots of studies identified this poverty framework for women’s rural to urban migration, this paper explores a range of non-poverty as well as non-income factors too that are increasingly significant. It argues that women’s internal migration in the contexts of rural Bangladesh is also connected to existing socio-cultural practices in this patriarchal society. These socio-cultural practices, in this paper, focus on gender relations—how women are positioned in the society and what implications it does have to their out-migration.

### 4. Violence against women: an emerging issue pushes women’s out-migration?

While Bangladesh has made tremendous progress in many areas of women’s empowerment and gender equality, the very recent studies come up with other side of the coin too. Female employment rates are still very low, even by South Asian standards. Despite growth in employment, the labour market is highly segmented along lines of gender. Women still concentrate on domestic services and on home-based work, for which many do not report any income (World Bank 2008). The critical concern is increasing trend of violence against women and children (VAWC) which is extreme and a very recent national survey reveals that about 80.2% currently married women experience any form of violence at least once in their life time (BBS 2016, pg. xxix). Child marriage also in Bangladesh is higher, ranks 8th in the world and according to latest data it is 52% under age 18 (UNICEF 2016, pg. 160). This VAWC as well as child marriage has a negative affect to female employments. Men’s ‘controlling behaviour’ as a type of violence (BBS 2016) restricts women to engage in outside work; they (the men) also produce ‘economic violence’ (ibid) through making barriers for women in accessing economic resources including incomes and employments.

This paper on women’s internal migration explores a connection between such migration and violence against women in rural households. This violence takes place in various forms e.g.
restriction to women’s mobility to public place, demand for dowry, son preference by husband but most dominant is beating wife by a husband or her male partner. This exploration is also consistent as well as significant to the national trend of increasing VAW which is mentioned before. While the country has made tremendous progress in many areas of gender equality and women’s empowerment, for examples, gender parity in education, more women in public services and formal employments, it seems that the trend of VAW is parallel to such achievements.

Dowry is one of key sources or reasons for violence against women those who are married. This form of violence, physical in nature and often made by husband, has been common in the country. Although there is a particular law (e.g. GOB 2010) to prevent dowry as well as violence, it seems that the practice is still dominant mostly in rural areas. While women in the past had nothing to do to protect themselves from dowry and violence, nowadays, some sort of resistances seemed opening up. This may be for many reasons including women’s increasing mobility, access to information and employments in recent Bangladesh. Whatever the reasons, the fact is that now they, in many cases, can avoid such violence.

The following case focuses on Tuli’s struggle, the woman who had a violent married life but escaped through a migration to town:

Tuli Begum (19) migrated from Mymensingh to Dhaka in 2013. Her family had to pay three lacs¹ as dowry during her marriage. But her husband demanded more money from Tuli’s family and started to make physical violence to Tuli for the money. Tulibrought 25,000 taka from her parents and gave it to her husband to satisfy him. But he was never satisfied. The violence was increasing more. Her husband went for another marriage for dowry. Tuli left her husband’s house and came back to her parent’s house in Gouripur of Mymensingh. She thought to make incomes to survive but work was not available in the village. Some village women earned through sewing clothes but Tuli did not have any skills on sewing. Her younger sister Nasrin had such skills and then they decided to migrate to Dhaka to manage a work in garments there.

(Source: FGD with garments worker, Dhaka, 6May, 2014)

While violence against women in practice is made by husband by her male counterpart, this violence by women (women to women violence) is also not uncommon. This takes place if a married woman losses her husband, becomes ‘guardianless’ in laws family and members of that family make her life much vulnerable. The dominant social norm is that having a husband is much significant for a woman. It gives an identity for a woman, also a sense of security that is explored by others too (Gardner and Kotalova 1995). Thus, when a married woman losses her husband, she turns into a vulnerable conditions in terms of socio-cultural aspects also.

The following story on Salma illustrates how she experienced violence made by her mother in law and sister in law. At the extreme stage of violence, she left the in laws family and took shelter in her native family and finally migrated to city to survive:

Salma (32) was born in Matlab of Chandpur. That is her father’s home district. After marriage she went to Mymensingh in her husband’s residence. Her husband was a poor

¹ Taka is the currency of Bangladesh; One lac taka = Hundred thousand taka
person; his income was not enough to survive in the village. So they migrated to Dhaka for a better life. But he died of heart attack after six months of their migration. After losing her husband Salma came back to Mymensingh again in her father in law’s house but she couldn’t able to stay there because of physical and psychological torture made by her mother in law and sister in law. She went to her father’s house in Chandpur again. Her father also was poor and was not able to support the daughter. There was no any work available in village for women like Salma. Finally she migrated to Dhaka to seek a work.
(Source: FGD with garments worker, Dhaka, 8 May, 2014)

Findings reveal that some of rural women in the study chosen to migrate as an option to combat violence they faced in origins. But this was not the case always. Women experienced violence even after they migrated, with husband in particular. This violence seems to be severe for women in urban non-kin context where a woman doesn’t have any apon (close relative based on blood relations) to whom she can seek help. This happened in Kulsum’s life who went to Dhaka with her husband, experienced violence made her husband, and he left his wife there:

Kulsum Begum (24) comes from Faridpur district. She was abducted by her (current) husband and then local people arranged marriage for them as part of solution. After marriage they migrated to Dhaka. Kulsum managed a job in garments and her husband was engaged in building construction work. In her new destination Kulsum started facing a bitter experience produced by her husband as well as mother in law. Her husband beaten herself several times for nothing any serious reason. Her Mother in law joined and she made more physical violence compare to her husband. The mother in law accused Kulsum by saying that she sent money to her parents frequently. One day she injured seriously in her head and eyes because of such physical torture. After this incident, her husband and mother in law left Kulsum alone in Dhaka and went to the village. The husband married off another woman without informing Kulsum. As soon as she informed, Kulsum came back to the village and filed a legal case against her husband. Then her husband divorced Kulsum. She has no ability to precede the legal actions and desire to migrate again to Dhaka.
(Source: II, Faridpur, 15 April, 2014)

Women can chose migration as an option because of violence against them in origin; at the same time they may experience fresh violence in the destination. It depends on a woman’s choice of partnership, with man to live in. The data reveal that desires for such partnership, love in conventional sense, attract women, the unmarried in particular, to migrate. They, however, face bitter experiences and force to back again as happened in Jorina’s life who chosen migration because of her love with a man in city but experienced tremendous violence once she married to the man and consequently returned back.

Jorina Begum (26) comes from PuraMajhra Village of Noakhali. Her father was a rickshaw puller. They were two brothers and three sisters. They were poor and her father’s took huge loans in the village. She had fallen into love with a transport worker (bus conductor) who worked in Chittagong city. Such relationship made through mobile conversation with the man. After a few days, Jorina migrated to Chittagong and married to him. After that
her mother in law helped Jorina to get a job in garments buther husband took away her whole salary in his pockets. Not only he took salary of Jorina but also started torturing her for more money. He was addicted to drugs and several times he beaten Jorina for money. Jorina could not tolerate the situation when, few months later, she became pregnant and then went back to her village for childbirth. After having a baby girl she again went to Chittagong to her husband but he was not found there.
(Source: II, Chittagong, 5April, 2014)

Violence against women is not the physical always. It can be economic also. The poorer women in rural Bangladesh tended to depend on husband for economic supports (‘maintenance’ by husband) in their marital life. But when a husband, for any reason, stops such support, it makes his wife vulnerable. The poor wife then finds difficulties to survive.

The following story is about Saleha, whose husband not only married off to another woman, but also stopped supporting to first wife (Saleha). Then she became worried with her children and migrated to city to survive.

Saleha (55) migrated to Bhairab from Nasirnagar in Brahmanbaria district. She has two daughters and married off already. Saleha’s husband married to another woman without her (Saleha) consent and stopped giving her maintenance costs. She became helpless and then migrated to Bhairab, a small town close to Brahmanbaria. She engaged herself in a construction work to there to survive.
(Source: II, Bhairab, 17May, 2014)

Like other South Asian countries e.g. India, violence against women as well as gender discrimination has a connection to sex preference in Bangladesh (Huq, Kabeer and Mahmud 2012). The society, in general, desires for son but if a woman fails to reproduce against such expectation, she may face violence. If the violence becomes extreme, it may force a woman to migration as became true in Maruфа’s life:

Maruфа Begum (20) was passing a terrible situation in her marital life. Her husband was an addicted man, used to torture Maruфа very frequently. Such torture increased a lot when Maruфа gave birth of a baby girl for second time. Not the husband only, nobody from her in laws family expected a girl again as the first baby also was same. They all together started physical torturing after the second baby (girl) born. She could not tolerate and went to her father’s house for a shelter. But he was a retired person and not capable enough to support her daughter with her two children. Maruфа was in an extreme situation then in 2009—how to survive with two small kids. She migrated to Bhairab, a neighbouring town to manage a work. From then, she is working in a factory in the town.
(Source: FGD with factory worker, Bhairab, 19May, 2014)

A woman may leave her husband’s family on her own choice as Maruфа did. But in most cases, husband can leave his wife because of her ‘incapability’ to reproduce a son. Husband’s such option is because of the patrarchal norms which dominate women in family life. Such preference of son is traditionally connected to those norms although a change is taking place in recent time (ibid).
The status of married women in family often depends on their capability to protect the patriarchal systems.

Rahima’s (35) husband left her because she gave birth of a daughter. Then Rahima went to her father’s house with the newborn daughter. But it became a burden to her father’s family, which is poor already. She thought to work locally to make income but work was not available for women like Rahima in her village in Shariutpur. Finding no any alternative she decided to migrate to Dhaka to start a work in garments. She left her baby to her parents in the village.

(Source: FGD with garments worker, Dhaka, 2 May, 2014)

Providing such economic support is required for not the abundant women only like Rahima but also for other women in a family depending on contexts. The older women in rural Bangladesh tended on depend on husband or sons (if husband not alive) to survive if they had no any income support. The following story is about Sarmin, who lost her husband and became dependent on sons to survive. But they did not care her mother and she had no any option other than migration.

Sarmin (55) never thought to leave her village when her husband was alive. Her situation became worst when her husband died because of disease. Sarmin took 10,000 taka as loans for treatment of her husband but her sons disagreed to pay the loans after husband’s death. Not the loan payment only, they refused to make food supports also to their mother. It made Sarmin very worried and then she decided to migrate to Dhaka leaving her own village in Jamalpur district. She collects wasted iron materials in Dhaka and sale them out to make a living. Before that she did household chores but received foods and clothes only, not any cash.

(Source: FGD with Day labourer, Dhaka, 3May, 2014)

Violence against women exists also in a form of ‘social stigma’ that further forces women to migrate. Due to patriarchal mindset in society, there is always a blaming approach that targets women and girls, even if a girl experienced violent behaviour from others. The study explores that rape as a form of violence against women creates a very critical situation for the victim/survivor who faces stigma at her own community and finds a comfort with migration or leaving out the community. The following story illustrates how a rape victim/survivor faced that critical situation:

Tanha (22) comes from a poor family in Barisal district. She used to support her family by doing domestic work in other households. That was essential and went well for that poor family. But one day she was kidnaped and gang raped by a group in 2012. After the incident, the local people started to blame Tanha and her family for the rape. This made extreme psychological pressure to them, Tanha stopped to move outside her home because of very rude behaviour of the community people. They made her image as a ‘bad girl’. In that situation, Tanha’s family took decision to send her to Barisal town to work in a factory there. But some people in the factory, already familiar to Tanha, started spreading the rape incident to other workers. Tanha faced psychological pressure again in her workplace. At last she and her family took a new decision to migrate to Dhaka to avoid such pressure as well as to survive.

(Source: KII Barisal, 10April, 2014)
The rural women may choose migration as part of their violence combating strategy as indicated before. But important is that violence, in many cases, is not a one-shot event for women. A woman may experience violence in different cycles of her life and by different persons. The case of Khushi below shows how domestic violence forced her to migrate to city but faced another round of domestic violence in the destination:

Khushi (35) migrated from Barisal to Chittagong in 2000. She took a labouring job in a shoe company there. During the time, Khushi married off a man living there. But her husband was greedy for dowry and tortured her for several times. Khushi divorced him for his behaviour and returned back to Barishal. She again married off in Barishal. But Khushi started to face another round of violence when she became pregnant. Khushi was the second wife of the man. Daughters of her husband started torturing her. They thought that their father wouldn’t take new baby but when Khushi became pregnant, they did not take it easily. They were afraid of losing their father’s properties. They were violent to Khushi; didn’t give her enough foods; also made false complain to their father against Khushi. One day the husband also tortured and left Khushi in her father’s house. After this incident Khushi divorced her husband and put a case against him. She didn’t want to live in her father’s house after the divorce, as he was poor. She needed money for her survival; also to continue the legal procedures. She migrated again to Chittagong to work in the shoe company there.
(Source: II, Barisal, 12April, 2014)

Violence against women, in most cases, is based on marital relationship between male and female (BBS 2016) and associated with various factors including dowry. The study, however, explores a different form of violence that is against never-married adolescent girl and takes place at domestic level based on her colour. The following story is on Dulena, an adolescent girl, who has been discriminated and experienced psychological violence in family because of her dark colour and escaped such violence through migration:

Dulena (14) migrated from Faridpur to Dhaka. She is the third child of her parents among four. Dulena’s mother is very bright and fare in complexion; her two elder sisters also are bright and fare like her mother but her complexion is dark and black like her father. From childhood Dulena’s mother didn’t take her while visited relatives’ home because of this dark complexion issue. Dulena’s parents sold their most of the land to meet expenses of marriage of her elder sister. Dulena get tortured by her mother and sister when she told them to keep some assets for her too. Dulena’s father loved her and didn’t torture her but her mother and sisters were annoyed with her most of the time. Dulena’s mother tried to marry off Dulena with an unknown person when she was 11 years old but Dulena didn’t agree to marry the man. After this incident her mother told her to earn for the family and started torturing in many ways. In that situation she couldn’t able to stay with the family and migrated to Faridpur sadar and managed a job in a jute mill with the help of her uncle.
(Source: KII, Faridpur, 20April, 2014)
5. Women’s role in rural household: de-construction from migration perspective

Literatures on ‘gender and development’ have a heavy focus on women’s role in households, mostly in rural contexts in South Asia. Application of number of gender analysis frameworks come up with evidences that women have lots of contributions in rural families but rarely recognized or acknowledged. This is because of traditional patriarchal socio-cultural practices that undermine women’s such contributions. Not in customary practices only, but also in official definition, women’s informal contributions are not counted. Mahmud and Tasneem (2011) identify this gap saying that government’s definition of ‘work’ is about the activity that produces goods and/or services which have a market value (Mahmud and Tasneem 2011). Women in households are engaged in a range of productive activities but these are not valued as ‘work’ in society (ibid). This perception strengthens the notion of ‘my wife does not work’. Jaim and Hossain made an economic analysis of agriculture, they did not ignore the gender perspective and argued that women’s contribution to agriculture, which is considered as unpaid family labour, is grossly underestimated (Jaim and Hossain 2011).

Although women as individuals migrate and earn, such role is often undermined because of household perspective, the unit which usually is led by men. This paper argues that family is a concern for migrant women also, they are an essential part of bread winner; therefore, have significant contributions to household economy. The data reveals that when a household falls in financial crisis, woman or girl of the household comes forward to cope with the worse situations. A large number of women approach NGOs/MFIs, take loans for local level survival. In case of extreme situations, they prefer out-migration to pursue incomes to support families. Thus, the role of women in rural households is very significant and cannot be ignored.

The following story tells how Naznintakes a responsibility for her family when it fallen in crisis:

Naznin Begum (28) migrated from Cuadanga to Dhaka. They had 10 decimals of land but all the pieces had to sell to meet treatment costs of her husband; in addition, had to take loans from different relatives for same purpose. Naznin did not earn; therefore, she was unable to repay the loan. There was less opportunity in the village for women like Parvin to get a paid work outside home. Naznin decided to migrate to Dhaka to earn to repay the loans.

(Source: FGD with domestic worker, Dhaka, 4 May, 2014)

When husband becomes unable to run the family in the patriarchal rural Bangladesh, it does not necessarily mean wife or women go for hunger. The above case indicates that women can develop their own strategy to survive and migration is one of strategies for them.

Women’s such migration does not have necessary connection with husband’s physical health or sickness. Not that a woman only works if her husband becomes sick or unable to work. Ratherthey choose migration for different and contextual socio-economic reasons. Seasonal unemployment is one of reasons that push many rural people to migrate. But important is that this migration does not confine or limit to male only. The following story comes from a low lying area in eastern belt that shows women also there migrate to town to cope with lean season.
Nahar (35) migrated from Nasirnagar of Brahmanbaria to the neighbouring town Bhairab. In their village most of the arable land go under water for 6 months and men become unemployed then. Women can manage home-based work during post-harvest season. Nahar also did that kind of work in a farmer’s house but received rice and foods only for her work. Her Husband earned average taka 100-200 per day as day-labour when agricultural work was not available. It was not enough for them to survive. So they took decision to migrate to Bhairab for a certain period of time. Naharenaged in cosmetics business and her husband is a rickshaw puller in the town.

(Source: FGD with factory and other workers, Bhairab, 21 May, 2014)

In rural Bangladesh, poorer women’s role in household is significantly associated with their membership in and access to the services by NGOs/MFIs. Studies, for example Mahmud, Sultan and Huq 2012 say that the poorer women were valued by their husband or/and other male members because of the economic supports they received from NGOs/MFIs. Which they further spent for families. Therefore, this de-constructs the existing notion that women do not have any cash or income supports to family.However, such accessing to credits has a relationship with the women’s migration also. The data reveals that the women not only limit themselves to make loan support to family but also take advanced role, migrate to city, to pay the instalments. The following story is about such role—Khaledachosen migration to pay the loans.

Khaleda Begum (40) migrated from Burirchar village of Barguna to Dhaka. In their village the women are not allowed to pursue outside paid work because of purdah (veil). In village her husband was a rickshaw-van puller. He had a rickshaw accident and injured seriously in his eyes two years ago. They sold their three decimals of lands at 90,000 taka for medical purpose. They also took one lac and fifty thousand takaas loans from different NGOs operated in the village. To repay this huge amount of loans they migrated to Dhaka. Khaleda works as cook and her husband as a rickshaw puller in the city.

(Source: KII, Dhaka, 10 May, 2014)

Women prefer migration not only to pay the loans, but also as a strategy to avoid NGOs’ pressure on them when they become defaulter. This is particularly true for specific geographical region where households are more vulnerable to natural disaster like river erosion and they loss their assets including homestead land. The case below illustrates how both river erosion and NGO influenced Anoyara to migrate:

Anoyara Begum (40) migrated from Bhola to Chittagong. Her husband was paralysed. She took fifty thousand taka as loans from different NGOs for her husband’s treatment. They also lost their homestead and agricultural land because of river erosion. In their village, the women are not allowed to engage in paid work outside home. They can do only home-based sewing and post harvesting work in farmers’ houses. Anoyara also did paddy-drying work in a farmer’s house. But that was not enough to survive as the income was too poor. Anoyara and her husband migrated to Chittagong for better income as well as to repay the loans.

(Source: FGD with domestic worker, Dhaka, 4 May, 2014)
6. Loyalty or negotiation or exit: women’s out-migration in Patriarchal context

Generally community people have negative perceptions towards women’s migration. The nature and extent of such perceptions vary place to place depending on situations or demographic composition of the family and migration history and social networks. The option for women’s migration primarily depends on local cultural contexts also—to what extent a context allows or not to migrate. Purdah along with cultural constructions of “women’s work” is a strong issue that determines the choice for women’s migration. It put barriers for many women to engage in outside home work locally. In spite of cultural rigidity or flexibility, the option depends on individual household too. The data reveals that in most cases men, being the household heads, take a lead decision whether women/girls of that household should migrate or not. These men are either husband or father and a sense of guardianship is attached to them. This is particularly true for the women who are currently married; therefore, have husband. For the never married women/girls, father or/and any other male member is the supreme authority to take such migration. For women who are divorced or extremely poor, usually take decision on their own or jointly.

In case of decision on migration women take different strategies—they become loyal because of strong barriers imposed by family, mainly husband; in many cases they can negotiate with family members; they also go for exit option ignoring any barrier. The situations of staying loyal or negotiation or exit depends on contexts.

It seems that having husband matters for many women in rural Bangladesh. The ever married women face multi-faceted vulnerabilities if a family lacks of husband or any adult male members. This, in contrast, helps women to develop their agency.

Not only husband but father also matters for the never married girls/women in rural Bangladesh. Death of a father makes many families economically vulnerable, as he (father) remains the main income earner in a family. The following story is about Naznin who lost her father and decided to migrate to support her family.

Naznin (25) comes from Char Krisnapur village of Faridpur. She is the eldest daughter of Rahima (55) there. Naznin migrated to Dhaka to get a job in garments there. Before migrating to Dhaka, she worked in a tailoring shop in Faridpur Sadar upazila. She got 1500 taka salary per month there. Naznin started work when her father died. He was the only income earner of the family. The family started facing severe problem after the death of Naznin’s father. The financial crisis forced Nazninto get a work; she earned 1500 taka per month but most of the money she had to spend for her conveyance. One of male colleagues of Naznin decided to migrate to Dhaka to work in garments; he also offered Nazninto be with him. Naznin accepted the offer but her mother was not agreed. At last she was able to convince her mother. In 2012, she migrated to Dhaka and working in a garments factory. Naznin sends 5000 taka every month to her mother.

(Source: Il Faridpur, 20 April, 2014)

But non-family issues such as community contexts are very important which influence women’s
choice and agency. A woman or girl’s migration depends not only on male member’s presence (husband or father) in a family but also on wider social norms in a locality. Women, especially from poorer families, find no any alternative to migration if they face socio-cultural constraints such as purdah in particular community context. The following story is on Ferdousi, who has husband but cannot pursue outside home work locally because of extreme purdah system in her village.

Ferdousi Begum (24) comes from Bhola, a coastal district in Bangladesh. Her husband was a daylabour there. After her marriage, her father in law gradually sold all the agricultural land to pursue household expenses. Ferdousi’s husband didn’t manage work everyday; in addition, the wage rate was very low to support his family expenses. Therefore, it was very difficult for them to survive. Like other village women Ferdousi also was not allowed to work outside home because of purdah (veil) in society didn’t allowed this. For social barrier of veil Ferdousi couldn’t able to work for money in their village. To manage extreme financial crisis, Ferdousialong with her husband migrated to Chittagong to seek a work.
(Source: II Chittagong, 3April, 2014)

Purdah puts a barrier for many women in the study locations. But it seems to be much rigid for the younger girls who are never married and have to face social stigma for such marital status. The following is about such dimension—Malekawho cannot do outside home work because of her unmarried status.

Maleka Khatun (16) belongs to a poor family in Patuakhali. Her father does a small-scale business. He took loan amount of taka 40,000 for his business but lost all the money he invested. That made a financial pressure on the family. Maleka was a hope for his father. She knew sewing and earned some money also staying at home. She could increase her level of income if would do it in market places like other men in the area. But the village women, unmarried in particular, are not allowed to do it there. The unmarried women or girls even cannot move outside home on their own choice. Maleka desired to help her father economically; she also wanted to use her skills on sewing in garments sector. She migrated to Chittagong and took a job in garments by hiding her original age.
(Source: FGD with garments worker, Chittagong, 5April, 2014)

But not that women and girls in every context face such purdah barrier. Purdah may be flexible, even in a rigid community context, if a married woman is ‘protected’ enough by her husband. Not that what she does or where does she work but with whom she does work becomes much important. The following story is about Juli who lives in a ‘conservative’ area in eastern Bangladesh but is allowed to work on local agricultural field as her husband is accompanied with the work. Later she migrated to city with her husband.

Juli (22) comes from Brahmanbaria district. Her husband was a small farmer there. Apart from her household work, she also took part in agricultural work with her husband. Usually the village women are not allowed to do work agricultural land. But if a poor woman does it with her husband, then society does not put restriction as Juli did. Juli’s family was poor; her husband took loans amount of taka 10,000 from others but they were not able to repay loans. They decided to migrate to Dhaka to earn more to repay the loans.
(Source: FGD with garments worker, Dhaka, 6May, 2014)
The study gives a sense that women rarely can ignore men, especially husband in case of migration decision-making. They, if take decision on their own, need to convince husband for a final decision. But this is not the case always. Economic hardship sometimes encourage women to ignore husband if opposes.

Not wife only, the never married younger girls also can ignore such opposition made by male member in family. The following story of Salehareflects such ignorance who desired to have some ‘pocket money’ for her own expenses. It is significant in rural Bangladesh where notion is that a woman does not need her own money rather she can depend on somebody else, husband or brother in particular.

Saleha Begum (23) migrated from Traisal of Mymensingh to Gazipur three years ago. She has nine brothers and sisters in her family. Saleha was unable to continue her schooling due to poverty. Both her father and brothers are rickshaw pullers but their incomes were not enough to meet the family expenses. Saleha often refused when she sought some money from her fathers or brothers. It influenced her to earn by herself and decided to migrate to city for own income. She took advice from her relative who is working in a garments factory in Gazipur for a long time. Her brothers and father did not agree with her decision but she was determined to migrate. Finally she migrated to Gazipur on her own decision. Saleha managed a job in a garments factory there and sends 3000-4000 taka every month to her family.
(Source: II Mymensingh, 21 May, 2014)

The study explores a reverse picture also where the community contexts are relatively supportive. Dulena of Kisoreganj had such experience. She faced poverty in her village and later decided to migrate to city. In this regard, the villagers encouraged her to do so.

Dulena Begum (25) migrated from a village named Choracor of Kishorganj to Bhairab. Her Husband was a rickshaw puller in their village. He didn’t earn enough money. They lived in a house of Dulena’s father. He sold his homestead land due to poverty and then rented a room for them for living. The family expenses were increased for that room. Dulena started a sewing work to support her family. But there was less demand of such homemade clothes. Their economic situations were not improved as expected. Some of villagers suggested them to migrate to Bhairab for more incomes. Dulena listened to them and migrated to Bhairab with her husband.
(Source: II Bhairab, 25 May 2014)

This support is also visible in case of family or household. As indicated earlier, presence of male member often becomes as obstacle for women’s migration. It; however, can be different if a family is very much needy and does not have any better alterative to women’s migration. The following story is about Hasi, a younger girl who chose to migrate to Dhaka for higher incomes and her father did not oppose to daughter’s such decision.

Hasi (20) migrated to Dhaka from Faridpur three years ago. Before migrating to Dhaka she worked in a tailoring shop in Faridpur. Hasi’s mother works in a brickfield while her father a rickshawpuller. She has one younger brother who is studying. Hasi realized that her income was not enough to fulfil her brother’s education cost and to support family expenses. She wanted to earn more by working in garments industry in Dhaka. She informed it to her parents and they were agreed.
(Source: II Faridpur, 20 April, 2014)
In recent Bangladesh, women’s mobility to public space, urban in particular has been a common scenario though their security and safety with such mobility is an increasing concern. Studies say incidents of violence against women including sexual assault are gradually increasing (Barkat et al 2012). This is a constraint; yet to examine how affecting women’s mobility to public space. This paper argues that the notion of space is very important for women’s migration. It is connected not with geography or location only, but also with a sense of security—where they (should) go and who (should) take away them there. The data reveals that many women live in such contexts in origin, which are ‘conservative’ in nature and restricts women’s mobility. Migration helps them increasing their mobility, also getting insights on new environment in destination. But the issue of safety and security remains very important for them.

Capitalising a social network works as strategy to make them safe and secure during migration. As the relevant cases, for example the case of Lipi on page 21 in this paper, explore that women or their families depend on a trusty connection into taking migration decision. If a potential migrant does not have such social networks, there are many risks as the following case of Marium illustrates how she faced problem when migrated to Dhaka.

Marium Begum (30) migrated to Dhaka from Rajshahi two years ago. Suddenly Marium’s husband was paralysed when they were living in their village in Rajshahi. She took loan of fifty thousand taka from different NGO’s and started cooking materials business in the village. She was cheated by a few evil customers and lost most of the money in her business. She was unable to pay instalments of the NGO loans and took decision to migrate with her husband for survive and repay their loans. They migrated to Dhaka but did not have any information on work and residential environment there. They left their village with 1000 taka only kept with them. After reaching Dhaka, they suffered a lot to manage work and a residence in Dhaka.

(Source: KII Dhaka 8 May, 2014)

But the problem Marium faced is common and not complex. The nature of problem for many women is not so simple and can be worst or severe. Nasima had such experience when she migrated to Chittagong and was raped in the city. This is described below:

Nasima Begum (20) migrated from Khagrachari to Chittagong five years ago. She was in a violent situation in different times in Khagrachari. She was sexually abused by a boy when she was in school. She left school for that reason. Later she had an affair with a boy and the boy also left her after making sexual abuse. Her family members also tortured her when they knew about her affair with the boy. She left her family also to avoid such hostile situations and migrated to Chittagong. But she lost address of her cousin there. Somebody found her on street and promised to find out her cousin’s address and took away her to his house and then raped. The next day she managed to find her cousin’s address and took shelter in her house. Nasima’s cousin helped her to get a job in the garments she was working. After getting the job, the supervisor of that garments proposed her for marry and she agreed and married to him. She faced a new problem when came to know that her husband has another wife. She did not leave her husband but very often facing physical violence being made by her husband.

(Source: KII Chittagong 10 April, 2014)
Having a trusty connection is very important for women’s migration. But it’s not necessary to work well. This is particularly true for a connection based on non-kin networks. The study explores some non-conventional reasons behind women’s migration which are further associated to their safety and security. The following story of Abida describes how she migrated to a different town to meet her boy friend and later cheated.

Abida Begum (22) migrated from Gangacara of Rangpur to Gazipur. She works in a garments factory in Gazipur. In 2012 she fell in love with a man living in Gazipur. That was happened through mobile phone conversation. Once the relationship developed, Abida left her house to marry him. She had a friend in Gazipur who helped her to migrate. After migration to Gazipur, Abida started living with the man as couple but they were not married yet. When people came to know about it, then they forced them to marry. Abida married to the man but after few days later her husband went missing leaving Merina. She returned back to her father’s house for few days but her family as well as society started treating her as bad girl. She again migrated to Gazipur to work in the garments factory.

(Source: KliRangpur, 5 May 2014)

Therefore, people heavily depend on a trusty network while take a decision for migration. A trusty network can ignoremany restrictions including social norms like purdah. The study captures a village in southern part of the country from where dozens of women migrated to far away Chittagong, the port of city to work in a Shoe Factory. They went there because the owner of the Factory comes from that village, has a good reputation to the village people. Lipi Akter is one of the village women who migrated for such background.

Lipi Akter (37) comes from Barishal. She migrated to Chittagong in 1991. She was the elder sister of her family, felt a responsibility to take care other siblings and never thought to leave the family. But her mind changed when Kalam, a reputed and respected person in their village, offered villagers including her to work in his shoe factory in Chittagong. She talked to her parents and they agreed with that as Kalam comes from their village and he has reputation among them. Lipi migrated to Chittagong and worked for several years in Kalam’s shoe factory. Not work only, she also married to a factory worker there.

(Source: II Barishal, 13April, 2014)

But most important is to depend on trusty family or kin connections to take migration decision. Many married women migrate with husband in a form of ‘family migration’. But if a woman needs to migrate using a different kin form, then she must need to look for relatives in the destination. Thus a form of social relationship or ‘social capital’ is required for women’s out-migration.

Usage of such networks is common in Bangladesh as part of safety and security, for women in particular. But it’s not necessary that they enjoy safety and security there always. It depends on their new networks and relationship in the destination. The following story of Salma reveals how she migrated to town because of her connection with a cross cousin there.

Salma Begum (24) migrated from Simulia village of Mymensingh to Narayanganj. They
are five brothers and two sisters. She is the younger daughter of her parents. They were in big trouble to manage family expenses when their father died. During that time Salma’s cousin was working in a garments factory in Narayanganj. Salma contacted with her and took decision to migrate to Narayanganj. She had the option to work in Mymensingh or Dhaka but she took decision of migrating to Narayanganj because of her cousin’s staying there. She was confident that with the help of her cousin she would get a better job and better life in Narayanganj. Her cousin helped her to get a job and initially gave her shelter for living.

Salma’s migration as well as getting a work and shelter was easy because of her kin networks in the destination. But a new network and connection in destination matter, and may be very important in women’s lives, for Salma in this paper. She faced an extreme situation in her marital life in the destination but it, in turn, enhanced her confidence to survive in a different way. The following is about that:

After migrated to Narayanganj, Salma got introduced with a man lived in that area. She liked the man and married too. But later she realized that her choice was wrong. Her husband was extremely violent to Salma, tortured regularly even on minor issues. Salma’s natal family members (mother and brother) asked her to get back home leaving her husband. But she did not want it as loved her husband very much. He did not provide any maintenance costs to Salma. She earned her own incomes doing household work in the area. Few days later Salma was informed that her husband has relation with another woman. When she (Salma) asked her about that, the husband severely tortured her. Then Salma left her husband’s house and never came back. After that, she received divorce letter from her husband. According to Salma, she was in better conditions as able to escape husband’s torture. She took a job of domestic worker and teaches Quran to other small children around her house to survive.

(Source: KII, Narayanganj, 20 April, 2014)

### 8. The sewing discourse: gendered work in destination

Studies on internal migration, as indicated earlier, reveal that women’s internal migration provides them access to various opportunities such as employments and incomes. These are important but this paper comes with a critical perspective that a sense of cultural reproduction of works exists in the context of women’s internal migration in Bangladesh. While most of the women do “women’s work” in village, the nature of work does not change significantly after migration to cities or towns. They engaged in such type of work which are gendered in nature and are not enough to de-construct gender division of labour although they are paid. Data reveal that most of the women do sewing centered work at garments in cities. The following story of Sorbanu explores that she went to Dhaka to get a work in garments. She managed also as she knows how to sewing.

Sorbanu (28) migrated to Dhaka from Narsingdi three years ago. She came in Dhaka to her father who was working in a private company in the city. Sorbanugot married in her village four years ago but her husband tortured her most of the days for different reasons. She survived there almost one year and then took decision to migrate to Dhaka. She was involved in sewing work in her village but didn’t earn money as expected. This sewing skill gave her confidence to migrate and get a work in garments in Dhaka.

(Source: FGD with garments worker, Dhaka, 6 May)
Not that all the migrated women have such skills and able to find a work as desired. Getting a work in garments requires skills, and women who do not have such skills go for alternative household work in cities. Luna migrated to city for survival but she did not know sewing to get a work in garments; therefore, engaged herself in household work there.

Luna (28) migrated from Rangpur to Dhaka. Her husband was a tenant farmer there. They took loans from NGOs for to meet costs in farming but didn’t get expected amount of crops. It made them defaulter to pay the loans. Then both of them decided to migrate to Dhaka for repay the loans. Luna did not know any other work than household chores; her husband also knew agricultural work only. After migration to Dhaka, her husband started working as rickshawpuller while Luna engaged herself in paid household work.
(Source: Il Rangpur, 10 May, 2014)

The same is about Lipi who was used to do earth digging work in village because of extreme poverty situation with her family. She chose to migrate for better income but did not have any skills to work in garments.

Lipi Begum (26) migrated to Dhaka from Sariutpur district. Her husband married her without consent of her father in law. So, he (father in law) didn’t accept them in his house. They stayed in their relative house for quite a while. In that time her husband was ill and Lipi did earth digging work to survive. She earned taka 100 per day for this work that was too less to support the family. In addition, the work was not available everyday. Then they decided to migrate to Dhaka for their survival. Both Lipi and her husband did not have any skills other than cooking and agricultural work respectively. In Dhaka, Lipi started her work as paid household worker. Her husband is still sick and he couldn’t do any work.
(Source: FGD with domestic worker, Dhaka, 6 May, 2014)

The idea of ‘women entrepreneurship’ is getting popular in recent Bangladesh. Several studies explore women’s increasing engagement in entrepreneurship as well as small business. This study; however, either did not have focus or could not find significant number of women’s engagement in such entrepreneurship. Perhaps, most of the women belonged to extreme level of poverty; they did not have enough financial resources or knowledge to be an entrepreneur. That does not mean women completely become reluctant to be an entrepreneur. The following story of Fatema illustrates that she is used to do botic work on traditional sarees for additional income apart from her paid household work in city.

Fatema (26) migrated from a Brahmanbaria village to Bhairab. Her husband had eye problem and they had no option in village to get proper medical treatment. In her village Fatema could manage work during post harvest season only; that is home-based paddy husking and drying work and available for three months only. The female workers like Fatema received foods and paddy only as wage, not any cash. This was not enough for Fatema’s family to reduce their hardship in the village. So for more incomes and also for her husband’s treatment, they decided to migrate to Bhairab. She started as household worker after migration. She had experience of designing on sarees and continued this also in her new destination. She spent her incomes on their living costs; also for her
husband’s treatment purpose. Few days later her husband was recovered from his eye problem and started working as a van puller.
(Source: KI, Bhairab, 10April, 2014)

Data reveal that the gendered nature of work remains almost same after women migrated to cities/towns. This can be an area of critique from gender equality point of view. But important is that it may help women to re-identify them from merely wife to economic partner in family in the patriarchy led Bangladeshi society.

9. From wife to economic partner: the improved conditions in family

While the women in villages play a strong role of wife-hood, their migration helps to become significant economic partners through direct cash contributions for family expenses. This, in turn, produces a range of benefits for them. They experience more value by their male counterparts. Their conditions in the family in general are improved. Parvin Begum of Comilla went to Chittagong to make financial support to her husband who was sick. But she has been in better economic conditions because of her work in the city. Now she can even able to spend for her son’s education.

Parvin Begum (20) migrated from Comilla to Chittagong. The reason was to manage money for better treatment of her husband who was sick. She kept her son with her mother and went to Chittagong to work in garments there. She knew some girls in her village who were working in different garments of Chittagong. She managed her work with a help from one of girls who works in the city. Her husband has recovered from his sickness because of income support made by his wife. Parvin’s money is also spent for their son’s education purpose. She has her plan to return back to village with her husband after having a handsome amount of saving. She also desires to give money to her husband to establish a grocery shop in their village after returning home.
(Source: FGD with garments worker, Chittagong, 5April, 2014)

Women who do not have skills or cannot manage a work in garments; they also can improve their economic situations after migration to city or town. Jhora, as the story below illustrates, migrated to a small town with her husband and started work in a local restaurant. It helped them to improve their situations a lot.

Jhora Khatun (45) migrated from a Mymensingh village to Bhairab with her husband. They were facing financial hardship in the village. Jhorna did household work in rich people’s house to earn. But she received foods and paddy only instead of cash. They were searching for better incomes and then migrated to Bhairab. They both have taken work in a restaurant in the town. They can earn a total of 8000 taka per month. They have no any children, so can save money.
(Source: II, Bhairab, 17May, 2014)

Not the ever married women only take an opportunity to support husband led family but the never married younger women also can play a strong role to improve the family’s economic conditions. For Hasina, as the story illustrates, the primary intention was not to support her family, rather to manage her own ‘pocket money’. But now she has a great contribution to her family and it has improved a lot with her incomes.
Hasina (23) migrated from Traisal of Mymensingh to Gazipur three years ago. She has nine brothers and sisters in her family. Hasina was unable to continue her schooling due to poverty. Both her father and brothers are rickshaw pullers but their incomes were not enough to meet the family expenses. Hasina was looking for a work so that she can expense on her own choice; also to contribute to her family. She took suggestions as well as help from her relative who is working in a garments factory in Gazipur for a long time. Her brothers and father did not agree with her decision but she was determined to migrate. Finally she migrated to Gazipur on her own decision. Hasina managed a job in a garments factory there and sends 3000-4000 taka every month to her family.
(Source: II Mymensingh, 21May, 2014)

10. Hostile to hospitality: the changing community perceptions

Because of women’s migration as well as incomes, they experience positive reaction in the family. Their family members come up with a form of transformative mindset, which reflected in their attitudes and actions, for example, reduction violence against women. Not in family only, data reveal that women are valued in community also because of their migration as well as incomes. This is very significant in the ‘conservative’ nature of origins where women have to face lots of socio-cultural barriers when migrate.

Monoara Begum faced a hostile behaviour from her village people; they even blamed her to take prostitution work in city but now she experiences positive behaviour for her incomes as well as contributions to family.

Monoara Begum (40) migrated from a Kishoreganj village to Dhaka. In their area, women are not allowed to do paid work outside home. Her husband was a rickshaw puller in the village and his income was very poor. It was very difficult to run the family with their limited income. They migrated to Dhaka for more income to survive. When they decided to migrate, some villagers told that most of the migrant women in Dhaka are engaged in illegal physical relationship for incomes. However, a few villagers and some of their relatives supported them in their decision. They also told Monoara and her husband that they could earn more if migrated. After migration to Dhaka, Monoaraworks as a domestic help in a household while her husband pulls rickshaw there. When they visit to village, most of the villagers appreciate and value them because of their higher incomes as well as improved economic situations in family.
(Source: FGD with domestic worker, Dhaka, 6 May, 2014)

Migration helps women, belong to extremely poor household in particular, to remove social exclusion they face in villages. This is a dilemma for poorer women—in one hand, they are excluded because of poverty, face various gendered social critiques once decide to migrate on the other. This dilemma; however, reduces as the following story of Sanu illustrates how her family has acceptance to community programmes because of better incomes come from her migration.

Sanu (20) migrated from Barisal to Dhaka two years ago. She was a student then but her family was unable to pay her educational expenses. Sanu’s mother Kulsum (50) sent her daughter Sanuto her elder sister who was working in a garments factory in Dhaka. Sanu’s father was sick and couldn’t able to earn. When Sanu migrated, most of the village
people didn’t take it positively. They asked why Sanu needed to earn when she has two brothers in family. Thus, the family had to face many critiques. But after her migration, Sanu not only became to earn but also take her brother to her for better education in the city. Sanu spends her most of income to meet family and the brother’s educational expenses. Gradually the villagers’ perception was changed. While they never invited to attend wedding ceremony of others in the village, after migration and increasing incomes, the family is frequently invited to such event.

(Source: II, Barisal, 10April, 2014)

11. From urban frustration to rural gendered aspiration

The above sections give a clear picture that migration creates various opportunities for women. They are able to pursue incomes, which in turn, ensure higher value both in family and community. This paper; however, captures a ‘frustrated’ picture of women in their urban living and it reproduces a gendered aspiration with their future life. They choose urban cities and town as destination but these places are not a heaven for their living. They experience lots of difficulties there, which force them to get back to the origins. The urban life is too frustrating in their lives from many aspects – recent high pricing of foods, very poor housing and services, hard labouring jobs, staying without kids etc. Many dream for return back, do it also but again engage in such work, which is “women’s work” in the villages. They experience new insights in destination but these do not help to de-shape their gendered aspiration. They intend to earn after return back but through rearing chickens, cows which confine them again to inside the home boundary. Nasima Begum of Rangpur migrated to Dhaka and worked in a garments factory there. But now she in the village and doing household work as did before the migration.

Nasima Begum (24) comes from a Gangachora village in Rangpur. She migrated to Savar with her husband five years ago. She worked in a garments factory and her husband was a rickshaw puller there. One year after their migration, Nasima became pregnant and left her job according to her husband’s decision. When she left the job, her husband couldn’t able to maintain their family expenses. They were passing a hard time after the baby born. When the baby turned two years, Nasima sent him to her mother in law and joined the work again. But she left her job again to spend time with the baby. They, along with the baby, wanted to live together in Savar but it was very tough also for higher expenses. After leaving the job, Nasima came back to Rangur permanently.

(Source: FGD with Returnees, Rangpur, 13May, 2014)

The migrated women who are still living in cities/towns generally have a plan to return back. The fact is that their future is centred to their family in origin. The following story of Farzana reflects her desire to return back to avoid high pricing and unfavourable social environment in city.

Farzana (24) from a Rangpur village migrated to Dhaka and started her job in a garments factory in the city. She was 18 years old when left her village. At the beginning, she drawn taka 5,000 taka per month and it increased up to taka 10,000. Although her income has increased over time but her expenditure has also increased. Everything was costly in Dhaka, from house rent to kitchen market products. There were problems in room conditions, bathroom, and electricity and gas supplies. Farzana’s husband also worked...
with her in the same garments. They already bought 10 decimals of land in their village. They didn’t like the living environment in Dhaka and desired to return back to their village after one year once they would have some more savings. They have planned that Farzana will do household work and her husband will engage in agricultural work after returning to the Village.
(Source: Il Rangpur, 11May, 2014)

Women’s reproduction role seems to have a strong connection with their choice or autonomy for living in destination. Once women become pregnant and give birth of a baby, they prefer to return back as they have a lack of care support in their non-kin based urban living. Women in Bangladesh have a long tradition to take a care support from relatives, especially mother, mother in law, sister when they give birth of baby. The migrated women who are still living in cities/towns generally have a plan to return back. HosneArarowed in a Dhaka garments factory but returned back to village when she became mother.

Hosne Ara (28) migrated to Savar from a Khulna village eight years ago because of severe financial crisis in their family. She worked in a garments factory in the town. She married to her colleague six years ago. Her husband comes from Gangachora of Rangpur. After one year of her marriage, HosneAra became pregnant, left her job and returned back to village as her husband suggested. This is because there is nobody in Savar to take care the baby after birth. Her husband is still working in the garments while HosneArais living in village. Her husband very often comes to village to see his family and it requires a lot of money as transportation costs.
(Source: KII, Rangpur, 10May, 2014)

Recent high pricing seems to be a very significant factor for poorer migrant women to determine a decision on return back. They migrate with an expectation of higher incomes and savings. But when this expectation does not meet, then they become rationale on their own ways. Khaleda is now living in Dhaka but strongly desires to return back to her village for this crisis in her urban life. She plans to pursue household work again once return back.

Khaleda Begum (40) migrated from Barguna to Dhaka. Before migration her husband was sick and they spent a lot of money for treatment. They sold their agricultural land; also borrowed 50,000 taka from different NGOs for the treatment purpose. They managed to repay most of the loans after migration. They have a daughter, aged 15 years. They are thinking to return back to village when they would have the required money to repay all the loans; also the costs to marry off their daughter. Khaleda has a desire that they will get back to their village and her husband will take lease of agricultural land and she will do household work as did before.
(Source: KII, Dhaka, 08May, 2014)

The poorer migrant women might have non-cash factor also behind their preference to return back. Salma, as the following story describes, is self-sufficient and in a better economic situation compare to the past. But she desires to return back because of her bitter private experience in her violent marital life in the city. She intends to rear cows and chickens in her village.
Salma Begum (24) migrated from Simulia village of Mymensingh to Narayanganj. They are five brothers and two sisters. She is the younger daughter of her parents. They were in big trouble to manage family expenses when their father died. During that time Salma’s cousin was working in a garments factory in Narayanganj. Salma contacted with her and took decision to migrate to Narayanganj. She had the option to work in Mymensingh or Dhaka but she took decision of migrating to Narayanganj because of her cousin’s staying there. She was confident that with the help of her cousin she would get a better job and better life in Narayanganj. Her cousin helped her to get a job and initially gave her shelter for living. After one year of her job, Salma married to a man on her own choice but later she realized that her choice was wrong. Her husband started torturing herafter the marriage. She could not tolerate it and left her husband’s house with three children. Her husband committed to another marriage and sent her divorce letter. Salma took a job of domestic worker and teaches Quran to other small children around her house to survive. She is trying to save money for establishing a poultry and cattle farm in the village. If she will manage to do this she will return to their village.
(Source: KII, Narayanganj, 20 April, 2014)

This paper, thus explores that women have a different migration choice over the time. They prefer migration for a better life; again prefer return back for a better life. The idea of ‘better life’ to them is varied, contextual and strongly depends on individual’s experience. Sometimes, it is associated with incomes, sometimes beyond the incomes and with a rural sense of happiness. Important is that the rural areas have a lack of industries and employment. Therefore, the migrant women, even who have gained technical skills on sewing, cannot use in rural setting. They can, at best, go for cloths-sewing using home-based sewing machine or pursue traditional cow and chicken rearing. These all are considered as a part of informal economy, women work as unpaid labour there and their contributions are not valued in formal accounting system and GDP. Such considerations; however, can question the national growth and development from an inclusive point of view.

12. Conclusion: Towards an inclusive growth for development

Poverty reduction and women’s economic empowerment in Bangladesh have created a platform where new questions have arisen. To what extent have income levels of poor women increased? Has there really been any significant progress in terms of gender equality when women face multifaceted discrimination with the simultaneous rise in their income levels? The questions are connected to also with the recent global debates on relationship between gender equality and growth (Kabeer 2012, Kabeer and Natali 2013).

Women’s access to outside paid work has been identified as one of important pathways of their empowerment in contemporary literature (Kabeer, Mahmud and Tasneem 2011). It is argued that women in many societies are undervalued, as they don’t have access to formal outside employments. These arguments are empirically based on women’s economic roles in informal work, for example, household work, which are non-paid in nature (Mahmud and Tasneem 2011). There are plenty of literatures which show that women’s engagements in outside formal work as well as incomes can contribute to their empowerment (Kabeer, Mahmud and Tasneem 2011). This paper, however, suggests to be careful to generalization of such arguments, and puts emphasis on considering specific cultural contexts before drawing any conclusion. It becomes much true in case
of Bangladesh, the country which has made significant progress over years.

There are some critical issues, which question such progress. Violence against women is extreme and a very recent national survey report reveals intimate partner violence as 87%; 65% married women have experienced physical violence by current husbands in their life time (BBS 2013). The country ranks top position in South Asia in child marriage (Malhotra et al. 2011). A study by Jahan (2010) indicates that female civil servants in Bangladesh face numerous problems such as negative work environment as well as problems of dual responsibilities at both home and at work. A recent World Bank study explores that religious and social norms become crucial factors that reinforcing unequal gender relations (Solotaroff and Pande 2014). As indicated earlier, the female migrants are an important contributor to national economy; they, being paid workers, play a very significant role in household incomes; but as the data reveals these economic contributions rarely make any sense for gender equality in their own lives. Their employments in a religious mixed patriarchal structure very often interact with particular norms and values, which act against gender equality and reinforce inequality.

These are very significant in the contexts poverty and socio-cultural status of women in Bangladesh. However, a critical gender analysis may explore severe limitations with the efforts. The idea of ‘access to resources’ has been a key focus of the efforts but in case of the Bangladeshi society this ‘access to resources’ rarely makes any sense for women. As the findings also in this paper indicate the female migrants’ employment or access to formal paid work does not necessarily change their position either in family or society. The state interventions, for example, the new policy framework for international migration considers females as potential migrants (GOB 2016). It, however, does not take account of a wider sense of gender equality in favour of female migrants. More specifically it ignores women’s agency and outcomes in connection to accessing the resources. If the migrant women become/remain unable to take decisions or negotiate, then the ‘access to resources’ may not be enough to reduce their vulnerabilities both in origin and destination. Resource itself, ‘employment’ in case of female migrants, is not enough if it cannot be capitalized well in favour of women (Kabeer 1999). Achieving gender equality is an outcome, which requires a number of steps into their empowerment process. Encouraging and promoting them in non-conventional employments is very important, but it may be a danger if any policy approach claims to be gender responsive, overlooks the wider patriarchal process and structure. Then there is a risk to gender stereotyping and reproducing gender inequality in spite of women’s increasing access to outside employments as well as incomes.
References:


Barkat et al., 2012. Situational Analysis of Sexual Harassment at Tertiary Level Education Institutes in and around Dhaka, Human Development Research Centre (HDRC), Dhaka, Bangladesh.


Das, N Yasmin, R Ara, J Kamruzzaman, Md. Davis, P Quisumbing, A and Roy, S., 2013. How do intra household dynamics change when assets are transferred to women? Evidence from BRAC’s “Targeting the Ultra Poor” program in Bangladesh. Gender, agriculture and assets: learning from eight agricultural development interventions in Africa and South Asia, IFPRI and ILRI.


Mahmud, S. and S. Tasneem., 2011. The Under Reporting of Women’s Economic Activity in
Bangladesh: An Examination of Official Statistics. BD Working Paper No. 01, BRAC Development Institute, BRAC University, Dhaka.


BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD), BRAC University is a centre of policy and academic excellence. BIGD is devoted to research on a range of governance and development concerns, as well as the nexus between the two. BIGD’s research is aimed at contributing to public policy as well as supporting its academic and training programs. It does not limit knowledge creation to being an end itself but rather to advance the pursuit of a just and prosperous society. It also plays an advocacy role to give voice to contemporary governance, political and economic issues. As an institute of BRAC University, BIGD works closely with the university motivated by its motto: ‘inspiring excellence’. BIGD also has the unique advantage of being associated with BRAC, the world’s largest NGO through its work. It is inspired by BRAC’s values in shaping its institutional work and professional standards.