

Men's Migration and Women's Participation within Household and Its Beyond:

Interpreting Their Adaptation Strategies in Social and Economic Activities

Md. Asaduzzaman & Asif Ekbal Arif

Abstract:

This paper has been explored on women's participation in household decision-making in contrast to their male partner's international migration. This paper also focuses on women's adaptive mechanisms in the case of attaining and doing social, including the decision regarding kinship relation maintain both blood relations and marital relations. Also, it focuses on participation in various symbolic activities, religious and social festivals and rituals, encountering psycho-social crisis within the family and its beyond and economic activities, including managing the household, income-generating activities, investing money, and consumption pattern. The findings of this study were generated from the village Qadirpur in Comilla district in Bangladesh. The researchers collected primary data by employing qualitative tools and techniques of data collection, including observation, participant observation, case study, informal interview, and key informant interview method of doing ethnographic fieldwork. The timeframe of this study is February 2017 to November 2017. The researchers collected data from the respondents of migrant's families. The respondents were selected by the purposive sampling method and intended to collect data and information from the migrants' family members only. Finally, this study's findings claim that women in the studied village opine a new dimension of empowerment beyond the orthodox view of women empowerment both homestead and its outside also. However, this can be acted as an alternative model of women's empowerment in the rural area.



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Introduction

The orthodox view of research literature regarding Bangladesh is that Bangladesh is a small country but large in population size. However, Bangladesh has enormous opportunities to supply labor forces in international labor markets due to the large population in the limited land capacity of Bangladesh. Bangladesh cannot use its labor forces within its national territory for the shortage of land, improper education system, and other structural factors. Because the employment opportunities are very low for the large labor forces of Bangladesh and for limited options of earning and livelihoods, Bangladeshi laborers are going abroad by push and pull factors of migration. The marginal labor force of Bangladesh with a lower level of education and other technical skills migrate in different parts of the world in accordance with their economic and social capabilities. Both urban and rural social structures are getting tremendous transformation due to this flow of migration. This flow of migration is contributing to changes in the sphere of family, marriage, kinship, social and economic relationships. Migration acts as an influencing factor in the above changes. International migration flow highly influences individual relations within the social structures, ideologies, and conventional knowledge systems. The primary and secondary sources of data are highly preferred to in the case of social research. In this study, primary and secondary sources of data have been employed. Observation, participant observation, case study, informal interview, and key informant interview methods have been employed for primary data collection.

Qadirpur of Comilla district in Bangladesh has been selected to collect primary data where 573 men have been migrated among the 612 families. In every family, one individual male member has migrated abroad. Among the migrants of Qadirpur, only 12 migrants have migrated with their wives and children. Among the 561 migrants, 416 migrants are married whose wives and children reside in their own village. Comilla is a famous place for migration because 13.6% migrants of the total migrants of Bangladesh in abroad are from this region. In this study, we have tried to explore women's position in the social and economic structures, including economic activities due to the male partner's international migration in global spaces of migration. As a member of the migrated family, women's adaptation strategies in maintaining relations with other members, their participation in social and economic functions, and their forms of participation are increasing due to the long-term absence of their male partners. These forms of migration of their male partners have been demanded different dimensions in the question of women's freedom in the society where they live. As a result, the question of women's empowerment will be identified in various existing social norms and customs. Generally, women's economic capabilities increase when their male partners migrated. It is important that the economic condition of women must be considered significantly. Generally, the migrants want to ensure women's security (Gardner, 1995). This study highly emphasizes the changes in economic spheres and women's participation in marriage and social status with the impacts of the flow of migration in Bangladesh.

Generally, the concept of women empowerment is a major concern in underdeveloped countries, and migration in such conditions can be an interesting indicator of women empowerment (Ullah: 2017). Here, women's empowerment due to their male counter migration is more potential key to find out the state of women in decision making whether women's position in society is changing or remaining the previous condition. For approaching empirically, the researchers conducted their study among 10 migrant households where women perform all the household activities and outside household duties. And the rest of the household decision-making and activities are conducted by women under

the surveillance of male migrants' brothers and fathers. Even many young female partners of male migrants are living in their parental house. Katy Gardner (1995) and Westgaard R. (1989) have conducted their research on this issue of migration from the perspective of Bangladesh. Appleyard (1989), Garcia (2005), Saha and Menon (2010), Hein de Hass (2006), Moore (1988), Godfrey (1992), and others have many influential publications on these issues in different parts of the world outside Bangladesh.

Statement of the Problem

The women's position in family and society can be determined with the observation and analysis of women's role in decision making in the family, their relationship with other members in society, the nature of outside family and kin members in their personal issues and the whole social views over women where they live. This imagery reflects the position of women in society also. A set of views and values are embedded in the mind of migrant man and they tried to follow these even after the completion of migration processes. He fails to understand that his ascribed values and views may conflict with the existing social customs, and these create the question of appropriation in changing social systems (Gunatillake, 1992). In a migrant family, as a member of the family, women have to be concerned in both family and social life; they have to think about the comments of others when they move outside of the domestic arena. Even women cannot maintain privacy in their personal matters, and several times, they have to tolerate other members' interventions in their personal issues. The averse changing mind of other family members create many problems for women ((Gunatillake, 1992). These changes influence not only the social spheres of women but also intervene in their personal matters. In this regard, male migrant's family and kin members interfere in women's personal issues, which stand against the questions of women's freedom in family and society. Sometimes, these interventions occur by such a person whose responsibility is to ensure women's security and protection in the absence of their husbands. In some other events, it has been observed that women are treated as submissive with other members' intervention of their personal matters. Even women have to pass their life with the fear of harassment because of the long-term absence of their husbands. Again, as a wife of a migrant family, women have to strictly follow the rules and regulations of the household head where women's individual choices and wills are never filled or remain incomplete. These are similar to the intervention of their personal matters.

Findings and Analysis

Among the wives of migrated men who are newly married, they have limited options in decision-making in the family affairs in most cases. But when women and their husbands shifted into single-family from the joint family, only then can women participate in decision-making in the absence of their husbands. This imagery strongly suggests that migrant husbands keep trust in the decision of their wives in the family. By the long-term absence of male members in the family, women can get a chance to progress of their own (Gardner, 1995). Remittance itself demands gender dimensions, which influences the lives of men and women related to this (Garcia, 2005). Women in migrant families play their roles as a manager of the household by hiring labor, taking children to school and other educational expenditures, buying and selling the necessities of their husband, construction of the new house and managing migration processes of other members in the family in the long-term absence of their husbands. Women are fundamentally contributing more to agricultural sectors. Definitely, women in migrant families can make instant decisions regarding various family issues and control their household (sanshar).

Case – 1. Managing the Household: The story of Rahela

After marriage, Rahela's husband migrated abroad, and her brother-in-law took the responsibility of the household head. A few months later, her brother-in-law also migrates abroad. Rahela is the senior-most in their joint family. By her seniority, she has to take the responsibility of household head. She has to do all the decision-making in the household, although her sister-in-law's husband and fathers-in-law assist sometimes. She withdraws remittances sent by her husband from the bank for household expenditures and visits the market for buying the necessities, but in case of a long path, she takes someone with her. All the necessities are bought with the permission of her husband, who communicates by mobile phone. Rahela manages teachers for her children in the absence of her husband.

Case study – 2. Women's decision in marriage: The story of Manzella Akhtar

After shifting into a single-family from the joint family, Manzella Akhtar takes the responsibility of household head. In the case of the marriage of her elder daughter, she negotiates with the bridegroom's family members. In the basis of her statement, her husband permits the decision of this marriage. Women's role as household managers is also seen in the social world outside the household. Women who belong to the joint household where all the male members are migrants, women participate in outside household management from the very beginning. Even when they form the single-family from the joint family, they make decisions and sometimes outside the family matters. As a wife of a migrant, women have to manage all the economic activities such as withdrawing remittances from the bank, buying and selling the necessities from the market, and maintaining social relationships with relatives and neighbors. This imagery is evidence that women are moving from conventional social values.

Women in the family cope with all circumstances through their empirical adaptation strategies in the law's family. They make their adaptation either weeping or without weeping, either making a mistake or not, but they have shown their submissiveness towards the family because of the long-term absence of their husband. Women contribute to the family after all the intervention of other members in their personal life. Women visit the social world outside the conventional social norms, such as not being permitted to speak except their husbands not permitted to visit outside the domestic arena. The women from the migrant husbands come from the conventional social norms and values, and these forms of women's participation are well adopted in society.

The traditional peasant society is going through a transformation due to the flow of remittances in the migrant household. The migrants get a chance to form a single-family and remittance makes it easy to build a new house (Hass, 2006). In recent decades, the transformation of rural society increases women's empowerment and their social status (Moore, 1988). Most of the time women have to live in a joint household after marriage, and she has to participate in various activities authorized by the household head. In this study, the migrants keep their wives in their home country just after 2 to 3 months of their marriage. In a joint household, women have limited options and spaces to participate in family issues after the first few months of their marriages. But due to the migration of their male partners, women have to participate in decision-making in family affairs for various purposes. Women have to follow various rules of the joint family when they enter as newly married. Even women have to bury their own choices and wills to maintain the family norms. Even in the joint family, they have to remain muted and tolerate discords of other members with the long absences of their husbands after marriage.

In many households, after marriage, the migrant's wife forms the single-family where this woman performs her role as household head. To maintain the single household, women have to face various obstacles of other members, and they have set strategies for confrontations of the obstacles. Instead of using the power of extended households, women from low-income families are more vulnerable, and these women are out of control (Westergaard, 1989). Women are bound to shift from the joint family to single-family, enlisting in the charts of vulnerabilities. And these vulnerable situations are coped with by women according to their strategies. When a woman takes responsibility for a family, she feels pressured by other members due to gender relations (Sharma, 1980). Generally, women cannot consume their own labor in the family what the men get (Whitehead, 1981). Most of the time, women have to work to protect their husband's households. Women either get their fruits or not; it makes another boundary for women in their individual arena.

Case study – 3. Women’s adaptation strategies in household: The story of Zona

After separation from the joint family, Zona got pressure from her brother-in-law because her husband lost a huge amount of money. Her husband works as a mediator between the illegal international agents of migration and the local people interested in going abroad. Her husband repays the money by selling his father's land. Zona's husband binds to flee with the burden of debts of others. Now Zosna's brother-in-law does not permit the use of the rest of the land of her father-in-law. Zona tries to make a good relationship with her brother-in-law by sharing her opinions in case of important matters, giving the good foods if she cooks. By discussing and prioritizing her brother-in-law, Zona manages him, and now her brother-in-law carries daily necessities with the cost of his own money. Women in single-family or joint families have to emphasize the views and opinions of other neighbors outside the family to establish their position in the society where they live. Whatever women do in society indirectly, they have to maintain accountability in society. This indirect accountability determines how the social system evaluates women and how women cope with this social system. Making mistakes or not, women apologies for someone taking a position in society.

Case Study – 4. The blurred Boundaries of Empowerment: The Story of Fatema

Fatema is 25 years old married woman. Her husband works as a labor migrant in the country Middle East. Fatema lives in her bridal home after marriage. Her husband Raisul went back abroad just after a few months of their marriage. At present, Fatema lives in a separate household adjacent to her law's house. However, Fatema enjoys all kinds of autonomy economically. She can invest her bride's money in income-generating activities, she can buy something that she wishes, and she can take medical treatment in accordance with her wish both for him and her son. But in the case of land management, including what crops would be cropped out, managing labor for cultivation, Fatema's household has a great dependency on her father-in-law. Most of the members of her laws' house make a critical judgment towards Fatema's parental house whether she sends the income of Raisul. That is why Fathema never shares the economic issue with the member of her parental side.

Even in wearing a dress and visiting relatives, Fatema has to get permission firstly from her husband and then from her father-in-law. One day, Fathima wore a share (traditionally a Bengali dress for married women) and visited one of her relative's houses. Her mother-in-law did not take it easy. Her mother-in-laws stigmatized her son-in-law by saying, 'without the absence of a husband, why does a wife wear a saree and go show her body to 'porpurush' other men?' A very few days ago, Fathima was in great trouble to admit her son to school. Both her husband and her father-in-law wanted to admit Helal into an institution that provides Islamic religious education. Fatema had great fighting to admit her son Helal to a

nursery school for general education. From the story of Fatema, it is obvious that women's empowerment in the village Qadirpur is not going through a clear-cut pathway rather, it is more inconspicuous. The deterrent of women empowerment maintains blurred boundaries between various parameters of social and economic conditions. The analysis of women's empowerment in such a situation is more connected with orthodox gender justice, not women's economic autonomy.

Concluding Remarks

Labor migration in developing countries creates opportunities for long-term socio-economic transformation. And this flow helps to complete various efforts and the resolution of various problems also (Appleyard, 1989). This study strongly clarifies how women's lives are changing after marriage with a migrant husband, including women's participation in social and economic spheres due to the long-term absence of their husbands. This absence of their husbands makes long-term opportunities for women in long-term decision making and managing household and family. This time women participate in social, economic, and cultural life outside the family affairs. As a result, men's migration, women's working spheres, freedom, and gender relations have been spread (Horitos and Despia, 1988). The long-term absence of male partners does not mean that women can control households and resources. The migrant's brothers, in most of the cases, control land, money supply, marketing, taking of remittances, and other responsibilities if the migrants have a brother. How do women control the economic and social sphere in this context? The field experiences proposed that women most of the time want to do such activities by their own brother and father. When their children are getting young, women strategically incorporate them in household activities such as marketing, visiting field, and land management. Thus, women within the conventional social structures make control over their husband's earnings. Women empowerment and their freedom of activities are changing with the conventional custodial familial and social system. In the primary stage of their marital life, whose husbands are migrants, women have to fulfill the demand of conventional family norms where they bury their own choices and wills in case of decision-making. But when they shifted into single-family from the joint family, they get the opportunity to participate in economic activities and manage the household. This form of imagery reflects the picture of women's empowerment. This pattern of empowerment engages women to participate in decision making, freedom of movement, practices of managerial roles without the ownership of property within the conventional social structures. These images make challenge conventional social structures to change women's position. Many voices of women have been explored in this study where women belong to the conventional social structures of women empowerment. The conventional idea of women's empowerment includes structural determinants such as education and the ownership of property. But taking men's migration as an influential determinant, this study explores new dimensions of assessing and analyzing women empowerment breaking the conventional framework of women empowerment.

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