



Tradition or Translation? Cynical or Sacred?

THE RISE OF ISLAMIC RADICALISM AMONG BRITISH BANGLADESHIS

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This paper aims to examine the background and reasons for the rise of Islamic radicalism amongst British Bangladeshis. Islamic 'fundamentalism', anti-western sentiments and the politicisation of Islam have been dominant themes in the media and public consciousness in recent years. Why have Islam and western secular democracy come to be seen as irreconcilable enemies? Why do British citizens choose to prioritise or emphasise their Islamic identity over and against their British identity? Why are radical forms of political Islam attractive? These are questions that will be examined here.

This is not an exhaustive overview of either Bangladeshi migration to Britain or modern Islamic trends. It attempts to explain the relationships between migration, minorities and radical politics within the context of contemporary Britain and its Bangladeshi community. A brief history of the Bangladeshi community in Britain will be followed by a discussion of culture, hegemony and identity. An analysis of the changing identity of British Bangladeshis will touch on issues of exclusion and racism. These ideas will then be fitted into the wider context of Islam and Islamic radicalism in the world. An overview of politics and current affairs will also suggest some possible reasons for the rise of Islamic radicalism in the world and why it has become attractive to Bangladeshis in Britain.

British Bangladeshis

Most Muslims in Britain come from the Indian Subcontinent, the majority from Pakistan, followed by

Indian and Bangladeshi Muslims. Many Bangladeshis worked as sailors, and 'jumped ship', establishing small communities in major ports around the world in the 19th and early 20th centuries. These communities were largest in Britain due to the colonial ties and the possibilities of finding further employment on ships. They were centred in major ports such as London, Cardiff, South Shields and Sunderland (Carey and Shukur, 1985:406).

The majority of Bangladeshis came to Britain in the 1950s and 60s. The 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act reinforced this pattern as friends and kin found it easier to be sponsored under the voucher system. These migrants at first saw themselves as temporary work migrants rather than settlers. They came in search of high wages rather than as a response to

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poverty (Carey and Shukur, 1985 and Gardner and Shukur, 1994:147) By the mid sixties family reunification in Britain began, first sons, then wives and other children slowly started to arrive (Carey and Shukur, 1985:407).

There are now approximately 300,000 British citizens of Bangladeshi origin, most of them in London. Most British Bangladeshis are from Sylhet, a region in the north east of Bangladesh, and the vast majority are Muslim. Bangladeshis and Bangladeshi culture have become a part of the dynamic 'British culture'. (Carey and Shukur, 1985:405). A look at some ways of understanding culture will help us analyse this process.

Changing Identities, Exclusion and Alienation

Muslims have become prominent in Britain and Europe in recent years. In Britain, there are over a million Muslims, but they have a presence in British consciousness beyond their numbers. Their prominence in the public arena has also been due to high profile political events. Within both the South Asian and Islamic communities in Britain and worldwide there is a diverse plurality, debates and conflicts that must be taken into account to avoid crude generalisations and essentialising.

The experience of migration and diaspora can lead to shifting notions of identity, the formation of new identities and hybrid identities. Experiences of racism and exclusion are also influential in identity formation and ethnic mobilisation. Europe's Muslims suffer from various forms of socio-economic, political and physical exclusion, and many of them live in relative deprivation. Vertovec and Peach's picture of the situation of European Muslims is bleak. They are described as "*divided and traumatised, weakened by unemployment and humiliated by dependence on social welfare*". They suffer from anti-Islamism, harsh immigration regimes, and fear of persecution, along with economic problems such as unemployment. (Vertovec and Peach, 1997:5). In Britain, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis have the highest rates of unemployment, the lowest rates of educational qualifications and the highest profile in manual work of any 'non-white' group.

Simultaneously, claim Vertovec and Peach, there is a new self-consciousness amongst European Muslims. More Islamic organisations and associations have been formed, and this creates increasing engagement in politics and society (Vertovec and Peach, 1997:6). Perhaps this is due to the decrease in the strength of the 'myth of return' and an increasing feeling of permanence. Perhaps it is a second-generation effect, with the greater confidence and feeling of belonging in

the hybrid identities of the second generation. Vertovec and Peach identify changes in Islam in Europe (ibid:9), which some say are part of a 'politics of difference' and anti-racism. Others, they say, claim it is part of a 'worldwide Islamic awakening (ibid:10).

There is certainly a group of European and British Muslims who are attracted to Islamic radicalism (Gardner and Shukur, 1994:161). This group emphasise their Muslim identity over other political and cultural identities (Gardner and Shukur, 1994:163). Young Muslims reclaim Islam for themselves, "*choosing to break away culturally on the basis of communal identity from the dominant values of the nations of which they are citizens in principle, but from which, according to them, they are excluded in practice*". They struggle against exclusion, racism, drug addiction, violence and delinquency; strict respect for religious prohibition is therefore important for them (Vertovec and Peach, 1997:52).

The first generation of Bangladeshis were more attached to their national identity as Bangladeshis, than the second who are more attracted to Islam (Gardner and Shukur, 1994:163). Many second generation Bangladeshis do not feel a strong bond with Bangladesh. On visits home they feel and emphasise their British identity. They feel out of place and alienated (ibid:159). The draw of Islam may be stronger amongst those who feel little association with either a racist British society or with Bangladesh (ibid:162).

The majority of European Muslims are politically moderate, not very religious, or practice their religion individually. They are often overlooked (Vertovec and Peach, 1997:38), by right wing analysts or the 'Clash of Civilisations' school of thought. Most Muslims take the view that outside Islamic countries, they are under a political obligation to live as responsible citizens of the society in which they find themselves. Taher echoes this in his analysis of British Asian attitudes towards the British Government, in his article '*Goodness gracious me, 3m Asians loyal to Britain*', for The Guardian (May 2000), he reports, "*most Asians condemn those youths fighting for the Taliban as much as anyone else in this country. Our survey showed that 72% thought that it was wrong for Muslim youths to fight for the Taliban*". It is important to remember this quiet and peaceful majority when discussing an infamous and high profile minority.

Islamic Fundamentalism

Islamic fundamentalism is an over-used and misunderstood term, used to describe various militant currents in contemporary Islamic thought. Youssef

Choueiri identifies three currents of 'Islamic fundamentalism'. 'Revivalism' emerged as an internal dialogue within Islam in the eighteenth century. It grew from remote rural areas beyond the reach of authorities. It's most famous manifestation is now in 'Wahabism' in Saudi Arabia (Choueiri, 1990:9). Islamic reformism was an urban movement in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It's intellectual leaders studied European success and dominance, in an attempt to reverse what they saw as 'Islamic decline' (ibid.).

Islamic radicalism has emerged in the twentieth century as a reaction to the growth of the nation state. It is popular amongst migrants, both internationally and internally in the great era of urbanisation. Islamic "*radicalism does not revive or reform. Rather it creates a new world and creates its own dystopia.*" (ibid:10). Islamic radicalism is the focus of this paper, as it is the most recent, relevant type of Islamic fundamentalism, and relates most closely with the general public usage of the term.

Islamic radicalism reflects, and is a response to, the social divisions and problems of Islamic cities. The rise of Islamic radicalism is linked with the growth of cities since 1945; it is linked to the anxieties and ambitions of certain groups in society. Choueiri identifies these as; small merchants, middle traders, artisans, students, teachers and civil servants (ibid:12). Many of these people are migrants, either internally in processes of urbanisation or internationally, as in the case of British Bangladeshis.

The messages of Islamic radicalism are stridently anti-western. Scholars such as Maududi (1992) (founder of the Jammah-I-Islami movement in South Asia) and Qutb offer convincing and coherent criticism of secular democracy and 'western' values and politics. They eloquently criticise socialism, capitalism, colonialism, secular democracy and the 'pagan materialism' (*jahiliyya-madiyya*) of the west (ibid:95). Their arguments are compelling and many of them overlap with those of European movements, such as anti-capitalism.

Maududi and Qutb's political ideas are bound up in the all importance of Islam and Allah in society. "*Sovereignty and legitimacy are unassailably placed beyond the realm of human endeavour*", Secularism and democracy are seen as a usurpation of Allah's sovereignty (Choueiri, 1990:105). Democracy is therefore, a direct violation of divine laws and a reversion to the days of pagan ignorance (*jahiliyya*), secularism meanwhile, is said to lead to corruption, oppression and treachery (ibid, 1990:106). "*For*

Maududi the idea of social justice is a stratagem of Satan to intrigue humans" (ibid:116). Maududi and Qutb do entertain some ideas that seem ridiculous or racist to a secular European scholar. The Zionist and Christian conspiracies, planning to undermine Islam or rid the world of spirituality all together are examples (ibid:107). The association of Jews with Capitalism and usury is a recurring theme, as is the idea that Communism is also a Jewish plot (ibid:119).

These types of radical ideas have reached Britain and the most angry and violent strains of Islamic radicalism are being preached here. 'Dirty Kuffar', the violent 'jihad rap' song released on the Internet and distributed through mosques, reported by Barnett, (2004) demonstrated the depths of hatred that exist. Gardner and Shukur point out that a "*heightened commitment to Islam, allows those involved both to express their frustrations with mainstream British society and to join a worldwide trend which links them politically and financially to global ummah*" (Gardner and Shukur, 1994:163). Gardner and Shukur point to the role of transnational communities and diaspora in the formation and construction of new currents within Islam. The effect of these linkages has been to increase the importance of events throughout the Muslim world on communities outside it. Solidarity with Muslims in other countries and a Global worldview are also features of this (Gardner and Shukur, 1994:163). These new forms of Islam see Islam as a 'total' political system. The continual comparison and interaction with the west has led to change, hybridity, and ambivalence in both Islam and 'the West'.

The effect of Politics

Political events have played a crucial role in the formation and popularity of Islamic radicalism and other currents in Islam. A series of events and controversies from the eighties until today has stimulated and maintained the strength and appeal of Islamic radicalism and other forms of political Islam. Influenced by the ideas of Bernhard Lewis, Samuel Huntington wrote the now famous 'Clash of Civilisations' (1993). He predicted that "*the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural*". He also states that economic modernization and social change are separating people from local identities. He goes on to say that these forces also weaken the nation state as a source of identity. Which also contradicts the more 'liberal' scholars cited above on this topic. He claims that religion has filled this gap in many parts of the world, often in the form of movements that are labelled 'fundamentalist' (Huntington, 1993).

Huntington points the finger of blame for this conflict firmly at Islam, claiming that “*Islam has bloody borders*”. Due to this aggression, he maintains, ‘the West’ must strengthen and protect itself and its dominance by limiting the military and economic strength of the Muslim world (Huntingdon 1993).

This article led to a war of words between right wing and liberal scholars. Edward Said responded to Huntington’s article with *‘The Clash of Ignorance’* (2001). He points out that Huntington and Lewis do not acknowledge the internal dynamics and plurality of every ‘civilization’. Terms like ‘the west’ and ‘Islam’ are too simplistic. He balances criticism of ‘Islamic fundamentalists’ by pointing out similar distortions and zealotry in “Jewish” and “Christian” religious and political discourse. Said wisely concludes that “*it is better to think in terms of powerful and powerless communities, the secular politics of reason and ignorance, and universal principles of justice and injustice.*” (Said, 2001).

It is interesting to note that Maududi and Qutb subscribe to similar ideas about the total incompatibility of western secularism and Islam as Huntington does. The similarities in these simplistic notions and inflammatory rhetoric are indicative of the political motivations of their intellectual work and their extremist worldviews.

Recent history in the Middle East reinforces antagonism between the Muslim World and the Anglo-American hegemony. Peter Beaumont’s article, *‘The Roots of Muslim Anger’* for the Observer offers a good analysis of this. He identifies Anglo-American attacks on Afghanistan and Iraq and support for Israel as specific grievances. He finds that internal conflicts within the Islamic world are influential and less obvious (Beaumont, 2001). Beaumont cites Professor Abdul Sattar Kassem, a lecturer in political science at the University of Nablus, “*What you have to understand is that many Arabs and Muslims want to build an Islamic civilisation in its own right. They blame the West in general - and America in particular - for subjugating that ambition by dividing the Arab world through the dictators that America supports. America has done this by fragmenting the Islamic world, dividing it under rulers it supports. America has perverted the attempts to democratise the Arab world. They are hypocrites. They preach freedom and democracy, but prevent Arabs from enjoying it and exploit their wealth. The final issue is the US support for Israel in tormenting the Palestinians.*” (Beaumont, 2001)

These sentiments are common in the Muslim world and beyond. However, Beaumont identifies other

sources of rancour. Hazem Saghiyeh, a London-based columnist for the Arabic newspaper Al Hayat, identifies some of the same causes of friction as Professor Kassem, but spreads the blame for the problem more widely. The failure of ‘the Islamic project’ on issues such as governance and modernisation are also crucial factors. This sense of failure has fostered a historic sense of inferiority at Europe’s dominance of the world since the nineteenth century. This is part of the continuous process of self-evaluation with respect to ‘the other’, identified by Hall, Cohen and Said. Feelings of inferiority are coupled with the demographic factors of urbanisation and unequal development. “*These are ... people who have lost their traditional ways of life but have not become modern, who have not benefited through all their education. It is a recipe for psychological breakdown and hysteria. In the past two decades that gap of expectation has increasingly been filled by the politicisation of Islam and Islamic fundamentalism*” (ibid.).

Deep divisions in the Islamic world itself accompanied the crisis of the nineteenth century. These divided those who argued for reform, modernisation or ‘an Islamic Enlightenment’ and those arguing for Islamic fundamentalism (ibid.). These factors were exacerbated in 1948 when Israel defeated Arab armies. The Military defeats, underdevelopment, lack of democracy and freedom of expression led to the rise of conspiracy theories (ibid.). Theories like those of Maududi and Qutb, blaming America or Jews for their feelings of powerlessness and alienation.

Opportunistic leaders such as Ayatollah Khomeini and Bin Laden understand and manipulate these feelings. Many of the poor and disillusioned see the ideas of Islamic radicalism as a magic solution to their problems (ibid.). In ‘the West’, similar discourses create hatred and fear, from the cultural racism of “orientalism” and the “Clash of Civilisations” through to the self-fulfilling prophecy of “Islamophobia”.

Conclusions

The huge inequalities in the world and the injustice of the ‘new world order’ have created a platform for radical and often violent movements to prosper. The seemingly unassailable empire of American capitalism and western culture are being attacked. They have spawned many cultures of resistance, and among the fiercest, and most attractive is Islamic radicalism.

There are large diverse Muslim communities in many Western countries. These migrations and the improvements in global communications, have led to the creation of new, hybrid cultures. The identities of

second generation Bangladeshis living in Britain are changing. Over time, with the mixing and inter-actions of different cultures, through the experiences of migration, minority, and exclusion, new identities and cultures are formed and chosen. New links and networks have grown up and Islam has assumed a growing importance as a unifying force for many oppressed peoples around the world.

British Bangladeshis may reject British society for any number of reasons. Poverty, exclusion, racism, or the British government foreign policies, which kill or support the killing of thousands of Muslims every year. Islamic radicalism is one of many paths they could take in response, which for reasons outlined above, is particularly attractive at the moment. The rise of Islamic radicalism has a range of global causes, and its popularity among British Bangladeshis is due to the interaction of local factors with global politics. We must remember, however that we are all responsible for the spread of the politics of hate, as it is a response to repression, exclusion, and hopelessness.

As Jason Burke points out in his book *'Al-Qaeda'*, "The greatest weapon in the war on terrorism is the courage, decency, humour and integrity of the vast proportion of the world's 1.2 billion Muslims. It is this that is restricting the spread of al-Qaeda, not the activities of counter-terrorism experts. Without it, we are lost. There is indeed a battle between the west and men like Bin Laden. But it is not a battle for global supremacy. It is a battle for hearts and minds. And it is a battle that we, and our allies in the Muslim world, are currently losing." (cited in Dalrymple, 2004)

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BANGLADESHI DIASPORA IN UK AND USA

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The term *Diaspora* generally stands for transnational groups of immigrants living abroad but maintaining economic, political, social and emotional ties with their homeland and with other immigrant communities of same origin. Diaspora has become an important element of international migration over the years. The economic and social interactions of the Diaspora can be beneficial simultaneously for migrants, host countries and home countries.

Nearly 3 million people have so far migrated from Bangladesh to take up employment overseas. It is estimated that 1.05 million among them have now

permanently settled abroad, as citizens or permanent residents. The Bangladeshi Diaspora contributes to the development of the country in many ways. However, there exists very little information on the Bangladesh Diaspora. To fill this gap, the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment (MEWOE) of the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) commissioned a study that was supported by International Organization for Migration (IOM), Dhaka. The report entitled 'Institutionalising Diaspora Linkage: The Emigrant Bangladeshis in UK and USA' was published in February this year by IOM, Dhaka.

The report identified Bangladeshi Diaspora as communities of long term migrants from Bangladesh who have settled permanently in and owe allegiance to host countries while at the same time are aware of their origin and identity, and maintain varying degrees of linkage with Bangladesh as well as fellow members of the immigrant communities.

Long term Bangladeshi immigrants have mostly migrated to the industrial countries including UK, USA, Italy, Japan, Australia, Greece, Canada, Spain, Germany, South Africa, France, Netherlands, Belgium and Switzerland. Among them, UK and USA accounts for the largest concentration of long term Bangladeshi immigrants.

The report notes that Expatriate Bangladeshis (EBs) have made their mark in diverse fields. Some have made original contribution in the field of research and education. Others have carved a niche in food industry through hard labour and creativity. Second generation EBs have showed great success in entering politics and the mainstream media. They have also formed various associations. These associations and the media organisations serve the need of EB communities by providing an opportunity to enjoy a vibrant cultural life. They also provide them access to information. More importantly, they have helped in developing a pan-Bangladeshi identity in their countries of residence.

It was further noted that EBs can take part in the economic development process of Bangladesh in many ways. Those involved in business can expand their domain to Bangladesh. They can also develop backward linkage in Bangladesh by importing necessary raw materials from here. Successful professionals can also participate in the development process of Bangladesh by sharing their skills in areas of expertise. EBs involved in mainstream politics of the countries of migration can also greatly contribute by positively influencing the policies of those countries for Bangladesh.

Both first and second generation EBs maintain varying degrees of links with Bangladesh. These links have been created and are maintained for varied reasons. These include the important role of EBs in the liberation war, the regular flow of remittances and investments in the home districts particularly in property. However, it was also found that the deep emotional attachment of the first generation EBs with Bangladesh will not necessarily be passed on to the second generation. The former has undertaken various measures to keep the latter interested about the country of their roots. But success in this regard will not be

impressive without institutionalising the process. Different innovative steps, therefore, should also initiated by government, civil society and private sector of Bangladesh to keep the ties with second generation EBs alive.

It was found that while participating in the economic development of the country in terms of investments, the most common avenue is real estate. Different categories of investor EBs faced various types of problems while investing. It was also found that a majority of professional EBs were deeply interested to participate in the development process of Bangladesh through sharing expertise that they have acquired in different fields.

On the basis of the findings of the study, some recommendations have been made. These have been grouped in three sets. The first set of recommendations deal with policy issues. The second set is made to address the concerns of the EBs and to build their confidence on the government. The third aims at institutionalising the mutually beneficial relationship among EBs and Bangladesh through concrete measures.

At the policy level, it is suggested that along with the many government initiatives already in place, the GoB may also highlight the problems of EBs to the government of host countries in bilateral discussions. It should also protect them by immediately considering the ratification of the 1990 *Convention on the Rights of Migrant Workers and all Members of their Families*. Efforts must be made towards image building that is based on positive achievements of the people of the country. Furthermore, the concerned agencies of the government should explore the possible market opportunities in Europe and North America, and other long term migrant destinations. On the basis of the market needs, the government has to make significant investment towards developing human resource to cater to such market. In order to make globalisation process meaningful, Bangladesh government should also take initiative so that the labour sending countries demand greater liberalisation in accessing labour market in the developed countries.

To build the confidence to the EBs, the government must give priority to some of the problems they are facing. Steps must be taken to improve services at the airport, provide migrants with voting rights and the right to contest in election and ensure speedy legal redress. A separate welfare fund may also be created for the welfare of EBs.

It has also been recommended that the contribution made by the EBs in the War of Liberation and

continuous support through remittances, investment, education and welfare work should be recognised through national celebration of a special day for the EBs. An award scheme for the Bangladeshi diaspora including both EBs and short term migrants should also be introduced.

Steps should also be taken to strengthen the linkages between the second generation and the home countries. Efforts could be made to organise Bangladesh study programmes, student exchange programmes, study travel programmes and joint projects among young EBs and young Bangladeshis. A Diaspora Research Centre could also be set up to carry out research on policy agenda charted out by the ministry. Steps must also be taken to encourage investment of EBs and encourage them to utilise their skills and expertise for the betterment of the country of origin. The government may consider taking steps to disseminate information, organise expertise such as education and health projects and training centres on catering. However, the government must also take steps to improve the law and order situation of the country. EBs must also be encouraged to influence the policies in the host countries that are beneficial to Bangladesh.

To encourage these, the government must also bring about necessary institutional changes including setting up an Inter-ministerial Coordination Committee, Cells in Bangladesh missions and Sub-committees under the MoEWOE may be founded. The capacity of the ministry must be developed further to enable them to take these steps and institutionalise the relationship between the Bangladeshi Diaspora and Bangladesh.

Many countries of the world have large diaspora populations. The diaspora groups generally possess deep psychological attachment with their roots. Experiences of global diasporas make it clear that feeling of diaspora communities for their countries of origin does not automatically produce mutually beneficial outcome. The country of origin has to take significant proactive measures to get on board its diaspora as partners in development.

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Report on the Project on **CAPACITY BUILDING FOR COMBATING TRAFFICKING**

The issue of trafficking in women and children is increasingly gaining attention in Bangladesh. Until recently, activities for combating trafficking were carried out mostly by NGOs. While it is indeed necessary for the higher echelons of the government to acknowledge and address the problem of human trafficking it is equally important for local government representatives to develop knowledge and understanding of the process in order to play an effective role in its prevention. To this end the International Organization for Migration (IOM) had undertaken a two-year project to help prevent the phenomenon through capacity building of local level government representatives, i.e., Union Parishad (UP) chairmen and members and staff of local NGOs. The Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU), one of the partners of the project, was responsible for developing a training module and other support materials for local level government representatives on combating trafficking. The project period was from March 2002 to February 2004.

The target beneficiaries of the project were the village people. The role of RMMRU was to prepare a comprehensive training module for awareness

campaigns by taking inputs from grassroots partner NGOs, other government and non-government organisations, conducting training of the trainers and monitoring the programmes of the NGOs under the project. The aims of this two-year project were:

- i) To enhance the knowledge and understanding of people from vulnerable areas on the complexity and magnitude of human trafficking,
- ii) To build the capacity of local government representatives, rural women, men, adolescents and children of vulnerable areas in combating trafficking.
- iii) To build institutional capacity in implementing programme on anti-trafficking issues as well as orderly migration.
- iv) To provide information and communication support materials to local level leaders on trafficking and orderly migration.

RMMRU successfully accomplished the targets of two year project. It trained 30 NGO personnel, prepared an anti-trafficking training module for the UP chairmen and members and providing training to 56 UP chairmen and members. Within the project period

RMMRU monitored field level trainings imparted by the local partner NGOs. RMMRU also monitored interventions of Combating Trafficking Committee* (CTC) organised by Rights Jessore and Association for Community Development (ACD) Rajshahi.

The 138-page training module for the trainers was supplemented by supporting materials, i.e., transparency, drama scripts, drama video and visual aides. RMMRU also developed two posters as disseminating tools. The whole process of module development can be divided into several phases.

Preparation of a Draft Information Kit

Following the review of existing materials on trafficking, a draft information kit was developed mostly on the basis of secondary information collected from various organisations. Six chapters were developed on different aspects of migration and trafficking. RMMRU also used some information on rescue and rehabilitation after interviewing concerned officials of the Bangladesh Mission in Kolkata and Socio-Legal Aid Research and Training Centre (SLARTC) of Kolkata.

Improving the Draft Information Kit

A Preparatory Needs Assessment Workshop (PNAW) was organised in the first quarter of the project as part of the module development programme. Staff of the partner organisations – ACD and Rights Jessore were invited to participate in the workshop. PNAW was organised at a time when ACD and Right Jessore had already completed a number of their needs assessment meetings with the UP chairmen and members in the project areas. Participants presented reports of these meetings at the PNAW.

The rapporteur's report of the PNAW highlighted important issues that needed to be incorporated in the draft information kit. Moreover, ideas about incorporating model programmes for raising awareness against trafficking in the chapter on prevention were considered. The draft information kit was revised and improved by taking inputs from the PNAW.

Designing a Session on Drama

In its project plan a drama on prevention of trafficking was envisaged to ensure that participants clearly understand the issue. The same drama was used by the UP chairmen and members in their efforts to sensitise the people on the issue. Pursuant to IOM's suggestion, RMMRU invited Theatre Centre for Social Development (TCSD) to implement this part of the

project. On the basis of RMMRU's concept, TCSD prepared the draft script. A number of meetings were held between RMMRU and TCSD in this regard and necessary changes were made in the original script. Eventually, the final scripts of a comprehensive drama and a few short pieces on the method and network of trafficking were prepared and added to the module.

Consultation on Information Kit

Participants of the partner organisations provided valuable input for the information kit during PNAW. They presented case studies and work experience on trafficking issues. RMMRU decided to arrange a three-day follow up consultation with some of the participants with two fold objectives. Firstly, the consultation was aimed to have detailed information of data and case studies. Secondly, it was aimed at validating the information kit developed after the PNAW. Apart from fulfilling these objectives, intense discussion took place in the three-day meeting on problems in implementing the laws that have been framed to combat trafficking.

Finalising the Module

The information kit was modified after the consultation meeting. New chapters were incorporated taking into account the duties and responsibilities of UP chairmen and members. Model awareness programmes for prevention of trafficking were also included. RMMRU sought the assistance of Bangladesh Centre for Communication and Development (BCCP) in order to develop the techniques and tools of these model programmes. A research assistant was assigned with the task of scanning BCCP library. A lesson plan and plenary for each session was developed at this stage and the preface, rationale and objective of the workshop, visual aides and evaluation sheet preparation were completed. A new session on *Various Steps and Techniques of Organising Training* was planned.

The final version of the module contained twelve working sessions including the inaugural and concluding sessions. The CT Sub Committee monitored the preparation of the module at every stage. It is hoped that the module will improve further with suggestions and critiques from the trainers.

Developing Training Support Materials

RMMRU has developed nine flip charts as visual aides for disseminating information about trafficking. The issue of migration, target of trafficking, methods of trafficking, trafficking network, duties and responsibilities of UP chairmen and members for combating trafficking, consequences of trafficking, and

* The committee comprising representatives of UP and local elites

methods of anti-trafficking campaign have been presented and explained through the flipcharts.

RMMRU has also developed two posters for UP chairmen and members as disseminating material. In the developing phase all the partners including IOM provided valuable inputs on the design of the posters. One poster contains messages regarding duties and responsibilities of UP members and the other explains trafficking-migration nexus.

Printing of the Module and Distribution

Throughout the project period, the ToT module was updated following inputs recovered. Updated information from books, journals, newsletters and other materials on trafficking was incorporated in the module on a regular basis. The project staff of

RMMRU participated in different training workshops on trafficking and module development. This also contributed to the development of the module. The Sub-Committee also reviewed the module in their regular meetings and provided valuable suggestions in this regard. Before finalising the module RMMRU met IOM and discussed different aspects of the module. Finally the module was given to a professional editor for editing. After final editing RMMRU published the module. It distributed the module to different ministries and other government functionaries, NGOs, donor agencies and various departments of public and private Universities.

Reporter:

Khandaker Rezwanaul Karim

Two RMMRU Talks

Speakers at a discussion session underscored the need for bringing in labour migration in the globalisation discourse. They also urged for policy changes with regard to migration into developed countries. The discussion took place following a talk on the *Illicit Movements of Goods and People in the age of Globalisation*, organised by the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU), at the University of Dhaka on 18 January 2004. The keynote presentation was made by Dr. Gargi Bhattachariya of the University of Birmingham, UK. The programme was participated by faculty members and students of the University of Dhaka.

Dr. Bhattachariya argued that the Bretton Woods institutions have led to the present form of globalisation, which is a combination of economic and foreign policy relations. Its vision, she argued, rightly or wrongly, places international trade at the centre of world peace and stability. The system is often criticised that the whole machinery of intervention in the economies of developing countries do not seem to benefit the poor. Dr. Bhattachariya favoured creating a framework for transparency and cooperation in global economy. She emphasised that regulation is now-a-days important with regard to issues like money laundering. She termed it as global criminal economy, which is the other side of information economy and network society. She identified that the end of Cold War and demise of the former Soviet Union exacerbated and accelerated the erosion of state legitimacy in dealing with organised crime. Last of all, she identified migration as an ongoing and escalating concern of the developed world. It still remains a highly politically charged issue despite demographic crisis, labour shortage, economic and social benefits.

The other discussion took place following a talk on *International Law and Minority Rights*, organised by the Refugee and Migratory Movement Research Unit (RMMRU), at the University of Dhaka on 15 February 2004. The keynote presentation was made by Dr. Javaid Rehman, Professor of International Law of the University of Ulster, UK. The programme was participated by the faculty members, scholars, researchers, and students.

Dr. Rahman stated that historically minorities have been object of persecution. He informed that after the First World War, attempts were made to protect minorities, although these efforts were mainly Europe centric. He identified lack of any particular definition of minorities and inherent weakness in those definitions. He argued that a group can be identified as minority in terms of power relations, although it may be numerically a majority. Dr. Rehman referred to different international legal instruments dealing with different aspects of human rights. He explained substantial rights of minorities: right of life and physical existence, right to non-discrimination and right to autonomy. He further identified the vulnerabilities of minorities and threats against their survival, which include risk of genocide, criminalisation and destruction of culture, religion and language, racial inequality and exclusion of minorities by the UN system on their autonomy. Dr. Rehman emphasised that minorities need special care and protection. He further urged for constructive dialogue, effective role of different international organisations and functionaries, regional organisations and non governmental agencies in standard setting and promoting the rights of minorities.

SECURITY AND EMPOWERMENT: THE CASE OF LEFT-BEHIND SPOUSES OF BANGLADESHI MIGRANT WORKERS

*Shahzada M Akram**

A necessary condition of short-term contract migration is that married male migrant workers leave behind their wives and families in the home country when they take up overseas employment. Separation from the husband has both positive and negative impacts on the left behind wives of migrant workers. In performing tasks that were previously performed by their husbands along with their own tasks, the left behind wives have to learn to cope with the changed gender role. Increased participation in the decision-making process of the family, management and use of remittance sent by their husbands, and in some cases running trades and stalls as small businesses independently have positive impacts on their empowerment and security in social and financial terms. On the other hand, bearing the full responsibility of maintenance of family and child rearing may become difficult for some of these women. Control imposed by in-laws may not allow them to participate in the family decision-making process. The risk of abuse by in-laws may become higher. Long absence of the husband may make a section of these women emotionally stressed. The consequences of male migration on the women left behind, therefore, candidates an important area for research.

Most research on international labour migration dealt with the migrants themselves. Consequences of male migration on the left behind females have been generally ignored, though some studies have been done.⁴ However, there has not been any major study on this group of women in Bangladesh. International migration brings in a new dimension to the reality that as an individual or as a group, women constantly face threats to their security at different spheres in Bangladesh's society. There is a need to identify what can be done at the policy level to provide support to this group of women in receiving and utilising remittances more effectively. There is also the need to make labour migration a development tool through providing protection of rights, and ensuring security to the migrant workers' wives left behind.

This study has attempted to encapsulate the level of security and empowerment that occurs among the left

behind wives of migrant workers from Bangladesh. The study has made an attempt to understand what changes have been experienced by the left behind wives in terms of economic, social, physical and emotional security. The study has also tried to trace changes in their level of participation in the decision-making process. It tried to identify the agencies the wives of migrant workers develop while dealing with the changed situation.

In order to generate primary data, interviews were taken from 100 left behind wives of migrant workers in Tongibari of Munshiganj, Kalihati of Tangail, Comilla and Maizdi of Noakhali in January and February 2004. Three categories: those who lived with their in-laws, those who lived with their own parents, and those who lived on their own were selected. Informal discussion with local leaders, and teachers also took place in all these places.

Field Findings

Migration of the husband in most cases resulted in higher living standard for the left behind wives. It was observed that most of the respondents used consumer items like television, video cassette player, refrigerator, renovated or new house, electricity, and safe drinking water at a higher rate, and natural gas for cooking in some areas. The majority of the respondents were economically well off compared to their husbands' pre-migration situation. This was mainly due to the regular flow of remittance. Some of the respondents had other sources of income as added economic support, while a few others diversified their sources of income through investing in income generating activities with the remitted money. These included investing in shallow (irrigation) machine, husking machine, sewing machine and rickshaws. Economic security was also achieved through savings in the form of cash deposited in banks or ornaments possessed by the respondents. Many invested in agricultural land. Most of the nuclear families were dependent on remittances. Other sources of family income included agriculture, cattle rearing, kitchen gardening and small business. It was observed that some respondents became involved in land management after their husbands' migration. A large number had skills such as sewing, tailoring,

embroidery and agricultural activities, but only a few utilised the skills in income earning.

Economic vulnerability was observed in case of few respondents. This was triggered off by a range of factors: due to decrease of harvest, decrease of income due to failed migration, not being able to maintain primarily household accounts, and increased likelihood of theft and robbery.

Restriction on women's freedom of movement hindered the left behind wives' access to formal sectors. Most of them faced obstacles to go outside the house, increased control by their parents or parents-in-law, other family members, difficulties in controlling their children, and social scandals due to the absence of husband. Husbands' absence in many instances, enhanced control on their movements, manifested through such restrictions. On the other hand, some respondents had comparatively more freedom of movement, social support from the families, and more access to formal sectors like educational institutions, banks, and NGOs.

Providing better education to children, more importance given to the respondents' opinions, neighbours coming to them for consultation, and better marriage prospects of family members were identified by most of the respondents as positive impacts. It was also found that the left behind wives learnt to use social networks in receiving economic support from relatives, neighbours, and local traders. Receiving emotional support in the form of counseling was also very important for the respondents.

It was observed that in some cases, large extended families broke up into nuclear families. The security needs compelled some respondents to live in their natal home after the husband's migration. However, in many cases, close relatives of husbands' side usually resided in the same compound. As a result, on one hand, the left behind wives' social security was ensured as they received all kinds of support from them. On the other hand, in some cases, their freedom of movement and participation in important decision-making were restricted. However, a number of the respondents mostly living in extended families faced ill treatment from other family members during the husbands' absence. In some cases, physical, verbal and emotional abuse by mainly in-laws was observed. Incidences of such abuse varied according to age and type of the respondent's family. The physically abused respondents, who lived in extended families of husbands and were relatively younger experienced such abuse mostly from within the family. Respondents living in nuclear families faced such abuse from neighbours.

It was found that long absence of husband created loneliness among a significant number of the respondents. The feeling of being deprived of physical relations in spite of being married, and development of mental gap with the husband was also identified by many respondents. Some lost trust in their husbands. The respondents followed different methods in facing such challenges. However, a number of respondents could not manage emotional stress. Regular contact with husbands ensured emotional security to the respondents.

A positive impact of husbands' migration was improved self-esteem of the left behind wives. A significant number of them took more decisions as a result of increased responsibilities, developed skill, and better communication skill in managing household activities, and they became involved in income generation. Developed social status also played a crucial role in this regard.

It was observed that the respondents' involvement in the decision making process significantly changed after the husband's migration. In this regard, the respondent's age and type of family were important factors. It was observed that the respondents participating in the decision making of the family were in most cases above 30 years, while respondents below 25 were hardly involved in such activities.

It was found that migration of husband brought a large number of the respondents out of home and gave them opportunity to participate in outside activities. A good number of respondents were involved in selling milk, eggs and vegetables, processing crops, managing agricultural production, and running businesses. They became empowered to some extent since most of them took decisions on spending their own earning.

Notes:

¹ Siddiqui, Tasneem, 2001, *Transcending Boundaries: Labour Migration of Females from Bangladesh*, (Dhaka: University Press Limited), p. 2. On an average, more than 225,000 Bangladeshis left the country each year during the 1990s on short-term contract jobs in different Middle-Eastern and Southeast Asian countries through formal channels.

² Siddiqui, Tasneem, 2004, *Institutionalising Diaspora Linkage: The Emigrant Bangladeshis in UK and USA*, (Dhaka: Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment, Government of Bangladesh and International Organization for Migration).

³ <http://www.bmet.org.bd>. According to the Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET) so far an amount of Tk 134,700.74 crore has been received (from 1976 to June 2004) as remittance from the Bangladeshis abroad. It is estimated that almost the same amount of money is received every year through unofficial channels. The growth rate in this sector is increasing every year.

⁴ See Goza, Franklin W. Eduardo Rios-Neto and Paula Vieira, 1993, 'The consequences of temporary out-migration for families left behind: the case of Jequitinhonha Valley, Brazil' Chapter XVII in UN *Internal Migration of women in Developing Countries*, proceedings of the UN Expert Meeting on the Feminization of Internal Migration, (New York: United Nations); Hettige, S T. 1997, 'Social Cost of Migration', presented at an International Conference on *Migrant Women Workers* organised by Regional Office of International Solidarity Center, Colombo, October 7-9; Hadi, Abdullahel 2001, 'Internal Migration and the Change of Women's Position among the Left-Behind in Rural Bangladesh', International Journal of Population Geography, No. 7; and Srivastava, Ravi, and S K Sasikumar, 2003, 'An Overview of Migration in India, its Impact and Key Issues', presented in a conference on *Migration, Development and*

Pro-poor Policy Choices in Asia, jointly organised by Department for International Development (DFID), UK and Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU) in Dhaka on 22 – 24 June 2003.

* *Shahzada M Akram is a Research Associate of the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU). He along with Khandaker Rezwanaul Karim of RMMRU undertook this research with a fellowship from the Bangladesh Freedom Foundation under its Forum on Women in Security and International Affairs (FOWSIA) project.*

THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITION OF DISINHERITED HINDU WIDOWS

*Ruma Halder**

Introduction

It is hard to find in particular what the position of women in the ancient Hindu social system was. However, it is clear from the old religious scriptures that with the end of the matriarchal system and introduction of patriarchy, women have become dependent on their male counterparts to a large extent. Since ancient times, Hindu women have been deprived of their right to property of their father and/or husband for survival. They remain dependent on parents during their childhood, on husband in youth and on children in old ages.

In Hindu society the scriptural and traditional issues are seen to be more important than the law. As a result, the insecurity that Hindu women suffer becomes a normal phenomenon. There have also been cases of misinterpretation of the scriptures. Especially, the evil impact of Hindu caste system has taken a dangerous form. Although many other laws have been enacted, reformed and amended, so far no the Hindu family law has not been touched.

Although in neighbouring India laws in this regard have been updated since independence in 1947, in Bangladesh the pre-1947 laws are still prevailing. In India laws have been framed and amended that have established women's rights on the property of father and husband. A wife's right to her husband's property is elaborately mentioned in Article 8 of Indian Succession Act. It is stated that if a Hindu man fails to distribute his property through a deed or testament, the inheritance will be determined based on Article 8 of the Hindu Inheritance Law and according to the list described in that law. In this way, a Hindu widow can

demand the property of her husband under this law. Article 25 of Hindu Marriage Law states that a Hindu divorcee woman will receive subsistence allowance from her former husband. It is also stated that if the divorcee woman does not marry again, does not engage herself in adultery, and does not earn enough, she is entitled to receive subsistence allowance for the rest of her life from her former husband. However, the issues related to the reform of Hindu family law in India are not applicable to Bangladesh.

Now a days, government and NGO are engaged in numerous campaigns for the establishment of rights of women and their empowerment. Still women are being repressed and deprived of their rights. Hindu women represent the most disadvantaged category in this regard. Independent efforts to ensure the security of Hindu women is hardly evident. In most cases the issue is avoided as a sensitive 'minority issue'. Even the leaders of this community have not taken any major attempt to address the problem. It is also important to mention that as there is no system of registration of Hindu marriage, the violence against women including incidents of desertion, child marriage and dowry is increasing.

Area of Research

In order to understand the socio-economic status of Hindu widows, information has been collected from a number of selected areas inhabited by Hindus. In conducting the study, issues such as the socio-economic status and availability of the target population have been considered. One hundred case studies have been collected from Shashikor and Lakshmipur village of Madaripur, Arichaghati and

Onmoypur village of Manikganj, and Barisal Zila Sadar. Opinions of lawyers, teachers, religious leaders, members of elite groups, and women leaders have also been taken.

Key Findings

It has been found from the interviews that the condition of Hindu women in society is extremely vulnerable. Out of the 100 respondents, only 4 were found capable of taking independent decisions on household matters and holding a valued position within the family. The rest of the 96 women were found to be vulnerable, their life uncertain and dependent. Most of them had no property. As soon as their husbands died, they were turned into slaves of the family while others became separated from the family.

In Hindu society if a widow does not have any boy child then the girl child will be deprived of her father's property. Moreover, women who do not have any child, do not have any right to their husbands' property. Although by law those who have the right to enjoy husbands' property, in most cases they are deprived of that, and are driven away from husbands' house. On the other hand, although it is legally admissible, widow marriages are still seen as an immoral act and thus are highly contemplated.

A Hindu widow hardly has any economic support, as she does not receive any property from her father or husband. As a result, her opinion is hardly valued in the decision making process of the family. She lives like an outsider and dependent on others. After the death of her husband she has to give up all her aspirations and passion. She can hardly involve herself in income generation outside the family as it is construed as disrespectful. Under such circumstances, it becomes difficult for her to earn a livelihood.

In Hindu tradition, all the gifts received by the bride during marriage is known as 'wife's/woman's property' and if necessary a widow can maintain her livelihood from this property. In ancient times, this 'wife's/woman's property' was the source of earning for widows. However, at present no such property exists for Hindu widows. This is because the in-laws consider the gifts received by the bride from her parents as their property. Due to the lack of resources it becomes difficult for a Hindu widow to raise her children.

A widow is not welcomed to observe social and religious programmes/ benedictions. It is also difficult to find a suitable bridegroom to marry off the daughter of a widow, as the mother cannot offer lucrative dowry for such marriages. As a result, the daughter of a Hindu

widow may suffer. Thus, with the death of husband, not only the life of the widow but also that of her daughter or disabled children becomes insecure. Hindu family law does not recognise the right of property to widow, girl child or disabled child.

Most of the women who do not have children do not have any place in the society since following the death of their husband they lose the last resort. The study shows that in this situation, many widows have been separated from their family and have taken permanent shelter in a *Mandir* or a monastery.

Caste system is another obstacle for the widows. It is found that a *Brahmin* widow cannot work for the low caste Hindu family or even cannot drink water in that house. This illustrates the plight of Hindu widows belonging to the upper caste.

Another problem of Hindu widows is that if both the daughter-in-law and mother-in-law become widows, the latter is deprived of the right to the property. The reality of the situation is that the daughter-in-law is forced to leave her in-laws' house as the mother-in-law sends the daughter-in-law to her parents' house or to India for remarriage. Due to various types of problems a large number of Hindu widows tend to migrate to neighbouring country. They believe there they will be able to seek legal support to redress these problems.

Issues of Consideration

Almost all the interviewees expressed that the level of vulnerabilities would have been much lower if they had economic capability. They identified the existing situation as inhumane. They seek for a change based on the universal human rights.

Almost all the lawyers, intellectuals, religious leaders, eminent persons, teachers and women leaders interviewed supported the cause of Hindu widows from the rights perspective. According to them, in order to establish their rights in conformity with the universal human rights, such ancient tradition has to be changed. There were some differing opinions as well. Some argued that in the present situation, the Hindu community in Bangladesh is already at risk. The recognition of Hindu widows' rights to property under an inheritance law may further increase their vulnerability as a community.

* Ruma Halder completed her MSS in Political Science from the University of Dhaka. This study has been conducted under the Young Researchers' Forum fellowship of RMMRU, and supported by the Higher Education Link Programme with the Refugee Studies Centre, Oxford University.



SOUTH ASIA MIGRATION RESOURCE NETWORK BULLETIN

NATIONAL LABOUR POLICY OF NEPAL GOVERNMENT

*Jagannath Adhikari**

His Majesty's Government of Nepal has issued a National Labour Policy in 1999. This document primarily deals with general labour policies and has no policy and practice of treating migrant workers (MWs) specifically. However, the following provisions are indirectly concerned with MWs as well:

1. One of the objectives of the labour policy is to make special attempts for institutional development of the regime of foreign employment of Nepalese, and secure its continuity.
2. For the expansion of foreign employment and increment of the reliability of its business, a high level advisory committee shall be constituted with the participation of ministry of labour, home, finance and National Planning Commission and foreign employment entrepreneurs organisations.
3. For the development of foreign employment, if necessary a foreign employment institution shall be established with the participation of the private sector also.

Plan of action for the implementation the policies stated above are:

- Programmes must be developed to eliminate gender discrimination in employment, and to address these problems women must be provided with access to technical and skill programmes.

Ratification of International Conventions

- Priority shall be given to ratify the important conventions, ILO conventions in particular.

Social Security

- Special programmes shall be conducted for security of migrant workers.

New Developments with regard to Foreign Labour Migration

1. Revision on Foreign Employment Act

A National Consultation on Draft Bill on Foreign Employment Act was held on 31 March 2004 in Kathmandu. Several MWs made friendly recommendation, which have been incorporated in the document. The document is currently being finalised.

2. Sticker Stamping Provision in the passport of MWs

The Government of Nepal has started the sticker provision in the passport of MWs from 13 April 2004 (i.e. 1 *Baisakh* of Nepalese New Year). When all the procedures and documentation are completed, the Department of Foreign Employment stamps a sticker. The sticker acts as a proof and the concerned country provides visa, following the sticker stamping. This step is taken to ensure that the person who had applied for the vacant position can only have the chance to go abroad. In the past the recruiting agencies would often change the name list after the visa approval in bulk. The government hopes that such malpractices could be substantially reduced after the introduction of sticker stamping method.

3. Pre-departure orientation Session

The Pre-departure orientation session has been made compulsory from February 13 2004. The government has strictly ordered the recruiting agencies to give an orientation to the MWs before departure. As a result such Pre-Departure Orientation Institutions have flourished and totals to 45 in Kathmandu.

4. Scheme for loan facility

The Government of Nepal started a scheme to provide loan facility to *Dalit* (artisan or low caste), *Janajati*

(ethnic community people) and those affected by the conflict situation to work as MWs from mid-April 2004. The Bank of Kathmandu, Nepal provides loan at 8% interest rate. The loan amounts to a maximum of Rs. 1,00,000 (Euro 1,111). The outgoing migrant has to bear the 20 percent of the total amount required and 80 percent is to be provided by the Bank of Kathmandu. The Department of Foreign Employment Promotion has deposited Rs. 10,000,000 (Euro 111,111) in the Bank of Kathmandu as insurance for the banks to provide loan to the persons meeting the criteria fixed by the government. The Bank receives the salary from the employer company and deducts its interest and pays the remaining amount to the family of the MWs here in Nepal.

5. Reservations in foreign employment quotas

The government has also fixed a quota on foreign labour migrants. According to this policy, the recruiting agencies should allocate 10% of the total positions available to women, *dalits* (low caste), *Janajatis* (ethnic community) and to those affected by the political conflict. This is being strictly followed nowadays.

6. Website Launch

An interactive website was launched on 13 April 2004 for the Gulf countries. The Embassy based at Riyadh maintains this website. The URL for the site is www.rneksa.org.

7. Bilateral Agreements

Nepal-Malaysia labor accord is in the process of being signed by the two respective governments. Similarly, bilateral agreements with other Gulf countries are also being considered by the Nepalese Government.

8. Provision of Labour attaché

Government of Nepal has also adopted a policy of providing labour attaché to a country where more than 5,000 Nepali work. But till now there are only two labour attachés employed for this purpose.

9. System of Lottery introduced for the selection of foreign labour migrants

Government has recently introduced a system of selecting foreign labour migrants who meet all the criteria for employment based on a lottery. When South Korean government put in a demand of 450 individuals as trainees in their light industries, there were about 15,000 applicants. Taking the advantage of this high competition the recruitment agency that was responsible for sending labourers charged high rates. It demanded higher under-table money from the labourers. The official charge was only Rs. 90,000 for an individual, but the Lumbini Overseas, which had to send the labourers, started taking up to Rs. 500,000 from the labourers for recruitment. To correct this situation, the government introduced a lottery system and the successful candidates would only need to pay the minimum amount required. The Recruitment Agency had gone to the Supreme Court to challenge the decision of the government. But the Supreme Court has ruled in favour of the government.

10. New Data-Base System

Government has introduced a new system of developing a data-base of MWs. Until the last year it only had maintained a record of how many got work permit from the Labour Department for different countries. From this year it has started maintaining data base on gender and institutional (through recruitment agents) / individual (arranging work permit on individual basis) basis. It has a plan to introduce recording the biographical data of the labourers who go to foreign countries for the work. If this is implemented, the new data base will be suitable for analysis from various perspectives.

** Dr. Jagannath Adhikari is the Chair of Nepal Institute of Development Studies, Kathmandu.*

VISIT SAMREN WEBSITE AT

www.samren.org

This website contains information on internal and international, regular and irregular migration from and within South Asia. Major sections of the website include an introduction of SAMReN; facts and figures on migration from South Asia; emigration acts of the member countries; international legal standards and recent initiatives; bibliography on migration literature; special programmes undertaken by the concerned governments of South Asia; and profiles of different civil society organisations working in this sector in this region.

GOB INITIATIVES FOR MIGRANTS

*Dr. Mohammad Nurul Islam**

Wage Earners' Welfare Fund

In 1990, on the basis of the Emigration Ordinance of 1982, the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) created a fund for ensuring welfare of the wage earners. The Wage Earner's Welfare Fund was later supplemented by one of the three rules framed in December 2002 under the 1982 Ordinance. The Fund is constituted with subscriptions from the migrant workers, interest earned from the deposit of licenses of recruiting agencies, 10% surcharge of the fees collected through Bangladesh missions abroad, and personal and institutional contributions. Needless to say, the bulk of the fund was raised from the subscription of the migrant workers.

The fund was created with the following objectives:

- Establishment of a welfare desk at the airport;
- Transfer of body of deceased migrant workers;
- Providing assistance to sick, disabled and stranded migrant workers;
- Providing financial help to the families of deceased migrant workers;
- Providing legal assistance to the migrant workers through the embassies;

The Fund is to be utilised for the following purposes:

- Establishment of a hostel cum briefing centre;
- Organisation of an orientation and briefing programme; and
- Establishment of a recreation club and information centre under the auspices of the Bangladesh missions abroad.

The Ministry for Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment has established two welfare desks at Zia International Airport, Dhaka for facilitating safe arrival and departure of expatriate Bangladeshis. These desks are providing services to the migrant workers in getting their emigration clearance. BMET officials are deputed for 24 hours at the airport desks to deal with the matters related with expatriate workers. Probashi channel in the airport is a new initiative of the Ministry to facilitate smooth departure and arrival of the expatriate Bangladeshis at Zia International Airport. A bar-code checking for the outgoing migrants have been introduced in order to prevent illegal migration. Expatriate Bangladeshis are now receiving transportation facilities introduced for secured and risk free movement from Zia International Airport, Dhaka to the inter-district bus terminals after

arrival in Bangladesh. Two buses are providing regular service to this effect.

One of the major programmes financed by the Wage Earners' Welfare Fund is the pre-departure briefing of migrant workers. The briefing session runs for two hours three times everyday and BMET claims that the coverage area of the session is increasing day by day.

A one-stop service centre is being constructed at Eskaton, Dhaka with all modern facilities to ensure enhancement of overseas employment and residential facilities where expatriate Bangladeshis and their family member would be able to stay for short period of time in safety and security. The facilities include accommodation, verification of authenticity of passports, services of airlines, travel agencies and money exchange centres, medical test, telephone, fax and e-mail, restaurants, and community centre.

Assistance is also provided to around 15 schools for the children of Bangladeshi expatriates in the Gulf countries. Currently in case of death of migrant workers the family receives a one time grant of Tk 20,000 from BMET. Bangladesh Mission in the labour receiving countries and BMET play the major role with regard to transportation of the deceased body to Bangladesh. An amount of Tk 100,000 is given to each returnee migrant worker who has not received any compensation from his/her employer. Moreover, if he/she receives less than Tk 100,000 as compensation, the balance amount is provided.

The Fund is managed by a Board of Governors. It is an inter-ministerial body consisting of representatives of the Ministry for Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Home Affairs, and Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs and representative of BAIRA.

Computer Database Network

With a view to creating a transparent and congenial environment in the process of migration from Bangladesh, a database computer network has been established in the Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET) with connection to the Ministry for Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment, airport and BAIRA Office. This database network has been established with the objectives of bringing in transparency in overseas recruitment process through checking fraudulent practices by the sub-agents, reducing the migration cost, increasing wage and creating opportunity for overseas recruitment from all

corners of the country, and ensuring welfare and service to the dependents of migrant workers. This set up has been established with the support of the Institute of Information and Communication Technology of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology.

The advantages gained through this project are:

1. Occupation and skills of potential migrants from every corner of the country can be known and equal recruitment opportunity will be ensured.
2. Illegal sub-agents will be eliminated and migration cost will be reduced.
3. List of job seekers can easily be available that will facilitate sending of workers. In this way the gap between the employer and employee will be reduced.
4. The recruiting agencies will be able to select candidates directly through this system.
5. Transparency and accountability in migration system will be established.

The government has made it compulsory for the overseas job seekers to enlist their names in the

database. An overseas job seeker must register himself with the nearest District Employment and Manpower Office (DEMO), Dhaka DEMO or BAIRA office. Each person is supplied with a Registration ID Card for his Identity and future use with a unique Registration ID number after all information is fed into the system. An amount of Tk 50 is charged as registration fee in the form of A/C payee pay order or bank draft in the name of Director General, BMET. He/she has to mention about three occupations that he/she intends to get involved in the destination country. Recruiting agencies will select their candidates as per their requirement from the database. Each job seeker can use this Registration card in future for any service relating to overseas employment from BMET.

This system is expected to eliminate the sub-agent system that currently persuades recruitment system for overseas employment. Apart from this, the service charge and airfare can be processed through bank.

* Dr. Nurul Islam is the Director (Research Monitoring & Computer) of BMET, Govt. of Bangladesh.

SAMREN FELLOWSHIP FOR YOUNG ACADEMICS AND PROFESSIONALS

South Asia Migration Resource Network (SAMReN) offers fellowships to young South Asian academics and researchers to conduct empirical research.

The aim of this initiative is to generate knowledge and understanding about migration and development and increase capacity of young professionals and academics.

Proposals will be accepted on all issues of migration within South Asia.

An amount of BDT100,000 (BDT 59.00 = US\$1.00) is offered for each fellowship.

The Fellowship will involve work for 3 months that may be spread over 6 months. Nationals of South Asian countries will be given preference, however those working on South Asian migration are eligible to apply.

Applicants should be under 35 years of age and have post-graduate degree.

Relevant work experience may also be considered.

For further details and application form contact:

Project Director, SAMReN

Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU)

3/3 E, Bijoyagar (4th Floor), Dhaka 1000, Bangladesh

Tel: 880-2-9360338, Fax: 880-2-8362441, E-mail: rmmrubj@aitlbd.net

or visit the SAMReN website:

www.samren.org

Applications should be dispatched by **15 January 2005**.

Only short-listed candidates will be contacted.

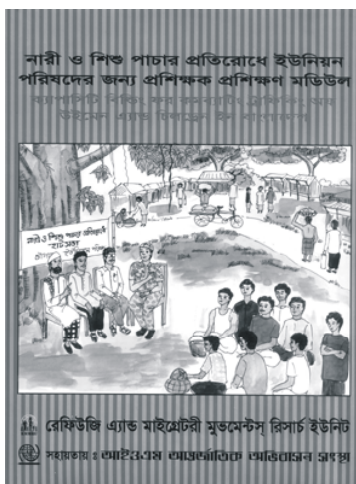
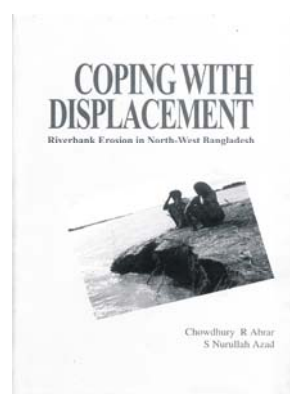
PUBLICATIONS

Coping with Displacement: Riverbank Erosion in North-West Bangladesh, by Chowdhury R Abrar and S Nurullah Azad, North Bengal Institute, RDRS and RMMRU, Dhaka, pp. 132, Tk 300.00

This study looks into the vulnerability and coping mechanisms of those affected by riverbank erosion in north-west Bangladesh. It traces their struggle through various phases: pre-displacement, disaster management, rehabilitation and long-term livelihood management. Instead of attempting to alter the course of nature, the study underscores the need for institutional mechanisms to help the affected people in coping with adverse consequences.

Riverbank erosion has devastating impacts on the lives and livelihoods of the affected people. They lose out in many ways, materially and in social terms. Displacement impinges on the occupational patterns of the households and brings about major changes in the family structure, as often members of households are forced to migrate to earn a living. Displacement exacerbates the process of women's participation in the public sphere. As traditional gender division of labour within the household does not experience commensurate change, the burden of displacement falls disproportionately on women.

The institutional responses of the government and NGOs in addressing the plight of the displaced people have also been analysed. The study recommends a concerted effort of the government, NGOs and other civil society institutions to address the plight of the affected people. It argues that government and non-government sectors need to develop creative programmes to cater to the needs of this marginalised group. It also recommends increased emphasis on promoting rights based approach so that the affected people can stake a claim on the state.



ToT Module for Union Parishad Chairmen and Members to Prevent Trafficking in Women and Children, Tasneem Siddiqui, Nahid Alam, Syeda Rozana Rashid and Rezwanul Karim, RMMRU, March 2004, pp. 138.

The issue of trafficking in women and children is increasingly gaining attention in Bangladesh. While it is indeed necessary for the higher echelons of the government to acknowledge and address the problem of human trafficking it is equally important for local government representatives to develop knowledge and understanding of the process in order to play an effective role in its prevention. To this end the International Organization for Migration (IOM) undertook a two-year project to help prevent trafficking through capacity building of local level government representatives, i.e., *Union Parishad* (UP) chairmen and members and staff of local NGOs. RMMRU was responsible for developing a training module and other support materials for local level government representatives on combating trafficking. This module is the outcome of this endeavour.

The module consists 12 chapters which deal with the concept of different types of migration and trafficking, causes of trafficking, women and children under risk of trafficking, traffickers' network, methods and routes, laws relating to trafficking, role and responsibilities of *Union Parishad*, a drama on prevention of trafficking, consequences of trafficking, rescue and rehabilitation, and different techniques to conduct training sessions.

Apart from the module, nine flip charts as visual aides for disseminating information about trafficking were also published. The issue of migration, target of trafficking, methods of trafficking, trafficking network, duties and responsibilities of UP chairmen and members for combating trafficking, consequences of trafficking, and methods of anti-trafficking campaign have been presented and explained through the flipcharts. Two posters as disseminating material were also developed. One poster contains messages regarding duties and responsibilities of UP members and the other explains trafficking-migration nexus.



Workshop: An evaluation workshop of the Combating Trafficking project was held at RMMRU on 15-16 March 2004. The workshop was participated by representatives of IOM, Rights Jessore, ACD Rajshahi and RMMRU CT project staff. A concluding ceremony was organised at the British Council Auditorium on 16 March 2004. The programme was followed by a stage show of the drama *Faad* (the trap), which was developed by TCSD under the project.

Talks: A talk on *Illicit Movements of People and Goods in the Age of Globalisation* was organised at the University of Dhaka on 18 January 2004. The key-note speaker was Dr. Gargi Bhattacharya of the University of Birmingham, UK.

A talk on *International Law and Minority Rights* was organised at the University of Dhaka on 15 February 2004. The key-note speaker was Dr. Javaid Rehman of the University of Ulster, UK.

Project Activities – Development Research Centre on Migration, Globalisation and Poverty

Advisory Committee Meeting: The first meeting of the Bangladesh Advisory Committee of DRC on Migration, Globalisation and Poverty was held at local Restaurant on 9 March 2004. Mr. Dalil Uddin Mondal, Secretary, Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment; Dr. Mohammad Farashuddin, President, East West University and Dr. C R Abrar, Executive Director, RMMRU attended the meeting as members of the Advisory Committee. Among others Professor Ronald Skeldon from DRC, Sussex, Dr. Shahdeen Malik, Dr. Tasneem Siddiqui, Dr. Sumaiya Khair and Mr. Afsan Chowdhury of RMMRU also attended the meeting. The agenda of the meeting were introduction of the DRC and the role of the Bangladesh Advisory Committee, RMMRU Project under DRC, identifications of areas of research, training and policy advocacy on migration in Bangladesh.

**RMMRU FELLOWSHIPS FOR
YOUNG ACADEMICS AND PROFESSIONALS**

Applications are invited for “RMMRU Fellowships for Young Academics and Professionals” under the Development Research Centre on Migration, Globalisation and Poverty. The Fellowships, each of Tk 88,000, will entail work for three months that may be spread over 6 months.

Bangladeshi nationals living in both home and abroad are eligible to apply. Non-Bangladeshi nationals interested in working on migration issues related to Bangladesh may also apply. Applicants should be below 35 years of age, have a postgraduate degree in any Social Science discipline or law. This condition may be relaxed in special circumstances (job experiences and publications on migration).

Applications must reach to the Project Coordinator, RMMRU
Sattar Bhaban (4th floor), 3/3 E Bijoyagar, Dhaka-1000
Phone: 9360338, Fax: 8362441, Email: rmmrubj@aitlbd.net
by **30 December 2004**.

Applications by e-mail are acceptable.

Applications must be supported by full particulars, a 1000-word project proposal and names of two referees whose recommendations should reach RMMRU independently.

Candidates are encouraged to prepare proposals on migration related themes that are available at RMMRU, or on the SAMReN website <www.samren.org>

Research: At present two research projects are going on under DRC. The first is on *Mobility of the Skilled: The Case of Migration of Nurses from Bangladesh*, conducted by Dr. Salahuddin M Aminuzzaman, Professor and Chair, Department of Development Studies, University of Dhaka. The broad objectives of the study are to assess the market and potentialities of nursing as a profession for women of Bangladesh for overseas employment.

The second study is titled *Autonomous Child Migration in Bangladesh*, conducted by Dr. Sumaiya Khair, Associate Professor, University of Dhaka. The objectives of the study are to find out the determining factors that contribute to voluntary autonomous child migration, the ways and means adopted by families or children for migration, types of employment they get involved following migration, the major problems and stresses a child migrant faces in work place, coping strategies to adopt, the degree of control they exercise on their income, the government's policy on voluntary autonomous child migration and legal regime that regulates child work.

Publications: A book titled *Coping with Displacement: Riverbank Erosion in North-West Bangladesh*, by Chowdhury R Abrar and S Nurullah Azad was published in March 2004 by the North Bengal Institute, RDRS and RMMRU.

A Training of the Trainers Module for the Union Parishad on Combating Trafficking was published by RMMRU under the Capacity Building for Combating Trafficking of Women and Children in Bangladesh project in March 2004. As part of the module, nine flip charts and two posters have also been published as training support materials.

Visit: A visit by Professor Ronald Skeldon from DRC, University of Sussex, took place from 8 to 11 March 2004, on the purpose of attending the Advisory Committee Meeting of DRC Project.

Young Researchers' Forum Activities:

A summary presentation of the six research studies conducted under the YRF Fellowship was held at RMMRU on 18 March 2004. Young researchers presented objectives and methodology of their respective studies.

Field Work: Field visits were organised in Munshiganj, Tangail, Comilla and Noakhali during January and February 2004 for a study on *Security and Empowerment: The Case of Left Behind Wives of Bangladeshi Migrant Workers*. The study was conducted by Shahzada M Akram and Khandaker Rezwanul Karim of RMMRU under the Young Professional Fellowship of Forum on Women in Security and International Affairs (FOWSIA), supported by Bangladesh Freedom Foundation.

Field visits were organised in Madaripur, Manikganj and Barisal in March 2004 under a study on *The Socio-economic Condition of the Disinherited Hindu Widows*. Ruma Halder conducted this study under the Young Researchers' Forum fellowship of RMMRU.

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