GLOBALIZATION-LED CHANGES IN LIVELIHOOD STRATEGIES, SOCIAL ORGANIZATION AND RURAL-URBAN LINKAGES OF WOMEN GARMENT WORKERS IN BANGLADESH

by

HELAL MOHD. MOHIUDDIN

A thesis presented to the University of Manitoba
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
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ABSTRACT

The globalization surge, together with an economic push in Bangladesh for international revenue earning, resulted in the emergence of an export-oriented assembling-manufacturing garment sector based on women's "cheap" labour. Livelihoods of these women labourers from poverty-stricken agro-rural areas of Bangladesh have undergone extensive changes. This study explores globalization-led changes and livelihood strategies among wage-migrants through a gendered perspective of rural-urban linkages. With a narrative emphasis, the study was conducted among women garment workers of Dhaka, Bangladesh in 1999 and 2001. The study explores how globalization has replaced women workers' social, contractual, mutual, traditional and communal agrarian livelihood with a depersonalized, alienating and urban division of labour. In relation to communal restrictions and sanctions on women's activities, wage-labour migration has invoked the systematic social seclusion of women—being cast away from natal communities for rebelliousness, and marginalized by class prerogative of better-off urban neighbourhood people. In the urban context, workers experience occupational health hazards; unsafe and unhygienic workplaces; absence of physical and emotional security; absence of a social safety net and legal protection. Increased incidences of pre-marital sexual relationships; separation and divorce; questioning of the role of religion, marriage, family, and other approved social institutions and bonds, indicate their exposure to increased "insecurity" and livelihood strife.

Livelihood strife compels the women garment workers to adopt survival strategies by frequently concealing their identity and relocating from one place to another, and avoiding confrontation and challenge on shop floors and within household and kinship circles. They submit and compromise, and pass their entitlements on to perceived male caretakers of the household, while recreating the image of docile femininity—nimbleness, obedience and dedication in the workplace. These strategies constitute their existence in a "transitory society" (*ferryghat samaj*) characterized by ambiguity and a sharp juxtaposition between the "known" and the "unknown" of livelihood decisions.

Women's wage-income has not reduced gender inequality; rather, it has perpetuated gendered vulnerability to deplorable livelihood conditions between their past and the future. Women workers do achieve some freedom of speech and of movement, confidence and self-reliance, and access to and control over decision-making, but only in a relative sense—at the expense of commodification of femininity and being subjected to a "framework of intimidation".

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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List of Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
BGMEA	Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Employers Association
BIDS	Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies
BRAC	Bangladesh Rural and Agricultural Committee
BTWL	Bangladesh Textile Workers League
EOI	Export Oriented Industrialisation
EPB	Export Promotion Bureau
EPZ	Export Processing Zone
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organisation
FSSAP	Female Secondary School Assistance Project
GB	Grameen Bank
GOB	Government of Bangladesh
GDP	Gross Domestic Products
GK	Gonoshasthya Kendra
GNP	Gross National Products
GSP	Generalized Systems of Preference
HDI	Human Development Index
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IDS	International Development Studies
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
LDCs	Least Developed Countries
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
NGO	Non Government Organisation
NUK	Nari Uddyog Kendra
RMG	Ready Made Garments
RSI	Repetitive Strain Injuries
RTI	Reproductive Tract Infection
STD	Sexually Transmitted Disease
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organisation
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
WFP	World Food Program
WHO	World Health Organisation

Glossary

Bariwala	Landlord
Bhodrolok	gentleman
Bastee	Slum
Grameen	Rural
Feriwala	Street Vendor
Hartal	Strike
Iftar	Breaking fast
Izzat	Dignity, chastity, honour of a woman
Khap khaoa	Adaptation/ adjustment
Bhatar	Breadwinner
Khemta/Khomota	Power
Mastaans	Local goons
Mudi	Puffed rice
Musafeer	Tourist/traveller
Taka (BDT)	Bangladesh currency (1 BDT = 0.017 US Dollar, 1999 scale)
Tokai	Street urchin/ scavenger
Orna	Scarf
Palli	Village
Burkha	Veil, black robe to cover whole body
Purdah	Seclusion
Sari	18 feet long garment for women
Shwadheen	Free
Shalwar kameez	Women's pyjama (shalwar) and shirt (kameez)
Shishu	Child/children
Noshto hoye geche	Has gone to the dogs (someone's derailment)
Bashi	Rotten
Ghazab	Curse for ruination
Kamla	Contract day-labourer
Paapi	Sinner

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview of the Problems of Research

One of the most powerful effects of a 'single global market' has been the separation of producers from consumers. If people in the west even glance at the label on the fashion ware they buy, they may notice in passing that it was made in Thailand, Indonesia or Bangladesh, and even they may wonder that such products travel vast distances; they are less likely to enquire what percentage of the price they pay actually reached the women who created the article, the purchase of which is legitimate by 'our' money and the power this bestows on us: the bottom line for busy consumers. One young woman I met working in a garment factory in Jakarta suggested every item should have a 'price of pain' printed on it, so that people would know how many tears and how much sweat are stitched into every article. (Seabrook 1996:88)

The 'price of pain' noted in the quotation from Seabrook (1996) serves as a starting point of my journey to enquire into the relationships between globalization and changes in livelihood for women wageworkers of Bangladesh garment factories. Globalization is commonly perceived as the latest form of monopoly capitalism (Robbins 1999, Ross 1997). In a general sense, it is built on the principles of trade liberalization, restriction-free access of the global capitalist entrepreneurs to national and overseas capital markets, and natural and human resources. Since the late 1980s, the Bangladesh economy has been embracing globalization principles at a rapid pace. Since then, the export-oriented ready-made garment (RMG) industry has become an identity marker of globalization in Bangladesh.

Cheap labour is one of the favourable conditions that Bangladesh has set to encourage transnational investment in the garment production sector. The garment factory jobs are primarily targeted toward easy access to the huge inflow of destitute and often helpless women workers. Economic distress and vulnerability of livelihood in rural areas of Bangladesh have forced these workers to migrate to cities in search of wage-

employment. The reasons for the emergence of a cheap female workforce in Bangladesh are worth discussing here.

Bangladesh society is typically characterized by dependence on 80% of domestic labour supply within the agrarian sector (Abdullah and Zeidenstein 1992). Familial competition for access to parcels of land is a predominant mode of existence (Cain, et al. 1979; Hartmann & Boyce 1979; Jansen 1987) under ecological-social adjustments and resettlement (Zaman 1989; Zaman and Wiest 1991; Hossain et al. 1992), seasonality and calamity (Agarwal 1990), and environmental, economic and political insecurity (Sen 1981). However, commodification of labour, mechanization and capitalization of agriculture (Griffin and Ghose 1979), massive land use for non-agricultural purposes (Bhaduri et al. 1986), and disenfranchisement displace marginal farmers and landless agricultural labourers from agro-income (Januzzi 1980) or petty commodity production. Consequently, demand for agro-workers has declined.

The above-mentioned processes aggravate unemployment and displacement of poor agricultural labourers, and compel typical male breadwinners to migrate to cities for wage-income. As men migrate, women in rural areas assume added responsibilities of maintaining both the household economy and agricultural tasks left by their men. Due to conservatism, patriarchy and *purdah* (Kabeer 1994), and the century-old practice of social norms discouraging involvement of women in off-farm income-generating activities (Kabeer 2001), women are excluded from extra-household means of earning in rural areas. Having no alternative ways to maintain rural livelihoods, young and able-bodied women from rural households also migrate to cities for wage-income. As the labour surplus problem in the cities worsens, women's labour turns into an underpaid commodity. Thus, abundant availability of women's labour power at low cost attracts transnational corporations (e.g., Nike, Adidas, Wrangler, Gap, Tommy Hilfiger, Wal-Mart, etc.) to invest in the Bangladesh garment sector for manufacturing of their apparel. This process lowers production cost of clothing manufacturing for global transnational corporations at the "price of pain" of workers. The following narratives of two women garment workers of Bangladesh exemplify "price of pain" caused by their wage-employment in the export-oriented readymade garment (RMG) manufacturing plants.

A worker tells her story:

> After migrating to Dhaka, we ended up in a bostee (slum) where there is
> no fresh air, no river and no kitchen garden or coconut tree. We buy
> everything we want to eat. Both my husband and I work and yet we cannot
> manage the expenses of our children. We often starve and are compelled
> to eat little and feed our children. I miss my village home because there I
> never had to struggle for food. (Absar 2001:109-10)

Another worker describes her livelihood strife:

> Wages are so low. It is not possible to last the whole month. So around the
> twentieth of the month, we start to have food scarcity and with that comes
> all the problems. No rice, no food. Sometimes we eat potatoes for days.
> Most of the time I go to work without having breakfast. My kids eat once
> a day often. Just dinner. After I come back from work I cook. They
> complain. I pretend it is not abnormal. I scold them for complaining.
> Sometimes I give them a good spanking and they stop complaining.
> (Absar 2001:120)

In order to dig deep into the implications of globalization for livelihood under these circumstances, I begin with a brief introductory appraisal of two interrelated arguments of the proponents of globalization. The arguments are, as Ross (1997:16-22) compiles, that globalization can generate a viable livelihood for the unskilled and disadvantaged, in the first place, and in the second place serves as the basis for empowerment of the powerless—especially the disadvantaged female workforce. These arguments establish a processual backdrop for my study—a test of compatibility of globalization-led factory work with livelihood changes of women garment workers of Bangladesh.

1.1.1   Does globalization-led wage-employment promote a desirable livelihoods?

The advocates of globalization often claim that outsourcing helps poor countries to employ their growing reserve of part-timers, temporary workers, freelancers and many more people displaced from incompetent domestic economic farms. Indeed this overarching claim is well proven in the context of the contribution of the Bangladesh Ready-made Garment (RMG) sector to employment generation. The sector itself generated employment for at least 1.5 million labourers (BGMEA 2003:18). However, available literature (e.g., Khatun 1998; Hossain et al. 1990; Seabrook 1996) suggests that

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the sector is nothing but an integral part of a global putting-out system. Outsourcing is the building block of the sector. As investors supply all raw materials (fabric, color, thread, button, design) of production, the factories operate as large tailor houses. Therefore, the sector flourishes without backward or forward linkages. In lieu of a formal industrial management system, the sector functions through informal management of a chain of investors and their intermediaries—multi-national corporations (Wal-Mart, Nike, Adidas, Wrangler, Tommy Hilfiger, etc.), international buying houses, national corporate agents, subcontractors, local factory owners and factory managers. Profit maximization is the guiding principle at every layer of the chain of intermediaries. As a result, the workers of these tailor houses live on trickled-down profits of the sector. Sweatshop conditions apply to their workplace: "its workday is of no fixed length; it links pace of work to endurance. It demeans the spirit by denying to workers any part in determining the conditions of or the pay of their work" (Stein 1977:xv, cited in Ross 1997:151-152). It is "a state of mind as well as physical fact", writes Leon Stein (Stein 1977:xv, cited in Ross 1997:152) in the introduction to his invaluable book titled *Out of the Sweatshop*. The sweatshop economy is driven by the contractors' hunger to accumulate every single cent out of exploitation. Sweatshops are constructed to minimize the cost of labour by whatever means necessary, to appropriate every penny of value, and to generate profit from the "difference between cheap and cheaper labor, no matter how vile the means of obtaining it" (Ross 1997:156). This is the organizing principle of the sweatshop. This principle, reflected in all forms of wage discrimination and labour exploitation (Khatun 1998; Jamaly 1992; Hossain et al. 1990; Seabrook 1996), characterizes the Bangladesh garment sweatshop.

The garment sector contributes 58% of total export earning of Bangladesh and stands as the fourth largest employer (Firoze 1998:129) in the world. Annual average revenue income of the Bangladesh RMG sector accounts US$4.2 billion (*BGMEA Newsletter* 2000a:8). It is the sixth largest supplier of apparel and garments to the US market (*BGMEA Newsletter* 2000a:5). According to Quddus and Rashid (2000:4), it is a US$4 billion industry. This statistic suggests the need to examine the social and human dimension of economic globalization. The fundamental question is: What is the share of this economic benefit in the livelihood of women garment workers of Bangladesh?

Available descriptive literature portrays a wide array of workplace problems (Jamaly 1992, Gain 1990), occupational health hazards (Khatun 1998), gendered and sexual exploitation (Afsar 1999), job insecurity (Hossain et al. 1990; Paul-Majumder and Zohir 1991), adrift migration (Afsar 2000), exploitation and violation of legal and human rights (Ahmed 1998), growing labour unrest and labour protests (Bhattacharya 1994, 1995, 1996) and deteriorating socio-economic conditions of workers (Paul-Majumder and Zohir 1991). Facts and figures of these studies represent the poor occupational and livelihood condition of women workers of the garment sector. Although these studies indirectly point to changes in livelihood conditions of the workers, they do not guide us to an in-depth understanding of trends and patterns of livelihood changes of the migrated workforce.

1.1.2   Does globalization-led employment opportunity lead to empowerment?

As noted, the other claim by supporters of globalization is that globalization-driven export-manufacturing sectors contribute to the 'empowerment' of women through creation of job facilities for poor women workers who lack adequate skill and education to work in off-household jobs. This argument deserves probing. Public rationalization draws attention to "inherent" qualities and skills (Khatun 1998) of women (e.g., nimble fingers), but evidence is strong that the industry favours the most vulnerable members of society for their apparent docility (see Reardon et al. 1998:2). Numerous studies reveal that, apart from the positive aspects of increased job opportunity for women, their subjection to newer forms of systematic exploitation is intensified through a number of factors—creation of labour shortage in rural household-based production, increased job market competition between surplus labourers, decline in cost of labour (Gain 1990; Paul-Majumder and Zohir 1991), misery, lack of education, increased patriarchal domination, and physical and social insecurity (Mitter 1986; Ong 1991; Jamaly 1992; Ross 1997; Hossain et al. 1990; Kahtun 1998; Ahmed 1998; Robbins 1999) These conditions call our attention to a disempowerment process. Mitter and Rowbothum argue that the sweatshop conditions are creating a new female proletariat (1996:112-119).

The proletarianization process starts through an international division of labour, in Braverman's (1974) term, "Taylorism", which refers to control by managers rather than the workers of every aspect of the production process. The garment sector resembles Braverman's attribution of Taylorism in that it paves the conditions under which "all possible brain work is removed from the shop floor" (Braverman 1974:114), and ultimately "workers are reduced almost to the level of labor in its animal form" (Braverman 1974:114). "Brain work" turns into an exclusively managerial task and the basis of managerial power. In contrast, exclusion of women workers from brainwork results in the systematic disempowerment. Stalker's (1977) 3-D thesis depicts a scenario in which women workers are assigned to do "dirty", "dangerous" and "difficult" tasks. At the household level, women's domestic responsibility constitutes a "double day, double bind" (Gannage 1986) condition for them, which ultimately arrests the possibility of their empowerment. Furthermore, women workers face resistance against their empowerment by male partners or coworkers whose ideas are engendered by the historical threat that unskilled women workers would take over the jobs of skilled male workers (Gannage 1986:174). Even though these conditions do not support a "woman's empowerment" thesis, they provide insight into the dynamics of wage-work and livelihood of women through the lens of *gender*.

1.1.3 Livelihood concerns for the future

Besides "cheap labour", there are other reasons behind the development of the Bangladesh garment sector: 1) Duty-free import of raw materials and establishment of bonded warehouse facilities, 2) the advantage of back-to-back[1] Letter of Credit (LC), 3) exemption of corporate taxes for five years, 4) income tax rebate on export earning, and 5) free duty on machineries imported for 100% export-based factories (Haider 2001). As a member of Lesser Developed Countries (LDCs), Bangladesh has been receiving quota privilege to export RMGs into US and Canadian markets under Multi-Fiber Agreement (MFA) and Arrangement on Textile Clothing (ATC), and into EU markets under

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[1] Definition of "back-to-back letter of credit": An importer procures a letter of credit from his/her bank in favor of a foreign supplier, and at the same time receives a letter of credit in his favor from the customer whom he is reselling the goods. If the two letters of credit are carefully matched as to documentation, the importer is qualified to finance the transaction. It is a quick and short cut method of investment and payment of goods and supplies of intermediary farms.

Generalized System of Preference (GSP) privilege. These benefits serve as the pulse of the sector. Due to the privileged conditions, the tailor houses mushroomed in big cities. The number of factories increased geometrically—from only 3 factories in 1976-77 (Paul-Majumder and Zohir 1991:1) to 3900 factories in 2001 (BGMEA 2001). So increased export earning—from only 0.4% foreign revenue in 1978-79 to 74% export earnings in 1997-98 fiscal year (BGMEA 2001).

The privileges, however, contributed to indiscriminate and disintegrated fattening of the sector at the cost of the demise of small-scale local enterprises and destruction of backward and forward linkage industries in Bangladesh. During 1999-2001, 86 Bangladeshi cotton yarn and handloom factories, 94 spinning mills and 442 dyeing factories closed permanently (Mahmood 2001). Besides, the greed of foreign revenue prompted ruling political parties over the next decades to compromise national industrial regulations. As a result, the sweatshop conditions of factories (as described above) have become an unofficially recognized attribute of the sector. Driven toward easy-money, the foundation of the sector is not built upon future-oriented or forward-looking strategies toward sustainability (Bhattachariya 1999).

The principles of Taylorism, and operational dependence on tailoring tasks, constrain the sector to assembly-line manufacturing, solely dependent on foreign "work-orders". However, as per the GATT agreement, MFA, ATC and GSP will phase out by 2005. It means that the Bangladesh garment sector will be pushed into a global level of competition of producers to meet "work-orders". The WTO requires Bangladesh to embrace a free-market policy without privilege. The Textile Monitoring Body (TMB) of the World Trade Organization (WTO) has been monitoring and implementing withdrawal of trade barriers and import-export discrepancies between the member countries since January 2002. The TMB is empowered to monitor and enforce gradual withdrawal of 'tax holidays' and benefits of member countries by the year 2005. It can also take punitive measures against countries making false declaration about transhipment "Rules of Origin" (Haider 2001). These adversities and the absence of backward and forward linkage industries threaten the sector with the nightmare of an impending collapse.

The crisis of sustenance of the sector has come to the fore also because of the move of international buyers-investors (mainly the MNCs) from Bangladesh to other countries. International investors always continue to search for outsourcing production options from one country to another in order to appropriate the advantages of distressed economic conditions of the poor countries. The producers cut down production costs through the exploitation of cheap labour, cheap raw materials, lack of trade union rights, government subsidies, and ensured deliveries. In order to minimize the cost of labour by whatever means necessary, as well as to appropriate every penny of value, and to generate profit from the "difference between cheap and cheaper labor" (Howard 1997:156), international buyers resort to the "farming out of work by competing manufacturers" (Ross 1997:13). In this line of outsourcing strategy, the Trade Development Act (TDA-2000) of the USA bestowed 72 Caribbean and sub-Saharan countries the privilege of duty-free and quota-free access of RMGs into the US markets. Bangladesh is excluded from this list of beneficiaries. Two big multinational buyers, 'Haddad' and 'Capital Mercury', had already shifted their interest from Bangladesh (Haider 2001). In 2001, Jordan became a competitor of Bangladesh in the pursuit of RMG export to the US. As per the signed agreement between Amman and the US, Jordan would purchase 8% of raw materials from Israel to get duty-free export access of the RMGs to the US markets (*Ajker Kagoj* 2001a:2).

These developments have had an immediate impact on the Bangladesh economy. By November 2001, 1276 garment factories shut down. Nearly 300,000 workers became unemployed. Of them, 90 percent are women (*Ajker Kagoj* 2001a:2). The sector had received an average of 46% annual growth of income in the 1994-95 fiscal year. The growth rate has never dropped below 6% until 2000-01. With beginning of the first year of MFA phase-out, the sector suffered a 6% decline (-6% growth) in national revenue earned in 2001-2002 (see Chapter III: Table 3.2). This is the first instance of decline in economic growth of the garment sector of Bangladesh.

The statistics suggest that the sector suffers vulnerability to collapse. Sobhan and Khundker express their concerns that these changes (MFA phase out and quota withdrawal) "will expose Bangladesh's rural women to relentless pressure which could not only squeeze their already low wages but would make enormous demand on them to

raise their productivity" (2001:xxii). In a larger social context, 20 million people are directly and indirectly related with this sector (Haider 2001). How does this large group of stakeholders respond to these persistent risks of collapse of the sector? Besides this general question, I pay central attention to women workers because they are the most directly affected stakeholders of the fate of the garment sector. A general pattern in the available literature demonstrates that, despite the sector having produced occupational and livelihood plight, women workers still prefer city life to rural life. The reasons are related to their relative emancipation from patriarchal domination, passivity, and unpaid bonded-labour position in the household (Paul-Mazumder and Begum 1997; Khatun 1998; Zahir 2000; Absar 2001), as well as the attainment of relative freedom of speech, physical movement, decision-making, and control over income-spending (Paul-Majumder and Begum 1997; Khatun 1998). Also, rural areas of Bangladesh lack wage-income opportunity for women. These realities, along with the ongoing crisis of the sector, call for focussed attention in understanding livelihood changes and rural-urban linkages of women workers of the sector.

1.2   Objectives of the Research

1.2.1   General objectives

A general objective of the research is to gain an in-depth understanding of the effects of globalization-driven wage occupation on the livelihood of poor and vulnerable people of cities and rural areas of Bangladesh, and their livelihood strategies in the changed situation. The objective refers to exploration, examination and documentation of the survival strategies women workers adopt in the context of livelihood changes involving household interdependencies and rivalries, family and kin relations, and the politics of patriarchy; as well as to evaluation of the implications of these strategies for household, kin-groups, lineages and larger community.

A more general objective is to document globalization-led changes in society and culture through an in-depth probing of all types of occupational and social relationships of workers in the "social communities" to which they relate in origin and in the new employment context. It involves an effort to understand the causes, nature and extent of workers' communication with their rural and urban bases. As well, the longer range

objective is to examine how the conditions of globalization in general and the garment sector in specific relate practically and theoretically to bases for the empowerment of women, and the social solidarity and social action potential in both rural and urban community contexts.

1.2.2 Specific research themes

a. Effects of globalization on livelihood of poor people

The RMG sector is increasingly being blamed for replacing women workers' social, contractual, mutual, traditional and communal agrarian livelihood with an alienating, urbanized and depersonalized division of labour (Seabrook 1996; Khatun 1998; Absar 2001). Such findings indicate negative changes in peoples' livelihood. The processes and patterns of change, therefore, have become an essential backdrop to this research.

b. Relationships between displacement, wage-migration and resettlement

With commercial land-use and disenfranchisement, present day Bangladesh peasantry is being displaced (Bhaduri et al. 1986) from traditional agrarian economic bases. Displacement of women from rural households is more intense because polygamy, divorce, abandonment and widowhood also underlie their displacement (Kabeer 1991). As displaced women resort to wage-migration and resettlement in alien urban settings, newer types of family and livelihood emerge (Shikder 1996; Agarwal 1990). This research embraces the theme of relationships between displacement, wage-migration and settlement for in-depth revelation of impacts of globalization on social organization.

c. Forms of interdependencies of workplace, neighbourhood and community

Attention is given to livelihood implications of specific working conditions, workplace safety, wage levels and industry compliance with wage guidelines. A North-South Institute study notes that garment manufacturers claim increasing pressure from retailers that increases "their need for an inexpensive, flexible, labour force" (Delahanty 1998:1). Also, due to the absence of effective governmental interventions, the industry characteristically involves long work hours, cramped quarters, poor ventilation, absence of appropriate toilet facilities and clean drinking water, fire hazard, poor wages, and lack of protection from harassment, assault and rape in travel to and from factories (Khatun 1998:78; Delahanty 1998:2). These workplace experiences may configure women

workers' psyche and attitude toward neighbourhood and community—often in unpredictable and contradictory manners (Khatun 1998). This unearthed phenomenon, therefore, is considered to be the focus of research for understanding the relationships between the workplace and life-space.

d. Types of emergent livelihood stresses

In this study, I trace the intensity of displacement, environmental refuge (Agarwal 1990), rise of female-headed households (Wiest 1998; 2000), lack of entitlement (Sen 1982) and empowerment (Agarwal 1990), domestic violence (Rahman 1999), and the nascent area of exploitation of women inside households. Special attention is paid to the exploration of unforeseen outcome with respect to social disorganization, ethical degeneration, and criminality, and their relationship to globalization-led livelihood decisions of women workers.

e. Forms of adaptation and survival strategies.

Considering the foregoing range of life-stressors arising from conditions faced by urban garment workers under globalization, this study identified general and unique survival strategies. Identification of coping mechanisms is intended to draw out obscure and apparently passive elements of livelihood strife that can become strategies. In-depth probing of these strategies helped to reflect on the nature of worker awareness, rationalization of conditions, notions or understanding of rights and power, individual and collective efforts to effect change, and the political action potential of the workers.

f. Forms of social interaction, reciprocity and exchange network

Dominant social interaction theories suggest that culturally homogenous social groups tend to be cohesive in themselves and protective of their cultural identity in alien cultural settings (Little 1964; Ogburn and Nimkoff 1972). While immigrant workers constitute an apparently homogenous group, it is worth inquiring whether the notion applies to their social interaction dynamics. In this context, this study emphasizes the evaluation of organizational bases for solidarity, and reciprocity and exchange networks. The evidence of difference and conformity with classical and contemporary notions of reciprocity (Sahlins 1965; Wolf 1966), and inter-household transfers (Lomnitz 1977; Foster 1965), have assisted in the probing of the present status of worker involvement in social exchange networks.

g. State of gender relations within and beyond the household

Attention is given to the gender dimensions of labour commodification (Naiman 1995). The study involved a comparative examination of men and women in the labour force as well as at the household level. While women's extra-household wage-income receives recognition (Boserup 1970, ILO 1996) and otherwise shelters them from threats of destitution (Lim 1978), it may also give rise to familial role-conflict and embezzlement (Collins 1995), and passing on of income to men (Rahman 1999). This study unfolds the present context of entitlement (Sen 1992) and disentitlement associated with wage-employment of women workers.

h. Communication and exchange between peasantry and urbanity, village and cities

This aspect of the research examined the range of ties and networks of workers with their natal households and communities and culture and value systems of origin. This section of the study was complemented by an examination of theoretical compliances with practical or real-life peasant societies. I researched whether remittance of workers brings about any change in contemporary peasantry (Wolf 1966), and what role the peasantry plays in wage-income and livelihood decisions of workers.

i. Safety-nets: conditions of occupational and social security

Considering the prevalence of livelihood insecurities—disenfranchisement, agrarian employment insecurity (Cain et al. 1979; Jansen 1987), seasonality and calamity (Agarwal 1990), and economic and political insecurity (Sen 1981), the study has also paid attention to individual and organized efforts toward establishing social security and safety-nets. Specific attention is paid to the everyday life insecurities of women workers. In this context, the occupational, residential and social insecurities of women are analyzed from a policy perspective.

1.3 Rationale of Research

a. Need of a holistic search of internal dynamics of livelihood changes

There is significant volume of descriptive literature on the plight of women garment workers that is partial in scope, e.g., workplace problems (Jamaly 1992; Gain

1990), occupational health hazards (Khatun 1988), job insecurity (Hossain et al. 1990; Paul-Majumder and Zohir 1991), and exploitation and violation of legal and human rights (Ahmed 1998). The different dimensions reflected in these studies remain disjointed without drawing insight into their inter-linkages, internal dynamics and implications for livelihood changes. I consider that the "price of pain", as stated as the beginning proposition of this study, reflects both sides of the coin, and the notion encompasses a wide variety of meanings, ranging from the household level to the larger social level crises the workers experience. Thus along with understanding causal relationships of their plight and crises, my research problem is also grounded in a deeper exploration of the other side of the coin—the price they pay in attaining strengths, opportunities, gains and prospects throughout their wage-employment cycle. I deem such enquiry a requirement to attain a complete and balanced analysis of the processes of change as well as to bridge gaps of understanding of the livelihood experiences of women garment workers in Bangladesh

b. An anthropological demand of a search of survival strategy

The reasons for the existence of a disadvantaged female workforce, as explained at the beginning of this discussion, call attention to a variety of responses of women workers to adjust to conditions of displacement, disorganization, dislocation and deprivation. To overcome conflicts over normative entitlements within households and with patriarchal and traditional moralities, complex changes may take place throughout the adaptive processes toward alternative livelihoods. Available literature suggests that despite the hardships, women garment workers in Bangladesh attain 'conscientization', 'confidence', 'self-reliance', and 'self-dignity' to some extent (Paul-Majumder and Zohir 1991; Khatun 1998). These individualizing tendencies can upset approved gender relationships and social organizational forms among garment workers, often coming into direct conflict with patriarchy, religious sanctions and traditional order, and undermining the established social safety-net (Wiest 1999). Adoption of an alternative livelihood or survival strategy, therefore, becomes imminent on the part of the women garment workers—maybe through juxtaposition of contradictory practices and expectations (Khatun 1998; Paul-Majumder and Zohir 1991). Given the paucity of studies on survival

strategies under the conditions sketched here, an in-depth enquiry into the forms of adjustments women workers adopt to cope with adversities is of immense significance.

d. Search for rural-urban linkages

Jamaly (1992) and Khatun (1998) reveal in their studies that garment factories recruit only young women aged between 15 years to 30 years, and that older women workers face termination on trivial charges. The finding raised a question for this enquiry about the occupational and social status of these women workers: Did the workers return to natal households after job loss? It also called attention to the importance of forms of exchange and reciprocal relationships and level of communication of workers with natal households while they were employed.

Rural-urban linkages may be reflected in interdependencies and interaction between women workers' natal households and newly formed households, conflict of old and new values, as well as changes in frequency and intensity of family and kin-based associations, communication and exchange, and the politics of patriarchy. Due to economic distress caused by the absence of a safety net and socially recognized access to resources or jobs for women in rural areas, I questioned whether the wage-migration of male breadwinners may have perpetuated the plight and vulnerability of female-headed households. In rural areas, household impoverishment may have forced able-bodied female members of households to migrate to cities for wage earning. Consequently, such movements may have resulted in strong conflict with normative patriarchal expectations of filial compliance and *purdah* (seclusion of women). Hence, globalization may have increased violence against women and created new stresses in gender and generational relations in rural and urban domestic settings. All these probable consequences have driven my research attention to focus on rural-urban linkages in workers' everyday life.

1.4 Key Research Concepts and Questions

As reflected in the above discussion, an imperative of my research was to investigate the following key concepts:

a) The dynamics of globalization-driven livelihood changes of women workers;

b) Women workers' perception and evaluation of the newfound livelihood;

c) Livelihood stresses and adversities related to ongoing livelihood changes;

d) Strategies to cope with livelihood stresses and adversities;

e) Perception of sustainability of the garment sector and employment opportunity;

f) Planning for future livelihood and preparedness for crisis period;

g) Rural-urban linkage, interdependencies and networks of exchange between natal and urban livelihoods of workers;

h) Implications of gender relations for livelihood decisions;

These key concepts are addressed through the following questions:

1. What are the characteristics of globalization in the context of garment sector employment in Bangladesh?

2. Do the workers experience, perceive or suffer from any emerging strife, unforeseen stress or unanticipated adversities that were not addressed in previous research?

3. Does globalization affect or transform the notion of reciprocity and social exchange network? How does any such transformation affect workers' livelihoods?

4. How does employment in the export-oriented garment industry affect women's domestic (household and family) roles and status, their entitlements, and their personal well-being which is generally defined as empowerment?

5. What are the techniques and means that the workers innovate or adopt to adjust to frequently changing livelihood environment? And, what are the strategies that the workers employ to safeguard their personal safety and security as well as cope with emerging adversities?

6. What types of linkages do the workers maintain with their natal household and community of origin? How do linkages with communities and families of origin affect the livelihood of garment workers?

7. Given the vulnerability of the garment sector employment, how do the workers forecast their livelihood conditions for the future? What types of preparedness measures do they adopt or plan to adopt on the basis of the forecast?

In general, the study deals with perspectives of two broader interrelated social phenomena: livelihood change and livelihood strategy, especially of women in society and culture of Bangladesh. These two livelihood issues are of immense significance for policy issues of Bangladesh. This study provides ground for some policy recommendations, addressed in the concluding chapter of this dissertation. These recommendations arise out of an examination of persistent strength, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of social solidarity and social action initiatives in Bangladesh. In order to understand the complexities of the research components, the study was conducted through a prolonged field-based 'in-depth' investigation.

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1   An Analytical Perspective of Corporate Globalization

Globalization is the most recent buzzword defined by different people in different ways (Scholte 1996:43). "It is a concept used as a short form to convey a wide variety of process, possibilities, and positions. It is, therefore, capable of different kinds of interpretations" (Kurian 1997:135). Globalization also "refers both to the compression of the world and to the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole" (Robertson 1992:8). Innovation and use of Internet, cellular phone, emails and satellite-based media and communication turn the world into a "global village." This attribute captures the ideational aspect of the concept. Theoretically, it involves the relationship of transborder and transnational exchange of technology, innovation, knowledge, trade, ideas and communication (Anthony and Lewis 1992:303).

Popular literature reveals disharmony attributes of globalization over harmony views—diversity elements over unity assumptions; heterogenization over homogenization; real-life global disequilibria over equity visions, and competition over the drive to conformity. Globalization is the highest level of expansion of corporate capitalism in the place of a philanthropic view of universalism (Robbins 1999). Thus Korten writes,

> It is a fundamental paradox of our time that in the name of market competition we have created a system that unifies corporations while dividing people and forcing them into a global competition for corporate favour. The human purpose is better served by a system that divides corporations and forces them to compete for the favour of people—in the true spirit of a competitive market. Let corporations compete to earn their profits. Let people and communities cooperate to create a good living for all. (1995:270)

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Sometimes globalization is viewed as "cultural homogenization" reflected in "the spread of Western commodities (e.g., Coke, McDonald foods, Nike shoes, baseball caps, Hollywood films), tastes, styles, icons (e.g., Golden Arches, The Slice), beliefs, and attitudes" (Wiest 2000:29). Such "cultural homogenization" takes place through the development of a culture of consumption (Robbins 1999). Frank (1990) argues that the phenomenal increase of the MNCs has an impact on indigenous modes of production mainly through destruction of craft and industrial production of the country. The MNCs infuse a "buy American" (Frank 2001) principle—a consumer ideology that turns the producers of indigenous modes of production to the buyers—the consumers. The colourful messages and glamour of advertisement reaches to the village level, to mould the mind of the indigenous producer-consumer to buyer only.

"Westernization" and "Americanization" are two other concepts commonly and alternately used to depict the nature of globalization. However, Appaduari (1990) asserts that meanings of these identity-markers are gradually becoming slippery and less acceptable. For instance, he writes about the confusion "Americanization" may involve in the understanding of globalization:

> It is worth noticing that for the people of Irian Java, Indonesianization may be more worrisome than Americanization, as Japanization may be for Koreans, Indianization for Sri Lankans, Vietnamization for Cambodians, Russianization for the people of Soviet Armenia and the Baltic republics, and reminds us that "one man's imagined community is another man's political prison". (Appadurai 1990:5-6)

If we view the tensions and reactions of the powerless to the powerful and the dominated to the dominator, the notion of political homogenization becomes problematic. Appadurai (1995) further asserts that globalization can be better understood through localizing processes since 'global homogenization' and localization feed and reinforce each other rather than being mutually exclusive. Therefore, it can be argued that globalization creates political and regional heterogenization, although it promotes 'cultural homogenization' through the development of a culture of consumption (Robbins 1999:25-32). Anthropological studies therefore need to emphasize the "production of locality" (Appadurai 1995:7).

One of the best examples of the locality perspective is drawn in the Latin American literature on the *maquiladora* manufacturing economy that sprouted along the Mexico-US borders. Since the NAFTA treaty was signed, US garment production has moved to Mexico. Valadez (1998) states that '*maquilisation*' helps multinational corporations (MNCs) to appropriate huge profits at the expense of cheap Mexican workers basic rights, forced labour, longer working hours, lower wages, as well as reduction in health and compensation costs. But the profit returns intact to the MNCs countries of origin. Ward (1990) shows that, with the expansion of the *maquiladora* shop floors, real wages of the workers dropped to below survival level. The *maquiladora* plants pay the workers a wage level 60% lower than that in the indigenous plants. However, under intense competition, most of the older indigenous plants were declared closed during 1980-1990 (Vargas 1995:3).

Scholte (2000) views that much used concepts like "internationalization," "liberalization", "universalization", and "westernization" may not capture the nature of spread of globalization beyond borders (2000:44-56). Therefore, he proposes "supraterritoriality" (1996:45) or "deterritorialization" as notions that help grasp economic and ideological features of globalization (2000:62-88). Appadurai also used the term "deterritorialization" (Appadurai 1996). The term suggests that globalization replaces territorial regulations with extraterritorial deregulation. It also refers to an economic as well as ideological "outsourcing" of the capitalist world order.

Works of Bourdieu (1988, 1994, 1998) delineate that globalization consolidates the economic base of capitalism with the creation and recreation of an ideology. Of various mechanisms, rhetoric is a powerful weapon of neoliberal economic globalization. Some of the neoliberal rhetoric includes structural adjustment policy (SAP), trade liberalization, free market economy, open door policy, etc.[1] Burawoy terms it as a "grounded globalization", meaning "real" grounded global-local experiences of people

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[1] Contemporary global capitalism accumulated in its very base the power to control the terms of discourse. Chomsky (2002) clarified that such accumulation has given rise to illegitimate concentration of power of capitalism to appropriate some discourses. Chomsky explains that the term "globalization" has also been appropriated by this new economic order, thus the people who speak on behalf of a "just globalization" (2002:495) are being treated as an "antiglobalization" force, or as vulgar Marxists. Chomsky also points to the contemporary use of rhetoric—e.g., "crusade" for "war" and vice-versa, and "terrorism" in place of violence. The political economy of rhetoric generates a global-level nuance and meaning favourable for contemporary capitalism.

within the structure of their ideological and perception domains (Burawoy 2000:341). Appadurai's (1995, 1996) own term *ideoscapes* depicts a similar view of globalization.

2.1.1 Corporate globalization: Linking the past with the present

Despite being a contemporary shift in the global political economy, globalization as a phenomenon has deep historical roots (Robbins 1999; Dalby 1996). During the colonial period, the international division of labour was an outcome of direct colonial rule and politics in colonized regions. In the ages of colonialism, the European countries were in the position of producers of goods and the colonies the source of raw materials (Wolf 1982). In globalization, the international division of labour and politics of "free trade", investment, aid and credit provide the bases of indirect colonial rule of rich capitalist states over the poor countries. Wolf (1982) provides an insight to understand globalization. He explains that we live in "one world" because no places of this world remained "untouched" under the supremacy of direct or indirect forms of colonialism in this universe (1982:x-xiii). Frank's (1969) notion of the *development of underdevelopment* traces back the link with reference to the plundering of wealth of colonies, as well as the creation of ever-dependent economic systems in the colonies (satellites).

Marx states, "the greater the social wealth, the functioning capital, the extent and energy of its growth, and therefore, also the absolute mass of the proletariat and the productiveness of its wealth, the greater is the industrial reserve army" (Marx 1958:603). Much earlier, when corporations had not yet emerged, Marx talked about the nature of commodity production in industrial capitalism. The analysis now fits in the context of globalized corporate rule. In the analysis of the commodity in the first volume of *Capital*, Marx stated that the use and exchange of material goods is a socially determined process. When the social process is subjugated by exchange, products of human labour "appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own". Marx regards the process as "fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour as soon as they are produced as commodities, and is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities" (Marx 1958:165). A worldwide promotion of commodity fetishism among consumers is the principal mission of the MNCs. MNCs infiltrate brand-fetishism into

every aspect of consumers' lives, furnishing lifestyles, and changing consumption behaviour.

Korten (1995) and Robbins (1999) analyse how neoclassical economics provided international development agencies (the World Bank and IMF) with political and intellectual rationality to advocate that industrial expansion into poor regions is a dynamic condition to drive mobility of capital and labour of the poor regions toward development and achieving efficiency. The GATT 1996 agreement removed protected trade relationships between the poor and the rich nations. Since the poor countries lack machinery, sophisticated transport, and credit and market access outside those protected relationships, local producers are faced with the new challenge of locating new markets and income sources. To attract foreign investment, these nations relaxed their international trade policies and opened up their doors for the global corporations.

To cut down production costs, multinational corporations (MNCs) in the last two decades have outsourced their production to underdeveloped countries. Korten (1995:220-221) illustrates, "of the world's hundred largest economies, fifty are corporations, and the aggregate sales of the world's ten largest corporations in 1991 exceed the aggregate GNP of the world's hundred smallest countries". "The world's 500 largest industrial corporations, which employ only 0.05 of 1 percent of the world's population, control 25 percent of the world's economic output" (Korten 1995:221). Thus, he writes, "The giants are shedding people but not control over money, markets or technology" (Korten 1995:249). The MNCs claim that they employed an otherwise displaced reserve of part-timers, temps and freelancers (Ross 1997), and contracted out the work to intermediaries or sub-contractors. The intermediaries work as the suppliers of consumer goods for Wal-Mart, Starbucks, McDonalds, KMart, the Gap and other MNCs. This outsourcing of cheap labour and raw material created hundreds of sweatshops in South Asia, Asia, Africa, and Latin America and in the Caribbean.

2.1.2 The garment sweatshop: Global heaven, local hell

Sweating refers to the system of subcontract which, in contrast to the integrated and supervised factory system, consists of the "farming out of work by competing manufacturers" (Ross 1997:13). The nature and logic of the sweatshop is that the contractors' hunger is endless even to save a single cent out of exploitation (Delahanty 1998; Fuentes and Ehrenreich 1985; Howard 1997; Ross 1997; Seabrook 1996). This literature shows that MNCs or TNCs are driven to outsource for cheap raw materials, low wages, lack of trade union rights, government subsidies, and ensured deliveries. Sourcing cheap materials is more important than transit costs (Mehta 1997; Loker 1999). The subcontractors of the MNCs thus target the cheaper labour force.

Dubeck and Borman (1996) argue that "internationalization of capital and labour" is one of the important principles of a sweatshop economy that promotes and appropriates advantageous situations of nonunion or cheaper sources of labour and lax workplace regulations of poor regions. "Dual segmentation theory" (Phillips and Phillips 1983) implies that labour markets are segmented into two workforces: 1) skilled and unionized male workers predominate the labour market in which there is a relatively high wage, secured employment, reasonable work conditions, opportunities for advancement and management practices circumscribed by rules and customs, 2) women, youth, racial and ethnic minorities are found in the secondary labour market with weak unions, poor wages, insecure employment, poor working conditions, minimal advancement and arbitrary management practices.

In the corporate age, commodity fetishism (Taussig 1980) turns into brand fetishism such as the "buy American" principle. Klein (1999) says that the principle of the successful corporations is that "they must primarily produce brands, as opposed to products" (Klein 1999:3). Some examples can be drawn from the marketing policy of Nike, Krafts, and Wal-Mart, etc. Philip Morris, the wholesaler of Kraft, paid $12.6 billion for the multinational Kraft in 1988, six times its paper value because of its brand name (Klein 1999:7). The trading takes place at the cost of the lives of the poor workers. Klein expressed that worker's work under strict control of talking to one another. She observed in *maquiladora* plants, "lines of young women hunched in silence over clamoring machines" (Klein 1999:202). They perform monotonous and tedious low-skill jobs under

militaristic management and abusive supervisors for a wage well below subsistence (Klein 1999:202).

Klein's (1999) study showed that China has the largest export-processing zone (EPZ) in the world. Eighteen million workers are employed in 124 EPZs, most of whom are young women. She presented a terrifying picture of inhuman working conditions in Chinese and Philippines factories. Cavite Export Processing Zone is the largest of the 52 EPZs in the Philippines. She calls it a "branding broom closet" (Klein 1999:202) in which nearly 50,000 workers work for 12 hours or more in a day to assemble Nike running shoes, Gap pyjamas, IBM computer screens and Old Navy jeans. These windowless workshops are crammed next to each other only a few feet apart.

Klein (1999) also observed that workers in Indonesia are paid $2 a day, and it costs Nike $5 to make the shoes while we buy the shoes for $100 and $180. At *maquila* plants, the average pay given to a young woman who makes a shirt for the Gap is 18 cents per shirt. That shirt sells for 20 or more dollars at the Gap in the US, making the wages paid for each shirt less than 1 percent of the total price of the shirt (Figueroa 1996). Most of the factories lack basic facilities: evacuation space, fire preparedness and ventilated floor. As a result, workers often experience fire hazards. In May 1993 the Kader toy factory in Bangkok, Thailand burned to the ground, killing 188 workers and injuring 469 more. (Klein 1999:334).

Studies by Ward (1990) and Vargas (1995) and Kopinak (1996, 1997) analyzed the process of declining wages and vulnerabilities of local industrialization in Mexican *maquiladora* sweatshop context. *Maquiladoras* are in-bond manufacturing factories that are created to channel into the country valuable foreign currency as well as to create employment for the unemployed people. However, the outcome on the labour side is minimal. Specifically, the wage-rate for the workers is dropped to below survival level. The *maquiladora* plants pay the workers a wage level 60% lower than that in the indigenous plants (Ward 1990). Yet, under intense competition with sweatshops, most of the older indigenous plants were closed by 1990 (Vargas 1995). Some researchers (Nash and Fernandez-Kelly 1983: Mies 1986, 1988) have pointed out that the outsourcing of production has also contributed to the unemployment of manufacturing workers in the United States.

At the same time, the TNCs advertisement budget increased exponentially. Klein presents a statement of Phil Knight, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Nike who expresses Nike's rationale: "There is no value in making things any more. The value is added by careful research, by innovation and marketing" (Klein 1999:197). Thus, MNCs support think tanks or university professors with attractive research projects. Korten (1995) says,

> Behind its carefully crafted public-relations image and the many fine and ethical people it may employ, the body of a corporation is its corporate charter, a legal document, and money is its blood. It is at its core an alien entity with one goal: to reproduce money to nourish and replicate itself. Individuals are dispensable. It owes only one true allegiance: to the financial markets, which are more totally creatures of money than even the corporation itself. (Korten 1995:67)

Studies of Lasn (1999) and Klein (1999) show that competition between MNCs comes down to a fierce battle of brands, not of products. From 1979 to 1998, advertising expenditure marked a fourfold rise in the US. In 1998, MNCs spent $196.5 billion only in the US. Global spending reached $435 billion in 1996 with a sevenfold rise since 1950. The increase in such spending is one-third faster than the pace of increase in the world economy (Klein 1999:7). Neo-liberalism, deregulation and privatization policies, and the lowering of corporate and other taxes provide MNCs opportunities to accumulate profit, and reinvest a large share of profit in advertisement. Everyday, "12 billion display ads, 3 million radio commercials and more than 200,000 TV commercials are dumped into North America's collective unconscious" (Lasn 1999:19).

Ross (1997) depicts corporate moneymaking lust through the facts of global advertisement spending. In 1992, Michael Jordan earned more than $20 million for endorsing Nike's running shoes that acceded Nike's entire 30,000 Indonesian worker's total wage. Disney's CEO, Michael Eisner, earned over $200 million from salary and stock options in 1996, at $97,600 per hour, amounting to 325,000 times the hourly wage of the Haitian workers who made Pocahontas, Lion King, and Hunchback of Notre Dame T-shirts and pyjamas, and who sewed on Mickey Mouse's ears (Ross 1997:9).

Clean Clothes Campaign International Forum (1998) exposes Nike's trick, which claims to have been ensuring full, cash minimum wages in all plants in Asia. Low wages

are trickily maintained by setting up low-rate payment against per piece production, and through large production targets for each workday together with curtailment of workers' rightful benefits. In a firm in China, Nike cancelled weekly holidays and the annual Christmas holiday that increased weekly working hours to 60-80 hours.

According to Korten, the quickest way for the corporations is to "make the kind of profit the system demands" (Korten 1995:207). Therefore, market, and profit and competition become the only target of the MNCs. Korten explains that the market system creates predators who play ruthless battles against the weak. The weak under the corporate age is the competitor who tends to run with morality, and that the corporate policies "capture and cannibalize existing values from a weaker market player" (Korten 1995:207). In short, the corporate age destroys humane production systems. Korten (1995) writes,

> In a free market, the 'weaker' player is often the firm that is committed to investing in the future; providing employees with secure, well-paying jobs; paying a fair share of local taxes; paying into a fully funded retirement trust fund; managing environmental resources responsibly; and otherwise managing for the long-term human interest". (Korten 1995:207)

Thus, the corporate age is an interlinked process that creates a 'buy American' mind, although the process is not only limited to product-market expansion. It acts in a chain: industry to manufacture, manufacture to agriculture, agriculture to personal spheres of human being.

2.2 Global-local Trends in Livelihood Change

The emergence of the global sweatshop, in a general sense, has taken place through revival of Hirschman's "trickle down" thesis. The thesis implies that the benefits of rapid economic growth of the rich countries (the North) will eventually benefit the poor countries (the South), even if the poor are not initially directly involved (Henrick and Kindleberger 1983:521). Hirschman's (1965) trickling down theory suggests that Northern progress would benefit the South through investment of the North and absorption of the disguised unemployed labour force in the South because it would raise the marginal productivity of labour and per capita consumption level in the South.

This corporate globalization principle affected both macro and micro domains of livelihood in many poor countries. Hirschman's assumption that the trickling down effects gain the upper hand over the polarization effect—advantage of the North of technology-intensity—has proven inappropriate in the context of outsourcing-based corporate globalization. Banerjee documented that pro-globalization national policies increased the gap between the rich and the poor and eroded people's access to basic human needs and goods and services (1988:7). Even in the decades of the 1960s and 1970s, shortly before the emergence of MNC-led outsourcing capitalism, "trickle-down" and modernization, the dependency theorists, radical socialists and neo-Marxists challenged these ideas with studies of their own. Drawing upon instances from the South, Asad stated that a national policy of modernization resulted in centralization of state power and bureaucracy in many countries (1980:18).

The following literature review will categorically unfold the different approaches to complex changes that the corporate globalization brought out in both macro and micro contexts of livelihood of poor countries of the world.

2.2.1 Changes in livelihood

Pierre Bourdieu (1977) conducted an in-depth ethnographic study of impacts of market forces on agrarian livelihood. His landmark study on labour market integration of Kabyle French colony peasants in Algeria was conducted in the late1940s. The study looked deep into colonialism and revealed that cash-economy intervention resulted in the transformation of meanings, symbols and cosmology of agrarian community dynamics. The transformation was reflected in changes of farming-harvest wall calendars and constructional aesthetics of houses. His study revealed the processes of wage-migration of rural workers in fast-growing cities, introduction of dowry into marriage, economic destitution of people and, above all, emergence of a class that did not even fit into a proletarian framework. Findings of some contemporary village studies of India and Bangladesh (Arnes and Beurden 1977; Banerjee 1980; Bhaduri et al. 1986; Boyce 1987; Adnan 1990) also reveal similar information—rapid changes in farming due to incorporation of money-economy into agriculture, and increasing number of disenfranchised agriculturalists who lack proletarian characteristics, thereby lack

potential for organized resistance to capitalist aggression in rural economy. In recent times, "rising landlessness and deteriorating livelihood conditions in the countryside assure a steady supply of young people in search of urban jobs and escape from the oppressions of patriarchy and poverty. This scenario is a familiar one around the world as national-states jockey for favourable position in the competition for investment capital that promises to offer livelihood alternatives to their poor and disenfranchised" (Wiest and Mohiuddin 2003b:1).

Studies of Latin American folk culture and social organization also reflect on social changes under capitalist expansion in rural livelihood. Robert Redfield (1968) introduced a comparative historical analysis of changes in folk culture over time and the impact of those changes on rural livelihood. While anthropologists like Wagley (1968) concentrated their attention on a descriptive presentation of diversity of Latin American rural culture, Foster (1979[1967]) looked into social changes in social cohesion, and Geertz (1968 [1963]) presented some features of impacts of ecological changes in Indonesian agrarian livelihood. Lewis (1961) launched a study of poverty and livelihood problems of the poor. His framing of "culture of poverty" (Lewis 1961) asserts that poor people live within certain commonalities of characteristic drawbacks that perpetuate their impoverishment. Many anthropologists, other social scientists, and development activists have been criticizing the theory for its inherent tendency to "blame the victim", and for failing to recognize that poverty is not a culture but a *condition*—an effect of complex socio-economic causes. Despite the misgivings of the theory that poor people themselves are responsible for their sufferings, Lewis used this construct effectively to study livelihood and coping strategies among the poor. Wolf (1966) extended the analysis of poverty in the agrarian community to a systematic analysis of impacts of expansionary money economy on rural society in general, and peasantry in specific. According to Wolf, poverty implies that subsistence takes priority over investment, and renders many cultivators unable to make ends meet (Wolf 1966:72). The impoverishment of the peasants is perpetuated through their political inability, powerlessness, lack of purchasing capacity and entitlement in land and agricultural economic activities. Wolf also asserted that intensification of investment in commercial agriculture creates "factories in the field" (Wolf 1966:72). More recently, Benería (1992) thinks that the Mexican agrarian

economy already collapsed[2] due to its over-dependence on the assembly-line manufacturing sector revenue. She also introduces the term "privatization of the crisis" to denote destruction of the economy from the state level to the household level. As with the state, frequent adjustment and restructuring takes place in the Mexican households on an everyday basis. Mallon (1986) reveals gendered implications of capitalist transformation of households. In her view, this transformation turned Peruvian households into suppliers of women labourers. In the rural context of Bangladesh, migration of women and men from rural households also reflects infusion of the capitalistic mode of production in agriculture (Adnan 1990).

The theories highlighted in this section reflect that capitalistic market integration contributes to changes in rural livelihood. The above discussed perspectives call for attention to wage-labour migration, livelihood changes and particularly subsequent livelihood survival strategies of women wage-labour migrants in the Bangladesh context.

2.3   Paradoxes and Contradictions of Globalization-led Livelihood

Globalization is not a unidimensional phenomenon. It brings about diverse meanings and consequences in peoples' livelihood. Sassen (1999) asserts that globalization-led livelihood may constitute differential assimilation experiences for different people over time and space. Being blended with expansionary globalization ideas, differential historical and local experience of people often becomes translated into paradoxes of livelihood. She believes that migration is not always an outcome of poverty (1999:41-50). For instance, the global trans-border migration, especially to the United States, produces different meanings and expectations for different people over time and space. According to Sassen (1999), America is a land of promise, wealth and prosperity for European emigrants, while the Asian migrants tend to perceive it as a colonial power despite its provision of better living. Historical experiences of the people of these continents frame this differential imagery, which ultimately leads to their differential livelihood pattern. Historical and cultural experience also frame livelihood of migrants in cities. With the idea of "global cities", Sassen (1999) argues that all cities are globally connected and emigrant livelihood in cities constitutes a local version of livelihood with a

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[2] The process is described in Chapter IV.

global level desire for prosperity. She draws examples from youths of Chinese cities who are dressed in American style, yet in a Chinese cultural version. Such ambivalence describes contradictions and paradoxes of globalization—somewhat resemblant of a "rural mind" and "urban soul" (see Chapter VIII) of emigrant people.

Tomlinson (1991, 1999) views cultural blending of global-local contexts as "cultural imperialism" because local cultural traits (i.e., dress codes and symbols) and practices disappear under robustness of familiarity of modern (western) commodities in popular mind. Information and media power provide the capitalist centers global level hegemony to dominate local cultures. He writes,"globalization lies at the heart of modern culture; cultural practices lie at the heart of globalization" (Tomlinson 1999:1). In this context, globalization is inseparable from modernity (Tomlinson 1999:32). His ideas of the "cosmopolitanization" (1996:192-3), "cosmopolitan" (1999:194-207), and "hybridization of culture" (1999:141) refer to the contemporary trends of transfusion of global cultural traits (i.e., taste for fast food) into the local context. Thus, he terms the localities as "glocalities" (1999:199-200) and the cosmopolitan cultures as "glocalised cosmopolitanism" (Tomlinson 1999:198).

However, Tomlinson (1999) also indicated that such cultural transmission and assimilation of local culture into global culture also produces contradictions and paradoxes. There are highly resistant local cultural forces that stand against cultural imperialism. Language, religious norms, mores and beliefs, as well as interpersonal and ethnic and political ideas resist cultural aggression, and are altered at a relatively slow pace (Tomlinson1999:88). Tomlinson (1999) also warns that cultural hybridization and deterritorialization processes may obscure persistent power inequalities, dependency of local economy and people, trade disparities and a widening gap between people. Thus peoples' cry of livelihood strife may not be heard, and resultantly their reactions and response may lead to erosive patterns of livelihood.

Appadurai (1996) views transformation and transfusion of culture as one response among multiple impacts of globalization. He believes that non-economic dimensions of globalization such as political and social lifestyle of people are equally as important as economic impacts of globalization (Appadurai 1996). Globalization-led migration converges people of diverse cultural background and ethnicities. Such convergence

constitutes "ethnoscapes" (Appadurai 1997)—a landscape of human interaction and communication that produces both bad and good consequences in the livelihoods of people. In this ethnoscape, flows of refugees and migrant workers may increase women trafficking for prostitution, and increase competition of day-to-day living of marginalized people. Yet, the global-local interaction process may provide local people with the prospects of social and political accomplishment to overcome civic strife. This optimism is transcribed as "the global and the local can become reciprocal instruments of the deepening of democracy" (Appadurai 2002:25), and may turn into "grassroots globalisation" or "globalisation from below" (Appadurai 2002:25). Thus, he contemplates the rise of civil societies and their activism in both local and global context. Kopinak (2003) expresses a similar type of optimism in the context of otherwise economic prospect of mass *maquilisation* in Mexico. She asserts that despite breakdown in indigenous economy, the Mexican "maquiladora dispersion is not contained in one zone, and may be better understood as forming industrial corridors or hubs via rural industrialization" (2003:1 Thus, an integrated national policy may guide budding rural industrialization for public good.

This body of literature suggests probing globalization-led livelihood changes of women workers of Bangladesh from a point of view of globalization with multiple consequences. These perspectives suggest multiple outcomes and pros and cons to globalization-led livelihood changes, as well as persistent possibilities of solutions to livelihood problems of women garment workers of Bangladesh.

2.4 Livelihood Strategies and Rural-Urban Linkage

In the macro context of society, there is literature that presents wage-migration as the most common form of livelihood strategy of the poor. Livelihood strategies at the household level (micro context) are documented in a few anthropological and social studies. In general, the first wave of literature suggests that a need for cash income usually forces the households to adopt cash cropping (Dewey 1980; Kumar 1979, 1983; Jones 1983), cash plantation or livestock production and rearing, or all of these activities together. Other than cash cropping, wage-migration, sharecropping, or petty-trading— whatever alternative mechanisms the household members adopt for income-

supplementation and survival—reflect their reliance and dependence on 'cash-earning' (Collins 1986:653-54). Guyer's (1982) study indicates that strategies are built around attracting cash-income. Her analysis is that although cash-income may contribute less economic benefit to households than non-cash income, it always attracts the labourers more than non-cash income does.

The second set of literature depicts the gendered nature of survival strategy. Sen's (1990) "household well being" (later adopted by the UNDP [1997]) or gendered distribution of household resources is a strategy that indicates that women bring higher health attainments, social benefits, and greater well-being to the household because women tend to distribute resources for the betterment of children and aged members of the households (Singh 1977; Buvinic et al. 1992). Kumar (1978) found in Kerala, India, that women from poorer and landless households and engaged in extra-household wage work can supply children with more nutrition-rich food, while non-earning housewives of marginally land-owning households fail to supply similar nutritious food to their children. Moore (1994) shows that, children below age five in low-income female-headed households of the Northern Province of Zambia grow up with close to the required level of nutrition in-take, while, in contrast, relatively well-off male-headed households fail to ensure that level for their children.

A third set of literature asserts that livelihood strategies may take the shape of political decisions. Phillips' (1989) study suggests that livelihood strategies do not refer to survival strategies only, but also indicate political strategies around identity and self-realization at the individual level. "Household strategies" (Phillips 1989) are based on power relations and political negotiations between members within the household. Therefore, the household is not only a productive but also a political (strategic) unit. Dwyer and Bruce (1988) observed a strong tendency among husbands to retain their own income for extra-household purposes. Thus, women's extra-household incomes do not remain as their own income but become consumed in the household channel. Under these conditions, women may adopt alternative strategic or off-the-record means toward savings and protection of their income. Drawing upon Bangladesh women's entitlement to micro-credit, Rahman's (1999) study unfolded the process of drainage and "passing

on" of women's entitlement to husbands—the power holders—for women's perceived strategic reasons of household-level harmony.

The fourth emphasis in the literature on livelihood strategies is region and culture-specific as well as gender-specific (e.g., Bennett 1981; Guyer 1982; Kumar 1983; Folbre 1982, 1984; Acharya and Bennett 1981, 1983). Bennett's (1981) study among highland Nepalese Hindu women identifies strategies of women to attain bargaining power—retention of freedom to divorce and remarry and maintenance of post-marital kinship relationships for support from natal households under the pressure of polygamy and abandonment. In societies where men own land, women's household strategies involve preparedness and protective measures against risk of divorce, abandonment, competition and conflict between co-wives, and insecurity and risk of disentitlement of their own children to household resources. In patriarchal and patrilineal cultures of India (Agarwal 1990; Dreze and Sen 1995), Bangladesh (Kabeer 1991; Abdullah and Zeidenstein 1992; Cain et al. 1979) and Nepal (Bennett 1983), dowry payment is paid by the bride's parents to secure her from facing the above-mentioned risks. As a strategy of security, women also tend to maintain a strong relationship with natal kin and neighbourhood for emergency support at times of conjugal and household crisis. Lomnitz (1977) calls these ties "social networks" which, in her view, are key to household survival.

With respect to livelihood strategies, the ideas of both coping and preparedness are reflected in some literature. Kabeer (1991) views that women adopt various livelihood strategies to cope with already existing household and social level adversities. Hossain and others (1993) complement this notion that strategies are equally chosen to secure future livelihood from unforeseen vulnerabilities. Collins (1995) and Kelkar and Nathan (1998) assert that no matter whether for coping or preparedness, women's household-based strategies become ineffective under double-exploitation situations, because these decisions have no impact on wage-exploitation and no strength over normative affiliation of domestic responsibilities. Some literature (Agarwal 1990; Shikdar 1998) indicates that strategies of women-headed households become synonymous to struggle.

In times of necessity, households also adapt by changing their structure (Nieves 1979). Kumar (1979) reveals in a study of food consumption that a wide range of

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monthly variations in household composition and consumption in Zambia take place due to frequent seasonal and temporary migration of household members. For instance, when elder men who are engaged in extra-household wage-work visit natal households for a short period of time, they are well fed; and women and children sacrifice a portion of the total household allocation of food. Again, when men leave, women and children are well fed to supplement the shortage in the other days' food-intake.

Gendered strategies also differ by types of households. An example is drawn from Ghanaian poor urban households that are characterized by "a loosely knit set of overlapping economies" (Lloyd and Gage-Brandon 1993:117): strong lineage ties, but weaker conjugal bonds; and income-earning, spending, production, consumption and other economic activities operate mostly outside the household. As a result, conflict between household members over intra-household distribution of resources and responsibilities is an everyday-life phenomenon in these households. Such a situation motivates women to develop the best possible strategies to protect their own interests often through savings, maintaining a separate bank account, owning land and allowing husbands no share to their own income. In the Ghanaian situation, women undertake such strategies also to live relatively securely when they get older and 'retire' from marriage[3] in a situation when they do not receive adequate economic and emotional support from their offspring.

Most peasant household strategies tend to be built upon a principle of maintaining solidarity, morality, kinship ties and mutual respect between household members. Boxhill (1993) argues that capitalist incorporation into the countryside increases female headed households, and weakens Jamaican household morality, and familial bonds between its members, as well as increased sexual disorganization—promiscuity, early sexual activity, premature pregnancy and young mothers, and sexual and venereal disease. Katzman (1992) pointed to other dimensions of the problem where increased incorporation of Caribbean women into wage-work changes perception and imagery of power and gender relations of household members. Young people often have an inferior image of their fathers and of adult males compared to the image they have of their mothers. Women

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[3] Lloyd and Gage-Brandon (1993:124-125) introduced this intriguing concept of 'retirement from marriage' to denote that women usually live a lonely life free of familial obligations.

often have a similar image of their husbands or partners because the real (abusive) behaviour of fathers and husbands does not fit the traditional 'macho' image of responsible and dutiful men (Katzman 1992). These problems have mounted because strict practice of marital rules and obligations is mandatory only among the richer classes. The black and *mestizo* populations variably practice common-law marriage or non-marital alliances. As a result, many children are born outside marriage and many female-headed households persist (Folbre 1991:24). Capitalism may create opposite conditions too. In recent decades, Jamaican men and women tend to share a common value that they need marriage and long-term serious relationships, love, fidelity, adequate income and good sex (Wyatt et al. 1994). It is observed that, as a strategy to return to family values, many elder household members, especially women, are increasingly being attached with religious practices and emigrating to other countries. Such strategies imply that capitalist transformation of households also bring changes in ideological and spiritual behaviour of human beings, especially under the livelihood pressure and ideological crises it creates inside the households.

Overall, intra-household strategies are determined by complex socio-economic and cultural factors. In remote agricultural communities of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, the households prefer boys to girls from their birth to death, because the boys serve as essential agricultural labour, bring dowry-money at marriage and take care of parents in their old age (Akram-Lodhi and Haroon 1993; Abdullah and Zeidenstein 1992; Caplan 1993). In *purdah societies*[4] (Kabeer 1991; Zaman 1995; Patel 1993) of Pakistan and Bangladesh, women are culturally and religiously assigned domestic activities only, because they are considered passive members of households who would be active members in their husbands' households upon marriage, and would be of no benefit to elderly parents. Adult sons, in contrast, are always valued because they are considered able to independently move and migrate from one place to another at times of seasonality and drought and crop loss (Patel 1993; Abdullah and Zeidenstein 1992). Therefore, preferential treatment in gender distribution of household income and resources in rural South Asia is generally conditioned by structural features of poverty (Kabeer 1991), agro-dependence (Griffin and Ghose 1979), seasonality and calamity

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[4] Characterized by seclusion and/or veiling of women.

(Agarwal 1990), lack of access to education, medical care, required level of nutrition and networks of a social safety-net (Sen 1990).

Some studies reveal that interhousehold transfers serve as one of the most important means of survival in the poorest households (Barbería et al. 1998; Bamberger et al. 1992; World Bank 2000). A World Bank (2000) paper shows that about half of rural households in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, the Kyrgyz Republic, Poland, Russia, and Ukraine give or receive income transfers through private networks. The same paper outlines that the poorest five percent of Russian households earn equal or more than one third of their formal wage income from interhousehold transfers while Ukrainian households earn nearly three-fifths of income through private networks.

In my study of women garment workers in Bangladesh, I have explored the nature and extent of reciprocity and interpersonal level exchange networks among "petty-wage labourers"[5]. Correspondingly, below I give greater attention to literature on reciprocity and exchange networks.

In relation to agrarian societies, Wolf (1966) demonstrated that coalitions, reciprocal borrowing and renting are some integrated strategies that protect agrarian social organization from vulnerabilities. Reciprocity as a strategy may constitute an essential part of livelihood dynamics in urban shanties. In a shantytown outside Mexico City, Lomnitz (1977) closely investigated strategies of poor people to overcome economic insecurity. She revealed that poor people maintain a network of long-term reciprocal interhousehold exchange among kin and neighbours. Such networks help them to survive destitution. She presented the unique idea that "security" itself is a commodity. Within the framework of economic destitution and absence of public services, livelihood security erodes. Thus, security becomes an "important commodity" (Lomnitz 1977:190).

An important component of Lewis's (1961) study is that it looked deeply at survival strategies of poor urban households. His study reveals that, despite a "culture of poverty", urban shanty communities retain shared values and rely on informal interhousehold exchange and distribution. Lewis pioneered an insightful study of urban poor adaptation with everyday-life socio-economic and occupational stressors caused by

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[5] I introduce the term "petty wage-labourers" in relation to garment workers to reflect the idea that these workers do not constitute the wage-labourer category in industrial labour relation context. For detailed analysis, see Chapter IV and Chapter IX.

their inaccessibility to public services. He did a two-decade-long study in Mexico City, Puerto Rico, and New York. Throughout the study he closely observed that uncertainty of formal earning and inaccessibility to basic needs of food, clothes, shelter, medication and furniture compelled poorer urban households to build a reciprocal exchange network of families, neighbours, and friends. These networks emerged as a means to cope with the inaccessibility of public services and credit systems. These networks also led to the emergence of a non-profit informal credit system among poorer households.

Bamberger and others (1999) conducted a comprehensive study of transfers through community level social networks in the Southeast Cartagena of Colombia in 1982. The study concludes that half the households received a transfer in cash or in kind. Such networks of transfers accrued fifty two percent of income for female-headed households and forty percent for male-headed households. According to them, transfers help poorer Colombian households to survive in two ways: first as an informal employment generation sector in richer households, and second as an informal social support network during crisis periods. A World Bank Report cited a different form of reciprocity, termed *utang na loo* (debt of gratitude), which is practiced in the Philippines. "When a household receives assistance from another linked to it by kinship or a close social relationship, it is compelled to return the assistance with interest, to avoid remaining in the donor's permanent debt. The obligation to repay can carry over from one generation to the next" (World Bank 2000:3). Sahlins' (1965) exchange theory model also presents reciprocity as a mode of exchange in both interhousehold and greater community level. According to his view, the harmonious dimension of reciprocity refers to informal mutual agreement between the giver and taker of the repayment at the latter's convenience, like contributions of parents transferred to children.

The above addressed theoretical perspectives provoke a probing of the existence and practice of reciprocity in livelihood of women garment workers of Bangladesh. A general view of the current trend of reciprocity is proved in the World Bank report (2003) that concludes that community-based reciprocal livelihood strategies seem to be eroding throughout the world. Earlier, Sahlins (1965) addressed the erosion of reciprocity through the notion of "negative reciprocity" In his view, it is the aggressive extreme expression of reciprocity which refers to forcible possession of goods or services by one from the other.

Market-oriented exchange relationships sometime turn into negative reciprocal relationships, because market-exchange is often controlled by the capitalists. Polanyi (1987) viewed similar erosions as "disembeddedness" of economy. Polanyi described how the consolidation of capitalism, commodity fetishism, and commodification of land and labour, together represent "disembeddedness" of the economy for society—a process that separates morality from economy, and brings greater livelihood strife. The World Bank report (2003) suggests preventing of such erosions through formal and organized civil society initiatives such as micro credit programs of NGOs, and through the establishment of gender equity. However, the following discussion shows that the wage-labour migration of women itself results in changes in gender dimensions of livelihood.

2.5 Changes in Gendered Domains of Livelihood: Identity and Social Existence

Boserup (1970) believes that entry of women into wage-earning sectors leads to their economic self-reliance, empowerment and dignified status in the household. Available literature on the Bangladesh garment sector suggests that, despite occupational and livelihood plight, women garment workers of Bangladesh perceive the factory job as a means to attain "relative freedom of speech and of movement", "access to" and "control over" decision-making (Khatun 1998), and empowerment of women (Naved 1994). With wage-income, women achieve power to play a decisive role in household activities and entitlements. The power bestows upon them decision making capacity and access to and control over their income and material resources. Absar writes, "there is a (positive) change in attitude towards early marriage, the dowry system, adoption of family planning, economic management, and career advancement and upward mobility" (2002:208).

Agarwal (1990), Dreze and Sen (1989) and Kabeer (1991) clarified notions of relative achievement, and imply that women's participation in economic activities alone cannot bring empowerment, specifically within the existence of patriarchy and established normative principles of entitlement that produce gender bias, inequality and deprivation in the household division of labour and consumption. These authors address women's entitlement at the household level. They put forward the proposition that women's empowerment at the household level can be defined through their level of

access to and control over household entitlements. Lack of entitlement of women in households refers to their exclusion from benefits of household economy.

Various authors on the Mexican *maquiladoras*[6] (Martin and Las 1989; Piore 1997; Salzinger 2001; Tiano 1990; Valadez 1998) and sweatshops of China, the Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia and Bangladesh (Seabrook 1996; Ross 1997, Fuentes and Ehrenreich 1981) assert that intensification of globalization-led wage-migration of women results in an increase of woman-headed households in city areas (Khatun 1998), as well as transformations in the gender-based traditional social order, and household responsibility and division of labour that affects whose relationships with family, household, lineage, neighbourhood, village and the greater community. In the Peruvian case, reliance on the cash economy resulted in capitalist transformation of rural households (Mallon 1986). Similar transformations as a result of participation of both men and women in migratory paid labour caused erosion in household ties as well as weakened extra-household kinship linkages (Collins 1986).

Maria Mies (1986) skilfully extends all these analyses into a depiction of cause-effect relationships of the capitalist production process and gender division of labour and their impact on social organization. She argues that 'industrialization' leads to a spiralling process of *"colonization"* and *"housewifization"* of women workers and cheapening of their labour (Mies 1986). Kaplagam (1994) further expands the analysis saying that the global capitalist mode of production is also responsible for women workers' "proletarianization", "marginalization" and "pauperization" (Kaplagam, 1994:133-38). However, Kaplagam (1994) looks mainly at the economic mechanism and overlooks the social linkages addressed in Mies' 'housewifization' hypothesis.

Tiano (1990) and Redclift and Sinclair (1991) see in monopoly capitalism a process of ideational subordination and deskilling of the workers, and also observe an active process in the creation of a new category, specifically a cheap labour force made up of women displaced from traditional agricultural systems. For Tiano (1990), *maquila* women workers constitute a category that gives them positions as neither a household labourer, nor a permanent manufacturing worker. Khatun's (1998) study shows that,

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[6] *Maquiladora* refers to the Mexican export-oriented assembly line factories that have sprouted up along the US-Mexican border.

because of increased demand for cheap women labourers in the mushrooming garment sector of Bangladesh, more women job seekers and their accompanying family members migrate to cities. Thus, the abundant supply of women job seekers increases competition for limited jobs between surplus labourers. In terms of supply and demand economics, this puts a dampening effect in wages. In terms of demands and supply economics, it puts a damping effect in wages.

Women's ideological crises and increased breakdown in household solidarity may have interlinakges. Tiano (1990) observes contradictory beliefs and ideology among the Mexicali *maquiladora* women workers about their identity in family and on the shop floor. The majority of workers Tiano interviewed at one point evaluated their new employment as a means of emancipation from their servitude in male-dominated households. At another point, most of them asserted that it would be better if women didn't work outside the home. Tiano (1990) thinks that such identity crisis among women arises out of ambivalence about the purposeful war of the MNCs and their sweatshops to break patriarchal ideological barriers in order to make sweat jobs more acceptable for women. At the same time there is the purposeful compliance of MNCs with traditional and stereotypical patriarchal ideals that ascribe to women certain "feminine" characteristics such as docility, patience, devotion, sincerity and manual dexterity. Such ambivalence ensures women as industrial labour reserve for MNCs and their sweatshops (Tiano 1990; Redclift and Sinclair 1991).

The body of literature reviewed here brings forth the need to probe whether disentitlement persists in the livelihood of women garment workers of Bangladesh, and whether it affects livelihood and invokes novel survival strategies on the part of the workers. Drawing from Mallon (1986) and Mies (1986), it could be suggested that patriarchy comes to be articulated within capitalism even outside of agriculture. Under the conditions of gender-based normative principles of distribution and consumption, and conflict of interests and power endowment, gendered crises of entitlement may stem from inside family and household. Apparent wage-labour opportunities for women may therefore lead to a process of "disentitlement" or "passing on" (Rahman 1999) of resources within normative entitlements, specifically from women to men, and thereby lead to the exploitation and appropriation of women's income by male household

members. In the context of wage migration of women garment workers of Bangladesh, these tendencies may invoke and perpetuate novel forms of livelihood and survival strategies among workers. The above-discussed dynamics are brought into a wider spectrum of analysis of this study in the following chapter.

CHAPTER III

THE GLOBAL GARMENT SWEATSHOP AND BANGLADESH

3.1 The Emergence of the Garment Sweatshops: Globalization of the Maquiladora Syndrome

The garment sector is the most expansive sweatshop sector in the world. The world trade in garments achieved 13% compounded growth per year during the period 1973 to 1986. The global garment trade increased from US $12.4 billion to $61.8 billion during this period (Hossain et al. 1990:5). It is availability of cheap labour that resulted in a 20% annual increase in garment trade of the Third World countries. The thrust of the Third World countries for international revenue earning through export promotion paved the way to expansion of labour intensive assembly-line garment manufacturing plants in these countries. Export-oriented principles of these plants institutionalize commodification of labour and "internationalization of capital and labour" (Dubeck and Borman 1996) through appropriation of advantages of cheap local labour, weak unions, poor wage rules, insecure employment, poor shop-floor conditions and arbitrary management practices. As well, developing countries' share in world trade of cloth and garments also increased from 16.45 in 1965 to 42.1% in 1985 (Hossain et al. 1990:5)

Neoclassical economic principles provided international development agencies (World Bank and IMF) with a political and intellectual rationality to advocate that industrial expansion and internationalization of capital and labour into poor regions is a dynamic condition to drive mobility of capital and labour of the poor regions toward economic efficiency and development. Removal of protected trade relationships between the poor and the rich nations are thought to be a rational measure toward globalization. Since the poor countries lack machinery, sophisticated transport, and credit and market access outside those protected relationships, local producers are faced with the new challenge of locating new market and income sources. As a result, local entrepreneurs

find subcontracted manufacturing and assembly-line factory operation for outsiders more profitable than indigenous initiatives of industrialization. Their respective countries also face enormous national and international pressures to relax international trade policies, and open up their doors to attract investment from rich foreign countries.

As a result of outsourcing of cheap labour and raw material, thousands of garment assembling plants sprouted in South Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean. These plants manufacture garment products for Wal-Mart, Nike, Adidas, Reebok, the Gap, Bugle Boy, The Bay, Sears, Macy's, Levis and many other companies and brands.

Internationalization of capital and labour is one of the important aspects of the garment sector. The principle of internationalization is to take advantage of non-union or cheaper sources of labour and lax workplace regulations. For example, *maquiladora* factories of the United States and Mexico border towns have emerged to exploit the advantage of low-wage Mexican labour. In respect to the operational principles, *maquiladora* conditions were implemented in garment factories of Bangladesh, Indonesia, Thailand, China, Chile and Haiti, as well as in electronic assembling units in Malaysia, Indonesia, Colombia, China and sportswear and shoe factories (Nike, Adidas, Wrangler, etc.) of Vietnam, the Philippines and Indonesia. I refer to this unique transborder operational conformity as the *maquiladora syndrome*.

One of the characteristic features of the *maquiladora* syndrome is that the sector affects peasantry and agrarian livelihood of the respective target countries in a more or less similar manner. The sector depends on the regular supply of a large workforce from rural agricultural households. Migration of rural peasant household workers to cities as sweatshop workers constitutes an early setback for agricultural production of most countries (Ross 1997). Another feature of the *maquiladora* syndrome is that the countries that entertained the garment sweatshops have undergone relatively similar experiences of a vicious cycle of destruction of their indigenous economies. Mexico is an example of such a setback. The overdependence on sweatshop revenue from *maquiladoras* helped to destroy the agrarian economic system of Mexico (Benería 1992). The *maquiladora* hit the agrarian mode of production hard in Northern Mexico (Martin 1989). The cycle is as follows.

Dispersal of the peasantry in the Northern Mexico region started in the late 1950s. In the decades of 1950s and 1960s, the US *bracero* (guest worker) program pulled thousands of Mexican agrarian male workers into the sweatshops inside the US. Migration of Mexican men at that time created an acute shortage in agricultural labourers (Arturo 1995). As a result, women in households were forced to provide additional labour in farming and manage diverse household responsibilities alone. In 1964, The United States cancelled the *bracero* (guest worker) program rendering those Mexican male workers unemployed. In 1965, Mexico established *maquiladora* export-processing zones (EPZ) in the northern Mexico border region under the Border Industrialization Program (BIP) to tackle a high unemployment rate caused by the collapse of the *bracero* program. Since the MNCs in the EPZ preferred to hire women as low-waged workers, the *maquiladoras* further aggravated the "male unemployment" problem in eighties. Meanwhile, male workers lost their connection with the agrarian production system. Even in the changed condition, unemployed male workers were reluctant to return to their agricultural occupation. As the *maquiladoras* further escalated large-scale migration of women workers, the agrarian production system in Northern Mexican regions collapsed (Arturo 1995). In the Bangladesh context, young women workers tend to meet the need of caretakers by promoting further migration of rural family members and relatives to cities (Khatun 1998). Under these circumstances, the abundant supply of women job seekers increases competition between surplus labourers of limited available jobs (Khatun 1998), as well as creates an acute labour shortage in agriculture.

The global garment sector has continuously been altering both the economic and social orders of all countries involved (Ross 1997). The above-mentioned vicious cycle may have a more spiralling effect in some contexts. Shiva's explanation of the Indian context is worth noting here. The parallel drawn from Shiva (1999) implies that as soon as shortage of labour in rural areas put the agricultural mode of production at risk, the MNCs began to exploit the situation with their business of hybrid seeds varieties and pesticides. According to Shiva, free trade policy in food and agriculture functions as one of the world's biggest refugee creation programs. For instance, India, in response to global free trade policy, has shifted from food crops to a cotton exporting economy with a threefold increase in land allocation for the production of "white gold" (cotton). Apparent

high profits of cotton production involved high costs too. The increase in pesticide use also became an ecological concern for the people. Now that the farmers are compelled to purchase hybrid seed each year from MNCs like Ciba-Geigy, their century old practice of preservation and reuse of open-pollinated indigenous seed is changed. The Indian farmers meet these costs only by taking out high interest loans from the same MNCs that control marketing system of hybrid seed and pesticides. In turn, farmers enter into a spiralling system of unrecoverable debt; land selling, abandonment of farming and migration to cities as agricultural refugees.

A manifestation of the *maquiladora* syndrome is that the instances of easy and quick foreign revenue earning prompt the Third World countries to install local *maquiladoras*. Mexican *maquiladoras* serve as the inspirational basis in this respect. For instance, after the NAFTA treaty, US garment production has moved to Mexico. It is shown in official statistics that Mexico had US$ 229 million deficit in textile and clothing trade with Canada and America in 1992. By 1995, Mexico has not only realized the deficit, but also earned a surplus of US$1.54 billion (Piore 1997). Such statistics supposedly inspires the Third World countries to entertain expansion of global *maquiladoras* on their soils.

The most obvious attribute of this syndrome is reflected in the global level conformity in the treatment of the workers and provisions of the working conditions of the sector. Referring to the above-stated statistics, Carmen Valadez (1998) explains that it has become possible only through "*maquilisation*" of the whole region at the expense of workers' basic rights and forceful implementation of faster working pace, longer hours of work, lower wages, reduction in health and compensation costs, as well as weak enforcement of labour laws. Wal-Mart, the sixth largest company in the world and the single largest retailer and importer into the US, pay the Bangladeshi workers 40-70% below the minimum legal wage for an 80-hour working week. It is calculated that these workers, some of the world's poorest people, are being deprived of $20 per week (which is more than average monthly salary of Bangladesh garment workers). The workers work in unhealthy conditions with restricted toilet breaks and are denied their statutory rights such as maternity leave, sick leave, festival leaves and allowances. In 1998, Wal-Mart

earned US $137.6 billion as revenue, which was 36 times greater than Bangladesh's total export, and domestic revenue of US $3.872 billion (National Labour Committee 1999).

The *maquiladora* syndrome is also reflected in the global level conformity of its means of production. Generally, the modern-age garment sector is different from other modern technology-intensive sectors. Its technology is low quality and unsophisticated, and it functions with low investment by the subcontractors, and low wages paid to workers. These labour-intensive factories usually operate without provisions of minimum working standard and bring health hazards to the workers. Generally, "Taylorism" (Braverman 1974:113) becomes the guiding principle of the sector. Taylorism—an institutionalized economic morality advocated by Frederick Winslow Taylor, refers to the ideas and practices required for the emergence of a highly powerful, technologically-minded and rationalized management to organize production of consumer and capital goods for domestic and overseas markets (Braverman 1974:112-121). The three central principles of "Taylorism" apply in this sector. First, "the labour process is to be rendered independent of craft, tradition, and the workers' knowledge" (Braverman 1974:113). Therefore, the managers instead of the producers (labourers) study every aspect of the production process in order to possess control of production. Second, "separation of conception from execution" (Braverman 1974:113) is maintained by the management in order for imposition of strict division of labour in the production process, as well as to ensure that "all possible brain work is removed from the shop floor" so that the "workers are reduced almost to the level of labour in its animal form" (Braverman 1974:114). "Brain work" is considered as an exclusively managerial task. And third, the managerial power on the shop floor supersedes all other capability. The sector also operates according to another principle of Braverman that suggests for managerial tasks to involve construction of new plants and routine reorganization of shop floors in order to separate workers from one another (Braverman 1974:193). These conditions result in a global level conformity of deskilling of workers and their alienation from the production process[1]. The Bangladesh garment sector is also not an exception. However, despite these generalizations, some specific privileges have greatly contributed to the emergence and sustenance of the Bangladesh garment sector. The following section sheds light on

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[1] For detailed discussion, see subsequent sections

specific conditions as well as the overall operational mechanism of the garment sector of Bangladesh.

3.2   The Bangladesh Garment Sector: Factors and Facts

The globalization agenda has embraced Bangladesh and Bangladesh has embraced the most recent wave of globalization since the early 1980s through accommodation of transnational capital investment strategies, multinational finance dependency, duty-free manufacture and assembly plants, private enterprise capitalism, growing dependence on commercial fertilizer and herbicide, and unimpeded access to the country's greatest resource – human labour. (Wiest 1999:1)

The garment sector is the most profitable adaptation in this pursuit. Like the Mexican *maquiladora* (Martin and Las 1989, Piore 1997, Salzinger 2001, Tiano 1990, Valadez 1998), which is based on foreign investments and international revenue earning, Bangladesh entered into a rapid process of globalization and commodification of labour through promotion of worldwide export expansion of the sector in 1990s. The garment sector contributes 60% of total export earnings and stands as the fourth largest employer (Firoze 1998:129) in Bangladesh. Thirty-five garment export items are manufactured there for overseas consumer markets of 31 countries (Nuruzzaman 1999:2).

Table 3.1 shows that from 1975 to 1987, the sector had received 81% annual average growth that is the highest of the growth rates of all other Asian countries. It was nearly three times higher than Indonesia, the second largest garment-manufacturing sector in Asia at that time.

Table 3.1   Share of RMG export by developing countries, 1975-87 (US$000)

Countries	1975	1987	Average Growth (%)
Bangladesh	141	441,310	81.3
India	216,866	1,472,691	9.2
Pakistan	33,009	449,540	21.6
Sri Lanka	3,767	568,611	21.1
Malaysia	37,345	854,064	19.9
Philippines	105,661	1,024,952	10.4
Thailand	50,279	1,090,788	19.4
Indonesia	3,308	619,268	31.3

Source: Quddus, M. and S. Rashid 2000:234.

Table 3.2 shows the annual growth rate of the sector in Bangladesh. The sector expanded at a rate of 17% average annual growth inside the country. The most phenomenal growth (43%) was observed in the mid-1990s. It was calculated that the growth of Bangladesh RMG exports between 1990 and 1997 was 46 per cent on average (Absar 2001:41). National export revenue of Bangladesh through RMG reached to US$4349.41 million in 1999-2000 (*BGMEA Newsletter* 2000c), which constituted 76.15 per cent of total exports earning (Bhattacharya and Rahman 2001:55). In 2001-2002, the sector earned US $4,584 million—74% of foreign revenue of Bangladesh (BBS 2003:52).

Table 3.2 Growth rate of the Bangladesh garment sector between 1990-2002

Year	Export in Mn. US$	Y-O-Y Growth Rate (%)
1990-91	866.82	
1991-92	1182.57	36.43
1992-93	1445.02	22.19
1993-94	1555.79	7.67
1994-95	2228.35	43.23
1995-96	2547.13	14.31
1996-97	3001.25	17.83
1997-98	3781.94	26.01
1998-99	4019.98	6.29
1999-2000	4349.41	08.19
2000-2001	4859.83	11.74
2001-2002	4583.75	-5.68
Average Growth Rate :		**17.11**

Source: BGMEA 2003: http://www.bgmea.com/data.htm

3.2.1 History of development of Bangladesh garment sector

The transformation of the textile sector into the garment-manufacturing sector in the Indian subcontinent has taken place throughout various historical stages of physical and intellectual domination of capitalism. In the first place, the British colonialists systematically destroyed the textile sector of Bangladesh in the early nineteenth century. Marx (1853 [MECW 1988:125]) explained that through banning of use of *Muslin*[2] and other hand-crafted Indian garments, and indiscriminate marketing of British fabrics and

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[2] A luxurious and fanciful hand-woven indigenous fine-cotton outfit produced in the pre-colonial Indian subcontinent.

garments, the British colonialists destroyed the indigenous textile sector of its colony[3] from 1818 to 1856. Prior to the invasion of the British colonial power, Bangladesh had a self-reliant textile sector those produced quality cotton fabrics far superior to that produced in Britain. The British passed an Act in 1720 prohibiting import and use of fabrics from the Indian subcontinent in Britain. Being the citizens of British India, people of India also lost their right to use indigenous "garment or apparel whatsoever, of any painted, printed or dyed calicoes, in or about any bed, chair, cushion, window curtain, or any other sort of household stuff or furniture" (Seabrook 2001:2). There was no relaxation of restriction on imports even after 1774, when a law prohibited the manufacture of purely cotton goods in Britain. The colonial market protectionism paved the way to establishment of a British monopoly on the textile sector; in obverse, it brought about the destruction of the indigenous textile manufacturing system in the Indian subcontinent. As textile industries in Manchester started to produce surplus textile goods, the colonial search for new consumer markets began. At the same time, the British control and domination of the indigenous manufacturing system turned the Bangladeshi producers into consumers (Seabrook 2001).

Since then, the textile and garment sector was being expanded and controlled by the rich nations of the world. It was only in the 1960s that the newly emerging economic powers of Asia grabbed the attention of the garment manufacturers of rich countries with their abundant reserve of a cheap labour force. Initially, eight countries of Asia, namely Taiwan, South Korea, Singapore, Hong Kong, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, India and the Philippines, appropriated advantage from quota-free production and export of garment products to the US and the EEC countries until mid-1980s (Gain 1990:4-5). The US and the EEC gradually withdrew export quota privileges of these countries in the mid-1980s. Since the NAFTA treaty, the US garment production has further moved to Mexico. Meanwhile, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore and South Korea developed an alternative economy—assembling, manufacturing and marketing of electronic consumer goods. The garment exporters of these countries did not abandon the garment manufacturing, but rather "subcontracted" to Bangladesh, Thailand and Indonesia to appropriate cheap

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[3] Greater Indian subcontinent composed of present day independent countries, namely Bangladesh, India and Pakistan.

labour, lax work conditions, undeveloped factory regulations and export promotion subsidies of the government of these countries (Haider 2001).

Although the Bangladesh government-owned RMG sector started its functioning in 1974-1975, it could not develop due to the imposition of the quota system by the US in 1976. During 1976-77, a German entrepreneur took the initiative to install a few export-oriented garment factories in Bangladesh (Paul-Majumder and Zohir 1991:1). There were only three RMG exporting factories during the beginning of the garment sector in 1977-78. The export earning from the RMG sector in the 1977-78 fiscal year was Taka 1 million—only 0.4% of total foreign revenue earning. In contrast, the revenue earning from the RMG sector in 1997-98 fiscal year rose to 3.8 billion US $—74% of total foreign revenue earning. By 2001, the number of garment factories in Bangladesh increased to 3900 factories (BGMEA 2000). The number of garment factories in Dhaka and Chittagong is 3,496; 2,850 factories are located in Dhaka (*Ajker Kagoj* 2001b). Through these factories, 41% of Bangladesh RMG exports enter into the US markets and 54% into the EU markets (Haider 2001).

As I explained earlier (section 1.1.3), besides cheap labour, specific privileges such as duty-free import of raw materials, bonded warehouse facility, duty-free import of machineries, privilege of "back to back" Letter of Credit (LC), exemption of corporate taxes and tax-free export earning facilities contributed to the rapid expansion of the sector. Added to these privileges, Bangladesh as a member of the LDCs, has been enjoying quota-free export privilege of the RMGs into the US and Canadian markets under the MFA (Multi-Fiber Agreement) and the ATC (Arrangement on Textiles and Clothing), and into the EU markets under the GSP (Generalized System of Preference) privileges.

Table 3.3 represents the position of Bangladesh as a garment exporter in three major apparel markets of the world. The quota advantages helped the Bangladesh RMG sector to remain in the position of 6th largest apparel exporter to the US during 1994-1997 (Quddus and Rashid 2000:53). Daewoo of Korea outsourced their plants to Bangladesh to take advantages of quota privilege and the Multi-Fibre Arrangement (MFA) in Bangladesh (Quddus and Rashid 2000:61). In a word, national and international level capitalist interests have created a mutually privileged condition for both the patrons

(investors-buyers) and clients (suppliers-manufacturers) that have led to the development of the Bangladesh garment sector.

Table 3.3   Position of Bangladesh RMG export in US, Canada and EU Markets, 1991-97

Year	USA	the EU	Canada
1991	8th largest	-	-
1992	7th largest	Largest T-shirt and shirt exporter	9th largest
1993	7th largest	Largest T-shirt and shirt exporter	-
1994	6th largest	5th largest T-shirt and shirt exporter	-
1995	6th largest	-	-
1996	6th largest	-	-
1997	6th largest	-	-

Source: Quddus and Rashid 2000:229

3.2.2   Management, operation and system of manufacturing

In terms of ownership and management and operation, Bangladesh garment factories are of two types. With a few exceptions, joint venture factories are located in the Export Processing Zones of Dhaka and Chittagong and operated by foreign investors and their local partners. Privately owned factories are located mainly in busy commercial and residential city areas, and operated by local investors and subcontractors.

With respect to export privilege, both types of factories are further divided into two groups. A group of factories enjoys certain export quota privilege to export ascertain quantity of garments to certain multinational buyers like GAP, Wal-Mart, Levis, and others. The other group of factories does not have quota privilege. The other type of factory normally does not manufacture for any specific international buyers. Instead of any specific agreements with overseas buyers, these factories maintain an open-contract system to manage as many independent work-orders as possible. Often they manufacture for the quota-privileged factories under an internal sub-contracting chain. The quota-privileged factories usually get "extra" and "additional" work-orders beyond the set quota limit. They subcontract the manufacturing of "additional" portions of the work orders to the second category factories.

Factories form three categories in terms of product output. The first category of factories manufactures the knitwear items like underwear, nightdresses, blouses, T-shirts, and gowns. The second category factories produce shirts, trousers and other woven

products manufactured in the woven manufacturing factories. The third category of factories manufactures sweaters and jackets. The Bangladesh garment sector is mainly composed of factories focussed on knitwear and woven goods. Manufacturing of sweaters and jackets requires specialized machines and skilled workers. This is why only a few factories manufacture jackets. Mainly male workers are employed in these factories.

Generally, the Bangladesh garment sector operates under two types of work-orders from overseas buyer. First, under CMO (Cutting and Making Order), the buyers supply all kinds of raw materials, design, cutting layout and other required inputs. Factories operate cutting, sewing and manufacturing management tasks only. 2) Under CMTO (Cutting, Making and Trimming), the buyers supply fabrics only. It is the responsibility of the manufacturers to assemble all other required inputs. Although rarely practiced, there is another type of contract between the buyers and manufacturers. Under this type of contract, the buyers are responsible only to negotiate agreements and memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with the manufacturers and pay the production cost. The factories employ every inputs of production such as raw materials and machinary.

Despite the distinction by ownership, quota and production type, and work-orders, the factories have either little or no difference at all in the management and manufacturing system and provisions of logistics. The role of factories is nothing but that of "tailors" manufacturing clothes in accordance with the design and conditions set by the buyers in work-orders. A number of national and international "buying houses" mediate and collect these orders from international buyers and subcontract them between the competing manufacturers. These subcontracting-mediating firms operate through the use of a relatively modern and sophisticated information and communication technology and direct lobbying with overseas buyers. These buying houses rate and categorize the factories in terms of their "efficiency" in meeting the set guidelines of the buyers. Thus, these firms and the buyers always ignore the issues of working conditions and the problems of garment workers.

In terms of the division of labour, the sector is primarily gender-segregated and secondarily skill-differentiated. Managerial and administrative positions are composed of skilled and high-salaried male personnel.

Figure 3.1 Division of labour in Bangladesh garment factories (M = Male, F = Female)

Production Manager (M)

Cutting Section	**Sewing Section**	**Finishing Section**
Cutting Master (M)	Floor in-Charge (M/F)	Floor in-Charge (M)
Cutter (M)	Supervisor (M/F)	Supervisor (M)
Cutting Helper (M)	Operator (F)	Ironer (M)
	Sewing Helper (F)	Folder (F/M)
		Finishing Helper (M/F)
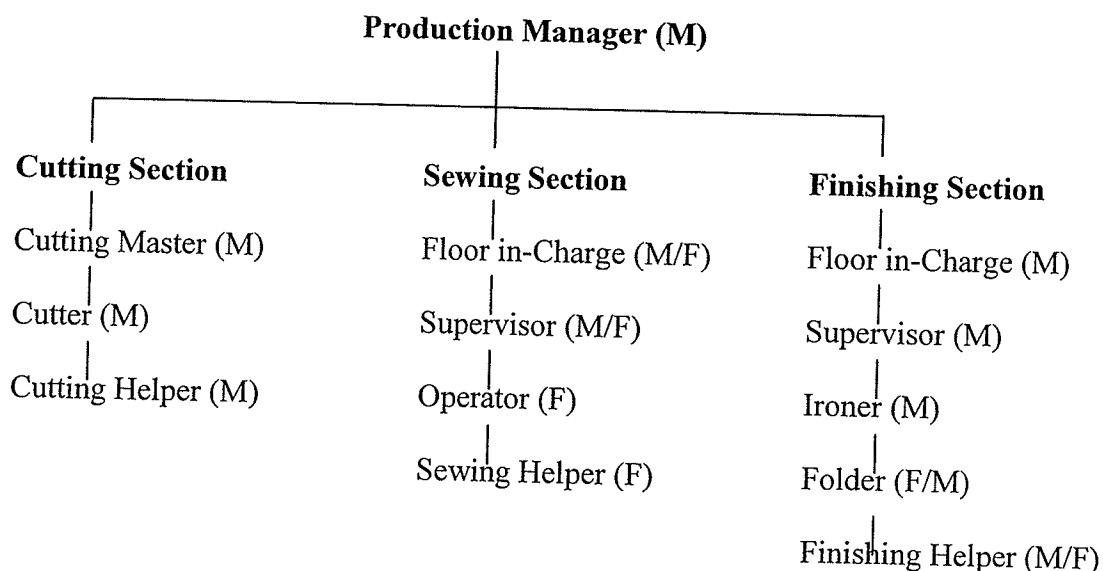
Source: Chowdhuri and Paul-Majumder, 1991

As a technical side of operation, the cutting section is a predominantly male-driven department. Depending on the size and magnitude of factories, three to ten male cutting personnel are employed in this section. Generally, the finishing section is also a male-majority department. The lower ladder of positions such as Finishing Helpers and Folders are primarily filled by women and secondarily by men. The sewing section is the main department of garment manufacturing. Depending on the size and magnitude of factories, 200 to 1000 workers work in plants. Except for a very small number of Floor-in-Charge persons and Floor Supervisors, most sewing workers are women. It was also observed that some relatively educated and articulate women are gradually taking over the positions of Floor-in-Charge and Floor Supervisors. Figure 3.2 also reflects a generalized rank-ordered distribution of the garment workers. Women constitute the largest share and lower stratum of the workforce.

A fundamental drawback of the Bangladesh garment sector is that it has failed to establish notions of sustainability and economic viability for the future of the country. In

the context of the global open market economy, the weaknesses of the sector become more evident than its strengths. In many ways, the profit-maximization objectives of the investors and subcontractors and their agents, together with governmental hunger for foreign revenue, have intensified the fragility and vulnerability of the sector. The following section demonstrates the vulnerability of the Bangladesh garment sector.

3.3 Fragility and Vulnerability of the Garment Sector

In order to take advantage of differences in wage rates between countries, multinational buyers move from one country to another to reduce production costs of garment production. Such a practice indiactes the lack of job security in this sector. The Amsterdam-based Clean Clothes Campaign reported companies moving from Poland and Hungary to Romania, Slovenia and Bulgaria (CCC 1999). In a similar fashion, the buyers are also moving from Bangladesh to the Eastern European and the Caribbean states. Big multinational buyers like 'Haddad' and 'Capital Mercury' have already withdrawn their garment business from Bangladesh (Haider 2001). Like elsewhere in the Third World, the governments of Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin American countries also relaxed manufacturing regulations in order to allow the investors of this labour-intensive sector to operate without provisions of minimum working standards. As a result, investors cum sub-contractors of these regions are able to offer even cheaper manufacturing costs for the buyers. Additionally, these countries are newly provided with privilege of quota-free access in the US markets.

The Clean Clothes Campaign report (1999) foretold that the countries with their dependence on garment export revenue would face an early economic setback in the near future. Much before the prediction of the Clean Clothes Campaign, Valadez (1995) drew upon the Mexican context to warn the world community of an approaching debacle saying that the *maquilisation* did not seem to help the national economy but only the MNCs to appropriate huge profits that were returned intact to their countries of origin. These predictions have started to come true in the Bangladesh context. Followed by the withdrawal of previously existing quota-free access of Bangladeshi RMGs to North American markets, and shifts in interests of buyers from Asian to East European and Latin American producers, nearly 1300 Bangladeshi plants shut down by 2001. As a

result, job opportunities for women in the garment sector have shrunk. About 50,000 workers lost their jobs from July to November 2001 (Haider 2001). It was observed during the field study of this research that closure of factories forced hundreds of workers to permanently leave their shelters or rented shanties in the slum areas for unknown places. Many workers informed me that they escaped due to their inability to pay outstanding rent for several months.

Growing globalization-driven pressures on the sector through the withdrawal of the GSP (Generalized System of Preference) and MFA (Multi-fibre Agreement) phase-out by 2005, and lifting of privileges from Bangladesh to Latin American and African countries under NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) and TDA 2000 (Trade and Development Act) have already started to hit hard the livelihood of poor garment workers of Bangladesh. There were 3,496 garment factories in Dhaka and Chittagong in 2000. Of 2,850 factories of Dhaka, 1,178 were shut by mid-November 2001. In Chittagong, 98 of 548 factories closed *sine die* (*Ajker Kagoj* 2001b). While these problems were raised, a Nigerian delegation requested the BGMEA to relocate some Bangladeshi factories in Nigeria to take advantage of US-declared duty and quota-free access of Nigeria-made garments in the US markets (*Bangladesh Observer*, Nov 23, 2001).

The newspaper *Ajker Kagoj* (November 07, 2001) refers to a press release of BEMEA (Bangladesh Embroidery Manufacturers and Exporters Association), which notes that 1000 computerized embroidery machines in 210 factories were installed in Bangladesh. An amount of Taka 45.6 billion is invested in this respect. It is estimated that 90% of foreign revenue earned from the embroidery remains in the national exchequer. However, shutdown of garment factories along with other problems resulted in the unemployment of 200,000 workers of the embroidery industry during the period June-November 2001 (*Ajker Kagoj*, Nov 07, 2001).

Previously, Bangladesh had been exporting 45% of its RMGs to US markets, while the rest to the EU countries and other parts of the world. In September 2001, woven garment and knitwear export of Bangladesh marked declines of 7.51% and 9.05% respectively (*Ajker Kagoj* 2001a). Before that time, Bangladesh was exporting about US $67 million worth of garments per month (*Bangladesh Observer* 2001a). By October

2001, garment exports declined by 52 million US Dollars (*Bangladesh Observer* 2001b). Similarly, exports to the EU nations declined during July-September 2001 by 1,746 million US Dollars compared to the figures of the previous fiscal year. In September 2001, US buyers cancelled 50 Letters of Credit (LC). It was reported that 100 labelling and 250 carton-making factories had closed by October 2001 (Bangladesh Observer 2001a).

In the Fourth Ministerial meeting of the World Trade Organization (WTO) held in Doha, Qatar during 9-13 November, 2001, the Bangladesh delegation strongly lobbied to secure duty and quota-free access of Bangladeshi RMG exports to the US and EU markets. In the event, representatives of LDCs and G-77 blamed the WTO for not implementing the decisions taken in favour of the LDCs in the Uruguay Round dialogues in 1994 (*Ajker Kagoj*, Nov 10, 2001). However, such efforts were unsuccessful, leaving the Bangladesh garment sector on the edge of collapse. These conditions bring to light the original argument of Marx, that capitalism produces wealth that it does not effectively distribute to all its participants (Marx 1958).

CHAPTER IV

METHODOLOGY

> If there is some observable degree of progression in the methods appropriate in most fieldwork situations, it is in the move from a "passive" to more "active" investigation, as research becomes more directed and focused. (Kemp and Ellen 1984:230-32)

Moving from "passive" to "active" investigation is a big challenge for anthropologists. Bourdieu (1977) describes that ethnographic research as involving basic difficulties of realization and transcription of discursive explanations of the natives and of their actions. Being outsiders, the anthropologist remains ignorant, and thus dependent on the description of the natives. However, he asserts that the anthropologist should the mistake of accepting their perceptions as unquestionable truths. This is not because the descriptions of the natives are lies, but because the descriptions constitute a limited form of knowledge for the anthropologist who lacks adequate entitlement to the roots of the culture. The theoretical and practical perspectives of this study's methodology, as described here, are built upon the drive to overcome this drawback of knowledge limitation, as well as the persistent risk of "scholastic bias" (Bourdieu 1998:123-32).

4.1 Methodology: Theoretical and Practical Perspectives

The proposition of "scholastic bias", as Bourdieu clarifies, is a tendency of social researchers to transfuse their own social experiences and relations into the minds of the people they observe and interact with. He writes:

> The anthropologist's particular relation to the object of his study contains the makings of a theoretical distortion inasmuch as his situation as an observer, excluded from the real play of social activities by the fact that he has no place (except by choice or by way of a game) in the system observed and has no need to make a place for himself there, inclines him to a hermeneutic representation of practices, leading him to reduce all social relations to communicative relations and, more precisely, to decoding operations (1977:1).

Thus, ethnography and participant observation technique may also involve the risk of representing the mirror image of the researcher's one-way scholastic view as that of the people and culture studied. Like Bourdieu, Mitchell and Charmaz (1994) assert that anthropologists "must strive to represent their subjects' understandings as well as their own" (Mitchell and Charmaz 1994:239). As Grills commented, "the point of departure and the point of return for ethnographic writing is the world of experience that we seek to represent" (Grills 1994:199). Successful representation of experience means not only the researchers' understanding of experiences of others reflected in their 'story-telling' but also making the respondents understand the experiences and relation of the researchers to their culture. In *Outline of a Theory of Practice* and *The Logic of Practice,* Bourdieu suggests that anthropological fieldwork should be composed of flexible and dynamic responses toward reflexive conditions of unforeseen and unforetold cultural contexts.

The *reflexive inquiry* is an adaptive research technique built on the principles of preparedness of the social scientists for pragmatic, intuitive and innovative practices that are directed toward grasping complexities of communities and practical livelihood strategies of people. This technique opposes artificial scholastic division of anthropology and sociology and imposed categorization of *subjective-objective* bipolarity, as well as false dualities in Marxian versus Weberian and Lévi-Straussian versus Sartreian standpoints, because these prejudices limit inquiry of complex phenomena within a certain boundary of observation. As well, *reflexive inquiry* diminishes culture and social organization preoccupations of social scientists in research. It serves as a set of empirically based conditions for synthesisation of potentials and possibilities of both objective and subjective views. Bourdieu wrote in *Homo Academicus* that *reflexive analysis* constitutes both "objective analysis" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) and "critical reflection", and that it "obliges us to realize that the two approaches, structuralist and constructivist, are two complementary stages of the same procedure" (Bourdieu 1988:xiv).

As I proceed through a discussion of the methodology of this study, I will gradually describe the influence of "reflexive inquiry" in this research. The notion of *thick description* (Geertz 1973, 1988) and *local knowledge* (Bourdieu, 1988:11) has

contributed to building the structure of this in-depth study. These notions suggest that an outsider should read a culture through the lenses of the people of that culture, and employ "intersubjectivity" (Cohen 1984) to dig beneath surface understanding. "Intersubjectivity" refers to a methodological stance that opens up doors for all possible sources of knowledge of various disciplines and fields of thoughts. Cohen (1984) says,

> Anthropology's task is not just to map the structure and process of social organization; to collect myths; to discover the morphology of religious systems. It is to achieve what the phenomenologists call 'intersubjectivity': to be able to think, emote and cognize with one's informants and thereby, to come close to their perceptions and understanding of their social realities. (Cohen 1984:228)

For the researcher's part of systematizing knowledge, Geertz, Bourdieu and Cohen advocated efficient use of both *emic* and *etic* perspectives in fieldwork. An *emic* perspective describes culture "from the participants' viewpoint, the observer uses concepts and distinctions that are meaningful and appropriate to the participants" (Harris and Johnson 1995:17). An *etic* perspective describes culture from the "observer's perspective, the observer uses concepts and distinctions that are meaningful and appropriate to the observer" (Harris and Johnson 1995:17). An *emic* perspective is built upon actions, views, opinions, thoughts, beliefs and perceptions of the insiders about their own culture, as well as an explanation of what the insiders do and why they do what they do. The present study was directed toward gaining as much knowledge from an emic perspective as possible. However, in the subsequent analysis, the *emics* of the study will help us to view social life through the lens of the informants, and *etics* to explain the *emics* in the researcher's words.

In final analysis, this study uses a *holistic* approach—triangulated appreciation of all possible venues and avenues of information, and synthesization of information by worker narratives of their broader social perspective and individual experiences.

4.2. Context of the Study

In June 1999, I set out for fieldwork to study *Garment Workers in Bangladesh: A Study of Labour Commodification, Social Solidarity and Forms of Social Action in Response to Globalization*—a research component of the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) funded "Globalization, Environmental Crisis and Social Change: A Case Study of Bangladesh" Project[1]. The foundation of the study was laid on grounds that under globalization "workers as individuals often experience a strong sense of isolation and helplessness that is fostered by transnational corporate industrial negotiations to remove governmental impediments to the free flow of capital and labour. This has given rise throughout the world to locally-generated suspicions of globalization consequences" (Wiest 1999:2). After six months of my fieldwork as principal field investigator of the project, I commenced the PhD research. For my PhD research, I broadened the project objective to an in-depth investigation of livelihood, livelihood strategy changes, and rural-urban linkages of women garment workers of Bangladesh.

4.2.1 The research team

The gendered character of garment sector employment, as well as class, status and gender differences between garment workers and me, placed a special demand on the project. As most of the garment worker informants were women, the study demanded involvement of a group of skilled and efficient women researchers to conduct the field research. Amena Khatun, to whom I am married, served as the field research coordinator of this study. Khatun is an experienced woman researcher with several years of prior research experience in the Bangladesh garment industry. Before joining this project, she had been serving the garment sector study component of the greater IDRC project. In the first stage of the study, she assisted in the fieldwork, and helped select and train field workers, interviewers and resource persons required in different periods and stages of the study. I also recruited three women field research assistants: Shabnam Hafiz, Suraiya Akhter and Afsana Siddik. Of the field research assistants, two were garment workers, and the other a graduate student of Dhaka University. Women researchers helped to

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[1] The Project is known as the "globalization project". This subset of the IDRC study was proposed, organized and supervised by Dr. Raymond E. Wiest (Wiest 1999).

establish effective communication and informal interpersonal relationships between women workers and me. At the beginning, women respondents were usually shy of exposing themselves to an "outsider" and a male researcher as well. My middle class social position did not appear to be a problem to poor class workers for interaction and communication with me. This is because the social structure of Bangladesh is constituted of everyday life interaction and interdependence of the poor and the middle class people (see Ahmad 1975:1-18). However, patriarchal norms, *purdah* (seclusion) restriction, and values of women's modesty led to their reserved engagement in the research. Even those expressing consent and willingness to participate in the research often demonstrated their hesitation and discomfort to communicate with me. The women research coordinator and assistants had access to women respondents' private premises, so the distance between the informants and me was bridged.

In the second phase of the study, fourteen garment workers were recruited as part-timers and substitutes on the basis of their availability for the study as well as to meet various contextual needs in different stages of the study.

4.2.2 Timeline, sampling technique and the study population

The research was conducted in two phases in Dhaka city, Bangladesh. A qualitative baseline study on globalization-led "livelihood changes", and "livelihood strategies" and "rural-urban linkage" of women garment workers of Bangladesh was conducted on 192 women and 6 male garment workers of Bangladesh in the first phase (June-November 1999). These respondents constitute the primary respondents of the baseline research. Given the focus on women in this study, six male workers were excluded from subsequent in-depth interviewing and observation by the end of this phase of fieldwork. The second phase (June 2001 – May 2002) of the study focused heavily on 'in-depth' investigation of the themes covered in the baseline study, as well as on the analysis of (comparative) changes that took place in them during the interval between the first phase and second phase of the study. Along with in-depth case studies on twenty women workers, 163 respondents from different levels of garment sector-related positions were also studied at this stage (Table 2.1).

Table 4.1 Distribution of the Phase One and Phase Two respondents by sex and relationships, Bangladesh, 1999 and 2001

	Number of primary Respondents by sex				Number of secondary Respondents by sex		
	Male	Female	Total		Male	Female	Total
Phase One	6	192	198		0	0	0
				Identification			
Phase Two	0	20	20	Close relatives	28	34	62
				Coworkers and friends*	0	44	*44
				Neighbourhood residents	8	15	23
				Factory managers	8		8
				Floor supervisors	1	1	2
				Buying house officials	4		4
				Community leaders	8		8
				Housing society presidents	3		3
				Grassroots union leaders	2	1	3
				NGO personnel	3		3
				Journalists	2		2
				Legal aid providers	1		1
Total	6	212	218		68	95	163

The research expanded via networking, through a *snowball sampling technique*, to include stakeholders living in the neighbourhoods of employed informants. Selected stakeholders related through backward and forward linkage occupations (factory owners-managers, van drivers, shippers, labellers, packagers, petty-traders, *jhut* traders-contractors, grocers, buying house[2] officials) also were interviewed. With these interviews, the study attempted to achieve a broader perspective on the principal research theme of wage-labour within globalization.

Frequent in-migration and relocation strategies of the respondents demanded *purposive sampling* to determine the study population. It was observed that single women workers frequently change workplaces and residences for various safety and security reasons (see chapter 5). Also, the *purposive sampling* was deemed useful for the following reasons: first, to keep room for voluntary involvement and withdrawal of informants; second, to substitute for frequent dropout of recorded informants; third, to entertain voluntary participation of eager and enthusiastic individuals and/or groups, and fourth, to ensure the participation of people with extensive experience in the garment sector (such as retired workers).

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[2] National and international intermediary firms that collect work-orders from foreign buyers and assign qualified factories to manufacture products as per work orders.

A sensitive balance between the objective and available time and resources guided the size of the research group for in-depth work. Emphasis was put on quality of information rather than on sample size. Good *rapport* was established with the workers in order to conduct this kind of time-consuming and demanding research.

4.2.3 Phases and stages in field work

The fieldwork of this study was composed of two phases, and various stages within each phase. These phases were set to accommodate IDRC project component goals, and my PhD related academic activities. I was engaged in literature review for this study and completion of PhD coursework requirements during January 2000 to May 2001. The second phase fieldwork started in June 2001 and continued until June 2002. The fieldwork details of both phases are discussed below.

The first phase of the study (June-November 1999):

1) In the first stage of Phase One, a weeklong reconnaissance survey was conducted to grasp overall field realities—strength, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for both the respondents and me. The reconnaissance survey provided me with clearer understandings of the field situation that in turn helped to devise the overall field work strategy of this research. Simultaneously, I searched for available literature, newspaper clippings, videos, documentary films and photographic documents and any other sources of secondary information on the garment sector.

2) In the second stage, I communicated with people and agencies related to the garment sector: the labour union leaders, factory owners and managers, NGOs, legal aid providers, human rights organizations, and bureaucrats in the Labour Ministry. The people and agencies I communicated with offered helpful opinions, suggestions, instruction and guidelines of the study.

3) In the third stage, I recruited a women field research coordinator and three women field research assistants.

4) In the fourth stage, I assembled logistics, facilities and equipment required for the study.

5) The fifth stage that began after a month of commencement of the study lasted until November 1999. The fieldwork resulted in the procurement of the baseline

information, which provided solid grounding and clear guidelines for the second phase of the research.

The second phase of the study (June 2001-June 2002):

6) In the first stage of the second phase of the fieldwork, I reunited with the women research coordinator and two field research assistants cum garment workers of the first phase study. The team spent two weeks to trace back to the informants of the first phase study.

7) In the second stage, a well-equipped office was rented to coordinate and operate research activities as well as to arrange focus group discussion sessions of the workers.

8) I started full-time fieldwork from the third stage of the research.

4.2.4 Study locations

The objective of my field investigation was to engage in *'active'* investigation through establishing direct communication and interaction with women garment workers. As the research focused heavily on first hand experience and perception of women garment workers about employment conditions and their livelihood change, the field research was structured around the logistics, relationships and decisions of daily life among garment workers. Most fieldwork was conducted off the shop floor.

Garment factories are concentrated in some specific areas of Dhaka city. Workers usually reside near these factory zones. Based on proportionate concentration of factories and size of resident worker population, informants are divided into four major factory and settlement zones (Figure 4:1): Mirpur-Pallabi (Zone 1); Kalyanpur-Shyamoli (Zone 2); Kochukhet- Ibrahimpur-Bhashantek (Zone-3); and Rampura-Malibagh-Tongi-Tejgaon-Mohakhali-Banani (Zone 4). However, several visits and investigations were made in worker residences near factories in Old Dhaka areas and Kamrangirchar, EPZ at Savar, and Gazipur and Narayanganj to complement information gathered for the main study. As and when the study demanded, workers in these zones were contacted, met and interviewed on various occasions and incidents.

Figure 4:1. Garment factory zones in Dhaka city

Source: http://www.bdonline.com
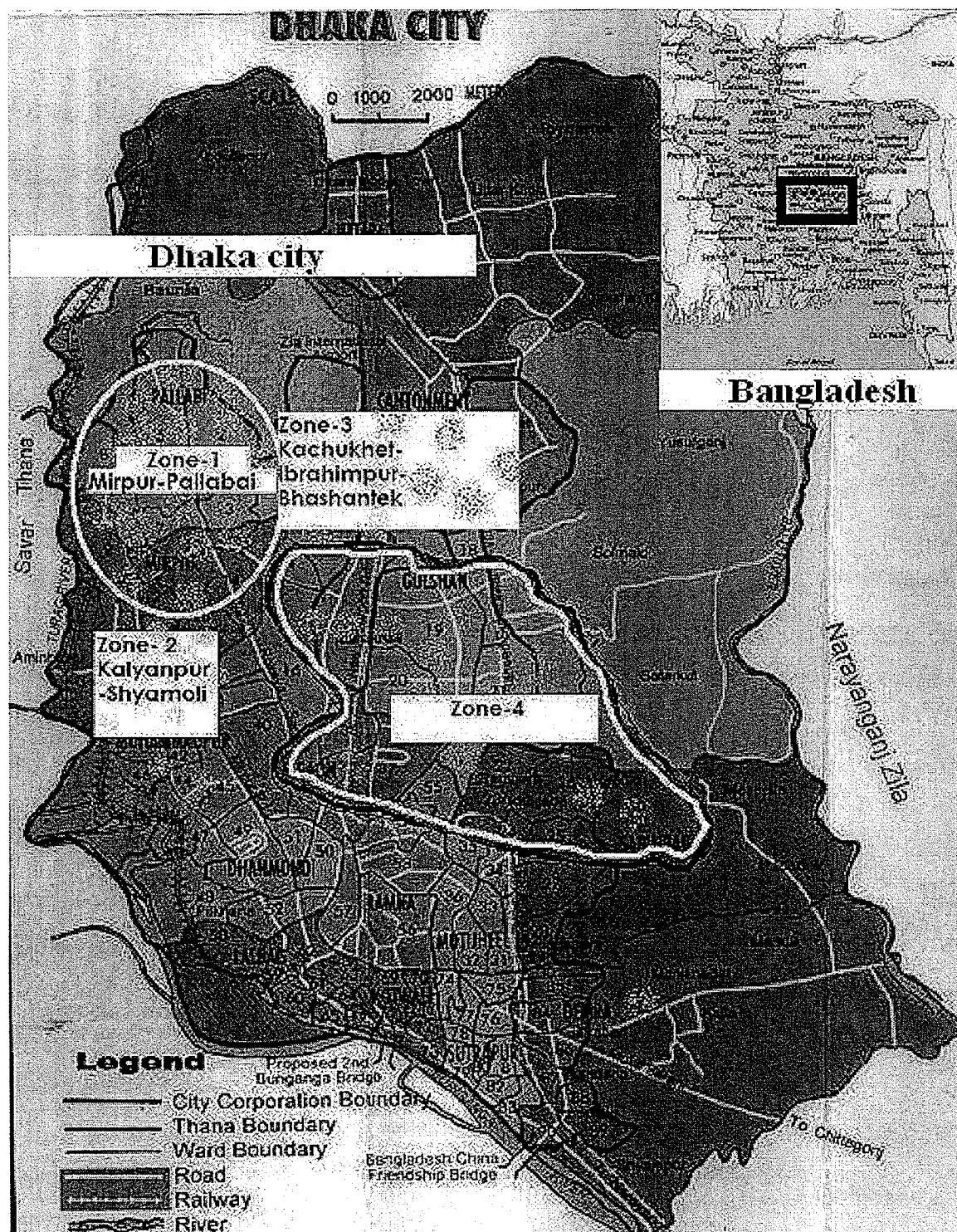
The informants of the study live mainly in Duaripara, Jhilpara slum, Bedibandh slum behaind Mirpur Majar, Shialbari slum, and Kalshi slum of Mirpur, Bhashantek slum of Bhashantek, Sattala slum at Mohakhali, Begunbari slum at Tejgaon, Agaragaon BNP slum and Kalyanpur pora (burnt) slum. Twenty-nine informants live in squatters of Milk Vita section no 7, Tinshed of Arifabad and Arambagh housing areas under Pallabi police station, and 2 hostels for garment workers run by Nari Uddug Kendra at Mohakhali and Mohammadpur.

4.3   Methodology: Field Experience and Research Techniques
4.3.1   Problems with formalized informal consent

At the outset of the study, my research team vividly communicated to the informants the intents of research, as well as our strong ethical commitments to safeguard their individual identity and confidentiality of information. As a strategy to build good rapport with target informants, we tried to be as informal, friendly and spontaneous as possible. As well, we distributed among them printed consent forms that clearly defined our professional obligations for mutual trust. These strategies developed apparent informant confidence in the researchers, and the informants allowed us to spend months in meeting, eating and chatting with them on their ways to and from factories, and in their residences. Yet, when approached, none agreed to sign the formal consent form. Upon consent and suggestions of most informants, we recorded responses on micro-cassette tapes. Soon we discovered through several cross-examinations that the agreeing research participants concealed or misreported personal information—their name, age, marital status, number of children, salary, present and permanent address, and migration history, i.e., all of the variables that typically make up the opening section of conventional standardized interview schedules.

The initial setback intrigued and inspired us to probe a question: why do the respondents welcome the researchers with friendly and cooperative gestures while deliberately hiding their identity? In our pursuit to find the answer, we discovered that our request to informants for written or oral consent contributed to deliberate withholding or distortion of information by informants for the following reasons.

1) The factories prefer unmarried and young tender girls. Such young tender girls also are most preferred as brides. Consequently, both employed informants and prospective brides tended to hide their actual age and marital status for perceived job security reasons.

2) The women garment workers of Dhaka live in harsh realities of mistrust and suspicion of "outsiders". An informant asked: "Are you both spies of the factory *malik* (owner)"? Another informant asked with suspicion: "Do you earn money selling our stories to foreigners?" Two informants uttered their annoyance, saying that they had faced many such "well-dressed" men and women researchers before, and that they only had wasted their valuable time and disrupted their normal life-style in the name of "so-called research". A worker cautiously requested us to confirm that her mother's suspicion that we were members of a racket of women-traffickers or pimps was incorrect. Four workers refused talking with the lone male researcher in fear of community rebuke and gossip, and out of shyness. All of these reasons tempted them to hide their identity by misreporting personal information—their names, age, salary, addresses and migration history. As they often recorded in follow-up interviews significantly lower age than in the original interviews, I encountered problems to follow-up and review their cases with precision. Although these problems were mitigated through crosschecking with "historical event' analysis", it resulted in obstruction and delays in the processing of data.

3) Despite assigning pseudonyms to each informant and coding their names; actual names always appeared to be essential to follow-up informants for extended probing, and for resolution of unfinished sections of the study. Due to frequent relocation of workers, the study suffered from a high rate of dropout of workers. In Phase One, 199 of 397 selected primary informants dropped off the study prematurely, and information from six other informants could not be effectively triangulated. Therefore, the study was confined to 192 women workers. After a year, 188 informants relocated, thus, only four of them could be traced.

We found through the in-depth study that the women garment workers of Dhaka are transient and migratory for various reasons. These reasons affect their livelihood decisions, as well as behaviour and reactions to an "outsider's" request for written or oral "consent". Residing in slums for a lengthy period of time often leads to their

victimization by crime rackets that force them to engage in various illegal and what are perceived to be immoral activities. These vulnerabilities lead to frequent escape from one place to the other, without leaving traces of personal information behind. Therefore, garment workers have a strong tendency to falsify their identity, and are reluctant to provide "formal consent".

4) Preoccupation with formalities of informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality interfered with the research among the available and traceable informants too. Intense ethical dilemmas arose periodically as some workers had denied that they had earlier provided "oral or informal consent", and rejected validity of evidence. Some of them did not permit researchers to retain backup copies of audiotapes that contained their voices. Consequently, we were frequently forced to decide whether to abandon significant sets of verified and finalized information, or to explore "actual" names of informants in a surreptitious fashion that would compromise ethical obligations. It was revealed in the Phase Two in-depth study that these responses of workers are often outbursts of overwhelming physical and emotional stress, and may not reflect their "real" opinions. Since institutional bureaucratization of research ethics in the form of formal "informed consent" left little space for researchers to adopt pragmatic solutions uncompromising of the workers, frustrations sometimes dampened enthusiasm for research, and interfered with the normal progress of fieldwork.

5) Some informants considered documentation of written or oral consent synonymous to *mistrust* by the researchers of information they provided. One worker reacted more directly: "As soon as you wanted to record my consent on tape, I started not to consider you a well-wisher. A friend never behaves this way!" Therefore, in case of our research, bureaucratization of informed consent appeared as a potential means of obstruction in rapport building, as well as stimulant of mistrust of researchers and fear of spying, intimidation, humiliation and blackmail among women workers.

6) Those workers who could not write their names either felt shy or considered our request for their verbal consent as an insult. A few informants perceived that their names were too old-fashioned to put on paper. Some of them recorded different names in different sessions after names of popular heroines in Bengali films. As a consequence of fake and multiple naming, the bureaucratic preoccupation with informed consent came to

interfere with the research. Therefore, we placed *mutual trust* above everything else. However, we repeatedly assured them that their privacy, anonymity, confidentiality of information, and freedom of voluntary involvement and withdrawal had been protected. The process was time-consuming and distracting to some extent. It also contributed to dimming the interactive character and spontaneity of the field research.

7) Each respondent tended to speak more about "experiences of others" than "her own experiences", especially regarding sensitive information, e.g., involvement in off-factory prostitution, premarital and extra-marital affairs, contraception and abortion, diseases and health problems, drug use, or illegal activities. Such a tendency reinforces self-defensiveness in their responses that tended to lead to refusal to allow documentation of their consent. Despite our reassurance of safeguarding anonymity and confidentiality, most informants rejected our justification of informed consent.

4.3.2 Logistic problems

Also, the fieldwork of the study faced logistical problems. *Unavailability of uniform information* was the primary logistics problem. Information about the total number of garment factories as well as export-import data, factory growth rate data, and foreign revenue data were different in the Bangladesh Garment Exporters and Manufacturers Association (BGMEA) newsletter; Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), Garment Workers Federation, some NGOs and a fortnightly NGO magazine named 'Garments Katha'. In order to overcome the secondary data problem, I accepted the nearly similar ones from more than one source.

Misinformation appeared as a logistic problem of the study. In most cases, official information supplied by the management of factories regarding number of workers, salary, physical facilities and welfare activities were found to be exaggerated and untrue, thus unreliable. It was observed and known from cross-examination with the workers that the actual number of workers in most factories was much more than the number cited in official records. We learned that the management of factories hides information of a large number of workers who are not recruited and paid in an official manner. Many informants of this study said that the factory management usually maintains false records

of factory-related information for "official" purposes—to satisfy government inspectors, and tax officials.

The study involved fieldwork under tremendous *insecurity*. Most interviews with workers had to be conducted at night. This increased the inconvenience, risk and insecurity. Police, local gangs and crime rackets, street-corner sex traders and their promoters, and patrol police sometimes intercepted the research team. Risk of unavailability of secure transportation as well as spying, chasing, challenging, and intimidation and threats of physical assault by locally-based gangs forced the research team to conduct some interviewing and focus group discussions and brainstorming sessions in the office rented to operate this study. For security reasons, women workers (especially single women) were allowed to stay in the office overnight.

Exaggeration, and false and inconsistent information complicated the fieldwork situation. Throughout the study, the research team was unknowingly gathering false and fabricated information supplied by the workers. Before good rapport and personal level confidence was built between the researchers and the garment workers, many respondents were supplying inconsistent, exaggerated and fake information—sometimes for fun, and often due to mistrust of the researchers. With frequent follow-up visits and focus group crosschecking, much confusing and misguiding information was detected and expunged.

4.3.3 Techniques of data collection

In order to realize the objectives of the study, I concentrated in a full-time, field-based and in-depth appraisal of 'gender', and 'economic' and 'social' dimensions of globalization-driven livelihood changes of women garment workers. The fieldwork of this holistic study incorporated the principles of *participant observation*—participation in the social system of my study population, and systematic observation of ongoing events (Ellen 1984, Spradley 1980). Throughout the study, I tried to maintain "deep immersion into the life" (Keesing 1981:6) of the people I studied. "Instead of studying large samples of people, the anthropologist enters as fully as possible into the everyday life of a community" (Keesings 1981:6). This principle served as the basis of selection of techniques for this study.

Participant observation as an information-gathering technique was used to the extent possible within the residences and communities of origin of the garment workers. *Group discussions* were conducted in Phase Two of the study to attain an understanding of social consciousness and to evaluate and stimulate discourse around social action oriented to improve working and living conditions. Drawing upon field notes and field experiences discussed above, I describe below the techniques of fieldwork adopted, and the background and justification of the adaptation.

The research started with informal levels of communication—meeting, sitting and chatting in a friendly manner with the garment workers on their way to and from factories and in their residences in order to secure a reasonable number of informants for the study. Within one week, the number of consenting informants rose to ten. My research team met each informant several times in a week. We were as informal, friendly and spontaneous as possible with them. The explicit consent of respondents was sought before we audio-taped worker responses rather than relying only on handwritten notes. The technique helped the fieldworkers to communicate with the informants for longer periods without interruption. The technique also served as an efficient means to observe body language and emotion and expression of the garment workers.

Drawing upon experience, with observation of the preferred mode of information dissemination among women workers, I felt it practical and effective to abandon the idea of a survey-type questionnaire-based interview which was perceived by workers as monotonous, time consuming and tiring. Instead, I emphasized building good rapport with the informants to pursue a relaxed, interactive, entertaining and participatory research method that would help the workers' speak spontaneously, and turn us into "insiders"—patient and friendly listeners, facilitators and serious observers of the depth and breadth of their livelihood patterns. Thus, I set my methodological strategy to view their livelihood through their own eyes in order to assemble as much accurate and minimally distorted information as possible. The strategy was chosen not just to listen to their voices, but also to feel and see their experiences.

Most of the *informal* and *formal interviews* were conducted in residential neighbourhoods of the workers for several reasons. First, available literature has documented the "sweatshop" character of labour in the garment industry (e.g., Delahanty

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1998; Fuentes and Ehrenreich 1985; Howard 1997; Ross 1997; Seabrook 1996). A characteristic of the sweatshop management is that it usually treats on-floor investigation as 'loss of productive hours' and 'a barrier to meet output-target'. Therefore, management tends to resist and obstruct in-house observation by outsiders. In the first phase of the study, my team was invited to six factories for short visits, but was not allowed to interview women workers at work. In the pursuit of capturing more holistically the effects of sudden livelihood shifts, pressures upon social relationship traditions and institutions, and increased emphasis on individuality, my experience paralleled those of other projects giving priority to off-the-job, in-depth interviews and case studies (see Appendix 1) among workers (e.g., Absar 2001a; Absar 2001b; Afsar 2001; Kibria 1995; Kibria 2001; Siddiqi 2000).

Second, I found that shop-floor-based investigation constitutes a limited form of knowledge of the work environment and a distorted perception because of the sense of intimidation and fear of the workers to reveal their real experiences and opinions in the presence of supervisors. The impact of these realities obliged me to seek less encumbered access of workers in the study. Thus, time and interview places were decided in accordance with preferences and convenience of the respondents.

Qualitative anthropological research in the form of *in-depth interviews* with selected informants was used to complement and elaborate upon household data based on standardized interviews. The objective was to probe beneath surface generality and public commentary (Scott 1990; Rahman 1999). These in-depth interviews were the principal source of information on: 1) the dynamics of rural societies and communities of origin of workers, 2) the livelihood interdependencies, solidarity, mutualism, interaction, and especially the form of reciprocal relationships among the workers themselves, and 3) adoption of non-conventional livelihood strategies.

Both unstructured in-depth interviews and group discussions were built upon free-form expression, careful listening, and idea exchange between interviewer and informants, and follow-up questioning. Discussion groups were facilitated to disseminate their understanding of social consciousness as well as to evaluate and stimulate discourse around social actions toward achieving improved working and living conditions. Several sessions were conducted to debrief them with collective information.

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In order to measure differential impacts of occupation and livelihood, *standardized interviews, focus group discussions,* and *in-depth interviews* were used. Data derived through use of these techniques are: pre-employment income sources; work and employment histories; occupational supports; wage rates; recruitment experiences; current employment status; working conditions; income levels over definable periods; income reliability; job security; job satisfaction; gender-based job access; awareness of worker rights; sense of worker solidarity; rating of worker treatment; and worker productivity. *Household interviews* and *case studies* were conducted to acquire information on worker migration; residence and settlement patterns; the character of worker households; livelihood conditions, e.g., income alternatives and sources, income pooling or other distribution, and income security; household decision-making; lifestyle, health and nutrition; family and other social connections.

Employed garment workers were interviewed to investigate individual and organized efforts and experience to employment—the avenues or means, strategies, costs and/or obligations incurred—as well as labour recruitment dynamics. In-depth interviews with persons in the neighbourhoods were conducted to expand upon and triangulate information derived from household interviews. A concise *structured interview checklist* was used as a guideline for interviewing. *Tape recordings* were made to capture interview details. Note taking and audiotapes were used upon informants' verbal consent and permission (as and when they were unwilling to sign on any papers). With informant permission, a camera was used on occasion to capture living conditions and relevant personal features (e.g., injuries or health problems) of informants. Apart from descriptive types of note taking, a two-page *code-table* was used for instant recording of information in numeric form in the field. This table helped to speed up data recording throughout the study.

The informants were allowed full freedom to take back the original audio-cassette(s) or paper(s) containing their personal information as and when they wanted to withdraw themselves from the list of respondents. The same policy applied to photographed information. Although most informants and their neighbourhoods were photographed upon their consent and willingness, most workers approved only a few copies to use for research purposes. The original negatives of photos and audiotapes that

the workers did not approve to use for research purposes were handed over to them in order to curb any possibility of duplication or reproduction by mistake. Names and personal details were disguised; pseudonyms and code numbers were used for each informant to ensure maximum *anonymity and confidentiality* in order to conceal their identity to third party people. For the purpose of identifying the informants for any further investigation, coded identifications were kept separate and inaccessible to any person except the researcher. For accuracy purposes, electronic data was kept password-protected.

Repeated *feedback and debriefing* of information to the concerned informants took place at least twice: instantly after information gathering and after transcription of information, i.e., prior to electronic data entry. Before writing our report, a summary of the common and unrestricted (by any informants) findings of the research was disseminated to available informants in eleven group discussion sessions in December 2001. Aggregated summary data also safeguarded anonymity and confidentiality of the informants.

Informants were reciprocated in sensible and logical manners. For instance, interview sessions sometimes resulted in informants' failure to reach the factory gate on time. Due to strict factory rules, timekeepers in factories used to mark late-goers as 'absent' and deprive them of their salary for that day. These losses were considered and reciprocated.

Follow-up study constituted a large section of the in-depth research. I traveled frequently to different areas of Dhaka city for follow-up reviewing of important information and informants. In order to follow-up core findings of rural-urban linkages of workers, I made twelve visits to rural areas—communities of origins of some respondents. There I interviewed family members of case study respondents, elected representatives of the *union parishad* (lowest level of local government) and respectable personalities in the community. Information that I collected through the grassroots level visits complemented worker information, and enriched and often confirmed my findings.

To enhance data reliability, as well as to overcome bias and eliminate risk of misrepresentation in the recording of the study findings, I used *triangulation techniques* and *multi-factor analysis*. For example, I used techniques of Participatory Rural

Appraisal (PRA)—specifically, participatory matrices, venn diagrams, pie diagrams, story sharing and projective techniques in group discussions. Multi-factor analysis was used to generate brainstorming in groups, and invoke alternative opinions, arguments and variety of viewpoints among workers. Information that matched in several contexts was adopted as acceptable information.

In short, the following field research techniques were used in this study:

1. *Structured, semi-structured* and *unstructured in-depth interviews* were organized around thematically focussed research questions to probe beneath surface generality and public commentary.

2. *Participant observation* was employed to deepen the sense of day-to-day logistics among garment workers, and dig out dynamics of obscure areas of changes in livelihood and social relation around garment industry employment.

3. *Group discussion* sessions were organized to gather information on common livelihood concerns of workers, and dynamics of change in their social contexts. Group discussions helped to gather information in a relaxed and participatory manner, as well as to check and correct errors in individualized interview data.

4. *Follow-up research* was conducted to complement and crosscheck field data.

5. *Triangulation techniques* were used to synthesize and solidify findings of this study.

4.4   Data Analysis and Presentation

As information gathered is predominantly qualitative in nature, descriptive analytical techniques are used in data analysis. To capture 'gender' dimensions, household dynamics, and rural-urban linkages of the workers, the major indicators used are: entitlement and deprivation (Dreze and Sen 1995), and "disentitlement" or "passing on of entitlement" (Rahman 1998) within the power structure of the households. Indicators used to measure level of "empowerment" of women are: *access to* market, physical mobility or freedom of movement, bargaining capacity, choice, and purchasing capacity. The other indicators used are level of access to rights in job and workplace, e.g., pure and safe drinking water, sanitation, required health and hygiene facilities, and privileges set by the factory laws of 1965 and 1979. Level of access to occupational

rights is measured by level of access to legal aid, and number of cases filed by workers against injustice and oppression. Other indices used were access (membership) to social and political institutions, level of enrolment of children in school, decision-making capacity in household spending, and access to basic needs and civic amenities.

A micro level use of indicators of GEM (Gender Empowerment Measure) is also used within data analysis. Although UNDP uses GEM to measure empowerment in countrywide contexts, especially to measure the comparative advancement of countries in gendered empowerment, some of the indicators of GEM fit into assessment of household and individual level empowerment as well. For instance, access to food and nutrition, education, health, decision-making capacity, income spending and level of caloric intake by boy children and girl children are the indices that helped to measure the level of empowerment of women workers for this study.

Besides level of "access to" and *"control over"* income and spending, level of liberty of free speech, position in household decision making, and level of understanding of right to form, join, organize and lead trade unions in workplaces are also used in the data analysis. *Decision making* capacity and *level of conscientization* and *consciousness* are two other measures used in data analysis. Specifically, *decision-making power* of women workers in relation to job selection, physical movement, household spending, division of labour, and child rearing was used throughout the study. *Level of conscientization and consciouness* are measured through assessment of changes in perception, attitudes, feelings, understanding or realization of own position and capacity of taking independent action. The measures are used in the analysis to reflect the impact of employment on livelihood change.

Information related to decision-making capacity of women workers was examined in more detail through the use of six indicators. It is worth noting that these indicators were applied in numerous household studies in India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand to examine the impact of women workers' earning on their self-worth and decision-making capacity (see Mujeri 1998:78). The indicators are: 1) family members seeking the opinion of the woman wage earning member on crucial issues, 2) ability to supply nutritious food to family members, 3) the practice of seeking approval from husbands/ (male breadwinners) on major purchases, 4) the practice of husbands soliciting opinion of

their wives on financial matters, 5) the ability to express opinion in public gatherings, and 6) self-confidence in dealing with strangers and outsiders.

The nature and extent of social change is captured through two comparative indicators: conditions "before job" and "after job". These indicators captured socio-economic conditions of livelihood changes. Perception and attitudes are categorized and *tallied* in organized matrices. *Likert scales* (i.e., excellent/extraordinary, very good, good/adequate/satisfactory, below standard, bad, and worst; for example, see Table 5.10) are used to process and analyze perception-related data.

The style of presentation in this dissertation deserves comment. Descriptive statistics are provided in many parts of the work, but I have used qualitative generalization in discussion where descriptive statistics do not tell the story. Some problem contexts are better exemplified through informant narrative. As women workers of this study have migrated from diverse cultural, regional and linguistic background, they often spoke in different dialects and expressions. In order to capture these dialects, as well as to represent some of their voices in as unaltered a manner as possible, I translated some words and phrases in literal form to the English language. These words are put in single quotes (''). However, adjustments have been made in some translations to achieve reasonable understanding in the North American context. In general, transliteration has demanded use of some worker expressions in colloquial terms. For example, informants used "family" and "household" interchangeably. In compliance with their expression, these notions are discussed interchangeably. As well, with consideration to sensitive personal information of workers, pseudonyms are used throughout this study. In case study reports identified by name and including named references within, all names of persons are rendered as pseudonyms.

As addressed at the beginning of this chapter, the methodology of this study was directed toward holistic inquiry of the livelihood of women garment workers. The group discussions and in-depth case studies of this study capture *thick description* (Geertz 1973, 1988) and *local knowledge* (Bourdieu 1988:11) of workers—nonconventional means of livelihood not captured in previous studies. Thus, the research has turned from a passive to an active investigation. And for analysis, I used *"insight"* and *"common sense"*, because "the decisive battle is not fought in the field, but in the study afterwards" (Evans-

Pritchard 1973:3), i.e., in analysis. Like Clammer (1984), I viewed fieldwork as translation, and analysis as "the text [which] is seen as a product of an interactive process between described and describer, analyzed and analyst" (Clammer 1984:78). Thus, the analysis has combined both emic and etic perspectives.

CHAPTER V

WOMEN GARMENT WORKERS OF BANGLADESH:
A SOCIO-ECONOMIC ACCOUNT

There are various viewpoints on the reasons women participate in manufacturing sectors at a global level. With the "housewifization" thesis, Mies (1986) viewed women's unemployment as a reason for their confinement inside the home as "wives" and "consumers" of capitalist goods. In this line of thought, women's involvement in the wage-employment sector can be viewed as a means to overcome housewifization. However, Mies further clarified that women's wage employment itself is not enough to eliminate "housewifization" until gender-based wage differentials in the manufacturing sector are eliminated. "Cheapening of labour" of women in the globalized factories rarely eradicates but escalates their housewifization along with proletarianization, marginalization and pauperization (Mies 1994:158 cited in Omvedt and Kelkar 1995:8).

5. 1   Women in Wage Employment: A Background Discussion

In the Bangladesh context, non-economic factors dominate this discourse. Some researchers argue that social and cultural factors are more important than economic factors. Kabeer (1991) argues that poor women often suffer from polygamy, divorce, abandonment and widowhood due to their lack of economic power and structural subordination to patriarchy and *purdah*. The widespread wage migration of men, increases the vulnerability of women. As a response of resistance to such conditions, women themselves nowadays tend to enter into wage-work. Therefore, participation of women in wage-work can also be viewed as a coping strategy to deal with social and cultural vulnerability.   Hossain and others (1993) cling to another dimension of this reality. They view women's increased participation in the RMG sector as a means to obtain sustained marital security—attracting men to marriage, and demonstrating their productivity to supplement household needs. Both arguments assert that socio-cultural

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factors (i.e., familial and social well being) dominate women's decisions more than economic factors in accepting wage-employment.

Absar, reviewing the above stated research issues, has compiled four major factors in the escalation of the employment of women. They are: 1) economic well-being and self-fulfillment, 2) pull and push effects, 3) improved marriage prospects versus financial incentive to induce men into marriage, and 4) patriarchal control versus urban living (2002:71-73). In my study, economic factors drive women toward wage-employment, and social factors intensify their preference for urban livelihood. I will analyze throughout the succeeding discussion that 'economic destitution' and thirst for 'economic recognition' of household and wage-work are two factors that force Bangladesh women workers to take garment sector jobs. It is worth noting here that I view 'economic destitution' to be synonymous with the broader framework of feminization of poverty (Mies 1999:24-64). The conditions that shape the socio-economic position of Bangladesh women are discussed here in this light.

5.1.1 Bangladesh women in wage-employment: Reflection of a social stimuli-response model

Bangladesh women lack acknowledgement of their economic contributions in the household. Although they take part in substantial agricultural activities, their work is neither paid nor valued in economic terms, and is considered as "house-work" or no work at all (Zaman 1992). As patriarchal familial principles define social status in terms of entitlement and endowment of household members in Bangladesh (Lindenbaum 1972; Jahan 1995; Alamgir 1977), their extra-household wage-work is often not considered as an occupation. "Familial norms and values are constantly drawn on in constructing the terms under which women and men enter and participate in public life and the market place" (Kabeer 1994:63). Women are identified through their male guardians—fathers, brothers and sons (Hartmann 1983; Islam 1982; Jahangir 1981; Jannuzi 1980; Jansen 1987; Aziz 1979). The infamous Vedic[1] verse defines women's life-cycle as "subordinate" to father in childhood and adolescence, to husband in marital conjugation and to son in older age. This principle is practiced socially irrespective of religions in

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[1] Hindu religious law and code of conduct.

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Bangladesh. Among the Muslims, there is a proverb (often misread as a religious verse) that "beneath the feet of husband, lies women's heaven". These tenets reinforce Bangladesh women toward unconditional submission to men in every aspect of their life. At the community level, virtues such as modesty, purity (chastity, dignity, *ijjat* (honor) and *lajja* (shame, shyness, submissiveness) and *purdah*[2] are desired virtues (Aziz 1979; Jumani 1991; Lewis et al. 1993; Arnes and Van Beurden 1977) for women. Gendered entitlement of means of production (land) acts as a basis of women's subjection in society.

Land is the basic means of production in rural Bangladesh. Ownership (Rahman 1998:142 cites Chowdhury 1982) and control of land by men provide the basis for male supremacy in society. The size and magnitude of land ownership determines the social, economic and material status and power of men. A man "must exercise his mastery over his land in many decisions necessary to farm it successfully and to his greatest advantage" (Thorp 1978:26). Second, only sons or male members are considered as agricultural workers in rural peasant households (Sobhan 1978:22). Achieving the "mastery", is linked to the ideology of male-supremacy in agricultural production. The preference for sons in Bangladesh arises from this socially constructed demand for male agricultural labourers.

Male bias results in minimal access of women to food consumption, in-house health care, education, and in the control of productive assets (Lipton 1988:44-45; Quibria 1993:7, 13-19). In the household distribution and consumption of food, a girl takes her meal only after satisfying male members' need (Lipton 1983:48, Dreze and Sen 1989; Jahan 1975; Alamgir 1977). She eats if a small amount of food is left for her— often the least nutritious share (Chen et al. 1981). Haq (1997) calls the tendency a "preferential treatment for boy child". Researchers invariably agree on this point that, the control of means of production and labour provide the base of such a strong patriarchal society. In turn, the bias becomes institutionalized in the greater community. Male bias increases along with the degree of poverty in these households: poorer households tend to be more male biased (Lipton 1983:48), because landlessness turns men into paid labourers in others' lands. Women's household work does not receive economic

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[2] Women's seclusion from men outside blood-relationship.

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recognition as having any cash-value. When poorer households may own small or marginal homestead plots, women's labour is viewed as their obligation in the household division of labour, since men work outside these plots for "cash" income. "Cash-handling" always remains in men's hands, so women are excluded from household financial management processes. Male bias and absence of control over "cash" results in women being poorer than men even within the same impoverished household. Thus, the feminization of poverty becomes articulated with household dynamics in poorer households of rural areas of Bangladesh.

Feminization of poverty in rural areas of Bangladesh begins in early childhood for girls (Adnan 1990, 1993; Ahmed 1983; Arnes and Beurden 1977; Casper et al 1994). Upon marriage in Bangladesh, women are mostly married to elderly men, generally 10-15 years their senior (Jeffery 1979). There is a traditional patriarchal norm behind this age differential. It is usually believed in Bangladesh society that a teenaged or under-aged bride will treat her husband as a guardian (see Jayaram 1981:24). In economically better-off households, dowry is practiced as a tool to consolidate patriarchy. Transfer of material wealth to men's hand in the form of dowry means transfer of pride, status and social recognition of male supremacy (Sharma 1984). Men take advantage of polygamous unions. For men, polygyny brings economic and social benefits. For women, the outcome is the opposite—poverty, dependence, risk of divorce and desertion. For men in poor families, dowry brings recurrent earnings from polygyny, social status as a respected breadwinner for several spouses, as well as veneration for *Mordami* (manly potency, *machismo*). But women cannot be polygamous. Also, there is a basic difference between widows and widowers. A parallel to what is observed in Mexican villages (Wiest 1998, 1973), divorced men or widowers in Bangladesh almost always remarry while widows and divorced and abandoned women tend to refrain from remarrying (Cain et al. 1979). They do not remarry due to lack of social support and fear of persistent community rebuke and gossip (Cain et al. 1979) that brings embarrassment to their natal households and risks future marriage of their children (Rahman 1999).

Despite a life-long enslavement of a girl, marriage at an immature age results in long-term health problems, stillbirth, miscarriage, sterility, and fall in life expectancy. Moreover, the girl loses the opportunities for schooling and higher study, income,

technical skill and motivation for self-reliance. One of the reasons empowerment projects fail in India and Bangladesh can be traced to child marriage (Carr et al. 1996).

Female-headed households are the poorest of all households in Bangladesh (Lewis et al. 1984) and India (Buvinic and Gupta 1997). For Hindu widows, religion ascribes superfluous obligations. They are not allowed to take any protein, have sex, do wage-work except animal husbandry and in-house poultry-raising, or to meet people except blood-relatives. As a result, they suffer from protein deficiency, lack of income and leisure, and motivation of self-respect (Leach 1971; Madan 1991). Religious obligations i.e., *upabash* (fasting), *prarthana* (prayer), *puja-archchana* (worship), preparation of *prashad* (food and beverage for tribute), *tirthabash* (self-exiling in religious pilgrimage) and *yoga* (meditation) consume the lions-share of a widow's life-time. In Bangladesh, there are no such religious restrictions for widows. However, familial norms are generally not supportive of widow-marriage (Chowdhury 1993; Chen 1986, 1991; WB 1991). Since patriarchy puts women in a subordinate position inside the household, poverty attacks women in the absence of male breadwinners in the household. Plight and struggle for existence escalates with divorce and abandonment of women and children by male partners. All these conditions jointly constitute a socially endorsed gendered subjugation of women. These stimuli of subjection give incentive to women to respond with craving for achievement of economic recognition of their labour power and cash-handling authority as well as emancipation from overall gendered inequity in society. It was observed in this study that the migration of rural women for garment sector jobs was primarily a response of rural women toward growing needs for economic well being and construction of individual self identity. Through portrayal of their socio-economic and occupational conditions, their hopes and real-life achievements are depicted in the subsequent sections.

5.2   Socio-economic and Occupational Conditions of Women Workers

5.2.1   Age level

I explained in the fourth chapter of this dissertation that certain socio-economic factors influence women garment workers of Bangladesh to provide spurious information about their age and marital status. It is worth clarifying prior to the following projection

of age, and marital and education status of the respondent that the "misinformation" problem is minimized through use of historical event analysis. The analyses of age, marital status and education are made on the basis of the facts related to women respondents of the phase one fieldwork because they constitute 91% of the total women study population (192 of 212, see Chapter II). As well, information from the 192 first phase respondents is more complex compared to that of the second phase study informants numbering only twenty. The second phase respondents are categorized by two simple features: first, twelve of twenty are married and the other eight workers are "never married", and second, all twenty workers fall into the age group 21-25.

Figure 5.1 illustrates that of 192 women garment workers surveyed, 143 workers fall in the age group 16-20. It means 74% of all workers fall in the age group 16-20 (also see Siddiqi 2000:12).

Figure 5.1   Age distribution of 192 garment workers of the first phase baseline survey
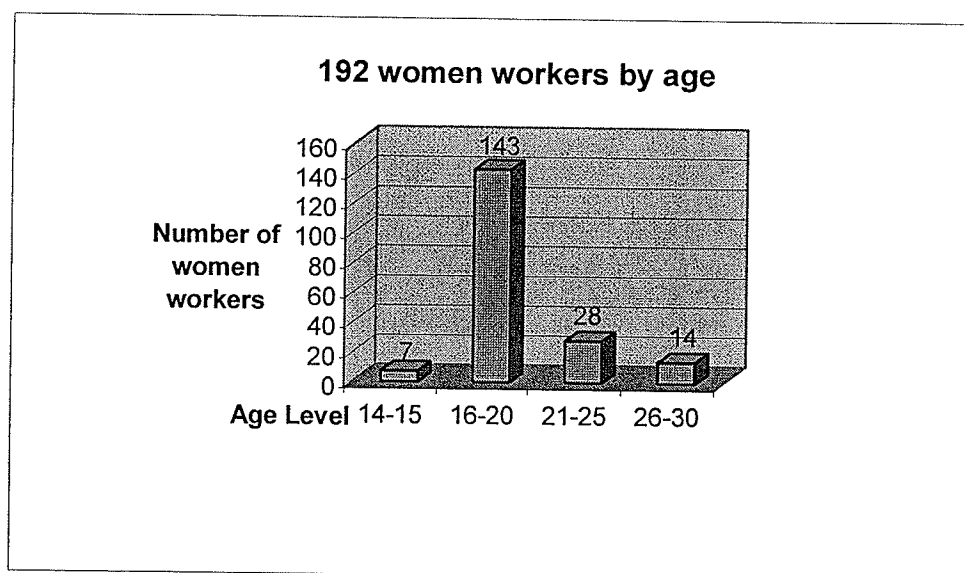
Workers expressed their opinion about the reasons behind the predominance of workers of age group 16-20. According to them, the factory management prefers "tender women", for they are considered more industrious and productive than workers in other age groups. A stereotypical perception sets the criteria for the management to practice and rationalize hiring of young women. The perception is that young women "can work longer shifts, can risk working in the night, will remain committed, are ambitious to

change their lot by learning, and are patient and easily controllable" (Wiest et al. 2003:172).

Only 4% of workers fall into age group 14-15. Earlier studies documented the presence of 14% to 21% child workers in factories (see Jamaly 1992; Khatun 1998; Paul-Majumder and Zohir 1991 for details). Recruitment of child workers dropped substantially during 1999 to 2002. This is because recruitment of child labour in garment factories was officially banned in 1995, factories became child labour-free by 1997. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed on July 4, 1995 between the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), UNICEF and ILO Bangladesh. The MOU put restrictions on exports from factories that are proven to be recruiting child workers. Recruitment of child labour generates a risk of more restrictions and sanctions by the European Union and the United States, nations in charge of monitoring violation of the UNICEF-mediated declaration. Also, the threat of cancellation of contract orders by the buyers resulted in a reduction in the number of recruited child workers. Factory records show these workers as adult workers for strategic reasons. I asked five factory managers and all of seven child workers to explain the reasons why child labour had not been completely eliminated from factories. The managers and workers provided similar information in response. The management recruit them out of a "helping attitude". When guardians or care-takers leave home for factory-work leaving children behind, they (children) become more vulnerable to abuse and delinquency-chains in the absence of custodians. Of seven workers in the age group 14-15, five were recruited upon repeated pleas of their elder sisters (guardians) who also worked for respective factories. The other two workers were recruited upon request of their *desi apas*[3] (custodians) on similar grounds.

As well, only a small section of workers fall into the age group 26-30. This section of workers constitutes only 8% of my respondents. It was known that the factory management does not prefer to recruit new workers older than age 25. When employed and experience workers reach age 25, their demand in factories also reduces. Through discussions with five factory managers and fourteen workers who fall in this age group, I

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[3] *Desi* means someone native to a locality, area or community. *Apa* means elder sister. *Desi apa* means a locality-based senior sisterly person. This is an ascribed relationship of respect of a non-relative junior girl to a senior girl who hailed from the same community or village.

revealed a two-fold reason behind this age-preference. First, women workers at this stage tend to devote themselves more to family matters and to rearing and education of offspring, and second, frequency of absenteeism and sickness is higher among this age group than other age groups. Therefore, most of the workers aged between 25-30 face termination on various fabricated charges. I interviewed two managers who have a few women workers of this age group in their factories. The managers expressed their disappointment with these workers, and reluctance to keep them in the job for a longer period. They complained that besides the fact that older workers are more experienced and skilled than the newcomers, they often become sick and frequently miss work. Moreover, they suffer from complicated family and marital problems more than other age groups. The managers described that their absenteeism is often bundled with excuses of child bearing and childcare. A management staff pointed out another reason behind managerial reluctance to appoint older women. Out of his managerial experience he described that senior workers usually resign under disapproval of their in-laws. "As familial responsibilities increase over years", he explains, "in-laws rarely approve women's compromise of *ashal kortobyo* (must-do obligations) for *nakal dhanda* (supplementary pursuits)". According to four managers, workers in this age group are less patient; they suffer from superiority complexes, they tend to bother others and blame juniors for their incapacity to work, and are said to become irrationally argumentative and disobedient to the factory management. They also claim high salary for their experience. All these reasons lay the basis for a lesser presence of older women in garment factory work.

Twenty-eight workers (15%) fall in the age group 21-25. It is represented in Figure 5.1 that workers in this age group also constitute a lesser proportion of the women garment workforce. Workers in this age group make up only one-fifth of the preceding age group (16-20). Apparently, the reason for less presence of the workers in factory work in age group 21-25 is directly linked with their "married" status. 66% women of this age group are married. As "married" status designates greater involvement in familial activities, workers in this age group constitute a lesser proportion of the garment workforce (see Table 5.1).

Table 5.1 Women workers by age and marital status, phase one of fieldwork,
Bangladesh, 1999

	Marital Status	≤15	16-20	% EM	21-25	% EM	26-30	% EM	Total	% EM
Ever Married (EM)	Married	-	9	11	9	11	4	5	22	28
	Separated	-	4	5	2	3	-	-	6	8
	Divorced	-	7	9	1	1	2	3	10	13
	Abandoned	-	23	29	3	4	6	8	32	40
	Widowed	-	5	6	2	3	2	3	9	11
	Total EM	-	48	61	17	22	14	18	79	100
Never Married (NM)/ Single		7	95	-	11	-	0	-	113	-
Total (EM+NM)		7	143	-	28	-	14	-	192	-
"EM" % within age group		-	34	-	61	-	100	-	41	-
"NM" % within age group		-	66	-	39	-	-	-	59	-

EM = "Ever Married" women (Workers), NM = "Never Married" (single) women
% EM = Percentage of Total "Ever Married" workers (79)

5.2.2 Marital status

Among 192 garment workers, 79 are married and 113 are single, or "never married". This is 40% and 60% of the total respondents (192) respectively. It means that most of the women workers are unmarried or single. "The term "married" is used to mean currently married, in contrast to formerly married women who are separated, divorced, abandoned, or widowed; these categories together are referred to as "ever married" (Wiest et al. 2003:175). "Married" is an informant-defined category to denote a legitimate heterosexual union.

Of 79 ever-married workers, 32 were married but are abandoned. This is the highest of all "ever married" categories. Abandonment rate is 41% of all (79) "ever married" workers. Some incidences of child marriage among garment workers were observed. Despite illegality in Bangladesh of marriage under 18 years of age, nineteen

women aged 16 or 17 are or were married (i.e., "ever married"); all but two of these are separated (1), divorced (2), abandoned (11), or widowed (3)[4].

In respect to marital status by age group, all seven workers in age group 14-15 are single, and all fourteen workers in age group 26-30 were or are married (i.e., "ever married"). The lowest presence of married workers is observed within the age group16-20. It is 25% (48/192) of total workers. Within this age group 16-20, 66% (95/143) are single, and 34% (48/143) are married. In contrast, 39% (11/28) of women are single and 61% (17/28) are married within the 21-25 age group (see Table 5.1).

Table 5.2 Marital status of "Ever Married" women workers by age groups, phase one of fieldwork, Bangladesh, 1999

EMW	Age group							
	16-20	% 16-20	21-25	% 21-25	26-30	% 26-30	Total EMW	% EMW
Married	9	19	9	53	4	29	22	28
Separated	4	8	2	12	-		6	8
Divorced	7	15	1	6	2	14	10	13
Abandoned	23	48	3	18	6	43	32	40
Widowed	5	10	2	12	2	14	9	11
Total EMW (Age Group)	48	100	17	100	14	100	79	100

Table 5.2 reflects that marital status of the women workers is composed of the following features: 1) only 28% of ever married women garment workers are currently maintaining a conjugal relationship. It means that most workers suffer from unsustainable marital or conjugal unions. Except widows, 61% of "ever married" workers have experienced separation, divorce and abandonment. 2) Abandonment rate is very high among married women workers (40%, 32/79). 3) High abandonment rate is observed even among the young and "tender women workers" in the age group 16-20. 48% (23/48) of respondents in this age group were abandoned. The abandonment rate is 43% in the age group 26-30—lower than that in the age group 16-20. It means that tender workers suffer more from marital insecurity. 4) It is observed that respondents in the age group 21-25 enjoy relatively sustainable conjugal life. Of the workers in this age group, 53%

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[4] Not shown in aggregate table. The information is extracted and compiled from individual data sets.

are married. As we proceed to the subsequent chapters, the relationship between age structure and livelihood changes among workers will be clarified.

5.2.3 Education, skill and worldview

Despite the fact that primary education is compulsory in Bangladesh, and female students get the advantage of free education up to class VIII, only 30% of workers have primary education and only 18% have studied up to class VIII. The Government of Bangladesh and the World Bank jointly provide monthly stipends to high school girls to encourage female education. As well, hundreds of national and international NGOs operate to elevate the education of girls in Bangladesh rural areas (GOB 1993). Yet, it was observed in this study that the stipend and projects have minimal impact on the elevation of educational status of girls. An account of the educational attainment of women garment workers will help to analyze the scenario. Of 38 workers with class VIII level education, only two had received the World Bank's FSSAP stipend. Thirty six workers never received any such benefit. Among these 36 workers, 29 were unaware of any such benefit.

Table 5.3 shows that only 16% workers fall in the fully literate category. Illiterate and marginally literate girls constitute 36% of workers. It was known from discussion with five managerial staff that while literate (educated) workers are most preferred, factory management likes to recruit moderately literate workers—the category that constitutes nearly half (48%) of this study population. In discussion sessions with factory managers and workers, I was informed that both workers and managerial staff believe that education increases workers' consciousness, skill, efficiency and confidence, and lack of education among women workers is the most visible factor behind their lower status and low wage in job. The managerial staff opined that although they prioritize "skill" and "attentiveness" over "education" for initial recruitment and salary fixation purposes, their experience was that educated workers acquired these qualities much more quickly than marginally literate workers.

Table 5.3 Educational status of women garment workers, Bangladesh, 1999-2001

Educational status	No of workers	%	Total (%)/ Category
Illiterate – unable to read or write	12	5.7	6
Marginally literate			
Able to write name only	9	4.3	
Able to read and write letter	36	17.0	
FS:* lower primary (up to class III)	39	18.4	30
Moderately literate			
Primary (Class V)	64	30.2	
Lower Secondary (up to class VIII)	38	17.9	48
Literate			
Secondary (SSC)	11	5.2	
Higher secondary (HSC)	2	0.9	
BA (Pass)	1	0.5	16
Total	212	100.0	100

It is very difficult to record actual educational attainments of the garment workers because they commonly tended to provide spurious information about formal education in order to hide their lack of education. Eleven workers recorded themselves as secondary (grade 10) school graduates while two workers claimed to possess a higher secondary (Grade 12) degree. A worker was recorded having a BA (Pass) degree. She indicated that she had failed to secure any prestigious job other than the factory job because of her marginal "third division" pass grade in secondary, higher secondary and graduate level. According to her, she treated the factory job as nothing but an *ashroy* (shelter) and a *sinri* (stair) to climb toward a better and prestigious job.

Most SSC graduates and class VIII graduates proudly claim that they deserve better jobs, and that they hate their factory job because it does not pay due recognition to their educational attainment. They tend to accept a factory job as an amateur venture, not a place to involve themselves with commitment and sincerity. However, for garment workers, quality of education matters more than years they had attended school. Most class VIII graduates could not read a newspaper or draft Bengali letters correctly. During this fieldwork, workers who were SSC graduates always tended to write in English, and to supply their information in written form. Eight of them wrote "appointment letter number" instead of "worker identification number". However, none of them wrote the word "appointment letter" correctly. Four of them considered the word "appointment" to

be a Bengali word, a word they use several times in a day. Only one of them is familiar with the name of "White House", and thought it would be as beautiful as the "Taj Mahal". Two of them sincerely believed that factory owners have no alternative but to meet consignment deadlines so they ship to the United States on time, because the delay in shipment would raise the anger of "America". One of them believed that in the event of shipment delay, the "angry America" would hurl an "atom bomb" on their factories and render them all jobless. They frequently used the word "bourgeois" to indicate bad people of all categories, including husbands who took flight and left their wives behind. Most of them are familiar with the words "IMF", "World Bank" and "multinational corporations". Nine class eight graduates and four SSC graduates expressed their perception that the World Bank and "multinational corporations" always do *matabbari* (bossiness) and *khabardari* (subduing) to snatch a large portion of worker salaries, and that is why factory owners are compelled to pay them less. Most of the workers who are class VIII or SSC graduates tended to remind the researchers that they were more knowledgeable and superior to the illiterate (*oshikkhito*) workers.

The apparent simplicity among the recorded educated workers reflects an adverse economic and social environment for education of women in rural areas. The following insight about "reasons" for their lower education status is drawn from several focus group discussion sessions. It was known that girls in the rural areas do not regularly attend school for numerous reasons. First, poverty conditions force the poor families to give higher priority to employing girls for acquisition of daily food than to education. Second, parents disapprove of schooling of girls because it compromises household work. Third, girls are discouraged from education because of distance to school and lack of transportation. Fourth, delinquent boys (*bokhaate*) harass school-going girls on the way to and from schools. As education of girls is commonly treated to be a secondary choice in Bangladesh rural society, poor parents usually prefer their daughters to drop out of school rather than resisting delinquent boys. Fifth, practices of restrictions and seclusion (*purdah*), often in the name of religion, start as early as eight years of age for girls. As a result, many rural parents view the co-education system even at primary level to be opposed to religious norms.

Gendered perception and gender conflict also act as potential barriers to educational attainment of rural women. Nine workers stated that they had stopped going to school upon realization that they were going to be "too educated" for young men of the villages to marry them. In response to the question "Why do men not wish to marry educated women?", a worker stated that men never permit women to raise their voice nor accept argumentative women. "They are afraid if we know more than they do, [because] we may disobey or defy them, or may not submit to them on every occasion". I asked twenty-one workers in different interview sessions if they also perceived that educated girls were not desirable as brides. Eighteen workers perceived that poor women who lived in rural areas should be educated up to a level that enables them to read and write letters. They expressed their opinion that rural girls should learn all types of household and domestic work as well as possible so that they could satisfy in-laws after marriage.

Seemingly, the substandard educational situation, and skill and worldview of women garment workers of Bangladesh, define their position in factory organization, wage dynamics and occupational relations.

5.2.4 Experience

The largest proportion (31%) of the respondents of this study has four to five years of experience in garment work (Table 5.4). Twenty three percent of workers have five to six years of experience. Experienced workers who have two to six years of experience altogether constitute 73% of the total number of respondents.

When asked why women workers remain helpers and operators despite their skills and experience, women workers described three reasons: First, frequent termination that pushes the workers into competition with the flock of fresher newcomers. Second, workers frequently relocate from one place to another under different types of occupational and social pressures (see Chapter 6). Since they do not receive any kind of experience certificates from their previous employers, the new employers treat them as newcomers. Third, most workers hide information about incidences of previous termination(s) from their new employers in fear that the new employers would read such information as the fault of the victim, as well as suspect them as trouble-makers. They fear that these possibilities would reduce their chance to become re-employed. Ten

workers in a group discussion session claimed that the employers usually knew they were recruiting experienced workers. However, they purposefully expressed their disinterest in recruiting experienced workers, because they were unwilling to comply with the factory regulation of a higher salary for "experienced" workers.

Table 5.4 Experience of respondents by length of service as garment workers, Bangladesh, 1999-2001

Experience (length of service)	N	%
< 1 month	1	0.5
1 – 6 months	1	0.5
7 – 12 months	4	1.9
1 – 2 years	22	10.3
2 – 3 years	17	8.0
3 – 4 years	41	19.4
4 – 5 years	65	30.6
5 – 6 years	46	23.0
7 – 8 years	7	3.3
8 – 9 years	4	1.9
10 – 11 years	3	1.4
> 11 years	1	0.5
Total	212	100.0

5.3   Factory Organization, Wage Dynamics and Occupational Relation

5.3.1   Division of labour

Generally, there are two types of factory positions for women workers: "helper" and "operator". A woman worker starts her job with helper status. Helpers do not perform any fixed work standardized by in the shop-floor division of labour (Table 5.5). They are usually posted to several work-posts, often by rotation, in line with the changed work-orders over time. Operators are assigned machine-work, especially stitching. Of 212 women workers interviewed, 174 (82%) are helpers, 36 (17%) are operators and only two are supervisors (1%).

Table 5.5 Garment factory shop floor division of labour, Bangladesh, 1999-2001
(n = 212)

Position	Number	Total	% Number	% Total
Supervisor	2	2	1	1
Operator (sewing)	36	36	17	17
Helper				
Sewing helper	84		40	
Finishing helper	43		20	
Folding helper	34	174	16	82
Cutting helper	9		4	
Ironing helper	4		2	

It is documented in earlier works (Paul-Majumder and Zohir 1994, BGMEA 2002, Absar 2002) that "helpers" constitute 35% to 40% of total workers and that they are usually lesser in number than the "operators". However, such generalizations derived through conventional shop floor surveys may present a distorted view of the division of labour. It is instructive in this context to present the experience of a young woman worker. Referring to the case of a previous and different research project, a worker informed me that managerial staff supplied false information to the researchers and government inspectors. She stated,

> One day a lady (maybe a researcher) visited our factory floor to note down our job positions. The supervisor presented eight of us, (all helpers) as operators. We were temporarily working on sewing machines at that time, and were not allowed to talk. We could not clarify that the supervisor had lied to her about our position.

I discovered through in-depth probing that the management of many factories plays a trick to exploit workers from due salary. Even though a large number of "helpers" possess skills of "operators" and are deployed to perform sewing tasks almost regularly, they do not receive "operator" title because operators are entitled to receive a higher salary than the helpers. Of 84 sewing helpers, 21 claimed that they were deployed as sewing operators, and had been doing that job for several months without receiving "operator" title. Twenty-nine helpers reported that they perform almost half of their duties as operators, yet are titled as "helpers" and paid according to that title. My study has also suffered from several incidences of misreporting of job title by workers. Fifty-two "helpers" reported themselves as "operators" in the beginning of this study. I

discovered later through in-depth probing that they reported such out of their confusion about job titles. Throughout this study, eight respondents always confused their title. These workers rarely receive an appointment letter, and become paid as "helper", although they do a substantial level of "operator" tasks. Therefore, the operators outnumber other categories of staff on the shop floor.

5.3.2 Wages and salary

In 1987, Bangladesh Wage Board declared TK 50.00 as the lowest daily wage for workers. Therefore, the factories are obliged to pay at least 1500 Taka monthly salary. Yet, no factories maintain the rule. All workers do overtime work to supplement their income. Income from overtime work is variable depending upon workers' skill, health condition and ability to manage their time. In an international comparison, hourly payment to a worker in Bangladesh garment factories is the lowest of all other garment manufacturing countries of South Asia and Southeast Asia. On an average, a Bangladesh garment worker receives a salary of only twenty-three cents an hour. It amounts to only 19% of the hourly salary of a Malaysian worker. In the South Asian context, the average hourly payment of a Bangladesh garment worker is one-third of that of Indian workers, and half of Pakistani workers (Table 5.1).

Table 5.6 Average payment per hour (US$) in the Bangladesh garment sector, 1999

Country	Average payment per hour
Malaysia	1.20
Thailand	1.00
India	0.60
Vietnam	0.40
Sri Lanka	0.40
Pakistan	0.40
Bangladesh	0.23

Source: Adapted and compiled from the Bangladesh Observer 1999:27.

With respect to labour cost and productivity, the Bangladesh garment workers are the most productive of all other South Asian garment manufacturing countries (Table 5.7). A Bangladesh garment worker produces a shirt with the minimum labour cost, which is as low as US$0.11. In comparison, the labour cost of a shirt by per unit

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production in India is US$0.26, in Pakistan US$0.43 and in Sri Lanka US$0.79. Yet the annual wage of a Bangladesh worker is the lowest of all countries. It is about half of the least productive country (Sri Lanka) of South Asia.

Table 5.7 Unit labour costs of garment workers in South Asia, 1994

Countries	Unit labour cost (US$/shirt)	Wage (US$/year)	Productivity (Shirts/worker/year)
Bangladesh	0.11	290	2536
India	0.26	668	2592
Pakistan	0.43	1343	3100
Sri Lanka	0.79	570	719

Source: Adapted from Zohir, S.C. 2000. Dhaka, 21-22 January.

I found that the average salary of a worker is around 1000.00 Taka (US$18.00 at time of research). It was calculated that a worker also earns 400 Taka (US$7.00) per month on an average from overtime work. It was also calculated that a worker needs at least Taka 1500 (US$26) per month in order to live a marginal hand-to-mouth existence. In order to substantiate this deficit, they are compelled to do extra-factory work (see Chapter 7). Nuruzzaman (1999:20) blames the wage commission of Bangladesh on grounds that it has not only failed to implement the Minimum Wage Board recommendations of 1994, but also remained insensitive to the need to review if the declared minimum wage is adequate to meet the marginal living of workers.

5.3.3 Benefits, overtime payment, bonuses, rewards and incentives

Generally, there is no practice of factory-centered occupational development schemes for the workers. According to the Factory Act 1965, no worker should be kept working more than 10 hours a day or 60 hours a week. More than 8 hours daily work must be considered as overtime and paid twice the hourly remuneration. The rate of overtime is not fixed in any garment factory. However, 92% of workers in my study informed that they get 50% of their salary as overtime. Only 8% informed they get equal to their regular hourly salary. Nuruzzaman (1999), researching existing factory laws in Bangladesh, outlines that workers are entitled to a weekly holiday, 10 days paid casual leave and sick leave, and annual leave calculated as 1 day against every 22 workdays, and

10 days of festival leave every year. No respondents of this study had ever received any such benefits (see Table 5.8).

Table 5.8 Job incentive payments received by 212 women garment workers, Bangladesh, 1999-2001

| | Frequency of incentive payment | | | | | |
| | More than once | | Once | | Never | |
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Festival Allowance (FA)	0	-	8	4	204	96
FA substitute (lump sum)	0	-	81	38	131	62
Bonus for regularity	0	-	21	10	191	90
Bonus for outstanding skill	2	1	5	2	205	97
Prizes	1	0.5	6	3	205	97
Zakat and Fitra	56	26	72	34	84	40
Other irregular charity	5	2	14	7	193	91

According to the factory laws of 1965 and 1979, Workers must be paid two "festival allowances" at a rate that equals their basic salary for two months. This is commonly known as a "bonus". For Muslims, these two festivals refer to their two *eids*.[5] Believers of other religions (such as Hindus, Buddhists and Christians) are also entitled to receive the same benefit. Most workers (92%) were aware of this regulation. However, only eight respondents of this study had received the full amount of festival allowance at most once. It is worth noting here that all eight workers who reported receiving a festival allowance were senior and skilled workers with permanent work status. They also reported that what they had received were "exceptions" and "special" benefit because they had always maintained "very good" and "friendly" relationships with their respective factory management personnel. This instance suggests that only a few privileged workers receive festival allowance. Thirty eight percent of workers reported that they had received a small "lump sum" amount of Taka 100 to 200 (US$1.72 to 3.4) instead of the festival allowance, and at most once.

There are virtually no practices of the occupational incentive system in the garment sector of Bangladesh. Nearly all workers (98%) I interviewed stated that they perceived due incentives and prizes (in recognition of their performance) to be an

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[5] The two largest religious festivals of the Muslims.

important means to create a congenial and healthy work environment as well as to boost competitiveness among workers. They suggested that bonus, rewards and monetary incentives should be practiced in factories in order to resist high worker dropout. According to the workers, only a few factories adhere to provisions of bonuses, prizes and reward for regular attendance and outstanding performance at work. The common practice of incentive is *Zakat* and *fitra*[6]. Largest number of workers received fitra and zakat. Those who have never received this incentive constitute 40% of workers. It means that 60% of workers have received *fitra* and *zakat* at least once in their service-life. Some (10%) workers received a bonus of Taka 100 (less than US$2.00) as a "regular attendance bonus" for not being absent from work for the entire month. It is also worth noting that some developments in provision of "regular attendance" bonuses may have taken place over the years. In 1999, only seven workers (4%) informed that they had received a 100 Taka "bonus" for not being absent from the factory a single day in a month. In 2001, 34 workers out of 50[7] (68%) were recorded as recipients of a bonus for regular attendance. Six of these workers also stated that by 2001, "regular attendance bonus" became a common practice in most factories. However, they provided a general understanding that all other areas of incentives remained unchanged.

5.4   Occupational Conditions

5.4.1   Job security and occupational safety net

Human resource management of the garment sector is characterized by absence of minimum job security and insurance. As with frequent recruitment, unjust termination is an everyday-life phenomenon in this sector. In 1999, 77% women respondents (148 of 192) of this study were victims of unjust dismissal at least once in a year. All of them

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[6] *Zakat* is one of the five pillars of Islam. *Zakat* means share of the dispossessed in the income of the well-off members of society. A person who lives above the marginal day-to-day living is bound to disburse a certain proportion of her/his income for poor people. *Zakat* is not charity or donation, but a *Farz* (a must-do duty) that a Muslim must practice. *Fitra* is another kind of share of right of the poor people on income of the well-off Muslims. This is variable and is determined on the basis of market price of basic needs.

[7] Out of these 50 initially selected workers, 20 were included in the in-depth case studies. Except for solid involvement of these fifty workers in the perception study, disjointed and sporadic information was received from the other 30 workers. Thus, these 30 respondents were not included in the mainstream analysis. However, wherever contexts demand, reference of relevant informant (as in this above comparison) is made throughout this dissertation.

reported that they were discharged without being paid a month or more of salary. In 2001, 9 of 50 workers (18%) reported similar unjust termination, which reflects a decline in such dismissal practices. Forty-eight women workers with more than three year's experience also conveyed their perception that frequency of deception and unjust termination of workers, and appropriation of their salaries by the management were declining gradually. However, they also asserted that decline in such practices did not mean that joblessness was decreasing correspondingly. Rather, other occupational pressures such as closure of factories under withdrawal of buyer's quota privilege and the phase out of MFA were contributing more to joblessness than forced unjust termination.

Job insecurity among women workers stems from not receiving an appointment letter or an official identity card (see Table 5.9). Thirty-five workers described a common problem—being mistreated as *kharaap meye* (bad girl)[8]. In general, most workers who did not have identity cards said that they had experienced mistreatment by police and *kharaap loak* (bad people) at least once, but could not present an identity card as garment workers. Forty nine percent of workers have identity cards, and 51% do not. Eighteen of 41 sewing helpers who have a work permit informed that they were not allowed to take their cards outside the factory. When asked the reason, most workers explained that management of some factories believed that women workers would lose or misuse the identity card. Six workers in a group discussion session shed different light on this managerial perception. It is widely known that management people often suspect women workers of engaging in off-factory *kharaap kaaj* (prostitution)[9] and that they are cautious so that *maan-samman* (reputation and good image) of the management and the factory are safe from police harassment and from blackmailers. A worker drew an example of identity card related problems from her workplace, referring to an incident that sheds light on reasons of managerial reluctance to issue identity cards to workers. One day a factory worker lost her identity card on her way home. Actually it was stolen from her bag by a call girl who sat beside her as fellow passenger in a *tempo*[10]. After a month, police arrested her on various charges, but she presented herself to the police as an

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[8] The concept refers to call girls or pimps.
[9] Usually refers to prostitution and other immoral activities such as stealing or joining band of thieves and rackets.
[10] A type of auto rickshaw assembled locally.

innocent garment worker. During the investigation of that case, the management of that factory was hassled and harassed by the police. The incidence greatly embarrassed and annoyed the management. Since then, the factory has maintained the sanction on carrying identity cards outside the factory.

Table 5.9 Women garment workers by official identification, Bangladesh, 1999-2001

| Position | Identification | | | |
| | Appointment letter | | Identity card | |
	N	%	N	%
Supervisor	2	0.94	2	0.94
Operator (sewing)	29	13.68	34	16.03
Helper				
Sewing helper	9	4.25	41	19.34
Finishing helper	4	1.89	11	5.18
Folding helper	2	0.94	9	4.25
Cutting helper	2	0.94	3	1.42
Ironing helper	1	0.47	2	0.94
Total	49	23	102	49

The owners usually do not provide workers any written document or appointment letters. Of 212 workers researched, only 151 workers received appointment letter and or identity card. Only 23% workers (49/212) have received appointment letters, or a receipt on appointment. Among them, 64% (29/49) are operators and supervisors. Other workers did not receive any formal appointment letter. Of 49 workers, 10 informed that they were not allowed to retain a copy of their appointment letter for personal records. A worker referred to an incident that reflects a possible reason for managerial reluctance to allow the workers to retain a copy of their appointment letter. One worker mortgaged her appointment letter to a petty-trader cum moneylender as collateral, or simply as a means to win trust of the moneylender. Later, the worker was terminated from her job, and left the area for good without repaying the debt and *bokeya* (credited) grocery bill of that moneylender cum trader. The moneylender repeatedly bothered some management people by asking for a payment on behalf of the runaway worker. At one point, he resorted to insulting two management personnel by hurling insults in public at the factory gate. He also committed several offences to four of the known friends and coworkers of that worker. The management took those issues seriously, and stopped supplying the

workers their copies of appointment letters. Some workers expressed that in order to maintain a high rate of production, the managers follow the strategy of keeping all occupational incidents inside factories. They treat worker-related off-factory issues as interruptions in the production process. However, all workers who were recruited without appointment letters stated that the condition had contributed most to the absence of bargaining power and job insecurity among the garment workers.

Generally, there are no occupational safety-net provisions in the garment sector. All respondents of this study were aware that they were entitled to pensions, gratuity, bonuses, welfare funds, and medical and maternity grants as per government regulation. However, none of the workers knew how these benefits could have helped to elevate their livelihood standard. Except for two supervisors and three senior operators (207), no workers expected to receive any kind of benefits upon retirement and being laid off.

Maternity leave has always been a neglected issue in the garment factories of Bangladesh. When asked, three management personnel informed that they never followed the Maternity Benefit Act of 1939 because it rarely fit with the context of contemporary women factory workers. The British Imperial government promulgated the Maternity Benefit Act of 1939 in consideration of a few available women wageworkers of that time. The Act was of a "draft" nature to address maternity issues of a few high official women of the late thirties. The context has changed by now, but the act still remains unchanged (Hossain et al. 1993:79). Participation of Bangladeshi Muslim women in the formal employment sector is a recent phenomenon. As well, given the condition of solo migration, absence of relatives, and longer periods of work, maternity problems of garment workers are much more complex and multifaceted than those of the women officials of the British period. Thus, the act needs to be amended to address contemporary maternity issues. However, factory management is to follow Codes 77, 78 & 79 of the Factory Act of 1965. The act clearly states that factory workers are entitled to a paid maternity leave of nine months. Women workers in several group discussion sessions informed that pregnant workers used to receive termination rather than maternity leave. This is why women workers prefer birth control and abortion to motherhood (see Chapter VII).

5.4.2   Managerial treatment on shop floor

Physical assault of workers by management is a prevalent phenomenon of the garment sector. It constitutes a modern form of bonded slavery in industries. It was observed in 1999 that 129 of 192 workers (67%) experienced physical assault by factory management at least once in their job lifetime. Of these 129 workers, 39 reported aggressive physical contact or sexual harassment by male supervisors. Although more recent information implies that the practice of physical assault of workers is declining in factories, it is not eliminated fully from the factory floors. Two of 50 workers had experienced physical assault in the year 2001. There also has been a decline in physical assault of workers by on-duty shop-floor management during 1999 to 2001. Only 4% workers experienced physical assault 2001. The rate is much lower than that observed in 1999 (67%). As well, none of the 2001 offences were sexually motivated.

Other than physical assault, most workers among the Phase One respondents reported harsh, rude and unkind behaviour from floor supervisors and quality controllers. With a few exceptions, male supervisors use slurs, barbs and abusive language towards workers. Workers are rarely allowed leisure breaks except for a half-hour interval for lunch. Factory supervisors often monitor and record off-work activities of workers. Sometimes they even set time limits for toilet use. Some factories introduce a "toilet card" (Nuruzzaman 1999:15) for workers to monitor and record their toilet use time. However, 29 workers in the Phase Two study reported that such practices were gradually declining in the factories. The workers suggested several reasons for the change in shop-floor work environment. First, educated staff is now replacing the previously recruited minimally educated supervisors. In general, supervisor positions in most factories had been filled by lesser-educated[11] *nijeder loak* (own people, beneficiaries of personal connection) or relatives of the factory owners for a long time. Only very recently has the factory management come to realize that nepotistic recruitment creates problems because *nijeder loak* usually tend to misuse power and disobey official discipline. Consequently, the demand for educated supervisors is being increased in place of kin-based recruits. Second, the sector has become a key focus of numerous research projects and journalistic

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[11] With "minimally-educated", the workers referred to high school dropouts or elementary college dropouts.

reports in recent years, and these reports have documented the exploitative and abusive shop-floor conditions. As a result, shop floors have been put under relatively regular inspection and surveillance by the government and international human rights groups. Consequently, the management of garment factories have given considerable attention to minimize maltreatment of workers on shop floors, with well-mannered and educated youth replacing abusive supervisors of garment factories. Third, workers also noted a recent trend toward reconstruction of the management-worker relationship on the basis of mutual sympathy and respect and dependence. This is partly because everyday interaction between the workers and management over the years has turned them into a "family". However, the workers sense that these changes really have been in response to downturns in the industry from a phasing out of the MFA and quota privileges. A worker explained it in a Bengali proverb—"*Dokkhi-i bujehe dukkhir dukkho*"—i.e., only a distressed person can feel the sufferings of another distressed person. One worker expressed her surprise, "for me, it is a very strange experience to see our bosses becoming so sympathetic to us (workers) at a time when the garment business suffers from *durgoti* (adversities) and faces an uncertain future like ours. I love this situation because it has turned managerial *janoars* (beasts) into human beings". It is worth mentioning that this worker also suspected the motives of such development by saying, "I am not sure if such *bhalomanushi* (humane treatments) are real or just another kind of management trick or pretext to render all of us jobless without compensation". Other workers also cast their doubts on the motives for managerial *bhalomanushi*. These observations suggest that garment workers interpret management motives on the basis of their own experience of managerial treatment of workers on shop floors, and it reflects an understanding of the larger forces affecting factory organization.

5.4.3 Shop-floor facilities and utilities

Previous studies (see Paul-Majumder and Zohir 1994, Jamaly 1992, Khatun 1998) portrayed poor provision of shop floor facilities as a common characteristic of Bangladesh garment factories. Table 5.10 presents worker perception about level of adequacy of shop floor-related essential utilities. Factory floors are often very congested and unhealthy. Ninety three percent of the respondents perceive their workspace as

inadequate. Eighty nine percent of workers reported inadequacy of latrines and 86% said that dining space was inadequate in their respective factories. Eighty two percent of workers reported inadequacy of common meeting rooms. Seventy four percent of workers consider that provisions of on-duty physicians in their respective factories were inadequate to meet basic health needs.

Table 5.10 Perception of workplace facility adequacy among 212 garment workers, rank-ordered by classification as "inadequate" and "unavailable", Bangladesh, 1999-2001

Workplace Facilities	Level of adequacy							
	Sufficient		Barely Adequate		Inadequate		Unavailable	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Childcare area	0	0	1	0.5	21	9.9	190	89.6
Duty physician	0	0	5	2.4	156	73.6	51	24.1
Common room	0	0	11	5.2	174	82.1	27	12.7
Work space	0	0	14	6.6	198	93.4	0	0
Breastfeeding area	0	0	16	7.5	164	77.4	32	15.1
Change room	4	1.9	13	6.1	149	70.3	46	21.7
Latrines	1	0.5	22	10.4	189	89.2	0	0
Dining room	0	0	29	13.7	182	85.8	1	0.5
Prayer room	0	0	36	17.0	67	31.6	109	51.4
Exhaust	1	0.5	48	22.6	156	73.6	7	3.3
Emergency power	8	3.8	49	23.1	148	69.8	7	3.3
Emergency exit	0	0	80	37.7	89	42.0	43	20.3
Window	7	3.3	82	38.7	123	58.0	0	0
Ventilation	14	6.6	89	42.0	109	51.4	0	0
Drinking water	7	3.3	107	50.5	98	46.2	0	0
Lighting	10	4.7	124	58.5	78	36.8	0	0
First aid facilities	51	24.1	89	42.0	34	16.1	38	17.9
Fans	4	1.9	140	66.1	68	32.1	0	0
Fire extinguisher	4	1.9	186	87.7	22	10.4	0	0

Seventy four percent of workers reported inadequacy of exhaust fans and 70% reported inadequacy of emergency power. Ninety percent of workers reported that their respective factories did not maintain childcare areas for the children of working mothers. Fifty two percent of workers complained about unavailability of space to perform daily prayers. Eighty eight percent of workers rated fire extinguishers and 66% rated fans as barely adequate. This information provides a grim picture of provisions of essential utilities on factory floors.

Despite poor provisions of factory floor amenities, some progressive changes in this area are also taking place in recent time. In 2001, all twenty respondents of the Phase

Two in-depth case study and four of the Phase One study admitted that their factories were by then furnished with fire extinguishers and, despite absence of on-duty physicians, they started to receive first aid for sudden onset ailments more quickly than ever before. In 2001, 26 of 50 (52%) workers informed that by then the management of their respective factories were supplying them a light snack in the afternoon during overtime work. In 1999, only 16 (8%) workers received a light snack during the overtime work.

5.5   Livelihood Conditions
5.5.1   Residence and settlement

1.5 million Bangladesh garment workers spend US$0.32 million on rent per month (*The Independent* 1998d:18). Yet as difficult as their work environment is, living accommodation for most garment workers has been so dismal and compromising that many workers prefer to remain inside the factory as long as they can. Even though the factory environment is unhealthy, many women workers prefer spending more time inside factories in order to get some comfort from fans and lights, and protection from rain (see Appendix 2 for example photographs of worker livelihood conditions).

Zohir and Paul-Majumder (1996) notes that types of residences of workers are varied. They reject a popular belief that most garment workers live in slums. According to their study, only 14% of the garment workers live in slums (1996:63). However, there is no macro level evidence in favour of this generalization. The study by Absar (2001) finds the opposite—i.e., most of her respondents live in slums. During my field visit, I observed most workers to live in slums. Given the unavailability of any nationwide survey on residence of Bangladesh women garment workers, I argue that it is not at all possible to establish a generalized claim about predominant residence features of the workers. One hundred and nine of 192 respondents (57%) of the first phase of this study lived in slums. However, I observed a considerable level of improvement in residence and settlement of workers during the second phase of this study in the year 2001. In this second study phase, 62% (31 of 50) of the women workers have lived in *paka dalan* (concrete buildings), whereas only 2% (14 of 192 workers) lived in such accommodations in 1999. Twenty-six of 31 respondents lived in comparatively neat

residential areas. All of the 31 workers moved from various shanty-houses to these concrete-built houses fairly recently—in 2000-2001. They were compelled to move to these relatively secure houses in realization of their strong need for privacy. Ten workers expressed satisfaction with the new residence saying that it met their privacy concerns, especially the prying eyes watching them shower. Twenty-one workers said that they had been having serious problems in showering and toilet use in their previous abodes. All of the 31 workers used to suffer from problems of sexual harassment and spying eyes while showering. These problems are reported as principal reasons for their moving from cheaper residences to these relatively expensive houses.

Seven workers lived in government staff quarters in Kalyanpur and Motijheel colony under unofficial "sublease" contract with the original tenant. They also moved from slums to these houses within six to eight months of the time of this study in 2001. They moved to these houses to evade security concerns—rape, extortion, theft, forced prostitution, and drug trafficking in the slums. Usually two to four workers share a subleased room to make their living homey and cost-effective. These workers said that they knew at least 40 other coworkers living under similar arrangements where two women workers share a room. The rent of a room ranges between Taka 700 to Taka 1000 with two persons sharing the rent.

A total of 62 respondents of both phases of this study lived in a number of newly constructed tin-shed buildings and low-cost houses. These sixty-two workers informed that the tin-shed housing project, constructed during 1998 to 2001, was also a new phenomenon. Some local people of Pallabi Arambagh housing society, Rupnagar housing society, Duaripara and Arifabad of Mirpur area took initiative to build these settlements to rent to the garment workers. Twelve to fourteen workers live in a six-room tin-shed building. Usually, two workers share a room. Tenants (workers) share bathroom and a common kitchen of rented tin-shed houses.

Some workers live in mess-houses composed of several small rooms with common shared toilet. These mess houses are built with low-cost construction materials in order to keep rent affordable for low-income group of people. In a 1995 survey, 33% of men and 15% of women workers were found living in messes (Zohir and Paul-Majumder 1996:93). The persistent risk of sexual harassment and insecurity often

discouraged women workers to consider living in mess houses. A comparison of two studies (Zohir and Paul-Majumder 1996 and Zohir 2000) draws our attention to a changing feature of residence conditions of women workers. In 1990, the mess-house residence of women workers accounted for about 8 percent of workers studied (Zohir and Paul-Majumder 1996:93). In 1997, 15 per cent women workers lived in mess-houses (Zohir 2000:13). Twelve percent (23/192) of respondents of the first phase of this study lived in mess houses. Findings of Zohir (1996) and the present study also suggest that women workers living in mess houses are increasing. All of the twenty-three workers expressed their *nirupaya* (helpless) condition as the lone reason for living in mess-houses. They explained that the high level of in-migration puts every migrant into a fierce battle for shelters. Under such a desperate condition, workers enter an exhausting struggle to address insecurity and their resources against housing availability. A worker described the condition of mess-houses as *"monder bhalo"* (better than the worst), because most mess-house tenants consider it as a better shelter than the slums.

5.5.2 Livelihood organization and domestic arrangements

Paul-Majumder and Zohir (1996) mentioned that most "helpers"—the largest section of garment workers—lived with family members or with relatives. Zohir (2000:13) found that the tendency of helpers to live with families was declining over recent years. He compared his finding with that of a preceding study, and stated on the basis of this comparison that workers living with families and relatives dropped to 72 percent during the 1996-2000 period.

I found in my study that workers generally live alone. Most workers live with their own families and other relatives only for temporary periods. Some workers live with parents for relatively longer periods (see Table 5.11). Their parents are also migrants in Dhaka. Parents of all 49 workers migrated to Dhaka in connection with jobs of their daughters. A few workers live with families of their uncles or other relatives. It is known that domestic arrangements of workers are not unchangeable phenomena. Workers frequently move from one place to the other without family members. Their parents also move for various reasons, mostly jobs. A small proportion of workers live with their affines, and yet for shorter period. Three of six workers live in families of their paternal

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uncles and two others in families of their elder brothers. Two workers live with their brother-in laws. These six workers expressed their reluctance to live with relatives for longer periods of time because of their realization that conflict of interest and personality between the guardians and the workers arise after a certain period of co-residency. Often these conflicts overshadow security and safety advantage of co-living. Eleven of 29 workers living with patrilateral joint families also expressed their similar experience and opinion. All of the 49 workers informed that they live with parents only in nominal terms, because all members of their families frequently relocate to make a living from various sources of income.

Table 5.11 Domestic arrangement of women garment workers, Bangladesh, 1999-2001

Domestic arrangement	N	%
Solo, live alone	128	60
Live with parents	49	23
Live with patrilateral joint family	29	14
Live with other relatives	6	3
Total	212	100

Eight workers suggest that it is not domestic arrangement but "economic role" that determines the position of a worker in the family. Most workers live on their own income. A few of them run the family as breadwinner. These families are composed of divorced, widowed and abandoned workers. Only a few of them cannot live on their own income, and thus depend on other earning members in the family who work and reside in some other place in Dhaka (Table 5.12).

Table 5.12 Economic role in household or family of 212 garment workers, Bangladesh, 1999-2001

Economic role in HH / Family	No. of workers	%
Self-dependent on own earnings	162	76.4
Principal breadwinner	23	10.9
Dependent on family earnings	20	9.4
Other	7	3.3
Total	212	100.0

The employment condition of garment workers offers little economic and social security for a viable livelihood. Employment insecurity reinforces minimal certainty of their living accommodation. As a result, relocation becomes a part of worker inclination. Even with housing improvements for garment workers, the low quality of worker livelihood generally remains unchanged. Poor job and living conditions together serve as agents of dislocation, alienation and an individuation process in the livelihood of the Bangladesh garment workers.

CHAPTER VI

LIVELIHOOD ON THE EDGE: STRESSORS OF LIFE-WORLD

For women garment workers of Bangladesh, occupational, residential and social insecurity are intertwined phenomena. For instance, sudden closure of factories and dismissals compel workers to default on their living space rent, to turn to informal moneylenders who lend at high interest rates, and to withdraw children from daycare centres and schools. They become more vulnerable to sexual harassment and breakdown of conjugal relationships. The following table presents the enormity of concerns of 212 women workers about insecurities and stressors that push their livelihood on the edge.

Women factory workers view the notion of "insecurity" through the lenses of real life-world stressors that engulf their occupational and social livelihood, and appear as major causes of tensions. The stressors range from short-term distressful events like dismissal, closure of factories, fire hazards, and slum eviction to long-term occupational health hazards and factory exits, stampede injury or death. In general, women workers view these stressors as three major types of insecurities: 1) occupational, 2) social, 3) residential.

6.1 Occupational Stressors

6.1.1 Joblessness and deskilling linked to international division of labour

It is documented in Table 6.1 that most workers are highly concerned about stressors related to occupational insecurity such as uncertainty of future occupation, dismissal, and fear of deskilling. Jobless workers often find themselves as specialized in garment manufacturing but unfit for non-manufacturing jobs due to their compartmentalized experience in the process of international division of labour. International division of labour means a division of work that compels workers to

invest their labour on a "need to know basis" only. The workers never see the bigger picture of the production processes. "The labour process is now divided between separate sites and separate bodies of workers. The production units operate like a hand, watched, corrected, and controlled by a distant brain" (Braverman 1974:124-25), i.e., the manager. Braverman's assertion that "degradation of work" is at the heart of the capitalist labour process fits well with the garment sector. Thus, deskilling is crucial, from management's perspective, because skilled workers historically were the most militant workers (Braverman 1974:9-14). Deskilling of women workers in a way is the crude representation of their employment vulnerability.

Table 6.1 Perception of women garment workers of their livelihood insecurity and stressors (Rank-ordered among 212 Dhaka garment workers, 1999 and 2001)

Types of insecurity	Stressors	Frequency among 212 workers	% of total
Occupational	Uncertainty of future occupation	199	94
	Dismissal	198	93
	Fear of deskilling or loss of skills	177	83
	Fire hazards	167	79
	Occupational health	132	62
	Sudden closure of factories	98	46
	Unavailability of emergency transportation	94	44
	Apprehension of shop-floor accident	67	32
	Conflict with the management people	56	26
	Beating and physical abuse in factory	53	25
	Fear of factory owner-appointed hoodlums	43	20
Social	Hatred expressed by neighbourhood people	201	95
	Entrapment: drug bearing, selling, using	178	84
	Rape, gang rape, killing	167	79
	Lack of helping hand during emergency	149	70
	Trafficking	131	62
	Drug addiction: to relieve pain and anxiety	77	36
	Fear of breakdown in marital or affair relationships	76	36
	Domestic extortion	67	32
	Degeneration of family members, especially children	58	27
	Abduction	56	26
	Fear of unwanted pregnancy	34	16
	Financial exploitation by relatives	34	16
	Unavailability of daycare centre for children	32	15
Residential	Isolation from neighbourhood people	201	95
	Slum eviction	118	56
	Theft, burglary at residences while absent	77	36

Some women garment workers cast their employment vulnerability by saying that factory work is so mindless and difficult that it causes decay (*khoy*) and devastation (*binash*) of body and soul within three to four years. As one worker put it, "A fifteen year old teen turns into a fifty year old woman after spending five years in the job". Another worker expressed that a large section of women garment workers lose physical and mental stability, determination and confidence to adjust to other kinds of work after they are terminated as garment workers. This type of factory-generated unemployment stress forces many women garment workers to become involved in prostitution and other immoral activities for survival.

6.1.2 Wage-exploitation

The workers regularly work longer hours, and on occasion must work extended hours just to keep their jobs. Overtime work is a double-edged sword for most workers. When there are urgent work-orders, the factory management often force the workers to do overtime work in order to meet their production quota and shipment deadline. Workers who do not comply with the managements' demand for overtime work risk forced termination. All of the respondents (100%) perceived that overtime work is the principal reason for their ill health. Yet, they are left with no choice but to do overtime work in order to make up even their subsistence level livelihood costs. Because of poor wage levels, 92% of the informants are forced to do overtime work, and they double their income through it. Many workers informed that they suffer from financial distress during low work seasons—when factories operate with less work-orders—and do not require their workers to do overtime work.

Worker dependence on overtime work supplies the management with opportunities to exploit their workers by wage and overtime payment. Overtime commonly is not reimbursed at a higher rate. According to the Factory Act 1965 (BAFLF 1999:57), no worker should be kept working more than 10 hours a day or 60 hours a week. More than 8 hours daily work is to be considered as overtime and paid twice the hourly remuneration. Extensive research suggests that these legal guidelines are not adhered to nor enforced (e.g., Absar 2001a:12; 2001b:77; Delahanty 1998). The rate of overtime payment is not fixed in any garment factory. The informants

indicated that they are usually paid only half time for overtime work as for "normal" hours, unless there are high profits from certain work-orders, or high demands to fill new work-orders. Only 8% of the respondents informed that overtime is paid at a rate equal to their regular hourly salary. Ten workers termed wage-exploitation as the "root evil" (*shobkichur mool*) of their livelihood problems.

6.1.3 Absence of occupational safety nets

There is not in place a general practice of factory-centred occupational safety nets such as pensions, gratuity, bonus, and welfare fund, medical or maternity benefits. Employment agreements or understandings are so lax or uncertain that few workers find any security in the appointment. The owners usually do not provide any written document to workers as verification of their employment status (see Table 5.9). Although "helpers" constitute the largest section of factory workers, they rarely receive employee documents. Among the recipients of identity cards and appointment letter, most are "operators". It was observed that many workers consider their factory work-record or worker identification number as appointment confirmation. Therefore, workers remain deprived of their deserved benefit for "experience". Due to absence of an occupational experience-record, most workers become compelled to accept "starter level" salary in other factories under situations of termination and joblessness by factory-layoffs.

6.1.4 Factory fire and hazard of worker stampede

Fire hazard and death by stampede are two big problems in Bangladesh garment factories. A total of 467 workers died in several factory fire incidents and fire-related stampedes in two decades (1980 to 2000). About 3000 fire incidents took place in Bangladesh garment factories during this period (personal compilation from newspaper data). In 2000, the biggest fire stampede in Chowdhury Garments of Narsingdi alone claimed 52 worker lives. The government and the BGMEA declared several compensation packages (see Appendix 5) for the families of the dead workers of these fire incidents. On 17 March 2001, the BGMEA declared that it would pay 100,000 Taka to the family of each worker who died in the fire. However, most of these commitments remained unrealized (The Daily Star 20 Sept, 2001). Many

workers suffer from chronic nightmares of fire hazard, and are panicked by any unusual noise inside or outside shop floors. A worker informed that she had observed several incidents of worker panic upon hearing louder noises of an exploding transformer or tire blow-out among street vehicles. Two workers informed that their senses are on constant alert (*shojag*) in fear of fire hazards. These opinions illustrate the aggravation of the sense of insecurity in the psyche of workers.

6.1.5 Dismal shop-floor conditions

In the garment worker perceptions and assessment of their job and workplace environment (Table 6.2), it is evident that they do not deem any factory facilities as sufficient. While provisions of some required facilities are absent in the workplace, available facilities and conditions are considered inadequate. Most workers deem provisions of workspace, latrines, dining space and common room inadequate. Workers characterize their workspace as very crowded and barely adequate for normal physical movement. Workspace crowding is considered to be associated with general tension, fear of entrapment, and fire hazard (see Table 6.4; also Absar 2001b:77, Delahanty 1998 and Paul-Majumder and Zohir 1994).

Many workers blamed provisions of inadequate number of toilets to be responsible for various diseases of workers such as kidney malfunctioning, reproductive tract infection (RTI), urinary tract infection, piles and gastrointestinal diseases. Three workers informed that lack of childcare area contributes to dropout and absenteeism of working mothers and sisters of younger siblings. Some workers view that dismal work floor conditions lead their discomfort including lack of commitment in work, fatigue, boredom, restlessness and eccentricity.

6.1.6 Occupational health hazards

Occupational health problems are common companions of the garment workforce. To the factory managers, health problems of workers are most potential barriers to attain production targets. Two of the factory management staff noted the tendency of sick workers to leave assignments undone in the middle of work-shifts. Even though this makes it difficult to maintain the pace and discipline of the work

organization, they claimed that they had to allow workers to leave for emergency purposes to meet doctors or to buy medicine. Factory jobs cause both long term and short-term diseases of workers. Fatigue from boredom and headache are two common forms of ailment that affect workers from the very beginning of factory work (Table 6.2). While interviewing, a worker who had less than a month experience in factory work informed that she had been suffering from headache from the first week of employment.

Table 6.2 Perception of workplace facility adequacy, rank-ordered by classification as "inadequate" and "unavailable", among 212 garment workers, Bangladesh, 1999-2001

Workplace Facilities	Level of adequacy							
	Sufficient		Barely Adequate		Inadequate		Unavailable	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Childcare area	0	0	1	0.5	21	9.9	190	89.6
Duty physician	0	0	5	2.4	156	73.6	51	24.1
Common room	0	0	11	5.2	174	82.1	27	12.7
Work space	0	0	14	6.6	198	93.4	0	0
Breastfeeding area	0	0	16	7.5	164	77.4	32	15.1
Change room	4	1.9	13	6.1	149	70.3	46	21.7
Latrines	1	0.5	22	10.4	189	89.2	0	0
Dining room	0	0	29	13.7	182	85.8	1	0.5
Prayer room	0	0	36	17.0	67	31.6	109	51.4
Exhaust	1	0.5	48	22.6	156	73.6	7	3.3
Emergency power	8	3.8	49	23.1	148	69.8	7	3.3
Emergency exit	0	0	80	37.7	89	42.0	43	20.3
Window	7	3.3	82	38.7	123	58.0	0	0
Ventilation	14	6.6	89	42.0	109	51.4	0	0
Drinking water	7	3.3	107	50.5	98	46.2	0	0
Lighting	10	4.7	124	58.5	78	36.8	0	0
First aid facilities	51	24.1	89	42.0	34	16.1	38	17.9
Fans	4	1.9	140	66.1	68	32.1	0	0
Fire extinguisher	4	1.9	186	87.7	22	10.4	0	0

Occupational health hazards are classed by workers into two categories— "short term" and "long term" problems—in terms of impact. Short term or temporary ailments refer to shop-floor sicknesses that last mostly up to their return to shelter after work shifts end. Workers blamed congestion and suffocation, lack of air, light and ventilation and locked doors and windowpanes as reasons for short-term health hazards.

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Given frequent electricity failure and inadequacy of fans on shop floors, they are to work under steaming hot conditions. Workers also blamed floating cotton thread particles and dust of sandals and fabric rolls as causes of allergy (see Table 6.3). Prolonged suffering from short-term problems cause long-term health hazards like tuberculosis, asthma, ulcer, repetitive tract infection (RTI) and repetitive strain injuries (RSI). Workers assert that physical health problems sometimes lead to long-term mental or psychological health problems of many workers. These problems include profound mistrust or paranoia, enmity, claustrophobia and other phobias, depression, and sudden short-lived irrational aggressive outbursts ("sudden insanity").

When asked about the reasons, the workers described that doors and windowpanes of most factories are kept closed for three reasons. First, factory doors are kept closed in fear of local resistance. Most factories in Dhaka are located in residential areas. Factory-adjacent residents and settlers often complain about factory generated mechanical noises and dust pollution, and force the management to keep factory doors and windows shut. Second, factory management commonly believes that open doors and windows cause exposure of fabric rolls to sunlight, moisture, dust and stain, and that such exposure spoils quality, texture and colour of fabric. Third, some factory authorities do so out of a suspicion that workers toss small goods and instruments out of windows for the purpose of stealing.

Most women workers consider the seating arrangement and lack of space to be the foremost reason for occupational health problems. Unavailability of pure drinking water substantiates this problem. According to the Factory Act 1965 and 1979, latrines and urinals must be provided in sufficient numbers. As per the guideline, a factory should provide at least one latrine for each 25 workers. Male and female workers should have separate latrines with the same worker-latrine 25:1 ratio. The workers I interviewed claimed that no factories obeyed the guideline.

Table 6.3 Rank-ordered health problems suffered by 212 garment workers,
Bangladesh, 1999-2001

		Health Problem	Number of Respondents	% of 212
Short term health problems	1	Fatigue from boredom	201	94.81
	2	Headache	197	92.92
	3	Skin irritation	197	92.92
	4	Allergy	184	86.79
	5	Coughing	175	82.54
	6	Drowsiness	162	76.41
	7	Sneezing	156	73.58
	8	Aggrieved feeling & depression	128	60.37
	9	Nausea	123	58.01
	10	Vomiting tendency	107	50.47
	11	Insomnia	97	45.75
	12	Panic	89	41.98
	13	Back strain	82	38.68
	14	Diarrhoea	51	24.05
	15	Eye soreness	44	20.75
	16	Hair loss	44	20.75
	17	Muscle spasms	44	20.75
	18	Rage and offensiveness; enmity	38	17.92
	19	Night fever	32	15.09
	18	Nervous breakdown	23	10.84
	19	Sudden insanity	12	5.66
Long term health problems	20	Asthma and lung diseases	98	46.22
	21	Ulcer	98	46.22
	22	Leuchorrea - yeast infection	61	28.77
	23	Menstrual irregularities	52	24.52
	24	Rheumatic fever	52	24.52
	25	Repetitive strain injuries	44	20.75
	26	High blood pressure	34	16.03
	27	Diabetes	31	14.62
	28	Inarticulateness - inattention	23	10.84
	29	Repetitive intestinal tract infection	22	10.37
	30	Sexual and venereal diseases	21	9.90
	31	Loss of sexual desire	18	8.49
	32	Jaundice	12	5.66
	33	Low blood pressure	12	5.66
	34	Memory loss	11	5.18
	35	Schizophrenia	11	5.18
	36	Leucaemia	7	3.30
	37	Sudden blindness	7	3.30
	38	Hysteria	7	3.30
	39	Sterility	3	1.41

Women garment workers in Bangladesh have limited understanding of modern medical services and lack financial ability to access them. They still prefer and trust alternatives to modern medical treatment. In Table 6.4, the status of the physicians whom garment workers prefer to consult offers a picture of their access to health care options. Most workers consult homeopathic physicians. They do so because homeopathic treatment a) is relatively inexpensive, b) is readily available, c) uses medicines that can be purchased on credit, e) is offered by physicians available in nearby areas, f) is considered as free of side effects, and above all, g) homeopathic physicians listen sympathetically to the worker's problems and take time in treating them.

Table 6.4 Rank-ordered first preference for type of medical practitioner for consultation by garment workers, Bangladesh, 1999-2001

Status of physicians	Frequency	% of 212
Homeopathic physicians	89	41.98
Herbal healers, Kaviraj	43	20.28
Religious healers/ fakirs/ Sorcerers	33	15.57
Dispensary-compounders, salesmen	16	7.55
NGO clinics	11	5.19
Hospital "outdoor" (outpatient clinics)	9	4.25
Paramedics/ diploma physicians	6	2.83
Private clinics	3	1.42
MBBS private practitioners	2	0.94
Total	212	100.00

Studies conducted prior to my study indicate that factories keep minimum provision of medical facilities for workers (Jamaly 1992, Khatun 1998, Paul-Majumder 1998, Absar 2001). My study is no exception; the majority of workers usually work without provisions of adequate medical facilities (Table 6.6). Although the BGMEA launched its first health care center for garment workers at Malibag Chowdhurypara of Dhaka city in 1994, women workers reported lack of provision of prompt service of the center. The other health care center located in Mirpur started its operation in 1999. 32 workers informed that yet they are to wait to receive medical consultation and treatment from these centers. Twenty workers in two group

discussion sessions outlined their preference for shop-floor medical facilities over outside clinics.

Table 6.5 Percentage of women workers in Dhaka accessing medical facilities

Medical Facilities	Female Workers (%)
No facilities provided	55.7
Appointed regular doctor	9.2
Provided adequate First Aid facilities	21.4
Provided staff amenities	5.6
Provided clinical facilities	2.0
Made arrangement with NGO	3.4
Provide medical allowance	1.1
Other	1.7
Total	100.0

Source: Paul-Majumder (1998:67).

Thirty-seven secondary informants claimed that apart from occupational health hazards, many workers suffer from reproductive health problems due to their involvement in unrestricted and unsafe sexual unions. Despite frequent marital and sexual unions, the rate of childbirth is quite low among garment workers. Six informants brought to my knowledge that many workers resort to induced menstrual regulations (MR) using traditional techniques and clinical MRs. Some NGO-led clinics (Merry Stopes, Red Crescent, Radda Barnen, Surjer Hashi clinics) provide them training on reproductive health problems. As contraceptives (pills) are expensive, they depend on their male partners to buy them pills.

The workers become more vulnerable to reproductive health problems because their male partners are reluctant to use condoms (*potka*). It was known in several group discussion sessions that many workers collect or buy pills from slum-dwelling middle-aged women who get free supplies of pills though government-sponsored family planning and population control programs. A health attendant cum trainer of the Merry Stopes Clinic informed me that workers she trained and counseled never informed her of their community-based pill collection process. She explained that reproductive health problems of many workers might emanate from use of date-expired and improperly preserved contraceptives. As well, taking improper and irregular doses of pills may escalate their susceptibility to reproductive

health problems associated with physical weakness, fainting, allergy, hysteric reactions, hypertension and acidity.

6.2   Residential Stressors

6.2.1   Slum eviction and slum torching

Slum eviction brings enormous stress and uncertainty in workers' livelihood. Most slums in Dhaka are built illegally on *khas* (government owned) lands. The respective government authorities periodically execute eviction operation in the name of construction or land-clearing purposes. In most cases, the workers do not receive notice of eviction in advance, thus are not allowed time to prepare for safeguarding their belongings and finding a new shelter. Government authorities do not issue early notice in fear of organized resistance by slum dwellers. Therefore, most slum dwelling workers suffer from constant fear of slum eviction and damage of shelters and personal property (mainly household and cooking materials) and belongings.

Absar (2002:95) states that slum eviction takes place for political reasons. She (2002:90) refers to the thesis of Moore and Putzel (1999) that democracy brings differential outcomes for the poor. As the control of slums rotates among strong-arms of ruling political parties over time, poor slum dwellers become pawns of political parties and undergo pressure to serve as vote-banks of the ruling party. For instance, after winning the national election in 1991, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) formed the government. The local level powerbrokers cum members of the party took over the control of most slums of Dhaka by 1995. Several slum eviction incidents took place during this period in the name of eviction of illegal settlers from government properties. However, dwellers treat slum eviction as a means of the ruling party to cleanse slums of the supporters of rival opposition parties. Soon new slums sprouted in the so-called restored government lands, and these new slums were filled up with so-called supporters of the ruling party. The Awami League, the opposition of the BNP, won the 1996 national election and formed government. The new ruling party followed a similar strategy. Slums evicted during 1996 to 2000 helped to uproot opposition party workers and establish a settlement of its supporters.

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Slum evictions by the ruling party are one of these measures that help it to take over control of slums by local political leaders.

Like slum evictions, torching of slums by rival slum proprietors brings enormous distress in worker livelihood. Torching incidents usually occur upon political rivalry and conflict of interest for control of slums. It is usually difficult for workers to find a new place in which to live after evictions or torching occurs. Workers who do not have close friends or relatives suffer the most from post-eviction destitution. Six workers expressed their experience that they were evicted in the first month of employment. Being new workers, they could not make close friends who could provide them with temporary shelters. Consequently, two of them were compelled to return to the natal home to bring more money. Four of these workers spent nights in disguise as devotees in *majars* (religious shrines) until finding new living places. Renting emergency shelters always costs the workers much more than regular shelters. Sometimes they rent emergency shelters under various types of restrictions and defamatory or insulting conditions imposed by the renters. Three workers described that they were forced to enter into six-month tenure lease agreements, and pay all of the rent in advance. All of them suffered a common fate— high interest rate indebtedness to informal moneylenders. A worker stated that despite doing backbreaking overtime work, she had become a pauper in the process of repayment of high interest instalment of that debt. It took a year for her to repay the debt.

6.2.2 Neighbourhood maltreatment

Nuruzzaman (1999:20) described that factories established in residential areas create dust and noise pollution as well as traffic jams in narrow residential lanes due to trucks and vehicles lined up to ship raw-materials and transport finished garment products. In my study, I found that residents of these residential areas blame unplanned settlement of factories for spoiling the residential environment of their neighbourhood. The noise created during busy factory hours causes disturbance to study and schooling of children. At the same time, the presence of *mastaans* (local goons), *dalaals* (middlemen), transport workers, *jhut* (cut-piece fabrics) traders, road-

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side tea and tobacco sellers, and temporary petty traders hinder usual movements of young girls and neighbourhood women. It is known from some factory workers that annoyed neighbourhood residents express their annoyance and rage at innocent garment workers. A worker's experience is worth noting here. Once during the short lunch break, a group of nine workers went to an adjacent playground to enjoy a meal together. The playground was empty. In a few minutes, five local *murubbis* (respectable senior persons) swooped in to prevent the workers from sitting in the playground. The expression of the worker was as follows, "we were not only barbed, but shooed out like stray dogs." She added,

> Local youth were rather more sympathetic to us. Three boys appeared on the scene and they politely requested the seniors to allow us to finish eating. In response, the seniors gurgled angry remarks that translate to meanings that we were whores and spoiling (*noshto kora*) the character of local youth. The result was that we left the place with hungry stomachs and loss of appetite.

Another worker described her bitter experience:

> In an evening, a colleague of mine and I were returning home after the closure our work-shift. We stopped seeing a roadside tea-stall[1] in front of the entrance of the factory-adjacent residential area. We ordered two cups of tea and were waiting to be served. To spend waiting time nicely, my friend and I were trading jokes. Naturally, we started to laugh. Meanwhile, two *murubbis* of that residential area were passing by. Seeing them, both of us tried to stop laughing, but could not. The *murubbis* thought we laughed at them. They suddenly became very enraged. One of them slapped my friend and started to beat me. The tea-seller quickly interfered and stopped that person from beating us anymore. The tea seller made them understand the fact that we had done nothing wrong to them. He also reminded them that what they had done was unjust. Yet, none of them cared to say "sorry". Rather they made an ultimatum to the tea-seller to move his stall within thirty minutes and ordered him not to show up at that place any further. I realized from that experience that the poor do not have any right even to smile.

I stated above that an improvement in living accommodations of the workers took place during 1999-2001. However, these improvements in their living

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[1] Floating and mobile roadside tea stall run by poor proprietors. These stalls are installed on a daily basis on indefinite spaces of pavements.

environment appear not to have raised garment worker social status. They live an isolated social life. Educated and middle class residents of the neighbourhood treat them as a "nuisance"; they look at these garment worker settlements with disdain. Workers living in Arambagh Housing Society said they lived in constant fear of eviction because the society people (association of owners) think that the girls are polluting the moral environment of the society. A housing society member informed that they were indeed afraid of the erosion of moral character of their youngsters who may build emotional or physical communication with the workers living in the vicinity. One of these housing society members mentioned that street-corner boys and delinquent youths of nearby slums gather around these houses in the night, presumably attracted to the young women garment workers. Such gatherings (*addas*) raise concerns among residents about theft, burglary, hijacking and armed clashes between the youngsters. Thus, the workers are often forced to maintain a closed and restricted living inside their temporary abodes.

6.2.3 Locational and area problems

Despite the fact that improvements in accommodation offer the workers marginal physical and emotional security, they also seriously interfere with worker continuity in job location. Now that workplaces have become farther for some workers, it has become difficult for them to maintain timely arrival at the factory gate. Four workers stated that they were to leave home for the workplace one and a half hours before their shifts start, and return home one and a half hour after the shift ends. As well, they were to change three transports to and from home and factory. As a result, their conveyance increased and personal livelihood time shrunk. Given three hours spent in commuting and twelve hours in the factory, they used to get only nine hours in the night to meet all other livelihood needs—shopping, cooking, taking dinner, maintaining urgent social relations and sleeping. Shortage of time brings various adverse consequences into their livelihood. Because of early departure, they used to leave home without taking an adequate and healthy breakfast in the morning. As well, late arrival at home used to compel them go to bed without a healthy dinner. With energies drained in daylong factory work, and tiredness and fatigue caused by

hectic commuting they could rarely engage in cooking dinner after returning home. These conditions compel them to eat cheap ready-made foods and fruits—mostly loaves, buns and bananas. Soon their health is run down and they fall sick. Most workers mentioned that their suffering from long term health problems like ulcer (see table 6.2) emanated mostly from poor dietary discipline. These four workers also blamed dust and air pollution (that they become exposed to on a daily basis from prolonged commuting) worsened their asthma and lung disease problems. Three of them described that late night commuting also exposes them to sexual harassment by fellow male commuters and transportation workers.

Given persistent adversities, all of the four workers rated their improved living accommodation as "cost-inefficient". During the period of this study, these women workers were searching around for jobs in factories within closer proximity of their residences. Two of them expressed that they would rather accept lower salaried positions in nearby factories than do better jobs in distant factories. However, two others indicated that lesser income would interfere with their capacity to afford secured residences, and that would ultimately lead to their vulnerability to accept a dehumanizing slum-dwelling residence. Thus, their livelihood can be treated as a vicious cycle of plight-bound choices, or a condition of "choicelessness". Their evaluation reflects the dynamics and conditions of the falling wages in the Bangladesh garment sector. As garment workers live on the edge of a marginal livelihood, their acceptance of a poor choice compromises other choices and preferences. In a broader view, the conflicts between choices reflects their "choicelessness". A metaphorical statement of a worker captures the state of their choicelessness when she says, "it is ocean to the right, it is ocean to the left; ocean faces us, it is ocean behind us".[2] It means that stressors and distresses circle them from every direction, making it difficult for them to select a better livelihood option.

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[2] The proverb recited by the worker in Bengali is rendered, *"amaago daaine sagaar, banye sagaar, saamne sagaar, piche o sagaar"*.

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6.3   Social Stressors

6.3.1   Marital fragility

Marital fragility is an integral part of life world of Bangladesh women garment workers. It is constituted of stressors like polygamy, infidelity and short-lived conjugality. Married workers experience a high rate of abandonment and divorce, and unmarried workers are victimized by sexual harassment, cheating by lovers, and entrapment of trafficking. It was revealed in the first phase of this study (1999-2001) that only twenty five percent "ever married" workers had sustained conjugal lives (see Table 5.1). Other workers of this category had experienced separation, divorce, abandonment and widowhood. Table 6.7 reflects that older workers, and those wedded before joining the sector, had experienced more stable conjugal unions than younger couples and those wedded after employment.

Table 6.6 Coherency of "sustained marriage" and age and period of marriage among 212 garment workers, Bangladesh, 1999-2001

| Period of marriage | Workers by "sustained marriage" | | | Total |
| | Age group | | | |
	16-20	21-25	26-30	
Married before job	3	5	16	24
Married after job	6	4	0	10
Total	9	9	16	34

I asked all of the 34 women workers to delineate the factors that prevented marital fragility in their cases. All of them outlined two principal reasons for their conjugal stability. First, their marriages took place under family-mediated (*paaribarik*) social arrangements, and through traditional religious wedding rituals. Thus, these workers perceive "marriage" and "family" as divine bonds. They also revere the prestige, dignity and honor of matrimonially involved kindred. A worker stated,

> Whenever feuds *(kaizza)* arise between my husband and I, our sense of respect to kindred serve as the biggest solvent. I always consider that if anything (like separation or divorce) happens because of our fault, we would be responsible for denigrating and insulting (*beijjati*) so many people—our relatives and in-laws and well-wishers. So, they (kindred)

may not stand beside us in our times of emergency or helplessness in future. I think my husband also feels the same".

Her narrative asserts that dependence on kindred support still serves as a significant denominator of familial stability of poor people in Bangladesh. The narratives of other respondents support this assertion. The workers mentioned "membership (of both husband and wife) of the same locality" *(ek-i jaigaar)* as the second most important reason for their family stability. Twenty eight workers were wedded to men of the same or neighbouring villages. Five of them were wedded to men of the same district. Only one worker among these respondents was married to a man from another district.

6.3.1.1 Abandonment

Six workers were abandoned when they became pregnant immediately after marriage. Two of the six workers had an abortion, one had a miscarriage, one gave birth to a dead girl child, and one left her baby boy to a foster mother. Only one of them continues to rear her eight-month-old baby boy.

The marital history of 23 abandoned workers sheds some light on the reasons for their abandonment. There are some commonalities in their marriages. 1) The marriages of all abandoned young girls took place within a year of their migration to Dhaka city. 2) They did not know their husbands before marriage. 3) They themselves mediated their marriage within a few days of reaching an understanding with their lovers. 4) There was no involvement or mediation of family members or relatives of bride and groom. 5) The marriages took place in *majars* (grave of religious saints), or huts of friends in front of one or two witnesses or friends. 6) There were no social functions or marriage ceremony. 7) None of the workers tended to collect the *Kaabin* (official marriage registration document), 8) *Mohrana* (bride-price) was set as low as 5,000 to 10,000 Taka (US$87 to $175). These lax conditions provided men with advantages to remain more or less free from social and legal pressure to sustain their marriage.

Abandoned young girls expressed their opinion that they had not foreseen risk of abandonment before it really came into being in their lives. Beforehand, all of the

23 workers thought that their marriage would not suffer from any problem because of their young age and devotion to husbands that had made them attractive to men. I asked, "What are the causes that had led your husband to take flight"? A worker replied, "Our *jouban* (tenderness) is our biggest enemy". Another worker explained the point metaphorically: "Dhaka is a garden with so many beautiful flowers by now that honey-bees have become too busy to drink honey from one flower after another". Another worker participating in the discussion expressed it this way, "Men enjoy heavenly pleasure by marrying girl after girl; today over here and tomorrow over there in another garment zone, because young girls are now as available as air, and as cheap as rain water."

Despite the fact that tender women are "easily available" and that their availability contributes to male indulgence in polygamy and abandonment of their wives, some other factors also escalate the rate of abandonment, or separation and divorce of married couples. Women workers pointed out in focus group brainstorming sessions and in in-depth interviews some of the reasons of abandonment. The reasons are: 1) inability of women workers to allocate sufficient time in family affairs, 2) refusal of wives to capitulate to the insistence of their husbands to give up this factory job, and 3) refusal of some girls to succumb to pressures of their husbands to become involved in criminal rackets such as pick-pocketing, stealing, blackmailing people, thuggery, drug dealing, sex trade, and other anti-social acts. All six cases of separation, two cases of divorce, and a case of abandonment resulted from the refusal of the incumbents to comply with demands of their husbands to join in gang activities. Yet other reasons outlined are: 4) protest of women workers against "deception", "fraud" and "blackmailing"[3] of husbands, 5) denial of abortion request in cases of unwanted pregnancy, 6) resistance against dowry demands, 7) women raising their voice against abusive husbands, 8) weakness or impotency of male partners, 9) drug addiction of husbands, 10) men absconding (*feraar*) on criminal charges, and 6) pressure on men from relatives and families of previous wives.

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[3] Expressions of workers themselves.

Yet, there are other conditions that contribute to marital fragility. Young women usually tend to wed after their arrival in Dhaka. Among 79 married workers, 42 workers wed after they had migrated to Dhaka. All of the 32 abandoned women were wed to men originated from outside Dhaka city. Like other migrants, these women also migrated to Dhaka in search of a new fortune. At a later stage of marriage, some of them came to know that their husbands had other wives somewhere else, especially in their villages of origin. According to the workers in my study, most men are polygamous and that polygamy plays a vital role in the breakdown of marriage. Some of these women were trapped and cheated into marriage. Two of 23 workers aged between 16 and 20 were entrapped in false acts and promises, and blackmailed by lovers before being compelled to marry them. They were photographed in indecent poses. During the period of their premarital love affair, they had trusted their fiancé's promises that those photos would be kept secret in their private albums only. However, when they had decided to break up their relationship and refuse to wed, their lovers used those photographs as weapons to force them into marriage. In fear of circulation of these photos among friends and relatives, they surrendered to marriage. However, this initial mistrust gradually led to the breakdown in marriage. Those men took flight, abandoning their wives.

6.3.1.2 Deception and fraud

Women workers considered incidences of premarital cheating to be responsible for breakdown of conjugal relations. Thirteen workers informed that their fiancés convinced them with false promises by faking their occupational status. Five workers later revealed that their husbands had wives and children in the husbands' respective villages. A worker admitted that she had conceived before formal marriage, because her lover made her believe that they had already become a legitimate couple upon taking oath in a *majar*[4]. However, her friends did not consider that oath to be proper for legitimacy of that marriage. Upon peer pressure, she requested her fiancé go for a formal marriage registration in court. Instead, her lover forced her to have a clinical abortion. After an indecisive period, she agreed to have

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[4] Shrines of religious-spiritual clergymen.

an abortion in her third month of pregnancy. At that point, her lover denied having any relationship with her. Soon she faced dismissal from her job on accusation of poor performance and frequent prenatal ailments. Having failed to pay outstanding rent of her tenement, she fled from Narayanganj to Mirpur, and took refuge with a friend who was also a worker at a Mirpur factory. She *"fortunately"* (expression of the worker) had a miscarriage in the fourth month of pregnancy. After a week, she joined another factory in Mirpur area.

Workers described fraudulent and deceptive incidents by male partners that take place regularly. Some women workers became pregnant right at the outset of their loosely defined marital bonds. In the words of a senior woman (a former worker), "Although most married workers go for induced and clinical abortions, their male partners rarely intend to wait until that period. They actually wait for excuses to flee. And you know how easy it is for men to blend in the huge crowd of Dhaka city". I noted that unless abandoned workers had children, they did not care much about breakdown of conjugal relationships.

6.3.2 Perceived erosion of the value system, and of ethics and morality

6.3.2.1 Crises of adolescent socialization

Women workers associate the garment sector with their livelihood upheaval and erosion in the value system and ethics and morality. The problem of proper socialization of adolescent dependents is recorded as a significant life world stressor for married women with children and guardians of youngsters. Juvenile delinquency, child vagrancy (*toakigiri*), child abuse, sex-trade and forced and paid homosexuality of underage children, drug addiction of children, joining in street-corner gangs and crime rackets are considered to be by-products of the elimination of child labour from factories.

Recruitment of child labour in garment factories was eliminated in 1998. At the beginning of 1995, the US Senate adopted the 'Harkin Bill', which declared a ban on importation of products produced by child labourers. Under the perceived threat of the 'Harkin Bill' and pressure from consumers and buyers to boycott products made

by children, The Bangladesh garment sector eliminated child labour by 1998. However, banning child labour pushed the child workers into even less favourable conditions. Despite the fact that multilateral international and national efforts[5] were made to compensate dismissed child workers with study stipends, and free education, the programs seemed to have little success to accomplish their objectives. A woman teacher of Ananda Niketan, a GSS run school, informed that although BRAC and GSS took all possible measures to attract jobless children to schools, most children preferred roaming around as scavengers in place of attending school.

Five workers in two group discussion sessions expressed that elimination of child labour from garment factories resulted in loss of their control of their younger brothers. They argued that previously existing child labour recruitment options had been "very helpful" for them in various ways: 1) children were learning manufacturing tasks quickly, 2) shop-floors were "perfect" places for their "practical learning" and "skill development", 3) their income, no matter how small was used to supplement household income, and above all, 4) their presence on the same shop floor always relieved custodian women workers of "extra" tension of the children's whereabouts. Now that custodians (women workers) stay most of a day inside the factory, leaving their dependent children unattended, they (children) become exposed to "bad company" and "bad tasks".

Seven workers informed that their brothers adopted the profession of "on-foot" hawkers who sell cigarettes and *paan* (betel leaf) at Paanthapath, Bijoy Sarani and other busy street intersections during red light traffic signals. Three younger sisters of three workers sell flowers and newspapers to passengers near traffic lights of Hotel Sonargaon, Paanthapath and Bijoy Sarani. They experienced several incidences of sexual harassment and abuse. These workers expressed their frustration about the gradual moral derailment accompanying changes in the garment industry in the form of increased exposure of their brothers and sisters to "bad company" and "bad incidences". Two young brothers of a worker were doing the very risky job of

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[5] The UNICEF and the BGMEA provides funds for education of children of the workers, and BRAC and the GSS run hundreds of non-formal primary education (NFPE) schools for them.

tempo[6] stewardship. At one point, the driver of the *tempo* the elder worked for abused him sexually. Since then, the boy has gone missing. Two other workers expressed their deep concern about their brothers' association with two local youths. They expressed their concern because they knew that those two local youths were involved in gang activities, and that police charged them before for their morally lax sexual misconduct. As well, working mothers experience similar types of stressors. An array of such stressors are reflected in the following case studies, each of which is identified with a pseudonym:

Case Study 1: Topu, age 28

Topu was divorced a year ago. In her twelve years of married life she gave birth to a daughter and three sons. According to her description, all of her children "went to the dogs". Tuni, her eleven year-old daughter, was working as a domestic servant for a middle class family in a nearby neighborhood. Recently she was sacked from that job for her alleged "illicit" (*oshobhyo*) and "unacceptable" (*kharap/bemanaan*) friendship with a middle-aged construction worker. Topu discovered a month ago that her elder son (named Babul), who was only a nine-year-old boy, was smoking with other boys of his age. After a few days, she came to know that he (Babul) became addicted to *ganja* (marijuana).[7] Babul also started to stay outside overnight during this time. Other sons of Topu are eight and seven years old. Although Topu spends the lions-share of her income to educate them, they take advantage of her absence for factory work, and frequently remain absent from school. They are grouped in the band of delinquent street children and 'scavengers' lacking family identity. Recently, her youngest son was caught red-handed for shoplifting, and was beaten mercilessly by a store staff member.

Case Study 2: Deenu, age 28

Deenu was divorced three years ago. As she had three daughters staying with her, Deenu did not remarry. Beenu, her elder daughter, was only 11 years old at time she fled home. The girl fell in love with a young street hawker. Two months ago, Deenu saw all on a sudden that her daughter was entering into a movie hall with that street

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[6] *Tempo* is a locally manufactured three-wheeled small vehicle that plies short distances in various routes of Dhaka city. Tempo stewards collect fares from passengers. A tempo steward remains standing on a small foot-base of the vehicle that poses high risk of accident throughout the journey.
[7] The local assumption is that marijuana is "addictive" like some other drugs. The expression is understood in the sense of widespread abuse of *ganja*.

hawker. She instantly intercepted Beenu going in the cinema. After taking her back home, Deenu beat and reprimanded Beenu for her undesirable affair at an immature age. Deenu soon repented for her outrage, but that did not yield any positive impact in her daughter's mind. Beenu fled home the next day. After a month, Deenu received a letter from her daughter. It contained a message that Beenu was doing well as a domestic servant with a family in Cox's Bazar. She did not provide her contact address, but rather warned her mother not to try to trace her. Deenu's friends fear that Beenu might have become victim of child prostitution over there. Deenu suspects that Beenu will never come back. She discovered recently that her two other girls were not obeying her commands anymore, and were doing and going according to their own whim. Now, for the sake of other two girls, she wants to quit her factory job. However, her poverty situation and helplessness force her to continue with the present job. She expresses her frustration in this situation saying, "Their father divorced me. I am also divorcing them. Let them do whatever they want. Let them go to whichever hell they like".

For some workers, the Bangladesh garment sector reinforces additional pressure of livelihood struggle to safeguard family from breakdown as well as to get rid of personality clash, family feud, conjugal mistrust, infidelity, and conflict of decision-making. The following case study sheds some light on these stressors.

Case study 3: Sultana, age 26

My husband started a joint venture petty-trading business with one of his friends in Narayangan a year ago. After he decided to settle there, he forced me to go with him. As a good and obedient wife, I moved there with him. He wanted me not to do factory jobs anymore; rather he advised me to take care of my children as an ideal housewife and mother.

After a month, both of us came to realize that my husband's income would be inadequate to run the family even at a subsistence level. Then he allowed me to go in search of a job. Although I had several years' experiences as a sewing machine operator, most Narayanganj factories offered me to join as 'helper' with just half salary of what I used to receive from my previous workplace (a Mirpur factory). Yet, I joined a factory in the position of helper. Soon my husband became indebted in his business. So I decided to come back to my earlier workplace at Mirpur.

I came back to Mirpur upon consent of my husband, and regained my operator position with a better salary. However, my husband did not allow my 7-year old boy to come with me. He told me that he would arrange for education of my son and teach him business after school hours. Actually, it was nothing but my husband's *mordaimma khemty* (patriarchal ego) that separated my son from me.

I regularly send money for his schooling and other expenses, and I visit and stay at Narayanganj overnight at least a day and a night each week. It is threatening to my job because I often do so on unapproved absence even from urgent shipment jobs.

Although I take these risks, my family is on the verge of breakdown. All my peace has gone as I have come to realize that my son rarely goes to school. Rather, he likes to do all sorts of nasty things—mixing with bad street boys, shoplifting, smoking, stealing money and (god knows) what not! I would like to bring him back to me, but his father takes his side saying that boys are always like he is now, and he would change automatically after some time. Taking advantage of my absence, my husband has also changed a lot. His drinking and gambling habit accelerated. As well, my son informed me of my husband's recent-most extra marital union with a *chakrani* (maid-servant) of a nearby house. I observed how he has changed! He is extremely rude to me these days, and very persuasive for my monetary contribution for his son. He also threatens me with divorce over filial matters. At the same time, my son also started to misbehave with me over his demand for money, money and more money. Nowadays, he frequently uses nasty words and slang as his regular vocabulary. I planned several times to leave this job and start to live in Narayangaj to get my family life back. However, my husband neither supports my idea of returning to them nor does he agree to listen to my request for his relocation to me. Everything he does stems from his male-ego, vested interest and greed for my income.

6.3.2.2 Drug addiction

Drug addiction among women is a relatively uncommon phenomenon in Bangladesh. Most popular types of drugs women use are gul, vaang, charas, phensydil. It is difficult to know the actual frequency and intensity of drug use of women garment workers. Eighteen secondary respondents informed that they know some women workers (who initially hated smoking and drug use) have become drug users through accompanying their drug user husbands and male partners, or by transporting or selling drugs as a source of extra-income. As well, there exist a few

workers who marry petty-traders of drugs. These "drug pairs" are known among other addicts by coded designations like 'Raja-Rani' (King-Queen), 'Miya-Bibi' (gentleman-lady), 'Tala-Chabi' (Lock-Key) etc.

6.3.2.3 Trafficking of women

Garment sector work also provides the pretext for trafficking of women. Disappearance of women workers without notice takes place for various complex reasons. "Trafficking" is one of them. Five workers expressed their traumatic feeling about "missing woman"[8], which refers to the trafficking of women. A type of worker disappearance takes place through marital channels—after marriage. Twenty-nine respondents believed that disappearing workers were trafficked to different sex-trade posts of Bangladesh and India. Eleven workers did not doubt these disappearances as trafficking, but rather termed these incidences as purposive and "necessary relocations".[9] Yet, it is a "mystery" to thirty-five workers who suffer from fear of entrapment and trafficking.

Most workers view that their inclination for wage-employment also perpetuates women's trafficking to some extent. Even better educated workers become victims of trafficking entrapment. Increased exposure of women to the media broadens their imagination and hope for better livelihood. As better-educated workers are more inclined to wage-employment, they become susceptible to deception and fraud. Attracted to false commitments made by different persons, five workers who were Secondary School Certificate (SSC) graduates changed jobs three times a year to obtain what were said to be better jobs. Upon provocation of two local *mastaans* (hoodlums), two of them left the factory twice to play roles in Bengali films as actresses. One of them expressed the outcome saying, "he (the thug) has used me like his wife, and promised to wed me soon. I had always believed that he would give me a part (role) in cinema. However, he showed me nothing but a knife at last". Another girl was forcibly violated by several provocateurs.

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[8] Workers use colloquial and local expressions to denote sudden disappearance of their colleagues. These expressions are: *"hawa"* (vanquished), *"naaika"* (untraceable), "Kharach hoya geche" (vanished fully).

[9] The "transit society" model discussed in the subsequent chapters reveals specific reasons for frequent relocation.

Hein's (1981) case study on women manufacturing workers asserts that, if there is "job satisfaction" among women workers, their livelihood stressors disappear or become blurred. According to his assertion, job satisfaction depends on a homey workplace condition, and recognition and approval of their work with periodic incentive provisions and close family-like social contacts among workers. Carroll (1969) views occupational safety nets and security and incentives as essential conditions for a stress-free livelihood of workers. Likewise, Benner (1984) and Howarth (1984) indicate that coping variables, such as a favorable environment for trial and error and training provisions, contribute to overcoming livelihood stressors of workers. The preceding discussion of the Bangladesh garment sector portrays a lack of these occupational conditions. As a result, the sector perpetuates a survival struggle among its workforce. Such struggle is captured in the "transit society" metaphor and survival strategies of members of that society that are subjects of the next chapter.

In light of the preceding discussion of stressors, it is evident that the Bangladesh garment sector under globalization has not only produced an image of an unskilled and impoverished workforce, but has also contributed to the construction of a subaltern life world. Strife constitutes the heart of this life world. Thus, this livelihood starts with hope and ends in despair.

CHAPTER VII

LIVELIHOOD STRATEGIES: ADAPTATION IN A TRANSITIONAL SOCIETY

7.1   Livelihood Strategies of Women Garment Workers

A livelihood system comprises the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living. Thus, a desirable livelihood system is composed of elements that provide it sustainability. According to Chambers and Conway (1992)—sustainable livelihood is a state of living standard that can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets both now and in the future without undermining the resource base. In light of the "sustainability" principle, sustainable livelihood entails various strategies used by people to accomplish the desired standard of living. Given the range of livelihood stressors of women garment workers of Bangladesh (as discussed in the preceding chapter), it is imperative here to identify their strategies toward overcoming these livelihood stresses, as well as accomplishing a desired living situation.

Referring to women's status in Bangladesh society, Kabeer (1991) argues that the participation of women in wage-employment itself is a need as well as principal livelihood strategy. According to her explanation, poor women often suffer from polygamy, divorce, abandonment and widowhood. Due to large-scale wage migration of men, marital vulnerability of women also increases. As a strategic response or coping strategy or resistance to these vulnerabilities, women nowadays tend to enter into wage-work. Hossain and others (1993) emphasize to another dimension of their strategies. They view women's increased participation in the RMG sector as a strategy of women to obtain sustained marital security—attracting men to marriage by demonstrating their ability to supplement household income. Both arguments in a way refer to the increased

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need for economic security at the household level, and corresponding strategies in its attainment.

However, my preceding discussions indicate that the largest section of Bangladesh garment workers live on their own, often marked by extra-household complexities and uniqueness of adaptation. In this context, their day-to-day coping strategies, negotiations and measures of adaptation also take unique and complex shape. Apparent contradictory perceptions of the respondents of this study about the functions of family and household are worth noting in this context. Of 192 workers of the first phase of this study, 169 (86%) workers treated family or household[1] as a repressive social unit for women, and thus they believed that it would not serve their long-term objectives. However, the same respondents described that they still crave for family or household for strategic reasons. In the first place, they need "household identity" for safety and security. Nineteen single (never married) workers represented a corresponding perception saying that they would never marry or form family unless *samaj* (community) would not interfere or pose threat to their individual choice, and *rashtra* (the state) would guarantee their safety and security and individual rights. In reality, strategic decisions make up the livelihood actions of women garment workers. The following examples will represent the array of livelihood strategies of women garment workers.

7.2   Adaptation Strategies

7.2.1   Strategic concealment of individual domains

It is widely thought that unmarried or single workers constitute the major workforce of the garment sector. This well-established notion may not represent the actual livelihood status of women garment workers of Bangladesh. "Age" and "marital status" are two sensitive personal domains of concealment among women workers for strategic reasons. Women workers generally tend to record their age much lower than actual age. As the factory management prefers to recruit tender girls, single workers conceal their actual age. *"Kurite Buri"* is a colloquial Bengali proverb that means "women at twenty are too old to be wed". Thus, single workers also resort to falsifying

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[1] The respondents used "family" and "household" interchangeably. Correspondingly, these terms are used interchangeably for the purpose of this discussion.

their age information in order to secure marital prospects. Some workers reflected on their panic of growing older because aged brides are least preferred in settled or family-mediated marriage in Bangladesh society.

Marital facts are even a more deliberately concealed phenomenon. Concealment is a strategy for retention of jobs. As the factory management prefers unmarried workers for their perceived ability to work for longer hours and overnight shifts uninterruptedly, most married workers hide their marital status from the recruiters. As well, divorced, abandoned or separated workers usually record their marital status as "bachelor" or "single" (never married) in staff portfolios. The same strategy applies to the presence of outsiders. A worker said, "I know some abandoned workers who married more than once, still you people and factory managers know them as never married". I noted in the in-depth study on twenty workers that, although there were twelve married workers, only two women voluntarily introduced themselves to me as married.

There are instances of concealment of educational status of some workers. Relatively well-educated women are increasingly accepting RMG factory-line jobs. These workers come from very poor families. Some of the better-educated workers live disguised as less educated workers. Fourteen workers of this study had higher education status. One of them had a bachelor's degree while other two workers had a twelfth grade school certificate. Eleven workers were secondary (SSC) school graduates. Given their acute survival needs under conditions of increased job market competition, better-educated workers conceal their academic status. They do so in order to find and secure RMG factory jobs believed to be designed for less educated workers.

Such strategic stances of workers have profound implications for wider livelihood spheres, often a chain-reaction of concealment of life-events and needs. A worker referred to one of her painful experiences of a practical and moral dilemma saying—

"My two year old son drank (rat-killer) poison, and was brought to the hospital in a critical condition. Yet I could not ask for a leave on these grounds, because I recorded myself as "unmarried" in my job file. I made so many unfounded lies to get a leave, but did not succeed because I was assigned an urgent task to meet the deadline of the next day shipment of an order. So, I escaped the factory like a thief. My son died. I could not save my job either. I even failed to reclaim that job on humanitarian grounds because my lies snatched away that opportunity from me." She added further, "a lie paves the way for a thousand lies. If someone of us

conceals a fact, she has to conceal another thousand facts. At some point, she becomes drowned in lies and finds nobody to rescue her".

7.2.2 Marriage as an adaptation strategy

Despite hiding marital information, "marriage" is a common strategy of adaptation of women workers in their newfound urban environment. Most workers conceive marriage as a strategy to protect their honour (*izzat*) and to ensure security (*nirapatta*), especially in transit to and from work in the late night. For strategic reasons, some women workers go for marriage shortly after their migration to Dhaka city. They usually marry poor men like rickshaw-pullers, taxi drivers, hawkers, day labourers, and fruit and vegetable sellers without collecting adequate information on the origins and occupations of these people. Such marriages reflect the yearning of women workers for "security". A worker explained metaphorically, "If dacoits or thieves see a signboard of a *thana* (police station), either they run away or rarely dare to steal anything from surrounding areas. Husbands are our police, families are our *thanas*". Another worker said, "In streets, men throw vile looks at us, some of them not only touch but fondle private parts of our body, some use obscene language and gestures. The most desperate ones block our ways with obscene proposals to go to bed with them. Then? The best is when a man drops by and picks me up from factory gate. And, this is why we rarely take time deciding when men propose to marry".

The need for security forces many single workers to build romantic relationship, often without concerted decisiveness. Single workers usually try to avoid turning their romantic relationships into marriage. It reflects a normative shift of women workers away from conservative social and religious values of the Bangladesh society. Twenty-three single (never married) workers admitted that they were engaged in romantic relationships, but did not want to marry for fear of loss of job and familial resistance. Being Muslim by religion, most single workers try to live alone, because Islam prohibits any premarital or extra-marital sexual communication or co-living. Despite the pressure of social restrictions and religious prohibitions, some single workers avoid marriage in fear of job loss.

7.2.3 Marriage as shelter

The livelihood of divorced and abandoned women workers is harsher than that of the others, especially the single worker. Divorced and abandoned workers usually tend to fall in love or remarry. A worker expressed her view, "If a man can get married to several women in several places, why not us?" Some abandoned women seek refuge in remarriage for the sake of their children, especially to get rid of communal gossip and doubt in legitimacy of their motherhood. Legitimacy of children is conventionally and socially considered as an essential normative element in Bangladesh culture. An abandoned woman with children is often blamed, or at least the legitimacy of her children is doubted. This type of tension was reflected in the opinions of four abandoned working mothers. They expressed their willingness to remarry for the sake of giving some identity to their children.

7.2.4 Marriage as a strategy to overcome dowry-woe

Generally, men from within the same community or rural areas of workers are considered to be ideal types of grooms. However, eighty-one women workers expressed their deep concern that they might fall victim to the widespread practice of "dowry-demand" (*joutuk*) by grooms from their natal communities. One worker stated in a straightforward manner, "Dowry payment has become an unavoidable custom in my village. My father can never arrange marriage for me for he has no means to manage dowry money. So, no matter who you are, if you want to marry me without dowry, I will not spend even a second to think of any other future consequence". Although instances of dowry demands by husbands are not absent in their urban contexts, it often becomes unrealizable for husbands because of the relative bargaining strength of their wage-earner wives.

7.2.5 Marriage as a strategy of resistance

For many women workers, marriage is a form of resistance and protest. More than 40% of married workers offered the opinion that they wed without much reflection, primarily to protest patriarchal domination of parents that they had suffered in their homes and communities of origin. Three workers wed to establish excuses for not

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remitting portions of their income to their families of origin. Eight workers wed coworkers to resist the insistence of natal household members for their return to villages.

7.2.6 Strategic choices in partner selection

Afsar (1998) observed among some garment workers a tendency to marry co-workers. In her opinion, these workers choose co-workers for marriage as an income maximization strategy. It is estimated by Unity Through Population Services (UTPS) that around 15 per cent of the women workers maintain sexual liaison with co-workers outside formal marriage (referred in Afsar 1998:21-22). According to Afsar (1998), sex with co-workers serves women garment workers somewhat with a marginal level of income-substitution. They have sex for small gifts of cash, and with the hope of security (Afsar 1998:22).

In contrast, Absar (2001) observed among women workers "lack of interest in marriage with co-workers for health reasons" (2001:174). Absar did not clarify what types of "health reasons" cause women workers to be disinterested in selecting coworkers for marriage. Thirty-five respondents of this study shed some light on their relative disinterest to choose coworkers. They offer two reasons: first, similar types of fatigue and tiredness may appear as a potential hindrance in romantic relations. A worker (named Koli) said, "I always dream to see my (to be) husband well-dressed (*fit-faat*) and waiting for me in a romantic mood (*hashi-mukh*). I dream so to forget my fatigue (*obosh shoril*) and to become lively after returning home". I would want my husband to work only during daytime". The other reason behind such disinterest stems from the gendered experience of workers. A worker named Ruksana raised a point, "husbands are always bossy. Naturally, I will never expect someone watching my every step and dictating every bit of my work, even at the workplace". However, she mentioned that she would have no reluctance to consider a relationship with a male factory worker who is stationed in another factory. Another worker (named Mita) expressed her opinion more romantically, "too much proximity of husband and wife brings too much boredom between each other. Family is nice when the wife anxiously waits for husband to come, and the husband waits to meet wife after hours of non-union".

7.2.7 Marriage as income-substitution strategy

A fairly uncommon dimension of marriage is observed among some slum-dwelling women who mediated remarriage of their husbands with other garment workers. There were two workers in Jhilpara slum and three workers in Kalshi slum who accepted remarriage of their husbands as an income-pooling strategy. Eighteen secondary respondents informed that these women did so to supplement income to help meet growing familial expenses that they had failed to meet with their limited income. They described that these "business couples" lived on income of the newly wed brides (who were either not pretty-looking or were physically flawed). In their opinion, these marriages usually break down very readily.

Another uncommon type of marriage occurs that takes place as an income maximization strategy of a couple that unites on the basis of their drug selling partnership. It was known from thirteen secondary informants that some workers formed "drug pairs". According to them, drug pairs have two characteristics: 1) They rarely split except upon death of a partner, and 2) women workers who become part of drug-pairs quit their factory jobs at some point and never return to factory jobs. I learned that these couples operate small-scale petty-trading of drugs. For safety reasons, the women partners of the pairs usually operate the drug trade businesses. Drug selling helps them assemble "extra-income" to overcome the hardship of living on an income from a formal factory occupations.

7.2.8 Extra-marital liaison as a livelihood strategy

Although Absar (2001) doubts if there is a mentionable level of extra-marital relationships among women as claimed in some literature (i.e. Kibria 1995, Afsar 1998, Khatun 1998), my study records a prevalence of such relationships in disguise. Although a person in Muslim-dominated Bangladesh society can hardly tolerate an illegitimate sexual bond, twenty-nine women workers were documented as "living together" with male partners, who they socially introduce as "husbands". Their relationships can be considered as a form of material-consensual partnership based on mutual interests such as security, renting of home, doing joint-venture petty business, etc. Eight workers started their partnerships to get rid of the "bachelor" identity that makes renting (subleasing) of

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living accommodations difficult. In Bangladesh, renters of houses rarely rent homes to bachelors out of prejudice that the bachelors are more prone to partying and maintaining an immoral life-style. Thus, some bachelor workers find partners of the opposite sex. At a point of mutual agreement, they introduce themselves to renters as a "married couple". Usually they cannot afford more than one bedroom. Sharing bedrooms makes their contractual bond susceptible to a consensual bond. I observed that these workers establish loosely defined marital bonds immediately before or after renting their abode. As a marriage ritual, the partners usually read *Kalimaah*[2] and make oaths of becoming man and wife, in rare instances in presence of other persons (usually friends) as witnesses. Although such practices provide them with some sense of legitimacy of their consensual unions, they are not validated as married in terms of religious and legal codes[3] and also because religious guidelines of ritual performances are absent.

7.3   Income Substitution Strategies

Workers need at least 1500 Taka (US$ 26) per month in order to live a marginal hand to mouth living. A worker cannot survive with her monthly salary—on average only 1000 Taka. Therefore, a garment worker is forced to supplement her income from extra-occupational sources. Commonly, workers resort to three immediate income supplementation strategies: 1) They do over-time work, 2) they buy food and daily necessities on credit, and 3) they borrow money from informal moneylenders or other private sources. All of these strategies are damaging to their health and livelihood stability. Overtime work causes sickness and exposes them to increased risks of occupational health hazards. Buying on credit turns them into "owing forever" persons that mire them in a vicious cycle of poverty. They take high-interest loans from informal moneylenders and become indebted forever. Shopkeepers and moneylenders sometimes take advantage of their indebtedness by sexual or other oppressive means. Three workers described their experience of serving their moneylenders as maids in their houses. They were forced to serve them until their loans were paid with interest. Twenty-one workers

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[2] Kalimaah is the fundamental monotheistic oath of the Muslims about their unconditioned submission to God. It reads, "There is no God but God". It is considered the base and the first pillar of Islam.
[3] In Bangladesh society, a couple is considered married after performing extensive religious-social rituals and legal procedures along with formal involvement of mediators and witnesses. Any other forms, such as mutual agreement of brides and grooms, are not considered 'marriage'.

were forced to mortgage (*Bandhak*) their valuables and ornaments and home appliances for taking loans. Fifty workers said that their destitution started with their need for loans. Only two garment workers in my study received loans from Proshika—a Bangladeshi NGO. Although they were not a direct target group of Proshika, they had become loan recipients by chance—in their capacity as members of a ten-member Proshika group in the Begunbari slum.

Workers are also compelled to adopt other means of income substitution such as carrying out orders for making handicrafts, stitching quilts (*kantha*), and sewing cheap dresses for slum-dwelling children and women. Some workers prepare, supply and sell cheap foods to fellow-workers. Although these income-substitution measures shrink worker time for household activities and resting, they are forced to adopt these conventional strategies. I interviewed Rowshan, a worker who cooks for 15 to 20 workers after returning from the factory. Each day she carries 15 to 20 tiffin carriers[4] filled with cheap lunches for fellow workers, so her friends call her "Tiffin Begum" instead of her original name Rowshan Begum. She thinks that selling cooked food to them allows her to live a cleaner life than others. In her words, "those who cannot afford to take extra workload after factory break either starve or adopt undesirable means[5] of livelihood."

7.4 Household Strategies

According to Phillips (1989), "household strategies" emanate from power relations and negotiations between members of the household[6]. In other words, household strategies constitute daily negotiations between household members (Phillips 1989:295-96). A household plays the roles of a strategic unit under disadvantaged economic conditions. Mallon (1986) argues that the capitalist transformation of households turns women as the suppliers of labour and capital that extends beyond household routine

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[4] A tiffin carrier is a tiered lunchbox.

[5] With "undesirable means", she refers to shoplifting, transporting drugs from one place to another for some petty drug traders, and serving as informer of local goons (*mastaans*).

[6] According to Bangladesh administrative definitions, household is a family unit, members of which use a common cooking fire (*chula*) and meal (*khana*) (Lewis et al 1993, Cain et al. 1979). Usually, they are of three types: 1) "nuclear household unit" that constitutes a married conjugal couple and their children, 2) "Multiple nuclei household", a commensal unit composed of married sons of the conjugal couple and their wives and children, and 3) "extended household", composed of a single nucleus and additional unmarried and widowed kin of agnatic or affinal relations (Wiest 1998).

responsibilities. Women's integration into both household and sweatshop responsibilities gives birth to a "double day" and "double bind' situation (Gannage 1986). "Double bind" refers to adoption of extra-occupational household means for survival alongside routine jobs. It is evident that workers adopt two common types of household strategies—birth control and rural-urban networking. Married workers try to keep family size small because of comparative disadvantage of mothers to secure jobs, and limited time for childcare. Although women workers did not disclose their personal information specifically, they informed about the use of contraceptive pills and induced abortions by many workers.

Despite their livelihood being on the edge, women workers send remittances to natal households. Workers consider remittance more as a strategy of networking than obligation. Five workers described remittances as their "insurance scheme". They claimed that they send remittance not for income substitution of their natal households but to secure an "alternative place of refuge at time of profound distress". A worker said, "I send remittance home to ease the anger of family members, because they disapproved of my migration for money. Although I do not at all wish to return to my village, I feel that it would be better to win their sympathy. Nobody knows if I will become forced to return home. If I return by chance, they may be the only hope for a place to live". Although these strategies imply a sense of "reciprocity" and "expectation of return of their contribution" among workers, each of these workers cast doubt on the likelihood they would be really reciprocated in times of crisis. A worker said, "Gratefulness and reciprocative attitudes seem to be disappearing very quickly from our society. So, I am just blowing a whistle in the dark".

Uncertainties, or "blowing a whistle in the dark", represent their unconscious choices as well as their tendency to act upon the rules of probability. This process is better reflected in changes of religious expressions among women workers. It is observed that women workers are increasingly becoming actors in the systematic reproduction of religious means of social adjustments.

7.5   Reproduction of Religious Means in Social Adjustments

Religious beliefs and practices among Dhaka garment workers have emerged along lines similar to those noted by Ong (1987) in Malaysia. Although a substantial number of workers openly challenge and defy established religious sanctions and restrictions, another segment of workers is becoming attracted to and involved in religious activities.

I noted that mounting tensions among garment workers are driving them toward two different responses. On the one hand, there is an extreme degeneration of belief and practice, and a distancing of some workers from traditional religious norms. On the other hand, there is a renewed vigour in religious belief and practice. My observation is that the number of veiled (*purdah*) workers is increasing rapidly. Several of my respondents who were sensitive and vocal advocates of women's liberation in July 2001 turned into pious and veiled Muslim devotees by November 2001. They informed me that many other workers are also following them in order to achieve "mental peace" and to "live clean lives". At the same time, some workers are using the veil as a means to hide themselves from surveillance of police, goons and *paaonadaars*—persons whom workers owe money. Rubina, a beautiful girl, started to use the veil (*burkha*) as a shield to protect herself from sexual harassment. She said, "After being repeatedly harassed in my previous workplaces, I decided to use a *burkha*. I have been using it since the first day of my job in the present factory. And surprisingly, I have been relieved of off-factory harassments since then." It appears that these strategies can be at once unifying and divisive for garment workers.

With the exception of three progressive-minded workers, all other garment worker respondents in the present study, irrespective of religious identity, visit the graves of spiritual leaders. They usually perform sacrifice of cash or kind believing that some hidden desires or wishes will be fulfilled through divine blessings. As well, they seem to believe in fate and miracles. Some women workers wear holy ornaments containing religious sermons. Some of them believe in ghost possession, while some others believe in and use black magic and satanic verses to influence others. Many workers have become disciples of spiritual leaders (*peers*) and drifters (*pagaal-faakirs*) thought to offer spiritual enlightenment. Some of these new spiritual leaders offer counselling and

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massage therapy. According to some of our respondents, the touching and fondling presents a confusing incongruity between therapy and sexual aggression.

7.6   Resistance and Protest Strategies

Operational and organizational structures of the Bangladesh garment sector provide the workers with a context for contestation. By living in and through the contradictions they experience, the garment workers affirm constructions that form the basis of their exploitation. Ong (1994) notes that at a given moment of time, gender and sexuality become the means of contestation against all oppressive forces, including managers of sweatshops, state officials or religious fundamentalists. In her view the sweatshop workers in recent times are not only objects to create exchange value of capitalist production, but also launch protest against the loss of humanity and autonomy in their work. In Malaysian sweatshops the resistance takes place in the form of spirit possession of the workers. Ong (1994) argues that such resistance reflects the ability of workers to challenge not only the shop-floor discipline, but also the disciplinary measures imposed on them and on every aspect of their lives outside the shop floor.

In the Bangladesh garment sector scenario, workers' everyday survival strategies build upon resistance inside the household, on shop floors and in public. In the household context, relationships between household members have become a new site of contestation. I noted that all apparently domestic relationships having a "conjugal" character are not necessarily "marital unions". Some young women may be participating in a "strategic consensual union" with men who are not "husbands" but perhaps their caretakers or pimps. These kinds of relationships challenge the normative values of a religious and patriarchal society. Protests by marriage can be viewed as a variable to display contradictions in the society. Even though marriage has become a strategic saviour of security and identity of women workers in their traditional normative system, marriage on their own terms demonstrates a defiance and rejection of family and custom and tradition. "Marriage as protest" is an expression of women's rights, individual rights, and individuality. The common tendency of divorced and abandoned women workers to establish new conjugal relationships exemplifies their rebellion against the flight of men and their newfound authority over men.

For women, the workplace scenario constitutes another site of contestation through juxtaposition of "desired-undesired" and "strategic" actions of women workers. On the one hand, for the factory management, women workers' theft of underwear and bras and other small objects from the factories are "undesired" actions. On the other hand, for workers, inhumane shop-floor conditions and the exploitative production management system constitute a sense of undesired and a despicable image of the management. Many workers use "weapons of the weak" (Scott 1985) in resistance to their humiliation. Some workers display signs of "sudden insanity" or "craziness", or suddenly burst into tears, cry, weep and engage in quarrelsome arguments with their supervisors. Some of them also utter insults and nonsense expressions. Some workers intentionally spit betel leaf with spice-based colouring on floors and walls. These activities resemble resistance of women workers that involve activities like breaking needles, staining and scratching machines, piercing fabric rolls, jamming bathroom taps and basins, and damaging small instruments or machinery parts on shop floors.

Workers sometimes exchange between themselves extremely defamatory expressions directed at the management. They enjoy and make special fun with vernacular expressions focussed mainly on the wives of male management, with terms such as prostitute, whore, pimp, etc. Male management personnel are often referred to as impotent (*ni-morod*), or having no genitals (*na-morod*). An activity that is openly defiant, but engaged in as a matter of "fun" or "sport", is to make sexually suggestive movements and gestures to allure and intentionally goad male co-workers and especially management personnel. Respondents informed that these behaviours erupt partly as a sharp psychophysical reaction of the workers to the monotonous hard work they do. However, these behaviours clearly reflect disgust and resistance of workers against inhumane and demeaning working conditions, similar to expressions captured by James Scott (1985) as "weapons of the weak", and applied to Malaysian women factory workers by Aiwa Ong (1987). Zaman (2000) also depicts diverse forms of everyday resistance among garment workers in Bangladesh, and notes the informal network base of such individual expressions.

Even though workers cannot form effective political resistance due to repressive management policies, organized worker protests in the ready-made garment industry are

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increasing gradually. In 2001, 68 incidents of violent protests against lay-offs and against payment delay took place all over Bangladesh. In the previous year, 36 similar incidents took place (compiled from newspaper reports; also see Zaman 2000). Other than trade unions, a few civil society organizations, NGOs, human rights organizations and voluntary legal support agencies have launched some initiatives to assist the workers in organized resistance. Still, much of these protest activities have remained small-scale, unorganized, and largely individual. As a result, worker resistances invoke management wrath. Consequently, they suffer consequences like salary cuts and termination. Management sanctions force them to relocate from one factory to the other in search of jobs, and from one place to another in search of better livelihood.

7.6.1 Relocation as resistance

In fact, the relocation strategy of workers is at the core of the construction of collective identity of this floating workplace. Relocations of women garment workers are not always caused by their passive and helpless conditions under workplace and neighbourhood insecurities. To the contrary, their relocations sometime constitute an expression of active resistance to conditions that threaten their values and sense of integrity. Their preoccupation with self-dignity and honesty, and self-control and concern for childcare and child-rearing responsibilities, and their deep despair and frustration with conditions that interfere with these goals force them to reject established sets of workplace and residence conditions. Thus, relocation as resistance is a simple expression of their craving for independence. Although these individual responses do not challenge the structural conditions of the RMG industry; indeed, they establish a sense of relative victory of workers over structural adversities. It is not unusual to find the construction of selves as subjects of oppression as there often is a "reproduction of the general structuring of difference within which ... resistance behavior is made to appear logical" (Kearney 1996:169 cited in Wiest and Mohiuddin 2003a:6).

The conditions that place relocation at the top of all strategies are glimpsed in the subsequent discussion.

7.7 Relocation as Survival Strategy

Relocation is frequent among the garment sector workers, involving both movement between factories and change of residence. The workers frequently move from one factory to another factory. Out of 212 women workers we interviewed, only five workers (2.4%) had not yet experienced job relocation. This is because they are new workers in the factory jobs with less than a year of experience (Table 7.1).

Table 7.1 Frequency of worker relocation among factories in Dhaka city by length of service among 212 workers, Bangladesh, 1999 and 2001

	Frequency of Worker Relocation between Dhaka Factories										Total
			Relocation								
	No Relocation (One Factory)		Two Factories		Three Factories		Four Factories		≥Five Factories		
Service length	(N)	Row %	(N)	Row %	(N)	Row %	(N)	Row %	(N)	Row %	(N)
< 1 month	1	100									1
1 – 6 months	1	100									1
7 – 12 months	2	50	2	50							4
1 – 2 years	1	5	14	64	7	32					22
2 – 3 years			9	53	6	35	2	12			17
3 – 4 years			14	34	20	49	6	15	1	2	41
4 – 5 years					19	29	45	69	1	2	65
5 – 6 years					14	30	29	63	3	7	46
7 – 8 years					1	14	5	71	1	14	7
8 – 9 years							1	25	3	75	4
10 – 11 years							2	67	1	33	3
> 11 years									1	100	1
Total	5	2	39	18	67	32	90	43	11	5	212

The workers relocate for more than one reason. They frequently change their residences and workplaces in order to escape rape, sexual abuse and forced involvement in prostitution, as well as drug and arms trafficking. Relocation also takes place due to dismissal from jobs, financial distress, defaulting on house-rent, slum eviction, and changes in workplaces of their husbands. Often relocation is a desperate means of "escaping" from moneylenders and home-renters the workers owe arrears.

Although most workers move from one factory to another after dismissal, many of them relocate to avoid frequent sexual assault or illicit pressure to involve them in prostitution, drug selling, or activities they consider "anti-social" or immoral. They also

speak of "fear of sudden relationships with married men (*parakia*)"; of "force from political parties to vote for them or to campaign for local political parties"; of "pressure from local thugs to become keepers of their illegal arms and ammunitions"; and of "the risk of being pawns of blackmailing rackets that use girls to compromise people". "Escaping" or hiding from husband, family members, relatives and coworkers are other important reasons for relocation of women workers. Relocation within Dhaka is thus part of their overall survival strategy (see Table 7.2).

Such relocations reflect the embodiment of a survival "instinct" among women garment workers. Workers talk about being forced to change their residence because they are unable to pay their rent. Twenty-eight workers escaped to other places to get rid of harassment by renters for outstanding house rent the workers owed over months. They are unable to pay rent because they do not receive their monthly salary on the due date. When factories delay payment of worker salaries and workers cannot arrange the rent from any other sources, they are eventually forced out of their shelters. Unable to pay outstanding house rent, they relocate to other places.

Neighbourhood crime rackets exert pressure and present considerable insecurity for women workers who reside in slums or shanties for any continuous period of time; local gangs also commonly victimize women garment workers. In these circumstances, women garment workers frequently change their residence and workplace to escape sexual abuse, rape, and forced involvement in prostitution, drug and arms trafficking and other antisocial activities. Concern for security induces many of these women workers to form conjugal bonds even though these bonds commonly perpetuate their subordination under a disguised patriarchy, and sometimes is used to leverage their participation in crime networks.

In the transitional periods, relocations often produce anxiety that ranges from physical insecurity to psychological trauma. Eleven workers expressed their experiences of seeking shelter as domestic servants for initial settlement in their new locations. Even though in Dhaka middle-class households there is a scarcity of women domestic help, girls with garment work background tend to be avoided as maids. Middle-class families are reluctant to recruit "unknown" girls because they have no reference persons. Also girls are often suspected of being thieves or members of crime rackets. All of the twenty-

eight workers informed that they failed to secure shelter as domestic servants because of perceptual stereotypes of middle class people that former garment workers would not be committed and dedicated in housework and would leave anytime, especially upon promise of factory jobs.

Table 7.2 Rank-ordered reasons for relocation to different factories within Dhaka city, 1999 and 2001

Order	Reasons for Relocation within Dhaka	Number of Workers Relocating Multiple Times					
		Number of Factories (f) Worked In				Total	% of total
		Two f	Three f	Four f	Five f		
1	Dismissal	13	16	6	1	36	17.4
2	To avoid immoral tasks	5	9	16	2	32	15.5
3	Escape outstanding house rent	2	12	10	4	28	13.5
4	Sexual assault	6	7	1		14	6.8
5	Slum eviction	2	8	1		11	5.3
6	Reasons 1, 4, 11			11		11	5.3
7	Marital/ partner's workplace		4	6		10	4.8
8	Reasons 1, 2, 4, 12			9	1	10	4.8
9	Escape from family members		1	6	1	8	3.9
10	Reasons 2, 4, 12			7		7	3.4
11	Love affair	1	2	3		6	2.9
12	Insecurity in previous shelter	1	4			5	2.4
13	Reasons 5, 18			5		5	2.4
14	Search for deserting husband		1	2	1	4	1.9
15	Peer influence		2	2		4	1.9
16	Reasons 1, 20	2		1		3	1.5
17	Reasons 9, 12	2		1		3	1.5
18	Being cheated	2				2	1.0
19	Reasons 9, 11, 18, 24			1	1	2	1.0
20	Escape factory punishment	1				1	0.5
21	Escape from former husband			1		1	0.5
22	Sickness			1		1	0.5
23	Peer group oppression	1				1	0.5
24	Unwanted pregnancy	1				1	0.5
25	Escape theft charge		1			1	0.5
	Totals	39	67	90	11	207	100.0

Relocations become a part of livelihood for some workers, often from the very beginning of their journey toward some adaptation to urban livelihood. The following case study sketches a relocation-torn life journey of a worker that represents the experience of many other workers in this livelihood shift.

Case Study 4: Umme Kulsun, age 22

> I am a champion in escaping and switching from one factory to the other. No one in this world switched liked me. I was 17 years old when I came to Dhaka for the first time to work as a domestic servant in a family. The master and his wife both were very good persons. As both of them were related with drama or cinema, different types of people used to gather at that home for *addas* (gathering for fun and pastime) till midnight almost regularly. I saw at a point that a friend of my master and mistress regularly come to that house during daytime when my master and mistress stay away. It had been far beyond my imagination that an urban gentleman could have any devilish intent about such an unattractive rural girl like me. One day he touched my body. I was too naïve at that time to instantly make any decision about what to do. I spent that night sleeplessly in fear, panic, horror and hysteria. My master and mistress just asked me who came home that day. I told them the name of the person. The master and mistress discussed something in English I could not understand. But, I guessed that a storm is approaching in my life.
>
> I woke up quite late the next morning. No one made me wake up either. After I woke up, I saw my poor father sitting on the floor of the drawing room. For the first time, I heard his voice so scary and harsh and rude! He ordered me to pack up my belongings and prepare to go back to village. The later experience was rather more horrifying. On the way to my village in Mymensing, he beat me four times as if I was guilty. He beat me once in front of many passengers of the bus. I was so insulted and shocked that I decided to leave my family for good.
>
> After four days, I stole and sold at a village tea-stall five kg's of rice—the last asset of my house, and fled with money for Dhaka. The conductor of the bus that I rode to come to Dhaka listened to me, fed me lunch and brought me to a factory at Mohakhali in the afternoon after his shift of duty was over. His friend, the gatekeeper of the factory, took me to his place to sleep over with her wife for that night. The next day, he helped me to get the job of helper and arranged a place at Sattala slum at Mohakhali. I was so grateful for their kindness that I called them *Dharma bhai* (brother by religion) instantly. None of them ever touched me but rather protected me from the risk of loss of dignity. They had control over

the *mastaans* of that slum whom they requested to ensure my security by all possible means.

After a week, they requested me to assist and accompany an 8-year-old small boy to meet his aunt. They hired a baby taxi *(autorickshaw)* and paid the fare in advance. We reached somewhere behind Karwan Bazar. The boy got down and went somewhere for a few minutes. After ten minutes he came back. I asked the boy many questions, but he did not reply even once.

We came back and found my *dharma brothers* suddenly relieved from some unknown tensions. They accompanied me to my place and gifted me a wonderful *shalwar-kamij* set (pyjama and long shirt for girls). I accompanied some other small boys to go to many unknown places of Khilgaon, Kamalapur, Malibagh and Tejgaon area four days in a week. I was trained to introduce those boys as my younger brothers if chased or raided by police. My earning from *bokshish* (tips) rose to 1000 Taka in four days.

On one evening when I was just out of the factory for home, a woman came near to me and hastily handed a polythene bag to me. It contained a *burkha* (veil). She walked with me for a few seconds and whispered a word panickingly – "put on this burkha and flee within a minute, otherwise you will be killed". She stopped a baby taxi, paid him fare and ordered the driver to drop me somewhere. Everything happened just in a minute. The incident took away all my senses. In a breathless condition, I heard the autorickshaw driver singing, whistling at me and asking whether I would like to spend that night with him. At a dark place beside the street, he quickly dragged me out of the autorickshaw, hastily penetrated my body, and quickly drove away leaving me in front of a *bagan* (park). I know now, it's Chanrima Uddyan. I felt I was dead, having no sense.

Suddenly, three ragged-clothed girls like me appeared and quickly dragged me inside the park. I heard them trying their best to know my every detail. Although I was hearing them slightly, I could not reply anything but groan. I can remember them disappearing one after another in the dark with men for *kharap kaj* (bad work; sex). Two men came to me too, but the girls resisted them and prevented them from violating me.

I had been so much traumatized that I could not even realize I spent a big night lying under a tree like a statue. When I regained a little sense, I saw a street sweeper coming toward me to help me stand up. I requested her to send me back to my village and showed her sign that I had money inside the fold of my pyjama. She approached a street boy selling flowers at nearby Bijoy Sarani traffic signal, who eventually agreed to accompany me to go back home.

Home was another hell for me. I was ridiculed, beaten by almost every one of my family members including a younger brother who was 6 years junior to me. A local *hujur* (religious healers) diagnosed my traumatized condition as possession by an evil *jin* (genii: goblin) for *napaki* (having no shower after sexual intercourse). To make me get rid of the evil *jin*, they tortured me physically, tied me up with rope and cut my hair. My family members used to show beastlike reaction and hatred to me upon insistence and ridicule of community people. One day, my mother handed all her savings to me and assisted me to flee home.

I heard of the Mirpur factories while working in Mohakhali factory. When I reached Mirpur by a baby taxi, I was desperate, strange looking like a boy with short hair, and above all too dirty to get any job anywhere. All on courage, I approached a worker of Denim Apparels of my age while she was taking a light snack at lunchtime. She became very sympathetic to me, allowed me to stay overnight with her, and managed a position of helper for me. I started to live with her in Duaripara slum. After a month, I was paid 500 taka and declared dismissed for failing to learn to work properly. Meanwhile, I owed my roommate 800 Taka for food, fare of room, seat rent[7], including 150 Taka that I borrowed from her to buy a new dress. I paid her 400 Taka and kept 100 Taka in hand. After I understood I would not be getting another job soon, I fled to Narayanganj as I heard from coworkers of a previous factory that some Narayanganj factories were recruiting new workers soon.

Soon I got a job in Shathi garments. After 7 days, the PM (Production Manager) sent me to his home to work as a domestic servant. Although the mistress was terribly abusive, I used to get good food and drink there. I became a healthy and beautiful girl in 3 months, and went under evil eye of a night-guard of the next-door neighbour, who again touched my body suddenly. My master noticed the incident, released me from domestic work, and took me back to the factory.

I worked there only for two months. Again a female co-worker allowed me to share room rent and live with her. I saw all other coworkers whisper, laugh at me and speak mysteriously after settling to live with her. Soon, I realized that she lacked female qualities and attitude, often behaving like men with romantic gesture and language as if I was wife and she was husband. I left her at a point when she started to disturb me at night [she indicates lesbian behaviour].

In the next three months, I lived with three more coworkers. One of them was quarrelsome, another had tuberculosis, and the other used to bring a boy at night, who she introduced to me as her husband. They used to meet

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[7] The rent amount for bed only.

three to four days a week, and kept the door closed for about an hour each time. Whenever they met at night, I had to go out to roam around for about an hour, for there was no partition in that room. Local goons and street people teased me, touched me and behaved notoriously during those days. On the day I left her, she became furious and envious, and lodged a false complaint against me to the floor supervisor that I had stolen two brassieres the previous day. Again, I was dismissed. Again I moved to Mirpur.

All of us have these types of experiences, and we now accept them as our fate and part of regular life. Now, we care little about what is good or bad. For us, remaining alive (*baincha thaka*) is the highest priority over anything else.

"Migration is a consequence of historical events, and shapes future events as they unfold through migration" (Bjerén 1997:245). The intrinsic validity of this statement is made manifest in the Bangladesh garment industry. The migration of women workers has been viewed as a consequence of "globalization-fever" of Bangladesh in the infant stage of the Bangladesh garment industry. By now, such migration has unfolded as shapes of a future society—the "transit society", or a society in transition. As I proceed to the discussion of the transit society in the next chapter, it is imperative to sketch a background of this society out of the above discussions of livelihood strategies of workers. The background—the state of worker livelihood—resembles what Benería (1992) termed "privatization of the crisis". It denotes destruction of the economy from state level to household level, and frequent and corresponding adjustment and adaptation struggle by individuals. To women garment workers of Bangladesh, livelihood is a set of dwindling conditions that push them to drift on the edge of vulnerability. Usually, their livelihood strategy, or craving for security and settlement, ends up in practical unions, including "marriage", or other forms of bodily submission. This type of livelihood strategy is well captured in the statement, "There are three options for young women in Dhaka. All involve clothes. They can make clothes for other people in the factories; they can wash clothes for other people as domestic servants; or they can take their clothes off for other people as sex workers" (Seabrook 2001:3).

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CHAPTER VIII

RURAL-URBAN LINKAGE

8.1   Fleeing-Diaspora, Fugitive-Diaspora: Construction of the "Transit Society"

The embodiment of a relocation response provides Bangladesh women garment workers a distinct community identity. The members of this community are not settler migrants, but "transmigrants" (Bjerén 1997:246) or long-term commuters (Glick Schiller et al. 1992). They encompass the diaspora attributes of "development refugees" (Bjerén 1997:246) displaced from their origins by globalization process. This diaspora is consequential, varying with the degree and intensity of livelihood strife. Sometimes these garment workers relocate to evade short-term adversities, and other times escape to ensure long-term distancing from more damaging type of adversities. Their relocation by dismissal and slum eviction or rent defaulting is of a curative nature. But, relocation by fugitive-like abscondment presents a long-term preventive strategy of the workers to get rid of criminal gangs and their pressures. Thus, the relocation response of workers embodies a fleeing diaspora at one time, and a fugitive diaspora at another time.

As I proceed, I will document that, besides a relocation response, this diaspora society has other complex attributes. In the first place, it is a unique women-majority migrant society built upon complex rural-urban linkages—rural type lifestyle and impoverishment, but urban type drive and struggle toward adaptation of and assimilation in the new economic courses and principles. Yet, the society members lack systematic planning for the present and specific vision or organized planning for the future. This state of uncertainty is expressed in the "transit society" (*ferryghat samaj*) construct. The attributes conveyed in the term "transit society" have implications for rural-urban linkages of livelihood change. The character traits, and operational and social bases of this new-formed society are worth discussing to analyze the dynamics of this linkage.

8.2   The Transit Society: A Society in Transition

The notion of the "transit society" represents the social existence and livelihood conditions of the women garment workers. Twenty garment workers attending an open interactive focus group discussion session came up with the idea of the "transit society". They perceived that their social existence has two attributes: 1) Their migration contributed to the formation of a new society that is unique and distinct from greater Bangladesh society in various respects. 2) The society can be best described by the term *ferryghat Samaj*—"transit society"[1]. They reflected on the symbolic idea that their social position could be compared with the people waiting at a *"ferryghat"* (transit place on a water body on the way to one's destination or passage) for the next ferry to come and row them across the river. Therefore, they viewed their society as "momentary" or "transient" in nature. Through the *transit society* model, they envision their existence as a contradiction between the "known" and the "unknown". This is a transit society in a sense that "they have gotten off at the garment factories in life's journey, but without a schedule or journey plan. They do not control the departure or arrival of ferries (hiring, firing, wages, etc., of the industry). Whether they take the next ferry to another place depends on their absorbing circumstances in that moment. There are no plans; day-to-day logistics interfere with planning" (Wiest et al. 2003:202)

Primarily, the society can be characterized by a lack of vision of the future by its members toward the future. Secondarily, this is a fragile and short-lived society that may not be sustained under a changed employment context of an unknown or unpredictable future. To be specific, the women workers perceive that their factory job should not be considered a dependable, stable, or guaranteed means of future livelihood. This understanding is reflected in the response of 256[2] women workers I interviewed during my 1999 and 2001 research periods. Of these 256, 223 workers do not perceive the garment job as their ultimate destiny, because the factories typically recruit young women workers who are 15 to 30 years old. The factory management usually terminates older women workers on various fabricated charges (Jamaly 1992; Khatun 1998; Paul-

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[1] By the end of this study, most informants regarded the notion of the *ferryghat Samaj* as an appropriate metaphor to depict the very nature of the social system in which they participate.

[2] 212 Phase One and Phase Two primary respondents, plus 44 secondary informants composed of coworkers (See Chapter II for details).

Majumder and Zohir 1991; also see Wiest et al. 2003). Besides age-vulnerability, the workers are vulnerable to joblessness under impending collapse of the Bangladesh garment industry by international quota withdrawal and MFA phase out (see Chapter I for detail). However, they have no clear basis on which to choose or prepare for an alternative occupation and livelihood options in the event of a sudden collapse of the industry.

The workers envisioned the following characteristics of the *ferryghat society*: 1) breakdown in the traditional gender-based household "chain of command"; 2) degeneration of family members, especially of youngsters and teenage boys who become "kepts" of hoodlums, drug-dealers and vagabonds; 3) growing mistrust and conflict of interest between family members—husbands and wives, and parents and children; 4) breakdown in ethics and morality that lead workers to be overly ambitious, and to attempt to earn money by any means; 5) unrest among workers, and self-identification as "unwanted" and "alienated" in the greater society; and 6) increasing individualism and egocentricism. The subsequent analysis portrays how these characteristics shape the "transit society".

8.2.1   Alienation and Individuation

As a contingent feature of wage labour economy, individuation or increasing individualization (McMurty 1998; Robbins 1999) has also become a character trait of the transit society. Individual interest shows signs of gaining priority over the collective good and cooperation in transit society. The transitory nature of the garment workers prevents the possibility of reciprocal bonding between them. Workers rarely engage in mutual interest complementation activities—exchange, gifting, feasting and sharing private premises. This is partly because they spend 14-18 hours inside the factory on an average, and utilize the rest of the day for cooking, washing and resting. Workers themselves also fail to make close interpersonal relationships for the same reason. Sixty-eight of 212 informants neither borrow nor lend money to coworkers. "The reason is that nobody knows who disappears, and when, without repaying the lender"—a worker explained.

Usually single workers share living and cooking space with coworkers to make living less costly and more secure. However, sharers seem to live in constant fear of

premature relocation of each other and their rent defaulting. Three workers of this study had disappearing roommates who left them with the burden of payment of their dues. Four workers did not share space with others in fear of quarrel and conflict. Workers commonly show a possessive tendency about their personal belongings; they keep their personal belongings locked in trunks. Often quarrel and altercation ensues on accounting and sharing of meal charges, and one's unapproved use of the other's belongings. Six workers prefer not to have roommates for fear of stealing or loss of belongings.

As well, the superiority complex of the better-educated workers acts as a barrier for social and organizational solidarity between workers. In some extreme cases, the less-educated and better-educated workers are divided into two hostile camps marked by jealousy, rivalry, mistrust, enmity, uncooperativeness, and fighting. Although there are exceptions, the tendency by better-educated groups to dominate the opinions and views of others often ends up in ruptures of friendship. These conditions contribute to the creation of a new form of alienation and division among the workers themselves.

Thus, the transitory nature and diverse background of workers prevent a "we" feeling in them. A reference to an incidence reflects the very individualistic characteristic of the 'transit society". An informant described an incident that happened during her return home after late night duty:

"A co-worker and I were walking fast late last night to come back home from the factory. All of a sudden, a teenage street corner boy swooped up on my co-worker. She cried for help. The street was calm. I could not do anything but ran away quickly".

"Didn't you try to resist the boy?" I asked.

"No! Actually I could have given the boy a lifetime lesson. I was carrying a very sharp wedge (*cheni*) in my shopping bag. Yes. I could at least have terrified the boy and set her free, but".... (she was muttering)

"Then why didn't you"? I wondered.

"Because I do not want to be gang raped the next day or any other time. The girl might have left the place by now. Why should I risk my life unnecessarily!", she replied.

The very characteristic of the "transit society" also seems to affect other areas of the livelihood of women. Many workers informed that local grocers are reluctant to sell commodities to workers on credit. House owners do not rent accommodations if workers

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fail to ensure advance payment of three to four months of rent. The NGOs are not interested in disbursement of loans to garment workers on the same grounds. In addition, the frequent relocation of the workers results in disruption in the schooling and socialization of their young dependents (teenage younger siblings and children). Workers with dependents perceive that their relocation results in the school dropout of minors who ultimately become exposed to problematic relationships, vagrancy, petty-theft, drug use and addiction.

8.2.2 Social conflicts

Social conflicts in the Bangladesh garment sector are of four types: 1) Worker-management, 2) worker-coworkers, 3) worker-family members, and 4) worker-neighbourhood residents. Conflicts between the workers and management emanate from delay in salary payment and sudden dismissal. In individual cases, workers cannot put united pressure upon the management people. However, it was observed in the last few years that the workers often organize themselves, form a movement and press demands for immediate payment of salary. In 2000, 138 such movements were organized all over Bangladesh (Excerpted by the author from the Daily Ittefaq of a year).. It was observed that beyond salary payment, workers often remain hostile to the management. Such hostility has arisen for a number of reasons, including injustice, oppression and the overall exploitative character of the factory production system. It was observed and learned from the workers that many conflicts remain confined only among women workers, and do not take violent shape. Worker-co-worker conflicts start from personal jealously, extramarital affairs, repayment of loans and exchange of personal belongings.

The conflict between workers and family members can be treated as a conflict of interest. Entitlement to household amenities often appears as a matter of conflict. Workers living in a family environment tend to establish their entitlement to personal belongings. Being members of poverty-stricken households, brothers or sisters who do not earn, want their sisters to share their personal belongings with them. However, the workers are found very conservative and unwilling to share their personal belongings with others. It was observed that 37 single workers stay separately from their family members, although family members stay nearby. In all cases, workers mentioned that

they like to enjoy freedom about what to do and what not to do after returning from the factory. Family members tend to pose obstructions to such attitudes and use the towels, clothes, soaps and perfumes of employed members. Being 'annoyed' with such behaviour, workers start to live separately.

8.2.3 Regionalism and fractionism

Regionalism and fractionism are characteristics of the transit society. Workers usually tend to think and act in terms of compartmentalized interests. They become grouped and divided into smaller bands on the basis of regional, cultural and linguistic similarities. It was observed that bands of regionally organized workers cultivate notions of hatred and hostility, and non-communication and distancing from each other. There are groups of workers who migrated from the northern Bangladesh regions (Kurigram, Gaibandha, Dinajpur, Rangpur, Bogra, Sirajganj, Pabna), north eastern regions (Sylhet, Mymensingh, Jamalpur, Sarishabai, Tangail), and Noakhali-Barisal regions. Regionalism can be a potential barrier to unity and solidarity among workers. Two workers explained that the factory management nurtures and provokes regionalism in order to practice "divide and rule" principles. Perhaps this assertion is true. A trade union activist also pointed out that regionally confronting groups are an active barrier to achieving solidarity among workers, and to pressing worker demands for rights and just treatment by the management.

The "transit society" is different because crises, changes, transformations and degenerations take place within this segment of society itself; the changes do not affect the urban middle-income and rich segments of Bangladesh society directly. The urban middle-income and rich people always maintain a distance from the "transit society" and vice versa, maybe due to their class-based preoccupation that low-class persons (*chotolok*), especially women, are morally lax, which corresponds to Muslim notions of the "'public' woman as necessarily immoral or sexually permissive"(Siddiqi 2000:16). The members of the "transit society" also perceive well-off people as unsympathetic, annoyed with and suspicious of them[3]. As a result, the poor segment of society to which garment workers belong is polarized from the middle-income and rich people, forming

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[3] See Chapter V for details.

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two disjointed segments that avoid mutual communication and social interaction (Wiest and Mohiuddin 2003b:235-36). With restricted interaction and cultural exchange between the two segments of society, the "transit society" always exists as an isolated entity. As well, being an urban community associated with ups and downs of the garment sector, the "transit society" does not affect rural social organization directly. In other words, the metaphor depicts a people revolving in a micro context of livelihood, founded in a specific region and operating through its unique features.

The character traits of "transit society" have some resemblance to the attributes of a "culture of poverty" (Lewis 1961). Lewis's (1961) theory refers to the following attributes of the poor: a) an inherent sense of inferiority and stereotypical attitude characterizes an individual poor person; b) poor people transmit a relatively autonomous "subculture" of self-perpetuating and self-defeating values over generations; c) sense of resignation, fatalism and lack of motivation among poor people perpetuates poverty. Despite some loose connections of character traits of the transit society with "culture of poverty" traits, the overall dynamics differ significantly. Lewis studied poor communities settled in some specific locations over decades, and repeatedly observed similar types of attributes entangled with the livelihood of those people. His notion represents a cultural perspective of impoverished and static diasporas. By contrast, the "transit society" is seen as a dynamic diaspora arising out of the global political economy. Lewis's (1961) theory, in constructing a "culture of poverty", is tantamount to "blaming the victims" (Valentine 1968:18-47), whereas the "transit society" is not a culture but *conditions*—effects of globalization-led complex socio-economic causes. I suggest that the dynamics of the transit society can be better described as a long journey of a diverse people with different targets.

8.3 Rural-urban Linkage: Perception and Attitude toward "Original" and "Transit' Society"

In the context of the MFA phase out, the mounting survival crises of the sector brought three researchable questions forward: 1) Given the vulnerability of the Bangladesh garment sector, did the workers intend to return to their natal households and to their communities of origins? 2) In consideration of their social and occupational vulnerability, how do the workers perceive and evaluate their own existence within the

greater community? 3) In the event of collapse of the garment industry, what would be the possible survival strategies of jobless women who are unskilled, inexperienced or otherwise unprepared to enter into other urban employment sectors?[4]

Most workers (87 percent, see Table 8.2) do not want to go back to their community of origin despite overwhelming unemployment problems in the job market of Dhaka city. Why do workers prefer not to return to their sending communities? There are numerous causes for women's migration. The migration histories (Table 8.1) of workers reveal that some of the rural push conditions (riverbank erosion and displacement, landlessness and general insecurity in the villages) and most apparent urban pull conditions influence their decisions to settle in Dhaka city. Eighty four percent of workers want to settle in Dhaka or other big cities (Table 8.1). The 16% who do not intend to settle in cities consist of more than one-third who desire to go to another country (see Table 8.2). It otherwise means that they also do not intend to go back to their communities of origin.

Table 8.1 Rank-ordered reasons for migration from rural areas to Dhaka city, and urban settlement expectations among 212 garment workers in Bangladesh, 1999 and 2001

Reasons for Migration	Will Settle	%	Will Not Settle	%	Total	%
To work in garment industry	52	24.5	5	2.4	57	26.9
Seeking any job	32	15.1	-	-	32	15.1
To work as domestic servant	27	12.7	3	1.4	30	14.2
River-bank erosion destitution	14	6.6	3	1.4	17	8.0
Being cheated by lover	12	5.7	1	0.5	13	6.1
To find ways to foreign countries	-	-	12	5.7	12	5.7
Insecurity in village	9	4.3	1	0.5	10	4.7
Landlessness	7	3.3	3	1.4	10	4.7
Move with whole family	7	3.3	1	0.5	8	3.8
To be independent and self-reliant	6	2.8	-	-	6	2.8
Husband's workplace or residence	4	1.9	2	0.9	6	2.8
Widowhood	3	1.4	1	0.5	4	1.9
Family feud	4	1.9	-	-	4	1.9
In search of deserting husband	2	0.9	1	0.5	3	1.4
Total	179	84.4	33	15.6	212	100.0

[4] These questions were researched through: 1) a perception study of preferences of women workers for future jobs; 2) a needs assessment to identify the present needs for women's survival in the face of sector vulnerability; and 3) open discussion to explore the rationale behind needs and preferences. The studies were conducted in 22 free-form focus group discussion sessions. Preferences and needs expressions were tallied by the number of informants and set up in matrices on the basis of ranked frequencies. This approach unveiled the dynamics of livelihood of women workers conveyed in the *transit society* metaphor.

It is worth noting here that attraction to work in the garment industry is not the primary factor stimulating rural to urban migration (Table 8.2). Only 27% of women of this study migrated to Dhaka to join garment factories. The more likely situation is that the garment sector is absorbing a significant number of otherwise destitute and unemployed women whose arrival in Dhaka city stems from diverse circumstances, and that these circumstances collectively influence their decisions of settlement in Dhaka city.

A non-conventional form of rural-urban linkage is observed in the formation of recruitment networks in Bangladesh. Twenty-one secondary respondents and two primary respondents informed that the RMG sector has given birth to a group of interregional recruitment brokers (*dalaals*) and touts. The brokers roam from district to district and village to village to recruit young girls for factories. They trap young girls into marriage. They often disguise their identity and skilfully present themselves to poor parents of village girls as lucrative grooms. They bring these girls to Dhaka and manage jobs for them in different factories of Dhaka. Most touts irregularly meet their wives to collect commission—a share of their wives' earnings. The workers seldom know their husbands and rarely live a conjugal life together. Two primary informants—one abandoned and the other claimed divorced—had gone through similar experiences.

Rural push factors that motivate their city-based settlement drives are of diverse nature. Since most workers perceive that the wage economy has provided them with some "self-realization", their sense of disentitlement in relation to rural community norms is heightened. Apparently, some of them realize that they have been unduly treated as a "domestic workforce" and that patriarchal subjection within the boundary and bondage of the *purdah* society (Kabeer 1989) has widely disrespected the human capability of women over centuries. In their opinion, the *purdah* society generally labels women migrants as deviant, rebellious, unchaste, deserters and apostates to some extent. Such branding weakens their quality as brides in rural areas. As well, it denotes their social seclusion from the communities of origin. Although some workers believe that this rural attitude is changing gradually, they do not feel themselves adequately attached to, or to be compliant with, the still existent hostile environment of the *purdah* society.

Table 8.2 Rank-ordered job preferences after conclusion of garment sector job in Dhaka, Bangladesh, 1999 and 2001

	Preferred job	Number of respondents	%
1	Work in beauty parlours	48	18.75
2	Will go to act in Bengali cinema - work for heroines	34	13.28
3	Will return home to natal household	33	12.89
4	Any type of job women can do (except prostitution)[5]	26	10.16
5	Run low-cost restaurant	24	9.38
6	Go to foreign countries as domestic servant	23	8.98
7	Start women's cooperative - self employment	17	6.64
8	Become housewife - husbands will take care	9	3.52
9	Embroidery work	7	2.73
10	Any type of job women can do, even if it is sex trade	6	2.34
11	Will run tea stall if able to get investment capital	5	1.95
12	Handicraft production	5	1.95
13	Aya (care-taker) of kindergarten school – daycare centre	5	1.95
14	Social work - family planning field worker if get chance	4	1.56
15	Work as seamstress – tailor	4	1.56
16	Uncertain	4	1.56
17	Run grocery shop	2	0.78
	Total	256	100.00

I noted that 56 percent of workers (143 of 256) had migrated to cities without the consent of their guardians in households of origin. Of these, 30% informed that they had been declared "defiant", "outcast" and "unacceptable" in their communities of origin. Twenty nine percent of workers expressed their disinterest to return to the household of origin in fear of *purdah*, and another 13% for their disrespect of patriarchy.

They suffer from urban push factors too. Social isolation in the city areas is one of the conditions that push them to the margins of a viable livelihood. They live isolated social lives in abodes that maintain little provision of access to water, sewers, education, medical facilities and physical security. The middle class neighbourhood residents are often harsh and disgraceful to the garment workers, and look at them with disdain. They consider garment workers as a "nuisance", and they often mastermind slum eviction. I interviewed eleven informants living in two rented tin-shed houses in a housing society of the middle class residents in Pallabi, Mirpur. The workers informed us that the

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[5] Some of the jobs within this category are conventionally thought to be strictly men's job. Perception of women workers of these jobs challenge normative gender notions of Bangladesh society. A description of these jobs and corresponding viewpoints of women workers are made in the next chapter (chapter IX).

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dwellers of the society were treating them as "prostitutes". I then interviewed two influential residents of the society to learn their attitudes toward poor girls. Both of them alleged that the girls were polluting the moral environment of the society. I found them afraid, based upon a suspicion, that their teenagers and youth of the society might lose their moral character through sexual communication with the workers. One of them further alleged that street-corner boys and delinquent youth of nearby slums used to gather around these houses at night. This person added that such gatherings (*addas*) heightened the concerns among the residents of possible increase in theft, burglary, hijacking and armed clashes between the local "goons". The garment workers rejected these allegations as false, and viewed them as indicators of their alienation from both rural and urban societies. Yet workers consider this isolation as less tormenting than the persistent humiliating patriarchal norms of their communities of origin. A worker stated, "Here (in Dhaka) I can overlook such isolation and live alone on my own, but overlooking is judged as even a more serious and punishable crime in my community of origin. This is why Dhaka is *monder bhalo* (better than the worst) for most women workers".

On the other hand, these individuating and alienating factors appear to be igniting worker's strong drive for self-sustenance and an alternative worldview. This type of desperation is expressed in words of one worker, "Who cares about village or city! Wherever I live, it's the same jungle! Wherever I go, it's the same lion that keeps chasing me". Although workers do not know how to plan for the future, they projected their wishes for future. Perceptions and preferences of women workers for future jobs demonstrate their tendency to act upon evaluation of comparative advantages of village and city-life.

The largest section of workers prefers beauty parlour and barbershop jobs. Seemingly Bangladesh society is composed of predominantly conservative Islamic values that leave no room for growth of a commercial beautification industry. As well, Dhaka is not a tourism city. Thus, it is popularly believed that there are a relatively small number of beauty parlours in Dhaka city that serve people from upper middle and rich classes. So far, there is no instance of women's employment in barbershops in Bangladesh. Drawing upon this context, I asked workers to explain the reasons of their preference for beauty

parlour jobs. All of the 48 workers prefer these jobs for *bakshish* (tips). They perceive that rich people go to beauty parlours, and that they generously pay a handsome amount in tips. Therefore, parlour attendants earn much more extra money from *bakshish* than from factory job salaries. There are also other attractions in these jobs. First, these jobs involve a nominal workload. Second, because of women ownership and management of beauty parlours, young women workers receive better security and safety in these jobs. Third, these jobs provide them with opportunity to remain slender, clean, well fashioned and attractive to others. And fourth, these jobs also provide them the opportunity of distancing themselves from *chotoloks* (lower class people) and *noshto manush* (rotten people) of their own class. Many women workers blamed male members of their own class of being more oppressive and offensive than those in other classes.

I asked how the workers had known about beauty parlour jobs. Sixteen workers informed that they had friends in beautification jobs. They gave up garment jobs earlier. A worker commented, "My friend Rani now lives a life of an actual *Rani* (queen). She committed to take me out from this *dozokh* (hell)". Some workers informed that the need for beauty parlours was growing in Dhaka, and that a considerably large number of home-based parlours have emerged in Dhaka city in disguise as beautification training centers in recent years. Women workers seem to have followed up job prospects in these yet unfamiliar occupational premises as a means of their quest for survival. At the same time, there are some workers who detest this type of jobs. Sixteen workers in a twenty-worker group discussion session expressed their opinion that the beauty parlour jobs are nothing but a form of disguised prostitution. A worker who preferred the parlour job instantly reacted saying that she still preferred the occupation, no matter whether it resembled prostitution or not. According to her opinion, these jobs offer women the dignity of *malkin* (mistresses), which is preferable to conveying an image of *beshshya* (whore) in the imagination of the *bhodroloks* (gentlemen). A parallel notion is expressed in Siddiqi (2000:16) as she argues that the women garment workers are "symbols of an inverted moral order", and that "the slippage between woman as worker and woman as prostitute is omnipresent in the public imagination" (2000:16).

The second preference of the workers is film-related jobs. The reasons are more or less similar to workers' preference to beauty parlour jobs, i. e., they would remain

financially safe and become attractive and beautiful girls. Twenty-six workers expressed their desperation for any job except prostitution for survival. Twenty-four workers perceived that the restaurant business would be suitable as their future occupation, because this profession provides certainty of profit, in other words, insures financial security. Twenty-three workers wish to leave Bangladesh for good for any jobs in foreign countries. Yet, no workers prefer jobs of domestic servants (*Kajer beti, bua, matari*) as alternatives. As well, 87% of workers do not wish to go back to their villages of origin no matter what distressful condition may arise in cities.

In a focus group discussion, one worker summarized the inclination of her group and represented the thinking of other workers as desperation for three things: "selfdom" (*aamaar*), "cash" and "glamour" *(roop)*. The words suggest an embrace by workers of the notions of individualism and capitalist principles of consumer culture. This further suggests that the transit society has transcended a strong sense of attraction of women garment workers to urbanity. Yet there is an active and visible rural-urban linkage of women workers. This linkage is better reflected in workers sending remittances to natal households.

8.4 Exchange and Networks: Reciprocity, Social Cohesion and Social Solidarity

8.4.1 State of rural-urban linkage of reciprocity and social solidarity

Afsar that women workers in the RMG sector contribute eleven percent more remittances than those employed in non-RMG manufacturing sectors (2000:12). It is revealed in this study that they do so to secure an alternative place to take refuge in times of crisis. A worker termed it as the "insurance policy of the poor". Although the workers usually perceive that they have minimal chance to return to natal households, uncertainty of urban livelihood forces them to remit a portion of their income in hope of future return of shelter or other needs. Their tendency may parallel Daniel Kaufmann's (1982) argument that poor households are often assertive, calculative and well aware of their inconsistent and unstable income, and this is why they tend to meet all their basic needs in a "contractarian" kin or community-based interhousehold exchange framework. He also mentions that the givers treat the transfers as an investment that eventually is reciprocated in the time of the giver's need. Kauffman's argument fits well with

traditional poor households that tend to remain unchanged and physically located in a certain community over decades. Their static existence serves as social collateral for exchange networks. However, because the "transit society" is dynamically changeable and the existence of households under transitional conditions is momentary, remittances fail to fulfill the criteria of a dependable collateral.

Therefore, workers prefer to build reciprocal networks among themselves within reachable premises. Women workers require informal community networks of assistance and exchange between each other for everyday life needs of childcare, accompaniment to factories and hospitals, and borrowing of goods and services from fellow-workers and their families. Slum eviction without any prior notice is a very big problem for the workers, resulting in a sudden severe uncertainty in their lives. Sometimes they find their properties (mainly household and cooking materials) damaged after returning from the factory. Compelled to immediately search for another place to live, sometimes under defamatory or insulting conditions, they face the prospect of increased immediate costs. In such experiences they turn to network connections (co-workers, relatives, or perhaps invitations from men interested in "marriage").

Bamberger and others (1999) observed a similar type of dependence of the people of Southeast Cartagena of Colombia on community level social networks of transfers. They revealed that transfers help poorer Colombian households to survive in two ways; first as an informal employment generation sector in richer households, and secondly as an informal social support network during crisis periods. Women garment workers of Bangladesh also serve as an employment generation network. Ninety-two workers interviewed for this study have become employed or reemployed with the help of other workers, often by those whom they have met only incidentally. Given the scarcity of daycare centers, workers usually rely on older family members of co-workers for childcare.

Classical community discourses commonly assert that small and culturally homogenous social groups tend to be more cohesive in themselves and protective of their cultural identity in alien cultural settings (McIver and Page 1967; Little 1964; Ogburn and Nimkoff 1972). Leiner and Meckl (1995) reveal that the immigrants' community organizations are sustained mainly on the basis of serving economic interests and intra-

organization income-redistribution between members. Intra-organizational distributions take place through economic and financial supports of well-off community members to disadvantaged members. Distribution is not necessarily expressed in economic terms, but instead has often been implied as a social arrangement.

However, despite worker need and preference for networks of transfer among themselves, the transitory nature of workers perpetuates fragile, superficial, weak and tenuous social networking that interferes with social solidarity and collective action. These loosely knit networks rarely serve material or monetary needs of workers. A statement of a worker nicely captures the characteristics of the networks. In her words, "We help each other when it does not cost the helper even a cent. We also take away our helping hands if helping seems to cost even a cent". Another worker said, "Probably it is only my descent and lineage people that reciprocate unselfishly".

Drawn from a welfare economics perspective, sociologists and anthropologists also regard "intergenerational support" (Cox and Jimenez 1990) as an informal social security system and an important medium of survival for poorer households. Children are motivated and educated to take care of their parents in old age as a social norm of repayment of the debts to parents of their investments in rearing children. Intergenerational support can be best described with the principle that reciprocity goes downward. Parents transfer services to their children. When their children grow up and become parents, they transfer similar types of services to their offspring. Households, families and kinship survive through this support network. Children reciprocate their parents with transferring services to the next generation.

However, most garment workers claim that the garment sector has brought intergenerational support system and conventional reciprocal network to an end. A statement of a worker, which represents voice of other workers as well, is as follows: "My parents did almost nothing for me. So, I do not feel obliged to do anything for them. If I go back home by chance, I will realize my remittance by every single penny from them". Another worker said, "When someone of us falls in trouble, she realizes how alone she is, and how cruel is everyone around her". The following case study echoes her assertion.

Case Study 8.1: Saleha Age 20, marital status - divorced

I am sharing my woes with you hoping that you could put them before wise people to answer my question what did they do to turn our (poor people's) world into a hell! I know you will not kick me and run away like everyone else of my people because you do not belong to this flock of swine I belong to.

I voluntarily took a divorce in my eleventh month of marriage. Before the formal divorce took place, my husband used to return home late night—drunk and polluted by whores. I also noticed that he was sleeping even with boys. After a while I started to feel ill with some kind of hay fever, sluggish feeling, sneezing, eyesore, and red scratchy rashes spreading over some parts my body. You know how expensive it was for someone like me to go to a physician. Yet I took time, saved some money by dint of weeks of starvation, and had several clinical tests. The doctor diagnosed something like syphilis. Meanwhile I had divorced the sinner (husband) who infected me with the disease. So, I informed my closest friend of the problem, hoping that she would accompany me or help me during treatment process. However, she instantly started to puke and hurled abuses so dirty and slanderous I could not stand it. Soon, all my colleagues, associates, family members, neighbours and everyone else I knew became abusive, hateful and disgraceful in extreme. Everyone started to point at me as an AIDS patient (although I do not yet know if it is AIDS or some other disease).

Soon I lost my job. My family members, including my *ma-janani* ("mother" expressed satirically) started to term me as a "whore", although everyone was well aware of my former husband's filthy life-style and my very conservative homebound attitudes. None from my community or neighbours ever showed any sympathy, only cruelty. I brought both my father and mother to the city from the village and did everything possible to give them a living. But they became so selfish that they had always tended to defend themselves in the community saying they did *tyajjyo* (dislodged me from kinship and inheritance). I was so frustrated and devastated by the enormity of rudeness of my people that once I thought to commit suicide.

However, my doctor was much more sympathetic—I would say exceptionally kind—because he attentively listened to my problems. Still now he is supplying me free (sample) medication. I also received so much knowledge from *Apas* (sisters, here refers to health counsellors) of two NGOs about reproductive health and my right as a woman. All of them became very astonished and sympathised to hear about the treatment of my community to me upon the disease. At one point the doctor also phoned one of his garment owner friends to recruit me. It worked nicely

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and I got a factory job with a better salary than before. Since then, I call him father (in my heart, he does not know this though), treat him as a father, and pray to Allah everyday for his ever-goodness and respect him above everything else in this world. He and *apas* suggested me not to disclose the fact of my illness to anyone anymore until I get fully cured.

Now that my health is improving and I am maintaining a better livelihood than before, *"boshonter kokil"* (birds of spring, referring to privilege-seekers) have started to crow around me. My parents came to know that I am fully cured (although not in reality). Thus, their *darad* (affection) and love for me suddenly started to overflow. But, I learnt a good lesson from life. So I returned them their treatment saying, "I also did *tyajjyo* you all."

This case study of *Saleha* serves as an eye-opener to grasp the complex attributes of livelihood of urban poor. The case study depicts a diversion in the classical notion of *asabiyah*, that people of a community with similar types of stresses are likely to maintain among themselves a greater solidarity. As well, informal transfer networks and reciprocal relationships that once existed as a means of survival of poor people are being broken down in the globalization context. Another dimension can be explained as growth of individualism and a materialist inclination among poor people that tends to weaken kinship relationships and social bonds. Thus, "choice" and "choicelessness" (Sullivan 1996) play determining roles in the construction of the worldview of the garment workers.

8.5   Rural Mind, Urban Soul: Identity Crisis

Young women garment workers of Bangladesh can be characterized as experiencing an "identity crisis"—the juxtaposition of a "rural mind" and an "urban soul". For instance, I observed that women workers of this study also shoulder the national burden of family breakdown, and male unemployment. Women workers as a labour force contribute to the reproduction of femininity in household level poverty. The capitalist development process of the garment sector encourages or forces women to frequently discover themselves in jobless conditions. As a result, women wageworkers treat such job-market instability as an inherently institutionalized condition for women. Consequently, they treat their own position in society as women—daughters, sisters or housewives first, and workers second. It is worth noting that one-quarter (five of the

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twenty) of the workers I worked with in focus group discussions believe that workers themselves are partly responsible for the sexual harassments they experience. This view, although most certainly in reference to "workers" in general and not in reference to themselves, draws attention to the contradictions these garment women workers embody in the construction of their self-imagery.

I asked workers to mention some problems in their attitude that they perceive as "rural" but yet entangled in their urban livelihood. Of many responses, they mentioned their endorsement of, and fascination with, traditional rural normative principles, no matter how patriarchal and oppressive these principles are. I asked, "How do you want to teach your children"? In response, most workers responded that they would teach them in light of the teachings of their forefathers (*baap-daadaara*). "So, you would teach your children even the wrongs and impractical teachings of your forefathers?", I jokingly asked twenty workers with whom I worked in two group discussion sessions. "No, our forefathers never did anything wrong, neither taught us wrong", responded one worker, and others supported her. "Then why do you complain so much about the cheating and oppression of your natal community people, especially men?", I asked correspondingly. Again another worker responded saying, "We complain because complaining and blaming others is a bad habit of us, the poor people. If we become better off, this habit will disappear". Other workers supported her analogy. Another worker mentioned that, due to increased unemployment of men and growing employment prospects for women, men have become jealous and unhappy over women. According to her opinion, men blame women for displacing them from wage jobs. She also believes that increased patriarchal cheating and oppression constitute nothing but an outburst of anger and discontent and sense of dispossession of men in the changed wage-occupation context.

Siddiqi (2000:16) reflects on these complexities and contradictions saying that women garment workers "call themselves into question" because of the ambiguous construction of the significance of their work conditions. She argues that the feminization of garment factory work in the face of severe male unemployment fosters their representation as a socially disruptive labour force—a subtle negative imagery that affects their lives. This imagery of a section of women garment workers refers to their

hitherto persistent enslavement within the greater gender-biased social organization matrices.

This self-imagery constrains their education and training too. Most women workers perceive that men view educated and trained women as rebellious and do not consider them desirable for marriage. I asked twenty-one workers in different interview sessions if they also perceived that educated girls were not desirable as brides. Eighteen workers perceived that women who lived in rural areas should not be educated, because education reduces the demand (*daam*) for women in the marriage market (*biyer bazaar*). This imagery also restricts their empowerment and upward mobility. I engaged some workers in brainstorming sessions to facilitate their expression of attitudinal problems they had in rural areas, and that they still nurture in their urban context. Among many such perceived problems, they commonly mentioned mistrust, regionalism, fatalism, marriage instinct and conservatism as intrinsic qualities in their everyday life.

This viewpoint stands in strong opposition to their other viewpoint that depicts the "transit society" as a base or foundation for them to reject and challenge traditional normative principles of society. The viewpoint of some workers is worth noting in this context. A worker asserts that she does not care anymore for factory jobs while there are "thousands of ways" (*hazarta raasta*) to earn better income. The other, while expressing her determination to remain in the city, challenged normative gendered notions of society saying, "*Laage to Jouban feri koira khamu*" (if required, I would rather sell my body). Nine workers expressed their readiness to accept the profession of driving bus, car or scooter—professions that are always viewed as men's jobs. Eleven workers prefer to take the challenge of learning heavy automobile (truck) driving to returning to their home community. In a similar fashion, eight workers expressed their desperation to secure any job in the Bangladesh film industry at any cost. In consideration of conservatism and the subordinate condition of women, this type of response can be viewed as women's challenge of the conventional job stereotypes. These tendencies project workers' drive to accomplish a livelihood that intersects their fantasy world with the real world, and provides them with some basis to be relieved of the strife of the present subaltern livelihood.

Thus, their rural mind is expressed in rural norms and beliefs in their everyday lifestyle. The urban soul is expressed in their ambitions and their attraction to, and accommodation of, an urban lifestyle. The juxtaposition of these often-conflicting expressions is part of their identity construction dynamic. Therefore, changes in the surface level of livelihood of women workers do not necessarily refer to significant changes in perceptual orthodoxy, which Bourdieu terms as "doxa", meaning experiences and perceived values deeply ingrained inside the consciousness of human beings. These conditions can be analyzed through the "habitus"[6] (Bourdieu 1977, 1990) framework. Habitus is an embodied state of taste and attitude of humans ingrained through a long-term socialization process. While persistent physical conditions of social changes result in changes in their livelihood aspirations, few changes take place in their perceptions.

8.6   Rise of Rural-Urban Complementation Economy and Informal Sectors

"Outsourcing" in the garment sector has resulted in the destruction of backward and forward linkage industries in Bangladesh. Such destruction takes place in two ways. In the first, complete outsourcing of the buyers cripples the manufacturing system of indigenous plants. As the buyers supply every production input—fabric, buttons, thread, labels, price tags, and packages—demand for these locally manufactured inputs diminishes. In the second place, facility of duty-free import of fabrics further escalates shut-down crises of the domestic plants. A segment of the RMG factory owners have established about 4,200 personally owned bonded warehouses in Bangladesh. The government has been patronizing duty-free import of fabrics and the establishment of bonded warehouses in order to assist the RMG sector to save their "lead time"[7] for business efficiency. However, the owners of the bonded warehouses exploit facilities of duty-free import of foreign fabrics. It is estimated that 153 million meters of fabric are being smuggled into domestic markets from these bonded warehouses every year (The Daily Juganatar, 03 June 2004). In the domestic market scenario, duty-free import of

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[6] In a general sense, "habitus" means "world-view", the way people perceive, emotionally connect and respond to events around them and evaluate the world on the basis of their perceptions. Habitus refers to every actor behind a person's socialization, i.e., family, class and gender experience over centuries and ages. Thus, habitus serves as an entity marker of society. That is why we can distinguish peasant-habitus from military-habitus, artistic-habitus or working class habitus. However, these experiences and perceived values are often more powerful than ideology and scientific logic.
[7] Time spent in export processing.

fabrics keeps their prices much lower than fabrics produced in domestic textile mills. As a result, 86 Bangladeshi cotton yarn and handloom factories and 94 spinning mills and 442 dyeing factories were compelled to shut down (Mahmood 2001) during the 1999-2001 period.

Despite this setback, the RMG sector has apparently created as its by-product a short-term and unsustainable secondary domestic clothing sector in Bangladesh. This secondary clothing sector is built upon three spin-offs of the export RMG sector: 1) smuggled fabrics, 2) auctioned clothes, and 3) surplus cut-piece (*jhut*) business. First, fabrics leaked into local markets from bonded warehouses go to non-standardized tailoring houses—private and home-based sewers. Second, there is a large market of auctioned-off products such as defective clothes and rejected consignments, and cancelled shipments. Third, the surplus and cut piece (*jhut*) fabrics go to different private and homestead tailors and mattress factories.

These three means have supplied the necessary conditions for the creation of a secondary domestic clothing market. This secondary sector further compounds the vulnerability of the national industrialization to destruction. The third means—the cut-piece business—brings devastating effects for indigenous plants. The operational mechanism of this business is as follows:

The buyers supply the RMG export factories contingency or additional rolls of fabric to make up for incidental manufacturing waste. As the shop-floor supervisors impose strict sanctions and penalty on workers for their mistakes in stitching and wasting fabric, most workers put their utmost attention to perfect stitching. As a result, factories often accomplish production turnout with the base inputs, thus without requiring utilization of extra fabric held contingent for make-up of the production waste. The factory management sells this unutilized surplus fabric in the open market.

The *jhut* traders buy surplus fabric from RMG factories and sell out to newly-emerged tailoring houses and individual tailors all over the country. While selling out surplus fabrics, the RMG factory management supplies the traders with designs of dresses and their stitching layouts. With copying designs and stitching layouts, the non-factory tailors throughout the country produce hundreds of thousands of dresses. These dresses barely look different from catalogued export-market products. Production costs of

these ready-made dresses are also much lower than sewn-up clothes or in-store retail prices of similar quality ready-made garments. Now that locally produced quality ready-made clothes are available for a cheap price, poor people can also afford to buy fancy dresses from street-side hawkers and informal (seasonal) vendors. As a result, this secondary sector has emerged as the most popular domestic ready-made clothing substitution economy of Bangladesh.

This substitution economy has contributed to the emergence of thousands of wholesale and retail markets that have become expanded and linked with each other all over Bangladesh. This economy has created jobs for millions of people in sectors like contracting, tailoring, transportation, printing, packaging, middlemanship, wholesaling, retailing and street hawking. It is reported that 75 mechanized and 175 semi-mechanized dyeing and finishing mills have been established in Bangladesh (Hossain 2001). A number of carton and packaging factories, and button factories and embroidery factories are also established in Bangladesh. Hossain (2001) shows that these factories meet 90% of market needs. In addition, the sector has promoted the establishment of many cottage-industry-type screen-print and block-print and box-print factories in metropolitan cities. Many rural people are employed in these substitution production facilities. Therefore, the sector has helped in the creation of a strong rural-urban linkage of culture and craftsmanship. This linkage has stretched from urban business centers to remote rural shops of Bangladesh.

Even though this secondary sector generates employment for millions of people, and links urban enterprises with rural economies as well as efficiently complements clothing needs of Bangladesh, it has failed to create conditions for sustainability. By contributing to the decline of domestic demands for vernacularly produced fabrics, it has put additional pressure of competition to the domestic factories. Under intense competition, the production of fabrics in vernacular factories appeared to be less cost-effective and cost-efficient in comparison with that in the newly formed secondary clothing markets. Consequently, nationalized and vernacular textile and spinning mills have scaled back or closed down, causing unemployment of thousands of workers of these plants. In the context of the MFA phase out and probable collapse of the RMG export sector, there is an acute risk of further unemployment of millions of people

employed in this secondary clothing sector. Being a by-product sector of the RMG export sector, the secondary clothing market cannot sustain a corresponding demise with the fall of the RMG sector.

8.6.1 The growth of the informal sector: A rural-urban dynamic

The RMG export sector also contributed to the expansion of the consumer market. It is reported that the consumer market in Dhaka city has expanded at a rate of 20 per cent annual growth. It is estimated that the 1.5 million workers created an effective demand of US$1.70 million worth of consumer goods (The Independent 1998d:18).

The poor workers cannot afford luxury consumer goods. However, they have created market demand for cheap and affordable cosmetics and consumer goods. Consequently, an informal complementation economy has sprouted in Dhaka city. In order to meet the active demands of workers, different types of small-scale enterprises and home-based factories have grown up in Dhaka city. These factories are of diverse types. They manufacture a wide variety of cheap commodities like soap, massage oil, perfume, tooth powder and paste and brushes, ribbons, combs, make-up kits, sandals, umbrellas, plastic food containers and bakery foods. These factories have emerged by targeting poor and low-income consumers, especially the garment workers. It is known that about fifty bakeries have been established in the Mirpur areas in the last decades. A chain of wholesalers, retailers, transporters and small tea stalls has developed around these bakeries. Thousands of people make their living from these informal sector occupations.

Apparently women garment workers pull a significant number of rural people to cities. Under the conditions of inadequacy of daycare centers in Dhaka city, some workers bring their parents (especially mothers) to cities. I met three indigenous medical practitioners (*kaviraaj*) and two traditional birth attendants (*dhaai*) who migrated from different rural areas to Dhaka city to serve poor garment workers. As the garment workers can hardly afford modern medication and healthcare facilities, they want and invite more traditional health practitioners to move from rural areas to cities. Of 212 informants of this study, 126 informed that at least one family member or relative of theirs moved from rural areas to Dhaka with their reference. At some point, these people

further serve as "reference points" for their family members and other relatives to move to cities. Most workers speak about the harsh reality of city life that, although their family members and relatives move to cities to serve some of their purposes, leads them to leave shortly after arrival. Such separations take place due to the transitory nature of every individual who is forced to switch from one job to another and one place to another to make up a meagre day-to-day living. Thirty-two workers informed that they had neither seen nor heard of anything of their relatives after their first separation.

These reference-migrants constitute the greater part of urban informal sector employment. They adopt various subaltern means of livelihood; they commonly resort to jobs of daily contract labourers *(thika shramikgiri),* shoe and umbrella repairers, brick-breakers, construction helpers *(jugali)*, rickshaw-pullers, street hawkers, fruit-sellers, petty-vendors, loaders and packers and helpers on trucks and buses and other vehicles, mobile tea and tobacco sellers, gardeners, flower-sellers and many other jobs on an "as and when available" basis.

What is alarming in this context is that the migration of rural peasant household workers to cities may constitute an early setback for the agricultural mode of production. Despite the fact that women garment workers generally do not intend to return to their communities of origin, the demise of the garment sector may force the reference-migrants to return to their origins. Meanwhile, they have also established their stake with the urban informal economy alternatives. Therefore, it is yet unclear to what extent they would be willing to return to their origins, and to readjust to a rural livelihood. However, the above discussion hints that the impending collapse of the RMG sector may lead to a state of chaos and disorder in both the rural and urban social structure of Bangladesh.

CHAPTER IX

LIVELIHOOD CHANGE, LIVELIHOOD STRATEGY
AND RURAL-URBAN LINKAGE: GENDER PERSPECTIVES

9.1   Gendered Face of Globalization: Identity Construction of "the Last Colony"

Karl Marx wrote in the nineteenth century about the pre-colonial "Asiatic mode of production"—rigid, stagnant, based "on the blending of agriculture and handicrafts, and on the unalterable division of labour" (Marx 1958:392). Mies portrays how British colonialism changed that scenario. With the expansion of capitalism, poverty is transformed into an institution, and feminization of poverty into a spiralling social process. Mies (1986) argues that for women the roots of poverty lie in a deep-rooted history of colonialism and capitalism, and that colonization institutionalized women's "housewifization". Thus, "women—the last colony" (Mies et al. 1986) is not confined only to city-based nuclear families, but also emerges in rural households.

Poverty has a broader meaning. It goes well beyond the meaning of an individual's "income poverty" (Sen 1992) or economic or material want. An individual's inability to meet any required non-material need also reflects his/her "capability poverty" (Sen 1990b). The overt examples of feminization of poverty is that compared to men, women in Bangladesh suffer more from hunger and malnutrition, ill health, morbidity and mortality from illness, maternal mortality, sex-selective abortion or female foeticide, disaster and dowry killing, unsafe environments, homelessness, and inadequate housing. Thus, the male–female ratio in Bangladesh is 106 to 100 (JAICA 2003:6), a complete reversal of the global biological trends. This ratio in the rest of the world is 100 to 106. Globally, women usually outlive men if both sexes receive similar nutritional and health care (Haq 1997:24). Limited access or lack of access to education, lack of participation in decision–making and in civil, social and cultural life, and social discrimination and exclusion from other basic services also constitute feminization of poverty (UNDP

1997b; Haq 1997; Dreze and Sen 1989; Sen 1990b). Thus, it is possible for women to be impoverished even in rich households (Kabeer 1996; Sen 1982) due to the presence of the above stated conditions.

In Bangladesh, feminization of poverty, colonization and housewifization are closely interlinked processes. The roots of women's poverty in Bangladesh lie not only in the lack of material resources, but also in deep-rooted historical-ideological systems. There are two weapons of housewifization: first, colonial-type control over the means of production—the land (Mies 1980); and second, ideologically imposed subjection of the labour force. First, the nuclear family serves as an "internal colony" in which women or "wives" are the colonized, and men or the "breadwinners" are the colonialists. Comparable to the external colonialists who used to plunder resources and labour from their colonies by force, the breadwinners extract and exploit labour of wives and the material resources that they produce with their labour power. Just as the external colonialism that always extends to rural areas to establish absolute control over land, men (in Bangladesh) grab absolute control over land. Second, "wives" are created as an ideological means of consolidation of men's colony. As with the attitude of the colonizers who profit more by enslaving women than by paying for their labour, the bourgeois men domesticate women as their "own" women—pure, monogamous and breeders of their heirs (Mies 1986:88-90). Earlier, the colonialists had established their complete control over slave women's labour power by turning them into their "wives" or "brides". Colonial men of these days also carried out similar practices over their colonies—their wives. The covert "last colony" principle has provided the ideological base of the garment sector recruitment and operation. This ideological basis is projected in the sexual division of labour, gender stereotyping, and bias for "tender" workers.

9.1.1 Sexual division of labour: Ideational subordination and gender stereotyping

The sexual division of labour in the garment manufacturing sectors is a vivid reflection of the "last colony" metaphor. Boserup (1970:22) shows that women work in industries and manufacturing plants where: 1) technology is low quality and unsophisticated, and functions with low investment and low wages; 2) These plants are very much labour intensive; and 3) in the division of labour, women hold low-paid and

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low ranked positions. Boserup (1970) and Stalker (1997) term these conditions as workplace ideology that distinguishes "men's work" from "women's work". In this dichotomy, women workers do '3D work'—"dirty", "dangerous" and "difficult" (Stalker 1977). They view this distinction as a means to justify gender discrimination and exploitation of women workers. Through the gender division of labour, women workers experience discrimination even when men and women do the same job. Such division of labour resembles what Braverman (1974) treats as a process of ideational subordination and deskilling of the workers.

Gender stereotyping forms the basis of labour composition of the export-oriented industries (EOI). For women, the labour market stereotype appears to be an extension of household-based gender norms. I noted the attitudes of five male factory managers towards the women workforce. None of them considered women workers as the mainstream workforce. Rather, women were associated with attributes like optional, secondary, alternate, sideliners, temporary and transitory. I asked all of them if they had ever considered the fact that without women workers they could not operate factories and make money. In response, all of them explained that the sector did not essentially target women workers, but utilized to their advantage a readily available workforce that was forced into the labour market by other means. In a similar fashion, they explained that if women workers were not readily available, the sector might have turned into a technology-intensive sector. According to their perception, women cannot constitute an essential workforce of a formal manufacturing sector, because they were meant to meet household labour needs.

The perception of managers suggests that ideological power of patriarchal norms plays a significant role in the construction of the demand-supply matrix of the labour market. Perhaps this is a reason behind the unchangeable socio-economic condition of women over decades. In 1978, Lim studied the trend of feminization of labour inside EOIs of Singapore and Malaysia. These industries were manufacturing consumer electronics for Western markets. She observed similar managerial stereotypes nearly three decades ago; and mentioned that women were considered as "secondary" or "marginal" sections of the labour force "with low skills, a low level of commitment to the labour force, willingness to work for very low pay, and lack of union organization" (Lim

1978:356). An additional exploitable advantage (1978:356-9) of women workers was explained as "great patience, care, industry and dexterity, and a minimum of spot disruptions on the assembly line" (Lim 1978:359). Seemingly, the notion of "nimble fingers" was not considered as a quality or skill of women workers. Rather the management has always exploited these qualities as a means for profit maximization. Tiano (1990) and Redclift and Sinclair (1991) observed it as an active process in the creation of a new category—a cheap women labour force.

As well, the gender stereotype contributes to the shaping of policies for recruitment of male workers. In 1986, the garment sector labour force was comprised of 90% women workers (Khan 1993:18). Paul-Majumder and Begum (2000:9) has observed that the share of women workers had dropped to 66.4 per cent in 1993. I also observed during this study period (1999-2001) that the participation of male workers in Bangladesh garment factories has been increasing. In 1999, I calculated the male-female ratio of workers in six factories as 85:15. In 2001, male-female composition of 16 factories was reported as 67:33. Absar (2001) assumes that the introduction of knitwear machines may have caused this drop. She writes, "in knitwear factories, heavy and more sophisticated machines are used and men handle these machines. Whether women can do the same job is not tested because of the traditional notion that women are weak and are not capable of operating heavy machines" (Absar 2001:36).

My study suggests that it is not introduction of knitwear machines, but an active shift in the preference of factory managers for better-educated men over non-literate or marginally literate women workers. The factory management, and women and male workers themselves explained some of the reasons for increase in male workers. Male workers of factories are usually better educated than women workers. Factory managers I interviewed perceive male workers as dynamic and equally fit for various work-posts: helpline, cutting, finishing, ironing, labelling, and packaging. They complain that women workers often make mistakes and take too long to learn and speed up their work. Managers also complained about an increased rate of absence and dropout of women workers due to sickness, family needs or emotional problems. Management embraces the idea that, despite the restlessness and the tendency of male workers to move for better-paid jobs, they are usually regular and less burdened with family affairs. According to

them, most women workers are less rational and less convincible than men, and they have a quarrelling habit and intolerance for each other. They allege that women workers embarrass the management and waste their production time by making "false" allegations of sexual harassment against co-workers—especially male workers. However, most workers I interviewed perceive managerial complaints as a typical male-biased stereotype. Some workers[1] rejected managerial complaints of "female habits" as a male preoccupation, and explained that what managers treated as "habit" was worker "reactions" and "resistance" against male injustice against them. In one group discussion, twenty workers called these allegations "managerial pretext for wage exploitation". They argued that women workers receive less salary than male workers doing the same job and having the same level of experience. The study of Paul-Majumder and Begum (2000) confirms this discriminatory practice (Table 9.1).

Table 9.1 Gender differentials in wages in the Bangladesh garment industry (1998)

Categories of Workers	Monthly wages (Tk)	
	Male	Female
Supervisor	4234	3082
Quality Controller	4038	1724
Cutting Master	3935	-
Operator	2254	1536
Ironer	1894	1106
Sewing helper	1200	762
Cutting Helper	1512	837
Finishing Helper	1209	1023
Folder	1528	1157

Source: Paul-Majumder and Begum 2000:26.26.

I noticed an apparently contradictory view of the factory managers about the male workforce. On the one hand, the processes of recruitment of male workers reflect an essentially male-biased mindset of the managers. On the other hand, the factory management consciously infuses the roles and responsibilities of male workers on shop floors with feminine imagery. Two factory managers I interviewed admit that they prefer "womanly" (*meyeli*)[2] men as their desired replacement for women workers. "I prefer

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[1] Twenty workers of two group discussion sessions.
[2] The term *meyeli* connotes a defamatory image of men. The Bengali term refers to men who lack male attributes (*machismo*), or *macho* image, and remain submissive like women.

those men who act as obediently as women, and bring in less trouble of unionism", stated one of the managers in a straightforward manner. A similar view is expressed in Salzinger (2001) who claims that the managers put a transnational rhetoric of femininity into local practice (Salzinger 2001:19), as well as reinforce a shop-floor perception and image of male workers who are "emasculated" or "not-men" (Salzinger 2001:18-19). This type of construction of gender identity is even more vivid in the managerial bias for "tender" young women workers.

9.1.2 "Tender" workers: Commodification of adolescent labour power

Despite the apparent shift in managerial preference for male workers, preference for "tender" women workers has not decreased in the garment sector. "Age" still remains an identity marker of the garment workforce. The industry bias for tender workers institutes a process of commodification of adolescent labour power—a newer face of corporate globalization.

Seventy-two percent of workers in this study are young "tender" girls between 16 to 20 years of age (Table 9.2). As claimed in Boserup (1970), these workers hold low-paid and low-ranked positions of "helpers" and "operators". Except in sweater and jacket factories that usually recruit older male workers, the gender division of labour and the preference for young workers became an established recruitment norm in garment factories (see Chapter V).

Table 9.2 Distribution of informants by age group and sex, Bangladesh, first phase baseline study, 1999

| Age group | Number of workers | | | | | |
	Male	% of P	Female	% of P	Total	% of P
Between 14-15	-	-	7	3.54	7	3.54
16 - 20	-	-	143	72.22	143	72.22
21 - 25	5	2.53	28	14.14	33	16.67
26 - 30	1	0.51	14	7.07	15	7.57
G Total	6	3.03	192	96.97	198	100

P = Sampled population of the first phase baseline study

The factory management prefers "tender women" on the basis of the "myth of nimble fingers" (Ross 1997) that depicts young women as more agile, industrious and

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productive than older workers. It is generally perceived that young women can work longer shifts, can risk working in the night, will remain committed, are ambitious to change their lot by learning, and are patient and easily controllable.

This "desirability" perspective has two dimensions. First, it serves as the rationalization for current recruitment practices of cheaper labour of women. Second, it culminates in sexual imagery in the production process and sexism in the workplace. Women workers[3] perceive that male managers and supervisors prefer young girls who retain their feminine beauty—well dressed and beautification-sensitive. A worker said, "Flirting (*chenali*) by dress-up and make-up seems to be a desired act in the view of my male bosses. I observed my bosses giggling and making suggestive remarks to girls with thick lipstick and make-up". Another worker remarked, "Some of us always try to please bosses with better dress and make-up". Salzinger (2001) also noted a similar type of interplay of the notion of managers that conveys a sexist notion of femininity and consequent pliancy of *maquiladora* women workers. She spells out that transnational perspectives of "desirability" and "docile femininity" contribute to the emergence of the "painted, permed and pliant panoptimex woman" (Salzinger 2001:18) in the *maquiladora* shop floors. According to her opinion, young women workers' physique becomes a visual means of satisfying male fantasies as "panoptimex managers" and "super-visors" (Salzinger 2001:18), and that sexuality of women workers gradually becomes embedded in the production system as determinant of the desirability of a worker. She writes, "gender meanings are forged within the context of panoptic labour control strategies in which women are constituted as desirable objects and male managers as desirable subjects" (Salzinger 2001:18). This desirability, to a great extent, a politic of patriarchy— a framework of intimidation—that goes hand in hand with the growth of the RMG sector, and extends into household-based gender relations. Thus, a construction of docile femininity shapes labour control strategies in factories, and women's subjected livelihood controls strategies inside the household.

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[3] All of the forty workers engaged in four group discussion sessions expressed the same viewpoint.

9.2 Frameworks of Intimidation

9.2.1 Shop-floor-based intimidations

A persistent sexist labour control strategy lays the ideological foundation of a framework of gendered intimidation—a set of means used by managers to control worker labour power. Irregular payment, sanctions on salaries and blockage of overtime payment are other means of managerial intimidation and taming of workers. The managers execute these actions to resist worker drives for empowerment, and their pursuit of better-paid jobs. As a result, workers become forced to borrow high-interest loans from informal moneylenders. This managerial practice renders women workers penniless paupers, and causes the starvation of many. Consequently, workers prefer not to risk their jobs but instead to practice docility on shop floors as an ultimate distasteful resort.

The factory management also practices a "divide and rule" strategy to keep workers divided into hostile camps. They introduce enmity, jealousy and hostility among workers by expressing their false favour for some workers over others, and by with promising of salary increases of some over others who deserve equitable treatment. Although workers suspect these promises to be false, they cannot avoid feelings of jealousy, suspicion and mistrust of each other. Once a divisive situation is established, "it is especially easy for companies to play off their employees against each other" (Fuentes and Ehrenreich 1981:58). Fuentes and Ehrenreich write, "It's a competition in which all workers are losers; wages are driven down everywhere, and health and safety conditions deteriorate, but job security is never achieved". Sociologist Cynthia Enloe is worth quoting here, "We are well being fed the line that we are each other's competitors" (cited in Fuentes and Ehrenreich 1981:58).

The politics of patriarchy being characterized here is not only a shop floor phenomenon but also a process that extends to interpersonal relationships of men and women in households. The following discussion will suggest that there exists a framework of intimidation that systematically resists women's empowerment in society.

9.2.2 Household politics

"Household politics" (Phillips 1989:296) has become a part of the livelihood of women garment workers. Phillips refers to "household politics" as "politics of gender relations and gender mediated political strategies" (Phillips 1989:297) that prevent household breakdown. I will broaden the application of this concept to the context of political-type household strategies of women garment workers of Bangladesh. In the context of the livelihood of women garment workers of Bangladesh, household politics extends beyond breakdown crises. In spite of the fact that marriage and conjugal relationships have become a strategic resort of many workers, they demonstrate more concern for job loss than for the breakdown of nuclear families. In that respect, household politics constitutes a more recent dimension of worker livelihood. It is one-sided—a male administered entity, and a "politics of patriarchy". As well, such politics results in the escalation of worker helplessness and their subjection to patriarchy and unexplored forms of intimidation. For instance, the garment sector provides husbands with the opportunity to easily exploit their wives. Men justify their practice of polygamy with the excuse of sexual discontent due to the prolonged absence, alleged exhaustion and decreased 'libido' of their wives (Khatun 1998:68). Most husbands doubt their wives' chastity, fidelity and purity. *Ashati* (unchaste) is a common term men use against their wives. One worker says, "My husband never believes in my chastity, and calls me *maagi* (whore). I know he spends night after night in brothels but it is me who is named by his deeds!" Some workers also reported that men practice malicious gossip against wives as a means to control their sexuality. This trend parallels Central Peruvian male household heads' practice of selective use of domestic violence and gossip (Mallon 1986) and migrating Mexican male heads' threat of gossip (Wiest 1973, 1983) and threat of physical abuse (Wiest 1983) to keep women from carrying on extra-marital liaison. While using charges of infidelity to control wives, husbands maintain a double standard.

Husbands of workers know that in order for their families to survive wives have to work for wages, but as men they believe home is the right place for their wives. Yet husbands often put their working wives under tremendous psychological pressure for their prolonged absence from home. Such pressure results in the construction of an image of nervous women in the household. In order to avoid being blamed by husbands for

familial detachment, most married workers also try to perform household responsibilities, i.e., shopping, cooking, participating in social functions and entertaining guests, especially friends and relatives of their husbands. Thus, women workers assume a "double bind" (Gannage 1986) situation. "This is a sex-blind conception of work day, because, 'women's work is never done'" (Gannage 1986:76). The other remark Gannage has made about Canadian garment workers also parallels self-perpetuating and intimidating conditions of women garment workers of Bangladesh. She asserts, "while working, their minds are constantly in touch with the needs of their family—planning the next meal or amending the family budget if they are laid off earlier in the year, or discussing family concerns with other women workers. Their working day is never ending" (Gannage 1987:78). Garment workers in Bangladesh view these pressures as yet another form of domestic violence that weakens their reliance on family.

Fertility control also turns into an intimidating practice for married workers. They tend to keep family size as small as possible. It does not mean that they have gained increased knowledge about sexuality, reproductive health and birth control. Although there are no specific statistics, I learned that the rate of conception and incidences of induced abortion are high among women workers. Most married workers consider birth-control to be a dehumanizing effort on their part because induced abortion causes physical and psychological stress on their body and soul. Given their perception of children, especially sons, as "real friends" and "caretakers" and "shelters"[4], they also assume shrinking family size to be a negative process that renders them even more helpless and friendless in their alien urban settings.

Most married workers treat their men as blackmailers and money launderers. Three workers informed me that their husbands had always threatened them with abandonment and remarriage in the event of their failure to pass on a portion of their income. Husbands used to claim dowry from wives, and threaten with marriage to someone else for dowry. Thus, most women workers feel compelled to pass on to their husbands a portion of their income. They do so not as a household strategy but out of their intimidated self—their helpless and hostage condition.

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[4] Three married workers viewed their preference for children with the words "real friends", "caretakers" and "shelter".

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An abandoned worker told her story:

> One day I could not give my husband as much money as he demanded. He went out and came back in the same night with a girl, who he introduced to me as his just-wed wife. I left home and slept over with a female co-worker. When I went home the next morning to bring my clothes, I did not see his so-called just-wed wife. Upon my insistence, he (husband) willingly admitted that the girl he slept with that night was a prostitute. That was the end of my relationship with the man.

This incident supports Mallon's argument (1986) that the capitalist transformation of households turns women into the suppliers of labour and capital. This is true not only in the industrial wage-employment context, but also in the context of household.

9.2.3 Image of domestic manhood

Sometimes the intimidation of women garment workers takes place in the guise of harmonious gender relations within the household. In contrast to the traditionally perceived gender roles, I recorded husbands in eighteen nuclear families who depend on their wives' incom. These husbands claimed that they cook, wash clothes and dishes, and take care of children and other household activities. In an earlier study, Zohir (2000) noted that with women going outside for wage income, men are now compelled to share household work—cleaning, shopping and taking care of children. Table 9.3 shows that three percent of women workers did not do housework before their employment. After employment, women workers in this category rose to fifteen percent. There is about a four per cent rise in men's involvement in cooking (from nine percent to 13 percent). Zohir (2000) observed that there is a correlation between increase in wives' income and increase in contribution of husbands in housework.

Women workers of the present study consider these apparent changes in roles of their husbands to be "ill-motivated" and "suspicious", and maybe a possible "pretext" for taking flight, or to intimidate them by other means. Four workers described that their husbands' had drinking and gambling habits, thus they tend to please their wives by doing household duties. Six workers mentioned that their husbands did not like to do any labourious jobs. As a result, they took over household tasks that are stereotypically defined as women's jobs. Two workers presented their husbands as TV-maniacs who

spend day after day watching satellite television channels on their small black and white television sets. Three workers reported their husbands' addiction to carom board game gambling. For all of these men, wives serve as their sources of gambling money. This is why most women workers consider the image of domestic manhood to be a relative and fragile notion, because they believe that men seldom compromise their macho image. The only exception was a worker who shyly expressed that her husband was of *meyeli* (woman-like) nature and liked doing "women's jobs" more than "men's jobs". Other workers generally incorporated the image of domestic manhood with a relatively newer type intimidation "technique". One worker said, "My husband is a cat if I give him money. The cat becomes tiger if I deny supplying it!" Another worker commented, "Whenever I find household work done nicely, I become rather more frightened because it means to me that he (the husband) would surely ask for my unconditional submission to some of his ugly demands[5]. An abandoned girl expressed her similar experience saying, "My former husband had two jobs only—first, watching *ashobbho*[6] films somewhere outside, and second, forcing and torturing me to do all dirty things for him". She explained that most married workers suffer from sexual intimidation by their husbands, and that husbands use their small contributions in household duties to justify their sexual misconduct over wives. Thus, she commented, "When I realized that my husband abandoned me, and that he would never come back, I felt like I just got out from hell, and won a ticket to heaven".

Table 9.3 Trends of changes (%) in workers' everyday life family roles by sex, 1997

Indicator	Male		Female	
	Before	After	Before	After
Takes decision alone	62.8	77.0	26.4	43.3
Goes out alone	90.3	92.0	19.9	47.5
Buys alone	71.7	85.0	23.3	44.4
Goes to the market	84.5	77.0	11.5	21.3
Does cooking	9.3	13.3	59.8	60.1
Do not do housework	37.6	48.9	3.4	14.7

Source: Zohir, S.C. 2000, adapted from Absar 2001:58

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[5] The worker referred to her husband's habit of bizarre sexual practices.
[6] "Blue" films.

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The sexual intimidation of women, as expressed here, affirms that women's wage-employment may not necessarily bring expected qualitative changes to gender roles within the family. Instead, patriarchy comes to be articulated within capitalism even outside of agriculture (Mallon 1986, Mies 1986). It can be assumed in the context of domestic manhood that perhaps a few men are performing a small share of necessary household responsibilities. Thus for women workers, the visible quantitative changes do not assure a deserved qualitative accomplishment of gender equity.

The framework of intimidation further stretches to the natal household environment of workers. Generally, workers maintain relationships with their natal households. Single (unmarried) workers, divorcees and widows maintain greater attachment with their natal households by remitting small portions of their income. Except for a few female-headed households, power and authority of intra-household decision-making and resource allocation rests in men's hands. Although workers view remittances as an investment (Chapter VIII), they also experience it as another node in the framework of intimidation. Fathers, brothers or other male breadwinners in the natal home front, exploit the normative marriage expectation of girls as a means of money laundering. They appropriate portions of women garment worker incomes in the name of saving, and/or investment in business. The story of a deceived daughter is worth telling here. A father insisted that his daughter remit a larger portion of her income to him for six months. He had repeatedly assured her that he had been saving her remittances to meet ceremonial expenses and dowry costs for her wedding. Soon she discovered that all promises her father made were false and that he consumed every single penny of her remittance. Forty-nine of 113 single workers indicated that male household heads in their communities of origin play disingenuous tricks to prevent them from marriage, because they constitute an insured source of income for them. Such tricks reflect a shift in the traditional marriage principle, because male household heads are considered to be the sole responsible persons to bear matrimonial costs for the girls in family.

The apparent contradiction of the framework of intimidation is that sometimes it appears to be the conscious choice[7] of the workers to transfer some portion of their

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[7] Chapter V and Chapter VII depict conscious choice in worker dependence on men for reasons of security and physical safety.

income to men. Workers explain that this conscious choice does not at all represent a relationship of reliance of women on men but that of dependence of men. Although this hope remains often unrealized, workers expect that the recipients of their remittances would provide them adequate security and greater dignity in time of distress. Three workers described this expectation through an employment metaphor. One of them said, "Actually, we hire men as *thika kamla* (contract labourer) and pay them *service charge*, because they complement the duties of body guards". She added, "The problem is that we are very weak masters (employers). So they deceive us and give inadequate service—just as strong servants do to their weak masters". This strength-weakness dichotomy ultimately strengthens patriarchal power relationships inside the household. Blumberg (1984) mentions that the control of women's wage-income by men is the most critical variable of family level power relationships. Male attempts to control the earnings of women exemplify the complexity of the practice of male power and their framework of intimidation. This framework also increases the disentitlement and disempowerment of women workers in households and in the greater society.

9.3 Entitlement-Disentitlement and Empowerment-Disempowerment

Entitlement refers to one's attachment to material and non-material dues. In Sen's (1983) framework, poverty and deprivation are results of entitlement failure. The opposite of poverty is "capabilities"—the combination of entitlements (such as exchange rights and property claims) and endowments (assets, money, helping hands) *per se*. Household is the primary genre of entitlement. Sen (1982) and Kabeer (1991) provide a broader meaning of entitlement that it "accommodates intra-household distribution based on normative kinship and family structure" (Kabeer 1991:245, cited in Wiest 1998:65). However, under the conditions of gender-based normative principles of distribution and consumption, and conflict of interests and power endowment, gendered crises of entitlement[8] may stem from inside family and households. Sen's (1990b) "cooperative

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[8] Sen (1982) introduces "entitlement" as an essential human capability, the lack of which results in degradation of livelihood standard, starvation and famine even under abundant food supply. Famine occurs not for scarcity of food, but for lack of individual's entitlement to required food. The term is a philosophical expression of one's attachment to his or her dues. In principle, the theory implies that a person has complete right and freedom of being attached to, or to attain, what the person is legally or socially entitled to. Moreover, the individual possesses the right to exchange his owned entitlements in

conflict model" implies that the household is thought to be a cooperative unit of production and consumption that must ensure entitlement of its members. Whenever some members, especially women, become deprived or denied of the entitlements, conflict of interest ensues within the household. In Wiest's words, "... there can be conflict between the interests of men and women members of the family unit" (Wiest 1998:65). My preceding discussion, demonstrating that wage-labour opportunities for women have led to exploitation and appropriation of their income by male household members, supports this assertion.

My discussions with parents of garment workers further shed light on worker disentitlement and conflict of interest within households. I interviewed fathers of sixteen garment workers at their rural residences. All of them claimed that whatever their daughters had been remitting to them were their dues and that they retained every right to consumption of remittances. I asked what they would do if their daughters were sent to in-laws' home as brides instead of to cities as workers? None of them replied specifically to this question. Fathers of eight workers claimed that their daughters got a job due to their *doa* (blessing), but I learned that five of them had always opposed the migration of their daughters and wished their daughter to never return home. In my follow-up discussions afterwards, all five workers rejected the concept of *doa*, and reframed it sarcastically as *boddoa* (curse) of their parents. One garment worker said, "They are so ungrateful that God is forced to take our side, and turn their *bobdoa* (curse) into Allah's own blessing, as he rescues us from their (the parents) hell."

Workers carry burdens of "disentitlement" by "passing on" (Rahman 1999:40-41)[9] resources within normative entitlements. Most garment workers perceive that they remit upon a sense of moral obligation to respect parents because parents gave birth and raised them. I interviewed the father of a worker who had deprived his daughter of her due share of a small familial land, and sold it without her consent. He commented at one point in my discussion with him, "She did not give me birth; it was I who gave her birth. So where is the point to ask her what I should do and not do?" His daughter, the worker,

order to gain or access other entitlements. "Inability" contrasts with "entitlement". "Inability" means lack of power to get hold of objects or services one is entitled to, i.e., what one deserves.
[9] Rahman discovered that poor women receive credit from the Grameen Bank (Bangladesh). However, the program generates "disempowerment" of women because of their submission under household norms and "passing on" of credit to their husbands.

expressed the reason for her helplessness in submission to that condition saying, "I have so much hate for him, for his unkindness and injustice; but you know, he is my father above everything! So, God will curse me if I go against him." Another worker said, "You know, men are always men, and we are always women the inferiors. Therefore, I think it is always wise to live with them with patience and tactfully, and not at all by raising their anger".

It is also observed that the workers themselves assume patriarchal norms. The majority of workers (53%) of this study considered men to be superior to women. 46% of workers perceive that men provide the best security to women. The same number of workers expressed uncertainty of their viewpoint (Table 9.4). This finding suggests that the wage-employment of garment workers has raised little or no conscientization, but that it has widened the range of their confusion regarding entitlement and empowerment. Workers have also demonstrated considerable confusion about core gender issues—whether women should always satisfy men, and whether they consider "home" to be the main place for women. They are also confused about their future roles to demand just and equitable treatment from men. Importantly, only eleven percent of workers perceive that women should challenge the injustice of men as well as press their rightful demand for a due share of consumption and endowment. In contrast, 36% of workers believe in traditional normative principles of not challenging men.

Table 9.4 Women garment workers' embrace of normative principles, Bangladesh, 1999 and 2001 (N=212)

Normative principles	Yes	%	Unsure	%	No	%
Men are always superior	112	52.83	94	44.34	6	2.83
Men provide women best security	98	46.23	98	46.23	16	7.55
Women should always obey men	89	41.98	103	44.58	20	9.43
Men have right on women's income	84	39.62	12	5.67	116	54.72
Home is the main place for women	77	36.32	106	50.00	30	14.15
Women should not challenge men	76	35.85	112	52.83	24	11.32
Men have right to control women	119	56.13	13	6.13	80	37.74

This study reveals a grim picture of women's disentitlement to food, nutrition, property rights, legal endowments and material dues. My findings support the assertions of Paul-Majumder and Begum (2000) and Absar (2002) that both the quality and the

quantity of food intake by women workers do not meet minimum nutrition needs. None of the divorced and abandoned wives received compensation from their former husbands. Three abandoned workers mentioned that they had requested male guardians of their respective natal households to assist them in their legal pursuit to receive compensation from their former husbands, but did not receive any support from them. None of the married Muslim workers I interviewed had received *mohrana* (bride-price)[10]. One worker raised an important question, "We are taught by parents to treat husbands as the sole guardian, and not to raise our voice. What is the meaning of this teaching if we claim *moharana* from husbands?"

Garment workers' views of gender relations show that although they have acquired considerable survival skills (as portrayed in Chapter 8) and preparedness to accept challenging jobs, little changes have taken place in their "habitus" (Bourdieu 1990:53)—incorporation of social dispositions, i.e., gendered socialization and ideology of normative entitlements in the material world. Most workers submit to traditional norms as a rational choice. Forty percent of them believe that men have the right to control women's income (Table 9.6). Fifty-three percent of workers believe that men are always superior to women, and 56% of workers hold to the idea that men have the right to control women. Only three percent of workers believe in the equality of male and female. This rigidity of a gendered mindset conforms to Bourdieu's discovery of a rigid worldview of women in the North African Kabyle society. Bourdieu observed that, although women in the Kabyle society had taken advantage of the wage-employment opportunities of the capitalist market system, their gendered perceptions remained unchanged. As with the Kabyle women who perceived male domination as a natural and rational social choice, women RMG workers of Dhaka also believe in the authority of men.

The reason for their rigid mindset may be that, although it is socially imposed, as Bourdieu explains, it is actually inscribed, incorporated and reproduced in the gendered habitus. The gendered habitus constructs and reconstructs their identity in a binary

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[10] According to the Muslim marriage law, it is mandatory for every groom to declare a modest amount of *mohrana* (bride-price) for his bride, and the groom must pay his wife the amount (composed of money and/ or property and assets) during their conjugal life. This is different from compensation for divorce or separation, and must be paid to the wife without any exception.

fashion—domestic or private social identity of women, and that of market or public identity of men. The garment workers also nurture the idea of public men and private women. Foucault's (1980) capture of this dynamic is worth noting. He asserts that, in relation to gender, social norms and practices are more powerful than consciousness. Thus, the power of rationality often does not pass through consciousness (Foucault 1980:186). As patriarchal household norms in Bangladesh revolve within the cultural context of social structure, women perceive the transfers of male authority over their social and labour power, from father to husband or brother, and to son (Kabeer 1991, Hamid 1996) in an orderly manner, and as a rational social process. The process keeps women disentitled, as if they have no place-of-being in society. This subaltern state of livelihood generally vivifies their lack of household-based entitlement.

Both framework of intimidation and lack of household-based entitlement weakens Boserup's (1970) thesis asserting that participation of women in wage-employment leads to their economic self-reliance, empowerment and dignified status in the household. The garment workers' preference for sons also reflects that wage-employment of the RMG sector has not contributed to a notable improvement in their empowerment and conscientization. Agarwal (1990), Dreze and Sen (1989), and Kabeer (1991) clarify the notion that women's participation in economic activities alone cannot bring empowerment, specifically within the existence of established socio-cultural norms that produce gender bias, inequality and deprivation in the household division of labour and consumption. With the persistence of these conditions, women workers construct their own identity with ambivalence in a context of confusion and uncertainty. Thus, their gendered entitlement within the family and household remains a weak and fragile entity. To some extent, passing on their entitlement contributes to the rejuvenation of male power and authority that is intimidatingly cloaked.

It is generally thought that the RMG sector has opened up ways for empowerment of women factory workers by orientating them to the modern world (Naved 1994; Kibria 1995); through their breaking of tradition and achievement of awareness of rights, through gaining purchasing and decision-making power (Khan 2001; Paul-Majumder and Begum 2000), and through increased involvement in family-bound decision-making processes (Jamaly and Wickramanayake 1996). The common instances used in defence

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of these arguments are that the workers now retain and practice the freedom of choice in purchasing preferable groceries, cosmetics, as well as to go to movies without male companions (Afsar 1998). It is also asserted in this body of literature that, with wage-income, women achieve power to play a decisive role in household activities and entitlements, and that such power strengthens their decision-making capacity as well as increases their access to and control over income and material resources.

Does wage earning empower women? Does the RMG sector symbolize women's introduction to an empowerment process? "Empowerment" is taken to be an individual's or group's ability to legitimately ensure entitlement decisions and enfranchisements in its favour (Agarwal 1990:394-95). For women, empowerment in its classical sense is understood as "adding to women's power" (Hamid 1996:135) of participation in decision making in social, political and psychological spheres. According to Freidmann, social, political and psychological spheres form an interconnected triad centered round an individual woman and her household (Hamid 1996:135). Thereby, women's access to and control over household entitlements are considered to be determinants of their status of empowerment within the household (Agarwal 1990, Dreze and Sen 1989, Sen 1990a and Kabeer 1989). Lack of entitlement of women in their households is at the root of the disempowerment process. In this light, I investigated two interrelated phenomena. First, what is the general level of entitlement of women workers in their natal and new-formed households? Second, to what extent do they enjoy access to and control over their income, and to what extent do they practice decision-making power in everyday life household activities?

A considerable number of workers believe that they have gender equity in opinion generation; but this condition is always variable—sometimes they feel that they have equity and sometimes not [11]. Only one-third (31%) of all workers perceive that they surely have equity in opinion generation. Fifty-one percent of workers believe that, although they have equity in basic consumption, it is also variable depending on their income-level, job position, remitting capacity, etc. Only thirty four percent of workers

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[11] It is worth noting here that workers' opinions represent their entitlement in family and household only at the time they were interviewed. The term "variable" refers to the reality that their views change with their experiences of frequent migration, change of partners, and joblessness. Some workers who have been enjoying equity at the time they were interviewed may not experience equity at another time with a changed context and a different set of experiences.

have always had equity in spending-related decision taking. Forty-eight percent of women workers perceive that male bread-earners sometimes work together with them in making plans for financing or investing their meagre savings and remittances.

Table 9.5 Women garment workers' general sense of empowerment, Bangladesh, 1999 and 2001 (N=212)

Indicators*	Surely		Irregularly		Never	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Equity in opinion generation	66	31.1	98	46.2	44	20.8
Equity in basic consumption	83	39.2	107	50.5	22	10.4
Equity in decisions of spending	34	16.4	170	80.2	8	3.8
Bread-earner solicits financing	69	32.6	101	47.6	42	19.8
Ability to express opinion in public	109	51.4	89	42.0	14	6.6
Self-confidence in dealing with strangers	176	83.0	18	8.5	18	8.5

*Indicators adapted from Mujeri and Singh 1998:78

In general, these figures reflect that the assumption of equity for women workers constitutes an image of privilege, and not that of their right. Yet, bread-earners[12] of twenty percent of workers do not care or feel obliged to engage working women in finance decisions of women's' savings and remittance. They take arbitrary decisions of finance management.

Except for a few cases (16%), male household heads generally do not force women wage earners to hand over their income (Table 9.6). Although 61% of women described that male household heads claim benefits from their wage-earned income, these men usually do not impose decisions on how to spend the earner's income, and do not assert their right of spending. Kibria (1995) also observes that women workers generally possess control over their income. However, my study suggests that such control does not necessarily refer to any significant change in their belief, attitude and worldview,. These conditions do not assure that women have due access to and control over income and spending; as Bourdieu alerts, "there are as many ways of realizing femininity as there are classes and class fractions" (1979:107-8). Given the presence of established male authoritarianism and framework of intimidation, perhaps their disentitlement is indirect and cloaked (often accentuated through blackmailing and cheating).

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[12] "Bread earner" represent the workers' view and their own classification and categorization of male household heads.

Table 9.6 Perception of entitlement to own wage earnings and control expenditures among 212 women garment workers, Bangladesh, 1999 and 2001

Husband/father/male household heads:	Yes (N)	%	No (N)	%
Forces wage earners to hand over salary	34	16.0	178	84.0
Claims or interferes with wage earner's salary	98	46.2	114	53.8
Asserts right to spend earner's income	77	36.3	135	63.7
Claims benefits from wage earner's income	130	61.3	82	38.7
Imposes decision on how to spend earner's income	56	26.4	156	73.6

Normative bondage paves the way to women's shop-floor-based gendered exploitation, the double bind (Gannage 1986) between job and unremunerated domestic responsibilities (Kelkar and Nathan 1998), and deprivation of their children from educational opportunities. Yet, a contrasting feature of women workers' livelihood is that, despite their general submission to normative entitlement (Chapter VII), many of them have acquired new meanings of self-identity and confidence, and economic power and independence in their individual livelihood context. Absar writes, "There is a (positive) change in attitude towards early marriage, the dowry system, adoption of family planning, economic management, and career advancement and upward mobility" (2002:212). Despite their plight, women garment workers in Bangladesh attain at least a relative or obscure form of freedom of speech and of movement, and access to and control over decision-making regarding their own spending and livelihood (see Khatun 1998). This is reflected in the perceptions and preferences of women workers regarding future jobs (see Chapter VIII, Table 8.1), which in a way bear witness to their rejection and challenge of the conventional gender-based division of labour. The expression of a worker captures this newfound meaning in their identity: "We do marry now *(biye kori)*; we do not get married or sit for marriage *(biye boshi na)*". Their perception of income endowment also hints a promise of change. Fifty-five percent of workers perceive that men do not possess the right to their income (Table 9.6), and that whatever they share or pass on to men constitutes a form of grace money. The majority (83%) of them demonstrate their increased self-confidence in dealing with strangers, and more than half (51%) realize the ability to express their opinion in public (see Table 9.4). These developments may have enhanced their mobility and capacity of adaptation as well as

prevented their destitution by still other means in adverse social contexts. They may have gained some new recognition too. However, the evidence presented in the wide array of analysis of this study reflects that globalization in general, and the garment sector resulted in the creation of a framework of intimidation—a rather recent and more complex set of gender relations in Bangladesh society. It is evident in the transit society livelihood of women garment workers of Bangladesh.

CHAPTER X

CONCLUSION

Rising landlessness and deteriorating livelihood conditions in the countryside assure a steady supply of young women in search of urban jobs and escape from the oppressions of patriarchy and poverty. This scenario is a familiar one around the world as national-states jockey to favourable position in the competition for investment capital that promises to offer livelihood alternatives to their poor and disenfranchised. (Wiest and Mohiuddin 2003b:2)

10.1 Analytical Perspective

Globalization and the commodification of labour in the Bangladesh RMG export sector has led to the displacement of traditional agrarian workers, and changed their interdependence from agrarian production to urban consumption. It is evident through this study that the RMG-borne globalization process in Bangladesh has contributed scantily to cultural homogenization, which is generally thought of as an attribute of globalization (Robbins 1999:25-32). The reason is that cultural homogenization implies the acquisition of global standard taste, demand and perceived affordability for consumption of certain commodities, but that the women workers of the RMG sector never accomplish that capability. Instead, they have become rather more impoverished—pauperized in a literal sense. Commodity fetishism (Taussig 1980) is an alien concept for them with respect to their everyday life and hand-to-mouth survival struggle. Rather, this "trickle down" (Hirschman 1965) economic development process has generated upheaval of survival and livelihood strife on the local level. The conditions can be viewed through the lens of "production of locality" (Appadurai 1995:7), because social and regional heterogenization has shaken broader community organizations and established social safety nets. In the national scenario, territorial regulations are replaced by extraterritorial deregulation, which means that national economic conservatism (i.e., import substitution policy) is replaced by international pressure (i.e., imposed structural adjustment and free

market policy). In the local context, wage-migration has also led to the replacement of women workers' social, contractual, mutual, traditional and communal agrarian livelihood with a depersonalized, alienating and urban division of labour. In view of the replacements of territorial regulations with exterritorial deregulation, the process may also connote "supraterritoriality" (Scholte 1996:45) or "deterritorialization" (Appadurai 1996).

The holistic stance of this study envisions that the wage-migration of women increases competition for limited jobs between surplus labourers; and that the cost of labour declines correspondingly. The process leaves women workers with little accessibility to other means of wage-occupation, and therefore, they become compelled to serve as a reserve labour army of the sector (Marx 1958, Bravermann 1974). In regard to communal restrictions and sanctions on women's activities, the wage-migration of workers has invoked direct conflict with patriarchy and customs of their places of origins, and traditional mores and perceived norms of the conservative social order of Bangladesh society. In the urban context, workers experience occupational health hazards, unsafe and unhygienic workplace; absence of physical and emotional security; absence of social safety net and adequate legal protection. Their wage-migration also contributes to an increase in the numbers of woman-headed and single-parent households. Increased incidences of pre-marital sexual relationships, divorce, separation; questioning of the role of religion and of marriage and family and other approved social institutions and bonds, indicate their exposure to increased livelihood strife. Added to these stressors, the lack of recognition of women's wage earning in a patriarchal social system propels their double burden—domestic responsibilities and low-wage workplace duties. These individualizing tendencies aggravate their vulnerability to sexual abuse and exploitation, and leads to a framework of intimidation and disentitlement within an established social safety net. They also become victims of systematic social exclusion—being cast away from their natal community for rebelliousness, and marginalized by class prerogative of better-off urban neighbourhood people. Above all, these problems are compounded to produce their imminent destitution following the impending collapse of the garment sector, caused by the withdrawal of multinational corporations from Bangladesh to elsewhere in the world in search of even cheaper sources of labour. Thus, "insecurity" and "choicelesssness"

(helplessness) become grounded in worker livelihood. These elements of social upheaval turn this localizing process of globalization into something that conforms to "grounded globalization" (Burawoy 2000:341), which means actual grounded global-local experiences of people within the structure of their ideological and perception domains. Appadurai's (1995, 1996) term *ideoscape* comes into application throughout this process.

In a methodological sense, this study unfolds a phenomenological intersubjectivity (Cohen 1984) which digs beneath surface understanding of the livelihood insecurity of women workers that renders them rootless and helpless. The phenomenological stance of this study has revealed that women workers cope with livelihood insecurities by resorting to two contradictory strategic responses: a survival strategy in the first instance, and a "take-no-risk" strategy in the second. Their desperation for survival and adaptation to city life leads to the adoption of non-conventional and innovative means—juxtaposition of contradictory practices and expectations. As a livelihood strategy of safety and self-protection, they construct an image of untraceable and missing women, and nourish this image by frequently concealing their identity and relocating from one place to another during most of their job-life. The other strategy is directed toward conflict resolution and avoiding confrontation and challenge on shop floors and within households and kinship circles. They adopt non-violent means; they submit and compromise, and pass on their entitlement to perceived male caretakers without realizing reciprocation. In the workplace, they recreate the image of docile femininity—nimbleness, obedience and dedication. These strategies have three common features. First, they are a reflection of a "rural mind" and "urban soul" of the workers—ingrained and unchanged socialization for submission (rural mind), and fascination for urban comfort and excitement (urban soul). It is also reflected in their identification of self-existence in a "transitory society" (*ferryghat samaj*) characterized by ambiguity and a sharp juxtaposition between the "known" and the "unknown". They know that the RMG sector will collapse and they will have to search for alternative and suitable wage-employment, but they do not know what these occupations would be. Second, strategies hinder worker solidarity and arrest prospects for their political emancipation, empowerment and gender equity. Third, these strategies constitute a self-deluding response of workers to globalization forces, which

ultimately perpetuates their gendered vulnerability to deplorable livelihood conditions between the past and the future. This crisis situation in the private sphere of worker livelihood reflects emergent "privatization of the crisis" (Benería 1992) in Bangladesh society.

Thus, it can be said that women's wage-income has not reduced gender inequality in society; rather, it is increased in most instances. Women have remained yet a "men's colony" (Mies 1986). Globalization-driven wage-employment may provide the garment workers an illusionary sense of freedom of speech and of movement, self-confidence and self-reliance, and access to and control over decision-making regarding their own spending and livelihood (but only in a relative sense). In fact, globalization results in the commodification of femininity and a framework of intimidation and exploitation of women workers. This framework brings in social disorder and chaos, and systematically curbs the possibility for women workers to become a formal labour force in the national economy.

10.2   Summary of Findings

10.2.1 Livelihood change

a)   The notion of "insecurity" (Chapter VI) captures a whole range of socio-economic and occupational conditions and concomitant life-world stressors of women garment workers. Occupational and social and residential insecurity are intertwined phenomena. These three types of insecurity together constitute worker "choicelessness". This means that the stressors and distresses encircle them from every direction, making it difficult for them to select a better livelihood option.

b)   A rapid process of social disorganization accompanies the expansion of the garment sector. Disorganization is reflected in marital fragility, trafficking of women, polygamy, infidelity, and conjugally-based blackmailing, deception and fraud, and erosion of their value system, ethics and morality.

c)   The elimination of child labour from factories has resulted in tremendous crises in adolescent socialization. The lack of supervision by working guardians has paved their way to juvenile delinquency, child vagrancy (*toakigiri*), child abuse, sex-trade and forced

and paid homosexuality, drug addiction, and joining in street-corner gangs and crime rackets.

10.2.2 Livelihood strategies

Despite the everyday struggle, the garment workers of this study show a remarkable resilience. I consider economic security as the most immediate livelihood need of the Bangladesh garment workers, because the livelihood strategies of workers begin with the goal to achieving it (see also Lomintz 1977). In order to attain this goal, they adopt a harmony view, and avoid confrontation and challenge. In the household, women's survival strategies are often expressed in the form of their submission and compromise, and "passing on" of their entitlement to so-called male caretakers (Rahman 1999). This response appears to be a strategy of conflict resolution inside households. As well, these responses recreate the image of docile womanhood in the workplace. This type of response constitutes a take-no-risk strategy on the part of women workers. In the final analysis, none of the strategies takes a political turn. Rather, they reflect an overall survival strategy to cope with everyday life stressors.

In this study I detail the livelihood strategies of workers as follows:

a)   Livelihood strategies of women garment workers of Bangladesh take two forms— survival strategies and adaptation strategies. Because of the high intensity and magnitude of life-world stressors, the struggle of "survival" surpasses the struggle of "adaptation" in urban livelihood. This is the reason for the workers' marginal adaptation with urbanity, and their preoccupation with struggle for survival.

b)   Survival strategies are reflected primarily in their frequent relocation, and secondarily in income-supplementation strategies, i.e., off-factory stitching and handicraft selling, catering supply, money-lending, buying on credit, and. in desperate cases, resorting to off-factory prostitution. Their shop-floor resistance—"weapons of the weak" (Scott 1985)—lies in between these strategies, more as reaction to inhumane work conditions than as livelihood strategy.

c)   Worker livelihood is a concealed domain in the sphere of human interaction. For strategic reasons, they conceal information of age, education, marital status, place of origin, and work experience. Their disposition to remain "untraceable" results in their

alienation and individuation, generates conflict and enmity, and results in social isolation. These are factors that hinder prospects for social solidarity and collective action.

d)   In some circumstances, the subaltern strategies of women garment workers stimulate challenges to established social institutions. For instance, women garment workers of Bangladesh have transformed marriage, a social institution, into strategic tools of their survival. In spite of the persistence of strict social norms and religious sanctions against the profanation of marriage, women workers use marriage as a temporary means of shelter and security from sexual harassment and their physical vulnerability, and as a strategy to evade dowry obligation. Sometimes marriage represents an on-the-spot contestation of patriarchy, while at other times it serves as an excuse for their non-remittance to the natal family.

e)   To workers, their remittance is a perceived means of survival, which is construed in the image of "investment" and "insurance" against unforeseen livelihood adversities of the future.

10.2.3 Rural-urban linkage

a)   In the urban scenario garment worker existence constitutes a "transit society" (*ferryghat samaj*)—a state of transition for an unknown destination, restlessness of the present, and uncertainty of future livelihood options. In the rural perspective, they hold the image of the expelled and unaccepted, and unexpected members.

b)   A complex identity crisis arises in live of workers. This is a condition characterized by a "rural mind" and "urban soul" of the incumbents, as if they live in a "nowhere" state of mind and body and soul. Workers possess and nurture and maintain a strong conviction for rural values and norms. At the same time, they hold a strong inclination toward urban comfort of relative freedom of movement.

c)   Wage-employment in the RMG sector has set the conditions for rapid erosion of traditional reciprocal interdependence and social cohesion, and inhibited solidarity and collective social action in both rural bases and urban settlements.

10.2.4 Gender dimension

This study vivifies three general and interconnected gender attributes of globalization-led livelihood of workers:

a)   Women's wage-income has not reduced gender inequality in society; rather, gender inequality has been increased in most instances.

b)   The livelihood of worker is intertwined with identity construction. Commodification of labour has taken an ideological shape, and turned into commodification of femininity. The process of commodification of femininity is instituted in the construction of imagery of desirability of women, and through creation of workplace-based norms of "tenderness", female docility and nimbleness of women in opposition to the imagery of "emasculated" (not man nor womanlike) men.

c)   The globalization-led RMG sector provides the context for the creation of a framework of intimidation of women workers. This framework ranges from the household to the workplace, and self-deceiving strategic responses of workers to globalization forces ultimately perpetuate their gendered vulnerability to further worsening livelihood conditions.

10.3   Epilogue: Commentary on Practical Implications

This study documents that security is the most immediate need of women workers. This finding calls for policy attention to rid women workers from occupational, residential and social insecurities (Chapter V). These insecurities are mutually interactive—one has an impact on the other in a cause-effect cycle. For instance, slum dwellers live in minimally secured conditions, and these conditions increase their vulnerability to sexual assault and victimization by crime syndicates. These experiences further cause absenteeism and degradation in performance and lack of concentration in assignments. Consequently, women workers face managerial abuse and dismissal. At the point of survival crisis, they relocate to newer places to live and another job to provide income. Within this cause-effect relationship, the slum signifies their residential insecurity, and assaults are defined as social insecurity. Consequent job loss reflects their occupational insecurity, and relocation represents another dimension of insecurity. Workers who live in buildings in neat residential areas may come across different

adversities, i.e., distance from factories or lack of suitable transportation options from home to factories. These conditions, as well as the need to minimize livelihood stressors of women workers, call for attention to three alternative measures: relocation of factories to the Export Processing Zones (EPZs), provisions of housing and provisions for social action. On the basis of my observation, the following overview is offered.

In common, all informants of this study outlined two problems that they believe must be "solved before anything else[1]". One is the dispersal of factories all over the city, and the other is the lack of provision of factory-adjacent worker residences. It has become evident through worker opinions, as well as my close observation of factory locations and worker residences, that workers of the EPZ-based factories face fewer residential and transportation problems than those of the sparsely located factories outside the EPZ. As well, EPZ workers experience less social insecurity like sexual harassment and victimization by criminal gangs than the non-EPZ workers. This fact, and residential stressors (described in Chapter VI) reinforce the suggestion that the garment sector should be transferred to the EPZs. Nuruzzaman (1999) blames weak planning by the government that did not foresee the problem in permitting installation of factories outside the EPZs. He also blames weaknesses and the inefficiency of law-enforcing authorities that allow the owners to install their factories next to narrow lanes of residential areas.

There are growing needs for more EPZs, and most workers believe that the government of Bangladesh (GOB) can and should establish more EPZs, as well as strictly enforce factory laws to regulate unlawful operation of the factories. Meanwhile, in 2000, BGMEA and the GOB planned to implement an ambitious "garment villages" project (BGMEA 2001:12). The objective of the plan was to relocate factories from Dhaka to a well-planned new industrial zone. In order to implement the plan, the Bangladesh government and BGMEA already launched a search for suitable *khas* (government-owned) land along the Dhaka-Chittagong and Dhaka-Narsingdi highways (BGMEA 2001:12). However, no progress in implementation of the projects was observed by July 2002 (the conclusion of fieldwork for this study).

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[1] Quoted from a worker's expression.

There are ample grounds to suspect the sincerity of the factory owners in the implementation of this project. I interviewed six factory officials to examine their opinions about relocation of their factories to the garment village. All of them expressed their reluctance to comply with relocation—obviously in fear of profit reduction. All of them claimed that transfer of factories would not be cost-effective. I asked if they would move if the Government of Bangladesh (GOB) or foreign donors would bear costs of relocation of their instruments and factory facilities. Still, none of them considered such a proposal to be acceptable. Their opinion was that these changes would increase manufacturing costs and decrease competitiveness in the highly competitive global apparel market. They also expressed the opinion that the GOB may back off from the plan of establishing new EPZs because of fear of a corresponding collapse of the RMG industry with the MFA phase out in 2005. These opinions indicate that the GOB and the factory owners have little concern for the solution of the everyday-life problems of workers. Their vision also reflects that the sector is established upon a short-term profit policy on the part of both the GOB and the factory owners, and that this policy has deliberately focused and fostered a short-lasting manufacturing sector merely for the purpose of export revenue earning. However, I suggest that if the GOB were to implement an integrated garment village project, in the event of collapse of the RMG industry, it could be utilized for domestic industrialization, or relocation of other environmentally hazardous manufacturing industries[2] from Dhaka.

Dispersal of factories caused limited provision of factory-adjacent residences of the workers. Yet in recent years, the Bangladesh government, BGMEA[3], and NGOs gave considerable attention to mitigate the residential problems of workers. Zohir and Paul-Majumder (1996) found that a factory provided low-cost housing in Rampura, Dhaka while another factory in Elephant Road provided free accommodation to thirty workers of a northern district. The low-cost housing accommodated seventy Garo (an ethnic minority community of Bangladesh) women workers. The workers were to pay only 450 Taka (US $9 at the time of that study) per month for both food and lodging. The Bangladesh NGO *Nari Uddyog Kendra* (NUK) has been operating a low-cost hostel

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[2] E.g., polythene and plastic factories, *biri* (tobacco) factories, waste recycling plants, etc.
[3] Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association

project since 1991. This NGO has four hostels located in Mohakhali, Shaymoli, Mirpur and Rampura. These hostels accommodate 600 women garment workers of Dhaka.

Besides these marginal efforts, large housing projects remained unfinished. In 1998, the then Minister of Industries committed to construct a garments village (*palli*) (*The Independent* 1998a:7) in Savar for factory workers of nearby Export Processing Zones (EPZs). The much talked about 40 million dollar (US$) project involves the BGMEA, the BRAC[4] and the government. It aims to ensure accommodation of 240,000 workers (*The Independent* 1998b:7). In 1998, the BGMEA also planned to construct two eighty-flat multi-storied building to house 4,000 workers in each building (*The Independent* 1998e:13). Also, BRAC received government loan worth TK 100 million to construct ten low-cost hostels for women garment workers in South Khan of Dhaka city (*Daily Ajker Kagoj*, 13 November 2001). The BGMEA, with financial assistance of ILO, and UNICEF and UNDP, undertook three housing projects for the garment workers in Dhaka (*BGMEA Newsletter* 1998b:9). One of these projects is planned to build six multi-storied low-cost buildings to ease the housing problem (*BGMEA Newsletter* 1998f:2).

None of these projects have been implemented yet. The factory officials I interviewed conceived these plans as utopian and contradictory to the "garment village" projects. They raised questions regarding the justification of these Dhaka-based residential projects, with relation to the proposed "garment village" project that suggests relocation of factories outside Dhaka. They suspect that such inconsistencies and disintegration between projects would ultimately lead to inaction or failure of all projects.

Workers and trade union leaders differ sharply with the managerial viewpoints. They explain that, if these projects were implemented, the relocation of factories and workers would not result in financial loss to these settlement projects. They view that these low-cost housing projects would rather meet the residential needs of thousands of low-income people of Dhaka city, and would always remain a profitable business sector.

Given the fact of high market demand for commercial space and for living space in Dhaka, my research supports worker demand for more low-cost housing projects. These projects could serve the present residential needs of women garment workers, and other urban poor in the event of worker relocation to garment villages.

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[4] Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) is one of the biggest NGOs of Bangladesh.

There is a growing need for public and private initiatives to assist women workers in enhancing their livelihood options. In case study 8.1, Salma urged for civil society initiatives. Salma reiterated her strong conviction that NGOs or civil societies would be able to play a vital role to help change livelihood conditions of poor garment workers. She refers to the contribution of the NGO that provided her with motivational support and counselling in reproductive health and sexually transmitted diseases. I quote here her statement, "If all girls received such counselling and knowledge, their livelihood would be free of exploitation and misery, and the most important of all facts is that such motivation can only be provided by better-off and better educated people".

A few NGOs have taken initiatives to ease the livelihood struggle of the workers. Although NGO programs are generally limited in scope, and serve only a few, workers prefer NGOs[5] for their approaches oriented to poor people. Most NGO programs are directed to maternal and child health and family planning [MCH-FP] (CARE, FPA, ICDDR,B); reproductive health awareness campaigns (Merry Stopes Clinic, Radda Barnen); legal support (ASK, WLA); political mobilization, conscientization and awareness building on occupational rights (KoNa); housing and occupational health (Joutha Udyog); day care and orphanages (Fulki); credit (Proshika); and non-formal primary education [NFPE] (Fulki, BRAC) for jobless child workers. Among these NGOs, only Fulki deals with workers' problems of housing, childcare and education of children of garment workers. In 1999, with support of eight factory managers, Fulki launched eight daycare centers in Monipuripara, KarwanBazar, Malibagh, Kolyanpur and Hatkhola area. Again with funding of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), it had established 22 daycare centres and orphanages in adjacent areas of the factory zones of Dhaka by 2002. Fulki also motivates the factory owners to initiate these provisions as part of their factory operation. By 2002, Fulki handed ownership of three orphanages over to the factory owners.

UCEP-Bangladesh (Underprivileged Children's Education Program) launched several training centers (UCEP-Bangladesh) for RMG-based skill development (BGMEA

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[5] Prominent Bangladesh NGOs are: *Gonoshasthya Kendra*, Merry Stopes Clinic, *Radda Barnen*, Concerned Women for Family Planning (CWFP), Bangladesh Family Planning Association (FPA), *Joutha Udyog*, *Fulki*, BRAC, CARE, *Kormojibi Nari* (*KoNa*), Bangladesh *Mohila Ainjibi Somity* (Women Lawyers Association [WLA]), *Ain O Salish Kendra* (*ASK*) and International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh (CDDR,B).

Newsletter 1998d:17). Its "Earn and Learn" program was started in 1998 to provide training and post-education employment to child workers affected by the elimination of child workers from factories (*BGMEA Newsletter* 1998e:4). In the wake of the 2005 MFA phase out, BRAC has recently launched a rehabilitation program for jobless workers. The program aims to offer workers training for self-employment, and their integration to alternative occupations like small business and petty trading; raising of poultry, dairying or fisheries; homestead gardening; laundry operation; cottage and handicraft promotion through embroidery, block, boutique, and tie-die; and restaurant and fast-food businesses. The impacts of these programs on worker livelihood have yet to be evaluated. I suggest evaluation of these programs, and the introduction of a national policy in the light of the performance of the NGOs and impacts of their programs. Since the MFA phase out process will likely render the RMG sector unsustainable, a national policy of rehabilitation and self-employment of women must be devised immediately.

Trade Unions should contribute as well. Although weakly organized, trade unions have succeeded in the formation of an alliance—the Bangladesh Garments Sramik Oikya Parishad. The alliance launched a movement to realize four basic demands of workers. These demands are: 1) Factory owners must issue appointment letters, identity cards, pay-slips and service books to workers. 2) They must practice national minimum wage regulation, and provide seniority and experience benefits to the workers. 3) Workers must be paid for weekly and national holidays, a festival allowance, and health and security insurance, and female workers must be paid a twelve-week maternity leave and be exempted from night duty. 4) The BGMEA must construct worker residences in industrial zones. On November 29, 1997, the alliance organized a nationwide successful protest to force the BGMEA to realize its four-point demand charter. The charter was adopted in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the BGMEA and the alliance. Although the BGMEA promised the labour minister of the Bangladesh government in 1998 that all demands would be meet by March of 1999, no action had been taken by July 2002, when my fieldwork was concluded.

The "divide and rule" policy of the factory management has always weakened worker solidarity. Therefore, the alliance must attend to conflict resolution and strengthening of worker solidarity. Although Afsar observed little efficiency of trade

unions in occupational dispute negotiations (1998:5), Absar (2002) sees prospects for change in trade unions. She wrote, "Najma Akhter, a female trade union leader, claims to listen to around 200 workers every day" (Absar 2002:67). Her optimism is reflected in this statement, "Trade unions work for workers and successfully fight cases on their behalf to ensure proper wage payments and so forth" (Absar 2002:67).

The lack of occupational safety and the absence of a security net provide the basis for shop-floor based exploitation of workers. Workers who are exposed to injustice and exploitation often cannot afford the high cost of legal actions. Trade unions, along with human rights organizations, should come forward with their projects to provide low cost and voluntary legal support to workers. Prodipon—a voluntary legal support organization—sets examples of success for any such projects. Prodipon has had success in bringing justice to 38 exploited workers. The case of Eva, a former garment worker of Evans Garment in Mirpur, is worth noting here. Eva, after being unjustly dismissed, went to Prodipon. The organization provided her all necessary legal assistance to sue the factory in the labour court. The labour court verdict fined the factory Taka 10,000. Eva received the amount from the factory as compensation.

Above all, in order to ensure a viable and sustainable livelihood of workers, the GO-NGO[6] policies should take a stakeholder perspective. There is a growing need for a motivational campaign project for factory management. A few instances in the Bangladesh garment sector indicate that a congenial worker-owner relationship is essential to solve most livelihood problems of workers without compromising factory production and profit. Both management and the workers can be educated to appreciate that they complement each other like two indivisible parts of an organ, and that they have a mutually inclusive stake or interest. These ideas can be reflected and disseminated in research reports and civil society dialogues. There is some evidence that the factory management is gradually coming forward to respond to these policy prescriptions in positive terms. Most factories reward a worker without absence for a month with a 100 TK bonus. This is an incentive system now commonly practiced in all factories. Concord Garment of Mirpur pays its workers a higher salary (Taka 1800-2500) than other factories, and they maintain a regular payment schedule. Although the factory

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[6] Government Organizations and Non-Governmental Organizations.

management has imposed a negative condition that workers must do overtime work for urgent work-orders, the workers generally consider this condition as acceptable, given the provision of other benefits. Some factories have introduced a system to assist the workers financially for celebration of festivals. These factories distribute *zakat* (the right of poor people to the income of rich people) to the workers before Eid Ul Fitr. A few factories pay an Eid bonus (festival allowance) worth 50% of worker salary. Sharat Apparels and Jupiter Apparels of Mirpur area are two examples of factories of this category. These two factories also offer the workers government declared holidays. The negative side of their practice is that they deduct salary from workers for those days from the next instalment of overtime earnings. I would assert that an efficient and forward-looking national policy might contribute to elimination of such negative practices. The policies should be devised around a perspective of sustainable security and a safety net for women workers. To adopt a pragmatic policy, the Bangladesh government should initiate a networking between factory managers, worker representatives and trade unions, academics and researchers, NGOs, international funding agencies and human rights organizations.

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APPENDICES

I. General information (of the informants)

1. Identification

    A. Name (Optional):

    B. Age: C. Sex: Female   Male

    D. Address (optional):

    E. Position:

        Helper   Other (specify)

        Operator   Not assigned

2. Social Position

    F. Marital status:

    ☐ Single   ☐ Sustaining wife/ married   ☐ Divorced

    ☐ Abandoned ☐ Seperated   · Widowed

    G. Number of children

    H Educational Status:

    ☐ Illiterate/ Unable to read or write

    ☐ Able to write name only ☐ Able to read and write letter

    ☐ lower primary ☐ Primary ☐ Lower Secondary

    ☐ Secondary (SSC)   ☐ Higher secondary   ☐ More/Other

    I. Family status in living:

    ☐ Single   ☐ Own family/live with parents

    ☐ Joint family   Other

    J. Family role:

        ☐ Family head   ☐ Self-dependent on earning

        ☐ Dependent on family earning ☐ Other position (mention specifically)

    K. Job status:

    ☐ part-time   ☐ full-time ☐ contract-basis ☐ Other (specify clearly)

3. Economic condition

    L. Salary (Monthly consolidated) ....

        Other (all) income/ sources of income ....

        Means of income supplementation (if required) ....

4. Employment Status

M. Experienece/ Years

< =1 - 2 years	1
2 - 3 Y	2
3 – 4 Y	3
4 -5 Y	4
5 –6 Y	5
6 or above	6

N.   How many hours do you work in a day?

O.   How many days do you work in a WEEK?

5. Awareness towards working rights and conditions

P   Do you have a written document (contract paper) of job/ identity card?
☐ Yes   ☐ No

Q   Do you know the service rule?
☐ Yes   ☐ No

R   What is the rate of overtime salary?
☐ Half regular salary   ☐ Equals to regular salary
☐ Double of regular salary

S   What are the criteria of payment ?
☐ Hourly basis   ☐ Monthly basis
☐ Number of produced material basis
☐ Other (Specify)

T   What is the nature of contract and agreement of your work?

Put tick as applicable

Types of contract	Code no
Not defined	
Parmanent	
Full time: daily basis	
Part-time	
Short-term Contract	
Daily labour	

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U How regularly do you do overt-time work (in a month)?
☐ Regularly (In a month) ☐ Very often (regular)
☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely regularly

V How regularly do you receive payment of over-time work?
☐ Regularly (In a month) ☐ Very often (regular)
☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely

W. Do you have any experience of doing over-time duty overnight?
Yes No

X. Is the over-night over-time salary higher than normal working hour salary?
Yes No

Y. How many hours do you get as *paid* resting hour/ interval/ break during over-night duty?

Z. List the required facilities factories provide for over-night works

	Facilities	Code no
1	Transportation	
2	Security service	
3	Audio-visual recreation facility	
4	Resting place	
5	Tiffin/ dinner	
6	Two of 1 - 5 (Mention)	
7	Three of 1 - 5 (Mention)	
8	Four of 1 –5 (Mention)	
9	All listed above	
10	None	

AA. Do the factory owners/ management force workers to do overnight over-time work?
Yes No

AB. If 'yes' how frequently do they force workers for overnight work?
Reguarly/ always Commonly Usually
Sometimes (for inst. in case of emergency shipment)
Rarely

AC. Do you know the factory laws of Bangladesh regarding terms and conditions of your job, leave, termination, benefits and other incentives?
Yes No

AD. What are the common causes of termination from work? (List in detail)

6. Occupational Support: Daytime Transportation

AE. Does your factory provide any transportation facility to the workers?

    Yes   ☐ No

AF. (If 'yes') How frequently the service (transportation) is provided?

    ☐ Regular/ Routine   ☐ During peak hours with heavy workloads

AG. (If 'yes') what types of transportations provided?

    ☐ Factory owned bus/ minibus ☐ Rented bus/ minibus

    ☐ Pick-up/ jeep ☐ Tempo/ Scooter/ Van/ Mishuk

    ☐ Rikshaw ☐ Other (Specify).

AH. How Distant is the Factory from your residence?

AI. What are the means to reach to your factory?

    ☐ Walking   ☐ Factory provided transportation

    ☐ Bus/ Minibus   ☐ Tempo/ Scooter/ Van/ Mishuk

    ☐ Rikshaw   ☐ Other (Specify).

7. Recreation and leisure

AJ. Mention the means of your recreation and leisure (list)

AK. Does your factory provide any means of recreation and leisure?

    ☐ Yes ☐ No

AL. (If 'yes') mention these means. (List means/ types/ categories).

    ☐ Annual picnic   ☐ Annual courtesy feast

    ☐ Commemorative feast for deceased mother

    ☐ Prize giving ceremony for best workers

8. Lifestyle

(Checklist for exploring different dimensions of community life through in-depth study).

AM.	Time allocation (by hours a day):	Cooking,
AN		sleeping,
AO		shopping,
AP		dining,
AQ		chatting.

			SCALE
AR	Sharing: (by frequency)	Ideas and values,	Always = 1
AS		experiences,	Often = 2
AT		knowledge,	Sometimes = 3
AU		emotions,	Rarely = 4
AV		joys and sorrows.	Never = 5

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AW	Feelings:	solidarity,	SCALE
AX		competition,	Always = 1
AY		conflict,	Often = 2
AZ		cooperation,	Sometimes = 3
BA		clash of personality and	Rarely = 4
		interest	Never = 5

II. Livelihood: working and living environment

(Note: following basic indicators are designed to acquire basic information about workplace environment. Use separate sheets for relevant information not covered in the checklist)

9. Job security

BB. Did you face termination within a year? Yes No

BC. If 'Yes', how many times did you face termination? (mention)

BD. Was the termination on just reason? Yes No

BE. Did you receive due remuneration and benefits during termination? Yes No

10. Physical security

BF. Did the management staffs (Production manager, floor supervisors) ever assault (beating) you physically in this year? Yes No

BG. How often the management staffs beat the workers?
☐ Regularly   ☐ Often
☐ Sometimes   ☐ Rarely
☐ Never

11. Exploitation

BH. Did you ever receive 100 Taka bonus (as per BGMEA declaration) for not absenting from work for a single day in a month Yes No

Treatment and behaviour of management/ superordinates to workers/ subordinates:

Treatment and behaviour (List all types)		Frequency of experiencing / Number of response				
		Regularly 1	Often 2	Sometimes 3	Rarely 4	Never 0
BI	Abuse					
BJ	Harassment					
BK	Torture & reppression					
BL	Penalty					
BM	Deception					
Note: In case of many other categories, use separate pages/ list as detailed as piossible)						

12. Basic on-floor supports and incentives

	Basic on-floor supports and incentives	Available	Not available	Irregular
BN	First aid and emergency treatment for on-floor sickness and ailments			
BO	Utilities (Fire extinguishers, emergency exit)			
BP	Emergency leave (upon sudden sickness)			
BQ	Light snack/ tiffin for overtime work			

13. Basic residential environment

BR. What Types of residences do you live in?
- ☐ Paka Daalan (Buildings)
- ☐ Wooden/ bamboo made cottage
- ☐ Tin-made houses
- ☐ Slum/ squatter
- ☐ Other (Specify).

BS. What types of tenancy do you live under?
- ☐ Own house
- ☐ Rented house
- Paying guest/sublease
- ☐ Other (Specify)

III. Migration, displacement & settlement

14. Migration

BT. Migration pattern
- ☐ Distant areas of the same district ☐ From other districts
- ☐ From the same thana (daily travel)
- ☐ Nearby slums (daily travel) ☐ Other (Specify).

BU. Reasons for Migration (List)
(Note: The following 14 reasons were mentioned by the respondents)

Reasons	Code no
Only to join garments	
Seeking any jobs	
As domestic servant	
To be independent/ self-reliant	
Husband's workplace/ Residence	
River-bank erosion destitution	
Landlessness	
Widowhood	

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Being cheated by lover	
Move with whole family	
Insecurity in village	
In search of deserter husband	
Family feud	
To find ways to foreign countries	

BV.   Will you settle in Dhaka?
      Yes   No

15. In-migration

BW. List causes and nature of your in-migration
      (For matrical sortings and organization)

BX. How many Dhaka-based factories did you work for within the range of your service life?

BY. Does your salary increase when you sitch from one factory to the other?
      Yes   No

BZ. Did you ever experience salary decrease in switching from one factory to the other?
      Yes   No

CA. Explain the reasons of salary increase and decrease
      (Discussion would take place in FGD sessions on the basis of intensity of changes in salary)

16. Residence and settlement pattern

CB. What is the first and foremost consideration to select the living place?
      Proximity to factory, market   lesser rent   Security
      Better society   Availability of friends/ sharers of rent/   Other (specify)

CC. Rate light and ventilation in your residence
      Adequate   Inadequate

CD. Rate your living space
      Adequate   Inadequate

CE. With how many households/families do you share a Kitchen?

CF. Is your living place safe during rainy season and winter?
      Yes   No

CG. Do you have access to pure drinking water (tubewell, WASA supplied water)?
Yes   No

CH. Is there any specific place for waste disposal nearby your residence?
Yes   No

CI. Is your living place linked with municipal drainage-sewerage system?
Yes   No

CJ. Sanitation: latrines: Do you have attached toilets?
Yes   No

CK. (If 'NO'), What types of latrines do you use?
Public toilet nearby   Public toilet (distant)
Shared toilet inside the house   Shared toilet outside the house

CL.OBSERVATION REPORT
Electric heater- unauthorized electric extensions

IV. Livelihood: occupational health hazards
(Information gathered through focus group discussion and interviewing)

CM. What are the health problems you perceive generated from the factory job?
(Describe their intensity, and range of sufferings to you).

CN. According to your perception, what are the causes of these health problems?
(Share in group and explain central causes for occupational health hazards).

CO. What types of physicians do you prefer most for consultation in sickness and
diseases?
(open-ended list coded)

Status of physicians	Code No
MBBS private practitioners	
Outdoor of Medical hospitals	
Private clinics	
NGO clinics	
Homeopathic physicians	
Herbal healers, Kaviraj	
Religious healers/ fakirs/ Sorcerers	
Paramedics/ diploma physicians	
Dispensary-compounders, salesmen	

CP. Mention the reasons for your preference.

18. Reproductive health

CQ. Have you ever gone under any treatment for reproductive health problems?

                                                 Yes   No

CR. What was the health problem?

CS. Name the reproductive health problem most commonly you observed among women workers? (List).

V. security and safety

19. Occupational security and safety nets

CT. Do you have any insurance/ guarantee against accident inside the factory?

   ☐ Yes   ☐ No

Perception study

CU. Rate the level of adequacy of required utilities in your factory

Utilities (Indicators)	Level of adequacy			
	Sufficient	Adequate	Inadequate	Unavailable
	1	2	3	4
Latrines				
Light				
Fan				
Ventilation				
Emergency power				
Drinking water				
Common room				
Dining room				
Prayer room				
Childcare area				
Fire extinguisher				
Work space				
Duty physician				
First aid facilities				
Emergency exit				
Window				
Exhaust				
Breastfeeding area				
Change room				

19a. Occupational rights, incentives and privileges

How often do you realize the following occupational rights, incentives and privileges?

Occupational rights/ safety, security options		Frequency of enjoyment				
		Duly 1	Often 2	Condition al3	Rarely 4	Never 5
CV	Maternity leaves					
CW	Leaves with pay					
CX	Leaves without pay					
CY	Sick leaves (pay)					
CZ	Casual leaves (pay)					
DA	Earn leaves					
DB	National Holidays					
DC	Festival leaves					
DD	Festival allowance					
DE	Annual increments					
DF	Due bonuses					
DG	Provident fund, gratuity					
DH	Welfare fund					
DI	Official loan/ credit					
DJ	Interest-free lending					
DK	Low-interest lending					
DL	Other					

19b. Compensation

DM. Were you ever compensated against work-injury, accidents, illness or any long term losses.

Types of Compensation	Code no
Total compensation	
Partial compensation	
No Compensation	

20. Insecurities

DN. List according to your perception the types of insecurities of your everyday life?

21. Self-protection

DO. Do your safety measures cause extra-spending from your income?   YN

DP. Do you have any organized efforts to ensure self-security?   YN

DQ. Do you have any skill or training for self-protection?   YN

DR. What types of GO/NGO supports do you need to ensure self-protection and security?
(List)

22. Alternative occupation: perception study

DS. If the garment sector closes forever in Bangladesh, what profession will you accept alternatively?

Note: data categorization/ codification (for SPSS database)

DT. Code of Research Phases

Phase One	Phase Two	12

DU. Age group recoding

14 – 15 years	1
16 – 20 years	2
21 – 25 years	3
26 – 30 years	4

DV. Identification of respondents

Phase One informants	1
In-depth case study informants	2
Perception study respondents	3
Relatives of workers	4
Neighborhood residents	5
Housing, community, union leaders	6
Factory management/ related people	7

Appendix-2
Photographs: Livelihood conditions of women garment workers of Bangladesh

Photo 1: A morning scene of a crowded city-street: workers on their way to factories

Photo 2: View of a congested factory floor

Photo 3: Factory fire

Photo 4: Victims of factory fire: corpse of workers

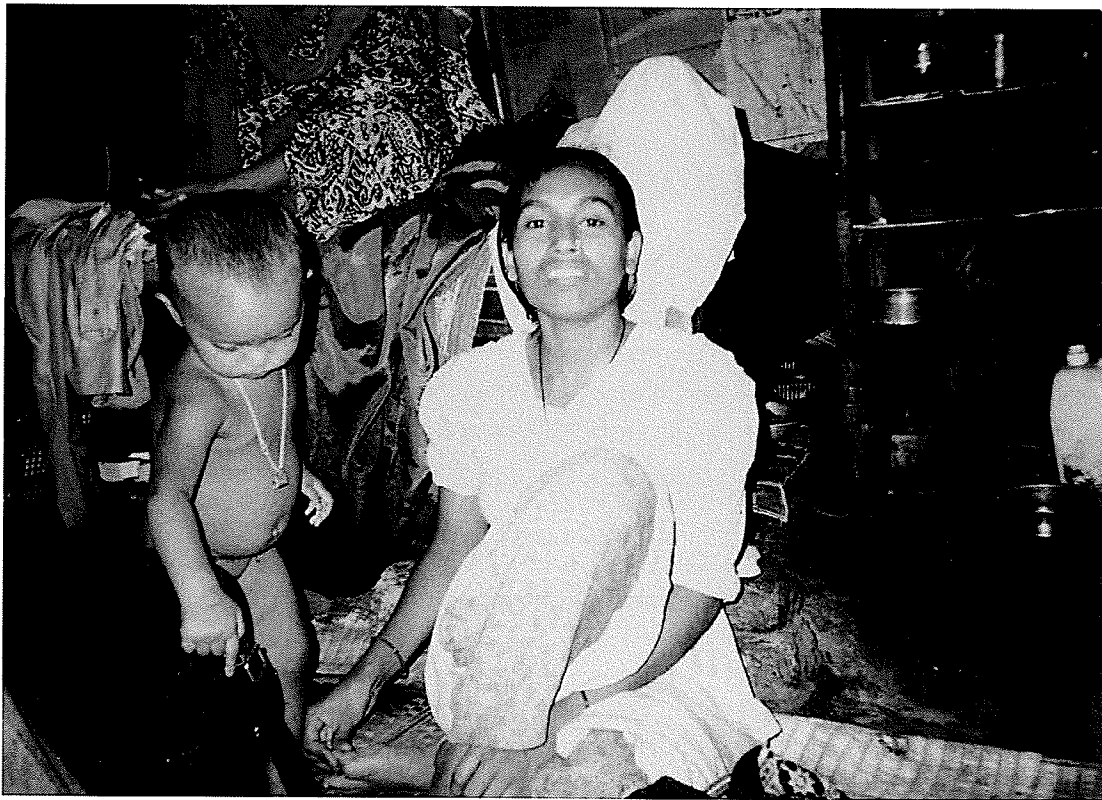Photo 5: Slums: the most common type of worker residence

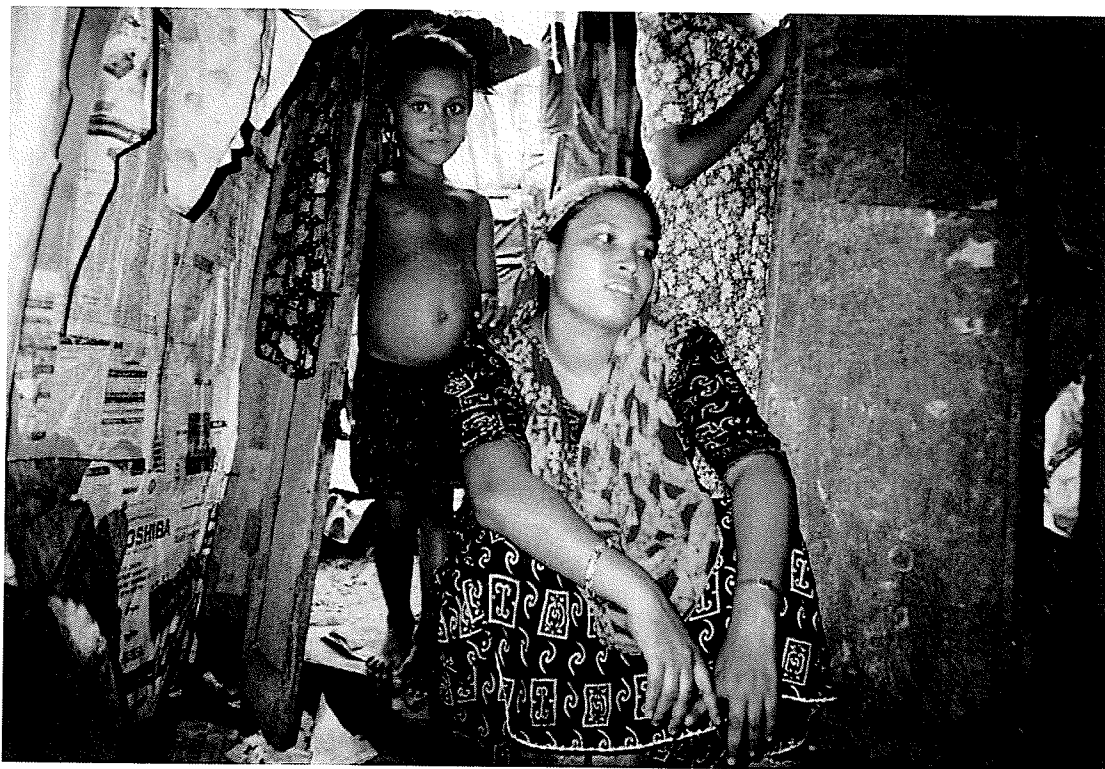Photo 6: An interior view of living accommodation of the workers (1)

Photo 7: An interior view of living accommodation of the workers (2)
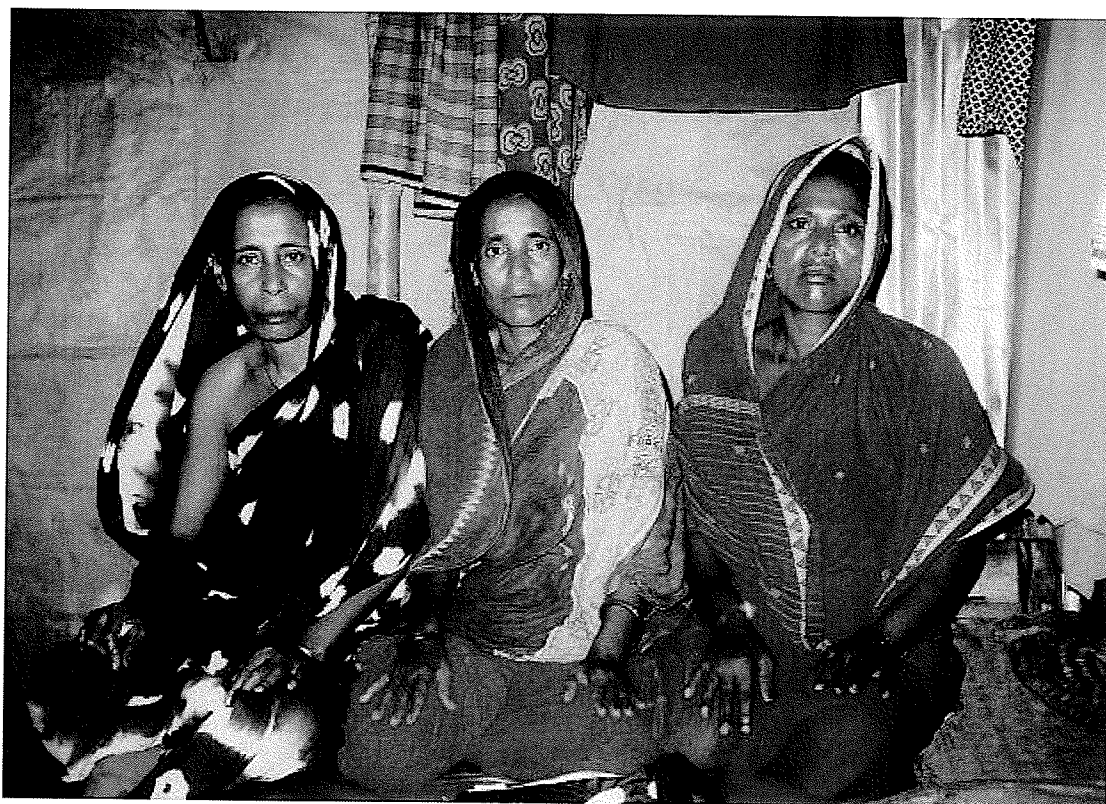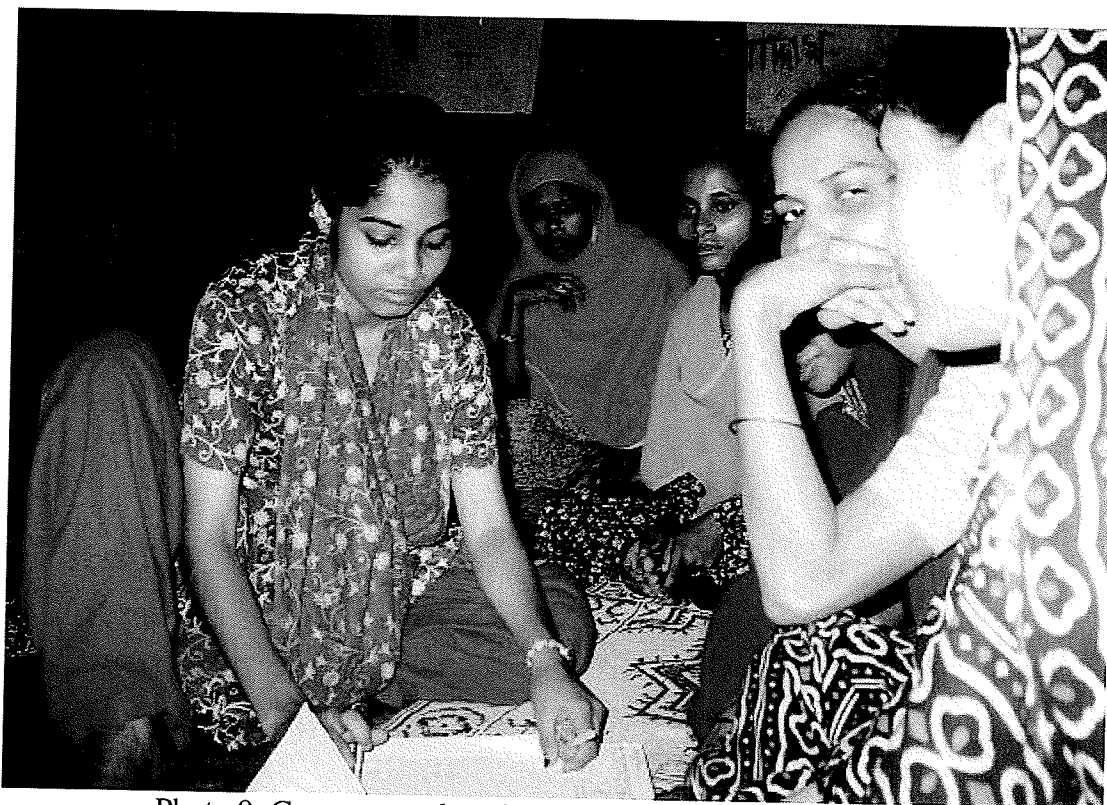

Photo 8: Reference migrants

Photo 9: Garment workers in a focus group discussion session
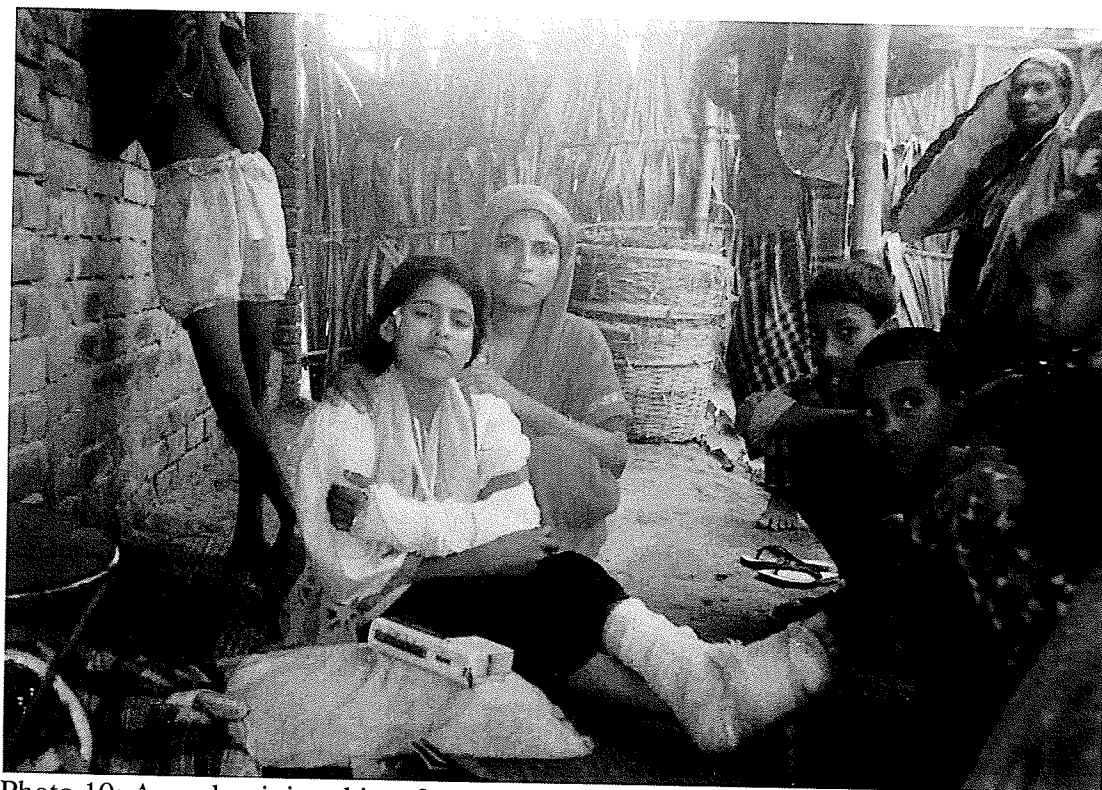

Photo 10: A worker injured in a factory fire describes her experience of the incident