

Migration

Historically, the movement of people from one area to another in search of better living conditions has been one response to natural or social disasters. Sometimes such shifts have involved whole families, in other instances only men have gone and send for other family members once they are established. In the section below we outline four primary migratory patterns: permanent and temporary internal migration, and permanent and temporary external migration.

The seasonality of agricultural production in Bangladesh results in intermittent and irregular employment for wage based workers. During harvest seasons, for example, the demand for workers far exceeds supply, and wages are generally high. In off-seasons, however, wage rates and earning capacity drops significantly. Some attempt has been made by government to mitigate this situation by instituting "food for work" or "rural works programmes", which offer limited amounts of employment particularly during the dry season. However, this is hardly sufficient to meet the demand and more informal mechanisms have developed to alleviate this situation.

One such mechanism is permanent internal migration. Census data of 1974 show that there is a continuing outmigration from areas such as Comilla, Faridpur and Mymensingh from 1951 to the present, and a transfer to less densely populated areas such as Khulna, Rajshahi, Dinajpur and Dacca (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 1974:25). In 1951, this permanent migration involved 2.31 percent of the population, rose to 3.53 percent in 1961

and is reported to have stabilized at approximately 3.44 percent in 1974. The total number of people involved has increased from approximately 950,000 in 1951 to about 1,711,000 in 1961 and to 2,430,000 in 1974.

In addition to these shifts, there are thousands of people who wander throughout the countryside looking for temporary employment. This is another way in which people are adjusting to limited employment opportunities. That is, there is a growing temporary internal labor force migration composed of people who move from district to district following the harvest patterns of different crops. Most often these people go only for the work seasons and return to a permanent homesite when harvests are over. In the slack season they may be rickshaw pullers or do odd jobs in their villages. They often face long periods of under and un-employment. Estimates of the magnitude of this migratory labor force do not exist as yet for Bangladesh.

In one study of female household labor, however, for which we do have some information, it was found that many of the sample women indicated that they, as well as their husbands if they are married, go to adjoining villages, thanas (counties), or even other districts looking for work. Their employment usually involves rice processing work although in some areas jute processing work is also available. Only women in villages in the Northwestern part of the country indicated that they would not leave their village to seek work in even nearby villages.

Internal migration, whether to cities and towns or within the rural countryside tends, in many instances, to weaken or destroy family bonds. Usually the males are the ones to leave the family and go in search of work. Left behind, families exist as best they can with both women and children seeking daily employment in the homes of wealthier villagers. The separation, if prolonged, may result in spouses losing track of one another, husbands remarrying in other districts and/or women entering temporary alliances with other males. The latter situation is rare, especially if the family is staying in the husband's village and other male relatives have taken supervisory responsibility for the women and children. Subsistence becomes ever more precarious if the absent male gradually cuts down on the amount of money he sends back to the family.

Male wage rates range from approximately Tk 10 (US\$.66) per day for unskilled agricultural labor to between Tk 13 (US\$.86) and Tk 25 (US\$ 1.65) for skilled workers and craftsmen. Occupations such as carpenters and masons may earn as much as Tk 27 (US\$ 1.77) and Tk 32 (US\$ 2.11) respectively per day. The present rate of exchange is that Tks equals US\$ 1.00. The amounts shown above have been rounded to the nearest US cent. These skilled jobs, however, rarely involve migratory labor. At present price levels it is difficult for most families to manage on Tk 300 (US\$ 20.00) per month. In the case of migrant labor the income earned has to support the laborer himself as well as his village based family. This means, among other things, that everyone exists with minimal amounts of food, clothing and shelter.

Wage earners are almost solely dependent on the market for goods and services where prices of basic commodities fluctuate by season. At present price levels the cheapest rice is about Tk 5 (US\$.30) to Tk 5.50 (US\$.36) per seer (2 pounds), wheat flour Tk 3 (US\$.20) to Tk 3.50 (US\$.53) per seer. These are the basic staples of the Bangladeshi diet to which vegetables are an addition. Meat, fish and dairy products are rarely eaten by people in low income groups. For example, it is estimated that a family making up to Tk 300 per month will spend an average Tk 228 (US\$ 15.00) per month on food, more than half of which will be on rice, about 12 percent on wheat and wheat flour, 6 percent on lentils and 6 percent on oil, 7 percent for fish and less than 1 percent each for milk, vegetables and poultry (Bangladesh Yearbook of Statistics, 1979:487).

External migration from Bangladesh to India and the subcontinent has been fairly well documented for the first half of the twentieth century. Between 1901 and 1961 there has been a net emigration of 4,233,334 people from the area now known as Bangladesh. Since 1971 this trend has continued and may be due to the:

high and increasing density of population and the consequent pressure on land... coupled with the lack of economic opportunities within Bangladesh and the emergence of industrial/commercial centres in the eastern zone of India which hold out prospects of employment opportunities (Khan, 1977:607).

Extraneous factors are assumed to explain decennial differences; for example, the Bengal famine of 1943 and

the partition of India in 1947. The 1947 period is exemplified by a significant exchange of Muslims (.7 million) and Hindus (2.5 million), with a net loss for Bangladesh of approximately 1.9 million people. These examples are of permanent forms of migration, wherein people change their national identity as well as their place of residence.

Another increasingly popular form of migration, especially in less developed capitalist countries, is the temporary migration of individuals seeking non-permanent resident status in another country and only short term forms of employment. Factors encouraging non-permanent migration include, but are not limited to, the lack of employment opportunities, population pressures, the non-availability of cultivable land, and general conditions of social instability. Natural catastrophes can exacerbate these existing social conditions and further stimulate out-migration, but such processes are usually well underway before the catastrophe occurs.

The need for, or interest in, migrating abroad varies by social class; those of wealthy, better educated families may send sons abroad for higher education and a good percentage of them may not return to their country of origin. This is encouraged by host countries making it advantageous for highly educated or technically skilled people to remain in their countries. This problem, known as the "brain drain" has a rich and extensive literature not necessary to restate here.

What is also increasing is the movement of semiskilled and unskilled labor to other countries which require manpower in greater numbers than may be locally available. The Middle East, in particular the OPEC countries, is a source of short term employment for Bangladeshis. Mostly men accept this form of employment, and a great incentive for leaving Bangladesh is the relatively higher salaries that are paid abroad. The combination of low salaries, high costs and limited employment opportunities in a country like Bangladesh, and attractive high salaries and material incentives offered abroad, draws many workers into an international labor pool.

In addition, the need of the government for foreign exchange encourages a policy of exporting manpower. Remittances from foreign employment of Bangladeshi

nationals, in 1979 alone, have been estimated at US 110 million (Storror, 1979). Whether the foreign exchange earned through manpower exports sufficiently compensates for the drain of essential skills and services from the country is a question that needs further investigation.

Since 1976, professional, skilled and unskilled laborers in Bangladesh are seeking and securing work outside the country in increasing numbers. Through 1976 a total of 6,087 people were employed abroad. By June 1979 the total number of overseas migrants was estimated at 55,588 of which approximately 43 percent were skilled workers, 24 percent unskilled, and roughly 33 percent were professionals (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 1979: Statistical Pocketbook, 554-555). For the two years for which we have complete information, between 1977 and 1978 labor out-migration increased by 45 percent. Present figures place the number of out-migrants at 80,000 or more, and while this is statistically insignificant in terms of the total population, its socio-economic and political importance is quite clear.

The total number of persons in technical fields or skilled trades such as craftsmen and contractors as well as professionals such as engineers, architects, teachers and doctors represent a relatively small proportion of the total occupational structure of Bangladesh. Migration in

Table 1: Patterns of External Labor Migration of Bangladeshis, percentages.

	1976	1977	1978	1979*	Total
Professional	09	11	07	01	07
Skilled	67	27	49	41	43
Unskilled	16	17	33	24	25
Miscellaneous	08	44	12	34	25
Totals:	6,087	15,725	22,809	10,967	55,588

* January to June only

Source: Statistical Pocketbook, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 1979.

these fields therefore, may have eventual negative consequences for general development patterns in the country as Bangladesh also remains dependent on such resources for its own development.

Becoming part of the international labor market means that workers thereby become subject to shifts in the international economy and are generally least protected by trade unions, fair employment practices or unemployment benefits. In the long run, Bangladesh may find itself in the same situation as Turkey, where thousands of workers suddenly became unemployed in Europe, were not allowed to stay, and so returned to Turkey to swell the ranks of the unemployed there (Berger, 1977).

The effects of this out-migration have consequences for family and village stability. All except the most urbanized people leave their wives and families in rural settings, where women become solely responsible for the daily affairs of the family. The problems of single-parent households become theirs even though economic need may be absent as these families depend on monthly remittances from abroad. Over time, the flow of money into such families encourages a rate of spending at prices few other villagers can afford. This and the following information comes from personal discussions with villagers and with sociologists presently engaged in doing a study of the consequences of out-migration on rural families.

Food, clothing and other prices tend to rise because of the free spending of "Dubai" families, as migrant families are called. Some families tend to buy land and retain sharecroppers to farm it, but others remove land from production and build brick houses on it. What is interesting to note is that the response of many families appears to be consumer oriented without being petit-bourgeois in the historical sense. That is, the money that is received is usually not invested in trade, business, education or savings. Rather, consumer items such as stereo-radio-cassette sets, automobiles, fans, refrigerators, irons, radios, watches, and the latest western fashions of clothes, songs and ideas become part of the village scene.

The distinction between migrant and non-migrant families is a new source of competition and tension in many villages and adds a new source for consideration in existing political and social alliances. In some villages it

has become difficult for non-migrant families to complain about the activities of migrant families. One reason for this is that to do so may limit one's chances of getting an opportunity to go abroad since this is often arranged through connections with those who have gone before. Another reason for not complaining is that complaints may result in physical retaliation and violence. The development of fairly affluent and conspicuously consuming families in the midst of general poverty may also add to village unrest and instability.

Labor Force Participation

The development of social processes which increasingly reduce the size of landholdings and separate people from owning the means of production, have also affected subsistence patterns and family organization. As people have been forced from the land, or had their landholdings reduced to units too small to support their families, family survival has become increasingly dependent on wage labor.

Traditional patterns of subsistence, based as they are on agriculture within the joint or extended family reinforced both production and reproduction within a single unit. However, with the extension of capitalist processes into the rural areas, the unity of the family as a productive entity continues to fragment, with a resultant change in the roles and statuses of family members. The decrease in landholdings and landownership means that inheritance matters become more bitter and problematic as family assets decline. Eldest male family members are increasingly unable to, or not interested in, providing security and support for distressed family members especially sisters and aunts. The status of the eldest male and female in a family become more difficult to maintain as families tend to center around smaller, nuclear units, and as all family members are forced to join the rural labor force.

The participation of all family members in the labor force has been a response to limited employment opportunities and the demand and seasonality of work creating conditions of both under-employment and generally inefficient production. The combination of these factors result in low rates of pay such that a single income

earning person is no longer able to support a family. Wives and children, therefore, are forced to seek work in addition to husbands.

The 1961 Census indicated that the total civilian labor force was approximately 17 million or 34 percent of the total population. The agricultural labor force represented 86 percent of the total labor force at that time (Statistical Pocketbook 142, 514). By 1975, the total population was estimated at 80 million people of which 27 million were in the labor force. Of the total labor force 78 percent or 21 million were employed in agriculture (Clay and Khan, 1977). While the percentage of the total population represented in the labor force remains much the same, there is a reduction in the percent of the population employed in agriculture, which indicates an increase in the total supply of labor as well as an increase in the demand for labor in the industrial and service sectors of the economy.

The effect on the family, particularly in the rural areas, is that any family member who can, should look for work, and this as noted earlier includes children as well as women. In other words, survival becomes an individual matter signifying the almost total fragmentation of the family as a productive unit. The rate of women's participation in the civilian labor force is 11 percent. However, this is an estimate at best, as no accurate data exists (Clay and Khan, 1977). Child labor, below the age of 13, is also not included in government statistics, but they too have joined in the ranks of the labor force in substantial numbers.

An additional consequence of general socio-economic trends is that subsistence activities of people are becoming more varied as they combine agricultural and non-agricultural work within the family. Small farmers may deal in buying and selling agricultural produce in local bazars, or act as small traders for other items. Men operate rickshaws during slow agricultural periods, and many people build houses, engage in traditional crafts, and join rural public works or food for work projects during the lean periods. This further weakens the family as a land based productive unit.

Rural women have traditionally been more limited than men in the employment opportunities open to them. Occupational openings, of course, vary by class, and for

poor rural women their alternatives have been mainly limited to domestic labor, midwifery, agricultural processing work and begging. None of these tasks are given occupational status by the Census or the Bureau of Statistics; hence, women relying on these activities for subsistence are an uncounted part of the rural labor force.

What becomes apparent in looking at relative growth rates of the civilian labor force vis-a-vis those eligible for work in both agriculture and industry is that total numbers of potential workers far outnumber employment opportunities. Within this larger trend exist employment curves which reflect, not only disasters, but less extreme shifts in weather, such as the drought in 1978-79; agricultural productivity, like the bumper jute crop in 1979, and social change, for example, technological innovations such as rice mills. General processes which cause these more minor fluctuations are further exacerbated and stimulated by major catastrophes. In the area of the family a particular consequence has been the development of singleheaded households. This problem faces village women to a greater extent than rural men, as men can and do remarry much more easily, and with less social opprobrium, than do women.

Singe-Headed Households

A significant consequence of this decade for village women has been a change in their perceptions regarding their own conditions. Research done since Liberation has documented that village women are aware of their dependence on husbands and male family members and realize the need for their own "self-reliance" and "self-sufficiency" (Kabir and Chen, 1976). It has become clear to many women that their dependency on males leads to their own increased vulnerability in times of disaster and social disruption. In the past dependency was not such an issue as other forms of familial security existed which cushioned the effects of disasters and absorbed widowed, destitute or divorced women.

With more recent changes, women realize and have become more articulate about their helplessness if they are left on their own, and while many have learned to manage, most mention the hardship and difficulties they have encountered in the process. Also apparent now is

women's willingness to work and have their own source of income. Gone is the shyness and reluctance to leave the household or appear in public which once characterized most women's behavior (Chen and Ghaznavi, 1977). The dependence of rural families on the wage employment of female family members has also lessened the significance of the social proscriptions of purdah or the seclusion of women, which traditionally regulated women's behavior (Feldman and McCarthy, 1976).

An additional need for this change in behavior and belief among Bangladeshi women is that for thousands of people their families have, since the early 1970's, been permanently broken apart because of death, loss of contact, migration or remarriage. While statistics are generally incomplete, two studies of rural working women done in the late Seventies show a total of 242 women of a total 425 being unmarried, widowed, separated or divorced. These figures undoubtedly overrepresent the numbers of husbandless women having to work (Chen and Ghosnavi, 1977; McCarthy, Sabbah and Akhter, 1978).

What is interesting to consider, however, is the number of rural households working women presently represent. In a survey of female household labor, of a total of 3654 village households sampled, an average of 330 or 9 percent have women who are working. Forty-one percent of the 122 working women in the sample represent single-headed households. What this data indicates is that as traditional forms of security diminish, rural women are forced on their own and must look for work to support themselves and their children. Other studies indicate that increasing numbers of educated women from the lower middle class and above are also seeking employment outside the home (Choudhury, 1974). Women are increasingly left on their own because of a weakening of kinship ties which provided for them in the past and because new forms of supporting networks have not yet developed.

The implications of female-headed households for family organization include, among other things, that levels of living may decrease as females are more irregularly employed and earn less than male counterparts. By level of living we refer to the access children have to education, the general health and nutrition of all family members and the general conditions of housing,

clothing and other amenities available to all Bangladeshi families. A small study of female household labor being done by the Women's Section, Ministry of Agriculture estimates daily wages of female household labor to range from Tk 1.10 (US\$.07) to Tk 7 (US\$.46). General daily wage rates for women in other occupations, and town or urban areas is approximately Tk 8 (US\$.53) per day.

The personal security of all family members may also diminish due to the absence of male family members and other assets such as cultivable land, household plots, livestock and even trees, are likely to be subject to theft or distress sales.

Summary and Conclusions

It is quite impossible to explain changes in selected social institutions and a general decline in the social conditions of Bangladeshis as a response solely to the post-independence era of Bangladesh. It is equally impossible to define this period as one of disaster. While numerous specific disasters did occur, one must examine the responses to these events as part of other events and processes which built upon and transformed extant social conditions during the period. This means that the disasters which occurred in Bangladesh need to be understood, not only from the point of view of the social and economic responses to any single event, but in the context of an analysis of the socio-economic and political trends which predated the period itself and elements of which may have been exacerbated by it.

Changes in the social organization of the family predate the War of Liberation and the attendant problems which have faced the country since 1971. In light of this, we have shown how the organization of the Bangladeshi family has responded to patterns of migration and labor force participation throughout this period. Patterns of response include a significant increase in the number of families dependent on wage labor, and a growing number of families requiring the wage labor of more than one family member for survival. It has been suggested that these processes, which may have been exacerbated at particular times, predate the post independence era and continue to hinder the social, political and economic development of the country. This means that there is

little evidence to indicate that segments of the population, or Bangladesh as a whole, has "returned to normal" or reinstated prior forms of equilibrium. Rather, it is increasingly clear that institutional changes within the society have made such a return impossible. In fact, the changes of family organization and maintenance we have described have become, and are now characteristic of, the basic social structure of Bangladesh.