

# Nexus between Rural-Urban Female Migration and Readymade Garment Industry (RGM): A Study in Bangladesh

Md. Reazul Islam

Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Varendra University, Rajshahi, Bangladesh

**Abstract:** *This paper portrays the Nexus between the Readymade Garment and Female Rural-Urban Migration in Bangladesh. The scenario of female migration of this study finds an association with Readymade Garment Industry(RMG) and Female Rural-Urban Migration in Bangladesh. Most of the women in garments sector are the poor migrant from village and initially their destination is to join in the garments sector. Based on the interview schedule and survey method, the findings of this study suggest that most of the migration occurs due to push factors. However, the pull factors contribute a significant amount of migration and opportunity to work in Readymade Garment Industry(RMG) is the single most pull factor for their migration from rural to urban areas.*

**Keywords:** Migration, Pull factor, Push factor, Readymade Garment

## 1. Introduction

At present Bangladesh is one of the rapidest developing country in South Asian Continent. In every year the rate, from rural to urban migration is increasing significantly. Most of them who migrate from rural to urban will be involved in garment industry.

Though migration, predominately considered a male issue and the most economic migrants to urban areas are committed by young males, but this has changed significantly with the recent increase in demand for female worker in the Readymade Garment factories in Bangladesh. Traditionally, in case of women, it was observed that the marriage is the main reason for migration, but the recent trend also emphasize the rise of independent women migration on the background of increase in employment opportunities in garment sector, export industries etc (Shanthi, 2006). Although migrants face various predicaments like, physical insecurity, poor housing, negative discrimination by official doom and development programmers at their places of destination, still the poor segment of our country considered migration as one of their salvations. Internal female manpower has in recent years emerged as the most important issue in the development discourse in Bangladesh. For this reason, female migration also has got much importance. Since the early 80s, there have been important changes in the macroeconomic policy in Bangladesh, in the form of greater export-orientation of the economy, liberalization of trade, and an expanded role for the private sector (Islam, 2014). From then Bangladesh readymade garment industry (RMG) sector has expanded and now Bangladesh has become an important part of global textile industries. According to Bangladesh garment manufacturers and exporters association (BGMEA, 2013) 4.00 million workers were employed at 5,700 factories in 2011-12. Among them 3.20 million are women (80%) and majorities of these women are disadvantaged and economically poverty stricken womenfolk (Rashid, 2013). In Bangladesh readymade garment industry (RMG) sector contributed 19,089.69 million USD in 2011-12, that is 78.60

percent of total export (Export Promotion Bureau of Bangladesh- 2012) that is 80% of the foreign earnings come from the readymade garments (RMGs) sector (Islam, 2014).

Besides, Readymade Garment industry (RMG) sector creates jobs in complementary industries or services such as accessories, packaging, toiletries, courier, finance, transport and telecommunication services, etc. (Rashid, 2013). Most of the garment workers migrant from rural area and firstly they join in garments sector. Young Bangladeshi women left home by the thousands and moved into squatter dwellings, company boarding houses or congested rooms in the Dhaka, Chittagong cities and free trade zones. The women became wage earners they work overnight and support their families. Their contributions to national income increased at staggering rates. Now women are the major contributors in national export earnings (Maksud, 2001). Thus migration is now considered as important livelihood strategy for the female worker of Bangladesh. This research focused the causes of migration, the impact of migration from rural to urban and its importance.

### Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this paper is to examine the links between female migration and readymade garment sector in Bangladesh. Besides, some specific objectives of this study are:

- 1) To know the socio- demographic profile of migrants.
- 2) To know the causes of rural to urban migration.
- 3) To find out the reasons for their involvement in garment Sector.
- 4) To reveal the consequences of migration.

## 2. Literature Review

Literature review help researchers limit the scope of their inquiry and they convey the importance of studying a topic to readers. A number of relevant books, journals, report, newspapers, website documents related to research problem have been consulted for the purpose of better understanding

the problem. Here an attempt has been taken to review some literature.

**Afsar (2001)** focuses on the sociological implications of female labor migration in Bangladesh. The paper is based on a sample survey of 213 (107 female and 106 male) workers drawn from the garments, pharmaceutical, electronics and food processing industries. Afsar study leads to a number of important findings as to the worker profile and background of female workers in formal manufacturing employment in Dhaka city, their status in the workplace and urban society as well as the functioning of the urban labor market from a gender perspective.

**Rahman&Chowdhury (2012)** indicate that internal migration has become both a major policy concern and a subject of a heated public debate in Bangladesh. It has been identified as both savior and villain of the national developmental story; a driver of economic expansion and modernization, while also the cause of severe urban deprivation and a destroyer of traditional rural life.

**Kibria(1995)** argues that the garments sector in Bangladesh has helped to create a new group of women industrial workers in the country. This article indicates that many of the women who work in the industry have had no prior wage work experience. In explaining this development, employer preference and global tradition are clearly important points to consider. In export production factories around the world women have emerged as preferred workers; employers often cite the lower cost and the docility and nimbleness of women in comparison to men.

**Majumder and Begum (2006)** in their studies indicate that women's employment in the export oriented industry of Bangladesh has narrowed down the gender gap in many spheres like employment, income, social prestige, control over income, decision making etc.

But at the same time, women's employment widens the gender gap in other spheres like health, social security etc. Tension and ambivalence are also more prevalent among female workers than among the male workers. Occupational segregation and gender discrimination in wage rates was also found to be significantly wide.

**Khosla (2009)** analyze existing literature on women's employment in the readymade garments industry in Bangladesh using a social exclusion framework. The paper finds that the impact of the industry on women's lives is mixed. Women have greater economic independence, respect, social standing and "voice" than before. However, harassment and exploitation persists. Given the important changes that this industry is helping to bring into women's lives, stakeholders should focus attention on making the industry a more humane and sustainable option for women.

**Dannecker (2002)** reveals that since the 70s the most noticeable feature of economic development in many Asian countries has been the employment of young women in industry. The increase of women workers in export oriented factories became a long-stay phenomenon in some countries, whereas in others like Bangladesh women have only been

recently linked to the global economy. In Bangladesh, virtually overnight, women entered a highly visible form of employment in factory production namely in garments.

**Shanthi (2006)** reveals that female labour migration in India tried to identify the pace of employment oriented migration. Traditionally, in case of women, it was observed that the marriage is the main reason for migration, but the recent trend also emphasizes the rise of independent women migration on the background of increase in employment opportunities in garment sector, export industries etc.

### 3. Methodology of the Study

This study is designed to examine the links between women migration and readymade garment sector in Bangladesh. The respondents of this study were female garment workers who migrated from villages to cities for livelihood and work at garment industries. This study is based on both qualitative and quantitative data. In order to achieve the objective of this research mainly social survey method was obtained. Data were collected directly from primary sources. A sample of 100 respondents has been selected from Ashulia in Saver and Mirpur in Dhaka. From Ashulia, 50 female workers were selected through purposive sampling who resides in two slums, two messes and 10 houses in Saver numbering 300. Similarly From Mirpur, 50 female workers were selected through purposive sampling who resides in two slums, two messes and 10 houses in Saver numbering 400. Due to the nature of the study, a semi-structured interview schedule was prepared and face to face interview was conducted. Some secondary data were also collected from different journals, books, research publications, website and other documents. On the basis of the purpose of the present study, necessary statistical tools have been used in analyzing the data.

### 4. Result and Discussion

The findings of the study describing the socio-economic background of the female migrant, nature of works before and after migration, causes and consequences of migration has been discussed categorically in five sections.

#### Socio-Economic and Demographic Profile of the Respondent

Socio-economic and demographic characteristics are very important to assess the homogeneity of the respondents as well as to go into the problem deeply. In this section an attempt has been taken to analyze the number of respondents by gender, age, level of education, occupational pattern, and monthly income. Table 1 illustrates the socio-economic and demographic characteristics of the respondents.

**Table 1:** Socio-Economic and Demographic Profile of the Respondent (N=100)  
Socio-Demographic characteristics

Sex=Female Age	No. of Respondents	Percentage
15-19	20	20
<b>20-24</b>	27	27
25-29	18	18
30-34	20	20

35-39	8	8
40-44	7	7
Total	100	100
<b>Educational Qualification</b>	<b>No. of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Illiterate	20	20
Primary	25	25
Secondary	35	35
Higher Secondary	20	20
Total	100	100
<b>Husbands/households occupation</b>	<b>No. of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Govt.Service	02	02
Private Service	38	38
Labor	20	20
Farmer	15	15
Business	08	08
Emigrant	01	01
No Answer	14	14
Total	100	100
<b>Husband's Educational Qualification</b>	<b>No. of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Illiterate	20	20
Primary	30	30
Secondary	35	35
Higher Secondary	15	15
Total	100	100
<b>Monthly Income</b>	<b>No. of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
>5000 TK	28	28
5000-10000 TK	42	42
10000-15000 TK	15	15
15000-20000 TK	10	10
20000-25000 TK	2	2
25000-30000 TK	2	2
30000+	1	1
Total	100	100

Source: Field survey 2011-2012

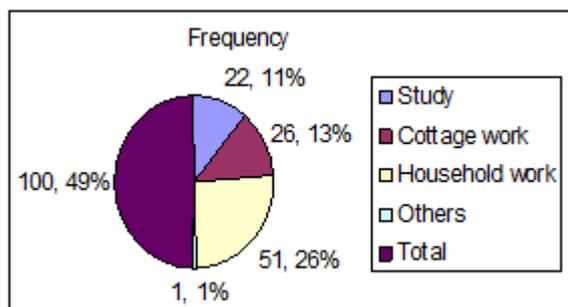
Total respondent of this study were 100 female garment workers. The highest number of respondents 27 are in age group of (20-24) and the lowest number of respondents 7 belongs to the age group of (40-44) In terms of respondents level of education, about 35% of the respondents completed secondary level of education 20% were illiterate and only 20% has completed higher secondary level education. The study reveals that 20% of the respondent's husbands or households are labor. In terms of total monthly income about 42% family income was between TK 5000-10000 per month, followed by 3% family income was between TK 20000-25000 per month. Marital status is the important component of any kind of study. Findings of the surveys in 1990, 1999 and 2002 showed that in garments industry only 28 percent of female workers are married, comprise more than 67 percent of total female worker (Majumder, 2002).

**Table 2:** Name of the district they come from

Name of the district	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Faridpur	12	12
Borishal	18	18
Kurigram	18	18
Rongpur	22	22
Soriatur	12	12
Rajbari	4	4
Khulna	4	4
Others	10	10
Total	100	100

Source: Field survey 2011-2012

Findings of the study show that, the female garment workers who migrates from various district in Bangladesh. The finding reveals that most of them has come from Faridpur 12% Borishal 18% Kurigram 18% Rongpur 22% Shirajgonj 12% Soriatur 12% Rajbari 4% Khulna 4% and 10% others district in Bangladesh.



**Figure (A):** Type of Work before Involvement in Garment Sector

Source: Field survey 2011-2012

The figure reveals that 22% of the garments workers were students 26.13% of them were cottage workers and 51.26% were housewives before joining the factory. This feature indicates that most of these women have no opportunities to involve in wage earning sectors.

**Table 3:** Causes of Migration

Causes of migration	Frequency	Percent
Family pressure	37	37
Husband Torture	15	15
River Bank Erosion	13	13
Individual Freedom	21	21
Cheated by the Beloved	4	4
Being Widow	5	5
Lack of Security in Village	2	2
No jobs in village	3	3
Total	100	100

Source: Field survey 2011-2012

Table 3 reveals that causes of migration and involvement in garment Sector. In this study, finding shows that 37% of the workers had joined the industry for family pressure. Most of them said that the economic condition of their family is not well enough to maintain a family size of 6-7. For this reason, they came to Dhaka to find a job in garment sector.

**Table 4:** Causes of Involvement in Garment Sector

Causes of Involvement	No. of respondent	percentage
Easy to get	27	27
No need of formal education	23	23
No alternative	25	25
Has status	15	15
Has right to quit	7	7
Others reason	3	3
Total	100	100

Source: Field survey 2011-2012

Table 4 reveals that 27% women think that the job of garment easy to get, 23% said that, no need of formal education to get garment job, 7% said that from garments sector worker has right to quit.

**Table 5:** Types of works they occupied

Types of works	No. of respondent	percentage
Machine operator	42	42
Helper	28	28
In charge	15	15
Supervisor	10	10
Quality controller	2	2
Others	3	3
Total	100	100

Source: Field survey 2011-2012

Table 5 reveals that 42% female worker are machine operator, 15% female worker are in charge and 2% are quality controller. Women typically occupy jobs as operators and are excluded from positions of responsibility (Ara, 2010). The findings of this study also support this. Most of the respondents under this study work as operator, helper, finisher, and involve in ironer section. Very few of them get appointment as supervisor.

**Table 6:** Effect of migration

Effect of migration	No. of respondent	percentage
Ensure income	27	27
Increased income	23	23
Increased status	15	15
Ensure security	10	10
Ensure empowerment	20	20
Others	5	5
Total	100	100

Source: Field survey 2011-2012

Table 6 reveals that 27% female worker said that migration and join to the garment sector very importance for ensure income, 20% female worker said that job in the garment sector importance for ensure empowerment.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

The nexus between Readymade Garment (RMG) and rural to urban women migration remain a less discussed area among the academician for a long time. The role of readymade garment industry in increasing the rural to urban women migration has not been adequately highlighted in the existing studies and policy documents. But with the initiation of the Readymade Garment (RMG) sector mainly in Dhaka city, the migration of women from the rural settings to this sector is growing fast. Readymade garment (RMG) sector creates jobs in complementary industries or services, such as accessories, packaging, toiletries, courier, finance, transport and telecommunication services, etc (Rashid, 2013). It is found in many previous studies that mainly young women of age group 16 to 25 work in garment sectors in Bangladesh (Kabeer, 1991). This is a common trend in case of labour forces in export-oriented sector worldwide (Fernandez, 1983; Joekes, 1985).

This study reveals that more than 80 percent of the respondents are the most able working category (15-30 year). Table 1 shows respondent's education status. This table illustrates that 20% of the respondents have no formal education 25% completed primary education 35% of the female workers have secondary and 20% of female workers have higher secondary education. Though, prior to the establishment of garment factories, poorer women,

compelled by poverty and lack of social security arrangements, migrated to towns and cities in search of improved livelihood to work as construction labour or domestic help, Readymade Garment (RMG) sector emerged as a leading factor for this type of women migration.

There is a presumption that garment workers particularly the female garments workers come from poor family since most of them are motivated to search for work in response to economic crisis of their family. The survey in 1996 shows that among the different groups of women that the garment sector has mobilized most are women from poor households (Majumder, 2002). The findings of this study revealed that most of the respondent believed from the garment sector they earned a secure income.

Though their employer did not pay them a regular scheme, they have not any formal contract, still now this sector is more suitable for them. This finding is consistent with the findings of (Sidique, 2003). He opined that the single most important aspect of garment employment that women workers valued was that they earned a secure income. While their wages were not always paid on time, in contrast to many other forms of employment available to them, they were paid and so had a minimum degree of security. Normally one female worker receives monthly remuneration Taka 3,000-3,500 (USD \$37.50-\$43.75). Poverty, lack of work availability, unemployment, natural disaster and socio-cultural factors like marriage, family conflict, better educational opportunities etc. are among the most dominating factors influencing the people to migrate. In Bangladesh, every year a large number of people are pursuing migration as their livelihood strategies (Rahman & Chowdhury, 2012).

The studies on push factor related to migration showed that migration is initiated by over-population, floods, natural disasters, riverbank erosion, growing landlessness and exploitation by the rural elite and money lenders. On the other hand, the perceived or potential earning opportunities in urban areas are the main pull factor. When women are considered in these approaches, they usually migrate to follow their husbands (Chant, 1995). The table 3 illustrates the causes of female migration to join the garment industry. The study finding shows that 37 % of the workers had joined the industry for family pressure. Most of them said that, the economic condition of their family is not well enough to maintain a family size of 6-7. For this reason, they came to Dhaka to find a job in garment sector. 15 % of the female workers came to get relief from husband torture and 5 % came to overcome the difficulties of widow life. Another 13 % came for destroying of homestead land for river bank erosion. A significant portion (3%) joined the garment sector for individual freedom. The study finding indicates that most of the respondents had been motivated to join garment sector by their relatives and friends. Table 4 reveals that causes of involvement in garment sector 27% women think that the job of garment easy to get 23% respondents said that no need of formal education to get garment job.

Table 6 reveals that effect of migration-27% female worker said that migration and joining to the garment sector are

very important for ensure income, 15% respondents said that joining to the garment sector increased their status and 20 % female worker said that job in the garment sector importance for ensure empowerment.

In their studies many thinkers (Afsar,2001; Kibria,1995; Dannecker, 2002; Majumder&Begum, 2006; Shanthi,2006) focus on the causes of female labour migration and increase in employment opportunities in garment sector. But they do not focus on Nexus between Rural-Urban female migration. This study is different from other studies because from the findings of the study it is evidenced that the migration of women from the rural settings to this sector is growing fast. Readymade Garment sector provide a wide range of employment opportunity for the devastated rural women.

## References

- [1] Afsar, R. (2001). 'Sociological Implications of Female Labour Migration in Bangladesh'. In RehmanSobhan, and Nasreen, Khandoker. ( Eds). *Globalisation and Gender: Changing Patterns of Women's Employment in Bangladesh*, Dhaka :The University Press Limited.
- [2] Barkat, A., &Maksud, A.K.M. (2001). *Impact of Globalization on Women in Bangladesh*, Dhaka: BNPS.
- [3] Bhattacharya, D., &Rahman, M. (1997). *Female Employment Under Export-Propelled Industrialization in Bangladesh*. London: polity press.
- [4] Begum, A. (1997). *Destination Dhaka –Urban Migration: Expectation and Reality*. Dhaka: The university press limited.
- [5] Chant, M. (1995). *Women and Survival inMexican Cities: Perspective on Gender, LabourMarkets and Low-Income Households*, Manchester: University press.
- [6] Dannecker, P. (2002). *Between conformity and Resistance:Women Garment Workers in Bangladesh*, Dhaka: The University Press Limited.
- [7] Fernandez, K. (1983). *For We are Sold, I and My People, Women and Industry*. In Mexico's Frontier, Albany: State University of New York press.
- [8] JoekeS,S.( 1985). *Women in the World Economy: An INSTRAW Study*, New York : oxford
- [9] Rahman. K. M. M., &Chowdhury, S., Kumar. (2012). *Decelerate Decline: State of Poverty in Bangladesh*, edited by Rashed, Al Mahmud, Titumir, Dhaka: ShrabonProkashani.
- [10] Kibria, N. (1995). *Becoming a Garments Worker: The Mobilization of Women into The Garment Factories of Bangladesh*. In *Globalization and Gender: Changing Pattern of Women's Employment in Bangladesh*, RehmanSobhan, and Nasreen, Khandoker. (Eds). Dhaka : The University Press Limited.
- [11] Khosla, N. (2009). *Women's Employment in The Readymade Garments Industry in Bangladesh* ; Westview Press.
- [12] Kabeer, N. (1991). *Cultural Dopes or Rational Fools? Women and Labour Supply in the Bangladesh Garment industry*. European Journal of Development Research.
- [13] Rashid. M. (2013). *Rural-Urban Female Migration in Bangladesh: Need for Information Support and Institutional Responses*; global journal of human social science sociology and culture, volume13 issue 5 version.
- [14] Ara, Ms. S. (2010). *Empowerment of Female garment workers*, Dhaka: PROGRESS, GTZ office.
- [15] Majumder, P., & Begum, A. (2006). *Engendering Garment Industry : The Bangladesh Context*, Dhaka: The University Press Limited.
- [16] 16.Majumder, P. (2002). *Health Status of Garment Workers in Bangladesh*, Dhaka :BIDS.
- [17] Islam, M. R. (2014). *Globalization and changing pattern of women life: A sociological study on Readymade Garment sector in Bangladesh*. Business review Bangladesh, Journal of Business and Technical Progress, Vol.3, No.1 Dhaka: East Raza Bazar Farmgate.
- [18] Sidique, K. (2003). *Deceleration in the Export Sector of Bangladesh and Women Workers: Assessing Impacts and Identifying Coping Strategies*. CPD Occasional Paper Series No. 26, Dhaka: Centre for Policy Dialogue.
- [19] Shanthi, K. (2006). *Female Labour Migration in India: Insights from NSSO Data*; Working Paper 4/2006, Madras: Madras School of Economics.