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**Women Migrant Workers and Their Transition across
State Boundaries:
Labour Exporting Policies of Bangladesh and the Reality**

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**Women Migrant Workers and Their Transition across State Boundaries:
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Abstract

Women's labor migration from Bangladesh gained traction in 2013. According to the Bureau of Manpower, Employment, and Training, a total of 2,91,098 Bangladeshi women moved for employment between 2015 and 2019. However, the most difficult challenge Bangladesh has is the repatriation of the majority of them from Middle Eastern nations owing to violence at the destination, which includes overwork, forced imprisonment, non-payment of salaries, malnutrition, and emotional, physical, and sexual assault. The death toll is also rising, expressing concern about migration policy. As a result, the study seeks to determine the extent to which the structure of Bangladesh's female labor exporting policy has the ability to safeguard such women in destination countries. This qualitative study seeks answers by conducting a careful content analysis of accessible secondary data and policy papers on the breadth and limitations of Bangladesh's women's labor exporting laws.

Keywords: Women migrants; Bangladesh; Empowerment; Alienation; Poverty; Migration policy

Introduction

The birth of Bangladesh in 1971 occurred at a time of emerging neoliberalism, which brought numerous changes in the cultural, socioeconomic, and politico-economic spheres. Migrant workers from Bangladesh, who are rhetorically considered “remittance warriors” owing to the internationalization of labor against the backdrop of neoliberalism, have become the country’s second-largest contributor of foreign exchange earnings (World Bank 2019).

While many Bangladeshi women moved abroad earlier to join their husbands in Britain, the US, and Italy, in particular, it was never easy for female workers to migrate overseas (Gardner and Shukur 1994). Value-driven migration policies intermittently banned female migration from the 1980s to the 1990s in the name of safety and security (Bélanger and Rahman 2013; Dannecker 2005). Moreover, negotiating numerous social, cultural, religious, and political barriers was more significant in patriarchal ideology. However, in the long run, Bangladesh started seeking opportunities for its women workers in the Gulf countries, including Oman, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates. The government began doing this at a time when other Asian countries were blocking or limiting women’s travel to these countries due to allegations and proof of workplace misery, abuse, and sexual harassment.

Every year, over 700,000 Bangladeshis find work abroad, with a substantial number of them being women, whose labor migration from Bangladesh began to gather speed in 2013. According to the Bureau of Manpower, Employment, and Training (BMET, 2020), 291,098 Bangladeshi women moved to work overseas between 2015 and August 2019, making the nation one of the top labor-exporting countries for women in the world. The essential point is that this recruiting procedure is primarily carried out by unauthorized brokers, which allows for trafficking and exploitation. Many reports have been published about the exploitation and oppression of migrant domestic workers of many ethnicities, especially Bangladeshis, in the

Gulf Area countries (Dale et al. 2002; International Labour Organisation [ILO] 2020a, 2020b; International Organisation for Migration [IOM] 2020a; Rubiano-Matulevich and Beegle 2008; United Nations [UN] 2015; Zlotnik 2020).

However, the formidable difficulty Bangladesh is currently facing is their repatriation, primarily from Middle Eastern nations, due to violence at their destination, which includes heavy workloads, forced imprisonment, underpayment, non-paid salaries, lack of food, and emotional, physical, and sexual assault. The mortality toll is likewise rising, highlighting increasingly severe concerns about such labor movement strategies. As a result, the current study seeks to determine the extent to which the structure of Bangladesh's female labor export policy has the ability to safeguard such women in the target nations. This qualitative study seeks answers by conducting a careful content analysis of accessible secondary data and policy papers on the breadth and limitations of Bangladesh's women's labor exporting laws.

Literature Review and Study Background

Bangladesh is a significant supplier of migrant labor in the Asia-Pacific region. Bangladesh's second-largest source of income comes from employment overseas, with remittances totaling US\$12 billion in 2016, according to a national overview study by UN Women. Even though there are fewer female migrants and they earn less, particularly the low-skilled ones, women send home up to 70 to 80 percent of their income, which is much more than males. In the 1990s, Bangladesh set age restrictions on female migrants and banned the labor relocation of women without skills, excluding those moving for domestic work, to safeguard female migrants. Many Bangladeshi women were deterred from emigrating by the difficulties of the process, but ironically, others were compelled to do so via illegal and unauthorized means. Women made up fewer than one percent of the overall outflow of registered migrant workers between 1991 and 2003 as a result of these restricted labor migration laws, which were partially based on

cultural gender norms. There has been a consistent rise in the female migrant labor force since 2003, after the government of Bangladesh lifted the prohibition on labor migration and other limitations. Most of the employment held by women is in the domestic sector, although they are also found in the textile industry (also known as the Ready Made Garment [RMG] sector), nursing, caregiving, driving, and secretarial work. By 2015, women accounted for 19 percent of all migrant workers in Bangladesh. However, this number is low compared to other South Asian countries (Rashid and Ashraf 2018; Shamim and Holliday 2018). The Bangladeshi government has recently started collaborating with other nations and international organizations to establish and implement programs, agreements, and laws that empower and safeguard female migrant workers. Bangladesh passed the Overseas Employment and Migrants Act (OEMA) 2013 and released the Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment Policy 2016 to protect the rights of migrants and turn obstacles into opportunities and advantages for society at large. In the same vein, the government acknowledged migration as a chance for growth in its eighth five-year plan, as acclaimed by the Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere (CARE 2021).

The Scenarios of Abuse of Female Migrant Workers

Local newspapers like The Daily Star and the Dhaka Tribune publish stories about female migrant workers' bodies being returned to their families after they died without being compensated or given a reason. Before their death, they experienced sexual and physical assault and dishonest recruiting agency practices in the country of destination (CARE 2021). Hundreds of thousands of employees who travel overseas each year to pursue their ambitions return in coffins and corpse bags. A total of 3,652 migrant workers' bodies were brought to Bangladesh in 2021, 25 percent higher than the previous year. In 2020, 2,907 dead bodies were brought home, based on data from the Wage Earners' Welfare Board. The largest country for work destinations, Saudi Arabia, sent the most corpses home in 2021 (1,295 total), followed by

Malaysia (725), the United Arab Emirates (374), Kuwait (323), and Bahrain (100). The remaining bodies came from Egypt, Greece, Turkey, Brazil, the United States, Japan, Sudan, Palau, and other nations (Ara 2022). The Daily Star reported, for instance, that between 2016 and 2019, “410 female migrant workers’ bodies were returned to Bangladesh, with the highest number coming from Saudi Arabia (153), followed by Jordan (64) and Lebanon (52),” and that just in 2019, “at least 800 female migrant workers returned from Saudi Arabia after being tortured and sexually abused” (Siddiqui 2020). Many female migrant laborers have reported experiencing starvation, sexual abuse, and physical torture. Female migrant workers experience excessive workloads, underpayment, and other abuse and assault. These women had no legal rights, no recourse to justice, could not contact the embassies, and were discarded by their recruiting organizations (CARE 2021; Shamim and Holliday 2018; Siddiqui 2020).

Year after year, employers or recruiting agencies seize the passports of migrant domestic workers in up to 95 percent of instances, preventing them from changing jobs, fleeing, or complaining to legal authorities. As a result, they are solely reliant on such agencies. Furthermore, they are subjected to extremely long working hours without any holiday and are kept locked within the house or property. They were sometimes denied food or given just leftovers. Several studies (Asis 2003; Boyd and Grieco 2003; ILO 2020b; IOM 2020b; Kibria 2011; Oppenheim 2019; Shaw 2018) have indicated mental violence in the form of screaming and insults. Abuse, such as being yanked by the ears or burnt with boiling water, is also prevalent. There is also physical abuse, ranging from verbal assaults to being groped, attempted rape, and real rape. Female workers confirmed that they were forced to endure various forms of abuse by their employers and agencies. Sometimes they were forced to work without pay, had to sleep on the floor of a storage room in a crowded and suffocating environment, or in the employer’s living room.

Many of the women questioned by the Ovivashi Karmi Unnayan Program (OKUP) claimed that recruitment agents in Middle Eastern countries beat, suppressed, and dehydrated them in order to compel them to go back to those employers, while it is the victim's own family and relative who had to pay for their return flights. Such women seldom appear in court because they believe the system is corrupt, they do not want to be labeled and stigmatized for speaking out about the violence they experienced, and they are afraid that their attorneys would urge them to dismiss their claims (Aljazeera 2019). The Bangladesh Rehabilitation Assistance Committee (BRAC) charity program stated that in 2019, about 900 female migrants returned from Saudi Arabia, while the number in 2018 was 1,300, with claims of mistreatment, torture, abuse, and non-payment of salary (Tithi 2019). While interviewing 110 migrant Bangladeshi women workers, 86 percent claimed they did not receive their full pay, while 14 percent stated that they were sexually abused during their period of work (Aljazeera 2019).

Although the OEMA 2013 was enacted to “advertise possibilities for foreign employment and to create a secure and equitable framework of migration, to protect the rights and well-being of migrant workers and their immediate families, and to make allowances in according to the International Convention on the Rights of Migrant Workers and Family members” all of these injustices are being occurred with the migrant workers.

According to the BRAC Migration Programme, around 600 recruiting agencies at present, although previously there were only 15 to 20 agencies, have been enticing economically weak women from all around the nation with the promise of better work and higher pay in Saudi Arabia via their local dalals (brokers). Currently, recruiting agencies in Bangladesh are getting the advantage of sending two male workers overseas if they can send one female worker. This system has also played a role in increasing migration to the Gulf States. On top of that, following the restructured law, women migrant workers officially do not

need to pay the recruiting agencies or pay a little to the brokers to migrate, so more and more women are becoming the prey of unsafe migration (Tithi 2019).

The BMET (2018) claimed that one out of every ten migrants from Bangladesh is a woman, most of whom are uneducated and poor. The agencies or intermediaries have fooled them with fake promises of better salaries (around BDT20,000 or US\$237 monthly), but they send them to the destination countries without any job contracts. Every year, hundreds of these migrant laborers return home empty-handed, with just 318 receiving compensation (BDT9,200BDT or US\$109 per labor) thus far in 2018. According to official data, over 83,000 female migrants worked in the Middle East in 2017, a figure that was four times greater than the preceding two years. This occurred due to negotiating a labor agreement involving Saudi Arabia and Bangladesh back in 2015. The most shocking data is about the caravan of corpses. Bangladesh received 311 women workers' dead bodies between 2016 and 2019 only from the Gulf countries and 119 only in the calendar year 2019; of them, 30 committed suicide, and 19 were unclear from Saudi Arabia (Tithi 2019).

In Bangladesh, as well as in the destination countries, more than hundreds of recruiting agencies, or dalal or middlemen, are working, and they are alluring and targeting the economically vulnerable, including divorced, separated, home servants, garment workers, and destitute women from all around the country in pursuit of better employment and higher income in those Gulf countries. There are no accountability procedures in place for government entities in Bangladesh that deal with migration and the welfare of expatriate employees. In the utter lack of such a framework, recruiting agencies continue to conduct their business with the assistance of local dalals (brokers). As a result, it is crucial to go through the entire process of women's labor migration and their protection by the system and policy in both the country of origin and the country of destination. Although the government of Bangladesh now and then

denies the disadvantaged and exploited history of women migrant workers, we want to understand and explore the truth about their marginalization in the workplace.

Research Questions and Objectives

Based on the research background, the central research questions that the research is going to explore are as follows,

1. How protective are the structures of women labor exporting policies in Bangladesh?
2. What is the real situation of the women labor migrants in the destination countries?

To address the central research question, the study explores the following specific aspects as well: the nature of the women migrants' workers, the major destination countries, and the nature of the jobs, the socioeconomic and mental status of female laborers during the post-migration period, the response of the Bangladesh government and destination countries to the emergency crisis of female laborers based on the provisions of OEMA 2013, and finally the status of female empowerment after migration in the host country.

Research Design

A qualitative approach has been used as per the direction of the research question, considering ontology and epistemology. A total of seven cases have been collected from secondary sources, which include two national daily newspapers, namely the Daily Star (4 cases), ABC Radio (1 case), and Reports of Human Rights Watch (2 cases). All the cases were taken only after cross-checking different sources in the national and international domains, and then the most reliable source was selected for our reference. The process of victimization and the nature of fraudulence and violence have been captured throughout the case studies. A thematic analysis tool was utilized, involving a rigorous content analysis based on available secondary data and policy briefs covering Bangladeshi women's labor-exporting policies. Ethical guidelines for

researching humans and from secondary data sources have been followed strictly and thus no incidents of psychological or physical harm have taken place, and credit has been given in terms of citation and referencing of the sources.

Theoretical and Analytical Framework

This research explores the answer to the research questions using the theoretical grounds of Ravenstein’s (1889) laws of migration and Lee’s (1966) model of migration. Thus, the characteristics of the female migrants and the phenomena that worked in terms of place of origin (push factors) and place of destination (pull factors), either in positive or negative ways, include evaluation of employment opportunities, living conditions, climate, the availability of cultural and leisure facilities, the presence or absence of discriminatory treatment, as well as cost factors. The intervening obstacles of women’s migrations also check attention regarding physical and political barriers. On the other hand, regarding the cases of female migration from Bangladesh, the nature of migration, trends, and migration differences among categories of migrant workers are seeking attention, and attempts have been made to explore these issues.

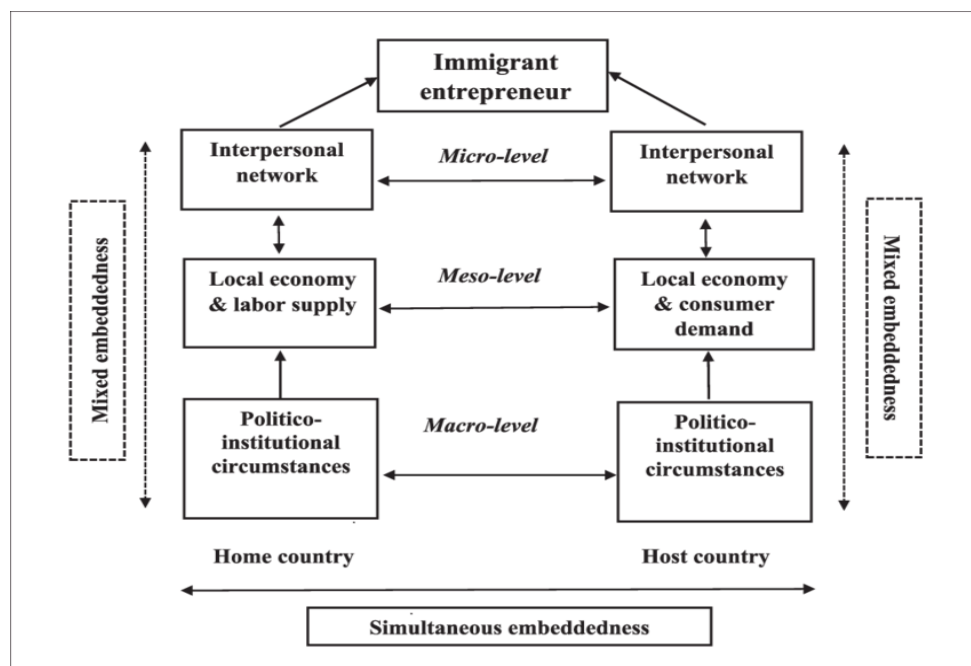


Figure 1. Simultaneous embeddedness (You and Zhou, 2018).

Using the theoretical framework of Lee's and Raven Stein's, the current research is analyzing the vulnerability of female migrant workers in both the country of origin and the country of destination. Thus, You and Zhou's (2018) simultaneous embeddedness approach has been utilized. Built on the concept of mixed embeddedness, simultaneous embeddedness focuses on the connections between the home and host nations. They situate the immigrant entrepreneur at the centre of the two home and host nations' three-rung spheres of influence and consider how important factors are constantly interacting in global space. Their attention is on international interpersonal networks at the microlevel. The local labor market circumstances in the home country were the main emphasis at the meso-level. Additionally, they contend that broad politico-institutional variables might either encourage or discourage immigrants from pursuing entrepreneurship at the macro-level, which was the area of attention. We attempted to investigate the causes of Bangladeshi women's migration and their vulnerabilities at home and abroad using the same methodology, and then we attempted to suggest some policy ideas for improvement and women-friendly migration policy.

The Nature of Women Migrant Workers

Feminization of labor (Standing 1989) during the 1980s in the global economic restructuring is attributed to a strong connection with women's long-distance migration (internal) also in Bangladesh. Bangladesh's RMG sector is known for its robust manufacturing capacities and vibrant ecosystem. The Bangladesh RMG sector has experienced continuous growth. It has emerged as an important worldwide center for garment sourcing, providing a platform for women to leave their homes and engage in various income-generating activities since the beginning of their establishments. Currently, there are more than 4,000 factories in this sector. Therefore, the feminization of migration flows is attributed to the internationalization of cheap labor (Chattopadhyay 1997; Piper 2003; Raghuram 2004), which became prominent in the last

four decades (Ahmed 2019). The nature of women's migration overseas can be described from a micro and macro point of view. Most macro-level studies considered modern slavery (Ahmed 2019; Bales 2012), the feminization of labor (Standing 1989), Bangladesh's strategic capture of the women's labor market in the absence of other countries due to their protective measures (Siddiqui 2008), the demand for cheap labor in the global market, and poverty and destituteness (Dannecker 2005) to be the catalytic factors responsible for the women's migration. In the case of microanalysis, the main focuses were found mostly connected to situational factors, such as gender stereotypes, patriarchy, being the victim of gender-based violence and stigma (Shamim 2006), and being forced to migrate abroad by the family members (Dannecker 2005; OKUP 2019).

It has been found that most women migrants are not literate enough and live in poverty, which easily influences them to get allured by fake promises of local dalals about a bright future overseas. In most cases, women interviewed noted that these local dalals neither have any licensed agency nor even care to maintain the legal requirements described in the OEMA 2013. It has been found that local dalals have extra-legal networks to produce fake evidence, such as birth certificates to subside the age margin (25 years), job contracts or recruitment letters, fake training certificates, and so on, in return for money. Even though women migrant workers were told earlier that they would never have to pay, they became the prey of those miscreant agents owing to their ignorance. These findings are also evident in a 2019 study by the Ovibashi Karmi Unnayan Program (OKUP), which means Migrant Workers Development Organization in English.

With all these discrepancies, the migration of women laborers has doubled in the last decade. Table 1 represents the women's power sold in the major destination countries.

Table 1. Nature of Women Power Sold in Major Destination Countries in the Last 30 Years**

Year	Number of Female Migrant Workers	Yearly Increase (Percentile)	Major Destination Countries (Ranked by number of migrants in a year)
1991-2010	151,979	-	KSA, UAE, Lebanon, Jordan, Mauritius, Malaysia
2011	30,579	10.37	UAE, Oman, Lebanon, Jordan, Mauritius, Malaysia
2012	37,304	21.99	UAE, Oman, Lebanon, Jordan,
2013	56,400	51.19	UAE, Oman, Jordan, Lebanon,
2014	76,007	34.76	UAE, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Jordan
2015	103,718	36.46	Oman, Qatar, KSA, Singapore, Malaysia, UAE
2016	118,088	13.85	Oman, KSA, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, Jordan, Singapore, Malaysia
2017	121,925	3.25	KSA, Oman, Qatar, Malaysia, Kuwait, Singapore
2018	101,695	-16.59	KSA, Malaysia, Qatar, Oman, Singapore
2019	104,786	3.04	KSA, Oman, Qatar, Singapore,
2020*	18,813	-	KSA, Oman, Singapore, Jordan
Total	921,294		

** The table has been compiled from the BMET (2020) database.

It is conspicuous from Table 1 that only a negligible number of women migrated to other countries than the Middle East, which we want to claim not only because of the discussed catalytic and situational factors but also because this involves extraterritorial loyalty to those lands because of the values rooted in the Bengali-Muslim identity crisis (Ahmed 2019), that if they go there, they will not be stigmatized.

Moreover, according to the BMET database, the nature of the job in those host countries ranges from professional (1 percent), skilled (44 percent), semi-skilled (41 percent) to less skilled (14 percent). According to the annual report of the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare &

Overseas Employment (MEWOE 2019), women are involved in different types of work. For instance, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia alone recruited over 0.3 million female domestic workers, whereas, in other countries, women are working as housekeepers, beautification workers, garment workers, caregivers, and so on.

Labor Exporting Policies and the Experiences of Returned Women Migrant Workers

According to the Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies (BAIRA), 13,000 member agencies are collaborating to recruit migrant workers. In contrast, an uncountable number of dalals are working, even though section 9 of the OEMA 2013 suggests “no person shall operate any activity relating to recruitment unless issued a license.” The OEMA 2013 seems to be very protective about migrant workers’ rights and welfare, yet the execution of the Act is highly questionable as the outcome is highly evident. It has been said that the position of these dalals is often linked to the Lumpen pauper system, or mastans, which emerged with the advent of political capitalism in Bangladesh, where every action is linked to local predatory capitalists (Ahmed 2019). The case of Shila is an instance of the effect of such a politically protected pauper.

Case One

Shila went to Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in search of a better life, but she met with a harsh reality once she reached there. She longed for compensation from her dalal as she was physically abused, worked without being paid, and finally spent two months in jail in Saudi Arabia before returning to Bangladesh. She said, “ My dalal beat me up and broke my leg as I filed a case against him.” She stayed in the hospital for months. The dalal is a local pauper in her village and has connections with political influencers. She is still looking for justice (Tithi 2019).

Returned migrant women abused and tortured abroad rarely get justice due to the intimidation of the local brokers. Besides, as they are mostly uneducated and poor, they hardly go for any legal aid. Workers, however, have the right to launch a civil complaint under Section 28 of the OEMA 2013. A migrant worker who is impacted by a breach of any of this Act's provisions or of the contract of employment may initiate a civil suit for compensation, without detriment to his or her ability to seek criminal prosecution for any infringement under this Act. Which will be provided under Section 18, Subsections 2 and 3. However, in those sections, we found no detail on how those compensations will be calculated and paid.

One of the returnees, Nuri Begum, lodged a complaint against her broker back in August 2019 and sought compensation. Before returning to Bangladesh from Saudi Arabia, she used to work as a housemaid in a family, and she reported that she was tortured and did not receive a salary for two months, and then she was also jailed for two months before flying home to Bangladesh. Nuri told the Thomson Reuters Foundation, "My dalal beat me up and broke my leg when I filed a case against him," She added, "After coming back to the country, I was in the hospital for 15 days, and now I am staying with a friend in fear, far away from my house, because the broker lives near my place" (Tithi 2019).

Like Nuri, most of the female migrant workers' histories are the same. The search for a livelihood ends in death for many, while for others, the trauma of torture and abuse never goes away after returning home. Most of these women who return home after facing such merciless torture and sexual harassment by their employers are not accepted well by their own families or by society at large. And the families of the deceased workers can never know the real reasons for their deaths, as no investigation is done. Official documents only state that they either died by suicide or suffered strokes. The trauma of torture and abuse never goes away even after returning home, rather it is replaced by the stigma of their own families and the society at large.

The inhuman conditions in which a large number of female migrant workers have to work overseas are represented in the following cases.

Case Two

On 24 October, Abiron Begum's family received her dead body in a coffin from the Shahjalal International Airport. The 40-year-old woman from Khulna went to Saudi Arabia in 2017, hoping to overcome her economic hardship. However, in a shocking turn of events, far from even close to fulfilling her dream, she had to give up her life due to the torture her Saudi employer subjected her. During her stay in Saudi Arabia, Abiron endured severe beatings at her employer's house, where she used to work as domestic help. The last time Abiron had a chance to talk to her sister, she expressed the terrible trauma that she had been going through. Reportedly, Abiron's employers beat her mercilessly; she even said her head had been shoved against a hot grill. She cried for help from her family over the phone, which was equally powerless to do anything to save her. At one point, her family completely lost communication with her (Tithi 2019).

Case Three

Kabirun Nahar, a 38-year-old woman from Moulvibazar, had recently worked as a housemaid at a Saudi household and returned to Bangladesh. Her employer never paid her. When she finally gathered the courage to ask for her salary, her employer got "enraged by her audacity" and pushed her off the second-floor staircase of the house. She returned home from the Kingdom on September 12 with scars on her forehead, a six-inch-long stitched wound on her left knee, and her right leg bandaged from her toes to her ankle (Tithi 2019).

Case Four

Dalia Amin, a 22-year-old woman who returned home from the Gulf country last August, had survived an attempted rape by her employers by jumping off the window of the building where

she used to work, which resulted in a broken vertebra and leg. Reportedly, she was not only tortured but also “sold” several times (Tithi 2019).

Case Five

Akhi, a 21-year-old girl with one elder brother and three other elder sisters, lost her mother when she was seven years old. His father was the owner of a small shop. After the departure of her mother, her father got married again. Akhi used to work in a beauty parlor. She was beaten up now and then by her stepmother, and thus she eloped with her cousin and got married, but after a few months, she got separated. She was sent to India as a home servant via a dalal when she was 15 and worked there for seven months. Then she was sent to Malaysia in March 2017 via the same dalal with the promise of working in a beauty parlor. However, she was employed in a massage center that operates as a prostitution ring without her willingness, and she urged them to send her back to Bangladesh. She was tortured now and then and engaged in prostitution. She has to take medicine to bear physical pain due to excessive sexual intercourse. She was forced to engage with a drug named “Ice” and “cocaine” so that she could work more and more, and gradually she became addicted. Every day she has to entertain 20-25 customers, and on the weekend, she entertains 50-60 customers. In 2018, she was caught by immigration police and sentenced to jail for three months, and after the completion of her sentence, she was sent to Bangladesh by Malaysian police with empty hands. Now she dreams and struggles to start a new life again (Kibria 2019).

Case Six

Dilara Begum, 24 years old, who worked as a Saudi Arabian maid, returned home empty-handed. She went years before wishing to achieve economic solvency but ended up with sexual abuse, physical torture, sleep deprivation, non-payment, and inadequate meals (Human Rights Watch 2010).

Case Seven

Rahima, 21 years old, returned home from Saudi Arabia after suffering from years of repression and labor exploitation. She explained that she was a housekeeper in Saudi Arabia. Her employers did not pay her salary; if she asked, they would usually stop providing food to her or give her a salary once every five months. They even poured hot water on her if she sought a salary (Human Rights Watch 2010).

BBC (2017; 2019) revealed that using online platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Website) and special apps (4 Sale) from Google and Apple, the maids are being bought and sold in the black market like slaves in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, which is a severe violation of the rules and regulations of the countries. While doing so, they use the hashtags “#Made for transfer” and “#Made for sale,” putting the price tag along with their picture, age, and phone number of the agency on their post and selling through bargains using messaging platforms. Thus, the broker brings girls and women from different countries to do this buying and selling business. All this demonstrated the violation of human rights and severe forms of violence. Some people have been arrested for conducting this online business in other countries, and the police are investigating many cases.

Reasons for Abuse: Reflection on The Implication of Labor Exporting Policies

The most significant reasons related to the abuse of workers compiled from the analysis of the cases show that there is a lack of awareness among the workers and a dearth of regulating activities to deal with dishonest recruitment agencies that provide false information to job seekers. As a result, proving an allegation becomes very difficult from the Bangladeshi side, as most workers are uneducated and have little or no training or proper information about the employer.

In addition, there is a lack of security and monitoring in the working place by the Labor Welfare Wing, as motioned in section 23 of OEMA 2013. For instance, the workers get abused

as they complain about irregular payments to the authorities. As there is a dearth of proper training, women are mostly less accustomed to the host country's language and environment. The agencies hardly brief them about the nature of the job they are pursuing. Provisions to oversee the pre-departure checks are not comprehensive, so recruiters are getting a chance to bypass them. The scope of the OEMA 2013 is limited to ensuring rights for workers employed overseas through formal channels. Therefore, those who went through informal paths are hardly protected. There is a lack of implementation of the OEMA 2013 and legal aid for the workers. Broadly, weak governance and accountability owing to the prevailing culture of undemocratic democracy in the womb of crony capitalism are also responsible for the crises.

The Response to the Emergency Crisis of Female Migrant Workers by the Country of Origin and Destination

The returnee migrant women workers defined the agency office in the Middle East as a "torture cell," as they were beaten, throttled, and starved until they agreed to work with them and agree with their terms and conditions. Since there is no separate or dedicated office for dealing with the arbitration cases of these migrant women workers, their claims remain undocumented. The BMET data showed that BDT2.9 million was received in compensation through arbitration for 315-woman returnees in 2018, and each woman got only BDT9,200 or US\$109, although they had to provide BDT10,000 to BDT10,0000 to the agencies and broker (Tithi 2019). The Migration Program at BRAC stated that female workers are returning home for one or several of four reasons, including irregular wages, a lack of adaptability, physical torture, and sexual abuse. The embassy in Saudi Arabia is not documenting even severe injuries and is unwilling to submit them to Saudi police, which is an injustice for these workers. In 2018, BRAC provided emergency services for the safe return of 1,365 female migrants from different countries. The Migration Welfare Wing of the Ministry stated that the government is helping

with repatriation, but they remain reluctant when it comes to taking the perpetrators to court, and sometimes the victim herself is not willing to go through the lengthy legal process, so they try to settle the disputes outside of court as they want to go back to the country as early as possible. Now the ministry is working on developing software to track the migrants both at the destination and the returnees at home (Anik 2019).

The Saudi government is also unhappy and feels disturbed by the reported cases of maltreatment of domestic female employees by their Saudi employers. Thus, in some cases, international organizations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch urged the Saudi authorities to protect these workers from abuse by developing strict policies and laws to protect migrant workers. The government must identify the corrupted recruitment agencies targeting vulnerable females and bring them to book for strict action. Some people have already been arrested for conducting the online business of selling “made” in the black market using online platforms and apps in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. The police are investigating around 90 cases in Saudi Arabia (BBC 2019).

The responses both in the place of destination and origin state are very limited in nature and not worthy to mention and thus demand a severe action plan to adopt to protect the labor law and to protect the rights of the migrant workers.

Recommendation for Policy Development

Significant legislative gaps exist in domestic and international aspects of migrant worker women’s pre-departure, post-arrival, return, and reintegration processes. It is the government’s responsibility to ensure the safe migration of women and protect their rights in their destined country when they return home after facing all kinds of violence at the hands of their merciless employers. The authorities often say they come back because they cannot cope with the Saudi culture and are not adequately trained for the jobs. Such statements demonstrate the failure of

policymakers to recognize the problem or the level of abuse these women have had to face. In an interview, Anisul Islam Mahmud Aljazeera, who chairs a parliamentary committee that monitors the work of the MEWOE, opined that “The government needs to spend more money on migrants and nurture them. As the need for female labor abroad grows, we must adopt a policy to safeguard them; the ministry is attempting but has not yet attained adequate status to address these gaps” (Aljazeera 2019; Migration Policy Institute 2020).

Furthermore, the Bangladesh embassy’s obligation under Riyadh’s is limited to storing data on women migrant workers, including those rescued by Saudi authorities, in shelter houses and finally repatriating them to Bangladesh. They are not doing anything more to preserve fundamental rights and care for the well-being of these remittance warriors, who suffer silently in their jobs. It is well known that the “kafala” system in Middle Eastern nations is one of the primary reasons why mistreated domestic employees cannot quit their professions after being subjected to systematic violence. Workers are not even allowed to maintain their passports under the regime. Their employers hold their passports, violating their human rights (Tithi 2019).

Although other Middle Eastern nations, notably Qatar and Bahrain, have eliminated the contentious “kafala” system in recent years, Saudi Arabia is far from doing so. Under these conditions, if we wish to break the tragic circle of exploitation, torture, and death in the Gulf nations, we must either focus on developing legislation that protects women in the destination countries or ceases shipping women workers as household assistants. The government should give this matter considerable consideration. If we must send our employees to the country, the migration experts working at BRAC stated, “we can send them as primary caregivers, nursing staff, and garment workers after providing them with the appropriate training, including language lessons, and only after making sure they are informed of their legal protections and

that they may seek redress if they encounter violent behavior and other problems” (Tithi 2019). Furthermore, we must explore alternative labor markets where female employees may feel protected. Because of the harsh working conditions in Saudi Arabia, countries such as the Philippines and Indonesia have long stopped sending their female employees there. By creating and exploiting websites and social media platforms, Bangladesh could improve its strategies for increasing awareness about migration and expanding online information distribution. All migrant groups, especially women, should have access to information and services. Thus, the government should come up with creative ways to do this. We would also want to see the administration take a decisive position right now. In order to assist migrants when they arrive, the government should set up facilities or offices at the airports (or other suitable locations) of the destination nations. For female migrant workers, the government should implement efficient and need-based reintegration programs and guarantee that returnees have access to them. All the amenities required for returnees should be made available through these programs, from financial advice to psychological assistance. This necessitates the employment of qualified personnel.

Conclusion

The caravan of corpses is getting longer, and more and more remittance warriors are coming home in coffins or destitute. The marginal condition of Bangladeshi women immigrants in Saudi Arabia cannot be explained in words. Bangladesh, a nation that relies so mainly on remittances, must plan for the homecoming of those migrant workers and the resulting loss of revenue and social unrest unless the proper policy is initiated to protect their rights in both the country of destination and the country of origin. More importantly, we need to develop a robust national policy that will protect all these needy migrant workers from maltreatment and fraudulence by different agents inside and outside the country—the whole migration process

needs to be monitored well by the state agencies. As a nation that exports labor, Bangladesh's government must exercise caution while entering into any labor agreements with other nations. Additionally, the actual migrant workers themselves needed to exercise greater caution before falling into any traps or starting the migration process. Ultimately, a safe, simple, and seamless migration is advantageous for both the person and the nation.

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