

**BANGLADESHI WORKERS IN SINGAPORE:
A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF TEMPORARY
LABOR MIGRATION**

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TO

Zabun Nahar Arayanna

Who has been a continuing inspiration to me

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Summary

This thesis is on Bangladeshi temporary labor migration to Singapore. This thesis examines the rationalities of the migrants and their families, their interpretations of the benefits of migration, the situation abroad and the social contexts these interpretations are embedded in. The data comes from fieldwork in Singapore and selected village studies in Bangladesh. Research methods include questionnaire surveys, in-depth interviews, focus group interviews, and participant observation.

In chapter two I present an overview of the relevant theoretical concepts forwarded to explain migration movements. I discuss the different approaches and their shortcomings and develop accordingly the frame for my empirical study. The extension of the rational choice model by including non-economic forces as well as the focus on migrant networks I have chosen allow not only new and interesting inside but a complex analysis of the different phases of migration processes.

In Chapter Three and Four the history of Bangladeshi migration to Singapore and a case study of a village in Bangladesh, where out-migration has become an important strategy of income generation of many families, are described. I argue in these chapters that migration processes cannot be understood without taking the context in the receiving as well as in the sending country into account. Especially the interpretation of the data I collected in the village allows me to criticise the economic models introduced in Chapter Two. I argue on the basis of the data collected that the social construction of status has changed due to

migration and initiates further migrations, independently of the economic benefit migration might have or the changing economic situation in the receiving countries. Furthermore the village study gives some interesting insights about the correlation between the notion of work and migration, education and migration or imagination and migration.

In Chapter Five I use sociological network approaches to present the organization of the migration processes between Bangladesh and Singapore. I scrutinize not only the role of social and symbolic ties but to show how these ties are getting redefined within the migration process and are continuously expanding. Thus several new and interesting aspects of networking and the way networks are constructed and changing within migration process are presented.

In the next two chapters I discuss and analyse the situation of the Bangladesh migrant workers in Singapore. The chapters reveal first of all that the migrants are active agents, who are able to negotiate and constitute their own spaces and room for manoeuvre while abroad.

In Chapter Eight and Nine I again present an analysis of the financial costs of migration and the impact of labour migration on the village level. First of all, I reconstruct the organization of migrations processes on different levels. By following concretely the interactions and activities of the different actors involved in the recruitment of labourers we gain an inside into the complexity of the whole procedure. A new transnational “industry” has developed around the organization of temporary labour migration, which is indeed difficult to control. It gets furthermore revealed how many actors are actively benefiting

from labour migration in the sending as well as in the receiving countries. Even though many migrants are becoming middlemen themselves the majority of migrants are actually the ones financing to a great part the whole “industry”. Therefore it is not astonishing, as the last chapter shows, that the economic situation of the families hardly ever improves through migration. The benefits for the migrants and their families are, if at all, non-economic. This outcome shows again, as I have stated in Chapter Two, that we need to extend the classical migration approaches and concepts is, as this thesis shows, only possible if the whole migration process is scrutinized and the data collected contextualized throughout the study. My thesis shows that mobility in times of global restructuring can only sufficiently be explained and understood if migration processes in their complexities are researched.

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Glossary of Non-English (Bengali) Words

<i>Adam Bapari</i>	Business people who are engaged in human migration trade
<i>Adam Babsha</i>	human-trading
<i>Attiyo</i>	relatives
<i>Bangsho</i>	Lineage
<i>Bari</i>	homestead, usually consisting of an inner courtyard with huts around (kin groups)
<i>Bari Murubbi</i>	head of <i>Bari</i>
<i>Bidesh</i>	foreign country
<i>Bideshi</i>	Foreigner
<i>Baralok</i>	rich person: good people
<i>Bhalomanush</i>	of high status: ‘good people’
<i>Bhalo Kaz</i>	good work: “work which is associated with higher status”
<i>BoroBari</i>	Literally large collection of households; (reputed Bari)
<i>Chalan</i>	Investment cost/ financial cost
<i>Chhotolok</i>	poor: ‘little people/mean people’
<i>Chhotomanush</i>	of low status, ‘little people’
<i>Dalal</i>	Broker / Agent
<i>Desh</i>	country/ home
<i>Ghor</i>	Room
<i>Gusthi</i>	Patrilineage
<i>Kacha Poisha</i>	easily earned/ received money
<i>Madrasa</i>	Muslim religious school
<i>Mandha Kaz</i>	bad work: “work which is associated with lower status”
<i>Matobbor</i>	village headman
<i>Mouza</i>	a village, a group or block of villages regarded as an administrative unit
<i>Murubbi</i>	senior member of the family or community
<i>Noya Sikder Bari</i>	New Sikder Bari
<i>Nichu-bangsho/gusthi</i>	low status lineage
<i>Paribar</i>	family
<i>Rakta</i>	blood
<i>Samaj</i>	society, community, also used for religious group
<i>Shalish</i>	conciliation
<i>Shikit Manush</i>	educated people
<i>Shikit manush-ar kaz</i>	work of educated people: the type of work which usually educated people do.
<i>Taka</i>	Bangladeshi currency. In 2000, the exchange rate was approximately SG\$ 1=Taka 30
<i>Thana</i>	administrative unit, <i>upazilla</i> / sub-district
<i>Ucchu-bangsho/gusthi</i>	high status lineage
<i>Union</i>	local council, a Union Board
<i>Zilla</i>	district