

Chapter 32

Migration Affecting Masculinities:

The Consequences of Migration on the Construction of Masculinities of Migrant Bangladeshi Men Living in the United Kingdom

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ABSTRACT

This chapter looks into the causes of behavioral changes among migrant Bangladeshi men after migration; especially changes in roles that they always considered are closely related to their gender identity. Masculinities inspire men to endure gender inequalities in the society. Therefore, one of the most significant causes of the chapter is to trace out the innate reasons of such changes, to plan some conscious actions that can be applied back in Bangladesh to challenge and change the prevailing constructs of masculinities to ensure a gender sensitive socio-cultural environment. The chapter reveals migrant Bangladeshi men's support to the perceived gender equality of British culture and their will to follow such practice. This chapter finally argues that migrant Bangladeshi men in the UK adopt a new kind of masculinities that doesn't have serious clash with the masculine ideologies that they had before migration and doesn't challenge their hegemonic position in the family.

INTRODUCTION

Migration is a concept that is as old as the human societies. From the dawn of civilization human were continuously moving from one place to another in search of better opportunities. Though centuries have passed since then, people are still following the path once travelled by their ancestors; may be in different ways, in different forms and under heavy loads of different regulations. In modern world, migration process depends on various specifics as the socio-economic status, educational backgrounds, national-

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ity, religion, gender or sexual identity of individuals and so on. Combination of different intersectional identities makes any individual more or less likely to migrate; and gender identity is one of the most influential ones. Individuals enter a new gender system through migration where they might discover their new roles radically different from what they have expected (Baluja, 2003).

Though globally the migration rate among women and men doesn't differ much (UNDESA, 2009), it is men who generally carry the pressure of expectation to support the family because of existing patriarchal social structure throughout the world. Almost every men living in human societies are somehow confined within the hypothetical construction of ideal masculinity. Masculinity is not any construction that is unitary and immovable; and they also differ in different contexts (Willott & Griffin, 1996; Edley & Wetherell, 1995). The study of migration often skips men as gendered constructs because the linear generalization of always considering men at the hierarchical level of power structures creates barriers to judge actual situation of men as gendered beings. Scholars often emphasize public exposure of men as more important than their inner feelings of gender (Kimmel & Messner; 1998).

The traditional concept of masculinity doesn't let men to be dependent on female members of the family. Being a man involves taking on the role of provider to the family (Willott & Griffin, 1996). Migration can be observed as a tool of reconfiguring one's masculinity by supporting or obstructing individual's ability to provide his family (Walsh, 2011). Migration, while might emphasize on the essentialized features of existing masculine attributes, also quickens the journey of a man to culturally accredited route of mature masculinity (Osella & Osella, 2000). In today's societies, migration works not only as a way to enact masculinities for men but also it works as the assertion of their manhood (Pessar & Mahler, 2003). As in most source countries, destination countries are portrayed as a utopia of all modern facilities and prosperity, migration increases peoples' expectation to accumulate a fortune from the destination country after migration. This way migration signifies a man's most glorious role, as breadwinner, who can support his family; or his access to outer world, where he can explore the unknown and create his own world.

Every year a good number of Bangladeshi citizens migrate abroad in search of better opportunities. If we focus on the data of global migration scenario we see that men are little more likely than women to migrate; whereas specific focus on Bangladesh shows us a great gender based disparity in the number of migrants. According to International Migration Report 2009, number of international male and female migrants was respectively 10.92 million and 10.48 million (approx.); whereas number of Bangladeshi male and female overseas migrants was respectively 935 thousands and 150 thousand (approx.) (UNDESA, 2009). One of the major reasons behind this is idealized masculinity is seen as an important virtue for men in Bangladeshi societies (Sowad, 2010). Men are seen as the household head and are entitled to all responsibilities to maintain the needs of the household, whereas women are only responsible for doing domestic chores. Interestingly, studies show that after migration men participates and helps women in domestic work from small to large extents (Donaldson & Howson, 2009).

Masculinities are continuously being secured, broken down and being reconstructed. Such formulation offers optimism to intervene the politics of masculinities to promote more peaceful and harmonious masculinities (Morrell, 2001). Sharing authority, even in small scale, with female counterparts after migration can result a positive change in the cognitive level of men and initiate reshuffling of responsibilities in both public and private sphere. So if migration can lead masculinities to such less hegemonic and more gender egalitarian way, then we need to search those determinants that lead the cognitive development of migrant men to gender equality. This chapter is focused to find out what does the process of migration to the United Kingdom (UK) mean to Bangladeshi men and their ideas

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