

Feminization of Pre-Migration Process of Male Migration: Changing Agency of Women in Rural Bangladesh

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Abstract

This article explores how young women's life courses sooner or later adapt to local migration culture involving them in their husbands' migration abroad that eventually create space to express their agency. In doing so, it sheds light on the feminization of pre-migration process following an intersectional analysis that focuses on how pre-migration activity, mobility and trans-border communication of women work together to bring changes in gender roles and social relationships in a patriarchal society. The findings of the study suggest that by observing the mobility and activity of the left-behind women of migrant households, the women of aspirant migrant households are encouraged in many cases to support their husbands' migration to enjoy their freedom and develop their agency that ultimately transform local gender relationships as a whole.

Keywords

Agency, Feminization, Gender, Migration, Transformation

1. Introduction

One afternoon in April 2017, my research assistant and I talked to Rekha (27), the wife of a migrant in Abu Dhabi for two years, sitting on small stools in front of her house while her seven-year-old son and four-year-old daughter were playing around us. Rekha informed that she dreamed of working as a primary school teacher or an NGO worker during her high school level education. However, she stopped her study after 8th class when her old father returned from abroad. After that, she changed her career objective and dreamed of marrying a migrant man as the second option to establish her position. She grew up in a

migration-prone area where a high level of male migration is seen. Although her father, paternal and maternal uncles have returned from abroad now, six of her half-brothers and several cousins still live in different countries in the Middle East. Similarly, many neighboring men of her father's and mother's village migrated to different countries. Thus, she observed how her mother, aunts, half-brothers' wives, and other women managed households in the absence of their husbands. So, she developed an ambition to marry a migrant-man so that she can deal with cash and manage the household alone. She stated,

“When my father returned from abroad, I changed my aim and started dreaming of marrying a migrant-man so that I can manage the household like my mother, aunts, and other neighboring women.”

However, her parents married her to a non-migrant who was a wage earner in the village because her parents' financial condition was not good as her elderly father returned from abroad. The family was not getting support from her half-brothers. When she became the mother of two children, gradually, she became concerned about the future of her little children and the household, seeing the neighboring migrant households. Once, she shared her concerns with her husband and advised him to go abroad. But initially, he was not enthusiastic because of his inability to manage the cost. “That time, I talked to my mother, who contacted one of my maternal cousins who finally managed a visa for my husband,” she said. After that, she informed that although her half-brothers did not help, she could manage the costs as her husband mortgaged-out lands and sold two cows while she borrowed an amount from her parents, and sold her jewelry. Currently, she manages the household taking instructions from her husband by phone and sometimes taking support from her parents, who live two villages away from Rashidpur.

Here Rekha's case indicates that the girls of the village have various aims during childhood to be engaged in earning activities after education. But their career decisions are interrupted by many social and cultural factors, which influence them to change their career decisions and eventually adapt to the migration practices of the locality where a high level of temporary male migration is observed. Migration and mobility heavily influence not only the lives of the migrants and their household members but also the non-migrants of the community. In this regard, [Raitapuro & Bal \(2016: pp. 389\)](#) show that from the outset of globalization in the 1990s, people around the world have been increasingly exposed to faraway places that have practical implications on their local lives. Consequently, in many cases male members develop aspirations to reach those places whilst their female counterparts play supportive role to achieve the desired future ([Collins, 2017](#)) contributing to reshaping the discourses and practices of local gender roles and social relationships.

1.1. Feminization of Pre-Migration Process

Migration has become an important economic, political and social issue of dis-

cussion not only on various national and international political levels but also in different academic disciplines in recent decades (Dannecker & Nadine, 2009). However, gender was not considered important in understanding the decisive factors behind international migration. Initially, women were considered as passive individuals who accompanied their husbands for family reunification (Hossain, 2023). This indicates that migration was always limited to men's issue. However, changes in women's role and involvement, their inclusion in the labor market including female migration and advancement in female emancipation process outdated the consideration of women as just the passive participants in the migration studies (Marinucci, 2007). This pattern of understanding began to change in the 1980s when the International Migration Review (1984) published an especial issue. Since then the concept, "feminization of migration" has become popular even though female migration is not a new phenomenon, but simply remained unrecognized in migration studies (Tittensor & Mansouri, 2017).

The concepts of the feminization of poverty, the feminization of labor and the feminization of migration play a significant role in the simplification of gender ideas discussed in feminist researches (Kabeer, 1994). The feminization of poverty presents women as the main victims of underdevelopment, structural maladjustment programs and the changes in agriculture or market system (Dannecker, 2005). Likewise, the feminization of labor focuses on the exploitation of women in new economic reconstruction due to unhealthy working conditions, low salaries and increased responsibilities (Akorsu, 2016). On the other hand, the involvement of women in formal economic sector is considered as their empowerment and self-dependence (Dannecker, 2005).

The feminization of migration focuses mainly on the quantitative increase in the mobility of women in the "age of migration" (See Massey et al., 1998) due to globalization process (Dannecker, 2005). Adepoju (2003) shows that, nowadays, more women migrate for economic reasons than as passive dependents of male migrants. There are also some evidences that women have become an influential force in the migration flow accounting almost 50% of all migrants, constituting what is referred to as a "mighty but silent river" that has been increasing since the 1980s (UNFPA, 2006). Castles and Miller (1998: pp. 9) argue that women play an increasing role in all regions and all types of migration. Therefore, feminization of migration is one of the major factors in migration flow. In the proposed study, the idea of the feminization of pre-migration process mainly focuses on the increasing involvement of women in pre-migration process of their husbands or household men and the subsequent changes in the discourse and practices of gender roles and social relationships in rural Bangladesh.

1.2. Analytical Framework

The article follows intersectional analytical framework that explains how multiple factors work together to determine the personality or identity of a woman or man in society (Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013). This theoretical idea highlights the social construction of gender as a core issue and concentrates on

gender roles, social relationships and power structure within the private and public domain (Afsar, 2011). This idea argues that migration affects men and women differently who challenge the existing relationships of power in various formal and informal sectors of the society (Anthias & Lazaridis, 2000). Therefore, Afsar (2011) argues that studying oppression is not “the end of the story” in migration research. For a complete understanding of the story, it is important to emphasize women’s agency by focusing on how women act maintaining dynamic and interconnected relationships with other people within existing structures.

This article conceptualized agency as the main issue to explore changing gender roles and social relationships. Mahmood (2005) shows that agency does not necessarily mean the acts of resisting the existing norms of the society, but rather the multiple ways where the norms exist. She argues that women’s subordination is often self-motivated that plays significant role in assessing women’s consciousness and agency in a society. In a similar vein, Rashid (2013) mention that agency does not indicate that women’s activities always bring changes in the society. Alternatively, sometimes, it indicates the continuity and acceptance of existing gender role.

Mishra and Tripathi (2011) conceptualized agency in a different tone where they argue that agency is the ability to work individually in a given environment. In this context, Kabeer (1999) views that women must feel a sense of power to establish their agency. She defines agency as “the power within” or the capacity to decide one’s goals and act accordingly to reach the goals. Marinucci (2007: pp. 12) argues that power does not mean a coercive right to oppress others rather an equal relation in which women are seen as a citizen of rights and the protagonists of their own choices. Power is not only practiced in institutions like family or society but also through network of personal interactions in everyday life (See Foucault, 1977).

While talking about domination, resistance and inequality in the society, Ortnner (2006) also defines agency by the concept of power. She maintains that social actors are neither determined individuals nor the free agents who can act beyond social norms. Instead, the actors are not only restricted but also allowed by social norms to produce and reproduce the practice of power. Similarly, Tenhunen (2006: pp. 129-310) argues that women’s agency does not develop from complete denial of, or escape from, social system. In reality, it originates within social system as it not only restricts women’s agency but also enables in multiple ways. Sökefeld (1999: pp. 417) perceives “self” and “identity” of individuals in a different way and shows that in anthropological discourse, the Western self is considered autonomous and egocentric whilst the non-Western self is shared with others in various ways. Brah (1996) argues that separate identity and shared identities work in the same field maintaining connections with each-other. Considering the above mentioned analytical framework, the proposed study aims to explore that many women are increasingly involved in the pre-migration process of their husbands in multiple ways which work together to create their space for maneuver within cultural codes.

2. Research Setting and Research Methods

The history of Bangladesh is linked to the history of migration. Prior to its independence in 1971, the people of its north-eastern part were the most mobile people migrating mainly to Britain and settle there (Gardner, 1995). However, the shortage of labor in the Middle Eastern countries in the mid-1970s opened the floodgate of contract migration leading to a change of direction from southern part of the country (Dannecker, 2002). This change in direction was accompanied by a change from permanent settlement to special job contracts for a limited time. When the contract is over migrants are supposed to return to their home country (Siddiqui, 2002: pp. 8). Currently, this type of temporary migration has become dominant in Bangladesh (IOM, 2005: pp. 104). According to a IOM UN Migration (2022) report, Bangladesh has been recognized as the seventh largest remittance recipient globally and the third in South Asia as it received USD 22 billion in 2022. 60 percent of the migrant households are totally dependent on remittances for their survival. At present, the contribution of remittance to national GDP is 6.2 percent.

Until recently, female migration from Bangladesh is not a usual phenomenon due to several restrictions imposed by the government of Bangladesh. Cultural and religious norms of Bangladesh do not encourage female migration for which it was started in 1991 for the first time. From 1991-1995, the number of female migrants was only 9308 which is 0.98 percent of the total migrants. However, this percentage decreased to 0.42 percent during 1996-2000 because of restrictions by the government (Siddiqui, 2005). Except the professional female migrants, all types of female migration were banned in 1981 for the first time which was later modified in 1987 by imposing restrictions on unskilled and semi-skilled female. The second ban was imposed in 1997 on all types women including professional ones which was later modified in 2003 applying restrictions only to semi-skilled and unskilled women migrants who are under 35 years of age (Siddiqui, 2005). This ban was lifted in 2006 to allow an increasing number of work permits for women (Murata 2018). Siddiqui (2001) argues that restrictions have sometimes encouraged female migration flows through illegal channels. So, the number of female migrants may be 10 to 50 times higher than official records. The gulf countries have been the main destinations for Bangladeshi female migrants. In 2015, the largest number of women went to the UAE (23.4%), followed by Jordan (21.0%), Saudi Arabia (20.2%), Oman (16.4%), Lebanon (8.5%), and Qatar (8.3%) in 2015. In addition, many women went to Malaysia and Hong Kong to work as housemaids (Murata 2018).

Along with a female research assistant I conducted ethnographic fieldwork mainly from January to December 2017 and then from September 2021 to March, 2022 in Rashidpur, a migrant village in Rashunia *Union Parishad*¹, Siraj-

¹*Union Parishad* is the lowest unit of local government. In a union, there are nine wards consisting one or more villages. A *Union Parishad* is comprised of a chairman, nine members for nine wards and three reserved women members. The chairman and the members are elected by direct election. *Union Parishad* oversees law and order and development activities of the government at the local level.

dikhan *Upazila*², Munshiganj district, Bangladesh. The village is an hour's bus ride to the south from the capital city, Dhaka. For decades, agriculture was the primary occupation of the villagers. However, agriculture has become more expensive than the prices of crops, which is a concern for many villagers. Again, the villagers lack enough land and education to look for alternative ways of survival (Uddin, 2022). It is difficult to manage decent jobs or do successful business in the country because of their lack of knowledge and corruption in the recruitment process (Bal, 2013). Migration has, therefore, been regarded as the only option for many villagers. So, they started going abroad since the early 1980s. Hence, crossing borders and sending and receiving goods have become a common scenario (Fakir & Abedin, 2021). The migrants of the village do not just sojourn abroad for a few years, rather they do it again and again (Dannecker, 2005). Currently, remittances have become the main source of income for many households. This brought about a marked change in the lifestyle and housing condition of the villagers as the houses were transformed from thatched to corrugated tin or sometimes brick buildings. According to local people, remittance-induced changes are more visible in Rashidpur than other surrounding villages in the locality. So, I have selected Rashidpur for the proposed study.

Census data show that the population of the village is 1404 divided into 307 households, of which 110 are migrant households. The village has 133 (127 men and six women) migrants who migrated to different countries, especially the Middle East, Southeast, and East Asia (Uddin, 2018, 2022, 2023). We conducted the fieldwork applying key informant interview, in-depth interview, life history interview, group discussion and continuous observation and interaction with the villagers along with a number of other anthropological methods to obtain a detailed and consistent overview of the changes in male-female relationships. The entire fieldwork combined approximately 200 discussions and group discussions with the members of aspirant migrant, existing migrant and returned migrant households ranging from half an hour to several hours depending on the situation (Uddin, 2022). We also talked to the tea stall owners, store owners, grocers, and the commoners as they live in the same social milieu of migration. Similarly, we spoke to village leaders, religious leaders, primary school teachers, service holders, entrepreneurs, drivers, masons, rickshaw pullers, agricultural laborers, and the like to get a fuller understanding of the issue (Uddin, 2018). We tried to internalize all aspects of their everyday lives by means of regular interaction and observation. We also tried to observe and participate in festivals, ceremonies, and other activities to understand their gendered interactions.

Research Ethics and Data Analysis

This article is the part of my PhD studies. I conducted fieldwork with men and women in a rural setting where women are kept under veil in the public places and where people are very much concerned about male-female interaction, es-

²*Upazila* is a local government unit between *Union Parishad* and district.

pecially with outsiders. To overcome this, I employed one of my female students who has background in anthropology and gender studies to work as my assistant in the field (Uddin, 2022, 2023). During the whole period of fieldwork, we were especially concerned about ethical issues. Before talking to the informants, we clearly explained the objective of the study and took their permission to gather data and information in a trustworthy rapport. The discussions were completely open-ended and unstructured. We did not use recorders as we realized that people become formal in front of recorder. We also did not use the camera without their permission to show our honor to their privacy (Uddin, 2022). When the fieldwork was over, I alone read the scattered and messy interview notes, field notes, and observation notes several times to code them according to the purpose of the study (Uddin, 2022, 2023). After that, I expanded the codes and categorized according to the central theme of the study for writing the report. Anonymity is required to guarantee the well-being of informants (Wilson, 2019). Therefore, I used pseudonyms for the informants and the village in the field notes and the publications when referring to people and places.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1. Women's Life Courses and the Creation of Space

Gender-based life courses are essential for assessing gender-based transformation of society. Vertovec (2004: pp. 11) argued that gender-based life courses are shaped by culture, history, and global economics, as well as their interrelations with various movements and migration of individuals. This implies that life courses of men and women are differently shaped by the history and culture of an area and the trans-border network of its population.

Since the early 1990s, girls' enrolment in secondary and higher secondary education has increased in both rural and urban areas of Bangladesh reflecting widespread awareness of the importance of education. Government provides annual stipend to poor female and male students along with tuition waiver. In addition to government initiatives, many NGOs contribute to the promotion of women's education by creating awareness and motivating people. As a result, since 2005, girls have outnumbered in grades 6 - 10, although at higher education levels, the number of female students is still lower than male students (Grabska et al., 2019: pp. 98). However, Grabska et al. (2019: pp. 11-12) in their study in Bangladesh, Sudan, and Ethiopia, argued that gender norms control and influence people from childhood. These are very influential in determining the future aspirations of the boys and girls of the society. They point out that girls need to be respectful and follow strict rules and norms that control their mobility, particularly after coming of age and before marriage. As a result, girls' education is disrupted and they drop out of school during or after high school level education.

In the case of Rashidpur, we found a wide variety of local reasons for girls' dropping out of school. Many informants identified the distance between college

and home and the availability of places for admission as important reasons for girls dropping out of school. For example, Shafia (18) stopped studying after finishing 10th class. While sharing the reason, she mentioned, "There are enough primary and secondary schools in our locality; but for college admission, we have to go to Shrinagar or Munshiganj, which are 15 - 20 km away from the village." She further informed that many promising girls of migrant households try to continue their education, but they cannot do so after finishing 10th class due to the distance of college from Rashidpur and the inadequate places for admission.

Data show that most of the women in the previous generations were illiterate. They worked only as housewives. But the increasing literacy, migration, and trans-border communication have changed many young women's perception of their traditional gender roles in the age of globalization. So, they have different career goals, such as teaching in schools, working in banks, working in NGOs, working as government employees, working as police officers, dealing with business, etc. Sumi, 17, a current student of 11th class and daughter of a migrant household, said, "I want to be a primary school teacher after completing graduation." Likewise, Farida, 15, a 9th class student of Rashunia high school wants to be a government official. In another case, Akhlima, 17, wants to work in an NGO or teach in a school. However, her mother informed that her studies had been suspended for one year after passing 10th class because a boy from a nearby village disturbed her on the way outside. There is no college in the vicinity of Rashidpur, the reason why the safety of the daughter is feared in the absence of father. Therefore, they are now thinking of marrying the daughter off. If the new husband gives permission, they will support her studies after marriage. In another case, Ruma, 28, the wife of a migrant in Singapore, said she was a very good student. She wanted to work in a bank after graduation. However, her mother feared for her safety in the absence of her migrant father because she was beautiful and used to go to school alone. When she was in 10th class, some boys of other villages used to bother her on the way to school, which is why her parents married her off at the age of 18 to save the honor of the household. Now, she manages her husband's household and takes care of her eight-year-old daughter and five-year-old son in the absence of her husband.

Many villagers informed that the absence of a father or male guardian affects the education and overall career of the girls in various ways. For example, Sazzad, 45, has been living in Saudi Arabia for 20 years. His wife Minara (35) manages the household taking instructions from him. The couple has three daughters and a son. The eldest daughter was in 9th class, the son was in 6th class, the second daughter was in class two, and the youngest daughter did not start going to school yet. The eldest daughter, Moushumi, 16, was a very good student who wanted to be a school teacher after graduation. She used to walk three kilometers alone from home to school. So, her parents were worried about her safety, for which her migrant father took several initiatives from abroad to marry her off. But, the initiatives did not work as her maternal uncles and other relatives did

not support her marriage at such a young age. However, an unemployed boy of a non-migrant household of Rashidpur village secretly developed a relationship with the daughter.

The boy and the girl contacted with each other so secretly that neither their parents nor other villagers could suspect their communication. When Sazzad visited home for four months in 2020, the girl and the boy disappeared from the village for a few days and married each other in a court in Chittagong, far from Rashidpur. Sazzad and his relatives searched for them for several days and found them in the beach area of Cox's Bazaar, where they were enjoying their honeymoon. Although the parents of both parties eventually accepted the marriage, Sazzad and his family members are ashamed of this incident to the society. Now, the study of the girl is suspended. Sazzad lamented,

“I had a plan to marry off my daughter to an educated man from a rich family. I bought a lot of jewelry from abroad to give her at the wedding, but she lowered my social position.”

In this regard, several informants informed that many girls now use mobile phones and the internet. Therefore, they can easily contact outsider boys through phone calls, Facebook, IMO, WhatsApp, etc., and may fall in love relations. They may continue the relationship after marriage which is a cultural clash with the traditional Muslim society of rural Bangladesh. So, many parents want to marry their daughters off before bad things happen. Thus, the career goals of girls are hampered in a patriarchal society. In this context, [Grabska et al. \(2019: pp. 97-106\)](#) argued that girls' lives might follow different turns as their goals are interlinked between education and marriage. Therefore, when a girl reaches the age of marriage, usually between sixth and 10th year of schooling, parents sometimes consider her marriage to be the best way to secure her future.

In Rashidpur and the surrounding, adolescence is considered a problematic period and puberty as a phase of strong emotions ([Grabska et al., 2019](#)). The interaction between boys and girls is looked with illicit sexual overtones. Therefore, unmarried girls' mobility alone in public places and their interaction with boys or outsiders are carefully observed by neighbors and other villagers. This situation creates apprehension among the guardians of migrant households in the absence of male protection. They fear that outsider boys may sexually harass their girls or the girls themselves may develop love relation, which may damage the girls' image and their family honor if they continue their study (*ibid*, pp. 106-108). In this context, [Gardner \(1995\)](#) showed that unmarried girls' honesty is attached to the male honor of their households. So, the guardians of Rashidpur marry off their daughters to save the honor of the household members. Many of the girls are married to migrants, whilst many others are married to aspirant migrants and non-migrants. When the girls' studies and career aims are hampered because of patriarchal practices or marriage, many of them change their aims and eventually adapt to the culture of migration of the locality. Those who are married to migrants try to create their space by negotiating everyday house-

hold decisions. Those who are married to non-migrants or aspirant migrants support their men's migration to create their space in the long run.

The findings of the study show that many women consider male migration as a second chance to establish their position in the household and society. The young wives are primary or high school level educated who try to be involved in household affairs, particularly when they are in nuclear households. Many progressive wives think that husbands are not the only ones responsible for earning and managing. They also can contribute by sharing their opinions or taking financial support from their natal home and/or NGOs where their husbands have limited access. Husbands also believe that their wives are educated who are capable of managing the household and public places without the support from male relatives. Thus, although the young generation women's education does not equip them to be engaged in earning activities, it plays a significant role in migration process. In this regard, Gardner (1995) pointed out that marriage is a significant sign of the life course in Bangladesh, particularly for women who move from their natal home to their in-laws' and whose identity changes from daughters to daughters-in-law and are considered as adult women. Similarly, in a migration prone area like Rashidpur, marriage is an indicator that gives women alternative options to be involved in the migration process, which eventually establishes their agency to enjoy freedom in the absence of men.

3.2. Male Migration and Female Support

Existing migration studies consider women as passive, subordinate followers or victims in the process of male migration because of their everyday relationships with men in a patriarchal society (Hiller & McCaig, 2007). However, Tittensor & Mansouri (2017) show that although women's opinion was previously absent in migration studies, now they are being considered in policy and research agenda. Afsar (2011) argues that the context and motivations for migration are complex, multidimensional, and multi-layered in nature. Therefore, migration decisions are taken by household members, relatives, friends or others to maximize earnings and minimize household risks (Thapa et al., 2019). While talking about women's role in men's migration, Afsar (2011) argues that women's role in men's pre-migration process can be active, passive, cooperative, consensual or conflicting based on their position in the household, their marital status, level of education, level of poverty, backing from natal home, access to household resources and significant others.

The findings of the study show that villagers consider migration as a household initiative (Gulati, 1993) that involves husband, wife, parents, or other household members in the course of their everyday happenings. In the case of migration of an unmarried man, mostly the parents and siblings are involved. Younger wives of extended or joint households are usually not involved unless they have financial involvement from their natal home. In contrast, in many cases, wives of nuclear households play an active role in pre-migration process of

their husbands from the beginning to the end because they believe that the future of their household depends on their husbands staying abroad for a few years (Gardner, 1995).

In a nuclear household, although parents, siblings, neighbors, or friends can play supportive roles from afar, the husband and wife are the main contributors for implementing the migration plan. Since men are the main earners of the households, they contact relatives, neighbors or friends to explore earning option in the country or abroad; because they know they are culturally responsible to support their households financially. They become more active when their children grow up and start going to school. However, if they find a reliable source, they share the information with their wives, parents, and well-wishers to get opinion. If the response is positive, the husband and wife take the final decision. If they do not have enough cash on hand, they plan how to manage the migration cost.

For example, Samir, 29, is an aspirant migrant waiting for a visa to go to Kuwait. He is the father of a seven-year-old son and a four-year-old daughter. He studied up to 12th class. After finishing his studies, he started to work as a computer operator in a clinic. However, the earning is not sufficient to lead a modest life with family. Moreover, his children are growing up. He said, "I'm just worried about the future of my children. They are our hope. As a father, I am responsible to educate them to be established in society." So, he was looking for scopes to go abroad through his relatives, neighbors, and friends. One day, while sharing the aspiration, one of his friends said that he (the friend) would talk to his (friend's) migrant brother, who has been living in Kuwait for ten years. A few days later, the friend informed that his brother could manage a visa for Samir. Samir shared the information with his wife and asked for her opinion. The wife responded positively and talked to her parents about managing a portion of the migration cost. The migration may cost up to 5000 US dollars. The wife plans to manage 1500 US dollars by borrowing from parents and/or taking loan from NGOs. Samir plans to manage the rest selling cows, mortgaging out land, and taking loans from relatives or neighbors. Now, they are waiting for the visa.

Regarding women's involvement, we found that, in some cases, women not only support their men's migration but also motivate them to go abroad. When children begin to grow up, like the father, the mother also gets concerned thinking about the future of their children and the households as a whole. They observe how the children in the neighborhood get a better education, wear better clothes and live better lives than their children because of remittance flow. They also observe how the neighborhood women deal with cash and move around in public places in the absence of husbands. This situation makes them worried about the future of their own children and their freedom as a whole.

Subsequently, they share their feelings and motivate their husbands to migrate. Sometimes, with the consent of the husbands, they initiate talking to their migrant father, brother, or uncle. From the very beginning, they strive to collect

information from home and abroad, think constantly and contribute to the management of migration capital either by borrowing from parents/siblings, selling their jewelry, taking loans from NGOs or local elites, etc. In this regard, [Abdul-Aziz \(2001\)](#) found that in Bangladesh many households borrow money from external sources to support migration of their members.

In one case, Saleha (32) lives in a *bhinno* (nuclear) household. Her husband, Alam (36), has been unemployed for many years. Her first daughter studies in fourth grade, while the second daughter studies in second grade. The children of her migrant brother-in-law are taught by a private tutor at home. She stated,

“The wife of my brother-in-law does not allow her children to play with my children. This is very insulting. Since we live in the same homestead, it is not possible to stop children from meeting each other.”

In such a situation, Saleha became worried about the future of her children and the household. Once, she shared her feelings with her husband and tried to motivate him to go abroad so that they can properly educate their children. Initially, the husband was ambivalent, as he could not afford the migration cost. In such a situation, she sought help from her parents and migrant brothers to manage a visa. One of her brothers, who lives in Bahrain, agreed to manage a visa which may cost 5000 USD. The process has not started yet. The husband is planning to manage 3000 USD by selling cows and taking a loan with interest. On the other hand, she wants to manage the rest amount by borrowing from other migrant brothers, taking loans from NGOs, and selling her jewelry.

In contrast, Jahanara (21), the wife of a migrant in Saudi Arabia, says, she lives in an extended household with her in-laws. Her husband migrated two years ago, six months after her marriage. Her elder brother-in-law was already a migrant who took her husband there. While talking about her personal involvement in the migration, she said, “I was not financially involved in the process. I only exchanged my feeling before his departure. He advised me to obey his parents and maintain good relations with everyone.” Afterward, she informed that her parents-in-law and migrant brother-in-law took all the decisions and managed the migration capital.

Women also contribute to repaying loans in the absence of their husband. When their sons go abroad, they contribute in the same way. They do so because it indicates financial well-being and the higher status of their households ([Gardner, 1995](#)). The findings further suggest that women do not consider migration solely as men’s aspiration; rather, they believe it is a household initiative linked to the welfare of their children and their own. Therefore, they are involved in the process from the beginning and share their ideas with husbands, increase their social networks and mobility to seek advice from guardians, friends, and well-wishers on how to manage the capital and how to provide their men with logistical, informational and social assistance before departure ([Collins, 2017](#)).

[Collins \(2017\)](#) perceived the aspiration of migration as a force that includes

human, non-human, and symbolic issues interlinked with each other to cause social transformation. He argues that migration aspiration increases the mobility and activity of the migrants and their household members to achieve the desired goals. Their activity, mobility, and trans-border connection change the mentality of individuals at the household level. Neighbors and relatives also observe the mobility and activity of the members of aspirant households regardless of gender identity. They do not mind if women from aspirant migrant households move and play an active role in facilitating men's migration. They know that women's role is important in pre, during and post migration period. Women's participation in migration process increases their mobility as they communicate across national boundaries. This creates their scope for negotiation or bargaining which was not possible in previous generations where *purdah* and patriarchy limited their mobility imposing social and cultural restrictions (Afsar, 2011). Thus, women's active role in pre-migration process contributes to the transformation of gender-based social relations in rural Bangladesh.

3.3. Female Support and Transformation in Gender Relations

Migration influences every corridor of human society (Asis, 2006). It is not only an "economic event" but also a "cultural event" which brings changes in gender relations and local practices (Dannecker, 2005). The effects of migration on gender relations are multifaceted and diverse where it does not follow a linear path between development and deterioration to explain women's position (Tienda & Booth, 1991). Gardner (1995) argues that the effect of migration is far from homogeneous, even within the same community or household. It may influence different members of a household differently based on their age, sex, literacy and sources of income. Different members of the same household may have different opinion on migration. The same person may have different opinions at different times. So, it is important to see the circumstances under which a person interprets the consequence of migration. The complexity of migration and gender relations is well-explained by Carling (2005: p. 8) who argues that the effects of migration on gender relation is difficult to measure as relations are continuously restructuring in response to socio-economic and cultural changes (Afsar, 2011).

Carling (2005), in his study with the Filipino migrants, argued that the perception of gender relations includes the roles of men and women in society and the process through which these roles are linked to notions of "maleness" and "femaleness." However, this perception is constantly changing over time in response to the spatial changes of individuals in a society. So, he argues that thousands of women play an active role in supporting their husbands' migration because there is an element of pleasure, freedom, and independence except the hardship of domestic work. The active role and mobility of women change their personality and behavior. Similarly, the findings of study show that in many cases women of aspiring migrant households are mentally prepared for how to

care for children, how to perform duties in the household and the public spheres, how to communicate with household members, neighbors, and relatives in the absence of husbands. Sometimes, they share their ideas with their aspirant migrant husbands and take suggestions. These activities change their agency and ideology as a whole. Rima, 25, the wife of an aspiring migrant, said,

“My husband will migrate to Malaysia next month. Almost every night, we share our ideas on how to maintain the household and outside activities alone. My mother and sisters also give me advice. Listening to them, I am mentally preparing myself to live alone with my two daughters and one son and manage the household like my sisters who are living alone in other villages with their children in the absence of their husbands.”

Like women, several aspiring migrant men also informed that they are mentally prepared not to suspect their wives if the wives go outside of the homestead when they are abroad. They are inspired by their migrant neighbors and relatives who allow women to move in public spheres. In this respect, Akash (28), an aspiring migrant said,

“I will not doubt my wife when she is alone in my absence. I cannot stay abroad if I have doubts. I believe she will understand that I will struggle in Qatar not only for my children or me but also for her. Therefore, I should take it easy because it has become a part of our village life. It’s common because many other married migrants are also doing so.”

Several male informants informed that many husbands in extended or joint households suggest their wives to follow the advice of in-laws and maintain good relations with all of their households. On the other hand, husbands of nuclear households advise their wives to pray and follow social rules so that neighbors do not suspect their mobility in their absence. However, they do not need to say more if they have grown-up children in nuclear households. They feel that if the children are grown up, the wives cannot do anything that would tarnish their personal and family image. However, in many cases, the migrants do not want their wives to seek help from neighbors. They fear that if their wives frequently ask neighbors for help, villagers may spread rumor of extramarital affairs. Unlike the wives of previous generations, young wives are less likely to take support from male relatives and neighbors, as they feel they are able to manage the household by maintaining regular phone contact with their migrant husbands. Therefore, both the migrants and their wives find it safe to manage the household without the help of others. Nonetheless, women keep in touch with natal homes on a regular basis to seek help from their parents or siblings when they need it for important reasons. If necessary, they can also get help from their father-in-law, brother-in-law, uncle-in-law, or trusted neighbors.

The above discussion indicates that migration creates new spaces for women as they directly receive the remittances and spent for their households. It influences their activities and social practices. They explore new possibilities chal-

lenging the existing gender and power relations (Dannecker, 2002). In migration process, women perform their culturally defined household duties and come out of boundaries to perform men's duties in the public sphere. The interrelationships of these roles work together to create their space for maneuver within cultural codes in a patriarchal society in rural Bangladesh.

4. Conclusion

This study is about the feminization of pre-migration process and subsequent changes in gender roles and social relationships in a village in Bangladesh. In doing so, the study explored how young women's life courses eventually adapt to local migration culture involving them in their husbands' migration process. The findings of the study reveal that girls of the village have various aims during childhood to be engaged in earning activities after education. But their lives may turn to different directions as their aims are interconnected between education and marriage. When they reach the age of marriage, usually between sixth and 10th year of schooling, parents sometimes consider their marriage to be the best way to save the family honor in the absence of male guardian. Marriage is a significant sign of their lives as they move from natal home to their in-laws. Their identity also changes from daughters to daughters-in-law and regarded as adult women.

However, many young wives consider male migration as a second chance to establish their position in the household and society. They are primary or high school level educated who like to be involved in household affairs, particularly when they are in nuclear households. Many of them are married to migrants, while others are married to aspirant migrants and non-migrants. Those who are married to migrants, endeavor to create their spaces by negotiating everyday household decisions. On the other hand, those who are married to non-migrants or aspirant migrants, motivate and support their men's migration in many cases to upgrade the household status, create their space and enjoy their freedom in the long run.

The study again reveals that men's migration aspiration increases the activity, mobility, and trans-border network of women to achieve desired goals in this age of internet communication. They also prepare mentally how to manage the households if the husbands are away. Thus, their assertive roles and enthusiastic mobility transform them mentally. The husbands are also psychologically motivated to allow their wives to move in public spheres in their absence. The husbands believe that their wives are educated who are capable of managing the household and public places without the support from male relatives. Thus, although education does not equip the young women to be engaged in earning activities, it plays an important role in migration process which eventually creates their room for maneuver to establish their agency to enjoy freedom. Therefore, women's positive roles and the compromising attitude of men have a long-term practical effect on the transformation of gender-based social relations.

The study followed intersectional analytical approach and considered gender roles and social relations as key to understanding how women's agency is shaped and reshaped by gender norms and cultural codes. Thus, I think we need to consider how women's lives are grounded in multiple social relations in order to understand their involvement in men's migration process and their strategies for tackling the challenges which are significant to assess the changes in their agency that they achieve through experiences.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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