

A Study of the Living Conditions of Bangladeshi Women Migrants in New York City

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to analyze the actual living conditions of first-generation Bangladeshi women migrants to New York City, one of the so called global cities. This study analyzes previous studies and statistical data, and is based on field research in New York City carried out between 2010 and 2018, Daka and rural Bangladesh between 1997 and 2012, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in 2010, 2012 and 2014.

Sassen [2003] emphasized that the demand for housemaid or nannie occupations by high income professionals as low-wage work to fill jobs that offer few advancement possibilities have greatly increased in global cities under globalization.

In regard to this issue, the authors found that Bangladeshi women migrants are often employed at a certain franchise store that has been expanding in New York City. They are also employed as cashiers at two specific types of store that are scattered throughout the city. On the other hand, some Bangladeshi women are also working at some stores in the Bangladeshi community. However, the Indian community in the same area has been injecting more capital into businesses, and as a result even though both groups belong to the same South Asian Continent, the disparity between the two in this community is remarkable.

The form of employment is part time on a minimum wage and as such, these low-skilled jobs offer few promotion possibilities. Originally, they belonged to the quasi upper-middle class and their families often employed housemaids in Bangladesh. However, since they have now been incorporated into the working-class in New York City, almost all of them have long working hours and have long commutes. The reason is due not only to the fact they have to make ends meet, but also the cost of living in this city and their children's higher education expenses are very expensive. They often think that sending their children to college will lead to better opportunities and they will be able to escape from the working-class in the future. However, especially female households with dependents have to face harsh realities and certain social issues as well.

Community connections among Bangladeshis remain strong after they migrate to New York City and they exchange various kinds of information among their fellow compatriots

(countrywomen and countrymen). As a result, they have been able to accumulate knowledge about how to live in New York City, to improve their English skills through working, and even how to state their own opinion within their homes. Although there have been improvements in empowerment of these women, it is difficult to argue that this has led to more life satisfaction or promotion of their well-being.

Key words : Bangladeshi women migrants, New York City, minimum wage, empowerment, well-being, working-class

I Introduction : Background to the study

Globalization has not only deeply affected the environment all over the world, but also the living conditions of people at the grassroots level in developing countries. For example, the productive capacity of multinational corporations had expanded through direct or indirect investment, and international trade in services and commodities crossing borders or nations has consequently induced the expansion of international labour migration. And although globalization has led to increased economic growth, for many it has led to some serious social issues, environmental devastation, and a widening of disparities in wages.

According to Sassen [2003] “Central to it are the global information economy, instant communication, and electronic markets – all realms within which place no longer makes a difference, and where the only type of worker who matters is the highly educated professional. The migration of maids, nannies, nurses, sex workers, and contract brides has little to do with globalization by these lights (Ibid. p.254).” Also, Sassen introduces the concept of the global city as an important factor in encouraging migration under globalization. In her study, New York City is listed as one of the global cities,¹ and she mentions, “Globalization has greatly increased the demand in global cities for low-wage workers to fill jobs that offer few advancement possibilities (Ibid. p.257).”

Numbers of migrants from Asia and their children, and second generations who were born in the United States of America (the United States) are increasing. Among Asians, a third of them are living in California; however, a third of Bangladeshis are concentrated in New York City.² Also, in recent years, half of Bangladeshis who have become lawful permanent residents (Green Card holders)³ have migrated to New York City.⁴

Since the 1990s, people who have tried to obtain visas to immigrate the United States are increasing rapidly and it has become the most popular destination for many Bangladeshis (Hassan [2008] p.56).⁵ With the rapid increase in remittances from the United States to the People’s Republic of Bangladesh (Bangladesh), the United States has also become to be regarded as an important source of foreign currency to the government of Bangladesh.⁶

Previous studies have examined the high value of remittances from Bangladeshis from the perspective of economic growth (Siddique [2003] : [2004]). However, they have yet to examine the number of Bangladeshis who have migrated to the United States and the actual living and working conditions of these migrant workers. There are also agents in Daka (Dhaka), or brokers in rural Bangladesh who are connected with those agents, who have earned a large amount of income from preparing the many kinds of immigration documents that are required for entry into the United States.⁷

Analyzing the background of Bangladeshi migrants to New York City, not only there is a

demand for labour force in this global city, but also the existence of family members, relatives, and Bangladeshi community. At the beginning of their lives in New York City, they depend on mutual support from the Bangladeshi community, just as if they were living in Bangladesh. However, because the reality of New York City is very different to that of their homelands, many of the adults, especially women, have to face unexpected problems inside rented apartments for brothers or relatives that have insufficient space for big families and no housemaids.⁸

Some women also have to find work. Some previous studies focused on women maids or nannies that migrate from South and Central America or Republic of the Philippines (the Philippines) to the United States (Cheever [2003], Parreñas [2015], Chang [2016]). However, as far as the authors could ascertain within the context of previous studies of women migrants in the United States, the actual living conditions of Bangladeshi women living in the United States is unclear.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the actual conditions of Bangladeshi migrants, especially women migrants to New York City, one of the global cities. The methodology of this study analyzes previous studies, statistical data, and is based on research by author in the United States, between 2010 and 2018, Daka and rural Bangladesh between 1997 and 2012, and the UAE in 2010, 2012 and 2014, .

II The poverty rate of Bangladeshis in the United States

1. Poverty rate in the United States

There has been very little research on Bangladeshi migrant workers in the United States. For that reason, in this section, the authors analyze statistical data of the poverty rate and some basic statistical data of Bangladeshis who have immigrated to the United States.

Table 1 shows the poverty rate of people in the United States according to selected criteria, between 2010 and 2017.

Table 1: Poverty Rate according to selected criteria between 2011 and 2017 in the United States

Proportion (%) \ Year	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Total	15.0	15.0	14.5	14.8	13.5	12.7	12.3
Sex							
Female	16.3	16.3	15.8	16.1	14.8	14.0	13.6
Male	13.6	13.6	13.1	13.4	12.2	11.3	11.0
Age							
Under age 18	21.9	21.8	19.9	21.1	19.7	18.0	17.5
Aged 18 to 64	13.7	13.7	13.6	13.5	12.4	11.6	11.2
Aged 65 and older	8.7	9.1	9.5	10.0	8.8	9.3	9.2
Race							
Asian	12.3	11.7	10.5	12.0	11.4	10.1	10.0
Black	27.6	27.2	27.2	26.2	24.1	22.0	21.2
Hispanic	25.3	25.6	23.5	23.6	21.4	19.4	18.3
White	12.8	12.7	12.3	12.7	11.6	11.0	10.7
White and non-Hispanic	9.8	9.7	9.6	10.1	9.1	8.8	8.7
Place of birth							
Native born	14.4	14.3	13.9	14.2	13.1	12.3	11.9
Foreign born	19.9	19.2	18.0	18.5	16.6	15.1	14.5
Naturalized citizen	12.5	12.4	12.7	11.9	11.2	10.0	10.1
Not a citizen	24.3	24.9	22.8	24.2	21.3	19.5	18.6
Work experience (Total aged 18 to 64)	13.7	13.7	13.6	13.5	12.4	11.6	11.2
All workers	7.2	7.3	7.3	6.9	6.3	5.8	5.3
Worked full time, year-round	2.8	2.9	2.7	3.0	2.4	2.2	2.2
Less than full time, year-round	16.3	16.6	17.5	15.9	15.5	14.2	13.4
Did not work at least one week	32.9	33.1	32.3	33.7	31.8	30.5	30.7
Disability status (Total aged 18 to 64)	13.7	13.7	13.6	13.5	12.4	11.6	11.2
With a disability	28.8	28.4	28.8	28.5	28.5	26.8	24.9
With no disability	12.5	12.5	12.3	12.3	11.0	10.3	10.1
Educational attainment (Total aged 18 and older)	–	–	–	11.9	10.7	10.4	10.1
No high school diploma	–	–	–	28.9	26.3	24.8	24.5
High school, no college	–	–	–	14.2	12.9	13.3	12.7
Some college, no degree	–	–	–	10.2	9.6	9.4	8.8
Bachelor's degree or higher	–	–	–	5.0	4.5	4.5	4.8

Note 1: _ means no data available.

2: _ This table was compiled by the authors.

Sources: United States Census Bureau [2019] p.12 (Table 3), Ibid. [2016] p.13 (Table 3), Ibid. [2014] p.13 (Table 3), and Ibid. [2013] p.14 (Table 3).

The poverty rate in the United States was 15.0% in 2011, 14.5% in 2013, and further decreased to 12.3% by 2017. The total number of people who live below the poverty line decreased in 2017. However, these indicators alone are not evidence the poverty issue has been solved.

In 2017, 39,698,000 people lived below the poverty line in the United States. Among them, there

were also 12 million under 18 years old who grow up below the poverty line (United States Census Bureau [2019] p.12). The latest poverty rate for those children was 17.5% in 2017. It may have harmful effects on them, such as limiting their access to opportunities of higher education, awareness, knowledge and their working conditions in the future. This data shows obtaining a good education greatly reduces the chance of living below the poverty line. The poverty rate of people who obtained a bachelor's degree was only 4.8%, on the contrary, a quarter of people who did not graduate from high school live below the poverty line in 2017.

Also, there is a gender gap. The female poverty rate was slightly higher, and the male rate was lower compared to the median figure in the United States every year between 2010 and 2017. Those with the highest poverty rate were people who did not work at least one week, followed by people with disabilities. Moreover, within the foreign born people who live in the United States, there was a big difference in poverty rates between naturalized citizens and non-naturalized citizens.

In addition, it is clear there is much discrimination in the United States when one classifies the poverty rate by race. According to this data, the poverty rate of whites (non-Hispanics) was the lowest between 2010 and 2017. However, the number of white people living in poverty was 26,436,000 accounting for almost 60% of the total people living below the poverty line of the entire country (ibid). For blacks, about one out of five people lives below the poverty line, showing that blacks remain left behind. On the other hand, one in ten Asians lives below the poverty line. Asians have the lowest poverty rate among all racial groups in the United States.

2. Bangladeshis in comparative perspectives

Although the poverty rate of Asians is the lowest, it is necessary to pay attention to the reality that there are many differences among Asian migrants to the United States.

The number of Asian migrants in 2017 was 19,475,000⁹, accounting for almost 6.0% of the total population in the United States. Among them, migrants from the People's Republic of China (China), the Republic of India (India) and the Philippines accounted for the majority.¹⁰

Among Asian migrants, only those who came from India, China and Japan have lower poverty rates than other groups in the United States, with India having the lowest.¹¹ In other words, Indians comprise the lowest poverty rate among Asians. On the other hand, what are the actual conditions of other Asians, especially Bangladeshi migrants?

The authors compared and analyzed the basic statistical data of Bangladeshis with Indians who have the lowest poverty rate among Asian migrants to the United States. The United States Census Bureau estimates that the number of Bangladeshis was 176,229 and Indians more than 4 million in 2017 (**Table 2**). In both groups, there is no significant difference in the ratio of female

Table 2 : Age and Sex (proportion) of Bangladeshi and Indians in the United States in 2017

	Bangladeshi	Indian
Population	176,229	4,094,539
Proportion of population (%)		
Total		
Female	49.2	48.4
Male	50.8	51.6
Under 18 years old		
Female	47.8	49.7
Male	52.2	50.3
18 years old and over		
Female	49.8	48.0
Male	50.2	52.0

Note: This table was compiled by the authors.

Sources: United States Census Bureau, American Fact Finder-Results, *SELECTED POPULATION PROFILE IN THE UNITED STATES 2017 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates* (<https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkmmk>) < retrieved: August 5, 2019 > .

and male. Also, the proportion of females is lower at about half (Table 2).

Table 3 shows the age bracket ratio of Bangladeshis and Indians in the United States in 2017. The largest number of Bangladeshis belonged to the age bracket of 5–17 years old, at 19.1%. Also, Bangladeshis had a high percentage of children (0–17 years old) at just over 26.0%.

The largest number of Indians belonged to the age bracket of 25–54 comprising 53.1% of the total population. Also, Bangladeshis are at 46.0%, or below half. However, looking at the ratio of these data alone, it cannot be said that there is an extremely large difference. There is a more prominent difference in the educational attainment index.

Table 3: Age bracket (proportion) of Bangladeshis and Indians in the United States (2017)

	Bangladeshi	Indian
Under 5 years old	7.6	7.2
5 to 17 years	19.1	16.2
18 to 24 years	10.9	7.7
25 to 34 years	16.2	21.7
35 to 44 years	16.2	19.9
45 to 54 years	13.6	11.5
55 to 64 years	10.5	7.9
65 to 74 years	4.3	5.2
75 years old and over	1.6	2.8

Note: Ibid.

Sources: Ibid.

Table 4 shows the education attainment of Bangladeshi and Indians to the United States in 2017. The largest gap shown in this data is that 39.4% of Bangladeshi females have a bachelor's degree or higher, compared with 71.1% of Indian females. The male index was 52.6%, and the average for all people 25 years old over in the Bangladeshi group was 46.1%. However, among

Indians, the male index was 77.9%, with an average of 74.6%. About 80% of Bangladeshis graduate from high school, while the Indian rate exceeds 90.0%.

As Sen mentioned, discrimination in gender and various disparities are prominent inside of India.¹² However, as far as the data on gender differences in Indian migrants to the United States is concerned, there is no educational disparity. In contrast, the Bangladeshi data shows a 13.0% difference between high school graduates and bachelor's degrees among women and men.

Table 4: Education attainment (proportion) by Bangladeshis and Indians in the United States in 2017

	Bangladeshi	Indian
Population 25 years old and over	109,962	2,822,133
Proportion of population 25 years old and over (%)		
Less than high school	17.8	7.7
High school graduate (or equivalent)	20.0	8.3
Some college or associate's degree	16.1	9.4
Bachelor's degree	24.1	32.3
Graduate or professional degree	22.0	42.3
High school graduate or higher	82.2	92.3
Female	75.6	90.2
Male	88.6	94.2
Bachelor's degree or higher	46.1	74.6
Female	39.4	71.1
Male	52.6	77.9

Note: Ibid.

Sources: Ibid.

Table 5 shows the language spoken at home and English Language speaking ability. The ratio of Bangladeshis who speak English less than fluently was 44.7%, and that of Indians, 18.7%. Also, more than 90.0% of Bangladeshis use Bengali other than English at home in the United States. This is because not only are Bangladeshis proud of Bengali as their mother tongue, but also historically it was one of the symbols of independence from West Pakistan when looking back at the East Pakistan era.¹³ Therefore, the first-generation Bangladeshis living in the United States attempted to keep Bengali and to pass it on to their children. However, from the child's perspective, even if they can speak Bengali, it is difficult to read or write.¹⁴ However, second-generation children tend to follow their parent's decisions, and in all lifestyle choices, including language, food and religion, with no opposition.¹⁵

Table 5: Language spoken at home and English speaking ability

	Bangladeshi	Indian
Population 5 years old and over	162,749	3,799,906
Proportion of population 5 years old and over (%)		
English only	8.4	23.2
Language other than English	91.6	76.8
Proportion of population 5 years old and over (%)		
Speak English less than fluently	44.7	18.7

Note: Ibid.

Sources: Ibid.

Table 6 shows the occupation by civilians employed 16 years old over of Bangladeshis and Indians in 2017. More than 70% of Indians are employed in management businesses, science, and arts occupations, but among Bangladeshis, the ratio was 37.9%. In both cases, the proportion of people engaged in the construction industry was low. However, many Indian and Bangladeshi people who came from poor families are still engaged in construction work with low-wages and long hours under the sponsorship that was forced upon them in the UAE.¹⁶ In this respect as well, there is some social discrimination, and disparity regarding the power to choose occupations is significant.

Table 6: Occupation (proportion) by Bangladeshis and Indians in the United States in 2017

	Bangladeshi	Indian
Civilians employed 16 years old and over	77,558	2,135,421
Proportion of population 16 years old and over (%)		
Management business, science, and arts	37.9	70.0
Services	17.4	7.1
Sales and office	26.1	15.5
Natural resources, construction, and maintenance	2.1	1.5
Production, transportation, and material moving	16.4	5.9

Note: Ibid.

Sources: Ibid.

The median income gap is more obvious (**Table 7**). Within all categories in this table, the incomes of Indians' is about twice that of Bangladeshis', and median married-couple family income already exceeds 120,000 dollars a year. Also, for both Bangladeshis and Indians, females' individual incomes were less than that of males'. Of these data, the lowest median family income was that of a female householder who had not spouse.

Table 7: Median Income of Bangladeshis and Indians in the United States

	Bangladeshi	Indian
Total number of households	38,004	1,051,292
Median family income		
Married-couple family income	58,228 dollars (89.0%)	126,600 dollars (92.4%)
Single female household with dependents	36,437 dollars (5.2%)	75,762 dollars (4.4%)
Single male household with dependents	60,162 dollars (5.8%)	131,893 dollars (3.2%)
Individual	176,229	4,094,539
Per capita income	20,821 dollars	49,778 dollars
Median earnings for full-time, year-round workers		
Female	38,771 dollars	71,042 dollars
Male	39,681 dollars	92,280 dollars

Note: Ibid.

Sources: Ibid.

As described above, education attainment, language skills, and occupation status are reflected in the poverty rate. **Table 8** shows the poverty rate by Bangladeshis and Indians in the United States in 2017. The poverty rate of Bangladeshis was 16.6%, which is worse than the median figure of all other nationalities. However, the Indian poverty rate was just 4.1%, less than one third of the total poverty rate of the entire country. The poverty rate was 21.0% among Bangladeshis, families with related children of the householder under 18 years old. This figure is slightly higher than the poverty rate among blacks seen earlier (**Table 1**). Also, the poverty rate of single female households was the highest at 22.4%, and following this, single female households who had children under 18 years old was 33.8%. From this social background alone, single Bangladeshi women migrants who live with children in their households may face the biggest difficulties of all groups living in the United States.

Table 8: Poverty Rate by Bangladeshis and Indians in the United States in 2017.

	Bangladeshi	Indian
All families	16.6	4.1
With children under 18 years old	21.0	4.1
Married-couple family	15.6	3.5
With children under 18 years old	19.9	3.4
Single female household with dependents	22.4	13.6
With children under 18 years old	33.8	21.2

Note: Ibid.

Sources: Ibid.

Sen points out that, “One indication that there is something defective in India’s ‘path to development’ arises from the fact that India is falling behind every other South Asian country (with the exception on Pakistan) in terms of many social indicators, even as it is doing spectacularly better than these countries in terms of the growth of per capita income.”¹⁷ He also emphasizes to experts who are working in New York State: “You should go to India and see the current situation in India.”¹⁸ Certainly, Indian professors, lawyers, and engineers as a professional state who decent academic backgrounds are working in New York State.¹⁹ India and Bangladesh belong to the same South Asian Continent, but their actual conditions in the United States are very different.

Also, most of the Bangladeshi migrants came from the upper-middle class in Bangladesh.²⁰ This section examined the basic statistics of Bangladeshis and Indians living in the United States and showed there are huge differences between these groups.

III Women migrants

1. Method of research

The main methodology of the authors' research on the living conditions of poor people in rural

Bangladesh is grounded on Chambers [1983].²¹ Following this research, the authors carried out numerous in-depth interviews in New York City.

International migration is multifarious, sometimes as an intricate arrangement structure or complicated matter for migrants who came from developing countries. It is therefore necessary to continue field research within both the sending and recipient countries; otherwise it will be difficult to undertake fieldwork and to analyze the serious social issues regarding living conditions of Bangladeshi migrants from the destination side alone. And even if the problem is solved at some point, the migrant's living conditions may worsen in the future. Moreover, since migrants are also vulnerable to immigration policies within the recipient country even if they should obtain citizenship, ongoing rigorous academic research has an important role to play. The authors have attributed value to the voices of migrants' perspectives that came from developing countries.

2. Research in New York City

Suzuki and Sato's present research was undertaken in New York City during the summers of 2012-2015, autumn of 2016, and the 2017 academic year. The authors carried out numerous in-depth interviews with many Bangladeshi migrants of the first-generation and a number of second-generations. We also participated in conferences almost every week in the South Asian Institute of Columbia University and so on.²² We conducted research on the Bangladeshi Community in Queens and Bronx, and have did participatory fieldwork and carried out several interviews during the South Asian Festivals in Queens and Manhattan, and of the South American community in 2017. Following, Suzuki conducted research during the summer of 2018. Separate interviews with a few Bangladeshis as preliminary research in New York City and Washington D.C., were also carried out in March 2010. All interviews were conducted in English and Bangla Basha (Bengali). All personal information obtained from the interviewees remains confidential, therefore protecting private information such as name, age, family structure and workplaces because these are quite sensitive.

The number of Bangladeshi migrant interviewees were 4 persons (only men) in 2010, 25 persons (9 women, among them 2 housewives, and 16 men) in 2012; 27 persons (4 women and 23 men) in 2013; 35 persons (7 women and 28 men) in 2014; 35 persons (11 women, among them 4 women who were second-generation, and 24 men) in 2015; 2 persons (1 person of each) in 2016; 35 persons as of August 2017, and 26 persons (12 women, among them 2 second-generation university students, and 14 men) in 2018. The authors have also carried out in-depth and open-ended interviews with some of the same persons in 2010, and between 2012 and 2018.

3. Background of migration: How did you access to New York City ?

From talking to the first-generation of Bangladeshi interviewees, it was found that most women migrated following their spouses. Three women had the power to choose²³ to migrate; two of them migrated in their twenties. Even then, they were influenced by brothers or cousins who were already residing in New York City. The reason these three women migrated was very clear: It was for better living and working opportunities for their brothers or children. They mentioned that, "There is a big gap of education between Bangladesh and the United States." First, we will focus on these three women's background and reasons for migration.

The first woman migrant said as follows:

"My cousin migrated to New York City alone and few years later, brought brothers and parents. Then these brothers could access to better and higher education. Therefore, the life in New York City of them who had migrated earlier seemed to be a successful example. Then, I believed the life in New York City will provide better education to brothers than rural Bangladesh. Also, I thought it would be a better opportunity not only for their education but also their future. If they will get a happy life, I am happy. Their happy is my happy, aren't you?"

The second woman also added:

"I wanted to find out a job after graduating from a university in Bangladesh. But the range of occupations and wages were both limited in Bangladesh. I wanted to develop my skills and future, because much more provide and support to my family members. So, I migrated to here where my cousin migrated earlier. It seemed to have a better life. I am thinking about their future, so much higher and better quality education is important. For that, I want them to graduate from a university in the United States. Then I would like to invite my parents also."

And the third woman stated:

"My two brothers have been living in New York City for almost twenty years. They have also graduated from the University in Bangladesh. They have to work long hours after migrated in New York City, instead of them, their children could access to high quality education. When I recognized it, I was thinking about that, I would like to give much higher education to my children."

The other hand, an elder woman who was invited her younger brother said.

"My brother has got Diversity Visa²⁴ and he started the store (Kiosk) in here. I came to New York because he needed store's help. I was really surprised when I came here. I never imagined that there was a store in such a dark place where the sun never shines and not many passersby. Nevertheless, the rent is expensive. Also, I can hear the very loud sound of Metro which is really noisy. I don't like such as place. I would like to go back to Bangladesh. What happened to my brother? Our life would have been enough in Bangladesh. It looks like he is crazy about money."

4. Education and working experiences of the first-generation of Bangladeshi women migrants

Among the Bangladeshi women interviewees, most of them had graduated from university or high school in Bangladesh, with the exception of one woman has finished junior high school and the other one has finished class 8. Also, among all of them, only four women had previous working experience in Bangladesh, one as a teacher, one as a school principal, and two as an engineer.

Within this research context, it was found that all women interviewees had belonged to the quasi upper-middle class in Bangladesh; their parents possessed land and employed housemaids, and as a result they had never had to undertake hard work around the house, and they couldn't have imagined that one day they would be up to their ears in chores in New York City. In Bangladesh, they had lived much more relaxed lives and they had time, space and emotional leeway on their hands.

5. Occupations and working conditions of the first-generation Bangladeshi women migrants

The four women worked as professionals in Bangladesh, but they were unable to move up the career ladder in New York City with three of them working for a certain franchise store. Also, one older woman has returned Bangladesh.

In reality, many Bangladeshi women migrants tend to be employed as part-time workers at certain franchise stores in Manhattan and Queens. They also worked as cashiers at a specific store in Manhattan and Queens. During the authors' research, no well-off people visited these stores. The price of goods is very reasonable compared with the other stores, and these employees are busy with a lot of customers. Also, some women and university students are employed at another specific store in Manhattan, both having branches scattered throughout New York City. This work is performed while standing and employees are very busy with many customers. In addition, since sanitation checks are suddenly conducted at franchise stores, it is necessary to pay considerable attention to hygiene, which places a lot of extra stress on employees.

The Bangladeshi and Indian communities in Queens run several grocery stores, traditional clothing stores, Bengal restaurants, BRAC²⁵ (Building Resources Across Communities)'s store, consultation organizations, a pharmacy, a jewelry store, a beauty salon with a henna tattoo, daily necessities stores, and so on. There, some Bangladeshi women are working as waitresses at Bengal restaurants or as salesclerks at traditional clothing stores. Their manager is either Bangladeshi or Pakistani and their jobs require long periods of standing while they are working. In this area, there were once several small grocery stores run by Bangladeshis, but after an Indian entrepreneur created a large store that attracted customers, some of the Bangladeshi

grocery stores have closed. One woman also rented a small space to start a small business, but she had to close it after a few months because of a lack of customers and she incurred debt. She complained, "I was bothered working long hours and I feel a pain to my fingers, I would like to stay with my family members as much as possible, so I tried to become an entrepreneur, but our funds on hand was not enough."

Some women are also working in room service (cleaning and bed making) at a hotel inside of Manhattan and Queens. One woman was standing with a large signboard of a bar, and distributing discount tickets in the center of Time's Square, which is the most crowded part of the city and the busiest tourist area. Also, two women worked at a kiosk run by their family members and were thus self-employed.

Most of the women started working after their children reached 12 years old, except for female households with dependents. The reason for working is clear: family budgets have tightened because of rising rents, food costs and tuition fees; almost everything has become more expensive. Above all, Bangladeshi migrants tend to prioritize their children's study and want them to go onto complete a college education so it will afford them better opportunities in the future.

Most of the women worked five days a week, except one woman, who works worked six days. One woman had decided to reduce her work to two days a week from five because her child had graduated from university and she no longer needed to send remittances to cover education costs. Also, her child sent remittances to family members almost every month.

In general they are limited to doing part-time jobs for a minimum wage and have a tendency to work for long hours in New York City. Especially, a few female householders with dependents mentioned that they worked overtime and that they were required to work long working hours to make a living. The incomes of Bangladeshi female households with dependents were below the median household income of the rest of the United States.²⁶

Due to these conditions, women support each other and exchange information about their children's education and lifestyles in this global city and so on, share a cup of tea while having a lively conversation in Bengali. They have also been making efforts to acquire better English skills through communicating with customers as well.

Through the authors' field research in the UAE, it became apparent that poor Bangladeshi women had to work as unskilled labourers for extremely poor wages for very long hours under the sponsorship system that restricted them and deprived them of their basic rights. Also, they had to live away from their important family members. Compared to these serious circumstances, Bangladeshi women migrants to New York City have gained opportunities that begun tried to improve their family lives gradually and feel empowered through mutual support and work.

Most of the interviewees were Muslim and they wear traditional support when they go to

work. According to them, since the Trump administration, there are concerns about the long commute on the metro.

6. Strengthening ties, but very different to Bangladesh

There are strong community connections and ties among the Bangladeshis and their family members in New York City. All interviewees mentioned that they had been introduced to their jobs from members of the Bangladeshi community in New York City. Bangladeshis tend to work in the same workplace with fellow Bangladeshis. It is naturally accepted in the Bangladeshi community that they will hold out a helping hand and offer fellow compatriots support where possible. The authors also showed in a previous study, how new migrants arrived at the international airport in New York City, family members, relatives or acquaintances welcome for them (Suzuki, et al. [2017]). In one case, it was mentioned that Bangladeshis who came from a certain district go on a one day picnic each year in four buses.

They enthusiastically pass on Bengali to their children and they convey Bangladesh traditions and the Islamic faith at home to preserve their cultural identities, even within the context of their lives as immigrants to the United States. However, some elderly people originally from large families in Bangladesh are isolated in this city and feel lonely in their rented apartments because their children work such long hours. It is not easy for family members to spend time together. Moreover, even if they would like to know how to help each other they are very limited due to their harsh circumstances; the cost of living is much higher in New York City, and gratuitous acts of kindness are uncommon. Elderly people who have accompanied their children from Bangladesh are often disappointed about the reality of weak community ties in New York City and as a result, some of them tend to go back to Bangladesh after raising their grandchildren.

All the women lived with their families, while there were instances of single men living in shared rooms. For married men who migrated to New York City, they brought their family members with them after they gained citizenship. This method was successful until 2016; however, since the end of 2017, many people have had to face the problem that they have been waiting for their family members' visas despite the fact that they have already submitted their application forms. This is plaguing those who have to live away from their families. In terms of policy, migrants are more vulnerable to immigration policy than citizens. And even if a person gains citizenship, it is not certain that they can maintain the same family structure in the United States as they did back home.

Conclusion

This paper examines the authors' field research, following analyzing previous studies mainly by Sassen, and statistical data. First, Bangladeshi women migrants are often employed in a certain franchise store that has been rapidly expanded in New York City. Others are employed as cashiers at two specific relatively inexpensive stores that have branches across the city. Besides, some are employed as salesclerks in traditional clothing stores or as waitresses at Bengal curry restaurants in the Bangladeshi Community in Queens. In addition, this paper found that not only the statistical data but also the disparities between the Bangladeshi and Indian community in Queens is remarkable despite both groups coming from the same South Asian Continent.

Connections among Bangladeshis remain strong even after they have migrated to New York City. Simultaneously, they all receive mutual support from their fellow Bangladeshis at work. Women are knowledgeable about how to live in New York City through their own experiences and exchange information among their Bangladeshi peers, and they have often acquired the ability to communicate with their customers in English, even though they may be new to the job. Moreover, they have also been gaining the power to offer their opinions on family matters within the household. It is also important to note that their living conditions are very different from the situation of the poor Bangladeshi women working as unskilled labourers under the sponsorship in the UAE. In that respect, although empowerment has improved, it is difficult to say that this has led to their satisfaction and promotion of their well-being.

Almost all interviewees belonged to the quasi upper-middle class in Bangladesh, and among them, some women graduated from universities or a few of them worked as professionals in Bangladesh, although, they have incorporated into the working-class in New York City. Accordingly, it is difficult to change jobs, there is little chance of promotion at work, and it is very difficult to rapidly change and move beyond the working-class in New York City. Conspicuously, there are issues of a feeling of tiredness due to long working hours and a long commute, limited occupational options with minimum wages, an inadequate living environment, the high cost of living, the cost of rent and college tuition, and the increased burden of domestic work and a lack of time to spend with their family members.

For the more reason, Bangladeshi women attach special importance to the education of their children and wish that will go to college or university, and often think of the possibilities offered should they escape from the working-class. So, they work long hours not only due to very expensive living costs but also to cover their children's educational expenses. However, single female households with dependents have to face the reality of remaining under the poverty line in the United States. Finally, elderly women recognize the Bangladesh community formed in New York City is quite different from that of their home country and as a result, some have returned

to Bangladesh after working to support their grandchildren in New York City.

Acknowledgement: This study was kindly supported by Grant Aid for Scientific Research (c) by Japan Society for the Promotion of Science. The latest two works (in Japanese) are: *International Labour Migration and Globalization: A Study on the Living Conditions of Bangladeshi Women Migrants* (Grant Number 26380709, 2014–17, by Suzuki, Yayoi and Sato, Kazuhiko) and *A Study of Bangladeshi Migrants in New York City : The Living Conditions of the Second Generation Migrants* (Grant Number 18K11792, 2018–21, by Suzuki, Yayoi).

Once again, Suzuki and Sato sincerely appreciate to Professor Chatterjee, Partha in the South Asian Institute, Columbia University inviting us as visiting scholars in 2017 academic year.

¹ See Sassen [2001].

² United States Census of Bureau [2019] Newsroom, FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: THURSDAY, JUNE 20, 2019, *Population Estimates Show Aging Across Race Groups Differs* (<https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2019/estimates-characteristics.html>) < retrieved: August 22, 2019 > .

³ According to Homeland Security, “Lawful Permanent Residents (LPRs), also known as “Green Card” holders, are non-citizens who are lawfully authorized to live permanently within the United States. LPRs may accept an offer of employment without special restrictions, own property, receive financial assistance at public colleges and universities, or join the Armed Forces. They also may apply to become U.S. citizens if they meet certain eligibility requirements” (<https://www.dhs.gov/immigration-statistics/lawful-permanent-residents>) < retrieved: August 13, 2019 > .

⁴ Homeland Security Official website of the Department of Homeland Security, Supplemental Table 1 in (<https://www.dhs.gov/publication/yearbook-immigration-statistics-2012-naturalizations>) and Supplemental Table 3 in (<https://www.dhs.gov/yearbook-immigration-statistics-2014-lawful-permanent-residents>) < retrieved : August 23, 2016 >

⁵ The increase in applicants is related to the Diversity Visa Immigration Program introduced by the United States. However, the actual numbers of applicants applying using this category were very limited. See Suzuki, et al. [2017] .

⁶ From interviews with government officers in the Ministry of Expatriates’ Welfare Overseas Employment and the Ministry of Commerce, the manager of the Bangladesh Overseas Employment and Services Limited, and owners and employees of agencies in Daka in 2012.

⁷ A lot of interviews undertaken with Bangladeshi migrants under the Diversity Visa Immigration Program, at New York City between 2010 and 2017, and further research including home visits in rural Bangladesh between 1997 and 2012 by Suzuki and Sato.

⁸ A lot of in-depth interviews undertaken with Bangladeshis, between 2010 and 2017 by Suzuki and Sato in New York City.

⁹ United States Census Bureau [2019] p.12.

- ¹⁰ Census of Bureau, American Factfinder-Results (<https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkmk>) < retrieved: August 22, 2019 >.
- ¹¹ Pew Research Center, Key facts about Asian Americans, a diverse and growing population [September 7, 2017] (<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/09/08/key-facts-about-asian-americans/>) < retrieved: August 13, 2019 >.
- ¹² See Drèze and Sen [2014] p.61.
- ¹³ Muhith [1992]. Also, a lot of research in Bangladesh between 1997 and 2012, interviews with Bangladeshi migrants in New York City between 2010 and 2018, and Washington, D.C. in 2010.
- ¹⁴ Interviews with the second-generation children in New York City in 2017 and 2018.
- ¹⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁶ Ali [2010], Human Rights Watch [2006: 2009], also Suzuki and Sato's research in the UAE in 2010, 2012 and 2014. Suzuki and Sato have visited the labour camp in 2012. Also, See Uttom, Stephan and Rozalio, Ronald Rock [February 10, 2017] *Bangladeshi migrant workers at risk of early death: They go abroad with dreams of prosperity but they're dying there in record numbers*, UCA Newscom, There for the voiceless (<https://www.ucanews.com/news/bangladeshi-migrant-workers-at-risk-of-early-death-/78345>) < retrieved: September 2, 2019 >.
- ¹⁷ Refer from Drèze and Sen [2014] p.50 and p.54.
- ¹⁸ Comment from Sen to participant's questions at Sen, Amartya and Bilgrami, Akeel (Speakers) [April 28, 2017] "*Society at Crossroads*" at the Rubin Museum of Art in New York City.
- ¹⁹ It was throughout Suzuki and Sato's observations and several meetings as visiting scholars to the South Asian Institute, Columbia University in 2017 academic year.
- ²⁰ See Suzuki, et al. [2017].
- ²¹ The authors carried out various research between 1997 and 2012, and undertook multiple home visits, in-depth interviews of poor people, slum dwellers, staff members of NGOs, government workers, housemaids and their employers, and so on. Questionnaire surveys were only possible for some interviewees. See Suzuki [2016].
- ²² The authors would like to show their appreciation to Professor Chatterjee and Mr. Carrick in the South Asian Institute, Columbia University for their invitation to undertake fieldwork and for their kind help in providing much important information that contributed to this study.
- ²³ See Kabeer [2000] about the concept of the Power to Choose.
- ²⁴ See Suzuki, et al. [2017] about Diversity Visa Immigration Program in the United States.
- ²⁵ BRAC has founded by Abed, Fazle Hassan after independence in Bangladesh, the main focus and activities at the grassroots level of BRAC are to empower the poorest, disenfranchised women and children in the areas of social injustice, poverty, health care, illiteracy, children's education, and so on, and it has adopted various kinds of approaches at the community base. See Abed [November 21, 2003], Lovell [1992] and Suzuki [2016]. Also, BRAC run Aaron as a Bangladesh clothing shop in New York City.
- ²⁶ United States Census Bureau [2019] p.2.

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