

# A study of the living conditions of Bangladeshi migrants in New York City

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to analyze the actual living conditions of Bangladeshi migrants in New York City in the United States. This research is based on previous studies and our interviews were conducted between 2010 and 2017 in the United States, and between 1997 and 2012 in Bangladesh.

The information of the enforcement of the Diversity Visa Program spread throughout almost Bangladesh since it was introduced in 1995, and the number of applicants increased. The number of Bangladeshis who obtain lawful permanent residents according to the category of Diversity Visa reached the quota restrictions in 2012. Since 2012 almost half of new migrants from Bangladesh coming to the United States use family-sponsored preferences. Employment-based preferences remain extremely low at 4.8% in 2015, which is inevitably reflected on the working conditions of Bangladeshi migrants in New York City.

Interviewees for this research originally came from the quasi middle class in Bangladesh, and their parents have their own houses or a mansion, have farm holdings or employ domestic maids. In addition, some of interviewees have worked as government officials or performed special kind of work in a particular field.

However, these first-generation Bangladeshi migrants have been incorporated into the working-class in New York City, and it means a decline in their standard of living, because their forms of employment are part-time jobs, or as seasonal labourers or irregular employees. Therefore, they have to do low-wage work for long hours to pay high apartment rent and preserve their daily lives. Due to this situation, they don't have enough time to spend with their family members or friends.

**Key words:** Bangladeshi migrants, Diversity Visa Program, first-generation, working class, New York City

## I Introduction: Background of a study

In 1931, Tagore Rabindranath who was the first person in Asia to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature, praised the region located in the eastern province of former British colonial India (id est. present the People's Republic of Bangladesh; Bangladesh), *Amaru Shonar Bangla* (Our Golden Bengal). Following the destruction of the Mughal Empire, one can trace the history of repression and suffering under the colonial period of the British, and the quasi-national colonial period as East Pakistan (present Bangladesh) under the geographically distant West Pakistan (present Pakistan). Indeed, due to harsh circumstances, the people living on the Indian subcontinent have been forced to migrate extensively, and the Partition of British India in 1947 resulted in one of the largest and most rapid migrations in human history (Bharadwaj et al., 2008, p.39). It is estimated that 14.5 million people migrated within 4 years (ibid.) with an estimated total migratory inflow of 14.5 million and an outflow of 17.9 million, implying 3.4 million missing people (ibid.). Additionally, "The operation of the Pakistan military in East Pakistan in 1971 caused an estimated 8 to 10 million refugees to cross the border into India" (Heitzman and Worden, 1988, p. 57).

During this period, a major reason why migrants or refugees were fled from the Indian subcontinent stemmed from the Partition under British colonial rule. Displaced people faced enormous problems in that they became aliens, or refugees, and were dispersed in different regions outside their homelands in order to survive. After the language movement, following independence and the liberation war, in December 1971, East Pakistan proclaimed its independence as the nation of the People's Republic of Bangladesh (Bangladesh). The Bangladeshi people are proud of the history of the independence of Bangladesh, and they are also proud of *Bangla Basha* (Bengali) as their mother's language, and *Shohid Minal* (monuments of martyr) that symbolize the endogenous nature of people desiring independence that are preserved throughout the country.

Following independence, although most refugees returned, an undetermined number remained in India. "Bangladesh accepted almost 100,000 stranded Bangladeshis from former West Pakistan. Also, about 600,000 non-Bengali Muslims, known as Bihari people, who had declared their allegiance to Pakistan during the 1971 war, continued to reside in Bangladesh"(Heitzman and Worden, 1988, p.57).

Reconstruction of their devastated motherland caused by war, and responses to large-scale movements of people and other political turmoil was remarkable. Since then, political turmoil and conflict between different parties has continued, contributing to a negative heritage. Poverty causes serious social problems and the promotion of modernization brought destruction of the environment to an area which was once a rich and fertile expanse of land, blessed with beautiful

nature that created a rich culture and art. Suzuki and Sato have visited Bangladesh twelve times between 1997 and 2012. In the dry season at the rural Bangladesh, there was beautiful scenery such as the Shonarua Bangla by Tagore. Also these field work revealed the existence the poorest people who live in slums after they have been deprived of their house and lands due to the promotion of modernization by foreign aid. The modernization of rural areas led by foreign aid deprives employment opportunities and productivity of agricultural crops. For that reason, the number of people trying to migrate or immigrate<sup>(1)</sup> to overseas by selling farm holdings<sup>(2)</sup> or borrowing money on site is increasing. Policies and advertisements by the government of Bangladesh also encourage international labour migration. In response to this policy, there are approved agencies in Daka for international labour migration working between the Gulf Coast Conference (GCC) states and Bangladesh.<sup>(3)</sup>

Since the mid-1970s, the area where Bangladeshi labourers most migrate are the GCC states. Research by Suzuki (2010, 2012 and 2014) and Sato (2010 and 2012) shows that there are many poor people from Bangladesh among the labourers who went to work in Dubai and Abu-Dhabi in United Arab Emirates (UAE). Indeed, almost all poor people who come from developing countries are working for long hours under harsh living and working conditions, which Human Rights Watch (2009) points out. In the case of Bangladesh, migrants pay significant mediation fees to agencies, the total amount reaching almost one year's salary of a typical Bangladeshi labourer in the UAE, for example.<sup>(4)</sup>

Since the 1990s, people who have tried to obtain visas to the United States are increasing rapidly and that country has become the most popular country as a destination for many Bangladeshis (Hassan, 2008, p.56). "The lives of migrants to the United States are shaped by the American Dream. In spite of the complex and often contradictory realities that surround these ideas, migrants tend to be among the most fervent believers of the American Dream" (Kibria, 2011, p.55). Additionally, remittances from Bangladeshis who migrated to the United States are on the rise,<sup>(5)</sup> so the government of Bangladesh is also interested in the economic benefits they bring to the country.

In recent years, there have been many previous studies related to migration or immigration, although the studies that focus on South Asia are mostly limited to India.<sup>(6)</sup> Here we can see the high interest in India. As far as our study is concerned, previous studies on Bangladeshi migrants are limited. Although it is within the scope of our current research, not all of them focus on the lives of the migrants themselves, and the hardships they face. Previous studies which examine the actual living conditions of Bangladeshi migrants have been carried out by Gardner (1995), Kabeer (2000), Kibria (2011) and Rahman, S. (2011), and as such are valuable research revealing the actual living conditions and voices of these people. Other previous studies have tended to

focused on the process of sending remittances (Azad, 2005; Siddiqui 2003) or their role (Siddiqui, 2003; Pradhan and Khan, 2015; Barai, 2012; Choudhury and Habib, 2008) through international labour migrants from Bangladesh. These studies evaluate the impact that remittances have had, a great impact on resources of foreign exchange earnings at the macroeconomic level, or the positive impact on households' finances. Certainly, if there is a remittance, there will be advantages such as liberation from the Mahajan (if they in fact borrowed money from a Mahajan), or guaranteeing their children's education for a longer period.

What is migration or international labour migration from developing countries? In the case of Bangladesh, for those who migrate to the other countries by selling off farm lands or are in debt to a Mahajan, it may be the last way to support themselves, or to survive.<sup>(7)</sup> And at the destination, every person has to start as an alien or diaspora in a foreign country. There may be some barriers at the destination.

In other words, migration or international labour migration should not be argued only from the point of view the effect of remittances. According to Gardner, "Migration cannot be understood fully without reference to power relations, both between places, and between people" (1995, p.16). Ali and Hartmann also point out the numerous risks in the United States as a destination: "For others—employers, natives, and government officials in receiving countries—the hopes and dreams of these people are often invisible. Many see working-class migrants as nothing more than disposable, interchangeable parts, factors of production, and little else" (2015, p.66).

This paper will focus on the actual living conditions of Bangladeshi migrants by discussing the state of the lives of migrant workers in the recipient country, specifically the United States, which is caused by power relations between the periphery and the center. Indeed, migrant workers from Bangladesh are mostly concentrated in New York City and their current status and living and working conditions have not necessarily been clarified.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the tendency toward migration from Bangladesh to the United States and to clarify their actual living conditions in New York City. The authors will reference previous studies, statistical data and original research carried out by Suzuki and Sato, who resided in New York City as visiting scholars at South Asia Institute, Columbia University in 2017. Research will refer to previous studies and materials at Columbia University, New York Public Library, and numerous in-depth interviews from Bangladeshi migrants which have been carried out since 2010. Finally, this study is also based on in-depth research conducted in Bangladesh<sup>(8)</sup> and other research carried out in the UAE.

## II Bangladeshi Migrants to the United States

In this section, the authors analyze statistical data of Bangladeshis migrating to the United

States. A lawful permanent resident is defined as, “a person who has been granted lawful permanent residence in the United States. They are also known as ‘green card’ recipients”.<sup>(9)</sup> “The Immigration Act of 1990 established the Diversity Visa Program, where 55,000 immigrant visas would be available in an annual lottery, starting in fiscal year 1995. The lottery aims to diversify the immigrant population in the United States, by selecting applicants mostly from countries with low rates of immigration to the United States in the previous five years”.<sup>(10)</sup>

**Table 1: Numbers of Bangladeshis applying online for entry to the United States for the electronic Diversity Visa (Fiscal Years 2007-2014)**

Fiscal Year	Entrance	Spouse and Children	Grand Total	Fiscal Year	Entrance	Spouse and Children	Grand Total
2007	1,023,438	413,518	1,436,946	2011	5,418,800	1,079,126	6,497,926
2008	1,754,789	409,799	2,164,588	2012	7,667,030	895,221	8,562,251
2009	4,313,346	805,530	5,118,676	2013	0	0	0
2010	3,828,371	834,324	4,662,695	2014	0	0	0

Source: Diversity Visa Program, DV 2007-2013 ([http://greencard.spar.ge/DV\\_Applicant\\_Entrants\\_by\\_Country\\_2013-2015.pdf](http://greencard.spar.ge/DV_Applicant_Entrants_by_Country_2013-2015.pdf)) < retrieved 10 July, 2017 > and Ibid., 2013-2015 ([http://greencard.spar.ge/DV\\_Applicant\\_Entrants\\_by\\_Country\\_2013-2015.pdf](http://greencard.spar.ge/DV_Applicant_Entrants_by_Country_2013-2015.pdf)) < retrieved 10 July, 2017 > (compiled by the authors).

Information about the establishment of the Diversity Visa Program and how one could apply online in order to qualify to migrate to the United States spread among the people who could access newspapers and the like. Some poor people also got information from brokers. In rural areas where poor people didn't always have access to news programs, it is unclear whether they got an accurate picture of the information or not. One interviewee did mention that the poor people are always disadvantaged in Bangladesh.<sup>(11)</sup> However, with a path to reside legally in the United States newly created by legislation, many Bangladeshi began applying for this new class of visa.

**Table 1** shows the number of Bangladeshis who applied online for the electronic Diversity Visa from 2007 to 2014. More than a million registered in 2007, 3.8 million in 2010, 5.4 million in 2011, and around 7.7 million in 2012. The total Bangladeshi labour force population was 75 million in 2012<sup>(12)</sup>, and therefore, almost 1 in 9 of the total labour force population applied to work in the United States via the electronic application process that year, with the total number of persons exceeding 8.9 million when spouses and children were included.

Indeed, the results of research carried out by the authors in P Village in rural Bangladesh, and Dubai showed poor people also had applied online for the Diversity Visa Program in rural bazaars, even though back then, villagers who were able to access the internet at home were quite limited.<sup>(13)</sup> S(man) who had worked as a construction labour in the UAE said, “I did not want come to the UAE. My elder brother and I wanted to go to the United States. If we had

the opportunity to live in the United States, at least, I think that there was a chance send to remittances to my family members. Anyway, it should be many times better than these hard conditions I endure now, where I cannot even send money to my loving mother”.<sup>(14)</sup> Also, in our research in rural Bangladesh, among the poorest people living in the slums, we found no one had applied online for this program.

**Table 2: Migrant number use for visa issuances and adjustments of status in the Diversity Immigrant category (Fiscal Years 1995-2014).**

Fiscal Year	Bangladesh	Other Asian	Grand Total	Fiscal Year	Bangladesh	Other Asian	Grand Total
1995	3,288	6,864	55,508	2005	2,542	6,462	48,151
1996	2,943	6,164	54,162	2006	3,421	7,402	46,145
1997	3,362	6,757	55,027	2007	3,518	7,151	40,076
1998	3,347	7,461	51,565	2008	2,286	7,335	46,633
1999	1,882	6,485	54,115	2009	2,663	7,759	48,036
2000	1,559	5,263	47,714	2010	3,017	8,824	51,312
2001	1,556	6,801	45,475	2011	3,090	9,167	51,118
2002	1,101	6,346	43,371	2012	295	6,481	34,463
2003	755	6,557	50,810	2013	0	9,785	52,571
2004	1,837	6,310	48,044	2014	0	8,500	52,342

Source: Immigrant Number Use for Visa Issuances and Adjustments of Status in the Diversity Immigrant, Category, Fiscal Years (FY) 2005-2014 (Table VII) (<https://travel.state.gov/content/dam/visas/Statistics/AnnualReports/FY2014AnnualReport/FY14AnnualReport-TableVII.pdf>) <retrieved 29 April, 2017>, Ibid., FY 2001-2010 (<https://travel.state.gov/content/dam/visas/Statistics/FY10AnnualReport-TableVII.pdf>) <retrieved 9 July, 2017> and Ibid., FY 1995-2000 (<https://travel.state.gov/content/dam/visas/Statistics/FY2000%20table%20VII.pdf>) <retrieved 9 July, 2017>. (compiled by the authors).

**Table 2** shows the migrant number use for visas issuances and adjustments of status in the Diversity Immigrant category from 1995 to 2014. Bangladeshis who obtained lawful permanent resident according to the category of Diversity Visa are highly concentrated during the 18 years since Diversity Visa Program was introduced in 1995. After numbers reached 50,000 by 2012 Bangladesh has been listed as a country that is not eligible for electronic application of the Diversity Visa Program since 2013,<sup>(15)</sup> according to legislative rules regarding this category of visa.

Looking at the result, no one obtained a visa to the United States among poor people in P Village. Even within the whole of Bangladesh, because the total number of the many who applied online, the number of who obtained lawful permanent residents was very limited. That is, the magnification in Bangladesh was inevitably high. Under these circumstances, those who acquired this category of visa felt they were very fortunate. However, they answered that they later learned that the reality of living conditions in the United States would be harsh upon moving there.

**Table 3: Bangladeshis obtaining lawful permanent resident status to the United States  
(Fiscal Years 1973-2015)**

Fiscal Year	Number	Fiscal Year	Number	Fiscal Year	Number	Fiscal Year	Number
1973	154	1984	823	1995	6072	2006	14,644
1974	147	1985	1,146	1996	8221	2007	12,074
1975	404	1986	1,634	1997	8681	2008	11,753
1976	590	1987	1,649	1998	8621	2009	16,651
1977	762	1988	1,325	1999	6046	2010	14,819
1978	716	1989	2,180	2000	7215	2011	16,707
1979	749	1990	4,250	2001	7171	2012	14,705
1980	532	1991	10,676	2002	5492	2013	12,099
1981	756	1992	3,740	2003	4625	2014	14,645
1982	639	1993	3,291	2004	8061	2015	13,570
1983	787	1994	3,434	2005	11487	Total (1973-2015)	263,743

Source: United States, Department of Homeland Security, Data for Fiscal Years (FY) 2013-2015 cited 2016a, p.12, FY 2015-2013 cited 2016b, p.12, FY 2001-2004 cited 2011 and FY 1995-2004 cited 2006b. U.S. Department of Justice Immigration and Naturalization Service, FY 1989-1999 cited 2002, p.24. Only Data for FY 1973- 1988 re-cited in Gall and Tall (1993) pp.171-172. (Complied by the authors).

**Table 3** shows the number of Bangladeshis obtaining legal permanent resident status from 1973 to 2015. Since the 1990s, Bangladeshi migrant numbers have trended upward along with those from Asian countries, in particular, India, China and the Philippines. And in 1995, when the Diversity Visa Program was first introduced, numbers doubled compared to the previous year. The number of Bangladeshi migrants also increased in the 2000s, and in particular, since 2005 more than 10,000 people have obtained lawful permanent resident status each year.

**Table 4: Bangladeshis obtaining lawful permanent resident status by broad class of admission  
(Fiscal Years 2005-2015)**

Fiscal Year	Total	Family-sponsored preferences	Employment-based preferences	Immediate relatives of U.S. citizens	Diversity	Refugees and asylees	Others
2005	11,487 (100.0)	3,118 (27.1)	1,520 (13.2)	4,625 (40.3)	1,753 (15.3)	405 (3.5)	66 (0.6)
2006	14,644 (100.0)	3,384 (23.1)	1,060 (7.2)	6,036 (41.2)	3,093 (21.1)	981 (6.8)	90 (0.6)
2007	12,074 (100.0)	3,015 (25.0)	1,165 (9.6)	4,108 (34.0)	3,254 (27.0)	475 (3.9)	57 (0.5)
2008	11,753 (100.0)	3,210 (27.3)	1,304 (11.1)	3,883 (33.0)	2,930 (24.9)	385 (3.3)	41 (0.3)
2009	16,651 (100.0)	7,326 (44.0)	957 (5.7)	5,128 (30.8)	2,928 (17.6)	232 (1.4)	80 (0.5)
2010	14,819 (100.0)	6,006 (40.5)	827 (5.6)	4,935 (33.3)	2,800 (18.9)	171 (1.2)	80 (0.5)
2011	16,707 (100.0)	7,821 (46.8)	648 (3.9)	4,988 (29.9)	3,049 (18.2)	117 (0.7)	84 (0.5)
2012	14,705 (100.0)	7,357 (50.0)	549 (3.7)	5,758 (39.2)	827 (5.6)	149 (1.1)	65 (0.4)
2013	12,099 (100.0)	6,272 (51.8)	740 (6.1)	4,701 (38.9)	92 (0.8)	245 (2.0)	49 (0.4)
2014	14,577 (100.0)	8,709 (59.7)	560 (3.8)	5,194 (35.6)	0	114 (0.8)	0
2015	13,570 (100.0)	7,044 (51.9)	653 (4.8)	5,667 (41.8)	0	167 (1.2)	39 (0.3)

Note: In the following source, the total number of Bangladeshi migrants was 14,645 in 2014. However, recalculating the number revealed figure of 14,577 by authors.

Source: United States, Department of Homeland Security (2016a, p.27, 2014, p.27, 2013, p.27, 2012, p.27, 2011, p.27, 2010, p.27, 2009, p.27, 2008, p.27, 2007, p.27 and 2006, p.27). (complied by the authors).

**Table 4** shows Bangladeshis who obtained lawful permanent resident status by broad class of admission (2005-2015) and **Table 5** displays the total number of persons obtaining lawful permanent resident status by broad class of admission (2005-2015). According to these data, Diversity Visas obtained by Bangladeshi applicants accounted for around 20% of the total between 2006 and 2011. In 2008, about a quarter of the number of applicants obtained lawful permanent resident status with this visa. These numbers are even higher when compared to the grand total of 3.5% to 4.8% during the same period.

In addition, the number and ratio of family-sponsored preferences among Bangladeshis has been increasing. Those who obtained lawful permanent resident status through this visa accounted for more than 40% of the total in 2009 and more than half in 2012. It is also clear that the percentage is higher when compared with the grand total of almost 20% during the same period.

On the other hand, very few applicants obtained lawful permanent resident status according to employment-based preferences. These numbers are even lower when compared with the total overall number. In 2015, the percentage comprised of just 4.5% of the grand total of 13.7%. Therefore, a clear majority of Bangladeshi migrants have to find their own jobs in the United States.

**Table 5: Persons obtaining lawful permanent resident status to the United States  
by broad class of admission (Fiscal Years 2005-2015)**

Fiscal Year	Grand Total	Family-sponsored preferences	Employment-based preferences	Immediate relatives of U.S. citizens	Diversity	Refugees and asylees	Others
2005	1,122,373 (100.0)	212,970 (19.0)	246,877 (22.0)	436,231 (38.9)	46,234 (4.1)	142,962 (12.7)	37,099 (3.3)
2006	1,266,264 (100.0)	222,229 (17.5)	159,081 (12.6)	580,483 (45.9)	44,471 (3.5)	216,454 (17.1)	43,546 (3.4)
2007	1,052,415 (100.0)	194,900 (18.5)	162,176 (15.4)	494,920 (47.1)	42,127 (4.0)	136,125 (12.9)	22,167 (2.1)
2008	1,107,126 (100.0)	227,761 (20.6)	166,511 (15.0)	488,483 (44.1)	41,761 (3.8)	166,392 (15.0)	16,218 (1.5)
2009	1,130,818 (100.0)	211,859 (18.7)	144,034 (12.7)	535,554 (47.4)	47,879 (4.2)	177,368 (15.7)	14,124 (1.3)
2010	1,042,625 (100.0)	214,589 (20.6)	148,343 (14.2)	476,414 (45.7)	49,763 (4.8)	136,291 (13.1)	17,225 (1.6)
2011	1,062,040 (100.0)	234,931 (22.1)	139,339 (13.1)	453,158 (42.7)	50,103 (4.7)	168,460 (15.9)	16,049 (1.5)
2012	1,031,631 (100.0)	202,019 (19.6)	143,998 (14.0)	478,780 (46.4)	40,320 (3.9)	150,614 (14.6)	15,900 (1.5)
2013	990,553 (100.0)	210,303 (21.2)	161,110 (16.3)	439,460 (44.4)	45,618 (4.6)	119,630 (12.1)	14,432 (1.4)
2014	1,016,518 (100.0)	229,104 (22.5)	151,596 (14.9)	416,456 (41.0)	53,490 (5.3)	134,242 (13.2)	31,630 (3.1)
2015	1,051,031 (100.0)	213,910 (20.4)	144,047 (13.7)	465,068 (44.2)	47,934 (4.6)	151,955 (14.5)	28,077 (2.6)

Reference: United States, Department of Homeland Security (2016a, p.27, 2014, p.27, 2013, p.27, 2012, p.27, 2011, p.27, 2010, p.27, 2009, p.27, 2008, p.27, 2007, p.27 and 2006, p.27). (compiled by the authors).



### III A fact reality for Bangladeshi migrants to New York City

#### 1 Methodology

The main methodology of our research on the living conditions of poor people in rural Bangladesh is grounded on Chambers (1983). For example, with questionnaires answers alone, it is hard to find that serious problems regarding living conditions of Bangladeshi migrants to New York City. In addition, it is also necessary to continue field research in developing countries as well destinations for migrants, since even if certain issues are solved at some point, there is still a risk that conditions may deteriorate a few years later, because migrants also stand vulnerable to immigrant policies in destination countries. Migrants are vulnerable to policy more than the general population.

Suzuki and Sato's present research was undertaken in Manhattan and Queens, New York City during the summers of 2012-2015, and autumn of 2016. Following, we also conducted research in Manhattan, Queens, Bronx and Brooklyn during 2017 year.

The authors also conducted research on the Bangladeshi Community in Queens and Bronx, and have done participatory fieldwork and several interviews on the South American community in 2017. Separate interviews with 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 in the interviewees remains confidential, since the research itself presented difficulties, because the subject matter was quite sensitive.

#### 2 Interviewees

The number of Bangladeshi migrant interviewees were 4 persons in 2010, 25 persons in 2012, 27 persons in 2013, 35 persons in 2014, 35 persons in 2015, 2 persons in 2016 and 35 persons as of August 2017. Among them, the authors have also kept many in-depth and open-ended interviews from several Bangladeshi migrants in 2010, and between 2012 and 2017.

There were no migrants who came to the United States on employment-based preferences among the Bangladeshi interviewees. Interviewees of the first-generation were not a person who possesses great property such as being large business owners in Bangladesh. Also, they were not coming from poor family. Their family owned a house of a certain size and farm holdings. Only one responded that his family have no farm holdings.

Among these interviewees, in most homes, they employed domestic maids.<sup>(16)</sup> All men responded that they had never carried out housework until they came to New York City. Unmarried women also said that in Bangladesh, most of them did not have almost cleaning and washing experience. Their educational background was above the high school graduation,

University graduates and master's degree holders are also included. Prior jobs in Bangladesh include governmental officers, government officials, engineers, principals, teachers, airport staff member, and others. The educational background of second generation children who migrated from Bangladesh following the first-generation is also high. Based on this background, these interviewees came from the quasi middle class or upper middle class in Bangladesh.

### 3 Finding a job and having to work long hours

The population of New York City was 8,537,673 in July, 2016 with the foreign born proportion (2011-2015) comprising of 37.2%, 49.1% of people over 5 years old spoke a language other than English at home (2011-2015), and 12.7%<sup>(17)</sup> of the population of this city were of Asian origin in 2010. Among them, primarily countries were China and India.<sup>(18)</sup> There is also a community of Bangladeshi migrants.

Bangladeshis keep strong ties with their families and relatives back home. Thus, all interviewees mentioned that they had acquired information about New York City from their family, relatives or colleagues via social media on their phones or from photographs or letters before they arrived in the United States. And when they arrived at the international airport in New York City for the first time, they were welcomed by fellow Bangladeshis. Things are clearly different for them compared to poor Bangladeshi migrant workers who arrive in the UAE without little prior information and have to work and live under harsh conditions. Still, several interviewees said that their images from some pictures of the night view in New York City that they saw in Bangladesh before coming differed from the actual living conditions they encountered after arriving.

Also one interviewee mentioned, "We have heard from other Bangladeshi migrants that you had to work hard before we arrived in here. The introduction of work relies on other Bangladeshi migrants who already reside in the city. We all recognize that employment opportunities are very important and therefore when there is labour demand, we will always introduce it to other Bangladeshi migrants. There are many Indian and Pakistani migrants in the United States and even though it is often thought that all South Asians are the same, that is due to Partition of British and things remain unresolved. In that respect, we think that former colonial policy has brought about some kind of racism, even here in the United States. "On the other hand, in New York City, there are support avenues for these communities based upon each community, region or country. However, the strength of the connection varies depending on the country or region of origin".

Most first-generation Bangladeshi migrants had gained work within two weeks or a month at most after arrival, but no one has a professional position. There are many new Bangladeshi

migrants employed in a certain franchise through the introduction of fellow countrywomen or countrymen already residing in New York City. The others are as follows: souvenir store clerk, mobile vender, mobile store proprietor, taxi driver, discount shop cashier, pedicab driver, waitress or waiter, restaurant gofer, billsticker, or library assistant.

They all have sufficient English ability for customer service jobs. Interestingly, Bangladeshi migrants are not represented in so called hazardous jobs such as construction, garbage collection, high-rise work on unstable moving cranes or window cleaning using a harness as a safety device,<sup>(19)</sup> cleaning public toilets, or watering flowers at high spaces along roadsides, etc. In summary, as far as comparing with hazardous work of migrant labourers in the UAE, the jobs of Bangladeshi migrant workers in New York City are significantly safer and less harsh than their fellow countrymen in the UAE. And yet, they have been facing harsh conditions since migrated to the United States.

The median household income in New York City between 2011 and 2015 was 53,373 US dollars.<sup>(20)</sup> However, due to part-time jobs, seasonal labourers, and irregular employees, the per capita salary of Bangladeshi migrants was roughly half of the city's average.

In addition, because rental apartments are exceedingly expensive in this city, migrants will spend a lot of time working. All interviewees had never experienced such high rent expenditure in Bangladesh. What is the harsh reality in New York City and in particular, how long are the working hours and how does it affect their lives?

For example, unmarried man said as follows.

One man as interviewee said, "I admired the life of New York City, looking at the pictures my friend sent. However, the reality is full of a lot of pain. Prices are too expensive. I had not even imagined that I would have to do work for such long hours. It is without talking with others, and it is a lonely job done through the night. Moreover, I use an old and dirty rental apartment communally with other Bangladeshi migrants. My house in Daka was larger and kept clean by a domestic maid. My brothers work as a doctor or a specialised job and they told me that remittances were not necessary. Most of my friends send money to their families in Bangladesh, and for that reason, their family members thankful, but at this point, I am not finding such a role. The greatest fun is to call to my youngest sister, but, there is a time difference, and now she is busy with examination study. Also, she is the adorable child of my family members. So youngest sister keeps to herself without me. Before I came to here, I wanted to watch a musical at Times Square. However, some friends from Bangladesh can't accept such modern music shows, and we also can't afford such expenses. Especially traditional music in Bangladesh is popular among middle-aged and elder people. I don't feel like going out alone. In Bangladesh, we always went out with friends or family members. So, I really feel lonely and I regret having come here".

Another man said, "Two weeks after coming, I came to recognize the severity my situation. At that time, almost everyone cried a lot. Life in New York City is lonely. We had lived in a community with a big family in Bangladesh, and we called them family members. A few have returned to Bangladesh, but, almost all of them have gradually got used life in the United States. There should not be homeless or beggars either in New York City. There is a mutual assistance offered to fellow Bangladeshis. Also, almost New Yorkers are friendly. Still, this city is too busy and the living conditions are not good. I think after marriage something will be more difficult among as husband and wife".

In addition, family issues became apparent through the interviews:

"After we migrated to New York City, my wife's thinking was changed. Her view of life is now very different from rural Bangladesh where we once lived together. She says that we need money for our children's future. Following arguments, we decided to get a divorce, and I have not meet my child for more than 10 years. Since both the address and the telephone number have been changed, there is no way to see my daughter".

Another woman answered, "In rural Bangladesh where we spent time together as a big family. After we migrated in New York City, we had to do work with long hours at different working place. Our job-related stress accumulated, because money is needed to do anything, anywhere. A pressure-cooker lifestyle has overtaken our time and caused stress on relationships. After we had our child things became worse, and sometimes the stress has affected my health. At last, currently we live separately. Our child's father went to court over parental rights and I am consulting a lawyer. Once, I really wanted to share everything, but I can't find it anymore. On the contrary, we are subject to the hardships of life in this big city. We actually came from same village, and the whole village knows about the situation. As you know that obtain a divorce is not a good issue in Bangladesh".

#### **4 Facing harsh facts; The high cost of rent**

New migrants are faced with a myriad of issues. Not only do they have to get a job, they have to find a rental apartment, open a bank account, get a credit card and obtain a social security card. These latter three things are imperative to live in the United States, and as such are urgent tasks of first-generation migrants. It is also required that they have a residential address for the application process for these identification.

In recent years, it has become more and more difficult to find reasonable rental apartments, not only for migrants but also the local population as the cost of real estate continues to skyrocket. Basically, to secure a rental apartment, a potential tenant's salary must be 40 times that of the cost of rent. The median value of owner-occupied housing units during 2011 and 2015 was 494,800

US dollars.<sup>(21)</sup> Manhattan dwellers paid an average of 4,081 US dollars a month for an apartment in June 2015<sup>(22)</sup> and there was 99 % occupancy rate. The median Brooklyn rental was 2,961 US dollars a month, and in Queens, 2,597 US dollars per month.

The New York City Subway operates 24 hours a day. However, congestion during peak rush-hour times and chronic delays are remarkable<sup>(23)</sup>, and people are increasingly unable to get to work on time, as they are forced to live further and further outside of the city due to the cost of rent. Additionally, many real estate companies only accept credit card payments at the time of application, and an initial fee of almost 120 to 150 US dollars.

Then they require income certification, one to two recent bank statements, a credit history and the last year's tax return, a copy of government issued photo ID and a social security card copy. Also, income certifications are required: a letter of employment stating the position, length of employment, salary with contact information and signature from the employer and two months' salary details. For new migrants, last year's tax returns may be exempt.

For new migrants there are many contradictions to be found, since many documents are not able to be submitted without confirmation of a permanent residential address, not to mention that rent is usually to be paid by bank check in the United States. One is also unable to initiate a credit history without first possessing a social security card.

Therefore, when new migrants are looking for a rental apartment, they are almost always subject to the above contradictions and stress. And if they are unable to submit a social security card, they are at a big disadvantage in concluding legal contracts. Real estate agencies or apartment landlords also request other security fees and other miscellaneous fees, or a guarantor. Often, finding a guarantor for a new migrant is more difficult than finding a rental apartment, since the guarantor's annual salary must be eighty times the rent of the apartment. Besides, the guarantor must also present a lot of personal information.

Just after arrival, new migrants are in a weak and vulnerable side, so how do they get over various obstacles? The above contradictions and difficulties of reality in New York City are well known by Bangladeshi migrants. Interviewees, first-generation migrants mostly stay with relatives, colleagues or acquaintances. They mentioned that mutual community support are traditional customs. However, one woman said, "Although I stayed at my brother's family's rental apartment, it gradually became difficult to live together". Another woman said, "I stayed at a cousin's family's house, but it was uncomfortable". Men, on the other hand, tend to live together for several years with relatives, or they share apartments with multiple occupants. However, there are issues such as noise, differences in perceptions of cleanliness and time. After they return from long working hours to a dirty room in a narrow space they feel stress. These things as well as different homecoming times and different rest times in their rental apartments

sometimes lead to arguments and fights.

Finally, this paper finishes with a quote from one interviewee: "It would be best to live with my family members in the country where I was born. Developing countries are kept poor by developed countries, with international movement of labour the result, so we have to work long hours in this way. I have worked as a professional worker before in Bangladesh. I have been attempting to enter that profession since almost 20 years in New York City. However, I can't escape from this working-class, it is our reality. Still I am very proud of Bangla Basha (Bengali), my traditional culture and the beautiful rural scenery and there are many kinds of biotic communities in rural Bangladesh. It is a beautiful country. However, because my homeland also has problems such as political corruption, health issues such as arsenic from the ground water, and environmental destruction I can't say I would like to return to my country right now."

#### IV Conclusion

The information of the enforcement of the Diversity Visa Program spread throughout almost entirely Bangladesh and was viewed by people as a potential method for obtaining lawful permanent resident status to the United States. On account of the number of applicants increasing rapidly year by year since it was introduced in 1995, also competitive was higher for the person obtained lawful permanent resident among Bangladeshis. For that reason, those who acquired this category of visa felt they were very fortunate. However, their image in New York City and real living conditions were different for them. Bangladeshis who obtained lawful permanent residents according to the category of Diversity Visa are concentrated during the 18 years until 2012, when the United States scrapped eligibility due to the high number of applicants. Because it has reached the quota restrictions for Bangladeshis in 2012.

Since then, almost half of new migrants from Bangladesh coming to the United States use family-sponsored preferences, well above the long-term average of 20%. On the other hand, employment-based preferences remain extremely low at 4.8% in 2015, which is inevitably reflected in the working conditions most of them face in New York City.

Living conditions in Bangladesh, especially in rural areas, and New York City are very different, yet migrants remain proud of their mother language Bangla Basha (Bengali), a rural environment blessed with abundant nature and a culture rich in tradition. Especially, first-generation migrants are proud of their native country even after migration. In other words, the center of traditional culture remains strong.

The connection between families, relatives and rural community in Bangladesh is strong. Most of first-generation migrants to the United States hope to accompany their family members over, with many of them have realized it. However, the working conditions that support them are still

severe.

These first-generation Bangladeshi migrants have been incorporated into the working class in New York City, the United States. Their working conditions in part-time jobs, seasonal labourers and as irregular employees, means they have been facing inevitable vulnerabilities. This study has shown many cases of substitutable labour, as pointed out by Ali and Hartmann. Also, this research since 2010 find out it is very difficult that first-generation Bangladeshis escape from the working-class in New York City.

That is, for Bangladeshis, the economic reality in New York City is quite different from that of their homeland, and they remain on the periphery, where they must work long hours to pay for high rent and just to live day to day, for instance. As a result, they are unable to spend much time with family and relationships have become weak or often break down. They are troubled, struggle and are conflicted with their circumstances.

Besides, women and unmarried men also have engage in domestic work. It is a pain, and there is hardship in the living conditions which they have never been experienced, as they come from the quasi middle class or upper middle class in Bangladesh. In most families' domestic maids were employed, so in the motherland, they have never experienced the burden of housework before.

Finally, according to the authors' research, there are those who migrated to the United States in order to access to higher education and employment opportunities for their children. Regarding these second-generation Bangladeshi migrants in New York City, the authors plan to continue research.

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## Notes

- (1) In this paper the definition of migration or international migration means those who migrate to a country other than of their usual residence for a period of at least one year, so that the country of destination effectively becomes their new country of usual residence (World Bank, 2011). We use the term immigration, depending on the reference.
- (2) Farm holdings are classified into small, medium and large holdings. They are sub-divided further into the following categories. Small farms encompass an area of 0.05 to 2.49 acres. Medium farms are 2.50 to 7.49 acres, and large

- farms are 7.50 acres above. Also, non-farm holdings are sub-divided into holdings with no cultivated area, holdings kitchen spaces without cultivated area and holdings with a cultivated area under 0.04 acres (BBS, 1999, p.31).
- (3) Research at Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment, and agencies in Daka, Bangladesh. Also, the total number of valid agencies are 1,143 and suspended agencies are 103 (<http://www.bmet.gov.bd/BMET/raHomeAction>) <retrieved October 1, 2017>. These agencies are called *recruitment agencies* in Bangladesh.
  - (4) Research in Bangladesh, and Dubai and Abu Dhabi in UAE.
  - (5) Remittances from the United States were 157.57 million US dollars in May, 2017, *Statistical Reports* in Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET) (<http://www.bmet.gov.bd/BMET/viewStatReport.action?reportnumber=15>) <retrieved June 19, 2017>.
  - (6) For example, Van der Veer, Peter, ed. (1995).
  - (7) Research in rural Bangladesh.
  - (8) Refer to Suzuki, Yayoi (2016).
  - (9) United States, Department of Homeland Security (2016a) p.1.
  - (10) United States, Embassy in Bangladesh (<https://bd.usembassy.gov/visas/immigrant-visas/diversity-visa/>) <retrieved August 25, 2017>.
  - (11) Research in Bangladesh and Interviews from Bangladeshi migrants in New York City.
  - (12) Bangladesh – Labour Market Profile 2012, p.3. ([http://ndc.gov.bd/lib\\_mgmt/webroot/earticle/2102/labour\\_market\\_profile\\_2012\\_-\\_bangladesh.pdf](http://ndc.gov.bd/lib_mgmt/webroot/earticle/2102/labour_market_profile_2012_-_bangladesh.pdf)). <retrieved July 24, 2017>.
  - (13) Mobile phones were widely used in Bangladesh.
  - (14) From an interview with S who had migrated from P village in Bangladesh to the UAE since 2009.
  - (15) Official USA Green Card Lottery Registration Program (<http://www.usa-green-card.org/en/list-of-countries-eligible-for-usa-green-card-divercity-visa-lottery-program-dv-2013-us-immigration.html>). <retrieved August 25, 2017>.
  - (16) In Bangladesh, domestic maids who have to do cleaning, cooking, washing and other chores, are widely employed by families of the middle class and above. Among them, child domestic servants are one of the serious social problems in Bangladesh. Some Local Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) have been working to solve these social problems (Suzuki, Yayoi 2003).
  - (17) United States Census Bureau (<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/newyorkcitynewyork/PST045216>) <retrieved July 30, 2017>.
  - (18) United States, Department Home Security (2016 b) pp.12-15.
  - (19) A man who was cleaning windows on the 12th floor of 13-story commercial building in Manhattan on 7 August 2017, fell to his death after his safety harness failed. Refer to The Washington Post, *Democracy dies in darkness* ([https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/nyc-window-washer-plunges-to-death-when-harness-gives-way/2017/08/07/7061add8-7bb1-11e7-b2b1-aeba62854dfa\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.a29965761e60](https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/nyc-window-washer-plunges-to-death-when-harness-gives-way/2017/08/07/7061add8-7bb1-11e7-b2b1-aeba62854dfa_story.html?utm_term=.a29965761e60)) <retrieved August 13, 2017>.



- (20) Same as reference (17).
- (21) Ibid.
- (22) Keil (June 10, 2015) *There are no apartments to rent in Manhattan*, NEWYORK POST (<http://nypost.com/2015/06/10/its-basically-impossible-to-find-a-rental-in-manhattan/>) <retrieved July 30, 2017>.
- (23) According to Fitzsimmons (May 31, 2017), subway delays have soared in recent years. There are now more than 70,000 delays every month, up from about 28,000 per month in 2012. *Why Is Subway Service in New York Getting Worse?* The New York Times (<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/31/nyregion/why-is-subway-service-in-new-york-getting-worse.html>) <retrieved July 31, 2017>.

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