

University of Hull

Women's employment in garment factories
in Bangladesh: emancipation or exploitation?

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Gender Studies, Department of Social Sciences.

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Date of Submission:

October 2010

Abstract

Women's participation in export-oriented industries has been one of the most dominant features in many developing countries since the 1970s. Employment in waged jobs has often been viewed as a means of women's integration into development processes. Research showed that development efforts in Third World countries negatively affected women and displaced them from their productive activities. As such, there was an increasing demand from liberal feminists and women development practitioners to integrate women into development processes through employment generation. They stressed the need for women's access to resources as the way to emancipate them from subordination. Although generation of employment through the establishment of export-oriented industries has given women access to economic resources, their participation in waged labour has given rise to a persistent debate in literature in relation to the issue of their emancipation/exploitation. This ethnographic research examines the implications of waged employment for women participating in export-oriented garment factories in Bangladesh.

Within a feminist and broader social science research methodology, this study employs both qualitative and quantitative research approaches and analyses the experiences of women as factory workers, as members of the household and as members of society actively involved in day-to-day interactions with other societal members. The findings of this study reveal that the implications of waged employment for Bangladeshi women are complex and contradictory. Analysis of women's perceptions as factory workers shows that they are exploited on the factory floor in different ways and experience new forms of patriarchal domination beyond their family. Exploration of their perceptions as household members shows that earnings improve their position within the family. Although they often do not control their wages and frequently bear the double burden of productive and reproductive activities, they enjoy autonomy and freedom from familial patriarchal domination to a certain degree. In addition, women's participation in the labour market and their constant presence in the male dominated spaces are incessantly contesting the traditional notions of gender practices and meanings in Bangladeshi society. This situation also influences women to challenge male authority to an extent. Even though the challenges are not widespread, these may create new possibilities for women in society.

Acknowledgements

A PhD degree is often an individual academic pursuit. Nevertheless, this effort would not be possible without the assistance and support of many accomplished players, who each played an essential but different role. I wish to acknowledge and say thanks to all of them.

First of all I would like to express my thanks and gratitude to the almighty Allah who gave me the strength and endurance to bear many tough situations, especially during the second half of 2007. Abir, my first son was born on the 20th of July 2007, back home in Bangladesh, while I was pursuing my study here in the UK. He was born ill and had wrong medication for nearly four months. Thereafter doctors diagnosed that he had pericardial tumour and required an open heart surgery. I went back home and with advice from doctors took him to India, where he had a more than six hour long surgery. Now he is quite alright by the grace of the almighty. My supervisor Dr. Suzanne Clisby gave me instant mental support at that moment and extended maximum cooperation all along. I thank Dr. Suzanne Clisby from the core of my heart.

Dr. Suzanne Clisby inspired, supported and encouraged me all the time. Her intellectual and thoughtful comments, critiques and supervision were invaluable. My knowledge was enriched by discussions with Dr. Suzanne Clisby, who taught me to thoroughly think the different dimensions of my research. Thank you very much Dr. Suzanne Clisby. I thank Dr. Majella M. Kilkey and Dr. Vassos Argyrou for their comments and suggestions on the initial chapters of the thesis. I also thank Dr. Mark Johnson for his enduring support and cooperation.

Garment factory workers, women in particular and family elders of a few female workers willingly talked to me and gave me their time. Without their cooperation and dedication, this study would not have been possible. I would like to thank all of them for making my effort successful in doing this ethnographic research.

I thank all the staff of Department of Social Sciences and Graduate School for their support and cooperation. Thanks also due to all concerned with Strengthening of Bangladesh Public Administration Training Centre (SBPATC) Project for their constant

assistance. I thank government of Bangladesh for giving me the scholarship that enabled me to pursue this work.

I am indebted to Mr. Mosharaf Hossain, former member directing staff (MDS) of Bangladesh Public Administration Training Centre, who against many impediments nominated me for a scholarship to undertake an MA degree, which gave me the perspective to think of a PhD programme. I thank Mr. Mosharaf Hossain and my friends and colleagues who extended their support in various ways.

And finally, I would like to thank all my lovely family members for their sacrifice and support through the days. They were always concerned with my wellbeing here in the UK. They struggled a lot, especially with Abir, because of those painful days of his life. My father Mr. Md. Azizur Rahman, my mother Mrs. Mahfuza Khatun, my elder brother Mr. Mohiuddin Faruk and my wife Jesmin Akter always inspired me. I thank them all for being so generous to me.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Introduction

The availability of waged employment for women in the Third World¹, since the 1970s, has been one of the most overriding features of postcolonial global economic restructuring (Ward, 1990:2). Dominant development discourses during that time encouraged developing countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America to pursue export-oriented industrialisation policy in their quest for development (Sinha, 1995:558; Tamborini, 2007:24). Within these countries, economic restructuring was largely based on the establishment of industries for export of such commodities as textiles, garments, electronics, toys, footwear and pharmaceuticals to the world market. These industries have overwhelmingly employed women in developing countries where export manufacturing has been a key sector of the economy (Sassen-Koob, 1984:1146). Although men have typically had better access to formal sector employment, women constituted the majority of the industrial workforce in developing countries, since they were perceived to be biologically and emotionally better suited for repetitive, low-skilled and low-paid jobs in these industries (Wright, 1997:84). During the early 1980s, the Bangladeshi government adopted an export-oriented industrialisation policy and since then garment factories have emerged as a major source of employment for Bangladeshi women (Khan, 2005:223-224). The export sector, especially export-oriented garment manufacturing industries, developed very quickly in Bangladesh and almost overnight brought women into highly visible forms of employment, linking them to the global economy. Prior to the development of the garment sector, Bangladeshi women were almost invisible in the waged labour market in the formal sector because of very limited employment opportunities (Feldman, 2001:1098; Kabeer, 2004:14).

Global market-oriented manufacturing industries have generated huge employment opportunities, particularly for women, and availability of jobs has been the most immediate benefit for them. Nevertheless, the enormous increase in women's

¹ This term has been designated to describe those states, which during the Cold War remained non-aligned with either the capitalist bloc led by the USA or with the communist bloc led by the then USSR. Third World principally consisted of the former colonies of Asia, Africa, Latin America and Oceania. In the course of time such other terms as developing countries, LDCs, the South etc. have been used to denote these countries (McGrew, 2000:353). These terms have been used in this thesis interchangeably.

participation in waged labour has generated intense debate in discourse, around the issue of women's emancipation/exploitation through factory work (Heyzer & Kean, 1988:3). This research attempted to examine this long established theoretical debate and to explore the effects of manufacturing jobs on women, working in export-oriented garment factories in Bangladesh. This introductory chapter provides an overview of this ethnographic study of the embodied experiences of female factory workers both as women and as workers. In the subsequent sections of this chapter I discuss the background and aims of the study, the rationale and objectives of the research as well as an outline of the presentation of the thesis.

Background of the study

This thesis is concerned with the experiences of female factory workers, particularly the experiences of women simultaneously as homemakers and as factory workers. The research essentially involves human relations, experiences of interpersonal relationships between women and men and the related contexts that influence these relations. I was particularly interested in exploring the interpersonal relationships between women and men within the perspectives of family, factory and society. I employed feminist and social science insights into this ethnographic research, with a view to creating a space to reproduce and reflect the multiple views of the participants of this study. My initial interest in exploring the lived experiences of women working in export-oriented factories grew while I was pursuing my postgraduate study. I studied other research findings focusing on the implications of waged employment for women and these influenced me to study the experiences of Bangladeshi women engaged in export-oriented garment factories.

The mobilisation of women into export-oriented industries was a means of integrating them into development processes (Lim, 1985, cited in Ward, 1990:2). Development until the 1970s fundamentally remained a gender-blind paradigm and liberal development theorists gave very little attention to women's experiences. They ignored women's traditional productive roles in the subsistence economy and tended to assume that production tasks were entirely performed by men (Parpart, 1993:447). *'A more accurate assessment would recognise that women have indeed been part of the development model from its inception; they have been presumed present, their labour*

marginalised and taken for granted' (Wright, 1997:77). Liberal economists viewed development as a process, in which economic growth and women's incorporation would go hand in hand (Cagatay & Ozler, 1995:1884). Boserup (1970) challenged this view, and developed the 'marginalisation thesis', which maintained that the process of economic development had given men privileged access to new technologies and education and thus created productivity difference between men and women. Therefore, women became disadvantaged in the labour market, which resulted in their dependence on men. Given this situation, Boserup suggested women's integration into development through gainful employment. The 'integration thesis' held that employment and access to resources would lessen women's dependence on men and would thus emancipate them from their subordinate position within society (Tiano, 1986: 158).

Increasing demand and lobbying from feminist activists brought about changes in dominant development discourses and planners emphasised women's integration into development processes, through creating employment opportunities for them (Tinker, 1990:29). Since the 1970s, the development paradigm shifted from an import substitution industrialisation policy to export-oriented industrialisation approach, which aimed at producing goods for the global market. Planners identified women as the prospective workforce for the export industry, since they viewed them as an underutilised human resource (Safa, 1995:33).

Women's increasing participation in export factories in developing countries has inspired new areas of research and theoretical discourse, especially in terms of the implications of employment for them. Since the mid 1970s, increasing numbers of theoretical and research developments have generated innovative scholarships within the women in development (WID) paradigm explaining the impacts of waged employment on women, working in export-oriented industries in developing countries (Lim, 1990:101). Lim claimed that the reason for the widespread interest in researching the impacts of factory work on women was the historical coincidence of a growing interest in women's changing roles worldwide with the expansion of export manufacturing in the Third World.

A number of studies focusing on the profile of female factory workers, working conditions inside factories, wages and occupational and health hazards articulated that

women's integration through employment in export-oriented industries has been more exploitative for them (Elson & Pearson, 1981a, 1981b, 1997; Safa, 1981; Nash & Fernandez-kelly, 1983; Bandrage, 1984; Young, 1984; Greenhalgh, 1985; Wolf, 1990b). Proponents of the 'exploitation thesis' claimed that Third World women were already integrated into development and their further integration in industrial production had been more harmful than beneficial. This view maintains that '*women provide cheap and easily expandable labour because discriminatory hiring practices, sex-segregated labour market[s], and inadequate preparation weaken their position within the labour market. Also, the typically intense competition for scarce jobs keeps wages low and workers docile*' (Tiano, 1986:159). Some other studies considered the availability of employment opportunities for women in both the formal and informal sector and reported that export factory work was more emancipating for women, and that they benefitted mostly from their employment in export-oriented industries (Lim, 1983, 1990, 1997; Krugman, 1997; Sargent & Matthews, 1997; Feenstra & Hanson, 1997, Meyer 2006). According to this view, '*industrialisation enriches women's opportunities while helping them acquire the skills and aspirations to take full advantage of their options. In this way, women who are traditionally victims of repressive patriarchal norms become autonomous contributors to society and its development efforts*' (Tiano, op cit.). Thus, previous research findings initiated a heated debate in theoretical discourse with regard to the implications of women's employment in industrial manufacture. Both groups of researchers conducted their study of employment impacts on women from different perspectives. I believe that, as Beek (2001:1565) suggests, the grounds of research influence researchers' interests, experiences, values and views, while researchers' views influence research findings. I believe that in order to create a comprehensive picture of the implications of employment for women, we need to analyse their situation in all settings where they continuously interact and experience their lives. Therefore, in this research, I intended to examine my theoretical understanding on the topic and to explore the realities of women's lives from the perspectives of the familial, employment and societal contexts, within which they constantly interact with other stakeholders. I believed that analysing their lived experiences from all these three settings would produce a holistic picture of their lives.

My interest in the subject was stimulated by my perceptions of the experiences of one of my sisters who is an Economics graduate, and who has been working in an

export-oriented garment factory as a senior executive for almost a decade. During the first couple of years of her employment she was single and lived with us in our family home. Her usual working hours were from 7:30am until 4:30pm but sometimes she had to stay in her office until 8:00pm because of the obligation for overtime work. Her remaining outside of the home during the evening was a source of conflict within our family, since Bangladeshi society does not readily accept such behaviour from unmarried women in particular. This situation bothered my father a great deal and at one stage he began to insist she leave her job. Thus, it was perceived in my family that her job created an unhealthy environment at home, especially because of overtime work. Verbal abuse was a regular experience for her on the days she was late in the evening. Nevertheless, she worked at least six days a week and overtime work was almost a routine matter. She would not have to do any domestic tasks in our family and she had full control over her earnings. Despite this fact, I perceived that she did not have a very good experience, while she was living with us. She is now married and living with her husband and therefore, in addition to her job now she also has to manage her family and cook every day, since there is no one to assist her. My perceptions of her struggle and the persistent debates on the subject concurrently influenced my research interest and wish to explore the experiences of Bangladeshi female garment factory workers.

Aims of the study

Women's large-scale participation in waged employment has generated intense debate over employment effects on their status. Does employment increase women's exploitation in society? Or does it emancipate them from their exploitative situation? This ethnographic study sought to answer these broad research questions. In doing so, the study focused on exploring their experiences as workers in garment factories, as members of households and as members of Bangladeshi society. More specifically, in this research I wished to-

- ❖ explore the perceptions of female factory workers about export-oriented garment factory employment;
- ❖ examine the experiences of female factory workers and their day-to-day interactions with others inside factories;

- ❖ explore the experiences of women workers with regard to their condition and position within their households;
- ❖ investigate the perceptions of female factory workers in relation to their position within the wider societal context

To truly grasp the impact of waged employment on women working in export-oriented garment factories, I examined women's perceptions about interpersonal relationships between women and men in all three settings and explored the views of others around them. I analysed their lived experiences in this study and tried to locate myself in the research process by employing '*conscious subjectivity*' in place of the '*value-free-objectivity*' of traditional research approaches (Klein, 1983:94).

Rationale of the study

In 1983 there were only 134 garment manufacturing units which employed 0.04 million workers and exported goods worth US\$ 32m which contributed 4% to total export earnings of the country. In 2008 the number of garment factories stood at 4740, in which more than 2.5 million workers were employed, 85% of whom were women and the value of exports was US\$ 10,700m accounting for 76% of total export earnings (Human Development Resource Centre, 2008; Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, 2009). Beyond being the largest export earner and employer of Bangladeshi women in particular, this sector has a number of positive impacts on the wider society. It has increased such economic activities as banking, insurance, foreign exchange, hotels and tourism. It has enhanced the development of the manufacturing of knitting and woven fabrics and accessories of garment products as backward as well as forward linkages and the growth of transportation and utility services (Hoque, Murayama & Rahman, 1995:111).

The export-oriented garment sector has thus made a significant contribution to the socioeconomic development of Bangladesh. Its importance and influence made it an interesting context for research. In Bangladesh, intensive studies concerning export-oriented industries and women's employment in the waged labour market, although relatively few in number, were conducted during the 1990s onwards (Hossain, Jahan & Sobhan, 1988, 1990; Feldman, 1992; Hoque, Murayama & Rahman, 1995; Kibria, 1995,

1998; Zohir & Paul-Majumder, 1996; Kabeer, 1997; Paul-Majumder & Begum, 1997; Absar, 2001, 2003; Dannecker, 2002; Paul-Majumder & Begum, 2006; Zohir, 2007, Siddiqi, 2000, 2009). These studies concentrated on the gendered aspects of export-oriented development of garment manufacturing from a wide variety of dimensions, including migration, the socio-economic impacts, health conditions of garment workers, occupational mobility, coping with factory life, and factory wages. These research literatures mostly concentrated on the significant increase of women's employment in the formal sector of the economy. Researchers attempted to explore the implications of waged employment for women and their efforts located their studies within the 'better off' or 'worse off' dichotomy. Yet, very few of these studies give us an idea about the extent of patriarchal relations that might persist on the factory floor. In addition, hardly any comprehensive research has been done that studied female factory workers concurrently as women, as garment factory workers and as members of society, which I think is very important in order to truly grasp the topic in question. As such, in this study I intended to cover all these aspects of women's lives to examine the impacts of garment factory work on them. Besides, research done previously dates back at least a decade. From this perspective, this research was an attempt to explore the gendered experiences of female factory workers within a time difference of ten years.

Objectives of the study

The purpose of this study was to determine the implications of waged employment for women. Since the lived experiences of women are constituted through their continuous interactions in different settings with other members of society, this research intended to explore the perceptions of both female factory workers and others involved with them. The objectives that I formulated for this research with a view to analysing the impacts of factory work on women were to-

- ❖ study the socio-economic profile of women and men working in export-oriented garment factories;
- ❖ explore the working conditions and structures inside garment factories;
- ❖ investigate the position and condition of female factory workers inside factories and within the family;

- ❖ examine the perceptions of male workers and male and female family elders about women working in garment factories;
- ❖ explore the perceptions of female factory workers about their self images;
- ❖ examine factory workers' perceptions of societal views towards them.

I considered both men and women as research participants, in addition to female factory workers, since I perceived that women's lived experiences and their perceptions are constantly influenced and constructed through the process of interaction with other members of society within different settings.

Presentation and outline of the thesis

The textual presentation of this thesis has been done in the first person, which articulates attention to my authorship. By writing in the first person I also acknowledge my position as a researcher who has been entangled within the research process. This thesis is organised in nine chapters. Following this introductory frame of reference, the second chapter explores different approaches to Third World development, and the critiques of these approaches which Western policy makers prescribed with a view to modernising developing countries. This chapter also elaborates the feminist development standpoint and the response of international development institutions with regard to women's relationship to dominant development processes.

The third chapter of the thesis discusses the gendered impacts of globalisation. I discuss the policy initiatives taken in Bangladesh in relation to women's development. I also discuss analyses of women's participation in paid employment and detail the debates that emerged in feminist discourse surrounding employment implications for women.

In chapter four I discuss the methodological approaches that I employed in this research. I discuss feminist research methodology and analyse whether men can research women. Further, this chapter provides a description of the setting, research sample and methods of data analysis. I also explain my own reflections on the research process and present my research procedures in a tabular form.

Chapter five focuses on the socioeconomic profile of both the female and male factory workers whom I interviewed for this study. In this chapter I discuss the factors that influenced them to take garment factory jobs. I also discuss factory working conditions in terms of labour welfare and the physical conditions of garment factories.

I employed a thematic approach in analysing empirical data which are examined in chapters six to eight. In chapter six I analyse women's perceptions of garment factory employment, the factory working environment, the construction of skill and turnover and promotional prospects for women in the factory work structure.

In chapter seven I discuss women's positions and conditions inside factories as well as within the family. In this chapter I analyse respect and reciprocity, violence and harassment, occupational and health hazards, and access to wages and related benefits for women on the factory floor. I also examine women's control over resources and gender roles and relations in the family.

In chapter eight I analyse women's position within the family and broader societal context. I explore women's experience within the family and their perceptions of their own image. I also analyse women's perceptions with regard to their position in society and people's attitudes towards them.

Chapter nine is the concluding chapter of this thesis, in which I recapitulate the findings that came from my data analysis. Women's employment in Bangladesh has put society into a transitional stage and I conclude the chapter with some aspirations that may arise because of the changing socioeconomic structures of the country.

Chapter II: Development discourse: from ‘women in’ to ‘gender and’ over the course of the 20th century

Introduction

Since the end of the Second World War, development has become an increasingly important part of international relations and global politics. Having been freed from colonial domination, the developing countries started their journey through post-war history setting development as the primary target in their quest for nation-building, economic growth and equity. In the 1950s and 1960s, economists largely understood development as rapid economic growth measured through macro-economic indicators such as GNP (Young 1993:13). Their thinking and action on development were dominated by the modernisation approach and they identified lack of capital as the main obstacle to change and, therefore, argued for ample supplies of capital in these countries to finance infrastructure, industrialisation and the overall modernisation of society (Escobar, 1995:86). Initially the United States financed post-war reconstruction through the Marshall Plan; during the 1950s private corporations played the key role while the United States provided most of the official development assistance to developing nations in the 1960s; in the 1970s private banks became the major source of capital for these countries (Waylen, 1996:31).

Nevertheless, development interventions in the Third World did not always follow the pattern policy makers anticipated. An extensive body of literature showed that development programmes not only failed to improve the living conditions prevalent in the developing countries but in many cases had also adverse effects on the lives of the people and especially on women. The inadequacy to deliver benefits put development policy initiatives under criticism from many corners. Dependency theorists critiqued the inadequacies of the development paradigm focusing on the nature of the relationship between the developed and developing nations and tried to explain the reasons for continued underdevelopment. Feminist scholars also generated a vast literature on women and development. This chapter is mainly organised around concepts of development and feminists’ perspectives on it. It begins with a discussion on post-World War-II reconstruction and then discusses development policy initiatives that were employed in the Third World, followed by the dependency paradigm of development that critiqued the modernisation approach. The bulk of the chapter then discusses

feminist approaches to development. The final section of the chapter concentrates on development policies of international institutions with regard to their responses to the call from feminist groups in terms of women's emancipation.

Post World War II reconstruction

The European colonial empires were dismantled in the 20 years after the Second World War. Decolonisation occurred around the world due to anti-colonial movements pursued by the people of the colonies and supported by both the then USSR and the USA (Bernstein, 2000:252). Post-war decolonisation resulted in the emergence of a good number of independent countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean. The term 'Third World' is one of several that has long been used to describe these newly independent countries which share relatively low per-capita incomes, high rates of illiteracy, limited development industry, distorted economy, poor or non-existent systems of service infrastructure, low degrees of social mobility, low levels of education and unstable political structures. The problems these countries were facing during the postcolonial era included poverty, ill health, famine, population growth, drought, indebtedness and political instability. However, despite an extraordinary diversity of characteristics and problems among developing countries the Western world portrayed them as 'simply one vast morass of poverty, exploitation and degradation' (Hulme & Turner, 1990:2). Development became a common cry for the solution of Third World problems in both rich and poor countries. After the end of the Second World War development became an important concept and the second half of the twentieth century has been termed the epoch of development, which was rooted in a speech by President Harry S. Truman, in which he announced his concept of a 'fair deal' for the entire world. Taking office as President of the United States, Truman in his inaugural address declared:

'More than half the people of the world are living in conditions approaching misery. Their food is inadequate, they are victims of disease. Their economic life is primitive and stagnant. Their poverty is a handicap and a threat both to them and to more prosperous areas.... What we envisage is a program of development based on the concepts of democratic fair dealing.... Greater production is the key to prosperity and peace. And the key to greater

production is a wider and more vigorous application of modern scientific and technical knowledge' (Truman, 1949, cited in Escobar, 1995:3).

The will by President Truman to realise a programme of development to address poverty in these countries shifted the attention of development policy makers. He stressed the need for replacing the old imperialism of exploitation for foreign profit with a democratic 'fair dealing' programme to combat poverty and to attain greater social equality. His programme involved the application of modern technology and capital in the poor areas of the world in order to attain economic growth (Escobar, 1995:36). Nevertheless, prior to Truman's speech in 1949, development planners during the 1940s concentrated on rebuilding war-ravaged Europe and started the European Recovery Programme (ERP).

The world's leading politicians gathered at Bretton Woods in the United States in July 1944 when the Second World War was drawing to a close. The Bretton Woods conference of 44 nations led to the establishment of two financial institutions, namely, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD, presently the World Bank) for providing long-term finance for investment and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for providing short-term finance to compensate for balance of payments deficits. Moreover, the Bretton Woods conference established the United Nations (UN), one of the major players in the development industry, as the key international decision making forum to maintain international political and military stability. It also established the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) which eventually became the World Trade Organisation (WTO) to regulate international trade and stabilise world commodity prices (Hewitt, 2000:291; Preston, 1986:76).

One of the first tasks assigned to these Bretton Woods institutions was to provide capital to help put the war-ravaged European economies back on their feet. Between 1945 and 1950 the United States channelled US\$ 19 billion through these institutions under the Marshall Plan, largely in the form of grants for the economic reconstruction of post-war Europe (Saunders, 2002:2). It especially aimed at moving Western Europe progressively from its post-war condition of crisis towards a working economy independent of outside support. The Marshall Plan, also known as the ERP, was successful, through the Bretton Woods institutions, in supporting the restoration of the

European economy. In the 1940s western scholars and policy makers were motivated by the success of the ERP. They perceived that infusion of foreign aid, investment and increasing foreign trade could develop Third World countries. The revival of the subdued European nations through a recovery programme like the Marshall Plan convinced liberal economists and western development planners that aid based strategic planning would enable developing countries to foster economic growth (Visvanathan, 1997a:2). For them, development and economic growth were synonymous. Liberal economists dominated the Third World development thinking. They advocated a basically unbalanced growth strategy that aimed at investment in a few key sectors of the economy. They argued that growth of these sectors would create demand for other economic sectors of the country. Thus, development in the core would lead to growth inducing tendencies to backward regions through a 'trickledown' process (Potter et al. 1999:46). The liberal development view was part of a wider modernisation theory which believed that the existing gaps between the developed and developing nations could gradually be covered on an imitative basis. The modernisation approach aimed to turn the Third World into images of industrialised societies of the Western world. It was the dominant approach in formulating development policy in the post war period. It defined development as a natural, linear process away from traditional ('primitive') social and economic practices toward a Western style ('civilised') economy. In the post Second World War period W.W. Rostow produced the single most famous book on modernisation and development. Rostow's stages of growth model of development achieved dominance in the strand of development economics. In his *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto* Rostow (1960) argued that the sequence of modernisation was uniform. *'Its possible to identify all societies, in their economic dimensions, as lying within one of the five categories: the traditional society, the pre-conditions for take-off, take-off, the drive to maturity, and the age of high mass consumption'* (Rostow, 1960:4). He equated development with modernity and argued that the developing societies with traditional values would move to a rational, industrial economy in the process of modernisation.

Rostow claimed that the developed countries had passed all these stages and achieved self-sustaining growth. In attaining development the developing countries also could expect to go through these stages of modernisation. The challenge was to identify barriers to development and necessary interventions to overcome these obstacles. The

subtitle of Rostow's book, *A Non-Communist Manifesto*, stressed that development was to take place in a capitalist context. The Rostovian growth model dominated the policies of the major international financial institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank through the early 1960s, setting targets for aid-flows to and growth rates for the developing countries (Preston, 1982:96).

Development in the Third World

Economists and policy makers along the Rostovian growth model identified lack of necessary factors of production, especially capital and technology, as the cause of underdevelopment of developing countries. They identified rapid industrialisation as the appropriate way to develop the Third World. They believed that investment in industrialisation would withdraw surplus labour from the low productive agricultural sector. Thus, the beginning of the economic take-off stage would start and the benefit of growth gradually would go to the population at large through the trickledown effect (Kuhnen, 1987; Young, 1993; Hewitt, 2000). Planners gave particular emphasis to developing manufacturing capacity, ignoring the importance of agriculture. The idea was that developing countries would first shift from producing primary products for export to manufacturing mass consumer goods for both domestic and international markets using unskilled labour. With the knowledge gained from this stage they would be able to produce more sophisticated and luxurious goods. Finally, they would acquire skills to produce capital goods as a better-skilled labour force emerged (Young, 1993:2-3). It is argued that growth rate depends on savings rate which is insignificant in developing countries and hence they needed capital aid to cover the shortage of funds (Kuhnen, 1987:1). However, large-scale official flows of resources from developed countries to the developing did not materialise and these countries were facing balance of payments difficulties during the 1950s (Hewitt, 2000:294). The 1950s was a period of rapid industrialisation in many developing countries. This was the era of import substituting industrialisation (ISI) to supply consumer goods to the domestic market. The ISI strategy often resulted in inefficient and uncompetitive industries in developing countries (Young, 1993:70; Waylen, 1996:33).

The period from 1960 to 1969 was the first UN development decade. Achievement of a minimum growth rate of 5% by each developing country was the UN

set objective of the decade. The UN urged developed countries to extend official development assistance to developing countries. According to development strategy, the industrial sector was assigned the dynamic role in these countries and little thought was given to agriculture. However, by the mid-1960s the inability to produce sufficient food for the growing urban masses in most of the developing countries became evident and planners identified this inability as a major constraint to development (Myrdal, 1968, cited in Young, 1993:3). Therefore, they assigned greater importance to modernising domestic agriculture. The Green Revolution programme was implemented, which introduced high yielding varieties (HYVs) of different food grains and associated technical inputs in agriculture in order to achieve rapid success in increasing food production. The Green Revolution programme achieved a rapid success in increasing food production. It brought a shift from subsistence production to production for the market. Nevertheless, the industrial countries granted less development aid than was expected and multinational corporations emerged as the major source of finance for developing countries. During the 1960s East Asian countries adopted an export-oriented industrialisation (EOI) policy and provided various types of fiscal incentives to encourage foreign investment. Governments of these countries established export processing zones lifting restrictions on international transfer of profits (Frobel, et al. 1980:295) and gave tax exemptions for firms located there as well as exemption from labour and other aspects of government legislation (Potter et al. 1999:83). During this time multinational corporations were moving to the Third World to establish manufacturing plants to utilise the cheap labour force of the developing countries. The establishment of industrial units by multinational corporations in developing countries increased capital flow in the form of foreign direct investment (FDI). In the 1960s 70% of the capital flows into the Third World was FDI (Waylen, 1996:33). Throughout the decade, the growth rate in the advanced economies accelerated and the gap between the rich and poor countries in per capita incomes widened. Income distribution between the rich and poor also widened. Moreover, most of the developing countries failed to achieve the desired minimum annual growth rate and it became apparent that neither was these countries 'taking off', nor was the expected 'trickledown' taking place (Hewitt, 2000:295). However, rather than interrogating the modernisation paradigm itself, planners blamed rapid population growth in developing countries for not achieving their desired economic growth rate (Young, 1993:10).

The 1970s was the second development decade and during this time planners brought about changes in their development thinking. They placed emphasis on employment and redistribution with growth. Growth with employment was considered to be a means of attaining a more equitable income distribution and reducing poverty. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) proposed the basic needs approach (BNA), which focused on creating employment opportunities for people and providing their essential needs (Young, 1993:7; Hewitt, 2000:297). The UN set objective of the second development decade was to attain at least 6% average growth rate in GDP for Third World countries. It stressed the need for financial assistance from developed to the developing countries in order to accelerate growth. Nonetheless, at the end of the decade it was evident that these countries had failed to attain the growth rate and the gap between the developed and developing countries had further increased. Further, the flow of financial resources to developing countries had decreased during this decade (Hewitt, 2000:300).

The 1980s was the third UN development decade. During this period the UN set objectives for the developing nations, included attaining an average annual rate of growth of GDP of 7%. The UN urged the developed countries to donate 0.7% of their GNP to the developing countries to accelerate development. The 1980s, however, was a terrible decade for the economies of developing countries as both official development assistance and FDI declined during this period. Most of these countries failed to attain the expected growth rate and the number of countries designated by the UN General Assembly as least developed (LDCs) grew from 31 to 42 in the 1980s (op cit.:301).

During the 1960s and 1970s the developing countries borrowed large amounts of money from developed countries and private banks respectively to fund large infrastructure and development schemes. During this time, the economies of these countries were based on exporting cheap raw materials and importing expensive manufactured goods from ex-colonial rulers. The assertion of oil power by the oil producing cartel OPEC (Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries) in the 1970s had a profound impact on the world economy and the Third World in particular. Because of growing oil prices the developed countries slowed down their economies, adopting anti-inflationary policies. They depressed prices and demand for commodities from developing countries and allowed interest rates to rise. The decline in commodity

prices reduced the export earnings of Third World countries. Furthermore, during the global recession in 1981-82 industrialised countries increased import tariffs, which again made it harder for these countries to export their goods. Third World countries had to pay out more and more while receiving less and less. This led to further balance of payments difficulties for them and the governments of these countries were no longer able to meet their debt repayments. They began to borrow money from banks just to service their earlier debts and the result was an international 'debt crisis' in the 1980s (Hewitt, 2000:300; Potter, et al., 1999:11-12; Willis, 2005:49-50). In order to obtain further loans and arrange debt repayments and rescheduling from the IMF, the crisis-ridden countries were then required to implement structural adjustment programmes (SAPs). SAPs, based on the free market neoliberal economic model, were IMF and World Bank interventions aimed at enabling these countries to move from stabilisation to export-led growth. SAPs included stabilisation measures to control inflation and to create a large trade surplus to continue debt service payments and adjustment measures to attain future economic prosperity. Stabilisation measures included such policies as raising interest rates, reducing government welfare expenditure, increasing charges on state-run utilities and currency devaluation. Adjustment measures involved opening up the economy to foreign trade and investment, removing import quotas, reducing tariffs, cutting off price controls, improving tax system, taking off wage controls and privatisation. Both policy interventions emphasised the need to decrease the role of government and to increase the role of the market in the economy (Green, 1995:42) SAPs introduced free-market neoliberalism into developing countries but in most cases it did not have the desired effect, rather it increased the poverty level, unemployment rate and cost of living in developing countries (Willis, 2005:52).

However, in 1990 the UN reiterated the need for official development assistance to the Third World and defined new priorities and goals for the growth of developing countries for its fourth development decade (1991-2000). The UN recommended that during this period developing countries should try to raise their rate of industrialisation by 8-10% and increase their food production by 4% and development planners accordingly formulated an International Development Strategy (IDS), which emphasised sustainable development (Encyclopaedia of the Nations, 2006). They placed emphasis on the growing incidence of poverty worldwide. They concentrated on economic growth and their strategy was market driven where governments were

required to play an 'enabling role'. During this decade private investment in developing countries increased enormously. Nevertheless, development aid from the rich countries was the lowest since development initiatives took off in the Third World and these countries experienced negligible economic and social development. Despite these failures the UN in 2000 set Millennium Development Goals, which were time-bound quantified targets for addressing extreme poverty by 2015. In achieving these goals the UN Millennium Declaration demanded a new partnership between developed and developing countries. It stressed the need for mobilizing domestic resources, attracting international flows and promoting international trade as an engine for development (Sachs, 2005:4). The Millennium Declaration sought greater effort to mobilise more international resources to attain the MDGs. Planners emphasised that the 0.7% target for official development assistance to developing countries must be met and argued that new sources of funding over and above this target should be actively explored and developed (International Labour Organisation, 2004a:xiii).

Throughout this period, developing countries followed the prescriptions formulated by dominant economists and planners, who were setting time-bound objectives for these countries and insisting they take on policy measures in order to attain development goals. The strategies of successive UN development decades have recognised that developed countries have a responsibility to contribute to the financing of development. The UN specified that each developed country should provide at least 0.7% of its annual GNP as official development assistance (Power, 2003:34). Planners viewed industrialisation as the way to develop the Third World and initially these countries adopted import substituting industrialisation (ISI) while during the 1960s East Asian countries followed the export oriented industrialisation (EOI) approach to development. The EOI was financed by foreign capital and it was argued that such industry expands rapidly. The EOI strategy was successful and these countries increased their overall level of production and they were termed as newly industrialised countries (Potter et al. 1999:52, 85). Given this situation, policy makers during the 1970s urged other Third World countries to follow the EOI strategy in their quest for development instead of ISI approaches to development. However, most of the developing countries could not attain the expected growth rate, which put the growth fetishism of modernisation theory under criticism. Modernisation theory was a more general type of development approach, which assumed that the benefits of economic growth would

trickledown to benefit all sectors of society. Yet, instead of sustained economic growth and greater social equality, the modernisation approaches produced several negative consequences in developing countries, for example, premature rise of consumption standards in comparison to low levels of local productivity (Portes, 1997:230). The first reaction to the inadequacies of modernisation theory arose from the Latin American dependency school, which argued that underdevelopment of the Third World is caused by unequal power relations between the developed and developing nations. Modernisation theory often failed to consider the gendered aspects of development and its gender-blind view also brought it under criticism from feminist activists, who argued that women should be the key participants in development policies and programmes. The following sections discuss the challenges to modernisation theory from the radical dependency school and feminist theorists.

Development and dependency theory

Latin American radical social scientists focused on the nature of relationships between the developed and developing countries, which was of primary concern in their critical development thinking (Bernstein, 1971:153). Heavily influenced by Marxist political economy, dependency theory posited that the cause of underdevelopment in least developed countries (LDCs) was their dependence on industrialised nations (Sinha, 1995:567; Portes, 1997:231). For instance, prior to the Cuban revolution, Cuba's economy was based on sugar export and it was dependent on the USA for both market and technology. Referring to Cuba, Cubitt (1988:39) argued that the economy of the LDCs was mostly based on the export of raw materials and the import of manufactured goods, which made them dependent. These countries were dependent on the advanced economies to provide the skills and technology to develop the products and buy the goods. Their dependence kept them underdeveloped. Their underdevelopment was not historical 'backwardness'; rather, it was the product of capitalist development (Amin, 1996:60). The dependency theorists developed the 'development of underdevelopment' thesis and argued that the development of industrialised countries and the underdevelopment of developing countries were integral to capitalist development processes. Frank (1967, cited in Potter et al., 1999:63) explained that they were the opposite sides of the same coin and argued that both development and underdevelopment were the necessary outcome and manifestation of the contradictions

of the capitalist system. The dependency school maintained that the world could be perceived in terms of a core of developed and a periphery of underdeveloped countries, where underdevelopment was largely a result of unequal and exploitative economic relations between the core and periphery (Connelly et al., 2000:36). Frank (1969) argued that the development of the capitalist system simultaneously generated underdevelopment in some areas and development in others. The LDCs became underdeveloped because of their integration into the world capitalist system. The utilisation of economic surplus caused development and underdevelopment. Frank identified the structure of the world capitalist system as one of metropolis and satellite. The metropolis exploited the satellite and appropriated its economic surplus which, in turn, kept the satellite underdeveloped. Frank argued that the satellites experienced economic development when they were economically isolated from the metropolises. Latin America initiated marked industrialisation and growth during the period of two world wars, since it had very loose trade and investment ties with the metropolis during these periods. Development in the region, however, reversed when, Frank claimed, the metropolis recovered from crisis and re-established trade and investment ties. Referring to Japan he argued that despite being a resource-poor country Japan industrialised quickly as it was never a satellite. He stressed that the regions that were most underdeveloped today were those which had the closest ties to the metropolis in the past. These regions were the greatest exporters of primary products to and the biggest sources of capital for the world metropolis. Therefore, underdevelopment must be viewed from a global perspective (Chew and Denmark, 1996:2).

Feminist critiques of development

Modernisation theories assumed that development was largely economic. They defined development in terms of economic growth measured through Gross National Product (GNP) and as such, women's role in development processes was invisible, since much of women's work occurs beyond the overt context of monetary economy. Therefore, policy makers assumed that men were the most productive workers and their assumption led to the worldwide failure to evaluate women's contribution to productive activities (Sachs, 1985:127). Feminist scholars focused specifically on the lack of consideration of women in the development process. They studied the role women played in development as well as the effect of development policies on them. A number

of studies beginning with Ester Boserup's *Women's Role in Economic Development* (1970) have shown that development processes have not only ignored women's contribution to the economy but also have had a detrimental effect on their economic position and status. Development interventions in Third World countries increased women's work load and worsened the status of their work (Escobar, 1995:171) and thus, inequality between men and women in society increased. The exclusion of women from the development process and its detrimental effects on them were issues of concern for feminists and the initial reaction was from liberal feminists who argued for women's integration into development processes, which became known as the women in development (WID) approach.

Liberal feminism and women in development (WID)

Liberal feminists examined the development process and advocated the integration of women into development. They challenged and responded to the inadequacies of modernisation theory, which said very little specifically about women. WID was a response to the inadequacies of the modernisation approach although it largely remained within this paradigm (Waylen, 1996:37), since liberal feminism believed in the viability of the capitalist economic system (Bandarage, 1984:495). Liberal development thinking ignored women during the First UN Development Decade. Elson (1995:4) argued that the development process in Third World countries remained male-biased and tended to hamper women from acquiring any benefit from the development effort. It denied women adequate access to productive inputs. Development objectives were defined in such a way that these were more beneficial to men than to women. In most cases women's interests were marginalised in the formulation and implementation of economic policy. Modernisation theory asserted that development required the emergence of 'rational industrial man' who acknowledged different opinions and was receptive to new ideas. It viewed women as close to nature and perceived them to be tradition-bound, conservative and therefore obstacles to modernisation (Scott, 1996:24). The perceptions of modernisation theory had marginalised women and their contribution to the economies of the Third World. Mainstream development processes largely benefited men and displaced women from their traditional productive roles and thus affected women adversely.

In the early 1970s Danish agricultural economist Ester Boserup first best illustrated the negative impacts of development on women and reported that many development projects failed to improve the lives of Third World women. She provided documentary evidence and noted that development processes in Third World countries marginalised women economically and socially. They were deprived of economic opportunities and status, which increased their exploitation and subordination in society. Further, the process of development increased their dependence on men in developing countries. Boserup's documentation of the negative impacts of development on women signalled the beginning of liberal feminists' advocacy of the integration of women into development as workers and producers. Liberal feminism stressed the importance of including women in development planning since their integration into the process would give them access to economic resources, which would provide them with the benefits of development (Kabeer, 1994:20). These arguments are best analysed and explained in Boserup's *Women's Role in Economic Development* (1970), Tinker's *The Adverse Impact of Development on Women* (1976) and Rogers' *The Domestication of Women: Discrimination in Developing Societies* (1980).

Boserup argued in *Women's Role in Economic Development* that the difference between male and female in traditional economies was proportional to the difference in their physical strength (1970:53), while the introduction of technology in modern economies made agriculture less dependent on human physical strength. Boserup critiqued the colonial and post-colonial agricultural policies, arguing that productivity-enhancing interventions had facilitated men's monopoly over new technologies. Men were associated with the modern cash-cropping sector while women were relegated to the traditional subsistence agriculture (1970:139). The modern economy brought new resources and opportunities to men, leaving women on the margins of development. The development process, thus, affected women and men differentially. The modernisation of agriculture created the gender division of labour and increased the dependant status of women as well as their workload. Men were introduced to cash crop cultivation by modern methods while women continued subsistence crop cultivation for the family using traditional methods. Boserup maintained that cash crop production and wage jobs were made available to men only. Cash crop cultivation brought money for men. Therefore, it was only possible for men to buy land when selling of land was introduced. The introduction of primary education created another gap between men and

women. Boys were sent to school while girls were confined to informal education. Thus, women were deprived of access to training, property rights, education and technology, which in turn, made the status of women in society inferior or secondary.

Boserup illustrated that in developing countries many towns grew up through development processes, which she termed '*male towns*', where only men were recruited for employment and '*access to the towns was often legally barred for women*' (1970:85). This was the case in South Africa and former Rhodesia, while in the Copper Belt in Zambia the employers provided land, where miners' wives could grow food for the family. It kept women confined in traditional activities. Boserup argued that in market economies of the Third World employers preferred men and created a sex-stereotyped hierarchy, while women's prejudice and lack of proper qualifications inhibited them from seeking employment in the modern sector. Since '*[e]mployment in [the] modern sector requires not only formal training, but also a certain attitude to work which may best be described as the capacity to work regularly and attentively [...]* Those who work within the confines of the family are not likely to acquire this attitude' (1970:214). Boserup elaborated the basic element of modernisation and attacked it, as it failed to benefit women in the Third World. She pointed out that parents taught that boys were superior to girls and such a view of male ascendance was also reflected in the policy process. Boys were provided with vocational training, while girls were trained to make them subsistence producers and better wives. She concluded that in some developing countries women were trained in craft and home industries and this was the first step to bring them into labour market. She called for proper education and training for women to enhance their competitiveness in the economic sphere.

Irene Tinker presented a similar analysis in her *The Adverse Impact of Development on Women* (1976). She argued that both development planners and implementers were generally men and they failed to realise that women had to perform two roles in society. As a result, development widened the gap between incomes of men and women (1976:22). In subsistence societies women perform both reproductive work and economic activity. Nevertheless, Western industrial society glorifies motherhood and downgrades the economic activity associated with child care and household work and this view is disseminated throughout the world. Acceptance of this stereotypical role defines women's place in the home and classifies them as economically dependent

forever. Moreover, it makes the productive role of women invisible. Tinker suggested, planners must recognise women's dual role and rethink the 'mythical stereotypes', which led to the definition of the labour force in terms of work performed for money and work located in the modern sector. They must consider subsistence labour, household work, childcare and other activities in the tertiary or informal sectors in defining work. Women played a very important role in the subsistence economy. They were also '*engaged in a variety of other economic activities – spinning fibres, weaving cloth, drawing water, tending market gardens and processing and preserving foods gathered from communal property*' (1976:25). Under tribal custom they had rights to land as users but the introduction of cash crops and of the concept of private property favoured men. She concluded, '*the process of development has tended to restrict the economic independence of women as their traditional jobs have been challenged by new methods and technologies. Because Western stereotypes of appropriate roles and occupations for women tend to be exported with aid and modernisation continually increases the gap between women's and men's ability to cope with the modern world*' (1976:33).

Barbara Rogers explained the attitude of international agencies towards women in development planning in her work, *The Domestication of Women: Discrimination in Developing Societies* (1980). She argued that women remained absent from planning and development processes in the Third World, since policy makers failed to realise women's role in the process as a whole. She articulated that planners based their planning on the domestic model familiar to them that '*a woman's place is in the home*'. They furthermore blamed the local government or tradition in justifying the absence of women in the development process. '*It is flatly stated that the government concerned would not approve the involvement of women and therefore none should be nominated; and it is not generally thought necessary to attempt to verify such statements*' (Rogers, 1980:50). Rogers quoted an employment advertisement for a job in East Africa by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), which asked only men to apply, arguing that the governments of the East African countries would not be able to work with a woman. She noted that there was no such evidence in support of this assertion; rather, a number of professional women were working in these countries at that time for bilateral and international development agencies. Thus, she argued, women were highly discriminated against in the UN family and there were virtually no women working as

experts for the Technical Assistance Recruitment Service (TARS) run by the United Nations.

Rogers made an in-depth study of the development planning process of the international organisations and offered a fresh insight into the *'pattern and practice'* of sex discrimination within the major international development agencies. She provided examples of sex segregation in development planning and argued that male planners did not recognise the participation of women in development. They treated women as male controlled unpaid labour and therefore denied them incentives. She examined some development interventions and pointed out that the discriminatory attitude of planners to women undermined project performance. She argued that planners needed to eliminate discrimination against women at all levels. They should find ways to save women's labour and to ensure that incentives were given to both women and men according to their contribution (Rogers, 1980:192).

The documentation of the adverse impacts of development on women's lives inspired and initiated liberal feminists' advocacy for the integration of women into development. Liberal feminism talked about equality of rights and opportunities for women and men in society (Gordon, 1996:13). Liberal feminism was rooted in the ideas of liberal philosophy, which focused on equality and liberty. Liberal feminists drew a distinction between sex (biological) and gender (social) differences between women and men and saw women's subordination as resulting from stereotyped customary norms held by men and internalised by women. They argued that women's subordination could be eliminated by breaking down these stereotypes and by giving them equal opportunities in all aspects of life including education and employment. Equal employment opportunity for women was an area of especial attention for them (Connelly et al., 2000:39). Liberal feminists demanded women's full integration into the development process and their movement had a major formative influence on the women and development approach. The term 'women in development' was first coined in the early 1970s by a Washington-based network of women development professionals (Razavi & Miller, 1995a:2-3). On the basis of their own experience of development initiatives in the Third World, these feminist activists challenged the 'trickledown' theory of development. They argued that modernisation was impacting differently on women and men. Development processes in the Third World bypassed

women and failed to improve their rights and status. Moreover, it deteriorated their position in developing countries. In order to improve the status of women, they lobbied for women's integration into national economies (Pearson, 2000a:390). Hence, it is evident that both liberal feminists and the Washington-based network of women development professionals were thinking along the same lines in relation to women's emancipation. Both these groups talked of women's integration into development, which is best known as the WID approach.

From 'women in' to 'gender and' perspective

Boserup's documentation of the negative impacts of development on women initiated the liberal feminists' advocacy of integration of women into the development process. Liberal feminists within the WID framework critiqued the development effort in Third World countries. They challenged the modernisation process although they remained situated within the modernisation paradigm. WID thinkers placed emphasis on the productive roles of women and argued for better opportunities for them in development processes. This advocacy was certainly a step in the right direction (Kabeer, 1994:29) and their efforts contributed to the shifts in policy framework. Nevertheless, the WID approach was subject to much criticism. It was argued that the WID approach failed to acknowledge women's contribution to the economy and adopted modernisation theory without questioning the implications of reproductive roles for women. Proponents of this approach concentrated only on how women could better be integrated into ongoing development initiatives (Rathgeber, 1989:6) and their demand for women's integration into development processes reinforced the colonial representation of Third World women (Chowdhury, 1995:34) who needed help to develop. They promoted development practices that ignored particularities, differences and local knowledge (Parpart & Marchand, 1995:1)

The WID approach was thus critiqued for appearing to accept the existing social structures without questioning the sources of women's subordination and oppression. Proponents of this approach were motivated by evidence from the Third World, which showed that women's status was declining in developing countries. In the process of modernising agriculture, colonial rulers introduced new technologies and the sexual divisions of labour. Liberal feminists did not question the introduction of such divisions.

They demanded women's inclusion into the development process but did not advocate structural change to the system, in which women were to be included. They did not question the notion of the 'male breadwinner'. However, since women did not subsequently gain from the development effort in developing countries, they urged policy makers to redress the problems so that women could share the fruits of modernisation (Visvanathan, 1997b:20). The WID projects typically had been income generating activities for women, which required learning a particular skill or craft (Rathgeber, 1989:7). As such, integration came to mean small and separate projects for women compartmentalised within development programmes and their continued absence from priority development projects. They remained absent from higher levels of planning and planners failed to treat them as equal agents in development (Goetz, 1991:139). Thus, the WID approach failed to respond to some of the fundamental issues related to women's subordination, which resulted in its facing challenges from other theoretical perspectives.

Marxist feminists (Hartsock, 1979; Dixon, 1980) viewed the inequalities between women and men as a part of the larger systems of inequality created by capitalism. In explaining women's subordination they used the dependency paradigm and argued that capitalism kept women in the home and perpetuated their subordination by enforcing their economic dependence on men (Connelly et al., 2000:86) and by relegating them to unpaid subsistence work. Radical feminists (Firestone, 1970; Eisenstein, 1984) extended the Marxist-feminist critique of global capitalism and argued that male-female relation was fundamentally a relationship of power. They analysed patriarchy or the domination of women by men in explaining male-female relation (Kabeer, 1994:50-51). Connelly (et al., 2000:89) notes that radical feminists believed that men as a group oppressed women in society and gained from this oppression. Radical feminists argued that patriarchy existed in all societies and was the fundamental source of inequality. Analysis of women's subordination by the Marxist feminists and the radical feminists served as a backdrop for a new approach to the development of women, which called for self-reliant development emphasising women-only projects and warned against close cooperation with male dominated institutions. This approach, which emerged in the second half of the 1970s and into the 1980s, is known as women and development (WAD) (Parpart & Marchand, 1995:13).

The WID approach critiqued Third World development approaches, since women were excluded from development processes, whilst Southern feminists and the international network Development Alternatives for Women in a New Era (DAWN) critiqued development policies since they perceived these to be problematic (Parpart, 1993:450; Pearson, 2000:390). Development planners considered Third World women as a homogenous group and ignored their lived experiences. The universal presentation of Third World women as uniformly poor and vulnerable was an issue of concern for them. They developed the WAD approach and argued that women had always been part of development processes and the nature of their integration in development sustained the existing structure of inequality. They emphasised taking women's diverse experiences into consideration and stressed the need for breaking down the structures of inequality (Sen & Grown, 1987). The WAD perspective related women's subordination to international structures and assumed that women's position would improve if international relations became more equitable. It explained women's subordination referring to the global economy and was preoccupied with the productive sector at the expense of reproductive side of women's work and lives. WAD intervention strategies therefore fell into the same trap as WID concentrating on productive activities such as income generating projects for women devaluing their reproductive roles (Rathgeber, 1989:9-10). However, the limitations of WID and WAD led socialist feminists (Beneria & Sen, 1981; Hartman, 1981; Young, 1981) to explore alternative theoretical frameworks on development in the mid to late 1980s. They critiqued the WID approach, identified the limitations of the WAD movement, extended it and inspired the gender and development (GAD) perspective, taking 'gender' as a category of analysis, which referred to the socially constructed relations between women and men. The GAD approach emphasised gender relations in both the labour force and the reproductive sphere (Visvanathan, 1997b:23).

Relations between women and men in every society are one of power, which is structured in inequality, where men are perceived as dominant and women are subordinate. Female subordination is created structurally by the pervasive ideology of male superiority, which shapes women's and men's view of themselves and their capacities. That men as a gender exercise control over valued political, economic and social resources is also another source of women's subordination. Therefore, dismantling the structures, which create women's subordination, by changing laws,

religious and political institutions, systems of beliefs and values and socialisation practices is crucial in balancing the power relation in society (Young, 1993:134). Women have to be empowered and giving them training, credit and access to resources are indeed very useful steps in their empowerment. The GAD framework is grounded in several key propositions. It argues that women are integrated into the development process in very specific ways and a focus on women alone is inadequate to understand this integration or the opportunities available to them through their integration for agency or change. The focus of analysis should be the totality of women's and men's lives, not merely their productive or reproductive roles (op cit.). Women are not a homogenous group; rather, they are divided by race, class, culture etc. Mainstream feminist scholarship did not focus on the differences between women but rather on their universal identity. The GAD perspective critiques the category 'woman' in feminist writings and argues that the analysis of contextual social organisations and social processes has to be taken into account to explain gender relations (Cornwall, 1997:9).

The WID School focuses largely on the outward manifestations of sexual inequality engendered by economic modernisation processes. In contrast, socialist feminists argue that sexual inequality is related to social class inequality and to the uneven and unequal development of capitalism world-wide (Bandarage, 1984:501). They seek fundamental explanations for women's subordination focusing on gender relations. Beneria & Sen (1981, 1997) criticised Boserup for neglecting the interconnections between social processes of capital accumulation, class formation and the declining status of women. In the process of generation and intensification of inequalities, they described Boserup's idea of better education and training for women to emancipate them from their declining status as *'treating cancer with a bandaid'* (1981:287; 1997:47). They argued that the roots of women's subordination must be analysed within the sphere of both production and reproduction in economic, social and cultural structures. Liberalism believed that women's poverty and subordination are *'simply aberrations within an otherwise just and equitable social system'* (Bandarage, 1984:499), which could be corrected through legislative reforms, attitudinal changes and employment generation for women, since they were due to traditional values and male ignorance. Bandarage critiqued the liberal perspective, arguing that it was not aberration but rather a structural feature of capitalism where exploitation was the root.

Therefore, the solutions needed not only political initiatives but also fundamental structural changes.

Socialist feminists argue that women's reproductive role is a determinant of their work, the sexual division of labour and the relation between women and men in society. From her study of Indian lace makers, Mies (1986:134) points out that women do this work in their leisure time at home. They consider themselves as housewives and the wages they get are far below the minimum wage of agricultural labourers. Beneria and Sen (1981:295; 1997:50) argue that the ideology of seclusion confines women at home and makes them willing to accept extremely low wages. A strict focus on the production aspect of lace making presents only a partial picture of the nature of women's exploitation. Therefore, placing emphasis on women's reproductive role, socialist feminists stressed the need for examining both their productive and reproductive roles and the interaction between these two. Liberal feminists uncritically accepted the capitalist system. They ignored the reality that equal opportunity for women and men did not exist within capitalism as the structure of inequality in it was based on race, class and sex. Hence, socialist feminists talked about transforming unequal social relations and called for the elimination of class and sex hierarchies through a radical transformation of society (Beneria and Sen (1981:295; 1997:50).

Building upon and emerging from socialist feminism, the GAD perspective viewed women as active agents of change, not as passive recipients of development (Rathgeber, 1989:13; Rai, 2002:71) and focused on gender relations, the relations between women and men in the workplace as well as other settings. It advocated the provision of education, training and access to resources for women, which were immediate perceived needs for them. Nevertheless, the WID world-view failed to consider the question of 'male power' as a property of gender relations, whilst GAD proponents advocated women's empowerment through redistribution of power between men and women in order to overcome their subordination to men. They stressed women's self-organisation to increase their political power within the economic system. The GAD approach sought support from all levels of the state- local, regional and central (Young, 1997:51-54). It emphasised women's empowerment and argued that improving the status of women required active cooperation from men.

The GAD approach led to the design of intervention and affirmative action strategies to ensure better integration of women into ongoing development efforts. It led to a fundamental re-examination of social structures and institutions to balance the power relations, which would affect women and men (Rathgeber, 1989:13-14). The GAD perspective identified women as a diverse group based on their race and class identity but it rarely explicitly challenged the goal of modernisation (Parpart & Marchand, 1995:14). The concept of GAD offered a new approach to including women into development processes. However, gender analysis failed to give any clear idea about the ways individual women and men experienced gender roles and relations in society. It, rather, took sexual differences as the starting point of analysis and hence, could not explain the dynamics of differences between societies (Cornwall, 1997:9).

The various perspectives on women and development have contributed important theoretical and practical insights to development. The GAD perspective, however, had a considerable effect on academic development discourse and inspired the postcolonial feminist approach. The issue of colonial discourse, in fact, has been the most immediate link between postcolonial feminism and gender and development (Parpart & Marchand, 1995:15). Postcolonial feminism incorporated postmodern and postcolonial approaches to theorising development. Both these approaches focused on considering diversity and understanding power in the construction of development. Postmodernism challenged the European route to development, which assumed the population of the Third World to be homogenous. Instead, it stressed diversity in social, spatial and temporal terms. Recognition of diversity and difference has been one of the most appealing aspects of post colonialism (Parpart, 1993:443; Willis, 2005:120-121). Colonial discourse developed from the works of Edward Said. Said initiated a systematically analysis of the production of the 'Orient' in *Orientalism* (1975). He articulated that Europeans came into contact with many Indian and African nations in the nineteenth century thorough colonial expansion. Said argued that the West produced these nations and their cultures as 'Other' to a Western norm. The colonial discourse assumed that Third World women were voiceless, non-liberated and tradition-bound and were an important impediment to modernity and development (Parpart, 1993:447). They needed to be civilised and developed like western women, who were modern, educated and had controlled their bodies and sexuality. Postcolonial feminists (Goetz, 1991; Parpart, 1993) rejected this broad generalisation and argued that there was no single 'women's

situation'. Women's lives were affected by multiple variables such as race, ethnicity or class and hence there could never be a single voice that expressed all women's concerns (Rathgeber, 1995:207). Race, culture, religion, class, etc., must be incorporated into feminist analysis. Postmodernists critique the universal pretensions of modernity and assert the need for the deconstruction of development discourse. Postcolonial feminists maintain that spatial and cultural contexts formulate the complexity of life as lived experiences and therefore, they put emphasis on '*local, specific and historically informed analysis*' on the basis of spatial and cultural contexts (Parpart & Marchand, 1995:4). They call for the recognition of differences and listening to the silenced and ignored voices of Third World women. For them, actual experiences are the only basis to formulate effective and appropriate strategies for improving women's lives (Parpart, 1995:240).

Postcolonial feminism has offered valuable contributions to theorising about development. It has revitalised feminism by questioning many assumptions that were under or unexamined previously and, thus, enriched feminist thought by encouraging differences and multiple identities in feminism. It emphasised discourse analysis and deconstruction of knowledge. However, despite its valuable contribution, postcolonial feminism was not beyond criticism. This approach did not propose any strategies for the development of women's lives that policy makers could think of. The argument that women in Third World countries experience their lives differently in different contexts does not entail that they cannot have anything in common. At least, women everywhere are facing sexism. Some feminists argue that there are widely varying viewpoints in feminism. The emergence of postcolonial feminism has empowered this area of knowledge. Nonetheless, others are concerned with the potential loss of feminist community because it is difficult to plan any action for the development of women without a fundamental share of feminist philosophy and a concept of 'woman'.

The 'woman' issues in the policy domain

Development specialists initially considered women as obstacles to development. They adopted the colonial representation of Third World women as tradition-bound beings, either unable or unwilling to enter the modern world. This vision of Third World women provided a rationale for ignoring them during the first development

decade (Parpart & Marchand, 1995:13). Policy makers viewed women in relation to their reproductive roles. They considered them the recipients of development effort and believed that women would gain through the trickledown effect. They ignored women's contribution to the economy. As such, mainstream development efforts largely benefited men and marginalised women in society, displacing them from their traditional productive roles. Illustrations of women's marginalization in development and a growing demand from feminist groups for their integration into the development process during the 1970s drew the attention of policy makers. The growth of feminism and the search for practical solutions to the failure of development contributed to shifts in development policy formulation. Policy makers were influenced by the WID advocacy, which emerged as a transitional movement (Newland, 1991:124).

Women's integration into development was called by WID, WAD and GAD proponents, although their perspectives were to some extent different. Drawing on liberal feminists' call to integrate women into development, the WID movement sought women's equality through income generating projects for them and access to resources, whilst WAD proponents argued for women-only projects separated from men. GAD proponents similarly stressed the need for women's access to training and resources but also wanted changes in the existing social structure for women's better integration into development for their emancipation. Postmodern and postcolonial feminists wanted to understand the lives and experiences of Third World women in specific temporal and spatial contexts. They sought women's emancipation but did not specify any strategy of inclusion in development. Rather they urged planners to avoid broad generalisations and emphasised spatial knowledge in formulating development interventions. Thus, all these approaches to women's emancipation had important insights and views. Policy planners and development institutions, however, remained situated within the broad WID paradigm influenced by liberal feminism. Although the first development decade ignored women, the second UN development decade linked women and development. It gave importance to the greater integration of women in total development efforts (Verceles, 1970:9; Tinker, 1990:29, 1997:34). The United Nations arranged a world conference on women and development in 1975. One of the main themes of this conference was equality between men and women. The meeting adopted the World Plan for Action, which contained objectives relating to improved educational opportunities, better employment prospects, equality in political and social participation, and increased

welfare services for women (Young, 1993:25). The United Nations declared 1976-85 the UN Decade for Women with the official themes of equality, peace and development. The UN declaration of a Decade for Women played a crucial role in highlighting the previously invisible role of women in economic development. The World Bank established a 'Women in Development Division' declaring WID an area of 'special operational emphasis' (Chowdhury, 1995:31). This initiative of the World Bank had its impact on different governments and resulted in the establishment of women affairs ministries or at least bureaux. The WID group was also able to influence the United States Government and in 1973 the US Senate adopted the policy to '*encourage and promote the integration of women*' into all aspects of development planning and policy making bodies (Pearson, 2000a:390). The WID advocacy efforts thus led to some enduring shifts in policy approaches to Third World development. Planners designed various programmes directed at Third World women, which reflected policy evolution. Moser (1991:95-110) classified the WID projects initiated by the World Bank into five approaches, namely, the welfare approach, the equity approach, the anti-poverty approach, the efficiency approach and the empowerment approach.

The welfare approach focused on women solely in terms of their reproductive role and considered child rearing as the most effective role of women in all aspects of economic development. Direct provision of food, nutrition project for children, pregnant and nursing mothers, and population control through family planning are examples of the welfare approach. The welfare approach was a reflection of stereotypical images of Third World women. It identified them as the passive recipients of development and therefore, it is not surprising that the concern of the welfare approach was to meet the practical gender needs of women. Moser builds practical and strategic gender needs on Molyneux's work (1985) regarding practical and strategic gender interests. Practical gender interests refer to women's and men's immediate perceived needs, which are required to fulfil their current socially-constructed roles. The provision of income earning activities and other basic welfare needs such as food, water and shelter are examples of practical gender needs for women. In contrast, strategic needs derive from the analysis of women's subordination and are formulated to overcome their subordinate position. The abolition of the sexual division of labour, the alleviation of the burden of domestic labour and childcare, and the establishment of freedom of choice over childbearing are examples of strategic gender needs for women (Molyneux,

1985:232-233; Moser, 1991:95-110). The welfare approach, introduced in the 1950s, was the most popular social development policy for women in particular. Nevertheless, by the 1970s there was widespread dissatisfaction with this approach, since development projects were negatively affecting women. Criticisms of female professionals and researchers resulted in the initiation of a number of alternative approaches to women, namely, equity, anti-poverty, efficiency and empowerment.

The equity approach emerged in the 1970s. It recognised women as active participants in development who provided a critical contribution to economic growth through their both productive and reproductive roles. It started with the basic assumption that development strategies have frequently had a negative impact on women and as such stressed the need for bringing them into development processes through access to employment. It recognised their practical gender needs to earn a livelihood and placed considerable emphasis on economic independence as being synonymous with equity. Therefore, this approach met important strategic gender needs by eradicating obstacles to women's advancement in public spheres. In order to bringing equality between the sexes, the equity approach placed emphasis on positive discrimination policies in a process of redistribution and a focus on legislative changes. However, it did not set any indicator of social status or progress of women.

The anti-poverty approach linked economic inequality between women and men to poverty and emphasised reducing income inequality. Since modernisation theory failed to redistribute income and trickle-down did not take place, development initiatives failed to solve the problems of Third World poverty and unemployment. Therefore, in 1972 the World Bank formulated policies such as eradication of absolute poverty and the promotion of redistribution with growth. The anti-poverty approach aimed at reducing poverty, meeting basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter and fuel as well as social needs such as education, human rights and participation in social life through employment and political involvement. It focused mainly on women's reproductive role and identified them as the poorest of the poor who needed assistance and emphasised increasing employment and income-generating options for them through better access to productive resources. Chowdhury (1995:33) argued that the anti-poverty approach portrayed women as traditional and voiceless; it treated them as 'objects', who needed help, not 'subjects', who could be active participants in development.

The efficiency approach was a reflection of the policy makers' realisation of women's important role in economy. Women constitute more than half the world's human resources. Indeed, their effective and proper inclusion in development processes would lead to more efficient growth. This approach urged development efforts to recognise the contributions of women to the economy and to integrate them into development processes (Chowdhury (1995:33). The structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) of the mid 1970s are examples of the efficiency approach, which defined economics only in terms of marketed goods and services and subsistence cash economy. SAPs recognised women as an under-utilised 'resource' for development. The efficiency approach emphasised women's productive roles and ignored their reproductive activities. This approach was simply a shifting of costs from the paid to the unpaid economy at the expense of women's unpaid workload within the household. As a result, the structural adjustment programmes impacted negatively on women.

The fifth approach of the World Bank was the empowerment approach, which emerged during the 1980s from the writings of the Third World feminists. This approach acknowledged the importance for women of increasing their power. It identified power as the right to make choices in life and to influence the direction of change through the ability to gain control over resources. It sought to empower women through the redistribution of power. The empowerment approach remains largely unsupported by both national governments and bilateral aid agencies due to its challenging nature. It thus had little influence on development industry.

Women in development became a very popular concept once it was articulated in the 1970s. Both government and feminist activists appreciated this concept throughout the second and third world conferences on women arranged by the United Nations in 1985 and 1990 respectively (Tinker, 1990:31, 1997:35). However, some of those working in the field of development were questioning the adequacy of focusing on women in isolation (Razavi & Miller, 1995a:12) and in the fourth world conference on women, held in Beijing, planners shifted their attention from women to gender, where the central point was gender equality and empowerment of women. Feminist scholars developed the concept of gender, which refers to the meanings and roles assigned to women and men and the different resources and opportunities available to both of them accordingly. In most societies men and women differ in the activities they undertake, in

access to and control over resources and in participation in decision making, maintaining gender inequalities, which planners regarded as an obstacle to development (Moghadam & Senftova, 2005:390). Therefore, feminists advocated gender equality, arguing for the redistribution of power between the sexes. They stressed the need for women's empowerment, which in turn, would balance the power relations between women and men. Relating to choices and capabilities, Kabeer (1999:437-438) defines empowerment as a process of change through which people acquire an ability to make choices, which they were previously denied. Kabeer distinguishes three dimensions of empowerment. Firstly, empowerment entails choice with regard to access to resources, secondly, it entails agency in decision-making and negotiating power. The third dimension of empowerment comprises achievements referring to the potential of the people for living the lives they want. Therefore, empowerment requires meeting both women's practical and strategic needs. The equality in access to resources and the restructuring of institutions are central to it. It means placing the gender equality issue at the centre of policy decisions, planning processes and institutional practices. It requires the systematic application of a gender-aware vision or in other words gender mainstreaming. The Beijing conference in 1995 introduced the 'gender mainstreaming' (GM) concept, which established the need for gender analysis before undertaking any development policy and programme. GM is a globally accepted strategy for achieving gender equality. This is not an end in itself; rather, a strategy to achieve the goal of gender equality. It involves ensuring gender perspectives are central to all activities—research, policy formulation, advocacy, resource allocation, planning, implementation and monitoring of projects. The UN Economic and Social Council defined gender mainstreaming (cited in Porter & Sweetman, 2005:2) as:

[T]he process of assessing the implications for men and women of any planned action, including legislation, policies and programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and social spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality.

Jahan (1995:13) distinguishes two broad approaches of gender mainstreaming, namely, 'integrationist' and 'agenda-setting'. The Integrationist approach intends to integrate women into existing development frameworks, where development priorities do not change because of gender considerations. The agenda-setting approach requires the transformation of existing development agendas with a gender perspective, which needs women's participation in development decision making. All development activities have a gendered dimension and impact. They may not benefit women and men equally. Keeping this view in consideration gender mainstreaming seeks to understand the roles, responsibilities, resources and priorities of women and men within a specific context. The Beijing Platform for Action designates 12 priority areas in relation to women's equality and empowerment (Antrobus, 2005:95), which was reinforced in the Millennium Declaration adopted by all UN member states in 2000. The Millennium Declaration addressed the issues of gender inequality and aimed to attain gender equality and the empowerment of women (Sweetman, 2005:3). Both the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and gender mainstreaming approach shift the focus from women to gender and are concerned about the unequal power relations between women and men. The MDGs recognise the importance of women's equality and rights in achieving economic and social progress. In particular the third Millennium Development goal '*promote gender equality and empower women*' in essence talks about women's access to resources and empowerment (Heyzer, 2005:9). Kabeer (2006:29-36) identifies three types of resources, namely, access to employment, access to education and political representation as indicators of women's empowerment. She argues that each of the resources in question is important in bringing about changes that could lead to gender equality and women's empowerment.

Conclusion

Development became one of the most dominant concepts since the post-war period of the 1940s and the legitimacy of development goals were never questioned; rather, questions evolved around the approaches to development in developing countries. Western planners perceived industrialisation to be the strategy of modernising Third World societies and asserted the need for capital importation in these countries in the form of aid to initiate industrialisation, since they lacked capital. During the first two postcolonial decades the policy was import substitution industrialisation for

producing goods for domestic markets and thereafter the development approach shifted to export-oriented industrialisation. The developing countries adopted policies to produce goods for the global market and became dependent on trade. Thus, the development paradigm over the years shifted from aid to trade dependency for the developing nations, although modernisation remained beyond reach. Development efforts somewhat adversely affected people and women in particular and as such, the legitimacy of development approaches to Third World development was called into question. In terms of continued underdevelopment in developing nations, dependency theorists reasoned the dependence of these countries on the developed world, whereas feminists argued that policy makers ignored women's productive role and emphasised their reproductive activities. Consequently women in developing countries were adversely affected. The development process in Third World countries marginalised women by displacing them from productive activities and deprived them of their control over resources (Afshar, 1991:1). Liberal feminists were the first who identified the negative impacts of development and inspired the women in development (WID) movement. The WID approach gave importance to women's productive roles and emphasised their integration into the formal economy as a means of improving their status (Razavi & Miller, 1995a:3). It argued for job opportunities for women since the provision of jobs has often been seen as an important way of integrating women into the development process (Elson & Pearson, 1981a:87). The WAD approach contested WID claims and identified capitalism and patriarchy as the source of women's subordination. It accordingly advocated women-only projects beyond male dominated institutions. The GAD approach emerged in development discourse, building upon WAD as an alternative to the WID movement. It took 'gender' as the key category of analysis. In order to achieve gender equality, this approach emphasised the analysis of both gender roles and relations (Razavi & Miller, 1995a:13). The gender roles framework derives from the insights of the WID approach, which places emphasis on women's access to and control over resources. GAD examines gender relations and proposes the redistribution of power between the sexes with a view to empowering women. In contrast, postcolonial feminism is linked to post development theory, which raised questions about identity. Postcolonial feminists focused on deconstruction, language and the power of discourse. They called for listening to the ignored voices of Third World women in order to construct strategies for improving women's lives on the basis of actual experiences rather than assumptions (Chowdhury, 1995:33).

WID and GAD are two major approaches to integrate women into development, although they vary widely (Klenk, 2004:65). Both WID and GAD evolved in a policy environment dominated by economic perspectives on development. Many development agencies have adopted women's economic empowerment as their main strategy for achieving gender equity, assuming that it will lead automatically to gender equality (El-Bushra, 2000:56). They mostly focus on improving women's economic capacity and their participation in the development process. Dominant international institutions continue to concentrate on women's productive roles and intend to bring them into the development process accordingly (Razavi & Miller, 1995b:65). Therefore, development projects still tend to fall within a WID integrationist approach rather than the more radical GAD perspective (Rathgeber, 1989:21). Jahan (1995:20-21) argues that development policy objectives of various bilateral and multilateral organisations have changed within a WID framework over the years. They initially followed an integrationist approach but the feminist demand to transform the development agenda slowly turned them to an agenda-setting approach. Hence, the issue of women's empowerment found a place in agency documents. Development agencies shifted their methodological approaches from WID to GAD but underscored the necessity of WID-integrated activities. Many agencies and governments followed a GAD methodology for project analysis and identification but a WID focus for project activities. Barriteau (2000:121-123) analysed the policies of the World Bank, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and reported that these international development institutions were WID oriented. They emphasised women's integration into development focusing on increasing women's economic activity and improving their access to productive resources and the labour market.

Thus, the major players in the field of development remain fundamentally situated within the WID paradigm. They shape national development policies, which obviously share the same approaches as they fund only those programmes which are formulated according to their guidelines. Therefore, both international development institutions and national governments continue to reflect the influence of the liberal feminist perspectives. They focus on bringing women into development within the WID framework with a view to liberating women from their exploitative situation. This perspective has been reinforced with the declaration of the MDGs, which focus on the immediate- the practical and tangible. In order to promote gender equality and empower

women, the Declaration commits to the elimination of gender disparities in education, which is a practical need for women. This is also a practical indicator of a shift towards women's greater emancipation in the longer term. Although policy makers talk about gender, it remains in theoretical discourse and WID continues to dominate development policy formulation, which argues for meeting women's practical needs like education and employment.

Chapter III: Globalisation and Bangladesh: implications for women

Introduction

The dominant feature of the international economy in the present day world has been the increasing interconnectedness of national economies. A growing trend of interaction among and integration of especially economic activities of nations is prevalent around the globe. Globalisation refers to those dimensions of the global economy, which have been strengthened by technological improvements (Yusuf, 2003:38). At a deeper level the driving force behind this process has been the desire of people to take advantage of the opportunities provided by interactions with other societies through trade, migration, investment, acquisition of knowledge and exploitation of resources (Mussa, 2003:15). Globalisation has internationalised technology and financial capital and influenced nation-states in restructuring economic policies, which led to trade liberalisation and removal of capital controls (Bevan & Fosu, 2003:2). Trade liberalisation and removal of capital controls were encouraging for the labour-intensive manufacturing industries of developed economies. Since growth in international trade intensified inter-capitalist competition and acute labour crisis in industrialised countries affected these industries the most, they utilised the opportunities afforded by globalisation to their own best advantage and moved to developing countries in a quest for cheap labour and became multinational in their operation (Lim, 1983:71-72, 1997:216-217). In the era of globalisation, world market factories became increasingly dominant in production and trade (Yusuf, 2003:36) and generated huge employment opportunities in developing countries, where they largely employed women. The numbers of working women grew rapidly relative to men and this trend of the labour process is termed ‘feminisation of labour’ (Standing, 1989:1080), which is one of the manifestations of globalisation.

The focus of this chapter is on the gendered impacts of globalisation and its implications for women. The first section, however, gives an overview of globalisation with reference to development, given that both these aspects are interlinked. The second section discusses the emergence of world market factories in the process of globalisation and its role in the global economy with its contributions in restructuring the labour process worldwide. The chapter then concentrates on women’s increasing participation in the labour force, while the bulk of the chapter then deals with policy

interventions in Bangladesh in relation to women's development. It also gives a glimpse of the position and condition of women in Bangladeshi society. The final section of the chapter analyses previous research findings with regard to the implication of employment in waged labour market for women.

Development and globalisation

Dominant development policy initiatives during the postcolonial epoch emphasised economic growth and planners identified industrialisation as a means and development as an end. The role of investment in industrialisation has always been seen as the crucial factor in economic development. In the context of Keynesian policies the immediate post-war development thinking saw state planning as the way forward for the developing countries in order to transform traditional society into a modern industrial economy (Milward, 2003:128). Keynes argued that the key to growth was investment, which would have a positive effect on job creation and the further generation of wealth. Keynes saw a key role for the government to promote investment through monetary policies and expenditure in attaining economic growth (Willis, 2005:35). Keynes's ideas regarding government role were applied in the post-War period of development interventions in Third World countries. As noted in the previous chapter, since these countries lacked resources for investment and economic growth, development strategies expected large transfers of money, technology and expertise from economically advanced states to fill the gaps and help the financing of the process of Third World development. The resources were usually transferred from one government to another as the Keynesian approach was based on government intervention at a national level and foreign assistance in terms of aid on an international scale (op cit.:47).

Thus, development initiatives in the 1950s and 1960s were mostly government led and dependant on foreign assistance. However, towards the end of the 1960s optimism for growth in developing countries gradually became dampened. Moreover, economies throughout the world experienced slowing rates of growth in the 1970s. In particular developing nations were rapidly losing export markets with falling commodity prices. Given this situation, neoliberal economists during that time began to argue that government intervention in the economy was leading to inefficiency and the best way to achieve economic growth would be reliance on market forces and private enterprises

(McGrew, 2000:349). They argued for state withdrawal from the economic sphere and the promotion of market mechanisms as the main engine of growth and development. Accordingly, attempts were made to reduce the role of the state in the economy placing greater reliance on the free play of market forces. The World Bank and IMF urged developing nations to adopt structural adjustment programmes (SAPs), which encouraged privatisation and liberalisation policies along with opening up the national economy to foreign investment (Hoogvelt, 1997:88). In fact, SAPs have played instrumental roles in many developing countries in establishing more open and globalised economies because the implementation of these programmes is often tied to international loans to relieve debt (Beneria, et al. 2000:vii). These efforts led to the interconnectedness of the global economy, which is labelled globalisation. In economic terms globalisation is the process of the widening of the markets for consumption, investment and production on a global scale and the expansion of social relations and social activities across traditional borders and regions (Milward, 2003:11). This process gained unprecedented momentum in its extension and depth from the 1970s with the development of technologies of transport and communications of corporate organisation and of the production process (Guinness, 2003:6). Technological development rapidly reduced transport and communication costs and removed the natural barriers of time and space that separated national markets. The steady decline in economic distance between nations stimulated closer integration between markets, producers, suppliers and consumers. Another driving force of globalisation is trade liberalisation, which has been a worldwide trend and almost all countries have lowered barriers to foreign ideas, capital and trade. The forces of globalisation thus have shaped the direction of national economies and policy processes. The rise of export flows related to foreign direct investment has also influenced global integration. The liberalisation of exchange regulations in many developing countries has facilitated the inflow of foreign direct investment increasing integration of these countries into the international economy (Cook & Kirkpatrick, 1997:57-59). Since the mid 1970s, international capital flows have increased both among industrial countries and with developing countries (Mussa, 2003:23; Yusuf, 2003:45).

The changes in the global economic situation stated above have played a crucial role in the process of globalisation, which implies an intensification of international exchange and growing links among national economies resulting in increasing flows of

goods and services across economies. The integration of national and regional economies into the global economy is one of the dimensions of globalisation, which also denotes social, political and cultural intensification. Nevertheless, economic aspects of globalisation gained focus, which reflects the extraordinary concentration of international trade, investment and financial flows (Pearson, 2000b:10). Economic globalisation has changed the structure of international trade. The reduction of trade barriers has increased the output of capital-intensive goods for export and has reduced the production of labour-intensive goods in developed countries. The opposite has happened in developing countries, which expanded exports of labour-intensive manufacture and has produced fewer capital-intensive import substitutes (Cook & Kirkpatrick, 1997:60). The process of globalisation has moved world market factories into the centre stage of the global economy and they dominate worldwide investment, production, trade and distribution strategies across nation-states. These factories are global companies, which take the entire world as their market, establish subsidiaries abroad, produce goods and services with the explicit purpose of export and make decisions in terms of what is best for the corporation as a whole on an international basis (Adam, 1975:90). They utilise national labour forces for international market oriented production.

Emergence of world market factories

Globalisation is related to the process of binding complex geographies and linking producers and consumers across spatial scales. As such, events, decisions and activities in one part of the world rapidly influence quite distant parts of the globe. This process is narrowing the consumption differences around the world as well. All these are different dimensions of the interconnected nature of global economies, where widening of markets and the expansion of production worldwide are of immense importance and world market factories are playing the key role in this process worldwide (Milward, 2003:33). These factories are also termed multinational or transnational corporations (MNC/TNC); the terms are used interchangeably in this presentation. The post-World War-II era of global relationships associated with the internationalisation of nearly all economies saw the emergence of a new international division of labour with the redistribution of manufacturing and service industries. This new division has involved a dramatic shift of production from developed to the

developing countries. It is linked to technological advances, which have enabled fragmentation of production, shifting labour-intensive activities to the developing areas, while financial matters and specialist management have stayed in developed countries. Transnational corporations are working as the driving force in the division of labour that has created a world market for labour and a world market for production sites. Governments of developing countries provide suitable incentives to them to attract inward investment. They establish export processing zones, which are designed to attract MNCs to invest in export production with a package of incentives, which includes the duty free import of raw materials and capital equipment, company tax concessions, simplified customs procedures and the provision of infrastructure (Potter et al. 1999:83). Export processing zones are production sites for industrial utilisation of labour power. A variety of designations such as 'export processing zone', 'free export zone', 'free trade zone', 'free industrial zone', 'special economic zone' and the like are used to denote the new enclave production sites (Frobel et al.1980:302). The term 'export processing zone', which is used in this study, refers to production sites, where goods and services are produced for global market by world market factories.

The growth of world market factories is one of the most revolutionary phenomena in the development of the world economy during the last century. These are actually the extended wings of large multinational corporations that relocated their production to developing countries to ensure continued profitability, new product lines, new markets, new investment outlets and above all new ways to reduce production costs (McEwan, 1978 cited in Tiano, 1994:11). World market factories and export processing zones (EPZs) became new elements in the new international division of labour. These factories are often although not always situated within EPZs. In the modern international economy these are institutions of increasing importance. Very few nations are now isolated from some involvement with world market factories (Parry, 1980:1). In practice, the largest MNCs orchestrate an ensemble of investments scattered across dozens of countries. Tied together by vast communications webs these firms perform various corporate functions such as research and development, production, and marketing around the globe. They deal with skills and wage rates of local labour, the tax and regulatory policies of governments, the availability of needed infrastructure and the supply of natural resources. The sheer size of many MNCs combined with their economic efficiency and international mobility not only provides them with a key place

in the world economy but also endows them with considerable political power and influence. Globalisation brought about changes in the power relationship between state and MNCs, where governments as a group have lost bargaining power to the multinationals (Cook & Kirkpatrick, 1997:56). They have the ability to manipulate transfer prices and to move their productive facilities to another country, which limits government's ability to tax them (Heymer, 1975:54; Frobel et al. 1980:295).

The significance of these corporations in the world economy is viewed in both quantitative and qualitative ways. Quantitative significance highlights the size of such corporations and their weight in such areas as world production, foreign investment, technology creation, trade, etc. Qualitative significance looks at the growth of these corporations and highlights their key tendencies in the capitalist system. In terms of size the largest MNCs have sales, which exceed the total gross domestic product of most Third World countries and they account for an important share of world production and control a major part of all foreign direct investment (Jenkins, 1987:8). These foreign investors never invest in the production of the most needed things, such as cheap food, clean water or simple housing. Foreign investment goes mostly into producing goods to export to rich countries. Historically many of the major exports of the Third World have been produced by world market factories (op cit.:11). Jenkins argues that these factories also dominate the marketing of those goods. As for example, the world coffee market is mostly controlled by four companies: Philip Morris, Nestle, Proctor & Gamble and Sarah Lee. These large corporations reap the majority of the benefits of world coffee production.

A typical MNC is NIKE. Its headquarters are in the United States and its entire manufacturing process is carried out through independent subcontracting in Third World countries. The NIKE brand is globally renowned and products can be bought in across countries. All financial decisions are carried out in the USA, while much of the production often takes place in developing countries, which generally welcome the penetration of such companies. Their movement in these countries is accelerated by an attractive investment climate made by government policies. Developing nations attract multinational subsidiary operations due to a number of such factors as cheap labour, low taxation and less vigilance concerning worker's rights and environmental protection. A number of governments in the Third World have passed laws which restricted the

formation of organisation and thus bargaining power of the employees. Moreover, they are rarely made to contribute to the social security net, for example, welfare, employment, insurance, etc. One of the distinctive features of most Third World countries is a large supply of unorganised labour. MNCs utilise this labour-power for world market oriented production (Frobel et al. 1980:296-297).

The development of world market factories began in the 1950s and 1960s. During that time the MNCs were relocating their manufacturing industries from developed to developing countries. This was a response to the new international division of labour and the pattern of trade in manufacturing. Some other important factors also account for this rush. First, Japan emerged as a major industrial power in the world economy in the 1960s and entered into the western consumer markets very rapidly and with great success. The ascendance of Japan as a major industrial power changed the global trade scenario. American and European manufacturers were falling behind in the competitive race and losing ground to Japanese firms. In such a situation, these manufacturers began to relocate their industries in developing countries to reduce production costs to compete with the Japanese (Heymer, 1975:47). Secondly, the global economy in the 1970s became far more open to internationally competitive trade due to the development of communications technology. A number of countries in the developing world during that time emerged as producers of exports and created global challenges to large manufacturers of the industrialised world (Standing, 1989:1077). A third factor was the tight domestic labour market in the developed countries during the 1960s and early 1970s. Many companies at that time were facing labour crises in those countries. High labour costs, low unemployment rates and chronic labour shortages affected labour-intensive manufacturing industries. Both labour crises and high labour costs increased their production costs. This resulted in losing their competitive advantage in international trade in textiles, garments, shoes, toys and electronic assembly. These labour-intensive industries then began to relocate their manufacturing plants to developing countries as they needed available labour force at a cheaper price (Lim, 1983:71, 1997:217). Thus, the world market factories emerged in the global scenario.

This process of relocation of particularly, labour intensive production has been a trend of the contemporary world economy. MNCs relocated their labour-intensive production establishments to developing countries that had abundant supplies of labour

with high unemployment rates and low wages (Frobel, et al., 1980:341). The implementation of structural adjustment programmes in these countries in the wake of the debt crisis of the 1970s facilitated this process. The aim of adjustment was to replace the post-war state-led development paradigm by promoting open and free competitive market economies. The structural adjustment development strategy emphasised privatisation and encouraged foreign direct investment and the liberalisation of foreign trade (Hoogvelt, 1997:168; Power, 2003:158). The proactive investment promotion measures of adjustment programmes in developing countries were favourable to MNCs. Governments created EPZs with the provision of necessary infrastructures and inexpensive electricity along with tax exemptions and duty free import facilities. Almost all the EPZs operating in developing countries provide all these facilities and various financial incentives to attract foreign capital (Frobel et al. 1980:297). Multinational corporations provide 80% of foreign direct investment in developing countries and directly employ nearly 50 million people in export processing zones throughout the world (Panos, 1999 cited in Pearson, 2000b:11). Low costs and the availability of a huge source of cheap labour in developing countries is the main attraction for them to shift production to export processing zones in these countries. The overwhelming majority of the workers they employ are women aged between sixteen and twenty-five years (Frobel et al., 1980:344).

Feminisation of labour and labour force feminisation

Global economic restructuring during the 1970s was marked by the rejection of import substitution industrialisation oriented development strategy and the growth of EPZs in developing countries, since planners articulated that an export-oriented development strategy could have favourable effects on economic growth. The focus on export-led development in Third World countries has had a profound impact on the working lives of women as the internationalisation of capital and production significantly changed the global labour process and brought a rapid growth in female employment (Nisonoff, 1997:178). EPZs have created millions of jobs globally and a major proportion, around three quarters of all workers, in export manufacturing sectors in developing countries are women (Standing, 1989:1080). MNCs play the key role in this job creation with their transfer of labour-intensive production processes to developing areas, where workers are cheap. Frobel et al. (1980:341) argues that the

existence of a large unemployed labour force and acute poverty in Third World countries force the unemployed to work at any wage. Wages are kept down through competition as a permanent pool of labour exists in the market and is desperately seeking work (Wright, 2000:233). Governments of these countries, moreover, welcome the arrival of MNCs in the hope of creating employment opportunity for huge numbers of unemployed people (Chant, 1989:171). Multinational corporations or their subsidiaries mainly produce such consumer goods as textiles, garments, sportswear, toys, and electronics and provide such services as data entry, and call centres. Some factories producing final consumer goods only assemble different parts, while some factories apply modern production technology, which combines both automated and labour-intensive production processes. Accordingly, the structure of production in EPZs is mainly characterised by a product and process technology requiring mostly unskilled or semi-skilled labour (Frobel et al., 1980:328; Elson & Pearson, 1981b:20; 1997:191), where a large share of the operating budget involves labour-costs. MNCs transfer unskilled or semi-skilled labour intensive jobs to EPZs to take advantage of low-cost labour in order to reduce production costs and improve their competitive position in the world market. In order to reduce costs, they have made these jobs flexible in nature, which has reduced workers' job rights. Due to the flexible nature of jobs, it is easier for employers to dismiss employees or reduce the size of the labour force (Standing, 1989:1078). Employers prefer and employ women on a large scale in these low paid flexible jobs, in view of the fact that they are perceived to be cheaper to employ (Beneria, 2000:xii).

Multinational export-oriented enterprises extensively employ women in their factories and women's participation in wage employment increased in the 1980s and 1990s relative to men. The global labour force has become more female and an ILO report shows that in 2003 1.1 billion of the world's 2.8 billion workers, or 40% were women which is 200 million higher than that of 1993 (International Labour Organisation, 2004b). Razavi (2003:8) argues that a greater demand for women workers in garments, footwear and electronic products has caused the increase in women's labour force participation. The rationale for employing women on a large scale in these labour intensive export sectors is mainly economic. The sexual division of labour confines women to household based activities, which are unpaid and socially undervalued. The unpaid nature of their housework lowers the value of their labour

power. Moreover, their confinement in household activities limits their employment opportunity, making their status inferior or secondary to men's in the capitalist waged labour market and MNCs take advantage of their inferior status. Women in developing countries are perceived to be a potential industrial reserve army who can be hired in a boom production period and fired when a crisis sets in. They are universally defined as 'housewives' and their universal identity as housewives gives employers the opportunity to cheapen their labour (Mackintosh, 1981:7; Thomsen, 1981:52; Mies, 1986:116).

Female employment in labour-intensive operations like garment production is more profitable as the unit costs of production is lower with female workers, since they can be paid less because of their inferior status in the labour market. Further, women are considered to have nimble fingers. Nonetheless, needlework requires training, which they receive mostly at an early age from other females, as it is classified as female work done at domestic level. Training in needlework is socially invisible and due to social invisibility it lacks social recognition. Hence, needlework is identified as unskilled or semi-skilled although industrial sewing closely resembles domestic sewing and teaching girls industrial garment making costs employers less. The tasks performed in export-led industries are tedious, repetitious and monotonous ones to which women are considered 'naturally' more suited, since the tasks they do at the household level are of the same nature. Explicit biological essentialism is brought into play in discourses that perpetuate notions that women are perceived as naturally more docile and willing to accept tough work disciplines. They are considered to be more obedient and supposedly willing to accept authority, moreover, less likely to become involved in labour conflicts (Elson & Pearson, 1981b:22-24, 1997:192-193; Chant, 1989:172). Therefore, the labour force of export-led industries is predominantly female as the jobs to be done here are 'women's work'. Women's increased participation in the labour force is captured by the phrase 'feminisation of labour force' which also denotes the deteriorating conditions of labour market (Razavi, 2003:12). Export-oriented development strategies, however, stimulated these new economic realities in developing countries, where the dominant feature is integration of women into development processes on a large scale. Growth in international trade has been favourable to women's integration into paid employment, since it increasingly absorbed women into the manufacturing sectors of developing countries (Joekes, 1995:ii). This has brought about profound changes in the labour

market around the world. Labour force has been feminised, whilst labour market conditions for both men and women have deteriorated and become precarious (Standing, 1989:1079; Razavi, 2003:13). However, in Bangladesh, women's integration into development through participation in waged employment began in 1982 when the government formulated the New Industrial Policy (NIP), which aimed at export-oriented industrialisation. Prior to this time, Bangladeshi women had little visibility in the public sphere with regard to employment in the formal sector of the economy in particular, because of social constraints due to the persistent influence of patriarchy and *purdah*, which limited employment opportunities for them (Mahmud, 1997:236). The following section gives a brief overview about the position and condition of women in Bangladeshi society.

Women in Bangladesh: relations of gender and power

Bangladesh is predominantly a Muslim country belonging to what has been defined as 'classic patriarchy' (Kandiyoti, 1988) although it is naive to articulate that all Bangladeshi women experience patriarchal relations exactly the same way but rather their lived experiences relate to their class, location, education etc. However, traditionally society considers that women must be associated with men and as such, their life is centred on father, husband and son. The honour of the family is believed to lie in purity in female sexuality and men are entrusted with the role of protectors. The institution of *purdah* is an arrangement to enforce female virtue- premarital chastity and post-marital fidelity. *Purdah* concurrently limits women's interaction with men beyond the immediate family and creates a gendered segregation of spheres. It confines women to the private sphere, restricting their visibility in the public (male) sphere and affects women's personal autonomy. *Purdah* also prescribes appropriate behaviour for women enjoining them to be modest, submissive and speak in a low voice so that their words do not reach male ears outside the household. In addition, *purdah* and patriarchy govern women's economic mobility. Therefore, women's scope of participation in waged work is limited and they remain dependent on men for their economic needs. Patriarchy describes a distribution of power and resources within the family along gender lines and men maintain power and control resources, which make women subordinate to men (Cain, Khanam & Nahar, 1979; Kabeer, 1988).

The separation of spheres introduces a sexual division of labour in society. Since women are confined in the private sphere, they perform all reproductive tasks at household level, while men participate in productive activities beyond the homestead. Women also participate in productive tasks that take place within the home compound but their participation in waged employment has been discouraged, since it is perceived to be a threat to family or more specifically male honour. Men cultivate in the field and women process crops at household level. Yet, men mediate all market transactions, since the market is a male place and as such, they have access to cash resources, which women lack. Men purchase all household needs, although women set the requirements and maintain the household. Women also engage in some purchases in their day-to-day household management, despite the fact that they often do not possess any cash. They make transactions with rice and do a little shopping from petty traders at village level (White, 1992).

Marriage is an important social institution in Bangladesh as elsewhere in the world. Association between adult women and men is not permissible in Bangladeshi society without marriage, as elsewhere in the Muslim world. Women depend on their male household members for arranging their weddings along with finding suitable spouses. A girl leaves her natal family because of marriage and goes to her husband's household, where she is subordinate to her mother-in-law as well as senior sisters-in-law. Her status in the family improves with the birth of children, especially sons, since descent in Bangladesh is organised along patrilineal lines. Her status in the family improves further when her sons marry. She attains the ability to gain the position of authority - open to most women - mother-in-law (Cain, Khanam & Nahar, 1979; Kabear, 1988; Feldman, 1992; White, 1992).

Gender & development policy initiatives in Bangladesh

Analysing the position of women in Bangladeshi society Cain, Khanam & Nahar (1979: 434) concluded that the systematic nature of patriarchy suggested that solutions to the problem of women's vulnerability and lack of income earning opportunity would not be easily reached. However, in a very short span of time, since they made their comments about Bangladeshi women, the situation started changing. The idealised picture of women in Bangladesh as cherished and protected daughters/wives/mothers

has been challenged although not to a great extent, because of a few policy initiatives of the government of Bangladesh. Women's lack of opportunities in the waged labour market and global calls for their integration into development processes inspired the government to adopt favourable policy interventions in line with the dominant development paradigm.

The integration of women into development processes has both socio-economic and political considerations. The Constitution of Bangladesh upholds the necessity of equal opportunities between women and men. Nonetheless, they are traditionally in a subservient position in the country and as such the constitution of Bangladesh declares that '*[s]teps shall be taken to ensure participation of women in all aspects of national life*' (Constitution of Bangladesh, 2004) and this is one of the fundamental principles of the State policy. The inclusion of the above principle illustrates that women in Bangladesh are not at an equal position to men in society, they do not have equal participation in all spheres of national life and therefore some efforts are needed at national level to tackle this disparity. The Constitution upholds the need for state intervention and sanctions positive measures for women in particular. Traditional socio-cultural practice legitimated the position of Bangladeshi women outside the labour market and discouraged their participation in public affairs. Nevertheless, the situation is now changing slowly due to some positive interventions that the government has adopted over the last three decades. Women have been more politically active in the country. A quota has ensured women's presence in the local government and National Parliament. Women render significant contributions during election campaigns by taking part in organising public meetings, processions, and rallies. The trend of exercising voting rights in women has also increased. During the general elections of 1991, 1996 and 2002 and local level elections in 1993, 1997 and 2002, the level of enthusiasm among women to exercise their voting rights was very encouraging. The government of Bangladesh also encourage women to participate in elections. There are seats reserved for them in both local government and the National Parliament. In 1997 the government of Bangladesh had enacted a law for direct elections to reserve seats for women in local government. In the early 2004 the government increased the number of seats in the National Parliament reserved for women from 30 to 45 (Constitution of Bangladesh, 2004). Besides, according to Article 65 (3), Bangladeshi women can contest any of the general seats at both local and national elections.

Bangladesh is a country where Muslims constitute around 85% of the total population and Hindus are the other significant religious group with around 8%. The Bangladeshis developed a culture which has absorbed Muslim religious beliefs and is tempered strongly by some other non-Islamic elements. Muslim values in the subcontinent and especially in Bangladesh, have been considerably influenced by Hindu-Buddhist religious practices and medieval Sufism, which made Islamic culture in Bangladesh softer and more flexible than it is in Pakistan or Middle East (Feldman, 1992:119; Wright, 2000:232). Women's access to the labour market is not regarded as an entirely appropriate function for women in Bangladesh, irrespective of their religious identity. Nevertheless, Bangladeshi women have been visible in the labour process since the post-independence period. Poor and landless women participated in a government-supported Food for Work programme, educated young women found employment opportunities in the rural health and family planning sector and expanded educational sector but they maintained *purdah* as best they could (Feldman, 1992:120). Since the 1980s employment opportunities have been stronger for them than for men due to the growth of the export garment industry in the country. In addition to merit the government policy reserves a 10% quota for women in gazetted posts, 15% for non-gazetted posts while 60% posts of primary school teachers for women (Khan, 2008:9). Besides, programmes extending micro-credit to large numbers of rural women also have contributed to greater access for them to economic resources (Pearson, 2000:396). Women's participation in both local and national level elections, their employment in both formal and informal sector establishments, development of their economic power etc. reflect broader movements in society in terms of women's emancipation. During the 1990s the government took necessary policy initiatives, which introduced women's recruitment in the defence services. Although the government policy sanctioned 10% reserved quota for women, they were barred from defence services. However, this bar was lifted in the early 1990s and recruitment of females in the Army Cadet Core is considered to be a big breakthrough in gender equity in Bangladesh (Hossain et al. 2002:4). All these were the direct outcomes of several noteworthy efforts undertaken by the Government to integrate women's issues into the broader policy and planning framework. These include a) formulation of the Fifth Five-year Plan (1997-2002) adopting the mainstreaming of a 'women's development' approach; b) declaration of the National Policy for the Advancement of Women; and c) adoption of the National Action Plan (NAP) for the advancement of women.

Bangladesh is one of the few countries to have a separate Ministry of Women's Affairs. In 1978 the government established the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs (MWCA), which works as the focal ministry for the advancement of women in the country. In relation to women's issues, it has two implementing agencies: the Directorate of Women's Affairs (DWA) and *Jatiya Mahila Sangstha* (National Women's Organisation). As part of the national women's machinery, MWCA is mandated to act as the central motivating force on issues of women's equality and development and to promote a broader and more consistent response by all government agencies to the needs and priorities of women. It formulated the NAP and National Policy for the Advancement of Women. The NAP emphasises the strategy of mainstreaming women's development in all government policies and programmes by sectoral ministries and agencies. As the national machinery, MWCA is responsible for facilitating the mainstreaming of a gender equality perspective in all policy areas. The Government in 1997 approved the NAP, which was chalked out with the following broad goals:

- a) to make women's development an integral part of the national development programme;
- b) to establish women as equal partners in development with equal roles in policy and decision-making in the family, community and nation at large;
- c) to remove legal, economic, political or cultural barriers that prevent the exercise of equal rights by undertaking policy reforms and strong affirmative actions;
- d) to raise/create public awareness about women's differential needs, interests and priorities and increase commitment to bring about improvements in women's position and condition.

The National Action Plan includes the elimination of gender disparity, expansion of non-formal education and the undertaking of social mobilisation programmes. In relation to women's employment, the Plan stresses the need to improve women's working conditions. This includes increasing the scope of maternity leave, more crèches and day care centres, adequate numbers of separate toilet facilities, better transport facilities, especially for night work and accommodation facilities for out of station work placements. The NAP also proposes the development of professionally elaborated

gender sensitive codes of conduct/ethics/self regulatory mechanisms for medical and media professionals, with the goal of promoting greater respect for women and their rights, monitoring action and taking internal disciplinary actions against violations of the agreed codes of conduct.

The government of Bangladesh declared the National Policy for the Advancement of Women in the country on International Women's Day on 8 March 1997. The objectives of the National Policy are comprehensive in scope and rest on the basic commitment to develop women as a human resource, establish women's human rights, eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and girls and recognise women's contribution in the social and economic spheres. Specific to employment, the plan includes the following objectives for ending women's economic inequality:

- a) to ensure equal rights of women on land, capital and technology as well as on all economic resources;
- b) to reduce the gap between women and men regarding availability of necessary information, skills and knowledge to benefit from economic opportunities;
- c) visualisation and recognition of the economic activities of women;
- d) ensuring equal participation of women and men in professional occupations.

Increasing women's employment opportunity is one of the commitments of the government of Bangladesh. National Development Plans since 1985 have focused on expanding opportunities for specialised training, skill development and entrepreneurship development programmes for women and increasing opportunities for income generation, access to institutional credit and institutional capacity-building for the promotion of women's participation in bottom-up planning. Promoting gender equality, and "realising the constitutional goal of equality between all citizens - women and men", was a major aim of the Fifth Five-year Development Plan (1997-2002). The Macro Chapter on Women's Development in the Fifth Five-year Plan endorsed mainstreaming as the strategy for women's development. The plan recognised the roles of all sectors in mainstreaming women's development and emphasised the policy and advocacy roles of MWCA. The Macro and Micro Chapters of the Plan on Women's

Development stressed the importance of implementing the National Policy and the NAP for the Advancement of Women and accordingly focussed on mainstreaming gender in all levels of the government's development work. Ministries were made responsible for implementing gender concerns within their respective sectors. With regard to women's development, the following were the broad goals and objectives as was mentioned in the Micro Chapter of the Fifth Five-year Plan:

- a) undertaking necessary steps to implement the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW);
- b) ensuring women's legal rights in property, inheritance and related laws;
- c) increasing women's participation in decision making at both the national and local level;
- d) promoting economic self-reliance of women through expansion of vocational skills training, especially in non-traditional areas, managerial training and credit facilities;
- e) developing women's entrepreneurship and create employment for women through skills training in various trades and extensive micro-credit;
- f) promoting economic self-reliance for women including access to economic resources such as land, capital and technology;
- g) mainstreaming women's concerns in agriculture and rural development, industry and commerce and also in the informal sector;
- h) ensuring the visibility and recognition of women's work and to reduce the gender gap in access to information, skill and knowledge about economic opportunities; and,
- i) raising the rate of female participation in the active labour force (employed) to bring it at par with men; and
- j) changing negative cultural values against women.

With regard to the monitoring of the implementation of various policies, programmes and laws undertaken by the government, the National Council for Women's Development (NCWD) and the Inter-ministerial Co-ordination and Evaluation Committee provide institutional mechanisms through which individuals and various women's organisations can participate. The NCWD, established in 1995, is composed of 44 members including the Prime Minister (Chairperson) to implement and review socio-

economic development policies to reduce existing gender gaps and enhance women's status. In order to make the NCWD effective, a monitoring and evaluation committee has been set up headed by the Minister of MWCA. Its function is to monitor the implementation progress of sectoral WID plans and submit quarterly reports to the NCWD. As the highest policy making body for women's development in Bangladesh, the NCWD provides guidance to all sectors and monitors implementation of critical policy decisions relating to women's issues and development. Hossain et al. (2002:3) identified the following as the significant achievements of the above stated policy initiatives in relation to gender and development in Bangladesh:

- a. The Women and Child Repression Act, 2000 has been passed for effective handling of violence against women;
- b. A multi-sectoral project for the prevention of violence against women has been finalised and approved;
- c. The government has enacted law providing the direct election of the female members of Union Parishad (Union Council- the lowest tier of local government) to increase women's participation in politics and decision making;
- d. A well-linked organisational structure has been established from the national level down to the lower tiers of local government in order to strengthen institutional mechanism and ensure effective co-ordination in the implementation of activities for women's development;
- e. Various women organisations, NGOs, private women activists, different government organisations, United Nations agencies and other international agencies have come forward with their own programmes to address gender issues in Bangladesh;
- f. Women have been given special preference and priority by providing stipend for female education;
- g. Support services such as Hostel facilities for working women, Day Care Centres, shelter for oppressed women and legal aid cell etc have been provided
- h. GO-NGO collaboration has come into being in a new form where NGOs are playing partnership roles in WID activities of the government;

- i. Micro credit programmes have been introduced on a comprehensive scale and women are the target group.

The most significant achievement in relation to women's development in Bangladesh has been the generation of employment opportunity for them. Although the principle of gender equality is recognised in the constitution of Bangladesh, the synthesis of traditional South Asian values and Muslim practices obstructed its achievement of such a noble idea. However, traditional values could not prevent leaders, such as Ziaur Rahman who eagerly sought international financial assistance for the structuring of women's integration into development. The Ziaur Rahman government implemented export-led growth strategies, which created a female dominated labour force in Bangladesh, where women have traditionally been excluded from the labour market (Feldman 1992:115). Prior to 1971 when Bangladesh was a part of Pakistan, the private sector was regarded as the engine of development and government gave all incentives to stimulate private sector initiatives. The policy resulted in a wide expansion of private enterprises in Pakistan (Rahim, 1978:1186). Immediately after independence the new government of Bangladesh adopted a large-scale nationalisation policy and acquired 85% of private enterprises of the country abandoned by their Pakistani owners (Islam & Quddus, 1996:168). In early 1973, the government announced the first industrial investment policy dominated by the theme of socialist economy. It limited private ownership expanding public ownership of the means of production and distribution (Rahim, 1978:1182). The first government of independent Bangladesh led by the then Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman imposed various restrictions on the growth of private industry and adopted import substitution industrialisation for economic development of the country. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was killed in 1975 and the post-1975 government of Ziaur Rahman brought about fundamental changes in the development strategy of the country with the adoption of an export-oriented industrialisation policy. The new government followed market-oriented strategies which implemented trade liberalisation policy as a means to attract foreign capital and rendered various incentives to encourage foreign investors (Ahmed, 2004:36). The Industrial Policy announced in late 1975 emphasised a larger role of the private sector and recognised the importance of both domestic and foreign private capital in promoting economic development of Bangladesh (Rahim, 1978:1184-1185).

The initiation of the New Industrial Policy (NIP) in 1982 and its revision in 1986 placed increased emphasis on private sector participation in development and export-oriented industrialisation. The government restructured import and export policies and initiated trade and tariff reforms to encourage increased investment in the export sector (Government of Bangladesh, 1986:1-2). The NIP of 1982 and the revised Industrial Policy of 1986 fundamentally were concerned with the strategy of export promotion and considered women the most favoured workforce (Rock, 2001:29). The Industrial Policy 1991 stressed the need for accelerated development of export-oriented industry (Government of Bangladesh, 1991:1) while Industrial Policy 1999 declared export orientation as the dominant feature of the industrial sector of Bangladesh, where the private sector would be the driving force. The government encouraged both foreign and national firms to produce for international markets and emphasised employment generation for women (Government of Bangladesh, 1999:1-2). The government of Bangladesh has established export processing zones to attract private investors and to assist in the setting up of export-oriented industries in the country. Essential infrastructural facilities like warehouses, communication, water supply, electricity, gas etc. are available in these zones. Besides, the following facilities and incentives are provided to the industries situated in these zones (Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority, 2007):

- a. Income tax exemption for ten years and proportional income tax rebate between 30 and 100 per cent on export earnings after this period;
- b. Duty free import of raw material, machinery, construction materials and other materials used in manufacturing process;
- c. Income tax exemption subject to existing conditions on salaries of foreign executives and technicians for three years;
- d. Tax exemption on interest of foreign loans;
- e. Tax exemption on royalties, technical know-how and technical assistance fees;
- f. Tax exemption on the profits on accounts of transfer of shares by foreign companies;
- g. Reallocation of running manufacturing units from abroad to EPZ;
- h. Export linkage materials required for production of goods to be exported, will be allowed to be exported through back-to-back LC by recognised

export oriented industries which operates through bonded warehouse facilities to the interior of the country; and

- i. Offshore banking facilities.

Throughout Bangladesh there are export-oriented bonded warehouses outside the export processing zones, which are established under EPZ-like conditions beyond any enclave. Both export processing zones and export-oriented bonded warehouses in the country have generated job opportunities for around 3.5 million people and 85 per cent of the total employed in this sector is women (Boyenge, 2007:8). Export-oriented industrialisation in Bangladesh is playing an important role in increasing female employment which provides women with the opportunity to contribute to the development of the country. Their employment in the export sector links them to the global economy as well.

The political economy of Bangladesh in the period following the 1980s global economic crisis has been restructured to better adapt to the state's need to maintain international credit, to earn foreign exchange and to respond to the interests of multinational corporations in their search for cheap sources of labour. Both multinational corporations and national policy facilitate the interest of the private sector for the implementation of an export-led growth strategy. Bangladeshi investors quickly responded to support export processing industrialisation and the country experienced a rapid growth in garments and apparel manufacturing sector which restructured the labour process in Bangladesh (Feldman, 1992:113, 115). Labour costs in Bangladesh are cheap on a world scale and women's labour is cheaper than that of men. Moreover, women here often do not ask questions about pay and working conditions (Wahra & Rahman, 1995:55) which relates to naturalising discourse as discussed in chapter VI. Hence, export-oriented industries in the country became female dominated as elsewhere in the world. The 1980s and 1990s saw tremendous expansion in opportunities for women's employment in the ready-made garments industry in Bangladesh where more than 2 million women are currently working (Human Development Resource Centre, 2008).

Employment in garment factories enabled large numbers of Bangladeshi women to participate in income generating activities in the formal sector. Microcredit

programmes are also being used to target especially women to involve them in income generating activities (Khandker, Samad & Khan, 1998:97). Credit provision for women is seen as a critical input for increasing women's employment in small-scale enterprises. In most cases the loans are used for homestead based self-employment activities such as paddy processing, poultry and livestock, small trade etc. The inclusion of women in rural credit and income generating programmes was a response to increasing pressure from promoters of gender-sensitive development policy in Bangladesh's domestic development community and its foreign aid donors (Goetz & Sen Gupta, 1996:46). Microcredit or extension of small amounts of collateral free institutional loans to individuals as members of groups for their self-employment and income generation is a Grameen Bank innovation while many other government (GO) and non-government organisations (NGOs) for instance, Bangladesh Rural Development Board (GO) and Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (NGO) have been remarkably successful in providing financial services to poor rural women on a large scale. Although microcredit was originally extended to poor rural women in order to improve their income earning power, there has always been a general presumption that it will also empower them by strengthening their economic roles and increasing their ability to contribute to their families' support (Osmani, 2007:696). It is argued that borrowing from a microcredit programme such as Grameen Bank increases women's contribution to household income, their non-land assets and labour supply to income earning activities.

Nonetheless, research on the empowerment effect of microcredit programmes has not always supported these presumptions. Pit & Khandker (1996), Hashemi, Schuler & Riley (1996), Kabeer (2001) claim to have found supporting evidence for the empowering effect. Participation in microcredit programmes strengthens women's ability to control their assets and income as well as helping them to establish an identity outside of the family and giving them experience and self-confidence in the public sphere (Hashemi, Schuler & Riley, 1996:650). On the other hand Goetz & Sen Gupta (1996) and Rahman (1999) make contrary claims. They argue that women exercise little or no control over their loans and male relatives predominantly invest a significant portion of their borrowed resources directly even though women borrowers bear the liability for repayment (Goetz & Sen Gupta, 1996:61; Rahman, 1999:69). Osmani (2007:714-715) presents conflicting evidence and argue that microcredit helps strengthen women's bargaining power although in most cases the activities financed by

credit brought to the household by women are performed by men since cultural inhibitions prevent women from undertaking such activities as fishing, petty trading, vending etc. while even where women are directly involved in credit financed activities like poultry raising, rice husking etc., they often have to depend on their male relatives for marketing their products. Osmani argues that access to credit cannot improve women's bargaining power to a great extent since patriarchal societal norms continue to impose socio-cultural constraints on women's autonomy. However, microcredit programmes are viewed as a way to enhance income and employment opportunity for women who can be self-employed in a variety of home-stead based informal activities.

The implications of waged employment for women

Whilst participation in microcredit programmes has given women the opportunity of becoming self-employed in microcredit financed small enterprises, export-oriented industrialisation approaches to development have provided them with the opportunity of employment in the manufacturing sector. Women's employment in the formal labour market is the manifestation of their integration into development processes. Their participation in waged labour has significantly increased in developing countries over the last couple of decades due to economic globalisation, where world market factories are playing the dominant role. Nevertheless, there is no single meaning of economic globalisation for women's work. There is a variety of opinion about the extent to which paid employment may be regarded as either exploitative or emancipating. As I outline below, it results in an ongoing debate about the implications of employment opportunities for women.

Employment opportunities provide women with economic resources and it is argued that there is a linkage between paid employment and power (Bhachu, 1988; Pahl, 1989). Earning a steady income empowers women and their role in family and community decisions is enhanced as a consequence of having paid work. Referring to other research, Meyer (2006) argues that paid work decreases women's financial dependence on men and increases their sense of self-worth as well as class consciousness, which leads to more equitable patterns of resource sharing and decision making. However, Elson and Pearson (1981a, 1981b and 1997) argue that there is considerable empirical evidence that their wages do not confer greater status or decision

making power on women even though they may be the chief source of family income. Frobel et al. (1980) argue that women's employment in export-oriented industries is based on the super-exploitation of the labour force. They maintain that working conditions in these factories are very poor, while jobs are very low paid. The wages workers receive in waged employment are often insufficient to cover the reproduction costs of the work force. Drawing on her own research in Java, Indonesia, Wolf (1990a) also articulates the super-exploitation hypothesis and argues that although factory work provides women with cash resources, these are very inadequate to meet the subsistence needs of one person and workers partly rely on their parents for their economic wellbeing. Studying the physical conditions and work environment in Mexico's Maquiladora industry, Butler & Teagarden (1993) report that the physical conditions of factories are very poor. They are usually inadequately ventilated and badly lit. Safety procedures are also inadequate. Factory working hours are very long, production targets are very high and workers have few rest periods inside factories. They also tend to suffer from various health problems such as gastrointestinal problem, respiratory problem etc. because of their factory job.

Lim (1983, 1997) on the other hand, argues that the availability of jobs for virtually any wage and regardless of the working conditions allows women to leave the confines of the home. They gain the opportunity to avoid early marriage and early child bearing. Employment increases their incomes and consumption levels. Their mobility is improved and individual choice is expanded. Moreover, they can exercise personal independence. Hence, waged employment is preferable for many women to the alternatives of staying at home, early marriage and child bearing, domestic service, or unemployment. Employment provides them with at least a partial liberation from the confines and dictates of traditional patriarchal social relations and they can exercise their personal independence (Lim, 1983:83, 1997:225). Bandarage (1984:503), however, claims that this independence has a negative impact. Employment in export manufacturing is unstable in nature and workers gain no marketable skills. Pregnancy, failure in meeting time-bound productivity, ill health due to job etc. are common grounds for dismissal. When women lose their job it is not unusual that their families refuse to accept them and men refuse to marry them because of their independence. This situation forces at least some of them into prostitution. Elson and Pearson (1981a, 1981b and 1997) also argue that jobs in world market factories are unstable in nature

and management prefers young women. As such, when it is necessary to retrench the labour force, women exceeding the age of twenty are first dismissed. They also contend that losing a job may put women into prostitution. Furthermore, they assert, factory work has the tendency to intensify the existing forms of gender subordination, to decompose existing forms of gender subordination and to recompose new forms of gender subordination. Wolf (1990a) demonstrates that Taiwanese women experience the intensification of gender subordination and their income is appropriated by their parents for the benefit of their brothers until they marry. Taiwanese daughters are forced to quit school and take jobs to support their parents or subsidise the educational expenses of their brothers. Greenhalgh (1985) also reports similar findings from her research in the Chinese context. Work in world market factories is organised through a formal hierarchy and women are positioned at the bottom. They are controlled by different levels of usually male bosses who exercise despotic labour mechanism on the factory floors. Thus, women experience new forms of gender subordination beyond their families (Ong, 1991), what Elson and Pearson term the recomposition of patriarchal control on women.

Javanese women, however, enjoy greater independence from patriarchal control in the family because of their employment and they control their own income (Wolf, 1990b). Researching Bangladeshi women, Kabeer (1997) argues that although women have little control over their earnings, factory work has positively impacted them. They are perceived as earning members of the household, which has shifted the balance of power within the family. Kibria (1995) also reports the positive impact of employment on Bangladeshi women and argues that earning an income has enhanced their sense of self-esteem and worth in the household. Similarly, Krugman (1997), Sargent and Matthews (1997) and Feenstra and Hanson (1997) studied the impact of Maquiladora employment on women in terms of economic factors, wages and skill and argue that these jobs are emancipating for women. However, the findings of Fernandez-Kelly with regard to the implications of Maquiladora employment for women sharply contrast to these reports. She (1983, cited in Tiano, 1986) maintains that Maquiladora employment is not a source of financial security, upward mobility or job stability because wages are low, job advancement is limited and employment is insecure. Women enter into factories not as autonomous individuals but as members of households, which are depending on their income. Since they surrender their wages to their family elders, their

work often fails to increase their financial independence. Employment also does not increase their domestic power, since they typically submit to male authority. Safa (1981) also presents a similar picture from her analysis of women's employment in world market factories. She claims that although these factories serve to integrate women into the development process by providing them with large numbers of new industrial jobs, they enhance the possibilities of their exploitation.

Nash and Fernandez-Kelly (1983) bring together articles that explore the effects of employment for women and men in Third World countries. Most of the authors of this anthology argue that employment has intensified women's exploitation, whilst Lim argues that employment in world market factories contributes to women's emancipation. Zohir and Paul-Majumder (1996), from a Bangladesh perspective, also report that the conditions of female garment workers are not precarious as often portrayed, although another research report by Paul-Majumder and Begum (1997) articulates that women have very little scope of upward mobility in factory jobs. From her research on women working in export-oriented garment factories, Zohir (2007) reports that employment has enabled women to resist poverty, empowered them, increased their mobility and expanded their individual choice. Similar findings are also evident from the report of Paul-Majumder and Begum (2006), whilst Dannecker (2002) reports that the effect of factory work on the lives of Bangladeshi women can be a threat as well as an opportunity for women. Tiano (1994:46-47) holds that employment in the export sector offers steady wages at or above the government mandated minimum. Furthermore, the working conditions in these companies tend to be better than those in other jobs like farm or construction work available to women and they benefit from their employment to some extent. Their earning capacity brings them the ability to challenge existing traditional social relations. Stoddard (1987, cited in Tiano, 1994:45) argues that the modern working environment in export-oriented industries transform the consciousness of women. Participation in waged employment gives them material resources and self-respect and increases their ability to challenge traditional patriarchal social relations.

Thus, research findings on the implications of waged employment for women present a complex and seemingly contradictory picture. Some analysts argue that employment in world market factories can, to some extent, emancipate women from their subordination. They can escape patriarchal control in the family and avoid early

marriage, childbearing and child rearing. Employment gives them the feeling of greater economic independence and increases their self-esteem. They can participate in family decision making processes. Others maintain that women's employment in world market factories has intensified their exploitation. They work long hours but receive low wages and since they have no control over their earnings, income does not enhance their power within the family. Factory work intensifies their subordination in the household and they experience new forms of patriarchal domination on the factory floors. These jobs are unstable in nature and they do not learn new marketable skill. Therefore, dismissal from their job may lead some women into extremely difficult circumstances, and reportedly, in some cases even into prostitution for survival.

Conclusion

The integration of global systems of production has been one of the most dominant features of the postcolonial world. The process of economic globalisation has developed a new form of relationship of dependence between the developed and developing countries. During the first two development decades developing countries relied on developed nations for aid in their quest for development. Financial assistance was transferred from government to government and governments in developing countries piloted development initiatives. However, during the 1970s policy makers termed government led interventions inefficient, since developing countries could not achieve expected growth. Planners urged governments to rely on market forces and to encourage private investors to set up manufacturing units. Accordingly, governments in these countries adopted structural adjustment programmes, which aimed at encouraging privatisation and trade liberalisation. They implemented export-oriented industrialisation policies, which encouraged production of goods for the global market with a view to utilising the labour force. The shift in policy paradigm was linked with establishing export processing zones and governments in Asia, Africa and Latin American countries set up such zones, where trade is unrestricted and free of all duties (Potter, et al., 1999:83). Multinational corporations took the opportunity of such policy changes to relocate their labour intensive manufacturing units to developing countries. They moved to Third World countries in search of cheap labour and appointed largely women in their industries since women's labour is perceived to be cheap in comparison to men's and also for a range of gender based perceptions discussed in chapter VI. Thus,

women gained large scale employment opportunities in the waged labour market with the ascendance of world market factories in developing countries like Bangladesh. Bangladeshi women traditionally had few employment opportunities in the waged labour market because of social norms and values. The government, however, took various policy measures to remove obstructions and adopted favourable steps to create employment opportunities for women. Appropriate policy initiatives, especially the NIP of 1982 and the revised industrial policy of 1996, encouraged women to participate in development activities of the country.

Women's employment in the formal sector has been a key means of their integration into development through a modernisation paradigm. As discussed in this chapter, their integration through employment in waged labour has given rise to two contesting lines of argument with regard to the implications of participation in factory work for them. One line of argumentation articulates that employment is more emancipating for women from their subordinate position in society. Proponents of this line of thinking speculate that waged employment provides women with economic opportunities and leads to greater liberty from patriarchal domination. Their wages enable them to enjoy more autonomy and personal independence and to delay marriage and child bearing. They also enjoy a greater role in family decision making.

The other line of thinking argues that employment in export-oriented factories intensifies and reinforces women's subordination in society. They often experience new forms of patriarchal control in their work places beyond the family. Further, they hardly enjoy any control over their wages and male control of wages leads to a situation, where women lose power in family decision making, their economic dependence is increased and subordination becomes more entrenched (Seccombe, 1980, cited in Chant, 1989:152). Women work long hours for low wages and the working conditions inside factories are very poor. Despite their long work on the factory floors they receive no reduction in their reproductive responsibilities in the household and bear a dual burden of labour (Anker & Hein, 1986 cited in op cit.).

Thus, debate about the implications of paid employment for women working in export-oriented industries persists. Some researchers argue that employment is more emancipating for women, while others maintain that it is more exploitive. However, it is

obvious that there is a good deal of truth in both propositions. Participation in paid employment may be both exploitive and emancipating. In this research I examine this debate in the context of Bangladesh and present my findings in subsequent chapters in light with empirical data that I collected from the field.

Chapter IV: Interaction and interpretation: the research process

Introduction

Export-oriented garment factories have been the major fields of employment for Bangladeshi women in the formal sector of the economy. The research question that guided this study was whether their employment in these factories was exploitative or emancipating. The purpose of the study was to gain an insight into the experiences and feelings women had about their job and obtain views of others regarding women's employment in garment factories. In order to understand this setting, my primary task was to identify a site, a number of participants, a period of study and appropriate data collection strategy (Janesick, 2000:384). This chapter turns to these issues surrounding the research approaches in which I engaged. I employed both qualitative and quantitative methods within both broader social science and feminist methodological frameworks. The adoption of qualitative methods facilitated the exploration and analysis of women's own experiences, understandings and commonalities of their lives (Clisby et al. 2007:8), while quantitative methods enabled me to obtain the generalised feelings and attitudes of a large number of participants around my research questions. For better understanding, I adopted an interpretive approach, which aims to study social reality in natural settings and attempts to make sense of phenomena from the perspectives of research participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000:3). As a researcher, I took the role of a 'complete participant' (Bulmer, 1982a:251) in factory production. For logistical reasons I had to take this role covertly, at least in the first instance, which indeed departs from feminist standpoints.

I am not claiming that this is a feminist research study per se but I agree with feminist methodologies and principles and as such wanted to draw on these as far as possible throughout my research. In this chapter I discuss feminist research methodology and explore issues of power and ethical aspects of research as raised by feminist researchers. Here I explain my own reflections on the research approaches I adopted and detail the various methods I employed in collecting and analysing empirical materials.

Feminist Research Methodology

Traditional approaches to social research silenced women's voices by positioning them as objects (Sprague, 2005:18). As women were the primary subjects of my research in my effort to analyse the implications of employment in garment factories for them it was thus important to me that I attempt to follow the line developed by feminist researchers, insisting on women's inclusion as subjects of investigation. They raised questions about power and ethical issues in research. They argued for subjective involvement of the researcher in the research process and advocated an approach to methodology which is respectful to respondents (Letherby, 2003:5). Methodology in social research entails the relationship between the process and the product of research and specifies how social investigation should be approached (Harding, 1987:3; Guba & Lincoln, 1994:108, 2004:22; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006:21). Each methodology links a particular epistemology, which refers to assumptions about the knower, the known and the process of knowing (Sprague, 2005:31). Much traditional Social Science research highlighted objectivity and identified subjectivity as an obstacle to knowledge. The practices of research, from a positivist perspective, are designed to erase any impact of subjectivity of the researcher on collection and interpretation of data, in order to produce value-free knowledge (Sprague & Zimmerman, 2004:39; Sprague, 2005:32). Feminist researchers, in contrast, see researchers' subjective experience as an important aspect of research and emphasise the emotional aspect of social life grounded in daily experiences. They reject the notion of 'value-free scientific inquiry' and insist that researchers' emotional involvement cannot be detached; rather, it should be acknowledged in producing knowledge (Letherby, 2003:68). Thus, feminist epistemology debunks the myth of 'value-free' knowledge production and I conducted my research along this line. I listened to women about the practicalities of their lives around my research questions. They described their lived experiences, which I analysed and subsequently presented, where my own perceptions have also been reflected.

Feminist research perspectives developed against the backdrop of a widespread androcentric bias in the research process (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002:39; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006:25). Traditional research identified only men as having the agency to produce knowledge. However, research done on men cannot represent universal human experience, cannot be assumed to represent women's lives, interests and

perspectives. The aim of social research is to capture and accurately explain social structures and contexts. It requires taking the experiences of all individuals into consideration. Knowledge is contextual and every individual experiences their social world differently. As such, accurate explanations of social realities necessitate understanding of personal experiences and feminist researchers identify these as valuable assets in knowledge production (Reinharz, 1992:258; Gilbert, 1994:90). They argue that research has to have a consciousness-raising component, which would impact positively on research participants and as social researchers this is our responsibility. Hence, much feminist research is connected to social change and social policy questions, and often offers explicit policy recommendations (Reinharz, 1992:251; Fonow & Cook, 2005:2212). Thus, feminist methodology is based on distinct epistemology, which differs from traditional approaches to research. It begins with the experiences of women, recognises the researcher as a part of the research process and acknowledges that the beliefs of the researcher shape the research process (Harding, 1987:9).

Feminist research is research on and with women and places them at centre stage. It involves direct contact with women and information is gathered directly from them (Kelly, Burton & Regan, 1994:32). It is defined as a focus on women, carried out by women for other women (Stanley & Wise, 1990:21; Webb, 1993:422). These definitions limit the accessibility of men into feminist research and thus, make my position as a researcher vulnerable because of my gender identity. As such, in the following section, I justify my location as a researcher and argue in line with Brayton (1997:8) that men can engage with feminist research methodologies. I would argue that interaction between men and women in research processes would produce important knowledge and the exclusion of men from feminist research would reinforce traditional gender stereotypes.

Can men research women?

Feminist research generates its problematic from the perspective of women's experiences, which forms the key focus of research. Therefore, many women and men categorically reject the possibility of men's claim to a feminist standpoint on the grounds that they do not experience the world as women do (Schacht & Ewing, 1997:167). Kelly, Burton & Regan (1994:33) argue that women experience the world as

members of a subordinate group and feminist research focuses on creating knowledge about the experience of these subordinate groups of society. Since men do not have any experiential knowledge of being women, they lack the ability to fully understand the subordination of women in society. Hence, women are better equipped to make a comprehensive study of subordinated groups (Mies, 1983:127). In contrast, Hawkesworth (1989:544) notes, it cannot be asserted that women only will produce an accurate depiction of the experience they gain as members of subordinated groups. It is true that men and women experience reality differently but it does not mean that they have intrinsically different ways of knowing. Further, an ability to accurately understand and explain social worlds is not a sex-linked trait (Peas, 2000, cited in Fawcett & Hearn, 2004:211). Experience is indeed very important in explaining social realities. However, in the process of creating knowledge more importance should be given to how research is carried out, how ethical issues are attended to and how participants are involved in the research process rather than preoccupations with forms of experience. Moreover, theorising from experiences and making links with the experience of others carries most weight and has utmost impact (Fawcett & Hearn 2004:212). All perspectives and knowledge are partial and situated and as such, full understanding of any subject requires the recognition of multiple realities. Therefore, I would argue that feminist research done by men would rather strengthen the field. Schacht and Ewing (1997:168) maintain that suggesting men cannot be or should not be feminist *'is not only an essentialist argument but such a position falls into a trap set by patriarchy itself'*, which reminds us that we live in a dichotomous world.

Harding (1987:8-9) defines feminist research as being done for women and argues that men can do feminist research if they can value women's experiences of social reality in producing knowledge. The argument here is that men must place themselves within the frame of the picture that they attempt to paint with women's experiences. In doing feminist research, men have to place themselves in a frame with women and try to create an environment in which women feel able to speak with them more freely. In the initial stages of this research, I perceived that creating such an environment with women in the context in which I was working was problematic and I obtained very limited access to data during that time. I detail this aspect in the research process section of this chapter. However, Harding (2004a:135) rejects the notion that women are the only generators of feminist knowledge and argues that men must contribute here from their

particular social situation. They have to listen to women effectively to take full account of their experiences and have to gain a feminist world view. Schacht & Ewing (1997:169) articulate that in gaining feminist consciousness men must learn about women's oppression, question their role in it, reject traditional notions of masculinity that are oppressive and put women's needs at least equal to their own. They have to deal with the challenges posed by research, which engages two separate and distinct entities, 'the researcher' and 'the researched', or 'the self' and 'the other' in the process (Fawcett & Hearn, 2004:203). Construction of these separate entities creates a hierarchical relation between them, which is an obstacle to research. They (op. cit.:213) argue that it is almost impossible to overcome this situation. Nonetheless, we can minimise this problem and feminist standpoint theory can help us a lot in this perspective.

The basic tenet of standpoint theory is that understanding women's subjugated position provides the possibility of producing more complete and less distorted knowledge (Maynard, 1994:19). To achieve a feminist standpoint, one must engage in the struggle necessary to see nature and social life from the point of view of women's social experience (Harding, 1987:185). Standpoint theory was presented as a way of empowering oppressed groups, of valuing their experiences, and of pointing toward a way to develop an oppositional consciousness (Collins, 2004:108). Hekman (2004:227) argues that feminist standpoint theory rests on two principles, namely the recognition that all knowledge is located and situated and the privileging of women's knowledge in order to replace knowledge produced by men. However, this latter point is not appropriate, as feminist standpoint theory does not mean that one form of knowledge would be replaced by another; rather, it claims that knowledge produced by men should not be considered absolute. Standpoint theory claims that knowledge is socially situated and argues that different kinds of knowledge are produced at different locations. Knowledge is based on experiences, and different experiences create different perceptions (Harding, 2004b:7). I listened to women talk about their experiences and perceptions of their employment in garment factories. As part of my research strategy I participated with women in factory production. The findings of this research are based on the experiences and perceptions women had about their employment in export-oriented garment factories of Bangladesh. I valued my own experiences, which I gained as their co-worker on the factory floor, whilst acknowledging unequal power relations that this involved, as an important part of the empirical evidence of this research. As

such, these subjective elements have also been reflected in the analysis. Harding (1987:9) argues that reflection of a researcher's own perceptions in presentation increases the objectivity of research. Researchers' subjective involvement with participants also narrows down the hierarchical relationship between 'the researcher' and 'the other'.

Power and ethical issues

Whilst Shakespeare (1997, cited in Fawcett & Hearn, 2004:212) maintains that in research he aims to equalise the research relationship and gives participants some control over the process, their participation and their words, the relationship between those who collect and those who provide information in creating knowledge is rarely balanced. In research the researcher is in a potentially powerful position and in greater control of the process (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002:107; Sprague, 2005:55). This power lies in authority that is explicitly based on the process, by which claims about truth are made and subsequently presented. This authority is influenced by researchers' methodological and epistemological approaches to the study, which are also determining factors in the construction and utilisation of knowledge (Williamson and Smyth, 2004:4). However, many authors argue that the use of 'participant' instead of 'subject' or 'researched' is the first step in moving towards a relationship of greater equality from a relationship of hierarchy (Brayton, 1997:4). Moreover, my participation with workers on the factory floor also helped me create a more equal relationship with my research participants. Klein (1983:94) argues that researchers' subjective involvement in the process is helpful in breaking down the hierarchical power relationship between the two parties involved in research. Reflexivity is a principle of feminist research, which opens the possibilities of negotiation regarding power relations in the research process. Reflexivity implies negotiation between researcher and research participants over what knowledge claims are made, for whom, why and within what frame of reference (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002:119).

Within feminist approaches to research it is important to establish rapport with people involved in the study (Reinharz, 1992:265). Feminist researchers underscore the need for high levels of personal involvement of the researcher in research processes. In this research my approach was participatory and throughout the process I had close

interaction with research participants. I had in-depth discussions with women around my research questions. I had dialogues with them and dialogue is the key element of feminist research (Gilbert, 1994:90) where power is relational, mutual and reciprocal between two subjects who are positioned in a relationship that develops throughout the process. Such relationships between these two parties empower research participants (Christians, 2000:148). A participatory approach to research is considered to address ethical concerns over unequal power relations between both parties engaged in the research process. Around my research questions, I sought opinions from my research participants and this could be more empowering as they could contribute to the description and analysis of a particular social problem. Nevertheless, social research, due to its humanistic nature, may infringe on the rights and welfare of individuals. Some research deals with the most sensitive and innermost matters in peoples' lives. Collection of such information is inevitably linked to ethical issues (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 1992:78). Researchers write research reports and, as such, out of the field they are powerfully positioned, which is also a matter of ethical concern. Thus, ethical issues saturate all stages of the research process and researchers need to be aware of and sensitive to these issues (Punch, 1998:281-282).

Feminist research shares the ethical concerns regarding privacy, consent, confidentiality, deceit and deception for fair conduct of the research in order to avoid harm to research participants. It is sensitive to ethical issues arising from the concern for and involvement with individuals participating in research (Olesen 2000:233). The sensitive nature of feminist research as with much social research means that integrating ethical issues into the research process is critical to ensure that research is guided by ethical principles. All researchers need to take ethical issues on board and minimally, according to Kirsch (1999, cited in Plummer, 2001:226-227) must usually:

- a. obtain informed consent from participants on an ongoing basis;
- b. make sure that participation is entirely voluntary;
- c. inform participants of any risks involved in the research;
- d. protect the privacy and confidentiality of all participants;
- e. ensure that participation does not cause any harm to the participants.

However, despite my best intentions, I found that I could not adhere to all these ethical issues at all stages of the research process, due to practical reasons. This is detailed in the research process section of this chapter. Nonetheless, Christians (2000:140) argues that accuracy of data is also a question of ethics in social research. As a researcher, I was very careful to ensure the accuracy of data, since fabrications, omissions and contrivances are unethical. I was also concerned about what Gilligan (1982, 1983 & 1988, cited in Christians, 2000:143) terms, 'ethics of care' which relates to responsibilities and relationships. 'Ethics of care' can be described as an 'activity of caring' and human care should play the central role in any moral decision making. According to Plummer (2001:228) the above stated ethical aspects of research are helpful in guiding researchers through their 'moral maze'.

Selection of the setting

The first step in doing field research is to select a topic for inquiry, which is often influenced by personal interest, as happened to me. The next step, the selection of an appropriate site and gaining access to it is linked to the research topic. Geographical and related practical considerations always influence the choice of setting. Moreover, researchers are concerned about easy access to the site (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 1992:277) at least in terms of communication. This study intended to examine the implications of employment in export-oriented garment factories for women in Bangladesh. Export-oriented garment factories in the country are situated both within and outside EPZs. Therefore, in one sense, this research is site specific (Marshall & Rossman, 1999:68) and such issues as geographical location, communication and accessibility of the site were indeed very important in selecting my research site.

In Bangladesh there are currently eight EPZs in operation and the second largest is the Dhaka EPZ (DEPZ) situated at Savar, one of the industrial areas of Dhaka, the capital of the country. Outside the DEPZ numerous export-oriented garments factories have been established at Savar, a fast growing industrial town with developed communication systems and road networks located 35 Km away from the capital city. I have lived in Savar for more than three decades and hundreds of thousands of female garment workers also live there because of their employment in export-oriented garment

factories. It is because I have spent so many years in this context that my interest arose and so it was logical to select Savar as my study area.

Selection of research participants

Whilst export sector employment in Bangladesh, as elsewhere in the Third World, is predominantly female oriented (Kelly, 1986:824; Addison & Demery, 1988:344), I involved both female and male participants in my study, which intended to obtain views about female employment from both genders. I also spoke with a number of respondents who belonged to some female employees' kin group with a view to exploring the experiences and perceptions about their respective female family members working in garment factories.

Choosing a study sample is an important step in any research project, since it is rarely practical, efficient and ethical to study whole populations (Marshall, 1996:522). Therefore, researchers select samples and well-developed sampling decisions are crucial for any study's soundness (Marshall & Rossman, 1999:72). The sample population of this study belonged to a homogenous group in terms of employment. As part of my research strategy, I worked as a quality inspector in two garment factories, although my researcher identity remained secret to all workers while I was working with them on the factory floor. In my first job, I worked with 169 workers in a non-EPZ factory where 113 were female and 56 were male, while in the second job 138 female and 38 male workers were my co-workers on an EPZ factory floor. Amongst 176 workers in the EPZ factory, 98 were female operators, 40 were female helpers, 22 were male operators, 5 males were 'ironmen' and the remaining 11 were male helpers. In the non-EPZ factory 87 were female operators, 26 were female helpers, 31 were male operators, 6 were male ironman and 19 were male helpers. My research interest centred mostly on the female workers and 138 and 113 female workers in two factories respectively formed my sample frame for the qualitative interviews. I selected 32 women from the sample frame as key respondents, with whom I had comprehensive discussions about the conditions and positions of women working in export-oriented garment factories. They consisted of those research participants who were especially sensitive to my areas of concern, were willing to discuss issues further and were able to provide collective and important viewpoints and opinions (Burgess, 1999:346). In my research, they comprised

unmarried, married, separated, deserted, divorced and widowed factory workers, living with and/or without other family members. Another determinant, in selecting key respondents, was their length of service. I selected key respondents, on the basis of theoretical sampling, which involved a search for validity of findings, rather than representativeness of study population (Finch & Mason, 1999:294). Coyne (1997:629) argues that theoretical sampling is a sort of purposeful selection of participants with a view to obtaining more specific information about a particular issue. Theoretical sampling necessitates building interpretive theories from emerging data, and selecting new samples to examine and elaborate that (Marshall, 1996:523). On the factory floor, I had general discussions with all workers, women in particular, around my research questions. I classified the data that I obtained at this stage and then I had thorough discussions with key respondents around each data set. The key respondents were those whom in the course of general discussions I perceived had more insights around research questions, were the most knowledgeable around the emerging themes and were willing to discuss additionally issues of central importance to the purpose of research. Size of the sample was of secondary importance to the quality of data, as qualitative research is concerned with smaller numbers of cases with more intensive analysis (Davidson & Layder, 1994:173). For the purpose of obtaining views of family elders of female factory workers, I conducted semi-structured interviews with nine male and four female family members representing thirteen key respondents, who were living with their kin groups in their respective houses. It is worth mentioning that I was able to visit and interview fifteen key respondents at their respective houses and around. Of them two were living on their own and I interviewed family elders of the remaining thirteen key respondents, while I was visiting them in their houses.

In addition to my detailed discussions with key respondents and semi-structured interviews with some family members, I conducted structured interviews with 107 female and forty-eight male factory workers. Of 107 female workers forty-four worked in six different EPZ factories and sixty-three represented nine non-EPZ factories while twenty-three males were from four EPZ factories and twenty-five were from five non-EPZ factories. None of them were from the area live in by either myself or my co-workers on the factory floor. Regarding the selection of respondents for structured interviews, I used 'snowball sampling' through factory workers who came into contact with me due to my work. Aber (1993:73) argues that the snowball sampling method is

used to obtain a sample where there is no adequate list of the population under study. The snowballing from one worker to another increased the pace of identifying respondents and commencing data collection, since I contacted prospective participants from within garment factory workers' networks. Snowball sampling is appropriate in such a situation where the target sample members are involved in a kind of network with others who share common characteristics (op cit.:74). Hedges (1979, cited in Aber) argues that snowball sampling is useful when the potential participants of the study are likely to be sceptical of the intentions of the researcher. From mid 2007 there had been some unrest² in the garment sector of Bangladesh, which was continuing during my study. Over and obvious issues of power and control, assistance from the management in selecting participants might have made employees especially sceptical of the purpose of the study because of that turmoil. Besides, it was not unlikely that management would influence the participants, which would produce biased data. Against these backdrops, I considered snowball sampling more appropriate for selecting participants for structured interviews. I present a summary of the research process in the following table, which includes research methods employed, number of participants and amount of time engaged in data collection.

Table- 4.1 Summary of research process

Name of data collection method employed in research	Number of participants		Number of covered garment factories		Time employed
	Female	Male	EPZ	n-EPZ ³	
Discussions	32	-	1	1	140 hours
Semi-structured interviews	4	9	-	-	15 hours
Structured interviews	107	48	10	14	250 hours
Participation Observation	-	-	Y	Y	670 hours
Total	143	57	11	15	1015 hours

² Workers' demands for regular payment of wages, overtime pay, pay rise, trade union rights etc. caused the unrest situation in the Bangladesh garment sector during that time. This situation mostly centred the export-oriented garment factories situated outside the Dhaka Export Processing Zone (DEPZ) factories of Savar, Dhaka. However, it affected some EPZ factories as well.

³ By n-EPZ I mean non-EPZ garment factories which are situated beyond any enclave. These factories also enjoy similar financial incentives and produce garments for export to the global market.

Research process

This inquiry was a blending of quantitative and qualitative research methods. Denzin (1978:21) advocated the term ‘triangulation’ which involves combining multiple sources of data collection, for example, I utilised participant observation, discussions, semi-structured interviews and structured interviews to gather data for this research. Researchers have viewed the idea of triangulation as entailing a need to employ both qualitative and quantitative methods in the same study to capitalise strengths of both approaches and to compensate for weaknesses of each approach (Jick, 1979:603; Punch, 1998:246). Qualitative research questions tend to be more exploratory, while quantitative research questions are, to a great extent, confirmatory. Greene et al. (1989:256) argued that employing both these methods in understanding social experiences leads to multiple inferences that confirm or complement each other and strengthen the validity of inquiry results. The convergence between qualitative and quantitative methods provides better opportunities for answering our research questions and enhances our belief that results are valid and not a method artefact (Bouchard, 1976:268; Bryman, 1988:131; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003:14). Feminist researchers also acknowledge the usefulness of combining methods and Reinharz (1992:210) argues that a multi-method approach increases the likelihood of researchers’ better understanding of research participants.

Drawing heavily on feminist research methodology and perspectives I attempted to address the subject/object issue of social research. I attempted to break the subject/object relationship in research processes. I started gathering data with qualitative interviews and ended with structured interviews. I commenced my ‘purposeful conversations’ (Kahn & Cannel, 1957:149) with female garment workers living in the same area I live in. Feminist research approaches urge researchers to get close to their participants to have a subjective involvement in research processes. However, I perceived that, as Sprague (2005:140) argued, getting too close to them at times raised the risk of limiting their willingness to disclose unfavourable information. In the initial phase of research I discussed my research questions with twenty-two women whom I knew personally because of our living in the same locality. On a random basis, I visited them in their houses and during ‘ice breaking’ sessions of discussions, I detailed my intention and purpose of talking to them. They all agreed, seemingly quite eagerly to

become part of my study. Nevertheless, as discussions progressed, I perceived that the conduct of research with them was very difficult. I obtained short, inadequate and apparently contradictory and confusing answers from most of them. Some of these respondents, for example, said they liked factory 'working hours' and did not feel they were too long, despite the fact that they also said they could not get adequate rest and sleep due to their working hours. I felt that the majority of them were very conservative in their responses to my questions and talking to them about issues like harassment was hardly possible due to cultural values and taboos. Culturally, such issues are not discussed in Bangladesh and for obvious reasons they often felt shy and did not feel comfortable when I tentatively tried to find out about sexual harassment at work places.

I appreciated the reality that persuading my female acquaintances to talk openly was not very easy, although initially they seemed interested to have somebody study personal aspects of their lives. Taylor & Bogdan (1984:47) argued, and this is how I felt during my field work, that research participants were likely to hide those things that researchers wanted to learn about when they knew too much about the research. Following an introductory meeting, I visited them several times and noticed that they had preconceptions about me, which worked as a barrier between us. Jorgensen (1989:58) points out that people tend to respond based on their preconceptions of a researcher. This may result in a range of reactions ranging from suspicion, disdain, indifference and antagonism, to inquisitiveness or friendliness. Yet, throughout the process of my initial interviews, the women I spoke with were very reserved and I failed to make any significant progress interviewing them.

At the outset, I thought that researching women, especially those whom I knew, would not be a difficult task. Nevertheless, I experienced from the field that whilst not impossible it is very arduous. Seemingly, the majority of my research participants at that stage were friendly, although I perceived that I could not break the power hierarchy, which worked within existing socio-cultural and patriarchal frameworks. Breaking down power hierarchies is one of the dimensions of feminist research that I could not negotiate with them, due to embedded gender practices. It was the major obstacle that I felt kept away my research participants from exploring the realities of their lives with me as a man. Therefore, for the purpose of my research I had to deviate to a great extent for a while from feminist research perspectives and situate my position within broader

sociological research methodologies. Despite my shift in research approaches, I was concerned about the power and ethical issues as outlined by the feminist research standpoint. However, I decided to try and speak with women who had no prejudice about me. Looking for such women, from other areas, did not seem practical to me. Research requires establishing an adequate level of trust, credibility and rapport and these are always problematic and time consuming, especially with strangers. Furthermore, women in Bangladesh traditionally hardly talk to any male stranger. In this situation, I considered that working on the factory floor would give me access to large numbers of people from both genders. I perceived that a factory job would help me the most to establish and foster relations with prospective research participants through my continuous interaction with them. In addition, it would enable me to obtain unfiltered first-hand knowledge of social life by observing them in their everyday lives, by listening to them talk about their experiences and by looking at the behaviours of people in work situations (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984:7). Very few previous researchers employed participant observation as a means of researching female garment factory workers. The majority of researchers mostly utilised interviews, questionnaires and the like in researching women's lives. Ruth Cavendish's *Women on the Line* (1982), Judy Wajcman's *Women in Control: Dilemmas of a Workers' co-operative* (1983), Alejandro Lugo's *Cultural Production and Reproduction Ciudad Juarez, Mexico: Tropes at Play Among Maquiladora Workers* (1990) are among the few accounts of working women's lives based on participant observation. Deirdre Kelly's *St. Lucia's Female Electronics Factory Workers: Key Components in an Export-oriented Industrialisation Strategy* (1986), John Sargent and Linda Matthews's *Skill Development and Integrated Manufacturing in Mexico* (1997), Kurt Alan Ver Beek's *Maquiladoras: Exploitation or Emancipation? An Overview of the Situation of Maquiladora Workers in Honduras* (2001), Naila Kabeer and Simeen Mahmud's *Globalization, Gender and Poverty: Bangladeshi Women Workers in Export and Local Markets* (2004) are some works in which they all utilised survey methods as a means of data collection.

Participant observation is the best known method employed in ethnography. Klein (1983:94) argues that ethnography is particularly appropriate to feminist research, as it helps researchers better understand the situation they want to know, breaking the power hierarchy between two parties. Researchers have to enter into an intense nature of relationship with research participants, in their effort to truly grasp their lived

experiences (Davidson & Layder, 1994:165; Fontana & Frey, 2000:655). My decision to take factory jobs was a means of gaining access to women's lives as their co-worker. I visited a number of EPZ and n-EPZ factories and explained my research intention to management personnel. I sought permission from them to participate in factory production with workers as a researcher. However, none of the factory managements I visited agreed to allow me entry into production floor. Perhaps the presence of a researcher on the factory floor as a worker was new and not any ordinary circumstance for management. They also might have thought that the presence of a researcher would have affected production targets. Further, it was not unlikely that they were suspicious of me and my motives. The continued unrest situation in garment factories at that time, as mentioned earlier, might be one of the reasons for their unwillingness to allow me to work in their factories. Therefore, in such a situation I took factory jobs as a quality inspector concealing the fact that I was a researcher⁴.



Figure 4.1 Researcher at work in a garment factory

The reason I became a quality inspector is because this position was one of the few possibilities for me as a man with no prior work experience in garment factories. Quality inspector is the only non-technical entry level managerial post in garment

⁴ One of my fellow quality inspectors took my picture at work in a garment factory. He was convinced when I told him that my parents and family wanted to see me at work in the factory. Thus, some others helped me in taking some pictures while I myself captured some of the pictures. Shots were taken using my camera phone. It is worth mentioning that workers on the factory floor agreed to be snapped although the intention was unknown to them.

factories which necessitates constant close touch with workers on the factory floor. Entry into such a post requires no prior job experience or training but a minimum class XII (A level) education. A quality inspector's task is to check whether the clothes have been sewn according to a buyer's specification. They check every stage of making of garments, which requires them to move and see the work done by every worker involved in the process. Therefore, taking the post of a quality inspector, given my research interest, was the easiest and most appropriate for me. This post belongs to the lowest tier of managerial level and mandates overseeing the workers. My gender identity along with over sight role on the factory floor placed me in a hierarchical position to an extent and I tried to make a friendly relation with factory workers with a view to breaking down the power relation that existed between me and them.



Figure 4.2: A woman is fixing machinery problems to keep production going

As quality inspector, I worked in two factories and I had the opportunity to observe and talk to 169 and 176 workers in the n-EPZ and EPZ garment factories respectively and as noted previously, they comprised both male and female workers. I talked to them during work, lunch breaks and even while we were commuting to the factory. I commuted by factory buses to both factories. I had lunch with them every day in the canteen, situated at the factory premises. Following my other colleagues, I used to go to the factories dressed casually. Thus, under cover, I tried to be one of them and gain their confidence and trust and create a conversation-friendly environment.

I started my first factory job in the n-EPZ factory in September 2008, and I finished a month later. Thereafter, I worked in the EPZ garment factory, where, I worked from November 2008 to December 2008. During my fifty-two day participation with workers in factory production, I had detailed discussions around my research questions with eight women in the n-EPZ factory and nine women in the EPZ factory. These seventeen women were my key respondents, with whom I had repeated discussions, as during work it was not possible to continue talks for a long time, at a stretch. They talked to me enthusiastically, although because of the nature of my participation with them in factory production, it was not possible on my part to tell them the intention or nature and purpose of my discussions, which a researcher should do willingly. These two conditions are deemed to be important principles of any ethnographic research (Norris, 1993:128), which I could not meet, because of my covert participation in factory production with them. Furthermore, covert research leaves no scope for people to give their informed consent. Thus, I had to compromise with feminist research approaches during my repeated discussions with seventeen key respondents. Nonetheless, over the course of my time on the factory floor many workers, irrespective of their gender identity, became friendly with me, to the extent that some of them invited me to their homes as well. After my participation with workers on the factory floor, I visited ten n-EPZ and nine EPZ female factory workers, in their respective houses. They introduced me to their family members as their co-worker and I perceived that such an identity helped me the most to dilute the power relations to a great extent, even though it would be naive to suggest that there were no power imbalances. Whilst at their houses I then revealed my real identity and explained my research intentions. They expressed surprise at my social identity and identity as a researcher. Some of them commented that I was very clever to hide my identity and interact with them as a factory worker but some seemed upset or angry about what I had been doing. Nevertheless, of these nineteen women four refused to be interviewed further, while fifteen others agreed to participate in in-depth interviews and share their experiences with me around my research questions. Word quickly spreads in factories and I understand that soon all other workers, with whom I had worked, came to know about me and my reasons for working at their factories.

I took the role of quality inspector covertly, as a means of entry into garment factories which would otherwise not have been possible. My factory job gave me access

to research participants and thus to data. Some researchers do not support this research approach on ethical grounds. They argue that this approach is counter to usual norms in empirical research. It is an invasion of privacy as respondents have no opportunity to give their informed consent to being studied. Further, deliberate misrepresentation of the character of research or the identity of the researcher is unethical (Erikson, 1968: 505-506; Bulmer, 1982b:218-221; Erikson cited in Bryman & Burgess, 1999: xxxii-xxxiii). However, I followed the line Denzin developed in response to this debate between covert and overt participant observation. Denzin (1968:502) argued that the goal of social research is the advancement of knowledge and explanation of social contexts. As such, researchers can adopt any method that does not cause harm to the people being studied. One of the most important aspects of research is taking care of participants' well-being. During my field work, I believe that there was no element in my research or any such attempt that caused harm to others. I maintained my own personal, moral and ethical standards which I considered more important in the field. I concealed the identities and locations of my research participants, along with places of data collection and present data in anonymised form to ensure that no-one can identify them or use my findings to affect them (Bulmer, 1982b:224; Whyte, 1984:210).

Covert participant observation is a long and well established ethnographic approach used in anthropological and sociological research. Classic instances of such research include Caudill's study of a psychiatric hospital where he posed as a mental patient (Caudill, 1952), Festinger and his colleagues covertly studied the religious behaviour of a group of people (Festinger et al, 1956, cited in Homan, 1980:51), Sullivan's study of an air force training programme, where he enlisted himself as an air force trainee (Sullivan et al. 1958), Loafland's study of alcoholics' interaction with Alcoholics Anonymous, where his students posed as alcoholics (Loafland & Lejeune, 1960), Humphrey's study of homosexual encounters in public toilets (Laud Humphrey, 1970 cited in Bulmer 1980:61), Rosenhan's study of the labelling process in psychiatry, where he used pseudo-patients (Rosenhan, 1982) and Homan's study of language behaviour of old-time Pentecostals (Homan, 1980). These studies have yielded knowledge, which probably could not have been obtained otherwise. Caudill (cited in Bulmer, 1982c:66) argues that covert participant observation is a means of gaining new knowledge which otherwise is not available. During my overt research, I experienced that research participants change behaviour when they knew that they were being

studied. I realised from my field experience, and Bulmer (op cit.) notes, that *'(T)he use of researchers whose identities are not known means that the research situation remains true to life, and is not distorted by the presence of (identified) social scientists, whose presence in turn influences the behaviour of others in that setting'*.

All research is secret in some ways and for the sake of research we do not tell our research participants everything. Roth (1962:284) argues that secrecy is a part of research, which cannot be avoided, rather as researchers we have to encounter this as an integral part of research. I concealed my identity to gain access to garment factories as a worker. Factory management, whom I visited and to which I explained my research intention, denied me access to factory floor as a researcher and disclosure of my real identity during covert participation would definitely restrict my access to factories and thus to data. As such, at that stage of research, it was practically impossible to formally obtain participants' informed consent. Research participants' informed consent is argued to be an integral part of research, which is violated in covert research. Nevertheless, the British Sociological Association (2002:4-5) allows covert approaches to research in circumstances where *'difficulties arise when research participants change their behaviour because they know they are being studied [and] [.....] when access to spheres of social life is closed to social scientists by powerful or secretive interests'*. The importance here has been placed on knowledge which is superior to ignorance (Homan, 1980:57).



Figure 4.3: Visiting a female participant in her home for in-depth discussions
(photo taken with permission by participant's son)

One of the primary tools of women's oppression is the maintenance of silence about their experiences and perspectives (Rich, 1980; Lorde, 1984, cited in Tolman & Szalacha, 2004:103). Against this approach, my intention from the outset was to be an easy-going listener with the motive of creating an environment, so that workers, women in particular, could speak freely. My ultimate aim was to engage them as '*active contributors*' in the process (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995:1668). This approach departs from survey design by providing an opportunity for women to talk about their lives, which mostly remain underexplored (Tolman & Szalacha, op cit.). I participated with women in factory production as their co-worker and, thus, became a part of their social world. Studying a social world means being a part of it and without being a part we cannot study the social world. Therefore, all social research is a form of participant observation (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983, cited in Atkinson & Hammersley, 1988:111).

I spent more than seven weeks in two garment factories, largely with women, and experienced their daily life there. I was a sympathetic listener, which is argued to be one of the best means of achieving rapport and trust in participant observation (Davidson & Layder, 1994:168). According to Guba & Lincoln (1994:115, 2004:34) the role of the researcher in interpretive research is that of a passionate participant who is actively engaged in facilitating the reconstruction of the voices of research participants. Throughout the process, my aim was to listen to and facilitate the reconstruction of the stories of women, as they interpret their realities in domestic, employment and societal environments. My participation in factory production helped me develop a close relationship with them. As a quality inspector, I tried to keep myself busy with my task on the factory floor to avail the opportunity of talking to every worker, irrespective of their gender identity. I used to share my perceptions and experiences with them, which in turn, encouraged them to tell me about themselves. Since I was a new recruit, they used to tell me the different aspects of factory work, about different persons on the floor and in the end, conversations were like learning sessions for me. I was learning from them about a world which I had never explored previously. My approach with them helped me create an image as being someone to whom they could express themselves, without fear of disclosure or negative evaluation (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984:38). I discussed my research questions whenever and wherever it was possible or they gave me time to do so.

The discussions I had with women on the factory floor were short and repeated for practical reasons. Long talks with them at a stretch would have slowed down their work speed, which ultimately would have resulted in their failure to meet hourly production targets. Sometimes it happened that they remembered an incident when I moved to someone else and later they themselves called me to relate that story of their life. I mentioned earlier that I conducted fifteen in-depth interviews beyond factory premises. Fourteen of these qualitative interviews I conducted in the houses of my respective participants, while I discussed my research questions with one woman in the national mausoleum at Savar, where hundreds of thousands of unknown 1971 ‘independence war heroes’ of Bangladesh are buried. The longest of my discussions with key respondents lasted for around four hours and the shortest was of a few minutes. During discussions, I encouraged them to talk, without any interruption from me. Sometimes they were very emotional and moved to some other topics, like personal life struggles. Despite moving to different tracks, I did not obstruct them in talking, although at times, I had to guide conversations towards my questions.

My employment in two garment factories enabled me to see men’s behaviour with and attitudes towards women for myself. Moreover, during my participation in factory work, I discussed issues surrounding women’s employment in garment factories with male workers and tried to find out their perceptions about women working with them. I observed how women face harassment from their male colleagues inside the factory and talked to them on these issues. Thus, my job helped me a lot to learn these aspects of my research from women, which would perhaps not have been possible at all previously. On the basis of my understanding from general discussions on the factory floor, repeated and in-depth discussions with key respondents and supported by secondary data analysis, I developed some thematic issues as central to understanding the implications of employment in garment factories for women. Based on these thematic issues I framed a structured interview schedule for women. Subsequently, I conducted 107 structured interviews with female garment workers from fifteen factories. The structured interviews with women focused on my research questions from different viewpoints and aimed to produce multifaceted sets of data. The intention, in interviewing women, was to find instances of data patterns that I got from my previous discussions and in-depth interviews. Each such interview took me around two hours on average. In addition to the structured interviews with women, I interviewed forty-eight

male factory workers who belonged to nine different garment factories. Each of these interviews lasted for forty-five minutes on average. I designed a separate structured interview schedule for them, which sought their views about working women and women's employment in garment factories. As I mentioned earlier, none of these female and male respondents of structured interviews belonged to the factories in which I worked, or were from the area I live in.



Figure 4.4: A semi-structured interview with the husband of a factory worker

Thus, I conducted two separate sets of structured interviews which varied in terms of issues, types and numbers of questions. During mid January and early April 2009, I conducted these interviews in a face-to-face situation, to elicit data from respondents regarding their background, opinions and attitudes. It is argued that adopting a quantitative approach with qualitative methods enables researchers to test their generalisations and readers to gain a sense of the flavour of the data as a whole. Researchers can make claims that they have not taken only those fragments of data which support their arguments; rather their presentation reflects the general trend (Silverman, 2006:52). I included open-ended questions in both structured interviews to encourage participants to talk freely around the topic (Sharpe, 1988:11). For structured interviews, I visited all my respondents at their respective houses during week day evenings and weekends and other national holidays. The semi-structured interviews that I conducted with nine male and four female family elders of thirteen key respondents, also took place at their respective houses, while I was visiting the key respondents. As

noted earlier, my intention in the semi-structured interviews was to obtain the views of family elders about their female factory workers. Interviewing is appealing in social science research as it provides researchers with access to people's ideas, thoughts and memories in their own words (Reinharz, 1992:19) and in my research, I employed interviews as a key strategy of data collection.



Figure 4.5: A structured interview session with a male factory worker

I recorded five qualitative interviews with a recording device, while on ten occasions I took both field notes and mental notes, since participants did not feel comfortable in the presence of such a device. In recording conversations that took place in factory premises or around I took 'mental notes' (Davidson & Layder, 1994:172) and at night I used to write these up in notes, which comprised a description of participants, main incidents, events, behaviours and my feelings. Field notes and mental notes were the means of recording semi-structured interview data, while during structured interviews I listened and recorded data on the schedule. I was a participant observer on the factory floor, where I talked and worked, observed and listened and participated with workers in meeting daily production targets. Observation is a more ethnographic research approach, which entails systematic noting and recording of events and behaviours of research participants. Observation plays an important role in social research as researchers note participants' body language, behaviour, attitudes etc. and utilise those in producing their reports.

I conducted 155 structured interviews in approximately 250 hours. For seventeen repeated discussions and fifteen in-depth interviews I employed approximately eighty hours, while I employed approximately fifteen hours for thirteen semi-structured interviews. I commenced my initial data collection during June, the beginning of rainy season in Bangladesh, which lasts until September. During this time it is difficult for people to move around due to rain. In the months from June to August I could manage twenty-two in-depth interviews on which I spent approximately sixty hours although, as noted earlier, I had very limited access to respondents during this time.

Data analysis

We analyse data to bring meanings and insights to the words and acts of research participants. Traditional analytic procedure contains such steps as organising data, generating categories, coding, collating codes into potential themes, defining and refining themes and finally presenting the overall story the different themes reveal (Marshall and Rossman, 1999:152). I employed a thematic analytical framework to analyse my data. This qualitative analytic method identifies and analyses themes and puts them together to form a comprehensive picture of the collective experiences of research participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006:79). I myself conducted the whole process of research through interactive means and, as such, I was familiar with the data and had some initial analytic thoughts. I started with concentrating on transcribed conversations and detailed notes to identify regular recurring experiences and feelings of my research participants. I identified various patterns of experiences and grouped all similar patterns together. I took the patterns of experiences as my themes, as thematic analysis focuses on identifiable themes (Aronson, 1994:5). In framing themes I mostly placed importance on the prevalence of patterns of experience but in some cases I considered the importance of the experience in relation to the overall research question. The overall view, regarding the implication of women's employment in garment factories, I drew on the basis of different themes, which I generated from qualitative interviews with reference to related quantitative data. In addition to the qualitative analysis, I analysed the quantitative data from structured interviews. In the structured interview schedule I set nominal values for the variables of each question. I used excel for interpreting these numeric data. The data was presented in descriptive form using frequencies and measures of central tendency (mean) for the analysis. I made the graphical

representation of descriptive analysis in excel as well, while numeric figures in subsequent chapters are shown in percentage (%).

Conclusion

Research is always an arduous task and perhaps it is very difficult to conduct any such task without pitfalls. Indeed my research had some strengths and drawbacks. A major strength of this research was the application of both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The quantitative research approach enabled me to cover a larger population to seek their views on the research questions, whilst the qualitative research approach facilitated me to obtain detailed narratives from the participants within their normative contexts. Triangulation or adoption of mixed methods was, thus, a strength, which helped me to cross-check and thus to generate rich data. I collected all data in a face-to-face situation, which is also strength of this research. My participation with respondents in the process enabled me to read their behaviour and attitudes in relation to issues of my research concern in a real life situation. I interviewed both men and women in my research. Inclusion of participants from both genders, especially kin groups of female respondents helped data triangulation and enhanced the richness of data. Furthermore, covert participant observation was another strength of my study. This approach enabled me to collect data in a natural setting, although it was also one of the ethical limitations of my study as I could not gain prior informed consent from all participants.

On researching women in relation to their employment in export-oriented garment factories in Bangladesh I integrated both qualitative and quantitative approaches in the research process. This inclusive viewpoint on methods appears to be increasingly accepted in feminist research circles in pursuit of research. Some researchers argue that both types of methods can be effectively utilised in research reflecting feminist values (Jayaratne & Stewart, 1991:91). Personal experiences are invaluable assets for feminist research. Accordingly, I intended to listen to women's experiences about their employment in garment factories. I started discussing my research questions with twenty-two women who lived in the same area I live in. Because of living in the same area and pre-orientation I had easy access to them although I gained very little data from them around my research questions. My initial interviews with them clearly demonstrated that a researcher's age, gender identity, social background, personality,

etc. are important factors that influence the behaviour of research participants a great deal. As such, I saw the need for a different approach.

As an overt researcher, I failed to gain access to garment factories. Thereafter I took factory jobs covertly. The immediate problem researchers frequently confront in the field is how to make contact and establish rapport with research participants (Sharpe, 1988:17). My living in the same area in the first instance while taking factory jobs subsequently enabled me to overcome this situation. I conducted seventeen repeated discussions with women on the factory floor and around. I experienced women's working life inside factories for myself and listened to them about the realities of their lives. My participation with them helped me the most to obtain their trust and confidence in a very short time. My research approach at this stage did not adhere to my wish to engage a feminist methodological approach. I discussed my research concerns with female factory workers but could not obtain their informed consent due to my covert participation with them. Nevertheless, at a later time I conducted another fifteen in-depth interviews with women where I followed feminist research strategies. I visited these women at their respective houses, told them my real identity, discussed my research intentions with them and they talked to me around my research questions in detail. I conducted thirteen semi-structured interviews with family elders of thirteen key respondents with a view to learning their perceptions about their working female household members. I subsequently conducted 155 structured interviews with both female and male respondents which aimed to collect data from a broader perspective. I devised two separate sets of structured interview schedules which covered the thematic issues that I devised from my previously conducted interviews. The schedules varied in terms of numbers and types of questions. One of my intentions from the structured interviews was to encourage respondents to talk freely and, as such, I set some open-ended questions in the schedules. I adopted a thematic analytic approach in analysing qualitative data while excel was my tool to analyse quantitative data and subsequently presented research findings. The research had some strengths and draw backs. In presenting research findings I maintained confidentiality and anonymity of my research participants (British Sociological Association, 2002:4-5). This is one of the strengths while one of the weaknesses of this research design is reliance on my memory to some extent in recording data. I collected data in four phases and in each phase I dealt with

different respondents employing different methods. The following table gives a detailed picture of the research process that I followed in this research.

Table 4.2: Research processes at a glance

Phase of data collection	Duration of each phase	Research method employed	Number of participants		Sampling procedure utilised	Factories covered		Time engaged (in hours) (approx.)
			Female	Male		EPZ	n-EPZ	
Phase 1	May 2008- July 2008	In-depth discussion	9	-	Random	3	-	60 (approx.)
			13	-		-	5	
Phase 2	September 2008	Repeated discussions	10	-	Theoretical	-	1	25 (approx.)
	October 2008	Participant observation	-	-	-			420 (approx.)
	October 2008	In-depth discussions	9	-	Theoretical			22 (approx.)
	November 2008	Semi-structured Interview	2	5	-			8 (approx.)
Phase 3	November 2008	Repeated discussions	7	-	Theoretical	1	-	18 (approx.)
	December 2008	Participant observation	-	-	-			250 (approx.)
	December 2008	In-depth discussions	6	-	Theoretical			15 (approx.)
	January 2009	Semi-structured Interview	2	4	-			7 (approx.)
Phase 4	January 2009 - April 2009	Structured interview	51	-	Snowball	6	-	250 (approx.)
			56	-		-	9	
			-	23		4	-	
			-	25		-	5	
Total	May 2008 - April 2009	-	165	57	-	14	20	1075 (approx.)

Chapter V: Garment workers of Savar: a socioeconomic profile

Introduction

Bangladesh is one of the most densely populated developing countries of the world with, according to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, a current population of about 141.5 million and a per capita income of US\$ 444 per annum. Out of the total population 48.8% are women (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2009) who are traditionally defined by their gender throughout their lives, within the family as daughter, wife and mother. Systems of patrilineal inheritance and patrilocal residence encourage the dependence of women on men and limit their social and economic autonomy, which is powerfully supported by *purdah* or female seclusion. The literal meaning of *purdah* in Bengali is curtain, which creates boundaries and hides from view. Likewise, the custom of *purdah* separates women from men and confines them to the household compound, keeping away from the outside world (Hoque, Myrayama & Rhman, 1995:74; Kibria, 1995:293). It is both a social and religious institution, which restricts women's access to the labour market. Observance of *purdah* by women is an indication of familial social status. According to popular perceptions, women from respectable and economically secured families do not participate in paid employment. However, the implementation of development works, such as the 'Food for Work Programme' by the government in rural areas in the 1970s initiated the inclusion of poor women in paid work in Bangladesh, despite traditional prohibitions against women's presence, in male dominated public spheres. Educated young women were employed in teaching and rural health and family planning sectors. The establishment of export processing enclaves and the rapid growth of export-oriented garment factories since the 1980s reshaped the labour market in a short space of time in Bangladesh and made women's presence markedly visible in public spheres (Figure 5.1). This chapter explores the socioeconomic profile of the garment workers who were my research participants. Attempts have also been made here to look into the factors that influence women to take garment factory jobs as well as the working conditions they experience inside the factories.

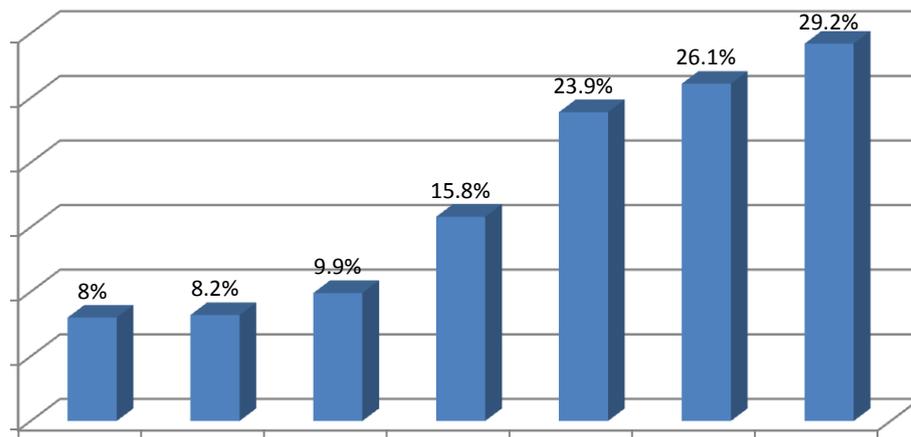


Figure 5.1: Trend of female participation in labour market over the years
Source: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (2007a)

Workers' Age

For the purpose of this research I interviewed altogether 161 female workers⁵ from twenty-five garment factories and forty-eight male workers from nine garment factories of Savar and men, however, are overrepresented in this sample to an extent. Among the female workers seventy three were from ten EPZ factories and eighty eight were from fifteen n-EPZ factories, while twenty-three male workers belonged to four EPZ factories and twenty-five of them represented five n-EPZ factories. The predominant age of the garment workers, whom I interviewed in this study, was between eighteen and twenty-four with 68%⁶ of female and 49% of male respondents belonging to this age group (Figure 5.2). This is supportive of the findings of other studies conducted in Bangladesh (Hossain, Jahan, & Sobhan, 1988; Kabeer, 1991; Dannecker, 2002) as well as of work forces in export sectors worldwide (Fernandez-Kelly, 1983; Joeks, 1985; Kelly, 1986; Lee, 1995; Beek, 2001). The age structure of factory workers in Bangladesh, especially in EPZs, has changed over the last few years, since laws prohibiting child labour in Bangladesh are maintained, in garment factories in particular. I noticed many factories had posted a sign at the entrance saying, '*We do not employ any worker below the age of 18*'. None of the EPZ factory workers I interviewed was below eighteen years of age, while a few n-EPZ factory workers were below eighteen.

⁵ Although I did not have very effective discussions around my research questions with 22 female factory workers, whom I interviewed during the first phase of my data collection, I included them in the sample frame to present the socio-economic profile of female garment factory workers of Savar. As such, this profile represents all female and male workers whom I interviewed for the purpose of this research.

⁶ For the purpose of clarity I have rounded statistics up or down to the nearest whole.

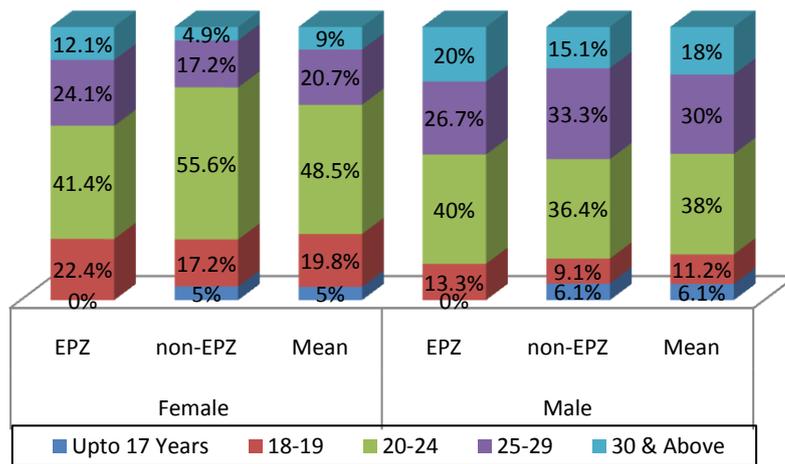


Figure 5.2: Age-gender distribution of garment factory workers⁷

I would argue that the enactment of the ‘Harkin Bill’⁷ has stopped employment of child labour to a great extent and brought about changes in the age structure of garment factory workers. A comparative analysis of workers’ age structure from surveys in 1990, 1997 (Paul-Majumder & Begum, 2006:17)⁸ and the present study shows that the number of workers up to nineteen years of age has gradually decreased over the years, while participation of workers between the ages of twenty and twenty-nine years has increased tremendously (Figure 5.3). Data show that the mean age of female workers of the 1990 and 1997 survey was nineteen and twenty respectively, which stood at twenty-three for 161 workers from twenty-five garment factories of my study. Thus, this workforce can be characterised by its gender specificity as well as by age structure. This finding does not appear surprising considering the fact that the working age worldwide is between twenty and forty. Nevertheless, the youngest female worker I interviewed in this research was fifteen years of age and the oldest was thirty-nine years old, while amongst the males, the youngest was sixteen years old and the age of the oldest was forty. Figure 5.4 shows that the majority (65%) of female workers started working in garment factories during their childhood or adolescence and this finding reflects a similar pattern to as found in a study by Amin, Diamond, Naved & Newby (1988:188).

⁷ In 1993 Senator Tom Harkin placed a bill in the US Senate entitled ‘The Child Labor Deterrence Act of 1993’ which intended to prohibit the import of goods to the USA produced by child labour (Paul-Majumder & Begum, 2006:16)

⁸ The survey 1990 of Paul-Majumder & Begum included 426 female and 245 male garment workers from 32 garment factories while they conducted their 1997 survey on 39 garment factories which included 589 female and 219 male workers.

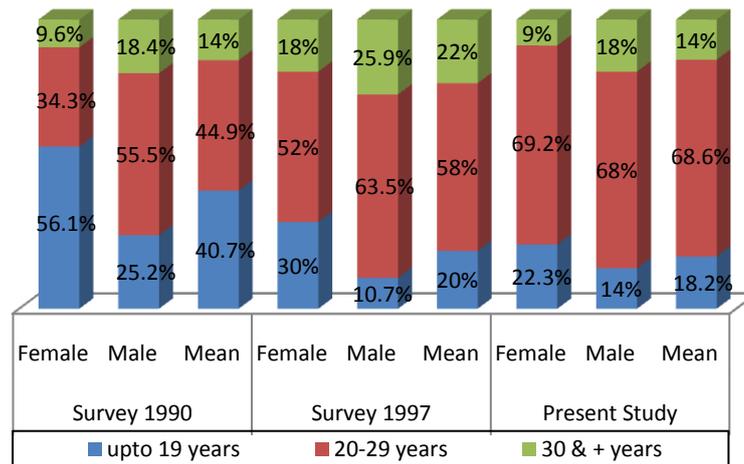


Figure 5.3: Changes in workers' age structure over the years

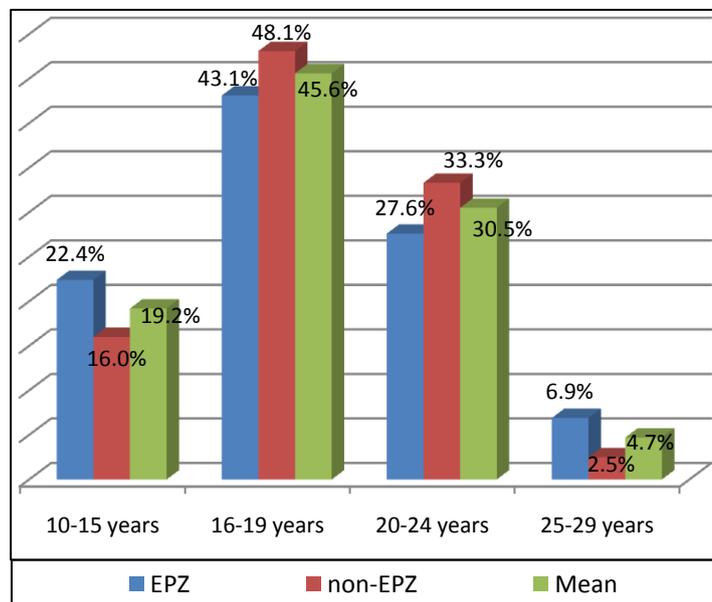


Figure 5.4: Age composition of female factory workers during first job

Education

All factory jobs in EPZs, now require a minimum of lower secondary level (class VIII) of education, while n-EPZ factory employers do not impose such any restriction regarding workers' educational attainment, although they look for job seekers' reading ability, especially ability to read English numbers. The following quotations highlight the role of educational requirements in obtaining garment factory jobs. The EPZ factory worker cited below collected a class VIII pass certificate from her village school, although interview revealed that she was a primary school dropout. Conventionally, only when one has successfully completed eight years of education, can one obtain such

a certificate from the school, when required. Since these certificates do not entail any national level recognition, these are rarely verified. Therefore, it is a common practice, especially in schools in rural areas, that one can obtain a class VIII pass certificate, without that level of education, if one is acquainted with the school management. Although, desire for an EPZ job inspired her to collect the certificate, she was not technically entitled to have one, but her willingness gave her the agency to engage in such subversive activity. She was a skilled sewing operator and despite her skill, she failed in her first attempt to obtain such a job, because she did not have that certificate. The second quotation reveals that the n-EPZ factory worker did not require such any certificate, but had to prove that she could read English numbers.

'In my first attempt for a job here I failed as I told them that I studied up to class V. I did not know that EPZ factories do not employ anybody without a minimum level of education of class VIII. [.....] I collected a certificate from my village school. It is very easy to obtain such a certificate if you spend some money. [.....] I gave a copy of the certificate with my application in this factory. I sewed some garment in front of them. They liked my work and gave me the job. [.....] I am a good sewing operator but I did not get a job in the previous factory as I did not have any class VIII pass certificate'.

-A married female EPZ worker aged 20

'I gave an interview and they asked me to read the numbers from an English datebook. I read and they took me in this factory'.

- An unmarried female n-EPZ worker aged 18

I had, however, a few illiterate female respondents from both the EPZ and n-EPZ factories, while all male workers had a minimum primary level education. Women of my study had an average of 7.7 years of schooling and this is supportive of other findings in Bangladesh (Kibria, 1995; Kabeer & Mahmud, 2004). The vast majority of the workers had formal education, although 9% of them could not read or write and had never been to school. Nevertheless, data show that the literacy rate among the garment factory workers (91%) was much higher than that (56%) of the adult population in Bangladesh as a whole (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2008). Among the female workers, 33% had lower secondary level education. These women either could not

complete education or left school, after attending VI to X classes, while 27% of female workers were primary school dropouts. The proportion of the female workers who had completed secondary education was about 17%, while 15% had attained higher secondary certificate (HSC) or above educational level, the corresponding figures were 39% and 32% respectively for male workers (Figure 5.5).

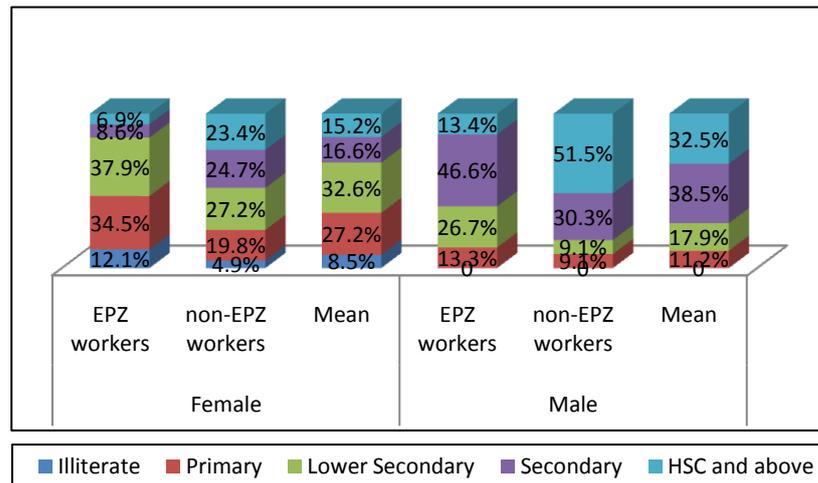


Figure 5.5: Educational status of factory workers by gender

Data reveal that the upward trends of levels of education among female garment factory workers are significantly low in comparison to that of male. Among the male respondents, 71% joined the garment factory with a minimum of secondary level education, while only 32% of female respondents had this level of education. It was noted earlier that the vast majority of female workers had taken their first factory job by the age of nineteen. Interviews reveal that a large number of girls had left secondary schools for employment in garment factories, due to poverty. Besides, distance to school, disturbance from delinquent boys on way to and from school etc. jeopardise female attendance in school. Further, one can at best complete only six to ten years of schooling by the age within nineteen years, due to late schooling in rural areas. Male workers, on the other hand, joined garment factories at an older age, with higher education. Therefore, a gender gap persists in education. Nonetheless, new employees, irrespective of their gender identity, usually join as helpers in the production line. In the course of time, enthusiastic workers learn to operate machines and become operators. Skilled, experienced and more highly educated operators can take up supervisory posts at managerial level. Therefore, the scope of upward mobility in managerial posts for women is limited and broader for men as this is influenced by level of education. Thus, the gender gap in education creates a gender gap in employment and I observed that all

supervisors in the two garment factories, in which I worked, were male. Supervisors are technically skilled managerial level staffs who coordinate the total production process, which is not possible for any beginner in this field. From her study, Kabeer (1991:152) argued that women of smart appearance, with secondary level education, were recruited directly in garment factories as supervisors or promoted rapidly to these posts. My study does not reflect such a finding.

Marital status

I observed a difference between female and male garment workers regarding their marital status. Figure 5.6 shows that 63% of male workers were married, compared to 43% of currently married female workers. Data suggest that the mean age at marriage of these female workers was seventeen years, while the mean age for girls in Bangladesh at national level is 18.1 years (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2007b). Kabeer (1997:267) argued that a significant number of female garment workers were divorced, seperated or had been deserted by their husbands. My study does not support Kabeer’s documentation, since the sample population of this study contained only 8% of female workers who belonged to these groups combined. During fieldwork, I observed that female workers often tried to hide divorce or desertion, due to cultural inhibition. I would argue from my own experience as a Bangladeshi and as Dannecker (2002:57) noted that in such cases, women are often blamed for a failed marriage, not only by their in-laws but also by their own families and others in their surroundings. Yet, my research data reveal that EPZ factories employ more married women than do n-EPZ garment factories, while the proportion of male unmarried wrokers is greater in n-EPZ factories than that of the EPZ (Figure 5.6).

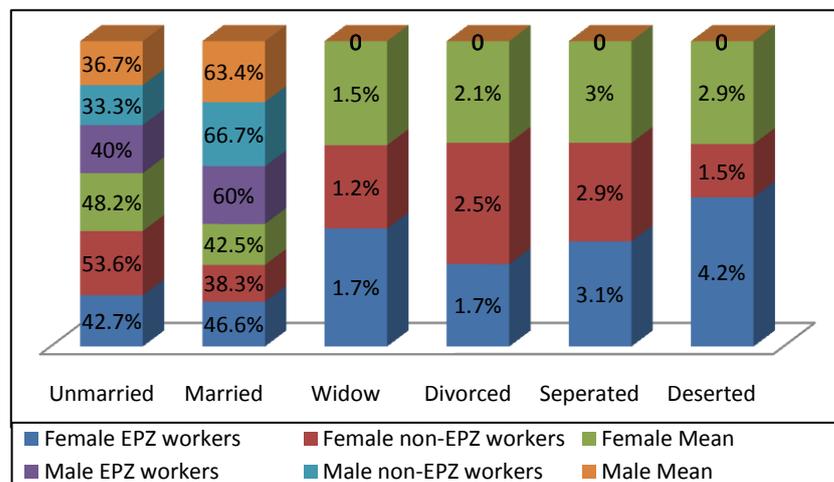


Figure 5.6: Marital status of factory workers by gender

In line with other studies, my study reveals that the work structure in garment factories is favourable to unmarried women (as discussed below) and as such, employers, especially in n-EPZ factories, prefer them for employment. Overtime work is mandatory in garment factories and Kabeer (1991:135; 2004:16) argues that unmarried workers can work long hours with full attention, without anxiety about family matters. They tend to welcome overtime work as a means of supplementing their wages, while married women prefer to or need to go home to attend to domestic responsibilities. Long working hours, in garment factories, make it difficult for them to combine factory work and caring for their families. As such, female garment workers are generally unmarried. I would also argue from my data that employers' unwillingness to give maternity benefits is another reason behind their preference for unmarried women. However, my female sample population constituted 42% currently married and 48% unmarried female workers. Interestingly, within the EPZ factories, the proportion of married female workers (47%) was more than that of the unmarried (43%) female workers. Data reveal that the prevalence of changing job, among unmarried workers, is higher than that of the married. Empirical evidence shows that 21% of married workers, of my sample population, had changed their job several times, whilst the corresponding figure for the unmarried workers was 47%. Among the married female workers, 59% took garment factory jobs after their marriage and 57% of these women were married by their parents by fifteen years of age, while 31% started their conjugal life at sixteen or seventeen. The proportion of female workers who started their factory job before marriage and were married by the age of fifteen was 19%. The proportion of such workers who were married by sixteen or seventeen was 53% and the rest got married at or after eighteen years of age (Figure 5.7).

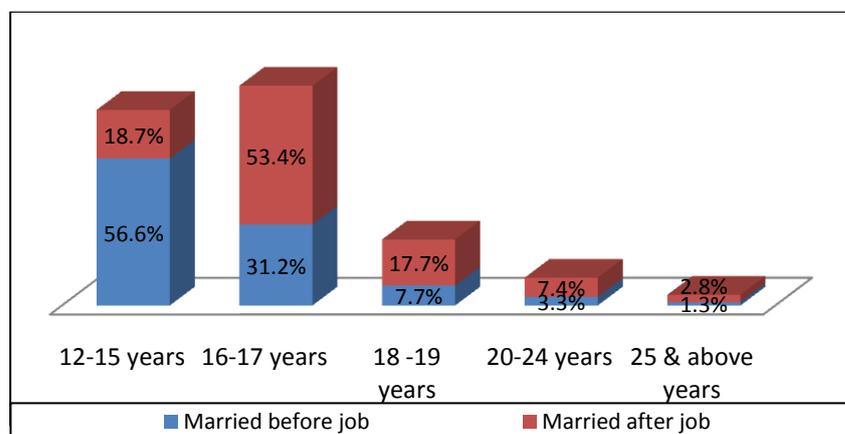


Figure 5.7: Age-marriage structure of female garment workers

Traditionally, the parents of a girl, especially in rural Bangladesh, try to marry her, once she reaches puberty, as she becomes a matter of concern for the family. The popular perceptions of having such a girl in the family is that she has no demand as a bride and her parents cannot marry her. To have unmarried matured girls is shameful for a family, and society does not accord a high status to unmarried girls (Chowdhury, 2004:247). From an economic perspective, marrying a girl is seen as lessening the burden of the family, whilst from a societal perspective, having such a girl is humiliating for the entire family, because other villagers interpret it this way. Further, at marriage, the parents of the bride frequently have to give a dowry to the family of the bridegroom. Blanchet (1996, cited in op cit.:249) argues that the amount of dowry is usually smaller when the bride is young. These factors often contribute to the prevalence of early marriage in rural Bangladesh (Caldwell, et al. 1998:147; Chowdhury, 2004:252). Nevertheless, many families now depend on their female members' income from garment factories, due to lack of resources and a declining familial economic status. Figure 5.7 shows that the proportion of female garment workers who married after taking a factory job, are relatively older at marriage, compared to those who married before starting factory job. This finding reflects those of some other studies in Bangladesh (Zohir & Paul-Majumder, 1996; Naved, Newby & Amin 2001) and I would argue that garment factory employment delays marriage, as well as child bearing. The following quotation of the unmarried female worker, reveals that she would have been a mother of a few children before twenty, if she had not taken a factory job.

'I am the eldest child of my parents. We are five brothers and sisters and my father does not earn enough to feed us all. [.....] One day, with one of my neighbours I came to town and started a factory job. [.....] If I lived in the village I would be a mother of a few children by now. I am better now because of my job'.

- An unmarried female n-EPZ worker aged 20

Data suggest that 47% of those who were married with two or more children, before taking the job, had not had any more children since they started working. It indicates that there is a negative correlation between having full time employment in the factories and child bearing. Interviews reveal that 63% of married female workers either had someone in the family to look after their children or they left them with other

family members in their village home. The spouses of 87% of female workers who took a factory job after marriage were engaged in diverse wage earning sectors in town other than working in a factory, while 79% of single female employees married their co-workers at a later time. In my study, I found that marriage between garment workers was common.

Residential status

The majority (84%) of garment factory workers of my study migrated to town from rural areas. The life stories of the workers I interviewed reveal that 87% were migrants who came to Savar from different parts of the country. This finding supports other studies on residential status of garment workers in Bangladesh and elsewhere in the world (Kelly, 1986; Kabeer, 1997; Beek, 2001; Ahmed & Bould, 2004). The migration data varied for male and female factory workers and statistics suggest that 7% of male workers were local and the corresponding figure for female was 18%. Moreover, figure 5.8 shows that 82% and 66% of male and female workers respectively, hailed from villages of districts other than Dhaka.

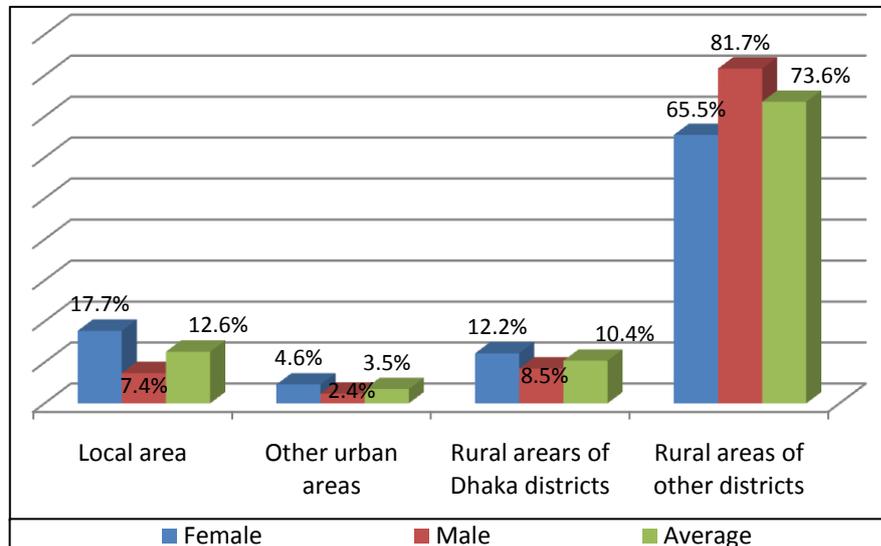


Figure 5.8: Place of origin of garment factory workers by gender

Entry into the garment industry and accommodation in urban areas are predominantly managed by social networking among family members, relatives, neighbours and friends (Findley and Williams, 1991, cited in Amin, Diamond, Naved, & Newby, 1998:188; Afsar, 2001:114). Garment factory workers are actively involved in social networks, which play an important role in migration. My empirical data

suggest that networks provide migrants with information about the opportunities in cities and food and shelter after arrival. Figure 5.9 shows that 45% of female workers were associational migrants who came to town with their family members or relatives, while 43% of them came on their own. My research data suggest that 73% of female migrants were from poor familial origin and they mainly migrated for economic reasons. They mostly belonged to families who were functionally landless (had less than half an acre of land) and thus were less able to meet household needs. Several other studies also revealed that female labour migration was driven by economic considerations (Lauby & Stark, 1988; Naved, Newby, & Amin, 2001; Kabeer & Mahmud 2004).

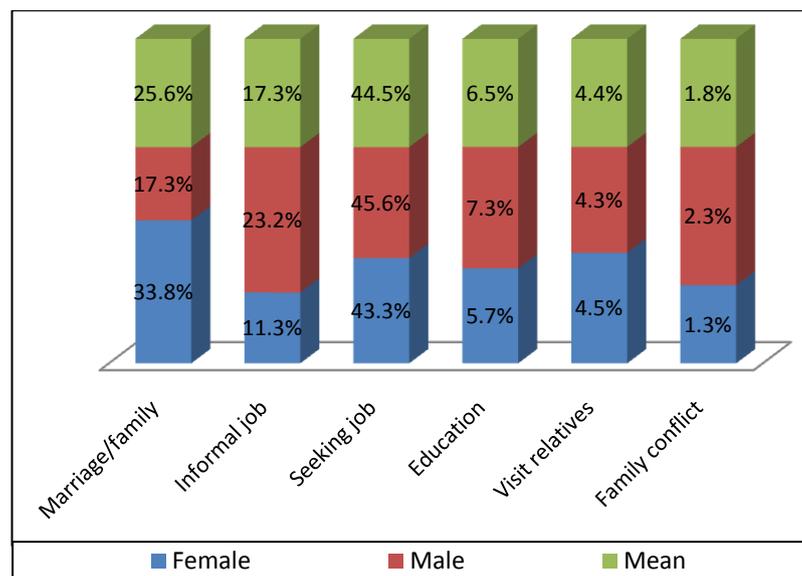


Figure 5.9 Reasons for migration by gender

Interviews reveal that young male individuals from rural Bangladesh migrated to urban areas in search of employment but female individuals did not usually do so, unless their families could no longer earn a living in their villages. The following quotation reveals the feeling of a male worker who came to town for employment, as he preferred a garment factory job to agricultural work.

'In the village I used to do agricultural work in the field. Garment work is much better than burning in the sun or getting wet in the rain'.

-An unmarried male n-EPZ worker aged 21

Limited employment opportunities in villages, as the following quotation reveals, force women to move to urban regions for jobs. This woman took a factory job, as she

belonged to a distressed family, due to her divorce. The custom of dowry is by law prohibited in Bangladesh, although it is culturally practised as ‘demand’ from the bridegroom party. Marriage does not take place if the demands are not agreed upon and inability to meet agreed upon demands often results in harassment, abuse and even divorce, as happened to this woman. In Bangladeshi society, girls are brought up by their parents and transferred to other families through marriage (Chowdhury, 2004:247). After divorce, women have to go back to their parents or brothers and depend on them for survival, since women’s independent living is hardly accepted in Bangladesh (Naved, Newby, & Amin, 2001:94-95). However, they have to manage their own living if their natal families cannot provide them with material necessities. Because of limited opportunities in villages, women in a situation similar to the woman quoted in the following narrative, migrate from rural areas independently.

‘The first few months in my husband’s family were nice and then they started demanding dowry. My widowed mother had no money so they began torturing me. My husband used to listen to my in-laws and beat me even when I was pregnant. [.....] Everybody in the family was angrier with me as I gave birth to a girl child. It was also my fault. My husband married again and divorced me when my daughter was 7 months old. [.....] I went to my mother who at that time was living in her father’s village with my other sister. My sister had three kids. My brother in-law was a day labourer and I knew that they did not have enough earnings to feed me or my daughter. [.....] So I came to Dhaka leaving my daughter with my mother in the village. One of my cousins lived here and worked in a garment factory. I told her that I wanted to stay and work. She helped me get a job in her factory. After a couple of months my mother joined me here with my daughter. [.....] My mother takes care of my daughter and I work. In the village there was no possibility for me to earn a living’.

-A divorced female EPZ worker aged 26

Declining employment opportunities in rural areas is the prominent push factor in rural-urban migration and the establishment of manufacturing units, along with availability of jobs in urban areas, are important pull factors. Empirical evidence suggests that mechanisation of post-harvest agricultural operation in Bangladesh has

marginalised women in agricultural production. This situation has increased women's migration to urban areas (Boserup, 1970). Data from my study show that 69% of male migrants moved to town for employment, while the corresponding figure for female migrants was 55%. Of the interviewed female migrants, 21% came to town, when their families moved, as a strategy of survival and in such cases, as the data reveal, they had no role in the family's migratory decisions. This is evident from the quotation below, which reveals that the woman migrated to town with her family and afterwards took a factory job with the aim of helping the family.

'I came to Dhaka when my family moved. We have no land and my father used to work as a day labourer in the village. We had very hard times there and once my father decided to move here. [.....] My father is a rickshaw puller here. It is a very hard task and sometimes we starve when he is ill. I have two other small sisters and two brothers. My father does not earn enough to feed us all. Therefore, I started working in a garment factory. [.....] My neighbours helped me find a job'.

- An unmarried female EPZ worker aged 19

A number of female workers came to town to work in the households of their distant relatives. Based on my own experience as a Bangladeshi and from anecdotal evidence, I would argue that taking children of poor relatives by richer families for household labour is a very common practice in Bangladesh. My sample population constituted 11% of female workers who migrated to town as housemaids and received hardly any money for their work or had little or no chance to go to school. Later, they started a factory job with permission from their relatives who forced them to give part of their salary for food and accommodation, although they performed household work at night. In this situation, they developed their own networks and friendship ties to find new living arrangements to distance themselves from their relatives. Some migrant women (11%) stated that their idea of working in garment factories developed during their time in city. A few of them (6%) came to town for study and were living with their relatives, mainly married brothers and sisters. Some others (5%) came to visit their relatives living in urban areas. These women explored the possibilities of urban living, while they were in town and negotiated with their families at a later time. This group of women was a bit older and had a higher educational background. Data reveal that

propensity to migrate was higher among young and educated women, as they were more aware of the opportunities available in urban areas and were better able to benefit from them. However, the first negotiation that these women, who migrated on their own, had to make at household level was about their decision to migrate. A significant number of these women (39%) faced opposition from their respective family members, since *'people talk badly about garment factory workers'* or because of their perception that women *'get spoilt'* if they work in garment factories. Due to their employment in garment factories, women often come home at night, which people perceive to be unbecoming of a 'good' woman. Moreover, women interact with men during work and this also is considered bad for them. My data reveal that these societal perceptions created a negative impression of female garment factory workers. Nevertheless, some of the women (6%) opposed their husbands' desires and migrated to town for jobs and most of their spouses joined them in urban areas. Thus, women irrespective of their marital status migrated to town. It is indeed very significant in a society like Bangladesh, where they are often expected to observe *purdah*. Data from my research reveal that mostly, economic needs of the family forced them to migrate and break *purdah* norms.

Living arrangement in urban areas

Patterns of migration, as well as marital status, determine housing arrangements in urban areas. Empirical data suggest that those who were associational migrants and were married lived in a familial situation, while others lived with friends and relatives and thus, rural urban migration has caused different types of household patterns. Previous studies showed that the majority of migrants and migrated women in particular, lived with their family members and relatives (Kibria, 1995:296; Zohir & Paul-Majumder, 1996:91). Living with family members and relatives is a common practice among female migrant workers and those who are able to arrange such accommodation do so. Figure 5.10 shows that 60% of female migrants and 49% of male migrants lived with their respective families. This finding is supportive of previous studies and thus data reveal that the majority of garments workers I interviewed in this study depended largely on their family members and lived in conventionally structured households, headed by husbands or male family elders.

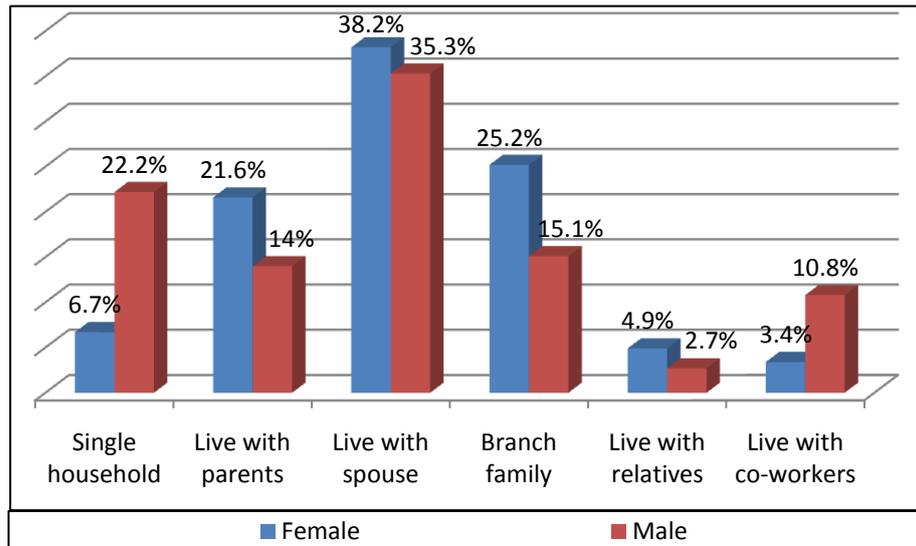


Figure 5.10 Urban living arrangements of garment workers by gender

Although, as was mentioned earlier, the notion of women living on their own or in non-familial situations in Bangladesh was not yet widely accepted, data show that 7% of female migrants were living in town on their own, in sub-let arrangements, without any male guardian. This is indeed an important social change that has taken place in Bangladesh, with the advent of garment factories. Previous studies also reported such accommodation patterns for female migrants (Kibria, 1995; Zohir & Paul-Majumder, 1996; Naved, Newby, & Amin, 2001; Kabeer & Mahmud, 2004). Landlords and men in particular, in such situations, take over the role of guardians, since a fundamental aspect of man's role in Bangladeshi society is guardianship. Older people, especially men in Bangladesh, usually perceive themselves as responsible for the moral status of women. The following quotation reveals that this pattern is reproduced in urban areas and women living on their own are often exposed to social control, established through landlords in the absence of their familial guardians. Furthermore, interviews reveal that their movements were controlled by the landlord and/or his wife.

'I live in a rented single room. Both my landlord and his wife are very strict. They always tell me that I should not go out and speak with people in the streets. [...] If any male relative or friend comes to visit me he has to wait outside the gate and usually talk with my landlord first. The visitor can come in if they are convinced. [...] My landlord and his wife always say whatever you do outside is your matter but inside the house it is our responsibility.'

- An unmarried female EPZ worker aged 21

Independent migration by women for garment factory jobs has brought about changes in housing arrangements in urban areas and single person households and branch or divided households (households some of whose members live elsewhere) have emerged. Data show that 25% of female migrants lived in branch households, while 5% of them lived with their relatives. Empirical evidence suggests that there was a marked difference in accommodation arrangements between female and male migrants. Female migrants predominantly lived in a familial situation, while male workers usually lived with family, as well as on their own. A familial living arrangement provides women with necessary social security from theft and other problematic incidents. Interviews reveal that such an arrangement gave them moral support and some services like child-care, which enabled them to work. A few of the female participants reported that local *mastans* (unruly people) and *touts* (cheaters) sometimes bothered them at their home. Moreover, a number of them experienced theft in their houses while away for work. Data suggest that familial living arrangements protected women from these inconveniences. ‘Messing’ or living in a shared room was common for male workers. However, 3% of female migrants were found living in such housing arrangements, where five or six women rented a large room and shared together to live in urban areas. Empirical evidence shows that migrant workers often rented cheap rooms in a large house. They shared toilets, bathrooms and kitchen with five to ten families. The rent for each room usually varied from BDT 350 (US\$ 5⁹) to BDT 1000 (US\$ 15) per month depending on size, structure and available facilities. Most of these houses had tube wells and electricity, while a few had gas burners. Data suggest that the bulk of the workers, irrespective of their housing structure, lived in one room accommodation. Those who lived in familial situations shared a room with four to five family members or relatives and co-workers. Only 3% of such workers had two rented rooms to live, where the husband had two wives. It is noteworthy that men in Bangladesh can legally keep four wives at a time, although it is rarely practised. Among the migrant female workers, 23% used an open bathroom with no water supply facility for bathing. Interviews reveal that whilst there were available houses, equipped with all basic amenities for private use of a single family, these were beyond the budget of these migrant workers. As such, they lived in such housing arrangements as a cost-saving strategy.

⁹ During my field work US\$ 1 was equivalent to approximately BDT (Bangladesh Taka) 69.

Reasons for taking the job

Data from my research suggest that tremendous pressures of poverty forced many women in rural Bangladesh to violate traditional cultural values and take paid employment. The coming of garment factories has widened employment opportunities for women and since the mid 1980s large numbers of unaccompanied rural women began occupying urban spaces through migratory processes. Interviews with garment workers reveal the cause of their migration to urban areas and show interesting links between migration, urban housing arrangements and formal sector employment. Empirical evidence suggests that, primarily, economic need propelled Bangladeshi women into factory employment and compelled them to break the *purdah* norms. This finding confirms those of other studies conducted in Bangladesh (Kabeer, 1991, 2004; Kibria, 1995; Ahmed & Bould, 2004). Data reveal that socio-cultural factors also motivated women, to an extent, to enter into paid employment. Thus, my finding supports the articulations of Lim (1990) and Standing (1992) when they suggest that economic need, as well as social and cultural factors, inspires women to enter into paid employment. They argued that women desired factory jobs as they wanted to utilise their education and also wanted the company of their friends, while my data reveal that husbands' demand for dowry worked as the underlying cause for some women to take such a job. As was noted previously, the custom of dowry is culturally practised in Bangladesh, although it is legally prohibited. Moreover, my research data reveal that women sought waged work as a part of their household strategy. Their participation in the formal labour market was thus largely a response to the economic necessity of their respective families.

Three types of explanations related to familial economic needs were apparent in women's accounts of why they had taken a garment job. The most widespread explanation from them was that they took a factory job to support their family. Figure 5.11 shows that 54% of women, irrespective of their marital status and urban living arrangements, offered this explanation that they were working in garment factories to support their families financially. In some cases, their income was spent on basic family needs, while in other cases it was earmarked for special purposes, such as house rent, tuition for children education etc. Data suggest that adult males of these households were mostly day labourers, rickshaw pullers and small scale traders. Further, some of

the households of these women had fathers or husbands who were seasonally employed. This group of women belonged to extremely poor households and the majority of them, before taking a garment factory job, participated in paid work, such as domestic service, agricultural work, brick breaking, building construction etc. Entry into garment factories was an occupational shift for them. They took the factory job, as it was a preferred form of employment, which paid higher wages and had better working conditions than those of their previous jobs.

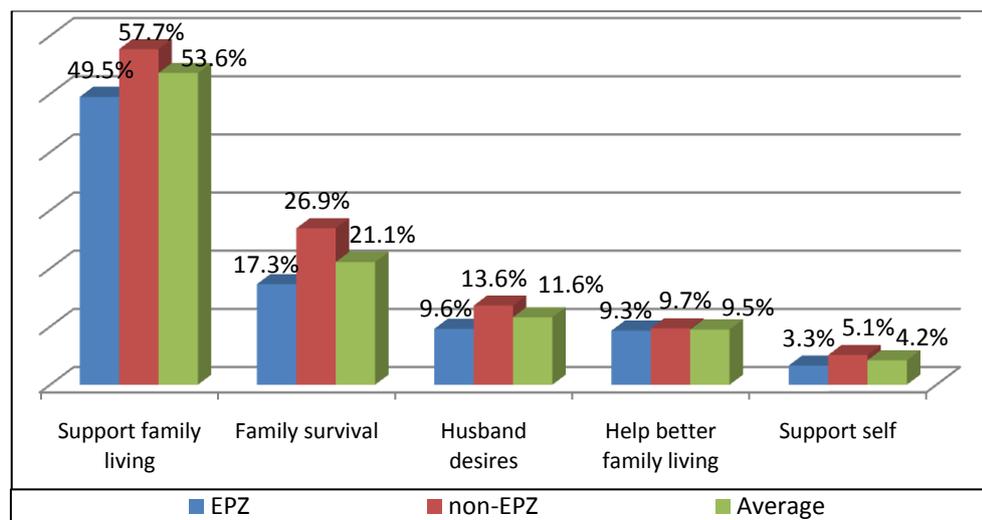


Figure 5.11 Reasons of taking paid employment

The quotation of the following respondent reveals that her mother’s factory job was the only means for their family to make a living, while she took the job of a maid servant, with a view to supporting her family, since scarcity propelled them. Her experience as a maid servant was very painful and for this reason she also started a factory job with her mother at a very early age. She viewed her factory job as being much better than her previous job.

‘In the village we were struggling with our living. My father was a day labourer and my mother worked in our neighbouring houses. We had a piece of homestead as our only asset. The death of my father intensified our struggle for food. My mother used to bring all her food she got from her work but that was very nominal. We had very hard times there. [...] One of our distant relatives advised us to move to Dhaka. He was a supervisor in a garment factory. He arranged a room for our living in a squatter and a job for my mother in his factory. My mother started the job of a helper but she

did not earn enough to meet all our needs. One of our neighbours in the squatter arranged a job as maid servant for me in a house. [.....] It was a lot of pressure there and I had to work all day and night. There was no time to rest and beating was common in that house. So one day I escaped that house and came to my mother. Life here is very difficult. You have to pay for everything. [.....] So one day I told my mother that I wanted to work with her in the garment factory. She took me to the factory and I started my new life as a helper before my puberty (sabalok). We two now earn for our family and my only sister is studying at a local school. [.....] A garment job is much better than domestic work’.

-An unmarried female n-EPZ worker aged 17

Sudden adversity because of the death of earning male family members, inability to work due to illness, collapse of business, loss of land etc., propelled 21% of female workers into employment. This group of women took waged employment, as a strategy to cope with crisis, because of familial adversities that made their family status vulnerable to downward mobility. They had no choice but to start earning for their family to avoid decline into the ranks of poor families. A few of the households in this group were female headed, where there were no males due to death, divorce or desertion. Most of these workers, before starting these jobs, either were housewives or students. The majority of them faced opposition from their family members to their decision to enter a garment factory. This opposition was because of traditional cultural values that women’s work was contrary to social norms and threatening to family honour. Women had to pursue and convince their family members, to allow them to take formal sector employment, which was not easy for many of them. However, for some there was no resistance, as in the case of the following woman, as she explained her situation.

She, like some other women, was displaced to town, because of sudden familial adversity. These women did not belong to the poorest group, although they became distressed, and economic scarcity became a major issue of concern for their family, as it was a question of survival. Taking a factory job, for women like her, was an effort to maintain their family status as the following narrative articulates.

'My husband was a petty trader in our village. He had no shop of his own. He moved from bazaar to bazaar and did his business under the sky. During rainy season it was very difficult for him to run his business. [.....] He used to take loan from a local NGO to do his business. At the end of every week he had to pay back instalments. He was doing very well and once the NGO people advised my husband to take money from them to rent a shop in our village bazaar. He took a term loan from the NGO and started a new business. [.....] We had very good times. We used to send our two sons to school. I had lots of dreams for them. [.....] One night there was a fire in the shopping centre and our shop with many other shops in the supermarket burnt into ashes. Overnight we became street beggars. We lost everything but we had an obligation to repay the NGO loan. You cannot even die before paying NGO loans back. [.....] We deposited all our valuables and the deeds of the homestead with the NGO and then came to town with our three kids. We had no option in the village. [.....] One of our village neighbours helped me find a factory job. Now I am a sewing operator. My husband is a rickshaw puller. We pay the NGO instalments every month. We also save some for our future. We hope to start again in our village'.

-A married female n-EPZ worker aged 27

This woman intended to go back to the village once she had adequate savings after repaying the NGO loan, while for some others, taking a factory job was an effort for them to meet their husbands' demand for money. In their accounts of why they had come to work in a garment factory, about 12% of the workers articulated that their husbands forced them to take a factory job. Many of these women indicated that their income was used for their familial basic needs, although they identified their husbands as the main family earner. In most of the cases, their husbands had regular employment and supported their natal families. Data reveal that some men had more than one wife and they did not work, but took the income of their wives forcibly. The following quotation reveals that demand for money from her husband forced this woman to take a factory job. She gave all her salary to her violent husband and thus, tried to fulfil the demand of her husband for money from her father. She was doing the job against her will, as she wanted to save herself, as well as her father, from adversity.

'My parents married me giving BDT 20,000 (US\$ 291) as dowry to my husband. After a couple of months of marriage my husband started demanding more money from my father. My father took a loan from a local NGO during my wedding to meet all costs including dowry. He is the only earner of a five member family and had to pay the regular NGO instalment every month. It was not possible for him to give more money to my husband. [.....] My husband is a rickshaw puller. He is very lazy and does not work regularly. We had hard times here at that time. [.....] I tried to make him understand my father's condition. He became angrier and insisted on me bringing money from my father. Once he started torturing me for money. I stood for everything for the sake of my natal family. [.....] One day my father came to see me here. He behaved very badly with my father and demanded money from him. My father sold some of his land and gave my husband BDT 10,000 (US\$ 145). [.....] After a couple of months he again started demanding money and treating me badly. Once I lost myself and wanted to know about the money my father gave him last time. He became more arrogant and beat me inhumanly. He was very cruel [....] and asked me to go away if I could not bring him money from my father. I discussed my situation with one of my neighbours. She advised me to take a factory job to meet my husband's demand for money. [.....] I give my husband all my income and he does not beat me anymore. But I do not like factory work. It is very hard and tiring'.

-A married female EPZ worker aged 21

Some women (10%) entered into a garment factory job with a view to enhancing the economic condition and standard of living of their families. The motive of these women, for taking a job, was to finance their children's educational costs and other familial needs. A small portion (4%) took a factory job to meet their own needs, with a view to lessening their family burdens. Both these groups of women had resistance from their family members, to their entering factory production, as traditionally there is a link between *purdah* and male honour in Bangladesh. Status considerations are violated when women work outside the home, since having any working woman in the family means male members cannot afford to support them (Feldman & McCarthy, 1983:952; White, 1992:84, Siddiqui, 2000:16; Kabeer, 2004:142; Salway, Jesmin & Rahman,

2005:342). However, they were able to go beyond this resistance to start a factory job. In their accounts of why they took a garment job, instead of any other, to meet their familial economic needs, the most prevalent reason they identified was the availability of such jobs. More than half the female workers (51%) articulated that a garment factory job was most easy to obtain, and anybody could get one, without any prior experience. Empirical data suggest that formal educational attainment was not mandatory for obtaining these jobs, to an extent. One can work in garment factories with minimum or even no formal education. At the same time, lack of required educational attainment was a matter of disqualification for a few women who tried for a job in other sectors. These women articulated that they took a garment job, as they had no other choice in the job market, due to lacking the required educational qualifications. Employment in garment factories is better than many other jobs available for women, such as domestic work, brick breaking or building construction and 17% of female workers preferred garment factory jobs, because of a better working environment. Data reveal that 5% of women liked a factory job, as it gave them a flavour of a modern working environment and monthly pay.

Access and recruitment strategies

The role of information and social networks is very important in obtaining a garment factory job. My study suggests that the majority of workers I interviewed entered into the factory job with help from their relatives, friends from the village of origin or neighbours. They had no problem getting a job, as they had acquaintances in urban areas. Personal relations and linkages were very important for them to become garment workers. This finding confirms other studies in Bangladesh (Dannecker, 2002; Afsar, 2002). Information about job vacancies is a practical help for a newcomer and the most effective source of information, for 67% of female workers, was their friends, relatives and neighbours, living in town. The following quotation illustrates that kinship ties gave this woman some sort of feeling of security and shelter in an environment that was completely new to her. Her relatives helped her find a job. Thus, networks play an important role in providing job opportunities for women.

'I came to Dhaka with my daughter two years back. Some of my distant relatives living here arranged a room for us here and a job for me in a

garment factory with them. [.....] After a couple of months I took my daughter to the factory to work with me. My supervisor was good and took my daughter in the factory. [.....] I took her as it was safe for her to be with me all the time. I always felt here safe as my relatives helped me a lot since I came'.

- A deserted female n-EPZ worker aged 31

Management, in most cases, asks the workers to bring their friends and relatives to fill up vacancies. Management's reliance on workers for filling up vacancies is, I would argue, their strategy to retain workers. It is likely that workers will not leave a factory if they have friends and relatives as their co-workers. As a factory worker, I experienced that employee turnover is very high in garment factories, since women move between factories seeking the most favourable conditions for them. As such, employee shortage is very common. However, another strategy management adopts is posting advertisements for vacant positions on notice boards outside the factory and other places. Gate advertisements were the source of information about job vacancies for 31% of female workers. Interviews reveal that a small segment of workers (2%) had kinship and locality ties with the entrepreneurs. Feldman (1992:123) argued that a large portion of female factory workers came from the owners' home village kin groups and this recruitment strategy tied them to some form of social obligation to continue working in their factories. In addition, it ensured the owners' guardianship and patriarchal control over the workers, which once was limited to immediate male family elders. My empirical data suggest that relatives living in urban areas assist new entrants in garment factories and the patron-client relationship, as Feldman observed, is now replaced by social networks. I would argue that the tremendous growth of the garment sector, the involvement of large numbers of workers and their economic necessity, have changed the pattern and recruitment strategy that Feldman found in her study. Nonetheless, all workers gave a written application for their desired posts, mentioning their age, address, marital status, education and experiences. Data suggest that the majority of workers (71%) obtained appointment letters outlining terms and conditions of work, wages and other relevant matters, while all workers had identity cards as proof of their employment in their respective factories.

Working conditions

Empirical evidence suggests that working conditions varied in EPZ and n-EPZ factories. I observed certain work-related problems in the factories in which I worked, and the majority of workers also mentioned these. In the following section, I discuss working hours and wages, wage-related and non-wage benefits as well as physical conditions and safety measures in garment factories.

Working hours

Interviews reveal that the majority of factories continue production for ten to fourteen hours a day and sixty to ninety eight hours a week, even more in some cases. During my entire employment period in the n-EPZ factory, we worked from 8am until 11pm with one hour lunch break (the only break in fifteen hours) and seven days a week. In the EPZ factory we had a weekly holiday and our working hours were from 7.30am to 8pm with thirty minutes lunch break, although my co-workers here articulated that previously they worked on holidays also. Overtime work is a regular phenomenon in a garment factory job and it varies between factories. Data reveal that after eight hours usual working time, EPZ factory workers frequently do two to four hours overtime every day, whilst in n-EPZ factories it is four to six hours and throughout the day workers can enjoy only a lunch break of thirty to sixty minutes. Previous studies revealed that working hours in export-oriented factories worldwide were higher than comparable working hours in any other sector. Addison and Demery (1988:379) collected data from some East Asian countries and concluded that working hours in the export sector were much higher than the government mandated hours. I found a similar pattern in this research in terms of factory working hours. Law permits garment entrepreneurs six working days and sixty working hours with a maximum of twelve hours overtime a week (Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority, 1989; Ministry of Labour and Employment, 2006a). Nevertheless, entrepreneurs hardly followed government rules and interestingly, I observed that none of the workers complained about overtime work. The majority of them (73%) welcomed overtime work, as it brought them more wages, even though some of them complained that they were not informed in advance, when they would be required to stay longer. However, this situation, especially for married women, created problems at home, since they were expected to cook in the evenings for the family. A significant number of workers (23%)

stated that their husbands or parents did not believe them and accused them of walking around the street or visiting their friends. Paul-Majumder & Begum (2006) argue that long working hours was a stress factor for the workers. They could not manage time for rest, recreation and adequate sleep.

Wage benefits

The government of Bangladesh has fixed minimum wages for both EPZ and n-EPZ factory workers (Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority, 1989; Ministry of Labour and Employment, 2006b). Their monthly minimum wages include a basic, 30% of basic as house allowance and BDT 200 (US\$ 3) as medical allowance. The government permits factory management to work overtime at double the basic hourly pay. Data reveal that factory managements rarely followed the government prescribed minimum wage rule, including date of payment. Monthly wages, including overtime bills and other allowances, are supposed to be paid by the 10th day at the latest of the following month. However, empirical data suggests that workers frequently received lower than the minimum wages, for their respective grades¹⁰. The majority of workers (67%) reported that they were aware of the minimum wages for their grade and received less per month than the wages fixed. Yet, hardly any of these workers expressed dissatisfaction with their take home salaries. Instead, 87% of them complained about irregular payment of their wages. They articulated that they got paid their wages on varied dates. Additionally, they and especially the n-EPZ garment workers often did not get their overtime bills with salary, which sometimes remained due. This is evident from the following quotation. This woman rarely got salary on her expected date, while her overtime bills regularly remained due. Interviews reveal that payment of salary on varied dates and non-payment of overtime wages with salary in n-EPZ factories created difficult situations for women, especially those who lived on their own or had

¹⁰ Government of Bangladesh fixed minimum wages for workers of various levels in both EPZ and non-EPZ factories. The monthly minimum wages for Grade-III (Senior Operator/Quality Inspector, etc.), Grade-IV (Operator/Cutter/Quality Inspector etc.), Grade-V (Junior Machine operator/Iron Man, etc.), Grade-VI (Junior Operator) and Grade-VII (Helper/Apprentice) workers of EPZ factories has been fixed US\$ 50, US\$ 45, US\$ 40, US\$ 35 and US\$ 25/30 respectively. In the non-EPZ factories their salary is respectively Tk. 2449 (US\$ 36), Tk. 2250 (US\$ 33), Tk. 2046 (US\$ 30), Tk. 1851 (US\$ 27) and Tk. 1662 (US\$ 24). It is evident that there is a big difference between the salaries of EPZ and non-EPZ factories. Moreover, interviews reveal that employers often do not follow the minimum wages rules and workers frequently got less than the government prescribed minimum wages in both EPZ and non-EPZ factories. However, workers prefer EPZ factories to non-EPZ factories since they provide better wages and opportunities. (Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority (BEPZA) Instructions I & II, 1989; Ministry of Labour and Employment, 2006).

dependants with them. Under these circumstances they had to depend on the mercy of other people like the landlord, shopkeepers, etc., for their living. This situation indeed creates insecurity for the workers and they cannot organise their lives as they planned to.

'I expect my wages by the end of the first week of every month. But there is no fixed date. Sometimes they pay during the second week and last month it was during the end of the third week. They pay overtime bills during the fourth week and now it is due for the last two months. [.....] At times I get less overtime wages than is due for the actual hours I did. They always deduct money from monthly salary if we are late and everywhere it is same'.

- A married female n-EPZ worker aged 21

This woman, like many others, often got paid less for her overtime work and this is a common problem workers frequently face, especially in n-EPZ factories. Another problem, this woman articulated, is the deduction of money from salary. Data reveal that garment factory workers were familiar with the practice of cutting salary as punishment if they came late or failed to fulfil production targets. Supervisors impose this punishment immediately and thus salaries are used as a strategy to implement factory rules and regulations. It is a method of punishment as well as reward for them. Interviews suggest that the most loyal had a better chance to receive their salary and overtime bills, while protesters risked their dues being cut. Nonetheless, data reveal that workers seemed more concerned about timely payment of their dues, than minimum wages or wage deduction.

Wage related benefits

There is an institutionalised system of reward and recognition in most of the factories. In both EPZ and n-EPZ factories, I found an announcement of a '*monthly special bonus*', for the group of workers who could fulfil their target on time. Other factory workers also voiced the existence of this system of special bonus. The existence of such a method of boosting workers' productivity, as I observed in my research, is not consistent with what Dannecker (2002:130) found in her study. She argued that workers were controlled by threats and intimidation. Nevertheless, the massive growth of the garment sector, in Bangladesh, has created ample job opportunities for workers. As such,

I would argue that management, induced by increased competition, now values workers' experience and tries to induce them by various types of bonuses instead of coercion.

An attendance bonus is provided in all factories. This system discourages workers' late presence or absenteeism, as three late attendances cost them this bonus, while one absence costs them both attendance bonus and the day's basic salary. Data suggest that each year, garment factory workers enjoy two festival allowances, equivalent to two months basic salary. By law they are entitled to have a minimum of 10% annual increment over their salary. However, both EPZ and n-EPZ factory workers stated that the amount of their yearly increment mostly depended on the desires of their supervisors.

Non-wage benefits

A married female worker completing a minimum of six months service in a factory is entitled, on application, to maternity leave with full basic pay for eight weeks before and eight weeks after the confinement. This benefit may be granted only twice to a woman, over her service period, with a gap of three years in between (Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority, 1989; Ministry of Labour and Employment, 2006a). All female workers I interviewed in this study, irrespective of their marital status, knew about this provision. They articulated that maternity leave was implemented in EPZ factories, while n-EPZ factories were reluctant. This is evident from the following quotation, when this woman states that she enjoyed maternity benefits during her job in the EPZ factory, while she had to leave her n-EPZ factory job due to pregnancy, as they did not give her maternity benefits.

'During my first pregnancy period I worked in a non-EPZ factory. They did not give me maternity benefits and I had to resign although they told me that they would take me again. [.....] My second child was born during my job in this factory. I got paid four months basic salary and leave for 112 days'.

- A married female EPZ worker aged 24

The provision of canteen facilities within factory compounds has been a norm. Data reveal that all garment factories had canteen facilities, and in most cases, management provided lunch or gave lunch allowances. The allocation of money for

lunch varied from BDT 12 (US\$ 0.17) to BDT 18 (US\$ 0.26). Workers expressed their dissatisfaction with the quality of food that management provided, and most of them favoured a lunch allowance. They preferred lunch allowances, as it would increase their take home salary. Moreover, canteens in some of the n-EPZ factories did not have enough space and interviews reveal that not all workers could take their food there.

Availability of child care facilities is another common feature in garment factories and those who do not have anybody in the home to care for their children availed themselves of this facility. Others argued that their children felt better in their home and hence they did not use this facility. Data reveal that factory managements provide child care facilities at their own cost, since the provision of child care facilities in factory compounds is one of the requirements, set by the Western buyers, which they have to follow. Nonetheless, the majority of workers (83%) stated that they were not allowed to see their children in the childcare centre during work. Obviously, such a restriction discourages women from using child care facilities inside the factory.

Most of the factories provide buses or transport allowances. Commuting to factories by factory buses is the preferred mode of transport for the workers. Data suggest that workers themselves collectively hired buses where management gave them transport allowances. They preferred such an arrangement, since it ensured their on-time presence in the office, saved them time and money and provided safety on the street.

Garment workers, by law, are entitled to enjoy casual leave (ten days in a year with full pay), earned leave (one day for every 22 days), festival leave (eleven days in a year with full pay), sick leave (fourteen days in a year with full pay), weekly holiday and a day off during the week for working on weekly holidays (Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority, 1989; Ministry of Labour and Employment, 2006a). It is worth mentioning that Fridays and Saturdays are public holidays in Bangladesh, although Fridays are the only weekend for export-oriented industries, since these industries work six days a week. Interviews reveal that the EPZ factory workers had more weekly holidays and more paid leave facilities, while the majority of n-EPZ factory workers said that they rarely enjoyed these leaves. Workers from both EPZ and n-EPZ factories expressed their grievances that they were allowed six days festival leave with full pay and for the rest of the days enjoyed during festival occasions, they

had to work on subsequent weekends without any overtime pay. The majority of workers (85%) said that they never got any day off, although they were paid overtime for working holidays. However, it is obvious that there was no opportunity for them to recover strength they lost during working days. Furthermore, workers continued work even when they were sick, since they could not enjoy leave facilities. This situation aggravated their sickness further. As such, workers' absenteeism in garment factories was a common matter, which in turn, affected factory productivity.

Physical conditions and safety measures

A number of previous studies reported that physical conditions and safety measures in garment factories were very poor (Hossain, Jahan & Sobhan, 1990:66; Butler & Teagarden, 1993:486; Zohir & Paul-Majumder, 1996:107). Researchers suggested that most of the garment factories were inadequately ventilated. They had inadequate and unhygienic toilet facilities and were often missing canteen facilities. They did not have adequate safety equipment and medical care. My research data are mostly contrary to what other studies revealed. None of the workers complained about the physical conditions and safety measures of their respective garment factories which, I would argue, are purpose-built buildings with relatively good working conditions. Foreign buyers now frequently visit garment factories and perhaps their frequent and regular inspections prompted better working conditions in garment factories. Siddiqi (2009:170) argues that buyers' accountability to Northern consumers and labour rights groups accounts for their frequent visits to garment factories. Previously, garment production would take place in hired buildings, which had very poor physical conditions and safety measures. However, most of the recent factories have windows from all sides and adequate exhaust fans, which clean the air and keep the production floor cold. As I observed and the majority of workers stated, factory buildings had very wide and separate staircases for women and men. They used separate toilets and none of them complained about the number of toilets, nor did they require permission to go to the toilet. Employers were very conscious about cleanliness and there were designated cleaners on the factory floor who cleaned the workroom and toilets at regular intervals. Workers also were not allowed to eat anything and had to use separate shoes inside the factories. Data suggest that a first aid box was installed on each factory floor, although these were not well equipped and there were no trained persons to handle them. Factory

buildings were equipped with a fire fighting system and each floor had a few male workers who received training on fire fighting. The majority of workers (83%) reported that they at least had one female qualified doctor in the factory compound and a dispensary, although they provided very limited medicine. Management in some factories, sometimes, during working hours, played music as a means of entertainment. Most of the workers (67%) appreciated music during work, as it broke the monotony of the incessant noise of sewing machines. Thus, my research findings demonstrate that physical conditions and safety measures of garment factories of Savar were much better than previous studies revealed.

Conclusion

Women in Bangladesh have traditionally participated in productive activity at the household level. Declining economic status and erosion of living standards led them to paid work, breaking the norms of *purdah*. They migrated from the countryside in search of employment, specifically in export-oriented garment factories. The majority of them (70%) were young women. Entry into garment factories requires some academic attainments and most of them (91%) had some formal education. They constituted both unmarried and married women who predominantly came from impoverished households, reliant on income from labour, although some women did not necessarily belong to the poorest of the poor. A few of them (8%) were widowed, divorced, deserted or separated. A good number of them (43%) migrated on their own and a few of them (7%) lived in single households. The majority of female workers (57%) migrated with their family members, relatives or acquaintances and familial situation was the preferred mode of living for most of them (93%). For many of them (54%) a factory job was their effort to support their family livelihood, while for some of them (21%) employment was their response to cope with a crisis situation. A few of the workers (12%) were forced to work by their husbands, while some others (10%) took a factory job to enhance their family's standard of living. Nevertheless, the majority of women (79%) who migrated on their own had to negotiate with their family members, in their way. Most of them (67%) got assistance, from their relatives, friends and neighbours, once they were in urban areas, to get a job. Thus, it is evident that rural-urban migration patterns and employment in garment factories have changed household arrangements and caused the emergence of atypical households in urban areas.

The majority of garment factory workers (71%) received formal appointment letters, which mentioned terms and conditions of employment, while they all had an identity card as a proof of their employment in their respective factories. Their working hours were higher than those of any other export sector job. However, working conditions in EPZ factories were much better than those of the n-EPZ factories. The EPZ factory workers enjoyed more benefits with regularity in the payment of wages and overtime bills. The n-EPZ factory workers received their wages on varied dates. They received their overtime payments irregularly, and at times, they remained overdue. Although physical conditions and safety measures were comparatively good in all garment factories, workers mostly preferred EPZ factories because of better working conditions and benefits. The subsequent three chapters present an analysis of the empirical data that I obtained from the field. The first analysis chapter concentrates on discussing the thematic issues linked to women's coming into the job.

Chapter VI: The new economic actors: perceptions and experiences of employment

Introduction

Women's participation in productive tasks, at household level in Bangladesh, rural areas in particular, has traditionally been a common phenomenon. The demand to meet family needs has required women's labour in maintaining the family and in fulfilling a wide range of productive activities (Feldman and McCarthy, 1983:951). In addition to their reproductive and household management works, their responsibilities have traditionally included the processing of all crops, care and feeding of livestock, rearing of poultry, growing of vegetables and all other tasks performed at household level. Their activities have traditionally kept them confined within the household compound with other women, while men work with other men beyond the household (Papanek, 1971, 1973). Patriarchy, a social system of male domination and female subordination, supported by the institution of *pardah*, has segregated the world of women and men in Bangladeshi society. Nonetheless, extensive poverty has eroded the traditional system of familial organisation in post-independent Bangladesh and since the 1970s, women's participation in wage earning activities for survival has been a continuously increasing feature. Prior to the advent of garment factories in the 1980s, there were relatively few employment opportunities for Bangladeshi women, especially in the formal sector of the economy, although they had some limited opportunities in the informal labour market. In their quest to earn an income, rural poor women during that time used to participate in the processing of agricultural products, jobs which were seasonal, unstable and low paid. Still, the mechanisation of agriculture further diminished their limited earning opportunities (Hossain, Jahan & Sobhan, 1988:113; White, 1992:85). Against this backdrop, the establishment of the export-oriented garment sector has mushroomed women's participation in waged employment and until presently, has provided them with the most stable form of employment in Bangladesh, as elsewhere in the world (Safa, 1983:96).

In this chapter I examine women's perceptions of factory employment. Here I argue that garment factories have provided numerous Bangladeshi women with large scale employment opportunities in the formal sector of the economy and they learn saleable skill from their factory work. On the factory floor, they work in a rigid

environment, where jobs are vertically segregated along gender lines and they are positioned at the lowest tiers in the work hierarchy. In factory jobs, they have very limited promotional prospects, which force them to exercise their own agency to the extent that they try to benefit from the constraints of work structure, utilising their work skills. As such, employee turnover in garment factories is very high. I discuss these aspects of factory work referring to the narratives of women workers in subsequent sections of this chapter. The subtitle of each section indicates a relevant theme that I developed from the narratives of female factory workers.

Women and the formal sector of employment

The social construction of gender, under patriarchy, has developed some norms for women, which traditionally have restricted their participation in the waged labour force. Hartmann (1981:14) defined patriarchy as a set of relations having a material base, which enables men to dominate women. The material base of patriarchy includes men's control over the property, wage income and labour of the female household members. It enables men to govern women's economic mobility and thus to maintain their dominance over women by excluding them from access to paid employment. In Bangladesh it describes a distribution of power and resources within households, such as men controlling power and resources, while women remain subordinate to and dependant on men throughout their life (Cain, Khanam & Nahar, 1979:406). The basic features of the traditional family system in Bangladesh correspond to those articulated by Kandiyoti (1988:278) in her description of '*classic patriarchy*'. Girls are married at a young age. They go to live in their husband's house, where they are subordinate, not only to all men but also to the older women. The cult of domesticity (Geschwender, 1992:2) and patriarchal rules of residence, inheritance and lineage work concurrently to limit the economic and social autonomy of women in Bangladesh. Their proper role, the cult of domesticity denotes, is to care for their husband, tend his home and raise his children (Islam and Sultana, 2006:61).

The custom of *purdah* in Bangladesh has been an integral part of the patriarchal belief system. Here *purdah* works as a means for the social control of women by men along patriarchal lines, restricting their participation in visible social roles and ensuring their participation in productive activities in the household. Feldman and McCarthy

(1983:951) observed it as a system that simultaneously ensured women's participation in familial agricultural activities, as well as their inability to control the fruits of production. Bangladeshi women in rural areas have constantly been involved in the processing of all agricultural products, within the confines of the household compound, in addition to the maintenance of all household activities. Under the patriarchal family system, the nature of their work is essentially inside the household and their economic and social protection is men's responsibility. However, the pressures of extreme poverty have challenged traditional organisation of family life in Bangladesh. Widespread poverty has compromised the ability of men to ensure women's economic and social protection and forced growing numbers of women to go outside the limits of their home compound to ensure livelihood sustainability, despite the sanctions against their presence in public places (Hossain, Jahan & Sobhan, 1990:34; Kibria, 1995:294-295).

Employment for women in the 1970s was very limited both in numbers and types. Women from poorer families had almost no opportunity to participate in waged employment in the formal sector. As such, many women during that time worked as casual waged labours, domestic servants, petty traders and even sex workers to alleviate poverty (Kabeer, 2004:14). Cultural restrictions on women's mobility, along with having little or no education, confined them in these most exploitative and worst paid jobs of the informal economy. The demand for labour for these jobs is unstable and they cannot create an ongoing marketable output. Against this backdrop, the rise of the export-oriented garment sector in the early 1980s provided enormous stable employment opportunities for women. It was noted earlier that, since these labour intensive industries, financed by foreign capital, were sensitive to production costs, they relocated their manufacturing sites to developing countries in search of cheap labour to maintain and boost their competitiveness in the global market. They employed women in their manufacturing units, since it was assumed that women in the Third World could be paid less for their work, because of their comparatively disadvantageous position in the labour market. The tasks women perform at household level are unpaid and they are treated as dependent on fathers and husbands and sharing men's wages. In patriarchal societies it is perceived to be 'natural' that men will occupy a higher economic position than women. The notions of women being more submissive, feminine, expressive, and dextrous, combined with their essential mothering role are often manipulated to justify women's lower economic position to men (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1983:67). Because

of these naturalising discourses, they are considered secondary to men in the labour market and when they enter into the workforce, they are not seen as needing the same remuneration as men. As such, the tasks they perform in the labour market are lower paid and they constitute a cheap labour force (Beaton, 1982; Hossfeld, 1990; Lim, 1983, 1997). The process of socialisation and nature of household activities induce a comparative disadvantage of women over men in the labour market, since their household tasks are not acknowledged in calculations of market efficiency. Conversely, however, one could argue that their comparative disadvantage position in the labour market gives them a comparative advantage in terms of employability. Labour intensive industries, such as the export-oriented garment manufacturing units, take advantage of the comparative disadvantage of women and their secondary status to men in the labour market and select women as the perfect workforce. Their employment in waged labour in Bangladesh has made their presence visible in the public domain on a large scale.

Women's participation in waged employment outside the home is a violation of *pardah*, an element of the existing gender order, which has been negotiated and redefined through continuous social interactions and changes (Danecker, 2002:20). The socioeconomic structure of Bangladesh has been upset by a series of social, political and economic crises in the early 1970s (Hossain, Jahan & Sobhan, 1988:111). The nine month long independence war of 1971 left many women abandoned. Many women became rape victims of war and were not accepted by their families, while many others were deserted because of the killing of many men (around 3 million) during the war. Post-war conflict over control and distribution of resources and a subsequent famine in 1974 created economic insecurities for many people. Therefore, the economic and social protection of families became difficult for men. This situation greatly affected traditional patriarchal controls of men on women, making it more flexible, since women were increasingly required to participate in paid employment for survival. Evidence suggests that poverty in Bangladesh destabilised the material basis of the '*patriarchal bargain*' (Kabeer, 1988:103; Kandiyoti, 1988:281). The socio-economic transformation of the country, because of poverty, pushed women to move beyond their home compound, in their quest for work and to challenge the custom of *pardah*. The advent of garment factories proves that patriarchal structures in Bangladesh were more flexible to the push of poverty and the pull of its power dynamics (Feldman, 2001:1113; Kabeer and Mahmud, 2004:147). As such, the rapid and phenomenal growth of the garment

industry has dramatically increased female participation rates¹¹, especially in the formal sector, in a short span of time, visibly transforming the gender composition of the country's labour force. Garment factories have played a major role in changing the pattern of female participation in the formal labour market. These factories have provided women with the opportunity of accessing waged employment and made their economic contribution visible in the national economy. All participants of this research articulated, as evident from the following narratives, that establishment of export-oriented garment factories created employment opportunities for women in the formal sector of the economy, which otherwise were rarely available to them.

'I have been working here for three years. In the village there was no possibility for me to earn money. One of our distant relations wanted to take me to their house as a housemaid. I did not like that kind of job. You do not get any money, just food for the work. [...] I convinced my father to allow me to come to town and join one of the garment factories. I like this work although it is hard. It is much better than the work of a domestic servant. I have a regular income here. I also work with other women in a group'.

-An unmarried female EPZ worker aged 20

'Obtaining a garment job is easy without much education. I did not go to school. I have worked as a garment worker for five years. [...] There are no jobs in the village. You can make some money participating in construction work or working for other people. But garment work is easier on the body than these works. Every month you get your salary. It is not possible in the village. [...] Garment work is good because you go to office everyday and learn something new'.

-A married female n-EPZ worker aged 23

The common theme in the accounts of these two women, like many others, regarding their decision to enter into garment factory work is their assessment that such work, as explained below, is better than any other work available to them. They opted

¹¹ In 1983-84 only 8% women participated in the labour force which stood at 29% in 2005-2006 as Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (2007a) reports.

for formal sector employment and obtained it through garment factories. Biographies¹² reveal that three women tried to find employment in local NGOs, while another two applied for government jobs but they were not successful. Since they wanted a job with a steady income, the only option these women saw was to start working in garment factories; however, it was not their first choice. The most often cited available income-generating opportunities for women were crop processing, domestic service, raising livestock, growing vegetables and construction work. According to the women I interviewed in this study, the major comparative benefit of garment work is financial. Employment in garment factories gives the opportunity to regularly earn money, which is not possible from other work available to them in the informal sector. Garment work is hard, but better than those outdoor jobs, in terms of its physical effect on the body. Construction work and the like involve the risk of physical injuries and other related problems, from which garment work is safer. Women perceive the nature of garment work to be better and more attractive than other traditional income earning activities within the informal sector. In addition, garment factory work gives them the flavour of working in the formal sector of the economy with other women and they perceive it to be modern in character, since they work in an office environment. For all of them office meant the factory building where they work regularly for a specific time with a steady monthly income, which almost is not possible in the informal sector of employment. As suggested by many participants, garment work is easy to obtain, since it does not require evidence of formal education. On applications new entrants have to demonstrate that they have, at least, familiarity with English numbers and have attained the age to take a factory job. Thus, these jobs do not require formal education, but rather provide work opportunities to women who have few possibilities in the formal sector.

Evidence suggests that the participation of huge numbers of women in garment production has brought about massive changes in the country's foreign exchange earnings and employment levels. Such changes have shifted official discourses on the visibility of growing numbers of female garment workers as well. In 1993, the then President of Bangladesh, Abdur Rahman Biswas declared at the Annual Apparel and Textile Exposition:

¹² By biographies I mean repeated discussions, in-depth interviews and structured interviews that I had with female factory workers on the factory floors and in their houses during my field work.

'The garment industry [.....] has come as a blessing to our teeming millions who could not for so long find any sources of employment. It has especially made the womenfolk self-reliant by creating large-scale employment opportunities for them'. (Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), 1993, cited in Siddiqi, 2009:164.)

Employment of huge numbers of women, in the formal sector of the economy, has been one of the most significant impacts of the introduction of export-oriented garment production in Bangladesh. In a brochure published on account of the 1993 Exposition the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association noted, *'for the first time in the history of Bangladesh this industry has created the highest employment opportunity for the country's underprivileged womenfolk in an organised industrial sector'* (op cit.). Thus, official discourses also articulate that garment factories provide women with the opportunity of participating in the formal sector of the national economy making, I would argue, a significant historical shift in traditional gender norms and relations in certain contexts.

Garment factory work environment

To enter garment factories, everybody has, first of all, to pass a number of guards who keep the gate closed and locked. I always felt myself imprisoned when the gate was locked behind me. Although one of the guards explained that this was necessary to protect the workers from disturbance by outsiders. A few women (21%) felt such a practice necessary, as they were safe inside the factory compound, since the gate was locked. Some others (27%) perceived the practice as a controlling system, since it allowed management to check who came late or left early, although late arrival or early departure was almost impossible. Late arrival risks a deduction in salary, while there is no scope of early departure from the factory, as it requires a gate-pass which, as I perceived and the following narratives articulate, was rarely obtainable from the management.

'Guards close the gate when we are in. Without an order from the management they will not open the gate for us. [.....] You have to collect a gate-pass from the management if you require going out. If you show the

pass guards will open the gate. [.....] They never give a gate-pass. I tried several times but never got one’.

-A married female n-EPZ worker aged 21

A gate-pass is required when someone requires short leave in an emergency and without any gate-pass there is no way to leave the factory compound. The rigidity of the work environment is evident from the above account. During production hours guards keep the gate locked and they never opened the gate without a gate-pass from the management when any worker needed to go out. Consequently, no-one can leave the factory premises until work is finished. Some respondents (34%) said that guards used to check them regularly, during entrance and exit, in their previous jobs. There was no provision of security checking in the garment factories in which I worked. Nevertheless, the system of keeping gates locked is perhaps a controlling mechanism management employ to ensure uninterrupted operation of the production process. As noted earlier, garment manufacturing is chain work and the production chain is made up of as many workers as needed. Withdrawal of a worker during production creates a vacuum in the whole chain and interrupts the production process. For this reason, nobody is allowed to leave the factory floor once they have joined the production chain. The gate is open during lunch break and some workers go home for lunch, but they frequently come back again, since unauthorised absence costs a day’s work and attendance bonus.

Production floors, inside the factories, are large rooms where the sewing machines are located one behind another in rows. An operator sits at each machine, performs a task on the garment and passes it to the next operator for another task on it. Thus, all operators involved in a row complete the entire production process. In front of every machine, there is a helper who assists operators in the smooth sewing of a garment. The production of garment is fragmented into as many tasks as is possible and all tasks are completed in one row. Each row is divided into a number of sections and each section is made of a variety of machines and operators skilled in different processes. The tasks of each section are supervised and checked by a supervisor and a quality inspector respectively, while a line chief controls the whole line or row. A production manager (PM) and a quality manager are responsible for target oriented quality clothing production for each floor. Management sets an hourly production target for every line, which automatically trickles down to everybody involved in producing the garment.

Failure of any worker to fulfil the respective hourly target is a failure of the whole row in meeting the production target and this liability goes up to the PM. In the factory, there are some 'reporters' who record hourly production of all workers and place hourly production reports before the factory management. From my participant observation, I perceived that the motive of the management was to obtain the highest level of productivity from workers. Management is more concerned about target fulfilment and as such, it seemed to me, they never allowed workers to leave the factory until the day's target had been fulfilled.

'Last week my father came to see me. So I did not want to do overtime work. I asked my supervisor for permission to allow me to leave at 5pm. He shouted and did not allow me to leave the office. We did night duty that day and worked until 3am to fulfil our target. [.....] The following day my father went home. I could not manage time to talk to my father because of work pressure. Regular work time here is 8am - 5pm and then we do overtime work until 11pm. [.....] They extend working hours whenever they feel it is necessary. There is no prior notice about time extension. We work until our target is fulfilled no matter how long it takes'.

-An unmarried female n-EPZ worker aged 19

Despite her unwillingness, she had to do overtime work, since her supervisor was more attentive to uninterrupted production and interested in target fulfilment and as such, her needs were of no importance to him. Management is least concerned about workers' needs and requirements. Fulfilling production targets is more important to them. They extend production hours as they feel is required. The gate is locked, the production target is fixed and workers are kept under close supervision. Thus, factory management creates a rigid work situation, so that machine operators must continually keep pressure on the pedal of the electric sewing machines, while helpers and others assist the operators in the smooth functioning of the production process.

'As long as we are in the factory we have to work. We cannot eat anything during work time. [.....] There is no permission to eat anything on the factory floor. [.....] If they find anybody eating [they] treat her very badly'.

-A separated female n-EPZ worker aged 23

In a twelve to fifteen hour long workday, lunch break is the only time for workers to eat or rest. In the EPZ factory we had a thirty minute lunch break while it was one hour in the n-EPZ factory. Beyond the lunch break, the only task is to keep production going, as is expressed in the words of the woman cited above. All respondents similarly revealed that they were not allowed to eat anything during the time they were on the factory floor. They avoided eating anything, because of the fear of repercussions from supervisors. They could neither go home when they require, nor could they eat anything when they were hungry. Their life, inside factories, was shaped by the ring of factory bell and electric lights. They started working as soon as the bell rang and the lights were turned on. They kept working until the bell rang again and the lights were turned off. (The lights are controlled by a master switch, which is turned off during lunch break.) As long as they were inside factories, they had to comply with management's desire. All respondents articulated that factory management never valued their individual emergencies or illness, as evident from the following accounts.

'The garment factory is like a prison. Our condition is worse than that of a prisoner in jail. They can move in jail but we cannot. [.....] We start with the ring of a bell and wait for the next bell to ring. We cannot stop until it rings again. If we stop the supervisor shouts. [.....] We start here at 7:30 in the morning and finish at 8pm. We have only 30 minutes break for lunch in the whole day. That is also our rest time throughout the day. [.....] One afternoon during last week I felt very ill. I wanted to go home but they did not allow me. They took me to the factory clinic. The doctor advised me to have one hour's rest. After one hour they called me to the production floor and I worked until 8pm like other days. [.....] We are as if like a machine which they operate according to their requirement'.

-A married female EPZ worker aged 25

She felt sick and was not willing to work that day. As discussed in Chapter V, she was entitled to a paid sick leave, which she was not granted. Management perceived production to be more important than her sickness. She compared the factory to a prison, where they had no freedom and perceived her situation to be worse than that of a prisoner in jail. The situation of the following woman was indeed more severe, as she could not manage time to purchase medicine for her illness.

'We start working in the factory at 8 in the morning and continue until 11 at night. We work seven days a week. Now we have no holiday. I am suffering from fever along with headache and cough for last couple of days. I cannot take medicine. [.....] The doctor in the factory clinic prescribed me 7 days medicine. They gave me 2 days medicine from the factory pharmacy and asked me to buy the rest. But I could not manage time to buy the other medicine. [.....] There is a pharmacy close to my house. It's still closed in the morning when I come to the office and I find it closed at night when I go back. [.....] There is a pharmacy here close to the factory. But people there do not know me. They will not give me on credit. I have no money with me now'.

-An unmarried female n-EPZ worker aged 18

Notwithstanding her sickness, she could not manage time to purchase the required medicine. My own perception and interviews reveal that garment workers inside the factories are like prisoners who are confined on the factory floor and obliged to work, as long as management desires. In the eyes of many workers, they are part of a machine, which management operates as they feel is required to meet production targets. The breaking down of tasks into simple procedures necessitates massive supply of machines and labour and it is argued that the mechanisation of production makes owners view workers as appendages of the machine (Burawoy, 1979:251; Ong, 1991:289). The work environment is very rigid and inside factories they have no or extremely limited freedom of choice. Nevertheless, biographies reveal that some women develop their own strategies to cope with this rigid work environment on the factory floors.

'(She addressed me) brother I will not come tomorrow. [.....] I feel sick. Besides, I do not like this task. It is complicated. [.....] They will assign someone else to work in my place. So when I come next day they will give me a new machine with another task'.

-A married female n-EPZ worker aged 23

Since she felt sick and did not like the task, she did not attend work the following day and escaped the situation she felt was difficult. Thus, some women employ their own agency to a certain level, when they feel it is required. More often than not, they

comply with the desires of management, once they have joined the production chain but their compliance does not imply passivity and some of them utilise their agency to deal with the rigidity of the factory working environment. Their work skills and experiences and the availability of jobs perhaps give them the courage not to surrender, rather to apply their own judgement in difficult situations, although this costs them their wages and attendance allowance.

Factory work and the construction of skill

Professional tailoring in Bangladesh, as elsewhere, always has been and still is deemed a male occupation. Men sit behind the sewing machines and they are exposed to the public in market places. Traditionally, women have been excluded from this occupation, although they constitute the majority of the workforce in garment manufacturing for export. Mostly, women operate the sewing machines on factory floors. They *'are considered not only to have naturally nimble fingers, but also to be naturally more docile and willing to accept tough work discipline, and [.....] to be naturally more suited to tedious, repetitious, monotonous work'* (Elson & Pearson, 1981a:93). Elson and Pearson noted that women learned sewing from their mothers and other female kin. Their training in needlework and sewing produces the skill they require in factory work, since industrial sewing of clothing resembles sewing with a domestic sewing machine. However, none of the interviewed women had experience in running a sewing machine prior to their starting factory work. Interviews reveal that the majority (87%) of female operators are able to repair their sewing machines or to change the needles without help. They learn these technical tasks in the course of time during their work on the sewing machines. Garment production processes are fragmented into small and simple procedures and as noted earlier, each machine operator performs one task in the making of a garment. The operator who bar-tacks the hems continuously works with the bar-tack machine. Thus, each worker performs the same small job repetitively, which, as the following woman attested, is very boring.

'Garment work is repetitive and boring. One is doing the same task every day. When I sew side-seams I only sew side-seams until the supervisor changes the task. [.....] The supervisor decides everything. Sometimes he

changes machine. I have no control over what tasks I should do. [...] I can work with other machines. I always try to increase my speed on a machine.'

- A married female EPZ worker aged 24

The repetitive and boring tasks gave women the opportunity to boost their speed. Since production is fragmented into small procedures, each operator performs the same task repeatedly on the same machine. Interviews reveal that it is an opportunity for them to gain expertise on a specific machine. However, an operator has no control over what task she has to perform. Supervisors assign a worker into the production process, wherever they feel is required. In this sense, factory work is flexible in nature to some degree. Because of work flexibility, workers are transferred from one task to another. This is also an opportunity for them to learn to work with other machines, and thus, flexibility of work enables women to develop skills in operating all machines related to sewing. Interviews reveal that workers learn machine operating in an informal way, as there is no provision of formal training facilities for them in garment factories. Providing training is not profitable for the owners and they perceive that training women through an apprenticeship is a waste of time (Westwood, 1984:24). Consequently, I did not find any apprentices in the factories in which I worked. Employers' perception that women do not require any training in needlework naturalises women's role as sewing machine operators. The naturalisation of women's roles has been the process of socialisation that relegated them to the domestic sphere, which is associated with domination and control (Kobayashi & Linda, 1994:230-231).

Nonetheless, new entrants usually start factory work as helpers who are the lowest paid workers in factories. They are the most inexperienced in the factory and their task is to provide necessary assistance to sewing machine operators. They cut threads from clothing, unstitch garment for alteration, mark garment for attaching pockets, zippers etc. and such other tasks, as they are asked. During their time as sewing helpers, they learn to operate sewing machines. On-the-job training is the norm, as the following narratives reveal.

'I joined the garment factory job seven months ago. I am a helper here. I cut extra threads from garments. [...] My operator is very good. She shows me how to operate (the sewing) machine. I sew garments during lunch and can

handle the sewing machine. She (her operator) has advised me to take a new job as an operator in some other factory'.

-An unmarried female n-EPZ worker aged 17

'In the previous factory I worked as a helper. [.....] Sometimes I used to cut remnant threads from garment. Sometimes I used to mark on the garment for attaching zippers. [.....] My operator was very nice to me. She allowed me to sit at her machine during lunch break. I learned to operate an electric sewing machine from her. [.....] Here I am a junior operator. This is my second job. I gave an interview here. They asked me to sew some fabrics. I did that and they gave me the job'.

-A married female n-EPZ worker aged 20

'Before joining garment job I had no idea about electric (sewing) machines. I started the garment job as an 'iron man'. I did not like that work. [.....] I wanted to learn to operate sewing machine. Beside me there was an operator. He was very good. [.....] He taught me how to operate a sewing machine. I learned to make collar sleeves of a shirt from him. Then I took job as a junior operator in another factory. There I learned over-locking, button-hole making and stitching the joints of a shirt. [.....] Here I do pants and now I can work with any sewing machine. I know the changing of broken needles and maintenance of machines. I also do ironing when required'.

-A married female EPZ worker aged 25

All these three participants, like other women I interviewed in this research, were willing to learn machining and to gain and improve their skill using their limited free time in factories. In their way, they got the required help from other sewing machine operators. Evidence suggests that workers do not receive any formal training that could have improved the level of the skill they achieved from on-the-job training. Since factory management does not provide any formal training opportunities, they themselves try continually to upgrade their skill as factory workers, even though the concept of skill is sexualised (Phillips & Taylor, 1980:85). Although both men and women operate sewing machines, machining in garment factories is identified as 'women's work' since

the majority of machine operators are women. It is classified as unskilled or semiskilled, while technically a similar job done by men in smaller shops is identified as men's work and classified as skilled. This example articulates that the construction of male and female abilities and thus activities depend on context. Tailoring is valued as an occupation, when it is done in public, while the same task becomes degraded, when it is done by women in garment factories. Thus, the social and gendered construction of 'skill' creates the difference between men's and women's jobs or occupations and undervalues women's work.

The lack of value placed in their labour capacity, defines female factory workers as unskilled or semi skilled, even when they attain the ability to run sewing machines and repair them without 'skilled' (male) support. Interviews reveal that operators have to demonstrate their ability to operate sewing machines when they are recruited for these 'unskilled' jobs but the beginners who know stitching are not asked about their ability during interviews or afterwards and they are recruited as helpers. The varied interview approach of recruiting operators and helpers signifies the difference between them. This difference is indeed skill, which they develop in the course of time on the factory floor. They perform repetitive and monotonous tasks like sewing one seam, adding hooks or buttons, which, as I experienced from my participant observation, necessitates much skill. Working on the sewing machines entails manual dexterity, concentration and attention in detail. Qualities such as close concentration, accuracy and manual dexterity observably require considerable skill (Pollart, 1981:65). In addition, working in a group with other members interdependently also requires human capital, meaning knowledge and skills. Other studies on female factory workers also suggest that women develop skill through factory work (Sargent & Matthews, 1997; Feenstra & Hanson, 1997). Women's participation in factory work gives them the opportunity to attain human capital, which is embodied in their ability to perform labour to produce economic value. Human capital does not mean skills generated only by formal education and training but also those created by on-the-job training (Lall, 1992:170). On-the-job training is the only option for female factory workers to learn skills. They attain skills through observation and machine operation in their own time. This informal training, thus, saves the factory owners an enormous amount of both labour time and money, at the expense of individual workers.

Turnover and promotional prospects in garment factories

The female workers I interviewed changed garment factories, on average, three times during a working life of five years¹³. Empirical evidence suggests that women do not stick to one factory for a long time and job-hopping is a common phenomenon among them. The high turnover rate of the garment factory workers is an important finding of this study. Other research on female factory workers in Bangladesh and elsewhere also corresponds to this finding (Eng & Keong, 1988; Hoque, Murayama & Rahman, 1995; Paul-Majumder & Begum, 1997; Dannecker, 2002). Workers perceive horizontal mobility as a strategy to improve their earnings and skills. Such other factors as working environment, regularity of payment and personal relationships with other workers also influence their mobility between factories. However, the following narrative, typical of the majority of workers, I interviewed in this study, shows that economic, as well as non-economic factors, made this worker change her work place three times.

I have worked in garment factories for nearly five years. I started as a helper. One of my neighbours worked in that factory as an operator. She taught me machine operating. She advised me to find a new factory when I attained full control over the machine. [.....] In the first factory I worked eight months. As a helper I got BDT 1000 (US\$ 15) per month there. In the second factory I worked as a junior operator. During interview the supervisor said I would get BDT 1300 (US\$ 19) in the beginning and after six months he would increase my salary. [.....] After six months I asked the supervisor to increase my salary. He said, management was trying to find new work orders and I had to wait until any new contract was signed. [.....] I knew that the factory had lots of work and other operators got much more than I did. So I decided to look for a new job. A new factory opened close by and one day one of my friends and I went there. In the interview they wanted to know my expected salary. I said BDT 2000 (US\$ 30) but they offered me BDT 1850 (US\$ 27). I agreed because it was much higher than my previous wages. [.....] But the work environment in this factory was very bad. The

¹³ I wanted to know their job histories during a work life of five years in garment factories.

supervisors used to treat us very badly. We had to work up to midnight. They did not pay full overtime bills. [.....] So I asked my neighbours to find me a job. One of them organised this job for me after she talked with her supervisor. I demonstrated my skill and they fixed my salary at BDT 2800 (US\$ 41) in the beginning. [.....] I have worked here for nearly three years. This factory is very good. We do not work here after 8pm. We have weekly holidays. We get lunch and tiffin (snack) from the factory. Previously I worked in non-EPZ factories. Some factories give lunch but there is no tiffin'.

-A married female EPZ worker aged 24

She was mostly motivated by increment and every job change brought her higher wages. Supervisors' behaviour was also a matter of concern for her and influenced her decision to find a new job. Interviews reveal and other research on female factory workers reports, that supervisor's behaviour¹⁴ on the factory floor is also responsible for employee turnover in garment factories (Wright, 2001:368). One more thing is evident from her description, that she liked her EPZ factory job, which was much better in terms of wages and facilities. She had been working in the EPZ factory for nearly three years, while she did her first factory job for eight months. Evidence suggests that new entrants usually stay longer at their first workplace, where they try to learn some skills and build some networks with others. The majority of workers (79%) got their first job with help from a relative or neighbour, whereas the subsequent jobs, in most cases, they themselves organised or found with help from their networks, developed inside or outside the factory. Garment workers learn quickly that hard work and negotiation with management are the ways of increasing income. Wages are fixed through negotiation processes and all respondents articulated that changes of workplace were almost the only way for them to negotiate with management and improve their incomes. They did not automatically get higher salaries after working a certain period of time in a factory unless they negotiated with management. The possibility for negotiation with management in new factories was higher. They could demand much higher wages during recruitment and the chances of receiving increments in new factories could be better and this was one of the reasons for the high mobility of factory workers. Interviews reveal that women learn this strategy very quickly and utilise it in the course

¹⁴ The behaviour of men, especially supervisors, is an issue of concern for especially female factory workers. This aspect of factory work is detailed in the next chapter.

of time for their benefit. This strategy is also closely linked to the employment structures within garment factories.

Nonetheless, despite the benefits and possibilities of mobility, promotional prospects for female workers are limited within certain parameters. Their prospect stops when they become senior operators, since further career possibilities in factory work are very limited for them. In six to twelve months, women learn how to operate a machine. Thereafter, usually they join new factories as junior operators. Promotion increases pay, which rises at a much lower rate if they continue in the same factory.

'In the previous factory I joined as a helper. My monthly wage at that time was BDT 1200 (US\$ 17). During the lunch breaks I used to work on the machine of my operator. After nine months I got a machine. [...] The supervisor fixed my salary BDT 1350 (US\$ 20) per month. I worked there six months. Two months back I joined this factory as an operator. Here my monthly salary is BDT 1700 (US\$ 25)'.

-A married female n-EPZ worker aged 21

'In the previous factory I joined as an operator. In the beginning my salary was BDT 2400 (US\$ 35). The working environment in that factory was very good. I worked there three years. They increased my salary only BDT 150 (US\$ 2.2) per year. [...] I joined here three months back as a senior operator. Here my salary is BDT 3200 (US\$ 46) per month'.

-An unmarried female EPZ worker aged 21

The biographies narrated above illustrate the ways, in which workers change factory as a means to gain salary increments, since their continuation in previous factories did not increase their salary¹⁵ as they deserved. Usually, a junior operator can operate at least one sewing machine, while an operator can use two or three machines and a senior operator can operate all machines used in the production line. Reaching the

¹⁵ Both Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority (BEPZA) Instruction I & II (1989) and Bangladesh Labour Law (2006a) sanction the provision of a minimum 10% salary increment per year for factory workers. Nevertheless, biographies reveal that management hardly follows prescribed rules and regulations and workers' increment depends on supervisors' desire, which leaves them scope for exploitation.

posts of junior operators, operators and senior operators are promotions for female factory workers, which brings them higher salary. After reaching the post of senior operator, promotion to them means an increase of salary, as they have virtually no scope for vertical mobility. The next promotional posts belong to the management category, which requires some degree of education. As discussed in chapter V, women join factory work with no or little education and hence, their promotional prospect in these posts is limited. The majority of interviewed female workers (89%) stated that low levels of education had affected their promotion to managerial posts to a great extent. As such, they employed horizontal mobility as a strategy to benefit from factory employment. They did not continue in one factory for long, but rather moved between factories, which brought them higher wages. From the adversities of factory work environment and structure they in the course of time learned how to take advantage from their disadvantaged positions in factory work. The skills or resources they developed from factory work and the availability of jobs served to enhance their possibilities of choosing differently.

Sexual division of labour on the factory floors

Beyond lack of educational qualifications, traditional gender discrimination also works as a barrier for women and 63% respondents articulated that management preferred men to women for supervisory posts. It is perhaps because of the existence of a '*male managerial model*' that perpetuates societal norms that women should not or cannot be successful in management (Terborg, 1997:647). It is argued that management usually perceives that women are weak and lack leadership qualities, and as such, they cannot supervise men, rather they should willingly accept supervision from men (Thorsell, 1967, cited Pollart, 1981:78; Ong, 1991:299). During interviews, some women also appeared to accept management's perspectives on the basis of normative gender roles and expectations.

'The supervisors always shout and frequently use bad language. Women cannot do so. All our supervisors are male and this is good. Management also prefers men for supervisory posts [.....] We (women) are not hard. If I say anything nobody will listen. So I think I should not be a supervisor'.

-A married female EPZ worker aged 23

Supervisors play a major role in organising production tasks. In order to maintain a steady flow in the production line, they have to ensure that all operators involved in the process coordinated with each other. Their responsibility is to provide a continuous flow of work so that no one in the section is idle. Their tasks keep them shouting on the factory floor. This woman perceived that women could not or should not shout or use bad language. She, like many others, believed that men should work in supervisory posts. Her fear, *'nobody will listen'* reflects her belief in male dominance, which she learned through processes of socialisation. Such perceptions illustrate that women themselves may justify the socially constructed gender roles of male and female. Social norms and practices teach them to accept gendered discrimination and the concept of male superiority, which reinforce the grounds of gender divisions of labour in factory premises. Their perceptions about gender roles influence some women not to apply for or accept supervisory posts, as happened to the following woman. Perhaps women's compliance with these norms also influences management, to some degree, to follow gendered divisions of labour in garment factories, in a perpetual reinforcing of these gender expectations.

'After working 5 years as senior operator I became supervisor in the previous factory although it did not increase my wage that much. But my promotion changed everything. Other women in the factory did not accept me as before. Always I had to shout at them, which I did not like. I had to take lunch with other male supervisors in a different table. I did not like eating with other men. Nobody respected me as a supervisor. So I left that factory. Here I am a senior operator. I think men should be supervisors'.

-A married female n-EPZ worker aged 39

She perceived men as supervisors and valued her feeling of association with female workers more. From her account, it is evident that promotion had negative consequences on her personal relationships with other female workers. It affected her interactions with her female co-workers. Moreover, she lost her occupational identity as being one of them. She, like some others, did not want to lose the space that was created through her participation in factory production with other women. Her personal feelings influenced her behaviour. Her promotion brought salary increments but this became less important to her than her feeling of association. Supervisors and line chiefs are required

to arrive early and leave late, since they have to organise tasks on the factory floor. The nature of the tasks as work organiser was also not convenient for her, since she had to commute alone. Furthermore, she perceived that nobody in the factory respected her and therefore she took a new job, again as a senior operator instead of a supervisor. It is evident that the existing cultural and structural barriers discourage women from taking managerial positions and they thus, to an extent, support the reinforcement of the distinction among factory jobs along gender lines.

Production in garment factories is divided into three main tasks: cutting, sewing and finishing. A general manager, always a man, is in charge of the total production process from cutting to shipment. The process starts in the cutting section, which is supervised by a male cutter. Usually men cut fabrics into small pieces and they are assisted by a number of male and female helpers. In their 1997 survey on the socio-economic and health condition of garment workers Paul-Majumder & Begum (2006:27) found that 24% of helpers in the cutting section were female. Production managers are in charge of the sewing floor. They are assisted by a number of line chiefs and supervisors. Each supervisor is responsible for twelve to fifteen sewing machines and each line chief supervises the tasks of four to five supervisors of a line. Production managers, line chiefs and supervisors were all male in the factories where I worked. Sewing machine operators and helpers constitute the main workforce of the sewing section and the bulk of the labour of a garment factory is concentrated here. The operator's task is controlled by supervisors who have to ensure time-bound work completion of each operator. Operators and helpers are predominantly female. In my sample frame 78% and 69% of the workforce of the sewing sections were female in the EPZ and n-EPZ factory respectively. Quality managers, assisted by some quality inspectors, ensure quality work from the operators. Quality managers and inspectors are usually male and there were no women in the quality departments in the factories in which I worked. A man supervised the finishing section, where there were some male and female helpers. The 'iron-man' is usually male, while folding, packaging and cartoning is done by both men and women. Paul-Majumder & Begum (op.cit.) reported from their survey that 40% of the helpers in the finishing section were female. Thus, evidence suggests, the employment structure in garment factories has feminised the sewing machines in relation to other equipment.

Interviews reveal that women perceive sewing machines to be light and easy to handle, while cutting and ironing machines are large, heavy and dangerous, and by implication, they perceive, require higher levels of skill. The explicit maleness invoked in their account justifies the unsuitability of women for certain kinds of job, reiterating a man's greater ability for these tasks.

'The cutting machines and irons are heavy and dangerous. Operating these machines require more strength and careful attention. These are more suited to men. These are men's jobs. I started factory job as an iron-man. I burnt my fingers several times. It was very hard and other women in the factory always sympathised with me. So I changed that job'.

-An unmarried female EPZ worker aged 20

The perception of this woman, like many others, is not surprising. Her impression about these jobs motivated her to change role. Since the task of an 'iron-man' was perceived to be hard, other women had sympathy for her. She viewed that working with cutting machines and irons requires more physical ability and careful attention and men are endowed with these qualities. It is likely that people's beliefs are influenced by the nuance and labelling of jobs. As such, she identified these jobs as men's jobs. All participants demonstrated similar understandings, because of traditional processes of socialisation, through which people learn to believe that men are stronger than women. In the gendered language of mastery, the strength and ability to control so-called heavy and more dangerous machinery constitutes a distinctly masculine ability.

As I have demonstrated, jobs in garment factories are highly segregated along gender lines. Gender identity of activities is widely accepted and reproduced by the workers, as well as employers, since we are taught to internalise the norms of gender roles and usually people expect men to be 'masculine' and women to be 'feminine' in their particular normative contexts (McCreary, 1994:521). Women work as sewing machine operators and helpers throughout their work life and men occupy most managerial and supervisory positions, as well as those requiring operation of heavy machines in garment factories. It is, perhaps, because women constitute the majority workforce and they independently perform one single task of the entire production process, unlike tailoring, that management keeps wages low in the sewing section to

reduce production costs, while the conflation of masculinity with higher skill confers on men higher status and wages (Siddiqui, 2000:13). Women form a homogenous group who usually are tied to lines and have to work at speed, while men do not form any similar single group. Evidence suggests that the gendered division of labour in garment factories puts men in control. Employment is organised through a formal hierarchy, where women remain at the bottom and a wage differential exists between men and women in general (op. cit.). However, in my sample frame I had 31% and 22% men in the n-EPZ and EPZ factory respectively, who were working as sewing machine operators and helpers in the sewing section, alongside women. Interviews reveal that work skill plays the most important role when salary is fixed for the workers within the same level of the hierarchy.

'My husband and I joined this factory at the same time. We worked for a week on trial basis. After the trial period my supervisor fixed BDT 2900 (US\$ 42) as my monthly salary while he got BDT 2800 (US\$ 40.5) per month in the beginning. As an operator I am more experienced and skilled than him. He cannot work as fast as I can do'.

-A married female n-EPZ worker aged 24

This woman and her husband joined the factory at the same time. She was more experienced and skilled and hence, she was accorded a higher salary. Her husband also articulated the same when I had informal talks with him during my participant observation on the factory floor. The following articulation of one of the male operators of an EPZ factory, like all respondents irrespective of their gender identity, points out that experience and skill are the factors that influence salary agreements in recruiting workers in garment factories. Nonetheless, the majority of women belong to the lowest paid jobs where, as noted earlier, very few men work. Moreover, the government sets minimum wages for a few managerial posts, in which mostly men are employed and the wages are much higher¹⁶ than those of female dominated posts. Women predominantly belong to the 'worker' category, while staff positions are male dominated and better paid, which indicates the existence of vertical job segregation (Hakim, 1981: 521) in

¹⁶ For instance, men are often employed for Grade-I (Chief Quality Controller/Cutting Master/Mechanic) and Grade-II (Cutting Master /Mechanic) posts. The minimum wages for these posts are respectively BDT 5140 (US\$ 75) and BDT 3840 (US\$ 56), while the same for a Grade-III (Senior Operator etc.) is BDT 2449 (US\$ 36). All workers belonging to Grade-III and downwards are predominantly female.

garment factories although interestingly, the following male EPZ worker, as evident from his narrative, is not acknowledging the vertical segregation in the work hierarchy.

'There is no discrimination in terms of salary between male and female workers in the factory. There are many women here who get more salary than that I do. I joined this factory three years back and my monthly basic salary when I joined was BDT 3200 (US\$ 46). After a couple of weeks a girl joined here who got BDT 3450 (US\$ 50) per month at the beginning. [...] They consider work skill and experience when they recruit. In the previous factory they told us that if they could not send garments for shipment on the agreed date they had to pay the shipping cost. Sometimes they declare bonuses for time bound production targets. [...] I think they see how fast a worker can work perfectly'.

-An unmarried male EPZ worker aged 21

Factory management is more concerned with timely shipment of garment orders, since they have to pay the entire shipment cost, in case of failure to meet a shipment date. Moreover, failure in shipping products on an agreed date may cost them future orders from the buyer and thus would impact negatively on the factory. It would limit their chance of getting new work orders from other companies as well. Therefore, factory management sometimes declare bonuses for fulfilling production targets on a due date. They require skilled workers and it is obvious, as expressed by the male EPZ worker that skill, speed and experience is the prime issue of concern for management when they recruit new workers.

Conclusion

The patriarchal family system in Bangladesh traditionally ensured that control over material resources, including female labour, was vested in male hands. It maintained women as dependants on men. *Purdah*, a powerful cultural ideal that worked along patriarchal lines, ensured that public space also remained the domain of men. Nonetheless, the Independence War of 1971 and the famine of 1974 together contributed to the intensification of poverty during the 1970s and eroded the ability of this patriarchal system to maintain women as dependants. Widespread poverty created a

milieu for women to break the limits of their participation in the labour force and the practice of *purdah* increasingly became untenable (Pryer, 1992:152). Prior to the advent of the garment sector in the 1980s, their scope to participate in the formal labour market was highly marginal. The establishment of the garment sector and the new market factories in Bangladesh had positive effects on women who were looking for paid employment. Garment factories widened employment opportunities for women and provided a stable source of income which earlier was not available to them.

However, the nature of work in garment factories keeps women in a type of confinement. They work in a rigid chain like situation in factories. The motive of management is to get as much work out of them as possible in the time their factories pay them for (Cavendish, 1982:90). Therefore, once they are inside factories, they have to complete the day as management desires. Their personal circumstances and needs are not valued by the management, since it is mostly concerned with the fulfilment of the production target. In this sense, garment factories are almost like prisons and workers are like prisoners who enjoy limited freedom of movement while they are inside, since they have to adhere to the desires of management. The rigidity of work environment also influences some women to a certain degree that they exercise their own agency when they feel is required.

Garment production processes are fragmented into as many tasks as possible. Floor supervisors assign each worker one specific task and workers do repetitive tasks for long hours, since they have no control over what tasks they have to perform. Supervisors sometimes change their tasks, as they feel is required and in this sense there is some sort of flexibility in factory work. The flexibility of work and repetitive task completion give workers the opportunity of attaining skill over sewing machines. They learn skill through on-the-job training at the expense of their own limited free time, since management does not provide them with any formal training facility.

Employment structure in garment factories is segregated along gender lines. Mostly men belong to the highly paid managerial posts, while women constitute the majority of the workforce and do the most exhaustive tasks in garment factories for the least wages. They remain dependent upon male skills and expertise, since men control the technical aspects of production, whilst maintenance, servicing and movement of

machines are male tasks. These are highly skilled tasks, which generally command high wages, whereas the tasks women perform are low paid, although sewing is also a skilled task (Collins, 2002:932-933). Promotional prospects for them in garment factories are very limited and the factory employment structure restricts their upward mobility to supervisory and managerial posts, while some women do not prefer these posts because of cultural and structural barriers. As such, women dominate the lowest levels of both pay and authority and men mostly occupy supervisory and managerial posts (Mills, 2003:43). Their position is moulded in the light of their role within the family, which reinforces the social construction of gender roles and similar patterns of hierarchy and subordination emerge in garment sector employment (Chant, 1989:152; Ong, 1991:287). Garment factory work structure incorporates and naturalises the discourse of traditional gender inequalities. The sexual hierarchy oppresses female workers as women and they are simultaneously oppressed as workers being employed in the least paid jobs.

Even though garment factory employment has enabled women to leave their traditional confinement in the home and move beyond the dominance of male relatives to some extent, they have been exposed to the dominance of alien male supervisors on the factory floor. Familial impoverishment has enabled them to work outside the home but not beyond male authority. Nevertheless, women can and do exert agency within relatively restricted parameters. Because of limited promotional opportunities for getting higher positions and better wages, women adopt horizontal mobility as their strategy of increment. Although they experience their life in garment factories as a member of the lowest level of the hierarchy, they utilise the available alternatives in terms of job choices. Since the garment sector is an increasingly flourishing arena of employment in Bangladesh, they can employ their agency to benefit from the constraints of factory employment.

Chapter VII: Workers' lived experiences in public and private spheres

Introduction

Although the constitution of Bangladesh guarantees women equal employment opportunities and equal wages for equal work to men, the widespread enforcement of *pardah* traditionally has confined them to their homes. The sexual division of labour, under patriarchal kinship relations, has designated the private sphere as predominantly female space and the public sphere as primarily male space. Nevertheless, the pressure of increasing poverty in post-independent Bangladesh has pushed women into visible areas of work outside the household compound (Pryer, 1992:141). The boom in the garment sector in Bangladesh, since the 1980s, has worked as a pull factor for large numbers of women and brought them beyond the homestead. Employment in export-oriented garment factories provided them an avenue to concurrently contest lack of employment opportunities in the formal sector and impoverishment. However, their position as an employee on the factory floor is determined by existing patriarchal ideologies (Walby, 1986:57). As noted in the previous chapter, patriarchal ideologies and relations affect work place culture in garment factories and reproduce a gender division of labour, where men dominate the hierarchy of activities, while women belong to the lowest tiers of the work structure. The gendering of work in factories reproduces the socially constructed notion of masculinity and femininity on the factory floor and reinforces the subordination of women in the workplace (Westwood, 1984:6). Alongside their subordinate position to men, they are the least paid workers who constitute the majority of the workforce in garment factories.

However, employment opportunities in the garment sector has brought women outside the homestead and enabled them to participate in gainful productive activities beyond their role, as an unpaid productive and reproductive worker, at the household level. In this chapter I analyse women's perceptions about themselves simultaneously as paid factory workers and as members in their respective households. I argue that female factory workers lack respect inside the factories and that they are vulnerable to violence and health hazards. Moreover, management, rather than demonstrating a concern for their wellbeing, in some cases, actually try to deprive them of their financial benefits. Women, however, are expected to surrender their wages to their household heads and I

argue that despite having a steady income, they gain little economic autonomy and they are doubly burdened with both factory and household work.

On the factory floor they work in a controlled atmosphere. As I observed, control is overt, visible and punishment oriented. The most common form of punishment is working extra hours after regular working time without payment. During working hours, eating anything or making and receiving phone calls are proscribed. Workers are free to go to the toilet without permission, although many of them commented that during the rapid flow of work they could not manage time to go when they felt the need. Further, supervisors question them if they feel someone is taking a long time in the toilet. It was noted in the previous chapter that the production process is organised in such a way that each stage of the process is dependent on the efficient and speedy completion of the previous one. As a consequence of failure in efficient and speedy task completion or violating factory norms, women more often than not experience maltreatment on the factory floor.

Power and respect within the factory

Men in garment factories are situated in a position where they can exercise greater power over women. Their power lies in their control over the production process, which promotes the subordination of women as gendered subjects in the workplace (Westwood, 1984:24). The authority relations in factories are exposed in the use of the term *tui*¹⁷ on the factory floor. I observed that supervisors frequently used the term *tui* to address all workers on the factory floor and this form of address demonstrates that they

¹⁷ In Bengali there are three forms of the English terminology 'you'. One of the forms is '*apni*' which is usually used to address aged people like familial elders, older familial kin, senior as well as respectable persons of society. Usually strangers irrespective of age are also addressed '*apni*'. Senior persons use the terms '*tumi*' and '*tui*' to address their juniors. Among friends and same aged people these two forms of 'you' are also used in Bengali. The usages of the terms '*apni*', '*tumi*', and '*tui*' are contextual. My parents and elder brother address me as '*tui*' while they address my wife as '*tumi*' although she is junior to me in respect of age. Customarily it is not appreciated to address in-laws '*tui*' since it is discourteous for them. My sister-in-law is junior to me but I address her as '*apni*' since because of being my elder brother's wife she gained status in our family over me. The term '*apni*' is to an extent linked to status. Someone senior but possessing a lower social status than a junior will customarily be expected to address the junior as '*apni*', whilst the junior can address a senior having lower social status as '*tumi*' but they are never expected to address seniors as '*tui*' since it is deemed to be audacity. The term '*tui*' to an extent indicates lower status. We address our male domestic worker as '*tui*' and the female as '*tumi*'. Usually they are not addressed '*apni*'. However, the term '*tui*' is not used to address any member of the lower subordinate services in the office, since in that case it is deemed to be unmannerly for them. Customarily '*tui*' demonstrates a familial and extremely informal relation to some extent, which is not appreciated in working relations. Moreover, men are not expected to address women using the terminology '*tui*' unless the context is familial and informal.

have control and authority over workers. Moreover, it is unmannerly when used in working relations. Members of factory management frequently addressed workers by their familiar names, which also expressed that they lacked respect on the factory floor. Interviews revealed that all women, irrespective of their age, experienced such treatment, which, as they felt and I perceived, was undermining for them. Another insulting aspect of authority relations is mistrust of workers. I observed, and interviews revealed, that management did not appear to trust workers on the factory floor. One day, during my work in the n-EPZ factory, one woman asked her supervisor for leave after lunch to go home to attend the funeral of her grandmother. I perceived that the supervisor had very little sympathy for the woman and the instant question to her from him was whether she had used her mobile phone during work. She gave her phone to the supervisor to check the call list and tried to make him believe that she got the message during lunch. Thereafter the supervisor called her mother for confirmation of the message. It appeared that frequent mistrust upon workers from management was a common phenomenon in factories. One of the supervisors once told me that workers usually lied and tried to cheat them to take undue privileges. In his view, workers' behaviour on the factory floor causes their mistrust of them. Yet, it is very difficult to justify that workers lie and try to cheat management. They work for their survival and, I would suggest, would try to make the most of their labour. Moreover, he told me that they rarely allowed workers to leave the production chain and he could not mention any type of undue privilege when I asked him. Nonetheless, the perception of supervisors about workers is linked to their lack of respect towards them.

'It is really painful that supervisors do not trust us. They will not believe in you when you are sick. They think we all are liars. They never believe us when we tell them about emergencies in our home. They phone our relations back home and want to confirm'.

-An unmarried female n-EPZ worker aged 20

She, like many others, expressed her dissatisfaction with supervisors' attitude towards them. Supervisors' mistrust of workers is an indication of their lack of respect. In her research of female factory workers in South China, Lee (1995:384) also observed similar unfair practices, which workers frequently experienced from supervisors on the factory floor. Interactions between the workers and supervisors inside the factories and

the way they treat female workers are always issues of concern for women. All interviewed women expressed their dissatisfaction in relation to supervisors' behaviour, attitude and approach towards them. Further, disciplinary strategies like verbal abuse and coercion inside factories invoke women as primarily sexualised bodies (Siddiqi, 2009:167).

'If we make mistakes or the supervisor thinks we do not work properly, he screams at us: daughter of a dog, prostitute. Work properly or I will kick at your back. They shout if they find anybody talking: "We do not pay for talking. Talk on the road not here". They let everybody know that we are at fault'.

-A married female EPZ worker aged 22

On the factory floor female workers in particular frequently experience abusive words from supervisors when they make mistakes or fail to fulfil production targets or infringe any factory norm. The language a supervisor uses in daily interactions with them, as expressed in the above narrative, is obviously insulting for workers and all interviewed women interpreted this as a lack of respect for them. They perceive that they do not have any respect as workers nor do they get any respect from men as women. Similarly in her research on the effects of economic globalisation on Bangladeshi women, Dannecker (2002:127) also observed that women felt disrespected on the factory floor as women as well as workers.

Violence and harassment in and out of the workplace

Female factory workers frequently cope with maltreatment from their supervisors on the factory floor. Interviews reveal that they were always apprehensive of being harassed inside the factories. For them, harassment ranged from demeaning verbal and body language and humiliating remarks to unwelcome touching and physical assaults including rape. During my job in the n-EPZ factory, a young woman was raped in another factory, shortly after she had finished her work late at night. A couple of days after the incident, we learned by word of mouth that the 'pretty woman' was taken that night by one of the relations of the factory owner, while she, with many others, was sleeping on the factory floor. Usually, workers sleep on the factory floor when they

finish their work late at night, since they cannot go home, because of insecurity on the streets. This incident shows that they are not safe at their respective work places either. Although such violence toward female factory workers is not common, I observed that women are prone to harassment in garment factories in different ways. In addition to more serious incidents, I also found supervisors frequently placed their hands on female workers' shoulders, while they were working. Pollart (1981:143) also found similar practices in UK and articulated in her research report that female factory workers frequently experienced overtly familiar and inappropriate sexual touching from supervisors on the factory floor. The majority of female participants (69%) of this research expressed their disappointment at the behaviour from supervisors. Despite their dislike at facing such behaviour from men, for the majority of them (87%), the most annoying experience was frequent bad language from supervisors. I observed, and interviews reveal, that the common violence for women in garment factories was inappropriate verbal and body language from men. Verbal abuse and intimidation is a widely accepted mode of labour discipline in garment factories and the widespread use of *gali* or expletives is the most common form of harassment for women on the factory floor, to which they are subjected during working hours (Siddiqi, 2009:168). During my work in the EPZ factory once I observed a supervisor used highly sexualised words and body language with a female operator who made some mistakes. The approach and words of the supervisor were so embarrassing that she cried on the floor. Another female co-worker expressed her antagonism, as evident from the following account, when I asked her comments on this situation.

'Don't they have a mother or sisters in their home? I do not understand how they use such language with a girl. If the supervisor thinks we are not working properly he shouts. If we make mistakes they call us names like daughter of a dog, prostitute and use all other dirty words. They call our parents names too. We made mistakes but why do they call our parents name? Sometimes other male workers also make dirty remarks. [.....] Management never took any action against such behaviour. They never think of us'.

-An unmarried female n-EPZ worker aged 22

The most annoying aspect for her was calling parents names. She articulated that experiencing dirty words from men in garment factories is common for female workers.

They also risk such physical assault as having pulling hair, slapping, hitting on the head and stroking. All respondents, like her, articulated that management never took any action against this type of harassment, nor were they concerned about their safety and wellbeing. Interestingly, female workers frequently underreported these sorts of violence but the reporting was higher when I asked them about these incidents in the case of their colleagues. However, some female workers (23%) reported that men always looked for an opportunity to have an affair and send love letters.

'We work with men in the factory but we do not mix with them. When somebody wants to talk to me I say I am married. I have two children. But some have proposed marriage. Some want to make relations only. I got several love letters. I do not tell anything to anybody, since others might blame me or think me bad'.

-A married female n-EPZ worker aged 24

Despite the fact that she was married with two children, she received marriage proposals from men, while some others wanted to have illicit relations with her. This is a cause of anxiety for female workers, although they usually do not tell others about such incidents. This is due mainly to their fear, as expressed in the account above, that in such cases women are blamed by others. They will be blamed, since they are transgressing what is regarded as 'male space', beyond the custom of *purdah* (Kabeer, 1991:149). Interviews reveal that women tried to maintain a distance from male workers as part of their observance of *purdah*. Siddiqi noted (1991:8) from her research on the discipline and control mechanism of Bangladeshi garment workers on the factory floor and I observed that they tried to control each other's behaviour on the factory floor as an effort to demonstrate that 'their behaviour is above approach'. Further, they use idioms of kinship like *bhai* (older brother) and *apa* (older sister) to refer to male and female co-workers respectively. This desexualisation of work place relations privatises male female relations on the factory floor and identifies appropriate persons with whom one can interact (Feldman, 2001:1106). Despite their efforts, they experience harassment from men as expressed in the above narrative. Another type of harassment is threat of dismissal and 47% of female workers reported that they experienced such threats from supervisors and others.

Interviews reveal that women are prone to harassment not only on the factory floor but also on the streets, while they commute, especially at night. Although the majority of respondents (89%) travelled by factory buses, they had to walk home from the main road. All respondents reported that the streets were unsafe for them and, especially after sunset, they face problems. The most common problems they face on the road are suggestive comments by street boys, as expressed in the account of the following woman. She, like the majority of female workers (71%), experienced remarks from men on the streets, while 23% reported they felt scared, since they were followed or attacked by muggers and unruly boys, while they were walking to their home at night.

'People say many things on the streets. We do not respond to them. [...] If we answer back, they will feel encouraged to pursue. Sometimes they follow us if we walk alone. [...] I feel scared. So we try to walk in groups'.

-An unmarried female EPZ worker aged 19

Another issue of concern for women is harassment by bus staff and 19% articulated that they touch the female body when they get into the bus. In addition to such harassment, biographies reveal, and Kabeer (1991:149) notes, that women coming home late at night can also be picked up by police on suspicion of prostitution. None of the female respondents reported any such incident but some of them experienced incidents of kidnapping from the street, which happened to their colleagues.

'One day we were walking on our way home at night. Suddenly a scooter stopped beside us and one man forcibly pulled one of our friends into the car. We recognised the man. He was pursuing her for a long time. [...] Everything happened so quickly that we could not scream. She was unmarried and very beautiful. We lived in the same house. After three days the man left her free. [...] Our landlord did not allow her to live in his house. [...] Other female workers also did not accept her. They always laughed at her. As if it was all her fault. So she changed her job and residence'.

-An unmarried female n-EPZ worker aged 19

Walking in groups is a strategy women adopt for their security. Despite adopting such strategies, they become victims of harassment and once victimised it becomes perceived as their fault. As such, the young woman in the above account faced ostracisation and humiliation following her ordeal and nobody accepted her. Violence against her on the street created a situation that led her to change her residence and job. Evidence suggests that women are vulnerable to violence not only on the streets but they experience violence at their place of residence also. The majority (71%) of those living with relatives reported that their female relatives often abused them verbally for not participating in household work, while 23% heard that male relatives of their friends often tried to have relations with them. A few female participants (13%) reported that local unruly people often bothered them at their houses, while some others living on their own experienced theft in their houses when away at work. The majority of female workers (67%) living with family sometimes experienced verbal abuse from their family members, because of their late night return from their job. Thus, everywhere they were at risk at becoming victims of violence. The creation of waged employment made them more vulnerable to violence within the work place, in the street during commuting and at the place of residence. Other studies of Bangladeshi female garment workers also note similar findings (Dannecker, 2002; Paul-Majumder & Begum, 2006; Zohir, 2007; Siddiqi, 2009). In addition to these painful experiences, they suffer from various health related problems caused by the work environment, as discussed below.

Health and wellbeing at work

Garment factories provide better working conditions on the factory floor in terms of physical facilities. Interviews reveal that despite having better working conditions, workers suffer from various health related problems, although they are not usually vulnerable to serious occupational accidents. Minor accidents that often occur in the factories include pricking of the fingers by needles or hurting the finger tips. The majority of female respondents (89%) said that since entering factory work, they had experienced various types of physical problems, while 11% reported that they had not experienced any illness because of their factory work. Interviews reveal and Paul-Majumder (2001:180) suggests that physical diseases from which garment workers suffer are correlated with their length of service. The prevalence of suffering is higher for those who have been working for a long time. The majority of those who reported

that they were not suffering from any health related problem because of factory work had been working for less than two years, while the length of service for others was more than three years. The most common problems women mentioned were headache and eye pain or eyesight problems.

'I have been working in garment factories for five years. Before joining here my health was very good and I had no physical problem. But now I use glasses. I feel severe headache if I do not use my glasses. Doctor told me that these problems arose because of extra pressure on my eyes during work. [...] I have to put on glasses for a long time and maybe someday I will get relief from my headache problem'.

-A married female EPZ worker aged 23

She had developed headache and eyesight problems after she had started factory work. She now had to wear spectacles, although she did not have any eye related problem before taking the factory job. This problem is caused by the nature of garment factory work, since stitching requires close eye contact and 9% of female respondents said that they suffered from regular headache and eyesight problems, while 23% suffered from this problem occasionally. Another great occupational hazard in garment manufacturing is stomach pain and continued weakening, as a consequence of long work, often without adequate rest and food. Vast numbers of female workers (59%) said that they suffered from stomach pain and physical weakness.

'I have been working in garment factories for nearly four years. Now I suffer from gastric trouble for the last six months. I feel very weak also. Before taking a factory job I had no physical problem. [.....] Work pressure is very high now. I cannot eat when I am hungry. Sometimes during work I do not take water also'.

-A married female n-EPZ worker aged 22

During work, nobody is allowed to eat anything on the factory floor so that there is no stain on the garment. Therefore, they have to work with an empty stomach, even when they need food. Because of long working hours, they cannot have adequate sleep and rest. The woman cited above, like many others, also did not drink enough water, as

she did not want to spent time visiting the toilet. It is not unlikely that workers will try to avoid using the toilet, since they are continuously pursuing target fulfilment. Hence, it may be the case that such workers are more vulnerable to urinary tract infection and related problems. The most prevalent chronic problems for garment workers, as they reported to me, were gastro-intestinal and respiratory problems. Interviews reveal that 33% female respondents had suffered from gastric related problems while 21% had respiratory problems.

'For the last couple of months I have suffered from respiratory problems. I also have a cough. I did not have these problems before. The 'over lock' machine spreads lots of dust when I work with it. [.....] Earlier I did not know that I should cover my face when I worked with sewing machines. Now I always use a mask when I am inside factories'.

-A married female EPZ worker aged 25

Fabrics and cotton used in garment factories contain dust, chemicals and other toxic substances. A World Health Organisation (WHO, 1986, cited in Paul-Majumder 2001:183) report articulated that workers of industries dealing with cotton, wool, fabrics etc. had high probability of respiratory diseases like bronchitis, chest pain, breathing problems etc. Workers continuously inhale dust and other substances directly when they work on the factory floor. Interviews reveal that some women did not know about this hazard, nor did they know that a mask could protect them from respiratory problems. Prolonged work on factory floor and inhaling toxic substances created the problems of the woman narrated above. Further, because of prolonged standing or sitting on the factory floor, they also develop swelling in the legs and back pain and shoulder pain in particular, and 14% of female workers I interviewed in this research complained of such problems. Since their working hours are very long, it is not possible for them to manage time to purchase medicine when required. As such, their physical problems become chronic and obviously it affects their total productivity, since it is not possible to work with full attention at full speed, because of physical problems. Beyond these health related problems, women frequently suffer from some mental pressures caused by factory employment. A significant portion of participants (33%) identified fulfilment of production target and escaping supervisors' maltreatment as a common cause of mental stress. Evidence suggests that safe home return at night causes anxiety for 21% women,

while 11% of married women felt worried for their small children. On the factory floor I also found women appeared tired and sleepy. If they often experience tiredness, it is also likely that they would experience increased psychological stress (Blaxter, 1985, cited in Paul-Majumder 2001:183).

Garment factory work can create both physical and psychological problems for women. Interviews reveal and other research suggests (Goonatilake & Goonesekere, 1988; Butler & Teagarden, 1993; Hosmer & Masten, 1995; Paul-Majumder 2001; Absar, 2003; Zohir, 2007) that the most prevalent problems for workers are headaches, physical weakness, eye pain, gastrointestinal problems, breathing problems, fever, coughs and colds, respiratory problem and fatigue.

Access to resources and abuse of power at work

Women are situated at the lowest tiers of work hierarchy and perform the lowest paid jobs in garment factories (Safa, 1981:419). Ethnographic evidence suggests that beyond employment in low paid positions, their promotional prospects in factory work are also very limited, which increases the frequency of horizontal mobility among workers. They adopt this strategy, as a means of increasing their salary. However, their changing factories provides management with the opportunity to deprive them of financial benefits due to them, in different kinds of ways.

'Previously I worked in a non-EPZ factory. I told them two months before leaving that job. But they did not give my wages when I left. Thereafter I had to go there three times for my salary. They asked me to go again for overtime bills. [...] They deducted four days salary and attendance allowance. They said I was absent four days which is not true. [...] I know they will do the same with overtime wages as they did with my salary. So I did not go there for my overtime wages. [...] You will not get your all wages when you leave a job. Everywhere it is the same'.

-An unmarried female EPZ worker aged 21

An employee has to notify management sixty days prior to her leaving a factory job. In that case, she is supposed to get all her wages from the factory on her final day at

work. Nonetheless, factory management did not give her all her due financial benefits and gave her deducted wages at a later time. In order to collect her wages from the previous factory, she had to go three times, which cost her three days salary and attendance allowance in her present job. It is likely that to obtain the rest of her wages, she would have to sacrifice a few more days' salary at the new factory. Thus, workers lose in both factories, when they change their jobs. Moreover, she perceives that she will not get overtime bills for the actual hours she did in that factory. In such a situation, it is likely that she will not go there again for her overtime wages, as the strategy management adopts in paying departing workers is discouraging for them. Officially, two hours overtime work a day is authorised but evidence suggests that workers do more hours than the norm specifies. To meet production targets, they also work on weekly holidays, which are treated as overtime work. During participant observation, I perceived that management records daily two hours overtime work on the computer system, while the extra hours are recorded manually. They follow this strategy to satisfy the buyers when they visit factories, to see how prescribed rules are followed on the factory floor¹⁸. Yet, this strategy leaves them with scope for manipulation and paying workers less for overtime work. Workers frequently complain of underpayment of their overtime wages but they are not aware of the degree. Quoting Barakat et al. (2003), an Oxfam report articulates that Bangladeshi garment workers receive on average 60-80% of their due overtime earnings (Oxfam International 2004, cited in Kidder & Raworth, 2004:18). The majority of respondents (79%), irrespective of their gender identity, said that deduction or even non-payment of wages to someone leaving their job was a common phenomenon in garment factories.

'Last time I could not attend office three days. I was very sick. On my return I filled in the sick leave form and my supervisor approved that. [...] The following month I discovered that they deducted my three days salary and attendance allowance. They told me that they did not get my application. I did not realise what really happened'.

-An unmarried female EPZ worker aged 20

¹⁸ Although workers usually do more than two hours overtime work they are taught to lie before visiting foreign buyers that they never did more overtime work than they are supposed to do. They are also taught to tell that they enjoyed a 'day off' as a substitute when they are required to work on holidays because of emergency. I perceived that workers also follow the teachings of management since they at least could work more hours and earn more money from their work.

As noted in chapter V, she is entitled to enjoy fourteen days paid sick leave a year but despite that management deducted her salary. She tried to bargain with them, but was not successful. The majority of interviewed workers stated clearly that they seldom received paid leave. All respondents from n-EPZ factories articulated that they never got tiffin allowances when they did more than two hours overtime work a day. Thus, factory management deprives workers in different ways of financial benefits and other related facilities.

'I am eight months pregnant. Management told me that I need rest now. They asked me to resign. [.....] I asked for maternity benefit but they said I have not completed six months work. [....] I could easily work three more days. I had no problem. Now I understand that they did not want to give me the maternity benefit. They said I will get the job here again if I come within next six months. [....] I am a very good operator. Every factory will take me'.

-A married female n-EPZ worker aged 20

Management deprived her of maternity benefits by asking her to resign three days before her completion of six months work in the factory, which as mentioned earlier is the minimum time she had to work to be entitled to maternity benefit. Prior to her leaving, because of her pregnancy, they relaxed her duties in the factory, in the sense that despite being an operator, she was working as a helper whose tasks require less physical stress. Helpers are not usually provided with a chair to sit on, but they gave her one. Further, they told her that they would take her again if she came within the next six months. All these perhaps impacted on her positively and she perceived that management was sympathetic to her. They may have valued her skill but did not value their financial obligations. She realised what they had done at a later date. This deprivation and her self confidence created agency in her and she said it was likely that she would look for a new job. The amount management saved by not giving maternity benefit was not that much for them but meant a great deal to her. However, it seemed that they do not care for workers' wellbeing and try to cut costs by depriving them of their salaries. All respondents articulated that management in garment factories deprive workers of especially financial benefits in different ways.

Power and resource allocation in the household

The female labour force in the garment industry of Bangladesh is made of women belonging to different economic categories. Biographies in my research suggest that quite a number of female workers do not necessarily belong to the poorest of the poor families. Their families do not solely depend on their income, since there is another breadwinner in the family and so their earning is a supplement to the household income. Nevertheless, the majority of women I interviewed took factory jobs, since their family required their financial support. Irrespective of the underlying causes leading women to factory employment, the dominant pattern of managing their income was, usually, to hand it over to their household heads.

'I give all my wages to my husband. Now he is my guardian and it is his responsibility to feed me. We work in the same factory. I give him my wages as soon as I get them. [.....] Before marriage I used to keep some for me and send the rest to my father in our village home. [.....] From our common fund my husband sends some money every month to his father. He spends money for the family as he feels is necessary. He maintains a bank account also. [.....] He does not spend money for his own pleasure. He spends money for the good of our family and saves for our future. Sometimes he also gives me [money] when I ask him'.

-A married female EPZ worker aged 21

Women living without family have more control over their income, but they usually remit a portion of their wages to their natal families in the villages. Their feminine identity changes once they are married. They become a member of their husband's family, as the most junior member, whose chief virtue is submission, learning how to do what will please the family and proving their worth through obedience, hard work, good temper and modest behaviour (White, 1992:97). The process of socialisation of men and women teaches them the concept of male breadwinner, and that purchasing food and other things for the household is a man's responsibility. As such, she surrenders her income to her husband. Her surrender of pay to her husband is her compliance with the broader ideological elements of the traditional patriarchal family system in Bangladesh. She views her husband as the benevolent dictator, whose

authority over financial matters is justified by her belief that he works for the good of the family and their future (Kibria, 1995:297). Further, surrendering to the financial authority of men reinforces traditional beliefs regarding gender roles, as sanctioned by patriarchal norms in society. Their contribution to their husband's family and kin corresponds to the classic patriarchal pattern that a married woman's labour is the property of her husband and his family (Kandiyoti, 1988:279). This is also evident from the following narrative of her husband who, like other male interviewed workers, believed in controlling female income.

'It is good that women are earning. But a girl should give her earnings to her father or husband. [.....] Women cannot take good decisions about spending money. They do not know how to utilise money properly. They do not have experience. So my wife gives me her income. [.....] I am not angry with her if she does not want to give. But I think she should give it to me. I am her guardian. [.....] I spend our income for the family and sometimes she takes some money from me. As a man it is my responsibility to feed my family members'.

-Husband of the above cited EPZ worker

He appreciates women's income but perceives that they should surrender their income to men since, as household heads, feeding family members is men's responsibility. In justifying their position, men deny women's agency and argue that women cannot utilise money properly. Even though he said he was not angry if she did not want to give him her income, I would suggest that since he wants to control her income, it is likely, as explained below, that he would be antagonistic in such circumstances. He believes in male guardianship, which illustrates that factory work has not changed the notion of gender subordination, in the sense that women depend on men's protection, although it may have reduced their dependence on men's provision (Razavi, 1999:676). The patriarchal bargain requires a woman to rely on male protection and provision, since she is considered the dependant of her father or husband who provides for her. Men's insights into women's dependence on them shape their perceptions about women's income, whereas women's belief in traditional notions of male protection and provision influence them to put their income under men's control (Mather, 1982, cited in Wolf, 1990a:30; Kabeer, 1997:265). Biographies suggest that

husbands' perceptions, about the likely impact of women's employment, were linked to matrimonial relationships. Irrespective of their marital status, the majority of male respondents (73%) viewed women's employment as adversely affecting patriarchal power relations within the family.

'I will not let my wife work. [.....] When a woman earns, she feels that she does not depend on her husband for living. So they do not listen to their husband. [.....] If her husband tells her anything she will answer back that she earns and is not dependent on his income. Their courage goes up. They become too free'.

-An unmarried male EPZ worker aged 23

Men are afraid of women's stable earnings, since they persistently remind them that they cannot afford to meet all their familial needs. They perceive that female wages serve to weaken their power base within the home. As such, the man cited above states that he will not allow his wife to take factory work, since he feels that he would not be able to dominate her if she earned a steady income herself. He believes that independent income gives women courage and some sort of agency to exercise their own judgement, which he identifies as a threat to patriarchal control over the family. Men subscribe to the belief that women's wages affect the balance of power between men and women. This belief can influence them to view women's income with hostility (Kabeer, 1997:270). As such, the following woman had to fight with her husband, when he discovered that his wife retained a part of her salary every month, without his knowledge.

'Earlier I kept some money and gave my husband the rest. He did not know. I sent that money to my parents. But once he heard me talking to my father over the phone about the money and he was very violent. [.....] After that I stopped keeping money. Now I give him all my wages as soon as I come home. But he thinks I lie. He records my daily overtime work on a calendar. [.....] He gives me some money. I do some small purchases for the family'.

-A married female EPZ worker aged 23

Her husband was hostile towards her when he discovered that she was withholding some money, without his knowledge. He perceived her behaviour as a threat to his dominance and through violence he re-established his patriarchal control over his wife. Biographies of married women I interviewed in this research reveal that preserving a portion of their wages covertly is a common practice among them, despite the possibility of physical violence from their husbands. In this case, usually their natal families benefitted from their contributions, but in some cases, they kept money for the future as well.

'I hold a part of my salary every month secretly. I have a bank account. I save the money for my future. The rest of the money I give my husband and it makes him happy. [...] He keeps some money from that and gives me the rest back. I maintain my family expenditure with this money'.

-A married female n-EPZ worker aged 39

Her husband was not aware of her secret savings. Her motive to save is to be prepared for any adversity that may arise in the future and at present, since she wants to keep her husband happy, she gives him the rest of her income. Whatever she gives makes him happy, since she is taking male supremacy for granted but it is not unlikely that disclosure of her secret savings might put her in a violent situation, as experienced by the woman, quoted previously. She, like a very small portion of respondents who had no male household head, had greater control over her wages, because her husband did not take primary responsibility for the family, rather he relied on her. Nevertheless, this placed a double burden upon her, as discussed below. It is more usually the case, however, that female factory workers including those who are unmarried and living with family, usually cannot control their monthly wages.

The following woman is the breadwinner for her family and she, despite her earnings, cannot spend money for her needs. Her parents' perceptions and expectations from her resulted in her losing control over her earnings. She turned into a reflection of the image of being a dutiful daughter to her parents.

'My parents take my wages as soon as I come home. If I do not give all my wages my mother is very angry. [...] My parents think that I would get

spoilt if I keep money with me. But sometimes I need some money for my own expenses. I feel very bad if they do not give me some money when I ask. [...]
From my earnings they pay the house rent, utility bills and do the shopping. My father cannot work regularly because of his sickness. My mother also does not work'.

-An unmarried female n-EPZ worker aged 19

'My daughter is very good. She gives me all her earnings as soon as she comes home. She is not like other girls who spend money on their own and do not think of their families. She takes money from me when she requires'.

-Mother of the above cited n-EPZ worker

She perceives her daughter to be good, since she surrenders her income to her. Nevertheless, having a steady income every month, yet being unable to spend money on her own needs, is a matter of dissatisfaction for her, although her mother said that she gave her money when she needed it. Biographies reveal that women exercise little control over their own earnings, since they are expected to surrender their wages to their household heads. Female workers living on their own in urban areas or those who are heads of their households are able to retain greater control over their earnings, since there is no one to dominate them. However, they are to conform to the custom of remitting wages for their family sustenance. Since men want to maintain patriarchal control over the family, they want and expect women to surrender their income to them. Further, women are taught to believe in male provision through the process of socialisation. As such, despite earning an independent income, women, in my empirical research, frequently appeared to me to be conforming to the traditional notion of patriarchy. On the other hand, the financial resources they gain through waged work provide them with a means to contest their subordination in daily life (Mills, 2003:48; Kabeer 1997:266). Nonetheless, they cannot or do not utilise their financial base accordingly, since they are usually devalued and, to some extent, they also deny their own agency and surrender to male dominance to a greater level, because of possible hostility from men. Their earnings are deemed to be a part of their household income and are allocated as the household heads desire.

Although resource theory (Blood & Wolfe, 1960) argues that women's contribution of their wages to the household budget should increase their bargaining power within the household, evidence suggests that women's participation in paid employment and contribution to family expenditure does not necessarily change their position within the family to a great degree. Pyke (1994:74) argues that women's contribution to family finances may not always bring them a greater power within the family, since men perceive women's earnings as a threat to their power base. Men's perceptions of women's earnings, as well as of their role as family breadwinner, influence women to surrender to male dominance, as part of their compliance with patriarchal beliefs and values. Their work on the factory floor brings them wages but also increases their workload, since they are also expected to perform reproductive and household labour.

Gender roles and reproductive tasks in the household

Empirical evidence suggests that women's participation in the factory work is largely economically motivated and they view their waged work as an unavoidable necessity for their families. The majority of them (87%) contributed all or most of their salary to family and household expenses. They make a substantial economic contribution to their family's welfare, without which all of them argued their families would be in a difficult situation. One of the striking features of patriarchy is the notion that the male is the breadwinner in the family, while women rely on men's provision. Traditionally, women perform all household tasks, which are unpaid, while men participate in income earning activities. Since men alone cannot perform their traditional role of family bread earner, because of financial scarcity, women participate in so called 'men's work' and help them for family survival. Although women help men financially, interviews reveal that men rarely support women in performing reproductive and household tasks. As such, women face a pile of work inside their households. Their lives are neatly divided into a paid productive phase and an unpaid reproductive phase. Their lives become split simultaneously between home and factory, reproduction and production, domestic labour and waged labour.

'I am a housewife. So I do all household activities. [...] I wake up by five in the morning. I clean the house and wash all the dishes (that we left

unwashed last night). Then I prepare food for the whole day. I take my shower and sometimes wash some clothes of my son and husband. I bring water from the tube well, feed my son and prepare my tiffin carrier for the office. I serve the food and eat breakfast with my husband. I leave for the office by 7:30am. [.....] I come back home from office at 11:15 nowadays. On my way back home from the office sometimes I do little shopping like purchasing vegetables and other necessary stuff for the family. I then clean the room, warm up the food and then we eat together. Thereafter I prepare the bed and go to sleep. [...] My husband is a rickshaw puller. I have a four year old son. He takes care of my son when he comes back home for lunch. [.....] I need help but I do not want him doing housework. I think men should not do household work. My mother says that men become less intelligent if they perform household works like women. I feel bad that my husband takes care of my son when I am away. It is my duty'.

-A married female n-EPZ worker aged 23

It is evident from her account that she does the 'male' shopping for her family although market place in Bangladesh is classified as a 'male place' and men purchase household food needs (Kabeer, 1997:277). Because of her employment she, like many women I interviewed, gained access to cash resources which enabled her to perform such traditional 'male task'. This is indeed an important shift in Bangladeshi society that has taken place over the years due to the advent of garment factories and women's employment in paid jobs. However, despite her being a full time worker she, like all other married workers, places more emphasis on her housewife identity. The sexual division of labour in the society teaches women to regard themselves primarily as 'housewives' and their husbands as 'workers'. As such, although married working women require help in meeting household activities, they do not expect their husbands performing reproductive activities with them, because of their traditional belief that men should not be involved in reproductive roles. Their traditional belief makes them feel discomfort, as they cannot perform all their household activities properly because of their employment. Nevertheless, biographies reveal that married women perform the majority of household activities, alongside their factory work, as there is no-one in the family to help them. They get little help from their husbands, which is not enough for them but since they perceive domestic work to be women's work they do not expect

greater help from their husbands. Women who migrated with their family articulated that they usually did not perform household activities. Their mothers did cleaning, cooking and all other household activities since they became the breadwinner of the family.

'In the village home she (daughter) used to do all the household work with her mother. Here she cannot manage time. So her mother does all the domestic work. She goes early in the morning and comes in the evening. She is very tired when she is back from her job. [.....] These are women's work. Sometimes she helps her mother. On holidays she works with her mother in the home'.

-Father of a 20 year old unmarried female EPZ worker

The socially constructed perception of men about gender roles is expressed in the above narration. The father of the woman knows her daughter is very tired, when she gets back from her job, but since housework is termed women's work, she is expected to perform those tasks when it is possible for her. Factory work, to a great extent, has relieved unmarried women living with family from domestic burdens, since their mothers perform the household activities. However, once married the majority of unmarried women (81%) said that they would prefer rather than expect their husbands to help them in household works, when it was needed.

'I live here alone. So I do all my household work. Here there is no-one to help me. Here there is no-one to ask me about anything. [.....] Earlier I lived with one of our distant relations. They expected me to work in their house in the evening. It was too much. I needed some rest. So I left. [.....] Housework is my responsibility. I don't want to be sitting when my husband is working in the house. I would like him to help when I really need that. When I do not feel well or I am very tired'.

-An unmarried female n-EPZ worker aged 18

Interviews reveal that unmarried women living with relatives have to perform domestic tasks like other married workers or those who do not participate in wage employment. As such, after a long day on the factory floor, they are left with no time on

their own. The woman quoted above did not like cooking or washing in the evenings but frequently felt pressure from her relatives. New living arrangements did not liberate her from domestic works but she felt a bit freer, since there was less pressure on her. She, like all participants of this research, expressed a belief in the traditional gender roles and relations formulated under patriarchy, which teaches that women have to perform reproductive activities within the household. Therefore, she wanted to perform these tasks and felt that her husband should help her in domestic tasks only when she was very tired or sick. She, like all other interviewed women, could not go beyond sexual division of labour to a greater extent, because of patriarchal beliefs and values.

'I am a sewing machine operator. I work in the factory from 8am until 8pm. In the house I do cooking, cleaning, washing and all other domestic tasks. [...] My husband is a night guard. He works from 10pm until 6am. He takes our children to school and brings them home. He feeds them when I am away. He is very tired from his work but does a lot of work in the home. Sometimes he does the shopping also. [...] I do not want him to wash the dishes or clean the house. Men cannot work like a woman'.

-A married female n-EPZ worker aged 24

Her husband got very tired from his night work but she did not appear (or wish to appear) tired working all hours. She believed that men cannot work like women. Consequently, she performed all labour-intensive and time-consuming domestic tasks alongside her factory work and bore a heavy burden. Male household members usually do the shopping because this involves engaging in the (male) public sphere but do not shoulder any responsibility for the activities, which are socially regarded as 'women's work' (Hossain, Jahan & Sobhan, 1988:130; Hadjicostandi, 1990:77). Although biographies reveal that women perform male tasks like shopping, all male respondents believed in line with women, that domestic work is women's work and women can perform these tasks better since they learn them from their mothers.

'Cooking, cleaning, washing, etc. are women's work. I think men should not do this work. They should not go in the kitchen. These are not their tasks. Women are good for these works. Allah has divided work for men and women. Women will remain in the house and do household work and men

will go out for earnings. [.....] If both of them work only then men can help women in domestic tasks. They can do the shopping. They can bring water if there is no supply etc. [.....] Now I do everything since I am unmarried'.

-An unmarried male EPZ worker aged 22

He believes that Allah has assigned men and women with distinct tasks. As such, men should not perform what are defined as women's tasks. Men often try to utilise religion to benefit and accordingly, he linked religion to sexual divisions of labour. However, he, like all other male respondents, thinks that men only can help women in performing domestic tasks provided they both work, because these are not their responsibility. The distinction between women's work and men's work evolves through the process of socialisation of male and female in society. I perceived an empirical evidence reveals that men were looked down upon if they did domestic work, since it was not often socially accepted. As a result, women also usually did not want men doing reproductive activities at household levels. Society teaches that women will perform all household works whilst men will earn for the family and will engage in income generating activities. In consequence, since women perform both productive and reproductive activities, they usually bear the dual burden as housewives and factory workers.

Neo-classical economists treat individual household members as disembodied entities whose labour is allocated to different activities on the basis of comparative advantages (Becker, 1991:78). As such, if the value of women's time is increased, their participation will be greater in paid employment, resulting in a reduction in their reproductive tasks, since they will be able to bargain within the family about the reallocation of domestic tasks. However, resource does not automatically bring bargaining power within the household. Social norms determine the ability and willingness to bargain within the family (Agarwal, 1997:11). Context specific social norms, values and cultures are intervening factors in the ability to transform one's resources into intra-household power. Both men and women define men as the breadwinner whose responsibility is maintaining the family. Surrendering wages to men perpetuates the position of men as head of the family and as the breadwinner (Pahl, 1989:154).

Conclusion

Women constitute the majority of the workforce and remain at the lowest tiers of work hierarchy in garment factories. Because of their position in the work structure, they are accorded little or no respect on the factory floor. They frequently experience maltreatment from management and are prone to violence and harassment inside factories from men. They also are vulnerable to violence and harassment on the streets, as well as in their place of residence. In addition, they frequently suffer from various health related problems, because of their employment in garment factories. Nevertheless, on the factory floor they tend to utilise their own agency to resist adversity and domination from men to some extent. Since women are perceived to be docile, they are widely employed in garment factories. However, their docility does not imply their passivity to management. In some cases, as I observed and Siddiqi (2009:170) noted, sometimes they slowed down their work speed, as a strategy of resistance against coercive situations. Nonetheless, they appear to conform to traditional social values in their home. Despite their being steady earners for the family, they usually perceive men to be the primary breadwinner for the family and surrender their income to their household heads within the family, since they often are unwilling to challenge the distribution of domestic power.

In relation to the management and disposal of women's wages, two ways of seeing the pros and cons of women's bringing an income to the family could be identified from feminist literature. One line of thinking argues that women have to surrender their income to their family and they retain no control over their earnings; rather, they are exploited in their families (Elson & Pearson, 1981a; Greenhalgh, 1985; Wolf, 1990b). The other line of thinking articulates that income improves women's bargaining power within the family and they can negotiate with family members in terms of decision making (Lim, 1983, 1997; Meyer, 2006). Since women surrender their income to their household heads and men in particular, they decide the disposal of women's income and thus control their wages, whilst in the absence of any male household head, women control their own income. From their surrendering income to household heads, one can assume that women usually do not feel they should control their income, since they perceive that men know what is better for the family. As such, parents control unmarried daughters' income, while married women's income is

managed by their husbands. Moreover, by handing over income women keep intact the norm of male breadwinner and decision maker around which the familial relationship in Bangladesh is organised (Kabeer, 1991:142). Nevertheless, women are also inclined to withhold some of their earnings without the knowledge of their household heads. Their withholding is an indication that they are not willing to surrender all their earnings to men, but rather they want and try to manage and control their own earnings. Since men perceive women's income as a threat to the balance of power within family, they tend to control female income and their desire sometimes leads them to hostility. The possibility of antagonistic behaviour from men contributes to the surrendering of women's wages as well as their agency to men. Men's authority over household income is not uncontested, but established practice and men's expectations limits women's ability to bargain to some extent. As such, they usually do not engage in collusive conflict with men within the household over the management of their earnings, rather their situation is a mixture of cooperation and conflict (Sen, 1990:132). They are engaged in '*cooperative conflict*', which addresses situations where cooperation is beneficial to both parties than non-cooperation, but both men and women have conflicting interests in the choice among cooperative arrangements. Therefore, although women's income is pooled within the household, their bargaining power in family matters cannot be explained in economic terms (Folbre, 1986:33).

Women's participation in paid employment does not change domestic relations to a great extent. According to a Beckerian model (1991), women's increasing participation in waged employment would reduce their workload in the household because of their access to resources. However, women's increased participation in paid employment does not automatically increase their bargaining power within the family and usually they do not bargain over the reallocation of household tasks, since ability and willingness to bargain is contextually sensitive. Society believes that women must be associated with men (Kantor, 2003:428). Women's adherence to social beliefs, norms and practices limits their ability and willingness to bargain with men within the family. As a consequence, women go to bed later than male family members and wake up earlier, since they have to perform the majority of household tasks. I would argue that their participation in paid employment has brought about little change in culturally defined notions of female and male role and responsibilities in the family. Housework is mostly perceived to be women's work. It is embedded in societal belief that it is

accepted as 'natural'. Therefore, it is unlikely for women to request a reallocation of gender roles, perhaps because of their belief that men would not listen to their request. Previous research suggests that waged work gives women a strong lever to create a power-base in terms of decision making, which enables them to exercise greater control within the household (Bhachu, 1988:96-97; Pahl, 1989:174). Nonetheless, although women seem not to challenge the traditional gender roles and relations their perceptions around these aspects are changing to an extent. As such, they at least expect some help from men in performing reproductive tasks and men also tend to participate in reproductive activities like child care. Women also enjoy spending some money on their own, despite the fact that they have to ask their household heads. These instances indicate that women's participation in paid employment has brought about some changes with regard to people's perceptions about gender roles and relations in the society to some extent.

Chapter VIII: Workers in societal context: perceptions of positionalities

Introduction

Export-oriented garment factories have provided women with access to and employment in the formal sector. Their employment in waged jobs has brought them beyond their traditional confinement within the home and they have got the opportunity to participate in the labour market alongside men. Women's visible proliferation in formal sector employment, because of the new international division of labour (Frobel et al., 1980), has to an extent, challenged the social norms and values in Bangladesh. For instance, their participation in paid employment with men, constant interaction with them or moving around beyond the homestead etc. is a violation of traditional social norms and values. The custom of *purdah* has supported patriarchy, to spatially limit women's movement, within the household compound and construct a rigid boundary between the public and private domains. Nonetheless, increasing participation of women in factory jobs, signals the weakening of the public/private dichotomy in Bangladesh (Feldman, 2001:1115). Their presence has enormously changed the street scenes of urban areas, where export-oriented garment factories are established. They occupy public places and in the mornings and evenings walk along the streets in groups. When on the streets, as I observed them, they hardly look to their right or left. It is perhaps, because of the fact that they are rushing to their destination. It is also not unlikely that they adopt this strategy to ignore street boys who often make suggestive comments to them. Conceivably the majority of people are not apprehensive about them, even though I perceived that people pretend to know everything about the women working in garment factories. Statements like '*they are the garment girls; they are young, unmarried and uneducated rural women; they work in garment factories because of impoverishment of their families;*' from people present a branded image about female factory workers. How do women working in export-oriented garment factories view themselves? What is their perception about the image of a female factory worker in society?

In this chapter I address women's perceptions about their position concurrently as contributing member to household finances within their family and active members of the broader society. Here I argue that women become self confident and courageous

because of their participation in waged employment and steady earnings. They also enjoy freedom of independent movement to an extent. Beyond these positive impacts, employment in garment factories has negatively affected them as well in the sense that a negative image has been portrayed of female garment workers. Their negative portrayal has made their position vulnerable in the society. In the subsequent sections I talk about these aspects in light of different themes emerging from women's narratives. The subtitle of each section points to the relevant theme, that I developed, as noted earlier, during the process of research.

Women's perceptions of their position in the family

Women earn a steady income from their waged work. They employ their time, energy and skills on the factory floor. In exchange for their labour resources they receive a wage. Biographies reveal that factory employment, primarily, was a means of survival for the majority of women and they all typically made their wages available for household consumption. As mentioned earlier, the great majority of them, in compliance with traditional social norms, place their earnings in a common pool, which is commonly managed by their (usually male) household heads. All women I interviewed, irrespective of their marital status, said that their income was important, in view of the fact that their families needed the money. The income was important to these women also since, biographies reveal, it brought them self esteem. All women, as interviews reveal, felt happy, because of their contribution to family expenses. Their income was a matter of great satisfaction for them, because they perceived that they were not dependent on other family members; rather, they actively contributed to their household expenditure.

'I give all my wages to my husband. He manages all our family income. But I feel happy as I earn every month. I feel independent. [.....] I am not dependant on my husband to feed me. It is not only his income that we spend for our familial needs. [.....] I am happy to contribute to our household expenses'.

-A married female EPZ worker aged 26

Although her husband controlled her income, she was satisfied that she did not have to rely on her husband for her living. Despite the fact that women do not directly control any or all of their income, they feel confident that they not only consume family earnings but also bring steady income for the family. Bringing an income into the family has been a source of confidence and self esteem for women (Pahl, 1989:130). Their contribution to the family is important in supplementing their household financial resources. Their family requires their earnings for continued existence and their income is not pocket money for extras or personal luxuries. All women I interviewed for this study said that their contribution has become increasingly significant to their family wages and as such, their importance in the family has been enhanced. Biographies reveal that women, irrespective of their marital status, perceived their position in the family has changed. The underlying cause for improving their status, as they articulated, was their financial contribution to subsistence production for their families.

'I think my job has changed my position in the family. Previously my father never asked me anything about any of our family matters. But now my parents want to know my views. [.....] My father is a rickshaw puller. Earlier we were struggling for food as he was the only earning member of our five member family. [.....] I give him all my wages. I contribute more in our family expenses every month than my father does. I think my parents feel obliged'.

-An unmarried female n-EPZ worker aged 20

She, like the majority of interviewed female workers, articulated that her parents sought her views in making their family decisions, which perhaps signalled a change in her position in their family. Women traditionally were regarded as voiceless and men spoke for them. They were considered powerless and vulnerable. In a wider context, as Pollart (1981:78) has argued, they primarily view themselves as wives, mothers and cooks, since they are portrayed along this line in the society. Nevertheless, anthropological evidence suggests that married women in Bangladesh and in other South Asian countries enjoy greater authority to an extent in family decision making processes, because of their motherhood (Das Gupta, 1995:483). Women's labour in the South Asian context is important to family and husbands are typically more dependent on their wives for household maintenance. Their dependence enables wives to have

more influence in household decisions (Malhotra & Mather, 1997:606). A large portion of household decisions are related to children, purchase of food and other daily activities. These decisions usually involve women, while decisions relating to the outer world, for instance, marriages in the family, market transactions, purchase of assets and property etc. often tend to be male domains (Malhotra & Mather, 1997:609; Kabeer, 1999:446; Kantor, 2003:430). Motherhood enables women to participate in some familial matters, where unmarried women are frequently ignored. Against this backdrop, at least asking unmarried women about their views in family decisions is possibly a great improvement for them, in terms of their position in the family. This could be seen to be supported by the basic arguments of resource theory (Blood & Wolfe, 1960), which articulates that the marital partner with more resources has greater negotiation power within the household (Fox, 1973:728; McDonald, 1980:848). Since women's labour is more important to subsistence production and families are dependent on their income, they are given more value in the family, which to an extent, improves their position in the familial context. The most common example female factory workers mentioned as an indication of their change of status in the family was decisions about job selection. The majority of women (93%) I interviewed for this study articulated that they themselves decided whether to continue their present job or apply to a new factory. They made decisions about their job selection, since they had the best knowledge about working conditions and facilities in factories, because of their continuous interaction with other factory workers. Their experience in relation to their job was valued in the family and hence, they were able to make their own decisions about those jobs, which, interviews with women reveal, they usually made in consultation with other family members.

Their experience within the public sphere and continuous interaction with other people changed their perceptions to the extent that their household heads cared for them in family matters. The women I interviewed seemed more confident about voicing their views in making family decisions, despite the fact that they had little control over their earnings. Male control over economic resources indicates the maintenance of the notion of men as household heads who are responsible for maintaining the family. Nevertheless, women's exposure to the outer world, because of their participation in paid employment, has led at least to some changes in the household in relation to traditional sexual divisions of labour. For instance, as discussed in the previous chapter,

men to some extent take care of their children during the time women are away for work. Men's involvement in household activities indicates changes in the notion of male and female roles in the family. Obviously, it does not mean that the notion of femininity and masculinity has radically changed but it perhaps signals that perceptions in society about gender roles are conceivably changing to some extent. I would argue that this change has positively impacted on gender relations, at least at household level.

Women workers are in constant interaction with the public sphere because of their employment. Their interaction begins with their efforts to cope with and adjust to a strange world. Interviews reveal that women in the course of time build confidence through their continuous interaction with the external setting beyond their home.

'Earlier I was very shy to speak with other people. I was very scared and could not walk alone on the streets. My husband accompanied me to the bus stop. [.....] Now I am brave. I do not feel scared anymore. I can talk to anybody. I am smarter than ever before'.

-A married female non-EPZ worker aged 23

While she was spatially confined and had very limited interaction with people, she did not have the courage to talk to strangers, rather felt scared. Factory work provides women working in the formal sector with the avenue to constantly interact with many others beyond their family. They experience how others behave and interact. Biographies reveal that they feel encouraged when, in the same setting, they see other women persistently interacting with other people. They constantly observe the setting and try to behave the way others do. Their constant interaction with other people and perceptions about the world they are interacting with, thus, brings some changes in them. Over the course of time they usually try to capitalise all available possibilities of factory work. Their effort in availing themselves of the opportunities and the prospects and problems in their way to some extent increases their consciousness as expressed in the following narratives.

'If I had passed the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examination I would have the chance to strive for supervisory positions. But I have nothing to do. I have to work as an operator as long as I work in garment factories. [.....]

Now I know the value of education. If you have more education you earn more. My parents could not educate me since we were very poor. [.....]I will try my best to educate my children at the maximum level. It will help them find a government job. My daughter will have a good marriage with an educated boy from a good family if I can educate her. Without education life is full of distresses.

-A married female n-EPZ worker aged 27

Despite having very good skill in operating sewing machines, she could not move on to higher positions in her job, because of her lack of required education. Failure in being able to capitalise the possibilities of factory work, because of lack of education, along with their desire for better job opportunities for their children, brought about some changes in their perceptions. Biographies reveal that all women, irrespective of their marital status, had a high level of educational aspiration for their children, since they did not want their children to suffer like them. Any job in the formal sector requires a level of education. As pointed out earlier, employers in the garment sector also want workers to have some educational attainments, while in recruiting people at managerial positions they want those who at least completed the Secondary School Certificate examination (equivalent to GCSE level). Since the majority of women could not complete secondary level education, broadly because of familial poverty, they often failed to benefit the most from the opportunities of their garment factory employment. They realised the importance of education because of the constraints they encountered in their life. Therefore, they were keen to educate their children so that they could better their lives. Their motive for educating, especially their daughters, was perhaps influenced by their belief that they would not have to submit to the adversities they faced in their life. Customarily, children in Bangladesh take care of their parents in their old age, in the absence of a social security system provided by the state (Chowdhury, 2004:244). Perhaps the expectation of the majority of married women (77%) from their children, in their old age, also motivated them to invest in their education. It is the same motive that encouraged some of them to secretly hold back some money from their monthly earnings. They saved money so that they could cope with hardships that may arise in future. They had become more conscious about their life chances and evidence suggests that their employment in export-oriented garment factories had contributed the most in this regard.

'My husband and I work in the same factory. We are married for nearly three years. We have not had any children yet. We have decided to wait a few more years for our first child. [...] We are now saving for our future. We are saving for our children. We want to educate them at the maximum level. We are saving so that we can educate them properly'.

-A married female EPZ worker aged 21

Her husband and she are both working and saving money for their children. They are conscious about their future and have decided to wait a few more years for their first child. Although, because of cultural inhibitions, it was not possible to ask about family planning, it appears that they are very conscious about their own family and future. As biographies reveal, a good number of women (54%) appeared to be very conscious about their family and life choices. It is plausible that their participation in waged employment has brought about changes in their views about life and made them more conscious about life choices. Their consciousness affects them positively and results in a delaying effect on their marriage and childbearing (Lim, 1983:83). Increased familial economic demands pushed women to waged employment, which resulted in a positive association of work, marriage, childbearing and family size. As was noted in Chapter V, evidence suggested that employed unmarried women marry at an older age in comparison to those who were married before coming into job. Employment opportunities thus influence the rise of delayed marriage, as well as delayed motherhood. Moreover, since childbearing is likely to affect women's earnings, because of the time demands of child care, I would argue, as biographies reveal, married working women might be inclined to delay and limit childbearing, which in turn, affects society positively. From a national perspective, this helps controlling the growth rate of population in a densely populated country where nearly 142 million people live in 144,000 sq. Km, whilst from individual perspective this is good for women, since early child bearing involves various risks for their physical and mental health. Moreover, delayed child bearing gives them the opportunity to save money and spend that for the education of their children and on their wellbeing in the long run.

Women's perceptions of their own image

The construction of gender, under patriarchy, has customarily been a symbol of male domination and female subordination. Women in Bangladesh are traditionally positioned at the household level and are assigned tasks that keep them confined within the homestead, while men specialise in work outside the homestead (Cain, Khanam & Nahar, 1979:413). They remain in the *ondor* (private), while the *sodor* (public) is the male space. Men exercise authority and power over women and the normative obligation of men is to provide them with food and shelter. Nonetheless, as was noted earlier, the changes in traditional socio-economic structures of Bangladesh over the years, because of poverty, have weakened the material base of men's patriarchal control. Impoverishment affected their capabilities to provide the family livelihood and thus to control female labour within the family. Economic hardship forced women to go beyond *ondor* and to increasingly participate in paid employment. Women's participation in waged jobs and regular contribution to family finances further destabilised male authority in the family. Evidence suggests that women's financial contribution to family expenditure has created a situation which has brought about some changes to an extent in the perceptions of social construction of gender roles and relations. This is, perhaps, a significant social change that has taken place in recent years in Bangladesh.

However, I perceived from biographic interviews that the most noteworthy change has taken place at women's level of perceptions about themselves. A great number (61%) of female workers said that they had become courageous to an extent that they could speak for themselves, which was not possible for them before starting a factory job. They perceived that the increasing importance of their earnings to their family welfare and livelihood made them feel confident, as articulated in the following narrative of the husband of an EPZ factory worker. Nevertheless, evidence suggests that it was not always unequivocally welcomed by all men. During interviews with the following narrator I got the impression that he was not entirely happy about his wife's changed perceptions, although not antagonistic to his wife.

'My wife works in an EPZ factory. I work as a petty trader. But she makes the most contribution to our living. We have two kids. I take care of them

when my wife is away. I take them to school every day. [.....] We bought 30 decimals cultivable land in our village. I bought the land in her name since it was from her money. [.....] I have a house in the village. I can cultivate the land. My wife can stitch garments for others. So we might have a better life in our village home. [.....] I proposed to her several times to go home and start life there. But she did not agree. She said she will work a few more years in the factory. [.....] Her behaviour has steadily changed since she is in the job. Earlier she used to depend on me for everything. But now everything has changed. [.....] She earns for the family. I think her income has made her feel more secure. The job has increased her courage so she can argue now’.

-Husband of a 25 year old EPZ worker

As articulated by her husband, she plays a key role in her family matters. Her husband perceived that her courage has increased, since she is the breadwinner for the family. Beyond contribution to family finances, owning a stable property gave her a strong power base within the family. Women’s contribution to family subsistence and interaction with other people can raise their consciousness, to the extent that they realise that they are also entitled to have their own views about family matters. Although, as biographies suggest, before coming out to work, they used to rely on their family elders, especially men, for everything, their participation in waged employment appears to increase their confidence and creates a situation that changes the socially constructed notion about women that has traditionally dominated in Bangladeshi society.

Women are largely employed in export-oriented garment factories, since they are perceived to be docile and easy to control (Elson & Pearson, 1981a; Ong, 1991). Traditionally it was believed that women follow orders and never argue. The construction of such gender characteristics plays a significant role in the bargaining process between men and women in society, especially at household level. My own observation and anecdotal accounts suggest that crying is a strong emotional behaviour assigned to women as a typical female behaviour. It was pointed out earlier that sometimes women cry on the factory floor, because of maltreatment from supervisors. Expression of such emotional behaviour helps to ease the situation inside the factories, where strict working conditions are maintained. However, my participant observation and evidence suggests that not all women on the factory floor behave in the way they

are socially depicted. Some women express emotional reactions, while others go beyond the traditional norms. They develop a strategy of resistance by challenging the verbal abuse in return.

'See; the supervisors always shout. Always they use bad language. Earlier I was always quiet. But now I also shout back. I also use the bad languages as they do. [.....] If I do not tell anything they will keep doing the same way. They think I am mad. So they are scared of me. [.....] They do not behave with me the way they do with others. I know I am very brave'.

-A married female n-EPZ worker aged 24

One day, I found this women shouting back at the supervisor, when he was very angry with her because of her mistake. This is indeed an irritation for the supervisors that women will shout back in their face. This sharply contrasts to traditional notions about women, and as I observed, supervisors feel embarrassed in such situations. Consequently, as I perceived, they particularly try to avoid using bad language with women who react defiantly. Some women learn this strategy in the course of time and utilise it to resist their supervisor's behaviour. Some others go beyond this and behave in a deviant way in such situations, as articulated in the following account.

'Supervisors use bad language when we make mistakes or cannot fulfil our target. Sometimes they even slap. Things were different six years back when I started the garment factory job. I used to cry at that time. [.....] In one of my last factories one day a supervisor slapped me. He did not like me at all. I was so angry that I got up from the chair. I threatened him that I would break his hands if he did that again with me. He complained to the production manager (PM). The PM said that what I did was not an appropriate behaviour for a girl. I became angrier with him and wanted to know whether the supervisor behaved appropriately. [.....] Nobody thought that I could behave that way. I also did not realise how I did that. But it worked tremendously. [.....] Since then I resist when somebody uses bad words with me. Once in this factory my supervisor was shouting when I made a mistake. I was very angry and said, 'Don't shout. Tell me what my fault is and what I have to do'. [.....] I am not scared about anything. I know

my job very well. Wherever I go I will get jobs in garment factories. I do not care for anything. I never think of the job'.

-A married female EPZ worker aged 25

The supervisor went to the production manager, since perhaps he perceived the reaction of the woman was highly insulting for him, although he did not think that the woman might also have some feeling of self-respect. Behaviour perceived as deviant for women is anything that challenges the dominant gender discourses that symbolise women as submissive in the society. Since intimidating approach from them is unfamiliar in the society, it is probably surprising for others around them. Nevertheless, women need to react against maltreatment and interviews with factory workers suggest that it changes situations. Women's experience and expertise in factory work make them feel more confident. Their confidence gives them courage and voice, which enables some of them to react defiantly against the bullying behaviour of the management. Thus, the interaction on the factory floor to an extent creates an avenue for women to challenge the predominant patriarchal gender hierarchies on the factory floor. Biographies reveal that some women try to capitalise upon this opportunity and go beyond traditional gender norms, although the majority (69%) articulated that they react in the language of silence, which is traditionally the expected way for women. Evidence suggests that conforming to gender stereotypes reinforces patriarchal domination on the factory floor. Then again, biographies reveal, contesting it brings about some changes in women's situation to a limited extent at the work place. Notwithstanding this fact, the majority of women do not counter traditional values and norms, although it is likely that continuous contradiction might change the situation. Although women's approaches to antagonism on the factory floor are different, they try to speak for themselves at least at household level. Interviews with women as well as men reveal that women's perceptions of themselves change in the course of time. Participation in paid employment, contribution to family living expenses and their interaction with men, especially on the factory floor, are the most significant factors that contribute to their changing perceptions of their own image.

Women's perceptions of movement

Participation in paid employment has given women the opportunity to leave the confinement of the home. Evidence suggests that a great majority (82%) of women I interviewed for this research were migrant workers. The migratory pattern of female factory workers has introduced different types of living arrangements in the urban areas. It was noted earlier that the majority of women migrated with their families and relatives and were living in a familial environment, while some others came on their own and were living independently in urban areas. They rented a room and usually lived on their own or sometimes lived with other women in the same room without any male guardian. Women's living arrangements without any male is an exceptional form of arrangement that emerged because of their participation in waged employment. It is the most significant change in relation to living arrangement for women in urban areas and people perhaps have become accustomed to such an arrangement, which is not widely accepted in Bengali culture (Naved, Newby & Amin, 2001:93). However, even though they are living without an immediate male guardian, older people, usually landlords, take the role of guardianship and control women's movements. Biographies reveal, and as discussed in Chapter V, that landlords exercise their control over women by imposing various sanctions on them regarding their interactions with strange men, staying outside during holiday evenings, inviting male friends to their houses etc. Yet, such living arrangements and household characteristics emerged as a response to the social change caused by employment opportunities in the formal sector for women. Although landlords take the role of guardianship, female workers living in such arrangements enjoy greater autonomy in urban areas.

'We enjoy holidays if the factory is closed. Sometimes we watch a movie on television. Sometimes we visit other friends at their houses. [...] I do not have to ask anybody for permission but I always tell my landlord. He is my guardian here. I do not do anything that will bring me a bad name in the society. [...] I commute to my village alone. I spend money for myself. Sometimes I go for shopping. I can do here what I want such as eating out, wearing clothes of my choice. [...] In the village people are very mean. They would not like these and always tease'.

-An unmarried female EPZ worker aged 19

She enjoys some sort of liberty because of her employment in garment factories. Since women live away from their villages, they, as is evident from her narrative, can do many things which people in rural areas usually do not like. Here, although they enjoy freedom of independent movement, all women living on their own articulated that they tried to protect their reputation as a ‘good girl’, which is perhaps a more difficult task. Biographies reveal that women living independently impose self-regulations and control their own behaviour in their interaction with people, and men in particular. They do not move alone on the streets and usually do not stay outside their home during the holiday evenings. More often than not they appreciate the role of landlords and other older people as their guardians. They appreciate the landlord’s role as local guardian, since having a male guardian in the eyes of society enables them to enjoy greater space and freedom of independent movement without attaching public censure on them. Furthermore, they pretend to be married and use a nose ring¹⁹ to signify their marital status. They use the identity of a married woman to protect themselves from the attention of the men with whom they interact. However, evidence suggests that married women also enjoy some sort of freedom of independent movement, because of their job, although most of them live with their family²⁰.

‘Before marriage my parents never allowed me to move alone. I had to take my younger brother or sister with me. I had the same situation after my marriage also. [.....] But things changed when I entered into garment factories. I could meet you here beyond my homestead because of my job. [.....] Now I work in the factory. I earn money every month. [.....] I give my wages to my husband. But he gives me when I ask for him. I go for shopping. I buy things for my children. Sometimes I go alone. But I always tell him before going out of my home’.

-A married female non-EPZ worker aged 25

¹⁹ Customarily married women in Bangladesh use a nose ring as a symbol of their married identity. Divorced and widowed women do not put on nose rings since it sharply contrasts with the meaning of the ring. Nonetheless evidence shows that women irrespective of their marital status put on nose rings to protect them from harassment from their male counterparts. Some women articulated that they felt more secure because of the ring since it gives people around them the impression that they are married and protected by some man. Therefore, they should not be approached by another man.

²⁰ Biographies reveal that one married interviewed woman lived independently, leaving her family in the village.

Women's independent movement is not generally approved of in Bangladesh. Consequently, some of their family members usually accompany them when they are going anywhere. Her taking a job changed the scenario and she could move more independently. She was the only woman with whom I had in-depth interviews in a place beyond her factory and home. Women perceive that their factory job gives them the opportunity of moving independently beyond cultural norms. Women's participation in paid employment requires them to move around. It is not always convenient for family members to accompany them on their way to and from factories every day. As such, their independent commuting has become an accepted norm against traditional social values. All those I interviewed articulated that their unaccompanied commuting to factories gave them self confidence and courage and the opportunity of independent movement. Biographies reveal that they could move independently wherever they felt was required. It is significant that they gained the freedom of independent movement because of their participation in waged employment.

'Factory work has made women independent. They go to office alone. It has made them brave. So they now can go anywhere without help. The scenario of the streets has been changed in recent years. [...] Lots of girls move around the streets during holiday afternoons. They are shopping for themselves. They go to cinemas. They do everything for themselves. They do not need any help from their male family members. [...] Earlier my wife did not go anywhere without me. But now she does not require anybody. Sometimes she takes money from me and goes alone for shopping. [...] It is okay. I do not mind. But I think she should ask me before going. [...] I think women should behave properly. They should go with other women. They should not stay outside (the home) in the evening'.

-Husband of a 24 year old EPZ worker

He also works in the garment factory with his wife. He appreciates his wife's independent movement and does not mind provided she follows the behaviour appropriate to women as noted earlier. Despite his feeling, he wants to continue traditional patriarchal control over his wife and wants her to ask him before she goes anywhere. All male respondents perceived that employment in paid jobs has changed women's position in society. They have to move alone to attend their offices and their

independent commuting gave them confidence and courage to move independently. Their access to paid employment and thus to financial resources gave them the opportunity to speak for themselves. Although the majority of women interviewed in this study surrender their earnings, evidence suggests that sometimes they get some money when they ask their household heads. As such, they can, for example, go out shopping or for leisure activities and manage to move independently. Interviews with men reveal that the majority of them (61%) think that women can move independently but that has to be within certain patriarchal norms. Biographies reveal that usually women also do not challenge the dominant norms of society. Rather they, to an extent, enjoy the freedom of independent movement within existing, if more relaxed, patriarchal norms.

Women's perceptions of people's attitudes towards them

Even though, as was noted earlier, impoverishment has forced women to take garment factory work in their quest for a steady income for the family, biographies reveal that garment work continues to be socially stigmatised in Bangladesh. Female factory workers and others around them perceive that society has negatively symbolised women working in garment factories. The social construction of womanhood, in Bangladesh, does not tend to appreciate women's work outside the home. For some interviewed women (14%) resistance from family members to their factory job was perhaps an articulation of such attitudes. Despite the fact that the garment sector in Bangladesh flourished in the 1980s and more than two million women are now working in this sector (Human Development Resource Centre, 2008), the attitude of society towards women working in garment factories has not yet changed very much. It is perhaps the nature of factory work that contributes to the negative depiction of female factory workers. The nature of factory work requires women to stay outside the home in the evenings. It is evident from the following account that those women who stay outside their home during the evening are treated as 'bad girls' in Bangladeshi society.

'Nobody respects a garment worker. People think that garment work is very low. They think that garment factory women are very bad. [...] We go home at night from the factory. Sometimes we stay on the factory floor at night. In our society only bad girls stay outside the home during the evening. [...] I

do not want any of my relatives to work here. I always tell my children that I do this job because I have no qualification to take any other job. My parents could not spend for my education. But I will try to educate you so that you can take a good job’.

-A married female n-EPZ worker aged 26

All interviewed workers, irrespective of their gender identity, indicated that people had a negative view about women’s participation in garment work. During my research I observed that nobody perceived this job as being bad for any male worker. It is perhaps people’s negative attitude towards women’s participation in paid employment that contributes to the negative portrayal of female factory workers. As was noted earlier, the suggestive comments that women experience from street boys are likely an expression of an attitude or feeling of a section of society towards them. The perceptions of factory workers themselves are also shaped by the experiences they gain from the broader societal perspective. Consequently, they also believe that garment jobs are bad or that women working in garment factories are bad.

‘Garment girl’ is a very bad name. Some people use this name as gali or expletive. [...] People think that girls working in these factories always shout. They work with strange men. They lose morals and become spoiled. So nobody wants to marry a garment girl. [...] One of my cousin sisters works with me in this factory. A couple of months ago she went home as her parents were talking about her wedding. The groom and his relatives chose her. Everything was settled and a date was fixed for the wedding. Just one week before the ceremony the father of the groom broke off the wedding. They had inquired about my cousin and came to know that she worked in a garment factory. The father of the groom told my uncle that they would not take a ‘garment girl’ as their daughter in law’.

-An unmarried female n-EPZ worker aged 19

Interviews reveal that garment factory work is hardly valued in society. The majority of male respondents perceived that people think of them as low grade workers, while the interviewed female workers of this study were explicit in their articulation, as in the following narrative, that people talk badly about garment factory work.

'People do not know what happens inside the factory. They think that we always joke and laugh with strange men. They believe word of mouth. They talk badly about female factory workers. They do not see how we behave on the streets. They believe that we all are bad. [.....] Some women are bad. They do bad things. They do not think about their future. They are free. But I am not like them. I behave properly. [.....] Perhaps people do not like us walking along the streets. But I have to support my family'.

-An unmarried female n-EPZ worker aged 20

Women's autonomy and visible independent movement is linked to the negative symbolisation of female factory workers and, for example, to the assumption that they will do anything for money. Such perceptions make women's position vulnerable in society in various ways as the following narratives illustrate.

'Garment girls are very bad. They do everything for money. Some of them come here leaving husband and children in the village. They live here with others for money. [.....] I have four girl friends from my previous jobs. They all work in different factories. They do not know each other. I pass my time with them. [....] I would not marry any of them. I would marry a village girl. [.....] These girls are very bad. They talk loudly. They do not feel shy. They do not respect others'.

-An unmarried male n-EPZ worker aged 20

'I married my husband on my own. We loved each other. We worked in the same factory at that time. [.....] Before our marriage one day his mother came to the factory gate during lunch to see me. After a few days he along with his mother went to my house and proposed to my landlord about our wedding. My landlord arranged our marriage and we started living together in my house. [.....] Sometimes he used to go to see his mother. But in a few months he changed a lot. He began living with his mother. I did not understand anything. [.....] Sometimes he used to come to see me. One day I followed him to his house. [.....] He was very violent when he saw me there. I was also very upset. I did not understand what to do. He was already

married and had a child. His wife at that time was pregnant again. [.....] I came back to my house. I am now eight months pregnant. My parents do not know my story. I cannot show them my face. [.....] Recently he has changed his job. I do not know his new factory. Sometimes he comes here and takes money from me'.

-A married female n-EPZ worker aged 21

Both narratives indicate the prevalence of vulnerability of female factory workers in society, because of men's attitude towards them. Men exploit women and benefit from their exploitation. Some women may get involved with men in good faith and experience destitution. It is unlikely that they will get any support from their families and others around them in these situations; rather, people may be likely to blame them for their sufferings, since many people still perceive women who move out of the homestead into the public (male) space, as both provocative and offensive (Abdullah & Zeidenstein, forthcoming, cited in Cain, Khanam & Nahar, 1979:95). Although women have been coming out for employment since the 1970s, people's perceptions about gender roles and relations in Bangladeshi society have not changed as much as might be expected over the years. However, this is not to disregard the significance of changes that have occurred and are occurring in Bangladesh, because of women's participation in waged employment.

I would argue that people perceive women's integration into the labour force as a threat to prevailing socio-cultural norms that have defined traditional gender relations and attributes. The nature of factory work necessitates that women stay outside their home for extended periods of time. Women's constant interaction with the outer world, their independent movement and autonomy do not conform to the traditional view and this can lead people to *'talk badly about female factory workers'*. Such negative portrayals of women working in garment factories can make their position in society vulnerable.

Conclusion

Access to waged employment and thus to financial resources enables women to contribute to their family finances. Their contributing role in the household economy

enhances their position, to a certain degree, in the family. Conversely, very few female respondents could give specific instances regarding the improvement of status in the family. Despite the fact that women may enjoy greater freedom of movement, they are usually required to ask permission from household heads. Nevertheless, their role as an earning member of the family contributes to the development of self esteem and self confidence. Their views may be more likely to be sought in making family decisions, even though biographies reveal that unmarried women are not keen to participate in decisions relating to their marriage.

Marriage in Bangladesh is traditionally arranged by families and men and women tend to rely on their parents for finding suitable spouses and arranging the wedding. Based on my own experience and White's (1992:100) note about wedding arrangements of women from her own research about gender class relations in Bangladesh, I would argue that usually unmarried Bangladeshi women, especially in rural society, are traditionally supposed to remain ignorant and detached from their marriage discussions and decisions, although there is no such pressure on men. Moreover, anecdotal accounts articulate that it is by convention indelicate for a woman to show any open interest on her own marriage. The processes of socialisation teach them to infer passivity and rely on their guardians regarding their marriage arrangements. They are taught to perceive that their guardians know what is best for them. Unmarried women also do not tend to perceive their male co-workers as prospective marriage partners. It is perhaps due to the fact that such marriage involves the risk that the partner might disappear by changing their job and place of living. Perhaps the fear about finding a marriage partner from a different region also contributes to their reliance on parents for selecting a groom from their own area. Nevertheless, although women do not decide their marriage partners, it is likely that they would have the opportunity to put their own views and consent in their marriage decisions, since their opinions are sought in the making of family decisions. Marriages in Bangladesh are predominantly arranged with relatively few free choice or love marriages. The custom and concept of marriage in Bangladesh has not changed yet but there is a chance that women would be better able to negotiate the process of marriage, because of their greater confidence, developed through their participation in waged employment.

Garment factory work provides women with many possibilities but they continue to cope with the negative light in which they are portrayed by society. However, they try to utilise the possibilities of waged employment, which is shifting the notion of traditional social constructions of gender roles and relations to some extent. Despite this fact, the majority of them articulated that they would stop working if their family could fulfil all their financial requirements without their participation in waged employment. Women entered waged employment because their familial needs necessitated their additional income. It is likely that they applied their agency in the form of bargaining and negotiating to pursue and exercise their choice of job, even in the face of opposition from other family members. Employment in garment factories gives them access to financial resources and human capital. Although the majority of them do not control all their earnings, they spend some money to an extent on their own. The work environment inside the factories is harsh and they have limited promotional opportunities in their job. These situations leave them the scope of exercising their own agency to some extent in order to try to extract greater benefit from factory work. Moreover, factory employment gives them the opportunity to leave the traditional confines of the home and enjoy freedom of independent movement to some extent. They are contributing to their household finances through their earnings, which their family require. Against this backdrop, it is difficult to explain the complexities of their thinking, in relation to their decision to leave waged employment in garment factories. The harsh working conditions and their experience on the factory floor might be influencing factors in their decisions about continuation in the job. It is also not unlikely that their negative image and vulnerability in society as garment workers, as well as the double burden of both productive and reproductive tasks they bear because of their job might have contributed to such feelings.

Chapter IX: Conclusion: the final thoughts

Introduction

The research intention that guided this study was to examine the implications of paid employment for women working in the export-oriented garment factories in Bangladesh. This, I now believe was an ambitious project because, as my field experiences illustrated, researching women as a man, especially in the context of a predominant Muslim country, whilst not entirely impossible, was certainly intricate. In this study, I employed my theoretical understandings of the process of knowledge production. Since knowledge is contextual and every individual experiences social reality differently, I tried to explore, comprehend and analyse individual voices about the everyday experiences of research participants, who took part in this study. The overall aim of this ethnographic study was to explore women's lived experiences concurrently as factory workers, as members of their respective households and as actors within a wider societal context. Ethnographic research is usually concerned with producing descriptions and interpretations of the meanings and functions of human actions (Hammersly & Atkinson, 1995:25). Accordingly, in this research, rather than just describing the day-to-day interactions of female factory workers, I explicitly interrogated the lived experiences of women working in garment factories, and presented the analysis of data in the form of verbal descriptions and explanations, although I also employed structured forms of data collection and quantitative data analysis as secondary to qualitative research approaches. I tried to explore research participants' perceptions of employment in garment factories, of the nature and structure of garment factory work, of their conditions and positions within broader societal context where they continually interact as well as their perceptions about their own images.

This is the final chapter of this thesis, where I discuss the conclusion of this study under the following themes: women's employment in garment factories, methodology and significance of research and the implications of waged employment for Bangladeshi women.

Women and employment in garment factories

Increasing numbers of women seeking waged employment has been one of the most momentous trends in post-independent Bangladesh. Although women's working outside the homestead has conventionally carried negative social status and as such they had little scope of employment, the nine month long independence war in 1971 forced self reliance on a large number of widows and rape victims, whilst a subsequent famine in 1974 increased the number of both women and men constantly experiencing economic insecurities. The harsh realities of life, because of extensive poverty, compelled women to participate in waged employment, whilst income from women's waged labour became essential for many families for their survival (Hossain, Jahan & Sobhan, 1988:112). The establishment of the garment sector in the 1980s and the expansion of employment opportunities improved women's participation in the labour market (Feldman, 2001:1099). The government of Bangladesh engineered the process of establishing export-oriented garment industries in the country and bringing women to these industries and thus to the productive sector of the economy. A key reason why women take jobs is due to material necessity and garment factory work for them is an attractive income generating alternative to available job opportunities in the informal sector. Prior to the advent of garment factories, women had limited employment opportunities in the formal sector. Some educated women worked as primary school teachers and family planning assistants (Feldman, 1992:120). However, appointment to these jobs required a minimum level of education and since the majority of women lacked educational qualifications, available informal sector jobs were the only means for their survival. They worked as domestic servants, agricultural waged labours, petty traders, and as casual workers in other outdoor sites like construction fields (Kabeer, 2004:14). The nature of most of these informal sector activities was that they were extensions of women's domestic roles to some extent, and required long hours but paid little. Domestic work, for instance, requires working from early in the morning to late at night, whilst construction work is very hard on the body and incurs risk of physical injuries. Moreover, these jobs were seasonal and as such, wages fluctuated. In addition, most of these informal sector activities paid in kind, for example, food instead of cash and therefore women gained little access to cash resources. Since they essentially remained confined within the informal labour market, their contribution to the economy remained invisible and as such, they continued to be marginalised. With the expansion

of export-oriented industries they gained access to the formal labour market through their employment in garment factories, where obtaining a job is relatively easy, requiring little or no education and prior training.

Women's employment became a legitimate issue in discourse when liberal feminists and the women in development (WID) movement within liberal development thinking sought women's integration into development processes. As discussed in chapter II, the liberal development approach assumed industrialisation as the strategy to foster economic development in Third World countries. *'Modernisation, development and industrialisation have sometimes been treated as synonymous (and therefore) the view that development is impossible without industrialisation remains a potent one'* (Cheteway & Allen, 2000:510). Development planners viewed development as a linear process, which would follow Rostow's (1960) stages of growth theory. However, they paid very little attention to women's experiences during the first two development decades. They ignored women's traditional productive roles in the economy and despite their being active participants in productive activities, development strategies marginalised their labour (Wright, 1997:75, 77). The WID movement held that development efforts were negatively affecting women in Third World countries and emphasised their economic independence as the key to freeing them from their subordinate position within society. *'The original concept of WID was based on the adverse impact of inappropriate economic development programs that undercut women's economic activities by treating them only as mothers. The solution [.....] was to design development programs so that women were integrated into them'* (Tinker, 1990:39). The call from the WID proponents hugely impacted on development policy planners and they urged for employment generation as a means of women's integration into development processes. Since the 1970s, export-oriented industrialisation in developing countries has been the most significant tool for generating employment for and integrating women into the processes of development. Export-oriented manufacturing units brought a sudden increase of job opportunities and a substantial integration of women into the formal labour force (Safa, 1981:432). The WID proponents argued for employment generation as a means of women's integration into the development process and their emancipation from subordinate positions in society, which broadly heralded two contesting views in discourse in relation to the implications of employment on women. It is widely argued in the literature that women are either

liberated through waged employment or additionally exploited because of their integration into waged labour.

Methodology and significance of research

My research was situated within this emancipation/exploitation dichotomy and for the purpose of research I adopted both feminist and broader sociological research methodologies in exploring the lived experiences of female factory workers. This ethnographic research was a blending of both qualitative and quantitative approaches. I concurrently utilised unstructured interviews to explore women's perceptions as garment workers, semi-structured interviews to examine the views of family elders about their female household members working in garment factories and structured interviews to study the views of both women and men from a broader generalised standpoint. My research focused primarily on women but also included men as research participants. The inclusion of men and obtaining their views about female factory workers was significant, as women are frequently oppressed by men through patriarchal relations. Since women do not live in isolation, I perceived the inclusion of men into the research as important to truly grasp the social realities of female factory workers. Bringing men into the analysis helped me to understand the ways in which their perceptions are socially constructed. Diversity of views and individual perceptions were central to this research. In traditional research, *he* is the norm and *she* is 'the other' while in this research I took women's experiences as central and drew heavily on feminist perspectives (Klein, 1983:91). I believe that people understand and can talk about their lives. My belief in people's agency influenced me to explore and understand women's experiences, perceptions, attitudes, behaviour and interactions in a descriptive form. One of the strengths of this research is recognition of women's agency. Women, in traditional research processes, remained invisible and subordinated, since researchers have spoken for them. In this research attempts have been made so that they moved from silence into speech and spoke for themselves.

Implications of factory employment for Bangladeshi women

Garment factory work, from an economic point of view, is a more lucrative alternative for women compared with agricultural work or domestic services. Their participation in factory work made their presence and contribution increasingly visible

in the national economy. Moreover, at least in comparison to many informal sector jobs, factory employment is less physical and gives them the flavour of working in a modern working environment. From this perspective, employment in export-oriented garment factories considerably improved women's position in the labour market. From an integrationist standpoint garment factory employment is a positive measure towards women's emancipation from their long-established subordinated positions (Wright, 1997:87). Although the gendered separation of spheres culturally defined private spheres as their 'proper place', through the introduction and expansion of export-oriented new market factories, women gained the opportunity to move from the private sphere to the public sphere and to participate in paid employment in the formal sector of the economy.

More often than not they have to utilise their agency to pursue their decision to work in garment factories. The adversities of poverty and the opportunities emanating from the establishment of export-oriented garment factories concurrently have influenced them to utilise their agency in the form of bargaining and negotiation to break the norm of male domination and *purdah* within patriarchal social relations. Utilisation of agency has enabled women to gain access to the labour market in the formal sector and to financial resources, which otherwise was hardly possible in past, because of their lack of required education. Women and their families benefit economically from garment factory work whilst factories also benefit. Employers take advantage of the traditional notion that women's earning is a supplement to the household income since they share men's income and therefore keep their wages low. Nevertheless, low wages do not mean that they are poorly paid relative to all other jobs in the informal economy available to them. The wages they earn from export-oriented garment factories are usually higher than what they would as petty traders or domestic workers. In addition, whatever they earn from garment factories tends to be far steadier than informal sector earnings.

Employment in garment factories enables women to leave the confines of the home and its patriarchal constraints to the extent that they enjoy relative autonomy and freedom of independent movement. Since factory work loosens patriarchal control over their individual behaviour, they enjoy some sort of personal freedom. They gain the opportunity to enjoy the companionship of other women and men from different regions,

which in turn enables them to develop and widen their social networks and enhance their life choices. However, their personal freedom comes at the price of social stigma. They bear a damaged identity and people talk badly about them, since they are considered to be morally degraded. Although they are contributing to their families and to the economic development of the country, garment factory work continues to be socially stigmatised. Women working in garment factories are frequently subject to teasing and taunts- the most common is 'garment girl' which bears a bad image in society. They are perceived as an 'other' invading public (male) spheres beyond their 'proper place' and as such they experience offensive behaviour and harassment from men while they are on the streets. They may also experience offensive behaviour in their places of residence as well as to some extent at their work places. As factory workers they are positioned at the lowest tiers of work hierarchy and are accorded little or no respect on the factory floor, but rather management adopts despotic labour control mechanisms which sometimes involve physical violence.

Garment factory management constantly try to increase workers' productivity and hence employ such mechanisms that workers also have to accelerate production. The organisation of production in garment factories is planned out by management according to time and motion studies (Buraway, 1979:246) forcing women to maintain a smooth flow of production without interruption. Management widely use maltreatment as a means of labour control and disciplinary mechanism. Workers enjoy limited freedom of movement on the factory floor, because of high levels of discipline and control. They frequently experience harsh working conditions on the factory floor. The organisation of work structure inhibits the feeling of solidarity among them, preventing effective collective resistance of the harsh working conditions. The nature of factory production keeps them interdependent. Therefore, failure in efficient and speedy task completion of one worker creates a situation where other workers on the production line also fail to meet their targets. They all then blame the weakest link and sometimes complain about each other. Moreover, they get little chance to interact with each other beyond the factory floor. At the end of the day they tend to be extremely exhausted, while in the morning they rush for factory buses. Their working lives are organised in such a way that the feeling of solidarity cannot easily flourish. However, this does not necessarily mean that they all extend their docility and absorb harsh conditions inside factories because of lack of cohesion. The rigidity of the working environment and

despotic labour management creates agency in some women and they resist maltreatment from men. Their skills in needlework and availability of jobs give them the courage and confidence to withstand men's hostility towards women on the factory floor.

Export-oriented garment factories not only provide gainful employment to women categorised as unskilled but also provide them with experience and basic work skills indispensable for future advancement. Whilst factory employment for women offers limited promotional prospects, the Bangladeshi female workers in garment factories utilise their agency and social capital, developed through continuous interaction with other workers, and adopt horizontal mobility as a strategy in the face of the constraints of vertical mobility. Since their work experience on the factory floors enhances their employability and self-worth, they adopt horizontal mobility as a means of increment through wage negotiations between factories. Earning an income increases women's self esteem and confidence, and raises their consciousness.

Nevertheless, the structure of garment factory work remains highly segregated along gender lines. Managerial positions are almost exclusively taken by men and there is a large gender gap between men and women in the work hierarchy. Mostly men work at the top of the occupational ladder, whereas women remain at the bottom of the structure. The jobs men do bring them higher status and wages, whilst women perform the least paid jobs and are accorded a lower status. Women's status and position on the factory floor are defined by the traditional patriarchal norms which keep close control over them. At the household level women's labour power is a resource of the family and controlled by patriarchal family norms whilst participation in waged labour extends this control to patriarchal management on the factory floor. Since the norms of patriarchal domination are employed inside factories, the bargaining power between management and women remains unequal. As such, they perform routine and repetitive tasks in harsh working conditions for long hours and low wages, which can be seen to be exploitative (Sargent & Matthews, 1999:213). Further, since despotic labour mechanisms are practised on the factory floor, as factory workers they lack the ability to say 'no' once they are inside factories. Their inability to say 'no' leaves factory management with the scope for neglecting issues related to labour welfare in garment factories (Hosmer & masten, 1995:292), As such, factory management is little concerned with worker's

health and wellbeing at the workplace. Even though the physical facilities and conditions of garment factories are relatively clean and comfortable, workers tend to suffer from various physical and mental health related problems like headaches, eyesight related problems, respiratory problems, gastro-intestinal problems and fatigue.

Garment factories provide women with gainful employment and a steady income, however, factory management hardly follows the prescribed rules and regulations with regard to labour welfare. They sometimes try to deprive workers of their due financial benefits and other related facilities and to influence them to lie before foreign buyers about the facilities they are providing for factory workers. Thus, factory management exploits women in different ways. The utilisation of the labour power of another person, without giving a just and equivalent return, is designated as worker exploitation (Webster, 1971, cited in Sargent & Matthews, *op cit.*). Moreover, whatever wages women take home, they usually surrender their income to their household heads, especially to men. Surrendering earnings to family finances does not mean that women willingly continue to extend their submissiveness to men as their mothers may have done. Some women, rather, tend to exercise control over their earnings to an extent but since men tend to perceive women's income to be a threat to their domination within the family, their perception about women's income and their desire to control it sometimes leads to male hostility. Hostile attitudes from men, along with women's adherence to social attitudes towards men as the family breadwinner, influence women to surrender their earnings. However, although they may not exercise control over all their earnings, they often do spend some money on their own. Women in Bangladesh, rural women in particular, usually do not have access to cash resources. They engage in some purchases as part of their day-to-day household management and the medium of transaction for them is often rice, to which they have relatively easy access, because of their participation in crop processing (White, 1992:81). Against this backdrop, women's access to cash resources and spending money on their own indicates a change in women's status in Bangladesh, which their mothers could not enjoy thirty years ago.

Notwithstanding women's participation in waged employment as part of their household survival strategy, women continue to perform the majority of reproductive tasks at familial level. Since domestic tasks are usually perceived by both men and women as women's tasks, women are expected to perform these activities. Although

there have been some changes in relation to societal perceptions about gender roles and relations and men tend to participate in some reproductive tasks alongside women, women mostly bear the double burden of both reproductive work at household level and productive work in factory premises. A significant impact of women's participation in paid employment in Bangladesh is the changes that have taken place over the years in societal perceptions about gender roles and relations and as such men now to an extent believe that they should help women in domestic tasks. Their participation in reproductive tasks, for instance, child care, is the evidence of people's changed perceptions of gender roles and relations in society. Contribution to family expenditure has also improved women's position within the family to the degree that they can put their views in family decisions or their views are sought when family decisions are made.

Customarily women in Bangladesh, especially in rural areas, are married off at a young age arranged by their families and until today child marriage is relatively prevalent (Chowdhury, 2004:247). Female sexuality in Bangladesh is controlled through early marriage, since sexual purity of women in the country, as in other Muslim countries, is of the utmost importance for the reputation and honour of the family. Here, male chastity is not questioned although, technically, in Islam male chastity is as important as female chastity (Kandiyoti, 1987:326; Chowdhury, 2004:252). However, garment factory work has a direct impact on women's reproductive health and marriage arrangements. Since families require women's income, they cannot afford to marry them off and until they are married they can contribute to their natal families. Once a woman is married off, she becomes a member of her husband's family and her income goes into the hands of her husband, which limits her ability to remit to her parents. Families' dependence on women's income and their participation in waged employment has also positively affected women, since it delays their marriage, resulting in their delayed childbearing and rearing. Furthermore, since childbearing and rearing negatively affects women's factory work, they also tend to limit the number of children in the family.

Export-oriented industrialisation approaches to development emancipated Bangladeshi women from their traditional subordinate positions by integrating them into the labour market. Waged work and economic resources provided them with the

necessary power base to acquire independence from traditional patriarchal control at household level and to enjoy increasing autonomy. Factory work jeopardises men's position of dominance over women at household level and at the same time subjects them to new forms of subordination within the factory. Since participation in waged employment decomposes patriarchal control at the household, female factory workers can work long hours until night on the factory floor whilst strict factory rules simultaneously recompose patriarchal oppression inside factories and compel them to work late at night. Thus, they are '*emancipated but unliberated*'²¹ from traditional patriarchal domination. Women's staying outside the home and working until night, is an instance of weakening familial patriarchy, which concurrently indicates the emergence of new forms of male domination beyond the family. They are emancipated from traditional familial patriarchy but subordinated to alien men on the factory floor under patriarchal management. The subordination of women enables factories to cheapen their labour and gain from it. Their families also dominate their earnings and gain from their labour. Women themselves also gain autonomy and freedom of movement to an extent at the cost of their own labour. Therefore, the implications of paid employment for women working in export-oriented garment factories in Bangladesh are contradictory and complex. It has some emancipatory aspects, which are empowering for women to a certain degree, but it also intensifies their exploitive situation in society in some ways. On the one hand, they work long hours for low wages under despotic management and harsh working environments where they enjoy little or no respect as workers but frequently experience patriarchal domination. They have little control over their earnings and bear the burden of both their traditional reproductive work in the family and productive tasks inside factories for earning an income for the family. These all demonstrate their exploitation as factory workers and as women. On the other hand, waged employment gives them the scope of mobility and economic security and enables them to make some purchases for the family. It can lead to greater participation in family decisions and an ability to utilise their agency to bargain and negotiate with other people to an extent. Employment increases their awareness and delays their marriage, child bearing and family size. All these are dimensions of their empowerment within the societal context (Hashemi, Schuler & Riley, 1996:638).

²¹ I borrowed this expression to describe the position of female garment factory workers in Bangladesh with regard to the emancipation/subordination debate from patriarchy from one of the articles of Deniz Kandiyoti entitled '*Emancipated but Unliberated? Reflections on the Turkish Case*' (1987).

Conclusion

The government of Bangladesh, through its pursuit of economic development, has created an avenue that has enabled women to avail the possibilities of global economic restructuring in a society where spaces were segregated along gender lines. Societal norms have traditionally restricted women to the domestic sphere and have imposed sanctions upon their mobility. However, widespread poverty has pushed Bangladeshi women to break the private/public dyad and female garment factory workers are active agents whose increasing presence in public (male) spheres has affected popular perceptions about gender roles and relations in society. Social values, beliefs and practices construct gender ideologies and images which we reproduce and reinforce through our constant interactions. Women's participation in the labour market and presence in male dominated spaces are incessantly contesting the traditional notions of gender practices and meanings and a new gender image has emanated, albeit one which continues to be socially stigmatised. Women have developed their own strategy to cope with their negative portrayal in the wider societal context. Imposing self control, moving in groups, maintaining distance from men, constructing fictive kinship relations and accepting new guardians are their approaches to negotiate with the relatively hostile environment beyond their homestead. They try to behave and interact in a 'modest' way as part of their strategy to demonstrate that although they are transgressing male spaces and working outside the home, they also are trying to maintain traditional values linked to appropriate female behaviour.

Women are conscious that they are exploited in garment factories. They perform tedious and repetitive jobs which are low paid and management frequently tries to deprive them of financial and other related benefits. Nevertheless, *'bad jobs at bad wages are better than no jobs at all'* (Krugman, 1997) and they are happy that they are able to contribute to their family maintenance. Moreover, employment has enabled them to enjoy freedom in their personal lives to an extent but simultaneously exposed them to new forms of patriarchal domination on the factory floor. The day-to-day interactions between women and men inside factories reproduce the notion of male domination and female subordination which they have traditionally experienced within the household. The work structure in garment factories is sexualised and despotic power relations are maintained to discipline and control workers. Factory management reinforces and

exacerbates traditional sexual hierarchies, but significantly, these do not go uncontested. At an individual level, some women try to resist and challenge patriarchal authority on the factory floor and they may lead the way to new possibilities for other women who might feel encouraged to challenge male domination, which possibly will construct a new gender image, since challenging behaviour is the driver of change.

Women in Bangladesh are playing an important role in the processes of social and economic transformation of the country. Their visible presence in the labour market is gradually creating their own space in the conventional public sphere. Bangladeshi society is in a transitional stage and a slow but steady process of change is taking place in the systems of beliefs and values of people in the country. They are growing accustomed to seeing women going out and working with other women and men beyond the homestead. Their participation in waged employment has threatened men's domination at the household level. It is likely that over the years it will also destabilise patriarchal control on the factory floors and will lead management to follow more acceptable and equitable labour practices inside factories. It will hopefully lead to a more favourable workplace where women will be able to work with dignity. Moreover, I believe that societal perceptions about gender roles and relations will also change and women will be visible in managerial posts in coming years. We can expect that the transitional period will lead to a gender emancipating discourse that will shift the norms of the society and sanctions will be imposed on harassment and the harassers rather than women. As factory workers, I think it is possible that one day they will enjoy equal dignity with men in society. Bangladeshi women constitute the main workforce of export-led industrialisation, seen as docile and who are working for minimum wages, and thus they are contributing to maintain the competitiveness of the labour market of the country in the global market place. The country requires increasing foreign investment to enhance export-oriented industrialisation which is perceived to be the appropriate strategy of economic development. I believe and we can expect that at the end of the transitional period, a congenial environment will emerge when society will be more concerned with women and their status and which will enhance women's greater role in development.

Policy recommendations

The garment sector is the single largest sector of Bangladesh in terms of foreign exchange earnings. Furthermore, the export-oriented garment industry in Bangladesh is the only major organized manufacturing sector which accounts for a large part of especially female employment. The advent of garment factories has brought about significant changes in many spheres, such as employment, access to cash resources, control over income and decision making etc. However, women's garment factory employment has widened the gender gap in some areas like work-load, health, social security etc. and the implications of employment on them are complex and contradictory. For example, because of factory employment women enjoy relative autonomy from familial patriarchal dominance but are subordinated to non-familial control through men on the factory floor under patriarchal management. They experience occupational segregation and gender discrimination in wage rates. Moreover, factory management hardly follows the rules and regulations with regard to labour welfare and tries to exploit women in different ways. Evidence suggests that women are employed in export-oriented garment factories to take advantage of their comparative disadvantage position in the labour market. Nevertheless, inward investment and workplace exploitation need not go hand in hand. Considering all these issues, I would like to make the following policy recommendations which should be undertaken with a view to minimising the adverse gender differentiated effects arising from women's employment in export-oriented garment factories in Bangladesh.

- a. The government of Bangladesh has formulated the Labour Law 2006 which provides one day weekly holiday, full pay for fourteen days medical/sick leave, eleven days festival leave and maternity leave for sixteen weeks. However, factory workers do not benefit to a great extent from these legal provisions because of employers' reluctance in implementing labour laws. Government should take necessary measures to strengthen the law enforcement machinery and emphasis should be placed on random factory visits by labour law enforcement agency representatives. Factory management may be asked to report on compliance with prescribed labour laws. Punishment may be imposed on the employers not complying with labour laws and standards while best employers may be identified and rewarded for ensuring best working conditions.
- b. Government may undertake a promotional approach such as introducing educational programmes within the working environment at times to suit

employers with a view to building and increasing awareness of both employers and employees about labour laws. Such programmes should be undertaken to educate both employers and factory workers on their obligations and rights in relation to labour law. Educational programmes can motivate employers to comply with legal provisions with regard to labour rights while laws cannot be easily enforced if there is no demand for the same.

- c. In the absence of appropriate labour organizations garment factory workers cannot prevent infringements of their rights. Factory management gives very little attention to any demand of female factory workers since as an individual their bargaining power is very weak. As such, with a view to improving working conditions factory workers must develop their collective bargaining ability and necessary steps should be taken so that they can organize them into trade unions. Furthermore, awareness needs to be created about the role of trade unions.
- d. Health and safety issues are neglected in garment factories and lack of appropriate health and safety measures are highly responsible for ill health of the workers. Moreover, time constraints and absence of leave facilities limit their access to medical facilities. Steps should be taken to improve the implementation of labour laws regarding occupational safety to ensure health security of factory workers'. Moreover, the government can establish health centres with suitable opening times at those locations where garment factories are clustered. Such steps would help workers avail health facilities without spending much time.
- e. Long working hours is one of the dominant factors affecting the health status of garment factory workers, curtailing their leisure and sleeping time. Therefore, a policy recommendation follows that a two-shift working system should be introduced in garment factories. Introduction of a double shift of work would raise workers' productivity. Furthermore, long working hours is an obstacle for efficient operators to take promotion to supervisory posts since they cannot manage both home and factory work effectively. A two-shift working system could help women gain promotion to supervisory posts.

- f. Education is the single most important factor in segregating garment factory work along gender lines. Therefore, raising female workers' educational level is the most effective way to eliminating gender imbalances in factory production. The first step in this regard should be to attract more educated women into garment factories. Government may sanction a quota for women in management position in factories.
- g. Higher category jobs in garment factories require the skill of garment manufacturing which an employee can acquire only through on-the-job training. Since there are no provisions for training facilities outside of the firms, one has to start one's career as a helper, the lowest job in garment factories. Absence of any formal training facility and lack of required skills are discouraging for educated women to have a career in export-oriented factories. Therefore, providing appropriate training facilities will be an effective way to attract educated women in garment factories.
- h. There is a negative portrayal of female factory workers in Bangladeshi society which is also discouraging for educated women to undertake garment factory work as a career. Steps should be taken to change peoples' perceptions of female factory workers. Their contribution to national economy should also be highlighted. Both print and electronic media can be utilised effectively in this regard, for example, to portray positive messages and images of female factory workers and highlight their contributions to the family and national economy.
- i. Women need to be trained to be suitably skilled for supervisory positions which are presently male-dominated. Steps should be taken to change traditional societal perceptions of women's images and women should be encouraged to take managerial positions.
- j. Although garment factory management tend to provide some child care facilities within the factory compound, they are reluctant to allow female factory workers to visit their children in the day-care centre. As such, women with young children feel discouraged to avail child care facilities. This

situation affects their work standard on the factory floor since there is a social risk in leaving them, especially female children, back home. Therefore, management has to allow women to visit their children in the day-care centre and encourage them to avail such facilities within the factory compound. Government also has to undertake an information campaign to make employers aware in this regard.

- k. There is an insecurity of overtime payment in garment factories. Enactment of legislation stating the payment date of overtime allowances can help improve this situation. Furthermore, workers should be given a copy of their time-card mentioning their total working hours.
- l. Importers of garments made in Bangladesh may also inquire about the implementation of labour law as prescribed by the government of the country.

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