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Decisions about Home: How Migrant Decision-Making Shapes Belonging for non-Bengali Muslims* in Bangladesh

Adiba Amreen
Teaching Assistant (TA) at the School of General Education
BRAC University
Email: adiba.amreen@bracu.ac.bd

*This study specifically looks at the experiences of migrants from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat/Myanmar (the then Burma)

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Abstract

Bengal has had a rich and complex history of migrations, well before and after the Partition in 1947. Non-Bengali Muslims* leaving India, such as people from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat, have also called Bangladesh home. Despite this, the experiences of Partition-era migrants in decision-making remain understudied. Using ethnographic, qualitative methods such as in-depth, semi-structured interviews and the author's own autoethnographic observations, this study aims to fill this gap by exploring migration decision-making. Drawing on theories of mobility capital, tangible and intangible inequalities and the politics of belonging, this article examines the role of economic opportunity, social networks and cultural memory in shaping migrant's decisions and their experience of homemaking in a new land. The findings show how migrants' conditions before migrating and their experiences of inequalities, both tangible and perceived, inform the decisions they make during their migration journey, as well as the role women play in keeping cultural memory alive and creating home. Ultimately, by foregrounding the lived experiences of non-Bengali Muslims, this study highlights the internal diversities that exist within Bangladesh.

Keywords

Migration, Decision-making, Partition, Mobility Capital, Inequalities, Belonging

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Introduction

A bungalow in Rangoon with tall, airy French windows and imported lace curtains. Sprawling tea estates across multiple districts. The largest house on the street and the befitting name *Gullywala*; these are the diverse backgrounds of the wealthy migrants who moved to then-East Bengal during and after the Partition of colonial India in 1947. Their identities are an amalgamation of these backgrounds, their migrations and their current status as citizens of Bangladesh, carrying pieces of every place they have lived in. A majority of migrants faced a very different reality, and their experience of migration and resettlement reflected this. However, wealthier migrants had the means to rebuild their life, or they came with opportunities that allowed them to build an entirely new one in a new land.

Identity is a complex topic in today's globalised world. While diaspora communities and the complexities created by colonialism are widely studied, one point in history remains outstanding- the Partition, which was followed by one of the largest mass migration events in history, an event that created new migrants in new lands, as thousands crossed borders in search of belonging.

However, the migration to East Bengal was not always involuntary or tied to Partition; instead, it often involved experiences of prior decision-making and the lived or perceived inequalities, and was usually driven by economic incentives, such as employment opportunities. Even beyond this, inequalities, both tangible and intangible, personal, social and cultural factors all play a role in migration decision-making (Mazzilli et al. 2024, 467). That being said, what were the prior conditions of these migrants before their migration? How did the decision to migrate ultimately impact them? How did they rebuild life in the new nation? These are the questions that

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this paper looks into. Using empirical data and autoethnographic observations, this paper aims to fill this gap by bringing forward the real-life experiences of migrants and their descendants in an attempt to broaden the historiography surrounding Partition in Bangladesh, a topic often forgotten. Accordingly, this study explores the role of identity and inequalities in migration decision-making since and after the Partition in 1947, with a particular focus on why migrants decided to make Bangladesh their new home even after the Partition had occurred, and why they decided to stay.

Historical Horizons

The history of migration, in the sense of immigration, to the Bengal Delta is rich, partly owing to its arable land, where the British sowed cash crops such as jute and tea. During colonial rule, economic opportunities beyond agriculture defined migration, like the coal industries and railways. These industries preferred to employ non-locals, colloquially *pardesis*, as locals would return to the fields during the harvesting and sowing seasons (Alexander et al. 2015, 28). Other industries, such as the transport and communication systems of the British empire had created a "vast, interconnected, zonal labour market" (Alexander et al. 2015, 22). Although women and children's migration was limited due to the poor conditions of the transport systems, the closer and more accessible the destination, the higher the likelihood of the presence of women and children (Alexander et al. 2015, 41).

Thus, by 1947, there were pre-established social networks already existing between East Bengal and different parts of India, and the mass exodus of Muslims towards East Bengal often followed these pre-established networks of connectivity (Alexander et al. 2015, 22). Even those without such networks chose East Bengal as it held a Muslim majority, and they felt a fierce loyalty

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towards Pakistan and a belief that they would be returning to their rightful land as Muslims (Sabur 2020, 111; Siddiqi 2013, 153).

However, language became a point of contention, as the West Pakistan government often favoured Urdu speakers, which left Bengali speakers with the impression that all Urdu speakers were highly privileged while simultaneously undermining Bangla, despite the vast majority of Pakistan's population speaking the language (Siddiqi 2013, 153). The West Pakistani elites held a pre-conceived notion that the Bengali Muslims were unreliable coreligionists due to their shared language with Bengalis from West Bengal, a result of the elites' anxiety regarding the reunification of East and West Bengal (Murshid 2022, 69-70).

This caused a divide between the urban, elite Muslims and rural Muslims, because the former stressed their proximity to foreigners through their use of language, speaking in Persian, Arabic and later, Urdu, to better establish themselves as Muslims in the purest sense (Kabeer 1991, 39-40). There was another group of urban, secular Bengalis whose focus was instead on their Bengali identity rather than their Muslim identity, causing a sharp divide between the elites themselves. These divisions created identity issues among the East Pakistani elites, as Bengali took on a secular connotation- further exacerbated by the racial undertones of how the Pakistani elites, who were mainly Punjabi, treated the smaller, darker Bengalis (Murshid 2022, 76).

This treatment of Bengalis, especially Bengali Hindus, by Pakistanis worsened with the onset of the Liberation War. There are innumerable accounts of rape, and one of the most cited reasons for the rape of Bengali women by Pakistani soldiers is to populate the land with "pure" Muslims, as well as dilute and weaken Bengali nationalism. By invoking the plight of the women of East Bengal, it became possible to involve more men in the guerrilla forces to build the nation

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(Mookherjee 2012, 1598). Thus, the treatment of Bengalis by the Pakistani elites and military led to a deep sense of Bengali nationalism emerging from the nine-month-long war, becoming a force behind the creation of the nation, and eventually the view that Pakistanis, or any Urdu speaker, is the enemy.

The nationalist sentiment that emerged from the war has marginalised non-Bengali ethnic identities, and often discussions of mobility and migration are stifled. Knowing the sequence of events and the trajectory in which they occurred gives us the necessary context to understand the centring of the Bengali-Muslim identity in Bangladesh, and why other Muslim ethnic groups who migrated here may be unwilling to speak on their experiences.

Literature Review

To begin, it is necessary to set the stage with an overview of globalisation in the context of this study. Ali and Appadurai both demonstrate globalisation via the global flow of capital and labour. Ali (1, 9) details the flow of jute as a cash crop from Bengal to far beyond, and the way it affected Bengal's peasantry's lives and livelihoods, connecting them to markets in Calcutta and Britain and the ebbs and flows of demand stemming from it. Drawing on the themes of globalisation, nationalism and minority production, Appadurai (2006, 37) traces the contribution of the widespread globalised network of migration to the creation of minorities. These works denote the circulation of capital, and the inherent need of migrants to go where opportunities to obtain or accumulate capital are readily available, as seen in East Bengal (Appadurai 2006, 37).

In addition to globalisation, nationalism is another concept needed to contextualise this study. Gellner defines nationalism as a political ideology that seeks the alignment of cultural and

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political boundaries, though linking state and culture has become increasingly difficult due to the movement of populations, as in immigration (qtd. in Anthias 2010, 3). As we discuss the ethnic minorities within the greater Bengali nationalist polity in Bangladesh, this definition becomes clear as a majority of state actors in Bangladesh are Bengali, with low representation of ethnic minorities. It is also particularly relevant in the modern globalised world, where complete ethnic purity has not been achieved and is becoming increasingly more difficult to achieve now. Although globalisation makes nationalism a small cog in a big machine, national ideologies and practices continue to underpin most political and cultural processes (Anthias 2010, 4).

Sabur (2020, 98) explores identity politics within a nation from the margins, critiquing the version of Bengali nationalism that has emerged out of the canonical narrative of 1971 and proposes a version of history that makes space for the multiple "others" living in Bangladesh. Similarly, Siddiqi (2013, 154) outlines the plight of the Bihari people who had long been migrating to Bengal for economic opportunities, and saw the creation of East Pakistan as a land of their own, despite their later othering as Urdu-speakers during and post-1971. This exclusion had violent consequences during the Liberation War, and Saikia (2004, 284)'s work deals with this, showing that state-sanctioned violence was inflicted upon Bihari women by Bengali freedom fighters who were recruited as fighters from refugee camps under the ideology of nation-building.

Sinha (2014, 156) states that national identity is constructed and continuously articulated and re-articulated. This process of defining itself and re-articulating is done through positioning itself against a host of "others" (Sinha 2014,156). Women are symbolically considered the gatekeepers of culture, tasked with holding the honour of the group and reproducing the culture in coming generations. However, the nationalist project's discrimination against women

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differentiates them by various factors- age, class, religion, ethnicity, and urban/rural residence- all affecting their inclusion (Sinha 2014, 158). Comparably, Yuval-Davis (1997, 5) begs the question, what does citizenship mean for people who are not full members of the community? Here, 'full-member' denotes those who enjoy full rights and obligations bestowed upon a citizen. Yuval-Davis considers the public domain to be political, and the private as the family domain, arguing that excluding women from the public is a deliberate design of citizenship, as men are considered both individuals and representatives of the family in public (Yuval-Davis 1997, 12). Belford and Lahiri-Roy (2019, 1) consider the emotional complexities of migration and the role of women in maintaining ties post-migration between the home and host countries. They state that migration reshapes 'home' into a socio-spatial construct tied to memory, identity and belonging. Migrants have to straddle "here" and "there", navigating dual identities and fostering connections with the family left behind- a responsibility often falling on women (Belford and Lahiri-Roy 2019, 6). On the topic of home, Ahmed (2020, 1- 5) challenges the assumption that home equates to stability and movement to freedom, instead exploring the complex processes behind movement and homemaking and the necessary institutional structures, affective labour and political power influencing these processes.

Despite Partition seeing the movement of 20 million people across borders, scholars of migration studies have largely chosen to look into the movement of people from the South to the West, while the huge movement of people within the South has been overlooked (Alexander et al. 2015, 1). Alexander et al. attempts to bridge this gap, looking into the migrations of Bengali Muslims during this period of upheaval. Focusing on this group allowed the authors to concentrate on patterns of migration and homemaking, and the factors which allowed them to create homes

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within completely new spaces- close, yet far from their original homes. They also argue that nation-making is a refugee-creating process; however, they turn inwards towards refugees within the South, from the South.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

This paper explores two main theories- mobility capital and the concept of tangible and intangible inequalities. It also includes discussions on identity and belonging, and the politics of belonging, to supplement these theories. These will analyse how migrants and their descendants navigated their migration and socio-economic integration in the country.

Beyond the overarching socio-political conditions in which migrants may find themselves, other factors also affect the decision to migrate or not. To understand this, the concept of "mobility capital" will be used. Derived from Bourdieu, mobility capital is described as the assets, competencies and dispositions that a migrant or migrant population possesses, the makeup of which influences the course of their movement. Mobility capital generally comprises high levels of literacy or portable skills such as artisanship, transferable assets, and dense social networks (Alexander et al. 2015, 56). Beyond these, migrants may also migrate based on the expectation of finding employment within which there would be a chance for upward mobility for themselves and their children (Alexander et al. 2015, 62), and inequalities within this can largely affect decisions taken.

Thus, inequalities play a significant role in migration decision-making. While tangible inequalities are those that can be measured, such as education or socio-economic inequality,

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intangible inequalities are those that cannot be measured and are often perceived (Mazzilli et al. 2024, 457). These perceptions, although understudied, are among the most important factors in decisions to migrate and the choice of destination. As Mazzilli et al. rightly pointed out, perception of opportunities and opportunities to reduce inequality are at the core of migrant's choices (Mazzilli et al. 2024, 464). Although these perceptions may not be quantifiable, how they form and shape up can lead to better insights into migrant's choices. At the same time, Wolton states that these inequalities, tangible or intangible, do not exist in isolation and are often the result of intersecting identity differences (qtd. in Mazzilli et al. 2024, 463).

This paper again examines identity; this time supplemented by belonging, which is understood as an analytical term that allows us to ask questions of *what* one may belong to and understand the attributes that connect them to a particular group (Anthias 2018, 6). Identity as a concept is expected to carry a complex, multifaceted understanding of oneself, and the relationship of one's identity to one's claim on resources (Anthias 2018, 3). The politics of belonging refers to boundaries that physically and symbolically separate the population into "us" and "them", the struggles that are involved in determining belonging and the contestations that occur in participating as a citizen (Yuval-Davis 2011, 3). Further, Yuval-Davis includes the use of intersectionality theory, in which the different situatedness of social agents establishes how various social, economic and political projects impact them.

Methodology and Demography

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This study takes a qualitative, exploratory approach to migration. The data was collected through eight in-person, semi-structured interviews. The number of interviews was kept deliberately low as the respondents' family genealogy was also taken to ensure the data is in-depth. Respondents, who were all either migrants or descendants of migrants, were chosen using a mix of convenience and snowball sampling, as introduction via a trusted source helped the respondents feel more comfortable to talk about a topic they did not often address. Dhaka city was the chosen research locale to ensure access to respondents. The conducted interviews were in English, Bangla, or Urdu, depending on the respondents' comfort, and the author's basic fluency in the three languages aided rapport. The collected data was translated and transcribed in English, and later arranged thematically. The transcribed interviews were also considered archiving, utilising oral histories and narratives as a methodology of the project. Interviews ranged from 40 minutes to three hours, and ethical considerations such as informed consent and respondent anonymity were maintained. Seven out of eight participants were women, barring one man.

The first table outlines the basic demographic properties of the respondents, including their age, education level, occupation, marital status and the number of children. The respondents ranged in age from 34 to 82 years, with the majority being in their 60s. As migrants and descendants of migrants were taken as respondents, the age range was kept intentionally open to include as many people as possible. Many of the original migrants had passed away or were ill with age-related ailments, leaving their stories with their descendants, whom the study spoke to.

Name	Age	Education	Occupation	Marital	Number of	Ethnicity

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				Status	Children	
Habiba	73	Senior Cambridge (Grade 12)	English tutoring, Newsreader on the radio	Married	4	Gujarati-Burmese
Basma	60	Honours Degree	Director of Creative Communication under ACI	Married	None	Gujarati
Abdul Shaheb	82	Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC)	Business	Married	4	Gujarati
Farzana	Late 40s to 50s	Master's Degree, PhD (ongoing)	Declined to answer	Married	1	Bengali

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Shama	59	Masters Degree	Quality Head of Sterile Facility at Beximco	Married	1	From Uttar Pradesh
Sabira	34	Masters Degree	Teacher handles family business	Married	1	Bengali
Farhat	62	Masters Degree	Part-Time Teacher	Married	2	Indian
Parizad	Mid 60s	Double Master's Degree; PhD, unfinished	Educator in Bangladesh and the USA; Cultural Specialist at the American Centre;	Married	1	Indian

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			Literary Translator			

Table 1: Basic demographic information of the respondents

The educational qualifications of the migrants ranged vastly, from having studied till Grade 12 to an ongoing PhD. However, among the descendants of the migrants, all held a Master's degree at least. Interestingly, all the respondents had some kind of occupation at some point, most being formal job titles except one. All the respondents were married as well, and almost all of them had children. The two oldest migrants had the most significant number of children- 4 each, while the rest had 1 or 2. One migrant had no children of her own. However, their family had many young cousins, nephews and nieces whom she considered her descendants, so the study also considered them as such.

Out of 8 respondents, 4 are migrants, and the remaining 4 are second or third-generation migrants in Bangladesh. Three of the migrants are Gujarati, one being both Gujarati and Burmese, and two of them migrated from Burma. Only one of these migrants came from Gujarat. The last direct migrant is Bengali, despite having Indian ancestry. She lived in Karachi and only migrated to Bangladesh upon marriage. The languages spoken among the direct migrants included Burmese, English, Urdu, Hindi, Gujarati, and Bangla, with English, Hindi, Urdu, and, of course, Bangla being the most common after their migration.

The descendants of the migrants mostly came from different parts of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, mainly Patna, in India. One of them also originates from Jalpaiguri, West Bengal. Their parents or grandparents were the initial migrants, and most came in the years following the

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Partition in 1947. The language practices of this group are also very similar to the first, as they have adopted the same language traditions- mainly Hindi and Urdu- from their predecessors, primarily considering Urdu their mother tongue for this reason. The shift here comes from the second-generation migrants, who consider themselves Bengali and their mother tongue Bangla. However, Hindi and Urdu were regularly spoken with the extended family at home. The respondents were asked what they considered their ethnic identity to be, and it has been recorded as such in the following table:

Name	Ethnic Identity	Place of Origin	Migration Status	Mother Tongue
Habiba	Burmese-Gujarati	Surat, Gujarat, India; Rangoon, Burma	Migrant	Burmese
Basma	Gujarati	Rander, Gujarat, India	Migrant	Gujarati
Abdul Shaheb	Gujarati	Surat, Gujarat, India	Migrant	Gujarati
Farzana	Bengali	Karachi, Pakistan	Migrant	Urdu

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Shama	Indian	Faizabad, Uttar Pradesh, India	1st generation descendant	Urdu
Sabira	Bengali	Jalpaiguri, West Bengal; Patna, Bihar, India	2nd generation descendant	Bangla
Farhat	Indian	Patna, Bihar, India	1st generation descendant	Urdu
Parizad	Indian	Saharanpur, Uttar Pradesh, India	1st generation descendant	Urdu

Table 2: Identity of the Respondents

Findings: Deciding to Stay

The concept of home differs significantly between migrants and non-migrants. There are various reasons why any migrant makes their host country their home. Often, these reasons are deeply personal and sometimes highly political. The respondents came to East Pakistan following Partition, with the idea that East Pakistan would be a Muslim-majority country where they could easily become naturalised as the rightful inhabitants of the land (Sabur 2020, 111).

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Conditions Before Migration

There are certain preconditions to migration- the state of one's previous life, their assets, and connections to their destination. The majority of respondents in this study started from an upper-class background, many of whom had businesses and generational wealth accumulated in their land of origin. Some had businesses that spanned generations, trading in luxurious diamonds or essential motor parts. These transferable skills enabled them to establish new businesses in Bangladesh.

Others' educational qualifications enabled them to gain employment and migrate to their new homes, such as Shama's mother, a double Master's holder from Aligarh University, or Farhat's father, who travelled Westward for his education. Acquaintances or family who had previously migrated also made up their social network in East Pakistan, aiding their migration. This allowed them to secure housing or accommodations soon after migrating. It was observed that the respondents who did not have one factor, usually had another; for example, Shama's mother did not have a social network in Dhaka, but she had secured employment before coming, whereas Parizad's father had no material connection to Bangladesh but came with a group of similarly motivated friends who made up his social network in the new country. These factors align perfectly with Alexander et al.'s (2015, 56) definition of mobility capital, which explains that certain factors lead to mobility or immobility. It is clear that the respondents in this study were able to use their mobility capital not only to migrate but also to naturalise themselves into the fabric of the new land.

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The respondents' reasons for migrating varied, but most stated inequalities as a factor. Those who migrated from Burma were mainly from the business community, and after the military coup that led to the rule of General Ne Win, businesses began to be nationalised, leading to their migration- the loss of assets, a tangible inequality. For those from India, the reasons were similarly economic, as opportunities for upward mobility in government work were dwindling, and there were much greater opportunities for employment in East Pakistan, where the government favoured Urdu speakers and where the new country had much more scope for business. Those who were highly educated, such as Shama's mother and Farhat's father, were especially sought in East Pakistan to lead schools and businesses in the new nation, thus creating the perception of better opportunities.

Factors post-migration

Stability in Income and Social Standing post-migration

After migrating, it became essential to make a home in the new country by stabilising income and solidifying social standings. Some respondents already had assets in Bangladesh, such as Abdul Shaheb, who stated, "We had a business here already, I just came and joined," or Sabira, whose grandfather came to Bangladesh to take over the tea garden they had in East Pakistan, leaving two brothers behind. Others used their transferable skills, mainly in business acumen, to build trade networks from the ground up, such as Hanifa's father. However, not everyone had such great luck in business. Basma's father faced multiple setbacks, most of them ethnically motivated. In her words,

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> "When my father first started his hotel business after we moved here, it was going well. However, after the war, someone came and kidnapped my uncles, who were very young at the time. They wanted the deeds to the hotel, and my father was forced to hand them over to save his brothers. This left him traumatised, and after that, when he got involved in an airline business, he did it under his Bengali friend's name. That man later took all the cash and ran off. So my father had a difficult time building up business here."

Similarly, Farhat's father also had difficulties setting up his petrol station business here, which, Farhat said, brought them down from the upper class to the upper middle class. These experiences highlight the intangible inequalities that migrants faced in Bangladesh owing to their ethnic differences. Nonetheless, despite the fathers' struggles, their daughters were educated and career women, a stark contrast to their mothers and other women in their communities of origin.

However, income is not the only source of stability; it also comes from solidifying social networks. Parizad's father had a strong network in Chattagram, where they lived. During the Liberation War, many of their non-Bengali acquaintances and neighbours fled the country, but he refused to despite the threats to their security. Their Bengali neighbours turned to him for help communicating with the Pakistan military. Also, they came to their aid by bringing them groceries and essentials so they would not have to leave their house and enter potential danger.

Another prime strategy for solidifying social networks was marriage. Often, women's migration decisions hinge on their perceived role as mothers and wives (Mazzilli et al. 2024, 460). Hanifa married her Bengali husband at 15 before she could complete her education. She was the

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oldest of four sisters who were already feeling insecure in their new home, and she assumes this was a motivating factor behind her early marriage, as such a marriage was unheard of in a community that rarely married outside of themselves and never so young- all her sisters married after eighteen. Similarly, Farzana, Farhat and all their sisters were also married to Bengali men, especially Farzana, whose parents specifically looked for Bengali proposals for her.

Women's role in creating a home

The homes visited during primary research were all cluttered in the charming way old homes are, stacked with books and memories, shelves storing fine china and family stories. Generally, women are considered the carriers of culture and are responsible for the task of creating a home and enculturating their children (Sinha 2014, 156), which was seen throughout the experiences of the respondents. Hanifa's mother was responsible for passing on her values to her children, which Hanifa continues to live by, stating,

> "My husband says, even after more than fifty years living with him, I keep saying "Ma, ma, ma, ma" because even after all these years, I still live by everything she taught me, and I pass on everything to my children."

In the same way, most of the respondents' mothers were homemakers in their new homes, responsible for the upbringing and enculturation of the children. When Basma's mother specifically wanted to further her education, her husband told her, "Who will stay home with the kids?" These women also lost their social and familial connections in their migrations after their

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marriage, as evidenced by Parizad and Farhat's mothers and Abdul Shaheb's wife, who stated she spent her first few days in Bangladesh crying. According to Belford and Lahiri-Roy (2019, 1), home is a socio-spatial system wherein the physical home and social household meld to create the home. These women often lost their social households to develop homes in their new lands. They were tasked with building new connections and assimilating while simultaneously building cultural connections in their children.

Opportunity Differences

When asked if the respondents felt that migrating opened up more doors than not, an overwhelming majority claimed that migrating opened up more doors for their families. It was noted that, although migrant mothers had limited opportunities when they arrived in Bangladesh, their female descendants were afforded much better access to education and professional growth, as was noted as a motivating factor behind migration by Alexander et al. (2015, 60). Respondents from business backgrounds stated that there were greater opportunities to build their businesses from the ground up in the new nation where few things were readily available. They refer to the state of Muslims in India and the changing tides of migration, which would have made upward mobility much more challenging than in East Pakistan. These responses fall well within the analysis of Alexander et al. (2015, 62), who state that migration is often chosen as a way forward for their families and children. However, Hanifa felt she had lost out on opportunities, as she found Bangladeshi society much more conservative than Burmese society. Hanifa considers herself Burmese, and had she

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been able to stay back, she feels she would have had much more freedom to study further and, in her words, "do something with my life, rather than just sit here."

Therefore, factors such as better opportunities, being part of the majority religious community, and stability in marriage have led to the respondents' decision to stay in Bangladesh rather than move West or to their country of origin. Some felt they would be second-class citizens elsewhere, whereas here, they have naturalised into Bangladeshis, with multiple generations living in the country now. However, having a hybrid identity in a country with a strong ethnic identity in its polity is a difficult task, even if economic opportunities improve, and staying connected to heritage becomes a conscious choice as well as a lived experience.

Discussion

The above findings show two clear patterns emerging. The first is that a migrant's economic conditions, capabilities and networks prior to their migration play a key role in their experience of migration and rebuilding life in a new place. The second shows women's significant contribution in recreating the socio-spatial idea of home by keeping the culture and familial connections alive.

Alexander et al. (2015, 56) have discussed that the Bengal delta's migrants have a relatively higher rate of literacy or other portable skills, e.g. business acumen, which gave them the ability to reestablish themselves. Some of the original migrants, such as Shama's mother and Farhat's father, were highly educated people who were specifically employed to work in East Pakistan and aid the building of new organizations or run schools. These economic opportunities opened the

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door for their migration from India, after which they found ways to remain via marriage or by establishing businesses.

Others' transferable assets allowed them the same freedom. Having generational wealth enough to own businesses that spanned across colonial India allowed families to split to keep their assets and businesses, leading to some siblings staying on while others migrated. Although migration networks may atrophy and fail if not maintained (Alexander et al. 2015, 69), these people, such as Abdul Shaheb or Sabira's family, had the means to visit their extended family across the entire subcontinent- from Dhaka to Karachi, Patna and Jalpaiguri, keeping networks intact and reconstructing life in a new nation. Moreover, these families also enjoy less precarious migration journeys (Mazzilli et al. 2024, 459).

Additionally, the data shows a clear pattern in the women's experience of migration, most of whom migrated after marriage, with their husbands becoming the primary caretakers of the home and children. They were responsible for recreating their own cultural paradigms in terms of language, clothing and food, and enculturating their children in a way that gave them relevant skills in their new environment as well as ensuring their own cultural heritage was not lost. This was true even for mothers who worked, such as Shama's mother, who came home to not only teach her daughter Urdu, which enabled her to communicate with their extended family, but also to learn Bangla herself. This dual responsibility carried by women, of ensuring cultural and familial connections remain alive while creating home anew, is discussed time and again in scholarship (Sinha 2014, 156; Belford and Lahiri-Roy 2019, 1; Mazzilli et al. 2024, 460), thus belonging often being created and shaped by women.

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Further, opportunities are one of the most important factors in decision-making, as documented by Alexander et al. (2015, 62), stating that migrants often decide on a destination based on the opportunities for upward mobility for their children. As Mazzilli et al (2024, 459) state, limited access to opportunities amidst precarious development challenges is a definition of tangible inequalities, and the growing discontent reported among the respondents shows that they felt they had much fewer opportunities in their original homes, while East Pakistan was rife with possibilities in comparison. Migrants have been seen to be sensitive to intangible or perceived inequalities, such as being overlooked for a promotional role, as experienced by Parizat's father (Mazzilli et al. 2024, 462). This is also a highly gendered discussion (Mazzilli et al. 2024, 459), as most of the female second-generation migrants were able to get many more opportunities in Bangladesh post-1971 than their female relatives who stayed on ever did.

Conclusion

`The primary motivator for migration was the economic opportunities. The findings clearly show that the main reasons for choosing to migrate to Bangladesh, then East Pakistan, were the Muslim-majority population. Those living in India or Myanmar post-partition realised that opportunities for professional growth were declining, businesses were being lost, and the ease of travel between India and East Pakistan was dwindling. This led to their migration into Bangladesh, where they could ensure growth and comfort for themselves and their descendants. Most of those who migrated then were reluctant to become immigrants again, instead choosing to stay in Bangladesh. Their descendants cited close family ties and the chance to better integrate into the social fabric as reasons for staying on. Thus, multiple generations of multi-ethnic, multi-cultural

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homes took root in Bangladesh, all carving out their own negotiations and understandings of their place within the social fabric of the nation.

We hear of a time when the culture of Bangladesh was not limited to the hegemonic ideal of "Bengali culture", but pluralistic, mixing and matching a melting pot of different traditions. Shama's mother in her *garara* flying through the roads of Azimpur colony on her cycle, the women in Abdul Shaheb's family in their colourful *rida*, people indulging in *sher-shayeri,* these paint an entirely different picture of Dhaka from what we know today. Learning about the lives and experiences of non-Bengalis in Bangladesh gives us a different perspective on what culture could look like in Bangladesh, challenging the dominance of Bengali nationalism over our consciousness.

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