

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF MIGRATION

#### Introduction

In this chapter, I address the endogenous dynamics of Bangladeshi labor migration to Singapore. Patterns of Bangladeshi migration indicate that a few selected districts in Bangladesh send the bulk of migrants to Singapore. This chapter will argue that migrant networks, located in reciprocal relations and holding symbolic value, can convincingly explain why migration surges out of a few geographical locations. Migrant networks facilitate flows by reducing risks associated with migration and increasing the possibility of success in the receiving country. Migration then generates further migration because migrants are obligated to ‘share’ their success with family members, relatives, and friends. This self-feeding character of the migrant networks as well as the social capital they provide to potential migrants, explain why migration to Singapore has become a socially accepted and widely practiced way of life in some districts in Bangladesh.

In the following discussions, I first define the social bases of network migration: social and symbolic ties that link potential migrants and stayers. Second, I describe the

specific resources that can be mobilized within groups and networks – social capital. Third, the analysis weighs the importance of social capital for Bangladeshi migration to Singapore. The evolution of migrant networks and the detailed procedures for the recruitment of migrants have been discussed to shed light on the function of social capital in the migration process. The attempt is to elucidate the fundamental internal dynamics driving migration flows and at times, “subverting structural factors inducing migration, such as, economic conditions in the countries of emigration and destination” (Massey et. al. (1987). This will provide a much-needed meso link between micro- and macro-levels of analysis: because, “the resources inherent in social and symbolic ties the people to large collectives, and enable collectives to bond people in groups” (Faist, 2000: 98). Analysis is based on the data from ethnographic village study in Gurail and migrant workers’ survey in Singapore.

### **Social Bases of Migration: Social and Symbolic Ties**

The presence of strong social and symbolic ties is one of the most ubiquitous characteristics of the traditional and semi-traditional societies. Social ties are “a continuing series of interpersonal transactions to which participants attach shared interests, obligations, expectations and norms” (Faist, 2000). In general, kinship forms one of the most important bases of migrant social organization. In Gurail, brothers, brother-in-laws, first uncles, and cousins are particularly important within the kinship networks. However, family connections are the most secure bonds within the interpersonal relationships. Family members come first to support the migration processes and aftermath care of families left behind. The strongest

relationships in the networks are between migrants and their brothers. Hearing many demands for assistance from various friends and relatives while in Singapore, migrants naturally display a preference for the tie of brotherhood. Between brothers there is a continual exchange of favors and help, one that cannot be measured in money alone.

To a brother arriving in Singapore without having prior cosmopolitan living experiences, a series of obligations is owed. A place to stay, help in getting acquainted with local disciplinary laws, work place behavior, the loan of money, or payment for the trip are just a few examples of how the ties of brotherhood are extended and tested in the migrant context. The next most important family tie within migrant networks is that between a migrant and his uncles or cousins or brother in laws. The strong relationships that brothers expect and maintain with respect to each other also extend to their uncles, cousins and brother-in-laws. Uncles, cousins and brother-in-laws are thus given preference over other relations in the offering of assistance. Among them, there is a strong family identification, one reinforced by traditional practices of co-residence and mutual assistance at the *Bari* level. These kinship connections are reinforced through frequent interaction. Kin assistance is generally extended freely and openly. Among relatives more distant than these, the strength of ties falls off rapidly and their roles in the migratory process are correspondingly smaller. Since many of the lineages in Gurail are connected through marriage, most villagers can trace kinship with each other (Inden and Nicholas, 1977).

Outside kinship ties, the terms, *Esthanio*<sup>1</sup> (from the same locality) and *Attiyo*<sup>2</sup> (relatives), are particularly important. People in their day to day life use these terms to indicate the relationship and responsibility goes with it. The term ‘*Esthanio*’ implies belongingness to particular geographic area which may be village, union, thana, or districts<sup>3</sup> and it usually works when someone is out of particular geographic location. However, the term ‘*Attiyo*’ indicates the broader kin relationships. For most villagers, the term *Attiyo* embraces thousands of people, who are seen as being “insiders” even if they are not part of one’s immediate lineage. *Attiyos* can be turned to for general help and support. Thus, there is a level of *Attiyo* and *Esthanio* which is very general, and does not tend to involve specific duties or support in the local context. However, when it is in the transnational space, all *Attiyos* and *Esthanios* trace their origin back and come for help each other.

Because of explosive growth, migration in Gurail has outgrown a social organization based solely on the limited confines of kinship, and networks have increasingly incorporated other close social relationships, for example, friendship. Friends when become international migrants, assist one another in a variety of ways: finding new employers, sharing information, and borrowing or lending money. Findings in Singapore suggest that although

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<sup>1</sup> *Esthanio* is a Bengali word which indicates belongingness to particular geographic area which may be village, union, thana or districts depending on the context. It involves certain responsibilities and execution of those responsibilities brings prestige for the person concerned and denial condemnation from the society.

<sup>2</sup> *Attiyo* bears enormous significance in the Bangladeshi society. The word ‘*Attiyo*’ means ‘connected by heart’. When a Bangladeshi mentions that he is my *Attiyo*, it means ‘he is my part of heart’. However, it depends on the context -villagers sometimes use it loosely and sometimes strongly. *Attiyo* covers blood relatives and relatives from the in-laws families.

<sup>3</sup> See Chapter Four, Table 4.1

initially concentrated among persons of the same age, friendships gradually extended to other generations, as migrants of all ages were drawn together by the common experience of life in Singapore. Important friendships are formed with migrants from other communities (usually other districts) through shared experiences at work, or at living (dormitories/worksites) in Singapore. In this way, interpersonal relationships within the migrant networks are extended and amplified beyond those possible through kinship or local friendship alone. The bonds of kith and kin do not lose their meaning or importance; they are simply augmented by new and different relationships that expand the range of a migrant's social resources. Thus, common origin from a particular region usually implies a series of common experiences, customs, and traditions that permit easy communication and friendship formation. As one moves up hierarchically from the specific geographic unit to more regional identities (village, union, thana and district, see Table 4.1; Chapter Four), one eventually arrives at another base of social organization, that is, symbolic ties.

Symbolic ties are “perceived bonds both face-to-face and indirect to which participants attach shared meanings, memories, future expectations and representations” (Faist, 2000). One of the main functions of symbolic ties is to integrate strangers. Among the migrants in Singapore, it is easily discernible that they trace their origins in the terms of districts. People from same districts address themselves as ‘*Esthanio*’. Thus, they form a symbolic ties based on the districts of origin. District-based identity at one point can go further also, involving members of the same national groups. For example, thousands of

Bangladeshi migrants in Singapore gather at Little India<sup>4</sup> on every Sunday. The real significance of Sundays lies in the fact that in the space of several hours, the migrant workers are able to free from the labor of work and just concentrate on rejuvenating his relationships with friends, to find comfort in the company of thousands of other countrymen and cast away any sense of alienation. This is, perhaps, a good example of an ‘imagined community’ (Anderson, 1983).

### **Social Capital: Dimensions and Resources**

Social and symbolic ties between actors carry important sets of resources that can be called social capital. The theorists of social capital argues that “networks of interpersonal ties and other social institutions created in the process of international migration have a life of their own that serves to promote additional movement by lowering the costs and risks of migration” (Massey, 1998:151). The key characteristic of social capital is its convertibility –

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<sup>4</sup> Foreign workers depending on their country of origin gather at different areas in Singapore. Bangladeshi, Indian and Sri Lankan workers gather at Little India, Thai workers gather at Golden Mile Complex at Beach Road, and Filipino maids at Lucky Plaza on Orchard road and the park next to Orchard MRT station. The history of Little India as a meeting place for Indian subcontinent immigrants can be traced back to the nineteenth century. Migrants start gathering at Little India from noon and stay approximately until 11 pm at particular places and roadsides. The spots chosen for gathering in Little India depend first on the workers’ home districts in Bangladesh and later on *thanas* or unions. At the first meeting with a fellow migrant worker, the question generally one hears is “*Apner desh kothay?*,” that is, “where is your country?”. Here ‘country’ means ‘district’ to them and not the country ‘Bangladesh’. They have a sense of belonging to a particular district and a tendency to favor the native district people over people from other districts.

it may be translated into other forms of capital, notably financial capital (Harker *et al.* 1990). People gain access to social capital through membership in networks. Networks constitute a valuable source of social capital that people draw upon to gain access to foreign employment and the benefits it brings (MacDonald and MacDonald, 1974; Boyd, 1989; Gurak and Caces, 1992).

Beginning in the 1920s, sociologists recognized the importance of networks in promoting international movement (see Thomas and Znaniecki 1927; Gamio, 1930). William Thomas's and Florian Znaniecki's acknowledged masterpiece on *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* illustrates some of the main principles of migration decision-making. The lesson is that no analysis can sufficiently describe and explain migration process without taking into account the ties within the social units potential migrants and their significant others are enmeshed (Faist, 2000:100). Drawing on social ties to relatives and friends who have migrated before, nonmigrants gain access to knowledge, assistance and other resources that facilitate movement (Cholden, 1973). According to Thomas Faist (2000), social capital has two aspects. First, social capital relates to an aspect of social structure that facilitates cooperation. Second, it is a resource for individual and collective actors.

The first aspect of social capital concerns the resources and mechanisms that facilitate cooperation and integrate groups. The argument behind the notion of social capital is simple: investment in social relations with expected returns (see, Lin, 1982). This general

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definition is consistent with various interpretations by scholars who have contributed to the discussion (Bourdieu, 1986, 1990; Coleman, 1988, 1990, Lin, 1982; 1999). We can analytically differentiate three mechanisms of social capital that lower transaction costs<sup>5</sup> and facilitate cooperation: obligation, reciprocity and solidarity (Faist, 2000: 104). Three elements are crucial for expectations and obligations to work as social capital: “the degree of trust in the other actors, the actual number of obligations, and the kind of services rendered in the past” (Coleman, 1990:360). Thus, stable relationships of exchange depend on a pre-existing minimum of informal trust.

Reciprocity implies “actions that are contingent on rewarding reactions from others and that cease when these expected reactions are not forthcoming” (Blau, 1974:6 cited in Faist, 2000). Reciprocity exists when what one party receives from the other requires some return. In general, “(r)eciprocity refers to exchanges of roughly equivalent values in which the actions of each party are contingent on the prior actions of the others in such a way that good is returned for good, and bad for bad” (Keohane, 1986:8). Reciprocity is a social norm when at least two sub-norms are adhered to: first, persons help those who have helped them, and second, persons should not harm those who helped them before. Thomas Faist (2000) has identified five characteristics in reciprocity: the balance of accounts (specific and generalized reciprocity), the temporal sequence of transactions, the kind of service exchanged, benefactor-contributor relations, and power relations.

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<sup>5</sup> In institutional economics, transaction costs mean the costs of making an agreement, monitoring its terms, and enforcing it (Williamson, 1981). These costs refer to the expenses of exchange itself, such as collecting information on transaction partners and on the commodity or action that is exchanged, the

An example has been given below to illustrate these characteristics of reciprocity in the context of Bangladeshi migration to Singapore<sup>6</sup>. Someone from Gurail in Bangladeshi who has migrated to Singapore turns up on the doorsteps of a fellow-villager to ask for better accommodation. The same villager who has been helped by the established migrant may not return the favor to the same individual but to other newcomers from the same village who arrive even later; this time not in finding accommodation but job referral. This is a specific instance of generalized and not of specific reciprocity. Also, there is not a simultaneous reciprocity but months or perhaps years are between. The services exchanged may not be the same: the first migrant helped his fellow-villager to provide better accommodation, the second one responded in finding job. And the benefactor in the second case was not the original migrant who helped but a new one from the same village in Bangladesh. “The norm of reciprocity as social capital helps to maintain, renew, or forge fresh social and symbolic ties and is usually a prerequisite for the formation of kinship-, friendship-, and community-based migrant networks” (Faist, 2000).

A third dimension of social capital is solidarity with others in a group who share similar social and symbolic ties. Solidarity signals affiliation of group members to the rest of the world. In many contexts, identity plays a crucial role in kinship systems, communities and even in symbolic communities. Collective representatives provide the common ground for identities. The most important basis of solidarity is collective representation. These are

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costs of negotiating an agreement or contract and of monitoring its implementation, and the actual enforcement costs of agreement (for details see, Faist, 2000: 103).

<sup>6</sup> I adapted this example in the context of Gurail from an example given by Tomas Faist, 2000.

shared ideas, beliefs, evaluations and symbols. Collective representations can be expressed in some sort of collective identity – ‘we’-feelings and refer to a unit of action. Solidarity can be either focused, directed towards a narrow kin group, frequently bounded by family and blood lineage, or it can extend to more diffuse forms (Faist, 2000). Diffuse solidarity pertains to larger aggregates. The solidarity among the migrants in Singapore and returnees back home are noteworthy here. For example, when the returnee, Taibur Sikder (detailed interview presented in Chapter Four), went to contest in the local government election, all the returnees in the village came to support him and he won in the election.

The second aspect of social capital includes all those resources that people use to pursue their goals in groups or networks. It refers to the potential value that inheres in social relations: “social capital is the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable networks of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:11). In essence, this second analytical aspect of social capital describes the manner in which resources available to any one agent are contingent on the resource available to others socially proximate to the person. According to Thomas Faist (2000), individual and collective actors can derive three main benefits from social capital: access to other people’s resources, improved information and increased control over other people. Tomas Faist (2000) has offered a simplified model to explain the functions of social capital in migration process (Figure 5.1). The model sketches the obligation, reciprocity, and solidarity and the benefits derived there from fulfill decisive functions in migration systems.

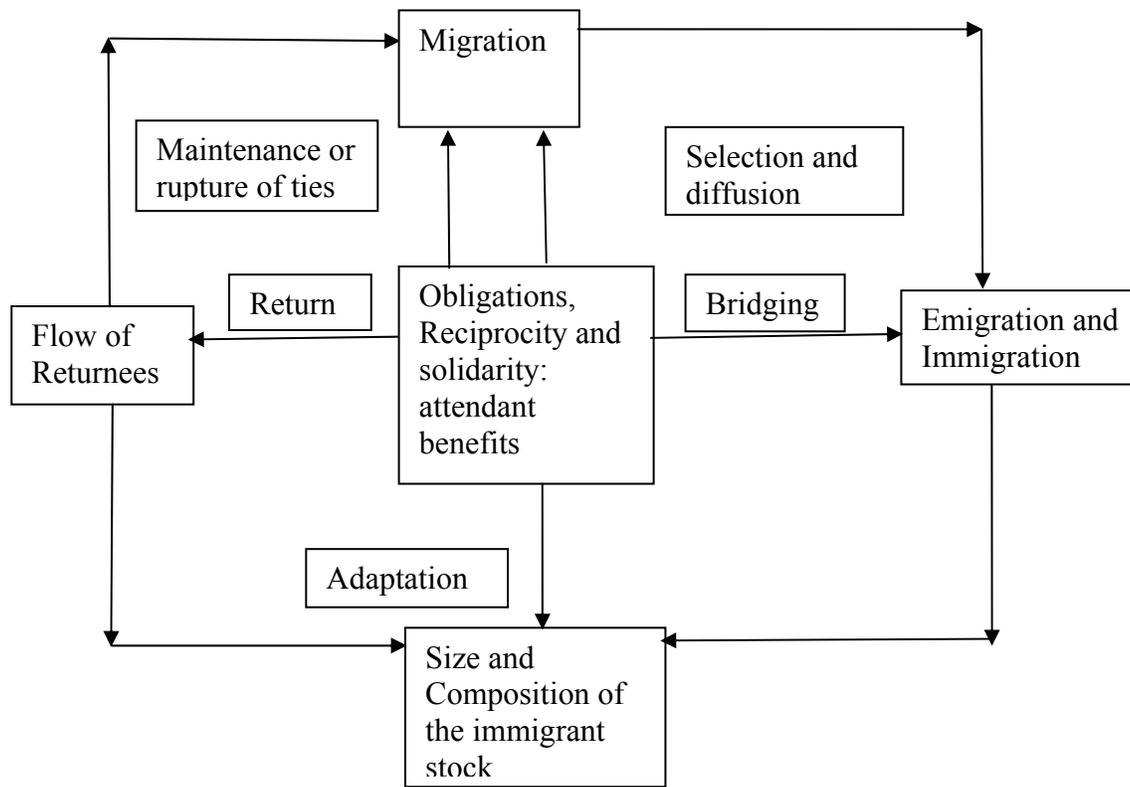


Figure 5.1: Functions of Social Capital in a Migration System – A Simplified Model (Faist, 2000)

## Formation of Migrant Networks

The first migration from this village was in 1988 and an enterprising Middle-East returnee was both pioneer migrant and migrant broker. At present, hundreds of migrants in Singapore hail from this village. All migrants in Gurail are related to each other by some forms of social ties. They were largely assisted by each other in the migration process. Such extensive social networks were not created overnight. They emerged gradually as migration moves beyond a few adventurous individuals to involve a wider cross section of the community. The first few migrants returned and on subsequent trips initiated others into the migrant process. Every new migrant created a new connection to Singapore. As more people migrate more often, the number of connections expanded rapidly and the quality of the ties also improved as people adjust to life in Singapore. There are around 12 main *Baris* (lineage based) in this village. I am presenting the data of one *Bari*, viz. *Noya Sikder Bari*, to show the trends of migration from this *Bari* (Table 5.1). This *Bari* is not an exceptional case. Almost all *Baris* in this village are experiencing the same trends of migration. There are seven households in *Naya Sikder Bari*. Total members of migration age (18-45) were 19 persons while total migrants were 13 persons. Only two households have yet to participate in the migration process. To understand how migration developed in an unknown village like Gurail and made migration as the way of life for the villagers, we need to look at the lives of some early migrants from Gurail. According to villagers, emigration from Gurail changed

from a trickle to a flood after a few men migrated to Singapore as early as 1988. One of whom was Asor Mia.

### Asor Mia

Asor Mia was a pioneer migrant and a migrant broker from this village. He was approximately 40. He worked in Libya and Iraq before migrating to Singapore. After returning from Iraq in 1987, he was in Bangladesh for several months. He inquired to his old friends about the possibility of migration to a new destination as he had some bitter experiences in these Middle East countries. He met one of his friends, Safi Mia, from Tangail district city. Safi Mia worked in Singapore for a few years and managed to save a considerable amount of money from his stay there. He advised him to migrate to Singapore. After hearing the life and working possibility in Singapore, Asor Mia visited some recruiting agents in Dhaka, capital of Bangladesh, to explore the official employment procedures for Singapore. He failed to get any way to go to Singapore with job contract. In fact, it was rare case to get job contract for Singapore during the late 1980s.

However, he came home with the idea that he would migrate to Singapore without work contract<sup>7</sup>. He met Safi Mia again to discuss in details. Safi Mia gave him addresses of some of his friends in Singapore. Upon arrival in Singapore in 1988, he met with a company foreman and managed to get a job in crane operation. He had prior crane operation experience in Libya and Iraq which helped him to secure a good paying job in Singapore. He remitted a large portion of his earnings back home by informal means. Remitting regularly back home made his family well-known in the village. He started receiving letters from relatives and villagers asking for help in the migration to Singapore. Within a few months, he developed relations with crane operators from other companies. And thus he was exposed to the top management people of the several companies including his own. Gradually, he came to the position to distribute jobs back home. At first, he assisted some of his very close relatives including brother and son-in-law to come to Singapore without any fee.

Later, he received more requests from home and started helping relatives, villagers, and people from other villages. At this second phase, he imposed fees for his service. Within several months, he made substantial amount of cash by charging service fees. As this was a profitable business, he left the job and started *Adam Babsha*<sup>8</sup> in a full time basis. He was with this business until his

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<sup>7</sup> As Bangladesh was a visa-exempted country at that time, he had no legal bar to visit Singapore as tourist.

<sup>8</sup> The term '*Adam Babsha*' is widely used in Bangladesh to denote those people who do manpower business. People who are engaged in this business are called '*Adam Bapari*'.

premature death in 1995<sup>9</sup>. To the villagers, he was one of the sincere and honest *Adam Bapari*<sup>10</sup> in this area.

Thus, all that is necessary for a migrant network to develop is for one person to be in the right place at the right time and to obtain a position that allows him to distribute jobs and favors to others from his community. Chance factors play a large role in determining where migrant networks eventually become rooted.

Migrant brokers are popular figure at the local level. Migrants, return migrants, and migrant brokers exchange favors, information, approval and other valued items. In the course of social transaction, the migrants, stayers, and brokers accumulate even more deposits based on previous favors of others. Some of the popular local agents in Gurail and nearby villages were Nazrul, Siraj, Sharif, Laltu, and Delour. They were all early migrants from this region. They have considerable influence in local politico-economic activities. In the local election they work as vote-bank. They are also invited to solve the village-level disputes and they are chaired in many social occasions. However, there are some cases where few prospective migrants have been cheated by agents and these agents are socially condemned. Thus, it matters what kind of reputation the agents have in the community of origin as it is directly linked to their social position.

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<sup>9</sup> Interviewed his Brother, Shukur Mia

<sup>10</sup> Person who is engaged in manpower business

## Functions of Migration Networks

Migration networks play a predominant role in the channeling of potential migrants to Singapore. People from the same communities are enmeshed in a web of reciprocal obligations upon which new migrants draw to enter in Singapore. Under the network migration, I identify two main actors – migrant brokers and formal recruiting agents- who are facilitating the migration process. Although some recruiting agents play a role in the migration process, I do not consider this a ‘commodified migration’ in which recruitment agencies solely serve as the facilitator of migration process<sup>11</sup>. To the best of my understanding, Bangladeshi migration to Singapore is much more a reciprocal migration based on kinship, friendship and neighborhood ties and because of this reciprocal character, migration to Singapore has probably emerged as a place-selective phenomenon and almost every migrant dreams of helping of his relatives, friends and community members back home in the migration process. We see the evidences of such reciprocal migration in North American migration system as well (Massey, 1987).

Figure 5.2 shows how migrant brokers and formal recruiting agents perform their respective roles in the migration process. While the diagrammatical presentation of the

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<sup>11</sup> Higuchi Naoto (2003) has offered a distinction between reciprocal and commodified migration in his recent unpublished paper titled “Migration Process of Nikkei Brazilians” in Mutsuo Yamada, ed., *Emigration and Latinoamericana: Comparacion Interregional entre America del Norte, Europa y Japan*, Osaka: Japan Center for Area Studies, forthcoming. I am indebted to Higuchi Naoto for sending me his unpublished manuscript.

operation of migration industry<sup>12</sup> may look simple, the actual process is indeed very complex and varies considerably from rural to urban areas. Since the bulk of the migrants hail from rural origin, this explanation fits in the majority cases. For the migration to Singapore, a prospective migrant needs an IPA<sup>13</sup> (In-Principle Approval) from the Ministry of Manpower, Singapore. This IPA is issued with the name and the passport number of the prospective migrant. Recruiting agents in Singapore apply for the IPs. They are required to present documents showing the genuine demand for foreign manpower in different companies. This means that they are not in position to draw as many IPs as they want to meet the huge demand from overseas.

The migrant brokers have usually worked in Singapore for long time, and thus they have already developed good connections with recruiting agents and top management levels of the companies. This interpersonal contact facilitates to arrange IPAs through formal recruiting agents in Singapore. National recruiting agents in Bangladesh are usually in a disadvantageous position in this regard. Few recruiting agents are enterprising enough to contact counterparts in Singapore and arrange job contracts directly from them. However, recruiting agents who have direct contact with counterparts in Singapore are in position to supply manpower regularly. Both migrant brokers and national recruiting agents employ

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<sup>12</sup> The term 'migration industry' is frequently used in Asia to indicate the people who earn their livelihood by organizing migratory movements as travel agents, labor recruiters, brokers, interpreters, and housing agents (see for details, Castles and Miller, 1998: 97). By 'migration industry', I mean here recruiting agents and migrant brokers who are in position to make the difference in migration occurrence.

<sup>13</sup> IPA means in principle approval. It acts like visa. Migrants from nontraditional source countries like Bangladesh are first given this IPA and when they visit Singapore with this IPA, they are offered work permit after some medical tests.

(local) agents separately at the local level in Bangladesh to collect the fees on behalf of the main agents. However, migrant brokers usually request their family members or close relatives to talk to the prospective migrants and to collect the economic cost of migration on behalf of them.

The IPAs come to the prospective migrants in Bangladesh through two ways: recruiting agents (national level recruiting agents) and migrant brokers. Local-level agents send passport and cash money to the national agents or migrant brokers to initiate the recruiting process. Local-level agents employed by national recruiting agents get a fixed commission for their service. This usually ranges from 5 to 10 per cents of the total economic cost of migration. Generally, local agents collect financial cost of migration from as many prospective migrants as they can. This leads to the situation where some of the prospective migrants are exposed to exploitation. However, local-level agents employed by migrant brokers do not behave like their counterparts. As they are from the same Bari or village, they are more reliable and trustworthy. Prospective migrants prefer to emigrate through migrant brokers. Sometimes, migrant brokers who are related to the prospective migrants by strong ties do not even charge the economic cost of migration in advance. It is paid during the post-migration period in Singapore.

In the course of interviews of migrant workers in Singapore, I found 12 primary migrants<sup>14</sup> who assisted a large number of potential migrants to come to Singapore. I took their detailed interviews to understand how personal networks work in the migration

process. Table 5.2 presents some basic data on these 12 primary migrants. These primary migrants in all cases were from good educational and social background and above the average educational level of Bangladeshi migrants working in other countries (Mahmood, 1991; Abdul-Aziz, 2001; Rudnick, 1996). These characteristics also established their credentials in the communities of origin. All of them were employed in construction sector. They were in Singapore for more than four years. The 9 primary migrants entered the network through relatives while the remaining 3 through friends. Altogether, the 12 primary migrants have been the source of employment opportunities for 283 persons. 101 persons received both primary assistance like financial help and secondary assistance like information about life, working opportunity and reliable recruiting agents or migrant brokers, while 182 persons received only secondary assistance.

They charged a good amount of money to the prospective migrants as service fees. Depending on skill composition of prospective migrants - skilled and unskilled, the fees were as high as twelve months salary earned by the migrant in Singapore. This is because most of the prospective migrants arrange the economic cost of migration through informal means like borrowing from relatives and money-lenders. While relatives offer financial assistance without monetary interest, the money-lenders charge as much as 120 percent interest rate per annum for the borrowed cash (Rahman, 2000). As a result, the bulk of the earnings go for paying debt. Migrant network operates on the basis of mutual trust and assistance to reduce the risks of victimization. This is possible mainly because of the small personalized nature of the networks. The parties know each other and have some experience

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<sup>14</sup> By primary migrants, I mean those migrants who assisted in the migration of others in a

of the reliability of both broker and potential migrants in the network and are ready to act on their advice and recommendation.

As the network becomes larger, the personalized character may become increasingly diluted and the transactions more impersonal and governed by the norms of contact. However, even in the case of a larger number such as case 9, where the first migrant became the means of finding job contract for about 36 others, recruitments were still from within the circle of relatives and friends. Some of these migrant brokers brought their relatives and friends by paying the economic cost of migration out of their own pockets. However, the recipients usually paid it back after coming to Singapore. Such recipients who received special favors are usually obligated to show similar favor for the kin and friends.

Relatives and friends networks offer their own forms of security and assurance. The network provided the migrants with information from those who have first hand knowledge of the construction firms and the type of employer he would serve. In the network placement, the person in the host country was well acquainted with the employer concerned. Hence, the migrant was able to obtain better conditions, benefits and security. Probably the most important attribute of the relatives and friends networks are the way in which it humanizes migration and reduces the sense of alienation which usually comes from employment in a foreign environment. Networks also provide a sense of security to the families sending the migrants. They gain some assurance that their relatives abroad can contact each other in the event of an emergency or urgent need.

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significant way, mainly financially.

## Empirical Evidence

In general, the existence of a stock of migrants in a potential destination area is the most important predictor of whether a particular community will send migrants to that area in the future. The empirical evidence from Bangladesh is overwhelming that networks established by earlier migrants act as conduits to channel for later migrants to the same destinations in an atmosphere of relative security. Data for this section comes from the migrant worker survey in Singapore (N=126). Migrant networks are found channeling the prospective migrants as well as the remittances<sup>15</sup>. In-depth interviews reveal that migrants are not alone in Singapore; they have their close relatives<sup>16</sup> as well. 78 per cent of the migrant workers had relatives in Singapore (Table 5.3). Of 78 percents, 41 per cent migrants had more than 5 close relatives in Singapore (brothers or first uncles and cousins). Of 91 percent migrants, 29 per cent migrants were from the villages wherefrom more than 100 workers migrated to Singapore. Thus, the data implies the existence of extremely higher incidences of migration occurrences in some villages.

Since many of the members are migrating from one *Bari*, lineage or village, they see it as social and moral responsibility to assist the prospective migrants. The fulfillment of the responsibility ensures the conformity to the norms and values of the society which, in turn, enhances his social status in the society of origin in relation to the nonmigrant and newly / prospective migrant families. Some migrants were found talking proudly for the fulfillment

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<sup>15</sup> Channeling function of migrant networks is discussed in this chapter. Remitting function of migrant networks will be discussed in Chapter Six under headline “Leisure Activities”.

<sup>16</sup> By close relatives, the thesis means first cousins and uncles.

of their social responsibilities. The statement of a migrant who helped the migration of some individuals can be worth-citing here; “when I first came to Singapore, I was alone from my *Bari*. Now I am not alone. I brought nine relatives including two from in laws. I have spent time and money for their migration process. Some of them even have not paid the money that I spent on their migration. No problem, villagers know who helped and who did not. I did a good work for my relatives and I know I will be rewarded”. Thus, it is clear that the motivation for bringing in new/ prospective migrants is beyond the immediate economic gain. Migrants are aware of the possible social benefits and they were content with this. The evolution of strong and effective migrant networks is, therefore, embedded into the socio-cultural aspect of the Bangladeshi society.

The contribution of a migrant to a new / prospective migrant can be understood in terms of the norm of reciprocity. Data indicates that 51 per cent of migrant workers received financial assistance from former migrants in Singapore when they first came to Singapore and 67 per cent of them received information help (Table 5.3). Once the migrants were on ‘foreign soil’, they did not forget to fulfill their own social obligations. 49 per cent of these workers helped the prospective migrants in Bangladesh through financial means and 63 per cent of migrants assisted the prospective migrants through information. Migrants, who could not meet their social responsibilities, had a clear plan to help them in future. 70 and 73 per cents of migrants wanted to help prospective migrants through financial means and information respectively. The old migrants and new /prospective migrants are thus tied into a bond of responsibility and obligation. It is the responsibility of the old migrants to assist the new / prospective migrants while it is again the obligation of the new migrants to do the

same for the prospective migrants. Thus, the role of migrant network in the perpetuation of labor migration is of great significance.

## **Summary**

In this chapter, I have shown how basic human relationships have been adapted to play new roles in the migration process. Bangladeshi migration to Singapore is based on an underlying social organization that supports and sustains it. This social organization includes common bonds of kinship and friendship, which get adopted and transformed through the reciprocity of mass migration. Together they compose a web of interconnecting social relationships that supports the movement of people, goods, and information back and forth between Bangladesh and Singapore. The interpersonal relationships that make up the networks are reinforced through institutional arrangements that bring migrants together on a regular basis in Singapore. Migrant networks are gradually built up and elaborated over the years. In the beginning phases, social ties to migrants in Singapore are few in number. Starting from a small base, they extend slowly at first. As migrant experience steadily accumulates in the population, however, the number of connections between migrants and others in the community expands rapidly.

Landless farmers in Gurail may be poor in financial resources, but they can be 'wealthy' in social capital, which they can convert into jobs and earnings in Singapore. For someone from 'Singapore migration-specific districts' which has a particularly well

developed migrant network, it is much easier to move to Singapore than those who are from non-migrant specific districts. The self-feeding character of the migrant networks and the wealth of social capital they provide to people seeking entry into Singapore labor market explain why Singapore migration has spread to involve all social groups in the community under study and has become a common feature of life throughout migration-specific districts in Bangladesh. As the risks of migration drop, migration becomes more widely accessible and eventually emerges as a mass phenomenon encompassing all sectors of society as we have seen in Gurail. Through the steady growth and elaboration of migrant networks, then, international migration comes to be seen as a reliable resource on which families can regularly rely in gaining social status and adapting to changing economic circumstances.

## Tables and Figure

Table 5.1

### Migration Patters of Noya Sikder Bari

	Family-1	Family-2	Family-3	Family-4	Family-5	Family-6	Family-7
<b>Total Members</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>9</b>
Male	7	5	6	3	5	2	4
Female	4	4	4	4	3	4	5
Total Members of Migration Age (Male) (18-45)	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Total Migrant</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>
Active Migrant (presently)	3	2	2	0	1	0	0
Returnee	1	1	1	0	1	0	1
Prospective Migrant	2	1	1	2	2	1	2
Never Migrant	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Years of First Trips</b>	1993 (1) 1994 (2) 1995 (1)	1994 (1) 1995 (1)	1994(1) 1995 (1) 1997 (1)	0	1995 (1) 1997 (1) 1998 (1)	0	1996 (1)
<b>Number of Trips</b>							
First Migrant	3	2	2	0	2	0	2
Second Migrant	2	2	2		2		
Third Migrant	2		1		1		
<b>Who helped mostly in the Migration Process?</b>							
Kinship	Yes	Yes	Yes	NA	Yes	NA	Yes
Friends	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Formal Recruiting Agent	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

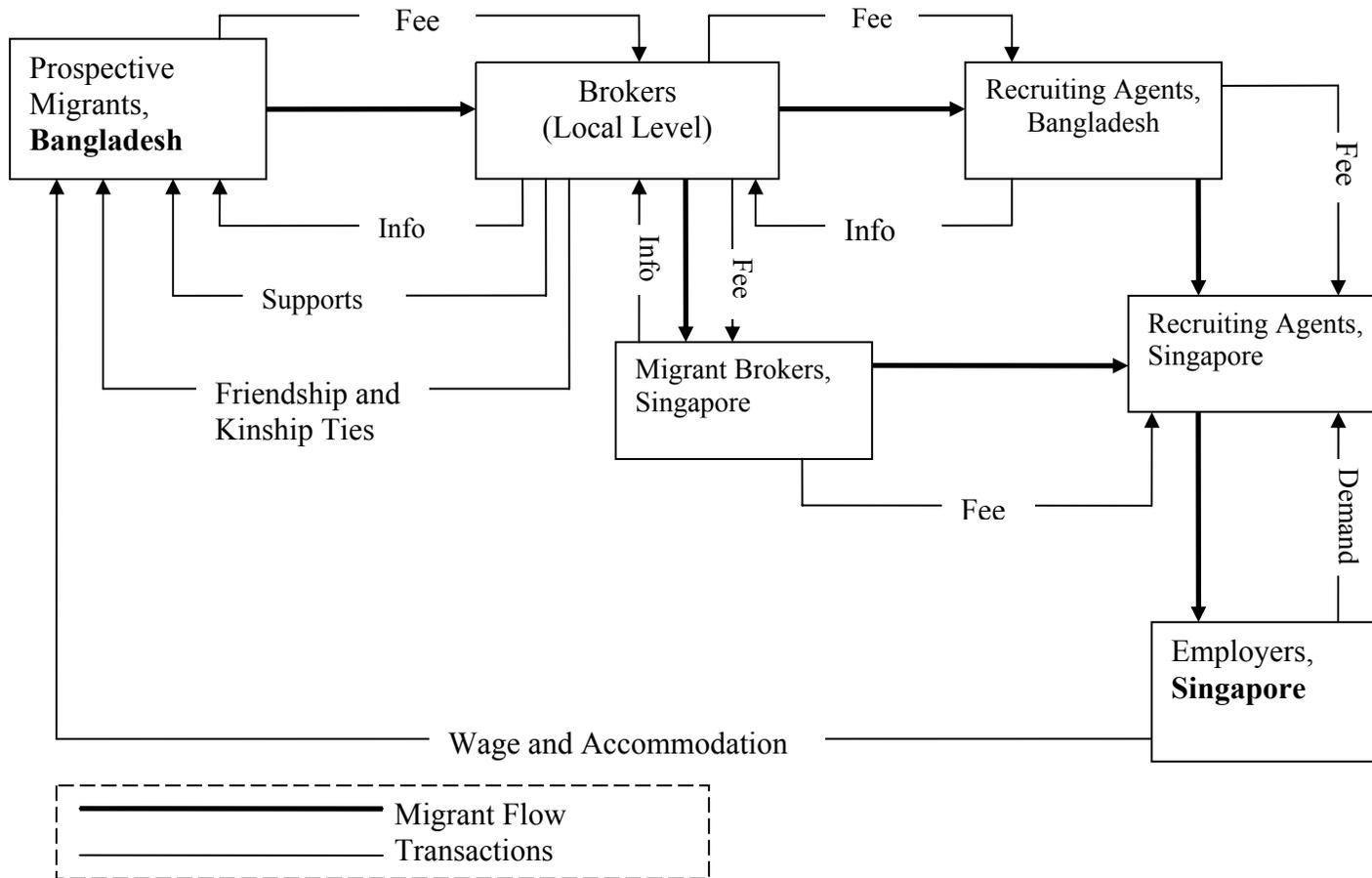
Table 5.2

## Primary Migrant's Profile and Placement of Persons to Singapore

Cases	Age	Education	Marital Status	Migration Experience	Received Help in own Migration From	<u>Helped others in Migration</u>	
						Primary Assist. <sup>17</sup>	Secondary Assist.
Case No.1	27	B.A	Unmarried	4Years	Relative	5	11
Case No.2	34	S.S.C <sup>18</sup>	Married	9 Years	Relative	6	15
Case No.3	30	H.S.C	Married	7 Years	Friend	10	18
Case No.4	40	10 (years)	Married	9Years	Relative	10	21
Case No.5	34	H.S.C	Married	8Years	Relative	12	20
Case No.6	25	S.S.C	Unmarried	4Years	Relative	8	13
Case No.7	28	H.S.C	Unmarried	5Years	Friend	7	10
Case No. 8	30	B.A	Unmarried	5Years	Relative	8	16
Case No. 9	35	9 (years)	Married	9 Years	Friend	14	22
Case No. 10	32	S.S.C	Married	7Years	Relative	6	10
Case No. 11	26	8 (years)	Unmarried	4Years	Relative	7	12
Case No. 12	36	8 (years)	Married	8Years	Relative	8	14
Total						101	Total 182

<sup>17</sup> By primary assistance, I mean mainly financial help. By secondary assistance, I mean mainly information help.

<sup>18</sup> SSC (Secondary School Certificate, 10 years ) and HSC (Higher Secondary Certificate, 10+2 years).



Note: The figure is adapted from Spann, 1994: 102

Figure 5.2: A Recruitment Network of Bangladeshi Legal Migrants to Singapore

Table 5.3

## Role of Migrant Networks

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Number of kinship members in Singapore	Percents	Number of Migrants from the Same Village	Percents
i. Below 5 members	36.50	i. Below 25	45.29
ii. 5 to 10	21.42	ii. 25 to 50	10.25
iii. 11 to 15	10.31	iii. 51 to 75	5.12
iv. 16 to 20	2.38	iv. 76 to 100	1.7
v. Above 20	7.14	v. Above 100	29.05
vi. No Relatives	22.22	vi. No Workers	8.54
Received Financial Assistance		Received Informal Assistance	
i. Yes	50.79	i. Yes	66.66
ii. No	49.20	ii. No	33.33
Offered Financial Assistance		Offered Information Assistance	
i. Yes	49.20	i. Yes	63.49
ii. No	50.79	ii. No	36.50
Planning to Offer Financial Assistance		Planning to Offer Information Assistance	
i. Yes	69.84	i. Yes	73.01
ii. No	27.77	ii. No	26.98
iii. Do not Know	2.38		
Channeling of Remittances of Migrants		Occurrence of Fraud in channeling	
i. Formal means (Bank)	2.41	ii. Yes	6.45
ii. Migrant network	95.16	ii. No	93.54
iii. Both	2.41		

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