

# Migration of Sylhetis to the United Kingdom: An Exploration

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## ABSTRACT

*Migration of Sylhetis to the UK is an age-old tradition. There are different reasons identified by many researchers for this trend of migration. The present study deals with a number of issues like demographic profile of migrants, historical background of migration, language and identity of Sylheti migrants, their socioeconomic problems and the situation of entrepreneurship and remittance in Sylhet region. The article is based on data collected from secondary sources. It shows that there is a gradual increase of Sylheti migrants in the UK, especially in London, from nineteenth century to date. Travel between Sylhet and Britain is found out in nineteenth century itself when both the places were connected to each other through imperial trading routes from Kolkata. Now more than 2.1% of total population living in London are Bengali migrants. Sylheti migrants seem to be sensitive for mostly twin identity, British Bengali and Bengali as well. They also value their Sylheti identity to some extent. The migrants face many socioeconomic problems like unemployment, ill health, lack of education etc. Majority of the migrants are employed in hotels, restaurants, catering services and textile industries. Self employment is common among the migrants; and Bengali women's participation in the labor market is frustrating. The study also reveals that 65% of Bengali migrants in the UK live below poverty line. Enterprise development on the basis of remittances did not take place in Sylhet region; and remittances are mostly used in unproductive sectors.*

## INTRODUCTION

Migration generally means displacement of the people from one place to another. In other words, people leaving their place of origin and settling themselves in a new place may be described as migration. Migration

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could be of different types. There may be rural-urban, rural-rural, urban-urban, urban-rural and transnational migration etc. The current article basically concentrates on transnational migration that has been taking place from greater Sylhet district of Bangladesh to London city of UK. These migrants are mostly mobile between the two cities, namely Sylhet and London; and they remain connected with their transnational linkages. Both transnationalism and diaspora usually throw a strong focus on the ideas and practices of the migrants that recreate and maintain home and a concomitant sense of belonging to places (Ahmed et al., 2003; Brah, 1996; Fog-Olwig, 2002; Levitt and Waters, 2002; Rapport and Dawson, 1998; Salih, 2003). Home as it is meant through the lens of transnationalism indicates ideological claims of belonging as well as practices of the migrants that connect them across nation-states (Vertovec, 1999). In most cases the people who have indulged in transnational migration hold twin identity close to their heart based on place of origin may be in connection to their forefathers and the current residence that they belong to. Although Brah shows a difference between the feeling of home as 'lived experience' and home as 'place of origin', she finds and admits there is an enduring 'homing desire' inbuilt to the diasporic consciousness (Brah, 1996:186). Traditional understanding of home presents a kind of passive life style of people that define household in relation to co-residence, collective (male) ownership of property and a common hearth. This understanding does not seem to be inclusive as the movement of people has not been taken into account while thinking of home. Therefore, traditional notion of home only embedded to a locality, but fails to define home in the context of displacement and mobility (Fog-Olwig and Hastrup, 1997; Gupta and Ferguson, 1997; Mand, 2003).

Migration of Bangladeshis to the UK may not be understood only in terms of searching for jobs or something relating to self-centered achievement. It probably goes beyond that. Migration and the feeling for household need to be analyzed and interpreted simultaneously so that the Bangladeshi immigrants in UK could be better understood. Gardner explains the relationship between migration and household for Bangladeshis living in UK as he says, 'best understood not in terms of movement of self-interested and atomized individuals, but more as a web of links between groups of people which stretches between interconnected places' (Gardner, 2002: 149). So, migration causes the household members living apart as well as together, despite knowing that migration is always a transformative experience and norms in relation to the household are reinvented and/ or negotiated. Moreover, gender and the life course are equally important

as they are very much connected with the experience of transnationalism (Mand, 2005). Sylhetis living in the UK often support the household left in Bangladesh through sending remittances, help buying land or building the house, and on the other hand women left behind in Bangladesh prepare and send suitable foodstuffs to the household in the UK from Sylhet. Preparation of different foodstuffs and affectionately send them to the kin living in the UK by the women shows a kind of gender-specific connectivity which also binds the household members with the notion of common hearth across places (Gardner, 1993). The present study deals with certain issues like demographic profile of migrants and historical background of migration, language and identity, socioeconomic problems of Bangladeshi immigrants in the UK and entrepreneurship and remittances in Sylhet region.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

General objectives of this study are to explore the trend of migration of Sylhetis to the UK and the overall conditions of Sylheti migrants in the UK. Apart from that, the study also investigates into the situation of remittances and entrepreneurship in Sylhet region of Bangladesh. Specific objectives are:

- a. To understand demographic profile of Sylheti/Bengali migrants in the UK;
- b. To investigate into historical background of migration from Sylhet to the UK;
- c. To dig out into the language and identity of Sylheti/Bengali migrants;
- d. To explore socioeconomic problems of the migrants in the UK;
- e. To explain the situation of remittances and development of entrepreneurship in Sylhet region.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This is an exploratory study based on data collected from different secondary sources. The secondary sources were books, articles from different journals, research reports, dissertation, presentation, websites, official records, working papers of different Institutes and Centers etc. Quantitative and descriptive data are collected on the basis of which analysis for the study is undertaken; and that is how the entire study

proceeded. Data collected from various sources were checked, rechecked and cross checked. The arrangements of data and analysis, interpretation, explanation and description of data have been done according to the objectives of the study.

## DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF MIGRANTS

There were 283,063 people of Bangladeshi origin living in Britain (Office for National Statistics, 2005). This population was .5% of total population of the UK and 6.1% of the entire ethnic minority population (UK Census, 2001). Out of total Bangladeshi population, 154,000 were born in Bangladesh (Kyambi, 2005), and the rest were in Britain. The growth of Bangladeshi population in the UK since 1951 may be seen in the following table:

**Table 1: Estimates of the Bangladeshi Population  
in the UK 1951-2001**

<i>Year (Census)</i>	<i>Total Number of Population</i>
1951	2,000
1961	6,000
1971	22,000
1981	65,000
1991	163,000
Actual 2001	283,000

(Source: Peach, 2005: 24)

In a recently published report by International Organization of Migration (IOM), the total Bangladeshi population in the UK has been shown as 2500000. The vast majority of Bangladeshi population in the UK have come from Sylhet district located in northeastern Bangladesh, mostly a rural area with a long tradition of emigration (Lawson and Sachdev, 2004). A total of 153,893 that means 55% of total Bangladeshi population in the UK live in London alone (Zeitlyn, 2012; Piggot, 2004, p.5). An overwhelming majority of Sylhetis who have migrated themselves to the UK live in London. In other words, Sylhetis mostly establish themselves in London with few exceptions. The 2001 census shows that 2.1% of total population lived in London were Bangladeshi immigrants; and

an overwhelming majority of this Bangladeshi population were in fact Sylheti immigrants.

A considerable number of Bangladeshis living in the UK are of young age with a median 18 years compared to 37 for white population; and around 40% of total Bangladeshis are of less than 16 years of age. The age structure of Sylhetis in the UK is also the same. Bangladeshi population mostly belongs to the age group of (16-64) years (ONS, 2002). More than 90% of the newer Bangladeshi immigrants who were born in Bangladesh also belong to less than 45 years of age (Kyambi, 2005). According to 2001 census, there was almost gender parity in the age range of (15-29) years where male-female ratio was (102:100); but the number of male was more than the number of females in the age range of (30-44) years where the ratio was (150:100) among the Bangladeshi immigrants in the UK (Samad and Eade, 2002). The male-female ratio among the Sylheti immigrants in London city follows the same trend.

### Historical Background of Migration of Sylhetis

Although Bangladeshis have been living in the UK particularly in London for a long time, the formation of Bengali community has recently taken place (Ansari, 2004). Early migration from East Bengal to Britain could be traced in the nineteenth century itself. Even a few migrations from East Bengal to London took place in eighteenth century too. But the early settlers in the UK from East Bengal came during 1850s to 1945. It is particularly mentionable that the migration of Sylhetis to London started in the nineteenth century onwards and most of the early settlers in the UK were of Sylhetis. The travel between Sylhet and Britain started in the nineteenth century through the regional connections with imperial trading routes from Kolkata (Adams, 1987; Choudhury, 1995; Gardner, 2002; Visram, 1986). It has been explained by Caroline Adams that Sylheti *lascars* were recruited by East Bengal Company to work on trading ships that used to move between and among India, Burma, China, the Malay archipelago and East Africa. Occasional trips to Britain from those places through trading ships used to be carried out as early as in the seventeenth century. During the height of imperial rule in India in 1850s onwards, Bengali *lascars* played vital role in manning of the Empire's shipping lines; and a huge number of Indian sailors were recruited to work in the engine rooms of British merchant ships during the period of World War 1 and World War 2, of whom many were killed, imprisoned and wounded (Adams, 1987).

The formation of Bengali community in Britain in the recent years should be understood taking early imperial seafaring connections into account. Routes were established between certain parts of East Bengal and East London; and the networks of patrons and facilitators were set up which played very crucial role in the later phases of migration from East Bengal, particularly from Sylhet to London (Gardner 1995, 2002; Eade and Garbin, 2005). Sylhet district was located along shipping routes from Assam to Kolkata and international trading ships used to embark from there (Choudhury, 1993). There were many networks of agents and boarding houses developed in Kolkata which used to provide links to employment on trading ships and for global travel. Many young Sylheti men visited Kolkata during this period of time to avail this opportunity for getting employment on the trading ships (Adams, 1987; Choudhury, 1993, 1995). Some of the early Bengali settlers in the UK shared their past histories with different researchers as they mentioned that from 1920s onwards a few Bengali settlers living in East London who were *ex-lascars* started providing similar shelter and guidance to Bengali sailors passing through London. Most of the *ex-lascars* settled in East London were Sylheti and the Bengali sailors who used to seek shelter and guidance to settle in London and used to be helped by the *ex-lascars* were also mostly Sylheti. The number of Bengali immigrants went up in 1930s and also during the period of Second World War. Initiatives were undertaken to form 'Bengali Community' at that time under the leadership of individuals like Ayub Ali and Shah Abdul Majid Qureshi who also created 'Indian Seamen's Welfare League' in 1943, a first organization of its kind (Adams, 1987).

The early Bengali settlers who were overwhelmingly Sylhetis mostly got employed in garment industry in East London and in restaurants of big hotels of London. A few of these settlers went to Midlands and the north of England for employment in textile factories. Bengali 'coffee shop' was established during this period to cater to the new arrivals; and later on this 'coffee shop' became the first 'Indian restaurant' owned by Sylhetis in London. The number of such restaurants increased to 20 in London by 1946. Around 300 such restaurants were found established across the UK by 1960; and the number had increased to 3000 throughout country by 1980 (Adam, 1987). Although exact number of these restaurants in the UK at present is not known, undoubtedly it may be expected to be substantially higher.

Huge numbers of Bangladeshi migrants settled in the UK in 1950s and 1960s (Zeitlyn, 2012). But there were only 300 Sylhetis living in London

in the early 1950s, almost all of whom were male (Adam, 1987). A few *lascars* settled in the UK after the end of second World War and some others settled immediately after the independence and partition of India in 1947 (Choudhury, 1995). Partition of India caused cutting off Sylhet from Kolkata which resulted in reducing the opportunity of getting employment in shipping to a greater extent, because of which many former sailors had to go through the situation of impoverishment during the period of 1952-55. To overcome the crisis the seamen's union came forward to help the former sailors as they managed to obtain passports for many of them to work in Britain, although the government of Pakistan tried to block the passports, but only succeeded partially. A substantial number of international passports were granted to the Bengali sailors and seamen and many others from East Bengal could obtain passport and visa to travel to the UK on sponsorship given by private institutions as well as visa was given to many to travel to London for medical purposes in 1956. Mostly Sylhetis availed this opportunity from East Bengal, came to Britain through established routes and relied on kin networks to find accommodation and employment (Gardner and Shakur, 1994).

By 1962, more than 5000 cheap unskilled laborers were taken to Britain from East Bengal as British Post-War demand (Adams, 1987). Most of them found employment in garment industries in East London as pressers or tailors (Kabeer, 2000) and others went to Birmingham, Oldham and Bradford to have employment in textile mills or heavy industries (Choudhury, 1993, 1995). These unskilled laborers mostly came from Sylhet region of East Bengal. Initially they did not want to settle in Britain rather wanted to stay temporarily as 'sojourners'. The 'myth of return' was cherished by Sylheti migrants for longer time, causing the process of family reunion and permanent settlement slower than for other South Asian Communities in Britain (Ballard, 2003; Anwar, 1998; Gardner and Shakur, 1994). The Sylheti migrants kept their family bond strong through frequent visit to the family as most of them left their wife, children and other family members at home in Sylhet. They also sent remittances to the family for buying land, building house, or launching business in Sylhet.

The period starting from 1950s until 1962 is considered as 'the golden age' of migration to Britain from the subcontinent since immigration was comparatively open during this time (Gardner, 2000). The Commonwealth Immigrations Act introduced in 1962 changed the situation as it restricted primary migration from the Commonwealth into three categories: the people with a specific job to go to the UK, those having recognized skill and qualification demanded by the UK, and others, especially those who



served the British force during Second World War (Solomos, 2003). This act in fact favored Sylhetis already employed in Britain as they started seeking suitable employment for their relatives and friends, and thereby established a sustainable 'chain migration' for Sylhetis (Gardner and Shakur, 1994; Eade and Garbin, 2005; Kabeer, 2000). Bengali migrants almost all of whom were Sylheti rose up to 200,000 in Britain by 1980s (Adams, 1987).

Sylhet is not only a district but also one of the important divisions among 7 divisions in Bangladesh. Sylhet division consists of 4 districts, namely Sylhet, Moulvibazar, Hobigonj and Sunamgonj. On the other hand, Sylhet district has 11 sub-districts (Upa-zila). The process of sustainable 'chain migration' had a twofold impact on Bengali migration; and Bengali migration was in fact Sylheti migration to the UK. Twofold impacts were: the specific regional form of migration in which people from different sub-districts of Sylhet district and also people from different districts and their sub-districts of Sylhet division migrated to the UK; and secondly Sylheti settlement patterns in the UK are very much regionally specific because of which a particular area is dominated by the migrants coming from a sub-district or a district of greater Sylhet division (Eade and Garbin, 2005; Gardner, 1995).

Contemporary migration pattern of Sylhetis to the UK is not much known. From the 1970s onwards, a new generation of youth activists has appeared who were either born in the UK or had grown up in UK, not much concerned about their transnational identity like the elders rather committed to fight racism in Britain which causes them suffering. Still the migration of Sylhetis to the UK continues; and the new Sylheti migrants are overwhelmingly young.

## **LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY OF SYLHETIS:**

Language and identity are interrelated to each other. Although language plays important role in determining the identity of people, language is not the only influencing factor that constitute the identity. But people usually express their group identity through language (Giles and Johnson, 1981; Sachdev and Bourhis, 1990). It is to be mentioned that actual language use and proficiency may not be related with identity. Sometimes a specific language may be treated as the revival of ancestral history, belief and identity, though all the group members do not speak in that language (Fishman, 1989; Giles and Johnson, 1981). Group identities cannot be developed in a sociostructural vacuum (Lawson and Sachdev, 2004). The



notion of *ethno-linguistic vitality* was developed in order to evaluate the combined influences of demographic, status, and institutional support (and control) factors on bilingual behavior of people (Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor, 1977; Harwood, Giles, and Bourhis, 1994). It is believed that the combination of “objective” (actual) and “subjective” (perceived) assessment of vitality is important to understand the ethnolinguistic behavior of the members of a group (Bourhis, Giles and Rosenthal, 1981; Sachdev and Bourhis, 1993). So language and identity of Sylhetis in the UK need to be explained from the above perspectives.

The language spoken by Sylhetis in Sylhet of Bangladesh is called Sylheti language. It is usually considered as a regional variety of Bangla (Bengali) or sometimes argued as a separate language too. But this issue is never settled only on the basis of linguistic ground (Edwards, 1994; Lawson and Sachdev, 2004). Sylheti language works as a diglossic “Low” variety and on the other hand, Bengali (perceived as national language) works as the “High” variety. Bengali is the official language of Bangladesh; and Sylheti language is spoken in the informal contexts mostly in Sylhet region (Lawson and Sachdev, 2004). Sylheti migrants in the UK face a different situation since English is highly dominating language there.

Most of the Sylhetis with a very few exceptions in the UK have high proficiency in English language. Simultaneously, 93% of Sylheti migrants have very good proficiency in Bengali too; but only 65% of them have good command over Sylheti language. Both English and Bengali are spoken by considerable numbers of migrants; and comparatively lesser numbers of migrants speak Sylheti language. There is no doubt that English is the strongest language of the migrants because of ground reality. Second-generation of Sylheti immigrants maintain high connections with the speakers of dominant language (Fishman, 1989; Bourhis and Sachdev, 1984). It has been reported that Sylhetis make greatest contact with English speakers, moderate contact with Bengali and lowest contact with Sylheti speakers in the UK. But still more than average numbers of Sylhetis make contact with Sylheti speakers. Both English and Bengali are used by the migrants to express their group identity. Although Sylheti language is spoken by comparatively lesser numbers of migrants, it plays vital role for the formation of group identity as Sylheti. But English and Bengali are considered more important for the group identity of migrants than that of Sylheti language. It is further revealed that English is used most in all domains except family/ household; Bengali is used most at home with family members, relatives and older migrants. Since the number of Sylheti migrants is overwhelmingly high in London, therefore, Sylheti language

is often spoken at the family environment as well as with the relatives. Sylheti migrants first prefer English in all public affairs and also want to identify themselves as British Bengali; their second preference is Bengali as they intend to revive and restore Bengali identity. The migrants also keep their Sylheti identity integral as of their third preference (Lawson and Sachdev, 2004).

## **SOCIOECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF MIGRANTS**

Bengali migrants living in Britain are generally poor, badly housed and deprived of adequate education. High rate of male unemployment and very low female participation in the labor market characterize Bengali or Sylheti community in the UK (Garbin, 2005: 1; Peach, 2005: 23). Average household-size in terms of total members of the household among the Bengali migrants was 4.7; and it was the highest among all the ethnic minority communities living in the UK (ONS, 2002). Household-size of Bengali migrants is in fact gradually decreasing. The size of Bengali household with more than six members has come down from 47% in 1991 to 30% in 2001. It has been shown in the statistics that 30% Bengali migrants in the UK live in officially recognized 'non decent homes' (HMSO, 2005). Bangladeshis living in greater London in overcrowded residences were nearly three times higher than the national average; and only 8% of Bangladeshis were found living single in the household (UK Census, 2001). Around 57% of Bengali households were identified with two or more dependent children which were more than three times compared to national average of 17% (Piggott, 2004). Among the Bengali migrants, 88% couples had children and on the other hand, 49% of British couples had the children. More than 42 % Bengali couples had 4 or over 4 children, and 4% British couples had 4 or more than 4 children (Ahmed et al., 2001). Only 38% Bengali migrants had their own home, and the rest lived in rented accommodation (Peach, 2005).

### **The Situation of Poverty**

A significant number of Bengali/Sylheti migrants live in a situation of poverty. There were 65% migrants living below poverty line. The migrant families involved in some kind of regular income generating activities also did not earn sufficient and therefore almost 60% of working families found living in income poverty. This percentage of poor among the Bengali migrants was much higher than the British whites, other whites, Indians

and Black Caribbeans which was only between 10-15% (Kenway and Palmer, 2007). Unemployment rate among the Bangladeshis in the UK was very high. It was estimated that two-thirds of Bengali children were forced to grow up in a situation of poverty which was again three times higher than the national average. Average net weekly pay of Bengalis and Pakistanis was £154.28; and it was £ 206.60 for British Whites (Zorlu, 2001).

Sending remittances to the family members left in Bangladesh was almost a common feature among the migrants in 1960s and 1970s. This trend seems to have declined at present. Studies show that 85% migrants sent remittances to Bangladesh from 1960s to 1970s, but it significantly declined in 1995 when only 20% migrants remitted their savings to their 'homeland'. The decline of sending remittances happened because of increasing cost of living in the UK, family reunion through which migrants established household in Britain instead of Bangladesh, family conflicts with the household members living in Bangladesh etc. Moreover, the second and third generation migrants were found less interested in terms of sending remittances to the 'homeland' (Garbin, 2004; Eade and Garbin, 2005). This has caused severe socioeconomic and psychosocial problems for the family members living in Bangladesh as well as in the UK.

## HEALTH OF THE MIGRANTS

The health situation of the migrants is generally poor. The Bengali migrants of all ages, irrespective of gender, religion and region are likely to rate their health three or four times more as 'bad; or 'very bad' than other populations in the UK. Around 13.7% of British Whites usually report that their health is 'not good' and on the other hand, 30.9% of Bengali migrants report as their health is 'not alright' (ONS, 2002).

### Employment Situation:

Over 38.3% male and 76.6% female among the Bengali migrants were identified as economically inactive (ONS, 2005). Around 20% men which is four times than the White men and 24% women, six times than the white women were completely unemployed. This rate of unemployment was highest among all the ethnic communities in the UK (ONS, 2002). Apart from that, never worked or long-term unemployment rate among the Bengali migrants was highest (17.1%), compared to 2.7% as national average (Peach, 2005).

The percentage of Bengali migrants working in hotels and catering was 65%; six times the average for greater London; and it was also estimated that six times than average number of Bengalis worked in textiles or were associated with printing (Piggott, 2004; Baker and Mohieldeen, 2000). A large number of Bengalis were found earning their livelihood through self employment. Bengali migrants were more likely to be involved in self employment than other ethnic groups (DCLG, 2009). But only 2.1 % Bangladeshis compared to 6.1% of total population occupied higher managerial professions (Peach, 2005). The rate of getting better employment among the new migrants is 42.8%, compared to 40% among the early settlers. But unemployment rate among the new migrants is higher (7.8%) than the early settlers (6.8%) (Kyambi, 2005:76).

## EDUCATION OF THE MIGRANTS

Educational attainment among the Bengali migrants (mostly Sylhetis) was very poor. Almost 49% Bengali women and 40% men did not have any educational qualification (ONS, 2002 and 2004). Most of the Bengali immigrants were involved in low paying jobs due to lack of adequate educational qualifications, resulting in high rate of poverty (Platt, 2007). However, 50% Bangladeshis aged (16-24) years living in greater London were students, but the level of education among the older settlers was very poor (Piggott, 2004). Only 6.8% of new immigrants had higher education and 39.8% did not have any qualification, but still it was better than that of settled Bangladeshi-born older community ( Kyambi, 2005: 76). It has been recognized that educational success rate among the younger age group of third generation Bangladeshis has improved significantly (Samad and Eade, 2002; Dench et al, 2006).

Earlier Bangladeshi children used to achieve lower grades than English children in different exams. Even in a statistics presented in 2002, it was shown that Bangladeshi children obtained much lower grades than other ethnic children like Chinese and Indian. But the situation has changed by now as according to Learning and Skills Council the success rate of Bangladeshi students has increased from 71% in 2004-05 to 74% in 2006-07. The rate of Bangladeshi female students entering higher education was 32% by 19 years of age; and for male students it was 29% in 2005-06 (DCLG, 2009). This trend is quite encouraging.

## Entrepreneurship and Remittances in Sylhet Region

Remittance contributes substantially to the generation of local funds in the region of Sylhet. But it is often said that lack of proper utilization of remittance causes poor development in the region. A study shows remittances are generally utilized for household consumption, purchasing of land, purchasing of flats and building of luxury houses in Sylhet region. Although around 70% entrepreneurs utilized remittances by investing in fixed deposits and savings scheme, only 5% used remittances in trading and enterprise development. The findings of FGD also show that remittances in Sylhet region are basically used in household consumption, land purchase, deposits and community help. A portion of remittance is used to build mosque, *Madrasha* and to help the relatives. The study concludes that the remittances are mainly used in unproductive sectors in Sylhet region (Hossain et al., 2010).

It seems that the flow of remittances to Bangladesh has increased substantially from Tk. 6,943.60 crore in 1998 to Tk. 54,295.14 crore in 2008 (Bangladesh Bank, 2008). The flow grew from Tk. 23,646.97 crore in 2004-05 to Tk. 41,298.54 crore in 2006-07 (Bangladesh Bank, 2008). There is an exaggeration in relation to the proportion of remittances by the expatriates of Sylhet region to the total remittances inflow of the country where it has often been said that 75% of total remittances in the country comes from Sylhet region alone. It means that Sylheti immigrants overwhelmingly contribute to the total remittances received in the country (Ahsan et al., 2005). This figure does not seem to be realistic. Data collected from the Foreign Exchange Division of Bangladesh Bank, Sylhet show that total amount of remittance inflow to Sylhet region during the period of December 2007 to August 2008 through banking channel was Tk. 3,873.42 crore. On the other hand, the total amount of remittances received in the entire country during the same period was Tk. 45,604.11 crore (Bangladesh Bank, 2008). So Sylhet region contributed only 8.49% to the total amount of remittances in the country. Expatriates of Sylhet may also send a small amount of remittances to other places of the country, especially to Dhaka city, which could not be taken into account here (Hossain et al., 2010).

It is noted that remittances are very poorly utilized in Sylhet region. Local funds created through remittances are often not invested in a productive way. There are many reasons identified for poor investment in productive sectors. Lack of banking facilities, disinterested to accept the challenge by the local people, high bank interest rate for loans/advances,

fear of loss in investment, better interest rate in deposits and lack of interest in developing entrepreneurship have been held responsible for it. More than two-fifths of the local entrepreneurs added some other reasons like poor infrastructural support, long and irritating bureaucratic procedure and idleness of the people as important barriers toward proper investment. One-third of the local entrepreneurs pointed out that lack of technological knowledge with regard to industrialization, ignorance about enterprise development, absence of 'one stop' service, investors lack creativity and awareness, fund constrains (due to collateral and complexity), absence of planning and regional policy are major reasons for lack of proper utilization of remittances (Hossain et al, 2010). Therefore, development of entrepreneurship in greater Sylhet virtually did not take place causing improper and inappropriate investment of remittances could inevitably be detected in the region.

## CONCLUSION

Migration of Sylhetis to the UK started long back in the nineteenth century. A considerable number of Bengali migrants settled in the UK in 1950s and 1960s. Needless to mention, most of the Bengali migrants settled early in the UK were Sylhetis. This trend of migration of Sylhetis to Britain continued till today. In the beginning, only men migrated and later on other family members including females were brought in for family unification. It has been estimated that total number of Bengali migrants has increased to 2500000 by now. Bengali migrants constitute .5% of total population in the UK. Around 55% of Bengali migrants live in London. Most of the Sylhet migrants prefer to live in London city as the early settlers from East Bengal in London were of Sylhetis. Now 2.1% of total population in London are estimated to be Sylheti or Bengali migrants. The migrants are mostly of young age; majority of them belong to (16-64) years of age. They prefer to be identified as British Bengali, mostly speak English in all public affairs. But majority of them speak Bengali at home and with relatives. The migrants love their Bengali identity and intend to cherish it as their origin. Some of the migrants value their Sylheti identity too, speak Sylheti language among the family members and relatives.

Around 65% of Bengali migrants live in poverty. Unemployment rate among them is considerably high. Two-thirds of Bengali children in the UK are forced to live in a situation of poverty. Remittance inflow to Bangladesh from the migrants has declined substantially causing socioeconomic and psychosocial problems for the family members left behind in the country.

The health status of the migrants is generally described as bad. More than 65% of Bengali migrants are involved in hotels and catering services for earning their livelihood; many of them are employed in textiles and garment industries. Women's participation from Bengali migrants in the labor market is indeed negligible. Almost 49% Bengali women and 40% men do not have any academic qualifications resulting in the involvement of low paying jobs. But newer Bengali migrants in the UK are better educated. Remittances sent to the family members in Bangladesh are not invested in productive sectors, rather used for household consumption, purchasing of land, buying flats and building luxury houses in Sylhet region. Enterprise development and development of entrepreneurship did not grow at all.

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