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# From Bangladesh to Brooklyn

excerpted & condensed from Youth Researcher Navipa Zaman's text

**How did environment, gender, urbanization, & workplace intersect in the stories of these four women?**

**"Rather than reduce these lives to time-old stereotypes or flashy symbols, this archive situates their voices in all their complexity. It captures both the heartbreak and the contradictions that arise when women shoulder the dual expectations of preserving culture and adapting to change. It also honors the quiet endurance behind their choice, their unique forms of resistance, and their visions of home, whether found, lost, or imagined. "**

*Youth Researcher Navipa Zaman*



**Bangladesh is a coastal country widely known for its garment factories & textile industry.**

**Perhaps Shown escaped a similar fate when she, like many new immigrant families, arrived in the United States seeking a better life. The promise of the American Dream is an alluring idea, one that Shown & her husband sought earnestly. In New York, she has found a close-knit community of friends, who have become family, mirroring survival strategies many immigrants adopt in an unfamiliar & sometimes isolating society.**

## Shown



**Despite this, women continue to seek out factory work, often as a last resort. Decades after Shown had left Bangladesh, tragedy struck close to home. A family relative of hers died in a shopping plaza collapse. The haunting stories of bodies being identified by loved ones, buried under pounds of cement and steel. Entire households have been left anchorless & owners & companies offer little in reparations. These stories are common.**

**They became the best available option for many women, despite the low wages & dangerous conditions. The average monthly income for these women is around $113 USD. For comparison, the cost of living a month in Bangladesh is roughly $460 USD. To add on to this, the employees face inhumane conditions, including but not limited to: 1) lack of clean drinking water, 2) fire & flood hazards, 3) abusive management (verbal & physical), 4) unpaid overtime, & in the most extreme cases, 5) sexual harassment.**

**Bangladesh is currently responsible for 81.16% of the ready-made garment products (RMG) produced globally. Made up of a female employee population of 80%, the RMG sector was initially seen as a tool for social mobility for lower-class & working-class families. Soon, these jobs became seen as necessary, not voluntary.**

## Aziza

**When Aziza moved to Brooklyn in 2005, the transition was jarring. *"It was new. Everything is for me new. New adventure. New culture. I don't know. I'm really scared — I'm so much cry, it's like one and a half month,"* she recalls. The most heartbreaking part of this memory was how deeply she missed her parents. While she carried the weight of being a wife & mother, raising children without the familiar support system she'd known in Bangladesh was overwhelming. Her life echoes the generational & cultural practices that countless Bangladeshi immigrant women have lived — expectations around work, family, & sacrifice. Though she fulfills these roles with love, she is also clear about the toll they take — the unseen labor of nurturing, maintaining, & sacrificing. Motherhood, it appears, is a full-time job—unpaid. Aziza holds on to the hope that she will be able to return to the Bangladesh that will always be her home, albeit a changed one.**



## Sume

**Sume values her daughters & works to teach them cultural values while also recognizing that they are shaped by the world around them, in this case, the melting pot that is NYC. She highly values education, both secular & sacred, & describes how she wants to go to school again. This dream of hers is one that many immigrant women suppress due to limited support, cultural expectations, & the challenges of balancing family responsibilities with personal ambitions. Sume emphasizes the importance of self-sufficiency in this world, which is an option not all immigrant women are offered either. Instead, they are at the mercy of their families, often patriarchal in nature. Despite this, Sume manages a career, raises two daughters, & maintains an excellent friendship with the people in her life.**



## Mitu

**The Dhaka that Mitu speaks of no longer exists. More people, more heat. She describes the quality of life she had grown accustomed to: "There was less pollution, fewer cars too." Mitu emphasizes, "I wish I had gotten married in Bangladesh & stayed there." This desire for home is a sentiment echoed by many immigrants. Along lines of race, ethnicity, & religion, building community with strangers can feel fragmented & uncertain. Often as a result, ethnic enclaves both offer a safe haven & strengthen generational distance in their emphasis on tradition. Mitu addresses these nuances directly. When discussing her children, she explains, *"I teach them to respect their elders, listen to others, to pray. To understand Muslim values & Bangladeshi culture. I tell them to speak in Bangla. To speak to their relatives."* There is comfort in protecting these values. But she also embraces American culture & engages with the diverse cultures around her.**