

**Narratives of Disjuncture: Women Garment Workers of Bangladesh and Sexuality in  
Literature and Social Sciences**



Raisa Mizan

ID: 13303015

Department of English and Humanities

January 2018

**Narratives of Disjuncture: Women Garment Workers of Bangladesh and Sexuality in  
Literature and Social Sciences**

A Thesis

Submitted to the Department of English and Humanities, BRAC University

By

Raisa Mizan

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in English

January 2018

## **Acknowledgments**

I owe my supervisors Professor Dr. Firdous Azim and Professor Dr. Samia Huq a great debt of gratitude. Without their guidance and encouragement, this paper would not have existed. They have given me their valuable time, counseled me through the various hurdles that I faced while writing this paper and motivated me to make an all-out effort. I am extremely grateful to my parents, grandparents and aunt Dr. Nishat Fatima Rahman for their constant and unconditional love and support. I believe that it is through their hard work and well wishes that I have reached where I am today. At last but not the least, I have to thank my friend and confidant Shahed Arman for believing in me and pushing me to strive and do better.

## Abstract

The women garment workers of Bangladesh figure highly in our national consciousness. They are undoubtedly the women of the nation. From social sciences to economics to media, their presence is everywhere. They are simultaneously figures of anxiety and figures of celebration. While the news of garment workers' exploitation in the form of low pay, lack of benefits and paid leave, lack of safe transport, lack of building safety regulations drive us towards a state of anxiety, their achievements in the economic sector make us proud and make us want to celebrate their hard work. However, the garment workers are curiously missing from the realm of literature. It is surprising that the image of the decrepit, fatigued garment worker bending over a sewing machine or the howling, lamenting worker who has lost a limb in a factory accident is rarely portrayed in the pages of literature. Nevertheless, there are a few literary works available which have attempted to encase the woes and the pleasures of the lives of the garment workers. The works that have been used in this paper are Nasreen Jahan's novel *Krush Kathe Konna*, Khandokar Masud Rana's novel *Garments Konnar Attokotha* and Tahmima Anam's short story "Garments." I have used the works of Dina Siddiqi, Petra Dannecker and Naila Kabeer for the social sciences perspective. Although this absence of the garment women from the world of literature can be a legitimate topic for research, this paper is concerned with the narrative differences between the representations of garment workers in literature and social sciences. In the differences between these two discourses, there emerges a disjuncture. This paper talks about the nature of this disjuncture and the reasons behind it.

## Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Chapter 2: Literary Representations of Women Garment Workers and their Sexuality.....	10
Chapter 3: Women Garment Workers and Sexuality: A Social Science Perspective.....	36
Chapter 4: Conclusion: The Disjuncture Between the Literary and Social Sciences Discourses on Women Garment Workers' Sexuality.....	56
Works Cited.....	68

“The degree and kind of a man’s sexuality reach up into the ultimate pinnacle of his spirit.”

---- Friedrich Nietzsche

“There is a need for promoting women’s sexual agency in today’s society, because if it wasn’t an issue, terms such as ‘female sexual empowerment’ would be made redundant. The fact that we merely have this vocabulary is indicative of that.”

---- Mia Yamanouchi

# **Narratives of Disjuncture: Women Garment Workers of Bangladesh and Sexuality in Literature and Social Sciences**

## *Chapter 1*

### *Introduction*

Recounting her visit to Dhaka in 1984 in which she first encountered the sprawling garment factories and their women workers who were making their debut in the public domain, writer and researcher Naila Kabeer said, “I was struck then by the sight of thousands of women moving briskly around on the streets of Dhaka... I was told they worked in the new garment factories which had sprung into existence almost overnight in response to incentives put in place by the government in 1982 to promote export-oriented manufacturing.” (Kabeer). The increased participation of women in the national economy through their employment in garment manufacturing jobs inspired vast amounts of and a variety of social sciences research since the 1980s. At the centre of such research was a discourse about gender with a happy news. These workers were women and hence, their presence in a field of work that was hitherto considered a male one was highlighted in almost every social science research about garment factory women. Kabeer marked women’s participation in the garment industry as a “remarkable phenomenon” in which the women of Bangladesh “appeared to have abandoned old and [strongly held] norms [of Purdah] in response to new opportunities” (Kabeer). Social sciences research into the feminization<sup>1</sup> of garment factory work is mostly fixate on the “supply and demand argument.” The demand side argument showed that women’s cheap labour due to their lack of skills and their supposed docile nature were the reasons behind their desirability among the factory owners.

---

<sup>1</sup>Feminization of labour refers to the gendered relations that arise out of the rise of capitalism and economic globalization.

“Often these studies [were] embedded in broader discourses about the relationship between capitalism and patriarchy” (Dannecker 2). The owners and employers of garment manufacturing industries as though mirroring our patriarchal society put working class women in assembly lines taking them out of the seclusion of their homes while at the same time dominating them with strict factory rules. Although traditionally tailors and dressmakers in Bangladesh have been men, sewing sophisticated, fashionable clothing articles for the west went on to become ‘women’s work’ because the ability and patience required in sewing such clothes were only thought to be found in women- their ‘petite’ hands were thought to be more adept than men’s at sewing delicate clothing items. The supply side argument talked about “the workers themselves, their choices and constraints, and thus argues either that women are better off or empowered through the work they perform and the income they earn or suggests that they are worse off with this kind of factory work because women’s so called weaknesses outside the workplace gets incorporated in the modern factories” (2). In my opinion, the weaknesses mentioned here usually relate to women’s sexuality which has been under surveillance in the conservative milieu of Bangladesh from time immemorial. The vision of the coexistence of men and women in the same arena in a factory gave rise to several anxieties in the conservative minds of Bangladeshi people. In Naila Kabeer’s *The Power to Choose*, the fathers and the guardians of women garment workers were shown expressing concern over their daughters joining the garment industry where they would be surrounded by men because of women’s general vulnerability towards sexual exploitation. In the same book, the religious scholars of the country were also shown to condemn the culture of men and women working together in the garment industry because they dreaded women’s so called immoral, sexual nature through which they supposedly tend to morally corrupt men and incite them to engage in premarital sex.



The initial social sciences research on garment factory women had also documented narratives of exploitation. Like the development oriented accounts of national and international NGOs, these early social sciences research talked about garment factory workers' low wages, poor working conditions, lack of job security, lack of benefits and paid leave, delayed payment of arrears, sexual abuse and harassment etc. "By the mid-1980s, the plight of the sweatshop worker carried considerable intellectual currency among feminist and left-wing critics internationally. Detailed documentation of the physically and economically coercive conditions of industrial work through converging human rights and feminist discourses made this possible" (Siddiqi 156). However, later research unearthed a range of agentive capacities including networking tactics among the neighbors and colleagues, implicit strategies for avoiding sexual abuse and organization building, greater income control in the households, increased decision making opportunities etc. that was lurking beneath the exploitation narratives.

Richly detailed ethnographies have extended the terms of the debate considerably, moving beyond whether women are better or worse off to a consideration of the paradoxes and contradictions generated by industrial work; a closer examination of the multiple contexts in which gender and sexuality are constructed and contested; and a greater emphasis on the lived experiences, cultural practices and modes of consent and resistance in the workplace and outside. (qtd. in Siddiqi 157)

Nonetheless, these agency discourses showed that the narratives of the garment worker's autonomy and resistance against the capitalist power in some domains were interposed with narratives of "greater surveillance in other domains" (157). The agency discourses also pointed out that the restrictions set by capitalist disciplining "in the other domains" were met with resistance by the workers.

The discourse on women garment workers of Bangladesh has percolated in the economic narratives as well, given that the rise of the garment industry in Bangladesh is an economic phenomenon. In these accounts, the garment industry is hailed as the savior of women because it has given them jobs which has empowered them and increased their mobility. Using the rational choice calculus often employed in economic discourses, it has been argued that garment factory jobs are generally taken up by poor, uneducated women which have expanded their individual choice as illustrated in Naila Kabeer's book *The power to Choose*.

The media was initially skeptical of the merits of the presence of women working as garment factory workers in the public sphere bordering on the previously mentioned conservative mindset. Earlier an important daily newspaper had stained the reputation of garment women with accusations of vulgarity thus: "A group of girls... faces in cheap make up, gaudy ribbons adorning their oily braids and psychedelic colored sarees with tiffin carriers in their hands are a common sight [these] days during the morning and evening hours. They are the garment workers, a new class of employees" (qtd. in Kabeer 82).

However, as these garment workers' presence in the public spaces became acceptable with the aging of the garment industry and the rise of feminist activism in the country, the media accounts of garment women also shifted from characterizing them as vulgar adulterers to miracle workers who have transformed the national economy by working diligently to develop the second highest grossing export industry of the country, toppling jute and after remittances. The radicalized, slogan spewing, rebellious workers mobilizing the factory strikes get as much media coverage as do the exploited, gaunt figures of the workers working attentively over the sewing machines.

Interestingly, despite being a dominant figure in the national psyche, the women garment factory workers are rarely present in Literature. Literature with a capital ‘L’ has scarcely engaged itself with garment women’s lives and maintained a diplomatic distance from recreating the battered, exploited and haggard figures of the garment factory women who toil away until their bodies break down or the horrors of the Rana Plaza tragedy. This disinterest of our writers in encapsulating the plight and the hopes and dreams of the garment workers stand in sharp contrast to the preoccupation of the social sciences with the lives of garment workers. It can be an area of research as to why literary writers have shied away from depicting the hardships and accomplishments of women garment workers of Bangladesh. However, the purpose of this paper is to find out the differences of representation in the literary and social sciences narratives about garment workers. A few works of fiction are available that have chronicled the lives of the garment women. The works that I will be looking at in my thesis are ace novelist Nasreen Jahan’s *Krush Kathe Konna*, novice author Khandokar Masud Rana’s *Garments Konnar Attokotha* and critically acclaimed author Tahmima Anam’s short story “Garments.”

*Krush Kathe Konna* is a dark and melancholic narrative of one woman’s journey through life’s various obstacles and their psychological effects on her. It is written in the first person voice of the protagonist Nilufer. Nilufer is a former garment worker who left this work as she was unable to cope with the work load and switched over to a modest paying job as a junior editor at a local newspaper. Nilufer’s younger sister Shaila is also a garment worker who due to her lack of proper education could not leave her job at the garment factory despite the inhuman burden of work that keeps her occupied till late at night and forces her to come home endangering her safety every night. The narrative is linear yet jumbled often the narrator

breaking the flow of the narrative to remember a past incident or to present vivid imageries that represent the inner thoughts of the narrator.

*Garments Konnar Attokotha* can be seen as a bildungsroman where the protagonist Sonia's transformation from an optimistic adolescent into a depressed married woman with a child is portrayed in the backdrop of a teenage love story gone wrong and the age old argument of the city versus country life wherein the chaotic city of Dhaka represents maturity, decay and gloom and the country is an idyllic setting which signifies naiveté, growth and contentment.

Tahmima Anam's short story "Garments" is a unique take on the lives of garment workers to whom the author attributes agency and maneuverability that they utilize to make their way through the harsh realities of poverty and exploitation that plague their lives. The story revolves around three garment workers- Mala, Jesmin and Ruby who are forced to become sexual objects to a man by marrying him together in order to rent a room. These women are ready to divide time, responsibilities and even sex amongst themselves to make the marriage run smoothly in the face of a desperate need of finding a place to live which was made inaccessible to them because of their unmarried status. However, the man they all marry turns out to be impotent which the wives cannot but accept despite their crushed desire of a blissful and sexually satisfying married life. One of the co-wives Jesmin resists this cruelty from engulfing her by letting loose and honing her sexuality in the confines of her rented room.

The above mentioned literary and social sciences discourses about garment workers portray the workers in two ways- as figures of anxiety and as figures of celebration. The abuse and exploitation of the workers both within the confines of the factories and on the streets evoke anxiety. The narratives of celebration are the ones that talk about the agency of the workers and

the successes and achievements of the industry that depend primarily on the labour of the workers. In literature as well as in the social sciences, the narratives of anxiety and the narratives of celebration are interspersed.

However, a careful reading of both the literary and the social sciences discourses about the women garment factory workers of Bangladesh has enabled me to identify a *disjuncture* between these two discourses. I have found that a certain narrative has been highlighted in the literary texts about garment workers while the social sciences discourses have chosen other areas of emphasis. This narrative disjuncture relates to the domain of sexuality. To be precise, this narrative is about garment women's sexual agency and sexual subjectivity. Sexual agency, a concept of sociology can be interpreted as a person's right to express his/ her sexuality in whichever way he/ she pleases. It includes the expression of a person's sexual preference, sexual orientation and sexual desires. It can also be interpreted as a person's ability or choice of using his/her sexual attractiveness to achieve a goal, that is, when a person's sexuality opens up spaces for maneuverability for them. Sexual subjectivity which is a concept of psychology refers to how a person views himself or herself as a sexual being (Dimen). In other words, it is sexual self-perception. "It includes their experiences of sex and eroticism, as well as their assessment of their own erotic and sexual desires, acts and fantasies. It encompasses their sexual pleasures and displeasures; appetites, revulsions and apathies; and the way they speak of or otherwise represent their sexual experience(s) and sexual dreams" (Dimen). Studies have shown that there are five elements of sexual subjectivity- sexual body-esteem, self-entitlement to sexual desire and pleasure, entitlement to sexual desire and pleasure from a partner, sexual self-efficacy and sexual self-reflection (qtd. in Boislard P. & Zimmer-Gembeck 55). The first element, *sexual body-esteem* refers to viewing one's body positively. It also includes "self-perceptions of sexual

attractiveness and desirability [which] form part of an individual's conceptualization of his/ her sexuality" (55). The next two elements *self-entitlement to desire and pleasure* and *entitlement to desire and pleasure with a partner* refer to one's assumed prerogative to possess and to attain private desires and pleasures. "These [are] identified as important elements of sexual subjectivity because sexuality has been described as coming to recognize desire and understanding what it means to experience pleasure from the body" (55). The fourth element of sexual subjectivity, *sexual self-efficacy* refers to one's own ideas about his/ her ability to handle desired sexual encounters and divert the undesired ones. "The final element, *sexual self-reflection*, ... [is][t]he ability to reflect critically on sexual experiences and make decisions about future sexual strategies and behaviors ..." (55).

In all of the three literary texts that I have mentioned above, garment women's sexual agency and sexual subjectivity have emerged as key themes, whereas the social sciences discourses mostly talk about garment workers' sexual suppression and exploitation. Dina Siddiqi has done a study on the sexual harassment of women garment workers which details the various ways in which garment workers face sexual suppression and exploitation. Their sexual agency and subjectivity are scarcely touched upon by the social sciences discourses. Petra Dannecker in her book *Between Conformity and Resistance* briefly discusses garment workers' sexual agency (the term is not mentioned) in relation to workplace power/ sexual politics which renders the workers simultaneously empowered and disempowered. In the same book, garment women's sexual subjectivity is subtly hinted at through examples of garment workers' reciprocity towards the sexual advances of their male colleagues and superiors.

In this thesis, I aim to examine this disjuncture by running a comparative analysis between the social sciences and literary accounts of garment women's sexual subjectivity, sexual

exploitation, sexual suppression and sexual agency. I will look at the portrayals of women garment factory workers in Nasreen Jahan's *Krush Kathe Konna*, Khandokar Masud Rana's *Garments Konnar Attokotha* and Tahmima Anam's "Garments" to delineate the imaginative ways and forms in which these women's sexual subjectivity and agency have been etched and the biting realism with which their sexual exploitation and suppression have been depicted with the help of a few themes. I will talk about *Krush Kathe Konna* and *Garments Konnar Attokotha* as working class novels wherein sexuality emerges as an important topic of discussion. I will explore the works of Naila Kabeer, Dina Siddiqi and Petra Dannecker to outline the social sciences discourses on garment workers' sexual suppression, exploitation, subjectivity and agency. Finally, I will try to uncover the reasons behind this disjuncture by using literary and social theories.

## *Chapter 2*

### *Literary Representations of Women Garment Workers and their Sexuality*

In this chapter, I will illustrate how women garment factory workers' sexual subjectivity, sexual agency, sexual exploitation and sexual suppression have been represented in the novels *Krush Katha Konna* and *Garments Konnar Attokotha* and the short story "Garments" through some themes. I will also talk about the novels in terms of being working class novels which have sexuality as a premise.

### **Thematic Representations of Garment Women's Sexuality**

#### **Women workers' bodies as a site of exploitation:**

Feminist theory has blamed the patriarchal system that controls society for exploitation of women in all aspects of life. Sylvia Walby in her book *Theorizing Patriarchy* says,

I shall define patriarchy as a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women ... the use of the term social structure is important here, since it clearly implies rejection both of biological determinism, and the notion that every individual man is in a dominant position and every woman is in a subordinate one ... (Walby 20).

She has famously described the composition of patriarchy- "Patriarchy is composed of six structures: the patriarchal mode of production, patriarchal relations in paid work, patriarchal relations in the state, male violence, patriarchal relations in sexuality, and patriarchal relations in cultural institutions..." (20). Walby's explanation of patriarchy gives us an overall picture of how women's exploitation is carried out in a patriarchal society.



When the exploitation of the garment workers of Bangladesh is considered, we can see all the six levels of patriarchy at play. Walby explains the structure of the patriarchal mode of production in terms of household economy where the housewives produce and the husbands expropriate the production (21). In case of garment workers who work for a capitalist industry, the workers are the producers whose work is undervalued whereas the factory owners, the foreign capitalists, the investors are the expropriators of profits. Walby's second level of patriarchy, patriarchal relations in paid work denotes that traditionally women have been kept away from "better forms of jobs" and relegated to jobs that are low skilled (21). Garment workers' work in the factory can be easily related to this category. The jobs of sewing, folding, ironing etc. to which the women garment workers are assigned are all low skilled jobs which pay very little. The third level which is patriarchal relations in the state means that the state is inherently patriarchal, as a result, its mode of economy i.e. capitalism is also patriarchal and hence, serves patriarchal agendas (21). In case of the garment workers, the garment factory which is a capitalist enterprise emerges as a patriarchal organization that dominates their behavior and movement through a set of stringent rules. Walby says that the fourth level which is male violence against women has been tolerated by the state by refraining from challenging it (21). Male violence against the women garment workers which can range from verbal to physical to sexual has been predominant in the garment industry but the state has taken no direct initiative to curb it. Walby describes the level of patriarchal relations in sexuality as the institutionalization of heterosexuality by patriarchy and making it the norm for all sexual individuals (21). In other words, patriarchy controls and dominates all people's including women's sexual subjectivity by

dictating their sexual preferences and suppressing the expression of their sexual desires.

Garment workers' sexual subjectivity is controlled by the patriarchal forces both within and outside the factory. The final structure which is the patriarchal relations in institutions has been described as a "set of institutions which create the representation of women within a patriarchal gaze in a variety of arenas, such as religions, education and the media" (21). We can extend this structure of patriarchy to our economic institutions including the garment industry.

From a Marxist standpoint, all of the three texts in discussion present pictures of workers' exploitation by capitalist enterprises which rely on patriarchal mores. Long working hours, meagre salary, lack of building safety regulation etc. are highlighted in these texts. In *Krush Kathe Konna*, Shaila gets back home late every night from her shift at the garment factory where she works because she is forced to do overtime to meet the deadlines despite her failing health. During one incident, one of her colleagues and friend at the factory Shamima had become overworked and extremely sick due to the daily hard work at the factory. However, she was not allowed to take leave and was forced to work through her illness. Shamima's body gave up as she threw up while working on a sewing machine. In the course of the novel, Shaila's colleagues take part in a protest against the factory management and the owners demanding their rights. They demand to be paid their pending salaries and overtime dues, for manageable working hours, respectful behaviour etc. A teary eyed but courageous Shaila recounts a horrible experience in a moving speech in front of the protesting workers where she and Shamima had been harassed by police officers. In a factory fire that indicates the lack of building safety regulation in the garments factories, one of the minor characters Benubala dies along with many nameless workers. In "Garments," Miss Bridgey who was sent to inspect the safety conditions and environment of the factory building in which Jesmin, Mala and Ruby worked was being set

up by the authorities who falsely claimed that their factory conditions were suitable for working by having the workers sing false praises of the building in front of Miss Bridget like that of Jesmin's- "This place is good. This place is okay. We love Sunnytex..." (Anam 4). An allude to the Rana Plaza tragedy was made which is the ultimate example of indifference towards workers' safety by the authority. Mala lost her brother and incurred permanent injuries to one of her legs in the tragedy. In *Krush Kathe Konna*, Nilufer recalls the horrible working conditions in the garments factory where she used to work-

The production manager of the garment factory we used to work for was a devil. The sewing machines were set up close to each other with very little space in between. In such a claustrophobic environment, we had to work under bright lights for hours. We used to get only two minutes for bathroom breaks and half an hour for lunch. For two hundred workers, there was allotment for only one bathroom, the cues in front of which were so large that we would fall sick holding our bladder. If anyone took more than two minutes to use the bathroom, they would lose portions of their salaries. Even worse, sometimes they would be beaten with a stick by the production manager so hard that they would almost faint. (Jahan 679- 680; My translation)

However, these characters being women, their professional role as garment workers keep them in a more vulnerable situation than their male counterparts. They are often victims of unwanted male gaze and are susceptible to being sexually exploited. That women have entered into a previously male dominated space and asserted their place there is threatening to the male ego. In "Garments," Jesmin is shown to be constantly on the alert lest her supervisor Jamal tries to molest her. In *Krush Kathe Konna*, Nilufer recalls that the production managers would proposition the young garment girls to sleep with them in exchange of overlooking the mistakes

in their work or poor performance. They would even threaten the girls with termination of their jobs if they declined to accept their proposals.

Feminists say that “patriarchy, as a transhistorical structure of domination, constitutes the family as the fundamental source of women’s oppression and as the key site for the colonization and the control of women’s bodies” (Feldman 1104). In line with this idea, Nasreen Jahan’s *Krush Kathe Konna* portrays the patriarchal family as a source of women’s oppression as opposed to the matriarchal family that provides women with support, sympathy and care. The protagonist Nilufer’s father has been painted as a typical male chauvinist and a misogynist. He physically and emotionally tortured Nilufer’s mother and his wife for not bearing him a male child. Nilufer’s mother had borne five daughters all of whom were scared of their father. Having had his desire for a male child killed with the birth of his fifth daughter, he would always be in a sour mood. He was extremely rude to his daughters and would lose his temper and beat them at the slightest of transgressions. Nilufer recounts that whenever her father would come home, he would bring with him a cloud of anxiety and gloom that would smother their playfulness. His absence from home signified freedom for his daughters. Nilufer’s father was so unsympathetic towards her, her mother and sisters that he left them without any financial compensations to remarry in the hopes of fathering a son. Nilufer and her sisters had to learn to fend for themselves very early in their lives. Nilufer’s older sister Saira married the first man who proposed to her in order to escape poverty. Nilufer and her younger sister Shaila had moved to Dhaka to find work and financially contribute to their family. Her mother, meanwhile had to sleep with a distant relative of theirs, Shaukat who would keep their family afloat in the tumultuous waves of financial crisis through his monetary contributions and guardianship. He also paid for the education of Nilufer’s younger sisters. After Nilufer’s mother died, she brought

her youngest sister Afsana to her house who was still a school goer which she shared with Shaila and an elderly woman who had been driven away by her son after he got married. This woman would look after Nilufer and her sisters as a mother and a guardian. She would cook and clean for them while Nilufer and Shaila would go out to work to feed the family. This family comprised of only women provides a stark contrast to the patriarchal family that Nilufer and her sisters had lived in under the supervision of their father. While the patriarchal family had been abusive to Nilufer and her mother and sisters, the new matriarchal family that she herself built with her sisters was a sanctuary of love, hope and support. Tahmima Anam's short story "Garments" also shows the family as a site of women's exploitation. Jesmin, one of the central characters was slapped by her husband Dulal when she tried to speak to him about his impotence. In Khandokar Masud Rana's *Garments Konnar Attokotha*, the lead Sonia was impregnated and left by her drug addict husband Rashu to raise their child alone.

In *Garments Konnar Attokotha*, Sonia and her family were ordered by the village court or shalish to leave the village both because of Sonia's romantic involvement with Shohag and her work at a garment factory. While her love affair was considered indecent and sinful, her involvement in the garment industry was seen as a more grave offense. Sonia was accused of spreading moral decay among the young girls of the village whom Sonia helped to get work in the industry. The villagers viewed garment work as morally questionable because of the widespread but misinformed association of garment work with prostitution. "In its present incarnation, the shalish is often seen as the arbiter of Islamic morality and justice and has come to play a significant role in judging the behavior of women" (1108). In fact, in some villages it has superseded the justice system. Hence, the shalish which is a micro level incarnate of

patriarchal religiosity had the authority to insult and ostracize a woman like Sonia over any action that they considered socially and religiously abhorrent.

### **Women's sexual subjectivity and sexual agency:**

Women's sexuality has been a topic of feminist authorship and scholarship for the longest time. Since the second wave feminism in the 1960s, women's sexual desires and fantasies started to get featured in literature penned by women. Feminist poet Maya Angelou's poems "Woman Me," "Phenomenal Woman" and "Seven Women's Blessed Assurance" present bold, confident women who with their beauty and sexuality draw men towards them. Angelou turns the pejorative colonial perception of women of color that they are "sexually aggressive" on its head by suggesting that they have the potential to be sexually assertive. Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is another example of a powerful intersection of racial and gender issues as shown in the skillful presentation of the clash between a black woman's sexual desires and sexual agency and patriarchal and colonial policing. Poets Adrienne Rich and Audre Lorde have portrayed lesbian relationships with vivaciousness and grace. Among the Bangladeshi feminist authors, Taslima Nasreen has been particularly noted for her brazen and blunt portrayal of women's sexuality and sexual agency. Her novels *Lojja* and *Ka* and her collection of essays *Nirbachito Column* unabashedly showcase women's sexual longings and sexual assertiveness.

The three texts under discussion, *Krush Kathe Konna*, *Garments Konnar Attokotha* and "Garments" also portray women's sexual subjectivity and agency. *Krush Kathe Konna's* protagonist Nilufer's free flowing, poetic narration encapsulates her sexual desires with a deep tint of passion, visceral oomph and a touch of spirituality-

If I had not seen Ranjan today, I would not have known that my desires centering a man are still latent within me. For years, I have had sexual encounters with men which were utterly bland and devoid of excitement. I lost my virginity at the age of twelve. I consider those times as bad memories and I try not to think about them at all. During the time I was working in a garment factory, a man from the slum once seized hold of me and I did not resist him. Finally, I am with Shayed. I have experienced such a periodic and weak feeling of lust with all of them that it passed the moment we disengaged. At least I am in a relationship with Shayed. Nevertheless, spare the first few times, whenever he touches me it feels so insipid and mild as though we are shaking hands. We love each other, we are sympathetic towards each other but our relationship lacks passion. Except Ranjan, there has not been another man who has been able to strike the deepest of cords within my heart that emanates passion. Ranjan is such an entity living within me that I will never want to kill. No matter how much I suffer on his account, I do not want to give up the dream of being with him. A human being without a dream is no better than a clock-work doll. I have been living a dreamless, loveless life for so long, the one who had sparked a passionate desire within me years ago and left, has come back to reignite that passion. So, I felt very nervous, I could not think straight about what he must have meant when he said he wanted to see me. (Jahan 680- 681; My translation)

Here, we can find instances of sexual self-efficacy and sexual self-reflection. Nilufer is shown to critically reflect on her choices of sexual partners and her experiences with them. She says that she did not enjoy her encounters with any of the men she has been with and that she only engaged in sexual activity with them out of need and not passion. She terms her sexual

experiences as ‘bland’ and ‘devoid of excitement.’ This is an example of sexual self-reflection which is the fifth element of sexual subjectivity.

Nilufer seems to be overcome with passion when she talks about her childhood sweetheart Ranjan. She says that he is the only man with whom she longs to be with and feels an intense desire for. Hence, when Ranjan asks her to meet with him, she feels nervous and begins to ponder the possibilities of this meeting. Her wonderings about the outcome of the meeting take a surreal turn as it transcends the mundane,

Why did he call me? Are we going to communicate in the language of mortals? All my deep rooted desires have started to surface and overflow. Where are we going to go from New Market? Is a strange darkness going to descend around us? In that darkness, a flaming sphere is going to appear, standing upon which I will reveal my face to him holding a candle light in my hand. Is Ranjan going to touch the wrinkles on my dark, desirous face with his fantastic fingers? (680-681; My translation)

Perhaps, Nilufer is confused about whether she will be able to handle being in a relationship with Ranjan despite her intense longing for him. In this, it is an example of sexual self-efficacy, the fourth element of sexual subjectivity.

In “Garments,” after Jesmin’s turn with her shared husband Dulal ended badly due to her maltreatment by him for mentioning his erectile dysfunction to him, it was Ruby’s turn. Although Jesmin could not have a healthy and happy marriage, her marriage certainly brought her a significant degree of freedom by allowing her to have a room of her own. Her room was her personal space where she could explore different facets of herself and her life. In the confines of her room, Jesmin wore the thong she stole from her factory and looked at her reflection



intently in the puddle of water on the muddy floor of her room. She eyed the silhouettes of her body and saw “a body encased, legs and hips and buttocks” (Anam 13) that was full of desires but those desires have supposedly been locked up. She viewed her body as being “closed up” which could be an indication of her having mastered control over her own body and its urges. She felt liberated at this thought. She was no longer dependent on a man for her financial expenses or her protection, she was self-sufficient. The use of a man for her was only in his name- it was over the moment she got married to Dulal and used her relationship with him to rent a room. So now, she was a “garments girl with a room and a closed-up body that belongs only to herself” (13). This could be viewed as an example of sexual body-esteem or having a positive perception of one’s own body which is the first element of sexual subjectivity.

In *Krush Kathe Konna*, Shaila exercised her sexual agency when she chose to have sex with a police constable in order to free herself and Nilufer from the harassment of the police. She used her sexual attractiveness to her and her sister’s advantage in the face of potential danger. One night Nilufer and she were stopped by the police while they were trying to flee their house in the slum because they could not pay the rent as they had not received their salaries from the factory. The police who were on their regular late night duty stopped them deeming their movement suspicious and threatened with arrest. Shaila willfully offered herself to the younger police constable and went with him to a nearby house. As a worried Nilufer called on her, Shaila reassured her by holding out one of her palms and telling her that she would be coming back soon.

In “Garments,” Jesmin and Ruby’s sexual desirability avails them rented rooms to live in. As these two garment workers were unmarried, they could not rent rooms because the land lords were wary of renting their rooms to unmarried girls in the fear of inciting immoral activities.

Mala who proposed that Jesmin, Ruby and she should marry Dulal together was already in a relationship with him. She had a limp in her walk and had a lower social status compared to him. Despite that Dulal agreed to marry Mala because she had paid him in cash and promised that she could convince two of her colleagues to marry him. Although Dulal was impotent, he wanted to marry three women at the same time because his lust for women had not left him. He also believed that at least one of his wives could “cure” his condition because Mala who was desperate to marry him believing that no other man would had suggested so to him. Initially, Mala approached Jesmin with her plan. Once Jesmin agreed to be a part of it, Mala told her that they needed to find another attractive girl who would be willing to join them. Mala and Jesmin screened through “all the unmarried girls” (1) and Jesmin decided upon Ruby. Jesmin’s preference for the “dark, but pretty” (2) Ruby with “small white teeth and filmy eyes” (2) shows Jesmin’s sexual attraction for Ruby.

In *Garments Konnar Attokotha*, Sonia went to a secluded place with Rashu and had intimate relations with him during the factory’s Cox’s Bazar trip. She also decided to marry him on her own accord thinking that he would be a good match for her because they both were garment workers. These decisions show her sexual agency.

Feminist poet and author Adrienne Rich argues in her 1980 essay “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence” that heterosexuality is not a natural human instinct. Rather it is a formidable institution imposed upon women by the patriarchy to exert its so called superiority. She says that through this institution men gain “physical, economical and emotional access” (qtd. in Rich 647) to women. Rich urges heterosexual feminists to look at heterosexuality as a political institution which puts women in a subordinate position to men and asks them to challenge this practice. She challenges the view that women are dependent on men for sexual and

psychological fulfillment. By viewing lesbian relationships as an extension of feminism, she calls for a deeper comprehension of the concept of lesbianism. She argues that it is necessary to make a distinction between lesbian continuum and lesbian existence. Lesbian existence “is the sense of self of women bonded primarily to women who are sexually and emotionally independent of men” (Caplan 45). On the other hand, lesbian continuum entails a range of womanly experiences- it goes beyond genital sex between women and branches out to “the sharing of inner life, the bonding against male tyranny, practical and political support, marriage resistance, female support networks and communities” (45). Rich is hopeful that once a better understanding of lesbianism is established, the sexual boundaries of heteronormativity that shackle women would be lifted and women could experience the “erotic” in the female sense.

Tahmima Anam’s “Garments” presents lesbian desires as a way of establishing female bonding and as a way out of and a resistance against oppressive male sexual domination. In other words, it paints a small scale picture of the lesbian continuum. In the story, Jesmin and Ruby’s interactions are portrayed in an erotic light by highlighting the stimulation of the senses and evoking the imagery of sumptuous food that is an allusion to latent sexual desires. When Jesmin and Ruby boarded the same rickshaw to go the Kazi’s office and Jesmin put her arm around Ruby’s shoulder in a friendly manner, she “notices she smells very nice, like the biscuit factory she passes on the way to Sunnytex” (Anam 5). On the night of the wedding, when Jesmin and Ruby were sleeping on the floor together, Jesmin projected her desire for sexual intimacy onto Ruby. She noticed her bodily movements, moved closer to her in order to take in the familiar, delicious smell of the biscuit factory and made physical contact with her by putting a strand of her hair in her mouth mirroring the act of oral stimulation. At the end of the story, when Jesmin was alone in her room, she again smelled the beautiful fragrance of the biscuit factory. This

could be an allusion of Jesmin's fantasy of being alone in her room with Ruby and having sexual contact with her.

However, in *Krush Kathe Konna*, Rich's idea that lesbian relationships are a path to establishing and strengthening bonds between women is subverted because here the sexual acts between Nilufer and her sister Saira are presented as a form of abuse. Nilufer's older sister Saira who was in her late teens would often force the prepubescent Nilufer to perform sexual acts on her. She would also probe Nilufer's body and engage with it sexually. While a hormone driven Saira would derive extreme pleasure from this incestuous engagement, Nilufer thought of her encounters with Saira as torturous and scary but she was not able to protest against it. Saira was physically stronger than her and she feared that protesting against Saira would anger her and put her in greater danger. Saira's portrayal as an abuser challenges the common feminist view that only holds men as capable of and responsible for sexual abuse. Conversely, one can argue that Nilufer's aversion and utter disinterest in the sexual experiences she had with Saira was due to its incestuous nature. Perhaps Saira being her sister made these encounters painful and horrendous. The anxiety that pervaded Nilufer's narration when she recounted her sexual encounters with Saira resonated with the dread and melancholy presented by Edgar Allan Poe in his short story "The Fall of the House of Usher." In this story, Roderick Usher, the owner of the house of Usher, an old mansion of the Usher family was in a constant state of anxiety while his twin sister Madeline had a tendency to go into cataleptic shocks. An incestuous relationship was hinted at and the cause of the various physical and mental illnesses that invaded their bodies was suggested to be the result of an incestuous relationship between their ancestors carried forward by their parents.

In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir characterizes lesbian relationships as a sign of female puberty. She says that in their adolescence, women often engage in sexual behaviour with other women which is nothing but a part of the process of growing into maturity. She considers homosexuality as a choice and not a natural instinct. She wrote, “Homosexuality is no more a deliberate perversion than a fatal curse” (de Beauvoir 436). De Beauvoir also believes that a lesbian woman even while engaging in lesbian practices wishes to be “a normal and complete woman,” (436) that is, she desires to have sex with a man and thus conform to the notion of being a complete woman as dictated by social norms. In the case of Saira from *Krush Kathe Konna* who as an adolescent engaged in sexual play with her younger sister Nilufer, de Beauvoir’s argument seems applicable. Saira’s involvement with Nilufer could be looked at as a part of her growing up. It is perhaps related to her discovery of sexual intercourse and wanting to emulate it with her sister for lack of a man.

### **Sisterhood:**

In all the three texts, sisterhood has emerged as a common theme. In *Krush Kathe Konna*, sisterhood is shown to be shared by actual sisters. Sisters Nilufer and Shaila were very close. They came to Dhaka from their village together in search of work and together they started work in a garment factory. Although later Nilufer left work at the factory, Shaila and she used to live together in the same house and both shared the household expenses. They provided for their younger sister Afsana and a female guardian whom they called “khala” (aunt) for managing their household. Both sisters deeply cared for each other and the others in their family. They stood by each other during tough times and consoled and encouraged each other to fight through those periods. However, eventually their sisterhood got disrupted as Nilufer gradually became distant from Shaila because she was pining for her childhood sweetheart Ranjan who was a married man

and superior to her in social status and Shaila did not approve of this. After Shaila got married and left the house, their sisterhood became permanently scarred as Nilufer was left to take care of Afsana and khala alone without Shaila's support. Here, we can see the breakdown of sisterhood because of the intrusion of heterosexual desires.

In "Garments," capitalizing on sisterhood, Mala manipulated her close friend and colleague Jesmin to marry her lover Dulal. Mala also convinced Jesmin to manipulate a younger and pretty worker Ruby by behaving and giving advice like an older sister and a well-wisher to join hands with Mala and Jesmin and enter a joint marriage. Here, sisterhood is advanced in order to incite sexual manipulation to achieve a shared goal.

In *Garments Konnar Attokotha*, sisterhood is represented through the bond of friendship. Sonia had a few close friends in her village- Jhumka, Mili and Rita. They were bosom friends who always looked out for each other. They encouraged Sonia to start a relationship with Shohag who was the archetype of the pure hearted and honest village boy ("gramer shohoj shorol chhele") and hence, an eligible bachelor. Here, sisterhood aids the blossoming of a heterosexual relationship.

### **Social stigma:**

Social stigma surrounding the profession of garment factory work plagues the lives of the characters of the two novels and the short story under discussion. Since the beginning of the garment industry in Bangladesh, the garment girls have been generally considered as "loose women," with no moral integrity and who sport their sexual desirability to gain favours. Their status has become consonant with that of prostitutes. Such a degrading view of women garment workers has sprung from the notion that these women have disregarded the norms of purdah and

infiltrated the male spaces of the workplace and the streets. Although today garment women are seen as valuable assets to the country's economy for their efforts in the establishment and the flourishing of the garment industry, their bad reputation still has not left them. As a result, garment workers are stigmatized by different sectors of society.

In *Krush Kathe Konna*, Shaila and Shamima faced terrible insults from the police who were on duty late at night for being on the street in the late hours of the night. Shaila and Shamima were returning from the factory after a late shift. While on the way, they were stopped by the police and interrogated. The police asked them where they were coming from at that late hour. When they told the police that they were garment workers who were doing overtime at the factory, one police officer said, "No decent woman is found on the streets at 2 o'clock at night" (Jahan 640). They also asked for proof that they worked in a garment factory. Shaila took out her identity card and showed it to the police. But Shamima like countless other garment workers who had been tricked by the authorities into entering jobs that had no security, had not received an identity card and hence, she failed to prove to the police that she was a garment worker. "The police officer held Shamima by the hand and called her a prostitute (bessha)!" (640). Then the police asked Shaila to leave and tried to drag Shamima to the nearby station. Shamima was dumbfounded and distraught at this mishap and started to cry. Shaila was infuriated by the police's injustice towards Shamima and threw a piece of brick at the officer who was taking Shamima away. The officer chucked Shamima on the street and came running to Shaila. He tried to choke Shaila with his hands for this transgression but was interrupted by two other officers. Later, they were set free. After this incident, a depressed Shamima told Shaila that she received such slander even in the security of her home. She said that every night when she returned home, her father would ask her, "How many men did you fuck today?" (641). While recounting this

horrible incident to Nilufer, Shaila breaks down in tears and says, “Bubu (older sister), they called us prostitutes! Are we prostitutes? What a shameful life we are living. I spit on it!” (640).

In the novel, Nilufer recounts many stories from her past life when she worked in a garment factory and lived in a slum with other garment girls. She says that the “stigma” of being a garment worker had even intruded into conjugal relationships ruining many marriages and subjecting women to spousal violence. She recalls the story of a garment worker who was her neighbor and had a good relation with Shaila and her. The girl after losing all her assets in a natural catastrophe in a coastal area of Bangladesh, had come to Dhaka and worked extremely hard to be able to save some money following which she fell in love with a man and got married to him. Within three months of the marriage, the husband who greedily took her money left her accusing her of being a bad woman. Because of her overtime in the factory, she often used to come home late. Once she had told her husband that she would come home at ten o’clock at night but had to spend the whole night at the factory which infuriated him. After she came home, he beat her mercilessly and abused her. He asked her, “Where were you the whole night, bitch? Whom did you sleep with?” (687). Nilufer added that pregnant garment workers had even worse fates when it came to spousal mistreatment. Besides losing their credibility at work because of pregnancy related physical weaknesses, the pregnant workers incurred physical violence from their doubtful and jealous husbands who would even question the paternity of the child that their wives were carrying- “Tell the truth, whose child is this?” (687).

In *Garments Konnar Attokotha*, Sonia and her family were humiliated and punished by the village court because of Sonia’s involvement in the garment industry. Sonia was accused of losing her morality because she took up work in a garment factory. She was also accused of morally corrupting other village girls by encouraging and helping them to get work in the



garment industry. As punishment for this “crime,” the villagers ordered Sonia’s father to take his family and leave the village in the following morning. Being unable to cope with this insult and in a state of shock, Sonia’s father passed away that night. A heartbroken Sonia left the village for Dhaka the following morning with her mother and brother.

### **Marriage as a way out:**

In all of the texts we have looked at, marriage has been posed as a remedy to various problematic situations. For Jesmin from “Garments,” marriage was the key to a home. Because she was unmarried, she was not allowed to rent a room on her own. Issues of modesty and morality barred her from having a place of her own. She was so desperate to rent a room that she agreed to share a husband with her friend Mala and colleague Ruby. In addition to that, she saw marriage as a way out of many “girl problems.” She believed that marriage could save a woman from unwanted attention from other men. In her own words,

In the factory, if Jamal put you in ironing, which is the easiest job, or if he says, take a few extra minutes for lunch, you can finish after hours and get an overtime, you can say, but my husband is waiting, and then you won’t have to feel his breath like a spider on your shoulder later that night when the current goes out and you’re still in the factory finishing up a sleeve. Everything is better if you’re married. (Anam 5)

It is interesting to note how wishful thinking of working class women remain similar. Let us have a look at a 19<sup>th</sup> century English novel at this point. Growing up in a working class family, Mary, the protagonist of Elizabeth Gaskell’s novel *Mary Barton* believed that marrying a wealthy man would allow her to escape poverty and ease into a life of wealth and luxury. To this end, Mary refused the marriage proposal of Jem Wilson who came from a working class family

as hers in order to gain the affections of Harry Carson who was the son of a wealthy mill owner. Mary thought that by marrying Carson, she would have a comfortable life for herself and her father John Barton. Like Mary, Nilufer from *Krush Kathe Konna* also saw marriage was a way to have a “well-settled” life. She thought that marriage to a man who earned well could put her financial difficulties to rest, or at least allow her to divide and minimize her stress. Therefore, she always nagged her lover Shayed to get a job and marry her.

In *Garments Konnar Attokotha*, Sonia married Rashu to challenge the bad reputation of a “garments girl” attached to her name. After her lover Shohag falsely accused her of cheating on him with a garment worker and broke off their relationship, Sonia pleaded with him to reconsider their relationship but to no fruitful result. In the meantime, Sonia’s father died out of heartbreak after he had been asked to leave the village with his family by the shalish or village court because they deemed Sonia’s love affair with the village boy Shohag unacceptable. They also believed that Sonia’s work in the garment factory had morally corrupted her and that she was spreading this corruption onto other village girls whom she had lured to the city to work in the factory. As a result, Sonia went into depression and found Rashu’s company soothing. Rashu worked in the same garment factory as her. After realizing Rashu’s romantic interest in her, Sonia also felt drawn towards him. She decided to marry Rashu and rationalized her decision thus- “If my life has taken such a tragic turn because of working in the garment industry, then it is only fair that I marry someone from this industry” (Rana 51, My translation). She thought that marrying Rashu would be a good decision because they were compatible. Also, she wanted to challenge the idea that garments girls were not marriage material. Her decision could be looked at as a retaliation against all those who question the morality of women garment workers and slander them rendering them unworthy of marriage.

## **Migration:**

Migration is another common theme in the three texts. Jesmin from “Garments,” Nilufer from *Krush Kathe Konna* and Sonia from *Garments Konnar Attokotha*- all had to migrate from their native villages to Dhaka city in order to get employment in the garment industry. However, the circumstances under which each of these characters took part in migration differed from each other.

Jesmin was forced to leave her village by the village court or shalish. She was accused of enticing a married man and leading him astray. After the accusation was proved, she was put in a hut where she was tortured and humiliated by the authority figures comprising the shalish and the man with whom she had the affair. The patriarchal nature of the village’s societal structure only rendered the teenage Jesmin guilty- the man who was older than Jesmin and her teacher was exempted from punishment although it was he who started this affair. Afterwards, Jesmin was ordered to leave the village and never come back. A hurt and distressed Jesmin migrated to Dhaka leaving her family behind in the hopes of finding a job at a garment factory through Kulsum who was her village acquaintance and a garment worker and to move away from the humiliation and agony she suffered in the village.

Nilufer along with her sister Shaila migrated to Dhaka in order to fight poverty. Their father had left their mother to marry another woman which put them in acute financial distress. Although immediately after their father left them, a distant relative of theirs provided for their subsistence for a while, he too left them on their own when he got married which shoved them into poverty all over again. After moving to Dhaka, both Nilufer and Shaila sought jobs at a garment factory so that they could earn and provide financial assistance to their family in the village.

Sonia's father was a poor rickshaw puller who could barely make ends meet. Seeing her family in distress, Sonia decided to help out by taking up a job at a garment factory. Although Sonia and her family had concerns about the environment of the garment factories because women worked there alongside men, her friend Rita's brother Shahin who also aspired to work in the garment industry convinced her to seek employment in the industry by assuring her that the environment of the factories was safe for women.

In all the three texts, migration was depicted as a process of transition from innocence to maturity. The villages which these characters hailed from were painted as idyllic settings where people were "shadamoner" or simple minded. The characters themselves were in their adolescence still untouched by maturity. Their migration to the city, a place emblematic of maturity and adulthood, brought significant changes in their characters. Through their journey from the country to the city, these characters gained maturity of thought and attitude. They also matured sexually through this journey. From a reckless and emotionally driven teenager, Jesmin from "Garments" matured into a smart and calculative adult who managed to find herself a place to live despite the obstacle she faced from her landlord who initially refused to rent his room to her because of her unmarried status. She also learned to take control of her body and sexuality after leaving her village and settling in Dhaka. As a young girl in her village, Sonia from *Garments Konnar Attokotha* was naïve and unaware of life's various twists and turns. After her migration to Dhaka and her exposure to a more mature environment, she learnt to accept the tragedies of life in the form of unrequited love, unrealized dreams and failed marriage. Sonia also reached sexual maturity after she met Rashu who was also a garment worker and was physically intimate with him. While in the village, Nilufer from *Krush Kathe Konna* was an innocent little girl who blindly trusted a predator and fell into the abyss of sexual abuse. After

moving to Dhaka and having worked at a garment factory that opened her eyes to the fact that people were always looking to exploit others for their gain, she turned into a cautious and mature woman who knew how to protect herself from predatory behaviour. Also, she took charge of her sexuality by starting to make conscious choices when it came to being physically intimate with men.

### **Working class novels and sexuality:**

Carolyn Whitson in her article titled “The Sexual Boundaries of Race and Class in Working Class Novels: Marrying up and Living it Down/ Marrying Down and Living it Up” defines working class novels as those novels that deal with working class issues such as “poverty, violence, illness, oppression, struggle” (Whitson 101)<sup>2</sup> etc. *Krush Kathe Konna* and *Garments Konnar Attokotha* can be looked at as working class novels because they talk about the women garment factory workers of Bangladesh and their plight. However, the purpose of Whitson’s article is to look at “sexuality and sexual behaviours as classed” (102) based on working class parameters. In the article, she points out a few characteristics of working class novels that hold sex and sexuality as primary themes. In this section, I will discuss *Krush Kathe Konna* and *Garments Konnar Attokotha* as working class novels on the basis of the characteristics presented in this article since these two novels also have sex and sexuality as important themes.

Whitson says, “In a working class novel with a primary character or narrator, a sexual relationship is used to say something about the choices or desires of that character. A working class novel with a focal character/ narrator is a story of a quest for upward mobility” (102).

---

<sup>2</sup> Carolyn Whitson. “The Sexual Boundaries of Race and Class in Working Class Novels: Marrying up and Living it Down/ Marrying Down and Living it Up.” p. 101.

According to Whitson, the person/ persons with whom the character/ narrator has a sexual relationship with will be the barometer of his desire because of that person's/ those persons' belongingness to the upper classes. In *Krush Kathe Konna*, Nilufer, a former garment worker who had been slowly trying to improve her condition through college education and working at a local newspaper as an assistant editor wanted to marry Shayed who was a middle classman to ensure that her mission for upward mobility was successfully executed. She kept insisting that Shayed look for a job so that they could get married soon. Her goal of marrying a middle class employed man was to provide her with a well-settled life allowing her to realize her dream of upward mobility.

Whitson mentions in the article that a cross-class relationship becomes “an impediment, a stalling out or a call back to class solidarity” (102). In *Garments Konnar Attokotha*, Sonia whose father was a poor rickshaw driver entered a relationship with Shohag whose family was better-off compared to Sonia's. The relationship progressed smoothly until Sonia's decision to go to the city and work in a garment factory created a distance between the two lovers. The relationship ended when Shohag accused Sonia of cheating on him with a coworker. Shohag in the heat of the moment, was quick to blame Sonia's profession as a garment worker for her moral degradation. After Shohag severed all romantic ties with Sonia, she went into the arms of Rashu, a fellow garment worker thus establishing class solidarity.

Whitson says that in working class novels, the cross-class romance is plagued by the lovers' inability to see each other as separate from their classes. “[T]he two involved can never get beyond the issues of class to appreciate the beloved for himself or herself” (109). In *Garments Konna rAttokotha*, Sonia continually mentioned her status as the daughter of a poor rickshaw driver which placed her with the working class demographic. Although Sonia was

accepting of her position in society and content with her life, she did worry that her relationship with Shohag might not work out because of their class difference. Since the beginning of her relationship with Shohag, she was well-aware of the potential failure of a cross-class romance. Her doubt turned into reality when Shohag ended their relationship. Although the primary impetus for the break-up was Sonia's supposed infidelity, Shohag blamed her work in the garment industry as having a catalytic effect on her moral decay that prompted her to engage in an affair. Since it was Sonia's working class status that pushed her to take up work in a garment factory, one can argue Shohag was implicitly blaming her class for her supposed immorality.

Whitson has observed that in many working class novels with a feminist agenda, class issues are intermingling with women's issues. She opines that in these novels a lesson about the relationship between class and gender oppression comes through. This relationship is that class struggles due to economic oppression worsens women's oppression. She gives the example of Marge Piercy's novel *Braided Lives* where three women are shown having abortions. The women being extremely poor did not have the resources to bring up a child. Also, one of the women who had procured a well-paying job was unwilling to leave the job to bring up the child thinking that it would relegate her to the poverty that she had been desperately trying to break out of. The women did not have the money to get safe abortions which posed a great threat to their health- one of the characters even died because of a botched abortion. In none of the cases, the husbands or boyfriends who caused the pregnancy, paid for the abortions because all the abortions were done without the knowledge of the fathers. The women were either scared that their partners would leave them if they found out about the pregnancy or would disapprove of the abortion (110). Thus an unwanted pregnancy became a bane for these women who were both struggling against poverty and to maintain a relationship with their respective partners. In *Krush*

*Kathe Konna*, Shamima, a garment worker and Shaila's colleague faced a similar predicament. Her social class that had launched her into a life of poverty and work related stigma rendered her vulnerable to sexual exploitation. Shamima became pregnant after a misguided dalliance with a male relative of one of her employers at the factory after a psychological breakdown due to continually being referred to and viewed as a prostitute both at home and outside. The man upon receiving the news of Shamima's pregnancy left her without a word. As a result, Shamima had no choice but to abort her baby. But Shamima's family who could barely make ends meet did not have the financial ability to procure a safe abortion for her. Shamima's mother took her to a cheap facility to get the abortion. The inexperienced hands that performed her abortion caused her to bleed profusely. But her family who were overcome with shame due to their daughter's misconduct, did not make any arrangements for money to take her to the hospital to stop her bleeding. In fact, their fear of losing face in front of the society had made them so indifferent about her life and well-being that they only sent Shamima's brother-in-law to get pain killers for her so that she would stop crying out in pain.

The eighteenth century which saw profusion in industries in the west with the arrival of the industrial revolution, also paved the way for proliferation of social novels which touched upon the lives of the working class. Charlotte Bronte's novel *Shirley* offers a take on the working class population who worked in a mill through the eyes of the bourgeois class that owned that mill. Robert Moore, a local mill owner ruthlessly sacked a number of his workers apparently being uncaring of their consequent poverty to derive profits from the mill which was in extreme debt. In the beginning of the novel, Robert was waiting for the delivery of new machinery that would save him some additional labour. But angry mill workers destroyed the machinery while it was on its way and gave rise to a labour unrest increasing business difficulties for Robert. Robert



was routinely being threatened on account of laying off workers and pushing them towards impoverishment. The labour unrest reached its peak one night when a group of angry mob comprising of labours attacked Robert's mill which was being witnessed by the two central female characters Shirley and Caroline. To the relief of Shirley and Caroline, Robert was able to defeat the attackers. For the onlookers, these rioters were nothing short of barbarians. They failed to see through their angry demeanors the sheer desperation and helplessness which had led them towards creating an unrest as such. In fact, these rioters had been portrayed as lazy workers who on the excuse of losing their jobs were getting drunk and inciting others to join the unrest in order to fight their former employer. In contrast to the rioters, the workers who had accepted their fates when they were laid off and had not joined the unrest were shown as good employees and good people. Perhaps, the reason that our society terms garment workers like Sonia from *Garments Konnar Attokotha* and Shamima from *Krush Kathe Konnaas* as bad women because they are unable to empathize with them like the bourgeois onlookers from *Shirley*. Perhaps, our society is not capable of realizing the desperation on the face of which Shaila from *Krush Kathe Konna* decided to sleep with a police officer.

In this chapter, we have looked at the literary representations of garment workers' sexual suppression, exploitation, agency and subjectivity. In the following chapter, we will look at the same topics through a social sciences perspective.

### *Chapter 3*

#### *Women Garment Workers and Sexuality: A Social Sciences Perspective*

My reading of the social sciences discourses on the topic of women garment workers' sexuality reveals roughly four kinds of narratives. The first narrative is about the sexual suppression/ domination of women garment workers. The conservative and patriarchal society of Bangladesh believes in the strict segregation of spaces or purdah between men and women which denotes streets and workplaces as "male spaces" and the house as a "female space." As a result, in the 1980s, when the women garment workers started to be seen on the streets of Dhaka and Chittagong in the early mornings and late hours of the night, it was met with a lot of backlash from conservative sectors which accused the women of insulting the norm of purdah. Also, the widespread Islamic mindset of the country considered women's sexuality to be dangerous that had the potential for causing disruption to the normatively structured and gendered society of Bangladesh. The women garment workers who travelled the streets without a male guardian in the late hours of the night were misconstrued and seen as flaunting their sexuality through their new found "freedom" of coming out into "male spaces." They were spitefully labeled as "prostitutes" which saddened and hurt many workers and they wanted to change this perspective by "renegotiating purdah" in their workplaces. This narrative also shows garment women as meek, docile characters who submit themselves social control. They are "disciplined" by patriarchal forces acting within the framework of the factory through strict rules and regulations. These factory rules and regulations deflect the bad reputation of the factory as a place of "free mixing" between the sexes. The factory owners and management, as though mirroring patriarchy, reinforce the system of purdah or segregation between the sexes by establishing separate working spaces for men and women.

The second kind of narrative regarding garment women's sexuality is about the sexual exploitation of garment workers. While the first narrative holds the garment workers as perpetrators who with their immorality and sexuality have corrupted the society, the second narrative features these women as voiceless victims who are susceptible to the male gaze and possible sexual violence.

The third narrative is about women garment workers' sexual agency. This narrative which talks about women who use their sexual attractiveness to both their personal and professional advantage is incomplete. There are two major problems with this narrative. Firstly, we never hear from the women under discussion themselves. Other workers' testimonies are used to situate these women in the midst of the broader discussions surrounding the garment workers' plight and agency. As a result, we only have second or third hand accounts and a few bland statistics about these women. Social scientists have paid very little attention to this narrative which could have blossomed in its own right and created an interesting area of research. Secondly, unlike literature, this narrative presents only the negative aspects of garment women's sexual agency. Because of the general taboo surrounding women's sexuality in our society, garment women's sexual freedom is considered offensive. The workers are often likened to prostitutes. In the social sciences narratives, the majority of women workers are shown to be horrified by this suggestion and protesting it. They are seen lamenting this as because of a handful of workers who engage in "immodest" behavior with the supervisors and other men in the factory, all of their reputations have been tarnished. They have also declared that they avoid contact with the workers who have been rumored to be involved in relationships with the supervisors or the male colleagues. (Dannecker 137-138). Some workers have acknowledged that even if a worker is not directly involved in sexual behaviour with men in authority, simply

being accepting of the non-sexual/ privileging advances made by the authority works to influence upward mobility in the factory hierarchy. Few of them have admitted to being complacent to romantic overtures made by the factory supervisors and other male colleagues to this end.

The fourth kind of narrative is about garment workers' sexual subjectivity. Compared to the literary narrative about garment workers' sexual subjectivity, this narrative has very little to offer because the social sciences have not put much emphasis on it as an area of research. Like the previously mentioned sexual agency narrative in the social sciences discourses, this narrative also becomes visible to us only through second hand accounts. The second hand accounts of some workers' reciprocity towards the romantic gestures made by their male bosses or colleagues can be seen as an instance of sexual subjectivity.

The following is an in-depth discussion of the above mentioned social sciences narratives about women garment workers' sexuality.

### **Sexual suppression of garment workers:**

Naila Kabeer says, "There is no doubt that women's entry into factory employment represented a radical departure from the long-established norms of female seclusion in Bangladesh. This was evident in the great deal of public attention, generally not very favorable, that it evoked" (Kabeer 82). Society denounced the garment workers for "the breakdown of the 'natural' principle of sexually segregated spheres" (82). Islamic scholars wrote polemics suggesting that women's employment in the garment industry not only exacerbates the male unemployment problem in the country but also upsets the "moral order" of society- "Women and men sit in the same working place face to face. Whatever liberal arguments are put forward in

favour of this arrangement, in reality the close proximity of the opposite sexes arouses lust and love for each other which on many occasions lead to immoral and scandalous affairs between them” (qtd. in Kabeer 82-83).

Again, “[r]eligious meetings were frequently organized within the vicinity of the factories, ... during which time various mullahs used loudspeakers to denounce the behaviour of the ‘bold’ garment women who moved around the streets of Dhaka unaccompanied by any male guardian” (83). However,

[a]lthough *wazmahfils* (religious lectures, often circulated as cassette and other recordings) condemning ‘garment girls’ circulated widely, for the most part, the social language of disapproval was not explicitly religious. The policing of women’s bodies in public spaces was not carried out not by religious authorities but by neighbourhood thugs, policemen and male passers-by with a strong sense of patriarchal entitlement.” (Siddiqi 7)

The assumption that garment factory women were immoral was so widespread that the term ‘garment girl’ started to circulate with degrading meanings to it. In an interview with Naila Kabeer, one garment worker exemplified this phenomenon thus: “People say that garment girls are bad. When we come out of the factory in a group, the men say, ‘Here come the garment girls. Pick the one you want’” (Kabeer 83).

Another interviewee of Naila Kabeer, Mumtaz remarked on how their long working hours confirmed people’s misconceptions about garment workers- “People talk, they see the women returning home in this area, they think, what does she do, she is just like a, you know...

[prostitute]... coming home at ten o'clock at night, sometimes she doesn't come home all night, so they start having doubts" (84).

Kabeer adds that "[t]his general disapproval was constantly fueled by rumors about 'incidents' of a sexual nature relating to garment girls, spread by word-of-mouth or reported in newspaper articles, and often assuming a very exaggerated form" (84). She gives the example of a garment factory in Narayanganj where one hundred and fifty girls were rumored to be pregnant. Kabeer's informant heard this story from a neighbour who used to work in the factory. The informant lamented, "That is why, people say such terrible things about garment factories" (84).

Under such attacks, most garment factory women felt threatened and were deeply hurt. They wanted to recreate the factory as a proper place for them to be in and remake their image as chaste women by reintroducing the element of purdah in their lives and workplace. "They did so with heads covered, gazes lowered, insistent on their 'good woman' status" (Siddiqi 7). Dina Siddiqi says that these efforts of the first generation of garment women which were supposed to testify for their propriety and modesty "were intimately bound up with secular notions of respectability" (7) although they are inextricable from religious beliefs.

Anthropologist Talal Asad in his book *Formations of the Secular*, has talked about various ritual practices prevalent in the medieval Christian communities to discipline their bodies and minds so that they can attain the desired mental state and disposition to become prepared for pursuing a 'higher calling.' The garment women's adoption of purdah reintroduces them as "self-regulating subjects" whose self-disciplining like the Christian monks could be marked on their bodies. Their embodiment of disciplining elevated their position in the society by vouching for their 'purity' and changing people's mind about them. As a study conducted by Anthropologist

Samia Huq shows, unlike the first generation of woman garment workers who were primarily concerned with rebranding their image as chaste and moral figures, today's religious garment workers are interested in "cultivating a pure 'mon' (mind, heart, mentality)" through a more textualized education of Islam through *Talims* and *Tafsirs* rather than simply fulfilling ritualistic duties of Islam which have become increasingly common in Bangladesh with the recent rise of religiosity in the country. However, their invocation of the 'purdah of the mind and the eyes' can be equated with the disciplining of the mind and body of the earlier garment workers (8).

The workers employed various tactics in redefining purdah within the bounds of the factory. They adhered to the strict rules and regulations involving separation between male and female spaces as enforced by the factory management. In their redefinition, "...certain rules and norms of purdah [got] selectively redefined" (Dannecker 138). In this redefined system of purdah, "the fact that women work[ed] together with men [was] compatible with the norms, [but] loitering and talking with men [were] not" (138). Also, within this mode of purdah, the so called good women went home right after work while bad women lingered after work. Such a line of redefinition allowed the workers to join the garment industry despite disapproval from parents and the society in general (138). The workers also sought to desexualize their interactions with male colleagues and authority figures through the use of fictive kinship terms which could also be read as a redefinition of the purdah norms. They would address their male colleagues or supervisors as "bhai" or brother to "deemphasize the sexual connotations of male-female proximity" (qtd. in Dannecker 138). The workers also monitored other workers' behavior and dissuaded them from engaging in inappropriate interactions with the opposite sex and thus constituting a "disciplinary regime" within the factory.

The factory owners and management fused the capitalist intent of profit making with patriarchal mores in order to dominate the young girls and women coming to work in their factory. They regulated their sexuality by setting up strict rules of segregation between the sexes which was actually a way for them to ensure disturbance free work zones to yield more profits. The rules were also set up to provide “cultural assurance to families concerned with the security and reputation of potential factory workers” (Siddiqi 6). The owners and the management actively designed the factory environment in a way that would allow very limited contact between male and female workers so that they could counter the bad reputation the factories had incurred. Their rules were meant to attract a “reliable (and pliable) labor force” (6) consisting of women from their own village of origin and others.

Petra Dannecker in her book *Between Conformity and Resistance* says that “sexuality is used in the factory for the production of gender inequality” (143). She says that men proceed to control women through harassment. Women’s attempts to desexualize the factory environment by establishing fictive familial relations with men that would put the women in control in cases of sexual situations is often overturned by the use of “the vocabulary of sexual abuse” (Dannecker 142) which leads to the construction of the workplace identities that serve as a basis for the creation of power relations inside the factory with the men in positions of power and women as their subordinates. Although the male authorities themselves have created separate spheres for men and women in the factory, they have shrewdly kept these spheres “permeable.” This permeability has enabled the men to occupy the top positions “thus making continual interactions with the women workers necessary” (143). This serves as an impediment to the building up and the creation of women’s spaces” (143) and consequently, to women’s agency and scope for maneuverability. The men in authority continually intrude into the female spaces



in the factory and disturb the bonding processes between women and the formation of network groups and alliances. During the lunch breaks, casual meetings on the staircases and on the way to and from work, the male supervisors often sexually harass the female workers which inhibits the construction of female spaces (143). The authorities also hinder this creation of female spaces through the superannuated trick of “divide and rule.” “Male supervisors use their power position, for example, to pick out one operator as a favourite, whom they then support and prefer. Dividing the workers they are in charge of, through a sexualization of the work relations, isolates them from one another” (143).

### **Sexual exploitation of garment workers:**

Dina Siddiqi says that working women in Bangladesh must subscribe to a gendered code of modesty while treading the grounds of public spaces- their workplaces and the streets. Working women, according to Siddiqi “face a double jeopardy with respect to sexual harassment” (Siddiqi 10). Because these women are not only subject to physical, sexual and mental abuse in their workplaces but also on the streets. “Women from impoverished backgrounds are the most at risk of this dual harassment, which derives legitimacy from culturally dominant associations between poverty, promiscuity, and public visibility. The predicament of garment workers is emblematic in this respect” (10). Siddiqi remarks that the bad reputation of the garment industry, the long working hours that keep the garment workers occupied in the factory after hours, the lack of transport facilities for workers and their supposed low position which translates into having no social protection are the factors that work together to render women garment workers vulnerable to sexual harassment and abuse inside the factory premises and beyond (10). Siddiqi says that research on the subject of garment workers’ sexual harassment is scarce. The data that is available is either quantitative or appears in a roundabout

way with other topics in focus. However, the prevalence of the sexual harassment of garment workers is evident in the result of a survey on the health and safety regulations in the garment industry that states that sexual harassment is apparently the biggest reason of anxiety for women workers(11). She also says that occurrences of sexual harassment in the factory environment are under reported because of the fear of retaliation or loss of jobs (11).

Siddiqi says, “The most obvious cause for sexual violence, including harassment in the workplace is unequal power relations in society as a whole. “Gender-based violence is informed by the distribution of social, economic and legal power in society” (17).However, it has been observed that with the increase of women’s participation in the workforce all over the world, the rates of sexual violence has gone up. The reason behind this is that the jobs that are available to women are not that variant- they only get to perform a narrow scale of jobs. These jobs are “characterized by high job insecurity, low pay, and bad working conditions, as well as low status and minimal bargaining power. These characteristics enhance the risk of workers being subjected to sexual harassment” (17).The report says that women who work in male-dominated fields or when a large of number women are supervised by a small group of men, sexually harassment increases. As for the women who are employed in the garment industry of Bangladesh, all of the above discussions are correct. “In Bangladesh, all indicators point to a close relationship between increased sexual harassment, women’s increased work participation and increased mobility/visibility” (18). Siddiqi also talks about globalization being an important factor that has resulted in the increase of sexual harassment of women in the workplace. She gives a disclaimer saying that globalization is not directly responsible for the increased vulnerability of women workers in the workplace. In fact, globalization has enabled women to earn and better their living standards. “Nevertheless, ... the conditions of employment most women continue to labour

under create ‘enabling’ environments for employers and others to get away with sexual harassment, simultaneously making it harder for employees to press for redress” (19). Also, “... the conditions of globalization today encourage the establishment of labour regimes that are flexible, casual and impermanent” (44). Therefore, the more vulnerable the worker is in terms of job security, the more risk she is in of facing sexual harassment (44). For example, “[h]elpers tend to have the least job security and also report the most vulnerability to harassment” (44).

For a 1996 study on the subject of sexual harassment of women in the workplace, Siddiqi interviewed many men and women workers from the garment and electronics industries. Here, I will discuss the findings of this study in relation to the garment workers. Siddiqi said most garment workers had not heard of the term “*jouno hoirani*” which is Bengali for sexual harassment. However, when described to them what this term entailed, the workers could relate to it. Also, the women presented their own understanding of sexual harassment. “Definitions of harassment that women gave ranged from rape and sexual assault to leering, suggestive comments, disrespect and verbal misbehavior on the part of male colleagues, superiors and strangers on the road” (33). The workers primarily expressed dissatisfaction regarding their disrespectful treatment by the factory authority and likened such behavior to sexual misconduct. “[T]he highly sexualized vocabulary and body language that supervisors, line chiefs, production managers and others use to discipline female workers creates a hostile, intimidating and sexually charged environment. A common grievance concerned insults hurled at parents and families (*Baba ma tulaygalideya*)” (34).

Siddiqi’s research revealed that workers were more vulnerable to sexual harassment in non-EPZ factories than EPZ factories. One of the respondents working in a non-EPZ factory gave an account of the harassment they faced-

Linemen don't open their mouths without calling us bitches and whores. The Lineman and PM say, "Daughter of a whore, why don't you work? You can die for all I care but you have to finish your work. When we would make mistakes, the linemen and supervisors would scream at us and call very bad names. They don't think of us as human. If we make the slightest mistake, or spend a minute too long in the bathroom, they put their mouths very close to our faces and scream right into our ears, using such filthy words, it's too embarrassing to tell you. They curse and shout so much, they leave us in tears. (34)

Workers at the non-EPZ factories also alleged that the supervisors, line chiefs and the production managers indulged in various forms of non-verbal and physical abuse such as hair pulling, slapping, stroking and hitting on the head, touching and kissing, winking, staring, whistling, standing too close and pinching. Sometimes the workers were given corporal punishment for stealing or disobedience. "Respondents also reported numerous incidents of sexual intimidation and coercion, that is, quid pro quo harassment ... Owners or their close male relatives, production managers and their relatives and buyers, as well the supervisory staff, were implicated in such charges" (34). The workers would be teased, physically touched, asked out and even propositioned by these male authorities.

Some respondents felt that buyers, local and foreign, were especially dangerous. Apparently, certain buyers are always on the lookout for attractive young women on whom to prey. Several workers from the same factory named a local buyer notorious for going through the assembly line and picking out good-looking young women. "He bugs them until they agree [to his proposition]. In the end, whatever happens, the girl is forced to leave her job." Unscrupulous buyers may take

advantage of the fact that they are not directly accountable to factory management, or that it would be against the interests of the ownership to challenge their behaviour. (35)

The night shifts pose the most danger to the female workers. The chances of sexual abuse increases after the workers finish their night shifts and before they are able to reach their homes. The shift can end any time after midnight and the factories do not have transport facilities for the workers. Going out into the streets at this hour raises the risk of sexual abuse. The workers then are forced to stay in the factory premises which are not safe for them either. "After the lights are turned off, various people continue to have access to the shopfloor. These include linemen, PM, supervisors, security guards, owners, management or their close relatives" (35). Women are often called out with false urgencies or taken to isolated areas of the factory and attacked.

The workers who are needy, entirely dependent on their jobs for their subsistence and have to run a household are under tremendous pressure to bow to the sexual overtures of their male superiors. Also, it is maintained that succumbing to the advances of the male superiors ensures getting paid on time.

The resistance to sexual harassment and abuse usually depend on the job security of the workers. The fear of losing their jobs keeps the workers from complaining or bringing charges. Given the casual manner in which the workers can be dismissed and replaced in the factories which is a derivative of globalization and the new division of labor, the workers find themselves forced to accept the abuse. Although some workers who are experienced have said that the management does not want to lose them because they are considered assets to the factory. Also, these women on the basis of their experience can get

jobs elsewhere if they want to and hence, when confronted with sexual abuse, these women often choose to leave. However, the inexperienced workers do not have the liberty to leave. Another reason that the workers can be easily dismissed when they forward a complaint of sexual harassment is that their recruitment processes are usually informal and undocumented. At the time of recruitment they are not given any document saying that they worked for the respective factory. As we can see,

[t]he incentives for reporting incidents of mistreatment, sexual or otherwise are extremely low. In the case of sexual harassment, retaliation by the offender, especially if the person involved is in a position of authority, is a serious possibility. As one self-identified rape victim said, there's no point in going to the management since they themselves usually are implicated in harassment incidents. Even if the accused is a lower level employee, the threat of retaliation remains. Security guards and others can easily accuse workers of theft or misconduct, and so have them dismissed. (45)

The women also fear retaliation from the accused outside the workplace and hence, they prefer to keep silent about the abuse or look for employment elsewhere. However, some women do choose to be vocal about and ask for compensation for the harassment to which they have been subjected. But speaking out has its consequences. Workers who are insubordinate get blacklisted by the factory owners through their informal network and find it difficult to get work once they are sacked from or leave their current job. As a result, sometimes these workers have to take on new identities. The prevailing notions of femininity in our culture, tend to on one hand, support submissiveness in garment women and on the other hand, shame them for speaking against the injustices done to them. Often,

their reputation is hampered. They are labeled as immoral or bad women. There is also a tendency of victim blaming when it comes to sexual assaults which holds these women accountable for their abuse.

Siddiqi's research also showed that sexual harassment has negative impacts on workers' productivity.

[The abused garment] [w]omen reported feeling acute shame and embarrassment as well as fear, sadness and an inability to concentrate on the task at hand. The helplessness and anger that accompanies such situations can be extremely disabling. Moreover, if a worker is publicly humiliated in abusive language for making mistakes, the ensuing fear and anxiety also increases the likelihood of making mistakes. (47)

Sometimes, the anxiety of being abused is so hard to bear that the workers are absent for long periods of time. However, poverty and the desperate need of employment, does not allow them to leave their jobs. So, they resort to implicit resistances such as deliberately slowing down output or feigning sickness. Also, when a woman is harassed, sexually or otherwise and it becomes a common knowledge, a general anxiety pervades the factory environment and the productivity of all workers is affected (48). Women workers often start wearing a borkha in the hopes of protecting themselves from sexual abuse and harassment. Since the borkha conceals the silhouettes of the body, it serves as a "protective armour" in the eyes of the workers. Siddiqi's study found that women who wear the borkha are less likely to face harassment from men than those women who do not wear it. Apparently, men tend to shy away from attacking the women in borkha because it has both

a cultural and religious significance in terms of being an attire belonging to chaste women (51).

Siddiqi's research also found that the unions that are usually quite vocal about other injustices against the garment workers and take firm actions to aid the wronged workers, have done very little to help the workers who have been the victims of sexual harassment or abuse. The reason behind this is that the unions do not have proper mechanisms or effective strategies to address the issue of sexual harassment (52). "One obstacle to pursuing cases through unions is that labor laws in Bangladesh do not mention sexual harassment specifically. By the same token, the criminal law used to prosecute cases of harassment do no mention the workplace or workers' rights specifically. This puts unions in a double bind"(53). Again, the channels of bringing the perpetrators down are fraught with internal politics where the unionized actions are rendered ineffective (52).

### **Sexual agency of garment workers:**

Petra Dannecker says that the women workers are often "active actors" who use their sexual desirability in order to improve their working conditions seeing no other way to make it happen (143).<sup>3</sup> According to Dannecker, these women succumb to the propositions made by their superiors hoping that it will help their working situation. Jona, a garment worker said in her interview with Dannecker, "My supervisor likes me very much. He tells me all the time that I am very pretty and sometimes he gives me sweets. I know that this is not a good behavior from his side but it helps me. I get less work load and when I come late he will not say anything" (144). This shows that the women who get involved in suchromantic affiliations with their bosses are well-aware of the stigma and negativity that surround such behavior. Nonetheless, they engage in it to gain favors from their bosses

---

<sup>3</sup> Petra Dannecker. *Between Conformity and Resistance: Women Garment Workers in Bangladesh*. p. 143.



that will make their work easier. Dannecker says that her interviews with the workers revealed that such involvements between workers and the men in authority are quite common, as one worker Kalpona put it, “at least all bosses are involved in affairs, they choose a girl, promote and try to protect her” (144). However, Dannecker says that although such relationships may prove to be beneficial for the women involved, “it is necessary to emphasize that these relations are embedded in the hierarchies and power structures between men and superiors and workers in the factories” (144). As we can see in the above statement by Jona, it is her supervisor whom she considers the initiator of the relationship and thus places him in the power position. However, in the same breath, she mentions that her supervisor is enamored by her and that he gives her presents and does her work related favors on a daily basis. This certainly gives her a certain level of power and agency and equips her to implicitly challenge her boss and disrupt the power dynamic between them. Cockburn has identified this form of sexual politics in the workplace and said that it relies on pleasure for both the parties involved. She says sexual pleasure can be a way “to disrupt male rationality and empower women” (144) in the domain of workplace sexual politics. The pleasure for the men chiefly lies in the possible sexual/ romantic engagement with the women workers while the women derive pleasure from being able to exercise control over the men even if in a limited manner.

The garment workers have said that they feel “empowered” when they are able to handle and effectively communicate with men in general both within the factory and outside. Sometimes these communications create opportunities for women to select a husband from the industry on their own and without the knowledge of their parents (144).

Although the tales about garment workers being sexually forward and approaching their supervisors to extract professional favors from them or simply getting involved with them romantically for the sake of their own pleasure are quite widespread, these tales are mostly narrated by second or third hand narrators. The women who are actually involved in such relationships seldom find their voice in the social sciences narratives. Specially, the women who are rumored to be making their bodies sexual currency in exchange of professional gains are never present in the social sciences accounts. In my opinion, the reason behind this has to do with the ‘covered’ nature of Bangladeshi society. Sociologist Farhad Khosrokhavar has said that in Muslim/ conservative societies, there is a ‘covered’ approach towards gender relations. In covered systems, gender relations are moderated by the principle of modesty. “Modesty and honor are defined in direct relation to the bodily and mental covering- over of the woman (the woman as the shield of honor for the community; the woman as manager of private space, closed to the public space)” (qtd. in Scott 155).<sup>4</sup> The societies that take a covered approach towards gender relations believe in the segregation of the sexes because it thinks of sexual activity between men and women as a force that is potentially dangerous and disruptive for the society. It orders that sexual activity be managed carefully and confined within the realm of the private space. Bangladeshi society being a ‘covered’ one, sex and sexuality are topics that are usually kept outside of public discourse. These are considered matters of the private life and they are meant to stay there. Hence, when the garment workers appear in borkhas in the public fronts, we consider it “normal.” Conversely, public discussions of women’s sexual subjectivity and sexual agency are considered taboo in the context of Bangladesh. Perhaps these garment women choose not to give such controversial details about themselves and

---

<sup>4</sup> Joan Wallach Scott. *The Politics of Veil*. p. 155.

their lives away to the researchers and flaunt them in the public eye because these could potentially destroy their already fragile reputation in a 'covered society' like that of Bangladesh's. Also, perhaps these women feel ashamed and guilty and are hesitant to come forward and give testimonies to the researchers about their actions through which they have violated the rules of the covered system.

As we've seen in the discussions of Naila Kabeer's work, these workers are heavily shamed by their female colleagues who view their actions as a deviation from the notions of feminine propriety prescribed jointly by Islam and the patriarchy. These women are compared to prostitutes by both their male and female colleagues and society in general. Women workers are particularly worried about the actions of these women. They complain that the scandalous actions of this particular group of women have been singled out by society at large and extended to them. In an interview with Petra Dannecker, one garment worker Shelly said, "Some women have love affairs inside the factories. Others always try to get attention from the management and the supervisors to improve their salaries. If they are able to build up good relations with them their work is easier. But such a behavior is very bad. Women like them are responsible for the bad reputation we have" (Dannecker 137-138). These workers have said that they do not mix with those women who engage in such immoral behavior thus emphasizing their own moral purity. In the same interview, Shelly said, "With these bad women I avoid contact inside and outside the factories. I do not normally join them during the lunch breaks and I do not walk home with them. If people get to know how they behave inside the factory, then they will think that I also mix with men" (138). Consequently, in the chaos of some workers' so called moral

deterioration and the harmful effects it has on other workers' reputation, the positive aspects of sexual agency as discussed in the previous chapter get lost.

**Sexual subjectivity of garment workers:**

In the interviews from Petra Dannecker's book *Between Conformity and Resistance*, some garment workers have noted that love affairs that bloom between male workers/ authorities and female workers in the privacy of the factories sometimes lead to marriages(143- 144). However, these workers emphasized that they themselves have never been involved in such relationships. They only talked about their coworkers who have developed romantic relationships within the factory. Also, the workers saw these relationships as morally wrong because these often fostered physical relations between the people involved. As a result, we cannot find a direct way of examining garment workers' sexual subjectivity from these social sciences discourses. We have to remain satisfied with the second hand accounts relating to garment workers' sexual subjectivity (the term is not used). In these second hand accounts, the acceptance of some garment workers of the romantic/ sexual offers made by their male colleagues or superiors is highlighted. This can be looked at as an example of the third element of sexual subjectivity which is entitlement to sexual desire or pleasure from a partner. Also, it can be an example of sexual self-efficacy because these women have consciously made the decision of entering such relationships.

In this chapter, we have examined the social sciences discourses about garment workers' sexual suppression, sexual exploitation, sexual subjectivity and sexual agency. In the following chapter which is also the concluding chapter, we will look at the previously

mentioned narrative disjuncture between literary and social sciences discourses about garment workers' sexuality. We will also discuss the reasons behind this disjuncture.

## *Chapter 4*

### *Conclusion: The Disjuncture between the Literary and Social Sciences*

#### *Narratives about Garment Workers' Sexuality*

From the discussions in the previous two chapters we can gather that the discourses and narratives about garment workers' sexuality in literature and the social sciences are almost the same. Both literature and the social sciences talk about garment workers' sexual suppression. In Naila Kabeer, we found the accounts of how society at large represses the sexual conduct of garment women. They are concerned about letting women work in the garment factories fearing that working outside the home for long hours alongside men would allow them to take charge of and express their sexual desires which would cause a moral disruption in society. Society criticized the garment women for crossing the boundary of their homes and stepping into the male spheres of the streets and the factory and shamed them by comparing them to prostitutes. We see a reflection of this controlling behavior of society when it comes to women's sexuality as though it is an untouchable, fearsome object in the world of literature as well. For example, in *Krush Kathe Konna*, Shaila and Shamima face verbal and physical abuse from the police who thought of them as prostitutes lurking in the night time on the streets. The fact that they were garment workers who had to work till late at night regularly was dismissed by the police. In *Garments Konnar Attokotha*, the idea that garment workers are immoral is reinforced through the trope "garments konna" or garment girls. Sonia along with her family was ostracized and banished by the village court for being associated with the garment industry which had supposedly lured the other village girls into moral decay.

Both literature and the social sciences have reflected on the sexual abuse and exploitation of garment workers. Dina Siddiqi has talked about the nature and the effects of sexual harassment and exploitation faced by garment workers both within and outside the factory. Because the women who work in the garment industry usually come from the poorer sectors of society, they are seen as women who are without any social protection and hence, “fair game” for sex. Therefore, the workers are susceptible to sexual abuse whenever they tread the streets. Within the confines of the factory, the garment girls are at risk of being sexually abused by production managers, line chiefs, male workers, the owners and their relatives and associates. Also, the workers are often propositioned by the authority figures and if they decline, they are threatened with termination. In *Krush Kathe Konna*, Nilufer gives an account of the sexual exploitation of her coworkers in a garment factory. She says that the production managers would often force the girls to have sex with them in exchange of overlooking slipups in the work or in case of illnesses. In “Garments,” Jesmin recounts that her production manager Jamal used to sexually harass her and the other workers at the slightest opportunity.

Finally, both literary and social sciences accounts shed light on the sexual agency and subjectivity of garment workers. As explained earlier, sexual agency can be referred to the use of one’s sexual desirability to make any form of earthly gains. Also, sexual agency can be an expression of one’s sexuality according to his/ her liking. Foucault’s concept of subjectification can be seen as “all the ways in which a person transforms him or herself into a subject” (Hildebrand-Nilshon, Motzkau & Papadopoulos 2). It can be understood in two ways. Firstly, it is a mode of power which is essentially a governing technique. “Governing action is divided into both acting upon others and acting upon the self...” (2).

“Secondly, it is the possibility of self-articulation” (2). In other words, subjectification is a process wherein a subject both experiences and exerts power. When faced with a power structure, the subject does not remain passive. Being vehicles of this power, they themselves exercise power. Subjectification or the exercise of power then equals the subjugation of others or the self. According to Foucault, “[T]he very processes and conditions that secure a person’s subordination are also the means by which [he/she] becomes a self-conscious identity and agent” (qtd. in Mahmood 17). In other words, the agentive capacities in a subject “are not the residue of an undominated self that existed prior to the operations of power but are themselves the products of those operations” (qtd. in Mahmood 17). Dwelling on Foucault’s ideas, one can imagine that the garment workers who are subordinate to the power of the garment industry, capitalism and state apparatuses are not only passive subjects who are exploited and dominated. Within the same field where they are subjected to the power of the capitalist enterprises or any other power structure, the workers are able to make spaces for maneuvering and exertion of power. One way of exercising power for the women workers is to utilize their sexuality in order to gain privileges from various power structures. Although these workers are in a subjugated position in the sense that their jobs and the related facilities that they hope to gain by offering to do sexual favors for different authority figures depend on the mercy of those figures, the workers, nonetheless, have a space even within the power structure that functions within the boundary of the factory or beyond for negotiation with the authority. Again, the women workers who come in contact with men working in the factory, often choose to start a relationship with them and even get married to them. This can also be read



as an example of sexual subjectivity because by entering a relationship with a partner of their choice, these workers are fulfilling their desires of intimacy.

However, there lies a disjuncture between how the literary and the social sciences narratives represent garment women's sexual agency and subjectivity. This disjuncture can be conceptualized in two ways. First of all, in the social sciences narratives, we never hear the voices of those women who embark on sexual relationships with their bosses for professional advantages or use their sexuality in order to gain a favor from an authority figure. We get to know about these women from other workers. That is, we only have second or third hand accounts that talk about garment women's sexual agency and subjectivity. The reason behind this lies in the nature of Bangladeshi society. The conservative/ covered society of Bangladesh takes offence at the discussion and display of sexuality in the public space. Also, the patriarchal mores that inform our social classes are misogynistic and view women's sexuality as a disruption to the moral order of society. When faced with such a society, the garment workers who rank at the bottom of our social hierarchy certainly feel intimidated to talk about their sexuality. Literature, however, powered by imagination enables us to get a glimpse into the minds of these workers. It offers representations of their sexual desires and preferences. It paints vivid pictures where these workers are shown exercising their sexual agency. In *Krush Kathe Konna*, Nilufer speaks candidly about her sexual desires, fantasies and displeasures. In the same novel, we are introduced to Shaila, a garment worker who used her sexual attractiveness to avoid a possible arrest by the police. She offered to sleep with one of the officers in order to prevent any further harassment. She also succumbed to the romantic advances of one of her male colleagues who was senior to her professionally. In *Garments Konnar Attokotha*, the

protagonist Sonia entered into a relationship with and eventually married a coworker named Rashu acknowledging her entitlement to intimacy and choice.

Secondly, in the social sciences narratives, these workers appear in a negative light. The garment workers who give accounts of those workers who allegedly exercise their sexual agency, present these workers as bad women. They complain against those women for generating a bad name for the profession of garment work. They say that it is because of the sexual freedom that these women enjoy that the entire community of women garment workers are considered immodest and immoral and labeled as prostitutes. They thoroughly despise those women who put their sexuality to use for gaining professional favors from the factory authority. Although one might argue that the practice of establishing sexual relationships with a view to achieving professional success is highly unprofessional and unethical, it should be considered that the garment workers who usually sleep with their bosses, do it out of desperation and need and for privileges such as receiving their salaries on time or being paid for overtime- privileges which are due to all workers anyway. One must consider the sheer helplessness that these workers experience when pitted against the power of any authority that they resort to sell their bodies. However, in the process, they gain a certain level of agency in that the male authority has to submit to the woman worker when vis-à-vis her sexuality. As we can see in *Krush Kathe Konna*, Shaila slept with a police officer for saving herself and her sister Nilufer from being jailed. The women workers are also judgmental of their fellow sisters who get into romantic relationships with their male coworkers or bosses. They view this action as immoral and also consider them as bad women. In *Garments Konnar Attokotha*, we see a reinforcement of this negative view of garment girls which pervades the psyche of the

general population starting from the protagonist's own family to the village where she lived. In a sarcastic comment made to Nayan who wished her happiness in life, Sonia recounted the damaging view that women garment workers hold for other workers- "Allegedly garment girls change soon after they start working in the factory because they have flings and romantic relations with men. They are bad girls and if anyone marries them, their life will be ruined" (Rana 48; My translation). The author, however, dismissed such views as misconceptions through the character of Nayan.

It seems that the women workers are critical of those female coworkers who have chosen to get into romantic entanglements with their male coworkers because through this action they are expressing their sexuality publicly. Bangladesh being a Muslim country, their disapproval of this action perhaps comes from the Islamic view of women's sexuality and the emphasis given on maintaining modesty and propriety of character in Islam. Asma Barlas and Fatima Mernissi have highlighted in their works that Islam views women's sexuality as a threat to the organization and the maintenance of structure in the society. The adherents of Islam believe that allowing women to display their sexuality outside the bounds of marriage, can bring about fitna or anarchy. The holy book of Muslims, the Quran itself orders women to cover up their bodies and conceal their beauty<sup>5</sup> and to remain in their homes so that they won't be seen by men who are not their family members.<sup>6</sup> This explains why women workers are annoyed by those workers who not only disrupt the public/ private binary so dearly upheld by both religion and patriarchy (Walby 19) by intruding into male spaces but also threaten to disrupt the moral order of society by the open exertion of their sexuality through their romantic and sexual relations with men.

---

<sup>5</sup> Surah 24, verse 31.

<sup>6</sup> Surah 33, verse 33.

Nayanika Mookherjee in her book *The Spectral Wound* has argued in relation to the Birangana that a certain 'sterilization' or desexualization in representation is required in order for women to be considered emblematic of the nation. Perhaps, the social sciences in its forwarding of the accounts where the women workers' sexual agency and subjectivity are negatively portrayed try to promote the garment women as the women of the nation and consequently, become restricted to this narrative which literature by dint of imagination seeks to undo. Perhaps, the national ethos that seeks to render the women of the nation pure, devoid of all sexuality, violence and malevolence, has effects on the women themselves. Hence, the women workers are shameful of the immoral acts of other workers which they deem as an impediment to becoming the women of the nation.

On the other hand, in the literary texts, women workers' sexual agency and subjectivity are represented either in a celebratory manner or with boldness. In *Krush Kathe Konna*, Nilufer paints a bold and brazen picture of garment girls with whom she used to live in a slum and worked side by side in the factory of exercising their sexual agency-

The girls here know how to seize moments from a life of drudgery for enjoyment. They spend a portion of their hard earned money on buying luxury items such as lipsticks. Initially these girls drained by hard work at the factory used to feel paralyzed by fear when they encountered the whistling and winking men on the streets. These same girls have learnt to empower themselves. Today, they courageously whistle back at the jeering and harassing men, they throw away covers from their breasts and boldly display them in front of the men who make indecent gestures to them while they laugh hysterically. The men would lose their

vigour in front of these laughing women who moved in groups. Shaila and I would derive a strange sense of pleasure from such spectacles. (Jahan 686-687, My translation)

Here, the women workers are perhaps expressing themselves as sexual beings by making inviting gestures such as uncovering their bosoms and whistling to the men on the streets. These same actions can be looked at as a form of resistance against sexual harassment- their bold actions were meant to disarm and embarrass the men who used to harass them. We can also perceive these actions on the part of the workers as an expression of sexual agency because these actions signify control over their own bodies and sexuality. These actions can also be viewed as an example of sexual body-esteem, the first element of sexual subjectivity. This representation of garment workers' behavior on the streets by Nasreen Jahan can be contrasted with the social science representation of the workers where they wear the borkha and avoid eye contact with the men who harass them on their way to and from the factory.

The reason behind the positive representation of garment women's sexual agency and subjectivity in the literary texts is perhaps linked to the authors' association with feminism. Nasreen Jahan is a self- professed feminist. In an interview with the daily Observer she said, "Feminism is not for women or men. It is for all mankind. I believe that feminism is an idea where men and women are equal and they stand for each other in every struggle" (The Daily Observer). Feminist criticism seeks to unearth a tradition of women's writing by looking for "the mechanisms of patriarchy, that is, the cultural mindset of men and women which perpetuate[s] sexual inequality" described in women's texts (Barry 122). From a feminist perspective, Nasreen Jahan's *Krush Kathe Konna* can be looked at as an

addition to the “female phase” of women’s literary tradition as described in gynocriticism which focuses on the “female experience” of the world (123). In *Krush Kathe Konna*, Nasreen Jahan takes women’s sexual subjectivity and sexual agency as key themes and displays them from women’s perspectives. Through Nilufer’s voice, the author perhaps gives her own opinions and analyses of women’s sexual agency and subjectivity which helps her challenge the barriers against women’s sexual expression.

Tahmima Anam’s “Garments” can be hailed as a feminist text where she presents garment workers’ sexual agency and subjectivity in an uninhibited way. Taslima Nasreen has lauded Anam for writing a story that reflects on women’s sexual desires in an article she wrote for the Dhaka Tribune. She praises her for etching a rebellious woman who refuses to bow to the violence of an impotent husband and as a form of resistance, “[thinks] about her sexuality when she is alone” (Nasreen). She defends Anam against the criticisms she incurred on social media for portraying women who are sexual and possess sexual agency. She takes up arms against the patriarchy in her defense of Anam-

The patriarchal society of Bangladesh doesn’t want any woman to write stories or novels about a woman’s sexuality. Men in this society think: Women do not possess any sexuality, and even if they do, they shouldn’t. Even if they have it, they should keep it hidden. Stories or novels should not be written about it. And if anyone does write on the topic of sexuality, it should be men – men and men only. Modesty is not for men; so they have the freedom to write about sexual desires or feelings – these are men’s properties. They will express it. Women are not even supposed to have them, let alone express! Men will use women to quench their sexual desires. Men will be active and women passive. Essentially, sexuality is

owned by men. Women are only required to give birth to and raise children. If anyone steps out of this boundary, she is shameless – a whore. If this is the mentality we have, then it is no wonder that people will be denouncing Tahmima's story. (Nasreen)

However, one might argue that the social scientists are often the biggest champions of feminism although they do not portray workers' sexual agency and subjectivity with the kind of celebratory enthusiasm as Tahmima Anam or Nasreen Jahan. The reason behind social scientists' negative depiction of workers' sexual agency and subjectivity perhaps lies in the previously mentioned tendency of social scientists to represent garment workers as emblems of the nation which requires the workers to be desexualized. It can be another line of research to look at whom this "women of the nation narrative" serves. Perhaps it serves the workers because it certainly improves their position from mere sweatshop labours with shady moral characters to the women with the most reputable achievements. Perhaps it serves social science itself because by portraying the garment women as the women of the nation social scientists are fusing scholarly affirmation and rationality with the fervor of nationalism which then goes on to become a wonderful addition to nationalist discourses and serves nationalists.

Tahmima Anam and Nasreen Jahan's bold and positive representation of garment workers' sexual agency and sexual subjectivity can be attributed to their ability to empathize with the workers. Perhaps, the authors were simply projecting their own beliefs about sexual freedom onto their characters when they unabashedly talked about women's sexual desires and sexual agency. However, the social scientists have a responsibility not to project their personal sensibilities onto their research subjects and maintain an objective

attitude during research and documentation. Hence, even if a social scientist has imbibed an open attitude towards women's sexual freedom, his sense of professionalism will not allow him to project his views onto the portrayal of his subjects. Perhaps this is the reason why the social sciences leave out celebratory descriptions of garment workers' sexual desires and sexual agency from their narratives.

One might argue that the two women authors in discussion have exoticized or romanticized the garment workers by equipping them with sexual subjectivity and sexual agency which they imbued with a touch of impudence- a sight missing from the accounts of the social sciences discourses on garment workers' sexuality.

As for Khandekar Masud Rana's *Garments Konnar Attokotha*, garment workers' sexual subjectivity and agency neither emerge in brazenness nor are described in a celebratory tone. The author manages to depict the instances of the protagonist Sonia's sexual agency and subjectivity in a neutral light. Nonetheless, by portraying the character of Sonia as a righteous and modest garment girl the author tries to challenge and curb the bad reputation of garment women perpetuated by the patriarchal modes of thinking.

The celebratory or bold representation of garment workers' sexuality by the literary authors can also be a result of unbound literary imagination. Plato has said in his masterpiece *The Republic* that the world of literature is an imperfect imitation of the real world which in turn is an imitation of a perfect reality where the Gods reside and which is beyond the reach of mortals. Thus literature is twice removed from reality. Perhaps the positive depiction of garment workers' sexual agency and subjectivity in literature is nothing but a flawed representation of the real world where their sexual self-perception and agency are not celebrated at all.



One can argue that in the process of imaginative representation of garment women's sexuality, authors Nasreen Jahan and Tahmima Anam have "othered" them. These authors in their apparent positive and celebratory representations of garment workers, reinforce a negative narrative that the garment workers wanted to separate themselves from. Having sexual agency meant that the workers sold their bodies to authority figures in exchange of professional or other privileges. Hence, the garment workers detested those workers who would deliberately use their sexuality to their advantage because this practice could place those workers in a problematic situation who were unwilling to compromise their chastity in of return professional and personal favors from men in authority.

## Works Cited

### Primary Readings

Anam, Tahmima. "Garments."

Jahan, Nasreen. *Panchti Upponnash*. Dhaka: Anyaprakash, 2003. Print.

Rana, Masud Khandokar. *Garments Konnar Attokotha*. Dhaka: Laal Shobuj Publications, May 2016. Print.

### Secondary Readings

Asad, Talal. *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*. Palo Alto, California: Stanford University Press, 2003. Print.

Barry, Peter. *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*. Oxford: Manchester University Press. Print.

Boislard P. and Ziommer-Gembeck. "Sexual Subjectivity, Relationship Status and Quality, and Same-Sex Sexual Experience Among Emerging Adult Females." *Australian Journal of Educational and Development Psychology*, vol. 1, no. 1, December 2011, p. 54-64.

Caplan, Pat. *The Cultural Construction of Sexuality*. London: Tavistock Publications Ltd., 1987. Print.

"Conferring with prolific writer, Nasreen Jahan." *The daily Observer*. Web. February 25, 2017.  
<http://www.observerbd.com/details.php?id=60301>

Dannecker, Petra. *Between Conformity and Resistance: Women Garment Workers in*

*Bangladesh*. Dhaka: The University Press Limited, 2002. Print.

Dimen, Muriel. "Sexual Subjectivity." *THE WILEY BLACKWELL ENCYCLOPEDIA OF*

*GENDER AND SEXUALITY STUDIES*. Web. 21 April 2016.

Feldman, Shelley. "Exploring Theories of Patriarchy: A Perspective from Contemporary

Bangladesh." *Globalization and Gender*, vol 26, no. 4, Summer 2001, p. 1097-1127.

Web. <http://www.jstor.org.proxy1.athensams.net/stable/3175358>

Hildebrand, Motzkau and Papadopoulos. "Reintegrating Sense Into

Subjectification." p. 1-13. Web.

[https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=4&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwiogcrzlPHYAhVELY8KHao5B8kQFggMAM&url=http%3A%2F%2Fforo.open.ac.uk%2F7235%2F1%2FReintegrating\\_Sense\\_into\\_subjectification\\_J.F.Motzkau\\_%2528bookchapter%2529.pdf&usg=AOvVaw31-e--VRLFcg7CR26useD8](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=4&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwiogcrzlPHYAhVELY8KHao5B8kQFggMAM&url=http%3A%2F%2Fforo.open.ac.uk%2F7235%2F1%2FReintegrating_Sense_into_subjectification_J.F.Motzkau_%2528bookchapter%2529.pdf&usg=AOvVaw31-e--VRLFcg7CR26useD8)

Kabeer, Naila. *The Power to Choose: Bangladeshi Women and Labour Market Decisions in*

*London and Dhaka*. London: Verso, 2000. Print.

Nasreen, Taslima. "Tahmima Anam's Story." *Dhaka Tribune*. Web. July 6, 2017.

<http://www.dhakatribune.com/magazine/arts-letters/2017/07/06/tahmima-anams-story/>

Nayanika Mookherjee. *The Spectral Wound: Sexual Violence, Public Memories and the*

*Bangladesh War of Independence*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2015.

Print.

Plato. *The Republic*. Web. [www.ipdh.net](http://www.ipdh.net).

Rich, Adrienne. "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence." *Women: Sex and*

*Sexuality*, vol. 5, no. 4, Summer 1980, p. 631-660. Web.

<http://www.jstor.org.proxy1.athensams.net/stable/3173834>

Siddiqi, Dina. "Do Bangladeshi sweatshop workers need saving: Sisterhood in the post

sweatshop era." *Feminist Review*, February 2009, p. 154-174. Web. 12 April 2016.

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233528079\\_Do\\_Bangladeshi\\_factory\\_workers\\_need\\_saving\\_Sisterhood\\_in\\_the\\_post-sweatshop\\_era](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233528079_Do_Bangladeshi_factory_workers_need_saving_Sisterhood_in_the_post-sweatshop_era)

<http://www.jstor.org.proxy1.athensams.net/stable/3173834>

Siddiqi, M. Dina. "The Sexual Harassment of Industrial Workers: Strategies for Intervention in the Workplace and Beyond." *UNFPA*, p. 1-64.

Siddiqi, M. Dina. "Workers' Lives Beyond Islam and Secularism." *Critical Muslim*, 2017.

Walby, Sylvia. *Theorizing Patriarchy*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1990. Print.

Whitson, Carolyn. "The Sexual Boundaries of Race and Class in Working Class Novels:

Marrying up and Living it Down/ Marrying Down and Living it Up." *Race, Gender &*

*Class*, vol. 9, no. 3, 2000. p. 101-120. Web. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41675034>