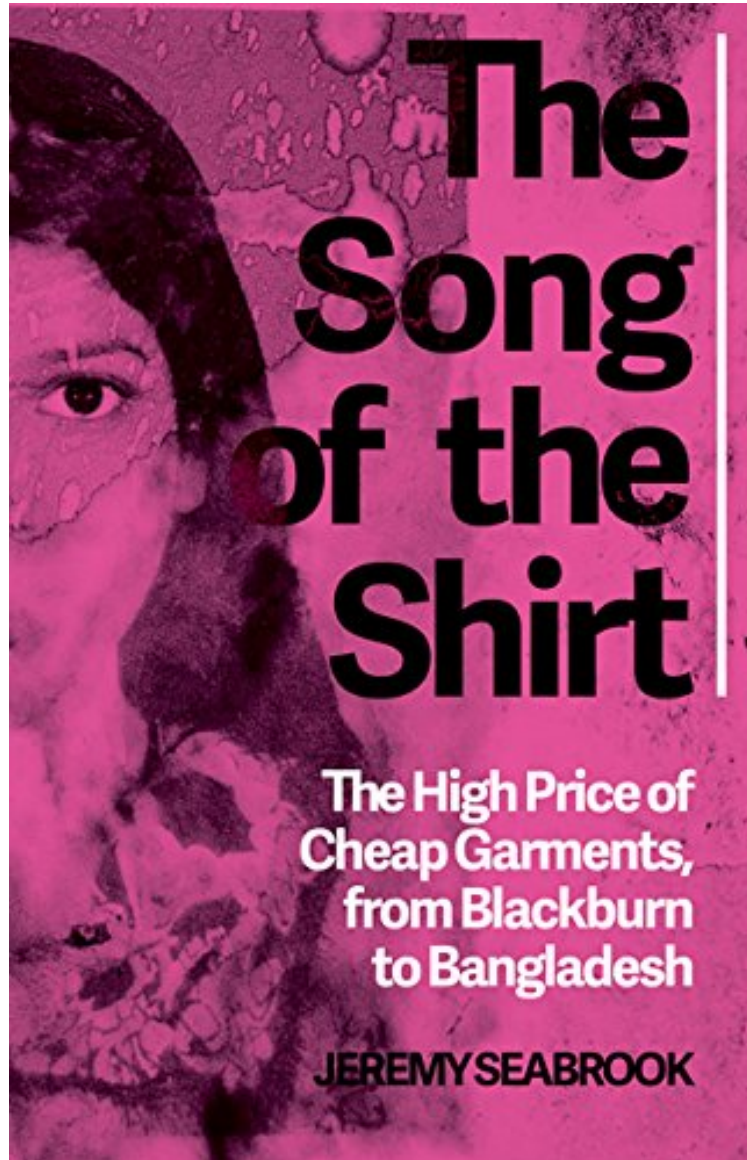


(Free) The Song of the Shirt: The High Price of Cheap Garments, from Blackburn to Bangladesh

# The Song of the Shirt: The High Price of Cheap Garments, from Blackburn to Bangladesh

*Jeremy Seabrook*

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**Jeremy Seabrook : The Song of the Shirt: The High Price of Cheap Garments, from Blackburn to Bangladesh** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Song of the Shirt: The High Price of Cheap Garments, from Blackburn to Bangladesh:

Oh, Men, with Sisters dear! Oh, Men, with Mothers and Wives! It is not linen you're wearing out, But human creatures' lives! Stitch - stitch - stitch, In poverty, hunger and dirt, Sewing at once, with a double thread, A Shroud as well as a Shirt.-from "The Song of the Shirt" by Thomas Hood (1843)

In April 2013 Rana Plaza, an unremarkable eight-story commercial block in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, collapsed, killing 1,129 people and injuring over 2,000. Most of them were low paid textile workers who had been ordered to return to their cramped workshops the day after ominous cracks were discovered in the building's concrete structure. Rana Plaza's destruction revealed a stark tragedy in the making: of men (in fact mostly women and children) toiling in fragile, flammable buildings who provide the world with limitless cheap garments - through Walmart, Benetton and Gap - and bring in 70% of Bangladesh's foreign exchange. In elegiac prose, Jeremy Seabrook investigates the disproportionate sacrifices demanded by the manufacture of such throwaway items as baseball caps and sweatshirts. He also traces the intertwined histories of workers in what is now Bangladesh, and Lancashire. Two hundred years ago the former were dispossessed of ancient skills and their counterparts in Lancashire forced into labour settlements; in a ghostly replay of traffic in the other direction, the decline of Britain's textile industry coincided with Bangladesh becoming one of the world's major clothing exporters. The two examples offer mirror images of impoverishment and affluence. With capital becoming more protean than ever, it won't be long before global business, in its nomadic cultivation of profit, relocates mass textile manufacture to an even cheaper source of labour than Bangladesh, with all too predictable consequences for those involved.

"The sweat and blood of Bangladeshi garment workers is woven into the very fabric of our daily lives. Seabrook, as he always has, delivers a brilliantly written jeremiad with an urgent moral message"-- Mike Davis, author of Planet of Slums

"Few writers are at once as lyrical or as precise about the living conditions of peasants and indigents. Seabrook's clear-eyed accounts of the immiseration as well as the dreams of young Bangladeshis are informed by extended conversations with scholars and activists, as well as historical research. EL What makes *The Song of the Shirt* especially important is its historical consciousness. EL Seabrook draws out the social, economic and imaginative parallels that connected, across decades and continents, Europe's and Asia's poor. EL Seabrook has established himself as perhaps Britain's finest anatomist of class, deindustrialization, migration and the spiritual consequences of neoliberalism. *The Song of the Shirt* may well be his masterpiece." -- The Guardian

"What distinguishes this book is its deep historical consciousness...stitches together history, folklore and hundreds of encounters with individual Bangladeshis to give a thorough picture of the structural injustices that have led to the present situation." -- The New Statesman

"At once illuminating, deeply absorbing, and sobering, this is an ode to the 'rags of humanity' -- the laborers, young and old -- who sometimes perish in order to create our fashionably casual clothes. It's written by one who's long been intimate with this part of the world and its anonymous dwellers, and who has responded always with passion and eloquence."-- Amit Chaudhuri, author of *Calcutta: Two Years in the City*

"In this short yet compelling book, Seabrook skillfully weaves together tales of peasants with stories of weavers, moving back and forth between the village and the city, water and land, lush green fields and the ramshackle appearance of South Asia's urban patches, even the poetic and the idioms of history. He is versed in historical sources but not burdened by them; and only someone with the sensibility of a poet can ruminate on the strange interplay of fire and water that has shaped the contours of the lives of his subjects. EL Seabrook has accomplished the enviable task of rendering naked the social processes which have helped to clothe the world and disguise some unpalatable truths about the treacherousness of what is usually celebrated as entrepreneurial capitalism." -- The Indian Express

"Jeremy Seabrook puts together stitch by stitch, thread by thread, a stark picture of garment manufacturing in Bangladesh. EL Seabrook places his riveting narrative in historical context --making the link with the fires that abound in present-day Dhaka's treacherous factories and the pauperization of 18th century Dhaka weavers because of brutal colonial policies. EL A searing anger pervades Seabrook's text. Every industrial 'accident' in 19th century England and 21st century Bangladesh is brought out of the archives. Stitched into this narrative, one gets the larger picture of disdain and disregard for the lives of the working poor." -- Outlook India

About the Author

Jeremy Seabrook is the author of more than forty books on subjects as diverse as transnational prostitution, child labor, social class, ageing, unemployment and poverty. His most recent include *People Without History*, a report from India's Muslim slums, and *The Refuge and the Fortress: Britain and the Flight from Tyranny*, a study of academic refugees between 1933 and the present day.