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Chief Editor's Note

The Central Journal of Bangladesh Open University (BOU) is one of the academic journals of Open and Distance Learning published in Bangladesh. One of the goals of the journal is to provide opportunities to the scholars in Bangladesh and worldwide with scientific papers on recent developments on ODL, OER, E-learning, MOOC and Moodle-supported open and distance educational knowledge based on empirical survey and desk-research. The journal is multi-disciplinary in nature. We want to bring the open and distance education of Bangladesh closer to the international environment and make open and distance educational resources more accessible to scholars worldwide.

One of our editorial policies is to ensure quality journal papers. We are proud to have eminent scholars in our Editorial Board with professional background of different disciplines.

We are very flexible in our editorial policies. We welcome articles from the scholars of different countries. We want to make our journal a platform of international comparative discussions on open and distance learning regardless of nationality, ethnicity and minority. Our scope is not limited to only open and distance education but is open to other disciplines too.

In the current journal issue, we present a diverse selection of stimulating articles from different scholars and researchers.

We regret to inform our readers that the publication of this issue has been delayed due to unavoidable circumstances.

As always, we would like to thank all the members of our editorial board, concerned faculties, reviewers, our secretariat, associates, designer, composer and publishers who have contributed relentlessly in publishing the volume-IV of Central Journal of BOU. Their guidance and support made our journey smooth and possible, and we are deeply indebted to all of them for their valuable time and efforts.

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Participative Management in Organizational Decision-Making: A Study in a Developing Country

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ABSTRACT

Workers' participation in management, regardless of its dissension and conflicts, is being increasingly embraced in different countries, both in capitalist and socialist, predominantly in the European countries, and in the Third World, as an ultimate approach of industrial democracy. In Bangladesh several attempts have been made through legislation to introduce joint consultation-type participation schemes but all are in vain. The failures are attributed, in the main, to the non-enforcement of laws, illiteracy of workers and apathy of management. No empirical research has been carried out to find out the real reasons. In the present study an attempt has been made to elicit the attitudes of the actors in the industrial relations system, i.e., workers, management and government, towards workers' participation in management as a whole and to make an objective analysis of the same. The study found that there is considerable scope for introduction and development of appropriate workers' participation program in the public sector industries if certain preconditions are met. It is, in fact, an attitudinal study in a large nationalized industrial enterprise in Bangladesh.

Keywords: Workers' participation, decision-making, developing country, management, workers' performance

1.0 INTRODUCTION

A cordial relationship between the labor and the management is sine-quo-non for industrial peace and productivity. With the recognition of this bare truth the participative management schemes have widely been practiced in many European countries for a long time. The needs for effective participation are many and varied. Experience and research indicate that there is a growing concern for democratic values being extended to work life. This is also reflected in the constant push from the employees for greater involvement in decision-making and thereby derives more satisfaction from work. Managers tend to work hard when they have feeling that they are implementing their own ideas and decisions. If we want the lower echelons to work hard, we will have to provide them with the same type of motivation, namely, an opportunity to participate and to get a feeling that they are making decisions in a real manner.

The demand from the employees for real participation in the decisions which affects them is on increase. In recent time, scholars have directed increasing attention to the issue of worker participation and its broader corollary, industrial democracy (Mankindy, 1991; Weiler 1993; Kester and Pinaud, 1996; Adu-Amankwah and Kester, 1999). In the industrial sphere, with every passing

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day new experiments are tried and carried on to give workers more scope, power, and authority to make decisions. On the practical empirical level, it is obvious that we are experiencing both widespread alienation from and resentment of the roles we occupy as workers, and a widespread, but poorly understood, attempt to deal with that alienation through increased participation (here implying something more than membership) for workers. Empirical evidence for these statements is almost ubiquitous.

McGregor (1960) contended that worker participation consists basically in creating opportunity under suitable conditions for people to influence decisions which affect them. It is a special case of delegation in which the subordinate gain greater control, greater freedom of choice with respect to bridging the communication gap between the management and the workers. This serves to create a sense of belonging among the workers as well as a conducive environment in which both the workers would voluntarily contribute to healthy industrial relations.

The great benefit of participation is that it restores to people at work their birth right to be contributing members of the groups in which they work. It builds human values at work which is important for society as well as employees, because there is evidence that job experiences do affect the psychological functioning of people as citizens (Kohn and Schooler, 1983). As one authority puts it, participative management is more likely to produce high levels of satisfaction and motivation than an authoritarian management. Participatory management practice balances the involvement of managers and their subordinates in information processing, decision making and problem solving endeavors (Wager, 1994). Since participation has an excellent potential for building team-spirit the democratic managers may use it to improve the subordinates' performance.

The debate about the institution of workers' participation is by now so well established that its proponents and critics have come to occupy well defined positions quite isolated from each other. The proponents of worker participation usually greet it with uncritical optimism – it cannot, after all, be, bad thing for workers to participate, no matter how small their part may be; and participation can be regarded as part of a trend towards more democratic relationships in industry.¹ Its critics, on the other hand, have pointed out that participation is invariably a state or business initiative rather than originating with workers or trade unions, and it has mostly been introduced in order to "buy off" at a cheap price or radical upsurge in the working class.

The benefit that is gained from workers' participation even in the present time with so many constraints in most cases outweighs all the arguments against it, put together. For this reason, workers' participation is now recognized as a movement which is rapidly spreading all over the world. Worker participation is no longer a question of "whether or not", but a question of "how". In a democratic society it is not sufficient if democratic pattern exists in political life but are excluded from economic life. If democracy is desired in political administration, why should it stop at the gate of the industry? To ensure that this does not happen, workers' participation in management becomes a necessity.² Thus, for management to win the commitment of employees to get work done properly, individual employees should not be treated in isolation, but must be involved in matters concerning themselves and the organization. It is for this reason that management should allow employee involvement in decision making on matters that affect workers in organizations to show their commitment to organizational goals (Akuoko, Dwumah, Ansong, 2012).

¹See, for example, M. Poole, *Workers' Participation in Industry*, Routledge, London, 1965, and C. Argyris, "Organizational leadership and participative management", in *Management of Human Resource*, Addison Wesley, 1967.

²Emery and Thorsrud (1976) aptly remarked: "We cherish democracy in political elections, in organizational life, in social politics, in cultural politics and economic politics. Why should democracy stop at the gate of enterprise?" See Emery, F. E. and E. Thorsrud, *Form and Content in Industrial Democracy: Some Experiences from Norway and Other European Countries* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1976), p.9

1.1 Conceptual Framework for Analysis

In this study our purpose is to analyze and discuss workers' participation in management within the undertaking. It is, therefore, important at the outset to define and discuss the framework of analysis that will be used in the study. Since the terms associated with participation pose problems of definition and concept, it has therefore been deemed necessary to make clear how the researcher understand the basic elements connected with the participation of workers in management.

Concept of Worker

The term 'worker' may have different meanings depending on the context in which it is used. Traditionally this term denotes blue-collar employees (i.e. industrial wage/earners) as contrasted with the white-collar employees (i.e. salaried persons). The meaning of the term may also differ from country to country. For example, in Yugoslavia, the term 'worker' means not only a physical worker but it also includes everybody who earns his living by work (Virmani, 1980). European Economic Area and Swiss Nationals (EEASN) define a worker as a person who is employed, actually or potentially, under a contract of employment and is not a self employed person (EEA, 2013). The term is, however, obviously vague. Careful practice describes those who work for hourly, piece-rate, or incentive wages as wage-earners or hourly rated employees. In distinction, those who are paid by the month and have a tacit guarantee of steady development are described as salaried employees, some of whom are supervisory employees and foremen (Yoder, 1959).

In the context of this study, 'worker' will be understood as describing an employee who is either a blue-collar worker or white-collar worker but who does not have executive authority in the specific organizational context. The problem of directors and managers in this context is specific because of the situation which exists in Bangladesh. It would be better to exclude them from participation in management because of the specific role they are now to play. One more reason for this is that they have this right through the very nature of their positions.¹

Concept of Management

The concept of management gives rise to difficulties as does the concept of worker in terms of role and authority. Difficulty arises from the fact that management is at the same time a decision-making activity, a system of authority and an elite group with particular social attributes.² The term management is vague and elusive. It is very difficult to define. Some people think of it as 'what manager does, some as getting things done through others', while some others define it as 'the process of managing, the combined human ability involved in managing and the personnel required to manage' (Mhetras, 1966). More elaboration is given by George R Terry. According to Terry-"management is the distinct process consisting of planning, organizing, activating, and controlling activities performed to determine and accomplishes the objectives by the use of people and resources." Harold Koontz and Heinz Wehrich (2010) define management "is the process of designing and maintaining an environment in which individuals, working together in groups, efficiently accomplish selected aims." But these definitions do not throw sufficient light on the management scene as a whole.

The prime responsibility of management lies in achieving the common objectives of the organization for which it is to coordinate and direct the people in a way so as to enlist their willing cooperation, thereby maintain the social system of the organization in a state of equilibrium. For the purpose of this study, the researcher regards management primarily as a decision-making process through which the objectives of the organization and the methods of achieving their attainment are decided. The researcher also draws a distinction between 'management' and 'managements'. The former refers to the process of planning, directing and coordinating activities, particularly economic activities and the latter refers to certain individuals employed by owners to

¹Existing labor laws in Bangladesh exclude all the employees from chief executive of the enterprise down to the supervisors from the term 'worker'. Cf. Bangladesh Labor Act, 2006.

²Harbison and Myers viewed management as an economic resource, an authority system and as an elite social grouping. See F. Harbison and C.A. Myers (1959), *Management in the Industrial World*, McGraw Hill, New York.

direct the activities of particular undertakings. They include the board of directors, chairman/managing director, managers, supervisors and foremen.

Concept of Participation

The term participation has often been misunderstood and misused. Douglas McGregor (1960) realized the difficulty of defining the term participation. He conceded to the fact that participation is one of the most misunderstood ideas that has emerged from the field of human relations, and then goes on saying that participation “consists basically in creating opportunities under suitable condition for people to influence decisions affecting them. That influence can vary from a little to a lot – is a special case of delegation in which the subordinate gains a greater control, greater freedom of choice with respect to his responsibilities. The term participation is usually applied to the subordinates’ greater influence over matters within superior’s responsibilities.” Here McGregor seems to represent the traditional view of superior-subordinate relationship with which we do not agree.

Davis (2007) defined participation as mental and emotional involvement of persons in group situations that encourage them to contribute to group goals and share responsibility for them. There are three important ideas in this definition: (a) mental and emotional involvement because through participation individual becomes ego-involved rather than becoming task-involved (see Allport, 1945); (b) motivation of an individual to contribute by releasing his own resources of initiative and creativity towards the objectives of the organization; and (c) acceptance of responsibility by a person in his group’s activities.

Meaning of workers’ participation varies from person to person. It constitutes different things to different people, not only ideologically but also in fact. Some use this term as workers’ representatives on the supervisory board, while others use it referring only to works council or any other specific arrangement (ILO, 1976). The highest level of participation is experienced when workers participate in strategic economic decisions like methods of production, planning and control of production, and investments and distribution; while it is at the lowest if workers are allowed to be involved only in personnel and welfare decisions like hiring and firing, promotions, and vacations and pensions (Blumberg, 1968; Strauss and Rosenstein, 2008). Strauss and Rosenstein (2008) suggest that forms of worker participation vary from actual participation in decision-making processes through management asking for advices from the union or just consulting the workers’ representatives to just receiving information from the management.

Renowned theorists like Rensis Likert (1961), McGregor (1960) and Tannenbaum & Schmidt (1958) attempt to integrate three elements, considered to be central to the concept of participation, namely, influence, interaction and information sharing, into a single ‘continuum’. According to Likert, the lowest level of participation occurs where employees are given no information about current situation or proposed changes. Towards the middle of the scale are the situations where employees are given full explanation for any proposed change and at the same time their ideas and suggestions are sought generally. The two highest levels are where ‘subordinates and leader tackle the problem as a group and after consideration and discussion decide upon solution but leader holds right to veto power’, and ‘leader and subordinates acting as a group tackle the problem and solve it, using the best available methods of group functioning.’ Similarly McGregor envisages the maximum participation occurring where the manager is indifferent to several alternatives and allows workers to choose among them. Both Likert and McGregor stop short of the logically possible extension of their continua where would exert a greater influence over decision-making than do their managers. Tannenbaum (1966) views it as formal involvement of members in the exercise of control, usually through decision-making in group meetings. Here control is defined as “any process through which a person or a group of persons determines what another person or group of persons will do”. This definition has been further classified by Pateman (1970) in the following words:

“This definition makes clear that participation must be participation in something, in this case participation in decision-making.”

For the purpose of this study, the researcher would like to mean by participation a process whereby the workers, individually or through representatives, and management exert equal influence over decision-making within the undertaking and, based upon information sharing,

attempt to reach agreement by working together rather than through utilization of coercive power. Here the researcher emphasizing on decision-making process within an organization and does not extend to decision-making operating outside the organization. Again, the researcher do emphasize on formal schemes through which workers' representatives participate in decisions beyond those normally subject to collective bargaining. However, the terms 'workers' participation in management', 'worker participation', 'participative management', 'individual democracy' or simply 'participation' would be used in this study interchangeably to mean the same thing.

2.0 UNRESOLVED QUESTIONS IN EXISTING LITERATURE

Vast amount of literature is available and numerous studies are underway on the various aspects of participation of workers in decisions within undertakings. Numerous field studies, experiments, case studies and surveys have been conducted in the organizational setting to understand the dynamics of participation. However, most of the studies have tried to determine the influence of workers' participation in performance in a one to one fashion. In the limited space allotted here it is not feasible to discuss all the studies on participation. In this section the researcher tries to focus on those studies only which have particular relevance to the present study.

F. W. Taylor was the first man to champion the recognition of the importance of human beings in managing an organization. Taylor's monumental work on scientific management was the first explicit attempt at using in an organization the knowledge that for increased productivity the employers need to make efforts to satisfy workers' needs. Taylor made certain simplistic assumptions about human behavior and motivation especially that monetary rewards would increase productivity (Taylor, 1911). The fact that human behavior is complex and that there is the need to go beyond the assumptions that economic or rational considerations are not sufficient in explaining human behavior got recognition in the studies by Elton Mayo and his associates at Hawthorne (Mayo, 1941). Nonmonetary factors like supervisory attitude and behavior, worker satisfaction, morale and group membership were shown to be important in these studies.

The importance of making fuller use of the latest potential of workers through management methods was stressed in the researches carried out by behavioral scientists like Likert (1961) and McGregor (1960). Their analyses were based on the assumption that the average worker is willing to accept the responsibility and will respond to the opportunity of using his intellectual faculties in larger measure. Maslow (1970) and Herzberg (1966) also concluded that management efforts directed solely towards the improvement of physical conditions and human relations in the enterprise could do little to create positive satisfaction and commitment among workers, whereas the enrichment of task and the introduction of a more flexible organization of work to give greater scope of initiative and self-fulfillment could be vastly more rewarding.

Despite the importance of the issue, very little research has been done in Bangladesh into the question of how much participation is desired by industrial workers as well as how the managerial people view the dynamics of participation. Although the Government has been and is still now interested in some sort of participation, basically joint consultation in the form of Works Councils or Works Committees, it failed to create enthusiasm or interest either among the partners of production or among any circle of the intelligentsia in the country. Due to pay lack of inspiration researchers probably did not pay any attention to this important aspect of industrial relations. Emran (2001) revealed that the extent of workers' participation in the public sector industries is yet limited. The study puts forward steps necessary for an increase worker participation in management of the public sector industries.

Islam et al. (2014) observed that only few motivational activities such as bonus, transport, canteen, medical facility and profit sharing are used in garment sector for motivating the employees. Moreover, the workers of garments industry identified causes of poor participation in decision making, such as absence of willingness of the management, absence of labor union activities, lack of workforce diversity, illiteracy of the workers and political grouping among the workers. According to section 208(1) of Bangladesh labor Code- 2006 the employer and the trade union of the establishment shall take necessary measures to implement the specific recommendations made by the Participation Committee within the time prescribed by it. Section 208(2) provides that if by

any reason the employer or trade union faces any problem in implementing the recommendations of the committee within prescribed time, the Participation Committee shall be informed of it and all possible endeavors shall have to be taken to implement the recommendations. But reality is that there is hardly any participation committee in RMG sectors. There are some industries, where the participation committee has been formed without maintaining the laws relating to the formation of the committee and somewhere they do not observe the functions of the committee.

3.0 OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Objectives of the Study

The present study was centered around the following objectives with certain specific queries:

1. How far a background for participative management has been created through the nationalization of industries as perceived by the actors, i.e. workers, management and government?
2. How much is the existing organizational climate conducive to participative management?
3. What are the desired forms of participative management as expressed by the actors?
4. What are the essential preconditions for successful implementation of participative schemes as desired by the actors?

3.2 Method and Procedure

3.2.1 Sampling Frame and Design

The study is based on literature survey to review the experiences in participation abroad and in Bangladesh; survey of labor legislations and labor policies currently in force in Bangladesh to trace the history and present state of participation in Bangladesh. Field study was conducted in a large industrial undertaking under the public sector in Bangladesh. The study was carried out in a company representing one plant of one of the leading and oldest manufacturers of jute products in Bangladesh. One plant was studied in order to eliminate inter-plant variance. A total number of 181 respondents were selected randomly. A workers' list was prepared department wise, dividing them into skilled and unskilled workers and 108 workers were selected randomly. The size of the sample from each was determined proportionately on the basis of the total workforce working in each department excluding casual workers. The number of workers thus decided was equally divided into skilled and unskilled workers who were then selected randomly by the help of a Random Number Table prepared by Kendall and Smith (1953). A total of 60 managerial people, including supervisors, were selected. Care was taken so as to include in the sample management personnel of all important functions at different hierarchies. 13 government officials employed in the Department of Labor, Ministry of Labor and Employment, and Ministry of Industries, were contacted for personal interviews. The researcher tried to increase the size of the samples in this group but failed to do so mainly because of the unwillingness of many government officials to be interviewed; these people also did not agree to fill in the questionnaire. Others, who did it, did it so anonymously. The government officials who filled in the questionnaire and agreed to be personally interviewed were holding senior positions in their respective offices.

3.2.3 Development and Administration of Questionnaire

Three separate comprehensive questionnaires, intended to be the principal instruments for obtaining necessary information, were prepared for (1) workers (2) management personnel and (3) government officials, were developed tentatively and pretested with management personnel and workers in the plant where final survey was conducted. Expert advice was also solicited before finalization of the questionnaire which was then administered to the samples. After collecting the data from all the three respondent groups, Likert's attitude scoring method was used for compiling and computing the data.

4.0 ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Impact of the Nationalization of Industries on Participative Environment

The attitude of the workers, management personnel and government officials toward the impact of the nationalization of industries in the context of Bangladesh were measured by five forced-choice statements where the respondents indicated their attitudes on a five-point scale. The differences between perceived and desired mean scores obtained in all the statements by both workers and management personnel are statistically highly significant (p.05). In case of government officials the mean differences are significant on all items except two.

Both workers and management personnel perceived that the nationalization of industries in Bangladesh failed to emancipate the workers from the exploitative clutches of top managers. After the independence of Bangladesh, the government, owing to committed political ideology and persistent demand from workers, took over the ownership of major industries, including the jute industry, with the belief that nationalization would be a panacea for the exploitation of workers. The study confirms the failure of such a belief. Both the partners of production, i.e. workers and management personnel, believed that the policy of nationalization should be used as an important vehicle for the amelioration of the conditions of labor. Government officials' desires also corresponded to that of the workers and management personnel.

Although the workers were near to the agree-point (mean score=3.75) both management personnel and government officials did not perceive that nationalization has resulted in the emergence of a powerful professional class of top managers who wield almost a similar power over the workers as the employers of private enterprises. All the three groups were of the view that nationalization has not created enormous power in the hands of union leaders over the managers. Creation of enormous power in the hands of union leaders due to nationalization is highly desired by workers (mean score=4.06) but it is thought to be least desired by management personnel (mean score=1.20) and quite important by government officials.

From the analysis of the data the situation does not seem to be frustrating for introduction of participative management in the nationalized industries, in particular. From the desired mean scores one can find an optimistic, rather than pessimistic, attitude of both workers and management personnel – the leading actors in industrial administration.

4.2 Organizational Climate for Participative Management

Organizational climate was measured from the opinion of the workers and management personnel expressed on ten items in a closed sub-questionnaire.¹ The mean differences between actual and desired opinion of all the items are statistically significant beyond one percent level of confidence. This it is obvious that the existing organizational climate for participative management as perceived by the partners in production clearly differs from what they desire to be.

Taking a criterion of 2 and below (between disagree and strongly disagree) none of the items could achieve this level in the case of workers. This implies that existing organizational climate, as viewed by workers, was not conducive to workers' participation in management. On the average, the management personnel also shared the workers' views (average perceived mean being only 2.00 as against 1.70 of workers). Taking a criterion of 5 (essential), not a single item, as desired by both the parties, achieved this level. But if the criterion is changed to 4 (very important) and above, one would find that all the items achieved this level except item (for workers) "In our company managers/supervisors remain aware of the state of the company's morals and does everything possible to make it high", and (for management personnel) item "In our company managers/supervisors show thoughtfulness and consideration for others". Almost all the job conditions described in the ten statements were absent but highly desired by both the workers and management personnel. The management personnel were indifferent to the item "managers/supervisors show thoughtfulness and consideration for others" which they considered to be quite important.

¹ The questionnaire items were adopted from L.E. Greiner, "What managers think of participative leadership", *Harvard Business Review*, March-April, 1973.

The desired mean scores of both workers (4.37) and management personnel (4.31) being very high indicate that both the parties equally desired for better organizational climate that might be conducive to participative management. Although existing organizational climate was not congenial for participative management, which found its expression in the overall perceived mean scores (workers 1.70 and management personnel 2.01), the future does not seem to be bleak (Tables 1 and 2).

4.3 Forms of Participative Management

Table 3 presents the desired ranking assigned to each of the forms of participative management by workers, management personnel and government officials. A respondent could rank any alternative form of participation in a continuum of one to seven. The maximum possible score in every case was the number of observations multiplied by 7.

An examination of Table 3 indicates that the coefficient of correlation (ρ) between workers and management personnel was very high (0.96). This revealed high similarities of opinion between the two groups. Similarity of opinion has also been found between management and government officials as the obtained ρ (0.75) was significant at .05 level of confidence.

It is obvious from Table 3 that the most preferred form of participation among the actors was having workers' representatives in the various joint labor-management committees at different levels in the organization. Other forms preferred by workers and management personnel (up to third rank) were worker-suggestion system and informal, direct participation in decisions at the shop floor level. The least preferred forms of participation, according to the parties, were boardroom representation by workers, either as minority or parity or representation along with ownership. This leads us to the conclusion that the industrial workers are least interested in ownership of industry or in codetermination rather they like to concern themselves in reasonable sharing of power through their representatives' involvement in managerial decisions. Since the management personnel also held the same view as that of the workers, it augurs well for the introduction of a consensus form of participation in the enterprise.

4.4 Preconditions for Participative Management

Table 4 presents the mean responses of the samples regarding the preconditions for successful implementation of participative management in the undertakings. The instrument used to find out the attitudes of the parties was a sub-questionnaire with 16 forced-choice statements along a five-point scale. The scale had five steps from 'not essential' to 'most essential'. A test of the significance of the differences of means between the different groups of samples indicates that the attitudes of the samples are not the same toward most of the desired preconditions for participative management.

A percentage analysis of the data also shows that while 45% of the workers considered item 1 most essential, only 3% of the management personnel agreed with the workers' views. Similarly, one-fourth and more than one-third of the workers respectively felt that items 9 and 10 were most essential preconditions for participation, but around nine-tenths of the management personnel voted against the views of the workers. In a like fashion, while more than 80% of the management personnel viewed items 8, 11, 13, and 16 as most essential preconditions for participation, less than half of the workers did not agree with the management personnel on these items (Table 5). With the exception of items 1, 9, and 15, all other items were considered 'very essential' by majority of the government officials. None of the items were viewed 'most essential' by this group of the samples.

5.0 CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The following conclusions emerge from the above analysis with respect to the demand for participation:

1. Nationalization of industries could neither ameliorate the conditions of labor nor could it create any purposeful background for workers' participation in management. Workers, management personnel, and government officials unanimously desired that nationalization should create the background for participation.

2. Workers have strong desire for participation in decision-making process of the organization. On the other hand, management personnel have shown the willingness to accept the workers' involvement in the decision-making except in the strategic top-level decision areas. The level of agreement both within and among these two partners in production suggests an orientation towards participation. Thus, there is considerable scope for increasing workers' influence in different organizational decisions.
3. Informal approaches to participation like job enlargement, job enrichment, individual counseling, group decision-making, etc. have to be given much importance in addition to the formal approaches. This is needed to help change the management style of functioning. If the informal methods can help develop a culture for participative styles of management within an organization, then people will develop faith in the system and formal representative participative forums can succeed in spite of different constraints.
4. Workers' participation in management should not be thought of as a substitute for collective bargaining. Participative forums should play a complementary role to the process of bargaining. Participation and collective bargaining should not be merged together, rather the demarcation between the two must be clearly defined. Workers' participation has not genuine chance of success if it is continued in opposition to trade union movement.
5. Workers and management personnel are in favor of statutory participation. There is, thus, the scope for introducing participative schemes with legislative support. But caution should be taken to rule out coercive legislation. It is desirable to have enabling statutes for such kind of legislation as to promote the institutional preconditions for labor-management relations.

The overall conclusion drawn from this study is that there is considerable scope for introduction and development of appropriate workers' participation program in the public sector industries, especially jute industries, if certain preconditions are met.

6.0 DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The ideas articulated in this paper may further be developed at least in two directions. First and foremost, future research on the existing and desired degree of workers' influence in different decisions at various levels, in other words, the relationship between the amount of participation that they should have and the amount they perceive they do have in a variety of areas. And, finding answer of 'in what way workers should be involved in decision-making areas?' The second direction for further research involves undertaking of empirical researches in the industrial relations system conceive the term "workers' participation in management" with theoretical analyses. In the absence of adequate empirical evidence, literature centers mostly around theoretical propositions related to workers' participation in managerial decision-making. Empirical researches should therefore develop along with conceptual developments. Also, culture researches need to explore how to improve not only organizational, but also employee and societal well-being.

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Annexure

Table – 1: Perceived and Desired Views of Workers and Management Personnel Regarding Organizational Climate for Participation

Measure of Participation Characteristics		Actual			Desired			$\bar{X}_1 - \bar{X}_2$	T*
		\bar{X}_1	SD	S.E. of \bar{X}_1	\bar{X}_2	SD	S.E. of \bar{X}_2		
1. Give the subordinates/workers a share in decision-making	W	1.63	.92	.09	4.47	.74	.07	2.84	24.58
	M	1.60	.66	.09	4.03	.31	.04	2.43	25.46
2. Inform the subordinates/workers of the true situation, good or bad, under all circumstances.	W	1.72	.84	.08	4.31	.63	.06	2.59	25.50
	M	1.57	.67	.09	4.00	.00	.00	2.43	28.00
3. Remain aware of the state of the company a morale and does everything possible to make it high.	W	1.66	.78	.08	3.97	.83	.08	2.31	20.94
	M	1.50	.50	.06	4.00	.26	.03	2.50	34.12
4. Are easily approachable.	W	1.80	.78	.07	4.69	.46	.04	2.89	32.95
	M	1.70	.78	.10	4.77	.42	.05	3.07	26.52
5. Counsel, train and develop workers.	W	1.59	.64	.06	4.60	.49	.05	3.01	38.68
	M	1.37	.48	.06	4.37	.48	.06	3.00	33.81
6. Communicate effectively with the subordinates/workers.	W	1.78	.79	.08	4.52	.54	.05	2.74	29.82
	M	2.53	1.41	.18	4.43	.50	.06	1.90	9.78
7. Show thoughtfulness and consideration for others.	W	1.65	.79	.08	4.15	.86	.08	2.50	22.22
	M	2.60	1.36	.18	3.80	.70	.09	1.20	6.03
8. Make changes in ways of doing things.	W	1.62	.75	.07	4.28	.74	.07	2.66	25.96
	M	1.70	.78	.10	4.47	.62	.08	2.77	21.33
9. Support subordinates when they make mistakes not due to negligence or without any bad intention.	W	1.66	.91	.09	4.18	.76	.07	2.52	21.96
	M	2.80	1.17	.15	4.63	.48	.06	1.83	11.16
10. Express appreciation when subordinates/workers do a good job.	W	1.85	.95	.09	4.48	.55	.05	2.63	24.74
	M	2.73	1.15	.15	4.63	.48	.06	1.90	11.68
Average across all items	W	1.70	.82	.08	4.37	.66	.06	2.67	26.29
	M	2.01	.90	.12	4.31	.43	.05	2.30	17.66

Notes: W = Workers (N=108); M = Management Personnel (N=60).

* The differences between mean scores of actual and desired on all items are statistically significant at the level of 0.01, both for workers and management personnel.

Table – 2: Mean Response to Organization Climate for Participative Management

Content	Workers (N=108)			Management Personnel (N=60)			Difference Between	
	Perceived	Desired	Difference	Perceived	Desired	Difference	Perceived workers & perceived mgt.	Desired workers & desired mgt.
In our company								
Managers/Supervisors:								
1. Give the subordinates a share in decision-making.	1.63	4.47	2.84	1.60	4.03	2.43	0.03*	0.44@@
2. Inform the subordinates of the true situation, good or bad under all circumstances.	1.72	4.31	2.59	1.57	4.00	2.43	0.15@	0.31@@
3. Remain aware of the state of the company's morale and does everything possible to make it high.	1.66	3.97	2.31	1.50	4.00	2.50	0.16@	-0.03*
4. Are easily approachable.	1.80	4.69	2.89	1.70	4.77	3.07	0.10*	-0.08*
5. Counsel, train and develop subordinates.	1.59	4.60	3.01	1.37	4.37	3.00	0.22@@	0.23@@
6. Communicate effectively with subordinates	1.78	4.52	2.74	2.53	4.43	1.90	-0.90@@	0.09*
7. Show thoughtfulness and consideration for others.	1.65	4.15	2.50	2.60	3.80	1.20	-0.95@@	0.35@@
8. Make changes in ways of doing things.	1.62	4.28	2.66	1.70	4.47	2.77	-0.08*	-0.19@
9. Support subordinates when they make mistakes not due to negligence.	1.66	4.13	2.52	2.80	4.63	1.83	1.14@@	-0.45@@
10. Express appreciation when subordinates do a good job.	1.85	4.48	2.63	2.73	4.63	1.90	-0.78@@	-0.15@@
All items taken together	1.70	4.37	2.67	2.01	4.31	2.30	-0.31@@	0.06*

Notes: * Not significant.

When workers and score is less than management personnel score (-) sign is used and vice-versa.

@ Significant at 0.05 level. @@ Significant at 0.01 level.

Table – 3: Forms of Participative Management by Workers, Management Personnel, and Government Officials

Alternative Forms	Score*	Workers (N=108)		Score	Management (N=60)		Score	Government	
		$\frac{\% \text{ of max. score}}$	Rank		$\frac{\% \text{ of max. score}}$	Rank		$\frac{\% \text{ of max. score}}$	Rank**
1. Having one of two workers nominated to the Board of Directors.	406	53.70	6	130	30.95	6	44	48.35	6
2. Having parity in the Board of Directors.	354	46.83	7	122	29.05	7	32	35.16	7
3. Workers having share in the ownership and getting elected to the Board.	498	65.87	5	170	40.48	5	76	83.52	2
4. Having workers' representatives in various joint committees at different levels.	690	91.27	1	386	91.90	1	88	96.70	1
5. Having a worker-suggestion scheme in the concern.	662	87.57	2	322	76.67	3	56	61.54	4
6. Extending collective bargaining machinery to cover the decision-making process.	546	72.22	4	264	62.86	4	52	57.14	5
7. Informal face-to-face participation in decision-making at work place.	584	77.25	3	352	83.81	2	64	70.33	3

Notes: * Maximum score possible is 756, 420 and 91 for workers, management and government officials respectively.

** Rank difference correlation coefficients (rho) are as follows:

Workers vs. Management = 0.96 (significant at .01 level)

Workers vs. Government = 0.29 (not significant)

Management vs. Government = 0.75 (significant barely at .05 level)

Table – 4: Mean Responses to Preconditions for Participative Management

Summary Contents	(W)	(M)	(G)	Difference Between		
	N=108	N=60	N=13	W & M	W & G	M & G
1. Decentralization of authority	4.30	3.90	2.92	.40**	1.38**	.98**
2. Education of employees	4.37	4.43	3.54	.06*	.83**	.89**
3. Efficient channels of communication	4.21	4.43	3.54	.22@	.67**	.89**
4. Non-political company leadership	4.20	4.40	4.38	.20@	.18*	.02*
5. Attitudinal change in workers and management	4.39	4.47	4.23	.08*	.16@	.25**
6. Complete sharing of information	4.08	4.53	4.08	.45**	.00*	.45**
7. Participation through plant level representatives	4.27	4.40	4.08	.13*	.19**	.32**
8. Strong trade unionism	4.27	4.80	3.77	.53**	.50**	1.03**
9. One established union	3.39	2.87	2.15	.52**	1.24**	.72**
10. Clear-cut jurisdiction of collective bargaining	4.16	3.67	3.92	.49**	.24**	.25@
11. Management's acceptance	4.40	4.77	3.77	.37**	.63**	1.00**
12. Clear objectives of participation	4.27	4.43	3.85	.16@	.42**	.58**
13. Harmonious industrial relations	4.28	4.93	3.77	.65**	.51**	1.16**
14. All level participation	4.34	4.37	4.00	.03*	.34**	.37**
15. Voluntary and grass-root origin	3.44	3.60	1.77	.16**	1.67**	1.83**
16. Upholding manager's formal authority	4.18	4.83	4.08	.65**	.10*	1.75**
Average	4.16	4.30	3.62	.14*	.54**	.68**

Note: W = Workers, M = Management Personnel and G = Government Officials

* Not significant

** P < .01 (two-tailed t-test) < @ .05 (two-tailed t-test)

Table – 5: Desired Preconditions for Successful Participative Management as Viewed by Workers, Management Personnel and Government Officials (percentage of respondents endorsing each response category)

Preconditions for Successful Participation	Respondents	Response Category					Mean Score
		NE	LE	MW	VE	ME	
1. Decentralization of the organization structure as well as of the authority.	W	0.00	5.56	5.56	42.59	45.30	4.30
	M	0.00	3.33	6.67	86.67	3.33	3.90
	G	0.00	46.15	15.38	38.46	0.00	2.92
2. Education of employees about the various aspects.	W	0.00	4.63	3.70	41.67	50.00	4.37
	M	0.00	0.00	3.33	50.00	46.67	4.43
	G	0.00	30.77	15.38	61.54	0.00	3.54
3. Efficient channels of communication, the participants' common conception and an appropriate system of rewards.	W	0.00	6.48	8.33	42.59	42.59	4.21
	M	0.00	0.00	3.33	50.00	46.67	4.43
	G	0.00	23.08	0.00	76.92	0.00	3.54
4. Freedom of organization's leadership from the control of any political party.	W	0.00	9.26	2.78	46.30	41.67	4.20
	M	0.00	3.33	0.00	43.67	53.00	4.40
	G	0.00	0.00	0.00	61.54	38.46	4.38
5. Attitudinal changes both in workers and management to adopt participative style of management.	W	0.00	0.00	9.26	42.59	48.15	4.39
	M	0.00	0.00	6.67	40.00	53.33	4.47
	G	0.00	0.00	0.00	76.92	23.08	4.23
6. Complete sharing of information by the company with the employees.	W	0.00	10.19	4.63	51.85	33.33	4.08
	M	0.00	3.33	0.00	36.67	60.00	4.53
	G	0.00	0.00	7.69	76.92	15.38	4.08
7. Necessity of having workers' participation through their representatives at plant level rather than external trade union representatives.	W	0.00	0.00	13.89	45.37	40.74	4.27
	M	0.00	3.33	3.33	43.33	50.00	4.40
	G	0.00	0.00	0.00	92.31	7.69	4.08
8. Existence of strong and effective and honest trade unionism in the enterprise.	W	0.00	3.70	7.41	47.22	41.67	4.27
	M	0.00	3.33	0.00	10.00	86.67	4.80
	G	0.00	0.00	23.08	76.92	0.00	3.77
9. Presence of only one establishes trade union in each industry.	W	9.26	9.26	13.89	29.63	25.00	3.39
	M	0.00	0.00	33.33	6.67	13.33	2.87
	G	15.38	15.38	0.00	15.38	0.00	2.15
10. Clearly defined are of collective bargaining & non-merging of collective bargaining and PM.	W	0.00	0.00	10.19	44.44	38.89	4.16
	M	0.00	0.00	43.33	46.67	10.00	3.67
	G	0.00	0.00	15.38	76.92	7.69	3.92
11. Management's recognition and acceptance of the concept of emocratization of work place.	W	0.00	0.00	10.19	39.81	50.00	4.40
	M	0.00	0.00	3.33	6.67	86.67	4.77
	G	0.00	0.00	23.08	76.92	0.00	3.77
12. Clarity of the objectives of participative management.	W	0.00	7.41	9.26	32.41	50.93	4.27
	M	0.00	0.00	0.00	56.67	43.33	4.43
	G	0.00	0.00	15.38	84.62	0.00	3.85
13. Harmonious industrial relations climate.	W	0.00	4.63	9.26	39.81	46.30	4.28
	M	0.00	0.00	0.00	6.67	93.33	4.93
	G	0.00	0.00	23.08	76.92	0.00	3.77

14. All-level participation and its extension to all decision-making processes.	W	1.85	2.78	2.78	44.44	48.15	4.34
	M	0.00	0.00	3.33	56.67	40.00	4.37
	G	0.00	0.00	0.00	100.00	0.00	4.00
15. It must be voluntary and it must evolve, but not imposed from above.	W	18.52	12.04	4.63	37.04	27.78	3.44
	M	0.00	43.33	0.00	10.00	46.67	3.60
	G	38.46	53.85	0.00	7.69	0.00	1.77
16. It must not threaten to undermine managers' formal authority.	W	0.00	5.56	12.04	41.67	40.74	4.18
	M	0.00	0.00	0.00	16.67	83.33	4.83
	G	0.00	0.00	0.00	92.31	7.69	4.08
Average across all items	W	1.85	6.31	7.99	41.84	41.95	4.16
	M	0.00	6.87	6.67	35.84	50.63	4.30
	G	3.37	13.94	8.65	68.27	6.25	3.62

- Scale: (1) NE = Not essential; LE = Less Essential; MW = Midway; VE = Very essential and ME = Most essential
- (2) W = Workers (N=108); M = Management Personnel (N=60); and G = Government Officials (N=13)
- (3) Significance of the mean differences:
- (i) Between W & M
 - a) For items 3, 4, and 12 –P/ 0.5
 - b) For items 1, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13 and 16 –P<.01
 - c) For items 2, 5, 7, 14, 15, and average P .05
 - (ii) Between W & G
 - a) For item 5 –P/ .05
 - b) For items 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15 –P/ .01
 - c) For other items –P/ .05
 - (iii) Between M & G
 - a) For item 10 –P/ .05
 - b) For item 4 –P>.05
 - c) For other items –P<.01



IDENTIFYING THE ENGLISH COMMUNICATION NEEDS OF THE ENGINEERING LEARNERS IN BANGLADESH THROUGH NEEDS ANALYSIS: AN ESP PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

This needs analysis study aims at identifying the engineering students' academic and professional communication needs. To attain the objective, the study makes extensive use of survey through students' questionnaire, semi-structured interview with ESP teachers and classroom observation checklist for data collection of the study. The researcher has adopted mix-method of research for this exploratory study. The qualitative data have been analyzed using thick description and pattern eliciting techniques and the quantitative data have been analyzed to measure the relative frequencies and rank order in terms of students' priority of their learning needs using SPSS. The analysis and findings of the study seem to suggest that there is a huge gap between what the students perceive as important for their academic and professional purpose and what the teachers teach or what the university offers in the curriculum. Hence, the study attempts to offer some valuable suggestions based on the findings to bridge this gap by addressing the issues in the ESP instruction in the curriculum.

Key Words:

English for Specific Purpose (ESP), Needs Analysis, Stakeholders, Qualitative method, Quantitative method, SPSS

INTRODUCTION

Needs analysis generally refers to the activities that are involved in eliciting information that serves as the basis for developing an ESP curriculum/syllabus that will meet the specific needs of a particular group of students (Iwai *et al.* (1999) cited in Zakaria *et al.*, 2017). English language communication need is one of the topmost priorities among all kinds of recruiting authorities not only in Bangladesh but also across the world. This is given even more priority while recruiting engineering graduates in different private organizations especially because of the inherent nature of their professional practice in the target situation. English indeed has never been assigned the appropriate status since the independence of our nation due to its highly complicated and thorny journey starting from the British to the Pakistani era and finally the various transformations that took place during military rule. Thus the miserable picture of most of our graduates across all sectors is quite visible which is quite evident among the engineering graduates of the country. Most of the domestic and multi-national employers reject many of these graduates because of their poor communication skills in English even though they have good command in technical skills. Teaching English language to engineering learners matches the English for Specific Purposes

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(ESP) approach. As Polack-Wahl (2000) stated, for the success of engineering graduates in their workplace in the global context, oral communication and presentation skills are considered to be the best career enhancers and the single biggest factor in determining the engineering students' success or failure in career.

In the similar fashion, Beder (2000) has emphasized on the relevance of the communication skills for the engineering graduates in the following statement:

"Skills such as problem solving, communication, interpersonal skills, critical and independent thinking skills should be nurtured in engineering education, not just as because these are the features and qualities that employers look for in engineering graduates but because these should be treated as indispensable part of any tertiary education." (Beder, 2000)

The valuable observations Beder (2000) has made are completely absent in the English curriculum for engineering students in Bangladesh.

This study is an attempt to identify the common English language communication needs of engineering students in Bangladesh to offer suitable suggestions to overcome from this crisis.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

English language teaching learning practices in the government engineering universities of Bangladesh always remain an area outside the main stream English teaching. However, most of the corporate employers especially those hiring engineers look for certain employability skills and abilities in the candidates to succeed in their professional life. One of these criteria is good communication skills in English which is found unsatisfactory among most of the engineering graduates in Bangladesh. Thus, the onus for inculcating such skills is on the English teachers. However, most of the English language teachers fail to inculcate the desired skills due to the absence of a skill-based textbook, inconsistencies with teaching-learning objectives etc. This problem further intensifies when one can notice that most of the English language teachers are from literature background without any professional experience or pre-service training. Therefore, it is quite evident that there is a significant gap between the needs of the students and the existing teaching learning practices that the present English curriculum entails.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Hence following are some of the research objectives formulated for this study:

- To identify and explore the current English language teaching practices in the engineering universities of Bangladesh
- To identify and explore the nature of the instructional materials used in these engineering universities of Bangladesh
- To identify and explore the potential gaps between the expectations of the students of the engineering universities with respect to English Language curriculum and the employability skills required by the industrial sector
- To identify the reasons for the lack of positive attitude and motivation among engineering students' towards English class in the engineering universities of Bangladesh
- To achieve the above mentioned objectives, the researcher has formulated the following research questions.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How far the teaching materials used in English class in engineering universities of Bangladesh relate to the students' learning purpose and career needs?
2. Do the English language teaching learning practices in Government engineering universities of Bangladesh have potential to bridge the gap between students' career needs and industry requirements?
3. To what extent do Bangladeshi engineering universities support the professional growth of English teachers for ESP instruction?
4. What are the reasons for the lack of positive motivation and attitude towards English class among students of engineering universities in Bangladesh?

LITERATURE REVIEW

A host of studies related to needs analysis on language teaching in engineering contexts have been conducted in Bangladesh and abroad. Thus this section aims to critically analyze and present studies highlighting the relevance to this current study as well as address the gap.

In this connection, engineering learners in Thailand have expressed their long term dissatisfaction over their ability to communicate in English (Wattanasakunpusakon, 1996; Kittidhaworn, 2001 as cited in Kaewpet, 2009). They have observed that ESP courses offered to engineering learners in their university in Thailand have not seriously considered their specific language and learning needs and thus they have emphasized to address those specific needs in their ESP curriculum.

In another study, Illing (2001) has conducted a study "*Wanted: Skills in Communication*" in Australia that has revealed his observations on the needs of communication skills of engineering graduates. Most participants in the study feel that they have gained adequate written skills like analytical and problem solving skills, subject specific knowledge, improved decision making abilities etc. through their academic degree. Despite this, majority of the participants have expressed their dissatisfaction with their degree as it has not provided the essential oral communication skills along with few other related skills such as management skills, understanding of others' points of view and others' cultures and competence to work in international environment (Illing, 2001, p.24). The researcher, however, believes that the English communication needs of Bangladeshi engineering graduates are different from Australian graduates.

Similarly, Reimer (2002) in his study on "*English and Communication Skills for global engineers*" observes that a range of skills is mandatory for engineers to maintain the relevance with the global environment of the new millennium. In the same article, he emphasized on English communication skills as more important than the subject knowledge. Reimer's (2002) study has some limitations as he focused only on the target communication skills and vocabulary to draw students' attention and motivation in ESP class. This study is of immense relevance to the present study.

Hagler (2014) has conducted a research among the Saudi Arabian engineering students to identify the attitudinal factors by offering specialized English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses. The central focus of teaching English language skills (LSRW) to engineering learners is to inculcate specific skills and expertise using ESP approach to make them easily adaptable to the engineering texts in English and be able to communicate in target environment. Hence the ESP approach postulates the idea that every single academic genre, namely engineering, medicine etc, is unique in its nature and therefore the specific stakeholders of that particular discipline requires specific skills to perform in English. This is further supported by an investigation administered by Hartel & Vittori (2010) in the following words:

"Specialized English for Science, Technology and Engineering is specifically important because it helps students in serving various special purposes that are connected with their area of specialization (Hartel & Vittori, 2010)".

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The present study titled "*Identifying the English communication needs of the engineering learners in Bangladesh through needs analysis: An ESP perspective*" falls within the framework of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) or English for Science and Technology (EST) as the whole language pedagogy in the context of engineering takes an ESP/ EST approach. By ESP approach, the researcher means a context where both teachers and students are very much aware of their teaching and learning purposes, goals and target use and where and how to apply the learning outcome. Henceforth, the present study is based on the following theories of ESP that help establishing a framework for this study.

ESP AS A SUPERORDINATE VARIETY OF ENGLISH- SUPER VARIETY THEORY

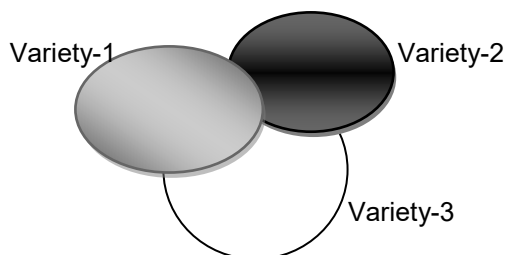


Figure: (01) The LSP Model (Bloor & Bloor, (1986)

Bloor and Bloor (1986) propose a Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) model which serves as a suitable theoretical model for ESP. For them, ESP is a variety of English other than general English. Hence, ESP learners must engage themselves either in engineering, or medical or nursing where the purpose of learning English is different from that of general English. In all such cases, s/he may need to have good command of either English for engineers, or English for Medicine, English for nursing. Hence the ESP learners face a tripartite structure of an overlap of minimum three language varieties such as one standard variety of English, the variety of the speech community and finally the third specific variety resulting from the overlap of the first two. Hence the LSP model suggests that the ESP learners must keep their primary focus on the common core variety of English, then they should move on to the specific variety of English language needs. Finally they suggest that success of an ESP learners depends on his/her level of mastery in the common core or general English (GE).

RESEARCH METHODS

This section is an overview of the research methodology employed in this study. Henceforth, various processes and events related to population, sampling, setting, instrument selection, design and administration for data collection have been duly addressed. Since the study exploits both quantitative and qualitative data, the study uses a mixed method.

Population and Sample: Since engineering students and English teachers serving in the engineering universities are the main source of primary data for this study, they have been treated as the population of this study. A total of 400 engineering students across various branches from BUET and DUET have been chosen were randomly chosen for data collection. However, the 379 participants finally turned up with successfully filled-in questionnaires.

Research Instruments for data collection: The most specified and valuable research instruments such as questionnaire, semi-structured interview and classroom observation checklist have been incorporated in this research to elicit both quantitative and qualitative data.

Design and Administration of Questionnaire and Classroom Observation Checklist (COC): The primary aim of administering a students' questionnaire was to obtain valuable information concerning the students' perceptions and opinions in the essential variables of the study such as existing English syllabus, teaching methods and materials, evaluation system and the potential gaps between students' expectation and the reality they receive from university. The questionnaire for students comprises 56 close-ended items assorted in seven different domains with the last section being an open-ended domain. To ensure optimal accuracy, the researcher has constantly offered clarifications to avoid confusion/s about the terms used in the questionnaire while administering in the classroom.

The COC has been designed and administered in reciprocation of the domains addressed in the questionnaire. Both the quantitative tools have been administered during the semester classes with prior appointment with the respective ESP teachers.

Conducting Semi-structured Interview: Semi-structured interview with the ESP teachers has been conducted in a very natural setting. The interview questions have been designed keeping

aligned with the items addressed in the quantitative tools. However any important issue missed in the quantitative tools has also been duly covered in the interview.

Data Analysis techniques: To have valid and reliable findings, obtained quantitative data have been tabulated and analyzed using SPSS to measure the relative frequencies of the participants' opinions quantified through Likert scale 1 for lowest to 5 for the highest score. However the qualitative data have been recorded in extended writing from audio and short notes. Attempts have been made to identify a common pattern from the raw data. In most cases the thick description technique has been adopted in analyzing the qualitative data. Finally the findings from each source were triangulated against the corresponding findings of other sources to validate the research questions.

RESULTS

The domain on motivation comprising seven items has been designed to elicit spontaneous responses from the participants. Based on the higher frequency of responses, following is the rank order presented according to the needs and priorities perceived by the students. The following table on motivation for learning English reflects the participants' top priority to improve communication skills and to pursue higher education abroad followed by the role of English as career enhancer with English enhancing status in friends and society and integration with western culture and being the last two.

No	Item	Disagree		Agree		Rank	Total	
		N	%	N	%		N	%
1	English helps in job & solving tasks in other subjects	18	5	359	95	2	379	100
2	English helps to pursue education abroad	8	2	366	98	1	379	100
3	The medium of instruction in university is English	52	14	324	86	4	379	100
4	It will help in personal Development	35	9	339	91	3	379	100
5	It will enhance status among friends & in society	109	29	270	71	5	379	100
6	To integrate with western culture	128	33	249	66	6	379	100
7	To increase my communication skills	8	2	367	98	1	379	100

Table 01: Motivation for Learning English

The following domain comprises 05 items on attitude towards learning English. According to the rank order in the table above, the participants showed highest (95%)

NO	Item	Disagree		agree		Rank	Total	
		N	%	N	%		N	%
1	People with high English proficiency can contribute to the country's development more than others	85	22	282	74	5	379	100
2	Use of English in government and business offices helps in getting service easily	48	13	308	81	3	379	100
3	A good command in English is a criterion for career and promotion	19	5	348	92	2	379	100
4	English to be the Mol in the engineering universities in Bangladesh	78	21	293	77	4	379	100
5	Reading English newspaper/ magazines helps in academics	26	7	340	95	1	379	100

Table-02: Attitude towards Learning English

priority in favour of reading English newspaper and its role in academics followed by the perception of 92% participants in favour of English being a top criterion for career enhancer. The students further prioritized the use of English in official purpose followed by usefulness of English as a medium of instruction along with the correlation between people with high proficiency in English and their contributing to the country's development being the last one.

No	Item	Disagree		Agree		Rank	Total	
		N	%	N	%		N	%
1	Syllabus should clearly specify the aims and objectives of the course	16	4	360	95	1	379	100
2	Current syllabus focuses on grammar and structures rather than professional communication skills	79	21	296	78	4	379	100
3	Existing syllabus lacks adequately on practicing and developing technical writings	51	13	321	85	3	379	100
4	Existing syllabus should include topic such as oral presentation and group discussion	27	7	348	92	2	379	100
5	There should be more credits/hours allocated to English course	111	29	257	68	5	379	100
6	English as a subject should be continued at least up to 3 rd year	148	39	212	56	6	379	100

Table- (03) Summary of English syllabus domain

The domain above on syllabus consisted of six items related to the strengths and weaknesses of the syllabus. The participants gave highest importance for specifying aims and objectives being the strength of a syllabus with 95% favorable opinions. The participants (92%) have shown their priority for including oral communication and group discussion in the English syllabus followed by the importance of including technical writing skills with their opinion on continuing English course up to third year being the lowest in terms of priority.

The following table shows that item-8 (*professional organizational skills*) with 97% responses tops the list in terms of learning preference. The participants have also prioritized teachers' guidance to deal with process writing followed by teachers using examples and references from their content area, learner-centeredness of language class, individual feedback from teachers, more students' talk-time rather than teachers', more pair and group work in class with integrated teaching of productive and receptive language skills being the last one.

NO	Item	Disagree		agree		Rank	Total	
		N	%	N	%		N	%
1	<i>Feedback & guidance to be given individually to understand the new concepts</i>	19	5	356	94	4	379	100
2	<i>English classes need to be learner-centered</i>	8	2	363	95	3	379	100
3	<i>Students to be given more time to talk in the class than the teacher's talk time</i>	24	6	353	93	5	379	100
4	<i>Students like to have more pair and group works in English class</i>	30	8	345	91	6	379	100
5	<i>Teacher should use examples and references from engineering field</i>	15	3	361	95	3	379	100
6	<i>Guidance to deal with process writing and solving tasks</i>	9	2	363	96	2	379	100
7	<i>Major language skills have to be taught in an integrated manner rather than in isolation</i>	21	6	332	88	7	379	100
8	<i>Communication skills, meeting etiquettes and manners of organizational cultures should be practiced to English class</i>	8	2	367	97	1	379	100

Table- (04) Summary of the domain of teaching methods and learning preferences

In the similar fashion, the following table on teaching materials and inputs summarizes the findings of the respective domain.

NO	Item	Disagree		agree		Rank	Total	
		N	%	N	%		N	%
1	Use reference books for extensive reading & doing tasks	280	74	96	26	5	379	100
2	Use CALL materials like CDs, films, audio-visuals	288	76	35	24	4	379	100
3	Wide range of fiction & stories used in English class	297	78	79	21	3	379	100
4	Materials are selected from general and engg. field	358	95	15	3	1	379	100
5	Students are allowed to bring interesting topics in class	298	79	84	19	2	379	100

Table-(05) Summary table for the domain of teaching materials and inputs

The table above demonstrates the students' top preference for teaching materials chosen from both general English as well as engineering fields rather than from very specialized genre with 95% favorable responses followed by the inclusion of students' chosen topics, use of fiction and stories in English class followed by CALL materials such as films and audio-visuals with the use of reference books for extensive reading and doing tasks being the least important.

When it comes to evaluation procedure, learners have reciprocated their opinions in favour of emphasizing oral presentation with 92% positive opinions followed by students' dissatisfaction with current assessment system with 85% and 84% responses respectively.

NO	Item	Disagree		agree		Rank	Total	
		N	%	N	%		N	%
1	Students are unhappy with the assessment	50	13	318	85	2	379	100
2	Current system promotes subjective evaluation	36	10	315	84	3	379	100
3	External and internal marks should be equal	68	18	298	79	3	379	100
4	Oral presentation to be evaluation in English class	27	7	348	92	1	379	100

Table-(06) Summary table for the domain of evaluation practices

Finally 79% majority of learners have demanded review of existing external and internal proportion to be of equal weight.

The following bar chart is a comparative study between the mean score of students'

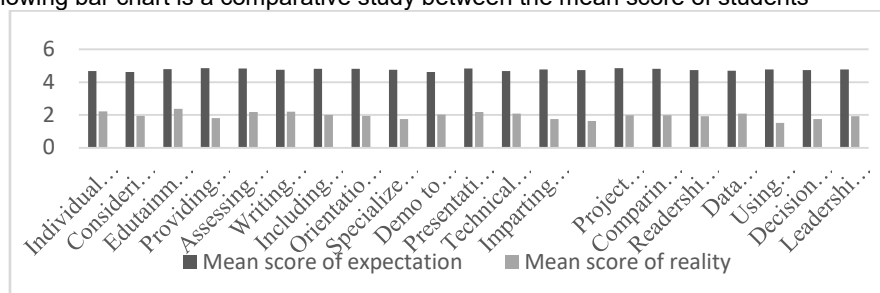


Figure-(07) Comparative domain "gap between the students' expectations versus reality"

expectation from university curriculum and that of the reality they receive from university clearly gives an alarming message that there is a huge gap in every single issue that is addressed in this comparative domain. The average mean score of students' expectation from university curriculum is 4.72 (out of 5) whereas the overall mean score of reality that they actually receive from university curriculum is only 1.96 (out of 5).

The findings from the semi-structured interview with teachers mostly correspond to that of the survey except in areas where students have claimed a complete absence of using field specific materials in language class. The students further claimed the absence of individual feedback although the teachers denied such claim. Since Classroom observation was conducted keeping aligned with the items in the survey, the findings also resemble the same as in survey and interview. The classroom observation helped the researcher in understanding the challenges of class with more than sixty students.

DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY

Since effective implementation of a curriculum is reflected in the meaningful teaching-learning practices, the Needs analysis study using various domains of curriculum of different engineering universities suggest that the existing English curriculum should include content based topics and promote more learner-centeredness to motivate learners and develop a positive attitude in English class. With reference to learners' preference and teaching methods and evaluation procedure, they have expressed their demand for more practice of information transfer, data analysis skills, role plays on various real life contexts, more of English laboratory sessions to continue, change in the proportion of external and internal weightage of marks, specialized ESP contents, more objective evaluation. The participants have further expressed their opinions in favour of frequent interactive sessions to know about industry's latest communication needs to better adapt themselves to their professional contexts. They have further opined for arranging mock group discussion (GD) and interview sessions in language laboratory to excel in their career interviews and to successfully mitigate related professional needs.

Interestingly, the researcher has drawn an inference between the samples of BUET and DUET. A significant majority of the samples from BUET have opined in favour of learning English to pursue higher studies abroad, get settled in developed countries and adapted with western culture whereas almost all the samples from DUET have stated their purpose of learning English to easily get a job as well as to get adapted with the modern society.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has employed both qualitative and quantitative method of research with a rigorous questionnaire survey with students of various Departments of engineering universities, semi-structured interview with English teachers teaching ESP courses in these universities and a classroom observation checklist as a follow up to verify the statements made in the survey. Collected data has been analyzed scientifically using software or programme stated earlier. Findings from various sources suggest that there is a huge gap between what the students expect from the teachers and the university curriculum and what they actually receive from the university. For a meaningful conduct of teaching-learning to meet up students' desires and demands, due space should be given in the revised curriculum. Proper initiatives should also be taken to arrange mock interview sessions in English lab class, adequate sessions for practicing oral presentation, group discussion (GD), mock professional practice to be aware of actual professional context and relevant challenges. The COC helps in exploring the difference between the use of class materials in these two universities as ESP teachers in BUET mostly uses literary extracts to develop speaking skills unlike teachers in DUET who uses CALL materials. However, to meet all such demands of the most important stakeholders of the university, ESP teachers in these universities should be provided with infrastructural and digital/ ICT support and enough space should also be allocated in the engineering curriculum to make engineering learners employable in the 21st century multi-national corporate culture.

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Status and Potentials of ICT Integration into Higher Education: A Case Study at Bangladesh Open University

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ABSTRACT

Information technology integrated in higher education of country enriches its acceptability. The aim of this study is to find the current status of ICT integration into higher education programs at Bangladesh Open University (BOU) which is the only university provides education in open and distance mode. Data was collected from two graduate programs running by School of Business of BOU. A total sample of 120 students was selected randomly. Structured questionnaire based on literature review was used for interviewing the sampled respondents. Descriptive statistical analysis was used to analyze the data. It was also taken an effort to find the comfortability level of the graduate students using ICT as well as to assess the potential of ICT used in higher education at Bangladesh Open University. In future, the findings of this report may contribute to find out the possibility and potentials of ICT integration in other programs of BOU.

Keywords: Information and Communication Technology (ICT), Higher Education (HE)

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Higher Education sector of any country plays a very important role. Information technology integrated within it enriches the acceptability. In traditional (face to face) mode of teaching, learners views and acceptance cannot be properly flourished whereas in open and distance learning mode is learners based which can make the learning system more alive. Bangladesh is now almost prepared to catch the edge of technology and integrated it into different sector. Bangladesh Open University is the only university in Bangladesh established in 1992, which provides education in open and distance mode. Good Information and Communication Technology support is essential and plays vital role for open and distance learning. For achieving effective delivery of education the university has taken steps to employ most of the modern communication technology. BOU has taken full advantage of the modern ICT to facilitate and support its students all over the country, e.g., provision of student-related information through web (with data bases at back end), Learning Management System (LMS), Interactive Virtual Class Rooms (IVCR), Mobile Technology, pre-recorded Video Programs and Live Programs (Live Streaming) through the use of National TV channel (BTV) as well as Satellite TV Channel (Sansad TV Channel), Radio Programs for both formal and informal academic courses in collaboration with Bangladesh Radio and Video Conferencing for better quality education (BOU Website).

Thus, this research, attempts to focus on the current condition of the ICT integration into BBA and MBA programs of Bangladesh Open University as well as to know the learners readiness and comfortability with the ICT in education. This study is divided into five sections.

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1.1 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1.1.1 The Broad objective of this research is to explore the current status of ICT integration in BOU's BBA and MBA programs and identifying the strategies to intensify the ICT use for exploring better potentials.

1.1.1 The specific objectives of the study will be as follows -

- to recognize current status of ICT integration in higher education programs (i.e. BBA and MBA) at Bangladesh Open University.
- to identify the level of comfortability with ICTs of the students of BBA and MBA programs.
- to know the potentials of ICT use in near future given the growth of access and inclusion of ICT at BOU.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Different published articles, journals, books, PhD research works were studied to get an insight of this research work. ICT refers to 'Information', 'Communications' and 'Technology'. While most ICT-related studies have been obsessed with the 'Technology' component such as infrastructure, networks and connectivity, the 'Information' and 'Communications' components have been overshadowed despite their primary importance in this grouping (Oye et al., 2011). The growth of information and communication technologies (ICT) has dramatically reshaped teaching and learning processes in higher education (Pulkkinen, 2007; Wood, 1995). The use of ICT offers powerful learning environments and can transform the learning and teaching process so that students can deal with knowledge in an active, self directed and constructive way (Volman & Van Eck, 2001; de Corte et al., 2003).

Distance Education is a method of teaching, where the instructor and learners are separated by time or physical distance. Students typically use various materials like books, references, CD-ROMs and electronic media to replace direct face-to-face learning. Social interactive education refers to conventional face-to-face learning. (Fulford and Zhang 1993). Bangladesh Open University is the only public university in Bangladesh that is offering distance education. Established in 1992, it has opened up new vistas in distance education in the country (website BOU).

According to Islam and Selim (2006), "The full potentials of ICTs infrastructure are yet to be exploited by BOU and other institutes that are committed to the promotion of open and distance learning. It is expected that the current improvement of ICTs infrastructure of Bangladesh may promote open and distance learning for educating mass of her people (p.42)." Teaching and learning has gone beyond the teacher standing in front of a group of students and disseminating information to them without the students' adequate participation (Ajayi, 2008). However, we are hopeful that the present government has declared to build "Digital Bangladesh" to connect rural and urban areas with high speed broadband internet connectivity. A number of telecommunication operators like Grameen Phone, Banglalink, Airtel, City Cell, Robi are increasing their ICT services throughout the country by introducing mobile internet, (Chowdhury and Khatun, 2013). Thus, this has opened up a door for an ODL (open and distance Learning) institutions like BOU providing better teaching and learning environment. Becker (2000) found that ICT increases student engagement, which leads to an increased amount of time students spend working outside class.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The nature of this study is explorative. Both primary and secondary data was used to achieve the purpose of the study. The target population is the students of BBA (Bachelor of Business Administration) and MBA (Master of Business Administration) programs in the year 2016 of School of Business at BOU. A sample of 140 students was selected randomly from the population. But only 61 students of MBA program and 56 students BBA program were responds. Thus, among the responded sample 52% students were from MBA program and 48% from BBA program.

A structured questionnaire was used for interviewing the sampled respondents, furthermore a structured questionnaire was also used interviewing with faculty teachers of School of business of

BOU to get the insights of their readiness of ICT integration. Out of the respondents of faculty teachers, only 25 percent female and the rest 75 percent was male. The structured questionnaire includes 5 statements in five-point likert scale ranging from strongly disagrees to strongly agree. Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement on “Whether they feel comfortable with Internet browsing for academic purpose.”, “whether the use of ICT make task more easily thereby increases productivity”, “whether they think ICT-integrated course provides better learning comparing to traditional print based materials”, “whether they feel comfortable in using multimedia in classroom” and “whether they feel that training on ICT will increase theperformance.” The questionnaire for students also includes 5 statements in five-point likert scale ranging from strongly disagrees to strongly agree accordingly. Several related published reports; ICT related published information from authentic internet sources, newspaper as well as related case studies in this field was accessed for secondary data. Statistical analysis was done to analyze the data.

4.0 RESULTS

4.1 Demographic status:

The demographic status of the learners of BBA and MBA programs of school of business of BOU are included in the appendix. From the table - 8 it can be observed that majority of the learners of both program are male reside in urban area. It was also found that significant portions (58%) of the MBA learners are within 31 years to 40 years old whereas in case of BBA learners, 63 percent were up to the age of 30 years. Looking into the Table - 8, it was also observed that maximum (57%) MBA learner's last degree was Masters whereas 55 percent of BBA learners passed Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) degree and 44 percent obtained 2 years Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree which is very usual. It can be noted that most of the respondents are from business background whereas 37 percent of the respondents were enrolled into MBA program and 26 percent are enrolled into the BBA program are from science background respectively. From the results of the survey it was also found that majority of MBA learners are having job in private sector, 23 percent government, and 53 percent of the BBA learners are having no occupation.

4.2 ICT integration status of BOU

The current status of ICT integration in higher education programs at BOU has been observed from the following 3 point of views – (i) current uses practice of technology, (ii) teachers' views and readiness towards technology, (iii) infrastructure and administrative support. Being the only distance learning university in Bangladesh, BOU has the following uses of technology in higher education: national TV, national radio station, E-books, apps, digital library, mobile technology, youtube, facebook, BOUtube, BOU website, E-learning, Web TV and radio, multimedia in classroom as well as LMS (Learning Management System). Furthermore, the current infrastructure and administrative is supporting in using these tools in a limited context.

To know the faculty members readiness of School of Business at BOU, a structured questionnaire was used. The study showed that all the respondents' responses were between strongly agreed and agreed. Thus, it was asked to the respondents to know whether all of them used smart phone with internet connection, it was found that 67 percent (Table - 7) of them were connected always with internet through mobile phone. In another statement related with faculty members regarding the use of learning management system (LMS) in their courses, it was highlighted that only 17 percent (Table - 7) respondents uses LMS in their courses and 83 percent (Table - 7) were reluctant to use. Furthermore, majority of them also indicated that they feel comfortable in using multimedia in classroom and agreed that training on updated ICT tools will increase their performance. This indicates that all the teachers of school of business are quite comfortable with the use of internet for academic purpose along with ICT tools in different programs. They were also in the same opinion that ICT integrated courses will provide better outcomes compared to traditional print based education system.

Furthermore, it was observed (from the table – 6, included in appendix) that majority of the faculty members identified several important problems or challenges they are facing while using ICT tools at BOU. Such as - lack of technical support, lack of basic knowledge/skills for ICTs, lack of

appropriate course content and instruction as well as lack of appropriate administrative support. On the other hand, learners of the MBA and BBA program also found that the lack of technical support, lack of appropriate course content and instruction and lack of appropriate administrative support are the major problems or challenges in the use of ICT at BOU.

4.3 Learner's comfortability with ICTs

All the learners of both programs are also requested to provide response for 3 statements in a likert scale. These statements are "I feel comfortable with Internet browsing for academic purpose", "Use of ICT make my study more easy thereby increases my efficiency" and "I think ICT-integrated course provides me better learning comparing to traditional print based materials and I enjoyed it". Table – 1 revealed that 61 percent, 41 percent and 60 percent of the MBA learners cluster their opinion in strongly agreed level for the statement 1, 2, 3 respectively. Apart from that there was a little deviation of response in agreed level which is 35 percent, 45 percent and 37 percent respectively. That is majority of the MBA students agree that they feel comfortable with internet browsing for academic purpose and they also think that ICT-integrated course provides better learning comparing to traditional print based materials.

In case of the learners of BBA program (Table – 2), 30 percent, 0 percent and 27 percent of the respondents cluster their opinion in strongly agreed level for the statement 1, 2, 3 respectively. Also there was a deviation of response in agreed level which is 52 percent, 0 percent and 50 percent respectively. Thus it reveals that learners of BBA programs were in moderate condition in using ICT in their higher education.

It can be observed from table – 3 that 90 percent and 57 percent of the MBA learners as well as 57 percent and zero percent of the BBA learners are having smart phone with internet connection and are used to LMS system. That is the learners of BBA program were not familiar with LMS concept. The respondents were also asked about the devices they randomly use the internet other than mobile phone set. The survey result given in Table - 4. It showed that maximum percentages of the learners of both programs are frequently use desktop computer and laptop to browse internet. Being the only distance learning providing university in Bangladesh BOU offers some ICT facilities at higher education programs. The respondents were asked about how many ICT facilities of BOU were known to them and in the next question the researcher tried to know about the facilities they are using presently at their higher education among the existing ICT facilities of BOU. Table – 5 shows the result. It was found that most of the learners of MBA program familiar with multimedia in classroom, face book, BOU website, National TV, E-books and other tools in a very little context. The learners are using almost all the ICT tools with which they familiar. The picture is quite different in case of learners of BBA program. It is seen that they didn't heard the name of many of the ICT tools rather than multimedia in classroom, National TV, Face book and BOU website tools. This research only covers the study centers at Dhaka city. So the scenario could be worse at the centers outside Dhaka city.

4.4 Potentials of ICT integration in Higher Education at BOU

Bangladesh Open University has huge potentials regarding inclusion of ICT in higher education. The school of business of BOU has conducting three categories Master of Business Administration (MBA) program. Furthermore, it has Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) program. From current year the university has started to take students on its M.Phil and Phd. Program. There is a high opportunity to get the benefits from inclusion of ICT of these programs. However, the infrastructure facilities of BOU are also satisfactory to support the necessity of doing so.

BOU is the only university in Bangladesh providing higher education in distance mode. By using its wider regional coverage, the university can reach higher education to the mass people. In this case fully integration of ICT will help a lot as well as make the course smoother. Mass people are the strength of the country. They need to be educated so that can contribute to development of the nation.

5.0 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The study reveals that presently all the teachers of school of business are friendly with different ICT tools. They are also positive in the opinion that ICT integrated courses will provide better outcomes compared to traditional print based education system. Moreover the learners of both sample programs were capable as well as enjoying the use of ICT in their higher education. However, it was seen that, few learners of BBA program had lack of confidence regarding the use of ICT. All the respondents had similar findings about the problems they are facing in using ICT tools in education at BOU. The administration of BOU should take steps to provide more technical support to teachers, students and support services as well as arranging training for the faculty members to overcome the findings that respondent identified.

Thus, it can be concluded that the status of ICT integration in higher education in Bangladesh especially in BOU is in emergent stage. Furthermore, the university has huge potentiality to speed up its inclusion of ICT into higher education.

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APPENDIX

Table – 1: Summary of MBA Students survey responses

Sl.	Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
		1	2	3	4	5
		MBA	MBA	MBA	MBA	MBA
i	I feel comfortable with Internet browsing for academic purpose.	0	2	0	21	37
		0%	3%	0%	35%	61%
ii	Use of ICT make my study more easy thereby increases my efficiency	2	0	6	27	25
		3%	0%	10%	45%	41%
iii	I think ICT-integrated course provides me better learning comparing to traditional print based materials and I enjoyed it.	0	0	2	22	36
		0%	0%	3%	37%	60%

Source: Researcher's Survey response

Table – 2: Summary of BBA Students survey responses

Sl.	Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
		1	2	3	4	5
		BBA	BBA	BBA	BBA	BBA
i	I feel comfortable with Internet browsing for academic purpose.	0	3	8	31	18
		0%	4%	13%	52%	30%
ii	Use of ICT make my study more easy thereby increases my efficiency	5	20	35	0	0
		8%	33%	58%	0%	0%
iii	I think ICT-integrated course provides me better learning comparing to traditional print based materials and I enjoyed it.	0	3	11	30	16
		0%	5%	18%	50%	27%

Source: Researcher's Survey response

Table – 3: Summary of survey responses

Statement	Response (%)			
	Yes		No	
	MBA	BBA	MBA	BBA
I use smart phone with Internet connection	90%	57%	10%	43%
I use LMS (Learning Management System) for any of my courses.	57%	0%	43%	100%

Source: Researcher's Survey response

Table – 4: Summary of survey responses

Which device you use to browse internet except mobile –		
Device	Response (%)	
	MBA	BBA
Desktop Computer	41%	68%
Laptop	27%	18%
Tablet	20%	3%
Net book	6%	0%
other	6%	10%

Source: Researcher's Survey response

Table – 5: Summary of survey responses

Program	Statement	Multimedia in Classroom	Face Book	Internet Connections in Classroom	National TV	BOU Apps	BOU website	Access in E-Library	LMS	National Radio	YouTube	Web TV and Radio	E-Books
MBA	Existing facilities of BOU	23%	20%	2%	8%	5%	16%	5%	3%	3%	5%	3%	8%
	Facilities are used currently	26%	15%	8%	7%	5%	14%	2%	5%	3%	2%	4%	8%
BBA	Existing facilities of BOU	29%	8%	3%	17%	0%	28%	0%	0%	2%	9%	0%	0%
	Facilities are used currently	32%	9%	7%	15%	0%	26%	0%	0%	5%	5%	0%	0%

Source: Researcher's Survey response

Table – 6: Responses for problems or challenges facing while using ICT at BOU

Problems or Challenges	Responses (%)		
	MBA	BBA	Faculty Teachers
Lack of Technical support	29%	20%	100%
Lack of basic knowledge/skills for ICTs	11%	20%	67%
Lack of hardware	17%	6%	17%
Uninterrupted electricity	7%	6%	42%
Lack of appropriate course content and instruction	21%	16%	83%
Lack of appropriate administrative support	12%	29%	75%
Other	4%	2%	0%

Source: Researcher's Survey response

Table – 7: Summary of survey responses of Faculty Teachers

Statement	Faculty Teachers Response (%)	
	Yes	No
I use smart phone with Internet connection	67%	33%
I use LMS (Learning Management System) in any of my courses.	17%	83%
I feel comfortable in using multimedia in classroom	91%	9%
I feel that training on ICT will increase the performance.	84%	16%

Source: Researcher's Survey response

Table - 8: Learner's demographic status (n=120)

Variable		MBA		BBA	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	44	72%	36	64%
	Female	17	28%	20	36%
Age group of respondents	Age up to 30 years	12	20%	38	69%
	31 years to 40 years	36	59%	15	27%
	above 40 years	13	21%	3	5%
Last Degree obtained	H.S.C.	0	0%	33	59%
	B.A. (pass)	0	0%	20	36%
	Bachelor	21	34%	3	5%
	Masters	34	56%	0	0%
	Above Masters	6	10%	0	0%
Educational Background	Science	23	38%	16	28%
	Arts	14	23%	5	9%
	Business	24	39%	35	63%
Occupation	Government	14	23%	3	5%
	Autonomous	7	11%	8	15%
	Private	32	52%	14	25%
	Others	8	13%	31	55%
Residence	Rural	11	18%	8	14%
	Urban	50	82%	48	86%

Source: Researcher's Survey response



Quality of Learning Resources of Commonwealth Executive Master of Business Administration Programme: A Case of Bangladesh Open University

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ABSTRACT

Commonwealth Executive Master of Business Administration (CEMBA) programmes is one of the prestigious programme in Bangladesh for making skilled professionals. For ensuring better learning engagements quality of learning resources plays a crucial role. This paper focuses on the quality of learning resources used in CEMBA Programme as per the learners' perceptions as well as the tutors' opinions. The paper also verifies the effectiveness of the learning resources in engaging the learners meaningfully. The paper finally sheds light on the scope of SDG integration into CEMBA courses.

Keywords: Commonwealth Executive Master of Business Administration (CEMBA), Quality, Learning Resource, Bangladesh Open University (BOU).

1. INTRODUCTION

The qualities of learning resources are essential components for learners in order to drive a stimulating learning experience of the learner. For learning materials in any medium, the importance of clear, unbiased, and accurate content is often taken to be so obvious that the detrimental effects of poor content quality are rarely analyzed. Mikk (2002), however, explained the value of conducting empirical research to measure both content quality and the impact of its absence. While his work focused on the assessment of quality in textbooks, it is equally relevant to content quality in other learning materials, including multimedia learning resources.

With the fascinating inventions and growth of educational technologies, distance education is expanding everywhere in the world in response to the increasing demand for it. At the same time, the higher education institutions, both in developing and developed countries, are struggling with the question of how to ensure that students learning through ODL receive the same educational quality as traditional on-campus students, if not better? There are a number of views regarding the quality assurance in ODL. Some are pessimist about the quality of ODL programmes while others are optimistic about it. Many agencies and individuals are "frankly suspicious of distance education, believing that distance education programs have either low standards or no standards (Carnevale, February 18, 2000; Twigg, Quality, 2001, p. 3).

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Poor or inadequate resources are the most discouraging aspect of the classroom ... the room was enclosed and there was no space to perform any activities other than general chalk and talk/teacher-centred strategies (Booth et al., 1998, pp. 3–4). To enhance the quality of education it is essential to improve the standard of basic teaching materials and general school environment. Increasing access without ensuring the provision of quality teaching materials and a suitable learning environment will not improve our societies, as was pointed out by a special rapporteur of the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council, Mr Kishor Singh (2012).

Although there are different views about the quality assurance in ODL courses and the existing alien quality guidelines may not be appropriate in local context, there is no way to leave the question of quality assurance in ODL courses/institutions unsolved. The need to ensure quality of ODL courses even rocketed high as demand for the ODL courses like Commonwealth MBA (CEMBA) is growing very fast. CEMBA is a very high quality professional academic programmes through open and distance education, recognized and accredited throughout the commonwealth countries. The commonwealth of learning and collaborating universities in Asia, i.e. Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), Bangladesh Open University (BOU), Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU), and Sri Lanka Open University (OUSL), Sri Lanka are pleased to launch the CEMBA programme to be offered initially in South Asia and subsequently throughout the commonwealth. Launched in 2002, the CEMBA programme is now expanding through partnership with universities in Asia, Africa, The South Pacific and South America.

CEMBA is mostly dependent on printed study resources. The printed textbooks and modules are developed and revised centrally under the auspicious of the Commonwealth of Learning (COL). In terms of the quality of the contents, it is believed that these are of international standards. However, the quality of the resources depends on their ability to fit with the purpose of the learners. Context plays a very important role in defining the quality of content. Therefore, there is a need for a quality audit to assess whether CEMBA study resources fulfill the local needs or not.

This paper intends to shed light on the quality of learning resources used in CEMBA Programme as per the learners' perceptions as well as the tutors' opinions. The paper also verifies the effectiveness of the learning resources in engaging the learners meaningfully. The paper also scrutinizes the scope of SDG integration into CEMBA courses too.

LITERATURE REVIEW

With regard to the meaning of the term “quality”, there are varied scholarly conceptions of the maiden term. The term “quality” changes from time to time (Harvey & Green, 1993:10). However, it is the receiving customers who judge quality of services that they receive (Sandmaung & Khang, 2013:262). Much as quality is understood to be a slippery and elusive concept which cannot be easily defined (Mwenje & Saruchera, 2013:142), it remains something that is “value-laden” for the user of a product or service (Juran, 1999:2.2). Quality, thus, is the basis for economic success, improved product or service, as well as customer satisfaction and competitiveness (Talib, Rahman & Qureshi, 2013). Harvey and Green (1993), however, state five ways of thinking about quality: “quality can be viewed as exception, as perfection, as fitness for purpose, as value for money, and as transformative” (p.11)

To enhance the quality of education it is essential to improve the basic teaching materials and general school environment. Increasing access without ensuring the provision of quality teaching materials and a suitable learning environment will not improve our societies, as was pointed out by a special rapporteur of the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council, Mr Kishor Singh (2012).

Curriculum mismatch is a big challenge for Cambodia higher education, while most Cambodia HEIs supply a relatively large number of graduates in accounting, finance and management. For this reason, this reflects students do not understand the skills demanded by employers and insufficient information on study and career opportunities (Khieng, Madhur, & Chhem, 2015) and the demands of future economic diversification (ADB, 2015). Therefore, the Education Strategic Plan 2014-2018 (2014) addressed the mismatch between the needs of the labor market in terms of skills, critical thinking ability and knowledge and the current products on the market.

The quality of services in HEIs counts on institutional management and leadership capacities, which includes qualifications of rectors, vice-rectors, deans and faculty members. However, their capacities vary from cities and provinces. For instance, it is 9 very rare to find full-time faculty members holding a PhD in provincial universities. Additionally, highly qualified faculty members allocate their time between public and private HEIs, and between teaching in the capital city and the provinces (Khieng, Madhur, & Chhem, 2015). Furthermore, the training is inadequate to empower faculty members to teach effectively at the university level due to less carry-out research, which is essential to improve the quality of HEIs. In fact, many HEIs especially private ones, have employed a very limited number of full-time teaching staff while a large number of teaching staff are part-time lecturers who have not been provided appropriate and adequate training opportunities and support from their institution (Williams, Kitamura, & Keng, 2016).

2. OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this paper aims at auditing quality of the learning resources used in CEMBA program in terms of need orientation, learner engagement, SDG integration, and context focus. It explores the following aspects -

- The quality of the learning resources of CEMBA Program in terms of need orientation;
- How far the resources of CEMBA program engages the learners;
- Status of SDG integration into CEMBA courses; and
- Strategies for further improvement of the CEMBA Program

3. METHODOLOGY

The paper uses mostly the primary data. An opinion survey was administered purposefully on the 50 learners, 5 tutors and 1 coordinator of the CEMBA program at Bangladesh Open University. A structured questionnaire was distributed among the learners, tutors and coordinator mentioned above. A total of 35 learners, 5 tutors and 1 coordinator responded in the survey. For data analysis, statistical software called Strata has been used in the paper. Tabular analysis has been done aligned with the specified objectives.

4. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

4.1 Perceptions of the learners

4.1.1 Contents of learning resources

Contents of the learning resources play a crucial role in teaching learning. Especially, in ODL system, the quality of learning materials is very much important as the learners need to comprehend the concepts by themselves. Table 4.1.1 summarizes the learners' perceptions about the content of the CEMBA course materials.

Table 4.1.1: Learners' perception regarding the content of the learning resources

Questions	SA	A	ND	D	SD
The contents of the study materials help me to acquire the knowledge and fundamental principles.	51.43%	25.71%	17.14%	2.86%	2.86%
Activities in the course books are well structured and combine ideas to complete assignments.	25.71%	14.29%	22.86%	20.00%	17.14%
Language used in the course materials is lucid and understandable.	74.29%	11.43%	5.71%	5.71%	2.86%
The sequence and layout of the course books are attractive and gives comfortable reading.	34.29%	0.00%	28.75%	22.86%	2.86%
The course materials help to analyze or critically assures ideas, arguments for case studies.	40.00%	2.86%	34.29%	17.14%	5.71%

Strongly agree = SA, Agree = A, Neither agree nor disagree = ND, Disagree = D and Strongly disagree = SD

Source: Field Survey, 2017

Table 4.1.1 shows that 74.29% of the respondent learners are convinced about the language of the course books; however, in other cases, the responses are mixed. The learners are not happy with the activities, cases, design and academic depth of the contents of the course materials.

4.1.2 Compatibility for learner engagement

Engaging learners is a very difficult but a must-to-do job for enhancing quality of learning. The learners of CEMBA programme are distant learners. There the study materials must be designed in a way so that they become self explained and include the learners meaningfully. Table 4.1.2 summarizes the learners' responses regarding the compatibility of the CEMBA course materials in terms of learning engagement.

Table 4.1.2: Learners' perception about the compatibility of course materials for learner engagement

Questions	SA	A	ND	D	SD
The way the programme materials has been designed is supportive and helpful for self-learning	40.00%	8.57%	20.00%	22.86%	8.57%
This learning materials will be a great incentive to enhance my carrier opportunities	42.86%	37.14%	17.14%	2.86%	0.00%
Learning resources are fully served your purpose.	45.71%	40.00%	11.43%	2.86%	0.00%

Strongly agree = SA, Agree = A, Neither agree nor disagree = ND, Disagree = D and Strongly disagree = SD

Source: Field Survey, 2017

Table 4.1.2 shows that there are mixed responses on the capability of the learning resources to engage the learners meaningfully. Regarding the design of the learning resources, 40% of the respondent learners strongly agree that these are engaging and helpful. However, 20% were neutral and 23% disagreed. In other two cases, such as career sensitivity and need-orientation of the course materials, learners varied mostly.

4.1.3 Need for integrating Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)

As the CEMBA students are usually the professionals and executives in various government, non-government and multinational organizations, it is important that they have better idea how to integrate international development agenda or goals into our contents. They feel that CEMBA courses should integrate the UN sustainable development goals into the contents.

Table 4.1.3: Learners' perception regarding the integration of SDG's specific (Goal 4) goals into the CEMBA course materials

	Agree	Neutral	Strongly agree	Total
CEMBA courses need to be integration to SDG's specific goals integration	12	5	18	35
%	34.29	14.29	51.43	100
Total	12	5	18	35
%	34.29	14.29	51.43	100

Source: Personal Survey, 2016

Table 4.1.3 shows that 51.43% of the respondent learners strongly endorsed the necessity of SDG integration into the CEMBA study materials. They feel that the UN sustainable development goals, especially Goal 4 should be integrated into the curriculum and contents of the CEMBA courses.

4.2 Tutor's perception about the learning resources

Tutors play the most important roles in CEMBA. Unlike face-to-face teachers, CEMBA tutors have to go through the whole study materials before coming to the tutorial sessions. Their perceptions give a significant message regarding the quality of the study resources. Table 4.2 summarizes the perception of the tutors regarding the quality of the study materials.

Table 4.2: Tutors' perception regarding the quality of the CEMBA study resources

Questions	Tutor's perception about contents				
	SA	A	ND	D	SD
The way the programme materials have been designed is clear and helpful for self-learning.	0%	40%	20%	40%	0%
Language used in the course materials is lucid and understandable.	20%	0%	60%	20%	0%
The sequence and layout of the course books are attractive and gives comfortable reading.	0%	20%	40%	40%	0%
The course materials help to analyze or critically assures ideas, arguments for case studies.	0%	60%	20%	20%	0%

Strongly agree = SA, Agree = A, Neither agree nor disagree = ND, Disagree = D and Strongly disagree = SD

Source: Field Survey, 2017

Table 4.2 shows that 40% of the tutors are not highly convinced with the design of the course materials. They disagree (40%) that the materials are helpful for self-learning. Most of the tutors (60%) do not agree nor disagree that the language use in the course materials is lucid and understandable. The tutors agree (60%) that the materials are helpful in terms of critical thinking and case analysis.

4.3 Tutor's perceptions about the SDGs: Tutors feel that the UN sustainable development goals, especially Goal 4 (Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all) should be integrated into the curriculum and contents of the CEMBA courses, which is partially missing at the moment.

4.4 Coordinator's perception about the learning resources and integration of SDGs: Coordinator agreed that the design of the course materials are helpful for self learning, language use in the course materials is lucid and understandable. He also agreed that the sequence and layout of the course books are attractive and gives comfortable reading and the materials are helpful in terms of critical thinking and case analysis. But he is not fully satisfied with this. He strongly agreed that SDGs should be integrated into the curriculum and contents of the CEMBA courses.

Learning materials must be evidence-based, objective driven, and designed to engage both today's students and teachers. Whether the products are print, digital, visual or web-based, it should meet the learning goals and addresses the demand and expectations of different cultural backgrounds of today's students. A well-presented document can be a potent motivation for student learning.

5. DISCUSSIONS

CEMBA program is in high demand among the executives in government, non-governmental and multinational organizations. As busy executives, they always prefer flexibility in learning. Given the very limited use of technologies, the learners of this program mostly reply on the printed textbooks.

5.1 Contents of learning resources: The learners are convinced about the language of the course books; however, in other cases, the responses are mixed. The learners are not happy with the activities, cases, design and academic depth of the contents of the course materials. They feel that more context specific cases should be included into the course contents.

5.2 Compatibility for learner engagement: The learners gave mixed responses on the capability of the learning resources to engage the learners meaningfully. Regarding the design of the learning resources, 40% of the respondent earners strongly agree that these are engaging and helpful. However, 20% were neutral and 23% disagreed. In other two cases, such as career sensitivity and need-orientation of the course materials, learners varied mostly

5.3 Need for integrating Sustainable Development Goals (SDG): As the CEMBA students are usually the executives in various government, non-government and multinational organizations, it is important that they have better idea how to integrate international development agenda or goals into our contents. They feel that the UN sustainable development goals, especially Goal 4 (Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all) should be integrated into the curriculum and contents of the CEMBA courses.

5.4 Tutor's perception about the learning resources: The tutors are not highly convinced with the design of the course materials. They disagree (40%) that the materials are helpful for self-learning. Most of the tutors (60%) do not agree nor disagree that the language use in the course materials is lucid and understandable. The tutors agree (60%) that the materials are helpful in terms of critical thinking and case analysis. However, they think that the contents of the courses should be upgraded continually, which is missing in the cases of the CEMBA courses.

5.5 Coordinator's perception about the learning resources: The Coordinator agreed that the learning resources are satisfied. But there are scopes for improvement. Course materials should be easier. Course contents should be more consistent and well synchronized.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Availability of quality resources for teaching and learning at postgraduate level is recognized as vital in providing better learning opportunities to learners. Without suitable resources, it is difficult for teachers to implement the curriculum effectively to improve what and how well the learners learn. A poorly resourced school will discourage and frustrate teachers in their school work and might have a negative impact on graduates' learning. The paper tried to unearth the quality of the CEMBA learning resources based on the learners' as well as tutors' perceptions. The findings show that the learners are not highly satisfied with the CEMBA learning materials. Also the tutors are not happy with the CEMBA textbooks. The following steps can be taken to revitalized the CEMBA courses –

1. Continual revision and update of the course materials
2. Taking regular feedback on contents and units of existing books/study modules from all stakeholders of this programme
3. Localization/contextualization of study materials
4. Reducing the volume of the books
5. Softcopy of textbooks need to display at BOU website and make provision to get access to the professional students
6. Online access to the text materials

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Syed Martuza's Idea of Language as Exposed in His Poem “সাঁই, এক বিনে মাঙলা এক বিনে”

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ABSTRACT

This paper reads one of Syed Martuza's poems from the perspective of Ferdinand de Saussure's idea of language. Like the other verses of Bangla literature in the Middle Ages, the poem is oriented by religious beliefs. However, this paper finds that, in this poem, Martuza presents a discourse on language where he identifies the nature of language as it is identified in modern linguistics. Like Saussure, he holds the notion that our reality is linguistic as we come into terms with reality with language. However, while Saussure says that there are no pre-existing ideas and nothing is distinct before the appearance of language, Martuza recognizes the language independent existence of the reality. Moreover, his idea of language embodies modern discourses on semiotics and the role of human thought on language and vice versa. Thus this study reveals that though oriented by religious beliefs, the verses of Bangla literature in the Middle Ages are not detached from the social realities.

Keywords: Syed Martuza, language, linguistics, Bangla literature

INTRODUCTION

Syed Martuza (1590 - 1662) was a Bengali poet and saint of the Middle Ages of the history of Bangla literature. His verses are wonderful embodiment of the development of Sufism. He finds suggestion of God's eternal act of creation in the passionate love of Radha and Krisna (ইসলাম, 2000, p.126) where Krisna is the symbol of the Supreme Spirit or God and Radha is the symbol of the Embodied Soul or Creation (ইসলাম, 1995, p.5). Thus, his verses, like those of Bangla literature in the Middle Ages, are oriented by religious beliefs. হাই ও শরীফ say that “এগুলো ধর্মতাবাদীর একাধারে সাধন সঙ্গীত, বোদন গীতি, ও ভজন” (2010, ক), that means, the verses of the Middle Ages are simultaneously psalms, songs of religious practices, knowledge and worship. However, do they discuss only religious beliefs? Don't we find there any philosophical discourse? Especially as they are linguistic expressions, don't they address problems related to language? Here we will read a poem by Syed Martuza to answer these questions. In this regard, we will use the idea of language by Ferdinand de Saussure, a prominent figure in modern linguistics, as the theoretical perspective of my reading.

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SAUSSURE'S IDEA OF LANGUAGE

Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) is a Swiss linguist, a key figure in the development of modern approaches to language study. Saussure (1966, p.16) maintains that "language is a system of signs that express ideas." In this system the basic unit of meaning is a sign which is a combination of a signifier and a signified. Here the signifier is the word-image which may be visible or audible, and the signified is the mental concept. For example, the signifier 'cat' signifies 'the concept of cat'. However, Saussure here does not mean the distinction between a thing and its name. Rather he means the distinction between 'word-image' and 'mental concept'. The distinction between the signifier and the signified is possible only at the analytical level. They cannot be separated at the level of thought. In language, "one can neither divide sound from thought nor thought from sound; the division could be established only abstractedly" (Saussure, 1966, p.113). However, there is no necessary relationship between the signifier and the signified. Any combination of different sounds or written forms may be used to refer to cat. The connection between the signifier and the signified is a matter of convention. Therefore, meaning of language is arbitrary.

Saussure further maintains that language is constitutive. For example, the terms we give to the seasons of the year shape the concept of year for us. In English there are four distinct names for seasons like spring, summer, autumn and winter. However, the year runs continuously without any breaks at any decisive point in time. As there are continuous changes throughout the year, divisions could be made anywhere. The year is not in reality divided into four. Different languages have different number of names for the seasons. For instance, in Bangla we have six distinct names for seasons of the year. Therefore, the seasons are not an objective fact of nature, they are a way of seeing the year. Saussure maintains that language does not give only names to things and concepts that already have an independent and meaningful existence. 'If words stood for pre-existing concepts, they would all have exact equivalents in meaning from one language to the next; but this is not true' (p.116). Our world is constituted by our language for us, and "there are no pre-existing ideas and nothing is distinct before the appearance of language" (p.112). Besides, a word in a language cannot be defined in isolation. Saussure maintains, "language is a system of interdependent terms in which the value of each term results solely from the simultaneous presence of the others." Thus meaning of language is relational.

A POEM BY MARTUZA

From the perspective of Saussure's idea of language as a system of signs, now we will read a poem by Martuza. The poem begins with the line "সাঁই, এক বিনে মাওলা এক বিনে". We have selected to read this poem, because in this poem we find the use of the term 'চিন' i.e. 'sign' as it is specifically used in modern linguistics. The poem (In হাই ও শরীফ, 2010, p.183) is as follows:

সাঁই, এক বিনে মাওলা এক বিনে
আর নাহি কোন কোই ।।
আপে হরে আপে রাখে সখি!
মাওলা আপে করে কেলি ।
আনন্দ মোহন মাওলা খেলায় ধামালী ।
আপে মন আপে তন আপে মন হরি ।
আপে কানু আপে রাধা আপে মুরারি ।।
সৈয়দ মর্তুজা কহে সখি
মাওলা গোপতের চিন ।
পরান পিরীতিখানি ভাবিলে নবীন ।। (২৯২)

An English translation of the text may read as under (*the translation is rendered by the author of this paper*):

O God, maola is nothing but one
And exists nowhere else.
He escapes himself, he stays in himself, darling!

Maola plays in himself.
 Infatuated by joy, maola is engaged in wordplay.
 In that entity is the mind, and the body I see.
 Kanu exists in it, Radha in it, and the Flute in it.
 Syed Martuza says, O my darling,
 Maola is the sign of the unexposed.
 The bond of passionate love is ever new if it is thought about.

'MAOLA' IS THE SIGN OF THE UNEXPOSED

We will start the reading with the penultimate line of the poem: মাওলা গোপতের চিন (Maola is the sign of the unexposed). Here the three words 'মাওলা', 'গোপত', and 'চিন' address a complex problem related to language. According to বাংলা একাডেমী সংক্ষিপ্ত বাংলা অভিধান (Bangla Academy Concise Bengali Dictionary) edited by আহমদ শরীফ, the word 'গোপত' means গুপ্ত (unexposed), লুক্কায়িত (concealed), অগোচর (something that is beyond human perception) etc. In the context of this poem 'গোপত' means 'something that is beyond human perception'. And the dictionary meanings of 'চিন' are 'দাগ (mark); চিহ্ন (sign); ছাপ (stamp); নিদর্শন (evidence/proof); অভিজ্ঞান (token of recognition); পরিচয় (identity) etc. With these meanings in mind, the verse মাওলা গোপতের চিন reads: 'Maola' is a 'sign' by which we express the 'entity' of what is 'beyond human perception'. Interestingly, Martuza here uses precisely the term 'চিন' i.e. 'sign' as it is used in modern linguistics. In line with Saussure's idea of language, as we have already discussed, the sign 'maola' is a combination of the sound-image i.e. signifier '*maola*' and the concept it refers to i.e. the signified. But what may be the signified of the signifier '*maola*' in this text?

As the text is considered as a Vaishnavite verse, an idea of the Vaishnavite philosophy may help us here to understand the 'signified'. According to Vaisnavite philosophy 'Krisna' is the symbol of the 'Supreme Spirit' or 'God' and 'Radha' is the symbol of the Embodied Soul or Creation. The creator takes a man-like form and the creation a woman-like form. The Supreme Spirit and the Embodied Soul, or the Creator and the creation, or the man-like form and the woman-like form are in passionate love with each other (ইসলাম, 1995, p.5). This Supreme Spirit, i.e. the Creator or the manlike form is 'unexposed' and 'concealed' because that is beyond human perception. Therefore, as the poem reads, this Supreme Spirit is the signified of the signifier 'maola' in the verse মাওলা গোপতের চিন. Thus, while undergoing a spiritual journey towards মাওলা i.e. the Supreme Spirit, Martuza takes up a discussion of language as a system of signs, as it is done in modern linguistics.

THE SUPREME SPIRIT AS A LINGUISTIC CONSTRUCTION

But why does Martuza take up the question of language while discussing the Supreme Spirit? Let us consider Martuza's statement "মাওলা গোপতের চিন" again. As we have already seen, one of the meanings of "চিন" (sign) is 'নিদর্শন', the meaning of which may be 'proof' or 'example'. Hence, the sign মাওলা itself is the proof and example of 'গোপত' ('that which is beyond human perception'). It declares the existence or presence of 'that which is beyond human perception'. Thus, this line implies that the Supreme Spirit ('that which is beyond human perception') is constructed by our language for us. Therefore, Martuza's attempt to attain the 'Supreme Spirit' required him to discuss the nature of language.

Martuza's way of dealing with the question of language indicates, in line with Saussure, the notion of language as constitutive. Language does not only give names to already existing things and concepts, but it shapes our world and ideas as well. Similar arguments are seen in Whorf, an American linguist, (qtd in Palmer, 1981, p.45) who argues that a language does not merely voice ideas, but it is 'the shaper of ideas' and we 'dissect nature along lines laid down by our native languages'. For example, Eskimo has four words for 'snow' – 'snow on the ground', 'falling snow', 'drifting snow' and 'snowdrift' (Boas, qtd in Palmer, 1981, p.21), while according to Whorf (qtd in

Palmer, 1981, p.21) Hopi has only one word to denote a 'flier' – an aeroplane, an insect or a pilot. As for the colour systems of languages, though they seem to be natural, Palmer's discussion (pp.70-75) shows that they appear to differ. Thus each language constitutes our phenomenal world differently and expresses that world by the language-specific concepts. In the same way, Martuza's poem says that the word 'maola' constitutes the concept of the 'Supreme Spirit'.

LANGUAGE INDEPENDENT SUPREME SPIRIT

However, besides speaking of the linguistic construction of the Supreme Spirit, Martuza refers to the language independent existence of the Supreme spirit as well. We can once again see the itinerary of Martuza's development of thought in the poem.

সাঁই, এক বিনে মাওলা এক বিনে
 আর নাহি কোন কোই ।।
 আপে হরে আপে রাখে সখি!
 মাওলা আপে করে কেলি ।
 আনন্দ মোহন মাওলা খেলায় ধামালী ।
 আপে মন আপে তন আপে মন হরি ।
 আপে কানু আপে রাধা আপে মুরারি ।।

We have already read that here 'maola'(মাওলা) is a sign (চিন) which refers to the Supreme Spirit. So, এক বিনে মাওলা এক বিনে/ আর নাহি কোন কোই (maola is nothing but one/And exists nowhere else) suggests that 'maola' i.e. the Supreme Spirit exists as one, and we talk about him with the help of the sign 'maola' i.e. language. Thus Martuza implies that the Supreme Spirit exists independent of language, but we cannot recognize him without language. With this meaning, the Supreme Spirit is not outside the sign মাওলা i.e. language. Similarly, আপে কানু আপে রাধা আপে মুরারি, that is, Kanu, Radha, and Flute are all in that entity i.e. in language. We recognize our reality with language. In the same stream of thought, the line আপে মন আপে তন আপে মন হরি (In that entity is the mind, and the body I see.) says that the mind and the body are also linguistic. The line also implies that it is the speaker (i.e. 'I') who makes the reality linguistic (as in আপে মন হরি) and then depends on language to recognize the language independent existence of the reality.

Thus, while Saussure maintains that "there are no pre-existing ideas and nothing is distinct before the appearance of language," Martuza does not say that before linguistically represented by the signifier মাওলা, the Supreme Spirit has no pre-existing essence or entity. Martuza rather suggests that the Supreme Spirit is language independent, but we cannot know and talk about him without language. That means, although our concept of the Supreme Spirit is linguistic, the existence of the Supreme Spirit is language independent.

'MAOLA' IS ENGAGED IN WORDPLAY

Further, Martuza says that আনন্দ মোহন মাওলা খেলায় ধামালী (Infatuated by joy, maola is engaged in wordplay). Here ধামালী refers to 'a play with words'. As 'maola' is a sign, this line আনন্দ মোহন মাওলা খেলায় ধামালী suggests that language is engaged in wordplay for meaning making. This reminds us of Saussure again saying that meaning of language is relational. That means, the signs in a language take their meaning from the relationship to other signs. They have no intrinsic meaning. So they play with other signs to produce meaning. As Barry (1995, p.42) exemplifies, the word 'hut' depends for its precise meaning on its position in a chain of words, like hovel, shed, hut house, mansion, and palace, related in function and meaning each of which could be substituted for any of the others in a given sentence. If any of the words from the chain is removed, the meaning of each of the other words would be altered.

THE BOND OF PASSIONATE LOVE IS EVER NEW IF IT IS THOUGHT ABOUT

The last line of Martuza's poem draws us to think further on the issue. He says, পরান পিরীতিখানি ভাবিলে নবীন (The bond of passionate love is ever new if it is thought about). How can a passionate love be relevant to the discussion of signs? Who is in love with whom? How can this love be a new one if it is thought about? From our discussion so far, it is clear that this bond of love is the love between the signifier and the signified. Their relationship gives birth to a sign. Interpreting 'পিরীতি' (the bond of passionate love) as a relationship between the signifier and the signified may seem to be forced. But the logic of the development of the poem, as we have already seen, leads 'পিরীতি' (the bond of passionate love) to refer to the relationship between the signifier and the signified. A sign may be considered new if it gives new meaning, and a sign gives new meaning only in the world of men's thought. That's why, Martuza says পরান পিরীতিখানি ভাবিলে নবীন. Roland Barthes' (1915-1980) discussion on semiotics may help us to understand this statement.

Roland Barthes was a French linguist, critic and semiotician. He maintains that, as in language, for any semiotic analysis the relationship between the signifier and the signified is accepted as true. In case of non-linguistic system, Barthes (1972, pp.109-59) says, this associative total of the signifier and the signified only gives birth to 'sign' (not linguistic sign as in language). For example, 'a bunch of roses' may be used to signify 'passion'. Here 'the bunch of roses' is the signifier and the 'passion' the signified. A sign is produced from their relationship, and 'the bunch of roses' becomes a sign. And the bunch of roses as a sign is completely different from the bunch of roses as a signifier. The bunch of roses as a signifier is empty. It is a bunch of roses, nothing else. However, as a sign it is full, charged with the idea of passion. An entity is born out of the relationship of the two. Cultural associations and social knowledge attach the signifiers to the signifieds. The operation of this signifying system in society is like that of the myth. TUNNER (1996, p.16) well describes Barthes's outline of the meaning system of myth: "an incremental signifying system in which social meanings attach themselves to signs, just as connotations attach themselves to a word. This culturally enriched sign, itself, becomes the signifier for the next sign in a chain of signification of ascending complexity and cultural specificity". Barthes (1972, p.115) represents this chain of signification in the following way reminding us that the spacialization of the pattern is here only a metaphor:

1. Signifier	2. Signified	
3. Sign		
I. SIGNIFIER		II. SIGNIFIED
III. SIGN		

He gives the following example in this regard.

I am at the barber's, and a copy of *Paris-Match* is offered to me. On the cover, a young Negro in French is saluting, with his eyes uplifted, probably fixed on a fold of the tricolour. All this is the meaning of the picture. But, whether naively or not, I see very well what it signifies to me: that France is a great Empire, that all her sons, without any colour discrimination, faithfully serve under her flag, and that there is no better answer to the detractors of an alleged colonialism than the zeal shown by this Negro in serving his so called oppressors. I am therefore again faced with a greater semiological system: there is a signifier, itself already formed with a previous system (*a black soldier is giving the French salute*); there is signified (it is here a purposeful mixture of Frenchness and militariness); finally, there is a presence of the signified through the signifier. (p.116)

In this play of constructing meaning, the sign born out of the relationship between the signifier and the signified always changes into a signifier signifying a new signified. Thus in the world of thought signs give birth to new meanings.

In the case of the poem we are discussing here, the signifier 'maola' refers to the signified 'the Supreme Spirit'. 'Maola' as a signifier is empty. Its bond with the 'the Supreme Spirit' gives birth to a sign 'maola' which is full. Now more considerations on the sign 'maola' may refer to new signifieds, and then the sign 'MAOLA' will act as a mere signifier. Thus 'the bond of passionate love' (পরান পিরীতি) between the signifier and the signified will turn into a new one. Hence Syed Martuza says, পরান পিরীতিখানি ভাবিলে নবীন (The bond of passionate love is ever new if it is thought about) and this implies that new dimensions of 'maola' are exposed through human thought.

CONCLUSION

As the Supreme Spirit is linguistic and as language is engaged in wordplay (আনন্দ মোহন মাওলা খেলায় ধামালী) for creating meaning, a discussion of language is necessary for an epistemological discourse on the Supreme Spirit. That's why, Martuza, while searching the Supreme Spirit, comes to consider the nature of language even in the first half of the 17th century.

Martuza's discourse on language identifies the nature of language as it is identified in modern linguistics by modern linguists like Saussure. Like Saussure, he holds the notion that reality is linguistic as we come into terms with reality with language. However, while Saussure says that there are no pre-existing ideas and nothing is distinct before the appearance of language, Martuza recognizes the language independent existence of the reality. Moreover, his idea of language embodies modern discourses on semiotics and the role of human thought on language and vice versa. Thus Martuza, while searching the Supreme Spirit, presents an enlightening discourse on the philosophy of language which includes the debates on language that are current in modern linguistics.

Once read from the perspective of language, Martuza's poem, a representative verse of Bangla literature in the Middle Ages, presents an enlightening discourse on language. This provides us the ground to argue that though oriented by religious beliefs, the verses of Bangla literature in the Middle Ages are not as a whole detached from the social realities. If read from other socio-cultural perspectives, they may go on to address the present socio-cultural problems and questions of the world. Therefore, Bangla literature of the Middle Ages should be read from the contemporary theoretical perspectives.

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Democratization in Bangladesh: Challenges and Suggestions

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ABSTRACT

After a long period of turbulent journey, parliamentary democracy has been restored in Bangladesh in 1991 but political governance of the country is still mired by innumerable ills. It broadly contains a wide arena of confrontation, competition, monopolization of state institutions and resources by the party in power. This trend of politics has tremendously weakened the formal accountability mechanisms and put governance in crisis. The party that wins the election absolutely monopolizes the state apparatus with 'winner takes all' attitude, leaving little scope for the losing party to take part in the process of governance, which leads them to be violent, destructive and irresponsible. In the monopolization process, the ruling party exerts a strong control over all the key state institutions and this is the actual scenario of democratization in Bangladesh and it is limited only in holding elections and demagogue of politicians. We have democratic institutions (Political party, parliament and election commission etc) but sorry to say that these are not institutionalized and vibrant, these are puppet like and inactive. In this article we are going to discuss the obstacles to institutionalize the democracy in Bangladesh and giving some suggestions to make the way of democratization smooth.

Key Words: Democracy, Democratization, Institutionalization, Bangladesh

INTRODUCTION

Democracy was incorporated in the constitution of Bangladesh as the fundamental principle of the nation just after the independence of the country in 1972 but it was a matter of great regret that within a short span of time it was snatched from the constitution. Henceforth Bangladesh underwent authoritarian regimes till 1990s, albeit Bangladesh has reinstated democracy but the country's political governance hardly witnessed any promising change. In Bangladesh a strictive political promotion, boycotting parliament by the opposition bench, economic inequality, absolute majority of the treasury bench, have impeded the path of democratization process. Article 70 of the constitution is a cardinal handicap to institutionalize democracy in Bangladesh. Economic inequality and backwardness of the commoners are also responsible for effective democratization process in Bangladesh. The Article commences with a theoretical framework narrating democracy and democratization, and detecting the hindrances of democratization process in Bangladesh along with the discussion of those obstacles with plausible illustration and at last drawing conclusion with recommendations.

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OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The specific objective of this study is to identify some challenges of democratization and how to overcome these.

RESEARCH QUESTION

This study is to find out answer of particular question. These questions are:

- a) What are the main obstacles to institutionalize the democracy in Bangladesh?
- b) Why democratization process faces challenges in Bangladesh?

METHODOLOGY

This study has followed the secondary source of data. The secondary data have been collected from various books; peer reviewed journals, seminar and working papers, local and foreign articles.

DEMOCRACY AND DEMOCRATIZATION:

'Democracy is generally seen as the political system which is most able to ensure political equality, protect liberty and freedom, defend the common interest, meet citizens' needs, promote moral self-development and enable effective decision making which takes everyone's interests into account (Held,2006).'

We can say against the backdrop of the aforesaid definition of democracy, democratization is the process by which democracy is established. In a word democratization means the process of institutionalization of democracy. According to S.PHuntington, 'at the simplest level, democratization involves the end of an authoritarian regime, the installation of a democratic regime and the consolidation of the democratic regime (Huntington, 1991).'

According to this minimalist definition of democratization process, Bangladesh is a democratic country and democratization is going on here but if we consider the maximalist definition of democratization that means the "Institutionalization of democracy" as the basis of democratization than we are to say Bangladesh is far away from the process of democratization since corruption in administration ,coercion in political behavior ,confrontational politics ,procrastination in bureaucracy and lack of consensus in national interest are the tantamount to Bangladesh politics . 'Political parties' tendency of not showing due respect to constitutional institutions –Parliament, Election Commission and the Judiciary –is the key reason for dysfunction in Bangladesh's parliamentary democracy (The Daily Star, 2011).'

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Challenges of Democratization in Bangladesh

The crucial components of democracy include a meaningful and regular competition for power without any coercion, free and fair election with active participation of the people and the presence of political and civil liberties with protection of human rights. As Huntington prescribed 'The principal criterion of democratization is selection of a government through an open, competitive, fully participatory, fairly administered election (Huntington, 1991).'

On the other hand Mainwaring and Scully predict that the countries which have developed institutionalized party systems will be successful in consolidating democracy. They define consolidation as political interaction between elites and masses that follow established and predictable rules of party competition, parties that develop stable roots in the society, party-based elections to establish legitimacy in the government and party organizations that are firmly structured and territorially comprehensive (Mainwaring, and Scully,1995). Democratic consolidation is very important from the focal point of Bangladesh which began as a democratic country and then at different periods converted into authoritarianism. Therefore the crying question in Bangladesh is not the installment of democracy, but consolidation of democracy. Democratic consolidation provides a hotbed platform for the continuation of democracy without any occasional outburst of dictatorship.

In this article we have scrutinized six challenges, which are making the way of democratization process difficult in Bangladesh. These are delineated below-

- a) Lack of party Institutionalization.
- b) Absolute majority
- c) Boycotting Parliament
- d) Economic inequality
- e) Presence of Article-70
- f) Astringent Political promotion

LACK OF PARTY INSTITUTIONALIZATION

The inducement of democracy in Bangladesh has opened up opportunities for participation in the political system. As political scientists have remarked the demand for wider participation must be followed by party institutionalization (Chowdhury,2002). Institutional political party system can provide grease to accelerate the democratization process. 'An institutionalized party system has a routine election calendar and consistent rules, which govern the winners and losers (Ibid).' Institutionalization has four criteria according to Huntington, these are as follows: "Adaptability-Rigidity, Complexity-Simplicity, Autonomy-Subordination and Coherence-Disunity (Huntington, 1968).' The indicators for party institutionalization are:(a) adaptability measured by party age and generational succession and change in opposition or ruling status;(b) complexity measured by the control of the party by individual and structural organization and differentiation;(c) autonomy measured by independence of parties of social groupings, and (d) coherence indicated by fractionalization (Dix,1992).' On the other hand Mainwaring and Scully suggested that party institutionalization can be measured by the rules of inter-party competition, the development of societal support for parties, and emphasis on elections as the means for selecting rulers and internal organization of parties (Mainwaring, 1995).

Party institutionalization is the pith of democratization process. Institutionalized parties only can play a vital role ensuring democratization process.

ABSOLUTE MAJORITY

Majority is better regarding politics but absolute majority is an ill omen for any political system especially for those countries in which democratic norms and values are not deep rooted or far from being institutionalized like Bangladesh. Absolute majority is the springs of unaccountability, arbitrary, coercion, corruption and so on. Regarding this French historian Lord Acton explicated 'power tends to corrupt, absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men.'

Absolute majority or two-third majority in parliament gives the legitimate right to the ruling party changing the constitution or passing any bill easily according to their own whims by denying the opinions of the opposition even constructive suggestions or relating to the national interest. First Past the Post (FPTP) voting system is working and that is very crucial in perspective of Bangladesh. First Past the Post (FPTP) voting system –means the winner takes all –is usually used in Bangladesh. FPTP voting takes place in single member constituencies, voters put a cross in a box next to their favored candidate and the candidate with the most votes in the constituency wins. All other votes count for nothing. We do not believe FPTP is not a decent system for electing a representative government concerning Bangladesh. Because representative can get elected on tiny amounts of public support as it does not matter by how much they win; only they get more votes than other candidates. FPTP in effect wastages huge number of votes cast in a constituency for losing candidates or for the winning candidates above the level they need to win the seat count for nothing. FPTP restricts a constituency's choice of candidates, representation of minorities and women suffers from, most broadly acceptable candidate syndrome where the safest looking candidate is the most likely to be offered a chance to stand for the election. On the other hand proportional representation system explicates that it ensures representation in Parliament proportionately on the basis of getting votes totally or in percentage in a district or division or country. Actually proportional representation system emphasizes on the getting votes proportionally but in FPTP system party members win seats in a district separately not dependent on the whole votes of the district.

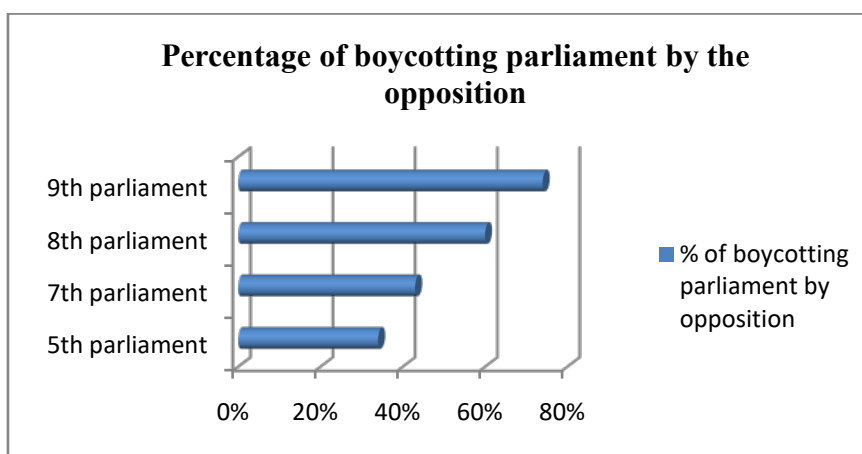
Table-1

Proportional Vs. FPTP/Plurality System	
Proportional Representation Voting System	First Past The Post Voting System
On the basis of getting votes proportionally and transferable voting system.	Single constituency and un-transferable Voting system.
More logical and rational	'Winner takes all' principle
Creating stable and balanced political system	Possibility of absolute majority that create political impasse and instability.
Reflection of each and every vote meticulously.	Assessing only winning votes
Ensuring competition and participation	Less participatory and more dominance.

In FPTP system a district or a division may be divided into several constituencies but in proportional representation system a district is regarded as a unique entity, after getting votes then it allocates member for each constituency.

BOYCOTTING PARLIAMENT

The trend of boycotting parliament by the opposition parties has been increasing gradually. Since 1991 or from the fifth parliament to date, we have been observing the boycotting scenario. Opposition parties condemned that ruling government does not give commensurate opportunity to them in parliament or they have been neglected by the ruling party. An underlying reason is activating behind the scenes of boycotting parliament, from the eighth parliament till now, the winner party have got two-thirds seats of the parliament resultantly they can pass any bill easily due to their absolute majority. Parliament boycott by the opposition parties in fifth, six and seventh parliament was less than those of eighth and ninth parliament. Parliament boycott turns a legitimate government into an authoritarian polity. Participatory parliament is important for the institutionalization of democracy. 'Confrontational politics and the resultant political unrest prompt the opposition to continually boycott parliament which has kept the House dysfunctional for years.'



ECONOMIC INEQUALITY

For economically developed countries it is easy to institutionalize democracy. But in poor countries it is too hard to institutionalize democracy and liberal political culture especially in Bangladesh. The people of this country live under poverty line and are illiterate. Their preoccupation is to fill up their

appetitive needs not the thinking about politics and most of the time they feel responsibility only casting votes during elections. Bangladesh as a poor country the peoples are subconscious regarding democratic values and they used to follow their leaders blindly. And in most cases the corrupt and muscle based leaders take the advantage – taking votes-of abject poverty of innocent people. According to (Huntington, 1991), economic development is the grease of democratization process.

One of the greatest barriers to full realization of the democratic ideal is severe economic inequality. Balanced economy is a prerequisite for the institutionalization of democracy. To continue the process of democratization economic inequality should be done away from Bangladesh and economically back warded people should be included in democratization process by ensuring their participation in the procedure of political development. Making the democratization process smooth in Bangladesh, the government's economic policy should be impoverished people oriented and have to ensure economic safety net for the ultra-poor.

PRESENCE OF ARTICLE 70

Article 70(1) which allows government to use power in the absence of any effective means of accountability, bars floor crossing by an elected member of parliament. As per the Provision of the constitution, if any parliamentarian votes against the decision of his /her party from which he/ she has been elected he /she would lose membership of the parliament. In our existing political culture, leader of the ruling party becomes the leader of the ruling party's parliamentary party and head of the government. So, the MPs of ruling party who constitute the majority in Parliament are to abide by the decisions of the government and provide the support to all actions of the government on the floor of the parliament. That guarantees the approval of all proposals put forward by government in parliament with captive support of majority MPs Parliament's authority.

Article 70(1) is a great bar to the proper democratization and ensuring effective parliament in Bangladesh and it creates an imbalance of power between parliament and government making government all powerful without any scope for check and balance by the parliament.

ASCRPTION OF POLITICAL PROMOTION:

According to Almond & Powell political promotion may be held through the two ways-

- Achievement status
- Astrictive status

Achievement is preferable to ascription. Institutionalization of democracy always follows the former not the latter. In Bangladesh sometimes it is seen that some political promotion is followed by astrictive formula. But it is not good for the political party and whole democratization process also. It makes a big gap between the grassroots politicians and central politicians. Many persons have got significant political post due to their policy of nepotism instead of achievement status. For this reason, grassroots politicians are now indifferent in politics; therefore, our democracy is vulnerable.

CONCLUSIONS

Britain, cradle of democracy, had established democracy after a long journey of 200 years and it is our beyond expectation that Bangladesh could institutionalize democracy within 20 years but we want to see installation of core values of democracy and smooth pavement of democratization process. Democratization is a continuous process and it needs a long span of time to reach in a stable condition. Bangladesh is a newly democratic state; therefore, it will take time to institutionalize democracy in her land. 'Democracy in Bangladesh stands on a delicate precipice today. The citizens have demonstrated a desire for it above all other forms of government, but the institutional and cultural framework for democracy to persist remains fragile. What is important to recognize is that despite many problems, Bangladesh is today again a democracy. Its institutions may be weak, its politicians may be corrupt, and its culture still reticent, but throughout history, its people have exhibited an abiding aspiration for democracy. It is this aspiration that has seen them regain it, and it is this aspiration that gives hopes to those who support democracy everywhere-that

the country can finally put in place an institutional framework and cultivate a political culture to sustain itself as a modern viable democracy.'

Political parties are always talking in favor of democracy but their deeds expose opposite scenario. Parliament boycott, lack of mutual trust and faith, intolerant in politics, uncompromising attitude, quorum crisis in parliamentary session, lack of consensus regarding national issues and so on are prevailing in our political system. Economic inequality contradicts with democracy. In Bangladesh, extreme economic inequality is easily visible which makes an impediment to the way of democratization. In addition institutionalization of democracy can be fueled or geared up based on the balanced economic system. In this regard, Alexis de Tocqueville has suggested three prerequisites for the functioning of democratization process-“voluntary association as mediating institutions, the division of power in a federal system and relative socio-economic equality that fostered political participation. Arend Lij Phart has argued that social homogeneity and political consensus are regarded as pre-requisites for or factors strongly conducive to stable democracy. Confrontational politics in Bangladesh has weakened the constitutional institutions-election commission, parliament, etc which are considered as the core of democracy since these instruments are the main driving force of democratization process.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There are some recommendations as following:

- a) Urge for sound party system. Because with this sound party system there will be patriot politicians and by them democracy can able to institutionalized in true form.
- b) Proportional representative voting system is essential to stop the first past the post voting system. Proportional system ensures strong people's representation.
- c) Opposition party has important role in the parliament. With effective and formative discussion they can influence the government or ruling party in making suitable public policy.
- d) Political leaders should have the spirit of patriotism, discipline, self-control, honesty in every sphere of life.
- e) Judiciary is the guardian of the constitution and fundamental rights. So independent judiciary can make the way of democratization process possible.
- f) Rule of law and administrative accountability and transparency is more important issue for any nation. In democracy all are equal before law and there is no place for discrimination on the basis of caste, color, religion, sex and economic status.

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What Did Taslima Want?: *Nirbachita Kalam* Reconsidered

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"My columns had created a storm inside offices, outside in the Press Club,
in literary gatherings" (Taslima Nasrin quoted in Sengupta 2004: ix).

ABSTRACT

Taslima Nasrin's Nirbachita Kalam (1991) documented a young woman doctor's struggle to get established in Dhaka. Nothing escaped Taslima's discerning eyes, be that the difficulties she faced as a single woman while renting a place, or the physical and psychological abuses her female patients suffered, or the sexual propositions she herself received from the so-called progressive intellectuals. Nirbachita Kalam was unique because of the way Taslima's forthrightness illuminated her analysis of women's precarious condition in Bangladesh. That's why, a quarter century after its publication, her first book of non-fictional writings is still in print, both in Bangladesh and India, having attained the status of a minor classic of Bengali literature.

Key words: Taslima, patriarchy, gender, violence, Bangladesh.

I: "TALES OF SORROW AND PAIN"¹

In 1991, *Taslima Nasrin's Nirbachita Kalam* (tr. *Selected Columns*, 2004) (hitherto *Nirbachita Kalam*) was published by Bidyaprakash, a notable publication house in Dhaka, Bangladesh, that used to publish literary works by leading Bangladeshi writers. It was rather a slender volume of 111 pages, containing a selection of 50 short, untitled, prose-pieces that originally appeared as part of Taslima Nasrin's (1962 -) regular contributions to three Dhaka-based weeklies. The jacket blurb introduced the 29-year old writer, who already had a number of collections of poetry under her belt, as "a writer with a distinct voice who has gifted us a rich harvest of prose writings, having tilted a hitherto neglected land" (translation mine) (Nasrin 1991). It went on to add: "Women are humans too, but the social system that is in place since the Middle Ages is reluctant to acknowledge this simple truth" (ibid). Taslima's columns exposing "religious prejudices and existing irregularities as well as the uncivilised attitude of the state and society towards women have prompted protests from those opposed to truth" (ibid). However, "the appreciation she has received from her countless readers has rendered these protests insignificant" (ibid). *Nirbachita Kalam* was nothing short of "a new milestone in Bengali literature", the jacket blurb proclaimed, rather prophetically (ibid).

Much in tune with the publisher's claims, Taslima's collection became an instant best-seller at the Bangla Academy's annual book fare where it was launched. It also won the most prestigious

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literary award that West Bengal, India, could allegedly offer, namely the *Ananda Purashkar* (1992). The book's *Ananda* reprint sold in hundreds of thousands of copies, matching the success of its Bangladeshi counterpart (Zafar 2005: 411). It was as if Taslima woke up one morning and found herself famous.

The articles compiled in *Nirbachita Kalam* were initially written by Taslima, then an anaesthesiologist at Dhaka Medical College Hospital, at the behest of her friends, themselves writers, editors, journalists. Collectively, they felt that as a health practitioner, Taslima's observations regarding women's condition in Bangladesh were important enough for documentation and dissemination. Befittingly, it was mostly in their edited weeklies that Taslima's columns, namely "Bahire Antare" (tr. "Without and Within"), "Anya Jiban" (tr. "The Other Life") and "Alpa Katha" (tr. "A Few Words"), first appeared. Compilations such as *Nirbachita Kalam* were nothing uncommon; many writers still do them on a regular basis in Bangladesh. However, what made Taslima's venture significantly different was the instantly recognisable and often angry voice of a woman writer, acutely alert in the observations of her surroundings and unsparing in her critique of what she considered to be unjust and wrong.

Nirbachita Kalam memorably, shockingly began with an abuse that Taslima suffered in Mymensingh, her hometown. In broad daylight, a teenage boy pressed a half-smoked burning cigarette to her arm, leaving a permanent mark. Although she shuddered in pain, her sixth sense 'as a woman' prevented her from seeking help. Taslima felt that some of those who would flock to her rescue might end up abusing her further. Although she was merely eighteen or nineteen at the time of the incident, she could visualise passers-by encircling her:

"They would crowd around to watch the fun — to stare at the curves of my body, my bright girlhood, my pain, my tortured cries, my anger and my tears. Some would pretend to console me, some patronisingly enquire about the incident, some would propose getting hold of the boy to thrash him, yet others would ask my father's name, and where I lived. In reality, everyone would enjoy looking at me, at my helplessness, my lack of security. Pretending to look at my burnt flesh, they would actually goggle at my bare rounded arm. My well-wishers would give catcalls behind me. All these considerations made me conceal my pain that day" (Nasrin 2004: 1-2).

For Taslima, this was the quintessential experience of being a woman in Bangladesh, that one constantly needed to fend off outside aggression against one's self. Taslima called herself lucky that the incident in Mymensingh was limited to a minor injury to her arm. After all, "no one has, as yet, burnt my face or blinded my eyes with acid. I am fortunate that a gang of men have not raped me. I am fortunate to be alive, still" (Nasrin 2004: 2).

Nirbachita Kalam is replete with observations that laid bare women's vulnerable condition both inside and outside the home space. In the course of its analysis, Taslima's upbringing in Mymensingh and her career in Dhaka would also be looked at in order to situate Taslima in a particular social and cultural context. As Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) made it quite clear in the early twentieth century, "one cannot judge women's writings without bringing in the social realm in which she has her existence, thus women's writing and her social positioning are completely linked" (Azim 2009). Social circumstances of women writers are, thereby, important markers for consideration in the ultimate analysis of their writings. In which ways, in Taslima's case, the personal experience of growing up as a woman in a patriarchal society enriched her understanding of women's condition in Bangladesh would be a related line of inquiry.

II: "THE FALLEN PROSE OF A FALLEN GIRL" ⁱⁱ

Born in 1962 in Mymensingh, Taslima studied medicine being encouraged by her father, himself a doctor. Her childhood was not a happy one as the unhappy relationship between her parents affected the young Taslima. Much to her mother's dismay, her father slept with many of his female patients. His neglect and abuse of Taslima's mother was resisted by Taslima, but he was too dominating to be overcome by his children. While growing up in a joint family, Taslima also experienced sexual molestation at the hands of her own uncle and she was one of the first Bangladeshi women to break silence and write on such a taboo topic. She did well at the medical

school, eventually becoming a government doctor, and was posted in various towns and cities across the country. Her profession allowed her unique forays into the lives of women in Bangladesh as she witnessed first-hand the psychological, physical and sexual abuse they sustained both inside and outside their families. From an early age, Taslima wrote poems, and in 1986, came out her first volume of poetry *Shikare Bipul Khudha* (tr. "Hungry Roots"), followed by a few other collections. However, it was her experience as a doctor coupled with her experience of being a woman in Bangladesh that turned her attention to prose. While posted in Dhaka, she befriended a number of progressive young men some of whom were already involved in various cultural and political movements such as the ones directed against toppling the illegal government headed by General Ershad (1981-1990). They not only encouraged her to write but also provided her with an enviable platform for publication. When Taslima's columns started to appear on a regular basis, they were avidly read by a great number of people, shooting up overnight the sales of the weeklies in which they came out. In Taslima, readers discovered a fresh voice, and importantly, that of a woman, writing about issues that dogged a woman, in a style that was direct, unwavering and uninhibited.

Between 1989 and 1994, Taslima wrote hundreds of columns for various newspapers that were anthologised, in quick succession, in four volumes of which *Nirbachita Kalam* was the first one, the other three being *Nashta Meyer Nashta Gadya* (tr. "The Fallen Prose of a Fallen Woman") (1992a), *Jabo Na Keno? Jabo* (tr. "Why Won't I Go? I Will") (1992b) and *Choto Choto Dukhha Katha* (tr. "Tales of Sorrow and Pain") (1994). During this period, Taslima also earned some notoriety by dating, cohabiting, marrying and divorcing a number of prominent writers, journalists and newspaper editors, the most famous among them was Rudra Mohammad Shahidullah (1956-'91), a highly original and bohemian poet whose premature death turned him into a legend of a sort among his followers. With Rudra, Taslima shared an intellectual, passionate and often turbulent relationship which found powerful expressions in both of their poems, often written in the form of a dialogue, and in Taslima's memoirs published after Rudra's death. Rudra's sexual adventurism, especially his frequent visitations of brothels, gradually tired her out. Once infected with syphilis, Rudra managed to infect Taslima too, something which deeply scarred her, both physically and emotionally, and the marriage fell apart.

Looking back, it is not difficult to identify the elements that helped propel Taslima to literary fame in the late 1980s and the early 1990s. First, there were her bold columns; then her impressive appearance (tall stature, bobbed hair, occasional smoking of cigarettes); and last but not the least, her unorthodox lifestyle, the friends she hanged out with, the lovers she had and 'discarded', the men she married and divorced. The 'scandal value' of an unconventional life led by a woman writer kept the tabloids and their gossip columnists busy, contributing to the emergence of a *nandita-nindita* Taslima, celebrated and censured almost in equal measure.

When Taslima sat down to write about her experience of being a woman in Bangladesh, her personal life played an important role in the way she saw men and evaluated social and religious customs that curbed women's freedom. In her autobiographies, Taslima noted how her passage from a shy provincial girl, guarded by an over-zealous family, to a physician turned writer residing alone in Dhaka had often been achieved through near traumatic experiences. She had to withstand social opprobrium when she took her first step outside her parental home. Even in Dhaka, where she enjoyed considerable economic independence and self-reliance, she was mentally and physically abused not only by her father but also by her husbands. Once, she was even threatened with eviction from her own apartment by the disgruntled apartment management committee, consisting mostly of men, disapproving of her 'antisocial' activities. This was not much helped by the role of the 'hostile' newspapers that made a fortune running salacious stories in which she was caricatured for being childless and three times divorced. Even her fellow writers became increasingly jealous of her success especially when she won the *Ananda Purashkar* in India, yet at the same time, they found her too attractive not to feel drawn towards her: intellectually, emotionally, physically (see, Zafar 2009).

What was there in Taslima's *Nirbachita Kalam* that made her stand out as a writer? Taslima wrote about a plethora of incidents that she had experienced not only as a woman but also as a government doctor trying to make a living in the nation's capital. Almost all of her columns started

with a personal experience, or something she had observed, or some conversations she had had with someone that prodded her into writing a particular piece. There were, of course, obvious financial benefits of writing for newspapers as her meagre salary was supplemented by the remuneration she received for her columns. However, it was her determination to proclaim the simple fact that 'women are humans too' that kept her going. There was so much pain and anguish pent up inside her that it required an urgent letting out of some sort through writing. Her columns became her journals made public.

Hailing from Mymensingh, a small town on the outskirts of Dhaka, we see her, in *Nirbachita Kalam*, trying to make a name for herself in the male-dominated, elite Dhaka literary circle. Being an outsider certainly did not help, and being a woman made it doubly difficult. There were obvious sexual propositions from the literary grandees of Dhaka who seemed to operate on a double standard when the so-called sexual purity was concerned (Nasrin 2008: 7). Taslima noticed with some concern that while the male writers were allowed to brag about their sexual conquests and revel in the 'blood-written letters' received from their female fans, the price she herself had to pay for having a few male admirers was 'character assassination' in the local press (ibid.). Taslima reported how the same writers, who praised her in abundance when her personal company was sought, would not hesitate to classify her disparagingly as a 'woman writer' as opposed to acknowledging her simply as a writer (ibid). In fact, in the 1990s, many Bangladeshi newspapers used to have designated pages for women's writing and whatever published there was not held necessarily in high esteem. Taslima had to combat prejudices such as these especially when she was compared conveniently with Selina Hossain (1947 -) , a notable Bangladeshi writer, but not with other established writers, all of them, it went without saying, were male (ibid).

While Taslima was battling prejudices of the aforementioned kind within the presumably secular-liberal Dhaka literary circle, she had to fight other kinds of battles that involved day-to-day living as a single woman in Dhaka. Taslima invoked Virginia Woolf to emphasise the need to have a place of her own since she had already achieved economic independence. However, the simple business of renting a place proved to be quite a daunting one. Taslima soon found out that unless a single woman of considerable fortune was escorted by a male guardian, the landlord would keep on shutting the door on her face (Nasrin 2008: 52-3). Understandably, Taslima's columns documented the struggles of an outspoken woman trying to get a foothold in Dhaka. The readers got a sense that as if in the pretext of writing newspaper columns, Taslima was graphing her bio. In many respects, *Nirbachita Kalam* was the precursor to her much talked about 7-volume autobiography that came out between 1999 and 2012. Let's consider a few more examples from *Nirbachita Kalam*:

- a. Taslima wrote about 'progressive' writers who heaped praises on their wives who once used to write but had already given up their careers in order to maintain their husbands' households: "Adila (Bakul) wrote but gave it up because she loved her husband (poet) Rafique Azad" (Nasrin 2004: 37). Taslima commented: "I see no connection between Adila's love for her husband and her writing. The fact is men are pleased when women sacrifice something for their sake. A man is delighted when a woman gives up her family for him. A man is awfully pleased if his wife stops singing because he objects, A husband often boasts how he has stopped his wife from dancing or painting as she used to before marriage" (ibid).
- b. Taslima decried the popular perception about a woman trying to be a writer in Bangladesh: "People look askance at a woman who writes. They think she writes because she has faced a terrible loss in her personal life. If anything tragic happens to a woman either she commits suicide, or turns to prostitution or she becomes a poet" (Nasrin 2004: 14-15).
- c. Taslima reported feeling awkward when a woman approached her in a public gathering and asked her twenty plus questions about her husband but did not care to ask a single question to know either her name or identity. "Yet she was satisfied she knew everything about me", Taslima quipped. (Nasrin 2004: 83).
- d. Taslima reported how many women's names were subsumed under their husbands' names after marriage resulting in a long list of nameless women who were invariably called Mrs. Alam, Mrs. Mohiuddin, Mrs. Sadeque and the like. She criticised the gender socialisation

process through which such wives were produced who, despite being university graduates, preferred household chores to white collar jobs (Nasrin 2008: 87-9).

Nirbachita Kalam is further important as it contained Taslima's observations on the lives of women she met through chance encounters and as their doctor. For instance:

- a. Taslima wrote about a husband who, citing his 'god-given' right, used to beat up his young wife and force her to have sex with him repeatedly: "The girl felt embarrassed by this excessive sexual urge. To please her husband she however endured it with gritted teeth. Later, because of the tenderness in her genitalia, she protested. Her husband forced her to obey him by using old electrical wires as whips. Sometimes she screamed and wept and objected to the maltreatment" (Nasrin 2004: 51). Later on, Taslima was surprised to meet the husband who turned out to be "a man everyone in society will accept as immensely respectable, saying prayers every Friday and being friendly to neighbours" (slightly edited) (52). Despite Taslima's intervention, the girl's misery continued unabated: "Even a beaten dog will arouse more pity than a woman abused by her husband" (ibid).
- b. Taslima mentioned a particular friend of hers who had a 'love marriage' as opposed to the traditional 'arranged marriage'. Despite that, her friend was routinely abused by her former lover turned husband. The marriage fell apart, but she had to marry again under social pressure and enter a similar cycle of domestic labour and marital rape (Nasrin 2008: 32-4).
- c. Taslima observed, as a doctor, how some married women had been subjected to mental and physical abuse for allegedly being infertile, although medical investigations later revealed that 'the fault' lay not with them, but with their husbands (Nasrin 2008: 95-6).
- d. Taslima discovered how some 'brothel-goer' husbands had arranged for themselves clandestine treatment for syphilis while their wives, infected by them, suffered in silence before developing fatal complications. Who were these male patients? They were "students, teachers, clerks, unemployed men, labourers, policemen, lawyers, officers, industrialists, bureaucrats — who else is left? They visit prostitutes regularly" and "give a healthy person the poison of their own decadence" (Nasrin 2004: 23).
- e. Taslima wrote about an 18-year old newly-wed patient whose husband had forced her to abort their first child. Since she had lost her ability to become pregnant due to abortion-related complications, her husband, aided by his family, was considering to take on a second wife (Nasrin 2008: 44-6).
- f. Taslima noted the almost endemic anaemia prevalent among many of her female patients. Upon enquiry, she discovered that their daily allowance of nutritious food was often given to the male members of their families (Nasrin 2008: 75).

In addition, Taslima criticised religious laws of inheritance that invariably allocated less or no property to women compared to their male counterparts; the *Hoodoo* Ordinance of Pakistan that victimised mostly women; religious texts of both Islam and Hinduism that supposedly rendered women subservient to men; Islamic fundamentalists of Bangladesh who called for the curtailment of women's freedom; various governmental, non-governmental and autonomous institutions that apparently adopted policies detrimental to women's dignity and interests; the proscription of the "Woman's Issue" of *Sananda*, a Kolkata-based magazine, that discussed women's sexual health although the earlier "Male Issue" exploring similar topics had been allowed circulation by the so-called 'censor *babus*' (see, Nasrin 1991, 2004).

III: "BEHULA FLOATED HER RAFT ALONE" ⁱⁱⁱ

Taslima's columns could be read as a direct protest against the many inequalities that still exist in Bangladesh. She wrote about various forms of oppressions, both covert and overt, that were operative often with apparent social and religious sanctions. The patriarchal norms, according to Taslima, were so entrenched in society that many women submitted to them without much enquiry or protest. While writing her columns, Taslima obviously drew on her vast repertoire of experience as a doctor, which lent her columns credibility and a unique status of their own. In this regard, her work can be compared, globally, to that of the Egyptian psychologist turned writer Nawal El Saadawi (1931 -). Once called the Arab Taslima Nasrin by Susan Sontag (1994), Saadawi is one of the first Arab women to write how, as a young girl, she was brutally subjected to female genital

mutilation (see, Amireh 2000). Thanks to her revelation, Saadawi lost her Directorship at the Egyptian Ministry of Health just as Taslima was 'compelled' to give up her position as a government doctor at Dhaka Medical College Hospital. In Bangladesh, Anwara Syed Haq (1940 -), a psychologist turned writer, was a definite predecessor of Taslima. However, it was Taslima's choice of words, her bluntness of expression, her stories of personal struggle, her uninhibited engagement with taboo topics and her knack for stirring up controversies that made her columns stand out from the rest. As the Indian writer Nabaneeta Dev Sen (1938-) implied, Taslima was able to write like that because of her quite unusual status as a childless and economically independent woman living on her own in Dhaka. Reflecting on her early publication experiences in Kolkata, Nabaneeta noted how her choice of subjects was often restricted by her status as a middleclass Bengali woman, wife and mother. She particularly felt pressurised not to write something controversial lest her children felt embarrassed at school. In those days, "our pen used to be shrouded in a *burka*", Nabaneeta reminisced (see, Dev Sen).

What did Taslima want? She wanted women not to be considered secondary to men, to be treated differently and disparagingly. She wanted women to realise their own potentials and make the best use of them. She wanted them to be equal partners in their life with fellow men, be they their fathers, brothers, husbands, friends, colleagues or lovers. She wanted a society that would not be dominated by patriarchal considerations, but by a humanistic, liberal-secular attitude. She wanted women to have full control of their reproductive system, both inside and outside marriage, a freedom that she controversially termed as the freedom of the uterus. She essentially saw religion as a controlling agent from which women must break free.

Many of the things Taslima wrote about were witnessed and experienced by many, but before her, almost no one had reported, written about and analysed, with such conviction and courage, social and religious practices as well as state structures that were deeply unfair towards women. It was also not that women's groups, before Taslima, had not raised issues of structural inequalities as well as social and religious injustices women were subjected to. Bangladesh had and continues to have a seasoned women's movement. However, while women's groups chose to focus on social and legislative reforms, Taslima could be seen as performing the more radical-surgical procedure of opening up and talking about women's sexuality that often got brushed under the carpet invoking a whole regimen of decency and taste. Curiously, various women's groups chose to maintain a safe distance from Taslima. Taslima also never showed any interest in joining them (Begum 2004). According to Hameeda Hossain (1936 -), a noted human rights activist, Taslima was an outsider, not only in the Dhaka literary circuit but also in the Dhaka-based women's circles, and "people don't like outsiders" (Hossain 2004). Also, given Taslima's strikingly individual stance on various issues affecting women, women's groups that depended upon consensus and collective action would not have much use of Taslima had she really wanted to be a part of them (Ibid.). These groups often needed to work at the grassroots and had to adopt a 'go slow' policy. It was the very nature of their work which 'prevented' them, for strategic reasons, not to be as excoriating in their criticism of state, society and religion as Taslima was.

Taslima's writings remain of interest today as the things that she saw and experienced and the people that she met along the way were documented with a directness the kind of which is still unique. Her columns were on social, religious and political issues that impacted women's lives, but they were also deeply personal. In her case, the personal truly became political. Like the famed Mexican painter Frieda Kahlo (1907-'54) before her, Taslima poured her heart out on her work: "I do not know how to please readers. I simply know how my eyes fill with tears as I write every column. Every sentence, every word in each sentence take shape from my heart, not from my pen" (quoted in Sengupta 2004a: ix). True to her temperament, Taslima did not mince her words, use polite expressions or euphemisms when reporting a certain incident. That she was irreverential to the (male) literary establishment landed her in troubled waters. The feminist groups, as mentioned, stayed away from her as some of them were alienated by Taslima's now-infamous remark calling them housewives (see, Deen 1998). The Islamists were also unhappy about her criticism of Islam and they were looking for an opportunity to go against her. They did not have to wait long as one particular interview of Taslima originally published in *The Statesman* of Kolkata surfaced in which she allegedly asked for a revision of Islam's holy text. Probably understanding the grave nature of

the accusation, she issued a statement contradicting what was reported about her in *The Statesman*, but that was too little a move to appease the Islamists. They started a nationwide agitation issuing a *fatwa* putting a price on her head. The BNP-led government (1991-1996) also wanted to have her prosecuted under the Penal Code 295A for allegedly hurting religious sentiments. A non-bailable arrest warrant was issued. Taslima initially thought of surrendering to the court but her lawyers advised otherwise worrying about her safety in custody. She went into hiding moving from one safe house to another at the dead of the night. In the meantime, enough international pressure was put on the BNP government to arrange for her safe passage out of Bangladesh. After going *incognito* for 60 days, Taslima surrendered herself to the court on time before she could be declared a fugitive from justice. She was whisked off the country to Sweden which offered her asylum (See, Zafar 2009).

There are, therefore, two Taslimas: One who courted controversy on the home soil and had to leave Bangladesh as a result, and the other one is the Taslima of *Nirbachita Kalam*, the young doctor in her late twenties who was penning her work for Dhaka-based newspapers. The freshness of her prose as well as her acute observations on gender inequalities that still plague Bangladeshi society stayed on with the readers, which is why *Nirbachita Kalam* is still in print more than a quarter century after its first publication, both in Bangladesh and India.

In the long run, Taslima probably did more political good than what her detractors would acknowledge. After all, she opened up a new vista of thinking about the condition of women, not necessarily in a language sanctioned by the Bengali *bhadralok* class, but in a language that was her own. A daring exposé like hers required a daringly new language, and Taslima stretched the Bengali language to its limit to express what was hitherto almost unimaginable, if not inexpressible. Taslima must be happy to see her book passing the test of a generation. In all likelihood, *Nirbachita Kalam* would endure as a courageous text on women's condition in Bangladesh. Time is ripe for its inclusion in courses on gender studies.

Acknowledgements: Professors Rajeswari Sunder Rajan of New York University and Peter McDonald of Oxford University, under whose supervision my research on Taslima initially began; and my parents, Professor Muhammad Abu Zaafar and Shaheda Zafar of Dhaka University, who did their best to collect hard-to-find materials on Taslima while I was studying for my DPhil at Oxford University supported by a British Commonwealth Academic Staff Scholarship.

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- 1993. “Behula Eka Bhashiyechilo Bhela”(tr.“Behula Floated Her Raft Alone”), Shikha Prakashani, Dhaka.
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ⁱ This sub-title echoes Taslima’s collection of newspaper columns titled *Choto Choto Dukhha Katha* (tr.“Tales of Sorrow and Pain”) (1994).

ⁱⁱ This sub-title has been taken from Taslima’s book of newspaper columns of the same title, i.e., *Nashta Meyer Nashta Gadya* (tr. “The Fallen Prose of a Fallen Girl”) (1992a).

ⁱⁱⁱ This sub-title has been borrowed from Taslima’s book of poems of the same title, i.e., *Behula Eka Bhashiyechilo Bhela* (tr.“Behula Floated Her Raft Alone”) (1993).

Spatial Inequality of Urban Environmental Services: A Case Study of Dhaka City Corporation

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ABSTRACT

Bangladesh is the most densely populated country in the world with total 164.7 million population in the year of 2017 and it will be 169.77 million (projected) in 2020 (United Nations 2017). On the other hand, Bangladesh is also a fast urbanizing country although its level of urbanization is still low (30.46%) in 2010 and (35.86%) in 2017 (Statistical report, 2017). Dhaka has a population of approximately 12 million residents, including 3 million in unincorporated areas and Dhaka's population is expected to reach 20 million in the year of 2020 making it one of the world's most populous cities (World Bank, 2007). Dhaka is growing even faster, at the rate of more than 6 percent per annum, while the environmental services provided by the City Corporation and other city authorities are not increasing with the pace of its population growth. On the contrary, the provision of environmental services available within the city corporations is highly unequally distributed. To analyze the spatial inequality of urban environmental services, mainly secondary data has been used from the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics among the data of 90 wards of Dhaka City Corporation. Data have been collected and analyzed by Geographic Information System (GIS) and the result is shown by GIS maps. The result revealed that there were a lot of spatial inequalities of urban environmental services among the 90 wards of Dhaka City Corporation. This study has displayed how such kinds of inequalities have been taken place among the 90 wards of Dhaka City Corporation with the causes of inequalities in terms of Urban Environmental Services. Some recommendations have also been given to reduce the existing inequality for sustainable development of Dhaka City Corporation.

Key Words: Environmental Spatial, Inequality services, GIS, City Corporation

1. INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh is an area of 1, 47,570 square kilometers with a population density of 1,115.62 people per square kilometer (World Population Review, 2018). Dhaka is the capital city of Bangladesh

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which is termed as the center of the country. This city is having a significant growth rate of urbanization which is experiencing inequality in every sector. Moreover, Dhaka is one of the most densely populated cities in Asia; with the population density is 35000 per square kilometre (EPA COCA MSW Initiatives). Bangladesh is also a fast urbanizing country which is growing very rapidly day by day although it's the growth of urbanization level is 7.62% from 2007-2017 (statistia 2019), while the environmental services provided by the City Corporation and other city authorities are not increasing with its population growth. On the contrary, the provision of services available within the city is highly unequally distributed. Urbanization plays an important role in socio-economic cultural and political advancement of the country. The average rate of urbanization in Bangladesh was 5% since independence (World Bank 2012) & the percentage of urban population has been doubled, from 15% in 1974 to 28.4% in 2011 (Bangladesh Population Census-2011). The rate of urbanization of Dhaka City is very rapid which creates a lot of problems those are hampering the basic rights of the citizens such as Urban Environmental services like electricity, water supply, sewerage and sanitation, gas and fuel supply, roads and transport facilities become severely inadequate. Migration is a unique force for rapid urbanization in Bangladesh.

1.1 Statement of the problem

Spatial inequality is very common in a city because of the changing character in the pace of time. There are a lot of inter-changeable socio-economical and others phenomenons, demographic diversity which are directly and indirectly make inequality particularly in terms of access to infrastructure and other environmental services such as water supply, electricity supply, sanitation and sewerage facilities etc. As a result Dhaka provides an example of an urban area with a high level of spatial inequality in every sector. Such types of inequality occurred mainly for the huge urban population and they had been suffered by various type of problem. In Bangladesh migration has been played the most ruling component as the increase of population in Dhaka city. Migration is caused by both rural 'push' (like landlessness, unemployment, poverty, low wage and environmental disasters etc. and urban 'pull' (such as the growth of factory employment, informal sector activities, education facilities and other opportunities) factors and most of the migrants are poor and vulnerable. Generally, they end-up finding shelter and accommodation in the proliferating shanty towns or squatter settlements of the cities and the rest of them find their residence based on income sources. In 2007 the total urban population of Bangladesh is 28.24 million and in 2016 the total urban population increase in 35.08 million (statistia 2019). In 2010 the national population growth rate was at around 1.4% per year (CUS estimate 2008). Ultimately, they are not getting urban environmental services even their basic needs also. This city has been experienced innumerable problems. Among the various types of problems, the main problems of Dhaka city corporation is the inequality and inadequacy of urban environmental services such as water supply, sanitation sewerage, electricity, gas, fuel telephone, solid waste management etc.

1.2 Concept of Inequality

Generally, the word inequality means not equally distributed. It is mostly used in resource distribution. Spatial inequality means the unequal distribution of services and resources depends on the site and situation in the course of time. In the pace of development issues, spatial inequality is a problem in terms of every sector such as socio-economic sector, public-private development activities and urban and rural environmental services. In an urban area, inequality is categorized into two aspects. First one is based on physical infrastructural and environmental services which are related with those services are provided by the city authority and the second one creates the social class which is created mainly based on the income of an individual or a group. Inequality is more important in the policy-making process of an urban area to align both geographical and social analysis for more equitable and sustainable urban development. Spatial inequality has great importance to the planners, policy makers and scholars of the different sector for the advances in globalization.

1.3 Objective of the Study

The main objective of the study is to determine the urban spatial inequality in the provision of environmental services including causes and consequences of such inequality within the Dhaka city Corporation area. The Specific Objectives of the study are as follows:

- To identify the pattern of inequality in the provision of urban environmental services within the area of Dhaka City Corporation;
- To bring about the causes of such inequality and
- To find out the inter ward disparities in the distribution of urban environmental services.

1.4 Justification

- A better understanding of the nature of inequality and its spatial pattern is necessary to undertake appropriate measures for mitigating inequality and for doing more social justice.
- Dhaka had a crystal primacy to overcome those problems according to the position of urban hierarchy in Bangladesh. So it was very much urgent to determine the pattern and level of inequality of Dhaka City Corporation in the provision of environmental services.
- This study also helpful to make a database which eventually important documents to set a balanced shape in from the imbalance structure of the city prevailing currently.
- The study is helpful to make people aware about the city with a system of interrelated balanced environmental services and then may expand in Dhaka City Corporation.

1.5 Literature Review

Spatial inequalities in the developing countries are high between rural and urban areas and also between geographically advantaged and disadvantaged regions (Bhuiyan, R.H. 1998). The ward commissioners face it is really hard to provide a good service to a large number of population of Urban environmental services. According to the famous researcher (Siddique 2000) who considered this problem seriously, recommended that each ward should have a size of neighborhood having accommodation about 2,500 population or roughly 500 households. Moreover, for ward office management the economic budget is also not satisfactory for the wards which are about 2,000 BDT per month. The inhabitants of Dhaka found that the municipal services which are offered to them are fair and equitable although it is significant to see that Dhaka is considered as the second most dirty city in the world (Luck, 2008). The city is mainly controlled by DCC. Around 15% of the citizens live in slums and squatters which are scattered all over the city (Asian Development Bank, 2008). As a result, it is having an impact on the services and infrastructure of the city and so DCC is not completely successful to the point of unmanageable (Siddiqui, 2005). They are facing many problems so a host of services was offered by DCC to its citizens (Ministry of Law Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, 1983). It is ensuring public health and safety, town planning, regulating buildings, lighting the street, managing disasters, arboriculture, providing cultural, licensing and certification facilities to its citizen. It provides some facilities for some specific occupation such as license for businessmen and some facilities are for all citizens. Here it is noticeable that only used by a few (for example primary health care facility is only used by the poor) and some of the facilities are meant for and used by all residents (Bartone, 2001). A number of research recommended decentralization of urban governance activity (Siddiqui, 2000; Siddiqui, 2005) but in fact, enough measures have not been taken to empower the activities of the ward label. It is DCC which is entirely responsible to clean drains and dustbin regularly (Ministry of Law Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, 1983). The urban citizens of Dhaka City are not getting proper urban facilities. The 'Public open spaces' are needed for different functional and leisure activities of the urban dwellers. Although the density of population is growing still some open spaces are found scattered in the city which are misused by anti-social occurrences. Then it gradually turns into dehumanized areas. These existing open spaces have different form like 'Urban Parks', 'Urban Recreational Areas' and 'Urban Development Open Spaces'. The 'Urban Development Open Spaces' also generate many activities (Nilufar, F 2000). To reduce the inequality, competent and effective public services are the best for it. When it is ensured that city has sufficient provision for water, sanitation, drainage and garbage removal, this also helps to reduce the health burden of having a low income. But in many cities in Africa,

Asia and also in Latin America the government does not take enough measures to address such issue and in many instances, they actually reinforce in inequality (Kanbur, Venables and Wan, 2010) .

2. RESEARCH METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

Although city inequality is an important issue in the process of urbanization very few researches had been done in Bangladesh. The literature review also proved that for a sustainable livable city it is very much necessary to find out the inequality in a city in terms of its various types of services which are closely related with its citizen. This study has been done mainly on the basis of qualitative approaches and comprises mainly ward wise population distribution, ward-wise household distribution, population age structure, male-female ratio, ward-wise slum population, ward-wise electricity connection, drinking water facilities, sanitation and sewerage facilities by using the GIS software. An objective of the study is closely related to the final output that research proceeds to obtain. The objectives of this study were formulated to address and evaluate the accessibility of different environmental facilities on the basis of population in different wards of Dhaka City Corporation. Secondary data has been collected to assess and evaluate the existing situation as well as to appraise the potential of development. Data has been collected mainly from secondary sources. Secondary data were collected from the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics to find out the inequality among the 90 wards of Dhaka City Corporation Bangladesh (Bangladesh population and housing census 2001) Besides this, secondary data were also collected from Dhaka City Corporation (DCC), Department of Geography and Environment of University of Dhaka, Rajuk, Center for Urban Studies (CUS), Urban and Regional Planning (BUET), Journals, Books, Papers and from websites. After collecting the data from Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), Center for Urban Studies (CUS) data were analyzed by the Geographical Software Geographical Information System (GIS) and presented by maps according to the variables of urban environmental services

3. STUDY AREA

3.1 Dhaka City Corporation

On 1 st August 1864 Dhacca Municipality was established. In 1978 it took the status of Dhaka Municipality Corporation. Again Dhaka Municipality had achieved the status of Dhaka City Corporation and divided into 90 wards (Figure 1). Dhaka City Corporation. Later on November 2011, Dhaka City Corporation divided into two corporations, north and south. Whereas south city corporation holding more territory than the north city corporation by the order of parliament of Bangladesh. Dhaka North City Corporation: Dhaka north city corporation consists of 36 wards includes the thanas of Mirpur, Mohammadpur, Sher-e-Banglanagar, Pollabi, Adabar, Kafrul, Dhaka Cantonment, Tejgaon, Gulshan, Rampura, Banani, Bimanbandar, Khilkhet, Vatara, Badda, Uttara and some others.

Dhaka South City Corporation: Dhaka South City Corporation consists of 57 wards includes the Thana of Paltan, Sahabagh, Jatrabari, Motijheel, Kotoali, Sutrapur, Bangsal, Wari, Ramna, Gendaria, Chowkbazer, Lalbagh, Hazaribagh, New Market, Khilgaon, Kamrangirchar and others.

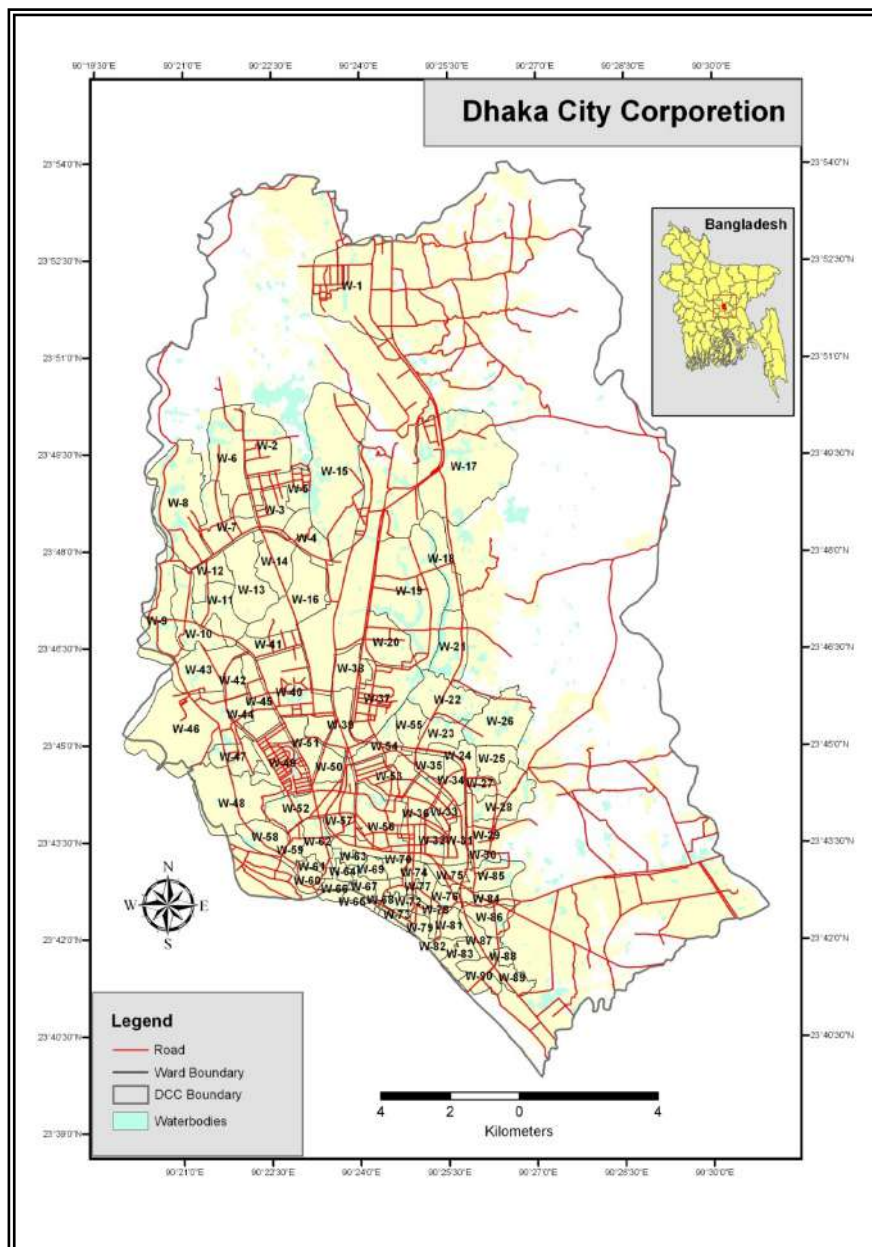


Figure 1. Dhaka city Corporation

Source BBS 2001

4. FINDINGS

4.1. Inequality of ward-wise population

Population of Dhaka city corporation are highly unevenly distributed among the 90 wards of Dhaka city corporation. To represent the spatial inequality of population distribution in Dhaka City Corporation GIS map is used (Figure 2). Here, ward no. 2, 6 and ward no 48 shows the highest in total population group (12501 and above) it includes the area of Pallabi, Shekherkolsi, Senpara in ward no 2 and wards no 6 are includes Mirpur 7, Marul, Alubdi. Here Mirpur 10, Sherkherkolsi and

Pallabi are planned area and Alubdi, Marul and Senpara are unplanned areas. (Source: BBS, 2001). Second highest population group (85,001-1, 25000) are distributed among the ward number 8, 12,13,14,16,17,22,37 and 41. We call it Moderate total population densely area. Ward no 8, 12,13,14,16 and 41 are located together in a linear position and all are the unplanned area. These wards include the area is Ward No 8: (Botanical Garden, Zoo, and Dhaka Commercial College). Ward no 12 (Paikpara, Shah Alibag road), Ward no 13 (Shaorapara, Kazipara), Ward no. 14 (Kafrol), Ward no 16 (Ibrahimpur, Tejgaon), Ward no 41 (Agargaon, Taltola). In total Population, another second highest area is Ward no 17 located beside a planned area Badda and Bashudhara or in the middle of Airport and Cantonment as an unplanned area named Khilkhet and Kuril. Ward no 37 represents itself as a planned and unplanned area named Tejgaon, Begunbari, Master bari. Most of the area of this ward is planned and ward no 22 are Purba Hazipara and Rampura. Third highest population area (55001-85000) are ward no 3, 4, 11, 9, 10, 43, 46, 47, 42, 40, 38, 20, 19, 21, 55, 54, 24, 25, 50, 52, 58, 24, 34, 25, 27,69,55,60 and 1. Only ward no 1 is the planned area. The rest of the wards are unplanned area but highly densely populated. These are Diabari, Golartek, Lalputi, Buddhijibi Monument, Gabtoli Bus stand, Haripur, Begum Bazar, Nazira Bazar, Central Jail, and Phul Baria etc. Population group (35000 and below) are ward no. 33, 31, 75, 73, 72, 76, 68, 63 and 65 that covers Circular road, Jasimuddin road, Kamlapur, Gopibag, Islampur road, Bangla Bazar, Kotowali and Boro Katra. (Figure 2).

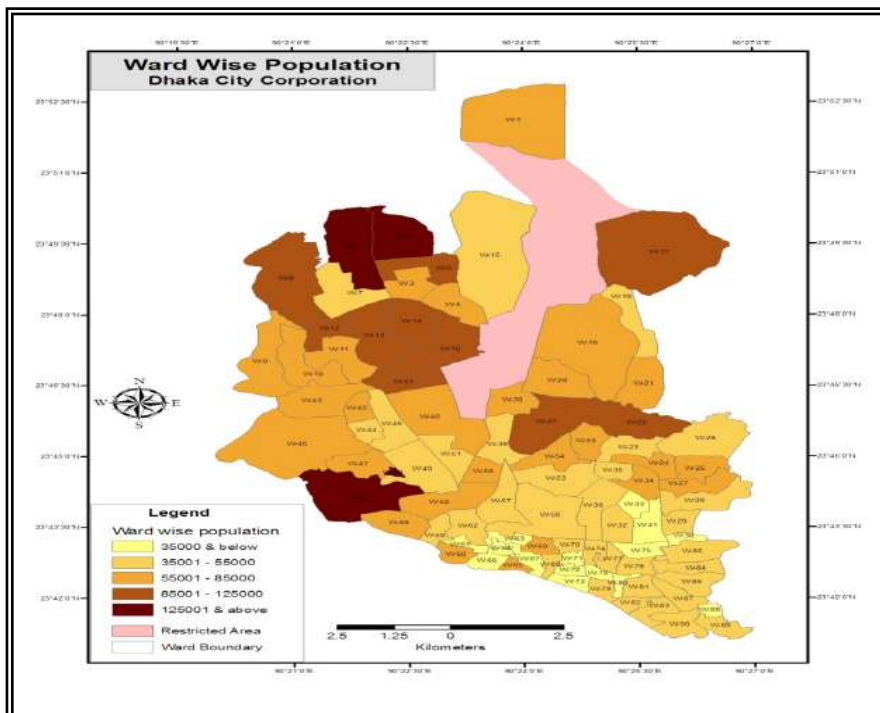


Figure 2 .Ward wise Population of DCC Source BBS,2001

4.2 Inequality of ward-wise household

In Dhaka City Corporation the number of households is directly related to the number of population. A large number of population demands a large number of household. If analyze the scenario of ward no 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 21, 22, 25, 37, 38, 41, 43 that includes the area Pikepara Shah Ali Bag road, Pirubag SHAorapara, Kazipara, Manipur, Senpara Porbota. Balurghat, Manikdi, Lalashara, Vashantek, Damalkoat. Khilkhet, Bashundhara, Kuril, North Badda, Merul Badda, Ulan, Rampura, Goran, Begunbari, Tejgaon, Masterbari, Nakhhalpara, Shahin Bag,

Agargaon Taltola, Passport Office, Adabor respectively we can see that here the number of population is high and as well as the number of the households also high. In a similar way, the second highest populated area also has the second highest number of household. I would like to mention such area name as ward no 10, 14, 19, 21, 24, 26, 27, 34, 40, 42, 46, 54, 55, 58, 60, 65, 89 that includes Technical Centre, Govt. Bangla College, Golder Bag, Talarbag, Shah Ali Bag, Technical College Kafrul, Banani, Kamal Ataturk Avenue, Gulshan Avenue. North Badda, Merul Badda, Goran, Meradia, Rajarbag, Shajahanpur, Shantibag, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Planning Commission, Crescent Road, Mohammadpur Tajmohol Road, Bashbari, Basila, Satmosjid Road, Moghbazar, Modhubag, Noyatola, Nawabgonj, Vagolpur, Azimpur, Baddanagar, Shahidnagar, Nalgora, Amtoli, Islampur, Bara Katra, Alambag etc. On the other hand the lowest populated area such as ward no. 1 to 8 and 47, 66, 67 has the lowest number of household. Some of the area Uttara, Ranakhola, Pollabi, Shekher Kolshi, Senpara, Mirpur 10, Mirpur Section 13, Mirpur Section 11, Mirpur 7, Marul, Alubdi, Section 1, Section 2, Section 6, Mohammadpur, Jufhrad, West Dhanmondi, Dhanmondi, Jhikatola, Chalk bazar, Kamalbag, Bangshal etc (Figure-3).

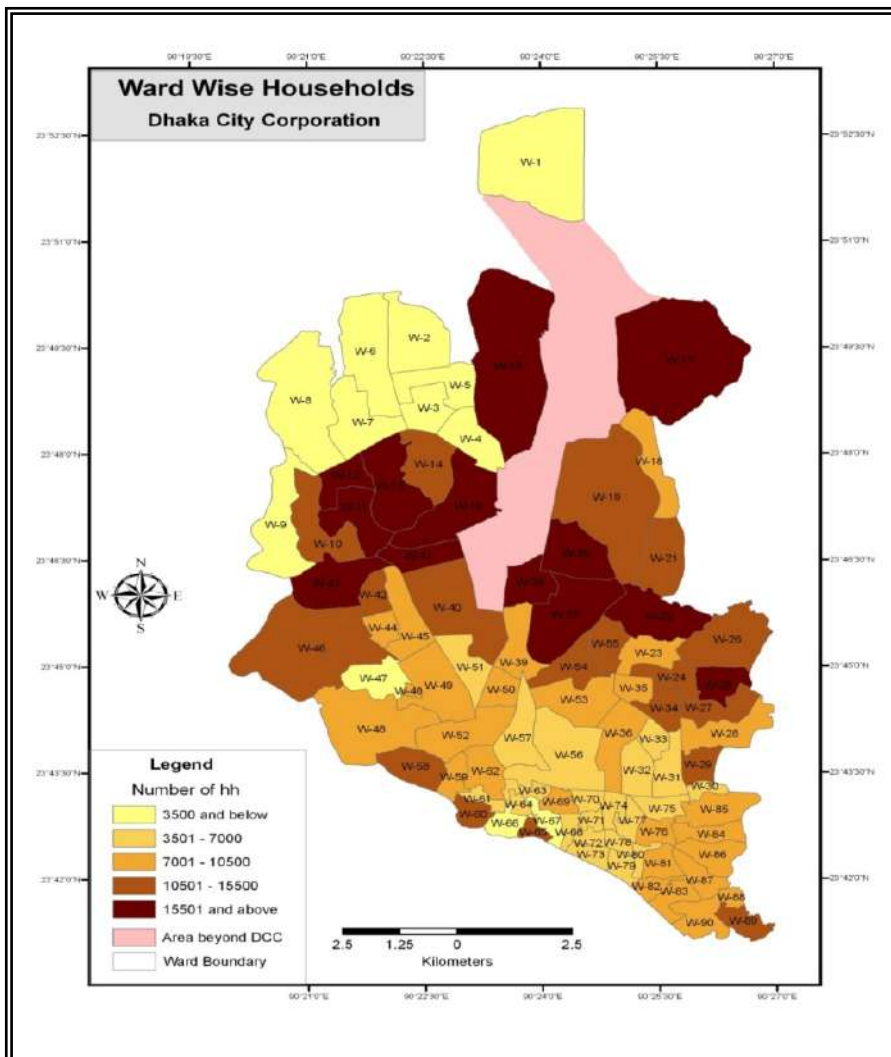


Figure 3. Ward wise households of DCCSource: BBS, 2001

4.3 Inequality of population age structure

The adult population are called active population group. In Dhaka City Corporation if we analyze the age group then we find that almost all of the wards are highly populated with age group 18-34. Very few wards are showing less variation between age group and that also has less household area (Figure 4).

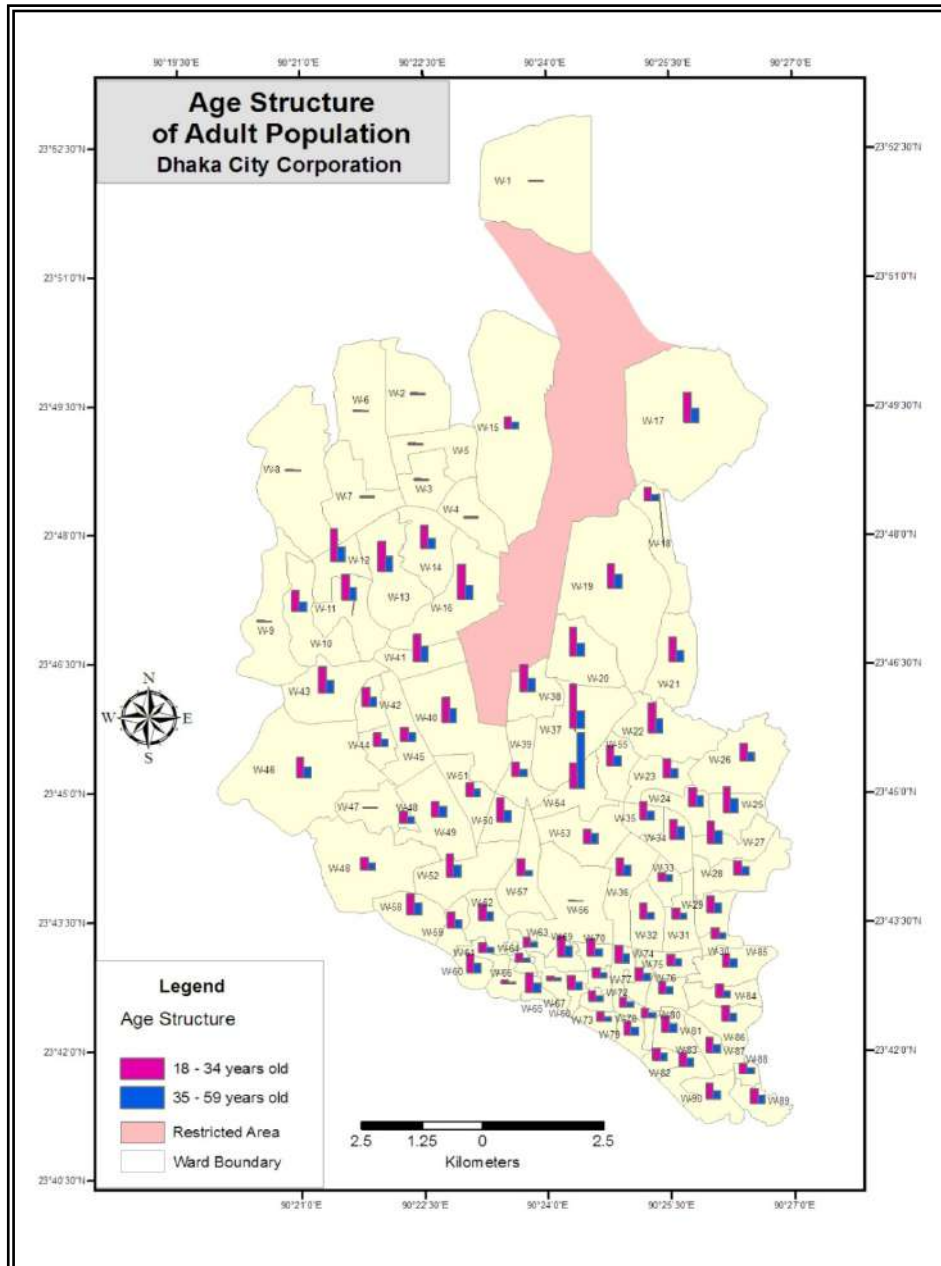


Figure.4 Age Structure of the adult population in DCC
Source: BBS, 2001

4.4 Inequality of ward-wise male-female ratio

Figure 5 shows the ward-wise male-female ratio. If we analyze we can find almost every wards are the same in the field of male-female ratio except ward no. 17, 37, 52 and 65. Here less female is found. These wards include Khilkhet, Bashundhara, Kuril, Begunbari, Tejgaon, Masterbari, Pilkhana, Gaosia Market, Islampur, Bara Katra

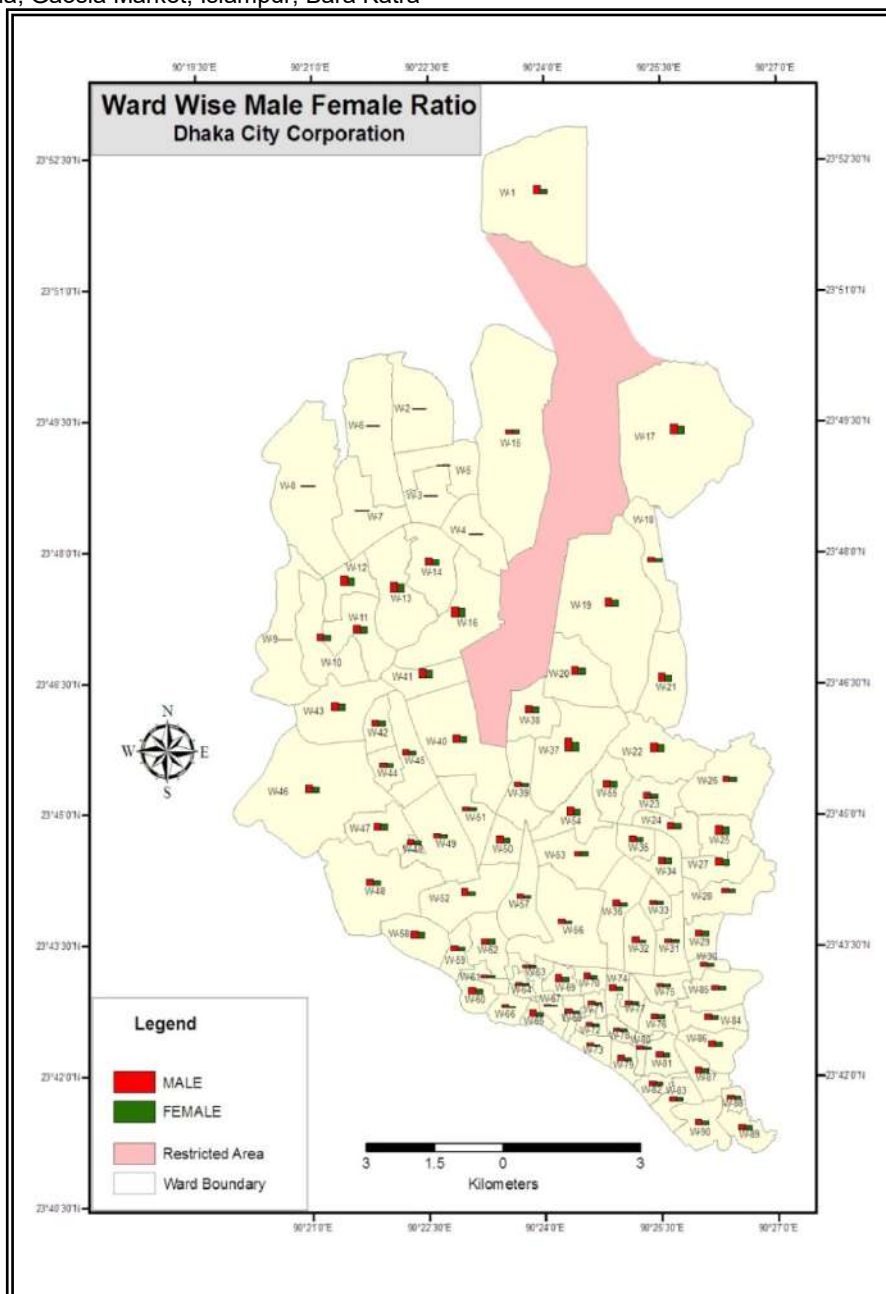


Figure 5. Ward wise Male-Female Ratio

Source: BBS, 2001

4.5 Inequality of ward-wise slum population

In 1993 CUS and ICDDRB had identified nearly 2100 slums and squatter settlements within the Dhaka City Corporation and adjoining built up areas alone (Arifeen and Mahbub, 1993). In 1996 CUS found in their study that some 3007 slums and squatter settlements in DCC area with an estimated population of nearly 1.5 million- A CUS study found that 3.0 million people (about 37 per cent) of DMA area may be considered to be living in about 4950 slums and squatter settlements (CUS 2005). Slum cluster population of the 90 wards of DCC is shown on the (Figure .6).

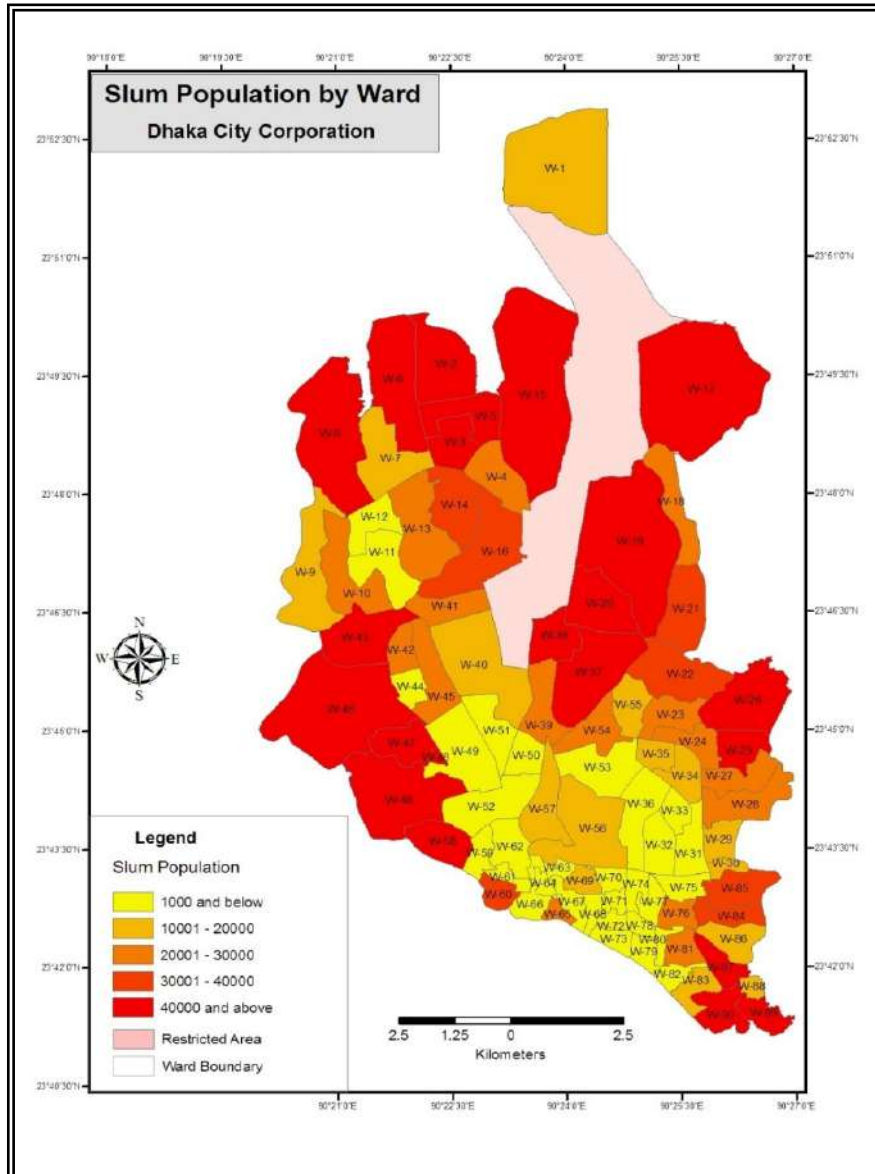


Figure 6. Ward wise slum population
Source: BBS, 2001

4.6 Electricity connection

In this study electricity facility refers to the availability of electricity for people. It measured by the number of people having electricity facility in different wards of Dhaka City Corporation (Figure 7) The demand for electricity in Dhaka is 2000 megawatts (DESA Chairman on BBC, 22.10.05, Bengali Morning Session). The demand for electricity in Dhaka is increasing at about 10 per cent a year (Islam, 2005). As the supply cannot meet the demand, load shedding has become a regular feature in Dhaka City.

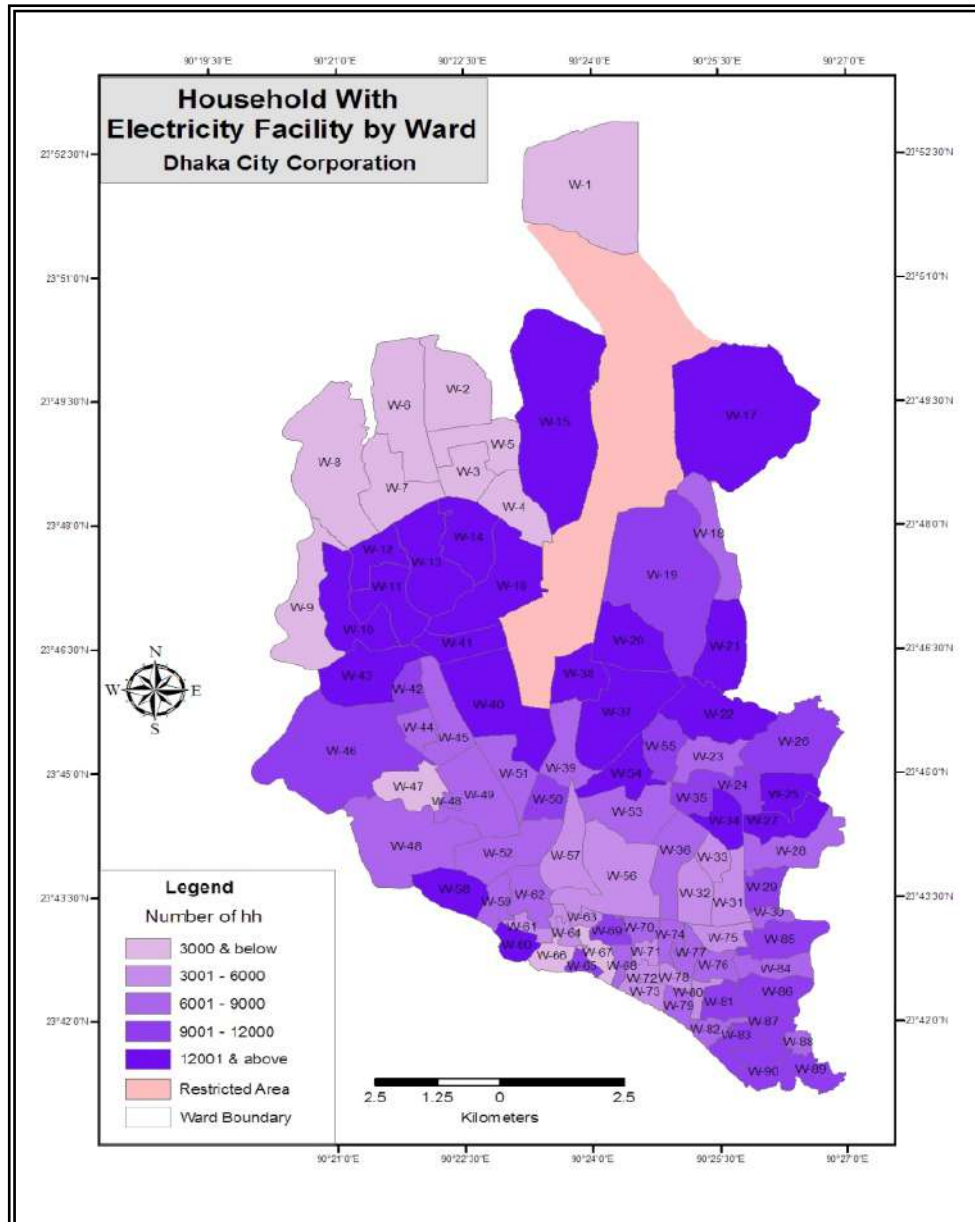


Figure 7 Household with Electricity facility by ward, Source: BBS, 2001

4.7 Drinking water facilities

In this study drinking, water facility refers to the number of the household getting water supply through tube well, deep tube well and tap.(Figure 8). Water supply system of Dhaka City Corporation is provided and maintained by Dhaka WASA. From groundwater and surface water source by deep tube wells and water treatment plants. There are 447 deep tube wells and 2 nos. of the water treatment plant in operation as per WASA report on through a water supply pipeline network of 2396.61 km. Water is also supplied through 38 nos. of overhead tanks operating in different areas of DCC. Considering the daily requirement of water for each person 160 liters per day total of 1209 MLD water is required for the area. Dhaka City Corporation area is served by only 981 MLD which is less than the requirement of water for the area. So $(1209-981) = 228$ MLD more water production is required per day which may be fulfilled.

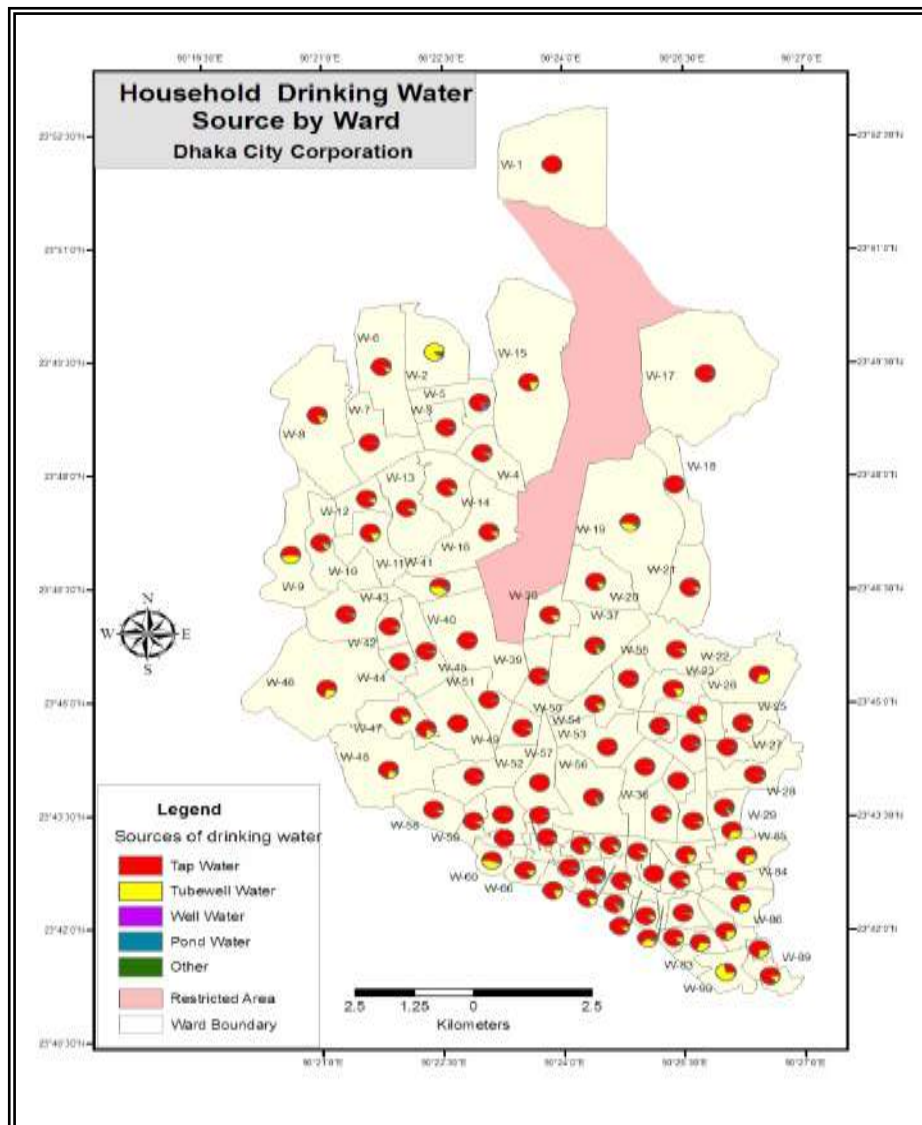


Figure 8 . Household with Drinking water source by ward of DCC, Source: BBS, 2001

4.8 Sanitation and sewerage facilities

In this study sanitation facility refers to the provisions of sanitation facility for people. It measures by the number of a household having sanitation facility in different wards of Dhaka City Corporation. At present only 30% of the population in Dhaka is covered by DWASA, sewerage system. There is only one sewerage treatment plant at Pagla with a capacity of 1, 20,000-meter cube per day. About 30% of the population use septic tanks while another 15% use pit latrines which are not regularly cleaned. Within Dhaka City area there is 881.02 km sewerage line, 50671 no's of sewerage connections, 29 no's of sewer lifting stations and 1 no's of sewerage treatment plants (DWASA, 2010). (Figure 9).In Dhaka City Corporation, Demra, some parts of Mirpur, Pallabi, Shyampur, Badda, Kafrul and Khilgaon Thana are not provided with sewerage line. These areas are to be included under the network of sewerage system of DWASA within 2015 or even earlier. Blockage of the sewerage line should be cleared immediately and regularly.

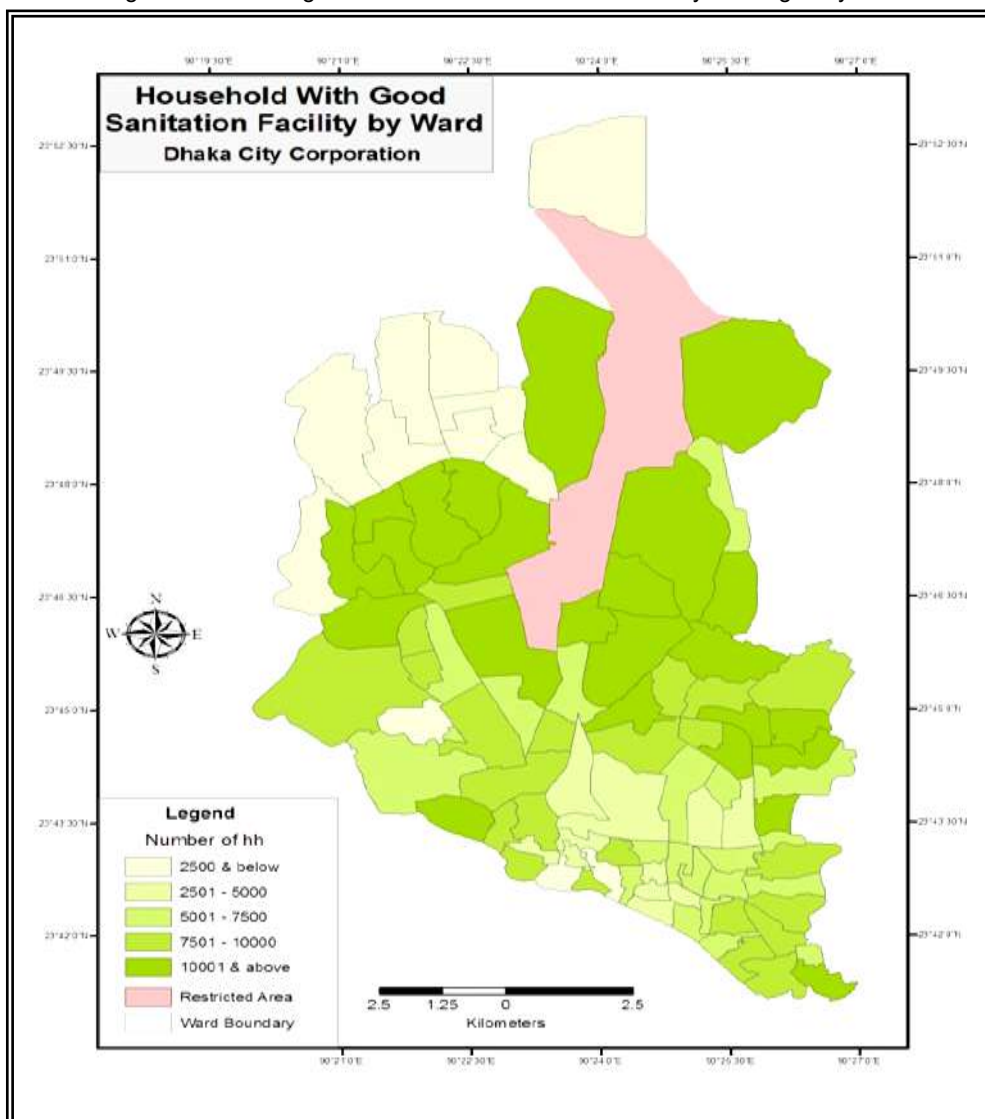


Figure 9. Household with good sanitation facility by ward of DCC
Source: BBS, 2001

5. CAUSES OF INEQUALITY

Dhaka has become a quite inefficient city with its inadequate, fragile and unreliable infrastructure. The provision of basic utility services is in short supply and irregular, and allocation or distribution of these facilities is unequal. A very large section of the population does not have access or cannot afford some of these services, e.g. electricity, safe water, gas and fuel supply, sanitation and sewerage facilities. To find out the causes of such inequalities the following problem are selected. These are lack of utility facilities, inadequate services, inadequate urban Governance, lack of coordination at the level of decision-making, lack planning, implementation, and maintenance of Services. Functional overlap of institutions in Dhaka also creates inequality because most of the times they cannot manage all the sectors. The multiplicity of institutions and development approach and this plurality results in uncoordinated efforts, which in fact create more problems than they solve. Rajuk is involved mainly six functions such as land and housing, road construction and maintenance. Lack of participation in Urban Governance also creates inequality because Governance in Dhaka is characterized by the absence of a practical process.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Bangladesh has a huge opportunity to establish a sustainable developed city through a process of urbanization. The provision of environmental services distribution should be distributed by following the appropriate rules and regulations according to the master plan to make the city more significant for the city dwellers. Road networks should be built in such a way so that all cities and towns can avail equal opportunities to get the facilities from the market. The appropriate policy also needs to make the Dhaka free from traffic congestion. The decentralization of administrative units, relocation of factories and may also shift other institutions from main Dhaka City to Suburb areas are very urgent to reduce the inequality of services for a livable city. City corporations are still suffering a lot of urban constraints. As a result, such problems create a huge disparity among the 90 wards of Dhaka City Corporation. City Corporation needs more income and needs to exercise strong power over the services provider organizations. Due to excessive population and inadequate roads and lack of open space city inequality is increasing. Moreover, slum dwellers are deprived of the basic human needs and from the various environmental which are given by the city corporation. Most of the dwellers and slum population of the Dhaka are not getting pure drinking water which is very much essential for human existence. Unplanned housing and Road networks, drainage and sewerage system and enormous traffic have been created more inequality in Dhaka city corporations.

The following suggestions have been given for Dhaka City Corporation to decrease the mentioned issues.

- The main causes of urban inequality are the lack of coordination in different urban development sectors. So, it is very important to increase the coordination within different urban development authority in a city corporation.
- Although Dhaka City Corporation is facing countless hindrances still the city has the opportunity to overcome the situation by the effective implementation of equal distribution of urban environmental services.
- When the master plan of Dhaka will be revised, there should be organized the policy for urban development to ensure the equal distribution of environmental services.
- There should be a certified authority of experts to supervise the equal distribution of environmental services among the 90 wards which should be provided by Dhaka City Corporation.
- All the organizations of urban development should be determined and strong to decentralize the services and infrastructure.
- It will be more beneficial if urban environmental services are provided by the collaboration of public-private partnership.
- There has to be a common development vision in all urban development issues.

- In the provision of urban land use, landowners should follow the land use policy and regulations which are formulated by responsible city authority.
- Geographical and Geological aspects should be considered for infrastructure development to resilience the urban hazards.
- Importance should be given the opinion of urban inhabitants about the services which are provided by the respective city corporation.

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Local People's Initiatives in Disaster Risk Reduction in Costal Bangladesh; A Sociological Study in Dakope: An Exploratory Study

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ABSTRACT

Bangladesh is one of the most climate induced disasters vulnerable countries in the world and will become even more so in coming decades as a result of climate change. Floods, tropical cyclones, storm surges and droughts are likely to become more frequent and severe in the coming years. The objective of the study was to explore the nature of local people's initiatives of south-western part of Bangladesh to reduce disaster vulnerability. The study intended to find out different levels of initiatives at family level, community level and institutional level to reduce disaster risk. Most of the previous researchers tried to find out the nature, vulnerability and coping mechanism of vulnerable groups. This paper instead of finding mere knowledge and coping mechanism of local people, intended to sense using personal and local (local community and local institutional) mechanism they use to face disaster. A triangulation of both qualitative and quantitative methodology was used connecting with Ulrich Beck's theory on risk society to conceptualize the study. The study found that, local people have various sort of initiatives in their daily life to reduce disaster risk. Three forms of initiatives were found namely, Personal, Community and Institutional initiatives. Among various personal initiatives likely, making houses on higher ground, saving food for emergency needs are noticeable. In community level they were found to use community workers or committee members to create a strong disaster signal system and after disaster risk reduction methods like providing food and water and sharing left resources among neighbor after disaster. The institutional initiatives refer to the initiatives taken by local NGOs and government authorities likely, the reconstruction of embankment and sluice gate etc.

Keywords: Disaster Risk Reduction, Local Initiatives, Vulnerability, Coping Mechanism

INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh like many other coastal countries of Asia is ranked as one of the most vulnerable and disaster prone countries due to its geographical settings (Kulatunga, 2012) and socio-economic context (Mondal, 2010). Experts concluded that, Bangladesh has been facing and will face a hard

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hit by climate change and it's after math – the natural disasters (Warrick and Ahmad, 1996; Huq *et al.*, 1998; World Bank, 2000; Agrawala *et al.*, 2003). There is plenty researches that proved that Bangladesh has a high vulnerability of disaster risk (Huq *et al.*, 1996; Asaduzzaman *et al.*, 1997; Ahmed, 2006; Ahmed and Hussain, 2009).

The people of Bangladesh have been facing numerous disasters from historical period and among the complex reasons behind these devastating disasters geographical position of the nation, topographical features or ecological traits are considered root causes, but all of them are shaped to be effective and counted as disasters by irrational human activities. (Nasreen, 2011). It is estimated that about 10 million Bangladeshi citizens are impacted by one or more natural hazards annually (Ernst, *et al.*, 2007). Bangladesh is considered as the most vulnerable countries to disaster during 1991 to 2010 in Global Climate Risk Index (Harmeling, 2012). International organization Maplecroft (2011) declared Bangladesh as the topmost vulnerable country due to climate change. Based on future risk and vulnerability, Maplecroft prepared an index on climate vulnerability of 107 countries in 2011.

While Bangladesh is facing several kinds of disasters, in future the country is likely to be affected by the biggest ever global disaster, i.e. climate change. The estimated increase in temperature would be 1.3 degree Celsius by the year 2030 and will birth new disasters (Nasreen, 2011). These disasters range from ravaging tornadoes to devastating floods. Of all the disasters the problem of flood has aggravated most from 1955 to 2004 and become one of the main concerns of people in Bangladesh. Abnormal floods submerge about 60 percent of the land, damage crops, property; disrupt economic activities and cause diseases and loss of life. Similarly, cyclones, which are sometimes accompanied by storm and tidal surge, pose multiple threats to human society along with erosion of soils, riverbank and coasts. Surge water creates salinity problem in the coastal belts (Nasreen, 2004). Due to a disaster poor people suffer from malnutrition as they fail to procure food (crop loss/damage, high price of essentials etc.). Deforestation, over fishing, over grazing, salt built up, water borne diseases from irrigation, endangered wild life from loss of habitat, loss of genetic diversity, water pollution, air pollution, climate change are related to each other and having impacts on food production. (Nasreen, 2011).

The current and forth coming climate threat can bring changes in the socio economic condition of the nation. These changes will threaten the significant achievements of Bangladesh has made over the last 30 years in increasing incomes and reducing poverty, and will make it more difficult to achieve the MDGs. Over the last 35 years, the Government of Bangladesh has invested over \$10 billion to make the country less vulnerable to natural disasters (MoEF, 2008). These investments, in many cases supported by development partners, including flood management schemes, coastal polders, cyclone and flood shelters, and the raising of roads and highways above flood level. But still the people of the country are under regular and tremendous threat of climate changes

“Bangladesh has taken holistic approach to disaster management, where stress has been given to working together with all stakeholders to build strategic, implementation partnership with all relevant government departments and agencies along with other Non-Government Players including NGO, academic, technical institution and donors. The role of government is mostly to ensure risk reduction and comprehensive disaster management is the focus of all national planning” (NAPA 2010-2015).

Researches have been conducted on the disaster risk reduction of the people of Bangladesh but this research aimed to evaluate the role of local people's initiatives taken to reduce disaster risk of the people. The various types of initiatives and indigenous knowledge used by the people has great role to cope with disasters. This study aimed to identify the nature of their coping strategies and the degree of the impact of the initiatives to reduce disaster risk.

RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

Bangladesh situated in a naturally disaster prone area of the world and natural disasters are very common for the people living in coastal areas of the country. Historically from 1584 tremendous cyclone's vulnerability is recorded in Bangladesh. Flood, water logging, drought and regular disasters like heavy shower are normal for local people and they were forced to be adopted with

these disasters. Moreover they have a traditional and hereditary knowledge on disaster risk reduction to face these regular disasters. Now with the advance of modern technology and increased concern, the international community has been working with national govt. and local institutions to reduce the disaster related vulnerabilities.

This study is attempted to identify these local knowledge or initiatives along with the role of national and international institutions working in the specific study area, which is situated in southern part of the country.

It is postulated that, if we can integrate local people's knowledge with modern technologies then, we will be able to reduce the disaster vulnerabilities more effectively and more accurately than ever before. Because the local people e.g. the affected community, the local govt. (Union Parishad or UP), local national and international NGOs and other local stakeholders have some natural knowledge that is not possible to acquire suddenly for any outsider. So, if it is possible to identify the types and nature of local people's initiatives of an area, then it will be easier for policy makers to implement any recovery or emergency relief activities for future works in there.

Moreover, if the local people's behavior pattern can be understood then the knowledge will help to reduce and solve sudden problems and losses of policy implication. Knowledge on local people's initiatives can provide us the information of their assets and their resources in the locality. If the policy makers have a clear idea on the resources of the affected area then it will help to implement recovery policy more effectively. Finally from sociological point of view, this study will allow sociologists to identify the impact of disasters on people's daily life and their future generation.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study has following specific objectives:

1. To understand the Nature of local People's initiatives in disaster Risk Reduction.
2. To analyze the Nature of indigenous knowledge in addressing Disaster Risk.
3. To evaluate gender based different role of male and female in disaster risk reduction.
4. To examine level of knowledge of the local people in disaster response and preparedness.
5. To examine the nature of initiatives of local NGOs and GoB in disaster response to the local people.

HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

1. The higher the amount of economic initiatives, the lower the disaster risk and vulnerability of the local people.
2. The higher the initiatives taken by local community authorities with active help of national and international organizations the lower the level of disaster risk.
3. The lower the level of education and information of the people, the lower the level of knowledge on disaster risk reduction and their implication.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Muhammad Saidur Rahman (2008) identified various indigenous knowledge of local people or local initiatives taken by the people of Bangladesh in the flood prone areas like south-west part of Bangladesh. Poor people living in flood prone areas for hundreds of years, practice indigenous knowledge for a number of activities including the following ones for preparedness, coping and response in flood disasters. Similar types of coping mechanisms also found in *International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR)* (2008) presented paper under the title '*Indigenous Knowledge for Disaster Risk Reduction: Good Practices and Lessons Learned from Experiences in the Asia-Pacific Region*'. The paper represented eighteen different indigenous knowledge and practices to cope with natural disasters. *Khan, Mizan R. and M. A. Rahman* (2007) show that, The geographic location of Bangladesh at the confluence of the three mighty river systems of the world renders her one of the most vulnerable places to natural disasters. The article suggests a partnership framework to implement prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery phases of disaster management.

Anshu Sharma and Mihir Joshi (2008) show how indigenous knowledge with modern technology helped the people of *Rajasthan, India* to make an environment friendly shelter using bamboo trees of their own locality. *Amir Ali Khan (2008)* shows the indigenous knowledge of earthquake safe housing construction practices prevalent in the rural and urban areas of the state of Jammu and Kashmir in northern India. The technique they use is known as "Taq" and "Dhajji-Dewari" system, have been found to have earthquake resistant qualities.

Irene Stephen, *Rajiv Dutta Chowdhury* and *Debashish Nath (2008)* show the use of bamboo to reserve the soil of embankment and reduce soil erosion of the embankment. *Koen Meyers and Puteri Watson (2008)* show that, Indigenous practices have proven to reduce the impacts of natural disasters in three islands in Sumatra, Indonesia, namely Simeulue, Nias and Siberut. These practices include *traditional communication* of Simeulue people, *human-settlement planning* of 'Nias' people and *building methods and associated rituals* of Siberut people.

Ahmed, Ahsan Uddin (2005) tried to explain the ways to reduce water related vulnerabilities of Bangladesh. The population of the country has been coping with extreme water-related events since ages. The focus of all response measures, however, has been on survival coping. People's survival coping strategies have so far been effective, although not robust.

Lorna P. Victoria (2009) shows the implication and importance of community based disaster management initiatives in disaster risk reduction. *Suvit Yodmani (2001)* shows community-based disaster management can be seen as risk reduction programs designed primarily by and for the people in certain disaster-prone areas.

Khan, Mizan R. (2006) shows the use of micro-finance in disaster risk reduction. The paper suggests that the scale problem and related issues can be addressed through establishing public private-NGO partnerships, with appropriate policy and financial support, nationally and globally.

METHODOLOGY

Methodology is the bone structure and the logical explanation of the research. Research methodology is a planned systematic and value-neutral way by which researchers go about their work of describing, explaining and predicting phenomena where they include theoretical procedures, experimental studies, numerical schemes, statistical approaches to solve a problem (Rajasekar, et, al. 2013).

In this article a triangulation of both qualitative and quantitative researches were used to support the aim of the research by numerical data and qualitative explanation. The quantitative analysis helped to prove the objectives of the research and the qualitative data helped to understand underlying and untold stories of the research problem.

Description of Study Location: The study was conducted in four villages of "Sutorkhali" union of Dacopeupazila under Khulna district located at south eastern corner of the country and considered as one of the upazila of the coastal belt. The villages were located near to Sundorban and surrounded by rivers. The villages were mostly disaster vulnerable and the villagers face flood related vulnerability in almost every year.

Study Universe: The people of Sutorkhali union are considered the research universe. According to the union parishad survey, there are about seven thousand people live in the union. To have reliable information connected to the study objective, the people aged 18-60 years were selected as study population.

Unit of Analysis: Adult people of the union aged between 18-60 years were considered as unit of analysis of the study irrespective to their gender or any other criteria.

Sample Size: with 95% confidence level, confidence interval 6 and 7000 population the study suggested a sample of 257. The study worked with 250 quantitative sample and 50 qualitative sample¹.

Sampling Procedure: Due to resource contains and nature of study a purposive sampling was used to collect data. But it was ensured that the sample represents the most of the population.

¹<https://www.surveysystem.com/sscalc.htm>

*Sampling Instrument and data collection technique:*In this study scheduled interview of survey method has been taken. This method was probably the best method in social research as it easy to collect empirical data with limited time & money. However this method was also considered useful to collect authentic data from lower educated people like the respondents of this study by asking scheduled questions & writing them from the respondents. Following the survey method structured interview schedule was used to collect data from field. Along with this regular case study and FGD guideline was used to collect qualitative data.

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Theoretically disaster risk reduction is closely related to social analysis of risk. Sociologists like, *Ulrich Beck*, *Scott Lash* and *John Urri* are prominent in this area of analysis. They contributed a theoretical basis of risk society that represents the variables push and increase social and economic as well as cultural risk in a society.

Ulrich Beck is one of the first sociologists to recognize this strange paradox in late modern society; that risk might in fact be increasing due to technology, science and industrialism rather than being abated by scientific and technological progress. Rather than a world less prone to risk, late modernity might actually be creating what Beck famously described as a “world risk society.”

For Beck, modernization and modernity surprisingly uninspiring and seemingly inconsequential taken individually, but collectively have cumulative significance (Beck, 2000). They comprise five interrelated processes:

1. Globalization
2. Individualization
3. Gender Revolution
4. Underemployment
5. Global risks (*ecological crisis and the crash of global financial markets, for example*)

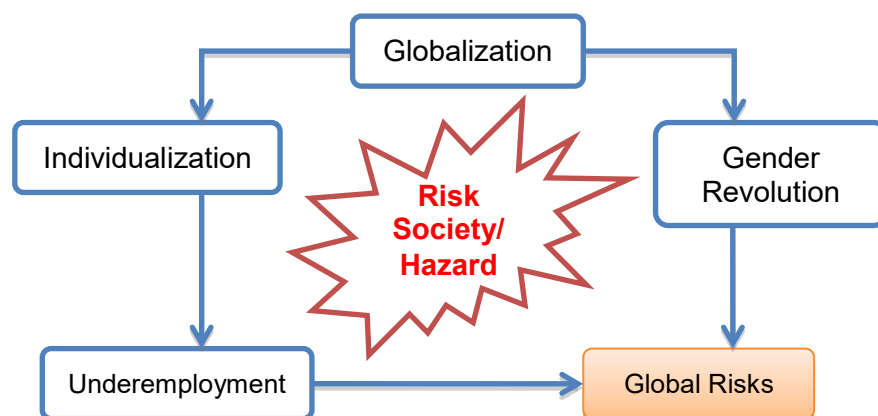


Figure: Components of Risk Society of Ulrich Beck. (Beck, 1999)

Beck actually identified a society which is tended to a diminishing control over risk and its epistemic or generative causes (Jarvis, 2007). To support his ideas he differentiated between hazards – as a naturally occurring events that is in general dangerous; and risk – is the danger that evolve from deliberative calculations made in the overuse of science and technology to enrich wealth. These are episodic and correlated closely to historical epochs, each of which evolves systems of social management in an attempt to deal with the manifestations of harm, hazard and risk.

History humanity is the stories of “plagues, famines and natural disasters”, numerous catastrophes from the dawn of mankind to the end of pre-modernity. Beck acknowledged, the humankind would be rolled back unless it would be flourished by industrial society. The technological advance which

resulted food security or reduced child mortality and increased life span of humanity are not any concern of Beck. He simply pointed that: risk and hazard are different conceptualizations, different phenomenon. Hazard refers to those naturally occurring events that are not the product of human activities (earthquakes, lightning strikes, famine caused by drought, tsunamis, hurricanes, fires, or floods, for example). These are acts of God: “pre-industrial hazards, no matter how large and devastating, were ‘strokes of fate’ raining down on mankind from ‘outside’ and attributable to an ‘other’ — Gods, demons, or Nature.” The history of human society has been the history of attempting to overcome, or, at the very least, minimize the impact of these hazards. And, in this respect, Beck is able to see great amounts of progress. Industrial modernity, of course, has not been so successful as to eradicate natural disasters but in evolving systems and responses (i.e., early warning and evacuation systems, construction technologies and legal building codes, disaster preparedness and emergency response systems) which enable the consequences of nature to be mostly inconsequential to our societies and political systems as a whole. Naturally existing hazards, in other words, have been increasingly subjected to a regime of control, emergency management, harm reduction, and disaster relief measures. One other hand he identified Risk as the outcome of industrial modernization where people’s irrational but conscious decision causes future harm for environment and society.

In the above theoretical framework of risk society developed by Ulrich Beck, the risk society or disaster risk is the dependent variable and the other components like, globalization; individualization, gender revolution, unemployment and global risk are independent variables. Based on the theory the study is conceptualized as:

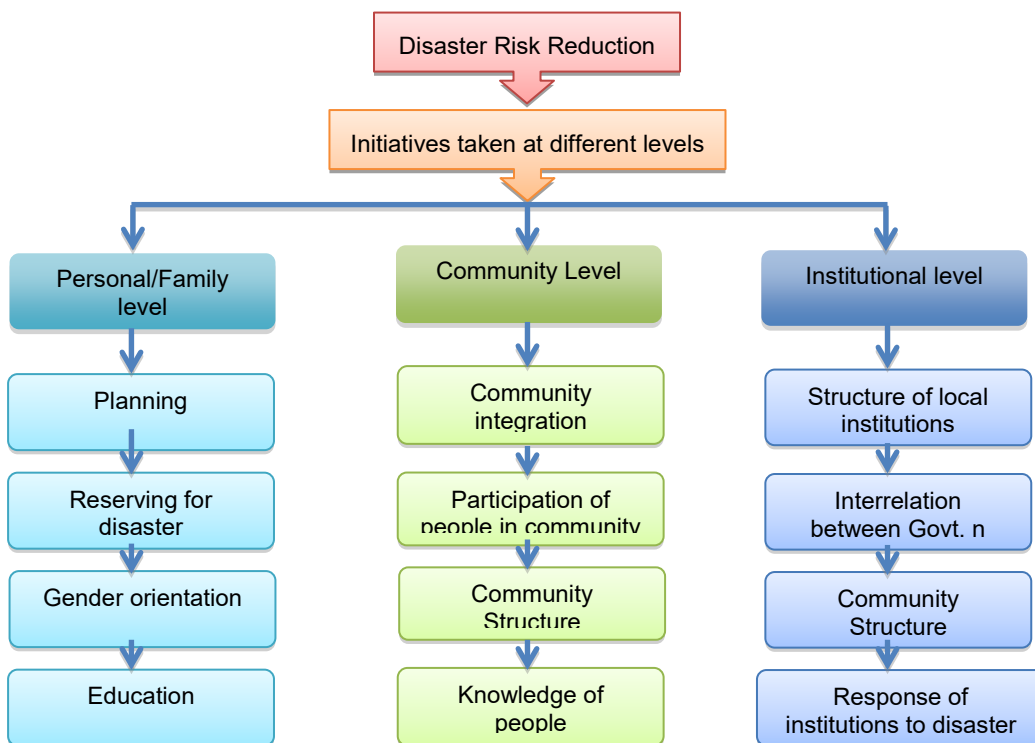


Figure: Conceptual framework on Disaster Risk Reduction

In the above conceptual framework it is shown that, the dependent variable ‘Disaster Risk Reduction’ along with the local initiatives depends on three different types of independent variables

or that is for this study known as three different level of local initiatives, the personal/family level, Community level and institutional level.

The conceptual framework helped to develop questionnaire for this study and the data were collected based on these conceptual framework. The collected information is categorized according to the objectives and hypotheses developed based on the conceptual framework and are presented in result of section of this study.

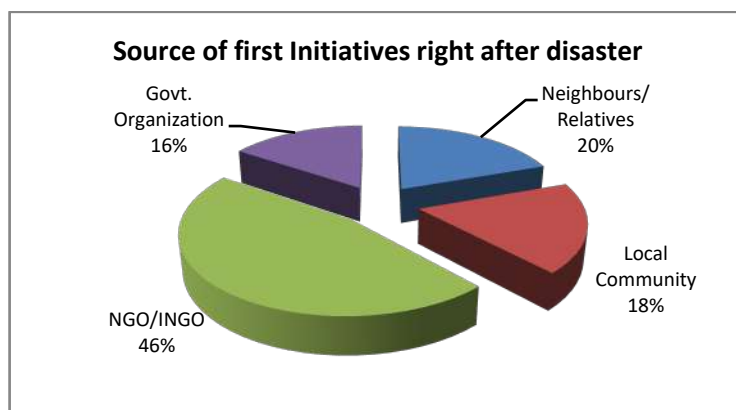
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study aimed to understand knowledge and experience of local people on disaster and how the local initiatives of various levels help them to reduce disaster risk in coastal Bangladesh. From the quantitative findings 100% respondents mentioned that they have faced at least one disaster in their life time and among them 91% responded that the cyclone (SIDR or AILA) was the worst disaster they have ever felt in their life. 65% respondents mentioned that the disasters completely destroyed their livelihood and pushed them to be vulnerable.

The disasters destroyed people's home, income source (fishing net or boat), submerged shrimp farms, killed their livestock and household belongings. It was not easy to recover the loses right after the disaster without any help from other organization. 52% respondents said they could not restore their regular life without the help of external supports (local or national) whereas only 10% respondents had the ability to restore their regular life right after the disaster as they were prepared for any upcoming disaster and followed strong coping mechanism before in hand.

Coping with disaster to reduce risk needs a comprehensive work of local people coupled with local institutions. It was identified from the quantitative and qualitative data that, various indigenous knowledge of local people or local initiatives taken by the people of Bangladesh in the flood prone area Sutorkhali union of Dakope thana. Poor people living in flood prone areas for hundreds of years, practice indigenous knowledge for a number of activities for preparedness, coping and response in flood disasters. There were a lot of coping mechanisms practiced in flood-prone areas.

Among various local initiatives the respondents were found mostly relied on the supports from NGO/INGO. Below chart shows how the common sources of initiatives and their percentage.¹



Local initiatives at personal/family level: The study found the following personal/family level of initiatives practiced to reduce disaster risk:

- People build their home on a raised platform so that the first surge of flood water does not wash away their belonging.
- Poor people usually have bamboo made rack or platform in their living room which they use as a bed to sleep at night but this helps them a lot at disaster to keep their household

¹ Source: Field data, March, 2015

belongings on it so that the flood water does not destroy them.

- People of the study area said they save dry food eg. Puffed rice, presses rice (Muri, chira) sugarcane molasses, Naru (made of coconut), dried jackfruit seeds to use after disaster. 41% respondents said they save emergency food before disaster for future use.
- People were always eager to teach their children swimming before they turn 4-5 years old as they live river basin so to cope with water induced risks they must learn to swim at early childhood.
- People harvest rain water in clay pot as most of the floods take place at rainy seasons. Moreover they also removed tube-well and sealed the tube so that no flood water enters into the tube well.
- People used boat or raft made of banana plants for their movement and home to home communication. Even in sometime when emergency rescue or shelter is not available people usually save their livestock or even live on banana raft for temporary basis.
- Right after disaster people took a few emergency initiatives to save themselves and their family members. The below table clarifies this:

First personal level initiatives right after disaster¹	%
Search emergency relief	58
Search for damages of houses	8
Take care of personal and family damages	27
Take care of cattle	7
Total	100

- Moreover a few very crude personal initiatives were found that helps the people to cope in a disaster:
 - Borrowing funds
 - Changing the normal diet;
 - Reducing the frequency and quality of meals
 - Searching for “wild foods” from the forest, instead of normal market purchases
 - Begging etc.

Local Initiative at Community Level:

- People helped each other to build house on voluntary basis so that they do not need pay for labor.
- Community people reconstructed embankments or polders right before any possible disaster (flood) to saved their village and crop lands in a voluntary basis.
- People shared the toilet left to use after disaster.
- Community people save an emergency fund (often supported by NGO or local govt) to use right after any disaster to provide emergency relief.
- Community people sharedwell-built house (semi pacca or pacca) if there was no shelter house to take shelter at disaster but now the study area have enough number of cyclone shelter built from government.
- People’s participation - community members are the main actors and propellers; while sustaining the CBDM process, they also directly share in the benefits of disaster preparedness, mitigation and development. In the sutorkhali union female are also found as active as male. The below table shows community initiatives right after a disaster:

¹ Source: Field Data, March, 2015

Community initiatives ¹	%
Provide emergency relief	24
Provide emergency medical help	13
Provide emergency shelter	21
Arrange relief from NGO/GoB	42
Total	100

- Moreover community people arranged training and group discussion to develop early warning and response group before disaster to help other to get enough time to take shelter before disaster.
- The community disaster management committees with collaboration of local institutions work for effective implementation of disaster management strategies in the locality.
- *Local Initiative at Institutional Level:*
- The local institutions like GoB authorities of *union parishad* and local NGOs played an effective role to reduce disaster risk. The *union parishad* has their local disaster risk reduction committee and the NGOs have their own beneficiary groups.
- Local authorities helped them to repair roads and community places (playground, mosque, temple, school) and other communication system.
- Institutional supports helped to repair or building embankments, sluice gates, polders, digging canals, ponds and roads.
- Provide emergency food relief to the affected people. Food, medicine, pure drinking water, shelter were the first emergency reliefs provided from institutional level right after a disaster.
- Some NGOs provide cash for work and cash for training activities to repair the community roads and excavate ponds at the same time to provide help to the people.
- Local NGOs arranged an effective early warning system to the local people to save them from disaster vulnerability. The NGOs provided numbers of megaphone to the selected scout of the community disaster management committee. The scouts had continuous communication with *upazila* disaster management committee and when they assume any sign of disaster then they use the megaphone phone to alert the local people.
- There were also flagging system to inform the local people about the degree of impact of disaster in the locality. The scout would raise different color's flag to show different degree of signal of disaster.
- Local religious institutions also played important role to warn the local people about disaster vulnerability. When the local people came to local religious institutions like Mosque and Temples then the religious priest and Imam of mosque describe them about disaster preparedness and aware them what to do before and after disaster.
- Local NGO and govt. institutions arranged community based awareness sessions through drama or pot songs and arrange training to cope with any future disaster.
- Most of the respondents of the study were indicated that there is a gap between govt. and NGOs working in institutional level to reduce disaster risk. The people expected a joint venture between these two institutions to bring highest outcome. 67.2% respondents supported that theGoB and NGOs should work together for best support to the affected people.

The quantitative and qualitative findings reported that, the people of the study area were still vulnerable in terms of their daily income to living condition. Most of the people of the area did not have work. Around 35% people reported that they could not go back to their previous occupation due to the embargo to collect honey, *golpata*, and wood from *Sundarbans*. Around 42%

¹ Source: Field Study; March 2015

respondents said they have lost their boat and fishing net and as they could not still manage the boat and fishing net, so they are still unemployed and no way to go back to their previous work.

Some of the local schools were vulnerable to water logging and need to repair. The students now could not take classes in the schools and colleges as those are not usable anymore. The local business places like '*Sutorkhali market*' is still under threat and people still can't not start fully their business activities due to loss of their money and infrastructure in the market.

The water supply system was still needs extensive support to restart the supply system. Most of the tube-wells were not operational and the ponds needed to repair. Although some of the ponds were repaired by local NGOs but those were not enough for the people.

Saline water induced in the embankment and made thousands acres of land were arable due to water logging and salinity. People can't produce any crops in the land and they even did not have any alternative source of income. So they were living in very vulnerable condition.

CONCLUSION

Disaster risk reduction is not an easy task and for a developing country like Bangladesh it is a huge challenge. This research has tried to find out the nature of disaster risk reduction and the role of local people's initiatives to enhance the risk reduction strategies. The study findings indicated the role of local people with the local NGOs and GoB institutions have a very extensive role to reduce vulnerability of the people's life.

The respondents who were found living on the embankment for two years were in tension about their going back to their original land. They expected that the GoB should take immediate steps to make them go back to their original land.

People have lost their homestead assets and valuables but they are restarting their life again. The children who were still living on the embankment facing problems to continue their normal study as they lost their books and other study materials but still some of them did not get those from any organizations and they even don't have money to buy those study materials again.

People needed support to go back to their previous occupations. Although NGOs along with GoB working to provide help but that was not enough as most of the raw materials for restarting their occupation is gone and they need to new materials to restart their occupation like fishing boat and net. Moreover the embargo to go to *sundarbans* to collect *golpata* and honey is another problem to restart people's previous occupation.

The women were worse vulnerable group among the respondents as they did not get any medical services and they were paying heavy toil to collect water and other daily homestead materials. The male members tried their best to earn daily meal and its women's duty to take care of their homestead but most of the time they cannot complete all those duties and become victim of torture of their husband.

Still the area needs widespread risk assessment and strong strategic support to reduce and remove the vulnerability of the people. The area needs regular monitoring to evaluate the changes of the people's living conditions. Only a regular monitoring can be helpful to provide a proper guideline to reduce disaster risk of the locality.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The following recommendations made from this study to reduce disaster risk:

- The local people's knowledge should be considered as a resource and use to reduce disaster risk in the locality.
- The knowledge found among the local people, eg. Raising house base, floating cultivation, saving dry foods for post disaster emergencies etc could be a good guidance to plan for next disaster risk reduction protocol.
- The women are found mostly vulnerable than male especially at post disaster period. So the relief supports should contain gender based specific relief items (eg. sanitary pad or bottled water) that will reduce women's vulnerability.

- If the existing GoB and Non Govt. institutions work together then they could ensure best use of the minimum relief available for their area. The joint effort always could bring better result than individual supports.

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Revisiting the Procedures Adopted by Banks to Finance SMEs: An Empirical Study

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ABSTRACT

The government of Bangladesh has broadly described the importance and modalities of financing SMEs by financial institutions in Industrial Policies 2016. SMEs are quite focused to finance by the financial institutions, especially by banks. Often there are debatable issues between banks and SMEs regarding funding procedures. Banks receive funds from Bangladesh Bank and other international development agencies. These financiers have prescribed criterion to grant loan for the SME. The present study will analyze the present scenario, possibilities, concerns, and constraints to evaluate procedures adopted by banks to finance SMEs. For this exploratory research, a convenient sample size of 50 entrepreneurs and 10 commercial banks were randomly selected from three districts. During the study, it was found that the SME loan procedures required to complete as many as 10 to 12 various steps. Besides, lack of policy support, inappropriate information, high bank interest rate, hidden cost, inadequate grace period or moratorium and non-availability of mortgage or collateral are the main difficulties faced by the SMEs. Also, banks have considered ability and intention to repay the loan, the requirement of working capital, business cycle, national festivals, owner's equity-credit-capital machinery ratio, business profiles and type of finished products etc. to grant the loan. In conclusion, this study suggested appropriate measures for the banks to efficiently finance SMEs.

Keywords: Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), SME Financing, Contributory Reinvestment Fund (CRF), Hypothecation and Collaterals, SME Sector Development Program (SMESDP)

INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh has stepped into the domain of middle income generating country recently and targeting to achieve the status of higher middle income generating country by 2021. Because of that Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are instrumental for the growing economic development of Bangladesh. They are predominant in our economy thus offer better employment and income generating prospects. SME financing bears significant interest to the stakeholders. The SME Policy Strategies 2005, Bangladesh Bank SME Policy 2010, Industrial Policy of 2005, 2010 and 2016 have described the importance and modalities for financing SME by banks. Traditionally, SMEs are labor intensive, much dependent on indigenous skills and technologies. Presently SMEs are quite focused on financing by the financial institutions, especially by banks.

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Often there are debatable issues between banks and SMEs regarding funding procedures. It is a fact that SMEs do not have the same access to finance as like as big firms. Thus, SME's access to various financial services is very much important to allow banking facilities to the unbanked. Lack of fund and in time is regarded as a fundamental constriction for the evolution and development of SMEs. Because financial services for SMEs is thought-out to be less attractive and less profitable undertaking by financial institutions especially by banks. Traditionally, SME financing is viewed as risky undertakings for bankers because of the lower capital base and scarce assets, coupled with their inability to meet collateral necessities. Administrative costs of the banks for procedural and monitoring requirements in financing SMEs are also higher yet it is a necessity by the regulators.

Bangladesh Government has well-recognized the virtuous role of SMEs in eradicating poverty, removing gender inequality and empowering women in society. Bangladesh Bank (BB) with the help of International Donor Agencies (IDA) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) has initiated several financing schemes to finance the SMEs. But SMEs are still lacking to get loans as start off or working capital to be provided by banks. There remains the significance of this study to analyze and evaluate the SME financing procedures by banks. This paper ensued to assess the overall scenario, recognized various issues and identified key concerns of SME financing by banks. In the end, empirical findings and suggestions are made keeping in view the win-win situation where both SMEs and banks can be benefitted.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Start off funds or working capital is very important for the sustenance and growth of the SMEs. Therefore, it is important to identify and avail the sources of entrepreneurial funds for SMEs. Though there are many steps taken by Bangladesh Banks to ease the access to funds for SMEs yet there are concerns for banks to finance them. It is also important to take a quick look at the existing policy to ascertain support to SMEs and banks. Does any system of collateral or some kind of shock absorbing measures in case of failure or economic downturn exist in Bangladesh? What are challenges faced by banks in providing financial support to SME? All those issues were not studied systematically so far, therefore it is important to address the gray areas lies therein to finance the SMEs by banks.

BROAD OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

This empirical study is undertaken to analyze the present system of financing SMEs by banks based on the above descriptive arguments and rationales. Therefore, at first, it will assess procedures, concerns, and constraints faced by banks to finance SMEs. Secondly, it will suggest measures to improve financial services where both SMEs and banks can be benefitted.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

- a. To assess the present scenario of financing SMEs.
- b. To discuss the ways and means to finance SMEs.
- c. To narrate the key concern for sustainable SME financing.
- d. To identify and analyze the constraints of SME financing by banks.
- e. To suggest measures for improving SME financing having a win-win situation for SMEs as well as for banks.

RESEARCH QUESTION

The main research question is to know what the procedures for banks to finance SMEs are and how the concerns can be addressed by regulators and entrepreneurs. The related research question is to identify the impediments faced by banks to finance SMEs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the absence of a universally accepted definition for SMEs, Bangladesh adopted their definition in the SME Credit Policies and Programs 2010 of Bangladesh Bank. Later, this definition is reviewed by the Ministry of Industry in the Industrial Policy 2016. However, while defining, factors like technological and technical requirements, skills of employees, value addition, working capital requirement and trade barriers in the market were not considered. The parameters as mentioned in the definition of the SMEs are given in Table I.

Table I: SME Defined (in terms of capital and employees)

Serial No.	Type of Industry	Invested Capital*	Number of Employees (Person)
1.	Cottage Industry	< 10 lac	<15
2.	Micro Industry	Tk.10 - 75 lac	16 - 30
3.	Small Industry	Manufacturing	Tk. 75 lac - 15 crore
	Service	Tk. 10 lac - 2 crore	31 - 120
4.	Medium Industry	Manufacturing	Tk.15 - 50 crore
	Service	Tk. 2 - 30 crore	121 - 300
5.	Large Industry	Manufacturing	> Tk. 50 crore
	Service	> Tk. 30 crore	>300

* Amount includes replacement cost and fixed assets but excluding land and factory buildings.

Source: National Industrial Policy of Bangladesh - 2016

Planning Commission of Bangladesh has informally estimated that SMEs accounts for more than 80% of private establishments. In aggregate, more than 0.9 million SMEs employ more than 7 million workforces. According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), the performance of SMEs in terms of volume and growth in the manufacturing sector only for 2008-09 to 2015-16 is given in Table II.

Table II: Data of Volume and Growth in Manufacturing Sector
(Considering Base Year at 2005-06. Amount in crore Taka)

Enterprise	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Small & Cottage	18525.3 (7.30)	20039.5 (8.17)	21176.0 (5.67)	22569.1 (6.58)	24557.9 (8.81)	26113.1 (6.33)	283426 (8.54)	303325 (7.02)
Medium & Large	74933.6 (6.54)	79631.4 (6.27)	88475.3 (11.11)	97998.3 (10.76)	108436.2 (10.65)	118540.3 (9.32)	1312254 (10.70)	1456683 (11.01)
Total	934589 (6.69)	996709 (6.65)	109651.4 (10.01)	120567.4 (9.96)	132994.1 (10.31)	1446534 (8.77)	1595680 (10.31)	1760008 (10.30)

Note: Rate of growth is shown in parentheses.

Source: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.

Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP 2005) has identified that lack of policy support, structural support, and poor governance are the three broad constraints which are faced by SME. Policy-induced constraints are originated by controls and regulatory measures on private investment that involves costs. Structural constraints include access to information, finance, infrastructure, skill, technology, and markets. On the other hand, Poor governance results in weak public service

deliveries. Combined effects of these three constraints impair the functional efficiency of SMEs. Here, access to sources of funds is regarded as one of the major structural impediments that create a bottleneck for SME's growth. Given these constraints, the resulting business environment imposes a greater cost on small business and hinders their growth.

According to a report titled "The Doing Business 2015" by World Bank and International Finance Corporation (IFC), Bangladesh ranked 172 among 189 economies in terms of ease of doing business. It was also ranked 87th in terms of protecting minority investors, 128th in getting credit, 111th in starting a business and 85th paying taxes. The government has already regarded access to finance as vital for SME sector development. More often than none, entrepreneurs have complained regarding the lack of fund and a higher rate of interest. Though the higher rate of interest creates constriction, the availability of funds is very important for the formation of SME. As per BB SME Policy 2010, the priority of access to finance is given to small entrepreneurs where the credit limit ranges from Taka 50 thousand to Taka 50 lac. Accordingly, 40% of the SME credit is kept reserved for small and 60% for medium size enterprises. BB shall finance banks at 5% interest where banks can set the rate of interest in sector or sub-sector wise with intimation to BB. But the total interest rate must not exceed 10% considering bank rates and interest charged by banks to the entrepreneurs.

Finance is not the only factor in doing business, rather it is the basic and most vital ingredient to start a business and to continue with it. Hundred years before the famous economist Adam Smith (1937) said that "Money begets money. If you have got a little, it is easy to get more but the great difficulty is to get that little money". It is also accepted that SMEs of Bangladesh is suffering due to that little start off money and/or collateral to initiate a business. BB also recognized the lack of collateral and absence of an appropriate grace period as major hindrances to the expansion of credit for SME growth. Banks are advised to provide collateral free credit facilities up to Taka 25 lac against Personal Guarantee in the SME sector. If deemed necessary, credit can be granted for products and machinery against the system of Hypothecation¹. Flexibility is also given to banks to adopt own policies and establish a client relationship. It is particularly applicable for determining collateral to grant loans in excess of Taka 25 lakh. However, banks are directed to formulate their own SME credit policy following the guidelines of the BB as a minimum benchmark for considering collateral and grace period.

The fund of BB, IDA and ADB have been channelized through various refinance schemes to facilitate SME credit by banks. So far, Taka 1618 crore has been refinanced to 22561 enterprises using Taka 2018 crore revolving fund of BB, IDA & ADB. The SME credit target and disbursement by the banks and financial institutions in 2015 are shown in Table III.

Table III: Target of SME Credit Disbursement (Taka in Crore)

Serial No.	Banks & Financial Institutions	Target	Disbursed	Achievement
1	State-owned Commercial Banks (SOBC)	12053.40	10610.82	88%
2	Specialized Banks (SB)	1600	718.78	44.92%
3	Private Commercial Banks (PCB)	45760.40	51895.61	113.41%
4	Foreign Commercial Banks (FCB)	803.64	1014.70	133.73%
5	Non-Bank Financial Institutions (NBFI)	3625.61	3719.53	102.59%
6	Islamic Bank (IB)	40743.44	47851.05	117.44%
	Grand Total:	104586.49	115810.49	110.73%

Source: SME and Special Programs Department, Bangladesh Bank

¹Hypothecation is legal term that refers to the granting of a hypothec to a lender by a borrower. In practice, the borrower pledges an asset as collateral for a loan, while retaining ownership of the assets and enjoying the benefits there from. The term comes from civil law; although its usage varies from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, it is nearly synonymous to a lien or mortgage. Source: <http://www.investopedia.com>

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

To address the research question and to attain the objectives of the study, it is obvious to search for facts, figures, opportunities, and constraints that the SMEs are facing in accessing loans from the banks. Since access to finance for SME is a vast subject, therefore, intentionally scope of the study was kept narrow and focused. Basing on literature review and field survey, this paper tried to come up with empirical findings and recommendations to facilitate finance for SMEs by banks.

RESEARCH METHODS AND DATA SOURCES

The study used both primary and secondary data. Being the SMEs population size is too big, a convenient sample size of 50 entrepreneurs and 10 commercial banks were taken randomly to conduct exploratory research for the study. The field survey was conducted based on questionnaires and interview in three districts namely Sirajgonj, Rangpur and Saidpur for the convenience of the researcher. During this study, in-depth interviews and discussion took place with entrepreneurs, experts, government and bank officials to develop the understanding of the financing procedures and problems entangled by banks, SMEs, and regulators. Interview and questionnaire survey was conducted among SMEs and banks to collect primary data. The questionnaire was basically subjective and sometimes used as a guide for interviewing the stakeholders. A considerable amount of secondary data was consulted from newspapers, magazines, publications, websites, books, and journals relevant to the study. At times tables and simple statistical tools like averages, percentages etc. were used for analyzing and making deductions.

MAJOR EMPIRICAL FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

1. Sources of Funds and Suggestive Interest Rates by BB. The government is implementing SME sector development program through banks and financial institutions with financial assistance from BB, IDA, JICA, and ADB. The government has directed to allocate 40% SME fund for the small entrepreneurs considering their contribution to the national economy. Priority has been given to the manufacturing sector over trading and service sectors. To remove gender inequality and to empower women, 15% of the fund is kept reserved for them. The interest rate has been fixed based on the BB rate which is 5% plus a maximum 5% can be charged to the client by banks. Thus, the total interest rate on SME fund would be maximum 10% per annum theoretically. Banks are directed by BB to consider a collateral free loan for up to Taka 25 lakh with adequate grace /moratorium for the SME. Details of the refinance schemes up to June 2015 are given in Table IV.

Table IV: Statement of Refinance Scheme of the Banks in 2015 (In Crore Taka)

S. No	Type of Fund	Amount	Refinanced	No of Enterprise	No of Participated Banks	No of NBFIs	Total SME Fund	Total Refinanced	Total Enterprise
1	BB Fund (All SMEs)	600	1223.70	12704	20	23			
2	BB (Women Entrepreneurs)	120	2332.94	24955	28	21			
3	IDA (EGBMP)	116	312.61	3160	17	15			
4	ADB	202	334.94	3264	9	7	2238	5926	58546
5	ADB-2	700	746.95	13645	19	13			
6	JICA (JPY 5000 million)	400	320.74	437	25	21			
7	Rural Based Agri Project Fund	100	654.39	381	29	20			

Source: SME and Special Programs Department, Bangladesh Bank

2. POLICY GUIDELINES.

One important achievement is the formulation of SME Objective Policies by BB. But it also contains some gray areas. There are no specific guidelines as to how the targeted credit will be disbursed

by banks. There is no visible and clear direction of authority to monitor the rate of interest being imposed on SME loan as suggested by BB. Clear directions are not given about collateral and grace period. How the risk of faltering loan will be mitigated that is not mentioned in the policy. During the research, it is also found that all government initiative is based on Dhaka and city areas. One of the significant government initiatives was the SME Sector Development Program (SMESDP) with the financial assistance of US\$ 50 million of ADB. This fund was targeted for proper development and expansion of SMEs. SMESDP was designed to allocate US\$ 15 million as program loan, US\$ 30 million as project loan and US\$ 5 million as a technical assistance loan. Out of these three heads, program loan appeared to be an unproductive expenditure which seems to be spent for policy and framework development.

3. ROLE PLAYED BY BANKS

a. The loan grant as shown in Table 5 was distributed through banks to the SME. BB has signed an agreement with the banks to finance SME and directed them to set interest maximum at 10% on disbursed loan (5% as BB rate and another maximum 5% charged on the client). Banks were refinanced on the realization of disbursed credit. They are authorized by the policy of BB to make a profit based on competitive terms and conditions.

b. Within the framework of the BB's agreement, Industrial Policy 2016, SMESDP and SME Policy Strategy 2010, banks have devised their own guiding policies to finance the SMEs. The subject banks of this research have categorized the SMEs into trading, manufacturing and service segment. It is observed during the study that only a few banks namely Eastern Bank, Trust Bank, BRAC Bank and Dhaka Bank are performing the leading role in distributing money to the SMEs. The statistics of loan distribution by banks are given in Table V.

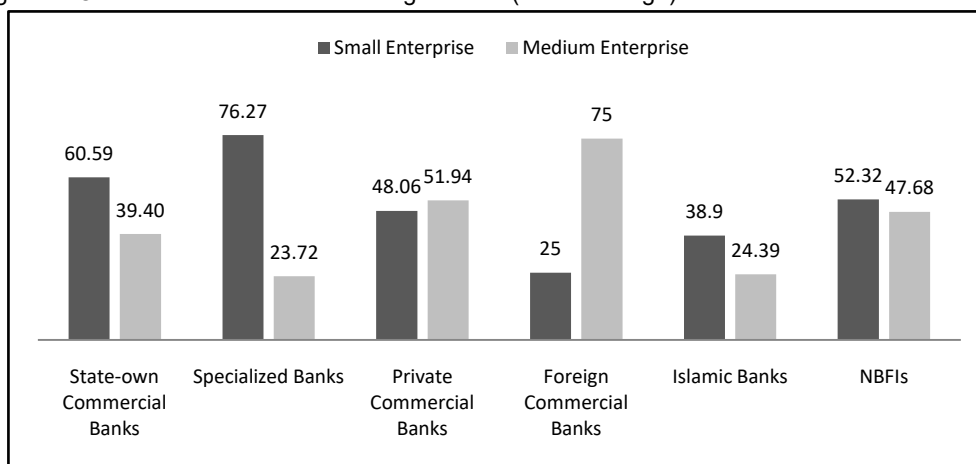
Table V: Bank Category Wise SME Loan for the Year 2015 (Tk. in Thousand Crore)

Sectors	Target Loan for SMEs	Total SMEs	Total Disbursement to SMEs	Total Loan Outstanding in Taka	Total SME Loan Outstanding in Taka	% of SME to Total Outstanding Loans	Total Small Enterprise Loan in Taka	% Small Enterprise Loan to Total SME Loan	Total & % of Small Enterprise Outstanding Loans	Total Medium Enterprise Loan in Taka	% Medium Enterprise Loan to Total SME Loan	Total & % of Medium Enterprise Outstanding Loans
Total Financial Sector	87.33	402524	103.42	148.79	132.07	88.76	39.93	45.72	59.35 (39.88)	47.40	54.28	72.73 (48.88)
Total Banks	84.62	387383	100.19	143.33	128.28	89.50	47.57	56.21	59.35 (46.26)	37.05	43.79	68.93 (53.74)
PCBs	43.10	171168	48.83	62.04	58.29	93.96	23.47	48.06	31.31 (53.71)	25.36	51.94	26.98 (46.29)
FCBs	0.75	2534	0.72	1.89	1.32	70	0.18	25	0.32 (17.20)	0.54	75	1.57 (83.07)
NBFIs	2.71	15131	3.23	5.45	4.87	89.41	1.69	52.32	2.41 (49.49)	1.54	47.68	2.46 (50.51)

Source: SME and Specials Program Department, Bangladesh Bank

c. From Table 5 it is also observed that 45.72% of the total financial sector loan was distributed to the Small and 47.40% for the Medium enterprise in the year 2015. In the overall banking sector, it was 56.21% and 37.05%. For PCBs it was 48.06% and 51.94%, for FCBs it was 25% and 75%, and for NBFIs it was 52.32% and 47.68% respectively. The overall performance of the banking sector is shown in figure 1.

Figure: 1 Overall Performance of Banking Sectors (In Percentage)



- d. State-owned commercial banks were well ahead of the Private Commercial Banks in terms of total small enterprise loan distribution (60.59%/48.06%) but fall short for medium enterprise (39.40%/51.94%). Still, NBFIs are playing a significant role in disbursing SME fund which should have been replaced by banks.
- e. BB has allotted Taka 50 crore to Taka 100 crore to each of the participatory banks (out of 600 crore SME Fund) which will be revised on a contractual basis. The study found that roughly all the banks have distributed the loan to the SMEs at a rate of 18% to 22% interest and at times on a quarterly compounding basis. Other charges that are imposed by banks were, 0.25% to 2% processing fee, Taka 3 thousand to Taka 5 thousand documentation fees, Excise Duty, Cheque Charge etc.
- f. The study has observed that banks have targeted 7%, 38%, and 55% loans respectively for service, trade and manufacturing sub-sector of Small Enterprise. It is also similar to the case of Medium Enterprise. Though all the banks have a similar allocation as observed in the overall banking sectors, PCBs have allocated a very high percentage of targeted loan for trading sub-sectors of SMEs. The targeted allocation by the PCBs is 60% and 40% respectively for trading sub-sectors which is quite higher than the average allocation in other sub-sectors. Approximated sub-sector wise earmarked loan percentage (Service, Trading, and Manufacturing) is shown in Table VI.

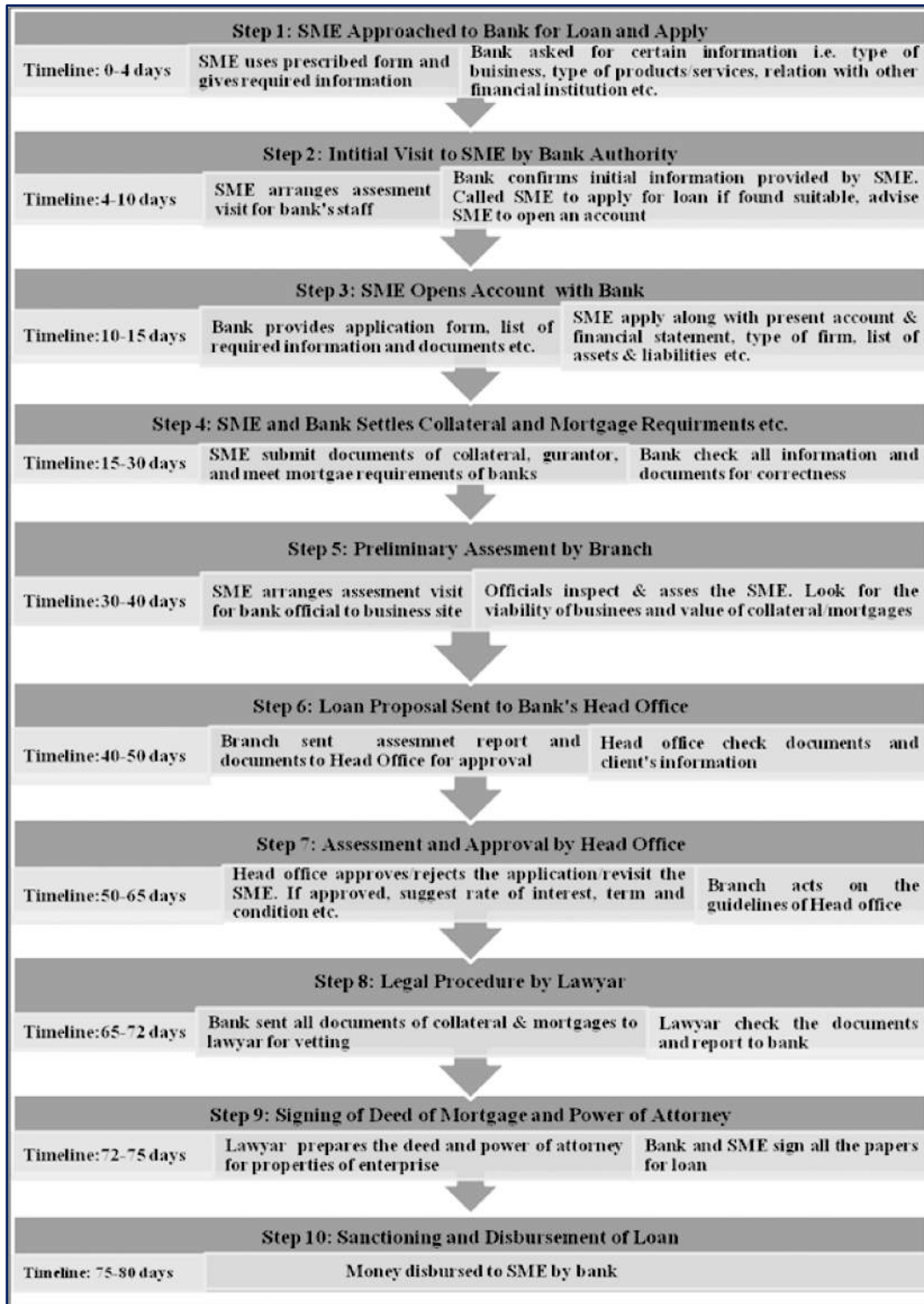
Table VI: Earmarked Loan Percentage for Sub-Sectors of SMEs

Enterprise	Small			Medium		
	Service	Trade	Manufacturing	Service	Trade	Manufacturing
Financial	8%	40%	52%	15%	35%	50%
Banking	7%	38%	55%	16%	35%	49%
PCBs	7%	60%	33%	27%	40%	33%
SOCBs	9%	0%	81%	0%	80%	20%
FCBs	15%	35%	50%	5%	50%	45%
IBs	4%	20%	76%	3%	25%	72%

Source: Field Study and Reports of Bangladesh Bank

- g. Banks usually value a few factors while they consider an enterprise to finance. Those factors are the ability and intention to repay the loan, the requirement of working capital, business cycle, national festivals, owner's equity-credit-capital machinery ratio, business profiles and type of service/finished products etc. Though "intention to pay" is claimed to be the most important factor in sanctioning loan by banks, SME experienced that they don't get fund without appropriate collateral. It is found that most of the subject banks are interested in issuing Cash Credit (CC) loan to the clients.
- h. Banks had a range of Taka 50 thousand to Taka 1 crore loan grants for the SMEs. Almost all the loans are granted for a period of 3 to 60 months. Some of them were renewable or overdraft basis. In some cases, banks have an arrangement of mix terms and conditions for the loan. In that system, one portion of the loan is given to procure capital machinery and another portion as working capital for the SME. One of the subject banks adopted reverse banking process and it went to the clients to identify their requirements. During that time this bank also endeavors to find out the client's credibility to get a loan. In deciding the interest rate, it was found that products or services of the SME played an important role. Banks also charged for 2% loan loss provision in fixing the interest rates. But nothing is told about the "loan loss provision" in the BB policy on SME.
- i. Banks claimed that they do not prefer to discriminate among the SMEs but it was observed that 35% to 40% of financing activities were confined to the city and urban area. The study found that during the July-September quarter in 2015, 82% SME loan was distributed by banks. Out of this distribution, 87% and 11% loan was distributed in urban and in rural areas respectively. Therefore, apparently, banks are not interested in rural areas which were a priority for the government.
- j. It has been found that the SME loan procedures required to complete as many as 10 to 12 various steps. It involved both the branch and head office of the bank. The flow chart as devised from the study for processing SME loan is given as Figure 2. It is understandable from the figure that these steps are taking place sequentially rather than simultaneously. It can be seen that step 1 to 5 and 7 to 9 can be carried out simultaneously; thereby timeline can be reduced considerably. Banks may adopt some kind of process reengineering to address this problem.

Figure 2: Steps for Processing SME Loan



- k. Subject banks claimed that "Hypothecation" is the primary security from the clients yet they were found considering capital machinery and land mortgage as their principal security. Most interestingly the research discovered that none of the banks have funded new entrepreneurs by providing "start off capital" rather financed only existing SMEs who have a proven business record for at least one to two years. Besides, the absence of grace period or moratorium is prevalent for entrepreneurs. Banks also asked for at least two guarantors for sanctioning loan out of which one person should be a family member.

EXPERIENCES OF THE SMES

1. As observed, the main difficulties faced by the SMEs to finance their business were non-availability of funds, high bank interest rate, hidden loan processing cost, lengthy loan processing time (2 to 3 months), non-availability of mortgage or collateral, the insignificant value of goodwill and inadequate grace period/moratorium
2. During the study, it was found that SMEs are not aware of the loan procedure. They were afraid to proceed to banks for lack of information, fear of the unknown, uneasiness about bureaucracy and shortages of assets that can be mortgaged for a loan. They were also afraid to lose their property if fail to repay the loan. Thus they relied on other formal and informal sources of fund. Notable informal sources were a loan from family and friends, local Mahajan (Money Lenders), local cooperative societies, the buyer (with a condition to sell products at a particular price) etc. These financiers charge very high-interest rates but provide funds very quickly. Other sources were mainly NGOs and microcredit supplier located in the area.
3. Many of the industries in the SME sector were found to be occasion/festival based. Thus, they required quick and timely finance to tap opportunities. Due to the long processing time, SME has failed to get fund timely. At times it took 15 days to 3 months for an enterprise to get a loan. But by that time the season or order went out of the hand. As a result, they failed to make a good profit.
4. The interest rates were too high as mentioned before. Besides, there were many hidden costs involved in getting a loan in the name of processing cost, insurance or cheque charge etc. All those costs together with increased the initial expenditure of the enterprise. At times the market behaves abruptly due to social, natural and political reasons thus incur more loss to the SME which ultimately affect the SME to repay the loan and get refinanced.

BARRIERS TO SME GROWTH

The requirement of guarantors, Tax Identification Number (TIN), and tangible properties was found to be the cardinal hurdles for getting a loan from banks. Raw material markets are often syndicated who controls the price and increase it during on-season. Though the financial institutions provided a loan to SMEs but didn't provide any networking facilities with potential buyers or suppliers. It is possible for banks to provide networking facilities to clients in attaining their customer responsiveness. SMEs can be informed by banks about potential markets since banks have their client information with them. SMEs often do not understand many terms and conditions which are given in the agreement. Thus, they feared to fall into unfavorable legal bindings. Besides, SMEs were subjected to double taxation- firstly on the products and secondly on their yearly income.

SUGGESTIONS

SME sector is given due importance by the government since their contribution is vital for the economic development of Bangladesh. The donors also extended their support to strengthen the effort of the government. All stakeholders considered the case of financing SMEs for their preponderance and role in our economic stability and growth. The banking sector has come forward to work with the government and donors for overcoming the financial constraints faced by

SMEs. To facilitate access to finance for SMEs through banks, the following suggestions are made basing on the study:

1. **Process Reengineering by Banks.** The study found that loan processing involves 10-12 various steps. Thus, banks are needed to revise their system of processing loan to bring it down to the shortest time. It should not take more than 15 days to sanction a loan. They may be needed to re-engineer their process to be more efficient to reduce cost, to remove bureaucracy and to be dynamic in providing a loan to SME. Instead of following the process sequentially, it is possible to do it simultaneously. Thereby, a few steps may be squeezed to reduce works and processing time.
2. **Dedicated Rapporteur or One Stop Service.** Branch of the banks may be given authority and flexibility to process a loan with just intimation to their head office. "One Stop Service" or "Dedicated Rapporteur" for entire loan processing issue may be appointed at the branch level. The dedicated individual will be made responsible for processing a loan and will work until the disbursement of the fund. The same individual will be the focal point or Rapporteur for the entire process.
3. **Interest Rate must be brought within BB Suggested Rate.** The maximum rate of interest which a bank can charge is 10% as suggested by BB. All the participatory banks must bring this rate within that limit by efficient banking and process re-engineering.
4. **Banking in Rural Area.** BB must ensure that participatory banks are opening and functioning in rural areas by setting up the branch. The incentive or permission to open new branches must be based on the performance in distributing SME loans to the rural enterprise. It has to be ensured that they fulfill the disbursement of targeted loan to rural entrepreneurs.
5. **Funding New Entrepreneurs:** BB policy may include provisions for funding new and innovative enterprises. Funding a new enterprise is vital for SME development. But there are no specific guidelines given by regulators. As like women and rural entrepreneurs, a portion of funds may be kept reserved for new SMEs.
6. **Grace Period and Moratorium.** BB policy suggested for an adequate and reasonable grace period or moratorium for the SME. But in fact, banks do not practice it. Moratorium or grace period affects the SME both financially and psychologically. It provides breathing space for entrepreneurs since they face severe financial constraint in the initial stage of entrepreneurial activities. It must be granted for the proven and successful SMEs.
7. **Monitoring by Regulators.** Bangladesh Bank along with donors may form a team to monitor and evaluate financing activities of banks. A system of close monitoring is required even at the branch level through extensive field visit by the team. Regular reporting and feedback between banks and monitoring cell are suggested. Since the target is set at the beginning of fiscal year, regular update and forecast of implementation by banks viz-a-viz reciprocal advised by the team to meet the target are needed.
8. **SME Database.** The government should create a central database for SME. The database should be an ideal one which will facilitate to finance SMEs. It must contain such details which will help the banking institutions to provide funds without collateral, with grace period or moratorium, with the lower interest rate, with great speed and to be based on goodwill or performance of SMEs.

CONCLUSION

Economic activities and development in Bangladesh are growing at a faster pace than before. For that matter, the SME sector would be the prime mover of the economy in terms of employment generation and social development. Being more labor intensive, SMEs are absorbing most of our workforces both at rural and in urban areas. The government, BB, and donors have given emphasis to assist SMEs in many ways. One of the important developments is the formulation of

SME Credit Policies and Programs 2010 by BB. The policy tried to compose a widely accepted definition for SMEs. This study has identified procedural constraints faced by SMEs to get funds. These are policy-induced, structural and those emanating from poor governance. Structural constraint includes access to finance. But access to finance encompasses all the constraint ranges from regulatory matters to the attitude of the banks. Though access to finance is considered to be the main structural constraint by all, yet banks were found reluctant and passive to extend credit facilities to the SMEs.

This study analyzed SME financing procedures through banks in light of BB SME policies and guidelines. The role of regulators, activities of banks and experiences of the SMEs were critically viewed to realize the hindrances faced by the entrepreneurs to access finance. Statistics have shown that BB, IDA, and ADB has provided funds for SME development with 5% interest rate and refinanced on realization. According to the BB guidelines, banks are directed to charge maximum 10% interest on SME loan. But in reality, banks are charging 18% to 22% interest in SME finance. The process to sanction loan as followed by banks are quite complicated and takes longer time. The study found that the process involves 10-12 steps and takes 2 to 3 months' time.

Banks and regulators are required to work closely and side by side with SMEs to facilitate access to finance and to reduce loan processing time. There is no shortcut for the banks to be more efficient to provide cheap finance to SME as prescribed by BB. They need to carry out some kind of process re-engineering to reduce the cost of credit and to sanction loan quickly. A central database for SMEs will definitely facilitate all parties in many ways to process loan speedily.

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জনসংখ্যা সমস্যা ও ইসলাম : প্রেক্ষাপট বাংলাদেশ

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কামরুজ্জামান^২

সহকারী অধ্যাপক (ইসলামিক স্টাডিজ), সামাজিক বিজ্ঞান, মানবিক ও ভাষা স্কুল
বাংলাদেশ উন্মুক্ত বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়, গাজীপুর ১৭০৫।

প্রস্তাবনা

বাংলাদেশের সামাজিক সমস্যাসমূহের মধ্যে জনসংখ্যা সমস্যা অন্যতম। সীমিত সম্পদ, অসীম প্রয়োজন আর অনিয়ন্ত্রিত ও অপরিচালিত জনগোষ্ঠী এ সমস্যাকে প্রকট করে তুলেছে। বিভিন্ন সময়ে দেশের প্রায় সকল সরকারের অধাধিকারপ্রাপ্ত সমস্যাগুলোর মধ্যে এটি শীর্ষে ছিল। কিন্তু নানা কারণে সমস্যাটির কাজিত সমাধান সম্ভব হয়নি। বাংলাদেশের অধিকাংশ মানুষ ইসলাম ধর্মের অনুসারী ও ধর্মভীরু। পরিকল্পিত জীবন যাপনের ব্যাপারে ইসলামের এমন সুনির্দিষ্ট ও সুস্পষ্ট নির্দেশনা রয়েছে যে, এ সকল নির্দেশনার সঠিক অনুসরণ বাংলাদেশের জনসংখ্যা সমাধানে তাৎপর্যবহু ভূমিকা রাখতে সক্ষম হবে। অথচ পরিস্থিতি পুরোপুরি ভিন্ন। ইসলামি বিধানের সঠিক বোধগম্যতা না থাকার কারণে এ দেশের অধিকাংশ মুসলমান পরিকল্পিত পরিবার গঠনে কোনো উদ্যোগ গ্রহণ করেননি। ইসলামি আহকামের সঠিক জ্ঞান না থাকায় যে আবেগ পরিকল্পিত পরিবার গঠনে ভূমিকা রাখতে পারতো, সে আবেগই অপরিচালিত পরিবার গঠনের অন্যতম প্রধান নিয়ামকে পরিণত হয়েছে। এ পরিস্থিতিতে বাংলাদেশের জনসংখ্যা সমস্যা সমাধানে ইসলামি বিধিসমূহের যথাযথ মূল্যায়ন এবং তা বাস্তবায়নের কার্যকর উপায় অন্বেষণ আবশ্যিক। আলোচ্য প্রবন্ধে এ উপায় অন্বেষণ করা হয়েছে।

কিওয়ার্ডস : জনসংখ্যা সমস্যা, পরিবার পরিকল্পনা, জন্মনিয়ন্ত্রণ, ইসলাম, বাংলাদেশ

বাংলাদেশের জনসংখ্যা

সাধারণভাবে জনসংখ্যা বলতে মানুষের পরিমাণ বুঝায়। তবে পরিভাষায় মানুষের যে কোনো পরিমাণকে জনসংখ্যা বলে না। বরং জনসংখ্যা হল এমন জনগণ যারা কোনো নির্দিষ্ট এলাকা, শহর বা দেশে বসবাস করে। All the people who live in a particular area, city or country, the total number of people who live there. (Dictionary, ২০০২:৯৮০) যখন কোনো দেশের জনসংখ্যা প্রাপ্ত সম্পদের তুলনায় কম বা বেশি হয় এবং তা জাতীয় কল্যাণ ও অগ্রগতিকে বাধাপ্রস্তু করে তখন তা সমস্যায় পরিণত হয়। বাংলাদেশ ১,৪৭,৫৭০ বর্গ কিলোমিটারের ছোট্ট একটি দেশ। প্রাকৃতিক বা খনিজ সম্পদে সমৃদ্ধ নয়, শিল্প বা কৃষিতেও আধুনিক নয়। উৎপাদনে, উপার্জনে, বিনিয়োগ ও বন্টনে উন্নত নয়। এদেশে লোক সংখ্যা প্রায় ১৫ কোটি, যার মধ্যে ২৮% ভাগ শিক্ষার আলো থেকে বঞ্চিত। (২০০৮ Statistical Yearbook, ২০০৯:১৬) যারা শিক্ষিত তাদেরও কোনো কর্মমুখী শিক্ষা নেই, যে কারণে তারা দেশের শ্রমবাজারে শিক্ষিত বেকারের সংখ্যা বৃদ্ধি করলেও দক্ষ শ্রমিকের অভাব পূরণ করতে পারেনি। সবমিলিয়ে বাংলাদেশে যে পরিমাণ কাজ আছে

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সে পরিমাণ দক্ষ লোক নেই কিন্তু শিক্ষিত বেকার রয়েছে অনেক, যারা বাংলাদেশের শ্রমবাজারে কোনো ভূমিকা রাখতে পারছে না। এ কারণে বাংলাদেশের জনসংখ্যা সম্পদ না হয়ে সমস্যায় পরিণত হয়েছে।

সর্বশেষ আদমশুমারি অনুসারে দেশের বর্তমান জনসংখ্যা ১৪ কোটি ২৩ লাখ ১৯ হাজার। জনসংখ্যা বৃদ্ধির বার্ষিক হার ১.৩৪ শতাংশ। (Population Census, ২০১১: ২১) যদিও শুমারির আগে জাতিসংঘের বিভিন্ন সংস্থা দেশের জনসংখ্যা ১৬ কোটি ছাড়িয়ে যাওয়ার তথ্য দিয়েছিল, কিন্তু বাস্তব সংখ্যাটি হয়েছে তার চেয়ে প্রায় ২ কোটি কম এবং এখনো জাতিসংঘের সংস্থাসমূহের হিসেবে দেশের জনসংখ্যা ১৪ কোটি ৮৭ লাখ। (UNFPA, ২০০৮) সর্বশেষ এ শুমারি অনুসারে বাংলাদেশে পুরুষ ৭ কোটি ১২ লাখ ৫৫ হাজার, নারী ৭ কোটি ১০ লাখ ৬৪ হাজার। দেশে পুরুষ ও নারীর বর্তমান অনুপাত ১০০ : ১০০.৩। দেশে প্রতি বর্গ কিলোমিটারে ৯৬৪ বসবাস করে ২০০১ সালের শুমারিতে এ সংখ্যাটি ছিল ৮৩৯। দেশে খানার সংখ্যা ৩ কোটি ২০ লাখ ৬৭ হাজার ৭শত। খানার আকার ৪.৪।

বাংলাদেশে জনসংখ্যা বৃদ্ধির হার ধারাবাহিকভাবে কমছে। ১৯৮১ সালে বার্ষিক বৃদ্ধির হার ছিল ২.৩২, ১৯৯১ সালে তা কমে দাঁড়ায় ২.০১-এ। ২০০১ সালে ছিল ১.৫৮ যা বর্তমানে ১.৩৪ ভাগে এসে দাঁড়িয়েছে।

বিভাগভিত্তিক পরিসংখ্যানে দেখা যায়, বরিশাল বিভাগে মানুষ কমছে সবচেয়ে বেশি। ২০০১ সালের শুমারিতে এই বিভাগে মানুষ ছিল ৮১ লাখ ৭৪ হাজার। বর্তমান শুমারিতে ৮১ লাখ ৪৭ হাজার। অর্থাৎ এই বিভাগে বিগত ১০ বছরে মানুষ না বেড়ে উল্টো আরো ২৭ লাখ কমেছে! বৃদ্ধির হার বলা হচ্ছে শূন্য ভাগ।

জনসংখ্যা বৃদ্ধির হার সবচেয়ে বেশি সিলেট, ঢাকা ও চট্টগ্রাম বিভাগে যথাক্রমে ২.১, ১.৮ ও ১.৩ শতাংশ। মেট্রোপলিটন এলাকার প্রতি মানুষের স্বাভাবিক আকর্ষণ এই প্রবৃদ্ধির অন্যতম কারণ হতে পারে। অন্যদিকে খুলনা বিভাগে জনসংখ্যা বৃদ্ধির হার শূন্য দশমিক ৬ শতাংশ। রাজশাহী ও রংপুরে যথাক্রমে ১.১ ও ১.২ শতাংশ।

সর্বশেষ শুমারি অনুযায়ী, দেশে প্রতি বর্গকিলোমিটার এলাকায় ৯৬৪জন মানুষ বাস করে। ১০ বছর আগে একই পরিমাণ জায়গায় বাস করতো ৮৩৪জন মানুষ। বর্তমান পরিসংখ্যানে দেখা যায়, ঢাকা বিভাগে জনঘনত্ব সবচেয়ে বেশি। এই বিভাগে প্রতি বর্গকিলোমিটারে ১ হাজার ৫০২জন মানুষ বাস করে। সবচেয়ে কম বরিশাল বিভাগে, প্রতি বর্গকিলোমিটারে ৬১৩জন মানুষের বসবাস। জেলা পর্যায়ে সবচেয়ে সবচেয়ে বেশি মানুষ বাস করে ঢাকা জেলায়, প্রতি বর্গকিলোমিটারে ৮হাজার ১১১জন। প্রতি বর্গকিলোমিটারে মাত্র ৮৬জন মানুষ বাস করে পার্বত্য জেলা বান্দরবানে। এটাই সবচেয়ে কম বসতিপূর্ণ জেলা। (Population Census, ২০১১:২৩) বাংলাদেশের বর্তমান জনসংখ্যা নিয়ে দ্বিবিধ বক্তব্য, নানামুখী পরিসংখ্যান থাকলেও ন্যূনতম যে সংখ্যা ধার্য হয় সেটিও ছোট্ট এই ভূখণ্ডের জন্য অত্যন্ত ঝুঁকিপূর্ণ। এ দেশের খাদ্য, বস্ত্র, বাসস্থান, শিক্ষা, চিকিৎসা, বিনোদন, শান্তিপূর্ণ বসবাস, নিরাপদ সড়ক ইত্যাদি ক্ষেত্রে কাঙ্ক্ষিত অবস্থা বিদ্যমান না থাকার মূল কারণ জনসংখ্যার এই উচ্চচাপ। বাংলাদেশকে এ সমস্যা থেকে মুক্ত করতে হলে এ বিষয়ে মুসলিম জনগোষ্ঠীর মানসিকতায় পরিবর্তন আনতে হবে। তাদের চিন্তা ও দর্শনে যে ভুল বিশ্বাস বদ্ধমূল হয়ে রয়েছে তা দূর করতে হবে। এ জন্য পরিকল্পনা, পরিবার পরিকল্পনা, ইসলামে জন্ম নিয়ন্ত্রণ ও পরিবার পরিকল্পনার ধারণা এবং জনসংখ্যা সমাধানে ইসলামের নির্দেশনা বিস্তারিত আলোচনা করা প্রয়োজন।

জনসংখ্যা সমস্যা সমাধানে পরিবার পরিকল্পনা ও জন্মনিয়ন্ত্রণ

পরিবার পরিকল্পনা হচ্ছে পরিবারের আয় ও সদস্য সংখ্যার মধ্যে সামঞ্জস্য রেখে পরিকল্পিত উপায়ে সদস্য সংখ্যা নিয়ন্ত্রণের মাধ্যমে ছোট ও সুখী পরিবার গড়ে তোলা। (Fifth Five Year Plan, 1998:50)

WHO এর সংজ্ঞানুযায়ী পরিবার পরিকল্পনা হল জীবন যাপনের এমন একটি চিন্তাধারা ও পদ্ধতি যা কোনো ব্যক্তি তার জীবনে কিংবা সম্পদ ও সম্পত্তির ক্ষেত্রে স্বীয় জ্ঞান, দৃষ্টিভঙ্গি ও দায়িত্ববোধের প্রেক্ষিতে স্বেচ্ছায় প্রণোদিত হয়ে গ্রহণ করে যাতে পরিবারের সদস্যদের স্বাস্থ্য ও কল্যাণের উন্নতি সাধিত হয় এবং তারা দেশের সামাজিক উন্নয়নে অবদান রাখতে সক্ষম হয়।

সুতরাং বলা যায়, পরিবার পরিকল্পনা বলতে এমন একটি কর্মসূচিকে বোঝায় যা দ্বারা পরিকল্পিত উপায়ে সুখী, স্বাস্থ্যবান ও সমৃদ্ধিশালী পরিবার গঠনের প্রচেষ্টা চালানো হয়। সন্তানের জন্মদান ঘটনাক্রমে না হয়ে পরিকল্পনা মারফত হওয়াই পরিবার পরিকল্পনা কর্মসূচির মূলকথা।

সন্তানের জন্ম পরিকল্পনা অনুসারে হলে সন্তান যথাযথ প্রস্তুতিসহ উপযুক্ত পরিবেশে কাঙ্ক্ষিত সময়ে পৃথিবীতে আসতে পারে। মা মানসিক ও শারীরিক দিক থেকে সন্তান ধারণের জন্য তৈরি থাকতে পারেন। বাবা সন্তানের ব্যয়ভার নির্বাহ ও

সন্তানসম্ভবা স্ত্রীর যত্ন, চিকিৎসা ও উন্নত খাবার নিশ্চিত করার জন্য প্রস্তুত থাকেন। পরিবার ও কর্মস্থলের জন্য দুজনেই সময় ভাগ করে নেন। ফলে সন্তানের আগমন আনন্দময় হয়। তার অনাদরে অবহেলায় বেড়ে ওঠার সম্ভাবনা কমে যায়। যাতে তার সুন্দর ভবিষ্যৎ এবং কাক্সিত মানবিক ও বুদ্ধিবৃত্তিক বিকাশ নিশ্চিত হয়ে থাকে। অন্যদিকে পরিকল্পনা ছাড়া ঘটনাচক্রে যে শিশু পৃথিবীতে আসে অধিকাংশ ক্ষেত্রেই সে অনাদরের শিকার হয়। তাকে অবহেলা করা হয় বা অবজ্ঞা করা হয়। মা-বাবা তাকে জন্ম দেয়ার জন্য এক ধরনের হীনমন্যতা ও অপরাধবোধে ভোগেন। ফলে তার পূর্ণ মানসিক বিকাশ হয় না। এ ধরনের শিশুরাই পরবর্তীতে অমানবিক বিভিন্ন কাজে লিপ্ত হয়ে থাকে। এ ধরনের শিশুরা এমনকি মাতাপিতাকে হত্যার মতো ঘটনাও ঘটায় থাকে।

পরিবার পরিকল্পনার সাথে জন্মনিয়ন্ত্রণ বিষয়টিকে এক করে দেখার কারণে ইসলামের একটি মহৎ ও আবশ্যিকীয় কর্মসূচী পরিবার পরিকল্পনা সম্পর্কে সাধারণ মুসলিম এমনকি বিশেষ ক্ষেত্রে বিশেষজ্ঞ মুসলিম পর্যন্ত দ্বিধায় পড়ে যান। তারা সহজ করে বলতে পারেন না যে, পরিবার পরিকল্পনা আবশ্যিক এবং ক্ষুধা ও দারিদ্র্যের ভয়ে ভ্রূণ হত্যা হারাম।

পরিবার পরিকল্পনা হল পরিকল্পিত উপায়ে পরিবার গঠন, পরিচালনা ও নিয়ন্ত্রণ পদ্ধতি। একজন পুরুষ ও নারী জীবনের কোনো পর্যায়ে এসে পরিবার গঠন করবে তার একটি পরিকল্পনা থাকতে হবে। বিয়ে করার পর সে তার স্বামী বা স্ত্রীকে নিয়ে কীভাবে থাকবে, কোথায় থাকবে, কেমন বাসায় থাকবে, বাসায় খাওয়া দাওয়ার মান কেমন হবে, কী কী খাতে অর্থ-সম্পদ ব্যয় হবে, আয়ের উৎস কী হবে, ব্যয়সমূহ কীভাবে নিয়ন্ত্রিত হবে, অপচয় ও অপব্যয় না করে কীভাবে আবশ্যিকীয় চাহিদা পূরণ করা হবে ইত্যাদি বিষয়ের পরিকল্পনা প্রতিটি মানুষেরই থাকা উচিত। সন্তান জন্মানের আগেই মায়ের স্বাস্থ্য, সন্তানের যত্ন, প্রয়োজনীয় অন্যান্য উপযোগিতা পূরণের ব্যবস্থার জন্যও পরিকল্পনা আবশ্যিক। সন্তানকে কীভাবে মানুষ করা হবে, কী ধরনের বিদ্যালয়ে তাকে পড়ানো হবে, ভবিষ্যতে সে কী পেশায় নিয়োজিত হবে সে অনুসারে পরিকল্পিতভাবে লেখাপড়া করানোও পরিবার পরিকল্পনারই অংশ। জন্ম নিয়ন্ত্রণের সাথে এর দূরতমও সম্পর্ক নেই।

জন্ম নিয়ন্ত্রণ হল স্বামী-স্ত্রীর দৈহিক মিলন সত্ত্বেও যেন সন্তান জন্মগ্রহণ করতে না পারে সে জন্য গৃহীত ব্যবস্থা। এর আসল উদ্দেশ্য হল বংশ বৃদ্ধি প্রতিরোধ করা। প্রাচীন কালে এ উদ্দেশ্যে আয়ল, গর্ভপাত, শিশুহত্যা, অবিবাহিত থাকা কিংবা স্বামী-স্ত্রীর যৌন মিলন পরিহার করা ইত্যাদি নানা পদ্ধতি অবলম্বন করা হতো। বর্তমানে অবিবাহিত থাকা বা স্বামী-স্ত্রীর যৌন মিলন পরিহার করার পদ্ধতিপরিত্যগ করা হয়েছে বরং এর পরিবর্তে এমন নতুন পদ্ধতি আবিষ্কার করা হয়েছে যাতে যৌন মিলন বহাল থাকে কিন্তু গর্ভ সঞ্চারণের পথ বন্ধ করে দেয়া হয়। ইউরোপ, আমেরিকায় গর্ভপাতের ব্যবস্থা এখনও আছে। বাংলাদেশসহ তৃতীয় বিশ্বের অধিকাংশ দেশে ঘোষণা দিয়ে বিভিন্ন ক্লিনিকে গর্ভপাত করানো হচ্ছে। তবে জন্ম নিয়ন্ত্রণ আন্দোলনের মূল লক্ষ্য গর্ভপাত নয় বরং গর্ভসঞ্চারণ বন্ধ করা।

ইসলামে জন্মনিয়ন্ত্রণের ধারণা

জনসংখ্যা সমস্যা ও জন্মনিয়ন্ত্রণের আলোচনার প্রাক্কালে স্মর্তব্য যে, পৃথিবীতে মানুষের আগমন, জন্ম, মৃত্যু এ সবকিছুই আল্লাহর ইচ্ছায় সংঘটিত হয়। এবং প্রত্যেক জীবের খাদ্যভার আল্লাহ নিজে গ্রহণ করেছেন।

وَمَا مِنْ دَابَّةٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ إِلَّا عَلَى اللَّهِ رِزْقُهَا وَيَعْلَمُ مُسْتَقَرَّهَا وَمُسْتَوْدَعَهَا ۗ كُلٌّ فِي كِتَابٍ مُبِينٍ

অর্থাৎ “পৃথিবীতে এমন কোন প্রাণী নেই যার জীবিকার ভার আল্লাহর উপরে নয়, আর তিনিই জানেন তার বাসস্থান ও তার বিশ্রামস্থল। সবকিছুই এক সুস্পষ্ট গ্রন্থে আছে। (আল-কুর’আন, ১১:৬) বাস্তবেও আমরা দেখতে পাই যে, আমাদের দেশের জনসংখ্যা যখন বর্তমানের তুলনায় অর্ধেকের চেয়েও কম ছিল তখন খাদ্যাভাব ছিল কিন্তু বর্তমানে দেশ এত জনসংখ্যা নিয়েও খাদ্যে স্বয়ংসম্পূর্ণ। (কালের কণ্ঠ, ২০১৮:১) সন্তানের জন্মের কারণে খাদ্যাভাব হবে এ ভয়ে কেউ যেন সন্তানকে হত্যা না করে সেজন্য আল্লাহ নির্দেশ দিয়েছেন।

وَلَا تَقْتُلُوا أَوْلَادَكُمْ خَشْيَةَ إِمْلَاقٍ ۗ نَحْنُ نَرْزُقُهُمْ وَإِيَّاكُمْ ۗ إِنَّ قَتْلَهُمْ كَانَ خِطْئًا كَبِيرًا

অর্থাৎ “আর তোমাদের সন্তানসন্ততিক হত্যা করো না দারিদ্র্যের ভয়ে। আমরাই তাদের রিযেক দিই আর তোমাদেরও। নিঃসন্দেহ তাদের মেরে ফেলা এক মহাপাপ।” (আল-কুর’আন, ১৭:৩১) সমগ্র পৃথিবী অথবা যে কোন ভূখন্ডের জনসংখ্যার প্রকৃত নিয়ন্ত্রণ আল্লাহর হাতেই সীমাবদ্ধ। মানুষ চাইলেও এর হেরফের করতে সক্ষম নয়। জাতি হিসেবে বাংলাদেশের তৃতীয় সম্পদ হচ্ছে জনসংখ্যা (রাজ্জাক, আব্দুর, ২০১৫:৫১)। আর জনসংখ্যার আধিক্য মানেই সমস্যা নয়। দক্ষ জনশক্তি যে কোনো দেশের জন্যই সম্পদ। বরং জনসংখ্যা তখনই সমস্যা যখন তারা থাকে অদক্ষ, অশিক্ষিত, অযোগ্য। প্রত্যেক নবজাতককে প্রয়োজনীয় শিক্ষা-প্রশিক্ষণের মাধ্যমে প্রকৃত মুসলিম ও দক্ষ সূনাগরিক হিসেবে গড়ে

তুলতে পারলে তবেই তারা দুনিয়া ও আখিরাত উভয় জগতের সম্পদ। যে উদ্দেশ্যে রাসূল (সা) বলেছেন, মমতাময়ী ও সন্তান প্রসবকারিনী নারীকে বিয়ে করো। কেননা আমি তোমাদের সংখ্যায় অন্যান্য উম্মতের উপর জয়ী হতে চাই। (আবু দাউদ, আস সুনান, ২০০৮:১৭৯) আব্দুর রহমান ইবন সালিম ইবন উৎবা ইবন উয়াইম ইবন সাযিফা আনসারী পর্যায়ক্রমে তার পিতা ও দাদা সূত্রে বর্ণিত, রাসূল (সা) বলেছেন, তোমরা কুমারী নারীদের বিয়ে করবে। কেননা তাদের মুখ অধিক মিষ্ট, তাদের গর্ভাশয় অধিক গর্ভধারী এবং তারা অল্পে সন্তুষ্ট থাকে। (ইবনে মাজাহ, আস সুনান, ২০০১:৩৬২) অধিক সন্তান সবার জন্য সমস্যা নয়। যেমন একজন ধনী ব্যক্তির জন্য অধিক সন্তান তার সম্পদের রক্ষনাবেক্ষনের জন্য কল্যাণকর। কিন্তু যার নুন আনতে পানতা ফুরায় অবস্থা তার জন্য অধিক সন্তানের অধিকার নিশ্চিত করা কঠিন। স্ত্রী-সন্তানের ভরণপোষণ ছাড়াও সন্তানের লেখাপড়া, চরিত্র গঠন, ধর্মীয় মূল্যবোধ শিক্ষা দেয়া ইত্যাদি বিষয়ে পিতার কর্তব্য বেশি। এসব দায়িত্ব পালনের যোগ্যতা অর্জিত না হলে বিয়ে না করে ধৈর্য ধারণ উত্তম।

وَلْيَسْتَعْفِفِ الَّذِينَ لَا يَجِدُونَ نِكَاحًا حَتَّى يُغْنِيَهُمُ اللَّهُ مِنْ فَضْلِهِ

অর্থাৎ “যাদের বিয়ে করার সামর্থ্য নেই, আল্লাহ তাদেরকে নিজ অনুগ্রহে অভাবমুক্ত না করা পর্যন্ত তারা যেন সংযম অবলম্বন করে।” (আল-কুর’আন, ২৪:৩৩) আল কুর’আনের অন্য এক আয়াতে আল্লাহর সৃষ্টি কাঠামোতে রদবদলকে শয়তানী কাজ বলে আখ্যাদান করা হয়েছে। যেমন, اللَّهُ خَلَقَ اللَّهُ

অর্থাৎ “(শয়তান বলল) তাদেরকে নির্দেশ দেব, তারা যেন আল্লাহর সৃষ্টি আকৃতি বিকৃত করে দেয়।” (আল-কুর’আন, ৪:১১৯) এ আয়াতে বর্ণিত আল্লাহর সৃষ্টি কাঠামোতে রদবদল করার অর্থ হল, আল্লাহ তা’আলা যে বস্তুকে যে উদ্দেশ্যে ব্যবহার করতে বলেছেন তা না করা অথবা এমনভাবে ব্যবহার করা, যাতে তার সৃষ্টির উদ্দেশ্যই ব্যর্থ হয়ে যায়। এ মূলনীতির মাপকাঠিতে দেখা দরকার যে, নর-নারীর সৃষ্টির পেছনে আল্লাহর উদ্দেশ্য কী এবং জন্মনিয়ন্ত্রণের মাধ্যমে সে উদ্দেশ্যে কোনো পরিবর্তন সাধন হয় কি-না। এ প্রশ্নের উত্তর আল-কুর’আন থেকেই পাওয়া যায়। কুর’আন মজীদ নারী-পুরুষের দাম্পত্য সম্পর্কের ব্যাপারে দুটি উদ্দেশ্য ব্যাখ্যা করে। প্রথমত,

نِسَاؤُكُمْ حَرْثٌ لَكُمْ فَأْتُوا حَرْثَكُمْ أَنَّى شِئْتُمْ وَقَدِّمُوا لَأَنْفُسِكُمْ

“তোমাদের স্ত্রীরা হল তোমাদের শস্যক্ষেত। তাই তোমরা তোমাদের ফসলের ক্ষেতে যেভাবে ইচ্ছা যেতে পার। তোমরা তোমাদের ভবিষ্যতের জন্য কিছু করো।” (আল কুর’আন, ২:২২৩)

দ্বিতীয়ত,

وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ أَنْ خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا لِتَسْكُنُوا إِلَيْهَا وَجَعَلَ بَيْنَكُمْ مَوَدَّةً وَرَحْمَةً إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِقَوْمٍ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ

“আলাহর নিদর্শনসমূহের মধ্যে এটাও অন্যতম যে, তিনি তোমাদের জন্য তোমাদের মধ্য থেকেই তোমাদের সঙ্গী সৃষ্টি করেছেন, যাতে তোমরা তাদের নিকট শান্তি পেতে পার এবং এ জন্য তিনি তোমাদের মধ্যে পারস্পরিক ভালবাসা ও মমতা সৃষ্টি করেছেন। নিশ্চয় চিন্তাশীল জাতির জন্য এর মধ্যে বহু নিদর্শন রয়েছে।” (আল-কুর’আন, ৩০:২১)

প্রথম আয়াতে নারীদেরকে ফসলের জমি আখ্যা দিয়ে একটি জৈবিক সত্য (ইরডুযডমরপধষ ভধপঃ) পেশ করা হয়েছে। জীববিজ্ঞান অনুসারে নারীর মর্যাদা ফসলের জমির মতই। আর পুরুষ হল চাষী। তাদের উভয়ের মিলনের সর্বপ্রকার প্রাকৃতিক উদ্দেশ্য হচ্ছে বংশ রক্ষা করা। এ উদ্দেশ্যের দিক দিয়ে মানুষ, জন্তু জানোয়ার ও গাছপালা সবাই সমান।

দ্বিতীয় আয়াতে নর-নারীর সম্পর্ক স্থাপনের আরো একটি উদ্দেশ্য বর্ণনা করা হয়েছে। তা হল, মানুষের সভ্যতা-সংস্কৃতির স্থায়িত্ব। স্বামী-স্ত্রীর মিলিত জীবন যাপনই তমদ্দুনের বুনিয়াদ। এ উদ্দেশ্যটা মানুষেরই জন্য আর মানুষের দৈহিক সৃষ্টির মধ্যেই এ উদ্দেশ্য পূর্ণ করার যাবতীয় উপাদান মজুদ রাখা হয়েছে।

মহাবিশ্বের বিশাল ব্যবস্থাপনা পরিচালনার জন্য আল্লাহ তা’আলা এক সর্বব্যাপী শক্তিশালী ব্যবস্থা প্রতিষ্ঠিত রেখেছেন। এর মধ্যে একটি হচ্ছে, খাদ্য বিষয়ক আর অপরিষ্কার হল বংশ বিস্তার। খাদ্য বিষয়ক ব্যবস্থাপনার তাৎপর্য হল, বর্তমানে যে সকল সৃষ্টির অস্তিত্ব আছে তাদেরকে একটি নির্দিষ্ট সময় পর্যন্ত বেঁচে থেকে এই ব্যবস্থাপনার কাজ চালিয়ে যেতে হবে। এ জন্য আল্লাহ তা’আলা প্রয়োজনীয় খাদ্য সরবরাহ করেছেন। দেহের ভেতরের অংশগুলোকে খাদ্য হজম করা এবং সেগুলোকে দেহের অংশে পরিণত করার ক্ষমতা দিয়েছেন। সর্বোপরি এ উদ্দেশ্যই খাদ্যের প্রতি সৃষ্টির স্বাভাবিক আগ্রহও তৈরি করে দিয়েছেন। এ কারণে মানুষসহ পৃথিবীর সকল সৃষ্টি খাদ্য গ্রহণ করতে বাধ্য হয়। এ ব্যবস্থার অভাবে পৃথিবীতে কোনো সৃষ্টিই অস্তিত্বশীল থাকতে পারতো না। তবে একজন সৃষ্টিকর্তার কাছে খাদ্য গ্রহণের এ ব্যবস্থাটি সচল রাখার চেয়ে বংশ বৃদ্ধির ব্যবস্থা বহাল রাখাই বেশি গুরুত্বপূর্ণ। কেননা ব্যক্তির জীবনকাল অত্যন্ত সীমিত। তার এ সীমাবদ্ধ আয়ু শেষ হওয়ার আগেই বিশ্বের কারখানাকে সচর রাখার জন্য তার স্থান দখলকারী তৈরি হওয়া অত্যন্ত জরুরী। এ দ্বিতীয় ও মহান

উদ্দেশ্য পূর্ণ করার জন্যই আল্লাহ সন্তান জন্মের ব্যবস্থা রেখেছেন। সৃষ্টিকে পিতৃ ও মাতৃশক্তিতে বিভক্ত করা, উভয়ের দৈহিক কাঠামোতে পার্থক্য রাখা, উভয়ের পরস্পরের প্রতি আকর্ষণ বহাল রাখা এবং দাম্পত্য জীবন প্রতিষ্ঠার জন্য উভয়ের মনের মধ্যে প্রবল আকাঙ্ক্ষা দান করেছেন।

বিশ্ব জাহানের অসংখ্য সৃষ্টিরাজির প্রতি লক্ষ্য করলে একটি বিষয় প্রতিভাত হয়ে ওঠে, যে জীবের সন্তান অনেক বেশি সংখ্যক হয় তাদের মধ্যে তিনি সন্তান লালন-পালন ও রক্ষণাবেক্ষণের জন্য খুব বেশি আগ্রহ ও স্নেহ-মমতা দান করেননি। কারণ এ সৃষ্ট জীবেরা কেবল বিপুল সংখ্যক সন্তান জন্মের কারণেই বংশ টিকিয়ে রাখে। কিন্তু যে সকল জীবের সন্তান হয় কম, তাদের মনে আল্লাহ তা'আলা সন্তানের প্রতি এমন গভীর স্নেহ-মমতা প্রদান করেন যে, সন্তান প্রাপ্ত বয়স্ক না হওয়া পর্যন্ত অত্যন্ত মমতা ও ভালবাসায় তাদের রক্ষণাবেক্ষণ করেন। মানব সন্তান সৃষ্টজীবের সকল প্রজাতির সন্তানের মধ্যে সবচেয়ে দুর্বলতম হয়ে জন্মায় এবং দীর্ঘকাল তাদেরকে মাতাপিতার তত্ত্বাবধানে থাকতে হয়। আল্লাহ তা'আলা পশু-পাখির যৌনচাহিদা ঋতুভিত্তিক ও প্রকৃতিগত চাহিদার মধ্যে সীমাবদ্ধ করে দিয়েছেন। কিন্তু মানুষের যৌনচাহিদা ঋতুভিত্তিক অথবা প্রকৃতিগত চাহিদার মধ্যে সীমাবদ্ধ থাকে না। এ জন্যই মানুষের মধ্যে নারী ও পুরুষ পরস্পরের সাথে স্থায়ী প্রেম-প্রীতির বন্ধনে আবদ্ধ হতে বাধ্য থাকে। এ দুটি বিষয়ই মানুষকে সামাজিক জীবে পরিণত করে। এখান থেকেই পারিবারিক জীবনের বুনয়াদ রচিত হয়। পরিবার থেকে বংশ আর বংশ থেকে গোত্র হয়। আর এভাবেই সভ্যতার সুবিশাল প্রাসাদ নির্মিত হয়।

ইসলামে পরিকল্পিত উপায়ে পরিবার কল্যাণ

ইসলাম একটি পরিকল্পিত জীবন ব্যবস্থা। জীবনের প্রতিটি স্তর ও পর্যায় সম্পর্কে ইসলাম যেমন সুনির্দিষ্ট ও সুস্পষ্ট পরিকল্পনা পেশ করেছে, পৃথিবীর আর কোনো ধর্ম বা মতবাদ সে সম্পর্কে কোনো বক্তব্যই পেশ করেনি। মানুষের জীবনের এমন কোনো দিক বা বিভাগ নেই যে সম্পর্কে ইসলাম বাস্তবভিত্তিক পরিকল্পনা পেশ করেনি। ইসলামি পরিকল্পনা মানুষের জীবনের প্রতিটি দিক, বিভাগ, স্তর ও পর্যায় থেকে সর্বোচ্চ কল্যাণ লাভের নিশ্চয়তা প্রদান করে। পরিবারের ক্ষেত্রেও ইসলামের সুনির্দিষ্ট পরিকল্পনা রয়েছে যা অনুসরণ করলে পারিবারিক জীবনেও সর্বোচ্চ কল্যাণ সম্ভব।

ইসলামের নীতিমালা ও হুকুম-আহকামের একটি বিশেষ দিক হল, এর প্রতিটি বিধান মানবিক এবং যুক্তিসঙ্গত। মানবীয় প্রকৃতির সাথে ইসলামি বিধি-বিধানের সহজাত মিল এ কারণেই লক্ষ্য করা যায়। ইসলামে মানুষের জন্য যে কোনো ক্ষেত্রে সবচেয়ে সহজ বিধানটিই দেয়া হয়েছে। মানুষের উপর অনাবশ্যিক কাঠিন্য আরোপ করে এখানে জীবন দুর্বিষহ করে তোলা হয়নি। অত্যধিক কঠোরতা, সীমিতরিক্ত বোঝা, পদে পদে নিষেধাজ্ঞা ও শৃঙ্খল কিংবা সাধ্যাতীত কাজের আদেশ দেয়ার নীতি ইসলামে একেবারেই বর্জন করা হয়েছে। বরণ সরলতা, শৃঙ্খলা, মানুষের প্রতি আল্লাহর সীমাহীন দয়া, মমত্ববোধ আর সাধ্য অনুসারেকাজের আদেশ দেয়ার নীতিই ইসলামি জীবন বিধানে সর্বোত্তমভাবে অনুসরণ করা হয়েছে। আল্লাহ তা'আলা এ মূলনীতি ব্যাখ্যা করে বলেছেন,

يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ بِكُمُ الْيُسْرَ وَلَا يُرِيدُ بِكُمُ الْعُسْرَ

“আলাহ তোমাদের জন্য সহজ করতে চান এবং তিনি তোমাদের জন্য কঠিন করতে চান না।” (আল-কুর'আন, ২:১৮৫) তিনি আরো বলেন,

لَا يُكَلِّفُ اللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا وُسْعَهَا لَهَا مَا كَسَبَتْ وَعَلَيْهَا مَا اكْتَسَبَتْ

“আলাহ কারো উপর তার সাধ্যের বাইরের দায়িত্ব অর্পণ করেন না। সে যা ভাল কিছু অর্জন করেছে তার প্রতিদান সে পাবে আর সে মন্দ যা কিছু অর্জন করেছে তার পরিণামও সেই ভোগ করবে।” (আল-কুর'আন, ২:২৮৬)

অন্যত্র বলা হয়েছে,

يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ أَنْ يُخَفِّفَ عَنْكُمْ وَخُلِقَ الْإِنْسَانُ ضَعِيفًا

“আলাহ তোমাদের বোঝা হালকা করতে চান, কেননা মানুষকে দুর্বল করে সৃষ্টি করা হয়েছে।” (আল-কুর'আন, ৪:২৮) আরো বলা হয়েছে,

وَمَا جَعَلَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ مِنْ حَرَجٍ

“আলাহ দীনের ব্যাপারে তোমাদের উপর কোনো কঠোরতা আরোপ করেননি।” (আল-কুর'আন, ২২:৭৮)

বিধান প্রণয়নে আল্লাহ যখন এমন নীতি অবলম্বন করেছেন, তখন যে বিধানে সত্যিকারার্থেই মানুষের ক্ষতি হয় অথবা কারো জীবনযাত্রা কঠিন হয়ে পরে কিংবা কাউকে অযথা হয়রান হতে হয়—এ জাতীয় বিধান উদ্ভাবন, প্রণয়ন বা প্রবর্তন করা ইসলাম সম্মত হতে পারে না। তাই পরিবারেও ইসলাম মাতাপিতার জন্য এমন কোনো পরিস্থিতি তৈরি বাধ্যতামূলক করে না যেখানে তাদের দায়িত্ব পালনে উদাসীন হতে বাধ্য হতে হয় অথবা তাদের নিজেদেরই জীবন সংশয়পূর্ণ হয়ে ওঠে। বেশি সন্তান নিলে খাবারের অসুবিধা হবে, তাদের আর্থিক নিরাপত্তা বিঘ্নিত হবে কিংবা সুখী হওয়া যাবে না – এ জাতীয় ইচ্ছায় যারা জন্মনিয়ন্ত্রণের কথা বলেন, তারা ইসলাম বিরোধী কথাই বলেন। কেননা মানুষের প্রয়োজনীয় এ উপাদানগুলো সরবরাহ করার দায়িত্ব কোনো মানুষের নয়। এ নিয়ে তার শক্তিত বা ভীত-সন্ত্রস্ত হওয়ার কোনো কারণ নেই। এ উদ্দেশ্যে কেউই জন্মনিরোধ বা জন্মনিয়ন্ত্রণ করতে পারবে না। কিন্তু আল্লাহর ক্ষমতায় পূর্ণ ঈমান রেখে কেউ যদি বাস্তবসম্মত এবং ইসলাম সমর্থিত কারণে পরিকল্পিত পরিবার গঠনের উদ্যোগ নেয় এবং সে পরিকল্পনায় সন্তানের সংখ্যা সীমিত রাখার বিষয়টিও থাকে, তাহলে তাকে নিষিদ্ধ বা অবৈধ বলার যুক্তি থাকে না। পরিবার পরিকল্পনার বিভিন্ন দিক বিশ্লেষণ করে ইসলামে বিষয়টির গ্রহণযোগ্যতা ও যৌক্তিকতা প্রমাণ করা যায়।

ইসলামে সন্তানের জন্মদানকেই মাতাপিতার একমাত্র দায়িত্ব বলা হয়নি বরং তাদের ভরণ-পোষণ, চরিত্র গঠন, প্রয়োজনীয় শিক্ষাদান, স্বাস্থ্য সম্পর্কিত যাবতীয় দায়িত্ব পালন এবং মৌলিক মানবিক চাহিদার অন্যান্য দিক পূরণ করার দায়িত্বও মাতাপিতাকে দেয়া হয়েছে। এ দায়িত্ব পালন করা মাতাপিতার অনিবার্য দায়িত্ব। কেননা এ দায়িত্ব পালন করা বা না করার উপর ভবিষ্যতের মানুষ যোগ্য হবে নাকি অযোগ্য হবে, চরিত্রবান হবে নাকি চরিত্রহীন হবে, স্বাস্থ্যবান হবে নাকি চিররোগা হবে ইত্যাদি বিষয়গুলো নির্ভর করে। হযরত রাসূলুল্লাহ (সা) এ প্রসঙ্গে বলেন,

وَالرَّجُلُ رَاعٍ عَلَىٰ أَهْلِ بَيْتِهِ وَهُوَ مَسْئُولٌ عَنْ رَعِيَّتِهِ وَالْإِمْرَأَةُ رَاعِيَةٌ عَلَىٰ أَهْلِ بَيْتِ زَوْجِهَا وَوَلَدِهِ وَهِيَ مَسْئُولَةٌ عَنْهُمْ

“পুরুষ তার পরিবারের ব্যাপারে দায়িত্বশীল। সে তার পরিবারের বিষয়ে জিজ্ঞাসিত হবে। নারী দায়িত্বশীল তার স্বামীর সম্পদ, সন্তান, সংসারের। সে এদের সম্পর্কে জিজ্ঞাসিত হবে।” (আল-বুখারী, ১৪২১:৩২১)

ইমাম নববী (র) এ প্রসঙ্গে বর্ণনা করেন, হযরত রাসূলুল্লাহ (সা) বলেছেন: “যাদের খাওয়া-পরা দায়িত্ব একজনের হাতে, সে যদি তা বন্ধ করে দেয়, তাহলে এ কাজই তার গুনাহগার হওয়ার জন্য যথেষ্ট।” (নববী, ইয়াহইয়া, ১৩৯২:৭৭) এমন দায়িত্ববোধ, সন্তানকে প্রকৃত ইসলামি আখলাকে মানুষ করার প্রেরণা, অবৈধ উপার্জন থেকে বেঁচে থাকার ইচ্ছা এবং দীনি কাজে প্রয়োজনীয় সময় ব্যয় করার লক্ষ্য নিয়ে কেউ যদি পরিকল্পিতভাবে সন্তান গ্রহণের নিয়ন্ত্রণ করেন এবং এ জন্য জন্মনিয়ন্ত্রণ পদ্ধতিও ব্যবহার করেন, তাহলে তা অবৈধ হবে না। কেননা এ কাজে তিনি আল্লাহ তা’আলা নির্ধারিত সীমালংঘন করেননি অথবা সন্তান হত্যার মত কোনো পদক্ষেপ গ্রহণ করেননি। আল-গাযালী (র) তাঁর ইহইয়াউ উলুম আল-দীন শীর্ষক বিশ্বখ্যাত গ্রন্থে এমন মত প্রকাশ করেছেন।

পরিকল্পিতভাবে সন্তান ধারণ ও জন্মদানের বিষয়টির স্বাস্থ্যগত দিকও বিবেচনা করা আবশ্যিক। (গাযালী, ইমাম, ২০০৪:৩২৪) আল্লাহ তা’আলা বলেছেন,

وَلَا تَقْتُلُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ بِكُمْ رَحِيمًا

“তোমরা নিজেদেরকে হত্যা করো না। নিশ্চয় আল্লাহ তা’আলা তোমাদের উপর অত্যন্ত দয়ালু। (আল-কুর’আন, ৪:২৯) এর তাৎপর্য হল, মানুষ স্বেচ্ছায় এমন কোনো কাজ করবে না, যাতে তার নিজের জীবন হুমকিগ্রস্ত হয়। এ ঘোষণাই আত্মহত্যা হারাম হওয়ার মূলভিত্তি। মানুষ নিজের ক্ষতি করতে পারে না। কেননা তার শরীর, স্বাস্থ্য, সক্ষমতা আল্লাহ তা’আলার পবিত্র আমানত। অন্যের ক্ষতি করলে বা অন্যকে কষ্ট দিলে নিজেকে সমপরিমাণ ক্ষতির হুমকিগ্রস্ত করা হয় বলে আয়াতে বিশেষ রীতিতে নিজের ক্ষতি করতে, নিজেকে হত্যা না করতে নিষেধ করা হয়েছে। এ থেকে এটাও প্রমাণ হয় যে, মানুষের জীবন সংশয়াপন্ন হতে পারে বা সে শারীরিকভাবে ঝুঁকির মধ্যে পরতে পারে অথবা তার কারণে অন্যের ক্ষতি হতে পারে এমন কোনো কাজও সে করতে পারবে না। পরিবার পরিকল্পনায় জন্মনিয়ন্ত্রণ পদ্ধতি অবলম্বনের স্বাস্থ্যগত যুক্তিটি এ বিশ্লেষণের মধ্যেই নিহিত রয়েছে।

অধিক সন্তান ধারণ যদি মায়ের জীবনের জন্য হুমকি হয়ে দেখা দেয়, বারবার প্রসব যদি পরিবারের অন্যদের অসুবিধার কারণ হয়; বিশেষত পরপর সন্তান নেয়ার কারণে যদি পূর্ববর্তী সন্তানের সকল হক ঠিকমত পালন করা অসম্ভব হয়ে পড়ে এবং সে সন্তানের জীবন ও যথাযথ বৃদ্ধি হুমকিগ্রস্ত হয় – তেমন ক্ষেত্রে মা ও সন্তানের স্বাস্থ্য এবং স্বার্থ চিন্তা করে কেউ যদি জন্মনিয়ন্ত্রণ পদ্ধতি অবলম্বন করে তাহলে তা নিষিদ্ধ হবে না।

ফাতওয়ায়ে আলমগিরীতে রয়েছে, স্তন্যদানকারী মায়ের যদি গর্ভ দেখা দেয় এবং স্তনের দুধ শুকিয়ে যায় আর এতে স্তন্যপায়ী সন্তানের ক্ষতির আশংকা থাকে এবং ঐ সন্তানের পিতার পক্ষে অর্থ ব্যয় করে ধাত্রী নিয়োগ করা অসম্ভব হয় তাহলে গর্ভে বীর্ষ প্রাণহীন মাংসপিণ্ডে পরিণত হওয়া পর্যন্ত এ জাতীয় মহিলার ঋতুস্রাব নিয়মিত করানোর জন্য চিকিৎসা করানো যাবে। (আলমগিরী, ফতওয়া, ১৪০৬:১১২) আল-গাযালী (র) এ সম্পর্কে বলেছেন, “স্ত্রীর দৈহিক সৌন্দর্য ও কর্মোচ্ছলতা যাতে স্থায়ী আনন্দের উৎস হয়, যেন দীর্ঘ জীবন ও যৌবন লাভ সম্ভব হয় এবং স্বাস্থ্যগত কারণে যেন স্বামী-স্ত্রীর মধ্যে বিবাহ বিচ্ছেদের আশঙ্কা তৈরি না হয় – এ উদ্দেশ্যে গর্ভনিরোধক পদ্ধতি গ্রহণ করা যাবে।” (গাযালী, ইমাম, ২০০৪:১২৯) বাস্তবিক পক্ষে, আল্লাহ তা’আলার হুকুম, হযরত রাসূলুল্লাহ (সা) এর গৃহীত বিভিন্ন ব্যবস্থাপনা এবং সে অনুসারে ইসলামি চিন্তাবিদগণের নানা বিশ্লেষণ থেকে প্রতীয়মান হয়, স্বাস্থ্যগত কারণে জন্মনিরোধ বৈধ হবে, যদি,

- ক) নতুন গর্ভধারণে স্তন্যপায়ী সন্তানের ক্ষতির আশঙ্কা থাকে;
- খ) সন্তান প্রসবকালে মায়ের জীবন সংশয়াপন্ন হওয়ার আশংকা তৈরি হয়;
- গ) কম বয়সে গর্ভ ধারণের কারণে কিশোরী মাতার সমূহ ক্ষতির আশঙ্কা থাকে;
- ঘ) শারীরিক দিক থেকে নারী এমন অসুস্থ হয় যে, গর্ভধারণে তার জীবন সঙ্কটাপন্ন হতে পারে;
- ঙ) বার বার গর্ভধারণ মায়ের জীবন ঝুঁকির দিকে ঠেলে দেয়;
- চ) দু সন্তানের জন্ম দানের মধ্যে স্বল্প বিরতি মা ও সন্তানকে স্বাস্থ্যগত হুমকিতে ঠেলে দেয় এবং সন্তানের হক প্রয়োজন অনুসারে আদায় না করার সমূহ সম্ভাবনা থাকে এবং

ছ) নতুন গর্ভধারণের মাধ্যমে সন্তানের মধ্যে বংশগত কোনো দুরারোগ্য ব্যাধি সংক্রমণের প্রবল আশঙ্কা থাকে।

উল্লিখিত অবস্থায় দীনদার অভিজ্ঞ চিকিৎসকের পরামর্শক্রমে মা যদি জন্মনিরোধের কোনো পদ্ধতি ব্যবহার করেন, সে জন্য তিনি গুনাহগার হবেন না। কেননা এতে আল্লাহর নির্ধারিত সীমা অক্ষুণ্ন রয়েছে।

সন্তান ধারণ ও জন্মদানের ধর্মীয় দিকটিও বিবেচনায় আনা যায়। ইসলাম কোনো ক্ষেত্রেই বাড়াবাড়ি বা সীমাতিক্রমকে পছন্দ করে না। এ কারণেই দান করার আদেশ যেমন দেয়া হয়েছে, তেমনি দান করে নিঃস্ব হওয়াকেও অভিনন্দিত করা হয়নি। দারিদ্র্যকে যেমন সমর্থন করা হয়নি, তেমনি সীমাহীন প্রাচুর্যকেও কাজিফত অবস্থা হিসেবে গ্রহণ করা হয়নি। সকল ক্ষেত্রে মধ্যম পন্থা অবলম্বনের আদেশ দেয়া হয়েছে। কেননা দারিদ্র্য যেমন মানুষকে ধর্মচ্যুত করে তেমনি সীমাহীন ঐশ্বর্যও পরিবারে অশান্তি ডেকে আনতে পারে। মানুষের এ বিপথগামিতার ক্ষেত্রে সম্পদের সাথে সাথে সন্তান-সন্ততিও তাৎপর্যবহু ভূমিকা পালন করে থাকে। আল্লাহ তাআলা এ কারণেই ঘোষণা করেন:

وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّمَا أَمْوَالُكُمْ وَأَوْلَادُكُمْ فِتْنَةٌ

“জেনে রেখ, নিশ্চয় তোমাদের সম্পদ ও তোমাদের সন্তান ফিতনা স্বরূপ।” (আল-কুর’আন, ৮:২৮)

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تُلْهِكُمْ أَمْوَالُكُمْ وَلَا أَوْلَادُكُمْ عَنْ ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ

“হে মুমিনগণ! তোমাদের অর্থ-সম্পদ এবং সন্তান-সন্ততি যেন তোমাদেরকে আলাহর স্মরণ থেকে বিরত না রাখে।” (আল-কুর’আন, ৬৩:৯) তাই সন্তানের সংখ্যাগত কারণে অথবা অন্য কোনো কারণে যদি তারা আল্লাহর স্মরণে প্রতিবন্ধক হয়ে ওঠে, তাহলে নিতান্তই আল্লাহর সন্তুষ্টি অর্জন এবং তাঁর যিকর অব্যাহত রাখার জন্য জন্মনিরোধ পদ্ধতি অবলম্বন করা যেতে পারে। এ ক্ষেত্রে আরো কিছু লক্ষ্যের কথাও বলা হয়ে থাকে। যেমন, যদি শত্রু এলাকায় জন্ম হলে সন্তানের ইসলাম বিচ্যুত হওয়ার বা ইসলাম ত্যাগে বাধ্য হওয়ার সম্ভাবনা থাকে অথবা ধর্মীয় অবক্ষয়ের কারণে সন্তানের অবক্ষয়ের শিকার হওয়ার বাস্তব সম্ভাবনা থাকে তেমন ক্ষেত্রেও সন্তানের সংখ্যা সীমিত রাখার স্বার্থে জন্মনিয়ন্ত্রণ পদ্ধতি অবলম্বন করা যায়। আধুনিক ইসলামি আইনজ্ঞগণ এ ক্ষেত্রে আরো একটি বিষয় উল্লেখ করে থাকেন। হযরত রাসূলুল্লাহ (সা) প্রাপ্ত বয়স্ক হওয়ার পর সন্তানের বিছানা আলাদা করে দেয়ার যে নির্দেশ দিয়েছেন, অধিক সন্তান হলে অনেক মা-বাবার পক্ষেই সে আদেশ মেনে চলা সম্ভব হবে না। জন্মনিয়ন্ত্রণ পদ্ধতি অবলম্বন করে সন্তান সংখ্যা সীমিত রাখা হলেই এ আদেশ পালন সম্ভব। তাই এ থেকেও পরিকল্পিত পরিবার গঠনকল্পে প্রকৃত প্রয়োজন এবং বাস্তব চাহিদার নিরিখে জন্মনিয়ন্ত্রণ পদ্ধতি অবলম্বনের বৈধতাই প্রমাণিত হয়।

হযরত রাসূলুল্লাহ (স) এর সময়কালে প্রচলিত আয়ল পদ্ধতিটি প্রসঙ্গত ব্যাখ্যার দাবি রাখে। আধুনিক জন্মনিরোধ সামগ্রি আবিষ্কারের আগে সাধারণভাবে সকল দেশের ও সকল যুগের মানুষ অনাকাঙ্ক্ষিত গর্ভনিরোধের জন্য আয়ল পদ্ধতি ব্যবহার করতেন। স্ত্রীর সাথে সঙ্গমের পর স্ত্রীর যোনির বাইরে বীর্ষপাত করার পদ্ধতিকে আয়ল বলা হয়।

গর্ভনিরোধ বা জন্মনিয়ন্ত্রণ পদ্ধতি হিসেবে আয়ল করা যাবে কি-না, সে সম্পর্কে বিতর্ক ছিল, আছে এবং থাকবে। সাথে সাথে এটাও মনে রাখতে হবে যে, পবিত্র কুর'আন মজীদে একে নিষিদ্ধ করা হয়নি। রাসূলুল্লাহ (সা) একে নিষিদ্ধ করেননি। সর্বোপরি রাসূলুল্লাহ (সা) এর সাহাবীগণের মধ্যে অনেকে আয়ল করেছেন এমন সুস্পষ্ট বেশ কিছু হাদীসও রয়েছে। সাহাবীগণের উচ্চমর্যাদা এবং রাসূলুল্লাহ (সা) এর আদেশ-নিষেধ মেনে চলার ক্ষেত্রে তাঁদের প্রশ্নাতীত নিষ্ঠার কথা মনে রাখলে সাহাবীগণের আয়ল করাকে আয়লের বৈধতা প্রমাণে যথেষ্ট মনে করা উচিত। কেননা তাঁরা তো সেই সব মানুষ, যারা কোনো প্রশ্ন ছাড়াই অবলীলায় নিজের সকল কিছু উৎসর্গ করেছেন হযরত রাসূলুল্লাহ (সা)এর একটি বাণী মেনে চলার জন্য। এ ক্ষেত্রে আয়লের বৈধতা নিয়ে যে সংশয় তৈরি হয়েছে, তার ভিত্তি সম্ভবত এটা যে, বিশেষ বিশেষ সাহাবীগণ যে আয়ল করেছেন, তা কি তাঁদের জন্য বিশেষায়িত কোনো আদেশ ছিল? অথবা তাঁদের কি বাস্তবিকই এমন অবস্থা ছিল, যাতে তাঁদের জন্য আয়লের প্রয়োজনীয়তা ছিল? বিভিন্ন দিক থেকে আলোচনা করলে অবশ্য এই সংশয়টুকুও আর থাকে না।

রাসূলুল্লাহ (সা) এর বিখ্যাত সাহাবীগণের মধ্যে সা'আদ ইবনে আবী ওয়াক্কাস, আবু আইউব আনসারী, য়ায়েদ ইবনে সাবিত, আব্দুল্লাহ ইবনে আব্বাস, উবাই ইবনে কা'ব, রাফে ইবনে খাদীজ, আনাস ইবনে মালিক, আব্দুল্লাহ ইবনে জাবির (রা) প্রমুখ নিঃশর্তভাবে আয়ল সমর্থন ও অনুমোদন করেছেন। আব্দুল্লাহ ইবনে মাসউদ ও আব্দুল্লাহ ইবনে উমর (রা) স্বাধীন মহিলায় ক্ষেত্রে শর্ত সাপেক্ষে আয়ল সমর্থন ও অনুমোদন করেছেন। (আইনী, বদরুদ্দীন, ২০০৬:১৮১) ইসলামের প্রাথমিক যুগে যখন মুসলিমদের সংখ্যা বৃদ্ধি ছিল অতি প্রয়োজনীয়, সে সময়ে গর্ভনিরোধ বা জন্মনিয়ন্ত্রণ একান্তভাবেই অনাকাঙ্ক্ষিত হওয়া সত্ত্বেও রাসূলুল্লাহ (সা) এর উল্লিখিত বিখ্যাত সাহাবীগণ কর্তৃক আয়লকে সমর্থন ও অনুমোদন করা আয়লের নীতিগত বৈধতাই প্রমাণ করে। আরো একটি দিকেও নজর দেয়া প্রয়োজন। হযরত রাসূলুল্লাহ (সা)এর কোনো সাহাবীই কিন্তু ইসলাম বিরুদ্ধ কোনো কাজ করেননি। সংখ্যা কম হলেও আয়লের ব্যাপারে কিছু সংখ্যক সাহাবীর প্রকাশ্য সমর্থন পাওয়া যায়। রাসূল যুগে এ বিষয়টি নিয়ে খানিকটা বিতর্ক ছিল, হয়তো সীমিত পর্যায়ে মতবিরোধও ছিল। যা ছিল না, তা হল কুর'আন বা হাদীসের সুস্পষ্ট কোনো নিষেধাজ্ঞা।

আয়ল প্রসঙ্গে হাদীসের একাধিক বর্ণনা রয়েছে। যেমন,

عَنْ جَابِرِ بْنِ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ قَالَ قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ وَالْفُرْأُنُ يَنْزِلُ

জাবির বিন আব্দুল্লাহ (রা) থেকে বর্ণিত তিনি বলেন, আমার রাসূলুল্লাহ (সা)এর সময়ে আয়ল করতাম এবং তখন কুর'আন নাযিল হতো। (আল-বুখারী, ইমাম, ১৪২১:২৩১)

জাবির (রা) সূত্রে একই ধারার আরো হাদীস বর্ণিত হয়েছে। জাবির (রা) বর্ণনা করেছেন, “আমরা রাসূলুল্লাহ (সা) এর সময়ে আয়ল করতাম। এ খবর তাঁর নিকট পৌঁছেছে, কিন্তু তিনি আমাদেরকে নিষেধ করেননি।” (মুসলিম)

আরো একটি বর্ণনায় তিনি বলেছেন, “আমরা আয়ল করতাম এবং তখন কুর'আন নাযিল হতো।” সুফিয়ান উক্ত বর্ণনার সাথে আরো যুক্ত করেছেন, “আয়ল যদি নিষিদ্ধ হতো, তাহলে আল-কুর'আনে তা নিষেধ করা হতো।” (মুসলিম:২১৩)

عَنْ أَبِي سَعِيدٍ قَالَ سَمِعْتُ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ مَا مِنْ كَلِمَةٍ الْمَاءُ يَكُونُ الْوَلَدُ وَإِذَا أَرَادَ اللَّهُ خَلْقَ شَيْءٍ لَمْ يَمْنَعَهُ شَيْءٌ

আবু সাঈদ (রা) বর্ণনা করেছেন, আয়ল সম্পর্কে আল্লাহর রাসূল (সা) জিজ্ঞাসিত হলেন। তিনি বললেন, “সকল বীর্যেই সম্ভাবন হয় না। যদি আল্লাহ কিছু সৃষ্টি করতে চান, তবে কোনো কিছুই তা রোধ করতে পারে না।” (মুসলিম:২১৩) অন্য বর্ণনায় রয়েছে, জাবির বিন আব্দুল্লাহ (রা) থেকে বর্ণিত তিনি বলেন, এক ব্যক্তি রাসূলুল্লাহ (সা) এর নিকট এলেন এবং বললেন, আমার একটি দাসী আছে। আমি তার সাথে আয়ল করি। আল্লাহর নবী বললেন, এতে আল্লাহ যা ইচ্ছা করেন তা রদ হবে না। কিছুকাল পরেই লোকটি ফিরে এল এবং বলল, হে আল্লাহর রাসূল (সা), যে দাসীটির বিষয়ে আপনার সাথে আলোচনা করেছিলাম সে গর্ভবতী হয়েছে। রাসূলুল্লাহ (সা) বললেন, “আমি কেবল আল্লাহর বান্দা ও রাসূল।” (মুসলিম:২১৩)

অন্য বর্ণনায় রয়েছে,

عَنْ جَابِرِ قَالَ قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ إِنِّي لَأُحِبُّ الْوَلَدَ وَأَنَا أَطُوفُ عَلَيْهَا وَأَنَا أَكْرَهُ أَنْ تُحْمَلَ فَالْإِغْرَالُ عَلَيْهَا إِنَّ شَيْئًا فَإِنَّهُ سَيَأْتِيهَا مَا فَدَّرَ لَهَا فَلَيْتَ الرَّجُلَ لَمَّا فَدَّرَ لَهَا فَجَلَّتْ ثُمَّ أَتَاهُ فَقَالَ إِنَّ الْجَرِيَةَ فَذُحْبَلَتْ فَقَالَ فَذُحْبَلَتْ إِنَّهُ سَيَأْتِيهَا مَا فَدَّرَ لَهَا

হযরত জাবির (রা) বলেন, এক লোক রাসূলুল্লাহ (সা)এর নিকট এসে বলল, আমার একজন দাসী আছে সে আমাদের সেবা করে এবং আমাদের খেজুর বাগানে পানি দেয়। আমি তার সঙ্গে সঙ্গম করি। কিন্তু আমি তার গর্ভবতী হওয়া অপছন্দ করি। রাসূল (সা) বললেন, তুমি যদি ইচ্ছা করো, তার সাথে আয়ল করতে পার। তবে যা নির্ধারিত হয়ে গেছে, তা

অবশ্যই হবে। কিছুকাল পরে লোকটি রাসূলুল্লাহ (সা) এর নিকট এল এবং বলল, ঐ দাসীটি গর্ভবতী হয়েছে। তিনি বললেন, “আমি তোমাকে বলেছি, তার সম্বন্ধে যা পূর্বে নির্ধারিত হয়ে গেছে, তা তার জন্য ঘটবেই।” (মুসলিম:২১৩) এ হাদীসের সবচেয়ে উল্লেখযোগ্য দিক হল, আগন্তুক মহানবী (সা) এর নিকট আযল করার অনুমতি চাননি। বরং কীভাবে দাসীর গর্ভ সম্বন্ধের রোধ করা যায়, তার পরামর্শ চেয়েছেন। আর মহানবী (সা) নিজে থেকে বলেছেন, তুমি আযল করো। সাথে সাথে এটাও বলে দিয়েছেন, আযল করলেই গর্ভনিরোধ সফল হবেই এমন নাও হতে পারে। কেননা আল্লাহ যাদেরকে সৃষ্টি করার পরিকল্পনা করেছেন, তাদের সৃষ্টি কখনোই কেউ প্রতিরোধ করতে পারবে না।

স্বাধীন স্ত্রীর সাথে আযল করার ব্যাপারে মহানবী (সা) স্ত্রীর অনুমতি নেয়ার উপর গুরুত্ব দিয়েছেন। যেমন,

عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ وَ عَنْ عَمْرِ بْنِ الْخَطَّابِ نَهَى رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ أَنْ يَغْزَلَ عَنِ الْوَالِدِ بِأَيْهَا

আবু হুরায়রা ও উমর বিন খাত্তাব (রা) থেকে বর্ণিত। রাসূলুল্লাহ (সা) স্বাধীন স্ত্রীর অনুমতি ছাড়া আযল করতে নিষেধ করেছেন। (ইবনে মাজাহ, ১৪১১) ইসলামি নীতি দর্শনে কোনো হুকুম নির্ধারণের ক্ষেত্রে মহানবী (সা) হলেন আল্লাহর মনোনীত অংঘড়ৎরু। যদি মহানবী (সা) এর সমকালীন কোনো বিষয়ে তাঁর সাহাবীগণ কোনো মত বা ফয়সালা প্রকাশ করেন, তাহলে তা মহানবী (সা) এর ফায়সালার মতই গুরুত্বপূর্ণ বিবেচিত হবে। কেননা সাহাবীগণের উচ্চ মর্যাদা ও মর্তবা এবং স্বয়ং আল্লাহ তাঁদের প্রতি নিজের সন্তুষ্টি ঘোষণার পর স্বাভাবিকভাবেই প্রত্যয় পোষণ করতে হবে যে, সাহাবীগণ হযরত মহানবী (সা)এর জীবদ্দশায় এমন কোনো কথা অবশ্যই বলেননি বা এমন কোনো কাজ অবশ্যই করেননি, যা আল্লাহ ও তাঁর রাসূল (স) পছন্দ করেননি। কোনো ক্ষেত্রে কারো মাধ্যমে যদি অপছন্দনীয় কোনো কাজ করা হয়েও থাকে, সাথে সাথে কুরআন বা হাদীসে তার সংশোধনী কিংবা হিদায়াত চলে এসেছে। রাসূলুল্লাহ (সা)এর সমকালীন কোনো বিষয়ে কোনো সাহাবী কিংবা সাহাবীগণ যদি এমনভাবে উল্লেখ করেন যে, নবী (সা)ও বিষয়টি জানতেন, কিন্তু তিনি নিষেধ করেননি, তাহলে তা তো অনুমোদনের পর্যায়ভুক্ত হয়ে যায়। তাই ইসলামি হুকুম-আহকাম নির্ধারণের ক্ষেত্রে তাকরীরি হাদীস যেমন গ্রহণযোগ্য বিবেচিত হয়, আযলের ক্ষেত্রেও তা না হওয়ার কোনো কারণ নেই। তাই আযলকে বৈধ এবং ইসলাম সম্মত মনে করাই যথার্থ। (শাওকানী, ১৯৯৩:১৯৭) ইমাম তাহাবী, ইবনে কাইয়েম, আল-গায়ালী (র)এর মত বরণ্য ইসলামি চিন্তাবিদগণ এ কারণেই উল্লিখিত হাদীসসমূহ বিশ্লেষণ করে এ ব্যাপারে ঐক্যমত্য পোষণ করেছেন যে, ইসলামে আযল নিষিদ্ধ বা অবৈধ কোনো পদ্ধতি নয়। অবশ্য আযলকে ‘আল-ওয়াদ আল-খফী’ বা গুপ্ত শিশু হত্যা হিসেবে ব্যাখ্যা করার একটা বিভ্রান্তিকর প্রয়াস লক্ষ্য করা যায়। এই বিভ্রান্তির উৎস হযরত জুদামা বিনতে ওহাব (রা) বর্ণিত একটি হাদীস। তিনি বর্ণনা করেন, রাসূলুল্লাহ (সা) বলেন, “আমি গায়লা বা দুগ্ধপোষ্য শিশুর মায়ের সাথে সহবাস করা প্রায় নিষিদ্ধ করে দিয়েছিলাম। এরপর আমি রোমান ও পারস্যবাসীদের সম্পর্কে চিন্তা করলাম এবং জানলাম, তাদের গর্ভবতী মায়েরাও সন্তানদের স্তন্য দান করতো। এতে তাদের কোনো ক্ষতি হতো না। এরপর সাহাবীগণ রাসূলকে (সা) আযল সম্পর্কে জিজ্ঞাসা করলেন। তিনি বললেন, ۞ وَاللَّهِ الْوَالِدُ الْخَفِيُّ ۞ এটা হল গুপ্ত শিশু হত্যা। (মুসলিম:২১৩)

অভিন্নসূত্রে হাদীসখানি ইমাম মালিক, ইমাম তিরমিযী, নাসাঈ, আবু দাউদ ও ইমাম ইবনে মাযাহ (র) স্ব স্ব হাদীস সংকলনে অন্তর্ভুক্ত করলেও হাদীসের ‘আযল’ সংক্রান্ত শেষ অংশটুকুর বর্ণনা তাদের গ্রন্থে নেই। তাছাড়া আযল যে গুপ্ত শিশু হত্যা নয়, সে সম্পর্কে পরবর্তীকালে রাসূলুল্লাহ (সা) সুস্পষ্ট বক্তব্য দিয়েছেন। যেমন,

عَنْ ابْنِ تُوَيْبَانَ عَنْ جَابِرٍ قَالَ: قُلْنَا يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّيْنَا بِهَا الْمَوْدَةَ الصُّغْرَى فَقَالَ كَذَّبْتَ الْيَهُودَ - إِنَّ اللَّهَ إِذَا أَرَادَ أَنْ يَخْلُقَهُ لَمْ يَمْنَعْهُ مِنْهُ شَيْءٌ

ইবনে ছাওবান ও জাবির (রা) থেকে বর্ণিত, তারা বলেন, আমরা বললাম, হে আল্লাহর রাসূল! আমরা আযল করতাম। কিন্তু ইহুদিরা দাবি করছে, এটা শিশু হত্যা। তিনিবললেন, “ইহুদিরা মিথ্যা বলছে। যদি আল্লাহ কোনো কিছু সৃষ্টি করতে চান, কেউ-ই তা রোধ করতে পারে না।” (আবু দাউদ)

এ প্রসঙ্গে আরো বিস্তারিত একটি বর্ণনা রয়েছে। ওবায়দ ইবনে আবু রিফা আনসারী বর্ণনা করেছেন। কয়েকজন সাহাবী উমর (রা) এর সামনে আযল সম্পর্কে আলোচনা করছিলেন। বিষয়টি নিয়ে তারা মতবিরোধ করছিলেন। উমর (রা) তাদেরকে বললেন: তোমরা কি এ বিষয়ে মতবিরোধ করছো, অথচ তোমরা হলে এমন সাহাবী যাঁরা বদর যুদ্ধে অংশ গ্রহণ করেছো। (তোমরাই যদি মতবিরোধ কর) তাহলে তোমাদের পরে যারা আসবে, তারা কী করবে? উমর (রা) তাদের যুক্তি শুনতে চাইলেন। একজন বলল, ইহুদিরা দাবি করে, আযল ক্ষুদ্র শিশু হত্যা। আলী (রা) সেখানে উপস্থিত ছিলেন। তিনি বললেন, আযল শিশু হত্যা হতে পারে না। ক্রম বৃদ্ধির সাতটি স্তর অতিক্রম করার আগে শিশু হত্যা হয় না। প্রথমত তরল মাটি বা বীর্ষ, দ্বিতীয়ত আলাক বা জমাট রক্ত, তৃতীয়ত মুদগা বা স্রুণপিণ্ড, চতুর্থত অস্থি, পঞ্চমত গোশত দিয়ে আচ্ছাদন,

যষ্ঠত, হাড় স্থাপন এবং সন্তত পরবর্তী স্তরের সৃষ্টি।' উমর (রা) আলীকে (রা) বললেন, তুমি যথাযথই বলেছ। আল্লাহ তা'আলা তোমাকে দীর্ঘজীবী করুন। (ইবন আব্দুল বার, ২০০০:২০৮-২০৯) বীর্ঘ থেকে শিশুতে রূপান্তরের এই পর্যায়গুলো আল্লাহই কুর'আন মজীদে সুনির্দিষ্টভাবে বর্ণনা করেছেন। যেমন,

وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ سُلَالَةٍ مِنْ طِينٍ - ثُمَّ جَعَلْنَاهُ نُطْفَةً فِي قَرَارٍ مَكِينٍ - ثُمَّ خَلَقْنَا النُّطْفَةَ عَلَقَةً فَخَلَقْنَا الْعَلَقَةَ مُضْغَةً فَخَلَقْنَا الْمُضْغَةَ عِظَامًا فَكَسْنَا الْعِظَامَ لَحْمًا ثُمَّ أَنْشَأْنَاهُ خَلْقًا آخَرَ فَتَبَارَكَ اللَّهُ أَحْسَنُ الْخَالِقِينَ -

“আমি মানুষকে মাটির নির্যাস থেকে সৃষ্টি করি; এরপর তাকে আমি বীর্ঘরূপে একটি সুরক্ষিত স্থানে স্থাপন করি; পরে আমি বীর্ঘকে পরিণত করি জমাট রক্তে, এরপর জমাট রক্তকে পরিণত করি মাংসপিণ্ডে, এরপর মাংসপিণ্ডে সৃষ্টি করি হাড় এবং পরে হাড়কে গোশত দিয়ে ঢেকে দেই। সবশেষে তাকে নতুন একটি সৃষ্টিরূপে গড়ে তুলি। তাহলে সুন্দরতম স্রষ্টা আল্লাহ কত মহান!” (আল-কুর'আন, ৪০:১২-১৪) ইমাম আযম আবু হানীফা (র), ইমাম আবু ইউসুফ ও ইমাম মুহাম্মদ (র) এর মতে, স্ত্রীর সম্মতি সাপেক্ষে আযল বৈধ। (আল-খাওয়ারিসমী, মুহাম্মাদ, ১১৮-১৯) ইমাম মালিক (র) সহ মালিকী মাযহাবের অধিকাংশ ফকীহ মনে করেন, গর্ভনিরোধের পদ্ধতি হিসেবে আযল বৈধ। তবে যোনীতে বীর্ঘপাত স্ত্রীর ন্যায্য অধিকার। যদি তিনি দাবি করেন, তাহলে তাকে এ অধিকার বা আনন্দ থেকে বঞ্চিত করার জন্য স্বামীকে ক্ষতিপূরণ দিতে হবে। (মালিক, ২৭২) আযল সম্পর্কে শাফিঈ মাযহাবের মত হল, আযল বৈধ এবং তা স্ত্রীর সম্মতি ছাড়াও বৈধ। এর মধ্যে যদি অপছন্দনীয় কিছু থেকেও থাকে, তা মাকরুহ তানযিহী বা তুচ্ছ ও ক্ষমাযোগ্য। ফিকহী পরিভাষায় শাফিঈ মাযহাবে যখন কোনো বিষয় সম্পর্কে মাকরুহ তানযিহী পরিভাষা ব্যবহার করা হয় তখন তার অর্থ দাঁড়ায়, এটা অতি উত্তম আচরণ থেকে একটু নিম্ন স্তরের আচরণ। হাম্বলী মাযহাবেও সাধারণভাবে আযলকে বৈধ বলে অভিহিত করা হয়েছে। (Khalid, Muhammad, 2018)

বর্তমানে গর্ভনিরোধের জন্য অনেক আধুনিক উপকরণ তৈরি হয়েছে। কনডম, পিল, লাইগেশন, অপারেশন, ইনজেকশন ইত্যাদি উপকরণগুলো যথাসম্ভব সহজলভ্য করা হয়েছে। মানুষ যেন এই উপকরণগুলো ব্যবহার করে সে জন্য নানা রকম বিজ্ঞাপনও প্রচার করা হচ্ছে। মনে রাখতে হবে, লক্ষ্যগত কারণে এই প্রচারণা ও প্রক্রিয়াকে ইসলাম স্বীকৃতি দেবে না। যেমন, এইডস থেকে রক্ষা পাওয়ার উপায় হিসেবে বিলবোর্ডে বিশেষভাবে যে শ্লোগানগুলো থাকে, তা হল, স্ত্রীর সাথে শারীরিক সম্পর্কে বিশ্বেস্ত থাকুন। অর্থাৎ স্ত্রীর সাথে সঙ্গম করলে এইডস হওয়ার সুযোগ নেই। কেননা স্ত্রী এইডস আক্রান্ত নন। পরের শ্লোগানটি হল, প্রতিবার মিলনের সময় কনডম ব্যবহার করুন। স্ত্রীর সাথে মিলনের সময় কনডম ব্যবহারের কথা বলা না হলেও পরে প্রতিবার মিলনে কনডম ব্যবহারের কথা বলা হল। মূলত এখানে বিবাহবহির্ভূত যৌন সম্পর্কের কথাই বলা হয়েছে। বস্তুত এভাবে জন্মনিয়ন্ত্রণ সামগ্রী ব্যাভিচার বিস্তারে ভয়ানক ভূমিকা পালন করে আসছে। তাছাড়া সামগ্রীগুলো ব্যবহারের নেপথ্যে কারণ হিসেবে ইসলাম যে কারণগুলোর কথা বলে সেগুলো মোটেই বলা হচ্ছে না। এমতবস্থায় মুসলিম উম্মাহ কী করবে?

এ ক্ষেত্রে আমাদের বক্তব্য হল, মা ও শিশুর স্বাস্থ্য সুরক্ষা, মা ও শিশুর যে কোনো স্বাস্থ্যগত ঝুঁকি প্রতিরোধ এবং দীর্ঘ স্বার্থে মুসলিম স্বামী-স্ত্রীও গর্ভনিরোধের লক্ষ্যে জন্মনিয়ন্ত্রণের উপকরণসমূহ ব্যবহার করতে পারবে। বিধর্মীরা আবিষ্কার করেছে বলেই অথবা খারাপ নিয়তে আবিষ্কার করা হয়েছে বলেই যে সেটার ভাল ব্যবহার সম্ভব নয়, তা কিন্তু না। বর্তমান পৃথিবীর অধিকাংশ বৈজ্ঞানিক আবিষ্কার অমুসলিমদের দ্বারা হলেও মুসলিমগণ কিন্তু তার মাধ্যমে উপকার গ্রহণ করতে সক্ষম হচ্ছেন। ইন্টারনেট, কম্পিউটার, বিমান, মোটর গাড়ি, জাহাজসহ অধিকাংশ যোগাযোগ ও পরিবহন মাধ্যমের আবিষ্কারক অমুসলিমগণ। নিজেদের কল্যাণের স্বার্থেই মুসলিম উম্মাহ কিন্তু তা ব্যবহার থেকে বিরত থাকছেন না। জন্মনিয়ন্ত্রণের ক্ষেত্রেও একই কথা বলা যায়। তবে কে কী নিয়তে এগুলো ব্যবহার করছে, তা বিবেচনার ভার আল্লাহ তা'আলার।

আমরা শুধু এইটুকু বলতে পারি, ইসলাম সর্বোত্তমভাবে মানুষের কল্যাণ নিশ্চিত করতে চায়। মানুষের জীবনকে হুমকিগ্রস্ত করা বা ঝুঁকির মধ্যে রাখা ইসলামের নীতি নয়। জন্মনিয়ন্ত্রণের ক্ষেত্রেও এই নীতিটি অনুসরণ করাই হবে সঙ্গত। তাহলেই অনেক প্রশ্নের জবাব সাধারণ মানুষও বের করে ফেলতে পারবেন।

উপসংহার

ইসলামের প্রকৃত লক্ষ্য বাস্তবায়নের জন্যেই পরিবার হবে পরিকল্পিত। মায়ের স্বাস্থ্য-সৌন্দর্য, সন্তানের স্বাস্থ্য-শিক্ষা-প্রশিক্ষণ ইত্যাদি বিষয়কে বিবেচনায় রেখে গর্ভধারণ এমনভাবে নিয়ন্ত্রণ করা যেতে পারে যাতে পিতামাতা স্বস্তি ও স্বাচ্ছন্দ্যের সাথে দায়িত্ব পালন করতে পারেন। অন্যান্য ধর্মের ন্যায় ইসলামেও মুসলিম জনসংখ্যা বৃদ্ধির প্রতি উৎসাহ দেয়া হয়েছে। কিন্তু শর্ত রাখা হয়েছে যে, মানুষের গুণগতমান উপেক্ষা করা যাবে না। মুসলিমের সংখ্যা বৃদ্ধির অর্থ এই নয় যে, সংখ্যা বাড়বে

কিন্তু ইমান, আকিদা এবং আখলাখের প্রতি লক্ষ না রাখলেও চলবে। মুসলিম জনসংখ্যা বৃদ্ধির কথা বলা হয়েছে, তবে তা নামধারী মুসলিম নয়। (রহমান, শফিকুর, ২০০৪:১০৪) বাংলাদেশের জনসংখ্যা এ দেশের জন্য একটি ভয়ানক সামাজিক সমস্যা। এর কারণ এটা নয় যে, তারা সংখ্যায় অনেক বেশি। বরং এর কারণ হল এরা অদক্ষ, নিরক্ষর এবং অশিক্ষিত। যার ফলে বাংলাদেশের জনগণ দেশের জন্য বোঝা। এদের অনেকের (৬২%) প্রাথমিক প্রাতিষ্ঠানিক শিক্ষা থাকলেও অধিকাংশই কেরানী বা আমলা হওয়ার উপযোগী। দেশকে উন্নয়নে বা উৎপাদনে স্বয়ংসম্পূর্ণ কিরার ক্ষেত্রে তাদের কোনো কর্মকৌশল বা কর্মদক্ষতা নেই। সুতরাং দেশকে জনসংখ্যার এ সমস্যা থেকে মুক্ত করার একমাত্র উপায় হল প্রত্যেককে সুশিক্ষিত করা। সুদক্ষ করা। প্রয়োজনীয় প্রশিক্ষণ ও প্রেরণা দিয়ে কর্মী হিসেবে গড়ে তোলা। তাহলে জনসংখ্যার আকার নিয়ে কাউকেই ভাবিত হতে হবে না। এ কাজ সফল করে তুলতে ইসলাম পরিকল্পিত জীবন গঠনের যে দর্শন পেশ করেছে তার আলোকে ব্যবস্থা গ্রহণ করা হলে, সমস্যা আর থাকবে না। তাহলে বাংলাদেশের জনগণ তাঁদের নিজেদের বোধ, বিবেক ও সামর্থ্য দিয়ে নিজ নিজ করণীয় নির্ধারণ করে নিতে পারবেন। ফলে জনসংখ্যা আকার যা-ই হোক, তা দেশের সমস্যার পরিবর্তে সম্পদে পরিণত হবে। বাংলাদেশের জনসংখ্যা সমস্যার সমাধানের এটি একটি দিক। আরেকটি দিক হলো, বাংলাদেশের একটি উল্লেখযোগ্য সংখ্যক মানুষ দারিদ্রসীমার নিচে বসবাস করে। অধিকাংশ নারীই কাজিফত স্বাস্থ্য সেবা ও সুযোগ থেকে বঞ্চিত থাকেন। অধিকাংশ মাতা নিজেই পুষ্টিহীনতার শিকার। এমতবস্থায় ক্রমাগত সন্তান জন্মানোর ফলে মাতৃ মৃত্যুহার যেমন ক্রমবর্ধমান, তেমনি ক্রমবর্ধমান অপুষ্টি ও স্বাস্থ্যহীন শিশুর জন্মদান। মা ও শিশুর স্বাস্থ্য ও স্বার্থ চিন্তা করে এ ক্ষেত্রে সন্তান গ্রহণের ক্ষেত্রে সুনির্দিষ্ট পরিকল্পনা ও আদর্শ ব্যবধান তৈরি সম্ভব হলে জনসংখ্যা বৃদ্ধির হার এমনিতেই কমে যাবে। এ ক্ষেত্রে আমাদের একটি ভিন্নতর পর্যবেক্ষণ রয়েছে। বাংলাদেশে উচ্চবিত্ত এবং সচেতন ও শিক্ষিত লোকেরা মাতৃস্বাস্থ্য, শিশুস্বাস্থ্য, প্রয়োজনীয় সেবা ও সুবিধা এবং বিশেষভাবে নিজেদের ভোগবাদী মানসিকতা দ্বারা প্রভাবিত হয়ে সাধারণত ১টি বা ২টি সন্তান নিয়ে থাকেন। বিশেষত স্বামী-স্ত্রী দুজনই চাকুরিজীবী এমন পরিবারে এ অবস্থা প্রকটভাবে প্রতীয়মান হয়। কিন্তু নিম্নবিত্তের মানুষেরা যথারীতি দুই বা ততোধিক সন্তান ধারণ ও জন্ম দিয়ে থাকে। এরফলে দেশের জনসংখ্যা কাঠামোয় একটি আশ্চর্যকর ভারসাম্যহীনতা তৈরি হয়েছে। যার ক্ষমতা নেই সে অধিকাসন্তান ধারণ করছে আর যার ক্ষমতা আছে সে ধারণ করছে একটি বা দুটি সন্তান। এতে স্বাস্থ্যবান সুন্দর শিশুর পরিবর্তে অপুষ্টি, অদক্ষ ও অশিক্ষিত জন্ম হয়। জনসংখ্যা সমস্যা সমাধানের ক্ষেত্রে অত্যন্ত দক্ষতা ও মানবিকতার সঙ্গে এ বিষয়গুলো লক্ষ রাখতে হবে। এতে যার ক্ষমতা রয়েছে, যেখানে মাতা ও সন্তানের পুষ্টি ও খাবারের কোনো অসুবিধা নেই সেখানে অধিক সন্তান জন্ম দেয়ার জন্য রাষ্ট্রীয় উদ্যোগ ও উৎসাহ থাকতে পারে। একইভাবে যেখানে মাতৃস্বাস্থ্য ও শিশু স্বাস্থ্য হুমকিগ্রস্ত, যেখানে শিশুর সুষ্ঠু বিকাশ ও পারিপার্শ্বিক সুবিধা লাভ অনিশ্চিত, সেখানে রাষ্ট্রীয় উদ্যোগেই সন্তান ধারণের মধ্যে কাজিফত গ্যাপ তৈরির ব্যবস্থা করা যেতে পারে।

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আইনী, বদরুদ্দীন আবু মুহাম্মদ মাহমুদ ইবন আহমদ ইবন মূসা ইবন আহমদ, উমদাতুল কারী, শরহে সহীছুল বুখারী, বৈরুত : দারুল ফিকর, ২০০৬ খ্রি., ১৪তম খণ্ড, পৃ. ১৮১

আবু দাউদ, সুলায়মান ইবনে আশআছ আস-সিজিস্তানী, আস সুনান, অনু. ২০০৮, বাংলাদেশ ইসলামিক সেন্টার, ঢাকা, হাদীস নং ২০৫০।

আবু দাউদ, সুলায়মান ইবনে আশআছ আস-সিজিস্তানী, সুনানে আবু দাউদ, সুনানু আবী দাউদ, তা.বি., বৈরুত : দারুল ফিকর।

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আল-বুখারী, ১৪২১, আবু আব্দুল্লাহ মুহাম্মদ ইবনে ইসমাঈল, আস-সহীহ, কিতাবুল নিকাহ, কিতাবুল আদব, দিল্লী: কুতুবখানা রাশীদীয়া।

আল-কুরআন

আল-খাওয়ারিয়মী, মুহাম্মাদ ইবন মাহমুদ ইবন মুহাম্মাদ, জামী মাসানিদ আল-ইমাম আযম, তা.বি., ২য় খন্ড, বৈরুত: দারুল কিতাব।

ইবনে মাজাহ, ১৪১১ হিজরি, আবু আব্দুল্লাহ মুহাম্মদ ইবনে ইয়াযিদ আল-কাযভিনী, আস সুনান, দিল্লী: কুতুবখানা রশীদিয়া, আযল অধ্যায়।

ইবনে মাজাহ, আস সুনান, অনু.২০০১, আধুনিক প্রকাশনী, বাংলাবাজার, ঢাকা, হাদীস নং ১৯৬১।

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জাতিসংঘের বিভিন্ন অঙ্গ সংস্থা গত কয়েক বছর যে পরিসংখ্যান ব্যবহার করছে, তার সঙ্গে বিবিএসের পরিসংখ্যানের বেশ পার্থক্য দেখা যায়। UNFPA ২০০৮ সালের বিশ্ব জনসংখ্যা প্রতিবেদনে বলেছিল, বাংলাদেশের জনসংখ্যা ১৬ কোটি ১৩ লাখ। আবার ২০১০ সালের UNDP মানব উন্নয়ন প্রতিবেদনে বলা হয়, ২০১০ সালে বাংলাদেশের জনসংখ্যা ছিল ১৬ কোটি ৪৪ লাখ।

WHO – World Health Organisation.