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# GENDERING THE NATION AND ENDANGERING GENDER: BANGLADESH NATIONAL REGIMES

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## Abstract

The paper argues that for women, politics starts at the personal level. Cutting through the binaries of high and low, public and private, the paper examines the process of nation creation with the infusion of rationalist and modernist principles. This in the process marginalised women by placing them within the private domain, thus excluding them from arenas of 'high' politics where issues critical to women and their lived lives are decided. Taking Bangladesh as its case in point, the paper examines the various national regimes, the constitution, the political, the economic, the religious, the legal, and examines the contradiction between the apparent and the real. Women's agencies brought forth through women's organisations and movements have played a critical role in putting right the discriminations yet the task is an arduous and long one since the seeds of discrimination are structural. The paper concludes by calling for relocating women by bringing about systemic transformations.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The issues - deprivations, marginalisation, discriminations surrounding women and their lived lives are not only varied and multilayered but are weaved into the fabric of the entity that is called nation-state, which constitutes the basic unit of the international system. Women and feminists have in their own ways and with varied tools been attempting to change and transform the system to make it women as well as people friendly. These interventions have taken place at various levels with women trying to define and interpret the system in their favour. Cutting across the divides of class, ethnicity, religion, abilities, disabilities, touchabilities and untouchabilities, the paper argues that the interventions are there. Whether these are incorporated within the formal domain of the knowledge system and discourses is another area of debate, which the feminist movements and women organisations in Bangladesh as elsewhere in the

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world have to reckon with. What is significant is that through these interventions pathways are being trenched out by women and they are carving out spaces for themselves as active equal citizens of the state.

Articles 27, 28, 29 of Part III (Fundamental Rights) of the Constitution of Bangladesh contain various provisions relating to equal treatment of women with men. One may therefore quite logically argue about the point of raising the issue of equality at all. This paper is an attempt to interrogate the notion and myth of **equality** as it is woven in the societal as well national system and examine the limits of the various national regimes that profess to bring about a system based on equality. The paper is divided into seven sections. The first section is the Introduction. The second section examines the gendering of the nation and the **constitution** of women as it evolved historically in the colonial context. The third section is an analysis of politics of nation building in Bangladesh and its impact upon women. The fourth, fifth and sixth sections take up three different but interlinked arenas of women's spaces, the political, livelihood and legal domains. In the final section, the paper makes some recommendations to bring about structural transformations for a humane democratic system.

## 2. THE GENDERING OF THE NATION AND THE CONSTITUTION OF WOMEN

The social reforms movements that began in colonial India were highly gendered. As the reformists took upon themselves the task of modernising the society women came in the central fore. *Sati* (widow immolation) which was abolished by the British in 1829 is regarded as a landmark in emancipation of women belonging to the Hindu faith. The legislative prohibition of *Sati* was the culmination of a debate that saw the emergence of three discourses around sati - the official, the progressive and the conservative orthodox. The official championed by the colonial powers, the progressives by social reformers like Ram Mohan Roy and the orthodox by the Hindu priests. However, what remained unproblematised were the *content* of traditional and modernity and the location of women in this entire debate. What is ironic is that the entire issue was debated within an extremely orthodox mode. The debate as it emerged was not if *sati* was a barbaric or inhuman act inflicted upon women, but if the religious scriptures enjoined *sati* to be mandatory for Hindu widows. The contention was what was authentic scripture *vis-à-vis* what constituted customs and practices. Interestingly, the three discourses revolved round the religious interpretation of *sati*. Based on the interpretations, differences were made between 'bad' *sati* and 'good' *sati*. If a woman was forced into it, the sati was bad; and if she went willingly it was good. This entire divide made women not only emblems of religion and customs but also devoid of agency and a thinking being. If she was coerced then she lacked the power to resist and if she went willingly, again she lacked the proper understanding of religion. In both cases, she was portrayed as the victim. In other words, modernity was gendered and orthodoxised, with

women and their bodies and minds being endangered.[1] What appeared to be more detrimental for women was the privileging of scriptures both Brahmanic and Islamic containing rules of social behaviour even when the assertion of these were problematic and open to interpretations. However, Warren Hastings in 1772 made these texts the basis of personal laws, the implications of this, as will be discussed later, was far reaching for women.

As the nationalist movement gained hold in colonial India, modernity was firmly genderised. The binaries between the public and the private, the cultural/spiritual and the material were inventions of colonial India. Partha Chatterjee[2] in his seminal work on "The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question" has brought this out most pointedly. Raising the question of the challenge of modernising, i.e., acquiring and internalising the western/colonial knowledge, technology and system; yet retaining the primordial and traditional, the tension between the two according to Chatterjee was resolved by the nationalists according to their own preferred agenda. A binary was drawn. As he puts it,

> The discourse of nationalism shows that the material/spiritual distinction was condensed into an analogous, but ideologically far more powerful dichotomy; that between the outer and the inner. The material domain lies outside us – a mere external, which influences us, conditions us, and to which we are forced to adjust. But ultimately it is unimportant. It is the spiritual that lies within, which is our true self, and it is that which is genuinely essential … The world is the external, the domain of the material; the home represents our inner spiritual self, our true identity. The world is a treacherous terrain of the pursuit of material interests… it is also typically the domain of the male. The home in its essence must remain unaffected by the profane activities of the material world – and woman is its representative. And so we get the identification of social roles by gender to correspond with the separation of the social space into *ghar* and *bahir*.[3]

This gendering of spaces and roles so essential to the creation of nationalism dictated that women could not be treated as equal citizens. Despite the romanticisation with the spiritual, it is the material - the *bahir* that ultimately rules and sets the parameters for the *ghar* - the interior/home. The parameter, one may argue starts with body politics, where the body of the woman becomes the embodiment of the nation as the biological bearer of the nation. She also becomes the object of cultural politics since culture, more specifically authentic culture is the quintessence of a nation. In other words, women, their bodies and

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[1]   For a detailed exposition see, Lata Mani, "Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India", in Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (eds.), *Recasting Women Essays in Colonial History,* Kali for Women, Delhi, 1989, pp. 88-126.

[2]   Partha Chatterjee, "The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question", in *ibid.,* pp. 233-253.

[3]   *Ibid.,* pp. 238-239.

lived lives are appropriated by the nation. The genderisation of the nation thus endangers the woman, since one may quite logically raise the notion of autonomy and personhood of woman. Quite poignantly Edward Said had suggested because of Orientalism, the Orient was not a free subject,[4] one can extend the same argument here.

The quest for constituting the woman according to the nationalist agenda soon found its space in the realm of education. This later came to be genderised as well. Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, often regarded as the founder of Muslim modernism appealed to the Muslim elite classes to prevent their daughters from getting a western modern education. He urged that Muslim women should be given a traditional, domestic education so that they can serve the nation by being moral and virtuous mothers and wives; men were to acquire education in science and technology. Sir Syed openly expressed his anxiety about women's education as he said,

> I cannot approve of the modern system of education devised for the education of women. Developing institutions for women's education and fashioning them along the lines of **European women's** institutions, is inappropriate for contemporary conditions of India ... I am also not in favour of the kind of knowledge being imparted to women as it does not suit *our conditions,* and ***our women*** do not need this knowledge for centuries to come (emphasis added).[5]

It is important to note that in colonial Bengal the nationalist construct of the new woman derived its strength from notion of cultural refinement. The *bhadramohila* (gentle woman) captured the imagination of the middle class women. It was taken up by them as a way of claiming their superiority at various levels, superiority from the European women who acquired knowledge for the material thus losing the feminine virtues, superiority over the preceding generation of women who were denied this opportunity and superiority over women of lower classes who were incapable of appreciating the finer tunes of the spiritual, the feminine. The patriarchy inherent in this education was quite sharp as constant references were made by women writers of the need to develop feminine virtues, of devotion, submission and housework and not to have any place in the heart for *mem sahib* (European women were referred to as mem sahib) like behaviour.[6]

The construction of *our women* is a critical signifier of the differentiations of culture and women became the markers and signifiers of these differences while

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[4]  Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*, Penguin Books, 1995.

[5]  Speech on Muslim women's education by Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, delivered in Lahore in 1888, Khutbaat-e- Sir Syed, p. 61. Cited, in Rubina Saigol, "The Gendering of Modernity: Nineteenth Century Educational Discourse", in Neelam Hussain et.als (eds.), *Engendering the Nation-State,* Simorgh Women's Resource and Publication Centre, Lahore, 1997, p. 167.

[6]  Partha Chaterjee, *op.cit,* pp. 246-247.

the men could compete and acquire the western knowledge of the material world. This construction, as it can be seen not only had a clear gender divide but also class differentiations became pronounced and articulated in a political language. Gellner[7] constantly reminded us of the construction of a high and low culture in the nationalist agenda. In post colonial Bangladesh one sees a rage of this as the debate on Bengali vs. Bangladeshi nationalism engulfs the political elite, while the subordinate communities suffer, with women being more marginalised since the state that was born out of the nation after all is a patriarchal construct and the public or *bahir* remains the domain of men in the ideology of nation-state.

## 3. THE BANGLADESH STATE

The Bangladesh State started off its journey as an independent State premised on very strong nationalist ethos, which has strong moral overtones as well. The state in its early years of independence in an attempt to establish its authenticity as a nation decided to send away the war babies on the plea of not keeping any polluted blood in the country. Little respect or concern was shown for the mothers who had wanted to keep their babies. The society and Bengali men were not ready to accept the rape victims of 1971 and all attempts were taken to 'rehabilitate' them by suppressing or erasing their traumas of war time. Rehabilitation meant either marrying them off or providing them with employment.[8] No space was provided for their psychological rehabilitation, women being property and honour of the nation were thus to be integrated and rape being a stigma and shame for the nation was not to be recognised or discussed. Instead the State 'honoured' them with the title *Birangonas* (war heroines). This had the effect of marking them off and identified. It needs to be emphasised that a nation builds itself upon the claims of authenticity and purity, which has its own connotations as stated earlier within the parlance of the nationalist discourse as 'spiritual'. The notion of 'our women' could not be disturbed. Operating within this formulation, without any change in the popular psyche about *our* women the bestowing of the title held little meaning for the women at that point of time. This intertwining of public and private robbed the recognition of the sacrifices of women. But indeed death and sacrifices of men were recognised and valorised. The new State thus began its journey by marginalising the sufferings and sacrifices of women. The ideology of patriarchy and nationalism indeed had its sway while the woman question remained subordinated and marginalised.[9]

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[7]  Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, Basil Blackwell, London, 1983.
[8]  For details see, Meghna Guhathakurta, "The Bangladesh Liberation War: A Summon to Memory", in Abul Kalam (ed.) *Bangladesh: Internal Dynamics and External Linkages*, University Press Limited (UPL), Dhaka, 1996.
[9]  For details see, Amena Mohsin, "Armed Conflict and Gender", *Women and Gender Studies*, University of Dhaka, June, 2006.

Bengali nationalism based on Bengali culture and language was incorporated into the constitution of Bangladesh as the basis of citizenship and nationalism. This, one may argue, was a logical outcome of the Liberation Movement of Bangladesh which was premised on a secular Bengali identity. This however created ethnic minorities as the ethnic communities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) refused to identify themselves with Bengali nationalism. The insurgency in the CHT started off with the Hill people demanding cultural autonomy and a constitutional recognition of their rights. The insurgency continued for over two decades and ended with the signing of a Peace Accord on December 2, 1997. It is understandable that the major brunt of such conflicts is inflicted upon women and children as internally displaced persons and refugees. Even those who remained within their homes had to live a life of insecurity and constant trauma. The nationalism that emerged in the CHT in the name of *Jumma* nationalism and the peace accord that ended the armed conflict also remains highly gendered. Bangladeshi nationalism resulted in the creation of religious minorities. Again minority women get most affected when identities get politicised, since women are looked upon as identity bearers of a community. Their physical security becomes the first casualty. The electoral violence following the national elections of 2001 bears this out.

Bangladeshi nationalism introduced religion as an element of nationalism. Secularism, a fundamental principle of the constitution was dropped. This paved the way for the politicisation of religion, though it may be noted that secularism in the Bangladesh context never implied the absence of religion. It was a matter of individual practice and belief. Bangladeshi nationalism brought religion into the public domain. Politics make strange bed fellows, Bangladesh politics is no exception to this. The State witnessed the alliance and even power sharing between mainstream political parties and religion based political forces. This problematised the question of women's empowerment as the state made compromises at varying points since religion became a critical factor in the political debates surrounding the State and women's rights.

On the surface the State maintained its getup of egalitarianism. The Constitution of Bangladesh in its Articles 9, 10, 27, 28 (1), 28 (2), 28 (3), 28 (4), 65 (3) calls for equality of women in all spheres of life and ensures women's participation in national and local politics. The Constitution also provides that the government can make special laws for improving the status of women. The State is also a signatory to the Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Initially, it had imposed reservations on CEDAW Articles 2, 13 (a), 16-1 (c) and 16-1 (f) on the ground that they conflict with the traditional law and Sharia law based on the Holy Quran. In 1997, the government withdrew its reservations from Articles 13 (a) and 16-1 (f). The reservations on Articles 2 and 16-1 (c) however remain, the government position is that they conflict with the Sharia law. However, women organisations

and movements have been making their interventions *vis-à-vis* the state. It is to an examination of three domains that the paper now turns.

## 4. THE POLITICAL[10]

Due to the private/public divide, women have remained under represented in the formal arena of politics all over the world and to redress their historic exclusion, quotas emerged as a global fast tract strategy, which has been regarded as an effective tool in ensuring women's presence in various levels of political structure. But this strategy also raised issues on the nature and modalities of gender quota and its limitations to empower women in politics. It has been argued by many that without addressing the *structural* constraints to women's political exclusion, their inclusion through gender quota cannot ensure effective representation. They call for the redistribution of socio-economic resources within societies so that women can enjoy civil and economic rights and become able to exercise their political rights fully. Moreover, by bringing more women in the system will not necessarily fill up the gap in politics. Women who enter the political arena through quota system cannot transform the sexual politics of the state institutions, rather they are forced to play on male's terms. Bangladesh's experience is a classical example in this regard. Instead of contributing to women's political agency, the quota system accentuated women's dependence on patriarchal politics – thus reinforcing their marginality.[11] Although women's representation in political elites has increased steadily over the past three decades, it remains low when compared to many other countries and to the democratic ideal of proportional representation.

One of the major reasons for the low visibility of women's participation in the political arena is the patriarchal nature of our society. Patriarchy as a system construct the imaginary hierarchy of gender relations where women are seen as unfit to do politics and placed within the private arena of home as mothers and wives. Although the divisions between public and private lives are often blurred in the daily lives of women in Bangladesh, they are defined repeatedly as private actors resulting in exclusion from politics. The socio-cultural mechanism of sex-segregation and *purdah* (veil) are also responsible for restricting women's mobility to interact with the public. However, it needs to be emphasised that increasingly *purdah* is being redefined by women as a mode of inclusion and greater mobility in the public sphere; since according to them it provides them with greater social respectability and acceptability. Despite this interpretation,

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[10] The author acknowledges Sajjadur Rahman, Assistant Professor, Department of International Relations, Chittagong University in helping her write this section.

[11] Najma Chowdhury, "The Implementation of Quotas: Bangladesh Experience - Dependence and Marginality in Politics", Paper presented at a Workshop organised by International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) on 25 September 2002 in Jakarta, Indonesia.

what again becomes more alarming and restricting for women in the structural sense is the reinforcing of patriarchal values that allows a woman in the public sphere with certain social norms mostly defined in terms of modesty in dress and behaviour. This is true for women holding the highest echelons of State power as well. This problematises the notion of empowerment for women.

Moreover, politics is no longer viewed as a conscious and deliberate participation in activities by which various resources are allocated among the citizens of a particular State. Rather the current trend does suggest that the political activities are conducted within an already given power-structure where women's perspectives are often ignored or marginalised by the male leadership\counterparts. The socio-cultural dependence of women is one of the most detrimental factors to their participation in the political domain. This is evident in the low resource allocation to women's human development by almost every State thus creating gender disparities in education, health, employment, ownership of productive resources and above all in political activities.

However, the Constitution of Bangladesh grants fundamental rights to its citizens irrespective of sex, race and religion (Article 36-39) and does not discriminate between women and men in contesting and voting for public representative offices (Article 66, 122). Through Article 65, the Constitution also provides for reserved seats for women in order to ensure their participation in the legislature and in the local government institutions (Article 9). The Constitution articulates the necessary steps toward facilitating women's participation in all spheres of national life (Article 9) and grants permission to adopt special measures in favour of women and children (Article 28) which gives the legitimacy for affirmative actions to attain gender equality and equity in the political arena.

The Constitution of Bangladesh also provides for a 300-member Parliament known as the *Jatiya Sangsad* (National Parliament). In the initial stage, 15 seats were reserved for women for a period of 10 years who would be elected indirectly by the Members of Parliament (MP) elected through general seats. At that time in 1972, the framers of the constitution expected that 10 years would be enough for women to acquire the required skills and resources to successfully enter the arena of electoral politics. The prime consideration behind this system was to ensure 'protected' representation in the legislature in view of women's drastically unequal political strength in contesting male contenders for the general seats. Therefore, quota was treated as the main avenue for women's entry into the Parliament while general seats remained under the monopoly of male politicians. In 1978, a Presidential proclamation increased the number of reserved seats to 30 and extended the period of reservation to 15 years from the date of promulgation of the Constitution in December 1972. In December 1987, this Constitutional provision lapsed and in 1990 the same system was reincorporated for 10 years in the Constitution by an amendment. The provision

also lapsed in 2001. On May 16, 2004, the *Jatiya Sangsad Reserved Women Seats Election Bill 2004* was initiated and passed on the November 29 of the same year which increased the number of women seats to 45.[12] These reserved seats are to be allocated among the political parties and alliances on the basis of their proportional representation in the national parliament. The Awami League in its election manifesto of 2008 promised to increase the number of reserve seats to 100 on the basis of direct elections.

Historically, the number of women who were elected MPs from general seats in the general elections had been very low. In the first election of 1973, the ruling party did not nominate any woman candidate and two women who contested from the general seats lost. In 1979, two women were elected, in 1986, five, four in 1991, and in 2001, twelve women were elected. Elections in 2008 saw the largest number of 88 women submitting applications to their parties in 299 constituencies. 58 women were either nominated by different parties or contested as independents. Out of this number only 19 were elected, (6.3% in a house of 300). With the selection of 45 women to reserved seats, the percentage of women in the Ninth Parliament has risen to 18.5% from 4.3% in the Eighth Parliament. One woman has been appointed as Whip by the majority party of the Parliament. No woman has been selected to chair a standing committee.

Since 1991, Bangladesh holds a unique position in the world where both the posts of the Leader of the Parliament and the Leader of the Opposition are occupied by women. Both Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina were drawn to politics after the violent deaths of their family members. This pattern of ascension to the leadership position by women is of course common in the South Asian region where the notion of 'legitimate successor' is a major factor for maintaining party unity. However, despite the kinship factor in Bangladesh, both Khaleda and Hasina proved that they are well able to contain and counter defection and bring some sort of discipline within their parties. It has been alleged widely that the main women leaders have treated the general seats as a reservoir of political power (as both of them contested in direct election from multiple constituencies) but failed to take any proactive measures to encourage other women to contest in general seats. However, women's participation in politics has increased over the years and votes received by women in the past successive election indicate that they have been regarded as credible candidates by the general voters. For example, in 1991 election, women candidates secured more than 30% of the valid votes cast in the contests for 16 seats. Again in 1996, female contenders received more than 50% votes in the five seats.[13] A few women, however, from all the three major parties that held State power received nominations to contest

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[12] As a result of this bill, the total number of MPs is now 345 and this provision is valid for the next 10 years.

[13] Shawkat Ara Husain, "Women Participation in Electoral Politics", *Empowerment,* Vol. 7, 2000, pp. 67-82.

in the general seats and won. But their political strength came mostly from the close blood or marriage ties with the party leadership. Therefore, the tremendous visibility of the two women could not ensure an integrated presence of women in the top echelons of party leadership or in the ministerial cabinets, although the recently held elections under the Caretaker Governments have witnessed huge participation of women voters. Political parties have also incorporated gender concerns into their manifestos. Both the Awami League (AL) and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) have mainly remained confined within the practical gender needs. Strategic needs perhaps are considered too volatile and sensitive as an electoral issue. The more extensive manifestos of *Jamaat-i-Islami,* on the other hand, reflect their ideological position regarding Islam and prescribe a rather separate and sub-ordinate status and space for women. These examples show the low level of commitment of our political parties towards women's issues and reveal their inherent patriarchal nature. Parties are regarded as the gatekeepers to the world of politics. Unless they categorically speak out for women, the dream of creating a 'critical mass' will remain unfulfilled. The following tables illustrate the points well. Women's representation in decision making forums in political parties remains low with numbers in central working committees varying between 2.7% to 11.2%.

**Table-1: Female Members in the Party Hierarchy of Major Parties in Bangladesh**

| Committee | AL | BNP | Jatiya Party | JSD | Workers' Party | Communist Party | Gonoforum |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Presidium and Secretariat | 5 (36) | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| Central Working Committee | 8 (71) | 11(148) | 10(346) | 4 (112) | 2 (53) | 4 (45) | 6 (100) |
| Percentage | 11.2 | 7.4 | 2.8 | 3.5 | 3.78 | 8.8 | 6 |

Source: Mahila Parishad

### *Exercise of Voting Rights*

An increasing number of women have participated in successive elections, which indicates their interest in engaging with democratic decision making processes. The percentage of women voters has increased from 48.42% out of a total voter list of 75.00 million in 2001 to 50.87% out of a voter list of 81.05 million in 2008. Women voters have significantly increased from 27.95 million in 1996 to 41.23 million in 2008 (Figure-1). Women members of political parties have been very active in house to house campaigns, and addressing political meetings. The role of media in projecting women's voices and concerns has also been critical in the 2008 elections.

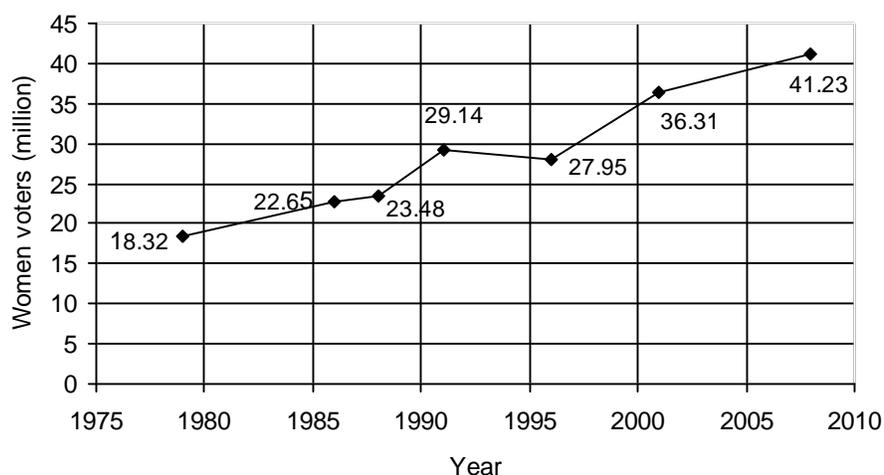**Figure-1: Trends of Women Voters in Bangladesh, 1979-2008**



**Table-2: Women in Cabinet**

| Period | Total Minister | Female Minister | % of Women Minister |
|---|---|---|---|
| **1972-75 (AL)** | 50 | 2 | 4.0 |
| **1976-82 (BNP)** | 101 | 6 | 5.9 |
| **1982-90 (JP)** | 133 | 4 | 3.0 |
| **1991-1996 (BNP)** | 39 | 3 | 7.7 |
| **1996-2001 (AL)** | 42 | 4 | 9.5 |
| **2001- 2006 (BNP led Coalition Government)** | 60 | 3 | 5.0 |
| **2009 (AL led Mohajote)** | 32 | 5 | 15.62 |

Source: *Women Representations at the Jatiya Sangsad: A Study Report, 2003*, Democracy Watch, The 2009 (figure based on present position).

Again, the cabinet, which is the highest level of the executive branch of the government, has traditionally witnessed marginal representation or at times, no representation of women. In the past, three things were noteworthy. Firstly, number of women with full ministerial status had never reached more than two in a cabinet of 40 or 60 ministers. Secondly, women ministers, deputy ministers and ministers of State had been mainly allocated portfolios that were not regarded as important and often associated with the term 'feminine' ministries. These include Women and Children Affairs, Social Welfare, Cultural Affairs, Primary Education etc. Thirdly, most of such ministers were not elected directly and hence lacked political strength to exercise authority in the cabinet. The present cabinet is a major exception and departure from the past, where important ministries, like Foreign Affairs and Home, are held by women elected MPs.

These have traditionally been regarded as areas of **High Security** monopolised by men**.** The appointment of women who had been directly elected with full ministerial ranks into these positions indeed is a major departure and important factor in the empowerment process of women. What remains critical here is whether these inductions would result in or at the minimum start the process of deconstructing the binaries of high and low security, and transform the state into a gender-sensitive system.

It is worth noting here that the 12$^{th}$ Amendment (1991) of the Constitution in Article 56(2) provides, while referring to appointments of Prime Minister, Full Ministers, Ministers, Ministers of State and Deputy Ministers, that not less than nine-tenths of their numbers shall be appointed from among members of Parliament and no more than one-tenth of their number may be chosen from among persons qualified for election as members of Parliament.

A similar provision, Article 58 (4), was earlier incorporated in the Constitution by the Second Proclamation Order No IV of 1978, which fixed the ceiling for members so appointed to the Council of Ministers to be 'not more than one-fifth'. The 4$^{th}$ Amendment in 1975 of the Constitution in Article 58 (3) had also provided for appointment of 'persons qualified to be elected as members of Parliament', but laid down no ceiling.

Such provisions offer the scope to include in the cabinet technocrats, professionals, and administrators, as well as persons from the Services or those otherwise qualified but not willing to face elections. However, it seems that since 1975, during periods when the Parliament functioned, this Constitutional provision was hardly used to appoint women to the Council of Ministers. This particular provision could be used as a strategy to supplement the intake of women into the cabinet from the Parliament.

In Bangladesh where money, muscle and *mastan* (hooligan) determine the course of politics, women MPs often find themselves to be the target of defamatory comments which also reflects the patriarchal nature of power-politics dominating in the society. Back in the Ershad regime, a political weekly even commented that the women MPs elected through reserved seats are nothing but the 'ornaments' of the Parliament. Sometimes they were dubbed as 'rented' MPs or 'MPs of five thousand taka'. More frustrating fact for these MPs is that such comments were often uttered by their own party members. A remarkable study by Jalal Firoj[14] revealed that the female MPs confront various hurdles in serving women community. As many of them are indirectly elected, the local administration and concerned government officials do not accept them with due respect and such non-cooperation make things difficult for the female MPs to

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[14] Jalal Firoj, "Performance of Women in Bangladesh Parliament: Opinions of the Women MPs of the Fifth and Seventh Parliament", *Empowerment,* Vol. 10, 2003, pp. 1-20.

conduct developmental works. Besides, party whipping and pressures also constrain female MPs to act neutrally.

The presence and performance of female MPs in the Parliamentary Committees can also be a determinant factor in order to evaluate their power-position in the decision-making level. Though it is a well-known fact that women members of the committees are very active, no women member has yet been elected as Chairperson of any committee.[15] Unlike the House, where rhetoric speeches are common, women members feel more comfortable in the concrete discussions of the committee and gain experiences over the ministerial affairs. It is now widely acknowledged that female chairpersonship can bring more dynamism in the functioning of the committees.

MPs are also known as the key lawmakers of any country. But in the case of Bangladesh, women MPs are seldom found to be active in this particular area. The study of Jalal Firoj showed that female MPs are not encouraged to initiate any Bill by their party members. Besides, female MPs themselves are not very enthusiastic in the technical procedures of initiating Bills. In his survey conducted on the female MPs, Jalal also found that not a single MP (female) could recall the name of any bill on which they worked in the committee. This is indeed a frustrating performance that should be taken into account seriously.

**Table-3**: **Alternative Proposals for Women's Participation[16]**

| Proposals | Increased Representation | Direct Election |
|---|---|---|
| **BNP led Alliance Government** Increase parliamentary seats to 345, of which 45 reserved for women Women's seats allotted to parties based on their strengths in the Parliament. | 45 | No |
| **Awami League** Increase women's seats to 100 | 100 | Yes |
| **Mahila Parishad** Increase Parliamentary seats to 450 of which 150 reserved for women Each women MP to be directly elected from 3 general seats | 150 to 450 or 33% | Yes |
| **Women for Women** Fixed one third parliamentary seats reserved permanently for women | 100 of 300 or 33% | Yes |

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[15] However, in the 7th Parliament, one women member was allowed to chair a committee *in absence of the Chairperson.*

[16] Badiul Alam Majumdar, "Increasing Women's Representation in Parliament: What is the Best Alternative?" *The Daily Star*, 14 March 2004. The AL's proposal has been cited from the party's election manifesto 2008.

The issue over reserved seats has been one of the hot-spurred debates in the political arena of Bangladesh. Because in the previous system, the debate over the reserved seats centered around the claim that the 30 constituencies for the 30 reserved seats were too big for women candidates compared to the area of the general seats for which the country was divided in 300 constituencies for 300 general seats. But in the present system, the reserved seats do not even represent any constituency, thus making women MPs more dependent on the high command of their respective parties. They will not be accountable to any people of any electoral area and as they do not have any specific job responsibility, their works are confined only to the decorative functions.

Moreover, the uncontested, certain and easy method of electing women MPs for the reserved seats is making women candidates to rely on lobbying and patronage. Besides, it has been criticised for long that the party with the highest general seats has always tended to exploit this reserve system that is often regarded as the 'vote bank' for the party in power. This explains to some extent the approach of the two major parties in Bangladesh to the ongoing discourse on quotas. Some observers argue that there is a greater need for quotas in the decision-making body of successive units of the party organisation. Although almost all major parties have their own women's fronts, these are relatively isolated bodies in terms of their interaction with the party leadership.

Thus, it is important to *feminize* the power spaces so that there would be increasing number of women in the spaces where critical decisions are made nationally. Concomitantly, women's movement as a political lobbying force needs to be strengthened so that they can dialogue with the major actors in the power structures. Moreover, measures to increase the number of female MPs need to be accompanied by concrete steps to improve the quality of political participation. In order to ensure *effective* participation of women in the political arena, particularly in the *Jatiya Sangsad* where reservation system is being practiced, the following factors are most critical.

Firstly, the reservation system must be able to generate a critical mass of women in the Parliament so that they can voice their demands in a meaningful way, rather than allowing tokenism which only reflects the generosity of the male policymakers. Moreover, the system should have a built-in mechanism to cultivate a new generation of women leaders with strong grassroots connections who would force the reservation system unnecessary in the future. It may be noted that an attempt towards grassroots connections in nominating party candidates is in the agenda of the Election Commission.

Secondly, the system should not contradict with the democratic principle of direct election in a particular constituency. The current reservation system for women which does not require direct election, to some extent, contradict with the constitution which calls for MPs to be "elected in accordance with law from single territorial constituencies by direct election …" [Article 65 (2)]. Thus,

without direct election, the basic structure of our constitution will be compromised.

Thirdly, the system should be able to make female MPs accountable directly to the people, not to the party higher-ups. The reservation system must not be used as a patronage tool for bestowing favours to women in the political party or family.

Fourthly, the system must ensure specific constituencies for female MPs so that there would not be any overlapping responsibilities. The voters of a constituency have their right to know whom to hold accountable for.

Fifthly, the system should be such that the female MPs are no longer viewed as peripheral actors whose doings are regarded as nothing but symbolic. Their nomination should be based on their 'electibility' so that the common allegations over the 'selling' of reserved seats can be stamped out.

The theory of critical mass tells the strategic importance of numbers and proportions regarding the capacity of a social group to influence the policy environment of any given institution. A 1992 Study by UN Division for Advancement of Women (UNDAW) determined that such critical mass of about 30 to 35 % women is needed for effective voicing of women's priorities in the government institutions, political parties and in the Parliament. The forces of globalisation and the consequences of developmental policies are also interconnected with the creation of enabling environment for women's political participation. A strong civil society that works toward building transformative community where people are conscious about their political rights is another critical factor for creating greater space for women in governance processes and structures. Women leaders within the parties should also recognise that they are in the right position to insist on and obtain a quota of party nominations for women politicians. However, women groups have continuously demanded for direct election for the women candidates. But a source of weakness in the movement is that of the varied and shifting stand on the number of seats or method of election that undermined the unity of purpose. Besides, the continuous regrouping or remapping of strategic options by the groups and organisations in order to control the movement has weakened their role in bringing any change. The recent growth of fundamentalism also poses threats to the consolidation of women's status in the public arena. Therefore, women leaders who are active in the public arena need to recognise that power can be and indeed need to be exercised with a view to removing hindrances to women's political participation and accelerating the process of advancement.[17]

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[17] For a detailed exposition of the issues also see, Roushan Jahan, Sayeda Rowshan Qadir, Hamida Akhter Begum and Jahanara Huq, (eds.) *Empowerment of Women: Nairobi to Beijing (1985-1995)*, Women for Women, Dhaka, 1995; Salma Khan (ed.) *Role of NGO in Effective Implementation of PFA and CEDAW in Bangladesh,* NGO

**5. DEVELOPMENT**

The close linkage between rights and development can hardly be overemphasised. The UN General Assembly in 1986 adopted the Declaration on the Right to Development. Article 1 of the document proclaims the right to development to be an inalienable human right. This tying up of development with human rights is a landmark development and widens up the scope and parameters of development. Conventional wisdom, however, views development as linear then cyclical. It assumes that the human ability to control and influence the natural and social environment is development whereas agrarian and subsistence societies that live in harmony with nature are viewed as backward and traditional. Such a notion is derived from western rational secular thought. The attributes of rational, control and influence are associated with masculinity, it is no surprise, therefore, as the discussion below would reveal that development has followed a masculine paradigm and has generally been male biased. The above notion of development not only has a distinct western and male bias, it is also too narrow since development is defined in purely economic terms. Development, as suggested here, is the human capacity and ability to choose between options and the freedom to have this option. Rights provide the space where this development can take place. In the context of human rights as well as the women dimension has been largely overlooked. Though the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted in 1948, in its' Article 2 entitled all to "the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status." Yet, women remain the most vulnerable section of society. It, however, needs to be emphasised again that women are not a homogenous category. They and their experiences vary according to their race, class, religion, culture and education. Despite the variations a common thread of violations though varied, bind their experiences. This, it is argued here, is due to the dominant ideology of patriarchy that violations against women are often sanctioned in the name of culture, religion, social values and even nurtured and sustained through education. The violations are regarded as normal and private, though in reality it is political and sustains the asymmetry in power relations. The violations against women start even before their birth and continue through their lifetime. The following will evince this.

Before birth, amniocentesis is used for sex selection leading to the abortion of more female than male foetuses at rates as high as 99% in Bombay. In China the most populous country, more males are born than female, even though natural birth ratios would produce more females. In childhood, according to the World Health Organization (WHO) reports, in many countries, girls are fed less,

Coalition on Beijing Plus Five Bangladesh (NCBP) & Secretariat, Women for Women, Dhaka, 2003.

breast fed for shorter periods, and taken to doctors less frequently. In adulthood, women are denied control over their bodies and are the targets of family planning programmes. Gender-based violence in the form of rape, sexual harassment, wife battery, and incest and dowry death is rampant. Such violations cut across race, class and religion.[18]

Amartya Sen has pointed out the deadly cost of social and economic inequalities between men and women by analysing the sex ratio of men and women in the developing countries. Whereas there are 106 women per 100 men in Europe and North America, there are 97 women per 100 men in the developing countries as a whole. Sen called this number the number of 'missing women'. The numbers that Sen gives us are quite chilling. The number of missing women in Southeast Asia is 2.4 million, in Latin America 4.4, in North Africa 2.4, in Iran 1.4, in China 44.0, in Bangladesh 3.7, in India 36.7, in Pakistan 5.2, in West Asia 4.3. If one considers the ratio of the number of missing women to the number of actual women in a country, for Pakistan it is 12.9%, for India 9.5%, for Bangladesh 8.7 %, for China 8.6%, for Iran 8.5%, for West Asia 7.8%, for North Africa 3.9 %, for Latin America 2.2%, and for Southeast Asia 1.2%.[19]

Economics is a major factor behind the systematic violations of women. Men are looked upon as the breadwinners, while women's work is undervalued and remains invisible. According to a UN report women performed two-thirds of the world's work and received only 10% of all income, and owned only 1 % of the means of production.[20] The pervasive idea that men are the primary earners led to formulation of development strategies and plan that excluded or diminished women's work. Women were regarded as passive dependants and relegated to reproductive rather than productive roles, thereby confining them to domestic spheres. This further shrunk the spaces for women. Women's activism and feminist scholarship stepped in to correct the situation. They challenged the existing notions of work and development. Ester Boserup's work on "Women's Role in Economic Development" in 1970 was a path breaker in this respect. She established empirically the vital role of women in agricultural economies and also documented the negative impact of development on women and their lives. It was argued that modernisation costs were largely borne by women. This

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[18] Charlotte Bunch and Roxanna Carillo, "Global Violence against Women: The Challenge to Human Rights and Development", in Michael T. Clare and Daniel C. Thomas (eds.), *World Security: Challenges for a New Century,* St. Martins, New York, 1994, p. 258.

[19] Martha Nussbaum and Jonathan Glover (eds.), *Women, Culture and Development: A Study of Human Capabilities*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1995, p. 3.

[20] Edna Belen Costa and Christine E. Bose, "From Structural Subordination to Empowerment: Women and Development in Third World Contexts", *Gender and Society,* Vol. 4, No. 3, September 1993, p. 305.

opened the movement for the integration of women into development as workers and producers. In 1970, the General Assembly included in the International Development Strategy for the Second Development Decade a phrase, which stated the importance of encouraging 'full integration of women in the total development effort'. The UN had declared 1975 as International Women's Year and the first UN Conference on 'Women in Development' was held in 1975. A women's decade was declared from 1976 to 1985 with the objectives of peace, equality and development.[21] Equality of women in all spheres of life was a major objective behind this movement, so development for women was not confined to economics rather it was a move towards empowerment, efficiency, equity and justice. It emphasised that women's work be recognised as work. The recognition was considered vital for the rightful and just place of women in society. Over the years, states experimented with different approaches to integrate women in the development process. Recognition was given to the fact that women had both practical and strategic needs. While practical needs addressed the day to day issues of women, strategic needs questioned the fundamentals i.e., subordination of women. The attempts to integrate women in the development process also juggled with these issues.

The initial attempts, however, did not come out of the stereotype perceptions and treated women as passive recipients of development and continued to emphasise upon the traditional role of women. The welfare approach is most mentionable in this context. The equity approach, which is widely regarded as the original approach to integrate women in development called for equity between men and women in all walks of life, thereby, questioning and challenging the naturalness of the unequal power relations between genders and, thereby, addressing the strategic needs of women by fulfilling their practical needs. This, however, touched the cultural sensitivity of many societies. The donors, therefore, shifted their focus from gender to economics and through the anti-poverty approach, they aimed to eradicate poverty of women and thereby meet their practical gender needs. Then the attempt was made to increase the efficiency of women through increased economic participation, which was linked with equity for them. Finally, through the attempts of the women of developing countries, the empowerment approach evolved. It emphasised upon self-reliance and internal strength of women and called for redistribution of power within and between societies.

The above attempts though not adequate in mitigating the inequalities between men and women were, however, a major challenge to the male biasness of the society. Though the initial emphasis of integrating women in development was on economics, which indeed was too narrow a perspective on development,

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[21] Ashequa Irshad, "The National Women Development Policy of Bangladesh: A Critique", *Social Science Review,* Vol. 16, No.2, December, 1999, Dhaka University Studies, Part-D, Faculty of Social Sciences, Dhaka University, Dhaka, p. 148.

the focus and the movement gradually shifted towards equality, education, employment and empowerment.

The UN also adopted CEDAW in 1979. It is widely regarded as the Charter of Rights for women. The UN World Conference on women held in Beijing in 1995 demanded that women's rights be recognised as human rights. It challenged the separation of family, traditional and customary law, and civil and public law that privileged men's control over households and women. It demanded that same punishment be meted out for crimes within family as in public. It also demanded women's control over their fertility, bodies and rights to land and housing. In other words, women were challenging the public/private dichotomy that is at the root of patriarchy and the subordination of women. This dominant gender ideology, it is argued here, is woven into the sinews and fabric of our society, which systematically marginalises women and renders all State 'attempts' at change quite futile since the changes are sought within a masculine paradigm, this again, it is suggested here, due to the notion of nation that premises itself on hegemony.

The development policies of the State have also added to the insecurity of women in many instances, especially those of the marginalised sections of the population. Agriculture is the mainstay of Bangladesh economy and women have traditionally been a part of this. Introduction of mechanised means into this sector has displaced the rural poor women from this sector. They have been deprived from their main means of livelihood. This has increased their economic and social vulnerability. It is common knowledge that there is a linkage between poverty and violence against women - an increase in one leads to the increase in the other as well. The mechanisation of agriculture also affects men. Many of them have migrated to urban areas in search of jobs. This further increases the vulnerability of women who are left alone to look after the family. Women often have become victims of sexual harassment and violations by the village 'leaders' due to the above. Many young women have also migrated to towns in search of jobs. In many instances, they have ended up in brothels or have become victims of the women trafficking chains. According to one estimate, between 1989 to 1999 around 200,000 Bangladeshi women have been trafficked. Every month 120 to 150 Bangladeshi women are trafficked to Pakistan and sold to brothels. The percentage of women active as sex workers in Calcutta is 13.50.[22]

Women of the minority communities have also been affected by the development paradigms of the State. For instance, the Garo women in the bordering area of Birishiri are victims of poverty. 80% of the Garo families in the area are dependent upon forest resources for their survival. But most of the forests have been taken over by the State as Reserved Forests. The women go

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[22] Yasmin Akhtar, "Woman Trafficking: A Global Malady", *The Independent,* 03 April, 2000.

into these forests to collect fuel wood and also their food items. Most of the time they also cross the borders because most of the forests on the Bangladesh side have been denuded while these are still lush and thick on the other side. While crossing the border the women are often caught by the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) personnel. They then are forced to satisfy their physical desires. The situation is not different on the other side of the border. They are often caught by the Border Security Forces (BSF) and again they have to satisfy their physical demands. The Garos are extremely poor and the women are bearing these violations for the sake of their families and children.[23] The insurgency in the CHT also affected the livelihood of the Hill people. As forests were being cut down in the name of counter insurgency, many of the Hill people dependent upon *jhum* (swidden) cultivation lost their only means of livelihood. The Forest Department also declared large tracts of forest land as Reserve Forests. Entry into the forest was declared as a criminal act. This placed many of the Hill communities, specially the numerically smaller ones into the most vulnerable position. Women are integral part of the subsistence economy system, they became doubly marginalised. Many of the large NGOs made their entry into the CHT following the peace accord with their micro credit programmes, but Hill people are not well integrated into the money economy, so many women took to wine making to pay the loans. According to many Hill women, development without taking into cognizance the socio- cultural specificities of society only results in dependence and marginalisation. Women being home makers have to take the major brunt of such marginalisation.[24]

The Readymade Garments (RMG) sector is often regarded as a case of successful women's empowerment in Bangladesh as about 85% of the RMG employed workers are women. This has led to feminisation of labour. On the surface of it, the employment of a large number of women in a vital employment sector is a positive trend, it has made the women visible in an otherwise traditional society where *purdah* is regarded as an important aspect of women's chastity and not only the women's but family's honour is also associated with it. But it needs to be emphasised that women belonging to the bottom strata of the society have traditionally been working outside their homes so there is a class dimension to the concept of *purdah* as well.

The Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP) uprooted many women from their traditional agricultural work forcing them to migrate in the urban areas in search of work. The RMG provided them with a niche and perhaps the only option. While the notion of option may be debated[25], there is also no denying that

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[23]  *Bangla Bazar*, (A Vernacular Daily), 05 January 1999.
[24]  For details see, Amena Mohsin, *The Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh: On the Difficult Road to Peace*, Lynne Publishers, New York, 2003.
[25]  Hameeda Hossain, Rowshan Jahan and Salma Sobhan, *No Better Option? Industrial Women Workers in Bangladesh,* University Press Limited (UPL), Dhaka, 1990.

for most young women migrating to Dhaka garment factories remain the locus of employment. Naila Kabeer's work on Bangladeshi garment workers, makes the point that despite exploitative conditions (discussed below), individual women are able to exercise a certain degree of autonomy and choice in their lives.[26] Petra Dannecker reiterates the same. She argues that though a 'we feeling' is yet to evolve among the female garment workers; yet they do exercise a certain degree of individual and collective agency and cannot be regarded a manipulated mass.[27] Nonetheless, the RMG sector is infested with human insecurities. Human insecurity includes both physical and psychological insecurities. Job satisfaction is an important component of the psychological well-being of the workers. A study conducted by Pratima Paul-Majumder[28] found a wide gap between the female worker's expectations and actual realisations in the garments sector with negative consequences on their mental health. Women are mostly employed in low skilled and hazardous jobs like operators and helpers. The works are not contractual and they get no appointment letters only identity cards are issued to them, which allows them entry and exit into the factories. Job insecurity is, therefore, a constant fear lingering with them. Her study found that 50% of the garment workers worked in the factory in tensed mood. Comparatively more female workers suffer from tension than male workers. 61% of the female workers as opposed to only 20% of the male workers reported that while working they were always occupied with various worries, such as how to reach home at night safely, how to protect themselves from supervisor's anger and how to save their job. In the absence of day care facilities, the mother workers also remain worried about their small children. It may be mentioned that the existing labour laws of the country allows for day care provisions, but there is none so in these factories.

Psychological insecurity is indeed closely linked to physical insecurity. Most of the factories are ill planned and there is inadequate provision for air and ventilation. Fatigue and tiredness is a common complain of the factory workers. The extent of physical hazards varies according to the job categories. As pointed out earlier women are mostly employed in hazardous jobs like operators. This requires sitting at a stretch for a long time, they are also more prone to occupational hazards like exposure to toxic substance, noise hazards, electrical

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[26] Naila Kabeer, *The Power to Choose: Bangladeshi Garment Workers in London and Dhaka*, Verso, 2002.

[27] Petra Dannecker, *Between Conformity and Resistance: Women Garment Workers in Bangladesh*, University Press Limited (UPL), Dhaka, 2002.

[28] Pratima Paul Majumdar, "Occupational Hazards and Health Consequences of the Growth of Garment Industry in Bangladesh", in Pratima Paul-Majumdar and Binayak Sen (ed.) *Growth of Garment Industry in Bangladesh: Economic and Social Dimensions,*: Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies and Oxfam GB Bangladesh, Dhaka 2001, pp. 72-207.

hazards, accidents such as pricking by needles, wrapping of modesty scarf with the sewing machine, etc. The survey showed that the incidence of physical weakness is significantly high among the operators and helpers compared to other workers. Chemicals used in clothes, small particles of cloth, and dust always irritated the operator's and helper's nose. It increases their chances of getting cold and coughs. Helpers also suffer from leg ache and swelling as they were required to remain standing for most of the working hours. The miscarriage rate among garment workers is high. The survey showed that about 18% of married workers experienced miscarriage. And about half of them had undergone miscarriage more than once. Due to unplanned structures workers mostly work in hot and humid conditions, consequently they often suffer from heat strokes and heat exhaustion. The noise and toxic pollution might cause long-term permanent damages to organs and hearing. The sanitation conditions are also deplorable. The survey revealed that on an average there is one latrine for 71 workers, whereas Factory Act 1965 provides that there should be 1 latrine for every 25 workers. There is no formal provision for maternity leave in most of the factories, though some of the factories do it on their own volition. In some instances, even if they are granted leave this is without pay, also there are no health insurance schemes, though a few factories have physicians but these are mostly informal. Safety and environmental regulations are more often violated.

Women also suffer from extreme bodily insecurity. Fear of sexual harassment, rape, and teasing is common. The female garment workers normally commute together for security reasons. The fear of being raped always lurks at the back of their minds. A survey carried out in 1999 revealed that about 52% of garment workers are unmarried young girls. They are often maltreated and abused both verbally and physically by the male supervisors, but for fear of losing their jobs they do not protest or complain. There is also no mechanism or channel of lodging formal complains. Wage discrimination exists between men and women. Legal provisions exist for the protection of women against harassment, but they are unaware of their rights since most of the workers are young and migrants from villages. The factories have mostly been built in unplanned ways and very few have provisions for proper fire exits. Often factory gates are locked during working hours. Consequently, deaths due to fire are on the increase in the factories and among the dead women constitute the majority. The International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation (ITGLWF) observed that garment fire death toll is the highest in Bangladesh.[29]

The employment in the garments sector, it is suggested here, may bring temporary relief or material well-being to the women and their families, but its long term implications are quite dire. One may also suggest that they take up these jobs for the sake of survival rather than as a matter of choice given the lack of options. They leave the jobs after three to four years with physical

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[29] *The Independent*, 17 October 2002.

impairments with little prospects for future jobs due to their physical conditions. The notion of empowerment of women through employment in the RMG sector, therefore, needs critical examination within the matrix of its long-term implications and the options available to the women.

Monetary benefit is the major objective for work. Although the situation has improved, in terms of wages, women workers still receive less compared to their male counterparts. As stated in Bangladesh Bank Policy Paper (2008), according to the Labour Force Survey (LFS) 2003, the daily average wage of paid labour for men was 68% higher than what the women received in rural areas. The difference was 79% in case of urban areas. Similarly, the LFS 2000 also shows that average women's wage rates were considerably lower than men, i.e., women's earnings were approximately 58.5% of men's. 41.7% women earned between Tk 1-750 per month compared to 7.3% by men. Again, 14.5% men earned between Tk 2501-3000 per month whereas for women it is only 5.9%. According to a survey conducted by *Karmajibi Nari (2009)*, 41% female garment workers faced discriminations in wages, 60% faced discriminations in getting promotions, and 39% did not get maternity leave with payments.[30] Similar discrimination of wages occurs in case of farm labourers. The *Daily New Age* (2009) reported that, for the task of harvesting, a man is hired for Tk. 250 and a woman for Tk. 120 for the same duration of work.[31]

As argued earlier, women are seen as the culture bearers of nation, this visibility of women is seen as a threat to the core cultural ethos of the nation by a large section of the population who believe that the proper place of women is within their homes and in order to protect themselves they must keep themselves covered. The market is regarded as men's domain thus the public private divide comes to the fore. The mobility of women and activities of the non-government organisations (NGO) in the rural sector and most importantly the rise of militant forces in the name of religion has given a vent to fundamentalist forces. The women as the bearers and markers of national culture are expected to conform to the patriarchal notions of "proper" and "propriety". Their mobility is perceived as a threat to the traditional structure. In order to stop this, recourse often is taken in religious sermons, which in all instances are interpreted and preached by men. There has been an increase in the number of *fatwas* given against women in the rural areas for their so-called improper behaviour. The major brunt of this rising fundamentalism is, however, borne by the marginalised women. However, it is critical to note that women have started questioning the "Holy" and reshaping it.[32] Women do have an understanding of religion and modesty and maintain that the veil is for both men and women. They argue that by serving humanity and

30  *The New Age*, 01May 2009.
31  *The New Age*, 01May 2009.
32  Elora Shehabuddin, *Reshaping the Holy: Democracy, Development, and Muslim Women in Bangladesh*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2008.

their families they are performing their religious obligations.[33] The journey from the private to the public, their visibility and mobility is indeed bringing about transformations, though slow, in the popular imagination about gender roles, women and their agencies.

However, the following articles of the Bangladesh Constitution have provided legal scope for the Government to enact national legislations requiring women's advancement:

Article 10:       Participation of women in national life;
Article 14:       Emancipation of peasants and workers;
Article 15 (2):   Provision of basic necessities;
Article 19(1):    Equality of opportunity;
Article 20 (1):   Work as a right and duty;
Article 28 (2 and 3): Discrimination on grounds of religion, etc; and
Article 29 (2):   Equality of opportunity in public employment.

The Government of Bangladesh (GOB) adopted the National Policy for the Advancement of Women in 1997 which embodied commitments to eliminate discrimination against women and girls in all spheres of life and promote women's equality in areas such as education and training, health and nutrition, housing and shelter, political empowerment and public administration and the economy. In 2008, the GOB adopted another policy guidelines document entitled, "The National Women Development Policy (NWDP)". The key objectives of this policy is to ensure equal rights for women in all spheres of national life and also to ensure safety and security for women in the national, social and family environment. The main features of the policy document include increasing the duration of maternity leave provisions to five months, reserving one-third of parliamentary seats for women and their direct election, as well as to ensure equal opportunity of women in terms of control of their earned property. It reinstates special attention for communication, sanitation, rest room facilities, day-care centre and health care facilities at the working places. The policy guidelines further affirm to take necessary steps to stop the sufferings of women working abroad, as well as launching special programmes to help women with distress. The GOB enacted 'Bangladesh Labour Law 2006' on 11 October 2006 to ensure employment security for women. This Act is considered a step forward because it has effectively unified 25 separate acts into one comprehensive law. There are a number of sections where the employment and protection of women have been mentioned. To implement the Bangladesh Labour Law 2006, the GOB has drafted Labour Rules-2008 encompassing issues related to women employment rights. The Bangladesh poverty reduction strategy paper entitled *Unlocking the Potential: National Strategy for Accelerated Poverty (NSARP)*

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[33]   Author's personal interviews with garment workers in Dhaka and Narayanganj in 2006.

was published in October 2005. It was preceded by an interim PRSP (I-PRSP) entitled, *A National Strategy for Economic Growth, Poverty Reduction and Social Development* which was completed in March 2003. NSARP included women's advancement and rights issues in two ways: (i) integrating a policy matrix specifically addressing women's advancement issues such as employment, political empowerment of women, violence against women, etc., and (ii) prioritising women advancement issues in 17 policy matrix that covered all sectors.[34] For the first time in the budget for the FY 2009-10, a separate statement has been made regarding the allocation that have been earmarked for women's advancement for the Ministries of Education, Social Welfare, Health and Family Welfare.[35] While the above indeed are appreciable but separate allocation for women in the agricultural and industrial sectors would have been more meaningful in terms of immediate livelihood concerns.

The State also undertook several measures to ensure increased participation of women in all walks of life. In this regard the Ministry of Women's Affairs was established in 1978. Women in Development (WID) focal points were established in all ministries, directories, departments and agencies in 1992 and the National Council for Women's Development (NCWD) was established in 1995 as the highest decision making body for women's advancement. The government also established a parliamentary standing committee for reviewing and advising on women's development programme. The WID coordination committee has been expanded at district and thana level for linkage and coordination.

The government has reserved 10% of high official posts for women. 10% of gazetted posts, 15% of non-gazetted posts, 60% of vacant posts at primary school and 90% of telephone and telegraph operator's posts have been reserved for women.

Despite the above measures, women continue to remain marginalised and their rights violated. It is submitted here that equality is not ensured through the framing of laws or adoption of economic measures, the question is more fundamental i.e., whether the societal and cultural values allow the space as well as opportunity for the implementation of the above. The paper argues that the very existence of patriarchal values privilege men. Right from childhood, a girl child is socialised into the context of a subordinate position to men in society. It has also been observed that in the rural areas more boys are being treated in the

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[34] Kaniz N Siddique, "Women's Advancement and Rights Issues in National Strategy for Accelerated Reduction of Poverty Reduction (NSARP) and their Implementation and Monitoring", Dhaka: Gender and PRSP Group, *Steps Towards Development*, 2008, p. 5.

[35] "National Budget 2009-10: Gender Analysis", *Steps Towards Development*, June 18, 2009.

paediatric wards than girls. Parents do not feel much encouraged to spend money for the treatment of their female children.[36]

## 6. THE PERSONAL AND THE LEGAL

As stated earlier, the enactment of the personal laws had far reaching implications for women. Matters relating to the private sphere were brought within the realm of state laws. The contradictions became apparent within a modern state, where the constitution, on the one hand, gave equality to women in all spheres of life but curtailed it through the personal laws. However, as the old saying goes charity begins at home, for women (in) justice also begins at home. To quote from the human rights activist Eleanor Roosevelt,

> Where after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places close to home – so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world … Unless these rights have any meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerted citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world.[37]

Women rights activists, therefore, have insisted that personal is political. It is the home where discrimination starts, power relations and roles are played out within the private, supposedly the domain of women. Discussed below are the issues related to Muslim marriage and inheritance – the two critical areas of security for women in a society like Bangladesh.

*Marriage:* A marriage under Muslim law is essentially a contract between a man and a woman. This contract is civil in nature requiring mutual consent and form. Since, it is a contract it requires the participation of two **equal** parties. However, an examination of marriages show that woman appears in most instances as secondary. The Act prescribes a form, called *Kabinnama.* It incorporates conditions, such as the amount of dower,[38] the mode of its payment, the form of divorce, custody of children and all other conditions which the spouses want to stipulate. Section 5 of this form mentions if the bride is a virgin, a widow or a divorcee, but no such query is made regarding the status of man. Although consent is an essential part of Muslim marriage, but given the location of majority of women in Bangladesh, this consent is often defective. While polyandry is absolutely prohibited, polygamy of up to four wives is permitted for

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[36] Author's personal conversations with paediatricians and nurses working in the rural areas in 2003 and 2007.

[37] Eleanor Roosevelt, *In Your Hands: A Guide for Community Action for the Tenth Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, United Nations, New York, 1958, Cited from *Who Answers to Women? Gender and Accountability*, UNIFEM, 2008/2009, p. 71.

[38] Dower or *mehr* is a sum of money payable to the wife by the husband in consideration of marriage. Sura 4, Ayat 4 requires this. It is an essential condition of Muslim marriage, can be prompt or deferred.

a Muslim man. However, it is qualified by the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance, 1961 that it requires the permission in writing of the Arbitration Council, and an application stating the reasons for the proposed marriage and the consent of the existing wife or wives. Although the Ordinance is an improvement in bringing about changes in the arbitrary practice of polygamy, but permission of existing wife/ves is often acquired through coercion, threats and physical torture. Muslim law allows the parties to separate from one another if every attempt to maintain the marriage fails. Divorce is referred to as *Talaq*. It is a power available exclusively to the husband, although he may delegate the power to his wife, or even to a third person who can pronounce *talaq* on the wife on his behalf if the husband for some reason is unable to do so. There are different forms of divorce.[39] Even in the case of judicial divorce, disparity exists between Muslim men and women in relation to the right to divorce. A man can obtain a divorce under any circumstance by pronouncing *talaq*, giving a notice to the Arbitration council and waiting for 90 days for it to take effect. A woman, on the other hand, who has not been delegated the right to divorce has to take recourse to a court and prove one or more of the grounds set out by the Dissolution of the Muslim Marriage Act 1939, which provides a woman with a number of specific grounds for seeking divorce.

A Muslim man may validly marry a Christian or Jewish woman but a Muslim woman may marry only a Muslim man. Even if a Muslim man did marry a non-*Kitabiya,* the marriage would not be void but irregular, i.e., the children would be legitimate but the parties would not inherit from each other. But a Sunni Muslim woman is not allowed to marry a non Muslim man, *Kitabiya* or non-*Kitabiya.*[40]

Under Muslim law, a mother is not the legal guardian of her children as of right. Being the primary care giver she has the first claim of custody, in the case of her male child until the age of seven, and in the case of girl child till the attainment of puberty. But the father continues to be the legal guardian and maintainer. After his death, guardianship falls on the paternal side of the children.

*Inheritance*: The Quran designated 12 people, including 8 women as heirs. These are the wife, mother, daughter, sister (full, uterine and consanguine), son's daughter and grandmother. But they cannot all inherit concurrently. Depending upon the priority one excludes the other. The Quran does not lay down specific share for a son. But a text, however, specifies that a son's share should be twice that of a daughter. Widows receive $1/8^{th}$ of the husband's share. Husbands receive $1/4^{th}$ of his wife's estate. It is clear that Quran made women as heirs.

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[39] For details see Faustina Pereira, *The Fractured Scales, The Search for a Uniform Personal Code*, University Press Limited (UPL), Dhaka, 2002.
[40] *Ibid.,* p. 15.

However, Quranic verses are often interpreted to suggest a divine indication that men are superior to women. Whereas Hammudah Abd al Ali makes the point that the implied leadership given to men was no more instrumental leadership allied to responsibility rather than to gender. He further adds that Quran does not state that men are superior to women. Rather it is the financial role of men as a factor which designates them as guardians of women.[41] It is indeed extraordinary but not surprising that this reading is not commonly accepted.

Besides the above, one also observes that even citizenship, a fundamental right had for long been mediated through a man. A child acquired her/his citizenship through the father. However through constant interventions by women's movements, organisations and CEDAW recommendation, the law has been changed in Bangladesh. The Citizenship Act 1951 had been amended in March 2009. Now children can claim citizenship, both through mother and father. Yet, the law remains discriminatory. If a man marries a foreigner, the wife acquires her husband's citizenship automatically but this does not apply in the case of a woman marrying a foreigner. This in other words implies that women do not have the same freedom and citizenship rights as those of men. The state has also delegated women to a secondary position by certain specific laws. For instance, the Head of household is the man. He is considered to be the bread-winner and master of the house. Family is the basic unit of the state. A child is thereby exposed to the power politics of gender at a very early age and is socialised into the notion of a male being the dominant figure or head.

The State has enacted some specific laws for the protection of women, like the Muslim Marriage and Divorce Registration Act of 1974, the Dowry Prohibition Act of 1980 and 1986. But these did not change the position of women in any substantial way. The effectiveness of a legal regime depends to a large extent on the cultivation of values and a culture that can stand as an impediment towards the perpetuation of those acts of violations and crimes. The Bangladesh polity has not done the former, consequently patriarchal values remain strong and women continue to remain insecure. The continued existence of family laws, specially the provisions on inheritance and child custody rights marginalises women, both of the Muslim and Hindu communities. The latter do not even have any rights of divorce, as Hindu marriages are not registered. It is important to bear in mind that Bangladesh is signatory to the CEDAW, the persistence of family laws thereby is not only a violation of the above, but also strengthens and privileges the patriarchal system.

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[41] Cited in Salma Sobhan, "Women, Religion and the Law", in Imtiaz Ahmed (ed.), *Women Bangladesh and International Security: Methods, Discourses and Policies*, Bangladesh Freedom Foundation (BFF) and University Press Limited (UPL), Dhaka, 2004, pp. 50-51.

The State on 30 January 2000 passed the Suppression of Violence against Women and Children Act, 2000. Certain provisions of the Act are reflective of the patriarchal values of the state. Section 31 of the said Act provides the placement of a child or woman into 'safe custody' if the tribunal considers it necessary. The very notion of 'safe custody' for women smacks of a male dominated society. It implies that women need to be protected and confined to safe place. Ironically enough, it is the victim who is being confined not the offender. In Bangladesh normally the following categories of women have been confined under 'safe custody':

- i) women marrying men of other religions or against the wishes of their parents;
- ii) Rape victims;
- iii) Women and girl child rescued from the brothels;
- iv) Women rescued from traffickers;
- v) Victims of domestic violence;
- vi) Lost or mentally un-balance children[42]

The law requires the safe custody to be situated outside the jail. But there is no such place in Bangladesh and women and children have been confined in jails under the pretext of 'safe custody'. From the above categories it is evident that these people require a secure and healthy environment not the confines of jail.

Section 13 of the Act says that the rapist would bear the responsibility of the child born out of the pregnancy; and if convicted the rapist would be detained in jail. It is therefore, not very clear that how he would perform his responsibility towards meeting the expenses of the child from the jail. The Act also states that a man would be considered to have committed rape if he has had sexual intercourse with a woman under the following circumstances:

- i) against her will;
- ii) without her consent;
- iii) with consent, but the consent has been obtained under threat of death or of hurt;
- iv) with or without her consent when she is under 16 years of age.

But in many instances the victim finds it either difficult or is unable to prove the elements of threat and non-consent.

## 7. RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

The review suggests that despite the existence of explicit principles of equality between men and women in the constitution, creation of specific institutions for gender equality and women's rights, the latter continue to remain

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[42] Ain O Shalish Kendra (ASK), "Nirapottahin Safe Custody" (Unsafe Safe Custody), *Bulletin*, Dhaka, September 1998, p. 4.

subordinate and marginalised. State ideology and practices based on patriarchal notions are largely responsible for the insecurity of women. The vortex indeed is complex, multifaceted and deep rooted. Interventions at various levels are required.

***The Private/Public Divide:*** The nationalist construction of the private/public divide, it has been argued, has much to do with women insecurities. The lines between the divide however, are not fixed and increasingly being contested and redrawn. Contestations are emerging from the global to the local levels. Globalisation has, on the one hand, forced many women to come out of the private, migrate and undertake jobs in markets both within and outside the borders of the state. On the other hand, one also observes a rise of conservative forces with women once again becoming the identity bearers of their communities since globalisation is perceived to have a homogenising impact on cultures. Interestingly, one observes not only a political economy but also class politics associated with this divide. It is suggested that in many spaces and locale, the private has blurred and women, as the analyses above suggests, despite barriers are contesting and carving out spaces for themselves and making their voices heard. This is true of an educated political party woman as well a village girl who has migrated to urban areas in search of work. In other words, women are negotiating their spaces and roles in the private as well public realm.

***The Legal Regime:*** The notion of equality makes the legal regime neutral and negates the power equations and relations existing within the society. This neutral, objective and biased stance is rooted in the tyranny of male objectivity and male norms. The law sees and treat women as men see and treat women. The masculine foundations of legal norms based on reasonable behaviour dismiss the experiences of those who refuse to conform to the societal standards of proper behaviour. Legal interpretations of sufferings also failed to acknowledge the distinct quality of women's sufferings. In other words, the law has been unkind and unjust in treating un-equals as equals thereby, obscuring the power inherent in the social world. The law has also been found harsh in its treatment of women. The "evil woman" thesis is often invoked and women are expected more than men to conform to societal values and norms.[43] The legal regime ought to engender itself for the fulfillment and incorporation of women's rights and experiences.

Women's movements have long called for a uniform personal code. However, one needs to be mindful that personal laws despite many of its discriminatory provisions are a sensitive issue for indigenous communities and many women. Women's movements therefore, need to open up this debate from a socio-economic and political perspective. This would require the women's

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[43] Lynne A Haney, "Feminist State Theory: Applications to Jurisprudence, Criminology, and the Welfare State", *Annual Reviews*, 2000, pp. 3-4.

movements to be more inclusive and reach out to the community people, specially the indigenous communities with issues of their livelihood and survival. It is the systematic deprivation and dispossession of their economic and political rights which make them more militant about their personal laws, as these are viewed as markers of their identity.

*The Development Paradigm:* The development paradigm also follows the above logic, centralisation and westernisation of the paradigm deprives women of their traditional means of livelihood. Women's development and participation ought to be an important component of the state development policies. Women being the home managers have insights of economics and 'development' unavailable in formal textbooks. Women's contribution to economics not being part of the formal system has remained invisible and unaccounted for. This invisibility has only strengthened and privileged men. Consequently, they are recognised as the bread earners and thereby head of household. It is time the State makes an endeavour towards equal headed households by recognising and thereby making visible the contribution of women towards 'development'. Women's experiences and knowledge must be made an integral part of the State development planning and strategies. In this regard, the State development budget ought to be gender sensitive and allocate a meaningful amount towards gender sensitive programmes.

Technology - a major tool of development is also not innocent. It has a distinct masculine bias and foundation. The slogan "user friendly" in the promotion of different new technological advancements is in fact a move towards commodification and commercialisation of products that are more often than not friendly towards the rich and the dominant. It overlooks the economic vulnerabilities and dependence of women and does not take into account their experiences. "Mother Friendly" is another slogan, which some of the multinational companies have been trying to popularise but this only reemphasises the patriarchal values of the society and State. The "equal opportunity" principle obscures the structural and systemic inequalities in the social system. This inequality is most blatant in the constitution of the family, the basic unit of the State and the citizenship laws of the state.

*Knowledge Production*: It is another sphere where fundamental and critical changes are urgently called for. The present curricula starting from the primary till the tertiary levels inculcate the traditional values and system, which as argued, are patriarchal and hegemonic. It is only recently that the gender component is making its inroads at the tertiary levels. The Dhaka University has opened a Department of Women's Studies, which again had to be renamed as the Department of Women and Gender Studies largely due to the pressure from the male students of the department. Different disciplines in the arts and social sciences have introduced courses in gender studies. Such initiatives, while welcoming, must however be introduced from the primary levels when the mind

is still young and at a formative stage. The introduction of gender sensitive curricula, it is expected will create a generation imbibed with human values and respect for diversity and humanity.

***The Political Arena***: Finally, politics is the realm where women's rights can be realised. Here the theory can be transformed into practice. The systematic exclusion of women is sanctioned by religious and cultural norms since women, as argued earlier, are considered to be private and politics is public. This dichotomy is political and based on core masculine values, and there is an urgent need to deconstruct this frame and divide. Despite having two women at the helm of national politics, it is indeed sad that women representation in the Parliament is quite negligible. A fundamental and qualitative shift is needed in the political arena. This can only be brought about by incorporating women's perspectives of collective empowerment, nurturance and life in the political vocabulary of the State. This would require women's participation in politics from the community to the State level.

The above changes are indeed difficult to come by. The civil society, citizens groups, the non governmental sector indeed has a major role to play in this respect. Globalisation despite its many discontents has opened up spaces for citizen's interventions. The Rights groups have transcended political/territorial boundaries and the State is under ***watch.*** Women along with their diversities constitute a major component of the above. They endeavour to build a non hegemonic, non homogenous and engendered State where people can speak and voices can be heard. Through experience, women have learnt that the difference between voice and silence is like between life and death.

*Razia Sultana*

# MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS (MDGs): AN EVALUATION

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## Abstract

Since its initiation in 2000, Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are considered as important initiatives for the overall social, political and economic development of the poor countries. Though governments of the poor countries are committed to accomplish these prominent targets within particular time frames, the projections, however, are challenged due to some institutional, political and fundamental problems of MDGs. To highlight the gaps, this paper attempts to analyse the issues and concerns of MDGs and their implications on the developing countries. The paper also tries to reveal that despite some of the good proposals and targets given by the international agencies, MDGs tend to be difficult to attain by the developing countries, due to weaknesses of the precise goals themselves. To look at these issues critically, the paper identifies the goals and their existing achievements in a particular developing country like Bangladesh.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the twenty-first century, attainment of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is crucial for the development of the poor countries. In September 2000, this unparallel initiative was taken by 191 Heads of Government with the support of the United Nations (UN) to stress on human development agenda apart from economic growth.[44] Thus, it has become crucial for many developing countries as the governments are overtly committed to achieve progress within particular time frame, i.e., by 2015 or 2020. To accomplish the eight MDGs, many countries are modifying their organisational formations with the expectation that these changes would increase their capabilities to meet the targets. Therefore, the goals are not merely ambitious for the developing countries but also lead to ensure some responsibilities to fulfill the objectives. Against this backdrop, the pertinent questions are - What are the key assumptions that underpin the MDGs as tools for growth and development of poor countries? Have the poor countries achieved

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[44] Samir Amin, "The Millennium Development Goals: A Critique from the South", *Monthly Review*, Vol. 57, No.10, 2006, pp.1-15.

the MDGs that the international agencies premised? If not, what are the issues and concerns behind these? To answer these questions, the paper critically examines the assumptions of MDGs from their conceptual contexts and as executed in the developing countries. In addition to these, the paper particularly throws light on the current status of MDGs in Bangladesh, as a case study to understand its achievements after eight years of its formation.

## 2. THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS (MDGs)

Since 1990s, there has been a shift in the development discourse that economic growth is not the only way to improve the wellbeing of poor nations, rather, human development indices are other means of development frameworks to reduce poverty and enhance wellbeing of poor people.[45] Based on this notion, a set of eight goals has been outlined for attainment by 2015 or 2020 which are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: The Goals of MDGs**

| No. | Goals |
|---|---|
| Goal 1. | Eliminating insufficient income, food insecurity and reducing poverty by half between 1990 and 2015 |
| Goal 2. | Accomplishing extensive primary education by 2015 |
| Goal 3. | Endorsing gender parity and advancing empowerment of women by 2015 |
| Goal 4. | Lessening infant and child mortality by two-thirds between 1990 and 2015 |
| Goal 5. | Decreasing maternal mortality by three-quarters between 1990 and 2015 |
| Goal 6. | Impeding the spread of HIV/AIDS, malaria and other communicable diseases |
| Goal 7. | Increasing environmental sustainability and improving the lives of around 100 million slum people through better sanitation and shelter by 2020 |
| Goal 8. | Intensifying global partnership for overall development. |

Source: David Satterthwaite, "Meeting the MDGs in Urban Areas: The Forgotten Role of Local Organizations", *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 58, No.2, 2005, pp.87-112.

## 3. KEY ASSUMPTIONS OF MDGs

According to UN Chronicle 2007, if MDGs are to be attained in all the developing countries, some 500 and 300 million people correspondingly have to be uplifted from living on less than $1 a day. Moreover, around 350 and 650 million people respectively will have to have access to safe drinking water and

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[45] Sakiko Fukuda-Parr, "Millennium Development Goals: Why they Matter?", *Global Governance*, Vol.10, No.4, 2004, pp. 395-402.

basic sanitation facilities.[46] Based on the explicit targets, the key assumptions are perceived that MDGs will:

- be well suited for  poor countries as the targets are prepared by the Western development activists;
- give legitimacy to improve human development goals within definite time frames;
- address  the concrete agendas which can be quantified;
- stimulate economic growth through global partnership between the rich and  poor countries in terms of aid, trade, debt and technology transfer;
- reduce rural and urban poverty by means of economic and social development;
- provide  the poor countries a proper guideline to be developed socially and economically;
- assist the donors and international agencies to monitor the successes of poor countries;
- include an universal image based on the principles of autonomy, self-esteem, cohesion and equality among the rich and poor countries.

## 4. ISSUES AND CONCERNS OF MDGs

Indeed, the assumptions of MDGs are crucial attempts to reduce poverty and improve the living standard of developing countries. However, the implementation procedures linked with the MDGs are not exempted from politics which exerts severe limitations. These are as follows:

### *Legitimacy of Neo-liberal Initiatives*[47]

In fact, the new concept of development through MDGs for poor countries is the creation of aid development by the Western countries. In this regard, Samir Amin has commented that MDGs are nothing but the new guise of neo-liberalist agenda.[48] At present, USA, Europe and Japan – the three major powers control over 85 percent of resources in poor countries through different agendas of

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[46] Asha-Rose Migiro, "The MDGS: Are We on Track?" *UN Chronicle,* Vol. 44, No. 4, 2007, pp. 1-95.

[47] Neo-liberalism denotes a set of economic strategies like privatisation, deregulation and free market economy which has been imposed by the Western world on the Third World countries. As said by  Elizabeth Martinez and Arnoldo García, the effects of neo-liberalist strategies are widespread by which the rich become richer and the poor become poorer. For details, see, Elizabeth Martinez and Arnoldo García, "What is Neo-liberalism?: A Brief Definition", Global Exchange 2007, available at: http://www.globalexchange.org/campaigns/econ101/neoliberalDefined.html, accessed 17 April, 2009.

[48] Samir Amin, *op.cit*., p. 5.

World Bank (e.g. controversial paper termed as Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper), International Monetary Fund (IMF) (such as, imposing the primacy of debt repair through Structural Adjustment Program) and World Trade Organization (WTO) (such as commercial expansion of business strategies for the benefits of the rich countries). Likewise, in the eight MDGs, some policies and actions are included to fulfill the interests of international agencies and the alliances. For instance, in terms of environmental sustainability, only a common principle (to integrate the rules of sustainable development into national and international strategies) is incorporated as it is well suited for "capitalist economic strategy."[49] Though some specific procedures (e.g. rejection of Kyoto Protocol by the USA) and other legal processes are cautiously omitted in MDGs.

It is alleged that, in many developing countries, the donors and international organisations plan and implement some projects according to their desires which are not in the interests of the recipient countries. For example, Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) has initiated Special Program for Food Security (SPFS) for halving the proportion of people in starvation by 2015. However, taking a case study from Guatemala, it has been found that, though this strategy entailed the opportunities to earn some extra cash for Guatemalans, it was not sustainable for the country because of increased environmental degradation through bean farming.[50] This shows that the MDGs often act as the ideological cover up for neo-liberal ideas which compromise the willingness and benefits of recipient countries.

### Top-down Process

Presumably, one of the external-led features of MDGs is its derivation from the UN and other international organisations.[51] Also, the goals are primarily prepared by the external professionals and development activists of the rich countries while the poor countries are ignored to set their own agendas. In this regard, the queries are – did the external experts address local problems of poor countries while designing the processes of MDGs? Did they maintain any linkage with the local institutions for greater dealings with the local representatives? To explain these, David Satterthwaite remarks that donor agencies and public administration have often failed to achieve effective pro-poor growth as the policies are of top-down approach and most of the specialists lack experience about grass root people.[52] Moreover, the UN 2003 Report claims

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[49] Samir Amin, *ibid.*, p. 7.

[50] Patrizio Warren, "MDG Activism and the Campesino Detachment", *Mountain Research and Development*, Vol. 26, No.1, 2006, pp. 9-14.

[51] Samir Amin, *op.cit.*

[52] David Satterthwaite, "The Millennium Development Goals and Urban Poverty Reduction: Great Expectations and Nonsense Statistics", *Environment and Urbanization*, Vol. 15, No.2, 2003, pp. 181-190.

that since the ratification of the goals, international agencies have been initiating different programmes in the absence of proper dialogues with the poor countries on whether these are achievable for them due to their budget constraints and other macro-economic problems.[53] Even, data from various countries denote that these strategies clearly disregard the role of community-based institutions, local authorities and NGOs.[54] In addition, the goals do not highlight separately those who are disadvantaged, backward and the poorest of the poor in the societies.

### Concerns about Organisational Forms and Procedures

Though donors and international agencies play pivotal roles in planning of MDGs, these associations, however, did not demonstrate how the benefits of MDGs will reach at the grass root level. Furthermore, they did not even address those services to which they have the right to use and how they can maintain or accumulate the resources for the poor countries. Another constraint is that most of the donors lack knowledge about local people, their views, beliefs and languages. As a result, the proposals they suggest for the poor are not friendly to local environment and are often influenced by their previous experiences from other countries.[55] Therefore, these suggestions sometimes go wrong to protect the local demands as they do not know what services are required by particular community and what their needs are. For example, in India, in the name of development, international organisations and the government get involved in slum eviction ignoring the local people's perceptions, thereby, often increasing the hostilities among the donors, government and the local people.[56] Another hurdle is the distribution of aid of different international financial institutions including World Bank and IMF. Though these organisations provide aid to the poor countries as a way to alleviate poverty, it is indecisive as to how much aid reaches grass root level in the absence of local procedures. Unless the aid reaches local people, perhaps, it is difficult to remove their overall hunger and poverty.

### Contradictory Timelines

The MDGs demonstrate time bound strategies to improve the wellbeing of poor people by 2015 or 2020. However, to some extent, the total period of time is contentious. For instance, in the case of poverty, the UN uses the data of 1990

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[53] Patrick Bond, "Global Governance Campaigning and MDGs: From Top-down to Bottom-up Anti-poverty Work", *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 27, No.2, 2006, pp. 339-354.

[54] David Satterthwaite, 2005, *op.cit*.

[55] David Satterthwaite, 2003, *op.cit*.

[56] International Alliance of Inhabitants (IAI), "Forced Evictions in Chennai (Madras)-Demolition Renders 30,000 Homeless in Tamil Nadu, India", 2007, available at http://en.habitants.org/article/articleview/1785/1/490/, accessed 21 May 2009.

instead of 2000 to measure its successes.[57] Thus, the total period of MDGs is in fact 25 years, not 15 years. For this very reason, much bigger population data is covered from the beginning to the end of the whole period. Even so, this issue is not clearly stated. However, it is crucial to mention that already more than eight years have passed since the ratification of MDGs in 2000. Under the existing conditions, questions may arise if it is possible for the poor countries to attain the overall targets within the next six to eleven years. It is projected that in some regions like Africa, Latin America and the Middle-East, the percentage of poor people would hardly be reduced within the stipulated timeframe of 2015 or 2020 and the total number of the poor would fall into poverty again because of stagnant growth.[58] As pointed out by the Human Development Report 2003, in twenty one countries, Human Development Index (HDI) had remarkably declined so far. Other targets had reverse outcomes. For instance, admission of children in primary school went down in twelve countries while child mortality rate deteriorated in fourteen countries. Moreover, hunger rates and people living on below $1 a day significantly worsened in twenty one and thirty seven countries respectively.[59] Under these circumstances, in many countries, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, the goal for the elimination of poverty cannot be achieved by 2015, not even by 2147, after 132 years.[60] Therefore, this time bound measure in absence of proper policies and programmes have become a major challenge for the developing countries to meet the MDGs' targets.

### Inconsistent Estimation of Poverty with $1/day

Though income-based poverty line is an important denominator to measure MDGs, this indeed, is based on a much less-ambitious aim than had been approved four years ago at the World Food Summit in Rome (1996) before the ratification of MDGs in 2000. During the Rome Summit, the target of reducing poor people was clearly indicated from 1096.9 million to 548.45 million.[61] But, in the Millennium Declaration, it was barely mentioned that by 2015, MDGs will halve the proportion of people whose earnings are less than $1/day. Nevertheless, halving the proportion instead of actual number does not give an accurate picture of poverty reduction, as it is unclear from which level to what level MDGs will reduce the number of poor people. Besides, there exists a large variation when it is measured by World Bank's own estimation procedure with a $1 a day poverty line. This assessment is hardly encouraging for poor countries as it does not

[57] Thomas Pogge, "The First United Nations Millennium Development Goal: A Cause for Celebration?", *Journal of Human Development,* Vol. 5, No. 3, 2004, pp. 377-397.

[58] Sakiko Fukuda-Parr, *op.cit*.

[59] Sakiko Fukuda-Parr*, ibid*.

[60] Tony Addison, George Mavrotas and Mark McGillivary, "Aid, Debt Relief and New Sources of Finance for Meeting the Millennium Development Goals", *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 58, No.2, 2005, pp. 113-127.

[61] Thomas Pogge, *op.cit*.

consider some other crucial aspects such as the precise policies that generate further poverty, redistribution of wealth, amounts of national currency variations from country to country and the revision of two base years' (1985 and 1993) Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) rate.[62] Therefore, distrust arises about the standardisation of MDGs as these indicators are not appropriate for all the poor countries, irrespective of urban and rural provinces. In many countries, governments use income based poverty line and PPP exchange rates but they do not take into account the expenditure and price ratio of non-food items (e.g. travelling expenses, clothes and medicine cost). These aspects are essential, otherwise there would be a huge difference of expenditure between poor and the middle income countries. Even, the costs of food differ with location in many developing countries. In rural areas, people often do not need to spend money for food (as they can produce their own crops) and water (since they can collect water from rivers, ponds and other natural sources) and accommodation (possibly owning land and housing materials). In the absence of these facilities, the monetary costs of low income urban people are comparatively higher as they have to spend a lot more for food, water and accommodation.[63] It is apparent that the same $1 a day poverty line cannot be applicable for both two areas as it might often exaggerate rural expenditures and devalue urban costs.

This inadequate prediction of World Bank does not play an important role for poverty measurement, as there are different living expenses within the same rural or urban location. For example, in rural areas, the living costs of seasonal labours are comparatively higher (as they have to pay for accommodation and travel costs) than that of farmers who are permanently living in those areas. Also, there are large variations of costs in terms of low and middle income countries. Thus, it is significant to enquire whether this indicator will be applicable in the same way for the poorest African countries and other middle-income countries like Brazil and Mexico. If it is so, then, why is this same indicator not applied to rich countries?  Thus, $1 a day poverty line has become doubtful in absence of examining the actual income required for people to alleviate poverty regardless of particular area or country.

### Improper Statistical Data

It is seen that MDGs often ignore how people experience "development". The reason is, apart from income poverty line, international agencies measure the achievements of MDGs based on some instrumental facts and figures which show the dubious picture of growth and development of the poor people. For example, in Nairobi, data of 1998 revealed that 1.2 percent of urban population

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[62] Raghav Gaiha, "Are Millenium Goals of Poverty Reduction Useful?", *Oxford Development Studies*, Vol. 31, No.1, 2003, pp. 59-84.

[63] Allen Wratten, "Conceptualizing Urban Poverty", *Environment and Urbanization*, Vol.7, No.1, 1995, pp. 11-36.

was considered as poor and of them, only 4 percent did not have access to sanitation.[64] In reality, poverty level is significantly high in Nairobi compared to the other cities in Kenya. Yet, there is no proof in this regard.[65] Likewise, in 2000, one hundred percent of the population of Mumbai had piped water facilities. This was actually measured excluding the issue of providing basic services to the poor people of that city.[66] Thus, the question is – should Mumbai be defined a poverty-free area although it ignores the significant portion of the urban poor people? However, these evidences of tricky policies raise the question of validity of successes over MDGs.

### Absence of Qualitative Measurement

MDGs can be perceived as excessively narrow in the sense that focus was mainly given on quantity not quality of achievements. Put precisely, the strategies stress more on outcomes through quantitative dimension rather than qualitative inputs. But, effective outcomes can only be achieved when there remain sound inputs. It is appalling that, MDGs have that kind of inherent problems to get the effective results. This can be interpreted in a way that MDGs have fixed some clear-cut targets of poverty reduction based on the ratio of people, without analysing the quality of services (e.g. education, water and sanitation). In terms of educational attainment, years of schooling and number of children attending the primary schools do not necessarily represent the number of education sessions. How is education quantified without any improvement of curriculum and teachers' training programmes in remote rural areas? In sub-Saharan Africa, it is strongly evident that there are large variations in terms of learning accomplishment at the same grade level.[67] Similarly, it is apparent in case of access to nutrition for mothers in South Asian region. Though progress has so far been achieved in case of hunger, the nutritional status of mothers has deteriorated as a result of mal-distribution of food during pregnancy, pre-natal and post-natal care periods.[68] Consequently, women are likely to give birth to ill health and low birth-weight babies. Besides these, there are some complex phenomena in MDGs which are interlinked with each other and not easy to quantify. For instance, enhancement of education level of women might reduce

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[64] Graham Alder, "Tackling Poverty in Nairobi's Informal Settlements: Developing an Institutional Strategy", *Environment and Urbanization*, Vol.7, No.2, 1995, pp. 85-107.

[65] Carole Rakodi, Rose Kamau-Gatabaki, and Devas, "Poverty and Political Conflict in Mombasa", *Environment and Urbanization*, Vol. 12, No.1, 2000, pp. 153-170.

[66] C. Arthur McIntosh, and Cesar E Yniguez, *Second Water Utilities Data Book,* Asian Development Book, Manila, Philippine, 1997.

[67] Jeffrey James, "Misguided Investments in Meeting Millennium Development Goals: A Reconsideration Using Ends-based Targets", *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 27, No. 3, 2006, pp. 443 –458.

[68] Atiur Rahman and Mahfuz Kabir, "Attaining the Millennium Development Goals in South Asia", *BIISS Journal*, Vol. 26, No. 4, 2005, pp. 509-536.

the rate of child mortality. But lack of clarity of this sort of linkage blurs the achievements of MDGs.

### *Perpetuate Re-colonisation Process through Unequal Partnerships*

More explicitly, the global partnership is based on two basic assumptions. On the one hand, it is presumed that aid will increase economic development. On the other, it will enhance pro-poor growth through the removal of budgetary obstacles.[69] It is reasonable to elucidate that, international agencies and the developed countries increase their support in the developing countries through different projects and programmes. Though in reality, this mutual partnership process is persistently questioned since it includes Western agendas co-opted with inequality, discrepancies and lack of cooperation.[70] Put precisely, in the name of providing aid, trade and support, US imposed 16 eligibility conditions on the poor countries through the programme of Millennium Challenge Account (MCA).[71] For these types of neo-liberal conditions, many African countries already fell into the aid trap as they needed to pay back more than what they had received.[72] This joint venture has become identical with domination, exploitation and continuation of imperialist rules which have locked the mutual financial systems and completely failed to achieve pro-poor growth. In addition, the goals executed some Western vision of development which had adverse social and economic impacts on the developing countries. Based on the preliminary needs assessment (termed as Dominican Model) of MDGs in Dominican Republic (DR), Martin Bosman and Mark Amen found that the implementation procedures and planning processes were simply dominated and supervised by the international agencies where women, local capacity builders and other marginalised groups were excluded from setting their own priorities.[73] The politics of Dominican Model was that the external experts imposed their suggestions to naturalise their positions which perpetuated the re-colonisation process in the country.

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[69] Tony Addison et al, *op.cit.*

[70] Samir Amin, *op.cit.*

[71] Susanne Soederberg, "American Empire and 'Excluded States': The Millennium Challenge Account and the Shift to Pre-emptive Development", *Third World Quarterly,* Vol. 25, No. 2, 2004, pp. 279–302.

[72] Patrick Bond, *op.cit.*

[73] M. Martin Bosman and M. Mark Amen, "Recasting Neo-liberalism in the Americas: A Critique of the Preliminary Needs Assessment of the Millennium Development Goals in the Dominican Republic", *Globalizations*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 2006, pp. 227-236.

*The Propensity to Pay Less Attention on Urban Poverty*

There is a concern that international institutions pay no heed to urban issues and priorities.[74] Apparently, the goals include some of the urban issues together with the improvement of lives of around 100 million slum dwellers by 2020. This target seems to be overly ambitious as the process to reach the goal is not clearly acknowledged. In 2000, enhancement of living standard of 100 million people implied only 15 percent of total slum population which cover a less proportion of total urban population of 2020. Another worry is that, most of the donors and international institutions pay more attention on rural poverty rather than urban scarcity, though the latter is gradually increasing and shaping a precarious form in many developing countries, due to rapid rural-urban migration and increase of slums.[75] This underestimation of urban poverty does not expose a true image of poverty assessment in many African and South Asian countries. Often, it is seen that a large segment of urban dwellers in the slum areas have less access to education and health care facilities, compared with the rural villagers. Though many slum dwellers are staying near to these amenities, it does not necessarily indicate that they are having access to these services. As argued by Satterthwaite "proximity does not mean access."[76] Quite obviously, it depends on other factors such as affordability, income, assets and power structure.

*Universalism of Goals and Essential Needs*

Each country is different from the other and has precise challenges. Therefore, the states might have different choices and national strategies to achieve growth and development. For example, African countries might give priorities on the prevention of HIV/AIDS, while the South Asian countries might put emphasis on decreasing corruption. Even, the AIDS prevention policies of South Africa will be quite diverse from that of South Asia, because of distinct culture, population growth, literacy rate and other related factors. But, MDGs include "one-size-fits-all" framework for each government with measurable targets of achievements ignoring state centric priorities.[77] This poses an actual threat since the policies used to attain MDGs will increase more inequalities among the minority groups (women, rural communities and ethnic people) and the main stream communities as the former generally advance very slowly than the country average.[78] But, MDGs do not view separately those who are the

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[74] David Satterthwaite, 2003, *op.cit*.
[75] E. David Sahn and David C. Stifel, "Progress towards the Millennium Development Goals in Africa", *World Development*, Vol. 31, No. 1, 2002, pp. 23-52.
[76] David Satterthwaite, 2003, *op.cit.,* p. 186.
[77] Alston, Philip, "Ships Passing in the Night: The Current State of the Human Rights and Development Debate Seen through the Lens of the Millennium Development Goals", *Human Rights Quarterly*, Vol. 27, No. 3, 2005, pp. 755-830.
[78] Patrick Bond, *op.cit*.

poorest of the poor in the society. In Guatemala, for instance, among 6.3 million people, 93 percent are struggling with severe poverty where most of them are indigenous *campesinos*.[79] The question is then, will the disadvantaged indigenous group adjust at the same pace with the mainstream Guatemalans? As their basic needs are explained by outsiders in the MDGs, it is difficult for them to have a voice in these matters. Like this country, many of the poor countries have destitute groups and without their active participation in MDGs, overall wellbeing of poor people is not possible. For that reason, Patrick Bond has critically acknowledged MDGs as "Minimalist Development Goals".[80]

### Absence of Other Key Objectives

Although MDGs take some of the complex issues of human development into account, they do not address other significant aspects including "participation, democracy and human rights."[81] In relation to a participatory approach (participation of people from below), people's active involvement is crucial in a sense that it is a means through which they can set their own rights and priorities over resources.[82] However, throughout the whole process (planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation) of MDGs, participatory forms of democracy are highly ignored.

On the other hand, the concepts of MDGs and human rights are complementary, as the former cover many aspects of human rights obligations (e.g. rights to food, health, education and shelter) and procedures (such as, the commitment of equal partnership includes civil and political rights).[83] But the absence of any human rights structure in MDGs context and lack of involvement of any human rights commission in the development agendas, increase debates about the efficacy of these types of technocratic characters of the actions. Other important issues such as violence against women, sexual abuse and reproductive health rights are principally excluded from MDGs programme.[84]

To address other issues, World Bank Report 2003 states that "all societies are composed of diverse social groups that may be identified on the basis of gender, ethnicity, religion, age and culture, as well as "spatial" and economic characteristics".[85] While analysing a balanced growth of a nation, Suzuki and McConnel point out that planners need to consider all types of individual,

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[79] Patrizio Warren, *op.cit.*

[80] Patrick Bond, *op.cit.*, p. 342.

[81] Sakiko Fukuda-Parr, p. 396, *op.cit.*

[82] Jim Ife, *Community Development: Community Based Alternatives in the Age of Globalisation (*2nd edn.), Pearson Education Australia, NSW, 2000.

[83] Philip Alston, *op.cit.*

[84] Patrick Bond, *op.cit.*

[85] World Bank 2003, "Social Analysis Sourcebook", p.13, available at http: www.worldbank.org.socialanalysis, accessed 11 July 2009.

collective, political and environmental aspects of the communities.[86] In the MDGs, it is notable that though gender and empowerment issues are discussed on a limited scale, other issues such as religion, ethnicity and different environmental settings are entirely sidelined. Conversely, "cultural change was seen as a key element in strategies for economic development."[87] Typically, cultural beliefs analyse gender roles within communities based on the divisions of economic activities, decision making proficiencies and other social responsibilities.[88] However, in MDGs, gender equity, women empowerment and women's participation in terms of culture are not comprehensible. It is also not clear whether the MDGs address issues unique to vulnerable women considering their social barriers, social customs and education levels.

## 5. STATUS OF MDGs IN BANGLADESH

To what extent are the above mentioned controversial issues evident in the case of Bangladesh compared to other least developing countries? If the divisive issues are evident in the country, then, how far will Bangladesh be able to achieve the goals by the assigned time frame? In fact, Bangladesh is a signatory state of MDGs and firmly committed to attain the goals within the particular time frame by 2015. While addressing the current status of Bangladesh, it is mentioned in the official report that the country is on the way to gain a number of targets which are very striking owing to the socio-economic development over the last few years.[89] As demonstrated by Mid-Term Bangladesh Progress Report 2007, the country has already accomplished MDG 3, (gender parity in primary and secondary schooling) in 2005. Also, it is on the right path to accomplish MDG 1 (halving the percentage of people below national poverty line and who are suffering from hunger), MDG 2 (accomplishing universal primary school enrolment), MDG 4 (decreasing under-five child mortality and infant mortality rate), MDG 6 (halting the extent of communicable diseases such as HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis) and MDG 7 (reducing the percentage of people without pure drinking water). Though, the country lags behind in certain areas such as MDG 1 (raising the share of the poorest quintile in national income), MDG 2 (gender parity in tertiary education), MDG 5 (reducing maternal mortality) and other targets of MDG 6 and 7.[90] In this regard, the current trends and tracks of

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[86] D. Suzuki and A. McConnel, *op.cit.*

[87] Su Braden and Marjorie Mayo, "Culture, Community Development and Representation", *Community Development*, Vol. 34, No. 3, 1999, pp. 191-204.

[88] J. Flood, *The Original Australians: Story of the Aboriginal People*, Crows Nest, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, Australia, 2006, p. 62.

[89] Mid-Term Bangladesh Progress Report 2007.

[90] General Economic Division, Planning Commission, Government of Peoples Republic of Bangladesh, "Millennium Development Goals", *Mid-Term Bangladesh Progress Report 2007.*

Bangladesh to achieve MDGs by 2015 have been described in a tabular form in Annex 1.

Though various reports depict some impressive statistical data of MDGs, it is perceived that there is a wide discrepancy between what has so far been achieved and what is to be targeted in different areas. This is because of the presence of controversial aspects of MDGs and other challenging issues considering the national context of Bangladesh. For example, achieving goal 1 (reducing hunger and poverty by half) depends on a number of factors. Generally, MDG 1 is measured with the 3 indicators ('percentage of poor people living below $1 a day', 'poverty gap ratio' and 'share of the poorest quintile in national consumption'). In Bangladesh, the poverty line has been measured in different ways (such as Cost of Basic Needs Methods and Household Income and Expenditure Survey) rather than following the PPP method suggested by the World Bank. This denotes that each country has its own flexible measurement rather than fixing certain indicators by the external designers. With these dimensions, it is estimated that country's actual poverty rate was 40 percent which is 1.7 percent less than the targeted rate of 41.7 percent. If the country continues to reduce the annual rate of poverty by 1.34 percent like the year 2005, it may reach its target by 2013.[91]

Based on this premise, it can be assumed that poverty has already been decreasing at a modest rate. Though, non-achievement in increasing growth rate and decreasing rapid population growth are the major stumbling blocks for the country to reach MDG 1. In this regard, World Bank 2005 report states that if the country's growth rate is around 4 percent, poverty might decline at a significant level.[92] In addition, Maqbul-E-Elahi envisages that the country requires GDP growth rate of more than 7 percent to achieve this goal.[93] Whereas, the country's current growth rate is only 2.9 percent. Perhaps, the targeted growth rate would be very challenging to achieve, as rapid population growth is fostering the number of ultra poor in the country. In this regard, the research of *Unnayan*

[91] Mid-Term Bangladesh Progress Report 2007, *op.cit.*
[92] The World Bank, "Attaining the Millennium Development Goals in Bangladesh: How Likely and What will  it take to Reduce Poverty, Child Mortality and Malnutrition, Gender Disparities and to Increase School Enrollment and Completion?", Human Development Unit, South Asia Region, 2005.
[93] Md. Maqbul-E-Elahi, "Oil and Gas Exploration in the Offshore (Part of Exclusive Economic Zone) Bangladesh: Prospects and Constrains, Paper presented at the Seminar on *Maritime Security of Bangladesh,* organised by BIISS, Dhaka, on 12 February, 2009.

*Onneshan*[94] predicts that the country will take another 81 years to eliminate poverty and 24 years to attain MDG 1.[95]

In MDG 1, it is also acknowledged that everybody has the fundamental rights to ensure their food security. Nevertheless, the price of food is rising and the poor are becoming unable to ensure their basic food. Therefore, the share of the poorest quintile in consumption is sharply decreasing though there is no standard data to measure this fact. On the contrary, the Gini index of urban inequality increased from 0.33 in 1990 to 0.44 in 2000 while the trend was identical (0.27 and 0.36 in the same periods) in rural areas.[96] Thus, targeting to reduce poverty by half within 2015, might not be possible to achieve due to certain realities including the presence of inequality in consumption, absence of pro-poor growth, income disparity, rich-poor gap, and inadequate initiatives to reach the benefits of economic growth to the poorest quintile.

Under Goal 2, achieving universal primary education, the basic right of children, is another important target in which the country has achieved tremendous progress. In 2005, the net enrollment in primary education was 87 percent which exceeded the targeted rate of 79.2 percent. It is anticipated that if the escalation continues, the country could reach its aim of 100 percent enrollment by 2012.[97] While primary enrollment rate is outstanding, widespread discrepancy is seen in secondary and tertiary education. In 2004, the net enrollment rate in primary education was 94 percent but the completion rate at this level was only 76 percent.[98] Though enrollment rate, so far, is on the way to attaining the goal, the completion rate of primary education is very unsatisfactory. Furthermore, the combined gross enrollment ratio in primary, secondary and tertiary education is only 56 percent.[99] Considering these gaps, it can be argued that there is a sharp decrease of overall education completion rate in the country.

Also, it is widespread in Bangladesh that the quality of education significantly varies in rural and urban areas. At the same time, the teacher-student ratio (1:59), teacher recruitment procedures (such as nepotism and favouritism), drop out trends of students and government allocation in primary

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[94] A Dhaka based think tank.

[95] Rashed Al Mahmud Titumir , "UNGA Informal Interactive Hearings on the Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developing Countries for the Decade 2001-2010", United Nations Head Quarters, New York, 22 June 2006.

[96] Rashed Al Mahmud Titumir and Jakir Hossain, "Bangladesh Case Study: Progress of MDG Implementation and Canada's Contribution", *Canadian Development Report*, 2005.

[97] Mid-Term Bangladesh Progress Report 2007, *op.cit.*

[98] The World Bank (WB) Report, "Development and the Next Generation", 2007.

[99] World Development Report and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), "Fighting Climate Change: Human Solidarity in a Divided World", Human Development Report, 2007/2008.

sector are very inadequate especially in the rural areas. In urban areas, the quality of education significantly differs between the upper class neighbourhood and the poor people, as the latter cannot afford the rising costs of schools. Considering the overall situation, World Bank Report (2005) asserts that perhaps the country might not exceed in increasing primary completion rates to 83-86 percent by 2015.

To achieve significant development, participation of mainstream women is an agreed goal of government. Thus, MDG 3 is crucial for the country as more than half of the population consist of women. Generally, progress is viewed in terms of girls enrolling in schools and involvement of women in employment and political sectors. The official report says that the country attained gender parity (50:50) in secondary education in 2005 due to encouraging numerous legal statuses of women. Moreover, the net enrollment ratio of boys and girls in primary school of the same year was 45:55 which showed more enrollment of girls than that of boys. However, the concern is that the ratio of gender parity in tertiary education is not satisfactory.

On the other hand, in the employment sector, women are now being involved in labour markets, non-agricultural sectors and various challenging occupations. According to Labour Force Survey 2003, the share of women in off farm activities is 59 percent which was only 41 percent in 1992.[100] Even in recent National Parliament Election 2008, participation of women is highly encouraging and a large number of them acquired high positions in national decision-making. Although contributions of women in different sectors are gradually increasing, discrimination against women is still prevalent in the country which is totally overlooked in MDGs. In a survey, it was found that 60 percent of women were tortured by their husbands especially for their dowry and 37 percent of women were physically abused during their pregnancy period.[101] Each year, about 200 women are murdered when parents fail to provide a dowry and physical assaults (such as beating, burning, kicking and dragging) by their husbands are very common scenarios in society.[102] These types of violence actually cause small to fatal physical and mental health problems of women including suicide, sexually transmitted diseases, mental depression and stress. Another dreadful part of Bangladeshi society is the sexual abuse of females who work outside home especially in the garment sectors. In a study, it is reported that 32 percent of working women are sexually abused and 50 percent have to suffer ill health

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[100] Mid-Term Bangladesh Progress Report 2007, *op.cit*

[101] ICCDDR,B, "Domestic Violence against Women in Bangladesh", *Health and Science Bulletin*, Vol. 4, No. 2, 2006 .

[102] Oxfam Australia, "The Winds of Change", *Oxfam News Quarterly*, George Street, Fitzroy Victoria, Australia, 2006, available at: http://www.oxfam.org.au/oxfamnews/pdf/march 2006.pdf, accessed on 20 July, 2009.

because of sexual violence which disrupted their working capacity.[103] Undoubtedly, violence against women, in a real sense, is a clear indication of human rights infringement. But, this major issue is not taken into consideration in MDGs programme.

Regarding Goal 4 and Goal 5, the country is gradually trying to achieve its targets of reducing infant and maternal mortality rate. At this stage, reduction of child mortality, maternal mortality and increase of immunisation coverage are becoming very rapid due to improvement of socio-economic conditions and effective family planning programmes. In case of infant mortality rate, the trend is decreasing. In 2006, the rate was 45 per thousand live births which was 9 percent ahead of the assigned target of that year. If the trend continues, the country might be able to meet its target of 31 per thousand live births by 2015.[104] On the contrary, due to rapid increase of annual immunisation coverage (e.g. 0.65 percent against the annual targeted rate of 2.6 percent), it is expected that the country is likely to achieve its target of 100 percent immunisation by 2012. Despite the declining trend of child mortality rate and rapid increase of child immunisation exposure, it is very challenging to attain the targets as child malnutrition of this country is highest throughout the world and more intense than any other developing country.[105] According to the World Bank Report (2005), around 10 to 18 percent of children aged between 5 to 6 years are extremely below weight and underdeveloped. Consequently, many children are dying of diarrheoa, cholera, malaria and other preventable diseases.

In case of maternal mortality rate, Bangladesh became successful to reduce 574 per 100,000 live births in 1991 to 290 in 2006. To meet the target by 2015, the country requires 147 per 100,000 live births. Though, at this stage, it is very difficult for the country to reach that goal because of ineffective health delivery system. As far as women are concerned, a significant number of deaths are taking place due to anemia, abortion, pregnancy related complexities and improper management during delivery. In 1990, 95 percent births occurred at home with the non professionals (e.g. friends and relatives) and rest of them took place in health centres with the trained birth attendants. Till now, births attended by skilled personnel are very low (20 percent in 2006) due to lack of awareness, traditional health beliefs, social discrimination and equity gap between the rich and the poor (22:1.5). Moreover, high absentee rates (75 percent) of doctors in sub-health centers and unavailability of drugs have made the quality of public

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[103] Naved, R., "A Situational Analysis of Violence against Women in South Asia". Paper commissioned by UNFPA CST Kathmandu for the Regional Workshop on *Parliamentary Advocacy for the Prevention of Violence against Women in South Asia*, United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA), Dhaka, 2003.

[104] Mid-Term Bangladesh Progress Report 2007, *op.cit.*

[105] The World Bank Report, 2005, *op.cit.*

health service very poor.[106] Although government took initiatives to improve the health situation, especially under Health and Population Sector Program (HPSP) and health financing, the initiatives are, however, challenged due to the frame-working of neo-liberal agenda (such as privatisation and cost recovery system) of the World Bank.[107] Thus, without effective institutional management, pro-poor service delivery and equity based health strategies, it would be difficult for the country to attain the goal of increasing the percentage of births by traditional health personnel to 50 percent by 2015.

Under MDG 6, combating Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) or Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) is one of the crucial targets of Bangladesh government, as it is gradually becoming a major public-health concern and important development threat to the country. Although the infection rates of South Asia and South-East Asian countries especially India, Thailand, Cambodia, and Myanmar are as elevated as 2-4 percent, Bangladesh, distinct from its neighbours, still has low infection rates of HIV. According to the UN AIDS Report, around 12,000 people were infected by HIV at the end of 2007.[108] Nevertheless, the country may face a vulnerable situation in the coming decades due to migration of high risk people in different neighbouring countries for occupational purposes. Besides, the region is becoming a growing hub of trafficking and smuggling.[109] Another worry for spreading HIV/AIDS in the country is the low contraceptive prevalence rate (58% in 2004) among the high risk groups especially among the injecting drug users, female sex workers and truck drivers. According to the National HIV Surveillance, the rate of HIV infection among street-based sex workers in the central part of the country is elevated in comparison with sex workers in other parts of South Asia.[110] Several risk issues such as huge commercial industries, lack of awareness, sexually transmitted diseases, absence of data and insufficient counselling services regarding the high risk groups have made the situation more extreme in achieving Goal 6.

In case of malaria, the country has achieved significant progress. In 2005, the malaria endemic rate dropped in 34 cases which was 42 per 100,000 in 2001. Though, the disease is highly prevalent in 13 districts among 64 districts. Regarding tuberculosis, Bangladesh has gained crucial advancement in combating the disease and its treatment. In 2005, 91 percent received the treatment compared to 84 percent in 2002. Even then, the country has a long way to go for achieving 100 percent successes in detecting and monitoring the spread of disease.

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[106] The World Bank Report 2007, *op.cit.*
[107] Rashed Al Mahmud Titumir  and Jakir Hossain, *op.cit*
[108] The World Bank Report 2007, *op.cit.*
[109] Atiur Rahman and Mahfuz Kabir, *op.cit.*
[110] World Health Organization (WHO) Report, 2003.

Under Goal 7, increasing environmental sustainability through effective programmes and policies is another target of Bangladesh government. For environmental sustainability, a country must have 25 percent of forest of its total land area. But, Bangladesh has only 13 percent of forest considering its total land areas. Except the *Sundarbans*, most of the country's lands are going to decimate because of deforestation. On the contrary, due to increase of population, energy consumption per head has declined. Also, gap between supply of and demand for energy resources is increasing sharply. It is projected that if Bangladesh wants to achieve the growth rate of more than 7 percent, it needs to attain the energy growth rate of more than 10.5 percent. As the country is highly dependent on imported energy, conceivably, it would be difficult to attain this goal.[111]

Enhancing the proportion of people with sustainable water and sanitation in rural and urban areas are other important targets under the same goal. According to the official report, 99.9 percent of urban people have access to safe drinking water.[112] However, this data raises the issue of statistical measurement of MDG while many people in urban slum areas are living with extreme deficiency of this basic facility. In rural areas, access to safe drinking water is generally ensured by increasing the number of tube wells. Yet, it is a great concern that a significant number of tube wells have arsenic contamination problems which increases the propensity of skin cancer.[113] The same is valid in case of sanitation as only 29 percent and 56 percent of rural and urban people respectively have improved sanitation facilities. Nevertheless, official data shows that the figures sharply leapt to 88 percent and 85 percent correspondingly in 2007 and the country is likely to achieve this target by 2010.[114] In spite of increasing the number of latrines, absence of proper investigation and monitoring raises the question of the quality of sanitation and other amenities. This is because, annually, a significant portion of people and children are suffering from water-borne diseases especially in the remote rural and urban slum areas.

Apart from these, improving the lives of urban slum people is another crucial target of MDG 7. Every year, due to rapid rural-urban migration, more than one million people become urban dwellers resulting in tiny slum city centres. From 1974 to 2005, the number of slums grew from 500 to 4,300, which is almost nine times greater than the previous times. Especially, Dhaka is now perceived as the biggest slum location numbering 4,966 which is comprised of 55 percent of total

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[111] Maqbul-E-Elahi, *op.cit*.

[112] Mid-Term Bangladesh Progress Report 2007, *op.cit.*

**[113]** One World South Asia (OWSA), "Bangladesh Local Filter to Combat Arsenic Tainted Water", 2008, available at: http://southasia.oneworld.net/Article/bangladesh-local-filter-to-combat-arsenic-tainted-water, accessed 17 July 2009.

[114] Mid-Term Bangladesh Progress Report 2007, *op.cit.*

urban dwellers.[115] Currently, only 36 percent of urban dwellers have safe accommodation. The rest of the urban poor live in slums and other temporary settlements where they are the victims of eviction and intense deprivation of basic facilities.

Goal 8, which addressed global partnership for growth, is a distinctive attribute of MDGs. The goal admits that the developed countries have shared responsibilities and obligations to the poor countries so that they can achieve the targets by 2015. To meet the challenge, Bangladesh is trying to collaborate with the partner organisations and developed countries through various projects and action oriented policies. The country is now facing major hurdles as donor supports have been reduced from the last couple of years. Since 1990, net flow of Overseas Development Aid (ODA) has been on a down ward trend and the country received only US$110 million in 2006 which remained US$1240 in 1990. Although developed countries are committed to support Bangladesh with equal partnership, fairer trading and proper plans, often these do not exist due to adverse economic conditions. For example, PRSP interlinked with MDGs is externally led policies structured by neo-liberal framework which portrays a significant convergence of interests of international organisations, curtailing a country's specific goals.[116] This donor led formula has not become an effective strategy for the country's poverty reduction. Another case in point is the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) implemented by IMF and World Bank which was detrimental and a template for the country's industrial sectors as it solely had benefited the donor countries.[117] In spite of these barriers, noteworthy development is attained in reducing debt service. But unemployment rates among the young educated male (aged 25 to 29) and female (15 to 24 years) are still considered as a challenge for the country as the rate is gradually increasing (3 percent in 1990 to 13 percent in 2003). In terms of information technology, telephone dissemination increased considerably in the country but per head computer and internet usage is still very low especially in the rural areas. Therefore, the target for making digital Bangladesh by 2021 is a challenge for the government as it depends on lots of issues such as manpower, proper plans and sustainable management systems.

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[115]Centre for Urban Studies (CUS), MEASURE Evaluation, National Institute of Population Research and Training (NIPORT), "Slums of Urban Bangladesh: Mapping and Census 2005" Dhaka, Bangladesh and Chapel Hill, USA, 2006. Also see, Khan Haider, "Challenges for Sustainable Development: Rapid Urbanization, Poverty and Capabilities in Bangladesh", *Munich Personal RePEc Archive (MPRA),* Paper No. 9290, Denver, USA, 2008.

[116] Rashed Al Mahmud Titumir  and Jakir Hossain, *op.cit*

[117] Toufique Ali Kazi, "Impact of Structural Adjustment Policies on the Environment in Bangladesh", Research Paper, 2000, available at: www.saprin.org/bangladesh/research/ban_environment.pdf, accessed on 20 July 2009.

Needless to say, MDGs show a road map to ensure basic rights of poor people in the country. Of the eight MDGs, the country has already attained the goal relating to gender equality in primary and secondary education and nearly achieved the target of enrollment of children in the same. For the rest of the MDGs, the government is very optimistic to accomplish its targets within the stipulated timeframes. But, despite the impressive results and likelihood of attaining the targets in these areas, there are still some areas where the statistical measurement has become flawed due to lack of significant structural changes. Thus, to make the MDGs an achievement, the country needs to address many internal and external challenges including unequal partnership with the donors, absence of good governance, slow pace of economic development, uneven growth in urban and rural areas, food insecurity, and absence of participation of poor people. Also, it is now apparent that without addressing the controversial issues and sector wise interventions (for example, increasing the immunisation coverage, raising awareness in HIV/AIDS, decreasing student–teacher ratios and improving the quality of services to reduce maternal mortality), it is unlikely that the country will achieve MDGs within a definite timeframe.

## 6. CONCLUSION

To sum up, it can be argued that MDGs outline a number of strategies particularly in socio-economic sectors for the developing countries based on equity, liberty, unity and partnership. But the assumptions that the international organisations presume have become unrealistic rather than pragmatic as there are sharp differences in what MDGs were supposed to achieve and what they would achieve within precise time frames. Also, the goals have various limitations which lead to the process of capitalist modernity and perpetuate a new form of exploitation, deprivation and intervention. Therefore, their attendant effects are evident in the implementation procedures in many of the developing countries including Bangladesh. Analysing the country's specific concerns in this paper, it can be argued that each country has its distinct fundamental needs which vary from culture to culture and society to society. Thus, success largely depends on how donors and international agencies address people's problems and make appropriate design for local actions using local knowledge and expertise. At the same time, it is significant to consider that MDGs at times put forth some dubious information regarding the development of poor countries because of structural problems of the programme, absence of appropriate methods to monitor and inaccurate prediction through erroneous statistical indices. Also, the achievements of MDGs are measured without addressing other issues such as the participation of poor people, the gap between the rich and the poor, quality of services and other political, social and cultural circumstances which are also evident in Bangladesh. Thus, MDGs may prove an important tool for Bangladesh or any other Least Developing Country if the targets are set up considering the gaps from local context. Otherwise, the goals will not help to take a proper shape for sustainable development of the poor countries.

**Annex 1: Status of MDGs in Bangladesh**

| Goals | Targets of Bangladesh | Indicators | Base Year (1991-1992) | 2000-2002 | Present Status (2004-2005) | Target for 2015 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Goal 1 Between 1990 and 2015, making halve the proportion of people whose income is less than US $1 per day and who suffer from hunger | 1.decrease percentage of people whose income is below US$1 per day (PPP) from 58.8% in 1991 to 29.4% by 2015 | 1.percentage of people below US$1 per day | 58.8% | 49.6% | 40% | 29% |
| | | 2. poverty gap ratio | 17.2 | 12.9 | 9 | 8 |
| | | 3. share of the poorest quintile in national income | 6.5% | 9% | 5.3% | - |
| | 2. decrease percentage of people with acute poverty from 28% in 1991 to 14% by 2015 | 4. percentage of people with minimum dietary energy consumption (188 kcl) | 28% | 20% | - | 14% |
| | | 5. frequency of underweight children age at below 5 | 67% | 51% | 48% | 33% |
| Goal 2 Achieve universal primary schooling of children irrespective of gender by 2015 | 3.enhance net enrolment rate from 73.7% in 1992 to 100% by 2015 and decrease primary school dropout rates from 38% in1994 to 0% by 2015 | 6. net enrolment rate in primary schooling | 73.7% | 82.7% | 87% | 100% |
| | | 7. primary school completion rate | 43% | - | 53% | 100% |
| | | 8. adult (15+) Literacy Rate | 37% | 39% | 54% (2006) | 100% |
| Goal 3 Remove gender disparity and empower women by 2015 | 4. eliminate gender inequality in primary, | 9. proportion of girls and boys in primary, | 55:45 34:66 25:75 | 48:52 52:48 36.64 | 53:47 50:50 36:64 | 50:50 50:50 50:50 |

| | secondary and all stages in education sectors by 2015 | secondary and tertiary education | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 10. ratio of literate male and female aged 15-14 years old | 42:58 | 46:54 | | 50:50 |
| | | 11. involvement of women in wage employment in non agricultural sectors | 41% | | 59% (2003) | |
| | | 12.percentage of seats for women in national parliament | 10.3% | | 14.8% (2006) | |
| Goal 4 Reduce child mortality by two thirds between 1990 and 2015 | 5. Gradual decrease of child mortality (under 5) rate from 151 deaths per thousand live births in 1990 to 50 by 2015 | 13. under 5 mortality rate(deaths per 1000 live births) | 151 | 82 | 77 | 50 |
| | | 14. infant mortality rate(deaths per 1000 live births) | 94 | 56 | 54 | 31 |
| | | 15. proportion of immunization of 1 year-old children in case of measles | 54% | 69% | 87% (2006) | 100% |
| Goal 5 reduce maternal mortality ratio by three quarters between 1990 and 2015 | 6. improve maternal mortality rate (from 574 deaths per 1000 live birth in 1990 to 143 by 2015) | 16. maternal mortality rate (deaths per 1000 live births) | 574 | 320-400 | 290 (2006) | 147 |
| | | 17. percentage | 5% | 12% | 20% (2006) | 50% |

| | | of birth attendant by skilled personnel | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Goal 6 Halt the spread of HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases by 2015 | 7.Combat HIV/AIDS by 2015 | 18.HIV prevalence rate among the pregnant women aged 15-24 | n/a | - | - | - |
| | | 19. rate of condom use among female sex workers, rickshaw puller, and truck drivers | | 24%, 2%, 25% | | |
| | | 20. CPR rate | 40% | | 58% (2004) | |
| | 8. decrease the incidence of deaths by 50% from malaria and other diseases by 2015 | 21. death rate of malaria per 100,000 people | | | 0.35 | |
| | | 22. achievement rate of malaria treatment | n/a | | | |
| | | 23. death rate of tuberculosis per 100,000 people | | | 47 | |
| | | 24. success rate of tuberculosis treatment under DOTS | 84 | | 91 | 100 |
| Goal 7 Ensure environmental sustainability | 9.Incorporate sustainable development principles into country programs and policies | 25.percentage of land areas surrounded by forest | 9% | 10.2% | 13% (2006) | 20% |
| | | 26.percentag | | | 2% | |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | e of area restored to maintain biological diversity | | | (2006) | |
| | | 27. total energy use(kilogram oil equivalent) per US$1000 GDP (PPP) | 123.18 | 92.36 | | |
| | | 28. CO2 emissions per capita metric tons | 0.1 | | 0.3 (2006) | |
| | | 29. percentage of people using solid fuels | | | 88% (2006) | |
| | 10.making halve the percentage of population by 2015 without sustainable facilities to pure drinking water and improved sanitation | 30.percentage of people with sustainable access to water rural: urban | | 72%:82% | 79%:99.9% (2006) | 100%:100% |
| | | 31.percentage of people with access to basic sanitation rural: urban | 15%:56% | 29%:56% | 84%:87% (2007) | |
| | 11. improve the lives of 100 million urban people who live in slum areas by 2020 | 32.percentage of urban households with their own accommodation and land | | 26%: 18% | | 55.5%:85.5% |
| Goal 8 Improve a global | 12. Developing a non | 33. net ODA received | 1240 | | 110 (2006) | |

| partnership for overall development | discriminatory economic system | (m/US)/ Bangladesh | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 13-14 addressing the needs of least developing, land locked and small island countries | 34 - 37 percentage of bilateral ODA received by small island and land locked countries | n/a | | | |
| | | 38 - 43 percentage of developed countries import from developing countries, average tariffs imposed by them on particular items, percentage of ODA to enhance trade capacity, debt relief and other related targets | n/a | | | |
| | 15. dealing the debt problems with national and international measures to make the debt crisis endurable | 44. debt service as percentage of exporting goods | 21% (1990) | | 8.8% | |
| | 16. develop and execute policies with the developing countries for youth | 45. rate of unemployment among 15-25 aged people | 3% (1990) | 8% | | |
| | | 46. percentage | n/a | | | |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 17.coopertion with the pharmaceutical companies for getting accessibilities of drugs<br><br>18.proper utilization of benefits regarding new information and communication technologies | of people with available drug access | | | | |
| | | 47a.personal users in computer per 100 people | | 0.34 | | |
| | | 47b. Internet users per 100 people | | 0.15 | 3 | |
| | | 48. telephone access per 100 people | | 1.32 | 8 | |

Source: Compiled from Government of Bangladesh (GOB) and United Nations (UN); "Millennium Development Goals: Bangladesh Progress Report", 2005; The World Bank (WB) Report, "Development and the Next Generation", 2007; World Development Report and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), "Fighting Climate Change: Human Solidarity in a Divided World", Human Development Report, 2007/2008; and Mid-Term Bangladesh Progress Report 2007.

*Syeda Rozana Rashid*

# OVERSEAS LABOUR MIGRATION AND SOCIAL MOBILITY: STRATEGISING INFORMAL SOCIAL SECURITY BY RURAL BANGLADESHIS

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## Abstract

The possibilities of economic prosperity, upward mobility and status improvement are some of the most powerful images that shape the desires and expectations of overseas labour migration of Bangladeshis. In a development perspective, investment of remittances for building houses, boosting kinship ties and status seeking may appear as unproductive and irrational. But people in Bangladesh have a different logic. In a situation where the state is unable to provide formal insurance and guarantees of wellbeing, people always feel the need to secure their position within the society via their investment in social capital. The absence of well-functioning capital and formal credit facilities for poor people creates strong pressures for overseas migration as a strategy to build informal social net. The paper suggests that the extent to which overseas migration can be a route to self-sustaining progress for people and the state depends largely on an efficient infrastructure, and well designed and carefully implemented formal protection and insurances.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, increased attention has been paid to labour migration issues in Bangladesh owing to a phenomenal growth of migrants and their remittances. Development practitioners calculate the contribution of labour migration in terms of creation of employment and the role of remittances in maintaining the balance of payments and foreign currency reserves. They often consider spending remittances for household consumption, life-cycle events, and upward mobility as 'unproductive'. There is a dearth of research, however, to understand why it is important for migrants to use their remittances in 'unproductive' sectors. Indeed, the challenges migrants face in transforming their economic capital into social status and social security are often overlooked by the researchers who focus on the real difficulties in investment of migrants' remittances for development.

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It is in this context that this paper examines the contribution of overseas labour migration through the lens of social mobility and informal security. It analyses the expectations of upward social mobility and higher status of the migrant families, who are often without any form of social security or insurance from the state or private sector. It is argued in this paper that remittances are a form of economic capital, but this alone is not enough to improve social position. In order to be socially mobile, migrants display their capacity to spend. They use remittances in building a house, marriage ceremonies, buying animals for sacrifice, leasing and buying land, all of which can be thought of generating symbolic capital. Some people try to strengthen their position by offering others patronage, paying large donations for mosques or construction of roads, and helping the poor in various ways. In other words, successful migrant families in the villages have accrued various forms of capital and mobilised these for upward social mobility.

This paper has its origin in a D.Phil study 'Livelihood and Social Protection in International Labour Migration: A Case Study of Bangladesh.'[118] Data and information used in this paper were collected through a year's ethnographic research in two migration-intensive villages in greater Comilla region.

The paper is organised into six sections including the introduction. It begins with a brief overview of labour migration from Bangladesh which is followed by a section on analytical framework. The fourth section analyses how migration has become a crucial means for households to achieve upward mobility and status. The section discusses how the economic capital earned in migration is converted into symbolic capital in order to claim local status. The fifth section discusses how connections to Bidesh (Foreign) constitute an important form of cultural capital for the migrants and their households in their attempt to move up the social ladder. Finally, the paper ends with a brief conclusion and recommendations.

## 2. OVERSEAS LABOUR MIGRATION IN BANGLADESH

Temporary or short-term international labour migration[119] of Bangladeshis to the Gulf and South-East Asia began in the 1970s. According to an estimate of

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[118] The study was conducted by the author during 2004-2008 as part of her Ph. D at the Sussex Centre for Migration Research, University of Sussex, UK.

[119] A temporary labour migrant is defined by the 1990 UN Convention as a person, who is employed or was employed or will be employed in a country of which s/he is not a citizen. Short-term or temporary labour migrants can be differentiated from permanent or other types of migrants by two distinct characteristics:

a) short-term migrants stay in the country of employment in specific job contracts for short duration which may be subject to renewal even for a number of times and b) short-term migrants are obliged to return to the country of origin upon completion of their contracts.

Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training of the Government of Bangladesh, more than 6.5 million Bangladeshis have migrated in short term contract as labour from 1976 to 2008. The United Arab Emirates (UAE), Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Iraq, Libya, Bahrain, Oman, Lebanon and Singapore are the most common destinations. Statistically, 48 percent of Bangladeshi migrants are employed in unskilled jobs, while another 48 percent are engaged in various semi-skilled and skilled jobs as manufacturing or garments workers, drivers, machine operators, carpenters, tailors, masons and so on. Doctors, nurses, engineers and teachers are regarded as professionals who comprise only 4 percent of the total labour migrants. It is true that jobs classified as '3D' (Dirty, Dangerous and Demanding) are almost always reserved for migrant workers in the Gulf and other Asian countries.[120]

Compared to the Gulf and South-East Asia, few Bangladeshis migrate to Europe, North America and Australia with work visas, although over the last few decades many Bangladeshis have migrated to the western countries as students and chose to remain there by changing their immigration status. Based on an educated guess, Siddiqui[121] estimates that around 1,178,400 Bangladeshis live in western countries as citizens. Among the 500,000 Bangladeshis living in the USA, 90 percent are professionals.[122] Since 1990s, Bangladeshis are entering the US under 'Opportunity Visa' (OP-1) and Diversity Visa (DV-1). The majority of those who have migrated to the US under these visa schemes are relatively less educated (most have secondary education) and found jobs in gas stations, restaurants, stores, security companies and taxi services.[123] Current migration to the UK is mainly for family reunification with those who are already there or for marriage. As estimated by Siddiqui[124], nearly 500,000 Bangladeshis live in the UK[125], more than two-thirds of whom work in the catering, retailing and restaurant sectors. Over the last few years, around 50,000 Bangladeshis have also migrated to Australia, New Zealand and Canada as students, professionals and skilled migrants.[126] Relatively rich and well educated Bangladeshis go to these countries to study at Universities. Unlike migration to the Gulf and South-East

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[120] See R. Appleyard. (ed.) *Emigration Dynamics in Developing Countries II: South Asia*, Ashgate, England 1998.

[121] T. Siddiqui, *Institutionalising Diaspora Linkage: The Emigrant Bangladeshis in UK and USA,* Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment, Government of Bangladesh and International Organization for Migration (IOM), Dhaka, 2004, p. 15.

[122] *Ibid.*, p. 15.

[123] *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

[124] *Ibid*., p.15.

[125] British official sources put this figure at 300,000.

[126] Available at: http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/immigrate/skilled/apply-who.asp accessed on May 2008.

Asian countries, these developed countries are less likely to draw unskilled people from the rural areas of Bangladesh.

Bangladeshis, who go abroad for skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled jobs mostly belong to rural low-income households with very little or no land of their own. They are not marginalised or the poorest of the poor[127] but possess very limited material resources to bear the cost of migration. Many of them are prepared to gamble their last resort by selling land or borrowing money from relatives or moneylenders for the opportunity to migrate, which may lead to social mobility through accumulation of economic capital.

## 3. AN ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

### Social Mobility

Social mobility - that is the movement of people, households and groups between different positions within the system of social stratification of the society - is a well-researched and established phenomenon.[128] The vast literature on the subject is inextricably entangled with wider discussions of wealth, race, ability, hard work, education, gender, culture and power. Most sociological attention has focused on intergenerational mobility which refers to changes in social status of a person, family or group over generations. In contrast intra-generational mobility refers to the level of upward or downward mobility of a person, family or group in its lifetime. Intra-generational mobility consists of movement up and down the stratification system by members of a single generation. Intra-generational mobility is often assessed in absolute or relative terms. Absolute mobility means that living standards are increasing in absolute terms, whereas relative mobility refers to the degree to which individuals move up or down compared to others in their cohort. Upward social mobility aspects of migrant households in Bangladesh will be discussed in this paper mostly within the above framework of intra-generational and relative aspects. The paper

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[127] The term 'poorest of the poor' refers to the persons who have the lowest per capita income. It also may include persons who even do not possess a homestead or who have lost all their savings and sources of earning.

[128] See for example, D. A. Sorokin, "Social and Cultural Mobility", in D. Grusky (ed.) *Social Stratification: Class, Race and Gender in Sociological Perspective*, Social Inequality Series, West View Press, Boulder,1994; A. Beteille, *Caste, Class and Power: Changing Patterns of Stratification in a Tanjore Village,* University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1965; D. Bertaux and P. Thompson, (eds.) *Pathways to Social Class: A Qualitative Approach to Social Mobility*, Oxford University Press, London, 1997; C. Osella and F. Osella, *Social Mobility in Kerala: Modernity and Identity in Conflict*, Pluto Press, London, Sterling, Virginia, 2000 ; and D. B. Grusky, *Social Stratification: Class, Race and Gender in Sociological Perspective*, West View Press, Boulder, 2001.

analyses the causes and consequences of the migrants' endeavours to achieve an upper social position than what they had before migration.

Working overseas as a means of radically enhancing one's own, and one's family's status is not unusual. Filippo and Caroline Osella[129] make a case for migration to the Gulf from Kerala, stating that it offers rapid and vast accumulation of capital by village standards, helping returnees forge a new identity, relations, and status through conspicuous consumption. Lefebvre[130], describing the situation in two villages in Punjab, Pakistan, concludes that migration to the Gulf has led to the strengthening of traditional customs and kinship ties instead of transforming them. In discussing the impact of migration on the development of Mirpur, Pakistan, Ballard[131] argues that while trans-national connections have channelled large amounts of capital into the pockets of farmers, the latter could not invest this in agriculture due to the lack of infrastructure. Migrants in Mirpur instead invested their money in the construction of enormous houses. Mills[132] informs us about Thai migrant women, whose idea of mobility is related to acquiring the lifestyle of the urban middle classes. In case of Bangladesh, Gardner[133] demonstrates that in Sylhet, involvement in international migration has led to increased economic and social differentiation. Those who had access to the resource of migration were able to transform their economic circumstances and use it to transform themselves into *Bhalamanush* (a good person), thus setting themselves apart from those who did not have such access.

This paper considers how rural Bangladeshis construct migration as means to earn capital, social status and success. In doing so, Bourdieu's[134] ideas of economic, cultural and symbolic capital and the distinction these create in 'social space' have been borrowed. To Bourdieu[135], it is the possession, use and

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[129] F. Osella and C. Osella, 1999, "From Transience to Immanence: Consumption, Life-Cycle and Social Mobility in Kerala, South India", *Modern Asian Studies*. Vol. 33, No. 4, pp. 989-1020.

[130] A. Lefebvre, *Kinship, Honour and Money in Rural Pakistan*, Curzon, Richmond Surrey 1999, pp. 264-67.

[131] R. Ballard, **"**A Case of Capital-Rich Under-Development: The Paradoxical Consequences of Successful Transnational Entrepreneurship from Mirpur", in F Osella and Gardner K., (eds.) *Migration, Modernity and Social Transformation in South Asia,* Contributions to Indian Sociology Occasional Studies 11, Thousand Oaks/Sage, New Delhi, London, 2003, p. 54.

[132] M. B. Mills, "*Engendering Discourses of Displacement Contesting Mobility and Marginality in Rural Thailand",* Ethnography, Vol. 6, No. 3, 2005, pp. 385-419.

[133] K. Gardner, *Global Migrants, Local Lives: Travel and Transformation in Rural Bangladesh*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1995, p.271.

[134] P. Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, Routledge, Cambridge, New York, London, 1986.

[135] *Ibid*., p. 114.

conversion of economic and cultural capital which determine people's status within the society. According to Bourdieu[136], society incorporates "symbolic goods, especially those regarded as the attributes of excellence, […as] the ideal weapon in strategies of distinction". He emphasizes the dominance of cultural capital by stating that "differences in cultural capital mark the differences between the classes".[137] Bourdieu expands these ideas in the context of French upper and middle class. Yet, these are found to be useful in analysing low-income households' social mobility through migration.

### Informal Social Security

Another concept which drives this paper is informal social security. Studies conducted in Sub-Saharan Africa and South and South-East Asian countries suggest that most households in low-income countries deal with economic hardships through informal insurance, arrangements arising between individuals and communities on a personalised basis, rather than through markets or states.[138] Drawing down savings, engaging in reciprocal gift exchange, buying and selling physical assets, and diversifying income-generating activities are some of the common strategies to build informal social safety net.

Perhaps, the most comprehensive analysis of informal social security in rural Bangladesh is provided by Geoffrey Wood. As he shows, like many other of the world's poorest countries, Bangladesh lacks an efficient government and/or pervasive formal labour market, both of which are preconditions for providing welfare to its citizens.[139] Poor governance and an inefficient market, Wood[140] argues, have led to the creation of an informal security regime which reflects a set of conditions, where people have to rely heavily upon community and family

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[136] *Ibid.,* p. 66.

[137] *Ibid.*, p. 69.

[138] See, H. Alderman and C. Paxson, "Do the Poor Insure? A Synthesis of the Literature on Risk Sharing Institutions in Developing Countries," in *Economics in a Changing World: Proceedings of the Tenth World Congress of the International Economics Association*, MacMillan Press, Moscow/London, 1994; T. Besley, "Non-Market Institutions for Credit and Risk-Sharing in Low-Income Countries," *Journal of Economic Perspectives,* Vol. 9, No. 3, pp. 115 – 127, 1995; J. Morduch,. "Between the Market and State: Can Informal Insurance Patch the Safety Net", *WDR on Poverty and Development 2000/2001*, 1999; L. Haddad and M. Zeller, "How Can Safety Nets do more with Less? General Issues with Some Evidence from Southern Africa," *FCND Discussion Paper 16*, IFPRI, Washington, DC. 1996.

[139] G. Wood, "Informal Security Regimes: The Strengths of Relationship", in I. Gough *et al. Insecurity and Welfare Regimes in Asia, African and Latin America*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2004, p. 49.

[140] G. Wood, "Poverty, Capabilities and Perverse Social Capital: The Antidote to Sen and Putnam?", in I. A. Khan and J. Seeley (eds.), *Making a Living: The Livelihoods of the Rural Poor in Bangladesh*, University Press Limited (UPL), Dhaka, 2005, p. 10.

relationships of various kinds as they cannot fulfil their needs from state or market. The ideas and practices regarding household development of labour migrants in rural Bangladesh are heavily reliant on this idea of building an informal social security.

### Social Mobility, Informal Security and Labour Migration

The absence of well-functioning capital and formal credit facilities for poor people creates strong pressures for overseas migration as a strategy of capital accumulation. In the event of failing economic conditions, and a lack of productive activities to bring in sufficient income, overseas migration appears as a mechanism by which poorer households self-insure against local livelihood risks. However, an imperfect market and poor governance has created conditions that encourage families to reinvest in consumption and real property rather than in production. People undertake migration more as a means of controlling risk of uncertainty and poverty than of increasing productivity. Migrants are reluctant to invest their accumulated capital into business or agricultural productivities, because unlike wealthy countries, there is no insurance coverage against a poor harvest or in business. More crucially, the funds that are required to cover any loss incurred in business or agriculture may also be difficult to borrow because the household lacks collateral to qualify for a loan. It is not surprising, therefore, that successful migrants prefer to invest their money in building houses, buying land and strengthening their position within the kinship and the society, which they consider not only a culturally viable means to seek social status but also as a great source of informal security and protection.

## 4. HOUSEHOLD MOBILITY, STATUS AND SUCCESS IN LOCAL PERCEPTION

In rural Bangladesh, households experience upward, downward or cyclical mobility depending on their asset base, their human capacities, the relations of surplus appropriation in which they participate, and the hazards of nature, demography and the market.[141] Van Schendel[142] has studied all these issues in detail and demonstrated that while there is a trend of 'downward aggregate shifting of the peasantry as a whole, [there was] increasing differentiation of peasant households and household mobility'. Despite considerable economic differentiation within farming households in Bangladesh, there are certain degrees of mobility between these groups.[143] First, upward mobility to the point of 'depeasantisation' took place after decolonisation, since the village elites for

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[141] See A. Abdullah (ed.), *Modernisation at Bay: Structure and Change in Bangladesh*, BIDS Studies in Development, University Press Limited (UPL), Dhaka, 1991, p. 123.

[142] W. Van Schendel W, *Peasant Mobility: The Odds of Life in Rural Bangladesh*, Van Gorcum, Assen, 1981, p. 287.

[143] *Ibid.*, pp. 263-266.

the first time got a chance to send household members into the army and state bureaucracy.[144] In addition to this, some new occupational groups have emerged in the villages including labour migrants, intermediaries, agricultural service providers such as pump-owners or tractor-owners, fertiliser traders and local politicians, all of whom maintain agricultural activities at the subsistence level, yet are capable of exerting considerable social and political power over the marginalised poor.[145]

Overseas labour migration is identified as one of the best possible options for upward mobility of poorer households in rural Bangladesh.[146] The author was told by many people in the villages that migration is 'for savings and prosperity' (*Aai-Unnotir jonno Bidesh kori*). The word *Unnoti* (success) has a wider meaning in the context of Bangladesh. *Unnoti* means more than the process of earning and saving money. Villagers use the word to indicate life, success and status, which involves accumulation of economic, social and cultural capital with the aim to attain freedom from the control and dominance of patrons and to gain the ability to exert power and influence over others. The definition of 'success' varies from person to person. In general, migrants who remit a sizable amount of cash for land purchase, household development and consumption are considered to be successful. At the household level, 'success' implies economic progress and its conversion into symbols of prestige, thereby gaining social recognition and status from others.

*Unnoti* is sometimes thus synonymous with material progress. For many poor households, remittances now constitute a major source of income, insurance and capital accumulation. However, to what extent this can lead to a better status depends on migrants' ability to transform their financial resources into symbolic capital, which implies 'the acquisition of a reputation for competence and an image of respectability and honourability.'[147] This could result in the building of new houses,[148] buying of land or other displays of familial wealth through spending on social functions such as weddings[149] and other rituals.[150] Some of the

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[144] *Ibid.,* pp. 263-266.

[145] See K. A. Toufique and C. Turton, (eds.), *Hands not Land: How Livelihoods are Changing in Rural Bangladesh*, Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS), Dhaka 2002; K. Westergaard and A. Hossain, *Boringram Revisited: Persistent Power Structure and Agricultural Growth in a Bangladeshi Village*, University Press Limited (UPL), Dhaka, 2005.

[146] Abdullah *op. cit.,* p. 125.

[147] Bourdieu *op. cit*., p. 291.

[148] Ballard *op. cit.,* p. 32.

[149] T. Siddiqui, *Transcending Boundaries: Labour Migration of Women from Bangladesh*, University Press Limited (UPL), Dhaka, 2001, p. 153.

[150] See F. Osella and C. Osella, 'Migration and the Commoditisation of Ritual: Sacrifice, Spectacle and Contestations in Kerala, India', F. Osella and K. Gardner (eds.) *Migration, Modernity and Social Transformation in South Asia,* Contributions to

most important ways migrants in the study villages convert their accumulated economic capital into symbolic capital are discussed as follows.

### *Pacca Ghor (Brick Building)*

This study's analysis of migrants' success, 'house' appears as an important focus because 'brick buildings' or *Pacca ghor* have become an important sign of successful migration in many migrant villages in Bangladesh. The trend of making *pacca* houses by migrants in rural Bangladesh has increased to such an extent that people readily identify migrant villages by the high number of such houses.

Soon after the repayment of debt, migrants invest in the renovation or building of a new house. Houses built by the migrants in the study villages are not as enormous as those made by the expatriates in Sylhet.[151] Most of the brick houses in the study villages possess the following features: a one-storied building with a higher concrete floor, brick walls and corrugated iron at the top. A typical tin-shed brick house costs Tk.500,000 - 700,000. In most cases, migrants send payments over time as the non-migrant members of the household erect the house. Construction materials, especially sand and bricks are brought in during the monsoon by large motor boats which carry them directly to the premises of the house. However, it is not until the dry season that the construction work begins. Migrants usually hire local labourers for the construction work. This provides migrants with an additional opportunity to offer patronage. It takes a few months to complete a three/four-room house depending on the inflow of remittances.

By building houses, migrants show success in both ways - they can publicly display their economic capital and transform this into symbolic capital.[152] The value and the meaning these houses represent have to be understood in the local context. In a society where ninety percent of houses are made of bamboo and corrugated iron, brick buildings represent the owner's ability to consume better. However, it would be naive to consider a 'pacca house' only as a status symbol. In a flood and cyclone-prone country like Bangladesh, a pacca house provides residents with comfort and security. Some migrants also rent out their newly built houses to ensure an extra source of earning for the household. Many migrant families justify renovation and construction of new houses or rooms as

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Indian Sociology Occasional Studies 11, Thousand Oaks/Sage Publication, New Delhi, London, 2003, pp. 109-140.

[151] See Gardner, K. and Z. Ahmed, "Place, Social Protection and Migration in Bangladesh: A Londoni Village in Biswanath," *Working Paper T18*, Development Research Centre for Migration, Globalisation and Poverty, University of Sussex, UK, 2006, p. 10.

[152] See F. Osella and C. Osella, 1999, *op.cit.,* p. 16.

essential to attract prospective brides and grooms for their eligible sons and daughters.

### Buying Land, Buying Status

The next thing to do for a migrant after debt payment, marriage of daughters and house building, is buying land. Indeed, in migration-intensive areas, overseas migrants constitute one of the main buyers of land. Before the 1980s, there was no price difference between cultivable land and a homestead in the study villages, whereas at present a homestead is 10 times costlier than arable land. The author was told that not many people in the villages had the ability to buy land at that time and hence the price was very low. The price of land has increased primarily as a result of the construction of the tarmac road, and the increase in the flow of cash in the area through remittances.

In reality, a significant portion of the current land transactions is occurring between would-be or failed migrants and successful migrants. Whilst would-be migrants sell their land to collect money for a visa and ticket, failed migrants sell their land to pay off loans and a successful migrant buys the land to strengthen his position. Similar trend can be observed among Gulf migrants in Kerala, India,[153] Sri Lanka[154] and Pakistan[155].

Migrants belonging to the landless and functionally landless families usually buy cultivable land. Those who already own a few *Kani*[156] of agricultural land want to invest in habitable land. The price of land depends on the location and quality. Some land is too low lying to be used for cultivation and are only suitable for fish farming. This land costs Tk. 20,000 to 40,000 (£150-£300) per 1/3 acre. A piece of higher land of the same size, adjacent to the concrete road, costs Tk.1,000,000 (£7400) as it is easily accessible and ideal for building house or industry.

Some migrants have also bought land in nearby town or the outskirts of Dhaka. In reality, these migrants who are proud of having a 'reference point' in Dhaka acquire only a lower middle class status in relation to urban social stratification. However, given the huge disparities in village and urban middle class structure and standard of living, maintaining even a lower-middle class status by the rural people in Dhaka is considered by the villagers as a great step forward.

This research suggests that there are economic, social and cultural reasons for buying land. First, migrants consider land purchasing as the safest investment

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[153] F. Osella and C. Osella 2000, *op. cit.,* p. 146-150.

[154] M. R. Gamburd, *The Kitchen Spoon's Handle: Transnationalism and Sri Lanka's Migrant Housemaid*: Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 2000, pp. 169-170.

[155] Ballard *op. cit*., Lefebvre *op. cit*., p. 204.

[156] 1 *Kani*= .33 Acre.

given the lack of viable avenues of investment.[157] Land or *jomi* is a vitally important term to someone living in a village in Bangladesh. It not only means the physical space on which people build their houses, but more importantly, also indicates the space where they grow their crops and make their living. Another major reason behind investing in land is that land prices in Bangladesh show faster growth than bank interest rates, as is the case with many other migrant receiving communities in South Asia.[158] Table-1 shows that the land prices in the study area have increased almost thirty times over a period of forty years. This rate is three times higher than that in a non-migrant area in Comilla. Despite its low return from sharecropping, leasing, or mortgaging, land has always a higher resale value than other material property such as houses or agricultural equipments. This makes land work as insurance for bad days. The author came across a number of households who have sold the land they had bought after the first migration in order to pay off a loan after having failed in a second migration.

**Table 1***: Progressive Increase of Cost of Land in Daudkandi, Comilla*

| Period | Cultivable Land (.3 Acre) | Habitable Land (.3 Acre) |
|--------|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1960s | Tk. 3,000 | Tk. 3,000 |
| 1980s | Tk. 15,000 | Tk. 15,000 |
| 2000s | Tk. 80,000-100,000 | Tk. 7,000,00-1,000,000 |

*Source: Based on the data collected by the author from the villagers during fieldwork*

The economic importance of land has made it a key instrument of social control.[159] It has been used traditionally as an instrument to exert political control, as well as to gain prestige and patronage in rural Bengal[160] and has thereby obtained considerable symbolic value. The root of this may be traced back to the history of unequal distribution of land over the last two thousand years when the feudal lords, Sultans, Mughals and the British ruled Bengal.[161]

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[157] See T. Siddiqui and C. R. Abrar, "Migrant Workers' Remittances and Micro Finance in Bangladesh", *Working Paper,* No. 38, International Labour Organization, Geneva, 2003, p. 48.

[158] See for example, F. Osella and C. Osella, 2000, *op. cit*., p. 146.

[159] See for example, A. Chowdhury, *A Bangladeshi Village: A Study of Social Stratification*, Centre for Social Studies, Dhaka, 1979; A. Rahman, *Peasants and Classes: A Study in Differentiation in Bangladesh*, Zed Books, London/New Jersey, 1986; and Gardner 1995, *op. cit.,* p. 72-75.

[160] S. Bose, 'Peasant Labour and Colonial Capital: Rural Bengal since 1770', *The New Cambridge History of India,* Vol. 3, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993.

[161] T. Mukherjee, "The Co-ordinating State and the Economy: The Nizamat in Eighteenth-Century Bengal", *Modern Asian Studies*, Published online by Cambridge University Press 2008, available at: http://journals.cambridge.org/download.php, accessed on July 2008.

Essentially, land remains central to social status and power in rural Bangladesh even in the post-independent era.[162] It seems that social power and status is directly proportional to the amount of land one owns. Jansen[163] argued that the more land a farmer owns, the more influential he is in the society and the easier it is for him to expand his landholdings further by taking over land from poorer farmers. Things have not changed much since Jansen did his research. Land is still central to socio-economic status in the villages. Asked about the impact of migration on her family status, Momota[164], a mother of three migrants to Italy, said that they have bought a piece of land in Daudkandi (town) and have also bought 3 acre of land besides the pacca road."

One must also take into account the emotional attachment of people towards their ancestor's property.[165] Failed migrants often expressed their disappointment by saying that they have 'ruined' (*noshto*) their ancestor's land for *Bidesh*. It appears that selling land for whatever reason is a painful experience especially for small holding groups. Ancestral land is not only a physical space, it connotes the very identity and history of the family concerned. A deep sense of pride and regret could be observed when these people say that once they had plenty of land. It could, therefore, be suggested that when migrants try to rebuild their property with remittances it is not solely for economic reasons. Perhaps, it is profoundly rooted in their aspirations to regain the glory of the past.

### *Large Spending on Social Occasions*

Apart from building houses and buying land, migrants spend a large amount of money at social and religious festivals. Villagers who are relatively well endowed with remittances but not well integrated into the social life of the middle class or well-off families in the villages, invest in cultural practices in order to elevate their standing, just as French buy into certain styles of 'distinction'.[166] For example, Rokeya[167] (24), sister of Shaheb Ali[168], a migrant in Saudi Arabia, informed the author that they are unable to lease in any land for subsistence farming because they had to spend all their money on a bull for *Kurbani* (Sacrifice). This choice of spending money on *Kurbani* is not so much to perform religious duties *per se* as it is for the good standing of their family. As neighbours say, "They have decided so; otherwise people will say, 'What kind of migration is Shaheb Ali doing? He does not even manage to send money for

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[162] E. G. Jansen, *Rural Bangladesh: Competition for Scarce Resources*, University Press Limited (UPL), Dhaka 1987, pp. 297-300.

[163] *Ibid*., p. 301.

[164] Not her real name.

[165] Gardner, *op. cit*., p. 73.

[166] See Bourdieu, *op.cit.,* p. 122.

[167] Not her real name.

[168] Not his real name.

*Kurbani*?" Rokeya and Ali actually belong to one of the poorest families in their village. Rokeya's father was a small farmer when she was a child. Her father was suffering from mental illness. One day he disappeared from the village and never came back. He left behind his wife, a daughter and two sons in tremendous hardship. Rokeya was only seven at that time and her mother started making a living by working in other people's houses in *Jhumpur*. In return, they used to get food, money and patronage. The household got its first opportunity to break the cycle of poverty when Ali grew up and went to Saudi Arabia with the patronage of his kin. To this household, which had always been dependent on other's patronage for their survival, *Kurbani* is a good opportunity to show its economic self-sufficiency. In the villages, *Kurbani* is a marker of social status because it is an occasion when the poorest section of the community receives donations from the wealthier households in the form of clothes, food (a portion of sacrificed animals), and cash. The ability to sacrifice automatically identifies a household as a 'giver' rather than a 'receiver'.

Again, funerals and death anniversaries are occasions where people prove their ability to spend money. In case of the death of parents, it is the responsibility of the sons to organise the funeral and feed as many people as possible. On average, 10,000 to 15,000 Taka (£75-£110) is spent for a funeral in village. Professional cooks are hired to prepare a feast and villagers are fed with utmost care. The obligation on migrant son/sons is far greater than on their non-migrant siblings due to their higher earnings. Wedding celebrations are another opportunity to invest in reputation and status.[169] Often people determine the status of a family by seeing their expenditure on food, the invitees, and the quality and quantity of food served. The bigger the feast, the more it makes an impression on people's minds about the economic capability of the organiser.

For many households in the study villages, one of the primary reasons for migration is to accumulate dowry for daughters. Customarily, parents receive help from wealthy relatives, but for those who have migrated remittances have considerably reduced such dependence on relatives. Now, many poorer families depend on migrant kin for their dowries and other marriage expenses for their daughters. After the marriage of her husband's sister, Shapla[170] told the author: "At last, he (her husband) has finished one of his main duties. Now we will be able to think about other things." In this marriage, the groom's side demanded Tk.40,000 (£280) as dowry and Shapla's husband paid the amount in two installments within six months from his earnings abroad. Whatever be his salary, a migrant can borrow from his fellow Bangladeshis abroad when a large sum is required and pay it back from his monthly earnings.

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[169] See Lefebvre *op.cit.,* p. 202.
[170] Not her real name.

Talking to a number of parents, the author got the impression that the daughters and sisters of migrants have a special value in the marriage market since their fathers or brothers can afford dowries. This is illustrated by Aleya's[171] story. While her husband was away, she and her brother arranged a marriage for her daughter. The groom came from a southern district of Bangladesh and was working in a government office at Daudkandi. The author asked her "How much do you need to pay as dowry?" She replied, "I have given a pair of (gold) earrings. They (groom's side) have given a necklace and bangles. I promised some furniture but not now, only on her father's arrival. They will wait since they know that he (her husband) is earning money abroad." In this case, Aleya's daughter could marry a man from a higher status family due to her father's migration.

Some migrant families in the study villages spend as much as Tk.150,000 to Tk.200,000 on marriages. This sum includes dowry, some personal clothes and gifts to the groom, gifts for groom's relatives (mostly *saris*), utensils, furnitures etc. The cost of marriage is thus five to ten times the amount they earn per month abroad. Yet, people invest in marriage because in the cultural context of Bangladesh, a *Bhalo biya* (good marriage)) is not only a status symbol for the family but also contributes to the economic and social security of the bride.

To sum up, spending *Bideshi taka* (foreign money) on brick buildings, land ownership and conspicuous consumption, all these have set a new standard of success and status in the villages which is directly related to people's migration to *Bidesh*.

## 5. COSMOPOLITAN IDENTITY AND STATUS

To the people in rural Bangladesh, who have never travelled abroad, *Bidesh* is a highly idealised and romanticised term where everything is 'nice and pleasant' (*Bhalo*) and better than Bangladesh.[172] Over the decades, television media and imported goods have played an important role in forging people's idea about *Bidesh* as a land of 'wealth'. However, the most important role is played by the migrants themselves, who through their narratives, attitude and gifts, have been able to create a positive image of *Bidesh*. In the words of Werbner[173], labour migration forges routes along which people, goods, places and ideas travel.

The image of *Bidesh* is so positive in the study villages that the word migration (*Bidesh Kora*) implies a high-status occupation irrespective of the actual nature of the jobs migrants have abroad. The phrase *Bidesh kora* (doing

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[171] Not her real name.

[172] See Gardner, *op.cit.*, pp.16-17.

[173] P. Werbner, "Global Pathways: Working Class Cosmopolitans and the Creation of Transnational Ethnic Worlds", *Social Anthropology,* Vol. 7, No. 1, 1999, pp.17-35.

migration) means more than earning a livelihood abroad. It implies migrants' exposure to an affluent and outside world and the opportunity to experience a cosmopolitan life. On a number of occasions, the author was told by visiting or returnee migrants: "I had been cherishing a desire to go to *Bidesh* since my childhood and Allah has given me that opportunity." This indicates a willingness to 'engage with the others' and experience a cosmopolitan life.[174] Vertovec and Cohen[175] define cosmopolitanism as 'certain socio-cultural processes or individual behaviours, values or descriptions manifesting a capacity to engage cultural multiplicity.' A 'cosmopolitan' person is believed to be prone to articulate complex affiliations, meaningful attachments and multiple allegiances to issues, people, places and traditions that lie beyond the boundaries of the residential nation-state.[176] Cosmopolitanism also implies the ability to stand outside of having one's life written and scripted by any one community whether that is a faith or tradition or religion or culture.[177] It means widening of consciousness and confrontation with alterity.[178]

There is however, a debate over whether labour migrants are cosmopolitan given the fact that they build their own cultural worlds in the country of employment. Werbner[179] argues that cosmopolitanism is a class-based phenomenon and there are multiple modalities of cosmopolitanism. Nonini[180] argues that labour migrants develop their own form of 'working class cosmopolitanism', which is different from that of elites.' To Werbner, in its fundamental sense, cosmopolitanism implies openness to strangers and strangerhood or differences[181], and labour migrants become cosmopolitan as they gain knowledge and familiarity with other cultures and acquire new patterns of commodity consumption and desire in their migratory experience.[182] In their attempt to cope with the cultural and national differences between their places of origin and their destinations, labour migrants develop new habits, a new life style in a different socio-cultural setting, and discipline, food and other consumption

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[174] U. Hannerz, *Cultural Complexity Studies in the Social Organization of Meaning*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1992, p. 252.

[175] S. Vertovec. and R. Cohen, *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism: Theory, Context and Practice,* Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York, 2002. p. 1.

[176] *Ibid*., p.3.

[177] *Ibid.*, p.4.

[178] *Ibid*., p.5.

[179] Werbner, *op. cit.*

[180] D. Nonini, "Shifting Identities, Positioned Imaginaries: Transnational Traversals and Reversals by Malaysian Chinese", in A. Ong and D. Nonini (eds.), *Underground Empires: The Cultural Politics of Modern Chinese Transnationalism*, Routledge, London, 1997, cited in Werbner, 1999, *op.cit.*

[181] Werbner, *op. cit,*. p. 26.

[182] *Ibid.*, p.15.

brings about behavioural changes within the migrants.[183] According to her, international migration from any particular society follows a series of hierarchically ordered pathways, along which many different nations travel, meet and interact, getting to know one another in the intimate context of work side-by-side.[184]

As far as migrants in study villages are concerned, these new subjectivities and identities are mostly apparent in their ability to speak Arabic and Hindi, and their attire as well as their knowledge about the migration process and different destinations. Fresh returnees in the villages are easily distinguishable from stay behinds by their attire - new clothes, shoes and relatively expensive wrist watches. Some migrants even like to show off gold necklaces. Again, it has become a norm that a returnee would bring valuable gifts such as gold jewellery, mobile phones, wrist watches, toiletries, blankets, clothing, televisions and various other electronic items for kin, neighbours and friends. These foreign goods have huge social and symbolic value making their bearers as *Bideshi*.

Citing examples of Indian rural people who experience circular migration between rural and urban places for a livelihood and retain a significant involvement with places of origin (rural homelands), Gidwani and Sivaramakrishnan[185] note that cosmopolitanism involves straddling two cultural worlds and transmitting sensibilities, ideas, materials and techniques in both the places through geographical movements - 'a cosmopolitan is a person who disrupts conventional spatial divisions and produces newly salient spaces of work, pleasure, habitation and politics.' The authors show that urban existence gives circular migrants leverage over how they are able to negotiate rural social relations and an imagination of urbanity. The same could be said for overseas migrants in the study villages of this study, although their transformative capacities might be qualitatively different from Gidwani and Sivaramakrishnan's urban migrants. As it has been already shown, migration provides the villagers an opportunity to be engaged in the culture of the villages by enabling them to continue to spend money on gifts and social occasions. Investing in material resources such as houses and land not only shows migrants' continuing affinity with village life, but also the possibility of reconstituting their social position.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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[183] *Ibid.,* p.15.

[184] *Ibid.*, p. 23.

[185] V. Gidwani and K. Sivaramakrishnan, "Circular Migration and Rural Cosmopolitanism in India", in F. Osella and K. Gardner (eds.) *Migration, Modernity and Social Transformation in South Asia,* Contributions to India Sociology, Occasional Studies 11, Thousand Oaks/Sage, New Delhi, London, 2003, pp. 339-367.

It is argued in this paper that overseas labour migration in Bangladesh is more than a livelihood strategy; it is a wider project whereby people expect to accumulate economic, social and cultural capitals which are fundamental to their survival and upward mobility.

The possibilities of economic prosperity, upward mobility and status improvement are some of the most powerful images that shape the desires and expectations of overseas labour migration of Bangladeshis. A positive image of *Bidesh* is continuously being produced by the attitudes of the returnees and their narratives and foreign goods carried by them. For some migrants, *Bidesh* turned out to be not a mere myth, but a reality which has fulfilled desires such as building a house, buying land, conspicuous consumption, and thereby moving up to the social ladder. Successful migrants and their symbols of achievement have created a model or standard of progress in the villages that many non-migrants desire to achieve.

In a development perspective, investment of remittances for building houses, boosting kinship ties and status seeking may appear as unproductive and irrational. But people in Bangladesh have a different logic. In a situation where the State is unable to provide formal insurance and guarantees of wellbeing, people always feel the need to secure their position within the society via their investment in social capital. Indeed, the extent to which overseas migration can be a route to self-sustaining progress for people and the state depends largely on an efficient infrastructure. Well designed and carefully implemented formal protection and insurances enable migrants to avoid a vicious cycle of risk management through an informal safety net allowing them to invest in productive cycles.

Both the State and private sector can contribute significantly to this end. The State should be transparent and honest in implementing its overseas employment policy and protection policies for migrants. Insurance policies should be introduced to cover the migrants from the risk of sudden unemployment. The State needs to ensure the best use of the wage earner's welfare fund in this regard. Bangladesh Embassies abroad should help migrant realise the compensation from their employers in cases of accident, injury, disability, and sudden lay off. Any attempt on the part of private insurance companies to improve the scenario must take into account the experiences of the migrant communities and recognise migrants' needs first. They may offer migrants need specific policies i.e., crop insurance, insurance for small business etc. which will allow migrants to invest their remittances in productive cycles. Most importantly, State should take initiative such as loan to develop small and medium entrepreneurship, which may create an environment for most effective utilisation of migrants' remittances.

*Abu Salah Md. Yousuf*

# POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN MYANMAR: NEW CONSTITUTION, INTERNATIONAL CONCERNS AND STRATEGIES OF THE MILITARY

## Abstract

The military government of Myanmar announced a new Constitution for the country and held a referendum in May 2008 to legitimise it. The military also declared its intention for holding a new election in the year 2010. Although the international community remains concerned about the internal developments of Myanmar, the divergence of national interests among the regional and international players could not yet result in any unified external stance or action against the country's military regime. Meanwhile, Myanmar's engagement with the neighbours in the areas of trade, commerce and investment remains unabated, saving it from both international sanction and isolation. While the US is always very vocal against the military regime in Myanmar, the new administration under President Obama shows its intent to bring about few changes in its policy *vis-à-vis* Myanmar. In this backdrop, the paper is an attempt to discuss critically the recent political developments in Myanmar in the light of the proposed new Constitution. The discussion takes into account the policies of the international community with respect to Myanmar. It also examines the policies of the military regime as to how it would adapt itself with the new realities, both internal and external.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The military regime of Myanmar announced a new Constitution for the country terming it as a "road map to democracy". Despite Cyclone Nargis,[186] the military held a constitutional referendum in the country in May 2008. However, there were accusations that the referendum was massively rigged, although the military junta denies such allegations saying that the referendum reflected the people's approval of the new Constitution. It may be mentioned that it took the military 14 years to draft the Constitution. They declared that the Constitution would strengthen the stability and integrity of the country and at the same time it would ensure the 'rights' of every section of the society. However, the democratic forces of Myanmar, in the country and abroad, are criticising the

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[186] Cyclone Nargis hit Myanmar's central coast on 2-3 May 2008 leaving at least 133,000 dead or missing and 2.4 million people in need of food, water, shelter and medicines.

constitution saying that it will not bring any change in the political stalemate of Myanmar. Furthermore, it will strengthen the position of the military regime in the country and weaken the hope of democracy. It is also argued that the new Constitution failed to ensure the rights of the people and the ongoing political system, hence its policy of isolation would remain unchanged. The military also pledged to hold a national election in the country under the new Constitution in 2010.

The political history of Myanmar shows that military remained as the unchallenged power in the country. It came to power in 1962. Since then, it has suppressed all democratic movements in the country. The crack down of 1988, the military's refusal to accept the victory of National League for Democracy (NLD) in the election of 1990, the arrest for NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi, and dismantling of the Saffron Revolution of 2007 established the military as the single political power of the country. The military considers itself as the 'sole saviour' of the country. Hence, they always deny international concerns about their policies towards the democratic forces. The military junta considers any international response towards Myanmar as interference in the internal affairs of the country. It continues having strong relations with China. Currently, its engagement with the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries has given the military an opportunity to ensure enhancing its trade and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) facilities in the country. Also, the natural resources of the country made some western countries eager to extend their investment in Myanmar. The military exploits it as an opportunity to deny any democratic transition of the country. The western support towards Aung San Suu Kyi, the head of the NLD and the icon of democratic movements in the country, sometimes compels the military to rethink about its strategies towards democratic forces in the country. The new Constitution is thus, considered as a consequence of constant pressure from the international community for establishing democracy in Myanmar.

But the new Constitution appears to give little hope towards democratisation in the country. Furthermore, it ensures overwhelming control of state power by the military. Hence, the international community's response to the military regime has not changed yet. The United States (US), the European Union (EU) and the ASEAN countries seem to be not much hopeful about the future democratisation in the country. On the other hand, the response from the US is always not considered as a sincere will to democratise the country, rather the US tries to contain China in the region by undermining pro-China regime in Myanmar. The western companies also want to ensure their presence in exploration of natural resources of the country, for which they need a pro-west regime in Myanmar. That is also a Chinese concern.

In this respect, the main objectives of the paper are to examine the contexts and contents of the new Constitution of Myanmar. Is the new Constitution

raising any hope for democracy in the country? What are the positions of democratic forces in the new Constitution? What are the responses from the international community towards the military regime of Myanmar and why international community fails to take a consolidated policy towards Myanmar? And what are the strategies of the military regime to ensure its control in the country, and how do they want to address the concerns of the international community towards Myanmar? The paper has been divided into six sections including introduction and conclusion. Section two gives a brief background of the active political forces of Myanmar at present. Section three examines the contexts and contents of the new Constitution. Section four focuses on the international concerns about the military regime of Myanmar. Section five examines the strategies of the military to continue their superiority in the country, and how they want to deal with internal and external players.

## 2. POLITICAL FORCES IN MYANMAR

Monks, masses and the military forces are the three important forces in Myanmar. Myanmar is a union of 135 ethnic groups with their own languages and dialects. Compositions of the different ethnic groups are under the eight major national ethnic races. In the composition, Burmese constitute 68 percent of the total population. Over 100 distinct languages or dialects are spoken in Myanmar. Some scholars think that the recent unrest in Myanmar is not only for democracy, but also it has historical and ethnic relations.[187] The government's version of Myanmar's history is radically different from the memories of other minorities.[188] At present, all of them are the supporters of Aung San Suu Kyi thinking that Suu Kyi can ensure their betterment in future days. Suu Kyi established the NLD in 1988. The party won 392 out of 492 seats in the election of 1990 under the military. In the manifesto, the party declared "all the people of Burma are very keen to establish a firmly united "Union" in the near future with equal rights for all ethnic nationalities who cherish democracy."[189] The military is accused of oppression on some selected minorities, and recruiting in the armed forces people from some minorities who were thought to be less political and more loyal to the national government.[190] Hence, most of the ethnic communities think that only NLD will ensure equal right for all communities and they are

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[187] Zarni and May Oo, "Common Problems and Shared Responsibilities: Citizens' Quest for National Reconciliation in Burma/Myanmar", *Free Burma Coalition Report*, The Free Burma Coalition, USA, 2004.

[188] *Ibid.*

[189] Manifesto of the National League for Democracy during the Multi-Party General Election of 1990.

[190] Josef Silverstein, "Burma's Struggle for Democracy: The Army against the People", in R. J. May and Viberto Selochan (ed.), *The Military and Democracy in Asia and the Pacific*, Department of Political and Social Change, Australian National University, Canberra, 2004.

dedicated to Aung San Suu Kyi. Though military did not hand over power to the NLD, the NLD remains an influential force in the country. Officially NLD is not permitted as a political organisation, but behind the scene, the NLD supporters are playing key role against military regime. Presently, most of the senior leaders of NLD are in jail, yet it is still the main political rival of the military. Until now, the military's suppression and violations of human rights against NLD remains unchanged. However, recently, the development of internet communication has opened a new opportunity for non-resident Myanmarese to extend their support to the internal protests of the country. They play an important role in ensuring the support of the international community in different levels against the military regime.

Myanmar's Armed Forces have created a state within the State, to ensure the institutional survival, dominance, and reproduction in the country.[191] They ensure their unity from three elements: training, ideology, and self declared special position in the society.[192] The officers of the armed forces have come from three backgrounds, from the ranks, from the students and graduates of Universities who were given a special training in the University and from the non-ranked militaries who completed the Officers' Training School (OTS) course after entering the armed forces. Until 1988, the military leadership remained in the hands of officers who rose from the ranks, the OTS and those close to Ne Win.[193] Since then, some of the graduates from the academy have been chosen to leadership, though they are limited in number. There are reports of growing divisions among the rank and file of the Army, though it claims that they are united.[194] The military regime argues that the membership of the United Nations (UN) and links with international community indicates its legitimacy. The Army believes that they are the only saviour of sovereignty and integrity of the country. If the power goes out of their hand, Myanmar would disintegrate and lose its freedom to the imperialists. In March 2006, Myanmar changed its capital from Yangon to Naypyidaw for preventing any internal protest and external intervention.[195] Any pressure from the international community is considered by the military government as interference in the internal affairs of Myanmar.[196]

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[191] David I. Steinberg, "The Problems of Myanmar and Myanmar's Problems", *Asia Regional Consultation on Social Cohesion and Conflict Prevention*, Asian Development Bank-World Bank, 16-17 March, 2000.

[192] *Ibid*.

[193] Military Commander and the Head of State of Burma from 1962 until 1988.

[194] Brian McCartan**,** "Moment of Truth for Myanmar's Military", *Asia Times*, 27 September 2007.

[195] Col R Hariharan (retd.), "Myanmar: Military Regimes Strategy to Stay in Power", *South Asian Analysis Group,* Paper no. 1612, 11 November 2005.

[196] Col R Hariharan (retd.), "Myanmar: U. N. Security Council's Move to Tackle the Military Regime", *South Asian Analysis Group*, Paper no. 1955, 17 September 2006.

Besides the political arena, the military junta controls the religious affairs of the country. In 1979, a Supreme Council of monks was created by the military for ensuring its control over the monks and the monasteries of the country. Every traditional ceremony, construction of monastery or temple has to be approved by the local representative of the Supreme Council. Monks who refuse to join the council are persecuted. However, the experience is that the military failed to achieve their credibility from the monks who continued to support the people. They protested against the military in 1988 as well as in 2007.

The control of the military is, however, not limited to religious congregations. Since the coup by General Ne Win in 1962, the military has dominated nearly every aspect of the political, economic, and social life in the country. Since then, no social mobility or opportunity took place outside of the army. At the economic level, the army controls two of the most powerful Burmese companies - the Union of Myanmar Economic Holdings (UMEH) and the Myanmar Economic Cooperation (MEC). The declared objectives of the UMEH are to "meet the needs of the military personnel and of their family" and to "become the main logistical support of the army." The goal of the MEC is to "transfer the funds allocated to the defence of the public sector towards the private." It is authorised to do business in virtually every area it wishes. All foreign investment in Myanmar has to be approved by the Myanmar Investment Commission (MIC), controlled directly by the military, which allows them to channel the profits from investment towards companies dominated by the military.[197] But Total SA[198] and other companies which have invested massively in Myanmar have made it clear that they are not involved in their politics.

In September 1993, to consolidate its power over the society, the military regime created the United Solidarity and Development Association (USDA), presenting it as civil society organisation but having direct links with General Than Shwe, who became head of the military in 1992 and the most powerful man in the country. The association now claims that 22.8 million people, nearly half the population of the country are members of the USDA. In fact, membership of the association is compulsory for students and citizens, many of whom have enrolled as members without knowing its purpose. On the other hand, any one refusing to join the association is exposed to harassment and opportunities in the educational or professional field are closed for him/her. Inside the association, student members are encouraged to monitor the activities of their classmates. Becoming a member of the USDA gives access to English and Computer courses as well as extra curricular and sporting activities. In 1996, the regime transformed the association into a force against the student members of the NLD.

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[197] *The Gathering Storm, Infections, Diseases and Human Rights in Burma*, Universities of Berkeley and Johns Hopkins, July 2007.

[198] A French oil and gas company, which is one of the six super major oil and gas exploration companies in the world.

Since then, USDA members have often been in the vanguard of repression. In this respect, the military is accused of human rights violation in the country.

The monks have important spiritual role in the society. About 89 percent of the population are followers of Buddhism in Myanmar. The monks are considered as spiritual icons. Hence, they are highly respected in the society. Buddhism as a religion always stands against violence and it motivates people towards peace and harmony. The monks are the symbol of this harmony. The monks have no personal property and economic expectations. Every morning, they collect their living for whole day from the houses. As a religious practice none can deny them any alms. The senior monks are known as abbots. They are the owners of pagodas. They use collected funds for pagodas. The government funds are also important for the development of pagodas. Basically, monks have no business without meditation. Since the independence of the country in 1948, monks have had an uneasy relationship with the State, but they appear not to have any political ambitions. Burmese monks not only play a spiritual role, but also have a history of political activism. They have been at the forefront of protest against unpopular authorities from British colonial power in the 1930s to the last pro-democracy campaigns in 1988 and 2007. Their political role stems from the days of the Burmese monarchy, which operated until the late 19th century, under which monks worked as intermediaries between the monarch and the public, and lobbied to the King over unpopular moves such as heavy taxation. Hence, the protest of September 2007 is not for the first time that monks have raised their voice against a repressive State and this is also not for the first time that the State has prevailed. In fact, this has happened throughout the political history of Myanmar.[199] The conflict between military versus people and monks is creating instability in the country. It is hampering the country's political and economic progress.

The Army engaged the country with multilateral organisations like United Nations Organisation (UNO), ASEAN, Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), and ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). They, however, pursues an isolationist policy. The military rulers are cautious against taking any initiative that can be used against them in future. Such a policy is hampering the country's economic progress. However, the Chinese political and strategic support is an important strength for the military.

## 3. PROPOSED NEW CONSTITUTION AND ITS CONTENTS

After a drafting process for fourteen years, the military government of Myanmar, unveiled a new Constitution for the country on 19 February 2008. The

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[199] S. D. Muni, "Monks, Masses and the Military", *Frontline,* Volume 24, Issue 20, October 06-19, 2007.

text of the Constitution is 194 pages with 15 chapters and 457 provisions. From 10 to 24 May 2008, the military organised a referendum for ensuring people's support for the new Constitution. The State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) issued the Referendum Law in February 2008 for the approval of the draft Constitution. The law excludes the voting right of the members of religious orders and persons who are illegally living abroad. They excluded monks thinking that their moral clout may influence the voting behaviours of the general people. There are 27 million eligible voters in Myanmar out of a total population of 54 million. General people had very limited scope to know about the new Constitution. The draft Constitution was circulated at limited levels and most of the people failed to know about the contents of the Constitution. The referendum was held without any international monitors. The junta prohibited the international aid workers to facilitate a multi-million dollar disaster relief programme in the country during Cyclone Nargis, thinking that the foreign nationals might take it as an opportunity to observe the election process. It was mandatory for the civil servants, including teachers, soldiers, police, and members of the USDA, to cast their votes supporting the new Constitution and most were told by their seniors to do so. The international community did not recognise the voting process as fair. The internal democratic forces of the country were accused of rigging the results of the referendum. But the government of Myanmar declared that 92.4 percent people gave their vote supporting the draft Constitution.

However, it is not the first Constitution of Myanmar. The constitutional history of Myanmar is a chequered one. The first Constitution of Myanmar was written in 1947, which created a Parliamentary system with two legislative chambers. It included a renunciation of war as an instrument of policy, a set of socialist-influenced unenforceable goals called directive principles, and a definition of relations of the state to peasants and workers, and fundamental rights of all. The Constitution established religious freedom, but in the same chapter it declared that Buddhism enjoyed a 'special position'. As early as 1949, a Ministry of Religious Affairs was created and religious courts were established. The State also conducted religious examinations and sponsored an international Buddhist celebration to commemorate the Buddha's 2500th birthday. Although the State was declared to be the ultimate owner of all the land, agriculture lands were, in fact, in private hands and the farmers were free to buy and sell as well as make all farming and marketing decisions. While some economic enterprises, such as transportation and power generation became government monopolies, there was a private economic sector which flourished alongside government business and cooperatives.

But the leadership of Burma failed to ensure unity and stability in the country according to the Constitution of 1947. In 1958, when the leaders split in their struggle to win control of the party and government, the rivals provoked a constitutional crisis. Prime Minister Nu tried to resolve it through a vote in the

Parliament, but even though he won, his margin was small and his backing came mainly from the minorities rather than the Burmese members. Having no dependable majority in Parliament on 26 October 1958, Nu stepped down as Prime Minister and recommended General Ne Win, the military commander, to form a caretaker government and restore political conditions under which elections could be held to resolve the political crisis. Ne Win's caretaker government of 1958-60 ruled without party support. It drew upon senior military officers and respected civil servants to serve in the cabinet and administer government officers. Ne Win scrupulously adhered to the letter of the Constitution, even demanding its amendment to allow him to serve beyond six months as non-elected member. But this strict enforcement of the law, insensitivity to the people, and impatience with the democratic process turned the public against his rule even though his administration brought law and order to a good portion of the country and improved the economy. However, when elections were held in 1960, the party favoured by the military suffered a devastating defeat while its opponents, led by U Nu, returned to power. A major issue was U Nu's promise, if elected, to make Buddhism as State religion. Nu worked hard to strengthen democracy and address the causes of national disunity, but he could not continue for too long.

In March 1962, General Ne Win led a military coup and arrested U Nu, the chief justice, and several cabinet ministers. He justified his actions as a means of keeping the union from disintegrating, restoring order and harmony in the society and solving economic problems facing the nation.[200] Suspending the 1947 constitution, which had been in effect since independence, he ruled the country with a Revolutionary Council consisting of senior military officers. Ne Win's stated purpose was to make Burma a truly socialist State. A military-controlled one-party system was established.[201] In April 1972, Ne Win and other members of the Revolutionary Council retired from the army, but they retained their positions of power in the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP). Following the socialist policy, all lands and much of the country's commerce and industry were nationalised. However, Ne Win had promised a new Constitution, and in September 1971, representatives of the party's central committee of the country's various ethnic groups, and of other interest groups were appointed to draft a document. A referendum to ratify the new Constitution was held in December 1973 with more than 90 percent of eligible voters signifying approval. The Constitution was promulgated in January 1974 which became the second constitution of Myanmar.

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[200] Josef Silverstein, *Burma: Military Rule and Politics of Stagnation,* Cornell University Press, London, 1977, p. 80.
[201] Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP).

The Constitution of 1974 identified Burma as "a sovereign independent socialist State of the working people."[202] "A socialist society", "A socialist economic system" and "Socialist democracy" were defined as the basic principles of the State policy.[203] However, the new Constitution transferred power from the armed forces to a People's Assembly of former military leaders headed by Ne Win. It allowed for a unicameral legislature and one legal political party. Ne Win was installed as President. The Constitution was nothing more than the institutionalisation of the power of BSPP. The system was intact, with relatively little change until 1988. The first change was seen in August 1987, when Ne Win startled the nation by admitting 'failure and faults' in the management of the economy and called for open discussion about the past and change. Within weeks, some changes were seen in the economic policies, and the restrictions on sale, purchase, transport, and storage of foodstuffs were removed.

In July 1988, while the nation was in turmoil and an emergency party congress was in session, Ne Win announced his resignation as party head and urged the leaders to consider the creation of a multiparty system. The party permitted his resignation, but did not adopt his recommendations. Another retired General, U Sein Lwin came in power as head of the party and sworn in as President of Burma.[204] To put down the growing national unrest, which had been building up during the year of 1988 and was about to culminate in a national strike on 8 August, Sein Lwin ordered the military to suppress the strike of unarmed civilians which resulted in the death of thousands.[205] He had resigned, shaken by violent student-led pro-democracy demonstrations, after only 17 days in office. Maung Maung, a civilian with ties to Burma's long time military rulers, the country's attorney general, was selected as the President of Burma on 19 August 1988. The country's military leadership evidently felt that having a civilian President would help to abate the protests, but instead they grew more. Maung promised for a multi party democratic system to end the people uprising, but the generals were not in favour of establishing democracy in the country. Hence, the Chief of the Army, General Saw Maung staged a coup on 18 September 1988, seized power and ordered the armed forces to suppress all dissent. The military's carefully constructed constitutional dictatorship crumbled and the army decided to restore all powers to its leadership. The military ordered

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[202] Article-1, The Constitution of the Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma, 1974.

[203] Article- 6, 7 and 8, The Constitution of the Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma, 1974.

[204] He had the reputation of having led his military unit in suppressing dissent on the university campus in 1962, and again in 1974 where hundred of students were killed and wounded.

[205] The uprising began on 8 August 1988, and from this date (8-8-88), it is known as the "8888 Uprising". Hundreds of thousands of ocher-robed monks, young children, university students, housewives, doctors demonstrated against the regime and mostly Buddhist monks and civilians (primarily students) were slaughtered by the military.

all members of the armed forces to resign from the BSPP and abolished all state institutions. They formed State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) comprising nineteen senior military officers under the leadership of General Saw Maung. The military government announced a change of name for the country from Burma to Myanmar in 1989. Also following the coup, the army dropped the original ethnic names of its military units as a last step in erasing the federal structure of Myanmar.

However, General Maung's take over of power started a new form of instablity in the country. The democratic forces under the leadership of Aung San Suu Kyi declared their strong desire for democracy. In the face of huge international pressure, the military declared elections to form a national assembly to revise the Constitution of 1974. Under the full control of the military, the country went for a multiparty election in May 1990 in which the NLD[206] won a landslide victory over the National Unity Party (NUP),[207] and about a dozen smaller parties.[208] The military, however, would not let the assembly convene, and continued to hold the two leaders of the NLD, U Tin U and Aung San Suu Kyi, under house arrest. Myanmar came under increasing international pressure to convene the elected assembly, particularly after Aung San Suu Kyi was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991, and also faced economic sanctions. In April 1992, the military replaced Saw Maung with General Than Shwe. However, with the failure of the National Convention to create a new constitution, tensions between the government and the NLD mounted, resulting in two major crackdowns on the NLD in 1996 and 1997. The SLORC was abolished in November 1997 and replaced by the SPDC, but it was merely a cosmetic change. The military announced that they were not bound by any constitution and they gained legitimacy from the international organisations and neighbours. Besides China, Myanmar also succeeded in extending its relations with the countries of ASEAN and India.

But again strong internatinal pressure came against the military government after the Saffron revolution of 2007. On 5 September 2007, the army forcibly broke up a peaceful demonstration in Pakokku and injured three monks. The next day, other monks took government officials as hostages in retaliation. They demanded an apology by 17 September, but the military refused to apologise. This sparked protests, involving the increasing numbers of monks in conjunction with the withdrawal of religious services for the military. Their role in the protests has been significant due to the respect paid to them by the civilian population and the military. Monks were demanding the government to reduce fuel prices, release all political prisoners, and begin negotiations with Suu Kyi

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[206] The party was formed in the aftermath of the 1988 uprising.

[207] The successor to the BSPP and patronised by military.

[208] In the elections, the NLD won 392 out of 485 contested seats (80.8%) compared to 10 seats by NUP.

and other democratic leaders. What make the 2007 protests different from the student-led uprising of 1988 are the monks' non-confrontational tactics, their orderly marches and religious chanting to provoke the military. Monks leading the procession carried their alms bowl upside-down as a symbol of protest. Some monks refused to take alms from the military and their families. The protest of monks threatened the legitimacy of the military in the national as well as in the international level. The Army has taken initiatives since then to ensure their position and strength in the power structure.[209] Hence, they felt an urgency to declare a new constitution for the country. They thought that it would stabilise the position of the regime in the internal and external arenas.

Among the basic principles of the Constitution, "Sovereign power of the State is derived from the citizens"[210] and "the Union is constituted by the Pyidaungsu (Union) systems", give some positive impressions, but the Constitution is to establish the superiority of the military in all of the State affairs. The Constitution proposed a presidential system, with extensive powers to the President. But it implies that President should have the knowledge of military affairs. On the other hand, the election process of the President is in the hand of an electoral college, where military has an important role. The Electoral College is comprised of the members of the People's Assembly, National Assembly, and Regional Assemblies, where 25 percent are selected by the Chief of Army. Hence, it is clear that the military will play the main role in the process of electing a President.

The Union Assembly is the national legislature and will comprise a Peoples' Assembly and a National Assembly. The National Assembly, theoretically, represents the states and regions of the country. 75 percent of the membership of each assembly is to be elected. The Chief of Staff of the Defence Forces is entitled to nominate 25 percent of all members of the Peoples' Assembly, the National Assembly and Regional Assemblies. The Constitution is vague as to the true nature and functions of each assembly. The Constitution is also silent about entire law making process. It establishes a servile judicial system comprising a supreme court and subordinate courts. The Union of Myanmar is to be divided into seven states and seven regions. The President will appoint a Chief Minister for each state and region.

However, the Constitution is criticised for its autocratic nature. It proposes a centralist government with very few checks and balances. The Army is to be entrenched in every institutions of the State, including the Union Presidency, the Union Government, the Union Assembly and Regional and State Assemblies. The military has the right to independently administer all affairs concerning the

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[209] The strategies of the military to ensure their position in the power structure is discussed in latter sections of this article.

[210] Article-4, Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar 2008.

armed forces. There is nothing in the Constitution about the appointment and removal of the Chief of Army. The Chief of Army will appoint the Ministers of Defence, Security and Border Affairs. He can also appoint 6 out of 11 members of the National Defence and Security Council which can declare a State of emergency. The Constitution gives the President the power to run the machinery of the State, but he does not have total control. The Chief of Army has total control over military and more control in the parliament. Hence, all powers belong to him.

The Constitution is considered by the military as a step forward for the seven-point road map of national reconciliation and transition to democracy in Myanmar, which was declared by the military on 30 August 2003. From the current Burmese government's point of view, the Constitution provides for a stable transition to democratic rule. Elections are scheduled for 2010, after which the new constitution would go into effect. On the other hand, the new Constitution raises very little hope for democracy among the internal political forces of the country and the international community. But the people's participation in the referendum for legitimising Constitution gives an idea that it can open up an opportunity to separate military from the administrative affairs. However, a new change in the governing structure may give some hope for democracy, but the real face of democracy will remain a dream to the people of Myanmar.

Since the Independence of Myanmar, the people have always remained eager for a democratic constitution in the country. During the Independence struggle of Myanmar, a conflict arose between older leaders of the pre-war period and the young leaders who had formed and led the wartime Myanmar army and the coalition nationalist party, the Anti Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL). Senior leaders were thinking of following the British framework, but young leaders were choosing a new framework. The founders of the Myanmar Constitution found three options for framing the new Constitution.[211] They could either return to some form of monarchy, which existed before British rule or they could create a bureaucratic authoritarian system, under the model of British rule. They had a third model, Parliamentary Democracy, which was introduced by British rulers to put the nation on a course to self-rule. At the end, the third model was accepted and the Constitution of the 1947 created a parliamentary system with two legislative chambers, where the right of ethnic groups were clearly elaborated. The new Constitution failed to resolve the internal ethnic conflicts of Myanmar. During the British period, some minorities were given special priority and others were excluded from the political process. After independence, the discriminated minorities revolted for their equal rights, but other groups denied it. The government failed to unite these conflicting

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[211] Josef Silverstein, "Burma's Struggle for Democracy: The Army against the People", *op. cit.*

minorities, and as a result, minority revolts started throughout the whole country. Hence, how the new Constitution will ensure the rights of all citizens was not clear. On the other hand, the opposition forces of the country criticised the new Constitution saying that the Constitution was nothing but enlarging and extending the role of the military in the country. The oppositions and groups inside and outside the country have unanimously rejected moves toward the new convention, because they said that the SPDC was just trying to avoid its responsibility of honouring the 1990 election results. The government presented itself as a regime that played by the rules and believed it had no reason to compromise with the opposition. The opposition, meanwhile, was caught uneasily between rejecting the government's rules and pushing for a different rule-based political and economic system.[212] However, the oppositions are repressed and undermined and it is clear that they would not be able to challenge the military. Though the new Constitution is a new model of military rule, the participation of massive electorates during the voting day proves that the people of the country still hope for an open democracy. Yet, the new Constitution raises very little hope towards democracy.

## 4. INTERNATIONAL CONCERNS

The concerns of the international community are divergent due to differences in the national and strategic interests of the respective countries. Myanmar is identified as a centre for huge natural resources. It has 283.2 billion cubic metres of proven gas reserves.[213] Hence, all the regional and international players feel it a necessity to continue good relations with Myanmar. The ASEAN countries**,** Japan, China, and India are economically and strategically related with Myanmar. Over the last 15 years, the countries have developed significant political and economic relations with Myanmar, with billions of dollars in trade and investment and more than a billion dollars by sale of weapons. In early 2007, China and Russia cast their first joint veto in the UN Security Council to block a measure that would have sanctioned Myanmar. The ASEAN countries are continuing "positive engagement"[214] with Myanmar.[215] But they failed to change the position of Myanmar government on the internal issues. Previously, India was vocal against the military regime in Myanmar. But now it has changed its stance and strengthened its relations with Myanmar mainly to serve its national interests, forged ties for importing gas from Myanmar and strengthening its

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[212] Naw May Oo, "Change in Burma?", *Foreign Policy In Focus,* 13 March 2008.

[213] Estimated on 1 January 2008, *The World Fact Book*, Central Intelligence Agency (CIA),USA,URL:https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/theworldfactbook/geos/BM.html, accessed on 18 June 2009.

[214] It is believed that engagement would help pressurise Myanmar to ensure reform in the country without any economic sanctions or without military interventions.

[215] Michael Green and Derek Mitchell, "Asia's Forgotten Crisis: A New Approach to Burma", *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2007.

connectivity with the countries of ASEAN region. The US wants to see a pro-US regime in the country that will help the US companies to extend their business in Myanmar. At the same time, the US wants to contain China through their presence in Myanmar. But the regime looks at US as a threat to its existence. China is also aware that any US engagement with Myanmar might hamper Chinese interests. The US has imposed sanctions against military regime. But the sanctions are not much effective for changing regime in Myanmar.

The UN, over the years, has been actively engaging itself with the leaders of the Myanmar government, and working for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi. Amid renewed western sanctions against Myanmar in recent years, the UN special envoy, Ibrahim Gambari, has remained literally the communicator between the military government and the international community.[216] During the crisis of 2007, the UN Secretary-General acted promptly by sending his envoy to Myanmar when the conflicts on the streets were intensified. He talked directly to the military leaders and opposition while remaining in close touch with the ASEAN leaders, China, and other concerned parties. His good offices were highly appraised by China and ASEAN. In finding a solution to the issue of Myanmar, the role of the UN as the representative of the international community will be essential for three main reasons. First, despite isolation, Myanmar has grown a relationship of trust with the UN through cooperation. Second, China, the trusted ally of Myanmar always considers the UN as the legitimate body through which international conflicts should be resolved, and has worked closely with the UN on many international issues. Third, the Myanmar opposition lobby has always maintained a good relationship of understanding and trust with the UN over the years. However, the UN efforts alone are not enough. Without regional players, it is not possible by any one to exert influence on the military government to accelerate reconciliation process.

Meanwhile, on 6 September 2007, the European Parliament condemned the violations of human rights and accused Myanmar's military of being a threat to South East Asia, but added at the same time, through the voice of its commissioner Vivian Reding, "Isolation will only make the population pay a greater price. We do not believe that additional restrictive measures will push the government in the desired direction or will alleviate the suffering of the people."[217] Although the EU position towards Myanmar is a common one, i.e., establishment of a legitimate civilian government that respects human right, its members are divided over the actual policy on ground *vis-a-vis* Myanmar. For example, some states like Britain, the Czech Republic, Holland, Ireland and Denmark are favourable for a firmer policy towards Myanmar, while France,

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[216] Aside from other regional actors such as China and ASEAN.

[217] "EU calls rights violations in Myanmar a scandal," *BurmaNet News*, 7 September 2007, URL: http://www.burmanet.org/news/2007/09/07/, accessed on 26 November 2007.

Germany, Austria, Spain and Poland have until now opposed it. Their position is explained in particular by the economic interests that they have developed in the country. Despite the regular appeals for the liberation of Aung San Suu Kyi, French diplomacy, for example, is mainly dictated by its financial investment in the country. It has supported the Total SA Company, one of the most important investors in Myanmar, and often accused of using forced labour. The enterprise directs the operation of gas fields in Yadana, which bring Myanmar's government between 200 and 450 million US dollars annually, or around 7% of the budget of Myanmar.[218]

The current measures from the European Commission include an embargo on the sale of arms and defence equipment, a ban on any non-humanitarian aid and a ban on investment in certain public enterprises. The strategic sectors which bring in money for the military and help it stay in power, like lumber, precious stones, minerals, gas and oil are not affected by the various banning measures. One cannot envisage an effective sanctions policy without a total ban on investment in the country, or at least a ban on investment in the areas vital for the military. From a political viewpoint, the EU has not shown very firm determination. In recent years, the EU has reduced its subsidies to projects aimed at the development of human rights and democracy. According to the association Info-Birmanie, the EU has only supported "softening" the draft resolution on Myanmar at the UN Security Council in early 2007.

In Asia, Myanmar's democrats have little chance of obtaining better support. The neighbouring countries, notably India and China, being big consumers of the raw materials that Myanmar possesses in abundance, have decided to remain silent about the internal affairs of Myanmar. The geographic location of Myanmar is of great interest to India which seeks to implement its "eastward" policy and to China which sees the possibility of obtaining an opening to the Indian Ocean and thus avoids the Strait of Malacca for routing its supply of Middle East oil.

China and Myanmar have always been good neighbours. Myanmar is the first country outside of the "Communist" bloc to recognise the People's Republic of China in 1949. Myanmar was also the first to sign a treaty of friendship and non-aggression in 1961 with China, and its leaders were the first to express their sympathy to the Beijing government following the repression at Tiananmen Square in 1989. In 1991, the Chinese leaders were the first to sell arms, planes, frigates and other military equipment to Myanmar military. China has also invested greatly in Myanmar's infrastructure, ports on the Indian Ocean, roads

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[218] Danielle Sabai, "The Burmese Crisis, Its Roots and the Urgency of Solidarity", URL: http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article1328, accessed on 26 November 2007.

and so on. It is a big importer of wood and minerals from Myanmar. Since early 2007, support from China for Myanmar has considerably deepened with a view to strengthening economic and financial links, intended to ensure the development of Yunnan, the Chinese province bordering Myanmar. China, with much caution, has recently added its voice to the international pressure against the repression, but it maintains its policy of "non-interference in the domestic affairs" of Myanmar. China has wished that Myanmar "begins a democratic process appropriate for the country" and restores "internal stability as quickly as possible". The well being of the Myanmarese people has little place therein.

India has taken a realpolitik[219] policy towards Myanmar considering its economic and strategic interests. In addition, India like ASEAN, believes that a positive engagement with the country may create opportunity for restoration of democracy. At the same time, it would ensure India's relations with the ASEAN countries in the economic as well as the political level. During the 2007 crisis, India waited until 26 September, the first few days where the Burmese junta sent the troops and killed several monks and civilians, to "express its concern" on the repression of the mobilizations. Questioned on the close relations between the Burmese junta and India by the US and British ambassadors during a visit to Thailand, the Indian foreign minister replied that "The cardinal principle of our foreign policy is non-interference in the domestic affairs of any country. It is essentially the job of the people in the country to decide what government they want."[220]

Thailand is the third biggest investor in Myanmar and the first destination for Myanmar's natural gas. In 2005, the Thai State Electricity Company, Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Myanmar regarding the construction of several dams on the river Salween, which borders Thailand and Myanmar, to supply Thai industry with electricity and water.

Myanmar became a member of ASEAN in 1997. The members of the Association, and particularly Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore, defended their position faced with international criticisms explaining that a State which violates human rights should not remain isolated and in a position to continue its abuses. According to the then Malaysian Prime Minister, Mahathir bin Mohamad "If Myanmar is outside of it, she is free to behave as a hooligan or a pariah, whereas if she is in, she will be subject to certain norms." It is what ASEAN has called the "policy of constructive engagement" supposed to lead

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[219] Refers to diplomacy based primarily on practical considerations, rather than ideological notions.

[220] "Indian Foreign Minister grilled on Myanmar", Deutsche *Presse-Agentur,* 14 September 2007, URL: http://www.burmanet.org/news/2007/09/14/deutsche-presse-agentur-indian-foreign-minister-grilled-on-myanmar/, accessed on 30 November 2008.

the junta on the path of democratic reforms. Russia, and Japan all have strategic interest in Myanmar, and none wishes to see instability in the region. Furthermore, as mediating players, these countries have less wielding power than China and ASEAN.

Hence, it is very complicated for the international community to ensure any effective reform in the country. The US and EU are trying to change the regime in the country. They are thinking about more sanctions. But the reality is that Myanmar has isolated itself from the west. On the other hand, the US slogan for restoration of democracy lost its legitimacy to some countries for the cause of its failure in Iraq.[221] Some countries think that this is the policy of the US to expand its hand to the natural resources of Myanmar. At the same time, the multinational companies of the west are thinking that the regime change in the Myanmar would strengthen their position in Myanmar. China, India, and some South East Asian countries, think that regime change would not be helpful for them to secure their interest in Myanmar. On the other hand, the US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's comment on Myanmar, "clearly, the path we have taken in imposing sanctions has not influenced the Burmese junta"[222] indicates that the US might reconsider its policy towards Myanmar. During her visit to Indonesia, Hillary Clinton announced that the Obama administration would consider signing the group's Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, a nonaggression pact signed by fifteen nations outside the South East Asian region. The Bush administration had declined to sign it, in part because of concerns that it might hamper the policy towards Myanmar.[223] However, it needs to be clear here that Hillary reiterated, like the former US officials, the policy of "constructive engagement" has also been unsuccessful. The situation has created a better position for China to increase its involvement in the energy sector of Myanmar. Chinese companies already have increased their investment in the different projects of Myanmar. Like China, India is also hungry for natural gas and other resources and eager to build a road network through Myanmar that would expand its trade with the ASEAN states. India is now Myanmar's fourth largest trading partner.[224]

Considering the reality, some international experts including UN representative to Myanmar Ibrahim Gambari, are proposing for strengthening multilateral approaches to ensure reform in Myanmar. They think that, like Six Party negotiations about the issue of North Korea, they can also forge a common

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[221] *BurmaNews Net*, 15 October 2007, URL: http://www.burmanet.org/news/2007/10/15/agence-france-presse-myanmar-regime-change-could-create-another-iraq-asean-chief-martin-abbugao/, accessed on 22 October 2007.

[222] Glenn Kessler, "Shift Possible on Burma Policy", *Washington Post,* 19 February 2009.

[223] *Ibid.*

[224] Michael Green and Derek Mitchell, *op.cit.*

way for pressuring the military regime of Myanmar. But others think that any international cooperation on the issue can do little to change the military regime in Myanmar. However, all parties agree that international cooperation on the issue may change the behaviour of the military on their own community. But China would not be eager to engage with any initiative that can increase United States' role in the country as well as in the region. Hence, it would not be easy for India and ASEAN to take further initiative against military government considering their economic and strategic interests. The US and EU are thinking of "carrot and stick policy"[225] to pressurise military for ensuring reforms in the country. However, it is not yet clear how far the policy would be effective[226] because if China and ASEAN think that the US wants to increase its influence on Myanmar, they may take different initiatives. Some observers think that China may change its policy considering the international concern on the issue. The response from Myanmar government is also important. Previously, when the issue became an international concern, they took some initiatives indicating that they were going for democracy. But few days later, they returned to their forceful approach of dealing with the international community.

## 5. STRATEGIES OF THE MILITARY

The military of Myanmar considers itself as the only credible upholder of national interest and national security of the country. Hence, it has taken measures to ensure its permanent position in power. It has also taken measures to tackle any international pressure for restoring democracy. The military proposed a roadmap for democracy without losing its control on administration. It has formed National Convention for drawing up guidelines for a new Constitution for the country and organised referendum for the proposed new Constitution. It has also contained ethnic insurgencies and tried to make sure that ethnic groups do not find common cause with the pro-democratic movements. When international pressure increases, the military release some political leaders saying that it is changing its policy and going for democracy. But, after some days they increase their pressure on the political forces and try to divide internal political forces from taking any combined initiative against government. They also have exerted full control over press and free expression.

Military leaders are working on a plan to organise two fronts to counter NLD in future elections and to establish its own power base in the country. The first was the creation of USDA in September 1993. It is estimated that USDA now has 16 million youths as members and is gradually turning into a leading political

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[225] Reward or punishment offered in order to get to do a certain task.

[226] Ian Holliday, "Rethinking the United States Myanmar Policy", *Asian Survey*, Vol. XLV, No. 4, July-August 2005.

organisation under the guidance of Myanmar's military government. It now plays the lead role in staging anti-opposition campaigns and rallies specially targeting Aung San Suu Kyi and her party NLD. The second organisation that the military is trying to revamp since 1998 is the War Veterans Organization (WVO). Speaking at the recently convened reorganised WVO conference in Yangon, Senior General Than Shwe stated that WVO members would be responsible for national politics, national defence, economy, community service and social welfare activities. War Veterans were also told that they would have to accept the command of the existing military leadership as they did when they were in active service in order to carry out national defence and security tasks. It is reported that WVO has 3010 retired officers and 88,162 other ranks as its members. WVO is being encouraged to function as NGO and has received financial assistance from the government to open business fronts to provide better incentive for its members. Present military government has also passed a law that forbids retired military personnel from forming any other organisation. This has been done possibly to ward off reoccurrence of 1985 event, when some senior retired military officers formed a political party called Patriotic Old Commanders League (POCL) and registered themselves with the election commission. Three candidates from POCL contested in the 1990 election and won one seat in the legislature. The military government disbanded the POCL in March 1992 because their activities were seen to be undermining the unity within the forces. All retired military personnel are now legally bound to be members of revamped WVO and thus willingly or unwillingly come under the leadership of the present military government.

In the international level, the military regime has successfully ensured its engagement with neighbouring countries. It secured its membership in ASEAN. China still remains its strongest ally. India's 'Look East Policy' and its desire for natural resources of Myanmar have given the opportunity for military to limit India's concern about the internal issues of Myanmar. Myanmar is considered as highway for forging any relation with the South and South East Asian countries. It is also a member of Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). Hence, the military regime can easily control the regional powers for taking any initiative against them. Though the US and Europe are contemplating of taking action, Myanmar's strong relation with its neighbouring countries can off-set any problem from the western sanctions. Historically, Myanmar followed a restricted economic policy. But in recent times, Myanmar is increasing relations with its neighbouring countries. Till 2003, Myanmar's economy was performing well. In the last four years (2004-2008), its economy has taken a negative trend. This has an implication for its political unrest. But the authority is not eager to open its economy considering that its larger engagement with the western economy would increase political pressure from the west.

The natural resources of the country are the major strength of the military. It is using it as an instrument for ensuring its position in the international arena. Myanmar has declared opening up its economy to market forces and foreign investment but this has not worked because the military is unwilling to release its grip on cartel areas like imports and exports, issuing of licenses, trading in rice and creation of infrastructure. This drawback and economic mismanagement have resulted in a near economic collapse with the official exchange rate of the *Kayat*, the local currency, being nearly 200 times lower than the black market rate.[227] The western companies want to invest in the gas sector of the country, but international sanctions are hampering their investment. The situation provides an opportunity for Myanmar to increase its relation with China by offering investment in the gas sector.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The new Constitution apparently did not raise much hope for democracy in Myanmar. Nonetheless, the huge participation during the voting makes it clear that people hope for a constitutional system in the country. The new Constitution does not indicate that the military would reward the nation with a western style democracy. But it seems that the military wants to hand over power to a government which would be controlled by them and help forge a relationship between the military and people. The regime's engagement with its neighbours in the areas of trade and investment may give a new understanding among the military officials to reshape its governing system, which will save them from criticism in the international arena as well as ensure their interests over the resources of the country. However, on the face of limitations, the new Constitution somehow created an impression that the army was changing its unscrupulous control over power in the country. But how the people of the country can play a role to choose their leadership and how a multi-ethnic country can secure its integrity are not addressed in the Constitution.

Meanwhile, the international community is divided on the issue of Myanmar. Though the new US President Obama's policy towards Myanmar has not taken any clear shape yet, it seems Obama administration may not be as aggressive as the Bush administration. At the same time, the Bush administration's policies cannot suddenly be abandoned. At the same time, there is also the concern that any action against Myanmar cannot be taken unilaterally without China's support. As indicated earlier, China's policy towards Myanmar is based on its own strategic interests. China will not like any change in Myanmar which could hamper its strategic and economic interests. This is because of the present military junta's continued good relations with China. However, international concern over Myanmar can transmit a strong signal to the Chinese policy makers

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[227] Muhammad Zamir, "International Concern over Myanmar", *The Daily Star*, 20 October 2007.

for reshaping its policy towards Myanmar. The new Constitution may be an initiative in this regard. However, considering the present developments, there appears to be little hope for democracy in the country in near future.

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# EXPORT-LED GROWTH (ELG) HYPOTHESIS: AN EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION ON BANGLADESH

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## Abstract

This paper investigates export-led growth hypothesis for Bangladesh over a period of last three decades using cointegration and multivariate Granger Causality technique. While conventional wisdom suggests that export growth contribute positively to economic growth, this study also provides strong evidence supporting the export-led growth hypothesis through bi-directional causality between export growth and economic growth in Bangladesh. Comparing the results between conventional bivariate model and multivariate model, this paper suggests that bivariate model to investigate ELG hypothesis (ELGH) gives the similar result as the multivariate model in the experience of Bangladesh. These findings indicate the importance of promoting exports in Bangladesh to enhance economic growth.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Economic growth is an extremely complex process, which depends on many variables such as capital accumulation, trade, price fluctuations, technological advancement, political conditions and income distribution, and even on geographical characteristics. Export-led growth hypothesis (ELGH) suggests that export expansion is one of the main determinants of growth. That is, along with the increasing amounts of labour and capital within the economy, the expansion of exports can generate the overall growth of the countries. According to its advocates, exports can perform as an "engine of growth". It is often asserted that the association between exports and growth carries some possible positive externalities for the domestic economy arising from world market participation, for instance, from the better allocation of resources, use of more advanced technologies and of course higher productivity. Further gains are realised through

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higher capacity utilisation and greater economies of scale due to large markets. In addition, the accumulation of foreign exchange from exports allows the import of high quality inputs, mainly capital goods, for domestic production and exports thus expanding the economy's production possibilities. However, these mechanisms are frequently invoked without any theoretical support or any empirical proof.

Bangladesh followed a strategy of a highly restricted trade regime after the independence in 1971. The basis of this policy regime was the import substitution industrialisation strategy of government. Like in many other developing countries, the import-substituting trade and industrial policies pursued by Bangladesh were aborted to deliver the desired outcomes along with rising internal and external imbalances. As consequences, trade policy reforms were introduced in the early 1980s. However, by the early 1990s, a large scale trade liberalisation programme was implemented. Since then a generous promotional measure for exports was introduced as an important element of trade policy reform which has contributed to the impressive export growth performance afterwards. The objective of this paper is to investigate the causal relationship between such export growth and the changing pattern of economic growth in Bangladesh to examine the validation of ELGH in case of Bangladesh. Consequently, the study is expected to provide a small contribution in policy structure through adequate theoretical support and empirical evidence. The paper is organised as follows: Section 1 is the introduction. Section 2 presents the theoretical and empirical review. Section 3 covers the methodological issues regarding the study. Section 4 provides variable definitions and data sources, while Section 5 presents the estimation techniques. Section 6 outlines the estimation results and discusses the empirical findings. The study is rounded up with conclusion in Section 7.

## 2. THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL REVIEW

The relationship between trade and economic growth in developing countries has been of continuing interest both in theoretical and empirical literature. The theoretical links between trade and economic growth have been discussed for over two centuries, although controversy still persists regarding their real effects. The classical school of economic thought that started with Adam Smith and subsequently enriched by the work of Ricardo, Torrens, James Mill and John Stuart Mill provided the initial sign of favourable arguments with respect to trade. Since then, economic literatures like that of Bhagwati, Krueger and many more documented the justification for free trade and various benefits of international specialisation towards the productivity of nations in a very well manner way.[228] Evolution of endogenous growth theory triggered the continuous

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[228] J. Bhagwati, "Anatomy and Consequences of Exchange Control Regimes", *Foreign Trade Regimes and Economic Development*, 11, 1978 and A. O. Krueger,

effort of theoretical justification even more and led to some alternative models that stress the importance of trade in achieving a sustainable rate of economic growth. Although most models emphasised the coherent relationship between trade and growth, they repeatedly made the point clear that trade is only one of the variables that enter the growth equation.

By the early 1980s, a change from inward-oriented policies to export-led orientation and export promotion strategy secured a wide consensus among researchers and policy makers.[229] In fact, interestingly enough, while most of the theoretical literature focused on the relationship between trade and economic growth[230], the empirical works have frequently been guided towards the examination of the relationship between exports and growth.[231] A large number of empirical studies have been conducted during the last two decades to investigate the role of exports on economic growth or the ELGH.[232] The ELGH was suggested initially by Kindelberger in 1962. From the theoretical point of view, the export growth should contribute positively to economic growth which is indeed the rationale behind the ELGH. Several studies regarding this issue using either time-series or cross-section data have been conducted along a number of divergent lines. The earlier studies by Michaely, Balassa, Heller and Porter, suggested that there remains a high correlation between export growth and economic growth.[233] But the main weakness of these studies is that a high degree of positive correlation between the two variables was used as evidence supporting the ELGH. Feder, Balassa and Ram used a highly significant positive value of the coefficient of export growth variable in the growth accounting equation and a significant improvement in the coefficient of determination with the inclusion of the export growth variable in the regression equation as evidence

"Liberalization Attempts and Consequences", *Foreign Trade Regimes and Economic Development*, 10, 1978, Mass: Ballinger, Cambridge.

[229] W. Tyler, "Growth and Export Expansion in Developing Countries", *Journal of Development Economics*, 9, 1981, pp. 121-30; B. Balassa, "Exports, Policy Choices, and Economic Growth in Developing Countries after the 1973 Oil Shock", *Journal of Development Economics*, 18, 1985, pp. 23-35.

[230] N. A. Adams, "A Note on Trade as a Handmaiden of Growth", *Economic Journal*, 83 (329) March, 1973, pp. 210-12; N. F. R. Crafts, "Trade as a Handmaiden of Growth: An Alternative View", *Economic Journal*, 83 (331), September, 1973, pp. 875-84.

[231] R. Levine and D. Renelt, "A Sensitivity Analysis of Cross-Country Growth Regressions", *American Economic Review,* 82 (4) September, 1992, pp. 942-63.

[232] ELG is considered one of the main pillars of the free trade school of thought that emerged in the 80s.

[233] M. Michaely, "Exports and Growth: An Empirical Investigation", *Journal of Development Economics*, 4 (1), March, 1977, pp. 49-53; B. Balassa, "Exports and Economic Growth: Further Evidence", *Journal of Development Economics*, 5 (2), June, 1978, pp. 181-89; and P. S. Heller and R. C. Porter, "Exports and Growth: An Empirical Re-investigation", *Journal of Development Economics*, 5 (2), June, 1978, pp. 191-93.

for the export led growth hypothesis.[234] But the methodological issue of these models has been criticised. There are another relatively recent group who have emphasised on causality between export growth and economic growth to assess whether or not individual countries exhibit evidence for export led growth hypothesis using Granger or Sims tests.[235] Jung and Marshall, Darrat, Chow, Serletis used such Granger and Sims causality tests and ended with a mixed and even conflicting result. The major shortcoming of these causality test results is that the Granger and Sims tests are only valid if the original time series are not cointegrated.[236] If the time series are cointegrated, then any inferences based on the traditional time-series modeling techniques will be invalid.[237] Finally, there have been relatively new studies which involve the application of techniques of cointegration and error-correction models conducted by Kugler, Ghatak, Milner and Utkulu, and Islam.[238] This relatively new methodology is free from the shortcomings found in methodologies of previous studies. Some studies have also been carried out in the recent past on Bangladesh that has provided mixed results. Ahmed et al. investigates the relationship between export and GDP growth for Bangladesh and found the base behind ELG hypothesis with bidirectional causality whereas Mamun and Nath suggests that there is a long-run unidirectional causality from exports to growth in Bangladesh.[239] The common

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[234] G. Feder, "On Exports and Economic Growth", *Journal of Development Economics*, 12 (2), February/April, 1983, pp. 59-73; R. Ram, "Exports and Economic Growth in Developing Countries: Evidence from Time-Series and Cross-Section Data", *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, 36 (1), October, 1987, pp. 51-63.

[235] R. F. Engle and C. W. J. Granjer, "Co-integration and Error Correction: Representation, Estimation and Testing", *Econometrica*, 55, 1987, pp. 1-87.

[236] W. S. Jung and P. J. Marshall, "Exports, Growth and Causality in Developing Countries", *Journal of Development Economics,* 18 (1), May/June, 1985, pp. 1-12; A. F. Darrat, "Are Exports an Engine of Growth? Another Look at the Evidence", *Applied Economics*, 19 (2), February, 1987, pp. 277-83; P. C. Y. Chow, "Causality between Export Growth and Industrial Development: Empirical Evidence from the NICs", *Journal of Development Economics*, 26 (1), June, 1987, pp. 55-63; A. Serletis, "Export Growth and Canadian Economic Development", *Journal of Development Economics*, 38 (1), January, 1992, pp. 133-45.

[237] M. E. Ekanayake, "Exports and Economic Growth in Asian Developing Countries: Cointegration and Error-Correction Models", *Journal of Economic Development*, 24, December 1999.

[238] P. Kugler, "Growth, Exports and Cointegration: An Empirical Investigation", *Weltwirtschaffliches Archiv*, 127 (1), 1991, pp. 73-82; S. Ghatak, C. Milner and U. Utkulu, "Exports, Export Composition and Growth-Cointegration and Causality Evidence for Malaysia", *Applied Economics*, 29 (2), 1997, pp. 213-223; and M. N. Islam, "Exports Expansion and Economic Growth: Testing for Cointegration and Causality", *Applied Economics*, 30 (3), March, 1998, pp. 415-25.

[239] Nasiruddin Ahmed, "Export Response to Trade Liberalization in Bangladesh: A Cointegration Analysis", *Applied Economics*, 32 (8), 2000, pp. 1077-1084; A.K.

idea though these studies share is that the level of development is an important factor in determining export-growth relationship. As such, although there is a vast collection of empirical literature, contradictory results obtain from these studies explain why this topic is still at the top of the agenda for both researchers and policy makers around the world.

## 3. METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

The study has some distinctive features. In this study, the cointegration and multivariate Granger Causality technique developed by Toda and Yamamoto (1995) has been used. Since, some researchers believe that the mixed and conflicting evidence regarding ELG might result from the omitted variables; the authors went beyond the traditional bivariate approach by including imports as an additional variable in the system. This is in accordance with some recent studies of Serletis and Riezman which suggest that imports may contribute to the establishment of cointegration and thus have to be accounted for when testing ELGH.[240] Imports have been included in this study to capture the role of promoting exports in the accumulation of foreign exchange that is additionally used in financing capital import which in turn enhances economic growth. Findings by Riezman, suggest that omitting important variables from the system may sometimes either mask or overstate the effect of exports on income. These findings have been checked here in case of Bangladesh by comparing the result of bivariate and univariate model. To assess whether the export led growth hypothesis is valid or not in case of Bangladesh, two points should be noted:

**First**, along with two-variable model, this paper has also gone beyond the traditional two-variable relationship and has compared the empirical result which is expected to shed a more accurate light on the issue.

**Second**, the second point relates to some important aspects of cointegration and causality study. This refers to the use of vector autoregressive (VAR) and vector error correction model (VECM). The VAR model essentially suggests a short-run relationship between the variables. This shortcoming can be avoided if VECM, which can generate long-run relation, is used. So, this study's results refer to the long run.

So far, only a few studies have used this methodology to study the "Export-led Growth" hypothesis in developing countries like Bangladesh. Given the small

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Mamun and K. H. Nath, "Export-led Growth in Bangladesh: A Time Series Analysis", *Applied Economics Letters*, 12, 2005, pp. 361-364.

[240] A. Serletis, "Export Growth and Canadian Economic Development", *Journal of Development Economics*, 38 (1), January, 1992, pp. 133-45; R. G. Riezman, P. M. Summers and C. H. Whiteman, "The Engine of Growth or its Handmaiden? A Time Series Assessment of Export-led Growth" *Empirical Economics*, 21 (1), 1996, pp. 77-113.

number of studies conducted using this methodology, it is expected that this paper will make a modest contribution to empirical literature in Bangladesh.

## 4. VARIABLE DEFINITIONS AND DATA SOURCES

In this paper, annual time series data of real GDP, real export and real import of Bangladesh for the year 1974 to 2005 have been used. Here, all the time series have been transformed into logarithms. Log transformation can reduce the problem such as heteroscedasticity as it compresses the scale in which the variables are measured.[241]

**Figure 1**
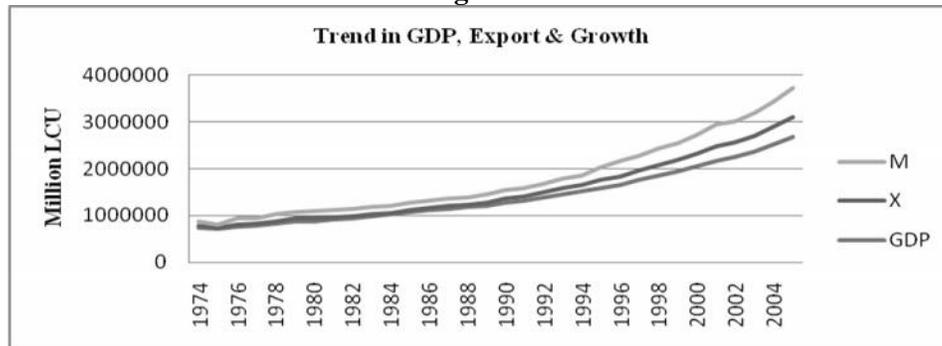


Data for this study were sourced from World Bank's World Development Indicators,[242] and various issues of the Statistical Year Book of Bangladesh published by Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics. A full description of the definitions and the source for each variable is presented in Appendix-1.

## 5. ESTIMATION TECHNIQUE

This empirical study consists of the unit root tests, the cointegration test and finally causality test using an error correction model.

### 5.1. *Definition of Causality*

According to the Granger (1969) causality approach, a variable y, say economic growth is caused by x, say exports, if y can be predicted better from past values of y and x than from past values of y alone. For a simple bivariate

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[241] The inclusion of imports in the system allows us to capture the role of promoting exports in the accumulation of foreign exchange which makes it easier for the economy to finance to importation of capital goods which in turn boosts economic growth.

[242] "World Development Indicators 2007" on CD-ROM, *World Bank, 2007*, Washington D.C.

model, it can be tested if x is Granger causing y by estimating equation (1) and then testing the hypothesis in equation (2), using the standard F test.

$$y_t = \Gamma_1 + \sum_{j=1}^{P} S_{11j}\, y_{t-j} + \sum_{j=1}^{P} S_{12j}\, x_{t-j} + u_{1t} \qquad \ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots .(1)$$

$H_o$: $\beta_{12j} = 0$ for j= 1, 2.............p $\qquad$ …............................ (2)

$H_1$: $\beta_{12j} \neq 0$ for at least one j

Here $u_{1t}$ is a white noise process. Variable x (Granger) causes variable y if the null hypothesis (2) is rejected, where $\beta_{12}$ is the vector of the coefficients of lagged values of the variable x. Similarly, it can be tested if y causes x by estimating equation (3) and testing null hypothesis (4) using the standard F test.

$$x_t = \Gamma_2 + \sum_{j=1}^{P} S_{21j}\, y_{t-j} + \sum_{j=1}^{P} S_{22j}\, x_{t-j} + u_{2t} \qquad \ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots .(3)$$

$H_0$: $\beta_{22j} = 0$ for j = 1, 2.............p $\qquad$ ...........................(4)

$H_1$: $\beta_{22j} \neq 0$ for at least one j

For a multivariate model, the idea is to test the joint influence of two variables (for trivariate model) on the third variable. The joint trivariate causality model is specified as:

$$y_t = \Gamma_1 + \sum_{j=1}^{P} S_{11j}\, y_{t-j} + \sum_{j=1}^{P} S_{12j}\, x_{t-j} + \sum_{j=1}^{P} S_{13j}\, m_{t-j} + u_{1t} \qquad \ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots .(5)$$

$$x_t = \Gamma_2 + \sum_{j=1}^{P} S_{21j}\, x_{t-j} + \sum_{j=1}^{P} S_{22j}\, y_{t-j} + \sum_{j=1}^{P} S_{23j}\, m_{t-j} + u_{2t} \qquad \ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots (6)$$

Here, m denotes import. The import equation is omitted because causality of this variable is not studied here. In this case, for equation (5)

$H_0$: $\beta_{12j} = 0$ for j = 1, 2.............p

$H_1$: $\beta_{12j} \neq 0$ for at least one j

However, it has been argued that in a regression context for determining whether some parameters of the model are jointly zero, the traditional F test is not valid when the variables are cointegrated and the test statistics do not have a standard distribution. That is, the usual tests for exact linear restrictions on parameters (e.g. the Wald test) do not have their usual asymptotic distributions if the data are cointegrated. Studies based on above procedures as they do not check for cointegration, and, therefore, may have missed out on some of the "forecastability" which becomes available through the error-correction term. In the presence of cointegration, standard causality tests (SGC) may be misleading.

To deal with this issue VAR model with the Error Correction Model (VECM) is used to test the Granger causality.

### 5.2. *Unit Root Tests*

Since a causality test holds only for stationary variables, unit root tests have to be performed on all the variables involved. A time series is stationary (in the sense of weak stationary) if its mean, variance and covariance remain constant overtime. At a formal level, stationary can be tested by determining whether the data contain unit root. The Augmented Dickey-Fuller (ADF)[243] and Phillips-Perron tests supplemented by Ljung-Box test are adopted for this purpose. The ADF test is based on the estimate of the following regression[244] for any variable z:

$$\Delta z_t = b_o + b_1 t + S z_{t-j} + \sum_{j=1}^{P} X_j \Delta z_{t-j} + u_t \qquad \ldots\ldots\text{.....................}(7)$$

$H_O$: $\beta=0$; variable z is non stationary. Where $b_o$ is a drift, t presents time trend and p is a large enough lag length to ensure that $u_t$ is a white nose process. If the series is not stationary a transformation of the variables, usually in the form of differencing, is needed to produce a stationary series on which causality tests can be conducted. (The logs of variables are taken so that, the first differences can be interpreted as growth rates). Since, it has been shown that, ADF tests are sensitive to the lag lengths chosen, by selecting an upper bound on the lag order an autoregression of that order has been run in this paper.[245] The last lag order has been chosen where it is found significant; where not the order has been reduced by one and is repeated until the last lag is significant. If no lag order is detected as significant, the Dickey-Fuller (DF) test has been run.[246] The critical values for the test are given by Mackinnon.[247] In case of non-stationary series, a transformation of the variable in the form of differencing has been done on which causality test can be conducted and the order of integration has been determined. If all the variables are found to be integrated of same order, cointegration test can be done.

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[243] See Serletis (1992), *op.cit*., and Riezman et. al., (1996), *op.cit*.

[244] Thereby reducing a tenfold difference between two values to a twofold difference.

[245] J. Y. Campbell and P. Perron, "Pitfalls and Opportunities: What Macroeconomists should know about Unit Roots", *NBER Technical Working Paper*, 100, 1991, NBER, Cambridge, M.A.

[246] The t-statistic under the null hypothesis of a unit root does not have the conventional t-distribution. Dickey and Fuller (1979) showed that the distribution under the null hypothesis is nonstandard, and simulated the critical values for selected sample sizes.

[247] J. G. Mackinnon, "Critical Values for Cointegration Tests", in R. F. Engle and C. W. J. Granger (eds.), *Critical Values for Cointegration Tests in Long-Run Economic Relationships: Readings in Cointegration*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, U.K., 1991, pp. 267-276.

### 5.3. *Cointegration Tests*

The presence of cointegration implies that a stationary long-run relationship among the series is present. That means, if a set of variable are cointegrated, the effects of a shock to one variable spread to others, possibly with time lags, so as to preserve a long run relation between the variables. In this paper, two tests have been performed to check cointegration although the focus is on Johansen test.

### 5.3.1. *Engel-Granger Test for Cointegration*

In the case of two variables, this can be done by estimating the following cointegrating equations by OLS and testing their residuals for stationarity.

$$LGDP_t = \alpha_0 + \beta_0 LX_t + u_{0t} \qquad\qquad\qquad \text{.….......................... (8)}$$

In the case of more than two variables:

$$LGDP_t = \alpha_1 + \beta_1 LX_t + \gamma LM_t + u_{1t} \qquad\qquad \text{.................................(9)}$$

If LGDP and LX are both I (1), then for them to be cointegrated u should be stationary or I (0). To check whether there is a valid long-run relationship among the variables, the stationarity of residuals have to be tested from (8) and (9) employing the ADF test. The EG test has been criticised on several grounds. First, contradictory conclusions may come depending on which equations (8 or 9) are being utilised to obtain the residuals for the unit root test. Another serious defect of the EG test is that, any error introduced in the first step is carried out to the second step. Finally, the method only allows for a single cointegration equation. However, if there are more than two variables, there is a possibility that more than one equation may depict the long-run relationships among the various variables.

### 5.3.2. *Johansen Test for Cointegration*

Johansen's maximum likelihood estimators that consider as superior to the former since it corrects the above pitfalls of the EG test. Johansen's test enables estimating and testing for the presence of multiple cointegration relationships, r, in a single-step procedure. The method involves estimating the following VAR model:

$$Y_t = \Gamma_0 + \sum_{j=1}^{P} A_j Y_{t-j} + u_t \qquad\qquad \text{.......................... (10)}$$

Where $Y_t$ is an n×1 vector of non-stationary I (1) variables, in this case $Y_t$ = (LGDP, LX and LM) in case of three variable model and $Y_t$ = (LGDP, LX) in case of two variable model. n = number of variables in the system. $u_t$ is n×1 vector of iid innovations. Johansen provides two different test statistics that can be used to test the hypothesis of the existence of r cointegrating vectors, namely, the trace test and the maximum eigenvalue test. Here, the trace test statistics have

been used. Denoting the number of cointegration vectors by r, the trace statistics is calculated under the null hypothesis, $r \leq r^*$ against the alternative of $r > r^*$.

### 5.4. *Vector Error Correction Model (VECM)*

Once it is established that two variables are cointegrated, the next issue is that of which variable "causes" the other. As noted earlier that, the SGC test is likely to be misleading if variables are cointegrated since the standard test do not contain an error-correction term. So, with cointegrated variables, there must exist an error-correction representation that may make the following form:

$$\Delta LGDP_t = r_{10} + \sum_{i=1}^{P} x_{11,i} \Delta LGDP_{t-i} + \sum_{i=1}^{P} x_{12,i} \Delta LX_{t-i} + \sum_{i=1}^{P} x_{13,i} \Delta LM_{t-i} + \sum_{j=1}^{r} \}_{1j} u_{t-1,j} + e_{1t}$$

(11)

$$\Delta LX_t = r_{20} + \sum_{i=1}^{P} x_{21,i} \Delta LGDP_{t-i} + \sum_{i=1}^{P} x_{22,i} \Delta LX_{t-i} + \sum_{i=1}^{P} x_{23,i} \Delta LM_{t-i} + \sum_{j=1}^{r} \}_{2j} u_{t-1,j} + e_{2t}$$

(12)

Here, another equation of import can be omitted because the concentration in this paper is to find out the existence and nature of casual relation between growth and export only. For bivariate model, the above two equations are obtained by omitting the term of import (LM). Here, $u_{t-1,j}$ is the stationary residual from the cointegrating equations. By introducing error correction terms in the above equations, an additional channel is opened up through which causality is tested. For example, in equation (11), the growth of real exports is said to Granger cause real income growth either when the coefficients of lagged $\Delta LX$, $\Delta LM$ and $\Delta LGDP$ are jointly significant through the F test or if $\lambda_{1j}$ is significant or both. So, if the series are correlated, the coefficients $\lambda_{1j}$ and $\lambda_{2j}$ are expected to capture the adjustment (speed of adjustment) of $\Delta LGDP$ and $\Delta LX$ towards long run equilibrium, while the lagged changes in the independent variables are expected to capture the short-run dynamic of the model. There is evidence that, the causality tests are often sensitive to the choice of lag lengths. The most recommended AIC has been used to select the lag length of the VAR system, which is achieved by minimising the AIC.

So, the guidelines for testing for causality are the following. The first step would be to test unit roots in all the variables involved. In the case of stationary variables, the model would be estimated in levels and causality test can be applied. If all the variables are nonstationary, I (1) in levels and are stationary in first differences, I (0), then a cointegration test is carried out. Once cointegration is detected, causality tests have to be performed using VECM. If no cointegration is detected, then the model has to be estimated in first differences and the SGC is applied.

## 6. EMPIRICAL RESULTS

Our empirical findings consist of unit root tests, the cointegration test and finally the Granger causality tests. The variables used in this study are following: LGDP is the natural logarithm of real GDP; LX is the natural logarithm of the real exports; LM is the natural logarithm of the real imports.

### 6. 1. *Time Series Properties of the Variables*

The stationary research assumes the existence of a unit root. Its number gives also the integration order for each variable. Table-1 provides the results of unit root tests using ADF test supplemented by Phillips-Perron and Ljung-Box Q-test up to a lag order of 4. The length of lags in equation (7) is determined using general to specific method where the upper bound is chosen to be three. The results show that the LGDP, LX and LM become stationary at 5% level by transformation with the first difference.

**Table 1: Augmented Dickey-Fuller Unit Root Test**

| Variables | With a Time Trend | | Without a Time Trend | | Ljung-Box Q Test |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Test Statistics | Critical Values | Test Statistics | Critical Values | P> Chi2 (4) |
| LGDP | -1.997 | -3.576 | | | 0.0000 |
| LX | -2.709 | -3.576 | | | 0.0000 |
| LM | -3.079 | -3.576 | | | 0.0000 |
| $\Delta$LGDP | | | -7.657 | -2.986 | 0.8650 |
| $\Delta$LX | | | -8.166 | -2.986 | 0.2365 |
| $\Delta$LM | | | -10.244 | -2.986 | 0.0026 |

Notes: Critical values are at 5% level of significance.

The integration order I (1) of the three variables has been determined according to the number of the unit roots. PP test (Table-2) also consistent with ADF test and concluded that all the variables are stationary at their first difference level.

**Table 2: Phillips-Perron Unit Root Test and Ljung-Box Q Test**

| Variables | Lags | With a Time Trend | Without a Time Trend |
|---|---|---|---|

| | | Test Statistics | Critical Values | Test Statistics | Critical Values |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| LGDP | 0 | -1.979 | -3.576 | | |
| LX | 0 | -2.700 | -3.576 | | |
| LM | 1 | -1.665 | -3.580 | | |
| ΔLGDP | 0 | | | -8.428 | -2.986 |
| ΔLX | 0 | | | -8.310 | -2.986 |
| ΔLM | 0 | | | -11.657 | -2.986 |

Notes: Critical values are at 5% level of significance.

## 6.2. *Tests for Cointegration*

As mentioned earlier, the second step in the process of finding a causality direction is to test for cointegration among the variables applying EG and the Johansen maximum likelihood cointegration tests that are applied to both bivariate and multivariate model. Though the emphasis is on Johansen cointegration test.

### 6.2.1. *EG Test*

Using EG test, stationarity has been checked through ADF test of the residuals that are obtained from OLS regression of LGDP on LX in bivariate model and LGDP on LX and LM in multivariate model. Table-3 shows that residuals from equation (8) and (9) become stationary indicating that both models are cointegrated. Applying the Johansen test as presented below did not affect the findings.

**Table 3: Engle-Granger Cointegration Test**

| Cointegrating Vectors | ADF of Residuals (without intercept) | | Lags | Adjusted R-squared |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Test Statistics | Critical Values | | |
| LGDP,LX | -3.115 | -1.950 | 0 | 0.9489 |
| LGDP,LX, LM | -2.935 | -1.950 | 0 | 0.9494 |

Notes: Critical values are at 5% level of significance.

### 6.2.2. *Johansen Test*

Under multivariate model, trace statistic accepts the null hypothesis in favour of r≤1. Table-4 shows that, the empirical support for one cointegration vector implies that all three variables, namely, export, import and economic growth are cointegrated and follow a common long run path. Therefore, the cointegration analysis provides a justification for the inclusion of imports in the analysis of ELG hypothesis for Bangladesh. So, the result of the Johansen cointegration test indicates that there exist long run relationship between economic growth and

export for Bangladesh. That means economic growth and export may reach a long-run equilibrium that depicts a stable relationship.

**Table 4: Johansen Cointegration Test**

| Trace Test (Lag 2) | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Cointegrating Vectors:  LGDP,LX, LM | | | |
| Cointegration Rank | | Test Statistics | Critical Values |
| Null | Alternative | | |
| $r = 0$ | $r > 0$ | 40.1446 | 29.68 |
| $r \leq 1$ | $r > 1$ | 14.6982* | 15.41 |
| $r \leq 2$ | $r > 2$ | 4.8444 | 3.76 |

Notes: Critical values are at 5% level of significance.

Under bivariate model, Table-5 shows similar result as multivariate model. This also indicates that SGC test is not valid for both models since variables are cointintegrated.

**Table 5: Johansen Cointegration Test**

| Trace Test (Lag 2) | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Cointegrating Vectors:  LGDP, LX | | | |
| Cointegration Rank | | Test Statistics | Critical Values |
| Null | Alternative | | |
| $r = 0$ | $r > 0$ | 17.9486 | 15.41 |
| $r \leq 1$ | $r > 1$ | 3.5153* | 3.76 |

Notes: Critical values are at 5% level of significance.

## 6.3. *Granger Causality Test*

The ultimate goal of this paper is to test the validity of ELG hypothesis in the experience of Bangladesh. To do so, the paper has emphasised to distinguish, if any, in two cases:

Case A: Bivariate model, relatively more used model

Case B: Multivariate model

### 6.3.1. *Case A*

In bivariate model, to determine the appropriate lag length, information criterion like Akike Information Criterion (AIC) or Schwarz Bayesian Information Criterion (SBIC) or Hannan-Quinn Information Criterion (HQIC) can be used. Here using all these criteria, the optimal lag length is chosen to be 2 that is associated with their smallest possible value. Table-6 shows that the coefficient of lagged $\Delta LX$ and $\Delta LGDP$ are jointly significant at 5% level through

the F test in both equations. Error correction terms are also significant in both equations for Bangladesh. These results imply both short-term and long-term bidirectional causality between GDP growth and export growth in case of Bangladesh. As the speed of adjustment coefficients are significant in the model, it can be stated that, a short run real GDP is corrected to a speed of 29% per annum. Although the individual impact of the variables may come out insignificant possibly because of the potential multicollinearity problem.

**Table 6: Causality Test (Vector Error Correction Methodology)**

| Dependent Variables | Lags | Error Correction Term ($E_{t-1}$) | t-Statistics (P>lZl) | F-Statistics (P>Chi2) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ΔLGDP | 2 | -3.34 | 0.001 | 0.000 |
| ΔLX | 2 | 4.98 | 0.000 | 0.000 |

Notes: Critical values are at 5% level of significance.

### 6.3.2. *Case B*

In multivariate model, using F test, bidirectional long-run causality between export growth and GDP growth (Table-7) can be seen. Using all information criteria, the optimal lag length is chosen to be 2. The coefficient of lagged ΔLX, ΔLM and ΔLGDP are jointly significant at 5% level through the F test in both equations (in equation 11 and 12). If the error correction terms are observed, they appear significant also in both equations for Bangladesh. It indicates that, a short run ΔLGDP is corrected to a speed of 40% per annum towards long run equilibrium. So that, these results imply both short-term and long-term bidirectional causality between export growth and GDP growth. Although the individual impact of the variables may come out insignificant possibly because of the potential multicollinearity problem.

**Table 7: Causality Test (Vector Error Correction Methodology )**

| Dependent Variables | Lags | Error Correction Term ($E_{t-1}$) | t-Statistics (P>lZl) | F-Statistics (P>Chi2) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ΔLGDP | 2 | -2.68 | 0.007 | 0.0003 |
| ΔLX | 2 | 2.39 | 0.017 | 0.000 |
| ΔLM | 2 | 4.62 | 0.000 | 0.000 |

Notes: Critical values are at 5% level of significance.

The overall findings suggest that, ELG hypothesis has been established by this paper through both long-run and short run bidirectional causality (GDP -> Export; Export -> GDP) in the experience of Bangladesh. Similar result has been found from causality test in both bivariate and multivariate model in case of Bangladesh.

## 7. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The importance of international trade and economic growth has been debated over the decades. The suitability of trade policy- import substitution or export promotion- for growth and development has been also debated in the literature. This paper reinvestigated the export-led growth hypothesis using cointegration and multivariate Granger Causality procedure in case of Bangladesh. The results of the cointegrating technique suggest that there exists a long run relationship between export growth and real GDP growth while vector error correction methodology provides us with the bidirectional causality between export and economic growth. That is, in Bangladesh GDP growth and export growth are working in tandem proving the validation of ELG hypothesis. Hence, our findings lend support to an export-oriented growth strategy in promoting an enhanced growth potential in a small open economy like Bangladesh. Our government in this venture should implement effective macroeconomic policies in stabilising its trade balance and liberalising the country's trade avoiding the use of regulatory and restrictive policy measures as much as possible. Along with it, measures should also be taken to ensure the adequate supply of well-equipped labour, as this would lead to a higher level of economic growth. Government should also prioritise the sectors of export based on the expected gains to the whole economy for which further sectoral research would be necessary in near future.

**Appendix 1: Data Definition and Sources**

| Variables | Notation | Definitions | Source |
|-----------|----------|-------------|--------|

| Gross Domestic Product | **Y** | GDP at purchaser's prices is the sum of gross value added by all resident producers in the economy plus any product taxes and minus any subsidies not included in the value of the products. Data are in current local currency (In Million). | World Bank National Accounts data and OECD National Accounts data files. |
|---|---|---|---|
| Export | **X** | Exports of goods and services represent the value of all goods and other market services provided to the rest of the world. They include the value of merchandise, freight, insurance, transport, travel, royalties, license fees, and other services, such as communication, construction, financial, information, business, personal, and government services. They exclude labor and property income (formerly called factor services) as well as transfer payments. Data are in current local currency (In Million). | World Bank National Accounts data and OECD National Accounts data files. |
| Import | **M** | Imports of goods and services represent the value of all goods and other market services received from the rest of the world. They include the value of merchandise, freight, insurance, transport, travel, royalties, license fees, and other services, such as communication, construction, financial, information, business, personal, and government services. They exclude labor and property income (formerly called factor services) as well as transfer payments. Data are in current local currency. | World Bank National Accounts data and OECD National Accounts data files. |
| GDP deflator | | The GDP implicit deflator is the ratio of GDP in current local currency to GDP in constant local currency. The base year varies by country. | World Bank National Accounts data and OECD National Accounts data files. |