

---

**International Journal of Social, Political and Economic Research**

**IJOSPER**

ISSN: 2667-8810 (Online)

[ijosper.uk](http://ijosper.uk)

OPEN  ACCESS

**Original Article**

Article No: 18\_V5\_I1\_A1

**ENVIRONMENT AND CULTURE OF BANGLADESH: IN THE CONTEXT OF  
URBANIZATION**

**MD. RUHUL AMIN\***

\* Assistant Professor, Department of  
Public Administration  
Comilla University, Comilla.  
[rubel\\_2008iu@yahoo.com](mailto:rubel_2008iu@yahoo.com)

**Abstract:**

Urbanization is a population shift from rural to urban areas, "the gradual increase in the proportion of people living in urban areas", and the ways in which each society adapts to the change. Bangladesh is moving towards more and more urbanization. Bangladesh, with a rich cultural heritage and unique resource potentiality, is passing through a transition phase where the ultimate goal is to achieve urbanization, i.e., a particular way of life. Demographic changes leading to the increase in number of million cities is responsible for significant changes in socio-cultural setup of the country. All such changes affect on the environment, both- rural and urban. The paper shows how continuous urbanization has changed the cultural values and the regional environment of the country.

**Key Words:**

*Urbanization, Environment,  
Culture, Bangladesh.*

## **1. Introduction**

Development is a phenomenon which is time-specific, region-specific and dynamic. It generally varies from person to person and region to region. According to A.P. Thirlwall (2011), “if the process of economic and social development is defined in terms of an increase in society’s welfare, a concept of development is required which embraces not only economic variables and objectives, but also social objectives and values for which societies blossom. Thus development means the up gradation of a country’s economy and society to get a positive effect on society’s wellbeing. For any country, the economic and social development is perhaps the greatest challenge. The total amount of goods and services produced per head of the population is generally termed as the standard of living of people of a region. In other way, it is determined by the number of people who work and their productivity. Productivity depends on various other factors including education, training, levels of technology, levels of capital accumulations etc. On the regional scale, it is also determined by rural and urban areas as there is huge gap at all levels of social and economic development among these two.

Urbanization is the shift of population from rural to urban settings, which is changing the face of Bangladesh for the last few decades. During 1980, only about 17 percent of the total populations of the country were urban dwellers, which have grown to about 31 percent in 2013 census (BBS, 2012). Urbanization and its accompanying problems are well-known on which the developed world has accumulated a wealth of experience. Urbanization and health issues are mainly related to the process of urbanization in recent years. Studying rural-urban differentials in mortality, morbidity and their causes become significant along with imperative to recognize and understand the ongoing interaction between rural and urban areas. The influence of urbanization goes beyond the limits of towns and cities, which influences on the living conditions, behaviors, values, cultures, political, social and economic processes and on surrounding environment of the urban population (CUS; 2006).

This paper aims at finding the relationship between the process of urbanization and the issues of cultural change among urban population. The discussion will focus on various aspects of urbanization including urban values, urban cultures, spatial divisions and social differences which effect significantly on the urban life style.

## **2. Urbanization in Bangladesh**

As mentioned by Perry and Perry that urbanization is a process. With the movement of people from rural to urban areas, along with the increase in number of population in the latter region, there is change in values, change in way of life among migrant people which in return change

the whole environment of the recipient area. When a young boy come from village area and starts residing in the town after getting admission in a well-known College or University, his attitudes take a different shape which is a mixture of his native village culture and the new urban environment. When he gets job in that town, his attitudes and values again undergo some different form in a more confident and strong manner. During his visit to his native village, his new vision and way of thinking causes major change in the village environment. Here the environment is not merely a physical one; rather it covers the social and cultural spheres of the region. Thus, with the numerical increase in urban areas, movement can cause a major change in the social and cultural domain of both – rural and urban areas (Islam, N. and Z. Mahjabeen; 2003).

### **3. Role of Culture in Development**

As according to Louis Wirth an “urban way of life” results in an “urban type” of character and personality. Wirth developed a pioneering body of urban sociological theory which is still an important aspect of the study of Urban Sociology. According to Ralph Linton, “The culture of a society is the key of life of its members; the collection of ideas and habits which they learn, share and transmit from generation to generation.” Actually, culture is the way of life and it provides the guideline which is shared by the members of a society. Communication and interaction among members of a society is based on the culture which people acquire from their earlier generations. Learning the cultural attributes from elderly people of the society and sharing such acquired culture with the present fellow-members and transmit this to younger family members to make the new generation to think and feel in a right direction- are the major characteristics of a society and its cultures.

The process, by which an individual learns the attributes of the cultures of a society, is called the socialization. At the infancy, a child learns the basic behavioral patterns of its society from the family members. This is the most important stage of socialization. It is a life-long process which starts from infancy and operates till death of an individual. Ethnocentrism is the belief that one’s own society or culture is superior to the others. Such an attribute is based mainly on judgment in relation to other society with the standard of an individual’s own society and culture. It reflects ones “cultural indoctrination that all customs that differ from our own are somehow abnormal- strange at best, uncivilized at worst.” In this present age of globalization, such an attitude exerts positive impact of promoting unity within one group or society (Islam, N and S. Shafi; 2010). But, in other way, it leads to conflicts and tensions among various groups or society and cultures. However, to counter these negative effects of

ethnocentrism, proponents of cultural relativity suggest that cultures must be analyzed on their own terms, in the context of their own societal setting. In other words, any society or any individual has no right to use their own values and norms to judge the other society or culture. It merely means that other cultures should be approached with attitudes of tolerance, respect and understanding.”

In urban centers, life is very busy and very fast. An individual in an urban centre keeps contact only with those persons who are of interest to the individual. In contrast, in rural areas, the relationships are personal, intimate, long lasting and without a motive of personal benefit (Islam, Md. A; 2000).

#### **4. History of Urbanization in Bangladesh**

The history of urbanization focuses on the processes of by which existing populations concentrate themselves in [urban localities](#) over time, and on the social, political, cultural and economic contexts of cities. Most urban scholars focus on the "metropolis," a large or especially important city. There is much less attention to small cities, towns or (until recently) to suburbs. However social historians find small cities much easier to handle because they can use census data to cover or sample the entire population (Wikipedia of Urban).

Historically, the level of urbanization in Bangladesh has been low but it is urbanizing rapidly now. At the beginning of the last century, in 1901, only 2.43 percent (or about 0.7 million) of the total population of present Bangladesh areas of British India lived in urban areas. During the first half of the century urban population growth was almost static. In 1941, less than 4 percent of the population lived in urban centres,

The total urban population was 1.54 million. Urbanization received impetus after 1947, when the Indian subcontinent became independent of the British rule and Bangladesh, then East Pakistan, earned a new political status. Since then a change has been observed in terms of the growth of urban population and also of urban centers. The total urban population rose from 1.83 million in 1951 to about 2.64 million in 1961. The important factor responsible for this rapid growth was a large scale migration of Muslims from India after 1947, who mostly settled in urban areas. A phenomenal growth took place during the 1961 to 1974 period, the increase being as high as 137.6 percent. The growth rate was 6.7 percent per year during the period as against 3.7 percent per year in the previous decade. This rapid urban growth is largely due to migration of people from rural to urban areas. The rural push factors, caused by economic impoverishment following the liberation war in 1971 and environmental disasters

in the following years contributed significantly. Rate of Natural growth of population was also quite high.

In 1974, urban population increased to 8.9 percent from 5.2 percent in 1961. In 1981 this rose to 15.5 percent. The inter-censal change during this period (1974-81) was 110.7 percent with annual growth rate of about 10 percent (Table 1). Like the previous decade both migration and natural growth partially contributed to this growth. But the most important contributory factor for the 1974-81 periods was the redefinition of urban places. The extended definition of the urban area with the inclusion of all 460 Upazila Head Quarters as urban accounted for 30 percent of the total increase in urban population during this period. This indicates the role of political administrative decision in shaping the quantitative demographic status of urbanization rather than quality of Urbanization. During the 1981-1991 period - a slower growth of urban population, 5.4 percent, has been observed compared with the previous decade. At about 20.0 percent level of urbanization the total urban population was 22.45 million in 1991 and that at 23.1 percent level, the total urban population rose to 28.6 million in 2001. Only the total population figure is available so far for the 2011 census, this (in the revised count) has been stated to be 150.4 million. With an estimated level of urbanization to be 28 percent the total urban population would be approximately 42 million.

The rate of growth of urban population is likely to fall to some extent in the future, but would still be quite high. The UN (2004) projection for urban population of Bangladesh for 2030 was 86.5 million. No projection for urban population in 2050 was, however, given. The proportion urban would possibly cross the 50% mark by 2040 and the 60% mark by the year 2050 when the total urban population would rise above 100 million (Islam Nazrul; 2010).

## **5. Current Scenario of Urbanization**

Bangladesh had some 522 urban centers of various size categories in 1991, now the number is 570. Of these, one (Dhaka) is a megacity, Chittagong, Khulna, Rajshahi and Sylhet are metropolitan areas, 25 are cities (with population of over 100,000) each and the rest are smaller towns. There are 7 City Corporations and over 315 Pourashavas (Municipalities). The other towns have the Union Parishad type of local government.

Bangladesh's urban population has been growing at a yearly average rate of 6 percent since independence, at a time when the national population growth was 2.2 percent. As a result, urban population has grown six-fold, compared with a 70 percent increase in rural population (World Bank, 2007). As per recent UN data, approximately 25 percent of Bangladesh's current population currently lives in urban areas. Of this urban population, more than half

lives in the four largest cities: Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna and Rajshahi. With a population of almost 12 million, Dhaka is the capital and largest city in Bangladesh. It is also the 11<sup>th</sup> largest city in the world. At the same time, it is consistently ranked as one of the world's least livable city. Although income growth is higher and the poverty incidence is lower than the rest of Bangladesh, Dhaka still is a low income city with large numbers of poor when compared with most mega cities of the world. Holding the prospects for better income opportunities than most parts of Bangladesh, rapid migration is causing Dhaka's population to grow much faster than the rest of the country. This fast urbanization is putting pressure on the city's limited land, an already fragile environment, and weak urban services. The population density is now believed to have reached around 34000 people per square kilometer, making Dhaka amongst the most densely populated city in the world.

Poor city management and low efficiency are exacerbating the problems. Urban traffic has reached nightmare proportions, often causing huge delays in covering small distances with associated productivity losses. Water and air pollution from poor waste and traffic management poses serious health risks. The already acute slum population is growing further, contributing to serious human and law and order problems. All major cities in South Asia are facing similar problems. In general, poverty, deplorable condition of slums, corruption and inefficiency in service delivery, weak governance and poor finances are characteristic of all South Asian mega cities: Dhaka, Kolkata, Karachi, Mumbai and Delhi. Dhaka probably ranks the worst, however, in terms of infrastructure, service delivery and city governance (A.K.M. Helal uz Zaman, Khan Md. Tariqul Alam, Md. Jahirul Islam; 2010).

## **6. Cultural change due to Urbanization**

As mentioned by Perry and Perry (2011), any type of change may be experienced either on macro level or middle level or on a micro level. Cultural change on a macro level is generated by large- scale and revolutionary social forces which affect the entire society and a large region. Urbanization is the most important example of such type of forces which have the ability to transform the structures and institutions of the society. At the middle level of change, communities experience alterations in the economic and political field. As for example, with the establishment of any industry, there is a huge demographic as well as economic change in the whole region as more and more people started to move towards the industrial region. It should be mentioned here that, the urban setting provides more opportunities to individual or to a society which was formerly excluded from the political process. Finally, on a micro level, change is generally felt through new patterns of

interactions where an individual or a small group interacts with each other. As for example, some changes are experienced by a family as a result of adoption of new norms, new values and new manners by some of the family members.

If we consider the Neolithic period as the first phase of development with agricultural revolution, then urbanization can be considered as the second phase of development with a marked socio-economic revolution. The urbanization process is quite an old process of cultural change (United Nations; 2004).

## **7. Urban Environment in Bangladesh**

Among the most significant environmental challenges we are facing now-a-days, is the global climate change, excessive fossil fuel dependency and growing demand for energy. “Tertiarization” of productive economic activities has significant repercussions on socio-cultural setup of the urban area. Household expenditure requirements and economic opportunities increase with the size of urban centers. The size of city also affects on the average productivity of the various informal activity and hierarchy of the modern activity. Hence, urbanization is considered as a condition and also as an expression of economic development.

The development in communication sector has totally changed the rural-urban condition of interaction. Extension of peri-urban areas helps in the changing socio-economic way of life in rural and urban areas. Urbanization is characterized by growth in rural sector productivity generated by an increase in the demand to be made.

With a rapid rush to adopt urban way of life, most of the youngsters of surrounding rural areas or suburb areas are trying to convince their earning family members to invest some portion of their income in various socio-cultural activities. Increase in private transport is one important change in this direction. Such a tendency can also be seen among slum dwellers. When earning members are unable to fulfill such requirements, then some type of disturbances generate within the family.

Increase in number of vehicles in towns and cities, help in increase the atmospheric pollution within the urban centers. A large numbers of health and mental disorder generate from such type of pollution.

The proper disposal of human waste is a huge problem in urban areas. Traditional technologies are unable to solve in this regard. Besides, existing toilets are extremely dirty and unhygienic. As a result, most urban slum dwellers relieve themselves in open air surrounding their locality. These results in extremely dirty and unhealthy conditions, with

streets and lanes dotted with human excrements. Such a habit creates lots of problems for women members of the area (Shaw, Margaret; 2007).

### **8. Scenario of Urban Culture in Bangladesh**

The level of urbanization in Bangladesh has increased from about 17 percent in 1980 to about 31 percent in 2011 and will be 50 percent within two decades. Rapid urbanization is witnessed in the country where the urban population ratios doubled. This, with a high population growth, has exerted enormous pressure on urban centers throughout the country. Access to labour, capital and markets, basic infrastructure, skills, technical know-how, networks and market linkages etc are the characteristic feature of efficient cities. But, for urban poor all these facilities are not equally distributed (UN world urbanization prospect; 2007).

In urban areas, the slums represent a huge economic failure. Sprawling urbanization has failed to produce corresponding economic growth which leads to huge gap between urban dwellers. Alcoholism is a disease endemic to slums and it leads to moral and economic degradation. Consuming alcohol by men restricts the amount of income that can be spent for their family which again leads to social diseases of domestic abuse and as serious health disorder.

In countries like Bangladesh, rural to urban migration and the resulting urbanization is related with a vertical shift in the labour force from the agricultural sector to the urban-industrial sector. These urban people, mostly slum dwellers, after recognizing themselves as “temporary workers” in the urban work field, tend to neglect the importance of economic and social changes- though it would improve their lives (World Bank Bangladesh Development series 2007).

### **9. Recommendations**

There is a strong need to engage the informal sector in urban planning processes by making them an equal stakeholder in it. Integration of informal settlements into city planning exercise through parallel efforts of regularization and up gradation of informally developed areas should be taken as utmost importance in urban planning procedures. It is necessary to include the following-

- ✓ Construction of trunk infrastructure to attract investments in preferred locations
- ✓ Opting measures of land development in environmentally sustainable areas which will ensure future expansion of lands. Such areas are generally identified 20-30 years before and be defined by a grid of secondary roads following neighborhood principles



staying clear of areas where development is not desired like ecologically sensitive areas. After identifying, these areas are provided with main infrastructure in a phased manner.

- ✓ Provision of land re-adjustment in some parcels of land, which are consolidated for effective provision of services through mutually beneficial agreements with landowners (Alamgir M; 1973).
- ✓ Provision of transport, energy, water and communication with urban development is also necessary. The availability of trunk infrastructure for water, sewage, roads, electric and telecommunication lines which influence significantly the spatial pattern of growth of urban centers.
- ✓ Access to a range of facilities for urban dwellers irrespective of caste, class, gender, and religion including education, hospitals, markets, community halls, clinics, safe space for recreation, safe space for religious and cultural practices, regional markets and so on (Ahsan,M.,R, & Islam,N; 1999).

## **10. Conclusion**

While Bangladesh is undergoing a rapid rate of urbanization and urban development, urban related problems must be addressed. Proper policy should prepare to address all kinds of negative values and sub-cultures, crimes and violence, poverty, deprivation, social ills, environmental degradation, socio-cultural relations etc. From psychological point of view, all types of urban problems, directly or indirectly, have caused certain form of value change among urban residents ( Barkat, A., & Akhter, S. (2001). The issue is how to improve the existing urban environment into such a place which is peaceful, safe and conducive for each and every single urban resident. Within limited space and resource, all parties concerned will have to continue to make our cities a better place for the benefit of our next generation. It is necessary to formulate the policy to achieve sustainable urbanization in Bangladesh.

## **11. References**

- Ahsan,M.,R, & Islam,N. (Ed.)( 1999). *Urban Bangladesh: Geographical Studies, Urban Studies Programme*, Dept. of Geography, University of Dhaka. Series no-06, PP. 1-6.
- Alamgir M. (1973). *Problems of Urbanization in Bangladesh*. Dhaka: Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (Mimeo).

A.K.M. Helal uz Zaman, Khan Md. Tariqul Alam, Md. Jahirul Islam (2010). Urbanization in Bangladesh: Present Status and Policy Implications. ASA University Review, Vol. 4 No. 2, July–December, 2010.

Barkat, A., & Akhter, S. (2001). A mushrooming population: The threat of slumization instead of urbanization in Bangladesh. The Harvard Asia Pacific Review, 1(1), 27-32.

BBS (2012). Bangladesh Population Census 2001. National Report (Provisional) Vol-1. Dhaka: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, Government of Bangladesh.

CUS (2006). Slums of Urban Bangladesh: Mapping and Census 2006, Centre for Urban Studies (CUS).

History of Urbanization ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/urban\\_in\\_Bangladesh](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/urban_in_Bangladesh)).

Islam, Md. A (2000). “Population Momentum in Bangladesh,” in CPD: Demographic Dynamics in Bangladesh, Dhaka: CPD and UNFPA.

Islam, N and S. Shafi (2010). “Globalization and Transformation of Dhaka City”, in S. Banerjee-Guha edited Accumulation and by Accumulation: Transformative Cities in the New Global Order, New Delhi: Sage, pp70-91.

Islam Nazrul (2010). Urbanization and Urban Governance in Bangladesh. [http://saneinetwork.net/Files/Urbanization\\_and\\_Urban\\_Governance\\_in\\_Bangladesh.pdf](http://saneinetwork.net/Files/Urbanization_and_Urban_Governance_in_Bangladesh.pdf) ).

Islam, N. and Z. Mahjabeen (2003). “The Role of Civil Society Organizations in Urban Development in Dhaka City.” Oriental Geographer. Vol. 47, No.2. pp. 29-46.

Shaw, Margaret ET el (2007) strategies and best practices in crime prevention in particular in relation to urban areas and youth at risk, proceeding of the workshop held at the 11<sup>th</sup> UN congress on crime prevention and criminal justice, Montreal.

United Nations (2004). World Urbanization Prospects, 2003. New York: Population Division of United Nations.

UN world urbanization prospect, 2007.

World Bank Report, 2007.