

CIVIL SOCIETY, GOOD GOVERNANCE AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN BANGLADESH: AN ANALYSIS FROM GENDER PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT

In recent development discourse, there is a well-known assumption that more participation of women in politics is important for democracy. In this respect, CSO- the third branch of power has opened up relatively new space for women's engagement through the issue of good governance. It is noted that gender power encompasses both in family and Civil Society, and family is both precursor and site of intimacy (Habermass, 1992). However, gender hierarchy in CSOs remains unquestioned and uncontested as well. Therefore, donor driven CSO was not linked with family and their attention did not include family. In Bangladesh, women were mobilized by different NGOs for different development projects, and women have been considered as development actors. After 1980s, fundamental groups were close to power, consequently purpose of women's mobilization have been negotiated by NGOs/ CSOs. But it is very interestingly noticed that the actors for women's mobilization have been changed over time, the reasons of mobilization have been altered over time but women remain constant as political subject.

Keywords: Family; Governance; NGO; Political Society.

1. Introduction:

Bangladesh gained independence in 1971 after a nine- month liberation war against Pakistan. The war had caused mass destruction, post independence population movements to and from India on massive scale creating a population of refugees. Reconstruction required the involvement of many actors including the government, local and international development organizations (CSOs/ NGOs) whose activities were primarily focussed on the rehabilitation of rural activities and rebuilding the social and physical infrastructures.

Since 1980s, NGOsⁱ become increasingly important vehicles for ensuring access of poor people to credit and other resources, reducing poverty, promoting economic development and managing the short term and negative effects of Structural Adjustment Program (SAP). In the 1990s, NGOs development activities increased considerably reciting the terms of empowerment, privatization and entrepreneurship. Its trend reflects NGO institutionalizations as a process which carries many contradictions in the emergent relations between NGO activities, and the state and donor interests.

As Feldman (2003:5-6) pointed out, Civil Society (CS) has been incorporated development discourse in line with privatization within the new liberal framework, a process which undermines both state development initiatives and oppositional politics. The reason is not only for donor increasing proportion aid through them, but also the notion of ‘NGOs can be seen as part of privatization strategy’ of World Bank and most Donor agenciesⁱⁱ. The shift of focus from rebuilding infrastructure to good governance can also be explained in terms of political phenomenon. From mid 70s to 91, there was direct or indirect military rule in Bangladesh. By the insurrection of 1990s, it has started to step towards democracy. During this period, there was growing recognition of NGOs as a collaborative partner of government to implement programs undertaken within Second (1980- 85), Third (1985–90), Fourth (1990 – 1995), and Fifth Five Year Plan (1995 – 2000) by the government of HM Ershad (1980– 90), Khaleda Zia (1990– 95) ,and Sheikh Hasina (199 – 2000). Therefore, opportunity has been created for CSOs to be involved more (Haque, 2002:418).

In Bangladesh, there is a tendency to categorize NGOs as Civil Society Organisation (CSO) without problematizing the concept of CS itself, its internal differentiation and relationships with the state and its historical changes. Limited attention has been given to the analysis of CS as a bearer of gender norms and relations. Women’s political participation and their contribution in politics has been crucial throughout the history of Bangladesh, but its space, activities and its actors have changed over time. In liberation war and onward activities for rebuilding the nation, women did play a very significant role. The Government of Bangladesh (GoB) took initiatives to mobilize women to support its activities and nation-building goals. With the decline of the socialist government, different national and international development organisations continue to mobilize women’s participation under the umbrella of community development. They mobilize women for the provision of different social services, forming groups for entrepreneurial credit and even for social movements (like social movement against domestic violenceⁱⁱⁱ and against youth smoking^{iv} and mass movement against polygamy, child-marriage, women trafficking and prostitution by Women’s Council of Bangladesh^v).

In Bangladesh, the state and NGOs have defined themselves in part by the difference from one another. This is not incidental. The mythic opposition of the state and NGOs reflects real struggle to establish themselves as the legitimate voice of the Bangladeshi people (White, 1999:308). The growing power of CSOs in relation to government poses new questions about their own transparency and legitimacy. In the specific

context of overpopulation, rural poverty and landlessness (83 % people live in rural area, and among them 50 % are landless), the role of CSOs can be important, and may be complimentary to the government's role. As Haque (2002) pointed out CSOs have taken over some basic services sector/ activities that state agencies supposed to do. The majority of the NGOs' (/ CSOs') members are women who represent a formidable political force as a group participating in election and shaping the result of the election. Also it is evident that resistance has been increased among the CSOs in certain policy adopt by the government, by their advocacy and publicity activities. They do have the direct involvement in macro political process by educating voter and having affiliation with the main political parties which promote their power. Finally, they have moved from social development to profit making economic enterprises what can be seen as contradictory with the initial objectives of the organizations. CSOs thus have become a formidable force affecting the political and economic domains, especially the power and legitimacy of the government. The shifted emphasis of donors from social development to good governance has changed national politics offered CSOs an additional site of action, notably the local political structure.

Understanding CS, GG and gendered political participation a context such as Bangladesh must probe deeper into the underlying premises and assumptions behind these concepts. This paper tries to address the essential issues and the key insights of debates on CS, GG and gender relevant to Bangladesh's current reality in order to provide a basis for a discussion from gender perspectives and develop their own referents for these terms in their practices of political participation.

1.1 Objective and Research Methodology:

The paper is based on findings of a research^{vi} which tries to contribute to the debate on women's political participation, governance and civil society (CS) formation in Bangladesh^{vii}. The study was qualitative and explorative in nature. Both primary and secondary data sources were used. Primary data were collected through an In-depth Interview. For secondary data, along with relevant scholarly literatures, it used the relevant documents of Transparency International- Bangladesh and The Hunger Project-Bangladesh.

To discern the ways in which diverse understanding on GG and participation silhouette, the pattern of women's engagement in social movement, the study selected two CSOs of Kishoreganj district, Bangladesh. The two selected CSOs had 8 female members in their district committee. The study interviewed 7 of them^{viii} and 2 male members (who were convenors of the committees) to have male perspectives in understanding gender aspect in CS and GG movement. Among the 7 female respondents, professionally they were very assorted^{ix}. Either in student life or entry period of profession, all was involved in politics. And being disheartened, they left politics, and afterwards got involved in social activities. Among the two male members, one was retired professor, and another one was prominent lawyer of Kishoreganj.

2.1 Civil Society and Gender:

The concept of CS is used throughout the European history, but gained more prominence when philosophers began to consider the foundations of the emerging nation state in the 17th and 18th century. A key assumption for the concept of CS was the Christian notion of human equality. At that time, it was linked with the idea of right- based society in which rulers and ruled were subject to the law, based on the social contract. It is a complex and contested concept with multiple interpretations. It has long history in western political thought (Ehrehburg, 1999). An important feature of the academic debate on CS, despite its diverse trends, how is gender as a domain of power continues to be treated in parallel to CS, but not as an integrated element. As mentioned by Howell (2007), the tendency to keep the family outside of the CS arena is a persistent

weakness in the CS debate, despite the recognition of women's collective action. Most CS theorists treated family merely as boundary marker to the CS, their primary concern being the state and CS relation. In Gramsci's view, CS is the field in which the struggle for hegemony unfolds. Therefore, it provides an opening for counter hegemonic projects to gain strength (Hodgkinson and Foley, 2003: XIX).

In contrast, Habermas (1992a:453) views the CS as an institutional core constituted by voluntary associations outside the sphere of the state and economy. These associations could be like church, cultural association, sports clubs, and debating societies to independent media, academics, groups of concerned citizens, grassroots initiatives, and organizations of gender , race and sexuality, occupational associations and political parties and labour unions. Habermas engaged more systematically with family in relation to the CS. He distinguishes family from CS (understood as the domain of commodity exchange and social labour) and state. The family is both precursor of CS and a site of intimacy (Habermas, 1989: 46-7 in Howell, 2007: 420). Extending from this view, Jean Cohen (1998:37), and also Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato (1995: 631, n 48) propose to view the "family" as the first association of CS. To their idealized depiction, family is assumed to be an egalitarian social unit, which provides an arena where the principle of "horizontal solidarity, collective identity, and equal participation" are first experienced and constantly reproduced. They gave justification for their positioning of the family in relation to the CS. Such principles revolve from the substratum of other associations of CS and democratic political life. However, this picture of the family glosses over the unequal power relations and hierarchies ubiquitous within families, often haggard along gender and inter-generational lines and underpinning processes of exploitation, violence and abuse within families.

Concern about gender as analytic category has emerged in the late twentieth century and remains confined in women and gender studies. This may partly explains why it is not been considered in major bodies of social theory on CS. The term "gender" is part of effort by contemporary feminist to stake claim to a specific definitional ground, to insist the insufficiency of existing theory for explaining persistent inequality between women and men. The use of word "gender" has significantly emerged at a moment of great epistemological turmoil. Yet as Howell (2007) pointed out, CS theorists have paid very little attention to the gendered nature of CS, at the same time, feminist theorists have involved very limited in CS theorists. "Feminist theorists have used the frameworks of social movements, voluntary action, rights, equality, civic engagement, and emancipation to understand women's political struggles, while CSOs have pointed to women's activism to illustrate the vibrancy of actual civil societies. The problem is rather that the way CS s conceptualized is not through the lens of gender and that how gender relations are explained has not led to a re-evaluation of CS theorists from a gender perspective" (Howell, 2007: 416-7).

To deepen the understanding of gender in CS, a thick concept of gender is necessary. Scott (1988:31) proposed an understanding of 'gender' as way of denoting the "cultural constructions"- the social creation of ideas about suitable roles for men and women. It is actually a way of indicating to the exclusively social origins of the subjective identities of men and women. Therefore, gender is a category imposed on sexed body. The definition of the term has two parts and several subsets. Though these are interconnected, but must be analytically different. "The core of the definition rests on an integral connection between two propositions: gender is a constitutive component of social relationships based on perceived differences between the men and women; gender is the primary way of signifying relationship of power. Changes in the organization of social relationships always correspond to changes in representations of power, but the direction of change is not necessarily one way" (Scott, 1988:42-3). Since gender is perceived to be the

differences between the sexes, and as constitutive elements of social relationships, it comprises four interrelated elements: first, culturally available symbols that evoke multiple and often contradictory. Second aspect is normative concepts that set forth interpretations of the meaning of the symbols that tried to limit and contain their metaphoric possibilities. The third aspect is gender relationship. Gender is constructed through kinship, though not exclusively, but it is constructed as well in the economy, and in the polity, which in our society at least, now operate largely independently of kinship. The subjective identity is the fourth aspect of gender. In the definition of gender all these four elements consist and no one operates without others. They do operate simultaneously, with one simply reflecting others (ibid).

2.2 Governance and Participation: Civil Society a Donor-Driven Concept?

After 1990s, theories of global systems of states and markets started to theorize a third aspect to known as global CS. Its notion required capturing a different phenomenon, which is activities of international non-governmental organizations (INGO) that network across national borders, and create a new space of solidarity within the world system. Since there are some indivisible goods (like environment), therefore concerted action for the prevention of its decay is necessary. Based on the idea that people across the world were united by certain common concerns formed the first plank of INGOs agendas^x. In addition to that, no one country, government, group of citizens could tackle these concerns in abstraction or in isolation from others. By common endeavours, strategies, and a pooling energies these problem could be tackled. To do so global CS actors inducted a normative turn in world politics that conventionally indicated by realism and by the national politics and sovereignty. In fact, a set of compelling principles, which aim to build an international consensus on states, should or should not treat their own citizens across national borders and territorial sovereignties have been established by the INGOs. Traditionally, state does have monopoly to hold the banner of sovereignty and state security. States resist any intervention by the outside agencies. Furthermore, it is very likely to use or misuse state sovereignty to hide state sponsored violence or lawlessness from the critical public gaze. Now a day, human rights INGOs, which accentuate solidarity with victims, have carried human rights issues into the global public spheres. Therefore, they strongly challenge the notion of having sole monopoly by states over the lives of its people. In line with these global human rights organizations have legislated and mandated an ethical and morally authoritative structure for national and international community (Chandhoke, 2005).

Besides the legitimacy of INGOs, since 1990 as an ultimate outcome of the Post-Soviet era, CS has become part of development discourse linked to donor-driven norms such as GG. The renewal of interests in the concepts of CS and democracy is not without tension. In the current use of the term CS is the area of collective and contested social interaction that takes place between the state, market and household. It also refers to the range of non-state organizations, groups and associations that form part of the voluntary sector. While descriptively this is relatively straightforward, CS is accorded a host of functions associated with co-operation, participation, trust and democracy raising to what Fine (2002, 796 cited in McIlwaine, 2007: 1252) calls 'pedestal status'. Although donors are often careful to use the term CS organizations, but in reality, they often inclined to equate them with NGOs (Howell, 2000; Howell and Pearce 2001 in McIlwaine, 2007). Donors has started to channel increasing amount of financial support through NGOs (Lewis and Opuku- Mensah,2006: 666 in McIlwaine, 2007) in an effort to promoting citizen's engagement, mostly through institutions and capacity building and partnership programmes and to finance alternative delivery of services . It has been noted that since NGO become more dependent on donors funding, their ability to represent constituencies and beneficiaries is undermined (McIlwaine, 2007). Donor concentration to CS though has been criticized at a broader level due to it's failing to address structural issues underlying poverty and inequality and neglecting the political dimension of CS (Mohan, 2002 in McIlwaine, 2007).

Until recently, CS was mainly thought of as a national concept. In reality, self-organized non-profit associations and social movements have been networking across borders for nearly two centuries, even though it has dramatically accelerated in recent decades. But there is an important point in the way in which central European and Latin American intellectuals began to talk about transnationality as a central element of CS. The term ‘global civil society’ sounds too extravagant since it brings together people from different parts of the globe. There are three important reasons to speak about ‘global civil society’; these are – first, whilst ‘global civil society’ may overstate what is really out there, ‘transnational civil society understates it’. Second point is, only ‘global civil society’ can be posed a counterbalance of globalisation. Third is that ‘global civil society’ has a normative aspiration that ‘transnational civil society’ does not. Kaldor, Glasius and Anheier (2001) came up with three propositions to analyse global civil society: (1) ‘Global CS as reality’^{xi}, ‘global CS and globalisation’^{xii} and ‘global CS as fuzzy and contested concept’^{xiii}. CS is a concept, which is located strategically at the cross-section of important string of intellectual developments in the social sciences. Centre for Civil Society (CCS) acknowledged diversity of the concept, and adopted an initial working definition that is to guide research activities and teaching.

“Civil society refers to the arena of uncoerced collective action around shared interests, purposes and values. In theory, its institutional forms are distinct from those of the state, family and market, though in practice, the boundaries between state, civil society, family and market are often complex, blurred and negotiated. Civil society commonly embraces a diversity of spaces, actors and institutional forms, varying in their degree of formality, autonomy and power. Civil societies are often populated by organisations such as registered charities, development non-governmental organisations, community groups, women's organisations, faith-based organisations, professional associations, trades unions, self-help groups, social movements, business associations, coalitions and advocacy group.”

(Centre for Civil Society, London School of Economics)

Since Global CS has been financing, patronizing national CS all over the world, therefore, national or local CS has been influenced by them. In many countries the global CS is keeping priority in GG issues. Being a funder, they exported the idea of good governance as an essential condition for development. Global CS has engaged national CS for their policy agenda. Therefore, GG is a term, which is cited very frequently. In fact, governance is a fashionable term, but its concept is as old as human history (Weiss, 2000:795). It is a complex system of interactions among structures, traditions, functions (responsibilities), and processes (practices) characterized by three key values of accountability, transparency and participation (USAID, 2002, p. 2 in Punyaratabandhu , 2004:1). Governance has been defined as the stewardship of formal and informal political rules of the game. Governance demonstrate those measures that involve setting the rules for the exercise of power and resolve conflicts over such rules (Hyden 1999: 185 in Kjaer, 2004:3).

“GG” has been described as the striving for rule of law, transparency, responsiveness, participation, equity, effectiveness and efficiency, accountability, and strategic vision in the exercise of political, economic, and administrative authority (USAID, 2002, p. 2 in Punyaratabandhu , 2004:1). There are two different streams of discourse on GG. One is donor agency driven, and the other is academic. Academic discourse is dealt mainly with the way in which power and authority relations are structured in different contexts, whereas donor-directed and policy-oriented governance discourse has focused more on state structures designed to ensure accountability, due processes of law, and related safeguards. Academic discourse is for understanding of institutional linkages between the state and CS donor-driven discourse, which is oriented toward enhancing policy effectiveness (Punyaratabandhu , 2004:1).

To UNDP, governance is viewed as the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage country affairs at all levels. It consists of mechanism, process and institutions, through which citizens articulate their interest, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations, and mediate their differences (Weiss, 2000: 797). The World Bank contributed significantly to the emanation of the concept of governance in the 1990s. Identifying corruption, bad policies and nepotism as severely hampering development, it introduced the term governance in 1989's report. World Bank does not operate with one single definition of governance; rather it varies based on particular usage. For example, in the 1989 report, governance has been defined as "the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development" (World Bank, 1989:60 in Kjaer, 2004:173). Later on, in another report, it defines as "Governance is the institutional capacity of public organizations to provide public and other goods demanded by the country's citizens or their representatives in an effective, transparent, impartial, and accountable manner, subject to resource constraints"(World Bank, 200a:48 in Kjaer,2004:173). Though according to the World Bank, the concept of governance varies, but there are four core features of GG. Firstly, public sector management (that involved civil service reform and privatization), secondly legal framework for development, thirdly accountability, and finally, transparency and information are the core features (Kjaer, 2004: 173). To Papart (2000:1), the concern with governance has largely been ignored both gender and power. Mostly, governance has been seen as gender- neutral concept. Governance is highly gendered; women's participation in authority position within governance structures, at all level is problematic. Yet by focusing entirely on formal positions of authority, the opportunity for changing the discrimination is minimal (Papart, 2000: 11).

2.3 Gender Dynamics in the Development of Civil Society in Bangladesh:

Just after the liberation, women's participation in politics has been seen as state driven activities. Women were considered as important group to be involved in politics and development activities. In the government driven initiatives, family was important area of consideration, which contrast with European women's equality movement. In late 70s, NGOs become increasingly important development partner of the state and international development institutions or donors. This donor driven development CSOs' were not linked with the family. Family was absent in the field of their attention, and gender hierarchy was never contested. Gender power pervades both in family and CS, and family is both precursor of CS and site of intimacy (Habermas, 1992). Women were mobilized by the different NGOs for different development project, and women have been considered as development actors. But in the early 80s, fundamental groups became very close to power, therefore, purposes of women's mobilization have been negotiated by the CSOs. It is very interestingly noticed that the actors for women's mobilization have been changed over time, the purposes of mobilization has been changed, but the women remain constant as political subject.

After 1990s, global wave of democratization has upshot the politics of Bangladesh as well. The new paradigm created a new floor for women's political participation, which generates from consciousness. Global campaigns for GG gathered women under the umbrella of social movement for GG. Women's political participation could be ensured by keeping or exercising state power or through the involvement in NGO / CSOs' activities. In terms of having state power, there is an essentialist view that entry of women in politics will be conducive to cleaner to politics since women by their very nature tend to be honest. Other way, when women will have power, they will not compromise with corruption. Experience of Bangladesh just contradicts with this notion. Corruption has been a persistent problem in Bangladesh. Fifteen years of women's leadership in state power have increased scale and dimensions of corruption in gigantic proportions (Chowdhury, 2008:14).

3. Findings: Understanding Participation and Good Governance

Understanding on something comes from, and is shaped by a process of power^{xiv} and consciousness. Gramsci distinguished three level of consciousness in the movement towards hegemony and the creation of historic bloc. These are; firstly; economic- cooperative which deals with specific interests of the particular group, secondly, the solidarity or class consciousness which extends to whole social class, and stays solely at an economic level; and finally, the hegemonic which brings the interest of the leading class into an agreement with those of subordinate classes and incorporates these with others interests into an ideology articulated in universal conditions (Cox, 1981: 168). Besides, Gramsci's notions of consciousness, feminist scholars have distinct but important stand on consciousness. Basu (2003) stated that in liberal democracies women are most likely to use their transformative ways and avoid co-optation when they carry a previous and/or ongoing link to social movement that encourages women's empowerment. The reason is that activism within social movements allows the building of collective identities, consciousness raising and combativeness in the direction of authorities that may persist women's identity and interests within institutions. In contrast, due to lack of linkage to social movements greatly assuages the transformative power women can exercise through institutions.

Case Studies: Views from Volunteers of Two CSOs of Kishoreganj (SHUJAN and CCC)

The study has selected Kishoreganj as area of research since it is known to keep religious harmony. Amongst the two organizations, SHUJAN is more based on local initiatives and voluntary job, but CCC relatively depends on TIB's fund and local contribution is less. The researcher has selected relatively self-dependent - SHUJAN and dependent to other- CCC, idea^{xv} was that these two types of organization might give more exploratory, dynamic (and even contradictory) information about women's political consciousness in the CSOs. Both organizations are working well in Kishoreganj.

3.1 Institutions, Programs and Gendered Political Participation:

On the basis of programs, the two CSOs performed in last seven months, it is clear that they (both CSOs) are basically working with awareness building related activities. More specifically, one of them (CCC) deals with programs like Campaigning (for blood donation and blood grouping), Gathering (mothers to be aware about their duties and rights), Discussion (gender and corruption), Rally (International Women's Day having special local theme corruption and women), Seminar on 'Improvement of health services at Union Parishad (UP) Level: Our responsibilities', Face to face and Open budget at Union Level (publicly discussion on queries regarding UP budget and decision or action has been done). It also did local level planning with Union Parishad to utilize their directly received aggregate grant by the Union Parishad. Besides all these, it had awarding program to encourage meritorious students who did very well in public examinations. On the other hand, Shujan deals with only one program, but in several times in several places. It has less involvement in respect to participants' presence, where as earlier one has more participants.

Level of participation not only depends on the level of political consciousness and programs that organization takes, rather there are so many things that contribute to decide. In general, women's participation (taking part in programs as audience or work as member of the organizing team of the program) in CSOs activities depend on things that are often ignored or less valued. Issues like 'nature of the organization', 'duration', 'time', 'theme' of the program and level of political consciousness greatly contribute in taking decision whether to involve. Among the above mentioned important areas, nature of the institution can be looked at who represent the institution. In both cases, there are few women in comparison

to men's involvement^{xvi}. From the above column graph, it is clearly evident that women are more interested on issues like blood donation, discussion on corruption and gender, mothers gathering and rally on international women's day. It proves that women have different interest to be involved. In addition, both CSOs are male headed, and local responsible of the supportive NGOs are male. This gendered nature of institutions gives less space for women. Therefore, "the concept of the gendered institutions calls for attention to a constellation of institutional traits rather than simply the people who occupy them. How an institution acquires a gendered character is a complicated question. The character of the groups that inhabit them shapes institutions. The longer either men or women inhabit an institution, the smaller the portion of people of the opposite sex, more that institution is likely to reflect the values of dominant groups. The gendered character of institutions is also determined by their distributional policies which may have unequal consequences for women and men" (Basu, 2003; 25). Consequently, gendered natures of CCC and Shujan confines women's participation in certain forms and programs, and are influenced by the men's way of looking and defining things.

3.2 Gendered Political Consciousness and Good Governance:

Women members, who involved in these two CSOs, either have political experience as activist or as a social worker before getting involved in GG movement. Some of them are from political family, where they have comparatively better opportunity than others to exercise their willingness in involving politics. Among the respondents those who involved in politics, most of them left politics due to its changed nature^{xvii}, lack of commitment of the national and international political leaders. Since politics had lost its values, the arena became men's field. To them, CS is the fundamental institution in raising voice for GG. CS can play significant role in promoting GG in all public and private institutions. They put emphasis on the political party. Given that, since 1990s lack of tolerance between political parties in Bangladesh has been creating numerous problems. Therefore, they have identified that in Bangladesh tolerance between political parties is one of the most important components for GG. According to one of them,

“Strong civil society is the precondition for good governance. It is the practice of truth, exercise the rule of law and unquestionable governance having transparency and accountability within all types of administration and political parties that would be concentrating on betterment of all human beings. It is a governance system that will ensure the fundamental rights of people, it takes all types of affordable measures to reduce all kinds of social injustice” (Kamrunnahar Begum, CCC).^{xviii}

They have found good relation between CS, practice of truth and GG. These are interlinked to each other. Another respondent mentioned in defining good governance;

“Making law effective and ensure rights of all human beings. In addition, make sure the rule of law is in exercise, and administration is not patronizing a specific party (ruling political party), rather it works for welfare of mass people.” (Dalia Sen, Shujan).^{xix}

Governance is a complex system of interactions among structures, traditions, functions (responsibilities), and processes (practices) characterized by three key values of accountability, transparency and participation (USAID, 2002, p. 2 in Punyaratabandhu, 2004:1). The three key values of GG cooperates each other very closely, and these are the preconditions by which GG can be assessed.

“Democracy should be present, administration should be society friendly, mass people friendly, and finally it should be women friendly. Furthermore, it makes sure that government is not patronizing to particular political party (most of the times, it does to ruling party), rather it works for interest of mass people. In addition, it is such kind of system where the government accepts views of the majority; muscle power and black money are not determinants of politics to get elected. Proper education policy works to make future generation more productive. Religious fundamentalism is banned, and government runs the country by some machineries like judiciary, legislative and executives” (Kamrunnahar Begum, CCC).

Governance is been defined as the stewardship of formal and informal political rules of the game. Governance demonstrate those measures that involve setting the rules for the exercise of power, and resolve conflicts over such rules (Hyden, 1999 : 185 in Kjaer ,2004 :3). Though governance means the rules of the game, but it is more about the way how people would be governed and the relationship between the governed governors. More specifically, it should have friendly atmosphere to society, general people and women. Here the basic important point is the reality that had been reflected by the respondent. Most of the public institutions are not women friendly, therefore, they have pointed out it should be included in the conditions of GG.

3.3 Political Consciousness and Level of Participation:

Participation is one of the three major conditions for GG. Political consciousness is the determinant of the level of their participation. Often it seems that people use this term as a tool or evidence for claiming their success in program implementations. It may remain ambiguous what type of participation we are talking about. Is it only to be present in the program or to contribute by labour, money or in any other means? In line with that, one of the respondents strongly mentions,

“Participation means to take part in different activities involved in the movement. Like raising awareness about the negative consequences of corruption, the role of an individual to stop or reduce it. In addition, let them know what rights they have, what they could demand from the governmental/nongovernmental service providing organization” (Kamrunnahar Begum, CCC).

Based on the reality and perspective that women hold, and the context exist in that district, it can be stated that participation should be based on moral obligations, people will decide how and when and for what they will participate. Participation when comes for GG, it should not be directed by material benefits. Participation means one kind of contribution; it could be by manual labour, money, even by mental support. Contribution needs to come from own perspectives and ability. It should not be imposed by outsiders. Even though some body is not involved by above mentioned points, but s/he is agreed upon an issue or not adversary position, then it could be taken as participation^{xx}.

The respondents of the CSO have been captured by the discourse of participation. Therefore, they quoted like any other government’s agency or NGO. The way CSO wants to get them involved by developing the program, they get involved. Papart (2000) mentioned there are three aspect of participation (political, economic and cultural and interpretative), but the respondents have only one meaning about participation. They have been involved in political aspects of participation. Even though they are involved in political

aspects of participation, but they limit themselves in only one area, which is project related activities, not in the determining process of how information may available to the public, and also not by their own initiatives. Since the mode of participation of the respondents tells us that were not cultural and interpretative, as a result there is less potential for women's transformative social change.

The participation of women members of two CSOs differs based on their understanding of the term GG, again their understanding of GG depends on level of their political experience and motivation. It has been pointed out that respondents who were more experienced in politics were clearer about the movement, and they were more strategic and visionary in engaging themselves, while others who were comparatively new in politics and GG movement they looking more on the output.

3.4 Gender Differences on Understanding of Good Governance and Participation:

Besides the political motivation, another important parameter is gender that makes disparity on understanding of both GG and political participation. Men and women understand GG and political participation in a different way. Women participate in the programs to address the issues that affect their everyday lives and family, whereas men think about participation in a more abstract term. While men (two presidents of the committees) think that GG is about transparency, accountability and participation of the government, at the same time, women have more holistic notion of GG, which includes human rights, tolerance, daily experiences, and broader level of consciousness. They think that GG is a comprehensive issue to ensure human rights in all stages of human life, and it is not only an issue for administration rather tolerance within political parties is important as well. One of the two male respondents said,

“Being an independent state, Bangladesh has to guarantee the fundamental rights of people. Ending all social injustice, citizen rights will be established and exercised. Judiciary, legislative and administrative – these three branches of the government have to make governance more sure”(Alok Kumar, CCC).^{xxi}

To them (men) GG means, if government runs the country based on the said specific machineries, and do not have malpractice, and then it can be stated as GG.

Female members do not want keeping it on theoretical frame. Their demand is more on practical experience based. They do acknowledge importance to what they are experiencing in their everyday life. Their understanding comes from the daily experience. For an instance, one (female) respondent said,

“Strong civil society is the pre- condition for good governance. Good governance means transparency and accountably will be in political parties, and in all types of administration. Administration has to be society friendly, mass people friendly and women friendly. Being a service providing institution of the state, it should work having responsibility of its own. Finally, tolerance among the political parties is another important condition for good governance” (Kamrunnahar Begum , CCC)

Political instability or lack of tolerance among political parties is a great problem in Bangladesh, affecting everyday life of women and their family. Women do realize it, and they have included tolerance as condition of GG. Therefore, it is no longer an issue of transparency and accountability only; rather it is a comprehensive system that is driven by the philosophy of betterment of all.

Regarding the understanding of participation between men – women do differ from each other. Men think participation is the basic condition for democracy, and democracy is the production house of GG. Men always go in the line of theory, so their views come from the theoretical guideline. Though women do value that participation is a condition for democracy, but they do not want to impound themselves within the theory. Therefore, they consider reality, possibility and also perspective what they are talking about. For an example, one of them (man) said,

“People are the owner of the state/country. Participation is the main principle of democracy. Participation is to involve people in different activities in different levels of action. It could be social, mental and physical”(Ashraf Hussain, Shujan).^{xxii}

Women stated that sensitivity is important in participation any social movement. They focused that one should be sensitized first before motivating others to do it. One respondent perfectly quoted,

“Participation means; to be sensitised oneself first, and then expand it to others. Aware and encourage people to fight for their rights”(Zakia Sultana, CCC).^{xxiii}

Another important thing they have identified which make their understanding unique. What they said participation is not something just to focus on number. If it is something like that then women should not take part in it. They^{xxiv} also added that it could have different form, like usually we consider participation contributing in terms of physical labour, mental support or money. She likes to add that if somebody is not against any action or decision but s/he could not make contribution in other way, then also it is participation. In this point one (woman) respondent replied,

“It means to do own responsibility on time. If it is to show that someone is participating only for ‘presence or increase the number’, then it is not participation. If somebody is not in adversary position, it could be taken as participation”(Shila Boumick, CCC).^{xxv}

3.5 Motivation of Participation in GG Movement:

Respondents of the CSOs were mostly from the comparative advanced group of the society. Many of them were directly involved in politics since their student life, but left politics after 1990s. They could not adopt themselves with the shifting paradigm of politics. Although they had left the politics but their involvement with people was very much visible in different emergency situation. Still they have their political vision to create a just society. Therefore, their past political experience and vision played an important role for their motivation. Along with political involvement, images of the mother NGOs are other important factors that stimulate their engagement in the movement. TIB and THPB have clean images in the country since one (female) of the participants pointed nicely,

“It [CSO] works against corruption. ‘Corruption free Bangladesh’ is a dream what we want to achieve. Reduce corruption at a tolerance level for the future generation, and move to make Bangladesh as ‘island of integrity’- we want to achieve by our movement” (Kamrunnahar Begum , CCC).

Corruption is a global problem. As a result, it is not so easy to wish to have corruption free world. Female respondents of those two CSOs do understand the global game of the corruption, and they do experience corruption more closely than men. Therefore, the agenda of the CSO attracts women to be involved. In addition, the visionary plan to see Bangladesh as 'Island of integrity' was another vital force to stimulate their involvement.

3.6 Restrictions or Limitations of Participation and Copying Tactic:

Corruption is a major problem in Bangladesh. It needs comprehensive action to work against corruption, but in most of the cases it goes isolated way that faces lots of difficulty. The initiatives taken by the CSOs are not enough to address it. As corrupted people are powerful in the society, and government official do not like to involve it directly, therefore, it is very much frustrating not to accomplish it. One of the participants (man) quoted,

“Corruption is in every cell of the society. CCC is a very small initiative to address the issue like corruption. It needs mass expansion, because the corrupted people in Bangladesh are very powerful. No government official likes to join anti- corruption related works. If sometimes, somebody says about their internal corruption then his/ her position will be jeopardized, CCC does not have administrative authority to support such victim” (Alok Kumar, CCC).

Besides, its (CCC) limited activities and administrative power, women do face many hindrances to take part in the movement. Professional women face problem regarding time since they need to carry all household responsibilities in addition to their job. Those who are not doing any direct outside earning related job, they need to ask their husband or brother or father to support them financially since these CSOs does not provide any money or benefit. Just like market depends on unpaid work of the household reproducing labour force, CS also depends on unpaid work of household, such as caring dependence, child-rearing other household activities, to free its participants to execute time and energy of its grounds. Since in most of the society it is women who maintain the household responsibilities, participation in CS that requires at least time become gendered (Jenson, 1997 in Howell, 2007). In most of the cases they have to make a choice between family and politics/ social movement.

“We (women) have to sacrifice, like when I go out for CCC work, family suffers. In this case family accept the sufferings for the betterment of the whole society” (Zakia Sultana, CCC).

Women have to negotiate with the domestic responsibilities and with priority. When they think to take in the social or political activities they have to go through opportunity cost^{xxvi}. Since most of the CSO theorists never consider family as part of CS, rather they distinguish family from CS, (Habermas, 1989 in Howell, 2005), therefore, women's domestic burden limits their engagement. Basu (2003:49) pointed “women are also more apt to become active in movement and institutions that address the interface between their private and public roles. This often happens when public policies hinder their capacity to fulfil their domestic responsibilities.”

Moreover, there are gendered notions of the society. People do not like to see their daughter, mother, wife or even sister in giving slogan or organizing people for any movement. It brings shame for them. Therefore, women need to struggle double, against family and state power. Even though, to some extent, husband is supportive or agree to accept and problem is manageable in single family, but joint family maintain hierarchy system which is more complicated than society for women. If somebody does not follow then she has to accept lots of negative profiles imposed on their actions. One of the women respondents said,

“(Women) have to face socially created many problems, like when women get involved corrupted people become angry, and do harm many ways. Society imposes many terms “Kharap”(bad) , Patita (prostitute), Usrinkhal (undisciplined) to women who are dedicated in such social movement” (Kamrunnahar Begum , CCC).

Male dominated society and culture are not pleased in welcoming women’s presence in social movement. Rather, it promotes the stigmatization of women activists by a social construct that operates in a similar way for isolation and silencing women. Gender practices have been intimidated by calling names of women in the society. In addition to that, women’s participation is limited in one specific task like program implementation related activities, and that has not been determined by them. Furthermore, as cultural and interpretative participation^{xxvii} is very much linked up with everyday experiences of women, and they could not exercise it within the two CSOs, consequently, their participation is confined within the said specific task. Moreover, local CSOs have been linked up with the international NGOs (TIB & THPB) for their financial and other types of support. Subsequently, they could not exercise their autonomy in decision-making activities. It is not unexpected that those NGOs could not conceptualize the problem through the lens of gender, and the explanations of gender relations are not leading to re-evaluation of CS theorists from a gender perspective (Howell, 2007). Subsequently, as long as women are taking part in programs like blood donation, blood grouping, mothers gathering and rally on a special event – these are fine to the society, but when they speak about corruption and corrupt people- they have to accept calling names, threats and harmful hindrances to their daily activities.

4. Conclusion:

The study provides new insights on gendered political consciousness and understanding ‘participation’ that underpin their engagement in GG through CSOs. The study concludes with a number of observations, as follows;

Exported by the Western development discourse, the concept of CS is linked up with donor-driven norms like GG. Since the global CSOs are the financier and patroniser of the national CS, therefore, they have the legitimacy to introduce issues (term and definition both) on the basis of their political agenda and priority. It is well figured out by the respondents in this study. Though UNDP defines governance as exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage country affairs at all levels, but the respondents (especially women) of the CSOs mentioned very specifically some aspects crucial to their lives, such as; tolerance, women friendly administration, effective measures to reduce social injustice and patronizing by ruling political party (/parties) over the administration. The daily experiences, priorities and expectations of women in respect to GG are not reflected in the global CS’s agenda of GG. Externally imposed notions of GG could not produce a gender neutral space, rather it creates hindrances towards women’s spontaneous potentials in participating social activities based on their preferences. The experiences of respondents in the context of Kishoreganj suggest that “just as there is antagonistic relationship exists between state and women’s interest”(Basu, 2003), so two CSOs and the space they provide for participation also bear gender norms. Women’s scopes to participate in the CSOs are embedded in institutional structures, which limit their choice and political agency.

The study tells us that in all CSOs or NGOs, people want to ensure participation, especially women's participation which has become another window of popular discourse. Yet women's participation is very much confined with the specific tasks which are basically related with programme implementation, not designing it or having control over decision making forum or activities. As long as their activities remain at this level everything is fine with the society, but when their actions challenge male dominated structural power, they encounter problems.

Since GG is an imposed idea, and participation is gendered, women's potentials are in many ways jeopardized because their visions and understanding are not accounted for. When the responsibilities shift from the state to the CSOs in ensuring or advocating for GG, the burden of participation goes to women, as articulated by women respondents who mentioned that they had to go through a choice between domestic responsibilities and social movements for GG. Given the patriarchal nature of the society, they have less opportunity than men to advocate their views, and must also accept so many call names that have very negative connotations in the society.

In creating a just and free society, women activists need home grown organization to achieve their agenda. In line with this perspective, an alternative could be to develop the concept of 'political society' for women. Since global actors have shifted focus to CSOs for governance, by which state has evaded its responsibilities. Consequently women have to take its additional burden and menace. Male dominated politics left out women, and encouraged to involve in CS, which is another male domain. Subsequently, theories of CS need to be evaluated through gender lens acknowledging contextualised reality, because the reality and history of post- colonial countries is different than others. It is not surprising that the forms or natures of CS are different, depending on specific features of the colonial and postcolonial historical trajectories particularly in South-Asia. Chatterjee (2004) used the term "Political Society" which has more autonomy to decide what to do, and how to do than CS. Since political society can discern the historical horizon of political modernity, and it is a site of negotiation and contestation opened up by the activities of governmental agencies, and ties of moral solidarity, therefore, it has more to offer for women's activism. Moreover, the actual transaction of everyday distribution of rights and entitlements lead over time substantial redefinition of property and law within existing modern state, which has more local relevance and applicability to women's social movement to achieve free and a just society for all.

The key objectives of GG as externally imposed entail the participation of women in CSOs' activities, but limited to the social sector. Under these circumstances the assumption of women's participation in CSOs in bringing gender equality is uncertain. Initially, the assumption^{xxviii} was that women's engagement in the CSOs activities was driven by their political consciousness. But the findings of this study tell us that there is something more to be investigated, namely how the transformatory potentials of their participation are promoted or suppressed by an externally imposed agenda on GG. Though unsuccessful movements may have influence over discourses in ways that tremendously pressure CS and probably the state (Katzenstein, 1987:16 cited in Basu, 2003:26), promoting women's engagement without considering the purpose of joining and understanding the gendered nature of the organizations might be for the sake of form rather than substance. In order to assess the transformative potentials of women in social change, we need to go beyond the women's involvement in CS.

Notes:

ⁱ Non- Governmental Organizations

ⁱⁱ For more, see Abul Hussain, The Changing Local Rural Power Structure: The Elite and NGOs in Bangladesh

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.asiamedia.ucla.edu/article-southasia.asp?parentid=97545>, accessed on 24.10.08 at 09:56

^{iv} <http://jci-anti-smoking.blogspot.com/2007/05/jci-members-in-roundtable-with.html>, accessed on 24.10.08 at 10:00

^v http://banglapedia.search.com.bd/HT/B_0212.htm, accessed on 24.10.08 at 10:05

^{vi} “Women’s Political Consciousness and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs): A Case Study of Two Organizations in Kishoreganj, Bangladesh”. The study carried out to accomplish MA Degree on Development Studies in 2008 from Institute of Social Studies, The Hague, The Netherlands.

^{vii} Bangladesh covers an area of 1, 44, 000 sq km with a population of 14.97 million (population census, 2011),

^{viii} The researcher could not reach to one woman member

^{ix} Two were teacher, and among others one from each profession lawyer, doctor, NGO worker, entrepreneur and politician.

^x The earth Summit of 1992 in Rio, where 2400 representatives came to play central role in deliberations.

^{xi} The spread of the term ‘Global CS’ reflects an underlying social reality. What we can observe in the 1960s is the emergence of supranational sphere of social and political participation in which citizens groups and social movement and individual engage in dialogue, debate, confrontation, and negotiation with each other and with various governmental actors- international, national and local – as well as the business world.

^{xii} The second proposition is the ‘Global CS’ both feeds on and reacts to globalisation. As Global CS the term globalisation is also a new concept having multiple interpretations. On the one hand, the globalisation provides the bedrock for civil society. On the other, Global CS is also a reaction to globalization, particularly to the impact of the spread of global capitalism and interconnectedness. Globalisation is as an uneven process has brought benefits to many but also excluded many.

^{xiii} Since we are not able to find agreed meaning for what it is actually, this is fuzzy and contested concept. It is fuzzy because the boundaries of the concept are not defined clearly. It is not clear what is to be included and what is to be excluded. In addition, the term has both normative and descriptive contents and it is not always possible to find an exact correspondence between the two. It is contested in that sense it is new and therefore can be interpreted by both practitioners and social scientists as they choose.

^{xiv} Here power refers to all three types (power to, power over and power within)

^{xv} On the basis of the researcher’s two years practical working experience with them

^{xvi} Since the researcher worked with one of the NGOs mentioned earlier, it is seen that usually 11 to 22 people represent the committee and women are mostly not more than 3 or 4. In case of CCC and Shujan, they had altogether 8 women.

^{xvii} Politics became more dependent on black money, muscle power, patronizing with social elite and administration, and political party.

^{xviii} Name has been codified. She was involved in leftist politics and later left politics and engaged herself in women council’s movement. She is an entrepreneur.

^{xix} Name has been codified. She is secretary of Shujan, unmarried and was involved in leftist politics and also involved in women’s council activities. Professionally she is a development worker.

^{xx} The definition has been drawn from the respondents’ views.

^{xxi} Alok (codified) is the convenor of CCC in Kishoreganj district. By profession he is a lawyer. He was also involved in leftist politics in his early life, but left direct political involvement after 1991.

^{xxii} Mr. Hussain (codified) had been involved in teaching Sociology in a government college for a quite long time.

^{xxiii} Ms. Sultana (codified) teaches Bengali literature in a local college.

^{xxiv} Ms. Sultana and Ms. Boumik, respondent

^{xxv} By profession, Ms Boumick (codified) is a lawyer and also involved in women’s council’s activities in Kishoreganj.

^{xxvi} “Opportunity cost is the value of the next best alternative foregone as the result of making a decision. Opportunity cost analysis is an important part of a company’s decision-making processes, but is not treated as an actual cost in any financial statement. Opportunity cost is of doing the best thing and ignoring the next best thing to be done”. Accessed 25th October, 2008 through http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Opportunity_cost

^{xxvii} For more see, Papart (2000).

^{xxviii} Based on researcher’s two years field experience with THPB.

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