

Institutional Aspects of Village Government in Bangladesh: *Issues and Constraints*

Md. Nurul Amin*

Dr. M. Abul Kashem Mozumder**

Abstract - Village government, an institution of local government at grassroots level, is an attempt to remedy the institutional constraints through which the government can carry out development programmes. The concept of village government gained importance even during the ancient period in Bengal but it evolved as a formal institution in the post-liberation period of Bangladesh. The existing village government e.g. Gram Sarkar, as a supporting institution of Union Parishad has numerous constraints. Neither the government provided funds for village governments nor could they mobilize adequate local resources. They always depend on the political patronage of the ruling party, which often renders this institution unsustainable. But it is necessary for the rural people to identify the local problems and to prepare plans and programmes for meeting the needs and mitigating the problems to undertake self-reliant activities. It also provides an opportunity to empower women at grass roots level socio-politically. However, it is expedient that the incumbent government always tries to use village government as an 'Appendix' of the politico-administrative purpose of their regime. So, reforming the institutional aspects of the prevailing village government is a *must* to meet the basic socio-economic needs of the villagers.

Introduction

Village government- well known as 'Gram Sarkar'- an institution of local government at grassroots level has become an issue of great interest for the socio-economic development of the villages of Bangladesh. The concept of village government got importance even during the ancient period in Bengal. The village communities in pre-British Bengal were self-sufficient and autonomous where commodities excluding Kerosene and Common Salt were produced by respective villages. Hence, village communities sustained over centuries in spite of constant dissolution and reorganization of states vis-a-vis dynasty. Sir Charles Metcalfe describes, "Village communities seemed to last where nothing else lasts. Dynasty after dynasty tumbles down; revolution succeeds revolution. Hindu,

* Research Officer, Bangladesh Public Administration Training Centre (BPATC), Savar, Dhaka

** Professor & Chairman, Department of Public Administration, Jahangirnagar University, Savar, Dhaka

Pathan, Maratha, Sikh, Mughals are all masters in turn but the village communities remained the same" (Saqui, 1994: 22).

Under British rule the indigenous system of village administration was repealed by the Zamindari system through the Permanent Settlement Regulation of 1793. The subsequent steps like the Chowkidari Panchayet Act of 1880, the Bengal Local Self Government Act of 1885, the Village Self Government Act of 1919- all aimed at bringing about reorganization of the structure and functions of local self-governing institutions at rural level. The local governing institutions, as evolved, appeared to be authoritarian in character and were laden with official representation. As a result, the limited local autonomy available to the village and the informal executive-cum-judicial body- the well-known Panchayet wherever it had existed, had been 'subverted' and ultimately the local administration lost its sensitivity to the local populace (Tinker, 1954:32-33). Though the Government of Pakistan issued the Basic Democracies Order of 1959 to reorganize local self-governing institution but local government at village level did not evolve during the Pakistan Period.

After liberation of Bangladesh, President Ziaur Rahman first introduced the system of village government called 'Swanirvar Gram Sarkar' (SGS) as an institution for rural development in the 1980s. Its main purpose was to promote people's participation and deal with land based production plan, employment planning, education, family planning, conservation of environment, etc. for accelerating growth to enable the country to pursue a course of self-reliance (Saqui, 1994: 3). However, that attempt was short-lived and was abolished in July 1982 just after two years of its initiation.

President H. M. Ershad and the government of Sheik Hasina also passed Acts to reintroduce the system, but could not revive village government. In February 2003, the government of Begum Khaleda Zia passed the Gram Sarkar Act to constitute Gram Sarkar (GS) at every Ward of a Union as a supporting institution to the Union Parishad (UP). The main goal of the GS was to involve the people in the development activities at the grassroots level and bring

socio-economic development in the countryside with people's participation and cooperation. But the existing Village Government or Gram Sarkar has to work with a lot of constraints. There are some burning issues and challenges to make Village Government effective and efficient for overall development of the village people.

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of the present study are as follows:

- i. To focus on the conceptual framework of the village government in Bangladesh;
- ii. To review the legal framework, evolution and practices of village government in Bangladesh; and
- iii. To identify the issues and constraints of village government for the socio-economic development of village people.

Study Method

For the purpose the study a brief literature review of the previous studies, relevant books, journals, dissertations, Acts, Ordinance, concerned rules and regulations, government documents and newspapers etc. based on origin, evolution, structure, function, practice, issues and challenges of village government and rural institution building practices in Bangladesh, are used as secondary sources of data which are examined in simple process as done in a qualitative research work. Personal observation is also used to analyze the historical data purposively.

Conceptual Framework

Village Government or 'Gram Sarkar' is a rural local government institution. It is also termed, in different times, as Swanirvar Gram Sarkar (Self-Reliant Village Government) or Palli Parishad (Rural Council) or Gram Parishad (Village Council) or Gram Sarkar (Village Government) as designed by the successive political

regimes. Under a legal framework it has local representation for the socio-economic development of village people within its jurisdiction. Under the existing Act it is an extended institution based on each 'Ward' of Union Parishad (Union Council), the lowest level for government interaction as an 'administrative unit' and this council is presented through an elected body. But the village government functionaries are nominated by the ex-officio and professional category. Village government is also an attempt to remedy the lack of useful organizations on village level through which the government can carry out development initiatives and programmes (Am, 1982: 1). Obviously, it is expected that the village government will carry out development planning and implementation at the local level.

But it is not an easy task to define 'village' or 'Gram' operationally in the context of existing administrative system of Bangladesh. According to the Swanirvar Gram Sarkar (Constitution and Administration) Rules 1980, "Gram" means a geographically bounded area within a union, inhabited by a community of persons and considered by the community as a gram or village (LGRD&C, 1980: 5). Nurul Haq writes, " Gram, at present moment, is a very ill- defined territory. Some are as large as a thana, such as Baniachang in Sylhet district, others are as small as having only a few areas. Some are populous and prosperous, others are petty and poor. Some are hilly, others lie on the valley. There are Mouza maps but no village map is available for any administrative purpose. Villages are helpful for location and identification but no attempt has ever been made to give legal jurisdiction for the purpose of separating one village from another" (Haq, 1980: 7). Hence, village, till date, has no operational definition.

However, in principle it is desirable to take administration nearer to the people and increase the capabilities of the villagers to manage their own affairs. From this standpoint, village government aims at creating suitable representative organization at village level to deal with various problems of the communities and mobilize resources for achieving self-reliant village economy. Therefore, for the purpose of our present inquiry, we may say that village government

is a local government institution at the rural level having professional and ex-officio representation, working as a supporting organization of Union Parishad for the socio-economic development of villagers.

Legal Provisions and Practices of Village Government in Bangladesh

In the literature of local governance and rural development an ancient Bengal village is often mentioned as a 'Little Republic'. Each village was within its own limits "autonomous and self-sufficient, governed by its own elected officials, satisfying its own needs, providing for its own education, police, tribunal, all the economic necessities and functions, managing itself its own life as an independent and self-governing unit" (Aurobindo, 2001: 403). It is true that rural local government institutions constituted during British colonial rule in Bengal and sustained up to Pakistan period. But local government at village level was formally established in the post-liberation period of Bangladesh.

After independence, the Second Five-year Plan (1980-85) of Bangladesh aimed at comprehensive rural development and emphasized the need for building up an effective and democratic local government institution at the village level for ensuring participation of people and to deal with land based production plan, employment planning, education, family planning, environmental health, village development plan etc. (GOB, 1980: 27-41). In this context, the government of President Ziaur Rahman decided to establish 'Swanirvar Gram Sarkar' (self-reliant village government) as a local government body at village level in the year 1980.

Swanirvar Gram Sarkar (1980-1982)

The first Swanirvar Gram Sarkar (SGS) was inaugurated by President Zia in 'Jirabo' village under Savar Thana of Dhaka District on April 30, 1980. As per direction of the President, the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives instructed on 24th May 1980 through the Swanirvar

Gram Sarkar (Constitution and Administration) Rules, 1980 to establish SGS in all 68,000 villages of the country excluding villages of Hill Districts. By December 1980, Swanirvar Gram Sarkar was formed in 64,732 villages. The Swanirvar Gram Sarkar consisted of one Gram Proadhan (Chief) and eleven members including two women members. The Gram Proadhan and members are elected by the Gram Sava (Council) on the basis of consensus. Gram Shava would consist of all adult villagers whose name was enlisted in the voter list.

The Gram Proadhan and members should ensure representation of people of all social strata/profession. The term of office of the SGS was for the first time three years and for the subsequent terms five years commencing on the day of its meeting after its constitution. The Thana Parishad was the directing authority of the SGS. The function to be performed by the SGS might be directed by the government from time to time. But in general SGS was responsible for overall development of the village. However, the specific functions of the SGS were following:

1. Increasing food production;
 2. Mass literacy;
 3. Population control and family planning;
 4. Law and order; and holding Salish to resolve local disputes.
- The SGS could also promote Gram Samabay Samity (village co-operative society) and Samabay Bank (GOB, 1980: 6).

The Swanirvar Gram Sarkar had a fund composed of (i) contribution from individual, Gram Samabay Samity or institution or local authority, (ii) income from any legitimate source. The SGS was to prepare annual budget for every financial year. There was provision for audit of its fund every year. For the efficient performance of its functions the SGS could appoint committees. But the formation of SGS as pointed out by the critics, was a duplication of rural administration of the Union Parishad. The UP, the lowest tier of the present local government system performed

identical functions, as such the formation of SGS would simply invite rivalry and unhealthy competition between these two rural institutions. The SGS was also dependent on political patronage for its survival. As a result the SGS was abolished in 1982 with the brutal killing of its founder.

Palli Parishad (1989-1997)

During the government of General Ershad, the Bangladesh National Parliament passed an Act on June 20, 1989, to constitute a rural local government body named 'Palli Parishad' (Rural Council) in the villages of Bangladesh. According to the Act, each 'Palli Parishad' would comprise one Palli Prodhan and eight members including two women members. The Parishad would elect one secretary from its members. The voters of the concerned villages would elect the Prodhan and the members of the Parishad. The Upazila Nirbahi Officer or officer authorized by him was the 'Supervisory Authority' of the Palli Parishad. The tenure of the Parishad would be three years from the date of its first meeting. The specific functions of the Palli Parishad were following:

1. Agricultural growth and increase of food production;
2. Population control and family planning;
3. Eradication of illiteracy and spread of mass education;
4. Settlement of disputes through conciliation for maintaining peace and order of the village;
5. Assist the law enforcing agencies;
6. Encourage the village people for formation of cooperative societies, small industries, farm for duck-hens, pisciculture and cattle rearing for economic development of the village;
7. Take up any welfare programme for overall development of the village people;
8. Encourage the village people for participation in development process and activities;

9. To develop the sense of development in village people and motivate them to develop the country; and
10. To carry out other responsibility given by the government (GOB, 1989: 4).

The Palli Parishad was empowered to mobilize fund which would consist of grants received from Union Parishad; grants received from any person, cooperative society, institutions; profit from any income earning project implemented under the supervision of the Parishad and money received from any other sources. The Proposed Palli Parishad, as assigned by its pioneers, was a progressive institution to manage rural affairs in Bangladesh. Unfortunately, the Palli Parishad was not activated due to the political turmoil that prevailed during its inception phase. So it is not possible to appraise the role of Palli Parishad in the socio-economic development of village people practically.

Gram Parishad (1997-2003)

The government of Sheik Hasina formed Local Government Commission in 1996 to suggest recommendations for strengthening of local government institution in Bangladesh. The commission submitted its report in May 1997. It recommended for the constitution of a Palli/Gram Parishad at Ward level of Union Parishad (GOB, 1997b: 3). In consonance with the recommendation, the National Parliament passed the Local Government (Gram Parishads) Act, 1997 and repealed Palli Parishad Act of 1989 on 8 September 1997 to ensure overall development of the villagers. According to the Act, for the first time, Gram Parishad would become a unit of administration, which is defined in section 152 (1) of the Bangladesh Constitution (GOB, 2000: 65). It would be constituted at every Ward of a Union and would be a body corporate, having perpetual succession and a common seal.

Gram Parishad would consist of one Chairman, nine male members and three women members. The member of the Union Parishad would be the Gram parishad Chairman for the concerned Ward. The

male and female who live in the villages under the jurisdiction of the Ward and whose names appear in electoral roll which is in force for the time being would elect the members in a general meeting under the supervision of the 'Directing Authority'. The terms of the Gram Parishad would be for five years from the date of its constitution. The detail functions of the parishad were following:

1. Preparation of survey report on socio-economic matters as specified by the Directing Authority;
2. Collect and preserve primary data on birth and death, marriage- divorce and send to Union Parishad;
3. Keep information on teaching syllabus of the Primary Schools, Madrashes and Maktabas and send report to the Union Parishad if any parent fail to do so;
4. Assist the concerned authority to implement the family planning programme and send report to the Union Parishad on the activities of the staff of the programme working at the field;
5. Cooperate with the concerned authorities for implementation of the programmes for supply of drinking water and sanitary latrines;
6. Creation of combined defense against cruelty to women, terrorism, theft, dacoity etc. and improvement of law and order and report to the Union Parishad in any circumstance;
7. Keep information on regular basis on supply of fertilizers, high yielding seeds and insecticides at the local level and report promptly to the Union Parishad and the concerned authorities if there is any crisis;
8. Report to the Union Parishad on the activities of the employees of all government, semi-government or non-government organization located in its own area;

9. Conciliation of disputes to maintain law and order in the villages;
10. Assist the law enforcing agencies;
11. Encourage the village people for cooperative societies; small industries, farms for duck-hens, pisci-culture, cattle rearing and tree plantation for economic development of the village;
12. Take up any welfare activity for overall development of the village people;
13. Perform any other work as specified by the government (GOB, 1997a: 5).

Gram Parishad could constitute subject wise standing committees according to needs and could determine the number of the members of such committees. As authorized by the Directing Authority, the Union Parishad shall pay a sum of money to the Gram Parishad to purchase paper, pen, ink, registers etc. to collect information, through survey, on birth-death, marriage, divorce etc. and assist the Union Parishad on the subjects included in the list of Union Parishad functions. Obviously, the above-mentioned functions are essential for meeting the basic needs of the villagers of Bangladesh. Unfortunately, as its predecessors, the Gram Parishad was not formed at village level due to indecision of the political regime in question.

Gram Sarkar (2003- Present)

The government of Begum Khaleda Zia decided to improve people's participation in the development activities at the local level. In response to the government decision, the National Parliament has passed the Gram Sarkar Act, 2003 and repealed Gram Parishad Act of 1997 to constitute Gram Sarkar as supportive organization of the union Parishad to ensure overall development of rural people. According to this Act, Gram Sarkar would be a body corporate, having perpetual succession and a common seal, with

power, subject to the provisions of this Act, to acquire and hold property both moveable and immovable, and by its name sue and is sued. Under this Act, Gram Sarkar would not be a unit of administration according to section 152 (1) of the constitution. There would be constituted a Gram Sarkar in every Ward of a Union. It would consist of one Gram Sarkar Pradhan, one adviser and thirteen members. The member of the Union Parishad would be the Gram Sarkar Pradhan for concerned Ward and the member from the reserved seat of the Union Parishad would be adviser. 'Directing Authority' would nominate the following persons as members:

1. One respectable person;
2. Three women including one trained women member of village defense party;
3. One trained male member of village defense party;
4. One agriculturist;
5. Two landless agriculturists;
6. One member of the cooperative society;
7. One freedom fighter;
8. One teacher;
9. One businessman; and
10. One medical practitioner or professional (GOB, 2003: 3).

Gram Sarkar has been assigned to thirteen functions such as development planning, maintenance of law and order, eradication of illiteracy, expansion of primary education, primary health care, family planning, registration of birth-death, marriage and divorce, agricultural development, conciliation of disputes, promotion of sports and culture, encouraging co-operatives, conservation of environment, welfare of the women and child, supervision of Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) and Vulnerable Group development (VGD) programmes. Gram Sarkar would appoint committee and sub-committee on each of the above-mentioned subject. It would have a fund known as Gram Sarkar Fund constituting money received from Union Parishad and any other

source. Upazila Nirbahi Officer would be the 'Directory Authority' of Gram Sarkar.

As per decision of Government Gram Sarker was formed at 39,786 villages, out of 40,392 following the enactment of the law in July, 2003. But Gram Sarkar declared illegal and unconstitutional by the High Court. The High Court verdict came on 02 August 2005 after three weeks hearing on a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) writ filed by Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST) challenging the legality of Gram Sarkar Act, 2003. Pronouncing the verdict, the court observed that there was no such provision in the constitution for a nominated supporting body in the local government system. Terming the Gram Sarker as a self-contradictory body, the High Court said, "A task which cannot achieve directly can never be achieved indirectly. The Act is 'ultra vires' of the basic principles of democracy that based on election" (UNB, 2005: 1). The High Court referred to the Article-59 of the constitution and observed that the local government in every administrative unit shall be entrusted to the bodies composed of persons elected in accordance with the law.

The government was decided to appeal against this verdict and an injunction was issued by the Appellate Division in favour of government to continue Gram Sarltar activities. The Local Government Division of the Government of Bangladesh also issued an instruction to allocate Tk. 5000 for each Gram Sarkar as 'lump allocation' from Annual Development Programme 2003-2004. According to the instruction, each Gram Sarkar would organize a motivational meeting under the supervision of Upazila Nirbahi Officer on the issues like the following:

1. Prevention of social crime like dowry, violence against women, child marriage, child and woman trafficking etc.;
2. Motivate the parents to send the children of school going age to the primary school;
3. Assist to implement birth-death registration;
4. To achieve the goals of sanitation;
5. Vaccination programme (LGRD&C, 2004: 2).

The Gram Sarker was also instructed to implement the scheme/project viz. (a) Provide and establish sanitary latrines; (b) Conservation of public water bodies for pisciculture; (c) Duck-hens rearing; (d) Tree plantation and conservation of environment; (e) Organize sports, cultural events and festivals; (f) Income generation programme (LGD, 2004:2). Obviously, the objective of Gram Sarkar system is to involve people at grassroots level with the development process. But in practice, it creates contradiction with Union Parishad and also lead to 'fueds' and intrigues in the village society. However, it is expedient that, Gram Sarkar is less effective but visible with the people's practical engagement than Palli Parishad or Gram Parishad.

Issues and Constraints of Village Government

Observer on local government and rural development always appreciate village government. But existing village government viz. Gram Sarkar in Bangladesh is functioning with some burning issues and constraints. There are as follows:

Election Process

According to the constitution of Bangladesh, local government should be composed of persons elected by the people of the area, which constitutes the local Government body. Under existing village government (Gram Sarkar) Act, it is provided that the election will be held in the 'Ward' concerned in a meeting of minimum one tenth male and female voters of the area under the supervision of 'Directing Authority' for nominating members on the basis of consensus. Such an election conducted by an administrative authority like Upazila Nirbahi Officer designated by the government may be questionable about being a fair and free election (Rahrnan, 1997: 7). The election to be fair should be conducted by a constitutional body like Election Commission and should be based on universal adult franchise under secret ballot. Open election may create rivalry amongst villagers. Moreover, an election conducted by an executive authority of the government may also be biased by the ruling political party.

Overloaded Functions and Inadequate Resources

A village government is now assigned to thirteen functions like development planning, maintenance of law and order, eradication of illiteracy, expansion of primary education, primary health care, family planning, registration of birth-death, marriage and divorce, agricultural development, conciliation of disputes etc. In the existing set-up, Gram Sarkar has no technical capacity to manage such a mammoth task. All of its functionaries work on voluntary basis. Gram Sarkar has no authority to impose taxes for resource mobilization, which is essential for execution of the assigned programmes. They always aspire for resources from outside to cater for their basic needs and statutory functions. As a result, most of the functions are not executed in due time and the mission of self-reliant villages through village government has not achieved at all.

Leadership

The village government would be a body for creating local leadership in the process of nation building. It is expected that the village government should be a planning and coordination unit representing various interest groups including teacher, landless, agriculturist, medical practitioner and member of Village Defense Party (VDP) including women. Obviously, local leaders have enough knowledge about local problems. But what kind of dedicated leader would be available in the villages is now a big question. There is highly complex set of functions requiring long period of training and proven ability of the leadership. Consequently, in the formative stage of existing Gram Sarkar, the National Institute of Local Government (MLG) organized a day-long orientation course for the members of the Gram Sarkar in each Union from 8 December 2003 to 15 January 2004. The course curricula includes the following subjects:

- a. Importance of Gram Sarkar and their role as supporting organization of Union Parishads;

- b. Functions of Gram Sarkar viz. sanitation, registration of birth-death, child marriage and dowry and other subjects; and
- c. Responsibilities of Gram Sarkar Proddham, adviser and members. (Saqui, 2001: 37).

Obviously, it is difficult to train-up all village government functionaries due to capacity constraint of NILG. But we cannot ignore training needs of the leaders engaged in village development activities.

Women Empowerment

Empowering women in local government institution through village government is an important issue. The government of Bangladesh is also committed to the participation of women in political decision-making process at grass root level. In existing Gram Sarkar Act, there is a provision of three women members including one trained women member of Village Defense Party (VDP). In addition, the women member from the reserved seats of the Union Parishad would be an adviser to Gram Sarkar. Consequently, 1,19,304 women from 39,768 constituted Gram Sarkar are nominated as a member of Gram Sarkar. Moreover, 12,828 Union Parishad members are nominated as ex-officio advisor to Gram Sarkar. Obviously, it is a great opportunity to the women to overcome their social, economic and political subordination in society and polity. However, to avail their full potentiality, the government should specify the role of women members in the existing village government set-up and also provide adequate logistic support.

Village Government Vs. Union Parishad

The duties and responsibilities of village government and Union Parishad are likely to be duplicating and overlapping. It is true that a Gram Sarkar can function as supporting organization of the Union parishad. But it also creates contradiction with the Union Parishad. The reason is obvious. The Chairmen of Union Parishads are least interested to consider Gram Sarkar as an institution for ensuring

federal system of responsibility and accountability within the Union Parishad framework (Yunus, 2003: 40). Moreover, women Union Parishad member who is ex-officio adviser to Gram Sarkar is also unhappy due to the emerging power relationship at the village level and also lose an opportunity to be a Gram Sarkar Prodhan. So it seems difficult to ensure a congenial environment of cooperation and coordination between village government and Union Parishad- a widely acclaimed pre-condition for the successful formulation and execution of development plans and programs at grassroots level.

Directing Authority

Conceptually a local government body must have adequate authority to carry out its own responsibilities and not be dependent on any other authority. The constitution of Bangladesh requires that the Parliament will confer powers on the local government bodies and the elected representative constituting the local government shall take decision in exercising these power (GOB, 2000: 22). But in existing village government system, the Directing Authority, an executive officer (Upazila Nirbahi Officer), has been given certain authority i.e. to nominate Gram Sarkar members, to take necessary measures for oath of office, to remove a member of his office, to fix where the office of the Gram Sarkar will be established, to determine the procedures for conducting meeting. It is desirable that the Election Commission and Gram Sarkar should decide all the matters by a majority vote and not by the executive authority of government. Moreover, one Upazila Nirbahi Officer in each Upazila supervises at least 10-12 Union Parishads under his jurisdiction. There are views that most of the time the Unions are not visited by the supervisory authority (Haq. 1980: 9). So it is also difficult to supervise properly a large number of village governments by the existing institutional framework.

Institutional Sustainability

It is expedient that the structure, composition and functions of village government in our country has changed with the change of political regime. Village government is also suffering from fund

constraints. We found that neither the government provided funds for village governments nor could they mobilize adequate local resources for villagers socio-economic development. They always depend on the political patronage of the ruling party, which renders this institution unsustainable. Theoretically, village government would be the basic institution on which the whole structures of local bodies stand. (Haq, 1980: 9). But we could not find its reality in practice. However, if the village governments or Gram Sarkars are to be effective institutions for planning, execution and coordination of development activities then all nation-building departments are likely to maintain close links with them, which may be a matter of choice and convenience. Village government is also mentioned as a corporate body. But it has no permanent office and officials for managing secretarial works of routine administration. Moreover, there is no provision of remuneration for Gram Sarkar functionaries like the Union Parishad.

Conclusions

Local government at village level is an essential requirement for grassroots democracy and development. It provides 'emerging leaders' in the nation-building process. Villagers can articulate their interest to the local political process and also provide support to the development programmes through village government. Moreover, it creates a chance to understand the political process of a democratic government and the villagers can play their role and responsibility in the governance of the country.

The existing Gram Sarkar has a lot of limitations. But it is necessary for the rural people to identify the local problems and the felt needs of the people. It helps to prepare plans and programmes for meeting the needs and solving the problems of the villagers and to encourage the people of the village to undertake self-reliant activities. It also provides an opportunity to empower women at grass roots level socio-politically. Moreover, Gram Sarkar can carry out the task of administration, development, law and order and social welfare within its jurisdiction.

However, if we look at the practice of the village government in Bangladesh we found that ruling government always tries to use village government viz. Swanirvar Gram Sarkar, Palli Parishad, Gram Parishad or Gram Sarkar as an 'Appendix' of the politico-administrative purpose of their regime. So reforming existing village government system is a must to meet the basic socio-economic needs of the village people. On the basis of issues and constraints of village government discussed earlier we may propose some recommendations for policy consideration.

Village government should consist of Village or Gram not Ward. Election of village government should be conducted by the authority of the election commission under secret ballot. Village government must have full authority to carry out its own duties and responsibilities and not be dependent on any other authority for its regular works. Training of the village government functionaries should be organized on regular basis for their capacity development as a leader of local bodies. National Institute of Local Government (NILG) should take necessary steps to meet the training needs of village government. The duties and responsibilities of the women member should be specified. The functions of the village government should be specified to resolve the conflict and confrontation between Gram Sarkar and Union Parishad due to overlapping of functions.

Moreover, coordination with other local agencies working in villages should be ensured. Legal authority to impose taxes and to undertake income generating as well as local resources mobilizing activities should be provided to the Gram Sarkar. Each village government must have a permanent office and a paid secretary to carry out its routine administration. Finally, an independent Commission should monitor the activities of village government and its functionaries on continuous basis. In fact, the above mentioned reform agenda will also be helpful to meet the grassroots peoples needs as well as local democracy through strengthening institutional capability of Village government in Bangladesh.

References

- Alam, Bilquis Ara and Md. Mukabber, (1981). " Gram Sarkar Prodhans and Sachibs of SGS: Some Background Information", *Local Government Quarterly*, Vol. 10. No.1-2.
- Alam, Munjur-ul, (1981). "Leadership Pattern Under Swanirvar Gram Sarkar in Bangladesh- An Examination of Some Characteristics of Gram Prodhans in Selected Areas of Comilla District", *Journal of BARD*, Vol. X, No.1 and 2.
- Am, Ann-Lisbet, (1982). "Dependence and Solidarity in Village Level Politics. Gram Sarkar Elections in Bangladesh, 1980", Copenhagen and Dacca: Centre for Development Research and Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, Mimeo.
- Aurobindo, Sri, (2001). *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication.
- Government of Bangladesh-GOB, (1980). *Second Five Year Plan: 1980-85*, Dhaka: Planning Commission.
- Government of **Bangladesh-GOB, (1989). Palli Parishad Act, 1989**, Dhaka: Bangladesh Government Press.
- Government of Bangladesh-GOB, (1997a). *Gram Parishad Act, 1997*, Dhaka: Bangladesh Government Press.
- Government of Bangladesh-GOB, (1997b) *Local Government Commission Report: Strengthening of Local Government Institution*, Dhaka: Local Government Commission, Government of Bangladesh.
- Government of Bangladesh-GOB, (2000). *The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh*, Dhaka: Bangladesh Government Press.
- Government of Bangladesh-GOB, (2003). *Gram Sarkar Act, 2003*, Dhaka: Bangladesh Government Press.

Haq, M. Nurul, (1980). "Gram Sarkar in Historical Perspectives", Bogra: Rural Development Academy, Mimeo.

Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives-LGRD&C, (1980). Swanirvar Gram sarkar (Constitution and Administration) Rules, 1980, Dhaka: Bangladesh Government Press.

Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives-LGRD&C, (2004). "Instruction for Using Lump Provisions¹ Financial Support in Implementing Specific Scheme of Gram Garkar", in Bengali, Dhaka: Local Government Division, Mimeo.

Molla, Md. Gyasuddin, (1992). Village Government in Bangladesh, Dhaka: Al-Hossain Printing Works.

Rahman, Mohammad Siddiquer, (1997). "Gram Parishad: Needed Some Fine Tuning to Meet the Fundamentals", The Daily Star, National Daily in English, October 13, 1997.

Saqui, Q. Md. Afser Hossain, (1994). Swanirvar Gram Sarkars in Four Villages of Bangladesh, Dhaka: National Institute of Local Government.

Saqui, Q. Md. Afser Hossain, (2001). "Village Government in Transition", The Journal of Local Government, Vol.30, No.1.

Tinker, Hugu, (1954). The foundation of Local Self- Government in India, Pakistan and Burma. London: The Athlone Press.

United News of Bangladesh-UNB, (2005). "Gram Sarkar Declared Illegal by High Court", The Bangladesh Today, National Daily in English, August 3, 2005, Dhaka.

Yunus, Muhammad, (2003). "Few Words About Gram Sarkar", The Prothom Alo, National Daily in Bengali, November 4, 2003. Dhaka.