

## Child Murder Issues in Bangladesh: Reasoning from Socio-Ethical Observation

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### **Abstract**

*Since last one and half decades, Bangladesh has confronting a growing number of child killing issues. For different social, economic and political reasons innocent child are being tortured, raped, sexually assaulted, and killed brutally in heinous means. According to the statistics of Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum (BSAF) in 2015, Bangladesh has witnessed 1,714 murders of children just over the last five years in which 968 child were put into atrocious death. The number explicit the fact that on average one child is being killed in each day. While legal actions and investigations on such cases are taking place but even though, that does not seem to hindering continuous child killing occurrences. Such incidents have made real threat to the rights to life of children. This paper is an endeavor to frame out a sociological and ethical examination on the possible reasons of child killing incidents in Bangladesh. Methodologically, the discussion and analysis will be followed inductively relying on a considerable number of literature reviews, empirical data and practical examples throughout the whole paper. We shall argue that child murder issues hoist responsibilities and accountability of both government and public, and therefore, required special consideration; child as a subject of unreasonable and terrible killing cannot be morally acceptable instead they should be protected from any vulnerable position of the society.*

**Key Words:** *Child's rights, social perspectives, killing reasons and context, moral arguments, government-public responsibilities.*

### **Introduction**

Maltreatments towards children are one of the invariable social delinquents throughout the human history. It is evidently shows that children have always been subject of undeserved impairments in different patriarchal dominating cultures either as being private property of parents or being placed in the minority group. Regardless of any major or trivial social, economic, and political uprising, children commonly possesses the most

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vulnerable position in the society among all other individuals since they are physically and mentally highly sensitive human beings. However, child-killing act takes new spiteful and malicious forms once again at present time, especially in developing countries like Bangladesh. A shocking number of innocent lives ferociously have been sacrificed for the sake of irrational and trivial interests of some people recently in Bangladesh. This growing attitude turns out as a real threat to child's salient rights like right to life, freedom, security, and expression. Many sociologists, criminologists, psychologists, and thinkers exemplified such offensive occurrences sometimes as negative impact of colonial culture, dominating attitude of ruling group, failure of law and regulation system, irrational act of abnormal person, or sometimes as a result of exercising negative freedom of people. This paper is synthesis of social and ethical observations over the causes of child murder incidents in Bangladesh. We shall examine this issue based on some contrasting ethical arguments to find out how child-killing acts is morally impermissible, how it contravenes the fundamental rights of child, and how it intensifies the moral accountability and responsibility of government and public. Finally, we shall try to come up with some possible suggestions to improve the present situation by seeking substantial attention of particular government. Let us concentrate on the following child killing incidents that recently take place in Bangladesh.

On 8 July 2015, a thirteen years teenage boy named Sheikh Mohammad Samiul Alam Rajon has been killed by barbarically beating in Sylhet. Later on 5<sup>th</sup> August 2015, an eleven years boy Rabiul Awal got killed in Borguna by public beating in the same way. Police reported that some people beat him inhumanely out of suspect that he has stolen fish and throw his dead body into the pond. A 12 year's old child labor Rakib Hawlader was killed in another most heinous way in Khulna on 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2015. He was first tortured, beaten, and then given air compressor in the sensitive part of the body in an unnatural way by the motor garage owner Omar Sharif, his mother Beauty Begum and a helping man Mintu Mia. Doctor's report revealed that his intestines were torn apart and lungs burst causing death. However, local public caught these suspects and handed them over to police of whom investigation is still going on (Chowdhury, 2015). A three years old child Sumaiya Akhter died being beaten by her father and mother who tried to prove that they are experts at exorcism. Another brutality has taken place on 29<sup>th</sup> February 2016 in the Banosree area of Dhaka city. In this case the mother takes the life of her daughter 12 years old Nusrat and boy 6 years old Alvi . And to the inspection officer she argued that she was uncertain about the future of her children and this is the reason she takes the life of her two flowers (bdnews24.com, 2017).

All the above incessant occurrences are explicating the conquest of physically power over the weak. These are not so common or accidental

murder cases rather show the brutality of individual person. Several primary queries hereby arise such as why children's lives are falling in such consequences? Do they really deserve this treatment? Why people are engaging in such heinous and demoralized actions? What are the ultimate reasons? In addition, who has the responsibility to rectify these things justly? All these questions put our individual and social character in serious charges.

### **The socio-moral rights and personhood of a child**

The ownership of child's social and moral rights as a human being or societal person is worth of particular attention. Generally, children don't get measured as equal to an adult person because personhood indicates a human being's possession of certain qualities which connote her as fully rational and rights-holder person. Such personhood qualities includes: autonomy, free will, free expression, judgment etc. To be acquainted with the social and moral rights of a child, first we need to recognize who is considered as child and does child have any particular moral status?

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) accords that 'a human being of less than 18 ages can be considered as child' (Article 3). This standard has been followed by most of the states. In 1989, UNCRC also approves a number of significant principles to uphold child's possession of personhood and their social, political, legal, and moral rights universally. Amidst these rights, children's 'inherent rights to life', 'right to have best interests', 'right of protection', 'right of expression', and 'right of privacy' are of central. For instance, "children have a right to privacy. The law should protect them from attacks against their way to life, their good names, their families and their homes" (Article 16). These rights explicitly narrates that "governments have a responsibility to take all available measures to make sure children's rights are respected, protected and fulfilled. ...This involves their social services, legal, health and educational systems, as well as levels of funding for these services..." (Article 4).

However, there are two philosophical camps that hold distinct approaches regarding the idea of personhood and pertinent rights. One group of philosophers like Immanuel Kant, Gregory Vlastos considers personhood of individual in the light of being human. Children hence count as dignified moral agent as they are also human beings and they possess all the inherited rights. Other group of philosopher emphasizes on the person's possession of certain rational aptitudes. Rene Descartes, John Locke, and David Hume identify 'consciousnesses as the decisive characteristic of a person which includes cognitive capacities to execute the consciousness nature (1985). Contemporary utilitarian philosopher Peter Singer stresses on the 'consciousness' quality of all entity that is capable of feeling sufferings (1974). Moreover, contemporary philosophers Boethius and Mary Midgley highlight on the importance of rational functions to be a person (1985). This

latter idea of personhood reflects strong societal nature of individuals along with their rational capability. Because, other than the consciousness or responsiveness quality, several personhood qualities are required for an individual to be tied up with the socio-political rights, laws, custom, moral code, responsibilities, and additional higher privileges of the society. Thus, accordingly, if a person makes any illegal act or violates the rights of others within that particular system, she is certainly subject of legal accountability and punishment. In this regard, Childs can account as a person only if they possess 'self-awareness' ability with cognitive quality.

Consequently, two theories have come to the forefront to identify the rights of child: the 'will or choice theory' and the 'welfare or interest theory'. Right, for will theory, is the exercise of choice of individuals. By the particular choice, individuals enforce their rights-power over others. On the other hand, interest theory judges right as the defense of individual's particular interest that enforces certain duties on other individuals (2016). This theory particularly helps us to identify the best interest for the child depending upon the context (Tom, 1992). However, whatever may be the disputes among the ethicist regarding the economic, political, and cultural category of rights but it can be easily recognized that the right to life or survive is the most fundamental right among all other rights of person.

Considering the above disputes, our approach is mostly convince by the 'best interests' theory of child's rights. There are good reasons to admit that the idea of personhood of child changes when we think of it under a concrete socio-political context. Although children are conscious human entity but we cannot treat them as autonomous person. Since, no children can ensure rational judgment of right-wrong things, take own decision, control thoughts, claim or exercise rights, protest strongly against injustice or demand for justice in the same way an adult person do. They are rather innocent, always dependent on others, and in every way harmless. Therefore, child with the ownership of fundamental legal and moral rights gets different treatment in a societal circumstance.

However, this difference does not entails that child's fundamental rights are less important rather it indicates that adult persons are mostly responsible for children's life and safety. The idea of rights and duties are interconnected, if an adult person is more capable of exercising rights more and over a child she is equally abides with the liability of protecting child's rights and so forth. Hence, the moral significance of child's personhood and moral rights is that if children are really rights-holders then the violation of their rights makes other persons accountable and responsible. Therefore, we cannot ignore or overlook our moral responsibility towards the child's rights and welfare.

Constitutionally in Bangladesh, child's rights laws uphold strong position of the child in the society, but practically, legal and moral rights of child is in extremely vulnerable position. The lacks of government and public responsibility are so perceptible that young Childs are continuously

get killed by the adults though they are not responsible or have not brought any harm to anybody. Childs are facing the death series before having any understand of worldly matters, before learning to fight for survival, or exercising their rights. Hence the obvious discussion comes to the point of relevant causes behind the child killing cases in Bangladesh.

### **Feasible reasons of child killing**

Child killing issue appears mostly as negative upshot of conservative mentality and irrational thinking in under develop countries like Bangladesh. The increasing number of child killing in Bangladesh is a shocking rate. According to the report of Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum (BASAF), in the last 5 years, the number of total infanticide is 1134. While the number killed child were 209 in 2012there it raised by 218 in 2013.Noticeably in 2014, this rate increased by 61percent with 350 than that of 2013.In 2015, total 292 and, till March 01, 2016, already 49 children have been killed brutally by various heinous means and for multiple reasons. At least 968 children were murdered after brutal torture from 2012 to July 2014 (The Daily Star, 8 August 2015). From private to public, following reasons appeared in child killing cases of Bangladesh:

#### ***Weak social and family bondage***

Now, the fact is that our family ties and other forms of relationships deteriorated in that level that it's high time to redefine the term family, near and dear ones and relatives. In the era of organic solidarity what we care most is nothing but ourselves and to promote individualism. Now we hardly make contract with our family members and kin as we became so busy with ourselves. Individualism gets preferences in the organic forms of society. And this matter can be clear with the following statistics. In the year 2014, among 366 children who were killed; 41 of them have been killed by their own parents, and this number is 40 out of 292 in 2015 and 9 so far in 2016. Now it becomes a fashion and trends of killing one's own child for a matter of nothing in the era of individualism.

#### ***Deconstruction of media messages and media impact***

Nowadays many crime programs is telecasting throughout the world over satellite TV to make people aware about crime and its impact on individual, society as well as on state in a greater sense. But some people see these crime programs only to make them learned and to know the tactics of occurring those types of crimes and this is how the motives of the telecasting is deconstructing by those criminal minded people. The tremendous increase of child killing in Bangladesh is one of the reasons of deconstructing the motives of those crime programs. In this era of globalization we have given ourselves enough away in the current that we are no more aware of ourselves and our own future and the long term consequences of the crime that are offending by ourselves. The media is

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also playing a significant role to take us away from our own cultural practices and the morality and ethics that is practices in our own culture. In each and every day we are introducing with new cultures of the world and thus assimilating us with foreign culture which is actually responsible for our moral and ethical degradation.

### ***Faulty Socialization***

Socialization denotes to the process through which a child came to know with the societal process and came to know about the social system in which he or she have to cope up with from the very beginning of the life to till death. It's a lifelong learning process. In the era of individualism, we are failed to give our children a healthy socialization and they are grown up with ill mentality. Sometimes it becomes difficult for us whom we should respect and whom we should revised. The greatest thing is that we forget to respect ourselves. Now we considered our children as an asset not as human; who will help us economically in our worse time of old age. We mostly like to spend our times only for personal purposes but not for ours wife, children's or families or anybody else. As a result children or other family members suffer from inferiority complex and feel lonely, and grown up with sick mentality. It's the high time to provide healthy socialization to ourselves and to ours children's.

### ***Economic gain***

Economic gain is another major reason of child killing in Bangladesh. Most of the time, the criminal kidnap the children and demand money from the parents as well as guardian of the children. But if the guardian failed to provide the demanded money then in fear the criminal killed the children and throughout the body here and there. This is also evident that although the demanded money has been paid but for the safety of the criminal they also killed the children brutally. So for the greed of money children are being abducted and killed brutally.

### ***Retributive attitude***

It is also evident from the recent some cases of brutal child killing that child are being victimized due to the revenge taking deeds. To take revenge the opposite sides take the initiative to make week the side against whom they are keen to take revenge. And in this process they target the children and thus by killing the children they take their revenge with the guardian of those innocent children.

### ***Dissatisfaction in the conjugal life and the impact of extramarital relationships***

Another reason of brutal child killing is taking place due to the dissatisfaction in the conjugal life and the extramarital relationships. This is why the child is being killed by the parent in most of the time. On 20th April 2016 a baby was stabbed mercilessly in the stomach by his mother and

later on the mother had injuries on her throat in order to kill herself too. Inspection officer opined that they are primarily assuming that the mother killed her own child and later tried to take her own life” And in this case the suspension of the wife on husband and husband suspension on his wife extramarital relationship is responsible for this heinous act. Parents randomly think that their children won’t be able to bear so much trouble of their life and thus being uncertain of their future they sacrifice themselves by killing. In Another case on 20<sup>th</sup> April 2016, Police found the dead body of mother and her boy child in a hanging condition and Police suspects that mother takes the life of her child and also takes his life by herself due to the dissatisfaction in the conjugal relationship as others neighbors also opined in the same way. So the dissatisfaction in the conjugal life and the extramarital relationships is playing significant role in the case of brutal child killing.

### **Moral accounts of child killing issue**

There are certain common moral senses in every individual. Our common moral instinct helps us to recognize some universal moral rules without the advocacy of any argument and regardless of any particular context such as ‘killing innocent person is wrong’, ‘it is wrong to harm others’, ‘everybody should be truthful’ etc. Apparently, we can say from our common moral sense that killing innocent child is surely a wrong act but, in this section, we are engaged to demonstrate this claim following two contrasting moral doctrines in ethics. The arguments would flow in the following way:

1. It is wrong to kill any innocent human being or moral agent
2. Children are most innocent, harmless, and reliant moral agents among all human beings
3. Childs have the ownership of certain fundamental legal, social, and moral rights
4. This social and moral status of children assign certain moral duties to other persons
5. Therefore, it is the moral duties of independent adult persons to secure children’s life along with the all fundamental rights

### ***Firstly, argument from deontological ground***

Deontological ethics accounts every human being as worth of supreme dignity and evaluates each human’s act following the underlying reasonable rules. It stands on the very idea that all humans are equally rational, free, and members of a shared moral community. German philosopher Immanuel Kant first developed this idea and later on followed by many prominent philosophers like Donald Ross (1939), John Rawls (1971), Robert Nozick (1974) in their distinct ways. According to Kant, every human life is intrinsically valuable only because they are human beings. Humans can think rationally, can make universal rules, and they are the actual judge of

right and wrong. These cognitive qualities entitled individuals with some fundamental rights. Therefore, humans are end-in-themselves and unparallel beings to any other entity.

In *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* (1785), Kant illustrates what fundamental cognitive qualities make a human as highest authority. Good will, duty sense, and universal maxims are those three rational aspects that help individual realize their autonomous character and moral duties. For a rational guideline of human act, Kant proposes three categorical imperatives these are:

Firstly, act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law without contradiction.

Secondly, act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never merely as a means to an end but always at the same time as an end.

Thirdly, therefore, every rational being must so act as if he were through his maxim always a legislating member in the universal kingdom of ends.

Kant argues that the moral righteousness of an action must be determined according to these above universal rational maxims. Good will is exercise by acting according to these moral laws which consists of a set of maxims and categorical in nature. Noteworthy thing is, 'it is wrong to kill any human beings' is one of the universal moral statements that easily reduces form these maxims. These rules not only demonstrate how to conduct an act but also conveying the moral duties of one human towards others. Therefore, no other human being is morally permissible to infringe in other humans life as well.

Now following this moral ground we need to justify whether the act of killing a child is rational or not. On the other hand, can any reason for killing a child be wise or rational? It is apparent that killing a child is completely a wrong act according to deontological argument. Because, taking one's life is the violation of universal moral laws of conduct. If any person claims any reason in favor of such act then this would be universally followed by every human according to this moral argument. In result, a child will have the same moral approval to kill anyone which would not be acceptable to anyone. From an intrinsic value point, there is no difference between a child and adult. A child first counts as a human being who possesses certain cognitive qualities. Thus, this ethical ground is against the child killing act and such act cannot be justified in any context. Therefore, killing child is morally not permissible for any reason.

### ***Secondly, argument from utilitarian ground***

Utilitarian ideas entirely opposite to the idea of deontology in ethics. This doctrine emphasizes on the ultimate goals or ends of act instead of means or ways of an act. Advocates of this moral idea consider all humans as moral



agents who are the member of moral community and owner of maximum moral dignity. 'Happiness' of moral agents is the only significant end of every act of individual. In 18<sup>th</sup> century, Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill propose this theory based on the hedonistic attributes of human. However, Mill's idea of 'maximum happiness for the maximum number of people' and his latter developed version of utilitarianism have made major contributions to this dominating moral theory for a long time.

Many utilitarians morally favor the legal killing act form 'rule utilitarian' approach such as state's death punishment. But there are disputes for the moral approval of non-legal killing act. Two popular interpretations of utilitarian idea clear its intention towards act of killing. One is of moral philosopher Philippa Foot's 'one to save five' trolley trope in 1967 and the other one is of Mill's 'harm principle' notion. The common trolley trope that used to understand and criticize the utilitarian idea regarding killing person is 'one out of five' (Alec, 2012). Trolley trope projects a hypothetical situation where a person falls in a moral dilemma to save the life of either one person or five persons. What would be the moral decision in this case? Utilitarianism, in this case, would suggest the person to save life of five people rather than one person so that the principle of happiness of maximum people can be ensured. Therefore, killing a person would be morally acceptable if it can ensure the moral significance of utmost happiness of maximum people. However, we think that this utilitarian demarcation of killing individual works only in exceptional moral dilemma; not in our regular moral practice.

Secondly, Mill's 'harm principle' justifies the extension of human power where a person can interrupt into the rights of other person within a socio-political context. In '*On Liberty*' (1859) Mill states that all individuals are free to exercise their civil and social rights, and no person is allowed to interfere in the liberty of other person. However, this makes a restriction to all individuals as well. A moral agent is that much free to exercise her rights so long it would not violate or harm the rights of others. Therefore, individuals have the right to interfere in the rights of other only when if it is about to harm or violates other person's rights.

Now consider these arguments in child killing issue. Murdering a child is morally acceptable if this can increase the maximum happiness of the maximum number of people or if a child violate the rights of others. Can a child killing act bring any maximum happiness to the society? How a child can be responsible for interfering into others life? Or how a child is threat to the rights of others? Except the exceptional legal cases, killing of person is clearly a wrong act in utilitarian doctrine because the utmost happiness and overall welfare of all moral agents is the precedence of this moral idea. Child killing does not fall into the category of any exceptional cases. Instead, from utilitarian ground, a child's life and rights protection should be prior to any other individuals since a child is a full of potential entity. No tropes would work to justify such acts of killing child.

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In the aforementioned moral grounds, we tried to show that from the rational and moral nature of humans, their socio-political status, and social welfare context, child killing is neither permissible nor justifiable. Rather it indicates the moral responsibilities of all other people. Brutal killing of children is a complete indication of socio-political devastation of a system for which urgent initiatives are required to be taken by particular the authority.

### **Probable Required Initiatives**

It is high time now to take effective steps and rethink over the existing legal laws that have made to stop these brutal children killing acts. UNCHR has made twelve significant recommendations to ensure the safety and welfare of the children which are needed to implement rapidly in case of Bangladesh. These are:

1. To increase the strength of national and local commitment and action;
2. To prohibit all violence against children (including the death penalty, corporal punishment, harmful traditional practices, sexual violence, torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment);
3. To make prevention of violence against children a priority;
4. To promote non-violent values and raise awareness of violence;
5. To enhance the capacity of all who work with and for children;
6. To provides services for recovery and social reintegration;
7. To ensure the participation of children;
8. To create accessible and child-friendly reporting systems and services;
9. To ensure accountability and put an end to violence against children going unpunished;
10. To address the gender dimension of violence against children;
11. To develop and implement systematic national data collection and research;
12. To strengthen international commitment of the issue of violence against children. (Source: The United Nations Secretary General's Study on Violence Against Children, 2008)

All these recommendations are strong enough to assign limitations to the adult persons in exercising their power and rights over the children. However, along with all these above recommendation, the first and foremost requisite one in Bangladesh is the enforcement of updated legislation and prompts execution of punishment. Many thinkers feel the need of new skilled judicial committee to deal with such cases, 'special crimes tribunals

are need for the declination of these series of occurrences and all the past offenders must have to get punish'- said BSAF chairman Emranul Huq Chowdhury (Al Jazeera). Second necessity is the realization of legal and moral duties of family and public towards the children. Practice of moral duties should be given from home to societal institutions by the religious education, healthy socialization, sound entertainment, and cultural learning. We need to keep in mind that all of us have to cherish the actual fatherhood and motherhood in our heart for our future generation.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Child killing issue is highly sensitive and exceedingly dreadful issue. Contemporary child murder issues seriously have been regulated thinkers and researchers attention towards children from human rights idea instead of relative cultural and religious beliefs. Since, it is morally a wrong act and against the principle of justice of liberal democratic country like Bangladesh. Continuous child killing incidents in Bangladesh thus visibly illustrate the illegal and demoralized practice of inequality policy towards minority groups like child. It substantially shows the lack of legal and moral concern of people towards children. People absolutely forget that such activities are real threat to the sustainable development between present, distant, and future generations. Although legal actions have been taken time to time but it is not enough alone to stop such heinous act of demoralized persons. Therefore, along with more strong judicial actions, required initiatives need to be promoted immediately to increase and realize the legal and moral duties of public and government to secure the life of children. Accepting the moral responsibilities can equate the major disproportion of equal treatment in this regard.

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