

**SOCIAL IMPACT OF RICKSHAW BAN IN DHAKA CITY****Rushni Korishi**

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**ABSTRACT**

*The rickshaw is a part of the traditional transport system in Bangladesh. The importance of this human-powered vehicle in Dhaka is more than imagined for the middle-class city-dwellers of the city. The majority of the rickshaw users considered it as the most important mode of transport for daily trips. The government of Bangladesh had tried to ban rickshaws from Dhaka city several times without considering the socioeconomic impact in the long run. This paper had attempted to investigate a social impact considering a rickshaw-free scenario in Dhaka. It had presented a detailed scenario of the city with and without rickshaws for policy consideration, further research, and urbanization planning.*

**Keywords:** Rickshaw, Rickshaw pulling job, Rickshaw ban impact, Urban transport, Dhaka city.

**Introduction**

Dhaka is a small and congested city where most of the trips are very short distance (between one to five KM only) that is why rickshaws are found very suitable. It charges a low fare for short distances compared to any other mode of transport. It is very much popular among the lower and middle-income earners. Nonetheless, it uses only human power without any kind of fossil fuels and so it is safe as well as environment friendly (Shovan, 2008). To go to school, to office, or shopping mall, if it is a short distance then passengers are looking for rickshaws. Every day, in the early morning, thousands of mothers go to school and come back with their children. Again, in the late morning, the officials look for it too. In the afternoon, couples are found to enjoy rickshaw trips very much around the city.

Rickshaws use in both urban and rural areas in Bangladesh as one of the principals means of transport due to convenience (Mim, 2019). It is not only an important issue for the economy, but also carries a cultural image and values. At the beginning of the twentieth century, rickshaws had been innovated in Japan (Zaman, 2013). It became popular after World War II when the price of fuels and motorized ventricles become expansive (OGL, 2019). Later on, it became popular in many other Asian countries including Indonesia, Singapore (Sultana, 2018).

In the year of 1919, rickshaws reached Chittagong via Myanmar. But it did not come to Dhaka from Chittagong (Hasan & Davila, 2018). The rickshaw was first introduced at Dhaka from Calcutta in 1930 (Edgerton, 2006). In 1938, the use of rickshaws had increased in Dhaka city when the jute exporters

purchased cycle and rickshaws from Calcutta for their personal purposes. Mostly the European businessmen lived in Narayanganj and Netrokona. Only 37 rickshaws were recorded in 1941 and by the year 1947, the number had increased to 181 (Zaman, 2013). Before 1947, as a district town, Dhaka had a population of 62,469 (GOP, 1951). After 1971, the population started to increase and in 1998, it reached 8 million-plus while the number of registered rickshaws had increased to 1,12,572 (BBS, 2001). That means the number of rickshaws has increased over the years in a very short duration due to popularity and convenience.

Only 5 percent of short trips are made by private vehicles, whereas more than 35 percent are made by rickshaws in Dhaka city (World Bank, 2005). Due to over vehicle (all modes) in the congested streets at the city, traffic jams are increasing every day and killing valuable labor hours. The government of Bangladesh had tried to ban or already banned rickshaws from various streets without considering the real situation. A few pilot projects had been observed in earlier periods but did not bring any positive results. Rickshaw ban may help only to the elite class people by reducing traffic but not for major middle-class citizens at all. However, this paper had tried to present the overall rickshaw-centric scenario in Dhaka city, its present socio-economic impacts, and the after-effects on the present society after banning from Dhaka city.

**Literature Review**

Rickshaw polling is considered in Bangladeshi culture as a low-class job. That is why, most research is more concerned about the economic

condition, healthcare, and other facilities of the pullers. Dhaka city is an overpopulated nation but it is small in land size. Hence, it is a very congested place. So, the number of rickshaws is an important issue for city governments. Zaman (2013) had concluded and detected the actual number of rickshaws are several times higher than the officially registered number that in 2000 was only about 0.3 million in Dhaka city. If a rickshaw is managed by two different pullers in two different shifts, and a rickshaw puller has 5 members in his family, the total number of dependences on rickshaws is more or less three million. That means it has a sound economic value that runs the society too.

Policymakers in Bangladesh are against rickshaws; and had demanded and planned for a rickshaw-free Dhaka city as it was declared several times (Shovan, 2008 and Mim, 2019). As an eco-friendly mode of transportation, the government may support the sector. More bans on rickshaws would increase more use of private vehicles as well as increase the cost of commuters too besides pollution and harming the eco-systems (Hossain, 2012).

Begum and Sen (2004) had discovered Five ideas regarding rickshaw pulling, pullers, and urban poverty. It had been stated that - (a) rickshaw pullers in urban cities come from a very poor economic background, as a part of chronic poverty; (b) rickshaw pulling provides an easy earning options for the rural poor who come to cities for work; (c) rickshaw pullers are in high health risks; (d) rickshaw pulling job provides an unsustainable livelihood and only for short-run; (e) rickshaw puller's household get very limited access to health, education/schooling, etc facilities and the poor range of occupational choices for children.

Hossain and Susilo (2011) had conducted on rickshaw use and social impacts for Dhaka city. It had found a crucial role of rickshaws in the traditional transport system in Bangladesh. The importance of this human-powered vehicle in Dhaka is more than imagined for the middle-class city-dwellers of the city. The majority of the rickshaw users considered it as the principal mode of their daily transportation.

Earlier research had focused on the employment and economic issues or social impacts for the

present time but skipped the impact after banning it from city life. This gap had been considered to conduct the research to identify the socioeconomic impact after the rickshaws ban in Dhaka city.

### Methodology

Rickshaw had been considered as a part of Bangladeshi culture. This study had collected primary data. A hundred respondents were rickshaw users at different locations in Dhaka, Bangladesh and they have selected randomly. This paper tried to explore the recent conditions and the possible future social impacts if rickshaws are banned. It conducted exclusive content analysis to explore the possible socioeconomic and environmental impacts of rickshaw banning from the mega-city. Secondary data was also collected to support numerical figures on the different topics regarding the socio-economic impact of banning rickshaws from Dhaka city. It had used a simple percentage technique in the tables for the easy explanation of the real scenario and no statistical software was used except the Microsoft spreadsheet program. Observation method also applied to plot a future situation of the city, city dwellers who use rickshaws as the main mode of transport for everyday life since long ago.

### Discussion

A rickshaw provides an easy way of earning for unskilled laborers, and a cheap mode of transport for poor and middle-class people of the city dwellers as well in Dhaka (Hossain and Susilo, 2011). Traveling to school, medical, or any other short trip, rickshaws are the best provider of transport and economic activity. As part of the history of the city, till today it has socio-cultural value and importance too. If the rickshaw would not be available anymore in the city, the poor, woman, medical-patient has to shift toward alternative solutions, i.e. auto-rickshaws, taxicabs, other i.e. bus, which may be difficult and even sometimes not possible considering the socioeconomic status and transportation condition of the nation. Rickshaw passengers have contributed to the initial stage of research. All aged rickshaw users are found in the city (See. Table 1).

**Table 1: Age-wise distribution of having rickshaws trips in Dhaka city**

<i>Age</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Main purpose</i>	<i>%</i>
16-25	8%	12%	Schooling going	88
26-35	13%	17%	Trip with babies	76

36-45	19%	27%	Shopping purpose	65
46-55	28%	29%	Social/Health Purpose	80
55+	33%	15%	Health/Office Purpose	95

Source: Primary data, 2022

Table 1 shows that people (age 16-25) use (10%) rickshaw for school going purposes. People (aged 26-35) use it (15%) for their child schooling

purposes (76). People (aged 36-45) also use it for shopping (65%). Aged people (46+) use for going to the medical purposes mostly (80-95%).

**Table 2: Public perception on banning rickshaws in Dhaka city**

<i>Comments on</i>	<i>Male (%)</i>	<i>Female (%)</i>
Banning	15	14
Not Banning	75	85
No comment	10	11
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Primary data, 2022

Table 2 presents the user's recommendation about rickshaws. Only 14 percent female and 15 percent male want rickshaw ban in Dhaka city while 80% on average do not prefer ban rickshaws from the

city. About 10 percent of respondents did not comment on it as they prefer expert suggestions or government decision/s.

**Table 3: Alternative of rickshaws ride to the city dwellers in Dhaka**

<i>Comments on</i>	<i>Male (%)</i>	<i>Female (%)</i>
Purchase Car	4	9
Using Bus	5	4
Using ride-share	22	23
Walking	22	14
Do not find solution	47	46
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Primary data, 2022

Table 3 exhibits the respondents' feedback to shift alternative mode of transport after banning rickshaws in Dhaka city. Only 6 percent of respondents have the ability and want to purchase private cars, 5 percent want to use public transport i.e. Bus, 22 percent of respondents want to use rideshare vehicles, and 46 percent of city dwellers of Dhaka do not find an alternative solution at this moment.

### Present Benefits for Having Rickshaws in the City Areas

Rickshaws are ideal for Dhaka city as road space is very limited but the number of commuters is more. World Bank (2005) had recorded that rickshaws block 38 percent of the road but carry 54 percent of the total passengers of the city. In opposite, Private cars block about 34 percent of road space but carry only 9 percent (WB, 2005).

In Dhaka alone, rickshaw pullers earn taka 20 million combinedly per month (Wadood and Tehsum, 2018). However, rickshaw supports a large number of poor laborers, the pullers, their families, manufacturers, the mechanics who fix the rickshaws, body. Seat, hoods and spare parts sellers, art workers on rickshaw garages; side by side, the street hawkers who sell them food and their family members too. The whole rickshaw sector employs about 38 different professionals (Hossain, 2012). It also creates a large scale of employment, especially for the poor laborers. A few other notable issues are-

- Provides an alternative to walking:** rickshaws provide an alternative of walking in the city; especially for the citizens who have to travel with children, carrying bags and baggies, or so on.

- b) **Save time:** A rickshaw is faster to walk than to take a bus. The average car speed in Dhaka city is no greater than the speed of a rickshaw due to poor traffic situations.
- c) **Safer mode of transportation:** The number of fatal accidents caused by rickshaws is very rare. Women with children feel more comfortable using the mode of transport.
- d) **Save environmental damages:** Bangladesh saves taka 100 billion per year by avoiding environmental damage only because of using rickshaws (World Bank, 2005).
- e) **Income generation option for unskilled poor:** rickshaws are always ready to create jobs for unskilled laborers. Hence, it reduced begging and crime.
- f) **Effective on narrow paths:** Dhaka city is very congested and roads are very narrow (Mahmud et. al. 2012). Motorized vehicles do not have access to all those roads. In that case, only rickshaws are the only reliance to move/shift, especially elderly or ill.

### Effect After Banning rickshaws from Dhaka City

Ban on rickshaws not only impacts rickshaw pullers but also passengers in many ways. Social impact is huge compared to the economic one. Dhaka residents would be the main sufferers of this ban if it occurs. City dwellers want a safe, convenient, comfortable transport system as well as smart traffic planning. Rickshaw bans may occur after making a convenient walkway, bicycles, or three-wheeled rickshaws, on public transport, etc. Improved air quality, safety, and convenience are highly expected from city dwellers in Dhaka.

#### 1) Social Effect After Rickshaws Banning

Action had been taken by the central government in Bangladesh to reduce traffic congestion from Dhaka city without having any success (Mahmud et. al. 2012). Pilot projects had been conducted with rickshaws banning from some areas but results were not expected. Besides private car parking space was found as one of the major causes of this traffic mismanagement (Molla, 2022). Experience in the Mirpur area of Dhaka city suggested that no travel time gain for fuel-dependent vehicles was achieved after banning rickshaws from Mirpur road. Bus travel has worsened following the rickshaw ban; passenger travel by bus is found slower compared to rickshaw trips. Taxi is not a

good solution for short trips. Nonetheless, it took more waiting times for passengers in those areas. It may raise a lot of problems rather than have solutions at all. As such-

- a) **Problems for city dwellers:** rickshaw bans harm the sick, women, aged, children, and disabled. 38 percent of trips in Dhaka for going and coming back to/from school by rickshaw (WB, 2005).
- b) **Problems for related parties:** rickshaw pullers buy cheap products from street hawkers. Ban on rickshaws would push on trouble for lack of customers.
- c) **Rise of living expenses:** For near distance, the rickshaw/s is a very cheap mode of transport. But the alternative is very expensive. The city dwellers who have no private vehicle would be under huge pressure for high living expenses.
- d) **Increase waiting time:** Most trips are short in Dhaka city and so people use rickshaws as an easier form of transport. It may increase both time and cost for the travelers (Hossain, 2012).
- e) **Create unemployment and lead to more crime:** As unskilled poor people came to the city to have an income source, rickshaw pulling is one of the easiest ways to generate income (Begum and Sen, 2004). If it becomes restricted, people without jobs would be engaged in antisocial or criminal activities.
- f) **Pressure to the rural area:** 90 percent of the rickshaw pullers come to Dhaka city from rural areas (Begum and Sen 2005). Ban on rickshaws would create pressure towards village areas in the country.

#### 2) Economic (With Other) Effect After Rickshaws Banning

There are three sorts of possible economic impacts of rickshaws banning: (i) macro level, (ii) micro level, and (iii) environmental damages.

At the macro level, studies found the overall net impact of banning rickshaws was disproportionately on the negative side. The overall social structure would be changed. The ban on rickshaws harms the economy. The fuel-free transport ban has been devastating; increases Taka 1.52 billion only for only parching the fuel per year in Bangladesh (World Bank, 2005).

At the micro-level, passengers' cost would be higher and rickshaw pullers' income would be lower. The overall economy has to face a few more challenges for these structural changes. Nonetheless

the migration process generally between rural and (to) urban have to be readjusted which may lead to a shoe-leather cost effect too.

Thirdly, the environmental system, as well as the ecosystem, would be hampered due to more fuel burning after banning human power-supported transportation. Nonetheless, the banning of fuel-free transport has deteriorated environmentally to create roads by cutting trees and hamper door-to-door service/mobility of the passengers living in Dhaka city.

### Policy Suggestions

The Government's target is to ensure the city dwellers' basic demand for improved air quality, safety, and convenient transportation. Everyone in society would be the owner of a private car, this concept is not acceptable. As congestion does not make cars slow, too many cars cause congestion. Hence, the policy has to take restrictions on the non-environmentally friendly transportation modes. Rickshaws provide not only an environment-friendly mode of transport but also legal means of earnings for the poor. Ban on rickshaws may increase the sufferings of the vulnerable i.e. pregnant women, children, and/or disabled by depriving them of having their most suitable means of transport.

- a) **Prepare the Environment First:** As for walking as an alternative to rickshaw rides, the first need is to be a better environment for walking. Dwellers in Dhaka city face many barriers to alternate rickshaws, i.e. good footpaths, safe streets, healthy public toilets, etc
- b) **Consider public participation:** Dhaka is a megacity. People do not accept any changes

unless they get a good alternative as such- a ban on rickshaws, a completely emission-free vehicle.

- c) **Prepare separate space for rickshaws and develop public transportation:** New roads to be developed for all kinds of motorized vehicles with a separate lane for rickshaws. Metro-rail, monorail, mass-transit route, etc. would be prioritized during policy formulation and execution to ensure better city services for its dwellers.

### Concluding Remarks

A few years ago, a parliamentary decision in Bangladesh was taken to extend the rickshaw ban across many parts of Dhaka (Molla, 2019). This anti-people initiative was taken based on some prejudices against fuel-free transportation, rickshaw in particular, without any regard to proper scientific investigation. It is hoped that authorities will eventually see the importance of fuel-free and eco-friendly modes of transportation.

For a better transport system in Dhaka, a wide network of roads with separate rickshaw lanes is needed first. It can reduce fuel usage and pollution as well. GO-NGOs cooperation is highly essential to have so. Nowadays, several developed nations i.e. China, Australia, and North America are promoting 2- and 3-wheeled bicycles (rickshaws) to reduce traffic congestion, pollution, and costs. Considering environmental safety and economic stability, governments have to inspire eco-friendly products i.e. Recycling items and fuel-free modes of transportation. Ban on rickshaws may not be the solution before finding the best alternative for Dhaka city.

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