

# **WARI HOUSING PROJECT IN COLONIAL DHAKA: PROBLEM AND PROSPECT OF ITS PLANNING AND APPLICATION (1885-1919)**

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## **Abstract**

*As urban historians suggested that Municipalization is the characteristic of colonial administration, its role in the making of Dhaka speaks of more or less the same stories. However, the introduction of this body also brought in the game of competing interests. The constant stand-off between the municipal body and the government officials on various issues mostly related to the funding of improvement works paved in a way to forge a local interest hence a local representation vis a vis to the central authority. The first imperative of this authority was to ensure the cleanliness of the city as the jargon of 'clean' city became synonymous with the 'clean' governance. This article will try to explore the various engagement of the colonial officials and the municipality, in the process of making Wari as the first planned and healthy residential area of colonial Dhaka.*

**Keywords:** Dhaka, municipality, Wari, housing, sanitation, politics.

## **Introduction**

Wari, the first residential area of Dhaka city initiated by the colonial officials, was the new addition of the modernizing process under the new aspect of colonial settings. During the era of the nineteenth century, the European Urban planners and medical scientists brought a new urban concept of a planned city, implemented in Dhaka like the other cities of India. From the first half of this century, the population of Dhaka city was increasing significantly when the English education system commenced and many fortune seekers were coming to Dhaka to get the new opportunities, were opened for the new English educated class by the colonial government. The “unhealthy” and “dire” condition of the city as perceived by the colonial government after the two decades of the establishment of the ‘Municipality of Dacca’ (1864), led the officials to take initiatives to build an area for the emerging educated middle class with modern facilities based on scientific knowledge. Wari was the first housing project initiated by the colonial

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government in 1885, especially for government employees. The contemporary viewers explained this area as the “sanitarium” (Majumder 58) which had modern civic amenities. Patrick Geddes, the eminent urban planner mentioned in his ‘Report on the Town Planning of Dacca’ in 1917, only about the two areas i.e. Wari and Ramna which had the advanced civic facilities (Geddes 5). The establishment of Wari as a new settlement tells us a diversified story of the sanitation process of a modern city. Apart from that, it narrates some accounts of power conflicts between the British officials and the local members of the municipality of Dhaka, in the issues of providing civic amenities to ensure the health infrastructure of the city. It is also revealed the story of the multifarious voices of the local people, who shaped the project in their ways. In this article, I will try to explore some issues related to the process of making the sanitary infrastructure to explore the above background of the Wari housing project, which was initiated by the government and worked out under the new political environment of the municipality.<sup>1</sup>

### **The Making of Wari**

By 1850, with the growth of population, the old part of the Dhaka city became overcrowded. The 'new knowledge' of health consciousness, the introduction of wheeled carriage, and the extension of the piped water-supply facilitated this outward move, and the newly emerging middle class started settling in the vicinity of the old part, and thus the growth of new residential quarters was begun first in the adjacent locality of the town where vacant lands were available.

To meet the growing demands of the new social class for building the new houses comparatively in the less crowded areas with ‘modern facilities’ the municipality had started searching the suitable lands in and around the city. In 1876 the municipality decided to buy and develop a *Khash Mahal* from the government which was situated in the north-east fringe of the city. The municipality offered Rs. 1475 for the whole estate but was rejected by the government as the offered amount was too low (Bengal Revenue Proceedings). In 1839, the first agricultural settlement of the land was made, and the whole area was leased out on *Jangle Bari* (forest) tenure at an annual rent of two rupees per *bigha* of the homestead and fruit-tree land and four *annas* per *bigha* of lands used by the washer men for washing and bleaching Muslims. The total revenue thus settled to a

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<sup>1</sup> The Municipal Act 1884 passed the local election system for running municipal activities by the elected members of (Bengal Revenue Proceedings) the city by the city dwellers.

little over ninety-one rupees. However, these rates proved too high considering the economic decline of the city. In 1841 a new and fresh settlement was made at something over fifty-nine rupees (Letter from Deputy Collector of Dhaka to Divisional Commissioner), but by 1876 five-sixths of the property had relapsed into the jungle.

Finally, in 1885, the government officials of Dhaka decided to develop the whole area under their supervision. The Collector of Dhaka, Frederick Wyer, was entrusted to the improvement of the land. Wyer took a great interest in developing the area. He ordered to clear jungles and to level the land. The broad grid roads with drains were constructed. The whole area was divided into a grid of spacious plots leased at an annual rent of six rupees per *bigha*. The lessee had given an undertaking to build a *pucca* (brick-built) house of a substantial character within three years. The plan of the houses had to be approved by the Collector, and the construction of any additional buildings within the allotted plots was prohibited without his permission. But by 1890 the government employees who were not able to build their houses due to the scarcity of money, the government provided them a salary of six months in advance. The condition was to refund the loan by the next 18 months from their salaries (Dhaka Prakash, 1894). The settlers had to obey the clause IX of *patta* (agreements) where the clearance of jungle and ensuring the cleanliness of the plot was mandatory. Any failure treated as a fault, and the Collector would take actions to remove the nuisance, and the expense had to be borne by the owner (Letter from the Collector of Dacca to the Chairmen).

Hridoy Nath writes in the early twentieth century,

The plots were immediately taken up by senior government officials and professional people like doctors, lawyers, and teachers, who built beautiful houses with gardens in front and rear. The houses were also supplied with electricity and piped water; with its broad metalled roads, well-lit drained, Wari eventually became a quality, upper-middle-class area—"the sanatorium of Dacca" as a contemporary described it (Majumder 58).

The "model" of modern housing area had already been suggested by H. C. Cutcliffe, the Civil Surgeon of Dhaka, (1969) in a complete scheme of sanitary reform to improve the unhealthy condition of the city (H.C Cutcliffe's letter to the Chairman of Dacca Municipality) as the other nineteenth-century experts and reformers proposed to improve the sanitary infrastructure for the cities of India and Europe. But ordering the cityscape by using sanitary

science to establish roads, conservancy, and sewage systems was no easy task to carry out. Each project had its own sets of difficulties. Above all, the question of the funds was always crucial for any project taken by the colonial government regarding the structural changes of the city. In this connection, Norma Evenson examines the government projects of city improvement of Madras, where he shows that the city improvement was always tended with a limited budget, and made adequate provision of roads, utilities, and sewers. These types of projects were considered by the government as a heavy drain on the city's resources (Evenson 5).

However, the measures were recommended to render the area salubrious through sanitary reforms. For the colonial officials, the most important challenge was to clean and clear the area by stopping all kinds of unhealthy practices related to the pollution of air, water, and neighborhood. The "unlawful construction" of the settlers by encroaching the government lands and public spaces like roads and the bank of the *Khals* (canals) were also the concern of the government to be stopped. The proper draining of filthy water was to be confirmed by dredging the *Khals* surrounding the Wari estate and freed them from the stagnant condition, which according to the colonial officials, was the result of constant throwing of excreta and rubbish, and making privies on the sides of those *Khals* by the neighboring people. Both the colonial officials and the members of the municipality were enthusiastic to achieve the goal of hygiene and health of the Wari estate because the success of such initiatives was directly linked to good governance. Thus, preventive measures had been suggested by the sanitary inspector after inspecting the east, west, and south side of the Wari *Khals* and its adjacent parts of the estate.

The early improvement work commenced with dredging the *khals* that the filthy water of the Wari estate could disburse properly through one channel. The decision was made to connect all the drains with the *khals* in a planned way after finishing the excavation work. But the work was delayed for various reasons. The municipality had to face a constant problem of the shortage of coolies and *methers* (sweepers) in the city (H.C Cutcliffe's letter to the Chairman of Dacca Municipality) Sometimes it led the officials to compromise with the "unlawful natives". We can give an example that Dengar Chandra Shaha and Gadhadar Saha encroached some area of Wari *Khal* at the west side of Thomson Street by constructing walls and privies. The municipality served them notices for the third time on 8 August 1888 to remove the walls and privies after the rejection of the petitions filed by the parties (Letter from the Chairman, Dacca Municipality to the Collector of

Dacca). Finally, the officials decided to free the encroached area and the municipality initiated the work of pulling up walls and privies. But the work was halted due to the shortage of coolies and the vacant land where the debris was to be dumped. The parties and the other residents did not allow throwing the rubbish into their lands (Letter from the Collector of Dacca to the Chairmen). To solve the problem, the Collector of Dhaka suggested two alternatives; to collect sufficient coolies, and finding out a convenient place in the distance to remove it, or to negotiate with the parties. Lastly, the officials compromised with the parties in the name of “maintaining public rights” (Letter from the District Magistrate of Dacca to the Chairman of the Municipality), and the dispute with the government had been settled by the payment of Rs. 35/- as the compensation of land, they had encroached upon (Letter from L. Here Esquire, Office of the Collector to the Chairman, Municipality of Dacca).

### **Who will Administer?**

In October 1889 the Sanitary Commissioner for Bengal Dr. W H. Gregg reported :

The sanitary arrangements of the town of Dacca have, I understand, received much attention from the Municipal commissioners who now seem to be taking a real interest in the affairs of the Municipality and to be doing their best to make the town as attractive and healthy as possible. There is still, however, a great deal for them to do [....] The people of Dhaka lived in the concentrated essence of the filth of all descriptions as there is no proper drainage to carry it away (Appendix IV to the Twenty-second Annual Report of The Sanitary Commissioner of Bengal).

However, their interest in the drive for cleanliness met with some opposition from the authoritative body in terms of implementing this huge task, and a blame game started within different pockets of power. For example, excavation of the *khals* was a joint work. From the governmental part, the Collector was responsible for providing financial support from the government allocation to the municipality to render the improvement works within the estimated time. The Collector forced the municipality repeatedly to make the *khals* ready for excavation; otherwise, the allocated money would have lapsed if the budget year ended. The filthy condition of *Khals* which delayed the excavation work, according to the Collector, “created by others than Wari settlers, was no way of tolerance”. He also opined that the existing filthy condition was the result of mismanagement and less interest of the

Municipal body to interfere with the matters and to take actions against the construction of the privies at the banks of the *Khals* surrounding the Wari estate. He (collector) sought an explanation from Municipal Chairmen about the prevailing condition and about the measures, which had already been taken by the municipality to remove the nuisance of the *Khals* (Letter from L. Here to the Chairman of the Municipality of Dacca). Such surveillance from the government part about the progress of the work was treated by the municipality as ‘nothing but exercising the power irrationally’. However, the municipality explored two problems, which created the obstacles in the process of liberating the *Khals* from the filthy condition. Firstly, though the municipality had given much attention and served notices several times to remove the ‘inefficient privies’ on the east, west, and south banks of Wari *Khals*, the settlers of these areas were not ready to remove them (Letter from the Chairman, Dacca Municipality to the Collector of Dacca). Secondly, the scarcity and absence of *methers* in Dhaka city delayed the said works. The Chairman claimed, “A very small number of *methers* could be found for this very work. The *methers* left their work early in the morning and remained hidden in different places to avoid working in the Wari *Khal*” (Letter from the Chairmen, DM to the Collector of Dacca).

The voices of inhabitants presented a different narrative about the *khals*, drains, privies, and the services provided by the Municipal body. They complained repeatedly against the Municipal negligence towards the construction of the *mether* passage and the existing poor drainage system in this area for discharging the filthy water and removal of the excreta. The Municipal commissioners had their particular explanation. According to them, the construction of the *mether* passages was mostly related to the construction of ‘efficient privy’. The by-laws had already been made to follow the model rules of constructing private privies and urinals (Schedule: Model Rules as to Private privies and urinals’ Municipal Act III of 1884 ), and the municipality even campaigned several times, to aware the citizen of this area for making the efficient privies within the house compound and keep some open spaces for the *mether* passages (Letter from the Chairman, DM to L Here, Collector of Dacca). The municipality also served notices to remove the inefficient privies and to reconstruct them efficiently. Upon this, forty owners of privies filed objections against the notices especially those who were residing near the west *Khal*, where so many ditches had been made by the owners to dispose of their daily nuisance. The owners claimed that if the municipality did not

provide the necessary facilities, they would not give up their old system of drainage and garbage management (Letter from the Collector to the Chairmen). The Municipal Act III, section 190, 197, 202, and 204 gave the certain rights to the neighboring tenants to use the bank of the *Khal* (Letter from L. Here to the Chairman of the Municipality of Dacca). These legal rights reinforced the inhabitants to disobey the municipal pressure of removing privies from *the Khal* side area.

However, the construction of the *methers* passage was proposed and mapped by the municipality, but after a detailed investigation they found that due to the paucity of land within and beside the house compound, it was hardly possible for most of the owners to leave some spaces for *methers* passage. In some cases, the owners had to demolish *the pucca* kitchens and even a few portions of their dwelling houses to provide space for the *methers* passage (Letter from the Chairman, DM to the Collector of Dacca). The Chairman perceived the prevailing unsanitary and unhealthy practices as the sources of various epidemic and endemic diseases like cholera, malaria, fever, etc.; he served notices to the owners to keep the ditches and privies clean and clear with their responsibility. It was a temporary solution until the *methers* passage was opened (Letter from the Chairman, DM to the Collector of Dacca). But the decision was strongly opposed by the Collector and he treated Chairman's order as "nothing but the lack of experience in municipal work". The collector found the same 'fault' in the clearing works of the *Khals*, done by the municipality. When the west *khal* was cleared and ready for excavation work, it was noticed by the Collector as filthy as earlier after a month and according to him, the municipality did not take any measure "to stop the filthy water to flow in" (Letter from L. Here to the Chairman). This factious relationship between the colonial officials and the municipal body affected the improvement works especially it hampered the establishment of a proper drainage system for the Wari estate.

Besides the problem of getting *methers* and "inexperienced municipal body", the paucity of the fund was identified by both municipality as well as the government officials as a key problem of the project. By 1891, most of the essential improvement works for healthy and modern civic life, such as; metalling of roads, construction of proper drainage system and *methers* passages, filling up of all the pits and ditches, and extension of water supply was left unattended. The municipality spent over Rs.2000/-for the improvement of the Wari project, which according to the Chairman "yields a

very small income to the municipality” (Copy of the resolution of a meeting of the Municipality held on 5 January 1892). The government allocation was proved insufficient for this project. To solve the financial inadequacy, the Divisional Commissioner who was the head of the Wari project proposed to raise funds, and by the second half of 1891, the “Wari Improvement Fund” was established (Resolution of the meeting of the Dacca Municipality held on 12 November 1891). The private subscriptions were invited and proposed to be remarked their contribution by naming the streets or lanes of this new area (Letter from L. Here, Collector of Dacca to the Chairman of DM).<sup>2</sup> Under the new financial resources, a bulk of improvement works commenced by the end of 1891. This second phase was started with giving special priority on the construction and repair of drains. The damaged side-drains of the eastern and the western sweeper paths of the housing were renovated. But in the next year, Mr. Rankin, the Collector of Dhaka explored the existing sanitary and drainage system of Wari estate as ‘depressing and miserable’. He observed, water was stagnant at various places and the stench was horrible, and a complete drainage scheme was very urgent to improve the present sanitary condition of this locality; until and unless an initiative was taken to construct *pucca* drains for easy discharge of filthy water to the *khals* of the east and the west, Wari would never be healthy (Letter from J. L. Rankin, the Collector of Dacca to the Chairman, DM). In September 1892, Mr. Begler, the Sanitary Engineer of Dhaka prepared a sanitary map after surveying the Wari estate to add this area with the main drainage scheme (Letter from D.M. Beglar, the Sanitary Engineer of Dacca to the collector of Dacca). But the prevailing “dire” condition led the municipality to commence the works of constructing and repairing the *pucca* drains throughout the area. The improvement works was continued and was progressed with various plans and actions such as; construction of drains beside the five main streets<sup>3</sup> (Letter from L. Here to the Chairman of DM), and repairing the eastern and western sweeper’s paths’ with side drains and extending the eastern part towards the north along the side of the railway fencing, putting up pipes on the extended streets, and lastly leveling and clearing the banks of *Khals* to reconstruct the *methur* passage was also included (Letter from L. Here to the Chairman of DM). The total estimated rupees 869/- was sanctioned from the ‘Wari Improvement Fund’ in

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<sup>2</sup> For instance, Gopi Kissan Sen, Sheristader of the Collectorate, donated Rs.100/- to metalling and widening the lane in Wari, Block VIII, which was named as “Gopi Kissan lane”.

<sup>3</sup> The five streets are, 1. Nawab Street, 2. Wyer Street, 3. Larmini Street, 4. Duobi Street, and 5. Here Street.



the first half of 1892. The amount was raised to Rs.1123/- for the extension of drains towards the new street named Akhoy Sen's lane and for putting a lamppost over there. After re-excavating the southern *khal* a sluice gate had to be built, and the construction of a *Pucca Ghat* in Wari Tank was also included in the improvement works under the same budget. The money was disbursed and the collector was enthusiastic to complete the said works under the supervision of the municipality. According to him, "tenants are very much feeling the want of those improvements." (Letter from L. Here to the Chairman of DM) But by 1895, only half of the said works had been commenced. The municipal Chairman stated diverse causes such as; the coming up of the rainy season, the problem of getting 'first-class' brick and the delayed coming up of roller for street leveling, etc. which were responsible for it (Letter from the Chairman, DM to the Collector of Dacca).

However, it is observed that the inner condition of the housing project was also not in a satisfactory state. The complaints against the *kutchra* drains were frequent and some *pucca* drains became old and narrow. In 1901, a petition had been submitted by one of the tenants of block 6, in the northwest of the Rai Akhay kumar Sen Lane that the drains of each side of his holding remained *kutchra* and *jungly* for almost throughout the year and was situated in the comparably lower level of the land. During the rainy season, water could not pass as fast as the other areas, where the *pucca* drain had been made. As a result, water halted for hours and damaged the huts and buildings, and affected the health of the tenant's family. Besides this, the absence of a proper outlet caused the accumulation of filthy water inside and outside of his holding. (Letter to the Collector of Dacca)

Another petition was submitted by Debendra Mohan Sen, for the improvement of the drains and to remove the daily nuisance. A *kutchra* drain existed at the south of his holding and north of Nawab Street which was the only outlet of his house. It started from his western gate and continued up to the end of his 3 *bighas* plot. As the flashed area of Municipal drains was very near to his holding, it caused a huge nuisance and affected not only the petitioner's house but also the neighboring holdings and even the passerby. The pigs also made deep holes in the flashing area where the dirty mass was stagnated. Debendra Mohan was scared observing the prevailing condition and appealed that if the disorder was being continued, it would cause damage to the health of his family as well as the neighbors (Petition of the Municipal Ratepayers and people of Dacca). After getting this petition, the Collector requested the municipality to prepare a drainage scheme for the Wari estate

and to estimate the cost. He noticed that “the *kutchra* drain along with the northern edge of the Here Road in Wari in a horrible state, an account of accumulation of filth and sewages and that the stench emanating there from is providing a nuisance to the people of the locality” and commented that “from the sanitary point of view Municipality should do it perfectly” (Letter from T. K. Johnson, (Collector) to the Chairman).

In 1913, the municipality prepared a complete map on the drainage system of Wari estate. Three types of drains had been shown in the map; *Kutchra* drains, existing inefficient *pucca* drains, and existing efficient *pucca* drains. To establish a proper drainage system in the Wari estate the estimated cost was Rs.14461/-. As the estimated amount was huge, the Collector suggested the municipality solve the drainage problem in a piecemeal way and he added that the contribution of the government and the municipality should be the same (Letter from the Collector to the Chairman). The Secretary of the municipality opined that many old drains were already out of order and repairing these drains was nothing but a waste of money. He suggested to construct efficient *pucca* drains and to remove all the *Kutchra* and inefficient *pucca* drains. But the shearing of almost half of the estimated cost for the drainage and roads by the municipality was not appreciated by the Municipal Commissioners and thus prolonged the improvement works again.

The improvement of the drainage system for the Wari estate and cleaning and clearing question of Wari western *khal* became prominent, as this area was highly related to the health of the Wari housing project. In 1917, P. Geddes explained in his report about the area as “[...] too insanitary average, it’s deteriorated and filthy places, are a dangor to their neighbourhoods [...] not even the prosperous suburb can remain isolated from its neighbours” (Geddes 5). The *khal* side residents of *Uttar Munsundi* and *Banagram* constructed their building and privies leaving no space for the *methur* passage by which the sweeper could enter the privies for cleaning. The budget was made in 1888 at the beginning of the 'Wari Improvement Plan', but the opening of a *methur* passage became uncertain due to the paucity of municipal lands on that side and the municipality temporarily made a bamboo bridge to clean the privies of that locality. But this solution did not last for a long time. After the break down of the bridge, service of those privies had been stopped and the accumulation of filth was continued (Letter from B.C. Chatterjee, Secretary, and Engineer of DM, to the Collector, regarding the Plan). The collector S.C. Hart

suggested to fill-up the western bank of the *Khal* by throwing the street sweeping and to make a *methher* passage on it. But the Municipal Chairman opined that there was no retaining wall, which could keep up the street sweeping, and it would be fell into the bed of *khal* and would be materially blocked the channel (Correspondences regarding the making of methher passage with the Chairman, DM and the Collector of Dacca). The local residents petitioned for time and again and the ward (III) Commissioner's (where the said *khal* was situated) grievances about the negligence of public rights, led the municipality to acquire lands for making the *methher* passage. The estimated budget was Rs. 1566/- for this project and they tried to collect money from the Government funds and contribution from the ratepayers (Copy of the meeting held on 12 September 1917). By 1918 the ratepayers deposited Rs. 573/- and the municipal conservancy sub-committee took decision to pay the rest of the expenditures. Unfortunately, no advancement happened. In 1919, the municipal Chairman requested the commissioner of the Wari area to deposit half of the estimated cost because the government contribution was uncertain for this purpose<sup>4</sup> (Islam 25-40). However, the drainage problem of Wari estate was finally solved by 1919. In 1912 PWD (Public Works Department) prepared an 'Underground Sewerage and Storm Water Drainage Scheme' with the help of the Municipal Engineer and Wari was connected with the main drainage scheme of the city by 1919 when the scheme was commenced. Interestingly, the neighboring areas of Wari like Munsundi and Narinda became out of this new drainage scheme. After the commencement of the new drainage scheme of the city, the ongoing process of *methher* passage on the west bank of western Wari *khal* became obscure.

It is necessary to mention in this connection that the latter half of the 1880s had generated a serious debate regarding the question of property rights of the *Khals* among the government officials and the municipality which created continuous obstacles in the improvement works of Wari estate. This debate was related to the allocation of money by the Government for the improvement of the *Khal* and its usage by the municipality. Secondly, it revolved the question of the responsibility to improve the condition of the Wari estate; whether it would be done by the government or the municipality. L. Here (the then Collector of Dhaka)

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<sup>4</sup> The economic condition became disturbed due to the outbreak of the First World War. This directly affected almost all the Government funding plans including The City Improvement Plan in Dhaka.

claimed that the *Khals* were government property and was never be the Municipal property according to the Municipal Act III of 1884, and rejected the chairmen's claim of receiving money directly from the government for that purpose (Letter from L. Here, to the Chairman). According to section 190 of the Municipal Act, the municipality was responsible only to keep the *khals* in a good measure (condition). In these above circumstances, the Municipal commissioners were reluctant to spend money for this purpose as the expenditure of this improvement project was directly dealt with by the government officials.

At the beginning of the Wari housing project, the government officials established an office named 'Khas Mahal Office' to supervise the estate. Though the municipality was responsible for providing the civic amenities to the whole city including the Wari area, the 'Khas Mahal Office' repeatedly interfered with the municipal decisions for executing the works. The municipal body was not always willing to spend money on the improvement projects of Wari from the limited annual income. They treated it as a matter of heavy expense of municipal funds. But the officials always put pressure on them to share half of the expenditure for any projects which were taken for the improvement of this area, especially for *khals* and roads of Wari from the sanitary point of view. For them, it was the duty of the municipality to make the city clean and healthy and Wari was the part of this city. The question of ownership thus came to the forefront in 1917 when the new settlement record was under process; Babu Pyari Lal, the Chairman of the municipality claimed the ownership of the roads and khals of Wari and its neighbouring area. He explained that the Wari roads and drains were made by the municipality in 1890, and since then the property of roads and *khals* was maintained by the commissioners at the cost of the municipality. Sometimes, they acquired the required lands for the extension of roads and drains from the adjacent area of the Wari project and thus the property came under the jurisdiction of the Municipal commissioners. He further claimed that the government officials had no rights on the said property and they could only interfere with the allocation sanctioned by the Local Government for this estate. But, in the old Settlement records and map, the roads and *Khals* were documented as the government property under *Khas* land. The municipality got the charge only to maintain the sanitary infrastructure and the roads of this estate by an order, issued by the Collector of Dhaka (Correspondence with the Chairmen and Collector to settle the ownership of roads and khals of Wari land). So the new document of ownership had been prepared according to the old Settlement

Record, and the interferences of the government officials were continued, though the financial contribution was getting short from the government part for the project<sup>5</sup> (Letter from Secretary to the Chairman, DM).

### **The Experiment with Local Government?**

Wari also reveals the condition of the other area of the city and the contemporary growth of local authority through the municipal works. The debate regarding the city authority was growing day by day after the establishment of the local self-government for the municipality in 1884. On 18 May, 1882 when Lord Ripon, the then Viceroy issued a famous resolution on the local self-government, the government inquiry committee investigated the credibility of the local educated class for administering the local self-government. The Joint-Magistrate A.C. Tute, a member of the committee reported that,

It is the leading city in Eastern Bengal and contains a population of men of education, wealth, and intelligence far beyond that contained in any Municipality of which I have any experience in India, not even excepting the two large towns in Madras Presidency- Tri-chinopoly and Salam. [...] but I do not believe, that the city can either produced or afford to have an elected, non-official Chairman. (Magistrate to GB on 12 September 1882)

He continued that the people of Dhaka “advanced though in education” were “apathetic to the most rudimentary requirements of sanitation”. He also added that “in the local hand Dacca would relapse from even the small advance it has made and sanitation became a thing of the past.” He strongly advocated, at any rate, the Magistrate of the district should be the Chairman and chief executive authority of the municipality of Dhaka. Like Tute, Edward Vesey Westmacott was ready to accept the elected municipal commissioners but expressed his hesitation in the same way as Tute. He preferred wealthy and businesspersons for the Commissioner post and added that “the educated were not generally men of substance and often suffered from financial problems”, and he wondered they would be able to overcome the temptation to tamper with the public funds entrusted to their charge. (Magistrate to GB on 12 September 1882) The opinion of the magistrates expressed nothing but their fascination to exercise the local power, which they wanted to share only with their compliant persons.

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<sup>5</sup> A list of government contributions from 1901 - 1910 for the drainage and roads and culvert has given by the municipal Secretary which shows the gradual shortage.

However, the local people were enthusiastic to establish a local self-government system for the municipality. After passing the Act II of 1873, 'The People's Associations' demanded to the government to introduce the election system for the post of commissioners, vice-Chairman, and Chairman. A petition signed by more than seven hundred people, sent to the Lieutenant-Governor Sir Richard Temple on 24 June 1874, requesting him to extend the privilege of electing the municipal commissioners to Dhaka, which was treated as "the most important place in Eastern Bengal". (Petition of the Municipal Ratepayers and people of Dacca) In 1884, after the declaration of Lord Ripon's proposal of self-government, they arranged a meeting at Jagannath School, where nearly twenty thousand people attended to support the bill. (Dhaka Prokas 1882) As mentioned above, the European officials were not interested to share the power with the newly educated middle class. In 1884, when the first Municipal election was held, all the candidates were local; the European and Armenians did not participate in the said election. The elected commissioners voted the Chairman, where the nominated commissioners remained silent. Thus, the election opened the door of new politics within the city regarding the municipal authority. The parties now became three; the government officials, the elected commissioners, and the nominated Commissioners. *Dhaka Prokas*, a local newspaper expressed the attitude of government officials towered the formation of local government ;

Though it is the intention of the higher authorities to introduce representative local self- government in this country, the bureaucrats are opposed to it lest this would curtail their authority. To make their opposition a success and to discredit the system the local officials have deliberately nominated such people to be municipal commissioners and members of the District Board who by their action would tarnish the image of the Municipality and District Board, and thus ensuring the chopping of the local self –government by the governmental ax. (Dhaka Prokas 1893)

### **The Pre-text for the Comeback of the Central Authority**

In 1897, L.P. Shire, the newly appointed Magistrate of Dhaka, sent an especial report to the government narrating the terrible state of conservancy and road communications in the city. He communicated:

The whole administrative arrangements for the removal of night soil ... down to the most trifling detail are defective and insufficient to a degree that is deeply disgraceful to the commissioners of the Municipality... the commissioners are afraid of the methers to a contemptible degree.... for

this reason, they allowed the Methers to openly exact bribes for removing the night soil, and for this reason, the carts are allowed to stink the town, because the Methers object to tar. The roads have been allowed to get into a disgraceful state. (Letter from The Magistrate of Dacca to the Government of Bengal)

This marked more prominently to the government when Rankin remarked in his annual report to the government for 1898-99:

Narayanan is still a model Municipality (run by Europeans) ... Dacca is the antithesis of Narayanganj. Nothing is ever done, except what can be carried out by the Chairman alone. Great credit is due to Khajeh Muhammad Yusuf, the present Chairman for what he has accomplished single-handed in the way of opening out sweepers' passage. But the members fail to back him up: they oppose nearly every proposal for the welfare of the town. Many parts are still in a filthy condition. Sweepers and carts are insufficient. The roads are bad. The management of the water-works is a disgrace, and the commissioners refuse to listen to advice regarding them. (Annual General Administrative Report for 1889-90)

'Dhaka Prakash' also observed that due to the internal politics, the sanitary condition of the city became so bad, which had never been seen before. The condition of the city paved the way to go back to the pre-election bureaucratic authority for the municipality. From 1891 to 1899, the post of Chairman and Vice-Chairmen were elected from the commissioners who were nominated by the government officials and elected commissioners. In 1900 Magistrate Rankin was nominated directly by the government of Bengal as the Chairman of the Dhaka municipality. This step put the clock back, transferring the power of the local government from the hands of the people's representative to British bureaucrats.

## Concluding Remarks

The conflict between the responsible British officials of 'Wari Khas Mahal' and the native commissioners of the municipality regarding the funds, ownership of the roads, *khals*, and lands created major obstacles to the success of the Wari improvement plan. Though the government officials of Dhaka initiated the first housing project to provide the modern civic amenities to the rising English educated class, they yet were not prepared to share the power particularly with the said social class in the questions of Municipal authority even in a small component of the city improvement project like Wari housing project. The situation changed when the native Chairman was elected for the municipality again,





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