

REPRESENTATION OF PHULBARI COAL MINE ISSUE IN DOCUMENTARY FILMS OF BANGLADESH

Sabrina Sultana Chowdhury*
Jannatul Ferdous Jhuma**

Abstract

Bangladesh has few natural resources of which coal is one. Phulbari is a coal rich area of Bangladesh. On the other Phulbari coal mine project is a burning issue in Bangladesh politics. Global alliance of corporate capital and some local interest wanted to extract coal through open pit mining method at Phulbari which will destroy the particular area. Many people will be dislocated and terrible effects will occur on environment if the coal mine project is implemented. Thousands of life and many stake holders are related with the coal mine project. As we know documentary film is based on real people and real life. It evolves with the actual life of people. In this regard, some documentaries based on this issue were made in our country. In this article, two documentaries *Phulbari* and *Dudh Koyla* have been analyzed to see how this critical issue has been depicted in the documentary films. Nationalism of Indigenous group, quiet and peaceful life, courage, consciousness, unity and determination of general people, uncertainty of people's life, terrible effects on environment, controversial position of policy makers, and comparative images about coal mine have been analysed in this article. Thus, the article helps the concerned people to get the whole dimension of the issue.

Introduction

Open pit coal mine project in Phulbari upazila, of Dinajpur district is a much discussed and important discourse now-a-days. Bangladesh has got few valuable natural resources of which coal is one. The northern part of the country is enriched with coal. In 1962, a German Group of experts first discovered the coal in Jamalganj area of Bogra. Later in 1994 a high quality coal has been discovered at Phulbari in Dinajpur district. To make super profit a global alliance of corporate capital tried to extract coal by open cut mining method at Phulbari which will cause a great harm to the coal enriched area. Many third world countries are also in vulnerable position for the covetousness of these

* Assistant Professor of Mass communication and Journalism, University of Dhaka

** Lecturer of Journalism, Communication and Media studies, State University of Bangladesh

international organizations. Since 1980s Bangladesh has adopted the 'development program' determined by stipulations of World Bank, IMF, other donor organizations and developed countries. These organizations fixed a program termed as '*Structural Adjustment*' for the least developed countries as an inevitable condition of getting foreign loans or grants. The key concepts of this program are: free trade specially to liberalize the import policy, reduce the function and responsibility of the state, curtailment of state expenditure in social sector, privatization of productive public institutions, and withdrawing the subsidy in different sectors etc. This program is mainly based on capitalism where free economy is considered as an inevitable part of capitalist economic development. It says, neither state nor political force rather market is the only factor which would control the economy. That is why the government of Bangladesh is taking steps towards different sectors such as health, education, natural resource etc. of the country according to the international donor's prescription. According to the specialists,

The imperialist system works in 'manufacturing consent' within the ruling class and enters into partnerships with them to grab resources and the total economy. The people and the government of Bangladesh have little work to do with the process of production and consumption. Most of the profits go to the private companies and the products are almost entirely exported to other nations. The local ruling class find their existence, power, security and affluence by being connected with global empire. So this is some sort of negotiated arrangement, local ruling classes and the global ruling classes have. With foreign aid, the global ruling class could build a major support base in the consultants, private sector big owners and beneficiaries from different projects. In the process, these bureaucrats, consultants, media and the ruling classes have become the fifth column of global capital and they try to 'rationalize' these grabbing as 'development'. The corporate media helps them in re-enforcing this notion and maintain secrecy in terms of economic dealings.¹

However, due to strong resistance of Phulbari people and the various activist groups, the project of the foreign company has not been successful. Based on this perspective some documentary films are made by different organizations and persons in our country.

Documentary as a Film Genre

As we know, film is an audio visual medium which depicts acts, events and fantasy in more attractive way compared to other medium of mass communication. There are various genres of film. Documentary is one of these genres. In general, documentary is a specific style of expansion where one sort

¹ Manoranjan Pegu, *The Phulbari movement: Resisting Neo liberalism in Bangladesh*. <http://www.meghbarta.info/state-and-politics/172-the-phulbari-movement-resisting-neo-liberalism-in-bangladesh.html>, 2012

of belief is taken place in spectator's mind towards people's surrounding and conscience of person. In other words, documentary is a serious movie, an art form that tries to teach you something and 'authenticity' is closely related to documentary. Patricia Aufderheide in her book *Documentary Film: A Very short Introduction* said,

Documentaries are about real life; they are not real life. They are not even windows on to real life. They are portraits of real life, using real life as their raw material, constructed by artist and technicians who make myriad decisions about what story to tell whom, and for what purpose.²

In fact, documentary is a type of film that is based on the real world and real people, depicting things in a truthful and objective manner. Besides, it has to function with a certain realism of style, on some real location without actors, artificial props or a pre-constructed narrative. It needs, obviously an artistic form, a moral and ideological manner which represents the content systematically.

The term documentary emerged in the nineteenth century which was termed by John Grierson, pioneer of the British documentary movement in the 1920s. He termed the documentary as a creative treatment of actuality. In 1922, an American film maker Robert. J. Flaherty made the first documentary film which was entitled *Nanook of the North*. Later, he made another documentary *Moana* (1926). John Grierson, the eminent documentary film maker, in a review paper, has described *Moana* as a documentary. From that very moment, the word documentary has been used as a terminology in the film dictionary. However, Bangladesh has the tradition of making documentary on different aspects and issues, especially on contemporary issues. Open pit coal mine at Phulbari Upazila is such an important issue.

Method

In this article, two documentary films *Phulbari* directed by Philip Gain and Ronald Haidar, and *Coal Milk (Dudh Koyla)* directed by Molla Sagor are selected for our analysis. The key method of obtaining data for this study is textual analysis as well as in-depth-interview and secondary materials are also used in the article. In the analysis, it is observed that how this sensitive issue is portrayed. The main objective of this article is to view the overall portrayal of Phulbari issue and to examine the quality and style of these two documentaries. The significant difference between these two documentaries is *DudhKoyla* was

² Patricia Aufderheide, *Documentary Film: A very short Introduction*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 2

made before the incident at Phulbari had taken place whereas *Phulbari* was made after the incident.

What Happened at Phulbari?

On August 26, 2006, thousands of people from adjacent villages headed towards Phulbari upazila in Dinajpur district to take part in a grand assembly. They demanded that open pit mining should not be allowed in the area. When the protesters marched towards the Asia Energy office to demonstrate their disapproval about open pit mining, security forces opened fire on a section of the rally. At least seven people were killed and around three hundred were injured.

This sanguinary incident was the consequence of mass people's movement against Asia Energy, a British company in contract with the Bangladesh Government to extract the local coal mines. Whether the people will be the authority on their own mineral and energy resources or these resources would be the way of making super profit by another developed state and multinational company— is a big question at present. Initially an agreement was signed on Phulbari coal project between the government of Bangladesh and BHP, an Australian company in 1994. BHP sold its ownership of the project in 1998 to Asia Energy, an inexperienced British company which was formed in 1997. Asia Energy started to work in Phulbari coal project with just one year experience. The company proposed development of an open pit mine to ensure maximum coal production at Phulbari where about 570 million tons coal lies at a depth ranging from 150 to 270 meters. Phulbari is a very densely populated area and known as a granary of Bangladesh. Agriculture is the main source of livelihood in the area with about three crops cultivated in the highly fertile area. The area is also inhabited by various indigenous groups. However, according to the agreement, the full ownership of the mine will be given to company; in contrast Bangladesh will get only six per cent royalty from the project. But why will Bangladesh give an important energy resource to a foreign company? Anu Muhammed argues:

With hundred per cent ownership this company would extract coal; the logic being given behind the open cut method is that coal is essential for the development as well as that is profitable for Bangladesh. They said it has no internal demand that's why it will be exported. But if there is no internal demand, why will it be necessary to extract coal? In fact Bangladesh would not be benefited as they said and coal extraction by open cut method is not necessary. Their words are fully deceptive.³

³ Anu Muhammed, *Phulbari, Kanshat, Garments 2006*, Dhaka, 2007, p. 98

The unskilled company, however, conducted a study on the high quality coal enriched area. As, to extract coal by open cut method, it will need involvement of huge number of people, because countless people would be eradicated from their own land. So without ensuring an understanding with local people it is impossible to start this project. By realizing the fact Asia Energy tried to convince local people. They started working on to create public support among villagers. They propagate, if coal is extracted from the mine, future of the inhabitants will be enriched. They said, the company would make beautiful houses, school, colleges for the villagers. Asia Energy also made some construction such as some small bricks dwelling with a wall, as well as they made a water tank, gave some colour television among young people. Through these works they wanted to motivate the locals that it will be a model town and they can be shifted in this model town. Asia energy tried to get support of some corrupted people for their own sake. To address this Anu Muhammed also argues:

Since Bangladesh is known as a corrupt country to foreign countries, so Asia Energy assumed that the work is very easy. They tried to create some morally degenerated people there for their own sake. But our general public do not practise ill conduct; it was out of their thought. People have the power to read between the lines of the propaganda which they started. They realized that a terrible occurrence is going to be happen. So they decided to protest.⁴

Understanding the company's fraudulence, a vibrant grassroots revolt had begun at the proposed coal mine area. People became united and promised to bear up against the foreign company's ill intention.

The study report of Asia Energy, however, mentioned that coal will be extracted in open cut method because there is a little possibility of accident and by this method ninety per cent coal will be extracted rapidly. But the reality is different from their report. The method contains a lot of complications which includes environmental, socio-economic, cultural, and mental enigma of inhabitants at Phulbari. The Open cut mine project will acquire approximately six thousand hectares of land. It will displace about 200000 people and they will be shifted in another area. To extract coal through open cut method, it will have to dig a deep hole; moreover, this way will need to dry the whole area. That is why underground water will need to be drained out by deep tube well, as a result the whole area of greater Dinajpur would become desert. People who live around the mine would have no means of living. This is because if agricultural lands are deserted there will be no source of earning left. Agricultural land,

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 118

homestead, architectures, graveyard, playground, people's culture, their unity, brotherhood all would be demolished. Water of the whole area would be poisonous. Thus, a great number of people will suffer a great loss and their future will fall in precarious situation. At all events, local people will not give their land to Asia Energy; they made it as their final decision.

Later, National Committee for Oil, Gas, Mineral Resources, Port and Power Protection and civil society had joined with Phulbari people against the agreement between Asia Energy and government of Bangladesh. Thus, the National Committee called for a *Gherao* program on August 26, 2006. To express the feelings, opinion and adverse effect of coal mine a peaceful program was decided on August, 26, 2006. Through this program they wanted to send the message to the government of Bangladesh and international communities. Thousands of people including teachers, students, farmers, and ethnic people as well as people from Dhaka, to express solidarity with peoples of Phulbari, had assembled at Dhaka intersection of Phulbari. They chanted slogan against the Asia Energy and proposed mining method. On the contrary, government deployed a large number of security forces to keep the rally controlled. The rally decided to boycott the Asia Energy and its collaborators socially. After finishing the concluding speeches in one and a half kilometre away from Dhaka intersection the demonstration was concluded. No sooner had it been concluded the security forces opened fire on the rally. Seven people were killed and as many as three hundred were injured. The carnage brought about to halt the democratic voice of disarmed general people, language and strength of the protest. This incident heightened public sentiment against Asia Energy. For the next couple of days the masses in the area boycotted all state machineries and continued their protest. The government representatives finally sat with the protest leaders for a deal. They agreed to meet all the six demands of Phulbari demonstrators which included among others the expulsion of Asia Energy from Bangladesh and dropping the open cut method. As per the agreement, the government would decide the method of mining in the country on the basis of public opinion.⁵

Following a strong protest and bloodshed on August 26, 2006 against the open-pit mining, the project remains postponed for the last seven years. But the plan of open pit mining in Phulbari is still alive as discussion of concerned authority

5 Government agrees to say 'no' to Asia Energy, *The Daily Star*, Dhaka, August 31, 2006.

of government on this issue is on-going. The Government of Bangladesh is thinking and taking initiative to restart mining at Phulbari. On January 29, 2013 Gary Ley, country director of Asia Energy Bangladesh visited Phulbari upazila and the local people brought out a procession protesting the visit. In spite of mass people's protest and demand, lease and license of Asia Energy for exploration of natural resources on the area are not yet cancelled.

Content Analysis of *Dudh Koyla (Coal Milk) and Phulbari*

Dudh Koyla is a documentation of the life of indigenous and Bengali people of Buchigram, a village under Phulbari upazila of Dinajpur. The ethnographic documentary directed by Molla Sagor describes the daily life of local people, their customs, traditions, their affection for own land, country, as well as their apprehension for eradication from own dwelling, their boldness for saving habitation, and the natural beauty of Buchigram village.

On the other hand, the film *Phulbari* describes grass root revolt in Phulbari against open cut mining. It also depicts possible sufferings of the local people and damages to the environment as a result of open cut coal mining. It describes the way of life of people of Phulbari. The film *Phulbari* gives some message to audience for understanding the terrible effect of open cut mining.

Quiet and Peaceful Life of People

The film *Dudh Koyla* starts with peaceful and usual life of Buchigram's people. Most of the people in the village are the indigenous farmers and workers. They have certain customs, traditions, rules, regulation and values. The film shows that, people of this village have been living upon their natural method of agriculture, they do hard work to earn their livelihood from their agricultural land. The cattle, domestic animals, trees, birds, raindrops are their constant friend. They have specific music that they perform by clapping and dancing with the beat of *dholok* (a musical instrument) to invoke rain every year following the scorching patch of draught. It shows that, the people of community paddled a pollution free life. Everything is natural and pure there.

The film *Phulbari* also starts with natural beauty of Phulbari area. In the beginning the film shows that one man is lying on soil and one hen is cackling. Fields are sparkling with golden crops. Men and women are working in their farms. The film maker as the narrator says:

It is quite, and peaceful. Fields are sparkling with golden crops. The simple people live in modest life with their farms and other business. This is the north-eastern region of Bangladesh, also known as granary of country.

Courage, Consciousness, Unity and Determination of General People

Both of the films depicts the people of Phulbari as bold, alert, united and determined about their land and right. In the documentary *Dudh Koyla* (Coal Milk), we see people are very courageous to save their land, their colony. The determination of local people against the coal mine is seen in the film. A man says: 'This is my land and I won't let it to be used for mining. Let see who dares to open the pit here. People are more aware than earlier as we see they said: at first we could not guess anything. Now everybody of us is alert.'

The villagers understand the tricky policy of Coal Company. It shows, people realized that, company treats them as an ethnic minority, they want to drive villagers. But the people do not bother about it; they will never agree to give one inch even not a single dust of their soil. Indicating another coal mine project, people said, two mines have been excavated, where is the sign of development there? What a pollution there, smoke, gas! These statements make clear that people of Buchigram are audacious, and more alert to save their motherland.

The documentary depicts the general people are determined to save their locality. They will never give their land for coal mine. Their unity is too strong against the coal mine. As they said:

Look, you have come to me and I see you as my children. Suppose I am your mother, could you sit here, if I don't let you? Never, I will simply not allow. Isn't it what it should be? Some people have this authority; likewise, if our people hold any control, the mine in Dinajpur wouldn't have been exposed like that.

The villagers realized that they have to resist. At the finishing of documentary they express their final decision that they do not need any mine there.

Similarly, In *Phulbari*, another selected documentary of the paper, we see that people of Phulbari are seriously conscious about their asset i.e. the coal mine and they are much united to save it. When they heard open cut mining will be excavated in their area, they disagreed with this decision. They wanted to tell the nation through a grand rally. People from Dhaka also joined this rally. On the other hand government deployed a large number of security forces to keep the rally controlled. The BDR jawans have been patrolling the streets of Phulbari since morning. Thousands of people with stick in their hand coming ahead to the Phulbari. After getting organized the protesters lead to the Asia Energy office to demonstrate the disapproval of open cut mining this British company contracted with Bangladesh government to develop an open cut mining. They raised anti-mine slogan, such as:

*Traitors like the Razakars of 1971 and Mirzafar of the British era,
When the mine came they became the new henchmen
Catch these henchmen and stuff them in sacks...*

It shows, On August 26, 2006 the protesters begin their march towards the offices of Asia Energy at about 3:30 p.m. The official of the local administration gave their word to the leaders of the movements that, the office of Asia Energy would be withdrawn from the Phulbari. Then the leaders of the movement started to go back. At this moment the BDR and police fired teargas, shells and bullets on a section of the rally. At least three persons were killed on the spot and more than 300 were wounded. The bloodshed led to a protest, a continuous strike in Phulbari. The demand for expulsion of the company from Phulbari and also from the country began. The protesters set deadline for the company. But Asia Energy's employees were still there. So protesters burnt the information centre and ransacked its warehouse where stored samples of coal. Finding no way employees of Asia Energy sealed their main office and left Phulbari with police escort. On the 30th of August the government dramatically agreed to meet all the demands of the protesters. The foremost demands was, to expel Asia Energy from four Upazila including Phulbari and the country. The government also agreed not to opt for open-cut mining in Bangladesh. So we see in this film that people of Phulbari never compromise with their tradition, their love, their mutual relationship and the environment. They never allow the conspiracy to destroy them. In this part the message we get, that demands of people are never ignored and people are very much united about their interest. As a villager says,

We are panicked indeed. Yet, we – our wives, sons, and daughters – all have become united. We have decided not to leave our village, homes and soil. If needed, we will die and be buried here. This is our final decision. We have remained and will remain faithful to our decision.

Uncertainty of People's Life as Damaging Effects on Socio-economic Situation

Open-pit coal mine would cause the detrimental effects on the usual life as inhabitants of Phulbari would fall in an indecisive abode. Both of the documentaries describe the fact through their narratives. The film *Dudh Koyla* starts with anxiety of Buchigram's people due to fear of losing their own homestead. By using image of daily affairs of general people filmmaker tried to depicts the peaceful and calm lifestyle of the community. At first it has shown that, a farmer taking his paddy away from the land, children are playing, men and women are busy in their daily work. A snake is trying to come in human habitation but it could not. In the background chorus of local people *Koyla*

khani chaina against the coal mine are echoing. The director portrayed the image of extraction of coal by coal agency's people and usual and pure lifestyle of people in parallel way. Through these images he wants to say inauspicious things are coming in their quiet and peaceful life. In another image it has shown that people were not informed about coal mine in their village, company's people told them different story to dislocate them from there. However they are now conscious about their rights. They will not give their land for digging coal mine. The director hurled a question through this documentary, *what comes first, coal or human*. It is a big political discourse which is expressed by the documentary.

Everyone's question is that where would they go if they were evicted. The documentary shows, people think it is better to kill than putting them under the severity. They are such a community who love their land with every drop of their blood. They live on the food; they yield in return of their hard work they do to grow crops. In the documentary, people say if they rehabilitate us in a sort of cluster villages and give us space merely for shelter, will it be any solution to quench the hunger? They express their anxiousness about their future by indicating their belly, 'It is my mine; it won't be satisfied with the golden coal.'

Threat to land security will be a significant factor in this project. Agriculture is a key economic activity for people in the project area with 67 per cent of all surveyed households earning income from the sale of agricultural products. While 80 per cent of the land that will be taken for this project is agricultural lands, there is insufficient land left to meet replacement needs. Despite limited possibilities for affected people to purchase productive land, the selection criteria governing access to the limited lands identified as available is not specified.⁶

The villagers have some common question, where will they go from here? Why would they flee from their land; to where?

If we notice the socio-economic impact of German Lignite Industry on Horno village of Germany, the horrible effects of open pit coal mine becomes clear. Horno (Rogow in the Sorb language), a village on the east of Cottbus near the Polish border, was devastated by Vattenfall in 2004 to meet delivery commitments for the Jänschwalde power station. While the deposits of lignite at this location represent only a small fraction of total mining output, the regional lignite committee as well as the Vattenfall predecessors VEAG and LAUBAG

6 Jennifer Kalafut; Roger Moody, *Phulbari Coal Project: Studies on Displacement, Resettlement, Environmental and Social Impact*. Dhaka, 2008, p. 10

maintained that the viability of regional power generation depended crucially on clearing Horno from the path of excavating equipment as it moved north. Upon recommendation of the responsible state authorities for historic preservation (Denkmalschutz), the town council of Horno declared the entire village a protected communal ensemble in April 1993. According to the Constitution of Brandenburg, 159 the integrity of this “established area of settlement” for the Sorb ethnic minority was likewise “guaranteed”. The Brandenburg State Assembly (Landtag) nevertheless passed the controversial “Brown Coal Act” in 1997 that foresaw the destruction of the entire village with resettlement of its 380 inhabitants.

An initial compendium of infringements on communal self-determination was prepared in 1995 by the English author Michael Gromm, a citizen of Horno. He subsequently created the website “Vattenfall Watch” to inform the English-speaking international people about the threat to the village. Michael Gromm has shown that initial employment prognoses in the Jänschwalde Region were inflated to guarantee the dominant status of lignite power generation, after which occupational opportunities progressively declined. Firstly, the lie was propagated and immediately raised to the status of the common weal that only the destruction of Horno would save jobs in the mining industry. Horno or 30,000 jobs!’ was the battle cry at the end of 1993; a year later, after privatization: ‘Horno or 12,000 jobs!’ and in 1997, when the Horno Bill was passing through Parliament: ‘Horno or 4,000 jobs!’. The truth is, that more than 90% of jobs in Lausitz brown coal mining in 1990 have since been lost in a never-ending process of rationalization, which has had nothing to do with Horno. In 2005-06, of 57,000 jobs in Lausitz brown coal mining in 1990 just 2,200–2,400 will remain in the Lausitz as a whole, after Vattenfall, Lars Josefsson has achieved his intended ‘synergy effects’.⁷

This situation would also occur in Phulbari if coal is extracted and this apprehension has come up in the documentary. It depicts, people’s life expenses would be higher if they move up from there. For example, a villager says, *the price of all kinds of meat jumped up. Beef sold over TK 100, buffalo-meat reached to 30-35 from 25...*, and many people would be jobless if they move. Thus, they have to beg, but they know begging is the worst thing to do in Bangladesh. The documentary shows the fear and uncertainty of people’s future life if they have to go away from their own house, land, and locality.

7 Michel H. Jeffery, *Status and Impacts of German Lignite Industry*. Sweden, the Swedish NGO Secretariat, 2008

In the film *Phulbari* it is argued that open cut mining will cause great harm on socio-economic condition of inhabitants of Phulbari if open cut mine is adopted in Phulbari. People will lose their lands, farms, traditions, love. In addition to that, they will lose their educational and religious institutions, graveyards, mosques, and temples. The mining area covers more than hundreds of villages and thousand acres of cropland in four upazilas in Dinajpur district. According to Asia Energy, which had a contract with the Bangladesh government, because of coal exploration, 40,000 people are needed to be relocated, away from the mine area. But the people of this area contend the company's estimate. In the film it is said that Asia Energy claims Bangladesh will receive half of the total profit accrued from the mining operation. But if the calculations are done right about the crops and other benefits from the land for the next 30 years that will benefit more in comparison to what they will get from the mine. As a villager says,

We just have one demand to the intellectuals and that is, they ensure our means of livelihood. Give us land; give us an island that will be only ours and nobody else. Let them tell us you cultivate land, build houses and develop it. But they will offer us some money. What shall we do with money? Say, you give me one lac taka; I will spend the money shortly. Then what? Shall we start begging? We will live or die here.

Cash compensation is a primary feature of this project. However, cash-based compensation, as opposed to land-based compensation, has been found to rarely improve the livelihoods of displaced persons. Furthermore, according to current research on development-induced displacement, "compensation by itself cannot adequately restore and improve the income levels and livelihood standards of people subject to exploration and forced displacement".⁸ It is, however, found in two documentaries—*Dudh Koyla and Phulbari*, open cut mining will make serious damaging effect on socio-economic condition of Phulbari people.

Terrible Effects on Environment

A serious concern of open pit mining is its environmental impacts. The film *Phulbari* gives the message carefully. In the film it is shown that, when coal will extract from mine many mineral come out and mixed with rain water. It will damage the paddy and other crop fields. According to Asia Energy,

The top-soil will be removed and preserved once mining operation begins in a particular block. This top-soil will be brought back and spread on the top of the area after completion of mining at the particular block which may take 3-5 years. It will be very difficult to preserve top-soil for such a long time. Top-soil may be washed

⁸ Michel H. Jeffery, *Status and Impacts of German Lignite Industry*. Sweden, the Swedish NGO Secretariat, 2008, p. 11

away during monsoon. At least 3-5 monsoon will be there before top-soil is used at the top of the filled out mining block. And the fertility of the top-soil will also be lost during these 3-5 rainy seasons.⁹

Besides, it also pollutes river water, kills fish. Deep voids need to be created to reach coal that lies below the surface. Large number of huge water pump need to be set up in a mine area to keep the pit mine dry. The life time of mine is 30 years. Water needs to be constantly pumped out. As a result area surrounding the mine go to dry. Phulbari is a fertile and vital food-growing region that produces between two and four crops per year including rice, the staple crop. As Jennifer Kalafut says about impact on food security of Bangladesh,

The vast majority of people in the Phulbari area are farmers and fisher folk and over 80 per cent of the land being acquired for the project is agricultural land which will not be replaced. The project, however, will not only adversely impact the livelihoods of farmers in Phulbari. As an agricultural area of major importance to Bangladesh, producing three annual harvests of rice plus additional crops and abundant fish, the project location raises serious questions and concerns for the nation as a whole. Due to its elevation, the Phulbari area is one of the only regions of Bangladesh not vulnerable to flooding that has devastated the rest of the country in recent years.¹⁰

The project would also reduce water supplies for the people by lowering the water table far beyond the project area. The mine would cause noise and dust pollution through dynamite explosion. More noise and dust will come from the trucks and trains that would haul the coal away from the mine. Coal dust will pollute the air. Water will be polluted by washing the coal, risking pollution of surrounding water bodies.

An important message given by the film is – transportation of coal is another concern. Although this will create employment and revenue but it would cause noise and water pollution in Sundarbans by the Mongla port.

Comparative Images about Coal Mine in *Phulbari* and *Dudh Koyla*

In the analysis, a rather different standpoint about coal mine in Phulbari Upazila has been found. The documentary *Dudh Koyla* shows that people of Phulbari do not want any coal mine in their locality. They will permit neither open pit mine nor another sort of coal mine extraction in Phulbari. They would rather die than give their land. In a few images of the documentary, it can be seen that some people are chanting the slogan - *Koyla khani chaina*, used as a background

9 Kollol Mostofa, MahubRubayat, AnupomShaikotShanto, *JatiyoShompod, BahujatikPuji and MalikanarTarko*. Dhaka, 2010, p. 112

10 Jennifer Kalafut; Roger Moody, *Phulbari Coal Project: Studies on Displacement, Resettlement, Environmental and Social Impact*. Dhaka, 2008, pp. 12-13

sound. As a villager says, 'We don't need coal mine, if we are to die, we will die here, if we are to live, we will live here.'

In this regard, Molla Sagar, the director of *Dudh Koyla* says,

When anyone thinks coal is our property, then consumption on this property easily come in mind because predominance is closely related to property. The attitude of coal as a resource has been pushed in our psychology. Thus, it remains no more, when it is thought as property, as well as it is tough to create movement against mine. People will be dislocated, environment will be polluted, and lands will be perished, if coal will be extracted by open cut method or underground method whatever it is. It will only create great calamity, after the extraction of coal. So the people of Phulbari do not want coal mine in any method. I tried to depict the fact in my documentary through film language.¹¹

On the other hand, *Phulbari*, shows that people of the mine area are against the open pit project, not against general extraction of coal. Director's camera captures the demand and understanding of people. Local people thought that the ownership of the coal and the fate of the affected people just cannot be handed down to a foreign company. They want to wait until the country develops its own mining expertise and technology. As an inhabitant of Phulbari says:

Let the coal stay under the soil for some more years. It will not evaporate. If the situation permits we will extract it ourselves and use 100% of the coal to meet our own needs. Then the people of Phulbari might say 'yes' and will sacrifice for the country's benefit.

Controversial Position of Policymakers

In the *Dudh Koyla* question arises against the government, and the political parties. It shows if government would not have given the permission for extracting the coal mine to foreign companies, they could not get any chance to savour or destroy our resources. The film describes, factionalism is one of the factor that causes harm for country. Grouping is a vital cause of backward position of our country. As an old woman says in the film,

If you go to the Khaleda and tell her that you are a supporter of the opposition party she will not listen to you. Their grouping has brought about all these mishaps in the country. If public had any control, the mine in Dinajpur wouldn't have been exposed like that. No outsider would have been able to touch our resource. I don't understand these, one thing I feel very strongly, we have to save this land with utmost effort.

So it is clear that in terms of coal mine, policy makers of our country remain in a controversial state. In spite of this, people of Buchigram are united and they do not bother about any political parties. They only want to protect their land from foreign company.

¹¹ Molla Sagar, Interview taken for this study on July 11, 2013.

Nationalism of Indigenous group

Dudh Koyla depicts the life of indigenous Saantal group. Though the Saantal have their own language, the children at the Paathshala sang National Anthem—*amar sonar bangla, ami tomay valobashi*. The film maker expressed it intelligently to establish that the indigenous people are also part of our country, they have also feelings of nationalism and patriotism, and they belong to this country. The children take an oath to they would never leave their motherland, they will revive their lost history, they will do, and surely they will. It is also a symbolic image to identify them as an important part of society and culture.

Besides, the conventional life style of the Saantal community is also shown in the documentary. They have a certain musical program which they perform by clapping and dancing with the sound of *dholok*.

Conclusion

The capitalist world system is threatening the existence of human being by unplanned and harmful programs as well as by polluting the environment in search of profit. Bangladesh is also a victim of the capitalist world. The two documentaries of this paper portrayed the Phulbari issue on this point. The study has identified the facts and how these facts are depicted in *Dudh Koyla* and *Phulbari*. People's emotion, fear, boldness, unity as well as environmental impacts of open pit method of coal mine extraction are portrayed in these two documentaries. It is the story of hope and empowerment of the people as well as the failure of the state to understand the emotions and need of the people. These documentaries portrayed the power of social movements. The people were aware of their rights and scared of dislocation. They were also concerned about the environmental degradation. We have seen how basic human rights were violated and weak governance led to a blood-soaked revolt. It is a portrayal of loving relationship between people and the environment. This popular resistance has definitely paved the way to resistance of any kind of challenges and social crisis with unity. These documentaries thus successfully contributed to our documentary film genre as well as showed the role of media portrayal and analysis of any significant event.