



MATERIAL CULTURE AND ENVIRONMENTAL WOES: DEVOTION TO FAST FASHION

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ABSTRACT

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The paper primarily focuses urban material culture and its adverse impact on urban waste management and finally the environmental services. The study results show the increase of personal purchasing capacity, pleasure in aesthetes, upholding the social esteem push people towards material culture at a hyper level. It causes a serious risk of waste management and ecological aspects. Urban governance across the world has to cost a lion portion of its annual budget for waste management and environmental preservation. However, the more wastes (liquid and solid) generates everyday that cannot be managed more than seventy or eighty percent resulting in a severe environmental costs. The paper mainly aims to find out the socio-psychological causes of increasing material culture and its effects on urban governance, waste management and city environments. The study has been conducted in qualitative approach and secondary sources have been used for data collection. Immaterial culture might be a suitable source of pleasure, happiness and social status that have to take as a social movement to minimizing material culture and moreover, socio-politically we have to follow the ideology recycle, reuse and reduce.

Contribution/Originality: The study is one of very few studies which have investigated the adverse impacts of material culture on socio-cultural and ecological services as it also erodes spiritualism, humanism, social harmony and ecology. The paper contributes the first logical analysis of the negative effects of fast fashion producing countries' (Bangladesh) labor rights and environments.

1. INTRODUCTION

The world is presently passing the era of globalization that focuses principally the economic and trade growth-it started effectively just after the Second World War-it continues sharply still. It was actually the horse race of capitalism though it commenced its journey steadily since industrial revolution. Now the capitalist race is running that may be called 'hyper-capitalism' that pushes forcedly the consumers to materialistic life style and spiritual and harmonious values are being seriously defeated all over. As peaceful values contradict the money making process so corporate giants avoid it cunningly and they leave some outfitting terms onto the consumer society so that the young and teens rush to the shopping mall forgetting the values. Bredemeier and Toby (1960) indicate that material culture leads to many social problems while other researchers state that material values affect the perception of happiness and ego of the individual. Human lives have presently been one kinds of material losing their emotional

feelings as they think all types of pleasures are in materialistic consumption and enjoyment. They have no time to think about the surroundings, community, blood connected relatives, and distressed people. If these feelings enter into their minds they feel they have missed something that takes them to a low position in the society. Their devotion to material activities are on rise steadily as it has an own nature to be circulated roundly. So the people who have been materialistic once cannot get rid of this ever in his next life.

It is one kind of addiction to seek happiness within material behaviors. Jealousy, ego, pride, arrogance, carelessness, reduced societal affection, and ambition are the close association of material culture. As a result, materialistic person cannot be stable in life; even he can contribute hardly something to the society leaving some socio-environmental complexity. Material culture generates socio-cultural disharmony as well as ecological risks heavily, though it generates high volumes of wealth that triggers the economic growth vertically from country to country. First policy makers are highly responsible for material culture as well as its immediate consequence of damaging ecology. Corporate conglomerates would like to make money felling the people into 'consumption romanticism' trap. Companies that are solely focused on reaching their global goals fuel worldwide material culture harm sustainable resources and damage the ecological system while they support economic development (Strizhakova and Coulter, 2013).

Consumer, seeking no deep meaning, running towards shopping centers causing the emptiness their pocket and generate unwanted wastes. Production, packaging, transportation and consumption all are the activities that belong more or less environmental and natural resources loss. So, ecology is the main concerning issue in the world though policy makers and companies are here mostly idle as they need politics mixed economy and wealth. Environmentalists and civil society are battling the consumerism and ecology. Production of materials claim huge amount of natural resources and waste management has been another governance complexity even after causing the environmental pollution by toxic garbage. Actually material culture is a common scenario in urban area as the people of the cities have money, digital media, availability of goods, and shopping centers. But I think this is one sort of problem in the lower class people in the cities. They have no money but their teen and younger family members are not far from the consumer culture that causes discomfort in their family sphere as well as to the peer groups.

1.1. Theoretical Background

In 'the object-relations theory of consumerism' it is consistent with Illouz (2009) call for the analytical framework of emotion to become central to consumption studies. Objection things are handled and used, powerfully combining embodied pragmatics with emotion, cultural myth and symbolism, which are in turn connected to wants. This approach helps us to understand how the material, pragmatic and emotional work together, and how such interactions can be an important part of the basis for understanding the institutionalized 'stability of volatility' of consumer desire (Illouz, 2009). According to Winnicott (1953) objects are not limited to material or physical things, but extend to psychological 'objects' like a parent or body part. It is argued here that his model of object-relations has much wider application for understanding the cultural basis of the relationship between people and physical objects, especially in the context of consumer societies where goods are continuously sought and desired for various capacities, some mundane, others perceived by users to be sacred.

In this theoretical argument, "practice theory" can be mentioned following the human habitual and custom behavior in regard to consumption and production activities. A lifestyle change influenced by global culture, media advertizing role but it is argumentative that intrinsic habitual nature of human being triggers them to consumption pattern and volume. Here too, though coordinated networks of people and things are given priority in organizing social life, questions tend to reside with materiality and material networks more than actual consumption practice, leaving significant cultural elements relatively unaddressed. To some, this focus on practice seems productive because it does not presume or speculate about cultural categories, meaning or symbolism but identifies how

'consumption occurs within and for the sake of practices' (Warde, 2005). The appeal of attending to such consumption practices seems to be that they are universal, habitual and continually unfolding within interrelated networks of other practices and hence have an apparent recursive material quality.

The allusion to an object-centered dialectic (object-relations theory of consumerism) of lack and desire is clear in Baudrillard (1968) structuralism commentary on consumer society; *The System of Objects* where he points out that people consume the *idea* of an object rather than the thing itself. What motivates people to be object-seekers is the promise of an object to aid self-transformation. Baudrillard's point is that objects, once acquired, eventually and perpetually disappoint – they never really satisfy the deep psychological needs that direct us toward them in the first instance. Consumer capitalism is thus founded upon a psychological lack that is perpetually stimulated, but never satiated. McCracken (1988) theory of displaced meanings is very similar to Baudrillard's notion of lack. McCracken also postulates a deep psychic motivation for consumption. In his theory, a chronic aspect of psychosocial life is the gap that exists between the real and ideal; in consumer societies the pursuit of desirable objects is an important resource for making bridges between the real and ideal. Dreaming and fantasizing are important, for it is in this imaginary domain that people come to define and build up their notion of an ideal which is then displaced onto consumer objects.

Campbell (1987) take up this point giving a historical dimension. His thesis is that, alongside the bourgeois, rationalist and technical ethic which characterized Weber's theory of capitalist development, there is a romantic, pleasure seeking, hedonistic spirit which drives modern consumerism. Central to the cultural complex of consumerism is day-dreaming, fantasizing and self-delusion. A major part of consumption is imagination – consumers' desire objects because they believe them to offer something novel, empowering or edifying. Thus, people do not have an actual desire for acquisition of objects per se, but the acquisition of 'dreams and the pleasurable dramas which they have already enjoyed in imagination' (Campbell, 1987).

Individuals' materialistic value has negative relationships with their ecotourism attitude, ecotourism interest, ecotourism intention, and willingness to pay a premium for ecotourism products and services (Lu *et al.*, 2014). Princen (1999) argues that consumption must be distinguished conceptually from other approaches to environmental problems. One approach is to work within the *consumption–production dichotomy*, examining not just purchasing but product use and non-purchase decisions. A second approach, one that challenges the prevailing dichotomy and its propensity to relegate consumption to a black box, is to treat all resource use as consuming, that is, 'using up', and ask what risks are entailed. Consumption can then be seen as material provisioning where risks increase with increasing distance from the resource; as background, mal consumption, or overconsumption depending on the social concern raised; or as a chain of decisions that compel the behaviors of restraint and resistance among 'producers'. Pursuing the consumption and environment topic engenders resistance among a wide range of actors for reasons that are personal, analytic, and policy related.

1.2. Research Questions

The paper mainly aims to find out the negative impacts of material culture on environment and there are some specific objectives. These are as follows:

- What are the consequences of devotion to fast fashion on ecology?
- What does consumerism badly influences the behavioral and spiritual values which are correlated to environmental degradation?

2. METHODS

This is an explanatory type of study which belongs to the category of applied research. It has been conducted on the basis of qualitative approach focusing the inductive philosophy. Here have been the secondary data sources that include academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, book review, organizational or institutional (public or

private, national or international) records, and reports of printed and electronic media. As primary data sources, there have been applied two methods such as empirical observation and experimentation. First, I gathered experiences from electronic media about the western fast and materialistic culture that lead me to study the field. Second, in my own society materialistic or western culture emerges at a very high pace as our economy is being growing fast and wealthy people get materialistic though media plays a vital role herein. Apart from, while studying in China, I experienced directly the consumer culture in the society and socialism can protect it very little. All these experimentations are other strong sources of the study.

3. DATA AND ANALYSIS

3.1. Material Culture and Its Cause Factors

Material culture is one kind of socio-economic disease that mainly attacks the young generation. It is actually an abstract feelings and psycho-emotional domain of human life. It is not a positive outlook but something negatives. Business companies spread it towards the consumers for their financial gaining. As a result, it starts from manufacturing office supported by political authority but social consumers are being victimized though in exchange of immediate some sparkling pleasure and emptying the pocket. Material culture means devotion and sometimes addiction to materialistic goods which are aesthetic, social status symbol, pricy, trendy and newer one. Actually non-materialistic consumption belongs also a material culture norm as it is intermingled to fashionable and trendy goods. For example, pleasure travel has already been a fashion and status symbol among the rich societies. Western people and the persons of emerging countries (like China) are spending huge of money in traveling and it is going to be a fashionable culture. Material culture is defined in its popular meaning: "devotion to material desires and needs, to the neglect of spiritual matters; a way of opinion, tendency and life, based entirely on material interests" (Richins and Dawson, 1992).

As material culture affects the environment so we should know why and how people get induced by material culture or consumerism. Then the ecologists can take initiatives to reduce the material culture. Only waste management cannot be complete solution. Governance mechanisms of all states are eager to economic and trade development and that's why they adopt the liberal economic and business policy. Most of the governments are not properly interested to ecology. So business personnel get plenty of policy facility all over the world. In this condition, corporate companies set such type of business design so that they can make huge amount of profits. They establish eye-catching shopping mall, advertise their goods attractive way spending a lot of money, enjoy tax holiday, and package the products sophisticatedly and consumers get attracted in a subconscious mind to the goods.

Businesses have realized that wealthy consumers are the most attractive targets of marketing. The upper class's tastes, lifestyles, and preferences trickle down to become the standard for all consumers. The not-so-wealthy consumers can 'purchase something new that will speak of their place in the tradition of affluence' (Miller, 1990). A consumer can have the instant gratification of purchasing an expensive item to improve social status. When frequently advertisements aired on digital media, teens, children and young people become allured by. A large amount of capital spent on advertisement and packaging but both are seriously threatening to environment. The technical and social relations that structured the mass media all over the world made it very easy for new consumerist lifestyles to become the dominant motif for these media, which became in time extraordinarily efficient vehicles for the broadcasting of the culture-ideology of consumerism globally (Sklair, 2012). Synthetic fibers are being used in packaging and digital advertisements spread radiation highly that contaminates the domestic environment. Material wealth increases sharply in the world that detaches people from socio-cultural and religious values. And they seek happiness in material goods that are aesthetic and fashionable ones. When they absorbed within goods they cannot get out to spiritual life. Their lives continue to the circle of goods and pleasure-some activities.

3.2. Material Culture in the West

Material or consumerist culture reached in the west world at hyper position. There is a close relation between wealth and consumption i. e. Wherever wealth is more, consumption is definitely more than that of elsewhere.

Apart from, capitalism is responsible for material culture. The USA has gone up to the highest point of production and consumption. Individual life has been merged within the material goods and Pleasurism. The motto 'earn, and enjoy' grasped the lives that made the persons unstable for each of the moments. The wealthy countries are mostly materialistic or consumerist such as the USA, European Union, and Japan. They generate mass waste and are responsible to pollution the ecology.

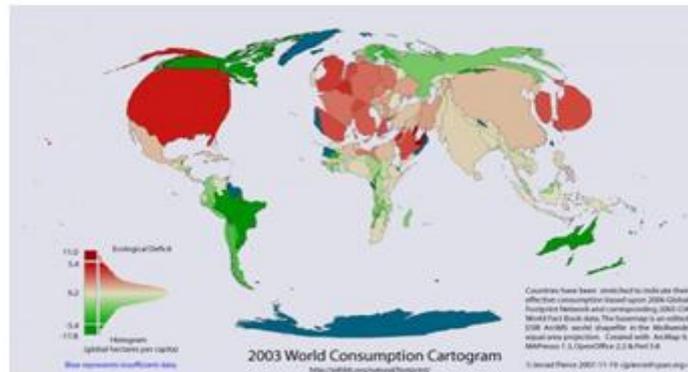


Figure-1. 2003 World Consumption Cartograms

Source: Global Footprint Network and Corresponding 2003, OA World Fact Book Data

Spiritual values have already disappeared from the society replacing the pleasure related all-out consumption that is also considered as the symbolic activity of aristocratic society. They use one unit of goods just for a week, at this moment a new one came to market and instantly they purchased it throwing down the older. This has been the integral part of their lives which may be called a 'consuming addiction'. European Union is actually more or less same and their consumption level is higher. 1 unit of consumption means 1 unit of waste that may be solid, liquid or gasified. Americans are purchasing five times the amount of clothing than they did in 1980. Due to this rise in consumption, developed countries are producing more and more garments each season. The United States imports more than 1 billion garments annually from China alone (Muran, 2007) while the United Kingdom textile consumption surged by 37% from 2001 to 2005 (Black, 2013a). Western world is enjoying conveniences to the consideration of risks of climate change as they export almost 75 percent of toxic wastes to the developing or poor countries. So the south is in a vulnerable situation though their consumption and waste generation is very little. On the other hand, industrial nations are rushing to the natural resources of the developing countries as their own resources are about to exhaust due to hyper production and consumption.

Mining resources of the poor nations have already been a source of wars across the world. So it views hyper consumption leads the world war-torn society that will perhaps end up the planet. Spiritual or moral values guide the individual people into a balanced and disciplined life which actually begets the happiness resulting in the balanced ecology. Material culture breeds corruption and crimes because consumption demands huge amount of money. For money people adopt the illegal ways causing the society unstable and unequal.

3.3. Bangladesh Scenario

Bangladesh is a developing country with a good growth rate. Annually its economy is growing above the rate of 7 percent and its bank reserve and export is on rise sharply. Also per capita purchasing capacity increases at a remarkable pace. So, it is viewed that it is an emerging nation with 160 million of peoples' consumer market in South Asia.

Table-1. Trend of gross domestic product of Bangladesh/BDT

Year	GNP (Mill)	US Dollar Ex	Inflation Index (2000=100)	Per Capita Income (as % of USA)
1980	250,300	16.10 Taka	20	1.79
1985	597,318	31.00 Taka	36	1.19
1990	1,054,234	35.79 Taka	58	1.16
1995	1,594,210	40.27 Taka	78	1.12
2000	2,453,160	52.14 Taka	100	0.97
2005	3,913,334	63.92 Taka	126	0.95
2008	5,003,438	68.65 Taka	147	
2015	17,295,665	78.15 Taka.	196	2.48

Source: International Monetary Fund 2016

The figure 2 shows gross national product and per capita income rise steadily that trigger the people to market line. Bangladesh doesn't belong to a materialistic or consumerist society; but recently consumerism influxes into Bangladesh as well as other developing countries as their purchasing capacity grows very well and globalization of media and market pushes them to 'market culture'. We can view that luxurious shopping malls or super markets establishes in all district cities let alone the divisional cities and women children and young generation rush towards them. The numbers of middle class people rise at a sharpened rate and urbanization rate is about 3.3 percent where shopping is one kind of habit and leisure. In fact, consumer market in the whole Bangladesh grows remarkably. Apart from, digital media has already reached all walks of people with attracting and eye-catching advertisement both in urban and rural areas. So, marketism is being influxes into the people in a fully fledged.

Consumerist culture mainly includes the devotion to automobile, consumer electronics, fast fashion and other home appliances. And Bangladesh has already been experiencing the fast culture as people are rushing to super markets before different types of festivals (religious and socio-cultural programs) such as Eid and Puja festivals, Valentine's Day, New Year Celebration etc. There is a correlation between material culture and black money-the people who earned their money illegal way they usually purchase flats, automobiles, and fast fashion across the world-Bangladesh is a good example in this connection. Only Dhaka city roads bear about 166840 registered cars that were quite impossible just before 6 years ago and on that periods Dhaka city was flooded by rickshaws. According to [Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission-BTRC \(2015\)](#) 'more than 130 million people, out of Bangladesh's population of 160 million, use mobile phones while around 50 million people access internet facility. During the same period last year, the figure was 117.5 million, which means the number of subscribers increased by over 11 percent in one year.

According to the BTRC, the number of internet users in the country in July last was around 50.7 million as against 40.8 million in August last year. This means the number has increased by more than 27percent in one year'. Refrigerator, just after television and a mobile set, is the next suitable choice to the purchase list of a Bangladeshi middle class or lower middle class family and refrigerator market is growing at about 8.6 percent rate. This increase of consumption means the increase of waste that ultimately contaminates the environment. Bangladesh, in fact, has been experiencing the environmental risks for a long time due to the lack of awareness, bad governance and ineffectiveness of environmental laws. Watersheds, air and soil are severely contaminated in Bangladesh and material culture will accelerate it badly.

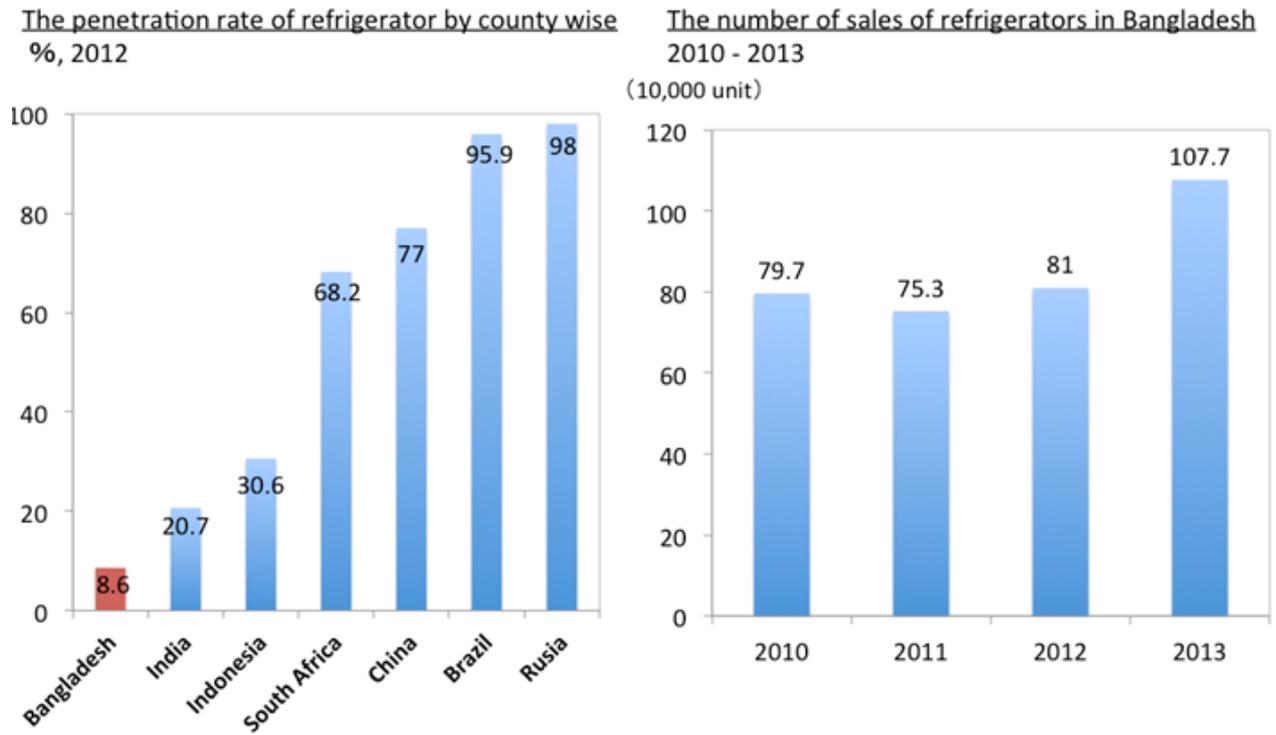


Figure-2. Refrigerator consumption increases steadily in Bangladesh
 Source: Japanese Ministry of Economy, trade and industry
 Source: Bangladesh Refrigerator Manufactures Association

As the chart shows, there has been a massive penetration of refrigerators in Bangladesh - more so than in other countries. In 2009, the number was merely 8.6 percent, but the sales have recently been increasing. According to the Bangladesh Refrigeration Manufactures Association, in 2013, the number of refrigerator was shot up over 1 million unites. It is expected that the number reach 1.3 million units in 2014.

3.4. Fast Fashion

Americans presently purchase five times more units of clothing than they did in 1980. So, both developed and developing countries are producing sharply increased amounts of apparel items all seasons. The United States imports more than 1 billion garments annually from China alone (Cline, 2014) while the United Kingdom textile consumption surged by 37% from 2001 to 2005. The statistics show fast fashion is highly a contributing factor to pollution. New clothing fashion generates mass waste and discards which are gradually making the waste governance complicated and budgetary from country to country.

Table-2. Household consumption expenditure on clothing in the European Union in 2014, by country (in million Euros)

Country	Consumption expenditure/m/E
United Kingdom	66,631.5
Germany	61,304
Italy	49,370.1
France*	38,719
Spain	20,734
Netherlands**	11,991
Austria	8,536.5
Poland	8,455.7
Belgium	7,582.5
Portugal**	4,966.9

Source: www.zerowasteurope.eu

This statistic presents the final consumption expenditure of households in the European Union on clothing in 2014, split by country. The highest expenditure was recorded in the United Kingdom, with households spending around 66.6 billion Euros on clothing in 2014. The average American household produces 70 pounds of textile waste every year. When you compare that number to the entire country, there is roughly 10.5 million tons of textile waste being thrown away? For example, the residents of New York City discard around 193,000 tons of clothing and textiles, which equates to 6% of the entire city's garbage. In comparison, the European Union generates a total of 5.8 million tons of textiles each year (Black, 2013b). While Americans donate or recycle around 15% of their unwanted clothing, these numbers show that a large portion of textiles are ending up in landfills worldwide e-waste every year.

'Fast fashion' refers to a business strategy to bring new clothing item to retail shop within a short time at lower price. And consumers presently are getting new fashion even two times in a week. There is a question how it is possible to sell such high units of new clothing and how they can manage the consumers of their new arrivals. Yes it is being possible because peoples' fashion choice get changed even in every week - they desire to wear a newer something - as they feel fashioning exposes the symbol of their self-esteem in their societal platform. Zara, Primark, H&M, Wal-Mart etc. are the global fashion brands. They are contributing to grow their economy remarkably- they make new fashion consumers- but they are little concerned about the fashion waste and their disposal. The brand retailers provide fashionable clothes all the year round and presently they have not to follow the traditional season cycle. Consumers also devoted to the all-time fashions. Fast fashion actually is characterized by the process from catwalk to design up to storing up within very short time than it consumed three or four times more in previous times. I think corporate has been created such type of consumers' purchasing style through attracting advertisement and different stylish and discounted offers. And people think it is cheap, fashionable and new; so they have been habituated to buy new one repeatedly. They forget they are purchasing increased numbers of units that cost more and they hardly concern about the environmental issue. Such this way hyper consumerism is taking our livable planet to exhaust.

Fast fashion gets popularity all over the world and it influxes presently from the West to East. It is a symbol of social status and if anybody does not maintain this culture, society regards them as the outdated people; so they are compelled to lean the fast culture. Corporate conglomerates advertise their products such way as if these fashion items are only the things that can speed up peoples' aristocracy heavily. Being allured by attracting advertisement, especially youths rush to markets to buy new one- then neighboring other people cannot abstain themselves from the trends-they also make them streamliners. Fast culture contributed the West economy to be healthy in the past; but presently it is considered that fast fashion leads the economy depressed and money transfer to other countries. Bangladesh and other developing countries are forwarding towards the fast fashion. Now a day, young people purchase at least one clothing item in every month and even during a festival or ceremony they buy three or four items in all societies though these are unnecessary. But they are completely unconcerned about the ecological impacts of fashioning.

3.5. Bangladesh and Fast Clothing

Bangladesh is the second largest fashion clothing exporting country just next to China. It exports the garments products mainly to western countries such as the USA, European Union. The West is actually the pioneer of fast fashion and their market is highly consuming of the stylish fashion clothing even at present time compared to others. Their high volume of consumption triggers the exporting nations to produce apparel items at massive volumes. China, Bangladesh, Kenya, Pakistan, Vietnam, Cambodia, India and Sri Lanka are the prime garments exporting countries. These nations provide the fashions to the West at the exchange of resource exploitation, inhumane work environment, lack of human rights and environmental pollution especially in Bangladesh. Bangladesh earns remarkable amount of foreign currency supplying the goods, but the dividends go only to the

accounts of fashion makers leaving the workers into a pale living standards. Bangladesh presently produces the spinning products, fabrics; clothing related linking products, woven and knitting items and exports them at a high volume. First, we can consider the production of cotton and wastes of clothing products (dyes, scrap clothes, toxic gasses and liquid chemicals) that are the fatally concerning matters to ecology.

The nations that (Egypt, Central Asian countries, Russia and North African nations) produce and export cotton, they use a massive amount of chemical fertilizers, pesticides, energy and water –which are greatly responsible to make the environment vulnerable – moreover, massive agro wastes generate of which only 30 percent to be recycled or reuse and rest of them goes into fatal substances. Narayangonj, Dhaka, Gazipur, Chittagong are famous for garments hubs in Bangladesh. These are not following the industrial zoning system as a result; commerce, industries, educational institutions, and residences have been located in same sites causing a lot of socio-cultural and ecological imbalances. The textile hubs, in fact, completely polluted locations especially the waters, and air hereof are severely contaminated. Roads, residential blocs and surroundings belong to substantially be a crowded environment. The satellite imagery confirms that around 2 billion children live in areas where outdoor air pollution, caused by factors such as vehicle emissions, heavy use of fossil fuels, dust and burning of waste, exceeds minimum air quality guidelines set by the World Health Organization. South Asia has the largest number of children living in these areas, at 620 million, with Africa following at 520 million children (UNICEF, 2016).

4. CONCLUSIONS

It is finally found that material culture spreads all the societies from West to East. Policy makers and corporate giants are principally responsible for material culture that affects global ecology seriously as well as it erodes spiritualism, humanism, and moral values making the lowered class people marginalized more. Textile dyes and clothing wastes cause a substantial contamination of water, soil and biosphere. For example, the whole water bodies of Bangladesh garment processing zones (Dhaka, Narayangonj, Gazipur, and Chittagong) get polluted seriously. Family environment are caused hazardous due to the huge volumes of clothing wastes across the world. Resource conflicts spread from country to country as natural resources are to be exhausted by this century due to over exploitation. Western countries enjoy the fast fashion culture and; but the low paid garment workers in Bangladesh have been sufferings a lot through supplying the fast low price clothes to the Western marketers. So, rational clothing culture has already been a global expectation that is getting a social movement.

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