

# A Changing Society: Observed through Three Generations

## BOOK REVIEW

**Title : A Family in Transition**  
**Author : Mohammad Afsaruddin**  
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**Reviewed by**  
**Prof Muhammad Anisuzzaman**

PRESENTING the picture of society in an autobiography is quite a rare thing. After Nirod C. Chowdhury none has been found like Professor Afsaruddin who could present the society and life in a historical perspective and in contemporaneous intellectual consciousness. Afsaruddin's "Family in Transition" has, therefore, come out with rare possibilities. He has unravelled the articulate or inarticulate ambition lying hidden behind the veil of exposed and exposed conflicts of the Bangalee society. He has done so with sociocultural anthropological point of view which though controversial is modern. The book is unique. There is nothing of its kind in Bangladesh.

The book under review is at once an autobiographical account and a sociological treatise. The author attempts to juxtapose three generations — the generation of his father, his own generation, and that of his sons in terms of ideas, values and issues — to explain how Bangalee society has changed over the last half a century or so. The author has witnessed the British rule in his adolescence, Pakistani rule in his youth, and Bangladesh governing herself in his mature years. The scion of a religious Muslim family tracing ancestors to Hazrat Shah Jalal and his followers, the author imbibles Islamic values deep in his heart, cultivates western values because of his western education and argues that he holds both values in high esteem — albeit recognizing that the third generation — his sons included — has tended to accept western values with very little or no touch with either Islamic norms or affinity with kinds left back in the rural society.

The author's father lived a simple peasant, business life with sibling, looking after all of them to the best of his ability. His father wanted him to go to Islamic schools. The author went to an English school instead. His father did not quite like it, but acquiesces in his son's preference. The author lived most of his life in urban environment as a Professor of

Not only family life styles, the larger society has changed considerably. The author perceptibly notes these changes, and their effects on the

**D**ARK VICTORY will not be among the party favours distributed at this year's celebrations for the 50th anniversary of the World Bank/International Monetary Fund.

Indeed, this new book published by Pluto Press, London, is an unrelenting unsparing attack on the twin financial institutions established in 1944 at Bretton Woods in the United States.

Author Walden Bello, director of the California-based Institute for Food and Development Policy, seeks to discredit the structural adjustment programmes that the Bank has foisted on an increasing number of developing countries.

In just 115 pages, *Dark Victory* strives to present nothing less than a unified theory of global politics during the past 15 years. The book is both overambitious and glaringly incomplete.

In a couple of detailed case studies, it convincingly refutes the Bank's claims that structural adjustment does produce long-term benefits for countries that follow the prescribed austerity regime.

Bello contends that structural adjustment has utterly failed in every single instance. The evidence presented in the book does not come close to supporting so sweeping a claim.

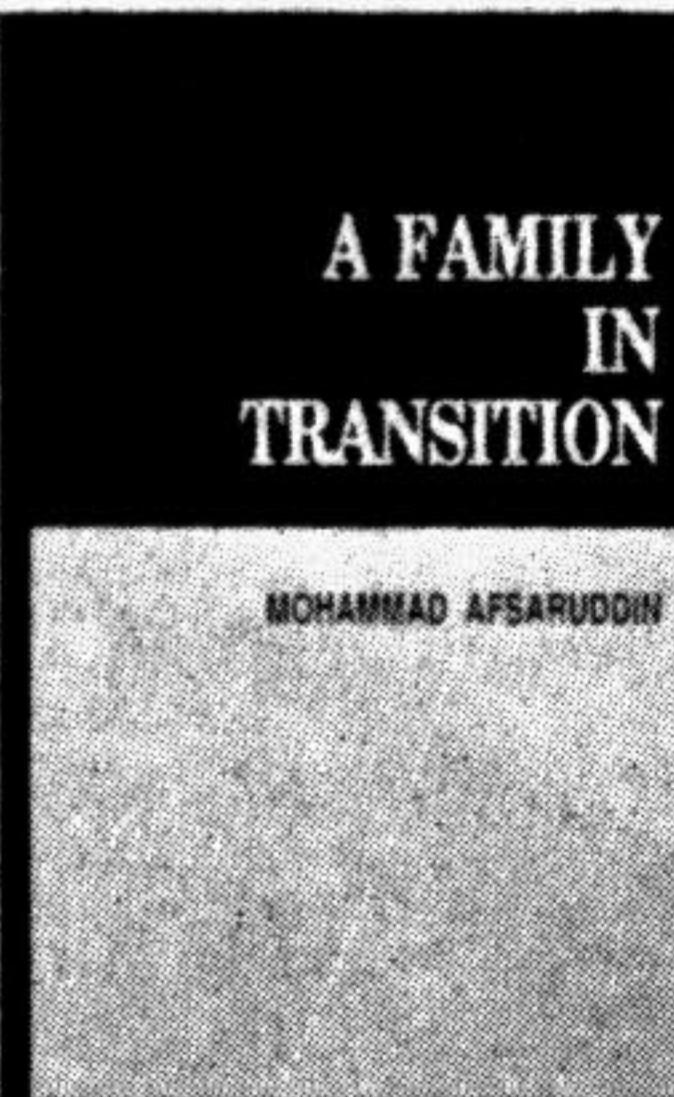
*Dark Victory* is also tendentious in its insistence that the US is solely and wholly to blame for global injustice. According to Bello, US President Ronald Reagan — with assistance from British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher — launched a worldwide "rollback" offensive on taking power in 1981.

## Ecological Spiritualism

**C**ontinued from page 9 looking back to the Vedic times of *tapovana*, he also proved himself to be a successful man of actions. *Shantiniketan* itself is an effective test-case for Tagore's reflections and discourses on environment. In his "A Poet's School", Tagore maintains: "... today the idea of *tapovana* has lost all semblance with reality and faded into the realm of legend; in a modern poem it would be merely 'literary' and an anachronism, unless remade under modern conditions of life (italics mine)". Indeed, through the *ashrama* of *Shantiniketan*, Tagore remakes the idea of *tapovana*, being fully aware of the modern conditions of life. It needs mentioning that Tagore's remaking of the idea of *tapovana* is tailored to the making of man, an ideal man. Tagore in a number of places makes it

clear that the making of an ideal man calls for the building of an ideal environment, and the latter again requires ideal education — fact, all these three are dialectically inter-linked.

The education policy that Tagore himself formulates for the *ashrama* clearly stresses the need for training students in the midst of nature and learning from nature itself — reading nature as a highly dense, potential text replete with spaces. Looking backward, one can now see that what has today come to be known as 'textuality of nature' was already considered by Tagore in his own way. It would not be outrageous to say that the Derridean hint that 'the world is text' was, perhaps in a different context, taken up earlier by Tagore in his idea of *Vishvakartha* which constitutes one of the learning grounds at



Mustafa, Sadeeq Khan, Abdus Samad Azad were among his close friends.

Missing from his observation is the politics of Dhaka University both of teachers and students that a reader would have expected from a sociologist sharing his entire life and time with the University.

His reflection on the Bangladeshi society, its moorings and values followed Western norms and preferences — while maintaining that "We should proceed towards progress on the basis of only what is ours". Yet the reader can notice that the "Generation gap is almost inevitable between my generation and my son's generation, because we still 'nurture the values and ideas of our father's generation'.... This may appear as a contradiction. While the author informs his readers that his youngest son now living in the USA hopes to marry and the initiative for it, is completely his own. He does not expect the author's role in it, he notes with caution that competitiveness is the general feature of the life of the present generation. "Life has become almost mechanical, and money-centred. Because of modern men's lack of moorings with social and cultural values and traditions of our society and because of their indifference to the spiritual

Although he says that he has never indulged in politics, the author has been a keen observer of political events and developments in the country. Some of his friends are now "seasoned politicians" of Bangladesh whom he had occasions to assist in some ways or the other. Oli Ahad, K G

have actually suffered as a result of the country's declining self-sufficiency in food production, brought about by a structural adjustment measure that cut government price subsidies.

The Bank was seeking to re-order Ghana's economic priorities with the aim of boosting cocoa exports. This export-driven growth strategy, designed to enable Ghana to pay off its foreign debts, failed to produce significant relief. Bello finds.

The emphasis on increasing cocoa exports also led indirectly to serious environmental problems, he adds. When cocoa prices began dropping on international markets — due partly to Ghana's over-production of the crop — World Bank advisers sought to spur overseas sales of the country's timber resources in an attempt to bolster foreign exchange earnings.

Ghana's tropical forests have consequently been ravaged, to the point where the once-lush country could be completely denuded of trees by the year 2000.

Bello then cites the verdict of Ghanaian economist Charles Abugre to the effect that structural adjustment has resulted in greater economic inequality and a rise in absolute poverty.

*Dark Victory* is much less convincing when it tries to discredit structural adjustment in Indonesia and Costa Rica. Indeed, Bello is reduced to describing Indonesia's apparent social advance as "one of the great mysteries of our time."

*Dark Victory* could have been a valuable antidote to the cheery self-evaluations being offered by the Bank and IMF on their anniversary — GEMINI

A majority of Ghanaians

not that Tagore was not at all aware of the forces of disintegration pervading modern life; but, then, he was always involved in a struggle for restoring peace and harmony through taking both inward and outward environment of man into account with commitments and convictions which are love made visible. It is here where Tagore distinguishes himself from the common run of environmentalists busy zooming in on the physical aspects of environment and ferreting out the details of absences.

Now, it is evident that Tagore is not only an environmental visionary and thinker, he is also an environmental activist. And his activism impressively ranges from planning through management down to implementation. Last of all, it needs mentioning that Tagore's spiritualism is never asceticism as such, but always asceticism animated by love for man and nature.

## Hara Kiri Guide is a Bestseller

**A do-it-yourself guide to hara kiri is a bestseller in Japan. Suwendri Kakuchi of Inter Press Service reports from Tokyo.**

**I**n the old days when samurais still roamed Japan, ritual self disembowelment was the honourable option for warriors faced with the shame of defeat.

Later, toward the end of the Pacific War, kamikaze pilots dove their explosive-packed Zeros into the funnels of US warships, blowing up the enemy vessels and themselves.

Now a bestselling Japanese book presents ways to commit non-combat hara kiri or suicide, describing in detail routine methods like pill overdose to extreme procedures like freezing and even self-immolation.

It also lists ideal places where to kill oneself — such as a dense wooded area at the foot of majestic Mt Fuji, where police authorities have uncovered numerous suicides in past months.

Published in September, *The Complete Manual of Suicide* has already sold 10,000 copies. Police say five bodies were found near Mt Fuji on Oct. 19 alone. Two of the dead carried the book, which includes a detailed route through the forest.

Although the site had been a 'favourite' among would-be suicide victims before, officials say the number of bodies found there by late 1993 was unusually high: 33, or an increase of 60 percent since the previous year.

But the manual's publisher, Misa Ochiai, denies the accusation that people who read the book commit suicide.

"The book is read by people who have no intention of killing themselves," she says. "It indicates how naturally people treat the theme of suicide in Japan."

Indeed, sociologists say the

with their lives. Loneliness and the strain to keep up with the fast-paced world runs deep in the lives of many people, especially those in the big cities, she says.

But many sociologists say those who do commit suicide in Japan do so because they were unable to bear pain usually brought on by illness.

They add that more than half of those who kill themselves in this country choose hanging over other methods. Says Yukio Saito of the Japan Help Line: "I expect that it's easier to find rope."

Official figures also indicate that even before Tsurumi's book came out, self-inflicted deaths in recession-hit Japan were already on the rise.

Suicides among children 14 years or younger increased last year by 2.2 percent since 1992, according to statistics. Most of these were attributed strained relations with friends and family and poor academic performance.

The total number of suicides in Japan by late December 1993 was pegged at 22,104, a rise of 4.8 percent from the previous year, with most of the victims middle-aged men.

Authorities found him, his wife and their four children — the youngest of whom was only seven months old — dead in their car one day last June. Forensic experts ruled their deaths as carbon monoxide poisoning.

Explaining why the children were included in the family death pact, sociologists say Japanese tradition holds parents responsible for their offspring.

Wrote the father in the suicide note: "I feel sorry for the children, but we are taking them with us."

## Tele-View

by Kaiser Parvez Ali

**I**n the recently concluded Australasia cricket cup in Sharjah, BTV did a commendable job by allowing the local representatives of CNN and BBC to sponsor to telecast the important matches. The live telecast sports lovers hours of excitement. However, the final live telecast did not include the prize giving ceremony and the jubilant faces of supporters present in the stadium. This failure to detect gold bars in one the passenger's briefcase by the scanning machine gives rise to speculation that huge amount of gold must be smuggled into Bangladesh without detection. Let us see how the story turns out in the coming weeks.

Thursday night's drama "Tumar Amar" indicated the moral message that love and wealth are two different things and wealth loses against true love. The heroine, Afzana Mimi, leaves her boyfriend Zahid Hussain for a wealthy painter. Afzana later realizes her mistake after the wealthy painter deserts her, she goes back to Zahid who waits for her in a depressed mental condition. The dialogue delivery of the artists were too slow and expressionless.

The Bengal feature film "Raj Laxmi and Srikant" shown on Friday was worth viewing. After many commercial films BTV chose a film which was entertaining with artistic value that had the tele-viewers glued to TV for three levels.

Another concluded serial "Mati O Manush" is a programme which is very informative for farmers and last week's programme showed how some farmers in Khulna have given up planting crops and have taken up shrimp cultivation, which due to increasing demand for shrimps is several times more profitable than crops. Looking on English films BTV seems to be repeating them like "The A Team" which does not interest viewers any more and soap-operas

like "Dallas" (just concluded) and "Dynasty" (presently showing) which were shown earlier were withdrawn due to unknown reasons. There are many new films in the world market and BTV in order to compete with Zee TV, BBC, MTV and Star Plus must give a shot in the arm to attract viewers which they are losing increasingly. Doordarshan seems to have taken the hint and many notable changes are seen these days since the quality and presentation has improved with introduction of many new programmes.

On May Day BTV has telecast only one half hour programme called "Ora Kaz Kore". More programmes were required to be telecast on this historic day, which comes only once in every year.

BTV telecast a new serial "Itee Katha" on Tuesday. The story is set in a village where Zamindars and rich shop owners are dominant and they misbehave with poor business men and villagers. The serial focuses on a poor family who earn their bread by producing cloth using handlooms. The market is poor for the cottage industry in this area. The sad serial has Abul Khair as the head of the family. He takes the items to market to sell, while his middle-aged son gambles with his friends. There are touching scenes when the grandson of Abul Khair wants to buy fish for meal and the money earned by selling the cloth does not cover the cost of fish. The grandson looks at the fish with tears in his eyes as a rich shop-owner could purchase the fish, and they could not.

Another scene is when Abul Khair asks his daughter-in-law to send his mentally retarded daughter acted by Neema Rahman back to her husband's house who does not want to have her back. Other characters that this tele-serial highlights is the portrayal of eunuchs in the society. They are shown with full make up, effeminate behavior, roaming in the markets, singing songs to earn their living.

## Shantiniketan

**continued from page 10**  
**participated by Santhal tribals, Baul singers, students, teachers and a large number of traders and craftsmen from north-eastern parts of India. The fair provides a glimpse of**



Baul Panchami celebrations

## Farringtons

**continued from page 10**  
**University level. I am grateful to my parents for having chosen Farringtons to prepare me for the higher levels of my academic pursuits. Wherever I go from here, I am certain that Farringtons would always have a special place in my mind and I**

would always find it a delightful experience to revisit Farringtons.

The writer is a Bangladeshi student studying in Kent who is just about to finish her "A" level and enter BA studies in Cambridge University.