

Bangladesh and its Attitude towards the External World

BOOK REVIEW

Title: Bangladesh and the South Asian International System

Author: Dilara Chowdhury

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THE book reached me at a time when a parliamentary stalemate was prevailing over an issue of foreign policy: to condemn or not to condemn the Hebron killing. The Hamletic dilemma was brought to an end with the government ultimately deploring the massacre and simultaneously quenching the Opposition's query about external affairs.

Published by the Academic Publishers in 1992, Professor Dilara Chowdhury's book "Bangladesh and the South Asian International System", for obvious reasons, has no reference to the latest carnage at the Gaza Strip. However, the book indicates that a small power like Bangladesh can only react and not really act in any international crisis. At the same time, the book tends to highlight the importance of Bangladesh in the South Asian regional politics, specially in the present changed global scenario.

The importance is suggested in the backdrop of Bangladesh's relation with the major powers (the United States, Russia and China) and that of our big neighbours (India and Pakistan). In doing so, the author observes that the foreign policy of Bangladesh maintained a remarkable consistency ever since its emergence. The external policy of Bangladesh survived through different military coups and political violence that brought about changes in the government. The nadir of this consistency lies in the government's attitude of 'non-alignment' towards the external world.

Interestingly, the author finds that this policy of non-alignment is vital for national security, both political and economic, which the previous

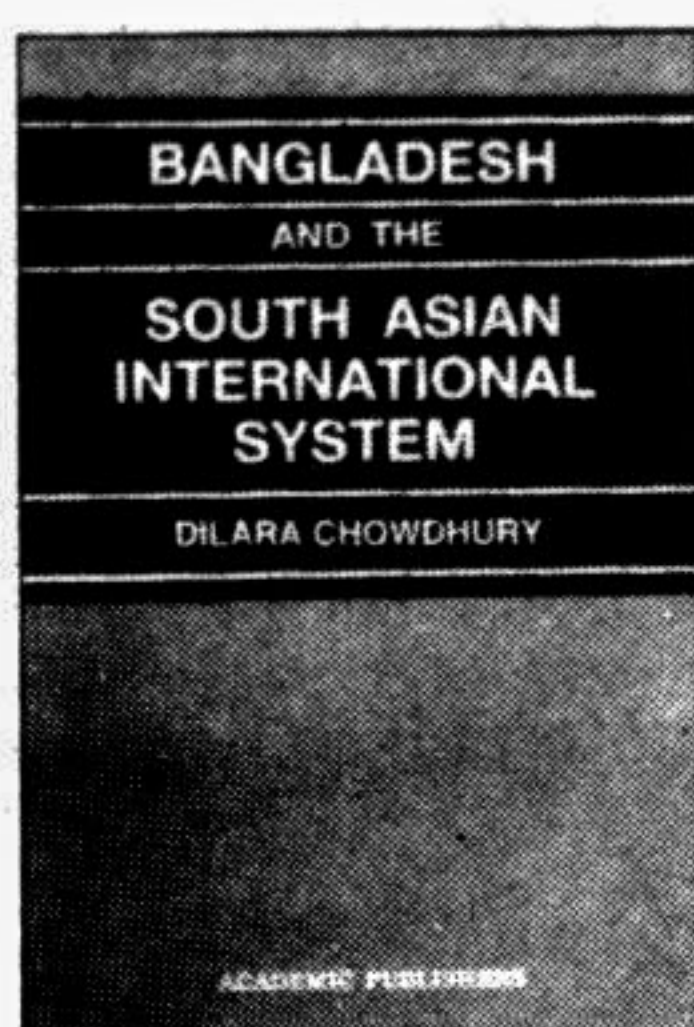
governments learnt from the Pakistani experience of 'disintegration'. In the introductory note, she says: "The option (for non-alignment) has been conditioned by Dhaka's historical experiences. During pre-independence days there was extreme polarisation in the subcontinent due to Pakistan's formal alliances with the West and India's informal links with the Soviet Union. Thanks to the Superpowers' rivalry, Pakistan's policy of alignment, instead of protecting its political independence and territorial integrity, hastened its disintegration. This was a lesson for Dhaka". (Bangladesh and the South Asian International System, pp 8) For a war-ravaged nation, economic development — rather foreign aid and geopolitical realities — also demanded this adoption of non-alignment and, curiously, these two factors forced the previous governments to tilt, albeit covertly, towards the major powers and big neighbours. "In the early years of independence", writes Prof Chowdhury, Dhaka visibly leaned on the Indo-Soviet bloc, in spite of its declared faith in non-alignment". In a press conference in London in 1972, President Sheikh Mujibur Rahman said, "We are a small

country. We want friendship with all and malice towards none".

Prof Chowdhury, quoting Zillur Rahman, notes that during President Zia's rule relationships between Bangladesh and the US improved because the US had considerable support among the bureaucrats, a segment of the army and opposition parties; there was mass resentment during Mujib's rule and suspicions grew on the Soviet role at the Chittagong port.

Zia's regime witnessed the improvement of US-Bangladesh and Sino-Bangladesh relationships with concomitant deterioration of Indo-Bangladesh and Soviet-Bangladesh relationships. Ziaur Rahman and later his successor Hussain Muhammad Ershad also succeeded in solidifying the bond with Muslim countries.

While referring to the present relationship with Russia, Prof Chowdhury comments that Moscow has realised 'India's ambition of power-centre in its own right, indicated by India's consistent and polite refusal to be drawn completely into the Soviet orbit... Moscow would now probably deal with Bangladesh on its own without subordinating



it to New Delhi". Regarding Soviet role during the 'Bangladesh War', Prof Chowdhury remarks, "... it was fairly simple for Moscow to determine and pursue a policy which helped enhance its national interests in the region". For some mysterious reasons, the humanitarian reason behind the Soviet role, I feel, is not duly addressed. And it appears that the author time and again intends to see the emergence of a sovereign Bangladesh as a 'diplomatic victory for India and the Soviet Union'.

About Bangladesh and the United States relationship, the author makes a frank and bold observation. She says, "... the assistance programme gives the US a strong foothold in Bangladesh's strategic location near the Indian Ocean she adds, "Washington wants a stable Bangladesh... political and economic chaos will certainly upset the status quo, which would be detrimental to the US interests in the South Asia".

Again, talking about Indo-Bangladesh relationship, Prof Chowdhury raises the Farakka, border dispute, Talpatti, fencing, trade and other bilateral issues to comment: New Delhi is allowing outstanding disputes to continue in order to provide itself with political levers, which are taking their toll on the bilateral relationship.

The writer sums up the Indo-Bangladesh relation as a journey from euphoria to pragmatism.

A good deal of the 344 page book - 69 pages, to be precise - deals with the Pakistan-Bangladesh relationship to conclude that "Pakistan and Bangladesh have developed a meaningful and mutually beneficial relationship".

An interesting comparison between the then East Pakistani and West Pakistani civil service employees and gazetted and non-gazetted officers are one of the outstanding inclusions in the book which helps us to understand the disparity that hastened 'Pakistan's disintegration'. Many of the ideas of the book are the fruit of the author's painstaking endeavour — as exemplified in the long list of bibliography. They are thought-provoking and can easily entail a series of healthy debate.

Foreign policy in itself is a very complicated subject, but the author — an associate professor of Government and Politics at the Jahangirnagar University — deftly and lucidly delves into her subject. The 'internal determinant of foreign policy' — the impact of internal situation of a country on its external issues and humanitarian factors, often slips out of the authors discussion.

In any regard, the ordinary-looking extraordinary book is worth reading to learn more about Bangladesh and its attitude towards the external world.

Reviewed by
Shamsad Mortuza

Tele-View

by Kaiser Parvez Ali

EID programmes telecast by BTV seem to be deteriorating with each Eid. This year no attractive trailers were shown prior to Eid as was done previously. BTV has really taken this year's Eid programmes lightly and did not take into account the expectations of millions of viewers who were waiting during the holidays for entertaining programmes.

Some of the major Eid programmes telecast by BTV were Bengali feature films, cartoon film, Ananda Mela, special Eid drama, Eider Katha Mala.

Let us begin with the special Eid drama Hashi Khushi. I think, after watching this drama viewers must have been broken into kanna as there was nothing special about it and it bored them as much. Viewers were waiting when this natak would end and they can watch the next Eid attraction. The drama was like the type shown every week. Shami Kaiser's overacting must have displeased many a viewer. The clash of ego between the two restaurant owners was blown out of proportion and was far away from reality. The drama failed to fulfil the expectation of majority viewers. Also televiewers were making less meaning out of the natak as everything seemed to be 'in confusion'.

Two Bengali feature films were shown, one on the Eid day and the other on the next. The first one was 'Neel Akasher Neechay' starring Razzak and Kabari. The film made in the late sixties was a clean entertainer with enchanting and captivating songs. The hero and the heroine looked bearable with fresh innocent looks. The other film was 'Moroner Porey' starring Alamgir and Shabana. They both received the best actor and actress award for this tragedy film. The story was off-

beat type where the hero Alamgir loses both his hands at the factory machine while Shabana has lungs cancer. After Alamgir is sacked from the factory for becoming invalid, he tries hard not to beg but he has no other alternative. Shabana, realizing she has little time left to live, starts to distribute their six children one by one to different childless parents for adoption. Shabana dies in the end. The tragic serious film was obviously good but would have been suitable for other days or occasions and not for the second day of Eid holidays when the viewers were in a festive mood.

Ananda Mela shown late night on the Eid day started with an interesting topic where Biman passengers board the plane and the entertainment begins on the screen.

The scene is then brought into the BTV studios with the cardboard of Biman aircraft in the background. Occasionally footage of exterior of Biman flight was brought on the miniscreen. With the passage of time gradually the show became boring, except the Jewel Aish magic part. The last part of the show had a play which was lengthy and not fit to be incorporated in Ananda Mela.

The host of the show was seen at times reading his script which must not have been the case. More rehearsals and memorizing or cueing and professionalism was required.

Eider Katha Mala telecast on the second day of Eid holidays was interesting having three celebrities Bipasha, Mou and Moushumi. They were interviewed on their previous Eid experiences and later songs of their choices were telecast. This sort of programmes need to be telecast where innovation and creativity play a part.

Chhaya Chhanda (film

songs) telecast on Eid occasion was different than previous years'. This year only the award winning songs were selected. These popular songs were enchanting. The feature length cartoon film Gulliver's Travels although old was interesting and viewers of all ages enjoyed the film show which was very lively with special effects and good techniques. More of this type of short cartoon films could have been shown on BTV for our youngsters on special occasions.

Tathapi episode telecast on Tuesday had Rehan Sobhan in dilemma. He was shown at various times pondering over his arrested girlfriend Kanak's (Polly Zohur) fate in the gold smuggling case. Although absolutely sure that she was not in anyway involved, could do nothing to save her, and it disturbed him more that he had arrested her on the basis of evidence inside the suitcase she was carrying.

During the trial when questioned by a lawyer, Kanak claims the suitcase as belonging to her, but it was shown earlier that her suitcase got replaced by another one. It is surprising that she cannot recognize that the suitcase is not hers. Meanwhile, her jealous colleague who was witness to the replacement of the suitcase realizes his mistake of not informing Rehan of Kanak's innocence and consults a surveillance officer who assures him of assistance to save Kanak from conviction on gold smuggling.

The smugglers, angry will Rehan that the gold could not pass out of airport, plan to take revenge by creating family problems at his housefront. They inform Rehan by a letter that one day Kanak would take his dead mother's place. This piece of information annoys him and he questions his father, who tries to explain the logic in case he takes the decision to marry Kanak. The serial seems to go deeper and deeper with each episode. Let us see how deep it goes next week.

Book Production Skills in South Asia

THIS is somewhat more from my personal experience than based on much detailed knowledge. And, do not pretend to be talking from much wisdom either. This is merely to give some ideas on book production skills in South Asia. The production skills are pretty much the same everywhere, but the educational, social and economic conditions of the societies that produce books are quite different in different parts of even the SAARC countries.

The possible justification for this paper is that I should try first to list some of the universals in book production in broad terms applicable to any culture — in terms especially appropriate for the publishing industries in this part of the world.

In any developing country book publishing is an industry small in monetary terms. "Even then it is a small switch that can set in motion and control a machine or an electrical system carrying power to remote areas. Book publishing is the key to educational and social and economic development."

To produce a book is a teamwork before it goes to the hands of the readers. Each member of the team has a necessary part to play and one of them can be eliminated. In the book industry four basic elements must exist. These are the author of a manuscript, the printer who turns the manuscript into a book, and a bookseller who hands the book to over readers. But the fourth element who is in the most central position and whose job is least understood by people outside the book field is the publisher, the main strategist and organizer of the total undertaking, and one who serves as the basic taker of the business risk of the book phenomenon. The publisher's skill is based not only on the knowledge of printing technology, but also involves knowledge about the socio-economic conditions of the people for whom the book is produced. He must have imagination and ideas also. These skills are mostly developed through experience. Experience cannot be expected where book publication is not free and economically lucrative. In developing countries the schools text book sector is a most viable business. This is almost everywhere monopoly business of the government. This is one reason why publication could not develop as a commercially inviting proposition in most SAARC countries except India.

In some parts of the world, specially in developing countries in South Asia, major publishers sometimes own their own printing press and bookshops or printers or booksellers go into book publishing. And in areas where professional publishing has not yet developed, authors serve as their own publisher, arranging a printer to print the books. The author then sells to the bookshops or directly to individual readers.

The printer is the manufacturer. They receive

manuscripts from publisher, and compose, print and bind an edition and send the book to the publisher. The printer plays no part in deciding what to print but merely does the job required by the publishers. So the publisher controls the production depending on their skills.

When we discuss the production skills — pat comes up the questions of book design: type arrangement, page layout, colours of ink etc., the quality of printing, quality and appropriateness of paper, the efficiency of proof reading, quality of binding and maintaining production schedule.

In many SAARC countries the profession of book design was unknown or designers were not available or used in book production. But now within the last 6/7 years the situation has greatly changed due to development of modern electronic technology of desktop publishing marrying old typographic concepts to new computer technology, making, possible relatively inexpensive composition of books by publishers themselves rather than separate type-setters. Desktop publishing combines a micro-computer, computer programmes (software) for word

processing on paper or tracing ready-copy for plates for printing. The newest revolution including colour scanning has increased the production skill in publishing and the new technology has been adopted by publishers in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and to some extent in Nepal. Publishers in Bangladesh have adopted almost all of the new technology to improve their production skill. Some publishers are now using the most advanced new system that combine typeset quality text colour graphics on a page electronically. At the same time National Book Centre Bangladesh is providing facilities, to improve book production skill to the publisher for further improvement of the process from editing to printing as well as marketing of books. All the training courses are conducted by Bangladesh National Book Centre on a regular basis.

Due to improvement in our production skill publishers are producing good quality books and have been able to export our product to Europe, USA, India, Japan, Malaysia etc. We are proud that we have received an order from an European publisher to produce a book for them. It proves that our skills have gone up to an international standard. But I must confess that, unfortunately, our binding quality has not yet been able to improve matching. The worst of all the weaknesses the publishers in Bangladesh suffer from involves miserable capital flow.

At the time of independence both India and Pakistan had some book production infrastructures which had continued to build an effective publishing industry. Both the countries have been able to improve their production skill in almost all sectors, including processing on paper or tracing ready-copy for plates for printing. The newest revolution including colour scanning has increased the production skill in publishing and the new technology has been adopted by publishers in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and to some extent in Nepal. Publishers in Bangladesh have adopted almost all of the new technology to improve their production skill. Some publishers are now using the most advanced new system that combine typeset quality text colour graphics on a page electronically. At the same time National Book Centre Bangladesh is providing facilities, to improve book production skill to the publisher for further improvement of the process from editing to printing as well as marketing of books. All the training courses are conducted by Bangladesh National Book Centre on a regular basis.

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English language publications have gone up by 70 per cent since 1985. Because of considerable import of books from the west, the Sri Lankans have become quality conscious although the cost of production is relatively high due to high cost of import of printing paper, ink and machinery etc. In such a situation the production of books in general is understandably still very small in volume.

Training for the development of book production skills is not institutionalised in the developed countries. In developing countries where publishing is not yet economically popular and viable there is a need of institutional training in this field. Asian Cultural Center for UNESCO is carrying out an yearly training programme for book personnel of these countries since 1972. Unfortunately most of these trainings are received by Government officers and not by professionals.

Before the socio-economic development plan was launched in Bhutan in 1961, no secular schools existed in the Kingdom, but religious-centred education was offered in a few monasteries. Religious text-books for these institutions were published using xylographic printing. Formal schools came into existence after 1961 and the Department of Education began to publish textbooks in Dzongkha (the national language). The Department of Education publishes its own English language books to suit Bhutanese schools, particularly at the primary level. Publications in the field of education have increased in recent years with the introduction of a new primary curriculum.

Bhutan has a few publishers dealing with books on various subjects like history, folk songs, folk tales, legends, religious texts, language learning materials and so on. Letterpress and offset are the main means of printing, while xylography is not uncommon for religious books; for quality colour printing, printers in India and other foreign countries are utilised.

In Maldives there are only 24 titles produced annually whereas India produces 40,000. This is not as bad as it looks. While India produces one title for every 21,000 people, the Maldives produce one title for 8,000.

I have just pointed out some features and not discussed details of the book production facilities in the region. The up-to-date situation of production skills in all the SAARC countries, as we know, feature new and exciting developments almost weekly. The publisher and printer have want very much to take advantage of the continuing progress abroad in book production and reducing the production cost and prices.

The above was delivered as the keynote paper at the SAARC Seminar on Book Production and Marketing held in Dhaka on May 3-5. Mr Rahman is the Joint Managing Director of Academic Publishers.

Learning to Live between Cultures

Daya Kishan Thussu writes from London

Conflicts between Tutsis and Hutus in Rwanda, Serbs and Muslims in Bosnia, Azeris and Armenians in Nagorno Karabakh and Tamils and Sinhalese in Sri Lanka show an upsurge in ethnic hatred, undermining cultural diversity. At the same time, a more cosmopolitan global culture is evolving as a result of the information revolution. Gemini News Service examines the possibilities of living between cultures.



Global village: Looking for cultural identity

FROM Bosnia to Rwanda, multiculturalism is under attack. People of different religions, cultures and ethnic affiliations are finding it increasingly difficult to live together in peace. As always, cultural differences provide easy ammunition for those eager to seize power.

Whether it is in the former Soviet Union, where the break-up of the empire has blown the lid off simmering disputes, or in South Africa, as black majority rule becomes a reality, the rise of ethnic and national chauvinism threatens the very idea of co-existence between different communities and cultures.

As well as centuries-old rivalries, recession-hit Europe has seen the power of newer hatreds directed against immigrants, as reflected in the success of neo-fascists in the recent Italian elections. Yet at the same time as this upsurge in nationalism, a new kind of global cosmopolitanism is evolving. This century has seen huge movements of people across national boundaries, seeking new lives or refuge, bringing their culture with them and absorbing what they find.

Today it is as normal to see a black or a brown face in Europe and North America as a white one in Africa or Asia. One can find Coca-Cola and hamburgers in every corner of the globe as well as an Indian or a Chinese restaurant in all the world's major cities.

Legacies of migration can be traced in the ghly mixed populations of many countries. In Britain, a broadcaster of Caribbean origin anchors tele-

vision's most-watched News At Ten. Peru's President Alberto Fujimori is of Japanese descent. In neighbouring Argentina, the flamboyant President Carlos Menem has his roots in Lebanon. In Lebanon itself, President Rafiq Hariri originally comes from Saudi Arabia. In South Africa, Joe Slovo, of European Jewish extraction, is one of the most powerful leaders of the African National Congress.

In addition, the United Nations and its allied agencies, the growing number of transnational corporations and increasingly visible non-government organisations employ international staff, blending cultures and languages.

This growing cosmopolitanism is at the heart of the work of cultural theorists. One leading exponent of this esoteric discipline is Homi Bhabha, Reader in English Literature in Britain's Sussex University and a distant relative of a more famous Homi Bhabha, the father of India's nuclear programme.

In his new book, *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha focuses on the 'perplexities of living, as he does, 'between cultures'.

He argues that migrant intellectuals from the Third World have broken the boundaries of traditional cultural debate and emphasised other ways of looking at the evolving global culture. Prominent among them is Salman Rushdie, now in his fifth year of hiding from Islamic militants for his liberal cultural outlook, who rejoices in the idea of 'cultural hybridity'.

Bhabha was born in Bombay to a Parsee family — a small

sect of fire-worshippers who originally came from Iran — and says he always felt 'outside the Indian mainstream'.

He has lived in Britain for more than 20 years and has acquired the status of what an Oxford professor called one of 'the West's finest intellectuals'. Palestinian-American academic Edward Said has called him 'a theorist of uncommon power'.

Educated in Bombay's Elphinstone College and then at Oxford University, Bhabha represents that group of Indians who, though born in India, are every bit Western in their attitude and language.

Bombay, he says with a glint in his eye, has a cosmopolitan identity. It has no pure, authentic culture: it is India in miniature, a 'mix of styles' — he labelled it 'Bombay Mix' in a talk for the BBC.

Bhabha argues that the Western concept of 'organic authentic national culture' needs to be questioned in today's interdependent and increasingly cosmopolitan world.

His cosmopolitanism is well-founded. His wife was born in a German-Jewish family which had fled the Nazis to live in Bombay. He finds similarities between the Jews and Parsees in that both are predominantly urban professional bourgeoisies. But unlike the Jews, the Parsees do not have a Zionist movement, a need for a 'homeland'.

According to Bhabha, the migrant is the key to a new view of culture, undermining the idea that culture and nation are the same. This challenge to the 'sovereignty of national culture as imagined

community' is being made by those who feel outside this community.

In the United States — the most culturally mixed of all societies — there has been a great debate about the inadequacy of the 'grand narrative' of Western civilisation, what feminists call the work of 'dead white males.'

Instead of culture being used for the 'transmission of national traditions', Bhabha sees a need for a new 'global analysis of culture' and a new category of world literature based on the 'histories of migrants, the colonised, or political refugees.'

This analysis, he says, should not be based on the vision of a 'global village' promoted by the media and corporate interests, but on a recognition of the 'cosmopolitanism of the modern world.'

Bhabha challenges the West's 'progressive myth of modernity,' which relegates the colonised nations to a historical backwater, claiming that racism has been and still is an integral part 'of the historical traditions of civic and liberal humanism.'

But he had not been able to fully extricate himself from that tradition. That he uses the phrase 'post-colonial' rather than 'post-independent' in his discussion of Third World cultures shows how much his intellectual framework is Eurocentric.

He is wary of discussing the political aspects of cultural domination — a kind of cultural colonialism which exists in insidious forms in an age when colonialism has supposedly ended.

Given that the world's information and culture industries — film, television, videos, computers, books and news — are dominated by the West, the emerging information society is inevitably influenced by a Western view of the world.

New media technology such as cable and satellite is bringing consumer culture, instantly, to the world's remotest parts. Does the 'global village' mean everyone will end up speaking Americanised English, watching reruns of bad American television serials and growing up on a diet of violent Hollywood films and banal celebrity chat and game shows?

Bhabha is more optimistic. He is convinced that many Third World cultures have the strength to take on the consumerist onslaught. For example, he says, the cultural elite in India has taken 'what is best in the West and Indianised it,' in the same way as Western Europe became an inheritor of the classical Greek and Roman cultures.

He hopes that India will become a carrier of the modernist idea. However, his optimism appears ambitious when the forces of reaction seem to get stronger in India as in the rest of the world.

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