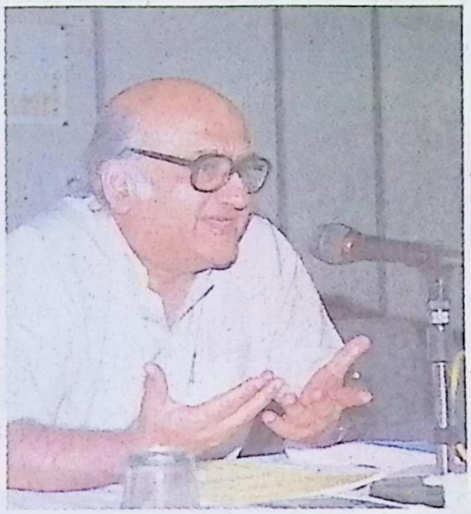
The Conscience Keeper

Deb Mukharji runs an appreciative eye over this seminal collection



Collected Works of Rehman Sobhan (in three volumes)

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Vol I Challenging Injustice: The Odyssey of a Bangladeshi Economist
Vol II Milestones to Bangladesh
Vol III The Political Economy of Malgovernance in

PROFESSOR Rehman Sobhan is among the best known and respected figures in Bangladesh, some may say a keeper of the nation's economic conscience. The three volumes of his collected works total an impressive 1,448 pages, comprising 188 articles and speeches.

His insight has focused beyond his training and profession as an economist to cover a wide arc, which has included politics, administration, and statecraft. The span of time over which he ranges effortlessly starts with the last decade of united Pakistan to the fourth decade of independent Bangladesh.

It can be said without exaggeration that no understanding of the process which led to the emergence of Bangladesh, and the first three and a half decades of its existence, can be complete without an acquaintance with his work. It is not necessary that one must always agree with his views. But there must be admiration for his passion and commitment to his beliefs, mostly supported by facts and figures and, particularly, the complete absence of equivocation.

Indeed, the reader, to quote the author's own words: "[W]ill be left with few doubts in their minds on where I stand on the particular issues I have addressed, or what I believe should be done to challenge the injustices which have risen, and continue to divide national as well as global society."

Professor Sobhan's approach is perhaps best summed up in the foreword by Professor Amartya Sen, as being "characterised by his determined will to challenge and fight against powerful -- and sometimes dangerous -- forces that imprisoned the human mind and body in dungeons of societal inequity."

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Though the editors have done a commendable job in trying to put the articles in three separate compartments, it was inevitable that there would be leap-frogging of dates and stated subject matters, with a particular strain of thought or argument seen in different volumes, besides, of course, repetition. I have attempted to place them together in the short space available, though each of the areas of his concern should ideally deserve separate assessment.

The thread of the deprivation of the deprived runs seamlessly through Sobhan's writings over forty five years, starting with the cold logic of figures with which he challenged the rulers of Pakistan in the decade of the sixties. At the