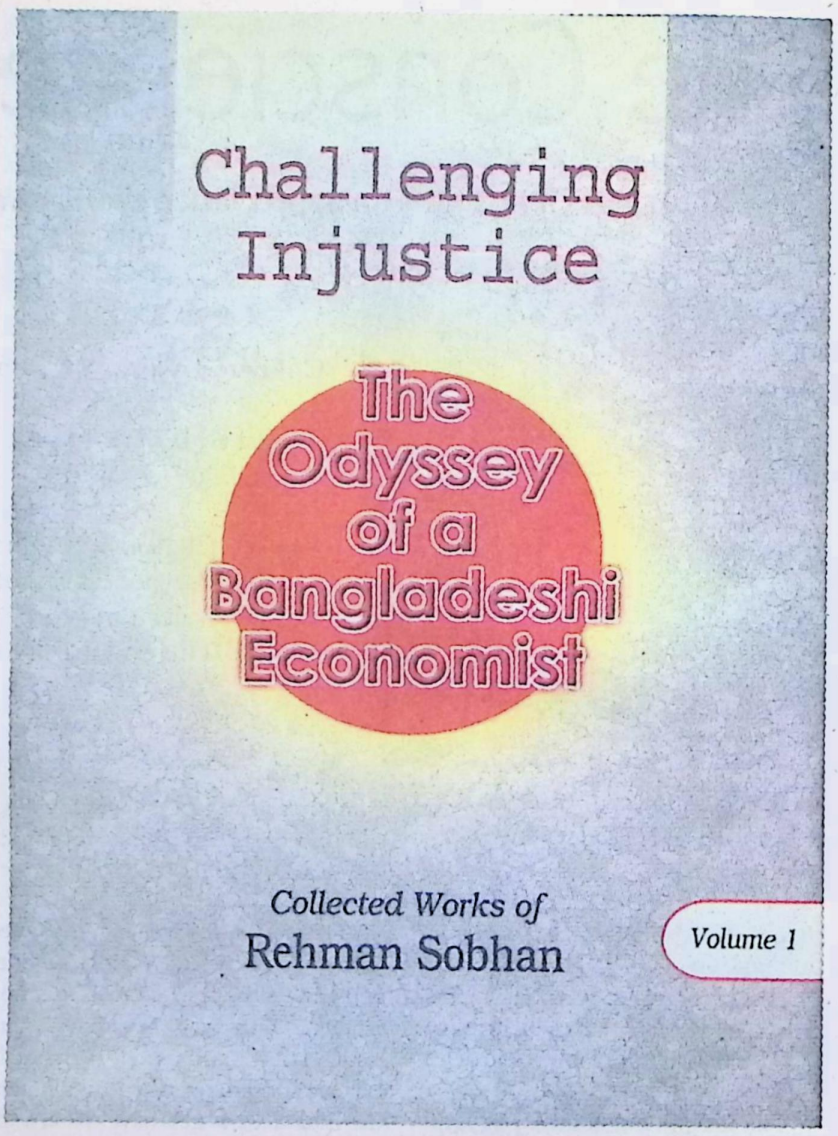
time, his arguments as an economist increasingly gathered the intensity of a nationalist, as he laid bare the exploitation of East Pakistan by the ruling establishment in West Pakistan.

Starting in 1947 with about the same base, a variety of measures were taken -- or not taken -- which widened the economic gulf. East Pakistan was impoverished as investments were channeled into West Pakistan, whose deficits were met largely by foreign aid.

Sobhan went into the minutiae of personal consumption levels to prove his point. The essential problem, he was to say, was political and not economic, and the "failure of the ruling elite of Pakistan to recognise the unique feature of two economies ... remains as the source of the disparities perpetuated by the policies of the Pakistani state."

In a retrospective analysis many years later, he was to describe the struggle of the sixties as 1. Restoration of democracy where power could be shared according to population. 2. Realisation of autonomy and self-rule. 3. Channeling of resources by the centre for development and 4. Due recognition of Bangla.

The Pakistan resolution of 1940, he pointed out, did not, in constitutional terms, demand a Pakistani nation state, but regional autonomy for two Muslim majority areas. In prescient words of caution, he said in 1970: "Autonomy and self-rule does not mean a new license to our Bengali bourgeoisie and power hungry bureaucrats to promote their personal property and ambitions." In 1969, the still young Sobhan had said that that was East Pakistan's moment of truth, and circumstances could be propitious for compressing the process of radicalisation. This would not happen even decades after the emergence of Bangladesh as master of its own destiny.



A series of articles from 1969 to 1971, occasionally under a nom de plume, brings back the uncertain yet heady days that were to lead to the events of 1971, which I had the occasion of observing from Islamabad. It is clear that people like Rehman Sobhan had foreseen the possibility of the shedding of blood to ensure East Pakistan's dues.

Understandably, Sobhan saw the emergence of Bangladesh in largely economic terms, even though he was not unmindful of the language movement. This area merited somewhat greater clarity and focus. The economic element may have been the underlying reason for East Pakistan's demands for autonomy, as reflected in Mujib's Six Points of 1966. But in the public mind, the language movement and the assertion of the Bengali cultural identity had a far more emotive, and no less political, appeal.

This continues to be starkly underlined by the fact that the issues which have divided Bangladesh politics, "duopoly" as Sobhan describes it, are not based on issues of economics, where the areas of disagreement are at best marginal, but of identity. Later, Sobhan would himself lament the "resurrection of those very forces which remained deeply inimical to the