historical processes which shaped the emergence of Bangladesh." These forces are clearly identifiable with those continuing to be imbued with the tunnel vision of a religion-based state.

In stressing the economic content of aspirations, Sobhan perhaps strays into shallows. While one may agree with the essentially economic basis of the Bengali Muslims' support for Pakistan, the assertion that this sense of nationalism, according to him well pre-dating partition, had a territorial definition as comprising the eastern part of the subcontinent, may not bear scrutiny.

The Bengali Muslim, particularly from eastern Bengal, had been, or had been made to be, on the back foot since 1757. 1857 would enhance the angst, and the annulment of Curzon's partition of Bengal did not help; neither did Chittaranjan Das's inability to proceed with the Bengal Pact. But investing this quest for a fair deal with a particular sense of Bengali Muslim nationalism for over "two centuries," as he was later to assert, or placing it in a territorial framework, is open to question.

Sobhan's belief in the uniqueness of the Bengali people is reflected in his observation: "Our Indian identity was, however, itself the by-product of external conquest where rulers from Northern India incorporated the peoples of Bengal into a succession of empires which culminated in the British empire," and needs to be seen in the context of an earlier remark from his days as a Pakistani national: "Nehru's myth of an India united by history and economics was confined to a narrow educated elite which myopically ignored the transcendental social realities of India."

One need only comment that had there been no external con- have been hardly any Muslims in Bengal. Bengal never was an island unto itself, as is true of most of the elements that comprised India. As to the "myth" of Nehru's convictions, a more mature Sobhan later takes a different view of the elements that unite South Asia.

From his earliest days, Rehman Sobhan has been "challenging injustice." Starting with his defence of the rights of the exploited people of East Pakistan, he has been relentless in exposing the hollowness of government policies that benefit only the privileged, and the foreign aid that disempowers governments who become alienated from the people as they seek to serve foreign prescriptions.

For him, poverty is the outcome of structural injustice rather than a deficiency of resources, and is perpetuated by the absence of planning for the poor. In the mid-nineties, he questioned the wisdom of market reforms which were hurting local industry, and the government's externally induced policies on withdrawing subsidies. For him, what is required is the "reconstruction of a polity committed to preserving state sovereignty, based on authentically representative institutions where work rather than access governs the distribution of material benefits."

Criticism of the effects of foreign aid and its manipulative nature remain a constant theme, and Sobhan implies that the restrictions on food aid by the United States may have been designed to create the ground for the violent changes of August 1975. Critical of the aid agenda of donors and their hegemony over policy reforms, he would like Bangladesh to rethink the aid relationship and recover the ownership of its reform process.

There is trenchant criticism of the economic policies of successive governments of Bangladesh. While investments are available for urban development and the rich flourish, there is little concern for the peasants "where our rural population remain victims of both societal and government injustices." This, in turn, has created "two societies, (which) remains in violation of the social contract which has underwritten Bangladesh's struggle for liberation."

Rehman Sobhan had been among the circle of people who advised Mujib on economic issues in the sixties (and was to participate in planning after the emergence of Bangladesh). He is clear that it was Mujib's ability to reach out to the people, far beyond the confines of the bourgeoisie in the cities, that prepared the ground for the stunning victory of the Awami League in the elections of 1970, and their subsequent participation in the war of liberation. He sees the assassination of Mujib, and the efforts not to accord him the recognition he deserves, as being the root of much of the travails of Bangladesh.

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The nature of politics in Bangladesh is a matter of continuing dismay for Sobhan. He was to say in 2001: "It was one of the unique features of the Liberation War that it made all of us who were associated with it feel bigger than we were. It is the misfortune of post-Liberation Bangladesh that so much time is invested in making people feel smaller than they deserve to be."

In 1991, Prof. Sobhan had been inducted into the first caretaker government in Bangladesh under