the stewardship of Justice Shahabuddin, and had sought to bring about economic reforms in the short period available at a time when the "Bangladesh economy (was) in a state of structural atrophy with little capacity for structural mobilisation," but with the conviction that "democracy has to be accompanied by development."

In 1991, Sobhan had cautioned that holding elections was no guarantee for the future of democracy in Bangladesh, and wondered whether the democratic exercise would reverse the process of degeneration in the governance of the nation. These questions continue, unfortunately, to retain their acute relevance.

Five years later, he was to see the major political parties locked in a struggle that negated democracy. As a member of an eminent citizen's group he sought to bring about a minimum understanding that would prevent a collapse of the system, but was unable, ultimately, to persuade the ruling party from pursuing the "March of Folly." His articles on the political situation in 1995-96 bring alive the obduracy of the political leadership in pursuing the "March of Folly," which I had occasion to observe from the sidelines in Dhaka. Ironically, there would be a replay of a similar scenario in Bangladesh in 2006-2007, with, however, a different outcome.

Sobhan dismisses the military as an agent of change, and recalls members of the Pakistan civil society welcoming the military coup of 1999 in the context of the corrupt politics of the times. One can see similarities with the situation in Bangladesh today. For him, worthwhile change in Bangladesh can largely be brought about by small farmers, non-defaulting entrepreneurs, small entrepreneurs, micro-credit borrowers, NGOs, and the 1.5 million force of working women.

In a significant speech in 2006, Professor Sobhan dwelt on his

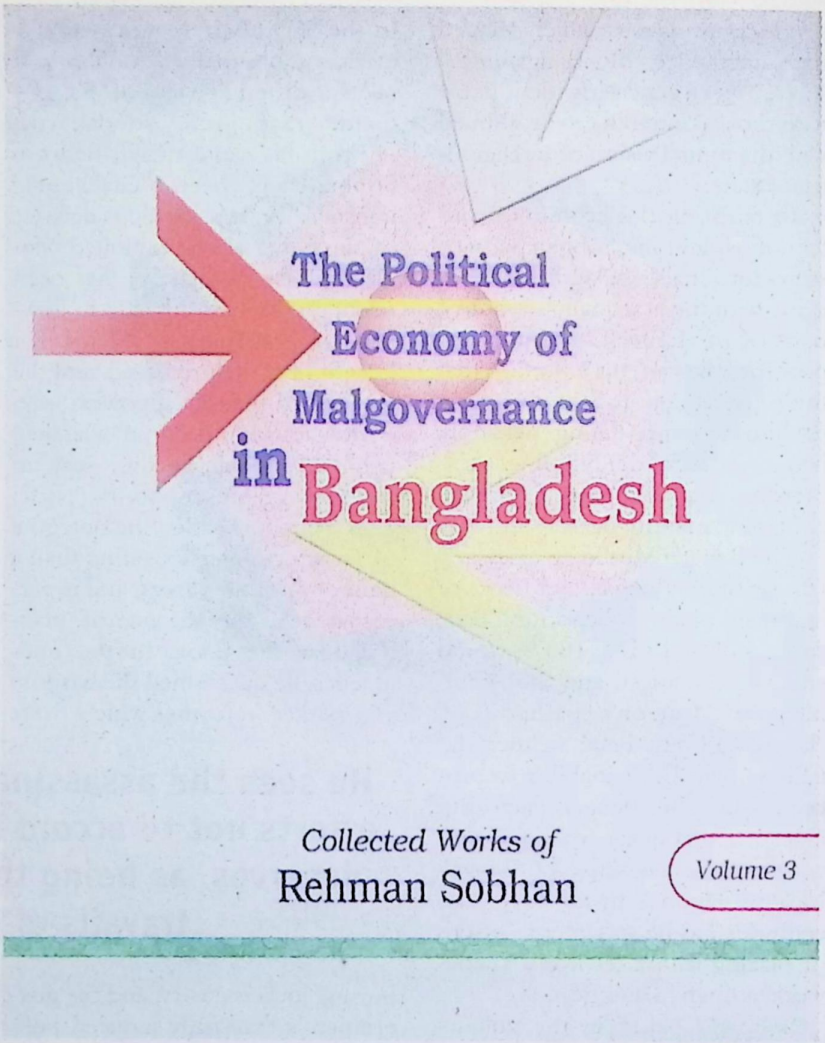


image of Bangladesh, its origins, and the current state of affairs. It is important as a reflection of his present thinking, and as a commentary on present day Bangladesh. He stresses that the founding fathers had envisioned a society "that projected our pluralism rather than our singularity" and a "genuinely inclusive society, which could democratise opportunities for the poor and dispossessed, as well as the religious and ethnic minorities," which are concepts reflected in the principles of the first Bangladesh Constitution, namely nationalism, democracy, secularism and socialism. This was a sea change from the exclusionary principles of the Pakistan Constitution.

Sobhan goes on to question the identification of religion as the basis of identity, overlooking the multiple identities of "culture, language, ethnicity, tribe, class, caste and gender," which were no less significant. In a departure from the Sobhan of the sixties, he says: "When Mohammad Ali Jinnah ... argued for Pakistan as the homeland of the Indian Mussalmans, he could not have been paying close attention to the geography of India." es on to refer to the abortive Cabinet Mission, differentiating between the political rhetoric of a Pakistan based on religious identity and "the realities of politics, economics and geography (which) demanded an integrated society that could accommodate the historical co-existence of peoples with different