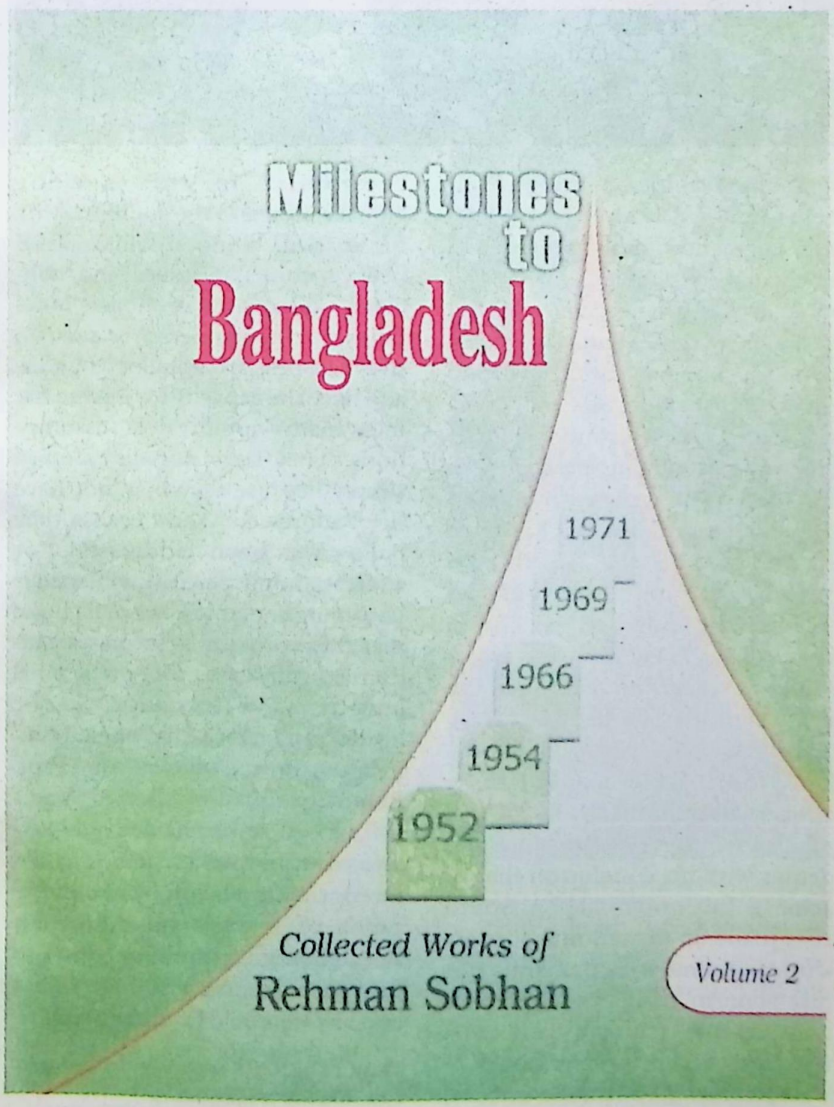
religious identities." With the passage of time, the author has evolved from the certitudes inculcated during his Pakistan days.

Prof. Sobhan describes how, in three crucial areas -- democracy, secularism and social justice -- the state of Bangladesh had failed to deliver. With money and muscle as the new pre-requisites for elections, parliament had ceased to be representative. Intimidation of the minorities increasingly ensure their diminishing participation in elections. Measures taken under the Enemy/Vested Properties Act have led to the seizure of assets of one million Hindu households, which have been dispossessed of two million acres of land. While Bangladesh may not have had many communal riots, in reality the minorities have been marginalised and "their communally defined identity ensures them a secure subsistence as long as they do not politically assert themselves or become vocal in making claims to secure their economic and human rights."

It is possible to overcome the present situation only by the creation of aninclusive and democratic society, and through a series of measures which empower the dispossessed.



I recall seeing just such a conditional promise held out by Golam Azam, then emir of the Jamaat-e-Islami, to the Hindus of Bangladesh some dozen years ago, though couched in honeyed terms. Social justice, emphasises Sobhan, remains a chimera, and the "reward systems of our society ... depend on access to power and influence." It is possible to overcome the present situation only by the creation of an inclusive and democratic society, and through a series of measures which empower the dispossessed.

Prof. Sobhan's focus is on Bangladesh, and there are, thus, only incidental references to India. His comments in a column written in November 1970, immediately before the landmark elections of December 7, on the anti-India campaign are, I think, revealing and worthy of analysis. Referring to the attitude of the younger voters, he writes: "The ancient nemesis of a Hindu-dominated India is an academic subject ... any suggestion of unification of Bengal or Indian domination of East Pakistan makes little sense to them."

Yet, this precisely is the image of India that is far from absent in an independent Bangladesh today. It would not be unreasonable to conclude that the same elements which tried unsuccessfully to fight the Awami League and the legitimate aspirations of East Pakistan on an India-to-be-distrusted-and-feared plank, and have subsequently wielded state power in Bangladesh, have successfully carried out their old indoctrination of fear and hatred of India. Regrettably, people of entirely different convictions