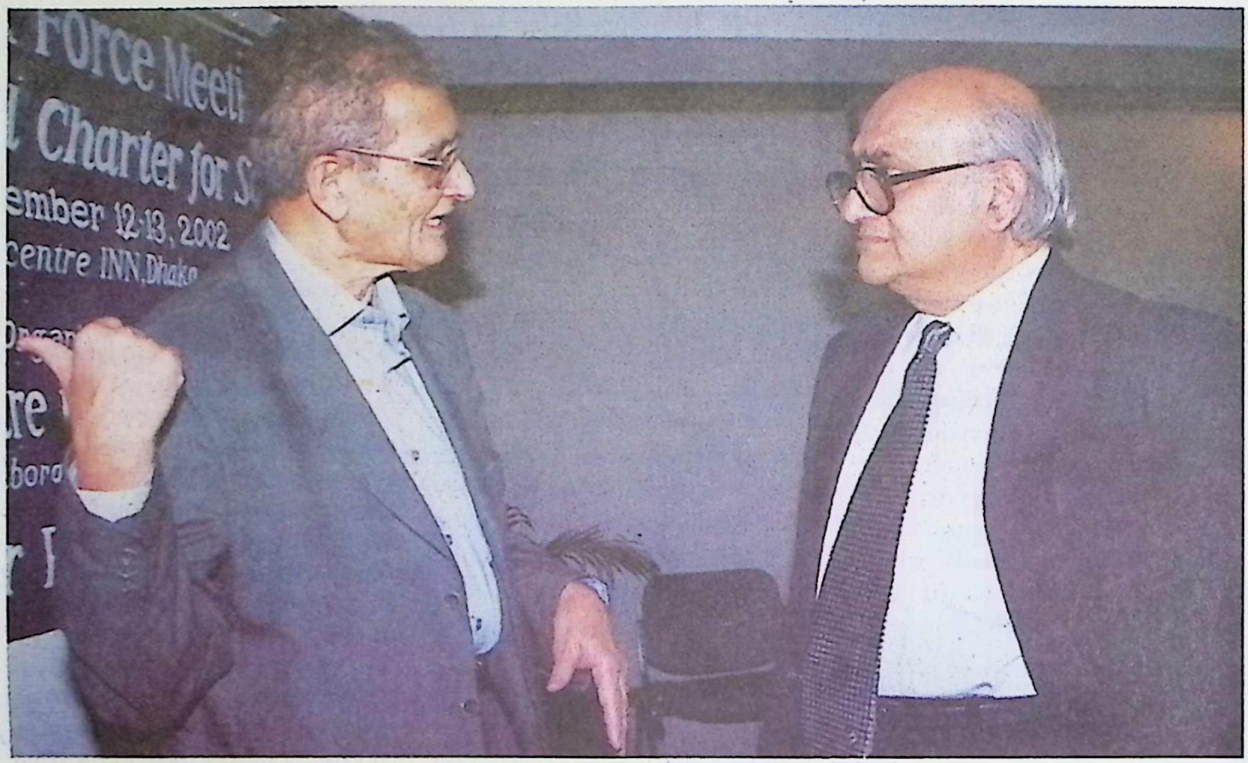


have unwit tingly contributed to this mindset. Prof. Sobhan himself refers on several occasions to the large trade gap with India emerging in the nineties, consequent upon Bangladesh accepting the donor driven advice of trade liberalisation. The negative effects of trade liberalisation on local industry can be a subject of genuine debate.

To single out Indian trade surpluses vis a vis Bangladesh is hardly relevant to the principles involved, and can only contribute to emphasising the negative image of India which some are so anxious to promote.

Prof. Sobhan states that civil societies have an important role to play to set the pace of liberalisation within the region, when governments have been ineffectual. In a major address in Delhi in 1997, he said: "The disruption of the largest integrated market in the developing world originated in the same fears and passions which originally made it unfeasible for its people to live together in the wake of the Imperial withdrawal from South Asia. The communal conflicts, first on confessional and then on ethnic/linguistic lines, which had divided communities, injected a passion and bloodletting into the conflicts which eventually undermined economic rationality and drove each faction of South Asia along the path of economic autarchy, without counting the cost."

One may disagree with his subsequent description of Kashmir as an item on the "unfinished agenda of partition," obviously an unwitting adoption of a Pakistani terminology. One may also question the primacy he accords to the integration of labour markets of South Asia, of obvious importance to Bangladesh and of some concern to India in terms of illegal migration. But no one would demur with his conclusion that to achieve full potential: "A South Asia made up of national borders without boundaries demands not just statesmanship by India but considerable courage and self-confidence from its neighbours."

Is Rehman Sobhan, the political economist in this age of globalisation and the supremacy of the market, tilting at windmills? I believe not. The issues and concerns, whose solution he has indefatigably championed over close to five decades, are genuine dragons and have the capacity to breathe fire into many comfortable assumptions. They have not disappeared simply because they may not have been addressed. And because they have not been addressed, or addressed only partially, violence is becoming endemic. One must hope that the words of advice and caution of this man of intellectual integrity and learning will be heeded, and not just in Bangladesh.

The three volumes of Prof. Rehman Sobhan's Collected Works will, of course, be retained by libraries and serious researchers. It would be enormously helpful if the publication of a single volume of his selected works, carefully edited to provide a window into both issues and history, could be undertaken.

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