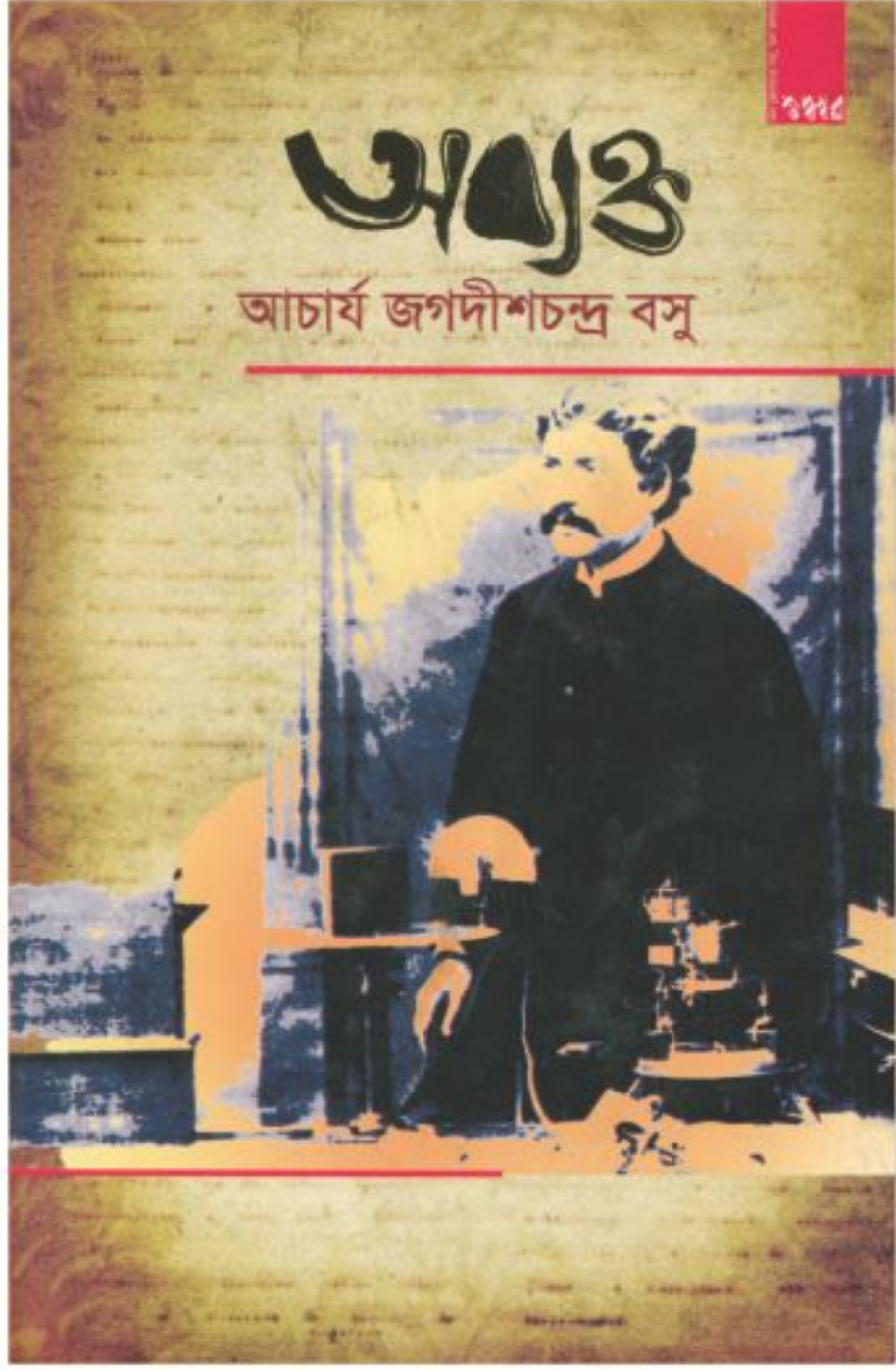


# The world of a scientist

Alamgir Khan reads of a famous Bengali



Abyakta  
Acharya Jagadish Chandra Bose  
Shuddhashar

JAGADISH Chandra Bose was born in Mymensingh and studied in Faridpur. Bikrampur, today's Munshiganj, is his parental home. He left for Calcutta in his childhood, later studied physics at Cambridge University and returned to India to teach at Presidency College. He faced discrimination there and refused to take any salary for three years until it was made equal to that of his white colleagues. In an India governed by the British, he became one of the leading scientists in the world. Jagadish invented the radio, but did not feel interested in patenting it, and so international recognition attached to the Nobel Prize went to Italy's Marconi. Afterwards, he spent a great deal of his life in proving the similarities between the living and the non-living. He stressed that plant life was the shadow of human life and did many experiments with plants to prove this theory. He was a life-long friend of Bengal's Nobel Laureate, the poet Rabindranath Tagore, and influenced him in several ways. Jagadish Chandra Bose was a great litterateur, too. He claimed that everything he wrote about science was first published in his mother tongue, Bengali, and later in a foreign language. He said this in his write-up, *Monon O Karon*, included in his book *Abyakta* (The Unexpressed), first published in 1921 and reprinted by Shuddhashar in 2012 in Dhaka.

This book, it is said, 'is still regarded by literary critics as a masterly exposition of the beauty of natural phenomena' (A versatile genius, Frontline, Nov. 20 – Dec 03, 2004). This small book contains Jagadish Chandra's scientific, philosophical and literary ideas. There is his short story, entitled *Palatak Tufan* (Runaway Cyclone), which many consider as the first instance of science fiction in Bengali. He has dwelt a lot on feelings in plants, which he discovered through various experiments done with tools of his own invention.

His crescograph, a device for measuring growth in plants, could measure a thousandth of a second. He wanted to name this device in Bengali as *briddhiman*, but later had to leave the idea aside because of lack of support from his countrymen who could appreciate nothing unless and until the West gave any certificate in its favour. The problem from the western intellectuals was that they used to change the Bengali names of his instruments into their European pronunciation, making them sound ridiculous, his *kunchanman* turned into *kanchan-man* the way India's Hori became Harry at the hands of Europeans.

Jagadish Chandra's love for his motherland is evident in his speech delivered at the literary conference in Mymensingh in 1911; his reverence for the land of his birth comes through in an address he delivered in Bikrampur in 1915. Both are included in this book. The Bikrampur speech is especially significant in understanding the vast humanitarian aspects of Jagadish's great mind. He stated in his speech that in a period when sending children to English medium schools was a symbol of elitism, his father sent him to a Bengali school. In school, on his right sat the son of his father's Muslim attendant and on his left was the son of a lower caste fisherman. He acquired a good deal of ideas about birds and animals from listening to their stories. When he came back home with his schoolmates, his mother used to entertain them equally with food without any discrimination. In his childhood, he could not even imagine that there could be any lower caste creatures among human beings or there were any problems in relations between Hindus and Muslims. In his view, those who are deemed lower-caste, untouchables in society, are the real manufacturers of all life-sustaining resources for the whole of mankind. Humanity also shines better in them than in the so-called higher caste people.

In the Bikrampur speech, he recalled the remarkable character of his father Bhagawan Chandra Bose, whose philosophy of life shaped the outlook and personality of Jagadish. Bhagawan Chandra engaged himself in setting up the first textile mill in the country, a tea garden in Assam, a loan office for farmers in Faridpur, industrial and agricultural fair in Faridpur, a technical school, etc., so that the lives of people could be improved in various aspects. He lost almost all his wealth in these development activities. Was he a failed man? Jagadish felt proud of this failed man, not because of his successes, but because of all his failures. Jagadish believed that big failures were nobler than petty successes.

There is much to learn from Jagadish Chandra's *Abyakta* now and in future as well. Recalling the works of Jagadish Chandra, a man deeply in love with his motherland, then known as Bengal, and following his ideals will benefit us more than anything else in this world.

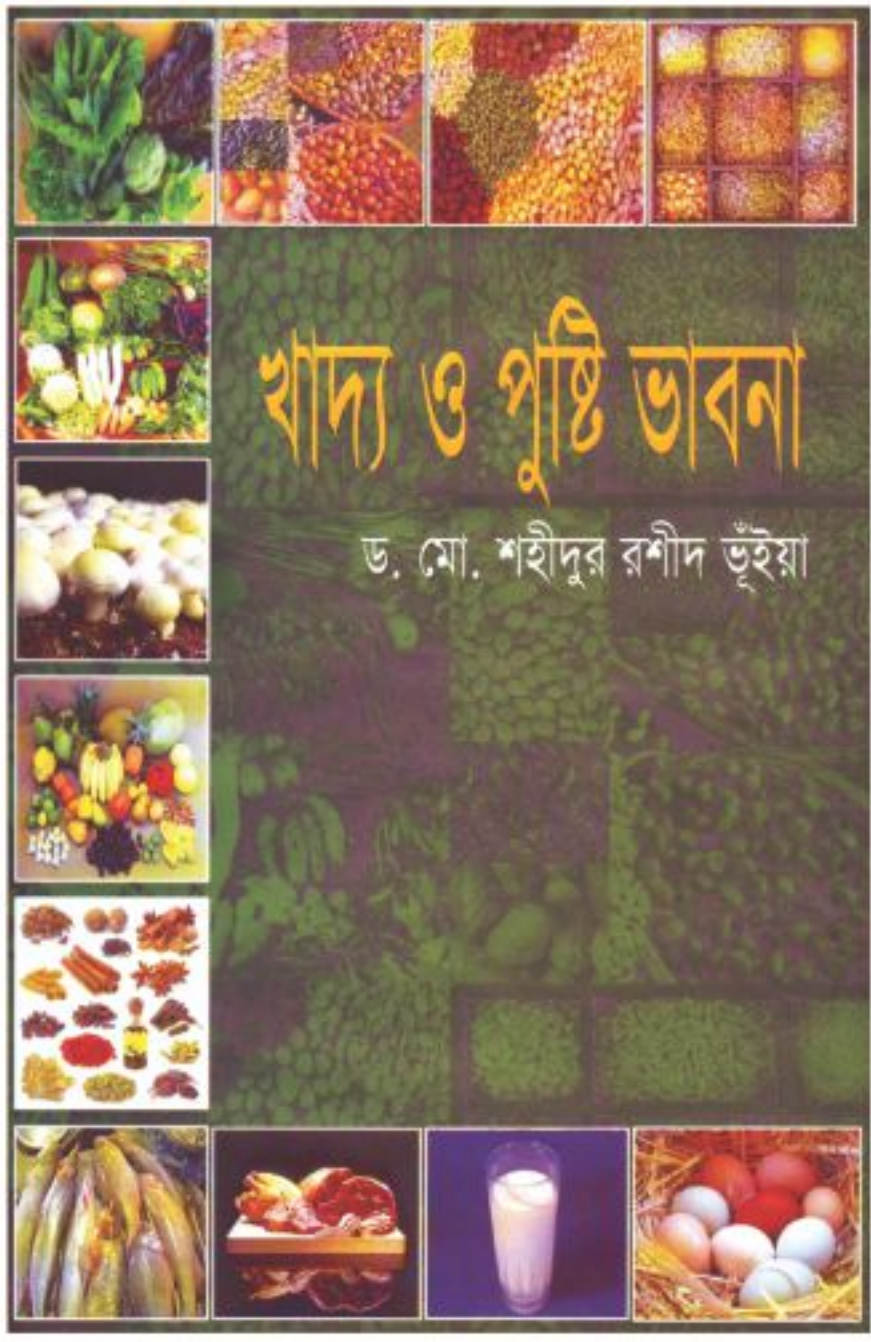
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# The food we need to eat

M. Zahidul Haque appreciates a new work

EVER since living organisms, including humans, began inhabiting this earth, food has been an indispensable item for their survival. In the beginning people used to take natural plant and animal parts to meet their daily food requirements. But with the increase of population, demand for food went up tremendously. Nutrition is another factor added to food. At this point, the world is much concerned about ensuring nutritious food supply to people.

In Bangladesh only a limited number of books has been written on food and nutrition. Appreciating the need for an exclusive book on food and nutrition, Dr. Md. Shahidur Rashid Bhuiyan has taken an initiative to produce a work on this subject. The result of his prudent thoughts is now out there. He has succeeded in bringing forth *Khadda O Pushti Bhabna*. With his long experience as a public agricultural university teacher and researcher in the field of agricultural science plus food related issues, Bhuiyan has discussed basics and applied sides of food and nutrition in seventeen mini segments. The work begins with the chapter, 'Khadda-Amader Pushtir Utsha'



Khadda O Pushti Bhabna  
Dr. Md. Shahidur Rashid Bhuiyan  
Pranto Prokashon

through additions of poisonous substances (e.g. formalin) in agricultural produce. The author offers suggestions in his book about motivating farmers toward clean and scientifically approved farming. At the same time, businessmen involved in such unethical practices of poisoning food items should be given motivational messages to create consciousness about the hazardous effects of food adulteration on human health. In other chapters, matters relating to nutritious foods, fat, vitamins, et cetera, have been discussed. The author has also put emphasis on the need for changing food habits in the chapter 'Proyojon Khadda Obhyash Poriborton' (Change of Food Habits Necessary).

Inclusion of a chart showing the food values of different foods in the appendix has added to the usefulness of the book. This reviewer feels that the book will be of great use to common readers, extension and nutrition workers, academics and students.

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# The poison in wealth

Shuvam Kabir is challenged by new fiction

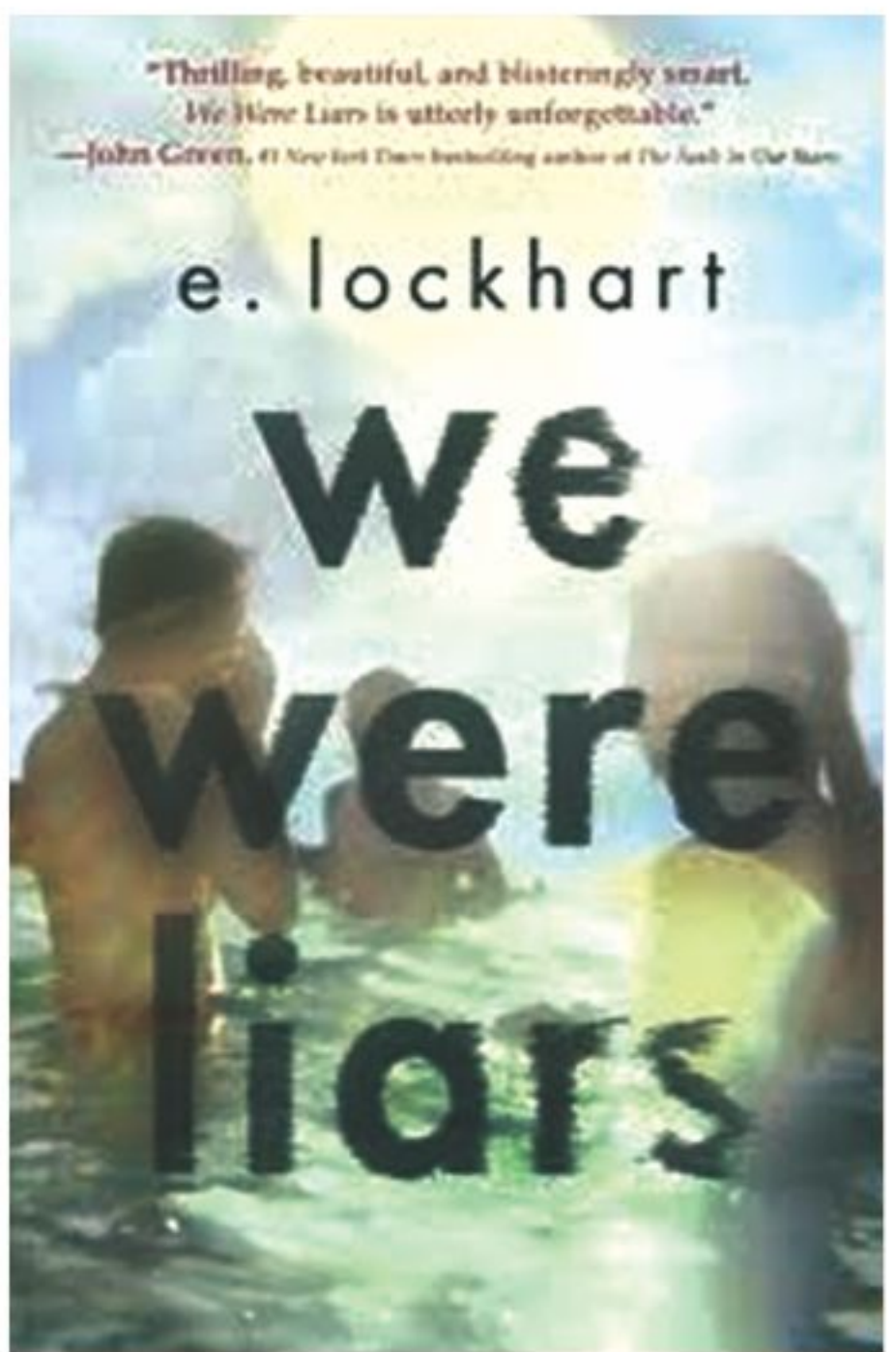
WE Were Liars is a recent novel by Emily Lockhart. Its plot concerns the antics of the ultra-high class Sinclair family during their family vacation on their private island off the coast of New England. The principal characters are the narrator, Cadence, two of her cousins, Johnny and Mirren, and her best-friend/soulmate Gatwick. Doesn't that sound like fun so far? Does it sound like a tale of sunshine and shenanigans, teenage hijinks and relationship issues?

Well, it is --- and more. *We Were Liars* is a tale of layers and depth. What looks to be a typical slice-of-life vacation tale on the surface is from the very start established to be more of a mystery and a thriller. Cadence suffers from intense migraines and memory loss stemming from a mysterious accident at the private island, Beechwood, during the summer of her fifteenth year. After a two year hiatus from island vacations, Cadence arrives back at Beechwood during her seventeenth summer to try and piece together what happened to her with the help of her three closest friends.

But arguably more important than this mystery is the continuous commentary on the poisonous influence of wealth. Pent-up bitterness, pettiness and greed of the older Sinclairs are viewed through the lens of the teenaged Cadence and friends. One of the primary conflicts is the main foursome's desperate attempts to maintain a hold on their own innocence in the face of it. This point of view on the American class system is quite possibly unique in literature—the four kids are still just kids, so while they partake of the rich lifestyle, they provide an honest view of it, and the associated guilt and confusion it inspires. Cadence and company do all this without creating a general condemnation of the rich and the successful. This commentary is skillfully woven into the narrative without being too overt or too political to take away from the story. By doing so, Lockhart creates a story that is both

The plot is well-crafted, and solid, with a payoff at the end that is satisfying, though perhaps a little abrupt. There is a twist at the end, as promised by most commercial blurbs for the book, but the reader's mileage may vary as to how well it holds up. Be warned, the tale migrates from lighthearted fun to dark and painful with surprising speed.

The story is not without its flaws, however. The writing style is a little nonstandard, especially at the start. Cadence's narration is very abrupt, structured almost like a poem, with strange and sudden line breaks that leave the reader almost too startled to notice how they emphasize and highlight the more meaningful passages. The narration can also be a bit too poetic in other ways. Look no further than her descriptions of her friends, which any



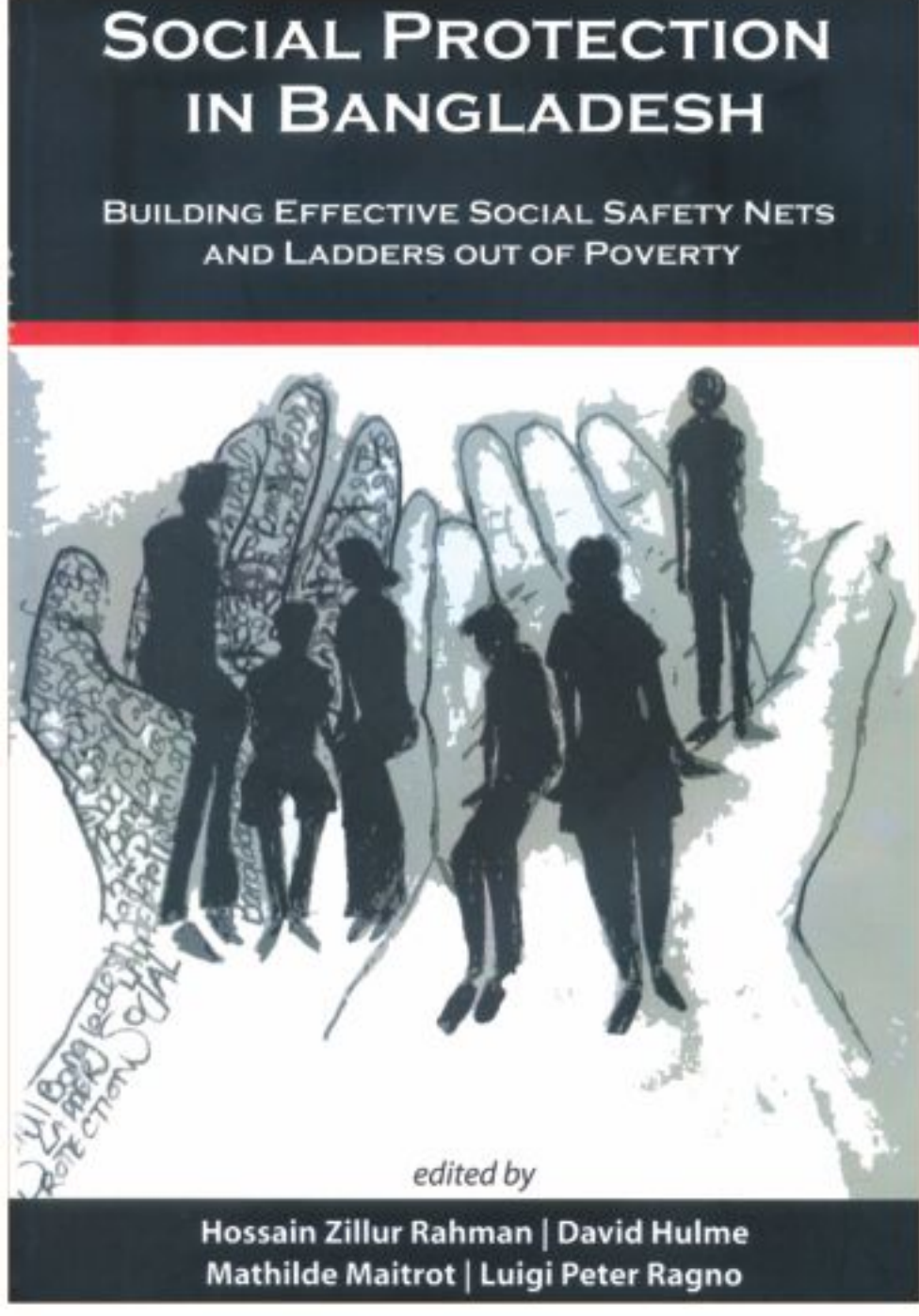
We Were Liars  
Emily Lockhart  
Random House

reader will be hearing a lot: "Johnny, he is bounce, effort, and snark....Mirren, she is sugar, curiosity, and rain....Gat is contemplation and enthusiasm. Ambition and Strong coffee." Vivid? Or overly fanciful? You decide, because it's a fine line that the novel tries to walk.

Which also brings us to the issue of characterization. Does there seem to be more focus on Gat in the previous quote? Get used to it, because Gatwick Patil is the center of Cadence's world. Emily Lockhart tries to do too much with him—he's the exotic foreigner, the saint-like idealist, the reactionary and revolutionary, the seductive bad boy, the outsider and outcast, the intellectual of the group, a teen prodigy, the only one to challenge the sheltered protagonist's worldview, etc., etc. He's every teenage dreamboy combined into one perfect super being. In contrast, Cadence herself is actually lacking in characterization. The only thing she can say about herself is that she supposedly "doesn't suffer fools" (she actually does, to an egregious extent). Otherwise, her entire character can be boiled to down to headaches, confusion, and self-pity (though at least the point of the book is for her to grow out of the latter).

Nevertheless, the book is highly enjoyable, with a deep, meaningful plot and delightful dialogue. The issues with characterization are easily overlooked by anyone who is more interested in either the plot or the social commentary, and the writing style becomes easier to swallow as you go along. As Young Adult Fiction, *We Were Liars* is sure to delight the casual reader and challenge those looking for something more into reassessing themselves and their beliefs.

SHUVAM KABIR WRITES FROM THE UNITED STATES



Social Protection in Bangladesh  
Building Effective Social Safety Nets  
and Ladders Out of Poverty  
Eds Hossain Zillur Rahman, David Hulme,  
Mathilde Maitrot, Luigi Peter Ragno  
The University Press Limited, UNDP

SOCIAL protection in Bangladesh has a long history of innovation and transformation and has been promoted and expanded by governments and politicians across the political spectrum. While the significance of social protection to combating poverty by protecting people from falling into poverty and promoting poverty exits, and to spur national development has been increasingly recognized in the literature...and is well documented in countries like Mexico and Brazil...the role that social protection has played in Bangladesh is little understood and the country's contribution to international social protection innovations, such as conditional cash transfers...and asset transfers...little recognized." These lines set the thematic content of *Social Protection in Bangladesh*, a book that seeks to illuminate those in the dark about Bangladesh's social protection programmes and its contribution to social protection innovations, as well as ways through which the programmes could be made even more productive.

*Social Protection in Bangladesh* is an anthology, in which various authors have contributed, and has been edited by Hossain Zillur

# The way to the future

Shahid Alam studies a work on social issues

Rahman, Chairman of a think-tank, David Hulme, Executive Director of a research organization, and Mathilde Maitrot and Luigi Peter Ragno, both doctoral research fellows at the time of the book's publication. All, including the other contributors, are of scholarly minds and leanings, and the book that has resulted from their combined efforts would also best serve those with scholarly bents and minds, and, dare I say, policymakers of Bangladesh (if, that is, they care to seriously go through it).

Eighteen chapters, covering a wide range of issues, make up the book, and mentioned here in chronological order: Consolidating Nets and Promoting Ladders in Bangladesh: From Social Safety Net Programmes to a National Social Protection System; Social Protection's Role within a Modern Development Agenda: The Socio-Economic Impacts; Social Protection, Poverty Exit and Household's Behaviour: A Multidisciplinary Perspective; Social Protection's Role in Reducing Poverty and Promoting Inclusive Growth in Risk Prone Environments; Global Perspectives on Graduation and Promotion; Fiscal and Financial Dimensions of Social Protection Systems; Child Sensitive Social Protection: A Case for Enhancing Effectiveness and Efficiency in Development Programming; Oportunidades --- Mexico's Experience; China's Experience on Social Protection of Migrants to Urban Areas; Use of Technology in Delivering Social Protection: The Case of MPESA; International Experience of Delivering Social Protection: Are There Lessons for Bangladesh?; Extreme Poor Adivasis and the Problem of Accessing Social Safety Nets; Comprehensive Social Protection for the Urban Poor: Integrating Health and Social Protection Programmes; Child Poverty in Bangladesh and the Social Protection Response: A Brief Overview and Ways Forward; UNICEF Support to Bangladesh Government in Modeling Child Sensitive Social Protection; The Fiscal Dimensions of Social Protection Reforms in Bangladesh; The Treatment Effort of Social Safety Nets Programmes in Bangladesh: A Regression Discontinuity Design Approach; and, Social Protection in Bangladesh: The Road Ahead.

Notwithstanding the enormous challenges posed by political, economic, social, and environmental issues, as well as the initial questions posed soon after gaining its independence, interethnic conflict, famine, total

dependence on foreign aid, widespread poverty and deprivation, a decimated infrastructure and the systematic elimination of a good section of its educated population, Bangladesh has achieved much as a low income country: 5 to 6% annual economic growth for 15 years, reducing extreme poverty from 41% in 1991 to 17 % in 2010, and on target towards attaining many of the Millennium Development Goals. The book identifies several factors contributing towards bringing about this enviable situation: a combination of government, non-government and private sector endeavours that have led to economic growth spurred by macroeconomic stability and the rise of new industries (the RMC sector obviously comes to mind); a rapid decline in fertility rate; public investment in rural infrastructure, agriculture and food production; and the role of NGOs and community-based organizations in service delivery and women's empowerment.

However, more needs to be done, and different approaches required. The editors say as much in Chapter 18: "The transition from being a poor, rural country to an urbanized and middle income country requires a different approach --- a systematic and multi-dimensional approach that can face emerging challenges and vulnerabilities and harness the growing capacities of the country. As the international experience shows, moving from a large portfolio of social protection programmes towards a systematic National Social protection Strategy --- grounded in well-structured institutional arrangements, resource access, improved service delivery --- could contribute to addressing the challenges that Bangladesh does and will face."

In Chapter 11, David Hulme and Mathilde Maitrot suggest some lessons that Bangladesh could learn from international experience. It has the resources to do so: large number of mobile phone users, a dense population, and large numbers of bright young people. Mobile phones can be used to serve and deliver health, education, food security, market information, and access to financial services. Regarding institutional arrangements, the country has the possibility of decentralizing social protection programmes delivery system. In Chapter 6, Armando Barrientos suggests a financial mix for developing countries for financing their social protection, and assistance from a range of sources that include government revenues, workers and employers' contributions, natural resource revenues, and

foreign grants and loans. He believes that international aid has short-term beneficial effects for low income countries, reallocating public expenditure and subsidies will be crucial in the short and medium term, while domestic resources will be important for the medium and long term financing of the extension of social protection institutions.

Luigi Ragno (in Chapter 3) discusses how, in developing countries, social protection has a developmental function and is designed to contribute to poverty alleviation by preventing people from falling into poverty (poverty entry) and by supporting people and households already living in poverty out of the situation (poverty exit). He observes: "...social protection instruments can lift restrictions on the productive capacity that households living in poverty face in, for instance, participating to saving scheme, securing of credit, improving consumption, as well as improving households resource allocations towards higher return investments in the short, medium and long term (e.g., children's education). This, in turn, can contribute to micro level growth and poverty exit by facilitating the accumulation and protection of assets, supply of labour, and several types of local economy effects." Touching on children, Disa Sjoblom (in Chapter 14), while acknowledging that Bangladesh has made much progress with its social protection response to child poverty, suggests that the social protection system be developed by: (1) placing children higher on the social protection agenda; (2) making household social protection programmes more child-sensitive; and (3) improving the effectiveness and inclusiveness of education stipends.

The social protection programmes in Bangladesh grew out of the country's early food and emergency relief schemes in the 1970s. These projects were institutionalized in the 1980s and 1990s into an efficacious disaster management system to reduce the vulnerability of the millions of Bangladeshis regularly displaced by floods and major cyclones. In the course of mapping out the evolution of social protection in Bangladesh, the editors (in Chapter 1) spell out its broad objectives: "...promote human development --- reducing hunger, permitting access to basic health services for the vulnerable, getting girls and boys to school, providing security to the aged and disabled --- and they also contribute to economic development through employment,

skill training, encouraging micro-enterprise and risk-taking, household level asset accumulation and local infrastructural development."

The editors, though, are under no illusion as to the success rate of the social protection programmes: "However, the contribution of social protection to Bangladesh's development is becoming increasingly constrained by the lack of a coherent strategic framework. Without a vision of how the social protection portfolio can evolve into an integrated and harmonized system, and with so many programme and agencies involved (alongside their differing capacities and interests), the potential achievements of social protection are constrained. Rationalizing the present portfolio, creating monitoring systems to assess performance, setting in motion experiments from which to develop innovative programmes, co-ordination and sharing of resources and designing effective institutional arrangements, are crucial challenges for the government of Bangladesh." Furthermore, to add to the woes, there is the problem of redundancy. Specifically, as the editors point out, "...while the government and development partners have introduced many new programmes they rarely close down old programmes. As a result, Bangladesh has witnessed a proliferation of safety net programmes over time."

An interesting point that one may intermittently come across in the book is that some of the social protection programmes in Bangladesh are modeled after those in India. To cite an example, the Employment Guarantee Programme that was introduced by the caretaker government (which was a controversial and dismal failure from both the political and economic standpoints) in 2008-09 was inspired by India's National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. So it is ironic to come across an otherwise valid observation made by the editors: "If Bangladesh wishes to avoid the shame of India --- becoming a middle income country with mass poverty --- it must pursue economic growth whilst systematically converting its social safety net programmes into a National Social Protection System." *Social Protection in Bangladesh* deals extensively with an area where Bangladesh has performed reasonably well, and in which it can excel even more.

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