

The times were out of joint

Shahid Alam reads of a difficult era

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AS I write this review, the referendum on Scottish independence has ended and the decision of the people revealed. The world has witnessed the functioning of a mature democracy. Moudud Ahmed, in *Bangladesh: Emergency and the Aftermath 2007-2008*, has essentially described the working of a flawed, indeed, immature, democracy that is Bangladesh, although, after an existence as a sovereign independent state for 43 years, it can hardly be counted as a fledgling country. Ahmed, a former minister, deputy prime minister, prime minister, and vice president of Bangladesh at various times, under different regimes, both democratic and non-democratic, in the process of describing his ordeal during incarceration in the incipient days of the Emergency rule from 2007 to 2008, actually illustrates the infantile state of democracy prevailing in the country. Although some of the contents of the book, written while the author was imprisoned, will likely raise the hackles of some, they are not

even remotely cataclysmic revelations. Being a book heavily leaning towards political matters, it contains contentious matters and observations, but it is also generous with political truisms, which, unfortunately for the nation, are usually paid only lip service in this country.

Ahmed lays out both one of those truisms and the underlying theme of the book in the introductory chapter ("On Remand"): "State is politics and politics is state. There cannot be a state without politics. Attempt to depoliticize a society is sheer madness and an anti-thesis to science of politics. The strength of a state lies in the political leadership and its institutions; to destroy those is to destroy the state itself." And that is precisely what, in his opinion (which, minus the hyperbole about equating politicians with the survival of the state, carries a lot of truth), the regime of 2007-08 had embarked on by trying to paint black the entire community of politicians, and acting to practically eliminate them from engaging in their vocation. He states in the Preface, "The purpose of this study is to examine and analyze the tenure of an illegal government and what motivated it to disrupt the progress of Bangladesh...."

The Preface contains a summary of his scathing attack throughout the book on the Emergency regime: "...before the country could take any solid roots to democracy, a coterie of generals led by the Chief of Army Staff forced the President of the Republic to proclaim Emergency in the country on 11 January 2007 and Bangladesh again, in violation of the Constitution, moved from democracy to an authoritarian rule...." Ahmed turns even more caustic: "There was no government as such, other than a combination of few individuals, civil and military, who committed the greatest crime against a nation aspiring to be prosperous within a short period of time...." He tones down as he brings up a nefarious coterie strongly suspected to have been working behind the imposition of the Emergency and all the negatives for the country that followed from it: "During this unelected regime good governance disappeared and those who always advocated the high ideals of good governance went silent. On the contrary, some multinational agencies, foreign embassies and a section of civil society took the position in favour of the Emergency and thereby encouraged the disruption of democratic process."

While Ahmed indulges in a lot of carping (not without foundation) against the Emergency and its backers, the top brass of the army ((in Chapter 1, "Promulgation of Emergency and the Interim Regime"), he briefly discusses an aberration of liberal pluralist democracy that was incorporated

(later repealed) in the Bangladesh Constitution: non-party caretaker government. Certainly, the 2007-08 edition contained a good number of inept buffoons, but the earlier versions were mercifully of a short duration because many of their members, too, were nothing more than glorified rubber stamps. In the extended edition, the real power behind the Emergency, the military, used them to front its agenda (including the denigration of the politicians in general). Ahmed believes that the Proclamation of Emergency should have been revoked or withdrawn once the conditions for which it was invoked had improved. He contends that the country had returned to normalcy within two weeks of its proclamation and, hence, it should have been revoked at that time.

Instead, the Emergency period was continued and "a well-orchestrated, organized mass propaganda was launched against the politicians...trying to establish that every politician was a thief and the politicians had done nothing for the country excepting making money for themselves" (Chapter 2, "Drive Against the Politicians"). The author then states the primary and immediate reason for the unelected military-backed interim government to have done so: "The bad name widely carried by the last BNP government primarily surrounding the office of the Prime Minister and the party office at Hawabhaban provided a strong excuse to whip up the campaign against the politicians as a class." He follows with a political wisdom that, sadly, is found lacking in the political culture of Bangladesh: "Corruption cannot be removed or changed to any significant degree unless the system of governance itself is changed and monitored regularly by an accountable institution."

Still on the topic of political culture, Ahmed could have pertinently mentioned that its currently abominable state has been a prime cause for the introduction of the caretaker system in the first place. He does fleetingly mention some of the manifestations of this culture: mutual intolerance of opposing viewpoints by the country's two major political parties, for one, but, another aspect, that of mutual distrust of each other's intentions by the two necessitated the constitutional emergence of the caretaker system. Ahmed, in an effort to justify his contention for a caretaker administration of specified short duration, states that the June 1996 and October 2001 elections were "acclaimed to have been free and fair." The question that springs to mind is, by who? Certainly, the winners and the election observers, in general. However, lest anyone forgets, in each of those cases, as well as in the December 2008 elec-

tions, the losing coalitions made it a point of crying foul, complaining that the elections had, in fact, been rigged. Right there is another instance of the abhorrent political culture that shows little signs of improving in the near future. And, for this situation to have come to pass, the politicians have to shoulder their share of the blame to a significant extent.

Ahmed does make an attempt to portray the politicians in less than a Sir Galahad image, but it is perfunctory, and qualified so as to minimize any thought of large-scale condemnation (Chapter 4, "The Role of the Anti-Corruption Commission: Basic Rights Violations"). He takes the case of the last BNP-led government to make his point: "...certain persons close to the office of the Prime Minister...indulged in corruption.... Most of them were not politicians in the traditional sense. They were basically businessmen who somehow procured nominations and won the elections with black money to enter into politics to earn a seat of social respectability and make further money by flourishing their own business or men who were close to powerful leaders of the government under whose patronization they made their wealth." He, however, acknowledges that, "...there would always be corruption in politics" (Chapter 11, "End of the Interim Regime"). Nonetheless, and this point could either indicate hard realism or a matter for debate, "...people are very conscious in making a distinction between the politicians who sacrifice and those who work for their personal gains and between the politicians who practice corruption in their own constituencies. They do not believe that the national politicians they like are corrupt." At least, with these statements, the author breaks away from the carte blanche on honesty that he seems to have conferred on most politicians almost throughout the book.

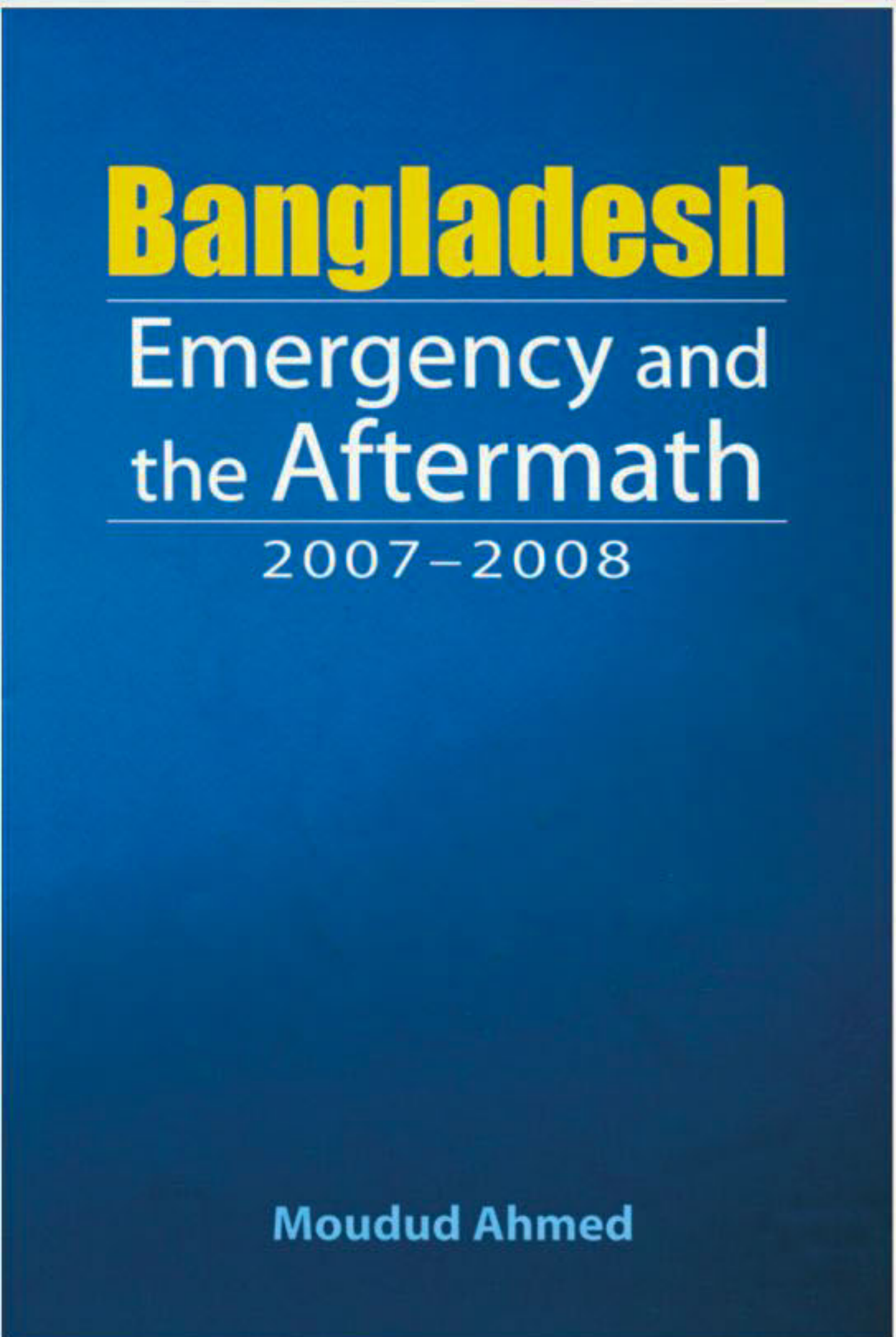
Ahmed, however, never strays too far from his theme of bashing the Emergency and its architects and administrators. He does take time out to discuss at some length a topic that he has practiced for a long time: law and its implementation (Chapter 3, "Corruption Laws", and Chapter 4). While he has been a vigorous critic of General Ershad and his regime in various parts of the book, he has mentioned, in a footnote, the obvious point that many would cogently make: that Moudud Ahmed was first a minister, then prime minister, and then vice president of the country in the very Ershad regime that he has taken to task. Back to the author's views on the Emergency government and its manifold failures. The judiciary was vitiated during this time, and, in his opinion,

Chief Justice Ruhul Amin only succeeded in "degrading the authority and image of the Supreme Court" (Chapter 7, "Judiciary"). Furthermore, "It was not only the Chief Justice but all the judges of the Appellate Division of this period would go down in history as to have played a role in establishing regressive examples of justice for a nation which used to be at one time proud of its judiciary."

The economy suffered its worst-ever decline during the first year of the interim government (Chapter 8, "Economy"). In the author's trenchant words, "...the regime had turned the 'emerging tiger' into a mouse in a year's time." On another important issue, he concludes that the "record of human rights violation of the interim regime was unprecedented" (Chapter 9, "Civil Order and Violation of Human Rights"). He also asserts that the image of the army was tarnished by General Moeen U Ahmed and his cohorts (Chapter 10, "The Image of the Army and the Role of Moeen U Ahmed"). In a rather disarming statement he admits that, "The military took the full advantage of the mistakes committed by the politicians of both the major alliances and the public support it enjoyed at the initial months after the Emergency was proclaimed. General Moeen, however, could not become an effective supreme leader...partly because of his dubious personal character...." Being a veteran politician, Ahmed does not fail to comment on real and imagined political give-and-takes. He believes that the "dream of returning to power made her (Sheikh Hasina) accept the terms of understanding which included a safe exit for General Moeen (Chapter 12, "Military Understanding with Sheikh Hasina")."

Moudud Ahmed avails of the opportunity to take another swipe at the 2007-08 regime. He thus sums up its tenure: "So under an unelected regime backed by guns when any military leader or their civilian cohorts men talk of democracy, rule of law, separation of judiciary or human rights keeping the nation under a lid of Emergency with voices of people throttled, freedom of press gagged, independence of judiciary defaced and repressions conducted with impunity, such loud words have never borne any credibility. The military leaders use these words as clichés to gain time to survive for as long as they can." And ends with this parting shot: "Neither the interim regime could punish any corrupt politician nor they could bring reforms in the political culture of the country nor they could improve the economy."

SHAHID ALAM, CRITIC, ACTOR AND FORMER DIPLOMAT, IS AN EDUCATIONIST



Bangladesh Emergency and the Aftermath 2007-2008 Moudud Ahmed The University Press Limited

First love, first passion

Punya gives four stars to a story

AMBER Lin's *Letters at Christmas* (Men of Fortune #1) was delightful in one word. This was my first book by her so I was pleasantly surprised. The story was fun with a friends-to-lovers theme that kept me entertained from the first page to the last. I probably wore this perpetual smile throughout while I was reading it.

Sidony has been waiting for letters for the last three years. Letters that were promised to her by someone she thought she loved. She has been heartbroken, disappointed... the tears have long since dried up, but the letters that Hale, her young friend, confidante and lover, promised before he left her for the sea, never arrived. She thinks he has forgotten her, and all that he said were lies.

Even though, at this point, she's angry at him, the news of his return to London doesn't stop Sidony's heart from beating like a drum. She doesn't want to show that she cares but when it comes to Hale, she's helpless. To double her misery (and embarrassment), when Hale finally arrives at her brother's estate, she's swinging helpless from a tree, stuck while trying to rescue that goddamned cat of hers, Poppet. And after such a long time, HE had to be the one to discover her that way, and not the way she initially... er, planned; all dressed up and graceful, staring out the window like she doesn't have a care in the world.

Damned cat! Despite that less-than-perfect reunion (of sorts), Sidony is still mad. She's also extremely tizzy at being near Hale after so long a time. He has gotten stronger, rougher, without much resembling the young man who left her after she gave him her virginity.

She and Hale... ah, there's an old history. First love turning into the first taste of passion.

Hale, the bastard son of a viscount, didn't have much money or prospect in the world. Yet, meeting her brother George as youngsters in school probably changed their lives for the good. Being

orphans and spending an awful amount of time on their estate, the three of them came together rather well. But at some point, it appeared that Sidony and Hale's relationship were going to take a different turn. George found his best friend, while Sidony found the man she could love. Best of all, her affection was returned just as heartily.

But Hale wanted more. He needed to prove himself worthy of Sidony, from which formed this plan to join a ship. At first, this sounded like the best option. Though leaving Sidony made him miserable to the bone, he thought he's doing it for them both. Hale's 'adventures' hadn't been something he could really talk about. Those were full of horrid realities that a seaman endures while at sea. He has experienced things he has no intentions of divulging to anyone. Though Hale was

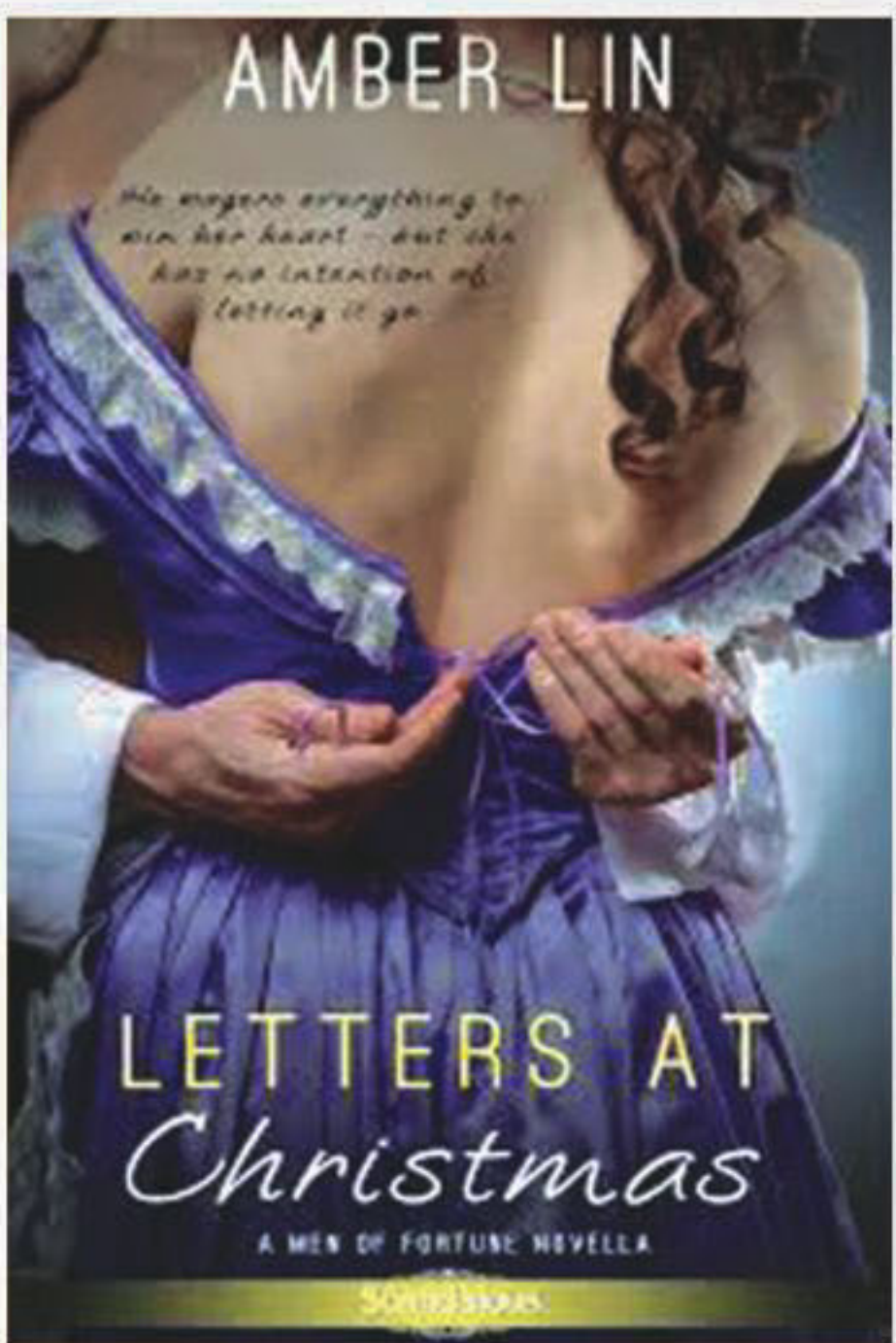
promoted rather early as a captain, he couldn't send one promised letter to Sidony, all because he was way too busy saving either his own or his crewmen's lives from one trouble or the next.

But that doesn't mean Hale never wrote anything to her. He just never had the opportunity to send those out. Before returning to England, he was scared to death that Sidony might have gotten married by now, or she'd be so mad that she'd turn away from him. Would've been the right punishment for him, seeing how he wasn't able to keep his side of the commitment. But had she kept hers? Is she still waiting for him? And so, finding Sidony still single gave Hale hope; hope that kept him alive in those dreary years. Maybe there's still time for them and he can convince her that they were meant to be together. Always.

Oh boy, you must read this story only for the snippets of Hale's letters that are featured at the beginning of each chapter. I wish those were his full missives and not snippets. The best scene of the story has to be when he gives them all to Sidony, his last bargaining chip to win her back. Not that she didn't want to be with him (there was no way these two could deny each other for long) but that scene kind of sealed the deal for their future.

There was also a secondary romance between George and some widow from the next estate. I don't know, their relationship seemed rather hazy, as if I was missing something there. I would've loved to know what kept disturbing George so much.

I never had any doubt that Hale and Sidony were just meant to be. Always appreciate when an author can put so much love and sweetness into a novella-length story without either making it feel rushed or overwhelming. Though a few more chapters would've been great, I'm still glad to have read it. Four stars. Definitely going to check out the next in the series sometime later.



Letters at Christmas Amber Lin Men of Fortune

It's all about discipline

Subir Kumar Bhattacharyya mulls over research issues

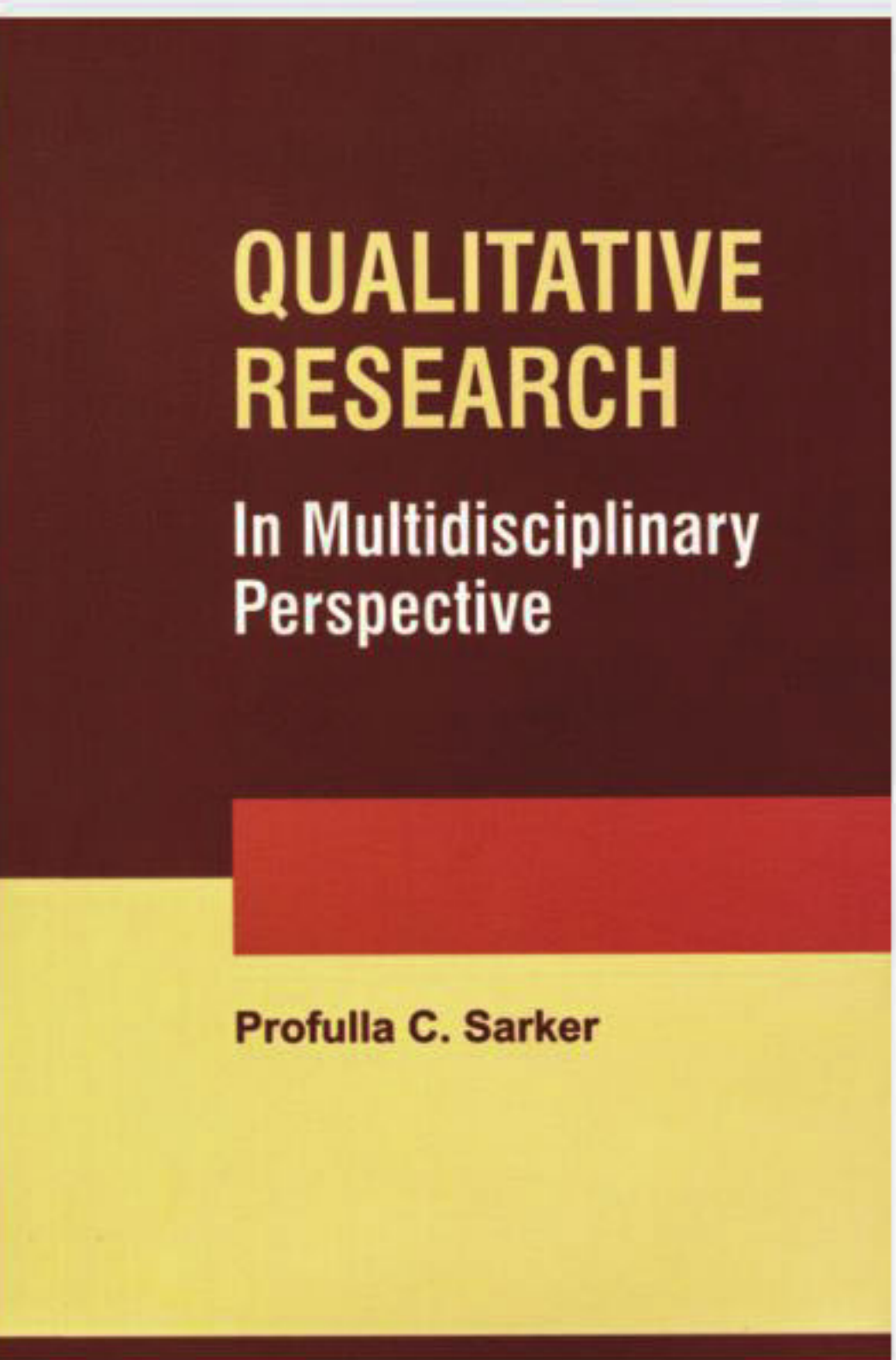
PROFESSOR Dr. Profulla C. Sarker, the author of the book under review, is distinguished Vice Chancellor of Prime University.

This valuable book is divided into nine chapters in 223 pages. The book is appropriately designed to inspire readers to gain knowledge about the entire gamut of research methodology and understand the concept of research, its scope and various types of research, including approaches to research in geo-social settings. It includes a chapter on ethical issues likely to crop up in various types of research, especially when data is manipulated and there is the likelihood of plagiarism. This volume also discusses ways of writing a research project proposal citing examples and using different methods and techniques to conduct research as well as collect data.

The author carefully deliberates on different types of sampling, pointing out which sampling is more suitable for a particular type of research for the selection of the study population and at the same time for the selection of the study area. The book focuses on different types of qualitative research methods and techniques applied to conduct in-depth as well as intensive studies along with their limitations. Moreover, topics like qualitative versus quantitative research and their strengths and weaknesses, data analysis methods and techniques, writing research report, drawing conclusions and policy implications along with guidelines for using references are all included in this volume.

Qualitative Research in Multidisciplinary Perspective covers in particular such wide-ranging subjects as Anthropology, Sociology, Social Work, Economics, Political Science, Public Administration, International Relations, Peace Studies, Gender Studies, Development Studies, Demography, Criminology and Gerontology, and in general touches on disciplines of Law, Business Studies, Education and Public Health. The book is well-written and is undoubtedly a comprehensive repository of knowledge about research methodology. The book can be an excellent source of reference for academics, researchers, administrators, practitioners and students of social sciences.

While the book is architecturally well-designed



Qualitative Research in Multidisciplinary Perspective Dr. Profulla C. Sarker Center for Research, HRD and Publications Prime University

and informative, some of the important topics, which could have been expanded further, thus elucidating vital concepts with practical examples, have been kept to a minimum, probably with the objective of keeping the volume agreeable to a majority of readers. I would like to believe the author will address such concerns and appropriately revise the text in the next edition. Despite this minor shortcoming, the book will be a complete guide for those who are devoted to doing research, particularly those focused on social sciences and students doing research for advanced studies.

SUBIR KUMAR BHATTACHARYYA IS A FORMER BANGLADESH AMBASSADOR