

Local Governance and Decentralization in Bangladesh Politics and Economics

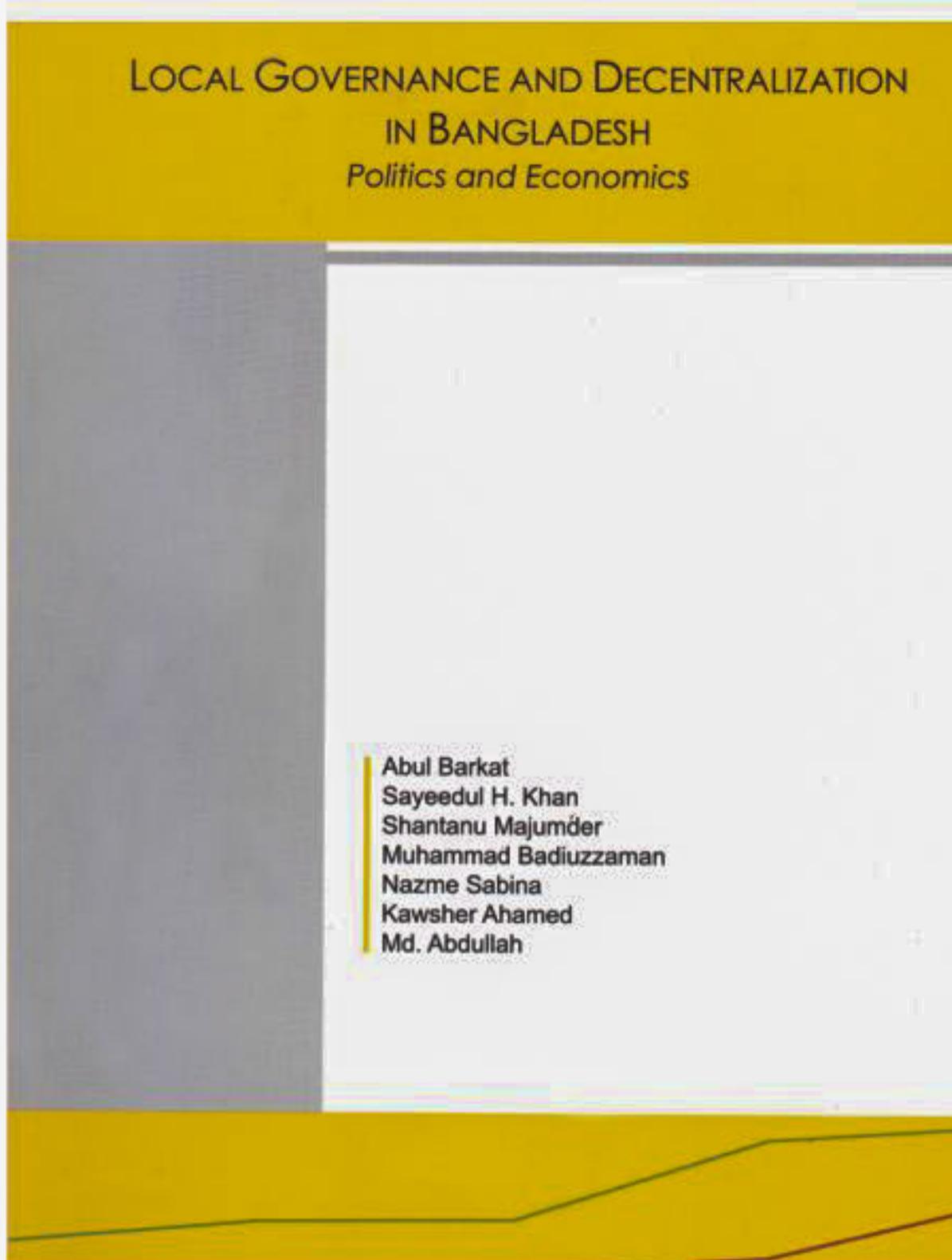
ABOUT the book and the study: The book contains the findings of an in-depth study into the Local Governance and Decentralization with an analytical approach and perspective of politics and economics, distribution of power and wealth and overall governance of the local system. The book also contains the existing scenario and suggested possible reformation that might bring major changes to attain the visionary ideas as documented in the Constitution of Bangladesh. This book is the first attempt to project most appropriate and practical ideas that suit the genius of the nation for the local governance and decentralization of power derived from the voices of the people who matter. It has examined the system prevailing in the Union Parishad, Upazila Parishad, Zila Parishad and Paurashava. In precise, the study has covered both rural and urban taking sample from almost half of the country's geographical areas, interviewing 210 Union Parishad Chairmen, 100 Upazila Parishad Chairmen, 48 Paurashava Mayors and 1218 households in rural and 552 households in urban.

Background: Bangladesh is a unitary system of state with the constitutional provision for Local Government Institutions (LGIs) to provide all amenities that people need. In fact, local government institutions should be represented by peasants, workers and women to ensure its administration and maintain public orders and act for empowerment and enrichment in quickest possible time. This critical issue was the major thrust of study to come forward with possible reformation.

Study Design: The study design and research methodology adopted were visionary to derive practical outcomes based on examination of demographic, social & economic profiles and political affiliations. The existing system of resource mobilization and its utilization including local revenue generated for development expenditure were examined in details in the study. The importance of free and fair elections to ensure instrumental governance was emphasized keeping in view the policy agenda for effective decentralization.

The way forwards towards empowering and improving local governance were examined critically in the study.

Key findings and recommendations: Based on the findings and analysis in fourteen chapters



some key recommendations were forwarded for consideration of authorities and key stakeholders. These were on structural, resource mobilization and utilization, transferred department, people's participation, local government election, governance etc. The findings as elaborated and justified in the book containing recommendation that local governmental institutions at present functioning like service delivery institutions but the spirit was always to act as local government with three features of executive, legislature and judiciary. The need for independent Local Government Commission was recommended emphatically. Paurashavas were found relatively better organized and enjoying more autonomy in the form of devolution. Regarding the Upazila Parishad having jurisdiction over all Unions, unwanted interventions by MPs were visible telling upon the spirit and principles of governance. Salary and honorarium presently received by union Parishad elected representatives was considered as inadequate and ignominious. Infrastructure and capac-

ity building were found inadequate. Resource mobilization and utilization were not based on modern transparent accounting system and the principle of value for money ignored totally. The Village Court was considered as an important institution and a crucial agenda for formation and suggested to strengthen significantly to ensure transparent governance. People's participation and involvement of civil society were found inadequate and exclusion of women in decision making was found as a practice followed almost everywhere.

Remarks:

Decentralization and devolution of power to local government institutions is a constitutional obligation and declared priority areas of reformation.

The LGIs are centuries old institutions but not empowered with capacity building and transfer of resources as expected due to highly centralized character of the governance of the country.

This book through an exhaustive study with appropriate methodology with sufficient samples came out with pragmatic suggestions for decentralization of power and authorities emphasizing arguments and reasons thereof. Although total size of the book is 693 pages but main texts are only in 348 pages containing exhaustive deliberations with examples and illustrations. The writers were not biased or suffered from any prejudice while drawing conclusions and making recommendations out of lesson learnt from analysis.

The sources of data used are primary data, those derived from grassroots level during discussion and collection. The Research Team visited physically and discussed with Deputy Commissioners and Thana Nirbahi Officers, Union Parishad Chairmen, Paurashava Mayors and Secretaries and organised stakeholders' consultations at local and national level at length.

So much of exhaustive and in depth study with empirical evidences is rarely found in any study seen so far. The study in precise advocated strongly in favor of effectiveness of local development and pursuing the decentralization and local governance reforms to ensure young democracy to settle and to make development efforts sustainable.

Thanks are due to Dr Abul Barkat and his team for their strenuous work and outstanding contributions towards effective local governance through decentralization.

It is also my privilege to express gratitude to Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC for their

generous support to HDRC financially and by sharing the experience of Switzerland where decentralization of power to local LGI's is the way of public administration and empowerment of people.

I suggest that GOB should urgently accept all these recommendations for implementation and incorporate in the 7th Five year plan under preparation as strategic interventions to attain the objectives of turning Bangladesh into middle income country by 2021, the year of golden jubilee of our independence.

The reviewer is Former Secretary to ten Government and Adviser to the former Care Taker Government.

Former Secretary to the Government, Dhiraj Kumar Nath finds the book a unique study with recommendations that demand to be incorporated in the 7th Five Year Plan document of Bangladesh.

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The Book contains 15 Chapters

A List of Illustrations with 123 Figures, 07 Tables, 22 Boxes, Two Annexure, a Map indicating survey location.

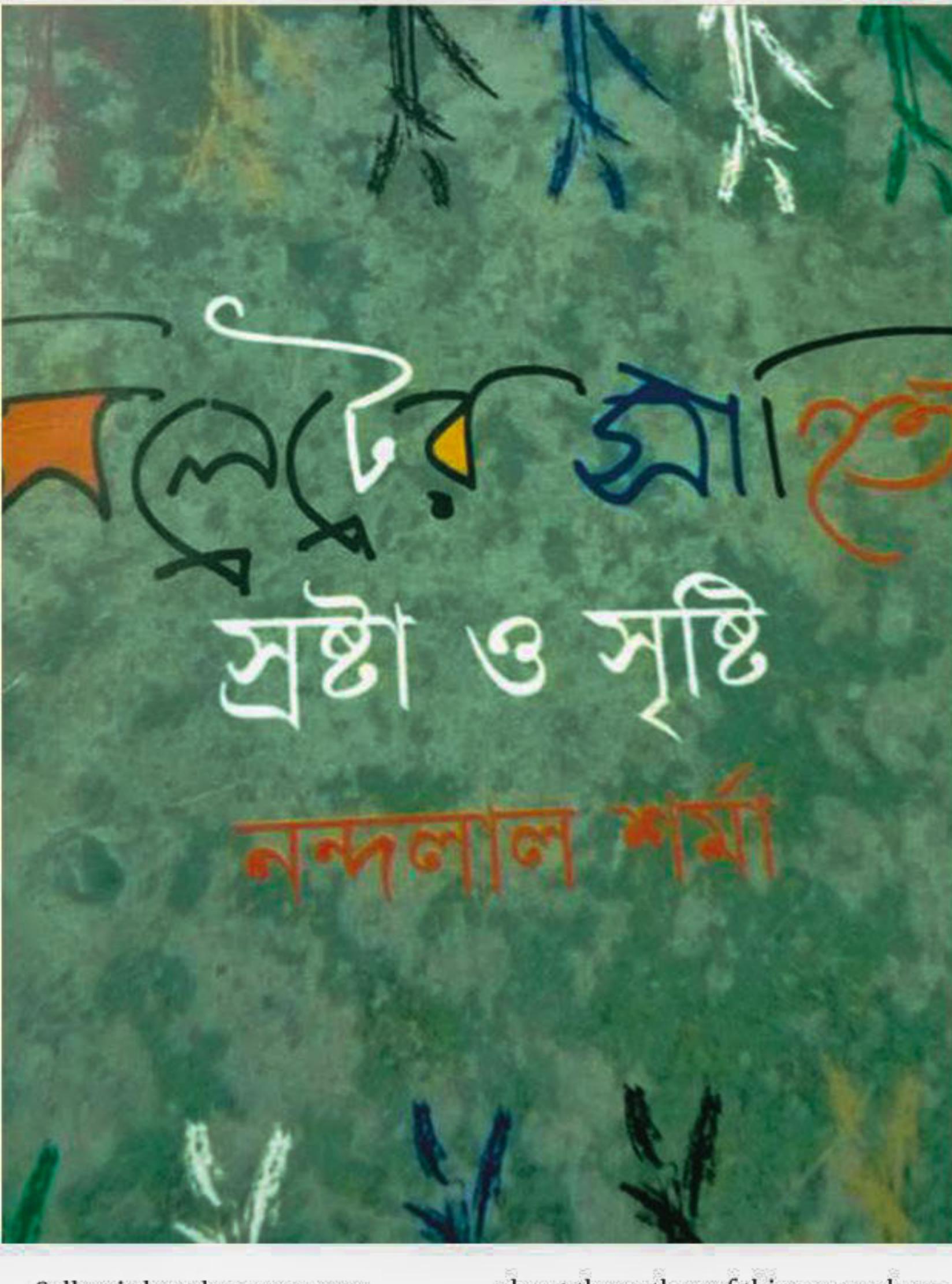
Sylheter Sahityo: Srosti O Sristi

An anthology of litterateurs hailing from Sylhet

Reviewed by Mahfuz ul Hasib Chowdhury

SYLHETER SAHITYO: Srosti O Sristi (Literature of Sylhet: Writers & their works) is a voluminous book by Professor Nandalal Sharma that covers a span of over one hundred years to enlighten the readers with adequate information about the authors, poets, essayists and educationists of greater Sylhet (Sylhet, Moulvibazar, Habiganj and Sunamgonj). It's a compendious anthology illustrating the biographies and prominent creations of the litterateurs of Sylhet division which have been generated and published over last more than one century.

To write some introductory things



Sylhet is best-known across Bangladesh and beyond for its natural beauty that comprises tea gardens, waterfalls, hills and forests. However, this region has been abundant with the creative fertility of a broad range of bards and minnesingers whose verses, fables and lyrics have spell-bound audiences across the nation through ages. Eminent figures like Hason Raja, Shah Abdul Karim, Radha Raman have enriched the literary and cultural treasures of this area with their timeless lyrics and discourses that jingle with a deeply moving tune of mystic philosophy which are even comparable to the

about the author of this comprehensive anthology, Professor Nandalal Sharma himself is a renowned educationist and researcher. He had been a teacher of Bengali language and literature for around thirty years and gave lessons on this discipline in various colleges all over the country while he was in government service. Currently, he is involved in Metropolitan University, Sylhet as a Professor, Controller of Examinations and Proctor—and he has been playing his role quite successfully in this multidimensional job since joining this university. He has so far written nearly fifty books on the linguistic,

mystic ideas found in poems by celebrated Persian poets like Omar Khayyam and Jalal Uddin Rumi. The depth and luminosity of mysticism decked with a universal appeal, as exposed lyrically through the rhymes of Shah Abdul Karim and Hason Raja deserve profound contemplations, eulogy and analysis. And lots of analytical and research-oriented works have been meanwhile carried out by different scholars about the contributions of Hason Raja and Shah Abdul Karim to the growth of mystic musings in Bangladesh.

literary and cultural history of Bangladesh and some of his books are often cited in publications by other authors.

To write about a few authors who have been alluded in this anthology, Syed Mujtaba Ali (1904–1974) should be named with special emphasis. He was the pioneer of modern Bengali travelogues. His travel stories, vibrant and savory with superb portrayal of his travelling experiences in different oriental and western countries still retain the power to enthrall readers of all intellectual heights. Moreover, Syed Mujtaba Ali was one of the first scholars to put forward the demand for the recognition of Bengali as the state language of East Pakistan (present day Bangladesh). He had outstanding communicative skills in Bengali, English, German, Arabic, Persian, Hindi, Sanskrit and some more languages.

Abul Maal A. Muhith, currently the Finance Minister of Bangladesh is one of the most illuminated scholars of Bangladesh and he has written a splendid number of books including American Response to Bangladesh Liberation War, Development Strategies: Lessons from Experience, Bangladesh in the 21st Century etc.

Nurul Islam Nahid, on the other hand, is the present Education Minister of Bangladesh and the translated titles of some of his books are Bangabandhu's Ideals, Aims and Struggle, Education Policy and Other Issues, Forty Years of Bangladesh Communist Party and so on.

Among many other entries, the name of Professor M. Abdul Aziz is also glaringly stated in the book. Professor M. Abdul Aziz is a highly renowned educationist and one of the leading economists of the country. He has taught economics in different colleges and universities of Bangladesh and was also the chairman of two education boards of Bangladesh. He has penned a substantial number of books on economics and other subjects and at present he is Professor Emeritus of Economics in Metropolitan University, Sylhet.

Syed Manzoorul Islam, an eminent scholar and Professor of English in University of Dhaka hails from Sylhet too and his biography has also been described in this anthology. Syed Manzoorul Islam is one of the iconic and most distinguished writers, translators, educationists and a highly esteemed literary connoisseur of our country. The list of his books published so far commands applause and veneration simultaneously. He has achieved a noteworthy number of prizes including Bangla Academy Award for his glittering literary feats and scholarly works.

Dwijen Sharma, the most famous botanist of the country, was also born in Sylhet. He lived in Moscow for many years working as a translator for Progoti Publishers. However, he returned home a few years back. He has written an extraordinary range of books on the ecological matters and biodiversity of Bangladesh. Any disquisition on Bangladesh's environmental aspects would remain incomplete without making reference to his publications.

Khandaker Mahmudur Rahman, currently Treasurer of Metropolitan University, Sylhet is a noted author too. During his professional career as an economist he worked for different domestic and foreign financial organizations and has so far written a great deal of books including A Framework of Comprehensive Village Development, Readings in Rural Development, Costs & Returns of Selected Winter Crops etc.

Professor Dr. Quazi Kholiuzzaman Ahmed is another top-ranking economist of the country who was also born in Sylhet. Bangladesh Water Vision 2025, Economic Reforms, People's Participation and Development in Bangladesh, Quality Education and Campus Violence: Case Studies on Dhaka and Rajshahi Universities are some of his remarkable books.

Dilwar (1937–2013) was celebrated as the "gonomanusher kobi" or populist poet of Sylhet. He wrote a broad range of verses on the creeds and cultural legacies of Sylhet and won a good number of prizes including Bangla Academy Award and Ekushey Padak.

Chowdhury Golam Akbar (1921–1988) was a folklore specialist of Sylhet. He represented Bangladesh in a conference on folklore studies in New York in 1977. After his death his son Chowdhury Harun Akbar (1952–2014) continued exploring the treasures of Sylhet folk literature by writing several books on this field.

Zainul Islam, another well-known intellectual and poet of Sylhet is currently pursuing a PhD program on Applied Linguistics under University of Essex, UK. The Bleeding Flames is one of his poetry books.

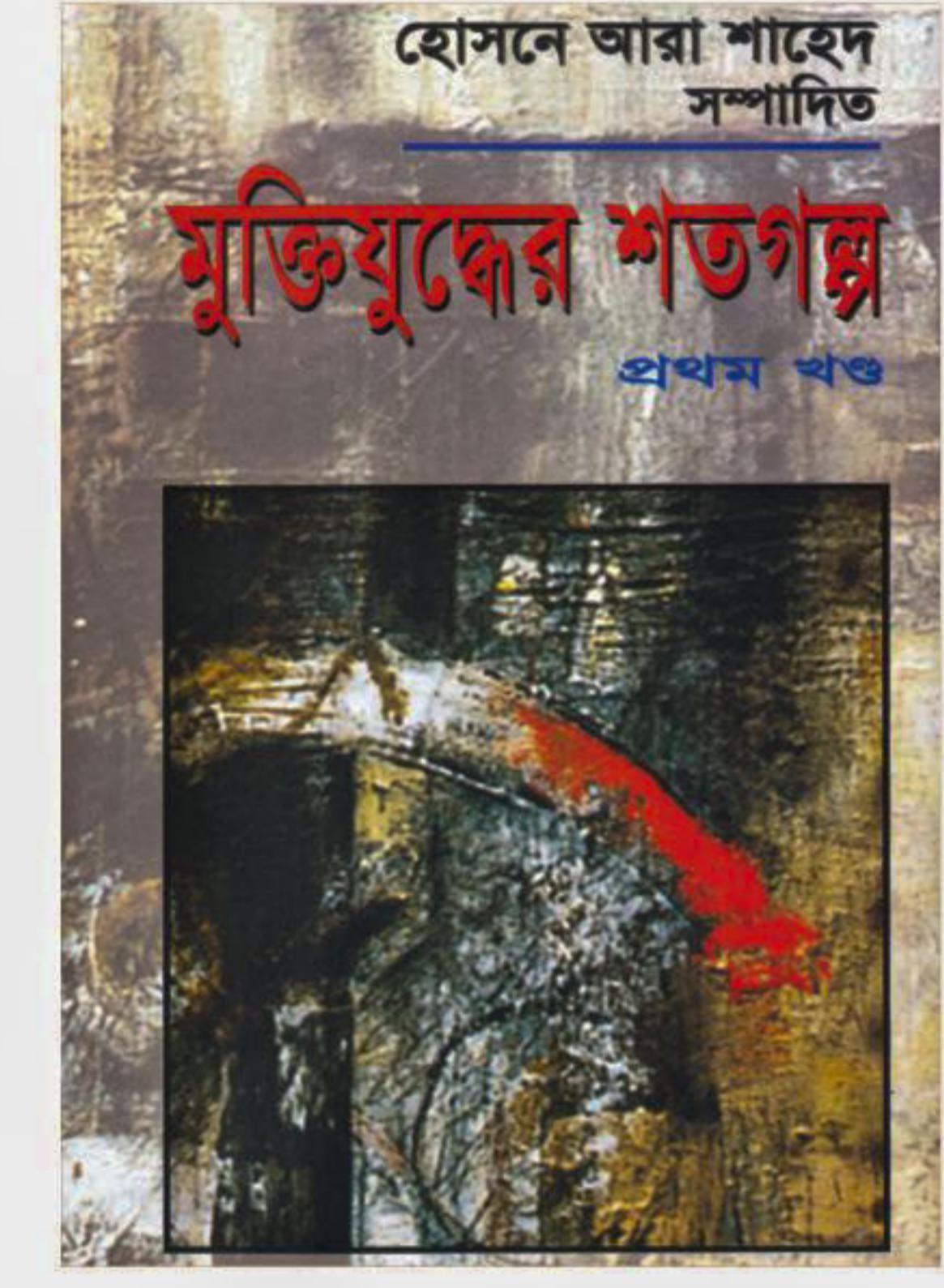
Many other writers and poets and their books have been cited in the anthology but all of them cannot be addressed in this sketchy piece of work. However, this initiative by Professor Nandalal Sharma is certainly an admirable one which will play a massive role in familiarizing the readers of the whole country with the literary heritage of Sylhet region.

The reviewer is a Senior Lecturer, Department of English, Metropolitan University, Sylhet.

100 TALES OF OUR HISTORIC WAR OF LIBERATION

'Muktijuddher shotogolpo'

Collected and Edited by Hosne Ara Shahed



Ameticulous compilation of 100 stories centering the Bangladesh War of Liberation has been done by Litterateur Hosne Ara Shahed in two volumes. Each volume contains 50 stories of renowned writers of the country. Shuchipatra has published the two volumes, which are available in Ekushey Boi Mela. The price of each volume is Tk. 700.00

The collection first appeared in 2001, when it was published by Globe Library. The second edition was also published by the same house. But the third edition this time has been published by Shuchipatra. The editor and publisher both expect that the compilation would help the future generations to understand the ethos of the War of Liberation a little better.

Hosne Ara Shahed needs no elaborate introduction. She is widely known among the literati as an author, writer and educationist. She is former principal of Sher-e-Bangla Girls' School and College in Dhaka.

Her story Sarojinir Chhabti is taught as a text in Department of Modern Indian Languages & Literary Studies (Bengali), University of Delhi. Among her many books, Memorable Dhaka, Collection of Essays, Education System of Bangladesh and Liberation War of Bangladesh have received much acclaim.

She has edited, Dhaka University in the Nineties and Unforgettable Dhaka University, published by Dhaka University Alumni Association, in February 2006.

The first volume of Muktijuddher Shotogolpo contains stories from Ashim Saha, Akhtarruzzaman Ilyas, Abdul Gaffar Chowdhury, Abdul Mannan Syed, Abdus Shakur, Alauddin Al Azad, Jahir Raihan, Jahanara Imam, Dilara Hashem, Nirmalendu Goon, Bashir Al Helal, Purabi Basu, Borhanuddin Khan Zahangir, Bhashkar Chowdhury, Mainul Hasan Saber, Makbul Manjur and others. The second volume contains stories from Mahbub Talukdar, Ranesh Das Gupta, Mobarak Hossain Khan, Rafikun Nabi, Rabeya Khatun, Rashid Haider, Rizia Rahman, Showkat Osman, Shahriar Kabir, Shihab Sarker, Sardar Jayenuddin, Sirajul Islam Chowdhury, Selina Hossain, Syed Shamsul Haque, Hayat Mahmud, Hashem Khan, Hasan Azizul Haque, Satyen Sen and others.

The writer is an Educationist and Litterateur.