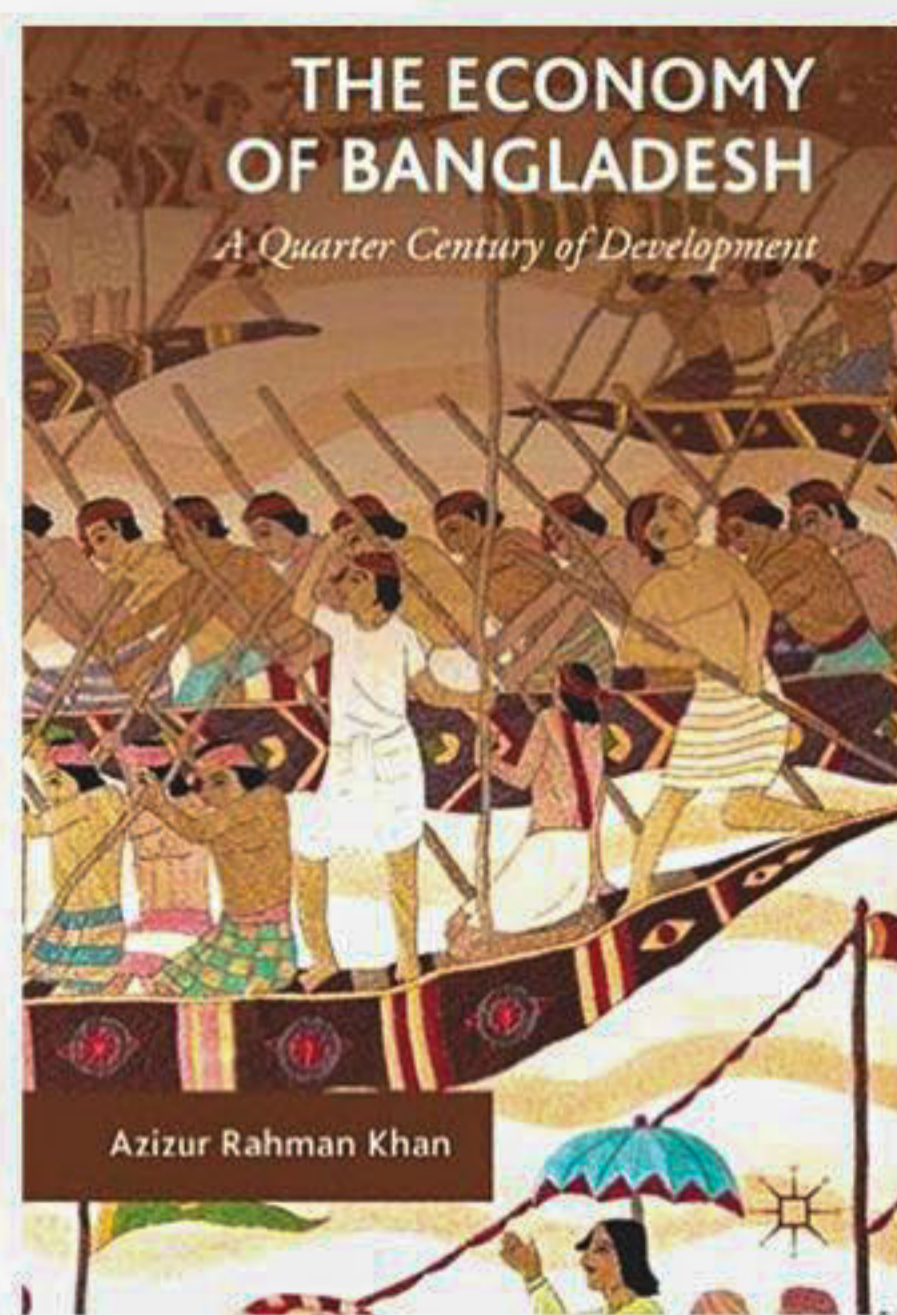


Story of Quarter Century of Development

AUTHOR: AZIZUR RAHMAN KHAN

REVIEWED BY RIZWANUL ISLAM



relating to poverty and inequality, and is based on very detailed analysis of data from five rounds of household income and expenditure surveys undertaken between 1990 and 2010. The last chapter addresses questions relating to future growth prospects of the country. In doing so, the author does not hesitate to get into inevitable issues concerning the political environment and governance.

The period covered by the analysis of the book is roughly a quarter century since 1995, although reference has occasionally been made to the experience of years prior to that when necessary and relevant. The basic storyline that emerges is not entirely unknown, and has both positive elements and concerns. The positives include a gradual acceleration in the overall growth of the economy; decent and uninterrupted growth of agriculture for about two decades; structural change – albeit limited – in the economy, with the manufacturing sector growing at decent, if not very high, rate; integration of the economy into the global economy as demonstrated by a rise in the share of exports in GDP; significant rise in the number of workers employed overseas and a consequent rise in inward remittances which, in turn, contributed (alongside exports) to the build-up of foreign exchange reserve; and a decline in the incidence of poverty as well as improvements in other social indicators of living. The concerns and challenges noted include the plateauing of overall economic growth around six per cent, slow

pace of structural change in the economy, the possibility of diminishing returns to new technology in agriculture, absence of diversification in manufacturing industries and trade, obstacles to faster growth of industries, the trade regime itself discriminating against exports compared to production for the domestic market, constraints emerging from the side of both social and physical infrastructure, and rising inequality in the distribution of income.

Khan gives credit to players who have contributed to the successes attained by the economy. For example, he mentions the roles played by successive governments in both facilitating growth and in attaining social development (although he argues that policy reforms have been only partially successful, as the goal of equal incentives for imports and exports has not been attained), by the NGOs, by migrant workers, and by entrepreneurs at all levels. However, he also points out the failures, for example, in diversifying the structure of production and exports, in removing the many obstacles to growth, e.g., inadequate infrastructure, limited supply of skills, distorted incentives, and the failure of governance.

The brief (almost telegraphic) description provided above of the book under discussion does not, however, do justice to its real distinction and strength. There are at least two aspects that need to be noted. First, of course, is in-depth empirical work behind the various arguments which is so characteristic of Khan's work. The second aspect that distinguishes this work from typical country focused studies is the comparative perspective that it adopts. Utilizing his vast knowledge of other countries, especially those of East and South East Asian countries, he weaves in comparative analyses whenever he finds relevant.

On structural change, for example, Khan looks at the historical context of such change in the currently developed countries like in East Asia and points out that Bangladesh needs to adopt the latter type of strategy, the key characteristics of which are high rate of overall economic growth that is driven primarily by growth in manufacturing and later in service sectors. Based on such a premise, he points out that a GDP growth of over 7 per cent per annum coupled with a much higher growth of industries would be needed to attain the kind of structural change that Bangladesh should aim at. Regarding the strategy for export-led

growth, Khan points out that the incentive structure in Korea was such that there was no discrimination against exports. Moreover, export-oriented industries were provided with additional support through a variety of measures. Policy reforms in Bangladesh have not led to the creation of a neutral incentive structure. How, then, did the ready-made garment industry attain the success it has? Khan points out that this has been made possible first by the erstwhile quota-based regime and subsequently through a series of industry-specific ad hoc measures. He, however, argues that this kind of industry-specific discriminatory support cannot engender a real process of export-led growth. For the latter to take hold, it is essential for the incentive structure to be neutral between exports and imports and for export oriented sectors to receive ex ante, non-arbitrary and time-bound support. He is of the view that if such an environment could be assured and other obstacles like infrastructure could be removed, "many non-RMG manufactures might have become profitable exports" (p.161).

The concluding chapter of the book looks at the achievements and failures of the economy of Bangladesh during the last quarter century, and in that context, takes a hard look at the issue of governance and the nature of governance failure in Bangladesh. While pointing out the deleterious effects of corruption on entrepreneurship and investment, Khan nevertheless argues for a strong government and underscores the need for a "national consensus" on the basic issues of growth and development. Also to be noted is the distinction he makes between "true liberal democracy" and "ritualistic democracy" as is practiced today in Bangladesh and the argument that the stake involved in capturing state power through the latter stands in the way of a radical improvement in governance and removal of obstacles to growth. The last two sentences of the concluding chapter of the book are quite striking: "The question is how might this vicious circle be broken? We do not think we know the answer" (p.171). But the question itself says a great deal and perhaps contains the answer to the challenge of accelerating growth in a way that reduces poverty and avoids a rise in inequality.

The reviewer, an economist, is former Special Adviser, Employment Sector, International Labour Office, Geneva.

Wisdom of a Revivalist

AUTHOR: SUBRATA KUMAR DAS

REVIEWED BY AKBAR HUSSAIN

Publisher: Bangladeshi Novels, Toronto, 2015; Price: 10 Dollars

SRI Chaitanya Deb (1486-1533) was an interesting and charismatic personality of the 16th century in Bengal, Assam, Orissa and across the eastern India. Although primarily his fame was related to a religious movement, his influence was also felt in reforming the society, politics and culture. 'Sri Chaitanya Dev', written by Subrata Kumar Das, a Toronto-based activist, is an attempt at exploring the life, works and mission of Chaitanya, the historical Bengali Hindu revivalist. Written in an easy Bengali, the book may satiate the thirst of the common readers. On the other hand, it is rich in details which for any future researcher can work as a valuable reference book.

We get a clear picture of Sri Chaitanya's life and works in this book which is not confined to religious perspective only. Subrata has dived deep in the historical context as well as philosophical aspects. From this book, we come to know that this great religio-cultural revolutionary did not write any book or proclaim any dogma to propagate his thoughts. Only eight Sanskrit slokas, known as 'Shikshashthaka' (Eight lessons to learn), are to his credit. One of them I have memorized for my personal satisfaction. The English rendering of the sloka reads: "One who thinks of himself lower than the grass, who is more/ tolerant than a tree, and who does not expect personal/ honour but is always prepared to give all respect to others, / can very easily always chant the holy name of the Lord."

Subrata has mentioned that hundreds of



books have been written on Sri Chaitanya Deb but almost none from Bangladesh although he was born in East Bengal and his main area of work was mostly in that part. It's true that Bengali culture and literature has been greatly enriched by Vaishnava thoughts but we have done nothing to celebrate the life and work of this great man. Expressing his dismay, the writer has mentioned in his recent book that it might be due to parochial religious sentiments.

The origin and development of Vaishnava religion in Bengal was a momentous event which originated from the time of Chaitanya. The writer has brought into light some very interesting facts about Vaishnava religion e.g. its origin, philosophy and gradual development. Subrata also has taken great pains to discuss the salient features of Sri Chaitanya's doctrine and his connections with the origins of his movement. He has discovered and connected the links between life and love for Lord Krishna as we find in the philosophical aspects of the Gita. He has found love as the source of emancipation or Nirvana which is the essence of life.

To any intellectual and thoughtful mind religion is always a matter of concern due to its inherent tendency to be guided by immovable dogmas based on the premise that in the realm of knowledge fables and dogmas are not acceptable option. Human knowledge is like a stormy ocean which is constantly churning to find out the essence of knowledge and its application for the betterment of our society.

I would acclaim this book for its efforts to find a unity with the contemporary times. There is a fundamental dose of tolerance in Indian way of thoughts. Even in the age of the Rishis and ancient scriptures the main impetus was on knowledge, not on dogmas. Sage Charvaka even being an atheist was not abandoned or killed. Rather he was respected as a Rishi for his knowledge. If we go through the history, we will find that Sri Chaitanya rightly followed the great traits of Indian tolerance. The book by Subrata Kumar Das is an effort to revive the great Indian traditions ushered by Chaitanya, the great Bengali philosopher and social activist.

This book on Sri Chaitanya Dev is a documentary proof of his understandings of a man who tried to spread this idea of universality almost 600 years ago. Hinduism was beset with caste system, dictatorship of Brahmanism and took rituals as religion. It was Chaitanya who revolted against those systems and declared and dreamed of a world that will be governed by love and mutual respect.

'Sri Chaitanya Dev' has been written with much dexterity and experiment digging out reference from various sources. It is hoped that it will help the readers to be enlightened on the life of the great wise man who was a reformer. Subrata has skillfully depicted the great but humble personality of a man who was much ahead of his life and times.

Editions of the book from Dhaka and Kolkata will surely be worthy efforts to meet the expectations of the greater Bengali-language readership.

The reviewer is a freethinker, writes from Toronto, Canada.

TRIBUTE TO A SCHOLAR

EDITED BY ABDULLAH AL MAMUN AND MASWOOD AKHTER

REVIEWED BY RAKIBUL HASAN

Published by Department of English, University of Rajshahi, Rajshahi, 2014

ON the first death anniversary of Professor Aali Areefur Rehman (1950-2013), 21 March 2014, the Department of English, University of Rajshahi published a monumental work, Literature, History and Culture: Writings in Honour of Professor Aali Areefur Rehman, to commemorate and honour one of the dearest and brightest souls in its history. The volume was edited by Abdullah Al Mamun and Maswood Akhter, both of them are presently Associate Professor in the English Department, Rajshahi University (EDRU).

Nearly a thousand pages long volume containing writings from scholars, intellectuals from across the country and a handful from beyond the border bears testimony to the life and work of this highly esteemed academician. The volume is divided into three sections: Section I is titled 'Literature, History and Culture: Personal, Academic and Creative Writings by Professor Aali Areefur Rehman'; the title of the Section II is 'Life and Legacy of Professor Rehman: Commemorative Writings'; and the Section III is named 'Literature, History and Culture: Research Articles/Critical Essays by Others'. Each of these sections has its distinctive features teeming with ideas, thoughts and passions.

Section I (1 - 534) showcases, though not exhaustively, the scholarship, creativity and sensitivity of Prof. Rehman. There is a wide range of writings in this section covering some highly academic pieces to short stories, poems, autobiography and meditations on diverse matters. The first one is an excerpt from the "Introduction" of his critical edition of Jeremy Taylor's Holy Living which he had submitted as a thesis for his doctoral degree in the University of British Columbia in 1984. There are some other papers of academic and literary interests on Fielding, Richardson, Scott, Shakespeare, Khushwant Singh and so on. Moreover, there are some of his personal writings like "Rajshahi in the Sixties: A Memoir", "Salad Days: Remembering Mid-Twentieth-Century Dhaka" and "Looking After the Old" which reflect the philosophic mind of this scholar immensely nourished by literature, history and culture. The literary and artistic merit of his writings, whether it is academic, personal or creative, is replete with imagery and other figurative uses of language. The following extract taken from "Rajshahi in the Sixties: A Memoir" can be a justification to this statement:

The steamer that you boarded was a real steamer: a paddle-wheeled, steam-engined, double-decker vessel that blew huge clouds of smoke from its stacks and let out ear-splitting whistles that seemed designed to be heard within a radius of at least a hundred miles. One of the great delights of this steamer, in those uncrowded, unhurried days, was the English breakfast of eggs, toast and jam that was served on the forward deck, in British colonial railways fashion, by white-uniformed and turbaned waiters. (271)

A special feature of this section is Prof. Rehman's Interview on English in Bangladesh. The interview was

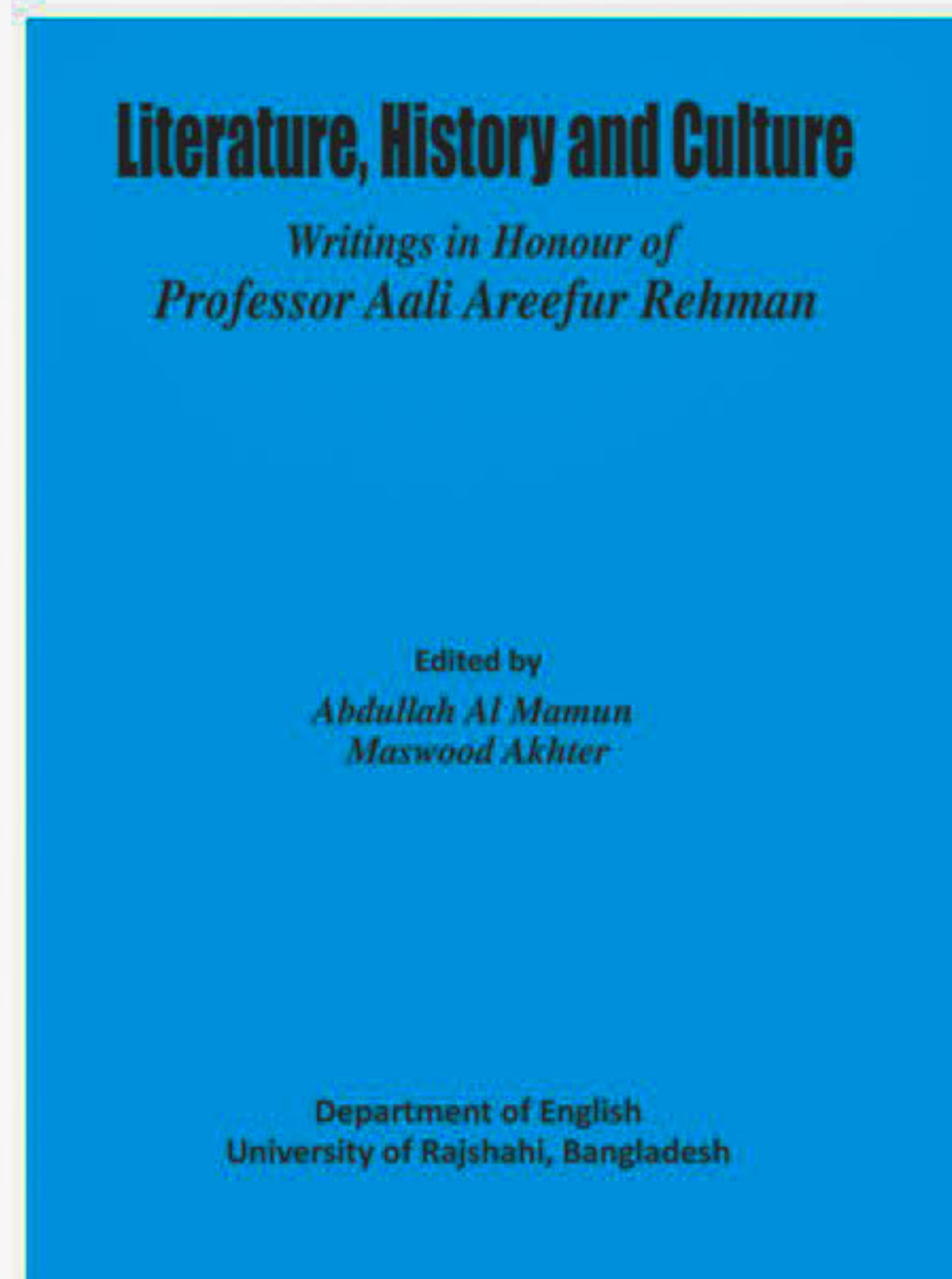
taken by Maswood Akhter and Muhammad Tariq-ul-Islam, two very active teachers of the English Department at Rajshahi University. In this interview, Prof. Rehman expressed his views on the present state of English studies in Bangladesh and its future reflecting his long experience of almost four-decades in this profession.

The writings of Section II (537-685) are full of love and respect that poured passionately from the depth of hearts in the memory of Prof. Rehman. While reading the pieces of this section, readers who knew him closely would go through the feeling of grief at his untimely death. The first three articles come from the three nearest people in his personal life – his wife and two daughters. They remember him as a loving husband and as an inspiring father. Other articles are written by his relatives, colleagues, students and friends in great admiration. In their portrayal, Prof. Rehman is illustrated as an exceptionally gentle, compassionate, amiable and vastly knowledgeable person.

Section III (689-946), the final section of this volume, offers a good number of wonderful research articles and critical essays revolving around the broad theme or scope of the volume: literature, history and culture. This volume would remain incomplete without this section because these writings acknowledge Prof. Rehman's lifelong quest for knowledge. The first article of this section, "Confronting the Canon

They remember him as a loving husband and as an inspiring father. Other articles are written by his relatives, colleagues, students and friends in great admiration. In their portrayal, Prof. Rehman is illustrated as an exceptionally gentle, compassionate, amiable and vastly

Contrapuntally: The Example of Edward Said", is written by Professor Fakrul Alam. Here Prof. Alam presents a brilliant and time-befitting solution to overcoming the post-colonial predicament in English studies drawing analogies from the thoughts and theories of Edward Said. Simi Malhotra and M. Shahidullah have searched for a suitable pedagogy for English studies in their respective native contexts of India and Bangladesh. These two papers, along with the one by Richard Kiely, are significant from the perspective of



English Language Teaching (ELT). Abdullah Al Mamun comes up with his ingenious way-outs to cope up with the challenges of declining market for English discipline in Bangladesh in his essay "English and the Market". Mashrur Shahid Hossain brings forth a deep insight into the politics of Nobel Prize in Literature in his article on four African Nobel Laureates. In another paper, Maswood Akhter offers a comprehensive and insightful discourse on postcolonialism. All the articles in this section, including those which are not mentioned here, are immensely thought-provoking and deeply researched. They advance the scholarship and existing knowledge in the fields of literature, history and culture which were the lifetime endeavour of Prof. Rehman.

The writings of this volume truly honour the memory of Prof. Rehman, and ultimately it becomes an excellent document of illuminating thoughts. It can be deduced how the two editors grappled with the painstaking task of editing such a huge volume. As a result, it comes to the readers with a few typos or other minor errors. They should also be given credit for the selection and arrangement of the writings which perfectly meet the demand of the occasion – commemorating Professor Aali Areefur Rehman.

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