

## BOOK REVIEW

Mohammad Mahabbat Khan and Syed Anwar Husain (editors), *Bangladesh Studies : Politics Administration, Rural Development and Foreign Policy* ( University of Dhaka : Center for Administrative Studies, 1986 ) 281+XIVpp.

The emergence of Bangladesh in 1971 as an independent country brought in its wake prodigious problems in various fields of development, the more so as its incipience was preceded by a violent and destructive war of liberation. Since then almost sixteen years have gone by, but Bangladesh still finds herself deeply enmeshed in a quagmire of development problems and continues to struggle to come out of the indignity of being classed among the least developed countries of the world. By now a considerable volume of literature has been written by well-known and not-so-well-known theoreticians and practitioners, on the various development issues of Bangladesh, pinpointing the problems endemic to them, suggesting ways to tackle them and proposing alternative development strategies. The problems, however, continue to prevail and plague and, with their end not in sight in the near future, the search to control and finally minimize them goes on. A fairly recent addition to this quest is Mohammad Mohabbat Khan and Syed Anwar Husain's edited book *Bangladesh Studies : Politics, Administration, Rural Development and Foreign Policy*.

Khan and Husain's book is a compilation of papers, bar one, which were presented at a workshop on "Bangladesh Studies : Politics, Administration and Foreign Policy" held in September 1984

under the aegis of the Center for Administrative Studies, University of Dhaka. Each paper was followed by a commentary by a designated discussant and such comments have also been included in this volume. In designing the format of their book, the authors have grouped the articles under four separate themes, placing the one on politics at the beginning, followed sequentially by those on administration rural development and foreign policy.

The theme on politics is represented by Azizul Haque's article "Politics in Bangladesh : Conflict and Confusion". Haque tries to establish the genesis of political culture in Bangladesh, which he finds to be a combination of some of the worst possible connotations in the political paradigm. One gets the impression that all possible political vices abound in Bangladesh to say nothing of a lack of firm political direction since her very inception. Haque thinks that it was a mistake to introduce parliamentary democracy in Bangladesh given the prevailing socio-political environment in 1972 (pp. 5-6 ). He further thinks that a government of military commander of a national government composed of different political groups would have suited Bangladesh's nascent political needs. The notable thing here is that Haque also does not come out and say what, in his opinion, should have been the form of government which would not have avoided all the subsequent "conflict and confusion" in Bangladesh politics. When he comes up with a suggestion on ways to break away from the "atmosphere of violence ( that ) has been in existence in Bangladesh since her inception" (p. 7) and move towards developing a rational political order, he calls for a social revolution under well-meaning leadership with an ideology and organized party, having a clear vision of the future. All these sounds little nebulous in that the author never develops his ideas to explain just what kind of social revolution he has in mind. Or, for that matter, what should be the ideological basis and concomitantly, the nature of future vision that the political leadership should possess,

In leading up to his illuminating account of political culture in Bangladesh, Haque provides a concise historical backdrop on the nature of political movements in British India and pre-1971 Pakistan. He believes that Awami League wanted to end the liberation war as early as possible (p. 4), which may or may not be the case. What is perplexing is Haque's silence on the role of India in Bangladesh's war of independence. Could it not have been in India's own interest to seek a quick military solution in order to ease the burden of the economic cost of harbouring millions of refugees on her soil, to concentrate on damping down on the menacing Naxalite movement in West Bengal and to instal a pro-India Awami League government as quickly as possible? Could it also not have been India's desire to cut down to size arch-enemy Pakistan as fast as she could in weather conditions best suited for rapid and mobile warfare? This would have enhanced her prestige internally and internationally, united the country when divisive and subversive forces were beginning to get problematical, and obviated any adverse international pressure on her.

Three articles comprise the next thematic grouping in the book : administration. From Azizul Haque's "political culture" we come across the idea of "administrative culture" in M. Anisuzzaman's interesting work, "Administrative Culture in Bangladesh : The Public-Bureaucrat Phenomenon". Administrative culture is depicted as interaction between the bureaucrats and the public aimed at deriving mutual advantage. He then follows with a very important hypothesis that for the alleged dysfunctions of the bureaucrats the public's role is a *sine qua non*.

Anisuzzaman identifies five aspects, he calls them "mystics of administrative culture : the mystics of rule, tadbir, districtism, service, and district administration and suggests, with a caveat that further empirical research is necessary to come to a more definite conclusion, that these are responsible for the elitist behaviour of the bureaucrats in relation to the public. The author has tended to emphasize on the role of the civil servants in creating what he calls a "subject" culture.

The attitudinal problems of the "public" in its interaction with the bureaucrats, which is an essential ingredient of administrative culture, are not touched upon. It is of prime need to explore public psychology and the social, economic and cultural factors which induce it to behave in the subservient manner it adopts towards the bureaucrats. Access of a few privileged people to the civil servant for gaining mutual benefit will certainly not bring about a "participant" culture.

Syed Giasuddin Ahmed and Mohammad Mohabbat Khan both deal with the general topic of Public Personnel Administration in relation to Bangladesh. Ahmed's piece is titled "Public Personnel Administration in Bangladesh : An Overview of its Formal and Informal Operations". He dwells upon the premier central personnel agencies of Bangladesh : the Establishment Division, the Public Service Commission (PSC) and the Ministry of Finance. One would be inclined to think that the first two organizations would suffice to encompass public personnel administration, but, because it "has enormous powers over the organization of bureaucracy" (p. 37), the author has chosen to discuss also the role of the Finance Ministry. Ahmed gives a comprehensive account of the formal organization and function of the three bodies and then probes into their practical operations. He comes up with the sobering conclusion that the volatile and uncertain political environment prevailing in the country since her very inception has prevented a healthy working of the central personnel agencies, in particular the PSC. The paper raises a few points that need explaining. Its discussant, Mohammad Faizullah (himself a civil servant), does a worthwhile job in providing some of the explanations. Commenting on Ahmed's thesis that the former EPCS officers have gained ascendancy over the erstwhile CSPs in running the Establishment Division, Faizullah provides a clarification which deserves interest if only to depict the elitist mentality of the erstwhile CSPs. The CSPs lost interest in the Establishment Division primarily because the Division did not provide : (i) job satisfaction, (ii) benefits and facilities like transport and foreign visits, and (iii)

career prospects in foreign postings or posting in international agencies (p.56).

Having recognized the obsolescence of an elitist bureaucracy typified by the ICSs and CSPs of bygone days, the Bangladesh government had opted for an integrated, non-elitist civil service. This change in outlook has been reflected in the policies of both recruitment and training of civil servants. Mohabbat Khan provides a compact but well-documented discussion on the country's central public administration and management training institute in his "Public Administration Training Centre: A Critical Overview". In addition to the fulfillment of the felt need for an integrated complex for training of newly recruited, mid-level and senior civil servants along with nongazetted lower level employees, all of whom used to have their own different training institutes, the merging of the four institutes and formation of the Public Administration Training Centre (PATC) at Savar have led to the economies of scale. Khan has meticulously traced the origin, development, organizational structure and functions of the Centre. He has also identified some problems the complex is facing and has suggested some policy recommendations to overcome them.

In his book *Bureaucratic Elites in Segmented Economic Growth: Bangladesh and Pakistan* (Dhaka : UPL, 1980), Emajuddin Ahamed found that the elitist bureaucracy in Bangladesh (referring to the former CSPs) is deeply imbued with guardianship orientations and favour a kind of limited popular participation within a framework of paternal rule (p. 181). The same sentiments seem to be in operation when Khan finds them resentful of having to share training facilities with the non-gazetted lower level employees and to stay and work at Savar which is only a few kilometres from Dhaka city. Khan strongly advocates for a performance-oriented, effective and responsible bureaucracy through integrated training at PATC, yet he criticizes the location of the complex on the ground that competent civil servants are unwilling to stay and work at Savar. This is not only a self-contradictory line of thinking, but also contrary to the very

idea of a non-elitist, competent and responsible bureaucracy. Autonomy of operation for PATC is a noble idea as the author suggests, but, in proposing the creation of a public body drawn from different professions to replace the present bureaucrat-predominated Board of Governors, Khan does not specify the number of representatives to be drawn from each professional category. Then, again, one is left in the dark as to the criteria for selecting these persons. For example, what should be the qualifications of the professional civil servants? A body composed of too many people may be unwieldy, runs the danger of harbouring mediocrities and may turn it into a debating society rather than an effective policy-making entity.

The next set of articles, comprising five in number, forms the section on rural development. The first three generally covers the various phases of institutional development of rural policies and programmes as well as how they have been put to practice. Ashraf-uddin Ahmed's work is entitled "Politics of Rural Development in Bangladesh, 1950-1970 : Issues of Community Development Programme, Local Government and Rural Works Programme". The parameter of the period that Ahmed covers, 1950 to 1970, really pinpoints to rural development programmes originated during Pakistani times, starting from the community development oriented V-AID programme in the 1950s to the Basic Democracy Model and Rural Works Programme in the 1960s. Ahmed has shown that in all these plans the element of political patronage was allowed to creep in to bolster the already powerful village oligarchs while the rural poor gained very little. The most innovative and enduring of rural development programmes in this country, the Comilla Model has only been perfunctorily mentioned. Since this project was undertaken in the early 1960s it is an important omission on the author's part not to have discussed it more substantially. It would be interesting to know if any political ramification was associated with its inception and implementation.

Mohammad Asaduzzaman discusses the Comilla Model in "Institution Building Programmes under Comilla Model of Rural Development in Bangladesh". Incidentally, this is the only article in the book which was not a part of the CENTAS workshop. Asaduzzaman leads off with a brief background which led to the establishment of the Pakistan Academy for Rural Development (PARD, now BARD) and the evolution of the Comilla Model. He highlights the essence of the Model's novel thinking: ".....to formulate a mechanism to replace patron-client relationship between them" (p. 104). The three major institution-building programmes of the Model, introduction of the Thana Council, development of the two-tier system of cooperatives and the creation of the Thana Training and Development Centre (TTDC) are profoundly discussed. The author, however, makes, at the very end, an abrupt and open-ended statement: "Though Comilla Model.....played a significant role in bringing about rural development in Comilla, its replication all over the country was comparatively unimpressive when measured against the expectations raised by the successes in Comilla" (p. 117). Since the experiment was successful in Comilla, the obvious question playing the squirrel in one's mind is why the model, through the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP, now renamed Bangladesh Rural Development Board), has not been replicated elsewhere in Bangladesh. What are the factors, of their absence, which have been impediments to its failure elsewhere? The point is of course very vital. Once Asaduzzaman raised it he should have followed it to its logical conclusion by providing some insights. After all, a successful programme of rural development pervading the entire country is the prime need for building a sound socio-economic infrastructure.

Salehuddin Ahmed takes up two case studies of primary cooperative societies to illustrate his hypothesis that "the development efforts..... have not benefitted the people at the grassroot level due, mainly, to the lack of effective receiving institution for the poor and disadvantaged people" (p.125). In "The Receiving Mechanism and Role of Community Activity : Experience of Rural Development in Bangladesh",

Ahmed argues that too much emphasis has been put on the supply or delivery side to the relative neglect of the demand or receiving side for development efforts to be effective. Ahmed uses his case studies as two examples of failure and success in terms of efficiency of the receiving institution and concludes that unless the rural poor, landless and small farmers form the core of the receiving mechanism, comprehensive rural development will not be possible. He then states that "it has been shown that the KSS in Bangladesh, at present form and stage, has not been able to emerge as a robust and active receiving system for the rural poor....." (p. 142). In extrapolating the KSS's failure in the entire country from his two case studies, Ahmed may have gone too far in generalisation. Intuitively one feels that he could be right in his conclusion but, a macro level generalization from micro level data of only two cases may have been too risky.

Barkat-e-Khuda's "Rural Development and Fertility Transition in Bangladesh : Guidance from Comilla Kotwali Thana" is an impressive paper combining elements of demography and economics. Based on a series of meticulously documented observations in a Bangladeshi village, Khuda contends that fertility reduction is positively related to improved access to education and better health services. The author has chosen a village in Comilla-Kotwali thana as his study area reasoning that the thana "provides a good example of rural development programmes undertaken on a reasonable scale over a relatively long period of time.....to be able to make its impact felt on the lives of the villagers" (p.149). Or, in other words, an atypical Bangladeshi village enjoying the blessings and advantages of rural development experiments of the Comilla Model has been focussed upon.

Just how much developed the study village is compared to the national average is evident from the big differentials in statistics of economic activities of the two. We are provided with the picture of a generally self-sufficient village populated by an enlightened community whose achievements could be inspirational for developmental activities elsewhere in the country. Khuda has shown that in this



village at least, the thorniest national problem, high population growth rate, has been successfully overcome. He believes that the high literacy rate in the area (85% for males and 61% for females) has contributed to fertility reduction. Khuda submits that education affects fertility by: (i) modernizing outlook and attitudes, (ii) delaying the age at marriage (iii) promoting contraception, and (iv) promoting modern ideas regarding hygiene and sanitation and, thereby keeping down infant mortality (pp. 162-163). It would be of crucial interest if other research could be undertaken to find out if education could also help do away with the shackles put on the rural populace's acceptance pattern that result from the prohibitions of fundamentalist religious leaders regarding family planning. Khuda provides a small but significant information when he finds out that in the study area males and females respectively desired, on average, 4.6 and 4.5 children—much above the maximum of 2 that the government has set to combat population explosion. Since these figures are inversely associated with the landholding of the respondents, he goes on to show that developed or not, the ancient factor of associating possession of land with security still remain.

The theme on rural development is winded up with A B. Sharfuddin Ahmed's "Changing Pattern of Social Structure in Rural Bangladesh". The author purports to depict changes in the social structure of rural Bangladesh without providing support from any substantial data base. He believes that the "upper crust" of the society has gone for western ways of life while the "lower crust" has remained traditional with religion playing a strong role in their lives. In this, as in several other conclusions, Ahmed has depended largely on intuitive generalization.

The final grouping in the volume, that on foreign policy, contains two pieces. Imtiaz Ahmed's article is entitled "A Projection of the Dynamism of Bangladesh-United States Relations". The growth of Bangladesh - U.S. relations has been a very important phase in this country's foreign policy in that it marked the end of her honeymooning

period with the Soviet Union and India, countries which had helped in her liberation struggle. Politics and perceived realities of economic dependency, however, soon projected the United States — a country whose government certainly had a negative role *vis a vis* Bangladesh's liberation war—as one with whom it would pay to have the closest relationship.

Ahmed identifies and analyzes four distinct phases in the development of Bangladesh-U.S. relations: the period of hostility (March 1971-March 1972), the period of conciliation (April 1972-August 1974), the period of improved friendship (September 1974-August 1975) and the period of total friendship (August 1975 onwards). The author then analyzes the bases for friendship between the two countries: economic and political. The political interest is defined in terms of a favourable ruling elite in this country that would not create obstacles to the U.S. economic interest in general and act as a check to the growth of communism. The economic interest is seen in terms of aid — certainly from Bangladesh's point of view the imperative factor— and profit motive from business interests. Ahmed, in explaining the economic ground for friendship, digresses though interestingly, to explain in detail the liberal and Marxist theories of imperialism.

Since Ahmed believes, and rightly so, that foreign aid is the focal point of interest in Bangladesh - U.S. friendship, it was expected that he would dwell on this subject at some length and he does not disappoint. In this context he warns that the massive flow of American aid has thrust Bangladesh in a financial, commercial and technical dependency syndrome in her relation with the U.S. Regarding transfer of technology, further research should be carried out to delve into the quality of the consultants who come with tied-aid and see if they are really being of much use to this country's needs.

Syed Anwar Husain's article "Bangladesh and Islamic Countries, 1972-1983" is self-explanatory as to its content. As we saw in the case of the Bangladesh-US relations, this country's interaction with the Islamic world by and large commenced very tentatively for precisely

the same reason : the Islamic world's negative role in the war of liberation. Husain faithfully records the chronology of events which has led to the present very warm relationship with the Islamic world. Common and specific determinants of the relationship are identified and explained. An urge for Islamic solidarity is seen as the common determinant. Among the specific determinants mentioned are the corresponding interests of the Islamic world and Bangladesh. The Islamic world has interest in the geo-political position of Bangladesh which allows her to play a vital role in bringing the Islamic world closer, the cheap labour force which this country can provide and the moral and diplomatic support which she can and does give to the cause of Islamic countries. Bangladesh's interest is in securing economic aid from the oil-rich Arab nations, getting remittances from her labour force working in the Islamic countries and acquiring moral and diplomatic support for her causes.

Husain raises a vital point when he says that as donor countries the Islamic nations have sought to influence the internal affairs of Bangladesh to a point where this country has developed an "Islamic orientation" in her foreign policy. He also believes that fundamentalism is creeping into Bangladeshi society and politics due to the influence of petro-dollars. Husain should have delved deeper into these assertions and analyzed the effect of apparent Islamization on this country.

Economic, administrative and socio-political factors are crucial to development planning and policies. These are most apposite to Bangladesh which finds herself in the doldrums in trying to build a solid infrastructure in the various development fields. Policies and events in Bangladesh are strongly influenced and guided by the divergent claims and expectations of competing interest groups and the need to respond to them with scarce resources. To the plethora of purely domestic problems has been added the dependency syndrome of foreign aid. The teething problems of administrative reorganization are acute and rural development is still a far cry. The picture is

gloomy; it is all the more imperative to work out some solutions to alleviate the poverty of the country and they could not come soon enough. Workshops of the sort which have provided the material for the book under review are absolutely necessary to come up with some answers. One wishes policy planners would go through Khan and Husain's book and gain some positive insight on development issues and solutions. The book is not devoid of some sound suggestions. If we overlook the printer's devil *Bangladesh Studies: Politics, Administration, Rural Development and Foreign Policy* is an important book for anyone interested in and anxious about the development problems of Bangladesh.

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