

## Book Review: "Society and Sociology in Bangladesh: A South Asian Perspective" by Sadeka Halim, ASM Amanullah, and Rasheda Irshad Nasir (Editors) (1st Edition)

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*Society and Sociology in Bangladesh: A South Asian Perspective*, a book written and edited by the current and former faculty members of the Department of Sociology, University of Dhaka, is a powerful analysis of sociological discourses, academic praxes, future prospects, and contemporary challenges and issues, highlighting national and international trends and prospects of sociology concerning tertiary education and academic research in Bangladesh and South Asia. This book, a combination of nineteen chapters by twenty-one contributors, is well articulated, comprehensive, and easy to digest for those readers who are interested in understanding social dynamics, their challenges, and the way forward. The book, which is methodologically grounded in findings from both empirical studies and systematic literature reviews, was published to commemorate the centenary of the University of Dhaka and designed to actively engage audiences within and outside the university related to social sciences.

In the first chapter, Professor

Rasheda Irshad Nasir and Professor ASM Amanullah, illustrate the history of the origin and development of the Department of Sociology at the University of Dhaka along with the identification of various academic traditions developed and nurtured by former faculty members and updated by the current scholars, linking up the courses of Sociology with 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and describing the potentiality of the department up in the near future. Connecting with the sociology of development, in chapter two, Professor S. Aminul Islam points to three paradigms focusing on the development and underdevelopment in agrarian structure, poverty, microcredit, and power structure. Similarly, Professor Monirul Islam Khan had a constructive discussion in the fourth chapter about the institutionalization of Sociology in Bangladesh in an attempt to review its present state of functioning and identify the underlying causes that shaped it in the given form based on real-life experiences and secondary literature.

In chapter three, Professor A. I.

Mahbub Uddin Ahmed theoretically explains contemporary changes in Bangladesh society, which is inextricably intertwined with the emergence of a new accumulation regime - accumulation by dispossession under neoliberalism. He identifies that the mixed capitalist system of Bangladesh has initiated five major capitalistic changes in its socio-economic formation, based on a historical analytical method and content analysis. These changes include: the rise of an industrial capitalist society, the emergence of a new lumpen class structure from its well-entrenched colonial class structure, the transformation from a colonial democratic state to a democratically undemocratic state, a shift from traditional mechanical solidarity to an anomic society, and, the commodification of the entire superstructure. Further, he argues that "neoliberalism" or "new imperialism" is the main cause of contemporary social change in post-colonial Bangladesh.

Based on the two decades of experiences from the engagement with teaching and developing 'Sociology of Minority' course, Professor Sadeka Halim, in chapter five, critically analyzes the problems of conceptualization of minority, local literature on minority debate and the critical discourse of factors responsible for deprivation of the minority communities as well as the marginalized status of indigenous communities in Bangladesh. As a part of the practical application of this course--promoting equality and equity for all forms of communities--this chapter suggests several potential scopes for future

research and improvements including the experience of social exclusion, oppression and marginalization as well as the integration of minorities into mainstream society, the acknowledgement of religious and ethnic plurality, effective census and disaggregated data, GO-NGO collaboration, land related disputes, 8th five year plan and SDG implementation, gender issues and the application of international instruments ratified by the Government of Bangladesh (GoB).

Differently, in chapter six, Professor Zeenat Huda depicts the contribution of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in imagining Bengali National Identity and framing the model of secularism according to sociological discourse and theoretical understanding based on a systematic literature review method. She highlights the significance of Mujibian philosophy for quality education at the tertiary level and sustainable development in Bangladesh, claiming that to ensure educational rights for all classes of people, the educational policymakers must embrace the philosophy of secularism, diversity, and cultural heterogeneity of Bangabandhu.

Regarding the problems and prospects of studying Medical Sociology in Bangladesh, Professor ASM Amanullah, in chapter seven, proposes a theoretical framework that fits well in the context of Bangladesh and demonstrates how the health challenges could be seriously related to national development agendas. He addresses discourses of the social construction of health, illness and medicine, unresolved structural problems

in the health systems, challenges during the dominant era of neoliberalism, and finally critical examination of why sociologists need to engage theoretically and empirically on the social realities of communicable and non-communicable diseases. Although Bangladesh has made significant progress in the field of health in its 50 years of independence, it has some challenges as well as strengths toward achieving the SDGs in Bangladesh.

Similarly, in chapter nine, Professor Shah Ehsan Habib discusses the issues of health and illness from theoretical and practical contexts, providing insights into social construction of health and illness, sociology of pandemics, pandemics and social medicine responses, global health strategies and frameworks, and challenges of international health governance in addressing global pandemic like Covid-19. Professor Habib also explains the significance of Medical Sociology in achieving SDGs and provides constructive discussion about capacity building on infection prevention and control in Bangladesh. The main differences between these two chapters lie in their focusing issues, theoretical explanations, and analytical approach. While the previous chapter focuses on the academic development of medical sociology in Bangladesh using historical and theoretical analysis and linking them to the local context of health challenges, the next one explores the sociology of pandemic with a theoretical assessment of health and illness in the context of 'Risk Society and Covid-19 Pandemic'.

In chapter eight, Professor Fatema Rezina Iqbal discusses the significance of studying 'Sociology of Marriage and Family' in Bangladesh, taking into consideration of the theoretical perspectives, causal factors, and consequences of contemporary changes in family patterns in Bangladesh as well as critically reflecting on the dynamics of family in a changing industrial and neo-liberal society based on secondary sources of data. She finally relates this course as family studies is crucial in achieving SDGs in developing countries like Bangladesh, and suggests a strategic direction for further teaching, research, and collaboration with multiple stakeholders at the national and global level.

Focusing on the interrelationship among democracy, state, and vested interest groups in post-1990s Bangladesh, Professor A. K. M. Jamal Uddin and Israt Jahan Eyemoon, in chapter ten, illustrates that Bangladesh has been facing a crisis of democracy and democratic values, specifically when a democratic state is considered to be characterized by high levels of political involvement, numerous political parties, a growing middle class, a dynamic civil society and regular elections. At the last part of this chapter, they provide a strategic direction to reach international standards in teaching and research of nationalism and democracy, future activities to coordinate with the international arena, and support for national goals and interests.

In chapter eleven, Professor M. Anwar Hossain discusses the role of 'Environmental Sociology' aiming to provide an overview

of the existing literature on environmental sociology and understanding the political ecology of water development, empirical analysis of Human Exceptionalism Paradigm (HEP) and New Ecological Paradigm (NEP) in the context of Bangladesh, and argues that since World War II, water development is dominated by Western techno-centric perspective under the policy prescriptions of liberal and neoliberal development. At the end, he suggests the tasks ahead in promoting this course that will contribute to addressing distributional justice, climate justice, and environmental justice.

Professor Jahangir Alam, in chapter twelve, elucidates the role of youth in achieving the global development agenda, like the MDGs and SDGs, as well as how such a global development agenda talks about youth in the changing society. He also sheds light on the benefits of the demographic dividend from youth employment, challenges ahead in maximizing the demographic dividend, and the youth unemployment challenge for Bangladesh towards the achievement of the SDGs. He focuses on the strategic directions to minimize youth unemployment and development challenges, and highlights that the population dividend, ensuring sustainable gender equality and decent work environment could be a far cry if the critical challenges ahead of Bangladeshi youth are not addressed properly through academic, public and private sector initiatives at the national and global level.

In chapter thirteen, Tahsina Akter focuses on the teaching of sociology and the significance of social science perspectives

and constraints of sociological research in Bangladesh, highlighting the role of the Department of Sociology of the University of Dhaka in addressing social issues, demonstrating from qualitative approach that blends historical, thematic, and critical analysis. She recommends the strategies of quality teaching, research, and linkage possibilities of the department of sociology with other academic and industrial entities, and concludes that adopting a home-grown approach based on practical and theoretical knowledge that can boost the efforts of social sciences teaching and research in Bangladesh.

Samina Luthfa and Wasifa Tasnim Shamma demonstrate, in chapter fourteen, the scholarly contributions on social political movements of Bangladesh as well as a constructive discussion on the contextual factors, dimensions, and processes of social movement based on the review of literature on varied social movements that took place in the country from 1960 to 2020. They argue that although social movements are far from being anything new, the theoretical tools of subaltern studies, cultural studies, and history have been replaced by new analytical tools in sociology. Presenting a thematic and chronological analysis of social and political movements of Bangladesh, they identify research gaps and provide a clear roadmap for action-based initiatives for strengthening relationships with several stakeholders for research and development at home and abroad. They suggest that intersectionality, post-coloniality, anti-neoliberalism, and interdisciplinary is a major expectations from social movement researchers of the future.

Professor Khairul Chowdhury, in chapter fifteen, attempts to rethink development strategies and pedagogy in Sociology in Bangladesh and critically reviews the theories of development and post-development, and how post-development theories challenge mainstream development theories characterized by Eurocentrism, colonialism, and neo-liberalism. He focuses on the meaning, practices, and the nature of development of Bangladesh based on secondary empirical data, as well as the identification of several critical social and economic challenges of development perspectives in Bangladesh, such as poverty and income inequality. Finally, the author emphasizes the need for a reevaluation of the Sociology of Development curriculum and teaching methods, as well as a persistent critique of Bangladesh's current development plans and accomplishments to achieve social justice.

In the next chapter, Debasish Kumar Kundu explores the conceptual dilemmas of "Peasant and Peasantry" and analyzes the peasant studies in global academia from the early period of industrialization to the post-colonial period and the re-examination of peasant studies in Bangladesh based on global and local literature. Furthermore, he focuses on the primary theoretical debates on the peasant society of Bangladesh and explains what sociology can contribute to further development of peasant studies, emphasizing the application of peasant studies for rural transformation in Bangladesh, possible forms of collaboration with national and international partners, and

the new manifesto for peasant studies in the age of 4IR and SDGs.

In chapter seventeen, Lipon Mondol discloses the transformation of Bangladesh from an agricultural society to a capitalist society. By drawing on relevant literature and empirical studies, he focuses on how unplanned urbanization and corrupt urban practices by power elites have made Bangladeshi cities unequal, unsustainable, and unlivable. He argues that governments have failed to build Bangladeshi cities that are inclusive and sustainable due to their unrealistic plans and passive responses to rampant urbanization. He also recommends how the governments can achieve their targets for SDGs by re-planning and remaking cities to be inclusive and sustainable for all.

In the next chapter, Humayun Kabir explains the scenarios of poverty and social inequality in Bangladesh, highlighting references from the RMG sector, gender inequality and violation of workplace rights, and modern slavery. He connects the situation with the 'marriage between poverty and inequality' through capital accumulation, focusing on the impacts on society. He highlights the role of the sociology discipline, focusing on workplace rights and contribution to national development, ensuring good governance, which mitigates the existing forms of poverty and social inequality in Bangladesh.

The nineteen and last chapter includes a keynote speech of the former Supernumerary Professor, K.A.M. Saa'duddin, on "Development and Sociology: A Theoretical Analysis", which

was presented at the biannual conference of the Bangladesh Sociological Association in 1990. He focuses on the new phase of underdevelopment that more appropriately explains the conditions obtaining in Third World countries today. He acknowledged that social evolution as the principal determinant of social change, according to classical theorists, and contemporary theorists labelled progress as an inevitable trend of humankind. He also illustrates the modernization theory and dependency theory, arguing that underdevelopment is the inevitable result of capitalism. With the advancement of science and technology, scholars of the sociology of development will develop a suitable theoretical framework for exposing the exploitation as part of the struggle against neo-colonialism.

Nonetheless, the entire book is undoubtedly a pivotal and thought-provoking text for students and emerging sociologists, while also providing a timely critical voice on society and sociology in Bangladesh and a South Asian perspective. Through the engagement with various theories and disciplines, it positions the book as relevant for a variety of intended global audiences, yet it also skips (unintentionally) some other sociological issues such as social gerontology, social psychology, social demography, social issues and problems, as well as criminology. While the book primarily centers on the context of Bangladesh and South Asia, it inadequately incorporates examples from other South Asian countries, which may be perceived as a notable deficiency. In addition, the necessity and applicability of

the courses in this book have been analyzed in the context of the achievement of the 'Global Agenda' SDG-2030. It is expected that further analysis of the applicability and significance of these courses may be conducted with other significant variables that will help to understand the society and sociology in Bangladesh and South Asia in the age of the fourth industrial revolution (4IR) and artificial intelligence (AI).

## References

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