

Note from the Editor

Fifty Years of My Sociology

Fifty years is a long time to be associated with anyone or anything. Other than the family, it is well-nigh impossible to endure anyone for that long. That is why it is celebrated as the Golden Year. As far as a career is concerned no one these days expects to carry on with the same of work for fifty years. Changing the kind of work one does a few times is the current norm. Yet, here I am still doing sociology for fifty years!

It was exactly fifty years ago this July in 1968 when I began my career in sociology, my undergraduate training at least. Sociology then was a new subject of study at the University of Dhaka and few knew of it even by name. It was taught as an introductory course in the BA programmes in some colleges and very few liked it. My personal introduction to the subject was a unique event. I had joined the Air Force after completing high school but did not enjoy the regimentation of the military life and quit soon after. I was then squandering away my time while my friends were completing their graduations and I became the “black sheep” of the family in no time at all.

There was tremendous pressure from my middle class family to do “something” with “my life”. But nothing appealed to me; university life was not even on the cards, I was hoping to get a job of some sort, preferably a managerial type. That is when a friend of mine who was taking his BA exam approached me with a sociology book, a simplified notebook to be exact, and requested me to read and explain the subject to him, assuming that I knew better English than he did. English then was the medium of instruction at the post secondary level but I had my secondary education in English. So, my friend was convinced I knew better English. Thus, to assist a friend I read the introductory sociology book and, I “liked” it!

Somehow, I felt that the book addressed some, if not all, the “questions” that I was “grappling” with since my teens (?!). It dealt with family, which was a troubling one for me, to say the least, rather I was a trouble for the family; culture, where I was a total misfit, caught between the native culture and the Western culture I was immersed in from my English model “public schooling”; state and politics, politics was heating up in the country, prior to the independence war; religion, the basis of the country then was now being challenged and new secular trends were already in vogue; urbanization, city life appealed to me so much so that I would often picture my small provincial town to be full of skyscrapers in the future; social problems, I was a social problem; etc. etc. With so much to look for in the book I was really impressed, it was my book, it sort of told my story, and hence I decided to read sociology and get to the university. The family was obviously relieved but did not know for a while that I admitted myself in the “Sociology

Department” and not the “English Department” as I was directed by my father, who did not accept the switch until my Master’s results.

The first day at the university, sometime during the first week of July, probably the 1st of July, was nothing I can be proud of. Being out of disciplined life and leading a life of a “deviant”, definitely in the eyes of my family and the society at large, I was not the best person to deal with. Being some years older than the rest of the class I got noticed immediately and soon picked up a quarrel with the teacher on the definition of “country” by which he implied the district one came from but I differed, got dubbed as “over smart” and we never saw eye to eye and our differences showed up now and then until his unfortunate demise many years later. It also took a while for the deviant one in me to be tamed and I did not really get to become a “good student” for another year or so. But the BA Honours programme in sociology at the University of Dhaka was really an impressive one that finally got me reading, enjoying and be involved for the rest of my life, never to regret my decision.

The three year BA Honours programme was not very much short of a graduate programme! We were expected to learn “anything and everything” that sociology represented albeit only through eight courses, taught over the three years. The first of these was called “Social Thought” and covered “all” social thinkers from Plato and Aristotle, through the middle ages, social contract theorists and to the current sociologists, including Sorokin, Parsons and Merton. One American professor commented that this one course would require more than three years to study. Indeed, one of the text books was titled, *Social Thought: From Hammurabi to Comte*, by Rollin Chambliss and then another, the three volume *Social Thought from Lore to Science* by H. Barnes and HE Becker, both now considered as classics. But these were only the introductory steps and soon we were delving into *The Republic* and *Politics*, *The Prince*, *Utopia*, *Leviathan*, *The Social Contract*, etc. and to supplement these further, *The History of Western Philosophy* and *The Story of Philosophy* and so on. In all these readings there was an obvious bias in favour of the Western society, politics and culture. But we had not even started on sociology yet.

The sociology department at the University of Dhaka had teachers mostly with Political Science background and thought that we must read those political thinkers to understand society. One teacher insisted on reading Sabine’s *A History of Political Theory*, a text from the 1930s. But we did not fare any better with the sociologists either. *Contemporary Sociological Theories*, written by Sorokin forty years earlier had nothing contemporary about it. *An Introduction to the History of Sociology* by HE Barnes did help me a lot though, particularly the section on Comte. But much of the chronological history of sociological theory was presented to us by the mammoth two volume *Theories of Society: Foundations of Modern Sociological Theories*, by Parsons, Shils and others though it only took the readers up to the World War II. In his AJS review (Vol. 67, No. 6, May 1962) of the book Hans Zetterberg noted that the excerpts in the book “do not merely highlight the history of our discipline, but ... continue to serve as inspiration for fruitful ideas in contemporary sociology” and insists that “we will become better sociologists

if we read them". The book took me closer to the sociologists as I began to read the original works of Weber, Durkheim and the others.

But in all these readings Oriental thought was missing and I never really got over that, although I read Khaldun and Kautilya, and Radhakrishnan, bits of Confucian, Taoism, Buddhism etc. I have always felt inadequate with my reading of the Oriental philosophy.

My reading of the sociologists in earnest started with Weber. One day, in my second year at the university, a senior friend handed me *The Religion of India* and more or less ordered me to read it. It was not religion but Weber's writing on India that attracted me to the book. I was impressed by Weber's knowledge of South Asian history but did not quite get the connection he was trying to make between religion and the economy. I soon read the translations of Weber's essays by Parsons and the other by Gerth and Mills, and also his essays on methodology. I was more or less hooked on Weber and followed on during my Master's year with a thesis on him. One of my teachers later in Canada called it a "handsome investment".

I did not much like Marx from what I gathered from the secondary sources and detested others who read him. But that changed later. Reading *Suicide* was a delight. Here I thought was real sociology being made and Durkheim's *The Rules of Sociological Method* continued to influence me for the rest of my life. I made half-hearted attempts to read Comte, Spencer and Pareto in their originals but never quite mastered those hundreds of pages. My worst experience was with Talcott Parsons. I never properly understood what he was trying to say; I jokingly named him the "Complicated Person". In a review in either the Time or the News Week magazine someone (my references could be wrong) translated Parsons' one page writing into one line in "English". That gave me enough reason not to read him at all, although I had to for various courses and criticised him later in my writings too. But I could never be free of him; my PhD Comprehensive exam fell on the same day Parsons died. The exam was postponed.

The extent of readings in just *one* course that these last few paragraphs indicate will give the reader some idea as to how exhaustive the training was. Indeed, the volume of reading was such that when I began my Master's programme, there really wasn't a single book that I needed to read. It may sound like bragging and the university library did not have millions of books but whatever books were there in my areas of interest I had read them all during my undergraduate days. During my Master's year I read the journals like AJS , ASR, Social Forces, Sociology, British Journal of Sociology etc. often beginning with the first volume, AJS 1895, ASR 1935 etc. These readings built for me such a solid foundation that I went on to call Sociological Theory as my primary area of specialization.

Though these indicate the expected amount of reading, very few students actually read as much. Only a hand full of students did get anywhere close. Most students could get away with reading the secondary and in later years just by reading a few note books. In any case the readings in other courses were no less extensive whether one read them or not. I remember in the course on "History and Civilization" where

the teacher on the very first day of class warned us that to be a sociologist you must have the world history on your finger tips! History had always been a subject of choice. Even when I was passing through my deviant period, I would read up on history whenever I came across anything. The warning acted as an added impetus and I went to the book store the same day and the best book on world history the salesman gave me was Toynbee's two volume paperback *A Study of History*. I read the book with lots of question in my mind and was ready to tell the teacher of my exploit during the next class but he started on the history of Ancient Mesopotamia and was not much interested to hear what I had read. Nevertheless, I followed up on his advice and continued to read history to the extent that I could challenge most students from the History Department. The standard textbook remained the Wallbank and Taylor's *Civilization Past and Present*, but I read through as many histories of civilizations as I could lay my hands on, including those of the Far East and the Americas, the Middle East and, of necessity, the histories of Modern Europe, South Asia and Bangladesh.

My reading of history has continued throughout my career and at some point I came to the realization that the crisis that sociology is facing today has much to do with the lack of knowledge of history. This is particularly true of the American (US) sociologists, who have little or no knowledge of the history of other societies or of other times. In more than one of my papers I have argued that you cannot have a sociology without the knowledge of *societies in time and space*. No generalizations about society can be done without taking into account those thousands of societies of the past. Sociologists have failed miserably in this.

The one new subject I studied in my Master's programme was "Sociology of Development" and learnt, to my horror, that poor countries like Bangladesh was destined to remain poor, because they were poor to begin with. We compared the pathetic plight of the poor countries of Asia, Africa and even Latin America in terms of the number of telephone, radio, television, hospital beds or even skyscrapers as compared to the "modern" and developed countries of Europe and North America. The theories of Durkheim, Weber, Parsons, and economists like Rostow and his "Non-communist Manifesto" were there to substantiate all those. Hosts of articles in the *Economic Development and Cultural Change* proved it with hard data. The only way out was to become "modern" like the West, to build industries and cities and to adopt the life of the West, with the help of the West, if they are so kind as to lend a helping hand through economic aid, investments, democracy and Hollywood movies.

BA and MA exams were completed with major political incidents like the war of independence intervening but with the best possible results in hand I was automatically thrust towards a teaching career. I did not have even two weeks of "unemployed" status nor had the option of looking up the news papers, selecting jobs and going for job interviews. I was called upon to teach and I started on my sociology career in 1974 without giving it a second thought and have been quite good at it throughout my life. I do not know what else I could have become but becoming a sociologist and a teacher has given me

immense pleasure and tremendous job satisfaction. I am still proud of my decision to read sociology and never forget the unsolicited role of my friend, now deceased, in it.

It did not take me very long thereafter to realize that if I were to continue teaching I do need a PhD and soon landed in a graduate programme at the McMaster University in Canada in 1976. I knew that with all my readings I was well prepared for the graduate programme. The books that we read in Bangladesh were a few years old as it took some time to procure these but I was up to date on the journals. Yet, I was caught totally unprepared by the intensity of the graduate training in North America, first in Canada and then in the USA. The command with which the professors deliberated and the passion with which the students responded, often raising storms in the classrooms, surprised me. I knew I had it in me to move to their level but it took me a while and a shift to a university in the USA. While I was applying for admission I had concurrently made applications to a number of US universities as well and after I reached Canada, Syracuse University, in the USA informed me that they would admit me directly to their PhD programme. So I left McMaster without completing another MA there.

But before I left McMaster, I faced the first jolt in my learning. While I was proud of my reading of Weber, the modernization theorists and the thesis work on Weber, at McMaster I was suddenly awakened to the fact that it was not Weber or Parsons but Marx that I should have invested in. Sociology had moved beyond the “non-communists”, it was socialist, if not damn right a communist, subject! The split between the “Marxists” and “Non-Marxists” was very clearly drawn, nearly 50-50 among the faculty and almost all the graduate students were Marxists. The Marxist students looked down with disdain upon the remaining few non-Marxist students and definitely with pity on the only Weberian there. If you were not well versed in Marx, you did not exist. Debates raged over “how” to read the *Capital* and what were the implications of the “unpublished” works. Loud Marxists always won the debates in the classrooms and cafeteria, not that the very timid non-Marxists engaged any of them, they debated it among themselves to establish this or that aspect of Marxism.

Parsons and the Sociology of Development were a laughing stock. The poor countries were not poor but *were made poor* by the Europeans and that poverty was maintained by the USA, who manufactured all kinds of falsehood, including false theories, like modernization, to ward off communism in these countries and would do so even by forcing a war on them, as was done in Korea and Indo-China. Also, noteworthy is that much of Africa was aided by Marxism, one way or the other, to attain its freedom from colonial rule. A new set of theories arising from Latin America called the Dependency theory challenged modernization theory and better explained all these. I did not spend enough time in McMaster to dwell on these but the damage was done. I got converted!

The first couple of years in Syracuse went too quickly as I had to rush through the required courses and the comprehensive exams, the toughest that could be ever devised. First it was a 72 hour take-home theory and method exam during which I did lie down for two to three hours to rest but could not sleep. This was followed by a 48 hour take-home area exam, again without a wink of sleep. If nothing else,

these exams were physically taxing. Among the requirements for PhD candidacy, I remember, was also a need to demonstrate proficiency in a second language and I am now amazed that I opted to do it in the computer language and am probably the first person in sociology to do so such a long time ago, in June, 1979.

The faculty at Syracuse was an ensemble of theorists of all shades and colours, including a few direct students of the masters like Mannheim or Parsons. It was, I deemed, the best place to specialize in theory and I took full advantage of it, honing my learning in the area much further. But the best part of my learning was in the area of research, of which I had little formal training by then. A number of highly learned professors through a range of specialized courses including statistics taught me not only the basics of research but the applications in different situations. My thesis supervisor, Professor Richard G. Braungart engaged me in the theories and philosophies behind the methodologies to the extent that later I could combine all these and design a whole new course that I called "Theory Construction" and taught it to the graduate students after getting back to Dhaka.

Marxism had its day in Syracuse too but that was in the past. Debates there now focused on the two upcoming issues, "phenomenological sociology" and the other on "women studies", both in their infancy but were becoming increasingly vocal and in the end Syracuse did contribute handsomely to both trends. Phenomenological sociology, based on the phenomenology of Husserl, itself on a weak foundation and heavily criticised, but like other fads in sociology, it caught on very quickly. Yet, it was not the philosophy or the theories being proposed but the qualitative methodology which it espoused that came to stay. Syracuse professors like Bob Bogdan along with West Coast (of USA) universities contributed heavily to establish and spread the eventual "qualitative research methodology". Being steeped in the positivist philosophy and working with high level quantitative methodology, I had issues with both the phenomenology and qualitative methodology. I wrote scathing criticisms of both and till today consider these as exercises in futility. These and a few other similar fads have ousted sociology from the domain of the sciences as initially intended and, I wrote recently, has landed it squarely among the pseudo-sciences.

In the Kuhnian terms I am, perhaps, the defender of the old paradigm in these regards. But a real "paradigm shift" did take place in me in terms of my exposure to Marxism and Dependency theories. My readings of Marx made me appreciate the man and his work immensely. I could see why in the land of capitalism itself he was stirring up so many minds to the realities of the post Vietnam era, the Civil Rights and women's movements. Weberian and the main stream sociology seemed so shallow and had already failed to explain these realities, losing face in the process.

Sociology in the USA never much bothered about the world beyond the oceans. The only time it ventured to study the "third world" was through the modernization studies, thoroughly planted in the Weberian and Parsonian theories. Picking up on the queues from McMaster, I started to build on the Dependency Theory in my thesis work to find an explanation of poverty in the third world. Not that I was not aware of

the colonial past, my own country was a British colony, but I began to see things in a new light. Frank, particularly with his criticism of the modernization theory, built up the most convincing theory of dependency, how the West with hundreds of years of colonial exploitation and continuing the same to the modern times had made these countries poor and dependent. As Dos Santos put it, the development of the poor countries totally depended on the extent the developed countries would allow these countries to develop. Even Marx had failed there. Marx had “nothing” to explain the ill fate of the world outside of Europe. Asiatic mode of production is often used in his defence but it is basically an apology for a theory and stated through a few personal letters and is so full of holes, as I showed elsewhere (1983), that Marx fared better without it.

Building on these arguments I set up my thesis (1982) putting one theory against the others in explaining poverty and development in the third world. With data from 78 countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America, the largest set of data till then. Using high level statistical analysis I ended up demonstrating in favour of the better explanatory power of the Dependency Theory. This was perhaps the first real empirical test of Dependency Theory with such a huge data set.

Returning to my country, I resumed my teaching, a career that lasted for over 43 years. As with all careers, I had my ups and downs, in fighting, silver linings but what I had most was tremendous level of satisfaction in coaching a good number of excellent students, at least during the first two decades. At later stages the student quality declined and the university itself became polluted with politics while academics got lost. Indeed, I became so frustrated that I resigned from the University of Dhaka after more than 30 years of teaching there and spent the last few years of my career in a couple of private universities, which had their own issues and nothing much could be achieved there in any case.

Through all those years of teaching my involvement was total. I participated in nearly all academic and extra-academic activities, including participating with the students on the stage and playgrounds. But my greatest achievement was in changing the curricula of the Sociology Department. As I noted at the outset, the BA programme at the University of Dhaka, though it did wonders for me, was based on just eight courses taught over three years and MA for one year with four more courses, one less if you wrote a thesis, probably based on the British university system of the 19th century and remained unchanged even after twenty five years. Much of the world had already moved into more open systems so in 1983 I proposed a change to a four year BA and one and a half year of MA programme with many optional courses, much like the North American system. Indeed, I wrote up a detailed list of over sixty courses that could be offered in the two programmes. Against tremendous opposition and over twelve years of fighting at each step I finally got to start the program in 1995. But two months into the programme, some opposing students locked up the Department and the university temporarily suspended the programme. After another twelve more years just when I left the University of Dhaka in 2007 the programme was restarted without me.

Fortunately, I had fared better in Sylhet where a new university was being set up. The administration there was very cooperative and we could start the proposed curricula in 1990 (or around that time, if my memory serves me correctly). Today, in most public universities and some private universities in Bangladesh sociology is taught in essentially the same structure I proposed, with perhaps necessary changes to update the courses and reading materials.

Back during my comprehensive exam I had used Mannheim's theory of ideology and utopia to explain Italian election. Upon my return to Bangladesh I picked up on that thread and with the collaboration of my colleague, Professor S. Aminul Islam we tried to explain the political situation and the role of the intellectuals in Bangladesh (1988). I later followed up with a number of studies on the intellectuals like defining the intellectual in a peripheral society (1988), intellectuals in the post-soviet world (2005) and building a typology of the current intellectuals in terms of "Public, Private and Platonic" intellectuals (2014). In all these studies I showed how the intellectuals today are different from the "ideal typical" intellectuals that Mannheim talked about. Because of the huge increase in education facility all over the world, the number of people who can be counted as intellectuals has increased many folds, to even millions within one country. With this increase, the nature and the type of work they do have also changed beyond recognition, in the process their ideologies and political stance have been affected as well. They are no longer the "free-floating" intellectuals just loitering in the cafes and writing criticisms of their government, many are actually working for their government! But most have "unfortunately" become professors, holding no particular ideology or even an opinion and may be completely apolitical leading a private life like any other member of the society (2014). In the post soviet era, the Left intellectuals, who were often considered the real intellectuals, are gone! And almost all over the world the intellectuals from the Right (?) are enjoying their ascendancy. I am now working on a complete volume on the intellectuals on these themes.

Even though I had moved far beyond Mannheim but his impact on my studies in sociology of knowledge remains active till date. This had its beginning in my criticism of phenomenology and the qualitative methodology (1983). I followed this with an appraisal of the "paradigmatic status" of sociology in 1984. But as noted earlier I was increasingly feeling that sociology, especially its theory building, was in a crisis, in the Kuhnian sense or not and American sociology was at the root of it all. Thus, I published a paper on "American Sociology: Crisis in Isolation" (1987). Although I dwelt on a number of other areas for some time, the question of crisis in theory building did not go away and the next time I began to work with it I came to the realization that sociological theory was not only in crisis, theory building itself had actually come to an end and wrote about the "End of Sociological Theory" (1999), which was later adopted as the title of my book (2005).

Continuing to work in this area I next looked at the prospect of US sociology in the 21st century and found it "facing a dead end" (2004). Since the 1930s sociology became exclusively an American discipline where it was promoted mainly by philanthropic organizations, mostly based in the church. In fact many of

the early sociologists were simply social workers, reporters and even priests or sons of priests who sought to uphold law and order in society. American sociology never got out of it, theory building or study of other societies was not even attempted. During the early years sociological theory was not even addressed in the sociology conferences. But more importantly, sociology in the USA had shifted its unit of analysis from the "society" to the "individual", giving rise to all kinds of complications and failing to build an appropriate methodology. So it gradually moved away from the scientific stance that it began with in the 19th century under the influence of Comte and Spencer to a position where now sociology is called just a "study" of society so that any methodology is legitimate.

Also, sociology is a discipline born out of a crisis, so that sociology fares well when there is crisis in society but suffers in a tranquil situation. "*What is bad for society is good for sociology and vice versa*". The US society is far more prosperous and peaceful today than at any other times, has been so since the mid 1970s. Up until then sociology was among the most popular subjects of study in the USA. Sociology books were among the best sellers in the late 1960s and the undergraduate enrolment topped the 36,000 mark in 1976 but then began to slide to the current number somewhere around ten thousand only. As a result there is little need for a sociologist there as is evident from the increasingly low student enrolment and the regular closures of programmes and even departments. So that sociology is dying in the USA!

Since the theories of Weber, sociology has been seeking to justify its stance as a science, or, *how not to be a science*. Because we deal with humans, and humans are not like atoms and molecules, we cannot use the scientific methodology followed by the other sciences is the primary argument. Anti-positivism and anti-empiricism has dominated the discipline for so long that today we are more comfortable using "qualitative methodology", which is supposed to be able to capture the finer issues of human life. Added to this has been the recent onslaught of "post-modernism" which negates the very fabric of theory building, it negates concepts and it negates generalizations. Born among the arts it professes "narratives" or story telling. If story telling becomes sociology, then what is literature for? Not many other sciences respect the claim of sociology to be a science in any case, but today that claim is louder among the sociologists themselves. But we like to be called and definitely claim to be a "social science". Most introductory text books will open with the statement that *sociology is the science of society*. My question is, therefore, if we are not doing science, then why do we continue claiming to be a science? By posing to be a science, when it is not, sociology has today turned into a pseudo-science (2008). What a fate for a discipline that began with all the promises to be the crowning glory among the sciences!

The crisis in sociology is even deeper than these. The low undergraduate enrolment is further burdened by the continued high level of graduate enrolment. So that there are many more PhDs in waiting than the discipline can absorb. Therefore, in order to survive the fresh graduates as well as tenured professors continue to create ever newer speciality areas. In the melee of these newly founded areas, often whole programmes and even new departments, the core of sociology gets lost. Population studies, women studies, criminology, gay and lesbian studies, peace studies etc. are only the recent breakaways from the

parent discipline as sociology itself faces a dead end. I remember in one of my visits to the Syracuse University in the mid 1990s I went to a book store to check out the new publications. Half the shelves were full of books on gay and lesbians while it was out of classical theory books. The Department of Sociology which was full of theory and methodology professors was now teaching only one required theory course. No student opted for any other.

The situation in Bangladesh is no different though it has taken a bit longer. In the mid 1990s when I was the Chair of the Department at Dhaka, there were 33 faculty members. In my recent visit to the Department I counted only 18, the rest have opened up their own departments to promote their personal areas of specialization. Anthropology, which was among the required courses was the first to break away followed by population studies, then came the new departments of women studies and development studies. Now there is a department of criminology and a department of “disaster” studies too. Sociology got depleted here as well. I remain the only one fully devoted to sociological theory and methodology.

Back in McMaster days, after my pitiful defence of Weber I had parted company with anything Weberian, indeed, turned into a vocal critique. But even if I left Weber, Weber refused to leave me. During the late 1980s, the Goethe Institute in Dhaka requested my assistance in organizing a couple of conferences on the occasion of the visit of two German sociologists. I was associated with the institute earlier during my student days when I went to learn German in order to secure admission in a German university, what else, to study Weber! I agreed and got out a book on Marx and Weber from the sessions (1988). During my renewed study of Weber, I came to the realization that most sociologists were studying the wrong Weber. The Weber who wrote about the Protestant Ethic and its influence on capitalism and later followed up with the studies of Indian, Chinese and the Middle-Eastern religions was not a sociologist but simply a historian. Sociology, by his own definition, was a generalizing science but these were studies of unique phenomena, namely the influence of Protestant Ethic on capitalism, which never happened elsewhere, and of unique societies. This I demonstrated the difference between through two concepts, “ideal Type” that looks at the unique phenomenon and the “Pure Type” that deals with generalization. The former Weber proposed when he wrote as a historian but the latter was developed while he was working on the *Economy and Society*, which by his own claim was a work on sociology (1988).

But Weber did have a very well developed sociology of religion in the essay with the same title, where he built up excellent generalizations about various aspects of religion. Unfortunately, his study of the Protestant Ethic was not a sociological study at all, or even a worthwhile study of the relation between religion and economy. It was flawed on so many levels that I am often surprised how university after university in the USA prescribes it as a “sociology text” to the introductory students! I argued these issues more forcefully in my next work on Weber, again at the invitation of the Institute in 2003. There I took up a detailed study of *The Religion of India* and *The Religion of China* and how flawed these were. And combining these all I claimed that the Protestant Ethic hypothesis is simply wrong and these studies are not so sociological either (2004).

Social inequality, poverty in particular, has always been an area of interest for me. I have studied and taught courses in this area and once in a while wrote about inequality in Bangladesh and USA. So, when one day I came across a study of poverty by the World Bank making unbelievable claims about poverty alleviation, as if they did it, my intelligence was challenged. So, I took on the World Bank and in a detailed study not only refuted their claims but also showed that as much as their data were wrong for most countries, the very methodology they used were also totally flawed making the whole study questionable (2005). To my satisfaction, I noted that some other scholars had made similar observations too. But the World Bank continues to supply similar faulty studies and some of us continue to refute these. I later compiled a collection of poverty studies and published it as a book (2010).

Then, very recently, I noted another fantastic claim made by the World Bank, this time about the middle class and how “billions” of people in the poor countries have moved to the middle class status. On reading the paper I was struck by the names of economists who were the pioneers of the study. The mainstream economists, the World Bank variety, have always shunned the “class studies”, this is the domain of the dreaded Marxists or the left leaning sociologist. So, why did all on a sudden World Bank and the economists started taking interest in class analysis? I smelled a rat there and lo and behold, what we sociologists often fail to see is that these billions of the “middle class” people are actually the future “consumers” of goods and services the richer countries are hoping to sell to! That’s the billion dollar reason.

My first objection to the study is that the definition of the middle class based on the income or consumption is wrong (2014). Middle class, more than any other class, is *not a class but a culture*. Certain amount of income may be necessary to be in that category but is not a sufficient condition to define it. Education, social network, traditions, cultural norms and values etc. are some of the issues that need to be factored in. In this study I also claim that as far as the economists are concerned class analysis is not their “cup of tea”, they have already messed up the poverty studies by measuring humans in terms of what they eat (consume), treating them as animals, now by proposing fantastic definitions, including ownership of cars and electronic gadgets as indicators they are again destroying the notion of the middle class and its culture. I am continuing on the study of the middle class, including in Bangladesh (2017), and hope to do further research in the near future.

Like in other countries sociology in Bangladesh also has its professional organization, a sociological association. I was associated with that too but soon, primarily due to personality clashes and infighting, it split into two. I continued with one faction but that too began suffering from the same problems, so I quit again. Much later, after living in isolation for some time I succeeded gathering around a few serious scholars and set up a very tiny “Society” with a handful of members in 2003. The primary objective was to launch this journal and carry on with research and publication away from the Department or the formal professional associations. With the support from those few colleagues I succeeded in launching this

journal, now in its 15th year and recognized internationally. Sociology in Bangladesh or of Bangladesh is today known to the rest of the world because of this journal.

Besides these, I have written on population, migration, development, gender, family and slums etc. but as one of my professors in Syracuse warned me when I decided to get back to the country, I got too involved with administration. I worked as the Chair, Dean, Director of Research, Editor, Secretaries and Presidents of organizations, set up and chaired, seminars, conferences and workshops and often had no time for research or writing. I am sure I could have, nay, should have, done much more but personal tragedies, political situations in the country and host of other work related barriers often held me back.

Yet, I am proud of my students, some of whom are internationally known in their own rights, my contribution in changing the sociology curricula and last but not the least, of this journal. I think I have served sociology well!

But sociology has not fared well over the last fifty years. When I began my career in 1968, sociology was at the top of its popularity in the USA. Sociology books topped the reading lists of even the general public while sociologists were being regularly called upon by the radio, television and the news papers to comment on the current issues. Students by their thousands flocked to get admitted in the sociology programmes. Sociology was respected as a “science” that could take care of the social ills. But when the social ills showed up in earnest in the form of protest against the Vietnam War, Civil Rights movements, women’s movements, fight against racism, increase in crime rate etc. sociology failed to deliver. Indeed, many sociologists were often at the forefront of these protests.

Yet, it was not these external factors but sociology was crippled from within. Sociology could never develop a convincing methodology, largely went on with one to one interviews to capture the trends of the whole society. The proposed alternatives in the forms of qualitative methodology and “narratives” are even worse as it is impossible to generalize from a few case studies of individuals. In fact, *sociology was never a discipline of the SOCIETY, it focused on this or that society but never society as an abstraction, society in time and space.* Sociology never sought to generalize beyond any one society or community, when it tried, as in the case of modernization studies, it failed miserably. As such, its status as a science, without being able to generalize or predict, has been repeatedly challenged, even from within and failed to defend that status. Today, it has more or less turned into a pseudo-science.

The division and subdivisions of the discipline into specialty areas, primarily in a struggle to survive, continued throughout these fifty years. Without a properly defined boundary within which to operate, it was always picking up topics that others ignored or even refused to study, like the gay and lesbians. On the other hand it also lost its subject matter to other disciplines, even “class” and “poverty”, the exclusive domains of sociology, are now claimed by the economists. Often, its subject got defined into new disciplines and new departments were opened by those who were once sociologists. So, a discipline that was at the top of the ladder fifty years ago is slowly dying with a whimper!

The situation in Bangladesh has not been much different either, given that few knew of sociology in the 1960s. It has lost its strength over the years, has been depleted of its faculty, has spawned new speciality areas and departments, while most of the serious scholars, the stalwarts, have retired. Student quality has declined. Not much has been achieved in terms of research or publication (1997, 2005), particularly in recent years. Sociology has also lost its prestige in the eyes of the people. This last has a lot to do with the involvement of its students and faculty in national and campus politics. Today, few talk of sociology in respectful terms. So that sociology in Bangladesh is also dying, if not already dead!

NAZRUL ISLAM

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