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Kamal SIDDIQUI, Jamshed AHMED, Kaniz SIDDIQUE, Sayeedul HUQ, Abdul HOSSAIN, Shah NAZIMU-DOULA, Nahid REZWANA: Social formation in Dhaka, 1985-2005. A longitudinal study in a third world megacity. Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate. 2010. xii, 406 pp. ISBN 978-1-4094-1103-1. Price: GBP 65.00.

Dhaka is the fastest growing and most probably also the poorest megacity in the world. The number of population in the Capital Planning Region might have reached 15 million in 2012, growing at an estimated rate of 450,000 per year. The exact numbers will soon be known; the census of 2011 yielded a much lower number of population for Bangladesh than expected and has become the topic of a heated debate; detailed numbers for urban areas are not yet available. In any case, every tenth Bangladeshi lives in the capital that is at least twice as big as the second biggest city, Chittagong. Located in the centre of the country, Dhaka has become easily accessible thanks to the many roads and bridges that have been built with international assistance since independence in 1971. The capital can be reached in a day from practically all places, the majority of the population can go to Dhaka and come back on the same day. That capital's inhabitants hail from all districts. Dhaka, thus, is a microcosm of Bangladesh. It's people, i.e. that of the capital as well as of the country, is homogenous, much more than elsewhere in South Asia: Almost all are Bengali and speak Bangla. Nine tenth are Muslim, almost all Sunni. That has not always been like that: Before the partition of India, Bengal and Assam in 1947 almost one third of the people living in the area of present-day Bangladesh had been Hindus, most of them fled to India; those who remained mostly belong to the lowest castes; only few of the upper caste/upper class Hindus stayed on. There are a small number of Christians. Many of the tribal population of around one million are Buddhists, Christians and animists. There are still around 300,000 Biharis, i.e. Urdu speaking Muslims, often Shia, who migrated to East Pakistan in 1947 and got stuck in Bangladesh in 1971. Many of them live in Dhaka. But for a city of its size the population is unusually homogenous.

Dr. Kamal Siddiqui, a former top bureaucrat and presently a professor at the University of the South Pacific, is the leading capacity on South Asian megacities in general and on Dhaka in particular. In the 1980s he led a team of researchers studying the people of Dhaka. The resulting book was the first of its kind in South Asia: Kamal SIDDIQUI, Sayeda Rowshan QADIR, Stitara ALAMGIR, Sayeedul HUQ: *Social formation in Dhaka City. A study in third world urban sociology*. Dhaka: The University Press Limited. 1990. For its review see IAF 21(November 1990), pp. 369-372. Dr. Siddiqui et al. also brought out: *Megacity governance in South Asia (Dhaka: The University Press. 2004)*, a comparative study of the regions five biggest cities, i.e. Kolkata, Mumbai, Delhi, Karachi and Dhaka.

'Social Formation in Dhaka, 1985-2005' is the most comprehensive and up-to-date academic work on the subject. The authors distinguish several social groups, i.e. the residents of government quarters; the educated middle class; the richest people; the formal sector poor; the informal sector poor; beggars, prostitutes and criminals; special areas and groups. A segment of the chapter on the 'formal sector poor' deals with female garment workers, the largest group of industrial workers in the country and even more in Dhaka, where most of the ready-made

garments and knit ware industries are concentrated.

Three findings should be emphasized here, namely (1) that the savings habits of the garments workers have not been encouraged through any institutional efforts (as micro credit is concentrating on investing in small business rather than on saving), (2) that garment workers are not recognized by the trade unions as industrial workers, and (3) that the garment sector has not been given the status of a 'real industry'. Why this sector is not considered an industry and what this means is not revealed. But it seems that such a status brings along financial privileges that are defended by established industries (pp. 211-217).

Among the 'informal poor' the authors distinguish rickshaw pullers, street children (*tokais*), hawkers, maidservants, poor female heads of households, beggars, prostitutes and criminals.

The authors give their methodology used for information collection as follows: "Finding relevant information to understand social change over a period of two decades was a challenging task. We had to deal with not only "length and breadth" but also "depth" issues. We had, therefore, to employ several methods of data collection. These were mainly as follows: (a) a household survey based on stratified random sampling (i.e. General Household Survey, GHS, and Government Quarters Survey, GQS) in both 1985 and 2005, based on a structured questionnaire, covering Dhaka City Corporation area with municipal holding numbers; (b) comparison of data on 100 targeted households, i.e. of the survey data generated for the same 100 households covered by GHS in 1985 and 2005; (c) stratified random household survey for government officials (living in government quarters) in both 1985 and 2005, based on the questionnaire mentioned at (a) above; (d) case studies of selected groups of people; (e) gathering information from selected respondents; (f) focus group discussion (FGD) with selected people, including FGD on certain issues with the participation of various stakeholders; (g) interview of government and semi-government officials; and (h) perusal of secondary materials, including newspaper reports, journals, books and magazines." (p. 21).

Payment of holding tax was used as an indicator that people were "at least out of extreme, if not moderate, poverty" (p.21). On the lines of the amount of holding tax paid, four zones are distinguished: Zone 1 of the old lower middle class, mainly living in Old Dhaka and areas around; zone 2 of the new middle class in Motijheel, Dhanondi, Gulshan, Mohammedpur, Ramna and areas around; zone 3 of the new lower middle class in Jafral, Shyamali, Jatrabari and Kamrangir Char, zone 4 of the upper middle class and rich in selected areas of Gulshan, Dhanmondi, Ramna, Airport and Uttara. The study, thus, is restricted to the area administered by the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC); the suburbs outside DCC, where another several million people live, is not included. Appendix I explains the different delimitations of Dhaka as used by the various bodies, as there are a Dhaka Statistical Metropolitan Area (DSMA); Dhaka Metropolitan Area (DMA); Dhaka Cantonment Board; Dhaka conurbation or Greater Dhaka; Old and New Dhaka; Dhaka City Corporation (DCC); Dhaka Planning Area (RAJUK), and Dhaka's Water and Sewerage Authority (WASA).

The questionnaires are reprinted in Appendix II. Laying out the results follows a rigid pattern with little room for explanations and sometimes leaves the reader guessing. The authors for example tell us that there are 130,000 hawkers, but only 50 were interviewed (pp. 253-54). At other places, we find such narratives. In the chapter on domestic servants we learn that "even in enlightened households known for good behaviour, certain "caste-like" attitudes did not thaw over the two decades [since the first survey]. Thus, the servant never sat on the sofa or chair, but

squatted on the floor. ... She or he would in many houses use a separate glass to drink water ... This indeed contrasts sharply with teachings of both Islam and “secular liberalism” to which the city elite owed its formal allegiance.” (p. 262).

Appendix III lists the instructions for investigators; Appendix IV introduces the places of interest in and around Dhaka; Appendix V contains a list of organisations directly concerned with Dhaka City; Appendix VI is the glossary of abbreviations and local terms, followed by an exhaustive bibliography and a detailed index.

The book will be the authoritative compendium for Dhaka’s social formation for many years to come. It sets a fine example of academic rigour to be followed in other centres in South Asia. It is an excellent starting point for more and more detailed research on the City. It is especially valuable for the group of Bangladeshi and German researchers who are presently engaged in studying Dhaka as part of the emphasis programme “Megacities - Megachallenges”, funded by Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft. It came out just in time for all of us who are finalizing their reports and for those who have started to take an interest in this rapidly growing city.