

BOOK REVIEW :

SOCIAL FORMATION IN DHAKA CITY

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According to the "Melting Pot Theory" given by the Social Anthropologists all races, cultures, castes and creeds are supposed to be melted into oneness and transformed into a homogeneous mass. After going through the recently published book "Social Formation in Dhaka City", we however, come to a conclusion that the same effect is not approaching constantly in case of Dhaka city. Rather, various earlier classifications here have suffered continuous changes and thus have taken up new shapes with distinctively new features and characters.

From the very title of the book one may get the idea that the book presents' an analytical study of the social formation of Dhaka city. One may however, be disappointed to find that instead of analytical study in to the subject, the book presents the related social, spatial, cultural, religious, behavioral and some physical informations in facts and figures. The book will thus serve the purpose of excellent source of information or 'data bank' essential for the Social Planners and Policy makers for their various projects, policy planning and formulations.

By all consideration the book is a 'picture' and not 'painting' of the contemporary social scene of Dhaka city. Some of the informations written in this book are available else where and in this context, the book is a mere compilation of related topics. But many informations, specially those pertaining to income, behaviour and attitude of the city dwellers towards various aspects of modern society have been carefully collected, processed and presented.

Any book in such an important subject like social formation must be looked at differently than a mere merchandize and the endeavour, sincerity and honesty in 'creating' this picture must be taken in to consideration. It is extremely difficult to find out the inner thought and aspirations of various sections of people through Questionnaire or interview. Most of the time, the respondents try to conceal the facts. However, after going through the methodology adopted and training program of the interviewer, this critic is convinced that the results are revelations of near-facts, if not absolute facts.

As already mentioned that the book presents a picture of the Social atmosphere of Dhaka, the point of consideration should be how clear and accurate this picture is. The

next point of consideration might be whether all necessary sections and profiles have been covered and incorporated in the picture. One very convenient and at the same time inconvenient aspect of any social survey out-put is that the same can never be verified. Thus the informations like number of people in various profession, as mentioned in the book will have no relation with that at the present time and the authors cannot be charged for that because of the 'benefit of recent changes'. In such a situation we have to believe blindly what the authors have recorded. This point deserves special mention because a number of foreign agencies and NGO's have been financing the rural survey and study programme in different parts of the country for quite a long time and each two study by different organizations in the same area vary beyond any limit. In this study, however, to believe since the authors were neither commissioned by any organization nor based for any obvious reasons, their revelations might be correct, impartial and near-facts, of course within the limit of 'random survey parameter'.

In the Chapter "An introduction to the study and an Overview of Dhaka city" the authors have seen the city as agglomeration of administrative regions. The physical and Social Planners would, however, find the study more useful if the same were based on the following stratification -

- (1) Govt. planned and developed region
- (2) Govt. planned and privately developed region
- (3) Loosely planned and privately developed region.

In the Chapter "A general Household Survey in Dhaka City" the tables have been prepared on the basis of random Survey, and the people who have long experience about the city might logically feel that some of the Table are far away from facts. The informations presented in the Chapter "The Richest People of Dhaka City" are not part of facts. The authors have, however, mentioned the reason elsewhere in saying that most of the respondents in this area did not show cooperation. In the Chapter "The Informal Sector Poor of the Dhaka city" more background informations about the squatters and floating population were necessary in order to realise the reasons and nature of rural migration, which is one of the most burning problems of the contemporary society.

The authors deserve special thanks for the endeavour taken in collecting informations and data's for such a valuable book. However, one is sure to be disappointed to find negligible informations about the manufacturing, processing and service industries of the city. While agriculture is the principle source of production in the urban areas (even though Government expenditure and business are important sources of finance here). These industries play pivotal role in social formation in the urban area and the Social and Physical Planners, Administrators and Policy makers frequently feel the necessity for informations and data's of this important sector.

Anthropologist Robert Oppenheimer said "In an important sense this world of ours is a new world, in which the unity of knowledge, the nature of human communities, the order of society, the order of ideas, the very notions of society and culture have changed

and will not return to what they have been in the past. What is new is new not because it has never been there before, but because it has changed quality". A metropolitan city is undoubtedly a minute version of the world incorporating various cultures, races, religions etc. into a composite mass, and aims at to serve the common cause and consistent development. This is of extreme importance for the Social Planners, without which social upliftment and fulfillment of the aspirations of the urban inhabitants stands as a mirage only. Any systematic venture in Social Planning is an welcome attempt and the authors of the Book under review have done excellent job by 'creating' an extremely beneficial 'resource base' for such purposes.

With all the limitations and criticisms mentioned so far, one should thankful to the authors and the publisher for a mammoth job, superbly performed.

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