

Note from the Editor

Ten years have passed. When I began working towards this journal back in 2003, I was not even sure it was a worthwhile enterprise. Academic journals in Bangladesh have very limited life-spans, rarely exceeding three to four issues. They all have good intentions behind them, often funding is also adequate, but they die a natural death simply because of the lack of research papers to publish. As it is, much of the publications are solicited and the contributing researchers are fewer in number than would be the case in a country with over eighty universities and a large number of research organizations. Indeed, researches, including in the social sector, worth millions of dollars are conducted every year in Bangladesh by numerous government and non-government entities. But very few, if at all, of these reach the reading public. They remain locked up as government files and in NGO folders. While on the other hand, the universities, unfortunately, are almost completely devoid of research funds. Whatever research is done by the faculty are out of their own pocket money or as consultants for the government agencies or NGOs and their reports meet with the fate just noted above. So that, to hope to publish a journal on a regular basis was more of a dream than could be attained as a reality.

The reading public, or to be more precise, the researchers, teachers and the students, are another matter of concern. Readership among the general public is limited to fiction and newspapers and magazines. Serious academic reading is totally absent there, primarily due to lack of interest but also because of the non-availability of academic journals. The ones who are expected to read, the researchers, faculty and students, simply do not read. I have noted this apathy my earlier editorial as well. There is very little need to read. To go ahead in life and career at the universities, either as a student or even as a faculty member, reading or doing research is no longer a requirement. Students pass their exams. reading hand written notes handed down through the generations or poorly compiled notebooks. Faculty members do not need to read for the simple reason that they are never challenged in the classroom. Also, there are other and more assured avenues of getting promoted. As a result even if regular journals existed, few would actually require reading these, either to impart knowledge or to get promoted. In the end, therefore, if a paper is published in a journal, only 3 people would read it, the editor, the reviewer and the author!

Given such a scenario, it was foolhardy to even conceive of a regular journal. The very few journals that get printed or are regular in circulation merely adorn the book shelves of the faculty, if and when received free of cost, but are rarely read. No one even contemplates paid subscriptions for any journal, volumes of journals lay waste, taking up precious space at the publishers' storerooms. The expenses are never met. Even bookstores do not want them, may be one or two copies and that too on loans to be paid back if sold. So that by all accounts it was a big NO, NO, to a journal publication.

But the urge to publish a regular journal of sociology was paramount, particularly for the fact that, sociology was being taught in Bangladesh as a formal discipline at the graduate and undergraduate levels for nearly fifty years then. There were close to hundred regular sociology faculty members at the universities and probably a thousand more at the various two and four year colleges and thousands of students, the government agencies and numerous NGOs who would require such a journal. The few past attempts made by the formal associations of the sociologists died their natural deaths and no one supported another such experiment.

Then an idea hit me. There was a thriving reading public out there in the international arena, where research on Bangladesh would be eagerly sought after. And I could reach them through the internet, which was not yet as big a thing as it is today but like everyone else I expected it to get bigger. Formal journals were still in hard editions and soft versions were literally frowned upon as "trash" by the big name journals. But I decided that this was the only way to go and managed to convince a few colleagues who also agreed to sit on the editorial board and with the little finances needed to rent a 100mb space on a local server I took the leap. At that time it felt like a challenge that I must surmount, but to think back, , it was just foolish of me to even to plan to construct the website, which I had to learn following a few text books written on the subject, for

the “dummies” like me. I have since forgotten the technique and have left the design as it was, but is very badly in need of reconstruction.

In any case, the Bangladesh e-Journal of Sociology was launched on the internet as a free to download peer reviewed international electronic journal of sociology with its first issue in January 2004, with the promise of two issues per year. The first issue came out with the papers presented in a seminar on Max Weber, jointly organized by the Goethe Institute in Dhaka. The primary objective of the e-Journal, as stated in the website, was to promote research and publication by the Bangladeshi sociologists and to set up what could be called a “Sociology of Bangladesh”. But the journal would also seek to be international, in its general objective, not only in its readership but also in the publication of research papers from all over the world.

The first few issues were, as noted above, purely solicited ones. Fortunately, the e-Journal received immediate recognition from the International Sociological Association (ISA) and from friends and scholars at home and abroad. And as I came to realize later, it was not only the first such attempt from south Asia but was one of the very few electronic journals anywhere in the world then. While in sociology it was probably second only to the pioneering Electronic Journal of Sociology (established in 1994 by Michael Sosteric, with Andreas Scheider as the editor-in-chief – Wikipedia), which was faltering because serious scholars and major publishers shied away from electronic journals as these were treated as frivolous publications. But the inevitable triumph of the electronic followed and soon even the non- electronic journals, including nearly all reputed journals, were forced to include an electronic versions. And today if you Google search for the e-Journal of Sociology, the first entry on the list, among 1.5 million entries, is the Bangladesh e-Journal of Sociology followed by the original Electronic Journal of Sociology. ISA now lists Bangladesh e-Journal of Sociology as one of the “core” journals of sociology along with the American and the British journals of sociology.

However, I overshoot, since soon after the first few issues my sources of articles started to dry out, although a handful of committed authors, S. Aminul Islam, Shahadat Hossain, and A. I Mahub Uddin Ahmed among them, continued to send in papers when I needed them badly to keep the publication going. But then came the time of reckoning as the e-journal was about to die its expected natural death. The flow of papers dwindled to almost nothing; two issues were published with just enough materials for one. But more importantly, contributions from Bangladeshi researchers reached its vanishing point as no more articles could be solicited. The journal was only publishing papers received from abroad, mostly from Nigerian scholars. In utter frustration I noted in one editorial that the Bangladesh e-Journal of Sociology might as well be called the Nigerian e-Journal of Sociology. I was at a point of giving up, except that the editorial board kept on supporting my dreams even when I was failing.

And just at about this point in time a US data base company by the name of EBSCO approached us for distribution rights. We, of course, readily agreed but remained fearful that we may not be able to continue much longer. But EBSCO did what we could not have dreamt at the time. The readership soared as university after university, associated with the data base, began to subscribe the BEJS for their own libraries and today nearly half a million sites have links to the Bangladesh e-Journal of Sociology, with nearly all reputed university libraries subscribing. Along with that, the readership and the submission of papers also increased phenomenally. We could now afford the luxury of rejecting papers on the basis of peer reviews. And as it stands, we can accommodate only a fraction of the papers submitted to us, even after doubling the size of the e-Journal and the number of articles published in each issue, while the average waiting time for getting published has grown to over one year. Today, the e-Journal does not have to follow the authors, not even from Bangladesh, the authors follow the journal, sending and when needed, resending the corrected papers. And according to one website, the current readership of the BEJS, on a three month average, stands at 77 readers per day. For an academic journal this is quite remarkable, definitely better than the 3 readers, alluded to above.

As a matter of policy, the BEJS has always encouraged young and upcoming researchers. Often accommodating their first research papers distilled from the PhD thesis and many have gone a long way since their first publication in the BEJS. A case in point is Professor Usman Karofi who got his first publication in the BEJS out of his PhD thesis when he was still a student in Malaysia and is now a well established professor in Nigeria. Incidentally, Nigeria remains the largest

contributor to the e-journal but is now closely followed by Bangladeshi scholars. A whole new breed of young researchers have recently emerged in the various universities, particularly in Khulna University, and the NGOs of Bangladesh who are well versed in methodology and ready to tackle sensitive topics such as domestic violence or sexuality. The recent issues of the e-Journal are a testament to their rise in Bangladesh. I not only congratulate and encourage them but claim this as the greatest success of the Bangladesh e-Journal of Sociology.

Ten years and ten volumes later, I feel that our objectives have been largely achieved, we are here to stay. Google lists most of the articles published in the BEJS in its scholarly website called the "Google Scholar". Google Scholar records the number of times an article has been cited by other researchers and I am often amazed by the number of the BEJS articles that get cited. The number of citations for an article often exceeds 50, which is exceptional for such a short existence of the journal. The most cited authors have so far been Habibul Haque Khondker, David Everatt and Shahadat Hossain, Mahbuba Nasreen, S. Aminul Islam and jointly S. Tahir and SMMR Naqvi. Some articles have been reprinted as book chapters, Shahadat Hossain, A.I. Mahub Uddin Ahmed, Syed Anwar Hossain, and S. Aminul Islam are among the ones who have been reprinted. In a few cases the articles have been translated into other languages like Spanish and Turkish. On our part we have compiled two volumes out of the articles published in the e-Journal, one on Max Weber was published by the Goethe Institute, Dhaka and the other on Sociological Perspectives on Poverty by us, the Bangladesh Sociological Society. We are also planning a few more such volumes on the major topics covered in the e-Journal. Two possible volumes comes to mind as the next compilations, one on Religion in Bangladesh, from the special issue of the same name, and the other on Nigerian Society and Culture. These compilations, we hope, will have a more lasting impact on the academia.

Thus from now on it is a job of maintaining regular schedule and making publication in the e-Journal a little more challenging, as a result more competitive. Hopefully the number of submissions will continue to rise, giving us the scope of choosing and presenting the best of these in our future issues. The submissions from Nigeria and the rest of Africa are among the best in terms of methodology, they are concise, to the point and well supported theoretically, reflecting on the high quality of research and teaching there. Submissions from the region, Pakistan and India, do need to come up in quality. Most of the rejected submissions are from these two countries. Bangladeshi submissions are definitely improving in quality and the numbers are very encouraging, although the senior authors are again missing from the recent issues. Scholars from the developed countries are yet to publish in the e-Journal in big numbers, although some have done so. I feel that as time goes by and we get to tackle more serious topics, they too will have the confidence to publish in the BEJS.

The ten years and the ten volumes need to be evaluated in the backdrop of the more than 55 years or so of sociology in Bangladesh. Prior to the e-Journal, Bangladesh sociology remained limited to classroom teaching with very little publishable research. Publications amounted to a few PhD theses and some text books. Abortive attempts to launch journals earlier only attest to the failure of sociology to get going. Only a few articles, to the best of my knowledge, mostly by me and S. Aminul Islam ever got published in the major international journals like those of the American Sociological Association. Even the attempts made to get a regional standing also failed recently as the government rules prevented us from establishing a South Asian Sociological Society. So that sociology in Bangladesh prior to the e-Journal remained as a "sociology in Bangladesh". Few individual expatriates may have done better but as far as the mainstream is concerned, sociology in Bangladesh has remained in a nascent state, failing to make any worthwhile contribution in the international scene, all through its existence. That is, until the founding of the Bangladesh e-Journal of sociology. Bangladesh e-Journal of Sociology has now taken it beyond borders into the international arena, where not only the journal but a large number of Bangladeshi sociologists have become internationally known. And for the first time in its history, Bangladesh sociology and sociologists from Bangladesh have found a footing in the global setting and can plan to establish a "Sociology of Bangladesh" with its own theoretical and methodological foundations.

The next ten years of the Bangladesh e-Journal of Sociology will focus on attaining such a goal.