

This interesting publication gives a first insight into various aspects of Bangladeshi society and its economy. The contributions motivate the reader to look deeper into the individual subjects.

Agnes M. Gerold

KATY GARDNER: *Songs at the River's Edge. Stories from a Bangladeshi Village*. London: Pluto Press, 1997 (1991). 160 pages, Pb £ 9.99. ISBN 0-7453-1094-X - Hb £ 30.00. ISBN 0-7453-1095-8

This is the narrative of a young anthropologist who did 16 months of field work in Talukpur, a small hamlet in the Sylhet District of Bangladesh, in 1987 and 1988. Her personal observations allow valuable insights into the villagers' lives, but also into her own reflections, since participatory observation most probably has its impact on the observer as well as on the observed. Talukpur, of course, is not the true name of the place and the names of people have been changed, but everything the author narrates has most probably been experienced by her; still, the book has been classified as "fiction" in the Library of Congress Catalogue. Without the restrictions of an academic exercise she has managed to write a very readable book, one of the few on Bangladesh which creates sympathy for the people and their country. The stories she tells are of birth and death, of women and marriage, of festivals and saints, of poverty and indebtedness, of natural calamities and successful and failed attempts to improve one's lot by emigration. Trying to integrate herself into society, she describes the life of the women, mainly confined to the security and restrictions of *purdah* and *sharom* (shame). There is little on agriculture and husbandry, on socio-economics or on lineage and marriage systems. Having studied anthropology had certainly sharpened her eye for the situation of being "exposed" for the first time to a different culture, if not to an unfamiliar environment. For the uninitiated there is a useful glossary of Bangla/All-Indian terms which enrich local English.

The book was first published in 1991 and has been positively reviewed. Since then the author has revisited the village and, in the new preface, gives a short account of the many changes. Given the small number of readable and informative books on Bangladesh, one appreciates that the book has been made available as paperback at an affordable price. It is to be highly recommended for first reading on Bangladesh, and even on village life in (Muslim) South Asia.

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