

[00:00:00] **Hilary:** Well, hello everyone. My name is Hilary Standing. I'm Emeritus Professor at the University of Sussex and Emeritus Fellow at the Institute of Development Studies, and I'm delighted to be warmly welcoming two very old, close colleagues and friends, Professor Naila Kabir and Professor Sabina Rashid, two very highly distinguished scholars in their respective fields within global development studies, gender relations and social transformation.

[00:00:27] **Hilary:** They have just both written books which are going to probably in many ways reset the way we think about gender relations in Bangladesh. Naila's book, *Renegotiating Patriarchy, Gender Agency and the Bangladesh Paradox*, is a work which goes back over 40 years of her experience of working, living and studying social relations and gender relations in Bangladesh.

[00:00:56] **Hilary:** Sabina's book, *Poverty, Gender and Health in the Slums of Bangladesh, Children of Crows*. That's the result of her 25 years of in-depth research and engagement with urban slum settlements, and how gender and poverty intersect and compromise women's health and well-being. They're both about patriarchy in the broader structural sense.

[00:01:18] **Hilary:** But they cover different timeframes, they cover different contexts, and they come from different disciplinary perspectives. So, we're going to have a conversation about the way these books complement each other, what some of their differences are about, and generally, what does this mean for thinking about gender relations in Bangladesh?

[00:01:39] **Hilary:** So, we're going to start, Naila and Sabina are going to talk a bit about their books to set the context, why they wrote them, what the main themes are, what they were trying to do in the books, and then we'll go on to discuss some of the issues that both books raise. So, I'll start with Naila because her time frame is even longer than Sabina's. It takes us back into the 1970s. So Naila, tell us about your book, why you wrote it, what you'd like to tell everybody about it.

[00:02:10] **Naila:** Okay. thank you, Hilary. I think I should start by just explaining what the Bangladesh Paradox is, because that is quite central to what the book tries to do. The Bangladesh Paradox, and as I've said in the

book, the development studies is full of so called paradoxes. The Bangladesh Paradox is the fact that when Bangladesh gained its independence in 1971, it was indeed one of the poorest countries in the world, second only to Rwanda or Ethiopia.

[00:02:36] **Naila:** It had very high rates of population growth, and people were terrified of Malthusian disaster. It was abjectly poor. Growth rates were low, and it had what has been described as an extreme form of patriarchy. Now that was how people talked about, and the phrase used by the Nixon administration was that it was an international basket case that was going to endlessly need foreign aid to survive.

[00:03:01] **Naila:** And I think those of us who were kind of, you know, working and researching at the time, we bought into the story. We thought that there was very little hope. We couldn't see, the way things were described. We just thought that these were very resilient forces that were at play.

[00:03:17] **Naila:** I think about 10, 20 years later, maybe even 15 years later, we started to see signs of change.

[00:03:24] **Naila:** Not necessarily in terms of economic growth, not necessarily in terms of poverty decline, but unexpectedly in terms of fertility rates. Fertility rates started going down, education improved, health improved, mortality, life expectancy. But what caught my eye was the fact that there was a closing of the gender gap in these social indicators.

[00:03:46] **Naila:** Now, I had done my PhD at the end of 1979, and I lived in a village in Faridpur, and I was looking at fertility behaviour, and it seemed to me very clear at the time that one reason why people had so many children is because they wanted a minimum number of sons. This was a culture of strong son preference, and daughters were almost regarded as, I think somebody called them, a rope around your neck.

[00:04:08] **Naila:** You know, they, they were kept in the home. They were not allowed to work. You marry them off as fast as possible. And its sons to whom you looked to be breadwinners, to look after you in your old age and so on. So, when I started to see by the late 80s, 1990s, that gender gaps were closing in these very important social fields, social indicators, but also

It seemed that, contrary to what son preference had led to, which was much higher rates of mortality amongst daughters than sons, amongst women than men, we were also seeing a reversal in mortality rates.

[00:04:45] **Naila:** So much so that by the late 1990s, girls were more likely to survive than boys in the first years after birth, which is the pattern for the rest of the world for various biological reasons, but had not been the pattern in Bangladesh. So, if you like, that was what caught my eye. Having studied son preference 1970s, I was struck by the fact that parents seemed to be now investing more in their daughters to the extent that daughters were surviving, they were going to school, in fact, girls' education was higher than boys at primary and secondary level. So, this book and the whole Bangladesh paradox, it's trying to explain what happened in Bangladesh in those decades after independence that turned it from a country that despite its poverty and its low rates of growth, started to perform far better on social indicators, on health education, than better off neighbouring countries.

[00:05:41] **Naila:** And what happened in Bangladesh that led parents to start shifting away from strong son preference towards much greater value to their daughters. So, if you like, that is what caught my eye, but in order to explain these shifts in patriarchal structures, it wasn't enough to just go and ask the parents questions, I wanted to understand what happened in the bigger picture, what happened in the structures that had kept son preference alive for so long.

[00:06:11] **Naila:** So, the book follows through the story of change as it took place, both at the, the macro level, the policymakers, the fact that one government after another remained committed to social development, to education, to secondary stipend for girls, to make sure that they caught up with boys. That has been a consistent story, no matter what government is in power. Also, what has been less studied is that people themselves were changing. People no longer seem to be guided by the cultural norms of the past. Cultural norms, social norms, the way they thought about their lives, the aspirations they had were also changing.

[00:06:55] **Naila:** And part of that change was that shift away from the past regarding girls as liabilities to a much more favourable attitude towards daughters. It's not that son preference has disappeared.

[00:07:09] **Naila:** Part of this is that in India, economic growth and poverty decline were accompanied by this female selective abortion, so that India saw a story of rising sex ratios at birth because many more boys were born than girls. In Bangladesh, not only are girls are more likely to survive, but there's a demographic thread to all of this, but it's located, I think, within a story of, of what you call it, social transformation of people turning away from the fatalism of the past towards taking more control of their destinies. We moved from a country of peasants to a country of entrepreneurs.

[00:07:49] **Naila:** It's not just the entrepreneurs, you know, the big capitalists who run the garment sector. You have entrepreneurship right down to the village level. And one of the reasons, for instance, that we saw rural transformation is that that spirit of enterprise, of trying to make a living wherever opportunities arise, that was very important to see change happening.

[00:08:11] **Naila:** And one thing we have been very fortunate about, although we have always had questions of economic status and wealth and class, we have not been held back by caste. We have a small indigenous minority, we have a small Hindu minority, but amongst the Muslim majority, for reasons that I explain in the book, caste did not put down deep roots, which means that people could aspire, even very poor people could aspire to a better future without worrying about the barriers that they might face through caste.

[00:08:43] **Naila:** So, I go through all these changes. I look at the reproductive domain, the productive domain, and I have a whole chapter going back to the village where I did my PhD and trying to find out from the people that I spoke to earlier. What had changed? Why was there this shift towards giving greater value to daughters?

[00:09:02] **Hilary:** Thank you very much, Naila, for a great introduction to your book, and I think that will have whetted people's appetite to read it. Sabina let's turn to you. Tell us about your book.

[00:09:17] **Sabina:** It's great to be in conversation with Naila Apa because I've read a lot of her work and it's such useful work, and listening to her talk about the changes from liberation and what she's seen, it's true there are a lot of changes and it's very positive.

[00:09:32] **Sabina:** My focus has been, for the last I would say 20 plus years, on urban slums. I'm at the BRAC School of Public Health, so I'm in a very public health school, which has elements of social sciences, but I'm an anthropologist, a medical anthropologist by training. The book is called Children of Crows.

[00:09:47] **Sabina:** I never got around to writing the book initially and the book was put away. I kept thinking I need to write every time I attended an urban health conference. I would ask myself, Sabina, you've got something to share and I think it's important. My lens is, it's not an either or. There is elements of course, there's been changes and social transformation and

[00:10:09] **Sabina:** I was also in fact affected by the social transformations by being able to work, when I used to go to villages and the comments I get from religious leaders and over the last 20 years when I go to the field very different, but I mainly worked in urban informal settlements in Dhaka city and urban informal settlements are a very messy chaotic space in terms of governance, the political structures, the fact that people have to pay rent. All they have is their sort of labour, wherever they work.

[00:10:39] **Sabina:** It stayed with me, the stories of the young women I'd met writing my PhD book, which was in 2001, when I'd done my fieldwork and I'd followed these families overtime during the slums post eviction and I worked with a lot of, uh, informal sector people. So, the ones who are trying to be entrepreneurs, but really, it's a struggle. just to give you a background, I've known these other families because in urban slums, it's very hard to follow up families.

[00:11:07] **Sabina:** Like if you look at 2000 and you look at the disruptive space of urban growth and the urban dilemma, I'd like to call it, with its modernisation, it's very hard to track and find individuals. So, I knew these other young group of women and their families from 2006. And I started

talking to them and I thought, you know, because they started calling me, I knew

[00:11:28] **Sabina:** them on a personal level for different reasons. And they started calling me saying where the government is called a holiday, we can't go anywhere and transport's been shut, businesses are shut and they're daily workers. So, they're street vendors, they do daily labour. And when COVID hit, we were worried as well to do or middle class sitting in our homes about how to keep working and about the virus. And it hit me, for many of the young women and their families, it was about how do we survive another couple of weeks and how long will the lockdown be? So, they were worried about food... The women I spoke to 20 years ago didn't work outside. Many of them had little kinds of enterprises within the slums. The women I spoke to, a select group of women in 2020, were working. They were street vendors. They were street hawkers, as we call them, selling towels, selling toys, and I knew them when they were street kids, and some of their children had now been continued to be street hawkers. And I realised, you know, how much has changed? There are micro level changes, but I moved beyond the gender relationships and I want to understand these women and their families and their lives in urban spaces. they

[00:12:47] **Sabina:** So, my book actually changed. I did a sort of a back and forth between 2002, during the slums eviction post eviction, what happens to families, and 2020 to 2022 to understand what happens during the pandemic post pandemic and what's going on in their lives. So actually, my book is characterised by crisis, and I call it crisis and disruptions at different levels.

[00:13:16] **Sabina:** I look at governance or police or the lack of voice and agency and, and I also look at the parallel worlds they live and, despite the changes, I feel it's still very micro for those who remain sort of in this chronic cycle of precariousness.

[00:13:33] **Sabina:** So, this is sort of ethnography narratives of lived experiences over time. And that's what the book was trying to say about urban slums, which tend to not have a comprehensive urban policy. And due to that, there's an absence of governance. NGOs that work there,

sometimes often pick more established slums, which means they've been there for longer.

[00:13:57] **Sabina:** So, slums that are on the periphery tend to be overlooked because it's harder to work there. You can have evictions overnight when entire settlements are removed and you stand to lose the latrines and the setups that you've invested in.

[00:14:11] **Sabina:** I was taken aback with some of the stories that I heard that seemed repetitive, but in different ways. So, its different ways, different jobs, different opportunities, but the choices, and I would call it at least in the urban spaces, not coined by me, but by another anthropologist, a cruel optimism in the face of all obstacles.

[00:14:32] **Hilary:** Thank you very much, Sabina. Thank you both of you for very powerfully setting both your books in, both in your own context of writing, but also in the context of a long period of change in, in Bangladesh. I think what they, they're obviously very different books, the canvas, Naila, that you present is astonishingly broad, actually. What you've managed to accomplish to tell us about Bangladesh over that 40 year period, I think is, is an extraordinary achievement. Sabina, what you accomplish is to tell us in micro-level detail, what it's like to live at the very sharp end of particular kinds of precarity.

[00:15:14] **Hilary:** But I think what both books, to me, what really struck me about both of them, is how they both put women and their agency and their responses right at the centre. Both give women voice, so we hear the voices of women in, in rural areas. We hear the voices of women in these new urban spaces.

[00:15:35] **Hilary:** You differ slightly in your conclusions. Naila, you again give us a very powerful case for a kind of optimism about how gender relations has transformed over that period. Sabina, your reading is a more pessimistic one,

[00:15:49] **Hilary:** there are multiple truths. I think what struck me thinking about where those differences come from is a few things really, but in

particular, I think the timeframes certainly tell us quite a lot about the differences.

[00:16:03] Naila, you're talking over a time frame where, I think, your argument is very persuasive about the upward trajectory in terms of gender relations over that period and all the reasons why that was the case. I think the demographic case is a particularly interesting one. Sabina, you cover a time period where there were two major, at least two major shocks going on.

[00:16:27] **Hilary:** There was the early economic shocks of the decade 2000 to 2010 and then, and then COVID. So, that seems to me to play into it and I'd be interested in your comments on the time frame. But of course the other big issue that you've both referred to is the context and context, it seems to me is, is really vital here, because we have changing rural social relations, but in Sabina's case, we have changing urban relations. And I just rechecked this morning because I was curious, what is the current demography of Bangladesh in terms of urban rural, and according to the World Bank figures for 2023, over 40 percent of the population is urban, and that's happened really over the most, most recent decades.

[00:17:14] **Hilary:** So, I guess what I wanted to ask both of you really was both about the timeframe, but also about what this tells us about your different readings of how gender relations are playing out. Are we in a sense almost inverting what we used to think about urban and rural, you know, that urban is associated with progression and things being better for women and so on, but these books almost seem to invert that they raise at least raise a very big question about well, what is happening in these urban spaces? Are we seeing new forms of patriarchy emerging? New ways in which gender relations are being compromised. So, I'd like to ask you both for your reflections on that.

[00:17:53] **Naila:** I think it is quite a striking set of conclusions. I think the time frame is important. I think my focus is important. You know, I set out to explain improvements and in order to explain those improvements, I had to take account of the fact that, in a country as populous as Bangladesh, there are no generalisations.

[00:18:20] **Naila:** So even in this optimistic story, there will be room for pessimism. Even in the rural areas that I worked in and where I have data for, there are many people whose lives are as precarious and they feature in my book, right? But I do think that urban poverty is higher. I suspect it is higher. When I looked at women who were struggling in rural areas, where did they go to try and earn a living?

[00:18:46] **Naila:** It was to urban areas. So, these women who could not find any form of work, who were destitute, et cetera, it's to the urban areas they went. I would also say that when we talk about multiple truths, one thing I had to do all through the book was to weigh up how different researchers interpreted the same realities, right?

[00:19:07] **Naila:** And therefore, it couldn't just rely on what I thought. I had to look at what somebody who was very pessimistic thought. Then look at someone who was looking at the same phenomenon and ask why they were being more optimistic. So, all the time, you are juggling with not just their multiple truths, but the multiple truths of people doing the research. And it is one of the reasons why there is so much statistics woven through my analysis. Because in the end, I thought, you know, I can give this interpretation, but let's have a look at what quantitative results tell us.

[00:19:42] **Naila:** And it sort of helps to portray what is a minority opinion, what is a majority opinion. That was a real struggle because I wanted to be fair to all parties concerned. I think there's one other reason that, Sabina and my book differ is that we have seen astonishing rates of economic growth in Bangladesh.

[00:20:00] **Naila:** We have seen major declines in poverty, but we have also seen a huge rise in inequality. And the people that Sabina is studying, these are the people who never got the benefits of growth. You know, they are at the bottom, and as a result inequality started to rise, the rate at which the fruits of growth started to trickle down, slowed down.

[00:20:25] **Naila:** So, if you like, Sabina's sample of the urban poor are precisely, A, precisely those people who have not benefited secondly, I think it's right that urban, urban slums are spaces of chaos. You know, there is some kind of governance structures, I think, in rural areas, whereas

people arrive out of nowhere, set up a house or shop or whatever in urban areas. All the development programmes have focused on rural areas. Social protection safety nets have focused on rural areas. So, the urban poor and the urban ultra poor, the people that feature in Sabina's books, have been missed out consistently by attempts that actually improved lives for poor people in rural areas.

[00:21:11] **Naila:** So, I think there are, you know, there's the time frame. It's the fact that I don't just focus on the very, very poor. I focus on, you know, different groups of poor people. And I think it's the inequality story. So, Sabina is picking up the raw end of economic growth in Bangladesh, the people who are not benefiting.

[00:21:28] **Naila:** And of course, the Bangladesh paradox was not just about poverty, it was about governance. And she's also picking up on the lack of governance that there is in these chaotic urban slums. You know, I think, the communities that develop in urban areas are made up of people who don't come from the same part of Bangladesh necessarily, who may not have known each other.

[00:21:48] **Naila:** So, I feel like we are, in that sense, the context matters hugely.

[00:21:52] **Sabina:** Let me just come in and, and just continue. I think, thank you Naila Apa because I think you laid out some, some really key issues and you're absolutely right. One thing I think that's important is I think what Hillary alluded to is also disciplinary and methodologies that have dominated public health and development and, and, and the kinds of data we use.

[00:22:15] **Sabina:** So multiple truths is not just about check what you did a very, very obviously a thorough job because you've been writing for a long time. I looked at a lot of the literature on urban slums, urban inequalities from quantitative indicators to epidemiologists to political scientists to individuals who have written about urban slums and some of the issues that came up around those who are political scientists was very much about governance, the history, the trajectory. I find methodologies and the framing as you rightly pointed out, you want to look for improvements,

methodologies can obscure. Also, the other kinds of stories that people want to tell. And I felt one of my criticisms around RCTs, and I think you've also criticized this, Naila Apa, is that it kind of invisibilises the complicated nuances that exist in lived experiences and what I found interesting was it's not static, they're all poor and they're all struggling. There was this individual sets of circumstances like if they had strong social political networks, they would at least manage to survive a crisis. Because they got more loans. They got free food during COVID because the shopkeeper would say, I will give it to you on credit for the next eight months, or the drug seller, which is the pharmacist would say, you can pay me back on credit.

[00:23:40] **Sabina:** Same thing with street sellers. Some of them had very strong family support or were well connected to one or two leaders in those settlements. And what I grew to realise that, and as you rightly pointed out, these are very messy chaotic spaces. So more established residents, even if you're very poor, would have somewhat of an advantage over those who didn't have, didn't have those opportunities.

[00:24:07] **Sabina:** I'm so glad you pointed out the widening inequalities because the last few years all I've heard is the trillion-dollar growth and poverty reduction.

[00:24:14] **Sabina:** And some people started speaking out about widening inequalities, but I feel like poverty itself, because of this group of precarious groups and those were slightly better off, it's still fluid, you could have a huge health scare, and suddenly you're borrowing and you're taking loans and you got, you know, I just felt it was just this very, very unstable space.

[00:24:37] **Sabina:** We did some, it's not in the book because the research came later, but we looked at garment workers and domestic workers during COVID. And one of the very interesting things was how many of them went back to the villages.

[00:24:47] **Naila:** They could not survive in towns, you know, there was nothing, there was somehow some kind of safety net in the village, in the rural areas. So, when we talk about this urban rural contrast, for those people who do not have roots in urban areas, rural areas, their village

communities still offer some semblance of a safety net that no one is there to look after them in the towns.

[00:25:10] **Sabina:** Absolutely right. And one thing interesting, you were saying about garment workers, at least there was some kind of, you come back to jobs, there's some sort of, you know, set up. But for informal workers, what happened, the ones who are street hawkers, they, some of them,

[00:25:23] **Sabina:** they just started begging because there was at least pity, but they were abused for begging because they couldn't go up near cars, right? There was a whole fear of viruses, cars had stopped going on these roads, but garment workers fared better because there's laws around garment work.

[00:25:39] **Naila:** What was very interesting is because we had this contrast between garment workers and domestic workers is the international community cared about the garment workers. Everybody saw that supply chains were being interrupted. Employers would ring them and say, you know, please don't go away.

[00:25:53] **Naila:** You will have a job to come to. The domestic workers, they arrived in the house, they were told to go away. Just overnight. Nobody rang to find out how they were. They were on their own. Yes, they were begging. They would go to fruit stalls and vegetable stalls in the evening to see if they could get leftovers.

[00:26:09] **Naila:** So that difference, international concerns have been on the global value chains. And I've always argued that you cannot expect standards to improve in global value chains when you have such a vast pool of reserve labour involved in these informal activities, day to day to survival. There was very little outreach towards people doing the kinds of street vending and domestic work and so on, and it was a real contrast.

[00:26:37] **Sabina:** Yeah, and I think there's certain kinds of lens to understand informal work entrepreneurs, you know, activity based without actually recognising there are no laws or systems to address really the level of fallout and precariousness that occurs when you're so much on the fringe in terms of rights and voice and exclusion.

[00:26:58] **Sabina:** Yeah,

[00:26:59] **Naila:** I'd like to say something else actually about methodology because my book is framed by a specific kind of theory which lends itself to pluralist methodologies, you know, theories of practice. So, looking at structures and looking at agency, looking at practice. And therefore, I did try very hard to combine the voices of people,

[00:27:20] **Naila:** the voices of women, the voices of officials. Sometimes collected by me, sometimes collected by other people. But I also, and I came from an economics background and you can't shake that off, you know, I also sought, wherever possible, particularly when there were arguments, let us say about microfinance, let us say about family planning, I also sought to draw on not huge national surveys, but people doing, you know, quite small scale household surveys.

[00:27:47] **Naila:** And one of the interesting things, and this is not the time to go into it is, you know, dowry has been such an ever present reality in the devaluation of daughters. The fact that you have to pay all this money. What I found in the villages I went back to is that the dowry was now, it was paid, it had to be paid, but it was seen as yet another investment in their future, like education.

[00:28:08] **Naila:** But what I also found, and this was not in my survey, but large numbers of fathers and mothers said they would not pay dowry. And when I did look at the national data and look at Sajid Amin's work, I'm very curious that the survey data that they, Population Council and so on, show far lower levels of dowry than we imagine.

[00:28:30] **Naila:** And in the village that I did my study in, it was often Islamic reasons that they don't pay dowry because dowry is anti-Islamic, but there were other reasons. So, I think, you know, I look at urban studies and they talk, uh, you know, recent studies by Sarah White and others talk about the enormous importance of dowry. I have no answers, but I am very puzzled how parents could start to favour daughters when dowry has not disappeared, or are they renegotiating what dowry means? You know, I think there's a very interesting research agenda there.

[00:29:05] **Hilary:** What kind of research questions are arising for you out of this?

[00:29:10] **Sabina:** I studied a lot of health disparities. My background is critical medical anthropology, when I look at moving forward, but also looking at my data, I even kind of say, look, there's multiple truths and lens. But when I studied these women, because I've done other projects in urban slums sort of large scale, five years, six years, nine years. I think what's important to point out that, it's not that there wasn't joy and there weren't moments of triumphs and I think what I realised was, and I say it in my book that, the joys are far more diminished, uh, given the structure of their lives.

[00:29:45] **Sabina:** And if I, I used an intersectional lens looking at power, politics, privilege, and class, I challenged the public health model, which is very disease oriented or statistics, but kind of bound answers into a truth and an objective truth, which I think, Naila Apa is also alluding to this, there are messy spaces and there are individual circumstances and both are coexisting. And there has been enormous changes since the 70s. But urban remains this dilemma of modernisation, but a conundrum and a magnifier of what still continues to be challenges. And if I see where, where we're going now, I think about gender and justice and I think at a fundamental level, with the MDGs and SDGs and all of that's been talked about in terms of achievements, you still have an underlying persistent sort of chronic marginalisation of populations and groups.

[00:30:42] **Sabina:** And. If we talk about justice, let's leave gender, like let's talk about justice and I know Naila Apa has written a lot about citizenship and Hilary, some of your work on gender, but if we don't address some of the structural drivers, if we don't address why women who are also migrating from rural to urban, we're going to be a mega city and I think in a decade or so, Dhaka city with a number of urban sort of migrants coming in about 400 per day.

[00:31:12] **Sabina:** So I'm constantly grappling between these two worlds where I want to hope for better for Bangladesh because against enormous odds, as Naila Apa explained, we've shifted a lot, but then I go out and I read and I see things and I'm in Dhaka, and urban, urban informal

settlements and the, and the lack of policies or investments, and I worry, I worry about what will gender justice, but what will justice look like for those who are constantly on, I feel, a cycle of catching up and then there's something else, another policy, a World Bank policy that well intentioned means they have to pay 10 different brokers for a license to pull, you know, three-wheeler cycle or to pay someone for a job in the government sector or private sector increasingly.

[00:32:04] **Sabina:** We are living in interesting times and I hope the forces of sort of pushing back and Naila Apa was referring to the sort of a shift in mind change. Young women are also much more vocal. The ones I spoke to working outside the homes. Are they exerting agency?

[00:32:20] **Sabina:** Yes. Do they have a lot of choice or are they living lives not of their own making, but some of it is? And they're managing the best they can and they take opportunities as much as they can and they're smart and they're driven to have better lives, but they're struggling. I mean, and I don't know what the future holds.

[00:32:43] **Hilary:** So, you're both, um, in a sense, pointing to a lot of uncertainty. This is... which is probably global, isn't it? What does that mean for the coming research agenda for gender and development in Bangladesh?

[00:32:56] **Naila:** First when we talk about these huge numbers of people migrating into the towns, we have to ask ourselves why. We don't just accept urbanisation as a given fact. We ask ourselves what is going on in the countryside, in rural areas, what is going on in agriculture and non-farm economy does not provide a living for women and for men.

[00:33:14] **Naila:** And why are they coming in large numbers to urban areas that are not capable of being planned swiftly enough to incorporate them. So, I think part of the future agenda and climate change, et cetera, is making it far more urgent, is to think about what forms of sustainable rural livelihoods we need to have and how these might slow down the rate of migration into urban areas.

[00:33:39] **Naila:** Because I don't think any city can cope with this level, with this pace of migration. In terms of research, I think, one of the phrases I use a lot in my book is, and it comes from Lila Abu Lughod, is we must all find our own pathways to personhood. And I think what I am seeing in Bangladesh is a variety of ways in which people define their own personhood.

[00:34:03] **Naila:** Some of them are deeply religious. Some of them take religious as just a part of daily life. For some of them, they're too busy for religion. But each of them is carving out, within a space of freedom, their own pathways to personhood. And I want those multiple pathways to remain intact. I don't want whatever's happening now in Bangladesh to block certain pathways in favour of the ones of those in power.

[00:34:31] **Naila:** So, for me, I think we need to do more research. Open Society Foundation has just done a survey. Bangladesh respondents were at the top in saying that they believe that human rights have been a force for good in the world. And they were almost at the top, 88%, said that human rights resonated with the values they held.

[00:34:54] **Naila:** Now, I don't know what one does with a survey like that. But it does tell you that the idea of human rights, and women's rights as human rights is not as alien to Bengali culture as some people might like to imagine. So, I think the research for the future is what kind of society do most people want?

[00:35:14] **Naila:** What kind of society do they foresee for the minorities in their country? For women in the country? For men in the country? And to what extent are they going to do something about the inequalities, the economic and other inequalities? So, for me, the research for the future is a futuristic vision based on current realities and current perceptions, because if people don't buy in to the idea of a just society, it's no use us talking about it.

[00:35:43] **Naila:** That's what I think the future agenda should be.

[00:35:46] **Sabina:** You know, at a micro-level, Naila Apa, yeah, fantastic. I thought very, very helpful. I just think we also need to move beyond siloed

approaches. So, research and disciplines tend to operate in their own worlds. Some of you may bring in multidisciplinary perspectives. I'm in a public health school, a medical anthropologist, but also to unpack what gender means, what justice means, the tools we use.

[00:36:10] **Sabina:** There's global donor prescriptions on what kind of research continues to dominate in the Bangladesh perspectives. And I think we need more and more of these in-depth ethnographies, social science research that can shed light on what is the mismatch.

[00:36:32] **Naila:** We can do that, we can do that, and we will not come to a uniform story. There will be people who have a certain notion of fairness and of certain the issue is. Are we willing to have a society that accommodates different ideas about justice, or are we doomed to being told yet again, as we have for the last 12, 15 years, the government will decide what justice is?

[00:36:56] **Sabina:** No, no, I don't assume uniform. My point is there's certain kinds of research disciplines and evidence that dominates Bangladesh. When I was here during COVID, it was the economists and the clinicians that dominated the COVID stories. We have to share the social science aspects, the nuances of what it was like with the lockdowns, to media journalists, because the task was set up to listen to certain kinds. So, of course, there's no uniformity, but we need more evidence. We need to decolonise the approaches. And that means also challenge funding bodies, but the kinds of research they prefer to hear about the numbers, the statistics, the homogenising, uh, poor and poverty, either the success stories or the extreme failures.

[00:37:44] **Sabina:** There's a lot of nuances in between that you alluded to that I alluded to, and I'd like to see that change sitting in a, in a university where at least get our voices out there, whether it's uniform or not. I mean, that's my point. Yeah. And public health has to reform its paradigm. It cannot be disease centric.

[00:38:02] **Hilary:** Thank you. You've given us a very rich and wide-ranging sense both of your books and of your thinking behind the books. I just want to ask if you'd each like to just give one last takeaway from your research

from your long, long engagement with these issues, what key takeaway would you like to leave us with.

[00:38:22] **Naila:** I guess the takeaway for me is, as a researcher, is always check your preconceptions. I think theory is important and you look for the theory that accommodates diverse perspectives and so on. But I think too many of us go into the field thinking we know what we're going to find.

[00:38:39] **Naila:** And I think remaining open to all the possibilities that exist and all the different ways in which people interpret their lives, I think would give us a much richer analysis of reality.

[00:38:50] **Hilary:** Thank you, Naila. Sabina.

[00:38:52] **Sabina:** Thank you. Accountability of researchers is very important and recognising we all have our own limitations, but we're trying to say something of a multiple truth out there. And for me, narratives are my form, at least where I find space to humanise individuals and there's critiques in both ways, but I think accountability is very important and recognising what part of a puzzle you bring in.

[00:39:21] **Sabina:** And what you leave out. I think that's important.

[00:39:24] **Hilary:** Thank you very much, Sabina and Naila, for this very wonderful, wide-ranging discussion. I hope that this will encourage the audience to find your books, buy them, read them, and be prepared to be amazed. Thank you very much, both of you.