

# Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's Thoughts and Visions



# Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's Thoughts and Visions:

*Emancipation, Peace,  
and Development*

By

Md Rafiqul Islam

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By Md Rafiqul Islam

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*I dedicate this book to all the martyrs who sacrificed their  
lives to liberate Bangladesh.*



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## ABBREVIATIONS

BAKSAL	Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League
BSS	Biplobi Sainik Sangstha
AL	Awami League
UN	United Nations
FFWFA	Freedom Fighters Welfare Foundation Act
FF	Freedom Fighters
JSD	The Jatiya Samajtantric Dal
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
JRC	Joint Rivers Commission
POWs	Prisoners of War
MNCs	Multi-national Corporations
NAM	Non-aligned Movement
OIC	Organization of the Islamic Conference
IDB	Islamic Development Bank

## PREFACE

Based on the theories of Political Science and Peace and Conflict Studies, this book, entitled *Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's Thoughts and Visions: Emancipation, Peace, and Development*, has given a fresh analysis of the life, philosophy, vision, thoughts and work of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. My training in both the disciplines—Political Science and Peace and Conflict Studies and my subsequent teaching in the latter discipline has greatly enabled me to take this opportunity to revisit the thoughts and vision of Sheikh Mujib through the lens of the theories of the multi-disciplinary subjects.

Peace and conflict studies is relatively a new discipline to look at an issue from a normative perspective. One of the most important sayings of Peace and Conflict Studies is that 'Peace is possible, but it is difficult to attain'. I came across this definition in the maiden class of Professor Dalem Ch Barman, the founder of the Department of Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Dhaka, sometime in 2000. Until I attended the class, peace had always been an eternal gift given by the almighty only when abiding by religious principles and beliefs. As time elapsed, I learned more about peace from my course teachers and realised the meaning of peace is not confined to such a single perspective.

Peace in a broader sense encompasses many more issues that essentially enable people to live, flourish, and contribute to where they live. It is more about justice, freedom, liberation, development, and the right to decide what is good and bad for humanity. From the classes, I learned peace is a comprehensive term that entails three issues, among other things: freedom, emancipation and development. My subsequent understanding of peace in a broader sense has encouraged me to write this book on Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's thoughts and visions on emancipation, peace, and development.

My perception and understanding of peace again widened and sharpened when I got enrolled at the UN-University for Peace (UPEACE), located in the small and beautiful country of Costa Rica, in Central America in order to pursue my MA in International Peace Studies. As an MA student at the University for Peace, I saw the flags of so many nations in the world flying,

and I also appreciated the sculptures of some renowned peace-loving personalities, including Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., Nelson Mandela and Kofi Anan. In the introductory class, the Rector of the University explained the essence of the act of hoisting those flags and described the unmistakable message of peace that the sculptures of all the personalities built at the premises of the University pass on to the young generation. It is to remind the young generation that peace is the unity among and presence of multiple cultures and is possible to attain through the great sacrifices of so many personalities. Thus, the University for Peace has placed the flags and sculptures of these peace-loving personalities on the university campus. The speech of the rector left a deep impression on me, and I thought that Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman belongs to the pantheon of people who have sacrificed their lives and suffered a lot for the greater good of the people around the world. Indeed, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman championed the cause of establishing the fundamental issues of peace, freedom, emancipation, and liberty.

This book is indeed the result of my quest to find out the nexus between the meaning of peace and the inspiring qualities of the formidable personalities—Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., and Nelson Mandela—who sacrificed their lives for the promotion of peace and achieving freedom, liberty and emancipation of their people. Sheikh Mujib's vision for and thoughts on peace, emancipation and liberty are worth mentioning and highly relevant to explain his role, commitment, and hard work for the greater cause of freedom and emancipation of the Bengalis and beyond. My multi-disciplinary education has allowed me to combine my knowledge of Bangladesh politics, history, and peace and conflict analysis. My multi-disciplinary training has also helped me relate to the issues of Bangladesh politics with the theoretical lens of Peace and Conflict Studies and has equally enabled me to explore the thoughts and vision of Sheikh Mujib from the perspectives of peace, emancipation, and liberty.

This book comprises ten chapters, which highlight the diverse issues of Sheikh Mujib's life and work, vision and thoughts, and the good and bad days of his life. The lens of Political Science and Peace and Conflict Studies has allowed me to analyse all these issues related to his life and work, which no longer remained within the boundary of the subcontinent, but rather surpassed the national boundary and founded him as a world leader. In each chapter, the theoretical understanding of a specific topic is first presented, which then leads to an exploration of the connection between his life and manifold works. This explanation gives a special feature of this book. After the introduction, the philosophical foundation of Sheikh Mujib's thoughts

and vision is analysed at the beginning of this book, which then becomes the guiding principle of the rest of the analyses of all the other chapters. As far as my knowledge is concerned, hardly a few books have so far provided a similar analytical insight into the philosophical foundation of Mujib's thoughts, vision and works. After the philosophical foundation, the global politics during his time has been presented in Chapter 3 because the global political environment shaped his thoughts and vision to work for the oppressed and deprived people. His thoughts on political emancipation and freedom are analysed in Chapter 4, where his life-long struggle for attaining freedom and emancipation is presented based on the theoretical understanding of emancipation and political freedom. Sheikh Mujib is an all-time most reliable friend of '*have-nots*' that he mentioned on many occasions in his public speeches. Chapter 5 has analysed why and how Sheikh Mujib turned into a friend of the '*have nots*'. Indeed, the philanthropic characteristic has developed early in his life and has eventually come to be reflected in his actions. Philanthropic activities promote the social peace and harmony in society. Chapter 6 gives a fresh analysis of his role in promoting peace and justice. Every event of his life and work has given insight to the development of this chapter on promoting peace and justice.

The remaining Chapters 7, 8 and 9 shed light on his vision and thoughts after he became the Prime Minister of the government of the new-born state. His role in nation-building and peacebuilding in the post-war country has been illustrated throughout the chapters. The established theory of nation-building and peacebuilding developed by the United Nations has guided me to analyse his role in peacebuilding in the post-war situation in Bangladesh. After becoming the Prime Minister in the new state, Sheikh Mujib focused his attention on gaining recognition for the new nation from the international community. During this time, he contributed to building regional peace and cooperation as well as global peace. He was highly devoted to the achievement of emancipation and political freedom for all the people deprived of basic human rights due to colonial exploitation and domination. His vision and thoughts in the regional and global context have elevated him to the height of global leadership. Millions of oppressed people across the world still remember his contributions.

This alternative explanation of exploring Sheikh Mujib's vision and thoughts on peace, emancipation and liberty will attract readers in different fields of study: *Political Science, International Relations, Peace and Conflict Studies and History*. Readers and students will get new insights and hints to analyse Sheikh Mujib's work, thoughts and vision in manifold ways. However, as a beginner writer on the works of such an awe-inspiring man, I cannot be

completely infallible; as well as I cannot give guarantee that the book is immune to mistakes. I have invested my best effort to provide references and footnotes to substantiate the issues, facts and events of his life. I also confess in advance that my analysis of Sheikh Mujib's life and works may not be complimentary to the works by other authors but altogether a newer version to its readership.

—Md Rafiqul Islam

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Writing a book is an arduous task. It takes a long journey—theory-building, developing thoughts and then connecting them with the events and facts, and most of all, giving a fresh analysis. An author follows all the steps silently and writes in a calm and quiet environment, but finally publishes it with a big celebration. It means that writing a book is a collaborative process involving many people, and this book is no exception.

I am grateful to Professor Harun-or Rashid, who has been one of my direct teachers and the key source of my inspiration for writing this book. I am equally grateful to all my teachers who taught me at different levels in my educational life.

An invitation from my SM Hall mate, Abu Yousuf, to deliver a lecture on ‘Bangabandhu’s Global Vision and Thoughts’ in February 2020 inspired me to work on this book. While preparing for the lecture, I realised that there were very few works exploring Sheikh Mujib's thoughts on peace, emancipation, and development. Motivated to address this gap, I began researching, planning, and writing, completing the first draft after a year of dedicated effort.

I am grateful to the people working in the libraries who extended their unfailing support to find appropriate books and journals while I was busy doing the spadework.

After the first draft, I became puzzled because I thought that this compilation of diverse works of Bangabandhu would not be appropriate to the readers. Thus, I sought peer review from my colleagues and friends. Among my peers, Md Monirul Islam contributed to reading a few chapters and gave comments. His comments helped me to enrich the draft. Monir is an amazingly brilliant scholar who helped me a lot to accomplish this task. My colleague Dr. Mamun Al Mostafa, Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Dhaka read the abstract of this book and provided invaluable comments to reorganise the introduction of this book. I am grateful to Mazadul Akash and Mahbuba Islam Meem for their support.

I am grateful to Dr. Sabbir Ahmed, Professor of Political Science, for reviewing the book and providing valuable feedback, helping me reorganize the chapters to make them more accessible. I also thank Professor Dr. Mohammad Tanzim Uddin Khan of International Relations for his insightful comments, which enriched the manuscript and enhanced its appeal to readers.

I am deeply grateful to Cecile Cutler, former lecturer of Geography at Flinders University, Australia, for her dedicated editing and invaluable support. Despite her illness, she generously assisted in refining the manuscript, making it engaging and accessible. I also extend my thanks to my colleagues, Zaynul Abedin and Golam Gaus Al Kaderi from the Department of English, University of Dhaka, for their assistance in the initial editing. Golam Gaus's insights greatly enhanced my ability to write clearly for a broader audience.

I am grateful to my wife, daughter, and family members who have endured my negligence towards them during that time. I could not properly take care of them while working on a tight schedule to finish the first draft of this book.





# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

This book explores the thoughts and vision of Bangabandhu<sup>1</sup> Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in achieving emancipation and liberty and promoting peace in the local and global context. This area of exploration has been widely unexplored, and thus, is a new in the field of Social Sciences. In recent years, there have been many publications in the forms of books, journal articles, media reports, Op-Eds, and so on on Sheikh Mujib's works and contributions. However, one can hardly find robust analysis in the fields of emancipation, liberty, peace, and development that uses an appropriate theoretical tool to understand him. This book is an endeavour to address this gap by reflecting on his outstanding contributions in the areas of emancipation from economic and political exploitation, peace, and development from a set of relevant theoretical lenses of Peace and Conflict Studies and Political Science disciplines. Thus, this book has adopted an eclectic approach that aims to provide new insights on Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and attract the attention of readers from diverse fields of academic, non-academic, and policy levels.

This book starts with the simple general knowledge that Bangladesh is the only country where the Father of the Nation,<sup>2</sup> Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur

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<sup>1</sup> Bangabandhu means 'friend of Bengal'. This title was awarded by the people of Bangladesh, on February 23, 1969 at a rally that took place at the *Race Course Maidan* (now the Suhrawardy Udyan). On that day, people bestowed the 'Bangabandhu' title on Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Tofail Ahmed, the then Dhaka University Central Students' Union (DUCSU) Vice President and *Sarbadaliya Chhatra Sangram Parishad Convenor*, announced the title on behalf of the people of Bangladesh. (See: Visser, Jacco. (2020). "'May you live with us forever Father!' Rethinking state and kinship among Bangladeshi long-distance nationalists in London." *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, Vol.54, no. 2. p.260).

<sup>2</sup> 'Father of the Nation' is an honorific given to individuals who played the most important role in the process of the founding of a country. In world history, there are some persons who played such a role and whose names are attached to the name of a country or a nation. Some of the names are written in golden letters, such as Peter I of Russia, Sun Yat-sen of China, Sir Henry Parkes of Australia, Miguel Hidalgo of Mexico, Sam Nujoma of Namibia, William the Silent of the Netherlands, Einar

Rahman was brutally killed with his family members by the conspirators, anti-liberation forces, and military officers within a short period of time after independence. As a founder of Bangladesh, Sheikh Mujib cherished a long vision and thoughts to emancipate the Bengali nation from colonial exploitation and foreign domination. He also possessed the dream of building the country as prosperous and prestigious in the world. But his dreams and thoughts were interrupted by his tragic assassination on 15 August 1975. The conspirators—at home and abroad—became successful for the time being by killing him, but the entire Bengali nation lost the founder and dreamer forever.

After independence, Sheikh Mujib returned to the new country from jail in Pakistan and started his mission of making the country a ‘Sonar Bangla’,<sup>3</sup> leaving no stone unturned. However, the anti-liberation forces (*Jamat-e-Islam, Albadar, Alshams*) in the 1971 War of Independence were equally engaged in proving the independence of the country as wrongdoing and unsuccessful. The local anti-liberation forces and foreign conspirators eventually became successful in killing Sheikh Mujib after just three years and seven months. With the killing, the anti-liberation forces also started to bury the spirit and vision of independence—democracy, secularism, nationalism and the principle of equality. The conspirators captured political powers and killed many of the political leaders including the four national leaders (former Vice-President Syed Nazrul Islam, former Prime Minister of Bangladesh Tajuddin Ahmed and Captain (Rtd.) Mansur Ali, and former

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Gerhardsm of Norway, Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya, Carlos Mannel of Cuba, Mustafa Kemal of Turkey, Sukarno of Indonesia, Tunku Abdul Rahman of Malaysia, Mahatma Gandhi of India, Don Stephen Senanayake of Sri Lanka and Mohammad Ali Jinnah of Pakistan. The name of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib is listed in this category. He has been given the honour of the Father of the Bangladesh nation by the people of Bangladesh. (See: Mantoo, Shahnawaz. (2015). “Sheikh Mujibur Rehman: Founder of Bangladesh.” *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, Vol.9, no. 5, pp.152-158.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Sonar Bangla’ is used metaphorically by Sheikh Mujib to illustrate a country free from hunger, poverty, corruption, illiteracy, communalism, and ignorance. He strongly believed that the existence of hunger, poverty and corruption would erode the value of Bangladesh’s independence. He was keenly aware that freedom would be short-lived if the Bengalis remained stricken with hunger, poverty, illiteracy, and injustice. Thus, Sheikh Mujib dreamt of building the country as a ‘Sonar Bangla’—a prosperous, developed, and prestigious one. This slogan inspired the freedom fighters of Bangladesh (then East Bengal) to fight against the Pakistani armed forces and free their motherland. (See: Guhathakurta, Meghna. (1997). “Sonar Bangla: Inspiration, illusion and extortion.” *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations*, Vol.23, no.1/2, pp.197-217).

Home Minister A H M Quamruzzaman) who led the War of Liberation in the absence of Sheikh Mujib in Dhaka Central jail on 3 November 1975. The conspirators succeeded in establishing their vested interest by killing many of the veteran political leaders and close associates of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Not only did they kill the national heroes of Bangladesh, but they also buried the spirits of the liberation war—by amending constitutions, abolishing secularism from the constitution and imposing military rule in the newly founded country. In a word, the conspirators succeeded in wiping out the dream of Sheikh Mujib first by his killing and then by amending the constitution and introducing policies that contradicted the spirit of the war of liberation.

The inquisitive mind of the readers today may, thus, ask what were the dreams of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman for achieving the right to self-determination, peace, prosperity, and development. So far, numerous books and articles have been written by many scholars on him in diverse fields. This book is also an endeavour to shed light on his thoughts and vision for achieving justice, peace, emancipation, and liberty for his people and beyond. As far as knowledge goes, this area of exploration is not yet mapped out or investigated sufficiently. This book is, therefore, dedicated to exploring the thoughts and vision of Sheikh Mujib, the philosophical foundations of his thoughts and visions, so many efforts for achieving peace and security, nation-building and post-war peacebuilding, and contributions to building regional and world peace. Thus, this book is a unique one in highlighting all these multi-dimensional issues based on descriptive and explorative methods. Through scrutinizing and assessing various books, periodical articles, speeches, videos, and newspapers this book has explored the contributions of Sheikh Mujib in the fields of justice, peace, emancipation, and development. Information and data collected from various sources have been connected with the theories and ideas from Political Science and Peace and Conflict Studies<sup>4</sup> and then the thoughts and vision of Sheikh Mujib in various arenas are discussed.

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<sup>4</sup> Peace and conflict studies is a field within the Social Sciences that identifies and analyzes violent and nonviolent behaviours as well as the structural mechanisms attending conflicts (including social conflicts). The aim of this relatively new discipline is to provide an understanding of those processes, which lead to a more desirable human condition and property. Peace and conflict studies entails understanding the concept of peace, which is defined as a political condition that ensures justice and social stability through formal and informal institutions, practices, and norms. (For details see: Barash, David P. and Webel, Charles P.

## Contextualising the Study

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman sacrificed his life for the freedom and emancipation of the Bengali<sup>5</sup> nation. His desperation and dedication to the freedom and emancipation of the people came into reality with the creation of Bangladesh as a new state. With a background of a middle-class rural family and no formal education in the socialist and capitalist system, he was successful in combining the principles of humanism, idealism, realism, socialism and capitalism; and indoctrinating his thoughts and vision for achieving peace, emancipation, and political freedom for the people not only in his own country but also across the world. For his contributions, commitment, and life-long struggle for the Bengali nation, Sheikh Mujib has been called the greatest Bengali ever.<sup>6</sup> The people of Bangladesh and beyond remember him for his achievements, outstanding personality, and the examples he set for emancipation, peace, and development. His physical stature, voice, charisma, courage, and charm transformed him into a steadfast and generous political leader who took upon himself all the suffering and pain to fulfil his thoughts and dreams. Yatindra Bhatnagar (1972) remarked,

Bangabandhu was the undisputed leader of 75 million people of 'Bangla Dash' (Bangladesh) and has also become a beloved and widely respected leader of freedom-loving people all over the world. He is not only a leader of men, a simple, dedicated, and trusted mass leader, but has become as the symbol of freedom, democracy and defence of people's rights. His life is an

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(2008). *Peace and conflict studies*. Sage; Charles P. Webel, and Johan Galtung. (2007). (Eds.) *Handbook of Peace and Conflict Studies*. Routledge).

<sup>5</sup> Bengali is a pejorative word coined by the British to condescendingly describe the Bangalees. However, this book has used the word 'Bengali' throughout the book, which means Bangalees. Indeed, Bengali is a commonly used term in the academic arena.

<sup>6</sup> The BBC Bengali Language Service surveyed its twelve million listeners to determine the greatest Bengali of all time (BBC, 2004). Respondents were asked to rank their top five choices, and in the end, more than 100 individuals received votes. The top twenty names were announced one by one each day, beginning on 26 March, Bangladesh's Independence Day, and ending on 15 April, the Bengali New Year's Day, with the naming of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as the greatest Bengali of all time. (See: Jones, Reece. (2008). "Searching for the greatest Bengali: The BBC and shifting identity categories in South Asia." *National Identities* Vol.10, no.2, pp.149-165).

inspiration and his patriotism is an example for the people all over the world.<sup>7</sup>

This remark about Sheikh Mujib is pertinent to illustrating his character and dedication towards people at home and abroad. Embracing Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at the Non-Aligned Summit in Algiers in 1973, Fidel Castro remarked about his personality and leadership, “I have not seen the Himalayas, but I have seen Sheikh Mujib. In personality and courage, this man is the Himalayas. I have thus had the experience of witnessing the Himalayas”.<sup>8</sup> This characterisation of Sheikh Mujib by his contemporary foreign friends gives testimony to his personality, leadership, and commitment to people beyond the border.

In comparison to Sheikh Mujib few of the political leaders in the annals of Bangladesh have had such impacts on shaping and forming the history of Bangladesh. Indeed, the rural setting of Tungipara—the bank of the river Madhumati, surrounded by trees, rivers, paddy and jute fields, and people with a multicultural background (Hindu-Muslim neighbourhoods)—fashioned his mind and soul to be free-moving, independent, and enthusiastic about embarking on the new ventures. About his early boyhood and school days, Bangabandhu wrote in his *‘Unfinished Memoirs’*<sup>9</sup>:

In school, I was crazy about sports; I was captain of the Mission School; I was older than most boys in my class because of the four years I had lost due to my illness, and I was a very obstinate boy, I would fight a lot.<sup>10</sup>

Sheikh Mujib’s self-confession about his boyhood and school life reflects the restless life of an independent boy. However, in his childhood, he was very sensible about his neighbours and friends; and was very much concerned with such social issues as poverty and exploitation. Even at this early stage, he loved to help the poor and invested a good deal of his time

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<sup>7</sup> Bhatnagar, Yatindra. (1971). *Mujib: The Architect of Bangla Desh; A Political Biography*. Delhi: Indian School Supply Depot, Publication Division, page. 1.

<sup>8</sup> I haven’t seen the Himalayas but have seen Sheikh Mujib: Castro in 1973. Retrieved from: <https://www.thedailystar.net/politics/i-havent-seen-himalayas-have-seen-sheikh-mujib-castro-1973-1320706>, November 26, 2016.

<sup>9</sup> *The Unfinished Memories* is the autobiography of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Sheikh Hasina, the former Prime Minister of Bangladesh, took the initiative to publish this autobiography and the University Press Limited, UPL, Dhaka published this seminal work. This autobiography entails the partial life history of Sheikh Mujib which inspires millions of people.

<sup>10</sup> Rahman, Sheikh Mujibur. (2012). *The Unfinished Memoirs*. The University Press Limited (UPL). Dhaka, p.13.

and energy in the service of others. The sense of belonging towards his peer groups and neighbours made him a kind and responsible young man, extending his helping hands to the people in need and the people who were the most vulnerable. Here, the 'people in need' does not necessarily mean the poor but would refer to all sorts of people who were in predicaments in different situations during his lifetime. For example, the young Mujib organised a campaign to draw the attention of Sher-e-Bangla A. K. Fazlul Huq, the Chief Minister of Bengal to the deplorable condition of the local people.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, his urge to repair the run-down school for the students proved that he was committed to working for his fellows and other people. Regarding his sympathetic commitment towards the needy people, Obaidul Huq (1973) rightly mentioned that,

The awareness of the distinction between the proprietary and socialistic aspects of human character was reflected in Mujib's dealings with others even in his boyhood. Indeed, he was born with a heart of unalloyed gold.<sup>12</sup>

Similarly, Sheikh Mujib was bold and courageous for the right causes. He never learnt to give up his desires and ideals due to pressure from any sources. For example, even when he was at school, he fought against the people who hindered him in organising a meeting to be addressed by Bengals prominent leaders A.K. Fazlul Huq<sup>13</sup> and Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy<sup>14</sup> at Gopalganj in 1938. He was sent to jail for seven days for the first time at the age of eighteen when he proceeded to save a fellow

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p.10.

<sup>12</sup> Huq, Obaidul. (1973). *Voice of Thunder*. Radical Asia Publications. (First edition). London. Dhaka, p.14.

<sup>13</sup> Abul Kashem Fazlul Huq, (A. K. Fazlul Huq as shortened form) was a Bengali statesman and jurist. He served as the first Chief Minister of Bengal (the head of government of the Bengal Province and the Leader of the House in the Bengal Legislative Assembly in British India), and later he served as the Home Minister of Pakistan. He played major political roles in British India and later in Pakistan (including East Pakistan, today's Bangladesh) and held various other political offices. (See: Bhattacharjee, Dhananjay. (2017). "AK Fazlul Huq and Bengal Politics Between the Two Partitions (1905-1947): Currents and Cross-currents." PhD dissertation., University of North Bengal; Rashid, Harun-or, (2003). *The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh: Bengal Muslim League and Muslim Politics, 1906–1947*. University Press Limited (UPL), Dhaka).

<sup>14</sup> Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy (H.S. Suhrawardy in this book as a shortened form) was a Bengali politician and lawyer. He was the fifth Prime Minister of Pakistan, serving from his appointment on 12 September 1956 until his resignation on 13 October 1957. (See: Ikramullah, Begum Shaista Suhrawardy. (1991). *Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy: A Biography*. Oxford University Press).

Muslim tortured by some Hindu men.<sup>15</sup> This jail was not a fruitless event in his life; rather, as said by Obaidul Huq, (1973), “from the seven days in jail he emerged a matured man, a confirmed political worker, and a bitter critic of the arrogance of authority”.<sup>16</sup> Sheikh Mujib learnt lessons from the pain, suffering and compromising life in jail that he narrated in his experiences in the book “The Prison Diaries” (*Karagarer Rojnamcha*).<sup>17</sup>

Sheikh Mujib passed Matriculation<sup>18</sup> in 1942 and was admitted to ‘Islamia College’.<sup>19</sup> Admission to this college was a milestone in his life as he was able to meet prominent political leaders there. The college was one of the central hubs of student politics in India (particularly for Muslim students) to fight against the colonial rulers as well as to work for the Muslim community. Besides his academic study, he came into close contact with renowned political leaders which enabled him to gain political acumen. By his enthusiasm and dedication, the young Mujib managed to become a popular student leader in the college. In 1946 he was elected as the General Secretary of the All Bengal Muslim Students League (ABMSL), the student wing of the All-India Muslim League in Bengal. Due to his popularity and dedication to political activities and student affairs, no other student leaders would dare to contest a position which he wanted to contest.<sup>20</sup> Having contacted the veteran political leaders A.K. Fazlul Huq, Abul Hasim and H.S. Suhrawardy, he was able to polish his political philosophy and enrich his knowledge as well as absorb a sense of responsibility to champion the cause of the people of his country. Student leader Mujib was also motivated by the spirit and vision of some other leaders, such as Subhas Chandra Bose and Mahatma Gandhi, to learn how to liberate his countrymen from the shackles of British colonial exploitation.

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<sup>15</sup> Rahman, Sheikh Mujibur. (2012). Op.cit. p.11.

<sup>16</sup> Huq, Obaidul. (1973). Op.cit. p.15

<sup>17</sup> Rahman, Sheikh Mujibur. (2017). *The Prison Diaries* (Karagarer Rojnamcha). Bangla Academy, Dhaka.

<sup>18</sup> Matriculation, a public examination, is now equivalent to Secondary School Certificate in Bangladesh.

<sup>19</sup> Islamia College (now Maulana Azad College) is an old institute of Liberal Arts, Commerce and Science in India, located in central Kolkata, West Bengal, India. The college is fully under government administration. It is located near the junction of Rafi Ahmed Kidwai Road and SN Banerjee Road, popularly called “Lotus crossing”. It is affiliated with Calcutta University.

<sup>20</sup> Rahman, Sheikh Mujibur. (2012). Op.cit. p.16.

Sheikh Mujib commenced his political life as an activist while he was still a student. The philosophy of 'Subhas Chandra Bose,'<sup>21</sup> Oxford-educated lawyer H.S. Suhrawardy and Mahatma Gandhi greatly influenced his mind and gave him the expertise to work for the people. The stormy politics in the 'British Raj'<sup>22</sup> in India, the outbreak of the Second World War, great famine and Hindu-Muslim rivalry, also shaped his mind and political knowledge towards working for emancipation and liberty. The contemporary socio-political conditions and close association with the liberal nationalistic political leaders taught young Mujib to become a revolutionary and one of the most influential leaders of his time. The non-violence teachings and technique of Mahatma Gandhi to challenge the British Raj also predisposed him to how to sustain himself as a peaceful leader in a difficult situation. He also came to know the work of Bernard Shaw, Karl Marx, Rabindranath Tagore and Kazi Nazrul Islam.<sup>23</sup> These works are highly educative and influential in motivating people to fight against oppression, suppression and exploitation. Despite having regional differences, all the personalities touched the hearts and minds of thousands of political leaders like Sheikh Mujib. His contemporary global politics such as colonialism, imperialism, the great depression, the Second World War, and decolonisation also shaped his mind to think and work for the oppressed people and establish peace and justice across the world. He gathered negative experiences from colonial exploitation, world wars, arms race, and

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<sup>21</sup> Subhas Chandra Bose was an Indian nationalist leader whose defiant patriotism made him a hero in India. He is widely regarded as the extremist leader of the provincial government of Free India. His organization, named *Arzi Hukumat-e-Azad Hind*, or the Provisional Government of Free India (also known as Azad Hind or Free India) was based in Singapore. During World War II, his efforts to rid India of British rule with the help of Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan left a troubled legacy. He died mysteriously just two years before the independence of his country. (See: Getz, Marshall J. (2002). *Subhas Chandra Bose: A Biography*. McFarland).

<sup>22</sup> The British Raj refers to the rule of the British Crown over the Indian subcontinent from 1858 to 1947. This period is also known as Crown rule in India or direct rule in India. The British Raj had a profound impact on the subcontinent, influencing political, social, and economic structures, and ultimately leading to the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947. (See: Brain, Allen & Bayly, C.A. (1990). *The Raj, India and the British 1600–1947*. National Portrait Gallery, London).

<sup>23</sup> See: Father of the Nation: Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Embassy of Bangladesh, Copenhagen. <https://bangladeshembassy.dk/bangladesh/father-of-the-nation/>; Also see: <http://www.londoni.co/index.php/64-history-of-bangladesh/biography/sheikh-mujibur-rahman-bangabandhu/319-sheikh-mujibur-rahman-bangabandhu-early-life-of-khoka-socially-driven-teenager-inspired-by-suhrawardy-biography-of-muslim-and-bengali>.



racism and thus was determined to eradicate all these issues for the triumph of humanity.

The human rights violations and suffering of the people in the sub-continent due to the famine in 1943, the Second World War and the partition of the Indian sub-continent in 1947 greatly influenced Sheikh Mujib to develop his mind toward helping and working for emancipation, liberty and alleviating the suffering of the poor people. During the great famine in Bengal, Sheikh Mujib stopped his studies and engaged in helping the starving people.<sup>24</sup> He closely observed how the government failed to provide food for the needy people and save lives. The Second World War worsened the situation of poverty and famine in Bengal because production in agriculture and industries quickly fell into decline. The British colonial authorities first stockpiled food in Bengal in preparation against an expected Japanese invasion.<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, the Zamindar and upper-class people stored food to make profits. Sheikh Mujib was highly critical of the policy of the British government and the Zamindar for their profit-making mentality instead of addressing the famine. He worked hard to collect food and distribute it to the starving people. He also realised how the British colonial government had failed to save the dying people of the sub-continent. He observed that the British government was busy with the war against the Axis powers. Sheikh Mujib considered that “The English were locked in battle and Bengalis would have to die of hunger as a consequence”.<sup>26</sup> He also witnessed the people's plight in the aftermath of the 1947 partition of the Indian sub-continent. The emergence of the two independent countries—Pakistan and India—led to a situation that separated brothers, sisters, neighbours, close ones and many more. Consequently, many were forced to leave their motherland and settle in unknown destinations. Despite his efforts and commitment towards a united Bengal<sup>27</sup>, the Bengal province was split into two parts, and East Bengal was annexed with Pakistan by the logic of its Muslim majority population.

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<sup>24</sup> Rashid, Harun-or. (2021a). *Bangabandhukosh*. Journeyman Books, Dhaka. p. 24.

<sup>25</sup> Lewis, David. (2011). *Bangladesh: Politics, Economics and Civil Society*. Cambridge University Press, UK. p. 57.

<sup>26</sup> Rahman, Sheikh Mujibur. 2012. Op.cit., p.17.

<sup>27</sup> Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was a devoted follower of his mentor, H.S. Suhrawardy. Suhrawardy, along with Abul Hasim, Sarat Chandra Bose, Kiran Sankar Roy, and others, at sought to establish a united Bengal. As a young student leader, Sheikh Mujib at a certain point supported Suhrawardy's initiative to create an independent state comprising Bengal and Assam.

After the partition of India in 1947, Sheikh Mujib remained in Calcutta<sup>28</sup> but living there for a longer time seemed to him fruitless. He felt the urgency to come to Dhaka and to do the important tasks for his people in Bengal rather than living in Calcutta. Immediately he returned to his hometown and met his family members. His father advised him to complete his Law Degree and concentrate on his professional life.<sup>29</sup> However, his inclination towards politics and strong dedication to the people inspired him to become involved in politics in East Pakistan. Sheikh Mujib realised that his statehood ideal had not materialised with the establishment of Pakistan in 1947. He dreamt of a separate country for the political and economic emancipation of his people. Thus, the political and economic exploitation of his people by the Pakistani elitist agitated his mind and drove him to speak out against injustice and misrule. He did not waste time but travelled to Dhaka to consult with influential and like-minded political leaders in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) about the plight and exploitation of his people. Interestingly, he was disappointed to see the nature and commitment of the elite-class politicians in his country. He was a political leader steadfast in pursuing his beliefs without rest, and the ensuing determination pushed him forward to dedicate his life to the people's cause.

With such a realisation, Sheikh Mujib came forward to organise like-minded people to work for the people of his country. He founded the East Pakistan Muslim Student League (EPMSL) on 4<sup>th</sup> January 1948 to influence students and accelerate political activities. This student organization is now named the Bangladesh Student League (BSL). Sheikh Mujib started his national political career upon his election as Joint Secretary of the newly founded 'East Pakistan Awami Muslim League'.<sup>30</sup> He consolidated his influence within the party gradually and emerged as one of the key persons in the Party. He was elected as the General Secretary of the 'East Pakistan

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<sup>28</sup> Calcutta, now known as Kolkata, is the capital of India's West Bengal state. The East India Company used this place as a trading post. Calcutta was India's capital under the British Raj from 1773–1911.

<sup>29</sup> Rahman, Sheikh Mujibur. (2012). *Op.cit.* p.88.

<sup>30</sup> In June 1949, Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani, Shamsul Huq of Tangail, and Yar Mohammad Khan founded the East Pakistan Awami Muslim League as a response to the centralisation of power by the government. Within a short time, the party emerged as a strong political alternative to the Urdu-dominated Muslim League in Pakistan, gaining widespread support in East Bengal. In the 1954 provincial elections, the party secured 143 seats. The United Front of East Pakistan, led by Huq, Bhashani, and Suhrawardy, won a total of 223 seats, decisively defeating the Muslim League, which managed to secure only nine seats. (See: Harun-or-Rashid. (2003). *Op.cit.*).

Awami Muslim League' in 1953. He continued in this position until 1966 and became the elected president of the party in 1966. Like his political mentor H.S. Suhrawardy, Sheikh Mujib underscored the importance of party organization and management. Therefore, he dedicated himself to reviving the political party eradicating all forms of conspiracies and intra-party conflicts. Under his dynamic leadership, the Awami League emerged as the political voice of the middle class and became a beacon of hope and aspiration for the people of East Pakistan. As a charismatic organiser, Sheikh Mujib managed to establish his firm control over the party and his followers.

Sheikh Mujib had experience in fighting against the British colonial overlords, and then he directed his new struggle against the then Pakistani colonialism.<sup>31</sup> He indeed supported the formation of Pakistan and he accordingly played an important role in bringing the leaders together for the cause of Pakistan.<sup>32</sup> However, he was very much aware of founding a separate state for the Bengali people as specified by the principle of the 'Lahore Resolution'<sup>33</sup>. Sheikh Mujib believed that the formation of Pakistan as a state was a temporary issue, Pakistan would never become a true political entity.<sup>34</sup> He envisioned the creation of a Bengali state that upheld the Bengali language, culture, secularism, and democratic principles. Following the formation of Pakistan, he recognised that the state's foundation on religious nationalism was inherently flawed and would not ensure an inclusive society for people of all backgrounds, regardless of race,

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<sup>31</sup> Schendel, Willem van. (2009). *A History of Bangladesh*. Cambridge University Press.

<sup>32</sup> Pattanaik, Smruti S. (2020). Bangabandhu and Bangladesh: Unrivalled Leaders of the Oppressed. In Md Emdad Ul Bari (Ed). *Bangabandhu and Bangladesh: An Epic of a Nation's Emergence and Emancipation* (86-102). Pathak Shamabesh Book, Dhaka. p.89.

<sup>33</sup> The Lahore Resolution, also known as the Pakistan Resolution, was passed on March 23, 1940, during the annual session of the All-India Muslim League at Minto Park (now Iqbal Park) in Lahore. Proposed by A.K. Fazlul Huq and backed by leaders like Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the resolution demanded the establishment of independent states for Muslims in the north-western and eastern zones of British India, where they were numerically a majority. This resolution laid the foundation for the creation of Pakistan in 1947 and significantly influenced the political dynamics of South Asia (See: Bhuiyan, Mohammed Abdul Wadud. (1989). "Lahore Resolution to Partition and Pakistan (1940-1947)", *Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society* Vol.37, no.3, pp.249-261).

<sup>34</sup> Rashid, Harun-or. (2021b). Bangabandhu: Somaj and Rastr-Bhabna (*Bangabandhu: The Thought of Society and State*). National University of Bangladesh. Gazipur. Bangladesh.

color, religion, or culture. Sheikh Mujib termed this independence of Pakistan as 'false independence' based on ambiguous structure and 'no article of faith'.<sup>35</sup> Immediately after the formation of Pakistan, he saw that the political leaders of Pakistan started to behave differently by imposing different techniques of exploitation, including language aggression.<sup>36</sup> He realised that the Bengali nation would not achieve true freedom. Instead, despite being the majority in the new state, the Bengali people would remain subordinate.

Sheikh Mujib believed in democracy, secularism and constitutionalism. He was determined to overrule the undemocratic Pakistani government through the democratic process, such as election. Gradually, he motivated his people to be prepared to achieve 'the right to self-determination'. He gradually emerged as the key political leader for the oppressed Bengali people which placed him at the forefront of all mass movements directed towards the right causes. After his imprisonment in 1949, he actively supported the formation of the first mass opposition political party, the 'Awami League', under the leadership of Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani.<sup>37</sup> Under the vanguard of this political party, Sheikh Mujib united the Bengali nation and subsequently spearheaded the struggle for independence. The conspiracy of the Pakistani rulers to snatch away the mother language Bangla and imposition of 'Urdu' as the state language of Pakistan, despite Bangla being the language of majority people (56 per cent of people in Pakistan used this language) in Pakistan, sowed the seeds of a movement for independent Bangladesh.<sup>38</sup> He played a key role in establishing the right to language and protested against the decision of the Pakistani government. The Pakistani rulers staged a conspiracy against the Bengali nation through aggression on mother language. The Muslim League government in East Pakistan strongly supported the policy of the central government of Pakistan. Thus, major political parties in East Bengal who believed in Bengali nationalism and identity formed a coalition named the 'United Front'<sup>39</sup> and fought the 1954 election against the Muslim League government.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid. p.52-53.

<sup>36</sup> Rahman, Sheikh Mujibur. (2012). Op.cit. pp.75-76.

<sup>37</sup> Rashid, Harun-or. (2017). (Mainstream Politics: Bangladesh Awami League-Council 1949-2016. (*Multharar Rajniti: Bangladesh Awami League - Council 1949-2016*)). Bangla Academy. Dhaka. Bangladesh.

<sup>38</sup> Rashid, Harun-or. (2021c). Op.cit.

<sup>39</sup> The United Front—a coalition of political parties in East Bengal formed by the Awami Muslim League, the Krishak Sramik Party, the Ganatantri Dal (Democratic Party) and Nizam-e-Islam, contested and won Pakistan's first provincial election to

In the 1954 provincial elections, Bengalis overwhelmingly voted for the Awami League-led 'United Front' electing them to power. The crushing defeat of the Muslim League by the United Front established the hope of self-determination of the Bengali people on a strong footing. The leaders of the United Front, including Sheikh Mujib, proposed a 21-point program to form the public opinion against the Pakistani oppression. He was not fully in agreement in forming such a front, but paying respect to the senior leaders he finally joined in the 1954 united front. After the election, he uttered, "...that their fight was not ended rather began and they must sweep away the M.L. (Muslim League) for good."<sup>40</sup> Sheikh Mujib as a leader of the Awami League was determined to oust the Muslim League forever which signifies his aspiration for the creation of a *Swadhin* Bangladesh. His aspiration and spirit of 'Swadhin Bangladesh', vividly emerged in *Darbar* of Pakistan politics when he stated his historic 'Six-Points'<sup>41</sup> in 1966 for national

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the East Bengal Legislative Assembly in 1954. A. K. Fazlul Huq, H. S. Suhrawardy and Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani, three popular political leaders in Bengal, led the front and defeated the Muslim League massively in the election. A. K. Fazlul Huq of the Krishak Praja Party became the Chief Minister of East Pakistan upon the victory of the United Front. Sheikh Mujib played a vital role in the victory of the United Front. (See: Rafique, Afzal, M. (1976). *Political Parties in Pakistan, 1947-1958*. Vol. 1. National Commission on Historical and Cultural Research).

<sup>40</sup> See: Rashid, Harun-or. (2021a). Op.cit. p.65.

<sup>41</sup> The six points are: (i) The Constitution should provide for a Federation of Pakistan in its true sense based on the Lahore Resolution, and the parliamentary form of government with supremacy of a Legislature directly elected on the basis of universal adult franchise; (ii) The federal government should deal with only two subjects: Defence and Foreign Affairs, and all other residual subjects should be vested in the federating states; (iii) Two separate, but freely convertible currencies for two wings should be introduced; or if this is not feasible, there should be one currency for the whole country, but effective constitutional provisions should be introduced to stop the flight of capital from East to West Pakistan. Furthermore, a separate Banking Reserve should be established, and separate fiscal and monetary policy be adopted for East Pakistan; (iv) The power of taxation and revenue collection should be vested in the federating units and the federal centre would have no such power. The federation would be entitled to a share in the state taxes to meet its expenditures; (v) There should be two separate accounts for the foreign exchange earnings of the two wings; the foreign exchange requirements of the federal government should be met by the two wings equally or in a ratio to be fixed; indigenous products should move free of duty between the two wings, and the constitution should empower the units to establish trade links with foreign countries; (vi) East Pakistan should have a separate military or paramilitary force, and Navy headquarters should be in East Pakistan. (See: Islam, Nurul. (2013). *Making of a Nation Bangladesh: An Economist's Tale*. The University Press Limited (UPL). Dhaka. p.85).

emancipation and empowerment of Bengalis. The Six-Points became so popular within a short time that it eventually turned into the ‘Charter of Freedom’ for the Bengalis, their ‘Magna Carta’<sup>42</sup>. The military Junta of Pakistan termed the Six-Points a device for dividing Pakistan and threatened to use any form of hard action against the Six-Points Movement. Consequently, on May 8, 1966, the Pakistani junta arrested Sheikh Mujib under the Defense Rules, and charged him with secession and high treason: this became known as the infamous ‘the Agartala Conspiracy Case’<sup>43</sup>.

However, the people of East Bengal—almost all quarters of people including students, general people and activists of the political parties protested against the decision of President Ayub Khan and formed a movement to free Sheikh Mujib. The movement soon transformed into a mass movement of peasants, students, artisans, and workers. The mass people demanded the dissolution of the trial of Sheikh Mujib and the immediate release of all imprisoned political leaders including Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. In the face of a massive popular uprising, Ayub Khan unconditionally withdrew the Agartala Conspiracy Case and released Sheikh Mujib and other political leaders from jail. The withdrawal of the case and the release of Sheikh Mujib and his fellow prisoners on February 22, 1969, significantly weakened the Ayub regime and elevated Sheikh Mujib to the peak of his popularity in East Pakistan. Indeed, after the conspiracy case, Sheikh Mujib emerged as an undisputed, homegrown hero for the Bengali nation. The massive support and spontaneous participation of the people proved that Sheikh Mujib was indeed the ‘Friend of Bengal’ and the people of his country loved him and did everything for him and liberating the country. Political leadership of the Bengali Nation had settled truly and conclusively

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<sup>42</sup> Magna Carta is a royal charter of rights agreed to by King John of England to make peace between the unpopular king and a group of rebel barons. The treaty promised the protection of church rights, protection for the barons from illegal imprisonment, access to swift justice, and limitations on feudal payments to the Crown, to be implemented through a council of 25 barons. (See: Holt, James Clarke, George Garnett, and John Hudson. (2015). *Magna Carta*. Cambridge University Press).

<sup>43</sup> The Agartala Conspiracy Case was a sedition case against Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the then leader of the Awami League and East Pakistan, and 34 other persons. The Ayub Regime intentionally filed this case in 1968 to diminish the spirit of the six point’s movement. It was alleged that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman along with others, had conspired with India against the sovereignty of Pakistan. The case is officially called *State vs. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and others*. (See: Ahmed, Moudud. (1978). *Bangladesh: Constitutional Quest for Autonomy: 1950-1971*. Vol. 41. Steiner).