Chapter 3

Leadership
The Iconic Bangabandhu: Leadership for Then, Now and the Future

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On the auspicious occasion of Bangabandhu’s birth centenary, that is, the Mujib Shatabarsha, the whole country pays its deepest respects and solemn prayers for him and all the martyrs of our glorious Liberation War. The country also remembers a judicious, brave yet profoundly humane leader and relevance of his leadership values in the contemporary world. In fact, leaders like Bangabandhu never die; rather, they remain alive in the hearts and minds of millions of people for generations after generations. Their deeds, achievements and righteousness secure permanent place of ultimate reverence among people. The year 2020 marks the 100th birth anniversary of Bangabandhu while the year 2021 marks the 50th anniversary of Bangladesh’s liberation from Pakistan. Thus, people of this country have two momentous events one after another, and are privileged enough as they are celebrating Bangabandhu’s birth centennial, this Mujib Barsho, just a year prior to the golden jubilee of independence.

Great leaders are born with intrinsic qualities to lead which they demonstrate from very early days, indicative of their future magnanimity. They always lead from the front and do not back away in the face of any
difficulty. These traits are manifested in Bangabandhu. He had all necessary characteristics of a top leader. Besides, as leader in his homeland, he became an icon for fighting oppression worldwide. Being at the helm of a war-ravaged, newly independent nation, he never hesitated about expressing solidarity and support for the oppressed beyond borders. This has been attested by admiration from leaders of other countries too. Even, those who often opposed him, could not but laud his leadership skills and other humane virtues. In addition to foresight and courage, his humanity places him at another level which very few can attain. The way he thought, worked for freedom from imperial Britain, directed and inspired people, guided the Liberation War of Bangladesh and finally made liberation possible from the clutches of Pakistan, provides ample evidences of his matchless brilliance in that regard. Certainly, his leadership remains very much relevant in today's world as was in his lifetime.

When Bangabandhu took charge of the independent Bangladesh, it was in grave disarray. Infrastructures destroyed, economic uncertainties, food shortage owing to natural disasters—everything was very much prevalent. But he was dauntless as usual and handled everything with splendid efficiency. For example, the economy was in very bad shape during 1970, 1971, and 1972, but within merely three and a half years, he stabilized it. Until his assassination, the growth of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) recorded 7.5 per cent from a negative 11.3 per cent. Within two months of returning home, he requested India to take back their soldiers and succeeded. Within 10 months, he approved a wonderful constitution whereas Pakistan took nine years and the United States took 13 years to formulate a constitution. Besides, he succeeded in receiving recognition from most countries within three and a half years of independence: out of 136 countries of the United Nations, 126 extended recognition. Bangladesh also became member of several important international organizations, like the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), Commonwealth, and Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). All these had been possible only due to the dynamic and charismatic leadership of Bangabandhu.
His whole life story is relevant for any leader of today's world. Anyone wishing to lead a nation must love its people. Bangabandhu's love for people is unquestionable and nothing new. An example may be brought in this regard. During the Bengal Famine of 1943, he went out seriously risking his own life to help people with relief and food, without judging their faith, castes or social status, ignoring recurrent communal riots, and more importantly, the ongoing World War-II from which British India was not immune either. After Pakistan was established in 1947, he kept up his struggles for ensuring justice and securing rights of people. He also suffered a lot for that. Bangladesh was part of Pakistan for 24 years and Bangabandhu had been in jail for over 13 years for his noble efforts. Hence, on the issues of human rights, his leadership and contributions are very much relevant as he wanted to establish and protect these rights.

Bangabandhu had respect for law and justice. Unlike many other revolutionary leaders, he followed the rule of law and legal processes. He had been perceptive of tolerance, secularism and loved all communities irrespective of their race, ethnicity, and colour. He tried to promulgate a system in Bangladesh where the government should be secular to all religions and sections of the society. These principles are necessary to adopt in the context of today's violence and wars that arise from a mindset of hatred and intolerance. Bangabandhu did not even hate his enemies. He made a very important statement to Pakistani Army in March 1971, “You will be an army, we have nothing to do against you, you go to barrack, you will remain as our brothers and we will remain as your brothers but stay away from outside of the barrack.” All movements he led, were spontaneously joined by people. After the Pakistani junta denied his rightful claim to form a government despite victory in the 1970 elections, he began a noncooperation movement, one of the biggest in history; 99 per cent of people from East Pakistan joined it, compared to barely 2 per cent of the Indians joining Gandhi's Noncooperation Movement. Bangabandhu had earnestly been supportive and sympathetic towards the poor and oppressed. While speaking at the NAM, he unequivocally said, “Today the world is divided between the oppressed and oppressor. I am
with the oppressed.” This was not just an utterance but he proved it throughout his life, even in his childhood. His generosity also knew no boundary. Despite horrible crimes perpetrated by Pakistani collaborators (Rajakars) during the war, he declared general amnesty for these culprits that did not commit murder, rape and arson in 1973. He said in this regard, “I believe that the brokers, who assisted the Pakistanis during the liberation war, realized their faults. I hope they will involve themselves in development of the country forgetting all their misdeeds. Those who were arrested and jailed without specific case against them under the Collaborator Act should be freed before 16th December 1974.” As a master in the art of compromise, a simple instance can be mentioned here; at the OIC meeting, Bangabandhu made a gainful compromise. He attended the meeting after securing recognition from Pakistan, not before that. This was only possible because of a leader like Bangabandhu. However, he never compromised his integrity. In the contemporary world, in many areas, compromise is necessary. That can be learnt if his footsteps are followed correctly.

Bangabandhu’s eminence did not remain limited within Bangladesh. Global leaders were aware and extended their respects towards him equally. In 1973, at the NAM summit in Algiers, Fidel Castro met and embraced Bangabandhu saying, “I have not seen the Himalayas. But I have seen Sheikh Mujib. In personality and courage, this man is the Himalayas.” Well-known British journalist Cyril Dunn said, “In a sense, Sheikh Mujib is a greater leader than George Washington, Mahatma Gandhi and Eamon De Valera. Because, he was always found strong-willed and determined to create his people’s own country; his beloved Bangladesh. He suffered imprisonment for more than two decades at the hands of the Pakistani regime due to the noble cause he pursued for his people.” Former governor of Manipur and Jharkhand, Ved Marwah, said, “I have met Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi, and many world leaders, but Bangabandhu was the most charismatic personality I ever met.”
The Father of the Nation had always been fearlessly protective of his country's people. He was not a revolutionary guerrilla leader unlike Che, Lenin, Ho Chi Minh or Mao; he did not believe strength would come from the barrel of guns. Rather, the trust people placed on him and his infinite, absolute love for them. Intimidation, torture, or offers of high and influential posts could not intimidate him. Despite being such a personality, he was always attached closely to his roots. He said, "I am Bengali, Bangladesh is my home and Bengali is my language." He spoke in his mother tongue at the UN General Assembly in September 1974 which bears out the love he had for his country and people. His acceptance as a universal comrade shows how a leader can assist and inspire others, aside from his own countrymen. Unfortunately, it is now a growing trend for many leaders, people, and groups in parts of the globe, to use divisive narratives and hate-mongering for their own vile interests. They should abandon those and instead, learn from Bangabandhu’s leadership, how he became an idol using struggle for freedom of his own country and beyond. He was a true leader of the masses with superior visions and precise predictions of future. His captivating personality and charismatic leadership, under three flags, bear testimony of this—the British Indian Empire, United Pakistan, and independent Bangladesh. In fact, his name is synonymous with and inseparable from Bangladesh, its history, and existence.

All great leaders have their respective back stories. To know more about Bangabandhu, his *The Unfinished Memoirs* is a must read. This is a vivid, invaluable treatise by the legend himself: his life story, starting from childhood days, development of political consciousness and becoming a career politician, his worldviews, use struggle for freedom against the Imperial Britain, internal colonialism of the Pakistani Military Rule, and gradual journey to becoming the founder of independent Bangladesh. It speaks about events up to the mid-1950s and for readers, contains ways through which one can adopt principles Bangabandhu steadfastly followed. It is not only his life story of a specific timeframe but also abundant invaluable teachings for people of Bangladesh and others; for
example, Bangabandhu’s honesty. Bangabandhu had been conveying this message to people, that is, they should never be corrupt or tolerate corruption. He himself never tolerated even the slightest of corruption and wanted, therefore, his people to abide by this as well.

The greatest achievement of Bangabandhu is the independent Bangladesh. He had an innate ability to instill his dream among people. Besides establishing a sovereign country, he inculcated the dream of Sonar Bangla, a prosperous Bangladesh, among all his followers. His cardinal principle was to stand for fairness, justice and rights of people for all time. Even as a school-going, young boy, he would always do this and speak with unyielding conviction all through his life. At the University of Dhaka, when the fourth grade employees demanded for increase in their privileges and wages, none sided with them. But Bangabandhu, owing to his habitual inclination, stood firmly by them. This resulted in expulsion and no further study for him. For 25 years, he could not even go to the university. After 25 years, however, when he became the Father of the Nation, they invited him to confer the graduation degree. These instances impart a very crucial lesson: one must have sincere confidence in oneself; with this, he/she can achieve desired goals, no matter how tough the odds are. Therefore, when there is any discussion about Bangabandhu, people should try to follow his virtues and cultivate those among themselves.

Bangabandhu always encouraged constructive criticism, followed rules and legal process. Throughout his life, he kept up these practices. Hence, when Bangladeshis will be observing his birth centenary, they must do things through the process of law. A notable attribute of Bangabandhu is his profound fellow feeling. For example, he was once returning from Delhi, and there was another gentleman, the relatively rich Fazlul Kader Chowdhury; but Chowdhury could not procure a railway ticket. Though in the opposition group, Bangabandhu gave him his own rail ticket, as the opponent leader might have more important things to do. In politics, they were in opposing blocs, but in behaviour, they were close. Nowadays, politicians from different groups do not even talk to each other, whereas,
Bangabandhu helped his opponent politician. This character is missing in today’s politics, yet can be good lesson.

His vision was one of his numerous strong points. Two main essences of this strength were his knowledge and endless love for people. Sir David Frost once asked him about his greatest strength. He said he loved his people. Sir Frost then asked about his worst weakness. He replied “I love them too much”. That love provided him with the strength, courage, confidence, and practical knowledge of situations. This knowledge, in turn, is the base of his philosophy about Bangladesh’s foreign policy. After inception, Bangladesh was a weak country with a devastated economy. He knew lots of help would be needed from others. In those days, there were two big blocs, one led by the United States and the Western powers, the other by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). The USSR helped Bangladesh a lot; without their help and veto, the country might not be able to achieve independence. Bangabandhu was in such a delicate situation where natural tendency would have been to support the Soviet bloc and go along with India. But being a highly practical man, he had comprehensive understanding of the situation and, therefore, maintained non-alignment. He did not join any bloc, rather said the cardinal principle of Bangladesh’s foreign policy would be “friendship to all, malice towards none”, and followed the non-alignment principle. This resulted from his liberal mindset, practical knowledge and in-depth acquaintance with the global scenario as a visionary. Till today, the country has been following his principles.

History remembers only heroes, while villains are forgotten and thrown into the ash-heaps; even if remembered, that is nothing but with utter despise. Killers on 15 August 1975 might have snatched Bangabandhu away from us, but his ideas, thoughts, activities, and achievements did and still do motivate not only the Bengali people in liberating their country but also other people in the world. In today’s chaotic times, a lot can be learnt from his leadership skills and virtues for dealing with present and future predicaments. He may not be physically with us, but his monumental legacies are, and they will, live on for generations.
Bangabandhu and Bangladesh: Unrivalled Leader of the Oppressed

Smruti S Pattanaik

1. Introduction

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is one of those leaders who made history by leading his own people from oppression to freedom, inspiring and uniting the Bengali mass behind the bar in Pakistan where he was incarcerated by the Pakistan military regime. It was no mean achievement especially in the Cold War period when he gave leadership to the country by flagging the economic exploitation, political discrimination and undermining of the cultural identity of the Bengalis who constituted a majority in the erstwhile United Pakistan. His journey was also not easy. On the one hand, he preferred for constitutional path to achieve the political and economic end. On the other hand, he did not want to be accused of breaking up Pakistan for which he has worked so hard during his student life. Yet, the military regime accused him of being indulged in secessionism and conspiracy, notably in the Agartala Conspiracy Case from which was eventually withdrawn. Bangabandhu did not lose sight of his objectives amidst all these accusations. He made it clear that he did not want to be the Prime Minister; nevertheless, he would not allow the rights of the people of East Pakistan to be trampled and succumbed to the
pressure brought by the military regime and other vested interests working against him. He endlessly negotiated with the Pakistani military regime to allow his elected party to form government. It was the obstinacy of the military ruler egged by ZA Bhutto who represented the military and bureaucratic elites' interest that led to the final parting of ways through a bloody war of liberation in which three million people perished.

Bangabandhu’s commitment to his people is attested by the fact that he spent eleven and half years in Pakistan prison. His name held the people together in the most adverse circumstances in their fight against Pakistan. He was the leader who channelized people’s aspiration for democracy and freedom, and championed the cause of Bengalis earning him the title of “Bangabandhu” (friend of Bengal). As he explained in his memoir, “As a man, what concerns mankind concerns me. As a Bengalee, I am deeply involved in all that concerns Bengalees. This abiding involvement is born of and nourished by love, enduring love, which gives meaning to my politics and to my very being.” This summarizes that Bangabandhu dedicated his life to the deprived and distressed people of the region and also beyond. Any leadership to succeed has to feel the pulse of the people and he was such a person who dedicated his life for the betterment of his people. His effort may not have succeeded as the flow of events post-1971 suggests, but no one can doubt his sincerity and dedication. It was no mean task to navigate the post-war economy and politics of Bangladesh that required his attention. The competitive divisive politics, the effort to get recognition, repatriation of Bangladeshi nationals in West Pakistan and constructing post-war economy amidst the drought of 1972-73 and worst flood and famine in 1974 were some of the challenges that confronted Bangabandhu.

2. Bangabandhu’s Early Life: Commitment to Uplift the Distressed

Bangabandhu’s leadership quality and empathy for the people was evident from the early period of his life as a student leader he placed his demand before the two stalwarts of Bengali politics, A K Fazlul Huq and Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy drawing their attention to the underdeveloped status of his village Tungipara. Later, when he was a student of Islamia College in Calcutta, his attention was drawn to the plight of the Muslims. He was
an admirer of Muhammad Ali Jinnah and worked closely with Suhrawardy. His leadership quality was recognized by Saheed Suhrawardy, a prominent leader of Muslim League, who took him under his wing. However, the sheer violence, riot and mayhem of the ‘Direct Action Day’ also known as the ‘Great Calcutta Killings’, affected him deeply. He worked for both Hindus and Muslims during this riot. He could not come to terms with neighbours and friends brutally killing each other in the name of religion. He was distressed by the violence that engulfed on the eve of partition. Therefore, not surprisingly, he took a pledge when he met Mahatma Gandhi, that he would ensure there is no communal riots in East Pakistan.

This had a deep impact on his non-communal politics in Pakistan. He spoke against separate electorate and in favour of Hindus being treated as equal citizens of Pakistan. He was aware of how the Bengalis were looked at by the West Pakistan elites—of being lesser Muslims as their mother tongue was denigrated and labelled as un-Islamic. In the name of being religious brothers, the Bengalis were asked to give up their demands that speak of their distinct socio-cultural identity as Muslims. He realized that religion is used as an instrument of oppression by the elites of West Pakistan to deny recognition of their language. He had realized the value of sacrifice in politics at early stage. After the birth of Pakistan, when he returned to East Pakistan, he said, “To do anything great, one has to be ready to sacrifice and show one’s devotion. I believe that those who are not ready to sacrifice and not capable of doing anything worthy. I was able to come to the conclusion that to engage in politics in our country one must be ready to make huge sacrifices to make our people happy.”

Bangabandhu relentlessly fought and gathered support for Pakistan as he was not only convinced of the idea of Pakistan but also felt that establishment of Pakistan would lead to the emancipation of Muslims in East Bengal, largely peasants from the oppressive landlordism where the landless labourers were working as bonded labourer in farms owned by mostly Hindu Zamindars. He was deeply concerned about the condition of the peasants. Therefore, partition of Bengal meant emancipation of Bengalis and Muslims.

His empathy for the poor was demonstrated at the early stage of his life when he distributed family supplies to the tenants working in their land and he defended his action and argued that they were hungry while
his family has “all these things”. His role as a leader of oppressed was demonstrated in three other important aspects of politics where he empathized and sided with those who were exploited as evident in his autobiography.

First, as a young leader he could understand the position of the Muslims as a minority in an undivided India. His belief in emancipation motivated him to be part of the Muslim youth group. He played an important role in canvassing for the party. He also played a role to bring the leaders together to fight for the cause of Pakistan. He tried to bring together leaders like A K Fazlul Huq back to the fold of the Muslim League and played a role in the reconciliation of Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy, Abul Hashim and Maulana Mohammad Akram Khan as he felt that divisions and differences between these leaders would not help the Muslim League in Bengal. However, his conviction that Muslims would be emancipated after the birth of Pakistan was shattered as well as his optimism of Hindus and Muslims staying together as equal citizens. Pakistan politics shaped differently as the two-nation theory became the foundation of Pakistan’s quest for constitutional democracy. This translated into one region, one language and contrary to Jinnah’s vision had no place for the minorities. However, the manner in which events unfolded in the early days of Pakistan, he slowly realized that the Bengalis do not matter in the politics of Pakistan. Besides, he saw how Suhrawardy was sidelined in West Pakistan elite dominated politics which affected Bangabandhu deeply.

He became aware of the situation after he formed the East Pakistan Muslim Students League. When the Muslim League National Guard was dissolved by the then Prime Minister Khwaja Nazimuddin, many of the workers who tirelessly worked for the Muslim League to expand the base of the party lost their jobs. Bangabandhu was very unhappy about this situation. He felt that these workers who could have contributed to the strengthening of the nation were left in lurch due to short-sighted policies of the politicians. Speaking about the politicians who occupied power and the bureaucracy whom he held responsible for the miseries of fellow Bengalis, Bangabandhu wrote, “these people did not have the mindset required to build self-reliant people for an independent country and to earn confidence of the masses. On the contrary, to consolidate their power they began to manoeuvre to control the Muslim League.”
Secondly, Bangabandhu became one of the enthusiastic proponents of Awami Muslim League when it was formed in 1949, an organization that was established to put forward the political aspirations of the Bengalis. It clearly showed his disenchantment with the politics of Muslim League which could not improve the situation of peasants. As the acting Secretary, he said that the party is “determined to bring an end to their present conditions”. The Awami Muslim League in 1955 formalized the deletion of the word “Muslim” from the party nomenclature which was first raised in July 1953 session of the party meeting. He opposed the imposition of Urdu without which the identity of his own people was at stake. To quote him, “…the demand of the majority must be met. We will continue our movement till Bengali is made the state language. Certainly, we are ready to work for this cause”. He was put behind the bar for demonstrating against the government and demanding that Bengali needs to be recognized as one of the official languages. It needs to be reiterated that Bangabandhu was very clear about the recognition that Bengali language deserves. He could see that without the recognition of Bengali, the language of the majority, it is not possible to lead a life of dignity. Moreover, education in the mother tongue would open up opportunity for employment in government jobs. However, the Pakistan government tried to label the protestors as agents of India, communist and traitors—labels that would delegitimize his demand, to drive masses against Bangabandhu and his supporters. He realized that the Pakistani regime was hoodwinking “the religious-minded people of East Pakistan with the argument that the Urdu should be the state language since it is Islamic language which was simply not possible. Every race loves its mother tongue. No nation has tolerated any attempt to insult its mother tongue.”

Third, his commitment towards the downtrodden was evident when he protested against the government order that instructed the dawals (who helped in harvest and got share in crop) that they cannot take back the harvest. According to this order, the dawals have to part with their share as the government-imposed ban on transporting of food grains. He empathized with the poor and also protested against the Jinnah fund that was set up by Nazimuddin where people including rural poor were forced to contribute. In another instance, Bangabandhu supported the demands of the Dhaka University workers who were evicted from their residences to
make a way for government employees and took them to meet the Vice Chancellor. Later, the students joined the strike. To prevent the strike to spread, the administration closed the university sine die. As a result, Bangabandhu along with students raised fund to help the striking employees financially.

Bangabandhu’s political life was influenced by his association with Pakistan movement and later his political experience as a leader of East Pakistan. His struggle to establish democracy under a ruthless military regime can be equated to his identification with the vast majority of the people who were economically deprived, politically oppressed and robbed of their democratic rights. The manner in which United Front government was dismissed in 1954 reflected the disdain and arbitrariness of West Pakistan elites. He not only united the people of East Pakistan along with other political stalwarts of Bengal but also mobilized them in his ultimate journey towards democracy and further to the War of Liberation. His faith on people to support his programmes remained unwavered. The Six-Point Programme that was put forward by Bangabandhu largely focused on the emancipation of the people of East Pakistan. He did not lose sight of the fact that West Pakistan’s economy rose faster than the East and it’s share in manufacturing was less and as a result of these and other factors economic disparity continued. He had no doubt that East Pakistan has emerged as a colony of the West Pakistan. The export earnings from the jute were spent in the development of infrastructure in West Pakistan. The large defence spending was sustained by the economic contribution of East Pakistan. Yet, Pakistan largely functioned under the philosophy that defence of East Pakistan lies in the West. Bangabandhu realized the peril of this defence policy in 1965 when East Pakistan was left at the mercy of India during the India-Pakistan War. It is therefore not surprising that his Six-point demand included having a separate militia for East Pakistan. In a nutshell, the Six-point geared towards spending the resources of East in that province. He was convinced this cannot happen with the province having a control over the currency and to stop flight of capital to the Western province.

There are several such instances in his political career after the East Pakistan Awami Muslim League was established. However, the party soon shed the name “Muslim” from the party name to emerge as a broad-based
party committed to the people of East Pakistan which included substantial religious minorities. He stood for secularism and non-communal politics and wished to base his politics on a sound manifesto—a lesson that he learnt during his political career. He was conscious of the trust that ordinary people bestowed on him. East Pakistan’s economic situation was terrible and something was needed to be done immediately to address the plight of poor and dispossessed especially in an agricultural economy like that of the province. There was “little state investment in agriculture, yields were low and poverty widespread.”13 Bangabandhu recognized this and took steps so that he can liberate his people from what many referred to as ‘colonial bondage’ and give them the right to govern themselves. He decided to fight election of 1970—the first ever election based on adult franchise and campaigned on the basis of Six-point and Eleven-point Programmes. The right to collect tax apart from provincial autonomy was important. The manifesto had details about the party’s approach to poverty. There was a realization that the fate of the people of East Pakistan could not be changed without resources. Awami League under the leadership of Bangabandhu had made it clear to the Yahya Khan regime that the Six-point is the framework within which the negotiation will take place. It was only after he realized the reluctance of the West Pakistan elites, the Six-Point became the foundation on which he based his politics. The Six-Point Programme also reflected his commitment to the betterment of the people of his country as he described the Six-Point as “our right to live.” He was also aware that these demands which contain the longstanding demand of his people expressed over the years would be mischievously interpreted by the vested interests by “raising well known cries of ‘Islam in danger’, ‘disruption of Pakistan’ and ‘sovereign Bengal’, etc.”14 The Six-Point Programme of the party also known as charter of freedom, was presented in Awami League council on 18 March 1966.

It is not surprising that he linked the prosperity of the oppressed people to the establishment of democracy in Pakistan. His politics focused on “making life better for his fellow Bengalis” as he very often in his speeches referred to East Pakistan as ‘Sonar Bangla’.15 What inspired Bangabandhu to fight for his own people is the realization that how East Pakistan was treated by West Pakistan. The 1970 cyclone and the large-scale devastation it caused did not draw the attention of the military rulers. Rather, it was the
international aid agencies that worked in the cyclone-devastated area. Moreover, Yahya Khan did not even bother to tour the cyclone affected area and assure people of support. Relief was mostly provided by the Western aid agencies. Bangabandhu noticed this apathy. In the press conference held in Dhaka after he toured the cyclone affected coastal area on 26 November 1970, he said, “Whilst individuals and charitable organisations the world over are raising funds for relief, the ‘22 families’ who have prospered on the blood of our people have yet to make any significant contribution towards relief. Indeed, the textile mills of West Pakistan, which have exploited Bangladesh as their principal market, have not even donated a yard of cloth for shrouds of the dead.”

Perhaps this is the time when Six-Point Programme of Bangabandhu appeared more relevant and the Bengalis concluded complete autonomy and self-rule are the few options. Reposing his faith in the unbounded love his people had from him, he further said, “The life of any individual like myself is nothing compared to the salvation of the people of my country. I know of no nobler battle than to fight for rights of the exploited millions.... To devote the rest of my life in fighting for restoration of their rights which have been forcefully snatched away.”

The manifesto of Awami League for the 1970 election contained some of the ideals democracy, rights of minorities, fundamental rights, etc. During his election tour in East Pakistan, Bangabandhu highlighted the plight of the people and said that economic exploitation of East Pakistan had forced the Bengalis to buy food grain from outside and it shared a major burden in the repayment of interest on loans when one-fourth of the money from the central government budget was spent in East Pakistan. There was lack of industrialization and unemployment led to frustration and despondency as Bengalis were treated as slaves. In all speeches during his campaign tour, he made a distinction between the elites of Pakistan and the common poor people making it clear that he was with the poor people of the country. He emphasized that he could offer his humble life for exchange of their immense love and affection that saved him from being hanged by the military junta in the trumped-up charges against him in the Agartala Conspiracy Case. Throughout his political career, he fought for equal citizenship and protection of the minorities. This was reflected in one election speeches where he said, “The members of the minority
community should know that we have always stood against every form of communalism. They shall enjoy equal rights with all other citizens and shall enjoy equal protection of the laws. Every effort must be made to develop our tribal areas so that these areas can be fully integrated with other areas and the tribal people are able to enjoy equal opportunities with other citizens in all walks of life.”

Bangabandhu’s leadership proved vital and perhaps nobody could have led the Liberation Movement as he did inspiring people through his ideals, political struggle and his approach of putting people first over everything.

On 28 October 1970, Bangabandhu reiterated, “The only feasible solution is reordering of the constitutional structure by giving full regional autonomy to the federating units on the basis of our Six-Point formula. Such autonomy in order to be effective must include the power of managing the economy. This is why we insist upon federating units having control over monetary and fiscal policy and foreign exchange earnings and other powers to negotiate foreign trade and aid.”

He was conscious of the fact that all the export earnings that Pakistan obtained from East Pakistan were spent in the West. East Pakistan remained poor and its people suffered. By 1969-70, the per capita income of the West Pakistan was 61 per cent higher than the East. Giving a speech in Paltan Maidan, Bangabandhu said, “No amount of naked threats can distract the deprived Bangalees from their demand for provincial autonomy based on their six-point plan.”

To quote G.W. Choudhury,

“In a democracy, the majority should not have any fear of domination, nor should they have to ask for safeguards, such as regional autonomy, reservation of places in the civil service and the army and guarantees that the economic development of their region would not be neglected nor their culture threatened. But for two decades, the majority Bengali group did feel obliged to seek these guarantees; and when they were not granted, Bengali sub-nationalism began to gather momentum until ultimately it became a national movement for the creation of a separate state.”

In his famous speech of 07 March which is one of the most powerful speeches in the history that prepared people for mass movement, if necessary, Bangabandhu said, “The bloody history of Bangalees tortured in Bangla itself. The history of the last twenty-three years is the history of
the wailing of dying men and women. The history of Bengla is the history of the staining of streets with the blood of the People of this country.”

While insisting that there cannot be any compromise on the Six-Point Programme, he said, “We are not beggars. We know how to establish the rights of the people.” He announced non-cooperation after Army was called in between it will be 02 March and 09 March to aid the civil administration. As the meeting of the National Assembly was postponed from 03 March to 25 March, he put forward Four-Point Programme as a precondition before the Awami League committed itself to attend the National Assembly scheduled to meet on 25 March. Bangabandhu accused the military regime for using arms against the unarmed people which were bought using these people’s money during their duty under ‘aid to civil’. Throughout March 1971, until the day he was imprisoned and transferred to West Pakistan, he continued to inspire people to fight for their rights and dignity and gave directives on how to continue with non-cooperation without resorting to violence so as to not give a justification to the military regime to suppress their movement by using violence.

He stayed committed to the Six-Point even though many of his compatriots thought that it may be difficult for him to achieve his goal. He knew that he has to fight. Thus, he exhorted the Chatra League, the student wing of the party, that there is no need to become a Shaheed rather they should be prepared to be Ghazi. He realized that to emancipate his people he would require autonomy of East Pakistan. Yet, he did not abandon the path of constitutionalism and his commitment to the electoral manifesto of the Awami League. His negotiation with Yahya Khan and Bhutto revolved around the issues of democracy, autonomy-political and economic. Bangabandhu had made it clear that he was ready for discussion with West Pakistan elites about his programme before the National Assembly was convened to clear any apprehension and misunderstanding they might have about his demands. After the meeting of the National Assembly was postponed, he said this postponement was ‘manifestation of a conspiracy against the Awami League and people of Bengal’ and ‘history made if the conspirators fail to come to their senses.’

The obstinacy of the duo, especially Bhutto who refused to accept the Yahya-Mujib understanding and their inconsiderate attitude to East Pakistan’s genuine demand paved the way for East Pakistan’s succession.
The white paper on situation in East Pakistan drafted in March 1971 were only white lies to accuse Bangabandhu of sedition and treating his demands 'ab initio as one of secession' while it was Yahya Khan and Bhutto who paved the way for eventual separation of East Pakistan. Yet, Yahya trained his gun on Bangabandhu who throughout March advised his supporters to be non-violent and also instructed on 25 March that no harm should be brought on non-locals as “their life, property and honour are our sacred trust”. Accusing Bangabandhu of obduracy, Yahya in his 25 March address said, “The man and his party are enemies of Pakistan... He has attacked the solidarity and integrity of this country—this crime will not go unpunished.” Not surprisingly, Bangabandhu took a decisive view and declared the independence of Bangladesh in definitive terms, “We shall not die like cats and dogs, but shall die as worthy children of Bangla Ma.”

While saying conclusively, “this time the struggle is struggle for freedom. The struggle this time is the struggle for independence” in his famous 07 March speech, he made it clear that the people of East Pakistan would not lead a life of bondage where economic exploitation has become the way of life. His call to people to observe hartal and non-cooperation was acceded. In fact, the ‘disassociation of Bengali public from the formally constituted government was evident on 08 March when the Chief Justice of East Pakistan High court refused to administer oath to the newly appointed Governor General Tikka Khan. This demonstrated the authority and legitimacy of Bangabandhu in the eyes of Bengalis.

3. Bangladesh’s Liberation War and Beyond

Ideals of Bangabandhu inspired the freedom fighters who fought for the liberation of Bangladesh. Independence of Bangladesh was declared in his name. Apprehending that he might be eliminated by the Pakistani military junta, he called his countrymen to say whether he is there or not, Bangladesh’s fight for their rights should not stop even if it meant shedding blood. On his eventual release from the jail, his first concern was his people. For example, on his way to Dhaka from London, Bangabandhu in Delhi said, “When I was taken away from my people, they wept. When I was held in captivity, they fought. And now that I go back to them, they
are victorious. I go back to join my people in the tremendous task that now lie ahead in turning victory into a road of peace, progress and prosperity. I go back not with any hatred in my heart for anyone, but with the satisfaction that truth has at last triumphed over falsehood, sanity over insanity, courage over cowardice, justice over injustice, good over evil... in the none months my people have traversed centuries.

After he reached independent Bangladesh, his major concern was to rebuild the war-ravaged economy. As the Prime Minister of the newly liberated country, he took action against black marketers, hoarders, though unsuccessfully, to see that the artificial rise of price is checked after he received the information about this. He had genuine love for people and understood the pulse of the people even though Bangladesh faced resource constraint to rebuild the post-war economy. His concern was to see the refugees who were staying in India to return and settle. He also tried to unite those groups and factions who fought for the liberation. Besides, disarming the armed groups that fought for liberation became one of the priorities. He sent his emissaries to see that Bangladesh is recognized by majority countries of the world. He was committed to stay away from bloc politics and follow non-alignment as guiding principle of foreign policy. The new constitution of Bangladesh embodied Bangabandhu's commitment. It was expected that the representatives of the people would implement programme to end exploitation and usher in fundamental economic and social change as a secular and socialist constitution ordained. His politics was guided by what was termed as Mujibism. In fact, Zillur R Khan who interviewed Banglabandhu on this aspect quoted him saying,

It is for the philosophers to expound on ideologies, if you think Mujibism is one. I can tell you what I think whether you call it Mujibism or by any other name. First, I believe in democracy; supremacy of the will of the people; government based on the consent of the governed; free thinking, free expressions and other popular freedoms which help blossom human hearts and minds. This is what I mean by democracy and I also know that you can interpret democracy in innumerable ways. Along with my conviction in democracy is my belief that the democratic
experience is only possible in a society free of exploitation and that is why I want socialism with democracy. I also believe that all religions in Bangladesh must exist on equal footing and that is what I mean by secularism—freedom of religion. Last but not least, I want the people to draw inspiration from the Bengali culture, language, folklore, mores and the general Bengali environment. Such inspiration will act as the motivating force for the Bengalis to work for the betterment of their golden Bengal and this is, again, what I mean by nationalism.34

He was a firm believer in socialist economy and this reflected in the 1972 Constitution. For example, Article 10 clearly laid out the objective of establishing “socialist economic system with a view to ensuring the attainment of just and egalitarian society free from the exploitation....”35 Peace was prerequisite to build a just and equitable society to which Bangabandhu was committed. He asked his cadres and others in Mukti Bahini to surrender arms, he established committee to look into the evacuee/abandoned property that were occupied and passed Restoration of Evacuee Property Order 1972. His commitment to secularism also flows from his ideology of equal and non-discriminatory society. As he clarified to the Libyan President during the 1973 NAM summit, “Our secularism is not against religion. Our secularism stands for harmony among members of all religion.”36 Some of the ideals which are the founding principles of Constitution was directed towards establish a classless and non-communal society. The fact that Bangladesh framed its Constitution in 1972 also reflected his leadership.

His government also took measures and initiated land reform. In 1972, he fixed a ceiling of 100 bighas on landholdings and exempted landholding of less than twenty-five bighas from taxation.37 The landholding of 100 bighas was further reduced to 33 bighas. Not only the refugees returning from India needed rehabilitation but also those who were wounded in the war, those who became destitute and 200,000 women who were raped during the war. This was a gigantic task that required immediate attention of the government. The public expenditure for the government to implement rehabilitation programme, building houses, distributing food grains was between January 1972 and June 1973 amounted to US$400
The social rehabilitation of rape victims was equally important for him. Bangabandhu termed these women as ‘Birangana’ or war heroine. He was also one of the most approachable popular leaders and allowed common people to meet him and listened to their problems. Naming the country as People’s Republic attested Bangabandhu’s commitment that the liberation of Bangladesh was made possible through the struggle of the people.

4. International Persona

Bangabandhu’s commitment towards the oppressed was not limited to Bangladesh. While addressing the 4th NAM Summit in Algiers on 06 September 1973 he said, “The world is now divided into two, the oppressors and the oppressed, I’m with the oppressed.” His devotion to the oppressed was reflected in his entire political career. According to Kamal Hossain, “A commitment was given to support oppressed people throughout the world who were waging just struggle against imperialism, colonialism and racialism.”

True to his love for the Bengali language, he delivered a speech on 25 September 1974 in the United Nations (UN) in his mother tongue and said, “Only those countries who have earned freedom after long years of struggles and sacrifices have strong will and strength of mind, remember Presidents, my Bangalees can endure sufferings but will not die. In the challenge to survive, the will of my people is my greatest strength.” The struggle of Bangladesh epitomizes the universal struggle for justice and peace. So, it is quite natural that Bangladesh would stand by the oppressed of the world from the beginning. His political career and politics reflected this dedication. This commitment to the poor people was also reflected in his speech at the UN in 1974 where he said, the contour of his foreign policy emerged from “The main idea of this policy is peaceful coexistence and friendship with all. Our complete allegiance to peace has emanated from the realization that only in a peaceful environment, we will be able to enjoy the fruits of our hard-earned national independence and employ all our resources and energy to fight hunger, poverty, disease, illiteracy and unemployment.”
5. Conclusion

Bangabandhu had unflinching faith on the people of Bangladesh and their ability to overcome the challenges that confronts the country. Once declared as international basket case, Bangladesh has come a long way since then. The 1972 Constitution that was amended by the military regimes who took over power after Bangabandhu’s assassination, has been restored.

It is not surprising that Bangladesh is performing extremely well in various sectors. It is one of leading manufacturer of garments and the country’s economic growth rate till the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic was more than 8 per cent. It tops the countries of the region in ensuring gender equality. The Constitution guarantees the rights of women as specified in articles 27, 28, 29 and 65(3). Bangladesh has significantly bridged the gender gap and ranked 50th among 153 countries according to the latest report of Global Gender Gap Report 2020. Bangladesh has closed 72.6 per cent of its overall gender gap. The country is making progress on the entire front and the economy that has been affected by pandemic is showing signs of recovery. ‘Rural Social Services Programme’ that was started by Bangabandhu is being expanded to cover all the districts of Bangladesh. About one-fourth of the families in the country have been brought under the social security programme. Many of the Bangabandhu’s vision of Bangladesh are being implemented.
Bangabandhu and Bangladesh: Unrivalled Leader of the Oppressed 101

Notes

3 Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, op. cit., p. 137.
7 Ibid., p. 21.
9 Ibid., p. 103.
10 Ibid., p. 104.
14 Sheelendra Kumar Singh et al., Bangladesh Documents, Dhaka: UPL, 1999, p. 23.
16 Sheelendra Kumar Singh et al., op. cit., p. 122.
17 Ibid., p. 33.
18 Ibid., p. 110.
19 Shyamali Ghosh, op. cit., p. 188.
21 Ibid., p. 242.
Quoted in Shamoli Ghosh, op. cit., p. 181.


Ibid., p. 92.

Sheelendra Kumar Singh et al., op. cit., p. 277.

Ibid., p. 280.

Kamal Hossain, op. cit., p. 72.

Quoted in Richard Sisson and Leo E. Rose, op. cit., p. 102.


Ibid., pp. 109-110.

Ibid., p. 111.

Kamal Hossain, op. cit., p. 145.

Quoted in Kamal Hossain, op. cit., p. 142.


Kamal Hossain, op. cit., p. 146.

“Speeches: 100 Years of Mujib”, op. cit.


1. Introduction

Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable...Every step toward the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering, and struggle; the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals.

— Martin Luther King, Jr

Human development process is an outcome of the tireless and uncountable efforts of many noble men since time immemorial. Human history, accordingly, acknowledges and respects many of such leaders in different fields of human development. Many leaders in Bangladesh are solemnly acknowledged in history and respected by the Bengali nation from the core of heart for their unparallel contribution in the emergence of Bangladesh and subsequent development in the multifaceted sectors of the country. However, among all leaders and contributors, the Father of the Nation² Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is unique and incomparable who is extraordinarily an outstanding political philosopher, a great political leader, an organizer of hundreds of social and political protest movements, a combatant against the oppression and suppression of people. He himself is the history of Bangladesh. Bangabandhu realized an
impossible dream of making Bangladesh as an independent sovereign state. Professor Muntasir Mamon, an eminent historian, argues that the presence of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib was the biggest event in the history of Bangladesh. There is hardly few pragmatic and dynamic political personalities over Sheikh Mujib who contributed immensely to the independence movement of Bangladesh and the shaping of its national identity. Bangabandhu is a golden gift for the Bengali nation who came from a middle-class Muslim family and emerged as a charismatic leader in Bangladesh and beyond. Bengali poet and essayist Anandashankar Ray had thus written, “as long as the Padma, Meghna, Gouri, Jamuna flows on, your accomplishment will also live on, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.” Definitely, the contribution of Bangabandhu will be remembered by the Bengali nation forever. Besides his outstanding role for the creation of Bangladesh, Bangabandhu greatly influenced the global politics by his thoughtful and sagacious inputs for the deprived and oppressed people. He was the leader of a newly independent and poor country, but his dedication and commitment to liberate the oppressed people have been praised by numbers of powerful leaders and remembered by persecuted people across the world. Nevertheless, his position and role in the international political context is hardly well-explained and presented. His speech and address in different occasions in his lifetime bear the testimony of how he perceived the international politics and thought for the people across the world. Against this backdrop, this paper intends to analyze the role and position of Bangabandhu in the global context, which is worth-mentioning for the future generation to know what he thought and did for the people globally. In the global level, Bangabandhu’s role can be analyzed in the context of right to self-determination, right to democracy and political freedom, fight against despotism, peace and people’s emancipation. The paper is divided into five sections. The first section is the introduction. The second section presents the background of the study encompassing life, schooling and development of political ideology of Bangabandhu. The third section analyzes the theoretical underpinning relating to the stimulant influencing Bangabandhu to work locally but think globally. The fourth section represents the major contribution of Bangabandhu to the global context. The fifth section concludes the paper.
2. Bangabandhu: Life, School, Political Ideology and Development

Bangabandhu was born in a middle class Muslim family on 17 March 1920 at Tungipara in the then district of Faridpur and current Gopalganj. His parents Sheikh Lutfur Rahman and Begum Sayera Khatun were respected by all quarters of people. In his early life, he was an agile young boy and no one had even imagined that his name will be portrayed in the history of Bangladesh. However, local people in his area began to realize that child Mujib had inner power and sense of involvement in different social activities. A scholar has narrated the innate characteristic of his boyhood as “his childhood activities were a silent prompting inside him to reach out to others, to fraternize with the people around him and to live intimately with them, as one of them in weal and woe, in joy and sorrow”. Bangabandhu began his schooling at Gimadanga Primary School and at the age of nine he was admitted to class three at Gopalganj Public School. Then he had been admitted to a local missionary school. However, in 1934 Bangabandhu was forced to go for a break of study due to ocular surgery on his eye. In 1937, he returned to school. He passed his matriculation examination in 1942. His school life was memorable and with full of events. Schoolboy Mujib met two legendary politicians, A K Fazlul Huq and HS Suhrawardy, who influenced him to think about politics and people as well. Huq argued, “politically speaking, Mujib’s attained adulthood much before his time”. His courage, sense of freedom and rights had been expressed in his school life. Bangabandhu as a student confronted with Prime Minister A K Fazlul Huq, and Commerce and Labour Minister HS Suhrawardy while he demanded unequivocally for repairing the students’ dormitory. Nobody even his teachers could imagine that young Mujib could candidly demand to the Prime Minister about the renovation of the student dormitory. Motivated by the avowal and herosim of young Mujib, the Prime Minister ordered to immediately overhaul the student dormitory. Bangabandhu started his college life in Calcutta where he concentrated mostly on politics rather than study. He had been gradually linked with the hopes and aspirations, the joys and sorrows, the travails and triumphs of ordinary Bengali people. He was closely acquainted with HS Suhrawardy, who helped him to learn political knowledge. Suhrawardy rightly identified his talent and dynamism making him a political worker.
His political aspiration came into reality when he became the member of the All-India Muslim League Council. During this time, the volatile political and social condition in the Indian sub-continent and devastation of the World War II greatly influenced Bangabandhu to think about people, system and the way of emancipating people from the oppression and exploitation. The bloody conflicts between the people of Indian subcontinent and British colonial ruler, communal conflict between Muslim and Hindu, realities of the 1943 famine resulted in untold sufferings and uncountable death tools. The plights of the people, misrule, oppression and discrimination transformed his mind into a rebel one for achieving independence and self-rule. Moreover, the teaching and thought of Bernard Shaw, Karl Marx and Rabindranath Tagore influenced Bangabandhu to develop his thought and mind. He had also been acquainted with the revolutionary activities of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose. Bangabandhu had been tremendously motivated by Suhrawardy’s staunchly logical approach and Subhash Bose’s spirit of dedication. The political teaching of great leader, Sher-e-Bangla A K Fazlul Huq motivated Bangabandhu to work for the common people to have their basic needs, food and shelter.

In his student life in Calcutta, Bangabandhu actively participated in political movements in the subcontinent and joined the Muslim League and the Pakistan movement. Bangabandhu dreamt to have a united Bengal. However, as a conscious political leader Bangabandhu from the very beginning of Pakistan state was aware of the rights of the Bengali people. He realized that his people had not attained real independence. After his academic-cum-political career, Bangabandhu returned to Dhaka and got admitted to the Department of Law at the University of Dhaka. His study in law was dreamt by his father. However, he did not continue his study as he was involved in the movement freeing Bangali people from the oppression and exploitation of Pakistani ruler. A scholar has rightly pointed out “Bangabandhu realized that Bangladesh was a separate geographical unit and its territory-based nationalism was separate; its economic, political and cultural characters were also completely different from those of the western part of Pakistan. Over and above, linguistic differences and a physical distance of Bangladesh, the then East Pakistan...
about 1,500 miles away from West Pakistan totally possess the sheer divergence between them."12 His lifelong struggle, persistent desire for independence and dedication to the destitute people finally contributed to wage a Liberation War and achieve a sovereign nation-state, Bangladesh.

3. Inspiration and Theoretical Underpinning

Bangabandhu's political vision in the national and global context has been influenced by writings of the Western rationalistic philosophers, especially Immanuel Kant, John Stuart Mill and Herbert Spencer. His global political vision also correlates with the political philosophy of Vladimir Lenin, Woodrow Wilson, Nelson Mandela and Mahatma Gandhi. Bangabandhu was the proponent and supporter of democracy and he fought for democracy in his entire life. Bangabandhu from his early life indoctrinated the teaching of behaving with the necessity and demand of the situation. This characteristics and leadership quality are linked with the realistic political philosophers, for example Nicolas Machiavelli who believed that politicians in some instances need to be strong enough when it would be necessary for political expediency and maintaining the stability of the state.13 He also emphasized to have a strong and intelligent political leader for the smooth functioning of state. Bangabandhu once mentioned that this is rational to behave as same as the bad people for the stability and prosperity of the country. As Bangabandhu said, "When you play with a gentleman, you play like a gentleman. But when you play with bastards, make sure you play like a bigger bastard. Otherwise, you will lose." Hence, Bangabandhu possessed the quality of a "philosopher king"14 proposed by Plato. Like a philosopher king, he has innate goodness and love for the countrymen. Plato argued, "a philosopher king is a ruler who possesses both a love of wisdom, as well as intelligence, reliability, and a willingness to live in a simple life".15 Bangabandhu as a leader in his lifetime experienced very simple life and was not aware of the personal or family gain, rather he always thought about the freedom of his countrymen. Even, he seldom afraid of going to jail for achieving the political freedom and prosperity of the Bengalis. Bangabandhu mentioned, "as a man, what concerns mankind concerns me. As a Bangalee, I am deeply involved in all that concerns of Bangalees. This abiding involvement is born of and
nourished by love, enduring love, which gives meaning to my politics and to my being”.

The Western rationalistic philosophy of John Sturt Mill had greatly impacted the political philosophy of Bangabandhu. Bangabandhu fought for the liberty, self-rule and freedom of speech for his people against the British colonial rulers and Pakistani government which J S Mill proposed in the middle age as the cardinal political philosophy of “liberalism”. Mill’s On Liberty addressed the nature and limits of the power that can be legitimately exercised by society over the individual. On Liberty involved an impassioned defense of the freedom of speech. Mill argued that free discourse is a necessary condition for intellectual and social progress. Social liberty for Mill meant putting limits on the ruler’s power so that he would not be able to use that power as per his own wishes and thus, make decisions that could harm society. The central concept of “utilitarianism”, developed by Jeremy Bentham was that public policy should seek to provide “the greatest happiness of the greatest number.” It has had influence on Bangabandhu’s political philosophy as he was the advocate of independence, liberation, and democracy and benefit to all individuals. Bangabandhu’s political philosophy was the freedom and liberty of the mass people irrespective of economic status, cast, colour, religion and ethnicity.

Bangabandhu had also been influenced by the philosophy of Immanuel Kant who proposed the idea of “perpetual peace” which could be secured through universal democracy and international cooperation. Bangabandhu’s lifelong commitment was concerned with democracy and international peace and security. The political philosophy of some great personalities and political leaders had also influenced Bangabandhu’s thoughts and vision in the national and international context. Bangabandhu was the proponent of socialism and social equity that he learnt from the teaching of Marxist and Leninist idea of “communism”, “social equality”, “nationalization policy” and “participation” of all sections of people in the economic and political processes. Bangabandhu believed that benefit of the socio-economic development must be provided to the
mass people in the society. Without social and economic emancipation of the poor people, the fruits of the democracy cannot be attained. With regard to peace and communal relationship within and between the country, Bangabandhu had been immensely influenced by the teaching of Mahatma Ghandi and the philosophy of Nilsen Mandela. Mahatma Gandhi believed in non-violence for social and political change, and religious pluralism for all sections of people in India. Bangabandhu followed and inculcated the principle of "non-violence", as a principle of political change in Indian sub-continent; and peaceful coexistence, and political freedom of all sections of people. As Bangabandhu mentioned, "I would like to say categorically and unequivocally that, our country will be a democratic, secular and socialist country. In this country, the laborers, peasants, Hindus, and Muslims all will live in peace and harmony".

In summary, Bangabandhu is a great leader, political philosopher and social reformer. His action, way of life and work had been influenced by many of the great leaders and philosophers. He had been able to inculcate the teaching and philosophy of the great leaders and political philosophers in his mind and applied accordingly in order to free Bengalis and make an independent state, Bangladesh. His experience and life-long struggle against the oppression of the common people inspired him to think globally when he saw people around the world were suppressed and deprived of political freedom and right to self-determination. His deep insight and dedication for the Bengali national identity and independence had been inspired by the deprived socio-economic and political policy exercised by the British and Pakistan rulers in their respective periods. The deprived and exploitative policies against the Bengali people led him to "imagine" differently as separate identity and construct a sense of Bengali nation. Bangabandhu struggled against colonial and undemocratic state power, first against the British and later against the Pakistan state that invigorated him to establish the economic, political, and cultural rights of the people of Bangladesh. His political philosophy thus places him to contribute to the global context. The following section describes the contribution of Bangabandhu to the global context.

The most important area Bangabandhu contributed was to attain the right to self-determination of the oppressed people not only in his own country but also in world arena. Bangabandhu sacrificed his life for the political rights and freedom of the people. The concept of right to self-determination was first expressed in the 1860s, and spread rapidly thereafter. The concept was popular and encouraged during World War I by both Vladimir Lenin of Soviet Russia and United States' President Woodrow Wilson. Wilson announced his Fourteen Points on 08 January 1918. On 11 February 1918 Wilson stated, "national aspirations must be respected; people may now be dominated and governed only by their own consent." Later the United Nation Organization (UNO) established in 1945 has included the principle "to develop friendly relations among nations based on the respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of people, and to take other appropriate measures to strengthen universal peace". Article 15 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) adopted in 1948 outlines "everyone has the right to a nationality and that no one should be arbitrarily deprived of a nationality or denied the right to change nationality".

Bangabandhu was outspoken and sincere leader for establishing the right to self-determination of the people across the world. Thus, in his speech in the UNGA in 1974, he stated,

Millions of freedom fighters from Asia, Africa, and Latin America had to sacrifice to achieve the promise of self-control that the UN Charter promises. This struggle is still going on. The war is going on unlawfully occupying the area, using force to end the equitable rights of the people and racism. Injustice is still prevalent in many parts of the world.

Bangabandhu was highly critical about the role of the world leaders in regard to ensuring the rights and political freedom of the people in the occupied nations. He was very much sympathetic to the people who had been fighting for the independence and political freedom against foreign ruler as well as the military dictatorship. In the last public address at Suhrawardy Udyan, 26 March 1975 Bangabandhu strongly uttered, "The
people of Bangladesh support the rights and just demands of Arab Palestinian brothers. They will stay behind Arab brothers to free Palestine. Wherever there are oppressed people we will be there”. Bangabandhu was a secular political leader and was not conscious only for the Muslim people, but was anxious for all oppressed people across the world. He also uttered, “The people of Zimbabwe (South Rhodesia) and Namibia are still in the final struggle for their national independence and liberation.” He urged the international community to help these people to achieve independence and self-rule.

This global vision and thoughts of Bangabandhu is still relevant for the oppressed people globally. In the current global stage, the world is not free from the evils such as vengeance, killing, hatred, ultra-nationalism, fascism, imperialist mentality, slaughtering of democratic values and principles, forceful deportation of the people, millions of refugees and homeless people globally. The current incidences in Myanmar, Syria, Yemen, Iraq and many other countries show the ugly face of world leaders against the poor and powerless people. Still people in Kashmir, Muslim people in Uyghurs in Xinjiang (China) and Rakhine province in Myanmar and other parts of the world have been struggling for their self-rule and political freedom. Surprisingly, no strong voice from the world leaders for the political freedom and self-rule for these people. Even, entire world is almost silent against the oppression and human rights violation happening in many parts of the world. Bangabandhu, in his lifetime, was unequivocal, raised voice against this oppression and human rights violation and emerged as a custodian of the poor and oppressed people across the world. In the current global context, the sense of “we versus they”, minority versus majority in terms of religion, ethnicity and political belief have been generating conflict, polarization and hatred instead of forming brotherhood and cooperation. This emerging division between and among the nations across the world is leading to carnage of innocent and peaceful people. The vision of Bangabandhu is an urgent need to stop such bloodshed, killing and hate game across the world.
Balanced and Equitable World System

During the tenure of Bangabandhu, the entire world was sharply divided into two blocs in line with economic and political system: one was capitalist system where democracy prevailed as the political principles and capitalism as the economic way of life; and the second was the socialism which was based on the communism and socialism. None of the system was purely people-centric and accepted by the people. The proponent of the capitalism referred it as a system to ensure individual rights, political freedom and economic emancipation. On the other hand, the proponent of socialism considered the capitalism the enemy of the people and argued that socialism as a system can provide economic emancipation of all people and provide scope to all people to participate in the social and political process. During Cold War era, Bangabandhu wanted to see a balanced and equitable world system where people can enjoy their rights and economic emancipation as well as exercise their rights in all spheres of life. As a world system, Bangabandhu, thus, suggested socialism as a system to change the world. Bangabandhu believed, “the capitalist were quite bent on waging a world war to achieve their goals”. In fact, there are different types of capitalist societies, ranging from liberating to exploitative, protective to abusive, democratic to unregulated. Thus, at the very outset of his return to the soil, he reiterated to the principle of socialism to be included in the Constitution of Bangladesh. In his Unfinished Memoirs Bangabandhu wrote:

I myself am no communist, but I believe in socialism and not in capitalism. I believe capital is a tool of the oppressor. As long as capitalism is the mainspring of the economic order people all over the world will continue to be oppressed.

He believed in the idea of socialism coined by Lenin. Bangabandhu studied it in his student life. Over the years of his struggle against the colonial power, he developed an affinity with socialism as a solution to poverty and unemployment. His experience by visiting in China in 1952 also inspired him to see a society of equality and justice. He realized that there was a gulf difference between the Pakistani and Chinese society in allocating resources and opportunities. By socialism, Bangabandhu meant to set up a society free from exploitation and oppression as well as
removing inequality from the social and political system. Bangabandhu realized that the real enemies of a country are those who exploit ordinary people in a society. Thus, in his lifetime, he fought against Brahmin or Muslim Landlords, or moneylenders or businessmen-politicians.

Capitalist mood of production and competition for resources among the capitalist states and multinational corporations (MNCs) are playing the major role in waging war in many corners of the world. Unrest in Myanmar, Syria, Libya, Yemen and other parts of the world is the game of the capitalist states for extracting natural resources and guaranteeing their arms business at the cost of human rights. Bangabandhu was critical about the evil of capitalism, and rightly cautioned people about the costs of the capitalist system. However, Bangabandhu was not able to stick with the socialist concept due to national and international pressures. Bangabandhu in his lifetime revised his policy of socialism and adopted mixed system of socialism and capitalism. Due to the internal pressure from his Ministers and external demand from the capitalist bloc, Bangabandhu embraced economic liberalization, built relationship with Islamic states and the United States as well.

**World Peace and Security**

Bangabandhu's vision of establishing peace is incomparable. In his entire life, he dedicated himself for the oppressed and suppressed people, no matter which part of the world they lived in. He was an actionist political leader who worked for the world peace by taking stand against oppression, suppression and exploitation. Bangabandhu was a true leader for peace and security of the people. He said, "we want peace everywhere in the world". He was in favour of any right cause of the freedom loving people across the world. He further said, "the just struggle of the people for freedom cannot be stopped by the force of arms". In fact, this vision and spirit inspired him to speak out for the anti-colonial struggle in the world, including Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau. Bangabandhu was outspoken leader against the illegal occupation of Arab territories by Israel. For his commitment to the world peace and security, he attended the Peace Assembly in China and strongly supported the principle "we want peace, not war". He envisioned,
We will not move towards a world filled with hunger, poverty, unemployment, fear of starvation, fear of being completely destroyed by nuclear war, we will look to a world where humanity is capable of great success in the era of astounding advances in science and technology. Indeed, Bangabandhu was a visionary leader who believed in the advancement of the science and technology as the key to development and world peace. He appealed to the people of the newly liberated countries to come forward and work for the world peace. Bangabandhu echoed the importance of forming public opinion and urged to form human chain for abolishing nuclear weapons, oppression, exploitation, forced migration, deportation and killing of innocent people.

Not only the utterance but also the action for peace and security had also been cardinal principle of global vision of Bangabandhu. He criticized the role of Israel in the Middle East to destabilize the normal life of the Palestine people. Bangabandhu also initiated to form a medical team and self-supporting group with the ex-war participants to help the Egyptian solders during the Arab-Israel war. For his role during the 1973 Arab-Israel war, Bangabandhu was praised by an Arab correspondent as, “Your Prime Minister (Mujib) has won half of Africa including Arab world in a big battle without firing a single shot”. This statement signifies the leadership of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. His vision has strong influence on the current peacekeeping mission of Bangladesh formed in 1988. Now, Bangladesh is the second largest peacekeeping force contributor in the world. Indeed, Bangabandhu first felt the need of attending peace promoting mission by sending assistances to Egypt. Bangabandhu’s vision of peace promotion and helping the occupied people by logistics and armed forces has strong influence in forming the peacekeeping mission of Bangladesh.

At the meeting of the Commonwealth Heads of Government held in Canada in August 1973, he eloquently stated, I believe that both the developed and developing countries have an overriding common interest in survival and in peace. The arms race remains a threat to mankind. Inherent in it is not only is the threat of total destruction, but also colossal wastage of the earth’s
resources. Can we not do something to divert these resources so that they may contribute to alleviating human suffering and advancing human welfare? Can’t we in the Commonwealth mobilize opinion against the continuation of the arms race and against pollution caused by nuclear tests? Can we not concert our efforts to contribute creating an environment of peace in the world? This was a strong message to the Heads of the Commonwealth countries to ensure the world peace and security. Ironically, the ideological division during that period was the main source of conflict and insecurity in the world. Bangabandhu was a strong critic of this division, arm race and occupation.

He further mentioned,

The continued occupation of Arab territories and the denial of the legitimate rights of the Arab people, and the people of Palestine is a threat to peace and urgently demands a just solution.

Bangabandhu’s speech and utterance in support of peace and security in different occasions reveal his commitment and dedication to world peace and security. He has been emerged as an eloquent speaker for peace and prosperity for the people in Bangladesh and beyond.

Neutrality and No to War

Bangabandhu’s philosophy in the world politics can be said as “neutrality and no to war”. Thus, he decided to join the Non-Aligned Movement as NAM firmly believed in the principles of “support of self-determination”, “Independent and respect for the sovereignty of all nations”, “resistance against colonialism, neo-colonialism, foreign occupation, and domination”, non-interference into the internal affairs of states, and peaceful co-existence among all countries.” Moreover, Bangabandhu in his first attendance in the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1974 pronounced, “Bangladesh has consistently pursued an independent non-aligned foreign policy promoting friendship with all countries of the world on the basis of mutual respect for sovereigny, equality, territorial integrity and non-interference in the internal affairs of other states”.

Bangabandhu envisioned a just and war free world. Thus, he believed in maintaining neutral role in world politics. Until his death, he maintained
neutrality and the principle of friendship to all and malice to none. In his maiden participation in the NAM conference held in Algeria in 1973, Bangabandhu pronounced the historic statement. He stated, “The world is now divided into two parts the repressors and the repressed. I am on the side of the repressed masses.” In fact, Bangabandhu’s view of neutrality was based on the “nonrealistic” view of foreign policy of joining with groups and alliances considering the national needs of new state. Neutrality in the international context was extremely essential for a new state in order to keep good relationship with countries. Another reason for taking neutral position in the international politics was to receive economic assistance which were very necessary for the country. In order to achieve the goal, Bangabandhu travelled the world and tried to make everybody understand about the realities of the new nation.

His philosophy of neutrality was also the cardinal principle in the national context of Bangladesh. Bangabandhu did not want to isolate from the local, regional and international forum. Rather, he wanted to actively attend any international initiative without interference of superpowers (USA and former USSR blocs). Since independence instead of liberation Bangladesh has been pursuing an independent non-aligned foreign policy, and Bangabandhu repeatedly proclaimed his desire to make Bangladesh “The Switzerland of Asia”. He rightly emphasized the true principle of non-alignment. Since the end of the Cold War, Bangladesh has maintained friendly relationship with its neighbouring countries. It has given priority to establish amicable relationships with its neighbours. Friendship with India, its giant neighbour, is a cardinal principle of Bangladesh’s foreign policy. In March 1972, Bangladesh signed a treaty of peace and friendship with India based on the model of the Indo-Soviet treaty of 1971. Bangladesh was also keen to establish close relations with its other South and Southeast Asian neighbours. With the Soviet Union and the Soviet bloc countries Bangladesh maintained visibly good relations. These countries supported the Liberation Movement of Bangladesh and after liberation, they granted quick recognition.

**Anti-imperialism and Racism**

Bangabandhu’s role in anti-imperialism and curbing racism was outstanding and praiseworthy. The fight against the British and Pakistani
colonial powers inspired him to fight against colonial and imperial powers. He himself dedicated his entire life for the liberation of Bengalis; and accordingly, Bangladesh was the first country to emerge as an independent country out of a successful national liberation movement. Bangabandhu rightly uttered,

Those who even today are struggling to vindicate their right of self-determination and their basic human rights in South Africa, Rhodesia, Namibia, Angola, Mozambique and other parts of Africa against the forces of colonialism and racialism must have the support from all those who value human freedom. We are pledged by our Constitution to support the just struggle of all oppressed people against colonialism and racialism. We cannot but condemn the recent massacres in Mozambique.\textsuperscript{56}

His utterance of equality, territorial integrity and non-interference indicate his commitment and position against the anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism. As Sanjoy says, “Bangladesh was deeply committed to anti-imperialism as it had already experienced the selfish motives of the powers that had provided military and political support to Pakistan in its exploitation”.\textsuperscript{57} Bangabandhu’s message sent to the World Congress of Peace Forces on the occasion of its conference held in Moscow in October 1973 which reflects his sentiment of anti-colonialism and oppression. He uttered,

I am indeed happy to learn about the holding of the World Congress Peace Forces in Moscow from October 25 to 31, 1973. At a time when people in different parts of the world are struggling against imperialism, colonialism and racialism and are striving for political and economic emancipation, such a Congress cannot but strengthen and inspire all those committed to the cause of world peace. The oppressed people of the world must liberate themselves from exploitation and man’s injustice to man must end if the world is to enjoy a stable peace.\textsuperscript{58}

Bangabandhu realized that world peace lies in the heart of the problem in the Middle East. He believed that world peace would not be attained until the complete withdrawal of the Israeli soldiers from the Palestine
land. Bangabandhu urged the world community to ensure the lasting peace in the Middle East for promoting international peace and security. He also emphasized on implementing the Paris Peace Agreement for the independence of Vietnam. Bangabandhu and Marshal Tito, the President of Yugoslavia opined,

Peace in Indo-China and in Southeast Asia as a whole could be achieved only by strict implementation of the Paris Agreement on Vietnam and the discontinuation of outside support and assistance to Lon Nol's regime in Cambodia. They condemned the overthrow of the legally constituted Allende's Government of Chile by military dictatorship.59

Indeed, Bangabandhu was critical against the racism and racial attitude across the world. His commitment to fight against colonialism and exploitation had also been surpassed into the African continent. At the Commonwealth Summit held in Kingston, Jamaica, in May 1975, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman urged the members of the Commonwealth to fully support the African strategy for South Africa and to approve the Darussalam Declaration. He declared, "Bangladesh had firmly imposed a full ban on trade relations with Rhodesia and South Africa." Bangabandhu also declared his country's solidarity with the Africans in their just struggle against the oppression of racism and apartheid in South Africa and to achieve independence.60 In summary, it can be said that Bangabandhu's role in abolishing colonialism, apartheid and racial discrimination was highly significant as he uttered boldly in his speech to stop all kinds of discriminatory policies in various international forums. He was able to collaborate with the leaders of NAM to provide all putting support for the people who are fighting for their real cause of freedom and self-rule.

Promotion of Peace and Cooperation

Bangabandhu's commitment to peace and cooperation is worth mentioning and praiseworthy. He believed in both "negative peace" and "positive peace" proposed by Johan Galtung.61 Bangabandhu relied on peaceful manner to solve all kinds of conflict and disagreement. Even, in his 7th March historic speech he emphasized on peaceful means. Nadeem Qadir,
a journalist rightly mentioned, “a large part of his speech detailed his efforts to convince the Pakistanis to avert any wrongful move to help end the crisis peacefully and without any bloodshed”. After independence, Bangabandhu promoted the principle of peace and cooperation. In the international level, Bangabandhu emphasized on peaceful coexistence and national development. Professor Ahmed and Kalam explained the “peace approach” of Bangabandhu’s foreign policy by saying “Bangladesh desires peace not only for the sake of peace but also for the strategic consideration of national development and security.” In the regional level, Bangabandhu wanted to maintain close relationship with neighbouring states, particularly with India. As a result, he signed the 25-year Indo-Bangladeshi Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Peace, which pledged extensive economic and humanitarian assistance and training from India for Bangladesh’s security forces and government personnel. Based on the “neo-realism” theory Bangabandhu emphasized on building peaceful relationship with Muslim states with a view to ensuring peaceful relations and attain international cooperation and development. Considering the reality, Bangabandhu sought Bangladesh’s membership in the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC), the Commonwealth of Nations and the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) and made a significant trip to Lahore in 1974 to attend the OIC summit, which enabled improving relations with Pakistan. For his contribution in promoting regional and international peace, Bangabandhu was given the peace prize at the Asian Peace Conference held in Dhaka on 23 May 1973. In his speech in that conference, Bangabandhu uttered,

We do not believe in the arm race. We seek the friendship of all nations in order to promote the welfare of the oppressed and exploited people everywhere…we are following a positive, non-alignment foreign policy by keeping ourselves aloof from the military power blocks. Promotion of international peace and solidarity is not merely the policy of the government, it has been enshrined in our constitution as one of the fundamental principles.

Bangabandhu was against arms race and arms production for the sake of world peace. For international peace and cooperation, he also
emphasized on the political freedom and freedom of speech of all people irrespective of race, color, religion, ethnicity and political belief. In the regional peace and security in the South Asia, Bangabandhu played the greatest role in attaining the regionalism. In a public speaking in Calcutta on 06 February 1972, Bangabandhu announced,

...Let us bring to an end once and for all the sterile policy of confrontation between neighbors. Let us not fritter away our national resources but use them to lift the standard of living of our people. We should not be wanting with all concerned for creating an ear of peace and South Asia, where we could live side by side as good neighbors and pursue constructive policies for the benefit of our peace.  

This was not the official statement for forming a regional forum, but his speech played an important role to think of forming a forum for resolving the differences among countries and attaining cooperation in multi sectors. It can be argued that Bangabandhu was a political philosopher, social reformer and peace thinker. Galtung argued that peace can be attained by education, research and movement. Bangabandhu was actively involved in the activities of peace movement for which he will be remembered in the international arena.

5. Evaluation and Conclusion

Bangabandhu had played significant role and had raised his thunder voice for world peace and self-determination of the oppressed people of the world. However, it is extremely difficult to pen picture the contribution of this great hero to the world politics. Needless to say, Bangabandhu was one of the few bold and dedicated leaders in the world who absolutely fought for world peace and rights to self-determination. He was a true human soul and an infinitely courageous leader who always spoke for the oppressed, suppressed, exploited and deprived people in any corner of the world. He was dedicated and devoted to the people not only in his country but also in the world arena. Many world leaders have applauded and appreciated his dedication, commitment and sincerity to the people. The Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi while delivering her speech at a public gathering in Dhaka during her visit in March 1972 said,
You may lack a lot of resources today, but you have a world-renowned leader who has dedicated his entire life for your welfare and has given you unity and courage. This is your greatest asset and I have no doubt that Bangladesh will be stronger with his support.\textsuperscript{73}

Bangabandhu was truly an asset for Bangladesh. His personality and position in the world is in apex. Thus, eulogizing Bangabandhu, Cuban leader Fidel Castro in 1973 said, “I have not seen the Himalayas But have seen Sheikh Mujib. In personality and in courage, this man is the Himalayas. I have thus had the experience of witnessing the Himalayas”.\textsuperscript{74}

Indeed, Bangabandhu’s heart and courage was as high as the Himalayas. Being a leader of a newly independent small state, he behaved and worked like a leader of superpower. Truly speaking, a great leader breaks the wall and boundary of a nation and enter the boundary of the entire world. Famed Egyptian journalist Hasnein Heikal, thus, wrote, “Nasser is not simply of Egypt and the Arab world. His Arab nationalism is the message of freedom for the Arab people. In similar fashion, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman does not belong to Bangladesh alone. He is the harbinger of freedom for all Bengalis. His Bangali nationalism is the new emergence of the Bengali civilization and culture. Mujib is the hero to the all Bengalis, in the past and in the times that are.”\textsuperscript{75} Of course, Bangabandhu is a real hero who remains in the heart of millions of people across the world. He had a long career of action, agitation, reflection, attempted conciliation, peacemaking, and oppression through arrest and incarceration. He articulated a vision of an impossible dream of liberating Bangladesh from the colonial power.

Finally, it is strongly said that Bangabandhu was a mature philosopher, thoughtful and visionary world leader. His vision is not confined in Bangladesh but has gone beyond the national boundary in forming public opinion for the right to self-determination and world peace. He was a courageous human being who valued democratic public reasoning deeply and worked accordingly. Thus, it must be said that the succeeding generations must apply the principles that he left behind flexibly, wisely and cooperatively to prevent global crisis and move towards a brighter future for generations to come.
1 Alliance for Strong Families and Communities, “Reflections on Martin Luther
2018/jan/reflections-martin-luther-king-jr-montgomery-story.aspx, accessed on

2 Father of the Nation is bestowed with persons who have tremendous contribution
to free the country, achieve independence and birth of their nations. According to
such logic, many names such as 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, Peter I of Russia
and 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
Gerhardsm of Norway, Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya,
Carlos Mannel of Cuba. For this logic, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman
is called the Father of the Nation.

3 Montasir Mamon, “Bangabandhu and Bangladesh”, available at
http://www.bangladoot.se/information%20folder/article%20on%20bangabandhu


5 The right to self-determination is the right of a people to determine its own
destiny. In particular, the principle allows a people to choose its own political
status and to determine its own form of economic, cultural and social
development. See also James Mayall, “Sovereignty, nationalism, and self-

152-158.

7 Obaidul Huq, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib: A leader with Difference, Dhaka:
Radical Asia Publications, 1973, p. 15.


9 Shawkat Ali, Armed Quest for Independence: State Vs. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman

10 Harun-or-Rashid, The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh: Bengal Muslim League
Obaidul Huq, op. cit.


According to Plato, a philosopher king is a ruler who possesses both a love of wisdom, as well as intelligence, reliability, and a willingness to live a simple life. See also, Plato, The Republic.


Liberalism is a political and moral philosophy which is based on liberty, consent of the governed and equality before the law. The proponents of liberal idea support a wide array of views depending on their understanding of these principles. However, they generally support free market, free trade, limited government, individual rights (including civil rights and human rights), capitalism, democracy, secularism, gender equality, racial equality, internationalism, freedom of speech, freedom of the press and freedom of religion. See Also, Leonard Trelawney Hobhouse, Liberalism. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964; Michael W. Doyle, “Liberalism and world politics”, American Political Science Review, Vol. 80, No. 4, 1986, pp.1151-1169.


Utilitarianism is a moral theory that promotes overall happiness or pleasure of the people and rejects actions that cause unhappiness or harm. This utilitarian philosophy advocates social, economic, or political decisions that aims to attain betterment of society. See also, Steven M. Cahn, (ed.), Seven Masterpieces of Philosophy, London: Routledge, 2016, pp. 337-383.


Communism is a philosophical, social, political, economic ideology and movement that is directed towards gaining communist society based on common ownership of the means of production and the absence of social classes, money and the state. This is called the well-ordered system that promotes equality in the society. See also, Janos Kornai, The Socialist System: The Political Economy of communism, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.
Social equality is a state of affairs in which all people within a specific society or isolated group have the same status in possibly all respects including civil rights, freedom of speech, property rights and equal access to certain social goods and social services. See also Thorvaldur Gylfason and Gylfi Zoega, “Education, social equality and economic growth: a view of the landscape”, *CESifo Economic Studies*, Vol. 49, No. 4, 2003, pp. 557-579.

Nationalization policy is the process of transforming private assets into public assets by bringing them under the public ownership of a national government or state. See also, Roberto Chang, Constantino Hevia, and Norman Loayza, *Privatization and nationalization cycles*, Washington D.C.: The World Bank, 2009.

Participation of all section of the people in the social and political processes refers, according to Leninist is the best democracy where all section of the people can participate by ensuring the dictatorship of the proletariat. To Marxist and Leninist, the Western democracy is not true democracy as it represents only the upper section of the people. See also, Patricia Springborg, “Karl Marx on democracy, participation, voting, and equality”, *Political Theory*, Vol.12, No. 4, 1984, pp. 537-556.

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, op. cit.

Non-violence is the cardinal political philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi who promoted this principle in Indian sub-continent to resolve any form of conflict and violence within and between communities and groups. Gandhi believed that non-violence ensures lasting peace because violence breeds another type of violence. See also, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, *Non-Violent Resistance*, Courier Corporation, 2012.

The first public address at Suhrawardy Udyan upon returning to the independent Bangladesh after 9 months in prison in Miyanwala, Pakistan, 10 January 1972. See also, 7th March Foundation, “Sheikh Mujib’s quotations”, available at https://www.7thmarch.com/quotations/, accessed on 19 March 2020.

“President Wilson’s Address to Congress, Analyzing German and Austrian Peace Utterances (Delivered to Congress in Joint Session on February 11, 1918)”, available at gwpda.org, accessed on 22 March 2020.


7th March Foundation, op. cit.

Sheikh Mujibur Rahamn, op. cit.


Forqan Uddin Ahmed, op. cit.


Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, op. cit.

Harun-or-Rashid, op. cit.

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, op. cit.


Ibid.

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, op. cit., p. 221.

Forqan Uddin Ahmed, op. cit.


Syed Anwar Hossain, op. cit. p. 274.

A.K.M. Atiquur Rahman, op. cit.

Ibid.


This is principle of foreign policy of Bangladesh.


A.K.M. Atiquur Rahman, op. cit.

Ibid.


The India-Bangladesh Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Peace was a 25-year treaty that was signed on 19 March 1972 forging close bilateral relations between India and the newly ‘independent’ Bangladesh. The treaty was also known as the Indira-Mujib Treaty, after the signatories of the treaty the Prime Minister of India Indira Gandhi and the Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.


According to neorealism or structural realism, a theory of international relations, power is the most important factor in international relations. It was first outlined by Kenneth Waltz in his 1979 book *Theory of International Politics*.

Muzaffar Ahmed and Abul Kalam, op. cit.


Syed Anwar Hossain, op. cit.


Rahman, 2006, Ibid.


1. Introduction

Long before the word “empowerment” became popular, women were speaking about gaining control over their lives, and participating in making the decisions that affect them in home and community, in government and international development policies. But the problem is, very few have a clear conception of empowerment. This is very difficult to understand what is empowerment? Empowerment can be defined as a “multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives. It is a process that fosters power in people, for use in their own lives, their communities, and in their society, by acting on issues that they define as important.”¹ In the same way, women’s empowerment refers to “women’s ability to make strategic life choices where that ability had been previously denied them”.² Accordingly, empowerment is central to the processes of maintaining the benefits of women at individual, household, community and broader levels. It involves the action of boosting the status of women through literacy, education, training and raising awareness.³ Hence, women’s empowerment is all about allowing
and equipping women to make life-determining choices across different issues in the country.

Empowerment ensures gender equality in all spheres of life. Gender equality refers the “rights, responsibilities and opportunities of individuals will not depend on whether they are born male or female.” It is also defined as a situation where “… all human beings are free to develop their personal abilities and make choices without the limitations set by strict gender roles; that the different aspirations and needs of women and men are considered, valued and favoured equally”. The ultimate goal of gender equality is the non-existence of discrimination based on one’s gender. To this end, the empowerment of women has an indispensable role, which is why the researcher preferred to use both terms together throughout the discussion.

Gender equality is, first and foremost, a human right. A woman is entitled to live in dignity and freedom from want and fear. As Begum Rokeya, pioneer of women’s movement made a clarion call for awakening of women saying, “You just educate your daughters and let them make their own livelihood.” To make that happen, there is a need to give women proper scope in all spheres of life for flourishing their merits and talents so that they can grow up with all human qualities, move in the world arena with dignity, and compete with others coping with the pace of the world. The rise of gender sensitivity is one of the distinguishing features of current times. It has taken hold of human imagination like never before. For all practical purposes, the concern of gender equity has graduated to the level of a policy objectives.

The Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, realized the necessity of gender parity having rightly identified at the beginning of the statehood that Bangladesh cannot have desired level of social upliftment without ensuring equal rights of women by providing them equal opportunities in “all spheres of national life”. Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman’s entire life bears testimony to his lasting love and passion for Bangladesh and Bengalis along with his uncompromising leadership with a generous heart. Through his political foresights and leadership, he turned the normal political process into revolution and swerved the revolution into Liberation War. Starting journey from a remote village of Tungipara, he turned into a charismatic leader.
Four governments were formed under the leadership of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. During the period women empowerment took different dimensions which brought significant changes for later. For instance, the need for gender equality in politics was first felt in his regime. However, he was not able to make Bangladeshi politics completely free from androcentric practices. The political challenges Bangabandhu faced were huge and must consider in the assessment of gender dimensions of his regime.

The first government of Bangladesh was formed on 17 April 1971 as a government-in-exile. Bangabandhu was made the President of Bangladesh. On behalf of the President, some Awami League leaders were running the government during that period. The mission of the government was to facilitate the Liberation War and secure international cooperation for Bangladesh. It was successful in its mission within a few months, many people joined the Mukti Bahini (liberation force). Naturally, this government had no scope to think about women particularly. Still, many women joined the Mukti Bahini as freedom fighters and many others facilitated the war through various means. Hence, this government is marked with a vibrant and large-scale women's movement which happened for the first time in the history of Bangladesh. This reflects the systematic inclusion of women in the mainstream politics.

Against this backdrop, this paper seeks to answer two pertinent questions: How did Bangabandhu’s empowerment thoughts start with his family members? What were the contributions of Bangabandhu to women’s empowerment? The paper follows qualitative methods. It also relies on both primary and secondary data. The primary data has been collected from the semi-structured in-depth interviews of four members of the Parliament and members of the Awami League’s Central Committee. Existing literature including books, journal articles, newspaper articles and recorded interviews are analyzed as secondary information. Before getting into the main discussion on Bangabandhu’s contribution to the advancement of women, the following section will discuss the conceptual framework of the paper.
2. Reflections through Family

Before providing the theoretical background, this section focuses on Bangabandhu and his reflection of empowerment through family relations. It is known to all that family is the first social institution where people's thoughts are reflected first. Bangabandhu's thoughts on the empowerment of women were also reflected through his attitude towards the female family members. Notably, Bangabandhu had deep love and respect for his wife, Bangamata Begum Fazilatunnesa Mujib. He felt completely indebted to her for taking care of the family in his absence. Besides, she gave him the support he needed to stand by his people. Bangabandhu's life as recorded in the *Unfinished Memoirs*, and the *The Prison Diaries*, was one of the unending sacrifices, unremitting courage, and unswerving commitment. In his book, Bangabandhu recounted numerous memories regarding his wife, such as,

> My wife, Renu got some notebooks for me when she came to visit me in the jail. The Prison authorities handed over those notebooks to me after thorough scrutiny. She requested me repeatedly to write about my life, so I have started writing today. ⑧

The perseverance of this great lady was reflected when Sheikh Mujib was entangled with the Agartala Conspiracy Case in 1968. Bangabandhu was brought under interrogation and simultaneously, Begum Mujib was also threatened of dire consequences of her support to the leader. A mass uprising of the people for the withdrawal of this case and freedom of the captives were materialized with the active participation of Sheikh Fazilatunnesa Mujib and her daughter, Sheikh Hasina.

To tackle the situation, the then army dictator Ayub Khan proposed a roundtable conference. Several political prisoners of the Awami League, Chhatra League, and Students Union were released to ease the roundtable conference to take place in Lahore. Moreover, some leaders of the West Pakistan Awami League came to Dhaka to put pressure on Bangabandhu to sit in the meeting. It was proposed that Bangabandhu will be released on parole and fly to Lahore for the discussion. However, Mrs Mujib knew the sentiment of the people of this land; she vehemently opposed Bangabandhu's release on parole. She sent her eldest daughter, Sheikh Hasina with this message which Bangabandhu obliged. This compelled the Pakistani military government to release Sheikh Mujib and all other co-
accused unconditionally in 22 March 1969. After this incident, Bangabandhu joined the round table conference and dis-accented with many issues that caused Ayub Khan’s political demise and a subsequent Parliament election of 1970. Nevertheless, Bangabandhu was not given the chance to form the government and this is a new chapter in the history of Bangladesh started emerging. Bangabandhu stated,

I have also seen from my own life that my wife has never stopped me from going out and stand against gunpoint. I have been imprisoned several times in my life for about 10-11 years. It happened a lot that I could not even give her a single penny to support the family before going to jail. My wife never expressed her anguish regarding this. I would have faced a lot of hurdle if she had ever done it. She has a tremendous contribution in my political journey. It is the names of the men that are written in history but the women are ignored. That’s why I have shared some of my life stories with you so that you understand that women have also played a significant role in the advancement of our political accomplishments. We should always remember this and give their due recognition in the society (Bangabandhu, 26 March 1972, Azimpur Girls High School).

Besides this, she never discouraged Bangabandhu in his fight against the Pakistani military junta. She never expressed her worries or dismay. Instead, she encouraged the leaders of the Awami League and the party men to stay patient in times of trouble. This was reflected in the way she passed her times in nine months of the War of Liberation in 1971. She also provided necessary information and support to the freedom fighters through the couriers.

I have hardly seen a courageous woman like my wife. Several times in my life, I was arrested by the Pakistani police and army. They imprisoned me, tortured me and held me captive for indefinite time. It was uncertain when I would be free and come back home. But my wife never broke down mentally. I have two great assets in my life-one is my self-confidence and another is my wife, my lifelong companion!

Reflecting on Bangabandhu’s thoughts, this paper referred to a quote of Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, the eldest daughter of
Empowering Nation through Empowering Women...Bangabandhu’s Thoughts

Empowering Nation through Empowering Women...Bangabandhu’s Thoughts

Bangabandhu where she said, “My mother always encouraged him to do politics for the people of this country, never pulled him back, she never cared for her own interest, and even she never thought what she will get in life”. About the influence of Bangabandhu’s wife in his political life, the Prime Minister mentioned suggestions of her mother to Bangabandhu before he had gone to deliver his historic 7th March address at Suhrawardy Udyan in 1971. Bangabandhu received several suggestions and comments from his party men on what to say and what not to say. All these created a form of confusion and stress in his mind. However, Begum Mujib understood him more than anyone else and therefore comforted her husband with kind words: “Say what is in your mind. Lots of people will voice lots of things. Your words would determine the fate of thousands of people. Whatever you want to say, say from your own mind”. That acted as a magic to declare virtually the independence of Bangladesh. The Prime Minister said Bangabandhu used to learn about the leaders and workers of the party through his wife when she met him in jail during the Pakistan period. Even regarding the marriage proposals of his daughters, he says she is studying, let her study and pass the IA and BA exam, then we will see of it. This infers that Bangabandhu realized the importance of education and economic emancipation of women.

Bangabandhu’s thoughts on the empowerment of women was reflected in his books *Unfinished Memoir*, *Karagarer Rojnamcha* and *Amar Dekha Noyachin*. He recognized the value of woman’s contribution with great importance. Bangabandhu considered the opinions given by the female family members; involved them in the decision-making process; and supported their socio-economic emancipation which paved the way for the empowerment of women.

3. Women’s Empowerment: A Theoretical Understanding

Empowerment has been used to represent a wide range of concepts and to describe a proliferation of outcomes. It has become a widely used word. Empowerment in its emancipatory meaning is a serious word that brings up the question of personal agency, links action to needs, and results in making significant collective change. It is also a concept that does not merely concern personal identity but brings out a broader analysis of human rights and social justice. Applied to gender issues, the discussion of
Empowerment brings women into the political sphere, both private and public. In this context, empowerment is a process to change the distribution of power between men and women, both in interpersonal relations and in institutions throughout the society. The concept of women's empowerment emerged from several important critiques and debates generated by the women's movement throughout the world during the 1980s, when feminists, particularly in the Third World, were increasingly discontent with the largely apolitical and economist "Women in Development (WID)", "Women and Development (WAD)", and "Gender and Development (GAD)" models in prevailing development interventions.

Two perspectives have emerged in the contemporary discourse on the modalities of gender equity: women's development and women's empowerment. It is Easter Boserup's pioneering work that paved the way for the rise of women's development perspective. According to Sharma, development strategy, however, has come under severe interrogation not only for its failure to deliver its promise but also for working against the interest of womankind. Consequently, the decade of the 1990s has witnessed the rise of women's empowerment perspective which shot into prominence at the Beijing Conference. In his book, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Paulo Freire has formally discussed "empowerment" for the first time in the 1970s. After him, many scholars discussed it as human potential, especially for women empowerment. Caroline Moser, at first, discussed it as redistribution of power.

But as a concept, empowerment is widely used, but seldom defined. The often-uncritical use of the term empowerment in development thinking and practice disguises a problematic concept. There is room for greater clarity about the concept and its application. Confusion arises with the concept of empowerment because the root concept "power" is itself disputed and debated in social science. Some definitions focus, with varying degrees of subtlety, on the availability of one person to get another person or group to do something against their will.

Given the diversity in the emphases and agendas in discussions on women's empowerment, the study found greater consensus in the literature on its conceptualization. There is a nexus of a few key words and overlapping terms those are most often included in defining empowerment such as options, choice, control, and power. Most often these are referring
to women's ability to make decisions and affect outcomes of importance to themselves and their families. Control over one's own life and resources is often stressed. Thus, there is frequent reference to some variant of the ability to "affect one's own wellbeing", and "make strategic life choices". Rowlands describes it as "a process whereby women become able to organize themselves to increase their own self-reliance, to assert their independent right to make choices and to control resources which will assist in challenging and eliminating their own subordination". Also appearing frequently in definitions of empowerment is an element related to the concept of human agency and self-efficacy.

Drawing mainly from the human rights and feminist perspectives, many definitions contain the idea that a fundamental shift in perceptions or inner transformation is essential to the formulation of choices. That is, women should be able to define self-interest and choice, and consider themselves as not only able but also entitled to make choices. Kabeer goes a step further and describes this process in terms of "thinking outside the system" and challenging the status quo. Kabeer offers a useful definition of empowerment that effectively captures what is common to these definitions and that can be applied across the range of contexts that development assistance is concerned with: "The expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them."

Let us look at the perspectives given by Rowlands, one of the most often cited writers on women's empowerment. According to him, to understand the process of empowerment, there is a need to be aware that power can take many different forms. Rowland's explains:

- **Power over**: Controlling power may be responded with compliance, resistance (which weakens processes of victimization), or manipulation.

- **Power to**: Generative or productive power (sometimes incorporating or manifesting as forms of resistance or manipulation) which creates new possibilities and actions without domination.

- **Power with**: "A sense of the whole being greater than the sum of the individuals, especially when a group tackles problem together".

- **Power from within**: "The spiritual strength and uniqueness that resides in each one of us and makes true human". Its basis is self-
acceptance and self-respect, which extend, in turn, to respect for and acceptance of others as equals.

Rowlands has considered some of the different manifestations of power. Using the conventional definition of “power over” empowerment means bringing people who are outside the decision-making process into it. This puts a strong emphasis on participation in political structures and formal decision-making and, in the economic sphere, on the ability to obtain an income that enables participation in economic decision-making. Individuals are empowered when they can maximize the opportunities available to them without constraints. Within the generative, “power to” and “power with” interpretation of power, empowerment is concern with the processes by which people become aware of their interests and how those relate to the interest of others. Based on the conceptual framework mentioned above, there are different dimensions of empowerment. The following section will analyze Bangabandhu’s contribution to the advancement of women and empowering them through various kinds of initiatives and programmes not only as a statesman but also as a leader.

4. Dimension of Empowerment: Reflections from Bangabandhu’s Thoughts

From a feminist perspective, interpreting “power over” entails understanding the dynamics of oppression and internalized oppression. Empowerment is thus more than participation in decision-making; it must also include the processes that lead people to perceive themselves as able and entitled to make decisions. As feminists and other social theorists have shown, societies ascribe a particular set of abilities to social categories of people. Empowerment must involve undoing negative social construction so that people can see themselves as having the capacity and the right to act and influence decisions. According to Rowlands, empowerment has to be within three dimensions:

a. Personal: Personal dimension means the development of a sense of self and individual confidence and capacity, and undoing the defects of internalized oppression.

b. Relational: Relational dimension is a process of developing the ability to
negotiate and influence the nature of a relationship and decisions made within it.

c. **Collective:** This includes involvement in political structures, but might also cover collective action-based co-operation rather than competition.

The following sections will elaborate these three dimensions of empowerment:

**Personal Dimension**

This section elaborates on how Bangabandhu contributed to his citizens and women's personal development. In this paper, development refers to the sense of self, individual confidence and capacity. Reference was also made of Begum Rokeya, the pioneer of the women's movement who made a call for awakening the women saying you just educate your daughters and let them make their livelihood. To make that happen, women need to be given scopes in all spheres of life to flourish their merits and talents so that they will grow up with all human qualities, moving in the world arena with dignity and competing with the pace of this world. With this vision, Bangabandhu's empowerment thought was first documented in his book, *Amar Dekha Noyachin*\(^{23}\), where he mentioned several times how much it is important for women to develop sense of self, individual confidence, and capacity building.

The main reason for China's development today is that both men and women have come forward to work together to build the nation towards progress. (*Amar Dekha Noyachin*, p. 101.)

In China today, the women have started joining the workforce. They are working hand in hand with the males. They are proving that God has created everyone equal. Once provided with right kind of support and opportunities, women can also become successful as scientists, doctors, and teachers and even as soldiers! (*Amar Dekha Noyachin*, p.99.).

China has established equal rights for men and women, that's why men cannot discriminate against women any more. (*Amar Dekha Noyachin*, p.99.).
After being freed from Pakistani prison, Bangabandhu returned to an independent but devastated Bangladesh on 10 January 1972. Therefore, a lot of challenges were awaiting him. The greatest challenge for him was to make a Constitution for Bangladesh. To tackle that, he issued a Provisional Constitutional Order stipulating a unitary parliamentary form of government. Accordingly, he resigned from the post of President and became the Prime Minister. Hence, the second government under the leadership of Bangabandhu took over. Subsequently, the Constitution of Bangladesh was adopted on 04 November 1972, which became effective on 16 December in the same year. The 1972 Constitution was very gender-friendly indeed. It clearly stated that steps should be taken to ensure the participation of women in all spheres of public life (Article 28). Several times in articles 27 and 28, it also declared equal rights.

The Father of the Nation initiated a programme in the First Five-Year Plan (1973-78), which was undertaken for upholding the dignity of women and rehabilitating the women who suffered loss during the Liberation War. The government of Bangabandhu made provisions for employment and allowance in particular for wives and daughters of those who embraced martyrdom in the Liberation War. He founded the Bangladesh Women’s Rehabilitation Board in 1972 which was reorganized in 1974 as Women’s Rehabilitation and Welfare Foundation. With this initiative, development for women started officially in Bangladesh. This foundation had myriad programmes including (1) built-up physical infrastructure targeted at the development of women in all the districts and subdivisions of the country; (2) imparted vocational training for broad-based employment of women; (3) established showroom and sales centers for productive employment of women; (4) extended daycare facilities for those women engaged in productive and training activities; (5) rendered treatment facilities to war-affected women; and (6) introduced scholarships and stipends for the education of the children of women affected by the Liberation War.

Women’s development in terms of education, health and family planning received highest emphasis for attaining social welfare. For example, the first five-year plan emphasized the capacity building of women through education and better health services. Around 60 per cent of destructed educational institutions were rebuilt by TK. 51 crore and about 36 thousand primary schools and few thousands high schools were
nationalized. On 26 July 1972 the education commission was formed and Tk. 3 crore 72 lakh was allotted for the next year. Additionally, 33 bigha (10.9 acre) of land in Savar were allotted for women’s skill development in agriculture in 1973. Hence, Bangabandhu recognized education as the most important component for women’s development and rebuilding their confidence and capacity. He also identified women’s connection with the agricultural activities in Bangladesh and emphasized on women’s involvement with this sector.

Besides, the implementation of “Agro-based Programme for the Rural Women” was started by the Women Affairs Department in 1973. Bangabandhu had made girls’ education up to class VIII free. It can be rightly said that Bangabandhu had sown the seeds of gender parity as without establishing equal rights of women and providing them equal opportunities in “all spheres of national life,” desired level of social upliftment cannot be achieved.24

Considering the socio-economic and cultural constraints faced by women in our society, it reserved 15 seats for women in the Parliament for 10 years (Article 65.3). Nonetheless, there were no territorial constituencies for the reserved seats. Also, a system of indirect election was put in place for the reserved seats, i.e., the directly elected members of the Parliament were to elect the female members of the reserved seats which were 5 per cent of the directly elected seats. Although this Constitutional provision was criticized by different women’s groups, it was the first step forward for the development of women.

Relational Dimension

Relational development involves developing the ability to negotiate and influence the nature of a relationship and decision-making within it. Women made significant contributions to the independence struggle and played a leading role in the Language Movement of 1952. The multifaceted involvement of women throughout the period of the Liberation War contributed to establishing women’s political rights in Bangladesh. During the Liberation War, women galvanized public opinion, gathered intelligence, offered medical help, provided food and shelter to the freedom fighters, raised the freedom fighters’ morale with patriotic songs, concealed weapons for the resistance, collected funds, and even
took up arms to fight in the war. Likewise, expatriate women helped the Liberation War gain momentum by providing their assistance at refugee camps and influencing international opinion. Hence, women’s involvement and participation in the independence of Bangladesh was multifaceted and diversified. Women are not only the mere victims of Liberation War as rape victims but also as frontliners. There are significant numbers of women who participated in the war as fighters, helping hands, messengers, cultural activists, mobilization, generating public opinions, medical assistants and also as mothers. Taramon Bibi, Dr Captain (Rtd.) Sitara Begum, Geeta Kar, Shirin Banu, etc., are the prominent war heroines and among them two women had been awarded as “Bir Pratik”. It is obvious to say that the Liberation Wars are not fought only in the battlefields, neither they fought only with guns, but worked in the refugee camps and mobilized people at all international levels. War heroes also include those women who have supported the valiant freedom fighters with food, shelter, funds, who have nursed the wounded and hid weapons risking their own lives.

Bangabandhu awarded the “Birangana”, “War Heroines” and was the first person recognizing the contributions of the mothers and sisters who were tortured by the Pakistani occupation forces and their local cohorts during the Liberation War. He asked the people to give women their due respect. Bangabandhu set a humane example by saying that it is not only the man but also the women who sacrificed their lives and dignity for independence. He realized that the patriarchal mindset of the feudal society may drive women into a hell of disgrace and humiliation. Therefore, without any delay, Bangabandhu asked the people of Bangladesh to give due honour and dignity to the women oppressed by the Pakistani army and call them his daughter.

From today, write “Sheikh Mujibur Rahman” in the place of “Father’s name” of those girls who have been raped (in the Liberation War). And write Dhanmondi 32 as their address. How could I repay their debt for what they have sacrificed in the Liberation War?

Bangabandhu’s initiatives to rehabilitate the rape victims and bring them into mainstream society need to be commended. On 22 December 1971, the government of Bangladesh declared that the women rape victims were brave ladies. Later, Bangabandhu arranged the marriage of many “Birangana” telling them to write his name as the father and 32
Dhanmondi as their address as many did not want to disclose the identities. Moreover, Bangladesh Abandoned Children Order, 1972 was taken to give a war child a better and dignified life.

Another challenge for Bangabandhu was to reestablish social cohesion which was torn apart during the Liberation War. It was observed that the Liberation War divided the patriarchal society of Bangladesh into different fractions but could not tear the texture of patriarchy. Therefore, on one hand, integrating the war heroines Biranganas into the society was a great challenge for him; on the other hand, it was much needed for establishing social cohesion in newly independent Bangladesh. This led him to destroy the initially prepared list of the Biranganas, as a part of his efforts to reestablish social cohesion.

Amidst these challenges, the first parliamentary election was held in Bangladesh in 1973. The ruling Awami League won 291 seats in the Parliament out of 300 seats. Hence, the third government under the leadership of Bangabandhu was formed. It was observed that women were marginally involved in the 1973 electoral contest. Although only 2 women contested out of 980 candidates, no one came out to be successful. However, as per the Constitutional provision, 15 women were nominated from Awami League to the reserved seats for women in the Parliament. Later in the same year, a local government election was held in Bangladesh and for the first time in the history the statutory representation of women was ensured at the Union Parishad level. However, in 1973 local government election, only one woman from Rangpur was elected as the chairman of a union parishad out of 4,352 unions.

To emphasize how Bangabandhu’s decisions encouraged women’s empowerment, this paper shares some relevant examples. It is highlighted that Bangabandhu appointed two women ministers—Begum Nurjahan Khurshid to the Ministry of Social Affairs and Family Planning (1973-1975), and Badrunessa Ahmed to the Ministry of Education (1973-1974). A 10 per cent quota for women in government jobs was also created in 1972. Additionally, Dr Nilima Ibrahim was the first Director General of Bangla Academy in 1974. Moreover, Muslim Marriages and Divorces Act was framed in 1974. In association with that, the “Girls Guide Association” was also extended and restructured. With these initiatives, Bangabandhu tried to enhance the capacity of women and their participation so that their voice
can be heard in the empowerment process and contribute to the development of the country.

Collective Dimension

Though the collective dimension of empowerment framework includes the involvement in political structure, it might also cover the collective action based on cooperation rather than competition. In his forthcoming book paper on “Bangabandhu and Bangali Nationalism”, Professor Syed Anwar Husain said,

Bengali nationalism was piloted by Bangabandhu. It was a recipe for people’s welfare both at home and across the world. Once the Bengali nationhood culminated in statehood, Bengali nationalism transcended to the world with its intrinsic ethos of self-assertion by the exploited peoples. With Bangabandhu, therefore, Bengali nationalism broadened itself into internationalism—a perfect liberal nationalism.

Hence, nationalism also symbolizes women. During the Liberation War, women were the victims of body politics where they were treated as the bearer of Bengali nationalism. They were not only the mere victim of violence and also contributed as a caregiver and participated directly in the war as mentioned earlier. Even before the Liberation War, they actively participated in all the nationalist movements. Bangabandhu opened the women wing of Awami League in 1969 which had produced lots of female influential leaders. In the Parliament, 15 per cent of seats were reserved not only to make women visible in the policymaking processes but also to incorporate gender perspective in the policies. Bangabandhu also participated in the first “Women International Congress” held in Mexico in 1975 along with prominent female leaders. The women’s movement that was ongoing in the world during that time resulted in many women’s movements in Bangladesh.

Despite the landslide victory in the 1973 parliamentary election, a deep political crisis arose due to the famine in 1974. This led Bangabandhu to take a masculine decision of moving from one-party domination in the Parliament to a single-party system. Therefore, the Constitution was amended for a one-party presidential form of government in January 1975. Hence, the fourth government under the leadership of Bangabandhu took
over. Bangladesh Krishak Shramik Awami League (BaKSAL) was formed dissolving all other political parties. Gender issues were also taken into consideration even in BaKSAL. Women constituted a significant front among the five fronts of BaKSAL, e.g., peasants, workers, youth, student and women. The creation of BaKSAL, however, threatened the status quo of the existing power relations in the society and promoted further factionalism in politics. Unfortunately, before the completion of his new political experiment, Bangabandhu along with his extended family members was assassinated on 15 August 1975. Bangladesh lost the “Greatest Leader” of all times. Even after the tragic incidents in 1975, women like Syeda Zohra Tajuddin, Sajeda Chowdhury, Ivy Rahman, Momtaj Begum, etc., were strong enough to hold the party as they were nurtured by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Even in the absence of Bangabandhu, they had the capacity to keep the party alive and strong and re-establish the vision of Bangabandhu in Bangladesh. The followings are stories of some female political leaders who were nurtured by Bangabandhu and have shown their excellence during the political turmoil.

Story of Begum Badrunnessa Ahmed

Budrunnesa’s political activism reached new heights when Awami League, led by Bangabandhu, began its Six-Point Movement in 1966. To accelerate the movement and ensure the participation of women, Bangabandhu directed her to launch women’s wing in the party. Thus, Begum Budrunnesa became the founding chairperson of the women’s wing of Awami League. As a part of the movement for the Six-Point demand, Budrunnesa then founded the Gana Shanskritik Parishad, which was an open cultural platform that pioneered the cultural movement against Ayub Khan’s regime spearheaded by prominent cultural personalities, such as Ehtesham Haider Chowdhury, Mustafa Sarwar, MA Hamid and Aminul Huq Badsha. In the 1970’s general election, Begum Budrunnesa was elected as MP under Awami League’s ticket. This time, Pakistan’s military regime led by General Yahya Khan refused to hand over power to Bengalis, which ultimately culminated in the Liberation
War of 1971. During the war, Begum Budrunnesa was separated from her family members for quite a couple of months. Later, she crossed the border through Cumilla town and entered India to join the war. During the war, she worked with Sarada Seva Sangha and Ramakrishna Mission to distribute essential food and medicine among the refugees. She frequently visited different refugee camps and submitted reports to Tajuddin Ahmad, Prime Minister of the Bangladesh Government-in-exile. After the independence, Budrunnesa established the Bangladesh Women’s Rehabilitation and Welfare Centre to shelter, train and help rehabilitate women affected by the war and Biranganas in particular. In 1973, she was re-elected as MP and served as the State Minister for Women, Education, Sports and Cultural Affairs.

Throughout her career, Budrunnesa mentored many famous political personalities of Bangladesh. Prominent parliamentarians Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury, Ivy Rahman and former Minister of Home Affairs Advocate Sahara Khatun started their political career under her wing. According to Sahara Khatun, “Begum Budrunnesa pioneered women’s participation in Bangladeshi politics. She suggested the involvement of more women in politics through welfare activities. In the late-1960s, under her leadership, we used to visit women to help them with their household chores and look after their children and ailing relatives. This was done to gain their confidence in Awami League so that they could join the women’s wing of Awami League and work for Bangladesh’s independence.”

As the closest neighbour of Bangabandhu, Begum Budrunnesa gained the respect and love of all the family members of Bangabandhu. She had the opportunity to discuss with Bangabandhu the issue of women’s rights in independent Bangladesh. “Bangabandhu’s and Budrunnesa’s houses were connected by a door. She was like family to him. She motivated him a lot to amend laws that had discriminatory provisions against women such as the Marriage Act, Divorce Act, etc. She also emphasized the need for secularism and gender equality in every aspect of the state,” adds Sahara Khatun.

Source: Jugantar, 16 March 2020.
Story of Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury

Following the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman’s ideologies, Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury joined Awami League’s politics in 1956. She never deviated from her political ideology. She was working for the public good. In 1965, she became the first woman leader to speak at the historic “Laldighi Maidan” in Chattogram in the presence of the central leaders of Awami League. In 1966, in response to Bangabandhu’s call for a Six-point Movement of the Awami League, she moved permanently from Chattogram to Dhaka. She played a courageous role in the anti-Ayub movement. In 1969, she was elected as the founder General Secretary of Mahila Awami League.

From 1969 to 1975, she served as the founding General Secretary of the Mahila Awami League with political wisdom. She was one of seven Members of National Assembly (MNAs) elected to the reserved women’s seat on 01 March 1971. In the 1973 parliamentary elections, Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury was elected MP in the reserved seat for women.

During the 1971 Liberation War Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury was the director of the “Gobra Nursing Camp” in Kolkata, for the Bangladesh government. She made important contribution in the rehabilitation of women who were tortured in the Liberation War. Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman formed the “Women’s Rehabilitation Board” to bring the oppressed women back to a healthy life. He gave the responsibility of managing the board to Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury. Other members of the board were Mamtaz Begum, Nurjahan Murshid and Rafia Akhtar Dolly.

Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury was the member of the Women’s Rehabilitation Board from 1972 to 1975. From 1972 to 1976, she was the National Commissioner of Bangladesh Girls Guide. She was one of the closest people to Bangabandhu.

Source: Jugantar, 16 March 2020.
Story of Mamtaz Begum

Mamtaz Begum was a Master of Arts Preliminary student of Dhaka University in 1968. In the same year, she was elected as the Vice President of Ruqayyah Hall of the University of Dhaka on behalf of the Chhatra League. Before that, there was no Bangladesh Chattra League (BCL) committee in Ruqayyah Hall. She expressed her desire to see Bangabandhu to the BCL President of Cumilla College, Syed Rezaur Rahman. He took Mamta Begum to house No. 32 in Dhanmondi. At that time Bangabandhu was sitting in the library. Mamta Begum entered the library and greeted Bangabandhu. At the very first sight, Bangabandhu treated Mamta Begum like his relative. She was impressed by Bangabandhu’s sincerity. After that Mamta Begum used to visit Bangabandhu’s house often. When Bangabandhu was accused in the Agartala conspiracy case, Begum Fazilatunnesa Mujib called Mamta Begum and advised her to take the girls ahead in the movement.

While remembering Bangabandhu, Mamta Begum, President of the National Women’s Organization, said, “Bangabandhu handed me 800 Taka and said, ‘You go and apply. You have to deposit 800 Taka in the party and get the National Assembly form’”. I took the 800 Taka and asked him, “where to take the form. He told me from the office of Awami League”. The party office was then in Purana Paltan. I came to the Awami League office and took the form. I signed in there. In the nomination, I saw my name was also there. Parliament would sit on 03 March 1971. We had to submit our nomination on 01 March 1971. Everything was organized from the party. They filled up the form. We were taken to the Election Commission. I went there and submitted the form, along with another 3 thousand Taka given by Bangabandhu. As an uncontested candidate, I was elected MNA on 01 March in the reserved women’s seat. We came to the Awami League office in Purana Paltan. Bangabandhu was then sitting with the radio. We are standing. Photographer Musa Bhai told the seven MNA of us to stand behind Bangabandhu. We stood. Musa Bhai took the pictures. The picture was published in the Daily Ittefaq on 02 March. On 01
March from the old Paltan office, it was announced on the radio at 2.00 o’clock in the afternoon that Parliament had been adjourned indefinitely. Bangabandhu told us, “The press conference will be held at Purbani Hotel.” He instructed us to go there. We went to Purbani. Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman said, “We were expecting a public meeting to be held in Paltan on 03 March.” We, the MNAs took the oath of independence along with Bangabandhu that, “we will not return home until the country is independent”. We did the preparatory work for 07 March. After the 07 March rally, we continued to prepare for the war. We held processions and meetings in different places of the country. Under the leadership of Bangabandhu, I had a backyard meeting with the girls of the neighbourhood.” 

Source: Juagantar, 16 March 2020.

5. Conclusion

This paper ends up by connecting the initiatives of Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina with the visions of Bangabandhu. The Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman started the process of uplifting the status of women by establishing their equal rights while his daughter Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has undertaken various steps to ensure the development of women and children in Bangladesh. She is committed to implementing the dreams of Bangabandhu by ensuring the rights and dignity of women as per the country’s constitution and by putting women’s empowerment at the heart of the development endeavours. Bangladeshi women have successfully shattered the glass ceilings in all directions from sports to politics, from business to police and armed forces, in the apex court, and at the top level of the administration and in the world. Their presence is felt everywhere. This paper concludes by stating that Bangladesh has emerged as a role model of women’s empowerment; life expectancy has increased, child and maternal mortality declined sharply, women’s empowerment increased; digital connectivity expanded markedly; and social harmony has been achieved.
Notes


23 Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Amar Dekha Noyachin, op. cit.