
Md Rafiqul Islam

BANGABANDHU SHEIKH MUJIB’S PHILOSOPHY OF FRIEND OF ‘HAVE-NOTS’: AN ANALYSIS

Abstract

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is the father of the Bengali nation who sacrificed his entire life for the greater cause of the Bengali people. Not only had he sacrificed his life for the emancipation and freedom of the Bengali nation but he also worked for the oppressed people across the world. That is why, he is widely recognised as the friend of the toiling masses. This article is an attempt to explore his contribution to the poor and needy people in his country and beyond. The existing literature, his speeches and his own books—The Unfinished Memoirs, Prison Diaries, New China I Saw—have given insight to explore how Bangabandhu contributed to the poor and needy people from his early life to his assassination. He dedicated his efforts and commitments towards his friends, neighbours, countrymen and above all to the oppressed people across the world. For his outstanding characteristics and qualities, Bangabandhu is called the friend of the ‘have-nots’. This article has the implications of making known his outstanding contribution to the oppressed people. Very few literature have highlighted this inner quality of Bangabandhu in an article format which is almost missing. Thus, this article has significance in academia to inform the readers and new generations about the outstanding contribution of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in the field of helping poor and oppressed people. This article also bears significance as it connects the philosophy of Bangabandhu with the present context at home and abroad to inform the readers that his philosophy of ‘have-nots’ is widely ignored in the present day.

Keywords: Bangabandhu, Haves, Have-nots, Oppressed People, Emancipation

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1. Introduction

This paper illustrates one of the best qualities of Bangabandhu that he exercised throughout his life, being a friend of have-nots.¹ Have-nots is a comprehensive term that refers to the section of people who are poor, deprived, excluded, and powerless in the social, economic and political process using any kind of terms like class, race, gender, sex, ethnicity, cast, etc. Bangabandhu emerged as a custodian of the voice for these have-nots people at home and abroad. In the 4th Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) conference in Algiers, the capital of Algeria, Bangabandhu unequivocally declared that he would take his stand behind the people who are poor and oppressed. At that meeting, he attended a secondary meeting with Badshah Faisal of Saudi Arabia, President Tito of Yugoslavia, President Anwar Sadat of Egypt, President Muammar Gaddafi of Libya and many more. In a speech at the meeting, Bangabandhu said, “The world is now divided into two, the oppressors and the oppressed, I’m with the oppressed.”²

In almost every stage of world history, people are divided into two groups—one that holds money and power, and the other who is deprived of money and power in social and political conditions. This division has always existed and has been the fundamental nature of world history. Karl Marx rightly pointed out this innate nature of class division and mentioned it in the opening sentence of his Communist Manifesto as, “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.”³ Throughout history, the division of society into oppressor and oppressed is present and they are in constant opposition to each other. This fight is sometimes hidden and sometimes open. In earlier ages, society was complex with a stratified class structure. For example, in medieval times there were feudal lords, vassals, guild-masters, journeymen, apprentices, and serfs. Modern bourgeois society sprang from the ruins of feudal societies. This society is also not free from class antagonisms. Now class antagonisms have become simplified, as society increasingly splits into two rival camps—the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

¹ This article uses the term have-nots to describe the needy and poor people. Bangabandhu in his lifetime mentioned in his speeches that he cares for people—the oppressed and poor people. Thus, some authors have used this section of people in different names such as toiling masses, poor, have-nots, and oppressed people. For example, Professor Atiur Rahman, Bangabandhu Chair Professor of Dhaka University, has written an article on Bangabandhu as the friend of 'have-nots' in the Financial Express, dated 17 May 2020. This article thus, consciously uses the term 'have-nots.'

² Shoeb Chowdhury, “NAM Summit and Bangabandhu,” *Daily Asian Age*, October 21, 2019, <https://dailyasianage.com/news/201601/nam-summit-and-bangabandhu>.

³ Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels* (International Publishers, 1930).

However, each time there is a fight it ends either in a revolutionary reconstruction of society or in the common ruin of the classes. The revolution is constructed by the strong leadership of some people who champion themselves by sacrificing their lives for the sake of common people to ensure the rights of the mass people. Bangabandhu talked about and raised his voice for the common people. This stand for the oppressed people was the reflection of his life-long struggle for the oppressed as he championed equity, humanity, and justice throughout his life. He never compromised with his ideals as long as he lived.

It is important to note that Bangabandhu did not utter this statement in the 4th NAM conference by accident. It came from his belief, nature, and lifelong work for the poor and destitute people in his country and across the world. Until his death, Bangabandhu practiced this altruism and humanism for the masses. Thus, at a public gathering in Dhaka during her visit in March 1972, Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi pointed out that, “You may lack a lot of resources today, but you have a world-renowned leader who has dedicated his entire life to 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.”⁴ Bangladesh was fortunate enough to have such a leader who appeared as a vanguard to achieve independence. However, hardly any literature has been dedicated to exploring the innate quality of Bangabandhu in the area of his contribution to helping and working for the poor and needy people in his own country and beyond.

This paper is dedicated to discussing the highest philosophy of Bangabandhu—the friends of the ‘have-nots’. In doing so, this paper tends to answer the question, ‘what are Bangabandhu’s key efforts and commitment toward the oppressed people across the country and beyond?’ The major aim of this paper is to shed light on how Bangabandhu perceived the toiling masses in his country and across the world. This paper has also highlighted how a home-grown national hero of the liberation war of Bangladesh worked for the working classes, poor and oppressed people. This paper has significance to shed light on Bangabandhu’s ideals and vision for the oppressed people in the present context in the face of growing inequality and discrimination. In contemporary Bangladesh, it is seen that the government is determined to meet the deadlines of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to edge poverty and foster

⁴ A.K.M. Atiqur Rahman, “Bangabandhu, the Thunder Voice for World Peace and Freedom,” *Daily Sun*, August 14, 2019, <https://www.daily-sun.com/arcprint/details/415206/Bangabandhu-the-Thunder-Voice-for-World-Peace-and-Freedom/2019-08-15>.

social justice. This initiative correlates with the principle of ‘have-nots’. But his philosophy for helping poor and oppressed people is widely ignored, and thus the gap between the poor and rich is increasing significantly day by day.

This paper is written based on a descriptive manner scrutinising secondary literature. The qualitative method has been applied for searching the literature and compiling, analysing, and presenting it in a written format. As qualitative methods, historical data and content analysis have been used to draw his contribution in the area of “friends of ‘have-nots’”. The speeches and comments Bangabandhu gave in different occasions have been searched, collected and used in appropriate places. His three books, *The Unfinished Memoirs*, *Prison Diaries*, and *New China I Saw* have given ample data to relate his work and commitment to the poor and needy people. Indeed, these three books contain rich data on Bangabandhu’s life, work and contribution. In order to present the points and arguments of Bangabandhu, secondary literature has been used to substantiate the information. As part of the data gathering and presentation process, the author searched current search engines such as Google Scholar and other reliable websites. However, very few books and articles are available in the English language on the topic. Thus, the author has relied on Bengali books, encyclopaedia and popular articles published in daily newspapers. However, the author has carefully chosen articles and books since many books have been written within the last few years, and that very few of these sources substantiate his contribution in this field. A few websites dedicated to the work of Bangabandhu (for example, *Speeches | 100 Years of Mujib*, <https://mujib100.gov.bd/pages/mujib/speeches.html>) helped to collect information and substantiate the argument of this paper.

In order to address the questions and major objectives, this paper provides an overview of the concept of ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’. Secondly, the article highlights the contributions of Bangabandhu in helping the poor and destitute people. This section is divided into seven sub-sections: (i) early childhood and development of the sense of neighbourhood; (ii) student life and friend to the have-nots; (iii) early political life and bonding to the poor people; (iv) extending hands to the poor people as a party leader; (v) sensible behaviour and kindness to the prisoners; (vi) Prime Minister and a friend to the have-nots; and (vii) strong commitment to the poor and oppressed people at the global level. This paper also sheds light on the relevance of his philosophy in the present context in the face of growing inequality and discrimination. Finally, this paper provides a discussion and conclusion.

2. The Concept of 'Haves' and 'Have-nots'

'Haves' and 'have-nots' are sometimes used to refer to the financial and social conditions of people. 'Haves' is used to mean the people who have resources and social position. On the other hand, 'have-nots' is used to refer to those people who do not have resources and social positions. These two terms are used interchangeably to distinguish social classes. Based on Marxist philosophy, the property occupies a pivotal condition as it determines the development and progress of human society. The property at the same time works as a parameter to divide society into two classes—the property owner, and those who do not have property.⁵ The first category of people is called the 'haves' who control and create social institutions like religion, ethics and family.⁶ On the other hand, the 'have-nots' are deprived of access to the opportunity to control the social institutions. Since time immemorial, this notion and structure of 'have', and 'have-nots' has existed in almost all social systems. Thus, the history of humankind is the history of domination of the property owners over the 'have-nots'.

Moreover, the concept of 'haves' and 'have-nots' can be defined based on the economic capability of each country and the ability of the people to consume.⁷ According to Amartya Sen, this is the access capacity of the people to the market, not the resources they have.⁸ Historically, economic conditions and the production of goods determine people's ability to consume. People living in affluent countries can spend more and consume more than people who live in poor countries. Their economic condition enables them access to resources as well as to buy whatever they desire. Based on this notion, there are three core areas of wealthy industrialised countries, all of which are found in the Northern Hemisphere: North America, Western Europe, and Eastern Asia.⁹ Other wealthy countries can be found dispersed in regions with large amounts of natural resources, such as the Middle East, or places of strategic location, such as Singapore. However, the world's poorer economies remain in the peripheral countries in Africa, Latin America, and Asia.

⁵ N.D. Arora and S. S. Awasthy, *Political Theory and Political Thought* (New Delhi: Har-Anand Publications, 2007), 287.

⁶ Branko Milanovic, *The Haves and the Have-nots: A Brief and Idiosyncratic History of Global Inequality* (New York: Basic Books, 2011).

⁷ Lara Cushing, Rachel Morello-Frosch, Madeline Wander, and Manuel Pastor, "The Haves, the Have-nots, and the Health of Everyone: The Relationship Between Social Inequality and Environmental Quality," *Annual Review of Public Health* 36, (2015).

⁸ Sabina Alkire, "Why the Capability Approach?," *Journal of Human Development* 6, no. 1 (2005): 115-135.

⁹ Folker Fröbel, Jürgen Heinrichs, and Otto Kreye, *The New International Division of Labour: Structural Unemployment in Industrialised Countries and Industrialisation in Developing Countries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

Access to opportunity and advantages also determines the categorisation of ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’. This concept of opportunity and advantages enables us to understand who gets more advantages than others in the world. People with access to opportunities and advantages can generally achieve a higher standard of living than people who lack opportunities. This can be true for individuals, global corporations, or whole countries. Countries with opportunities and advantages over others can achieve a higher standard of living for their people than countries without such opportunities or advantages. In this condition, some factors, such as the amounts of available natural or human resources, arable land for farming, forests for timber, and freshwater for fishing, determine the economic strength of a country. Strategic locations and special zones also determine the opportunities and advantages for some countries that generally provide greater access to world markets.¹⁰ Examples of human resources are a large labour pool or a higher percentage of educated professionals.

Primarily, the amount of resources and opportunities determine the division of ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’ people. This categorisation is also determined by the access to and enjoyment of social, political and economic rights. The following sections analyse how and why Bangabandhu was concerned for the ‘have-nots’ class not only in his country but also across the world.

3. Bangabandhu—the Friend of Have-nots

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (17 March 1920-15 August 1975) is known as a politician, revolutionary leader, activist and humanistic leader. Despite his revolution for political and economic emancipation, Bangabandhu ruled the independent Bangladesh as Prime Minister from 1972 to 1975. The lesson of altruism began at an early age and flourished gradually in the different stages of life and ended with the sacrifice for the great cause of human beings. Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman learned the lesson concerning how to help needy people and expanded his hand throughout his life, as he can be seen leading relief efforts for disaster-affected people in the country. The following discussions describe how he has become the friend of ‘have-nots’.

3.1 *Responsible to the Neighbours at Early Childhood*

The sense of belongingness and responsibility to the poor people developed in Bangabandhu’s mind from early life. From his childhood, he learned to live amidst

¹⁰ Albert Szymanski, “Dependence, Exploitation and Economic Growth,” *JPMS: Journal of Political and Military Sociology* 4, no. 1 (1976): 53.

joy and sorrow. This sense developed slowly and unconsciously but noticed strongly by his neighbours.¹¹ As an example, young Mujib felt very sympathetic and kind to the poor people who had been affected by poor harvests and were struggling to manage to find two meals a day. The prolonged and severe drought caused severe food shortages and starvation in his ancestral place, Tungipara. Bangabandhu observed this hard situation and became sympathetic to the poor people. He pleaded with his father and motivated him to distribute paddy from their own 'gola'¹² (storehouse) in order to ease the suffering of the distressed people. Historian Syed Anwar Husain outlines this situation:

“One morning, the boy Sheikh Mujib invited quite a large number of such peasants; each of them was given paddy and rice from his family stock.”¹³

This was the example of a broad, kind and benevolent mind towards the needy neighbours that developed from his tender mind and transformed throughout his life. Another incident also shows his attitude as the friend of the 'have-nots' from a young age. At the beginning of the academic session, Bangabandhu donated all the money given to him by his father to some of the poor students to buy their books and clothes. Young Mujib gave importance to the philanthropy of buying books and garments for the poor students instead of spending on his own. These were examples of kindness as well as his responsibilities towards the poor people in his society, which he got from his conscience and feelings for the needy people.

From his early life, Bangabandhu was friend of his fellow poor boys and passed a very joyful life with cooperation and understanding. This is how the young Mujib was socialised in society. According to Huq (1973), “The thought must have stirred in his heart that the real value of the money which belonged to a man was to be assessed by the number of human benefits that its expenditure could produce.”¹⁴ From early boyhood, Bangabandhu realised the intrinsic value of human relations and socialisation with peer groups that ultimately developed his youthful mind to be transformed into a growing, mature, and benevolent human being.

¹¹ Obaidul Huq, *Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib: A Leader with Difference* (Dhaka: Radical Asia Publications, 1973), 13.

¹² 'Gola' is made of bamboo and wood to store foodstuff in the rural areas of Bangladesh.

¹³ Syed Anwar Husain, “Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (1920-1975),” in *Twenty Great Bengalis*, ed. A Majeed Khan (Dhaka: The University Press Limited, 2008), 259-279.

¹⁴ Huq, *Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib*, 14.

3.2 *Friend to the ‘Have-nots’ from Student Life*

Bangabandhu’s student life was colourful. He was not a typical student as his frequent illness and the transferable job of his father interrupted his student life. Due to this prolonged student life, Bangabandhu completed his matriculation examination in 1942 at the age of twenty-two.¹⁵ Although he was not a serious student, he was very active in outdoor activities such as sports and social activities. More importantly, he was very kind to the poor students and worked with his home tutor Kazi Abdul Hamid who formed the Muslim Welfare Association—a society dedicated to helping the poor students in Goplagonj.¹⁶ He actively worked in this association and visited every household to collect rice, which was used to buy books, pay examination fees and meet other expenses for the poor students.

In his Unfinished Memoirs, Bangabandhu noted, “He had to do a lot of work for his tutor—collecting money and searching lodging house for the helpless students.”¹⁷ This example shows his commitment and dedication to the poor students. This teaching of ‘philanthropy’¹⁸ was inculcated in his young mind to work for people in society who faced difficulties in their lives. Eventually, Bangabandhu took responsibility for the association after the demise of his home tutor and continued the society without interruption. Moreover, he was entrusted with the position of secretary when his Muslim teacher became the President. This association played an important role in collecting money from Muslim houses to spend for poor students. Sometimes, this association forced people to help the organisation for poor students. In his own words Bangabandhu wrote, “If any Muslim refused to help us, we would join forces to make him pay his share.”¹⁹ This confession reflects strong dedication towards poor people. He knew that contributions from each Muslim family enabled them to run the operation and help poor students.

From his early childhood, Bangabandhu was a very ‘obstinate boy’²⁰ which led him to take any action according to his own way. Even his parents did not restrain

¹⁵ Sayyid A Karim, *Sheikh Mujib: Triumph and Tragedy* (Dhaka: The University Press Limited, 2005), 17.

¹⁶ Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, *The Unfinished Memoirs* (Dhaka: The University Press Limited, 2012), 9.

¹⁷ Rahman, *The Unfinished Memoirs*, 8.

¹⁸ Philanthropy is a term that denotes an initiative to help others. It also means generosity in all its forms. By philanthropic mentality, people invest their gifts of “time, talent and treasure” to help make life better for other people. *Oxford Learners Dictionaries* defines philanthropy as “the practice of helping the poor and those in need, especially by giving money”.

¹⁹ Rahman, *The Unfinished Memoirs*, 8.

²⁰ Rahman, *The Unfinished Memoirs*, 9.

him from doing these kinds of tasks. This teaching and commitment eventually resulted in him becoming a humanitarian leader. Bangabandhu moved to Calcutta (now Kolkata) for higher education. In this new location he again became involved with humanitarian tasks and kept on standing by the 'have-nots'. The famine in Bengal in 1943, which caused more than 30 million human lives, shocked him terribly. He mourned deeply seeing so many starving people and uncountable dead bodies on the street. Bangabandhu stated:

“And now I saw what we were reduced to mothers dying in the streets while their babies still suckled; dogs competing with people for leftovers in garbage dumps; children abandoned by their mothers who had run away or sold them driven by hunger. At times, they failed to do even that since there would be no buyers. They would knock on doors and cry out: ‘Give us some food, I am dying and can’t go on; at the very least give me some of the water that you have strained off the boiled rice’. She would often die even as she uttered these words! What were we to do? We distributed our hostel leftovers among the famished, but how far could that help solve such a massive problem?”²¹

This revelation proves his heart-burning attention to the poverty-stricken and hungry people during the famine. In association with other students, he did a mammoth task of saving the lives of people dying for lack of food. The famine in 1943 was caused by the mass transportation of food by the British Raj to feed its army. It was fabricated starvation in the Indian sub-continent.²² Bangabandhu first showed his leadership skills in 1943 when he distributed rice to the famine-stricken people from his father’s stock in secret.²³ During the crisis, Bangabandhu worked hand-in-hand and helped the needy people.

Due to this terrible situation in the Indian subcontinent, Bangabandhu decided to stop his studies and join in the efforts for a ‘soup kitchen’ formed by H.S. Suhrawardy to help the distressed people. A true human can show such a sign of courage and dedication to engage in humanitarian actions by stopping even his education. Involvement in other humanitarian actions from time to time prolonged

²¹ Rahman, *The Unfinished Memoirs*, 18.

²² Shashi Tharoor, *Inglorious Empire: What the British did to India* (London: Penguin UK, 2018); Kalim Siddiqui, “The Political Economy of Famines during the British Rule in India: A Critical Analysis,” *World Financial Review*, July-August 2020.

²³ Tharoor, *Inglorious Empire*.

his student life. His father was also positive in his actions as Bangabandhu dedicated himself to the cause of the common people. However, his father always reminded him to continue his studies and become a good man. In his own words, Bangabandhu noted, "If you don't study you won't become a good human being. And one other thing: if you have sincerity of purpose and honesty of purpose you will never be defeated in life."²⁴ Bangabandhu was a very loving son thus he always took the advice his father gave him. Keeping the words of his father in mind, he went to Calcutta for his examinations despite his poor preparation due to his engagement in relief work.

In summary, it can be said that Bangabandhu in his student life was an agile, dedicated youth who used his time and energy for the benefit of the people. He was the friend of the poor and needy people. In times of crisis, young Mujib sacrificed his valuable time.

3.3 *Early Political Life and Bonding with the Common People*

Young Bangabandhu's vision was to involve himself in politics for the greater cause of the people and the nation as a whole. From when he was a student he showed his leadership capability as was identified by H.S. Suhrawardy. His strong political commitment and enthusiasm meant he attended all the meetings held in his area to see the leaders and what they said for the betterment of the people. While a student at Islamia College in Calcutta his two favourite interests were politics and tea.²⁵ However, his political affiliation was to ensure the betterment of the people, more particularly the 'have-nots'. Huq (1973) argued in this regard, "To Mujib politics was a serious business which involved the destiny of the people. He made politics truly people-oriented that is, brought it to the doorstep of the people where it belonged."²⁶ Bangabandhu was by nature very hard towards the oppressors, but very soft to his people. He always thought about his people, not his career and family affairs. H.S. Suhrawardy identified his dynamic quality as a political worker and farsightedness in working for the people.

The philosophy and work of some renowned personalities in the Indian sub-continent greatly shaped Bangabandhu's political life, thoughts and vision. The teachings and work of Netaji Subash Chandra Bose, Mahatma Gandhi, A.K.

²⁴ Rahman, *The Unfinished Memoirs*.

²⁵ Huq, *Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib*.

²⁶ Huq, *Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib*, 14

Fazlul Huq and H.S. Suhrawardy greatly influenced his life and work.²⁷ From the teaching of those leaders, he learned how to love the common people. In his early political life, while working with H.S. Suhrawardy, Bangabandhu visited different places to organise the Muslim League as a political party in the Indian sub-continent. Surprisingly, only the elite Muslim class, Landlords, and Zamindars ruled the Muslim League. The common Muslim people rarely joined in the party activities. Bangabandhu and H.S. Suhrawardy changed the power structure and transformed it into a party for the common people. Bangabandhu's role as a young political leader was outstanding in mobilising the masses and strengthening the Muslim League. As a student leader, he was highly critical of the encapsulation and concentration of power in the hands of the elite. He was a strong supporter of the distribution of power to all people considering the regions of the poor and the rich. He was also critical of the Khawaja family who tended to capture all positions and power in Bengal. Thus, during the council of the Muslim League in 1946 Bangabandhu demanded a proper share of the common people in politics and asked H.S. Suhrawardy not to compromise with the feudal Khawaja family in sharing position and power.²⁸

During his time at Islamia College (now Maulana Azad College) in Calcutta, Bangabandhu worked as a general secretary of the College Student's Union. As the general secretary, he maintained a good relationship with the manager in charge and that enabled him to help the poor students in their study as well as living in the hostel. Whenever any needy student came to him, Bangabandhu helped them in different capacities. About the society and politics, he possessed sharp knowledge. He realised that the Bengalis were poor because they did not try improve their condition. For centuries, the foreign rulers dominated the Bengalis. Thus, he tried his best to form a separate entity and political forum to ensure the rights of the poor Bengalis. His generosity, kindness, empathy and dedication towards the poor and needy people were felt vehemently during and after the 'Direct Action Day' in 1946 called by Mohammad Ali Zinnah. Bangabandhu extended his hand to the wounded and frightened people with support and cooperation.

It can be seen that Bangabandhu's early political life was indeed his student life when he attended political programmes and had contact with veteran political leaders which helped sharpen his political knowledge. In his college days in Calcutta, he did very little besides doing politics.²⁹ He was more eager to do something for the

²⁷ Husain, "Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (1920-1975)," 261.

²⁸ Rahman, *The Unfinished Memoirs*, 46.

²⁹ Huq, *Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib*, 15.

people and was transformed into a friend of the masses through the struggles against the British Raj, Zamindar and Muslim upper-class leaders who dominated the people.

3.4 *Extending His Hands to the Poor People as a Party Leader*

Bangabandhu became politically active when he joined the All India Muslim Students Federation in 1940.³⁰ He joined the Bengal Muslim League in 1943. During this period, he worked actively for the League's cause of a separate Muslim state of Pakistan, and in 1946, he became the general secretary of the Islamia College Students Union. During this time he "emerged as the most powerful man in the party" because of his knowledge in politics as well as closeness to H.S. Suhrawardy.³¹ After obtaining his B.A. degree in 1947, Bangabandhu was one of the Muslim politicians who closely worked under H.S. Suhrawardy during the communal violence that broke out in Calcutta, in 1946, just before the partition of India.³² His inclination for politics and holding a political position was not a miracle but was a continuous process through showing dedication and commitment to people and the political process. He struggled for the people, undertook politics for the people and suffered for the people. About his commitment to the people, Bangabandhu wrote:

"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 my very being."³³

In his entire political life from a layman to party head, Bangabandhu worked for the betterment of the people which enabled him to become a friend of Bengal as well as a friend of the masses. As a party leader he worked hard to transform the Muslim League from the platform of the rich to the vanguard of the poor and middle-class people.³⁴

After the creation of Pakistan, Bangabandhu returned to Dhaka from Calcutta intending to work for communal harmony in East Pakistan. The immediate aftermath

³⁰ Syed Nur Ahmad, *From Martial Law to Martial Law: Politics in the Punjab, 1919-1958* (London: Routledge, 2019).

³¹ M. Bhaskaran Nair, *Politics in Bangladesh: A Study of Awami League, 1949-58* (New Delhi: Northern Book Centre, 1990), 99.

³² Zillur R Khan, *The Third World Charismat: Sheikh Mujib and the Struggle for Freedom* (Dhaka: University Press Limited, 1996), 32.

³³ "Sheikh Mujib's Quotations," 7th March Foundation, <https://www.7thmarch.com/quotations/>.

³⁴ Karim, *Sheikh Mujib*, 17.

of the division of the Indian sub-continent was widely marked by communal riots, killing and destruction of property by the contending religions.³⁵ The Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs were all engaged in riots, and brutally killed innocent people in many locations. Bangabandhu returned to Dhaka to stop further killings in East Pakistan and tried to assure the Hindu community about living in Pakistan, as they felt fearful and insecure.³⁶ Bangabandhu visited every corner of the country and motivated the students in major colleges to oppose the despotic decision of the government.

Bangabandhu knew that the formation of Pakistan would not ensure the rights and freedoms of people in East Pakistan. He therefore put emphasis on the formation of a strong political platform. Within two months of the creation of Pakistan, Bangabandhu realised that “Bengalis have not achieved true freedom; they have to attain it through a revolutionary program.”³⁷ He then engaged in organising the ‘Democratic Youth League’³⁸ to ensure communal harmony as he considered it vital to form a student organisation. After admission to the Law Department, University of Dhaka, Bangabandhu consulted with the student leaders to form a student forum in East Pakistan, and finally on 04 January 1948, the East Pakistan Muslim Students League was established. As a young student political leader, he keenly observed the aftermath of the political situation of the new state and became disheartened to see that corruption and anti-people government policies were the main hurdles in attaining the rights and freedoms of the common people.

Bangabandhu was very loyal to the people of his country, thus any law that brought harm to the people and property always concerned him greatly. He always protested about such laws and encouraged public opinion against every unjust decision and law. For example, Bangabandhu expressed his deep concern when the newly independent Pakistan enforced a law that banned the Dawals system. According to this system, poor farmers who work on other people’s lands get food grain in exchange for their labour. This decision of the Pakistani government was very inhumane for the poor people because the poor farmers were completely dependent on the food grain that came from other regions. Bangabandhu demanded the abolishment of the

³⁵ Suranjan Das, “Communal Violence in Twentieth-century Colonial Bengal: An Analytical Framework,” *Social Scientist* (1990): 21-37.

³⁶ Rahman, *The Unfinished Memoirs*.

³⁷ Rahman, *The Unfinished Memoirs*, 90.

³⁸ The Democratic Youth League was established in July 1947 in Dhaka by the students, political workers and non-communal and secular elements of society. This organisation aimed to develop a future course of action through deliberations towards the protection and integrity of the Bengali language and culture.

law otherwise many of the poor people would die from starvation.³⁹ Consequently, the government finally announced that the Dawals would get their rice back from their respective districts upon submitting a receipt to the authority. Surprisingly, many of the farmers did not get their rice despite submitting the receipts and when Bangabandhu heard this news, he led a procession against the local authority so that the poor Dawals would get their due share of rice.⁴⁰

As a student of Dhaka University and a young conscientious political leader, Bangabandhu was very proactive in every matter and occasion where the interest of the common people was connected. He criticised the decision of the university authority when the authority reduced the number of the employees, as that curtailed the employment opportunities of the people. He realised that the number of students had increased but not the number of employed. As a result, employees had to work all day long. There was no job security of the employee and the government could sack any employee at any time. Moreover, the government curtailed the accommodation facilities and other benefits of the employees. Bangabandhu spoke to the employees and protested against the decision of the university: he then organised the students' leaders to work for the poorer employees. Due to his active participation and strikes, the university authority expelled him from the university without showing any valid reason. Nevertheless, Bangabandhu never compromised with any unjust decision. The university authority ordered the protesting students to sign a bond and go back to class. Almost all the student leaders signed the bond and left the movement except for Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Bangabandhu told the authorities that he would not compromise with any unjust decision of the university authority consequently, he was sent to jail where he had a miserable time. He even left his education unfinished at the Dhaka University. This action signifies that Bangabandhu was a man with a kind-hearted approach to the deprived and marginalised people. He could have compromised with the university authority like the other student leaders, but he remained standing as the last man in favour of the rights of the fourth-class employee of the Dhaka University.

After the creation of Pakistan, Bangabandhu thought that he would live in peace with his family. However, his expectations were thwarted when the Pakistani rulers kept him in jail day after day without any logical grounds: his only offence was that he used to talk about the rights of his countrymen. In the jail Bangabandhu

³⁹ Rahman, *The Unfinished Memoirs*.

⁴⁰ Rahman, *The Unfinished Memoirs*, 111.

managed to meet many people including political prisoners, robbers, outlawed people, and even the most notorious people. On many occasions, he talked to them and wanted to know why they have been imprisoned.

As a young political leader, Bangabandhu also learnt the power of restraint to cope with every adverse situation. The environment of the jail was not good and in some instances, he had a very miserable life with the poor living and sanitation situation. He was also given the ordinary food that used to be fed to the general prisoners which affected his health terribly. This lesson led to him forming his opinions concerning the situation of the common people in his country. Although he was forced to live in jail for a long time, he never thought to compromise with the authority; rather he dreamt of working for the deprived people who had been in jail year after year with poor food, living conditions, and sanitation.

Indeed, Bangabandhu's dream was to work for the people. His dream seemed to parallel the historic statement of Martin Luther King Jr "I have a dream"—the movement for civil and political rights, and emancipation from racism.⁴¹ Bangabandhu's dream was to do something for the people of his country. In Khulna Jail, when the civil surgeon asked him, why he was in prison for so long, he replied that he wanted to take power.⁴² He would seize power to serve the people of his country. The civil surgeon was surprised to hear this statement because he had never heard such an answer from any political prisoner. Bangabandhu emerged as a true friend of the people and he was even ready to sacrifice his life for their freedom and rights. As a young political leader, he had little power in the political arena, but his contributions were high enough to bring enough changes in the socio-economic context of the region. He knew that the rulers of Pakistan would not work for the betterment of the people in East Pakistan, thus leadership is extremely essential for those who would speak out for the poor.

Bangabandhu gradually worked to fill the gap in the political arena through his commitment, dedication, and feelings towards the people. As a political leader, he urged the elites of Pakistan to address the food crisis in East Bengal.⁴³ He emphasised on the need for equal share for the people of East Pakistan. He knew that people in this region were poor because they have been dominated by the Hindu businessmen

⁴¹ "I Have a Dream, Address Delivered at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom," August 28, 1963, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/i-have-dream-address-delivered-march-washington-jobs-and-freedom>.

⁴² Rahman, *The Unfinished Memoirs*, 182.

⁴³ Rahman, *The Unfinished Memoirs*, 148.

for a long time and also deprived by the Muslim League elite class who ruled the country but did very little for the betterment of people.

In his political career, Bangabandhu urged his countrymen to launch non-cooperative movements and hartals against unjust decisions, however he was very much concerned about the daily needs of the poor. Thus, in his speech on 07 March he showed humanism⁴⁴ towards the poor people. He urged his countrymen to be prepared to face the enemy with whatever they had at their hands, but he also reminded them that:

“To ensure that no suffering is inflicted on the poor people, to ensure that my people do not suffer, from tomorrow the following things will be put out of range of the ‘hartal’. Rickshaws and hackney carriages will work; railway trains and launches will run.”⁴⁵

This is how Bangabandhu showed his sense of humanism towards the poor and needy people. A leader with high acumen and political knowledge can take such a timely decision when speaking in front of millions of oppressed people who expected an order from a leader to fight against the oppressive government. Moreover, he urged his people to protect each other irrespective of religion, culture, creed, caste etc. His philanthropic leadership qualities were also expressed by his spontaneous appeal towards the rich and capable people to help the poor and incapable people. Bangabandhu urged:

“We, from Awami League, will try our best to help those who are embracing martyrdom and those who have received injuries. Those who are capable, please extend your monetary support, whatever you can to our relief fund. And every owner of industries will pay salaries to all workers who participated in the 7-day ‘hartal’.”⁴⁶

Bangabandhu knew that many people have already fallen into trouble and crisis due to political turmoil and hartal. He asked his party men to extend their hands

⁴⁴ Humanism is a rationalistic approach and sentiment valuing the lives of the people, freedom and needs. This philosophical stance ensures human dignity. The *Oxford Learners Dictionary* defines humanism as “a system of thought that considers that solving human problems with the help of reason is more important than religious beliefs. It emphasises the fact that the basic nature of humans is good.”

⁴⁵ Shakila Nur, “The Struggle this Time is the Struggle for Our Independence: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman’s Historic 7th March Speech,” *Advances in Language and Literary Studies* 10, no. 2 (2019):107-120.

⁴⁶ Nur, “The Struggle this Time is the Struggle for Our Independence.”

towards needy people. A man with a kind heart and with such vision and thoughts can certainly have such pragmatic thinking before calling an all-out strike in the country.

3.5 *Kindness to the Poor and Oppressed during Prison Life*

It is already been noted that Bangabandhu had to pass twelve years of his life in jail. He treated the poor prisoners in jail without discrimination. In his own words:

“I was forced to go to jail five times. I have been imprisoned as a political prisoner. I have also had to suffer rigorous imprisonment. I also had to go to jail as a *hajoti* (prisoner). So, I have understood the condition of all kinds of prisoners with my own life.”⁴⁷

The prisons had facilities including cleaning, cooking, laundry, and manual labour that functioned using prison labour. Although Bangabandhu was a political prisoner and was treated with respect by other prisoners, he treated them as fellow human beings in return. The various letters of correspondence from Bangabandhu during his prison days detail how he often conversed with prisoners and listened to their predicaments.⁴⁸ The details of his time spent in prison involving his friendly relationship with all the nearby prisoners indicates his kindness to the poor and oppressed during his prison life. Bangabandhu was vehemently against the most heinous forms of crimes, but his records show that he understood how prisoners were more often than not over-punished for their deeds, and how a little human compassion can go a long way in improving lives within even the desolate confines of the prison. Bangabandhu was very sympathetic to the prisoners with mental illness. The jail authorities behaved poorly towards these people. Observing their suffering and treatment in jail Bangabandhu said to his wife, “If I ever become mad, don’t let me go to the mental hospital or the jail.”⁴⁹ This comment reflects his kindness to the mentally sick prisoners.

3.6 *Friend of the Poor as the Prime Minister*

Bangabandhu was imprisoned in Pakistan for the entire period of the liberation war and the Pakistani rulers released him immediately after their defeat in the war. He returned to the liberated soil in Bangladesh on 10 February 1971 after

⁴⁷ Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, *Karagarer Rojnamcha (The Prison Diaries)* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 2017), 27.

⁴⁸ Rahman, *Karagarer Rojnamcha*, 27.

⁴⁹ Rahman, *Karagarer Rojnamcha*, 64.

visiting London and New Delhi. After returning to his free country, Bangabandhu became the Prime Minister of the new country. As Prime Minister he had to face mounting problems and difficulties in the administration of the war-ravaged country, however, he was determined to ensure the freedom and equal rights of all the people. Bangabandhu declared with optimism, “We want to build a Golden Bengal on the ruins of this Bengal, now in the wilderness. The mothers of the future will smile and their children play in that Bengal. We will build a society free from exploitation.”⁵⁰ Bangabandhu was a visionary and he always loved to dream of a country where people would live with prosperity and happiness and was dedicated to building his country as Sonar Bangla.

As an initial policy, Bangabandhu formed a planning commission headed by renowned economist Dr Nurul Islam with a view to the economic emancipation of the people.⁵¹ Bangabandhu undertook the nationalisation policy where he wanted to ensure workers’ participation in the management of industries.⁵² His understanding was to ensure the rights and privileges of the working classes in the production sectors, as they are the sole stakeholders in the industries. He held the spirit of a vernacular leadership aiming to set a form of system that would essentially ensure the rights of the mass people. Regarding the nationalisation policy, Bangabandhu asserted,

“We must create a system in which the people from the grass-roots can fully participate in the decision making and implementing process. Therefore, I want to decentralise the administrative system and rearrange the representative institutions in such a way that they will reflect the needs and hopes of not just one public but different publics as well.”⁵³

Despite enormous criticism of his policy, as Prime Minister, Bangabandhu wanted to develop the country so that the poor people could change their positions into self-sufficient and prosperous ones. Thus, he declared, “Our independence will become valueless if we fail to provide food to the foodless, home for the homeless, jobs to the jobless.”⁵⁴ To provide food, shelter and health facilities to the poor people, Bangabandhu was a proponent of socialism.

⁵⁰ “Radio and Television Address March 26, 1972,” *The Daily Star*, March 17, 2020, <https://www.daily-bangladesh.com/english/Bangabandhus-speech-on-March-26-1972/38780>.

⁵¹ Karim, *Sheikh Mujib*, 18

⁵² Karim, *Sheikh Mujib*, 278.

⁵³ Syed Serajul Islam, “The Role of the State in the Economic Development of Bangladesh during the Mujib Regime (1972-1975),” *The Journal of Developing Areas* 19, no. 2 (1985): 185-208.

⁵⁴ A H Khan, *Father of the Nation* (Dhaka: Bangladesh Cultural Forum, 2011), 232.

Bangabandhu was very sincere in ensuring the rights of the working classes. Although there were enormous criticisms against the socialist policy, as well as division among the policymakers, he supported the socialist policy and went for the nationalisation of all industries. In a statement on 09 February 1972, he declared,

“I assure our workers that a basic goal of the socialist economy which we are committed to establishing will be securing the just rights of workers and ensuring their welfare. A plan is being prepared whereby measures of nationalisation would be combined with new arrangements to ensure workers’ participation in the management of industries. Indeed, they would themselves share in the fruits of increased production.”⁵⁵

Such a statement reflects a plan to ensure workers’ rights and benefit in the production system, however, this nationalisation policy did not produce an economic benefit for the have-nots as there was a conflict in every sphere of life in the initial days of the new country. The vested interest groups, anti-liberation forces and international conspiracy worked as a barrier to the benefits of independence to the poor people. The political and military bureaucrats, party men and business classes became corrupt and they amalgamated resources at the cost of the suffering of the poor and famine across the country. Bangabandhu was frustrated to see the changing scenario of the country and he was motivated to form a platform one-party system BAKSAL. He wanted to form this platform to include all sections of people except the anti-liberation force and ultra-leftists who were the real troublemaker in the aftermath of independence. Through this platform, Bangabandhu wanted to include the local and poor in the decision-making process so that they were able to change their fate.

It was not only the formation of a political platform, but also the policy of nationalisation and land reforms to distribute the resources to the farmers and the landless people which was important. Based on socialism, Bangabandhu initiated nationalisation of the medium and small-sized industries with the view of giving job opportunities to the people. He wanted to break the concentrated industrial policy where only twenty-two families occupied all major industries which seemed to Bangabandhu as contrary to justice and equality in the society.⁵⁶

Along with the industrial policy, Bangabandhu took on land reform policy. According to this policy, people who cultivate land and produce food grains must

⁵⁵ Islam, *The Role of the State in the Economic Development*, 188.

⁵⁶ Khan, *The Third World Charismat*.

own the land. Bangabandhu stated, “Farmers in Bengal have a cultural attachment to their lands and so I have allowed individual farm families to privately own 8.3 acres.”⁵⁷ Bangabandhu initiated the distribution of ‘Khas land’⁵⁸ to the poor and landless people. Initially three lakh (three hundred thousand) landless peasants were selected to be granted land for cultivation purposes.⁵⁹ Bangabandhu as a leader of the poor and have-nots realised that poor and landless people are the burden of the country. Land must be brought under the production process, and land distribution is the only way to bring the poor into this process of self-sufficiency of food production. Indeed, Bangabandhu’s commitment to improving the condition of the poor was unquestionable. Thus, he claimed, “I made a political commitment to the nation that I will leave no stones unturned in ushering in changes which will bring about a general betterment of life, the economic emancipation of the disadvantaged people.”⁶⁰ For the farmer classes Bangabandhu was kind and dedicated to changing their fate. “Our farmers are the most unfortunate and oppressed classes. That’s why our effort must be engaged to change their condition”, he contended.⁶¹

However, the political, social and economic conditions of the war-ravaged country did not favour fulfilment of his desire to alleviate the sufferings of the poor people. Moreover, the rampant corruption, internal conflict, and division among the security forces failed the first Prime Minister’s attempt to run the country smoothly. The national and international conspiracies also compelled him to compromise with the demands of the masses.

3.7 *Bangabandhu—the Friend of ‘Have-nots’ Across the World*

Sheikh Mujib transformed into Bangabandhu (i.e. ‘friend of Bangla’) as well as the friend of the poor across the world. The sections above have described how Bangabandhu thought, fought and sacrificed for the people first in the Indian sub-continent, then in the Pakistan period and finally in independent Bangladesh. His contributions and sacrifices for the people before the independence of Bangladesh are outstanding however, they were not just confined to his people, but he also spoke and worked for the destitute, poor and suppressed people in many locations in the world.

⁵⁷ Khan, *The Third World Charismat*, 170.

⁵⁸ Khas land refers to government-owned land. In this form of land ownership, nobody has property rights. The government can allocate and use this land according to government policy.

⁵⁹ Islam, *The Role of the State in the Economic Development*.

⁶⁰ Khan, *The Third World Charismat*, 194.

⁶¹ Sajedul Awal, ed., *Bangabandhur Bani: The Selected Sayings of Father of Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman* (Dhaka: Pathak Shamabesh, 2020), 53.

As Tariq Karim remarks, “Bangabandhu’s political and worldviews were shaped by his associations with his own family, community, mentors and the larger society that he was born into.”⁶²

His uncompromising fighting spirit for oppression in his country taught him how to fight for the poor against all forms of exploitation world-wide. Tariq Karim again remarks that “Bangabandhu’s worldview emanated from his own and his people’s collective experiences, in fighting for justice against the denial of equality, fundamental political, economic and cultural rights and particularly the right to self-determination, and of equity in development.”⁶³ In his speech to the United Nations in 1974, Bangabandhu explained:

“While the legacy of injustice from the past has to be liquidated, we are confronted by the challenges of the future. Today the nations of the world are faced with critical choices. Upon the wisdom of our choice will depend on whether we will move towards a world haunted by the fear of total destruction, threatened by nuclear war, faced with the aggravation of human suffering on a horrendous scale, and marked by mass starvation, unemployment and the wretchedness of deepening poverty.”⁶⁴

Thus, many times he reminded the international community about the responsibilities and duties to alleviate poverty:

“Whether we can look forward to a world where human creativity and the great achievements of our age in science and technology will be able to shape a better future free from the threat of nuclear war, and based upon sharing of technology and resources on a global scale so that men everywhere can begin to enjoy the minimal conditions of a decent life.”⁶⁵

⁶² Tariq Karim, “Bangabandhu: the Architect of Bangladesh’s Foreign Policy: His Vision of Independent Bangladesh’s Place and Role in the Region and the World,” *The Daily Star*, September 7, 2020, <https://www.thedailystar.net/in-focus/news/bangabandhu-the-architect-bangladeshs-foreign-policy-1956905>.

⁶³ Karim, “Bangabandhu: the Architect of Bangladesh’s Foreign Policy.”

⁶⁴ “Bangabandhu’s Speech at the United Nations,” Permanent Mission of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh to the United Nations, <https://bdun.org/1974/09/25/speech-of-bangabandhu-sheikh-mujibur-rahman-on-25th-september-1974-at-the-unga/>.

⁶⁵ “Bangabandhu’s Speech at the United Nations.”

Indeed, he was very much concerned about the rights and dignity of the poor and oppressed people world-wide. He was touched by the leadership capabilities and charisma of some of his contemporary leaders including Houari Boumediene, Haile Selassie, Mrs Indira Gandhi, Fidel Castro, Prince Norodom Sihanouk, Colonel Gaddafi, Marshal Tito, and Anwar Sadat.⁶⁶ Among all these great leaders, Bangabandhu was exceptionally vocal against the exploitation and oppression and fought for the poor and oppressed people irrespective of race, colour and religion and raised his voice for the Palestinian people as well as the oppressed people of Vietnam.

Bangabandhu emerged as a world leader who talked and worked for the poor people for their right to self-determination, social and economic rights. From the 1970s onwards, the world leaders of powerful states (for example the USA and the former Soviet Union) were very much engaged in military security, expanding boundaries and blocking the opposite ideology (socialism vs. capitalism) causing serious human rights violations, economic loss and human casualties.⁶⁷ However, some leaders including Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib had been proactive in stopping expansionism, imperialism, and killing of innocent people. He urged the world leaders to avoid the nuclear power race and use the ingenuity of the people to attain development and prosperity for the people. As an eloquent speaker and friend of the poor people at the summit of the non-aligned movement held at Algiers from 5-9 September 1973, Bangabandhu commented:

“I would like to make it very clear that what we stand for is the solidarity of the progressive forces of the world – that is for those who are oppressed and those who stand by them in their just struggle for liberation from oppression.”⁶⁸

Very few leaders during his time were able to utter such a speech concerning human rights in the international forum. The lifelong struggle against the oppression in the colonial and Pakistan period made him bold and courageous enough to take the side of the oppressed people. He contended that the oppressed people across the world must be liberated and given their right to self-determination which would provide the opportunity to decide what is best for the people in each colonised country.

⁶⁶ Khan, *The Third World Charismat*.

⁶⁷ Donald J. Puchala and Stuart I. Fagan, “International Politics in the 1970s: The Search for a Perspective,” *International Organization* 28, no. 2 (1974): 247-266.

⁶⁸ AKM Atiqur Rahman, “Bangabandhu in Algiers for Non-aligned Summit,” *The Daily Sun*, 2020, <https://www.daily-sun.com/post/503216/Bangabandhu-in-Algiers-for-Nonaligned-Summit>.

Bangabandhu also gave directions to overcome the problem of the poor countries. He emphasised that “The rich countries have been able, through concerted and conscious action, to improve their position, often at the expense of the poor countries.”⁶⁹ However, the effort of the rich countries was not always sincere and honest, rather many of them exploited the poor and plotted to extract resources from the poor countries. Thus, the world system since time immemorial has been based on exploitation, where the rich countries extract resources at the cost of serious human rights violations of the people in poor countries.⁷⁰ Even the imperial powers directed genocides to take control of the land and resources of poor marginalised people across the world.⁷¹

Bangabandhu realised how the poor people across the world including the Bengali have been exploited by colonial powers year after year. He was outspoken against such exploitation and human rights violations. His realisation is still relevant in the international system as some countries are exploiting the world economic system for their prosperity and luxury keeping many other parts of the world as poor and deprived.⁷² Bangabandhu also pointed out that people in poor countries are faced with grim prospects. With the worsening terms of trade, stagnation in exports, and food deficits, we are confronted by formidable problems of poverty, hunger, illiteracy, disease and unemployment.⁷³

As a farsighted and visionary leader, Bangabandhu understood the challenges of the world system and urged the world leaders to work together to face the challenges to human survival. He stated, “Our ultimate resource is our people”. Thus, he emphasised that the intellectual resources of every country must be pooled together.⁷⁴ It is a fact that the current age is the age of excellence of science and technology where the power of ingenuity that the people have, has been instrumental in attaining economic progress and prosperity of the people. Bangabandhu urged the world community to utilise this ingenuity of the people to eradicate poverty, illiteracy and human diseases.

⁶⁹ Karim, “Bangabandhu: the Architect of Bangladesh’s Foreign Policy.”

⁷⁰ Kajsa Ekholm and Jonathan Friedman, “Capital Imperialism and Exploitation in Ancient World-Systems,” *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* 6, no. 1 (1982): 87-109.

⁷¹ Michael Renner, “The Anatomy of Resource Wars,” *World Watch Paper* 16, no. 2 (2002).

⁷² Erik S. Reinert, *How Rich Countries Got Rich... and Why Poor Countries Stay Poor* (London: Hachette UK, 2019).

⁷³ AKM Atiqur Rahman, “Bangabandhu in Algiers for Non-aligned Summit,” *The Daily Sun*, September 3, 2020, <https://www.daily-sun.com/post/503216/Bangabandhu-in-Algiers-for-Nonaligned-Summit>.

⁷⁴ Rahman, “Bangabandhu in Algiers for Non-aligned Summit.”

He also realised that poverty is not a natural phenomenon; rather the powerful nations are responsible for creating poverty. According to his wisdom and thoughts, weapons and arms races consume much of the world's resources, however, poverty could be removed through the utilisation of resources. This is why Bangabandhu urged,

“Can't we do something to protect these resources so that they can contribute to reduce human suffering and also can contribute to human welfare? Can't we form an opinion against the Commonwealth against the continued weapons competition and pollution caused by nuclear tests?”⁷⁵

As a true friend of the destitute people across the world Bangabandhu was not only concerned for the sufferings of his people but also anxious for other oppressed poor people. For example, in 1974, in his visit to Egypt, Bangabandhu expressed his full support with the people of Asia, Africa and Latin America who were poor and oppressed. He said,

“Those who are struggling to ensure their right to self-control and their basic rights against colonialism and racial discrimination in South Africa, Rhodesia, Namibia, Angola, Mozambique, and other parts of Africa should have the support of all those who believe in human freedom.”⁷⁶

In summary, it can be said that Bangabandhu saw the sufferings of the poor people throughout the world and this agitated greatly so he spoke out against oppression and exploitation.

4. Relevance of Bangabandhu's Ideals in the Present Context

The above sections have highlighted how Bangabandhu thought and worked for the poor and needy. This quality developed from his childhood and continued until his death. Speaking about this special quality, Mahabub Alam claimed, “Sheikh

⁷⁵ Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's Speech at the Commonwealth Heads of Government held in Canada in August 1973. Also see: A.K.M. Atiqur Rahman, “Bangabandhu, the Thunder Voice for World Peace and Freedom,” *The Daily Sun*, August 15, 2019, <https://www.daily-sun.com/arcprint/details/415206/Bangabandhu-the-Thunder-Voice-for-World-Peace-and-Freedom/2019-08-15>.

⁷⁶ Rahman, “Bangabandhu, the Thunder Voice for World Peace and Freedom.”

Mujib adored everyone with his soul especially the deprived, the needy, and the helpless people. He aided everybody with the whole thing even beyond his capability to relieve the griefs of the common individuals.”⁷⁷ His childhood and family teaching shaped his mind and soul to work for the poor neighbours. His association with great political leaders such as H.S. Suhrawardy, and working with humanitarian leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi greatly motivated him to work for the poor and needy. Manjarul Hussain also pointed out, “He in no way forgot that his starting place came from rural regions and he constantly thrived to help rurally and deprived humans even when his very own existence became at risk.”⁷⁸

That is why the question generally comes what are the present conditions of poor versus rich people at home and abroad, and how far the ideals of Bangabandhu are exercised in ensuring the rights of the poor. Bangabandhu dreamt of establishing Bangladesh as a ‘Sonar Bangla’ where people will enjoy their rights without compromising. He also worked to establish a just and equitable world where there would be no exploitation and suppression by the rich people of the poor. However, the reality is different to what Bangabandhu dreamt. The difference between the rich and poor is being increased day by day instead of reducing the income gaps between rich and poor.

In Bangladesh, economic development and social progress have been attained significantly within the fifty-two years of independence of Bangladesh. But, the fruit of development and progress has not been distributed among the people equally and fairly. Capitalism and market economy have resulted in class differences and concentration of wealth in the hands of few people. Statistics show that “The income share of the bottom 40 per cent of people is 21 per cent, and in a sharp contrast, for the richest 10 per cent it is 27 per cent.”⁷⁹ Income differences and resource sharing between the rich and poor have reached at an alarming situation. The intermingling of politics and business has changed the entire economic situations where businessmen control politics and extract the highest economic benefit from the country. This was not the ideals of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman who fought against economic freedom. Table 1 shows the picture of income inequality in Bangladesh.

⁷⁷ Sheikh Mahabub Alam, “Bangabandhu–The Great Philosopher, Nature Lover and Tourist Champion will Glorify Tourism in Bangladesh as “Father of Tourism Industry,” *Journal of Tourism and Hospitality* 5 (2016): 2-12.

⁷⁸ Manjarul Hossain, “Political Activities of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as a Charismatic Leader,” *London Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Sciences* (2019).

⁷⁹ “Growing Income Inequality in Bangladesh Causes Concern,” *The Financial Express*, August 3, 2021, <https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/views/reviews/growing-income-inequality-in-bangladesh-causes-concern-1627918086>.

Table 1: Income Inequality in Bangladesh⁸⁰

	2010	2016	2022
Gini Coefficient	0.458	0.482	0.499
% Share of Income Bottom 40%	14.32	13.01	12.87
% Share of Income Top 10%	35.85	38.16	40.92
% Share of Income Top 5%	24.61	27.89	30.04

According to Table 1, in Bangladesh, in the last ten years, income inequality has increased despite the country has attained significant progress in economic, infrastructure and social services. Inequality is measured by some factors, such as differences in education, employment and living standards in the villages and urban cities. The politicians and businessmen utter the ideals of Bangabandhu in their speeches but they hardly exercise these ideals in their personal lives. Bangabandhu never thought about accumulating property and resources, but his followers may have deviated from the ideals. Now, some of the political leaders are far behind of the ideal of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. They often give the lip service, but spend all their effort for their own interest. A report shows that US\$ 61.6 billion have been smuggled from Bangladesh from 2005-2014.⁸¹ Bangabandhu never dreamt this Bangladesh where his countrymen would smuggle and launder money.

Resource distribution is another problem for the resource gap in Bangladesh. Bangabandhu wanted to build the ‘Sonar Bangla’ which means that people will live without discrimination. The political power and position of some people empowered them to enjoy uncontrolled resources. An unholy nexus has been formed among some groups of people who hold social and political positions. This nexus enables them to exploit general people to enjoy their basic rights. Bangabandhu in his lifetime also realised this unholy nexus and thus, uttered that ‘government officials are the servant of the country and the servant of the people.’⁸² Surprisingly, this ideal of Bangabandhu is missing grossly. Although, much initiatives have been undertaken

⁸⁰ Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, *Final Report on Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2016* (Dhaka, Ministry of Planning, 2018); Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, *Preliminary Report: Household Income and Expenditure Survey HIES 2022*, (Dhaka: Ministry of Planning, 2023).

⁸¹ Faiz Ahmad Taiyeb, “Bangladesh has Many Ways to Tackle Money Laundering,” *The Daily Star*, September 11, 2023, <https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/views/news/bangladesh-has-many-ways-tackle-money-laundering-3416091>.

⁸² Tariq Karim, “Bangabandhu and His Timeless Exhortations to the Nation,” *The Daily Star*, March 17, 2020, <https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/news/bangabandhu-and-his-timeless-exhortations-the-nation-1881709>.

to distribute resources among the general people, bad attributes such as corruption, negligence, nepotism, theft, and unlimited consumption of some people have ruined many of the initiatives to attain social justice in the society.

Globally, large income and wealth gaps also exist across the world. The gap is significantly widening. The top 1 Per cent of the world’s population owns a disproportionate share of the world’s resources.⁸³ Table 2 shows the extent of income inequalities globally.

Table 2: Extent of Income Inequalities across the World⁸⁴

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the last 10 years, billionaires have doubled their wealth, making nearly six times more than the increase in wealth seen by the bottom 50%.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For every US\$ 100 of wealth created in the last 10 years, US\$ 54.40 went to the top 1% and US\$ 0.70 went to the bottom 50%.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The top 1% have gained 74 times more wealth than the bottom 50% in the last 10 years.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Since 2020, for every dollar the bottom 90% have gained, billionaires have gained US\$ 1.7 million.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For every US\$ 100 of new wealth created in the global economy between December 2019 and December 2021, US\$ 63 went to the top 1%, while the bottom 90% gained US\$10.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Since 2020, billionaire wealth has grown by US\$ 2.7 billion a day.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During the worst of the pandemic, according to the World Bank, the income losses among the poorest 40% of humanity were twice as large as among the richest 20%, and global income inequality has risen for the first time in decades.

This high level of inequality is leading to lower economic mobility and lower overall growth rates across the world. The high levels of inequality can also result in unsustainable growth patterns in society. Income inequality is also responsible for political instability, reduced social cohesion and reduced investment in human

⁸³ United Nations (UN), *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2019* (New York: United Nations, 2019).

⁸⁴ Martin Brehm Christensen, Christian Hallum, Alex Maitland, Quentin Parrinello and Chiara Putaturo, “Survival of the Richest: How We must Tax the Super-rich Now to Fight Inequality,” *Oxfam Briefing Paper*, (January 2023): 15.

capital.⁸⁵ Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib as a leader of a Third World country spoke against the income inequalities and disparities in the world system. He thus emphasised on establishing a just political system by abolishing colonialism and imperialism. He supported the policies to ensure social justice and economic prosperity in the world. Bangabandhu was a visionary leader. He realised that uncontrolled capitalism would create income gaps and disparities in the world.

This is exactly what is happening in the world. Statistics show that “The share of global income going to the richest 1% of the population increased between 1990 and 2015 in 46 of the 57 countries and regions for which data are available. The bottom 40% of producers in each of the 92 countries for which data are available earned less than 25% of total income.”⁸⁶ Global report also highlights that the world is failing to achieve gender equality. According to the statistics, “More than 340 million women and girls will still live in extreme poverty by 2030, and close to one in four will experience moderate or severe food insecurity.”⁸⁷ The increasing climate change is likely to worsen these scenarios, “As many as 236 million more women and girls will be food-insecure under a worst-case climate scenario.”⁸⁸ Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib emphasised on innovation, science and technologies for solving the growing problems. It is seen that wealthy countries have invented sophisticated technologies to solve the problems. But the cost of the technologies is high and almost beyond the purchasing capacity of the poor countries. Thus, the people in poor and disadvantaged countries suffer from diseases and natural disasters.

The inequality existed in different geographical regions as well. For example, “Sub-Saharan Africans’ average income is sixteen times that of North Americans.”⁸⁹ The Oxfam report highlight that “poverty has been increased in the first time in last 25 years. rich people have become dramatically richer and corporate profits have hit record highs, driving an explosion of inequality.”⁹⁰ It is seen that big powers and multinational corporations are busy with their own. Sometimes, big powers are

⁸⁵ Christensen et al., “Survival of the Richest.”

⁸⁶ UN, *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2019*.

⁸⁷ United Nations (UN), *Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Gender Snapshot 2023* (New York: United Nations, 2023), https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2023/09/progress-on-the-sustainable-development-goals-the-gender-snapshot-2023?gclid=Cj0KCQIAjMKqBhCgARIsAPDgWlwcfy5WcZd3NyeUbcxoIFMXZ1_fE8X09do1b7LOYDZ1y1qv4JA8EVsaAofJEALw_wcB.

⁸⁸ UN, *Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals*.

⁸⁹ United Nations (UN), *World Social Report 2020: Inequality in a Rapidly Changing World* (New York: United Nations Publication, 2020), <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2020/01/World-Social-Report-2020-FullReport.pdf>.

⁹⁰ Christensen et al, “*Survival of the Richest*.”

involved in proxy wars and direct conflicts in many parts of the world which is one of the major causes of poverty, human rights violations, killing and refugee flows. Sheikh Mujib in his lifetime warned the world leaders about the arms race and military industry as well as the division of the entire world into 'oppressed' and 'oppressors'. He always supported the toiling masses and urged the world community to save the oppressed. In the present world, hardly any leaders talk about the oppressed people.

At the global level, fair treatment, cooperation, and justice are grossly absent in many contexts. Many states justify their actions in a realist manner. Powerful states are busy for their interest and luxury. Even, the powerful states hardly care for the human rights of the people. We see that a new form of imperialism has emerged where poor countries are trapped by the powerful states. Most often, some states become bound to buy weapons and military hardware despite keeping their citizen starve. Sheikh Mujib realised the cruel side of the international politics and thus, uttered that rich countries should help the poor countries in the field of science and technology for the betterment of the people. However, his philosophy and vision are now rarely exercised. The military intervention of Israel has caused unprecedented killing and human rights violations. As of 12 February 2024, UN Women reports that "At least 28,340 Palestinians were killed in Gaza, and 70 per cent of those killed are said to be women and children. 67,984 Palestinians have been injured."⁹¹ Sheikh Mujib in his lifetime protested the suppression and aggression against the innocent Palestine people. However, the world leaders are currently careless and silent against such oppression. The rise of ultra-nationalism, imperialism, extremism, and racism are the major causes of the victimisation of innocent people across the world.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be argued that throughout his entire life, Bangabandhu did not consider his own prosperity and happiness. Rather, he was very much conscious about the rights and interests of the oppressed people both at home and abroad. Therefore, he became disheartened to see the behaviour of the leaders of the Muslim League, and accordingly decided to discontinue his studies to engage in full-time political activities. When his father told him to go to the UK to study law and become a barrister, Bangabandhu replied by saying that he did not want to have prosperity and no longer hankered after fame and money.

⁹¹ "Gaza: When Mothers Have to Bury at Least 7,700 Children, Very Basic Principles are Challenged, UN Women's Rights Committee Says," *United Nations*, 2024, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2024/02/gaza-when-mothers-have-bury-least-7700-children-very-basic-principlesare#:~:text=As%20of%2012%20February%202024,67%2C984%20Palestinians%20have%20been%20injured.>

To talk about the plight of the oppressed people, he had to go to jail for unjust reasons. However, he never hesitated to go to jail but was concerned enough to talk about the legitimate rights of the poor people. He sacrificed his time in jail with torture, starvation and mental agony, which also enabled him to understand the sufferings of the poor. Moreover, his life was very stressful on many occasions which enabled him to realise the pain and suffering of others. For example, when he was visiting Lahore to meet political leaders in Pakistan to discuss the issue of East Bengal, he had only two rupees in his pocket.⁹² He stated, “He was feeling famished since he had not had anything since morning.”⁹³

After the creation of Pakistan, Bangabandhu returned to his homeland from Calcutta intending to concentrate on his professional life and family. However, the injustice and deprivation of the poor inflicted by the Pakistani ruler again forced him to come out with a new spirit and vigour to liberate others. This new fight for the poor in his independent country compelled him to complete his education early thus, his parent’s desire remained unfulfilled. Bangabandhu again proved that he is a real friend of the poor and needy people in his country. For helping the needy people, he did not care about his sufferings, stress and even his punishment given by the ruling authority.

After the liberation of Bangladesh in 1971, Bangabandhu returned to the newly independent state with optimism to alleviate the suffering of the poor. From the very beginning, Bangabandhu worked to include socialism and democracy as the fundamental state policy in the constitution in Bangladesh. As a Prime Minister, he formulated policies to alleviate poverty and attain economic development. He dedicated himself fully to building the nation following the destruction. On many occasions, he appealed to his party, workers, bureaucrats and other sections of people to work hard to improve the condition of the country. However, many of his people did not respect his appeal, rather many had been involved in anti-state activities to defame his government. A charismatic leader knows how to overcome every crisis and challenge. Bangabandhu also initiated every effort to face the crisis. For example, after the 1974 famine, and with the death of about 1.5 million people, he told the National Assembly:

⁹² Rahman, *The Unfinished Memoirs*, 146.

⁹³ Rahman, *The Unfinished Memoirs*, 145.

“We have to put a smile on poor people’s faces. Bengal’s people have to survive with minimum food. I have asked many leaders around the world. They came and helped me. With the help of friendly countries, we started our war against hunger... I don’t know how much I could help. But I only know that there were no flaws in my attempt.”⁹⁴

Indeed, Bangabandhu was a sincere and devoted leader from early on to the end of his life. He believed in people very much and stated,

“The freedom will go in vain if the people of Bangladesh cannot have enough food. This freedom will remain incomplete if our mothers and sisters do not get clothing. This freedom will remain incomplete if our youth do not get employment or work.”⁹⁵

This vision and thoughts reflect the concern for the have-nots in his country. Not only did he work for his countrymen but Bangabandhu was equally sincere and dedicated to all the poor and oppressed across the world. In particular, he was vocal against the oppression and suppression of the people in many poor countries such as Vietnam, Palestine, Southern Rhodesia (present Zimbabwe), South Africa and Namibia. On many occasions, in meetings and conferences Bangabandhu stated that he is with the ‘have-nots’. Accordingly, he urged world leaders to work for a balance between the rich and poor countries. As a visionary and true world leader he could think and work for the poor.

The visions and ideals of Bangabandhu to work for the ‘have-nots’ are not exercised in present day. Very few political leaders care for the greater benefit for the people. Imparting education of altruism and nationalism to the young generation is a prime concern for building a competent generation. It is a verifiable reality that the entirety of the social and political system has deteriorated; nevertheless, concerted efforts must be undertaken to safeguard the principles of the rule of law, democracy, and human rights. Bangabandhu wanted to establish a free and just society which is currently lacking in Bangladesh. Bangabandhu emphasised on accountable

⁹⁴ Bangabandhu made this statement in the National Assembly. Also see: Md Mizanur Rahman, “Bangabandhu and Bangladesh are Synonymous,” *The Business Standard*, March 07, 2020, <https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/bangabandhu-and-bangladesh-are-synonymous-53014>.

⁹⁵ Bangladesh Awami League, *Bangladesh on the March towards Prosperity: Election Manifesto 2018* (Dhaka: Bangladesh Awami League, 2018), 5, https://www.sdg.gov.bd/public/files/upload/5c324288063ba_2_Manifesto-2018en.pdf.

government where office holder would be responsible for every action which is missing in Bangladesh now. Institutions must work effectively to curb corruption, money laundering, plundering, and misuse of power. Bangabandhu also emphasised on building people-oriented administration. Moreover, political will of a country is extremely crucial for determining the policy and ensuring social justice. After 53 years of independence, a just and fair society is still absent, but which must be ensured through exercising the philosophy of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.