

The Bangladesh Awami League, 1971-1975

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CERTIFICATE

Certified that the dissertation entitled: " THE BANGLADESH AWAMI LEAGUE. (1971 - 75) " submitted by PRABHAT KUMAR SINHA in partial fulfilment for the award of the Degree of MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY has not been submitted for any other degree of this or any other university. To the best of our knowledge this is a bonafide work.

We recommend this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.


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DEDICATED
TO
MY
GRAND PARENTS

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In most democratic systems, the political party is an integral part of the political process which converts the need and demands of people into administrative and political actions. Political party designates organisations whose goal is the capture of public office in electoral competition with one or more other parties. Subsequently the term party was extended to include political organisations not engaged in electoral contest: revolutionary organisations seeking to abolish competitive elections and the governing groups in totalitarian states.

Political parties are the main intermediate and intermediary structures between society and government. They are central to the modern political systems and they may be defined by their common aim. They seek political power either singly or in cooperation with other political parties.

There have been various approaches to understanding parties. Edmund Burke, Benjamin Constant and others conceived of party as an ideological group. According to Burke, "a party is a body of men for promoting by their joint endeavours the national interest, upon some particular principle in which they all agreed."

Maurice Duverger, however, argued that often "geographical proximity or the desire to defend one's profession or personal interest leads to the formation of parties; doctrine comes afterwards".¹

Joseph Schumpeter also contradicts Burke by saying that "a party is a group whose members propose to act in concert in the competitive struggle for political power".²

According to Weber "a political party is an associative type of social relationship devoted to secure power within a cooperative group for the leaders in order to attain ideal or material advantages for its active members "which" may consist in the realization of certain objective policies or the attainment of personal advantages or both."³

The party structure relate very closely to the functions and the methods the political parties employ to realise their aim of capturing or retaining political power. One of the most important analysis of party structure has

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1. Duverger, M. Political Parties - Their Organization and Activity in the Modern State (London, Methuen, 1954), pp.24-5.
 2. Schumpeter, J.A. Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy (New York, Harper, 1950), p.283.
 3. Weber, M. The Theory of Social and Economic Organization (London, 1947), pp.373-4.

been offered by the French political scientist Maurice Duverger. He put forward a four-fold classification of party structure: These were (1) the caucus; (2) the branch; (3) the cell; (4) the militia. The caucus concentrates on a small membership emphasising quality not quantity. It concentrates mainly on electoral activities. Its members consist of local notables elected for their individual qualities and local influence.

Unlike the caucus, the branch party is a mass party seeking to enrol the maximum membership. Its political activities are permanent, not merely confined to election periods. It usually has a centralised party structure, the basic unit being distributed geographically according to the constituency arrangements.

Duverger's third type of structure, the cell is an invention of the revolutionary socialist parties. It is smaller than the branch and is geared to continual political activity. Its activities are secretive and they regard the winning of elections as of secondary importance.

Duverger's fourth form of party structure is the militia type of organisation in which the structure takes on the hierarchical character of an army. The militia form of

organisation is adopted by revolutionary parties. However, Duverger adds that his four basic types are more likely to be found in mixed, rather than pure form.

Robert Michels argued that all political parties - indeed all organizations and even the most democratic ones - are oligarchical in the sense that they are controlled by a minority of leaders.

Political parties operate within party systems: There are various classifications of party systems.⁴ (a) One party systems, e.g. the Soviet Union, Tanzania. Here one can see the limitation of the classification according to numbers. Although one party is allowed to compete electorally in Tanzania, the competition within the party, and the ability of the electorate to defeat prominent party leaders at the polls,⁵ distinguishes the working of that party system from the more authoritarian one-party system of the Soviet Union.⁶

4. See, G.A. Almond, A Functional Approach to Comparative Politics, in the Politics of Developing Areas, ed. G.A. Almond and J.S. Coleman (Princeton, N.J., 1960), pp. 40-50.

5. See C.P. Potholm, Four African Political Systems (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1970). Ch.5 for an outline of the Tanzanian political system.

6. See Huntington and Moore (eds.), Authoritarian Politics in Modern Society: The Dynamics and Established One-Party Systems (New York, 1970), Chs. 4 and 7.

(b) Two party systems, e.g. the United Kingdom. Here the systems have two main parties, but there are other third and minor parties, which hold the balance in the Parliament/Congress.

(c) Multi-party systems, e.g. France and Italy. These are the systems in which there are more than two parties represented in the legislature.

Classifying the party system in the Third World countries is difficult because of the lack of growth of parliamentary institutions. India did adopt a parliamentary system but the system has largely revolved around the Congress. Pakistan could not develop its parliamentary institutions and for whatever short time it had the parliamentary system, its politics largely centred around the Muslim League in the West Pakistan and the Awami League in the East Pakistan later.

One of the initial dilemmas in understanding the political parties of Pakistan is that of classification. The time honoured categorization of dividing these parties into leftist parties and the regional parties poses its own problems. It has been suggested that parties can be based either on a doctrine or no doctrine. The party based on

doctrine is characterized by the fact that its leaders and its basis of appeal function largely in the realm of principles and moral argumentation. In Pakistan, only the Islamic groups and the communist would have qualified as doctrine-based parties. The non-doctrine party on the other hand, has as its appeal and organizing basis a "shared interest or identity", it may be socio-economic classes, charismatic leadership, church, trade union, shared nationality, public office or spoils.⁷

The classification breaks down here when applied to Pakistan Religious Groups, like the Jamaat-i-Islami and the Nazam-i-Islam, which were certainly doctrine-based parties, but so was the Muslim League insofar as it firmly stood on the issue of separate electorate in the pre-independent India. Hence the picture that emerges in Pakistan (or for that matter in many third world countries) is confusing⁸ in terms of classification or characterization of the political parties.

7. Neil A McDonald, The Study of Political Parties (New York, 1955) pp 31-32

8. Ibid.

Pakistan ~~was~~ in many ways was never one country even at its strongest, the bond between east and West Pakistan was tenuous. It was a geographical incongruity, physically more than 1,000 miles apart, the people spoke different languages, had different cultures and different economies. Islam, the Central government and a short history were the only factors in common.

Apart from the economic and other disparities the fact that affected the people of East Pakistan most was that despite their majority, they had to suffer the humiliation of being dominated politically by West Pakistan's bureaucracy and military oligarchy. They demanded that injustice against them should cease forthwith and their genuine and legitimate political, cultural and economic aspirations should as respected and fulfilled. The Bengalis were forced by Pakistan bureaucracy and military junta to feel alienated in the country with which they had cast their lot in 1947.

The people of pre partition Bengal had suffered the most of the colonial impact of the British rule. Its economy had virtually collapsed during the early rule of British. It was true that the Bengali Hindus had also suffered to a large extent the brunt of economic exploitation, but the fact remained that it was the Bengali Muslim who had

suffered the most⁹ while the Hindus had taken advantage of the Imperial Policy and built a "landed aristocracy", the Muslims had failed to do so and were left as oppressed cultivators. Mansoor Ali had aptly remarked that "In Bengal, the landlord is Hindu, the peasant is Muslim. The money lender is Hindu the indebted man is Muslim...."¹⁰

Thus the Bāngali Muslim leadership was concerned more with its own economic amelioration than anything else, when the movement for a separate Muslim homeland was gaining ground in a very vague form after Mohammed Iqbal's Presidential address at the All India Muslim League conference of 1930 at Allahabad. Even Iqbal had envisaged only a north-west Indian Muslim state without making Bengal or East Bengal a part of it¹¹. The Muslim League was weak in Bengal and the leadership of Bengali Muslims was in hands of the Krishak Praja Party (KPP) led by Fazlul Huq. In 1937 elections, the Krishak Praja Party gained majority of seats.

9. Jamna Das Akhtar. The saga of Bangladesh (Delhi, 1971) p.34 and D.N. Banerjee, East Pakistan (New Delhi, 1969), pp 5-6

10. Mansoor Ali, quoted in S.K. Chakraborty, The evolution of politics in Bangladesh 1947-1978 (New Delhi, 1978), p.4

11. Banerjee, East Pakistan - A case study of Muslim Politics (New Delhi, 1969) p. 24 and B.M. Choudhry, "The Evolution and Muslim League Politics 1906-1947", (Calcutta, 1947).

It had placed more emphasis on the social and economic grievances of the Muslim masses. However Indian national Congress had refused to form a coalition government with them and hence they^{were} compelled to form a government with the help of the Muslim League¹².

Jinnah lost no time in bringing Fazlul Huq within the League's fold and ironically, the choice for the mover of the Pakistan resolution at the Lahore session of the Muslim League (1940) fell upon Fazlul Huq who had no belief in the two nation theory¹³. He believed that the Bengal's problem was fundamentally economic and required a radical solution.

The Lahore resolution was the starting point for the creation of Pakistan, though in fact the resolution did not mean more than a loose confederation of Pakistan in which the proposed units would have complete autonomy even to the extent of sovereignty¹⁴.

12 S.K. Chakrabarti, evaluation of Politics in Bangladesh, 1947-1978 (New Delhi, 1978) p-15.

13 Ibid.

14 A.R. Malik, "Paschim Pakistan Sashakder Lakshya Bangla Jatir Binash" in Banglar Bani Mujibnagar, 5 October 1971. quoted in S.K. Chakrabarti, Evolution of Politics in Bangladesh, 1947-1978, (New Delhi, 1978) p-23.
See K.K. Aziz, Party Politics in Pakistan 1947-1958, Lahore, 1976, pp. 94-95.

The difference between the All India Muslim leadership and the Bengali Muslim leadership soon manifested in 1941 and Fazlul Huq was expelled from the Muslim League. Huq formed his own party and continued his government till he was forced out and replaced by the Muslim League's Khwaja Nazamuddin. In 1945, the Muslim League ministry of Bengal was defeated in the legislature and leadership passed to H.S. Suhrawardy.

The Indian viceroy announced in June, 1947, the scheme under which the province of Bengal was to be divided between India and Pakistan. H.S. Suhrawardy immediately started a campaign for an undivided sovereign Bengal¹⁵. Coming from an old Muslim League and a former Chief Minister of Bengal, this idea of an independent Bengal was not palatable to the All-India Muslim League which had fought for and achieved the partition of the country. From this incidence may be traced the Muslim League-Suhrawardy difference of opinion. The Muslim League took the first step in replacing him with Khwaja Nazimuddin as leader of Bengal Muslim League. On his part Suhrawardy made the rift irrevocable by staying on in India, professedly to look after and comfort the Muslims left in India, later it was alleged by his political opponents that he had done so because he had no confidence

15 See K.K Aziz, Party Politics in Pakistan 1947-1958, (Lahore, 1976), pp. 94-95.

in Pakistan's survival as an independent country. He came to Karachi in December 1947 to attend the Muslim League annual session and protested against the rule that residence in Pakistan should be a requirement for membership of the constituent Assembly. But the seat in the assembly was declared vacant on the ground that he had never attended any session and was residing in a foreign country¹⁶. When after some time he returned to Pakistan he discovered that his seat in the national legislature had gone, that the party in power looked down upon him as little less than a renegade, and that there was no opposition party to which he could ally himself. His survey of the prevailing political situation conveyed to him the idea that there was no opening for him in politics save by establishing a new political party.¹⁷. The later course of action will be discussed in the subsequent chapter.

In the new state of Pakistan the shape of things to come became clear immediately after the oath taking ceremony in the constituent Assembly. A Bengali member demanded that the Constituent Assembly meet in Dacca and Karachi

16 He protested against this ruling, see Constituent Assembly of Pakistan Debates, 18 May 1948, Vol III, p 31.

17 See K.K. Aziz, Party Politics in Pakistan 1947-1958, (Lahore, 1976), pp. 94.

alternatively. However he was rebuffed by the then Pakistan Prime Minister, Liaqat Ali Khan. Since the birth of Pakistan, the ruling elite was dominated by the West Pakistanis, particularly the Punjabis who wanted a structure whose accent was to be on central authority. This obviously meant undermining the political, economic and cultural aspirations of a vast number of people in different regions not effectively represented in the ruling coterie. It was however, the East Pakistan, the region farthest from the seat of power, that suffered the most from the beginning, the Bengalis were conspicuous by their total absence in the ruling group of Pakistan.

The nature of the Muslim politics in pre-partition India and the attitude of the ruling elite of Pakistan even in the early days were indications enough to make the East wing politicians apprehensive about their place.

The post partition Bengali nationalism had its root in the language issue¹⁸. It was obvious that the language issue was the starting point of Bengali nationalism. When Mohammed Ali Jinnah visited Dacca on 19 March 1948 and asserted that Urdu had to become the sole state language of

18 See Tariq Ali, Can Pakistan Survive Death of a State, (Penguin, London, 1983), p. 45.

Pakistan, a language Movement had already started in East Bengal, by the Rashtrabhasa Sangram Parishad set up in October, 1947 under the auspices of the Jamaddin Majlis¹⁹. At the call of the Sangram Parishad, a general strike was observed all over the province on 11 March 1948 defying police atrocities. In spite of the Nazimuddin (the then chief Minister of East Bengal) government's high handedness the language movement continued unabated and it was perceptible from the local protests that greeted Jinnah when he asserted that Urdu had be the sole state language. The language movement, which had already started in East Bengal suddenly took a serious turn and a mass language movement flared up after the declaration of Nazimuddin in Dacca on 26th January 1952, that Urdu would be the only state language of Pakistan. The movement was by no means confined to Dacca. It spread to all towns and even villages of East Bengal. The peasants, the workers and all sections of people joined the students in this movement²⁰.

19 Badruddin Umar, Purba Banglar Bhasa Andolan Tatkalin Rajniti, Pratham Khand (The Language Movement in East Bengal and contemporary politics, Part I), Calcutta, 1971) pp- 106-07.

20 Mushan Murshad, Bangladesher Swadhinta Sangramer Sanskrutik patabhumi The Cultural Background of the Independence Movement of Bangladesh (Calcutta, 1977) p. 24.

The language movement of 1952, is of the greatest importance in the history of nationalist movement in East-Bengal. What was mainly a cultural movement before 1952, became from February 1952, a full fledged political movement.

On the economic front one finds the same picture repeated. Pakistan's economy presented an almost classic example of colonial exploitation. The elementary injustice done to East Bengal was to consider the economy of a geographically divided Pakistan an integrated whole. The geographical separation though did not prevent mobility of capital, it prevented the mobility of labour. Because of the regional disparity in the development of the private sector which was reinforced by the short sighted policies of economic resource allocation in the public sector, a large share of capital formed in East Bengal was transferred to West-Pakistan. Had inter-wing mobility of labour been possible, this transfer of capital could have been partially neutralized by a corresponding movement of labour from the poorer to the richer region²¹.

On the other hand, according to an official report of the government of Pakistan itself, the net transfer of

21 See Mohamad Ayoob and K Subrahmanyam, The Liberation War (New Delhi, 1972)p. 39.

resources from East Bengal to West Pakistan during the period 1948-49 to 1968-69 amounted to approximately 2.6 billion dollars²². In Pakistan, resources were transferred from the poorer and less developed to the richer and more developed region flouting the basic canons of federalism. Arjun Sengupta aptly called Pakistan's economic policy as "planning for disparity"²³

The Pakistan economy had created an euphoria in the west and the New York Times commented that "Pakistan may be on its way toward an economic milestone so far reached by only one other country, the United States"²⁴.

Such phenomenal economic growth coupled with the utter neglect of East Bengal's interests led to an enormous concentration of wealth in the hands of a select coterie in the west wing of Pakistan. This was a major reason for the crisis of the system that Pakistan faced in the period 1969-71.

22. Government of Pakistan, Planning commission, Reports of the advisory panels for fourth Five year plan 1970-1975, Vol. I, July 1970.

23 Arjun Sengupta " Planning for Disparity " in Pran Chopra (ed) The Challenge of Bangladesh: A special debate, Bombay, 1971, pp. 79.101.

24 New York times, January, 18, 1965, quoted in Ayoob and Subrahmanyam, The Liberation War (Delhi, 1972), p. 40.

In the higher echelons of the civil service and the armed services, where the decision making powers were concentrated, the situation, from East Bengal's point of view was much worse.

The above discussed inter-state colonial structure that had emerged in Pakistan after 1947 was bound to bring a strong reaction in East Bengal. The near absence of a strong and visible exploitative class and the initial emphasis on the independent personality of "Muslim Bengal" blurred class distinctions. The "national question", as it is termed in Marxist jargon, therefore became the rallying point for all classes of people²⁵.

The Muslim league, being both unwilling and unable to express popular grievances or to give proper leadership to the people, the stage was set by 1949, for the formation a new political party.

Besides the Muslim League, the other major parties were Krishak Sramik Party led by Fazlul Huq, the Republican Party led by Khan Sahib (a west Pakistan based Party), the Pakistan Socialist Party (a direct descendent of the Socialist Party of India formed in 1934 as the Congress

25 Mohammed Ayoob and Subrahmanyam, The Liberation War, (Delhi, 1972) p. 50.

Socialist Party)²⁶ and the Communist Party of Pakistan (formed in 1948 - a breakaway of the Communist Party of India)²⁷. Other minor parties were the Pakistan National Congress (this succeeded the Indian national Congress in Pakistan with its headquarters in East Pakistan and consisted of mainly the Hindus)²⁸. The Gantantri Dal (based in East Pakistan), the Krishak Samity of East Pakistan etc.²⁹.

During the autonomy movement, the main political forces in Bangladesh were divided into three camps: the "staunch autonomists" consisted of the bulk of the Awami League, NAP(M), Communist party (pro-Moscow) "For them the question of full-fledged autonomy for the region was as important as the establishment of Parliamentary democracy in the country as a whole"³⁰. The second camp of the "moderates" consisted of Muslim League (Council), Jamat-e-Islami, Nazam-e-Islami and Awami League old timers like Ataur Rahman Khan. These

26 See K.K. Aziz, Party Politics in Pakistan 1947-1958, (Lahore, 1976), pp. 104-126.

27 Ibid

28 Ibid

29 Ibid

30 For details see. "Autonomy Movement", chapter VIII in Ghosh Shyamali, East-Pakistan Awami League, 1958-71 (an unpublished thesis, J.N.U. New Delhi, 1980, pp 259-309.

parties attached more importance to the establishment of a parliamentary system, which they believed would have taken care of the issue behind the demand for autonomy³¹.

A leading leftist intellectual of Bangladesh commented that the "democratic struggle against national repression" on the people of Bangladesh by the representatives of the "feudal elements" of the then West Pakistan was led by the Awami League and that in the absence of any organised class movement the workers and peasants also joined the Awami League platform³².

However, besides the Awami League, the other parties (Muzaffar) the National Awami Party (Bhashani) the various factions of the Muslim League the outlawed communist Party and its fuctions and the policies- religions parties like the Jamat-e-Islami, the Nazam-e-Islami etc. and other student groups were at times, the key factor in the politics of the province.³³

The third camp consisted of leftist parties and other groups who suspected that the autonomists were stooges of

31 Ibid 1-1-77.

32 Badruddin Umar, Politics and Society in East Pakistan and Bangladesh (Dhaka, 1973) p. 113.

33 Ibid.

imperialists forces and represented the emerging East Bengali bourgeoisie³⁴.

It was the Awami League formed in 1947 under the name of Awami Muslim League, which led the autonomy movement for East Pakistan standing for the right of self-determination of the regional units. The 1970 general elections, which the Awami League had fought on the basis of its 6 points programme that is fiscal and political autonomy of East Pakistan, it symbolised the cultural, economic and political aspirations of the oppressed East Pakistan. Since 1964, the Awami League fought the Bangladesh liberation movement culminating ultimately in its independence in 1971.

The newly emergent state of Bangladesh was faced with a gamut of challenges. There was the problem of nation-building, reconstruction of its economy, political development, institutionalisation of its politico-administrative structure and a secular polity. There was the problem of resettlement of the refugees, restoration of law and order and trial of alleged war criminals and the rights of ethnic minorities.

34 Sen Gupta, History of freedom movement in Bangladesh (Calcutta, 1974).

There was at the same time, the fear of a bitter power struggle among the many leaders. But the support of the nation clearly belonged to the Awami League government. The legend of Sheikh Mujib, his charismatic appeal and his hypnotic hold over the masses were enormous assets for the government. The extent of Mujib's success in establishing his authority all over Bangladesh is indicated by the withdrawal of all Indian troops from the country by 12th March, 1972.

The opposition in Bangladesh comprised of political forces of diverse ideological orientations. The Islamic nationalist parties including the Jama'at-i-Islami, the several factions of the Muslim League, the Pakistan Democratic Party, the Nizam-i-Islam and the Jamiat-ulama-e-Islam were at first held to be collaborators with the Pakistanis and hence, they were banned, later however, amnesty was declared for members for these parties: and an attempt was made by their leaders to find a new secular party.

The national Awami Party (Bhasani) was distinguished by its more aggressively anti Indian, anti-Russian, and anti American stands the Jatio Samaj tantrik Dal (national Socialist Party) was a party of the left which was trying to

make attempts for revolution through existing Parliamentary institutions. There were many underground parties like the Bangladesh Communist Party Leninbad, the Purbo Bangla Communist Party and a few other Marxist-Leninists and Maoists parties. These left radical parties put more emphasis on the contradiction between peasants and feudal elements, claiming that nationalism cannot be achieved without a class struggle³⁵.

Thus in sum, the Bangladesh liberation struggle had unleashed forces of revolution that were not content with mere independence. After the emergence of Bangladesh as a separate state, there was a polarization of politics with the Awami League and its pro-Moscow and rightist supporters on the one hand and the several open and underground communist parties on the other.

Such was the situation with which the ruling Awami league had to contend with. The triumphant beginnings of Bangladesh were only a door to massive problems for Sheikh Mujib and his government. And the events showed, as the

35 See editorial Purbo bangla Vol. IV (2,1973) pp. 2-3; and Sadhan Karmokar (Probably a pseudonym of one of the leaders of the EBCP(M-L), "Bharater Biplobi Sangrame Chiner Nirobata: 'Ke Kon Drishti Dekhe' "(China's silence on the revolutionary struggle in India: 'who sees from what angle" (pp. 6-8 of noted from S.K. Chakarobarti, Evolution of Politics in Bangladesh (Delhi, 1978) pp.6-8.



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work would examine, the buoyant optimism at the birth of the nation soon became pessimism with disastrous and tragic consequences.

The study of the ruling party during the initial years of an independent state assumes an importance. Same was the case with those four years after Bangladesh's independence. Bangladesh was an unique phenomenon in itself. It had inherited its politico-socio-economic legacy from Pakistan as a result of its second independence.

The leader of the Awami League. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman because of his sacrifices and qualities of leadership had already become the veritable symbol of the spirit of the emergent Bangladesh. In the crucible heinous military oppression, the liberation movement for a separate nation became a people's war for liberation. And despite its high price, Bangladesh emerged as an independent sovereign state. Its proclaimed goals were secularism nationalism, socialism and democracy.

CHAPTER II

GROWTH OF AWAMI LEAGUE

The announcement of independent India and Pakistan and the departure to the British had left behind a political vacuum in Pakistan. India had a stable political party, the congress, which was a wide based organisation. It was an unique political instrument. It had following among the rich, the poor, the capitalists, the workers, the landlords and the peasants. Pakistan's Muslim league, on the other hand was an organization with a narrow limited base, though very strong in the countryside because of the grip which landlords and religious mystagogues¹ exercised over the peasantry. It was a top heavy politics marked by a distinctly feudal approach to problems.² The landlords were powerful enough to make or break the political parties because of the complete influence they exercised/enjoyed over their lands and their tenants.

The geographical areas comprising Pakistan was mostly agrarian. The partition had a destabilizing and a

1. pirs - the religious leaders.

2. Tariq Ali, Can Pakistan Survive, Death of a State, (London, 1983) p.41.

dislocating impact on the political, economic and social levels. There was a mass exodus of Hindus and Sikhs from atleast Punjab, Sindh and Bahawalpur and were replaced by Muslim refugees from India. The newly emergent state of Pakistan was naturally beset with a wide set of contradictions and problems which was not foreseen by Jinnah and other leaders. They were unfamiliar with the problems of Sindhis, Punjabis, Baluchis, Pathans and above all, the Bengalis. The geographical dimension of the country posed a major dilemma to the rulers. The west and east Pakistan were separated by 1000 miles of the Indian territory. 60% of the population was Bengali and lived in the Eastern wing, while political power lay in the west.

The various specificities characterizing the Pakistan state reflected certain contradictions in its polity, which always dominated the Pakistan state and in due course of time became aggravated. The most important was the reluctance/impossibility of the rulers of Pakistan to implement the universal principles of a liberal democratic state, regular elections, universal adult franchise, political and civil liberties etcetra. The civil service and the army were West Pakistan based. Karachi being its political capital and the economic power/capital gravitated towards the centres of real power.

Regional disparities are not unheard of even advanced countries. Pakistan however systematically developed such disparities on political and social grounds. Democracy was an explosive subject right from the inception of the Pakistan state, as an unrestricted franchise would have meant a tension between the majority of population in the Bengali East and the majority of the ruling class and the state apparatus based in West Pakistan. The language question highlighted the contradiction first. The Pakistan leadership decided on Urdu being the national language of the country. The decision was taken as imposition by the Bengali populace who fiercely protested against this arguing that Bengali was spoken by 56% of the population, Punjabi by 37% while the rest spoke Pushtu, Sindhi, Baluchi and Urdu. The language imposition was fought by the East Pakistanis till 1971 in different guises.

The Muslim league as a political party remained weak which led to splits and formation of new political groupings. Notably enough the new political formations were determined largely by the east-west divide. The league suffered the most in East Pakistan on account of the new formations.

The East Pakistan political outlook perhaps was clearly reflected in Suhrawardy's proposal at the Karachi session

of the Muslim League in December 1947, when he pleaded for non-communal national parties. Though only ten members including himself and Mian Iftikaruddin voted for it, these efforts to introduce secular democratic politics in place of the earlier communal autocratic policies which even according to the founder of Pakistan, had no political relevance beyond the establishment of the state.

Later, in March 1948, Suhrawardy, reiterating his preference for broad based secular national politics, proposed the formation of the Pakistan national League which would be open to all Pakistani nationals⁴.

In June 1949, a number of Muslim League MLAs and workers who were disillusioned with the undemocratic functioning of the party bosses formulated the Mool Dabee, a booklet written by the young dissident Shamsul Huq. A Peoples Muslim League namely, the East Pakistan Awami League (EPAML) was founded at the convention held on 23 June 1949 with Maulana Bhashani as its President. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was its joint secretary. In 1952, the East Pakistan Awami Muslim League coalesced with similar splinter Parties of the Muslim

3. For details see M. Rafiq Afzal, Political Parties in Pakistan 1947-1958 (Islamabad, 1976).
4. Constituent Assembly of Pakistan (Legislative) Debates, Vol. 1, No. 8, 6 March 1948, pp. 261-2.

League in Punjab, Sindh and north West Frontier Province to form the Awami Muslim League on the initiative of H.S.Suhrawady.⁵

Soon the party became political expression of opposition on the language issue and identified itself with the demand for provincial elections on the basis of universal adult franchise in East-Pakistan.

The Awami League was anti Muslim League platform with ex-Muslim Leaguers of various shades. There were secularists, non-secularists, rightists, leftists, centrists, nationalists, regionalists, ambivalents and so on.⁶ But in addition to being anti-ML, the leaders had other positive common denominators also. All of them had a similar socio-economic background⁷, a common culture heritage and, above all, a common interpretation of the 1940 Lahore Resolution of the All India Muslim League which according to all of them envisaged sovereign regional federating units forming a federal state of Pakistan.

5. Mustaq Ahmad, Government and Politics in Pakistan (Karachi, 1959), ed., pp 158-60.

6. Shyamali Ghosh, the East Pakistan Awami League, 1958-71 (an unpublished thesis, J.N.U, New Delhi, 1980), p.20.

7. *ibid.*

The Awami League demanded that time had come for clearly delineating what programmes and procedures were to be adopted for Pakistan. It declared that Pakistan would be an independent sovereign socialist union of states; there would be two regional units, namely, east and west, the regional units in Pakistan would have to be given full rights for self determination. It declared that land would have to be nationalised gradually; in order to avert political subjugation, in other words neo-imperialism, foreign capital would have to be discarded completely, basic industries like minerals, defense, bank, insurance, jute, communication, forestry etc. would have to be nationalised. Similar stress was laid on making Bengali as one of the national languages. Other important objectives were; repeal of the safety laws, abolition of Zamindari system without compensation, nationalisation of jute trade and key industries etc.

Secularisation of the party was a step in line with the Awami League's demand for joint electorates. It was timely for it aroused the support of non Muslims, specially Hindus, who themselves were supporting joint electorates, and also other non-communal progressives who might have otherwise left the party. Alienation of both these politically conscious sections would have hit the Awami League severely

at a time when consolidation was crucial for further mobilisation. The younger generation opposed the communal nomenclature and wanted the removal of the word 'Muslim' from the party. Bhashani initially hesitated to effect any change in the nomenclature and gave his ruling against the secularists demand. However the secularist forces within the party resisted this and ultimately succeeded in getting the word 'Muslim' dropped from the Awami Muslim League in its council session in October, 1955.

Bhashani's consolidation of the dissident Muslim League element against the ruling party helped enormously in the process of development of a viable opposition⁸ In the meantime, H.S. Suhrawardy, a man with a proven parliamentary competence and skills, came to the forefront to crush the ruling Muslim League.⁹

It was through Suhrawardy's effort that the Awami League took the character of a mass based opposition party. He distinguished the Awami League from the Muslim League by saying that their party did not believe in identifying the state with the party and the administration.

8. Md.A.B.Bhuyian, Emergence of Bangladesh and the role of Awami League, (Vikas, 1982)

9. Ibid.

Suhrawardy claimed that the party was opposed to fascism and firmly believed in democracy.¹⁰

As noted earlier, the question of language had deeply angered the Bengalis. The 1952 language consolidated the Bengalis under one platform and imbued them with an ardent fervour and zeal to assert themselves against the West Pakistani ruling elite.

The Awami League issued a lengthy declaration, in which it discussed the contemporary political and social situation. The Muslim League was condemned for bringing "untold miseries" to the people. The League declared that it will strive for the creation of a welfare republican state based on the principles of Islamic democracy. Civil liberties of all kinds were to be zealously guarded. It declared that the real ownership of land belongs to "Allah, the supreme sovereign", and the so-called present owners are only the trustees who hold the land subject to the needs and requirements of the state as the symbol. It declared that Jagirdari and landlordism must be abolished : no person could hold or own more than 280 acres of canal - irrigated or 500 acres of un-irrigated land.¹¹

10. Ibid.

11. See charter of people's demand (published by Qurban Ali, Paramount Press Dacca) quoted in K.K. Aziz, Party Politics in Pakistan, 1947-1958, (Lahore, 1976) p 97.

However, subsequent pronouncements belied the above announcements. Suhrawardy later defended landlordism and stated that its abrupt abolition would create chaotic conditions and would shake the whole economic structure of the country. He asserted that the landlords were the most healthy party of nation's economic life and its development.

Later in a May, 1958, the Awami League held its convention in Lahore, and decided to aim at providing for a family of each peasant 25 acres of land and limit the maximum holding to 20,000 units (250 acres) for big estates. It decided on distribution of waste land among tenants, landless farmers, agricultural labourers and petty landholders, with the right of ownership.¹²

The Awami League said that the main idea of socialism was a planned economy with a view to secure fair distribution of the national wealth. The League leaders said that their movement was a socialist movement in the sense that it was directed against the prevailing social system of Pakistan which had led to the concentration of national wealth in the hands of a few families. This was a simplistic definition of socialism. However Mujibur Rahman

12. Ibid. p 97.

made the undefined commitment of the Awami League to socialism little clearer. He maintained that phased establishment of an exploitation-free society was the ultimate aim of his party. But he also clarified that it did not entail importation of ideologies from abroad which by implication meant that the Awami League would not work for the establishment of a classically defined communist society, though it would work for an exploitationless society.¹³

The Muslim League was in a politically enviable position till 1954 over both the levels of the government. The Awami Muslim League had contested elections in west Pakistan but was not able to gain even a handful of seats. Situation was different in the east where in the 1954 elections were fought between the ruling Muslim League and the united front.¹⁴ It issued a 21 point manifesto and on its basis contested the elections.¹⁵

13. Shyamali Ghosh, East Pakistan Awami League, 1958-71, (an unpublished thesis, J.N.U, N. Delhi-1980)

14. The united front was a loose coalition made up of the Awami League, the Krishak Samaj Party, the Nizam-i-Islam and a few other groups.

15. Jyoti Sen Gupta, Eclipse of East Pakistan (Calcutta, 1963), pp. 165-167.

The leaders of the united front were united by a shared distrust and hatred for the former provincial government and their desire to achieve greater autonomy for East Pakistan. The manifesto demanded full regional autonomy for East Pakistan, leaving to the Government, power over only defense, foreign affairs and currency. The manifesto also included Bengali as one of the national languages.

The election result was a great victory for the united front and the Muslim League was completely routed. The united front secured 228 seats: the League secured only nine seats. The victory has been described as a revolt of the East Pakistanis through the ballot box.

Very soon, there was a split in the Muslim League and Iskandar Mirza who was at the helm of affairs brought the republican party into existence, Incidentally, it was Suhrawady who presided over the Republican party (Awami League had an alliance with Republican in 1956).¹⁶ Many were surprised that with Suhrawady's assumption of power, a clear unambiguous trend of ideological divergence was taking place\shape in the Awami League. It had provided cover to men with different political trends who were commonly opposed to the government. After Suhrawardy assumed power,

16. Mohammed A.B.Bhuiyan, Emergence of Bangladesh, and the role of Awami League (Vikas, 1982).

the leftist group headed by Bhashani refused to cooperate, signifying the beginning of an open fight between Suhrawardy and Bhashani- the two top leaders of the Awami League. Bhashani was irked by Suhrawardy's pro Western stance, ultimately, in July, 1957, he formed the national Awami Party, Suhrawardy was eased out of office in the same year.¹⁷

Martial law was imposed in Pakistan in 1958 and General Ayub Khan took over as the chief Martial Law administrator. The imposition of Martial law in Pakistan brought to an end whatever limited channel of expression that the East Pakistanis had through the political parties. The pretension of a Parliamentary democracy was still better than no democracy at all. The martial law imposition heralded a new phase in Pakistani politics. The simmering discontent of the Bengalis continued building up below an apparently calm surface. A distinct Bengali nationalism became prominent after this. The Bengali alienation is well illustrated by what Ataur Rahman said "I did not feel as much when I went to Zurich to Geneva... or London as much as

17. Md. A.B. Bhuyian, Emergence of Bangladesh and the Role of Awami League, (Vikas, 1980)

I feel here in my own country that I am in a foreign land."¹⁸

The martial law regime of Ayub began a crackdown on all political activities. Political leaders were imprisoned and the press was censored. The Elective Bodies Disqualification Ordinance (EBDO) was promulgated to disqualify politicians from political participation for a period extending to eight years.¹⁹ However in 1962, the ban on political parties was lifted in order to enable Ayub to legitimize his martial law regime through "constitutionalism". For this, came up a political front, called the convention of Muslim League. Disillusioned and disenchanted by party politics, Suhrawardy formed a national Democratic front with a minimum programme.²⁰ However after Suhrawardy's demise, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman revived the Awami league.

Awami League's manifesto brought out in 1964, demanded full autonomy and removal of economic political and administrative inequality between the two wings, east and

18. Speech by Ataur Rahman Quoted in Chakrabarti, P.91. Evolution of Politics in Bangladesh, 1947-78.
19. From accounts given in Jayanta Kumar Ray, Democracy and nationalism on trial (Simla, 1968).
20. Ghosh, East Pakistan Awami League 1958-71 (an unpublished thesis, Delhi, 1973).

West.²¹ The Bhashani led National Awami Party also gave a call for regional autonomy. The Ayub regime, to appease the Bengali masses, declared the removal of inter wing disparity as a constitutional obligation.²² The third five year plan allocated more funds to East Pakistan than to West Pakistan.²³ The fact remained, however that the actual indicators of development showed the contrary trend and the east-west disparity continued.

It was the complete neglect of the East Pakistan numerical majority in the management of the Pakistani affairs, the west Pakistani insensitivity to the Bengali culture and the loss of their identification with the mainstream, which led to a cause of alienation among the East Pakistanis. The 1965 war Indo-Pak war saw the eastern wing defenseless, further convincing the East Pakistanis of their neglect and exploitation by the west wing. This feeling of discontentment was not merely confined to the middle class but had taken deep roots in the masses

21. See, Rashiduzzaman "Awami League in the political development of Pakistan", Asian Survey, July 1970.

22. See, Constitution of the Republic of Pakistan (Karachi, 1962), p.76.

23. See Raunaq Jahan, Pakistan: a failure in national integration (New York, 1972), p.76.

because their economic plight was very grave. The discontentment needed to be channelised into a form of movement and it was the Awami League which ably provided it. In March, 1966, the Awami League published a pamphlet called "our right to live" which contained the famous six point programme.²⁴ The six point programme called for:

Point 1- The constitution should provide for a federation.... with supremacy of legislature directly elected on the basis of universal adult franchise.

Point 2- Federal Government shall deal with only two subjects, viz.; defence and foreign affairs and all other residuary subjects shall rest in the federating states.

Point 3-a, Two separate but freely convertible currencies for two wings may be introduced.

b, One currency for the whole country may be maintained. In this case, effective constitutional provisions are to be made to stop flight of capital from east to west Pakistan.

24. Bangladesh Documents Ministry of External Affairs, Govt. of India (New Delhi, 1971), Vol. 1, pp.23-33.

Point 4- The power of taxation and revenue collection shall vest in the federating units and that federal centre will have no such power--the consolidated federal fund shall come out of a levy of certain percentage of all such taxes...

Point 5-Foreign exchange earnings ofEast Pakistan shall be under the control of East Pakistan Government and that of west Pakistan under the control of west Pakistan govt.... The constitution shall empower the unit governments to establish trade and commercial relations, set up trade missions in and enter into agreements with foreign countries.

Point 6- Setting up of a militia or paramilitary for east Pakistan.

The six point programme was a turning point in the Pakistani politics. It ushered in the nationalist movement in East Pakistan led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's Awami League. The league had articulated and channelised the rebellious agitating mood of the Bengalis. It consolidated and strengthened its position as the most representative political party and mouthpiece of east Pakistan. The East

Pakistani confrontation began with the announcement of 6 point programme.²⁵

The factors leading to the formulation of a set of demands virtually asking the status of a confederal unit for East Pakistan was a product of set of socio-cultural and politico-economic problems. The six points focussed on the politico-economic problems. The socio-cultural problems had already given rise to very effective protest movements. The 6 points suggested a change in the east west equation. The formula envisaged by the Awami League for the redressal of East Pakistan's politico-economic grievance were basically two set of changes. One, an overall change of the political system and two, a change in the centre-state relations. A failure on the part of the Pakistani leadership to admit these realities and accordingly altering the situation led in the complete alienation of the East Pakistanis--and the evolution of the six point formula exemplified this.

The point I demanded federation of Pakistan on the basis of the Lahore resolution with the supremacy of the legislature. The Awami League contended that it will be sheer dishonesty to deviate from the Lahore resolution. It

25. See Jahan for details Pakistani failure in national integration (New York, 1927), p.69.

said that as far as the people of East Pakistan were concerned they had voted overwhelmingly for a constitution based on the Lahore resolution in the 1954 general election.

The Awami League argued that the point-2 was based on the fact that the 1946 Cabinet Mission which had proposed an Indian federation with only 3 subjects, viz. Defence, Foreign Affairs and communication was acceptable to both the Congress and the Muslim League²⁶. It said that the federation becomes strong by the loyalty and affection in which it is held by the people in peace and the allegiance they owe and obedience they show. It argued that due to strong diversities in the Pakistani state, it shall be decentralization that will make the work of the state efficient both in the administration and in the developmental spheres.

The point-3 which demanded two separate but freely convertible currencies was put forward by the Awami League to save East Pakistan from sure economic ruination by effectively stopping flight of capital from the east to the west. It said that due to the geographical separation the two wings ipso facto were two economic units. Since the central bank and other joint stock banks were located in

26. Maulana Azad, India wins Freedom (Vikas, 1958).

West Pakistan, the east Pakistan money after travelling and meandering in circulation throughout the country, accumulates in west Pakistan. This money was invested in west Pakistan making its capital formation grow rapidly. It led to better employment opportunities in the west. Hence the Awami league demanded separate reserve bank for east Pakistan to check the flight of capital from east to west.

The points 5 and 6 wanted taxation and revenue collection vested in the federating units and separate accounts for the foreign exchange earnings of the two wings. The Awami league argued that the two thirds of Pakistan's foreign exchange is earned by jute but that earning is utilized neither for the jute growers nor for the East Pakistan. It contented that the East Pakistan has earned bulk of the annual foreign exchange, hence the foreign exchange accounts should be kept separately and the requirements be met by the two wings either equally or in a ratio to be fixed.

Sheikh Mujib was arrested in April 1966. Leaders of most of the opposition parties condemned his arrest and complete hartal was observed in East Pakistan on 13th May, 1966 to express resentment against Mujib's arrest.

The six point programme movement regained momentum, after slowing down during Mujib's imprisonment, after the

start of anti Ayub movement in 1968. Mujib was later implicated in January 1968, in the Agartala conspiracy case²⁷ However, belying the government's expectations, Awami League's credibility went on rising in the eyes of the public. This was reflected in the formation of the all parties students Action committee to support the 6 points programme.

The students movement gathered momentum and Ayub was forced to release Mujibur Rahman and call for a round Table conference. This was a clear cut victory for the Awami League and personally for Sheikh Mujib whose status soared high. The league now joined the Democratic Action committee (DAC) which was formed in Dacca on 8th January 1969 to launch a movement for restoration of federal parliamentary democracy. During the round table conference, Mujib stressed on regional autonomy with the six points programme forming its base. However the DAC did not stress regional autonomy and the league parted company with it on the 13 March, 1969. Ayub postponed the question of regional autonomy to be decided by the national assembly and granted only parliamentary democracy and direct election.

27. For details, see Amitabh Gupta, Bangladesh (Calcutta, 1979).

Due to severe internal crisis coupled with a hostile opinion against Ayub after Pakistan's war with India and the Tashkent pact which followed, Ayub had to handover the power to General Yaha Khan on 25th March, 1969. Yaha Khan promised to remove corruption and to hold early election on the basis of adult franchise.

On the 28th November, 1969, Yaha Khan spelt out the plan of his transfer of power where he left the issue of provincial autonomy to future constitution making body and announced that elections would be held in 1970. Ban on political activity was lifted in January, 1970.

The Awami league declared unequivocally that it was contesting the election of December, 1970, on the basis of six point programme which had become the symbol of the Bengalis future existence. Mujibur Rahman declared that the forthcoming election was not for capturing power but to be a referendum on the six point programme and the league was unambiguously clear that it had to realise it either through the ballot or through a movement.

The election were held as promised and the results shocked even the Awami Leaguers. It had captured 160 seats out of 162 allotted to the East Pakistan and in total 167

seats out of 313 seats in the national Assembly, thereby gaining an absolute majority.²⁸ The Awami League had won 288 seats out of 300 seats in the provincial assembly.²⁹

The electoral verdict with absolute majority by the Awami League was not anticipated by the military regime. The Awami League staked its claim to form the government at the centre. However, the ruling junta and the leading West Pakistani Party, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) showed its reluctance in accepting the Awami League as the ruling Party at the centre.

Sheikh Mujib warned that if the implementation of the 6 points programme was not acceptable constitutionally to the Yaha regime and the PPP, the East Pakistani people would resolve the conflict by extra constitutional means. Mohammed Ayoob has succinctly remarked that the mandate received by the Awami League had connected its six point programme into non-negotiable demand of East Pakistanis.³⁰

28. Bangladesh Documents, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India (New Delhi, 1971).

29. Ibid.

30. Mohammad Ayoob, "From Martial Law to Bangladesh" in Pran Chopra, ed., The Challenge of Bangladesh - A Special Debate (Bombay, 1971), pp.40-59.

The Awami League declared complete hartal from the 3rd to 7th March 1971 which ended in a resounding success. Addressing a meeting in Dacca Mujib declared, "Our struggle this time is the struggle for freedom our struggle this time is the independence. Jai Bangla."³¹ The Bangladesh national flag was hoisted in this meeting. For all practical implications, the Bangladesh independence struggle was on. Maulana Bhashani echoed the same sentiments while addressing a public meeting and declared that East Bengal would be independent."³²

Mujibur was put under arrest in the early hours of 26th March and simultaneously the Yaha regime unleashed military action on the East Bengalis. Mujibur just before his arrest made the formal declaration of the independence of Bangladesh on 17th April 1971 at Mujibnagar, the National government and the birth of a new republic of Bangladesh were publicly proclaimed and Sheikh Mujib was declared the President. The newly proclaimed government operated

31 Bangladesh - My Bangladesh (A collection of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's selected speeches and statements). 28th October 1970 to 26 March 1971, ed. with notes by Ramendu Mazumdar (Delhi, 1972).

32. Chakrabarti, Evolution of Politics in Bangladesh, 1947-1978 (New Delhi, 1978).

clandestinely and the real administration and struggle was carried by the Mukti Bahini of the government of Bangladesh.

Ultimately on 16th December 1971 Bangladesh got freedom with the joint armed action of the Mukti Bahini and the Indian army.

With this political background, the Awami League now assumed the new role of a ruling party in the newly independent Bangladesh. The Awami League opted for the Indian model of political development as the model for Bangladesh by having parliamentary democracy with relatively free political process while restricting the extreme left and the extreme right.

The supporters of Mujib evolved a new political ideology called "Mujibism" or in Bengali "Mujibbad" which included four basic principles; democracy, socialism, nationalism and secularism. This in fact replaced the earlier six point programme whose objective had already been achieved by the liberation.

The Awami League slowly established its authority and started the difficult process of building a political structure.

CHAPTER III

AWAMI LEAGUE GOVERNMENT AND DEMOCRATIZATION

It is imperative to analyse the socio-economic condition of the people of Bangladesh right at the outset, so as to understand the dynamics of League's post independent politics.

The right wing politics in Bangladesh was initially non-existent. The leftists were unimpressive as their universal ideology did not have much relevance for a society which lacked a sharply defined class conflict. Moreover the emergent middle class, mainly a post partition phenomenon, was emotionally very much tied to the masses, namely the proletariat from which they sprang. Due to a slow industrial growth since independence and its economic stagnation generally, capitalism was not able to take firm roots. Pakistan did not really have an upper class, but only a proletariat and a middle class and mostly a lower middle at that. The absence of any pull from, a significant upper class and a sense of shared deprivation of privileges resulted in a preservation of emotional and cultural bonds between them.¹

1 M. Anisur Rahman, "East Pakistan: The Roots of Estrangement" South Asian Period (London), Col. 3, No. 3 April 1970, pp. 235-39.

Class antagonism in Bangladesh therefore remained blunted and it did allow, the Awami League, a centrist Party with mass base to have its own way in Bangladesh politics.

However, the Bangladeshis were politically a conscious people despite low level of urbanisation because of to a large extent, the administrative system obtained in this region during the British rule². They thought that the first and foremost duty of the various parties would be to work shoulder to shoulder with the Government in its task of national economic reconstruction and building up a society based on democracy, socialism and secularism. They believed that political activity could wait till the tasks and resettlement and rehabilitation were completed. Some non-Awami League parties in fact gave the slogan of 'economy first, politics second'³.

After the Awami League leader, Bangabandhu⁴ Sheikh Mujibur Rahman returned to Dacca on January 10, 1972, it would not have been out of place in the circumstances prevailing, in Bangladesh then, to concentrate all powers in his hands. Most of the Bangladeshis would have considered

2 See Khalid Bin Sayeed, Pakistan - The Formative Phase (London, 1968).

3 National Herald, 17 January 1972.

4 Mujibur was affectionately referred to as "Bangbandhu" by his admirers (friend of Bangla).

it necessary for a short period because of the near anarchic conditions prevailing and the enormous tasks ahead.

On the contrary however, Sheikh Mujib, a day after his arrival, promulgated the Provisional constitutional order, introducing a parliamentary form of government. The Awami League opted for the Indian model of political development as the model for Bangladesh, by having parliamentary democracy with relatively free political processes while restricting the extreme left and the extreme right. Mujib himself became the Prime Minister⁵.

Bangladesh needed a constitution formally and Sheikh Mujib acted swiftly to ensure one. Order 22 of the President was promulgated on March 23 providing for the establishment of a constituent Assembly which was to consist of the members who were formerly the members of the National Assembly of Pakistan and to the provincial Assembly of East Pakistan in the elections held in 1970. The Constituent Assembly enacted the constitution only seven months later⁶.

5 Bangladesh Betar, January 12, 1972, and Dainik Bangla (Dacca) January 12, 1972. (quoted from S.K. Chakrobarati, Evolution of Politics in Bangladesh, Associated publishers (Delhi 1978).

6 For a detailed discussion of the constitution making in Bangladesh, see A.F.Huq 'Constitution making in Bangladesh', Pacific Affairs vol. 46. (1,1973), pp. 59-76. 7 The constitution of the people's Republic of Bangladesh, 1972, Government of Bangladesh.

A 34 member constitution Drafting committee, with Kamal Hossian, Minister for law and Parliamentary Affairs, as chairman, was set up on April 11, 1972. The Drafting committee completed its work on October 11, 1972. Six of its members however, did not agree with the majority view and submitted dissenting notes. The Parliamentary Party of the Awami League accepted 80 amendments to the Draft Bill. The final draft of the constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh was adopted by the constituent Assembly on November 4, 1972.

The following were the salient features of the new constitution⁷.

- i. The constitution consisted of XI parts, containing 153 Articles and four schedules.
- ii. A nationalist, secular, socialist and democratic constitution for Bangladesh was envisaged.
- iii. The constitution set up a unitary independent, sovereign republic, known as the People's Republic of Bangladesh.
- iv. It provided for a Parliamentary democracy. The President was a mere constitutional head. All executive powers belonged to the council of

⁷ The constitution of the people's Republic of Bangladesh, 1972, Government of Bangladesh.

Ministers headed by the Prime Minister. The council of ministers were collectively responsible to the parliament (Jatiya Sangsad).

- v. The constitution provided for a unitary government.
- vi. Transition to socialism was ought to be achieved through Parliamentary means.
- vii. Right to property was subject to restrictions and nationalization could not be challenged in a court of law⁸.
- viii. Restrictions were imposed on the judiciary.
- ix. Part of the constitution deals with the fundamental principles of state policy and part III with the fundamental rights.

Thus the needs of the individual were subordinated to those of the state. As Tajuddin Ahmad - the finance minister told the constituent Assembly, the constitution provides the mechanism by which the Parliament, democratically elected by a politically conscious people, can determine priorities on the basis of the objective conditions obtaining in the country at a particular phase and implement them consistent with socialism and the wishes of the people⁹.

8 Section 1 of Article 42 in Part III.

9 See the constituent Assembly debates, 30 October 1972, published in the Bangladesh Observer, 31 October 1972.

The constitution did not face much criticism in the constituent Assembly since there were just three opposition members including 2 independents¹⁰. Even the criticism outside the assembly was mild. Most of the criticism centered around the fact that the constitutional provisions regarding parliamentary supremacy and party discipline were 'aiming' to create a unique system of dictatorship¹¹ and the extensive emergency powers permitted in the constitution and the limitations put on fundamental rights led to the charge that the document was intended for a perpetual emergency¹². They criticised the constitution on the 'socialist' provisions of the constitution which they felt, should not have been a part of directive principles but enforceable by a court of law.¹³ A contemporary intellectual observed that the constitution was a "fundamental measure against socialism, democracy, nationalism and secularism. Broadly among the opposition parties, however it did not

10 These members did not sign the constitution after it was passed

11 . See Badruddin Umar, " A constitution for perpetual Emergency" Holiday (Dacca), October 1972.

12 Badruddin Umar, "The proposed constitution A fundamental measure against socialism, democracy, nationalism and secularism, : Holiday, October 22, 1972.

13 These socialists were the non radical communists, for eg. the communist Party of Bangladesh.

create any major controversy. The national Awami Party (Muzaffar) and the communist Party (Moni) suggested a few changes but in general welcomed the constitution. The Bhasani faction of the national Awami Party and the Jatio Samajtantric Dal (JSD) did offer some criticism but agreed that a 'bad' constitution was better than none at all ¹⁴. The constitution however, failed to inspire the vast majority of the youth who would have wanted some more radical provisions included.

The fact, however, remained that early drafting of the constitution helped in stabilizing the emerging political structure in an infant democracy. The new constitution came into effect on December 16, 1972. General elections were held on March 7th, 1973. The Awami league was triumphant overwhelmingly. The Awami league had called the elections a referendum on the four fundamental principles of state policy- nationalism, socialism, democracy, and secularism, because of Mujib's charisma, his role as the leader of the Awami league in bringing about the liberation of Bangladesh his party's victory was a foregone conclusion. One foreign journalist wrote "Sheikh Mujibur Rahman would

14 The Bangladesh observer October 21, 1972.

have won hands down even if the elections had been conducted by the United Nations and supervised by the Red Cross¹⁵."

It was true that a number of political parties were in the electoral fray. However the fact remained that the actual fight was between the two major political forces of Bangladesh. The Awami League the national Awami party (M) and the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) represented one force. They had taken an active part in the Bangla liberation struggle and were in common agreement on a minimum programme necessary for the new state along progressive lines. Their aim then was to consolidate and strengthen the newly independent state towards a greater economic prosperity. They stood for strengthening the democratic structure and a stable polity. They shared a common friendly perception towards India and the socialist nations.

The NAP(M) was considered to be the strongest challenge to the ruling Awami League because of its clean and unsullied image. The party had dedicated and committed workers who were secular in their outlook and had an

15 As quoted in Talukdar Maniruzzaman's "Group Interests and Political Changes Studies of Pakistan and Bangladesh," pp 145 South Asian Publishers, (New Delhi, 1982.)

understanding of the path of economic and political progress.

Both the NAP(M) and CPB launched a virulent campaign against the prevailing corruption in Bangladesh. An incident on January 1st, 1973 involving the killing of two students¹⁶ in a police firing electrified these 2 opposition parties and others who were looking for an issue to mobilise mass sentiment against the regime.

The unsavoury incident galvanized the students, the opposition supporters and members of the general public also. Dacca was virtually paralysed for 3 days between 4th and 6th January. The NAP(M) and the CPB demanded immediate resignation of the Awami League government calling it a protector of the American imperialism and they also tried to draw an analogy though poor, between the 1952 language movement and the 1973 Vietnam Protest Day. Personal diatribes were hurled against Sheikh Mujib and his honorary life membership conferred on him by the Dacca students Union was withdrawn¹⁷.

16 The two students were a part of the demonstration against the Vietnam war and the US role in it. Both of these students were members of the Bangladesh students Union i.e., the NAP(M)'s students front.

17 "Slump in Poll Prospects of NAP(M)". Link 18 February, 1973, p 25.

It was clear, however, that the opposition was overplaying the issue. This ultimately, boomeranged on the opposition particularly the NAP(M) the CPB. The students and other fronts of the Awami League launched a counter movement and forced the NAP(M) and other leaders to apologise to Mujib. The NAP(M) and others apologised to Sheikh and their credibility with their supporters stood eroded.

The second political force contesting the elections comprised of various individuals and groupings. The various grouping and individuals had no love lost between themselves. However on the eve of the elections, they tried to make a common cause. They stood for close ties with China. They were anti India and wanted special relations with Pakistan¹⁸.

While the first group of forces recognised the leading role of Sheikh Mujib, the second one chose Maulana Bhasani as its leader.

Bhasani managed to rally seven political parties behind himself. These seven parties entered into an alliance. The

18 "Bangladesh goes to the polls: the extremist Threat", Link, 11 March, 1973, p. 27.

alliance comprised of NAP (Bhasani), the Bangladesh Jatio League led by Ataur Rahman, the Banglar Jatiya league led by Oli Ahad, the Bangladesh Communist party (Leninist) led by Maji Danesh and Naseem Ali, the Bangla Communist Party led by Deban Sikdar and Abul Basar, the Shramik Federation led by Serajul Hussain Khan and the Bipli Chhatra Union led by Mahbabulla.¹⁹

Creation of a "Muslim Bengal" was a constant theme for Maulana Bhasani during the electoral campaign. The slogan smacked of communalism and symbolised the right wing reactions. He blamed the India agents for the genocide in Bangladesh which had preceded its independence and not the West Pakistan soldiery.

The (Jatio Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) was a formidable opposition party besides the above discussed political forces. However it did not enter into any alliance with either of the National Awami parties and hence could pose no real treat to the Awami League. It contested the elections on the issues of occupation, unemployment and inflation.

One significant aspect during the elections was that controversy over fundamental issues of socio-economic and

19 "Awami League banks on Mujib to get through the poll", Link 11 February 1973, p. 21.

minor issues featured prominently. There wasn't much controversy over fundamental issues of socio-economic and political policies. "Conspiracy ²⁰" was the major issue for the political parties engaged in the electoral battle. The Awami League, the NAP (M) and the CPB were dubbed as agents of the Soviet Indian hegemonism. This was retaliated by the Awami League, the NAP(M) and CPB on same lines who charged the Bhashani led front for being tools of the US-Chinese imperialism. The issues of corruption, high prices, political violence etc. had taken a back seat.

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman conducted the campaign in the characteristic style of his image of "Bangabandhu" and his main theme was his vision of Sonar Bangla (Golden Bengal). The four principles of Mujibbad -democracy, Socialism, nationalism, and secularism, were strongly defended and sought to be accomplished by Mujib. Mujib also defended the close and special ties that Awami League had forged with India in the midst of an anti-Indian campaign launched by the various opposition parties.

The Awami league directed the major part of its campaign against the Bhasani led alliance which had suddenly adopted a policy of aggressive confrontation against Mujib.

20 See Rounaq Jahan, "Bangladesh in 1973: management of factional politics", Asian Survey, February 1973.

The election campaign however did not arouse much public enthusiasm²¹. Awami League's victory was a foregone conclusion. The issues debated and highlighted during the course of campaign were overshadowed by the charismatic hold of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman over the Bangla masses. He remained the tallest figure in the national set up and his role in the Bangla liberation was too obvious a reality to be under rated despite the non-fulfilment of the peoples aspirations by the Awami league government. Even the period was too small to reasonably judge the Awami League government performance.

The elections took place on time and though the Awami League was expected to win handsomely, its margin of victory came as a surprise to even the political observers. The following table would show the landslide victory of the League and a complete electoral demoralization of the opposition.

Given Below is the table showing the results of the first general elections held in Bangladesh: March 7, 1973²².

21 Ibid.

Name of the party	No. of seats contested	No. of seats won	% age of votes secured ²²
Awami League	300	292	73.17
National Awami Party (Muzaffar)	223	-	8.59
Jatio Samajtantrik Dal (National Socialist Party)	236	1	6.48
National Awami Party (Bhasami)	169	-	5.42
Independent and Others	159	6 ²³	6.34
	1087	299	100.00

However, the legitimacy and the validity of the Awami League's spectacular triumph in the polls was marred by some overzealous workers and activists of the party who resorted

22 The no. of seats won and % age of votes secured by each party were counted from the constituency - wise results published in the bangladesh observer 8,9,10,11 March 1973.

23 The election in one constituency was postponed due to the death of one candidate Al won the seat later.

to strong-arm, tacts and even false ballots in their in their desire to win all the seats.²⁴

The opposition parties too were responsible for violence. Political murder claimed the lives of 700 Awami League workers and 500 supporters of the opposition parties between February 1972 and January 1973²⁵. Both the Awami League and the opposition parties attempted to fix the responsibility on each other and their respective foreign allies for the use of violent tactics. The official view of the violence however, and expectedly was that the violence during the elections was indulged into by the opposition parties in a well calculated manner to defame and discredit the government. The government also charged the opposition that they had received clandestine support from China and America.

The opposition on the other hand claimed that the widespread violence was resultant of the government's suppression of the opposition. It blamed the pro-Indian-

24 See for eg. Walter Schwarz, " How Bangladesh lost its political virginity", Guardian (London) reprinted in the wave Dacca, 31 March 1973; Sirajul Hussain Khan, "electoral Democracy Buried", Holiday (Dacca) 18 March 1973. (Quoted from Maniruzzaman's Group interests and political changes, Delhi, 1982.

25 Holiday, 7 January 1973. (quoted from Maniruzzaman's Group Interests and Political changes, Delhi-1982.

Soviet lobby inside the Bangla government for inciting and investigating the alleged suppression.

The electoral victory of the Awami League was a complete renewal of the mandate given to it by the people of Bangladesh in the 1970 polls. A political commentator had said " Such an overwhelming triumph is unprecedented in a parliamentary democracy²⁶" yet another staunch critic of the Awami League, Badruddin Umar commented that only the political half wits thought that the Awami League would fail to get a comfortable majority²⁷.

The Awami League in its 1973 manifesto had arosed strong expectations regarding transition to socialism which might have meant different things to different sections of the people. For the poor, it must have meant a better life condition which they had been seeking since a long time under different regimes. For those politically and socially conscious but ideologically neutral, it probably meant somewhat better distributive justice while for the ideologically committed/oriented ones it meant restructuring of society with a thorough change in production relations,

26 "Bangladesh: Father Nephew and Son" Economic and Political weekly (Bombay) 24 march 1973, p. 587.

27 Badruddin Umar, " Bangladesh : Elections and After", Indian left Review (New Delhi) Vol. 2, No, 3, May 1973, p. 45.

etc. But the composition of the Jatiya Sangshad of 1973 was more or less the same as that of the constituent Assembly which consisted of members elected in the Pakistan general election held altogether in different circumstances and for a different purpose²⁸.

However the management of the nationalised industries was entrusted to corrupt and inefficient bureaucrats who had been trained and recruited by successive colonial regimes. They were hardly committed to socialism or even state capitalism. Because of government's faulty marketing policy hoarders and profiteers had acquired a major stronghold on the economy.

All this led to a tremendous economic hardship to the masses causing a marked erosion of popular support to the Awami League regime.

High expectation due to national resurgence and consequent frustration led to boiling discontent among the masses who were disillusioned with the regime. The opposition lacked the skill and capacity to play the game

28 For detail regarding Jatiya Sangsad composition See, Raunaq Jahan, "Members of parliament in Bangladesh", Legislative Studies Quarterly, August, 1976, p. 361.

through constitutional means. It was left with violent methods which suited the mass resentment. Thus violence increased. Between January 1972 to August 1973, 7,700 murders were registered²⁹.

The economic condition of Bangladesh gradually aggravated after the elections. The country was seized with a grave economic crisis unending inflation, mass unemployment and famine. Mujib launched the first five year Plan in 1973, claiming to have chosen non-capitalist path of economic development. The five year Plan broadly aimed at developing public sector as the dominant force in the economy, abolishing the remnants of feudalism and checking the spread of capitalism in agriculture. However inspite of League's socialistic planning it failed miserably on the economy front. On the industrial front it could barely reach one-fourth of the target in the first quarter of 1974³⁰ in agriculture, the food production fell down substantially. there was a 40% rise in the price index upto June 1974 in comparison to 1972-73.³¹

29 "Bangladesh: A new chapter", Link (New Delhi) 4th November 1973.

30 S.R. Chakravarty, "Bangladesh -Politics in Reverse Gear", South Asian Studies (University of Rajasthan, Jaipur) Vol. 11, No. , 1976, p. 102.

31 Ibid p. 104

The opposition parties were apparently relying on the many weakness and defects of the ruling party- its nepotism, corruption, and high handed way to turn the people in their favour. They over-estimated the importance of the economic factor and underestimated the importance of the national factor. It was true that the urban education middle class agreed with them. However, the basic masses, the peasantry, the urban poor, the destitutes or the so called vastuharas, the artisans, and the workers had a different view. They felt that despite their economic hardships, their supreme duty was to unite around their leader so that the hard non independence remained safe³².

In other words the relatively well to do people of the urban middle class were affected more by the economic hardships and thus stood against the regime. The rural and urban poor voted solidly for Mujib³³.

The opposition parties thus stood demoralised and for the time being it was non-functional. One of the main reasons for the poor showing of the opposition parties was

32 O.P. Sangal , " People vote for Mujib' New Wave, vol. 2, no. 32, 18 March, pp. 8-9

33 See *ibid*.

their organisational weaknesses and constant infighting. In most of the constituencies, the opposition parties had put up more than one candidate leading to splitting of votes - loss for them and gain for the Awami League.

Yet another reason of their electoral drubbing by the Awami League was the fact that they could not really grasp the aspirations of the people firstly during the autonomy movement and later during the liberation struggle. Bhashani's 'Islamic socialism' was very vague for the Bangla populace and it was not clearly defined by him and other leaders. his pro-Peking leanings too adversely affected the party at the hustings.

Lack of material resources among the opposition contributed in no small way in their electoral debacle. And lastly, there was some truth in the opposition allegation that it suffered from political pressure exerted by the government indirectly as well as directly through unofficial party workers of the League and also members of the militia like the Rakhi Vahini etc.

The election results had no doubt, bowled out and completely shocked the opposition. The shape of things to follow in Bangladesh was probably because of no parliamentary opposition to the Awami League.

CHAPTER IV

CIVIL AUTHORITARIANISM OF MUJIB

Despite its thumping victory at the hustings, the Awami League was faced with serious challenges from the left. Shortly, after becoming the Prime Minister, Sheikh Mujib warned publicly that "naxalites" would be shot dead. Ordinances were passed to facilitate the battle against the left.

The Jatio Samajtantric Dal believed that the movement for the liberation of Bangladesh fell short of becoming a full fledged people's war. It expressed its opposition to the national leadership, saying that it represented only 8% of the people but owned 85% of the national wealth.¹ The Jatio Samajtantric Dal declared itself to be supporter, a mass front, of the "correct" proletarian organisation, the Bangladesh Communist League (BCL). The Bangladesh Communist League had a programme/struggle to achieve socialism. It saw a contradiction between the ruling elite, the Awami League and other agents of imperialism and the proletariat which will be resolved by a violent revolution. It hoped that the Chinese will sympathize with their cause.

1. See preface Ghoshona Patra, Bangladesh Chatra League, 1972, published by Publicity Secretary, JSD, January 1973 (quoted from Talukdar Maniruzzaman's Group Interests and Political Changes, South Asian publisher, New Delhi - 1982.

Yet another radical Communist Party was the Bangladesher Communist Party Leninbad (BCP-L). It believed that the revolution in Bangladesh remained unfinished because the bourgeoisie assumed its leadership. It considered Russian communism as revisionist and India was dubbed a potential imperialist power.

The Sarbohara Party led by Siraj Sikdar called for a proletarian revolution and it formed a national liberation front². The liberation front launched a liberation war procuring funds and arms forcibly from pro-government sources. The National Awami Party (Bhashani) supported Sikdar's efforts in this respect.³

Other leftist parties were the Sammobadi Dal, the East Pakistan Communist Party⁴ (EPCP), the East Bengal Communist

2. The national liberation front consisted of peasants, workers and oppressed linguistic and national minorities - including Biharis and members of the Chakma and Santhal tribes.
3. Maulana Bhashanir Bibrits (Bhashani's statement), 2 December 1973 (quoted from Maniruzzaman's Group Interests and Political Changes, New Delhi, 1982).
4. This group was the most radical of the leftist organisations, which did not recognize Bangladesh and called it a colony of India. It stood for resurrection of East Pakistan. Because of its continued use of the name "East Pakistan", it was the subject of the strongest government action.

Party (EBCP-ML).⁵

The Awami League government as noted earlier, passed many ordinances⁶ to contain the radicals - special tribunals were established to try these leftist radicals. The state action against them were outside the purview of the courts. It was under these circumstances that the Awami League government raised a special security force, generally known as the Rakhi Vahini. The officers of the Rakhi Vahini were trained in India; and the organisation targeted anyone not willing to toe the Awami League line. The establishment of the Rakhi Vahini was the first expression of Mujib's authoritarianism. Rakhi Vahini soon acquired notoriety and was used to crush the political opponents of the Awami League in general and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in particular.

Mujib also threatened to arm other branches of the Awami League which included the students, workers and the youth Leagues to fight, in his own words "the armed anti-

5. The EB CP had split into three groups, one of the groups was led by Matin and Alauddin which saw the liberation struggle as a fight between two 'bourgeois dogs' and it chose the line of murder and killing all the class enemies. They sought collaboration with the naxalites in India. It was active in Attrai, Rajshahi, Dinajpur, Pabna and Kushtia districts.

6. See Bangladesh Observer, 29 and 30 January, 2 and 6 February, 1974 for the Proceedings of the Jatiya Sangsad concerning the laws.

state miscreants". In July '73, hundreds of radical leftists were arrested and huge cache of arms seized from them. The government repression was mostly directed against the Sammobadi Dal and the East Bengal Communist Party (M-L) and the Jatio Samajtantric Dal (JSD). The JSD asserted that the Awami League workers had killed 60,000 and arrested 80,000 since liberation⁷. The Awami League claimed, on its side, to have wiped out armed miscreants from half of Bangladesh's 18 districts. The radicals of the East Bengal Communist Party also alleged that Mujib had launched a virtual war against the radicals at Indian behest, where a similar trouble was going on in West Bengal in the adjoining districts of Bangladesh.

It was abundantly clear that government was not successful in containing the leftist radicals, either with special powers or with state repression. The situation was the same as that of former colonial countries where the solution was to offer an ideology which centered around one nationalist leader (Nasser, Nkrumah, Tito or even Nehru⁸). In Bangladesh, it was Mujibism. And in due course of time,

7. The Bangladesh Observer, 19 July 1973.

8. Nasser was the Egyptian leader, Nkrumah in Ghana, Tito in Yugoslavia, Nehru in India. In the post-independent years of these countries, the politics revolved around these leaders who had no leader of their standing or an ideology in their countries.

The regime's economic policy created multiple middlemen in the system. Large scale smuggling across Indian border was alleged to be the cause of high prices in Bangladesh. The foremost factor against the Awami League government was corruption by its officials and workers.

It was alleged that while the Mukti Bahini was on the verge of winning the struggle, many tradesman had joined the Awami League to make unscrupulous profit when the Pakistani traders left Bangladesh, some Awami Leaguers occupied their commercial establishments and used their Party's victory for their personal benefit. All these gave rise to slow but distinct resentment among the masses. The opposition could rightly sense this and they started utilising the opportunity to oppose the Awami League.

Discontentment, in fact, began from 1972 onwards itself against the Awami League. Non-availability of essential goods, the ever-rising price-index, the sharing of austerity, the corruption and nepotism of the Awami League leaders, charges of Indian influence in Bangladesh, all these factors led to a growing unpopularity of the Awami League.

The economic situation had worsened because prices of all imports increased in the international market between

1972-74. In 1972 there was a short fall in winter-rice crop due to a drought. In 1973, a severe cyclone affected large part of the coastal belt causing an estimated damage of 951 million takes.

Besides corruption, the functionaries of the government who were experienced only in colonial subordinated provincial administration, completely lacked the broader perceptive essential to run a national government. The inefficiency was very clearly reflected in the management of the 1974 famine¹¹.

The government failed to foresee the crisis and so it was unprepared. The domestic procurement operation in early 1974 was a dismal failure¹². The government's ability to procure foodgrains from abroad was limited by a foreign exchange shortage, the abnormally high price of rice in the international market, an inability to obtain short term credit, the non co-operation of the international community and particularly hostile attitude of the U.S.¹³. The

11. See Mohiuddin Alamgir, Famine in South Asia: Political Economy of Mass Starvation (Massachusetts, 1980), Chapter 4, p.101 and Ch.9, pp.383-404.

12. Ibid

13. Ibid

government functionaries themselves showed little sensibility to the impending tragedy¹⁴.

Hence, the famine eroded the Awami League's credibility to run the government and led to the polarisation of now well sustained opposition to the League.

The Awami League regime, it was abundantly clear, had failed to ameliorate the conditions of its people on the economic front. Constant rise in the prices of the essential commodities resulted in enormous hardship for the masses. Moreover the economic squeeze for the people was a gain for the minority elite¹⁵. There were allegations of corruption against the League regime. Popular disenchantment with the government increased which was reflected in armed attack on police stations. It increased in alarming proportion after June 1973 which was indication of the regimes loss of support in the countryside.

But the Awami League government instead of mobilizing people by concrete policies and programme to improve their conditions strengthened and multiplied its law and order

14. Ibid

15. In 1973, Bangladesh saw the emergence of small group of new rich - usually Awami League supporters - who made quick money as under regime's patronage.

agencies. Moreover, mere use of its coercive machinery undermined the support base of the regime.

The Bangladesh economy was tottering in 1973-74 with the production in both agriculture and industry failing to reach the level achieved before its independence accompanied by shortfalls in imports and exports. Gross domestic Product (GDP) in 1972-73 was estimated to be 12-14%, lower in real terms than the GDP in 1969-70 and the GDP per capita was estimated to be one fifth lower than the GDP per capita of pre-independence days¹⁶.

The administration was plagued by intense factionalism. Bitter infighting marked the Awami League regime between the "Mujibnagar" and "non mujibnagar" administrators¹⁷. The scramble for positions in the top echelons of the administration was joined by the returnees from Pakistan¹⁸. This largely resulted in undermining the coherence and administrative efficiency of the services.

The armed forces were no exception and they remained faction ridden. The rivalry was particularly intense

16. Planning Commission, Annual Plan, 1973-74 (Dacca, Bangladesh Government Press, 1973), pp.1.

17. See Rounaq Jahan's Bangladesh in 1972, p.200, for a discussion of the conflict between the 'patriots' and the 'collaborators' after liberation.

18. Ibid.

between the forces who had fought in the Bangla liberation and the repatriated forces from Pakistan. A huge member of army personnel repatriated from Pakistan were posted in insignificant posts after their repatriation¹⁹. Jealousy and conflict was the hallmark of the relationship between the military and various para militias under the name of the Bahinis²⁰ which belonged to the government or the Party in power, adding to the problems of co-ordinating the law and order enforcing agencies.

Since liberation, the Awami League was no more effective as an organisation because of increasing factionalism within the affiliated organisations became severe with the worsening Law and order situation and the deepening economic crisis. The crisis within the Awami League aggravated when Sheikh Moni, the chairman of the Awami Youth league declared that the Parliamentary system had failed in Bangladesh. Soon there were reports of the clashes between the Awami Youth league workers and the Awami League volunteers in various parts of the country. The crisis within the Awami League was further fuelled when the

19. Lt.General Wasiuddin was made an officer on special duty on his return from Pakistan, though he was the senior most officer.

20. The government had half a dozen such organisations like Rikki Bahini, Chesyasenak Bahini etc. Clashes among these Bahinis were quite frequent.

finance minister, Tajuddin Ahmad admitted frankly that the government policies were responsible for the famine in Bangladesh. The Prime Minister asked Ahmad to resign for the sake of "national interest" creating a virtual split in the Awami League.

It was clear by the end of 1974 that there was not any civilian institutional group in Bangladesh to implement Mujib's plan/programme of national reconstruction. Because of the deepening crisis within the Awami League and its frontal affiliated organisations, Mujib could not utilise his organisation for mass mobilisation in support of his policy decisions.

Indeed the economic problems and intense factionalism in the administration and the Awami League compounded Mujib's problems and led him to adopt authoritarian measures as shall be examined later in the chapter.

The nearly euphoric expectations which was generated by the 1972 constitution and the 1973 general elections proved to be short-lived and the hopes of the people belied. To their great shock and bewilderment, they witnessed the gradual and sometimes sudden transformation of Mujibur Rahman from a democratic to an authoritarian ruler. In due course of time all constitutional and political powers were

concentrated in the hands of one man, Sheikh Mujibur, who through various constitutional amendments, emergency declaration, the change over from parliamentary to the presidential form of government, without checks and balance and ultimately the introduction of a single Party, the Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League (BAKSAL), became a virtual dictator generating deep discontentment among the masses, with the army being no exception. This Mujib said was done to bring about the democracy of the exploiting masses²¹.

On July 14th, the first amendment to the constitution was passed. The amendment empowered the state to effect special trials under special provisions of the persons who were charged with crimes against humanity like genocide, war crimes and other crimes which fell within the ambit of international law. The amendment further ensured that no such law which was passed by the parliament to try and punish the members of the army or auxiliary services and the prisoners of war crimes, can be challenged in the court of law on the ground of it violating any clause or article of the constitution.

21. This was said in the parliament on 25th January 1975 in the presence of just 2 visitors in the gallery.

However, it was the second amendment to the constitution which showed Mujibur's authoritarian designs. The second amendment Act passed by the Jatiya Sangsad in September, 1973, put serious restrictions on fundamental rights and the jurisdictions of courts. Previously the state had the obligation to produce the arrested or the detained person in the court within 24 hours of arrest. With this amendment, this power was transferred from the courts to the magistrates.

The magisterial power, however, did not cover the enemy or an alien person arrested under the preventive detention law. The preventive detention law empowered the state to arrest or detain a person for six months without a trial and the period could be extended on the recommendation of an advisory council consisting of three members²². The second amendment also provided for the provisions of emergency. The President could now issue a proclamation of emergency if he was satisfied that a serious threat to Bangladesh or the part thereof existed. Emergency could also be proclaimed, if the President was satisfied that there was a serious danger to the economic life of the people and the country.

22. The Constitution (second) Amendment Act, 1973, Government of Bangladesh.

The amendment also extended the maximum intervening period between two sessions of the Parliament from sixty to 120 days.²³

The situation in Bangladesh deteriorated rapidly. The economic crisis was aggravated by one of the worst floods in July-August 1974 which resulted in near famine conditions and thousands of people died. In the meanwhile the underground leftist radicals intensified their clandestine armed activities. Newspapers reported 100 such encounters between the government forces and the extremists. The Prime Minister alleged that 3000 Awami League leaders and workers which included 4 MPs had been murdered by the extremists²⁴.

On December 25th, 1974, a Jatiya sangsad member and an Union Parishad Chairman were murdered when they were offering the Id prayers. On December 28, 1974, the Awami League government imposed emergency "in view of the grave situation created by hostile elements acting in collusion with the collaborators of Pakistan Army, extremists and enemy agents in the pay of foreign powers²⁵.

23. Ibid.

24. This was stated by the Prime Minister in a broadcast to the nation commemorating the surrender of the Pakistani Army on December 16, 1971.

25. As said by a home ministry spokesman on the promulgation of emergency.

Immediately after the proclamation of emergency, all fundamental rights conferred by the constitution stood suspended for an indefinite period of time. The government sources claimed that the emergency was necessary to ensure public safety, security of the country and maintenance of essential supplies. The Awami League leaders pointed out to the near chaotic situation prevailing in the country with the frequent acts of murder, mayhem, sabotage and violence indulged into by the anti-social elements. The proclamation empowered the government to ban lockouts and hartals, impose censorship for the press, tap communications and also suspend the functioning of political parties, clubs and trade unions. Death penalty was prescribe for the hoarders, smugglers and blackmarketeers.

The emergency promulgation in the country gave rise to serious speculations and apprehensions among the people that the form of government will be changed over to the presidential form of government²⁶. It was not very late and on January 25, 1975 the constitutional amendment, (fourth) was moved in the parliament and passed within two hours of its introduction. The President gave a quick assent and

26. The speculation had, in fact, been ripe for quite some time. Umar Badruddin, "Parliamentary System or Presidential System", Holiday (Dacca), January 13th, 1973.

Mujib took over as the President immediately in a remarkable swiftness, describing the fourth amendment as his "second revolution"²⁷. The unseemly haste in which the entire switchover from the parliamentary to the presidential system was conducted raised lot many eyebrows in the country and abroad and Mujib's credentials as a democrat suffered a severe blow on account of the changeover. The President was empowered by the amendment to appoint the Prime Minister and the council of ministers from amongst the members of the Jatia sangsad or those qualified to become the members of the Sangsad²⁸.

The fourth amendment act concentrated virtually all powers into the hands of the President who was to be elected directly. Strangely enough, no such election was required for the first President. This meant that Mujib did not require any election. The President was not responsible to the Jatiya sangsad. The amendment absolved the President of any accountability to the Parliament. Even the ministers were to be accountable/responsible to the President and not

27. Mujib claimed that the measure was in consonance with true democracy, and asserted that it was necessary for the emancipation of the exploited masses.

28. Text of the constitution (fourth) Amendment Act, 1975", Government of Bangladesh, Bangladesh Observer, January 26, 1975.

to the sangsad. The President had the veto powers on the bill passed by the Parliament²⁹.

The fourth constitutional amendment, put severe restrictions on the powers of the judiciary. The President could appoint the Chief Justice and other Judges of the Supreme Court at his discretion.

The President had the powers to dismiss a Judge on grounds of misbehavior and incapacity³⁰. The President had similar powers in relation to the subordinate court Judges too. The Supreme Court also lost its powers to try the cases involving the fundamental rights cases³¹.

The fourth amendment also empowered the President to order for only one political Party in the country. The President had the discretion to decide the nomenclature, membership programme, organisation, finance and functions of the national Party. A sitting member of Parliament would

29. Any bill passed by the Jatiya Sangsad could either be approved or outright vetoed by the President within 15 days of the presentation of the bill to the President.

30. Earlier any such step needed a resolution of the parliament passed by at least two-thirds majority of the Parliament.

31. The power was transferred to the constitutional courts, tribunals or commissions set up by the Parliament.

lose his seat unless he became a member of the national Party within the stipulated time³².

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on June 6, 1975, announced the constitution of the national Party called the Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League (BAKSAL). The ideas enshrined for the Party were that it would strive for the implementation of the main four objectives of the constitution that is nationalism, socialism, secularism and democracy. It called for the establishment of a society free from exploitation, improvement of the standards of living of people and generation of more employment. On the foreign policy front it swore by non-alignment and support to movements against racialism and colonialism.

The constitution provided for various fronts of the BAKSAL³³. It also provided for the units of the Party in districts, sub-divisions and lower levels.

32. The constitutional ground to form the Bangladesh Krishak Shramik Awami League was thus prepared.

33. Fronts were constituted among the peasants (The Bangladesh Krishak League), industrial workers (The Bangladesh Shramik League) and Women (the Bangladesh Mahila League). These fronts were to be countrywide based.

The President of the country was to chair the Party, he also headed the working committee (Party executive) and the central committee of the Party council (the highest body of the Party). The Chairman of the Party was empowered to nominate all the members of the working committee, one-third of the members of the central committee and fifty members of the council. He was the authority to appoint the secretary General secretaries and other office bearers of the Party.

The control of the chairman was kept intact everywhere. The 19 districts of Bangladesh were reorganised into 61.³⁴ Each district was placed under a governor who had to be a member of the Jatiya sangsad and a member of the BAKSAL. Appointed by the President, he was assisted by an administrative council selected by the President from among the Party cadres.³⁵

Mujib made repeated appeals to all the political parties to join the BAKSAL. However, the radical parties led by Serajul Alam Khan, the Purbo Bangla Sarbohara Party (East Bengal Communist Party),³⁶ the Purbo Bangla Sammobadi

34. Practically each sub-division became a district.

35. See, Bangladesh Observer, "Basic changes in the concept of district administration", a review.

36. The leader of the Purbo Bangla Sarbohar Party (East Bengal Communist Party, Siraj Sikdar was arrested and killed in the first week of January 1975.

Dal-Marxbadi, Leninbadi, the East Pakistan Communist Party - Marxist-Leninist and the Bangladesh Communist Party (Leninist) refused to join the BAKSAL. The Moscow supporters hailed the formation of the BAKSAL but even amongst them, not many were taken in the central committee. The Executive committee of the BAKSAL consisted of Sheikh Mujib and 14 others who were close followers of his and leaders of the now former Awami League.

Sheikh Mujib declared that 70 members of the central committee would be in charge of the 70 multipurpose co-operatives formed by him.

Many Bangladeshis and the observers of Bangladesh very soon realised the implications of the draconian set up in which they found themselves. They watched with dismay and anger the transformation of Mujib from a democrat to a dictator. The constitutional parties like the national Awami Party led by Bhashani and the other faction led by Muzaffar could do a little in terms of mobilising people as these parties themselves were torn by factional feuds. Bhashani occasionally did make attempts to launch mass movements but without much success. In his desperation, the Bhashani men gave a call for armed struggle against the Awami League regime which did not evoke much support. The

Party, remained in dilemma in its ideology on the question of Islam, socialism and secularism. The active radical left parties as we have already seen were ruthlessly crushed. Mujib very obviously had become a dictator who probably thought that concentration of all powers in his hands was a permanent response to his fastly eroding popularity. The Mujib government had failed to generate a minimum basic support for a stable and acceptable administration which is necessary to run any state. Mujib was unable to rise to the occasion, and meet the challenges thrown by continuing deterioration in the socio economic conditions of the country. Mujib proved to be an abject failure in checking corruption which was absolute, unlimited and unchecked at practically all the official levels. To begin, aids were sought to be misappropriated and many a times were not even utilized.³⁷ The red cross societies are usually not subjected to criticisms but in Bangladesh the Red cross itself became a target of attacks.

Mujib further failed to solve the law and order problem. Illegally acquired arms by different elements during the liberation struggle were not surrendered despite

37. Many aid giving countries insisted on making their own arrangements for the management of aid and the distribution of relief goods.

repeated appeals by the Awami League government. These arms were used time and again to physically eliminate the political opponents.³⁸

The fact remained that Mujib had virtually made all constitutional means of expression and opposition to his government virtually impossible. Mujib's closeness with India became a deep suspect in the eyes of the Bangla populace. Indian bonafide itself became doubtful even within the responsible sections of the Awami League and India was sought to be made the scapegoat for all the ills faced by Bangladesh. The Leftists as well as the rightists accused Mujib of being a puppet in the Indian hands.

The Army was disenchanted with the Mujib regime because Mujib had shown no inclination to build up the defense forces and had in fact, relied for his personal security upon the Rakhi Bahini which received more money, was better equipped and seemed in all matters to have precedence over the regular armed forces.

38. By March 1975, it was estimated that about four thousand members of the Awami League including five members of the Parliament were killed by forces of the Right and Left. Nor was the method adopted by the government in dealing with the terrorists very illuminating. The persons suspected to be belonging to the anti-social forces were arrested, and brutally tortured after arrest. Many police posts in Different parts of the country were raided and in most of these cases, the raiders were able to escape with large quantities of arms and ammunition.

However, it is difficult to suggest that conditions in Bangladesh were ripe for a broad based popular revolution. The masses, undoubtedly were disillusioned with the Mujib regime and this enchantment was shared by the young officers in the army but the people did not visualise or thought of an immediate alternative. The concluding chapter would examine the entire gamut of causes and conditions in Bangladesh which were responsible for Mujib's overthrow.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Political parties have been the major agents/instruments for political development and socialisation in most of the developing third world countries. This is particularly true during the period immediately following their independence as there are very few institutions which are concerned and which can affect the political culture, behaviour and pattern of the people¹

The political system of a country is a sub system of the larger social system which again in turn is embedded in its history and culture. Politics has its roots, as a consequence on a state specific-unique set of values. The Muslim residents of Bengal before partition were downtrodden economically² and hence the politics in Bengal centered around their economic plight. If they joined and voted for Pakistan, they did it with the hope of a better life with their counterparts in the West Pakistan. However, their

1 C.D. Gopinath, Pakistan in transition (Delhi, 1975), p.1

2 For details see S.K. Chakrobari, The Evolution of Politics in Bangladesh, 1947-1978, (New Delhi, 1978), pp. 1-4.

aspirations and hopes were soon belied by a gradual cultural, political, social and economic subjugation by the ruling elite of West Pakistan.

It was against such a background that party politics in East Pakistan which later became Bangladesh, took place. It has been aptly observed that, "In Pakistan, political parties were in the main, children of frustration"³.

Historians and political scientists have said that the political development of a state is conditioned the way it is born. The new state of Bangladesh took birth through violence, mayhem and blood spawning the diverse thinking and ideas which disrupted the pre-revolution consensus among the Bangladeshi leaders about the adoption of a Westminster model of democracy. The various groups, advocating the view that the poor conditions of the country could be ameliorated only through a social revolution of the Chinese type, had acquired a large quantity of arms and ammunition during the struggle for liberation. After independence, they drew their cadres from the Mukti Vahini members. These various groups questioned the parliamentary form of government and challenged Mujib's regime.

3 K.K. Aziz, Party Politics in Pakistan, 1947-1958 (Islamabad, 1976), p. 179.

It was true that the Awami League had provoked a mass nationalist revolution but the fact remained that it proved to be an abject failure in the challenging task of running the problem ridden new state. The polarization between the centrist Awami League and the radical revolutionary groups became sharper by 1974.⁴ Consequently, Sheikh Mujib put aside the parliamentary government and resorted to the device of one party dictatorship and totalitarian control.

Even those who were familiar with the tensions building in Bangladesh after Mujib had resorted to dictatorial tactics, had not anticipated an anti-Mujib coup. However, it will not be out of place to suggest that Mujib's programme of total control had one major lacuna. He had overlooked the possible reaction of the regular armed forces. He had ignored the suggestions of his advisers to take precautionary measures against an army coup. The budgetary allocation for the defence remained at 13% of the total expenditure. A major complaint of the armed forces was that even from this allocation, the Rakhi Vahini was the recipient of arms and ammunition. The plan to increase the strength of the Rakhi Vahini from 25,000 in 1975 to 1,30,000 in 1980 was looked with deep suspicion and

4 Asian Survey, Vol XVI No. 2, February 1976.

hostility by the army, where on the contrary, the recruitment was stopped.

For a variety of reasons, the army was anti Indian. They felt that the 'Indian army just walked into Bangladesh, when we had already finished the job'. They were bitter about the fact that the Indian Army took away to India all the sophisticated weapons and vehicles captured from the Pakistan Army forces when they surrendered in December, 1971. They also had a feeling that Sheikh Mujib was no more than a puppet of the Indian government. This anti Indian sentiment on the part of the armed forces gradually developed an anti-Mujib orientation. However, Mujib had alienated beyond a tolerable consternation the officers of the army by demoting and even sacking several of them on the prompting of some Awami League leaders who had personal scores to settle with the officers concerned.

The ostentation, pomp and grandeur surrounding the President had increased in inverse proportion to the fall in his popularity. Conditions in the countryside was much worse than before because of government's failure Industries were in no better shape. Nationalised as they were, most of them were placed under new Awami League appointees, who had neither experience nor competence. Inflation soared and prices registered a 400-500% rise.

By 1975, it was disappointingly clear to the Bangla populace that Awami League had failed to fulfill the promises made in 1972. Parliamentary democracy had been scrapped. Mujib had sought to establish himself as an all-powerful President who must rule by decree. The national Assembly was deprived of its powers, the judiciary was reduced to the status of a subordinate branch of administration the rights of citizens and the judiciary's power to enforce them taken away.

In fact, even as early as 1972, it seemed to various sections of the Bangladesh society that Awami League regime was going to be of revenge than reconciliation. The most affected classes of citizens were-the Pakistan Army and its paramilitary auxiliaries; the Bengalis who had declared their support for Pakistan during war; the non - Bengali population indiscriminately described as Biharis, regardless of their ethnic origins; members of professed Muslim organisations; and individual Muslim theologians and scholars.

The Awami League regime passed the collaborators order of 1972. It claimed that the Bangladesh administration had come into existence on the night of March 26, 1971. All those who had worked for nine months from March 26 to

December 16, 1971, were declared traitors and collaborators of the Pakistani army and having helped the enemy to continue to occupy the territories of Bangladesh which they had no right to do.

This piece of legislation was largely seen by the affected citizens as an exercise in judicial vengeance. Having set up the tribunals to try and punish the collaborators, the government declared that any lawyer who dared defend them would himself be considered guilty of collaboration and liable to be charged and arrested. The result was widespread fear. Lawyers declined to take up "Collaborators" cases.

The order prescribed a scale of punishments varying from, two months in prison⁵ to death penalty. The sufferers of the collaborators order were prominent people belonging to the Muslim League, the Jamaat-e-Islami, the Nazam-e-Islami etc. The same fate befell many others including the non-Bengalis, the Biharis and as alleged other professional rivals. The collaborators order thus provided a legal order to prosecute and if possible bring an end to political opposition to the Awami League government.

5 It was raised to 5 years with retrospective effect.

The newly emerged state of Bangladesh required a broad-based national government and a progressive reconciliation between the antagonistic sections of the Bangla people.

The opposition parties in Bangladesh remained fragmented and inconsistent lacking in effective leadership and mass appeal. Despite the shortcomings of the Awami League, the person of Mujib had made all the difference. League's complete domination in the administration had naturally eroded opposition's stake in the system and in the process had blocked the maturity of the parliamentary democracy. In the event of failure to get their terms constitutionally, the opposition tends to get demoralised and they often resort to strong arm tactics through non-constitutional means.

The intermittent violent upheavals had definitely weakened people's respect for authority, law and order and brought to the fore serious socio-economic and political disturbances warranting authoritarianism⁶

6 T. Maniruzzaman, "Bangladesh: An unfinished Revolution", Journal of Asian Studies (New York) Vol. 35, No. 4 1975, p. 89.

The Awami League had failed to meet the expectations of the masses following the nationalist struggle culminating in Bangla independence. Mujib could not meet the challenge of the revolutionary leftists. And as it happens normally in the third world countries, the solution is to offer a make-shift ideology centering around one leader⁷. In Bangladesh, the ideology was 'Mujibbad' and the leader was Mujib. However, the weakness of Mujibism as an ideology was reflected in the factionalism of the Awami League. Tajuddin Ahmad, the Finance minister lead the group that believed in the socialist economy and not the mixed economy. It opposed the nationalization of industries and foreign trade without the nationalization of the distribution system. Another group led by Khondaker Mustaq however favored mixed economy. The Awami League was plagued by these ideological divisions and had its implications in the smooth governance of the country.

The division among the younger party members was far more serious as reflected in the split in the students League, leading to the establishment of the Jatio Samajtantric Dal. Tension between two factions of students league of the Awami League, had in fact resulted in serious

7 Ibid, p. 905.

clashes in Dacca, Rajshahi and Chittagong Universities claiming several lives.⁸

The Awami League indeed, as noted, was not able either to steady the economy or effect any real steps towards socialism. Despite nationalization of the 90% of industries and foreign trade, the truth was that the distribution of both locally produced and imported goods was carried on by licensed "dealers". Most of these licensees were the Awami League workers who sold their permits to professional merchants at very prices.⁹ In addition 60 thousand houses abandoned by the non-Bengalies appropriated by the Awami League workers.¹⁰

As the organization and forum of nationalism, the Awami League had drawn into its fold all those who sought and aspired for an independent Bangladesh.¹¹ The party leadership had made no effort to train the freedom fighters in socialism. They rather relied on Mujib's charisma to maintain unity. However, very soon the Awami League workers

8 See Holiday, April 7, 1974.

9 See Bangla Bani, 30 September and 12th November, 1973.

10 See Gonokanatha, 1st June 1973.

11 See Talukdar Maniruzzaman, Group Interest and Political changes, studies of Pakistan and Bangladesh, (New Delhi, 1982) p. 160.

found Mujibbad unrewarding and had to be enticed with perquisites such as licenses and houses. This did create dissension and dissatisfaction within the party leading to fragmentation and providing fuel for revolutionary arguments.¹²

When a situation develops like the one which developed in Bangladesh, people are overburdened with the frustration of their expectations and disillusionment with the administration. Bangladesh was passing through such a situation since the latter part of 1974, and more particularly after the constitutional amendment of January 1975.

It was reasonably argued that what the country needed then was not vacillation and vengeance through the constitutional niceties or distortions but bold, imaginative action calculated to restore order in the shortest possible time and Mujib was an abject failure in effecting this.¹³

The revolt against Mujibur Rahman was sparked off by a minor incident in the Bangladesh army. An officer's wife

12 Ibid., p 161.

13 See M. Rahman, Bangladesh Today: An Indictment and a Lament (London, 1978).

was insulted by a prominent member of the Awami League and when the officer protested against this, he too was subjected to humiliation. The matter was taken to the President for arbitration but rather than displease a party chief, Mujib chose to reprimand the officer himself. The latter was reduced in rank first and then discharged. Suppressed anger and consternation in all army circles followed. The incident brought to boiling point, a simmering resentment that had been growing in the armed forces for some time. They had seen as to how Mujib showed no inclination to build up a real defence force; he relied rather for his personal security upon the Rakhi Bahini which received more money, was better equipped and seemed in all matters to have precedence over the regular armed forces. The incident relating to the officer's wife seemed the last straw on the camel's back.

The world does not yet know how the coup of August 15, 1975 was planned and carried out.

The Bangladesh people did not show or express any shock or surprise upon receiving the news that the President and his family had been assassinated. That reflected the level of unpopularity of the once "Bangabandhu", the father of the nation.

The group of officers who organised the coup were inexperienced young people who had no political plans of their own; they carried out a limited scheme and achieved a limited objective which was the elimination of Mujibur Rahman. But the elimination of a single person, however powerful was no solution to anything. What followed Mujib's assassination was a period of coups and counter-coups. At the end of 1975, Bangladesh entered into a period of greater uncertainty than was the case under the Awami League regime. Bangladesh had remained under military regimes despite movements for restoration of democracy which is being led by none other than the Awami League headed by Sheikh Hasina Wazed daughter of Mujibur Rahman.

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