



Bangabandhu's historic announcement in racecourse on March 7, 1971.

PHOTO: JALALUDDIN-HAIDER

The following is based on a lecture given by the writer at the Bangla Academy some years ago, based on *The Unfinished Memoirs*—an autobiography of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, translated by the writer and published by University Press Limited (UPL). It traces the evolution of the founding figure of Bangladesh, from a fiery young man drawn to fighting injustice to a passionate champion of the downtrodden whose politics and beliefs were honed by the movements he participated in that ultimately made him play the lead role in Bangladesh's road to independence.

# Bangabandhu's Vision of Independence

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One of the most striking characteristics evident in *The Unfinished Memoirs* is how the young Sheikh Mujibur Rahman showed immense courage and resolve in standing up against arbitrary and overpowering forces, and how he became a figure who spoke truth to power repeatedly. In the process, he developed into Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the kind of leader able to inspire others to drive out the brutal and powerful occupation army

anything and everything for his country and its people. This is why at one point of his narrative, when he feels that Moulana Bhashani had acted unbecomingly in public when Mr. Shamsul Huq had been asked to preside over a meeting instead of him, Bangabandhu says he nevertheless retained his respect for the Moulana, since he had sacrificed so much for the cause of the people by that time. As Bangabandhu notes on the occasion, "To do anything great, one has to be ready to sacrifice and show one's devotion. I believe that those who are not ready to sacrifice are not capable of doing anything worthy. I was able to come to the conclusion that to engage in politics in our country one must be ready to make huge sacrifice and show one's devotion" (137). Some years later, when he had become the father of two children, we find Bangabandhu thinking thus just before he is going to be arrested yet again:

"I was getting more and more attached to my children. I didn't feel like leaving them but I would have to. I had consecrated myself to the cause of my country—so what was the point of becoming sentimental about my family? If one loves one's country and its people one must be ready to sacrifice something and in the end might have to give up everything (159)."

Bangabandhu's life, as recorded in *The Unfinished Memoirs*, is one of such continuing sacrifices, unrelenting courage, and unswerving commitment. In it he

demonstrates time and again the ability to bear immense pain for a cause and endurance and immense capacity for sheer hard work. The narrative allows us to see how in addition to the sacrifices he had made in terms of family, education and finances, he had to work endlessly and undergo constant travel. He endured sleepless nights, physical pain as well as deprivation of all sorts in his dedication to the cause of his people. During the Bengal famine, for example, he laboured for some time in gruel kitchens in Kolkata; a little later we find him involved in relief work in Gopalganj.

Whatever the young Mujib was involved in, he was hard at work, completely focused on the job at hand, and convinced that what he was doing was important for the future of his country and its people. Such commitment and capacity for hard work, coupled with organisational skills, will explain why we see him being made secretary of different committees at different levels, whether as a youth in Gopalganj, or a student in Kolkata. It is for such complete commitment that we find him getting involved in Muslim League politics in the city, or becoming a rising politician in post-partition Dhaka. After he came to Dhaka he very quickly quit the Muslim League and rose to prominence in the Awami Muslim League that he had helped create.

When in the first stage of his political career he had launched headlong into the movement to create Pakistan, he appeared to have kept in view the sacrifices made by



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As part of their election campaign Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy travelling in Rajshahi by boat (1954).

that had come to bloody his beloved Bangladesh in 1971. Again and again in his autobiographical writings we see how he is ever ready to stand up and protest against injustice and willing to sacrifice