



other Bengali Muslim leaders before him; he always had a clear sense of history and knew what it could teach us. He thus tells us at this point of his story that he was very conscious of the Sepoy Mutiny and the Wahabi movement and very much aware of “how the British had snatched away power from the Muslims and how then “the Hindus had flourished at their expense” (23). He is aware too, he tells us in the same section of his narrative, of the Wahabi movement, Titu Mir’s rebellion and Haji Shariatullah’s Fariazi movement. A little later, he underscores the necessity of breaking free from the clutches of “Hindu moneylenders and zamindars” (ibid).

The implication of such passages are clear; Bangabandhu is surely saying that as a Bengali Muslim ready to campaign for Pakistan in Kolkata, he knows that he has models before him in various Muslim movements and leaders whose achievements are recorded in Bengal’s history. He is fully aware of the resistance undertaken over time against British colonialism, Hindu feudal elements, rapacious financiers and business men of all religions who preyed on Muslim peasants and workers. It was no doubt his consciousness of the way ordinary Bengali Muslims suffered at the hands of Hindu Bengali Brahmins that had on a previous occasion made him take on the Hindu Mahasabha leader of Gopalganj town, Suren Banerjee and his men. This was the occasion for the young Mujib’s first experience of jail as well as of police and court proceedings.

But as a young and budding leader he was always willing and ready to stand up against all men with feudal mindsets, Hindu or Muslim. In the formation of Bangabandhu’s consciousness, anti-feudal as well as communal emotions played a major part, as did his awareness of the negative roles played by such men in Bengal’s history. This was clearly why he endorsed Mr. Abul Hashim’s manifesto for the Muslim League in which the veteran ideologue argued that the zamindari system should be abolished. The budding leader came to the realisation that he would have to take a stand against the feudal Muslim leaders of East and West Pakistan’s Muslim League because these people were essentially lackeys of the British, opportunists, anti-people, selfish and heartless. It was with such knowledge that Bangabandhu would launch himself in the movement to wrest control on behalf of all Bengalis—Hindus as well as Muslims—in the next phase of his political career in the newly created province of East Pakistan. And he would do so with the same kind of courage, indomitable spirit, self-sacrificing mentality and commitment he had shown in the movement for Pakistan under Mr. Suhrawardy’s leadership in Kolkata.

*The Unfinished Memoirs* is thus very much the story of a spirited young politician learning about how he should take his people forward on the road to independence as he plunged deeper and deeper into Bengal politics. It is very much a narrative revealing Bangabandhu’s instinctive identification with ordinary people and sense that he belonged to them and not in the pockets of distant rulers. It is also about his realisation that the real enemies of a country are those who exploit people—Brahmin or Muslim landlords, moneylenders and businessmen-politicians. Patrolling the streets of Kolkata with a gun in his hands

to protect Muslims during the riots that took place there before Partition, he soon realised that though a Muslim Leaguer it was his responsibility to save Hindus as well as Muslims stranded in riot situations. The young Mujib’s intense involvement in saving Bihar riot victims afterwards left him with an even greater appreciation of the havoc caused by communal feelings and the need to rise above them to work for our common humanity.

Back in his country after Partition and deeply involved in East Pakistani politics, we find him stressing the importance of “ensuring communal harmony in Pakistan for the nation’s future” (109). He now has the additional realisation that maintaining peace between people of different religions inside Pakistan was essential since religious riots had chain reactions, inevitably creating an endless flux of refugees and immense suffering for

decision-makers in Dhaka and Karachi know how such a restriction could affect “*dawals*” or day labourers who worked in rice fields outside their home districts and who received a part of the harvest for the work that they did, which they would then take back home after harvesting was over? Immediately, the young Mujib organised protest meetings against such an unjust and arbitrary measure and even rushed to Khulna to “lead a procession of *dawals*” there (111). Repeatedly, at this stage of his political career, we can see Bangabandhu getting involved in such situations on behalf of ordinary people and pitting himself against rulers based in far-off cities and walled places who knew little or nothing about their lives but who imposed decrees on them ruthlessly and capriciously. At one such point of Bangabandhu’s narrative he indicates that any leader who has surrounded himself with officials and cut himself off from

supported by people in 1947” could be defeated so easily in record time, the answer that came to him immediately was that “it could be put down to coterie politics, rule of tyranny, inefficient administration and absence of sound economic planning” (127).

Every educated Bangladeshi should read the *Unfinished Memoirs*, if only because he or she can deduce from it the steady evolution of his political philosophy. The excellently paced narrative reveals the way Bangabandhu began to evolve the founding principles of Bangladesh and realise the need for good and people-focused governance from close encounters with politicians and government officials. As he got to know the people of East Bengal, and as he went from district to district and town to town there after the Kolkata part of his educational and political life was over, he began to evolve a vision for



**During the mourning rally in memory of the Language Martyrs, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman with Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani, Mohiuddin Ahmed and Tajuddin Ahmed (February 21, 1964).**

ordinary people everywhere. Later, when in jail in Faridpur for an extended period of time where he met the philanthropist Chandra Ghosh, who had been put there unfairly by bigoted politicians and administrators, the then ailing Bangabandhu said to him in tears, “I always treat people as people. In politics I make no distinction between Muslims, Hindus and Christians; all are part of the same human race” (190).

Plunging even deeper into East Pakistani politics, Bangabandhu realised that the only reason for him to be in politics was that it would give him the opportunity to work for ordinary people; it was only their causes he should stand up for. One of my favourite passages of *The Unfinished Memoirs* depicts the young Mujib reacting against the arbitrary imposition of the “cordon” system in rural East Pakistan to restrict inter-district food grain movement. How would the

ordinary citizens would inevitably be alienated from them and would alienate them as well.

In 1948, while travelling from one part of the country to another on organisational work, Bangabandhu learnt that lower class employees of the University of Dhaka were on strike for more pay and better facilities. Consequently, he joined them and the students campaigning on their behalf. He had felt then that it was easy for him to see that “they had taken the measure because the people in power had decided to ignore their demands” (119). His experience at this juncture, as with the landless farmers affected by the cordon system, convinced Bangabandhu that the Muslim League was losing support rapidly because of its anti-people policies and administration. When the young Mujib asked himself some months later why the party that had been “so enthusiastically

Bangladesh that would lead him closer and closer to its founding principles—secularism, nationalism, democracy and socialism. Looking at the Muslim League government at work in East Pakistan, Bangabandhu came to understand clearly why government must be by the people, for the people and of the people, why democracy worked best, and why any government in power should work on democratic assumptions.

There are thus many lessons we can learn from *The Unfinished Memoirs* that are of timeless value. The young Mujib realises, for instance, in 1950 that the problem with Liaquat Ali Khan was that “he wanted to be the prime minister not of a people but of a party” (144) and “that a country could not be equated with any one political party” (ibid). More than once, Bangabandhu had the feeling that the Muslim League government was asking for trouble by trying to smother