



(L) A student procession at Dhaka University campus during the mass uprising of 1969. (M) Deepa Sen, leading the procession by Dhaka University students after Asad was killed on January 25, 1969. (R) A street children at the forefront of a procession during the mass uprising of 1969. Police bullets killed the child soon after the photograph was taken.

THE ANGRY YOUNG WORLD

Dhaka University Campus in context: East Pakistan's "Mass Upsurge" at Local, Regional, and International Scales

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This article considers student activism at Dhaka University in the 1960s as a case study for considering student politics at multiple scales: local, regional, and international. In addition to providing a historical narrative of Dhaka's engagement in the Mass upsurge campaign that led to the end of the Ayub Kahn regime, it also considers the ways this movement was informed by a sense of student power that extended beyond national borders.

In 1968, of course, students were causing headaches for government leaders far beyond Pakistan's national borders and regional scale. While newspapers were under strict censorship and were limited in their ability to run stories about the activities of anti-government activity in Pakistan, they were free to report on the activities of students elsewhere, and they did so in high volume. In fact, in the Pakistan Observer for the year of 1968, student uprisings dominate the coverage, occupying as much attention as the Vietnam War. There was also a weekly column reporting on student political uprisings entitled "The Angry Young World" which ran articles on a variety of uprisings. The sense from reading these dailies was of a world being turned upside by youth revolt; thus, even though the papers did not have any stories regarding student activity in Pakistan, they fomented a spirit of youth political agency through reportage on other arenas, and created an international scale into which students at Dhaka University could place themselves. These newspaper stories provided the linkage of Dhaka University students with the larger "imagined community" of the youth in the Global Sixties. Of particular interest was the rising young star in the British New Left, Tariq Ali. In an article entitled "Britain's Student Revolt Goes International" the international spirit of "1968" is personified by Ali:

Britain's Rudi Dutschke is a Pakistani 24-year-old Oxford student Tariq Ali whose energetic face, with its black mustache, is today the very face of student agitation in Britain... The mission that Tariq Ali has set himself and that of his followers is to make heard, as loudly as possible, the protest of a whole youth against the actual state of the world... For the first time in history, Britain today has an internationalist youth. However limited its action may be currently, it is opening a new era (d'Etchevers, Jaqueline. 1968. "Britain's Student Revolt Goes International." The Pakistan Observer, May 5, p. A12).

Articles such as these connected Pakistani students directly to the global uprising of youth political activity in 1968. They also made Tariq Ali a powerfully exciting figure, and students were eager to make contact. As he wrote in his memoir:

The student movement in Pakistan (which then included Bangladesh) was in its fourth month of struggle and the revolt had extended to every town in the country. The Student Action Committee from Rawalpindi and Dhaka were pressing me to return. I was determined to see it all for myself (Ali, Tariq. 2005. Street Fighting Years: An Autobiography of the Sixties. London: Verso, p. 319)

Ali (2005) made arrangements to visit each wing, and after his visit to West Pakistan, where he was well received, he was certain that, "The entire country seemed to be crying out for change, but before I could accurately estimate the possibilities I had to visit East Pakistan" (Ali 2005:323). Ali's experience in Dhaka depicts clearly the fluidity of identity in the period. On one hand he was an international figure, on another he was a West Pakistani, and yet he found common ground while simultaneously recognizing the local specificity, explaining:

I was only in Dhaka for a few days, but it became very clear that this was a different

world. Linguistically, culturally and politically it was a separate nation. Its oppression made it difficult not to become a separate state. And yet, I felt more at ease, intellectually and politically, in Dhaka than in Rawalpindi. The political culture was far more advanced. I spoke at a large student meeting underneath the famous Amtala tree on the Dhaka University campus (Ali 2005:323).

Ali's speech was important on multiple levels. As a figure, he represented an important blurring of the distinctions between East and West Pakistan, as well as international identity. His visit and his support for the East Pakistan movement represented the mutually constitutive relationships between the scales that the mobilization existed within.

The processions were growing larger and larger each day, and the city was no longer functioning. Demonstrations against the regime were reaching into numbers for 40,000 to 50,000 in attendance (Umar, Badruddin. 2006. The Emergence of Bangladesh. Volume 2: The Rise of Bengali Nationalism (1958–1971). New York: Oxford University Press, pp.154–63). On January 20th the movement took a deadly turn. A massive procession of students had begun to march from the Amtolla to the General Secretariat. Police opened fire and attacked the students. Nabi (Nuran, Nabi. 2010. Bullets of '71: A Freedom Fighter's Story. Bloomington: Authorhouse) recalls:

The police confronted the protesters. A student leader of Chatra Union named Asad

How often had his ageing mother,
With such tender care,
Hung that shirt out to dry
In her sunny courtyard.
Now that self-same shirt
Has deserted the mother's courtyard,
Adorned by bright sunlight
And the soft shadow
Cast by the pomegranate tree,
Now it flutters
On the city's main street,
On top of the belching factory chimneys,
In every nook and corner
Of the echoing avenues,
How it flutters
With no respite
In the sun-scorched stretches
Of our parched hearts,
At every muster of conscious people
Uniting in a common purpose.
Our weakness, our cowardice
The stain of our guilt and shame—
All are hidden from the public gaze
By this pitiful piece of torn raiment Asad's
shirt has become

Our pulsating hearts' rebellious banner.
The day after the three-day mourning period, a gathering occurred just off the Dhaka University grounds that exceeded 100,000 demonstrators from a wide swath of society. Protesters carried placards with Asad's image, as well as the images of the Language Martyrs from the Bhasha Andolan. During a march protesting Asad's murder, police again opened fire, killing more demonstrators (Hanan, Mohammed. 1987. Bangladesh Chatra Andoloner Itihash. Vol. 2: 1953–1969. Dhaka: Owarshi Prokashani p. 371).

By the end of January, the government had virtually no control of the Eastern province and the students in West Pakistan, following the direction of Bhutto, were rioting again. In an article in a weekly news magazine Holiday, in February 1969, Badruddin Umar commented, "...the students have emerged



Dainik Azad, January 21, 1969

Protest against the Ayub regime extended through the diaspora community as well, as students in London overtook and occupied the Pakistan High Commission building. The London Times reported:

More than 100 Pakistani students took over the Pakistan High Commission Building...after a stormy protest meeting at which students condemned the Ayub regime. They occupied two floors of the building...Demonstrators lined the balcony chanting and waving placards saying: 'This building is occupied' and 'Ayub Out.' (Ali 2005:244–45).

Students were united at local, regional and even international scales with a sense of political agency and power.

In Dhaka, the students responded to the uprisings in the West by escalating the Eleven Point Campaign. The leaders of SAC met at Modhur Canteen and devised a plan to bring the Ayub regime to its knees. Tofail Ahmed recalls the moments just before the group launched a series of strikes in January 1969 that would come to be called Mass Upsurge, "It was no longer just autonomy. We needed total governmental structural change." (Personal interview 2010). The group decided that they would call for a General Strike on January 5, 1969. The call for the strike was heeded by all of the major political parties. In response to the unity of the SAC, the political parties formed the Democratic Action Committee as a united platform to free all political prisoners and to suspend the Ayub Khan government.

The days following the January 5th general strike were filled with constant agitation in Dhaka. The Guardian newspaper, commenting on the situation, even called Tofail Ahmed, the convener of SAC and VP of DUCSU, the "virtual governor" of Dhaka (Kamol, Ershad. 2010. "The Tragedy of Student Politics." The Star Weekend Magazine, February 12).

was at the forefront of the procession. A police officer approached Asad and brandished his gun at point blank range. He fired. Asad's lifeless body fell to the street. We couldn't believe what we had just seen. Anger filled our blood as we charged to the site. The police, overwhelmed, retreated. Asad's body was recovered and brought to the college (p. 122).

The brutal assassination of Asad uz Zamman, a student at Dhaka University and a well-known political activist on campus, had a profound mobilizing effect on the movement. The student community was affected deeply and personally by the death of such a popular and prominent member of the campus. A gruesome image of his dead body just after being shot, with blood pouring from the back of him was printed on the cover of virtually every newspaper the next morning, and SAC declared three days of mourning on his behalf.

Students gathered the morning after the death and raised Asad's bloodied shirt onto a pole. Thousands of students gathered in mourning for their fallen comrade. Tofail Ahmad recalls, "At that day, we took an oath that Asad's death would not be in vain. He was one of us—not just a Bengali—a student of Dhaka University, truly one of us. We felt a sadness deep in our bellies" (Personal interview 2010). Asad was declared a martyr by the students. A well circulated poem for the martyred Asad, captures the mood of the students,

Like bunches of blood-red Oleander,
Like flaming clouds at sunset
Asad's shirt flutters
In the gusty wind, in the limitless blue.
To the brother's spotless shirt
His sister had sown
With the fine gold thread
Of her heart's desire
Buttons which shone like stars;



Amanullah Asaduzzaman
(10 June 1942 – 20 January 1969)

as a powerful political factor not because it is an accident, but because they are performing a historical task in the development of our society" (Umar, Badruddin, 1969. "The Eleven Pointers" Holiday, February 9, p. 6.). He chastised the political parties for their inability to show the same unity and sophistication as the students demonstrated in the Eleven Point Program, arguing, "It is precisely because the students have announced a programme which is very much in conformity with the thinking of the ordinary people—the peasants, the workers, the middle class, the students... that the people have rallied around their eleven point program" (Umar 1969:6). The movement had taken on dimensions that were beyond the demands of the Six Points, thanks to the students, and it had become imbued with a sense of power that Ayub could not ignore.

Ayub announced, on February 21, 1969 that he would not run for office in the next election. The date of the announcement, February 21, as the day the largest student movement success in the nation's history, the Bhasha Andolan, celebrated annually, was certainly not an accident. He devised a plan for constitutional reforms and planned for roundtable talks to discuss the reforms with major political leaders. He also released the prisoners of the Agartala Conspiracy Case, including Mujib. On February 24, 1969, Sheikh Mujib went before a crowd of over 100,000 people at the race course grounds near Dhaka University, and embraced Tofail Ahmed, thanking the students for their work and dedication. At this event, Ahmed placed a garland of flowers around Mujib's neck and gave him the title "Bangabandhu" (friend of Bengal). This title stayed with Mujib throughout his life, and is still used as an affectionate and honorific term for Mujib (Husain, Syed Shahid. 2011. What was Once East Pakistan. Karachi: Oxford University Press).

The roundtable talks fell apart, and finally, after months of chaos and disorder, Ayub conceded defeat and stepped down from power in March 1969. He handed over power to an interim military administration, headed by General Yahya Khan. Yahya declared Martial Law, but also declared that national elections would be held within a year. The Mass Upsurge movement had shaken the Pakistani state to its core and the students of Dhaka University felt an empowerment that was on scales both geographically and in terms of community that was unprecedented. In terms of the Global Sixties, students in Pakistan had achieved what revolutionaries young people across the world desired: they had literally brought down the ruling regime.

Student activism in the late 1960s at Dhaka University cannot be contained in a narrative of nationalism nor of internationalism, and as such, serves as a valuable example elucidating the overlapping scales at which movement identity functioned simultaneously. While certainly at times, as demonstrated in the discussion of the local context, students were addressing specific and unique circumstances tied to their most immediate location (the campus), at other times, as demonstrated in the regional and international contexts, that same campus served as a place where students enacted and articulated their actions as part of larger frameworks of understanding. Thus the campus itself, as a place, also did not function within a singular scale symbolically for students. Overall, as scholars continue to seek understanding of the student activism of the 1960s as a pattern of "Restless Youth" occurring across the world, the case study of Dhaka University provides a useful example of the importance of considering various scales of context (local, regional, international) as interdependent and mutually constitutive in the actions and imaginations of movement participants as they define both themselves and the places they claim as their own.

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