

Kingshuk Chatterjee*

BORN OF BLOOD : Bangladesh and the
Dilemmas of a Divided Society

Introduction

Bangladesh had come into being as a country fighting two major historical forces in the last century – the colonial and the post-colonial. The anti-colonial struggle was waged not only against the political elite of the Raj, but also the socio-economic elite that had come into being with the Permanent Settlement – the violent disjunction of 1947 resolved that, by removing that elite in what was to become history's most violent partition. At that point, Bangali Muslims made common cause with fellow religionists elsewhere in the subcontinent, hoping to live unmolested in their new-found freedom.

In the quarter century that followed, it became clear that religion was less secure of an imaginary than it was previously thought. The homeland for Muslims of the Indian subcontinent failed to live up to the promises of a new start, as the traditionally dominant elite of the Western Wing tried to secure their domination of the Eastern Wing as well. The predominantly Bangali Muslim population of East Pakistan found domination by the Muslim elite of West Pakistan every bit as unpalatable as that by the Hindu elite of what had now become India. Attempts at adjustment did not quite succeed, as the population of East Pakistan were subjected to systematic economic exploitation and

* Professor, Department of History, Calcutta University, India

political subjugation by the West. As East Pakistan struggled in its search for a better life, demanding first equitable treatment, and then autonomy, West Pakistan responded with the heavy hand of repression. The brutality of Pakistani attempts at subjugation, first during the years of martial law, and then the systematic carnage approximating a genocide, made the second violent breach in the subcontinent that occurred in 1971 even more painful than the past one.

In the half century that has lapsed since its independence, Bangladesh has had a long journey out of the economic deprivation as well as social subordination. Rapidly rising through the ranks of underdeveloped countries, Bangladesh today shines bright as a beacon of economic performance in the subcontinent. However, its political institutions are still somewhat wobbly, and the societal landscape far from having stabilised over the decades since 1971. As a result of this instability of political institutions as much as persistent issues with the socio-economic landscape, Bangladesh now appears to be a society deeply divided within itself. The people of Bangladesh seem to be torn over the dilemma of whether they are to be a linguistic nation (of the Bangali people) or a confessional nation (a Muslim country). Still more importantly, a far more divisive question continues to haunt them from their years as a part of Pakistan – whether they are to be a Muslim nation or an Islamic one?

The paper begins with the original idea of post-partition East Bengal, and how that was prematurely botched under Pakistani rule. It then goes on to talk about the vision of Bangladesh that Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman stood for in 1971, and goes on to analyse its two components – the vision of Bangladesh free of economic exploitation by others, and the thornier question of Bangladeshi identity. The essay concludes by contending while the economic vision is well on its way to being realised, the question of identity is quite far from being resolved.

The Bangali dream and how it fell short in Pakistan

The birth of Bangladesh in 1971 was like the end of a long nightmare, and what followed was meant to be a dream – that of the Bangabandhu and the generation of the *Muktijoddhas* about what they aspired for their country to become. The nightmare proved inordinately long simply because the point of origin of the three countries of modern South Asia was among the most violent breaches in the history of mankind. It resulted in the displacement of over 17 million people, and a carnage with hundreds and thousands of people being raped, brutalised and killed on either side of hastily drawn frontier lines. But the violence of the disjunction was not limited simply to the human cost of the partition and the trauma of dislocation, but also because it created hard boundaries within an economic landscape that had come into being over two millennia. The ostensible irreversibility of the moment of 1947, sealed in the blood of those who were lost in the mayhem, ensured that markets, economic relations and networks that had sustained the economy of the region over the centuries had to be virtually reconfigured overnight to keep life going.

After living under the thumb of Zamindars created by the British, life in East Pakistan did not really solve much of the existential problems of the people. The problem had its roots, in a way, because of dislocations in the character of land-ownership caused by the colonial land settlement, and its impact on capital accumulation.¹ In a province that was demographically divided almost half-and-half among Hindus and Muslims, the overwhelming share of economic resources that remained outside the colonial apparatus was concentrated in the hands of non-Muslims.² Although there remained quite a few Muslim landowning families, the bulk of agricultural land in what was a predominantly agricultural economy remained in the hands of Hindus. In an economy that was waking up to economic modernisation, this left the masses of Bangali Muslims at a

serious disadvantage – both as landless peasantry, and as a social group with comparatively less access to education.³ Such inequitable distribution of resources among the two largest communities thus became a crucial factor in the decision to claim Bengal (with an ostensible numerical majority for Muslims over Hindus) for Pakistan by (relatively wealthy) politicians from Bengal who had joined the Muslim League.⁴ The prospect of loss of economic dominance also resulted in the Hindu determination to resist the handover of the whole of the province to Pakistan.⁵ Hence, even though the partition of the Indian subcontinent happened largely with whole provinces either going to India or Pakistan, Bengal was one of the only two provinces that were partitioned largely along the axes of communitarian majority, disrupting the natural flows and networks of commodity exchange and commerce that had evolved over several centuries.

The outbreak of violence in 1947 physically extirpated from East Bengal many of those who had been instrumental in keeping the region confined largely as a hinterland of the western part. The assumption was that after the departure of those social forces that had kept the region economically as a hinterland of the western part of Bengal, East Bengal would flourish. However, while much of the fixed assets (agricultural land) remained in East Bengal, most of the movable capital of the undivided province remained located in the western part of the province, in the hand of their Hindu owners. Hence, East Bengal began its journey as a part of Pakistan severely impaired in terms of capital wealth. Part of this was somewhat offset by the expropriation of the immovable capital assets of the Hindu evacuees under the rubric of Enemy Property, which became part of the seed capital for the Pakistani banking system and economy.⁶

However, while the people of East Bengal did not have to deal any more with the unequal economic competition of their Hindu counterparts as in colonial times, they still had to reckon with

their fellow Muslims from West Pakistan, and the preferential treatment accorded to them by the Pakistani establishment. The economic resources of East Bengal (or the East Wing), especially income from the export of jute, were deployed for the development of the West Wing in what shaped up to be a kind of 'internal colonialism,' while East Bengal continued to languish economically.⁷ At the very least, there was an almost systemic neglect of the economy of East Pakistan in terms of promoting and financing industrial and infrastructural development, resulting in the economic marginalisation of the people of East Pakistan.⁸ Pakistani decision to insist on a single language, Urdu (spoken by less than 10% of the Pakistani population), as the official language presented the prospect of further marginalisation of the Bangali Muslims of East Pakistan – galvanising opinion around the Bangali language, and sowing the seeds of Bangali nationalism. This was complicated even further by the determination of the political class of West Pakistan, buoyed by their domination of the bureaucracy and military establishments, to subordinate the demographic majority of the East Wing to a permanent political subjecthood. The predominantly-Punjabi ruling class of Pakistan had no intention to allow the culturally distinctive people of East Pakistan to enjoy a dominant position within the country without undermining the Bangali component of its identity, which was identified as being inadequately Islamised.⁹

Thus, soon after having established Pakistan as the homeland of the subcontinent's Muslims, the people of East Bengal had to resist the ruling dispensation of that very same 'homeland' in defence of the language that they spoke at home. With the steady marginalisation of all those who at various points chose to stand for the linguistic identity of the Bangali people, it became clear as early as 1952, that the people of East Pakistan could never become equal citizens of the country without sacrificing their linguistic and cultural identity and accepting their subordination to the dominant West. Hence, with time the demand for

provincial autonomy developed into a formidable movement powered by linguistic nationalism, and eventually had the people of the East Wing break free with their own homeland – Bangladesh. The Pakistani establishment had always been suspicious that the Bangali culture which distinguished East Pakistan was the handiwork of the large Bangali Hindu minority, and that once allowed to drift East Pakistan would drift back into the Indian orbit, and maybe even join it.¹⁰ Much to their surprise, under the leadership of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the breakaway East Bengal emerged as a sovereign state completely independent of India. Having broken the Pakistani connection, the Bangalis were left free for the first time ever to give shape to their own destiny, using the economic resources of the land finally by and for themselves.

Bangabandhu's dream of an Equitable Society in Bangladesh

As in most cases when a nation is born, the creation of the sovereign state of Bangladesh was not only the end of one journey, but also the beginning of another. East Bengal, as indicated above, had been treated merely as an economic hinterland of the western part of the province right through the colonial era, and then that of West Pakistan since 1947. This naturally had impeded the process of capital accumulation in the province. But still more importantly, the violent disjunction of 1947, while it had freed the people of East Bengal from economic domination of the West, had also cut off and cauterised those networks of economic and commodity exchange which had shaped the economy of the region. The creation of Pakistan involved the creation of new networks of exchange, before 1971 disrupted even that. Hence the greatest challenge before the sovereign Republic of Bangladesh was to simultaneously develop new commodity baskets, new markets and networks of exchange, while at the same time kick-start the process of capital accumulation – in other words, lay down the contours of a new economic dispensation altogether.¹¹

To start with in 1971, the hero of the *Muktijuddha* and one of the principal architects of the fledgling country, Bangabandhu Mujibur Rahman dreamt of a Bangladesh that would work for everyone – the rich and poor alike, and not just the educated middle class that constituted the traditional constituency of the Awami League, who constituted the vanguard of the *Muktijuddha*.¹² The problem of which developmental model to follow was crucial, because the capital that was actually accumulated since 1947 by Pakistan, and made available to the people of former East Pakistan upon becoming Bangladesh, was limited. Hence, the government had to begin working with very limited resources, with little prospect of receiving any external assistance right at the outset. With very little entrepreneurial capital accumulated in private hands in East Bengal (barring some old entrepreneurial families like the Esfahanis, who chose to continue in Bangladesh), the option of capitalist economy did not appear much sustainable as a model of development to follow.¹³ The initial idea, therefore, was clearly of a planned economy, with efficient allocation of resources by a four-member Planning Commission.¹⁴

The Planning Commission was given the specific task of laying the foundations of a modern industrial economy. The Commission initially considered nationalising the assets of only West Pakistani, i.e. non-Bangali entrepreneurs, but eventually they recommended nationalisation of all industrial ventures, so that allegations of selective appropriation of non-Bangali assets could not be made.¹⁵ This was expected to provide a substantial pool of resources for the banks to lend to entrepreneurs in a bid to kickstart the economy. However, the total quantum of the assets so nationalised was way short of what would have been needed to provide stimulus to all the various sectors of Bangladeshi economy – agriculture, industry and services – and also provide resources for the security apparatus of the state, generate economic opportunities for the *muktijuddha* generation. As a consequence, expectations of redistribution of assets in

order to spur ahead capital formation did not materialise, because the state needed to optimise the use of all the resources it could lay its hands on in order to build the country literally from scratch.¹⁶

Many historical accounts tend to imply that Bangabandhu was a socialist, as do many others who were then, and still remain protagonists of a controlled economy of sorts.¹⁷ However, some of the people who have worked with him seem to imply that he was not a died-in-the-wool socialist, and that his support for a planned economy was more tactical than ideological – as was the case with so many other statesmen and politicians of the 1970s, during what was considered the high tide of socialism.¹⁸ He merely believed that the model of a planned economy was more appropriate to Bangladesh in the 1970s. The tardiness in the economy of Bangladesh in its initial years was attributed to the developmental model of planned economy itself. Accounts of people who were in the Planning Commission have given the lie to the story, showing the problems to have been more structural and material than behavioural or developmental.¹⁹

The obstacles to economic development that Bangabandhu had encountered could not be overcome in his lifetime. This may have been partially responsible for the turmoil in the political arena that led to the brutal massacre of Sheikh Mujib and almost all his family. When General Ziaur Rahman came to power the economic model favoured by Bangabandhu was replaced with one more suited to the capitalist world-view.²⁰ The ‘course correction’ was partially influenced by the huge quantum of developmental aid that became available (presumably in a bid to wean Bangladesh from the socialist bloc), and partially because General Zia could mobilise the capitalist elements and business interests in Bangladesh behind his regime.²¹

After the end of the Cold War, as the era of developmental aid began to draw to a close, targeted development – particularly from the European Union – became the mainstay of Bangladeshi

economy. This pitched the country firmly in the capitalist bloc, under the guidance of the Finance Minister M. Saifur Rahman.²² The economy of Bangladesh witnessed a series of reforms to bring this about and ensure that greater reliance would be placed on private capital, and the role of the government would be limited to investments in the realm of social overhead capital. These reforms began during the first elected government of the coalition led by the Bangladesh National Party (BNP) under Khaleda Zia, the widow of General Zia. By the time Sheikh Hasina formed the government defeating Begum Zia at the polls, Bangladesh's economy was beginning to show the signs of a take-off. Hence, despite the economic policies being at variance from what many believed Bangabandhu's vision to have been, PM Hasina stayed the course and the liberalisation of the country's economy continued apace.²³ From the 1990s, then, a bipartisan consensus emerged in the Bangladeshi political landscape, in which pro-business BNP, votaries of Islamic (i.e. regulated) economy like the Jamaat-e Islami and erstwhile protagonists of regulated economy like the Awami League could all be said to have embraced market economics.²⁴ Awami League and its leader Sheikh Hasina, however, apparently continue to subscribe to the position that it is primarily the responsibility of the state to put in place infrastructure and social overhead capital. Hence the state continues to invest heavily in the promotion and improvement of education and health infrastructure all across the country.²⁵ Furthermore, the state has signed on the Belt-Road Initiative of China and has undertaken a massive overhaul of the country's infrastructure (as of 2022, no less than 67 infrastructure projects happened to have been operational), so much so that rail, road, riverine and air connectivity between the various parts of the country have changed beyond all recognition in course of the last decade.²⁶ It is expected that with this dramatic expansion of the country's infrastructure, economically backward regions would be connected with larger markets, which would help the people come out of their economic backwardness.

Has Bangladesh abandoned Bangabandhu's dream? That hardly seems to be the case. In the heady decade of the 1970s, when the western capitalist bloc was on the defensive as a result of the oil shock, the Soviet Union and its model of regulated economy seemed to carry all before it. As the head of the fledgling state, Bangabandhu resorted to the model of a planned economy because that seemed to have been the more successful model of the two. Had he lived on, and was presented with the option of developmental aid that came the way of Bangladesh during the days of President Ziaur Rahman, and targeted development of the economy that came in the 1990s, there is no reason or evidence to suggest that Bangabandhu would have disapproved of the choices made, or indeed the outcomes.

On the whole, he would have been happy with the path Bangladesh has travelled in the realm of economy. While a large section of the Bangladeshi population is still mired in economic backwardness, especially in the countryside, the quantum of backwardness has reduced dramatically through the operations of NGOS, micro-credit organisations and finally the dramatic rise of the garments industry.²⁷ If Bangladesh is able to sustain its present levels of growth, her levels of domestic capital accumulation would be considerably better suited for a period of sustained economic growth – which happens to be the basic precondition for the creation of the equitable social order that Bangabandhu and the *Muktijuddha* generation had envisaged. But the fact that the present social order is not fully equitable as yet, serves to explain why fifty years after it came into being, Bangladesh still remains divided over what it stands for.

Bangabandhu's Other Dream – the Bangladeshi Identity

While Bangabandhu's concerns about the material basis of Bangladesh appear well on course to being properly addressed, it is the other dream of Bangabandhu that appears to be a little more contested. The Bangladesh that Sheikh Mujib and many of his generation had envisaged was of a Bangladeshi identity

premised firmly on the language and culture of the Bangali people.²⁸ In the half century since its emergence, the country has struggled to remain set on this path, but appears to be torn between the two selves that went into the making of Bangladesh. The country was envisaged as one distinct in its linguistic and cultural character from West Pakistan, defined by a kind of ethnic nationalism. But despite sharing the common linguistic provenance with West Bengal in India, it differed from the latter in having a dominant majority of people being Muslim by faith, even as it made room for the confessional 'other', i.e. Hindus in its body-politic. This element of 'religious nationalism' was quite strong in Bangladesh all along, and did not have much use for *dharma-nirapekshata* (secularism). Accordingly, the reality on the ground is not only that Hindus feel marginalised in present-day Bangladesh, but also that *dharma-nirapekshata* is engaged in a mortal contest with a new wave of Islamic ascendancy that has begun to characterise Bangladesh's social landscape.²⁹

Indeed, despite all the deep-seated suspicion of the Pakistani state and its functionaries that East Bengal would eventually drift back into the predominantly-Hindu India in order to reunite with Hindu-majority West Bengal, Bangladesh was meant to be the homeland for the Bangali Muslim when it broke free of Pakistan in 1971. The *Muktijuddha* generation dreamt of a land where being a Bangali did not compromise being a Muslim, and being a Muslim did not jeopardise being a Bangali, because they saw no opposition or contradiction between the two.³⁰ The *Muktijuddha* was not simply about obtaining *freedom from* Pakistan, but also about the creation of a Bangladesh where there would be both the *freedom to* be a Muslim and to speak Bangla without being any the worse for that.³¹ Hence, despite the considerable material and logistical assistance given by India, even during their first meeting at New Delhi in January 1972, Sheikh Mujib is known to have made it clear straight away to the Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi that Indian military forces deployed in Bangladesh

needed be withdrawn without much delay.³² Neither did the Indian government show any urge to do otherwise – the pull-out was promised to be completed by 31 March 1972, but was completed on 13th March instead.³³

The Hindu minority that stayed back in East Pakistan was always very articulate, and constituted the mainstay of the Awami League in supporting its demand of provincial devolution and then provincial autonomy.³⁴ This ensured three things during the brief existence of East Pakistan. First, that the Awami League developed a level of trust towards the Hindu component of East Bengal's population, and in return enjoined a secular approach to the religious question in the aftermath of the language movement of 1952. Second, the Hindu component in East Bengal's population was always to be considered as a sort of fifth column by the Pakistani establishment, (and those among its supporters who were not much enamoured of the Bangali component of their identity, and identified more with the Islamic component – primarily the Muslims who had migrated from Bihar and elsewhere in North India during the carnage of 1947, but not limited to only those).³⁵ Third, a clash between the inclusive disposition of the Awami League and exclusionary disposition of the Islamists was always around the corner.

The Pakistani establishment, of course, identified the Awami League approach as a betrayal of Islam, and the Islamist position of the Jamaatis and others the true representation of Muslim interests.³⁶ It needs be appreciated, though, that there never was any one single monolithic body of thought, belief, practice and culture in Islam – neither in the subcontinent, nor elsewhere. The manner of emergence of Islam as a religion, culture and civilisational force in the North-western part of the subcontinent that came to constitute Pakistan was completely different from that in Bengal. While the spread of Islam in what used to be West Pakistan was the result of a gradual Islamisation of the society from top down, through intermarriage and conversion of

the higher echelons of the society first, and then trickling down, the rise of Islam in Bengal frontier was the result of a social phenomenon that moved bottom up – it was more the common people of the region who embraced Islam and the Muslim way of life voluntarily, carrying much of their cultural baggage into the new faith.³⁷ Hence, the Bangali approach to Islam was always more accommodative of past language, culture and social practices. Syncretic in nature, the Islamic socio-cultural space had room as much for the syncretic *Auls and Bauls* and their Sufi-like ways that came in the baggage train of the Sultans and Mughals from the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries, as it did for the Islamists who emerged in the late-nineteenth century and the Arabicisation of the practice that they stood for.³⁸

The Bangali culture absorbed all these influences, and made room for each, without being submerged by any – which often riled the purists. The language itself accommodated the cultural experiences of both Hindus and Muslims over the centuries of its developments in such a catholic fashion that it could reasonably be claimed that as late as the eighteenth century the language was essentially non-sectarian. In the early nineteenth century, the protagonists for the creation of a *Hochsprache* (lit. High Speech or High Culture, i.e. the written language) consciously tried to Sanskritise the language, reducing the number of loan words from Persian and Arabic. It was only upon this that the language appeared somewhat alien to the Islamic experience, even though what by default appeared to be the Low Speech or Low Culture (i.e. the spoken language) retained the earlier non-sectarian character.³⁹ In response, in course of the second half of the nineteenth century, a conscious attempt was undertaken at 'Islamising' the written Bangali language (therefore reformulating the *Hochsprache*) by means of deliberate insertion and usage of Persian and Arabic words, the result being what was often referred by Bangali Hindus to be *Musalmani Bangla*. The emergence of the more Sanskritised and Perso-Arabianised variants of the Bangali language contributed to the widening chasm between the Bangali Hindus and Muslims.

By the early twentieth century, Bangali Muslim practices also were already of two broad sorts – first, the original, more syncretic, Sufi-like, folksy traditionalist Islam, venerating the *pirs* and *mazaars* with a relaxed, amorphous social structure and porous cultural frontier defined by the popular language of Bangla; second, the more modern, relatively more puritanical, Arabicised approach to Islam insisting more on distinctively ‘Islamic’ practices with well defined and hard cultural frontiers (the kind represented by the Jamaat-e Islami).⁴⁰ Both these strands had united in their struggle for a homeland for the Muslims in 1947, but once the homeland was won, their differences resurfaced once the cultural and linguistic question was broached by the state of Pakistan. Bangali was identified as a language too much Hindu in its vintage to be a proper vehicle of Islam and Islamic values, in order to justify a cultural monochrome standardised through Urdu. A costly mistake, as it eventually turned out.

Pakistani imposition of one cultural vision of a heavily Arabicised variant of Islamism dominating the socio-cultural landscape of West Pakistan as the definitive form of representation of Islamic culture and values, expressed through the medium of Urdu was designed as a strategy for creating uniformity in the centralised political apparatus of Pakistan.⁴¹ In East Pakistan this coincided with the politicisation of what was essentially a socio-economic struggle between the better educated and by-now privileged urban classes and the relatively less privileged elements of both urban and suburban East Bengal took the form and shape of a struggle between votaries of two types of Islam. On the one hand stood those sections of the people who championed the cultural autonomy of the Bangali people and demanded a share of political power in the state of Pakistan, refusing to be homogenised into a single Islamic mould conforming to the political, economic and cultural domination of West Pakistan. This social group was in the process of emerging as the social elite of East Bengal from the 1950s, and formed the social constituency of the Awami League). On the other stood those segments of the population of East Pakistan who were fighting for their own political space against the former segment,

seeking political legitimacy from their adherence to a more puritan idea of Islamic identity, favouring the more 'Arabicised' variant of the faith instead of the more syncretic one. In many ways, the genocidal violence that characterises 1971 was more vicious because of this particular complexity of the social landscape of East Bengal.⁴²

The ability to absorb diverse influences is essential to Islam – it is known as *ikhtilaf* (pluralism, for want of a better word). Islam is broad and expansive enough to accommodate diversity, and difference. Pakistan's failure to accommodate the diversity within the lived experience of Islam persuaded Bangladesh to break free, but the contest between these two broad currents within Islam has not been resolved yet, because the struggle for social domination waging between ethnic nationalists (drawn from primarily the educated urban privileged classes) on the one hand and the religious nationalists (comprising the less-privileged urban and suburban classes, operating in a social coalition with a section of the urban elite) on the other is far from being resolved. The vision of Bangabandhu, as it comes through a broad variety of his observations and speeches at different points of time, seems to show that he envisaged this expansive, inclusive essence of Islam as being the defining attribute of Bangladeshi identity. The Islamist approach that proposes to prioritise the more 'Islamic', i.e. Arabicised, attributes of the culture however remains no less strong in Bangladesh today, and appears to be growing stronger by the day. Any resolution of the tussle over the Bangladeshi identity appears quite remote fifty years after the country came into being, and the prospect of widespread social violence continues to cast a very long shadow.

Conclusion

Born of blood, Bangladesh continues to undergo the same kind of churning that had led to its creation in the first place. To that extent, the country of Bangladesh is still a work in progress. If that work is to be defined in terms of what the *Muktijuddha*

generation envisaged (with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman being one of its embodiments), then we might say there were two agenda in the making of Bangladesh. One had to do with the creation of an equitable social order; the other had to do with the kind of social order it was meant to be.

Half a century after it came into being, Bangladesh is materially much better off than the region has ever been from colonial times. The transformation of Bangladesh's economy got to a very slow start on account of its low level of capital accumulation – a problem that was overcome with crucial international developmental aid only after Bangladesh abandoned its initial preference for the socialist model of development. As the capitalist model of development grew its roots, the country has steadily begun to move towards a state of sustained economic growth. However, the benefits of the veritable economic miracle are yet to trickle to the furthest corners of the country, leaving social fissures and fault-lines quite deep as of now.

The other divide has to do with the essence of the country that came into being half century back. Bangladesh today exhibits a kind of tension that we see in many other countries of the Muslim world – to be Muslim, or to be Islamic? To frame the choice in the form of a binary – Muslim or Islamic – is to miss the essence of Islam, which is capable of accommodating a very broad range of diversity. To frame it in the binary – Bangali or Muslim/Islamic – is to miss the essence of being Bangali, as Pakistan did in 1971. There was no opposition between the two in the mind of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, as far as we know. One hopes for a day when there would be no opposition in the mind of people of Bangladesh, either.

Notes

1. The land revenue settlement introduced by the British in the Bengal Subah began by recognising incumbent revenue collectors (of the Mughal successor-state) with access to land, i.e. *zamindars* as what the British thought the term literally meant, i.e. landlords. In course of the nineteenth century, this brought about a severe dislocation in the nature of landownership in the province – on the one hand, the peasantry (both Hindu and Muslim) lost the security of tenure that they had hitherto enjoyed; on the other hand, a large section of the old landed aristocracy (both Hindu and Muslim) began to be pushed out of landed wealth by a new group of people (overwhelmingly Hindu) who had made their money in commerce, and now wanted to invest their wealth in land. The landed classes, which constituted the bedrock of Mughal aristocracy made way for the new landed class, which invested in western education and surfaced as a new social elite, markedly different from the old one – there were far more Hindus than had been the case previously.
2. For a brief but extremely useful discussion of the demographics of Bengal, see Sugata Bose, *Peasant Labour and Colonial Capital: Rural Bengal Since 1770*, New Cambridge History of India, III:2, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 9-37.
3. See, Muntassir Mamoon, *Nineteenth Century East Bengal*, [tr. By Kingshuk Chatterjee, Meghna Guha-Thakurta and Rana Razzak], (Dhaka: International Center for Bangladesh Studies, 2010), pp. 102-26.
4. See, for instance, Begum Shaista Shaheed Suhrawardy Ikramullah, *Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy: A Biography*, (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 35-62.
5. See Joya Chatterji, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition 1932-47*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 191-219.
6. Rehman Sobhan, Former Professor of Economics, Oxford University and former Member of the Planning Commission of Bangladesh, in personal conversation with the author, Dhaka, April 2022.
7. For a very detailed treatment of this problem, see Jayanta Kumar Ray, *Democracy and Nationalism on Trial: a Study of East Pakistan*, (Simla: Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, 1968).
8. Ayyaz Gull, "Development of Under-development: the Case of East Pakistan", in *Journal of the Punjab University Historical Society*, vol. 28, no.1, January-June 2015, pp. 1-12.

9. Ayesha Jalal, *The Struggle for Pakistan: A Muslim Homeland and Global Politics*, (Cambridge, Ma: Bellknapp Press of the Harvard University Press, 2014), pp.87-88.
10. This was the reason why in their last ditch attempt in holding East Pakistan together, the military action that began in March 1971 targeted the hapless Bengali Hindus who never left their home in East Bengal in spite of the carnages of 1946-47, 1950 and 1962. More than 8 million of the remnants of this Bengali Hindu community of East Pakistan were driven out, with thousands of others being killed.
11. Prof. Rehman Sobhan, in personal conversation with the author, Dhaka, April 2022.
12. Rehman Sobhan, *Untranquil Recollections: Nation-Building in Post-Liberation Bangladesh*, (New Delhi, Sage, 2021), p. 33.
13. Prof. Rehman Sobhan, in personal conversation with the author, Dhaka, April 2022.
14. The four members of the Planning Commission were the Deputy Chairman Nurul Islam (in charge of External Resources Division and the Bureau of Statistics), Mosharraf Hossain (later replaced by A.K. M. Hassan, in charge of the Divisions of Agriculture, Water Resources and Rural Institutions); Rehman Sobhan (Industries Division, Power and Natural Resources Division, Physical Infrastructure Division , i.e. Transport, Communications and Physical Planning and Housing [PP&H]) and Anisur Rahman, (General Economics Division, Programming and Evaluation Division and Social Infrastructure Division). The Commission formally operated under Tajuddin Ahmad, but in practice reported directly to Bangabandhu. See Sobhan, *Untranquil Recollections*, pp. 52-53; 59-60.
15. Sobhan, *Untranquil Recollections*, pp. 105-09.
16. Faiz Ahmed Taiyeb, *Bangladesh: Arthanitir Panchash Bachhar*, (Dhaka: Adarsha, 2021), pp. 40-42.
17. See, for instance, Muntassir Mamoon, *Ganatantra, Samajtantra O Bangabandhu*, (Dhaka: Kathaprakash, 2021), pp. 64-110.
18. Sobhan, *Untranquil Recollections*, pp. 75-76. Nurul Islam, *Development Planning in Bangladesh: A Case Study in Political Economy* (Dhaka: Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, 1980).

19. Sobhan, Ibid.; Nurul Islam, *An Odyssey: the Journey of My Life* (Dhaka, Prothoma Prakashan, 2017).
20. Taiyeb, *Bangladesh*, pp. 48-57.
21. William B. Milam, *Bangladesh and Pakistan: Flirting with Failure in South Asia*, (London: Hurst and Co. 2009), pp. 192-93: Ahtar Hossain, "the Economy Towards Stabilization", in Habib Zafarullah, *the Zia Episode in Bangladesh Politics*, (Denver, Co: Academic Books, International Academic Publishers Ltd, 2000), p. 69.
22. Faiz Ahmed Taiyeb, op. cit. pp. 72-74.
23. See Azizur Rahman Khan, *The Economy of Bangladesh: a Quarter Century of Development*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).
24. For the particularly interesting shift of the Jamaat-i Islami from regulated economy to neo-liberal economics, see Maidul Islam, *Limits of Islamism: Jamaat-i Islami in Contemporary India and Bangladesh*, (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 200-34.
25. M.G. Quibria, *Bangladesh's Road to Long-term Economic Prosperity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).
26. Prof. Rehman Sobhan, in personal conversation with the author, Dhaka, April 2022.
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