**HIS103** Section:**25**

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*2. Write an essay of 2000 words on the transformation of autonomy movement into demand for independence focusing on the Six Point Program, its implications and subsequent events including Agartala Conspiracy, 11-point program and 1969 Mass Uprising. At the end mention your learning from studying this part of Bangladesh history.*

Autonomy Movement and the Path to Independence

# Introduction

The history of Bangladesh is full of struggles. This small nation had to fight against not only one oppressor but two! During the movements again the British Empire, many people from this small nation played a vital role. A.K. Fazlul Huq, Shahid Suhrawardy, Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani, were among the key figures to bring independence in the Indian Sub-Continent. In fact, it was A.K. Fazlul Huq who presented the “Lahore Resolution,” and according to this resolution, the independence and division of the Indian Sub-Continent took place. It was due to his efforts, India and Pakistan were born.

The now Bangladesh was divided to be a part of Pakistan based on Religion, while not sharing any geographical borders or even culture! Right after the independence of Pakistan, West Pakistan began exploiting East Pakistan. All the controls of the Government, along with the economy of the country was kept on to West Pakistan alone, and East Pakistan was ruled mercilessly. It may appear that the Leaders of West Pakistan understood from the very beginning that East Pakistan would eventually cut free from Pakistan, so they decided to exploit as much as they could in the meantime.

# Background

The demand for autonomy by the Bengalis continued even after its independence from the British Empire. The demand what was once against the British again got raised against West Pakistan.

In 1947, when the Indian Sub-Continent was divided and was given independence from the British Empire, both the newly formed country, India and Pakistan were established on the basis of autonomy. Having autonomy was the whole idea for movements against the British Empire. Also note that the principle of the Lahore Resolution was, “Autonomy and Sovereignty.”

These two countries were formed on the basis of religion, as a result, Pakistan had two parts, East Pakistan and West Pakistan. Except for a similar religion, these two parts had major differences in culture and lifestyle.

As the leaders of West Pakistan retained control over the whole of Pakistan, they kept all the governmental functions to West Pakistan alone. Even the industries and production were kept under the West Pakistanis. In a sense, this territory of Bangladesh didn’t enjoy any autonomy nor any sovereignty for hundreds of years before 1971.

# Flow of Events

On 8th January 1948, “পূর্ব পাকিস্তান মুসলিম ছাত্রলীগ” debuted which got popular as ছাত্রলীগ. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was the General Secretary of this student political organization. The majority of the student members of the organization participated in the anti-British movement, so while watching the unjust behaviour towards east Pakistan from the central body, they were heartbroken. On 23rd June 1949, this organization debuted as “পূর্ব বাংলা মুসলিম আওয়ামী লীগ” and became the first Political Opposition party in Pakistan. It had Maulana Bhashani as its President, and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was one of the Joint Secretary. The first two of the 42 Proclamation of this newly formed party were, (1) According to Lahore Resolution, keeping Defense, Foreign Affairs and Currency System to the central government, Bengal should be given autonomy, (2) Recognizing Bengali Language as one of the State Language of Pakistan. These proclamations quickly became popular and well-accepted to the people of East Pakistan.

**6-Points Demand:** In 1965, one of the advocates of Autonomy, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman declared that autonomy for East Pakistan has become urgent. And he didn’t only declare the need, he prepared a 6 points manifesto. On 6th February 1966, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman proposed the six-points demand for autonomy in an opposition party convention at Lahore, which was dominated by the West Pakistanis. Among the 740 members present, there were only 21 from East Pakistan, and among the 21, 4 was with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman’s party. Upon raising the demand, it was at instant rejected by 735 members. Protesting this Sheikh Mujibur Rahman with his people walked out and came back to East Pakistan.

On the 7th of February, these 6-Points were published briefly in the daily newspaper, and many of the leaders of the East Pakistan Awami League weren’t even aware of these points. Though the elderly leaders were whimsical about these, the young hands supported it wholeheartedly and arranged movements in support of it.

The Six Points were:

1. Constitutional structure and Nature of State- The Constitution should be constructed for a Federation in its true sense according to the Lahore Resolution. The Government should be parliamentary and it must be selected on votes by the adults. The Law Council must have sovereignty.

2. Federal Power- The Federal Government should have only the power to control Defense and Foreign Affairs. All other power should be vested upon the provincial government.

3. Currency and Economic Power- There should be two separate currencies along with two state banks for the two regions. Currencies cannot be trafficked from one region to the other. Under one federal bank, there should be two central banks that would control separate currencies.

4. Tax and Customs Power- All types of taxes and customs should be collected by the provincial government, and a percentage would be passed to the federal government.

5. Foreign Trade Power-

a. Two regions should have separate arrangements for earning foreign currency.

b. Provincial Government would keep their earned foreign currency within.

c. The Federal Government would collect foreign currency equally or as per the constitution.

d. The product produced in the country should be exchanged in both regions without any customs.

e. Provincial Government should be given the right to establish trade contacts, trade mission establishment and export-import with foreign countries.

6. Ability to form local army- For the defence of the east Pakistan power should be given to form own paramilitary.

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his party Awami League started promoting the 6-points demand massively. They started arranging public meetings, rallies in every corner, and the Ayyub Government being fear-stricken, intercepted all these meetings. On 8th May 1966, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was arrested on Country Protection Act. Before the arrest, from 20th March to 8th May he gave speeches on 32 public meetings, and in this small time, he was able to gather unimaginable public support on 6-Points demand, which strengthened the demand for autonomy much more.

**Agartala Conspiracy:** Amidst these circumstances, Pakistan Government struck a conspiracy plan to create breakage among the Anti-Ayyub politicians, and damage Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Awami League. This is known as Agartala Conspiracy.

On 6th January 1968, the Government released a press release declaring to unveil the conspiracy. It charged a total of 28 persons including 2 Awami League leaders and 2 Bengali civil surgeons. On the 18th of January, it also declared Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as a convict of the conspiracy while he was still in jail. At that instant, the students of Dhaka University showed massive protests against this. The Awami League demanded a public trial with the opportunity to self-defend.

**Student Movement and 11-Points:** In January of 1969, East Pakistan Student League and East Pakistan Student Union formed the “Student Protest Committee” as a political alliance. This Committee declared 11-Points demand as a part of their protest activities. The 11- Points were:

1. Abandoning the policy of provincializing the solvent colleges, establish school & colleges at every part, give permissions to set private schools, reduce the tuition fee by 50%, subsidize the Hall & Canteen cost by 50%, provide education through mother language everywhere, start Bangla department in courts and offices, mandatory free of cost education till class 8, a concession to students in public transport by 50%, cancel the university ordinance, and give complete autonomy to universities.

2. Parliamentary Democracy should be established based upon the direct votes of the adults. Freedom of Speech and Journalism should be ensured.

3. Full autonomy and ability to form own paramilitary should be given to East Pakistan.

4. Giving autonomy to Baluchistan of West Pakistan, South-West borderlands and Sindh, sub-federation should be formed.

5. Bank, Insurance, Jute and Large Industry should be nationalized.

6. Taxes of farmers should be reduced while pardoning the due ones.

7. Equal and just rights to workers should be ensured, along with permitting to form trade unions.

8. Flood control measures should be ensured in East Pakistan while cancelling the law on the overall utilization of water resources.

9. Emergency Act, Safety Act and other refraining acts should be cancelled.

10. Cancelling Saito, Santo and Pak-USA military contract, independent and unbiased foreign policy should be adopted.

11. All the captured citizens all over the country should be released and all the cases should be dropped along with diminishing the Agartala Conspiracy case.

All the 3 major political parties of East Pakistan joined in these 11-points demands.

**1969 Mass Uprising:** Though Anti-Ayyub student protest started in October of 1968, it gained peak momentum in January of 1969. And when a leader of the Menon group, Asaduzzaman was killed, the protest went out of the government’s control. Even by enforcing section-144, evening curfew and mass arrest, the protest could not be diminished. In the Mass Protests of 1969, around 100 East Pakistani people were killed by the Police.

The protests spread throughout the country, and upon the call of the Student Protest Committee 75% of the basic democrats resigned, some of the basic democrats were killed by the rebellious public in the villages.

And then this mass protests contained its extreme form when Dr. Shamsujjoha was killed by police’s bayonet charge on the 18th of February. The news of his death resulted in a mass protests so fierce that the government had to remove the Agartala Conspiracy Case on February, 22nd 1969 and freed Bangabandhu.

# Impact

Amidst the mass uprising in East Pakistan and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman submitting a constitutional draft, some parts of West Pakistan started to demand autonomy. Such became the situation that demand for breaking West Pakistan into 4 autonomous provinces gained popularity. In such circumstances, Ayyub Khan gave the presidential power to Yahia Khan and resigned.

Yahiya Khan declared national and provincial elections to be held in 1970. And in that election, Awami League won an absolute majority in East Pakistan. But through excuses, Yahia Khan kept on delaying the power handover, and he even suspended the general assembly. And on 3rd March 1971, East Pakistan Student League publicized a manifesto titled, “Independent Sovereign Bangladesh and Activities.”

# Learning Experience

Through studying this part of Bangladesh history, a clear understanding of how all the events progressed, and a clear conscience on the chronological occurrences has been gained. This brought me to the conclusion that all the events, even before the independence of the Indian Sub-Continent, after its division, and before the start of the Liberation war of Bangladesh are correlated. One event led to another subsequent event, which eventually led to the sovereignty and independence of Bangladesh.

This part of the history also taught me the roles of famous leaders during the British Rule like A.K. Fazlul Huq, Sheikh Shahid Suhrawardy, Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani and how eventually they became passive when it came to realizing the rights of their fellow brothers of the Eastern territory from the west. Even though they fought hard for sovereignty from the British, they didn’t raise that high of a voice when they didn’t get the much-desired sovereignty even after separating from the British Empire.

But, in times of need, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman emerged as the undisputed leader who became the voice of the general Bengali people. And though, the old seniors of the party weren’t willing to go in full length to bring in what was rightfully theirs, the younger people, the students and the working-class people supported Mujib in full.

It has also become evident that all these movements for the Realization of rights were possible and had so much momentum because of the culture of practicing politics during the studentship. It was the students who went into the front line and showed their protest, carried on the voice of Sheikh Mujib during his absence.

It should also be noted that the general people would not have gone all-out, and would not have been on their feet, ready to sacrifice everything, had they not been oppressed mercilessly by the Pakistani rulers. It was all the oppressions and economic disparity which pushed the mass public to stand and fight till their last drop of blood.

And the brilliant political play, played by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman by presenting a revamped political draft which not only ensured the development of East Pakistan but also that of the struggling underdeveloped areas of West Pakistan. And it was due to this strategy the underdeveloped areas of west Pakistan also raised their voices to be free and sovereign.

In the end, one cannot but question if all these had any major international player behind the curtain orchestrating all these, as many of the decisions by West Pakistan were simply foolish and was begging for a fight! Let’s not also forget how the left-wing influenced the independence a lot, and Bangladesh was slowly turning its head in that way, but it turned out to be a capitalistic economy anyway in the present days.