A Personal History is Part of a National History

Hameeda Hossain
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Foreword

Hameeda Hossain illustrates through her personal history how different individuals and divergent groups shaped the vision of the Bengali nationalist movement in the 1960s. Her’s is the story of a young woman with a non-Bengali linguistic-cultural background – she is from Sindh and educated in the USA – who came to Dhaka from Karachi in 1963 for a month’s visit to be with her older sister which changed the trajectory of her life. In Dhaka through her sister Khursheed and her brother-in-law Erfan Ahmed, who was a Bengali, she was introduced to a group of young people, some of whom studied in the best educational institutions in the West as she did, but who have become passionately engaged in promoting a vision of a society, politics and economy which was very different from that of the Pakistani ruling elites. She became attracted to their values and discourse of secular society, democratic politics and socialist economy. Eventually she married one of these young people, Kamal Hossain, a rising lawyer with a keen interest in politics. She returned to Dhaka in 1965 and made it her home for the rest of her life.

In this monograph Hameeda Hossain recounts her political awakening from 1965 onwards, which was kindled through her engagement with three groups of people – academics and intellectuals, women’s rights and cultural activists, as well as artisans and crafts workers. All three groups, through various ways, were asserting Bengali nationalist and secular identity, resisting
oppression and exploitation by Pakistani ruling elites and propagating democratic, egalitarian and humanist values.

She discusses three initiatives of academics and intellectuals, the first group who awakened her political consciousness: Their first initiative, *New Values* was an English language journal which was edited by Khan Sarwar Murshid of the English Department of Dhaka University. It was published intermittently from 1949 to 1966. *New Values* was influenced by humanist thought and attracted contributions by literary critics, political analysts, Marxists as well as liberal democrats.

The second initiative, National Association for the Advancement of Economic Progress (NASEP) was a study circle which was founded by Kamal Hossain and Rehman Sobhan and joined among others by Mosharaff Hossain, Badruddin Umar, Kamruddin Ahmed, and Ziaul Haq Tulu. NASEP produced a number of policy-oriented pamphlets on topics such as democracy, economic disparity, education, students and politics and so on. Some members of NASEP reached out to politicians and prepared briefs for opposition members of the National Assembly.

The third initiative was *Forum*, a weekly which was published between 1969 to 1971. Hameeda Hossain was the editor, Rehman Sobhan, the executive editor and Kamal Hossain, the publisher of the weekly. *Forum* succeeded in getting contributions from well-known academics and journalists from home and abroad such as Nurul Islam, Anisur Rahman, Rehman Sobhan, Badruddin Umar, Muyeedul Hasan, Amartya Sen, Neville Maxwell, Mazhar
Ali Khan, M.B. Naqvi and so on. The weekly published investigative reports, literary critiques as well as commentaries on current politics. *Forum* articulated a political position in support of the foundational principles of the Bengali nationalist struggle. It continued publishing till the genocidal assault by the Pakistani military on March 25, 1971, when it was banned by the government.

The cultural and women’s rights activists were the second group who contributed to her political awakening. Hameeda Hossain acknowledges that she woke up to the “woman question” through association with women such as Nurjehan Murshid, Rokeya Rahman Kabir, Razia Khan and Maleka Begum. She discovered that women were not only demanding their own rights but were engaged in other social and political struggles. Peasant movements were led by women (Ila Mitra, Hena Das). Many local and voluntary women’s organisations stood up for protecting minority women during communal riots and worked for communal peace. Women were active in leftist politics (Monoroma Mashima, Maleka Begum). Cultural and democracy movements were led by women such as Sanjida Khatun and Begum Sufia Kamal. All these women inspired her to situate women’s movement in the larger context of peoples’ social and political movements.

The third group of people who deepened her understanding of Bengali culture and tradition were the artisans and crafts workers. Shilpacharjya Zainul Abedin introduced her to this group. She discovered the beauty and creativity of the traditional crafts in Bengal and women’s contributions in producing them. She travelled to the villages and saw the work of women in weaving textiles like
Jamdani and making Nakshi Kantha. She became aware of the invisibility of women’s unremunerated work in the production of crafts. Together with a few other women, including Khursheed, she became involved in enterprises to create an urban market for the crafts produced by rural women and open up income earning opportunities for them.

Hameeda Hossain’s narrative brings to life the interconnections of a small group of like-minded people in Dhaka in the 1960s who were bound together by a common vision for the future of the country. She sums up their dream as a “liberation from authoritarianism [and] a move towards equality and justice”. They imagined Bangladesh to be “a place where freedom of thought and expression would be the basis for a culture of public reasoning.” Many of these interconnected individuals were university teachers but some were journalists, lawyers, artists, bureaucrats and business people. They had access to political leaders who sought out their advice. Professor Abdur Razzaq comes across as a great bridge builder between and among people with divergent linguistic and occupational backgrounds.

What makes her account interesting is that Hameeda Hossain tells her personal story side by side with what was happening in the country. She discusses the major milestones of the grand narrative of the Bengali nationalist struggle of the 1960s – the six points movement, Agartala conspiracy case, eleven-points movement, 1970 national elections, and finally the eventful month of March 1971. But she chooses not to dwell on the grand narrative too much. Instead she focuses on the mostly untold story of the intellectual and
cultural ferment which was created by civil society activists in the 1960s. We should keep in mind that the 1960s was the era of military dictator Ayub Khan when political activities were either banned or restricted. The majority of well-known political leaders, particularly Bengali nationalists, were repeatedly imprisoned. But while political actors were kept behind bars civil society activists filled in the vacuum and advocated the cause of the Bengali nationalists. Their activism in different fronts drew people from various groups and classes which broadened the mass base of support of the nationalist struggle.

Hameeda Hossain writes with great flair and lucidity while remaining reticent in style, free of self-aggrandisement. By going back and forth in time she builds up a suspense and momentum to her narrative which makes this short monograph a compelling read.

Rounaq Jahan
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About the Author

Hameeda Hossain is a Founder member of Ain o Salish Kendra, a legal aid/human rights organization and currently Vice Chair of Research Initiatives Bangladesh. A freelance writer and researcher she has previously worked as editor, Oxford University Press. Her major research was on textile production for the East India Company in Bengal. Other publications include books and articles on craft development, issues related to women's employment and human rights. She has been associated with third world women's networks such as Asia Pacific Women, Law and Development (APWLD) and human rights organisations such as South Asians for Human Rights (SAHR).
I

Introduction

A macro-history is more than a record of events and episodes. It reveals the underpinnings of how nations are made and societies are transformed. It often becomes an interpretation of the past in terms of the present, leaving out what doesn’t fit into our notions of nation building.

Within a macro-history of a nation in the making lie a multitude of micro-stories, of individuals and groups caught in a complex storm of divided loyalties, of political turbulence, of idealistic activism and intellectual discourses, all of which, in different ways, fit into the many crevices in a macro-history. It is these micro-histories in which I am interested. I will leave it to historians to provide macro explanations of what happened and how. And I leave it to political theorists to go beyond and explore the whys of the particular historical events I recall.

In the mid-sixties, when I visited Dhaka, I was caught up in the political awakening amongst different groups who were beginning to formulate and explore their notions of statehood and their engagement as citizens. Academics, professionals and political activists were coming together to look back at the reasons why Pakistan had failed as a state.
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In this paper, I will recall the ongoing intellectual and cultural discourse in Bangladesh that contributed to a politics of resistance and to notions of economic and political transformation. I will draw upon contemporaneous discussions and interactions, as well as upon stories of resistance from the sixties and seventies. Such debates engaged an activist academia with popular exchanges in the media. They contributed actively to the political dynamics of the time. I gained an insight into these initiatives through my association with groups such as New Values, NASEP (National Association for Social and Economic Progress) and Forum. I was inspired by individuals involved in these groups.

At that time I also became aware of the “woman question”. Well-known middle-class women were part of the ongoing intellectual and cultural ferment. Their personal experiences had a significant bearing on the ongoing class struggles as it did on their struggle for personal rights. Their collective experiences led them into challenging social inequalities and political ideologies. This calls for an understanding of how the women’s movements in Bangladesh engaged with national struggles in the sixties and raised concerns of gender based justice. Women thus challenged their subordination under customary practices or religious norms by questioning both the community and the nation state.

In my paper I look back at the discourses and debates amongst members of the intelligentsia, those with whom I was familiar or with whom I interacted, to understand the urge for social and political transformation. A social and political awareness of popular protests and demands in East Bengal (officially East Pakistan after 1947)¹ owed to this intellectual and political understanding of the state. It constituted an urge for a new society

¹ I will refer to East Bengal in this essay rather than East Pakistan, as it expresses contemporary sentiments.
and beyond in the making of a new state. Hence the pursuit of new values that would uphold the rights and dignity of citizens.

I will draw upon the ideas or discourses amongst some intellectual groups such as New Values, NASEP and Forum, to understand their interaction with the political dynamics of change.

I will, further, track the women’s struggles for state led legal reforms and the challenges faced by women in confronting the politics of violence. The feminist discourse in the sixties focused on a recognition of rights and pursuit of legal reform. It provided a background towards their journey in post independent Bangladesh from birangana to mukti juddha.

The essay is based largely on my personal recollections, contemporary accounts in the media and political writings of old issues of New Values and Forum as well as NASEP’s printed monographs. I have also relied upon post war feminist analyses of women’s struggles in Bangladesh.
II

The Storm

1971 was a brutal year for Bangladesh... it saw the start of a genocide in March followed by nine months of an undeclared war. Within 24 years of coming together as a nation state on the basis of a shared religious identity, the Pakistan military launched “Operation Searchlight” on its citizens – setting fire to slums, attacking police headquarters and university halls, assaulting press offices and private homes. This was the state’s response to long standing demands for free and fair elections as a basis for establishing a democratic system of governance and for equality in representation.

In the years since 1947, the people of East Bengal had claimed a right to their language. This was won by them in 1956, but at the cost of several lives of students, who were shot by police at a protest rally in 1952. They continued a constitutional struggle to promote their demands for fair representation in governance. In 1966, the Awami League had formally proposed a Six Point program for autonomy as the basis of the Pakistan state. In 1969, students from the left leaning parties had visualized a more equitable state. They drafted an Eleven Points program which went further towards social and economic change. This too had become part of the national struggle after it was adopted by the main political parties.

The impending conflict surfaced soon after the national elections in December 1970. The people had voted overwhelmingy for the Awami League and yet the party was being denied its right to lead the country and to formulate a constitution based on a Six
Points formula for autonomy in governance of the two parts of Pakistan. The lack of agreement between the Awami League and the leading political party in West Pakistan led to political rumours of military intervention and popular resistance. The Awami League made efforts at negotiating with other political parties. At the same time, it continued to build up a political movement for autonomy in East Bengal. By January 1971 it was moving forward on a plan for constitutional reform. At a meeting in Suhrawardy Uddayan (then known as Race Course) Awami League members of Parliament had taken a collective vow committing themselves to a constitutional system based on its Six Points program.\(^2\)

When the government canceled the session of the Constituent Assembly on 1\(^{st}\) March 1971 and the army was called into action on 25\(^{th}\) March, the people of East Bengal decided to free Bangladesh. It was a beginning …. of a new state. Even before 25\(^{th}\) March, East Bengal was turbulent. From Joydebpur we heard of combat between \textit{Muktis} and the army, in Rangpur road blocks prevented ration consignments reaching the cantonment. In Dhaka and other cities people observed \textit{hartals} in support of the Civil Disobedience Movement – the only weapons we had to challenge military orders of curfew and to resist their violations of citizens’ rights.

This struggle had accelerated over time. Inequalities and discrimination had surfaced early on since the fifties. The Language Movement was a unifier, which led to further struggles against discrimination and challenges to a unitary state. The answer was to devise a constitutional system, in which the two regions could exercise autonomy. This appeared more rational given the

\(^2\) The Six Points program announced on 7th June 1966 declared that except for defense and foreign affairs, all subjects would be decided by each region. It was a step towards autonomy and decentralized decision making.
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differences in language, culture, economy and social systems. These differences were further dramatized by events in 1970. In November, the Bhola cyclone had devastated many coastal habitats but failed to arouse an effective response from the central government. In December, the alienation of the people of Bengal was further demonstrated in the national elections. The Awami League won an overwhelming majority in the eastern part, but only a few seats in West Pakistan. Similarly, the West Pakistan parties won no seats in East Bengal. When Yahya Khan came to Dhaka in December 1970 after the election, he announced that he would call the Constituent Assembly and Bangabandhu would be the leader of the house. This suggested possibilities of a peaceful transition, but then Yahya’s subsequent visit to Bhutto’s village in Larkana, Sindh, and his parleying with generals stoked suspicions of his political motivations and the likely denial of a constitutional settlement. It was rumoured that under cover of a village shooting expedition Yahya Khan was holding discussions about a possible military response.

There had been much political activism before and after the elections. Political issues were raised by different groups but the major interest was in working out a national solution for self-governance. Since 1969 the Mahila Sangram Parishad committees were active in resisting communal and gender violence in outlying districts. The Chattro Sangram Parishads spread the message of Six Points to remote villages and towns, while women students were no less active in joining self-defense classes and attending political meetings.

The reasons for this ferment go back to the making of the Pakistan state in the fifties and sixties, when at each step of state building, a large part of the population felt discriminated and excluded because of their ethnicity, religion and language. And
power remained concentrated in a few authoritarian structures and non-representative institutions. Politically and economically, East Bengal had been neglected: there had been little or no political participation. Controversy over an official state language had been raised in Parliament in the fifties, when members from West Pakistan turned down a proposal by Sri Dhirendranath Dutt,\(^3\) and other Bengali members, to adopt both Bangla and Urdu as state languages. Since 1958 a military dominated government had been hugely repressive. It had used force to compel compliance and suppress different groups. This had prompted different political groups to come together as a national movement under the leadership of the Awami League.

In Dhaka, in particular, there was a growing sense of exclusion. There were marked differences in parliamentary debates over a constitutional framework. The Bangali representatives found themselves at odds with proposals for establishing Islam as a state ideology. There was also discriminatory access to opportunities in government services and in education. These trends alienated the professional community in East Bengal.

The language movement contributed to the formation of a national identity which evolved into a nationalist struggle. The Jukto Front, a coalition of progressive political parties in East Bengal, contested and won elections in 1954, but soon found themselves out of power. In their support there was much intellectual debate that claimed a new sense of identity and sought means towards a social and political transformation. The paths to a shared existence were shrinking, as powerful forces in West Pakistan led by the military and bureaucracy asserted their control over East Bengal. The resistance in East Bengal was gaining pace with academics and professionals providing supporting arguments to political activists.

\(^3\) Grandfather of Aroma Dutt, currently member of Parliament in Bangladesh.
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The public discourse was enriched by economists who wrote and talked of two economies, political leaders demanded fair representation and the media expressed fears of what was to come. The ideas that floated from them reached the public even in remote places where villagers began to question where the returns from jute, the golden fibre of East Pakistan, were invested, or why universities in East Bengal were deprived of funds.

III

My Story

In Dhaka, beginning on 1st March 1971, we had to manage our days through hartals, declared as part of the Civil Disobedience Movement announced by Bangabandhu and curfews imposed by the government. Even as we sheltered fellow activists in our home we lived in fear of sudden interrogations or arrests. My husband Kamal⁴ had contested the bye elections to the Parliament from Tongi. During the month, he used to be busy in discussions with members of his party, the Awami League. He, along with Amirul Islam, a fellow lawyer and party member,⁵ had been asked by Bangabandhu to assist Tajuddin Ahmed⁶ in issuing daily directives in observance of the Civil Disobedience Movement. Every day several officials would drop in at our house to report on what had happened during the day and to suggest further action in support of the citizens’ movement.

An Awami League majority in the December elections had created hopes that its Six Points’ Program could be the basis of constitutional negotiations. To this was added an Eleven Points’

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⁴ Kamal Hossain joined the Awami League in 1968 and became very active in its policy making committees. We were married in 1964.
⁵ Amirul Islam, a lawyer, had won elections in 1970 from Kushtia. Kamal and Amir had filed many constitutional petitions in the High Court and fought legal battles for the Awami League.
⁶ Tajuddin Ahmad was the Secretary General of the Awami League. In April 1971 he crossed over to India and ran the government in exile as Prime Minister. He was assassinated on 3rd November 1975. He was a strong believer in secularism and constitutional politics.
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Program\textsuperscript{7} announced by the left parties. Since December 1970 a group of Awami League MPs used to meet with friendly academics to formulate an outline of a constitution that would recognize citizens’ demands. They engaged in an exercise to draft a constitution for Pakistan based on Six Points; they drew upon ideas for a state based on principles of democracy, secularism, socialism and nationalism – ideas that had evolved over years of struggle. These principles were later adopted by the first Parliament in independent Bangladesh in November 1972.

Bangabandhu had asked Kamal to work with Tajuddin Ahmad in this exercise. For privacy they used to meet at the house of an AL supporter in Narayanganj. Kamal used to go off very early in the morning and return late at night so we saw little of each other.

1971 was a busy time for me as well. Since 1968 I had taken on the responsibility of editor at \textit{Forum}, a political weekly. Rehman Sobhan was executive editor and Kamal Hossain was the publisher. I used to work in the garage behind our house on Circuit House Road, which we had rented for the \textit{Forum} office. Preparing the print copy was not an easy matter in those days. There were no computers allowing us to amend and add copy. Each typo had to be manually corrected. The final matter had to be arranged with metal tiles, each one representing a letter. Each page had to be tied onto a wooden frame and taken to the printers in old Dhaka, usually on a rickshaw.

My memory may not be accurate on this, but I think that in a March issue of \textit{Forum}, we had described the intimidating scene in Dhaka, where Yahya had arrived with a heavy military escort for negotiations with the political parties. Remarkings on the need for a peaceful settlement we had included an article with some prognosis

\textsuperscript{7} In addition to the Six Points, the Eleven Points represented class based demands. These had been endorsed by the Awami League.
of the talks between Yahya Khan and the Awami League. We also took note of what was happening on the streets. We visited persons injured during the conflict who were under treatment in the Dhaka Medical College hospital.

On the twenty fifth I was trying to finalize the week’s issue of *Forum*. In between I would step into the house to check on the girls.\(^8\) We were to carry the frames by rickshaw to *Sangbad* for printing the next day. The roads became unusually quiet that evening. Some civil servants had come by for further directions. Selig Harrison, the *Washington Post* correspondent, had dropped in to find out if anything had changed.

No one else came and by 9 pm everything was still. Kamal left with Amirul Islam for where ever they had planned to spend the night. Apprehension lay thick across the city. At night I received several calls, some from persons who had worked with Kamal and others who did not identify themselves. They asked: “What shall we do”, “Shall we bring down our black banners and Bangladesh flags?” I could only advise them to stay safe. Then by 12 pm the phone went dead.

Like many others we waited in fearful silence …. Not knowing what would happen … At 2 pm there was a loud burst and several soldiers barged into the house, pointing their guns at us, demanding to know where Kamal was. After looking into all the rooms and round the garden they left threatening to return again.

I thought this was the end.

\(^8\) We had two daughters Sara then aged 4 years and Dina aged 2 years.
IV

The Storm accelerates …

The military action finally put an end to a state that was built on false notions of unity, that had to be maintained through military rule. That there was no reason for these two regions to form one state was quite evident from the time of its formation. It is ironic that the Muslim League won an overwhelming majority in East Bengal for a separate land for Muslims. Yet Bangalis were discriminated by policies made in West Pakistan, deprived of development and alienated from governance institutions. They had voted for the Muslim League in 1946, but found little voice in governing the new state. While their resources were used for development outside their borders they had little share in opportunities.

What was interesting in the awakening of Bangla consciousness of their cultural and political identity was the nature of the public discourse and writings in East Bengal, which gave space for diverse points of view. As opposed to the imposition of an ideological state of Pakistan, the sixties in East Bengal saw intellectuals defining their visions of democracy and secularism, of nationalism and human rights that could infuse state structures. Their ideas filtered into the conversations and rational discourses of several groups. They created a space for articulating relations between citizens and state and of structures that could contribute towards a free society. Such discourses were so different from the notions of militarism and authoritarianism that were being foisted by the state of Pakistan that it could only hasten the inevitability of a divide between the two geographically separate entities which had become one state in 1947.
The sixties were a vibrant time in East Bengal, with political discussions, art and writing dominating the academic scene, and with protests marking life in the city as well as outside. Political leaders interacted with academics and professionals to engage in intellectual debates on the future of the state and processes to protect citizens’ rights.

What was indeed striking was the diversity of beliefs and philosophy amongst the discussants. As these ideas floated around there was also a confidence that an alternative to the existing centralized state of Pakistan could be negotiated so that East Bengal could define its own future.

*Forum* Cover by Rafiquin Nabi, 3 January 1970
My first view of Dhaka

On my first visit to Dhaka in 1963 I was struck with the differences between the two parts of Pakistan – in language, culture and history, in its terrain and class formation. The public discourse in Dhaka reflected the people’s alienation from the policies or orders that emanated from Islamabad.

I had come from Karachi, a large commercial city, where I was preoccupied with work in a publishing house, the Oxford University Press. My ambitions of becoming a writer or journalist were limited to occasional articles I wrote for *Outlook* (a political weekly edited by Iqbal Burney). In Karachi, the divisions between Sindhis and Mohajirs (migrants from India in 1947) were issues that dominated the political landscape and contributed to communal antagonisms. I had little involvement in these ongoing political debates. Not that the commercial character of the city and its class divisions allowed for an engagement in public debates. Bengal was very distant from our horizons. Bengal’s language and history, its culture itself, appeared to belong to a different world.

In contrast, in the Dhaka of the sixties, I was struck with the public discourse and popular activism. Wherever I went I found people actively engaged in political conversations, questioning the discrimination against their language, denial of their culture, deprivation of opportunities, maldistribution of resources. Above all, their absence from decision making. Each group of urban citizens questioned political decisions that ignored their reality. Unlike the commercial life of Karachi, Dhaka was in ferment in the
sixties, a cultural and intellectual ferment that reflected people’s political alienation from the philosophical workings of the state of Pakistan.

I had read a little about Bengal’s recent history: its famine during the second world war caused by the diversion of food stocks to the British army, about different episodes of resistance and of their leaders who challenged authority whether imposed on class or gendered communities. Bengal’s history also reflected women’s activism. I had read of the heroic activities of Ila Mitra leading women peasants in the Tebhaga Movement, of Hena Das’ participation in the Nankar movement in Sylhet. Their iconic leadership of the peasant resistance in the fifties continued to inspire urban stirrings in the sixties. Women like Manoroma Basu of Barisal, Lila Nag and Sufia Kamal in Dhaka were strong protagonists of communal peace.

Ila Mitra and Hena Das, leaders of the Tebagha and Nankar Movements.

Nearer our time the forced imposition of an unfamiliar language or denial of popular music or literature had led to a strong
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response from cultural activists. This was evident in popular reactions to a TV ban on women singing Tagore songs or wearing a teep on their foreheads. Women were in the forefront of this cultural protest. They continued to wear a teep on their forehead as was a common custom in Bengal. And they sang Tagore songs in public if not allowed on television. Indeed, music and theatre offered outlets of expression and freedom to women even beyond the middle class. Through these protests cultural activists came together to form Chayyana"ut, which has since been a leader in promoting Tagore’s music and philosophy.
VI

My Political Awakening

I came to Dhaka at a time of growing citizens’ protests against discriminatory state policies right across Pakistan. Following the Language Movement which climaxed in the police killing of students in 1952 and the Jukto Front election victory in 1954, there were expectations of open dialogues and an assertion of intellectual and cultural freedoms. But bureaucrats remained in power and used subtle means to maintain their influence. Thus official initiatives were taken to use Arabic words instead of words of Sanskrit or Prakrit origin, or to replace Tagore’s songs with religious readings and so on.

These controls faced challenges. Over time Chayanaut led by Sanjida Khatun and Wahidul Haq became the cultural voice of the middle class. It became a common practice amongst middle class families to enroll their children into music classes run by Chayanaut. It was in the fifties that Chayanaut initiated a public celebration of Pohela Boishakh (Bangla New Year) by welcoming its dawn with Tagore songs. At first a small group of students would gather together in the park. As their chorus of Esho Hey Baisakh resounded across the Ramna Green they attracted passersby and more singers joined them. In subsequent years Fakir Alamgir’s folk songs reflecting a different class ethos added to the richness of music in East Bengal. The Mongol Jatra (a carnival like procession) was many years later initiated by students and teachers of the Arts College. Over the years the Pohela Boishakh celebration has come to represent a strong secular, cultural tradition in music, arts and crafts.
This awakening was not only through music and the arts. I became more aware of the intellectual awakening through conversations in Dhaka University. I had taken a month off from work in Karachi to visit my sister, Khursheed Erfan Ahmed, in Dhaka in 1963. Later after I married Kamal and moved to Dhaka in 1965 I met with different groups. I found the intellectual/academic discourses on democracy and secularism contributed to a political sense of national identity. The social movements, and in particular the Language Movement, gave rise to a new middle class across the intelligentsia and the political world.

My memory is still fresh with the broad areas of political thought expanded upon by Professor Abdul Razzaq at Dhaka University, with Dr Khan Sarwar Murshid and Nurjehan Murshid and their *New Values* group, with Rehman Sobhan, Kamal Hossain whose ideas were inscribed into pamphlets published under the name of NASEP (National Association for Social, Economic Progress In East Pakistan) and later with *Forum*, where I was more directly involved as editor. In the following pages I will recall how their ideas visualized the making of a new state, and identified a role for the intelligentsia in a democratic society. It introduced me to a vibrant society in search of a future.

*My introduction to Dhaka University*

The Dhaka University Teachers’ Common Room had become a hub for debates amongst teachers and some of their students. Most of them were critical of the Ayub regime and military rule. Around Professor Abdur Razzaq (popularly referred to as “Sir” by most of us) were to be found younger teachers such as Anisuzzaman (Bangla Department) and Munier Choudhury. They held animated discussions on democracy and militarism. Sir was one of the first
Muslim students to be admitted to Dhaka University which had opened in 1921. He had then gone on to do a PhD in London University under the socialist Professor Harold Laski. Although his thesis never won him a degree, he had advised many students on preparation of their subjects whether it was colonial India or contemporary South Asia.\textsuperscript{9} His treatise was later published in Dhaka.

A man of many parts, Professor Razzaq had explored the subject of militarism and democracy in great depth and applied his knowledge in practice. His study had become a must read for politicians as well. His challenge to authoritarian decisions in this period set an example to many teachers and students to question claims of authority.

Sir was highly independent and a firm believer in democratic values. So he did not hesitate to challenge undemocratic decisions or orders. Thus, when the Dhaka University Ordinance (1961),\textsuperscript{10} was imposed to deny the right of teachers to engage in political activity, Sir took up the challenge and filed a petition in the High Court in 1966. He argued that he was not subject to this restriction since his contract did not include this conditionality at the time of his appointment (1938).\textsuperscript{11} He was able to persuade Mr. Brohi, a leading civil lawyer from Sindh (West Pakistan) to argue his case. The brief was drafted by Kamal Hossain.

\textsuperscript{9} In fact Prof. Razzaq was instrumental in showing me some of the archival sources which enriched my study of textile production and he insisted that a knowledge of Persian was important for a study of 18\textsuperscript{th} century India.

\textsuperscript{10} Dhaka University Ordinance, XXIII of 1961 provided that “an employee of the University of Dhaka shall not take part in or subscribe in aid of, or assist in any way any political movement, or any activities tending directly or indirectly to excite disaffection against the Government.”

\textsuperscript{11} \textit{Abdur Razzaq vs. The University of Dacca 18 DLR 1966 HCD 103}.
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In the sixties, Dhaka University students had actively protested against the university administration and the government. Sir’s appeals and support for the struggle for democracy in East Bengal had no doubt inspired student leaders such as Motia Chowdhury or Rashed Khan Menon. When Governor Monem Khan, (known to be a protégé of President Ayub Khan), was invited to inaugurate the Dhaka University Convocation the students and teachers were able to organize a massive demonstration to prevent his attendance. As a result the Convocation was disrupted for which some students had to pay a price. Amongst them Zaker Ahmed, who was in the front line of these protests, was expelled. Later, after independence he was appointed a judge of the High Court. The legal battles found the lawyers working along with academics to resist laws and law enforcement measures which militated against their rights to freedom of assembly and free speech.

As the political movement in East Bengal accelerated under the leadership of the Awami League, Sir and other university teachers actively interacted with political leaders, in particular with Bangabandhu and Tajuddin Ahmed. Often Sir’s apartment across from the Shaheed Minar became the meeting point in 1969 to 1971 where senior professors such as Khan Sarwar Murshid, economists including Rehman Sobhan, Mosharraf Hossain or lawyers such as Kamal Hossain would meet with political leaders. Rounaq Jahan, recently arrived from Harvard, contributed to this group, with her published thesis on The Failure of National Integration. Their discussions were instrumental in influencing the course of events and possible responses. This coming together of academics and political leaders served to strengthen the movement.

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13 Zaker Ahmed had to defend himself in the High Court. Later after independence he was appointed a judge of the High Court.
But the threat of military rule was a deterrent to citizens’ participation; nor indeed was it likely to lead to peaceful negotiations. The declaration of Martial Law in 1958 and Ayub Khan’s taking over of power in 1961/1962 led to even greater controls. Notwithstanding these threats Sir responded to an invitation from Dr Sarwar Murshid to address the *New Values* club on the implications of military rule. He explained his thesis on the incompatibility of democratic development with the rise of military expenditure.

Prof. Razzaq’s ideas gave an impetus to many young teachers who engaged in discussions in support of the political movement for democracy. As recorded by Kamal Hossain:

By now our circle had begun to take shape as a stimulating, informal discussion group. In retrospect the core of like-minded young teachers who continued to engage in discussions on current issues, while recognizing the risks involved, were those who were to play positive roles in the movement for regional autonomy and ultimately independence.\(^{14}\)

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\(^{14}\) K. Hossain, *Gyantaposh*..., *op. cit.*, p 256. They included Khan Sarwar Murshid (English), Muzaffar Ahmed Chowdhury (Political Science), Dr Nurul Islam (economist), Dr Anisuzzaman (Bangla). Younger writers such as Ahmed Sofa added to his list of disciples.
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**Association with New Values**

During my visit I also came to know another group of writers and professionals who wrote for *New Values*, a journal of ideas published by Dr. Khan Sarwar Murshid, a professor in the English Department. His wife Nurjehan Murshid, an Awami League member, had been elected to the Provincial Assembly in 1954. Both of them had an expansive circle of liberal minded friends who used to discuss and actively engage with the political movement. According to his daughter Tazeen Murshid, “His closest ally was my mother.”

They engaged in intensive discussions with Musharraf Hossain, Professor Muzaffar Ahmed Chowdhury, Professor Jyotirmoy Guhathakurta and Professor Abdur Razzaq. But these discussions were not limited to a few friends only. *New Values* became a forum for the exchange of ideas between people from
different parts of the world who shared certain values. “Communication with the rest of South Asia and the wider world was in English. In 1949, East Pakistani society was officially multilingual and the horizon of *New Values* went beyond provincial borders. English was then a natural choice of communication with this wider world.”

Well known writers from across South Asia contributed their thoughtful articles. Some issues included writers from beyond as well. The *New Values* journal published between 1949 to 1966 was described as one reflecting a “scholarly and intellectual firmament of Bangladesh.” It became a strong platform for secular, democratic and socialist discourse. In one of its contributions it spoke out with courage thus:

The creation of Pakistan as an Islamic state and the authoritarian instincts of those who assumed power militated against basic values such as democracy, freedom of speech and assembly and the establishment of human rights and social justice. The implications for East Pakistan were grave indeed as it evolved into a market for West Pakistan with widespread institutional discrimination against Bengalis which left them very poorly represented in the civil service, the military and other powerful state bodies.

During my month’s visit to Dhaka in 1963, Dr Murshid asked me to assist in editing a volume. This was a very exciting enterprise as it familiarized me with their political thoughts on democracy and secularism and their expectations in the making of a state. Dr Murshid, a senior professor in the department of English literature, was very well versed in philosophy, history and literature

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15 Tazeen Murshid’s written replies to my queries.
16 In looking through Dr Murshid’s papers recently I was pleased to see that he had credited me as assistant editor. I am deeply grateful to Kumar Murshid and Sharmeen Murshid for access to their apartment to view copies of New Values.
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(both Bangla and English). He appealed to a wide circle of writers who responded with learned articles on state craft or social dynamics. At a time when the urban middle class in East Bengal was going through a soul searching regarding expectations from a nation state, the contributions from writers in New Values spurred further debates amongst academics and professionals.

Progressive political parties were open to such discussions and drew upon these debates. Amongst the articles I found more relevant for an understanding of a society working for change I read Sarwar Murshid’s “The Challenge of being a Vice Chancellor”, Selena Hussain’s “Culture and Moral Values”, Badruddin Umar’s “Politics and Parties in Pakistan, (1947-1958)”. Razia Khan, a writer and university teacher did not hesitate to put down her critique of social realities. She became my guide into contemporary Bangla writings.

According to one commentator, “The New Values group deeply influenced by humanist thought, envisaged a liberal democratic society where culture belonged to the secular arena.”\(^{17}\) Its first editorial, in fact, stated the objective of New Values was to “direct a searching enquiry into the roots of beliefs and attitudes and help remove some of the obstacles to intelligent action as a means to good life.”\(^{18}\)

In the 17 years of its publication New Values became well known in intellectual circles across South Asia with contributions from literary critics, political analysts and socialists. What was remarkable was the diversity of views which were expressed in New Values from writings by Marxists to liberal democrats, from literary critics to political theorists. This is what made the journal and its

\(^{18}\) Ibid., p. 29
contributing members a rich repository of political philosophy which continues to echo in our discussions today.

The titles of articles in *New Values*, such as “The Mind of the Educated Middle Class in 19th century Bengal” (Prof. Abdur Razzaq), “Economic Determinism and Freedom” (M.N. Roy), “Pakistan and the Islamic State” and “Religion and Political Freedom” (Najmul Karim) indicate the questioning by political philosophers. The journal, according to Tazeen Murshid “...promoted values of … freedom of thought, intellect and expression. It was not a journal overtly on politics, though its message was political. Its themes were literary, on arts and aesthetics. It visualized a kind of a perfect society, a utopia in a philosophical sense.”

**NASEP Policy Analyses**

During my visit in 1963 I encountered a third group of professionals who had returned recently from their studies abroad. Although they had been studying in the West (the UK and the US) they had kept in touch with political developments at home. In fact, they continued throughout their time abroad to communicate with friends at home, questioning political developments. This is evident from their exchange of letters. On their return they had enthusiastically got together a study circle\(^\text{19}\) which was to be a meeting point for exchange of ideas following a return to civilian governance and democratic planning in East Bengal. It was also an attempt to involve political leaders into debates on political and economic policy which went beyond the rhetoric of political power. Rehman Sobhan, Kamal Hossain, Mosharraf Hossain, Badruddin Umar, Ziaul Haq Tulu and Erfan Ahmed, amongst others, formed the nucleus. Prof Abdur Razzaq remained their mentor and brought

\(^{19}\) National Association for the Advancement of Social and Economic Progress.
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gthem into contact with others in the university. Kamruddin Ahmed (a senior lawyer and author of *A Social and Political History of Bengal*) was close to the AL.\(^{20}\) Having written about labour conditions he was able to bring up the subject of workers’ rights in these discussions.

Several of the NASEP members used to teach at the Dhaka University. This helped them build bridges with students. Little did they realize that military statecraft depended upon appointments of loyalists as Dhaka University teachers or as Governor, who could carry out orders from above. Since these loyalists imposed controls on the teachers and students, it made it nearly impossible to hold open discussions in the University. Interaction of teachers with students and political leaders was thus discouraged.

Therefore, NASEP set up a study circle outside the University where they could keep in touch and communicate with students of economics, politics and law. To reach out more effectively to students and politicians, they decided to draft political tracts for circulation which would provoke discussions. These tracts were supposed to analyze the failures of the existing system of governance and to project policy alternatives based on values that promoted and protected citizens’ rights. Thus, when the President of Pakistan declared that one economy would prevail in the country, a NASEP pamphlet authored by Rehman Sobhan challenged it by pointing out the reality of two different economies in West Pakistan and East Bengal. The government’s pronouncement of a religious ideology as the basis of the state was challenged by a pamphlet on constitutional principles or values of secularism, which was written by Kamal Hossain. Musharaf Hussain authored the third pamphlet on education which promoted values of freedom of thought and expression. These pamphlets were meant to provide the core ideas

for students or political leaders who were exploring new notions of a nation state. The ideas projected by the NASEP group showed their belief in a governance system that would promote democratic rights and protect human rights.

NASEP’s founders were encouraged by precedents set by President John F. Kennedy to consult with intellectual groups (of economists in particular) in policy matters. Thus, NASEP members too felt that political decisions should not be restricted to rhetoric and political slogans but should derive from an understanding of policies and programs.

By 1961/62, however, Ayub Khan had taken control and the country was under martial law. Suspicious about the exchange of political ideas, the government decided to restrict involvement of academics in political activities. Professor Razzaq filed a petition in 1966 challenging this order. He won his claim on the limited ground that he had been employed long before these restrictions were imposed.21 The restrictions remained in the case of other academics.

In this restrictive atmosphere, the NASEP members were inhibited from more active involvement or projection of their ideas. Before their pamphlets could be circulated widely, they were alerted by friends that the intelligence agencies were showing an unhealthy interest in their discussions with students. To play safe the printed pamphlets were rapidly removed from the press and deposited in Rehman and Kamal’s cousin’s house in Narayanganj. Since the owner was the director of a maritime company he was presumed to be above suspicion.

While the intelligence agencies were kept at bay, the pamphlets prepared by the NASEP group remained “underground”,

21 Abdur Razzaq vs. The University of Dacca 18 DLR 1966 HCD 103.
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only to be discovered later during a house cleaning job! A few years later, after Rehman and Salma were married, and were moving to their new house, they discovered a large, heavy trunk which had to be carried by four strong men. No one seems to recollect whether these pamphlets found other homes and audiences. Nevertheless, their ideas continued to be dispersed through other channels.

The NASEP members continued to use whatever space they could to communicate their ideas of a nation state that would uphold values of democracy, secularism and human rights. These discussions filtered down to the political world as well where they were reflected in slogans for freedom of thought and speech. A few journalists, along with Muyeedul Hasan, joined the group discussions and renamed themselves as Jono Moitri Porishad. Whether a change of name was able to elude the intelligence agencies was not clear.\(^{22}\) I knew the members of this group individually but had nothing to do with the organization – neither NASEP nor Jono Moitri. I think they were before my time in Dhaka. NASEP preceded Forum.

*Voices at Forum*

My third engagement brought me in touch with a wider number of progressive activists and writers, particularly in the world of media and politics. It also introduced me to high points in ongoing debates as well as with subtle bureaucratic means of influencing public opinion. It was not that I was unfamiliar with government interventions and controls. After all, in Karachi, too, as I helped out in *Outlook*, a political weekly, I was witness to frequent orders issued to the editor, which taught us to keep within strict lines set by the bureaucracy.

\(^{22}\) See R. Sobhan, *op. cit.*, p. 271.
For Rehman and Kamal, Forum responded to their need to project their analyses of political developments, to make economic prognoses as well as promote ideas for social transformation. A weekly publication could reach a wider audience than NASEP had done. Our intent was to create a platform for reasoned public discussions on alternatives for a new society.

We used to meet together in our house in Dhanmandi with a handful of persons, including journalists Muyeedul Hasan and Ahmedur Rahman, business executives such as Ziaul Haq Tulu, and the Marxist politics professor Badruddin Umar. We discussed the possibility of publishing a weekly journal, which would offer space for a democratic exchange of ideas in East Bengal and, as it developed, into exchanges from South Asia. In a way this was a continuation of the discourses at New Values and NASEP, but with a particular emphasis on critiques of the discriminatory economic policies and political controls. These articles inspired discussions on strategies for political and economic transformation.

At that time security was a major issue for the eastern region. The impasse in 1965, was created by the Indo-Pakistan war. Bangalis had begun to question what protection they could expect from the state, which offered no defense and left the region in isolation. Instead they were told that they could count on the foreign ships in the Indian Ocean which had stood by for East Bengal’s defense. What security could East Bengal expect from the state if its defense lay with foreign powers? The signing of the Tashkent Peace Agreement furthered their exclusion as no leader from East Bengal was included in the negotiations. There was a growing feeling amongst the intelligentsia that the political dynamics in South Asia had isolated East Bengal and increased its security risk.

23 Ahmedur Rahman, a correspondent for the Ittefaq died in a plane crash before we could start publication.
We decided to apply for a declaration from the Home and Information Ministry. This was a legal requirement for a regular publication. We submitted our papers sometime in 1967. After several months of running back and forth we were finally able to obtain a declaration. Our first issue which came out on 22 November 1969 ran a charcoal sketch by Shilpacharjya Zainul Abedin on its cover with the appropriate title of “The Spectre of Famine”. We were grateful to Shilpacharjya Zainul Abedin for allowing us to use this and later other sketches of the Bhola cyclone or the Palestine crisis. We were also gratified with the cartoon contributions made by the well-known artist Rafiquin Nabi. The *Forum* cartoon sketches were very popular, and introduced him as a cartoonist as well.

I was roped in as editor of *Forum* mainly because of my editorial experience, but once I got into the work I found the discourse energizing and exciting. It was risky running a weekly journal on two counts. We worked on low budgets - actually no budget - since the big companies/corporations did not favour our socialist ideas. A second risk came from the information ministry whose main task was to censor and question any discussion of their policies and statements. As editors we were called in occasionally for lectures from the military representative in the Information Ministry so that we comply with their directions. In one particular case we were called in and informed that we were not to allow any cause for offence to a friendly country. The latter reprimand came in response to an article written by one of *Forum’s* leading correspondents, Mazhar Ali Khan, who critiqued the Shah of Iran’s ancestry. Iran being a strong supporter of the Pakistan regime could not be mentioned even in an insignificant magazine published from Dhaka. There were other times too when we were called in by the Martial Law administrator and asked to restrain our writers and to make our editorials less aggressive. However, we continued, and so
did our correspondents, to analyze the failures of integrationist policies, and to report on the unfolding of political events in East Bengal.

In spite of its limited circulation, *Forum* was by no means insignificant in its influence. From its inauguration - which was attended by leading left leaning political leaders, professionals and journalists, with nationalist inclinations - to its weekly output, we were able to invite contributions by leading economists and journalists. The most notable amongst the economists were Amartya Sen and Nurul Islam (who was later appointed as the Chairman of the first Planning Commission of Bangladesh). In fact, some of the members of this Commission who contributed articles (Rehman Sobhan, Mosharraf Hussain and Anisur Rahman) showed a pre-disposition towards a socialist economy.

Aside from its economic analysis and commentary, *Forum* played host to a range of investigative reports, on political events (by Muyeedul Hasan), and on the military (“Who’s Who in the Aviary”). The latter were written under a pseudonym at the author’s request. Although we started *Forum* with the intention of projecting political options and choices for East Bengal we were able to include South Asian voices of writers, journalists and professionals who theorized and analyzed what could lead to a peaceful, democratic South Asia. So, in addition to the many local contributions furthering the debates on Six Points and Eleven Points programs for autonomy and self-determination, we found considerable interest amongst progressive South Asians: the Sri Lankan feminist Kumari Jayawardene wrote only once, but journalists Mazhar Ai Khan and M.B. Naqvi from Pakistan were regular correspondents from Lahore and Karachi. From far away in the UK, Neville Maxwell wrote on subjects of interest to South Asians. The articles were not restricted to current politics only. In fact, Razia Khan, Professor of English
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Literature at Dhaka University, wrote a series of brilliant articles on Bangla literature.

Looking back at two years of *Forum* articles, even 50 years later, I found considerable relevance in discussions on the state of the political economy: Anisur Rahman wrote several pieces on “Economic Growth and Social Justice”,\(^{24}\) and “Socialism and Freedom” which could do well in a reprint today. At the time the main concern was with intra-state relations (between the centre and provinces). But we did not ignore the class dimensions of the struggles in Bengal. Thus, while several writings were devoted to the outcomes of the Round Table Conference (in March 1970)\(^ {25}\) or to electoral politics of December 1970, a review of labour reform by Kamruddin Ahmad\(^ {26}\) or an article entitled “Land to the Tiller”\(^ {27}\) or “Red Dawn for Red Caps” demonstrated that beyond political concerns of equality within the nation state we were seeking paths to economic justice.

The elections had raised hopes of a return to a civilian, elected government, which would give space to citizens’ voices. Elections had been postponed twice that year on account of climate conditions, but by December the election results had led to a heightened expectation that state structures could be transformed to ensure regional autonomy. Diverse groups had articulated their position on the issues of citizen’s freedom of participation in state matters. At the same time political events were moving towards a crisis point with rival groups contesting for power, through their electoral victory or through the back door with military support. In these controversial debates on “Islam in danger” versus “secular

\(^{24}\) *Forum*, 25/4/1970  
\(^{25}\) “Lessons of RTC” and “Post Mortem on RTC”, (14/8/1970)  
constitutionalism” *Forum* continued to counsel that the path of peaceful negotiations amongst elected representatives could lead to a workable solution for a federal state system. It expressed such a hope in its first editorial entitled: “In Search of Freedom…” and warned of the consequences in its last editorial entitled: “Options for a Sane Man”.

Once the principle of a political settlement is accepted then there can be no option but to come to terms with the people’s demands. It now has to be confirmed whether Bangla Desh will settle at least for Six Points as their minimum demand or they have been pushed by recent events to a point of no return. If the nation is to break let it go peacefully and without bitterness to live as a friend and neighbour.

*Forum* Cover sketch by Rafiqun Nabi, 14 March 1970

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*Women’s Activism*

I woke up to the “Woman Question” through my association with women activists such as Nurjehan Murshid, a political leader, Roqaiya Rahman Kabir, an educationist, Razia Khan, a poet, writer and teacher, and Maleka Begum, who had started out with the student movement before she helped form the Mahila Parishad. Since the early sixties they had voiced their concerns about inequalities in personal laws. Nurjehan Murshid told us of her electoral responsibilities and of how women leaders had sent recommendations to Justice Rashid Commission’s draft for the Muslim Laws Ordinance of 1961. Perhaps the reason Ayub Khan accepted some of their suggestions was because he needed women’s support to curb the influence of the religious leaders. However, the law fell far short of their demands, particularly relating to inheritance, divorce and guardianship.

Their discussions were not limited within the universe of the academia alone. Women’s activism took different directions. In fact, women activists and community workers had worked together in the aftermath of the 1947 riots to protect embattled minorities. From their work had emerged the *Atto Rakha Samitis* in Wari, Ganderia and other neighbourhoods in Dhaka. Begum Sufia Kamal who had migrated from Kolkata worked together with Lila Nag sheltering Hindu families and resisting communal violence. Others were actively engaged in their neighbourhood *Samitis*.

At the same time, women students, such as Maleka Begum and Ayesha Khanam, were active in the *Chattro Union* (left students’ Union) of Dhaka University affirming their politics of secularism, economic rights and equality. Under their leadership young university women students had formed the *Mahila Sangram Parishad* in 1969. They supported the nationalist movements but at
the same time worked together in response to the violence on women. Later in 1970, the Bangladesh Mahila Parishad held its inaugural meeting in Purbani Hotel. Along with some other invitees I was present at this meeting which was presided by Sufia Kamal. Several women leaders spoke out in no uncertain terms against communal politics and identified the need for reform of personal laws. Younger university women through their membership in the Mahila Sangram Parishad carried these messages beyond Dhaka.

Some took up the cause of women’s self-reliance by promoting their participation in economic activities. The invisibility of rural women’s production and their absence from the market featured in some of the nationalist discussions. While the shops in Dhaka were flooded with an assortment of goods from West Pakistan the traditional craft items produced by ordinary artisans, both women and men, in villages of East Bengal were not visible in urban displays. Yet East Bengal’s economic history provided rich evidence of its hand made textiles, silver and brass ware amongst other crafts which reached export markets until the nineteenth century.

Talk of autonomy also raised the question of artisan’s exclusion from the market. In the sixties there were probably only a few display centres for village crafts in Dhaka run by women. Joya located in the Sheraton Hotel, (now Intercontinental) was run by Shilu Khan (later Shilu Abed), and Khurshidi Alam. Another called Kanak in Gulistan was owned by Mena Hasan.

At this time through Professor Razzaq I got to know Shilpacharjya Zainul Abedin, who introduced me to the world of arts and crafts in East Bengal. In our visits to Sonargaon, Shilpacharjya Zainul Abedin pointed out the family division of labour. In each craft process women artisans were involved in the
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preliminary processes only, with little recognition of their labour, while the men completed the final object and sold it in local haats or bazars. Very little reached urban markets.

This is how I got involved with women’s craft work. In the mid-sixties, three of us\textsuperscript{29} set up a retail outlet in a garage. At Auronima crafts women and men could display their products for sale at prices which they calculated as fair returns on their labour. We did this to introduce village work to urban buyers and to prove that we did not need to depend upon imports from West Pakistan. My involvement with them took me to the countryside and introduced me to the life of village women in Bangladesh. In the sixties, village women made the most beautiful crafts, from kanthas to pottery, working mostly as family labour and unaware of the value of their work. Most of them were engaged on family farms or in craft work. Few of them thought of their work as creative labour which needed to be compensated. We tried to organize some of these working women into cooperatives where they could work together and gain economic benefits.

The women’s movement in the early years sought to raise awareness of their economic value in terms of their production. These discussions continued in women’s wings of political parties and outside prompted by progressive women professionals.

Political parties had organized women’s wings which became involved in the national movement but at the same time they raised concerns of women’s rights. Under advice from the Communist Party, the Mahila Parishad was formed by bringing together women from neighbourhood communities (\textit{Atto Rakkha Shamitis}) with women students. This is when Maleka Begum and Ayesha Khanam became actively involved in its formation. The

\textsuperscript{29} My sister Khursheed Erfan Ahmed and her sister in law Mahemunir Ahmed.
Awami League had its own women’s wing. The basis of their movement was to support secular, nationalist politics and within this structure to promote legal reform in personal laws and to encourage women’s economic activities.

During the war and afterwards women played a vital role as freedom fighters. They were involved in different ways which is why the definition of freedom fighters is not only limited to those who used weapons but also those who sheltered fighters, worked in hospitals and provided back up support.
VII

Conclusion: A New Beginning?

While there may have been reasons to believe that there was little logic in the formation of the Pakistan state and separation was inevitable there could be no justification for the brutality of 1971. The autonomy arrangements that were being proposed could have led to a rational separation through an acceptance of the diverse needs of different regions. Instead, the military chose to impose unity through its gun power. In *Forum*’s last editorial of 20\textsuperscript{th} March, we noted that a military solution could not lead to peace. Nor could genocide fulfill the design of the aggressors.

Aggressors rarely recognize the voices of reason. The military chose the path of genocide in Bangladesh. When “Operation Searchlight” started on the night of March 25\textsuperscript{th}, all activities were suspended. The groups which had shared their hopes of freedom and plans for a democratic state dispersed in different directions, but continued to work towards liberation of a society and to affirm their beliefs in democracy and human rights.

1971 marked the end of a chapter of a failed state. It was also the beginning of a new world. In 1972 as we emerged from our diverse experiences of violence, dislocation, dismemberment, we faced a new future.

As we pursued our dreams, we pondered on 1971 and what it was about. Not just an independent state. We imagined 1971 as a liberation from authoritarianism, as a move towards equality and justice. A place where freedom of thought and expression would be the basis for a culture of public reasoning. Through such freedoms
we hoped that citizens could pursue their dreams and construct a democratic society.

But that is the beginning of another story… of an ongoing struggle.
CGS-Square Fellowship  
An Initiative for developing the liberal future

Square today symbolized a name - a state of mind in the business world. From its inception in 1958, Square has today burgeoned into one of the topmost conglomerates in Bangladesh. Square started out as a small-scale pharmaceutical venture in 1958. By its fourth year square turned into a profit-making organization. During last 5 decades, Square has become pioneer in diversified fields of business starting from pharmaceuticals to healthcare, Textiles to Readymate Garments, Toiletries to Consumer Goods Information & Communication technology to media. Its present unassailable status is the outcome of its successful diversification. The relentless pursuit for excellence; the urge to never stand still, to never slow down and to never stop thinking, Square looks at the future with increasing confidence. Square intends not only to strengthen its strong local footings but also extend its global presence.

Square’s activity goes well beyond adhering to a business. As a socially conscious and responsible corporate body, Square is committed to the improvement of the society as a whole. Well being of consumer, employee and society are the three foundation pillars of the values and principles of Square. To set an example worth emulating in the world wide prevention of genocide, University of Dhaka Centre for Genocide Studies (CGS) and Square Toiletries jointly arranged a 3-year long Fellowship Program “CGS-Square Fellowship 2015-2017 to create awareness about this global phenomenon. Patronizing issues of the own boundary is one of the major activities that Square are willingly doing every day. Thus, we are keeping our foothold in not only cultural, recreational or sports rather issues like genocide that are quite important for show casing the long history of our country thus widen our scope of understanding for the liberal future.

For details, visit CGS website at: http://dugenocidestudies.blog.com