

Short Sketch of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman

Born in 1920 at a simple family, this is the story of a simple man becoming the father of the Bangali nation. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was the third among six children of Sheikh Lutfur Rahman and Sayera Khatun. The childhood of Sheikh Mujib as portrayed by Sheikh Hasina, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh and the eldest daughter Sheikh Mujib, saying: "My father [Sheikh Mujib] grew up rural - amid rivers, trees, birdsong. He flourished in the free atmosphere inspired by his grandparents. He swam in the river, played in the fields, bathed in the rains, caught fish and watched out for birds' nests. His care and concern for classmates, friends and others were well-known as giving away his tiffin to the hungry, clothes to the naked, books to the needy and other personal belongings to the poor. One day, my grandfather told me, he gave his clothes to a poor boy and came home in his shawl". His parents used to call him 'Khoka' out of affection. Born in a large family, young Mujib was raised with love and affection, moving from one lap to the other as the apple of his family's eye. According to his daughter Sheikh Rehana, "He [Sheikh Mujib] was the gem that everyone loved to see. His two elder sisters cuddled him almost around the clock. He grew up little by little and started learning Bangla, English, Persian, and Mathematics. His initiation in education was through my grandfather."

In 1938, Sheikh Mujib tied the knot with Fazilatunnesa, fondly called Renu by the family with family rituals. The pair subsequently became the happy parents of two daughters, Sheikh Hasina and Sheikh Rehana, and three sons, Sheikh Kamal, Sheikh Jamal and Sheikh Russel. Renu was the best friend of Sheikh Mujib such that there was nothing in this world that these two friends could not share. In his 'Unfinished Memoirs' he has expressed their deep mutual understanding of his personal and political life: "My wife told me one day while sitting with me in a room within the jail gate, 'Since you are idle, write about your life now'. I told her, 'I can't write, and in any case what I have done is that worth writing about? Will the public benefit from the stories of my life? I haven't been able to achieve anything! I guess all I can say is that I have tried to sacrifice a bit of me for my principles and ideals'" (P-1, Unfinished Memoirs).

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was very keen to know about everything and fond of studying a lot. His father used to buy a lot of books and he used to read out history, geography, English, Bangla, religion, science, literature, the stories about legends and the repression committed by the British regime. According to his daughter Sheikh Rehana, "Little Mujib was curious about everything, asking one question after another to his father, who also answered all his queries. He used to read out the stories of legends, religion, science to him. My grandfather and father Mujib were like friends. While they could share everything without any reservation, their relationship didn't miss out on mutual respect. My grandfather never resisted his child from undertaking any feat." While teenager Mujib was recovering from his eye operation, he used the period very prudently and instinctively by attending meetings in the evenings then the '**Swadeshi Movement**', according to his 'Unfinished Memories'.

Mujib's commitments and accountabilities towards himself reflected while he was a student at Gopalganj Missionary School. He served in jail from his high school life. He remained in custody for seven days as he went to rescue one of his friends who was captured and tortured by some local people, which ended up with a clash in 1941. Upon completion of his secondary education, Mujib moved to Kolkata for higher education. Whilst studying at the Islamia College in Kolkata, Mujib got involved with the movement for the creation of Pakistan and became fully active in politics, regularly visiting Suhrawardy in Calcutta, attending and giving speeches at public meetings and rallies, and forming Muslim Student League in Madaripur. However, when communal riots broke out across India, especially in Bengal, he took an active part in protecting Muslims and non-Muslims alike, often by risking his own life.

There is no doubt that the political consciousness of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was instinctive from an early age. Before he became fully active in politics, he rushed doors to doors, gathered experiences and understood the people's sufferings and exploitation by the British. These eventful experiences helped him develop his leadership from a young age and brewed him to devote his whole life for the sake of the emancipation of the people. And thus, Mujib, who was the apple of eye of his family, started moulding himself to become the Architect of the Bengali nation.

Upon returning to the then East Pakistan, Mujib took admission in the Department of Law at Dhaka University. He founded the Muslim Students' League in 1948. When the then Prime Minister of Pakistan declared that the people of East Pakistan must accept Urdu as their state language, Mujib put all his energies in building a movement against this declaration. He and some of his colleagues were arrested while holding a peaceful demonstration in support of the demand for Bengali to be one of the state languages of Pakistan.

For supporting strike by 'Class Four' Dhaka University Employees for their various demand on 1949, Mujib was fined by the University Authority for leading and arrested for staging a sit-in protest in front of the Vice Chancellor Residence. He was then elected as one of the joint-secretaries of the newly formed East Pakistan Awami Muslim League.

Mujib soon garnered mass support, developed his own credentials as a leader to be trusted by his party members as well as the mass. In 1953, he was elevated to the post of general secretary of the party. During this period, he was evolving as an advocate of democratic politics. Mujib helped organize the Awami Muslim League and briefly served as a provincial minister twice in the 1954 and 1956 governments. As a minister in the provincial cabinet, he was never particularly happy. In 1957, he decided to resign his position as Minister to work full-time for the party. He started advocating for adjustment in economic and political relations between the two provinces of Pakistan through constitutional means.

Mujib began to travel the country to canvas for the rights of Bengali people of the then East Pakistan by condemning the military rule in Pakistan. His uncompromising stance against the military rulers and championing of the causes of the Bengali masses led to continuous harassment and imprisonment by the Pakistani military regime keeping Mujib behind bars for over half of the twenty-four years that they ruled in what is today Bangladesh because of his restless campaign against West Pakistan's exploitation of the East. He was incarcerated no less than twenty times and faced the gallows twice. It became routine affairs of the state to arrest Mujib at every turning of political events in the country between 1949 and 1971.

The Six-Point Movement by Sheikh Mujib spurred in 1966, is commonly acclaimed by analysts to be the foundation of Bangladesh's independence earned him the title of Bangabandhu – friend of the Bengalis in 1969 at a titanic public meeting organized by the Central Student Action Committee at the Racecourse Maidan (now Suhrawardy Udyan) on February 23.

After being subjected to systemic discrimination such as, economic subjugation in the allocation of federal funds and foreign exchange, recruitment to public services by the central government, the six-point formula for regional autonomy was revealed by Mujib in Lahore 1966.

The six points of the formula were:

- 1) a form of federal government, a parliamentary system directly elected via one-person-one-vote,
- 2) two separate reserve banks and currencies for the two wings of Pakistan,
- 3) Other than defence and foreign policy, all issues will be dealt with by the federal provinces,
- 4) a paramilitary force for East Pakistan,

- 5) fiscal affairs, much as taxation and resources allocation, will be state responsibility, and
- 6) monetary and trade policies, such as foreign reserve maintenance and establishing trade links, will be handled separately by the two wings.

The Awami League communicated the six- point amongst the people and soon mobilized a mass movement, creating a political awakening among the Bengalis for emancipation and self-rule and had provided the framework of independence for Bangladesh in the following years. In 1968, the military regime - led by General Ayub Khan - filed the notorious Agartala Conspiracy Case against Mujib and 34 Bengali civil and military officers with charges for conspiring to secede East Pakistan from the rest of Pakistan. However, withdrawing unconditionally in 1969 Sheikh Mujib was released and then Pakistani military ruler promised to hold a general election which was held between 7 December 1970 and 19 January 1971.

The Awami League, under Mujib's leadership, won an absolute majority leading formation of the government; ironically it never happened. Instead, the Pakistani army prepared for war against Bengali people in East Pakistan. The Bengalis, under Mujib's leadership, responded by declaring non-cooperation movement which paralyzed the country. In this context, Mujib delivered the historic 7th March speech. The speech in all its essence called for the emancipation and freedom of the Bengali people. At midnight on March 25, the Pakistan army launched its heinous act of genocide against unarmed Bengalis. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman proclaimed the Independence of Bangladesh in the early hours of March 26. Right after the proclamation, he was arrested and taken to a Pakistani prison. On April 10, the first government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh was formed and Bangabandhu was elected as President by the constituent assembly. Syed Nazrul Islam was elected as Vice President and acting President in the absence of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, while Tajuddin Ahmed was elected as Prime Minister.

The leaders take their oath in office on April 17 at a famous mango garden (Amrakanan) of Baidyanathtala in Meherpur, now known as Mujibnagar. After nine months of bloody war, Bangladesh was liberated with the surrender of the Pakistani occupation army on December 16, 1971. In August and September, the Pakistan Junta held a secret trial of Bangabandhu and sentenced him to death. People of the world were enraged and demanded the security of the President of Bangladesh. On December 27, the Bangladesh government demanded Bangabandhu's immediate and unconditional release.

Under immense international pressure, the Government of Pakistan was forced to release Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on January 8, 1972. On that very day, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman travelled to London on his way to Dhaka. There, at a crowded press conference in his hotel, he spoke to the world press. On January 9, he met then British Prime Minister Edward Heath. Prior to returning to Dhaka, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman made stop over at Delhi, where Indian President VV Giri and the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi welcomed him. When the Father of the Nation reached Dhaka on January 10, millions of jubilant citizens welcomed him with open arms. He went straight from the airport to the Race Course Maidan, now renamed Suhrawardy Udyan, where he addressed the people of independent Bangladesh for the first time.

On January 12, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman took charge as Prime Minister of the Bangladesh government and began the reconstruction of the war-ravaged country. Within three-and-a-half years, Bangabandhu laid the foundations of the new war-torn, dilapidated Republic by putting into effect several measures, including rehabilitation of 10 million Bengali refugees, withdrawal of all allied forces within 3 months of victory, formation of the constituent assembly and a constitution for the new State within 10 months, recognition of Bangladesh by more than a hundred States. He also ensured Bangladesh's membership to important international bodies

including the Commonwealth of Nations, United Nations, NAM, and OIC, as well as the enactment of International Crimes Tribunal Laws.

The World Peace Council awarded the Julio Curie Peace Prize to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman for his contribution to world peace on May 23, 1973. On September 6 1973 Bangabandhu set off to Algeria to participate in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Summit. On the side-lines of the summit, he held bilateral talks with many world leaders. Bangladesh received world recognition by becoming the 136th member of the United Nations on September 17, 1974. On September 25, at the 29th General Assembly of the United Nations, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman delivered the first ever speech at the UN in Bangla, and thus he established the representation of an indomitable nation in their own language.

Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was assassinated by a handful of army renegades in the early hours of August 15 1975, as part of a larger national and international political conspiracy hatched by anti-liberation forces. They conspirators murdered in cold blood every member of his family except two daughters, Sheikh Hasina and Sheikh Rehana, who by fortune were abroad at that time. The fiendish murderers didn't even spare Sheikh Russel, who was only 10 (18 October 1964).

Throughout his life, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman believed in democracy, freedom and was vocal about people's emancipation from exploitation and oppression. He also believed in peaceful, non-violent movement. From 1947 to 1970, Bangali nationalist movement, under Mujib's leadership, became stronger day-by-day. He stayed within the bounds of democratic principles. He believed in coexistence and mutual tolerance of different groups and equal rights of all citizens. BBC in a survey found unequivocally that Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is the greatest Bangali of all times. He is the father of our nation- the leader who is inseparable from his country and country man.

Reference:

1. The Unfinished Memoirs – Sheikh Mujibur Rahman ; The University press limited, Red Crescent House, Level 6, 61 Motijheel C/A; ISBN 978 984 506 110 0
2. <https://cri.org.bd/publication/Mujib/Mujib-Father-of-a-Nation.pdf>
3. <https://cri.org.bd/2021/06/16/all-you-need-to-know-about-the-six-point-movement-in-east-pakistan/>
4. <https://albd.org/articles/general/36642/Rise-of-Political-Awareness-in-Young-Mujib>
5. <https://albd.org/articles/general/36641/Early-Life-of-Sheikh-Mujibur-Rahman>
6. <https://archive.dhakatribune.com/opinion/special/2021/08/15/life-of-bangabandhu>

Note:

Information and photos courtesy of National Implementation Committee for Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's 100's anniversary celebrity.