

Subalterns Too Can Speak and Contend for Power: Drawing Inspiration from Sheikh Mujib's 7th March Speech in Nation Building

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Abstract

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the founding father of Bangladesh, is a leading proponent of empowering the oppressed and inspiring the marginalized and forgotten to come together, unite, and encourage one another to speak up and fight for their rights. His dynamism takes the Bengali nation to independence as a legendary nationalist and sage. His leadership and pro-people political initiatives were effective and fruitful enough to dismantle the repressive political, economic, cultural, and other policies that the West Pakistani rulers imposed on East Pakistan. The author of this paper aims to demonstrate Sheikh Mujib's role in transforming a politically apathetic population of seventy-five million people into politically aware citizens who ultimately contend for power and establish a free country. Especially, this paper focuses on Sheikh Mujib's famous 7th March Speech, which is considered one of the most inspiring speeches in world history. This qualitative research paper explores Sheikh Mujib's 7th March Speech as the final inspiring force that powers resistance to West Pakistan's neocolonialism on East Pakistan after the partition in 1947, using postcolonial subalternity as a theoretical framework. To serve the study's purpose, the 7th March Speech of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is examined through the lens of a significant historical event.

Key words: Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Marginalized, Subaltern, Power, 7th March Speech, Neocolonialism, Inspiration.

Introduction

From antiquity to the current era, time has influenced some of history's most memorable speeches. It is evident that there are speeches that possess electrifying power in persuading thousands of the people to sacrifice their lives. Even some of the speeches have immense power transcending the national boundaries registering universal value for humankind. "The power of speech has driven people to fight for glory, victory, or survival; it has shaped the outcome of wars and framed they are viewed by prosperity" (Field, 2013, P. 9). In introducing the great leaders and the reason for including their speeches in the book *We Shall Fight on the Beaches*, Jacob F. Field (2013) states, "The speeches in this were delivered by some of the history's greatest generals and most revered heroes, as well as some of the most reviled figures" (P.10). According to him, such kind of speech "reveals the power of the spoken word to rouse and console, to celebrate and eulogize" (P.11). This exceptional book contains speeches by forty-one great leaders and warriors, including Alexander the Great, Hannibal, Julius Caesar, William the Conqueror, Emperor Constantine, Elizabeth I, Oliver Cromwell, George Washington, Napoleon Bonaparte, Bismarck, Abraham Lincoln, Vladimir Lenin, Woodrow Wilson, Adolf Hitler, Winston Churchill, Charles De Gaulle, Franklin Roosevelt, Stalin, Mao Zedong, Ho Chi Minh and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, spanning 2500 years of human history (Field, 2013). Interestingly, among all of those history's great leaders, Sheikh Mujib is the only one who liberates the oppressed people of East Pakistan, who were politically, economically and culturally marginalized by the dominating rulers of West Pakistan.

Since the creation of India and Pakistan in 1947, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman led the people of East Pakistan and transformed the literally peace-loving innocent folks to 'Mukti Bahini' and achieved independence on 16 December 1971 through a continuous struggle and bloody war against the unjust tyranny of West Pakistan. However, the famous speech of March 7, 1971 was the ultimate mantra of the marginalized people of Bangladesh to jump into the freedom struggle. The Speech on 7th March sets the tone for the great war of liberation. It transformed seventy five million people into a national army who were ready to fight for freeing their beloved motherland till the last drop of their blood. The deeply emotional summons from the heavy heart of Sheikh Mujib instills unfathomable spirit in people's mind to fight and liberate their dear land from the Pakistani neo-colonizer.

Nevertheless, the call from Sheikh Mujib for the rights and emancipation of the people of Bangladesh economically, politically and culturally may be a great example that how “Subalterns Too Can Speak and Contend for Power” and encourage people to ‘nation building.’ So in this paper, the author attempts to exhibit the contribution of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman who, despite being a representative of the subalterns, contends the West Pakistani authoritarian government by his exhortation and power of speech, leadership and eventually inspires the subaltern masses in nation building. This qualitative research paper explores Sheikh Mujib's 7th March Speech as the final inspiring force that powers resistance to West Pakistan's neocolonialism on East Pakistan after the partition in 1947, using postcolonial subalternity as a theoretical framework. To serve the study's purpose, the 7th March Speech of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is examined through the lens of a significant historical event.

Literature Review

Several historians, journalists, and academics have attempted to investigate the significance of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's position and contribution as a politician in his long struggle for nation-building. A large number of authors, political commentators, and historians from both home and abroad have praised his unwavering opposition to West Pakistan's rulers. They also clearly demonstrated his unwavering efforts to gain shared economic and political power from West Pakistan for the people of East Pakistan. They have also expressed their utter surprise at how a politician can mobilize millions of politically illiterate and politically unaware farmers, workers, students, women, and people from all walks of life to become politically aware. Kazi Ahmed Kamal (2020) asks a question as a statement that

“who is this leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman? What manner of a man is he who draws millions of people to march behind him? Why did a million people gather before him when he addressed them on 23 February 1969 or on 7 June 1970 in Dhaka.”

(P. vii)

He gives the answer of his own question as:

World has thrown up many great leaders but history will record that none could muster a million people if only he declared his wishes that he wanted to address them. Neither Hitler

nor Mussolini, Churchill, Roosevelt nor Stalin could collect a throng of a million people as Sheikh Mujib does. There are few leaders in the world who are so popular and yet constantly run the risk of being thrown behind bars.

(Kamal, 2020, P. viii)

And again, he goes on with his passionate words of appreciation and acknowledgement of Sheikh Mujib's aim as a political leader:

Sheikh Mujib has turned the different and deprived people of East Bengal into a country of new hope purpose. He gives expression to the voices of quiet suffering, to the voices that speak without words, to the anxious voices that had never any hope of being heard. The real and silent East Bengal has got a voice now and has come out in the open. (Kamal, 2020, P. xiii)

Eventually, the question of fight for the poor and distressed folks was so embedded with Sheikh Mujib that nobody could deny that. This truth is exposed with Kamal's (2020) next statement:

Sheikh Mujib is indeed the bridge over the moods of two generations. He believes in the cause of people particularly because he saw bigotry and intolerance of the landlords to the peasants in Faridpur. He has seen the horrifying riots in Calcutta-the birth pangs of India and Pakistan in 1946. (P.P. 35-36)

Commenting on his historical 7th March Speech, Kamal (2020) states:

The speech will go down in the history for its stirring appeal to the nationalistic impulses of the people. He concluded his speech with a clarion call "to fight with whatever you have.... This is a struggle for emancipation, a struggle for emancipation, a struggle for independence. (P. 201)

Another scholar and historian, Zulfikar Newton (2020), demonstrates that Sheikh Mujib emerged as a leader from the middle class. The representatives, according to Spivak, came from this middle class segment pact with the British, which resulted in the irrational partition in 1947. Sheikh Mujib, on the other hand, is unique in that he campaigns for the interests of oppressed people. According to Newton (2020):

History has it that it is the middle class that generally produces great political leaders, philanthropists, social workers, litterateurs, cultural activists and the like. And it is true of Bangladesh as well. Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is the epitome of such a middle class personality. (P. 23)

However, he states that “The speech of 7th March by Bangabandhu bore testimony of the declaration of independence de facto” (Newton, 2020, P. 88) and further adds that

The speech of Bangabandhu on 7th March is one of the historic speeches the world has ever known. By the freedom-loving people of the world it will be regarded as an immortal speech ... Bangabandhu's sagacious speech of 7th March was the outcome of thirty years of political life. (Newton, 2020, P. 84)

There was immediate impact of the 7th March speech in East Pakistan. Newton (2020) adds:

After the historic 7th March ushered in a new day-8th March, 1971, Monday. It was the day when Bangabandhu assumed the power of ruling the country. The controlling power of the Pakistan government ceased. On this day Mr. Tajuddin Ahmed, General Secretary of the Provincial Awami League, in a statement gave a complete explanation of the programme declared by Bangabandhu. As a result of this declaration it becomes clear that Bangabandhu initiated the rule of a parallel government in East Bengal.

(P. 88)

In his book *A Biography of Father of the Nation: Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman*, historian Zillur Rahman (2020) says:

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is the first in the list of the greatest Bengalis of all time. The power of miraculous sacrificial leadership is evident in the personality of the individual in the ages. With such a person, with just one finger pointing, a great revolution occurs on the earth. As a result, humanity is liberated. (P. 7)

Commenting on the influence of the leadership of Sheikh Mujib, Zillur Rahman (2020) further states:

He led the people of Bangladesh cherish the dream of independence. At his call, the people fought a war. Hence he is ‘the architect of independence’, a title often attached to his name. A person fighting for the independence of a nation and contemplating on every form of freedom for the nation, becomes the guardian of that nation. And that is how he is the ‘JatirJanak’ or father of the nation to the people of Bangladesh. (P. 9)

Selina Hossain (2020), a well-known writer, tries to recognize Sheikh Mujib's links to the common people. She emphasizes his authority over people, as well as the people's faith in him, in her writing. She writes that:

No other political leader could come as close to the poor, unfortunate masses as he could. The people of Bangladesh fought the war of liberation at his call. Thus the new nation of Bangladesh achieved for itself a place in the world map. (P. P. 9-10)

Almost all historians, authors, journalists, and political analysts who discuss Sheikh Mujib, must evaluate his 7th March Speech from their own point of view. Selina Hossain (2020), too, captures the audience's enthusiasm for the speech. She states:

Bangabandhu declared that a public meeting would be held in the Race Course Maidan on 7th March and there he would give his next instruction. On that date, lacs of people gathered at the Race Course Maidan. There was no end of people's excitement. Everyone waited eagerly for their leader. They were impatiently waiting for his instructions (P. 55)

Sheikh Mujib's 7th March Speech is regarded as the greatest by the famous historian Anthony Mascarenhas (1986). As he says, "On March 7, however, Mujib delivered his historic speech at the Suhrawardy Uddayan—perhaps the best of his tumultuous political life —calling for a total noncooperation with Pakistan government (P. 56).

Sheikh Mujib's 7th March Speech has been described in various ways by historians and political analysts. The following statement emphasizes its oratory skills as well as its public stand against West Pakistani exploitation in another famous book on Sheikh Mujib and Bangladesh *named War and Secession : Pakistan, India, and the Creation of Bangladesh* (1990). It states:

At the mass rally at the Ramna Race Course on 7 March, the day after Yahya's speech, Mujib gave a masterful demonstration of oratorical skill. He satisfied the crowd with his toughest public stand against the west and the unshakeable commitment of his party to the emancipation of the Bengali people. (Sission, P.101)

As shown by the following statement, the response to such a historic speech must be enormous:

Responding to Mujib's call for civil disobedience and reflecting `rousing sentiment of the *Bangalees*, the Dhaka Center of the Radio Pakistan was immediately renamed Dhaka Betar Kendra when it began using the name of the country as *Bangla Desh*, instead of East Pakistan. An overwhelming majority of print journalists also sided with the *Bangla Desh* cause. (Dowlah, 2016, P. 57)

The above statements from academics, journalists, political commentators, and historians demonstrate Sheikh Mujib's pivotal role in the formation of Bangladesh. The majority of the statements focus on Sheikh Mujib's charismatic presence and leadership, which has brought

together more than seventy five million Bengalis in East Pakistan to fight for their rights. Some critics accept his exceptional oratory, which enthralled his audience. Real, leaders with the magnanimity of Sheikh Mujib are uncommon in history, and the people of East Pakistan were lucky to have such a leader. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, on the other hand, is the architect of Bangladesh as a sovereign nation in all senses of the word. Despite all of the above listed scholars' comments and statements about Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the author observes that none of them discuss Sheikh Mujib's transformation from a common man to a national leader. Besides, they fail to consider him as the collective voice of the seventy five million oppressed citizens of the then East Pakistan. As a result, this author focuses on Sheikh Mujib's position from the perspective of a subaltern who, because of his exceptional qualities, could "Speak and Contend for Power." The author also demonstrates the enormous inspirational influence of Sheikh Mujib's historic final speech on March 7th, which motivates people to fight for freedom.

Subalterns Too Can Speak and Contend for Power

The term "subaltern" is closely linked to postcolonial studies, especially Gyatri Spivak's popular essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (Spivak, 1988). Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is a leading figure in the field of postcolonial studies, as well as a critic and theorist. At its most fundamental level, postcolonial studies is an ethical exercise. One of the main agendas of postcolonial criticism has been the deconstruction of the Eurocentric worldview, which colonialism had naturalized and, as a result, marginalized numerous indigenous cultural and epistemic traditions in the colonized world. Another aim of postcolonial studies has been to raise the voice of the oppressed and create conditions that enable those who have been enslaved by colonialism to be heard. Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), which pioneered the field of postcolonialism, prominently expresses both of these ethical interventions. We see a continuation of this ethical imperative that underpins postcolonialism in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak as well. In 1942, the British Raj was rapidly losing political control of the Indian subcontinent, and the final years of colonial rule were marked by calamitous abuse. Thousands of skeletal human bodies died in the streets of Calcutta during the Bengal Famine of the early 1940s, during WWII. And, even though we want to speak about colonialism and postcolonial legacies, resistance to colonialism, and other forms of cultural colonization and resistance in terms of cultural colonization and resistance, we must never forget

the physical violence that marked colonial rule and colonial subjugation. As a result, as we can see here, Spivak, who would go on to become one of the leading postcolonial thinkers, grew up witnessing some of the most heinous acts of violence perpetrated by Colonial rule and its evil.

Now, before we get into who or what a subaltern is, and whether or not the subaltern can talk, it's important to note that, although Spivak has been mistaken for the creator of the subaltern idea, the concept does not originate in her writings. In reality, Spivak interacts with versions of the subaltern idea that were already well-established before she published her essay in "Can the Subaltern Speak." However, the fact that the term "subaltern" conjures up the name of Spivak today tells us something about Spivak's influence on the creation of the subaltern concept. However, in the field of critical theory, the term can be traced back to the writings of Antonio Gramsci (1971), a prominent Marxist intellectual and theoretician who used the term subaltern to refer to a group of people who were subordinate to hegemonic groups or classes in the early twentieth century. To comprehend this meaning, we must first comprehend the concept. Hegemony can be thought of as a way of exercising power in its most basic form. The exercise of brute physical force is one of the most evident ways in which authority can be claimed. (Gramsci, 1971, P. 78) Anyone with a gun, for example, can now terrorize others into submission. Antonio Gramsci, on the other hand, believes that there is a different way to exert power over someone else (Gramsci, 1971, P. 78). For example, it is a win-win situation, if someone can convince others that anything he does in his own self-interest is indeed good for them. People would do so voluntarily because they have been persuaded. So, according to Gramsci, the dominant class in a society primarily asserts itself, primarily asserts its power, by non-coercive means. That is, by persuading the whole populace that the ruling class's interests are the same as the people's interests. Gramsci refers to this non-coercive claim of political power by a single class over other classes of citizens as hegemony. Hegemony, in its most basic form, is a method of asserting authority. Therefore, Gramsci emphasizes on the constitution of a state of the subaltern people of their own (Gramsci, 1971, P. 51)). According to Gramsci (1971): "The subaltern classes by definition are not unified and cannot unite until they are able to become a "State": their history, therefore, is intertwined with that of civil society, and thereby with the history of States and groups of States (P. 52).

The prominent group of South-Asian historians who founded the Subaltern Studies Collective in the 1980s took up the Gramscian interpretation of the word subaltern. And this group of historians, known as the Subaltern Studies Group or Subaltern Studies Community, focuses on postcolonial

societies, such as postcolonial Indian subcontinent. The historian Ranajit Guha (1982) was one of the most important members of this party. In his essay titled "On Certain Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India," Ranajit Guha (1986) describes how the Subaltern Studies Collective used the term "subaltern." Guha argues in his essay that the words "subaltern" and "elite" are diametrically opposed. And, for Guha, who was writing in the sense of colonial India, the term elite included not only European colonizers, but also dominant indigenous groups who had access to hegemony either through their relationship with the colonial government or through their western-style education. It would also identify with the wealthy, such as large landowners or the manufacturing and mercantile bourgeoisie. In a broader sense, the word elite refers to those members of a society who have political and economic agency, as well as the right and power to act on their own self-interests and desires in political and economic arenas. That is what a member of the elite is. In other words, the elites are those who have the ability to participate in politics and economics and express their own self-interests. And Guha describes the subaltern, arguing that the subaltern is antagonistic to the elite. As a result, Guha describes subaltern as all members of a society who do not fall into the elite group. So, here, subaltern refers to a negative space or a negative role, rather than a particular class, caste, or race. It's a position of powerlessness, of opposition without social or political agency, of opposition without a sense of self. (P. 4)

Spivak now engages with these current meanings of the subaltern in "Can the Subaltern Speak" (1988). As a result, she interacts with both Antonio Gramsci and Ranajit Guha's thoughts. But, in Spivak's intervention, she characterizes subaltern, or rather, she describes the distinguishing characteristic of this subaltern status as the inability to communicate. From this subordinate position, no speech is possible. In other words, according to Spivak, the answer to the question "Can the Subaltern Speak?" is a resounding no. The subaltern has no ability to communicate. As she states:

For the 'true' subaltern group, whose identity is its difference, there is no unrepresentable subaltern subject that can know and speak itself; the intellectual's solution is not to abstain from representation. The problem is that the subject's itinerary has not been traced so as to offer an object of seduction to the representing intellectual. In the slightly dated language of the Indian group, the question becomes, How can we touch the consciousness of the people, even as we investigate their politics? With what voice-consciousness can the subaltern speak? (P. 27)

Spivak's intention has often been misunderstood due to the brevity of his statement. She's also been chastised for attempting to silence the working class, but Spivak's argument is straightforward. If we consider speaking to be a form of discourse generation, as Foucault defines discourse as "meaningful utterances," there are checks and filters in place within each society that allow certain utterances to be accepted as discourse while others are rejected. So, while anyone can speak or write indefinitely about any topic under the sun, the power equations that underpin society ultimately determine what will be accepted as discourse and what will not.

This is not to say that speaking is physically impossible from a subaltern position. However, this speech is never accepted as meaningful utterances, capable of articulating self-interest and self-identity, and carries the weight of socio-political agency. Some scholars have argued that rather than saying that the subaltern cannot speak, it is more accurate to say that the subaltern cannot be heard by society. Both statements, the subaltern cannot speak and the subaltern cannot be heard, refer to a similar inability to generate discourse from within the subaltern position. On the contrary, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the founding father of Bangladesh proves that "Subalterns Too Can Speak and Contend for Power."

Discussion

As a young politician, Sheikh Mujib witnessed the violence of the artificially produced Bengal famine in 1940s followed by the birth of India and Pakistan as two separate nation states in 1947. In his *Unfinished Memoirs*, he described the horrible situation of the famine:

Hundreds of thousands of people were swarming to the cities in search of food. But there was no food or clothing left for them. The British had confiscated all naval vessels for 'the war effort. They had stockpiled rice and wheat to feed their soldiers. Whatever was left had been appropriated by businessmen. This led to a horrifying situation. Businessmen began to sell rice that would normally sell at ten takas a maund at forty or even fifty takas. Not a day went by without people dying on the city streets (Mujib, 2012, P. 17)

The pact between middle-class nationalists and British colonialists allowed India and Pakistan to be born. It was essentially a pact, which required a curving up of the cultures that had been living

together in the subcontinent for centuries. Moreover, the partition based on the absurd idea of religion paves the way to a permanent conflict in the region. According to Willem Van Schendel (2009):

“In the early 1940s, the Bengal famine had played havoc with the delta’s social fabric. Now, in 1947, the Partition of India tore that fabric asunder. Without an understanding of Partition and its effects, it is not possible to make sense of contemporary Bangladesh. (P. 96)

Especially for the case of Pakistan, this separation is history’s one of the most pathetic mockeries with two separate lands of more than thousand miles away from each other. For young Sheikh Mujib, growing up as a politician in British India under veteran Bengali politicians like Hossain Shahid Sohrwardy, A. K. Fazlul Haq and Maulana Bhashani, this pact did not translate so much into the abstract notion of independence. Bengal, like Punjab, was a site of partition and gruesome brutality, with Calcutta being one of the cities where the most horrific scenes of crime and violence occurred during the partition period. Schendel (2009) states,

The Partition of India was a geographical solution to a political fiasco. The partitioner’s knife cut through three provinces (Bengal, Assam and Punjab) and through innumerable trade routes and family ties. It created two long borders and left the partitioned societies in shambles, ruining millions of lives and upsetting cherished social arrangements. Many of the effects were unintended, unanticipated and long term.” (P. 96)

As a student of Calcutta Islamia College, Sheikh Mujib witnesses that blood on the street. It was not metaphorical blood but real blood from colonized subjects who have been killed. Fakrul Alam (2012) writes in the introduction of *The Unfinished Memoirs*, “When communal riots broke out in the wake of the partition of India and the birth of Pakistan, he played an active role in protecting Muslims and containing the violence ” (Introduction, P. XVI). In his own description, the horrible scenes of the riot come out. As he says, “Calcutta city streets seemed to be strewn with dead bodies. Neighborhood after neighbourhood was in flames. It was a horrible scene! That people could treat each other in this way was too frightening a thought (Mujib, 2012, P. 69). Thus, Sheikh Mujib had the direct experience as an activist of the Hindu-Muslim riot whereas Spivak had only few glimpses as a child. However, both of them have shared empathy toward the victims.

Sheikh Mujibur Rehman was born in the backward village of Tungipara in the then-district of Faridpur on March 17, 1920. He was chosen by fate to serve and play a crucial role (while also suffering) in sapping the future of 75 million people in what was to become a free Bangladesh. A sense of involvement began to develop inside him even at the earliest stages of his childhood. It was as if he felt a silent nudge within him to reach out to others, to fraternize with the people around him, and to share intimately with them in their joys and sorrows. Much of this was happening slowly, unconsciously, and invisibly. Mujib was born into a middle-class Bangalee family, and his political leadership was a direct product of the popular Bangalee's goals and aspirations. He was inextricably connected to ordinary Bengali people's hopes and dreams, joys and sorrows, trials and triumphs. He spent the best days of his life behind bars from a young age, which is why his strength was the power of the people. He learned his first political lessons from Hussain Shaheed Suhrawardy, a prominent political figure in Bangladesh at the time, when he was still a teenager. Mujib grew up amid the looming darkness of the subcontinent's storm-tossed politics and the Second World War. He experienced the horrors of war and the harsh reality of the Bengal famine of 1943, which claimed the lives of approximately five million people. He became a rebel as a result of the people's plight under colonial rule. Sheikh Mujibur Rehman developed a deep familiarity with the works of Bernard Shaw, Karl Marx, and Rabindranath Tagore after graduating. During the Hallwell Monument movement in Calcutta, he also learned about Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose's revolutionary activities. Another great man, "Sher-e-Bangla" A.K. Fazlul Huq, inspired him with his political ideology of "dal-bhat" for all. He realized at that early stage that in a poor exploited nation, political programs would complement economic programs. His time in jail started when he was in his teens and was sentenced to six days in prison for engaging in a political campaign. He moved the natural eddies of the subcontinent's political movements while a student in Calcutta, and became affiliated with the Muslim League and the Pakistan movement. But, soon after Pakistan was established and Bengal was partitioned in 1947, he realized that his people had not achieved true independence. It was a change of masters that had occurred. Bangladesh will have to make new plans for a second independence movement. From that point on, his thinking process started to broaden. As early as 1948, he had a fresh realization and a new way of thinking about politics. When Ali Mohammad Jinnah and Lique Ali Khan both announced that there would be only one state language, Urdu, he was a student at Dhaka University's Law Faculty. The same year, a campaign was launched to make Bengali one of

Pakistan's official languages. In reality, this movement can be considered the forerunner of the Bangladeshi independence movement. The demand for freedom of speech and expression evolved into a demand for national independence. Bangabandhu was also at the forefront of the agitation in Dhaka in 1948 to protest the army's killing of police officers. He was imprisoned for supporting the Dhaka University lower-level employees' protest. Just before he was released from jail, he was suspended from his university. In 1966, at a political conference in Lahore, Bangabandhu presented his landmark Six-Point Plan. From 1966 to the general election in December 1970, East Pakistan's political movement was largely based on Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's official Six-Point Program. This policy called for Pakistan to have a federal state system and Bangladesh to have complete autonomy with a parliament. The Awami League secured an absolute majority in the elections under Bangabandhu's leadership. The results of the elections alarmed the military junta. General Yahya's order on March 1 postponed the conference, which had far-reaching consequences and engulfed Bangladesh in political turmoil.

Then, on March 7th, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman delivers his final speech at Race Course Maidan, where millions of enraged people from all walks of life have created a wild sea to absorb and digest all of the atrocities committed against them by West Pakistani rulers. This very moment is portrayed by the poet Nirmalendu Goon in the poem "How Freedom Became Our Own Word":

A poem is about to be written;

Millions of excited, rebellious, impatient listeners Waited for the happening

From dawn in the park's open field a sea of people has been wondering—

"When will the Poet show up?" (Tr. Alam, 2020)

The depiction of the emotion and scene of this historic speech, as well as its enormous effect on the seventy-five million people in East Pakistan at the time, is without exaggeration. Sheikh Mujib emerges as the dazzling star of hope for Bangladesh's collective subalterns. And so the triumphant subaltern roars: "The struggle this time is for our freedom/ The struggle this time is for independence!" (Field, 2013, P. 203). Sheikh Mujib delivered this historic speech in 19 minutes, speaking at a rate of 58 to 60 words per minute. 60 words per minute is considered optimal in broadcasting theory. In the 1,107-word voice, there were no annoying repetitions. There were no extraneous articulations; only the gist or main points were included. In his speech, he began by thanking his supporters, the ordinary people from all over the country. Very quickly and aptly he

narrated the past history of the present situation. He addressed them as "My brothers and Sisters" as the elected leader of the common people:

Today, I come to you with a heavy heart. You know everything and understand as well. We tried our best. But the streets of Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna, Rajshahi and Rangpur have been dyed red with the blood of our brethren. People of Bangladesh today want liberation. They want to survive. They want to have their rights. We had a hopewhich would lead to the emancipation of the people economically, politically and culturally. (Field, 2013, P. 202)

In this expression, the relevant 'speech idioms' for mass communication were used correctly. On the eve of Bangladesh's founding, it was a conversation between the people of Bangladesh and their undisputed leader. The main text of our liberty was this fluent and extempore speech delivered in a lucid language and style. In order to draw the audience, Sheikh Mujib used a conversational style while delivering this speech. At certain points, he posed questions. He asked five specific questions: "What wrong did we do? What Round Table Conference? Whose Round Table Conference? You expect me to sit at a Round Table Conference with the very same people who have emptied the laps of my mothers and my sisters?" (CBGR, Para. 16).

For engaging with the audience, proper implementation of the 'ask query, then response' prescription had taken place. The use of the present tense in a logical manner revitalized the voice. For the sake of a conversational style, he had also beautifully interspersed the past and future tenses in his voice. In case of giving orders and instructions, he made shorter sentences. For example,

If the murder of my people does not cease, I call upon you to turn ever home into a fortress against their onslaught. Use whatever you can put your hands on to confront this enemy. Ever last road must be blocked. We will deprive them of food. We will deprive them of water. Even if I am not around to give you the orders, and if my associates are also not to be found, I ask you to continue your movement unabated. (CBGR, Para. 25)

To communicate the common folks, he attributed his speech with real information:

Arms were used against the unarmed people of Bangladesh. The arms which were bought by our money, to safeguard the country from foreign aggression, are now being used to kill our poor people. My distressed people are being shot at. We are

the majority in Pakistan. Whenever we, the Bengalis, wanted to take over power, wanted to become masters of our own destiny, they pounced on us- every time. (Field, 2013, P. 203)

As he was the leader of the subaltern, he always kept their plights in his mind, even during his address to millions of people at Race Course Maidan. He pinpointed the ways of performing during the following non-cooperation movement:

I now declare the closure of all the courts, offices, and educational institutions for an indefinite period of time. No one will report to their offices- that is my instruction to you.

So that the poor are not inconvenienced, rickshaws, trains and other transport will ply normally-except serving any needs of the armed forces. If the army does not respect this, I shall not be responsible for the consequences. (CBGR, Para. 22-23)

And again in later part of his speech, he categorically mentioned the directives of the non-cooperation movement:

To assist the families of the martyred and the injured, the Awami League has set up committees that will do all they can. Please donate whatever you can. Also, employers must give full pay to the workers who participated in the seven days of hartal or were not able to work because of curfews. (CBGR, Para. 27)

However, at the end of this short and precise speech, we find the final de-facto declaration of independence of Bangladesh:

I ask my people to immediately set up committees under the leadership of the Awami League to carry on our struggle in ever neighborhood, village, union and subdivision of this land.

You must prepare yourselves now with what little you have for the struggle ahead. Since we have given blood, we will give more of it. But, Insha'Allah, we will free the people of this land!

The struggle this time is for emancipation! The struggle this time is for independence! (CBGR, Para. 29-31)

The historic non-cooperation movement started after this address, and Sheikh Mujib effectively took charge of Bangladesh's civil administration. During this time, however, the military junta

expanded its military strength and launched “Operation Searchlight,” a midnight mass killing on March 25. Sheikh Mujib was apprehended, but the subaltern revolt in the name of “Mukti Bahini” fought back fiercely and won the freedom after a nine-month bloodbath. This historic address, on the other hand, ignited the entire revolution, turning unarmed farmers, fishermen, workers, students, teachers, government leaders, and even armed forces soldiers and officers into freedom fighters. Talking on the immediate impact of the speech, Selina Hossain (2020) remarks that the “Patriotic Bengalis followed his orders unquestioningly. Bangabandhu’s speech was so inspiring and powerful that the people welcomed his words with continued applause. The Race Course Maidan resounded with slogan after slogan...” (P. 55). This is interesting that Sheikh Mujib instructed the people with all possible ways in this speech. As Selina Hossain (2020) says:

He instructed on how to organize and conduct the noncooperation movement. After this all organizations and institutions in East Pakistan began to follow his instruction. The central government became nonfunctional in East Pakistan. The country was being run on Bangabandhu’s orders. The unquestioning acceptance of his instructions left the central government bewildered. They realized that to put a rein on this movement would not be an easy task. (P. 56)

Unquestionably Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was the architect of the free Bangladesh. Several historians and political analyst unanimously accepted this fact. Dowlah (2016) states:

There can however be little dispute that if the credit for articulating the grievances of the people of erstwhile East Pakistan against the exploitative and discriminatory policies of united Pakistan (1947–71) and for galvanizing the people for self-determination and eventual independence of the country must be given to one individual, that person must be none but this fiercely nationalistic charismatic leader. (P. 13)

History reveals that how a person can raise ‘consciousness’, as Spivak (1988) says in her essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, Sheikh Mujib has done that successfully. Dowlah (2016) further adds:

Mujib outshined all others in articulating, propagating, and representing the interest of the people of East Pakistan, which he preferred to call Sonar Bangla (Golden Bengal), and as history has shown, the movement that he pioneered eventually

culminated into the disintegration of Pakistan and the emergence of Bangladesh.
(P. 28)

Interestingly, the surrender of the Pakistani forces on 16 December, 1971 is described as “a spectacularly electrifying event for the people of Bangladesh” (Field 2013, P. 203). Since its inception as a separate entity during Pala Dynasty, Bengal flourished as a prosperous land ‘possessing a distinct language, culture and ethos’ (Field, 2013, P.203). The same impression is expressed by another historian in the following statement:

Then, Bengal came under Muslim rule in the mid-12th century (1150–1338), when it managed to maintain somewhat independent status for about two hundred years despite occasional challenges. The liberation war finally brought it to a reality for the people of East Bengal—eventually they succeeded in securing an independent geopolitical territory to foster their own distinct nationhood that evolved through episodic triumphs and setbacks as well as complex interplay of religious, cultural, and political crosscurrents ever since its embryonic formation in the eighth century.
(Dowlah, 2016, P. 87)

The overwhelming victory of the freedom fighters, led by Sheikh Mujib, is one of the most important events in world history in terms of people's uprising, resulting from a massive loss of millions of lives and devastation. As Anthony Mascarenhas (1986) states:

But one of the 20th century's great man-made disasters is also among the greatest of its human triumphs in terms of a people's will for self-determination. The united upsurge of the Bengalis to fashion their destiny against overwhelming odds captured the imagination of the world. (P. 7)

In 1947, one of history's most shameful incidents, the partition of Bengal, founded on illogical religious identity, was rectified by a bloody war and the deaths of millions of people in the Bangladesh War of Independence. As Dowlah (2016) says that “More importantly, Bangladesh liberation came as a triumph for secessionist movements—it was the first in newly independent

states that had emerged following the processes of decolonization with illogical boundaries” (P. 88).

Thus, Bangladesh has faced neo-colonization of Pakistan since the Muslim invasion and occupation in the 12th century, followed by British rule for about 200 years, and then again after the partition in 1947. The long eight centuries of colonial rule left a land of helpless, deaf, and oppressed people. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman gave them the courage and voice to speak. This is like the father of Negritude movement, poet, politician and postcolonial theorist Aime Cesaire (1969) gave voice to Shakespeare’s (1610) Caliban in his adaptation from *The Tempest* to *A Tempest*. Caliban's revolt contrasts with the revolt of every black man enslaved and abused by colonizing Europe. Caliban wants his freedom back at the end of the fight, breaking Prospero's grip. This is an example of him claiming his identity. Reclaiming this identity is not sought through any fight or revolution rather through his refusal to obey Prospero’s order. Through Caliban’s final speech in *A Tempest*, Cesaire (1969) eloquently accuses the colonization:

Prospero... you're an old hand at deception...
you ended up by imposing on me
an image of myself:
underdeveloped ... undercompetent
that's how you made me see myself!
And I hate that image...and it's false! (P. 64)

Conclusion

In his 7th March Speech, Sheikh Mujib explicitly ignites the indomitable strength and energy of the seventy-five million previously oppressed citizens to battle and defeats a trained army from West Pakistan. With this triumph, the Bengali people's long period of subjugation, imperialism, and colonialism comes to an end. This victory brings an end to West Pakistan's neocolonial rule. This joy of victory achieves the Spivakian proposition of self-representation and raising the voice of the subalterns (1988). There are many stories of marginalized people fighting exploitative power throughout history, but only a handful of those battles bear the sweet fruit of liberty. Many leaders in history have screamed for their oppressed people, but their cries have gone unheard. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's leadership and oratory, on the other hand,

overcame all obstacles and produced a counter-protest against the exploiter. Throughout his three decades of political struggle, his portrayal as a subaltern voice has triumphed against all odds. As a result, his famous 7th March Speech will be remembered for centuries as a source of inspiration for marginalized people to fight for power. As a result, Sheikh Mujib represents every Bangladeshi subaltern; a revolting image of the oppressed East Pakistani collective who reclaimed their self-consciousness to speak. Sheikh Mujib's historic 7th March Speech was delivered in response to the wishes of 75 million people, as he said at the outset of his speech that “the cry we hear from the Bengali people is a cry for freedom a cry for survival, a cry for our rights.” The motivation of the speech finally bolstered the people's determination to see a free and independent Bangladesh arise. Thus, this paper contributes to the postcolonial subaltern debate on voice building.

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