
CHAPTER - VII

CONCLUSION

One of the most important features of the Party system in Pakistan was its regional character. No Political Party could claim to have mass base in both the wings of Pakistan. While the Muslim League, which was responsible for the creation of Pakistan, had been gradually sliding down towards the abyss of its extinction on account of its weak social base, it had simultaneously been giving way to the emergence of new power groups and Parties in the political scene of the country. The Awami League in East Pakistan was the most important Political Party that sprang from the womb of the disintegrating Muslim League.

The East Pakistan Awami League, the first Muslim opposition Party in Pakistan, was founded by the dissident Muslim Leaguers. If any one man should be given credit for the rise of an opposition in East Pakistan, it was Moulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani. Moulana Bhasani became a popular figure in the 1930's when he organised the peasant movement in East Bengal and Assam. Later, in the 1940's he gave his support to the Pakistan movement led by the Muslim League. It was under his leadership that the East Pakistan Awami League was born at Dacca, on June 23, 1949. He consolidated

the dissident Muslim League forces and youth in the province against the ruling Muslim League. Though Suhrawardy's contribution to the formation of the Awami League was much less significant, his followers, many of whom were the best Party workers of undivided Bengal Muslim League, constituted the core of the Party.

The East Pakistan Awami League was, thus, more a platform to mobilise the discontented opinion against the ruling Muslim League than a Party in the strict sense of the term. Within its ranks, the Party had all shades of opinion and interests.

From the very beginning, the Awami League had within itself two distinct traditions - elitist tradition led by Suhrawardy and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the populist tradition led by Moulana Bhasani. The elitist group was, indeed, the dominant faction within the Party. However, the populist faction was able to exercise a greater influence in the formulation of the Party's policies and programmes. As a result the party acquired an image of a progressive and radical organisation. As long as the Party was in the opposition, these group differences remained quiescent. The populist group was more interested in implementing the party programme and policies than the elitist group which was primarily concerned with power and using it for furthering their class

interests. It may therefore be noted that the main issue on which conflict between the groups arose was not on the question of sharing power between them but on the question of the ends for which power was to be used. With Moulana Bhasani and his followers breaking away from the East Pakistan Awami League, the character of the Party had undergone a radical change. For, it had lost its populist and communist cadres who were mainly responsible for its popularity. The party had now come under the firm grip of the elitist group led by Suhrawardy and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Since 1957, the East Pakistan Awami League, thus, became more or less a homogeneous organisation.

Party's main asset was its leadership. It had powerful and popular leaders like Moulana Bhasani, Suhrawardy, Shamsul Nuq, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Ataur Rahman Khan, Abul Mansur Ahmad and Toffazzal Hossain (Mohan Mia), editor of 'Ittefaq'. The main students organisation in East Pakistan, the East Pakistan Students' League, was affiliated to the Awami League.

In East Pakistan, Party Politics first crystalized itself under the leadership of the Awami League which played a prominent role in the Anti-Basic principles committee movement in 1950, the language movement of the province in 1952 and in the defeat of the Muslim League in the 1954 election by forming an electoral alliance with minor parties.

The Party created among the people an awareness that East Bengal must get its due share. These movements helped the consolidation of the East Bengal Middle class which eventually enabled the Awami League to reap the benefit. Thus in 1954, the Awami League consolidated itself as a strong opposition Party in East Bengal.

But its most notable contribution was made while the Party was in the opposition by arousing the people of East Pakistan against the maladministration of the Muslim League Government. The Party roused the consciousness of the people of East Pakistan about their plight under the Muslim League. It infused in them courage to face the oppression of the Government. Its main contribution in the 1950's had been the building up of opposition in the country and also in the politicization of the masses.¹ The Awami League can rightly claim that it gave the first lessons in agitational politics to Pakistan. Suhrawardy said that the Awami League "has been carrying aloft the banner of liberty and freedom and has therefore become the main opposition party against the Muslim League."² Organising an opposition party against Muslim League immediately after the creation of Pakistan was itself a great thing. This was due to the organising ability of Moulana

¹ M. Rashiduzzaman, "The Awami League in the Political Development of Pakistan," Op.cit., p.586.

² Morning News, November 25, 1953.

Bhasani, Suhrawardy, Shamsul Huq and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Moulana Bhasani was the most outstanding leader of the democratic opposition in Pakistan. The Awami League stood for the establishment of democratic tradition and values in the country. It tried to establish the democratic rights of the people such as freedom of thought, freedom of organisation and right to work.

It was noteworthy that the Awami League was able to enlist the sympathy and support of the students and it was through them that it was able to maintain contact with the people. The students and youth of East Pakistan provided the leadership to the language movements in 1948 and 1952 largely because, during this period there was no organised opposition party to formulate the grievances and represent the interests of the people of East Pakistan. The East Pakistan Awami League which was an organisation of the middle class was still very weak. During the language movement in 1952 the Awami League was able to win the confidence of the Students' community.

Unlike the Muslim League which was composed of Zamindars, Nawabs and other vested interests, the Awami League was an organisation of the middle class in East Pakistan in terms of the composition of the economic interest groups which provided its main support in the country. They were the surplus farmers, the petty traders and industrialists and the lower echelon of the Civil Service. The number of

traders and industrialists was small in East Pakistan; they suffered from comparative disadvantage in competition with their more established counterparts in West Pakistan. The most important support of the Party in the rural areas came from the middle or surplus farmers; they were in command of local Party leadership and local Government institutions. Many of them also had trading and business interests and in this respect they were linked up with the urban middle class.

The leadership of the Awami League in East Pakistan came largely from the recently urbanised strata of the rich peasantry in the countryside. They were mostly lawyers, teachers, students and Government servants. Since they were the recently urbanised section of rich peasants, the leadership had maintained very close contact with the countryside in East Pakistan. This close contact with the countryside enabled the Party leadership to mobilize easily the masses in their struggle for a place in the Sun.

Although the popularity of the Party and particularly of some of the individual Awami League leaders such as Moulana Bhasani and Suhrawardy was undoubtedly great, the party was weak organisationally during its early years. It professed to be more progressive than the Muslim League, but in structure there was no fundamental difference between the two. Both the parties restricted membership to Muslims. Later on as a reaction against the non-secular

religious bias of the Muslim League, the Awami League adopted secularism as one of the planks of the Party's programme. In fact, it was the political consideration of mobilising the minority community's support that compelled the party to adopt secularism as one of its principles. In spite of this, the East Pakistan Awami League could not mobilise the minority communities to its side. However, it reflected a realistic and democratic approach to political problems.

The socio-economic programme and policies which the party desired to implement showed a radical departure from the policies and programmes of the ruling (Muslim League) party in Pakistan. In its manifesto, the Awami League declared that it was above all class interests. It stated that the main objective of the Party was to establish an Islamic Social order. It was also clear from the manifesto that ideologically, the Awami League maintained a democratic position. In terms of its economic philosophy it was a liberal party with socio-democratic leanings. In short the Awami League identified itself ideologically with the masses, revolted against capitalism and fanaticism of the Muslim League. It demanded democracy, adult franchise, joint electorate, regular periodical elections, settled method for the amendment of the constitution, regional autonomy and secularism.

In the field of foreign policy the party's declared aim was to follow an independent and non-aligned foreign policy. It supported national liberation movements elsewhere. It must be noted that these foreign policy postures of the Party were mainly influenced by the populist faction led by Moulana Bhasani. The East Pakistan Awami League had deviated from its declared policy when its elitist faction had supported Suhrawardy who, as the Prime Minister of Pakistan, defended Pakistan's military alliances and pursued a pro-western foreign policy.

The East Pakistan Awami League was always quick and responsive to champion the cause of the people. It was highly successful in convincing the emotional Bengalees that their interests and rights were not safe with a government controlled and directed from West Pakistan. It not only identified itself with the aspiration of the Bengali population but also formulated a programme of political action in furtherance of that objective. The Party came out with the demand for provincial autonomy and supported the cry "Bengal for Bengalees".

While other Political Parties including the left parties failed to understand the character, importance and power of the national question in East Bengal, the Awami League, though a middle class organisation, perceived

and articulated this crucial question. The Awami League represented the revolt of the middle classes of East Bengal against the economic and political domination of Pakistan. The movement for the cause of Bengali language marked the beginning of the struggle "for the establishment of real national rights."³ As the emphasis of the movement shifted from language and culture to economics and politics, the Awami League was able to project itself more and more as the foremost and in the last stages, the exclusive spokesman of Bengali interests.⁴ The Awami League argued that because of the virtual immobility of labour and capital between the two wings on account of distance, Pakistan should have two economic policies. The economic problems of the two provinces must be solved independently of each other.⁵ It opposed the one economy thesis pursued by the ruling class in Pakistan and propounded what was later known as the two-economy thesis. Awami League leader said: It is a country (Pakistan) which in reality is not one country. We are going to form one State out of two countries. We are going to form one nation out of two peoples."⁶

³See the address of the Chief Minister, Aaur Rahman Khan on Feb. 21, 1958, Morning News, Feb. 22, 1958.

⁴Mohammad Ayoob, "From Martial Law to Bangladesh". In. The Challenge of Bangladesh, Edited by Pran Chopra, Op.cit., p.48.

⁵See Chief Minister, Aaur Rahman Khan's inaugural address to the Seventh Annual Conference of the All-Pakistan Economic Association at Rajshahi on December 18, 1956. The Statesman, December 19, 1956.

⁶Details see. Constituent Assembly of Pakistan Debates, vol. 1, No. 51, 16 January, 1956, pp.1816-1927.

The Awami League also claimed that the Central Government should observe the federal principle. It should deal with three subjects i.e. Defence, Foreign Policy and currency and coinage and that the other subjects should be left to the provincial Government. It also demanded parity in all respects which included services, military, commerce and industry. The Awami League fought for a larger share in the benefits of economic progress and a larger share of resources for the economic development of East Pakistan. It wanted greater participation by East Pakistan in the process of political and economic decision-making. It also demanded autonomy in the management of the financial and foreign exchange resources of East Pakistan.

The Awami League had to moderate its demands when Suhrawardy was the Prime Minister of Pakistan. This had to be done to maintain itself in power in East Pakistan and not to embarrass its Awami League colleagues at the centre. But it did not moderate its demand for regional autonomy because the Party was essentially an organisation of the East Pakistani middle class. While fighting for regional autonomy, the Awami League said it would replace the non-Bengali bourgeois by a Bengali bourgeois.⁷

⁷The Awami League's programme of regional autonomy was not clearly spelt out during the period under study. It did not also become militant and popular. The Awami League's demand for regional autonomy took concrete shape only in 1966 when Sheikh Mujibur Rahman put forward his six point programme. Details see. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, 6-Point Formula, Our right to live, Dacca, March, 1966.

The achievements of the Awami League Government in East Pakistan were not very impressive. The Awami League government implemented only some of the less important items of the 21-Point Programme such as the release of political prisoners, repeal of undemocratic acts, establishment of rule of law, separation of judiciary from the executive, establishment of democratic tradition and principles, reorganisation of the entire educational system, reorientation of educational policies and making of Bengali as one of the state languages of Pakistan. The crucial items which would have had a lasting impact on the East Pakistani Society, if implemented, were left over because the Party had to function within the framework of the Pakistan Political System which was dominated by the bureaucracy drawn largely from the upper classes and from West Pakistan and closely linked with the landowning and industrial elites through an extensive network of business and family relationships. Naturally the ruling elites were interested in the development of West Pakistan and the favoured private entrepreneurs were from that region. The West Pakistani dominated bureaucracy in East Pakistan also adopted a hostile attitude towards the Awami League and its Government because it stood for regional autonomy which, if implemented, would go against their interests. Since the Awami Leaguers were inexperienced in administration, they

had to depend upon this bureaucracy for implementing their policies and programmes.

But the most limiting factor of this Party was that it was an organisation of the rich peasants and petty traders. This was clear from the paltry implementation of the land reforms. The Awami League government, of course, adopted various measures to solve various problems arising out of the whole-sale acquisition of rent-receiving interests. By 1957-58, the acquisition of Zamindari had almost been completed. But there was still no statutory protection of the tenants. Share-cropping which was widely prevalent in East Pakistan was not abolished. The Government failed to enact a law which would fix fair rent at one-third of the gross produce. Although the Awami League Government abolished the Zamindari System, it failed to implement the land ceiling provision of the Act. This was because the rich peasants who constituted the social base of the Awami League exerted tremendous pressure on the ruling Awami League against the effective implementation of the land legislation provisions. Given its class composition, the Awami League could not initiate, let alone accomplish, the progressive step in the economic evolution of East Pakistan Society: Combating rich farmers for the benefit of the landless and the poor and middle peasants. This was the only way to arrest the

continuing increase in the relative and absolute size of the country's poor.

Again, because of the pressure from the trading community the Awami League had to give up its policy of nationalisation of Jute trade.

The industrial Policy of the Awami League was aimed at the industrialisation of East Pakistan. With a view to invite private and foreign capital into the province, the Awami League Government declared against the policy of nationalisation of industry. Thus, the industrial policy of the Awami League government was clearly oriented towards East Pakistani traders and industrialists.

The Awami League Government, instead of rooting out corruption, facilitated corruption on a large scale. This was due to the character of the party members who showed general susceptibility to corruption while the Party was in power. For them, political power was a means to enrich themselves. This revealed not only the middle class character of the Party but also the fact that it lacked any clear ideology.

In short, it may be said that the Awami League in East Pakistan was organised around personalities and

not on ideology or interest. Despite the split in the Party in 1957, the East Pakistan Awami League remained as the only organised and powerful Party of the country, indeed it was the only best organised Party in Pakistan. The real strength of the Awami League was due to two factors. First, the growing popularity of its leaders like Suhrawardy and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman who played a crucial role in retaining its considerable political strength. More important was the role played by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in maintaining the organisations' popularity. Notwithstanding his firm commitments to the elitist group, Sheikh Mujib's rhetoric and even his personal style of life were populist in character. He was a man with whom the people could identify. He bridged the gap between the elitist leadership of the Awami League and its populist mass base. And, second, the growing popularity of its programme of regional autonomy with the people. The future of the Awami League would largely depend upon what concrete shape the Party would give to its most important demand of regional autonomy. More important would be its capacity to sustain and strengthen the movement for regional autonomy.