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## Conscious Spontaneity: The Anti-Authoritarian Revolt of 1968 in East Bengal

S. M. Shamsul Alam\*

*The article elaborated on the notion that the Bengali resistance and Pakistani domination during the anti-authoritarian revolt of 1968 in East Bengal were defining rather than mutually exclusive. Accordingly, it suggests that analytical emphasis should be focused on the spontaneous context of resistance, rather than stopping short at viewing the confrontation and resistance exclusively as mass social movements, which challenged power and authority in an organized fashion. Another conceptual dimension of the paper flows from the idea that Pakistani power and Bengali resistance were mutually defining, that is to say that power and resistance are entangled and mutually transforming. Here, various early attempt at counter-hegemony by Bengali are discussed and the notion of the spontaneous origins of the revolt are emphasized with an eye to their impact and seminal role in what later developed into the independence movement in 1971.*

The anti-authoritarian revolt in East Bengal that started in late 1968 that reached its peak in early 1969 with the demise of the dictatorial rule of Ayub Khan, in many ways paved the way for the emergence of a separate nation-state-Bangladesh in 1971.<sup>1</sup> The history of this revolt is well known and has been covered in newspapers, but a systematic attempt to analyze the events is absent. No doubt some attempt is being made to contextualize it in the context of the nationalist movement and the role of various "classes" in the revolt. On the other hand, Chowdhury and Khabiruzzman concentrate on the *causes* and the *consequences* of the revolt. Perhaps the latest example of such scholarship is Lenin Azad's work. A massive book, six hundred and ninety three pages including index, it attempts to show the linkage between the Pakistan state formation and its consequences to the rise of nationalism in East Bengal and the creation of Bangladesh. Fahimul Kadir, on the other hand, uses a

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<sup>1</sup> During 1947 to 1971, Bangladesh was known as "East Pakistan." I have used East Bengal to denote "East Pakistan" which became Bangladesh in 1971.

"subaltern perspective" to analyze the role the masses (*gonomanosh*) played in the revolt. Although he articulated his theoretical perspective at the beginning of his paper, a careful reading of the text will reveal the fact that his analyses remain confined within the *causes* and *consequences* model of the revolt. What are missing in all these analyses are the situations and modalities of power and resistance relationship in East Bengal during the last phase of Pakistani colonial rule in Bangladesh. This relationship explains the complexities of domination and subordination that the Pakistani colonial state established with East Bengal. The main purpose of this paper is to present a new interpretation of this important revolt by offering a model of subaltern/subordinate participation in the anti-authoritarian struggle<sup>2</sup>.

In a nutshell, this perspective does not view power, i.e. state-power; in the context of the Pakistan state and resistance to it by the East Bengal subaltern forces, mutually exclusive or given, rather they were contested and were the result of a constellation of various forces and tendencies. Through this confrontation both the nature of power and modes of resistance were mutually transformed. Indeed, in early 1971, when the ultimate struggle to establish an independent state, Bangladesh, finally began, the Pakistani state hegemony and the Bengali response to it, were profoundly transformed by the events of 1968 and early 1969.

The revolt of 1969 in East Bengal will be explained by using this interpretative framework. In other words, following Haynes and Prakash, I argue that neither domination nor resistance is autonomous. These two are so entangled with each other that it becomes difficult to analyze one without discussing the other. Furthermore, Nicolas Dirks (1994: 5) warned us not to view confrontation and resistance as a social movement in which masses in an organized fashion, question and challenge power and authority, rather emphasis should be given at the *spontaneous* context of *resistance*, though organized social agitation remains important in understanding large-scale transformations. However, this spontaneity, as we will see in the context of East Bengal of 1968-69, is not without any political objective. The specific aspect of this political objective derives, in my opinion, from the mutuality of power of the Pakistani colonial authority and Bengali resistance to it. Thus, the revolt of 1969 in East Bengal is the result of *consciousness spontaneity*--

spontaneous revolt to accomplish a clearly defined political objective. However, this mutuality of power and resistance, in the context of 1969 in East Bengal, further provides another conceptual dimension of the paper, i.e., to treat power and resistance as contested terrain.

This paper consists of five sections; the first two sections explain the formation and crisis of the Pakistan historical bloc and its various rationalities of colonial governmentalities. Here, various early attempts of counter-hegemony by the Bengalis will also be discussed. The last three sections describe the process of the revolt itself and the effects of the revolt, i.e. the emergence of a radical subjectivity whose main goal was to construct a new political community.

### The Post-Colonial Historical Bloc and the Emergence of Bengali Counter-Hegemony in Pakistan

During the political mobilization demanding a separate homeland for "Indian Muslims," two political trends could be identified. First "the constitutional movement" represented by the Muslim League leadership which preferred peaceful handover of power through dialogue and negotiation with the British and the creation of a homeland for Indian Muslims. Secondly, various peasant and other subaltern forces in East Bengal and other parts in colonial India rose and violently protested not only their immediate oppressors like *zamindars* (land owning class) which created the colonial policies, but also the colonial state itself, which I believe had implications on the first trend. On the eve of the partition and creation of Pakistan and India in 1947, it is important to keep in mind that different social categories participated in the Pakistan movement for different reasons, purposes and interests which they wanted to be fulfilled. This issue brings us to the issue of post-colonial modalities of power in Pakistan.

To understand the post-colonial modalities of power, it is important to introduce three interrelated concepts from Antonio Gramsci<sup>3</sup>: historical bloc, hegemony and passive revolution.

To Gramsci,<sup>4</sup> historical bloc is the complex relationship of class and class factions in a given society and its even more complex relationship to the state power. Furthermore, it connotes a historical, crystallized formation of popular groupings and their subjective sense of political identity. For a historical bloc to be successful in ruling, it must enact

<sup>2</sup> Throughout the paper, I use Gramsci's idea of subaltern class, which he defined in terms of various social categories that lack their own hegemonic project or subjected to upper class hegemony. See Antonio Gramsci, 1971. *Selections from the Prison Note Books*. New York: International Publishers, P.1.

<sup>3</sup> Gramsci 1971

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid* 337

hegemony, that is, a process of consensus within the historical bloc and across the society. Indeed, as Sassoon puts it, hegemony is the glue that binds the different factions of a historical bloc.

To explain the limits of bourgeoisie historical bloc, Gramsci in his famous *Notes on Italian History*, introduced another original concept—"passive revolution of capital".<sup>5</sup> To Gramsci this concept means that a new historical bloc lacks the political ability to launch a total war against the old social classes; instead, it adapts a gradualist approach to social reform and compromise in such a way that the subaltern classes will not overrun it.<sup>6</sup> Partha Chatterjee explains Gramsci's idea in the following manner, which I believe, has some significance in post-colonial Pakistan.

(...) In situations where an emergent bourgeoisie lacks the social conditions for establishing complete hegemony over the new nation, it resorts to a 'passive revolution,' by attempting a 'molecular transformation' of the dominant classes into partners in a new historical bloc and only a partial appropriation of the popular masses, in order first to create a state as the necessary precondition for the establishment of capitalism as the dominant mode of production (Chatterjee 1993: 30).

Immediately after the partition, two types of crises with profound impact on Bengali politics could be discerned: (1) immediately after the creation of Pakistan, there was no hegemonic class or bloc in Pakistan. This was quite different from India, where the ruling power bloc enjoyed the backing of a powerful capitalist class; (2) the state of Pakistan, which was the result of a nationalist social movement, failed to develop clear-cut economic and political policies. The dominant classes came to power suddenly, and they were in a constant search for what Uyangoda has called a "viable mode to articulate power," i.e., a hegemonic project. This corresponded to the periodic eclipse of consensus-building projects, such as various economic and political agendas sponsored by the ruling power bloc, and the consequent collapse of consensus among the masses. In other words, since hegemony is the "glue" that binds various fractions of ruling historical bloc, the post-colonial historical bloc of Pakistan had failed to articulate a working hegemonic project. Indeed, the disequilibrium within the bloc showed that the post-colonial state of Pakistan was neither *natural* nor *legitimate*, two important characteristics for a colonial hegemonic project. Here an important question arose. The colonial and post-colonial state is so violent and repressive that one

<sup>5</sup> Gramsci 1971:114

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid* 114

could hardly talk about consensus (hegemony). But Engles and Marx remind us that in colonial and post-colonial hegemonic context, there is a thin line between repression, violence and hegemony. Furthermore, a careful look at South Asian history will reveal the fact that *violence directe* was the exception rather than the rule and a consensus was the main vehicle of ruling. The Pakistan state's colonial relationship with East Bengal follows these rules.

Most scholars agree that the historical bloc that emerged in Pakistan after the partition was characterized by a multiplicity of classes. It consisted of large landowners drawn largely from Sind and Punjab, Muslim businessmen from various parts of India who migrated to Pakistan, and various professional groups such as civil servants, lawyers and military officials. All these classes, as I pointed out earlier, were the direct by-products of British imperialism. Within that historical bloc, the land owning class was the most powerful because it was the only "indigenous" class that was well entrenched in Pakistani civil society. This can be seen in their relatively strong representation in the councils and assemblies of the ruling Muslim League.

The initial attempt of post-colonial nation-building in Pakistan was very much a reflection of the ideas of Jinnah, "the founder" of Pakistan. Jinnah as a by-product of British imperialism, was a secular person who wanted to establish a "democratic" Pakistan, a far cry from a "Islamic state."

The new state would be a modern democratic state with sovereignty resting in the people and the members of the new nation having equal rights of citizenship regardless of their religion, caste or creed.<sup>7</sup>

Tariq Ali has argued that soon after partition, Jinnah was considered to be the one who would declare the Muslim League a secular party and change its name to the "Pakistan National League." But the idea leaked to the press and was abandoned due to pressure from fundamentalist forces.

With support from the landowning class, Islamic fundamentalist forces, especially the Jamiat-i-Islami party, attempted to counter the liberal response to "nation building" through democratic principle. The Jamiat-i-Islami party and the Jamiat-al-ulama-e-Hind belonged mostly to the Deobandi school of religious conservatism and were staunch opponents of the state of Pakistan from the start on the grounds that the Muslim League and its leaders were un-Islamic. Party leader Maulana Mawdudi, in accordance with the Deobandi School of Islamic thought, felt that the Muslim League, in joining the demand for Pakistan, did not

<sup>7</sup> Jinnah as quoted by P. M. Hoodbhoy and A. H. Nayyar 1985: 170.

aim to establish an Islamic state and form of government, on the contrary, it aspired to a form of liberal democratic state where non-Muslims would have the same rights as Muslims; this kind of state could not be preferred over a Hindu dominated India. These *ulema* (religious experts) raised the obvious question: if the intention was to create a secular state in Pakistan, then what was the harm in a united India?

To counter this Islamic fundamentalist demand, the Muslim League leadership sought the support of two other social groups created by colonialism, namely, the military and the bureaucracy, whom the Muslim League thought would be ideologically similar. It would be wrong to assume that the incorporation of the military and bureaucracy within the historical bloc was merely a tactical move - it also had some important political considerations.

The Pakistan Movement, it should be mentioned here, was essentially a political movement. As a political party, the Muslim League, which "led" the Pakistan Movement, never enjoyed broad-based support nor were its leaders democratically elected. Kammaruddin Ahmed has argued that Jinnah's becoming Governor General of Pakistan signified the capitulation of the civilian leadership to the bureaucracy. Indeed, the first Secretary General, Chawdhury Mohammed Ali, and the first Chief secretary of East Pakistan, Aziz Ahmed, were both career bureaucrats during the British administration and became rulers of Pakistan. Besides executing state policies formulated by the politicians, the bureaucracy began to form its own policies. The weakness of the Muslim League as a political party and a legislative organ, along with the lack of an ideological consensus within the historical bloc, made the bureaucracy virtually omnipotent. In fact, the bureaucracy understood quite well the dilemmas of the Muslim League.

The political scene of Pakistan in the 1950s was characterized by a confrontation between the bureaucracy and the military on the one hand, and the civilian politicians on the other. In a moment of uncertainty, the Pakistan Constituent Assembly adopted the first constitution of Pakistan in 1956, nine years after independence. Once again, the various social classes in the historical bloc failed to agree on how to share political power. Uyangoda has explained the reasons for this:

What seems to have caused this failure is the existence of multiple and heterogeneous units and circuits of power that constantly disrupted the voice of command of the State. No group within the power bloc could emerge as the leading hegemonic force that could introduce even a semblance of stability.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Uyangoda 1986:90

In this context, the military under the leadership of General Ayub Khan captured political power. The military coup of 1958 solidified the rule of the military and bureaucracy in the historical bloc. At the same time, it eliminated the civilian politicians' influence from the bloc. The rationale that Ayub Khan provided for the intervention was given in a speech to the nation on October 8, 1958: to rescue the nation from "the chaotic conditions brought by the civilian politicians." To him these politicians were "self seekers" and "their aim nothing but self-aggrandizement of thirst for power."<sup>9</sup> Thus, the military takeover of 1958 revealed the failure of the ML and the existing rulers as agents of the hegemony-seeking bourgeoisie. The ML had failed to evolve as a viable bourgeois democratic party for the same reasons that the social classes within the historical bloc had failed to come to a consensus. Indeed, the military posed what Uyangoda has called the "counter image of the League's failure."<sup>10</sup>

The new military-bureaucratic oligarchy soon attempted to redefine the nature of the classes within the historical bloc. This was done by replacing the Muslim League as a link between the state and civil society. The task of hegemonizing civil society was given to a close-knit, homogeneous historical bloc. To obtain legitimation for this task and to create a popular base in rural areas, Ayub Khan introduced the Basic Democracies (BD). This system was intended to serve various functions: it would create a clientele for the regime, initiate developmental works, and provide a framework for local government. After the introduction of the constitution in 1962, the BD system was given extra constitutional functions such as creating an electoral college for presidential and assembly elections- (both national and provincial), and to umpire in cases of conflict between the president and the national assembly. In brief, the introduction of the BD system by the Ayub regime was primarily to legitimize the new historical bloc's power by uprooting the civilian politician's role.

Therefore, from the very beginning, the post-colonial state of Pakistan suffered from what could be identified as a hegemonic crisis. This crisis derives from the fact that the classes composing the post-colonial historical bloc had failed to arrive at a consensus on how to rule. The military intervention of 1958 was an attempt to rearrange the historical bloc by uprooting the ruling Muslim League as its partner. However, these various hegemonic attempts by the Pakistani post-colonial

<sup>9</sup> Khan as quoted by Jahan 1972:150.

<sup>10</sup> Uyangoda 1986:96

historical bloc never remained unchallenged by the Bengali subaltern forces. It could be argued that the hegemonic crisis of the historical bloc was also expedited by the various counter-hegemonic movements articulated by the Bengalis. I will focus on these counter-hegemonic movements by concentrating on one Bengali political leader - Moulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani (1880-1976), popularly known as Moulana Bhashani.

Bhashani's oppositional politics started in 1904 when he went to Assam, North-west of India, to organize cultivating and immigrant Bengalis. These immigrant Bengalis experienced various forms of discrimination and prosecution in the hands of the provincial government and indigenous Assamese population. The British authority, fearful of long-term violence between these two communities, i.e., Assamese and Bengalis, introduced the so-called Line system that demarcated and separated the two communities. For the Bengali immigrants, lands allocated to them were of an inferior quality and inadequate. By early 1943, in large part to Bhashani's organized protest, the Line system was abolished and Bengali immigrant poor peasants received additional cultivable land.

During the period of Pakistan movement, Bhashani who was a member of the Muslim League supported the party's demand for Pakistan. Bhashani, being a down-to-earth leader was always close to ordinary people, mostly peasants; he developed a mutual dislike for the conservative rank and file of Muslim League leadership and its policies. This was to become more apparent when Bhashani was elected in 1948, under League ticket, as a member of the parliament from Tangail, north of East Bengal. During the parliamentary debate, Bhashani articulated various oppositional agendas that stood in sharp contrast to the Muslim League policies. These include the demand for Bangla to be the national language of Pakistan and autonomy for East Bengal and at one point of the parliamentary debate on budget, he asked, "Are we (the Bengalis) the slave of the central government?"<sup>11</sup> These oppositional agendas articulated by Bhashani culminated in the creation of the Awami Muslim League 1949. This organization was indeed the beginning of oppositional politics on East Bengal against the Pakistani hegemonic state. All the different currents of politics and political ideology stemmed from the people who organized themselves within this organization. Bhashani's role in counter-hegemonic oppositional politics was most pronounced during the 1968-69 revolt. I will return to this issue soon.

<sup>11</sup> Bhashani as quoted by Maksood 1994:64.

Thus, it could be argued that the post-colonial state of Pakistan from the beginning experienced a contentious hegemonic crisis. It should be clear from the above discussion that the crisis stemmed from two sources, namely, a) various factions of the historical bloc could not agree on a unified hegemonic project, b) political activities by the Bengalis also accentuated crisis for the historical bloc as well.

### Colonial Governmentality and Resistance

In this section, I would like to introduce Michel Foucault's concept of governmentality to read the Pakistani colonial rule in East Bengal. To Foucault, governmentality is "contact between technologies of domination of others and those of self." In more general terms, Foucault argues that "government" is the "conduct of conduct," that it is a "form of activities aiming to shape, guide, or effect the conduct of some person or persons." Thus, though Foucault addresses the issue of state in terms of relations between self to self, he is most concerned with control and guidance, within social institutions and communities and exercise of political sovereignty and different forms and meanings of government.

(Foucault) was interested in government as an activity or practice, and in arts of government as ways of knowing what that activity consists in, how it might be carried on. A rationality of government will thus mean a way or system of thinking about the nature of the practice of government (who can govern; what governing is, what or who is governed), capable of making some form of that activity thinkable and practicable both to practitioners and to those upon whom it was practiced.

More specifically, to Foucault the essential feature of the "art of government" is "introduction of economy into political practice."<sup>12</sup>

It is well known that Foucault's writings in general and governmentality in particular deal with the European historical experience. How does this experience translate in the context of colonial and post-colonial situations? Both Partha Chatterjee and David Scott address this issue in the context of India and Sri Lanka respectively. Scott formulated a concept, political rationalities of colonial power, which he defines in terms of "historically constituted complexes of knowledge/power that give shape to colonial projects of political sovereignty." Furthermore,

<sup>12</sup> Foucault, 1991:92.

A colonial political rationality characterizes those ways in which colonial power is organized as an activity designed to produce effects of rule. More specifically what I mean to illuminate are what I should like to call the *targets* of colonial power (that is, the point or points of power's application, the object or objects it aims at, and the means and instrumentalities it deploys in search of these targets, points, and objects); and the field of its operation (that is, the zone that it actively constructs for its functionality).<sup>13</sup>

Partha Chatterjee, on the other hand, uses the concept to offer a critique of a liberal state in post-colonial India and to explain the rise of Hindu fundamentalism that challenged the core of the liberal state.<sup>14</sup> Since 1947, when in East Bengal, British colonialism was replaced by Pakistani colonial rule, the governmentality of the state, was "universalism/homogeneity" translated in official discourse as "national integration." However, this homogeneity has its element of construction of "other" with no subtle racist overtone. Ayub Khan, who ruled Pakistan from 1958 to 1969, justifies the idea of "national integration" in the following terms.

It would be no exaggeration to say that up to the creation of Pakistan, they (the Bengalis) had not known any real freedom or sovereignty. They have been in turn ruled either by the caste Hindus, Moguls, Pathans, or the British. In addition, they have been and still are under considerable Hindu cultural and linguistic influence. As such they have all the inhibitions of downtrodden races and have not yet found it possible to adjust psychologically to the requirements of the newborn freedom. Their popular complexes, exclusiveness, suspicion, and a sort of defensive aggressiveness probably emerge from this historical background.

The "universalism/homogeneity" as governmental rationalities of Pakistani colonial power in East Bengal has three interrelated themes. Besides political rationalities, it has its cultural and economic rationalities. Now I turn to these issues. Before I do that, it should be kept in mind that, though I am explaining them separately, they are indeed related.

<sup>13</sup> David Scott. 1993.

<sup>14</sup> Partha Chatterjee 1995.

### *Cultural Rationalities*

The creation of the culturally homogenous "nation-state" of Pakistan began in earnest with the withdrawal of the British colonial forces. With this rationality in mind, the Pakistani historical bloc declared that Urdu would be the *lingua franca* of the entire Pakistan, though the majority of the people lived in East Bengal and they spoke Bangla and demanded that Bangla should be the national language. However, the demand for Bengali as a national language went through two distinct but interrelated phases. The first phase, between 1947 and 1951, was constitutionalist in nature as the demand was placed through parliamentary debates and newspaper articles. The second phase, in early 1952, was characterized by direct confrontation with the central authority. In this phase, a powerful link, between various urban and rural subaltern classes, was established with important consequences. I will discuss these two phases in turn.

The language controversy within Pakistan started even before the creation of the new state. Dr. Ziauddin Ahmed, Rector of the Aligarh University and intellectual leader of "Islamic Nationalism," argued that Urdu would be the official language and medium of instruction in Pakistan. The opposition to this argument first came from Dr. Muhammad Shahidullah, noted Bengali linguist and educator, who opposed the suggestion by saying that imposing Urdu on the Bengali speaking population is against the scientific theory of education, right to self-determination and provincial autonomy and "If Urdu or Hindi instead of Bengali is used in our law, courts, and universities, that would be tantamount to political slavery."<sup>15</sup> The first organized opposition to the proposal to declare Urdu, as the national language came from the Tamuddin Majlis, a cultural organization formed by professors and students at Dhaka University in September 1947. In a booklet entitled "Pakistaner Rashtra Bhasha, Bangla na Urdu" (Pakistan's State Language, Bengali or Urdu), it was proposed that (1) the Bangla Language shall be the following: a) the medium of instruction in East Pakistan, b) the medium of court communication, c) the medium of mass communication; and that (2) the languages of the central government will be both Urdu and Bengali." One contributor in the booklet, Professor Kazi Mothar Hussain, argued that the attempt to impose Urdu as the national language stood for the possibility of replacing old masters with new ones from the same religion. He maintained that the attempt to impose Urdu against the will of the people of East Bengal would result in

<sup>15</sup> M. Shahidullah as quoted by R. Islam 1985:147.



total failure. He even warned "it might lead to the end of the relationship between the East and the West."<sup>16</sup> Thus, the voice of dissent against Urdu as a national language initially came from intellectuals, students, academic professionals and some Bengali politicians. Around this time, students in Dhaka were beginning to form their own political organizations independent of the Muslim League to foster what they called "a revolutionary outlook among the people" in order to "bring economic freedom."<sup>17</sup> This political orientation was distinct from the politics of the Muslim League. By the time the language movement came to the forefront the ruling party had already antagonized student activists in East Bengal by branding them as being communist inspired. Meanwhile, the decision by the central authority to impose Urdu on East Bengal had already become an issue in student politics, and it began to emerge as direct confrontation with the Pakistan state.

The turning point of the language movement, and the beginning of the second phase of the movement was in 1952. The background of this needs to be explained. The Provincial Government of East Bengal, in accordance with the Central Government, set up a committee on March 9, 1949 to reform the structure of the Bengali language. When the East Bengal Language Committee submitted its report to the central authority, it argued:

1) that the Sanskritization of the language be avoided as far as possible by the use of simple phraseology and easy construction in vogue in the speech of East Bengal. 2) that the expressions and sentiments of Muslim writers should strictly conform to the Islamic ideology. 3) that all the Sanskrit principles having no direct and important role to play in the principles of Bengali grammar, be omitted and only genuine Bengali principles existing in the language and envisaged in this report be found out and established as principles of Bengali grammar. 4) that the unintelligible technical terms of Sanskrit grammar imported to Bengali grammar which made the confusion worse, be substituted by the simple non-technical terms of Bengali language.

It should be mentioned here that the phrase "Sanskritization of the language be avoided" was actually meant to exclude all the Sanskrit words from Bengali and to replace them by Urdu, Arabic or Persian words to "conform to the Islamic ideology."<sup>18</sup> All these recommendations by the government-approved language committee, needless to say, were politically motivated and designed to defuse the political agitation.

Meanwhile, in 1950, a set of constitutional proposals, alternatives to the proposals of the Basic Principles of the Subcommittee presented by the Muslim League regime to the Constitutional Assembly of Pakistan, was adopted at a National Convention held in Dhaka. The proposals stated that the Unitary State of Pakistan should be made into the United States of Pakistan (USP), and that the USP should consist of two regional states, West and East Pakistan (East Bengal). In the USP, Urdu and Bengali should be the two national languages.

Against this background Nazimuddin, the Prime Minister of Pakistan, announced at the Dhaka session of the ruling Muslim League on January 26, 1952 that "Urdu will be the state language of Pakistan."<sup>19</sup> This announcement triggered the language controversy once again and a new phase in the Bengali language movement was initiated. A new All Party (except the ruling Muslim League) State Language Committee of Action was formed. The turning point came on February 21, 1952 when police firing at student demonstrators resulted in several deaths. A *hartal* (general strike/closure) was organized by the All Party Committee of Action. Anticipating vigorous public opposition to state authority, the Provincial Government had already banned the English daily *The Pakistan Observer*, which had supported the Bengali language demand. On the night of February 20, the State also imposed Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code banning demonstrations and public meetings. Students, however, defied the government ban and held protest meetings. The army and paramilitary forces were called to restore "law and order." As a result of police shootings several students were killed, hundreds were injured, and thousands were arrested. The students killed attained *shahid* (martyr) status and entered the Bengali psyche forever. Spontaneous strikes continued on the following day. The demonstrators set fire to the pro-government *Morning News* office, owned by the former Chief Minister Nazimuddin's family.

The immediate aftermath of February 21 was a classic case of the radicalization of mass consciousness with a great degree of spontaneity, which can be explained by the fact that after February 21, the movement took a massive turn as it spreads to the rural areas and the peasant masses stood solidly behind the students. The peasants' support can be explained partly by the fact that most of the students came from the rural areas. But it was primarily due to their disillusionment and frustration with the State of Pakistan. The overall socio-economic conditions had deteriorated, as described in the first section of this paper, as the State of Pakistan firmly

<sup>16</sup> Hussein as quoted by Gulam Kabir 1987:102.

<sup>17</sup> Umar 1970:10.

<sup>18</sup> Islam 1985:147.

<sup>19</sup> Islam 1985:152.

established a colonial relationship with East Bengal. The peasants had hoped that the exploitation by the Hindu "zamindars" would end, but in place of the Hindu zamindars (large land owners), a new Muslim *jotedars* (small landholding cultivating class) had emerged. The monopoly of West Pakistani personnel in administration and bureaucracy was resented by the rural population as it meant fierce competition for the already scarce jobs for their sons. Moreover, they resented bitterly the Urdu writings on postal stamps, money order forms, currency, and other government forms, for Urdu was a foreign language for them. Thus, from 1952 onwards, the Bengalis of Pakistan drew inspiration from the sacrifices made on February 21 in all their subsequent struggles. Moreover, the social mythology of the martyrs or the "shahids" of the "Bhasha Andolan" created a profound impact on the collective will of the Bengali masses. In the process of the creation of this mythology, the *Bhasha Andolan* constituted the center of gravity of a new nationalist discourse articulated by the Bengali subaltern social classes.

### *Economic Rationalities*

It should be clear that from the beginning Pakistan's historical power bloc failed to establish hegemony, and therefore, consensus, in civil society. This lack of consensus was more complicated than it might appear. Although the historical bloc failed to agree in the political and ideological spheres, all the classes, including the powerful landowning classes, supported the idea of capitalist industrialization. Political commitment to this policy by the regimes of the pre-Ayub Khan period between 1947 to 1958 and the Ayub Khan period (1958 to 1968) was the outcome of various economic, political, and historical factors.

In this section, I will discuss the economic rationalities of post-colonial governmentality of Pakistan. In the area that came to be known as Pakistan, the industrial bourgeoisie was invisible, both politically and economically. The commercial activities during the pre-partition era were largely conducted by Hindu and Sikh traders known as *banias*. After 1947, these traders were forced to leave Pakistan and a vacuum was created. It was quickly filled by Muslim trading communities who settled in Pakistan not only from various parts of India but also from Burma and East Africa. Since this type of bourgeoisie was a newcomer to Pakistan, it lacked roots in civil society and quickly became entirely dependent on the state for the transformation of their immigrant merchant capital into industrial capital. Immediately after 1947, the Pakistani state, proposed an elaborate plan to transform this merchant

capital into viable industrial capital. However, the merchant class showed initial reluctance in investing their savings into industrial activities. The state took a number of measures to encourage these investments. The Investment Enquiry Committee was created, and the Pakistan Industrial Development Corporation (PIDC) began working in 1952. By establishing these and other financial institutions, the state's role in developing a bourgeois class was ensured; it consolidated bureaucratic control over industrialization. Rashid Amjad has informed us that many members of the PIDC came from big industrial houses, including Nasser A. Sheikh (Colony), and Adamji and Sayed Wazir Ali (Wazir Ali Group).

Meanwhile, in September 1949, the British pound sterling was devalued, followed shortly by the Indian currency. Pakistan refused to devalue its currency. The result was a virtual halt of trade between India and Pakistan since India refused to accept Pakistani rupees at the official rate. As a result, Pakistan's trade with other countries changed rapidly, creating a great emphasis on domestic industrialization and the protection of domestic markets.

Meanwhile, some internal factionalized struggles had also been resolved in favor of domestic capitalist industrialization. The Minister of Commerce, Sir Alexander MacFarquhar, suggested an open imports policy that would thwart the domestic manufacturing industries. But the Finance Minister, Ghulam Mohammed and Zahid Hossain, the Governor of the State Bank of Pakistan, adopted various policies to counter the decisions of the Commerce Ministry, hence supporting the interests of the growing bourgeoisie. After the end of the Korean boom period, Pakistan suffered from an acute shortage of foreign currency reserves, which further restricted foreign commodity imports. From that time on, Pakistan's bourgeoisie enjoyed a protective market and state-initiated promotion for their industrial activities.

Thus, the transformation of merchant capital into industrial capital was made entirely by the state's manipulation of various events. Bureaucratic control of Pakistan's industrialization was accomplished by safeguarding the class interests of the bourgeoisie through state intervention. This firmly established the link between bourgeoisie and bureaucracy. During the Ayub Khan era, the military entered the scene and uprooted the civilian political influence in this process.

The Pakistani industrialization policy must be explained within the context of the overall growth strategy that was pursued during the 1950s and 1960s. This strategy was established by various five-year plans prepared by expert policy planners and foreign advisors.

According to Emajuddin Ahmed, this growth strategy could be summarized as follows: (1) an emphasis on private enterprise, (2) the necessity for what is known as "functional inequality," and (3) the adoption of a "one economy" thesis.

Hanna Papanek has argued that the emphasis on industrialization based on private enterprise was the result of an association between the Muslim traders of India and the Muslim League. Regarding the state's role in private enterprise, Jinnah declared in the 88th annual meeting of the Karachi Chamber of Commerce in April 1948 that:

Government will seek to create conditions in which industry and trade may develop and prosper...I would like to call to your particular attention the keen desire of the Government of Pakistan to associate individual initiative and private enterprise at every stage of industrialization....Commerce and Trade are the very lifeblood of the nation. I can no more visualize a Pakistan without traders than I can one without cultivators and civil servants. I have no doubt that in Pakistan, traders and merchants will always be welcome and that they, in building up their own fortunes, will not forget their social responsibility for a fair and square deal to one and all, big and small.<sup>20</sup>

Indeed, all subsequent five-year plans guaranteed state support for private enterprise:

It is a basic assumption of the Plan that for the implementation of the industrial development programme, reliance will be placed primarily on private enterprise. This assumption has been made not so much to reduce the burden on public finance as in recognition of the fact that private enterprise has a key role to play in the economic development of the country.

The state provided further impetus to private enterprise in 1952 by establishing the Pakistan Industrial Development Corporation (PIDC). As mentioned before, the creation of PIDC extended bureaucratic control over the bourgeoisie. Furthermore, the PIDC was given the task of setting up enterprises in those areas where private initiative was not forthcoming. Once an enterprise started functioning adequately, it would "divest" itself. The private enterprises were thus protected from foreign competition, were granted credit in case of shortage of capital, and were given tax shelters and export bonuses. Closely related to the state's support of capitalist industrialization based on private enterprise was what came to be known as "functional inequality." The basic assumption behind this strategy was that a high

degree of both regional and class inequalities was necessary to promote savings and to create a condition of viable industrialization. Thus, "It will be necessary to tolerate some initial growth in income inequalities to reach high levels of savings and investment," and again, "We cannot distribute poverty. Growth is vital before income distribution can improve."<sup>21</sup>

Mahbubul Haq, the main architect of economic development during the Ayub Khan period, justified "functional inequality" by saying that economic development is a "brutal and sordid process" and argued that the "road to eventual equality may inevitably lie through initial inequalities." Griffin has argued that this strategy was designed to squeeze resources from those classes with high savings, but in reality, this practice took away surplus from the rural population and redistributed it to the bourgeoisie.

Another important aspect of the overall strategy adopted by the Pakistani historic bloc was to treat the economy of both East and West Pakistan as a single entity, formulating what was known as the "single economy thesis." East and West Pakistan, although united as a single nation, could more correctly be identified as a double economy. All the social indicators—demographic, linguistic, cultural, and educational—were quite different from East to West Pakistan. There was one similarity, however: East and West Pakistan belonged to one religion, Islam, which was the unifying force for the Indian Muslims (including the Bengali Muslims) in the demand for the independent Pakistani state. Even so, as Mukherjee has argued, the Islam practiced by the Bengali Muslims was somewhat different than the Islam of the rest of India. The reasons, however, for adopting this one economy thesis were growth efficiency and maximization of output. The Pakistani post-colonial state argued that investments should be made in those areas where output would be maximum, and where demand and absorption of output were higher. West Pakistan thus became the main beneficiary of both state expenditure and foreign aid from metropolitan countries.

In brief, the post-colonial state of Pakistan fostered a capitalist industrialization heavily based on private investments, a tolerance of so-called "functional inequality," and the "one economy" thesis. The impact of this governmentality on East Bengal was disastrous; it firmly established a colonial relationship between East Bengal and West Pakistan. Indeed, the Bengali subaltern response that culminated during the revolt of 1969 can be traced to the economic rationalities adopted by the Pakistani state.

<sup>20</sup> Jinnah as quoted in Hanna Papanek 1974: 10.

<sup>21</sup> Government of Pakistan 1960: 49.

### *Political Rationalities*

In post-colonial Pakistan, one of the most important aspects of political rationalities of governmentality was the "constitution making" process which as we will see, in this section, was motivated by the state's overall concern of universalization and integration.

The first step in this direction was to form a constitution for the new state of Pakistan. For this purpose, on March 1949, the Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan, proposed what was known as "objective resolution" in the General Assembly. In that resolution, the Prime Minister, tried to synthesize western states with an Islamic flavor. He argued, "all authority must be subservient to god".<sup>22</sup> Furthermore,

The state shall exercise all its powers and authority through the chosen representatives of the people. This is the very essence of democracy; because the people have been recognized as the recipient of all authority and it is in them that the power to wield it has been vested.<sup>23</sup>

However, his delicate balancing act of Islam and modernist conception was challenged when Hindu members of the assembly from East Bengal expressed doubt that in the new state of Pakistan, the minority rights would be protected and a religious minority person would be allowed to become the head of the state. In response, the Prime Minister Khan argued anyone; either Muslim or non-Muslim, receiving the majority vote would become the head of the state. This argument, however, was immediately contradicted by an Islamic scholar, Maulana Shabbir Osmani;

The Islamic state means a state that is run on the exalted and excellent principles of Islam.... (it) can be run only by those who believe in those principles. People who do not subscribe to those ideas may have a place in the administrative machinery of the state but they cannot be entrusted with the responsibility of framing the general policy of the state or dealing with matters vital to its safety and integrity.<sup>24</sup>

The objective resolution, however, was passed on March 12, 1949, and on the same day a Basic Principles Committee was formed to draft the first constitution of Pakistan on the basis of the Objective Resolution. On December 1952, the report of the Basic Principles Committee was

<sup>22</sup> Government of Bangladesh 1982: 137.

<sup>23</sup> Government of Bangladesh 1982: 137.

<sup>24</sup> Osmani as quoted by Hasan Zaheer 1994.

presented to the Constituent Assembly. The report suggested that the central legislature consist of a single house at the center and single chamber of provincial assemblies in East and West Pakistan. Though it claimed to be federal, most of its power was concentrated in the hands of the central assembly. As provincial representation to the center is concerned, it called for "equal representation" which has important implications for the Bengalis, as it signified losing its majority status.

The political rationalities of the Pakistani governmentality along with cultural and economic rationalities faced immediate resistance from the Bengali subalterns.

When the debate on Resolution was going on, in February 1950, the newly formed Awami Muslim League conveyed a conference in Dhaka, which proposed a counter resolution. It suggested the following resolution.<sup>25</sup>

- name of the country should be United States of Pakistan.
- parliament should consist of one house only and it will be only for four years.
- Bangla and Urdu should be the national languages of the state.
- There should be two separate defenses united for two wings of the state under a supreme command.
- there should a regional militia and recruits should be from that region.
- there should be regional office in East Bengal for international trade.
- And, other responsibilities should be on the regional government.
- Pakistan should be a socialist republic.

However, the resistance against political rationalities, started even before the transfer of power to the Muslim League by the British. In early 1947, two oppositional political organizations emerged--East Pakistan Muslim Student league and *Gono Azad League* (People's liberation League) (these two organizations, however, paved the way of formation of Awami Muslim League, mentioned before). These two organizations contain, perhaps, the genesis of counter-hegemony in East Bengal. The manifesto argues that:

Country's freedom and people's freedom are two separate things. A country might get independence from the foreign rulers but it does not mean people are free. Political freedom is meaningless, unless people are economically free because without economic freedom social and cultural progress is not possible. So, we decide that we must struggle for people's economic freedom.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Zaheer. Ibid 1994:15.

<sup>26</sup> Umar 1970: 1.

Meanwhile, on June 23 and 24, 1949, Moulana Bhashani presided over a convention of many political workers in Dhaka. For the convention, Shamsul Haq, a prominent worker, drafted a document titled *Muldabi* or "original demand". This document further challenged integrationist policies of the state of Pakistan. It called for full self-determination for all the provinces, land reform to distribute lands to landless peasants and nationalization of essential industries. It contained many religious issues but as a counter-hegemonic document to combat colonial governmentalities, it was indeed unparalleled.

Along with these urban political activities against the Pakistani colonial governmentality, the rural subalterns especially the landless peasants, started to revolt as well. Although these revolts started in North-west Bengal, immediately before the 1947 partition, its effect was most pronounced in the late 1940s and early 1950s. One of the issues through which peasants organized themselves was *tebagha*—that is landless sharecroppers should pay two thirds of the crops. One of the most important aspects of *tebagha* and other peasant movements was the participation of women in large numbers (Begum 1988, Custers 1993, Roy 1992). This participation not only concentrated on the caring of wounded combatant; in many occasions, women directly fought the police and military that were deployed to safeguard the interests of the landed classes. Begum's and Custers' work contains many examples of women's heroic participation in *tebagha* and other peasant movements. One of them was Ella Mitra. In early January 1950, in Rajshahi, north west of East Bengal, four police constables were killed in a skirmish with *santhal*-indigenous population and peasants. Afterwards in a police crackdown, Ella Mitra, a movement organizer was arrested and suffered unthinkable torture including inserting hot boiled egg in her private parts and rape, by the police.<sup>27</sup> Interestingly, Mitra belonged to a Hindu minority community in East Bengal. Her testimony, which was circulated as a political pamphlet, describing her torture in the hands of Pakistani police, further debunked the myth that minority rights would be safe guarded in a "democratic" Pakistan.

In a nutshell, the rationalities of the Pakistani colonial governmentalities, i.e., cultural, economic, and political, were erected with two principles in mind. They are, 1) to establish a unified hegemonic project by the Pakistani historical bloc; and 2) to fill the cultural and historical differences between West Pakistan and East Bengal in terms of "national integration" which, as I have argued earlier, was an important aspect of the colonial governmentality.

## Narrative of the Revolt

The military takeover of 1958 in Pakistan showed the deep-seated hegemonic crisis of a post-colonial historical bloc. As I have explained before, the reason for this crisis is twofold; different factions of the bloc could not agree on any specific hegemonic project and/or strategies to deploy power. This crisis was intensified by many subaltern movements from below. However, the coup rearranged the components of the historical bloc and effectively neutralized the civilian political factions from the bloc by removing them altogether. In its place we observe the ascendance of the military-bureaucratic elite. However, this rearrangement of the bloc did not quite shield the bloc from crisis. The revolt of 1969 in East Bengal that toppled the military dictatorship of Field Marshall Ayub Khan showed the strength of subaltern forces in further aggravating the hegemonic crisis of a post-colonial state.

According to the spontaneity of the subaltern forces and its intensity of participation in the revolt, we could argue that the revolt went through three distinct phases.<sup>28</sup>

- 1) Emergence;
- 2) Uprising; and
- 3) Spontaneity.

## *Emergence*

The revolt started in West Pakistan following two events; 1) in November 1968, seventy students of Rawalpindi went to Landikotal, a northern place famous for smuggling goods. When those students returned with smuggled goods, they were arrested and the goods were confiscated by the police and 2) a few days later, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, after resigning from the Ayub cabinet started to criticize the government and students from Rawalpindi's Polytechnique Institute where he had been invited to give a speech. Police prevented him from giving the speech. These two consecutive events triggered a series of clashes between students and police and soon it spread all over the province. In East Bengal the revolt started when Maulana Bhashani, along with various peasants and labor unions, on December 6, 1968, organized a

<sup>28</sup> This presentation of a narrative of the revolt is not quite a linear presentation of the events, though it might appear that way. Rather a varied narrativization of the revolt according to its intensity and degree participation of the subaltern forces.

rally labeled as "Julum Protirode Dibesh" or day of resisting repression, against the Pakistan state. In that rally, representatives from students, peasants, workers and various subaltern groups spoke and demanded the fulfillment of various economic and social demands. The emergence of urban political coalition involving various segments of the subaltern categories, toward the end of 1969 was the most significant aspect of the uprising and as we will see later, this coalition had also important implications in undermining and neutralizing the hold of various mainstream political parties in the direction of the uprising. In fact, Maulana Bhashani's rally on December 6 was a response to the Auto-Rickshaw Drivers Association strike against traffic police harassment. On December 2, the Association observed a general strike which was attended by another important faction of urban proletariat namely the cycle-rickshaw drivers.

Tariq Ali<sup>29</sup> argued that Bhashani agreed to hold the rally, when he was approached by the rickshaw drivers and he had already started a concerted effort to undermine the state's authority in East Bengal. This coalition of solidarity further radicalized the rickshaw workers. In the December 6th rally Bhashani called for a general strike on the following day December 7, literally shutting down Dhaka. It was quite clear that from the beginning there was a rift developing between the mainstream political parties and the subaltern political interests. All the mainstream political parties were always eager for a negotiated settlement with the state with a periodic and convenient use of mass mobilization and they were reluctant to see that the movement did not slip from their hands and at the same time, guarantee that they had all the people's support behind them. That seemed to be what happened in late December 1968. The history of the 1969 revolt should be explained in this contradictory space.

On December 20, 1968, a spontaneous strike had broken out in Haterdia, a small, semi rural town, in Dhaka district. These events were the first signal that the rural subaltern people were becoming active in opposing the Ayub regime. The peasants were demanding the end of exploitative tax revenue system and control system enacted by the colonial state. Four people—one primary school teacher, and three peasants were killed when police opened fire on the demonstrating crowds. A government press release argued that during the normal business activities, some people including students and peasants tried to shut down shops and stores. When police tried to refrain them from doing it, they protested and started attacking the police. Police then arrested four people. Soon after two hundred people gathered and tried to

free the arrested individuals. Then, police opened fire for "self-defense" and three people were killed.<sup>30</sup> This was the state interpretation of the event, which was common throughout the uprising. This also shows the discrepancy between the state's and subaltern interpretations of events related to the uprising. On the same day, in Narail in the district of Jessore, southwest of East Bengal, scores of people were seriously hurt in clashes with police and para-military forces.

In the volatile situation of spreading the revolt, all over the province, three major student organizations: Student League and two factions of Student Union, formed *Chatra Sangram Committee* (Student Resistance Committee) to outline an eleven-points program. These points included restoration of democracy and universal adult franchise and autonomy for East Bengal as well as for other provinces in West Pakistan. It called for nationalization of major industries, banks and insurance. It demanded the release of all political prisoners. On foreign policy, it demanded withdrawal of Pakistan from all U.S.A dominated military alliances. Although, the eleven-points program was drafted by the students with active collaboration of other subaltern strategies, it nonetheless set the course and agenda for the uprising and was in sharp contrast with mainstream political parties and its demands. Not to be outpaced by the students, eight mainstream political parties that included, Awami League, both factions of National Awami Party, and an array of right-wing political parties like Jammeeet-I-Islam and Najim-e-Islam party, formed the Democratic Action Committee (DAC) on January 8, 1969. The day DAC was formed, its leaders called a press conference demanding political rights and freeing of political prisoners. Kamal argued that the political programs of DAC and the students' eleven-points differed considerably. With the participation of so many right-wing parties within DAC, its programs were limited to immediate political goals. Moreover, within DAC these right-wing forces were very powerful regarding the political decision making process of DAC. One example of this was when the students' alliance supported DAC, it never endorsed the eleven-points program.

After the eleven-points program, the students effectively controlled the course of the movement. In that situation on January 20, 1969, a student leader Assaduzzaman was killed by police fire and with that the entire uprising entered into a new phase.

<sup>29</sup> Tariq Ali 1970:175

<sup>30</sup> *The Dainik Pakistan*, December 30, 1968.

### *Uprising*

On January 17, 1969, *Chatra Sangram Committee* (Student Resistance Committee) organized a rally in Dhaka University campus and demanded the implementation of the eleven-points program and the end of state repression. In that meeting, on January 20, a resolution was passed to observe, a province-wide *hartal* (a general cessation of all public activities as a form of protest). However, there was a ban on public gatherings known as *144 dhara* imposed by the state provisions. In spite of that ban, on the day of *hartal*, hundreds of students and workers from all over the city gathered in Dhaka University campus. There was a brief meeting and after that a procession of ten thousand students and workers marched outside the campus by defying the ban. There was a pitched battle between the police and the demonstrators and a student leader Assaduzzaman, was killed when police opened fire. After that incident, the entire uprising entered a new phase. After the killing of Assad, women students took the lead of the uprising. In a patriarchal society this was indeed a significant shift. The student committee called for another strike on January 21. That day the entire province was shut down and all the rallies and demonstrations were attended by not only large numbers of students but also by workers, peasants, and various professional groups like writers and intellectuals. The spontaneity and cross-class nature of the uprising provided a distinct character of the uprising.

### *Spontaneity*

After the killing of Assad, the province observed a three-day mourning period, which ended on January 24 with a general strike. The army was called to quell the strike. There were numerous incidents of firing and clashes with police and army. On one such incident, Matiur Rahaman, a fifteen-year-old schoolboy was killed. That evening, the governor of East Pakistan, widely despised, Monaium Khan announced that the army had taken over the control of Dhaka city and curfew was imposed until further notice. On January 25, six people including a mother, Anwara Begum while nursing her baby, were killed by stray bullets and 14 were injured. With these incidents, the entire agitation went beyond control of both the state and mainstream political parties. In that situation, President Ayub Khan announced his willingness to hold talks with DAC leaders and promised to withdraw the emergency that had been imposed at the beginning of the uprising. The DAC leaders, as I have mentioned earlier,

mainly from right-wing political parties, who were already alarmed with the militancy and the growing strength of the subaltern forces within the uprising, were eager for a negotiated settlement with the state. Smelling compromise, in a massive rally on Dhaka University campus, students warned both the state and DAC leaders that no compromise would be acceptable until the demands of the people were met.<sup>31</sup> By the third week of February of 1969, the regime was visibly collapsing. The state dropped all the charges against Sheikh Mujibur Rahaman, a prominent leader of the opposition, and others who were accused of conspiring with India to secede East Bengal and declare it an independent nation. At this point, the masses demanded not only the release of all political prisoners but also the resignation of Ayub himself, who finally stepped down by declaring martial law and handing over the power to army chief, General Yahia Khan on March 25, 1969. However, Ayub's resignation was expedited by a political strategy known as *Gherao*.<sup>32</sup>

### **Gherao: The Subaltern Strategy**

In a situation of subordination/domination, what strategy or strategies do the subaltern masses use to transform their subordinate position? It should be clear from the above discussion that from the beginning, there was a rift or clash of political goals between subaltern forces and mainstream political parties in their opposition to the Pakistani state. The mainstream political forces knowing very well that, to borrow Gramsci's<sup>33</sup> term "war of movement," frontal assault on the state was neither possible nor advisable, as it would erode their power by radicalizing the subaltern forces. Their strategy was "war of position"-a gradual and "molecular transformation of the state".<sup>34</sup> It will be simplistic to argue in contrast to "war of position" or "passive revolution," that subaltern forces adopted a "war of movement"-a "frontal assault on the State." Here Gramsci's observations of modern state are noteworthy;

The assertion that the State can be identified with individuals (the individuals of a social group), as an element of active culture (i.e. as movement to create a new civilization, a new type of man and citizen), must serve to determine the will to construct within the husk of political society a complex and well-

<sup>31</sup> *The Pakistan Observer*, Feb. 6, 1969.

<sup>32</sup> *Gherao* is a Bangla word that stands for an act of occupying the premise of offices or industries and not allowing the owners/managers to leave until specific demands are met.

<sup>33</sup> Gramsci 1971.

<sup>34</sup> Gramsci 1971:268.

articulated civil society, in which the individuals can govern themselves without their self-government, thereby entering into conflict with political society--but rather becoming its normal continuation, its organic complement.<sup>35</sup>

Thus, following Gramsci, if we view the state and state power, in a wider context of politics, then the restricted definition of politics i.e., capturing of state power by the proletarian classes, will disappear and subaltern politics takes a new form. This new politics of subaltern includes their presence and transformation of civil society and "self-government." Here subalternity creates an "autonomy vis-a vis the enemies they are going to defeat and at the same time they seek support who actively or passively assist them".<sup>36</sup> In this context, it is important to note that subaltern categories that participated in the 1969 uprising were not homogenous social categories. Since we are defining subalternity in terms of its relation to hegemonic construct in the context of the state, subalternity is, indeed, a heterogeneous ensemble. In the late 1960's East Bengal subalternity included urban proletariat, radicalized students, peasants, and various factions of petty bourgeoisie like professionals, teachers, intellectuals, writers, etc. In this heterogeneous ensemble of subalterns, it is quite obvious that it would adopt various strategies in the course of struggle to subvert state power. This difference in strategy is further qualified, if we see that the state deploys power differently in a different context and its manifestations are also myriad. The subaltern strategy of *gherao*<sup>37</sup> should be explained from that perspective. On the basis of the various ensemble of subaltern, we could, for analysis of its participation in anti-authoritarian revolt, identify two trends of *gherao*; 1) *gherao* by trade unionist and urban professional groups, 2) *gherao* by the rural subaltern categories. Various professional groups were mobilized and participated in the uprising for the fulfillment of their immediate economic gains like salary increase. For example, on March 19, 1969, various professional groups especially, the employees of government, semi-government, and autonomous organizations started *gherao* campaigns for various demands that included salary increase and other benefits. This category of professionals included workers from hospitals, provincial secretariats (administrative center) and transportation sector. On the same day, professionals from state banks and insurance companies from Dhaka City office also *gheraoed* their respective offices

<sup>35</sup> Gramsci 1971: 268.

<sup>36</sup> Gramsci 1971: 53.

<sup>37</sup> *Gherao* is Bangla word that stands for an act of occupying the premise of offices or industries and not allowing the owners/managers to leave until specific demands are met.

and refused to withdraw until their demands were met. Among the urban social classes, it was the various trade unionists representing various factions of urban working classes that showed the most militant character that spread, in a very short time, all over the country. On March 10, 1969, twenty thousand workers from Platinum and Jubilee Jute Mills in Khulna, southwest of Bangladesh, *gheraoed* the owners' office and proclaimed that the *gherao* would continue unless the owners met their demands. The workers, finally, left the premises when the owners met with worker representatives and agreed to the demands of the workers. On March 11, 1969 in the Tangi industrial area near Dhaka, workers from Satrang Textile Mills, *gheraoed* the mill managers' office and demanded the rehiring of workers who were fired earlier for participating in strikes. In this instance too, workers left when the managers met the demand. Both of these instances of *gherao* were reported in Adamji Jute Mills, on March 11, 1969, and Ajex Jute Mills both in Narayangonj near Dhaka and Khulna Jute Mills in Khulna, Kohinur Chemical Company and Bata Shoe Company in Dhaka on March 15, 1969.

The most important aspect of this *gherao* movement was the participation of the rural subaltern masses especially by peasants. This participation according to Kamal<sup>38</sup> took an unprecedented turn in late February and early March of 1969. This could explain the spontaneous peasant outburst against the cattle thieves whom they identified as their immediate enemy. This agitation was, indeed, related to the overall uprising of 1969. Kamal<sup>39</sup> argued that the Krishak Samity, a peasant organization, started the whole agitation but soon it took an unprecedented spontaneous turn. Maulana Bhashani called on one of the leaders of this movement, Abdul Malek Mia, told Kamal (1985: 75), at the height of anti-Ayub movement, and another peasant organizer Kasimuddin Dewan from Tangail area, and argued that unless the peasants were rescued from the cattle thieves, the broad based anti-Ayub movement would not be possible at the local level. So in early February of 1969, numerous gatherings were organized against the cattle thieves. Quite a few houses owned by thieves were *gheraoed* and they were apprehended and brought to the "people's court." After a brief trial, they were given different sentences like fines, breaking of legs and hands with bamboo and in a few instances even death. When the culprits were not in the house, quite often, it was burned. On such an occasion in Tangail, on one early February morning of 1969, about fifteen thousand peasants assembled. They started a "long march" to catch cattle thieves who were

<sup>38</sup> Kamal 1985: 75.

<sup>39</sup> Kamal 1985: 75.



living under the protection of a powerful local *sardars* (chief). During the "long march", villagers voluntarily identified the thieves' houses and at least ten thieves were apprehended and summarily executed. This type of agitation soon spread in other districts like Comilla, Pabna, Jessore and Dinajpur. In this context of spontaneous outburst against local oppressor, an obvious question must be asked. Where were the police and other law and order authorities? Why did peasant masses take the law in their own hands? Answers for these questions are not hard to find. Kamal (1985: 77)<sup>40</sup> argued that there was always an alliance between the thieves, local police and powerful landowners in the villages. In one instance villagers caught a few thieves and handed them over to the police for proper prosecution, but within a few days, to their dismay, the villagers realized that the thieves were being freed to start their activities again. Quite often a thief would steal cattle from the peasants and keep it in the houses of landowners or the chairman of the union council, head of the local administrators. Then the cattle owners were informed that they had to pay a "ransom" in order to get their cattle back. Since local law and order authority was not of much help to them to get their cattle back, the peasants would pay the "ransom" which would then be distributed among the thieves, police, and land owners. On a few occasions, peasants would attack police stations and other government offices in retaliation against cattle stealing.

In brief, *ghareao*, though extra-legal agitation against the local oppressors, had proven to be an effective tool against the localized power relations by the oppressed subaltern masses.

### Spontaneity and the Emergence of Radical Subjectivity

Foucault in *The Subject and Power* argued that his works are an attempt to show how modern modalities of power transform human beings to subjects. Following this clue, I would like to argue that in the context of the revolt of 1968 in East Bengal, for a subaltern categories, counter-hegemonic strivings and participation in resistance movements constitute an important criterion for the process of subjectification and the emergence of a radical subjectivity. This is, indeed, a response to the processes of deployment of power by the Pakistani post-colonial state. What emerged immediately after the revolt of 1969 was a radical collective subjectivity that had redefined the power/resistance nexus. Does the notion of spontaneity play any role in this transformation?

<sup>40</sup> Kamal 1985: 77.

Gramsci,<sup>41</sup> while mentioning that "spontaneity" as the "history of the subaltern classes," argued that a "pure spontaneity" does not exist and "spontaneity" should be linked with what he called "conscious leadership" which for Gramsci, I believe, derives only from a working class party. In East Bengal, during the revolt of 1968, this link between subaltern spontaneity and "conscious leadership," in this case urban petty bourgeoisie leadership, was never established. Though "conscious leadership" sought the support of the subaltern classes, on many occasions there was apparent "joint action" between these two categories, but the interests of these two remained polar opposites and fractured. Furthermore, it should be clear by now that in relation to Pakistani historical bloc, both Bengali petty bourgeoisie "consciousness leadership" and other Bengali social groups constitute the subalternity categories, but the revolt of 1968 - 69 paved the construction of a radical subaltern subjectivity in *difference* with and *independent* from petty bourgeoisie "conscious leadership." In other words, the emergence of a radical collective subjectivity indicates the formation of "subalternity within subalternity."

It might be clear from the last two sections that the peasants in Magura started the revolt in western East Bengal. From the beginning, it was quite apparent that two largest parties, Awami League and National Awami Party (NAP), did not have any clear-cut strategy to channel the growing public anger into a militant political program. The Awami League leader, Sheikh Mujib, during the early phase of the revolt was in jail. Although his party, with its six-points program, voiced seemingly nationalistic concerns, but this nationalism could be identified as "elite nationalism," as it was directed to deny the West Pakistan bourgeoisie class its social base in East Bengal and replaced by the Bengali urban middle class. The Bengali urban middle class and the rising Bengali bourgeoisie supported the subaltern demands to the extent that it did not threaten its overall grip on the situations and were always afraid of a "war of movement", a frontal assault by subaltern categories. It supported mass mobilization, hartals, and other subversive acts but was always eager to maintain a firm grip on the situations. This is what, Guha,<sup>42</sup> in the context of anti-British agitation by Congress Party during the colonial period, called "discipline and mobilize". The emergence of radical subaltern subjectivity, during the revolt period and afterwards, should be understood in this context of difference.

<sup>41</sup> Gramsci 1971:196.

<sup>42</sup> Guha 1997:100-50.

However, this difference between mainstream political parties and emerging radical subjectivity was most pronounced with the idea of a Round Table Conference, proposed by the beleaguered Pakistani historical bloc for discussion between the bloc and opposition politicians, to be held on March 1969. The oppositional parties that were opposing the existing historical bloc were eager to join the conference as old equilibrium within the bloc had been disrupted by the subaltern agitation and the necessity of a new historical bloc formulation became acute. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman who was released on February 22, 1969, also expressed his willingness to attend the conference. It is interesting to note that while Sheikh Mujib was in jail, most of the Bengali opposition leaders refused to attend the conference, but once he was freed, the last obstacle for attending the conference was removed. However, to the embattled Pakistani historical bloc, the conference supposedly served two purposes: 1) to rearrange the components of the historical bloc; and 2) to gradually incorporate those factions of the oppositional politics within the "new and improved" historical bloc. This conference, however, as mentioned before, shows the rupture and the difference between mainstream (consciousness leadership) political parties and subaltern subjectivity. Let us go back to Bhashani and his role in all this.

As mentioned before, on January 10, 1969, an alliance among students of Dhaka University was formed, and this alliance, on January 14, 1969, declared the eleven-points program. This program incorporated various socio-economic demands that reflected various subaltern concerns. Bhashani immediately supported the eleven-points program. When the Pakistan state and its leader, Field Marshall Ayub Khan, announced the Round Table Conference, Bhashani called for an alliance between students, workers, peasants and other subaltern forces to realize the eleven-points program proposed by the student alliance and refused to attend the conference until the points had been fulfilled. When Sheikh Mujib was released from jail, he met with Bhashani who advised him not to attend the conference. To Bhashani, it was designed to derail the movement. Sheikh Mujib attended the conference that was held in Rawalpindi, West Pakistan, between March 10 to 13, 1969. The political decisions that Pakistan state and oppositional parties agreed on were timing of a general election and establishing a parliamentary form of government. This is indeed a classic case of passive revolution. Bhashani, on the other hand, continued his agitation. In a speech at Chiora, eastern East Bengal, he argued that peasants, agricultural workers, laborers, lower salaried people were defying bullets and struggling for a just society, and would not stop until such a society was

established.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, in an unflattering report in *Time*, that identified Bhashani as a "prophet of violence," said he was very popular among the peasants and lower classes.<sup>44</sup> The report quoted him saying, "my religion is revolutionary, and I am a religious man. Therefore, it is my religion to rise up against *wrong*"<sup>45</sup> After the Round Table Conference, Bhashani's politics of subversion continued and he consistently argued that change in the government always failed to bring economic and political change.

Thus, following Bhashani's politics during the revolt of 1969, it could be argued that while mainstream politicians, through their passive revolution, tried to arrive at a negotiated settlement with the Pakistani historical bloc, the subaltern categories emerged as a radical collective subject with different political agendas and strategy.

### Conclusion: Quest for a Political Community

The elite historiography of the creation of Pakistan often argued that it was a demand for a homeland for all the Muslims of India. This demand was placed by arguing that in post-colonial Hindu India, the rights of Muslims will not be fulfilled. However, this universalist colonial discourse of Muslim League "leading" the demand for "Muslim Pakistan," as explained before, experienced immediate difficulties. The technique of rule that Pakistani post-colonial state adopted could be identified as what Guha called *dominance without hegemony* which is a situation of domination "in which the movement of persuasion outweigh that of coercion without (...) eliminating it altogether." The technique to deploy power by the Pakistan post-colonial governmentality and its various rationalities are, indeed, symptoms of the conditions of *dominance without hegemony*. The revolt of 1969 suggests that Bengalis sought to construct a new political community alternative to the Pakistani state and its situation of *dominance without hegemony*. The quest for the alternative community rested on the premise of the Pakistan state's Islamic universalism, where the specificity of Bengali was denied. Even in 1958, when the civilian historical bloc was overthrown by a military coup and capitalist industrialization was introduced as a rationality, Islam remained the single most important hegemonic construct. The revolt of 1969 was an outcome of all these rationalities, its failure and its

<sup>43</sup> Maksud 1994:326.

<sup>44</sup> *Time*, April 18, 1969.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

rejection. The mainstream Bengali political parties also participated in the revolt but their main concerns, however, were to position themselves close to the state power. The subaltern categories, on the other hand, participated in the revolt to propose an alternative politics and a notion of a political community that were indeed at odds with mainstream politicians and political parties. This contradiction or tension between these two world views has important methodological implications, as the history of the 1969 revolt should be written on the basis of not only a conflict between the Pakistani post-colonial governmentality and the Bengalis, but also the rupture or schism between the Bengali petty bourgeoisie political leadership and various subaltern categories. What is the genesis of the political community that the Bengali subalterns, through protest, tried to establish? The answer to this question is the idea of civil society.

Following Gramsci<sup>46</sup> if we define civil society in terms of separate space between the state and the private spheres, then Bangladesh has a long tradition of a strong and vibrant civil society. In the pre-British period, the idea of a civil society existed in the context of individual property rights and social responsibilities. Thus, the property relations provided the idea of power and social responsibilities, creating the foundation of exchange relations. This was the foundation of the relationship between the propertied and lower class. This character of civil society in pre-colonial Bengal was radically altered with the advent of colonialism. Colonialism replaced the individual property rights into state rights within a capitalist system. During the Pakistani colonial rule (1947-1971), the state continued to violate the independent space of civil society and the conflict between the Pakistani colonial state and the Bengali civil society reached its peak during the revolt of 1969. In other words, the revolt of 1969 exemplified the struggle for the retaking of the violated space of civil society by the Bengalis. However, the idea of civil society needs to be read in the context of Foucault's notion of governmentality that argued the modern modalities of power entrenched in every aspect of social life that cut across the liberal divide between the state and civil society.<sup>47</sup> In other words, it would be wrong to see the state as a domain of coercion and force and civil society, in contrast, as a zone of freedom.

The idea of (Foucault's) governmentality...insists that by exercising itself through forms of representation, and hence by offering itself as an aspect of the self-disciplining of the very population over which it is exercised, the

modern form of power, whether inside or outside the domain of the state, is capable of allowing for an immensely flexible braiding of coercion and consent.<sup>48</sup>

Thus, when we discuss civil society as an "autonomous domain," one needs to keep in mind the problematic concerns of civil society that it is not immune from omnipotent presence of power. However, to explain the quest for a new political community articulated during the revolt of 1969, we once again return to Maulana Bhashani's politics.

It is true that Bhashani's politics contains a strong religious component in it. But the Islam that Bhashani was interested in could be identified as "popular Islam" where cultural and historical specificities were emphasised and orthodox and strict textual interpretation of the Islamic text was shunned. Indeed, a deeply religious man Bhashani was all his life a staunch opponent of religion-based politics and political parties. He preached the Islamic ideal of *Insuff* (justice) and struggled to establish *Insaniatte* (citizenship based on justice and equal rights). This idea, though Islamic, Bhashani articulated in terms of citizenship that was based on religious pluralism and democratic principles. Bhashani's politics spanned seventy-six years that incorporated the struggle against three different types of state power- British, Pakistan and finally post-colonial Bangladesh. Jahangir<sup>49</sup> argued that Bhashani's struggle is based on a combination of millenarian, Gandhi and Islamic missionaries' ideal that runs counter to the all-successive state power. As I have mentioned before, Bhashani's vision of civil society was essentially pluralistic where religious, economic and cultural hegemony and homogeneity are resisted. The revolt of 1969 and Bhashani's role were to create that type of political community.

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<sup>46</sup> Gramsci 1971.

<sup>47</sup> Chatterjee 1995:31

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