

WOMEN LEADERSHIP IN THE EMERGENCE OF BANGLADESH: A STUDY ON BANGAMATA SHEIKH FAZILATUNNESA MUJIB

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Abstract

The emancipation of Bangladesh occupies a significant place in world history. Both men and women of Bangladesh valiantly participated in the liberation struggle and consequently, in the nation-building process. However, throughout the long period, liberation has been constructed as an exclusively male endeavour that ignores the contribution made by women in the process of bringing the nation into being. As women played an active and significant role in the process of constructing this nation, the need is now to reconstruct the traditional ways of representation as well as to see the role of women's leadership in the emergence of Bangladesh with a special focus on the life of Bangamata Sheikh Fazilatunnesa Mujib. In this regard, accommodating qualitative research methodology, more specifically the feminist research approach, this paper aims to explore the leadership of Bangamata by adorning the 'Behavioural Theory of Leadership' along with 'Transformational Leadership Theory' that emphasizes the actions, not on mental or inner characteristics of a leader. These theories centre on how an individual's surroundings structure that person into a leader. This paper has depicted the leadership of Bangamata in the creation of Bangladesh and its political-economic journey onwards.

Keywords: Bangamata, Liberation War, Leadership, Patriarchy, Gender Identity, Subjectivity

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Introduction

The history of human civilization cannot avoid wars and their devastating impact on the lives of people, both wo/men. War changes many social equations, but patriarchal and culturally prejudiced societies are worst affected (Deb, 2021). The 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War is an example. It showed how wars are gendered and how academic history overlooks women's contributions. Bangladesh gained independence in 1971 after a nine-month bloody war with Pakistan. The war site documents genocide, violence, torture, and psychological terror. The mainstream narrative of the liberation war emphasizes men's bravery while downplaying women's. Popular war stories glorify masculine valour and the number and narration of women sexually violated (Brownmiller, 1975). Ironically, women in the liberation war were mostly sexually assaulted and labelled "war victims" (Deb, 2021). Liberation war is no exception to society's longstanding tradition of silencing women. Few studies have examined women's leadership in Bangladesh's liberation struggle. Bangamata Sheikh Fazilatunnesa Mujib's leadership in Bangladesh's founding has also been understated in history. This study examined Bangamata's life to portray and analyse her leadership academically. "We know Nelson Mandela, Mahatma Gandhi, and Subhas Chandra Bose. Unfortunately, we know little about Bangamata, who silently helped create Bangladesh and sacrificed everything for it. It is our shame." Aroma Dutta's words reflect the lack of discussion on Bangamata's leadership and inspiration. This paper portrays and analyses Bangamata Sheikh Fazilatunnesa Mujib's leadership in Bangladesh's emancipation, filling a gap in women's leadership studies. This paper has five parts. The first part deals with Leadership, Women, and the Emergence of Bangladesh: An Unheeded Issue. Part B covers paper concepts and analysis. Part C covers Methodological Considerations, while Part D covers Bangamata Leadership: An Amalgamation of Learning, Observance, and Actions. In the end, this paper presents a discussion and conclusion.

Part A: Leadership, Women, and the Emergence of Bangladesh: An Unheeded Issue

The liberation war of Bangladesh has demonstrated one of the most brutal, barbaric, and inhuman tyrannies on mass people by the Pakistani Army. The year 1971 marks a global bloodbath. Although both men and women contributed to Bangladesh's 1971 liberation war, the war's history is mostly pro-men, ignoring women's sacrifices and contributions. One common narrative of the war is that Bangladesh gained independence from the blood of three million martyrs and the loss of honour of two hundred thousand women (Begum, 2020). In a patriarchal

society, this is not unusual. The dominant social-political-economic structure of society creates and re-creates the standard of reality (Hall, 2000). Women's role in nation-building is not "seen and heard" in a society where women's voices are muted from the start. Patriarchal societies view women as passive victims of war. More importantly, such constructed reality illustrates how patriarchal societies shape national historiographies. The masculine valour and heroism of *Muktijoddhas* (freedom fighters) are profoundly placed in every story plotted on the liberation war. Women are labelled war victims and tortured while held captive. The first Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, honoured the spellbound women as Birangona (Bengali for war heroine) after the liberation war. However, portraying women's leadership and role in Bangladesh's liberation war is incomplete (Gayen, 2015).

Women, parallel to men, participated in the said war by glorifying their roles as fighters, helping hands, cooks, messengers, diplomats, motivators, medical assistants, and, last but not least, mothers (Bhuiyan and Dipu, 2020). Some, but very few narratives illuminate the political economy of wartime women leaders. Bangamata's role in the liberation war is not well-studied. All the works glorify men as fathers of the nation, freedom fighters, war heroes, and so on. Literature portrays Bangamata as a supportive wife, describing her personality, likes and dislikes, humility, and deeds. Nevertheless, her life and actions need to be studied and analysed thoroughly to understand her leadership which remains buried under the 'patriarchal' depiction of an ideal and sacrificing wife.

Part B: Concepts and Theoretical Framework

i. Patriarchy and Culture

The word patriarchy comes from ancient Greek and means "the dominion of the father." In Old Testament herding cultures, the father had complete control over his household (LeGates, 2001: 11-12). According to Lerner, patriarchy developed historically around the patriarchal family, men, and women. Patriarchy is "the institutionalization and manifestation of a continuation of male domination over women in society as a whole, as well as male dominance over women and children in the home" (Lerner, 1986: 239). Radical feminist Kate Millett used this concept to describe masculine dominance over women. Patriarchy is "a set of social relations with a material foundation that permits men to dominate women" (Cain et al., 1979: 406). They say,

In Bangladesh, patriarchy describes a distribution of power and resources within families such that men maintain power and control of resources, and women are powerless and dependent on men. The material base of patriarchy is men's control of property, income, and women's labour (Cain et al., 1979: 406).

ii. Power

The term "power" has strong normative implications, irrespective of the processes that are associated with this label, which influence its perception as oppressive or as an agent of change (Leder, 2016). It has diversity in authority dynamics, actors, structures, and observable and latent factors (Koester, 2015). We want to strengthen ties while acknowledging power. Foucault (1982) claims that social networks discursively construct subjects to model power disparities that affect institutions and conventions. Power protects the powerful by influencing values and institutional processes, coercing the weak and sometimes blinding them to challenges and alternatives. According to Foucault, these factors range from historical precedent to state-building to enforce discipline. This shows how gender dominance is nurtured rather than imposed. Women become objects and must adapt to power dynamics. Foucault's emphasis on power's constant transformation suggests women must resist attempts to mould them if they want freedom and power.

iii. Empowerment

The origin of empowerment is closely associated with terms like "awareness," "ability," "agency," and "power." It began as an awareness of the oppressed against the oppressor (Freire, 2020). Empowerment transforms economic, social, and political relationships, according to Sen (2000). Rolands (1998) broadens empowerment to collective interests. Kabeer (1999) defines empowerment as acquiring the ability to control actions (agency) to achieve goals (achievement). "Ability" or "capability" can refer to the autonomy of choice (Sen, 1990) or human dignity related to the quality of life (Nusbaum, 2000). Longwe (1995) proposes a more operational view of empowerment based on welfare, access to resources, consciousness and awareness, participation and mobility, and environmental control. Now, keeping the focus on autonomy from the various linkages we have discussed, there should be a psychological aspect of striving for improvement against social limits to power (Stromquist, 1995). Empowerment is the ability to change the status quo by becoming the subject of power dynamics. We are considering the male-dominated or female-disempowered behavioural and practical paradigm. Without power as a subject, resources, and agencies cannot translate agent control into social network control of institutions and customs (Kabeer, 1999).

iv. Subjectivity

French feminist Luce Irigaray (1985a) deconstructed the traditional idea of 'subjectivity'. She believes society's "subject" is male-defined. Females are ignored or objectified. Freud called women "lesser versions of males" when discussing sexuality. Irigaray argued that Freud's description of female sexuality is problematic. Freud cannot know how a woman feels, decides, or experiences sexuality as a man (p. 134-41). Irigaray adds that even female philosophers must use masculine language. A female philosopher defining female sexuality must first learn Freud's theories and then expand them. Irigaray claims this process turns women into men. Females cannot have opinions or become "subjects" (Irigaray, 1985a, p. 140-41).

v. Identity

This idea of a collaborative identity presents "an image of how movement activists challenge the dominant cultural order through the process of constructing their individual and collective identities where several third parties take part in the construction process" (Chowdhury 2006: 336). According to Mellucci:

Collective identity [links] personal change with external action, collective action functions as a new medium that illuminates the silent and arbitrary elements of the dominant codes as well as publicizes new alternatives (Mellucci in Haque 2015: 254).

If we want to understand the emergence of the leadership role of Bangamata Sheikh Fazilatunnesa Mujib we have to understand the above concept of patriarchy, culture, subjectivity, and identity along with empowerment. She could flourish her subjectivity, and identity within the patriarchal socio-cultural context and could empower herself and could play significant leadership during pre and post-independent Bangladesh.

Theoretical Framework

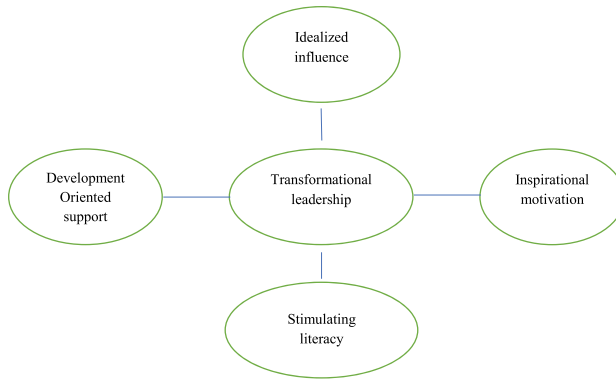
"Leaders in the business world should aspire to be true planetary citizens. They have global responsibilities since their decisions affect not only the world of business, but world problems of poverty, national security, and the environment" (Roddick, 1992, p. 226). This quote reflects leadership on a universal ground irrespective of any gender discussion as it is found that the gender of leaders empirically has affected the reactions of their subordinates (Garcia and López-Zafra, 2006). Sheikh Fazilatunnesa Mujib's leadership and contributions to Bangladesh's emancipation

are therefore crucial in a patriarchal society like Bangladesh, where women's lives are governed by patriarchal norms. This study uses the "Behavioural Theory of Leadership" and "Transformational Leadership Theory" to illustrate the scenario. Both theories demonstrate female leadership's individual and collective value. The autonomous and flexible actions of a female leader from behavioural theory challenge patriarchal boundaries, and leader-people relations from transformational theory expand the horizon beyond the patriarchal paradigm.

The behavioural theory of leadership centres on how an individual's surroundings, not inherent capacities, the structure that person into a pioneer (Higgs, 2003). One of the crucial aspects of this theory is conditioning which means that an individual is expected to act or lead in a specific manner due to environmental responses to behaviour (Yukl, 1971). By emphasizing the development of specific behaviours and actions, this theory enables leaders to incorporate their cultural and personal identities into their leadership approach. Sometimes termed the style theory, it proposes that leaders are not always naturally successful, yet can be made based on their behavioural attributes. It supports empowerment by emphasizing that leadership skills can be learned and developed, allowing individuals to take charge of their growth and development as leaders. This theory intensively emphasizes the actions of a leader as it posits that the best indicator of successful leadership is seeing how a leader acts. It, therefore, encourages agency by suggesting that individuals can choose to adopt specific behaviours and actions that will make them more effective leaders. The Behavioural theory enjoys numerous benefits principally that individuals can learn and choose what activities they need to carry out to turn into the sort of leader they want to be. This approach allows for greater personal autonomy and self-determination in the development of leadership skills. This flexibility enables leaders to adapt their approach based on their own experiences and the specific context in which they are operating. Another incredible advantage of this theory is that it argues anybody is capable of becoming a leader irrespective of class, gender, race, and religious identity (Davis & Luthans, 1979). By focusing on behaviours, this theory allows for a more equitable distribution of power, as it suggests that anyone can become a leader regardless of gender, background, or inherent traits. It challenges patriarchal norms and promotes greater gender equality in leadership positions through the development of specific behaviours and actions. However, while it permits flexibility, it does not straightforwardly recommend how to act in specific situations (Rowley et al., 2010) which in turn, widens the avenue for implementing a leader's learning, knowledge, and experience according to the unique circumstances and contexts. According to the Behavioural

theory, an efficient leader would have qualities like exceptional “communication skills, sympathy, and empathy”- traits that would enable them to be concerned about people around them (Jogulu & Wood, 2006).

Burns (1978) originally put out the theory of transformational leadership to distinguish between leaders who have strong relationships of motivation with their followers and subordinates and those who place a heavy emphasis on trade to produce results. Leaders who work to develop new concepts and viewpoints for the organization’s growth and prosperity are referred to as practicing transformational leadership. They mobilize the organization’s members to make fundamental changes to the organization’s foundation and basis to be ready and to gain the necessary capabilities for moving in new directions and reaching higher ideal performance peaks by cultivating commitment, passion, and loyalty among managers and staff. With the promotion of agency and self-efficacy, transformational leaders can empower people and emphasize the importance of giving individuals the tools and resources they need to succeed. The goal of the transformational leader is to convert followers’ private interests into group interests by calling their attention to greater demands and continually seeking potential motives in them. Transformational leaders can therefore help people feel more engaged and committed to their work, which emphasizes autonomy and self-determination regarding the importance of individuals having control over their own lives and actions. Transformational leadership, according to Bass and Avolio, is a cognitive, moral, and spiritual process that offers organizational development patterns through dependable equal power leadership. By fostering strong relationships and motivation, transformational leaders can encourage collaboration, dismantling patriarchal power structures that privilege certain groups over others. Transformational leaders promote acceptance of group goals developing a culture of valuing subjectivity, individual identity, belonging, and mutual respect, a response against the stereotypical bias of gendered discrimination and marginalization. They offer a variety of forms of support for employees and motivate people to pursue the organization’s objectives by outlining the organization’s prospects and providing a model commensurate with those prospects (Moradi & Shahbazi 2016).



Factors influence transformational leadership (Adapted from Moradi Korejan, M. and Shahbazi, H. An analysis of the transformational leadership theory. J. Fundam. Appl. Sci., 2016, 8(3S), P: 458)

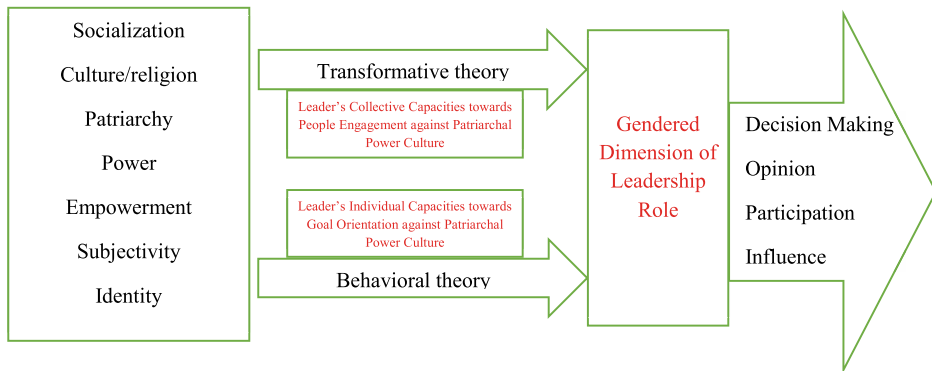


Fig: Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

Part C: Methodological Considerations

This research is underpinned by feminist research methodology. Feminist research methodology reveals the questions from the perspective of women’s experiences. It also uses women’s perspectives as a significant indicator of the reality against which hypothesis are tested (Harding 1987). Feminist epistemology was chosen because this paper focused on women and their different experiences and perceptions from men. It showed Bongamata’s leadership role, which men never have. The paper uses “beyond methodology” (Fonow & Cook, 1991). The research used discourse and content analysis. The qualitative paper used primary and secondary sources to ensure triangulation and validity. An oral history questionnaire collected primary data. Content analysis was used to review historical archives, documents, books,

articles, reports, websites, journals, and films about Bangladesh's liberation. The study's nature and goal dictated "purposive sampling" for respondent selection. The paper's goal was to select respondents who had seen Bangamata, interacted with her, and studied her life. After this, only four in-depth Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were conducted to understand Bangamata's leadership.

Due to government Covid-19 movement restrictions, three interviews were conducted face-to-face and two via Zoom. Interviews were recorded and written down in a new notebook with respondents' permission. The research team debriefed each interview. Interviews averaged 44 minutes and respondents received no gifts or financial benefits. Due to schedule conflicts and the COVID-19 pandemic, the research team was unable to interview Bangladesh's Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her sister Sheikh Rehana to discuss their mother's glorious and significant role in Bangladesh's history.

Part D: Leadership of Bangamata: An Amalgamation of Learning, Observance and Actions

There is a widely heard saying that behind every successful man, there is a righteous woman. Words will fall short to narrate the contribution of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to Bangladesh. It is nearly impossible to capture it in a framework. It is also a fact that Bangamata- the most constant and reliable companion of Bangabandhu throughout his life has always been shadowed by the mountainous image of her husband at least until recently. However, literatures suggest that she played a crucial role during the political upheavals of the then East Pakistan. This chapter will unearth/take a deeper look into her leadership that has changed the course of the history of Bangladesh forever.

The Rise of a Shadow Leader

Bengali patriarchal culture views women as carers, not decision-makers, influencers, or leaders. When we look back at the 20th century, the grip of patriarchy was much stronger- a timeframe which Bangamata belonged to. She was able to break patriarchal chains with family support. Bangamata was adopted by her in-laws after losing her parents and grandfather at seven. She was raised with Bangabandhu whom she considered as her playmate and friend. Bangabandhu and her became the closest friends who could share everything. She completed her primary education in a joint family at her in-laws, a dream at the time when girls' education was neglected. Although she could not attain much academic education, she was fond of reading books, varying from literature to philosophy and politics.

She discussed book topics with Bangabandhu when he visited his family (Begum, 2020; Ibrahim, 1995). These discussions allowed her to observe Bangabandhu's ideology and personality and gain wisdom that would shape her future. Professor Nasreen Ahmed opines:

Bangamata was not that much academically educated, but she gradually equipped herself through her observation of the surroundings, through her dealings with Bangabandhu and with others. She learnt to understand things in her own ways, analyse things according to the situations, and develop her own perception (Dhaka, February 2022).

Bangabandhu used to discuss about politics, philosophy and share his thoughts and ideology with Bangamata- his constant companion and attentive disciple (Begum, 2020). As Bangamata was a good listener and observer, she gradually adopted Bangabandhu's ideology which circles around secularism, humanity, compassion, patriotism and love for the people. Hence, she became politically conscious and a political expert as well. To what extent she believed in her husband's ideology and adopted it within herself can be exemplified by the tumultuous incidents during the communal riots across Bengal and Bihar in 1946. Her mental and physical condition was not good as she was traumatized with their first child's death. During that period, Bangabandhu was relentlessly working for the victims of riots under the leadership of Hussain Shaheed Suhrawardy- the mentor and a father-figure to Bangabandhu. Suhrawardy was well-aware of the deteriorating condition of Bangamata and advised Bangabandhu to be with her side instead of being deployed to Bihar. After hearing this, Bangamata immediately sent a letter to Bangabandhu in which she wrote, "You were not born to be my husband only, you have to work for the country as well which should be your priority. Do not worry about me and do your work. Allah will take care of me" (Chowdhury, A.G., 2021, p. 47).

In her journey towards becoming a politically conscious person, Bangabandhu never considered her a mere disciple, he always regarded her as a reliable companion who could provide an analytical and pragmatic suggestion, and even oppose anything that she considered improper. With that utter trust and respect, Bangabandhu regularly shared political issues with her and sought her opinion. It was like a daily routine (Begum, 2020; Ibrahim, 1995).

On March 22, 1971, Bangabandhu was in a dilemma about hoisting the flag of Bangladesh at his residence on the following day (March 23) which happened to be Pakistan Day- a significant day in the history of Pakistan. There was tremendous pressure on Bangabandhu to hoist Bangladesh's flag on March 23, but he was

quite uncomfortable as it might seem like treason to the country. Under such an anxious situation, he sought suggestions from Bangamata- his reliable and realist advisor. As expected she came up with a brilliant idea and advised that students must hand over the flag to Bangabandhu first and then that he would hoist it. This act would keep him safe from any potential accusations of treason or *lese-majeste* as it could be strongly argued that Bangabandhu showed respect to what people wanted. Bangabandhu followed his wife's advice simply, and he hoisted Bangladesh's flag over his residence on March 23, 1971. This incident portrays the extent of Bangabandhu's respect and reliance on his wife's advice (Chowdhury, A.G., 2021).

However, it was not a one-way process i.e., only Bangabandhu was initiating the discussions and asked for her opinions. It was a both way approach where Bangamata proactively participated, ignited the discussion and placed her thoughts in her own ways. In Aroma Dutta's words:

Bangamata used to discuss on almost every issue with Bangabandhu and the dining table was her favourite spot. It was like a regular practice. She willingly shared her thoughts on national issues and gave her opinions. She was highly dedicated towards politics and made clear comments. She was a good analyst and never expressed her thoughts without a thorough analysis (Dhaka, March 2020).

Whenever Bangamata felt necessary, she used to discuss and give her opinions and suggestions to Bangabandhu. The story behind Bangabandhu's emergence as a writer can be considered an outstanding example of this aspect. Professor Atiur Rahman opines:

It was Bangamata who was instrumental in motivating Bangabandhu to write his memoirs- a "goldmine" of the history of Bangladesh. We would have known very little about the struggles of Bangabandhu and the exact history of our liberation had she not been insistent on him writing his memoirs (Dhaka, March 2022).

From Bangabandhu's own words we came to know that Bangamata inspired him to write his memoirs (Rahman, 2012). Hossain Shaheed Suhrawardy, Sher-e-Bangla A.K Fazlul Haque, and Moulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani did not write about their lives and struggles, so the nation lacks a detailed and accurate history. Bangamata foresaw the importance of writing, and the rest is history.

Another crucial event depicts Bangamata's proactive stance in providing suggestions to her husband during a tense situation in March 1971. Bangabandhu discussed the political stalemate with President Yahya Khan and Zulfikar Ali

Bhutto for over a week without success. Bangamata warned her husband on March 23 that any compromise with Yahya and Bhutto would anger the public, who wanted independence. However, the Pakistani military would wait to kill him (Chowdhury, A.M., 2021). This marks how bold and prescient she was in making her statements.

Leadership of Bangamata: From an Advisor to a Leader

Bangabandhu faced countless hurdles and went through tough times throughout his entire political life. 6-point movement, Agartala conspiracy case, mass uprising in 1969, the speech of 7th March, and flag hoisting on 23rd March can be considered the most significant events when Bangabandhu was the prime leader of the Bengali nation. Literatures suggest that throughout this entire troublesome period, Bangamata consistently supported her husband and provided him with such invaluable suggestions that shaped the future. Focusing particularly on this point, Abdul Mannan Chowdhury (2021) indicates that Bangamata has mostly been portrayed as an advisor, a follower and a constant companion of Bangabandhu. However, reflecting on her role in national politics where she actively participated, assumed leadership in critical times he rather considers Bangamata as a *de facto* veteran politician. Aroma Dutta opines in a similar manner:

There should be no doubt that she [Bangamata] was a politician and a leader. She was a super challenge taker and brave women, who in the face of overwhelming male dominance, never hesitated to raise her voice and guided towards the right direction (Dhaka, March 2020).

Bangamata has left a permanent impression in the history of Bangladesh with her bold stand in numerous crucial occasions. At the height of the 6-point movement when Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was imprisoned, the Ayub junta left no stone unturned to foil the uprising. Many factions were created within the political sphere of East Pakistan and to counter the original 6 points, a countering ‘8 points’ demand was placed by some of the prominent political colleagues and companions of Sheikh Mujib in his absence. It was a well-devised plan orchestrated by the regime to divert people’s attention from the 6 points which was being gradually turned into one point- independence. On one fateful day, when a nasty political debate was going on at Sheikh Mujib’s residence over the issue of adopting the new 8 points dropping the original 6 points, she strongly intervened, vehemently opposed this idea of changing the core of the movement in the absence of their leader, and firmly declared that those who would not accept the original 6 points should leave the party. Her decision on sticking to the 6 points prevailed surpassing

the desires of many veteran politicians and the movement was saved from any sabotage (Chowdhury, A.M., 2021).

During Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's absence, Bangamata acted like the unofficial leader of Awami League from organizing the party to helping movements financially, and from providing directions to encouraging political workers (Begum, 2020; Chowdhury, A.G., 2021; Chowdhury A.M., 2021; Ibrahim, 1995). She was an excellent politician without a title who could understand the pulse of the people, observe the situation minutely, analyse it critically and then act accordingly. Between 1968-1969, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was detained in the Dhaka Cantonment on the charges of *lese-majeste* and he was the prime accused of the famous Agartala Conspiracy Case along with 34 others. With the 6-point movement being accepted popularly by the laymen, there was a popular uprising demanding the release of the captives and the withdrawal of this case. During that turbulent period, students and party activists relied on Bangamata's guidance and were able to develop broader unity with other student organizations and political parties (Chowdhury A.M., 2021). In a desperate bid to quell the uprising, the then military dictator Ayub Khan proposed a round table discussion in participation with all parties in Pakistan and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was expected to go to Lahore for joining the conference on parole as the head of Awami League. There was also pressure on Sheikh Mujib from his political colleagues like Aatur Rahman Khan, Abul Mansur Ahmed, Tofazzal Hossain and others to attend the session accepting Ayub Khan's proposal. However, Bangamata vehemently opposed to allowing her husband to be paroled and to take part in the roundtable discussion. She was so adamant about her decision that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman complied and refused to attend the conference. She understood what people wanted, rightly foresaw the course of the movement and its gradual conversion into mass uprising and decided to stick to people's cause. This incident paved the way for the unconditional release of all the captives and the revival of the 'one man, one vote' system. The autocratic regime collapsed under immense pressure from the public, and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman emerged as the undisputed leader of the Bengali nation and earned the title, 'Bangabandhu.' (Begum, 2020; Chowdhury, A.M., 2021; Ibrahim, 1995). This success was mainly due to Bangamata's stance, and had she not intervened, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman might not have become 'Bangabandhu.'

Aroma Dutta unveiled a crucial aspect of Bangamata's thought leadership in drafting the 6 points that remained largely undocumented so far. In her own words:

Bangamata contributed in developing the famous 6 points...I can particularly recall two points- one is related to financial & banking issues, and the other one is defence. She made substantial contribution in designing of at least these two points. Her logic behind the defence part was that there was no strong military establishment here [in East Pakistan] and at least the naval headquarters can be transferred to East Pakistan as it is a riverine country, has access to ocean with a glorious naval history (Dhaka, March 2022).

It might seem highly astonishing how a ‘housewife’ who never studied ‘academically’ beyond primary education could intellectually contribute to preparing the famous 6 points- the Magna Carta (Chowdhury, A.M., 2021) of the Bengalis. However, she never stopped studying and learning as Bangabandhu had always been her constant mentor. Aside from her role as a thinker and advisor, her ‘actions’ during the liberation war and post-independence period are also instrumental in portraying her leadership role. During the entire period of the liberation war, Bangamata along with her family was put under house arrest with constant surveillance. However, this could not dissuade her from contributing to the liberation war and she created her way. Nilima Ibrahim (1995) mentioned that during the liberation war, the Pakistan Army burned down Bangabandhu’s paternal house which left his parents homeless. They were not even permitted to stay with Bangamata despite several requests. She, however, took it as an opportunity and devised an outstanding plan which made Nilima Ibrahim doubt that “even an experienced politician like Bangabandhu might not have taken such an action” (p. 59). She requested Dr. Nurul Islam to arrange a cabin for her parents at the P.G Hospital where they could stay and get treatment. Her request was accepted, and she got permission to visit them daily for an hour. Bangamata capitalized on this opportunity and soon the cabin became a junction from where she started getting news from her sons and relatives about the ongoing liberation war. Even this cabin was turned into a covert centre by the freedom fighters for communication using secret codes with support and direction from Bangamata. After the independence of Bangladesh, Bangamata companioned her husband in rebuilding the war-torn country. She particularly devoted herself towards the rehabilitation of the war heroines as they were struggling hard to be accepted into the society. Aroma Dutta recounts:

Bangamata was the main catalyst in rehabilitating and gaining their [war heroines] recognition. She worked relentlessly with Nilima Ibrahim, Sufia Kamal and others to comfort them, arrange treatment and establish them socially. The main challenge was their acceptance into society and in a bid to gain their recognition, she suggested Bangabandhu recognize them as his daughters (Dhaka, March 2022).

Part E: Discussion and Conclusion

Discussion

The story of Sheikh Fazilatunnesa Mujib's transformation from Renu- a simple housewife to Bangamata- the lady behind the stage, displays the process how she turned into a leader even in a highly patriarchal society. This Sheikh Fazilatunnesa Mujib's transformation into Bangamata exemplifies the power, empowerment, agency, subjectivity, and identity of female leadership in the face of patriarchy and cultural expectations. Bangamata's leadership roles and actions challenged traditional gender roles, defied societal norms, and contributed to the empowerment of women in a patriarchal society. Her behavioural and transformational leadership qualities and ability to inspire and mobilize others highlight the potential for women to effect meaningful change, even in challenging circumstances.

i. Advisor and Confidante

As an advisor and confidante to Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Bangamata played a role in providing him with advice and support. This aligns with the transformational leadership theory, which emphasizes the leader's ability to inspire and motivate through personal relationships. It is essential to remember that her advice was always taken into account considering female influence might be limited due to societal norms. This displays her agency and power as a leader, despite operating in a highly patriarchal society. Besides, behavioural theory might not provide specific guidelines on how to act in certain situations, instead, it encourages to apply her own learning and experience to adapt to unique contexts. It is crucial that such adaptability made Bangamata's learning and experiences substantially sufficient to navigate complex political situations effectively. Her ability to contribute unique insights and perspectives challenges the traditional gender norms that restrict women's participation in political decision-making processes.

ii. Support for Organization

Bangamata's involvement in planning and organizing political events demonstrates her skills in facilitating meetings, coordinating logistics, and providing support. It promotes behavioural theory's inclusivity and flexibility, as it allows her to adapt the behaviours to different situations. These involvements demonstrate how she challenged societal expectations regarding gender roles. It becomes more illuminating considering her participation in these events was genuinely empowering since she faced resistance and limitations due to societal expectations.

By actively participating in the logistical aspects of political endeavours, she defied the notion that women's roles are limited to domestic spheres. This highlights the agency and empowerment Bangamata achieved through her leadership role. Furthermore, her involvement in these events led to tangible outcomes justifying her contributions were not mere symbolic.

iii. Mobilizing Women's Political Participation

Bangamata's efforts to mobilize women and encourage their political participation align with both the behavioural and transformational leadership theories. By advocating for women's rights and involvement, she exhibited the behavioural aspect of leadership by actively working to bring about change. Additionally, her ability to inspire and motivate women to join the socio-political movement reflects the transformational aspect of leadership. She certainly had distinguished between building strong motivational relationships with her people and primarily focusing on transactional exchanges to achieve results. These efforts of mobilization and participation are also examples of female empowerment and agency. Her transformational leadership was not limited to specific groups as she was able to inspire and motivate a broader audience. Thus she challenged the patriarchal norms that limit women's engagement in socio-political movements, eventually empowering women to break free from societal constraints and actively contribute to the struggle.

iv. Beyond Symbolic Representation

Bangamata's role as a symbol of fortitude and unity, standing beside Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in public gatherings, represents a transformational aspect of leadership. By providing a visible representation of the Bengali community's resolve and solidarity, she gave them a sense of purpose. Her presence as a strong female figure was universally accepted in an environment of resistance from those who adhered to traditional gender norms, suggesting the charismatic leadership she was. Bangamata had been a source of constant moral support offering consolation, inspiration, and relief while visiting hospitals, war-affected families, and refugee camps. Her endeavours made sure that during a crisis, the essential requirements of the impacted populace were fulfilled. The people engaged in the battle for independence were given courage and inspiration by her presence and encouraging remarks. Additionally, her instrumental presence translated into displaying the power and agency of female leadership in shaping cultural and societal perceptions. Her presence as a strong female figure not only inspired others but also challenged the patriarchal expectations that confine women to supportive, non-visible roles.

v. Diplomatic Engagement

Bangamata's diplomatic engagements and efforts to establish contacts with world leaders highlight a behavioural aspect of leadership, involving communication, networking, and advocacy. It also demonstrates her agency and power as a female leader. Through her interactions with international figures, she promoted the cause of Bangladesh and sought support for the liberation movement. It is essential to remember that her gender were a constraint on her diplomatic efforts, and she faced struggles in gaining support due to societal biases. By this, she defied gender biases in international diplomacy. The gender dimension is that her diplomatic efforts as a woman in a war-led role helped amplify the voice of Bangladesh on the global stage and the notion that women can go beyond their ability to engage in high-stakes political affairs.

vi. Emblem of Resiliency

Bangamata's active role in raising support for the freedom struggle aligns with the behavioural theory, emphasizing the leader's actions in mobilizing and engaging others. Meanwhile, it is important to note that gender biases and stereotypes have historically influenced such leadership roles, particularly in male-dominated fields such as warfare and politics. Women in war-led roles have often faced challenges and barriers due to societal expectations and prejudices. Despite the challenges posed by a patriarchal society, her travels, meetings with political figures, and efforts to raise awareness and sympathy for the cause reflect her leadership qualities. Bangamata, as a woman, played a significant role in garnering support and drawing attention to the atrocities faced by the Bengali people during the war. The freedom fighters and the Bengali populace were inspired and encouraged to continue the battle for independence by her steadfast support and bravery in the face of hardship. She thus managed to challenge the stereotypes that limit women's influence and displayed the power of female leadership in effecting social and political change.

Bangamata in war-led political roles demonstrated behavioural and transformational leadership by fostering motivation, encouraging teamwork, and promoting the organization's goals and values. It displays Bangamata Sheikh Fazilatunnesa Mujib's leadership style and her initiatives to subvert patriarchal traditions, improve women's rights, and promote gender equality. It can also be a testament of her management style adhered to feminist ideals, the effects it had on the empowerment of women, and the wider socio-political context of Bangladesh.

Conclusion

This paper has particularly posited that her leadership is best explained by the *behavioural and transformational theory* which focuses on the actions of leaders while positing that people can learn to become leaders through teaching and observation. Bangamata's journey in the political sphere started at her very young age through frequent and consistent discussions with Bangabandhu. This created the avenue for her to be acquainted with his ideology that she nurtured and gradually adopted within herself. She diligently observed her husband's leadership, understood it, respected it and supported him with every possible means. Throughout this entire process, she became a leader herself by cherishing her husband's ideology and teachings, and her leadership qualities further sharpened with her foresightedness. When almost every prominent politician was detained during the height of the 6-point movement, the way she led the party, motivated the workers, and kept alive the movement is the testament to her strong leadership which reflects she was both a thinker and a doer. Hence, her leadership fully aligns with the behavioural theory as Bangabandhu played the most significant role in shaping her leadership while the 'actions taken' by her is the best indicator of her being a successful leader. There should no doubt that Bangamata was a firm leader and will be remembered so through her acts that had been instrumental in shaping the history of Bangladesh.

Reflecting on her life, this paper illustrated the crucial role she played in the history of Bangladesh while analysing her leadership and concludes that she is unquestionably a leader. Her life is all about courage, and perseverance, and the actions she took in her short-spanned life are proof of her leadership. In this entire journey, she successfully played the role of both an advisor and an active political worker. However, it is quite difficult to put her in a single framework and further scholarly research is required to unearth her contributions to the nation and understand her leadership. This will help the upcoming generations understand how much she contributed to the freedom of this nation. She can certainly be regarded as an idol for Bengali women and a symbol of women empowerment. The way she acted, raised her voice boldly in a male-dominant political sphere, and successfully materialized her thoughts can surely be exemplary. It might be claimed that although Bangamata made a substantial contribution to Bangladeshi history, her place in those narratives has been comparatively underrepresented. The prevalent patriarchal attitudes and the emphasis on male political personalities are two reasons for this underrepresentation. Despite the fact that there may not be any explicit references to Bangamata Sheikh Fazilatunnesa Mujib's underrepresentation

in historical narratives, it is crucial to recognize the more generalized patterns of gender bias and the historical marginalization of women's contributions. Hossain Shaheed Suhrawardy once suggested to his disciple Sheikh Mujibur Rahman not to "neglect" Bangamata as he (Suhrawardy) considered her as a "very precious" God-sent gift to Mujib (Begum, 2020). It will not be an exaggeration to say that Bangamata is an invaluable gift to her family as well as to the nation. Due to covid and lack of access and availability of respondents those who know Bangamata personally, number of respondents remain small. In addition, we tried to reach two daughters of Bangamata but could not reach. We hope more social scientists will come forward and work on her from academic point of view.

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