

Chapter 9

Music and Politics in Bangladesh: A Journey of Musical Movements

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ABSTRACT

“Bangladesh” is not only a popular song by George Harrison, a British singer, but also a showcase of the aura of music through which a relatively small area of land—Bangladesh—was introduced to the rest of the world in 1971. This is a unique example of the power and use of music to change the canvas of war, cruelty, weapons, murders, geo-politics, and a massive refugee problem. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the history of this musical power in the political liberation of Bangladesh, as well as how a generation of teenage bloggers in the country harnessed music to actualize their objective of bringing what they saw as justice to people who, in their judgement, undermined their country’s war of liberation.

INTRODUCTION

In Bangladesh, as in other parts of the world, music is not only a combination of some words, lyrics, rhythm and beats. In fact, music is a strong entity and bond which has the power to resonate with human beings irrespective of their nationality. Indeed, Bangladesh’s political history is not only a journey of legislation and warfare, but a voyage of musical movement for the liberation of the country. An exploration of the history of the revolutionary forces that resulted in the country’s independence will show the rhythm of music lying at the core of the hearts of every Bengali person.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-5817-1.ch009

Music played a huge role in the country's struggle for independence, as this chapter will demonstrate.

The revolutionary political history of Bangladesh is not an excursion of only a few weeks or months. It was a long journey. Bengalis fought for the right to use their indigenous language as a means of communication. They also fought for the establishment of their own identity and political liberation. In achieving victory in all of these aspects of their lives, music became the strongest weapon to unite the entire nation.

In this chapter, the infusion of music into the political movement in Bangladesh is broadly analyzed against the backdrop of four milestones in the history of the country. These are:

- a) The use of music to protect and preserve the mother language of the Bengali people in what was then an undivided Pakistan (1952).
- b) The use of music to fight for, and establish the rights of Bengali people from the time of their liberation war to the point of gaining independence in 1971.
- c) The role of music in uniting the entire country against the military dictatorial dictatorships and mass uprisings of the 1990s.
- d) How music was used in the movement spearheaded by the younger generation of Bangladesh citizens under the banner of the "Shahabag movement" or "Gonojagoron Mancho" (2013), as the youthful protesters chanted and demanded the hanging of war criminals and saboteurs of the country's liberation struggle for independence.

The methodology adopted in this chapter for the examination of these four epochs in the history of Bangladesh consists of textual analysis and interviews. For the latter, five experts who played significant roles in the history of Bangladesh were interviewed. They are: (a) Hasan Arif, who was the general secretary of the Combined Cultural Organizations Alliance of Bangladesh; (b) Maruf Rasul, one of the leading organizers of the *Ganajagoran Mancho, Shahbag movement*; (c) Sayeed Zayadull Ahsan, a prominent journalist and political analyst in Bangladesh; (d) Shibabrata Barman, also a journalist and famous novelist and writer; and (e) Sadiqur Rahman, one of the political activists of the mass uprising of the 1990s and *Shahbag* movement.

Also analyzed in the chapter is the *Shadhin Bangla Betar kendro* (radio station) that served as an inspiration for the freedom fighters who engaged the powerful Pakistani army in the war of independence, and the "Muktir Gaan" which the Bengali youth used during the liberation battles in the form of war and patriotic songs to unite the freedom fighters and keep them morally strong. In addition, this chapter looked at the impact of the *Concert for Bangladesh* jointly organized by the Beatle's

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