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Reflective Essay: Bangladesh's Youth-Led Uprising

The recent rebel movement in Bangladesh, led by young citizens that toppled the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, seriously motivated me to re-evaluate the power and the prospect of contemporary youth movements in influencing modern societies. What started as a campaign against a controversial system of government employment quota soon evolved into a countrywide campaign that countered the well-established political order. The Bangladeshi youth highlighted the strength of a revolution and showed that when systematic injustice collides with social activity, even the most powerful political systems can be replaced. This consideration made me see the larger implications of such movements, not only to Bangladesh but to the whole world.

Youth protests in Bangladesh were evoked mostly by the quota system in public sector jobs. This policy offered special treatment to certain populations, such as descendants of the 1971 War of Independence, ethnic minorities, and people with disabilities (Macdonald, 2024). Although created to correct the historical imbalances, the system was a source of intense resentment to a number of young citizens. These merit-based quotas, which were seen as arbitrary and creating a discrimination-related youth unemployment crisis, aggravated the country-level severe unemployment crisis already experienced by the youth (Al Jazeera, 2024). Though the movement started with the demands aimed at ending these quotas, it quickly expanded into the larger confrontation of the institutionalized corruption and economic inequality (Prakash, 2024). In Bangladesh, as in much of the rest of the world, the youth tend to feel deeply disenfranchised, with political influence held by elites and opportunities constrained. Such an environment did not only foster large-scale dissatisfaction but also provided a strong motivation for activism among the younger generations.

My first impression after the Bangladeshi protests was shock and appreciation. Initially, I had a very limited comprehension of the movement and viewed it within the scope of a particular job quota policy. Nevertheless, as the protests escalated, it became apparent that the problem was much more fundamental. The young people were knocking down a simple facade to fight what they considered a wholly fraudulent and old-fashioned political system. It reminded me of other youth movement in Sri Lanka, Aragalaya of 2022, where the frustrated population achieved success in bringing down their government (Rafique, 2023). I strongly identified with them even when distanced. The youth in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka were venting a common frustration. They were not only protesting on their own behalf but also for the prospect of a better society, where success would be attained through merit. This brought a strong reflection in me concerning the contribution of young people in making our world a better place. It got me thinking seriously about the worth of protesting and activism not only on a country level but also on an international scale as a significant mode of transformation.

The Reflective Cycle by Gibbs was a very powerful tool that helped me organize my emotional and intellectual experience of observing the Bangladesh protests (Adeani et al., 2020). I was able to move past superficial responses to the deeper systemic insights. My sentiments shifted from mere curiosity to strong admiration at the bravery and unity of the protesters. When working through the reflective phases of this cycle, this emotional reaction drove me to look beyond the catalyst of the job quota system. I interpreted the movement as a clear protest against the more systemic failures—political disenfranchisement, generational unemployment, and institutional corruption. The social media-based, decentralized organization was not only a strategy but also a symbolic rejection of a centralized power structure that privileged achievement over merit. Eventually, this process of reflection brought me to a certain

conclusion: the demonstrators were not protesting the change of one particular policy but a systemic, justice-driven reform of their society.

To conclude, through this reflection, I have learned more about how youth can transform the political system. The situation in Bangladesh demonstrates how strong grassroots movements and youth-based activism can change the political and social landscape. It has helped me be more conscious of my own contributions to equity and social justice both locally and internationally. I have learned that such movements are not merely concerned about the short-time overthrow of political systems but also the long-term transformation of the society. While momentum can overthrow governments, sustained change needs a vision, ethical leadership, and structural change. The current and future generations, including mine, have the challenge of carrying on with this activism, not only in the streets, but also in the institutions and policies that hold our world. I will become more active in the youth movements in the future, applying the lessons of the Bangladesh rebellion on how the empowerment of youth can bring social changes. The introspection of these events has reconstituted my understanding of the concept of responsibility and the concept of leadership and has made me aware that the future is created by those who have the guts to question the established order.

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