

DOI: 10.7596/taksad.v7i1.1343

Citation: Khan, M., Zahoor, M., & Naz, H. (2018). The Xenophobia, Racial Identity and the Crisis of Federalism in East Pakistan. *Journal of History Culture and Art Research*, 7(1), 287-300. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.7596/taksad.v7i1.1343>

The Xenophobia, Racial Identity and the Crisis of Federalism in East Pakistan

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Abstract

The racial identity of Bengal played a significant role in shaping and determining the political discourse in South Asia at different periods of history. The most violent expression of this identity occurred during the 1970-71 crisis between East and West wings of Pakistan and culminated in the dismemberment of Pakistan and the emergence of separate independent state of Bangladesh with the support of India. This violent episode of assertion of racial identity was marked with drama, trauma and tragedy. The tragic memories of violence are still alive and affect the attitude of people and state as well. While for Bengalis the war of 1971 was a war of liberation and deliverance from tyrannical and exploitative rule of West Pakistan, for Indians the victory was a great national achievement and a good lesson and settling of score with Pakistan. For Pakistanis it was the act of betrayal from Bengalis and an Indian conspiracy. An attempt will be made in this study to understand the development of racial identity in East Bengal and its culmination in armed conflict of 1971. An effort will be made to understand the xenophobia of Bengali nationalists and the xenophobic response of Pakistani military. The study will trace historical and structural roots of this phenomenon to understand the way this xenophobia was politicized and to understand the dynamics of this crisis through application of xenophobic response of conflicting identities. Xenophobia, in East Pakistan, acquired the general character and was institutionalized and manifested itself in mass scale. This study will be an effort to approach this problem through historical perspective; where the humans' social behavior determined and guided the political conduct of a certain community.

Keywords: Xenophobia, Racial identity in Bengal, East Pakistan crisis, Elections of 1970, Bengali nationalism, Dismemberment of Pakistan, Ethnic conflict in Pakistan.

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Introduction and Theoretical Preliminaries

The racism and xenophobia are considered as the twin aspects of the same social behavior in a society. These two aspects of social behavior had certain convergent and certain divergent features. Michael Benton a sociologist at Bristol University defined racism and xenophobia, "Racism can then be the name for that dimension by which persons assigned to another group are kept at a distance because they are considered racially inferior. Xenophobia can designate the way that others are kept at a distance because they are considered different" (Benton, n.d.: 2). Self is the essence of a nation but nation's exclusiveness of self against the others and its excessive rhetoric heightens the tensions against rival or immediate others. Elie Kedurie a leading theorist of nationalism argued "nationalism is a combination of patriotism or love for the country and xenophobia or dislike for outsiders" (1994: 49-50). So patriotism and xenophobia through the process of inclusion and exclusion work simultaneously for the construction of national identity.

Jared Diamond considered xenophobia as a basic characteristic of animals. This xenophobia or the fear of others was programmed in human DNA as well and humans primarily reacted under these xenophobic impulses when they establish contact with others. Diamond also believed that xenophobic hostility is the part of our genetic as well as cultural behavior. The cultural differences emerged as the identity marker of different cultural groups and the process of inclusion and exclusion was determined by certain shared markers of identity (Diamond, 2002: 201). He mentioned that racial, national, ethnic, religious and political characteristics of groups had provoked conflict and culminated in episodes of genocide (Diamond, 2002: 355).

The multi-layered construction of the identity of self was based on certain shared features which distinguished them from others. Diamond elaborated the role of xenophobic impulse in the elimination or subordination of others by certain powerful and developed group. He considers xenophobia as self-destructive trait of human beings, which even led to their ultimate fall. This human trait had direct animal precursors but technological advance of human beings had made it a lethal one and human's destructive and killing power had accelerated genocides. He also explained that xenophobia had promoted dual standards of behavior in human beings. Genocide is taken as acceptable under this dichotomy, the killing of "others" by "us" and perpetrators of genocide take pride and are considered national heroes sometimes.

These episodes of genocide clearly reflected the destructive xenophobic traits of human beings as Jared Diamond believed that the modern technological prowess had improved our killing power (Diamond, 2002: 05). The xenophobia in heterogeneous societies like Pakistan in 1970s with a perpetual state of competition and confrontation between different identities resulted in mass killings and destruction with the excessive use of modern weapons by armed forces in East Pakistan. East Pakistanis or Bengalis were not only geographically apart from the other provinces of Pakistan but also culturally and linguistically as well.

According to Jared Diamond geographical and environmental factors played a vital role in the development of a civilization or culture. The geographical and environmental disadvantage of East Bengal had emerged as a great hindrance on the path of development; these structural weaknesses had created asymmetrical relations with other provinces and had sharpened their sense of deprivations. East Bengalis considered the others including British, Hindus and West Pakistanis exploiters of their resources who had ignored their internal structural and environmental weaknesses, which facilitated the domination of others.

The 1971 crisis was depicted in national narratives of Pakistan, Bangladesh and India in a highly distorted, biased and conflicting perspective. This violent episode of regional conflict had many distortions,

exaggerations and miss representations in national narratives. Faraz Anjum in his article highlighted the “discursive practices” employed in Pakistani text books regarding role of army in East Pakistan crisis to avoid the historical truth (Anjum, 2013: 203). East Pakistan crisis is a marginalized narrative in historical text and nationalist historical discourse while Pakistan army’s brutal suppression of Bengali nationalist struggle has been largely ignored (Anjum, 2013: 21).

The exclusive racial identity of Bengalis already existed and asserted in different manner in different historical processes and had developed conflicting or cooperative relations with others according to the needs of existing political elite. As in the case of Rwanda and Burundi genocides had been summed up in the book *Leave None to Tell the Story: Genocide in Rwanda*, published by an organization i.e., Human Rights Watch. For constructing contrasting identities, pre-existing racial hatred was fanned by cynical and power hungry politicians for their own ends. They exploited and politicized the existing xenophobia as a deliberate choice and fostered hatred and fear to perpetuate their hold on to power and pitched one identity against others for their own political motives. The nexus of interest emerged among sub-groups for certain collective interests as reflected in the genocide of Rwanda and massive atrocities were committed in this episode of genocide by rival groups (Anjum, 2013: 317).

Benedict Anderson defined national identity as an “imagined political community” constructed through print capitalism, map and museum (Bandyopadhyay, 2011: xvi). The construction of national identity is based upon the perception of ‘self’ with shared common cultural characteristics and in stark contrast to ‘others.’ The obsession of nationalism required the construction of walls around the self and exclusion of others. According to Sajal Nag, “the journey of nations begins with the construction of self the basic criteria for which is a preconceived homogeneity. But achieving such homogeneity proves elusive and the search becomes an exercise in peeling an onion, which involves the shedding of people who do not fit the constructed identity or who question the accepted framework” (Nag, 2001: 4753-4760). Rabindranath Tagore, a Bengali writer and believer of humanism and internationalism, found the essence of “western type nationalism,” which he deplored in following words:

(Racial) blindness is the fundamental disease of nationalism. Whether by fraud or by error, one (nation) has to prove itself to be the greatest and concurrently has to belittle others. This is the basic tenet of nationalism - the chief component of patriotism. . . self-interest is what nationalism stands upon. . . Even when there is direct conflict, the prosperity of one antagonizes the others. The increased strength of one is a potential source of danger to the other (Nag, 2001: 4753-4760).

To some extent, Bengal had maintained its distinct identity in subcontinent from centuries and asserted its racial, linguistic, political and regional identity which had manifested in the establishment of regional autonomous political dynasties which resisted the central authority in Medieval India. The distinct geographical location of Bengal had played a vital role in forming and flourishing of this identity. During British rule the process of modernization had paved the way towards political manifestation of this racial and cultural identity with its strong nationalist and regionalist ingredients. The emergence and development of modern Bengal identity was the result of a double movement of ideas and objectives in national and regional spheres. This convergence of nationalist and regionalist interest against xenophobia of the British domination had facilitated the co-existence of these dual identities. Since the British, as imperialists, entered into India through Bengal which was a unique entry, given the historical trajectories of invaders in India, the centuries old regionalism of Bengalis produced a unique blend of regionalism and nationalism.

Xenophobia and Bengali Nationalism

The partition of Bengal in 1905 not only caused proliferation of the Indian nationalism, but it had also started a new process of identity formation which cracked the existing nationalist construct. The xenophobia against the British had transformed into a new shape of xenophobia in Bengali Muslim elite against the domination of Hindu classes and achieved its geographical manifestation in Eastern Bengal against the dominance of Western Bengal. The xenophobia and geographical location had played a significant role in the assertion of Bengali Muslim 'self-hood' against the 'other-hood' of Hindus.

The asymmetrical position which had clearly manifested in economic and political marginalization of Muslims in United Bengal had further sharpened the Bengali Muslim elite's consciousness of self-hood, and their xenophobia had pushed and hard pressed them to join the ranks of Muslim nationalism and they emerged as the forerunner of the demand of Muslim separate homeland. This convergence of regional interest in a trans-regional alliance with its inherent contradiction had pushed the Bengali Muslim elite in the ranks of All India Muslim League. Suhrawardy and Abul Hashim launched a radical campaign of political recruitment for All India Muslim League (AIML) in 1940s and the Bengal Muslim League membership exceeded the membership of all other provincial Leagues of India (Kokab and Abid, 2013: 11).

The shared Hindu xenophobia of Muslim political elite of both regions was transmitted and penetrated in the minds of Muslim franchise and they voted in favor of Muslim League in 1945-46 elections, which paved the way towards the establishment of a Muslim separate state with two distinct geographical units in East and West of India with Muslim numerical majorities. After the achievement of primary objective of a deliverance from Hindu domination the inherent contradictions of this constructed 'self-hood' had surfaced and contested in different spheres of newly crafted power structure in Pakistan. Bengali Muslim leadership extended support to idea of Pakistan for regional autonomy, as Abul Hashim perceived that Pakistan would be a "socially just" state, with equal opportunities and freedom from economic exploitation, a "people's Pakistan" (Bos, 2014: 21).

Central leadership of Pakistan failed to accommodate and co-opt the regional realities, in case of Bengal; central leadership collaborated with Bengal ruling elite due to the convergence of mutual political interests. The first prominent victim of the repressive policy of Liaquat Ali Khan's regime was Suhrawardy. He was not welcomed on his return to Pakistan; he faced personal bashing and was portrayed as agent of India. He was debarred to enter in East Pakistan; his membership of Constituent Assembly of Pakistan was cancelled in March 1949 and in May 1949 was expelled from Pakistan Muslim League (Kokab and Abid, 2013: 13). These repressive measures to crush potential political challengers reflected the policy of non-accommodation and lack of democratic credentials of central regimes.

The leadership of Bengal gradually adopted a parochial and xenophobic response against Western Wing's domination and rejected every formula which even served their own region's interests. In the East Wing, passive tendencies were developed because of blame game of exploitation of West wing and the Bengali middle class further lost the economic opportunities that Independence had offered to them (Zaheer, 1994: 63).

Xenophobia, Bengali Identity and Separatism

The Bengali language emerged as the first strong identity marker of separate racial and national identity. The construction of Bengalis' 'self-hood' was further facilitated by the geographical and cultural disparities, representation in political and administrative structures and resource distribution in new state. The Bengali political elite exploited the socio-economic backwardness and underrepresentation of

Bengalis in state institutions. They propagated that Bengal's political and economic marginalization and backwardness was due to the West Pakistan's domination and their resource exploitation of the Eastern Wing. Later on Punjab was singled out and declared as the major culprit of the miseries of the East Bengalis because the hegemonic face of Pakistani state was represented by civil and military elite which was predominantly Punjabi in composition.

The Muslim League was portrayed as the agent of West Pakistan's domination and its Bengali leaders and other collaborators were declared as the stooges of West Pakistan or Punjab. To defeat the Muslim League in East Pakistan election in 1954, a United Front of Bengali parties with divergent ideological orientations and manifestos like *Ganatantri Dal*, a leftist party, and *Nizam-i-Islam* a rightist religious party emerged due to xenophobia towards West Pakistan (Zaheer, 1994: 33). The result of the elections had also undermined the representative character and legitimacy of Constituent Assembly of Pakistan. The members of Constituent Assembly of Pakistan from East Pakistan had lost legitimacy and representative character due to clear verdict of Bengali franchise.

The establishment of One Unit was also a xenophobic response of East Pakistan against the perceived domination of West Pakistan due to its majority population. Moreover, it had further increased the East Wing xenophobia with the perception that the scheme of One Unit was designed to deprive them from their democratic rights (Saikia, 2011: 46). One Unit scheme was perceived variously by various constituent units: smaller provinces leveled charges against the Punjab terming One Unit as a formula of Punjabi domination. East Pakistan, on the other hand, perceived unity of Western Pakistan provinces calculated to counter the demographic majority of Bengalis.

The 1956 Constitution was adopted by the Assembly despite of the walkout of Awami League and other opposition parties from East Pakistan, which strained the relationship between East and West Wings but *Awami* League consolidated its position with the slogan of provincial autonomy. It continued its propaganda and consolidated and enlarged its support base at such an extent that civil-military establishment was in no mood to share power with *Awami* League in their expected win. The xenophobia of Eastern wing domination by the self-acclaimed guardians of the integrity of country namely Iskandar Mirza and Ayub Khan imposed Martial Law because they considered holding elections a dangerous exercise in the existing political situation in 1958 (Zaheer, 2011: 73).

The military dictatorship of Ayub Khan increased the sense of political alienation, and the process of industrialization further aggravated their sense of deprivation, exploitation and marginalization. The politicization of Bengali grievances was accelerated. It was the most effective and efficient weapon in the armory of the opposition forces. The political elite in East Pakistan perceived that the promotion of national symbols and national development by West Pakistan as a symbol of nation's progress was the self-aggrandizement of West wing, while the West Pakistan's influential elite considered the Bengali as latter-day Muslim converts still corrupted by Hindu practices so not sufficiently Muslim (Rose and Sission, 1992: 09). For the civil and military establishment who were predominantly Punjabis, Bengalis were having a Hinduized culture.

The concept of 'parity' between two wings in representative institutions further deepened this mutual mistrust and widened the gulf and promoted hatred between two wings. The separate electorate was also considered as a West Wing's tool to reduce their majority. The Bengali elite was concerned to counterbalance the Western Wing's domination in administrative structures of the state, where they were distinct minority though majority in representative political institutions, but their bid was foiled due to the close nexus of Western political elite and the civil-military establishment.

Michel Foucault, a profound French thinker and postmodernist philosopher, considered "language is oppression" (meaning that language was developed to allow only those who spoke the language not to be

oppressed whereas all other people that don't speak the language would then be oppressed). The language movement was not only assertion of cultural identity but it also reflected the Bengalis' xenophobia of economic marginalization by depriving the jobs to Bengali educated youth through the barrier of a 'foreign' language (Rose and Sission, 1992: 9).

Although the Bengali sense of deprivation, exploitation and victimization was acute in political and economic spheres and the real issues lied in these spheres. However, the Bengali language emerged as a symbolic identity marker and it was used as a tool of assertion as well as exclusion of others, like the Biharis' exclusion from Bengali nationalism, although they had shared economic deprivations with them. The Dhaka University emerged as the center of Bengali nationalist identity because of its leading role in language movement. During the military operation of 1971, Dhaka University and Shaheed Minar were first attacked and massive atrocities were committed at both places by Pakistan's army so much so that Shaheed Minar was demolished in first night of the military operation. The symbolic expressions of identity of other-hood were attacked and excessive use of force was an expression of power to create fear in others and also reflected the hatred for others' identity. The xenophobic identity had accelerated this process of destruction and elimination of others' identity through mass killing, extortion, humiliation and dislocation.

Mujibur Rehman had founded East Pakistan Student League in the first week of January 1948, and it emerged as a frontline organization in agitation. The students of Dhaka University formed a Committee of Action, representing all shades of opinion —leftists, rightists and centrists— in March 1948 to struggle for national status of Bengali language. The roots of language controversy were traced from the establishment of Pakistan, but its first forceful manifestation was witnessed when Muhammad Ali Jinnah in his Dhaka address in early 1948, had declared that Urdu was to be the only national language of Pakistan. Bengalis felt dismayed because Jinnah himself had a halting command on Urdu. This dismay resulted in language riots in 1952, when Nazimuddin reaffirmed Urdu as national language. The 1952 riots were depicted as oppression of West wing through police. However, the heroic resistance of Bengalis and first martyrs of Bengali national movement were eulogized (Rose and Sission, 1992: 9).

The supporters of Bengali language staged a protest and police had to open fire on the Bengali demonstrators on 21 February, 1954, killing several. A *Shaheed Minaar* (Martyr's Monument) was erected at the site of the firing to commemorate the Bengali resistance against West Pakistan domination and the day was celebrated every year. The reaction was so strong that it changed East-West relations and wiped out the Muslim League in March 1954 Elections. The ruling Muslim League secured only 9 seats of the total Muslim seats of 237 in a house of 309 members (Zaheer, 2011: 27). It was an ignominious defeat for a party that created Pakistan.

Feroz Ahmad claimed that "with the intensification of economic exploitation and political repression, Bengali nationalism also grew more virulent, clouding the class issues and leading toward a generalized hatred of West Pakistanis." (Ahmad, 1998: 30). At the time of independence East Pakistan's GDP was Rs. 13,130 million, while West Pakistan's GDP was Rs. 11,830 million. But in post-independence phase West Pakistan due to concentration of resources outclassed the East Pakistan and in 1968-69 East Pakistan's GDP was 20,670 million while West Pakistan GDP was 27,744 million Rupees. East Pakistan had better literacy rate with more college and university graduates as compared to West Pakistan in 1947, but later on due to low pace of development in East wing and limited resource allocation, it created West Pakistan's monopoly in these spheres too, which was deeply resented by Bengalis (Ahmad, 1998: 15-16).

After Ayub's decade of development economic disparity increased between two wings and GDP of West wing was 30 per cent more as compare to East wing and average standard of living was 126 per cent

better in West Pakistan. This relative marginalization in sphere of economic development was considered colonization and resource exploitation of East Pakistan by the West Pakistan (Ahmad, 1998: 23-24).

The process of subordination or subjugation sometimes initiated a process of elimination or extermination of others, but violent conflict damaged the both conflicting groups. The East Bengal in 1970s offered a fertile land for the germination of the seeds of hatred and racial identity further nourished by the xenophobia of masses. The geographical and environmental disadvantage of East Bengal developed an asymmetrical relation with geographically and environmentally prosperous West Pakistan. Later the center of power in political, economic and administrative spheres was captured by the Western Pakistani elite. The political and economic deprivation of East Bengal's elite and middle class was related with the resource exploitation by the West. The floods of 1970 further added fuel to existing grievances. Deprivation was politicized and the results were manifested in the form of electoral mandate of general elections of 1970. The natural calamity of floods offered a promising opportunity to Awami League which efficiently capitalized on it and outclassed its local political rivals and secured a landslide electoral victory in subsequent elections.

After the floods of 1970, the relief activities were politicized due to the massive propaganda of Awami League which further complicated the situations. East Pakistanis considered that West Pakistan's response was insufficient during the disaster which further magnified their perception of the insensitivity of the West Pakistani elite to the welfare and interest of Bengalis. Maulana Bhashani demanded "complete financial autonomy" and even threatened the separation of East wing (Rose and Sission, 1992: 30). The 1970's floods further weakened the already fragile national bond and sharpened the sense of deprivation in Bengal and strengthened the political support base of Awami League and discredited the administrative machinery of the state under the domination of West Pakistan.

The national disaster of great magnitude due to environmental factors was politicized in such a context that it sharpened the racial identity in Bengal. Khan Abdul Qayyum, leader of a faction of the Muslim League declared that Mujib and his party launched "a campaign of hatred against West Pakistan" and this belief was shared by several high ranked military officers (Rose and Sission, 1992: 31).

The 1970 Elections fundamentally altered the political landscape of Pakistan and radically shattered the existing elite power structure. The mass political mobilization and active and excessive engagement of political elite with masses had changed the dynamics of power structure (Rose and Sission, 1992: 273). The excessive provincialism of the party system in the absence of a single national representative political party widened the gulf between East and West wing particularly. The politicians from East and West wings emerged as the political rivals, and masses were deeply politicized through mass mobilization in pre and post elections scenario. The East-West political divide further accelerated the process of assertion of the identity in Bengal which was started since the partition of 1947 and culminated in the secession of 1971.

The elections of 1970 proved as the culmination of this process of political assertion of this Bengali racial identity. It was effectively transmitted in the minds of the Bengalis. The Awami League under the firebrand leadership of Sheikh Mujib-ur-Rehman had secured a landslide victory in East Pakistan. It had secured 160 out of the 162 seats and bagged 75 per cent of casted votes in East Pakistan. However, it could not win a single seat in West Pakistan. Awami League had contested only 7 seats out of 138 in West wing and concentrated on East wing only. Similarly PPP concentrated on West Pakistan and did not contest a single seat from East wing. While smaller parties also enjoyed support in certain regions, there was no national party with the support base in both wings of Pakistan (Afzal, 2005: 397-98).

Although Awami League had 38 per cent share of national vote but it had captured 53 per cent seats in the house of 300 members. On the other hand Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party secured 81 out of 138 seats in West Pakistan and secured 20 per cent of national vote share and 27 per cent seats at

national level. The bastion of power for PPP were Punjab and Sind, where it secured respectively 62 out of 82 and 18 out of 27 seats and one seat from NWFP (Bose, 2011: 21). Although Mujib secured 75 per cent votes in East but it constituted 42 per cent of total registered voters. Despite all appeals of exploitation and discrimination East wing had a relatively low turnout of a 56 per cent while in Punjab turnout was 67 per cent, in Sind it was 58 per cent and NWFP and Baluchistan had 47 per cent and 39 per cent turnout respectively (Bose, 2011: 19). So the divided electoral verdict further complicated the process of transfer of power for Army establishment which was the wielder of power.

These election results clearly depicted the effectiveness of the Awami League's propaganda of exploitation and victimization of East wing by the West wing. The political elite had successfully politicized this xenophobia in East Bengal and sharpened the rifts between two wings. The assertion of racial identity in Bengal had excluded the Bihari Muslims and declared them 'others' and equated them with supporters of West Pakistan, while included the Hindus due to shared linguistic and cultural identity markers thereby extending its relationship with India. While the West Pakistanis declared the East Bengalis as a Hindu-like and portrayed them as the enemies of Pakistan and Islam. They thought suppression and atrocities were justified by labeling them as anti-Islam. The xenophobia of other-hood played a significant role in the acceleration of violence during armed conflict in post March 1971 period.

Bhutto was aggressive, confrontationist and ambitious to capture power in post elections scenario. He wanted a share in federal government and even declared in public meeting at Lahore, "I am no Clement Attlee" (Taseer, 1979: 118). Although he did not have the required majority in Assembly but his rhetoric was based upon "Punjab and Sindh are bastions of power in Pakistan, I have the key of the Punjab Assembly in one pocket and that of Sind assembly in other pocket." He challenged the representative claim of a sole majority of Awami League and their intentions of implementing the Six Point agenda through new constitutional arrangement; he questioned the right of a party from one region to speak for the entirety of a territorially and culturally plural Pakistan. PPP launched a campaign to establish itself as one of two "majority parties" in Pakistan and demanded a share in future power structure. West Pakistan's military and civil establishment also extended support to his claims due to shared xenophobia, mistrust and convergence of interests to counter Awami League's dominance (Rose and Sission, 1992: 59).

Mujib could not implement his Six Point agenda without the support from West Pakistan either from PPP or other smaller parties for the adoption of constitution although he enjoyed the necessary simple majority required for formation of the federal government. Bhutto considered that "six Points being a concealed formula for secession in two strokes rather than one" (Bhutto, 1971: 27). During his meetings with West Pakistan political leaders at Dhaka in early February Mujib had shared his fears with West Pakistan's political leaders that Yahya would not summon the Assembly and had no intentions to transfer power and that Bhutto had conspired with him and working as his 'stalking-horse' and certain generals were also the part of this conspiracy (Rose and Sission, 1992: 77).

Yahya Khan invited Mujib to visit West Pakistan as his guest for further detailed negotiations, but Mujib's xenophobia and mistrust prevented him initially to accept this invitation although he was well aware of negative political implications of this refusal. But his xenophobic impulses prevailed against his political interest. Later on Bhutto also expressed his own xenophobia and mistrust, when he declared that he could not put his members in the position of being a 'double hostage' in Dhaka, he perceived Indian threat and hostility on one hand and Awami League's aggression on the other hand as a threat to the security of party members. Later he declared National Assembly at Dhaka a 'slaughter house' for his members. His perception of security threats to himself and his members had reflected the deep seated trust deficit between two leaders of both wings. Although Bhutto exploited these concerns for political motives and exaggerated the situation both shared xenophobia against each other and blocked many avenues for political negotiations. Mujib in a meeting with high ranking officials had reacted on Bhutto's

refusal and declaring Dhaka as slaughter house in turn he showed same fears and declared West Pakistan as a potential slaughter house for his members (Rose and Sission, 1992: 79-80).

The xenophobia and mistrust was such a deep rooted phenomenon that on 21 February, Yahya asked his civilian cabinet to resign because it had five Bengali ministers, who could possibly breach his confidence, although these ministers were handpicked by Yahya himself but their racial identity sacked them from power corridors because Yahya and military establishment were not ready to share its policies regarding East Pakistan with civilian cabinet especially the East Pakistan's ministers (Taseer, 1979: 14).

Awami League reacted strongly on the dismissal of civilian cabinet and the meetings of martial law authorities with the leadership of PPP and threatened with dire consequences if the politics of 1950's was returned and rejected all conspiracies in creating the 'artificial crisis.' They appraised their talks with other West Pakistani leaders and dismantled their fears of East Pakistan's domination in future democratic power structure. Awami league considered the retention of powers for foreign trade and aid in center as an effort to maintain Western economic domination and continuation of colonial exploitation of East Pakistan resources. They also believed that the power sharing with PPP at center was an effort to reduce their majority in perpetual minority (Rose and Sission, 1992: 87).

By 27th February 1971 all parties, except PPP and Muslim League (Qayyum), of West Pakistan were ready to attend the proposed session with their certain reservation about Six Points agenda. Yahya postponed the session despite several requests from East Pakistan governor. The postponement had confirmed the fears and 'darkest suspicion' of Eastern wing that West Pakistan was not ready to transfer power to a party from East Pakistan (Taseer, 1979: 35).

During political negotiations for constitutional consensus the policy of military establishment 'was passive and reactive rather than active and assertive.' The military establishment was deeply concerned to protect its corporate interest and keep intact its power leverage although it was ready to transfer power for the establishment of liberal constitutional regime but at their own terms and conditions. The military establishment had failed to maintain its position of neutrality and emerged as the custodian of Western wing interests. With their insistence for coalition government with PPP, it made itself partisan rather than neutral mediator (Rose and Sission, 1992: 278).

The announcement of 1st March to postpone the Assembly session provoked widespread protests in Bengal. Within one hour of the announcement of Yahya, around 50,000 to 60,000 people equipped with bamboo sticks and iron rods jammed the roads, burnt the Pakistani flag and picture of Jinnah (Bose, 2011: 23). The violent mobs filled the streets and anti-West sentiments were reflected from the spontaneity and intensity of this response. Awami League was also surprised but immediately responded to capitalize his political power. But now popular sentiments of masses had determined the course of actions of leaders and the leaders were led by the masses (Rose and Sission, 1992: 91).

In post-1970 elections scenario, political leaders were extensively engaged with masses, held frequent public meeting, aroused popular sentiments to create pressure on their political rivals and to strengthen their position of political bargaining but this unusual public contact in post-election scenario to exert pressure on their rival forces, ultimately reduced the bargaining capacity of leadership and strengthened the hawks on both sides of political divide. This process also resulted in further fragmentation and accelerated the misperceptions and sharpened their respective identities and exposed the conflict of divergent interests in future power structure. The fear of domination and exploitation by the 'others' had deepened the crisis.

Awami League assumed the civil and political authority after popular protests and two systems of authority or parallel governments were established in East Pakistan. The *defacto* political authority was

exercised by Mujeeb and his supporters, while military authority was restricted to cantonments with the break of civil order. This situation existed till 26th March 1971 (Rose and Sission, 1992: 92). During this period the police force was inactive and army stayed in barracks and exercised restraint (Bose, 2011: 30).

The armed forces faced great hardship due to effective blockade of food supplies by Bengalis. Mujeeb had challenged the authorities and exercised power without formally assuming authority and responsibilities. During the 25 days of Mujib's rule there was not a single incident of conflict between armed forces and Mujib's supporters (Bose, 2011: 35). The military adopted the policy of appeasement but Bengali hatred was reflected from the incidents of terror against non-Bengalis.

Xenophobia, Genocide and War Crimes

According to the military sources 172 people were killed and 358 injured in the violent incidents during first week of March. The properties owned by the West Pakistanis were attacked and looted and even the American consulate was attacked and foreigners were threatened. These incidents explained "the violent xenophobic expression of a narrow ethno-linguistic Bengali nationalism that becomes the hallmark of the revolt" (Bose, 2011: 36). The violence spiraled out of control and resulted in a complete civil war in which atrocities were committed on both sides. However, being well equipped Pakistan army outdid the civilian miscreants in committing war crimes.

The Pakistan military launched operation on the night of 25-26 March and Yahya Khan blamed Mujib for "obstinacy, obduracy and absolute refusal to talk sense" as a reason of military operation. He declared Awami League as an enemy of Pakistan which wanted to attack the solidarity and integrity of Pakistan and they were punished for this crime (Zaheer, 1994: 163). The military establishment had already declared Mujib and Awami League leadership as rebels and Bengali units in Pakistan army were disarmed along with the Bengali police force. A strategy was launched to arrest the leaders of student organizations and to eliminate the intellectuals of Dhaka University.

The army reacted as a pre-emptive strike against armed uprising of Bengalis on March 26 for creation of "Republic of Bangladesh". It claimed that military operation was to undo this plot for succession (Ahmad, 1998: 34). The military exercised maximum use of force to achieve its objectives. The military was on offensive to re-establish the writ of state through all means (Bose, 2011: 48). The army demolished the *Shahid Minar* on the first night of military operation and killed a few alleged rebels. This act of vandalism had no military reason rather the demolition of a memorial of the language movement of 1950 had a symbolic significance. This act of humiliation raged the Bengali national sentiment and *Shahid Minar* emerged as the symbol of Bengali national pride and a national movement thereafter (Bose, 2011: 58).

The army also attacked on another center of Bengali nationalism, Dhaka University, and committed atrocities through the excessive use of force and killed people indiscriminately without making arrests. The military commanders exercised power without the fear of accountability. This excessive use of force and hatred is reflected from the following conversation:

(Officer A): '... What do you think would be the approximate number of casualties of the University? Just give me an approximate number, in your view. What will be the number killed, or wounded, or captured? Just give me a rough figure. Over'.

(Officer B): '88. ...approximately 300. Over'.

(Officer A): 'Well done. 300 Killed? Anybody wounded, captured? Over'.

(Officer B): '88. I believe only in one thing: it's 300 killed. Over'.

(Officer A): '88, yes, I agree with you, that's much easier, you know, nothing asked, nothing done, you don't have to explain anything. Well, once again, well done...." (Bose, 2011: 66).

The Pakistani army also attacked the Hindu areas of settlement and attacked certain houses randomly and killed indiscriminately including infants to create fear and to punish the accused instigators of the Bengali rebellion. People were terrified and fled to India to save their lives. It was a huge exodus and fleeing people were in millions. The Indian government was taken aback and it started raising voices against Pakistan at international platforms.

The Bengali soldiers mutinied at different places and attacked the West Pakistani officers, personally and their families. Later, the Bengali soldiers and officers were disarmed and killed. Their weapons, ammunitions and vehicles were taken away. For taking revenge, Bengalis attacked the houses and killed the West Pakistanis and non-Bengalis and even mutilated their bodies (Bose, 2011: 29). Bengali xenophobia was also reflected from the brutal acts of violence committed against Biharis on 28 March at Crescent and People's Jute Mill "Men, women and children were shot, knifed-killed in any way possible. The bodies were thrown into the river." Biharis claimed that *laks* were killed while admitted the killing of thousands in this single incident of violence at two jute mills located at Khulna (Bose, 2011: 81). A chain process of violence had started under the mantra of retaliation and punishment. Innocent people were killed, their bodies were mutilated and decomposed and blotted corpses were thrown in rivers and sometimes left unburied. Women were attacked and raped to humiliate the enemy on the both sides of the divide; even children were not spared from this tyranny.

The rival groups also supported the local militias. For instance, *Mukti Bahini* (Liberation Army) was supported and equipped by nationalist Bengalis and Indian army while Pakistan's military establishment supported Al-Badr and Al-Shams, constituted by local Bengali and Bihari supporters. These militias committed widespread violence against each other and justified their atrocities with their respective ethnicities and ideologies (Saikia, 2011: 50). The Pakistani army adopted a reactive strategy and excessive use of violence to punish the rebels and create a fear in local population by extreme punishment and humiliation to prevent future recruitments of Bengali rebels (Saikia, 2011: 51). But this reactive strategy was proved counter-productive and accelerated the process of recruitment and widened the support base of Bengali nationalists.

The military administration motivated their Punjabi soldiers to annihilate nationalist Bengalis. Indian politicians and their supporters also used the war as an opportunity to cut Muslim Pakistan down to size and neutralized the Eastern border. Leaders and followers thus reduced their enemies into abstract numbers and demographic units, categorizing 'us' and 'them'. The abstraction of the human person to fit ethnic religious and national labels opened the space for a cold, inhuman purpose for one human being to violate other human being (Saikia, 2011: 54-55).

The exclusive racial identity of West Pakistani soldiers against exclusive racial identity of Bengali nationalists, although they were the citizens of same state and shared common religion, was based upon xenophobic perception of selfhood against the other-hood. The soldiers committed atrocities to teach a lesson to other or as a response in state of fear from the others. Many veterans from Pakistan narrated that "they viewed Bengali uprising as a rebellion" and were determined to crush it. Some said that they killed noncombatant Bengalis because they feared for their own death (Saikia, 2011: 57). They tortured and raped the Bengali women to humiliate and dishonor their men. After the war the Bangladesh authorities sponsored an abortion program and compelled the victim women to get rid of 'bastard Pakistanis' with the incentive of inclusion into the community and normal life in new liberated state (Saikia, 2011: 61).

Sarmila Bose highlighted the process of demonization through which negative connotations and symbols were assigned to rival groups. She highlighted that, the Bengali freedom literature referred Pakistan army as “occupying Force”, “*Khan Sena* (army)”, “*Shala* (bastards) Punjabi”, “Punjabi Kukar (dog)”. The west Pakistani description of Bengalis like “miscreants”, “muktis” and “Awami League thugs” was comparatively a weaker one (Bose, 2011: 161-62). Feroz Ahmad claimed that due to negative indoctrination West Pakistanis treated Bengalis with “vengeance and pride” which was reflected from Major Kamal’s alleged remarks “that once the West Pakistanis had conquered East Bengal each of his soldiers would have a Bengali mistress and that neither dogs nor Bengalis would be allowed in the exclusive Chittagong Club” (Ahmad, 1998: 28).

Brigadier Qadir of Pakistan Army shared the most horrifying experience of his life at Santahar, a Bihari dominating village, which was attacked by Bengali militants, and they had recovered 34 bodies of minor children with smashed heads from a small room. One of his soldiers wanted to retaliate “to bash in the heads of captured Bengali militants” (Bose, 2011: 85). There were numerous incidents of atrocities committed by Bengalis and government of Pakistan white paper claimed that 15000 Biharis were killed in Santahar-Naogaon area (Bose, 2011: 85). Sarmila Bose assessed that “the Bengali nationalist rebellion in East Pakistan was openly militant and quickly turned into xenophobic violence against non-Bengali” (Bose, 2011: 166).

In this state of anarchy “everyone was doing everything to everyone else” as explained by the Pakistani Army officer posted in Chittagong by the end of March (Bose, 2011: 85). Hamood-ur-Rehman Commission established that military action was not merely preventive, it was also punitive in nature. It has been also observed that it was as if a ferocious animal having been kept chained and starved was suddenly let loose (Aziz, 2003: 326). The Commission Report also recorded that if “a miscreant was in a particular village, instead of any attempt being made to secure him or even killing him, the whole village was subjected to machine gunning and its inhabitants killed without regard even to age or sex.” It also established that “soldiers and officers to go to respectable people and forcibly take away young girls for their carnal pleasures, even at times killing the wretched victims after satisfying their own lust” (Report of the Humood-ur-Rehman Commission of Inquiry into the 1971 War, n.d.: 90).

The training of Pakistani Army was to fight a conventional war against external threat especially India, they were not trained to deal with internal civil wars. The army behaved and acted as to fight an enemy at enemy lands. The West Pakistan’s propaganda and perception of Bengali identity as ‘Hindu like’ identity and Indian involvement and support to Bengali militants further accelerated the violence and brutal atrocities committed by Pakistan Army. General A. K. Niazi had blamed General Tikka for the brutal use of force and criticized “the military action was a display of stark cruelty, more merciless than the massacres at Bukhara and Baghdad by Changaiz Khan” (Niazi, 1998: 46). Although he himself worked in the same fashion as General Tikka Khan on assuming the authority he considered the East Pakistan Operation “it is not going to be an ordinary campaign. It would be a merciless conflict for survival.” (Niazi, 1998: 52). Lt. General Niazi’s remarks on taking over command had clearly reflected this attitude “what I have been hearing about shortage of rations? Are not there any cows and goats in this country? This is enemy territory. Get what you want. This is what we used to do in Burma.” (Niazi, 1998: 503).

Yasmin Saikia categorized the conflict in Bengal from March 25 until December 16, 1971 into three distinct but interlinked wars and according to her “one was a civil war between East and West Pakistan, the second was an international war between India and Pakistan, and the third was an ethnic war between the Bengalis and Biharis” (Saikia, 2011: 50). The assertion of certain identity constructs had facilitated the proliferation of multidimensional armed conflict. The conflict zone had become very complex after the attack of Indian forces. Likewise the atrocities became multifold and pervasive. Therefore, Bengali national narrative of liberation struggle is ‘villain versus victim’ version instead of a

heroic struggle. The emphasis is on victimhood by 'human-demon barbarian Pak army' which attacked the unarmed people and committed atrocities of unprecedented nature. The national narrative of Bengal exaggerated the incidents of violence and ignored the armed resistance offered by the *Mukti Bahini* and atrocities committed by them (Bose, 2011, 53).

The military operation in East wing was welcomed by the elite in the West wing; a sense of relief was prevailed. There were no public protests at outrageous policies and no demand of national reconciliation. The military establishment imposed a strict censorship but generally media in West Pakistan had followed the government line, and even at times it appeared more aggressive than the regime. A continued state of denial of human rights violations by Army existed and forcefully rejected the reports of international media. The media also played its role in creating war hysteria and praised the governments for giving up political process and it further nourished the West Pakistani xenophobia against Bengal and India as well (Zaheer, 1994: 325). The political elite across the different sections also extended support to military regime due to their own vested interests. This attitude and insensitivity in the Western wing indicated the depth of hatred against Bengalis and it also reflected the shared xenophobia of Western military, political and intellectual elite against East Bengal.

Pakistan's text books produced tunnel vision of this violent episode of Pakistani history as a conspiracy and "outsiders' job"; it lacked rational interpretation and failed to acknowledge historical, cultural, economic and political factors which accelerated the assertion of Bengali separatist national identity (Anjum, 2013: 217). The dominating historical narrative of East Pakistan crisis in text books of history largely blamed East Pakistan's Hindus, India's involvement and Bengali political conspirators as factors in dismemberment of Pakistan. Even text books glorified the bravery and endurance of soldiers against Bengali miscreants and Indian intruders (Anjum, 2013: 224-225).

Conclusion

The genocide in Bengal in 1970-71 had different aspects; it was the clash of racial identity between Bengalis and non-Bengalis as well as clash of national identity between assertive Bengali nationalism against Pakistani nationalism. Besides this, ethnic, political and religious reasons also played its role in the complexity and intensity of this conflict. Jared Diamond listed land or power disguised in ideology as one motivation of genocide. He opined that minimal level of certain ideological or psychological motivations accelerated the genocide. But diamond believed that exclusively it was the economic reasons, the exploitation of the resources of the victims is the primary motivation (Diamond, 2002: 259). Diamond's listed motivations of conflict and genocide were also applicable in East Bengal conflict; primarily this conflict was for control of resources and control of power disguised in ideologies.

Both sides were involved in excessive use of force, terrorism, humiliation of each other in the fear and retaliation. The xenophobia of other's attack was the reason of many preemptive strikes. There were mass killings, rapes, and other atrocities committed by Pakistani army against the Bengalis (both Muslims and Hindus) and Bengali militants against West Pakistanis, Biharis and other supporters of West Pakistan from their own community. So the xenophobia played an important role in the proliferation of violence and racial identity assertion that emerged and flourished because of existing political and economic asymmetrical relation between two geographical parts of Pakistan and politicization had promoted hatred which resulted in excessive use of violence. Out of this violence and hatred, a new country of Bangladesh was born and East Bengalis got a separate country. Religious nationalism which caused the creation of Pakistan failed to glue the two parts of country together and economic exploitation of Bengalis triggered them to create their separate country on racial and linguistic nationalism.

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