**Healing is the answer An urgent appeal to the COAS and PM of Pakistan**

[Dr Rakhshinda Perveen](https://dailytimes.com.pk/writer/dr-rakhshinda-perveen/)

December 2, 2020

In an age of glorification of oversimplification, instant success and speed one may wonder how to state what happened on the 16 December 1971 in the Ramna racecourse ground of Dhaka. The dismemberment of Pakistan’s Eastern wing has been summed up by the victorious side as the liberation and by the armed enabler as a humanitarian action. A vast majority of people, including well educated people of the present day Pakistan, could never recognize the magnitude of the misfortune. Rather they were and are led by biased nationalist/regionalist narratives, that too often work in favour of enemy forces. This in turn culminates in clear diversion of resources from priority problems like education, health, infrastructure and population. Those digital media warriors, who already have an anti-Pakistan agenda and/or sentiments; their interest and influence are further fed by the mockery of a human tragedy and humiliation of our army. The cost of this unattended damage is yet to be fathomed and it has certainly affected our collective mental health and happiness.

A quick scan of the academic literature and gray literature around this harrowing occurrence, gives a blurred image of the history that led to the change in our geography. As per the late veteran journalist, Kasturi Rangan, in his special feature in the ‘The New York Times’ (1974), the then Prime Minister Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, during an official visit to Dhaka, stated in a public apology that, “shameful repression and unspeakable crimes were committed in Bangladesh by the Pakistani Army before the eastern part of Pakistan gained independence in December 1971.” The archived document also recorded that Mr. Bhutto had been disparaged by a few hundred demonstrators when he visited a memorial for Bengalis killed in the 1971 struggle for independence. During which, the demonstrators shouted, “murderer Bhutto, go back!” Historically, the hostility of the public sentiments had justification in their origins, however it has been cleverly manipulated and a plethora of literature has been produced since then to malign Pakistan army in particular. Sadly, the books with a tilt towards Pakistan, bearing Pakistan’s perspectives or aiming to straighten the record without truth-twisting are not only little known but too few in number. In the last two decades I have been personally inspired by three books. These have convincingly advocated the case of Pakistan in relation to the 1971 tragedy. Dr. Junaid Ahmad (A Pakistani scholar) authored, ‘Creation of Bangladesh: Myths Exploded’ (2017). Besides busting most of the insurgency-related myths, he meritoriously proved the falsehood of the number of Pakistani soldiers who surrendered. Whereas ‘Dead Reckoning: Memories of the 1971 Bangladesh War’ (2011), authored by American-Indian academic and journalist Dr. Sarmila Bose not only unfolded how the 1971 war is still playing out in the region but challenged the assumptions about the character of the conflict. Whilst, not exonerating the West Pakistani forces, Bose’s book bluntly states that the Pakistan army &quot;turned out to be fine men doing their best to fight an unconventional war within the conventions of warfare&quot;. This statement single handedly is enough to anger both external and internal enemies of our country. The words of internationally acclaimed Pakistani origin American strategist, Mr.Shuja Nawaz aptly describe Bose’s contribution as, “powerful and poignant retelling of the birth of Bangladesh…” and he adds, “her book should help the people of both countries accept the facts of that tragic and bloody separation of 1971 and to take responsibility for the war that stained the verdant Bengali countryside red.&quot; One cannot ignore the stunning story “Of Martyrs and Marigolds” (2011), penned by Ms. Aquila Ismail (engineer, academic, writer and current director of the Orangi Pilot Project) .Yet to incapacitate the ache that I receive while relating with some passage, I must share a heart wrenching line, “no one from Bangladesh was party to the surrender document” (p.179). I sincerely wish that our foreign office, strategists from political parties and think tanks could do some deep diving and soul searching into this book.

History should not be tempered, and the past is irreversible. However, a proud history can be shaped, and a future filled with moral victory can be created by taking some intellectual risks and revisiting the moral foundations of politics in our part of the globe

Far from the ecosphere of biased or unbiased academic arguments and research is another biosphere composed of shambolic spots inhabited by some 300,000 to 450,000 human beings who migrated in 1947 to the Eastern part of Pakistan.

More than half of them are in Dhaka. They are characterized by discrimination, identity crises and dearth of dignity. Some local and international non-profits have chosen some of them as target audiences and intended beneficiaries. Their stories and images create data for the research students and development practitioners. The usual superficial nature of the logical framework bound projects successfully fail to look beyond the obvious and answer the unsaid questions of different generations clustered in inhumane conditions. The vocal among the younger ones occasionally voice their anger, their demand for basic human needs and individuality through human rights/NGO forums. The current pandemic of COVID 19 has added more to their existing deprivations and vulnerabilities. A story published in Dhaka Tribune in April 2020 quoted Shahjahan, who lives with his five family members in a single room, “Maintaining social distancing is a dream for us. We have so little space to live. If the virus spreads in the camps, it will result in a famine here.” Internet surfing did not provide any follow up to the stories that intermittently emerge on TV screens and newspapers. In the “camps” of Bangladesh (Former East Pakistan), the unending showcasing of the multilayered deception faced by the generations of forgotten, abandoned and betrayed Pakistani Biharis who sided with Pakistani army in 1971 is neither “newsworthy” nor of any “commercial interest”.

History should not be tempered, and the past is irreversible. However, a proud history can be shaped, and a future filled with moral victory can be created by taking some intellectual risks and revisiting the moral foundations of politics in our part of the globe. These most unfortunate people with many names like Bihari’, ‘Mehsoreen’, ‘Maura’, ‘Muhajir’, ‘etc. have yet to receive a formal, civilized and dignified exit from their current situation which they do not see (and still do not see) as their final destination. There are no easy solutions, but this denial has to be ended. Healing is the answer.

How can this be done and more importantly who can do this? Pakistan as a mature state has to take urgent actions for rehabilitation of those stranded Pakistanis who want to reclaim their Pakistani citizenship . In spite of being a staunch advocate of democratic institutions and without undermining these I would not mince words in disclosing my unaltered believe that this issue of Pakistani stranded Biharis can only be solved by military-civil leadership’s collaboration with the COAS taking a lead. There should not be even an iota of competition or comparison. It is all about compassion and contribution. Nothing is more powerful than the power of purpose. The issue can be and must be settled with the intellectual strength and empathy before enemies of my Pakistan assemble to celebrate 50 years of the fall of Dhaka.

*The writer can be reached at dr.r.perveen@gmail.com*