



TEACH THEM THE TRUTH:
NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH!

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"...It would be different if it were given to us to live a second time through the same events with all the knowledge of what we have seen before. How different would things appear to us? How important and often alarming would changes seem that we now scarcely notice! It is probably fortunate that man can never have this experience and knows no laws that history must obey." (Hayek, 1976, p 1).

The 16th December 1971 is a black day no matter which side of the spectrum one is or their opinions about the war. As a Pakistani, it hurts. However, there is one misconception that needs clarification. There are various versions about why we lost. All have their merits, but none is a complete truth, and none of those versions qualifies as "absolute reason". Exploring the truth is the subject matter of this piece.

The real reason we lost East Pakistan and the war was not the size of our military arsenal or the destroyed runways making the PAF (one of our strongest pillars in military strategy) ineffective. It wasn't the Mukti Bahini, distance from West Pakistan or the Indian-influenced Bengali teachers, as stated in our Pakistan Studies book. It is not to say that these factors played no role at all, but it's a critical mistake that we believe these factors as the deciding factors. The real reason why the two nation's theory, or at least a significant part, drowned in the Bay of Bengal was our refusal of democracy. A tradition of violation of merit.

A culture where ethnic marginalisation was dominant, and yet we refused to accept it. So it was overlooked. One thing needs to be clarified before I move further; there is a great difference between elections and democracy. Elections are a process that is part of democracy, but democracy is a culture which includes our thinking, perceptions, ways of doing things and decision-making processes. If we had adhered to 'Democracy', things would have been different today.

Why did Mukti Bahini come into existence? Why did the East Pakistanis feel that the western brethren were being unjust? Why was the Indian-influenced Bengali academia able to strengthen the Bengali narrative? These questions must be part of our discourse on the 1971 war. We need to understand these issues since they serve as a key to why General Niazi surrendered. All these things, including the surrender itself, were the consequences. And according to my understanding, none of them serves as the cause. Our discourse should focus on the cause.

We had a racial superiority complex against the East Pakistanis. We did not consider them 'Pakistani' enough. East Pakistanis were taunted for the colour of their skin, their language, their dress and even their food. Somehow West Pakistan was superior; it was a belief that there was something in the West Pakistani blood that was missing in the east. And many facts point out this thinking.

Let's start with the self-proclaimed Field Marshalls' account. He calls the Bengalis, among other things, a

down-trodden race who have always been ruled. Due to space limitations, I can't present a cortical discourse analysis since that would be a study itself (if worth doing at all), but what he tries to say is that Bengalis were less evolved compared to the races in West Pakistan. Filed Marshall Ayub writes in friends not masters:

"The people of Pakistan consist of various races, each with its historical background and culture. East Bengalis, who constitute the bulk of the population, probably belong to the original Indian races. It would be no exaggeration to say that up to the creation of Pakistan, they had not known any real freedom or sovereignty. They have been ruled by high-caste Hindus, Moghuls, Pathans, or the British. In addition, they have been and still are under considerable Hindu cultural and linguistic influence. As such, they have all the inhibitions of down-trodden races and have not yet found it possible to adjust psychologically to the requirements of the new-born freedom. Their popular complexes, exclusiveness, suspicion and defensive aggressiveness probably emerge from this historical background."Friends, not Masters¹

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So it was the creation of Pakistan that gave the Bengalis a flavour of freedom. By this logic, Ayub means that West Pakistani races were accustomed to the idea of freedom very well and knew exactly what to do with it:

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I wonder how the General could write about an ethnic group in such a tone when the ethnic group in question has had a rich tradition, a history and an essential role in the politics, society, history and culture of the entire Subcontinent. How could we expect unity, coherence and a single nation if we call the majority race of the country down-trodden, alien to the concept of freedom, and if we give them inclusion in the government, it is a favour to them?

The point here is that the East Pakistan discourse in Pakistan studies and Pakistan history literature doesn't introduce the students to this critical aspect. The marginalisation of East Pakistan and its exclusion through institutional means was a crime we committed against humanity. We led the East Pakistanis to a point where they said 'no more', yet we, in our Pakistan books, blame the Mukti Bahini and the Indian intervention.

¹https://archive.org/stream/FriendsNotMastersAPoliticalAutobiographyByPresidentAyubKhan_201705/Friends-Not-Masters-A%20Political%20Autobiography%20by-President%20Ayub-Khan-_djvu.txt

We need to understand that the Mukti Bahini was a reaction to the racist attitudes that we had while India in 1971 did what any rational country would - an opportunity to weaken its enemy. They would have been foolish not to exploit it in their favour. We had to keep our house in order and failed miserably at doing our job. This failure should be the basis of the discourse in our school curriculums of Pakistan study.

The accounts of deregulatory statements, comments and writing can go on and on. The point here was to show that if a state leader is looking at the East Pakistanis in such a way that they're considered lesser humans, less Pakistani, their political rights are a favour granted by West Pakistan. Even the quality of their Muslimhood was questioned. How would you expect to win a war, keep them together with you and aim at progressing and taking the whole nation ahead? Yes, 1971 was a mistake, a political blunder and a human rights crime, and it has to be the discourse in our curriculum now.

We rejected the right of the Bengalis, who won their right democratically. The only optimum solution was to give power to the majority leader. Had we been a democratic nation, we would never have chosen this ignorant path. This would have been easy if we West Pakistanis had considered East Pakistanis equal citizens. But we didn't, and we are making a big mistake by not letting our younger generation know. The truth can't be hidden; they will come to face the facts that will make them lose hope in the country and its foundations leading to a catastrophic collapse.

Lastly, have we learnt anything from the 1971 debacle? A whole part of our country was separated from us. Do we have any takeaways? Are we repeating these mistakes somewhere else? There is conflict theatre in Pakistani with similar sorts of issues. I can't forget a public servant saying in a documentary I saw during my college years, "before we came in, these people were savages". It turns out we have learnt nothing from 1971.

In conclusion, we need to revisit the chapters dealing with 1971, its causes and consequences. The younger generation needs to be aware of the blunders committed by non-democratic forces who also had support from political parties in western Pakistan. Racism, whether tacit or exploitative, should be a concern since we are a racially and culturally diverse nation (a nation. I hope). We are faced with groups that have the potential to become Mukti Bahini, and if we keep on denying that, I fear history might mercilessly repeat itself.

The world doesn't forgive the ones who forget history; it's a cruel mistress, my friends. Let's revisit the discourse on 1971.

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