



## REMEMBERING PARTITION OF BENGAL AND THE LIBERATION WAR OF BANGLADESH

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### Abstract

Memory and amnesia are always at the core of the relation between human beings and History. The interplay between past and present, memory and amnesia are always considered as a shape giver to investigate the earlier years of cataclysmic events. Partition is an empirical reality of human civilization. But how far it is possible to recreate that defunct memory of the horror and anxiety through a speculative narrative? Even if one embarks on this project can he bring forth something more than an exhaustive history of the Liberation War. The partition of Bengal in 1947 and the Bangladesh liberation war of 1971 are the major tumultuous episodes dismantled the course of history –millions of people become homeless, abducted and decapitated by the name of religion and politicized nationalism. The cataclysmic events of partition is not a matter of contingency –one has to understand the political and religious agenda of Pakistani colonialism and the ‘localized’ narratives that led the liberation war of Bangladesh. It is rightly unjustful to target one specific religion to withhold the other. The history of Bengal partition is not about the division of Bengal, Pakistan and Bangladesh but a grim reality of the scapegoats of the country. Keywords : convulsion, racism, identity, violence

Partition and liberation war are not synonymous. Historians prefer the phrase ‘Partition of Bengal’ whereas they use ‘Bangladesh Liberation War’ while narrating the events of Bengal and Bangladesh. Does the partition leads the liberation war or the liberation war leads the partition? Are the narratives reliable enough to underscore a specific conclusion?where from the historian should begin the narrative? Bangladesh as a separate nation has emerged not due to any specific movement that a historian can probably claim. while one may begin with the 1905 partition embedded in the ‘divide and rule’ policy to safeguard and dictate the provincial state of Bengal contains nearly eighty million people before the convulsion. while other critics may not agree with the same assumption that led such

cataclysmic events. The chronology remains ambiguous when the course of the events itself appear ambiguous. This paper is an attempt to justify and redefine the problems of historiography, locating the fissures in the documentation of such narrative. Amrita Bazar Patrika had organized a survey on 23rd April 1947 regarding the partition of Bengal. The framed question was “do you want a separate homeland for Bengali Hindus?” and the poll reports that 98.3% were in favour of division. Surprisingly 99.6% Hindus responded to the poll and demanded Partition.

The Hindu community believe in tranquil cohabitation and solely follows the virtues of ‘Samskara’ and ‘Karma’. Peace is their religion. They embrace anything pitiable, denounce communalism

and division. The narrative seems familiar, isn't it? Familiar because it is a general narrative we believe and take it for granted. The decision of the partition of Bengal is not a sudden event. The East coast of India was affected by Odissa famine and 33 percent of the population was decimated in 1866. India could feel the impact of British rule as the famine was preceded by a draught. The vast area of North-East India which was spread over 1,89,000 square miles was difficult to preside over for the Englishmen. Sir Stafford Northcote, a British politician, president of the board of Trade in 1866, secretary state for India in 1867 had initially proposed the division of North-East India for administrative reality. His opinion was to replace the Governor rule prevalent in Madras and Bombay. John Lawrence, the viceroy of India was dissatisfied regarding the opinion of Stafford in fear of losing his post and wishes to keep Odissa and Bihar separating Assam and its surroundings. In 1847, Assam was separated from Bengal even having only two million people over there –an illogical decision granted by the British government almost twenty two years later Dakha, Mymensingh, Chattogram were thought to be connected with Assam. Lord Curzon while visited Assam tea plantation during 1900, the owners of these plantations requested him to built a port in Chattogram for it takes high cost to cross Calcutta port. In 1902 after getting Berar province from Nizam of Hyderabad, Curzon rethinks about locating the boundaries of Bangla, Assam, Madhya Pradesh and Madras. According to his plan Chota Nagpur, Ganjam and Sambalpur will be connected to Madhya Pradesh and Bangla respectively. This agenda is known as Risley Note in history. Andrew Fraser, the lieutenant governor of Bengal between 1903 and 1908, tries to incite the Muslims with the planning of accommodating them in a separate space. Fraser thought of connecting Faridpur and Bakarganj with Assam in 1903. Risley supports Fraser evidenced in his note, "Bengal united is a power. Bengal divided will pull several different ways...one of our main objects is to split up and thereby to weaken a solid of opponents to our rules".

The Aligarh Movement had meant for the the progression of the Mohammedan community

though it triggered the racial distinction apparently. Undeniably the movement was a social movement but can we consider its effect had set 'new standards...in Islamic exegesis'. K.K.Aziz the Pakistani historian supports the movement and says, "It sets new targets in education, new standards in literary composition and criticism, new ideas in social thinking and new norms in Islamic exegesis. It was a social movement and preached the gospel of the 'good' life in Aristotelian sense." Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, a philosopher and founder of Mohammedan Anglo Oriental college in 1875 whose devotion for Islamic faith and his major initiative for educating the Mohammedan community was undeniably praiseworthy. In the early phase of life he abhorred British rule and their prospect though later he shows faith in western education realizing the futility of indigenous education. During a speech delivered from Mohammedan Literary Society Syed Ahmed encouraged the elite and middle class Muslims to cope up with western education which was the only way of getting govt jobs and to elevate their position in the Hindu dominated society. Economically poor classes of the Muslim community though never got anything from such movement as Syed Ahmed had never any agenda for them. These neglected section of Muslim community who later refused to served the elites and led the Independence war of Bangladesh. `A movement should lift the whole generation irrespective of the barriers of caste and creed.

The seed of destruction though much before planted and later W.B.Oldham, the commissioner of Chittagong in Bangladesh took the advantage and proposed to unite the muslims of East-Pakistan to reduce the power of Hindus. Curzon in Dec 1904 went to Dhaka and his speech deliberately reminds the Muslims of their rich ancestry, their lack of freedom in Hindu dominated Bengal, and their lack of education. Using religion as a political tool Curzon had sanctioned one lakh pound Dhaka's Nawab Salimullah in less interest to gain the favour of the Mohammedan community. In an article titled "The New Province-Its Future Possibilities", published in the "Journal of the Moslem Institute" in 1906 by Dhaka's Nawab Salimullah where he states, "No one

can deny that the partition has roused the entire Mohammedan community of Eastern Bengal. Many poor Mohammedan Youths, who had graduated with honours, but were roaming about in search of suitable employment are now getting prize posts, which they so highly deserved". Nawab Syad Shamsud Huda, a Muslim activist opines, "Before the partition, the largest amount used to be spent in districts near Calcutta...the best of colleges, hospitals and other institutions were founded in or near the capital of India...we have inherited a heritage of the accumulated neglect of years". The 'divide and rule' policy worked though it was not supported by many British dignitaries. Brodrick argued and addressed Curzon, "of we are weak enough to yield to their clamour now, we shall not be able to dismember or reduce Bengal again, and you will be cementing and solidifying, on the Eastern Flank of India, a force already formidable and certain to be source of increasing trouble in the future". The partition of Bengal Presidency was an inevitable and it becomes official in 16Oct, 1905 announced by the viceroy of India Lord Curzon. Amalesh Tripathi opines, "The genesis of the partition of Bengal had nothing to do with Curzon's determination to crush a seditious congress. It had its origin in anti-Bengali prejudice among the civilians and in the administrative necessity imposed by the geographical and demographical expression of Bengal under the British rule."

The elite people talk about secularism. Are they really sincere about it? Do they follow the path by themselves? Secularism for the elite people is a set of rules they prescribe but never follow them. Delusion of secularism is a kind of religious agenda. People are led to believe secularism and nationalism goes parallel. The liberation war of Bangladesh was not a sudden event merely fought by Bangladeshi nationalists –it is essential to decipher the Pakistani colonialism which led the liberation war of Bangladesh. One of its major trigger was Lahore Resolution in 1940. The muslim leaders in British India demanded for a separate state. The All India Muslim League had a three day annual session and they had framed the Resolution. Primarily they demanded for a separate nation to exercise their

own administration and religious activity. The Hindu philosophy is different compared to that of Muslim. The Lahore Resolution led by Muhammad Ali Jinnah had demanded the division of Indian subcontinent. It was a religious partition than a topographical one. Nawab Khwaja Salimullah, the fourth Nawab of Dhaka in association with Aga Khan III and William Archbold, principal of M.A.O college, Lahore visited the viceroy Lord Minto at Simla on 1st Oct, 1906. Their primary objective was to reduce the power of National Congress. In his presidential address on 26, December, 1936, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru says, "...one must seek a clue in British foreign policy...True, the British Govt always talked in terms of the league and in defence of collective security, but its action belied its words and were meant to leave the field open to fascist aggression"(The Labour Monthly, Vol.19 Feb 1937, No.2, P.P 98-107).

In the election of 1937 National congress obtained a majority and won the election which was never a satisfactory conclusion for Jinnah and Muslim League. Jinnah became more selective and for he prioritized the battle of freedom for the Mohammedan community over India's battle of freedom struggle to British colonialism. For several occasions it was suggested to form a separate nation but the name Pakistan was never proposed before Allahabad conference. Sir Mohammad Iqbal, the Urdu poet and philosopher raised the issue of 'Two Nation Theory' and suggested for Pakistan to be a separate nation in Allahabad address on 29 Dec, 1930. Rahamat Ali, a student of Cambridge University, founder of 'Pakistani National Movement' had emphasized Muhammad Ali's claim and published several booklets. Jinnah celebrates the "Day of Deliverance" on 22 Dec, 1939 when all the members of congress party resigned for not having been consulted regarding India's association world war II alongside Britain. In 20th march, 1940 Abul Kasem Fazlul Huq, the first Prime Minister of Bengal had presented Lahore Resolution where Jinnah claimed for North-west and North-East of India to be separated, forming an independent country. Jinnah argues, "The High command of Congress is determined, to crush all other communities and culture in this country and

establish Hindu Raj in community". Though it is quite debateable as Bipan Chandra, a historian has opposed Jinnah's ideology, "The communal card was alone available for playing against the national movement and the rulers decided to use it to the limit to spake all on it." Bipan Chandra expresses such concern when Indian Congress could not vie with Jinnah and his propaganda.

World War II inflicts a major havoc in the European countries though it was one of the major factor that kept British in back foot and prompts India's liberation. Japan in 7 Dec, 1941 launched attack on United States. During Feb, 1942 the Chinese President Chiang Kai Shek visited India for help. Chaing Kai Shek after visiting India asks Franklin Roosevelt to talk with Winston Churchill to change Britain's imperial policy on India if they at all hope of getting any help alongside them in world war. A.V. Alexander, sir Stafford Cripps arrived in Delhi on 24th March, 1945 and engaged in several discussions with the Indian leaders and dignitaries. Jinnah remain unmoved in his claim for Pakistan. It is Abul Kalam Azad who believed that Jinnah was exaggerating the facts, "From personal knowledge and with a full sense of responsibility I can say that the charges levelled by Mr Jinnah and the Muslim League with regard to injustice to Muslims and other minorities were absolutely false". Though Ayesha Jalal, a Pakistani-American historian shows faith in Jinnah, "In Jinnah's eyes that colition threatened the stability of the existing political structures and orderly progress along moderate and nationalist lines. The alarming rise in communal tensions in the remaining three years of the Khilafat agitation is a commentary on the soundness of Jinnah's assessment". The Partition of India finally occurred and the two independent states – Union of India and Union of Pakistan have been divided.

People of Pakistan was overjoyed having a separate nation in 1947, since Aligarh movement it was a long period that they had fought for this. Liberation war of Bangladesh was never meant for a separate nation, unlike Pakistan it was the struggle of minority class, the 'other' who were isolated ever since the Muslim community raised their propaganda. East Pakistan though always favoured

Jinnah and their prospect but was not ready to give up their mother tongue and culture. The Bengali speaking people were majority in group whereas the Urdu speaking people, notably the elite section were negligible in numbers. The Governor General of Pakistan, Jinnah during a speech held in Dhaka University in 1948 spoke in favour of Urdu and tries to boast it as State language. Such decision was never accepted by the majority working class people and the students who led a movement against govt. The students of Dhaka University led a procession with the demand of Bengali language to be accepted as official language on 21 Feb, 1958. The armed forces had openly fired and few students got killed. since then 21 February was officially celebrated as Language Martyr's Day and got the official status on 7th May, 1954.

Economy is the base of every civilization whereas East-Pakistan had always deprived the East of economic stability. It was the the leader of Awami League Shiekh Mujibur Rahman claimed certain facots known as "Six Point Demand" –the foreign trade exchange accounts should be shared equally between the two sectors East and West, regarding administration if Defence and Foreign affairs remain under federal govt then other residual projects should be in control of federating states, the taxation section should be under control of federating units, East Pakistan must have separate Navy headquarters and military force. The Ayub Khan Govt was desperately seeking avenge against Mujibur. Sheikh Mujibur and few military officers had been accused of conspiracy against govt and he was arrested on 19th june, 1968. General Ayub Khan claimed that Sheikh Mujibur had conspired with Indin Govt in the city of Agartala, known as "Agrartala Conspiracy Case". People of East-Pakistan revolted against such false accusation and the civil war was aggravated.

"The object of all honest govts should be to prevent your being imposed on this way. But the object of most actual governments, I regret to say, is exactly the opposite. They enforce your slavery and call it a freedom"(Freedom) marks G.B. Shaw. What sort of role did the Pakistan Govt play? Were the govt fair enough towards the all citizens? The

ideologies propagated by Ayub Khan govt was embedded undeniably in colonial repression. In 1951 he became the first commander-in-chief of Pakistan army and since 1953 holds the position of Defence and Home Minister. The East Pakistan had never got any constructive effort from him and while in 1965 he engaged in presidential race. This presidential race was never a favourable one for him while he was forced to resign in 1969. Ayub Khan's successor General Yahya Khan allowed a general election and that proves a disaster for them. The rise of Awami League gradually became a threat foe west Pakistan. The league had secured the 60 percent vote in the 1970 election and since 1947 it was for the first time that East Pakistani political power was in a driving seat. The leader of Awami League demanded proper finance and association for the development of East-Pakistan. Unwilling though Yahya Khan arranged a meeting in Dhaka with Awami League on 3rd March, 1971. The political leaders including Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and other official proposed the cancellation of the meeting. The outrageous people of East-Pakistan gathered in streets and the protest was a furious one. The power hungry Yahya Khan led a genocide known as "Operation Searchlight" in History. On 25th March 1971, the West Pakistani govt plotted a military assassination whose aim was to kill the Bengali Nationalists and politicians of East Pakistan. The slaughter began in Dhaka on 25th March at night, the mass killing continues and they had killed almost six thousands of Dhaka University. Sheikh Mujibur was arrested on that night. Mujibur was arrested after the midnight of 25th March and since the incident 26th March is celebrated as Independence Day in Bangladesh. Over thirty thousand nationalists were killed and many fled. Few months later the commanding General of Pakistani Forces A.A.K.Niazi had surrendered to the forces of India.

Beyond these notable events there were few leaders whose contributions were merely projected. We do talk about Sheikh Mujib but leaders like Maulana Bhasani are rarely epitomised who lead Bengal when Mujibur was arrested by Ayub Khan. Maulana voiced for the partition of East-Pakistan in

Kagmari Conference in Feb, 1957. Though he was never endorsed by the other leaders of Awami League and subsequently left behind when Mujib was released. Badruddin Umar's "Juddhopurbo Bangladesh"(1976) is critical of Sheikh Mujib and the agenda of some Bangladeshi Nationalists. Begum Mushtari Shafi's "Swadhinata Amar Raktajhara Din" appeared in 1971 narrates the struggle of a mother who lost her daughter, a brother was separated from the sister, a husband lost his wife, lack of food and shelter created a havoc. Every narrative has an objective and the critics have analysed the events from different dimension. The 'oral history' is not reliable enough that can retrieve the politics of partition and the liberation war. Thus it is quite impossible to find a narrative without a nationalist discourse and biased ideologies when the graph remains a vertical one. The ideology of nationalism may overpower the psyche of people who enlighten with the news of protecting their nation by the name of religious hooliganism. The sense of plurality undergoes a crisis that promotes the virulence among citizens causes deliberate isolation from each other. The social, religious and cultural isolation revitalize the liberation war at its core. The narratives produced can be challenged remain sceptical over ages. The political debate claims that people speak about secularism, claims to be secular while others not being so. If secularism and nationalism are taken to be the touchstone of such narrative one may find it objectionable. For the layers unveil the true colours of communalism which embedded firmly in such narrative never unfolds.

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