

Conflict and Development: A Case Study of East Pakistan Crisis, 1971

Masood ur Rehman Azhar¹, Saima Masood², Dr. Nor Malina Malek³, Khaliq ul Rehman⁴

¹*School of Social Sciences, Universiti Sains Malaysia*

^{1, 2}*COMSATS University Islamabad Wah Campus, Pakistan*

³*Associate Professor, School of Social Sciences, Universiti Sains Malaysia*

⁴*Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan*

Abstract: This essay supports the theoretical approaches of conflict and development and reveals that unequal development and resources scarcity deepens the poverty and creates conflicts in the society. Resource scarcity and unequal distribution of available resource create new marginalization and grievances. The marginalized, deprived, and excluded people struggle for their rights through non-peaceful means. This case study presents a theoretical analysis of an International conflict, i.e., East Pakistan Crisis, 1971, and reveals that political, economic and social inequalities create an understanding of deprivation among the masses causing large-scale violence and conflict in society.

Keywords: Poverty and development, poverty and conflict, conflict and development, resource scarcity and conflict, unequal development, East Pakistan Crisis, Bangladesh.

Development is a complex phenomenon. It creates conflicts when unequal development happens in the society. Marginalized and excluded people try to get their rights through non-peaceful tactics. Resource scarcity can also be a source of conflict in the society (Homer-Dixon, 1994). This essay supports the theoretical approaches of conflict and development and reveals that unequal development and resources scarcity creates conflicts in the society. It is a case study of the East Pakistan crisis, 1971. It was an internal civil conflict which became international when an external power intervened to help the armed opposition (Desai & Potter, 2008). As a consequence of this conflict, East Pakistan was dismembered and became Bangladesh.

British Empire decolonized India in August 1947 and Pakistan and India became independent states. Pakistan comprised two territories, East Pakistan and West Pakistan, separated by 1500 kilometers of Indian Territory (Schendel, 2009). West Pakistan had political, economic and administrative hegemony on East Pakistan. East Pakistan was a raw material producing area and contributing a significant share in the exports of Pakistan, but was not getting an equitable share in the national income. From 1947 to 1965, a lot of development happened in West Pakistan due to foreign aid and income from exports of raw material. Heavy industries, big dams, and communication networks were established, economic activities accelerated, public and private investments were encouraged, basic health and education facilities were provided. But during all this

process East Pakistan was excluded or only received a small share (Haq, 1966).

This unequal development generated a sense of deprivation among the people of East Pakistan. They started a struggle for their rights, which led to a conflict in the state. In the 1970 elections, East Pakistanis got a majority of seats in the National Assembly, but power was not transferred to their leadership. On this issue, riots started in East Pakistan, and the Pakistan army launched a military operation to suppress the agitators. A civil war broke out when East Pakistanis retaliated. Millions of people were displaced during this war, and approximately one million were killed. India helped freedom fighters and attacked East Pakistan in December 1971. The Pakistan Army surrendered after two weeks, and ultimately East Pakistan became Bangladesh (O'Donnell, 1984).

Pakistan emerged as an exceptional state on the world map in August 1947, due to three factors. First, it was founded on the basis of religious nationalism. Religion was a cementing force among its various ethnic groups, i.e. Bengalis, Punjabis, Pashtuns, Sindhis, and Baluchis. The only other example of a religiously based modern nation-state is Israel, which came into being in 1948. Second, Pakistan consisted of two territories, East Pakistan and West Pakistan, separated by 1500 kilometers of Indian land (Schendel, 2009). Geographically East Pakistan was surrounded by India from three sides and had comprised only 16 percent (144,000 sq. km) of the total area of Pakistan (940,000 sq. km) (er-Rashid, 1967). Indo-Pak Partition cut the trade links and transport connections of East Pakistan. The primary mean of transportation between both wings was through the sea which took almost seven days to reach on either side. According to the 1951 census, 44 million out of a total population of Pakistan (78 million) were living in East Pakistan (Schendel, 2009).

The third factor was: Pakistan did not inherit any central state institution of the colony. India, on the other hand, inherited the capital New Delhi as well as most of the civil bureaucracy, armed forces, and police. The bulk of the colony's resources and industries and its major port cities of Mumbai (Bombay) and Kolkata also went to India. By contrast, Pakistan inherited mostly raw-material producing regions without the industrial

units to process this material. The new rulers of India succeeded the British in the old center of colonial power while the new rulers of Pakistan had a much harder time to establish themselves. It was a unique state which needed to govern two unconnected territories without having the necessary infrastructure of the country and sufficient resources (Schendel, 2009).

East Pakistan was a highly densely populated area with a high poverty rate comprising a single ethnic group called "Bengalis" (Rahman, 1997). Bengalis had contributed a lot to the struggle for independence during the British regime. The All India Muslim League, the founder political party of Pakistan, was created in Dhaka (Capital of East Pakistan) in 1906 and the majority of its founding fathers were Bengalis (Hasan, 1971). Throughout the struggle period (1906-1947) for independence, Bengalis were contributing at the front line of the All India Muslim League.

Soon after the independence of Pakistan, Bengalis began to feel a sense of deprivation, when Urdu was announced as the national language of Pakistan. Only 2.3 percent were Urdu speaking while Bengali was a language of 54 percent of Pakistanis (Azhar, Malek, Masood, & Rehman, 2018; Rahman, 1997). The educated Bengali elite openly opposed this decision. But the West Pakistani Muslim League leadership was considering Urdu as a symbol of national integration. Bengalis started a movement for recognition of their language as a national language. The government used force to suppress this movement and in February 1952 police killed some activists of this movement in Dhaka. This was a turning point when Bengali nationalism arose, and people of East Pakistan considered the West Pakistanis as the dominating class, which was exploiting their rights (Rahman, 1997).

Bengali political leadership started feeling a sense of deprivation when they had not been allowed to exercise their political power without the consent of the powerful bureaucracy of West Pakistani origin. Khawaja Nazimuddin, a Bengali, became Governor General of Pakistan after the death of Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah (the founding father of Pakistan) in 1948, but he was unable to control the dominant military and civil bureaucracy of West Pakistanis. Likewise Husain Shaheed Suhrawardi and I.I. Chundrigar being prime ministers were powerless. This practice deepened the sense of deprivation of Bengalis leadership in the newly built Islamic state of Pakistan (Hasan, 1971).

The Bengali politicians had been selected by the central government for top posts to make a show of Pakistan unity. It was a regular practice that they were pushed aside if they failed to win the confidence of West Pakistani politicians. For their part, the Bengali politicians took on jobs at the center in the hope of forming national policies that would favor the Bengali interests. Most of them resigned when their efforts proved failed or when they did not satisfy those in control of the center. This phenomenon created a lot of dissatisfaction

within the Bengali political elite, and it led to an increased Bengali hostility to the center (O'Donnell, 1984).

Economic inequality between both territories was a major point of concern which ultimately became a significant cause of dismemberment of East Pakistan. Jute was a major export of Pakistan during the 1950s and 1960s (Haq, 1966). East Pakistan was a Jute producing region. Income of this jute export went to the central exchequer, from where it was distributed to both wings. The central government was investing a lot of money in the development of West Pakistan while East Pakistan remained neglected. It created a sense of deprivation among Bengalis, and they started believing that West Pakistan is exploiting their resources (Hasan, 1971).

The economic growth rate of Pakistan during the 1960s was more than five percent. Bengalis believed that the economy of East Pakistan was organized to accommodate the interests of West Pakistan (O'Donnell, 1984). Poverty was growing in East Pakistan day by day, and it was happening due to the diversion of the real resources of East Pakistan to West Pakistan. Two-thirds of Pakistan's foreign exchange was earned in East Pakistan, mostly through jute exports, but much of this amount was diverted to West Pakistan. In this way, West Pakistan was receiving considerable resources from East Pakistan to finance its development (Haq, 1966).

Disparities were also created by the allocation of private and public investments to West Pakistan or West Pakistanis rather than to East Pakistan and Bengalis. Big industrial zones were set up in West Pakistan. From Karachi to Hyderabad, Faisalabad to Sheikhupura, Lahore to Gujranwala, and in Gadon Amazai, major industries were set up, but East Pakistan was totally neglected in this process. Just twenty-two families owned 66 percent of Pakistan's industrial wealth and controlled 87 percent of the assets of the banking and insurance industries. None of these twenty-two families were from East Pakistan. The west was also favored in the allocation of central government expenditures, including foreign aid (Haq, 1966).

There were also disparities in the distribution of foreign aid, and central government favored West Pakistan interests above those of East Pakistan. All industries of the East were chiefly owned by the West Pakistanis who were, one way or otherwise, beneficiaries of financial aid from the central government. The traditional Bengali small-scale and cottage industries wasted away when West Pakistanis established big industrial units in East Pakistan. The internal allocations of foreign economic and military aid, by and large, went to the Center and the West Pakistan provincial government. East Pakistan received only 25 percent of the economic portion of the foreign aid and hardly any of the military monies. Although both wings were producing about the same quantities of food grains, the comparable nutritional level of the Bengalis was lower due to their larger population (O'Donnell, 1984).

According to Dr. Mahbub ul Haq (1966), the net balance-of-payments position of each wing revealed that the Bengalis had received a comparatively smaller share of foreign aid, loans and foreign exchange reserves than West Pakistan. Even if the distribution of these economic resources had been divided equally between East and West Pakistan, the transfer of real resources would still have diverted 4 to 5 percent of East Pakistan income to the West annually due to the larger population of East Pakistan. The transfer of resources to West Pakistan made a significant difference in provincial investment levels. West Pakistan's investments were significantly larger than its domestic savings because of the sizable flow of resources from East Pakistan and abroad. Total investment was at least 12 percent of all goods and services produced in West Pakistan while in the East total investments fell short of savings because of the compulsory transfer of savings from East Pakistan to West Pakistan. These disparities between East and West Pakistan would grow if the pattern of planning has not been changed (Haq, 1966).

Dr. Mehboob ul Haq (1966) revealed that between 1947 and 1965 income of West Pakistanis had been increasing substantially while there was no evidence of an increase in per capita income of East Pakistanis. The standard of living of the vast majority of Bengalis, especially those living in the lower income brackets (below 60 US dollars a year) was declined. Facilities of education and communications advanced much more rapidly in West Pakistan than in the East.

Bengalis started agitating over these economic disparities during President Ayub Khan Regime. Ayub Khan recognized the economic disparity between East and West Pakistan and promised parity between two wings within 25 years starting from the third five-year plan of 1960-65. But the Bengalis regarded it as an empty promise and made it clear to the government that they would not wait more than two decades for fulfilling their needs. Bengalis started protests for their rights which compelled Ayub Khan to announce a fourth five-year plan 1970-75 in the late sixties. In this plan, more than 50 percent of projected public funds were allocated to East Pakistan. But this was regarded as too late to bridge the economic gulf between East and West Pakistan (O'Donnell, 1984).

Sheikh Mujib ur Rehman, the leader of the Awami League, a Bengali nationalist political party, started a vocal Bengali opposition to the discriminatory economic policies and programs of the Central government. He launched a campaign against the Ayub government and demanded provincial autonomy (Azhar et al., 2018; Hashmi, 2005). Sheikh Mujeeb got support from the middle class and the peasantry of East Pakistan and started criticizing the Ayub Khan Government in public processions. Sheikh Mujeeb called for a general strike in June 1966 for the implementation of his six points program of provincial autonomy. During this strike, riots occurred and more than a dozen people killed. The government immediately arrested Sheikh Mujeeb. This act of government further deteriorated the situation in East Pakistan, and people

started a violent agitation against the government of Ayub Khan (Matinuddin, 1994; O'Donnell, 1984).

In March 1969 Ayub Khan was forced to resign by the Chief of Army Staff General Agha Muhammad Yahya Khan. General Yahya Khan took the office of the President himself and promulgated Martial Law in the country. He released Sheikh Mujeeb immediately and announced a schedule of elections in April 1970. Elections were held in October and November 1970. The two major political parties, Awami League from East Pakistan and Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) from West Pakistan took part in these elections: Awami League got 160 seats out of 162 allocated seats of East Pakistan, while PPP got 81 out of 138 seats in West Pakistan. The Awami League got a total of 160 out of 300 seats in the National Assembly of Pakistan, while the PPP scored only 81 out of a total of 300 general seats (Malik, 2008).

West Pakistan's politicians were not much optimistic about the outcome of the elections. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the chairman of Pakistan Peoples Party, was already considering violent repression. Bhutto advised Yahya Khan in the summer of 1970 to forget about the elections: 'Yahya the soldier and Bhutto the politician will make a very good team and can together run the country.' When Yahya asked him what he proposed to do about East Pakistan, Bhutto reportedly replied: 'East Pakistan is no problem. We will have to kill some 20,000 people there and all will be well' (Khan, 1983). General Yahya Khan did not transfer power to Awami League despite its clear majority seats in the National Assembly. He favored Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and used delaying tactics to transfer the power (Rais, 1985).

Bhutto and Yahya Khan signed a secret pact ("the Larkana pact") after the elections results. Both decided to launch a military operation in East Pakistan to suppress the Awami League. It was anticipated that there would be a retaliation to this operation and ultimately a civil war would break out, which would lead to the separation of East Pakistan. In remaining West Pakistan, Yahya Khan would be President and Bhutto will serve as Prime Minister (Niazi, 1998).

Sheikh Mujeeb and Bhutto, both were fighting to gain the power at any cost. Their stagnant attitude compelled them not to search for any solution for the transfer of power. Bhutto's ambitions to govern Pakistan sabotaged any reconciliation process. Likewise, Mujeeb with the backing of India never intended to negotiate seriously (O'Donnell, 1984).

Yahya Khan ordered the Pakistan army to move into East Pakistan in January and February 1971. On the other side, Bengalis were protesting and demanding the transfer of power to the Awami League. Yahya Khan used delaying tactics regarding this transfer of power until the first week of March when the army took control of the whole Eastern wing. During the first week of March 1971, peaceful protests of Bengalis turned violent. Riots started in the whole of East Pakistan. On March 25, 1971, the Pakistan Army launched a full-scale military operation in Dhaka to control the agitators

(Schendel, 2009). On the first day, the Pakistan army tried to disarm the police and the paramilitary East Pakistan Rifles in Dhaka because of their potential to offer serious armed resistance. They were overwhelmed after fierce fighting. Another target was the Dhaka University, which had been closed during the civil disobedience of the previous weeks, so fortunately many students had gone to their homes. The troops took control of the campus, using mortars on dormitories and killing students and faculty (Deutschman, 1971).

Sheikh Mujeeb was arrested on March 26 and shifted to West Pakistan. Awami League's militant wing "Mukti Bahini" started a guerrilla war against the Pakistan army. The conflict turned to a civil war, and the Awami League declared it a war of liberation. India provided support to militants and set up training camps along the border of East Pakistan (Faruki, 1971).

A lot of atrocities happened during this conflict. Millions of people were displaced, women were dishonored, children and elders were killed, and state infrastructure was damaged. It was an armed struggle between the Pakistan armed forces and the Bengali nationalists in which no human rights were protected. No exact figures for these atrocities are available (Siddiq, 1977).

This conflict attracted international attention because it was a part of two larger geopolitical games: the rivalry between India and Pakistan and the struggle between the Cold War superpowers. Pakistan was an ally of the United States in the South East Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) while India was allying with the Soviet Union. Due to this factor, the conflict was splashed across the front pages of the world press throughout 1971 (Schanberg, 1971).

The Soviet Union supported India and the Bangladesh liberation movement, while the United States and China allied themselves with Pakistan. Pakistan also received support from many Muslim-majority states. This division indicated that the conflict could not be resolved by diplomatic means as discussions in the United Nations became stuck, and bilateral consultations effected no change of the position. On the contrary, as the war continued throughout 1971, India and the Soviet Union came closer together and provided more direct support to the fighters of the Mukti Bahini (Schendel, 2009).

Freedom fighters got control of a lot of area of East Pakistan till October 1971, and it was evident that the Pakistan army was unable to regain control of this area. On the other side, the freedom fighters also could not win a military victory. India moved forward from supporting freedom fighters towards full-scale military invasion. It stepped up its international propaganda campaign. In November, India put an army general in charge of the joint command of freedom fighters and Indian troops and expanded its military operations inside East Pakistan but did not declare the war. On December 3, 1971, the Pakistan air force carried out raids on airfields of north-western India from West Pakistan. India retaliated by entering into East Pakistan with 400,000 troops,

and the (third) India—Pakistan War started (Faruki, 1971). The Soviet Union provided air cover to the Indian armed forces. On the other side, the United States halted military aid to Pakistan blaming civilian casualties and atrocities (Warner, 2005).

The Indian armed forces and the freedom fighters who battled alongside them had all the advantages. They entered East Pakistan from all directions. They were better armed than the Pakistan army and had control of the air and the sea. They were welcomed as liberators by most of the local population. The Pakistan army put up a fierce resistance, and it resulted in a lot of casualties. The supplies of Pakistan armed forces were already cut down by India, while the local population was supporting Indian troops, so the Pakistan army did not resist for a long. On December 16, 1971, the Pakistan army surrendered, the war was over, and an independent state "Bangladesh" had come into being (Niazi, 1998).

90,000 Pakistanis, both civilians and military personnel, were made prisoners of war. They were taken away by India, where they spent three years as prisoners of war until their return to Pakistan as a result of Simla agreement (1974). The number of people who were victimized during this war remained unknown. It is estimated that approximately one million people were killed during this war. Millions were displaced from their homes. Material damages were very extensive, hundreds of roads, railways, bridges, and six airports had been destroyed. Chittagong- the main port- was full of mines. Telecommunication network was out of action. Countless houses, schools, hospitals and community centers had been damaged. Agriculture, fisheries, livestock, and horticulture were severely affected (Azhar et al., 2018; Schendel, 2009).

At the time of its independence in 1947, Pakistan was a unique state with two territories, East and West Pakistan, separated by 1500 kilometers of Indian land. It inherited minimal resources and state infrastructure from the British. The West Pakistanis had more influence on political, administrative and economic affairs of the state. Pakistan was a raw material producing country which relied on foreign financial and military aid. From 1947 to 1965, Pakistan's economic growth rate was more than five percent. It was a period of industrial and economic development of Pakistan, but East Pakistan was excluded from this process, thus creating a sense of deprivation among East Pakistanis. They started the struggle for their rights, but unfortunately, their grievances were not addressed properly. A lot of economic disparity and unequal development between East and West Pakistan ultimately lead to a civil conflict. In 1970 elections, East Pakistanis won a majority of seats in the National Assembly, but power was not transferred to them. They started agitating for their rights, and the Government of Pakistan launched a military operation to suppress the agitation. The people of East Pakistan retaliated, and a civil war broke out. This civil war converted to an international conflict when India attacked East Pakistan. The Pakistan Army surrendered on December 16, 1971, and East Pakistan

became Bangladesh. A total of 90,000 troops and civilians of Pakistan were captured as prisoners of war. About one million people were killed during this nine-month protracted conflict.

This case study supports and proves the theory of development and conflict and reveals that unequal development creates conflict in the society. Resource scarcity and inequality in the distribution of available resource in developing countries create new marginalization and grievances among the masses. The politically marginalized, economically deprived, and socially excluded people fight for their rights through non-peaceful means causing large-scale violence and conflict in society.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Azhar, M. u. R., Malek, N. M., Masood, S., & Rehman, K. u. (2018). Linking poverty and environment as causes of conflict: a case study of Pakistan. *Journal of Advance Research in Social Science and Humanities*, 4(8).
- [2]. Desai, V., & Potter, R. B. (Eds.). (2008). *The companion to development studies* (2nd ed.). London: Hodder Education.
- [3]. Deutschman, P. (1971). Pakistan: What Never Gets Said. *Nation*, 213(15), 457-460.
- [4]. er-Rashid, H. (1967). *East Pakistan: a systematic regional geography & its development planning aspects* (2nd ed.). Lahore,: Sh. Ghulam Ali.
- [5]. Faruki, K. A. (1971). India's Role in the East Pakistan Crisis: Legal Aspects. *Pakistan Horizon*, 24(2), 18-30.
- [6]. Haq, M. (1966). *The strategy of economic planning; a case study of Pakistan*. Karachi,: Pakistan Branch Oxford University Press.
- [7]. Hasan, K. S. (1971). Political Background of the East Pakistan Crisis. *Pakistan Horizon*, 24(2), 3-12.
- [8]. Hashmi, J. (2005). *Haan mein baghi hoon*. Lahore, Pakistan: Saghar Publishers.
- [9]. Homer-Dixon, T. F. (1994). Environmental Scarcities and Violent Conflict: Evidence from Cases. *International security*, 19(1), 5-40.
- [10]. Khan, M. A. (1983). *Generals in Politics: Pakistan 1958-1982*. New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House.
- [11]. Malik, I. H. (2008). *The history of Pakistan*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press.
- [12]. Matinuddin, K. (1994). *Tragedy of errors: East Pakistan crisis, 1968-1971*: Wajidalis.
- [13]. Niazi, A. A. K. (1998). *The betrayal of East Pakistan*. Karachi: Oxford University Press.
- [14]. O'Donnell, C. P. (1984). *Bangladesh: biography of a Muslim nation*. Boulder, Colo.: Westview.
- [15]. Rahman, T. (1997). Language and Ethnicity in Pakistan. *Asian Survey*, 37(9), 833-839.
- [16]. Rais, R. B. (1985). Elections in Pakistan: Is Democracy Winning? *Asian Affairs*, 12(3), 43-61.
- [17]. Schanberg, S. H. (1971). Pakistan Divided. *Foreign Affairs*, 50(1), 125-135.
- [18]. Schendel, W. v. (2009). *A history of Bangladesh*. Cambridge New York: Cambridge University Press.
- [19]. Siddiq, S. (1977). *Witness to surrender*. Karachi: Oxford University Press.
- [20]. Warner, G. (2005). Nixon, Kissinger and the breakup of Pakistan, 1971. *International Affairs*, 81(5), 1097-1118. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2346.2005.00504.x