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Victory Day in Golden Letters –War of Liberation

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ABSTRACT

December 16, 1971 has been written as 'Victory Day' in Golden Letters in the Indian history and will remain as a Golden Day for ever in the military history of our country. 93,000 soldiers of Pakistan Army surrendered before the Indian Army at one time on this day and laid down their arms; unprecedented in the realms of military history. They were taken as prisoners. It was Thursday when the 'instrument of Surrender' was presented by Lt Gen A K Niazi, C-in-C of Pakistan Army in East Pakistan before Lt Gen Jagjit Singh Arora at Dacca with a request to accept it. The main issue is the International war related crimes committed by the Pakistan military forces to demolish the uprising by the 'Bengalis'; the people of East Pakistan.

KEYWORDS : Seeds of Discontent, Credibility, Legacy.

Introduction

Bangladesh was the part of Pakistan after division of India in 1947. Bangladesh gained her independence after sacrificing lots of lives in 1971 after nine month fighting against autocrat Pakistan (Iqthyer Uddin, 2013). Bangladesh has a glorious history and rich heritage. Once it was known as 'Sonar Bangla' or the Golden Bengal. The territory now constituting Bangladesh was under Muslim rule for over five and a half centuries from 1201 to 1757 AD. Subsequently, it came under British rule following the defeat of the sovereign ruler, Nawab Sirajuddaula, at the battle of Palassey on 23 June, 1757. The British ruled over the Indian sub-continent including this territory for nearly 190 years from 1757 to 1947 (Dixit & Singh, 2003). With the termination of British rule in August 1947, the sub-continent was partitioned into India and Pakistan. Bangladesh became a part of Pakistan and was called 'East Pakistan'. The new colonialists of Pakistan replacing the British Colonial rule, crippled the Bangalis politically and economically by its despicable misrule and oppression manifested by its wanton and brutal attack on the Bangalis on the dark night of 25th March, 1971 (*The Hindu*, 2010).

December 16, 1971, has been written as '*Victory Day'in Golden Letters* in the Indian history. This day will remain as a Golden Day for ever in the military history of our country. On this day, Lt Gen Jagjit Singh Arora, GOC- in C Eastern Command of Indian Army, accepted history's greatest military surrender post World War II.93,000 soldiers of Pakistan Army surrendered before the Indian Army at one time on this day and laid down their arms; unprecedented in the realms of military history . They were taken as prisoners. It was Thursday. That afternoon when the 'instrument of Surrender' was presented by Lt Gen A K Niazi, C-in-C of Pakistan Army in East Pakistan before Lt Gen Jagjit Singh Arora at Dacca with a request to accept it (*Daily Excelsior*, 2012).

The Seeds of Discontent in East Pakistan

Bangladesh was the part of Pakistan after division of India in 1947. Pakistan had two wings named East Pakistan and West Pakistan.The 1971 War was the international manifestation of the domestic political estrangement between the two halves of the Pakistani state. With little beyond a common religious belief and a deep distrust of India to bind them, these two halves slipped toward civil war as discontent in the eastern portion (now Bangladesh) grew into an autonomy movement during the late 1960 (Jackson,1975). The breaking point came in March 1971, when the Bengalis were denied the fruits of their victory in December 1970 elections: the principal East Pakistani party, the Awami League, had won the majority of seats in the country's parliament, but the Punjabi dominated polity of the Western Wing leadership -- particularly the ambitious Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, head of the Pakistan People's Party –refused to hand over power to Bengali politicians and thus stalled on convening the National Assembly. Z. A. Bhutto leader of PPP with lesser number of seats in National Assembly was sworn in as Prime Minister (Rehman, 1979).

Tension between the two sides reached unbearable levels as the law and order situation deteriorated. Civilians, Politicians, Students and intelligentsia came on the streets demanding from the military regime to honour the results of the election. President Yahya imposed curfew to control the situation. But people broke the curfew by doing demonstration and slogans. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman delivered a speech in Race course field (now called Shohrawardi Uddan) on 7 March 1971. In this speech he declared this fight is our fight for Liberation, this fight is our fight for independence (Iqbal, 2009). President Yahya khan appointed General Tikka khan as a governor of East Pakistan by planning to conduct genocide in East Pakistan. Yahya came to East Pakistan to do meeting with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on 15 March, 1971 and in the same time he brought troops in East Pakistan simultaneously. Pakistani government tried to show their effort to solve the problem but they took time to arrange troops to do the genocide in East Pakistan. At the night of 25 March 1971, genocide was started by Pakistani army. It was called Operation Searchlight (Ali, 2008). All foreign journalists was sent out of country. Pakistani army started massacre by killing arrested Bengali officers in Rajarbag Police line. They attacked Dhaka University and killed not only students but also teachers and staffs. President Yahya ordered "killed three million of them" (Malik, 1972). 30,000 people were killed, and the death squad were moved towards on the town, East Pakistani was flown out to escape from west Pakistani army.

In a bright spot of hope, the resistance movement was not dead in East Pakistan. AL leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was not executed; rather he was arrested and taken to West Pakistan, where he would spend the rest of the war. On 26 and 27 March, Major Ziaur Rahman, a high-ranking member of the military and the President of independent Bangladesh, from a small radio station in Chittagong, pleaded with the people of East Pakistan to resist the West Pakistan army.

The formal Bengali army officers meet in Head quarter of second East Bengal in Taliapara on 4 April 1971. Colonel Mohannad Ataul Gani Osmany, Lieutenant Colonel Abdur Rob, Lieutenant Colonel Salahuddin Mohammad Reja, Major Kazi Nuruzzaman, MajorKhaled Mosharaf, Major Nurul Islam, Major Shafat Jamil, Major Mainul Hossain Chowdhury and others were present. Bangladesh Armed Forces was formed and selected Col. MAG Osmani as a commander in chief. This arm Forces fought alongside of civilian of Bengal known as Mukti Bahini (Iqthyer Uddin, 2013). People fled the army occupation in urban areas and headed to the villages, and lines of refugees streamed out of Dhaka. Many professional urbanites had to swap their western clothes for "village garb," – *lung is* for men and conservative dress for women – in order to blend in with the rural villagers and not stand out conspicuously to the army. Within days, the army began to close in on the villages as well and people began to make a run for the western and eastern borders to enter into India. Predictably, the Bengalis retaliated and open rebellion broke out in the east. The rebels proclaimed the independence of "Bangladesh" on 26 March, and by early April a provisional government had come into existence at "Mujibnagar" in India. The level of violence increased during the spring and summer of 1971, and, military action led to a sea of refugees, estimated to be 10 million, flooding into the eastern provinces of India. Pakistan launched a pre-emptive attack on India on 3 December, which triggered the much desired Indo-Pak War of 1971 (*Daily Excelsior*, 2012).

Domestic pressure notwithstanding, the initial Indian reaction was relatively cautious. India did not authorize direct military action across the border. In a 29 April meeting, Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi apparently considered ordering a military advance, but Foreign Minister Swaran Singh counseled restraint and recommended holding military intervention in reserve in case "interim measures did not resolve the East Pakistan crisis" diplomatically (Dixit, 2002). Similarly, General S. H. F. J. "Sam" Manekshaw, the Chief of the Army Staff and simultaneously the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee, advised Gandhi that India's armed forces would need many months to prepare for conflict. Moreover, the imminent arrival of the monsoon would prevent major operations until November at the earliest. Gandhi agreed to a delay, but ordered Manekshaw to plan for war as a policy option for the future. The Indian leadership thus seems to have hoped for a resolution short of open war in the intervening period as long as the refugees departed and stability returned to the east either through a resolution that gave power to a moderate Awami League regime within the Pakistani state or through the creation of an independent Bangladesh. Pakistan also placed its military on a war footing during the summer and fall, transferring significant forces to the east and raising new units in the west to take their places. By November, the Indian Army and paramilitary troops were regularly providing artillery support to the Mukti Bahini and, toward the end of the month; the army had even made small incursions into East Pakistan in several locations. Cross-border raids and artillery exchanges by both sides became common (Khan, 2001).

Pakistan, whose strategy for defense of the east called for offensive in the west, therefore launched its air force against several targets in western India on the evening of 3 December 1971. That night, the Pakistan Army opened an offensive all along the Western Front from Poonch in Kashmir to Longewala in the Rajasthan desert. India had been preparing for Pakistan to make the first move and had drafted its plans accordingly.Its principal focus was in the east, where it was hoped that a well-conceived offensive would crush Pakistani resistance quickly and result in the conclusive establishment of Bangladesh as an independent country. Unleashed, India's Eastern Command over an East Pakistan in two weeks. Despite often spirited resistance, the Pakistani defenders were faced with an impossible strategic situation. Their commander, Lt. Gen. A. A. K. Niazi, therefore signed an instrument of surrender at 4:31 p.m. in the Eastern Theater, on 16 December 1971 and a ceasefire went into effect on both fronts at 8 p.m. the following day, leaving some 90,000 Pakistani prisoners of war and civilian detainees in Indian hands (www.saja.org).

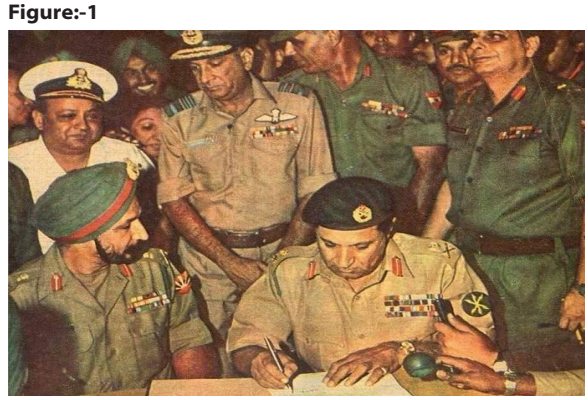
The Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina said, "The Bengali nation arrived at the juncture of the crucial 7th March of 1971 voyaging a long path of struggle of the Language Movement of 52, the election of the 54, the Education Movement of 62, the six –point Demand of 66, the Mass Upsurge of 69 and the election of 70." The Champion of freedom Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in front of a million of people at the then Race Course Maidan declared that this time the struggle is for Independence, this time the struggle is for our freedom. In fact, the new chapter of freedom struggle got momentum from that day.

The Victory that was achieved in 1971 has brought about a sense of stability, security and peace in the lives of Bangladesh. The sweet dream of a prosperous future was realized in the oppressed and anguished life of the Bangalis. '*Joy Bangla*' the weekly mouthpiece of Bangladesh Awami League was published on 16th December 1971. It headlined the story of hoisting of Bangladesh flag in the official and non official buildings of Dhaka. The full throated slogans of long live Bangabandhu rent the air. The headline also covered the retreat of Pakistan army faced with the advances of heroic freedom fighters of Bangladesh along with Indian soldiers into Dhaka city. The deserted and destroyed life of Dhaka city returned to normal activity and pulsation. The air was full with slogans of Joy Bangla', 'Long Live Bangladesh – India friendship and amity'. After the 16th December, the Dainik Pakistan was published as the Dainik Bangla on the 18th December .This was the single chief newspaper published in independent Bangladesh. On that day the paper headlined "Joy Bangla Joy" under eight columns. It wrote:

"Oh my golden Bangla, I love you". My motherland, every inch of it is sacred and holy today. This is my dream homeland. Hats off to youhey my motherland touched with the burning passion of freedom and throbbing hearts of seventy five million people. Your name is Bangladesh written in red letters of blood of millions of lives. Not only the marauding Pakistan army but also their armed collaborators have snatched away millions of lives by their cruel, beastly assault which destroyed millions of households , looted honor of women'.

On December 17, the times of London in a headline 'the Fallen General' wrote that General Niazi looked angry and ferocious while signing the deed of surrender of defeat at the table of Racecourse field at the distant thunder of gunshots. He looked pale and crestfallen in the midst of jubilation and joy of people overwhelmed with excitement of the victory (The Hindu, 2010).

Figure:-1



Lieutenant General A. A. K. Niazi (right) signing the Instrument of Surrender while surrendering to Lieutenant General Jagjit Singh Arora of the Indian Army (left).

Pakistan's military debacle naturally started a political upheaval that ended with Zulfikar Ali Bhutto coming to power as the truncated country's new leader. After prolonged wrangling and some additional skirmishing (most notably in the Lipa valley in Kashmir in May), Bhutto and Gandhi signed the Simla Accord at the eponymous hill resort on 3 July 1972. Innumerable details remained unresolved, however, and the two sides did not come to an agreement on the redefinition of the Cease-Fire Line, from thenceforth to be called the Line of Control (LOC), in Kashmir until December 1972. The first exchange of prisoners also took place that month, but the last of them, held hostage to bitter political machinations, did not return home until April 1974.

Despite Ceasefire Agreement of January 1949 and January 1966, Pakistan continued to be inimical towards India.It adopted everlasting aggressive posture. She continued getting military and financial aid from all conceivable sources. It joined SEATO on 8 September 1954 as member of collective defence system in South East Asia against any member country. In September 1955, Pakistan joined Baghdad Pact which later came to be known as CENTO. Aim of this treaty was that each member will pour resources individually for the collective defence of the area. These defence treaties gave tremendous sense of security to Pakistan against any threat from India. Between 1954 and 1965 Pakistan received aid in military hardware worth 1.5 Billion including 650 latest Tanks, aircrafts submarines and seacrafts. America continued pouring in aid and arming Pakistan relentlessly. Pakistan thus acquired formidable military capacity in ground, air and Sea. Iran and Turkey also supplied war material to Pakistan during this period. Pakistan military leadership was thus intoxicated with military power and had lost the sense of strategic reasoning and ground realities (*Daily Excelsior*, 2012).

The sanctity of the LOC is in sharp focus this time, too, involving just India and Pakistan as the sole stakeholders – and not the US as well. India and Pakistan routinely accuse each other of triggering incidents on the LOC and violating the ceasefire that was officially agreed to in November 2003.Describing the ceasefire, the *Los Angeles Times* had said on November 26, 2003: "Taking a significant step to end one of the world's most dangerous conflicts, nuclear-armed rivals India and Pakistan agreed to a cease-fire aimed at halting 14 years of cross-border gun battles in the disputed Kashmir region."

Pakistan's 8 January,2013 action, besides being a ceasefire violation, also involved physical transgression of the LOC and the gruesome

killing of two Indian Army Soldiers, Lance Naik Hemraj and Lance Naik Sudhakar Singh , including the mutilation of bodies and carrying away of the head of one as a trophy. The reaction in India was overwhelmingly one of anger. Indian Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh said that this incident had seriously damaged the ongoing peace process and "after this dastardly act, there can't be business as usual with Pakistan." Bikram Singh, the Chief of Army Staff of India said that "We reserve the right to retaliate at a time of our choosing."He also said, "The attack on January 8 was premeditated, a pre-planned activity. Such an operation requires planning, detailed reconnaissance."

Indian Leader of Opposition Sushma Swaraj said that "If Pakistan does not return the severed head of the martyred soldier Hemraj, India should get at least 10 heads from the other side". She also said that the Indian government had to avenge the death of the two soldiers. Protests took place outside the Pakistani High Commission in New Delhi, and the protesters painted Pakistan Murdabad (Death to Pakistan) on its walls (*The Economist*, 2013).

A War of Credibility

The final tally of the 14-day 1971 war announced by Indian Defence Minister Jagjivan Ram, in the Parliament on Dec 18, 1971, puts Pakistani losses at 94 aircraft and Indian losses at 45 aircraft (www. indianairforce.nic.in). While it is generally said that the actual figure for kills/losses or the truth lies somewhere in between the claims of both India and Pakistan, one must also note that the 1971 war was an outright decisive victory for India. With objectives and air superiority fully achieved, numbers had very little meaning or immediate worth for the Indian side. Even so, numbers and more importantly, attrition, have always been secondary when compared to actual objectives achieved, that influenced the overall outcome of the war.

It is to be estimated that most of the losses on both sides occurred among the ground forces. The Indian Army and associated paramilitary forces lost approximately 3,300 to 3,600 men killed, 8,000 to 10,000 wounded, and 900 missing or captured. Adding 100 IAF casualties and 200 men from the Navy, India's total human cost comes to somewhere between 12,500 and 14,600. Additionally, the Indian official history notes the loss of 69 tanks and 10 artillery pieces (*The Daily Excelsior*, 1999). Recent analyses by an unofficial team of Indian specialists gives Indian tank losses as 81 and claims that India destroyed or captured 217 Pakistani tanks, a result very similar to early assessments by the International Institute of Strategic Studies: 83 and 220 respectively (www.bharat-rakshak.com).

Pakistani casualty figures are skewed by the surrender in the east. There is also considerable variance in the few sources that specify casualties: one authoritative source, for example, lists a total of 2,700 killed (1,400 in the west, 1,300 in the east), while another reliable historian gives some 5,800 deaths in East Pakistan alone. Using the lower figure for combat deaths, Pakistan personnel losses for the period from March to December 1971 come to at least 9,100 killed, wounded, and missing in addition to approximately 79,700 military and paramilitary prisoners of war as well as 12,500 civilian internees captured in the east. The number of dead and wounded, however, may have been much higher. Pakistani ground force equipment losses included some 63 tanks and 108 artillery pieces taken in the east as well as the probable destruction of at least 100 additional tanks in the west.

Aircraft casualties on each side can only be estimated. Recent research by Indian analysts indicates Pakistan lost 50 combat aircraft and India 56 to 58 to enemy action. These numbers include planes lost in air-to-air battles, shot down by ground fire, or destroyed on the ground by air strikes. In addition, the PAF destroyed at least 13 of its own fighters at Dacca to prevent them falling into Indian hands. These figures are similar to those in the Indian official history that lists Indian losses as 56, but claims 75 "confirmed" losses for Pakistan (including those destroyed by the PAF at Dacca). The IAF lists another 15 of their own as destroyed or damaged owing to accidents. Pakistani accounts list their own aircraft casualties to enemy action as only 24;they claim approximately 104 aircraft kills against the IAF.Pakistani losses to accidents are unknown (John, 1971). The credibility of a Secular Democracy over a Military Dictatorship known for oppression of its own people,should also come into consideration.

The PAF extensively received foreign assistance and aircraft throughout the war, and these not only added to its combat element but more importantly, helped camouflage the extent of its losses. The most famous example would be the transfer of 11 RJAF F-104A Star fighters to Pakistan, on 13 December 1971. This was not initially mentioned in Pakistani accounts, was first noted by IAF pilots when the F-104s they shot down, bore a desert camouflage (www.gwu.edu).

Legacy of the War

The 1971 war left a legacy whose significance remains potent today. For Bangladesh, it is the great war of liberation, the founding event of the state and central to national identity. Nonetheless, frictions between "freedom fighters" who struggled for independence and "loyalists" who sided with Pakistan in 1971 have been a recurrent theme in domestic politics. Furthermore, Bangladesh has been host to several hundred thousand so-called "Biharis" since 1971. These people, non-Bengalis trapped in the new country after the war, have lived a precarious existence in refugee camps for the past three decades awaiting resettlement in Pakistan. They have thus become a domestic issue in Bangladesh as well as a bilateral problem between Dhaka and Islamabad. Although the passage of time and President Musharraf's conciliatory gestures in 2002 have muted some of the rhetoric, Pakistan-Bangladesh relations also continue to labor under the shadow of mutual recriminations over the question of alleged mass atrocities during 1971. India emerged the undisputed military victory in the war, but soon found that the political fruits were not as satisfying as it might have hoped. In the east, relations with Bangladesh soured after an initial honeymoon period and have remained problematic and frequently tense. In the west, the Simla Agreement did not "solve" the Kashmir problem and the fragmentation of Pakistan did not substantially reduce Indian perceptions of Pakistan as a threat; indeed, some have argued that the elimination of East Pakistan simplified Pakistan's security problem and made the country more sound from a strategic standpoint. Moreover, few Indians seem to have recognized the depth of Pakistani enmity after the 1971 defeat and the serious challenge that this would pose to Indian diplomacy and security policy in the wake of the conflict (John, 1971).

Pakistan suffered the most from the war. The loss of half the country was nothing less than traumatic, leaving a deep well of bitterness over the Indian invasion of the east and especially over Indian support to the Mukti Bahini before the outbreak of full-scale hostilities. For many Pakistanis, the war reinforced their conviction that India intended somehow to "undo Partition" and fragment Pakistan. The impact on the Pakistan Army was particularly brutal. Two enduring aspects should be highlighted. First, the war was short in duration owing to international pressures and limited resources on both sides. Second, although it ushered in a new nation state, the conflict did not result in a "decisive" victory for India; that is, India could not dictate terms to Pakistan and its security situation only improved marginally after the war.

However, a future conflict, whether sparked by infiltration across the LOC from Pakistan or an attempt to implement India's worrying "limited war" concept, would almost certainly entail much higher costs in lives and property even if it could be kept at the conventional level. Meanwhile the possibility of nuclear escalation means that the consequences of any outbreak of fighting are incalculably more terrifying than in 1971. Having colored the perceptions of the three major actors in this sanguinary drama for the past 42 years, the 1971 India-Pakistan war remains relevant today and shows no inclination to diminish in importance (Singh, 1982).

Conclusion

India's dramatic victory not only brought Bangladesh into being and reduced Pakistan by half; it also resulted in the formalization of Soviet-Indian ties in a pre-war treaty, generated enduring suspicion in US-India relations.

Credit for Indian victory of 1971 goes to Political and military leadership besides Indian Armed Forces' which carried a lightning offensive in the East in synergy with Mukti Vahini of East Pakistan. After 1962 debacle we had already redeemed our honour to an extent during the 1965 war. Ultimate was achieved in 1971. China had not vacated captured areas of Ladakh sector and we were compelled to give away Hajipir after capturing it in fierce hand to hand fights in 1965. It would have been obvious that India would be waiting for an opportunity to exploit any political/ military situation in the neighborhood which could be used to establish India as reckonable military power in the sub-continent. This

opportunity came on 26 March 1971 when Sheikh Mujibur Rehman of East Pakistan, leader of Awami League, declared Eastern Wing as independent nation of Bangladesh**.**

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