

Bangladesh: Literary Responses to the Tragedy of 1971

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Introduction

To suppress East Pakistan's demand for political autonomy, Yahya Khan government launched a planned genocide on the 26 March 1971. In the following nine months, three million people were massacred; the largest number of people killed in the shortest span of time in human history. People from all walks of life were; students, teachers, professors, doctors, nurses, scientists, politicians, poets, artists, writers, government workers, military and paramilitary personnel, industrialists, shopkeepers, rickshaw pullers were executed. Innocent and unarmed villagers; men, women and children were rounded up, raped, mutilated and massacred by the West Pakistani troops. The outcome of this genocide was the Liberation War of 1971.

On 16 December 1971, the Pakistani army occupation ended and they surrendered before the joint command of the Mukti Bahini (Freedom Fighters) and Indian Army. An independent and sovereign Bangladesh was born.

Literature is often written in response to a specific occurrence and occasion. Writers and poets are called the "conscience of the people." We find mixed literary responses in Pakistan during the Tragedy of 1971 in East Pakistan.

Renowned names such as Ahmad Nadim Qasmi, Mumtaz Mufti and Safdar Mir favoured the government's atrocities and brutality against the innocent Bengali people. Writers and poets sympathizing with the Bengalis and against the government's drastic action lacked courage to write their opposing views and remained silent. The truly exceptional thinkers like Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Habib Jalib, Ata Shad, Gul Khan Naseer, Ajmal Khattak, Ghani Khan, Sheikh Ayaz and Anwar Pirzado did not remain silent. They had the courage to speak their mind.

Army Crackdown

The Bangladesh War, incorporating the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971, was an armed conflict between Pakistan Army and the people of East Pakistan that lasted for nine months, from 26 March to 16 December 1971. It resulted in independence of Bangladesh from Pakistan.

Since Independence in 1947, East Pakistan accounted for a majority of the country's population but political power remained firmly in the hands of West Pakistanis, specifically the Punjabis. A system of representation based on population would have empowered East Pakistan; the establishment in West Pakistan devised 'One Unit' scheme, in which West Pakistan was considered one province. The sole reason was to counterbalance the East wing's votes. Apart from economic and political exploitation, Bengalis were grossly underrepresented in the Pakistan military. Bengalis were only 5% of combined Army, Air Force and Navy forces in 1965; only a few were in command positions, the majority were in technical or administrative posts.¹

Despite a huge defence budget, East Pakistan received none of the benefits such as contracts or military support jobs.

The Indo-Pakistan War of 1965 over Kashmir highlighted the military insecurity among Bengalis. An under-strength infantry division and 15 combat aircraft were positioned in East Pakistan to thwart Indian retaliations during the conflict.²

In 1948, Mohammad Ali Jinnah declared in Dhaka that 'Urdu, and only Urdu' would be the official language for all of Pakistan.³ This proved highly controversial because Bangla was spoken by the majority of East Pakistanis. The language controversy resulted in a revolt from East Pakistan; students and civilians lost their lives in a police crackdown on 21 February 1952. The day is revered in Bangladesh and in West Bengal as the Language Martyrs' Day. Later, in memory of the 1952 killings, UNESCO declared 21 February as the International Mother Language Day. The conflict left the East Pakistanis feeling alienated and hostile.

The situation climaxed in 1970 when Awami League, the largest political party of Pakistan, led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman won a landslide victory in the national elections. They were denied the right to form the government, which led to a nation-wide strike.

All foreign journalists were systematically deported from Bangladesh. Bengali members of military services were disarmed. On the night of 25 March, the Pakistani Army began a violent effort to suppress the Bengali opposition.. The operation was called Operation Searchlight by the Pakistani Army. It was carefully devised by several top army generals to crush Bengalis.

The capital city of Dhaka became the focus of violence and the process of ethnic elimination was initiated all over Bangladesh. Residential halls of University of Dhaka were particularly targeted. Pakistani armed forces destroyed The Jagannath Hall and an estimated 600 to 700 residents were murdered. The Pakistani army denied charges of cold blooded murders at the university in the Hamood-ur-Rehman Commission in Pakistan. The massacre at Jagannath Hall and nearby student dormitories of Dhaka University is corroborated by a videotape filmed by Prof. Nur Ullah of the East Pakistan Engineering University, whose lived directly opposite the student dormitories.⁴

All over Bangladesh, Hindu areas suffered severe brutalities. By midnight, Dhaka was ablaze. Time magazine reported, "The Hindus, who account for three-fourths of the refugees and a majority of the dead, have borne the brunt of the Muslim military hatred."⁵

On the night of 25 March 1971, the systematic and planned murder of the people of East Pakistan began. In March, Yahya Khan brutally reversed the overwhelming mandate of Sheikh Mujibur Rehman. Yahya Khan came to power on 25 March 1969. Ironically, on the same day two years later, he instigated ruthless massacre of the Bengalis.

Simon Dring of The Daily Telegraph wrote about 25 March, 'How Dhaka paid for a United Pakistan?' In his report, he provided the first eyewitness account of the terror campaign, designed by the Pakistani generals to 'save' the 'integrity' of the nation.

He recorded that 200 students were killed in Iqbal Hall, the headquarters of the anti-government students' union. Two days later, bodies of students were still smouldering in burnt-out rooms, scattered outside the Hall, many floated in a nearby lake and an art student lay sprawled across his easel.⁶

The corridors of the Iqbal Hall were covered in blood. The military removed many of the bodies but 30 bodies were unaccounted for.

Soldiers buried the dead in mass graves, which were bulldozed over by tanks. Shanty houses running alongside a railway line near the university were destroyed. Professor Jotirmoy Guha Thakurta and his wife Pashanti's house had a pool of blood on the stairs, five days after the massacre

There was a fierce battle between the Bengali policemen and the troops at the Rajarbagh Police Headquarters. The late Jahanara Imam wrote in her book, *Blood and Tears*, that most of the policemen were killed and rest were forced to retreat. Many university professors including Prof. Modayniruzamman, Dr. G. C. Dev, Dr. F. R. Khan and Dr. A. Maqtadir were killed. The offices of 'The People' and 'The Ittefaq' were burnt. Most of the market places and slums area was burnt to ashes including Rayer Bazaar, Thathari Bazaar, Naya Bazaar, and Shakaripotti. The night of the 25th till the morning of 30th March, the army killed people in the Dhaka Club and dead bodies were left on the ground.

Response in West Pakistan

27 March 1971 was a lovely day in Lahore. The city was full of flowers, colours, and fragrance. The writers, poets and intellectuals gathered at Shah Hussain College, to proceed to the Shalimar Gardens in Bagwanpura to attend the annual *Urs* of sixteenth century Punjabi saint-poet, Madhu Lal Hussain. People danced the traditional *bhangra* of Punjab. The devotees preferred *dhamaal* to the beat of the *dhhol* and exhaust themselves dancing ecstatically. Lal Hussain and Dulla Bhatti rebelled against the Mughal authority during the reign of Akbar the Great. *Dhamaal* at the shrine during *Urs* is usually held in the last week of March and is not an expression of merriment but an expression for freedom and justice.

On 26 March 1971, Reports of genocide in East Bengal reached people in West Pakistan. Led by Professor Manzoor Ahmad, the Principal of Shah Hussain College and Shafqat Tanveer Mirza of Majlis-i-Shah Hussain, a procession started from the college to the shrine. Inside and around the saint's tomb, the devotees sang louder than ever before and people danced in a state of frenzy. On my lips were the verses of my poem:

*Lal Hussain! O Lalon's kin,
Rise up! In Bengal your Madhus are being massacred
They shot at the songs of Lalon time and again
In '48 in '52 and later on too....
And today they are ablaze with the songs of Tagore and Nazrul
Rise up Lal Hussain, Madhu is lonely, embrace him.
Combat with your songs the bullet whistling towards him
Get up Lal Hussain,*

*Dulla Bhattis of Bengal are filing-up
Get up poet, where have you left your gun?
My poet, the night grows long without Madhu*

One of my poems about the plight of our fellow countrymen in East Pakistan was translated in Urdu and sent for publication in *Awami Awaz*, published by M. R. Hassan. There was harsh reaction from the military-bureaucracy of West Pakistan. I was arrested in Lahore and M. R. Hassan in Karachi.

A few days later, it was learnt that on the night of 25 March, tanks rolled into Dhaka and targeted the students. The university canteen, usually the center of students' politics was burnt and the owner, Madhu was shot dead along with other three members of his family. Bashirul Haque wrote in his book, "Twenty years after the Genocide in Bangladesh".

Madhu lived in Dhaka University Shib Bari quarters in flat number 3/D. One night, the soldiers attacked his apartment and in 90 minutes, killed four members of his family. Madhu Da had large family, five sons and six daughters and daughter-in-law. Ranjit was the oldest and worked for an insurance company. Madhu Da, Ranjit, Bina Rani Dey were killed at the same time. Mother, Jugamaya Dey, met the same fate along with her husband, son and son's wife the same night.⁷

Pakistani Writers and Poets in support of Army Crackdown

On 7 April 1971 the writers and poets from Lahore condemned the armed intervention by India in East Pakistan. In a resolution adopted at the Writers Guild House, the writers demanded that the Government should mobilize all means of information at its disposal "for the propagation of Pakistani nationalism for reflecting and widespread public communication of the ideals of Pakistani nationhood". They expressed gratitude to "our great neighbour and friend, the People's Republic of China who had, in the note of protest to India, condemned the Indian interference in Pakistan's internal affairs."⁸ They supported the stand taken by the President of Pakistan in his reply to the letter from the President of USSR.

The meeting was presided by Abul Asr Hafeez Jullundhari, the author of our national anthem, and attended by Lahore's leading poets and writers: Ahmad Nadeem Qasimi, Prof. Hamid Ahmad Khan, Muhammad Safdar, Mir, Jamiluddin Aali, Meerza Adeeb. Maulana Hamid Ali Khan, Qateel Shifai, Dr. Enwar Sajjad, Ishrat Rahmani and Syed Qasim Mahmood.

Indian action in East Pakistan was strongly condemned. Government of India was warned to desist interfering in the internal affairs of Pakistan. Ignoring the crimes committed by the government in East Pakistan, the writers welcomed the assurance of the President of Pakistan that political power would be transferred to the representatives of the people as soon as conditions returned to normal. The resolution said that the most important concern was the preservation and protection of the integrity of Pakistan.⁹

The writers noted with 'surprise and Indignation' that some Indian writers had given utterances through AIR to their support for 'the totally unfounded and mischievous propaganda of India against Pakistan'. They advised that they should recognize the importance for writers to uphold "the

standard of truth and honesty in all situations and should have the courage to criticizing the injustices of their own country. They should specially remind their Government of the untold cruelties that it had unleashed on the Muslims of occupied Kashmir and of India throughout these 23 years.”¹⁰

Before the meeting adopted the resolution, it was addressed by Abul Asr Hafeez Jullundhari, Ahmed Nadim Qasimi, Prof. Hamid Ahmad Khan, Ishrat Rahmani, Prof. Muhammad Usman and Prof. Anjum Roomani.

The resolution was a carbon copy of *Jamaat-i-Islami's* statements. Zeno (Muhammad Safdar Mir) wrote in his cultural notes, ‘The Writers’ Responsibility’, ‘well attended meeting of writers and poets of Lahore passed a strong resolution against Indian intervention in Pakistan's present crises.’ Zeno noted that it was not the first time Pakistan faced Indian aggression. Pakistan was an unacceptable entity to the Indian ruling classes. He further added that Indian aggression on West Pakistan in 1965 and on East Pakistan in 1971 was a part of a historical process. Zeno concludes in the following words:

“As writers, it is our duty not merely to sing in abstract terms the songs of our people's heroism; this is important. Also necessary for our successful struggle is to prepare our people for this long struggle by clarifying the nature and context of this struggle. It is when we forget the overall perspective and keep our eyes concentrated on the immediate fight, that we get confused about the political nature of the incidents in East Pakistan, about the distinction between our friends and our enemies. The enemy is likely to take advantage of our confusion. The only way we, as writers, can help in the struggle of our people against the challenges to our very existence is to understand what the conflict means in its totality and what forces are engaged in this conflict on both sides. If we are clear about this, it would not be difficult for us to help clarify it for others; both within Pakistan and abroad. And that is the best way in which the writers can be of service in our present struggle.”¹¹

During the war, the writers from Rawalpindi appealed to the writers worldwide that they should support Pakistan. Sayyed Zamir Jaffri wrote in his book, *Judai ka Mosam*, that these writers appealed on 10 December 1971 and included Mumtaz Mufti, Shorish Malik, Majid Amjad, Fateh Mohammad Malik, Afzal Pervaiz, Manzur Arif, Colonel Mohammad Khan, Ada Jaffri, Qamar-al-Hussaini, Sultan Rashk, Jamil Malik, Akhtar Hoshiarpuri, Sadiq Nasim, Aziz Malik, Insar Nasri, Karam Haidri, Ayub Mohsin, Ahsen Ali Khan, Rabia Fakhri, Jamil Yousaf, Perveen Fana Sayyed.¹²

Uxi Mufti, Deputy Director of Pakistan Council, Ministry of Information, took out a procession of writers and poets on a decorated truck through the bazaars of the city on 14 December 1971.¹³

Writers like Masood Mufti, who served as bureaucrats during the 1971 war in East Pakistan, forgot the basis on which Bengali Muslims broke the strong bonds of Bengali nationalism, accepted Partition of their land, culture and history and joined hands with West Pakistanis 1,000 miles away from them, according to the outstanding Punjabi writer Shafqat Tanveer Mirza. Masood Mufti views in his diary *Lambey*, were partial and one-sided. As a civil bureaucrat and representative of the Government of Pakistan, he projected views of the government. He does not recognize the economic complaints of the Bengalis against the West Pakistanis. The Biharis and other refugees

from India never fused culturally with the locals. It was a fight for quotas. The Bengalis made many political sacrifices for West Pakistanis. Masood Mufti also wrote *Chehre* and *Rezezy*. He wrote in *Lambe*:

“The scale of violence in 1971 was far greater than that of 1947. This time not only Muslims killed other Muslims, but in the name of Bengali nationhood, Muslims, along with Hindus, killed other Muslims.”¹⁴

Ironically, the writer in denial about the killing of hundreds of thousands of East Pakistani Muslims at the hands of Muslims of Pakistan Army. Overlooking the atrocities in East Pakistani, Mufti writes:

“On seeing Chittagong my eyes were filled with tears. In the beginning of March, women and children were killed in Isfahani Jute Mill Club. I saw splashes of blood. On one of the walls, I saw the marks where a child’s head was smashed and the brain was sticking on the wall. I saw *burqas* of women in shreds. I saw a new unused *paranda* (head band) of a small girl. And finally I saw a book of a small child with a picture of a deer. It was the same book my child reads in his school in Lahore. I picked up the book. The marks of blood were visible on it. I thought that was my own child’s blood and tears started falling from my eyes abruptly.”¹⁵

Quite interestingly, our poets and writers either remained silent or favoured the Yahya Khan government during the genocide of the people of East Pakistan. They justified the massacre of innocent people by the Pakistan army on grounds that the killed people were traitors and Indian agents.

Josh Malih Abadi in his poem, *Jangi Qaidiyon ke Khandan*, wrote:

Kaun hain yeh bewian jin ke jigar hain chak chak
Jin ke chebron per hai zardi, jinki mangon main hai kbak

(Who are these wives with broken hearts?
They have pale faces, and there is dust on their foreheads)

Ahmad Faraz wrote a poem in favour of 1965 war, writes on POWs in his poem, *Meri Ankhain mera Chehra Lao*:

Main abhi zinda hoon
Maujood hoon
Yeh meri ana man sake
Aj ke din
Hi gae the mere sathi
Meri shaula bhari ankhain
Mera angar sa chehra le ker
In andheron ki taraf
Jin me meri hui

Shamyon ke zia chikhti thi

(Yet I am alive
I exist
This very day
My friends had gone
Taking my burning eyes
And my face like coal
Towards that darkness
Which resounds
With cries of burning candles)

Jamil ud Din Aali in his poem, *Aey Dais ke Hawao*, wrote about POWs

*Aey Dais ke hawao sarhad ke par jao
Aur unko chu ker ao*

O' winds of my country, cross the borders
And go touch them and return

In another poem also titled, *Aey Dais ke Hawao*, Jamil ud Din Aali wrote:

*Aey Dais ke hawao
Khusbu main bas ke jao
Aur unko le ke ao*

(O' winds of my country
Take the fragrance along
And bring them back with you)

On return of POWs, Qateel Shifai, wrote:¹⁶

*Chun ke her zakhm se teer akhbir
Purfishan ho gae hain aseer akhbir
Sari duniya ne sadaqat ke himayat kerdi
Jag utha he sare zamane ka zameer akhbir*

After picking the arrows from each wound
Finally the prisoners have got freedom
The entire world has sided with the truthfulness
Finally the conscience of the world has been pricked

The Conspiracy of Silence

With the exception of Faiz Ahmad Faiz and Habib Jalib, most of the Urdu writers remained silent and did not challenge the government. There were, however, many Sindhi, Balochi, Pashto and even Punjabi poets and writers in West Pakistan who refused to believe in the theories circulated by the PPP, the Muslim League factions, the *Jama'at-i-islami* The *Jama'at*, actively collaborated with the killers in East Pakistan.

Andrew McCord wrote whether Faiz remained silent during the crisis in 1971 in East Pakistan.¹⁷ In fact, even raising this question was unjustified. Faiz was tremendously disturbed by the crisis that led to the creation of Bangladesh in 1971. Soon after the fall of Dhaka, Ayub Mirza reports that Faiz was found under the blankets in a darkened room at Flashman's Hotel in Rawalpindi refused to get out of bed or turn on the lights. According to McCord, his most remembered public statement was a repudiation of the Soviet Union for its alliance with India. Some accounts say that Faiz offered to return his Lenin Prize, as Tagore had renounced his British knighthood after the massacre at Jallianwala Bagh.¹⁸ However, this is not true. According to renowned Urdu poet, Sahar Ansari, Faiz refused to return the Lenin Peace Prize saying that it was not a prize by some government but it bore the name of great Lenin. In a ceremony in Khaliq Dina Hall, Karachi, many speakers said that Faiz should return the Lenin Peace Prize. Faiz was present on this occasion. He courageously said in the public meeting that he would not return it. The people who came to visit me in the jail also confirmed this. They told me that there was immense government pressure on Faiz to condemn the Soviet Union and and return the Peace Prize.

Writers and Poets against Genocide

In spite of restrictions and the hardships of jails and confinements Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Habib Jalib, Sahar Ansari, Anwar Ahsan Siddiqi, M. R. Hassan, Fehmida Riaz, Ata Shad, Ghani Khan, Sheikh Ayaz (Sindhi), Gul Khan Naseer (Balochi), Ajmal Khattak (Pashto), Asif Shahkar (Punjabi) and myself, a Punjabi poet, stood against the force used to crush the political, economic and cultural rights of the people of East Pakistan and denounced West Pakistan government's inhumane and brutal treatment of the Bengali people.

Faiz Ahmad Faiz wrote a poem titled, *Stay Away from Me*:¹⁹

How can I embellish this carnival of slaughter?
How decorate the massacre?
Whose attention could my lamenting blood attract?
There's almost no blood in my rawboned body and what's left
Isn't enough to burn as oil in the lamp?
Not enough to fill a wineglass.
It can feed no fire,
Extinguish no thirst.
There's a poverty of blood in my ravaged body—
A terrible poison now runs in it.

If you pierce my veins, each drop will foam
As venomous as the cobra's fangs.
Each drop is the anguished longing of ages,
The burning seal of a rage hushed up for years.
Beware of me. My body is a river of poison.
Stay away from me. My body is a parched log in the desert.
If you burn it, you won't see the cypress or the jasmine,
But my bones blossoming like thorns on the cactus.
If you see through it in the forests,
Instead of morning perfumes, you'll scatter
The dust of my seared soul,
So stay away from me. Because I'm thirsting for blood.

On April 8, 1971, Faiz wrote another poem²⁰:

This is how my sorrow became visible
Its dust, piling up for years in my heart
Finally reached my eyes.

The bitterness now so clear that
I had to listen when my friends
Told me to wash my eyes with blood.

Everything at once was tangled in blood-
Each face, each idol, red everywhere
Blood swept over the sun, washing away its gold.

The moon erupted with blood, its silver extinguished
The sky promised a morning of blood
And the night wept only blood
The trees hardened into crimson pillars
All flowers filled their eyes with blood
And every glance was an arrow

Each pierced image blood. The blood
– a river crying out for martyrs –
Flows on in longing. And in sorrow, in rage, in love

Let it flow. Should it be dammed up
There will only be hatred cloaked in colours of death.
Don't let this happen, my friends,

Bring all my tears back instead,
A flood to purify my dust-filled eyes,

To wash this blood forever from my eyes

I also wrote some poems; the innocuous prerogative of a poet in hard times and was promptly tried by a military court. The judge in *kbaki* passed a sentence of rigorous imprisonment and six lashes. I sincerely realized that it was too trivial when compared to colossal sacrifices made by the Bengali poets, writers and intellectuals. Army Generals and the *Razakars* and *Al-Badr* murdered dozens of intellectuals on the eve of surrender.

Two nights have befallen us
Poor old forgetful mother!
One night we saw the moon blossoming in the plait
The next, we witnessed the sun burning your forehead.
From the land of the five-eyed blonde
Hailed hounds in dirty uniforms
On the first sight,
Your bosom quivered
Under heavy jackboots;
On the other, the shower of bullets
Pierced through your breast
And our song soared higher
And higher

M. R. Hassan published a bimonthly, '*Awami Awaz*'. My Punjabi poem was published in *Awami Awaz*, with Urdu translation. When I was arrested he went to the military courts and told them that the responsibility of publishing that poem lay on him and not on me, therefore, he should be arrested. He was arrested for publishing my poem against the military operation in East Pakistan and forced to stop the publication of *Awami Awaz*.

In 1972, M. R. Hassan was arrested again for distributing pamphlets against the operation in East Pakistan and jailed for four months. He was arrested once again for involvement in anti-government political activities. The case was launched in Lahore and he was fined.²¹

In 1967, Hassan, along with Faiz Ahmad Faiz, Mir Gul Khan Naseer, Ajmal Khattak, Sheikh Ayaz, Mohammad Ibrahim Joyo and Hassan Hamidi founded '*Awami Adbi Anjuman (Pakistan)*'. He became the first Secretary General of this literary organization. He kept the organization alive from 1967 to 1985; he gave a new life to progressive literature in Pakistan.²²

As mentioned earlier, I was granted 6 months' imprisonment and six lashes and a fine of rupees 2000, on non-payment my jail term was to be extended. Faiz arranged to pay the fine and sent it to the authorities. This was against my plans because I wanted to extend my jail term by non-payment and avoid the punishment of six lashes. However, Faiz was unaware of my plans and acted in good faith, although it proved detrimental for me.

Dr. Azizul Haque and his 'Young Peoples Front' was a pro-China group of leftist severely criticized the genocide in East Pakistan by the Pakistan army. He wrote articles against the military action and also took out processions. He continued the activities favouring East Pakistan through the platform of *Halqa Arbab-e-Zauq*. During my jail term, Dr. Azizul Haque looked after my family although I belonged to the pro-Moscow National Awami Party (NAP)

Many decades have passed since the fall of Dhaka 1971, but the verses of Habib Jalib are still engraved in public memory. He who wrote the historic verses during Fatima Jinnah's campaign:

*Aisey dastoor ko,
subah-i-benoor ko,
main nabin manta,
main nabin manta...'*

(‘Such a constitution (reference being to the Ayub regime) —
Such a morning without light,
I do not accept,
I do not accept.’)

The arrival of each military government gave Jalib a fresh lease of life. His heart bled with the separation of East Pakistan in 1971. The 1970 elections caused a storm that blew across Pakistan. Habib Jalib wept for the massacre of common people from East Bengal:

*Mohabat golion se bo rabe ho
Watan ka chebra khood se dho rabe ho
Guman tumko keh rasta kat raba be
Yaqaen mujko keh manzil kbo rabe ho*

(You are trying to sow love with bullets,
You are smearing the face of our country with blood,
You think you are nearing the destiny,
But I am sure you are losing the way.)

Sahar Ansari wrote in ‘*Nasal-e-Ziyan Guzeeda*’

*Hamare mehbub jism ber su sisak rabe hain
Wo beyaqini ki wadiyon mein bhatak rabe hain
Kisi ke kapre phate hue hain
Kisi ke pistan kate hue hain
Yeh aag or khun ke samundar
Ubher rabe hain ataab dar ber*

(Our beloved ones are anguishing in pain

And are lost in uncertainty
Some of them have their clothes torn off
And some have their breasts cut off
These oceans of fire and blood
Are appearing yet everywhere.)

The popular Balochi literature by Gul Khan Naseer urged Balochis to revolt against the Pakistani state²³ and severely criticized the horrific action of West Pakistan army against East Pakistan in 1971.

One of the popular Baluchi writers Zahoor Shah (1926-1977) wrote about East Pakistan in 1971:

My heart bleeds
To wet the barren land for my miserable people in the hope
That one-day these lands will turn green
And there will grow red flowers. Gather the seeds of those flowers
Because these are from my blood.²⁴

Sheikh Ayaz, great Sindhi poet and a West Pakistan leader of the Awami League was arrested and kept in Sukkar Jail. He composed several poems in support of Bengali people.

Another Sindhi poet, Anwar Pirzado, an officer in the Pakistan Air Force, suffered because he supported the people of East Pakistan. In his poem, 'March 26, 1971', he wrote:²⁵

A Bengali mother today
Wails over the body of her infant,
Its chest riddled with bullets.
The blood-drenched child
Wants to call out to its mother
With its tongue wrenched out
But cannot utter even a word.
A flicker of breath moves in and out.
The mother finally accepts death,
The blood congealed and blackened.

More children are hacked away.
A father sees his daughter
Unclothed, a plaything in the hands of strangers.
Darkened corpses, clotted blood.
But Islam was saved.
The Ghazis celebrated victory over Bengali chests,
Earned blood-stained medals
Which are against mankind.

The red page of history unfolds
A spark turns into fire.
The dark drops of blood will raise their head.

Your bullets will come to an end.
Bamboo sticks
And shining axes
And homemade guns will burst forth,
The spade will be ready.
Red flags will unfurl
The blood of martyrs will live for centuries
This living blood,
The game of blood will lead us to our destination—
The red revolution.

Literary responses to the incident of 1971 emerged sporadically from various regions of West Pakistan. However, no novel was written about it. It may be termed a failure of the historical imagination, collective literary responses from Pakistan about the great tragedy of East Pakistan was sparse and casual. It is surprising when compared to the writings that emerged after the Partition of British India in 1947, the well-known short stories of Manto and the poems of Faiz as well as Qurratulain Hyder's '*Aag Ka Dariya*' (trans-created by the author in English as '*River of Fire*').²⁶ It is surprising that West Pakistani men of letters, otherwise known for their loud support of social and political issues at home and abroad, were not forthcoming on the issue of the disintegration of the country and atrocious massacre of their own people. The incident appeared to have touched only a few and even fewer who felt any deeper significance of national morality. The country just wrote off the whole incident.²⁷

Notable short stories of Intizar Hussain and Masood Ashar '*Band Aankhon Par Donon Haath*.' Sarwat Hussain's poems '*Aik Insaan Ki Maut*' (The Death of a Man) strike a collective note but personal conviction is missing. A noteworthy example is Sorayya Khan's debut English novel '*Noor*,' Another remarkable novel is '*Breaking Links*' by Razia Fasih Ahmad. '*Breaking Link*' is one of the few novels from Pakistan to reach out across to address this overwhelming void.

Recent Publications

Intezar Husain and Faiz Ahmad Faiz referred to the bloodstained legacy.

Pakistani author, Sorayya Khan wrote a novel about 1971 titled *Noor* published by Penguin. *Noor* breaks the long silence among Pakistanis writers about East Pakistan. The story is about Ali, a young Pakistani soldier, brings home Sajida, who lost her family in a cyclone and is found wandering in the streets of Dhaka. Ali raises her as his own daughter. Sajida marries and has children and is Noor is one of them, a child so special and gifted that she has access to secrets yet to be revealed and memories her mother and Ali have buried. Born with Down's syndrome, Noor begins to paint the most astonishing pictures from her first birthday. The blue of her infant drawings is the blue of the Bay of Bengal, that relentless body of water that rose up in an angry tidal wave and swept away her mother's childhood. Noor's unerring drawings bring the past back for Sajida: the cyclone, the sea full of fish, the fishing boats on the shores of what was once East Pakistan and has since become Bangladesh.

Wrapped like a snake in a tree high above the swirling waters, young Sajida survived besides rotting fish in torn nets when the rest of her family perished. In a series of chilling portraits, Noor brings the

past back with an exactitude that is both fearful and astonishing. She draws uprooted trees, shattered boats and the unrelenting monsoon rains. She details the unimaginable atrocities committed in the name of nationalism: the senseless killings of millions, the rivers water red with blood, the bloated corpses with tied hands floating like paper boats down the river and the graffiti in a now-forgotten script written on a wall: *Joi Bangla*. Noor draws what Sajida has forgotten and what Ali has barred from his memory. Her drawings reveal a 'connection'; not severed, merely buried, with Sajida's past, with Ali's compliance in those acts of unmitigated barbarism. The novel moves inexorably towards its final cathartic question: "*What was it like? There?*" and in the answer lances a long festering wound.²⁸

Razia Fasih Ahmad's most ambitious work is the novel entitled '*Sadiyon Ki Zanjeer*', translated recently by the author titled 'Breaking Links.' The novel is a conscious decision to write about the historical reality of the major crisis in 1971. She researched the historical details and eyewitness's accounts in Pakistan and Bangladesh. The novel presents external realities through strong internal emotions. Just as the two World Wars left legacies of their own in the world literature, this novel creates a legacy based on the human tragedy of the political clash of East and West Pakistan, which resulted in the break-up of Pakistan and the creation of Bangladesh. This tragedy has heart-felt emotion and great empathy, the writer tried to create a wider canvas by looking at the big picture. She describes a full spectrum of people, of the social injustice and lack of vision in one group of people and hypocrisy of other, who blame everybody but themselves.

Razia Fasih Ahmad presented individual actions that affect peoples' lives and group actions that result in death, devastation and grief. The novel presents a human story artistically woven into the emerging mosaic of the East Pakistan tragedy. The most remarkable aspect of the novel, '*Sadiyon ki Zanjeer*' is its readability. It is a gripping narrative, a rare thing in our so-called 'modernistic' times. The description of scenic geography is so beautiful that they look more like some rare paintings of master painters.²⁹

Razia Fasih Ahmad wrote:

Sheikh Mujib realized that he was surrounded on both sides. Awami League wanted him to declare independence immediately and President Yahya was totally against it. He read the draft of his proposed speech one more time and thought of a new strategy: He would not announce the creation of Bangladesh but would keep the tone of his speech firm and threatening. He added to his speech:

The door is open for negotiations with the West Pakistanis and the path of resistance is open for our people. If there is no agreement, we cannot do anything but there is still time. If one shot is fired during this period or our people are subjected to oppression, then we will turn every house into a fort. We will be ready to face the enemy with whatever weapons we have. And, to the government, I shall say, "No more spraying of bullets. You cannot suppress seventy million people. We have shed our blood once. We are prepared to shed it again.

He would play another trump card to enliven the masses and give them something to chant: *Remember, the present struggle is for liberation. The present struggle is for independence. Joi Bangla.*

He felt better. These last sentences could easily be interpreted as the Declaration of Independence.”³⁰

Conclusion

Pakistan Army with the support of political and religious militias during the war of 1971 carried out widespread violations of human rights, killings and displacement of civilians in East Pakistan. Three million people were killed and ten million fled to India. At the onset of the Bengali nationalist uprising led by the Awami League, Pakistani forces targeted Bengali intellectuals, students, political activists and masses, especially at college campuses in the capital Dhaka and other cities.³¹

Al-Shams and *Al-Badr* forces, at the instruction of the Pakistan army, murdered a large section of the intellectual community of Bangladesh.³² On one hand, the writers and poets of West Pakistan brought out various works in favour of the government; they wrote in great lengths for the POWs. Sadly, nothing was written or expressed about the killing of their countrymen. There are many mass graves in Bangladesh and even today new graves are discovered, such as in an old well near a mosque in Dhaka located in the non-Bengali section of the city, discovered in August 1999.³³ Few West Pakistani writers and poets decided not to remain silent. Others sympathized with the Government of Pakistan and endorsed the brutal actions of Pakistan army against the innocent people of East Pakistan.

Another group of writers and poets remained silent about the horrors of 1971. They justified their actions by claiming no knowledge of the actual events but as creative writers, they were duty-bound to seek information and respond accordingly. The poets and writers who supported the Government of Pakistan claim that they did not realize the extent of what was happening in East Pakistan. This is baseless reasoning because everyone knew the 25 years history of East Pakistan’s economic, political and ethnic exploitation at the hands of West Pakistan. West Pakistan dominated the Bengalis and divided the country politically. East Pakistan accounted for a majority of the country's population, political power remained firmly in the hands of West Pakistanis, specifically the Punjabis. Apart from economic and political exploitation, Bengalis were gross underrepresented in the Pakistan military. In 1970, Awami League won a landslide victory in the national elections but was denied to form the government and told to give up their constitutional right.

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Who could my wailing blood arouse or attract?/The blood in my emaciated body is hardly/Enough to fill up a lamp or a glass./What fire could it fuel, whose thirst could it quench?
Blood is hardly left in my afflicted body/Yet poison wells in its every vein./Prick me and see: Each drop is snake venom/Of pain and grief distilled for ages./ Encapsulating heat of all rages.
Stay away from this wide river of poison./This kindling-dry body, stay away./Light it, and the campus of the garden will burn/Not with cedar and jasmine, but a thorn tree, my bones./Scatter it and over field and forest scatter not/Sweet dawn but ashes of my afflicted soul./Stay away. My heart thirsts for blood.)
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