

## **From Autonomy to Separation: A Case Study of Fall of Dhaka**

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### **Abstract:**

*In 1971, the separation of East wing of Pakistan is such an extraordinary misfortune that there is no point of reference throughout the entire existence of South Asian history. Subsequently, not just essential changes occurred in the political issues of the locale yet in addition the mind and thinking about the Pakistani people was seriously influenced. Creation of Bangladesh is the dark chapter of Pakistan's History. Many historians believe that the Civil War crisis (1970s) was mis-managed by the political and military leadership. The main argument of this article will try to explore those which leads the demands of autonomy to separation and to prove with arguments the weakness of political and military leadership in escaping the Pakistani nation from political debacle of 1971.*

**Keywords:** Autonomy, Separation, Civil war, Military leadership, Social distance, Etc.

### **Introduction:**

The Muslims of united India started struggle for their rights under the British Raj. In the mid of 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Second World War took place, which severely affected the British economy and Britisher were unable to

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control their colonies specially united India. British government decided to divide the united India. Within a short time of three months Britisher partitioned united India. On August 14, 1947, according to famous 3<sup>rd</sup> June plan, united India was partitioned into two sovereign dominions of India and Pakistan on the premise that the Hindus and the Muslims are two separate nations, based on Religio-political, financial, and social contrasts. The pioneers of Muslim League understood that in unified autonomous India, overwhelmed by the Hindu lion's share, it is difficult to protect the financial, political, and social privileges of the Indian Muslim community.

### **Social Distance:**

#### **a. An Appraisal to the Historical Buildup:**

Retrospectively, Pakistan on its independent on 14th August 1947, inherited a diverse sociopolitical culture. On the one hand, the country was declared a shelter for the Muslims of South Asia, and on the other, it inherited the political order of British-Indian state. Moreover, these two diverse orders adjusted in Pakistan were bounded by the idea of “Muslim majority” declared state as an Islamic state having Islam as an official religion with Western liberal democracy as being the political machine to operate the state mechanism. The historical identity of Pakistan had assembled by two major driving forces. The first one was the “Islamic identity” patronized by Delhi Sultanate (1206-1526) and Timurid Dynasty (1526-1720). Islamic socio-religious identity remained dominated in both of the Muslim’s majority poles of the Indian subcontinent, popularly known as the Western and the Eastern corners of Subcontinent. Even under the British Colonialism, both of the poles kept the Islamic identity maintained and struggle for the self-rule and provincial autonomy. On the eve of the disintegration of British colonial state, both Muslim’s majority poles, the Western and the Eastern proposed the creation of Pakistan on Islamic identity and declared the country as a separate homeland for the Muslims of South Asia. The second one was the Western liberal democracy and civilian supremacy, patronized by British colonial power in India. On this discourse, the British-Indian state was founded and operated through the administrative structure of civilian supremacy, local’s representation, and

autonomous institutions. The British form of the governance abolished the style of governance of Delhi Sultanate and Timurids autocratic state. Similarly, such as the Islamic identity, the British-Indian “sociopolitical identity” of democratic structure and civilian supremacy remained dominant in both Muslim’s majority poles. A struggle for autonomy ended with the creation of Pakistan in 1947 with bi-polar identity of Islamic socio-religious and the British socio-political legacies. During the period of state’s consolidation, started after independent (1947) and ended with the disintegration of country in 1970s, actually was phase of the political adjustment, and much decisive for the better survival and future’s existence of Pakistan, suffered in adjusting both of the inherited identities.

### **b. Social Distancing and Political Disintegration:**

Robert E. Park defined social distance as “an attempt to reduce to something like measurable terms the grade and degrees of understanding and intimacy which characterized personal and social relations generally”.(Wikipedia.org) In the phase of the state’s consolidation and political adjustment, one of the major challenges face by Pakistan was the socio-psychological and racial dis-connection between both of the poles of Pakistan: the Bengali majority Eastern pole, and the ethnic-compositional Western pole. The social, racial, ethical differences between both poles of Pakistan weakened the political and religious forces in binding the Muslim majority areas into a single political state. Moreover, most of the powerful factor, in deteriorating the social relation and nation’s build up, was the pre- and post-independence crisis which fueled both the poles in keeping their identities separately. The post-independent phase of Pakistan secured for economic consolidation and political adjustment between two poles was disturbed by multiple crisis. The first one was the racial identity, which had less capacity to adjust another race. The West Pole hosted racial groups, such as Punjabis, Pashtoon, Sindhi and Baloch considered themselves as racially superior on the Bengalis of East Pole. Such a racial superiority brought the elements of egoism and “Ours” and “Other-hood”. This egoistic stance of West Pakistani plunged East Pakistani into a political inferiority, and later, the relative rejection of their political demands liberated the feeling of Bengalis of East Pole. The second one was geographical distance

between both poles which ultimately created problems in the normalization of social relations. United by a political state, and separated by socio-cultural identity, the communities hosted by both poles never proved a single nation. The third factor was the very low flow of humans between both poles. Due to Indian state in-between, both poles of the Poles of Pakistan faced hurdles in land-traffic and human-flow. The hosted communities of both poles never interacted properly for social mobilization, cultural exchange, and state patriotism. Since independent to the Civil War of 1970s, very low ratio of people of Host-Pole visited the Guest-Pole. The fourth factor was the irrational approach of political leadership toward understanding the rationale of socio-cultural split between Poles. This factor was massively ignored by the first leadership and they never ever believed on that such a gigantic political crisis like Civil War of 1970s will triggered by a minor factor. The fifth factor which developed a momentum of split was the hosting of federal capital by the West Pole. Bengali communities and leadership felt themselves isolated from the power-hub of a state. They felt themselves disconnected from the decision-making center of a state and believes that West Pole owned the state. So, in addressing the Bengalis ethnic grievances, neither the federal state nor the civil society of West Pole approached the crisis as the issue of an entire nation. It relatively contributed more to the social distancing. These factors further widened a social gape between Poles resulted in social dis-connection, hatred, jealousy, and egoism. It disturbed the phase of economic consolidation and political adjustment which later triggered an all-Civil-War in 1970s. Autonomy of Pakistan no-longer lasted and Bengalis created independent Bangladesh on the eve of the disintegration of Pakistan in 1970s was termed as the “Real Autonomy”.

## **2. Making Mindset for Separation:**

### **a. The Birth of Pakistan & Inexperience Leadership of West Pakistan:**

Pakistan was a dream for the Muslims of united India, when Pakistan became a reality the Muslim political leadership became astonished because the high command of Muslim League had less experience in political administration. The high command of Muslim

League in Western wing was mainly from the feudal class and they had autocratic mindset and they ruled Pakistan in such a colonial manner. After partition, Pakistan was a geographical fatuity, Pakistan had two wings far 1000 miles from each other. Along with this long distance, there were other number of differences between the two wings, which made the mission of nation building troublesome. The people of Eastern wing had a uniform culture and well educated. While the people of Western wing had a diverse ethnic group with different civilizations, history, and lifestyle. The people of Bengal never accepted the shekels of foreign rule. The high command of Muslim League in Western wing is mainly from the feudal class and they had autocratic mindset and they ruled Pakistan in such a colonial manner, which created the atmosphere of mistrust. This journey of mistrust converted into a movement soon and the Eastern wing change its path with Pakistan in 1970s bloody Civil War.

**b. Failed to Express the Views of Common Masses:**

After the creation of Pakistan there were a lot of issues, rather than tackling issues, more issues were raised. Storm of refugees from India, lack of financial resources and many more issue, which needed solutions. Allegedly, deliberately the language issue was created inside Pakistan. In March 1948, Urdu was announced as the national language of Pakistan.<sup>1</sup> (Khan H. , Constitutional and Political History of Pakistan, 2012) Residents of East Pakistan became shocked when Urdu was announced as the national language of Pakistan. The political leadership started agitation against this decision in peaceful manner, but the issue was not acknowledged. Very soon these protests and strikes turned into movement when on 21<sup>st</sup> February 1952, police opened fire on a peaceful protest which resulted casualties.<sup>2</sup> (Talbot, 1999) Although the Bengali language was acknowledged as national language of Pakistan along Urdu, but it was too late. At this point the estimations of the Bengali public had been harmed. For Bengalis, giving up one's life for even an essential thing like language end up being a pricey

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<sup>1</sup> Hamid Khan, Constitutional and Political history of Pakistan, p 167.

<sup>2</sup> Ian Talbot, Pakistan: A Modern History, p 89.

arrangement. This incident changed the thinking approach of Bengali leadership and common masses.<sup>1</sup> (Ayaz, 2015)

**c. Proved to Be Patriotic:**

The Muslim League had battled the war of the Muslims of India before partition. Surprisingly, after the independence, the Muslim league who was then the ruling party changed its policy and stressed for a strong central government with very less autonomy for federating units. As a matter of the fact, in 1946 elections in united India, All India Muslim league had clean sweep majority but during its seven-year rule, the Muslim League portrayed irrelevancy in helping the Bengali public. As a result, Bengali regional political powers were emerged and formed a political alliance namely United Front. In a very short period of time the political leadership and the people of East Bengal showed their concerns as in the provincial election in East Bengal in 1954, where Muslim league was badly defeated. Be that as it may, the Muslim League and the leaders of West Pakistan had not taken. The language issue united the whole Bengali leadership under one plate-form.<sup>2</sup> (Zaheer, 1994) Actually in 1954, the Bengali political leadership and common masses gave a clear message to West Pakistan that a true democratic and federal Pakistan can remain united, otherwise, the separation of East Pakistan would be eminent.

**d. Constitutional Betray:**

The constitutional and lawful treachery with East Pakistan started when all the regions of West Pakistan were changed into a solitary unit under one-unit scheme. The primary goal of this plan was to take out the numerical part of Bengalis. In this way, without precedent for the nation, a unique scheme of parity was imposed. Which was commensurate to burglarizing the individuals of Bengal of their privileges. The number of inhabitants in Bengal was 56% of the nation's populace. Even then, the individuals of Bengal acknowledged this special law for the unification and

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<sup>1</sup> Babur Ayaz, What's Wrong with Pakistan, p 47.

<sup>2</sup> Zaheer Hassan, The Separation of East Pakistan: The rise Of bengali Muslim Nationalism, p 157.

strengthening of Pakistan.<sup>1</sup> (Khan H. , The Constitutional and Political History of Pakistan, 2012) It does not end there, the constitution of 1956, guaranteed the holding of general elections within two years but Martial law was imposed on 7<sup>th</sup> of October 1958, with general Ayub Khan as the head of state, that was the final blow, which paved the way for the fall of Dhaka on 16 December 1971.

### **3. Political Development Stopped by Military Intervention:**

Ayub Khan was born in the village of Haripur in 1907. Join British Indian Army in 1928 as a Second Lieutenant and fought Second World War in Burma.<sup>2</sup> (Khan A. , 1967) After partition of united India, Ayub Khan decided to join Pakistan Army. Ayub Khan was appointed as first Muslim Commander in Chief of Pakistan Army in 1951. With the help of Sikandar Mirza, he implemented the first Martial Law in 1958. After three weeks he ousted Sikander Mirza and declared himself as a President. Ayub's dictatorial end political development and links between political leaderships. Ayub Khan had strong British military background. Lack of statesmanship, he deals affairs of the state in pure military manner. After the military coup in 1958 in the country, the political development became stopped. Political leadership of East Pakistan thought that implementation of martial law was conspiracy against East Pakistan. People of East Pakistan believed that martial law was continuity of Military law kept on inciting the privileges of East Pakistanis.<sup>3</sup> (Devasher, 2018)

#### **a. Enforcement of EBDO:**

When Ayub Khan took power in 1958 one of his fundamental designs was the obliteration of the current political request. In this association, he abrogated the 1965, constitution on 7 October 1958.<sup>4</sup> (Niaz, 2001) Legislators who were particularly targeted and charged under security and military law were mostly from the National Awami Party and the East Pakistan Awami League since both these gatherings were against

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<sup>1</sup> Hamid Khan, Constitutional and Political history of Pakistan, p 172.

<sup>2</sup> Ayub Khan, Friends Not Master, p 21.

<sup>3</sup> Tilak Devasher, Pakistan at the Helm, p 53.

<sup>4</sup> Ilhan Niaz, The Culture of power and Governance of Pakistan 1947-2008, p 105.

One Unit. In August 1959, Ayub Khan passed the Elected Bodies Disqualification Order (EBDO). Under this, 75 pioneers were precluded for taking an interest in political exercises for a long time until December 1966.<sup>1</sup> Under the EBDO, Ayub Khan principally targeted East Pakistani legislators from the Awami League while leaving the Muslim League generally immaculate. Accordingly, the takeoff of politicians from public life further multiplied the feeling of political hardship of the individuals of Bengal.

**b. Circumstances Lead to Debacle:**

According to 2<sup>nd</sup> constitution of Pakistan, the tenure for the President of Pakistan was 5 years. First tenure of Ayub Khan came to an end in 1964. It was mentioned in the constitution that after the expiry of Presidential tenure, it was essential to conduct the Presidential election within 120 days.<sup>2</sup> (Haq, 1993) Ayub nominated himself as a Presidential candidate for the election. The opposition united themselves and made an alliance namely "Combine Opposition Parties". Opposition declared Miss Fatima Jinnah as a Presidential Candidate for the upcoming political race.<sup>3</sup> (Syed, 1995 ) The appointment of Miss Fatima Jinnah caused a flood of worry among Ayub Khan and his companions. Ayub Khan depended on sharp strategies to forestall Miss Fatima Jinnah from challenging the decisions. Ayub Khan on one event called Miss Fatima Jinnah a traitor and said that she wanted to break Pakistan along with the patriots. The poll for the decision was hung on 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1965. Ayub Khan swipe the poll with clear majority and secured 49,951 votes, while Miss Jinnah got 28,691.<sup>4</sup> (Muhammad, 1995) Miss Jinnah charged that "these decisions have been fixed. I am certain that the alleged triumph of Mr. Ayub Khan is his most prominent thrashing".<sup>5</sup> (Afzal, 1998) The interesting facts about the election was that the areas such as Karachi, Dhaka, and Chittagong where people

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid

<sup>2</sup> Noor ul Haq, Making of Pakistan: The Military Perspective, p 57.

<sup>3</sup> Muhammad Aslam Syed, Islam and Democracy in Pakistan, p 81.

<sup>4</sup> Baz Muhammad Constitution Making in Pakistan 1927-1985, p 71.

<sup>5</sup> Rafiq Afzal, Political parties in Pakistan, p 91.



were aware about their rights gave their mandate to Miss Jinnah against Ayub Khan.

The war in 1965 further worsen the relation between the two poles of Pakistan. War affected the psyche of East Pakistani people. During the war there was only one division of armed forces were deployed in East Pakistan. Geographically East Pakistan was surrounded by India almost from all sides. War lasted for 17 days, in the course of war, East Pakistan was left defenseless. After the war, Bhutto made a statement that "East Pakistan was saved by the Chinese ultimatum".<sup>1</sup> (Rizvi, 2013) Bhutto's announcement further multiplied the feeling of uncertainty in East Pakistan. The Bengali reaction on the event was that "if the credit for Pakistan's security during the war goes to China's unintentional hatred with India instead of the Pakistani armed forces, at that point for what reason do we need Pakistan". Pakistan declared victory in the war against India but the Tashkent accord which was signed by Pakistani President made the victory doubtful. After this battle, the Bengali individuals' relationship with Pakistan reached a conclusion that they had headed out in different directions.

#### **4. Bengali Nationalism and Role of Political Leadership:**

There was no response to the Tashkent arrangement in East Pakistan other than in West Pakistan. Since the needs and ways of the two territories were unique. Notwithstanding giving 60% income, East Pakistan had become a weight for West Pakistan. In decade of 1960s, the Bengali Nationalism came to its peak. Sheikh Mujib-ur-Rehman took an advantage of the circumstances and announced his famous six points program, which was based on the provincial autonomy. Mujib's six points were the quintessence of the long-standing requests of the Bengalis. These requests of Mujib became the voice of the hearts of the Bengali public. West Pakistan would not try to understand the six points from the beginning and deciphered it as treason. (Choudary, 2008) The rulers of West Pakistan sang the same old tune that Mujib's six points were a vicious attempt to separate.

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<sup>1</sup> Hasan Askari Rizvi, *Military and Politics in Pakistan*, p 101.

It would try to convince that Bengalis are trying to break Pakistan together with India. The principle reason for the six points was to offer rights to all the oppressed ethnic groups, including the Bengalis, who had been denied of essential rights since the creation of Pakistan.

The Ayub regime officially public the Agartala conspiracy case in 1968. A statement was made that 28 persons were taken into custody belonged to the armed forces and civil service. East Pakistani papers all the while censured the backstabbers and requested model discipline. In any case, the declaration of Mujib's association in the trick changed the circumstance. Mujib was added to the rundown of schemers fifteen days after the trick was uncovered.<sup>1</sup> Formally, there is no solid motivation to dissipate these questions. In the meantime, Sheikh Mujib, who was in prison at that point, was additionally remembered for the rundown. The Bengali public named this move of the administration as close to home hatred of Governor Muneem Khan. Notwithstanding, the impulsive way wherein the connivance case was taken care of prompted compassion toward the denounced. Superfluous exposure of the case made the denounced legends.

In 1969, Ayub khan escape himself from the political seen and again left the people of Pakistan in swamp. Ayub khan abrogated his own constitution and handed over the power to Commander in Chief of Armed forces General Yahya khan.<sup>2</sup> (Ahmed, 1959) General Yahya took the power from Ayub khan and tried to build a confidence between the two poles of Pakistan. The very initial step took by Yahya khan was the announcement of LFO. The first ever general election was fixed on the basis of “one man one vote”. Permitted the ideological groups to lobby for the year's end races.<sup>3</sup> (Sehgal, 2020) Political parties issued their manifestos and tried to convince the people. The major political groups such as Awami League and Pakistan People’s party participated in the election and made a huge public gathering. At the end of the 1970, the election was conducted peacefully. Resultantly the Awami league swipe the poll in East Pakistan by securing

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<sup>1</sup> Hamid Khan, Constitutional and Political History of Pakistan, p 210.

<sup>2</sup> Mushtaq Ahmed, Government and Politics in Pakistan, p 89.

<sup>3</sup> Ikram Sehgal, Blood over Different shades of Green, p 187.

160 seats out of 162 and the People's Party got a huge mandate in West Pakistan.<sup>1</sup> (Sehgal, 2020) The result of the election was a tense situation for the ruling military junta. The fear, which had built up in the late 1950s, became a reality in front of the military establishment.

After the political decision which was taken peacefully, people gave their mandate to their respective political groups. The process of government making was begun. There was some minor difference among the ideological groups, which was able to be solved but the military government put its weight in the scales of the minority party which was the Pakistan People's Party. Sheikh Mujibur Rehman demanded that the inaugural session of the assembly should be called till 15<sup>th</sup> February 1971, but instead of his demand the gathering was called on 3<sup>rd</sup> March. However, the inaugural session was never let to be held. Most of the leaders of the Awami League were arrested. As a result, the temperament of the Awami League workers and common Bengalis was on its peak.

During this time Bhutto made a good relationship with senior army generals. Both influenced the Yahya Khan to postpone the inaugural session of the gathering. Yahya Khan was under pressure and made a tactical mistake by postponing the inaugural session of the gathering. Which made the situation of the East wing out of control. Common masses started agitating against the decision of the central government. The military took limited action against the agitators with the goal that the legislature can set up a writ. Which further created a hurdle in the way of normalcy. Yahya Khan reached Dhaka on 15 March 1971, to find out the solution of the crisis.<sup>2</sup> (Salik, 2013) After several proposals put forward by the Bengali leadership but negotiation became unsuccessful. During negotiations, the Bengali leadership showed flexibility not only for the success of negotiations but for Pakistan. The last round of negotiations took place on 24<sup>th</sup> of March 1971 but met with an unfortunate end.<sup>3</sup> (Mehmood, 2013) It was commonly believed among the military generals that if we make a solid move against the Bengali

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid

<sup>2</sup> Sadiq Salik, *Witness to Surrender*, p 97.

<sup>3</sup> Safdar Mehmood, *Pakistan Divided*, p 125.

public, they will be frightened. The army took an action against the agitators. The Bengalis were quiet for some time; however, this quietness end up being the main quietness since the tempest. During negotiations Yahya Khan open the military operation as plan B. The military action, which was taken on the night of 25<sup>th</sup> March, which changed the autonomy struggle of Bengalis into the freedom movement, resultantly the humiliating defeat of Pakistani federal state was occurred.<sup>1</sup> (Sehgal, 2020)

### **Conclusion:**

Creation of Pakistan was a result of long and extensive struggle of the Muslims of South Asia. Pakistan started its journey as an independent state from 14<sup>th</sup> of August 1947 with two poles, but this journey was disrupted in adjusting the political diversities and economic consolidation. The 24-year's brotherhood between the West and East Pakistan formally ended with a bloody civil war in 1970s. There were several causes of that sad incident which took place in 1971. The cultural and social diversity, geographical futility, deadlock on the constitutional development, and differences on the distribution of wealth were responsible for the dismemberment of Pakistan. The primary reason which contributed to the unforgettable event was the diverse political approach leadership of the two poles of Pakistan. On the one hand, the leadership from the East pole, mainly from middle class, was politically conscious, socially aware, educated and much connected to the populace. majority of them were retired bureaucrats, lawyers and statemen. They remained much active in first row of freedom fighters in colonial India, and in post-independent Pakistan, they secured the status of a political leadership, as well. While on the other, the leadership from the West pole was largely from the aristocratic background. Since representing the initial law-making body in 1947 till the first general ballot casting of Pakistan in 1970s, almost all the political representatives from West pole belonged to 'bourgeoise'. So, after the independence, the state's leadership remained in the hands of West polers, and they in many ways behaved in an inappropriate way. Such steps of West Pakistani leadership sow the seeds of separation. In the post-1970s Pakistan, the

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<sup>1</sup> Ikram Sehgal, Blood over Different Shades of Green, p 215.

unjust behavior of the majority-owned province and federal instigated and compelled the educated youth in particular and the masses in general among the smaller provinces of Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Sindh to strongly voice for their rightly. It is feared with the passage of time, the irresponsible and irrational behavior of the federal state may turn the ethnic grievances into a liberation movement. If such an inappropriate political behavior remained the order of the day, it can be perceived that Pakistan will face the second phase of a civil war. It is high time to learn from mistakes committed in the history of the nation, otherwise, history will revert with the same brutality.

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