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War Memories and Peacebuilding in “From East Pakistan to Bangladesh”

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Abstract

Hearts are as much ravaged by war and as much in need of repair as burnt-out cities. Thus, the success of peacebuilding depends, at least in part, on individuals' life writings that allow them to put their past tainted by war and its horrors behind them and offer them future possibilities of reconciliation and peace. The study of the life writing (memoirs) 'East Pakistan to Bangladesh' by Saadullah Khan was used as a test case in this research paper to support this argument. The critical framework of Decolonizing Trauma Theory given by Rothberg (2009) was used in this qualitative study to explore how the writer, who not only fought in the civil war in Bangladesh but was also taken as a prisoner of war, moves beyond a cycle of retaliation to something more constructive. The objective is to explore how, after facing the horrors of war, human beings can feel compassion for antagonists and offer alternative narratives divergent from the official narrative. An analysis of the war imagery demonstrates that the writer does not use it to create a meta-conflict to legitimize war, demonizing the enemy to justify the killings and polarizing us versus them as good and evil as a means for dealing with the conflict. Rather, he uses war imagery as an organizing principle, determining and impacting people's response to the world and the war with a new perception and comprehension that emphasizes the factors of contingency and ambiguity. This approach enables him to eschew blame. Hence, he does not attribute the causes of conflict to the members of the out-group, thus suggesting possibilities of transformation and peace, rather than ascertaining factors such as the nature of the enemy that suggests the impossibility of peace.

Keywords: decolonizing trauma, forgiveness, heroic courage, memory, peacebuilding, war

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Introduction

Hearts are as much ravaged by war and as much in need of reconstruction, as burnt-out cities. Thus, the success of peacebuilding depends, at least in part, on individual's life writings that put their pasts of war and horror behind them to offer future possibilities of reconciliation and peace. The life writing (memoirs) *East Pakistan to Bangladesh* written by Saadullah Khan (2021) is used as a test case in this research paper to support this argument. This qualitative research aims to explore the writer's struggle in the civil and Bangladesh war of 1971 in which he was prisoned because of his retaliation and constructive criticism. The objective of this research is to explore the horrors of war, and how human beings transcended their pain and sorrows to feel compassion even for antagonists and looked forward to reconciliation.

A study of war literature and literature on war represents a range of different historical and thematic perspectives, evoking contradictory responses and emotions. The question is raised as to why should we read a variety of texts about war, battles, and soldiers. War destroys, kills, maims, and brutalizes and it also seems remote from our lives. Parent (2011) asks the question that if the horrible experiences of soldiers seem to have neither semblance nor relevance to our daily existence because of their extremely unique character then what is the point in studying the literary works that are born of such unique experiences and distant worlds? I believe that as responsible citizens, we have to accept the duty of deploying fellow human beings as soldiers in war (while we enjoy the comfort of normal, peaceful life) and aptly honour the martyrs and give due respect to the veterans who return. Our obligation is to lend an ear to these perspectives, no matter how painful or foreign they seem. We are accountable and equally aware of the social, economic, and political injustice of historiography. This not only highlights the rising issues but the ethical complications as well that are enrooted in our society.

Problem Statement

This study argues that the life-writing *East Pakistan to Bangladesh* written by Saadullah Khan (2021) is a site of evidence that the act of remembering war is a conscious and cognitive endeavour to honour the heroic courage of soldiers as well as, to offer possibilities of reconciliation and peacebuilding.

Review of the Literature

The representation of traumatic pasts such as the Holocaust, colonial wars, and slavery in the U.S., South African Apartheid, WWs, Partition of the Sub-continent, '9/11', and other violent events in literature are favourite sites of memory studies. The logic of individual and cultural trauma, narrative structure, content- selection and omission, use of language, symbols, and metaphors, and the belief system about the social functions of literature are some of the central questions with memory studies deals. .

Franklin (2011) explores the Pulitzer prize-winning Holocaust survivor story *Maus Spiegelman* (1986), the haunting tale of survival woven into the author's account of his tortured relationship with his ageing father. Franklin (2011) writes that

“the subject of *Maus* is the retrieval of memory and ultimately, the creation of memory” (n.p.).

She further differentiates between voluntary and involuntary remembrance and argues that remembering trauma is a complex act and the sufferer is not always conscious of what he shares and what he does not want to share.

Another study by Leggott (2015) examines the connections between trauma and memory in the background of the Spanish Civil War. Leggott (2009) critically explores the two Spanish novels: *La Voz Dormida* [The Sleeping Voice] (2002), written by Dulce Chacón (1954-2003) and *Un Largo Silencio* [A Long Silence] (Caso, 2000). These novels revolve around the theme of “extreme physical and psychological repression” directed at the survivors in the immediate post-Civil War years and beyond. Leggott discusses the cultural politics of these two novels in the light of contemporary debates about trauma, memory, and the recuperation of the past. This highlights the contribution made by these literary works to the collective memory of the Spanish Civil War and its aftermath. She writes that:

“[a]s cultural products that construct narratives about the past, these works respond to a desire to counter the historical amnesia imposed by the dictatorship and continued during the transition, by contesting

hegemonic discourses and creating alternative versions of history”.
(p. 26)

She adds that:

“Recovery of historical memory, closely associated with the importance of trans-generational transmission, is central to both of these novels” (ibid.).

She further writes;

“Produced by second-generation writers who can draw only on “post-memory” of the events that they narrate, *La voz dormida* and *Un largo Silencio* reconstitute the past from the stories and memories of others, rather than from direct knowledge” (p. 31).

Both the above-mentioned studies indicate that remembering is a highly subjective act and is influenced by the context in which it is produced. Memory is also colored by societal and political reality. Ballantyne (2003) in his review of Gyanendra Pandey’s *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism, and History in India* (2001) explores the relationship between “history and memory” and emphasizes “the complex interdependence between ‘events’ and ‘interpretations’, and the shifting meaning of Partition for individuals, communities, and nations in South Asia” (p. 196). Pandey questions how the phenomenon of Partition has been interpreted and projected by India and pro-India historians as a singular reality completely ignoring various other co-existing versions. Ballantyne (2003) suggests that Pandey’s account is evidence that historical narratives of those who lived through it vary from the versions created by outside observers. Buelens et al. (2013) collection of contemporary literary criticism and theory further develops trauma theory, explores new areas, provides new insights, asks new questions, and makes new connections. Nevertheless, despite its focus on biopolitics, culture, and community, the vital significance of the subjectivity of traumatic experience cannot be underestimated.

Schofield (2014) in her review of Ayesha Jalal’s ‘The Pity of Partition: Manto’s Life, Times, and Work across the India-Pakistan Divide’ Jalal (2013), writes that the author (Ayesha Jalal) reflects on the event of partition with the lens of memory studies and suggests that recollection of traumatic events are narrated in such a manner as to undermine the significance of

historical events. Jalal (2013) has looked at the riots of 1984 that took place after Indira Gandhi's assassination and the violence in the wake of the demolition of Babri Masjid in 1992, and she comments that the extremity of suffering in these tragic incidents had been minimized in narratives and the phenomenon had been represented as just "periodic happening". The reasons and consequences are not delineated appropriately; rather, it obscures the matter and pushes the events under the term of religious communalism. The researcher also points out that Jalal has used Manto's creative writings on the theme of partition to study the unreliability of memory in finding the truth.

Rastegar (2015) explores the significant role of cinema in the development of cultural memory around war and conflict in colonial and postcolonial contexts. Three historical eras, i.e. the colonial period, the national-independence struggle, and the postcolonial have been studied through cinematography. Beginning with a study of British colonial cinema on Sudan, then exploring anti-colonial cinema in Algeria, Egypt, and Tunisia, followed by case studies of films emerging from postcolonial contexts in Palestine, Iran, Lebanon, and Israel, this work aims to fill a gap in the critical literature on both Middle Eastern cinemas and to contribute more broadly to scholarship on social trauma and cultural memory in colonial and postcolonial contexts. This work treats the concept of trauma critically and posits that social trauma must be understood as a framework for producing social and political meaning out of these historical events. Social trauma sets out a productive process of historical interpretation, and cultural texts such as cinematic works both illuminate and contribute to this process. Through these discussions, *Surviving Images* illustrates cinema's productive role in contributing to the changing dynamics of cultural memory of war and social conflict in the modern world.

LaCapra (2014) emphasizes in "Writing History, Writing Trauma", the significance and truth value of narratives situated in historical and traumatic contexts that can "offer significant insights (or at times, oversights), suggesting lines of inquiry for the work of historians". Fictional narratives thus recall what is historically suppressed, minimized or hushed, or ignored and discounted. Trauma narratives in this way function as a kind of history.

Aldoory (2019) in her PhD dissertation *Verbalizing the Wounds: A Study of War Trauma in Selected War Narratives* writes that the Global War

on Terrorism and its aftermath have led to the emergence of Western and non-Western literary narratives that highlight trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder inflicted upon American soldiers as well as, on Iraqi and Afghan civilians who participated and witnessed wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Many contemporary novelists have set their stories and characters against the backdrops of “War on Terrorism” and its aftermath. “War on Terrorism” has produced a body of literature that situates individual experiences of war within the fictional structure of memory novels that employs postmodern literary techniques to document the features of individual and collective traumatic consciousness of the overwhelming events of the war. While some people are haunted by their traumatized memories, others use writing as a cathartic process to heal their wounds. Literature facilitates the process of recovery through “verbalizing the wounds”, extending and translating the private experiences of soldiers and civilians beyond the limited individual dimension to the larger public domain of collective memory. Aldoory (2019) examines trans-historical trauma in Sinan Anton’s *The Corpse Washer* (2013) and Kamila Shamsie’s *Burnt Shadows* (2009), confessional working through and Apocalyptic acting - out in Kevin Powers’ *The Yellow Birds* (2012), Saadawi’s *Frankenstein* (2013) in Baghdad and Andrew Slater’s “New Me” in *Fire and Forget* (2013); and the transcultural response to war trauma in Nadeem Aslam’s *The Wasted Vigil* (2008), and Helen Benedict’s *Sand Queen* (2011).

The articles and seven books *On Veterans Who Bring War Home* is a collection of seven separate forewords to seven books based on war experience (Hohman, 2015). It honours those American veterans who fought for America in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan. It brings together seven books that are the stories, biographies, and memoirs of veterans, recognizing their painful struggle to reconcile with trauma, understanding that war is not over, it is rather brought home with them. These veterans explore what it’s like to live with their remembrances. Some are based on veterans’ struggle to cope with life outside of war. These stories are poignant and passionate accounts of soldiers delving into their past. The foreword to each of these books smashes the myth that war experience can be left behind.

It is argued in *War Trauma, Collective Memory, and Cultural Productions in Conflict Zones: Kashmir in Focus*, that “Euro-American

exclusivity has mostly been responsible for eclipsing the universalizing appeal of trauma studies” (Hanif & Ullah, 2018). In a bid to cater to trauma accounts of the Global South, their study endeavours to explore the trauma accounts of people living in Kashmir, a conflict-torn place among the Asian countries. Therefore, the value of this research lies in the fact that despite of the horrific nature of the traumatic experiences of the inhabitants of Kashmir, and its representation in literature, “little scholarly attention has been given to it to voice out these accounts, which are necessary for claiming the truthful depiction of the Kashmiris” (ibid). This article analyzes a Kashmiri Anglophone literary text titled *The Collaborator* by Waheed (2011) by using the theoretical framework of Jeffery C. Alexander et al.’s Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity and Kai. T. Erikson’s Collective Trauma. The findings are that, the traumatic memories of the Kashmiri community are similar to distressed people of the Global North.

Ullah’s (2020) analysis of Afghan trauma survivors in Atiq Rahimi’s novella *Earth and Ashes* (2000) draws upon the model that engages with trauma to work through the brutal events, a process that;

“involves acknowledging and transforming the legacy of trauma while trying to leave its debilitating effects behind. The study, thus, focuses on how the protagonists come to terms with the shattering experiences by which they are deeply marked” (Ullah, 2020).

The novelist does not give historical or factual details, yet he adds to the Afghan cultural and psycho-social history, by illustrating the aftermath of the war on survivors, thereby preserving the ignored, downplayed, and often disowned events and the concomitant affective structure of feelings of the Afghan people.

Critical Framework: Decolonizing Trauma Theory

Trauma theory is an interdisciplinary area of scholarship developed since the 1980s in the West through the cross-breeding of psychology and the humanities. Literary scholar Caruth (1995) has debated for a definition and understanding of traumatic experience. She defined trauma as an extraordinarily frightening event or experience. She adds that racism, and colonial experience are forms of historical trauma. Caruth (1995) opens debates on ethical responses to forms of human suffering and their cultural and artistic/ literary representation of trauma. Caruth (1995) believes that

remembering and recounting traumatic experiences cannot be factual or linear and does not bear direct reference. She asserts figurative language, images, and the use of other literary devices in memoirs or life-writing narrating trauma transmit the force of a traumatic history. Rothberg (2009) in his earlier book, *Multidirectional Memory* considers memory as multidimensional/multidirectional. He postulates that the act of remembering can be both creative and productive, especially working towards decolonizing trauma. Two concepts of classical Trauma Theory “acting out” and “working through” are focused on Decolonizing Trauma Theory (Rothberg, 2008). Rothberg finds these two concepts interconnected, non-binary modes of coming to terms with traumatic experiences, in which melancholia may be regarded as a form of “acting out”, whereas the Freudian concept of “working through” is to be considered as “an articulatory practice” that enables the traumatized subject to recall memories of “something that happened to one (or one’s people) back then while realizing that one is living here and now with openings to the future” (LaCapra, 2001). Thus, Decolonizing Trauma theory makes room for various modes of addressing and negotiating trauma towards its undoing.

Analysis

The present study focuses on how the writer uses war imagery as an organizing principle, determining, and impacting people’s response to seeing the world and war with a new perception and comprehension that emphasizes factors of contingency and ambiguity. This approach enables him to eschew blame; he does not attribute the causes of conflict to the out-group members, thus suggesting possibilities of transformation and peace, rather than ascertain factors such as the nature of the enemy that suggests the impossibility of peace.

War Imagery

The imagery of war can become an organizing principle, determining how people see the war after a generation and consequently how they choose to act. The writer can create a “meta conflict” by dwelling upon the glory of killing the enemy. Such grandiose, epic war imagery can perpetuate militarism, and legitimize violence, and aggression as a means of dealing with conflict, with the “others”. An analysis of the war imagery in the

memoirs demonstrates that the writer does not use it to create a meta-conflict to legitimize war, demonizing the enemy to justify the killings, polarizing the ‘us’ versus ‘them’ as good and evil as a means for dealing with the conflict.

Glorification of Heroic Courage of Pakistan Army

Though there is no chuckling or chest-thumping in recounting the skirmishes and battles in which the antagonists were besieged, defeated, and destroyed, Brig. Saadullah appreciates the best qualities that human beings are capable of displaying even the deep sorrows and horrors of war. Despite the realization of the folly and savagery of war, Brig. Saadullah glorifies and honours the suffering of men during the war. This is not a justification for war; this is an appreciation of the soldier’s principle of service above self. Whereas the soldiers in War Poets’ poetry, Hemingway’s war fiction and Stephen Crane’s novel *The Red Badge of Courage* (Crane, 1895) are demotivated conscripts, no more than cannon fodder, Brig. Saadullah’s descriptions elicit respect and admiration for the transcendental ideals that the Pakistani soldiers fought and fell for. He exalts and sanctifies their unswerving loyalty, selfless sacrifice, and unconditional obedience to the call of duty. He writes that the army policy allowed one of the two brothers to return to West Pakistan. Zulfiqar asked his younger brother to return but Lieutenant Sarfraz begged Zulfi to go: both stayed. Later Zulfi was martyred and Sarfraz was wounded. Saadullah Khan depicts a big number of casualties and wounded soldiers, but he places them on a pedestal and lends a splendour to their death. They are martyrs who die for their country and its ideology. He does not, like (Rupert Walter, 2006), a world war I poet, speak only of “The Dead” which is an abstract collective. His intimate bond with his soldiers is expressed in his recollection of many individual examples of heroic courage. He recalls second lieutenant Ali, who volunteered to be transferred to the battlefield; as young medical students who refused to go back to the safety and comfort of his homes to stay with the wounded; despite being outnumbered, low in ammunition and no hope of help, cut off from communication with the outside world, without fire and air support, the troops were defiant in death as in life. There are many examples of heroic courage, compelling sense of duty and determination, and he pays homage to all those who fought tenaciously for Pakistan. His applause for the soldier’s principle of service above self that brings dignity,

honour, and respect to human life is evocative of Tennyson's poem ([1854](#))
The Charge of the Light Brigade,

“Was there a man dismayed? / Not though the soldier knew / Someone
had blundered / Theirs not to make reply / Theirs not to reason why / Theirs
but to do and die” (n. p.).

The brave soldiers endure with dignity the horrors of war. Saadullah discovers a noble loveliness, and sublimity in the middle of dreadful suffering, and appreciates the comradeship among soldiers in war. Nevertheless, he is fully aware of the precariousness of this beauty; it is a terrible beauty as it is born out of violence and suffering. Death for a noble cause brings glory, dignity, and even nobility to common men who had come from unknown or lowly origins. They could not have claimed such honours in the smug comfort of civilian life. He exalts the notion of sacrifice for one's country and emphasizes the profound value and meaning that attends martyrdom.

Comparison with World War I Poets

World War 1 poets like Wilfred Owen recapture vivid images of the savagery of war and human suffering to show the futility and horror of war. As their vision is pessimistic and anti-heroic, they remain trapped in the hellish suffering and fail to come out of the trauma of war. This failure to manage reconciliation with conflict hinders their healing, the process of finding peace within and around them. They are unable to praise or pray. On the other hand, Brig. Saadullah, while applauding honourable death on the battlefield, does not bring to fore the gory, physical details of dying. One of the most macabre war poems of Wilfred Owen titled “Dulce et Decorum Est” ([2014](#)) is a horrified, depressing lament focused on minute details of the act of painful death. It opens with a terrifying description of the defeated army on the run:

“Bent double, like old beggars under sacks, / Knock-kneed, coughing
like hags, we cursed through sludge, / Till on the haunting flares we turned
our backs/ And towards our distant rest began to trudge. / Men marched
asleep. Many had lost their boots/ But limped on, blood-shod. All went
lame; all blind” (n.p.).

The retreating soldiers are not heroes, rather they are decrepit figures. Reduced to the status of hags, beggars, lame, and blind. They are shown shorn of any nobility or glory; they are defeated in spirit, mind, and body. In contrast, though Brig. Saadullah describes the inferno of fire that continued unabated, “the relentless pressure, the grind of the Civil War”, seeing “death everywhere”, and noting that “out of my two regular battalions, every fifth man was a casualty i.e. killed or wounded” (p. 47), yet in remembering those who fell, he does not lose his optimism, as he writes “Brave boys [Shaheeds]! their memory always kindles a light in a sad heart (p. 32). Despite depicting anguish, savagery, and horror of war and the ensuing enormous misery, East Pakistan to Bangladesh remains a surprisingly tender book. He notes with a lump in his throat, “Our boys were caught, the enemy crossfire...An enemy light machine gun felled the Lieutenant, ‘feet’ away from the bunker. Someone tried to retrieve his body. He was also mowed down.” (p. 48). He cries over the loss of his men, who are like his own sons, but at the same time like the father of Samson Agonistes, he finds consolation in the idea of heroic sacrifice for the collective wellbeing of countrymen; “Nothing is here for tears, nothing to wail / Or knock the breast, no weakness, no contempt / Dispraise or blame, nothing but so noble, well, fair, / And what may quiet us in a death so noble / ... Calm of mind all passion spent (Milton, [1671](#)).

Condemnation of Atrocities Committed by Insurgents

The Memoirs bring to light some misrepresented or overlooked aspects of the insurgency in East Pakistan. History is written by victors; in this case, Bangladesh and India, who tend to construct a version, a perspective that denies, minimizes or justifies the vile Indian machinations and brutalities committed by the Indian-funded Bengali terrorists, which is the most disturbing aspect of this tendency. While much publicity is given to the condemnation of the Pakistan army’s military action by India, Bangladesh and International media, what is less reported or ignored altogether is the crimes against humanity committed by the insurgents. Bose ([2011](#)) writes, “The crude attempt at misusing press reports is the inclusion of excerpts that malign Pakistan Army and exclusion of gruesome atrocities” (p. 11) committed by insurgents against non-Bengalis without citing any sources. Many instances of manipulation in documenting facts have resulted in a lop-sided narrative of 1971, abounding in numerous distortions.

Brig. Saadullah writes that in March 1971, “negotiation [between Awami League and Yahya] broke down. The Sheikh tried to take over by force and Yahya decided for military action. Neither side was prepared” (p. 18). In this context, Bose (2011) writes that Sheikh Mujib in his speech on 7th March 1971 exhorted his followers to turn “every house into a fortress and fight the enemy with whatever they had” (p. 26). His provocative language using war images of a fortress, fight and enemy unleashed fierce ethnic hatred and chaotic violence. Brig. Saadullah writes, “The Awami League took over the reins of government and the army was confined to barracks. The cantonments were blockaded: milk, meat, bread and fresh vegetables were not allowed to enter the cantonments.” (pp. 17-18). The communication system came to a grinding halt, roads were blocked, bridges were destroyed, Pakistani flag and pictures of Mohammad Ali Jinnah were burnt. There was looting, plunder and arson. Brig. Saadullah describes the atrocities committed by insurgent Bengalis in these words, “The worst victims were Biharis. Their life, honour and property were forfeited. Organized massacres started immediately. Violence was contagious, it was spread to all non- Bengalis.” (p. 18). If war brings out the best in human beings, regrettably it also wakes up the dormant beast. Thousands of non-Bengalis - men, women and children - were indiscriminately butchered. He writes, that the Indian funded terrorists “disarmed the non-Bengalis and took them into the wooded area. Shots rang out; some cries and silence of muted woods prevailed again. The Bengalis had forgotten Rabindra Nath Tagore, [who said] ‘a thousand crimes take birth where a single drop of blood is spilt through tyranny’” (p.34). The indiscriminate massacre and genocide of non-Bengalis has been corroborated by many distinguished researchers like (Bose, 2011; Afrasiab, 2016; Ahmad, 2016; Hali, 2021). Non-Bengalis fled in terror. Further elaborating the terrible situation, Brig. Saadullah writes that the Dhaka airport looked like a refugee camp. “Incidents, like the barter of a car for two air tickets to go to West Pakistan, were not unheard of. Some non-Bengalis were murdered within sight of the troops guarding the airport. In a rage, some of the men banged their butts on the ground but they were not allowed to fire.” (p. 18). The stern orders were not to intervene. The utter humiliation forced some officers “to resign their commissions rather than suffer this agonizing pantomime.” (p. 18). Bose (2011) in her book *Dead Reckoning* makes the same point by quoting Mascarenhas (1971), a journalist, who, though known for his bias against

Pakistan Army, had to admit the restraint exercised by the Pakistan army. He says, “It speaks volumes for the discipline of the Pakistan army, that its officers were able to keep the soldiers in check during what to them was a nightmare of 25 days”. She further comments,

“The murder of army personnel caught in ones and twos became an everyday occurrence” (p. 32).

After the open rebellion, troops at Chittagong and Rajshahi were besieged along with their families and children. There was a mass massacre at a large scale as can be seen from such descriptions in *East Pakistan to Bangladesh*,

“Earlier about a company strength at Pabna had been virtually decimated. Their wailing dependents were also among the beleaguered at Rajshahi” (p. 25).

Finally, the army was allowed to take action to restore law and order and protect the lives, honour and property of innocent people. The army came to rescue them from their severe ordeal and the evacuation of families commenced. To say that Army retaliated to curb the insurgency is wrong; it was a rescue operation.

Ethnic hatred was displayed both verbally and physically. The terrified non-Bengali students in Rajshahi medical college fled for their lives when the word went around to “kill these lice”. The language was used as a weapon to ostracize, shame, humiliate, intimidate and persecute non-Bengalis. They were compared to lice that suck blood to live on their prey. The use of such denigrating language justifies violence and savagery, as, by dehumanizing human beings, it reduces human beings to vermin that can be crushed with impunity because lice are without emotions and are harmful as well.

Tribute to the Bengalis dedicated to Pakistan

Brig. Saadullah’s gallery of heroes is adorned with many Bengalis as well, who along with Pakistan Army fought with dedication and valour for the safety and unity of Pakistan. He expresses a strong sense of comradeship with the patriotic Bengalis. His affection, praise, and respect for them are no less than his warmth of feelings for the West Pakistani combatants. There is not the slightest hint of ethnic bias or discrimination or partisanship.

Coming from different backgrounds and ethnic identities, all the combatants fought together in the most adverse circumstances for a common purpose. Of the many pictures of dedicated Bengalis, who staked their life and property for Pakistan, some are mentioned here. One of the chapters in the Memoir is titled “Hadi: The Portrait of a *Razakar* [Volunteer]”. Hadi, a Bengali youth was an “extremely dedicated Pakistani” (p. 187); his father had been butchered by the Muktis because his spiritual master (*murshid*) was a Punjabi from Multan. “One of his brothers was murdered while another survived after receiving a chest wound, as did his nine years old nephew after three bayonet thrusts” (p.187). He organized a band of enthusiastic young Bengalis to deter Indian infiltrators and check terrorism unleashed by the Mukti’s. There is another chapter that is given the title “A Brave Bengali Boy”; this is the story of a 12-13 years old Bengali boy who volunteered to join the *Razakars*, but as he was too young to be recruited as a *Razakar*, he was attached to the company headquarter. On one occasion, some of the Pakistani troops engaged in a skirmish with the enemy were stranded on a riverbank. Their only chance of survival was a boat that drifted downstream. This brave Bengali boy dived into the water in that “inferno of mortar and machine-gun fire, his young arms were soon pushing a reluctant boat upstream” (p.49) and finally he succeeded in banking it near the survivors and saving them. Brig. Saadullah “recommended him for the President’s Award for Children for bravery” (p. 50).

Of the many college students who were lured to Indian training camps, one was Fakhru, who had fled to India to receive military training for sabotaging Pakistani army posts and terrorizing Bengali and non-Bengali civilians. He noticed “the humiliating discrimination” (p.65) made between Muslim and Hindu emigrant trainees. Disillusioned, he realized that he made a wrong choice and decided to return, join Pakistan Army and fight against the Indians-backed Muktis and the Indians. He and his band of hand-picked school and college students were dedicated and fearless. At another place, the Brig. pays tribute to Captain Hakim, who had valiantly directed the guns to the fire calls from the Indians, “He was a fine lad, a cool and courageous Bengali officer” (p. 56). Brig. Saadullah writes that there were many Bengalis who “fell defending their convictions. Ideological frontiers of Pakistan were crumbling, but they were not without their defenders” (p.42). Brig. Saadullah describes at length his visit to the family of Abdul

Mannan, a 20 years old teacher who was martyred by the terrorists for his 'crime' to speak in favour of Pakistan. "His steadfast purpose and fearless advocacy for Pakistan rankled in the heart of the Hindu *Zamindar*" (p.42). Brig. Saadullah's hazardous journey to visit the grieved family of *Shaheed* Abdul Manaam demonstrates his homage to the martyr, his sense of gratitude, ownership, compassion, and respect for the pro-Pakistani Bengalis. Free from any ethnic bias, Brig. Saadullah praises Lieutenant Naeem's bravery and writes,

"I can never forget the face of that very fine lad. A dark, tall, slim fellow with shiny eyes...No people have a monopoly on courage or wisdom. Allah gives his bounties freely" (pp.120-121).

Constructive Approach

The challenge of conflict can be dealt with positive or negative energy : some people become paranoid, schizoid, reactive, angry, aggressive, and retributive. Yet Brig. Saadullah's response is not of anger or hatred or retaliation. Brig. Saadullah remembers many difficult situations, trying circumstances in which human beings demonstrated goodness of heart and spirit of altruism. He writes, "There is a lot of good in human beings only if they are given a chance to do something useful. To do something good and worthwhile is the fulfillment of life" (pp. 7-8). This optimistic view of human nature and constructive aim of life is all the more remarkable as it comes from one who had witnessed the atrocities of war, who had seen the worst crimes perpetrated by men caught in the frenzy of war.

Brig. Saadullah connects his personal experience to a larger context. He does not ignore context-related and other factors that could explain in totality or partly the actions perpetrated. The Memoir analyses the economic and political causes of the Civil War and brings out how the conflict started from both objective causes such as Indian conspiracy and false propaganda that induced misperceptions and mistrust as well as subjective factors such as greed, selfishness, incompetence, and megalomania of people at the helm of affairs. And sometimes, power-hungry politicians, rapacious to seize control, refuse to engage in dialogue, and decline negotiations for that "would have amounted to self-curtaiment of influence, a course rarely attempted by those in power." (p. 5). "Follies of elders" (p. 19) resulted in Civil War that could have been averted. It was not inevitable, but the

political will to ward off the danger was missing. Sometimes errors of judgment unleash the hounds of war. He looks at the civil war in East Pakistan as a result of the “Remarkable lack of foresight and astounding miscalculation” (p. 5). Brig. Saadullah comments on the lack of foresight in the decision-makers at the helm of affairs in these words, “The venture in East Pakistan was reckless: it succeeded for the time being through the untiring efforts of the dauntless servicemen whose only ambition was to fight for Pakistan and they strained every sinew in its service. Unfortunately, Yahya Khan and his coterie drew the wrong lessons. For them, the success was justification for the continuation of this disastrous course” (pp. 22-23). Brig. Saadullah glorifies heroic courage and high morale of the Pakistan army but does not justify war. Nor does he rationalize it as a necessity or as an inevitable reality. In his view, conflicts and wars can be averted by right planning, calculated decisions based on foresight, wisdom, equity, and just distribution of wealth. Most of the wars that took place or are prolonged because of miscalculations, has the inability to foresee the colossal disaster in terms of loss of human lives, collateral damage, and ensuing misery.

He shows sympathy for the “sad local history” (p. 3) because 200 years of British exploitation and misrule of Bengal subjected the population to poverty and ignorance. He feels sorry that nobody has so far tried to break the vicious circle of poverty, and ignorance resulting in lethargy, resentment, frustration, and hostility. Rebellion in such a situation becomes a vicarious quest for security.

Brig. Saadullah Khan concludes the Memoirs on a note of prayer for the wellbeing of Bengalis, The Bengalis “naively thought they were marching to security. They are still seeking it. I wish and pray they would succeed. The obstacles are mountainous. Yet taking a poetic view I am in emotional unison with Nazrul Islam when he says, ‘We shall smash the dark night, despite its mountainous barriers like the Bindhial Chal” (p. 184).

He comments on the aftermath of war in Bangladesh in these words, “An abjectly poor society torn with strife is in an absolute mess... They need large men, wise and courageous to forget and forgive and restructure their torn society. Benevolence unfortunately is not a virtue of the weak. Nor is wisdom the product of a feeble mind” (pp.185-186).

This narrative opens up possibilities of conflict resolution and healing which is a process by which people become more aware of future possibilities of reconciliation and peace. Brig. Saadullah's response to conflict, and civil war is positive, and constructive. We find his memories restorative and optimistic. There is neither rhetoric of anger or hatred, nor a cry for retaliation. Rather, we find his compassion for his former countrymen who were duped by the nefarious Indian propaganda. He rises above the cycle of revenge to a more positive and constructive attitude.

Brig. Saadullah presents a contextualized perspective in which the focus on the antagonists' inhumanity is less prominent. He avoids a one-sided understanding of the events and does not attribute the causes of the conflict, the Civil War to the out-group members. Usually, in-group people perceive themselves as positive and the outgroup is seen unfavourably and as a constituting homogenous group in which the "good ones" are 'exceptional'. The intensity and grimness of war generate polarization, that is us (good) vs them (evil). There is no ethnic hatred against the Bengalis as can be seen by his sincere wishes for the well-being of Bengalis and the praise and gratitude that he extends to the Bengalis who helped and fought along with the Pakistan army in erstwhile East Pakistan in 1971. His recollection of the West Pakistanis who staked their lives to save Bengalis when East Pakistan was hit by the Bhola cyclone in 1970 is evidence of the love that the Pakistan army had for their fellow brothers. He quotes one of the pilots, Babar, who dared to fly a helicopter that had been declared dangerous to rescue the stranded people in remote water-bound areas. Ignoring both the warnings of life-threatening flight and court-martial, he volunteered his services and said,

“if hundreds of thousands of our countrymen are dying for lack of support, I will risk both, my neck and my career” (p. 6).

The memoirs do not suffer from one-sided or distorted views, partisanship, or inaccuracy. It critiques xenophobic militancy engineered by political opportunism, contingency, and expediency. Retaining his sanity in the mayhem, the Brig. keeps intact his humanity and prays for all those enmeshed in those turbulent times, “Allah give us wisdom, I silently prayed.” (p. 46). This prayer is made after listening to a 17th-century story narrated by a Bengali, about the conflict between the Bengali leader Isa Khan and the Mughal general Mann Singh who had been sent to conquer

and rule Bengal. It is worthwhile to know the entire story to understand that Brig. Saadullah did not live in a state of denial and confronted what happened in erstwhile East Pakistan. He offers his critical analysis of the situation in the light of the history of the region. He says that during the reign of Emperor Akbar, the Mughal army headed by Mann Sing Bengal invaded Bengal. Isa Khan, the Bengali ruler fought back, and retreated to an out-of-reach quarry. But neither side could gain a decisive victory. There was a deadlock. One day, unexpectedly Isa Khan challenged Mann Singh to a duel. In the duel, when Mann Singh was disarmed, Isa Khan offered another sword to his disarmed enemy but Mann Singh declined. "Diplomacy and peace followed. Wisdom achieved, what combat could not. Isa Khan accepted the title of *Masanad-e-Aala* and ruled in Akbar's name, without paying any levy to the central government. I thought for a long time, should not a Bengali Isa Khan run the county? There was NO Akber at the centre nor a Mann Singh in the field. 'ALLAH gives us wisdom, I silently prayed'" (p. 46). This narrative, divergent from the official version opens up possibilities for conflict resolution and healing which is a process by which people become more aware of their responsibilities, moral obligations, and accountability. Brig. Saadullah connects his personal experience to a larger context. He does not ignore context-related and other factors that can explain in totality or partly the actions perpetrated.

The power of the Memoir lies in the fact that it can supplement history by the provision of information that lies outside the historical domain of simply counting the casualties on the battlefield, documenting the collateral damage, and devastated infrastructure, and merely developing the polarization of the victim and the perpetrator, the defeated and the victors. This narrative provides a much-valued glimpse into the minds of the combatants, their ideals, the purpose they fought for, their ordeal, and their emotions-something that is non-existent in factual records. This is how this personal account not only enriches the already available information on the conduct and traumatic effects of war but also develops empathy for the reader to sympathize with and respect the combatants who fought and fell for their country.

Discussion and Conclusion

Having encountered inhumanity in others with whom, one had shared significant life experiences, who were former countrymen, or friends, one's

assumptions of rules of behaviour can be negatively affected, faith in human goodness can be shattered, and can adversely affect an individual's subsequent responses, reactions to those who had inflicted wounds. Nevertheless, the reconstruction of events by Brig. Saadullah facilitates a comprehension that emphasizes factors of contingency that suggest possibilities of transformation and peace, rather than ascertain factors such as the evil nature of the enemy, that suggest the impossibility of peace. Encounter with the antagonists as fellow human beings who were misled lays the basis for an interpretation and understanding of one's pain and suffering as less destructive. The memoirs show a movement towards reconciliation, and peacebuilding, beyond the culture of violence that fabricates mythologies to bequeath the legacy of jingoism based on hatred to successive generations thereby blocking the possibility of reconciliation and the way forward.

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