

Two reviews by Syed Badrul Ahsan

The wars that Pakistan began and lost

THE story of the 1965 India-Pakistan wars, in May and September, today appears to be an almost forgotten episode in the history of the subcontinent. Yet there are the incidents and the personalities who remain etched in the memory for the varied roles they played in the conflict, assuming that you regard the Rann of Kutch battles and the later, larger war in September 1965 as a single stream. On the night India's prime minister Lal Bahadur Shastri died in Tashkent, hours after he had inked a deal with Pakistan's president Ayub Khan, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was awakened from sleep by his Machiavellian foreign secretary Aziz Ahmed. 'Sir', said Ahmed, 'the bastard is dead.' Bhutto's response was, 'Which one?'

Bhutto was unhappy at the declaration his president had signed with Shastri. Both men, in his opinion, were equally bad. Farooq Bajwa, in this excellent history of the 1965 conflict, demonstrates something else: the conflict was largely one of Bhutto's making, with considerable input from senior Pakistani officers. On a broader scale, though, the genesis of what has by now mutated into endless suspicion and bitterness between India and Pakistan lies in the inability of the two countries to resolve their dispute over Kashmir. The trouble originated with the dithering of the Hindu ruler of Muslim majority Kashmir over the issue of the state's accession to one of the two independent countries the departing British colonial power had fashioned out of India. And then Muhammad Ali Jinnah, through sending Pakistani soldiers disguised as tribals into Kashmir, clearly with the aim of capturing the state and have it merge with Pakistan, made matters worse.

Much of the same scene was to be played out in 1965, first through Operation Gibraltar in the Kutch, and then through Operation Grand Slam in September. Bajwa's account throws up, in precision of language, what many have known for a long time --- that the ambitions of Pakistan's political classes and its military have repeatedly pushed the country into risks it could eventually take itself out of through international intervention. Bajwa does not, of course, deal with the 1971 conflict. That is not his remit. But when one considers, having first read From Kutch to Tashkent, the entire set of circumstances which led to Pakistan's break-up in December 1971, one can easily comprehend the mentality in Pakistan that have caused it repeated humiliation. And in all this long tale of misjudgment and humiliation, one name that keeps cropping up is that of the inordinately ambitious Z.A. Bhutto.

Having taken over as Pakistan's foreign minister in early 1963 on the death of Mohammad Ali Bogra, the young Bhutto quickly set out to reshape the country's foreign policy. In the Cold War era and with Mao Zedong's China pushing its way to global prominence, Bhutto sought to impress on Ayub Khan the need for a 'New Foreign Policy' for Pakistan. The country, he reasoned quite articulately, was in need of lessening its dependence for aid and military support on the United States and focus on developing ties with the Soviet Union and China. Curiously, though, neither Bhutto nor President Ayub Khan felt any desire for an improvement of relations with neighbouring India. If anything, Pakistanis looked upon India and Hindus with undisguised contempt. In 1964, on his way back home from an overseas trip, Shastri stopped over at Karachi airport, where he was received by Ayub Khan. When the Indian prime minister departed for Delhi, Pakistan's military ruler contemptuously referred to Shastri's short stature and made it clear that he saw nothing remarkable in the man. Ironically, Shastri would, by the end of September 1965, cause grief for an entire Pakistani establishment.

Bajwa's work is a clear enumeration of the mistakes Pakistan made in going to war with India in 1965. The Kutch issue was eventually settled through British mediation, with Prime Minister Harold Wilson playing a leading role in assisting the two sides to reach a compromise. What Pakistan had called Operation Gibraltar came, in the end, to nothing. That should have led to rethinking among policy makers in Rawalpindi. It did not. By August, through a euphemistically coined Operation Grand Slam, the Pakistan army sent in, in a bad repeat of Jinnah's October 1947 exercise, soldiers again in the guise of tribals in the hope that the move would inspire Kashmiris to rise in revolt against Delhi and repudiate their union with India. In the event,

the Kashmiris did not rise to the bait. For Pakistan, the lesson was lost. Worse, its leaders appeared to be completely oblivious to the fact that the Indians might take action against Pakistan, which they eventually did on 6 September.

It was not Pakistan's finest hour, despite repeated assurances by Ayub Khan and the military that Pakistan's soldiers were scoring huge successes on the battlefield. Indian forces, at places in difficulties, were nevertheless in little mood to give Pakistan any route out of a conflict Pakistan's leadership had created. Incredulously, Ayub and Bhutto banked on the idea that the Chinese would, in something of a repeat of 1962, would send their soldiers from the north into India and thereby ease the pressure on Pakistan. Even as the war went on, Ayub Khan visited Peking, only to be disappointed. Chou En-lai was not about to promise any help, either in the matter of an attack on India or supplying Rawalpindi with fresh weapons. China's advice was simple: if Pakistan's army was in trouble, let it go for guerrilla warfare against Indian. An unhappy Ayub Khan returned home, unsure of the ways and means by which he could reach a cease-fire with Delhi.

But a cease-fire was finally arrived at, on 23 September, though not before Bhutto had demonstrated some of the histrionics that would subsequently destroy him and his country. His rant on freedom for Kashmir won no sympathizers. If anything, over the months he had become an irritant for governments in Washington and London. Lyndon Johnson warned Ayub Khan about the ambitions of his young foreign minister. Harold Wilson, for his part, would spot evil incarnate in Bhutto. In Tashkent, both Alexei Kosygin and Andrei Gromyko would studiously ignore Bhutto and deal directly with Ayub over a possible agreement with Shastri. Ayub Khan himself was no angel. On arriving in Tashkent in early January 1966, he infuriated Kosygin by telling him that when the India-Pakistan conference opened the next morning, he would not shake hands with the Indian prime minister. He did not want Pakistanis back home to see images of their brave Muslim leader shake the hand of a Hindu. He backed down in the face of Kosygin's fury.

Bajwa's account of the 1965 conflict is a fascinating account of the men who mattered in that year of monumental Pakistani blunders. Long details of the many meetings the American ambassador to Pakistan, Walter P. McCone, had with Ayub and Bhutto provide an important insight into US-Pakistan relations at that point, especially in terms of Washington's discomfort over Rawalpindi's growing ties with China. Ayub, who had not been exactly happy with President John F. Kennedy's decision to send McCone as ambassador to Pakistan, given that America's envoys to India were decidedly of a higher intellectual stature, was roughly told by McCone at the height of the September war, 'Mr. President, the Indians have you by the throat.' Ayub's angry response was that Pakistan would cut off the hand put on its throat.

Tashkent was a victory for Lal Bahadur Shastri. Much as the Pakistani delegation wished to have a clear message about the future of Kashmir included in the declaration, the Indian team showed itself in little mood to accommodate Rawalpindi's desires. Tashkent was to turn out to be the initial steps in the unraveling of Ayub Khan's presidency and the diabolical rise of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto to political prominence. Having clung on to power through a clearly rigged election, by means of a curiously shaped Basic Democracy system, Ayub Khan was a spent force by 1968, the tenth anniversary of the coup d'etat that catapulted him to the presidency. More significantly, growing discontent in East Pakistan over political and economic deprivation would lead to the rise of Bengali nationalism under a young, uncompromising Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who would eventually find his own place in history as the founding father of Bangladesh.

From Kutch to Tashkent promises to be a source of delight for researchers of subcontinental and especially Pakistani history. In broad measure, it is mirror into the negative psychological make-up that has consistently defined Pakistan's political and military leaders since the country was created in 1947. One wonders if any lessons have been learned.

Women on the march

THE truth is self-evident. Women are the change-makers today, all around the world. And it is not just in politics but on a deeper, larger level as well. Change must always come through a demonstration of courage. In these past few decades, courage has arisen in women aplenty, to a point where they are now leading voices in a transformation of societies nearly everywhere. No, not everything is smooth. There are the usual obstacles, the old male chauvinism, the ancient taboos about what women should and should not do. Even so, the barriers are being crossed, or broken down, ever so clearly and decisively.

The caveat, of course, is there --- that women are yet objects of sexual gratification for men in diverse regions of the globe and are yet subject to patronizing by men. That last point comes through in Sharon J. Mijares' simply titled essay, Women Gathering, in this revealing compilation of write-ups on women's changing role in enabling social change. Mijares notes the reluctance of men, even now, to treat women as their equals. She observes the behaviour of a spiritual leader from Africa:

'He sits on a stage with three male disciples behind him, as he requests that the women from his group gather in front of the stage on the floor below. He introduces, thanks, and dismisses them, as he moves on to other content within his speech. He does not invite any of these women to join him on that stage.'

And that is where the difficulty comes in, this unwillingness on the part of men to share the stage with women. In this work, however, writers straddling a whole world make it obvious that while women may yet be trapped in the prison of male obstinacy, they are beginning to loosen the shackles and emerging into sunlight on their own. To be sure, societies such as the one in Saudi Arabia still remain feudal. And with religious fanaticism, of the kind propagated by such outfits as the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan and the Hefazat-e-Islam in Bangladesh, rearing its monstrous head, there are reasons to be worried about the future of women in Islamic societies. Equally true, though, is the determination of women to resist any encroachment on their hard-earned liberties by the forces of obscurantism.

Sharmin Ahmad, in her exposition of women's issues in Rising Phoenix: Weaving Peace, seems to be underscoring just such a point through her incisive essay on the perils Bangladesh's women went through in the course of the country's war of liberation in 1971. In a conflict that left as many as three million people dead and tens of thousands of women dishonoured by the Pakistan occupation army, there was yet the courage in some of the women to speak up, even if it was to be many years later. Ahmad's narrative focuses on the trauma Ferdousy Priyabhashini was subjected to for months on end by the army and its local henchmen in Khulna. Ahmad's point is without ambiguity: when Priyabhashini decided to reveal the tale of her sorrows, it was sheer courage she was resorting to. In a society which has traditionally considered a raped woman as a fallen woman, Priyabhashini's decision to inform the country of what was done to her was a saga of courage in its totality. She is, as Sharmin Ahmad would say, a rising phoenix. Note Ahmad's assessment:

'Ferdousy buried her tormenting past in silence, and attempted a fresh start. She became her own counselor. When memories of genocide and torture became unbearable, she would meditate and surrender to God.'

The natural world provided her with means to speak --- to say things her lips could not repeat. Nature spoke to her and she spoke through Nature.'

The canvas expands through the work. Tenzin Dhardon Sharling, in her passionate essay Tibetan Women: Devotedly Defiant, expounds on the courage Tibet's women have systematically demonstrated since the region was seized by China in 1959. The narrative brings to light hitherto unknown realities, owing to a total ban on news of happenings inside Tibet, about the ways in which Tibet's women have waged their own war of resistance against the Beijing authorities. Of particular poignancy is the repression and humiliation a group of fourteen nuns, known as the Drapchi Fourteen (Drapchi being the prison where these women were detained following anti-China protests between 1987 and 1989 in Lhasa) went through as a consequence of their political activism. In 1993, these nuns, with apparently nun Ngawang Sandrol in the lead, were able to smuggle out a cassette on which they had recorded songs of freedom, resistance and faith. These nuns were to be severely punished by the Beijing authorities.

Uganda's Despina Namwembe has a larger issue to handle and is indeed equipped to deal with. Her essay, Protecting Mother Earth, dwells on the role of women in conserving nature through a proactive role in interacting with the land. Women are still challenged by resistance to a bigger role for them over matters relating to the land. That does not in any way permit them to rest easy when it comes to handling household issues. Men are nowhere on the scene. Take it from the writer, in her own words: 'Traditionally in Africa, the young women and their daughters are in charge of making sure that there is food prepared for all family members.'

That is an onerous task, as women striving to push Liberia and Ghana into a region of peace know only too well. As Leymah Gbowee notes in her Women Building Peace Against All Odds, for years until the fall of Charles Taylor in Liberia, mothers watched helplessly as their young daughters were kidnapped and raped and their young sons were drugged and recruited as boy soldiers by the various warlords in the region. By 2002, in

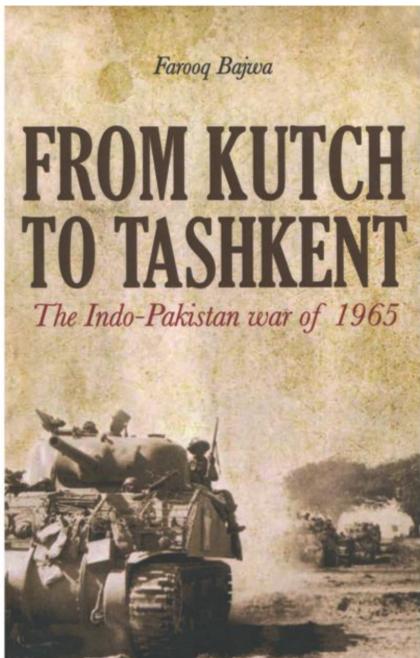
the run-up to which over 200,000 people had been killed in Liberia, women through the Christian Women's Peace Initiative had decided that 'if men chose to go to war, their wives would withhold sex.' These women did more: they compelled the two sides in Liberia's civil war to hammer out a peace deal. Until they did, the women would lock the men in the conference room and bar the door. Security forces threatened to place Gbowee under arrest, to which she responded in a novel way:

'... I began to strip naked in front of them. This was the strongest act of indignation I could demonstrate. Even though many of these men had most likely raped other women, combining violence with sex, they were immensely shamed at my demonstration.'

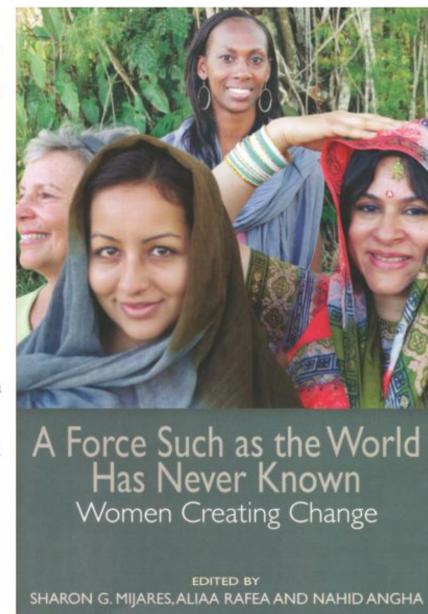
Liberia's women eventually won victory of a remarkable kind. They saw Ellen Sirleaf Johnson elected president of Liberia.

Other stories by other women, all of them privy to assertive self-esteem, abound in this work. Collectively, they are a statement --- that women across the world are moving on, that with men running out of ideas about the world, it is time for women to govern, to save the Earth.

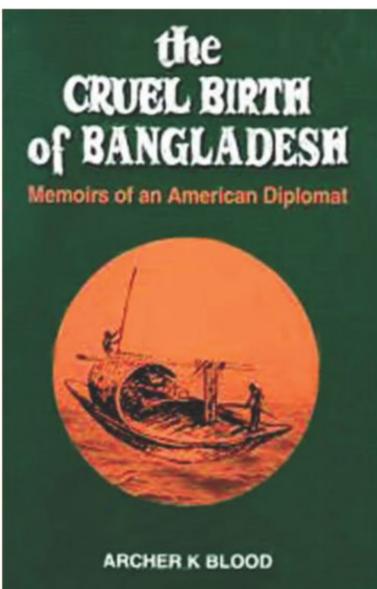
SYED BADRUL AHSAN IS WITH THE DAILY STAR



From Kutch to Tashkent The Indo-Pakistan war of 1965 Farooq Bajwa Pentagon Press, New Delhi



A Force Such as the World Has Never Known Women Creating Change Edited by Sharon G. Mijares, Aliaa Rafea and Nahid Angha INANNA Publications and Education Incz Toronto, Canada



Revisiting Archer K. Blood

Patrick DeSutter

consulate signed the telegram, which included the following allegations:

'Our government has failed to denounce the suppression of democracy. Our government has failed to denounce atrocities. Our government has failed to take forceful measures to protect its citizens while at the same time bending over backwards to placate the West Pak[istan] dominated government and to lessen any deservedly negative international public relations impact against them... But we have chosen not to intervene, even morally, on the grounds that the Awami conflict, in which unfortunately the overworked term genocide is applicable, is purely an internal matter of a sovereign state. Private Americans have expressed disgust. We, as professional civil servants, express our dissent with current policy and fervently hope that our true and lasting interests here can be defined and our policies redirected.'

Predictably, President Richard Nixon promptly removed Blood from his post in Dhaka in overt retaliation for Blood's justified insubordination. Blood's decision to challenge his country's policy had a lasting negative effect on his career and his image was only recently rehabilitated within the American governmental establishment. However, Blood's actions did not go unnoticed in the newly formed independent state of Bangladesh, where he and his family were lauded as partners in the freedom struggle.

Shahudul Haque was a friend of the Blood family and remembers their presence in Dhaka fondly: 'I was about the same age as the two older Blood children. We would play cricket and softball and work on homework together.' Haque befriended the family during Blood's first posting in Dhaka in the early 1960s and reconnected with him during his

stint as Consul General in 1970-71 when Haque was a young Bengali nationalist. Haque's first hand accounts of the atrocities committed by the West Pakistani military on a daily basis gave Blood a personal stake in the violence. 'He knew that it was a concerted effort on mostly defenseless, unarmed people, and it didn't take long for him to express his hatred of it,' remembers Haque. It is not surprising then that the famous telegram was sent less than two weeks after the commencement of Operation Searchlight on 26 March.

Blood's sympathies were shared by the majority of his fellow citizens throughout the course of the war. Media reports by the New York Times and other organizations documented the violence throughout 1971 and the American public was horrified. The 'Concert for Bangladesh,' held that summer, featured stars including Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, George Harrison and raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for relief work.

While the American public's respect for Bangladesh and Bengalis was apparent, the United States government's relations with the newly formed nation were awkward at best. To this day, only one trip by a sitting American President has been made to the country. Bill Clinton arrived in March 2000 and stayed for less than a day---his trip to a village was cancelled due to security concerns. This does not seem like the kind of diplomatic relationship befitting a pair of countries with a combined population of nearly half a billion.

In Bangladesh, the horrors of 1971 have not, and likely will not ever be forgotten. However, in the United States, a collective desire to forget our complicity in the atrocities perpetrated against Bengalis seems to

have caused us to forget that the country even exists. After 1971, the war faded in the memories of Americans who were concerned with Vietnam, Watergate, and disco. American students are taught almost nothing about Bangladesh's history, geography, or culture today. Indeed, when I informed friends that I would be coming here to work, some thought that it was part of India and many could not have located Bangladesh on a map, let alone tell you anything about the country or its people. Bangladesh is essentially invisible in the American media if one overlooks the sensationalist coverage of the Rana Plaza incident, which focused narrowly on the poor working conditions in garment factories without questioning the economic pressures on factory owners coming from American-based multinational corporations.

So, what is being done today to rectify this strange relationship? Today, the United States government is making a concerted effort to reach out to young people in Bangladesh and 'promote mutual understanding', according to Viraj LeBailly, director of the American Center and Archer K Blood Library in Baridhara.

Of course, the American Center Library's namesake is telling. The American government institution was renamed to honor the once ridiculed consul general in 2005, the year after his death. The then American ambassador to Bangladesh, Harry K. Thomas, said of the man, 'It saddens me that Mr. Blood was punished as he was simply speaking what he felt was the truth. From Archer Blood's example, we can take hope. Even at their darkest hour, the Bengalis had influential and brave friends who knew the truth and

spoke out.' Today, LeBailly sees her mission as fostering a two-way dialogue with Bangladeshis in a way that would honor Blood. To her, Blood's example 'demonstrates the importance of opposing views and that kind of dialogue.'

The American Center is the base of American outreach in the country. At a time when American embassies around the world have been turned into maximum-security bunkers, and are anything but welcoming for visitors, the move to establish a more friendly presence in Dhaka is a step in the right direction. The main functions of the American Center are providing the space and resources of a lending library, assisting Bangladeshi high school and university students to find resources for American study with the EducationUSA program, and sponsoring cross-cultural programs throughout Dhaka. It certainly seems like the American Center is a popular place for local young people. On the day of my visit, there were already nearly a dozen high-school students in the library less than thirty minutes after it opened, and EducationUSA receives over seventy students per day.

Only time will tell if this American strategy will work in Bangladesh, and similar or more drastic efforts must be made in the United States to increase cultural awareness there. However, the resuscitation of Archer K. Blood's name and reputation bodes well for American policies, and we can only hope that the country continues to try to live up to the best of its people.

PATRICK DESUTTER IS AN INTERN AT THE DAILY STAR