

THE WAR OF FOOTAGE

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The introduction of 'China' and 'Soviet Union' in the scenario

Interestingly, one may find clear bias in the way these news channels introduced the positions of superpowers in the war. For example, CBS Evening News for April 7 reported:

(Studio) Communist China supports West Pakistan in East Pakistan rebellion; charges India with interference in civil war. NBC Evening News reported the same day:

(Studio) Communist China accuses India of supporting East Pakistan rebels; last week, USSR indirectly supported rebels.

Support of China for West Pakistan was highlighted quite often. CBS Evening News for May 1 again reported:

(Studio) West Pakistan says China (People's Republic) offered to increase aid to help West Pakistan against East Pakistan rebels.

On the contrary, support of USSR for East Pakistan was always interspersed with China's opposing position, for example, ABC Evening News for April 12:

(Studio) USSR Leaders Brezhnev and Podgorny criticise West Pakistan for bloodshed in East Pakistan; Premier Kosygin meets with West Pakistan and India Ambassadors. Communist China pledges support for West Pakistan, criticises India.

What is interesting was that support for East Pakistan by any country or world personality, other than USSR, was hardly ever mentioned in news. Even the famous 'Concert for Bangladesh' by George Harrison and Pandit Ravi Shankar went unaired by these channels. To be on the safe side, no footage was ever found regarding this concert in the archives, even though newspapers filmed the event extensively.

India enters the 'Pakistan/Civil War' hash

The denomination 'Pakistan/Civil War' now turned to 'Pakistan/Civil War/India', 'India/Cholera', 'India/Refugee/Cholera',

'India/Cholera', and 'India/Refugees', and that is what it continued to be called until nearly the end of the war, and incessantly till mid-June for certain. The refugee crisis was undeniable, but there was a tension of who was winning in this politically crafted humanitarian race. I would like to share one particular incidence.

Walter Cronkite in the CBS Evening News of June 14 and Howard K. Smith on the next day reported that USSR had helped fly East Pakistan refugees from Calcutta to central India. In both the cases, the accompanying footage showed the



poor living conditions in refugee camps. But the interesting part was when American aircrafts were shown transporting refugees. They broadcasted a clip comparing US' process of flying people with that of the USSR, emphasising that their way was far better because the crew showed the passengers how to buckle up and at the end of the trip gave them chocolate.

India turned to be the centre of the news eventually. Senator Kennedy's visit to refugee camps, Kissinger's visit to India and Pakistan, Indira Gandhi's world tour,

the Nixon-Indira meeting, India's Friendship Treaty with Soviet Union—this series of events brought India to the spotlight. The titles of the report started to turn into India/Refugees/US AID, India/Kissinger/Refugees/Agnew, India/Kissinger, or India/Kissinger/US-Pakistan Aid. Finally, by the end of August, or at most the early days of September, the whole 'Pakistan/Civil War' tag had been transformed into the 'India-Pakistan War'.

Dhaka falls!

It was December 16. The result of the war

television channels would term our victory as such, is beyond comprehension.

However, the last news I would cite here is NBC Evening News for December 16. The news was named simply 'Bangladesh'. John Chancellor reported:

(Studio) New nation of Bangladesh profiled. 8th largest in world in population; 1 of the poorest (USD 77/yr/person); geographically size of Arkansas. Flag includes map of nation in gold. Problems cited: returning refugees, rebuilding of war rubble. Political turmoil probable with leader in jail; dependence on India necessary.

The media is not only words, symbols or codes; it is the centre of targeted selectiveness implemented through a plethora of expressive means. We do not convey reality the way it is; the language we use shapes our perspective of it. And our language is the media. Information is not only the fact – it is also its formation as a media event. Information – presented or suppressed – both tell about the deeper meaning and the deeper politics of an event or history. The absence of the people's war in the footage of the media, and the absence of the word 'Bangladesh' till the very end of the time, speaks volumes of the associated politics. And footage speaks volume about the war.

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PHOTO: SCREENSHOTS FROM ABC AND CBS NEWS FOOTAGE.

1. For instance, New York Times, 28 March 1971, 31 March 1971, 7 April 1971; The Guardian, 31 March 1971; Times [London], 3 April 1971; New Stateman [London], 16 April 1971.

2. Harun-or-Rashid. 1995. "British perspectives, Pressures and Publicity Regarding Bangladesh, 1971", Contemporary South Asia 4(2): 140-41.

3. Mohammed Delwar Hossain. 2010. "Framing the Liberation War of Bangladesh in the U.S. and the U. K. Media: A Content Analysis of The New York Times and The Times (London)". M.A. thesis, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale. Cited in Srinath Raghban. 2013. 1971: A Global History of the Creation of Bangladesh, Harvard University Press.

