

Why Bangladesh overtook Pakistan



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occasional terrorism, and the farcical nature of its democracy was exposed in the December 2018 elections. But the earlier caricature of a country on life support disappeared years ago. Today, some economists say it shall be the next Asian tiger. Its growth rate last year (7.8 percent) put it at par with India (8.0 percent) and well above Pakistan (5.8 percent). The debt per capita for Bangladesh (USD 434) is less than half that for Pakistan (USD 974), and its foreign exchange reserves (USD 32 billion) are four times Pakistan's (USD 8 billion).

Much of this growth owes to exports which zoomed from zero in 1971 to USD 35.8 billion in 2018 (Pakistan's is USD 24.8 billion). Bangladesh produces no cotton but, to the chagrin of Pakistan's pampered textile industry, it has eaten savagely into its market share. The IMF calculates Bangladesh's economy growing from USD 180 billion presently to USD 322 billion by 2021. This means that the average Bangladeshi today is almost as wealthy as the average Pakistani and, if the rupee depreciates further, will be technically wealthier by 2020.

Other indicators are equally stunning. East Pakistan's population in the 1951 census was 42 million, while West Pakistan's was 33.7 million. But today Bangladesh has far fewer people than Pakistan—165 million versus 200 million. A sustained population

planning campaign helped reduce fertility in Bangladesh. No such campaign—or even its beginnings—is visible today in Pakistan.

The health sector is no less impressive—far fewer babies die at birth in Bangladesh than in Pakistan. Immunisation is common and no one gets shot dead for administering polio drops. Life expectancy (72.5 years) is higher than Pakistan's (66.5 years). According to the ILO, females are well ahead in employment (33.2 percent) as

received just one member of the former Indian Civil Service.

None should be more surprised at these new developments than those West Pakistanis—like me—who went to school during the 1950s and 1960s and grew up surrounded by unconcealed racism. Short and dark Bengalis were reputedly good only for growing jute and rice and catching fish. They were Muslims and Pakistanis, of course, but as children we were made to imagine that all good Muslims and real

never survive economically and would humbly ask to be taken back.

Others optimistically imagined that the disaster had taught Pakistan a profound lesson making change inevitable. Responding enthusiastically to the popular *roti, kapra, makaan* slogan, they believed Pakistan would shift from pampering its hyper-privileged ones towards providing welfare for all. Equally, it was hoped that the rights of Pakistan's culturally diverse regions would be respected. None of this happened. Instead, we simply got more of what had been earlier.

Thirsting for vengeance, Pakistan's establishment could think of nothing beyond wounded honour and ways to settle scores with India. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's secret call for the nuclear bomb led to the famed Multan meeting just six weeks after the surrender. That centralisation of authority breeds local resentment remained an unlearned lesson. In 1973, Bhutto dismissed the NAP government in Balochistan and ordered military action, starting a series of local rebellions that has never gone away. In doing so, he re-empowered those who ultimately hanged him.

In a nutshell, Bangladesh and Pakistan are different countries today because they perceive their national interest very differently. Bangladesh sees its future in human development and economic growth. Goal posts are set at increasing exports, reducing unemployment, improving health, reducing dependence upon loans and aid, and further extending micro credit. Water and boundary disputes with India are serious and Bangladesh suffers bullying by its bigger neighbour on matters of illegal immigration, drugs, etc. But its basic priorities have not wavered.

For Pakistan, human development comes a distant second. The bulk of national energies remain focused upon checkmating India. Relations with Afghanistan and Iran are therefore troubled; Pakistan accuses both of being excessively close to India. But the most expensive consequence of the security state mindset was the nurturing of extra state actors in the 1990s. Ultimately they had to be crushed after the APS massacre of December 16, 2014. This, coincidentally, was the day Dhaka had fallen 43 years earlier.

Bangladesh is conflicted by internal rifts. Still, being more multicultural and liberal, its civil society and activist intelligentsia have stopped armed groups from grabbing the reins of power. Although elected or quasi-elected Bangladeshi leaders are often horribly corrupt and incompetent, they don't simply endorse decisions—they actually make them. Ultimately responsible to their electorate, they are forced to invest in people instead of weapons or a massive military establishment.

For Pakistan, these are lessons to be pondered over. CPEC or no CPEC, it's impossible to match India tank for tank or missile by missile. Surely it is time to get realistic. Shouting "Pakistan zindabad" from the rooftops while obsequiously taking dictation from the Americans, Chinese, and Saudis has taken us nowhere. Announcing that we have become targets of a fifth-generation hi-tech secret subversion inflames national paranoia but is otherwise pointless. Instead, to move forward, Pakistan must transform its war economy into ultimately becoming a peace economy.

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compared to Pakistan (25.1 percent).

How did West Pakistan's poor cousin manage to upstage its richer relative by so much so fast? It's all the more puzzling because Bangladesh has no geostrategic assets saleable to America, China, or Saudi Arabia. It also has no nuclear weapons, no army of significance, no wise men in uniform running the country from the shadows, and no large pool of competent professionals. At birth, East Pakistan had, in fact, no trained bureaucracy; it

Pakistanis are tall, fair, and speak chaste Urdu. We'd laugh madly at the strange-sounding Bengali news broadcasts from Radio Pakistan. In our foolish macho world, they sounded terribly feminine.

The mega surrender of 1971 made West Pakistanis eat humble pie. But, even as the two-nation theory went out of the window, the overwhelming majority was loath to change its thinking. The west wing renamed itself Pakistan, many assuming this was temporary. They said Bangladesh could

Tea advertisements and the ideal woman in 20th-century colonial Bengal

NAMIA AKHTAR

TEA was introduced into the Indian subcontinent as a colonial cash crop to preserve British and Indian commercial interests. However, soon it emerged as a national beverage blurring regional distinctions, occupying its position as a symbol of unity within ethnic and religious diversity. Gautam Bhadra, in his book "From an Imperial Product to a National Drink: The Culture of Tea Consumption in Modern India", argues that before the Great Depression, locally produced tea in India was exported to the UK and Europe, but some of it was consumed locally, primarily within the elite circles in Bengal.

Before the Great Depression, producers with their unsold surpluses looked for inward markets for tea consumption; hence, aggressive advertisements were forged to infuse the demand for tea into the fabric of the society. In the 1930s, tea was disassociated from its imperial nature and a new image of tea was formulated. In this new version of tea adverts, tea was portrayed as a Swadeshi (indigenous) drink that united a diverse India, serving the purpose of the Indian Nationalist Movement. Moreover, women were frequently depicted as bearers of this new tea culture.

I analysed the construction of the concept of ideal woman examining tea advertisements from 1935-1945 in forty issues of one of the most influential monthly magazines of 20th-century Bengal, *Prabasi*. The magazine started its journey in 1901 from Allahabad, directed towards the Bengali diaspora in India. However,

from 1905 onwards, it was being published from Kolkata. Among the contemporary magazines of its time, *Prabasi* had the highest circulation number. Rabindranath Tagore was among its regular contributors.

In the construction of femininity in tea advertisements, traditional gendered norms were reiterated. Tea was conceptualised as a family beverage served by women to other women, men, and children, where women played a critical role in ensuring the hospitality of guests through serving tea. The embodiment of exclusive gendered tones created new social norms based on existing societal values. Women were depicted in the multiple roles of mothers and wives. Drinking a cup of tea was not rendered as bringing solo pleasure to the woman; instead, women attained the pleasure of tea in family gatherings or in the comfort of the couple's private moments. These portrayals of women enhanced their functionality as wives, capable of satisfying their husbands.

Through the articulation of these roles, an ideal woman was constructed as an individual who was not preoccupied with herself, instead absorbed herself into the needs of her children and husband. The woman in tea advertisements performed exceptionally well in executing traditional roles; drinking tea was meant to help execute her domestic tasks instead of giving her pleasure in its entirety. In this way, tea advertisements formulated new notions of femininity centred on women's role in the domestic sphere.

These trends can be observed in advertisements throughout the period. Some advertisements during this



An advertisement featured in now-defunct *Prabasi* magazine conceptualises tea as a beverage that should be served to guests. Tea was promoted as a symbol of hospitality while women played the role of the tea cup bearer.

period claim that tea facilitates the housewife to multitask; it provides her with additional energy to spend quality time with her children after an

engaging day of housework. From 1944, tea advertisements began to include ancient paintings from Ajanta and Ellora caves. Some of

these advertisements compared the refreshment that tea brings to a sensualised female body. Images of sensualised gods and goddesses frequently appeared in tea advertisements. One ad embodied tea as an impetus to enliven the sexual lives of married couples. In tea ads that included nude imagery of goddesses, feminine stereotypes were embodied as emblems of high art, legitimising male voyeurism through the depiction of women as symbols of sexuality and nature. Simultaneously, it signified the importance of women's reproductive role in society as consumption of tea supposedly enhanced fertility.

While contemporary tea advertisements in Bangladesh no longer articulate notions of sexuality by containing images of nude gods and goddesses, many of the gendered constructions that tea advertisements manufactured remain with us. Tea continues to be served as a family beverage by women, and advertisements to this day depict images of women as the bearer of tea culture in the family.

Advertisements are produced based on existing societal norms, but the indigenisation of tea through aggressive advertisement campaigns also pronounces its transformative role in instilling new cultural values. Commercials act as powerful catalysts of social change that can introduce new elements in any culture. Advertisement companies and businesses have a more significant role to play in challenging women's traditional role in society and harnessing greater values attached to notions of gender equality.

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ALBERT EINSTEIN
(1879-1955)
A German-born influential theoretical physicist

No problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Accord
- 5 Traverse
- 10 Friend of D'Artagnan
- 12 Joust need
- 13 Prepares for contingencies
- 15 Cool, to jazzmen
- 16 Money machine
- 17 "— pig's eye!"
- 18 Become sharply attentive
- 20 Fix text
- 21 Like cliffs
- 22 Wind indicator
- 23 Vestige
- 25 Pulsate
- 28 Pay tribute to

DOWN

- 1 Maze choices
- 2 Acropolis setting
- 3 Reduce gradually
- 4 Great weight
- 5 Chowder chunk
- 6 Fan cry
- 7 New York lake
- 8 Digitize for computer use
- 9 Sober
- 11 Rink patron
- 14 Road sign
- 19 Trifling
- 20 Bit of history
- 24 "Lord Jim" author
- 25 "Help me out here"
- 26 Last
- 27 Arthurian island
- 29 Set straight
- 30 Soprano Scott
- 33 Rear — (accident)
- 35 Towel word
- 38 Young fellow
- 39 Possesses

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COME ON, WHEN I'M GOING TO TEACH YOU EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT BEING A GIRL.

ALL YOU NEED IS INNER BEAUTY, POISE...

...AND A DUMB BROTHER FOR CONTRAST.