



Social Sciences Spectrum

A Double-Blind, Peer-Reviewed, HEC recognized [Y-category](#) Research Journal

E-ISSN: [3006-0427](#) P-ISSN: [3006-0419](#)

Volume 04, Issue 02, 2025

Web link: <https://sss.org.pk/index.php/sss>



East Pakistan 1971: Shared Histories, Contested Narratives, and a Common Future

Nasir Shafiq

PhD Scholar, Department of Intl Relations, Muslim Youth University, Islamabad, Pakistan

Correspondence: nasirshafique38@gmail.com

Dr Raziq Hussain

Assistant Professor, Department of IR, Muslim Youth University, Islamabad, Pakistan

Email: raziq.hussain@myu.edu.pk

Dr Waseem Khokhar

Assistant Professor/HOD, Department of IR, Muslim Youth University, Islamabad, Pakistan

Email: waseem.khokhar@myu.edu.pk

Article Information [YY-MM-DD]

Received 2025-05-14

Revised 2025-06-15

Accepted 2025-06-30

Citation (APA):

Shafiq, N., Hussain, R & Khokhar, W (2025). East Pakistan 1971: Shared histories, contested narratives, and a common future. *Social Sciences Spectrum*, 4(2), 1033-1044. <https://doi.org/10.71085/sss.04.02.523>

Abstract

The events of the 1971 crisis and the subsequent creation of Bangladesh remain a contested moment in South Asian history. Examining various hangovers from this crisis, antecedent history, and the evolution of the political landscape in both East and West Pakistan provides an understanding of the critically important events of this period. It addresses the humanitarian impacts of this tragedy. The article demonstrates that a combination of structural factors, identity, and a lack of political accommodation contributed to the collapse of the State, and that both historical narratives and competing national narratives continue to drive the relationship between Pakistan and Bangladesh. To provide a more comprehensive, evidence-based, and complete understanding of the events of 1971, using voices that are rarely discussed, the article calls for this work. Further, it provides a new theoretical approach (IRM) for thinking about reconciliation as a structural, ideational and discursive process. By reviewing global examples of reconciliation, the study presents pathways to achieve historical acknowledgement, transform narratives, and enhance engagement with political and social institutions. Ultimately, it concludes that sustainable reconciliation will require a gradual, inclusive and future-oriented approach grounded in mutual recognition and long-term dialogue.

Keywords: East Pakistan 1971, Bangladesh Liberation War, reconciliation, Integrated Reconciliation Model (IRM), Conflict Transformation, Collective Memory, South Asia.



Content from this work may be used under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution-Share-Alike 4.0 International License](#) that allows others to share the work with an acknowledgment of the work's authorship and initial publication in this journal.

Introduction

The separation of East Pakistan in December 1971 marks a major break in the political and historical development of an entire region, namely South Asia. The establishment of Bangladesh is the result of a long series of interlinked events influenced by various factors: major miscalculations by politicians; social injustices stemming from structural inequalities; identity-based clashes among ethnicities and populations; and the actions of foreign states, acting through the United Nations and other means (Jalal, 1990, p. 312). The breakdown that led to the separation of Pakistan was not a single event but a product of many interconnected incidents and stages of development arising from the post-colonial problems the people of Pakistan faced in building a viable state. The structural, geographical, demographic, and institutional differences between East and West Pakistan created ongoing tension between the two parts of what was known as Pakistan, which never fully identified as a single nation (Zaheer, 1994, p. 45). To date, the events of 1971 remain the subject of contention in the literature, national history books, and among historians; in memory, there is no definitive view of what happened. Over 50 years later, the legacy of 1971 continues to shape the ongoing development of Bangladesh and Pakistan's relations. The lack of a formal reconciliation process between the two countries has allowed competing narratives about the events of 1971 to become entrenched, often leading to distrust between the two nations and reducing opportunities for constructive interactions between their respective populations (van Schendel, 2009, p. 168). Compared to the dominant narrative in Bangladesh, which centres on a historic struggle for independence due to systematic oppression, the narrative in Pakistan often centres on a lapse in national leadership and the external actors (especially India) influencing the split between East and West Pakistan (Sisson & Rose, 1990, p. 152).

The persistence of contested memory reflects the challenges facing post-conflict societies as they attempt to reconcile their histories. According to conflict transformation scholars, unresolved historical grievances can produce both structural and cultural forms of violence, even in the absence of direct or violent conflict (Galtung, 1996, p. 31). The absence of institutional mechanisms for dialogue in Pakistan and Bangladesh further entrenches the divisions between these two countries. Therefore, revisiting the East Pakistan tragedy is not just a scholarly endeavour but also an essential ingredient in fostering necessary dialogue, mutual recognition, and long-term stability in bilateral relationships. The article adopts a multidimensional approach to re-examining the 1971 crisis, first situating it within the broader historical and structural context of the conflict and examining the interrelations of political, economic and identity factors that contributed to its escalation. Next, it examines the conflict itself, focusing on the human costs, such as displacement, violence and long-term social fragmentation. This analysis seeks to move beyond state-centric, dominant national narratives of the conflict to offer a broader view of how different communities, especially the Biharis, were affected (Bass, 2013, p. 245). A primary concern of this study is a critical engagement with competing historiographies. While the importance of official national narratives is recognised, the article attempts to move beyond binary interpretations.

The article's key focus is the development of the Integrated Reconciliation Model (IRM), a comprehensive framework for addressing historical grievances and facilitating reconciliation. The IRM integrates theories from Johan Galtung's conflict transformation, constructivist theories of identity and narrative formation, and a deconstructive approach to analysing historical discourse and power relations. Using the IRM provides a multi-faceted framework to illuminate not only the root causes of a conflict but also the pathways available for achieving reconciliation. Specifically, this research emphasises that reconciliation is not just a political/diplomatic process but also a

fundamentally social and discursive one, which requires changes in the narratives and identities of those involved, as well as in how institutions consider their role in the process of reconciliation (Wendt, 1999, p. 25; Derrida, 1976, p. 158). This research supports the hypothesis that for Pakistan and Bangladesh to achieve genuine long-term peace, there must be a transition away from reliance on blame and towards more inclusive and dialogic approaches to the past. Such a framework would not erase the distinctions between the two cultures; instead, it would acknowledge their complexity, recognise that there are multiple forms of suffering in both, and create space to develop a shared understanding of one another. In this regard, re-examining the events of 1971 is not only about gaining a greater understanding of history but also about creating new opportunities to establish peaceful relationships and work together for a better future in South Asia.

Historical Roots of the Crisis, Conflict Dynamics, and the Politics of Memory

West and East Pakistan were united into a single political entity in 1947 with the creation of Pakistan. The two regions were separated geographically and culturally, which helped develop structural imbalances that would ultimately destabilise Pakistan (Jalal, 1990, p. 312). Structured as a centralised state, with a concentration of military and political power in West Pakistan and the absence of geographical contiguity, this created imbalances that were not only administrative but also predetermined by the state's institutional architecture, in which the system of decision-making operated. As a result, even though East Pakistan had a demographic majority, it remained relatively underrepresented in the civil service, military, and political leadership positions (Zaheer, 1994, p. 45). This created a growing perception of marginalised and excluded populations, which, over time, led to political alienation. Increasing perceptions of central government authority also resulted from this concentration. East Pakistanis viewed the policies emanating from the central government as either serving or undermining the interests of the West Pakistani elite rather than reflecting a national consensus. The disconnect between East and West would result in weak state legitimacy and create opportunities for political movements to build around regional identity. The tensions that arose from the dissolution of political, social, and economic inequality were largely due to issues of recognition, representation, and dignity.

An example of how symbolic politics influences national identity is found in the Language Crisis of the early 1950s. After the promulgation of Urdu as the sole national language, some East Pakistanis viewed this as a means of excluding them from their culture and from using their language (van Schendel, 2009, p. 111). Thus, the Language Movement of 1952 was an important event in building a Bengali national identity, as linguistic grievances were broadened into a wider political movement. From a constructivist perspective, language is an essential vehicle for articulating and contesting identity. According to Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, social reality is created through the three processes of externalisation, objectivation and internalisation (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 61). Therefore, the prioritisation of Urdu and the de-prioritisation of Bengali provided a basis for institutionalising identity-based divisions, which contributed to later political conflict.

Economic disparities created additional tension between East and West Pakistan. Although empirical evidence on economic inequality remains debated, there is consensus that perceptions of inequitable resource distribution were highly significant in shaping political attitudes in East Pakistan (Bose, 2011, p. 52). The jute produced in East Pakistan accounted for a large share of Pakistan's much-needed export earnings at the same time that provincial development funds were perceived to be disproportionately weighted in favour of West Pakistan. This perception fuelled feelings of economic injustice and strengthened demands for greater autonomy. Amartya Sen has

noted that perceptions of economic inequality carry substantial political significance, especially when they intersect with identity and representation issues (Sen, 1999, p. 87).

Political chaos unfolded in Pakistan as the 1970 general elections led to a significant crisis, with the Awami League, the dominant party in East Pakistan, barred from forming a government despite winning 160 of 162 seats there. In the historical context, this unprecedented performance at the polls was due to the deep political divisions between East and West Pakistan. As Pakistani political leaders failed to provide a successful transition of leadership from West Pakistan to East Pakistan, tensions began to rise, with neither the political elite nor the military leadership able to reach a compromise, thus further demonstrating deep-seated and structural divisions and violence in society (Ziring, 1997, p. 289). Instead of the elections providing a solid basis for future political stability, the actions taken by Pakistan's political and military leadership after these elections foreshadowed the level of violence and chaos that would occur as a result of these elections. A military operation in March 1971 transformed Pakistan's political crisis into an armed conflict within the nation as the military attempted to re-establish state authority (Sisson & Rose, 1990, p. 152). The failure to achieve either a successful transition of power or the re-establishment of state authority created immense humanitarian suffering as the conflict progressed, resulting in several thousand people being displaced and fleeing to neighbouring India, causing a humanitarian crisis, giving an excuse to India to intervene militarily in December 1971, leading to an armed conflict between India and Pakistan.

There remains much debate about the impact of the war's human casualties on civilians, as estimates vary widely due to differences in methodologies, political sensitivities and a lack of firm data (Rummel, 1994, p. 331). However, there is general agreement that the violence and suffering in 1971 were substantial and affected large sections of the civilian population. Of great importance, the violence that occurred in 1971 was not unidirectional. Many communities faced victimisation, including the Bengali community, the non-Bengali community (particularly Biharis) and many other minority communities (Saikia, 2011, p. 203). Understanding that these experiences take many forms is essential to creating an inclusive and balanced view of historical events.

The complexity of the conflict makes it difficult to categorise people simply as primary victims or perpetrators, given the many variables involved. Because civil conflicts encompass many forms of violence, such as state-sponsored repression, insurgency, and ethnic retaliatory violence, there was significant fragmentation in the ways Bengalis represented their experiences of violence during the 1971 conflict. The historiography of 1971 comprises several competing histories that reflect different identities and political agendas. While the Bengalis' collective identity was forged through the liberation struggle against an American-supported oppressor and sustained through public commemoration, education, and governmental discourse, this narrative has become the basis for a shared national identity (van Schendel, 2009, p. 168).

In Pakistan, the crisis has almost always been viewed through a different lens than in India (Zaheer, 1994, p. 389). The predominant lens has been political failure, administrative breakdown, and/or the impact of external assistance, most especially from India, and the role it played in shaping the circumstances of the conflict. While recognising some mistakes on their part, official versions have historically been much more reserved in their response to claims of widespread human rights abuses. The reasons for this divergent interpretation point to broader issues in the search for the truth about these difficult parts of national history. Increasingly, independent research is being conducted with the intent to move away from these polarised interpretations and to express the complexity of the conflict. Scholars such as Sarmila Bose and Yasmin Saikia have written books that describe the various forms of violence, intra-communal violence, retaliatory violence, and so

on, and they advocate the need for descriptive analyses of each of these forms of violence (Bose, 2011, p. 210). Research conducted by independent scholar's challenges existing narratives by incorporating diverse perspectives and demonstrating the limitations of binary definitions.

Theoretical Innovation: Integrated Reconciliation Model (IRM)

Conceptual Foundation

This article presents an original idea called the IRM, developed to help find a better way to reconcile after conflict, particularly in the case of Pakistan and Bangladesh. The IRM combines three ideas about analysing conflicts into a single framework, enabling it to examine all types of conflict and how to move on after they occur. Most existing methods for reconciling after conflict have focused on just one of three things: creating a new government, normalising relations with your neighbour, or developing a better economic relationship with the country you are a neighbour of. However, none of these addresses the full situation. Many conflicts, like the one that occurred in 1971, do not continue solely because of ongoing material disparities but also because established accounts of what happened have shaped people's identities and how they think the conflict should be remembered. Therefore, researchers need to look not only at how to create institutions to achieve true reconciliation, but also at how we can change the way people perceive and make sense of things before real reconciliation can happen.

The IRM is particularly applicable to the 1971 case because it represents a multifaceted rupture; governance failures, arguments over identity, and competing historical narratives are all aspects of the crisis. By combining perspectives from conflict transformation theory and social constructionist understandings of social reality with a deconstructive critique of dominant perspectives within a given discourse, the IRM offers a holistic framework for both understanding how the conflict originated and identifying potential avenues for reconciliation (Galtung, 1996, p. 31).

Pillar I: Conflict Transformation as the Structural Foundation of Reconciliation

The first pillar of the IRM framework is grounded in conflict transformation theory, which offers a holistic understanding of violence and peace. According to Johan Galtung, there are three types of violence—direct, physical, and structural—that provide a layered understanding of conflict dynamics (Galtung, 1996, p. 32). In the 1971 crisis, the most obvious manifestations of direct violence were armed confrontation, killing, and widespread suffering on both sides. However, prior to and throughout the period of overt/physical violence, structural forms of violence (which consist of inequities in political representation, the distribution of resources, and participation in governmental institutions) were equally important in creating and maintaining systemic inequality in East and West Pakistan. Because of systemic inequalities, conditions were created that enabled the marginalisation of people, thereby fostering political mobilisation and escalating conflict (Galtung, 1996, p. 35). Cultural violence plays a significant role; it includes narratives, ideologies, and symbols used to rationalise or justify violence, or other forms of violence. Competing identities, loyalty, and/or legitimacy have shaped how individuals perceive 'the other' and have provided a means of rationalising exclusionary policies. Cultural violence helped to turn political disagreement into an existential struggle. The IRM utilised Galtung's notion of positive peace; positive peace is more than the mere absence of violence; it entails the establishment of a just, equitable and socially cohesive environment (Galtung, 1996, p. 37). Reconciliation, from this definition, goes beyond the mere cessation of hostilities and also involves restructuring and re-establishing relationships and structures that generate conflict. To achieve this, there must be a long-term effort to eliminate inequities, promote inclusion, and restore trust between societies.

Pillar II: Constructivism and the Transformation of Identity and Narrative Structures

The IRM's second pillar relates to constructivist theory and its focus on how identity, formed through ideas and shared meaning, shapes political behaviour; Wendt (1999) argues that international relations and states' interests and identities are not innate but develop through relationships (Wendt, 1999, p. 25). On the other hand, Berger and Luckmann view social reality as comprising ongoing processes of externalisation, objectivation, and internalisation (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 61). This framework helps develop an understanding of identity in relation to both constructivist positions. In Pakistan and Bangladesh (1971), national identities have developed from selective views of historical events, shaped by political leaders, institutionalised by state-based agencies, and formed by everyday people as they learn from each other over time about their past. Historical narratives become part of who we are as a people and take a long time to change.

According to the IRM, three interrelated processes occur during this process (creating the primary story/tree of each narrative):

- **Externalisation:** creating and distributing stories about 1971 by political leaders, intellectuals and institutions (the ruling body, state, governance).
- **Objectivation:** the establishment of those created and distributed stories through school textbooks (particularly in the context of 'what we are told') by the governing body (government) institutions responsible for developing them in each state.
- **Internalisation:** accepting those stories as truths/established realities through the way we (society) absorb them over time and respond to them each day.

As such, these processes describe how multiple competing and parallel narratives have survived to date despite increased scholarly attention to each. Additionally, and perhaps most importantly, this relates to the difficulty of reconciling competing truths, as established and diverse historical truths are; it also relates to identifying the many ways in which we look to create our own established narrative around "our own history," the lack of historical convergence as we create different and unique policies/procedures, and ultimately the bringing about of the same functionalities of each state (Pakistan and Bangladesh) as it relates directly to re-establishing ourselves through national identities. Reconciliation in the IRM is reconceptualised as a process of changing narratives by re-evaluating dominant narratives, incorporating different viewpoints to create alternative futures, and encouraging dialogue among competing ideological interpretations, rather than abandoning our national identity in favour of establishing our shared national identity in relation to one another.

Pillar III: Deconstruction and the Critical Reframing of Dominant Narratives

The IRM's deconstructive theory is rooted in the work of Jacques Derrida. The aim of deconstruction is to expose the assumptions and contradictions embedded in mainstream discourse, thereby challenging the notion that meaning is fixed (Derrida, 1976, p. 158). Historiography has been established since 1971 as containing narratives based on binary oppositions (e.g., victim/perpetrator, liberation/oppression, justice/injustice). These binary oppositions provide clarity and coherence; however, they also oversimplify the complexities of historical accounts and, at times, exclude other methods or experiences that occurred within the same time frame.

IRM employs deconstruction as a means of:

- Identifying overlooked or suppressed components of the dominant narrative.
- Questioning the credibility of official history.
- Presenting multiple points of view and ways to perceive the conflict.
- Including the opinions of less-privileged minorities (especially non-Bengali people).

Deconstruction dismantles established binary structures (e.g., victim vs perpetrator) and provides a more thorough and open process for understanding history; therefore, it is fundamental to both reconciliation and the acceptance of the variety of ways people suffered, rather than giving preference to one individual's viewpoint over another's.

Implementing the IRM for Reconciliation Between Pakistan and Bangladesh

The IRM is intended to serve as both a conceptual framework for reconciliation and a practical process for achieving it. The application of the IRM can be viewed through three interrelated domains of reconciliation: historical, narrative, and institutional.

Historical Reconciliation (Truth)

Historical reconciliation is characterised by truth-telling mechanisms, documentation and acknowledgement; the establishment of joint historical commissions, which facilitate access to archival material and promote collaborative scholarly research, is an important element in this process. There are historical precedents for these types of efforts, such as truth commissions; global experience from truth commission projects demonstrates the importance of identifying and acknowledging past injustices to achieve true reconciliation (Hayner, 2011, p. 24). The process of historical reconciliation in the context of Pakistan and Bangladesh must take into account the diversity of communities that were affected by these events.

Narrative Reconciliation (Identity Transformation)

Through Narrative Reconciliation, we are changing people's perspectives and representations of our history. We are developing new ways for people to connect with one another through education reform, cooperation between educational institutions, and the use of media to build empathy and friendship. The constructivist aspects of the conflict are addressed through Narrative Reconciliation, which enables us to revisit and reconstitute our identities and work towards reducing intergroup conflict. To reconcile with one another, we know that we must change not only the political situation but also how we perceive and regard each other.

Institutional Reconciliation (Sustained Engagement)

To facilitate communication and cooperation, formalised approaches to Institutional Reconciliation will create a framework for developing social diplomacy, economic collaboration, shared culture, and individual-level interaction. By establishing these mechanisms for Institutional Reconciliation, we are creating methods to sustain dialogue and reinstate an ongoing process of reconciliation. They also provide opportunities to discuss grievances, build trust, and foster long-term collaborative behaviour.

Global Examples for Reconciliation

The information gained from various reconciliation processes in post-conflict nations will help develop a better understanding of reconciliation for all nations. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) established in South Africa is a prime example of the importance of validating

victims' suffering through testimony and of restorative justice (Hayner, 2011, p. 89). Also, in Latin America, it has been shown that institutional mechanisms are important in providing justice for historical wrongs. The implementation of these two reconciliation models will take different forms depending on the contexts in which they are applied. Therefore, the IRM framework allows for flexibility by drawing on international and local lessons and using a model that incorporates both theoretical and practical principles.

Challenges to Reconciliation

The process of individuals reconciling with one another faces significant obstacles that must be addressed to achieve complete success over the next several years. These include political sensitivities, disparate national/herstory worldviews, and a lack of institutions that facilitate reconciliation. Countries and people on both sides typically do not welcome revisiting history. Political leaders on both sides avoid pursuing reconciliation because they face multiple national-level pressures not to do so. Additionally, entrenched national narratives make it more difficult for people to accept differing views of their own historical events. Furthermore, because there are so few sustained institutional frameworks for reconciliation, opportunities for meaningful dialogue between the two sides are very limited. To overcome the challenges associated with reconciliation, long-term commitment must be made; inclusive dialogue must be developed; and a mutual willingness to confront difficult historical issues must be demonstrated. The IRM will assist both sides in successfully addressing the challenges associated with reconciling by offering a comprehensive framework for organising reconciliation using three strategies: 1) Structural Transformation; 2) Narrative Reconfiguration; and 3) Discursive Inclusivity.

The Functional Architecture of the IRM

The IRM has developed an innovative approach to studying reconciliation in post-conflict periods, using an integrated model of conflict transformation, constructivism, and deconstruction to examine the events of the 1971 crisis. According to the IRM, reconciliation is a gradual process that unfolds over time rather than an isolated event. Furthermore, reconciliation is based on changing structural, narrative, and identity issues, or on creating new structures, narratives, and identities, so that people can experience reconciliation in their lives. The IRM indicates that it is essential to include, among other things, recognition of past historical injustices and constructive dialogue between individuals and groups to establish sustainable peace. Regarding the establishment of better relations between Pakistan and Bangladesh, the IRM offers a means to bring about the necessary changes amid decades of societal obstacles, working towards more cooperative and respectful relationships. Although the historical record is static and cannot be altered, the way histories are viewed and addressed can change, thereby providing an avenue for reconciliation grounded in a common humanity and mutual affirmation.

Policy Recommendations for Reconciliation between Pakistan and Bangladesh

The above analysis shows that reconciliation between Pakistan and Bangladesh can be achieved only through a multi-pronged and multifaceted strategy that goes beyond traditional diplomatic methods. The IRM provides a basis for developing a series of policy options to implement reconciliation through an integrated plan of action across the domains of History, Narrative and Institutions. The recommendations presented in this paper are based on theoretical knowledge and comparative experience from post-conflict societies, while remaining mindful of the historical and political context of South Asia.

Establishment of a Joint Historical Commission

A key element of reconciliation will be the establishment of a Pakistan-Bangladesh Joint Historical Commission, which will facilitate collaborative research, archival access and scholarly dialogue on events related to 1971. The Joint Historical Commission will comprise historians, social scientists and independent experts from both countries, as well as international scholars where appropriate. The commission's focus will not be on developing a single, unified historical narrative, but rather on creating a structure in which the various narratives regarding events in 1971 can coexist within a single analytical framework. By fostering transparency and academic rigour, the Joint Historical Commission will reduce mistrust and address historical omissions, particularly regarding the experiences of individuals who have traditionally been marginalised (Hayner, 2011, p. 24). Evidence from other truth commissions shows that developing and institutionalising truth-finding mechanisms can be valuable for fostering mutual understanding and reducing disagreement regarding prior events (Hayner, 2011, p. 89).

Archival Cooperation and Documentation Initiatives

Accessing historical records has been problematic for scholars studying 1971. Both Pakistan and Bangladesh should take the lead in making their archives available to researchers and the public by declassifying documents, digitising records and materials, and providing cross-border access for scholars. This would include military and administrative records, as well as oral histories. Joint documentation initiatives, especially those that include multiple accounts of testimony from various communities (especially Biharis and other marginalised communities), will help create a more thorough and inclusive record of history. Such activities are consistent with the increasingly accepted global best practices in post-conflict documentation, where both access to and preservation of historical materials are required for academic and reconciliation purposes (Bass, 2013, p. 245).

Educational Reforms and Curriculum Revision

The formation of a country's identity and collective memory largely depends on how education is structured in both countries, so there is a need for both nations to re-examine their school and tertiary curricula to include multiple perspectives on the events of 1971. This does not need to mean abandoning national narratives, but rather restructuring them to include broader, evidence-based perspectives. Academic initiatives such as joint textbooks, faculty exchanges, and collaborative research will also support this process and allow students to see a wider range of examples, thereby improving critical thinking by introducing new information that balances the traditional narratives of conflict between the two states (Wendt, 1999, p. 25). In this way, there is hope of producing gradual changes in how both countries construct their national identities through education, thereby reducing distrust between the two nations over time.

Promotion of Academic and Cultural Exchanges

To facilitate reconciliation, it is critical for society to engage at the societal level; therefore, countries and higher education institutions should support all forms of interpersonal engagement between individuals through cultural diplomacy, including people-to-people exchange programmes (e.g., student exchanges), joint conferences (e.g., product launches), cultural festivals (e.g., art exhibitions), and collaborative research projects. Not only do these forms of interaction provide individuals with an opportunity to communicate directly with one another, but they also help them see others in a more human way, which counteracts negative stereotypes that have resulted from misunderstandings stemming from geographical separation. One potential means of

developing understanding or empathy between societies, or of establishing common historical and cultural experiences, is through cultural diplomacy (Galtung, 1996, p. 35). The above types of activities support constructivist theory (which states that the process by which an individual creates meaning and discovers new identities is a product of social interactions).

Media Responsibility and Narrative Pluralisation

The role of media organisations in societal discourse and collective memory is vital. Therefore, it is important for both nations involved to support responsible, impartial coverage of the events of 1971 in their respective media outlets, including a range of viewpoints. This could include creating collaborative media initiatives, such as documentaries or history-related projects, to portray a range of aspects of the conflict fairly. By developing an understanding grounded in diverse perspectives, the media has a greater opportunity to foster a deeper, more empathetic understanding of the past (Bose, 2011, p. 210).

Gradual Confidence-Building Measures

Reconciliation is a long-term process that requires time and gradual progress (it takes time to build confidence and trust; thus, reconciliation will take time). Therefore, it is recommended that we approach reconciliation gradually, supported by trust-building measures (e.g., small-scale cooperation to improve trade, develop educational institutions, share good health practices, and engage in cultural exchanges). The idea behind creating a foundation of trust through gradual relationship improvement is to provide the first step in establishing an atmosphere of trust, enabling you to overcome the remaining, more complex and sensitive issues (Jalal, 1990, p. 312).

Conclusion

The article asserts that establishing improved relations between Pakistan and Bangladesh requires more than simply engaging diplomatically or sporadically. Political dialogue and economic cooperation are both necessary but not enough on their own to achieve a deeper transformation of the legacy of the 1971 war, which persists in today's structures of inequality, patterns of representation, and competing identity formations that influence both countries' perceptions of themselves and each other (Jalal, 1990, p. 312). To do this, a more comprehensive strategy than either can provide on its own is required, one that addresses both the material and symbolic dimensions of the historical conflict. In this context, the IRM offers a theoretically sound yet adaptable approach to advancing reconciliation across these multiple factors. Specifically, the IRM applies the principles of conflict transformation through constructivist and deconstructive lenses, using a multidimensional approach to address structural inequality, divergent narratives between the two parties, and the discursively excluded voices of both parties (Galtung, 1996, p. 35). The strength of this framework is that it does not treat reconciliation as linear or singular, but rather as an ongoing, dynamic process arising from the interplay among each country's institutions, societies, and historical interpretations.

The requirement for longitudinal, structured engagement through diplomacy, culture, economy, and people-to-people connections demonstrates that institutional connections show how working together creates opportunities that build relationships of trust and reduce miscommunication over time (Sisson & Rose, 1990, p. 225). Reconciliation through institutional engagement will require more than symbolic acts; therefore, it is necessary to develop long-term policy frameworks as part of the reconciliation process. Learning from experiences in other post-conflict settings (comparative analysis) is also essential for establishing a future-oriented perspective on reconciliation. The findings of truth and reconciliation commissions provide useful guidance on

implementing similar programmes; however, they must be further refined in light of the specific situations facing each individual region (Hayner, 2011, p. 89). The IRM provides a flexible, context-oriented framework for applying global lessons and experiences to local circumstances to facilitate reconciliation in South Asia, while acknowledging the region's unique complexities, including its rich and diverse historical, political, and cultural heritages.

Pakistan and Bangladesh can overcome their turbulent pasts by adopting a future-oriented approach that emphasises respect for each other as equals, empathy, and inclusion. If reconciliation occurs in accordance with the IRM guidelines, it will create a channel between two historically disparate societies, thereby fostering a more peaceful and stable regional atmosphere. Furthermore, the IRM reinforces the idea that durable peace will exist through justice, understanding, and productive engagement with one another, and that true peace cannot exist without these qualities (Galtung, 1996, p. 37).

Conflict of Interest

The authors showed no conflict of interest.

Funding

The authors did not mention any funding for this research.

References

- Bass, G. J. (2013). *The blood telegram: Nixon, Kissinger, and a forgotten genocide*. Knopf.
- Berger, P. L., & Luckmann, T. (1966). *The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge*. Anchor Books.
- Bose, S. (2011). *Dead reckoning: Memories of the 1971 Bangladesh war*. C. Hurst & Co.
- Derrida, J. (1976). *Of grammatology*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Galtung, J. (1996). *Peace by peaceful means: Peace and conflict, development and civilization*. Sage.
- Hayner, P. B. (2011). *Unspeakable truths: Transitional justice and the challenge of truth commissions*. Routledge.
- Jalal, A. (1990). *The state of martial rule: The origins of Pakistan's political economy of defence*. Cambridge University Press.
- Rummel, R. J. (1994). *Death by government*. Transaction Publishers.
- Saikia, Y. (2011). *Women, war, and the making of Bangladesh: Remembering 1971*. Duke University Press.
- Sen, A. (1999). *Development as freedom*. Knopf.
- Sisson, R., & Rose, L. E. (1990). *War and secession: Pakistan, India, and the creation of Bangladesh*. University of California Press.
- van Schendel, W. (2009). *A history of Bangladesh*. Cambridge University Press.
- Wendt, A. (1999). *Social theory of international politics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Zaheer, H. (1994). *The separation of East Pakistan: The rise and realization of Bengali Muslim nationalism*. Oxford University Press.
- Ziring, L. (1997). *Pakistan in the twentieth century: A political history*. Oxford University Press.