

GENOCIDE DURING THE BANGLADESH LIBERATION WAR, 1971

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Abstract

During the Bangladesh Liberation War from 26 March to 16 December 1971, the Pakistani military carried out genocide against the people of Bangladesh. It resulted in the deaths of about three million Bengalis. Pakistani soldiers raped between 200,000 and 400,000 Bangladeshi girls and women. In 1948, the United Nations defined genocide as the intention to destroy a national, ethnic, racial or religious group, either in whole or in part. There have been earlier studies on the genocide in Bangladesh, but this article aims to connect the UN definition of genocide with the author's family members' experience as freedom fighters, and her own observations in 1971, and to establish that the Bangladeshi people were victims of genocide committed by the Pakistani army. Using grounded theory, autoethnography and visual sociology methodologies, this study involves interviews with six participants, the author's personal experiences and the use of relevant images. The evidence (findings) provided in this article confirms that the atrocities committed against Bangladeshis fit the UN definition of genocide. The author concludes that it is time that the United Nations recognised that the atrocities committed by the Pakistani military government against the Bangladeshi people in 1971 were "genocide".

Keywords: Genocide, Operation Searchlight, Bangladesh Liberation War, Muslim, Hindu, culture, media

Introduction

On 14 August 1947, British India was divided into two countries known as India and Pakistan. Pakistan was born as a bifurcated state. It was divided by 1,600 kilometres as East and West

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Pakistan, and India was located in between the two wings of Pakistan (see Figure 1). During the partition of India in 1947, the people of East Bengal (later East Pakistan and now Bangladesh) were searching for an identity and a separate nation, and embraced Pakistan as their homeland. The founder of Pakistan, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, used religion, Islam as his political tool to separate from the Hindu majority India. So, many Bengali Muslims opted for Pakistan on the common religious ground. Some Hindus decided to stay in East Bengal because of their common ethnicity with the Bengali Muslims, who were culturally similar in terms of language, dress, food, song and music. More than 80 per cent of people of East Bengal were Muslims and the majority in the rest 20 per cent people were Hindus.



Figure 1: *Map of India and Pakistan, 1947–1971*

Source: Marziya Mohammedali

Since the birth of Pakistan, the Pakistani leaders (of the then West Pakistan) boasted about their religion, Islam. They considered themselves “superior” because they believed in one invisible God (Allah). They viewed Hindus as “inferior” people who worshipped idols. They were critical of Bengali Muslims for being culturally aligned with Bengali Hindus. They insisted that Muslims should abandon Hindu culture, which is incompatible with the Islamic ideology. Some people from Bihar in India also migrated to the then East Pakistan. The Pakistani leaders considered the Biharis one of “us” because they shared common cultural traits and spoke the same language, Urdu (Akman, 2002, p. 545).

Soon after the establishment of Pakistan in 1947, the government in West Pakistan (now Pakistan) began viewing East Pakistanis as the “Other”, instead of treating them as their fellow

country people. In 1948, Muhammad Ali Jinnah declared Urdu would be the state language of East Pakistan, ignoring the fact that the East Pakistanis were Bengalis whose mother tongue was Bangla. Over a period of 24 years (1947–1971), Bengalis were marginalised intellectually, culturally, economically and politically.

Pakistan was ruled by a military dictatorship from 1958 to 1971. East Pakistan constituted more than 55 per cent of the total Pakistani population, yet the East Pakistanis were deprived of the opportunity to participate in decision making in state affairs. West Pakistan received more foreign aid for development than East Pakistan (by a ratio of 80:20). The distribution of American economic aid was similar: 66 per cent was allocated to West Pakistan and 33 per cent to East Pakistan (Samad, 2009, p. 27).

Under these circumstances, in 1966, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, leader of East Pakistan's major political party, the Awami League, presented the "Six Points" demands to the Pakistani government and called for greater autonomy for East Pakistan. The military government of Pakistan refused to accommodate the demands made by the Bengalis (Saikia, 2011).

Finally, in the 1970 general election, the Awami League under Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's leadership won a landslide victory in East Pakistan. Yet the West Pakistani government did not hand over power to the Awami League. In his historic 7 March 1971 speech, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman declared, "The struggle this time is for emancipation! The struggle this time is for independence!" (Rahman, 2013b, p. 214). During the nights of 25–26 March 1971, Pakistani troops began a crackdown on East Pakistan. Just before Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was arrested, he wrote a brief declaration of independence. It stated, "Today Bangladesh is a sovereign and independent country" (Rahman, 2013a, p. 225). The Bangladesh Liberation War, also known as the War of Independence or the 1971 War, had begun. Under the military dictatorship of Yahya Khan, the Pakistani army resorted to violence, thinking that only extreme violence would subdue the Bengalis. This led to genocide in Bangladesh from 25 March to 16 December 1971 (Chowdhury, 2001; Jahan, 2012). It resulted in the deaths of about three million Bengalis, including Muslims, Hindus, political activists, students, professionals, businesspeople, rural and urban people, and women. Pakistani soldiers raped between 200,000 and 400,000 Bangladeshi girls and women (Jahan, 2012; Sharlach, 2000, p. 94).

I am a Bangladeshi woman who lived in West Pakistan from 1964 to 1970, as my father was transferred to West Pakistan for work. We moved back to Dhaka in East Pakistan in 1970. During the nine-month genocide period in 1971 we lived in Dhaka. In this article, I first briefly discuss the disparity between the two wings of the then Pakistan. Secondly, I discuss my research methodology. Thirdly, in the literature review section, I examine the definition of genocide and evaluate the literature that discusses the atrocities committed against the Bangladeshis in 1971. Fourthly, I discuss the findings of my research based on my observations of Bangladeshis' sufferings, their mental agony, my extended family members' role as freedom fighters, and the genocide committed by the Pakistani military in my surrounding urban areas. Finally, I conclude that it is time that the United Nations recognise that the Pakistani government's atrocities against the Bangladeshi people in 1971 were "genocide".

Research methodology

For this article, I have used three methods: grounded theory, autoethnography and visual sociology. My first method, grounded theory, is based on qualitative research. The benefit of grounded theory is that interview data speak on the subject matter. It does not depend on any preconceived notion (Charmaz, 2006). Grounded theory can also be used as a comparative method in which the researcher compares one set of data with another on the research topic. For example, for this research on genocide, I noted the points of struggle and conflict and looked for how participants defined and acted in the situation. From December 2019 to February 2020, I noted down six participants' experience of the War of Liberation (4 male and 2 female participants). Four participants were freedom fighters (*mukti joddha*) during the 1971 War of Liberation. They are also members of my extended family, including uncles (*mamas*), an aunt (*mami*) and a cousin. Two participants, my mother and my brother, shared their observations of the War of Liberation period. By applying the grounded theory method, I tried to connect the interview data with my lived experience. This research is mainly based on interviews and note taking with the consent of the participants. The participants have consented to have their names published in this article.

My second research methodology was autoethnography. This involves providing readers with the researcher's stories of lived experiences, so that the readers can reflect on the particular events. Personal stories can become a means for interpreting the past, translating and transforming the context, and envisioning a future (Jones, 2005). In this context, my personal story will establish that the Pakistani military committed genocide in Bangladesh in 1971.

My third methodology was visual sociology. Visual sociology is based on photographs of an event or incidents. The photographs lead researchers to contextualise and integrate the meaning from the photographs into their research (Harper, 2005). For this study, I found the Liberation War Museum in Dhaka a fruitful resource for my visual sociology. It has archival photographs, newspaper clippings, documentaries and a *birangonas* (brave women/war heroines) rape victims section, and photos of killings of intellectuals. The Liberation War Museum collections depict wartime violence, and show how women were raped, killed, took up arms, received military training from India and migrated to India (see also Figure 5).

I also used secondary sources for this study. I purchased books from the Liberation War Museum bookshop that also assisted me in writing this article. Published materials held in university libraries also proved useful.

Literature review: Definition of genocide and the case of Bangladesh

In 1944, the term “genocide” was coined by a Polish-American jurist named Raphael Lemkin. It meant the destruction of an ethnic or a national group. According to the 1948 United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Genocide Convention), genocide is the intention to destroy a national, ethnic, racial or religious group, either in whole or in part. It includes killing members of the group, causing serious bodily or mental harm, deliberate physical destruction in a concerted and calculated way, imposing measures to prevent births of the group members and forcibly transferring children from one group to another group (United Nations, 1948, Article II).

MacKinnon and Fein noted that the distinctions between genocide, mass killings and war crimes are blurred. In order to establish genocide, the definition should focus on the perpetrators who

direct their violence to physically destroy the target group. The perpetrators work collectively, and they are usually organised actors such as the state or the military, who target another collective group. They stressed the gender-specific aspects of genocide. Girls and women are the victims of sexual violence, and this should be regarded as an important factor in genocide (Fein, 1999; MacKinnon, 1994, pp. 11–12). Saikia noted, “Genocide is strategically used by perpetrators to accomplish their mission of establishing their power. They define the event through their motivation to wilfully destroy and annihilate the victim community that they identify as different from them” (2011, p. 47).

In the case of Bangladesh, the following statements by official dignitaries clearly point out the genocide executed by the Pakistani army in 1971. On 28 March 1971, the Consul General of the United States in Dhaka, Archer Blood, sent a confidential telegram to the Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, in Washington, DC. The telegram, titled “Selective genocide”, described the horror that was occurring in Dhaka. Archer Blood stated, “Here in Dacca [Dhaka] we are mute and horrified to a reign of terror by the Pak military” (Blood et al., 2013, pp. 241–242). Archer Blood was shocked by the horrors the Pakistani military committed against the Bangladeshis, including politicians, intellectuals, students and Hindus. He asked the US government to at least express shock at the atrocities committed by the Government of Pakistan. However, he was surprised at the indifference of US foreign policy, which continued to support Pakistan (Blood et al., 2013, pp. 241–242).

Later, on 13 June 1971, on page one of the *Sunday Times* (UK) the term “genocide” first appeared in the context of Bangladesh. Pakistani journalist Anthony Mascarenhas in his report titled “GENOCIDE” provided graphic descriptions of the crimes he witnessed during his ten-day visit to Bangladesh. He revealed that the intention of the Pakistani military was mass killings of Bengalis. Mascarenhas stated:

“We are determined to cleanse East Pakistan once and for all of the threat of secession, even if it means killing of two million people and ruling the province as a colony for 30 years,” I was repeatedly told by senior military and civil officers in Dacca and Comilla. (Mascarenhas, 1971)

A civil servant called Muhith (1994) shared his conversation with Pakistani officials in May and October 1971. According to Muhith, the West Pakistani soldiers argued that the killing of 300,000 or even 3 million Bangladeshis was justified because it would preserve the nation of Pakistan, which came to exist in 1947. Muhith said that they compared Bangladeshis to monkeys or chickens (Muhith, 1994). Lieutenant General A. A. K. Niazi, the West Pakistani military commander in East Bengal, referred to Bangladesh as “a low lying land, of low lying people” (Schanberg, 1971, p. 6; see also Beachler, 2007, p. 478). Yet later, General Niazi admitted that the atrocities in East Pakistan constituted “a display of stark cruelty, more merciless than the massacres ... by Changez [Genghis] Khan ... or at Jallianwala Bagh by the British General Dyer” (Bass, 2014, p. 70, as cited in Ghosh, 2015, p. 93).

During the War of Liberation, in August 1971, US Senator Edward Kennedy visited refugee camps and hospitals in Calcutta, India. Upon his return, he issued a report to the Senate Judiciary Committee on Refugees. The report, *Crisis in South Asia*, stated that it was “one of the most appalling tides of human misery in modern times” (Kennedy, as cited in Keating, 2009). He was appalled by the Pakistani army’s systematic campaign of terror and its genocidal consequences. Kennedy’s effort to raise global awareness was successful. Finally, the US Congress pushed through a bill to ban arms sales to Pakistan (Keating, 2009).

Findings: The plight of the Bangladeshi people, 25 March – 16 December 1971

Destruction, in whole or in part, of an ethnic, national or religious group

The atrocities committed by the Pakistani army fall within the UN definition of genocide. Several acts recognised by the United Nations as genocide, particularly the intention of a group to destroy a national, ethnic, racial or religious group, are described in this section. As I examined the different aspects of genocide, I found that some of them overlap.

On the night of 25 March 1971, when the Pakistani military commenced their genocide against the Bengalis in the then East Pakistan, several people left eye-witness accounts of the atrocities of Pakistani army. Rafiqul Islam, a resident of the Dhaka University quarters at Nilkhet, stated that on the night of 25 March 1971 the Pakistani military launched “Operation Searchlight”, and

used heavy machine gun, mortar, rocket launcher and artillery fire on the residential quarters and halls of Dhaka University, particularly in the Iqbal and Jagannath Hall areas (Islam, 2019). On 25 and 26 March 1971, slums, bazaars, fire and police stations, newspaper offices, political parties' headquarters, and residences of political leaders were destroyed.

From 27 March 1971, Dhaka witnessed a great exodus of city dwellers to rural areas. Dhaka became empty and looked like a ghost city (Islam, 2019). Beachler (2007) also noted that on the night of 25–26 March 1971, the Pakistani military started Operation Searchlight. Dhaka University was a symbol of Bengali nationalism; hence, it was the first target of attack. Some foreigners sent their eye-witness accounts of the genocide to the US government (Beachler, 2007, pp. 475–476). Dr Jon E. Rohde, an American physician who worked for three years with the US Agency for Independent Development (US AID) witnessed the genocide. Dr Rohde sent a letter about the genocide to the Ohio Republican Senator William Saxbe (Beachler, 2007).

On 29 March 1971, from the Ramna Kali Bari (near Ramna Race course) Dr Rohde and his wife saw Pakistani soldiers burning the remains of men, women and children killed in the early morning. They saw someone counting 103 Hindu students who were buried there. Then there was a tank attack at Iqbal Hall where bodies were still unburied. Indiscriminate killings also took place in remote regions of Bangladesh. Automobile licence plates with Bengali writing were changed to English. Pakistani soldiers told Bengalis that Urdu (the West Pakistani language) was a more civilised language and that they should abandon the Bengali language (Beachler, 2007, p. 478).

The genocide spread to other districts of Bangladesh. Reza (2013) stated that on 3 March 1971, a 17-year-old male youth, Shanku Shamajdhar, was shot dead. He is said to be the first martyr of the Bangladesh liberation movement. Then the Pakistani military randomly killed people. People in Rangpur proper Thana were taken to assigned locations where they were brutally killed. Pictures of slaughterhouses and killing fields in other districts of Bangladesh can be seen below (see Figures 2 and 7). Some Biharis were provided residence in the Cantonment area. They were used as spies during the night-time Pakistani military operations. Reza (2013, p. 223) commented:

On the black night of 25th March '71, when the city of Dhaka was in a complete blood-bath, at the same time militaries launched massacre at Rangpur city as well. Arrests and assassinations were on full swing and *Biharies* launched looting and plundering over the city.

Writers on the genocide in Bangladesh such as Rafiqul Islam noted that the plight of the Bangladeshis became worse when some locals assisted the Pakistani army, for example, the Peace Committee, Razakar Bahini, Al-Shams and Al-Badar Bahini. The Al-Badar Bahini's duty was to trace Bengali intellectuals and professionals, pick them up from their hiding places, and finally torture and kill them in a heinous process (Islam, 2019).

In November 1971, there were massacres at Foy's Lake in Chittagong. Some Biharis helped the soldiers in this genocide. The Biharis reportedly carried knives, swords and other sharp instruments. The Bengali victims were kicked and beaten up, and then they were pushed towards the people who were carrying weapons. Then the Biharis gathered some Bengalis to dig graves for the dead bodies. Once they finished burying the bodies, they were also killed (Jahan, 2012, p. 275). The *Daily Star* newspaper reported that in Chittagong city, the Foy's Lake area in Pahartali was used as the main killing field, and, after the war, at least 11,000 human skulls were found there (Uddin, 2016). Jahan noted that Bengalis retaliated by attacking many non-Bengalis (mostly Biharis). Bengalis believed that the Biharis worked as informants to the Pakistani soldiers. However, Biharis also became victims of acts of violence committed by Bengalis (Jahan, 2012, p. 257).



Figure 2: *A boy at the site of a mass killing during the 1971 genocide near Sreemangal in Sylhet, Bangladesh*

Source: Photo by Adam Jones, Ph.D./Global Photo Archive/Flickr

The Sunday Times (UK) reporter Mascarenhas, who toured around Bangladesh in 1971 for ten days and interviewed several Pakistani military personnel, stated that the then Pakistani government's policy for the Bangladeshis contained three elements:

(1) The Bengalis have proved themselves “unreliable” and must be ruled by West Pakistanis; (2) The Bengalis will have to be re-educated along proper Islamic lines. The “Islamisation of the masses” ... (3) When the Hindus have been eliminated by death and flight, their property will be used as a golden carrot to win over the under-privileged Muslim middle-class. (Mascarenhas, 1971)

Akmam (2002) observed that Pakistani politicians' hostility against the Hindus has been a historical phenomenon. Since the Pakistani leaders believe that Hindus worship idol gods, they consider them inferior. They believe that their religion, Islam, is superior as they pray to only one god (Allah). This religious tension existed in the 1940s when the Muslim League and its leader Muhammad Ali Jinnah used it as a political tool to gain the independence of Pakistan. The Muslim League leaders became very vocal that Muslims should abandon Hindu culture because it was not compatible with the Islamic faith. As a consequence, after the partition of India, many Hindus from East Bengal (then East Pakistan) migrated to West Bengal (India). Similarly, many Bengali Muslims from West Bengal and non-Bengali Muslims (especially Biharis from Bihar, India) migrated to East Pakistan (Akmam, 2002, p. 545).

Culturally, Bengali Muslims and Hindus have many similarities. They speak the same language, Bangla, and their music, poetry and literature are in the Bangla language. Both Muslim and Hindu Bengalis are fond of the poet Rabindranath Tagore and Kazi Nazrul Islam's literary works, which are also written in the Bangla language. Muslim and Hindu Bengali women's traditional dress is a *saree* (long cloth wrapped around the waist and draped over the shoulder). On the other hand, Biharis share cultural similarities in terms of language and clothing with the West Pakistanis. They speak the Urdu language like the Pakistanis (Akmam, 2002, p. 545). Hence, the West Pakistani leaders considered Biharis “one of us”, and the Bangladeshi Muslims were regarded as the “other”, “them” and “Hindus”.

Targeting a religious group: Hindus

Jahan noted that, on the night of 25 March 1971, the first targets of the mass murder were the Hindu students who resided in Jagannath Hall in Dhaka University. A few students were spared and were asked to collect the dead bodies and pile them outside. The soldiers kicked them and commented, “We will see how you get free Bangladesh! Why don’t you shout ‘Joy Bangla’ [‘Victory to Bangla’?]” (Jahan, 2012, p. 267).

New York Times reporter Schanberg (who was in Bangladesh until June 1971) reported that many Hindu shopkeepers were killed in Dhaka. Hindu temples were demolished (as cited in Beachler, 2007, p. 478). As the genocide moved out of Dhaka, the targeting of Hindus continued. Over a thousand Hindus were killed in one day in Barisal. In Sylhet, about 300 selected Hindus were killed (Beachler, 2007). A Khulna resident told me (the author) that every morning their family witnessed dead bodies of Hindus lying on the streets.

During the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971, Pakistani soldiers were indoctrinated to believe that Bengalis were Hindus and, therefore, they belonged to an inferior race. They were told, “*Yeh Hindu hain, inhe maar dalo*” (They are Hindus, kill them). Muslim male circumcision is obligatory in Islam. In search of Hindu Bangladeshi, the Pakistani army asked men to undress or open their *lungis* (men’s traditional garment) to check if they were circumcised (see Figure 3). Girls were frequently victims of rape, but sometimes they were spared if they recited *Kalima* or *suras* (Muslim prayers) (Sharlach, 2000).

The violence led to a mass exodus of Hindu and Muslim Bangladeshis to West Bengal, Tripura and Assam. They were forced to flee because their properties were looted and burnt. While I was writing this article, one Hindu Bangladeshi young girl, Meghna, told me that there were many sad stories within her family from the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971. It will be very painful to share those incidents.



Figure 3: *Pakistani soldiers' act of dehumanisation. The Pakistani soldiers asked men to undress or open their lungis (men's traditional garment) to check if they were circumcised. This statue was exhibited at a seven-day sculpture exhibition held at the National Museum at Dhaka on 20 May 2022.*

Source: SK Hasan Ali / Alamy Stock Photo

Rape: Serious bodily or mental harm

According to the 1948 United Nations Genocide Convention, genocide includes deliberate physical destruction that is concerted and calculated. It can include perpetrators imposing measures to prevent births of the group members, and forcibly transferring children from one group to another group. The following discussion on the rape of Bangladeshi girls and women by Pakistani soldiers fits the United Nations' definition of genocide.

Eye-witness testimonies described the mass rape of Bangladeshi girls and women by Pakistanis. Soldiers raped many women before murdering them, and many were left pregnant so that the surviving community would live with shame and humiliation. Sometimes, after raping Bangladeshi women, the soldiers killed them by forcing a bayonet between their legs. Prepubescent girls who were cut and gang-raped often died later. Sometimes rape victims committed suicide. Girls were also kept in confinement, inside the barracks, to be raped by senior officers for months (Sharlach, 2000, p. 95). Akhtar et al. discussed the experiences of 22 Bangladeshi women who were victims of rape and displacement during the Liberation War of

1971. These women spoke of the brutality of the Pakistani army, and how they lost their loved ones (Akhtar et al., 2012).

Rashid noted that the archives of the Liberation War Museum make it clear that many women were raped in 1971. The pictures or paintings of raped women (see Figure 4) reveal how the Pakistani army brought shame on Bengali women and were desperate “to change the racial makeup of the Bengalis who were considered Hindu-like and an inferior race” (Rashid, 2018, p. 78).

Some rape victims opted to have abortions. After liberation in 1972, some women were forced by their families to give up their new-born babies for adoption, and some willingly gave up their babies for adoption to Western countries because the child would be branded as “illegitimate” by their family members. About 5,000 war babies born were adopted, mainly by Christian missionaries or orphanages outside Bangladesh (Ahmed, 2022, p. 5). In some cases, being forced to give away their baby caused mental health issues for the mothers, while in other cases, adopted children returned home in an attempt to find their mothers, often unsuccessfully. This also resulted in mental health problems (Rashid, 2018, pp. 85–87).

In 1972, the term *birangonas* was coined by the first prime minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. It was meant to honour women with a high status, recognising that they contributed to the Liberation War effort. After independence Sheikh Mujibur Rahman set up rehabilitation centres for the rape victims. He honoured the rape survivors as *birangonas*, meaning war heroines. Men were offered rewards if they married these women (Saikia, 2011, pp. 55–56).

In his YouTube video conducted in the Bengali language, “Tahader Juddho” [meaning “Their War”], a Bangladeshi Liberation War researcher Afsan Chowdhury (2001) documented interviews with many freedom fighters, especially women who lost their children, husband, family and often their dignity, and who were called *Biranganas*. It also contains interviews with wives of *mukti joddhas* who assisted them during the liberation war. The interviewees also spoke about the mass killings by the Pakistani army and the *razakars*’ collaboration with the Pakistani military. *Razakar* is an Arabic word meaning volunteer. In this context, it refers to Bangladeshis who volunteered to kill their fellow Bangladeshi civilians.

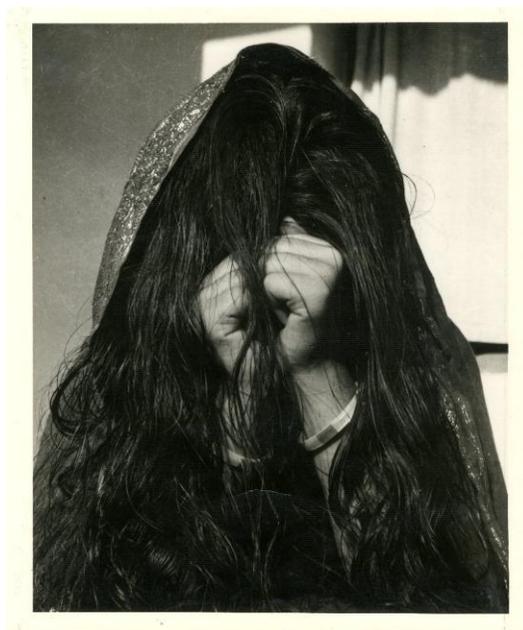


Figure 4: *Photograph of a Bangladeshi girl, survivor of sexual violence, after she was freed by the freedom fighters from a Pakistani army camp*

Source: Photographer: Naibuddin Ahmed. Courtesy: Liberation War Museum

Danger and trauma: Personal accounts



Figure 5: *Mukti joddhas (freedom fighters) training in India. Farida Khanam Saki and her younger sister Shirin Jahan Dilruba (Aleya) are pictured 2nd and 3rd from the right with other freedom fighters. Major Sharma and Major K.B. Singh of the Indian army trained them.*

Source: Farida Khanam Saki

My aunty (Mrs Balayet) Farida Khanam Saki was a student at Dhaka University and a resident of Rokeya Hall/Hostel in 1971. She also served as a freedom fighter during the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971 (see Figure 5). Saki Aunty served as the Member of Parliament for the reserved seat of Noakhali (2019–2024).

Saki Aunty shared her personal experience of being a freedom fighter (*mukti joddha*) in the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971. She also discussed the genocide carried out by the Pakistani military in 1971. Aunty recalled that, before 25 March 1971, there were already rumours that at any time the Pakistani military would start bombing the Bengalis. So, some university students in the Chhatra League (a students' political organisation) were training for possible guerrilla warfare to counter the Pakistani military attacks. Aunty said that the nature of their work was to deliver information and arms to the guerrilla fighters. Aunty recalled her first-hand experience of the night of 25 March 1971:

On 25th March, we went to Khilgaon. After returning to our dormitory we [myself and my friend] took our meal with the other girls. The other girls [students] went to their studies. My friend and I sat on the lawn talking. Around quarter past ten or quarter to eleven we heard loud noises of gunfire.

There was noise all over the place. And it was moving closer towards us. By the time we assembled within the dormitory the fighting spread, surrounding the university area.

It was the night of 25th March. We all ran past behind the dining hall and went to the Provost's house, knocking on her door. She did not open the door. A house tutor, *Apa* (sister/madam), saw us crying and came to help. Her house was attached to the Provost's house and it looked like one house. *Apa* moved us to a storeroom and locked it from the outside. She told us to keep quiet. We could hear the approaching boot steps.

Saki Aunty continued:

The Pakistani army thought all the girls were present in the Rokeya Hall. The Biharis were with them. The Biharis probably gave them the information. The girls of the Chhatra League used to go for parades with dummy guns [in preparation for a possible attack by the Pakistani regime who were not willing to hand over power to the Awami

League]. After the parade they would come to the dorm in the noon and afternoon for a wash, then go to the canteen for refreshment and then go home. They were some 150–200 girls. They [Biharis] thought they lived in the dorm.

Aunty said that when they left their dorm (students' hostel), they walked past the racecourse where there were so many dead bodies and so much blood all over the place that they had difficulty finding a bloodless spot to step. Eventually, Aunty managed to return to her home town in Noakhali. Noakhali is a district in south-eastern Bangladesh. Then, from Noakhali Aunty and her sister Aleya fled to India to take up the freedom fighters training. Aunty recalled how the Bengali Muslim collaborators, the razakars, worked for the Pakistani army against their fellow Bengali citizens:

The razakars burnt our house and other political leaders' houses. I could not stay there. I moved to the village. My *shejo mama* (maternal uncle) took me to Kadirpur *nana's* (grandfather's) house. This house was the main coordination and communication centre. All freedom fighters (*mukti joddhas*) while moving stopped by that house. We used to gather information. We stayed there during April and May. In May they killed my *shejo mama* who was an Awami Leaguer. It was the razakars working for the army who killed my *mama*. We could not live in that house any longer.

Aunty continued:

The razakars made our life hell. They gathered information about freedom fighters' movements. One day we had to stay under the water in the canal with just our noses above the water. The fear of "army are coming" was gripping us. And the razakars were causing a lot of problems almost like torturing.

Aunty said that, when they headed to India, one razakar followed them and caused many problems. So, "our people picked him and they bayoneted him in front of us. They killed him near a canal along the path we were heading, and threw his body into the water". Aunty recalled that it was an extremely difficult journey to India and that they had hardly any spare clothing and other necessary items with them. Saki Aunty's account confirms that the perpetrators of the violence intended to destroy an ethnic group, in whole or in part. She experienced this in Dhaka, Noakhali, and also when she was fleeing to India for safety and military training.

Speaking of hardship, a young Bangladeshi, Soheil, 20 years old, told me that during the Bangladesh Liberation War, during the day, his grandparents, parents and extended family members used to hide under water in the marsh land of their village.

The next participant who witnessed the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971, my late uncle, Mr Mahmudur Rahman Balayet, was a law student at Dhaka University. Later, he received military training in Dehradun (Tendua Camp) in Uttar Pradesh in India. He became District Commander of the Bangladesh Liberation Force (*Mujib Bahini*) for Greater Noakhali (Noakhali, Feni and Lokhipur). He also served as a Member of Parliament for the Awami League, Noakhali in 1973–1975, and 1986–1988 (see also Muktiyuddho Gobeshena Kendro Trust, 2014). Balayet Uncle recalled:

Salimullah Muslim Hall [SM Hall], Room 156. I shared the room with another student. I was involved in student politics, *aandolon* (freedom movement) and even with the Bangabandhu's 7th March speech. We went to meet Bangabandhu. We were told to be careful. The Pakistani army may attack any time.

On the night of the 25th March, the former Chhatra League leader assigned me the responsibility to collect the first aid boxes from the Red Cross Office. They arranged a minibus. My job was to go to the Red Cross office and collect first aid boxes. Once I collect the first aid boxes I should take them to Palashi Barrack (in Dhaka) where they arranged three rooms. There were other people to help me. I had not eaten all day.

At about 11:15 p.m., while we were eating bread, two guys came running, telling us that the Pakistani army is already here on the north side of the New Market. The army has created obstacles all over the place. We crossed the barricades and walked towards the New Market. We saw military trucks, a lot of them, without headlights, so one could not clearly see all the trucks one behind the other in a long row.

They were targeting the students. We jumped over the wall and moved into Azimpur Colony (residential area). We removed our shirts to be undetected. At the same time, they started firing like rain. We were not sure if they targeted us. They targeted the East Pakistan Rifles Headquarter because most of them were Bangladeshis [East Pakistani born].

Balayet Uncle continued:

We four moved to my elder sister's house in Azimpur. We stayed at Azimpur for a couple of days. On 27th March, the Pakistani army lifted the curfew. We went to SM Hall. It was all locked up. Then we went to Zahurul Huq Hall. We saw many dead bodies. Then we went to Jagannath Hall. We saw many dead bodies and some, two or three, dug up holes. Most teachers and students at Jagannath Hall were Hindus. Then their bodies were put into the holes. We walked towards the Press Club. On the east side of the High Court we saw a rickshaw *walla's* (rickshaw puller's) dead body on his rickshaw. This became one of the famous photos for the media.

Later Balayet Uncle went to my parents' house in Nakhalpara in Dhaka. He said:

I stayed at your house for a few nights. On 2nd April, *Dulabhai* [brother-in-law, your father] on his way to his office drove me to a ferry *ghat* (port). I crossed the river by boat at Demra and then got on a truck and went to Daudkhandi. I walked from Daudkhandi to Noakhali, and reached Noakhali [my hometown] on 4th April.

Uncle said that he saw dead bodies lying on the roads, and dead bodies floating in the river. In Noakhali, 121 people were lined up and shot by one firing squad. The atrocities of the Pakistani army led many Bangladeshis to flee to India, where they took military training to fight the Pakistani army in Bangladesh. My late Balayet Uncle's words are further evidence that the Pakistani soldiers were targeting a specific religious group, the Hindus, as he witnessed at Jagannath Hall in Dhaka.

My other maternal uncle, Mr Azizur Rahman Iqbal, also confirmed that it was genocide. Iqbal Uncle, was a college student in Noakhali during the Liberation War 1971. He was also trained as a *mukti joddha* (freedom fighter) in Haflong in Assam, India. He stated, "We were trained to fire the rifle, semi-automatic and self-loading (SLR) rifles. Our camp was in Agartala. We followed orders from our superiors and then carried on operation in Noakhali." On the question of genocide, Iqbal Uncle commented:

Yes, of course, it was a genocide. The Pakistan army aimed to kill the Bengalis. They killed anyone they wanted. They created terror and panic. They killed a rickshaw *walla* (rickshaw puller) without any reason.

I saw many dead bodies thrown into the canal from the wooden bridge called *Kala Pole* at *Choumuhani Chourasta* [intersection] on Sonaimuri road. It is over the Sonaimuri Lakhsham road to Dhaka.

Uncle Iqbal spoke of a confrontation with the razakars: “Our operations in Noakhali commenced from midnight. We attacked a razakar camp and our fellow fighters killed 45 razakars in the nearby Chaprasir Hat.”

The next participant, my cousin, Mr Emran Mohammad Ali, shared his experience as a freedom fighter:

I was a 17-year-old college student in Noakhali during the Liberation War in 1971. When the Pakistani army entered Noakhali, my father sent me and my older brother Ibrahim to India to become freedom fighters. We went to Comilla District and then to India.

We were trained at the Tendua Training Centre in Uttar Pradesh in India. We were trained to operate semi-automatic rifles, LMG, etc. We were given major training. Then we were moved to the Rajnagar camp in Agartala. We preferred Maijdee, Noakhali for fighting the Pakistani army.

Our plane had 400 freedom fighters. We were supposed to go to Noakhali en route to Chittagong. But I ended up assigned in Chittagong [on the Bangladesh–India border] transit camp. The Indian helicopters dropped arms and ammunitions using parachutes.

Cousin Emran spoke of a major confrontation with the Pakistani army, and how the Mizo Hill Tract people sided with the Pakistani army:

We encountered a major confrontation on 16 December 1971. When the Pakistani army was fleeing Bangladesh towards Burma, they saw us (about 132 freedom fighters) taking shelter in a school in Chittagong. They surrounded the school. It was about 4 to 5 hours’ fight. The tribal Mizo people assisted the Pakistani army.

We informed the Indian authorities. Immediately, about 400 Tibetan-trained militia in India came to our rescue. The Tibetan militia ran over the hilly terrain with arms and ammunition and killed the Pakistani soldiers, and some surrendered. After the Pakistani army surrender, the Hill Tract people informed us that Bangladesh became independent on 16 December 1971.

Regarding the hardship of fleeing, cousin Emran said that, as they were fleeing to India, they had to cross the *dhan khet* (paddy fields) and marshy lands. There were big leaches on the trees, which fell onto his body several times. They were severely bitten by leaches. It was scary and dangerous.

The Mizo tribal people (whom cousin Emran mentioned) are from Mizoram, India. The state also shares a 722-kilometre border with the neighbouring countries of Bangladesh and Myanmar. In 1971, the Mizo people were having land disputes with India, hence they supported the Pakistani army (against India). Schendel noted that, since the partition of India in 1947, the Mizoram people have desired an independent state. They formed a political party, Mizo National Front, and its military wing, Mizo National Army. They occupied the main towns and declared the region independent of India. But the Indian army retaliated by bombing the Mizoram's main town and villages (Schendel, 2016, pp. 85–91).

As a result, the Mizoram government crossed the border and established their capital and military headquarters in the Sajek region (the Chittagong Hill Tracts) in East Pakistan. By 1969 most Mizo fighters launched attacks on Indian troops from the Hill Tracts in East Pakistan. Since there was a history of India-Pakistan conflict over Kashmir to the north-west, the Pakistani government supported the Mizo rebels with funds, arms and training to de-stabilise India. During the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War, the Mizorams proved helpful to the Pakistani army, whom they believed would help them to fight the Bangladeshi freedom fighters as they could cope with the topography of Bangladesh (Schendel, 2016, pp. 85–91). Also, during the 1971 Liberation War, the Chakma leader Tridiv Roy betrayed the Bangladeshis and sided with the Pakistani regime. After the war, Roy abdicated his title as Raja of the Chakma circle in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and left for Pakistan, which he made his home for the rest of his life (Subramanian, 2017).



Figure 6: *Captivity and confinement*

Source: Sakhawat Kabir

Figure 6 depicts the situation in Bangladesh in 1971. It suggests that the confinement of a Bangladeshi youth by the Pakistani army was similar to the Royal Bengal tigers kept in a zoo. Both were deprived of their right to freedom of movement. Meanwhile another Royal Bengal tiger (left) was enjoying his freedom in a jungle. This freedom of movement was taken away from the Bangladeshi people during the genocide in Bangladesh in 1971.

My eye-witness account

My extended family's accounts reveal that the Pakistani army aimed at the annihilation of the entire Bangladeshi people. Some members of my family fled to India for safety and military training to take up arms against the perpetrators and to liberate Bangladesh from the Pakistani army's atrocities and oppression. In their aim to liberate the country, they also endured many hardships. Similarly, in the nine months of the Bangladesh Liberation War, from 25 March to 16 December 1971, I also witnessed how the extent of the violence throughout Bangladesh caused mental agony and harm to my parents. In this section, I discuss my eye-witness account of the period. I was born in Dacca (now spelled Dhaka) in the then East Pakistan. My father, the late Mr Nurul Matin, was a banker in the State Bank of Pakistan, and my mother, Mrs Dil Afrose Matin, was a homemaker. They had four children. I was the only daughter, and the other three were sons, two older than me and one younger.

When I was in class 2 in Dhaka, my father was transferred to Karachi, West Pakistan. My father took up his position as Principal Officer in the State Bank of Pakistan. We lived in Karachi in West Pakistan from 1964 to 1970. When we returned to Dhaka in 1970, I was enrolled in class 8 in Shaheen School, and in 1971 I returned to my old school, Viqarunessa Noon School, in class 9.

In Karachi, then West Pakistan, my younger brother, Maimun Faizul Matin and I studied in English-medium schools, and my older brothers (*bhaiyas*), the late Ayman Saiful Matin and Erphan Shehabul Matin studied in Bengali-medium schools. We used to visit our grandparents in Noakhali in East Pakistan during our school vacation every year. Back then, in 1964–1970, I found Karachi a glamorous city, with beaches and theme parks, and fast-food places such as kebab shops. I had Urdu-speaking friends in our neighbourhood and at school. Some industrialists' families lived in our neighbourhood. The daughter of one such affluent family was my friend. I was mesmerised when I visited their huge, beautiful home. We siblings also had the privilege to ride in their family commuter plane. But when we visited East Pakistan on school holidays, I found Dhaka a simple, small town even though it was the capital of East Pakistan. Noakhali (Maijdee) was a much smaller town where my grandparents lived. Therefore, the disparity between East and West Pakistan was clear.

As I was growing up in West Pakistan, I saw that they were very keen to retain Urdu as the vernacular language in English-medium schools. In my school in North Nazimabad, my mother asked the school authorities to seek permission from the Board of Education to teach the Bengali students their vernacular subject in the Bengali language. But the school authorities did not approve her request.

I also noticed that West Pakistani women boasted about their culture, which they considered Islamic. For example, Pakistani women wore their traditional dress, *shalwar* (long trousers), *kameez* (shirt) and *dupatta* (shawl). They considered that they covered their body with this dress; therefore, that was more Islamic. I found some Pakistani women in our neighbourhood made discriminatory comments about my mother's traditional clothing, which was the *saree* (long piece of cloth wrapped around the body) and *blouse* (short top). They commented that the blouse revealed part of women's back and that was un-Islamic (Kabir, 2007). However, I found the

tight-fitted *kameez* of some women were revealing, and that can be considered un-Islamic because Islam emphasises modest clothing.

In 1970, when we returned to East Pakistan, I started gradually grasping the indifference of West Pakistan's central government towards the people of East Pakistan. On 3 November 1970, the Bhola Cyclone struck East Pakistan. There were about 500,000 casualties, and the damage cost approximately \$84 million. But immediate help and aid did not come from West Pakistan. The people of East Pakistan saw the uncaring attitude of the central government. So, in the December 1970 general election, the Awami League won a landslide victory with 167 seats in the National Assembly, and West Pakistani Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP) won only 88 seats in the National Assembly (Samad, 2009, p. 39).

This was the first democratic election in Pakistan. But the military government under General Yahya Khan postponed the National Assembly session for an indefinite period. This led to protests and demonstrations in Dhaka, Chittagong and other cities (Samad, 2009, p. 138). On 7 March 1971, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, leader of the Awami League, delivered his historic speech at the Ramna Race course Maidan. He called for a non-violent and non-cooperative civil disobedience movement (Rahman, 2013b). I saw my father very enthusiastically taking two of my brothers to the Ramna Racecourse to hear the historic speech of Bangabandhu. They all wore their walking shoes and caps to attend his speech.

There were two Mujib-Yahya meetings on 16 and 17 March 1971 to resolve the constitutional crisis, but in vein. Then on 21 March 1971, there was a meeting between Mujib, Yahya and Bhutto. During these meetings, Yahya Khan moved military troops, aircrafts, arms and ammunition from West Pakistan to East Pakistan to launch a full-fledged offensive against the civilian population of East Pakistan. After the 25th March night crackdown Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was moved to West Pakistan (Samad, 2009, p. 139).

On the night of 25 March 1971, our neighbour, uncle Amin, called my father from his rooftop, saying, "Matin, Matin, *aagun* (fire), *aagun* (fire)." We all went to our rooftop and saw that the small hut-type houses behind our house had been set on fire. The blaze was high enough to reach our second-floor rooftop. There were noises of people screaming, crying and running.

By the next morning, the people living in the slum area in front of our house left. Within 2–3 days, the people of our neighbourhood left. We stayed behind in our house in Nakhhalpara. On 27 March 1971, my uncle came to our place and stayed with us for three days. He told us his first-hand experience of the Pakistani army attacks on Dhaka University students (as discussed earlier).

Our house was located in Dhaka. At the end of the side road, which connected to the main road, an army booth was set up. There were two to three military personnel who checked our car entering or leaving the area. Since my father spoke fluent Urdu, they may have believed that we were “one of them”.

Yet in the nine months of the 1971 war, my parents were worried about their children’s safety, particularly the safety of my older brothers (aged 19 and 17 years). This was because the Pakistani army believed that every young Bangladeshi student was a “miscreant” (as the freedom fighters were labelled). My father took my two brothers out of college because he feared that they would be suspected as freedom fighters. My eldest brother, Ayman Bhaiya was unwell. So, my father placed him in a clerical position in a bank. My father initially wanted to send my second brother, Shehab *bhaiya*, with Uncle (who visited us on 27 March) to become a freedom fighter. But my uncle, Balayet *mama*, thought that it would be difficult for my brother because he was still young. Also, my uncle, Balayet *mama*, was concerned that my brother had allergies and tended to sneeze in the morning. So, if he sneezed in the field, their freedom fighting operation would fail!

Our house was located in Nakhhalpara, Tejgaon (behind the Member of Provincial Assembly [MPA] Hostel). There was a Pakistani military post at the end of the road (near the main road). My second brother spoke good Urdu (as we returned from West Pakistan in 1970). So, when he returned from college, the Pakistani soldiers would ask him to sit and chat with them. My brother naively sat with them.

One day my father saw my brother sitting with the Pakistani soldiers and wiping his nose. He was wiping his nose because of his allergies, but my father thought that my brother was being abused. So immediately my father planned to send my brother to his friend’s place in Karachi. My brother Shehab *bhaiya* stayed with Nazir uncle’s family for 3 months. Then he moved to his

hostel. He studied first year in a college in Karachi. Later, in 1973, with the help of a people smuggler, they all (my brother and uncle's family) returned to Dhaka.

Thus, the Pakistani army's presence in our residential area caused constant mental agony for my parents. There were torture cells in two abandoned houses on our street. The Pakistani army also set up offices in two vacant houses in our street. The Pakistani army also set up their Martial Law Court near our house. The prisoners were tortured in the torture cells located in our street during their trial at the Martial Law Court. Every evening around *Maghrib* prayer (sunset prayer) time, the Pakistani army used to torture Bangladeshi students and professionals. We heard their screaming. It was very loud. It still rings in my ears. My mother told me that sometimes, at night-time, she saw from our roof top, through their slightly open curtains, the prisoners were hung upside down, and some were beaten to death. It was a very sad time in our lives. We felt helpless and remained quiet about the situation. The agony of confinement is depicted in Figure 6.

Rafiqul Islam (2019) stated that, during the nine months of the Liberation War, the Bihari areas, particularly Mirpur and Mohammadpur, were used to torture Bengalis. Yet my observation of the torture houses in our neighbourhood reveals that Pakistani army torture camps were spread throughout Bangladesh. They used abandoned houses for torture, as they had easy access to them (see also Figure 2).

Finally, when the India-Pakistan War started on 3 December 1971, my father moved us to our aunty's house in Azimpur for our safety. He stayed behind in our Nakhhalpara house. On 14 December 1971, when the Pakistani army were losing the war with India, they killed many intellectuals and professionals (see Figure 7). During the night-time, they knocked hard at our house door in Nakhhalpara to check if we were in our house. My father turned off all the lights and stayed quietly in his bedroom. They thought that the house was vacant, so they left.

The Pakistani army also looted the property of Bangladeshi people. There was a vacant block next to our house. They dug trenches there. When they deserted the place, they left bags full of cash. Our cook, the late Abdul Mannaf, discovered those bags of cash when he tried to hide from the Pakistani army in the trench on 14 December. He later brought those bags to our house. When my father saw the bags, he immediately asked our cook to burn the cash. So our cook did in the middle of our garden! During their nine-month stay in our neighbourhood, sometime the

Pakistani soldiers knocked on our door and used the phone in our lounge room. Perhaps it was their way to keep us under surveillance.

My eye-witness account of the nine months of the Bangladesh Liberation War shows how the Pakistani army caused mental anxiety for my parents who were concerned for their children's safety, as they knew all Bangladeshis were potential targets of the violence. Also, my father narrowly escaped death at the hands of Pakistani soldiers when they knocked on our entrance door on 14 December 1971, again, purely because of his ethnicity. These experiences fit the 1948 United Nations Genocide Convention's definition of genocide, which includes targeting members of an ethnic group to cause serious mental harm.

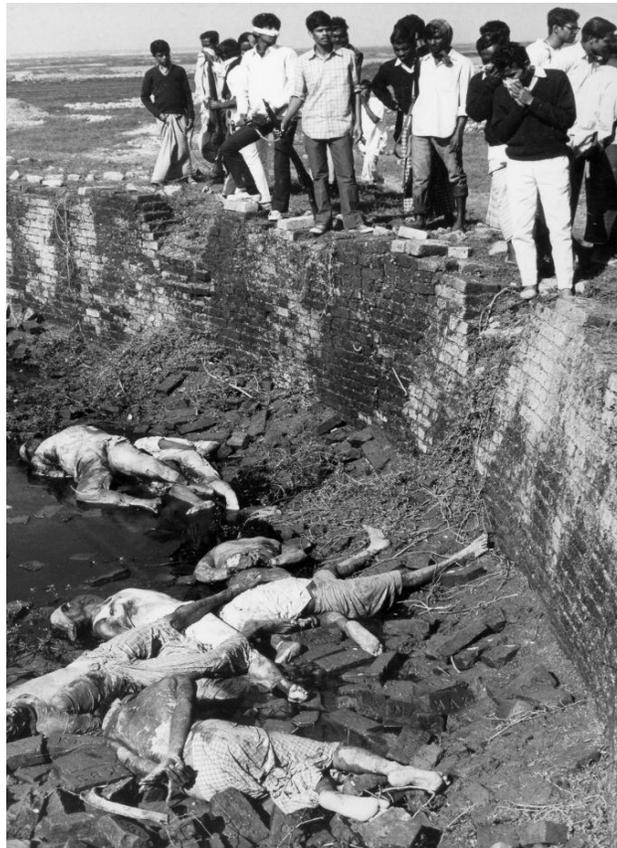


Figure 7: Bangladesh genocide: The bodies of Bengali intellectuals and journalists who were tortured, killed and dumped in a brick field on the outskirts of Dhaka by Pakistani soldiers and their collaborators, 14 December 1971

Source: Rolls Press/Popperfoto/Getty Images

Conclusion

In 1971, from 25 March to 16 December, the Pakistani army killed more than three million people. In addition, 200,000 to 400,000 women were raped, and about 10 million people were displaced and had to flee the country. With regard to the indiscriminate killing of Hindus, the Counsel General of the United States in Dhaka in 1971, Archer Blood (2002, p. 222), wrote in his memoirs: “In the fateful spring of 1971 I thought that the Pakistan Army’s action against the Hindus was criminally insane ... I cannot see any military justification for their action.” The genocide finally ended with the surrender of the Pakistan military to the Joint Command Forces of Bangladesh and India on 16 December 1971. In 2017, the Bangladesh Parliament declared 25 March as “Genocide Remembrance Day” (Ahmed, 2022, p. 7).

Ahmed (2022, pp. 35–36) observed that, in 1972, the International Commission of Jurists, Geneva, prepared a report pointing out that some of the actions of the Pakistan military were directed against Bangladeshis only because of their Bengali ethnicity. It also mentioned that, by killing the intellectuals, the Pakistani army aimed to weaken the educational fabric and destroy the potential leadership of Bangladesh. The Secretariat of the International Commission of Jurists concluded:

In addition to criminal offences under domestic law, there is a strong prima facie case that criminal offences were committed in international law, namely war crimes and crimes against humanity under the law relating to armed conflict, breaches of Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions 1949, and acts of genocide under the Genocide Convention 1949 (Part IV). (as cited in Human Rights Watch, 2009, p. 10)

Arguably, the International Commission of Jurists’ report and earlier statements by journalists such as Anthony Mascarenhas and foreign delegates such as the US Consul General Archer Blood, and later by the Pakistani military commander Niazi, indicate that the extreme violence carried out by the Pakistani army against unarmed Bangladeshi civilians was definitely genocide. In the genocidal process, many Bangladeshi people were displaced and uprooted from their land. They were forced to flee to India as refugees, and some chose to be trained as freedom fighters in India. They came back to Bangladesh to fight the Pakistani army and its collaborators.

The published literature and archival materials discussed in this article reveal the agony and anxiety of the Bangladeshi people during the War of Liberation in 1971. Many Bengalis including students, intellectuals, politicians and Hindus were killed, and many women were raped. The participants in this study also discussed their hardship and anxiety, and the indiscriminate killings by the Pakistani army.

My observation of my parents' anxiety and mental agony about their children's safety in their residential area occupied by the Pakistani army showed that we were also vulnerable during the Liberation War period. In addition, the torture of Bengali prisoners in the abandoned houses in our neighbourhood was a horror we lived through.

The Pakistani central government in West Pakistan (1947–1971) deprived the people of East Pakistani politically, economically, culturally and militarily. In the 1970 general election, the Awami League in East Pakistan won a landslide victory, but they were prevented from forming government. Then the West Pakistani government decided to wipe out the Bengali people of East Pakistan through mass killings, rape and torture. The systematic denial of the Bengali people's rights for 24 years, and then the intention to annihilate the Bangladeshis, entirely or in part, definitely falls under the definition of genocide. Finally, I would conclude that the number of those who were killed by the Pakistani army in the nine months of Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971 should not determine whether it was genocide; it is the intention and action of the Pakistani military to destroy the entire or part of the Bengali population which determines whether Bangladeshis were victims of the Pakistan government's genocide. The Pakistani army killed many Bangladeshis, caused serious bodily and mental harm, raped many women and shattered their future aspirations. The United Nations must recognise the atrocities committed by the Pakistani military government against the Bangladeshi people in 1971 as "genocide". Failing to recognise the events of 1971 as genocide will be a severe injustice to the victims; it will also be an injustice to genocide studies.

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