

= Rape during the Bangladesh Liberation War =

During the 1971 Bangladesh war for independence , members of the Pakistani military and supporting Bihari and Bengali Razaker militias from Jamaat e Islami raped between two and four hundred thousand Bangladeshi women in a systematic campaign of genocidal rape . During the war , a fatwa in Pakistan declared that the Bengali ' freedom fighters ' were Hindus and that their women could be taken as the ' booty of war ' . Imams and Muslim religious leaders publicly declared that the Bengali women were ' gonimoter maal ' (war booty) and thus they openly supported the rape of Bengali women by the Pakistani Army . The activists and leaders of Islamic parties were also involved in the rapes and abduction of women . Scholars have suggested that rape was used to terrorise both the Bengali @-@ speaking Muslim majority and the Hindu minority of Bangladesh . The rapes caused thousands of pregnancies , births of war babies , abortions , incidents of infanticide and suicide , and , in addition , led to ostracisation of the victims . Recognised as one of the major occurrences of war crimes anywhere , the atrocities ended after surrender of the Pakistani military and supporting Razaker militias . Initially India claimed its support for the Mukti Bahini and later intervention was on humanitarian grounds , but after the UN rejected this argument , India claimed intervention was needed to protect its own security , and it is now widely seen as a humanitarian move . Despite the Pakistani government 's attempts to censor news during the conflict , reports of atrocities filtered out , attracting international media and public attention , and drawing widespread outrage and criticism .

During the war Bengali nationalists also committed mass rape of ethnic Bihari Muslim women , since the Bihari Muslim community supported Pakistan .

In 2009 , almost 40 years after the events of 1971 , a report published by the War Crimes Fact Finding Committee of Bangladesh accused 1 @,@ 597 people of war crimes , including rape . Since 2010 the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) has indicted , tried and sentenced several people to life imprisonment or death for their actions during the conflict .

The stories of the rape victims have been told in movies and literature , and depicted in art .

= = Background = =

Following the partition of India and the creation of Pakistan the East and West wings were not only separated geographically , but also culturally . The authorities of the West viewed the Bengali Muslims in the East as " too Bengali " and their application of Islam as " inferior and impure " , and this made them unreliable . To this extent the West began a strategy to forcibly assimilate the Bengalis culturally . The Bengali @-@ speaking people of East Pakistan were chiefly Muslim , but their numbers were interspersed with a significant Hindu minority . Very few spoke Urdu , which in 1948 had been declared the national language of Pakistan . To express their opposition , activists in East Pakistan founded the Bengali language movement in February 1952 . Earlier , in 1949 , other activists had founded the Awami League as an alternative to the ruling Muslim League in West Pakistan . In the next decade and half , Bengalis became gradually disenchanted with the balance of power in Pakistan , which was under military rule during much of this time ; eventually some began to call for secession . By the late 1960s , a perception had emerged that the people of East Pakistan were second @-@ class citizens . It did not help that General A. A. K. Niazi , head of Pakistani Forces in East Pakistan , called East Pakistan a " low @-@ lying land of low , lying people " .

There had been opposition to military rule in West Pakistan as well . Eventually the military relented , and in December 1970 the first ever elections were held . To the surprise of many , East Pakistan 's Awami League , headed by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman , won a clear majority . The West Pakistani establishment was displeased with the results . In Dacca following the election a general said " Don 't worry , we will not allow these black bastards to rule over us " . Soon President Yahya Khan banned the Awami League and declared martial law in East Pakistan .

With the goal of putting down Bengali nationalism , the Pakistan Army launched Operation Searchlight on 25 March 1971 . According to Eric Heinze the Pakistani forces targeted both Hindus

and Bengali @-@ speaking Muslims . In the ensuing 1971 Bangladesh genocide , the army caused the deaths of up to 3 million people , created up to 10 million refugees who fled to India , and displaced a further 30 million within East Pakistan .

Rounaq Jahan alleges elements of racism in the Pakistan army , who he says considered the Bengalis " racially inferior ? a non @-@ martial and physically weak race " , and has accused the army of using organised rape as a weapon of war . According to the political scientist R J Rummel , the Pakistani army looked upon the Bengalis as " subhuman " and that the Hindus were " as Jews to the Nazis , scum and vermin that best be exterminated " . This racism was then expressed in that the Bengalis , being inferior , must have their gene pool " fixed " through forcible impregnation . Belén Martín Lucas has described the rapes as " ethnically motivated " .

= = Pakistani Army actions = =

The attacks were led by General Tikka Khan , who was the architect of Operation Searchlight and was given the name the " butcher of Bengal " by the Bengalis for his actions . Khan said ? when reminded on 27 March 1971 that he was in charge of a majority province ? " I will reduce this majority to a minority " . Bina D 'Costa believes an anecdote used by Khan is significant , in that it provides proof of the mass rapes being a deliberate strategy . In Jessore , while speaking with a group of journalists Khan was reported to have said , " Pehle inko Mussalman karo " (First , make them Muslim) . D 'Costa argues that this shows that in the highest echelons of the armed forces the Bengalis were perceived as being disloyal Muslims and unpatriotic Pakistanis .

The perpetrators conducted nighttime raids , assaulting women in their villages , often in front of their families , as part of the terror campaign . Victims aged 8 to 75 were also kidnapped and held in special camps where they were repeatedly assaulted . Many of those held in the camps were murdered or committed suicide , with some taking their own lives by using their hair to hang themselves , the soldiers responded to these suicides by cutting the women 's hair off . Time magazine reported on 563 girls who had been kidnapped and held by the military ; all of them were between three and five months pregnant when the military began to release them . Some women were forcibly used as prostitutes . While the Pakistani government estimated the number of rapes in the hundreds , other estimates range between 200 @,@ 000 and 400 @,@ 000 . The Pakistani government had tried to censor reports coming out of the region , but media reports on the atrocities did reach the public worldwide , and gave rise to widespread international public support for the liberation movement .

In what has been described by Jenneke Arens as a deliberate attempt to destroy an ethnic group , many of those assaulted were raped , murdered and then bayoneted in the genitalia . Adam Jones , a political scientist , has said that one of the reasons for the mass rapes was to undermine Bengali society through the " dishonoring " of Bengali women and that some women were raped until they died or were killed following repeated attacks . The Pakistani army also raped Bengali males . The men , when passing through a checkpoint , would be ordered to prove they were circumcised , and this is where the rapes usually happened . The International Commission of Jurists concluded that the atrocities carried out by the Pakistan armed forces " were part of a deliberate policy by a disciplined force " . The writer Mulk Raj Anand said of the Pakistani army actions , " The rapes were so systematic and pervasive that they had to be conscious Army policy , " planned by the West Pakistanis in a deliberate effort to create a new race " or to dilute Bengali nationalism " . Amita Malik , reporting from Bangladesh following the Pakistan armed forces surrender , wrote that one West Pakistani soldier said : " We are going . But we are leaving our Seed behind " .

Not all Pakistani military personnel supported the violence : General Sahabzada Yaqub Khan , who advised the president against military action , and Major Ikram Sehgal both resigned in protest , as did Air Marshal Asghar Khan . Ghaus Bakhsh Bizenjo , a Balochi politician , and Khan Abdul Wali Khan , leader of the National Awami Party , protested over the actions of the armed forces . Those imprisoned for their dissenting views on the violence included Sabihuddin Ghausi and I. A. Rahman , who were both journalists , the Sindhi leader G. M. Syed , the poet Ahmad Salim , Anwar Pirzado , who was a member of the air force , Professor M. R. Hassan , Tahera Mazhar and Imtiaz Ahmed .

Malik Ghulam Jilani , who was also arrested , had openly opposed the armed action in the East ; a letter he had written to Yahya Khan was widely publicised . Altaf Hussain Gauhar , the editor of the Dawn newspaper , was also imprisoned . In 2013 Jilani and Faiz Ahmad Faiz , a poet , were honoured by the Bangladeshi government for their actions .

= = Militias = =

According to Peter Tomsen , a political scientist , Pakistan 's secret service the Directorate for Inter Services Intelligence , in conjunction with the political party Jamaat Islami , formed militias such as Al Badr (" the moon ") and the Al Shams (" the sun ") to conduct operations against the nationalist movement . These militias targeted non combatants and committed rapes as well as other crimes . Local collaborators known as Razakars also took part in the atrocities . The term has since become a pejorative akin to the western term " Judas " .

Members of the Muslim League , such as Nizam Islam , Jamaat Islami and Jamiat Ulema Pakistan , who had lost the election , collaborated with the military and acted as an intelligence organisation for them . Members of Jamaat Islami and some of its leaders collaborated with the Pakistani forces in rapes and targeted killings . The atrocities by Al Badr and the Al Shams garnered worldwide attention from news agencies ; accounts of massacres and rapes were widely reported .

= = International reaction = =

There is an academic consensus that the events of the nine month conflict were a genocide . The atrocities in East Pakistan were the first instances of war rape to attract international media attention , and Sally J. Scholz has written that this was the first genocide to capture the interest of the mass media . The women 's human rights organisation Bangladesh Mahila Parishad took part in the war by publicising the atrocities being carried out by the Pakistani army .

Owing to the scale of the atrocities , US embassy staff had sent telegrams indicating that a genocide was occurring . One , which became known as the Blood telegram , was sent by Archer Blood , the US Consul General in Dhaka , and was signed by him as well as US officials from USAID and USIS who at the time were serving in Dhaka . In it , the signatories denounced American " complicity in Genocide " . In an interview in 1972 , Indira Gandhi , the Indian prime minister , justified the use of military intervention , saying , " Shall we sit and watch their women get raped ? " The events were discussed extensively in the British House of Commons . John Stonehouse proposed a motion supported by a further 200 members of parliament condemning the atrocities being carried out by the Pakistani armed forces . Although this motion was presented twice before parliament , the government did not find time to debate it .

Before the end of the war the international community had begun to provide aid in large quantities to the refugees living in India . Although humanitarian aid was given , there was little support for the war crimes trials which Bangladesh proposed at the end of the war . Critics of the United Nations have used the atrocities of 1971 to argue that military intervention was the only thing to stop the mass murder . Writing to The New York Times , a group of women said in response to women being shunned by family and husbands , " It is unthinkable that innocent wives whose lives were virtually destroyed by war are now being totally destroyed by their own husbands " . International aid was also forthcoming owing to the issue of war rape .

According to Susan Brownmiller , mass rape during wartime is not a new phenomenon . She argues that what was unique to the Bangladesh Liberation War was that the international community , for the first time , recognised that systematic rape could be used as a weapon to terrorise the people .

= = Aftermath = =

In the immediate aftermath of the war , one pressing problem was the very high number of

unwanted pregnancies of rape victims . Estimates of the number of pregnancies resulting in births range from 25 @, @ 000 to the Bangladeshi government 's figure of 70 @, @ 000 , while one publication by the Centre for Reproductive Law and Policy gave a total of 250 @, @ 000 . A government @-@ mandated victim relief programme was set up with the support of the World Health Organization and International Planned Parenthood Federation , among whose goals it was to organise abortion facilities to help rape victims terminate unwanted pregnancies . A doctor at a rehabilitation centre in Dhaka reported 170 @, @ 000 abortions of pregnancies caused by the rapes , and the births of 30 @, @ 000 war babies during the first three months of 1972 . Dr. Geoffrey Davis , an Australian doctor and abortion specialist who worked for the programme , estimated that there had been about 5 @, @ 000 cases of self @-@ induced abortions . He also said that during his work he heard of numerous infanticides and suicides by victims . His estimate of the total number of rape victims was 400 @, @ 000 , twice as high as the official estimate of 200 @, @ 000 cited by the Bangladeshi government . Most of the victims also contracted sexual infections . Many suffered from feelings of intense shame and humiliation , and a number were ostracised by their families and communities or committed suicide .

The feminist writer Cynthia Enloe has written that some pregnancies were intended by the soldiers and perhaps their officers as well . A report from the International Commission of Jurists said , " Whatever the precise numbers , the teams of American and British surgeons carrying out abortions and the widespread government efforts to persuade people to accept these girls into the community , testify to the scale on which raping occurred " . The commission also said that Pakistani officers not only allowed their men to rape , but enslaved women themselves .

Following the conflict the rape victims were seen as a symbol of " social pollution " and shame . Few were able to return to families or old homes because of this . Sheikh Mujibur Rahman called the victims birangona (" heroine ") , but this served as a reminder that these women were now deemed socially unacceptable as they were " dishonored " , and the term became associated with barangona (" prostitute ") . The official strategy of marrying the women off and encouraging them to be seen as war heroines failed as few men came forward , and those who did expected the state to provide a large dowry . Those women who did marry were usually mistreated , and the majority of men , once having received a dowry , abandoned their wives .

On 18 February 1972 the state formed the Bangladesh Women 's Rehabilitation Board , which was tasked with helping the victims of rape and to help with the adoption programme . Several international agencies took part in the adoption programme , such as Mother Teresa 's Sisters of Charity . The majority of the war babies were adopted in the Netherlands and Canada as the state wished to remove the reminders of Pakistan from the newly formed nation . However , not all women wanted their child taken , and some were forcibly removed and sent for adoption , a practice which was encouraged by Rahman , who said , " I do not want those polluted blood in this country " . While many women were glad for the abortion programme , as they did not have to bear a child conceived of rape , others had to go full term , filled with hatred towards the child they carried . Others , who had their children adopted out so as to return to " mainstream life " , would not look at their newborn as it was taken from them . In the 1990s many of these children returned to Bangladesh to search for their birth mothers . In 2008 , D 'Costa attempted to find those who had been adopted , however very few responded , one who did said " I hated being a kid , and I am angry at Bangladesh for not taking care of me when I needed it most . I don ' t have any roots and that makes me cry . So that is why I am trying to learn more about where I was born . "

Forty years after the war , two sisters who had been raped were interviewed by Deutsche Welle . Aleya stated she had been taken by the Pakistani army when she was thirteen , and was gang raped repeatedly for seven months . She states she was tortured and was five months pregnant when she returned to her home . Her sister , Laily , says she was pregnant when she was taken by the armed forces , and lost the child . Later she fought alongside the Mukti Bahini . Both say that the state has failed the birangona , and that all they received was " humiliation , insults , hatred , and ostracism . "

= = = Pakistani government reaction = = =

After the conflict , the Pakistani government decided on a policy of silence regarding the rapes . They set up the Hamoodur Rahman Commission , a judicial commission to prepare an account of the circumstances surrounding the atrocities of the 1971 war and Pakistan 's surrender . The commission was highly critical of the army . The chiefs of staff of the army and the Pakistan Air Force were removed from their positions for attempting to interfere with the commission . The Commission based its reports on interviews with politicians , officers and senior commanders . The final reports were submitted in July 1972 , but all were subsequently destroyed except for one held by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto , the Pakistani president . The findings were never made public .

In 1974 the commission was reopened and issued a supplementary report , which remained classified for 25 years until published by the magazine India Today . The report said that 26 @,@ 000 people were killed , rapes numbered in the hundreds , and that the Mukti Bahini rebels engaged in widespread rape and other human rights abuses . Sumit Ganguly , a political scientist , believes that the Pakistani establishment has yet to come to terms with the atrocities carried out , saying that , in a visit to Bangladesh in 2002 , Pervez Musharraf expressed regret for the atrocities rather than accepting responsibility .

= = = War Crimes prosecutions = = =

In 2008 , after a 17 @-@ year investigation , the War Crimes Fact Finding Committee released documentation identifying 1 @,@ 597 people who had taken part in the atrocities . The list included members of the Jamaat @-@ e @-@ Islami and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party , a political group founded in 1978 . In 2010 the government of Bangladesh set up the ICT to investigate the atrocities of that era . While Human Rights Watch has been supportive of the tribunal , it has also been critical of reported harassment of lawyers representing the accused . Brad Adams , director of the Asia branch of Human Rights Watch , has said that those accused must be given the full protection of the law to avoid the risk of the trials not being taken seriously , and Irene Khan , a human rights activist , has expressed doubt about whether the mass rapes and killings of women will be addressed . Khan has said of her government 's reaction :

A conservative Muslim society has preferred to throw a veil of negligence and denial on the issue , allowed those who committed or colluded with gender violence to thrive , and left the women victims to struggle in anonymity and shame and without much state or community support .

The deputy leader of Jamaat @-@ e @-@ Islami , Delwar Hossain Sayeedi , the first person to face charges related to the conflict , was indicted by the ICT on twenty counts of war crimes , which included murder , rape and arson . He denied all charges . On 28 February 2013 , Sayeedi was found guilty of genocide , rape and religious persecution , and was sentenced to death by hanging . Four other members of Jamaat @-@ e @-@ Islami Bangladesh , including Motiur Rahman Nizami , have also been indicted for war crimes . Abul Kalam Azad , a member of the Razakars , was the first person to be sentenced for crimes during the war . He was found guilty of murder and rape in absentia , and was sentenced to death . Muhammad Kamaruzzaman , senior assistant secretary general of Bangladesh Jamaat @-@ e @-@ Islami , faced seven charges of war crimes , including planning and advising on the rape of women in the village of Shohaghpur on 25 July 1971 . The ICT sentenced him to death by hanging on 9 May 2013 . In July 2013 Ghulam Azam was given a ninety @-@ year sentence for rape and mass murder during the conflict . Abdul Quader Molla , A member of the Rajakar militia during the war was charged with abetting the Pakistani army and actively participating in the 1971 Bangladesh atrocities : rape (including the rape of minors) and mass murder of Bangladeshis in the Mirpur area of Dhaka during the Bangladesh Liberation War . After the government had amended the war crimes law to allow a sentence to be appealed based on leniency of punishment , prosecutors appealed to the Supreme Court of Bangladesh and asked for it to upgrade Molla 's sentence from life in prison to death . On 17 September 2013 , the Supreme Court accepted the appeal and sentenced Molla to death . Finally he was hanged in Dhaka Central Jail on 12 December 2013 at 22 : 01 .

= = In literature and media = =

A photograph taken during the conflict of a woman who had been assaulted featured in an exhibition in London . Titled Shamed Woman , but also called Brave Woman , the image was taken by a Bangladeshi photographer , Naib Uddin Ahmed . The image is considered by John Tulloch to be as " classical a pose as any Madonna and Child " . One of the more emotive photographs at the exhibition , the woman has her hands clenched , her face completely covered by her hair . Tulloch describes the image as having the " Capability to reveal or suggest what is unsayable "

Orunodoyer Ognishakhi (Pledge to a New Dawn) , the first film about the war , was screened in 1972 on the first Bangladeshi Independence Day celebration . It draws on the experiences of an actor called Altaf . While trying to reach safe haven in Calcutta , he encounters women who have been raped . The images of these birangona , stripped and vacant @-@ eyed from the trauma , are used as testimony to the assault . Other victims Altaf meets are shown committing suicide or having lost their minds .

In 1995 Gita Sahgal produced the documentary War Crimes File , which was screened on Channel 4 . In 2011 the film Meherjaan was shown at the Guwahati International Film Festival . It explores the war from two perspectives : that of a woman who loved a Pakistani soldier and that of a person born from rape .

In 1996 the book Ami Birangana Bolchi (The Voices of War Heroines) written by Nilima Ibrahim was released . It is a collection of eyewitness testimony from seven rape victims , which she documented while working in rehabilitation centres . The narratives of the survivors in this work , is heavily critical of pre war Bangladeshi society`s failure to support the victims of rape .

Published in 2012 , the book Rising from the Ashes : Women 's Narratives of 1971 includes oral testimonies of women affected by the Liberation War . As well as an account from Taramon Bibi , who fought and was awarded the Bir Protik (Symbol of Valour) for her actions , there are nine interviews with women who were raped . The book 's publication in English at the time of the fortieth anniversary of the war was noted in the New York Times as an " important oral history " .

The 2014 movie Children of War tries to capture this horror on celluloid . The film By Mrityunjay Devvrat starring Farooq Sheikh , Victor Banerjee , Raima Sen , among others is meant to " send shivers down the viewers ' spine . We want to make it so repulsive that no one even entertains the thought of pardoning rapists , let alone commit the crime . The shoot took its toll on all of us . "