

History of the Liberation War

Muhammed Zafar Iqbal

Translated by
Yeshim Iqbal

Proteeti

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Muktir Udyog

Painting :

Shahabuddin Ahmed

Cover & Page Design :

Khondoker Tofazzal Hossain

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Country

Of all the feelings that people have, the most beautiful is surely love. And of all the things that one is capable of loving in the world, the most intense love has to be for one's own country, one's motherland. There is nobody as unfortunate as the person who has never felt love for their motherland. We are very lucky that the war we fought for independence of our motherland has a history of supreme sacrifice, unbelievable bravery and valor and great achievement. When people hear about this history, then they not only feel deep love and compassion, but they are also filled with pride at the thought of what this country's people have achieved.

Early History

A story must always be told from a little earlier than when it starts, and so Bangladesh's history can be told from the British period. The British have ruled this region for approximately two hundred years. Thousands and thousands of people have been killed, imprisoned and exiled in their attempts to be free. In 1940 the 'Lahore Resolution' [1] declared that the two areas that had the most Muslims would become two countries and the remaining area would become a separate country. But on the 14th of August, 1947 the two areas that had the most Muslims became one country, Pakistan, instead of two, and on the 15th of August the remaining area became a different country, India. And so a very strange country was born; the two parts of the country were in two different places. What is now Pakistan was known as West Pakistan and what is Bangladesh was known as East Pakistan. There is a two thousand kilometer distance and an entire country – India – between them!

Division, Discrimination, Exploitation, and Conspiracy

East and West Pakistan were two thousand kilometers apart. Even the people were way apart in their looks, language, food, clothes, culture and their heritage. The majority of the population had only one thing in common and that was religion. If a bizarre country like this was going to survive, a little bit of extra effort had to be put in, but the Pakistani rulers did not do this. During the partition

West Pakistan's population was twenty million and East Pakistan's was forty million, so it would have made sense to have two people from East Pakistan for every one person in West Pakistan in everything – education, business, police, government. But in reality it was just the opposite – there were eighty to ninety percent of West Pakistanis in everything. 75% of the budget was spent on West Pakistan and 25% on East Pakistan, even though 62% of the revenue income was from East Pakistan. Most frightening of all was the number of armed forces – West Pakistan had 25 times as many as East Pakistan! [2]

Language Movement

Much worse than economic oppression is oppression on a country's language, of its culture and heritage, and that is exactly what West Pakistan's rulers started to do. Pakistan was born in 1947 and in 1948 Pakistan's founder, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, went to Dhaka and announced that Urdu would be Pakistan's national language. [3] The people of East Pakistan immediately started to protest. The movement intensified and reached its peak on the 21st of February, 1952. Rafiq, Salam, Barkat, Jabbar and many others were shot and killed by the police. But even that couldn't stop the movement, and in 1956 Pakistan's rulers were forced to recognize Bangla as a national language. [4] Our beloved Shaheed Minar was created where the language martyrs were killed, and the 21st of February is now a special date not only for Bangladesh, but for the whole world, as International Mother Language Day.

Military Rule

From the very beginning, Pakistani rule was a conspiracy, in disguise and the biggest player behind was the army. 60% of the country's budget was spent on the army, [5] and they were not willing to give up their luxurious way of living and let a civilian government take over. Using political unrest as an excuse, in 1958 Pakistan army chief Ayub Khan took over power. He didn't rule for a day or two, rather he ruled for eleven years. Military rule can never bring about anything good. In the history of the world, there is not a single example of military rule moving a country forward, and it was no different for Ayub Khan.

Six Points

The country was under military rule and the people of East Pakistan were being severely deprived – the Bengalis were not willing to accept this. In 1966, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the spirited leader of the Awami League (Bangladesh's largest political party) announced his six-point [6] demand for autonomy. This was an extraordinary document demanding freedom from economic exploitation, deprivation and oppression. [7] It was an extremely brave move, considering what kind of oppression and persecution the Pakistani political leaders were suffering at the time. As soon as this was announced, almost all of Awami League's important leaders were arrested and put in jail. Also, to teach him a lesson, Bangabandhu was accused of treason under a case called the Agartala Conspiracy. [8]

The East Pakistanis refused to accept this and protests sprang up all over the country. Imprisonment, torture, gunfire from the police and EPR (East Pakistan Rifles) – nothing could stop them. Students led these movements; they had an eleven-point demand. [9] Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani had not been imprisoned and he came forward also. The movement became a mass revolt – who dared to stop it? The bright young teenager Motiur died in this movement in 1969, as did Dhaka University student Asad – after whom Ayub gate was then renamed Asad Gate. The Pakistan army was finally forced to free Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the other leaders. Also, the mighty President Ayub Khan handed over power to the Pakistan's army chief General Yahya Khan.

The date was the 25th of March, 1969 – nobody knew then that exactly two years later on the same date, one of the world's most horrific genocides would be committed.

Pakistan's First General Election

As soon as General Yahya Khan was in power, he announced the first general election in Pakistan's history, which was scheduled to take place on the 7th of December, 1970. On the 12th of November one of the world's worst natural disasters occurred on the coast of East Pakistan – almost a million people died in the devastating

cyclone. The Pakistani government did not come forward as they should have after such a huge disaster. Those who had survived the cyclone started to die from lack of food and water. [10] The Bengalis of East Pakistan were enraged at Yahya Khan's neglect and cruelty towards their people. At a public meeting, a furious Maulana Bhasani demanded that East Pakistan be free. [11]

On the 7th of December, 1970, Pakistan's first General Election was carried out in a fair manner. The generals of the Pakistan army had no respect for the political leaders. They assumed that a single political party would not obtain a majority, so they would all just fight amongst themselves. The army could use this as an excuse to remain in power and plunder the country. [12] So General Yahya Khan was shocked to see the results of the election – which were unbelievable. Out of 162 seats in East Pakistan, Bangabandhu's Awami League got 160. Along with the selected female candidates out of 313 seats of Pakistan National Assembly. East Pakistan's Awami League got 167, West Pakistan's Zulfikar Ali Bhutto got 88, and other parties together got the remaining 58.

Put simply, for the first time Pakistan would be ruled under East Pakistan's leadership. Bangabandhu clearly stated that people cast their votes in favor of his six points, he would formulate the constitution based on these six points, and the country would be ruled by these six points.

The Pakistan army then decided that no matter what, the Bengalis could not be allowed to rule Pakistan. Unknowingly, General Yahya Khan had begun the creation of a new nation, Bangladesh.

Conspiracy

The largest collaborator in the generals' conspiracy was the army ruler, Ayub Khan's one time Foreign Minister, West Pakistan's People's Party Chairman Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. All of a sudden, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto invited Yahya Khan to Larkana to "hunt ducks." All the key generals also joined them to "hunt ducks". Presumably, this is when they began to design the 'blue print' how to stop the Bengalis from taking power. [13]

Even though a conspiracy was being planned, General Yahya Khan was careful not to let this be known. So on the 13th of February he announced that on the 3rd of March there would be a session of National Assembly in Dhaka. Everyone began to eagerly await that day.

On the 21st of February that year, martyrs day was commemorated with a different kind of fervor. There was a massive number of people at the Shaheed Minar, people beginning to dream of independence. When the Pakistan army saw all these people, what little doubt they may have had went away. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto had a minority number of seats and had no reason to share any power at all, but he became desperate to be in power anyway. On the 1st of March, he postponed the proposed session of National Assembly. It was as if all the anger the Bengalis had been holding inside them exploded; the people of the country were absolutely furious.

March Turmoil

When the postponement of the Assembly was announced on the radio, the Commonwealth Eleven was playing against Pakistan at the Dhaka Stadium. Instantaneously the people erupted in protest; Dhaka Stadium became a battlefield. Schools, offices, stores – everything were shut down immediately. Thousands of people took to the streets; Dhaka became a city of processions. The people began to chant slogans for independence: “Joy Bangla,” “Bir Bangali Ostro Dhoru, Bangladesh Swadhin Koro” (Brave Bengalis, take up arms to liberate Bangladesh).

Bangabandhu called a five-day hartal and an indefinite non-cooperation movement in Dhaka and the whole country. Through this nonviolent movement, Bangabandhu said that the Pakistani administration was not to be cooperated in any way, and his words brought all of East Pakistan to a standstill. To control the situation, a curfew was imposed – the students and the public broke the curfew and took to the streets. There were processions, slogans, rage everywhere, people dying under the army’s gunfire - but nobody stopped.

On the 2nd of March at the Dhaka University's historical banyan tree, the flag with Bangladesh's map was hoisted. On the 3rd of March at the Paltan Maidan, the Students' League meeting decided that Rabindranath Tagore's "Amar Sonar Bangla" would be Bangladesh's national anthem. [14]

After the five-day hartal on the 7th of March, Bangabandhu went to today's Suhrawardy Uddayan to deliver a speech. By then all of East Pakistan was following his rule. Tens of thousands of people came to hear his speech; Suhrawardy Uddayan was literally a sea of people. Bangabandhu announced in this famous speech, "This time the fight is our fight for liberation. This time the fight is fight for independence." [15] There have been few speeches of this type in the history of the world. The speech brought together all the people and gave them the courage they needed to sacrifice their lives for the independence of their motherland.

On Bangabandhu's call, while the nation started a non-cooperation, the Pakistan military were killing people, by the hundreds, in every corner of Bangladesh. The people put up barricades to stop the Pakistani military. All over the country, along with black flags, the flags of an independent Bangladesh were flying. Young people began to train for a war. In a speech at the Paltan Maidan on the 9th of March, Maulana Bhasani announced that West Pakistan should make their own constitution, because East Pakistan's people would create their own independent country and have their own constitution. [16]

Right around this time General Yahya Khan was preparing to start the genocide. General Tikka Khan, known as the Butcher of Baluchistan, was sent to East Pakistan as governor, but none of the Justices in East Pakistan agreed to swear him in. Yahya Khan went to Dhaka on the 15th of March and pretended to have discussions with Bangabandhu while troops were secretly being brought in. War-ships with arms and ammunition tried to dock at the Chittagong port, but the people wouldn't let them. Bhutto joined the conspiracy on the 21st of March and came to Dhaka to pretend to have discussions.

On the 19th of March the Bengalis rebelled at Joydebpur. Countless people died in the fight that ensued when forces were sent from Dhaka to stop these Bengalis. The 23rd of March was Pakistan Day, but besides the army cantonment and the Government House, a single Pakistani flag could not be seen anywhere in Bangladesh. [17] At Bangabandhu's house in Dhanmondi that day, the free Bangladesh flag was raised while 'Amar Sonar Bangla' was played. [18]

The next day was the 24th of March. There was an ominous feel in the country – it was as if the whole country's earth, sky, and air knew what was about to happen and was holding its breath wait.

The Beginning of Genocide: Operation Searchlight

General Yahya Khan picked the 25th of March for his genocide because he thought it was a good day for him. Two years ago on that day, he had taken power from Ayub Khan and become Pakistan's President. On the 25th of March, he gave the order for one of the cruelest genocides in the history of mankind. General Yahya Khan had said to his army, kill three million Bengalis and they will eat out of our hands! [19] The genocide had been planned for a long time, and the blueprints were called 'Operation Searchlight,' [20] where it was clearly stated how pretenses of a discussion would be used to stall for time, how the Bengali forces would be wiped out, how the Dhaka University would be attacked; simply put, how a nation would be destroyed.

There were barricades on every street. Since it would take a long time to get where they needed to go, the Pakistan army started Operation Searchlight slightly ahead of schedule, at 11.30 pm and started one of the world's most heinous massacres. To ensure that there would be no witnesses to this, all foreign journalists had been sent out of the country. But one extremely brave journalist, Simon Dring, risked his life to hide in Dhaka city and send news to the rest of the world, through the Washington Post, of what was happening in Bangladesh. [21]

Before attacking the innocent people in Dhaka city, the Pakistan military had either killed or arrested all the Bengali officers in the

army and disarmed the rest. The EPR at Pilkhana had been disarmed, but they still fought all night with whatever they had. The military had been unable to disarm the Rajarbag police unit, and they were the first to engage in actual battle. After suffering a lot of damage, the Pakistan army retreated to bring in tanks, mortars, heavy arms and machine guns, with which they managed to overpower the Rajarbag police line. [22]

There was no end to the terror of the 25th of March. The Pakistan army went to Iqbal Hall (what is today Sergeant Johurul Haq Hall) and Jagannath Hall and murdered all the students there. Before the students were murdered, they were told to dig a hole in front of the dorms in which they would be buried after they were killed. BUET's Professor Nurul Ula managed to film this massacre from the window of his house, and this video is now on the Liberation War archives on the internet, and can be seen by anyone. [23] Not only the students of Dhaka University were killed – the staff and the teachers were murdered also. The nearby slums were set afire and their people killed. They then attacked the Hindu areas of old Dhaka, destroying the temples and burning down the houses. Anyone who tried to escape was shot. On the 25th of March- Dhaka was like a scene from hell, with only flames to be seen and the sounds of gunfire and people screaming to be heard.

The main objective of Operation Searchlight was to arrest Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. A commando team of the Pakistan Army went to his house and arrested him. He had heard of what was happening and warned all the leaders of his party to stay away, then waited in his house for what would certainly be his death.

Free Bangladesh

Before the commando team took him away, Bangabandhu had declared that Bangladesh was independent and called together the people to free the country from the hands of the Pakistan army. His declaration was transmitted with the EPR's transmitter from Dhaka to Chittagong to the rest of the country. [24] When the

announcement was made, it was after midnight on the 25th, and so the 26th of March is our Independence Day.

The country called East Pakistan was removed from the map of the world forever, and in its place came Bangladesh. But that Bangladesh was still battered and full of pain; the monsters of the Pakistani army were still on her land.

Resistance and Resistance

After committing one of the world's most terrible genocides in Dhaka, the curfew was lifted from eight in the morning to three in the afternoon on the 27th March, and thousands of terrified men, women and children fled Dhaka city towards rural areas for safe abodes. General Tikka Khan thought that he would be able to occupy the whole country by the 10th of April just like he had occupied Dhaka city, but the reality proved to be very different. Although they were totally unprepared the Bengali armed forces regrouped in different areas, and along with the students and people, they put up an incredible resistance.

The armed forces and EPR in Chittagong rebelled and took control of a large part of the city. On the 27th of March, from Chittagong's Kalurghat radio station, Major Ziaur Rahman read the declaration of independence once again on behalf of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. [25] At that time this speech created a new inspiration among the people. To take control of Chittagong city the Pakistan army had to attack from their ships and planes, and it wasn't until the 10th of April that they managed to take control of the city from Bengali fighter. They initially occupied Kushtia and Pabna, but the Bengali forces defeated them completely and held on to these cities till the middle of April. The same thing happened in Bogra and Dinajpur – the Bengalis reclaimed the cities that had been occupied by the Pakistani soldiers. In Jessore, the Bengali forces rebelled when they were being disarmed, and even though almost half of them lost their lives to the Pakistani army, the rest of them managed to escape from the cantonment. The Pakistani army had control of Comilla, Khulna, and Sylhet, but the Bengali forces persistently fought them. [26]

During this time the Pakistan army had brought in two divisions from Pakistan to Bangladesh, as well as countless militia and arms and ammunition by ship. With their massive air fleet and huge supply of weaponry, the Pakistan army started to spread all over Bangladesh. Ultimately, by the middle of May, they had taken control of all the major cities. [27]

On the 11th of April the government of Pakistan sent General A. A. K. Niazi to take the responsibility of the armed forces from Tikka Khan. The freedom fighters were then starting to prepare for the next stage of war – guerilla battle.

Refugees

While nobody in Bangladesh was safe after the 25th of March, the Pakistan army was the most furious at Hindus and those who were associated with the Awami League. Young people who might take part in the War of Liberation were also targets. Young girls were in the most danger of all. Along with the army, Bangladesh's Bihari population joined in the destruction and because of their torture, a massive number of people took refuge in India. According to the United Nations and Newsweek, the total number of refugees was ten million. At that time the population of Bangladesh was only seventymillion—which meant one out of every seven people had left their own country and home to be a refugee in another country. [28]

India gave refuge to this massive number of people, but was under a lot of pressure because of the cost of feeding and sheltering them. It may seem unbelievable but there were more refugees than the residents at Agartala! The refugees lived terribly, with not enough food or space to live and widespread disease. People died of cholera and diarrhea. The highest toll was on young children and the elderly. At the end of the war, it was seen that in several refugee camps, there was not a single living child left!

Bangladesh Government

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had given the people hope for a sovereign nation, but at the time of the liberation war he was imprisoned in Pakistan. The person who took charge of this

movement for freedom was Tajuddin Ahmed. He left his family to fend for themselves and crossed the border to India on the 30th March. There were no other leaders with him at the time; he contacted everyone later to form the government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh.

On the 10th of April the historical Proclamation of Independence was announced at Mujibnagar. This proclamation morally and legally established Bangladesh as an independent country. In this new country, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was the president and Syed Nazrul Islam was the vice president and acting president in Bangabandhu's absence, and Tajuddin Ahmed was the prime minister. On the 17th of April in Mujibnagar (Meherpur's Baidyanathtala) Bangladesh's first government was sworn in before national and international journalists, and ceremonially started its journey. [29] Their first responsibility was to lead the armed struggle against the Pakistan army and drive them out of Bangladesh.

Fight Back

In the beginning, the battles that took place were disorganized and unplanned. But slowly the freedom fighters grouped together and began to fight back. The position of Commander in chief of the Bangladesh armed forces was given to Colonel (Retired) M. Ataul Ghani Osmani, Chief of Staff to Lt. Colonel Abdur Rob and Deputy Chief of Staff to Group Captain A.K. Khandaker. Bangladesh was divided into eleven sectors. The first sector (Chittagong, Chittagong Hill Tracks)'s commander was at first Major Ziaur Rahman and later Major Rafiqul Islam. The second sector (Noakhali, Comilla, South Dhaka, part of Faridpur)'s commander was at first Major Khaled Musharraf, later Captain Abdus Salek Chowdhury and lastly Captain A.T.M. Haider. The third sector (North Dhaka, North Sylhet and parts of Mymensingh)'s commander was at first Major K.M. Shafiullah and then Major A.N.M. Nuruzzaman. The fourth, fifth, and sixth sectors' (South Sylhet, North Sylhet, and Rangpur and Dinajpur respectively) commanders were Major C.R. Datta, Major Mir Shawkat Ali and Wing Commander M.K. Bashar. The seventh sector (Rajshahi, Bogra, Pabna)'s commander was Major

Nazmul Haque; he died in a car crash and then Major Qazi Nuruzzaman took over. The eighth sector (Kushtia, Jessore, Faridpur)'s commander was at first Major Abu Osman Chowdhury and then Major M.A.Manzoor. The ninth sector (Khulna, Barisal)'s commander was Major M. A. Jalil. The tenth sector was for the naval areas, it was under direct control of the commander-in-chief. This sector had no officers, so the naval commandos fought under the commander of whichever sector they were in at the time. These naval commandos carried out an incredible mission called Operation Jackpot on the 15th of August in which they blew up several ships with mines in Chittagong [30]. The eleventh sector (Tangail, Mymensingh)'s commander was Major M. Abu Taher; he held this responsibility until he was injured in a fight in November.

Besides these eleven sectors, Ziaur Rahman, Khaled Musharraf, and Shafiullah were in charge of three brigades, named the Z force, the K force and the S force after the first letter of their names respectively. Also, in Tangail, Abdul Kader Siddiqui led a regional team. Not only did he lead this extremely well-organized team of fighters called the Kaderia Bahini to fight, he also put together a team of volunteers to help them. [31] At the end of the war the Bangladesh air force joined the armed forces, and this air force has the credit of being the first to carry out a bombing in the war. [32]

A courageous group of young guerillas called the Crack Platoon captured international attention by carrying out an extremely dangerous guerilla operation right under the Pakistani military's noses in Dhaka city. [33]

Bangladesh Liberation war truly was a people's war. Countless students, farmers, workers and people from all spheres of life took part. The indigenous people from the plain land and hill also joined the liberation war. They had no shoes on their feet or clothes on their backs and no necessary weaponry – they didn't even have any time to train. In the words of Khaled Musharraf, the battlefield was their training ground. They had unbelievable courage and deep compassion for their motherland. While Bangladesh's regular armed forces fought the Pakistani military, the guerilla teams

attacked the Pakistani military from the underground, forcing their movement to be restricted to their own camps.

There is no end to the stories of bravery of these freedom fighters. One small story from a book written by a Pakistani army official goes like this: 'A young freedom fighter was arrested by the Pakistani army in Rohanpur area of Rajshahi in June 1971. Despite terrible torture, he refused to disclose any information. A Pakistani major finally held a stengun to his chest and said, answer my question or I'll kill you right now. The fearless young freedom fighter bent down and kissed the ground of his motherland for the last time, stood up straight and said, I'm ready to die. My blood will free this country.' [34] This is what is patriotism, valiance and bravery. The Pakistani army saw these young fighters and knew they would never be able to defeat them. Sooner or later, they would have to admit defeat and leave the country.

The Swadheen Bangla Betar Kendro may not have fought with arms, but it was like a real soldier in the Liberation War all the same. With the help of our poets, writers, artists and the cultural activist, the radio station continually encouraged the people and gave the freedom fighters courage. Songs from that time still inspire people today.

This history would be left incomplete if women's role in the freedom of Bangladesh was not mentioned. Only because of their help could the freedom fighters move safely through the country. The women took part in cultural activities that encouraged the freedom fighters, provided medical services to the injured, and even went to armed battle.

Traitors

The Pakistan army had no friends in Bangladesh - except for a few traitors. The people of Bangladesh rejected these traitors completely during the election; the Council Muslim League's Khwaja Khairuddin, the Convention Muslim League's Fazlul Qader Chowdhury, the Qayyum Muslim League's Khan A. Sobur Khan, the Jamaat-e-Islami's Golam Azam and the Nizam-i- Islam's Moulvi Farid Ahmed. [35] Out of these, the Jamaat-e-Islami political party

is worth special mention. To help the Pakistan army, these traitors created the team of rajakars - which was mainly made of the armed cadres of Jamaat-e-Islamis. In September a political delegation from West Pakistan complained to General Niazi that the entire rajakar group consisted of Jamaat-e-Islamis. General Niazi then ordered that the rajakars be called Al-Badr and Al-Shams. [36] These rajakars/Al-Badr/Al-shams had neither the strength nor the courage to face the freedom fighters directly, [37] but as puppets of the Pakistan army they carried out unspeakable torture and oppression on the Bangladeshi people. The Pakistan army did not know the people of this country, it was the Al-Badr, Al-Shams and the Razakars who helped identify them. Whatever the word Razakar might mean literally, there is no phrase that is hated more by the Bangladeshi people.

Fighting Outside the Country

During the freedom movement Bengalis who lived outside the country were of an immense help. They raised money for the freedom fighters and the Bangladesh government, alerted the world about Pakistan's genocide and formed public opinion in favour of Bangladesh's freedom. Especially noteworthy were Justice Abu Sayeed Chowdhury, Architect F. R. Khan, Professor Muhammad Yunus, and Professor Rehman Sobhan. It was not only the Bangladeshis that helped – on the 1st of August in New York's Madison Square Garden, Ravi Shankar, George Harrison, and many other artists conducted one of the largest concerts of that time, that captured the attention of the entire world. The American poet Allen Ginsberg wrote a beautiful poem about the refugees' suffering, "September on Jessor Road," that still moves people to this day. [38]

Countries For and Against

When the world began to find out about the Pakistan army's genocide, most countries' sentiments were for Bangladesh, but two very important countries – the United States of America and China – worked on Pakistan's side, against Bangladesh's freedom. In 1971, even though mostly Muslims were being killed in the name of Islam, almost all of the Muslim countries sided with Pakistan

to try and stop our movement for freedom. Even if the American government was on Pakistan's side because of political reasons, the people of America stood by Bangladesh. When he came to know about the genocide, the US Consul General at that time, Archer K. Blood, was livid; the telegram he sent to the State Department is known to be the harshest letter ever written in the diplomatic world.

Near the end of the war, America sent warships of their Seventh Naval Fleet and the Soviet Union sent their nuclear armed naval fleet to the Bay of Bengal. As hard to believe as it may be, because of Bangladesh's freedom movement, two of the world's largest superpowers came up against each other with their nuclear weapons. [39]

At the very end of the war, when victory for the joint Bangladeshi and Indian army was certain, America tried to stop it by repeatedly sending ceasefire proposals to the United Nations Security Council, and the Soviet Union vetoed these proposals every time, clearing the road for our victory. But the country that played the most important role in our achieving freedom was India. This country took on the responsibility of feeding and sheltering a hundred thousand refugees and supplied our fighters with arms, training, and shelter. After India recognized Bangladesh as a country, they joined forces with the freedom fighters. One and a half thousand Indian fighters died in this war. [40]

Joint Forces

Around July the freedom fighters began to fight back in an organized manner, and by October they had become strong and confident. They began to systematically attack and take over the Pakistan army border outposts. The guerilla battles also began to be more and more daring. The Pakistan army's response to these battles was to go into villages with the rajakars to burn down houses and kill the people. By that time the Pakistan army's morale was beginning to weaken and they no longer wanted to go outside of their camps. [41]

The Pakistan army's situation in Bangladesh started to get so bad that, not being able to find any other solution, they attacked India on the 3rd of December. The intent was to attack suddenly and

destroy the Indian air force, but this did not work at all. India immediately announced war against Pakistan, joined the Bangladeshi forces, and entered Bangladesh with their army. Pakistan then had five infantry divisions in Bangladesh. According to conventional rules of war, the Indian army should have taken in three times as many, that is, fifteen divisions, but because the freedom fighters were with them they took in only eight. [42] The freedom fighters themselves had managed to stop the movement of the Pakistani army. It wasn't only the freedom fighters; all the general people of the country were also in the war with the joint forces.

The fighting lasted only thirteen days. At the very beginning and after bombing all the airports, the Pakistani pilots fled to Pakistan. After the few ships left in the ocean had been sunk, only their ground forces remained. The Pakistani army was very skilled at killing innocent people – the freedom fighters and Indian army were eager to see if they were equally skilled when it came to actual fighting.

After the fight started the Pakistani camps fell apart rapidly – they somehow managed to desperately hold on to a small area of land. The Indian army and the freedom fighters passed them by and rapidly approached Dhaka. The Meghna river didn't have a bridge, so the common people used their boats to take the armies and their weaponry across the river! [43]

In Dhaka, General Niazi and his generals were relying on two very strange things to keep them going in the war. Firstly, they thought that in West Pakistan, they would defeat India so badly that India would have no choice but to retreat from Bangladesh. And secondly, they thought that China would help from the north and America would help from the south. Both these ideas were entirely wrong. The Pakistanis themselves were completely defeated in West Pakistan, and no Chinese or American soldiers provided any assistance at all! [44]

Surrender

The freedom fighters and Indian soldiers surrounded Dhaka and

demanding that the Pakistani army surrender. Because the Governor House had been bombed, Governor Malik and his ministers took refuge at Hotel Intercontinental (today's Sheraton). The Indian air force dropped thousands of leaflets: "Surrender to us before the freedom fighters get you." [45]

Dhaka's powerful and mighty(!) Pakistan army then decided to surrender. When he saw that the surrender documents had something about surrendering to the joint leadership of 'Bangladesh' and India, a Pakistani general weakly tried to suggest that the name 'Bangladesh' be removed from the document, but nobody paid attention to him; there was no way to deny the truth of history! [46]

On the 16th of December in front of thousands and thousands of people at the Racecourse Maidan, General Niazi signed the surrender document that forced him to bow his head and leave a free Bangladesh. The victory that the 70 million people of the country had been awaiting for nine long months was finally came to them who lost their loved ones during the war.

It was the 22nd of December by the time the rest of the Pakistani soldiers had surrendered all over Bangladesh.

Cries of Anguish in the Joy of Victory

Before the people could begin to truly celebrate the surrender of the Pakistan army, a terrible piece of news came to them. In the first week of December when everyone began to understand that Pakistan's defeat was inevitable and Bangladesh would actually become a sovereign country, then the traitors of this country, the Al-Badr – captured three hundred of the country's teachers, doctors, engineers, journalists, artists, poets, authors and scientists. When the people desperately began to try to rescue them, their ravaged bodies began to be found in the Rayer bazaar killing field and elsewhere. The traitors wanted to ensure that even if the country would be free, it would never be able to stand up with its head held high, and so they calmly murdered the strongest and most talented of the country's individuals.

Involved in the murders of the intellectuals were the Jamaat-e-Islami's student group, the Islami Chhatro Shongho's central

committee member Chowdhury Moinuddin, Ashrafuzzaman Khan [47], Motiur Rahman Nizami (chief of Al-Badr, East Pakistan) [48], and Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojaheed (central organizer of Al-Badr, East Pakistan). [49]

Our Pride

The earth that we stand on today, the sky we see when we look up, and the air in our lungs when we take a breath; we owe it all to our freedom fighters. This is a debt we will never be able to repay, but the Bengalis have been given the opportunity to express their gratitude through the honors of valiance. Of the people who have received these awards, the highest honor of Bir Shreshtho has been given posthumously to seven freedom fighters. They are Mohiuddin Jahangir, Hamidur Rahman, Mostafa Kamal, Ruhul Amin, Matiur Rahman, Munshi Abdur Rouf, and Nur Mohammad Sheikh. Until recently, Birshreshtho Matiur Rahman's body was in Pakistan and Birshreshtho Hamidur Rahman's body was in India. They have both now been brought back to Bangladesh. They are now kept with a deep love in our country with the other Birshreshthos and countless martyrs of the war.

Of those given these honors on the 15th of December, 1973, female freedom fighters were also included. These women not only provided shelter and assistance to the freedom fighters, but fought by their side too. [50]

The Shame of War

Any kind of war is a crime against humanity –innocent people who are not involved in the war in any way always end up having to give their lives. This happened in our country too. During the war, the Biharis who lived in Bangladesh sided with the Pakistani army and carried out unspeakable brutalities like violence, oppression and killing on the Bengali people. In response to their brutality before, after, and during the Liberation War, many Biharis were murdered, among which were women, children, and completely innocent people. Almost all of the Biharis wanted to go back to Pakistan, but the Pakistani government did not welcome them, and so this unfortunate group of people have been living sub-human lives in the Geneva camps for many years.

The Statistics of Genocide

During the liberation war in Bangladesh, there were about eighty thousand Pakistani soldiers, twenty five thousand militia, twenty five thousand civilian forces, and fifty thousand rajakars, Al-Badr, and Al-Shams members. On the other side there were about one hundred and seventy five thousand freedom fighters. Near the end of the war another two hundred and fifty thousand Indian soldiers joined the freedom fighters. At the end of the war after the surrender, about ninety one thousand Pakistani prisoners were transported to India. [51]

During the war, two hundred and fifty thousand women were violated by the Pakistani army and their group of traitors. About ten million people left the country to take refuge in India – it is unbelievable and yet true that if they had not left, it is very likely that they would have all been murdered in Bangladesh.

How many people were killed in Bangladesh is not known for sure – there are several different estimates in the media. According to the 1984 World Almanac, it is a million. According to the New York Times (22nd December, 1972), it is between half to one and a half million. According to the Compton's Encyclopedia and the Encyclopedia Americana, it is three million. [52] The exact number may never be known. In Bangladesh today, the number is said to be three million.

After Independence

When the liberation war was taking place in Bangladesh, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was imprisoned in Pakistan. General Yahya Khan had given him the death sentence and a grave had been dug for him in jail. After the Pakistani army was defeated in Bangladesh, Bangabandhu was freed, and he returned to his country on the 10th of January, 1972. [53] By the 15th of March, the Indian army had left Bangladesh.

It got more and more difficult for the new Bangladesh government to immediately fulfill the people's dreams that had been created with the joy of victory and Bangabandhu's return. The people who had taken responsibility to run the government had no experience

doing so. The Pakistani army had destroyed all the roads and factories at the last moment, the country's economy was completely ruined. There were hints of a conspiracy in politics too – a distance began to grow between Bangabandhu and Tajuddin Ahmed, who had led the country during the war. Conspiracies started not only inside the country but outside also, when there started to be a shortage of food in the country, rice-bearing ships heading towards Bangladesh suddenly turned away. [54] People started to be hungry – famine took over the country. There was political unrest, which was attempted to be quelled by the Rakkhi Bahini. All together, anarchy began to take over, and at that point the Awami League government created 'Bakshal' and tried to establish a one-party rule – which may have been acceptable right after the independence but was not so at all four years later. There were disappointment and anger everywhere. Taking advantage of this situation, a few young officers of the army assassinated Bangabandhu and his entire family, not even leaving out the newly married wives or the young child. Also four of Awami League's most senior leaders, Syed Nazrul Islam, Tajuddin Ahmed, M. Mansur Ali, and A. H. M. Qamruzzaman were put in jail where they were killed. As if this is not a civilized place – rather a nation of barbarous people.

A dark time began. Bangabandhu's government had issued a general amnesty and forgave a group of the traitors, but those war criminals who had murdered, tortured, raped and burned down houses were not forgiven. These eleven thousand war criminals were imprisoned to be tried. After the assassination of Bangabandhu and his family, on the 31st of December 1975, Justice Abu Sadat Mohammad Sayem and General Ziaur Rahman's government forgave them. [55] The war criminals then began to be rehabilitated by the military government and dictatorship. The beautiful constitution that had been created in 1972 was slowly modified until the fundamental ideals like secularism was essentially removed. [56] Religious fanaticism and communalism began to take place in the government and in society.

After fifteen long years and many movements, the country went back to democracy in 1990. Since then, Bangladesh has been attempting to stand on its feet with a democratic government.

Last Words

This country that has suffered so much grief is a country we deeply love. We are eternally grateful to those who have given their lives for this country. And those despicable traitors and war criminals for them we have nothing but hatred. Even after thousands of years from now – or as long as Bangladesh survives- they will never be forgiven.

We hope that the new generation will feel the passionate joy that comes with loving one's motherland. We hope they will travel all over the country to find the freedom fighters and touch their hands to say, you have given us a free country, we give you our love. We hope they will look into the freedom fighters' eyes and say softly, we give you our word, we will work to create the Bangladesh that you dreamt of. We promise, we will pay back your debt of blood.

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