

WOMEN'S ROLES IN THE 1971 BANGLADESH GENOCIDE

FAHIM ABRAR ABID, WIEBKE LEHNER, MAJA
PRZYBYSZEWSKA

BANGLADESH CAMPAIGN TEAM – MAY 27th, 2024



Women freedom fighters of the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War. Photo courtesy: Urmi Rahma via [Network of Women in Media, India](#)



Riviermarkt 5, 2513 AM The Hague, Netherlands



+ 31 62 72 41006



info@ghrd.org



<https://www.ghrd.org>

CONTENTS

OUR MISSION.....	3
INTRODUCTION.....	4
1. RAPE AS A WEAPON OF GENOCIDAL WAR.....	5
1.1. CONTEXT AND THEORIES OF CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUAL VIOLENCE.....	5
1.2. EXPLAINING THE USE OF CRSV.....	6
1.3. THE MANIFESTATION OF CRSV IN THE BANGLADESH LIBERATION WAR.....	7
2. CONTRIBUTING TO THE CAUSE.....	9
2.1. HOW WOMEN CONTRIBUTED TO THE CAUSE OF THE WAR DESPITE THE MASS SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST THEM.....	9
2.2. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION IN THE WAR AND ITS IMPACT.....	10
2.3. NEXUS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND WOMEN’S ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN THE WAR.....	10
3. RECOGNITION AND REMEMBRANCE.....	11
3.1. WHY SHOULD WE REMEMBER AND RECOGNISE THE GENOCIDE?.....	11
3.2. BANGLADESH-PAKISTAN RELATIONS AND THE NATIONAL POLITICISATION OF THE GENOCIDE.....	13
3.3. EDUCATION AND AWARENESS.....	14
CONCLUSION.....	15

OUR MISSION

The mission of this report is to present the various experiences of women during the Bangladesh Genocide in 1971, emphasising their resilience, contributions to the war, and suffering. This report seeks to honour their legacy, advocate for justice, and foster international recognition.

The purpose of this report is to:

- Highlight the systematic and brutal sexual violence inflicted upon women.
- Recognise the crucial roles women played in the liberation movement.
- Showcase women's bravery and their impact on the fight for independence.
- Advocate for accountability and seek international recognition of the genocide.
- Encourage public awareness and understanding of the 1971 genocide.

Overall, this report aims to ensure that the sacrifices and heroism of women during the Bangladesh Liberation War are not forgotten, and to promote a more just world.

INTRODUCTION

In the context of armed conflict, women fulfil a wide variety of roles. They confront issues of survival, engage in resistance, and build resilience. Yet their experiences and contributions are often erased from collective consciousness in the process of post-conflict societal rebuilding (Mookherjee, 2006). The Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971 is a noteworthy example of how the lack of acknowledgment of women's experiences and involvement feeds into, and is mutually reinforced by, the failure to recognise atrocities occurring during conflict. Specifically, the survivors of widespread rape and sexual torture are often purposively excluded from public discourse about the conflict experience, since their identity contradicts cultural stigma about sexuality, the role of women in the community, and perceptions of national honour (Sharlach, 2000). The lack of recognition contributes to Bangladesh's contemporary political contestation as well as the perception of the role of women (Bass, 2016, p. 262). Therefore, this report sheds light on the intricacy of women's wartime experiences, their subjugation to sexual aggression, and their contribution to the cause of national self-determination through their participation in liberation movements.

The Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971 was driven by East Pakistan's demand for autonomy from West Pakistan. Accumulated grievances of economic, linguistic, and political oppression resulted in an uprising, leading to widespread unrest and eventually armed conflict. After the Bengali nationalist Awami League's electoral victory in the National Assembly was denied by the Pakistani military junta, protests erupted. The Pakistani military responded with brutal repression, committing genocidal violence and triggering a nine-month long war. India's military intervention and support of the guerrilla forces eventually resulted in the surrender of West Pakistan on December 16th, 1971, and the creation of the state of Bangladesh. Today, it is the largest country facing the consequences of a genocide (Bass, 2016, p. 140). Although it remains largely ignored in the West due to geopolitical and strategic considerations, the Liberation War encompassed one of the most brutal instances of mass atrocities: estimations of its severity claim three million deaths, 10 million forcibly displaced persons, and approximately 200,000 women and girls falling victim to conflict-rape (Jahan, 2012; Sharlach, 2000).

Chapter 1 of this report delves into the multifaceted nature of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV). By explaining its theoretical underpinnings, this chapter aims to clarify why CRSV is perpetrated and how it may be conceptualised as a 'weapon of war'. Theories of the purposeful, strategic use of wartime rape are applied to the Bangladesh Liberation War to showcase that CRSV was not merely a ubiquitous conflict by-product, but was in fact perpetrated with genocidal intent.

To move beyond a framing of women as mere victims of conflict-related violence, the following chapter examines the agency of women within the Bangladesh liberation movement. Despite the mass atrocities and subjugation through sexual aggression, women contributed much to the cause of liberating Bangladesh and fighting the Pakistani army.

Therefore, a presumed causal link between CRSV-victimisation and a motivation to partake in conflict struggles will be examined.

Finally, the report investigates how the lack of international recognition of the genocide affects Bangladesh today, particularly from the perspective of non-acknowledgement of women's experiences. Moreover, current efforts to achieve recognition of this tragic event are traced to highlight the challenges inherent to demanding accountability and public education. The role of organisational initiatives (the government of Bangladesh and genocide research centres), commemoration, and awareness raising are emphasised, concluding with an account of Global Human Rights Defence's own efforts to contribute to the cause of recognition.

1. RAPE AS A WEAPON OF GENOCIDAL WAR

This chapter introduces the conceptualisation of CRSV and theoretical accounts of its use as a weapon of war before delving into the symbolic violence inflicted on women in the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971.

1.1. CONTEXT AND THEORIES OF CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUAL VIOLENCE

The Bangladesh Liberation War is one of the most brutal and grave instances of gendered wartime violence, yet its dynamics of victimisation have received little international and academic attention. Estimations of how many women and girls were raped range from 200,000 to 400,000 victims – an amount far exceeding the much more internationally recognised use of rape in the Bosnian war (Sharlach, 2000, p. 94). This makes one wonder why the plight of Bangladeshi women has received so little consideration. By clarifying the purpose behind strategic sexual victimisation in conflict and showcasing why its use in the Bangladesh Liberation war constitutes an instance of genocidal rape, this chapter aims to shed light on the intersection of gender, power, and violence.

The events in 1971 can be best subsumed under the phenomenon of CRSV, which, according to the United Nations Secretary General (2024, pp. 1-2), is defined as following:

The term “conflict-related sexual violence” [...] refers to rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced abortion, enforced sterilization, forced marriage, and any other forms of sexual violence of comparable gravity perpetrated against women, men, girls or boys that is directly or indirectly linked to a conflict.

Over the last decades, more attention has been paid to the gender-specific dynamics of conflict violence, with increasing recognition of rape as a specific and intentional phenomenon of war, rather than just a regrettable yet mere by-product (Nordås & Cohen, 2021). It is a symptom of institutionally-embedded gendered norms and customs within patriarchal societies which are made visible through the disproportionate exertion of

gender-based violence in conflict contexts (Copelon, 2011, p. 256; Leatherman 2007, p. 55; McDermott, 2020, p. 3, Seifert, 1996, p. 40). CRSV can manifest in several ways. Many scholars posit a difference between opportunistic and strategic perpetration of sexual violence (Koos, 2017). However, in practice, this is a rather arbitrary and ambiguous distinction, as it is very hard to prove *ex post* whether, and when exactly, CRSV was perpetrated strategically. Usually, it is difficult to trace whether there were explicit instructions and military commands to exert this kind of violence. This results in a blurred line between sexual violence that would occur due to ‘conflict opportunism’- proximity to possible victims, heightened pressures of exhibiting masculinity, indiscriminate violence in genocidal contexts – and its use for territorial gains. The case of Bangladesh is a striking exemption to this ambiguity: the widespread occurrence, targeting of specific groups, and institutionalisation of sexual violence through rape camps are indicative of a strategic use of CRSV.

The intentional use of CRSV as a tactical ‘weapon of war’ however has a distinct objective since it is rooted in the dynamics of power, control, and intimidation, which characterise armed conflict. Concretely, it intersects with socially embedded gender hierarchies to produce a particularly brutal tool of subjugation and psychological warfare (Seifert, 1996). In practice, CRSV is part of a belligerent strategic effort to subdue the opposing faction by exerting tremendous physical and psychological trauma on civilians, especially women and girls. Tracking the severity of sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict situations poses a significant challenge. Social stigma and the breakdown of (judicial) institutions in the conflict context inhibit an accurate assessment of the actual scale of violence. This explains the diverging estimates of rape victims in the Bangladesh Liberation War (Sharlach, 2000, p. 94).

1.2. EXPLAINING THE USE OF CRSV

CRSV is an intense act of physical and psychological subjugation that goes beyond its concrete instantiation. There are several factors to consider when exploring why sexual violence may be employed as a strategy of warfare. Fundamentally, this form of violence results in a disruption of community structures since women hold a particular place in these patriarchal social relations. In war, it is often the women who uphold community cohesion, their victimisation is therefore targeting the entire group integrity and functions as a “symbolic rape of the body of that community” (Seifert, 1996, p. 39). Additionally, in patriarchal cultures, violating married women further serves to humiliate their husbands. Since there is a proprietary perception of married women, their sexual victimisation demasculinises their husbands. The latter can be explained by understanding that rape is a ‘feminised’ violence: its sexual component and usually forceful subjugation of the victim is the ultimate assertion of male power and masculinity. The concept of nation in patriarchal societies is inextricably linked with sexuality and masculinity (Mookherjee, 2015, p. 9). Thus, the nation’s brutal violation through sexual aggression therefore not only tarnishes the victim but defiles the honour and integrity of the nation it stands for – it is another act of territorial conquest on a symbolic level. This conquest also involves the continuation of the

opposition's bloodline: strategic rape often intentionally results in pregnancies and is aimed at diluting the enemy's genetic and ethnic heritage. Building on this theoretical understanding of the various aims and frameworks of CRSV as a weapon of war, the next section examines the presence of these factors in the context of the 1971 Bangladesh genocide.

1.3. THE MANIFESTATION OF CRSV IN THE BANGLADESH LIBERATION WAR

The high estimates of CRSV victims in the 1971 war are indicative of the strategic use of rape by the Pakistan army to terrorise the population of the former East Pakistan (Beachler, 2007, p. 467; Koos, 2017, p. 1937). Women were systematically targets of sexual violence, subject to gang rapes, kidnapped into forms of sexual slavery, and brutally tortured, mutilated, and murdered (Saha, 2023). This brutalisation is widely recognised in the academic debates as one of the most obvious instances of rape as a 'weapon of war' (Beachler, 2007, p. 467; Koos, 2017, p. 1937; Seifert, 1996, p. 40). By examining the prevalence, patterns, and perpetrators of CRSV, this subsection links strategic rape to the enactment of genocide.

According to Jahan, the Liberation War can be divided into three phases. Whereas the first phase is marked by the murder of young able-bodied men by the Pakistani army, the turn to CRSV is more prominent in the second phase which ranges from mid-May to September (Jahan, 2012, p. 255). The third phase, lasting from October until mid-December is characterised by guerilla tactics culminating in the outbreak of conventional war until the surrender of the Pakistani army on December 16th, 1971.

The violence was carried out indiscriminately by the Pakistani army forces, backed by local collaborators such as the *Razakar* (Mookherjee, 2015, pp. 12-13). In the context of the Liberation War, the *Razakar* were an auxiliary paramilitary force, but it has become a broader political category to denote any collaborators of the East Pakistani army. In the chaos that warfare inflicted on communities, CRSV devolved into a rampage where also "Bengali and Bihari politicians, strangers, neighbours, and even friends and family members" raped women and girls (Saikia, 2011, p. 159).

The victims were targeted without respect to age or social status and often raped in front of their close family members or in public spaces, for everyone to see (D'Costa, 2018). Others were abducted and kept confined in cantonments, barracks, and tanks. Many of the victims were aggressively murdered after being raped. For example, some were stabbed with a bayonet through their genitals. This showcases the aggressiveness at play in this ultimate assertion of male power in the context of a genocide. Many fell victims to their wounds. In particular, pre-pubescent girls were reported to have died after being gang raped (Sharlach, 2000, p. 95). Even if they survived the attacks, the inflicted shame and trauma led many women to commit suicide. Some were found hanging by their sarees in the rape camps established within cantonments (Saha, 2023).

In warfare, “a woman’s body becomes the territory on which men inscribe their political programs” (Mookherjee, 2015, p. 3). This is visible in the myriad motivations behind the rape of the women in Bangladesh. As previously acknowledged, their common denominator is the intent to inflict shame and constitute vulnerability within the Bengali population through asserting dominance, which is associated with masculinity and thus military prowess. The rape of Bengali women was used as a means to extinguish the flame of nationalism by targeting the honour of the freedom fighters, and the ethnic group more generally, on multiple levels.

On the individual level, this manifested as the aim to humiliate the men whose wives were subjected to rape – very often so in public environments where their family and community members were forced to witness the atrocity. Concretely, this humiliation stemmed from the local perception that the rape of a married woman bears greater insult for her husband, as his ‘property’ was transgressed, leaving him demasculinised as he was unable to defend what is ‘his’ (Mookherjee, 2006, p. 439). The victims themselves were ‘depersonalised’ (Saikia, 2011, p. 163), as their instrumentalisation for the soldiers’ pleasure affirmed their social status as objects (Mookherjee, 2015, pp. 166-167).

At the local community level, the public rape of women and girls served to demoralise its constituents by severing social bonds. As Mookherjee (2006, p. 439) argues, shame is a property of communal networks in Bangladesh. Inflicting such deep mortification within the local relations aimed at inhibiting the ability of communities to stand together cohesively and defy the Pakistani army. The dishonour imposed on the community could thus only be restored by ostracising the victim. Therefore, CRSV as a weapon of war to disperse communities is particularly ‘effective’ in societies where shame is imposed on the victim rather than the perpetrator (Sharlach, 2000, p. 90). In Bangladesh, this is facilitated by a patriarchal culture where family honour is associated with chastity and purity, as well as “the norm of *purdah*, or female seclusion” (D’Costa, 2018, p. 167).

Furthermore, the shame cast on the group is reinforced by a discursive overlap between the body of a woman and the body of a community (Mookherjee, 2006, p. 440). The feminine is often perceived as the domain of emotion and home; its transgression thus poses an intense violation to the humanity and trust it represents (Saikia, 2011, pp. 161-163). This logic also extends to the symbolism of the female body on the national level, where it is envisaged as the motherhood of a nation (Sharlach, 2000, p. 90). By targeting Bangladesh’s women, the Pakistani army directly attacked the locus of the group’s integrity and cultural and national identity.

However, the assault was not merely confined to the socio-cultural psyche. Perhaps the most transgressive intent of CRSV was its use as a means of ethnic cleansing. In West Pakistan, Bengali Muslims were historically perceived as less pure and “hinduised” (Mookherjee, 2015, p. 163). This was to be corrected through ‘purifying’ their bloodline by impregnating the women of East Pakistan. Diluting the ethnic heritage by repopulating East

Pakistan with a new generation of ‘pure’ Muslims was the principal justification for the use of conflict rape (Sharlach, 2000, p. 101). Furthering their politico-military objectives through attempting to alter the ethnic composition of the Bengali population as well as undermining its cultural coherence was central to the nationalist aspirations of Pakistani soldiers (Saikia, 2011, p. 164). Moreover, it ensured that the inflicted trauma and violence reverberates for generations to come.

Sexual violence can be weaponised as a tool of genocide through the inscription of male violence on female bodies which symbolise culture and society as well as the reproductive capacities of an ethnic group. Sharlach (2000) links the events of Bangladesh to similar occurrences in Yugoslavia and Rwanda to argue that rape may fall under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide (United Nations, 1948). In this logic, the infliction of mass trauma on through sexual violence may constitute an instance of genocidal violence since it fulfils the conceptual properties as laid out by the convention: it is perpetrated with the intent to destroy an ethnic group. As previously delineated, this is clearly reflected in the events of the Bangladesh Liberation War. The strategic deployment and explicit order given to Pakistani soldiers to terrorise, humiliate, and ethnically cleanse the Bengali population thus can be considered an instance of genocidal rape with the intent to erase Bangladesh’s morality, integrity, identity and continuity.

2. CONTRIBUTING TO THE CAUSE

The resistance and war effort likely stemmed from a combination of external factors, like brutal actions by the Pakistani soldiers, and internal factors, like the emotional and psychological state of the women involved.

2.1. HOW WOMEN CONTRIBUTED TO THE CAUSE OF THE WAR DESPITE THE MASS SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST THEM

During the war of 1971, many women wanted to defend their nation in the war efforts. Women's desire to fight in the war is not unique to the war of 1971 (Rashid, 2019, p. 94-95). Women had already participated in prior movements, such as the 1952 language movement and the 1969 mass uprising, which had been going on for so many years and subsequently led to the war. During the war, women were predominantly portrayed as vulnerable or as rape victims and were censured. The history was written by those in power. As Bangladesh is a patriarchal society, it is evident why women were framed in such a way. Nevertheless, despite their agonising circumstances and resentment, women contributed to the war in various manners. From fighting as guerillas to providing medical care, women played vital roles (Shoeb & Ushoshee, 2021).

The majority of the women had taken part in the war as freedom fighters, providers of food and shelter to the freedom fighters, diplomats, messengers or squealers, medical

assistants and nurses, mothers, etc. As many people took shelter in the refugee camp during 1971, some women gathered and distributed daily necessities, especially for the children. Some of them participated in the Mujibnagar government-in-exile and others in guerilla activities. Some women helped the freedom fighters by allowing them to hide their weapons or sheltering them in their homes. Women's contributions varied depending on their family's socio-economic and cultural background. Nonetheless, they played a crucial and courageous role. Despite their ongoing struggles to receive proper credit, their contribution was just as significant as that of men.

2.2. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE WAR AND ITS IMPACT

In a patriarchal society, women's attire or dress code is often seen as a way to embody and transmit cultural values, which played an important role in 1971, too (Ranjan, 2016). In Bangladesh, women used to wear *Sharee*, *tip (bindi)* and flowers as adornment; however, the Pakistani government labelled the culture of Bengali as Hindu culture and was against these customs. Also, due to geopolitical and historical reasons, East Bengal (present-day Bangladesh) was heavily influenced by the Turko-Afghans and adopted their cultures. Bangladeshi women felt that Turko-Afghan Muslim culture was quite similar to their own Bengali culture, which is why an amalgamation of cultures ensued, and Bengali Muslims adopted some of their dressing sense as well. Bengali women used to wear *Sharee* (cultural representation), which is an extremely long fabric. Bengali Muslim women also wore *Burka* (religious aspect). Whether they wore *Sharee* or *Burka*, both aimed to cover their bodies to protect their dignity. Therefore, socio-religious factors always conditioned women to protect their dignity.

The Pakistani army was also aware of this aspect, and one of its purposes was to tarnish the dignity of the Bengalis. Hence, they used to rape and impregnate these women, and many would give birth to war children in the Muslim country's nationalist liberation war. Unfortunately, Hindu women were marginalised even more (Rashid, 2019). According to Md. Ikra (personal communication, May 8th, 2024), a Bangladeshi academician and genocide scholar, said women confronted a range of emotions as they endured the horrors of widespread rape and the constant fear of loved ones being killed, whether brothers, sons, husbands, or friends. They felt a sense of deprivation as their male counterparts were participating in the liberation war; therefore, they felt the urge to step in and provide their services during the war (personal communication, May 8th, 2024). As women were facing extreme CRSV, it was important for them to participate in the war to protect their dignity and feel included like their male counterparts.

2.3. NEXUS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND WOMEN'S ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN THE WAR

A common phenomenon worldwide is that sexual violence is used as a weapon during wars (Crawford, 2017). However, at the same time, despite facing CRSV, women in Bangladesh were not afraid of taking part in the war. A woman is on the verge of losing everything after being a victim of CRSV due to the war. It is quite common that a woman's family or people around her refuse to accept her as they consider her a disgrace due to societal norms. For instance, the cultural norm of Bengali Muslims includes a guarded and sheltered life of women, which was nearly wrecked in 1971 as thousands and thousands of women were suddenly left helpless and were compelled to fend for themselves as rape victims and widows (Jahan, 2013). As casualties of the war, many women were disposed of by their families to avoid subsequent dishonour or shame (Brownmiller, 1981; Jahan, 1973). Also, women often lost their families as a result of the war and were left without protection. Consequently, women became refugees without families (husbands or children) and were considered rebels (Wood 2008). Therefore, the trauma that women suffered due to the CRSV triggered or encouraged them to actively take part in the war as they became more rebellious against the oppressor while trying to seek justice.

There could be two vital reasons for their involvement in the war. Women desired an independent country, and more importantly, they had psychological incentives. Due to the resentment they were holding against their abuser, they might have wanted to take revenge for the CRSV that women had to face during the war. Additionally, some lacked fear as the rape or sexual violence victims were treated brutally to keep their desire to live, so the sole motive now left for them was to participate in the war so that the violence could be stopped. This fueled a desire to end the suffering so that no one had to go through the same turmoil again. Hence, even though after rape women may turn out to be extremely fragile and vulnerable, but also distinctly resistant. Consequently, the countless number of rapes or CRSVs happening during the war acted as a driving force for women to actively take part in the war as a declaration of retribution.

3. RECOGNITION AND REMEMBRANCE

This chapter explores the reasons for the remembrance, the socio-political status quo and the need for the international recognition of the genocide.

3.1. WHY SHOULD WE REMEMBER AND RECOGNISE THE GENOCIDE?

The memory of women's participation in the 1971 War is often neglected, while their contribution was significant and heroic. When their fathers, husbands, or brothers were fighting or when they passed away, these women were responsible for their families' survival

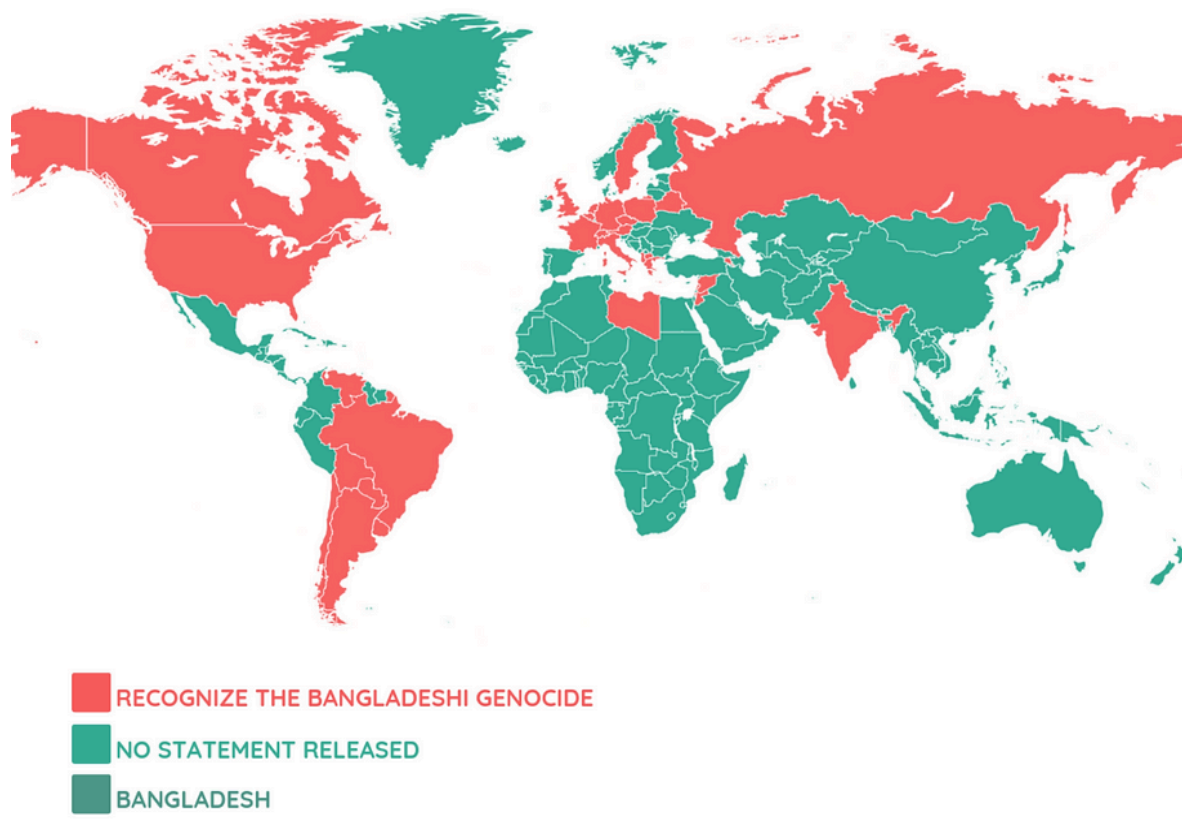
and preserving fragments of normality. Their sufferings and sacrifices remain largely unrecognised, and it is imperative to commemorate them for several reasons. Most importantly, memory allows for immortality.

The recognition of women's experiences is pivotal in fully understanding the genocide and ensuring that the blandly presented historical context does not overshadow the perspectives of the victims and survivors. Women who survived the 1971 genocide have endured unimaginable pain for many years. Their testimonies, gathered in numerous publications, illustrate the extreme brutality they faced. The rape victim is traumatised for life and often suffers in shame and silence in prominent contradiction to the glorification of male war martyrs (Mohsin, 2013, p. 86). Even though in Bangladesh there are centres where the victims can seek help, many of them are not aware of such possibilities and sometimes believe that what happened to them in 1971 was a "bad fate" (Mohsin, 2013, p. 88). Moreover, this issue revolves around a broader discussion about how society tends to prioritise sacrifices associated with death, neglecting the sacrifices of women in terms of their honour and resilience. As "women constitute the fabric of civil society during wartime" (Mohsin, 2013, p. 86), it is crucial to commemorate them and pay tribute to their often tragic experiences.

Furthermore, the recognition helps in coping with the trauma and can positively contribute to the healing process for the survivors and their families by providing a sense of closure. Hence, it is essential to acknowledge their suffering and resilience, giving them a voice in telling the stories and the power of agency to reclaim their narrative, advocate for justice, and foster a supportive community that recognises and addresses the impact of their experiences.

Another important factor is the fact that international recognition would allow the identification of the party responsible for the atrocities and bring justice to the victims of the crime of genocide. Genocide in Bangladesh is often called the "forgotten genocide" due to the public's obliviousness. Recognition for the committed crime would prevent future cases of genocide and make political and military leaders aware that their crimes would be prosecuted (European Bangladesh Forum, 2023, 9). There are international organisations like the Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention, Genocide Watch, and the International Association of Genocide Scholars (IAGS), which have researched the Bangladesh cases and officially recognised them as crimes against humanity and war crimes (European Bangladesh Forum, 2023, 48). Some countries have already recognised the genocide, however, more direct action is needed.

Countries that recognize the Bangladeshi Genocide of 1971



Countries that recognise the Bangladeshi Genocide of 1971. Source: Genocide Watch (2022). Accessed May 25th, 2024. <https://www.genocidewatch.com/single-post/recognition-of-the-bangladesh-genocide-of-1971>

There exist many challenges in achieving recognition and accountability. They mostly include political manipulation, the progression of time, and the complexities of international dynamics. Moreover, the social stigma is still present in Bengali society and silencing the survivors is still an existing practice.

3.2. BANGLADESH-PAKISTAN RELATIONS AND THE NATIONAL POLITICISATION OF THE GENOCIDE

Throughout the years, the relationship between Bangladesh and Pakistan has been at a stalemate. It remains complicated due to historical and political factors. Nevertheless, there were several calls for Pakistan to apologise for the atrocities committed in 1971, yet an official apology has not been made. A formal apology would significantly improve the process of reconciliation, acknowledging the past and enhancing bilateral relations.

Many of the victims believe that Pakistan should issue a formal and official apology for the events of 1971 (Hoque, 2013). The feelings of pain and loss are still overwhelming among the Bengali families, influencing the relations with Pakistan's citizens. There are cases of people unable to work with or befriend Pakistanis due to severe mental or physical harm deeply rooted in their perceptions (Ahmad and Rahman, 2013, p. 51). Therefore, an apology might bring some consolation and peace to those still grieving today.

Bangladesh has made efforts to recognise the genocide and seek justice for its victims. One of the initiatives includes establishing war crimes tribunals to prosecute the crimes committed in 1971. Even though there was general support for them in society, these tribunals were accused of being biased and using political reasons instead of seeking justice for the aggrieved. Moreover, there were cases of the governments politicising the genocide and using it for their purposes instead of helping the families of the martyrs (Ahmad and Rahman, 2013, p. 49).

Despite the recognition, there is still a lack of attention from the government to the needs of survivors of the atrocities of 1971 (Hoque, 2013). Not enough has been done to ease the pain endured by the survivors. The government should pay more attention to the survivors of the genocide and assist them in coping with the trauma. Even though there are help centres, the awareness and methods for dealing with traumatic experiences are low. Moreover, many victims of sexual violence have been silenced by societal stigma, hindering the full recognition of their suffering. These circumstances present a gap that could be bridged by proper education campaigns and governmental assistance, highlighting the need to focus on raising social consciousness on state-supported means to confront the distressing events.

3.3. EDUCATION AND AWARENESS

Education plays a pivotal role in preserving the memory of 1971. Awareness campaigns, education materials, and public commemorations are effective in ensuring that the memory of the genocide, its martyrs and survivors, is not forgotten.

In order to commemorate the victims, many national initiatives have already been undertaken. For instance, the Liberation War Museum in Dhaka aims to present the history of the Bengali nation and its fight for independence in the context of human rights violations and genocide. Furthermore, March 25th was established as a national Genocide Remembrance Day. Another important date is December 14th, Martyred Intellectuals Day, to commemorate the intellectuals killed by the Pakistani forces. In short, there are domestic efforts to preserve the memory of the Liberation War and the Genocide, however, they should be more focused on the survivors to assist them in coping with the life-long trauma.

GHRD has been advocating for justice for victims aiming to raise awareness about the genocide and gain its international recognition. In social media, the NGO publishes educational materials on the genocide and Bangladesh, its challenges and opportunities.

CONCLUSION

This report aimed to shed light on women's experiences during the Liberation War and genocide in 1971, particularly focusing on CRSV, women's contributions to the fight, and the remembrance of their sacrifices. Moreover, the report underscores the need for recognition of their efforts and resilience. Bangladeshi women also played crucial roles during the war as active participants in the struggle for independence. Despite the sexual violence they endured, their contributions to the independence war were heroic and displayed remarkable courage. Especially since the CRSV was weaponised by the Pakistani military to terrorise the Bengali population. It aimed to cause deep psychological trauma, asserting dominance over the population.

Therefore, the recognition of these atrocities is pivotal for several reasons. Firstly, it provides a sense of closure for the victims and helps in the healing process. Secondly, the international recognition of the genocide would keep the perpetrators accountable for the crimes and serve as a warning. Thirdly, it educates generations about the war's history, ensuring that women's sacrifices are not forgotten. Additionally, an apology from Pakistani authorities could improve the reconciliation efforts by acknowledging the army's actions in 1971.

Furthermore, proper education and public awareness are pivotal in preserving the memory of the 1971 genocide. National efforts like the Liberation War Museum and commemoration days are significant improvements; however, there is a need for a more focused approach to the needs of the survivors and their families. The educational campaigns and awareness actions should aim to support those people in overcoming the trauma they have endured. Global Human Rights Defence (GHRD) and other organisations contribute to the cause by raising social awareness and building political initiatives to gain international recognition of the "forgotten genocide".

In conclusion, recognition and commemoration of women's experiences during the Bangladesh Liberation War are crucial for providing justice. Their suffering, resilience, and contribution to independence highlight their strengths and fight for a better tomorrow. By giving these women a voice and acknowledging their sacrifices, we honour their legacy and ensure that such atrocities are neither forgotten nor repeated.

REFERENCE

B
I
B
L
I
O
G
R
A
P
H
Y

- Ahmad, Hasina and Moushumi Rahman. (2013). Nilufa, Rumana, Farzana and Sharmin: Residents of Nirala But Nowhere to Go. In *Rising from the Ashes : Women's Narratives of 1971*, edited by Shaheen Akhtar. Translated by Niaz Zaman, Ain o Salish Kendra. Dhaka: The University Press Limited and Ain o Salish Kendra.
- Akmam, W. (2002). Atrocities against humanity during the liberation war in Bangladesh: A case of genocide. *Journal of Genocide Research*, 4(4)
- Bass, G. J. (2016). Bargaining Away Justice: India, Pakistan, and the International Politics of Impunity for the Bangladesh Genocide. *International Security*, 41(2)
- Bose, S. (2007). Losing the Victims: Problems of Using Women as Weapons in Recounting the Bangladesh War. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 42(38)
- Batabyal, G. S. (2020). *Politico-military strategy of the Bangladesh Liberation War, 1971*. Routledge India.
- Beachler, D. (2007). The politics of genocide scholarship: The case of Bangladesh. *Patterns of prejudice*, 41(5), 467-492.
- Brownmiller, S. (1981). *Against our will: Men, women, and rape*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Crawford, K. F. (2017). *Wartime Sexual Violence: From Silence to Condemnation of a Weapon of War*. Georgetown University Press.
- Copelon, R. (2011). Toward accountability for violence against women in war: Progress and challenges. In Heineman, E. (2011). *Sexual Violence in Conflict Zones: From the Ancient World to the Era of Human Rights*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- D'Costa, B. (2018). Birangona: Rape survivors bearing witness in war and peace in Bangladesh. In E. Bemporad & J. W. Warren (Eds.), *Women and Genocide: Survivors, victims, perpetrators*. Indiana University Press.
- European Bangladesh Forum. (2023). *Eyewitness. Witnesses and survivors of the 1971 genocide in Bangladesh speak*. Edited by Harry van Bommel.
- Heidegger, P. (2011). Der stille Kampf der Kriegsheldinnen: Frauen und der Unabhängigkeitskrieg von 1971. *Südasiens*.

- Hoque, Mofidul. (2013). Introduction. In Shaheen Akhtar (Ed.), *Rising from the Ashes : Women's Narratives of 1971*. Translated by Niaz Zaman, Ain o Salish Kendra. Dhaka: The University Press Limited and Ain o Salish Kendra.
- Jahan, R. (2013). 'Genocide in Bangladesh'. In S. Totten., & W. S. Parson (Eds.), *Centuries of Genocide: Essays and Eyewitness Accounts* (4th ed). Routledge.
- Jahan, R. (1973). Women in Bangladesh. In Ruby Rohrlich-Leavitt (Ed.) *Women cross culturally: Change and challenge*. The Hague: Mouton Publishers.
- Koos, C. (2017). Sexual violence in armed conflicts: research progress and remaining gaps. *Third World Quarterly*, 38(9), 1935-1951.
- Leatherman, J. (2007). Sexual violence and armed conflict: Complex dynamics of re-victimization. *International Journal of Peace Studies*
- McDermott, R. (2020). The role of gender in political violence. *Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences*, 34
- Mohsin, Amena. (2013). Experiences of Two Indigenous Women: Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). In *Rising from the Ashes : Women's Narratives of 1971*, edited by Shaheen Akhtar. Translated by Niaz Zaman, Ain o Salish Kendra. Dhaka: The University Press Limited and Ain o Salish Kendra.
- Mookherjee, N. (2006). 'Remembering to forget': public secrecy and memory of sexual violence in the Bangladesh war of 1971. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 12(2)
- Mookherjee, N. (2008). Gendered embodiments: mapping the body-politic of the raped woman and the nation in Bangladesh. *Feminist Review*, 88(1)
- Mookherjee, N. (2015). *The spectral wound: Sexual violence, public memories, and the Bangladesh war of 1971*. Duke University Press.
- Nordås, R., & Cohen, D. K. (2021). Conflict-related sexual violence. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 24
- Ranjan, A. (2016). *Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971: Narratives, Impacts and the Actors*. *India Quarterly*, 72(2)
- Rashid, A. (2019). *Gender, Nationalism, and Genocide in Bangladesh: Naristhan/Ladyland*. Routledge.
- Saha, S. (2023). Women's Suffering during the Bangladesh Genocide of 1971. *Remembering the Bangladesh Genocide of 1971*,

- Saikia, Y. (2011). War as history, humanity in violence: Women, men, and memories of 1971, east Pakistan/Bangladesh. *Sexual Violence in conflict zones: From the ancient world to the era of Human Rights*,
- Seifert, R. (1996, January). The second front: The logic of sexual violence in wars. In *Women's Studies International Forum* (Vol.19, No. 1-2, pp. 35-43). Pergamon.
- Sharlach, L. (2000). Rape as Genocide: Bangladesh, the Former Yugoslavia, and Rwanda. *New Political Science*, 22(1)
- Shoeb, M. Z. H., & Ushoshee, Z. (2021). Role of Women in the Liberation War of Bangladesh. *SSRN Electronic Journal*.
- United Nations Secretary-General (2024). *Conflict-related sexual violence: Report of the Secretary-General*. United Nations.
- United Nations. (1948). Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.