

Women's roles in the 1971 Bangladesh Genocide

FAHIM ABRAR ABID, WIEBKE LEHNER, MAJA
PRZYBYSZEWSKA

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Riviermarkt 5, 2513 AM The Hague, Netherlands



info@ghrd.org



+ 31 62 72 41006



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Our Mission

Present the various experiences of women during the Bangladesh Genocide in 1971, emphasising their resilience, contributions, 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 their bravery and 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.

By addressing these factors, this report aims to ensure 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 encompass a wide variety of roles by grappling with survival, engaging in resistance, and building resilience. Yet their experiences and contributions are often erased from the collective conscious in the process of post-conflict societal rebuilding (Mookherjee, 2006). The Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971 is a noteworthy example of how such lack of acknowledgment of women's experiences and involvement feeds into and is mutually reinforced by a denial of overall recognition of conflict atrocities. Especially 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 feeds into Bangladesh's contemporary political contestation as well as the perception of the role of women (Bass, 2016, p. 262). Therefore, this report aims to shed light on the intricacy of women's wartime experiences, subjugation to sexual aggression, and contribution to the conflict development 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 found their expression 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 16, 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, 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).

First, 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 conceptualized as a 'weapon of war'. Theories of the purposeful, strategic use of wartime rape are then connected to the specific context of the Bangladesh Liberation War to showcase that it was not merely a ubiquitous conflict by-product but was perpetrated with genocidal intent.

To move beyond a framing of women as mere victims of conflict-related violence, the next 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 off the Pakistani army. Therefore, a

causal link between CRSV victimization and a motivation to partake in conflict struggles will be examined.

Finally, the report examines how the denial of international recognition of the genocide affects Bangladesh today by acknowledging the experiences of women particularly. 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 organizational initiatives, commemoration, and awareness creation are emphasized, 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 conceptualization 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 victimization 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 recognized use of rape in the Bosnian war (Sharlach, 2000, p. 94). This begs the question why the plight of Bangladeshi women has received so little consideration. By clarifying the purpose behind strategic sexual victimization 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 Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (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 and more attention has been paid to the gender-specific dynamics of conflict violence, with increasing recognition of rape as a specific phenomenon of war, rather than just a ubiquitous by-product (Nordås & Cohen, 2021). It is a symptom of institutionally embedded gendered norms and custom within patriarchal societies which is 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 variations: many scholars posit a difference between opportunistic and strategic perpetration of sexual violence (Koo, 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 – the case of Bangladesh is a striking exemption to that. 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 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 characterize 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, this means that CRSV is part of a belligerent’s strategic efforts 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 in itself. 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, ranging from 200,000 to 400,000 (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. Firstly, this form of violence results in a disruption of communal bonds since women hold a particular place in these patriarchal social relations. In war, it is often the women who uphold community cohesion, their victimization 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 victimization is supposed to demasculinise their husbands. The latter can be explained by understanding that rape is a ‘feminized’ violence: its sexual component and usually forceful subjugation of the victim is the ultimate assertion of male power and masculinity. On a broader scale, the female body is also often mystified as a symbol for the nation and motherhood. The concept of nation in patriarchal societies is inextricably linked with sexuality and masculinity (Mookherjee, 2015, p. 9). Its brutal violation through sexual aggression therefore not only tarnishes the victim but defiles the honour and integrity of the nation it stands for – thus it is another act of territorial conquest on a symbolic level. But this contestation also relates to role of women as continuing the bloodline of the opposing faction: the resulting pregnancies are often intended by-products of strategic rape with the aim of polluting 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 a strategic use of rape by the Pakistan army to terrorize the population of the former East Pakistan (Beachler, 2007, p. 467; Koos, 2017, p. 1937). Women were systematically targeted for sexual violence, subject to gang rapes, kidnapped into forms of sexual slavery, and brutally tortured, mutilated and murdered (Saha, 2023). This brutalization is widely recognized in academic debate 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, this subsection links strategic rape to the enactment of genocide.

According to Jahan (2012, p. 255), 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.

The violence was carried out indiscriminately by the Pakistani army forces, backed by local collaborators such as the *Razakar* (Mookherjee, 2015, pp. 12-13). However, 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” (Saikia, 2011, p. 159) raped women and girls.

The victims were targeted without respect to age or social status and often raped in front of their close family members or public spaces for everyone to see (D’Costa, 2018). Others were abducted and kept confined in cantonments, barracks, and even tanks. Many of the victims were aggressively murdered after being raped, e.g., by being stabbed with a bayonet through their genitals. This showcases the vast aggressiveness at play in this ultimate assertion of male power in the context of a genocide. Others fell victims to their wounds, especially 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 explicitly 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 – 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 members are forced to witness the atrocity. Concretely, this humiliation stems from the local perception that the rape of a married woman bears greater insult for her husband, as his ‘property’ was transgressed, leaving him demasculinized as he was unable to defend what is ‘his’ (Mookherjee, 2006, p. 439). The victims themselves were ‘depersonalized’ (Saikia, 2011, p. 163), as their instrumentalization for the soldiers’ pleasure affirmed their social status as objects (Mookherjee, 2015, pp. 166-167).

On the level of the local community, the public rape of women and girls served to demoralize 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 was 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 ostracizing the victim, therefore, CRSV as a weapon of war to disperse communities is particularly ‘effective’ in societies where the shame is imposed on the victim rather than the rapist (Sharlach, 2000, p. 90). In Bangladesh, this stems from 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 conceived of 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 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 “hinduized” (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 weaponized as a tool of genocide through the inscription of male violence on female bodies which symbolize 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 terrorize, 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

There are some external factors, such as Pakistani's attitude and brutality towards women and their families, and internal forces, such as the way women were feeling, whether emotionally or psychologically, had contributed to the cause.

2.1 How women contributed to the cause 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 war is certainly not a phenomenon unique to the war of 1971 (Rashid, 2019, p. 94-95). As a matter of fact, the liberation war was not something that was quite sudden, so women's participation in the war was not surprising either. 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. Also, In the 1971 war, throughout different narratives, women were predominantly portrayed as vulnerable, censured, or rape victims as the history is written or narrated in an exclusive manner by those who are in power and Bangladesh is a patriarchal society, so it can be understood that why it was done in such a way. Nevertheless, despite being in agonizing circumstances and filled with their own resentment, women's contribution to the cause is incalculable as they have fought in the war in various manners. Therefore, from fighting as a guerilla to engaging in medical care, women actively participated in the war by playing different vital roles (Shoeb & Ushoshee, 2021).



Bengali women are taking training for war. Source: © The Daily Star, (December 16, 2016)

Sometimes immediately and sometimes indirectly, 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, and some of them in the front war and many more. As many people took shelter in the refugee camp during 1971, some women gathered and distributed daily necessities within their capacity in the refugee camps, especially for the children. Some of them participated in the Mujibnagar government-in-exile and other guerilla activities. Some other women helped the freedom fighters by allowing them to hide their weapons or sheltering them in their homes, etc. Therefore, depending on the socio-economic and cultural surroundings of their family, women's contributions varied; nonetheless, they played a crucial and courageous role for which we are forever in debt. Despite their ongoing struggles to receive proper credit, their contribution was just as significant as that of males.

2.2 Significance of Women's Participation in the War and its Impact in Bangladesh

In a patriarchal society, women's attire or dress code is regarded as the preservers of the culture of society and it played an important role in 1971 (Ranjan, 2016). In Bangladesh, women used to wear Sharee, tip (bindi), flowers, etc., as adornment; however, the Pakistani government labeled the culture of Bengali as Hindu culture and was extremely against wearing these. Also, due to geopolitical and historical reasons, East Bengal (present-day Bangladesh) was heavily influenced by the Turko-Afghans and adopted their cultures as they felt that their (Turko-Afghans) Muslim culture was quite similar to their own Bengali culture, which is why an amalgamation of culture happened and Bengali Muslim adopted some of their dressing sense as well. Bengali women used to wear Sharee (cultural aspect), which is an extremely long fabric; at the same time, Bengali Muslim women also used to wear Burka (religious aspect). Whether they wore Sharee or Burka, the purpose of both of these attire was to cover up their body to protect their dignity. Therefore, due to socio-religious factors, women were always wired to protect their dignity.

The Pakistani army was also aware of this aspect, and one of its purposes was to tarnish its dignity. Hence, they used to rape and impregnate these women, and a lot of them would even give birth to war children in a Muslim country's nationalist liberation war. Unfortunately, Hindu women were marginalized even more (Rashid, 2019). According to Md. Ikra (personal communication, May 8, 2024), a Bangladeshi Academician and Genocide Scholar, women had to go through a rollercoaster of emotions, as one point, they had to bear the fact that their own gender was getting raped, and at another point, they had to bear the information that their loved ones were getting killed whether brother, son, husband or any friends. He added that at the same time, 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. As women were facing extreme CRSV, it was really important to them to participate in the war to protect their dignity and to feel included like their male counterparts; also, due to the socio-religious aspect of this region, it was progressive in Bangladesh.



Bengali women were in shoot practice in 1971. Source: © United News of Bangladesh, (December 16, 2022)

2.3 Nexus of sexual violence and women's active participation in the war

“Every war is accompanied by sexual violence against women” (Bose, 2007). Worldwide it is a common phenomenon that sexual violence is used as a weapon during the war (Crawford, 2017). However, at the same time, it could be seen that despite facing CRSV, women were not afraid of taking part in the war, which is no different in the case of Bangladesh. Due to the war, a woman is on the verge of losing everything and after being a victim of CRSV, 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 sudden thousands and thousands of women were left helpless and were compelled to fend for themselves as rape victims and widows (Jahan, 2013). Even though these women were casualties of the war, to avoid the subsequent dishonor or shame, a lot of them were disposed of by their own families (Brownmiller, 1981; Jahan, 1973). Also, due to the war, there might be no one left alive in her family to look after her, or even if there was, they might be reluctant to accept that woman as she was a rape victim. Later on, women became refugees without families (husbands or children) and turned out to be rebels (Wood 2008). Therefore, the trauma that the woman suffered due to the CRSV triggered or encouraged her or other women 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, mainly psychological, along with their desire for an independent country. One of them could be, due to the resentment they were holding against their abuser, they might want to take revenge for the CRSV that their gender had to face during the war. The other one could be there is no fear for life left in them as the rape or sexual violence victims were already getting treated brutally to keep their desire to live, so the sole motive now left for them is to participate in the war so that the violence could be stopped and no one had to go through the same turmoil and agony in the future. Hence, even though it is usually seen that after rape, women turn out to be extremely fragile and vulnerable, the countless number of rapes or CRSV that was happening during the war acted as a driving force for other women as well to actively take part in the war as a declare of retribution.

3. Recognition and Remembrance

3.1. Why should we remember and recognise the genocide?

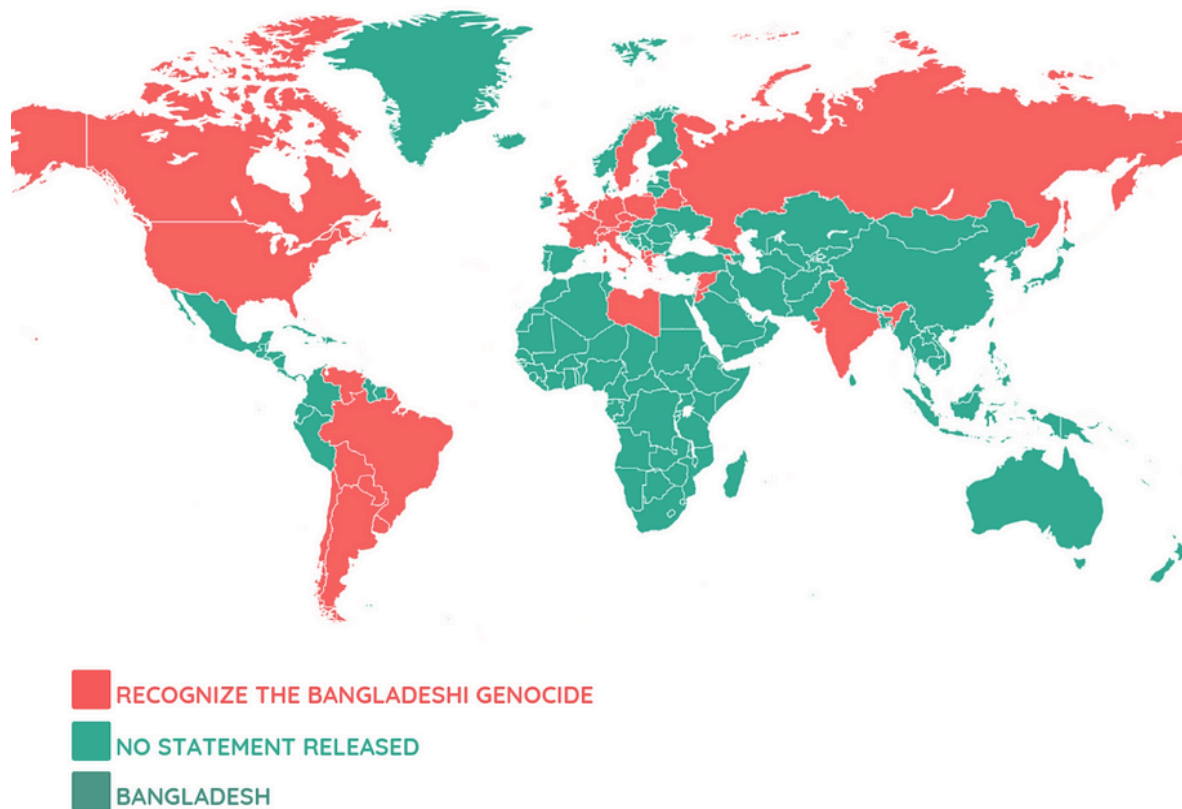
The memory of the women's participation in 1971 is often neglected, while their contribution was significant and heroic. When their fathers, husbands or brothers were fighting or when they passed away, these women were responsible for families' survival and preserving the fractions of normality. Their sufferings and sacrifices remain largely unrecognised, and it is imperative to commemorate them for several reasons. One of them is that memory gives immortality.

The recognition of women's experiences is pivotal in fully understanding the genocide and ensuring that the bland historical context does not overshadow the perspectives of the victims and survivors. Women who survived the 1971 genocide have endured unimaginable pain throughout years and years. Their testimonies gathered in many 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 war martyrs (Mohsin, 2013, p. 86). Even though in Bangladesh there are centres where the victims can look for 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 hard work. As "women constitute the fabric of civil society during war time" (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 obliviousness. The realisation of the committed crime would prevent future cases of genocide and make the political and military leader 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 International Association of Genocide Scholars (IAGS), which researched the Bangladesh cases and officially recognised the genocide 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. Credit: Genocide Watch. (2022).

<https://www.genocidewatch.com/single-post/recognition-of-the-bangladesh-genocide-of-1971>

What are the 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. The 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 overbearing 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, the 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 about them and methods of 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. In essence, the authorities 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, the 25th of March was established as a national Genocide Remembrance Day. Another important date is the 14th of December, 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.

The Global Human Rights Defence (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 the women's experiences during the Liberation War and genocide in 1971, particularly focusing on conflict-related sexual violence, their 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 survivors and their families' needs. The educational campaigns and awareness actions should aim to support those people in overcoming the trauma they have endured. 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.

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