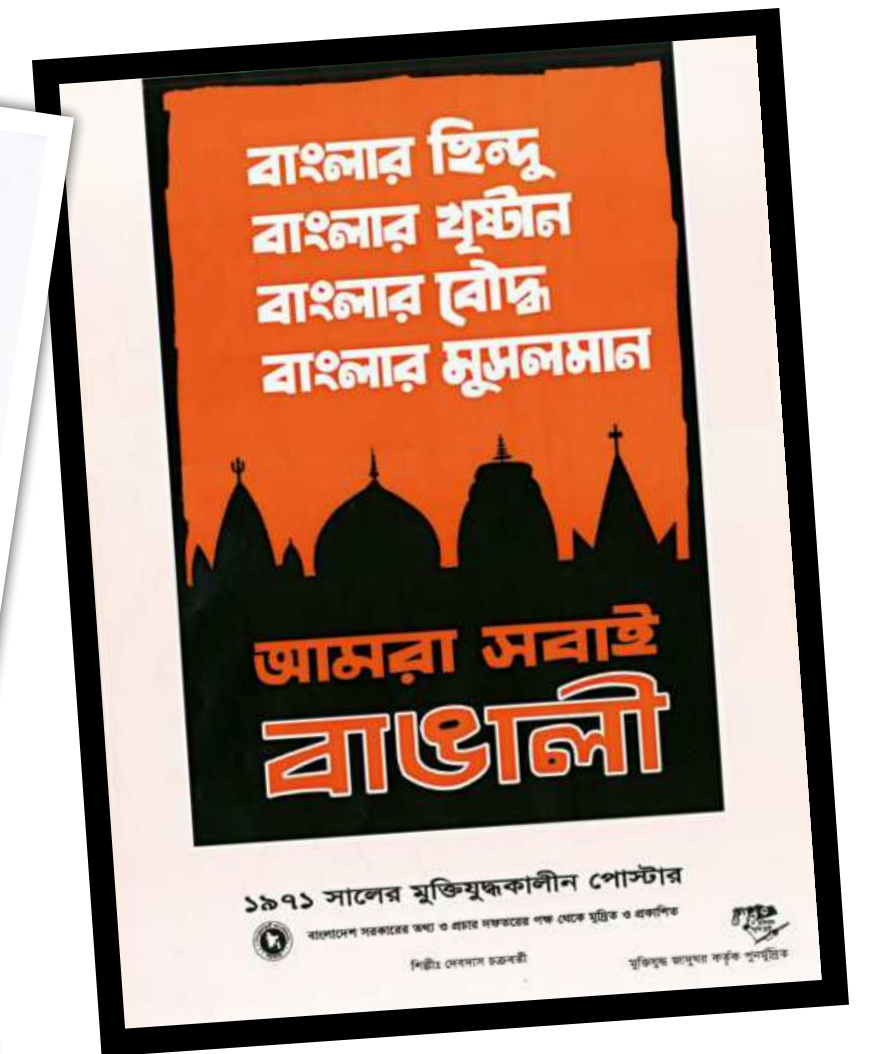


POSTERS OF 1971

A guide to freedom

There is always a price for liberty — a price to pay for freedom, and a price one owes to enjoy the pleasures that come with it. The events of 1971 are glorious in the history of Bangladesh, as we became a sovereign state through a nine-month long armed struggle, but it was not just the battlefield where war was raging.



At every refugee camp in the neighbouring country; at every training camp where valiant youth of the nation, farmers, day labourers, and able men and women learned warfare in the spirit to free their native land; at every liberated zone of Bangladesh — there were travelling musical troupes singing songs of freedom and victory.

Posters and placards were printed to present before the rebels in an effort to further inspire them to carry on their struggle of freeing their motherland.

Much has been written and spoken about slogans of those times. The rebellious cry, *Joi Bangla*, still stirs the same emotion to the millennials as it did to the baby boomers who fought for the liberation of Bangladesh.

Slogans are a catch phrase, and many take the form of placards, and posters, which is primarily a placard for public display with slogans and designs combined.

Before the war, placards were particularly popular. They could be written on large

pieces of paper, glued on a light piece of wood or 'chatai' and were carried to processions and meetings. Their purpose was simple but decisive. They augmented the slogans that were chanted and added visuals to gatherings where demands were being made.

It was a time when printing technology was not developed and given that they were considerably expensive, placards were more common in our socio-political scene than posters. They lacked designs but the lyrical words that they more often than not featured, inspired thousands.

After the Mujibnagar Government was formed in exile, it became important for the administration to hand down information regarding the war to the people who were actively taking part in it.

Across the globe, the cause for Bangladesh had garnered tremendous support, and it was imperative that updates were sent to these kind souls who were fighting a war in a different frontier, one where the battle lines were drawn by ideology and the means to fight were civil support and not military.

The Mujibnagar Government took it upon

themselves to print posters for the local soldiers, and for an international audience which, in light of a media blackout by the Yahya regime, could narrate the poignant tale of the struggle for freedom of Bangladesh.

In retrospect, one can scrutinise posters of our liberation movement into many categories.

The speech of 7th March gave many directions to the Bengali people, and these words by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was one of the most iconic posters that came out —

Ebarer Shongram/Shwadinatar Shangram/Rakta Jakhon Diyechi/Aro Rakto Dibo/Ghorey/Ghorey Durga/Gorey Tulo.

Done in a vivid colour scheme of black and red, over a white background, although seemingly more of a placard than a poster, it did create a visual effect where red was the colour of glory and victory; black of mourning, and white of peace. One must break it down to realise that, at times of war, is necessary for peace but a loss of life is always to be mourned.

Another poster of an iconic nature was one that asked every Bengali, and perhaps people across the globe, to boycott Pakistani products.

The poster read — *Bangladesher shompod bridhdi korun/Pakistani Ponno Borjon Korun.*

The 1971 liberation war was a struggle

of the masses where every individual made contributions. It was thus deemed important to appeal to the people to reject Pakistani products, which in turn, would benefit the future economy once the country had emerged victorious.

Similar posters also read, simply — *Bangladesh needs your help.*

And then, there was September on Jessore Road, Allen Ginsberg's famous poetry; the four lines of which made perhaps the most touching poster during the entire war.

Millions of babies in pain/millions of mothers in the rain/millions of brothers in woe/millions of children no where to go.

And the world did respond to the anguish of the Bengali people. Bengalis, and civil society across the globe protested the atrocities and pleading for immediate action from their respective governments. And many administrations, even in those early days, extended their arms in assistance.

The struggle of 1971 was that of the people of East Pakistan. It had no discrimination, we were all united under one banner, to stand against oppression. Since those tumultuous days of March 1971 till this day, the posters of 1971 have played an important role to define the goals set before us.

Today, they remind us of a time when people stood against tyranny and emerged victorious.

By Mannan Mashhur Zarif
Images collected from the Liberation War Museum



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১৯৭১ সালের মুক্তিযুদ্ধকালীন পোস্টার



বাংলাদেশ সরকারের তথ্য ও প্রচার দফতরের পক্ষ থেকে মুদ্রিত ও প্রকাশিত

মুক্তিযুদ্ধ জাদুঘর কর্তৃক পুনর্মুদ্রিত

