

Liberation War in Photographs

The Photographic exhibition being held at La Galerie on the War of Liberation represents some rare and historic documents. The exhibition jointly presented by La Galerie and Muktiyuddho Smriti Trust is an attempt to give a comprehensive history of the freedom struggle of the Bangalees. Although it would be unkind to say a complete history have been given but the attempt has been made to be precise and as extensive as possible keeping in mind the constraint of space and availability of documents.

The exhibition is composed of 47 photographs taken by senior photo-journalist Aftab Ahmed. Most of the photographs are those of Dhaka and surrounding areas during the '71 period. Aftab Ahmed's professional touch is vivid in some of the shots that he took from the historic March 7 meeting at Suhrawardy Udyan and the aftermath at the killing field of Rayer Bazar brick field where many of our intellectuals were brutally murdered by Razakars and Al-Badr — the henchmen of Pakistani Army.

There are 42 photographs by freedom fighter photographer S M Shaif. His photographs are all from Sector 8 as he was fighting in that sector. He has some rare and candid shots of the Liberation War and atrocities of the Pakistani soldiers and their band of Al-Badr and Razakars.

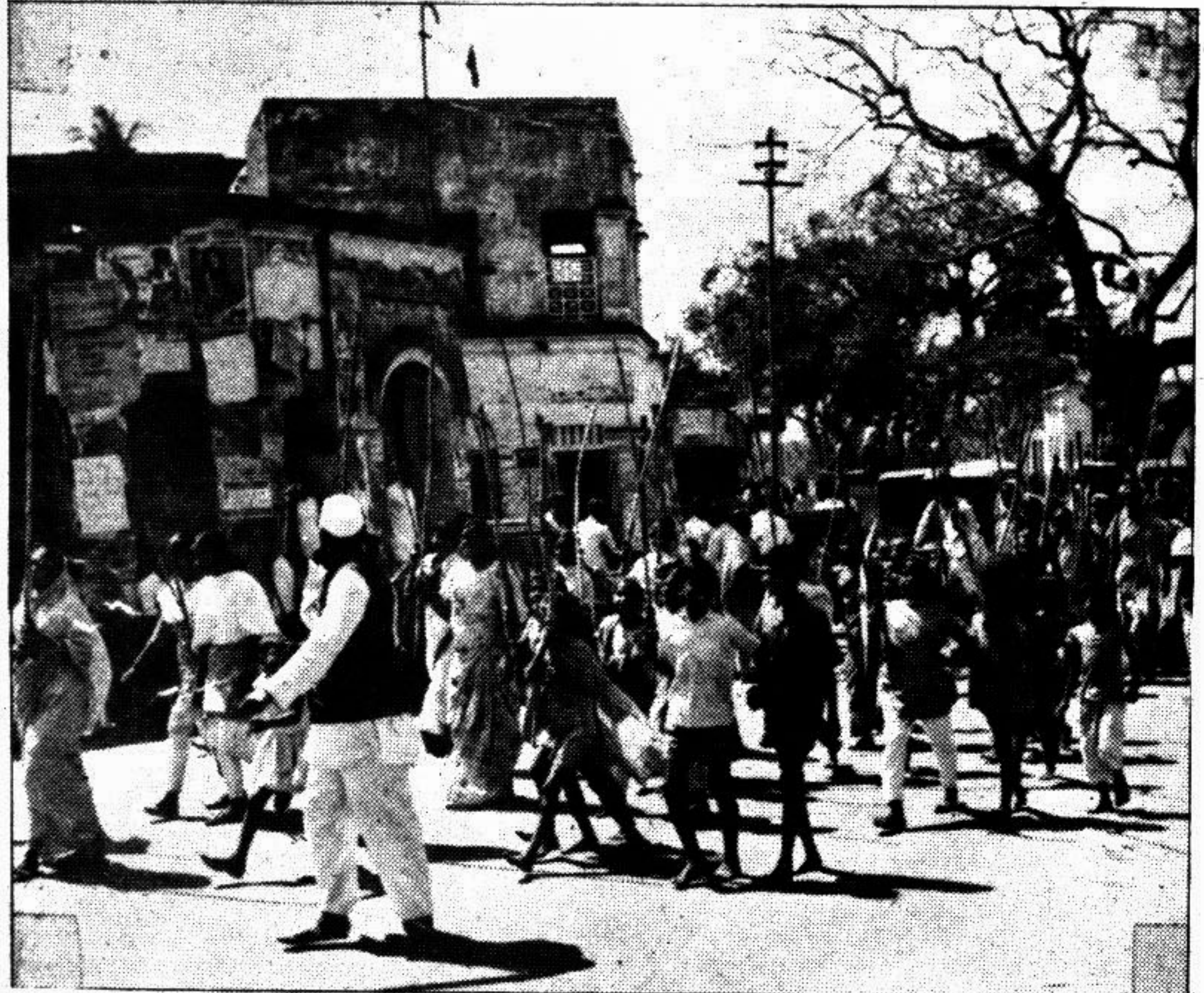
The third collection is that of the photo album published by the Muktiyuddho Smriti Trust which give a comprehensive history of Bangalees' fight for freedom from the time of Nawab Sirajuddowla till December 1971.



3 March 1971 in Jessore town a school student, Lablu was shot by Pakistan army. — S M Shaif



8 March 1971: Girls and women march the streets of Jessore town in support of the non-cooperation movement. — S M Shaif



8 March, 1971: Women and children marching on the street of Jessore in protest of killing of housewife Charubala by Pak Army. — S M Shaif



The martyr: Eternal sleep —Muktiyuddho Smriti Trust Album



4 April 1971: A youth suspected of being a Muktiyuddha shot to death and left to rot by Pak army in Dharmatola, Jessore. — S M Shaif

PORTALS OF THE PAST A Photographic Journey through History

MARCH has come around once again, this time all the more significant as we enter the twenty-fifth year of our independence. As always, we look back over the years and reflect on what we have gained, on how far we have come and, most importantly, what we owe to our motherland and the martyrs who have given their lives that we may live in freedom.

This year La Galerie has arranged an evocative exhibition of photography on our struggle for independence. It is a very thought-provoking study indeed, not concentrating just on the Liberation War of 1971, nor going back just to 1952. In fact, it dates back past 1947 when we were freed from the shackles of the British. It takes us back to the times when the concept of actual freedom first entered our minds and began to take a concrete shape. We are taken as far back as to the battle of Plassey. In this journey of nationalist awakening, we are taken from Sirajuddowla, through the portals of our history, to Sheikh Mujib and our valiant struggle for freedom. It is a very moving exhibition, an effective endeavour to retrieve us from the torpor into which we inevitably fall from time to time.

Works of quite a few photographers are on display, including the famous names of Mohammed Takiullah, Rashid Talukdar, Anwar Hossain and others. About 150 photographs are on display, each with a tale of its own to tell. We begin with the image of a freedom fighter, rifle in hand: "Amra Chali Abiram" (Our Relentless Journey). The journey takes us to the heroes of the past, Tipu Sultan, Sirajuddowla, Titumir, Khudiram and Surya Sen. We are gradually led to through each phase of history till we arrive at the threshold of our freedom, the Shahid Minar in 1952, the six-point demand, Asad's blood-stained shirt, the Agartala case, Bangabandhu's historic address of March 7 and more. The images conjure up the reality of the past before our eyes and we cannot help but be imbued by a feeling of fierce pride in our past and a strong determination for our future.

The visitors at this exhibition seem to be overcome by a sense of belonging, a revival of feeling which are all too often suppressed by the everyday chores of life. A young woman stands transfixed before pictures of the genocide. She lives abroad and is here on a visit. She had been abroad during the Liberation War too but had heard much about it from friends and relatives. This exhibition is helping her to come to terms with her heritage.

Another photograph displays a victim of rape in Magura. One cannot look too long at this painful photograph of violated innocence. What we have had to pay for our freedom! And this exhibition has served well to remind us of what a dear price has been paid. "This exhibition has been long overdue," says two young university boys visiting the gallery. "Our young generation must be shown these things, how our independence has been won. We are always ready to do anything for our independence." Their expressions seemed to be reflected in the picture of the freedom fighter on the wall beside them.

Veteran photographer Aftab Ahmed's shots depict the tumultuous Race Course of March 7, pictures of political leaders, and a candid shot of Kader Siddiqui in an emotional moment of tears.

The vicious inhumanity of the '71 genocide has been caught in the large photograph of the dead body of an infant, being devoured by a street side dog. The greedy eyes of the dog echo the cruelty of the killers.

There is around 50 photographs on display taken by S M Shaif who was a freedom fighter. His photographs are particularly of interest at the moment because many feature the late General Manzur, whose killing is being investigated at present. We see Manzur with his C-in-C Osmany, with Bangabandhu after the war and with Capt Huda who was later killed in November, 1975.

Among the visitors of the exhibition is Asaduzzaman Nur, the well-known actor who has brought his son along to this display of our history. He pauses before the picture of Jahanara Imam and says, "She may not have been able to finish her task but she has succeeded in directing the attention of the young generation towards our independence. She has taught the people to think about independence, and that is a great achievement."

An army officer stands writing in the visitor's book of comments before leaving the show. He had been a sector sub-commander during the War of Liberation. This exhibition seems to have been a nostalgic trip down memory lane for him. His eyes still have that far-off look as he silently departs.

A woman has brought her two daughters to the show. While the elder girl painstakingly explains each picture to her younger sister, the little one asks, "Where was I when all this happened?" You may not have been there at the time, little one, but the Liberation War has lifted a great responsibility upon your shoulders! It is you, young ones, who are to carry our history into the future, to uphold our glorious past.

Probe News Agency



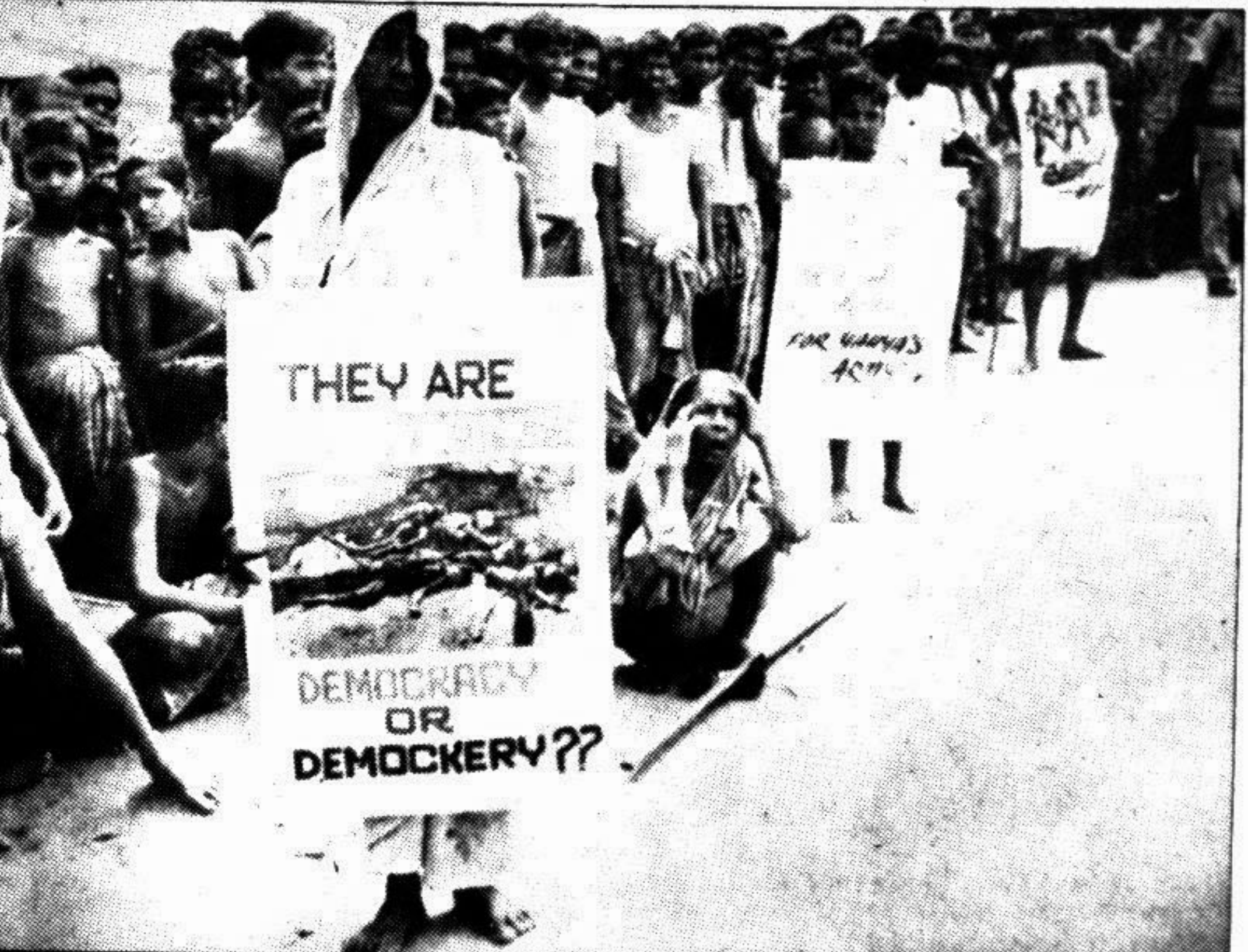
8 December 1971: After Jessore was liberated, C-in-C Bangladesh Liberation Forces Gen M A G Osmany taking the salute. Behind him is Maj Gen M A Manzur who was Commander of Sector 8. — S M Shaif



Discovery of a mass grave in Jessore in December '71. One of innumerable killing fields where Pak army, Al Badrs and Razakars committed mass murders of innocent Bengalees. — S M Shaif



Muktiyuddhas taking meals between operations. Courtesy: Muktiyuddho Smriti Trust Album.



Refugees in West Bengal — Muktiyuddho Smriti Trust Album



The exhibition at La Galerie, Banani, Dhaka