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As the truck was moving at high speed, the soldiers, thinking Khaleq to be dead, threw him out of the truck. Khaleq died instantly. The soldiers brought Mansura to the town hall building.

Mansura recognised the town hall building. She was in a state of shock already. She was dragged to the auditorium where she found a large number of young women who had no clothes on. Every woman appeared to be in great distress and was crying.

Out of the window, she found a number of Bangalee youths in the field who were being tortured by the Pakistan Army. She felt as if she had come to hell from where there was no way to escape. She saw a number of young people on whose eyes acid was being poured and who were later shot dead. Till evening she saw the horrific scenes but more was yet to come. By this time the inhumane soldiers took away Mansura's clothes. In the evening, the soldiers entered the auditorium and dragged the woman away into a nearby room. She could hear the screaming of the women. She was, too, violated by a number of soldiers. As she resisted, the soldiers whipped her and put acid on the injured places. In the early morning, the women were brought back to the auditorium. That day four women tried to escape but the soldiers chased them. Seeing no other alternative, the women jumped into the well and committed suicide.

For a long twenty-five nights, the same atrocity was conducted on Mansura and the other women. Women screamed in void but it was as if no one heard. They were abandoned to their fate. Human life

was violated by extreme forms of atrocity. A number of women died inside the auditorium. After repeated torture, Mansura became very ill and was bleeding profusely. Thinking she would die soon, the soldiers called a rickshaw van driver and put her on the van. They ordered the driver to take her near the river and throw her into the water. By this time, Mansura had her abortion. Fortunately the van driver knew Mansura and Mostafa. He brought some food and water for her and took her to her village.

The villagers came to know that Mansura had come back alive. The collaborators came to Mansura's house, accused her of being a characterless

The villagers came to know that Mansura had come back alive. The collaborators came to Mansura's house, accused her of being a characterless woman and said that she must leave the village immediately. They also said that since her father-in-law had been killed and her husband had joined the liberation forces, she would be living alone in her house and the youth of the village would visit her as she was of loose character. Mansura understood that if she leaves the village, the collaborators would

occupy her house. She was also too sick to walk. She begged the village elders to allow her to live in the village. The village elders requested the collaborators not to force her out of the house as she would die on the way. The collaborators agreed to let her stay in the house till her physical condition improved, but no one in the village was allowed to meet her or help her. However, the common villagers were highly sympathetic towards Mansura. Before every dawn, people used to put rice, dal and vegetables in front of her door secretly and anonymously. She struggled against the wave of apathy and resentment and managed to survive on such small donations till Victory Day.

Mostafa Mia was not aware of the tragedy surrounding his family. As a victorious Freedom Fighter, he entered the village and was welcomed by the people of the village. Some of the village elders advised that Mostafa Mia, as a Freedom Fighter, was an important person in the village; as such, he should not live with a violated woman and should divorce her immediately. They further said that they would arrange a beautiful bride for him. Mostafa Mia told them that he had to talk to Mansura first before reaching a decision. Mansura was overjoyed to see her husband alive. She narrated the whole episode to him. Mostafa told the village elders that Mansura was not a characterless woman as characterised by them. She was kidnapped by the Pakistan Army and their collaborators. Providing her security was the responsibility of his father and of the villagers. His father tried but was brutally killed and the villagers did not come forward to save her. As such, the fault lay with the villagers and not

with Mansura. He would not divorce his wife.

The villagers started a noncooperation movement against Mostafa and were very unkind to Mansura. As a result, Mostafa's business failed, the family became very poor and eventually, they had to move to Rangpur town in search of a living. They took shelter in a slum and he started pulling rickshaws. Mansura made a peaceful home and gave birth to two children. Although poor, they were happy in life.

A Freedom Fighter, who came to know the tragic story of Mansura and Mostafa, wrote a chapter in his book on the Liberation War. He also arranged a television programme and invited them to participate in it. His wife provided financial assistance to them. After the programme was aired, a martyred family member provided them with rickshaws and vans. Later writers, media reporters and researchers also wrote their tragic tale. Students and youth of Rangpur on Independence and Victory Days honoured the couple for their heroic struggle. After long years, the villagers realised their mistake and welcomed the family back to the village. They are now proud members of the community. Recently, they appeared as witnesses in the War Crimes Tribunal formed to try war criminals of 1971 as they are living witnesses of the atrocities committed on the people of Bangladesh. They decided to fight the silence and tell the world about the atrocities of 1971.

The writer is a Freedom Fighter, recipient of Swadhinata Padak and a researcher on the Liberation War.

THE UN'S SILENCE

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The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) met in April and September of 1971 but did not seriously consider the genocide in Bangladesh either. The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) did not even issue a statement of concern and condemnation under the pretext that its role did not extend to 'internal questions' of a member country. An exasperated Indira Gandhi tried unsuccessfully to rebut the 'internal question' arguing, "It is not just a small part of the country that is asking for rights. It happens to be the majority of the country, not a small part wanting to go away."

Since then 44 long years have elapsed and in line with U Thant's observation that 'it is for future historians to gather facts and make their own evaluations', numerous books were written, and seminars and workshops were held in many parts of the world, including many US universities, demanding the UN to recognise the genocide in Bangladesh. Bangladesh genocide is included in the curriculum of many US and Canadian Universities. An international conference on 'Truth and Justice' in Dhaka in July 2009 called the UN to recognise the mass killings carried out during the 1971 Liberation War as genocide.

In his recently published, award winning, much acclaimed book, *Blood*

Telegram: Nixon, Kissinger and A Forgotten Genocide, based primarily on the declassified White House tapes, reporter-turned-academic Prof Gary Bass of Princeton University wrote, "This book is about how two of the world's great democracies—the United States and India—faced up to one of the most terrible humanitarian crises of the twentieth century. The slaughter in what is now Bangladesh stands as one of the cardinal moral challenges of recent history... In the dark annals of modern cruelty, it ranks as bloodier than Bosnia and by some accounts in the same rough league as Rwanda."

Yet, UNHRC is unperturbed by the genocide that remains unrecognised—the killings of three million unarmed civilians—notwithstanding the fact that *Guinness Book of Records* listed the massacre as one of the top five genocides in the 20th century. Quite to the contrary, it is sparing no opportunity to condemn the trial process of Bangladesh's International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) where the convicts were given all avenues available in the due process of law. In a statement issued in Geneva on November 19, a spokesperson for the UNHRC said the government should not implement death sentences awarded by ICT, "given the doubts that have been raised about the fairness of trials conducted before the tribunal." The latest statement came in response to the recent



U Thant (1909-1974), the third Secretary General of the United Nations, did not succeed in sensitising the international community about the plight of East Pakistan's struggle for self-determination and independence.

execution of two war criminals. Regrettably, without expressing any compunction for its inaction in 1971 to side with the victim, the UNHRC is now expressing its concerns for the perpetrators whose offences, in the words of ICT presiding Justice Obaidul Hassan, "indubitably fall within the kind of such gravest crimes which tremble the collective conscience of mankind". If UNHRC could keep itself mum in the pretext of 'internal question' of a sovereign country, when

three millions unarmed civilians were brutally annihilated, does it now possess the moral right to express its concerns about the open trial process of ICT and the execution of a few convicted war criminals through due process of law, which, by the way, very well is an 'internal question' of a 'sovereign country'?

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