

# ACCOUNTS OF WAR

APURBA JAHANGIR

January 1, 1972, The Indian Council of World Affairs published a collection of stories about the serious abuses that Pakistani forces committed during the Liberation War of Bangladesh. The book was called "How Pakistan Violated Human Rights in Bangladesh." This was the first publication which acted as an official statement from people who witnessed the barbaric acts of the Pakistani army. After 44 years, 'Ahmed Sofa Rashtra Sabha' (an organisation dedicated to the works of famous writer Ahmed Sofa) took the initiative to translate this book in Bangla. The first edition was published in the *EkusheBoi Mela* 2016 from Agami Prokashani, named *Bangladesh e Pakistan er Manob Adhikar Langhan*.

The book includes comments from people all over Bangladesh. Renowned personalities such as artist Kamrul Hasan, director Fazlul Karim and others also shared their experiences regarding the fearsome nine months. 33 untold stories have been included in this book, including French philosopher Andre Malraux's comment which was the foreword for the original book. Malraux's foreword showed his indirect and to some extent, emotions towards the 1971 scenario of our country. As a lot of controversy rose regarding the liberation war, Malraux stood by Bangladesh, condemning Pakistan's actions and neglect towards Bangladesh.

After the war, international strategists tried to explain that the war was just another outcome of the clash between China and the Soviet Union, and was just a political thing. Malraux countered this and wrote, "If Marshal Yahya Khan had not decided to exterminate the Bengalis, and if he had not sent his planes to bomb Indian Airfields, what would be the role of China, the United States, the Soviet Union in this affair? As is the custom, each ambassador would have defended his

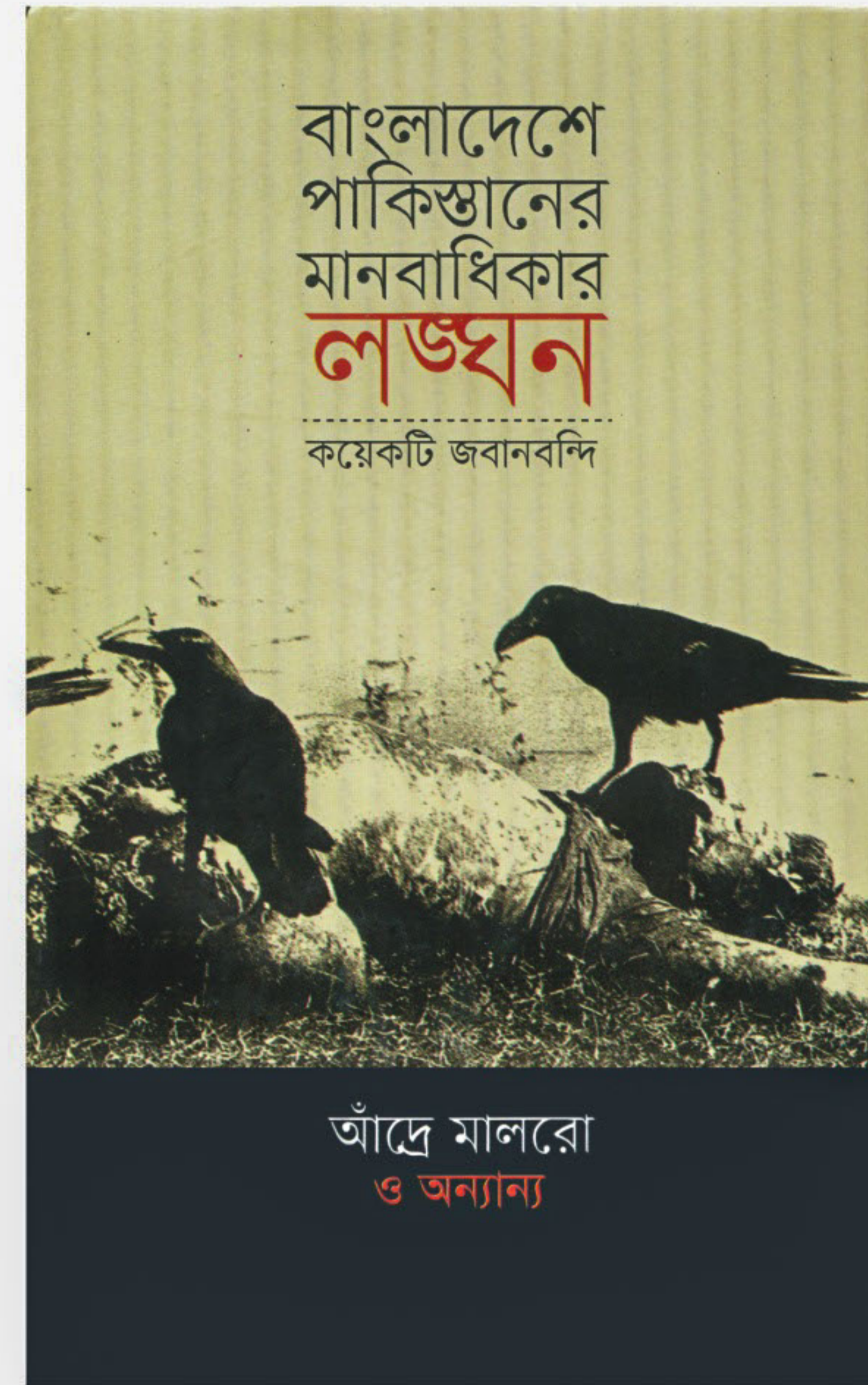
country. The Pakistani ambassador in France – I repeat: of Pakistan – nobly defended Pakistan. He did not kill anybody. The electoral victory of the Awami League was troublesome for Islamabad. The electoral victory of the people's front was so for the French right; it did not exterminate its opponents for all that. If politics is an art, it is one of reconciliation and not of assassination."

The statements from the public, which this book incorporates, show what exactly Andre Malraux was talking about. The vicious acts that followed throughout the nine months were a lot more than just a political outcome. The book writes eye witnesses describing incidents from people being buried alive to being tortured in the Pakistani camps, incidents which can only be compared to the acts which took place inside the Nazi concentration camps.

Maya Dasgupta, who was an assistant judge in Jessore, describes how her husband Santosh Kumar, the sub judge of Jessore was murdered in the hands of the Pakistani army. Their only child Rana, then 10 years old, was an eye witness to this event. In her record, she mentioned that the Pakistani army tried to kill Santosh, Rana and their house keeper Badal, five miles away from the district court. It was luck that the bullet did not hit Rana and he later escaped. Muhammad Sahidul Islam also shares his story as a prisoner of

the Pakistani Army. He describes how he with 59 other falsely accused prisoners had to live in a dark small cell for 22 days, with nothing to eat, and a glass of water for the whole bunch. In the book, Sahidul quotes, "Death was much better than how we were being treated." Mother Teresa's statement is also included in the book where she describes the devastating scenarios inside the refugee camps. Like these, 29 statements have been collected for this book, just to give a glimpse of what people went through.

The book serves as an important document of our history of the liberation war. The real life stories which are incorporated can give a reader shivers down their spine. It is a written testament of how barbaric and bloody the road to our freedom was. Though 45 years have passed, this book reminds us of the sacrifices people made, the events that occurred, and the lives we lost to attain liberty. A must read for Bangladeshis across the globe who want to know what the liberation war was actually like. ■



## HERITAGE

Rashid Ahmed Chowdhury, or more commonly known as Bulbul Chowdhury, was born in Chunarigram, Chittagong and grew up in Kolkata. "At that time, a muslim boy who dances was considered impossible!" says Hasanur Rahman Bacchu, guitar-guru and President, Bulbul Academy of Fine Arts.

we revolted. After Amanullah Chowdhury left, his wife Raiza Khanam Jhunu made another institution of the same name-BAFA, changing the B of Bulbul to B of Bangladesh. And since then, apparent 'branches of BAFA', so far 19, have opened all across the city- none of them authentic." The main campus of BAFA is still in the historic location of 7 Weisghat. The other original branches of Bulbul

# BAFA: A HISTORY

NAZIBA BASHER

PHOTO: KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO

During his graduate education, Bulbul came in across well known artists, like sarod player Santosh Chandra, composer Timir Baran Bhattacharya, and dancers Uday Shankar and Sadhana Bose. Such interactions spurred his desire to excel as a dancer. He got his break in 1936, when he was given the chance to perform with danseuse Sadhana Bose in the Rabindra Nritya Natya *Kach O Devajani*. To avoid the scrutinising gaze of contemporary conservative Muslims, that was when he took the pseudonym Bulbul Chowdhury. After the division, in 1947, Bulbul came back and became Pakistan's cultural ambassador. As a dancer with an Islamic background, Bulbul broke stereotypes and ingrained in the people, a love for dance and culture. In 1953, with his troupe, he visited countries like Britain, Ireland, Holland, Belgium and France. He was also declared the National Dancer of Pakistan in 1949.

In 1954, Bulbul Chowdhury passed away from cancer. His wife, actor and dancer Afroza Bulbul Chowdhury and friend Mahmud Nurul Huda wondered about how to make Bulbul's name live on. "Then after making many journey to and for the Government, a lot of speculation, and hard work, with Justice M Ibrahim as the first president of the institution, on May 17th, 1955, the first class was held at what used to be a CID office once- 7 Weisghat, Kotwali, renamed Bulbul Academy of Fine Arts (BAFA)," says Hasanur Rahman.

Since then, BAFA can boast of some of the best artists in the country, even today, of being from their institution. "Here, we call ourselves 'Made in BAFA'. It is a matter of immense pride for all of us that we were once students of this prestigious place." Hasanur Rahman himself was a student of the Hawaiian guitar, under the tutelage of Panna Ahmed. In 1979 he earned his certificate, after which he became a teacher, a committee member and then eventually, the president.

"While we were just committee members here, Amanullah Chowdhury was the then president. During his reign, the whole place had become quite family oriented- his wife being the principle, his daughter being a teacher and his relatives being in the administration. So naturally,



PHOTO: COURTESY

Academy of Fine Arts are in Dhanmondi (Ali Hossain Girls High School), Kamlapur (Kamlapur School and College), Mirpur (Mirpur Shahid Smriti High School), Banasree (Holy Crescent School and College), Uttara (Uttara Girl's High School and College) and Mohammadpur (New Medashiri School).

The courses available are of vocal training and songs- Nazrul sangeet, Rabindra sangeet and folk, dances such as contemporary and classical, instruments- Hawaiian guitar, Spanish guitar, Tabla, Violin, Flute and Keyboards.

BAFA has been consistent in instilling

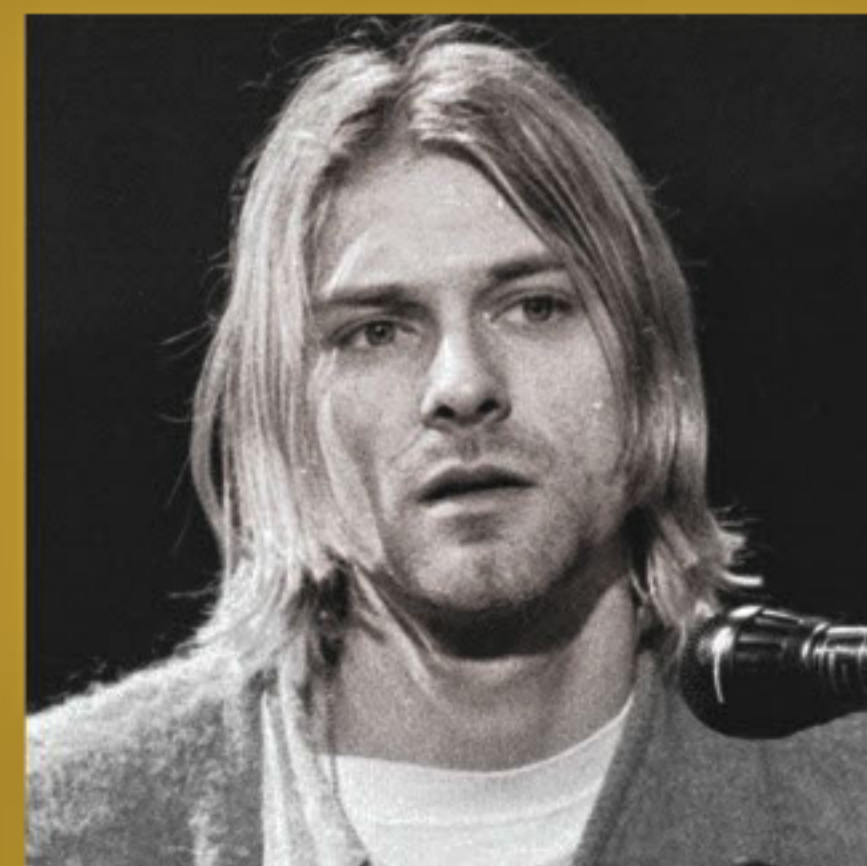
culture and performing arts in the young hearts of our country for decades now. Unfortunately, with the world moving immensely fast, and with younger children being more and more pressurized into the rat-race of the real world so soon, these arts have now become 'back-benchers' in our lives. Hasanur Rahman says, "I still believe that art and culture helps a child grow mentally and physically. It not only helps in their physical growth and exercise, but are mentally more relaxed than children who have nothing to do but study and play games."

The building which hosts the main

office and branch of BAFA is a significant one. A building from the 17th century period, the architecture and interior boast nothing short of royalty. The intricately designed staircase, the wooden floors, the large oval windows and semi-circular balconies, which give you a sneak-peek of the majestic Buriganga River, can intensify your liking for what once used to be a fortress.

This historic building is now in dire need of restoration. "Because of the confusion of 'real BAFA', it seems the government is also confused about which the authentic BAFA is, considering how the imitated institutions are getting more highly regarded now. Also, even after being stamped a heritage site, our building gets no proper maintenance and care. Without the government's help, we will not be able to sustain this prestigious building," worries Hasanur Rahman. "Having that said, I invite the youth of today to open their minds and hearts and delve into the arts, so that they don't have to resort to anything even remotely close to violence for a purpose in life. And our institutions doors are wide open for anyone who wants to be a part." ■

## PEARLS OF WISDOM



"THE DUTY OF YOUTH IS TO CHALLENGE CORRUPTION."  
KURT COBAIN  
American musician



"TO FIND JOY IN WORK IS TO DISCOVER THE FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH."  
PEARL S. BUCK  
American writer and novelist

"THERE ARE THREE PERIODS IN LIFE: YOUTH, MIDDLE AGE AND 'HOW WELL YOU LOOK.'  
NELSON ROCKEFELLER  
Vice President of the USA

