

## 1971: Another chapter ...

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"In East Pakistan [General Agha Mohammed Yahya Khan and his top generals] also planned to murder its Bengali intellectual, cultural, and political elite. They also planned to indiscriminately murder hundreds of thousands of its Hindus and drive the rest into India. And they planned to destroy its economic base to insure that it would be subordinate to West Pakistan for at least a generation to come."

The events of killing the intellectuals during the 1971 Liberation War of Bangladesh raise three particular questions concerning the perpetrators, the places, as well as manners of doing the same.

First of all, with regard to the question as to who were responsible for killing the intellectuals, Lawrence Lifschultz in his book titled, *Bangladesh: The Unfinished Revolution* depicts, "[t]he Al-Badr organisation, a fanatical religious group which operated as a paramilitary arm to the Pakistan Army in 1971, was responsible for some of the worst killings during the war, particularly of nationalist intellectuals." Correspondingly, in a report titled, *Butchery By Al-Badr*, circulated in the *Patriot*, New Delhi, on December 23, 1971 states: "when the Pakistanis were overpowered, they left the killing to the fascist Al-Badr, the armed wing of the Jamaat-e-Islami. This fascist body has already butchered about 200 leading intellectuals, doctors, professors and scientists..." Furthermore, in an interview, Mr. John Stonehouse, a British Labour M.P., stated to Press Trust of India (PTI) in New Delhi on December 20, 1971 that, 'during his visit to Dacca yesterday (December 19), he got the names of these Pakistani army officers who organised the murders, and members of Al-Badr, an extremist Muslim group, who carried out these heinous crimes [of killing of intellectuals] just before the surrender of Pakistani forces in Dacca.'

Secondly, a report titled, *Choranter Chanchollokor Dolil*, published in the daily *Purbadesh* on December 22, 1971 depicts a secret meeting held in Mohammadpur, Dhaka on 9 August 1971 which results in killing hundreds of intellectuals in different places including Dhaka. A book titled *Ekattorer Ghatok Dalalra Ke Kothay*, reveals that the perpetrators used to abduct the intellectuals blindfolded who were brought at the Al-Badr headquarters set up at the Mohammadpur Physical Training College and butchered at the nearby mass graves. It has been evident that the Mohammadpur Physical Training Institute was a "Torture Camp" where most of the targeted intellectuals were brought after being picked up blindfolded from their home.

Finally, it is commonly known to the people that the intellectuals of Bangladesh were killed to be dumped at the riverside brickfield. More specifically, the main spots of execution in Dhaka city were the marshy land at Rayerbazar near Mohammadpur and another at Mirpur in an extremely barbaric manner. It has mostly been heard that they were either shot in the head or buried alive with their hands tied back. Some had their eyes plucked off too.

Data shows that nearly 80 percent of the intellectuals of Dhaka were killed and many of the distorted corpses were barely recognisable. However, there are some other places like "the Thataribazar killing field, *Bosila Etakhola* (now Kaderabad housing in Mohammadpur), *Shirnirtek* killing field, *Lohar Bridge* killing field at Gabtali (beside Amin Bazaar bridge), several mass graves in Mohammadpur, the killing field in *Rokeya Hall* of Dhaka University, the mass grave in *Adabor* and the killing field in *Sharengbari* in Mirpur which have no mark or sign of identification." As a matter of fact, we typically know about *Rayerbazar* and *Mirpur Boddho*

civil servants and so on were targeted mainly as "national group". These cases also indicate that they were killed with an intention to destroy the Bengali national group as they were the people who used to promote and seed the spirit of nationalism in the heart of the Bengalis through various social and cultural activities.

The strategy of intellectual killings is not new in case of genocides as it is seen that it happened during Armenian Genocide, WWII, as well as Cambodian genocide. In 1971, the Bengali intellectuals were massacred just because they were the bearers of the nation's intellect and conscience of our nation.



Rayer Bazar killing fields.

PHOTO: AFTAB AHMED

*Bhumi* as intellectuals killing ground.

Just like other genocides around the world, the Bengali intellectuals were killed for the purpose of making Bangladesh a talentless State. In the case of the International Crimes Tribunal of Bangladesh (ICT-BD) concerning *Ashrafuzzaman* and *Chowdhury Mueen Uddin* (ICT-BD (I) of 2013), *Ali Ahsan Muhammad Mujahid* (ICT-BD (IV) of 2012), and *Motiur Rahman Nizami* (ICT-BD (III) of 2011), it has already been iterated and proved that the persons of diverse professions namely professors, journalists, activists, doctors, artists, writers, engineers,

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