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THIRD EDITION

VOLUME 2

MODERN INDIA, PAKISTAN, AND BANGLADESH

Introduction to Asian Civilizations

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*Edited by Rachel Fell McDermott, Leonard A. Gordon,
Ainslie T. Embree, Frances W. Pritchett, and Dennis Dalton*



COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS
NEW YORK

Columbia University Press
Publishers Since 1893
New York Chichester, West Sussex
cup.columbia.edu

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Sources of Indian tradition / edited by Rachel Fell McDermott ... [et al.]. — 3rd ed.
p. cm. — (Introduction to Asian civilizations)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-0-231-13830-7 (v. 2 : cloth : alk. paper) — ISBN 978-0-231-51092-9 (electronic)
1. India—Civilization—Sources. 2. Pakistan—Civilization—Sources. 3. Bangladesh—
Civilization—Sources. 4. India—History—Sources. 5. Pakistan—History—Sources.
6. Bangladesh—History—Sources. I. McDermott, Rachel Fell.
DS423.S64 2013
954—dc23 2011038816



Columbia University Press books are printed on permanent and durable acid-free paper.
This book was printed on paper with recycled content.
Printed in the United States of America
c 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

COVER ART: Album/Art Resource, NY
COVER DESIGN: Milenda Nan Ok Lee

References to Internet Web sites (URLs) were accurate at the time of writing. Neither the author
nor Columbia University Press is responsible for URLs that may have expired or changed since
the manuscript was prepared.

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The third major aspect of Pakistani identity pertains to whether the military will sustain its role as the dominant political player. Some political analysts argue that criticism of the military top brass in the wake of the 2007 street protests has minimized the chances of the military returning to power. Others argue that the military has entrenched itself in the state system and the economy to such an extent that it can dominate policy-making from the sidelines.

Until the civilian leadership creates a credible and coherent civilian alternative to the military's influential role, and until Pakistan's internal security problems and external tensions can be eased, the military will retain the potential to manipulate, through direct or indirect means, the political life of the country.



Chapter 10

BANGLADESH

INDEPENDENCE AND CONTROVERSIES OVER THE FRUITS OF FREEDOM

TWO NATIONAL SONGS

We begin this chapter with two songs beloved in Bangladesh. The first, the Bangladeshi national anthem, "Āmār Sonār Bānglā" ("My Golden Bengal"), consists of several lines of a poem by Rabindranath Tagore, who spent eleven years of his life (1890–1901) in what is now the Kushtia District of Bangladesh, managing his father's estates in Shilaidaha. During this period he traveled the region widely and wrote numerous short stories and poems set in its lush, riverine countryside. The poem excerpted for the national anthem was written in 1906, during the agitation over the first partition of Bengal. The song was adopted as the national anthem in 1972, after Bangladesh became independent. Tagore is thus claimed and beloved by India and Bangladesh: both countries have chosen one of his songs as their national anthem.

The second, a marching song, "Cal Cal Cal" ("March on, march on, march on!"), is by Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899–1976), known as the "Bidrohī Kabi" ("Rebel Poet"), who spent his active literary life in the western parts of Bengal in the 1920s and 1930s. He wrote nearly three thousand songs on themes of patriotism, romantic love, the evils of bigotry and fundamentalism, and Hindu–Muslim harmony (he married a Hindu woman, and in addition to songs on Islamic devotional practices wrote many devotional songs for Hindu deities). He was a good friend of Tagore, a passionate anti-imperialist, and, by early 1942, a critic of the idea of partition. In 1942 he was struck with what might have been some form of Pick's disease, and lived the last thirty years of his

life without verbal or mental capacities. In 1972 Bangladesh obtained permission from the government of India to bring Nazrul to live in Dhaka, where he was made an honorary citizen and eventually the National Poet.

RABINDRANATH TAGORE: THE NATIONAL ANTHEM

Here Bengal is likened to a verdant motherland, or Ma.

My golden Bengal
I love you.
Your skies, your air
forever play in my heart
like a flute.
Oh Ma,
in spring the scent from the mango groves
intoxicates me,
thrills me.
Oh Ma,
in autumn I see
sweet smiles in the ripened fields.
What brilliance, what shade,
what tenderness, what enchantment
you spread like a cloth
at the roots of banyan trees
and along the banks of rivers.
Ma, a word from your lips
is like nectar to my ears,
thrills me.
Ma, if sadness ever darkens your face
My eyes will brim with tears.

[Rabindranath Tagore, "Āmār Sonār Bānglā."
Bengali original taken from "Virtual Bangladesh:
The National Anthem of Bangladesh,"
http://www.virtualbangladesh.com/bd_anthem.html.
Trans. R. F. McDermott.]

*KAZI NAZRUL ISLAM: "MARCH ON, MARCH ON,
MARCH ON!"*

The song reproduced here was composed in the early 1930s, became popular during the 1971 war, and is today still sung in military contexts. The "peacock throne" of the last stanza refers to the Mughals' legendary seat of power, a throne carried off to Persia by Nadir Shah in 1739.

March on, march on, march on!
Drum beats sound in the sky,
and the earth below is restless.
Youth of the new dawn,
march, oh march, oh march!
March on, march on, march on!

Breaking down the doors of dawn
we will usher in a reddened morning
and shatter the night of darkness;
not even the Vindhya will obstruct our path.
We shall sing of the new and the young,
bringing life to the cremation ground,
a new heart,
new strength to our arms.
March, new soldiers, listen,
tune your ears to the call to life
at the gates of death.
Break, oh break them down;
March, oh march, oh march,
March on, march on, march on!

On high a thunderbolt booms its commands:
Open up your bedrooms; come out
dressed as soldiers and martyrs;
enter the military parade.
"When will the lost empire return?
I still crave it today."
So you walk, singing melancholy songs,
tears streaming from your eyes.
No, leave behind the peacock throne;
wake up, wake up from your faint.
You see how many Persias, how many Romes, Greeces, and Russias
sank—and they all rose again.
Rise, feeble ones!
We will build a new Tajmahal from the dust.
March on, march on, march on!

[Nazrul Islam, "Cal Cal Cal." Bengali original taken from
The Poetry of Kazi Nazrul Islam in English Translation,
vol. 1, ed. Mohammad Nurul Huda (Dhaka: Nazrul
Institute, 1997), 485–486. Trans. R. F. McDermott.]

collaborators, since the army personnel could not even read the local road signs; most of these came from rightist groups, including Ghulam Azam's Jamaat-e Islami; they formed the volunteer group Al-Badar. Between March and December 1971 perhaps ten million people, 80–90 percent of them Hindus, were displaced and turned into refugees, flooding the northeastern states of India. An estimated two hundred thousand women were raped, some in army "rape camps." As for the dead, estimates vary wildly, from hundreds of thousands to three million.

The Indian government provided shelter, military training, and arms to the East Pakistan resistance. Indira Gandhi, buoyant after a landslide election victory in India in March 1971 and responding to genuine Indian expressions of support for Bengalis after the crackdown, issued statements of her "deep anguish" for the "people of Bangladesh," and in June told the Indian Parliament that India would not accept a solution to the Pakistan crisis that entailed the death of Bengali aspirations. Indian troops attacked Jessore on November 20, and by December 3 there was all-out war. Yahya appealed to the Chinese and to the United States, both of which countries gave lip service assurances of support, but within days it was clear that the Pakistani army would have to surrender. On December 16, Pakistani general A. A. K. Niazi surrendered to Indian lieutenant-general Jagjit Singh Arora, and Bangladesh was born.

December 1971 witnessed some of the worst atrocities of the war. Once it was clear that Pakistan would lose, paramilitary groups, principally the Al-Badar, the armed wing of the Jamaat, executed a calculated liquidation of more than two hundred leading Bengali intellectuals (journalists, doctors, and professors). Although to a significantly lesser degree, West Pakistani loyalists also experienced fear and death; military mémoires describe the week between December 16 and 22, when the provisional government returned to Dacca, as one of jubilant and vengeful killings by members of the Mukti Bahini. Indian army forces, however, remained until March 1972, and helped to reduce such violence.

Jahanara Imam's Wartime Diary

Some of the most moving testaments to the horror and despair of 1971 are preserved in novels, short stories, and poetry. The first excerpt below is from the published diaries of Jahanara Imam (1929–1994), who spent her life in higher education as both headmistress of a girls' school and professor in the Teachers' Training College in Dacca. Following the army crackdown on March 25, her son Rumi joined the liberation struggle. To help assuage her anxiety about his welfare, Imam kept a diary during the nine months of the war. Rumi did not return, and her husband, Shariful Alam Imam Ahmed, died after having been picked up for questioning by the Pakistani army. After Imam published her diary in 1986, she was famed as *Shahīd Janānī* ("Mother of Martyrs").

Thursday, 25th March, 1971

After the remarkable success of the Resistance Day on 23rd March, there was a shadow of gloom. Only disturbing news came from everywhere. The meetings between Yahya, Mujib and Bhutto failed to find a solution. Sheikh Mujib carried on his meetings with the President and after the meetings continued to repeat to the journalists that the talks were progressing. At the same time he asked the people to carry on with their struggle. He called upon them to build fortresses in every house.

For the last few days there have been rumours afloat that thousands of Pakistani troops were landing at Dhaka airport in plain clothes. I didn't want to believe it but still it created a sense of unease in me. Some friends telephoned from Chittagong and informed us that shiploads of weapons have arrived from West Pakistan. The Bengalee porters of the port refused to unload this cargo and built barricades on the street. To prevent them the army shot at them at random.

There is a two-day-old stubble on Rumi's unshaven face. Clutching a handful of his hair, he said: "You know Mother, the Mujib–Yahya talks are bound to fail. It is only a Pakistani ploy to gain time. They will never give us independence on a platter. We will have to win it through armed struggle."

I shuddered. "What are you talking about? The Pakistani army has got all the latest weapons. What would you fight them with?"

In an excited voice Rumi replied, "Exactly, I fully agree with you. Sheikh Mujib is going to the President's House everyday in his white car flying the black flag, but there is no progress in the talks. Meanwhile, thousands of Pakistani troops are landing in plain clothes at the airport and ships loaded with weapons are anchoring at Chittagong port. At the same time the so-called Bengalee heroes armed with bamboo staves are marching to Bangabandhu's house to salute him. After returning home they have a feast of rice and fish and take a siesta with the satisfaction of having done their duty. At the Paltan grounds, they are parading with dummy rifles. Are we still living in a land of fairy tales? There must be a limit to naivety."

"What is the solution then?"

"I don't see any, Mother."

A cold wave of fear and terror ran down my spine. "No, no, don't say that. You are saying that only because you don't support Sheikh's political moves. You hot-blooded young people are itching for a fight. Sheikh is guiding the movement in the right direction. Even if the talks with Yahya fail, the non-violent, non-cooperation movement will lead us to our goal."

"Mother, you are still living in a fool's paradise. Just look at these few facts—whatever has happened to East Pakistan is directed against the Pakistan Central Government. In normal times these would have been considered acts of high treason. The President of the country is in Dhaka but East Bengal is following

the directives of Sheikh Mujib. Offices, courts and banks do not obey the Government. They obey Sheikh. Then look at the humiliation of the Pakistani government. Tikka Khan could not become the governor because no judge agreed to give him the oath. He had to be satisfied with the post of Martial Law Administrator. The President landed in Dhaka and there was a demonstration in front of his house. No Bengalee is selling any foodstuff to the armed forces any more. They are virtually surviving on bread and water. They even had to get food from West Pakistan by plane. In the face of acts of such defiance the Yahya government has been extremely tolerant. Don't you see why? They are only buying time. These discussions are nothing but eyewash. The Sheikh is too late. This is not the way of survival."

I was getting impatient. I said, "Go shave and take a cold shower. That will cool you down." Rumi got up to go to his room. I was quite demoralised, as if I had lost all strength. . . .

I was fast asleep. Suddenly I woke up at a very loud sound. Rumi and Jami came rushing to our room. "What's the matter?" Deafening sounds of heavy guns, the intermittent sounds of machine guns, the whistling sound of bullets filled the air. The tracer balloons brightened the sky. We all ran up to the roof. South of our house, across the playground, are the University Students' dormitories—Iqbal Hall, Mohsin Hall and a few other buildings of the University quarters. All the noise came from that direction. There were screams of anguish and heartrending cries of the victims along with the sound of weapons. We could not stay there for long because of the sparks. Rumi quickly lowered the black flag and that of independent Bangladesh.

Suddenly I remembered that Berek and Kasem were in the outhouse on the ground floor. We all rushed down. As soon as we opened the wooden door to the courtyard our Alsatian dog Mickey rushed in and started moaning pathetically and rolling on the ground. I called Berek and Kasem. They came in quickly. I told them to bring their beds and sleep in the drawing room.

Mickey refused to move out of the room. It seems that all the noise of the guns and the light of the tracer balloons had badly shaken him. Rumi lovingly patted his head and said: "Don't be afraid, Mickey. You will stay with us upstairs." But he refused to go upstairs either. He was looking for a corner. Finally he crept into a dark corner under the staircase and curled up quietly there.

I lifted the receiver. The phone was dead. Hearing Baba's voice, Rumi was holding his hands and telling him something in a whisper.

There was no sleep for the rest of the night. I went upstairs again. There was fire visible at a distance. We could still hear the sound of the different types of guns, big and small. The tracer balloons continued to inflame the sky. There were sounds of people crying for help all around. The pillars of fire were getting bigger and higher in the North, South, East, and West.

Nobody uttered a word. Rumi and Jami opened up the polythene packets and unloaded the contents into the commode, a little at a time lest it got blocked,

and then pulled the flush. Jami washed the mortars and pestles very carefully with dish-washing powder to remove the smell of chemicals.

After that, Rumi packed all his books on Marx, Engels as well as Mao Tse Tung's military writings into a polythene bag. We did not know where to keep them. We didn't want to bury them underground because it would spoil the books. Then I remembered a gap between Berek's room and the boundary wall. We threw the packets of books in there as soon as the faint light of dawn appeared on the horizon. Rumi covered the packet with a few dried fronds of palm.

Friday, 26th March, 1971

At six o'clock in the morning I heard a faint voice calling me. I ran to the window and looked out nervously. I saw Kamal Ataur Rahman, curled up under a tree in the garden. Kamal is an Honours student at the Dhaka University and stays in the Mohsin Hall. I rushed down and opened the door. Rumi and Jami helped me to bring the semi-conscious Kamal indoors. He had spent the night with a few other students in a bathroom in the Hall. Due to the bright tracer balloons he did not dare to come out at night. As soon as the morning light appeared they all left the bathroom and fled in different directions.

After some nursing and breakfast, Kamal felt a little better. We switched on the radio. After recitation of the Holy Quran only one piece of music was being played over and over again—the instrumental rendering of a popular patriotic song. At 7 o'clock in the morning I went to our neighbor, Dr. A. K. Khan's place to use their telephone but it was also dead. Gradually some more faces appeared at the windows of our neighborhood. There was terror on every face. Everybody had spent the night awake and nobody knew what was really happening. All the telephones were dead. . . .

At 9 o'clock, the instrumental music suddenly stopped and a harsh voice was heard on the radio. Curfew was announced all over the city until further orders. People were also reminded of the punishment for violating curfew. Martial law was announced and all the articles of the martial law were read out. The announcements were made in Urdu first and then in English. The pronunciation, style and accent betrayed the Army background of the announcer. Probably the military government could not find any more suitable person at this time.

Curfew for an indefinite period! Even without curfew nobody would dare to go out amidst the shootings and firings. There was no end to the sound of the gun shots. The pillars of fire were getting bigger and bigger and now we could see them from our windows. The dark smoke covered a large part of the bright blue sky over the city.

Mickey continued his moaning all morning. His Alsatian nature had been changed by the sound of non-stop gun-shots. We all in turn tried to cheer him up and feed him but to no avail. . . .

Just before evening the electricity went off. Our cup of misery was full to the brim. There was some respite in the sound of gun shots. Mickey also appeared

somewhat more composed. He went out and sat on his favorite wooden box in the left of the courtyard. He also ate some food.

I took out some candles and lit them. I placed them at different places on the ground floor and the top floor. Barek and Kasem have stayed indoors the whole of today. In the evening I told them to bring their beds into the guest room and asked them not to go out into the courtyard at night. Gratefully, they brought their beds inside. I felt as if we were all sitting in Noah's Ark. . . .

It is hard to get the BBC. . . . All India Radio has so far only said that there are troops on the streets in Dhaka and nothing more. Dhaka TV station is closed. There was nothing to do and so we had early dinner. As we were leaving the dining room, Rumi suddenly remarked: "Mickey is rather quiet. Looks like he has finally overcome the shock."

Jami said: "We should bring him inside."

We opened the door and went to the courtyard. In the flickering candlelight we saw Mickey lying in the courtyard. He was dead.

Saturday, 27th March, 1971

The sound of gun shots, pillars of fire and clouds of smoke kept us awake last night also. There was some relief in the morning. The noise stopped for a little while. People started peeping out of their doors. Barek and Kasem opened the main door and stepped out. Soon they ran back and said: "Madam, there are people and traffic on the road."

I was surprised because there had been no announcement of lifting of the curfew in the radio. It is 7:30 now. I quickly raised the volume of the radio and went to my room to change.

At 8:30 after breakfast as soon as the lifting of the curfew was announced on the radio, Rumi and I went out in the car. Kamal left for his brother's place. Jami stayed home with his grandfather. Sharif said, "I will take a rickshaw and go to Banka's place."

I suggested, "Rumi, let's go to Mother's place first and then to the hospital."

Rumi said, "Mother, I will need the car for a couple of hours."

"Okay, but before that let us finish the important errands."

Near the vegetable and fruit market, Rumi suddenly stepped on the brake pedal and the car stopped with a screech. He cried out: "Oh my God!"

We found the entire market burnt to ashes. Coils of smoke were still rising from the glowing embers. I screamed: "Look! Look! There are charred human bodies!"

Rumi switched on the ignition and pressed the accelerator. He said, "Mother, don't look there." He took a turn to the right toward Mirpur. . . .

Before entering the hospital Rumi again cried out: "Oh God!" and stopped the car. The Shaheed Minar was razed to the ground. All the pillars had been pounded with heavy guns. There were tears in my eyes. What had they done? They had desecrated the Martyr's memorial that was raised in memory of the

students who were killed during the Bengali Language movement in 1952. There were troops guarding the area with combat helmets on their heads covered with net. I whispered to Rumi: "Let's move. There isn't much time."

After parking the car we ran along the long corridor of the hospital. It was crowded. Some had come with their injured friends and relations, some in search of their near and dear ones. Many people had taken shelter in the Hospital corridor. As we were climbing the stairs we saw Anisa Begum, widow of Professor Hai of the Bangalee Department; her daughter Haseen Jahan; her elder brother with his wife and others. They were all standing in the corridor. Anisa and Haseen Jahan embraced me and started weeping. Prof. Hai had died in a train accident a few years ago, but his family was allowed to stay in the university quarters in a flat in building No. 34 besides the Shaheed Minar. Haseen Jahan in a sobbing voice said: "Aunty, soldiers entered our building and killed Professor Moniruzzaman. Professor Jotirmoy is badly injured."

I was shocked. I asked, "Is it Professor Moniruzzaman of the Bengalee Department?"

"No, he was from the Department of Statistics. There is blood everywhere in our building, Aunty." . . .

As we entered our house . . . Sharif brought some news about the events of the last two nights. . . . The University Cafeteria which has traditionally been the centre of student politics is no longer there. The owner Modhu has been shot dead and the canteen has been burnt. Besides Prof. Moniruzzaman of the Statistics Department, many other professors have been killed, including Dr. G. C. Dev, Dr. F. R. Khan, Dr. A. Muktadir. The Calcutta radio announced the deaths of Prof. Nilima Ibrahim and Begum Sufia Kamal. When I heard it could not check my tears. . . .

I felt dizzy. I went upstairs and lay down. Tears rolled down my cheeks. After a little while Rumi came and sat near me. He held my hand and said, "You don't even have the whole picture, Mother."

I looked at him and asked: "What do you mean?"

"I have visited only a few places and talked to some people. Nobody has the complete picture. I am trying to piece together all the information and it will be quite some time before we have the composite picture. I suspect that the situation is much more horrifying and gruesome than it looks."

I cried out aloud. In a choked voice I said, "I don't want to know any more. Whatever I have known so far is breaking my heart. Oh God! What curse have you brought upon us? Are they human beings or beasts?"

"They are worse than beasts, Mother. They won't have a place even in Hell for what they have done."

[From Jahanara Imam, *Ekatteer Dinguli* (lit. "The Days of Seventy-One"), trans. Mustafizur Rahman as *Of Blood and Fire* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1989), 36-48.]