

# Faridpur Genocide 1971: An Analytical Study on Sree Angan Ashram's Massacre

**Md. Enayet Hossen**

Lecturer, Bangladesh and Liberation War Studies, Noakhali Science and Technology University,  
Noakhali, Bangladesh.

## Abstract

During Bangladesh's 1971 liberation war, three million defenseless civilians were mass-murdered. The crimes of Pakistani armies reach outside of the capital city within a short period. However, with the assistance of their local allies, the Pakistani occupation army invaded Sree Angan Ashram on April 21, 1971. In the history of the Faridpur Liberation War, it was the first invasion and attack. The eight monks of the Ashram were savagely murdered, and their belongings were taken. The purpose of this study is to investigate the question of why the Pakistani army visited Sree Angan Ashram. What was the purpose of their intended attack on Sanyasis of Hindu descent? This dissertation focuses on examining the nature of Faridpur's genocide in the Sree Angan Ashram. However, the results of this qualitative analysis indicate that the Hindu population was primarily targeted due to their religious convictions, which are pro-Indian and anti-Islam.

**Keywords:** Genocide, liberation war, perpetrator, Hindu minorities, ashram, persecution.

## Introduction

Torture and genocide are two horrific aspects of Bangladesh's liberation war of 1971. Because of their race and religion, a large number of victims were targeted. Three million people were slain in the nine-month conflict by Pakistani forces working with local collaborators. Commencing on March 25, 1971, this slaughter quickly spread to remote areas. Faridpur, in the province's center and 85 miles west of Dacca by road and ferry, was only moderately damaged physically by the army's April attack, in comparison to certain other cities in East Pakistan. An effort to suppress the Bengali autonomy movement was launched on March 25 and included the attack (Sydney H. Schanberge, 1971)<sup>[1]</sup>. To identify the property of the minority, the Pakistani Army painted large yellow "H"s on the Hindu stores that were marked for burning or damaging. Hindus were mostly targeted because of their pro-Indian and anti-Islamic religious beliefs. Furthermore, Pakistani soldiers were led by certain local collaborators, such as Rajakar, Al-Badar, and Bihari, to raid and plunder minority properties. The first genocide took place in Faridpur at the Sree Anganan Temple with the assistance of these local collaborators (Rezaul Karim Bipul, 2015)<sup>[2]</sup>. Eight monks were killed and the Sree Angan Temple's belongings were looted by the Pakistani army when they first arrived in Faridpur in April 1971.

But the Pakistani Army began inciting panic in the community by setting fire to village after village in addition to carrying out death missions and rapes. What was the intention of the genocide? Were solely Hindus the targets of this campaign? What about the kids and women? Were they free or subjected to

persecution? Using current data, this article aims to address these queries. Comparable to the persecution of Jews during the Holocaust and Serb Muslims during the slaughter in Bosnia, the Hindu community was the most persecuted minority in 1971 (Shahid K. Chowdhury, 2021)<sup>[3]</sup>. There are plenty of stories about women's roles in history, from being sexually assaulted and tortured to being wiped out, but very few discuss how they fought for their freedom on the battlefield. Numerous women lost their lives.

### Methodology

This study is a qualitative approach based on secondary and primary sources. Both published and printed sources have been used in this article. Sources for this research include books on genocide theory, research papers, articles, and websites of several genocide research centers. Interviews conducted on the site with witnesses to the massacre during the Sree Angan Genocide are included, as well as several other interviews. The findings of the article have been produced from the data obtained in the content-analysis method.

### Definition of the term 'Genocide' and 'Sree Angan' Ashram's Massacre

Raphael Lemkin (1900–59), a Polish scholar, first coined the term in 1944 for his book on Nazi imperialism, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe: Laws of Occupation, Analysis of Government, Proposals of Redress* (Douglas Irvin-Erickson, 2017)<sup>[4]</sup>. Lemkin invented the term 'genocide' by combining 'genos' and 'cide'. 'genos' means race or people and 'cide' means 'to kill'.

Lemkin linked Genocide to the very sustainability of human civilization, while he propagated the necessity of the Genocide Convention to frame a law against the crime, saying, "we are lacking real moral solidarity in protecting the basic values of our civilization, life and culture"<sup>[5]</sup>. Genocide destroys this 'civilization, life and culture', thus resulting in something different from crime such as usual murder or torture. Murder or torture is associated with the destruction or security of the individuals, but genocide is associated with the destruction of the beauty of the diversity of human civilizations. In 1945 he wrote more specifically that, "Whoever, while participating in a conspiracy to destroy a national, racial, or religious group, undertakes an attack against life, liberty, or property of members of such groups is guilty of the crime of genocide."

The term Sree Angan Massacre refers to the killing of eight Bengali Hindu sanyasis at the Sree Angan monastery in Faridpur, East Pakistan, on April 21, 1971, by the Pakistani army is known as the Sree Angan genocide of Faridpur. The atrocity claimed the lives of eight sanyasis at the hands of the Pakistan Army (Abu Sayed Khan, 2013)<sup>[6]</sup>. In 1899 CE, Prabhu Jagadbandhu of the Mahanam Sampraday established Sreedham Sreeangan, also known as Sriangan, as an Ashram in Faridpur, Bangladesh. The Mahanam Sampraday's headquarters in Bangladesh is located at this ashram. Eight monks were murdered and the ashram was devastated by the Pakistani Army during the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War. Every year, there is intense religious devotion towards the celebration of Janmastami. There is a parade through the town honoring the Hindu deity Krishna. Sree Angan or Sreedham, Jagadbandhu When the Bengali calendar's "Ashar 1306" celebration of "Roth Jatra" took place, the "Jagadbandhu Shundar" founded Sree Angan. It was "Sreeram Sundar" and "Sreeram Kumarmudi" that gave the land for the Angan. There used to be a lot of "bhokto" (devotees) who visited the location daily. In order to accommodate them, the Angan has a facility. 150 devotees can stay in its about 30 rooms. There are

multiple prayer halls encircling this artificial Angan. Shoes must be removed when entering the prayer halls. Most interesting thing about the Angan premise is, that it was the “Nouka Mandir”.

### **Background of Faridpur Genocide 1971**

The crackdown on March 25, 1971, marked the beginning of Bangladesh's genocide. The Pakistani army formally began its genocide campaign in what was then East Pakistan on the fatal night of March 25, 1971, when it unleashed murder squads that massacred 7,000 defenseless, unarmed Bengalis in a single night with great savagery. The Awami League garnered the lion's share of votes and triumphed handily throughout Bengali territory in the December 1970 national elections in Pakistan. The West Pakistani military generals, who had previously held the position of power, decided on February 22, 1971, to suppress the Awami League and those who supported it. From the beginning, it was understood that a genocide campaign would be required to eliminate the threat posed by Bengalis demanding fundamental democratic and human rights: "Kill three million of them," declared President Yahya Khan during a conference in February, "and the rest will eat out of our hands (Huda, T., 2019)."<sup>7</sup>

As the backbone of the resistance movement, the instructors and students at Dhaka University were the main targets of Operation Searchlight, with hundreds of them killed. Young boys were identified as the group the Pakistani army was most likely to recruit for the resistance. Corpses of young men would be discovered in the morning outside army camps, floating down rivers, or in fields.

According to British journalist Anthony Mascarenhas, who was first in the world media to report on the genocide against the Bengalis, a Pakistani army major told him, "This is a conflict between the pure and the impure... There are people here who identify as Muslims and may even have Muslim names. However, in their core, they are Hindu. Now, we're sorting them out. The people that remain will be true Muslims. Even Urdu will be taught to them by us." Has Hindu's religious identity turned into a nightmare? In 1971, being a Hindu was practically a felony ( Hasan, M., 2010).<sup>8</sup> In the genocide, the Hindu population was a particular target. Due to their vulnerability, a sizable number of Hindus sought safety as refugees in India. Those who were unable to flee the country were subjected to violence. They suffered torture, rape, and death . Hindu men used to wear lungis and topis instead of dhotis, while women would wipe the redness off their heads. Through Char Kalima (Four Kalima), the military used to check who was Muslim and who was Hindu. Muslims or Hindus were occasionally made to strip off in order to undergo circumcision!<sup>[9]</sup> Anthony Mascarenhas was informed by a soldier that an elderly man who had a beard and started acting like a devout Muslim had been captured. He even referred to himself as Abdul Mannan. However, after we checked his circumcision, the game was over." The Hindu community was pro-Indian to the ruling class and elite of Pakistan. Therefore, the attack was planned to maintain the ideology and maintain the alleged unity of Pakistan's two sides (Afsan Chowdhury, 2020)<sup>[10]</sup>. The violence against the Hindu community is exacerbated by this ambition and belief. According to Anthony Mascarenhas, the Hindus were being hunted down. The ruling class thought that the Hindus were pro-India. He believed that the genocide was a component of the Pakistani elite's exploitation. They deliberately killed Hindus in an attempt to resolve the political unrest in East Pakistan ( Anthony Mascarenhas, 1971)<sup>[11]</sup>. Following the crackdown on March 25, a significant number of Hindus began to flee the state as they realized they were among the primary targets of the genocide. While traveling to India, several of them perished. According to the census, Ninety-five lakh Hindus

lived in East Pakistan in 1961. After the independence in 1974, about 7,14,780,00 people lived there in India. About 6,10,39,000 Muslims lived there in total at that time. Furthermore, 96 lakh 63 thousand people identified as Hindus. That indicates that the genocide claimed the lives of 42.17% of the 13.5% of people who lived. Hence, it is safe to say that religion had a significant impact on the genocide [12]. The intensity of Hindu victims will increase if the issue of refugees is taken into consideration.

However, Contemporary researches suggest that about 60% of the refugees were Hindus. It can be assumed that at least 6 million Hindus became refugees in India. In other words, the Hindu population in occupied Bangladesh was only 37 lakhs. The results of the case study show that about 42.17% of Hindus had lost their lives in the genocide. In other words, out of 36 lakh Hindus in the occupied territory, about 12 lakh Hindus had lost their lives. About one-third of the Hindus became a victim of the genocide in 1971. According to the census of 1961, the Hindu population in East Pakistan was 18.5%. In the first census conducted after independence (in 1974), it was supposed to be 13.2 million Hindus (according to the percentage of the earlier census). But the actual number of the Hindu population stands at 96 lakh 50 thousand, which highlights a decrease in the percentage. This is one of the implications of the planned genocide towards the Hindu community. The number of Hindus in the country has reduced to 13.5%. However, Banglapedia, published by the Asiatic Society, suggests emigration as a reason for this declination. ...Due to the oppressive measures of the Pakistani government and especially the atrocities committed by the Pakistani army during the Liberation War in 1971, many Hindus decided to migrate to India ( Sirajul Islam, “et al.” 2013)[13].

Following the 25 March Operation Searchlight, the Pakistani army began its killing mission in the village regions. On April 21, 1971, the Pakistani army reached Faridpur through Goalanda Ghat with the help of local collaborators. The Rajakars and Albadars (local anti-freedom fighters) built a camp and welcomed them. The martyrs and saints of Sri Angan claimed that in the early hours of April 21, during the liberation war, the Pakistani army positioned itself at the intersection of Rajbari Road and Goalanda Ghat. One by one, they began firing rounds towards the city from that point on. Later that night, Gowalchamat entered the city and slaughtered eight sadhus of the Mahanam sect in Sriangan as they were chanting. The first martyrs were the eight monks who left their homes forever.

But it is evident from this study that, the main reason for this decline is the systematic persecution of Bengali Hindu. Some incidence is to be mentioned. The main intention of the genocidal events of Jandi massacre, a village in Faridpur, was the persecution of Hindus. Though both Hindu and Muslims used to live in the village, only the Hindu community was targeted and persecuted in the event ( Masud Rana, 2019)[14]. The intention of this genocide was systematic persecution of Hindus.

### **Faridpur genocide: Impact on Sree Angan Ashram**

There was virtually no conflict between Muslims and Hindus in Faridpur before the arrival of the army, and this situation was similar across East Pakistan. After the arrival of the army, a friction between Hindus and Muslim was created. After leaving Dhaka, they proceeded to Faridpur by crossing the Padma at Goalundo Ghat on 21 April 1971[15]. A dawn raid on Goalanda ghat in Faridpur was carried out by Pakistani invasion forces on April 21. After a massive skirmish with the freedom fighters, the invaders occupied Goland Ghat about 9 am. They next went through the Goalchamat area to enter

Faridpur. In the meantime, a helicopter carrying the Pakistani army touched down in Faridpur. Sri Angan Math was having kirtan while they were passing through Goalchamat.

As they entered Faridpur city in the evening, they went through Goalchamat. At this juncture, they were halted by their Bihari accomplice at the Sree Angan Ashram. With the assistance of accomplices from Bihari, the Pakistan Army surrounded the ashram and made its way into the compound. Some of the resident sanyasis left the ashram as soon as they heard of their presence. However, nine sanyasis stayed at the ashram. In the ashram's prayer hall, the sanyasis were doing kirtan at that moment. Meanwhile, the monks were engrossed in kirtan when the Pakistani invaders and Biharis led by Captain Jamshed came in front of the monastery. The Pakistani invaders ordered the chanting saints as 'Bahar mein ao'. But the saints did not pay attention to that and continued to chant. Kirtan songs were being sung in the prayer meeting of the temple. In the ashram's prayer hall, the sanyasis were doing kirtan at that moment. Chants from the kirtan included "Jaya Jagadabandhu Hari! Jagadabandhu Har Jaya Jaya! ". It's said that the slogans were misinterpreted as "Jai Bangabandhu" by the Pakistani army. The Bihari collaborators too convinced them that the sanyasis were praying for victory for Sheikh Mujibur Rahman<sup>[16]</sup>.

Furthermore, under the elephant apple tree in the ashram grounds, in front of the temple, the Pakistani forces dragged the sanyasis as they approached the prayer hall. Sevayat Haripriya Brahmachari, one of the ashram's nine residents, miraculously lived that day. By avoiding the assassins' gaze, this 82-year-old saint managed to survive. The remaining eight were forced to form a line in front of the already-positioned Pakistani soldiers. Twelve rounds were fired one after the other, according to eyewitness testimonies. As they died, the sanyasis shouted "Jaya Jagadabandhu Hari"<sup>[17]</sup>. It was the first genocide in the history of Faridpur happened at the Sree Angan ashram of Prabhu Jagat Bandhu Brahmachari. All of these 8 monks were the first martyrs of Faridpur. Sevayat Haripriya Brahmachari, who is the only surviving person of this genocidal event told me while giving interview, 'They killed eight sannyasis right in front of my eyes. By hiding between trees and brownia flowers, I managed to survive. We don't hurt anybody, we don't hurt anybody. Why did they kill us?'

**Table 1<sup>18</sup>: Following are the 8 monks who were killed by Pakistani army in brushfire:**

Name	Age	Gender
1. Kirtanbrato Brahmachari	55	Male
2. Nidanbandhu Brahmachari	45	Male
3. Andhakanai Brahmachari	65	Male
4. Bandhudas Brahmachari	50	Male
5. Khitibandhu Brahmachari	45	Male
6. Gourobandhu Brahmachari	40	Male
7. Chirobandhu Brahmachari	22	Male
8. Robibandhu Brahmachari	50	Male

That same day (April 21), in the early evening, nine of us sadhus were performing Namakirtan as usual, according to Haripriya Brahmachari, who amazingly survived from the massacre. We heard an unexpected sound of gunfire and cannon. We continued the kirtan without pausing for even a second. Then the soldiers came inside our kirtan ashram. They had some Biharis and Bengalis with them. I took

cover behind the house's stairway. I then took a step back and hid behind a brownie bush a few yards away. I witnessed the military murdering eight Lord devotees in front of my eyes when they were arranged in a line. Father, I was shaking with fear. I didn't scream because I thought it would end my life if they heard the sound. The dead remains were then brought to the Chalta floor, which is currently the location of the saints' tombs. There was blood everywhere. Bloodstains were present. After plundering the ashram, they departed. In the ashram, cash and valuables were looted by the military and their Bihari accomplices. A truck belonging to the Faridpur Municipality removed the bodies early the following day. Five days later, the spire of the shrine was demolished by the Pakistani army utilizing dynamite.

Why did the Pakistani army come to this monastery? And what was their intention? Manos Bandhu Brahmachari who is currently serving as main Sebayet at Sree Angan Ashram, replied in one of his interviews "On 21 April 1971, Pakistani army attacked Sree Angan ashram in the evening. First, It is true that Hindus were especially targeted in the liberation war of Bangladesh. As it is a Temple of Hindu Minorities, they were attacked intentionally. Second, the chanting song "Joy Jagat Bandhu" was misguided to the Pakistani army as "Joy Bangabandhu" by the local collaborators that led them to conduct such atrocities."<sup>19</sup> Manosbandhu Brahmachari Claims, at first the Pakistani army introduced communal conflict massively in our country. However, he added that the sanyasis who were chanting songs in the prayer hall thought not to leave offering prayer even if they might be killed. Because they thought that they must have to leave this world one day. Then eight monks were ordered to stand in a line and all of them were killed brutally.

According to Sydney H. Schanberg, in Faridpur, most of the shops are still physically intact, despite the fact that many of them, mostly Hindu-owned, have been destroyed. However, all other facets of life have been completely destroyed, and the town's anguish, despair, and anxiety are common to almost every community in this invaded province home to 75 million people. When the army entered Faridpur on April 21, the elderly woman and her 84-year-old husband fled to Bodidangi, a Hindu village located approximately three miles away, in search of safety. The army attacked Bodi Dangi the following day, and according to trustworthy local reports, up to 300 Hindus were killed. Muslims who were sympathetic to Hindus were also plundered and set fire to Hindu homes by the army, who threatened to murder them if they did not attack Hindus. As a result, reports indicate that 90% of the Hindu homes in the vicinity of Faridpur were destroyed by fire. An undetermined number of Faridpur's 10,000 Hindus have been killed and others have fled across the border to predominantly Hindu India.

Hindu residents were alarmed by the savage murders that occurred on the first day of Pakistani operations. Many of them moved out of town into rural areas<sup>[20]</sup>. The holy relic of Prabhu Jagadabandhu was found and taken to India in a casket by two surviving sanyasis, Amar Bandhu and Haripriya Brahmachari. Rabindranath Trivedi claims that a few days before the Pakistani Armed Forces' surrender on December 16, 1971, Captain Jamshed, who ordered the killing and the ashram's subsequent degradation and destruction, committed suicide in front of Lord Jagadabandhu Sundar's shrine ( Rabindra Trivedi, 2007)<sup>[21]</sup>.According to reports, the accomplices buried him in the Sree Angan enclosure, close to the Shiva temple's pond. According to freedom fighter Prabodh Kumar Sarkar, Captain Jamshed had become a madman before his death. Following Bangladesh's independence, the

Sanyasis went back to the ashram. They reconstructed the temple that was damaged and restored the holy relic. In this order, new sanyasis were progressively started.

### **Nature of Sree Angan (Ashram) temple's Genocide:**

The widely accepted definitions do not arbitrate the genocide in Bangladesh. However, this killing in Faridpur's Sree Angan Ashram could be proven to be genocide with the right theoretical analysis. Before starting this definitional study, it is vital to clarify two key elements related to definitions of genocide: the "group identity" of the targets and the "intent" of the perpetrators.

The attempt to exterminate a group of people or individual members of the group who were specifically chosen for their identity is one of genocide's most important features.<sup>22</sup> Thus, "intent" and "group identity" are crucial concepts in genocide analysis. The Bangalis and the Hindus were the two main groups that the perpetrators targeted. The Bangalis are a distinct ethnic group that differs from the peoples of West Pakistan in terms of culinary habits, attire, literature, culture, folklore, music, and the arts. Their physical characteristics and mixed-breed ethnicity set them apart from West Pakistanis. The largest minority community in East Pakistan, the Hindus, were another major target of the pro-Pakistan perpetrators. According to Frank Robert Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn, Genocide is a form of one-sided mass killing in which a state or other authority intends to destroy a group as that group and membership in it are defined by the perpetrator (Frank Chalk, "et al.", 1990)<sup>[23]</sup>. According to this definition the massacre of Faridpur Sree Angan Ashram was conducted by the Pakistani army and its local collaborators to completely eradicate the particular Hindu minorities group. It is worth mentioning that, Helen Fein mentioned the massacre of Bangladesh, especially the killing of Bangali Hindus as genocide <sup>[24]</sup>.

Additionally, from the above discussion, it is true that the nature of atrocities at the Sree Angan Ashram was one-sided. In this genocide, the Hindus were targeted intentionally by the local collaborators of the Pakistani army. The Pakistani army and its local collaborators firstly killed the Hindus of this monastery. However, they destroyed all the Hindu shops in the city on the following days.

### **Conclusion:**

Sree Angan Ashram's genocide is one of the significant events in the history of the liberation war of Bangladesh. The Pakistani occupation army conducted atrocities on the ashram's monks intending to eradicate the anti-Islamic Hindu minorities. However, it is defined by experts that if a particular group or member of the groups is killed or eradicated intentionally it is genocide. The Pakistani army's first targeted attack on Faridpur's Hindu minorities was in the Ashram. It helps to accelerate the recognition of Bangladesh's genocide worldwide. Additionally, the massacre of Sree Angan Ashram reminds us of the atrocities of Pakistani Armies during the liberation war of Bangladesh. The most important thing is that after the a<sup>25</sup>trrocities, other Hindus of the Faridpur city were attacked by the army and its local collaborators. The ashram administration built a memorial in the grounds of Sree Angan in 1996. For the eight sanyasis who passed away, eight black plaques were made. The plaques are 95 centimeters tall with a square base that is 40 square centimeters in size. They resemble truncated pyramids.[6] In Kolkata, India's Sree Sree Mahanam Angan, a memorial has also been built. In the memorial, eight slabs of engraved marble bear the names of eight Sanyasis.

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