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CREATION OF BANGLADESH BY SRINATH
RAGHAVAN**

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Review

A deeply impressive book at many levels: in the depth of its research (conducted in more than a dozen archives spread across four continents), in the acuity of its analyses, and in the power of its prose. The thematic scope is as striking as its spatial scale, with the author exploring and uncovering the military, political, economic, and cultural dimensions of the 1971 conflict. Through this magnificent work of scholarship, Srinath Raghavan has confirmed his standing as the leading historian of his generation. (Ramachandra Guha, author of *India After Gandhi*)

Raghavan has written a meticulously researched and complex historical narrative that moves at a fast clip and brings a global perspective to what is all too often seen as a regional conflict: the Bangladesh independence war of 1971. It is sure to spark fruitful debate on South Asian history, as well as on contemporary historiography. (Kaiser Haq, author of *Published in the Streets of Dhaka*)

The consequences of one of the last century's defining conflicts are still with us, and Raghavan brilliantly provides the definitive account of how high-level diplomacy involving the superpowers, India, Pakistan, and China shaped its outcome. (Stephen P. Cohen, author of *The Future of Pakistan*)

Wonderfully written and deeply researched, Raghavan's book will become the standard account of India's 1971 war with Pakistan and the emergence of Bangladesh. In a time when South Asia is edging to the forefront of world affairs, everyone interested in international politics should consult this superb interpretation. (O.A. Westad, author of *Restless Empire: China and the World since 1750*)

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The broader perspective is one of the things that makes the book unusual. Many of the principal actors of 1971--military men, diplomats, bureaucrats and politicians--have penned personal memoirs. Archives in various nations have been released. Professional historians have written reams. But nobody has explored 1971 and the events that led up to it across so many dimensions...This is a splendidly researched book, which presents a logical well-argued case for revisiting the myths surrounding the birth of Bangladesh. (Devangshu Datta Business Standard 2013-10-18)

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Raghavan's book on the Bangladesh War of 1971 underscores the point that the famous Indian victory was as much a feat of Indian arms as that of a favorable global conjuncture that had been created through diplomacy, as well as the contemporary great power dynamics involving the U.S., USSR, China and India, along with the usual dash of contingent developments that often shape historical events...From the point of view of the Indian approach to the crisis, Raghavan breaks new ground by the use of archival material made available only recently, such as the papers of the Ministry of External Affairs at the National Archives, or the papers of policy makers such as P.N. Haksar, R.K. Nehru, T.N. Kaul, T.T. Krishnamachari and Jayaprakash Narayan at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library. Of course, given his emphasis on describing the global dimensions of the Bangladesh event, Raghavan has made full use of the archives of the erstwhile German Democratic Republic, of Russia, U.K., Canada, and papers of leaders such as Richard Nixon or organizations like Oxfam, World Bank and the United Nations. The result is that he is able to put to rest some of the abiding myths surrounding the intervention. (Manoj Joshi The Hindu 2013-12-09)

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The war of 1971 was the most significant geopolitical event in the Indian subcontinent since its partition in 1947. At one swoop, it led to the creation of Bangladesh, and it tilted the balance of power between India and Pakistan steeply in favor of India. The Line of Control in Kashmir, the nuclearization of India and Pakistan, the conflicts in Siachen Glacier and Kargil, the insurgency in Kashmir, the political travails of Bangladesh--all can be traced back to the intense nine months in 1971.

Against the grain of received wisdom, Srinath Raghavan contends that far from being a predestined event, the creation of Bangladesh was the product of conjuncture and contingency, choice and chance. The breakup of Pakistan and the emergence of Bangladesh can be understood only in a wider international context of the period: decolonization, the Cold War, and incipient globalization. In a narrative populated by the likes of Nixon, Kissinger, Zhou Enlai, Indira Gandhi, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Tariq Ali, George Harrison, Ravi Shankar, and Bob Dylan, Raghavan vividly portrays the stellar international cast that shaped the origins and outcome of the Bangladesh crisis.

This strikingly original history uses the example of 1971 to open a window to the nature of international humanitarian crises, their management, and their unintended outcomes.

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The Archives Speak

By not me

"1971" is a fascinating diplomatic history of the 1971 India/Pakistan war and the creation of Bangladesh. The book is based on research in the archives of several countries (though not of Pakistan's, which remain closed). New information is disclosed, and new lines of interpretation are put forward. It's a major work of scholarship.

American readers will be interested in (and perhaps horrified by) the book's demolition of the faux-realism of Nixon and Kissinger. They were convinced that other countries saw the crisis as a test of America's commitment to an ally (Pakistan); accordingly, they applied crude pressure tactics against India and tried to draw China into the war on Pakistan's side. In reality, the world saw the crisis as a regional conflict brought on by the Pakistani Army's atrocities in East Pakistan. To the surprise of Washington, China was interested in improving relations with India, not in going to war with it; and American threats against New Delhi only prompted India to speed up its military campaign in East Pakistan. The result was a debacle: the war ended with America estranged from the winner (India) and tarnished by its association with the loser (the genocidal regime in Islamabad). If statesmen could be sued for diplomatic malpractice, Nixon and Kissinger would have needed good lawyers. Of course, Americans soon forgot how their government had behaved in 1971. But when I lived in Chennai in 1999-2002, Indians still remembered how Nixon tried to intimidate them by sending the USS Enterprise into the Bay of Bengal in 1971. Indians have long memories.

In short, "1971" is great political history. Any student of modern South Asian history would love it. I took off one star only because large sections of the book consist of little more than quotes from official memoranda and cables. These are strung together to support the narrative, but the book would have been richer if they had been fleshed out with more analysis and biographic color.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

A solid piece of work.

By Kafishna

I selected the book mostly for its subtitle. I was interested to see how creation of Bangladesh was a sign of systemic shift in international politics and how non-linear it was--the total affair's beginning to end, as opposed to the conditioned belief of millions in Bangladesh/India/Pakistan that it was a Sub-continental affair, and especially an India-Pakistan affair. First, a disclaimer: I am no scholar, just a reader. My comments may appear non-kosher to the purists and hardcore buffs.

Anyway, I find the book very enjoyable and when someone outside of academic and professional arena finds a book on international politics so enjoyable, I think the credit lies with the author's capacity to write. It is an excellent book. The individual rhythm of world powers and their dynamic interactions vis-a-vis 1971 Bangladesh crisis read like a movie script. Author pretty much annotated every paragraph and his research is impressive. What got me going is the superb narrative style, where each chapter ends with the expectation about the subsequent scenario. It also touches on several key factors that forces one to ask 'What if.....? The thesis of the epilogue is very moving, observing how close Bangladesh was not to be born. One thing I wish the author could touch upon: how much of the creation of Bangladesh is a result of personal blunders and arrogance of extremely few powerful people. I highly recommend the book and hope the author considers a translated version to reach the wider audience.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Excellent expose of the bloody 1971 birth of Bangladesh

By Paul Lawrence

This book is an excellent work. The author Srinath Raghavan must have pored over many many volumes of diplomatic reports and the like to produce this book. Heavily laden with notations and massively infused with quotations the book looks at the 1971 birth of Bangladesh. It delves back into the history of the region and concisely brings into focus a range of issues. Laying out the chronology of this book must have taken the patience of Job and outside of the quotations the author is (somewhat refreshingly) brave enough to say what he means and mean what he says. The author is certainly not out to curry favour with anyone as he skewers quite a number of people on all sides of the equation. Not only that but the immediacy of how he writes makes you feel you are in the room with the protagonists. He conveys emotion and tension brilliantly throughout.

As the book moves onto the meat and potatoes of the crisis and into the combat phase he retains the focus on the political sphere. This is about the 1971 creation of Bangladesh, not a military history. The inexorable march towards fuller commitment of Indian units provides a tragic touch to the book.... even if you didn't know the rough history of the conflict you'd be able to feel things sliding that way regardless as the author carries on with his history. So many thousands dying in the fields and yet still talk talk talk by various factions that wanted things their way or the highway.

Ultimately this book seems to have become THE book to read on this topic. Undoubtedly there are other more specialised military histories out there and certainly histories of Bangladesh itself will cover this subject in some detail but this book seems to have more than supplied the need. And even amongst people that speak little English it is known about - this book can be bought from street vendors on the streets of the Bangladeshi capital of Dhaka and people will notice you are reading it. So even if they cannot fully read it, they know it by the cover.

If you have an interest in the subcontinent post-WW2 it is hard to recommend this work too highly.

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[Raghavan's] superb analysis of the global intricacies of 1971 uses [a wide] lens with great precision to explain the breakup of Pakistan more convincingly than any preceding account...Raghavan...draw[s] on an impressive array of far-flung and hitherto untapped sources as [he] investigate[s] the strategic ambitions, the moral pressures, the judgments of risk, and the sheer brutality of that pivotal year. [He] show[s] how the most powerful democracy in the world could become complicit in a mass slaughter, and how in turn India--the world's largest democracy but also one of its poorest and militarily weakest--was pushed to intervene to stop the slaughter. For Raghavan, the origins of the Bangladesh crisis lie in the peculiarities of Pakistan and the intricacies of its politics. It is one of Raghavan's consistent and convincing arguments that, contrary to retrospective nationalist narratives, there was nothing inevitable about the fact that Pakistan would break violently in half less than a quarter of a century after its creation...Raghavan provide[s] the first authoritative account of the debates among Indian decision-makers, as they weighed the pressures and risks of action to stop the violence...Raghavan's [book] carries important warnings to Indian decision-makers about the costs of circumspection and delay. Raghavan argues that a swift and early intervention might well have been effective: helping save innumerable lives and much suffering, it would have left Bangladesh less battered and more able to rebuild as a democratic state...Raghavan [has] given us [an] indispensable stud[y] of one of the most sordid and important instances of horror and help. (Sunil Khilnani New Republic 2013-11-09)

The broader perspective is one of the things that makes the book unusual. Many of the principal actors of 1971--military men, diplomats, bureaucrats and politicians--have penned personal memoirs. Archives in various nations have been released. Professional historians have written reams. But nobody has explored 1971 and the events that led up to it across so many dimensions...This is a splendidly researched book, which presents a logical well-argued case for revisiting the myths surrounding the birth of Bangladesh. (Devangshu Datta Business Standard 2013-10-18)

The vastly complicated international dimension of the Indo-Pakistan War is expertly mapped out by Srinath Raghavan in 1971: A Global History of the Creation of Bangladesh...Raghavan analyzes with precision the military operations and economic realities of 1971; he also offers an indispensable array of international perspectives on the war, with the views from Beijing, Bonn, Ottawa and beyond, all analyzed in concert. Raghavan's book makes clear that for all the power it projected, the United States was never the prime mover in the conflict, and that even if Nixon and Kissinger had been moral paragons, there is little reason to believe they could have dramatically changed the outcome. (Thomas Meaney The Nation 2013-11-19)

Raghavan has produced a scholarly study couched in sparkling prose. He has a wide canvas, seeking not only to delineate the policies of the major international actors, including a number of middle powers, but also to situate the liberation struggle in the context of broader global historical processes. He is at his best as a

diplomatic historian. The centerpiece of his book is a detailed, skillfully pieced together account of the evolution of Indian, U.S. and Russian policies in 1971. (Chandrashekhar Dasgupta Outlook India 2013-12-09)

Raghavan's book on the Bangladesh War of 1971 underscores the point that the famous Indian victory was as much a feat of Indian arms as that of a favorable global conjuncture that had been created through diplomacy, as well as the contemporary great power dynamics involving the U.S., USSR, China and India, along with the usual dash of contingent developments that often shape historical events...From the point of view of the Indian approach to the crisis, Raghavan breaks new ground by the use of archival material made available only recently, such as the papers of the Ministry of External Affairs at the National Archives, or the papers of policy makers such as P.N. Haksar, R.K. Nehru, T.N. Kaul, T.T. Krishnamachari and Jayaprakash Narayan at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library. Of course, given his emphasis on describing the global dimensions of the Bangladesh event, Raghavan has made full use of the archives of the erstwhile German Democratic Republic, of Russia, U.K., Canada, and papers of leaders such as Richard Nixon or organizations like Oxfam, World Bank and the United Nations. The result is that he is able to put to rest some of the abiding myths surrounding the intervention. (Manoj Joshi The Hindu 2013-12-09)

Raghavan's reflections on the course of the war and its termination challenges the traditional narratives of the war and underlines the importance of the international dimension in explaining the outcomes...1971 is bound to reinforce Raghavan's reputation as a leading scholar on the security politics of India and the subcontinent...Raghavan has filled a big breach in understanding the evolution of contemporary India...Raghavan's work, one hopes, will inspire a new generation of scholarship that can historicise the evolution of India's foreign and security policies and thereby help improve the quality of the current strategic discourse in Delhi. (Indian Express 2013-12-14)

Excellent. (Isaac Chotiner New Republic 2013-12-12)

A perceptive new book. (Isaac Chotiner Times Literary Supplement 2014-01-10)

About the Author

Srinath Raghavan is Senior Fellow at the Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi, and Senior Research Fellow at King's India Institute at King's College London.

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