

Sarmila Bose: A Dedicated Soft-Seller of Brutal Pakistani Genocide against Bengalis --

Jamal Hasan

Sunday, 27 March 2011

From: Islam Watch

She came like a whirlwind causing a little tsunami in the US capital. The day was March 15, 2011 and the place of occurrence was the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars.

This Woodrow Wilson Center

already became controversial to many expatriate Bangladeshis. A few months ago, Dirk Moses, Woodrow Wilson Australian scholar brought his revisionist theory of the Bangladesh genocide in another seminar called "The secession of East Pakistan in 1971 and the question of genocide" Moreover, William Milam, the Senior Policy Scholar of the Center, a former US Ambassador to Pakistan and Bangladesh is now under deeper scrutiny. According to some observers, this former American diplomat cherishes strong sympathy for the Pakistani ruling elite. Not too long ago Milam and Bose co-authored an essay in favor of selling American F-16 fighter jets to Pakistan.

Sarmila Bose's intellectual

and academic research centers on one agenda. That is to blemish the Bengali nationalists and glorify the brutal regime of late Pakistani general Agha Mohammad Yahya Khan. For the last several years, in the academic world Sarmila Bose's pro-Yahya regime slant was so well orchestrated that it got very receptive audience in the Pakistani press. Even the so-called Pakistani liberal media, including the Daily Times of Lahore and Karachi's Dawn became the favorable launching pads of disseminating her distorted version of the events of 1971. Quite undoubtedly, to many of the retired Pakistani army personnel directly involved in mass killing in the erstwhile East Pakistan, this Bengali Hindu woman's academic work appeared as a manna from heaven!

We are familiar with the term "self-hating Jews".

There may be a few anti-Semite Jews present in the academia. Who knows, there could be a few Hitler-loving Jewish scholars roaming in the academic world also. Sarmila Bose seems to be the only academician of Hindu Bengali heritage who took the painful responsibility of soft-selling a barbaric army dictatorship, which was viciously brutal and merciless to the Hindu inhabitants of the then East Pakistan.

In 1971 she was only twelve year old she wrote in one essay. She might have seen many Hindu refugees taking shelter in her Kolkata neighborhood. Although she was in the pre-adolescent age, she was supposedly a witness to a calculated extermination of religious minority on the other side of the border. She wrote in one of her revisionist essays earlier, "Growing up in Calcutta in West Bengal, India, I heard stories about the Pakistan army raping and killing Bengali women during the 1971 war." She did not stop there; she further wrote, "This paper seeks to bring to scholarly and public scrutiny the deeply problematic representations of sexual violence in narratives of the 1971 war which I discovered in the course of my broader research on the 1971 conflict.¹ That rape occurred in East Pakistan in 1971 has never been in any doubt. Every war is accompanied by sexual violence against women. In the case of Bangladesh, the Pakistan army itself has not denied that instances of rape took place. The question is, what was the true extent of rape, who were its victims and who the perpetrators, and was there any systematic "policy" of rape by any party as opposed to opportunistic sexual crimes in times of war."

On 15th March, 2011 book event in the Woodrow Wilson Center promoting her another revisionist book, "Dead Reckoning: Memories of the 1971 Bangladesh War", Sarmila Bose's premise was very similar to all of her earlier academic works. In the thirty minute time slot allocated to her she taunted the Bengali nationalists and the Bengali nationalistic aspiration with her subdued sarcastic rhetoric. She said, "Bengalis used such semantics like Hanadar Bahini, Noroposhu, Punjabi army to denote the members of the Pakistani army". She shed her crocodile tears criticizing the Bengalis for depicting the ruthless Pakistani General Yahya Khan as a demon. She said, "Yahya did not personally harbor prejudices against the Bengalis". The audience was spellbound. Of course, many of us were outraged to observe such shameless act of a hired assassin, who simply played the role of a paid agent of the perpetrators of a crime against humanity.

R. J. Rummel, the notable author of genocide describes the perception of Pakistani army officers towards the Bengalis in his book "Death by government" this way, "These 'willing executioners' were fuelled by an abiding anti-Bengali racism, especially against the Hindu minority. "Bengalis were often compared with monkeys and chickens" said Pakistani General Niazi, 'It was a low lying land of low lying people.' The Hindus among the Bengalis were as Jews to the Nazis: scum and vermin that [should] best be exterminated. As to the Moslem Bengalis, they were to live only on the sufferance of the soldiers: any infraction, any suspicion cast on them, any need for reprisal, could mean their death. And the soldiers were free to kill at will. The journalist Dan Coggin quoted one Punjabi captain as telling him, 'We can kill anyone for anything. We are accountable to no one.' This is the arrogance of Power."

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after reading her essays may wonder if the Pakistani army was the only villains regarding extermination of Bengali Hindus. Before coming to the Woodrow Wilson Center's book event we were exposed to one of her such slanted essays titled "ANATOMY OF VIOLENCE: An Analysis of Civil War in East Pakistan in 1971", which she wrote a few years ago. She describes on the chapter of atrocity on Hindu population this way, "The minority Hindus, perceived by many in government, in the armed forces and the majority population as pro-India and a traitorous force within the country, were in a particularly vulnerable position during the civil war. Many Hindu villagers in Khulna, for instance, spoke of their harassment at the hands of local Muslims, which got serious enough for them to decide to seek refuge in India. Thousands of them collected what belongings they could and went by boat to a village called Chuknagar, from where they went by road towards the Indian border. At Chuknagar they were relieved of their boats and many of their belongings by local Muslims there, usually for a pittance or nothing. The harassment, hounding out, and dispossession of the Hindu refugees in this area took a turn for the worse on 20 May. On that day, according to numerous eye-witnesses and survivors, a small unit, comprising only 20-25 men, arrived from the direction of Jessore and killed a very large number of adult male Hindu refugees among the thousands thronging the river bank and bazaar of Chuknagar. Once again, women and children were not harmed. Upon the departure of the unit, large scale looting of the refugees' belongings, cash and jewelry, appears to have been conducted by the locals, who disposed of the bodies by throwing them into the river.[27]"

There are numerous instances where the Pakistani occupation force, while capturing a village was selectively destroying Hindu habitats. The Washington based World Bank official Dr. Ziauddin Choudhury was a young civilian officer of the government of Pakistan in 1971. In a recent essay "Forgotten Women of the 1971 War" published in the Daily Star from Dhaka he chronicled, "One afternoon the Army Major walked into my office and informed me that he had reports that a neighbouring village was harbouring a good number of "Hindu miscreants" with "arms". He said he had reports that the armed gangs were plotting to attack the army, and that it was necessary to sort the place out. I knew it was futile to plead with him without jeopardizing my own safety; however, I suggested that his report be further verified by the police. He looked at me as though I had lost my mind! My concern was also elsewhere. My second officer, a seasoned provincial service officer, was a Hindu. I had taken pains to keep him away from any possible encounter with the Pakistan Army, as we were already acquainted with the penchant of this murderous force to summarily dispose of members of the Hindu community, government official or not. A week after the arrival of the Army in Munshiganj, the officer had stated his intention to me to move to a nearby village where the town Hindus had congregated. He moved his family to this village even though I had warned him that moving to a predominantly Hindu village might not be a good idea. The army was more prone to attack such places in the pretext of miscreant cleansing, since according to the Pakistan Army, all Hindus were suspected "miscreants".

We have millions of witnesses still alive who could support the theory that the Pakistani army systematically and methodically targeted the Bengali Hindus to cleanse the land of the pure of "infidels". Many of us who were adult enough to witness firsthand the 1971 tragedy knew there was a systematic policy of annihilation of religious minority in our native land. Sarmila Bose and Dirk Moses put much of the burden of violence on the inter-ethnic conflict, i.e, the riots among Bengalis and Biharis. But they failed, either deliberately or inadvertently, to do much investigative work in

their research methodology to verify the existing dominant view that the ruling Pakistani military junta of 1971 following the pattern of the Nazi regime of Germany conducted a calculated policy of genocide in the erstwhile East Pakistan.

Those revisionist historians promoted by the Woodrow Wilson Center were emphasizing on the bloody episodes of the Bengali-Bihari civilian conflicts subsiding the bigger picture of the killing by state machinery. Sarmila in her presentation on the March 15th gave a self contradictory argument. She said, the violence between two different linguistic groups in the eastern part of Pakistan reminded her of the conflict in the Balkans. We all know there was continuous blood letting between the ordinary Serbs, Croats and the Muslim population. In addition to that, there was a perpetrated genocide conducted by individuals like Radovan Karadzic, a Bosnian Serb. The International Criminal Court decided to prosecute Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic, who happened to be in position of power in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Oxford scholar deviated from her own argument of comparing the two conflict situations by explicitly soft selling the marauding Pakistani army this way, "the atrocity was committed from two sides of the war. There were war criminals on both sides - perception varies depending on which side someone belongs to." In this particular case, she equated violence among civilians and the methodical pogrom conducted by state machinery. In her short lecture Sarmila not only distorted the genesis of Bangladesh movement, she outwardly misrepresented the events linked to it. She said, the noncooperation movement in March 1971 was a violent one, which is far from truth.

Not too long ago, the military on the streets of Pakistan under Pervez Musharraf regime refrained from crossing a "red line". That was the imaginary boundary of not going for wanton killing of unarmed civilians. Pervez Musharraf's restraint was not manifested in his fellow officers' game plan of the earlier era on the fateful night of March 25, 1971. Dr. Abdus Sattar Khan, a Pratt and Whitney scientist based in Florida told me his account of that dark night. Dr. Khan was a lecturer in Dhaka University. He miraculously survived the ordeal but witnessed the massacre in the Dhaka University Teachers Quarter first hand. He saw an officer was relaxingly smoking cigarette on the ground as his subordinate soldiers were conducting the killing of the academicians. In the Woodrow Wilson Center event Sarmila Bose expressed her clear antipathy towards the Bengalis of Pakistan because they (the Bengalis) called the Pakistani army as occupation army and noroposhu (human animal). Alas! Sarmila was only a twelve year old naive young girl who failed to understand that after March 25 of 1971 most of the Pakistani army crossed the "red line", which in later year another Pakistani army ruler Pervez Musharraf avoided in a different setting. In the year 1971, the average Pakistani soldier was immensely brutal to Bengalis, especially the Hindus. The reality was most of the occupation army behaved like a typical barbaric occupation force losing all human qualities.

Most recently one of my close relatives told me his anecdote. In 1971, Mr. Khaled Ahmed was the Chief Engineer of the Pakistan Television in the DIT Building, Dhaka. The TV office was well secured area, part of which was guarded by an auxiliary

force called the Militia. One such militia was a nineteen year old man from the North West Frontier Province in the then West Pakistan. This young Pathan jawan had come back from his tour of duty in the "war front". He told Mr. Khaled Ahmed in Urdu, "This nation will not survive". Mr. Ahmed asked the young militia the reason for such assumption. The militia in his reply gave the eyewitness account of inhuman brutality, which academicians like Sarmila Bose may think only common human being can do. The Pathan militia said some of the jawans in the bunker on a regular basis brought three or four young women from the nearby village. They were kept in the bunker completely naked. Day after day, one after another soldier committed rape upon them. Later on the girls were shot to death. This recurring process continued presumably within the knowledge of the commanding officer. Dr. Sarmila Bose, a senior research scholar at Oxford did not have time to delve the extent of brutality committed by her favorite patrons among the Pakistani army retirees.

Susan Brownmiller, the renowned American feminist and author in her book "Against our will: Men, women and rape" puts the number of women raped from 200,000 to 400,000. She wrote, "Eighty percent of the raped women were Moslems, reflecting the population of Bangladesh, but Hindu and Christian women were not exempt. ... Hit-and-run rape of large numbers of Bengali women was brutally simple in terms of logistics as the Pakistani regulars swept through and occupied the tiny, populous land ..." Brownmiller quotes a description of one such assault which targeted a recently-married woman, as reported by Aubrey Menen: "Two [Pakistani soldiers] went into the room that had been built for the bridal couple. The others stayed behind with the family, one of them covering them with his gun. They heard a barked order, and the bridegroom's voice protesting. Then there was silence until the bride screamed. Then there was silence again, except for some muffled cries that soon subsided. In a few minutes one of the soldiers came out, his uniform in disarray. He grinned to his companions. Another soldier took his place in the extra room. And so on, until all the six had raped the belle of the village. Then all six left, hurriedly. The father found his daughter lying on the string cot unconscious and bleeding. Her husband was crouched on the floor, kneeling over his vomit."

During the Bangladesh war of independence in 1971, the Pakistani military junta and quite a few of the country's Islamist organizations forged an alliance, which can be categorized as a nexus of evils. That mullah-military entente is supposedly continuing even in the present day Pakistan. The alleged mastermind of the Bangladesh intellectual killing, Major General Rao Farman Ali was known to maintain close ties with the members of the Jamat-e-Islami of Pakistan. This party, along with its auxiliary force, the Al-Badr death squad was accused of being involved in killing scores of Bengali intellectuals and professionals. After the independence of Bangladesh, quite a few ring leaders of the death squad fled the country and took shelters in the West. According to some analysts, many of the Western living Bangladeshi Islamists under different political banners are closely connected with such unsavory characters. It has been observed, majority of the expatriate politically active Bangladeshi Islamists even today failed to detach themselves from the legacy of their forebearers' role in 1971.

In the year 1971, as the events were unfolding in the Indian subcontinent, most of the officers of the Punjabi dominated Pakistani military and the members of the Jamat-e-Islami of Pakistan started to consider Hindus and India as their mortal enemy. The combination of a sense of ethnic and racial superiority and religious supremacy made the Bengali Hindus of Pakistan the easy scapegoat. Before the flare up of the India Pakistan conflict, the Jamaatis in the then East Pakistan started to send threatening letters to a number of Bengali intellectuals and professionals, who were not considered to be patriotic Pakistanis. The Jamaati letters mentioned a cautionary note for not falling in the trap of the "evil design of the Brahminist Hindu India who was out there to 'dismember' Islamic Pakistan". Quite a few recipients of such an ominous message lost their lives in the hands of the Islamist zealots. That happened in the month of December of 1971, only a few days before the country became independent.

In the Sarmila Bose's book event, among the attendees, a few known US based Bangladeshi Islamists suddenly came to our attention. They kept quiet during the whole lecture session; none of them raised any hand when the question and answer part was going on. As the program finally concluded they rushed to the author like a bunch of bumble bees. They did not hesitate to applaud their suddenly found "Crown Jewel". Although any such typical Islamist hardly ever shows respect for an Indian or a Hindu, this was completely a different situation. They found in Sarmila a Hindu academician who could enhance their narratives, would strengthen their political brethrens of the Jamat-e-Islami of Bangladesh in the current volatile and uncertain political environment. This was indeed a crucial moment for them considering the fact the Bangladesh Government has started the trial of the War Criminals of 1971, many of who happen to be the leaders of the Jamat-e-Islami of Bangladesh.

Sarmila Bose's newly found fans encircled her with laudatory remarks. A smiling Sarmila like a queen bee was handing over her autographed books to the allies of the Bangladesh Jamaat. Coincidentally, the Woodrow Wilson book event prompted the revisionist historian to complete the full circle.

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(The essay was published in Islam Watch (www.islam-watch) on Sunday, 20 March 2011 - Bangarashtra)

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