



# 1971: A Global History of the Creation of Bangladesh

By Srinath Raghavan

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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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### Editorial Review

#### 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*)

Starting with the rising tensions in South Asia, **Raghavan** uses archives from seven countries (plus the United Nations) to offer a panoramic view of the 1971 crisis as a turning point for longstanding India-Pakistani tensions, for the cold war that now had to reckon with the global aspirations of China, which would soon recognize Bangladesh, and for the globalizing tendencies that would eventually undermine the bipolar world order...[An] impressive new histor[y].

(David C. Engerman *Chronicle of Higher Education* 2013-10-07)

In *1971: A Global History of the Creation of Bangladesh*, **Srinath Raghavan** has chronicled in vivid detail the course this contest [for power] took and the way global politics shaped it...The book ends up demolishing more than one myth. Henry Kissinger has a well-deserved reputation as a clear thinker and a master practitioner of realpolitik. *1971* casts him in a different, weaker, light. How did this admirer of Bismarck, a person who clearly understands the limits of power (his *A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh and the Problems of Peace* is a masterful account) err so badly in South Asia? Raghavan's assessment of Kissinger and American strategy is devastating.

(Gayatri Chandrasekaran *Mint* 2013-10-04)

**Raghavan** offers fresh insights into the 14-day war that led to the creation of Bangladesh. (Saikat Datta *Hindustan Times* 2013-11-01)

[An] absorbing and very detailed account of the creation of Bangladesh...[Raghavan] has produced an impressive analysis of the way the international community

reacted to events...When dealing with India's role in the crisis, Raghavan is adept at puncturing historical myths.

(David Gilmour *Literary Review* 2013-11-01)

[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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