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## ***Shankar's Weekly* and the Liberation War of 1971**

### **[Abstract**

Political cartoons, particularly those published in *Shankar's Weekly*, provide a unique and underexplored perspective on the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971. While traditional historiography emphasizes military campaigns, genocide, and diplomacy, cartoons capture multidimensional narratives reflecting public opinion, global civil society, and ideological positions. Between January 1971 and March 1972, *Shankar's Weekly* published 134 cartoons on the Liberation War, depicting themes such as genocide, refugee crises, international relations, and the roles of leaders like Indira Gandhi, Yahya Khan, Bhutto, Nixon, and Mao Zedong. Cartoonists including Shankar, Abu Abraham, Amal Chakraborty, and Rebat Bhushan Ghosh combined satire, political critique, and humanistic concern. Iconography often portrayed Yahya Khan as a monstrous figure, Bhutto as a schemer, and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as the symbol of Bengali resistance. Political cartoons function as narrative devices, condensing complex events into visual forms, shaping public opinion, and reflecting societal values. Many cartoons appeared without captions, yet conveyed powerful messages that mirrored civil society engagement and international awareness of the war. Integrating cartoons into Liberation War studies enriches the historiography, providing insights into the emotional, political, and global dimensions of 1971.

*Keywords: Liberation War, political cartoons, public opinion, genocide, visual history]*

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In recent years, I have been searching for different kinds of source materials to bring diversity into Liberation War studies, and whenever such materials have been found, I have used them. Diversity of sources naturally leads to diversity in research. While searching for such materials, it occurred to me that cartoons published during the Liberation War could be an important and valuable resource.

The historiography of the Liberation War can be enriched if we seriously consider political cartoons and use them as historical sources. In 1971, newspapers and magazines across the world published a wide range of materials on the Liberation War—news reports, features, short stories, novels, poems, and cartoons. However, these materials have rarely been incorporated into the dominant narrative of the Liberation War. Cartoons, in particular, have been almost entirely ignored.

Our intention is to diversify Liberation War research. The Liberation War is not linear; it is multidimensional. In the early years, emphasis was placed primarily on military history and the narrative of victory. Over the past decade, genocide has rightly received significant scholarly attention. Yet there are many other important dimensions—such as regional Liberation forces, the adversaries, and global civil society. Research on these aspects would help us better understand the scope of the Liberation War and add greater richness and variety to existing scholarship.

As mentioned earlier, cartoons related to the Liberation War were widely published in newspapers during 1971. Indian newspapers, however, carried the largest number of such cartoons. These cartoons highlighted the complexities and dynamics of war and violence. One of their distinctive features is that they not only depicted the external outlines of the conflict but also captured the emotions and perspectives of global civil society.

Just as we see today in the context of the Israel–Palestine conflict, where global civil society often takes a stand in favor of humanity, in 1971, although many governments opposed the Liberation War,

global civil society stood firmly in support of Bangladesh. In this context, newspapers and magazines became the voice of civil society, articulating Bangladesh's struggle, and cartoons played a particularly significant role in this effort.

Most cartoons on the Liberation War were published in newspapers from West Bengal and other parts of India. A large number appeared in *Jugantar* (published from Kolkata) and *The Times of India* (published from Delhi). In addition, *Anandabazar Patrika*, *Kaalantar*, the weekly *Desh*, *Darpan*, and English-language newspapers such as *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, *The Statesman*, and *Hindustan Standard* regularly published cartoons.

Some newspapers even reserved a small space on the front page for short or “pocket cartoons,” often under titles such as *Abhyartha*, *Third Eye View*, or *Smile a Day*. Prominent cartoonists of the time included Amal, Chandi, Sufi, Kutty, Laxman, Rebatibhushan, Abu, Sudhir Dhar, among others. Many of these artists had their cartoons published in multiple newspapers and even abroad—particularly Abu. The two cartoonists who produced the largest number of cartoons on the Liberation War were Amal Chakraborty (Amal) and Abu Abraham. An album of Abu's cartoons on Bangladesh has already been published under my editorship.

During the Liberation War, *Banglar Bani* and *People* were published from Mujibnagar. These featured cartoons by Bangali cartoonists Nayan and Satun, whose real identities I have not yet been able to trace. In 1970, Rafiqun Nabi regularly drew cartoons for *Forum* magazine, where even the cover illustrations were cartoons. Mohammad Yunus published the *Bangladesh Newsletter* from the United States and drew some cartoons himself.

It is worth noting that most of the cartoonists working in India had no formal connection with art schools or colleges, whereas most of those drawing cartoons in Bangladesh were associated with art schools or colleges.

Cartoons related to the Liberation War also appeared in Western newspapers, though in smaller numbers. With further research, many more such cartoons may yet be discovered.

Cartoons can address a wide range of subjects, but those published in newspapers are generally political in nature. A cartoon is not merely the distortion of figures or facial features; it must convey an idea, a thought, a message. An artist's distinctiveness is reflected in the use of line and form—Abu's lines are different from Chandi's. A cartoonist must, by necessity, be politically aware. Familiarity with international affairs gives cartoons a deeper dimension, as seen in the work of Abu Abraham. Moreover, holding a political or ideological position—of any kind—is essential.

Cartoonists are not only politically conscious but also deeply humanistic. One of Abraham's cartoons depicts a Vietnamese farmer alongside a Bangali farmer. During his time in London, he worked for *The Guardian*, a mildly left-leaning newspaper. He strongly opposed American aggression in Vietnam, which enabled him to merge the experiences of the two farmers into a single image, giving the cartoon a unique depth.

The themes of these cartoons included refugees, genocide, administration, international relations, and history. Key figures frequently portrayed were India's Indira Gandhi, Pakistan's Yahya Khan and Bhutto, and occasionally Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. In Western cartoons, figures such as Nixon and Kissinger also appeared. With few exceptions, Yahya Khan was depicted as a monster, a savage beast, or even as Hitler. In this context, Kamrul Hasan's famous depiction of Yahya Khan accompanied by the slogan "Let Us Kill the Beast" may be regarded as one of the most powerful cartoons of 1971—though some may disagree. It is also among the finest examples of political posters from that period.

Many cartoons were published without captions or titles; the message was so clear that viewers could grasp it instantly. In most cases, Bhutto was portrayed as a villain or as a submissive tool of the military establishment.

The cartoons compiled here were published fifty-five years ago. They were collected by Punam Mukherjee. The *Shanker's Weekly* in which they appeared are over fifty years old, and the artists themselves are no longer alive. Yet it is in their memory that this volume has been compiled.

In this context, the 1971 Genocide–Torture Archive and Museum began collecting cartoons related to the Liberation War published in newspapers and magazines from Mujibnagar, India, and various other countries. The subject was the Liberation War. We collected over a thousand cartoons. A review of these materials shows that newspapers from different parts of the world published at least one or two cartoons on 1971 or the Liberation War. This indicates that, after the Second World War, the Liberation War of 1971 was one of the most globally recognized events.

Three decades ago, I began editing a book series titled *The Liberation War and the Media*. The first volume of the series focused on cartoons. Reaz Ahmed compiled 350 cartoons in that book—the first of its kind. Nearly twenty-five years later, Shahid Kader Chowdhury and I jointly edited a two-volume work titled *The Liberation War in Cartoons*, which included nearly 500 cartoons. In 2025, I edited and published *Abu’s Bangladesh 1971*. The present volume has been published as a continuation of that ongoing effort.

## 2

As an important tool for creating a dialogue between society and the state, political cartoons are the social reflection of any political event. The purpose of a political cartoon is to criticize any political event, the political actions, or the political figures satirically. It questions various government and state policies and underscores the inconsistencies of popular culture. The news, collected and published by the journalists, is conveyed more powerfully satirically or humorously to the readers by the cartoonists. Like politicians, artist also conveys a message. The correct message is correct time helps to win the struggle. A Cartoon is also like a message. We can say cartoonist through their cartoons proves their affiliation to different phase of struggle. They have the power to convey the main message, as Scot Maccland said, “amplification through simplification.” It is natural that, during nationalist or freedom movement. They become the spokesperson of civil society and make clear what is happenings in the society or state. Political cartoons also play a significant role in creating public opinion and manufacturing consent. Some call cartoons ‘educator and

editorialist, seller and seducer.’ So, the cartoons generally regarded as something ‘satirical’ became an intense phenomenon in the end. However, political cartoons are not only used to express an opinion and challenge the government policy or hegemonic discourse; instead, it is also used to spread hate speech. The events of World War II and Nazi propaganda that used to propagate antisemitic cartoons testify to the role of cartoons in spreading hate speech.

However, the debate over political cartoons that emerged in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is unprecedented in the history of cartoons. On the one hand, the states-be they democratic or authoritarian or fascist-are cracking down on the dissident cartoonists. On the other hand, the publication of a cartoon of the Prophet Muhammad, founder of Islam, in a Danish newspaper in 2005 caused a great deal of controversy. The Muslim world erupted in rage. Similar disputes erupted after *Charlie Hebdo*, a French satirical weekly magazine, published cartoons about the Prophet Muhammad and Islam; Islamic terrorists attacked *Charlie Hebdo* and killed almost 17 people in response to the publication. The world, including the Muslim states, protested against the attack and expressed solidarity with the cartoonists. At the same time, a heated debate exploded in the East and West over the political cartoons and the limits of freedom of speech and expression. The controversy started cantering the cartoons is still going on.

The cartoons we have collected are based on the Liberation War in 1971. Without any doubt, the cartoons illustrated in the context of a significant political-historical event have been categorized as ‘political cartoons’. Understanding political cartoons requires a thorough understanding of the cartoon’s content, pretext, and social and historical conditions, and audience. Although to some researchers, captions of the cartoons are necessary for understanding that cartoons, some argue, captions are not always required to understand the cartoons.

Social and political cartoons are sketched on the context of a specific social, political and historical events and realities. It is impossible to comprehend cartoons alienating it from the context. However, cartoons never provide a detailed account of any event;

instead, they offer a specific event narrative. While discussing the cartoons of 1971, we have to remember that these will offer some narratives of that event.

### 3

First, in general, the cartoon presents a narrative of a specific event more than a description of that event. In the case of 1971, four types of narratives are available. For us, 1971 is the year of the Liberation War, genocide, and independence. For India, there exists a 'humanitarian' point of view which includes sheltering refugees, training freedom fighters, building support for Bangladesh, and finally, the military intervention. For Pakistan, it is a year of 'dismembering'. They think East Pakistan had become isolated due to the conspiracy of India, local Hindus, and the nationalist political parties. And, the international media, especially the the US media, sees it firstly as a 'civil war' between East Pakistan and West Pakistan and secondly as a war between India and Pakistan. Since the cartoons collected for this collection have been published in Indian periodicals, the Indian narrative has become evident.

From March to December, it is clear that the content of the cartoon was changing with the events. During March-April, the main issues were the non-cooperation movement, mass uprising in East Bengal, Yahya's cruelty, the genocide, Bhutto's conspiracy, the silence of world conscience, etc. Moreover, cartoons criticizing international politics, especially the US and the Chinese policies, were published. In May-June, cartoonists began to criticize Indian policy, especially to create a consensus in favor of recognizing Bangladesh. Even India was criticized for not taking any action against Pakistan while Pakistan was inciting. Cartoons in July, August, and September focused on the refugee crisis and the efforts of Indian authorities to resolve the situation. However, in October, November, and December, cartoons sharply criticized the US and the Chinese policies and anticipated Yahya's imminent defeat. Many cartoons focusing on the Victory were published in December. Besides, the newspapers published various cartoons in puja festivals, relating the festive events with the Liberation War and crisis.

There are some familiar characters in the representation of cartoons. For example, the people of Bangladesh have been portrayed through the caricature of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Indira Gandhi and Sharan Singh's caricature have come up to illustrate Indian authorities and government. Similarly, Bhutto and Yahya represented Pakistan and its military and civil authorities. Cartoonists often depicted Yahya Khan as some terrifying beast and Bhutto as a conspirator. The caricatures of Nixon represent the USA government and its policies, whereas Chou en Lai and Mao Zedong represent the Chinese policies.

#### 4

Cartoons criticize as well as give pleasure. However, the success of political cartoons and the magnitude of expression often depend on the political-democratic culture of a state. Moreover, some differences might appear between the study of contemporary political cartoons and the cartoons that were drawn almost half a century earlier. When we look at the cartoons of 1971, we get an idea of the situation and the social and political repercussions created by that situation. In that sense, the cartoons show the nature of the representation of 1971 in the public sphere.

Cartoonist Chandi Lahiri remarked, "Very few cartoons create public opinion. When a public opinion is built on an issue, or a cartoon is drawn in keeping with the public interest, that cartoon becomes very popular overnight." If a cartoon is drawn on an issue or an event that generates a strong reaction in the people's perceptions, it will elicit a response. From this point of view, it seems possible to study and examine both the public opinion and public perceptions of that time especially in Kolkata with the cartoons published in 1971.

From all parts of the world, civil society's role in the Liberation War was unprecedented. Ordinary people and activists marched, rallied for Bangladesh. Writers and journalists repeatedly highlighted the genocide, Pakistan's brutality, and the plight of refugees. Artists, musicians, and poets contributed from their standpoints. The cartoonist also played their role by depicting the realities in a satirical way. We've seen some of the cartoons already.

Although I was not entirely unfamiliar with the internationally renowned Indian cartoonist Shankar and his weekly magazine *Shankar's Weekly*, my knowledge of him was limited. Shankar used to organize an international art competition for children and adolescents. In the decade of 1960s, our friend, the Bangladeshi artist Abul Bark Alvi, won a prize for one of his watercolour paintings. That was when I first heard Shankar's name.

While collecting cartoons related to the Liberation War, Shankar and his magazine came back to my mind. However, *Shankar's Weekly* was so rare that it was impossible to trace copies while staying in Dhaka. Shankar was also the founder of the famous Children's Book Trust and established India's first Dolls Museum. His contributions extended far beyond cartooning; through his diverse initiatives, he became an institution in himself.

Some time ago, researcher Punam Mukherjee informed me that she had located copies of *Shankar's Weekly* from 1971. From these issues, she collected cartoons related to that year, and it is on the basis of those cartoons that the present volume has been compiled.

Several renowned Indian cartoonists were born in Kerala. Among them, Shankar was the eldest and the most famous. His full name was Kesava Shankar Pillai, though he was universally known simply as Shankar. As mentioned earlier, Shankar was not only a cartoonist; he was also an organizer and a writer, and he played a significant role in shaping the psyche of Indian children.

Shankar was born in 1902 in Kayamkulam, Kerala. In 1927, he graduated from Maharaja's College of Science in Trivandrum. He then went to Mumbai to study law, but soon realized that it did not interest him. He had been drawing cartoons since his school days. During his college years, he also received training at Ravi Varma Art College in Mavelikara.

In Mumbai, Shankar began drawing political cartoons. Some of his works were published sporadically, particularly in *The Free Press Journal* and *The Bombay Chronicle*. During this period, he caught

the attention of Pothan Joseph of *Hindustan Times*, who invited him to join the newspaper. Shankar accepted the offer. Until 1946, he worked at *Hindustan Times*, living in Delhi with his family and establishing various institutions there.

Shankar's cartoons attracted the attention of elite circles, including British viceroys. Before 1946, he had the opportunity to travel to London, where he trained at various art schools and further refined his artistic style.

He returned to India just before the Partition of the country. In 1948, he made a major decision: inspired by the British satirical magazine *Punch*, he decided to publish a satirical weekly of his own. Thus, *Shankar's Weekly* was launched. The magazine featured commentary on current events along with cartoons. Although Shankar himself drew many cartoons, he also opened the magazine to both established and emerging cartoonists. He personally invited several artists to contribute, including Rebatibhushan from Kolkata.

Jawaharlal Nehru held Shankar in great affection and admired the magazine he edited. He once told him:

“Don't spare me, Shankar. Hit, hit, hit me hard.”

Nehru inaugurated *Shankar's Weekly*. Between 1947 and 1964, during Nehru's years in power, Shankar drew more than four thousand cartoons featuring him.

Throughout his life, Shankar drew political cartoons, yet he never provoked personal resentment. Politicians are often uneasy about political cartoons and resent cartoonists. While Shankar's cartoons were rich in satire, humour, and irony, he was careful not to hurt cause of personal. The cartoonists who worked for his magazine were equally mindful of this balance.

Nehru once remarked: “...without the least bit of malice or ill will he (Shankar) points out, with an artist's skill, the weaknesses and foibles of those who display themselves on the public stage. That is a service to all of us for which we should be grateful. For we are apt to grow

pompous and self-centered, and it is good to have the veil of our conceit torn occasionally.”

In response, Shankar commented: “Perfection is not for any man, however powerful and highly placed he may be. Nehru had the wisdom to realise that.”

If all the cartoons Shankar drew on India were brought together, they would offer a visual outline of Indian history from 1937 to 1980.

In 1949, Shankar launched the *Shankar’s International Children’s Competition*. In 1978, he established a competition for children’s literature and founded what is now the famous Children’s Book Trust. He also founded the International Dolls Museum, the Dolls Designing and Production Centre, the Dr. B. C. Roy Memorial Children’s Reading Room and Library, Shankar’s Academy of Art, Shankar’s Centre for Children, and the Indraprastha Press.

Shankar received almost every major Indian honour except the *Bharat Ratna*, along with numerous awards from different countries. Delhi University awarded him an honorary Doctor of Literature (D.Litt.) degree.

Shankar passed away on 26 December 1989.

## 6

*Shankar’s Weekly* was first published in 1949. Shankar provided opportunities for many cartoonists of the next generation to work on the magazine. Among them were Kutty, Ranga, Abu Abraham, Basanthan, Ramachandran, Vijayan, Rebatibhushan, and others. In 1975, when Indira Gandhi declared the Emergency, Shankar decided to shut down the magazine. This decision did not result in any deterioration of his relationship with Indira Gandhi. On the contrary, it was Indira Gandhi herself who ensured a permanent space for the International Dolls Museum.

In 1971, Shankar supported the Bangladesh movement with full commitment. His engagement with the war through the media began on 3 January and continued until 1972. Every week, *Shankar’s*

*Weekly* carried not only commentary and reports but also at least one cartoon related to the Liberation War. There was also a regular cartoon column titled *March of Time*, which featured collections of small cartoons; Bangladesh appeared there frequently as well. The Liberation War was also depicted on the magazine's cover on numerous occasions.

From 3 January 1971 to March 1972, a total of 134 cartoons related to the Liberation War were published, all of which have been compiled in this volume. In many cases, the names of the cartoonists could not be identified; accordingly, no names appear in the captions of those cartoons. Where names could be traced, the identified artists include Shankar, Nege, Raj, Prakash, Soman, Das, Madhu, and Vijayan. In some cases, although the artist's name could not be found, the style and form strongly suggest Shankar's hand; in such instances, the cartoons have been attributed to him.

Among the artists mentioned above, apart from Shankar, Vijayan, and Rebatibhushan, detailed biographical information about the others could not be obtained. Many cartoons in *Shankar's Weekly* were signed "Prakash," but the Prakash found through online sources appears to be Prakash Shetty. Since he was only eleven years old during the Liberation War, it is reasonable to assume that the Prakash associated with the magazine was a different individual. The same uncertainty applies to the names Madhu, Soman, and Raj. Raj may possibly have been Raj Thackeray, the nephew of political leader Bal Thackeray. Soman may have been K. A. Soman, born in Kerala and also known as Somji. Vijayan (1930–2005), whose full name was Ayyappanpillai Velukkutty Vijayan—better known as O. V. Vijayan—was born in Kerala and was a celebrated Malayalam writer as well as a cartoonist. He worked for *Shankar's Weekly* for a period.

The cartoonist signing as Das is assumed to have been Jishudasan. Among all these artists, after Shankar himself, the most popular was Rebatibhushan Ghosh (1921–2007). During his time, he contributed cartoons to almost all major newspapers in West Bengal, as well as to little magazines. His cartoons on India's political situation were marked by a refined sense of humour. His drawing style, lettering,

and even his signature were highly distinctive, reflecting a unique visual language and technique. It is immediately evident that his cartoons were the work of a master cartoonist. Many of them could be enjoyed without captions.

During the Liberation War, while based in West Bengal, Rebati Bhusan Ghosh approached the subject through an international lens. His cartoons addressed issues such as Sino-American relations, the perspectives of major global powers, and the silence of the United Nations. The subtle wit present in his cartoons is largely absent in many others. Shankar had noticed his talent early in his career, soon after he began drawing cartoons, and in 1970 was invited to join the Children's Book Trust in Delhi. However, he did not stay there long and continued working primarily as a freelance artist. In 1971, several covers of *Shankar's Weekly* were illustrated by him; these were more accurately described as illustrations rather than cartoons.

Many cartoons signed by Nege appear in the magazine, but no information about the artist could be found. It is possible that these were syndicated cartoons produced by a cartoon syndicate.

In conclusion, it can be said that all the artists who contributed to *Shankar's Weekly* during 1971–72 were committed and sincere supporters of the Bangladesh Liberation War.

## 7

From as early as 3 January, *Shankar's Weekly* began publishing cartoons related to Bangladesh. Between 3 January and 21 March, a total of 26 cartoons appeared. Of these, six were collage cartoons published under the column titled *March of Time*. If we take these collages into account, the total number of cartoons during this period stands at approximately forty. Most of them were drawn by Shankar himself, while two were by Prakash.

This was the phase when the Bangladesh movement was moving steadily toward its decisive outcome. The first cartoon, published on 3 January, focused on the election results. Mujib is shown in a jubilant mood, having won an absolute majority. The tiger—symbolizing East Bengal—sits contentedly, radiating confidence

and joy. Yahya, on the other hand, appears stunned, as this was not the outcome he had anticipated when he allowed the election to take place. His intelligence agencies, particularly his security adviser Umar, had assured him that Mujib would not secure a majority and could therefore be politically manipulated. Bhutto, frightened by the result, is shown seeking shelter with Yahya.



*The Bengal Tiger, Bhutto has expressed himself against East Pakistan getting more power. Shankar. 3 January 1971*

Nearly three weeks later, on 24 January, another cartoon appeared. Yahya announces that Mujib will become Prime Minister, indicating that the balance of power has tilted decisively in Mujib's favor. Although Yahya makes the announcement with a smile, India is shown warning Mujib not to trust him. One jarring element in this cartoon is Mujib's attire—he is shown wearing a *dhoti*. This reflects a recurring mistake in Indian cartoons of the time. Much like the Pakistani mindset, the cartoonists assumed that being Bangali automatically meant wearing a *dhoti*, a garment culturally associated with Hindu identity. Depicting Mujib this way unintentionally echoed Pakistan's flawed perception of Bangali identity. It is unlikely that the cartoonists themselves consciously intended this implication.

*Balance of power*



*Balane of power , President Yahya Khan has referred to Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as the future Prime Minister of Pakistan. Shankar. 24 January 1971*

Two weeks later came a cartoon on the plane hijacking incident, which brought Pakistan and India into direct confrontation. Pakistan had provided shelter to the hijackers, and it was widely believed that the hijacking had Pakistani involvement. This suggestion is conveyed through the figures of Bhutto and Yahya, both shown playing violins joyfully, hinting at their complicity.

The cartoons published before 25 March reflect the political deadlock surrounding the convening of the National Assembly. Talks between Mujib and Bhutto collapsed, and Yahya refrained from calling the Assembly into session. The cartoons suggest an understanding—or collusion—between Yahya and Bhutto, who are shown in a celebratory mood. Notably, there are no cartoons on Bangabandhu's historic 7 March speech or the subsequent successful non-cooperation movement. However, the cover of the 21 March issue focuses squarely on events in Bangladesh. Drawn by Shankar, it depicts Yahya and Bhutto perched anxiously in a tree while Mujib shakes it from below. Through this powerful image, Shankar brilliantly captures the collective mood of the Bangali people.

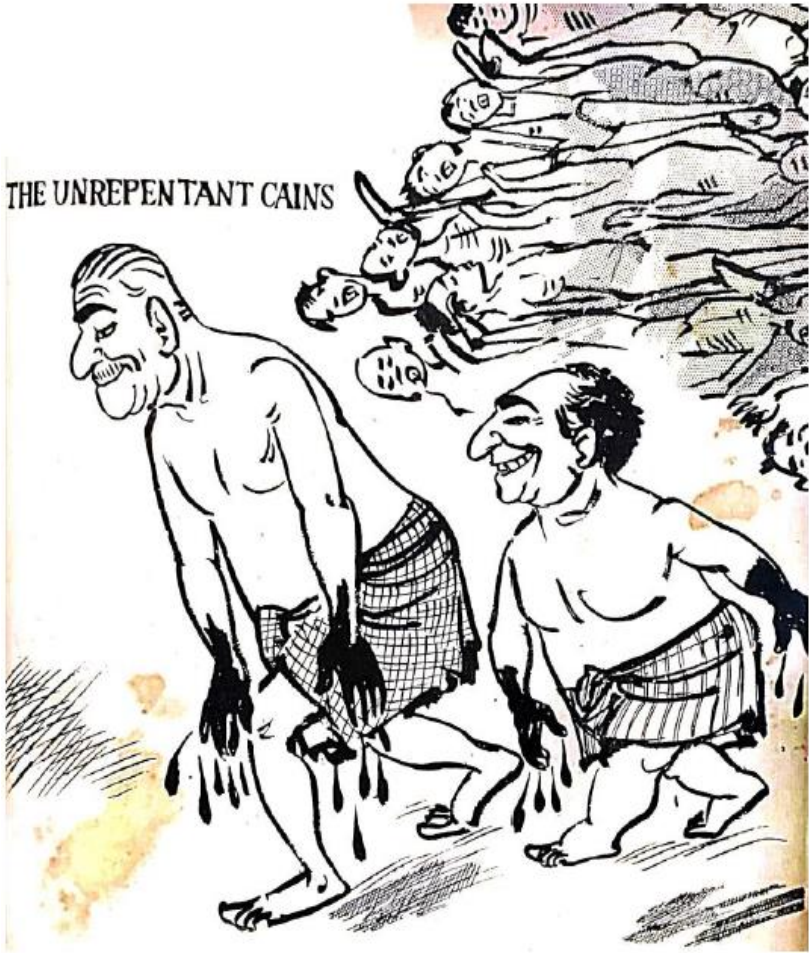
*Once Military Rule, Always Military Rule*



*The meeting of the newly elected Pak. National Assembly has been postponed indefinitely. Shankar. 07 March 1971*

The final collage cartoon of 21 March includes a scene in which Mujib is seated in darbar/court, flanked by two sentries holding spears. Once again, they are shown wearing *dhotis*—the same cultural misrepresentation repeatedly.

In the four issues published in April, fourteen cartoons appeared, with two of the issues featuring Bangladesh on the cover. Most of these cartoons are presumed to be by Shankar. Together, the fourteen cartoons vividly portray the situation in Bangladesh during April. The genocide began on 25 March, independence was declared on 26 March, and throughout April the violence intensified. Refugees began pouring into India. The superpowers are depicted as deaf and blind, and even the United Nations is shown shifting the burden of the refugee crisis onto India.



*The Unrepentant Cains. Shankar. 11 April 1971*

The 4 April issue features a cover on genocide, while an inside cartoon addresses Bangladesh's declaration of independence. Yahya and Bhutto are shown pleased as the genocide unfolds, while the international community remains willfully blind and deaf. The 11 April cover again focuses on genocide—countless bodies lie scattered, with Yahya and Bhutto's hands drenched in blood. The title reads *The Unrepentant Cain*, a contemporary visual reimagining of a mythological tale.



*Internal Affair. Prakash. 18 April 1971*

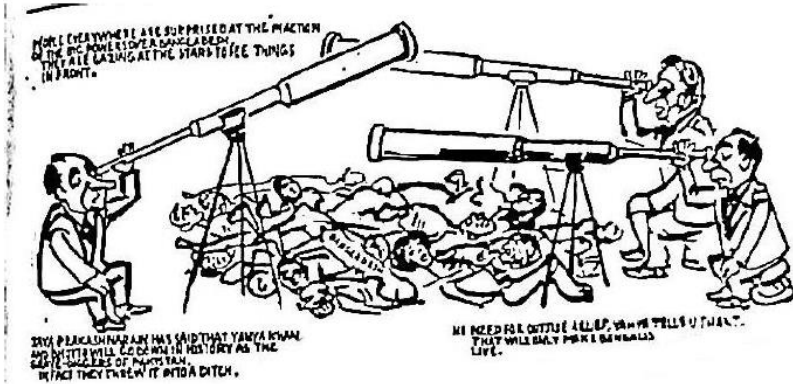
World Health Day fell on 7 April, and on that occasion, Das contributed a collage cartoon. Its theme was novel. Titled *The Mixture as Before*, it suggests that the world continues unchanged: the Vietnam War rages on, Bangladesh (East Pakistan) lies devastated, communism is shown on its deathbed, and racial apartheid persists in South Africa. On 11 April, a full-page cartoon again depicts the genocide in Bangladesh, while the United States declares it an “internal matter.” The 18 April issue carries a Bangladesh-themed cover and includes a drawing by Dhiraj Choudhury. Another cartoon in that issue shows Bangladesh standing up in resistance.

The cartoon published on 25 April is particularly striking. A goat is tied to a post, its body bearing the words “Free Bangladesh.” Yahya, dressed as a butcher and wearing a lungi, stretches out his hand, while Mao Zedong places an axe in it. The title reads *Helping the Butcher*.



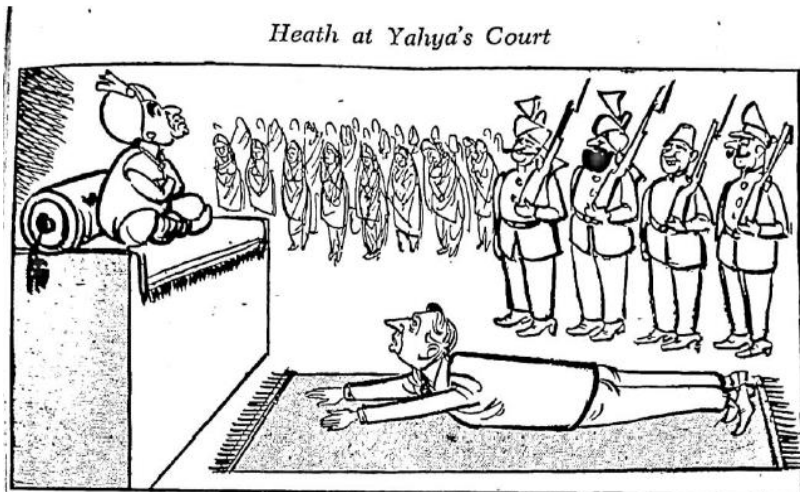
*AID TO THE BUTCHER. Shankar. 25 April 1971*

In May, *Shankar's Weekly* published its annual issue, larger in size and priced at two rupees—an issue that was likely published every year. That month saw the highest number of Bangladesh-related cartoons: fifteen in total. Contributors included Shankar, Nege, Prakash, Somen, Madhu, and Vijayan. The themes did not differ significantly from those of April. Yahya and Bhutto remained the central figures; genocide and the indifference of global powers dominated the narratives. China and the United States featured prominently, and the silence of the Islamic world was also highlighted—an issue rarely addressed in other cartoons I have seen. Even the monsoon issue's cover focused on Bangladesh.



*Super Power attitude and Genocide'. May 1971*

In June, Bangladesh appeared on the covers of two issues. In one, India is depicted as a pilgrim going from one superpower “shrine” to another, appealing for help for Bangladesh, only to be turned away everywhere. The second cover addresses the mass rape of Bangali women, who are shown pleading for help while world leaders turn their backs, exposing their indifference. Both covers are likely by Shankar. Another cover, probably by Rebatibhushan, also appeared that month.



*Britain is understood to have sounded Pakistan on a UN role in solving the refugee problem. 20 June 1971*

A particularly sharp cartoon published on 20 June mocks Britain. Yahya is shown seated in court while Mr. Heath lies prostrate before him, reporting obediently and suggesting that Yahya request the United Nations to assist with the refugee crisis.

## 8

In the four issues published in July, *Shankar's Weekly* carried the highest number of cartoons. Among them were one cover cartoon and two collage cartoons. Three cartoons focused on how Yahya Khan was deceiving world leaders. The cover of the 4 July issue shows Yahya misleading global leaders by talking about a “new constitution,” effectively throwing dust in their eyes.

Seven cartoons addressed the role of Nixon, Kissinger, and the United States. In one, Nixon is shown caught in a dilemma—on one side stands Yahya (portrayed as a devil), and on the other, the steadily growing anti-American public opinion. During July, rumours circulated that Khondaker Mostaq was attempting to establish contact with the United States to propose a compromise formula. This appeared in a cartoon titled *Ventaquilist*. Kissinger is shown delighted, with Mostaq sitting in Yahya's lap.

Another cartoon featuring Kissinger shows Yahya preparing a garland made of skulls from East Pakistan to present to him, saying, “You don't know what you are missing, Mr. Kissinger.” Two cartoons also address the Nixon–Mao relationship.

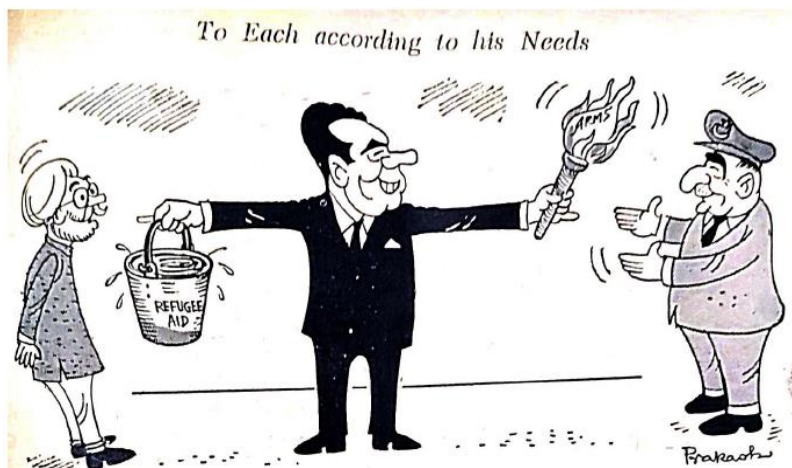
July also saw the highest number of cartoons on refugees, the refugee crisis, and the role of the United Nations—eight in total. One cartoon depicts a discussion of Indian history, noting that refugees have come to India from Punjab, Kenya, Tibet, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh, while “we” originally came from Central Asia. Nege mocks the situation by portraying tourists visiting refugee camps and epidemic zones. In one cartoon, a man boasts that he conducted a helicopter survey over cholera-infested areas.

In another cartoon by Nege, Indians are shown marching and declaring that the refugee crisis is a global problem, while the “world” remains silent. Refugee aid is depicted as grossly

inadequate. A donor tells India's Foreign Minister Swaran Singh, "Take it or leave it—I'll save it for my dog." Kutty portrays the United Nations wearing dark glasses, reinforcing the idea that the UN serves only powerful states—a truth that remains valid today, just as it was fifty-five years earlier.

In August, ten cartoons were published, showing a noticeable shift in tone and theme. It becomes clear that the situation is turning against Pakistan. Yahya threatens Mujib with trial but is unable to carry it through. Greater emphasis is placed on Pakistan's allies—Nixon, Mao, and the broader roles of the United States and China—while also highlighting that their support is failing to strengthen Pakistan.

The cartoon published on 1 August is particularly telling. Nixon is shown providing refugee relief to India and weapons to Pakistan. The title, *To Each What They Need*, perfectly captures the nature of American policy in a single image.



*To Each according to his Needs. Prakash. 1 August 1971*

The cover of the 8 August issue offers an assessment of the contemporary situation. Yahya threatens India with war. The symbolism is striking: under the moonlight, the moon (Indira Gandhi) looks on while a dog (Yahya) barks. The title reads

*Barking at the Moon.* This issue also features a powerful drawing of a freedom fighter, though the artist's name could not be identified.

Another cartoon from 8 August, titled *A Friend in Need*, depicts Mujib bound at the gallows, Bhutto exultant, and Yahya declaring that Mujib will be executed. Nixon is shown supplying arms, while Mao's poster is visible in Nixon's hand—signifying America's reliance on China. A week later, another cartoon featuring Mujib appeared, titled *I Will Do It and No One Will Help Me*. Yahya orders Mujib's trial in a military court. In the image, Yahya stands by the gallows holding the noose—symbolizing Mujib's trial—while Mao and Nixon stand at a distance. In effect, by ordering the trial, Yahya is inviting his own downfall, with Mao and Nixon remaining mere spectators.



*A Friend in Need, President Yahya Khan has said that Mr. Mujibur Rahman may be executed. 8 August 1971*

The 22 August cartoon is particularly satirical. Titled *Time to Slip Away*, it mocks Yahya's claim that Pakistan had emerged from the East Pakistan crisis as a strong and proud nation. The hollowness of this claim is exposed by showing Yahya as a balloon being inflated by Nixon and Mao with a pump, while a bull (India) laughs from afar—signalling Pakistan's precarious condition.

A cartoon by Prakash titled *Black Narcissus* appears in the 15 August issue. Yahya gazes at his own reflection in a river, whose bed is filled with skulls. An axe and other killing tools lie nearby. The face reflected back at him is that of a genocidal murderer.

The first cartoon addressing the Soviet Union appeared on 29 August. It depicts the Soviet warning against threatening India. Yahya and Mao appear alarmed by this cautionary message. The title reads *Instructions to Dismount or Stop Sign*.

In September, the number of cartoons in *Shankar's Weekly* dropped sharply to just four. All four, however, depict Pakistan's deteriorating position. One cartoon (5 September) shows China saying "one China," Nixon insisting on "two Chinas" (China and Taiwan), while Yahya declares that when it comes to Pakistan, there is only "one Pakistan."



"Please make no mistake, when it comes to Pakistan there's only One."

"Please make no mistake, when it comes to Pakistan there's only One." Soman. 5 September 1971

The 12 September issue features a Bangladesh-themed cover titled *The Wounded Tiger*. Yahya is depicted as a battered tiger, bruised and weary, holding a sheaf of paddy—symbolizing an offer of forgiveness. At the time, he had announced “amnesty” for refugees, promising that those who returned would not face reprisals. In the cartoon, innocent animals (the refugees) look on but hesitate to approach. Yahya’s appeal is shown as futile.

Another cartoon by Shankar features Bhutto. When Bhutto demands the “civilianization” of the government, Yahya chases him with a knife in hand. Vijayan’s cartoon, also published on 12 September, draws on Pavlovian psychology. In essence, Vijayan mocks the Communist Party of India (CPI), which was vocal in demanding recognition of Bangladesh but was widely believed to align its policies strictly with Soviet directives.



*You Asked for It. Mr. Bhutto has called for immediate "civilianisation" of the Pakistan administration. Shankar. 12 September 1971*

By September, Pakistan’s decline is unmistakable. The swagger and bravado are gone; the country is cornered from all sides. Global public opinion no longer supports it. The cartoon published on 26 September captures this very condition.

---October opens with a striking cartoon. Both Russia and the United States propose that India and Pakistan engage in talks, but Pakistan refuses. The cartoon shows a water-filled vessel—symbolizing Indo-Pak friendship. Kosygin (Russia) is seen pulling a donkey (Yahya) toward the vessel to make it drink, while Nixon (the United States) pushes from behind. The donkey does not move, indicating Yahya's unwillingness to accept the proposal. At a distance, leaders from various countries watch and laugh, highlighting the impracticality of the proposal.



*Tell her "You woman, shut up!". Shankar. 7 November 1971*

Another cartoon shows Nixon dressed as a priest, advising India to exercise restraint. In a cartoon by Vijayan dated 10 October, it is suggested that Yahya is fake will be the same as Thieu of Vietnam. The

17 October cartoon depicts Russia advising the United States to remain restrained.

Notably, the October cartoons do not focus on genocide or the refugee crisis (with one exception). Instead, they reflect Pakistan's declining position. Nixon and the broader international arena increasingly appear aligned with India and Russia in supporting Bangladesh. Apart from the United States and China, no major power is seen opposing this stance. The cartoons clearly suggest that a resolution to the crisis is imminent.

In November, Bangladesh became the central theme in every issue of *Shankar's Weekly*. This month saw the highest number of Bangladesh-related cartoons—fifteen in total—with Bangladesh featured on the cover of three issues. A defining feature of the November cartoons is their focus on Bangladesh and the role of the superpowers. Earlier cartoons had emphasized genocide, refugees, and the performative statements of world leaders; in November, individuals take center stage—Indira Gandhi, Yahya Khan, Nixon, and Mao.

The cover cartoon of 7 November is outstanding and was likely drawn by Shankar. Its title reads, "*Tell Her, 'You Woman, Shut Up'.*" Indira is shown striding forward with confidence, overcoming countless obstacles and moving steadily toward victory. A frightened Yahya pleads with Nixon to stop her. The subject matter and execution are both masterful.

A similar message appears in another cartoon, also likely by Shankar. Mujib is shown in captivity, with U Thant holding Yahya's hand. U Thant proposes talks between India and Pakistan to reduce tensions. Indira responds indifferently, telling U Thant to ask Yahya to negotiate with Mujib instead. The title reads, "*Go to the Right Man.*"

Another cartoon from the same date shows Indira and Kosygin smiling on one side of a fence, while Mao Zedong's effigy sits atop Yahya's head. China declares that it will supply arms to Pakistan if war breaks out with India. A bewildered Nixon stands nearby. In

another cartoon by Prakash published on 7 November, Indira is shown ignoring Pakistan's propaganda.

The 14 November issue features a Bangladesh-themed cover. This cartoon is particularly witty. On one side are internal and external forces opposing Bangladesh; on the other is the Liberation War itself. Overwhelmed, Yahya appears to be drowning, while Mao hands him a bundle of grass. The proverb is apt: a drowning man clutches even at straw. Yahya's situation is precisely that. The cartoon also carries a deeper meaning—superpowers habitually practice double standards when dealing with small or weak states.

Another sharp cartoon published on 14 November focuses on Bhutto. After returning from a visit to China, Bhutto claims the trip was successful. However, during customs inspection, only clothes and bottles of liquor are found in his suitcase. Yahya comments, "No Mao, no Chow"—implying that the visit yielded no concrete assurances from China against India.

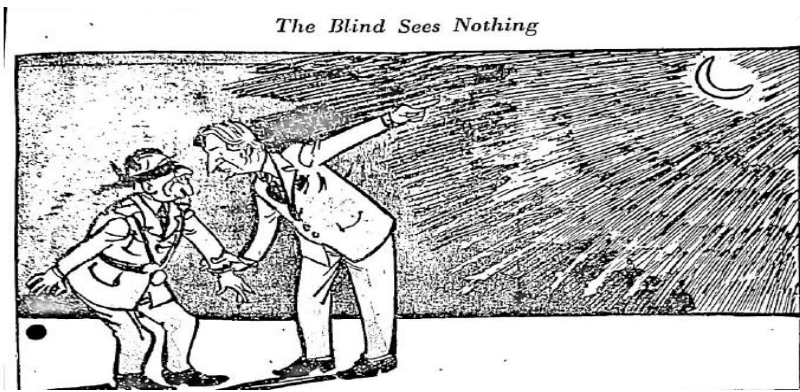


*No Mao, No Chou? Mr. Bhutto who led a Pak delegation to Peking claimed he had achieved "solid result". 14 November 1971*

Another cartoon depicts Yahya trying to straighten the twisted tail of a lion representing India. The title reads "A Test of Patience." Pakistan is provoking India to go to war, but India refuses to take the bait. The 14 November issue also includes a fine refugee-themed illustration by Rebatibhushan.

The 21 November issue once again features Bangladesh on the cover. Superpowers are shown backing Yahya, leading him to believe that world opinion is on his side. Indira and her ministers, however, are jubilant, having realized that this very “world opinion” will ultimately be Yahya’s undoing.

In the same issue, Prakash contributes an intelligent cartoon titled after a play by Tennessee Williams—*Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. A cat cries out desperately, shouting “Mao, Mao,” though it should be meowing. Pakistan, in dire straits, is crying out for Chinese support, but China offers no response.



*British Premier Heath is reported to have advised President Yahya Khan that without the participation of the elected representative of East Bengal his scheme of a new Constitution was bound to fail. 28 November 1971*

Pakistan’s worsening condition in November is further highlighted in two more cartoons. The 28 November cartoon titled “*The Blind See Nothing*” shows Yahya attempting to draft a new constitution. British Prime Minister Heath warns him that such a plan will fail without the elected representatives of East Bengal. In another cartoon from the same date, the United States softly advises Yahya to talk to representatives from Bangladesh—mere lip service, as Nixon is shown stroking Yahya’s ego.

This cartoon features the smiling faces of three villains—Mao, Nixon, and Yahya. Within a week, however, these smiles would disappear. The final cartoon of this period, by Prakash (28

November), depicts Yahya in a deeply pitiable condition. Mao is shown injecting him with “strength”—symbolizing China’s opposition to India at the United Nations—an intervention that ultimately proved futile.

## 10

By December, everything had reached its inevitable conclusion. It is therefore reasonable to assume that most of the cartoons from this period would focus on Pakistan’s humiliation—and that is indeed the case.

War between India and Pakistan broke out on 6 December. The first December issue of *Shankar’s Weekly* was published on 5 December, and within just two days of the war it had already become clear that Pakistan was failing badly. One cartoon shows Yahya fleeing in panic, repeatedly crying “India, India.” As before, India is portrayed as the real force behind the Mukti Bahini; in reality, it is the freedom fighters who are chasing him. Nixon, Mao, and even Bhutto are shown turning away from Yahya. A companion cartoon published around the same time depicts Sadat and Nixon proposing “peace.” Yahya’s hands are stained with blood, yet he believes that accepting a peace proposal might offer him some relief.

The cover of the 12 December issue focuses on Yahya. By then, it was evident that Pakistan would have to surrender. Yahya is shown seeking a moment of respite. In the cartoon, he tries to climb down, only to find that the ground below is bristling with spears. The caption reads: “Look, they won’t even let me set foot on the ground.” Another intriguing cartoon follows the cover. India, depicted as a lion, is resting. Yahya kicks the lion in an attempt to humiliate it, but the lion awakens and nearly devours him. This single image perfectly captures the context of the time: Pakistan provoked India repeatedly and finally attacked in December; India awoke and struck back decisively.

Another excellent cartoon from 12 December draws on the once-famous Siamese twins. The title reads “*Surgical Separation of Siamese Twins.*” Here, Pakistan is shown being separated. Yahya flees in terror, while Bengalis smile in relief. At the center stands

India's Defence Minister Jagjivan Ram, holding a bloodstained sword. Once again, Bangalis are inaccurately depicted wearing *dhotis*—a distortion discussed earlier.

With India victorious, the remaining cartoons mock Pakistan, Nixon, and Bhutto. A particularly fine cartoon by Shankar, published on 26 December, shows a uniformed freedom fighter smiling as he tells a beggar: "They the Pakistanis have left behind their uniforms to make up for our shortage of clothes."



*"They've left behind their uniforms to provide us clothing." Shankar.  
26 December 1971*

The collection does not end with cartoons from December 1971 alone. To maintain narrative continuity, cartoons published up to March 1972 have also been included.

On 2 January 1972, the magazine's cover featured the Bangladesh armed forces. Bhutto had finally come to power. A cartoon shows a newborn child—Bhutto—being delivered, with Nixon and Mao acting as midwives. The implication is clear: Bhutto initiated the war in order to seize power, with the support of China and the United States. Another cartoon from the same date ridicules Bhutto further. Mujib is shown sitting calmly in prison—almost like a zoo

enclosure—while Bhutto, depicted as a monkey, asks from outside, “Would you like some peanuts?” World leaders observe from afar. At the time, rumours were circulating that Bhutto was in talks with Mujib. In reality, Mujib had already emerged victorious; there was little left for Bhutto to negotiate.



*DID YOU THINK TO BE GRATEFUL? Gen. Yahya Khan has been put under house arrest by President Bhutto. 16 January 1972*

A related cartoon published on 9 January shows Mujib, personifying the state, walking out of prison. Bhutto hangs helplessly nearby. The title reads “*Any Conditions?*”—questioning whether Mujib’s release came with strings attached. This was the cover cartoon. Another cartoon shows Yahya under arrest, with Bhutto standing outside holding a sword. The title—“*Mughal Tradition*”—perfectly captures the deeper meaning: in Mughal history, sons imprisoned fathers, brothers killed brothers, all in pursuit of power. Yahya had once regarded Bhutto as a younger brother; now, Bhutto arrests him to consolidate his rule.

This account concludes with the cover cartoon of 12 March 1972. The United States has finally recognized Bangladesh—arguably out of compulsion and self-interest. The cartoon shows Nixon reluctantly moving toward Mujib, who extends his hand but turns

his face away. Nixon says uncertainly, “I think... Mujibur Rahman.”



*The United States has recognised Bangladesh. 12 March 1972*

11

Cartoons published in West Bengal largely reflect the emotional outlook of Bangalis living in the border regions. Beneath the humour in these cartoons lies deep emotional resonance. *Shankar's Weekly*, however, was published in North India, and most of its cartoonists approached the issue from a South Indian, metropolitan perspective. They too expressed emotion—especially in drawings (rather than cartoons) dealing with refugees—but their primary focus remained international. They emphasized the perspectives of China and the United States and highlighted the indifference of global leaders toward Yahya and his genocide, particularly in the early phase.

In these cartoons, Yahya, Bhutto, Nixon, and Mao emerge as villains, while Mujib and Indira appear as hero and heroine. Mujib, however, appears relatively less frequently. The Soviet Union is

largely absent, while leftist politics is occasionally treated with irony.

In cartoons from West Bengal, each cartoonist's drawing style is distinctive. In *Shankar's Weekly*, apart from Shankar himself, the stylistic individuality of other cartoonists is less pronounced. West Bengal cartoons tend to emphasize a clear statement; by contrast, *Shankar's Weekly* often relies on light satire grounded in everyday political developments rather than overt declarations.

The 131 cartoons published in *Shankar's Weekly* over the course of one year are therefore of immense significance. Not all newspapers published cartoons regularly, but *Shankar's Weekly* was a cartoon magazine by nature—and for that entire year, Bangladesh remained its central theme. Domestic Indian politics failed to attract much attention by comparison.

Taken as a whole, this body of work demonstrates that 1971 was perceived not only by writers and journalists but also by artists as a major international event. Through their work, they engaged with the war, sought to influence and mobilize public opinion, and framed the conflict visually for a global audience. Most importantly, when these cartoons are viewed sequentially—from January 1971 to March 1972—they provide a clear outline of what happened in Bangladesh and how the Liberation War was perceived internationally. In particular, they reveal in detail the roles of China and the United States and their biased attitudes toward genocide.

It is striking that, even half a century later, those attitudes have changed very little. Gaza is a telling example.