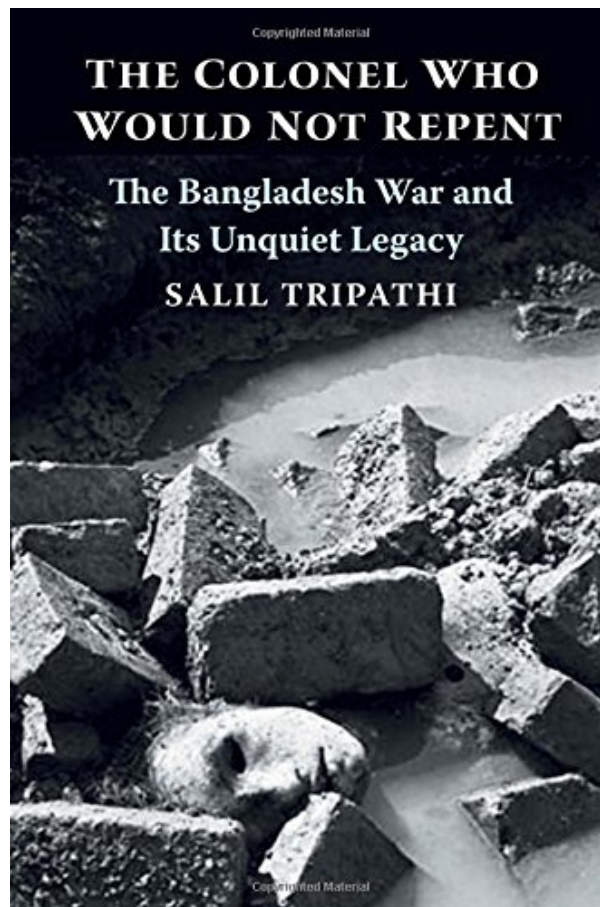
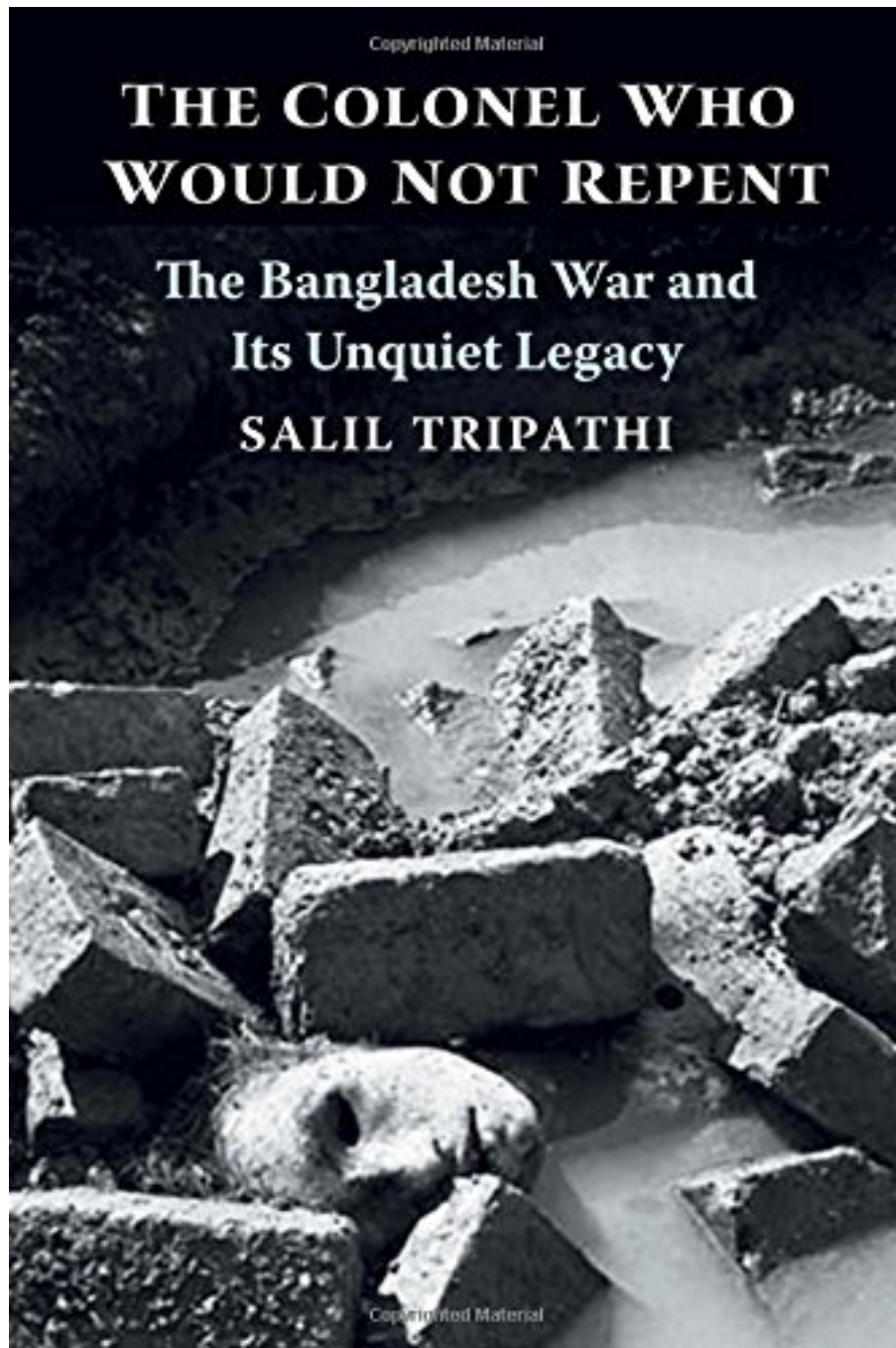


THE COLONEL WHO WOULD NOT REPENT: THE BANGLADESH WAR AND ITS UNQUIET LEGACY BY SALIL TRIPATHI



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Review

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About the Author

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A searing, kaleidoscopic portrait of Bangladesh from the 1947 Partition to the present

Bangladesh was once East Pakistan, the Muslim nation carved out of the Indian Subcontinent when it gained independence from Britain in 1947. As religion alone could not keep East Pakistan and West Pakistan together, Bengali-speaking East Pakistan fought for and achieved liberation in 1971. Coups and assassinations followed, and two decades later it completed its long, tumultuous transition to parliamentary government. Its history is complex and tragic—one of war, natural disaster, starvation, corruption, and political instability.

First published in India by the Aleph Book Company, Salil Tripathi's lyrical, beautifully wrought tale of the difficult birth and conflict-ridden politics of this haunted land has received international critical acclaim, and his reporting has been honored with a Mumbai Press Club Red Ink Award for Excellence in Journalism. *The Colonel Who Would Not Repent* is an insightful study of a nation struggling to survive and define itself.

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Tries to explain contemporary politics through a historical lens

By Nabil

This is the first book I read dealing with Shahabag movement. The author does a commendable job in presenting the situation neutrally. The story-telling nature of the book is executed well. Not only does this book include personal anecdotes of brave survivors, it highlights the nuances of the politics. Mr. Salil did a superb job in presenting the difficulties of setting up war-crimes trial 40 years later while also understanding the deep sentiment of victims seeking justice and closure. The only shortcoming would be devoting less pages to document the history under military rule. A must-read for a neutral reader of the history of Bangladesh.

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

Birth pangs and a midlife crisis:

By Vistasp Hodiwala

It’s astonishing how personal histories of significant historical events can so eloquently blank out a significant chunk of narrative whilst disproportionately bloating up events that serve narrow national interest. As an Indian school kid growing up back in the 80’s, the 1971 war was just a 15 day affair when Sam Maneckshaw and JFR Jacob emerged as heroes extraordinaire riding astride their army jeeps and battle tanks like knights in shining armour to ‘rescue’ Bangladesh.

And that was that.

But why on Allah's earth did the Bengali Muslim in a matter of just two and a half decades decide to go against his co-religionists when Islam was the cohesive glue that was supposed to hold it all together? What precipitated a defiant Mujibur Rehman to challenge the Pakistani establishment? What kind of brutality and atrocity did the local citizenry brave to get to a point where it became unbearable to live without the thought of independence? Why was the secular identity so dear to the average Bangladeshi brought up on a steady intellectual diet of Rabindranath Tagore and Kazi Nazrul Islam?

It took Salil Tripathi's scholarly and sensitive work *The Colonel Who Would Not Repent* to restore sense and balance to that skewed narrative. Not that anything about India's contribution was exaggerated then or need not be celebrated now, but the spectacular lack of awareness most of us in India have about the birth pangs of our neighbour to the east is a thing of humbling detail. This heartrending account about the birth of a nation also takes into account the events during India's partition and the advantages it frittered away due to crude political ambitions and tragic bickering in a mere 5 years since her birth.

Yes, Bangladesh still performs way better on key human index indicators than its two larger and more noisy neighbours to its West but its political framework is as brittle as it started out with and Salil's book explores this with tremendous depth and total empathy. So if you ever feel curious about this passionate neighbour of ours, this book is as good a place to begin as any.

1 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

An authoritative and very readable account of the war in Bangladesh

By Kevin

“*The Colonel Who Would Not Repent*” is the remarkable story of one of the twentieth century’s most cataclysmic conflicts, the 1971 war which resulted in the creation of Bangladesh.

Salil Tripathi describes the social, linguistic, political and cultural fault lines that separated the two parts of former Pakistan. When the government in Islamabad tried to eliminate political differences through a campaign of repression in early 1971, after Sheikh Mujibur Rahman’s Awami League from the East had won an all-Pakistan election but had been prevented from taking power, Bengali resistance and, eventually, Indian intervention led to the defeat of West Pakistan and the emergence of Bangladesh as an independent state.

During nine months of conflict an estimated 10 million refugees fled to India. As Tripathi points out, this was “the single-largest and most rapid instance of forced displacement in recent history.”

The war saw a systematic attempt to liquidate the intellectual and cultural elite of the new state at birth. It also witnessed a program of rape carried out by Pakistani forces. In a particularly moving section of the book, Tripathi examines the military campaign of sexual violence, recording with empathy the stark and painful testimony of survivors.

“I decided to tell the story of each woman I met, because each experience taught me something new,” he writes. “It is easy to talk of ‘a quarter million rapes’ and think that each violent encounter was the same. It never is.”

Independent Bangladesh fared badly as a result of misrule and, in 1974, famine. In August 1975 junior officers staged a coup. Tripathi delivers a masterly forensic account of the assassination of Mujib and members of his family on the night of 14/15 August, His detailed description of the bloodbath in the Presidential villa moves from room to room, execution to execution. The youngest victim was Mujib’s ten-year old son.

Recounting the chronicle of political killing that stretched from Mujib's murder to the eventual rise to power of General Hussain Muhammad Ershad in 1983, Tripathi describes a "cycle of violence, revenge, and reprisals" in which "junior officers had killed Mujib and replaced him with Khondaker Mostaq Ahmad; Khaled Mosharraf removed Mostaq; Taher had Khaled Mosharraf killed and released Zia; Zia had Taher executed in jail after a secret trial; gave immunity to the junior officers but sent them overseas; other officers killed Zia, and Manzur was blamed; army officers then had Manzur killed. This was Ershad's moment."

Bangladesh still struggles with the legacy of its violent birth. "The Colonel Who Would Not Repent" is an authoritative and highly readable account of the war, its origins and its aftermath. It skillfully illuminates the country's recent past in a way that sheds light on its present.

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