



## Freedom

22 March - 22 April 2012



The Gallery @ Idea Store Whitechapel presents 'Freedom', an exhibition to mark the 40th anniversary of Bengali independence. Organised by the Swadhinata Trust, the exhibition is part of Bengali Heritage Month.

The exhibition features images from the war of independence by photographers Anwar Hossain and Abul Lais Shyamal, as well as related posters.

The events of the war in 1971 started with Operation Searchlight, a planned military assault carried out by the Pakistani Army on 25th March 1971 to curb the Bengali nationalist movement. The Pakistani military regime unleashed a systematic campaign of mass murder.

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the elected Bengali nationalist leader, asked the people to support the struggle by any means available to them: "I call upon the people of Bangladesh wherever you might be and with whatever you have, to resist the army of occupation..."

Initially, the Pakistani military attacked independence activists and the minority Hindu communities. Soon after, however, they targeted the whole population, including Muslims, women, children and the elderly. No one was spared and the killings were indiscriminate.

The mass killings in Bangladesh (then East Pakistan) in 1971 are seen as one of the most concentrated acts of genocide in the twentieth century. According to the Bengali government, three million people were killed, 250,000 women raped and ten million people fled Bangladesh to seek refuge in neighbouring India.

The Bengalis organised themselves into guerrilla forces and fought back against the occupying military. This exhibition tries to capture themes of resistance, hope, and love during the war. Bangladesh became liberated on 16 December 1971, after nine months of the Liberation War.