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# BANGLADESH A BRUTAL BIRTH



PHOTOGRAPHERED BY KISLOR DAREKLI

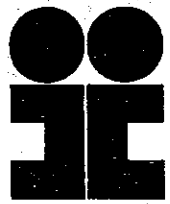
FOR THOSE WHO SUFFERED

# BANGLADESH A BRUTAL BIRTH

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INTRODUCTION BY S. MULGAOKAR

PHOTOGRAPHED BY KISHOR PAREKH

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THE FULL STORY OF BANGLADESH CAN NEVER BE TOLD.

EVEN IN MAN'S VOCABULARY OF HORROR THERE ARE NO WORDS TO DESCRIBE THE BRUTALITY OF THE PAKISTANI ARMY AGAINST ITS BENGALI BROTHERS. IT LASTED NINE NIGHTMARISH MONTHS. THERE IS NO PARALLEL IN HISTORY FOR THE CUMULATIVE SCALE OF ATROCITIES BY THE PAKISTANI ARMY BETWEEN MARCH 25, 1971, WHEN NEGOTIATIONS FOR AN AUTONOMOUS EAST BENGAL BROKE DOWN, AND DECEMBER 17, 1971, WHEN THE BANGLADESH FLAG WAS RAISED IN DACCA.

IT WAS NOT JUST A CASUAL FLING OF DEATH LIKE THE HOLOCAUST OF HIROSHIMA. IT WENT BEYOND THE CLINICAL CRUELTY OF THE BELSEN CONCENTRATION CAMPS. DURING THOSE NINE MONTHS THE DEHUMANIZATION OF BANGLADESH DEFIED IMAGINATION: ONE OUT OF EVERY SEVEN EAST BENGALI FLED FROM HIS HOME—AND A TIDAL WAVE OF 10 MILLION PEOPLE WAS HURLED INTO REFUGEE CAMPS IN INDIA; AT LEAST TWO MILLION PEOPLE WERE WIPED OUT; THOUSANDS OF WOMEN WERE RAPED; THE MUTILATED AND THE MAIMED HAVE NOT BEEN COUNTED YET; AND GOD KNOWS HOW MANY CHILDREN HAVE BEEN IRREVOCABLY BROKEN BY THE TRAUMA OF TERROR.

THE PEOPLE OF EAST BENGAL HAVE ALWAYS KNOWN THE WORLD AS HOSTILE AND UNPREDICTABLE. THEY HAVE KNOWN THE FURY OF CYCLONES, THE TYRANNY OF TYPHOONS, PRE-PARTITION RIOTS, THE EXODUS OF PEOPLE AND, ABOVE ALL, PITILESS FAMINES. THEN, THROUGH THE LAST 25 YEARS OF WEST PAKISTANI RULE, THEY HAD SEEN THEIR "SONAR BANGLA" (GOLDEN BENGAL) DRAINED OF ITS PLENITUDE FROM THE JUTE FIELDS AND THE BOUNTY OF ITS TEA ESTATES DISAPPEAR TO A NEVER-NEVER LAND CALLED WEST PAKISTAN

1,000 MILES AWAY. TIES OF ISLAM, THE BENGALIS WERE TAUGHT, BOUND THEM TO THE STRANGER WHO CAME AS A BROTHER, SPEAKING NOT THEIR SOFT NATIVE TONGUE BUT A STRIDENT URDU. WERE THESE THEIR BROTHERS, THESE TALL FAIRER MEN WHO DESPISED THEIR RICE-AND-FISH CULTURE AND WHO SCORNEED THEIR PLAINTIVE BOAT SONGS? WERE THESE THE PEOPLE TO WHOM THEY HAD HANDED THEIR POST-COLONIAL DESTINY?

FOR 25 YEARS THE EAST BENGALIS BENT WITH THE WIND THAT BLEW FROM THE WEST. YOU HAVE ONLY TO SEE THEIR EYES IN THESE PHOTOGRAPHS, TO LOOK AT THE WAY THEIR LIMBS HAVE TAKEN ON THE CONTOURS OF THE PRESSURES APPLIED ON THEM, TO KNOW THAT, MORE THAN ANY OTHER AGRICULTURAL PEOPLE IN THE WORLD, THEIR ENTIRE UNDERSTANDING OF LIFE IS BASED ON ACCEPTANCE.

AND THEN, AT THE END OF 1969, TO THESE PEOPLE WAS GIVEN A MIDDLE-AGED MAN WITH A KIND OF STRANGE FIRE IN HIS TYPICALLY ROUNDED BENGALI BELLY, AND A STRANGE RING OF ANGER IN HIS MUSICAL BENGALI TONGUE. THAT MAN IS SHEIKH MUJIBUR RAHMAN. SHEIKH MUJIB, WITH ALMOST BIBLICAL SIMPLICITY, OFFERED THE BENGALIS ONLY ONE WORD: BANGLADESH. BUT IN THAT WORD HE GAVE THEM NO MORE AND NO LESS THAN THEMSELVES, THE KNOWLEDGE THAT THEY WERE CHILDREN OF BENGAL. NO WONDER THAT THE WEST PAKISTANIS FELT, FOR THE FIRST TIME, A SHIVER OF FEAR. "THOSE BLOODY BENGALI BASTARDS" HAD BEEN STRUCK BY A NEW KIND OF PLAGUE. THE GENERALS SMELLED ARSON AND REVOLT: THE BENGALIS HAD THE FIRST FLASH OF A NEW CONSCIOUSNESS.

FOR THIS THEY GAVE BACK TO MUJIB, BY A VOTE AS ABSOLUTE AS ANY POLITICAL LEADER CAN EVER GET. THE AUTHORITY TO NEGOTIATE ON

THEIR BEHALF FOR A NEW LIFE. MUJIB ASKED GENERAL YAHYA KHAN ONLY ONE THING: TO BE ALLOWED TO BEAR RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE BENGALIS' OWN FUTURE. HIS PLEA WAS COINED IN SIX POINTS. NONE OF THESE PROCLAIMED AN INDEPENDENT NATION. THE PLEA WAS ESSENTIALLY A PACKAGE WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF PAKISTAN. THE GENERAL DID NOT SAY NO. AS THE TALKS WENT ON, HIS TROOPS WERE MOVING IN. HE PLANNED TO LET THEM LOOSE WITH ONE TERSE COMMAND: "CRUSH THE REBELLION." HE DIDN'T WANT TO KNOW HOW THEY WOULD SET ABOUT IT. ON MARCH 25 HE FLEW BACK TO PAKISTAN.

KISHOR PAREKH WENT TO BANGLADESH WITH NO PRESUMPTION THAT HE WOULD ANNOTATE THE GENOCIDE, OR EXPLAIN THE EXODUS, OR SHOW THE SPIRIT OF A PEOPLE, OR RECORD THE HALLELUJAH OF THE HOMECOMING. HE WENT TO FIND OUT WHY IT HAPPENED, HOW IT HAPPENED AND, ABOVE ALL, TO SEE FOR HIMSELF WHAT STRANGE HOPE DROVE A HOPELESS PEOPLE ON. THE PAKISTANI SOLDIERS HAVE MADE SURE THAT EVERY STREET CORNER AND EVERY SWAMP IN BANGLADESH WILL BEAR ITS OWN MEMORIAL; THAT EVERY FAMILY FOR GENERATIONS WILL HAVE ITS OWN TALE TO TELL OF A SACRIFICIAL OFFERING TO FREEDOM.

WHAT COMES OUT OF THIS BOOK, IN ITS FOUR MAJOR SECTIONS, IS THE UTTER MEANINGLESSNESS OF IT ALL. WE HAVE SEEN BEFORE PICTURES OF A RAPED WOMAN—BUT THE FACE OF THE BENGALI WOMAN THAT PAREKH SHOT FOR THE FIRST SECTION IS THE FACE OF ONE WHO NOW LIVES IN A WORLD WHERE NEITHER FORGIVENESS NOR PAIN NOR MEMORY CAN EVER ENTER. IT IS A FACE AT THE VERY EDGE OF SUFFERING—A SUFFERING DENIED ITS OWN UNDERSTANDING.

THE FAMILY OF REFUGEES IS CAUGHT AS IF THE PHOTOGRAPHER HAD BEEN PRIVILEGED TO KEEP HIS CAMERA OPEN ON A NIGHTMARE. THIS FAMILY LACKS EVEN THE INNATE COHESIVENESS THAT BINDS PEOPLE TOGETHER IN FLIGHT. NOT ONLY DO THEY HAVE NO DIRECTION AS A GROUP, BUT EACH ONE OF THEM, IN THE WAY IN WHICH A LEG IS SEEN RAISED AS IF WALKING ON ITS OWN, SUGGESTS THAT THEIRS IS A WORLD WITHOUT A CENTER. OR PERHAPS THEY HAVE SEEN SO MANY DISMEMBERED LEGS THEY ARE NO LONGER SURE FOR HOW MANY MILES MORE THEY CAN CALL THEIR LEGS THEIR OWN. THIS IS THE STORY OF THE ULTIMATE DISPOSSESSION.

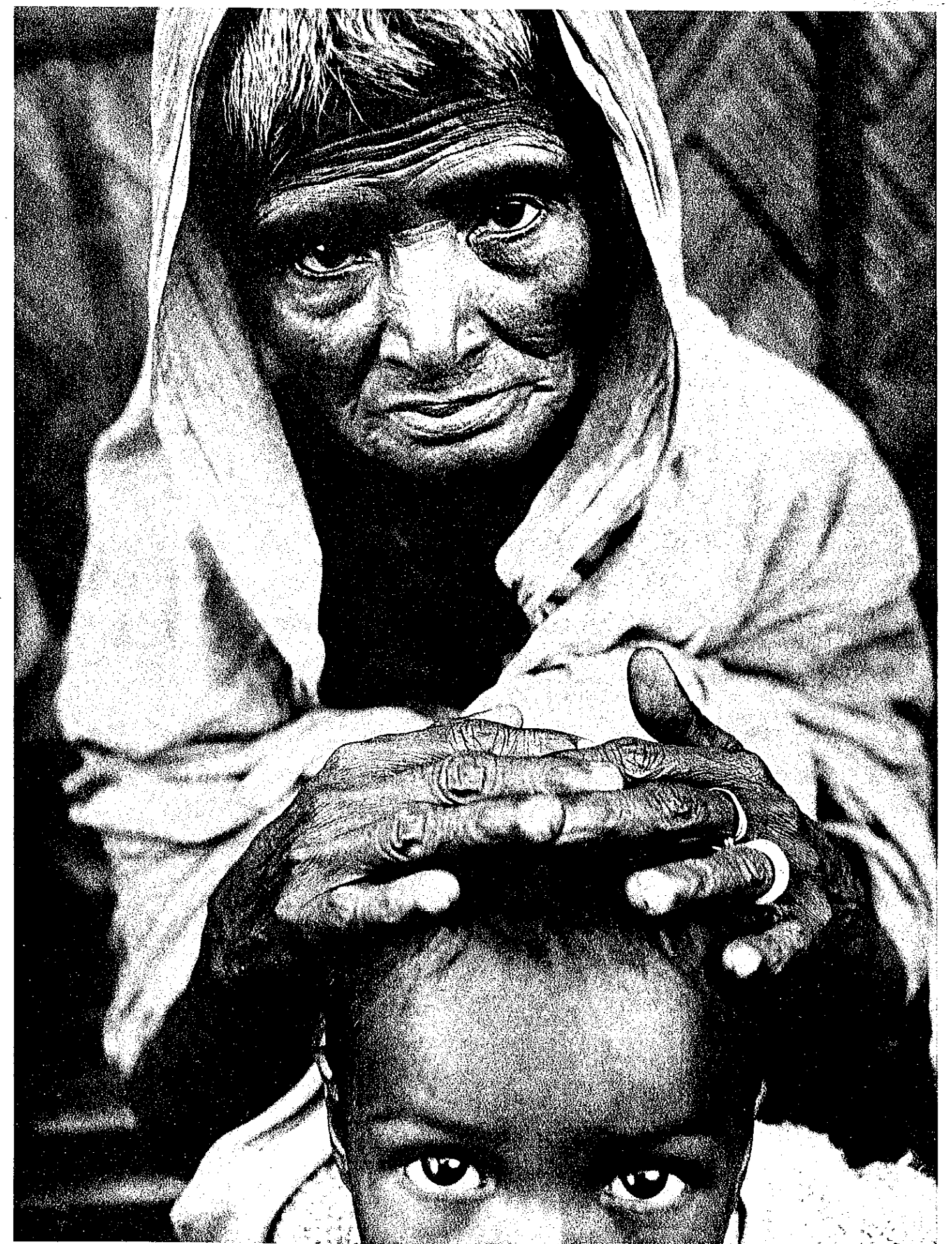
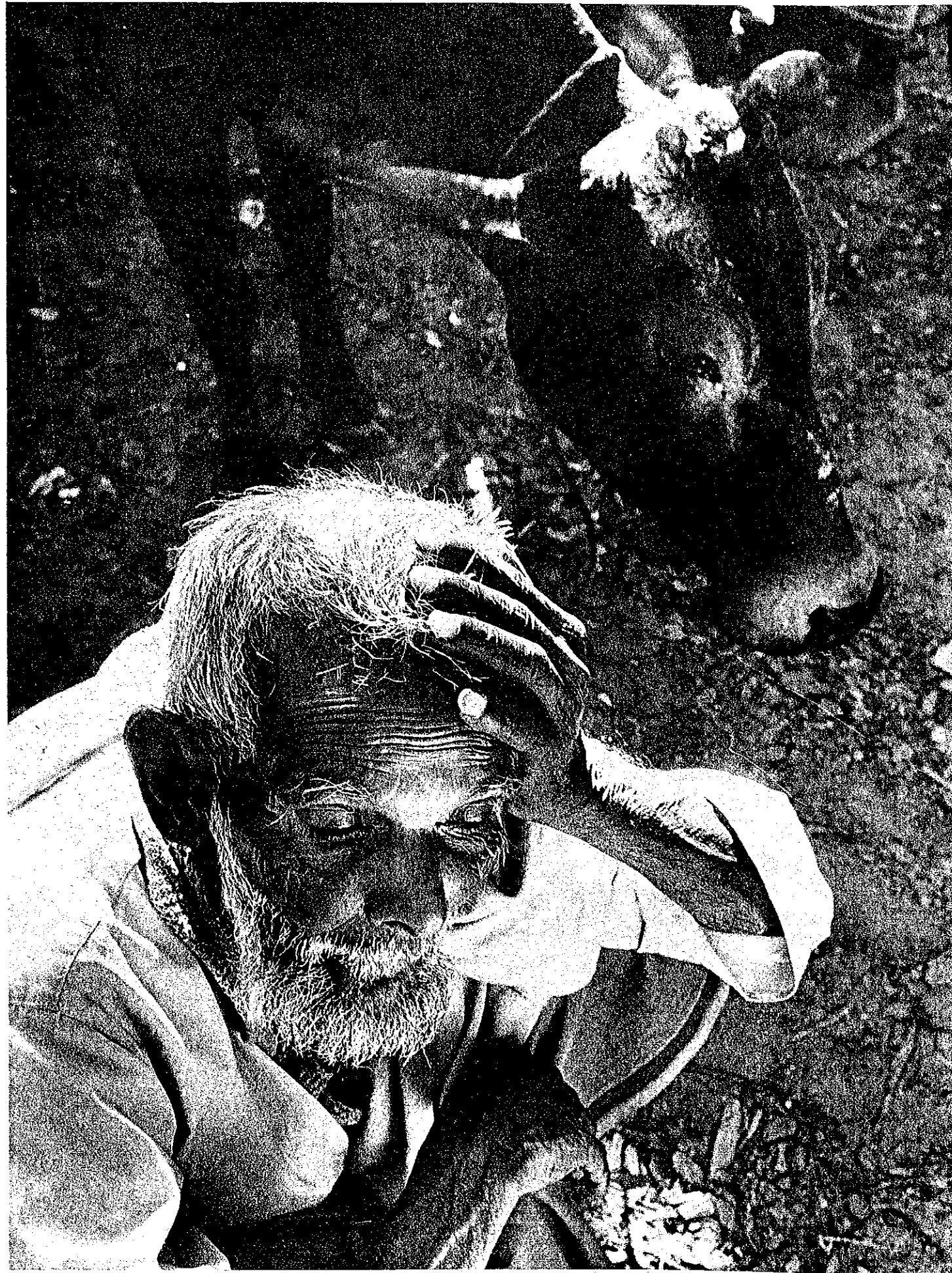
CONTRAST, HOWEVER, THE PICTURE IN THE SECTION ON THE RENEWAL OF THE LIBERATION STRUGGLE, WHICH SHOWS A GROUP OF MUKTI BAHINI YOUTH. NOTE THE EYES OF THE FREEDOM FIGHTERS AND COMPARE THEM WITH THE EYES OF THE OLD MAN EARLIER IN THE BOOK. BETWEEN THE TWO PICTURES LIES NOT A GENERATION GAP BUT THE ESSENCE OF THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN DESPAIR AND RENEWAL. THE YOUNG MEN WITH THEIR RIFLES HAVE NO CERTAINTY OF VICTORY—ONLY THE CERTAINTY THAT THEY CAN NOW LIVE NO OTHER WAY.

THE SECTION ON LIBERATION THAT ENDS THIS SAGA IS EXACTLY AS IT MUST HAVE BEEN FOR THOSE WHO HAD LEFT BANGLADESH WITH NO HOPE OF RETURN. WE WILL REMEMBER NOT THE FEET WALKING ON A FIELD OF FLOWERS, BUT THE FAMILY ARRIVING NEAR THEIR HUT, AND THERE, CROUCHING, A YOUNG GIRL WHO AS LONG AS SHE LIVES WILL SEARCH FOR THE KILLER IN THE DARK.

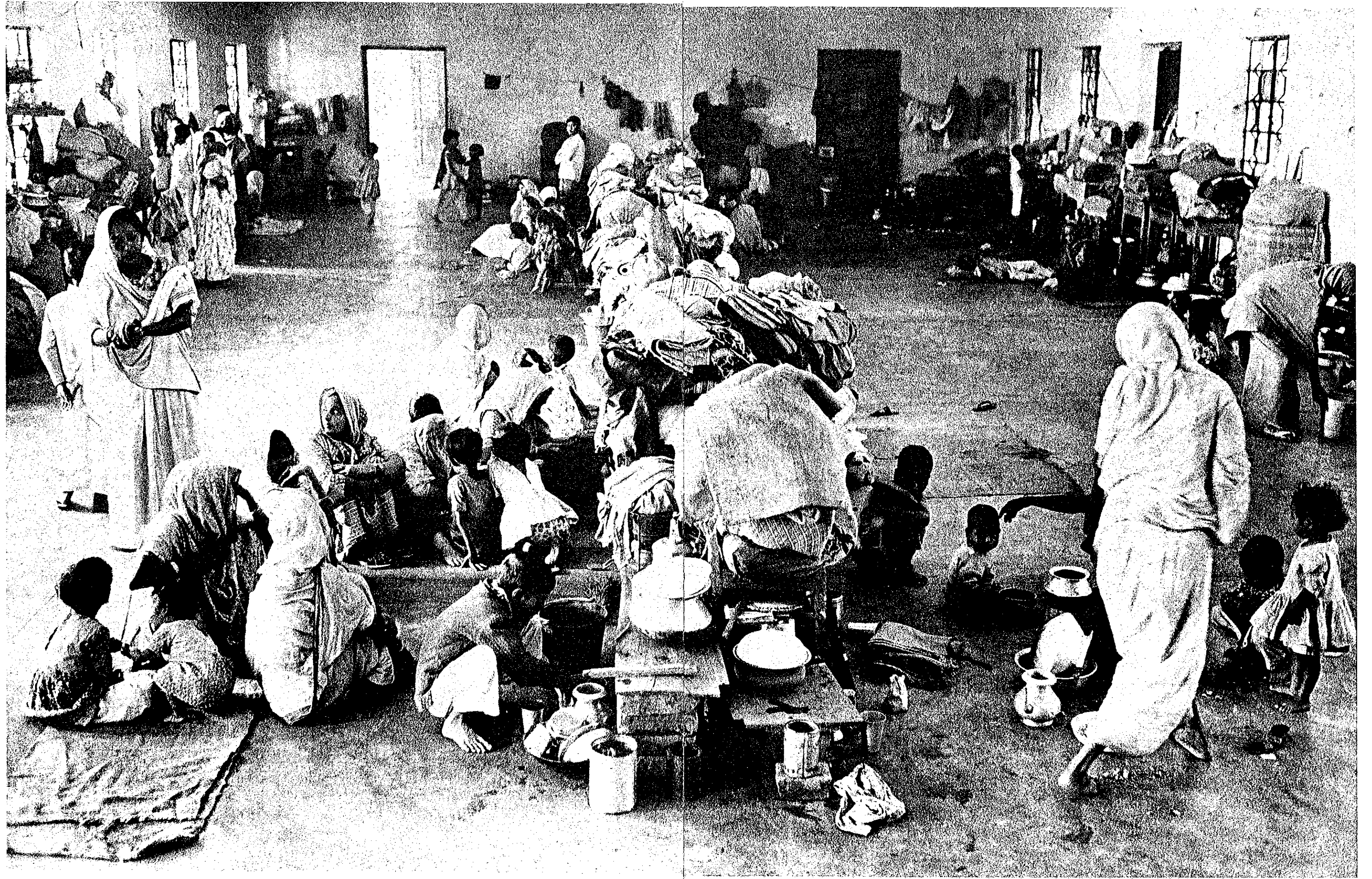
THESE PHOTOGRAPHS DESCRIBE THE SHUDDER OF NINE MONTHS LIVED AT ZERO LEVEL.



IN FLIGHT LIKE STARTLED RICE BIRDS, PANICKED PEASANTS FLY IN THE DUST BEFORE THE SCYTHE OF DEATH, LEAVING THEIR FIELDS UNHARVESTED AND THEIR ANCESTRAL VILLAGES UNINHABITED



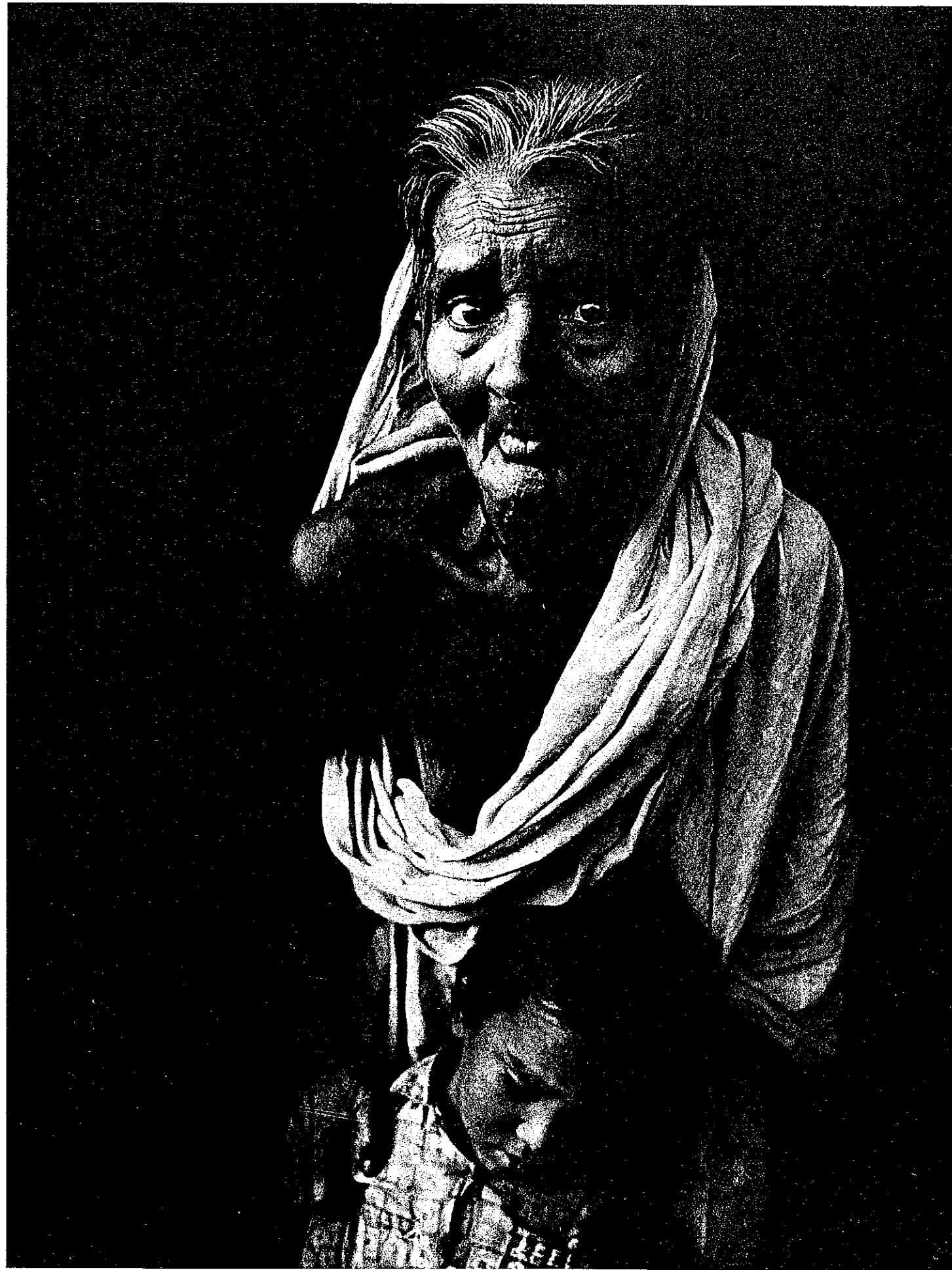
AT THEIR FLIGHT'S END, THE REFUGEES SIT BEWILDERED IN TRANSIENT CAMPS, BESIDE THEIR TIRED ANIMALS. A LONG TIME AFTER I HAD TAKEN PICTURES LIKE THESE I WAS HAUNTED BY THEIR EYES



IT WAS PITIFUL, HOW PEOPLE TRIED TO CREATE AN ILLUSION OF HOME  
IN THE CAVERNOUS HALLS AND CAMPS THAT THEY ALIGHTED ON

MAKING NESTS FOR THEMSELVES AMONG THE PRECIOUS TRIVIA OF  
THEIR LIVES



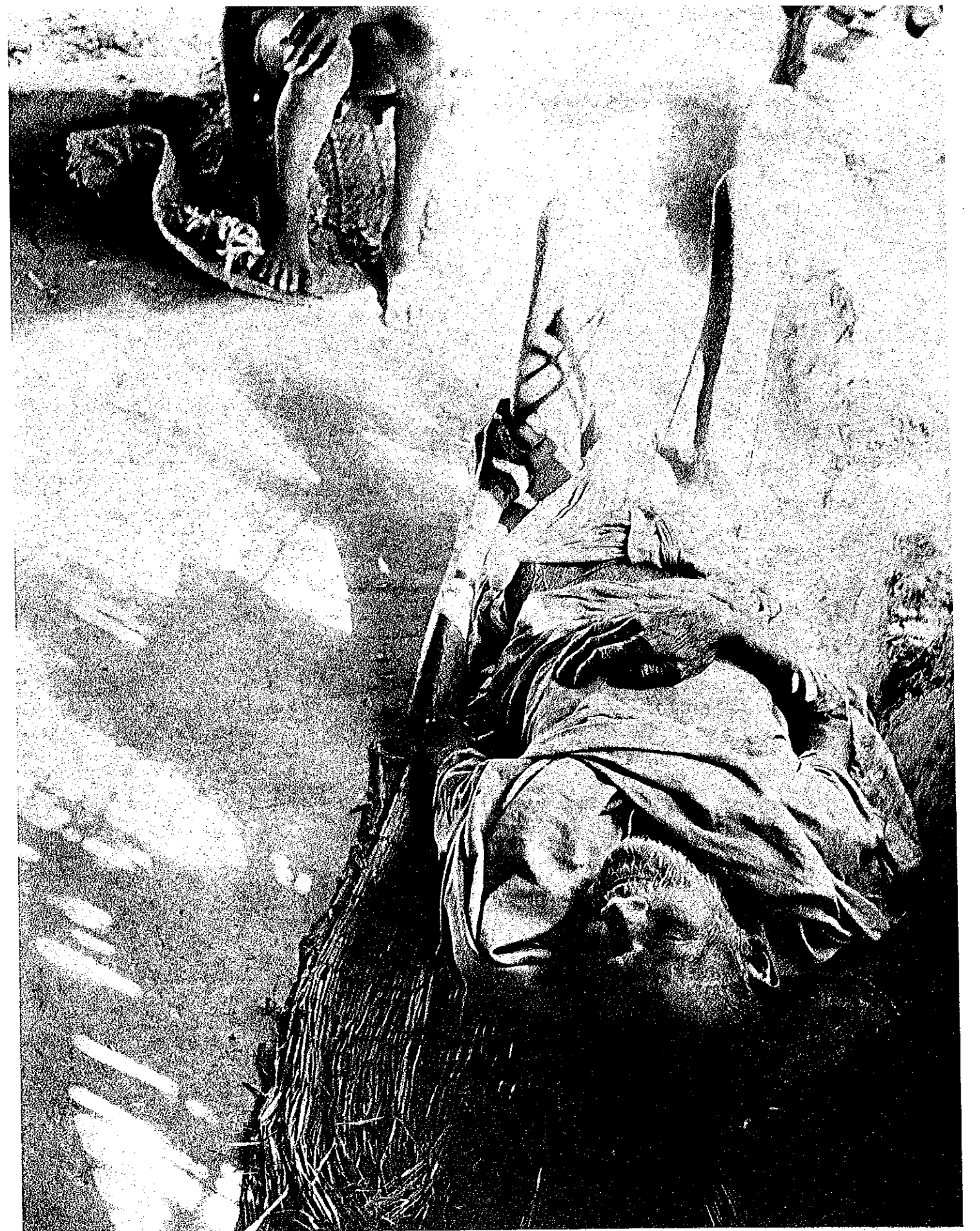


OLD AND YOUNG COMFORTED EACH OTHER: I SAW A BOY TENDERLY FEEDING HIS DYING GRANDMOTHER WITH LUMPS OF RICE MOISTENED IN WATER. I ALSO SAW THE STARK LONELINESS OF THOSE ALL ALONE.



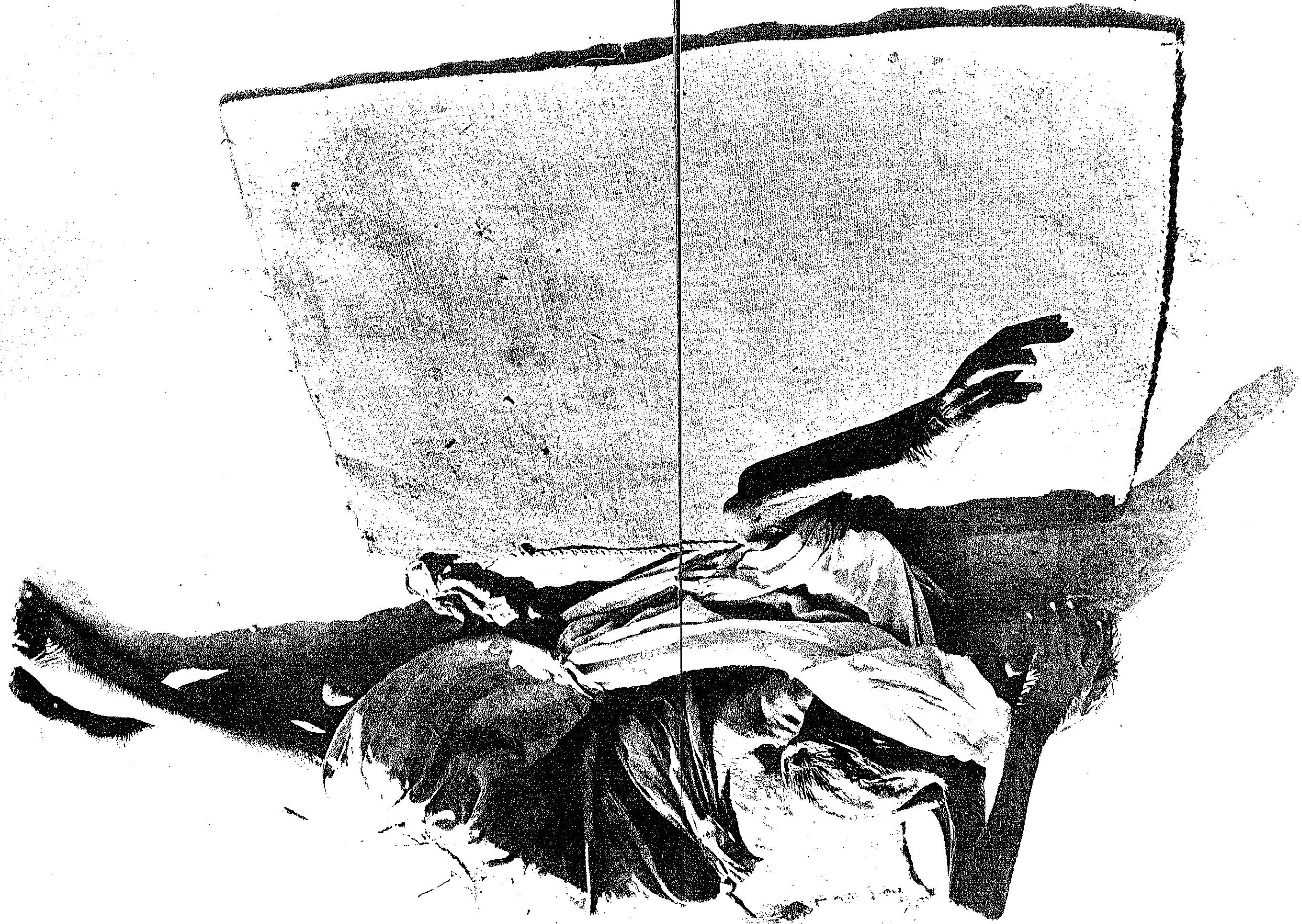


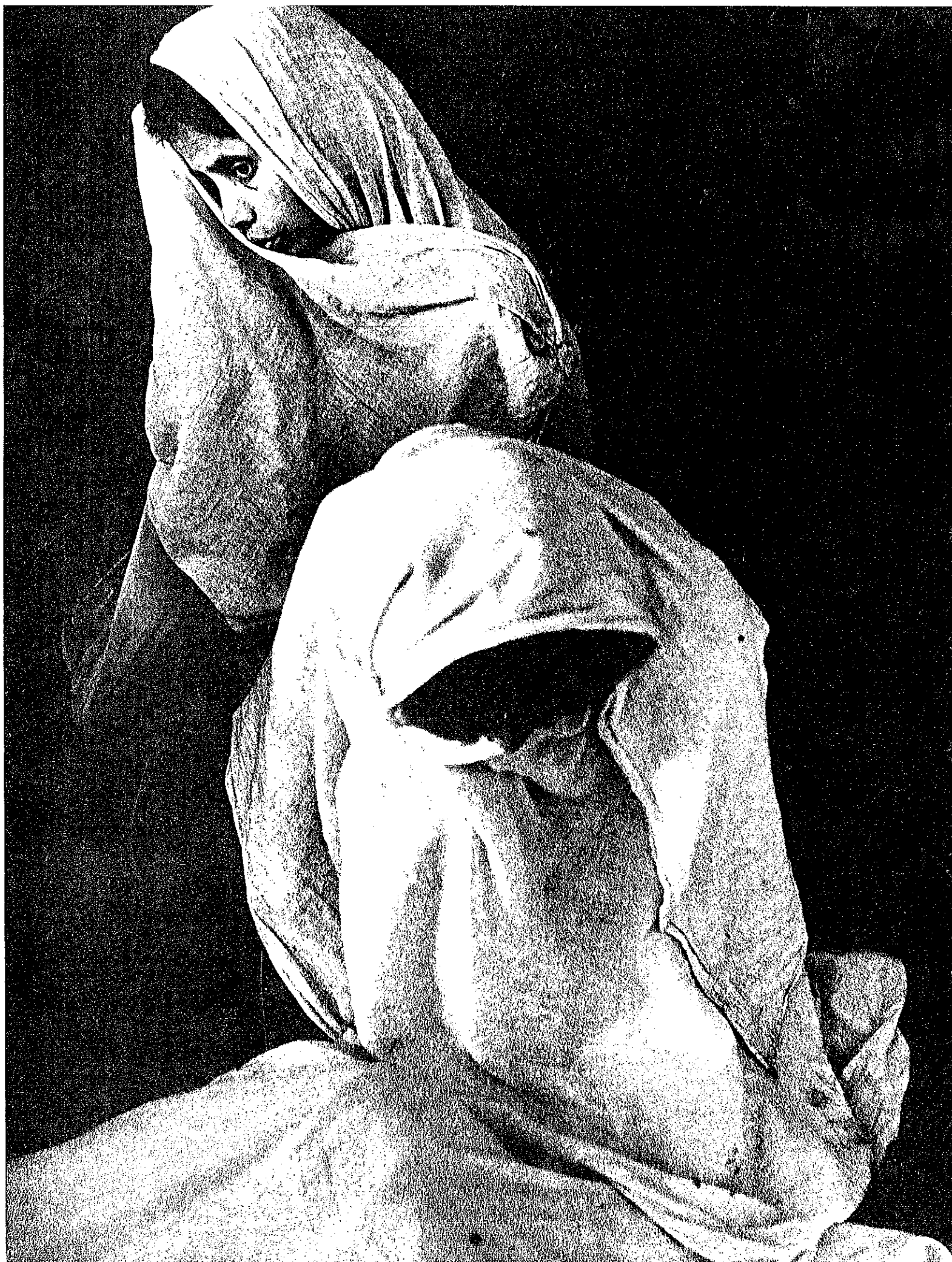
NINE MILLION REFUGEES ALL IN ALL FLED FROM EAST PAKISTAN TO INDIA. EASY TO TABULATE THE DRY STATISTICS. EASY TO SHRUG THEM OFF. BUT SORROW IS INDIVIDUAL, TO BE SUFFERED SEPARATELY.



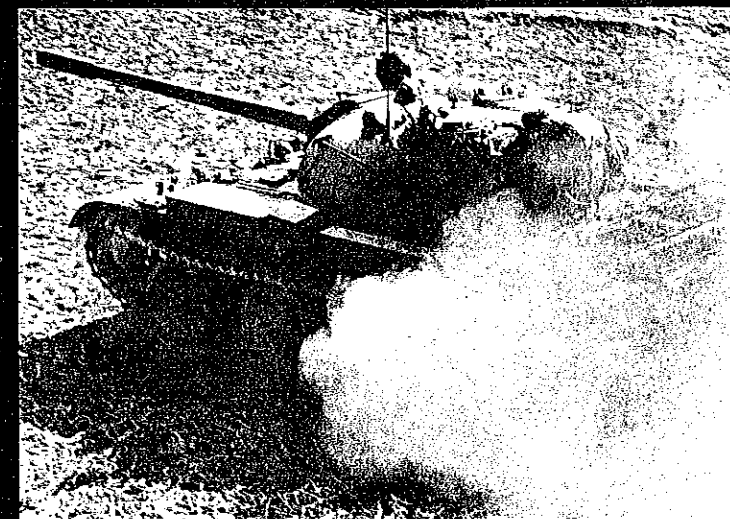
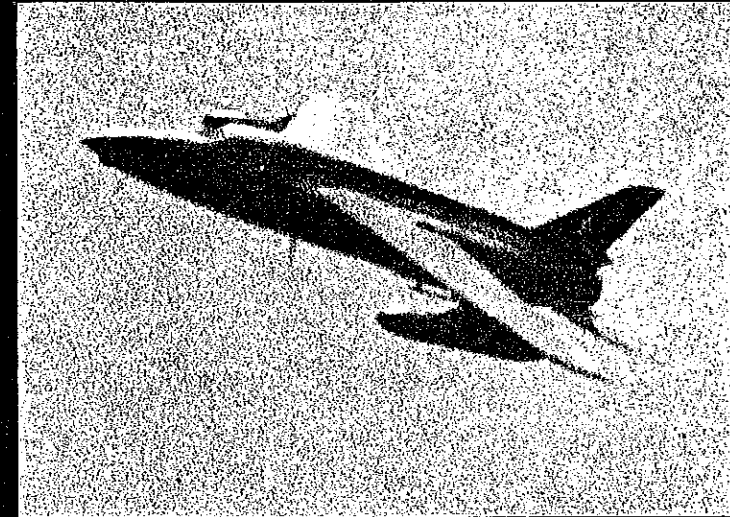
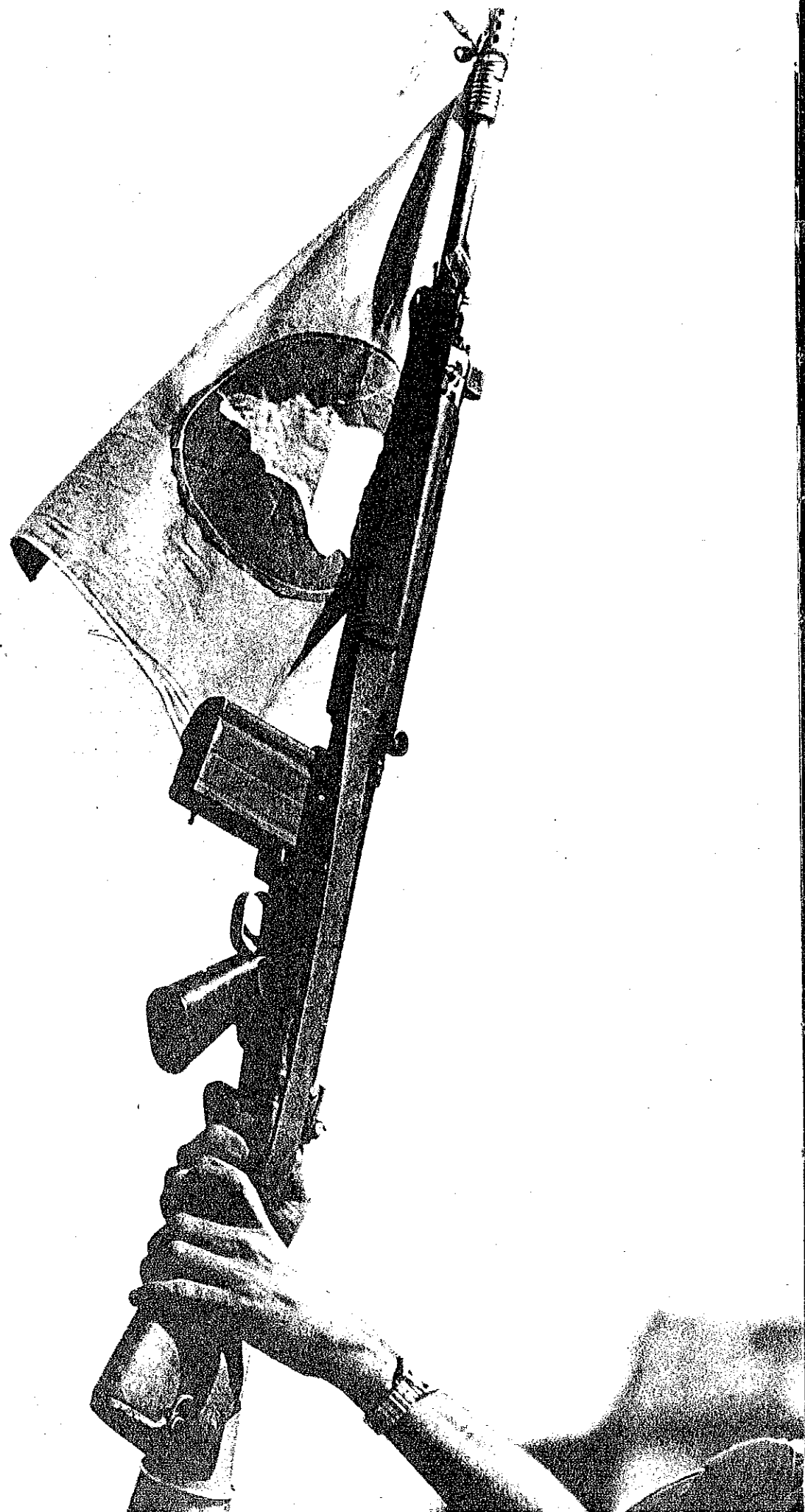


I POKED MY HEAD INTO A COLD ROOM AND SAW AN OLD WOMAN CURLED UP LIKE A CHILD ON A BLANKET, HAVING A WAKING NIGHTMARE. OTHER WOMEN WERE READING THE KORAN TOGETHER, RECITING THE VERSES LIKE LAMENTATIONS.





WIDOWS SUFFERED THEIR PRIVATE GRIEF, WHILE THE STATESMEN TALKED AND BARGAINED. IN EAST BENGAL, THE GUERRILLAS BEGAN TO GATHER. SOON INDIA WAS INVOLVED, AND THEN THE WAR BEGAN.



THE BANNER OF BANGLA DESH WAS UNFURLED. THE WAR MACHINES GIRDING UP. BUT THE TRUEST STEEL WAS IN THE SCHOOLBOYS WHO SLUNG ON BANDOLEERS, AND IN THE PROFESSIONALS WHO CALMLY MOVED UP FRONT. ▶





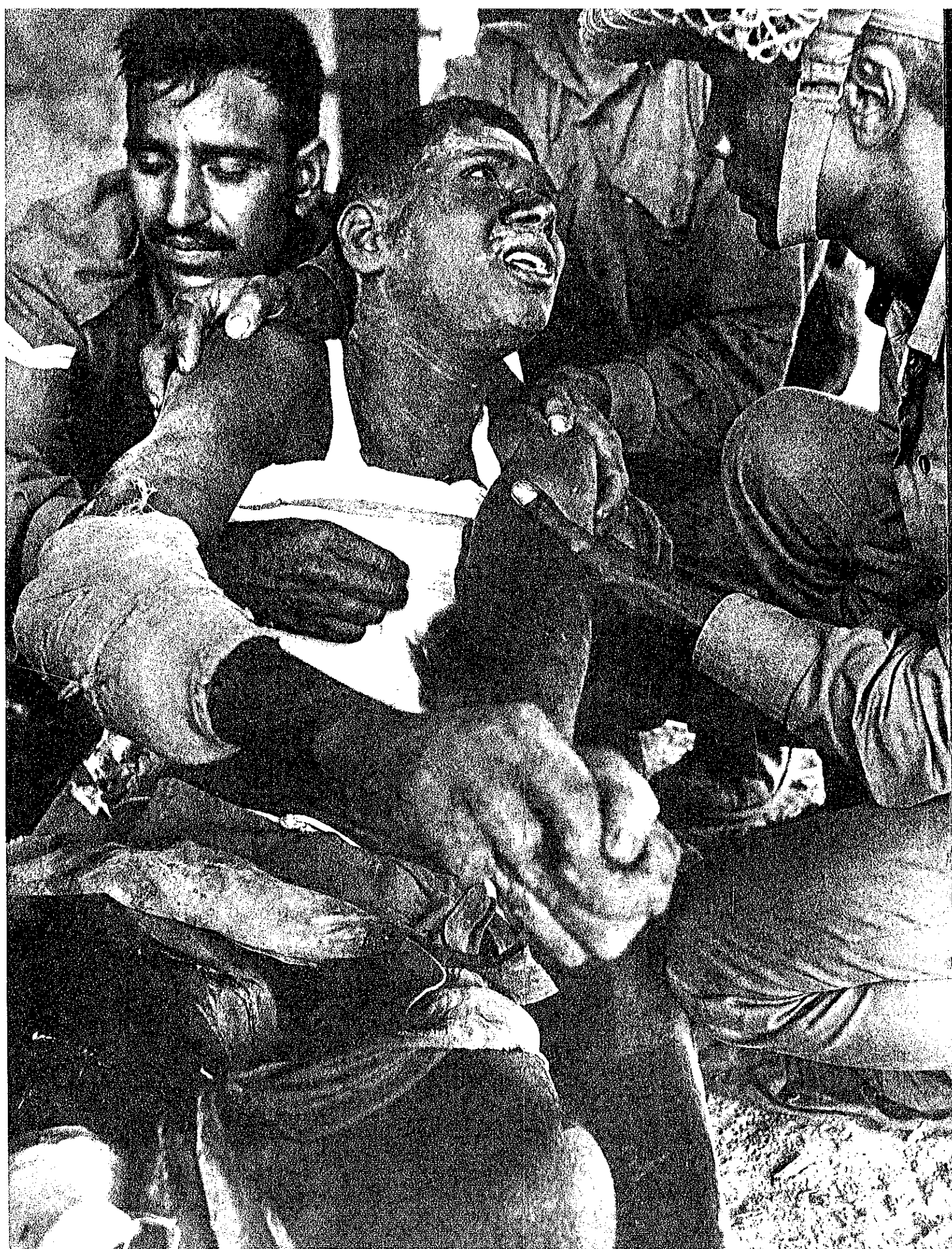


INDIAN ARMOR MOVED INEXORABLY PAST THE BODIES OF ITS ENEMIES. THIS ANONYMOUS MAN BY THE ROAD. WHO KILLED HIM? WHO MOURNS HIS NOSED THEIR WAY TOWARD THE HEART OF DACCA. I CAME ON HIM?

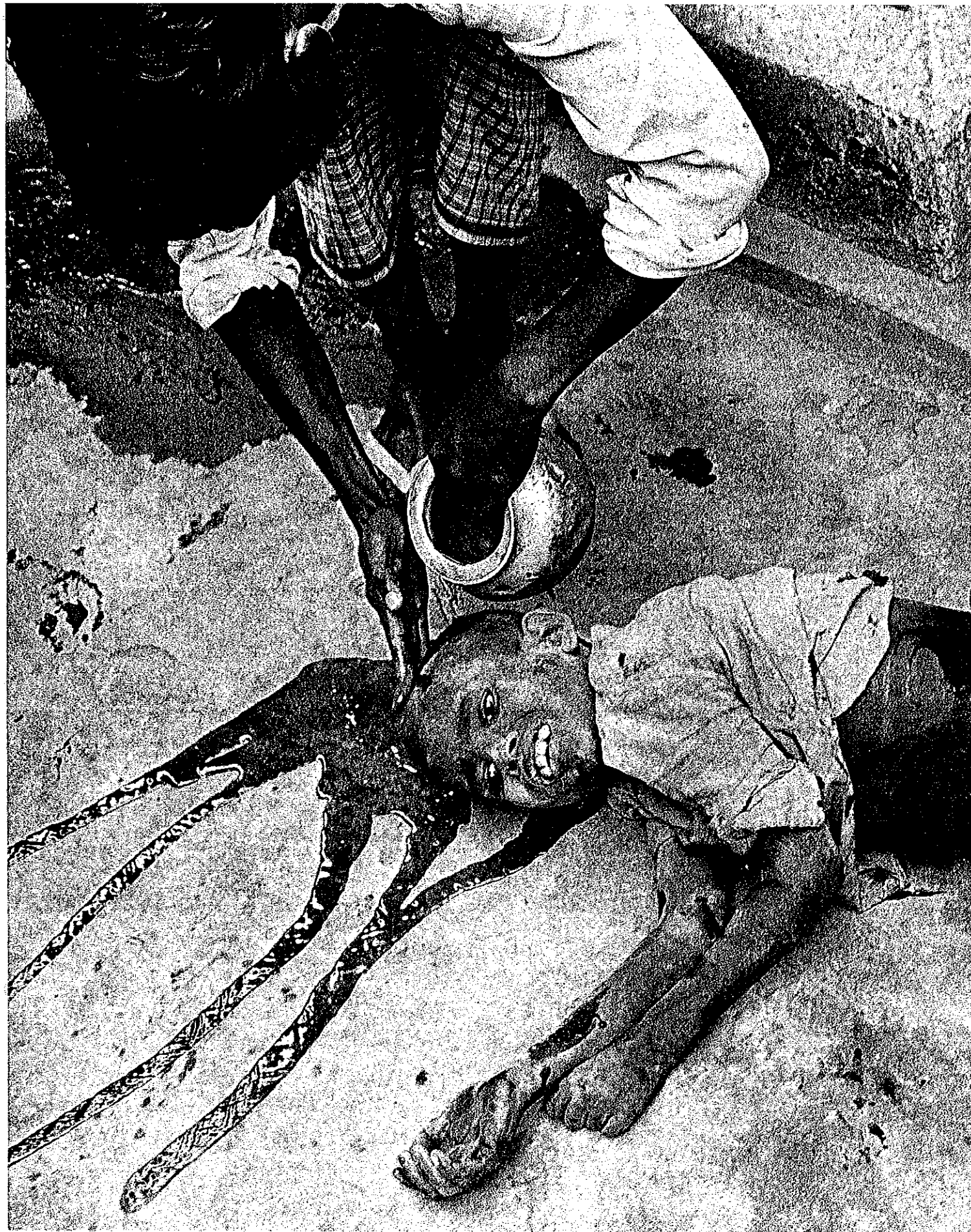


DUSTY *JAWANS*, FOOT-SOLDIERS, OF THE INDIAN ARMY BEAR A WOUNDED COMRADE FROM THE FIGHTING FRONT ON A STRETCHER

IMPROVED FROM BLANKETS AND SOME PLANKS AT JESSORE NEAR THE FRONTIER.



HIS YOUNG BODY TORN UP IN SEVERAL PLACES BY A PAKISTANI SHELL, A JAWAN OF THE MADRAS REGIMENT IS PATCHED UP BY COMRADES AT A MAKESHIFT AID STATION ON THE ROAD TO DACCA.

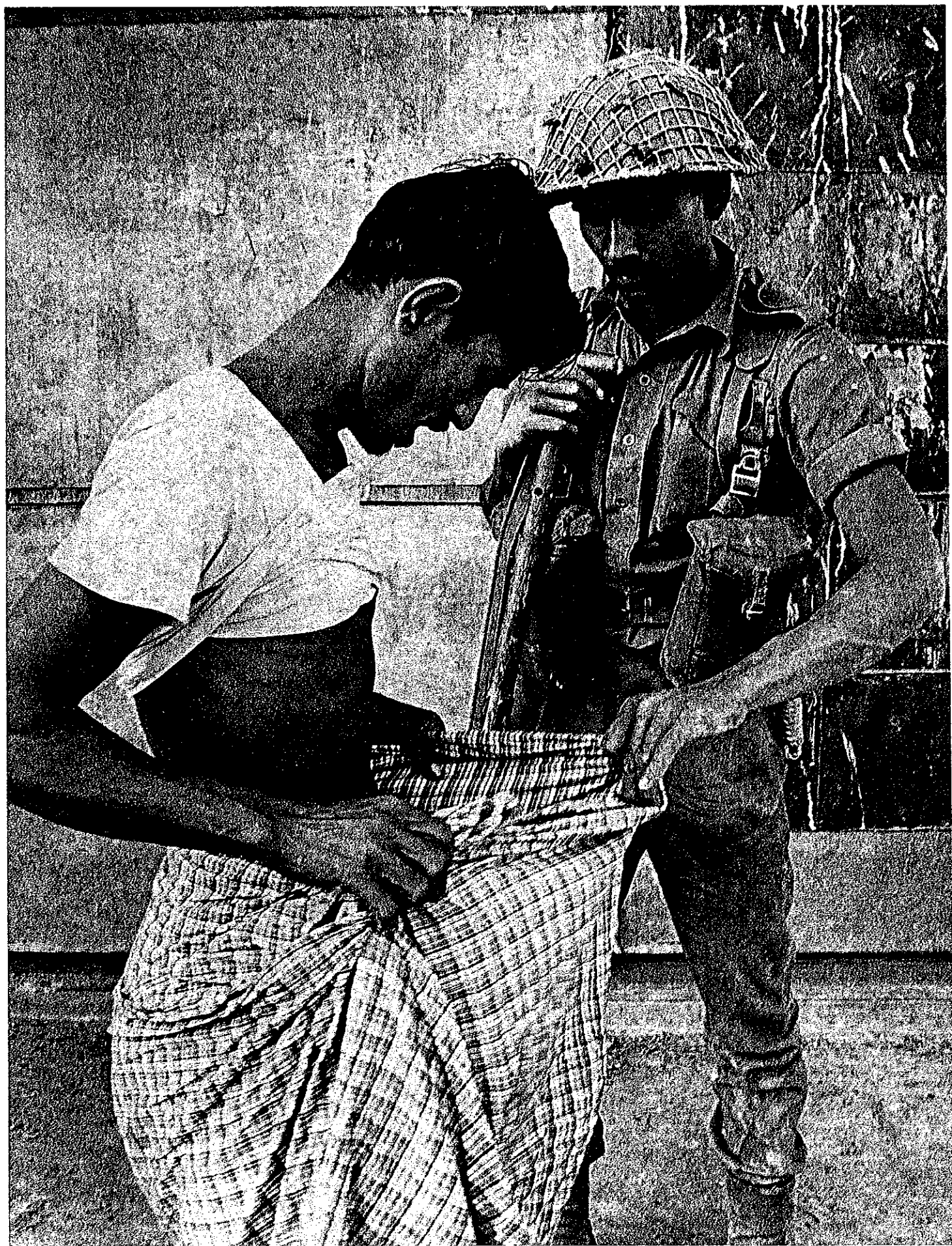


THERE WERE MORE INNOCENT CASUALTIES: I CAME UPON THIS HALF-NAKED BOY LYING IN A POOL OF HIS OWN BLOOD. AN ELDER MAN

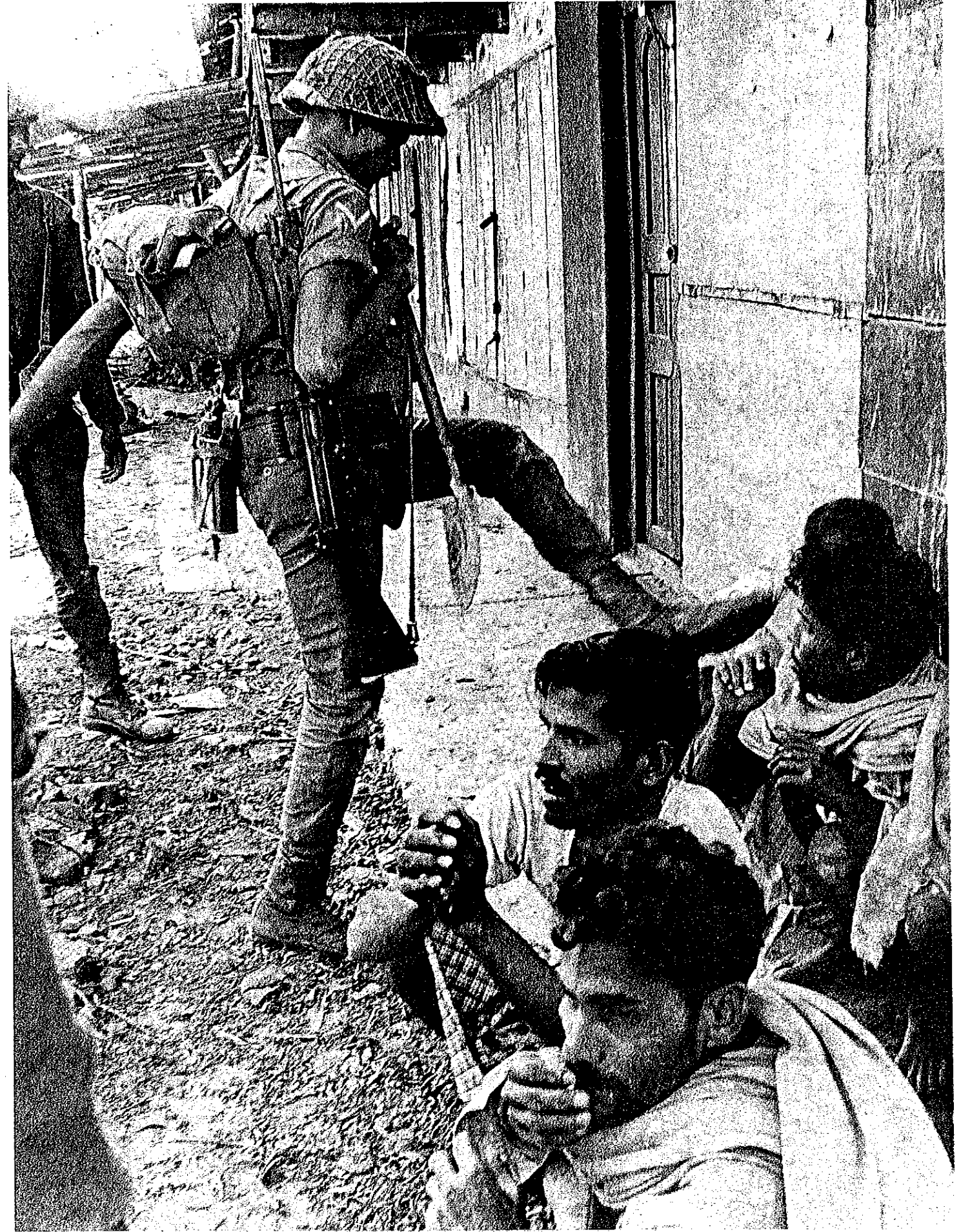


GENTLY WASHED HIS HEAD WITH WATER, THEN LIFTED HIM UP—BUT WHERE IS SAFETY TO BE FOUND? ▶

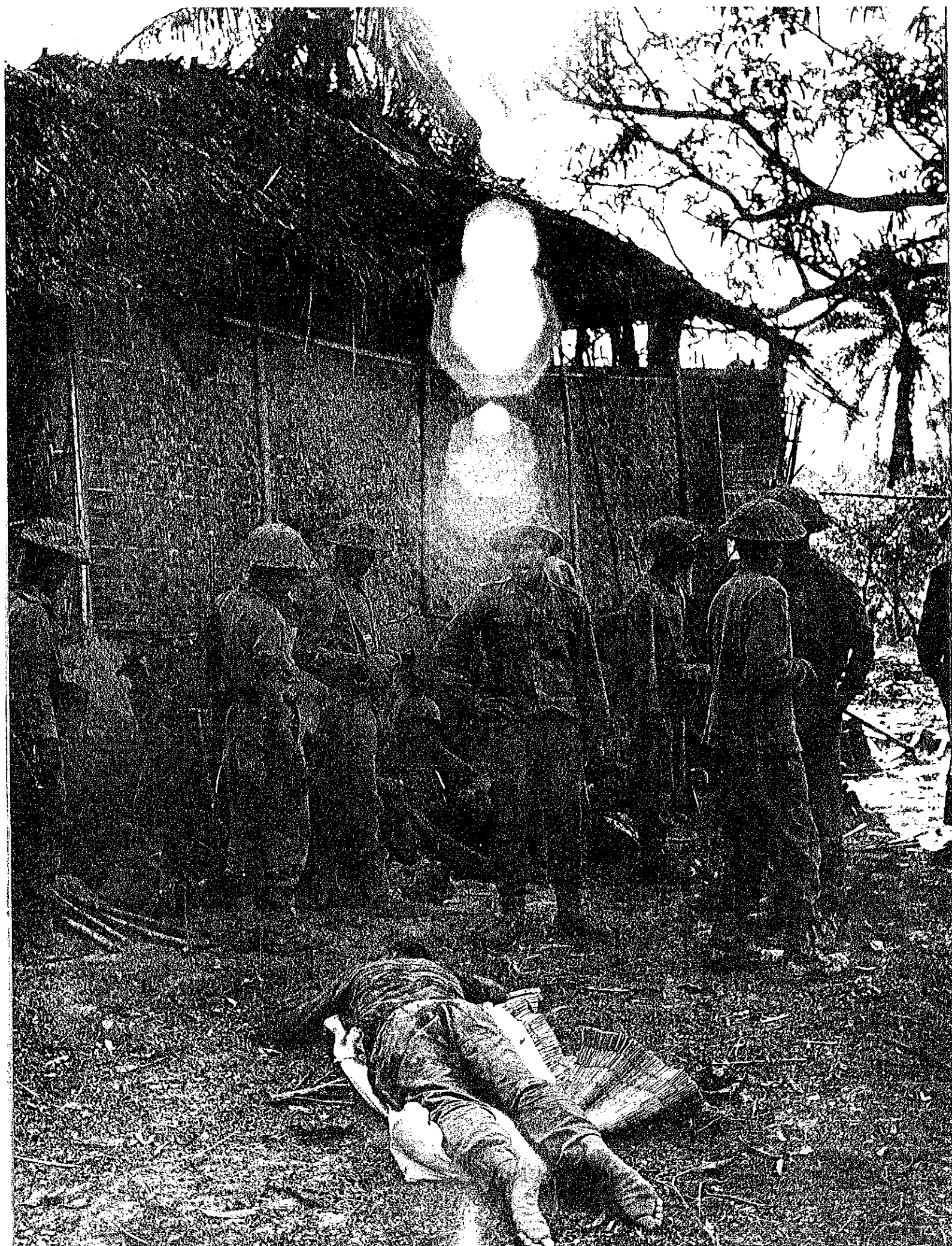




INDIAN TROOPS GRIMLY ROUND UP VILLAGERS SUSPECTED TO BE PAKISTANI SPIES. THEY PEER INTO *LUNGIS* IN SEARCH OF WEAPONS. THE



*JAWANS* I WAS TRAVELING WITH WEREN'T TOO GENTLE: THEY HAD SUFFERED CASUALTIES.



THE FIGHTING ENDED SUDDENLY, AND THE BONE-TIRED SOLDIERS DROPPED OFF TO SLEEP WHERE THEY WERE. A *JAWAN*, RUSHED OFF TO THE EAST BENGAL CAPITAL, STANDS GUARD AT DACCA'S SHATTERED AIRPORT. ▶

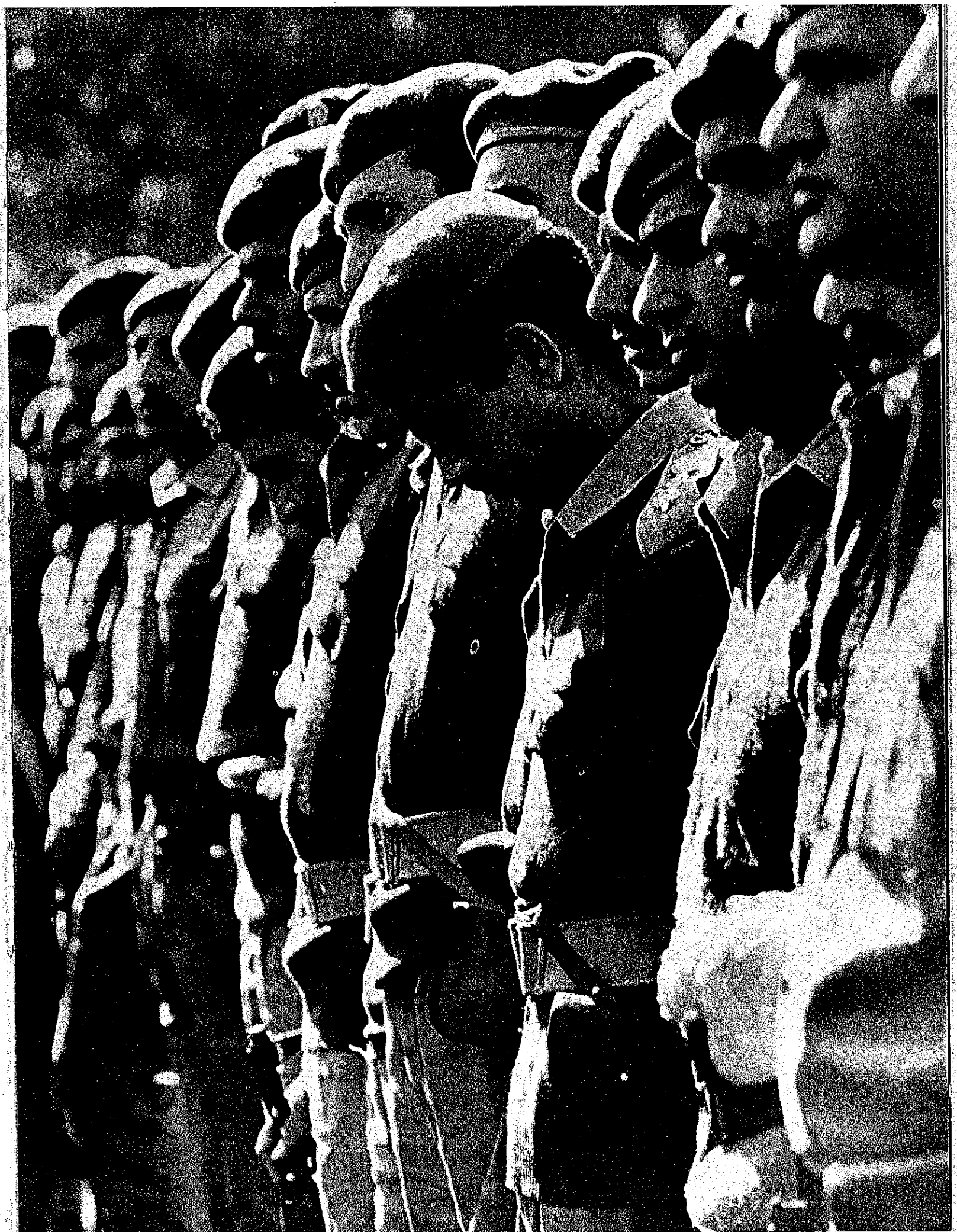
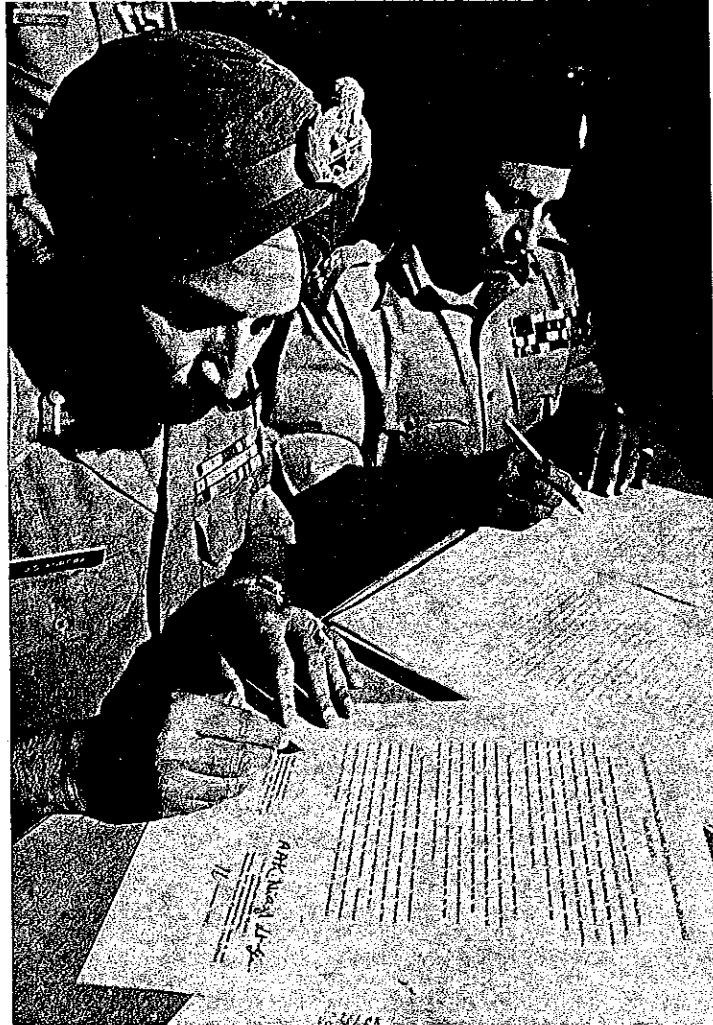






WITH THE GUNS SILENCED, THE GENERALS CAME TOGETHER TO TALK ABOUT THE TERMS OF PEACE. THE INDIAN GENERAL WAS COOL,

CONFIDENT AND GRACIOUS. THE DEFEATED PAKISTANI CLENCHED HIS JAW.



THE PASSIONS OF WAR THE GENERALS STILLED WITH THEIR SIGNATURES. SOME OF THE PAKISTANI SOLDIERS ON PARADE BOWED THEIR HEADS TO HIDE THE TEARS. THEIR GUNS MADE A HEAP LIKE FIREWOOD. ►





DESPITE DEFEAT, LIFE GOES ON. IN A CANTONMENT ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF DACCA, AN ARMY COOK KNEADS CAKES OF UNLEAVENED BREAD

FOR BREAKFAST. OTHERS JUST STAND AND WAIT FOR THE VICTORS' ORDERS. ►

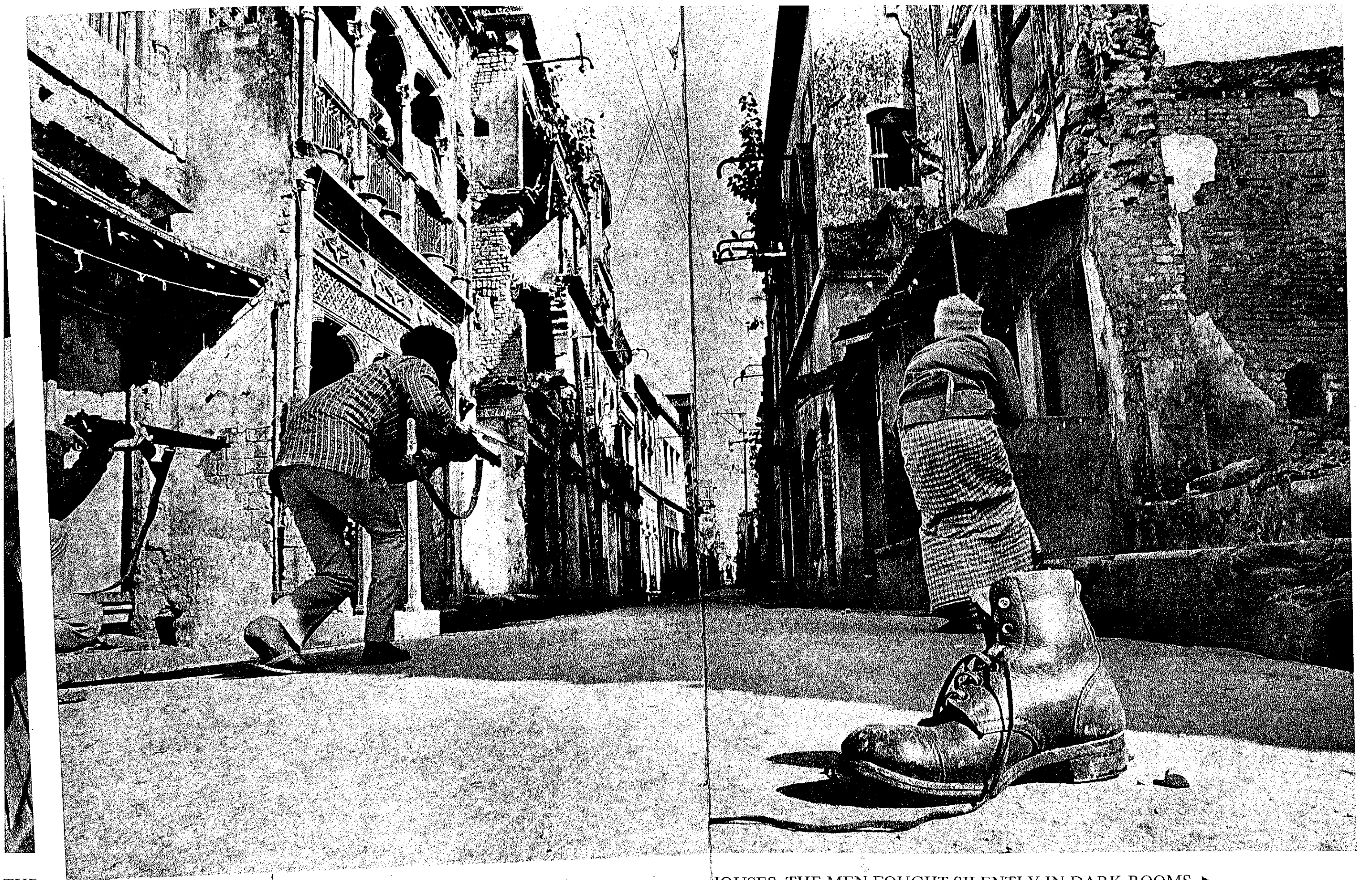




THE RESONANT STREETS OF DÁCCA WERE A FOREST OF HANDS, GRASPING FOR THE FUTURE, IT SEEMED TO ME.



BUT ON THE FIRST DAY OF ITS FREEDOM, DACCÁ WAS TO WITNESS MORE VIOLENCE AND MORE BLOOD.



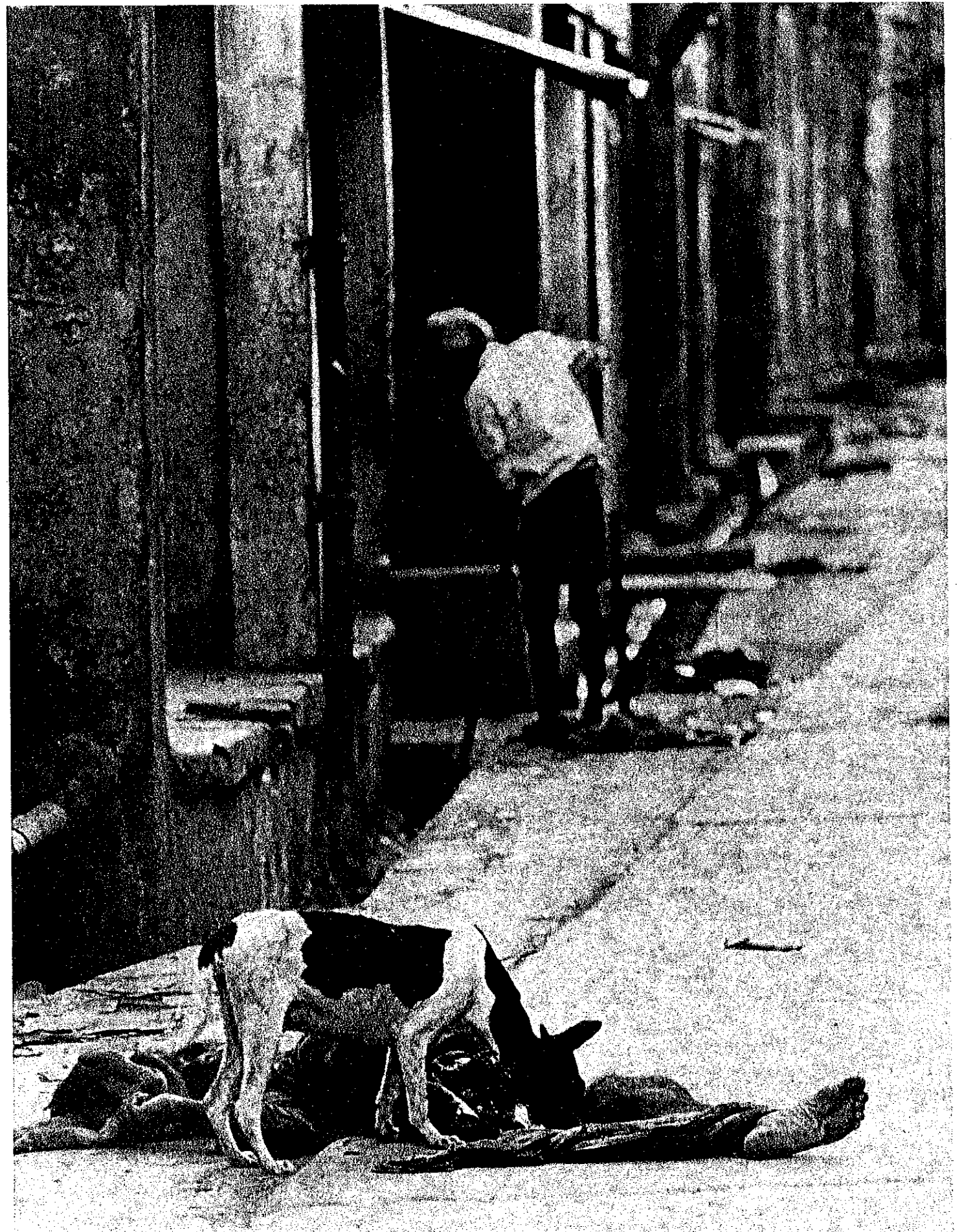
THE  
GRA

IN A STREET OF HORROR IN THE OLD QUARTER OF THE CITY, I SAW  
MUKTI BAHINI GUERRILLAS HUNTING SNIPERS. ENTERING THE

HOUSES, THE MEN FOUGHT SILENTLY IN DARK ROOMS ►

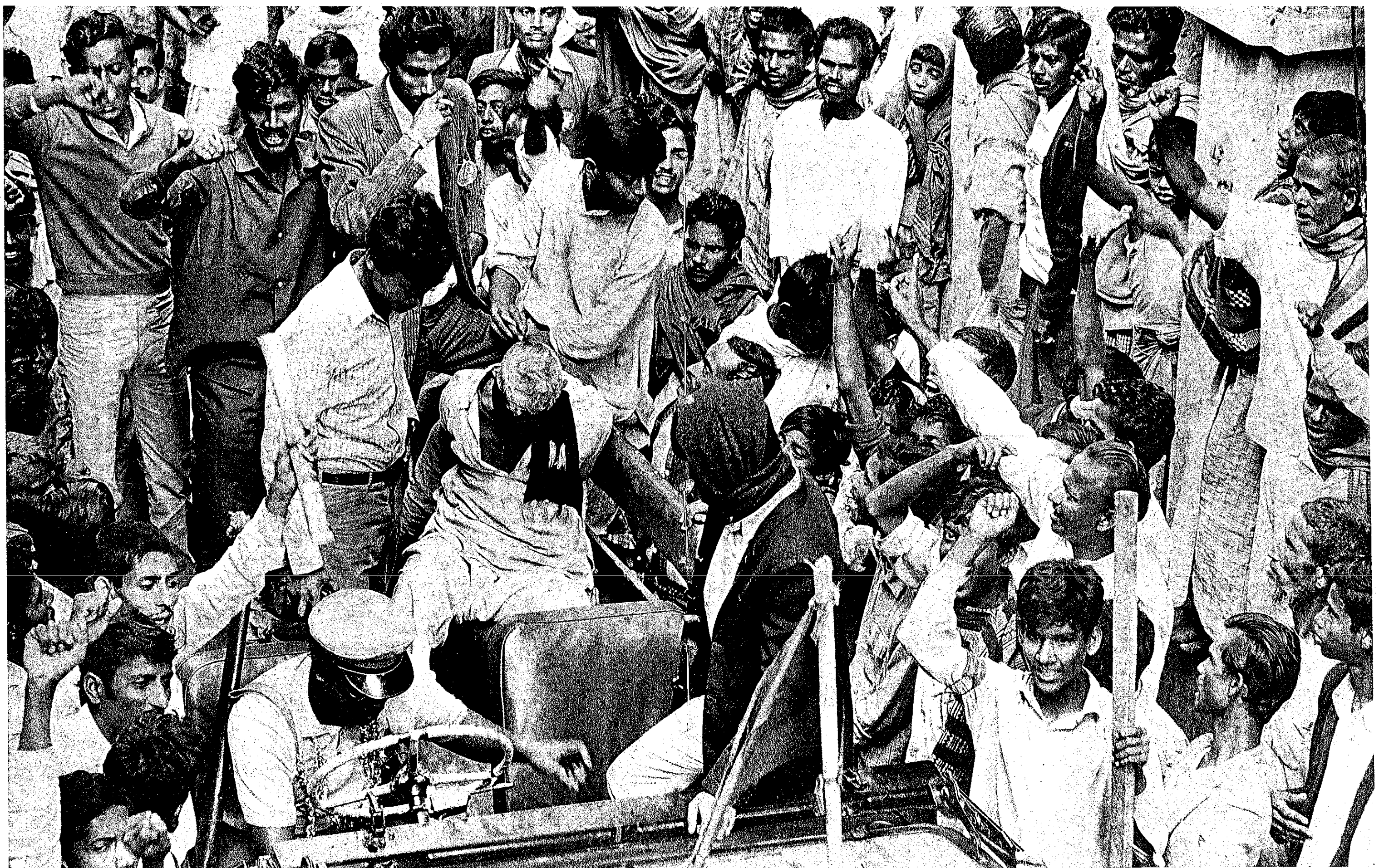






ONCE 50,000 PEOPLE HAD LIVED HERE. NOW THERE WERE ONLY 200. THE REST HAVE FLED, LEAVING THE DEAD ON THE STREETS, TO THE SCAVENGING DOGS AND THE STRICKEN EYE OF THE PASSER-BY. ►



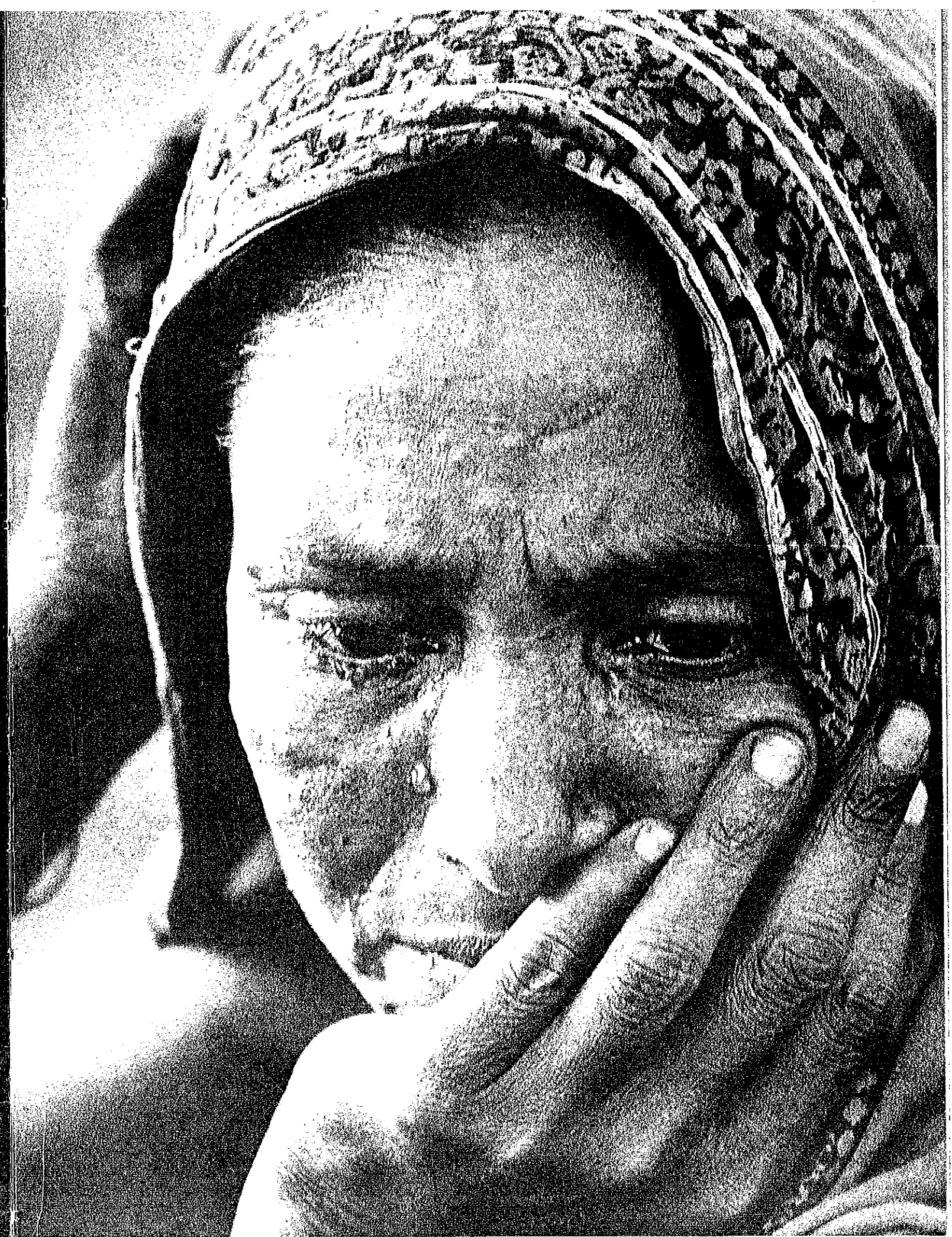


THE MUKTI BAHINI HAD CAUGHT A *RAZAKAR*, OR SPY. BLINDFOLDED, TRUSSSED UP, THE GRAY OLD MAN RAN A GAUNTLET OF FOLK SHOUTING THEIR PENT-UP HATRED, ON HIS WAY TO HIS STERN PUNISHMENT.





THE BODIES LAY IN SHALLOW PONDS IN THE MUCK. I SAW A SKELETON WITH THE STRANGLER'S KNOT STILL AROUND ITS THROAT, THROTTLED IN THE MIDDLE OF A SHRIEK. PEOPLE WEPT AS SILENTLY AS THE DEAD.

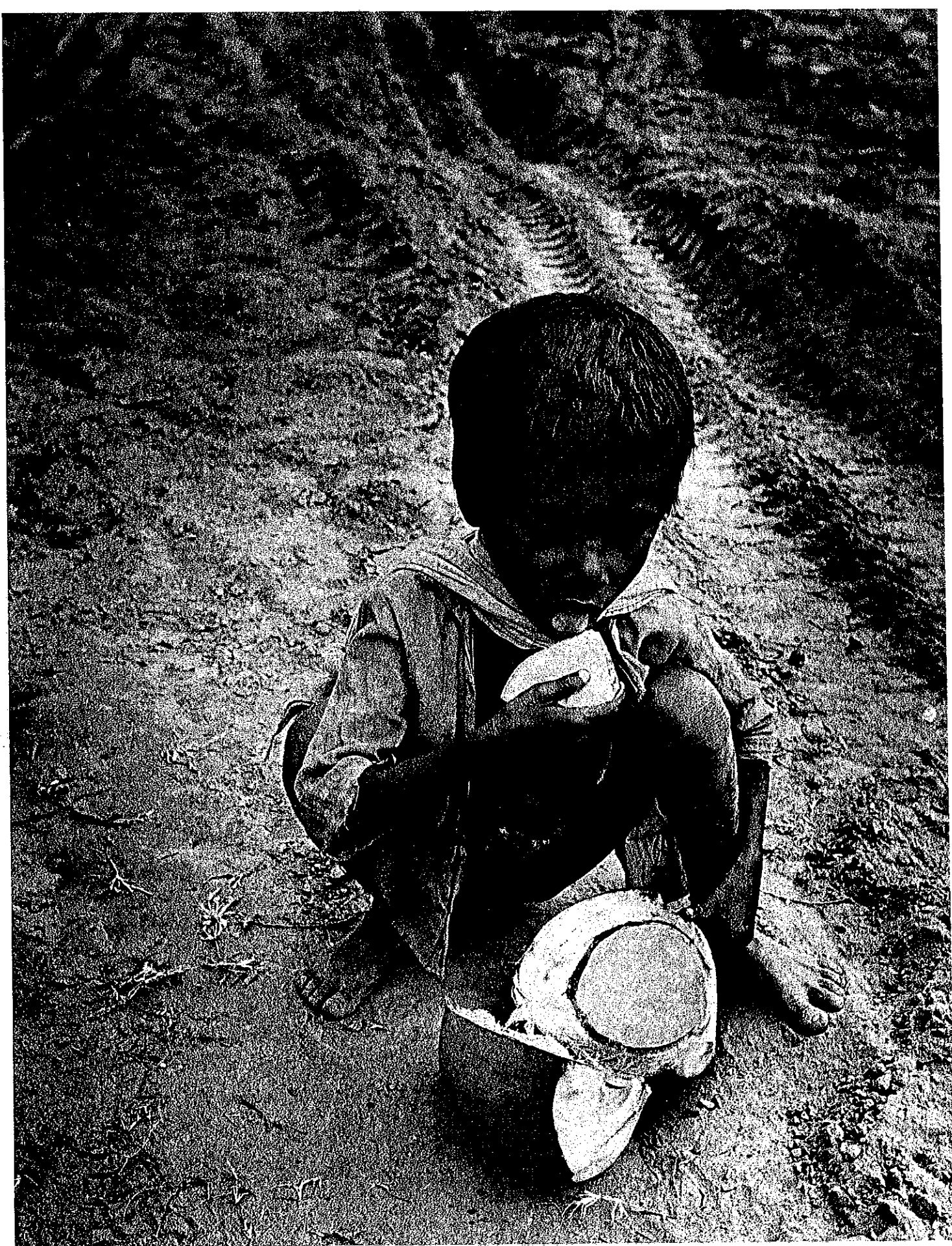




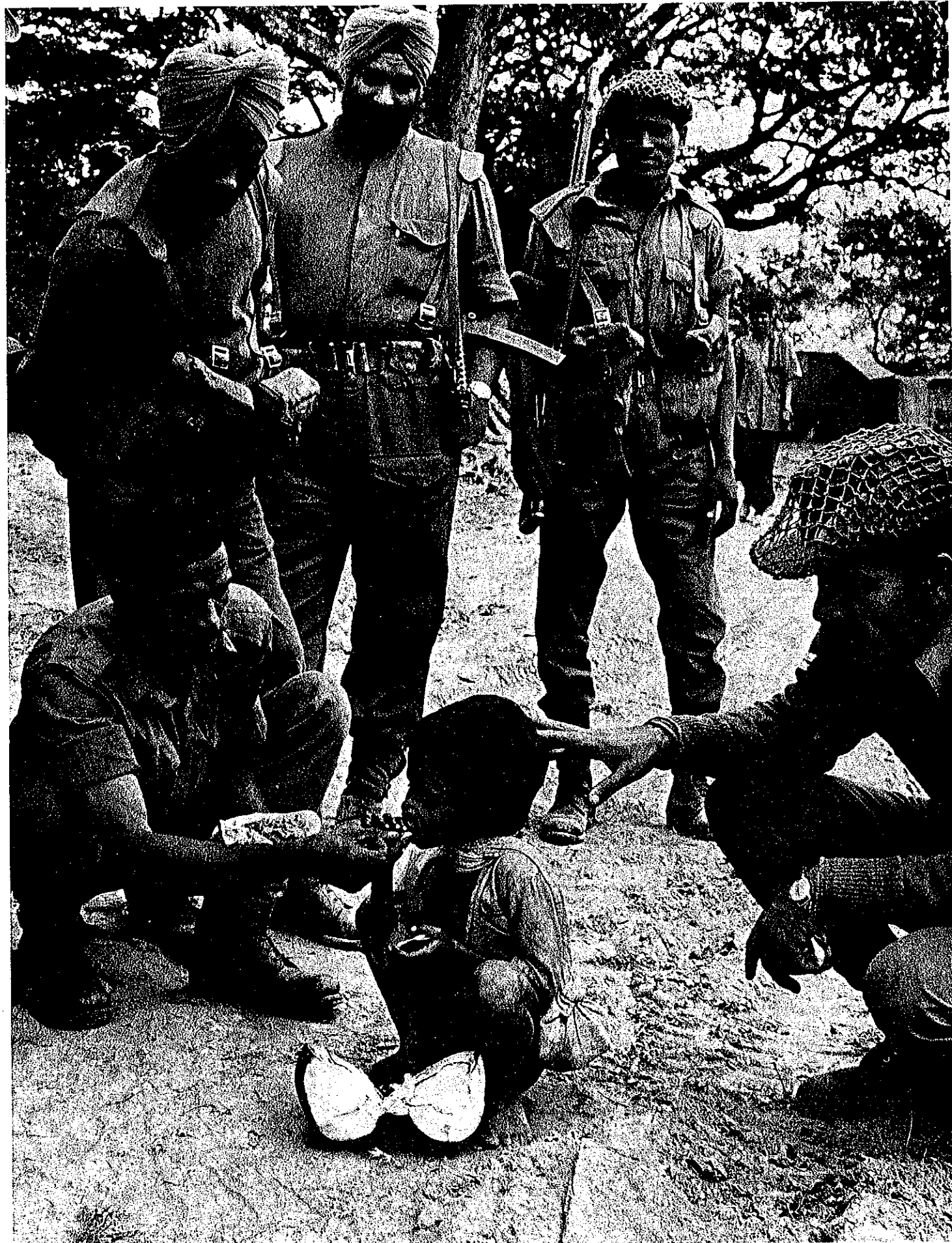
“I DIDN'T KNOW WHETHER I WAS TO LIVE OR DIE. I WAS MENTALLY  
READY TO DIE.

BUT I KNEW THAT BANGLADESH WOULD BE LIBERATED.” ▶  
—SHEIKH MUJIBUR RAHMAN





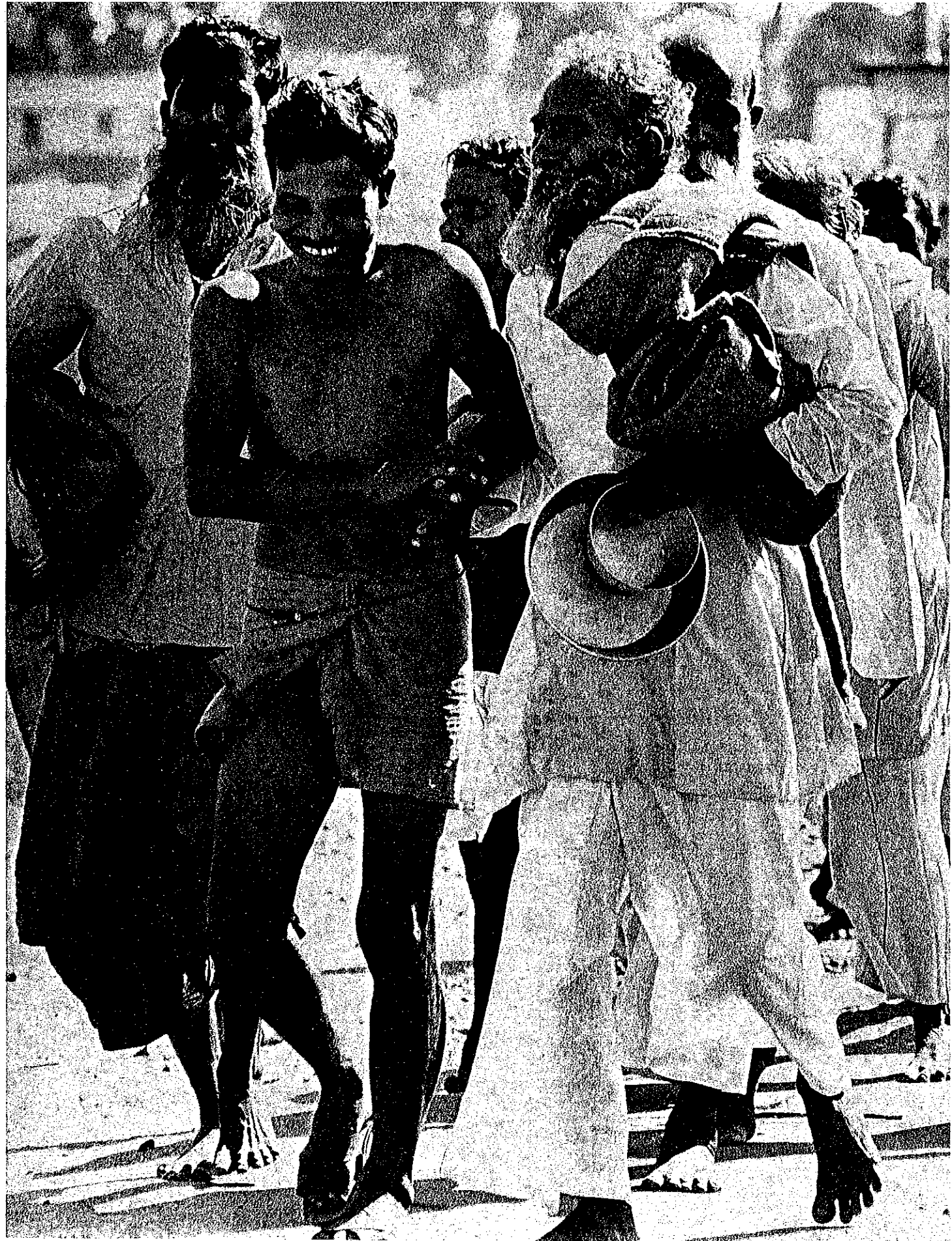
I FELT THAT THE COUNTRY WAS STILL LIKE THIS LITTLE BOY  
SUBSISTING ON COCONUTS AND THE KINDNESS OF STRANGERS. BUT



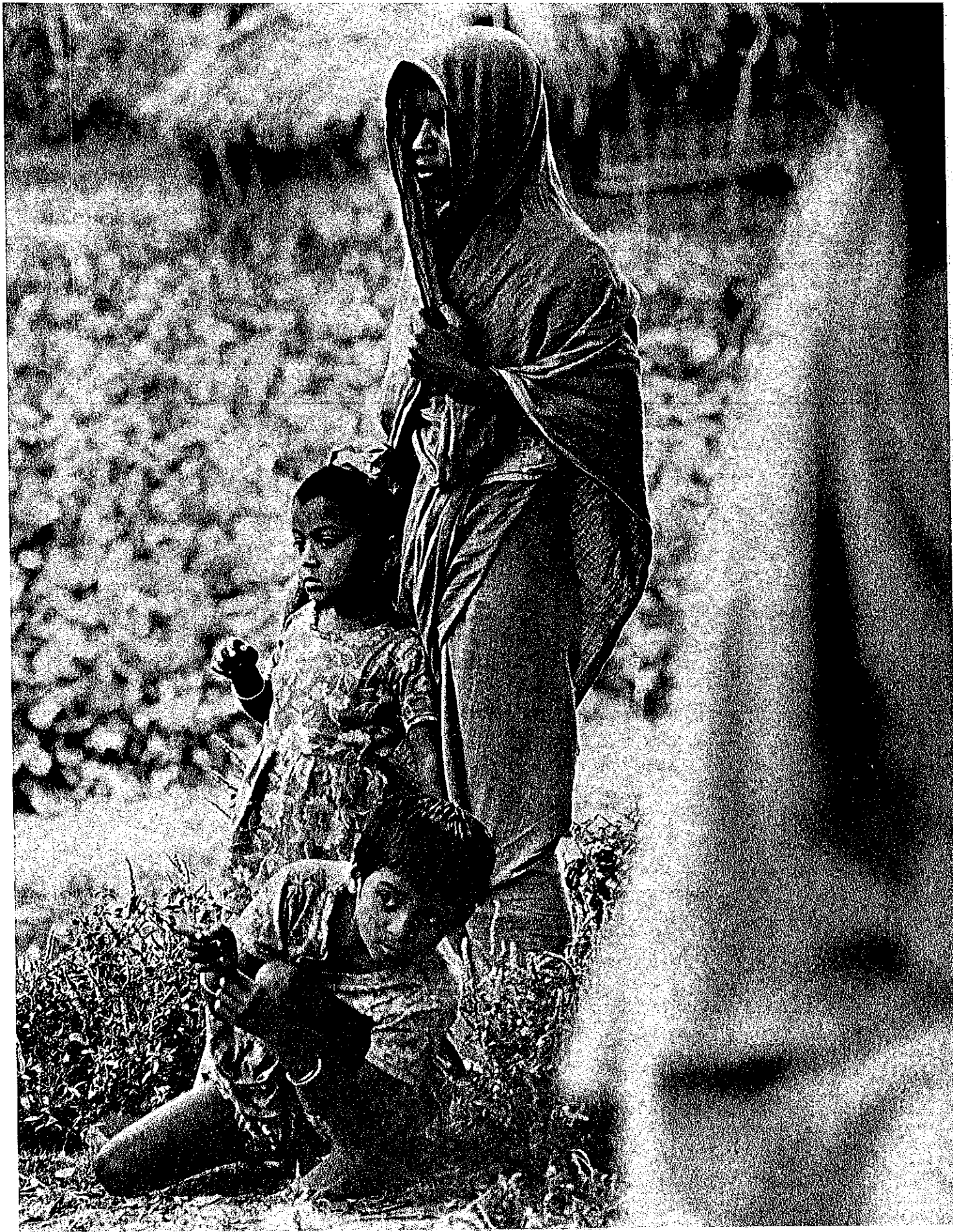
THERE WAS ALSO THE EXHILARATION OF COMING HOME ON REFUGEES'  
FACES. ►



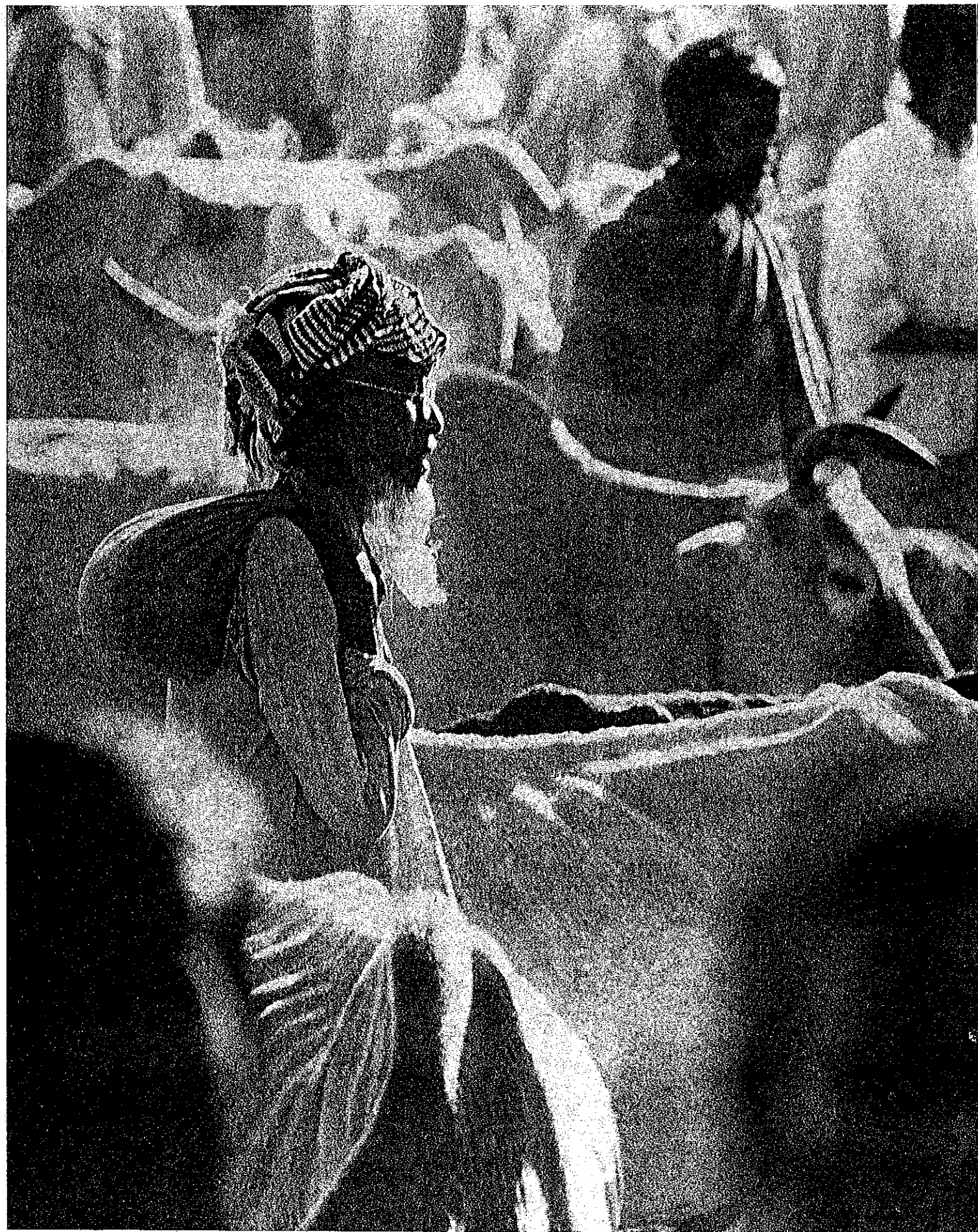




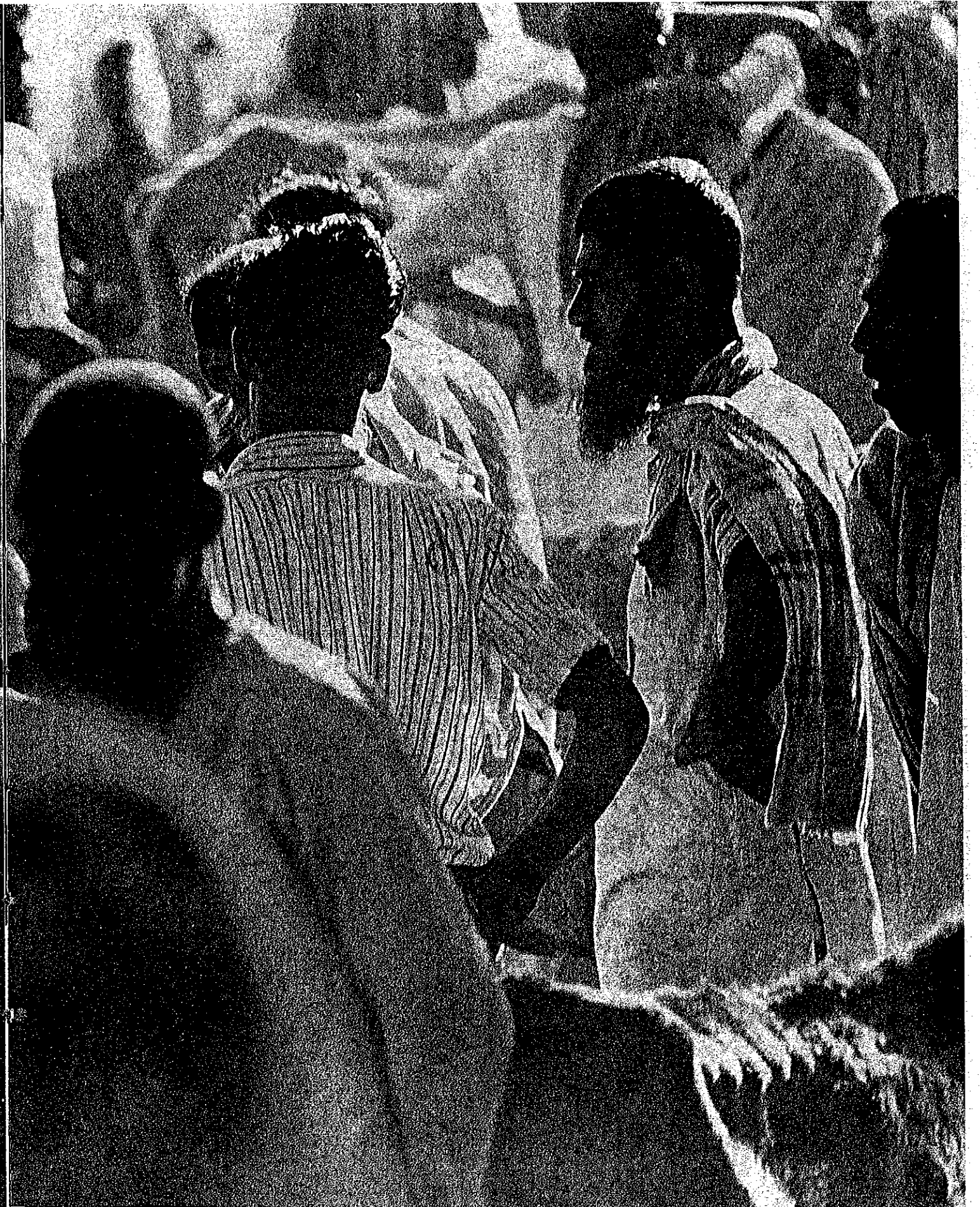
THE JAILS WERE OPENED AND ALL THE PRISONERS FREED. I WATCHED MORE QUIET HOMECOMINGS, LIKE THIS WIDOW AND HER TWO



CHILDREN RETURNED TO THEIR VILLAGE, BUT WITH HUSBAND AND FATHER GONE.



LIFE TRIUMPHS, AS IT ALWAYS DOES. FARMERS COME TO BUY NEW WORK-ANIMALS AT THE CATTLE-MARKET, AND IN A MILD BENGALI



AFTERNOON, I WATCHED TWO BOYS CHASING A CALF AMID A BANK OF YELLOW MUSTARD FLOWERS. ▶

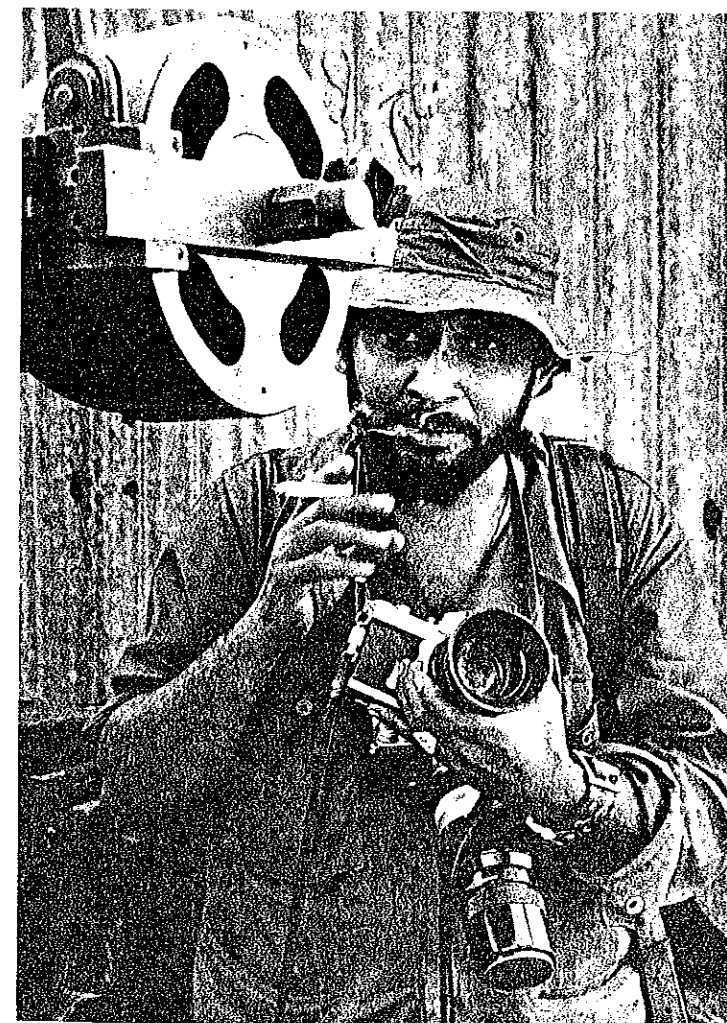




I WOULD LIKE TO THANK THE FOLLOWING, WHO MADE THIS BOOK POSSIBLE:  
S. MULGAOKAR FOR THE INTRODUCTION;  
WERNER HAHN, ART DIRECTOR;  
ARTHUR KAN FOR MAKING THE PRINTS;  
GENERAL SUPPORT: JOHNNY GATBONTON, KEITH HOWELL,  
VICTOR ANANT, DINSHAW BALSARA AND JOHN WALEY.

A PROFESSIONAL PHOTOGRAPHER, KISHOR PAREKH TOOK HIS MASTERS IN CINEMA FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA. WHILE THERE HE WAS AWARDED SIX OF THE SEVEN PRIZES IN AN INTERNATIONAL CONTEST SPONSORED BY THE NATIONAL PRESS PHOTOGRAPHERS' ASSOCIATION, *ENCYCLOPAEDIA BRITANNICA* AND *LIFE* MAGAZINE.

RETURNING TO INDIA IN 1961, PAREKH JOINED THE DELHI-BASED *HINDUSTAN TIMES* AS ITS CHIEF PHOTOGRAPHER. HE IMMEDIATELY MADE HIS MARK, COVERING THE SINO-INDIAN WAR OF 1962 AND THE INDO-PAKISTAN WAR OF 1965. HIS COVERAGE FROM INDIA FOUND ACCEPTANCE IN A WIDE RANGE OF INTERNATIONAL PUBLICATIONS, INCLUDING *NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC*, *PARIS MATCH*, *THE SUNDAY TIMES*, *TIME* MAGAZINE, *STERN*, *POPULAR PHOTOGRAPHY* AND *ASAHI GRAPHIC*. COVERING THE TASHKENT SUMMIT TALKS THAT RESOLVED THE INDO-PAKISTAN WAR OF 1965, PAREKH WAS AWARDED A GOLD MEDAL AND CASH PRIZE BY *SOVIET LAND*.



INDIA PROVIDED PAREKH WITH THE OPPORTUNITY FOR SOME TREMENDOUSLY CREATIVE WORK. HIS COVERAGE OF THE FAMINE IN BIHAR STATE WAS EXHIBITED IN THE UNITED STATES TO RAISE FUNDS FOR THE VICTIMS.

IN 1967 PAREKH JOINED *THE ASIA MAGAZINE*. TRAVELING THROUGHOUT ASIA AND AUSTRALIA, HE BROUGHT BACK MEMORABLE PHOTOGRAPHIC IMPRESSIONS OF THE PEOPLE AND PLACES HE VISITED. PAREKH IS NOW PHOTO EDITOR OF PACIFIC MAGAZINES LIMITED, PUBLISHERS OF *ORIENTATIONS*, *INSIGHT* AND *CHIC* MAGAZINES.

ASSIGNED BY THE ASIAN NEWS SERVICE TO COVER THE WAR IN EAST PAKISTAN, HE SUCCEEDED IN PENETRATING THE EXODUS FROM THE AREA, AND JUMPED TO THE HEAD OF THE QUEUE OF SOLDIERS, LIBERATORS AND NEWSMEN. IN A MATTER OF DAYS HE WAS ABLE TO RECORD THE AGONIZING BIRTH OF A NEW NATION: BANGLADESH.

