

The Depiction of Women in The Bangladesh Liberation War: A Comparative Study of War based Films and Novels



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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

I hereby declare that this thesis is the student's own work and effort. All sources of information incorporated here have been duly acknowledged. This thesis has been submitted with my approval.

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DECLARATION

This thesis is a presentation of my original research work. Wherever contributions of others are involved, every effort is made to indicate this clearly, with due reference to the literature, and acknowledgement of collaborative research and discussions.

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Abstract: To know about the history, tradition and livelihood of a nation there are so many ways. Films and books can be considered as the most authentic sources. Films and books are very popular among new generations. Regarding the Bangladesh Liberation War films and books, they play a major role in carrying the true history of a nation's birth, its sufferings, and sacrifices. The films that show us the history of 1971, the birth of Bangladesh, are biased in a sense. When it comes to representing the women's contribution and activities the films seem to be patriarchal; glorifying only manhood, men's contribution and their activity while showing women only as war victims, and helpless. In comparison with the films, novels are much more appreciable. Suffering of women, their withstand and active role in the war have been demonstrated very well in the novels. Through films a half-bared truth is spreading among generations. People have the right to know about the truth of their nation's birth, their past and their history. Only the neutral representation of history can ensure the distribution of the true message to generation after generation, which is actually done by the novels. This paper aims to focus on the fact that the 'Half-truth' of our history is being presented in the films and to throw light on the reality of women's contributions and struggles during the war which are actually depicted in the novels.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Bangladesh gained its independence after a nine-month-long war in 1971. In the beginning it was a war between fully armed military forces with all kinds of destructive weapons against a group of unarmed, innocent people. People of East Pakistan were helpless; running for their lives leaving their homes, lands, relatives, domestic animals and everything behind. As the people were not aware that such a terrible situation was approaching and did not know what to do, they were all fleeing in search of a safe place to get peace and security in their lives. When they realized that running and fleeing could not be a solution, people from all the sectors started gathering together, making plans, preparing themselves for war, and started war training. They understood that they need to fight, have to resist the enemies, and have to protect the motherland from all the brutalities. Young-old, male-female, even children too contributed to the war. It was not like that, only the political leaders or male citizens of the country fought for the nation and brought victory. People from all walks of life, both male and female, both directly or indirectly participated in the war and brought victory. But it is a matter of great sorrow that the contribution of women in the liberation war has never been exhibited and recognized properly both in print media and electronic media. There is always a biased illustration of women's activity throughout the war in the films. The common knowledge about the liberation war is that "three million people died, ten million people moved to India and 200,000 females became the victim of sexual violence". To the new generation the knowledge about the Liberation War is limited to these numbers and the brave stories of male freedom fighters, how bravely they fought for the country and sacrificed their lives. And this is a half-truth. People, especially the younger generation get acquainted with the history of war either from the books or from the screen presentation. Films on

the Liberation War are very popular means to know history, struggles and all the issues related to the independence of the nation. But the films on Liberation War of Bangladesh present women characters only as passive, vulnerable, helpless and rape victims. Except for the film *Guerilla*, no other film presented a bold female protagonist who fights for the country, risking her life for the sake of the country. Ladies not only showed their bravery and worth in the war field holding rifles, but also were politically, culturally, and socially active. They did work as doctors, nurses, informers, social workers, cultural activists, and soldiers; and continuously gave mental and other support to their fathers, brothers, husbands and all the people who went to the war. Apart from being a rape victim they had to suffer a lot both physically and mentally for being women, and the 'minority' part of this patriarchal society. These things are rarely shown on screen. It is the responsibility of the authorities of media, television and other technological platforms to disclose the actual truth to the people. In the films we can see almost a common pattern; the military came to this land, raped women, killed people randomly, the male citizens of the land took oath to protect their motherland and their mothers and sisters and at the end victory came to this land. Thus the circulation of a biased history keeps rounding among the people. In comparison with the films, different novels based on the Liberation war of Bangladesh are much more acceptable in describing and presenting women's conditions and contributions. The true history of Bangladesh's emergence, actual struggles of women, their resistance, their contribution and society's treatment towards them can be seen in the novels very clearly.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Liberation war of Bangladesh, a war against the Pakistani oppressors to save the honor of the mother tongue of the Bengali nation. Both male and female contributions bring victory to Bengali nation. But the contributions of women in the Liberation War of Bangladesh have always been neglected. All the films show how men fought bravely, sacrificed their lives, their determined activities and efforts to save the nation and particularly the helpless women. Several producers, intellectuals and researchers raised questions against these biased representations. They talk about the sexualization of women on screen, representation of women as war victims, traumatized and passive characters, while few argue that women freedom fighters should be presented which never happened in the films.

Kaberi Gayen, a professor of Dhaka university from the Department of Mass Communication and Journalism in her journal titled “Women, War and Cinema: Construction of Women in the Liberation War Films of Bangladesh” talks about the biased depiction of women in the Liberation war based films where no female freedom fighters have been shown. According to her in the liberation war based films some common issues can be noticed regarding women characters- raped women as ‘schizophrenic’, women were fleeing to protect their lives and chastity, and most importantly they have been portrayed as helpless. She talks about male dominated society and its patriarchal ideology by stating that, “Mass media either works as a helping force to continue the dominant ideology by spreading the language of the powerful, or

creates new language to engender new perspectives”. She mentions the name of the film *Guerilla* which portrayed a strong female character where the character is being sexualized. This paper is intended to focus on these common issues along with the other persecutions that women had to endure during the war that are still in the dark, the praiseworthy activities that never come to light, involvement and contribution of women in the war that have not been presented in the films of Liberation War of Bangladesh.

Maleka Begum, in her documentary book *Muktijuddhe Nari*, tries to show the efforts, sacrifices, and contributions of women during the Liberation War of Bangladesh. She shows evidence of female contribution in the war and she expresses her opinion that it's a matter of concern that the truth about female contribution, the name of the female freedom fighters, their activities and involvements of many female political members and activists have been mystified. Mentioning the name of different books, documentaries, female social workers she tries to show how much it is needed to know the truth about history, struggles, sacrifices and specially the neglected 'female part'. She mentions 'socialization' and 'government's negligence' behind the reason for not getting proper recognition of female involvement, sufferings and contribution in the Liberation war of Bangladesh. We can see her points clearly reflecting from these lines, “in spite of their political participations, women were confined within their domestic barriers because of socialization (*Narisomajer ei rajnoitik ongshogrohon sottoe narir vumikake samajikikoron prokria tokhono paribarik gonditei aboddho kore rekhechhilo*). (p. 34)” and “The policies that had been ordained by the Bangladesh government during the war, there was no decision regarding the issues like- arrangement of training for women, preparing them for guerilla movement, assigning any female parliamentarian for administrative activities (*Muktijuddher somoy Bangladesh sorkar ze niti grohon korechilo tate narider proshikkhon deoya, taderke guerilla juddher jonno toiri kora,*

prosashonik kormo kando porichalonay nari sangsodder dayitto deoya—ejatiyo kono siddhanto chhilona). (p. 57)

Ram Krishna Saha, a filmmaker in an article, published in *Provat Feri* talks about the depiction of women in liberation war based films. According to him the movies, songs and other ways of representing the war history, is nothing but glorifying men's activity during the war. The film makers either neglect or suppress the real brave stories of women during the liberation war. Instead of giving their appropriate honor women have been depicted as oppressed and weak entities. Like professor Gayen he also talks about 'male gaze' and 'sexualization' of women and 'commercial purpose'. He suggests the adoption of novels while making films to depict the actual role of women in the Liberation war.

Afroza Bulbul in her research work "Screening War: Gender, Sexuality, and Nationhood in Cinematic Representation of Liberation War in Bangladesh" argues that the women in the war films have been presented as either sex workers or sufferer. In general she said that it is a matter of great 'dilemma' to portray the contributions of women in any war. Women have always been presented as victims rather than war heroines. She pointed to issues like 'sexualization' and 'commercialization' of female characters, 'passive role' and 'vulnerable women'. She talks about the media and power politics in relation to the depiction of women in war movies. She raised the question regarding women participation in the Liberation War of Bangladesh, "War Heroines' (*Birangonas*) are only those who were raped in the war. But how about those heroines who fought with arms in the battlefield along with the male combatants directly against the Pakistan Army?"

In an article published on *Daily Star* titled "Bangladesh National Cinema in the Age of Globalization" Catherine Masud said, "in Bangladesh although liberation war figured prominently

as a theme in a number of films, there is very little critical research from feminist perspectives, except some newspaper and article where it is acknowledged that in Bangladeshi movies, the subject of '71 is often compromised by two major pitfalls: firstly, the tendency to fall back on time worn conventions and sentimental clichés, and secondly an inability or unwillingness to maintain a dispassionate distance from their subject matter.”

All the scholars and researchers talk about biased representation in the films; not being portrayed as freedom fighters, only shown as weak and vulnerable beings who were only concerned about their chastity. But what about the political activities of women? Apart from rape issues, what about the tortures that women had to endure in the military camps? And most importantly, what about society's treatment toward women after the liberation war? This paper will discuss these issues.

Chapter 3

Movie reviews

Movies are a popular form of entertainment, and have the ability to play different roles in society. They give its audiences visual pleasure. Through movies, audiences can get information which can have educational value. The interesting part about movies is that they can spread knowledge and information in the form of entertainment. They can reflect the anxieties, emotions, beliefs, and values of a society, and have the ability of picturing one nation's political ups and downs, and social issues. If we consider war films particularly, we can see they include warfare, combat scenes, battles, bloodshed, screaming, crying, people running and fleeing, firing, bombing and all these things. According to *Wikipedia*, the themes that are generally reflected by war films are, “combat, survival and escape, camaraderie between soldiers, sacrifice, the futility and inhumanity of battle, the effects of war on society, and the moral and human issues raised by war”. The director Sam Fuller defined war films by saying that, “a war film’s objective, no matter how personal or emotional, is to make a viewer feel war”. On the other hand, John Belton, “identified four narrative elements of the war films within the context of Hollywood production: a) the suspension of civilian morality during times of war, b) primacy of collective goals over individual motivations, c) rivalry between men in predominantly male groups as well as marginalization and objectification of women and d) depiction of the reintegration of veterans”. Regarding women in any war history, they are simply seen as nurses, poor mothers or wives, and obviously as war victims. Considering the films based on Bangladesh’s Liberation War in 1971, we can see all these things including firing, bombing, battle, bloodshed, genocide, rape and all except the appropriate glorifications of women attributes. Here is a broad discussion on several popular and award winning war films of the Liberation War of Bangladesh.

Nadir Naam Madhumati, directed by Tanvir Mokammel, is a national award winning film. It tells the story of a distant village situated beside the river Madhumati, its people and young boys who joined the Guerrilla force, particularly a tale about Bachchu, a young boy. The movie started with the scene where Bachchu was trying to shoot birds but his aim was not to the point and the birds fly away. Because of his failure at pointing the target properly his father scolded him. Later on in the movie we have seen the gradual development in the boy from a naïve young teenager to a brave and strong Guerrilla fighter. We did see a scene where in the house of teacher Amulya Chakrabarty, Bachchu along with his friend Akhter, Shanti (widow daughter of Chakrabarty), an old lady was listening to Sheikh Mujib's speech on radio. The idealist Brahmin teacher was very conscious about the upcoming political situation and was warning the young boys of the village. He had some influence over the young boys of the village. After seeing people from neighboring villages running away as the military had burnt down their villages, Bachchu and Akhter decided to fight for the country. According to the plan Bachchu had stolen his father's gun and some money from the locker to join the training camp in the neighboring village. On the other hand, Motaleb Mollah, Bachchu's father, a landlord of the village, supporter of Muslim League and the chairman Abdul Khaleque welcomed the military force who invaded the village. Motaleb's wife left him after he molested Shanti and then married her. Pakistani military forces started killing the innocent villagers, especially the Hindus, raped women and destroyed and burned houses. The young and elderly male members continued their guerrilla attacks. At the end of the movie we did see Bachchu killed his father who was obedient to Pakistani military.

Not only killing and brutality have been portrayed in the movie, there were love scenes too where Bachchu fell in love with a village girl, regularly the girls came to bring water from the river and

noticed Bachchu obliquely. They stared at each other and one day he followed her to the house. A wonderful movie that represented Bengali's beliefs, culture, hardship, pain and resistance.

Alor Michil, directed by Narayan Ghosh Mita, a wonderful movie which is based on the context of post Liberation War. The movie focuses on the post-independence corruption, movements and voices against smuggling, stocking of daily goods and injustice. It's a story about a middle class family's sudden growth and inner conflict between ethics and moralities of the family members. There was an old father, elder son Aleem and his secret business, his sudden financial betterment, his beautiful and ideal wife Meena, and a younger son Rana, who was a freedom fighter and concerned about the post-war country's people and their sufferings. These two brothers had a young and sweet niece whom both the brothers used to love a lot but at the end she became the prey of corruption and the unrest situation of the country. We have seen another character Shahid, a freedom fighter, his protestation, motivational speeches, political activities, participation in processions, making people aware about the social discriminations and how he contributed to the resettlement activities of the ruined country. The movie started with the scenery representing a typical middle class family, their poor condition and limitations. Then the audience got acquainted with the pictures from Liberation War's mass killing, dead bodies, destruction and a picture of a women who was hiding her face representing a rape victims. The movie showed the condition of the country after a few months of its victory; hunger, poverty, Corruption, robbery, high price of daily necessities and dissatisfaction within people. To resolve all this disruption Rana, Shahid, and other freedom fighters came forward and again raised their voice, came on the streets, again started meeting, hanging posters, speeches and all sorts of protestations. As Aleem was involved in illegal business and corruption, Rana left the house to show his objection against his brother's misdeeds and to show his patriotic zeal. Rana and Shahid went to plant trees for the

country as a social activity out of their social responsibility, they along with other friends engaged in several benevolent activities. They all gathered together to raise their voice against corruption, discrimination and all the syndicators. The film showed us family binding, love, emotion, violence and romance. It also portrayed love scenes between Rana and Dina, Alo and Rashed. At the end of the movie we could see that to save Rana, Alo gave her life away. Thus finally all the criminals got trapped with the sacrifice of a life.

Matir Maina, the first Bangladeshi movie nominated for an Oscar award. The plot of the movie is the pre Liberation War situation. The movie focused on the religious beliefs and cultural practices of Bangladeshi people. The depiction of religious conflicts and family matters has been masterfully described. The setting of the film is set just prior to the prolonged and bloody uprising war, as citizens find themselves galvanized along religious and political lines, with tempers beginning to fray. The story centered on the lives of a rural family in a remote village, bearing witness to the way in which the winds of change blew across the ordinary citizens. If we focus on the characters we could see Kazi, known as Master among the villagers, an extremely conservative Muslim, who was adamant too. For his blind beliefs, his daughter had to die. He was unwilling to accept that only praying cannot solve the uprising social and political problems or cannot resolve the health issues. We have to find solutions and ways to solve problems through our activity. Milon, Kazi's brother who was open minded, politically conscious and culturally aware; he used to enjoy cultural arrangements like boat-race with his nephew and niece, listen to folk songs, and when it was needed he was ready to fight for his country. Ayesha, Kazi's wife who was not concerned about the country, its independence and all, to her all these were critical words. She was just concerned about her family, children, she obeyed her husband's words though she had a tizzy mind; she liked to go to hear folk songs, had no problem with the colorful Eid dress which her

husband considered as ‘non-muslim’ dress, but she remained quiet as she was afraid of her husband. Anu, the only son of Kazi, who was forcefully sent to ‘Madrasa’ as Kazi believed that his son was getting exploited with wrong ideas and ethics from Milon. Throughout the film we have seen how Kazi terrorized the whole family with his own blindness towards Islam and with his stubbornness. We also witnessed the death of Rokan because of the superstitions that were prevailing in the society regarding religion and human beings. At the end when war started Ayesha forced her husband to run away along with the other villagers but he refused, saying that his religion would protect him. Milon joined the war for the sake of the country, Ayesha ran away with Anu to protect themselves and Kazi remained inside the house silent and frightened. Thus the director Tareque Masud portrayed the political, cultural and religious conflicts of Bangladesh very wonderfully in the movie.

Arunodoyer Agnishakhi, a film by Subhash Dutta portraying the struggle of people during the Liberation War, counteraction of the freedom fighters and particularly the pictures of sexual violence. It’s a story about a young, innocent and beautiful girl Romena who was living an ordinary life; she used to go to the river with her friends, roaming around laughing and giggling, enjoying cinema shooting that took place in their village, she used to like Asad, a young boy and dreamt of marrying him and spent the rest of her life with him having children, household chores and all. But when the war broke out all the dreams of her got scattered and disrupted. She was taken away by the Pakistani Military and had been raped. Along with other girls she was being tortured in the military camp. Somehow she escaped and ran away to her village. She gave birth to a War child. All the family members of her was killed by the military and Asad too was shot, she got traumatized and tried to commit suicide. Somehow actor Anwar Hossain saved her, whose acting she used to enjoy once and addressed him as brother. Again she was taken by the military

and Anwar Hossain got released for being a famous actor and having no connection with any political activity. Then in the movie we would see Anwar Hossain felt stressed and found a freedom fighter camp where he met the characters Asad, and Badruddin; Asad somehow managed to survive and Badruddin was the chief of the camp, both the fighters once used to like Romena but they dedicated themselves only for the country. In the film we have seen a scenario of a camp where all the injured freedom fighters are brought for treatment, those wounded young boys, lying on the bed were showing their eagerness to save the country, to fight against the oppressors again after the recovery. We have seen in a scene where all the girls were standing inside a pond hiding their bodies under water and Pakistani soldiers were calling them to come out and show their bodies. This scenario showed how females were tortured in the military camps. Several girls were rescued by the team of Badruddin, who was killed by the military after completing an operation where he was shot and then hanged in a tree by the military with the help of local Razakars. Asad too was killed during an operation. Throughout the movie Anwar Hossain roamed around and spent time inside a safe place playing cards and listening to the radio. But at the end of the movie he decided to take the responsibility of the war child of Romena and the war heroines of the village out of his conscience. The movie showed how male citizens sacrificed their lives where females had to sacrifice their chastity and honor for the independence of the nation.

Guerilla, directed by Nasiruddin Yousuff Bachuchu, based on the novel *Nishiddho Loban* by the prolific Bengali writer Syed Shamsul Huq. The director himself is a freedom fighter. The story of the movie focused on the central character Blkis's life events; how an ordinary housewife became a part of guerilla movement, done several guerilla activities, got captured by the military and at the end she destroyed a military camp. In this movie we witnessed this brave

female character which is rare in the war films of Bangladesh. Bilkis Banu, who was in banking profession and her husband was a journalist, she lost her husband on the day of operation searchlight, 25 March 1971. She could not even know what happened to him, he just vanished on that day. After that she became desperate to find him and gradually got attached to the urban guerrilla force and their movements. She started working with Alam, Shahadat, Mrs. Khan, Rumi, Altaf Mahmud (the legendary personality of Bengali nation's cultural field), Fateh Ali, and others. She used to take care of her mother in law at home, do her official work and at the same time was working as an active guerilla member; maintaining intercommunication, completing secret missions like placing bombs inside the military gathering, and she even had to endure the teasing of the local Razakars. We have seen Mrs. Khan, another guerilla member who had good connection with Pakistani officers, used to supply information and different necessities to the freedom fighters to make successful operations or to ensure their comfort. She even sacrificed her life for the country. At a scene we did see most of them got captured and Bilkis, with the help of Taslim Ali Sardar, managed to escape from the hands of the military and Razakars and somehow ran away to her village Joleswari, Rangpur. There she came to know about her younger brother Khokon, the commander of the local freedom fighters, who had done several successful operations and destroyed a railway bridge. Then she got the news of the brutal killing of her uncle and Khokon. They were even not allowed to get a proper burial and declared as '*Dakat*' (bandit). Along with Siraj, a member from Khokon's group Bilkis went to manage the burial of the dead bodies and got captured by the Military where Siraj was tortured and found Hindu. Bilkis, to protect herself from torture and molestation, blew up herself with a grenade along with the military camp. Thus she protected herself. This movie showed us the sufferings of freedom fighters and how brutally they had been treated, as in a scene we heard from Siraj that

they had to eat dried fish for survival, and see how brutally military has killed Khokon and his uncle, the torturing scene of one of the guerilla members in the military camp and abduction of the legendary figures for their involvement in the War. The film showed the sacrifices and struggles of the freedom fighters and how militaries treat our people like animals with the help of Razakar.

Dhire Bohe Meghna, a film directed by Alamgir Kabir, which was initially planned by Zahir Raihan. A liberation war based film where a girl, Anita Gupta, from Delhi came to visit her aunt's house in Bangladesh where she knew about the facts of Bangladesh's independence, the bestiality done by Pakistani Military and the later condition of the newly born country and about the freedom fighters from Manu Da, Sumit and Nazma. The whole cinema did not follow a linear storyline, it followed the pattern of going forward and backward; sometimes it showed stories from the past, some scenarios from present and sometimes it showed pictures and documentary clips of the liberation war. The beginning conversation between Manu and Masi Maa (Sofia), created suspense about Nazma's story, Sumit's story; what happened to Nazma? Why does she need more sleep? What happened to Sumit? What is the mystery of his father's death? Who is Hashu? Gradually all these questions got answered. We know about Sumit's father who was a benevolent person, who wanted the country poverty free and this is the lesson Sumit learned from his father who was his idol. Later on, we came to know that both Sumit and Manu Da were freedom fighters. From a conversation between Manu and Anita we came to know about the story of Manu's border crossing along with other helpless people and freedom fighters, how the military exploded the boat along with the people inside, how he got captured and tortured by Militaries and how Muktibahini rescued him. From the conversation between Sumit and his staff reporter we came to know a tormenting story of a father and his daughter during the liberation war where militaries asked the father to bring his daughter and the father instead of bringing her, killed her to protect

her honor or chastity. Nazma lost her husband during the war who was killed by the military and she was abducted by them but somehow managed to escape and took shelter in someone's garden. After that she got traumatized. Sumit offered Anita to watch a Documentary on the Liberation War. In the documentary we could see the brutalities done by the militaries; genocide, dead bodies, destroyed houses, roads, rail lines, and other vehicles, mass killing of the intellectuals and so on. After seeing all these atrocities Anita could not sleep properly and thought about her beloved whom she lost in the liberation war. He was a pilot and joined the war and was killed by the Pakistani force. From the movie we could know about the issues connected with our independence like exploiters, patriotism, resistance, Dalal, Bihari, Bangali-Bihari conflict, '*Bir Bengalis*' who joined the war to protect the nation, neighboring country India's help and the ultimate victory. We also witnessed the bitter truth about the freedom fighters after the war who engaged in misdeeds like robbery out of poverty as the newly emerging independent country was devastated; culturally, politically, economically and socially. In the film the river Meghna actually represented the Bengalis who are calm, hospitable, and productive and at the same time dangerous, violent and vindicators. At the end we came to know about Sumit and Manu's political activity and were introduced to Madhobilota and Hashu, wife and sister of manu. Hashu is a shy, quiet character who fell in love with Sumit and at the end she was considered as 'missing', by this word maybe the director intended to tell about the rape victims who were abducted by the militaries and never returned. The movie ended with showing different clips of liberation war documentaries like, male freedom fighters are taking their war training, wreckage, dead bodies, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's return from jail, Tazuddin Ahmad's speech, male citizens and freedom fighters were enjoying, and celebrating the victory and surrender of Pakistani military force and Yahya Khan. And finally

Anita could realize what freedom meant with a regression that she could not fulfill the last wish of her beloved who sacrificed his life for the sake of the country.

Khelaghor (Dollhouse), directed by Morshedul Islam, a film based on the liberation war and romance focusing light on the life of a War Heroine. The plot of the film focused on the romance, between a college teacher and a girl who was a victim of Pakistani militaries' lust. In the starting scene of the movie we have seen that a boatman is supplying rifles secretly to the freedom fighters. Later on we came to know that this boat man was Mukul, a local teacher, among the villagers he was known as 'Master', who secretly helped freedom fighters providing those weapons, information and helped to discover lurking places for their safe stay. Next we got introduced with another character Yakub, a local college teacher who was concerned about his career, the country and wanted to do something for the country but at the same time believed that there was no hope as Pakistani forces were well arranged with destructive weapons and Bengalis were unarmed and disorganized having only patriotic spirits and longing for a free nation. Then came another character Rehana or Jhumi or Anna, whom Yakub's friend Tunu sent for a few days to Yakub to give her shelter, as the condition of Dhaka was not safe enough and he had to go for war that is why his cousin needed a safe shelter to live in. In the beginning it seemed that Rehana was a mysterious girl who sometimes laugh loudly for silly reasons, sometimes ask too many questions and act as dumb, sometimes she cried and talked about things that were not clear to Yakub or to the audiences and sometimes she acted smartly as though she could do anything. This character Rehana might irritate the audience initially for her silliness at the serious situation of the war but gradually we would feel sympathized for her after knowing about her incident, what happened to her on the day of 25th march 1971. In the film except from the romance and love between Rehana and Yakub we have seen scenes like people are leaving their villages as militaries

had invaded those villages, a scene where the chairmen was ready to molest a girl, we could hear stories about freedom fighters from Mukul where he told Yakub that young boys were doing so well; they were bombing military boats, destroying military camps and punishing the leaders of 'Shanti committee'. We did see the house of 'Volanath Kobiraj' where all the helpless and homeless girls and women got their shelter during the war. The rest of the movie showed how Rehana and Yakub spent their time at an abandoned home; did cooking, had conversation about Rehana's childhood days, and how gradually Yakub fell in love with Rehana and their romance. The movie takes a surprising and sore turn when Tunu came to bring back Rehana and told Yakub that Rehana is traumatized as she experienced a mishap during the day of operation searchlight; military abducted her and after ten days threw her on the road and someone being sympathized took her to the hospital in devastated condition. After that incident Rehana acted weirdly. Hearing all these, Yakub felt pity for her and finally made the decision to join the War so that no Rehana ever had to go through such a tremendous situation and had to leave their beloved ones. Rehana left and Yakub joined the freedom fighters who came to the house he and Rehana were living in. A fearful and confused person finally got the spirit to do something for the helpless girls who were becoming the war victims. Like Mukul who in the beginning through her poem recitation expressed the zeal to protect the helpless mother land, '*Utho ma, 7 Koti sontan, Hindu Musolman, rokto diye holeo shodh korbo moroner ei Ovijan*' that means the sons of these land are ready to sacrifice their blood to protect their mother, their land and the nation.

Kalmilata, a wonderful movie, directed by Shahidul Hoque Khan, presented the emotion of language movement, the cruelty and inhumanity by Pakistani military during the liberation war and the aftermath of the war. It showed how a beautiful village had been burnt down by the militaries, the dreams of the girls scattered, young men and even children showed their patriotic

zeal and gained freedom and how all unitedly worked to reform the devastated village. The story of the movie was about a remote village and its people; what they had to endure, what they sacrificed for independence, how all the villagers unitedly resisted the Pakistani oppressors, and how victory and reformation came. The movie started with the beautiful scenery of the village and shows women doing their daily household chores. We got introduced to the family of Banu, her brother Moti, and her widow mother. Later we came to know that Banu's father died during the language movement and before going to school Moti offered flowers at the local Shaheed Minar. At school the teacher gave inspiring lectures on language movement. After that we got introduced with Koli and Buri; Koli was an warm hearted young boy, elder son of village's school teacher, everyone specially Talukdar considered him as a slow coach as he always kept roaming around and singing using his music instrument '*Dotara*', but he loved to help others and on the other hand an old lady having a goat which she considered as her apple of eyes. We have seen romance between Banu and Koli. Banu's mother earned money by selling cow milk and Banu made beautiful '*Nakshi Kantha*' for others. Banu's mother had the courage to raise her voice even in front of Talukdar, the village landlord. Then comes Oli, younger brother of Koli, who used to study in Dhaka but had to return to the village as the condition of Dhaka was not well and all the educational institutions were declared closed. Talukdar's wife wanted to get her daughter married to Oli and hearing those words Rabeya, Talikdar's daughter, kept blushing and smiling. We could see romance, song, dance, between Oli and Rabeya. We did see the scenario of all the villagers at the tea stall listening to the Radio. Hearing Radio Oli showed his vigor to fight against all the oppressors as he believed that we had endured enough injustice and he tried to encourage his elder brother for protestation and to be ready to go for war. Then in a scene we did see that people from the city and neighboring villages are fleeing toward this village for survival. And during every war

around the world there are people like Talukdar who are corrupt and selfish, what matters to them is only profit. We did see Talukdar asked his boatman to take more money from these runaway peoples. Moti came and told her mother and sister about these helpless people, he showed his eagerness to stand beside the poor peoples. All the villagers seemed very hospitable, even the Buri, they gave food and shelter to those people. While serving food Banu came to know from a stranger that Pakistani army raped her in front of her husband and then killed her husband. All the villagers along with the newcomers were panicking and listening to the radio, and at the same time Talukdar's wife was concerned about Rbeya's marriage. Young boys while playing tried to kill the military's jack straw with their toy bow. When the military invaded the village, Oli and Koli along with other enthusiastic boys came forward with sticks in their hand to resist the Pakistani force. Even Buri too started sharpening her chopper to kill the military but ultimately we see that they have killed the goat and made its barbeque, her only wealth. She was crying helplessly and left the place. Moti too went to war with her mother's permission. He stole a gun from a Pakistani soldier Bioscopewala was ready to work as an informer, there was a scene after hearing the declaration of independence on radio where men were lifting Bangladeshi flags, and were taking their war preparation. After being raped Banu was cursing her fate and thinking about her incomplete desires. A Bangladeshi army officer hired Moti as a freedom fighter seeing his patriotic spirit. This little boy wanted to take revenge of her sister's rape, mother's sufferings and for all the misdeeds that Pakistanis were doing. When the fighting started, Moti showed his boldness and exploded a bridge but at the end he was brought down with a bullet from Pakistani military. Moti's death traumatized his mother. Oli took an oath that he would not touch food until killing all the militaries, he was dreamin of Rabeya waiting for him after the war with a garland. In a scene we could see freedom fighters giving rifles to the village ladies and a dancing scene could be seen

here holding rifles. But after the scene we did see men are fighting bravely with militaries but no women fighters had shown throughout these scenarios in the battle field. After the war we did see Koli lose one of his legs and console Banu saying that “you lost your honor, I lost my leg, and this is how with sacrifice we gained our freedom”. At the end we would see that Talukdar died, Banu, Buri, Oli, Koli, and all the villagers worked together to bring back the greenery, beauty and prosperity to the villages where freedom fighter caught and punished all the food and necessary good’s stockers and returned their weapons to the government.

Chapter 4

How men and women have been depicted in the films

Movies are important forms of popular culture. They have the authority to carry on one nation's history and have the capacity to influence its audiences. People who have not witnessed the war during 1971, those who have a little idea about the issues and circumstances regarding the war, or our new generation can find war films as the source of our history, information and can earn the passion, vigor and eagerness to protect the honor and liberty of the motherland, from the films. Both male and female audiences can get encouragement from the films to do something for the country, can feel the importance of freedom and can feel the pride of being an independent nation. The true representation of the sacrifices of our freedom fighters (both male and female) can encourage people to be a responsible citizen of the country. But the representation of history should be exact and proper, and should not be half-bared. Both male and female citizens of East-Pakistan did their best to protect the country, resisted the enemy. Not everyone directly participated in the war; many worked as secret agents, informers, cooks, nurses, many gave inspiration to the nation through their poems, songs, or many people started gathering foreign attention through their different activities, protest while others used to collect funds from door to door for the freedom fighters. While some people participated actively, others participated passively in the war to support the nation during the terrible time and to encourage the fighters who had joined the war and were ready to sacrifice their lives. But it is a matter of great regret that our filmmakers, Medias presented women only as war victims, not as the brave warriors or as contributors to the war. If we analyze the films that have been discussed above, considering the issues of women representation we can say that the history has been hidden. The exact reality has been denied.

In the film *Nadir Naam Madhumati*, (1996, Mokammel) we have seen freedom fighters, their brave activity, the cruelty of Pakistani military, the heinous acts by the Razakars, and the condition of women. We have seen the boldness of the protagonist Bachuchu who at the end killed his traitor father for the sake of his country, once who was an innocent and irresponsible boy; became an energetic, fearless fighter who dedicated himself for the nation. Teacher Amulya Chakrabarty, who was killed by the military, was an intellectual and ideal man who was concerned about the country's political situation, used to encourage and motivate the young boys. We did see Akhter and his friends and other boys from neighboring villages who gathered together to fight for the country. They punished the local collaborators, rescued the raped woman, and helped the villagers.

In comparison with the male characters in the film the women characters are less active, submissive and muted. Not a single female freedom fighter have been presented in the film. In the beginning when Bachuchu's mother kept asking several questions about mass killing, sheikh Mujib, military, and refugees, Motaleb stopped her saying that women don't need to know all these things and she became silent. After being the chairman of the village and being corrupted with power when Motaleb wanted to have Shanti for the night saying that if she agreed, the military would release her father. She didn't resist bravely and asked to marry her, showing the typical Bengali characteristics of being concerned about 'Izzat' (chastity), honor and legitimacy. We have seen a traumatized mad woman who was abducted by the military and returned after seven days and her whole family was murdered by them and didn't even get a proper burial. Then we see a women raped by the Razakars and committed suicide after she was rescued by Muktibahini. Watching all the wrong activities by Motaleb, his wife goes to her daughter's place, as she had no

power to control her husband or to raise her voice. An old woman was cursing the chairman for his wrong deeds. Girls were falling in love with the Muktiyoddha, laughing, bringing water from the river and doing silly acts during the war. All the female characters are shown as weak, helpless and victims of the war. They did not have the power to resist or to fight against the enemy along with the male fighters. There were no female characters in the film who showed her enthusiasm for freedom or engaged in any political activity or showed any resistance against all these adversities.



Picture 1: woman as ideal wife, learning dance from dance master and doing romance. *Alor Michil* (1974)

In Alor Michil (1974, Mita), we see how freedom fighters like Rana, Shahid, and their friends dedicate themselves again to restore the devastated country like they did during the liberation war. They are helping the rape victims, poor people, and working against the corruption. All the male characters specially Rana, Shahid, Rashed, shamim, showed their objection against the oppression and injustice. On the other hand female characters like Meena, Alo, and Dina, have shown typical Bengali women's characteristics having limitations for being daughter, wife, mother, and daughter in law or simply for being a woman. When Meena questioned her husband's income source, her husband beat her; she could not leave the house like Rana either for being an ideal wife or for social conventions. Throughout the film we see her as quiet, patient and a motherly figure who is kind to everyone. Once she helped Shahid from being caught up by police as he was a student politician, fighting against oppression. Alo, simply a young girl who regularly went to college, having her dance class, a beloved, representing a domestic girl. Deena is a dedicated lover who can do anything for Rana still having some limitations for being a daughter. They all played their stereotypical female roles in the movie. At the beginning of the film while showing documentary clips from liberation war the image of a fearful woman who was hiding her face with her hand may representing the rape victims. At a scene we can see the character Shahid is giving condolence to Nasima, a rape victim saying that to gain Bangladesh's independence the nation has to pay the big cost of losing their mother's and sister's honor and now it's their duty to protect them. Throughout the movie we cannot witness any significant woman character who showed any interest in any social work or showed their concern for the country. All they are concerned about is family, love, and relationships. Alo is the victim of political and social conditions. Her sacrifice brought light to the social syndicators.

In *Matir Maina* (2002, Masud), we can see no major female character except Kazi's wife Ayesha. She is nothing but a puppet of Kazi's desire, belief and his adamantness. She has no right to take any decision regarding family matters or about her own children. She is not allowed to do whatever she likes. She never could express her inner feelings as we see she likes to enjoy 'Jatra Pala' (ballad-opera) but out of Kazi's fear she hesitated to go. She has to follow her husband's command. She hid the allopathic medicine that Milon brought for Asma, which was ultimately thrown away by Kazi as he believes in only religious stuff. She had nothing to do with her daughter's death as she is obedient towards her husband. She said, I have no war. She is not interested in the political unrest as she was mourning her daughter's demise. She has been muted by the male character in the film. At the end to save her son's life and her own life she skedaddled leaving her husband behind. On the other hand, Milon, a major character who could deny his brothers authority and go for war. From the beginning he was a very energetic, politically and culturally conscious young man.



Picture 2: Sexualization of female characters, *Guerilla* (2011)

Guerilla (2011, Bachuchu) the only film where a female protagonist has been presented and shows her guerilla activities. Though the film is different from the stereotypical war movies but in portraying the character Banu and Mrs Khan it becomes commercial. It showed that these ladies are using their beauty and charm to win over the trust of the military officers. Like the present cinemas present the heroines in an attractive way so the audience gets interested, similarly Bilkis has been presented during the party where an officer tries to smell her body. In the party scene Mrs. Khan also received compliments for her outlook from an officer. In the beginning scene we can see romance between Bilkis and her husband, as without intimate scene movies are less interesting. These things can be considered as commercial purpose. In a scene we see, a military officer raped Taslim Ali Sardar's wife. we see girls are bringing to the military camp, they are crying, devastated and when Bilkis got caught the military officer was vividly talking about her female body, touched her body parts, we see scuffling between the officer and Bilkis, he was smelling her, sexualize scene, the officer said, "I am getting hot now" after knowing that she is Hindu. These can be considered as the sexualization of female characters. In the end note of the film we can see Bilkis is recognized as a martyr. The male characters like Alam, Shahadat, Mrs. Khan, Rumi, Altaf Mahmud Fateh Ali, Siraj, Bilkis's brother Khokon and uncle all got tortured and killed brutally because of their love for country and nation. Only our protagonist Bilkis could run away smoothly from Dhaka city and at last could protect her 'ijjat' by giving her life away. Is it because she is a female and at the same time heroin of the film?



Picture 3: Heroine enjoying her bath. (*Dhire Bohe Meghna*, 1973)

In *Dhire Bohe Meghna* (1973, Kabir), we see Anita Gupta, a girl from Delhi, come to visit Dhaka. In This film there are no significant female characters. We see Nazma, who has lost her husband during the war and was abducted by the militaries and become traumatized. Where Nazma is a fragile character enduring the war incident, Manu Da and Sumit are portrayed as strong and determined characters to do something for the newly born country though both have sorrows inside as one lost his sister and another his beloved during the war. In the beginning we see Anita's bathing scene. This scene is not a mandatory part in war films, but to attract an audience it is needed. We see her romance and intimacy with her beloved in a park and at last we can discover that she had hatred for war because she lost her beloved in the war who was a pilot of East-Pakistan and she could not fulfill his desire to make love with him before he was going to the war. She feels guilty that because of her tradition and ethics she could not make him happy. Anita blamed herself for years, thinking herself selfish. A girl is feeling upset not for the country or about the war, she was upset because she couldn't make love with her beloved. This is really ridiculous. Later we see Sumit and Hashu's love affair and attachment. Madhabilata, a virtuous wife, a friendly and

motherly sister in law. Not a single female character showed their patriotic spirit in this film, rather they were overwhelmed in their thoughts of their beloved, their emotions and their family life. We can say the presence of the female characters in the film are only to please their male audiences showing nothing meaningful except some romantic scenes and sexualized scenes, where men characters are the figures who were concerned about the country, fought bravely to protect the motherland and the sisters. Sexualization and commercialization can be seen in this film very clearly. At the end there were only men enjoying victory, taking training for war, and only men freedom fighters had shown. Where were the females of the country? Weren't they happy with the victory?



Picture 4: women spending their good times. *Khelaghor* (2006)

Khelaghor (2006, Islam), the film shows us how local school teachers like Mukul, full of enthusiasm, patriot, worked as secret agent for the freedom fighters during the war. We see Yakub who once used to believe that, 'there is no hope' but after hearing the tragedy of Rehana, his beloved, he decided to go to the war so that no other Rehana ever has to face such tragedy. Here we can mention the lines what Gayen has talked about the representation of women in her paper,

“As per the classical war film framework, the violation of women was what drove the men to war; thus, the weak position was constructed based on the rape experiences of women during the war”. We come to know from Mukul about the stories of village children, how they destroyed military boats, how young boys are attacking the militaries and punishing local collaborators. On the other hand the heroine of the film Rehana, who was acting weirdly in the beginning and then the audience can realize that she was being raped and become traumatized. Could not the film show how bravely Rehana fight against the enemy to take the revenge of her rape? In the shelter house we see girls are spending time playing Ludo, eating pickles, and doing other girlish things. Is it true that girls used to do such silly activities during a panic-stricken situation? If we notice the end note of the film that is, “...but nobody bothers to keep count how many dream-dollhouses of innumerable Rehanas, Jhumis, or Annas get shattered by the brutality of war”, we see it shows the typical Bengali domestic characteristics of girls, as though girls were only concern about their beloved or husband and their domesticity. This is not true always.





Picture 5: where men are taking oath to protect the country, there women are seen as either traumatized or rape victims, after the war men take the responsibility of the war children.
Arunodoyer Agnishakkhi (1972)

Arunodoyer Agnishakkhi (1972, Dutta) showed the story of Romena, a beautiful village girl. She was raped several times, she gave birth to a war-child whom she hates and wanted to kill. She was tortured in the military camps and become traumatized. She was upset as she lost her Ijjat and could not marry her beloved Asad as she dreamt of. Throughout the film we have seen other girls were being tortured in the military camp, the news about the bunkers after the victory where the evidence of sexual violence on women have been found. Romena wanted to commit suicide but could not because of Anwar Hossain. Except from rape scene and helpless women, we see brave fighter like Asad, Badruddin, and many other men who fought for the country, got injured, even sacrificed their lives and murdered brutally. At the end we have seen that Anwar Hossain took the responsibilities of the war child, came forward to give those raped and traumatized women their proper honor, and gave them comfort. Women characters have been portrayed as nothing but war victims, depressed, melancholic, helpless, and typical Bengali women having emotion,

concerned about chastity, who were rescued by and dependent on men, where men are the only protectors and shelter of these females. Men, even in the hospital beds, showed their energy, spirit and rigidity to fight for the country. Asad wanted to go to the war again though he was badly injured. Being mad when Romena was running, Badruddin tried to quiet her and was captured by the military. After killing him they hanged him in a tree.

In the film *Kalmilata* (1981, Khan), we did see so many characters, their patriotic zeal, romance, corruption, killing, burning and ultimate victory of Bengali people and how they restore the destroyed village. We have seen characters like Koli, an irresponsible, vagabond boy who becomes a freedom fighter, a responsible man, for the sake of the country. His younger brother Oli, a young educated boy, returned from Dhaka, well aware and concerned about the political condition of the country. Oli had a patriotic spirit, from the beginning he showed his eagerness for freedom. The Bioscope man got ready to work as a secret informer, a school teacher who motivates his students with nationalistic ideology, a children Moti, too joined the war and became martyr after exploding a bridge bravely. On the other hand characters like Banu, her mother, Rabeya, her mother, Buri, the runaway woman all were doing typical female activities like romance, stitching Nakshi Kantha, selling cow milk, serving food to the refugees, bathing and bringing water from the river throughout the film.



Picture 6: women are dancing, doing romance, raped and traumatized women, where men and even children like Moti were fighting for the country. (*Kalmilata*, 1981)

We did see romantic dancing scenes too in the film. While Oli was determined of freeing the nation from enemy, and was dreaming of a scene where Rabeya was welcoming him, when he would return from the war; Rabeya's mother was concerned about her marriage then, Banu being raped was thinking about her beloved Koli and her ruined household, the unknown woman was thinking her past. We did see a dancing scene where women are dancing with rifles. It seems a bit funny. Where even a child, like Moti, took the oath to protect his mother, sister and the country, there all the female characters were just running away to protect their chastity, crying and waiting for men to make the country free from all kinds of oppression. And after the war it was the men who came forward to bring back the greenery of the house, raise voice against the corruption. Female characters are not that significant throughout the movie. It seems like they just contributed to the romantic dance scenes, domestic activities and to the rape scenes and nothing else.

Chapter 5

Analysis of the novels

Novels can be defined as long narratives dealing with human experiences. Like films they too have the power to spell-bound its readers. Novel keeps a record of images, emotions, sorrows, happiness, sufferings, and daily life activities of human beings in written form. While reading a novel, a reader can think himself or herself in the place of the characters and can experience the reality. Like important documents they keep records of history, culture, tradition and truth of a nation. And these documents keep going from hand to hand, generation to generation spreading out knowledge, information, and truth. It makes its readers acquainted with the unknown facts, doctrines and stories of human beings. If we consider the novels based on our Liberation War of 1971, we can see how beautifully and largely describe our nation's struggle, their urge for political, cultural and economic freedom, their sufferings, the brutalities they endured, the resistance of the nation against all oppression and how we achieved our freedom after a long bloody battle, how people from all walk of life, male and female all contributed to the independence. Here is a broad analysis of a few novels based on the Liberation War.

Raifel Roti Aurat by Shaheed Anwar Pasha, the first novel on Bangladesh's Liberation War. An unknown narrator narrates everything; the observations of the Protagonist Sudipto, who was very optimistic toward the independence of the country, his inner feelings, what happened on the night of 25th march and what happened after that and other characters' stories. Sudipto Shaheen, a university professor, a keen observer, who along with his wife and three children somehow escaped from the mass killing of Pakistani military. After that he had to run away from place to

place to protect their life. He described vividly what happened that night, what happened to Nilkhet, to the university halls, Rajarbagh police line, to the nearby slums and the ruined monuments, institutions, and tried to find out if there were any familiar faces or any news about them. He and his friend Firoz talked about different political issues and observed many brutalities. Though the enemies tried to focus on the religious issues, the novel showed us that it was not only the '*Hinduani*' issues that was their problem, the reason for their hatred was Bangla Language, Bengali's nationalism and their love for the country and mother tongue. Sudipto told us the stories of his job interview, his conversation with different professors, his realizations and thus the writer showed us throughout the novel what actually happened during 1971, all the issues; political, religious, cultural, prejudices, conspiracy, sectarianism, exploitation and unjust that lead the nation to a terrible condition and brings the ultimate victory. In the novel the writer showed us what was the role of some parasites and traitors (also known as leaders of Shanti Committee and Al-Badre) like Mr. Khalek and Malek, Harmuj Mia, Firoz's uncle who were working for Pakistani forces. Pasha was a novelist, journalist and a senior lecturer at Dhaka University, who used to believe that East Pakistan would have its freedom from all kinds of oppression and this belief is narrated throughout the novel, but unfortunately he could not see and enjoy the joy of freedom as he was killed on 14 December in the hand of Bengali collaborators. But in the form of a novel, he left behind an indisputable documentary of our history for our nation. This novel showed us how Pakistani leaders, being aware of our nation's political and cultural spirit, and patriotic zeal, decided to suppress us using rifles and other destructive weapons and tortured our women physically and mentally. His son Rabiul said to The Daily Star, "Being a sensitive person, he put into words his hatred, grievances, pain, expectations and his convictions in this book" and he also

added that, “He did realize that he would die if the Pakistani forces got the book. Yet he wrote it. He perhaps felt the necessity of documenting history.”

There are few lines in the book, “General Tikka Kha ordered his soldiers- killed the Bengali people, loot their bazars, rape their women. Before giving the declaration he did give a short speech- soldiers, president himself proud of you. You people are the pride of Pakistan. The great responsibility of protecting Pakistan and Islam is upon you. Those Bengalese, following the command of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, they are becoming Hindu forgetting Islam. So, war against these people is not merely a war, it is Jihad (*Senapoti Tikka Kha adesh diyechhilo- bangalider tomra hotya koro ,tader dokanpat lut koro, bari ghor jaliye dao, tader meyeder dhorshon koro. Ei adesh deyar age chhoto ekta vumikao diyechhilen Tikkas Kha- joan vaisob , tomader jonno president soyong tomader gorbobodh koren. Tomra pakistaner gourob. Pakistan o Islam ke rokkhyar mohan dayityo tomader upor. Ei j sob bangalider dekhchho, era sheikh Mujibur Rahman er netrittye Islam ke vule giye sokole Hindu hoye jacchhe. Otoyeb eder biruddhye judddho shadharon judddho hobena, ta hobe puropuri jehad*). (p.30)”. These lines clearly showed the hypocrisy of the Pakistanis.

In the book *Talash* by Shaheen Akhtar, we did see the story of a war heroine Meri and her journey to real liberty. Using Maryam’s journey from past to present; her experiences of violence, trauma, and rape, her sufferings and desires, the author actually vividly presented the history of Bangladesh, its politics, the aftermaths of the Liberation War, how society treated its war heroines, how was the journey of women during the war and after the war and what was the contribution of men and women towards independence. This book can be considered as an appropriate document of the birth of a new country Bangladesh. This book has been translated into different languages.

The author won Asian literary prize for this book. The South Korean writer, novelist and chair of the *Asian Literary Award* comment on the book *Talash* that, “Imperialism and colonialism, war and violence, the depiction of war criminals, mistreatment of independence fighters, and ongoing ill-treatment of rape victims are all interwoven in the narrative of the novel.” and added that “one of the greatest feminist anti-war docu-novels of our time.”

Mukti, a researcher who tried to uncover the real history of the Liberation War, went to the War heroines like Maryam and others, to different social workers to know the truth, to collect exact information and showed the hidden and tormenting truths about the Biranganas. A wonderful novel described the suffering of Bengali people, the cruelty of Pakistani forces, and the sacrifice and contribution of men and women during the war.

Chapter 6

How men and women have been presented in the novels

In the novel *Raifel Roti Aurat* represented the true history of Bangladesh's birth. What actually happened on 25 March, what was the reaction of people, and how people from all walks of life started resisting Pakistani military force and brought our Liberation. If we observe the depiction of men and women distinctively in the novel, we did see that in the beginning both men and women were randomly killing by the militaries and young ladies were brought to the cantonment where they were raped and tortured, people were busy hiding and protecting themselves from the enemy as people were totally unaware about the chaos. Yet both men and women tried to resist, and protect themselves. If we observe the character Sudipto throughout the novel, we did see he had immense love for his country and nation, from the beginning he tried to protest against all the injustices but in a polite way. He was a sensitive and quiet person, who always tried to avoid clashes but could not resist himself when it was about justice, truth and morality. He felt guilty inside for doing nothing significant for the country. We did see his emotion from the scenario where the narrator narrates that standing in front of the ruined Shahid minar, he was crying. We did see in the very first conversation between Mr. Khalek and Sudipto regarding the issue whether the boy from Jamat-E-Islam who was died in a chaos can be considered a martyr or not, where Mr. Khalek was saying, "Where the blood of a martyr droppes, a mosque must be built there. (*Shahid er rokto jekhane poreche sekhane masjid banate hobe*)" And in reply Sudipto said, "The boys were quarrelling among themselves. A death like that can be called martye! The meaning of martyr....." (*chelera to nijeder moddhe maramari kore morlo! Oi vabe keo morle take shahid bola jay naki! Shahid mane to.....*). (p. 22)"

-“Would break the Shahid minar! Sudipto showed his wonderment (*shahid minar venge deben?* – *Bismoy prokash kore Sudipto*).

-Hundred times we will do this. You will do blasphemes and non-Islamic activities there, should not we perish it? Then we will build a mosque there (*Ek sho bar vangbo. Apnara sekhane kufori kam korben, sherek korben, ar seta amra vangbona. Venge skhane banabo masjid*).

Sudipto could not control himself and replied that,

- It is heard that, in the Middle age Muslims destroyed temples to build mosques, so this is not a false saying (*moddho juge shona jay musulmanera mandir venge masjid banato, seta tahole mittha noy*). (p. 23)”

We did see that both Firoz and Sudipto frequently went to the university halls to see the conditions. They both felt attachment with the students and were feeling bad. Firoz started his political career from the belief that, until Bengali could establish their political position properly, the continual process of unfair activities would never come to an end. He used to use slang while uttering names of any west-Pakistani rulers. He was very concerned about the nation’s leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman’s safety. He was not quiet and sensitive like his friend. When on the way to Firoz’s house Sudipto and Firoz meet Mr. Khalek, who was talking shits about the residential students, being irritated Firoz said, “Are you asking for believing in your cock and bull stories (*eisob gaja bishwas korte bolen*)? (p. 37)”

We came to know about Hasim Shekh, a policeman from Rajarbag police line, who came to Firoz for some money, he had to send money to his old mother and then he would join the war. We could see his spirit from the few lines, “they killed my brothers and friends, and dishonored our mother

and sisters- should not we take revenge? Swear of God, swear of mother, swear of our blood, we must take revenge (*amader koto vai bondhuke ora mere fello, ma-boner ijot nilo-amra tar shodh nebo na? khodar kosom, amar mayer kosom, amader rokte kosom, amra er shodh neboi nebo*). (p. 45)”

We did know about Abdullah Mansur alias Aman the famous painter, who through his paintings showed the people how west Pakistani authorities were exploiting the east Pakistanis. He was killed by the military. He lost his mind after seeing the dead bodies of his little children. Being traumatized he was uttering the words, “I will shoot and want to be shot down (*ham goli kore ga, goli khayega*). (p.71)”

Though Sudipto tried to help him but he could not. Sudipto was recalling what happened few days back when male students collected the dead bodies who were killed by Pakistani authorities for their protest against them before the war started, they brought the bodies under the Banyan tree at university campus and female students were giving slogans “Bengali brothers, watch your brothers’ blood (*Bangalee vai, vai re- Bangalee vai er rokte dekh*)”

We did see Nazim, Sudipto’s student, who was a journalist. He along with other journalists was collecting real news and was taking pictures as evidence in secret and the team was rescuing wounded people, taking them to the hospitals.

We did see the spirit of a local boy who used to smoke and wander around and was a gatekeeper of a cinema hall. But after 7 march he left the job and started working as a volunteer for Awami league. He along with other local boys made barricades to resist Pakistani military and was saying to Firoz, “they are coming to kill us sir. I will die after killing at least five of them (*ora amader marte aschhe sir. Kom kore holeo pach jon ke mere morbo*). (p. 98)”

Firoz's friend Korayshi who was later revealed as Jamal, who was a political activist working along with Bula for the country. In the beginning he was talking with Firoz about forming a new government and other political activities.

If we focus on the female depiction of the novel we see that the narrator showed us from the very beginning that the Pakistani military started their heinous acts like rape, and torturing women, from the very first day. There is a line in the very beginning, "Firoz has seen, an infant who could escape death miraculously, is sucking its dead mother's breast for milk with hope to survive (*Firoz dekhlen, mrito jononir ston chushe tokono bachte chaichhe sei obodh aloukik vabe beche thaka shishu*). (p. 7)" We can imagine how pathetic it was.

"Entering into this house seems very worthwhile for them. Three beautiful women, huge amounts of gold and money. These are war prizes, so these are halal (*Ei baritate dhoka tader khub sarthok hoyeche. Tin tinte khubsurat aurat, chollish vori jeowar, pachsho rupey. E sab male ganimat, otoeb halal*). (p. 19)" From these lines could assume what was their purpose, and how they treated women. Women were nothing but objects to them, whom they wanted to use and then left behind. And there were Dalals like Mr. Khalek who supported such men like animals as when the military returned his nieces and sister in law he showed his gratitude towards them as they sent 300 rupee for their treatment. Yet women faced all the adversities bravely and fought for their honor, their chastity, their country and dear ones.

We did learn about the bravery of professor Manirujjaman's wife, who lost her husband, son, brother in law and nephew in front of her eyes and still did not get emotionally weak Or maze. She poured water to the mouth of her dying elder son who could not drink it, then she watched a dying Hindu professor, who was asking for water and she brought water for him. When she realized that

he had some hope to survive, she went to his wife and said, “Sister, come out. Take your husband inside. My husband has died. Your husband is still alive (*Didi, ber hon. Apnar sahib ke ghore nin. Amr saheb mara gechhen. Apnar saheb ekhono beche achhen*). (p. 29)”

We came to know the story of Momena who gave shelter to Hasim shekh, a runaway policeman from Rajarbag police line during such an unrest situation. Momena was alone, still she showed kindness toward him as he said the military would kill him.

We can mention the bold story of Poli, who was abducted on 25 march and placed in the brothel inside the cantonment, which was especially for the officers. She took the oath to kill at least one officer. Using her trickery she managed to convince an officer who rescued her from the brothel and took her to a house inside the city. And on the very first night she killed the officer with a chopper. After killing the officer she did not get insane, she was looking for a mine to kill more militaries. Nazim managed a mine somehow and with that mine, fastening it on her chest she jumped in front of a truck which was full of military personnel. Thus she destroyed a military truck along with 20-25 militaries and sacrificed herself.

To show the horrible condition of women during the war we can mention a few lines from the novel. “Now it is impossible to understand from which social status she belongs. Because there is no ornament or any clothes in her body. But there are some marks of ornaments on her naked body. Dangles had not the patience to unfasten the earring. Tearing ear is the evidence...Between her teeth there is raw meat...having no alternative, to protect her dignity she may bite the barbarian’s stinky body to her utmost power. Her belly is telling that she is pregnant. And the heartless militaries fired on the exact part where she was carrying the baby- one bullet on her womb and another on her chest (*shamajik morzadar kon dhaper ei meye ta ekhon ar bujhbar upay nei. Kenona*

onge bostro alongkaer kichu nei. Tobe ulongo shorire alongkarer chinno ache. Kaner makri khule nebar dhoirzo durbrittoder chhilona. Kan chera dekhei bojha jay...ar mukher moddhe daate lege ache kacha mangso...somvrom rokkhyar shes chestay osohay nari pranpone kamre dhorechhen borborer puti-durgondho deho... peter obostha dekhe sposto bujha jachchhe, romoni sontan somvoba chhilen. Ebong pasondora guli koreche peter moddhe sontan thakar sey jaygatitei-tolpete ar ekta buke). (p. 128)”

At the end we did see sister Bula, who was a member of secret communist party, but most of the people knew her as a polite and innocent teacher, a supporter of Jamaat-E-Islam, she would distribute Jamaat-E-Islami books among girls, but inside the house she used those books to cook her mother’s food. The authorities had no doubt about her activities. Political leaders like Mr. Jamal/ Qurayshi were gathering members from everywhere; police, E.P.R, students and common people who wanted to join the war and placing them in different houses secretly. Later on these people composed ‘Mukti Bahini’ to join war against those barbarian Pakistani forces. And secret agents like Bula were providing them shelter, food and other necessities.

Thus the novel included the real history of the nation, true contribution of males and females.

Talash, the novel has been divided into several chapters. Each chapter described the true history of Bengali people, their sacrifices and their struggle for freedom. The dreams and desires of a girl like Maryam has been given importance in this novel and at the same time it showed how men sacrificed their lives for the country, how the military and society had treated girls and how they showed their courage and spirit during the war and even after the war, all these issues have been depicted in this novel.

In the very chapter ‘Maryam orafe Mary (Maryam alias Mary)’ we did see the mention of both men and women’s participation in political activity before the war. Maryam, who like other girls used to see the dream of having a husband, children and a family, and was frequently asking for marriage to his beloved Abed Hasan who was busy regarding meetings, processions, preparations for the war. Participation of women can be seen in these lines, “when girls like you are taking training with dummy rifle, doing parade standing under sun, uttering aloud slogans; here you are talking about your marriage frequently (*Tomar moto meyera jokhon dami raifel diye training nichchhe, rode dariye left-right korchhe, gola fatiye slogan dicchhe, tomar mukhe khali biye biye-jop-top*). (p. 13)”

This very chapter also showed us the condition of girls then, as we did see Abed was avoiding Maryam as he was busy with his political activity, while her belief was that ‘marriage is the ultimate goal for every girl’, but when Abed felt his physical desire he did come to Maryam and after fulfilling his desire he would leave her.

In the chapter ‘operation searchlight’ we got introduced with Mukti, who was working to reveal the true history of our nation. Then we did see our protagonist Maryam along with others leaving Dhaka and we got introduced with different male and female characters and with their tormenting stories. Mrs Alauddin left her husband’s dead body behind, Malina Gupta lost 11 male members of her family, all killed by Pakistani military, Engineer Toiyob, and his pregnant wife Shapna who did think Mary as a prostitute who might seduce her husband, a childless couple, all were running away in search of a safe place away from the enemy. In an abandoned house they all were passing their time. Until the military attacked the house and killed everyone; tore down Sapna's belly with bayonets, abducted a woman, and burned down the houses.

In the chapter '*Ekhon Juddher tritiyo mas* (it is the third month of the war)', from the few words of Mukti about women we did see the worst condition of women in this patriarchal society during and after the war, "The reason behind her misery is her reproductive organ, which is the chief part of heredity- its purity. Which is only for men's valid usage. Which became unguarded during the war. Enemy's penis entered it. Semen entered into the ovary. Embryo started growing. After the war, the special order for abortion could not bring women's sanctity back (*Tar (Maryam) durvagyer karon narir projonon ongoti, za bongsho rokkhyar suchimukh- er pobitrota. Za shudhu ekjon purusher beboharer jonno ebong boidhovabe. Seti orokkhyoniyo hoye pore juddher bochor. Shotrur purushango tate dhuke pore. Birzo dimbashoye chole jay. Bhrun druto barte shuru kore. Sadhinotar por bishesh oddhyadesh jari kore gorvopat ghotanor por o narider pobitrota punoruddhar hoyi*). (p. 48)

In the same chapter, we did see characters like Hajir Beta who was a religious person, and according to him it was totally *halal* to enjoy female bodies (rape women) during the war as it is stated in Islam too (according to his religious ideology). In the military camp the captured freedom fighters took oath to protect their mothers and sisters and wrote it down on the wall. And at the same time we came to know about the daughters and brides in the village who would go to the Muktibahini's camp with their rafts to give them food. These activities were also part of war.

The novel showed us that during the war Bengali women lost their thousand year's old traditions that were their "chastity (*Satitto*)" and "sharee". Yet they showed their mental strength, their eagerness to see a demon free, oppression free country, and contributed to the independence directly or indirectly.

In the chapter “*Antorbas, sharee o sotitto* (Undergarment, Sharee and Chastity)” we did see Maryam’s words that reflected the torture women had to endure during the war which was beyond imagination. She said to Mukti, “Few messy pieces of clothes on body or rape, not just that. Each kick of boots, jabbing with bayonet, or cigarette burns, they all were equally awful to me. Not a single one was normal. People want to know only about how many times a day the military raped us. As though other tortures were not torture to them (*Tena poraye rakhlo ba dhorshon korlo, ta shudhu na. protyekta buter lathi, beyoneter khocha ki sigareter chhyeka- amar kache soman voyaboho. Ektao normal na. Ektar theke arekta kom na. militari dine rate ko’bar dhorshon koreche , loke khali er hisab jante chay. Onyo sob nirzaton tara nirzaton mone korena*). (p. 64)”

They had to wear stinky and bloody clothes, there was no sanitation system, if they asked for water, urine would have given to them, and they were not allowed to wear any cloth. Still they wanted to live, dreaming for a new free land.

In the chapter ‘*Joddha* (fighter)’ we did see the contribution of men in the Liberation War, how bravely they fought for the country, and never hesitated to give away their lives for the country. In the beginning of the chapter we did see Mr. Sharma who was giving motivational speech to the members who were determined to go for their mission after taking their training from the neighboring country. We did see Mantu and his team were ready for the ‘Rajakar capturing’ mission. Our freedom fighters did not have any advanced and modern weapons like Pakistani force but they had the courage, zeal and spirit to free themselves from the oppressors. We did see freedom fighters like Sharif, Majibor, Aminul, Matin and Milon who fought bravely in the front line and sacrificed their lives or got severely injured. We did see the tragic death of Mantu who used to be teased by other freedom fighters for his fear but at the end he died fighting bravely.

In the chapter ‘*Anuradhar Dayeri* (Anuradha’s Diary)’ we learned about the condition of War Heroines, a few could return to a normal life, even to their home. And Anuradha, a Birangana, who was very optimistic toward freedom of the nation and used to inspire other girls inside the military camp saying that, “If soldiers lose their courage, they cannot fight, similarly for our survival we need to be courageous (*Monubal harale soinyora jemon juddho korte parena, amrao temon bachte parbona*). (p. 85)” we did know about Shova Rani who lost her husband after six months of her marriage and then raped by two Pakistani soldiers, Joba, the victim of gang rape who died on the spot, and Shemoli Rahman, who after the war took her own revenge. Being a divorcee and having two children she too ran away with others during the war. But our corrupted and prejudiced society treated her inhumanly and then she started earning her daily bread from the military officers and recognized as a prostitute to the society and to her relatives those who never stretched out their helping hand during her worst condition.

In the novel we came to know about freedom fighter Parul who fought for the country along with the male freedom fighters. But with the change of government her name had been erased from the list of freedom fighters. And after the war, one of her comrades tried to sell her in a brothel.

“In Dhaka cantonment all the 563 girls are pregnant. The time of their abortion has been passed off. The news to Kafiluddin Ahmad from his elder brother in law Golam Mostafa, seems like the sky broke over his head (*Dhaka cantonment e 563 jon meyer protyekei gorvoboti. Tader gorvopater meyard uttirno hoye geche. Khoborta boro shelok Golam Mostafar mukhe shonar por Kafiluddin Ahmad er mathay akash venge pore*). (p. 97)” These lines actually showed the treatment of our society towards the Biranganas and their helpless condition. Regarding this Anuradha’s prediction was, “After war men become heroes, where girls considered as unchaste (*Juddho sheshe purushera hoy bir, meyera hoy kolongkini*). (p. 99)”

In the chapter ‘*Uddhar porbo* (Rescue Episode)’ we did see how our male freedom fighters rescued Maryam and many more girls like Maryam. “Maryam was screaming and kicking on the door asking for help by addressing them father and brother. The response from the other side was, ‘o mother, o sister, we are coming, we are coming’ (‘o baba, o vai’ chitkar kore kore Maryam tokhon dorjay lathi marche. Baire thekeo chitkar ase, ‘o ma, o buin amra aschhi, amra aschhi). (p. 113)”

Many girls after losing their chastity and being rejected from their families and society decided to go to Pakistan with the captured soldiers.

In the chapter ‘Birangana office’ we did know about Bebi, a social worker, working in the Birangana office, during the war freedom fighters would send her letters mentioning their needs like sweaters for the winter and she started weaving after receiving the letter. Thus ladies from their home would help the freedom fighters. In the same chapter we did see that, War Heroines being rejected from their husbands, fathers, family and society started living in the rehabilitation centers and with their cooking skills, handcrafts, contributed to the economy of the war-torn country. We also did know about some wicked people who showed their interest to marry the war heroines only for the things that the government then announced for those who would marry Biranganas. We did see Birangana like Radharani who had chosen prostitution as her profession finding no other ways to live. She became an alcoholic. We learned about Tuki who had to leave her village for her being a War Heroine and managed to work in a garment factory. Though they were rejected, neglected, still they showed the willingness to live life, to have a better life and kept going. Female freedom fighters either didn’t get recognition like Parul or lived a miserable life like Kakon Bibi as she said to *BBC* that, “If I were a criminal, the government definitely would have found me out. Must put me into jail. I did fight for the country, sacrificed my blood, but no one cares for me now. (*Khuni asami jodi oitam, taile nishchay sorkar amare bahir kora hartu.*

Amare hajote dia thuito. Aij juddho koirā, shoriler rokto dia juddho koirā ami ghore boisya roichi. Kehoi khojo ney na). (p. 241)’’

Thus the novel has portrayed each and every detail about women during the liberation war.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

After analyzing all these movies and novels we can see the differences between the representations of women during the Liberation War of Bangladesh. The movies that have been analyzed in this paper: *Matir Moyna* (2002), *Arunodoyer Agnishakkhmi* (1972), *Khelaghor* (2006), *Kalmilata* (1981), *Guerilla* (2011), *Dhire Bohe Meghna* (1973), *Alor Michil* (1974), *Nadir Naam Madhumati*, (1996), we can see the female characters as rape victims, beloved or mother of freedom fighters, or traumatized characters who were either mad or committed suicide. Regarding rape scenes Gayen argues that, “the rape and rape victims have been represented- only for commercial purposes or as the part of history of this country’s emergence”. After analyzing the movies we can agree with Gayen as we did see unnecessary sexualization and rape scenes in the movies. Moreover we did see in the films that female characters were running away along with others to save their lives and chastity, doing romance, concerned about their domesticity, concerned about marriage and other things except the country’s terrible condition. No significant character has been presented in these movies who showed their spirit, vigor or boldness or any eagerness to fight for the country except the movie *Guerilla* (2011), which is actually an adaptation of the novel *Nishiddho Loban*. And this is also to be noted that the actual tortures and sufferings of the females during the war have not been represented in the films properly. Films showed rape scenes either for their commercial purpose or to gain public sympathy as sexual violence of women is a sensitive issue all over the world and ‘romance’ scenes, glorification of female body, and sensual or sexualize scenes can play a major role to attract its audience.

According to Fröhlich (2010) and Tuchman (1979), “the overall theoretical framework of covering war in mass media gives evidence that to justify war the political leadership use fragile and susceptible images of women, but strong and powerful images of men” and this is what we can see in the movies as characters utter words like, ‘*ijjat*(honor and chastity)’ , ‘*tyag*(sacrifice)’ and relate these with ‘*ma-bon*’ (mother and sisters) to show how freedom has been gained . Maleka Begum mentioned the social condition, social restriction for women during the war in her book *Muktijuddhe Nari*, she also showed that in spite of having so many obstacles, girls participated in the war and worked as freedom fighters, social, political and cultural workers. She talked about the tortures and violence that females have to endure. But these things are missing in the films.

On the other hand, in the novels that have been analyzed in the paper: *Rifel Roti Aurat* (1973), and *Talash (The Search)* (2004), we can see female characters as freedom fighters, taking training for war, giving slogans, working as secret political agents, member of guerilla force, destroying military camps and boats with grenade, cooking for the male freedom fighters, taking care of them in the refugee camps and taking risk of their lives. The novels also showed that except from rape, how girls have been tortured during the war. In the novels we can see traumatized men, which is missing in the films. If we consider the time context of the Liberation War we can imagine the condition of women; there were limitations, restrictions and other issues for females. Society was always and still hostile for women. They were bound to the society, to the male members of the family. Yet thousands of females participated in the war directly as a fighter, and many others both from rural and urban areas helped the freedom fighters by providing them necessary medicines, clothes, food and information. To state the different condition of females during the war Bulbul mentioned in her paper, “There has been mounting evidence suggesting that women and girls experience war differently than men and boys, with women usually facing more insecurity,

disadvantage and marginalization (Denov, 2006)” as also stated with expert’s reference, “In terms of women’s participation in war, it can be said, in almost every war, women either supported or participated directly with arms. They involved themselves in cadres and military units. Despite their bravery, ‘it is often the case that feminist nationalists are themselves once again under the thumb of institutionalized patriarchy once national independence is won (Nagel, 2001:353)’.” The novels vividly described the true sufferings of women during the war, how mentally and physically they have been tortured. And this is also true that many females did not take any part or contributed in war directly or indirectly. Many males too did not participate or contributed in the war. But in the films the contributions of males have only been presented neglecting the female contributions and their actual sufferings. To know the true history of the nation is a fundamental right of the new generation and all the citizens of the country. Publication of the half-truth can be considered as a severe crime, as women sacrificed their lives for the country, fought bravely in the front line along with male freedom fighters. Their contributions, their sufferings and their activities during the war must get recognition and be represented in the films and media appropriately. So we can say that, the appropriate depiction of women's activities, their bravery and their hardship during the Liberation War of Bangladesh is much more accurately depicted in the novels than the films. Regarding the films, we can say they are doing business instead of spreading true history to the nation.

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