
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Representation and Role of Women in the Recent Film Narratives of the War of Liberation of Bangladesh in 1971: A Critical Study

Abdullah AL Mamun

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Jashore University of Science and Technology, Jashore 7408, Bangladesh

Corresponding Author: Abdullah AL Mamun, **E-mail:** engh.almamun@just.edu.bd

| ABSTRACT

The paper deals with the heroic-patriotic roles and daring encounters of women captured in the cinematic tales and narratives during the 9-month long War of Liberation in 1971 in Bangladesh. It focuses on the movies depicting the barbarity meted out inhumanly to the innocent people of Bangladesh and genocide in 1971 and how women sacrificed immeasurably and contributed significantly to the collective efforts for freedom by combating and resisting the West Pakistani brutality and violence in numerous ways, thus the paper seeks to explore the 1971 Liberation War-based movie productions made in the 90s and in recent times to revisit and relocate the gallant portrayal of women as fundamental and inseparable instrument of resistance that led to our hard-earned victory and independence. The movie narrative and representation of their selfless sacrifice, dominating and undaunted visual presence and performance regenerate and reclaim their roles far removed from the stereotyped gendered status.

| KEYWORDS

Nationalism, gender, representation, independence, stereotyping, resistance, male-gaze

| ACCEPTED: 01 February 2026

PUBLISHED: 12 March 2026

DOI: 10.32996/ijllt.2026.9.3.7

Introduction

The war of liberation in 1971 in the history of Bangladesh is the most significant event and the glorious phenomenon in the creation of Bangladesh following a mass struggle of about 9 months against the west Pakistani occupation forces. The liberation war is the result of the secular democratic spirit of the nation and the spirit of patriotic fervor of the people of Bangladesh. Years of discontent over social and economic disparity, cultural conflicts and tortures and discriminations over the majoritarian East Bengal led to this inevitable war for freedom. This paper explores the films based on 1971 where the role of women along with the MuktiJoddhas (freedom fighters) has been projected and recognized as fighters contributing to the collective cause of freedom as opposed to the stereotyped portrayal of women as victims of torture and rape. In this connection Professor Gayen observed,

Results showed that though women had multifaceted roles in the war, like worldwide war frames, the films of Bangladesh were no exception to represent women as passive rape victims and to commercialize rape. They were never represented as freedom fighters. (Gayen,2015)

Apart from the 'constructed reality' (Hall,2000) that women face on cinematic screen which appears to be real is subverted in this paper with a winning and more comprehensive and convincing projection of women in 1971 a fact that marks a cinematic protest on the representation of women in recent times in the mainstream commercial cinema.

Women in mainstream cinema

According to the prevailing history of the liberation war,

"Bangladesh has achieved the independence from the blood of three million martyrs and the loss of ijrat (loss of chastity)

of two hundred thousand women" (Sarkar, 1998:2).

The evidence of wartime torture gave men the honour of muktizoddha (war heroes), whilst the same evidence of torture has been perceived as women's loss of honour. So the dominance on the male contribution and portrayal as soldier fighting and winning the war has taken precedence over the portrayal of women suffering tortures and becoming victims of rape which in reality is not the case. Women as impure beings having been raped finds the audience-gratification in commercial cinema and their alleged powerlessness in the cinematic narratives is the manufactured truth.

Raped women had to publicise their own impurity through these films. The winner males were magnanimous. (Gayen,2015)

The comment that Professor Gayen makes is appropriate in the sense that the recognition of women and their roles as freedom fighters were overshadowed unfairly because-

The cine industry and alternative film movement of Bangladesh did not go beyond the recorded mainstream history. Like the mainstream history, the image and contributions of women in the war films are also constructed with negligence, depriving women of their honour as freedom fighters. (Gayen-2015)

The films that I am going to discuss in detail in this paper will be an attempt to explain the portrayal of women and their direct and indirect contributions to the independence in 1971 liberation war which replaces the mainstream portrayal of women as merely victims of torture. They actively participated as freedom fighters in various categories joining hands with Muktiyoddhas and winning their operations against the Pakistani occupation forces, therefore defying and challenging the established war based **cinematic narratives where men are magnanimous characters** (Gayen, 2015) and the women are impure rape victims committing suicide in the films on repressive grounds of patriarchal ideology. The films to be discussed will place and recognize women as freedom fighters reviving their status as soldiers and guerrillas in the actual war challenging the idea of disfigurement of women's status and their victimization as passive entities. They carry strong messages and are inspired by ideological spirit, secular democratic thrust and patriotism to face and fight the battles where they leave indelible and indispensable marks of participation and victory defying the fact that 'Women's representation as soldiers is rare' (Gayen-2015) allowing the director-narrator an alternative space of reality which is a neglected or subdued phenomenon of history. To capture the inevitable participation, sacrifice and contribution of women in 1971 in various capacities we could attune to W.B.Yeats- The women fighters 'transformed utterly' on many occasions and -

'All changed, changed utterly:
A terrible beauty is born.' (Yeats, Easter 1916)

Hangor, Nodi, Grenade

The film *Hangor Nodi Granade* is based on a true story at Kaliganj Village in the district of Jashore during 1971 in the Bengali Novel by Selina Hossain. The gripping storyline revolves around an illiterate virginal daughter of nature named Buri. She is an exuberant and curious young woman in Haldia village full of energy and vitality. She agrees to marry Gofur quite older than her who is a widower with his two sons Salim and Kalim. Buri leads a very happy life since she doesn't understand the 'mire and fury and complexity' (Yeats, Easter 1916) of human life and she is completely different from Gofur's late wife. Her inimitable ways of life and playful simplicity capture the audience in that the portrait of a young woman in a rural setting in Bangladesh finds a strong cinematic expression. The rural and traditional Bengali womanhood find eloquent expression in the rural landscape and achieves what Akira Kurosawa observes 'cinematic beauty' and the audience will soon experience a 'deep emotion' (Nastasi 2014). The director heavily draws upon the rural wilderness with its natural landscape to emphasize the rural Bengal 'signifying the beauty and simplicity of nature' as the backdrop to the horrors augmented by the West Pakistani occupation forces and that the 'inner beauty of the village' stimulated the spirit of Bengali Nationalism amongst the mass population of Bangladesh particularly the freedom fighters. The director in his interview observed his dedication in weaving the rural landscape and the history in the narrative of the cinema.

'I was a freedom fighter and it is always a joy to deal with the sacrifices and glory of the war in my films,' and he also mentioned that one needs to have honesty and dedication to history to portray it genuinely (New age, 2014)

The character of Buri apotheosizes womanhood and motherhood on one side and the heart and courage of a freedom fighter on the other which in this film narrative reestablishes the role of women not as caregivers or caretakers of the households or rearing up children but as freedom fighters with strong determination and resolution to protest and fight back. However, the gendered representation of women in films by the media is subverted in the narrative of *Hangor, Nodi, Ganade* because Buri in reality stands above all shortcomings and obstacles of gender when we focus our vision on her resolution and fury in her eyes to sacrifice on a

momentary strategy to fight back the Pakistani oppressors. Buri's role as a mother taking full responsibility of the two sons of Gofur as well as her functional traditional role of looking after her husband's home transforms her into a different woman when she becomes the mother of an autistic child Rais. Rais is her constant source of worry and tragedy. He grows up to be a burden and her sorrow with his physical impairments. She forces Rais to speak like others but he remains dumb. These heart touching emotional scenes capture our heart and we still await her performance in the end.

Buri: Talk Rais, why can't you speak like others?'

Rais: Silence prevails.

When she sees the procession of the MuktiBahinee with the flags of Bangladesh (Freedom fighters), She becomes emotional thus,

Buri: Can't you hold the gun and go to the war like your brothers?

Rais: Silent but raises a branch of a tree like holding the flag up and down like those in the procession with the slogan 'Joy Bangla'.

However, what Laura Mulvy observes (1988:62) regarding the representation of women as '***the bearers of meaning, not the creators of meaning***' can be deconstructed here since Buri creates a very strong message that unsettles the traditional portrayal of women's role in the liberation war of 1971 film narratives with an awe inspiring calling.

Only men were the freedom fighters, and women never perceived the war and its various impacts. They were just the victims of the war. These stereotypical concepts (Shifat S., Ahmed S. 2019) often represent the reality in a straight way, whereas in reality, women also participated in the war to sacrifice their own respect and loved ones.

Salim and Kalim discuss various issues in silence about the MuktiJuddha (liberation war strategy as planned by the MuktiBahini members) and would never bother to respond to Buri's inquiries as to what they meant by war and independence ignoring her naiveté and illiteracy, simplicity and limitations. However, her character is catapulted to massive transformation and emancipation when she sacrifices her autistic son Rais to the Pakistani army to save thousands of freedom fighters. She only bemoans on the blood-soaked dead body of her son Rais rolling into the stillness of death on the yard and stands transfigured and exalted before our eyes winning our hearts immediately as a true woman freedom fighter.

'It portrays a valiant mother who sacrifices her son with this belief that it is better to sacrifice one life than perish thousands' (Mir, 2018).

Joy Jatra

The film is based on the war of liberation of Bangladesh in 1971, directed by Touqir Ahmed. The Narrative begins with natural rural sights and sounds- a constant natural background forming the quintessential image of Bangladesh. The clay mud houses, the un-metalled serpentine roads, the rivers all conjure up images of tranquility and happiness. The chiseled minarets of the mosque and its hallowed yard are contrasted with the statue of goddess durga emerging behind the grandma's balcony, her beloved ancestral home. What Chashi Nazrul Islam observes about filming narratives of war is very appropriate here,

'Many people have the idea that making a film in 1971 requires fighting scenes engaging explosions, tanks, machine guns and lots of soldiers; however, it is a wrong assumption'; and added that a war-based film can also deal with the psychological and social dilemmas of war victims rather than battlefield scenes (New age, 2014).

These strong visual images are not to be missed. Hawa, a village woman (Bipasha Hayat) cuddling her child fondly, and humming tunes of a lullaby again accentuates the quintessential bonding between the mother and the child and hints metaphorically our motherland and the brave inhabitants of the soil irrespective of cast, creed, colour, race and religion. The very secular spirit as an ideological provision in the nation's struggle for freedom is captured through the spectacle of variety or unity in diversity. The juxtaposition of the beautiful and spectacular Bengal with its rich natural landscapes with the oppressive gruesomeness and brutality of the Pakistani authority unleashing their ruthlessly inhuman violence upon the green and sacred body of the motherland captures the sensitive consciousness of the audience. The boats are plying on the river with the charming sights and sounds around and the rowing of the boat creating the murmuring music in the waters all personify a strong spirit of Bengali nationalism, the root of which, lies deeply in the primordial rural and cultural lives of the people of Bangladesh. Nature and life in the placid lap of the pleasant natural surroundings of nature epitomize the flora and fauna of Bangladesh which always fired the imagination of the patriotic freedom fighters and inspired the freedom struggle. In this connection Majid's observation in the light of *Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie is vital as the rural wilderness of Bengal played unpatronizingly an instrumental role against the brutality of Pakistani forces in their charging battles,

Navigating the numerous waterways under the inhospitable conditions of the monsoon, they find nature attacking them, even driving them to madness. (Moiz, 2)

Suddenly this heart-warming picture of the village is disturbed by the image of a vulture swooping upon a chick and flying away.

“On the evening of 25 March it launched a pre-emptive strike against the Awami League and other perceived opponents including the members of the intelligentsia and the Hindu community----- their campaign of terror then moved into the countryside, where they battled local troops who had mutinied” (Sunday Times UK, 13 June 1971)

25 March 1971 Burning and torching, preplanned killing, communalism- The armed Pakistani battalion forces lay siege to the village and unleash their severity to its fiercest cruelty. So the happy picture of the simple rustic ways of Bengal is transformed into what Anthony Mascarenhas has written to Evans that

‘He had been an eye witness to a huge systematic killing spree and heard the army officers describe the killing and torching as a “Final Solution” and published in Sunday Times the article with the heading “Genocide”.

The camera now moves across the trucks with armed soldiers looking for the whereabouts of the freedom fighters (Mukti Bahini) which the local Imam refused to answer and was right away shot to death. Another shamelessly brutal scene is when the sweet maker Foni in his attempt to pretend to proclaim a Muslim with a hand full of sweets is dishonored and killed. This act of identifying Hindus is mentioned –

“I have witnessed the brutality of “Kill and Burn Missions” as the army units, after clearing out the rebels pursued the pogrom in the towns and villages. I have seen whole villages devastated by punitive action” (Mascarenhas, Sunday Times 1971)

Now the whole village is torched and people men women and children are indiscriminately killed. A few of the villagers, managed to escape into the boat and flee the outskirts of the village leaving behind their homes, lands and necessities all, and all their dreams and memories. Adam and Hawa lost their child in a state of chaos and smoldering fire to save their lives which is priority now. Hawa remained still and motionless as the boat began to move- All the members on board the boat are fighters and without their sacrifice freedom would not be possible. A Total portrait of the emotional bonding of the people of Bangladesh in a close knit family for the collective cause of freedom is shown brilliantly in the film without showing massive gun battle. Sacrificing one’s home, love and children is no less precious and immaterial than sacrificing lives for the noble cause of the nation. The child from the Hindu caste was hungry and Hawa, a Muslim woman who already dumb in grief losing her child behind the scourge, breastfeeds the baby. Mothers have no caste, no race. They are made for the wellbeing of humanity and the director captures that scene when Hawa (Bipasha Hayat) who just lost her own baby got another child on board to fulfill her obligation of motherhood. Adam and Hawa are symbolically the parents of all babies irrespective of colour caste complexion and religion. This highly emotional and all-embracing humanity captures our heart and we can safely redefine the stereotyped and subdued, un-heroic and subjugated portrait of the women during the hard times of 1971. It is not only participation in the war with weapons that can aesthetically portray women’s participation in the war but the female characters in the film emphasize their contribution being one with those with guns and weapons. Sakhina the newly wedded young woman suffers from mortal pains from the injuries caused by bullets of the Pakistani soldiers but she is still holding on to her beloved husband Kashem. They will continue to fight for their existence holding each other till their last moment. Sakhina fought a losing battle while Ponchanon grieved over his wife and daughter lost to the hands of the military. Hawa, Sakhina and Marium build their stories on board the boat and sailing without the knowledge of their destination with courage and fortitude. A patrol wing of Pakistani soldiers taking the boat suffocated this bunch of brave souls but they didn’t give up and the small child Turjo was suffocated to death subsequently by his mother and she stopped her child’s voice altogether for saving the lives of all on board. This is another supreme sacrifice this mother has done for the nation but didn’t give up or give way to the brutal ways of the Pakistanis. Shall we not call her a freedom fighter that saved the lives of those heading towards the Indian border for training in the art of warfare to combat the Pakistani forces? The supreme sacrifice and contribution of the women on board could not be undermined when a small baby’s life was smothered to death only to save other lives on board from the clutches of Pakistani forces.

The Brahmin grandfather throws away his clay god and embraces humanity above everything at one point. Escape is no solution. A portrait of brotherhood as opposed to the religion-based Pakistani agenda- is projected very powerfully. Finally, the day light of victory is reached with the birth of a new born baby at the loss of some male and female freedom fighters. The director revives the spirit of sacrifice and contribution of the women and redefines their narrative in powerfully emotional scenes in this movie. This conversation between Marium and Johnson positions the spirit of women for revenge-

Marium: what would I do with the border? What would I get there?

Johnson: The other side is safe; we will get food and shelter there. Training for warfare also.

Mariuum: Will you take me with you to fight?

Johnson: (Silent and confused), looks around uneasily.

Marium: I have no one anymore. My heart is filled with pains and hatred. I want my revenge. I want my country back.

Marium's resolution and strong determination is highlighted which relocates the alternative version of women in the film narrative showing strong will to fight against the Pakistani occupation forces. A series of misfortunes occur on board the boat. The elderly Ramkrishna, shell-shocked, dies of heart attack and there is another woman awaiting the emergence of a newborn, awaiting motherhood. The director-narrator immensely highlighted the humanizing impact of the coexistence of men and women as an indispensable bond when we see all the members are holding on to each other's pains, struggles and sufferings and claiming their unarmed resistance with collective will power together and this way the director-narrator has subverted the gendered representation of women in the narrative allowing an equal moral and psychological space for both men and women.

Aguner Poroshmoni

National award winning film 'Aguner Poroshmoni' by Humayun Ahmed in 1994 is another brilliant and unconventional narrative based on the novel of the same title. The directorial genius of Humayun Ahmed is another wonder.

The movie centers around the member of Mukti Bahini, Bodi by name who has to take shelter at Mr. Matin's family for some time during the hardest times of the liberation war in 1971. The Pakistani military forces have unleashed their sudden brutal atrocities and the second largest genocide after the Second World War is depicted in this narrative. The powerful emotions around Bodi bind all the emotions of the family members as well as of the whole future of the country beautifully. The freedom fighter is bound by his sacred obligation and patriotic spirit for the nation which engages the imagination very powerfully. The director-writer's ability to delineate subtle human emotions with the spirit of nationalism is unparalleled. The weaving of emotions of love, brotherhood, neighborhood, motherhood and nationhood is remarkably intertwined in this narrative.

Birds in the cage strongly symbolize the people of the nation under seize by the Pakistani occupation forces unlawfully while the songs keep reminding us of the glorious cultural heritage the people of Bengal belong to.

'All political religious and cultural activities came under scrutiny and were severely restricted. The aim was to stifle Bengali nationalism and foster Islamic elements in the culture.' (Mascarenhas, Sunday Times 1971)

The brutal atrocities of the Pakistani occupation forces are shown very vividly when the Pakistani military forces picked up on suspicion many young men on the roads from public transports and brushfired them to death. They are all dumped into the mass grave with blood oozing out of their body.

"Dhaka was described as flowing with blood, but this was merely a small scale rehearsal (on the 25th of March) for the events that were to take place several weeks later." (Mascarenhas, Sunday Times 1971)

The cold-blooded and relentless brutality is just indescribable. The power of the narrative lies in the resilience that the freedom fighters display in their character and personality, particularly Bodi, who left his beloved mother and sister and visited them one last time only to reinforce his obligation to his nation. Ratri's mother prays for Bodi's life instead of her own which in such grave circumstances all mother of Bengal would have done.

The story also builds on Ratri's idolization of Bodi as well as her abysmal depth of reverence for a freedom fighter and her romantic dreams about him. Her struggle to support Bodi in his quest, and also wanting to save him from harm at the same time, is very emotional, and genuine though her courage is not recognized for honour or for participation in the war in the traditional narratives portraying female freedom fighters. Her songs are a powerful cultural reminder for the viewers that weave the strong identity and nationalism. The songs greatly motivate nationalist pride, patriotism and courage.

The title has a strong symbolic and metaphorical significance in that Tagore's message is a profoundly cultural and aesthetic one that purges the soul and the body- the Pakistani brutality against the cultural heritage is accentuated thus-

"The sudden attack obviously sought the extermination of the intellectual class, particularly the bearers of Bengali culture and a large part of its audience." (Mascarenhas, Sunday Times 1971)

The ending is highly suggestive of optimism and hope of a new independent Bangladesh with the sun shining and the birds freed at large. Mrs. Matin and her daughter Ratri are equally concerned about Bodi's life and the risks he has to take. Ratri infuses new hope and strength to Bodi's passion for liberty when she talks about the caged birds that she wants to free as the nation gets victory over Pakistani rule. She is brave but not approved of for front line warfare by Bodi, yet she shows her enthusiasm and high spirited exuberance for a Bangladesh free from all oppressions. She sings songs every time she is overpowered by hope and emotions of love for Bodi which instils in him strength and a vision of a beautiful family, life and nation. An unalloyed bonding of affection has bound him within the family. Following Bodi's severe injury, Ratri's life is turned upside down and she vows and prays for him. Her dreams hovering around Bodi is shattered but she holds on to her faith in new possibilities in an independent Bangladesh.

Guerrilla

One of the most successful and breathtaking movies based on liberation war of 1971 in Bangladesh is Guerrilla directed by freedom fighter director / Actor Nasiruddin Yousuf. This movie has earned worldwide critical acclaim for its powerful visual narrative.

Plot- City of Dhaka- Journalist-Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's declaration of independence:

The movie begins with the issue of the devastating plans of the Pakistani forces to carry out the pre-emptive attack on 25th of March, known as 'Operation Searchlight'- the darkest night in the military history of Bangladesh. As independence was declared- the news report that Hasan, the Journalist will cover that night. Amidst chaos and confusion outside, Hasan leaves for his duty.

The platoons and trucks with Pakistan soldiers enter the city of Dhaka to what Antony Mascarenhas later wrote was to commit "Genocide". The freedom fighters also join hands together chanting slogans of freedom in the next scene of the narrative. Their high nationalist spirit and patriotic zeal find expression in their chants and pledge to fight back against Pakistani Occupation forces-

"As independence is declared, we will lay down our lives but won't give Bangladesh to anyone". (Guerrilla)

This spirit ignited the freedom fighters all through for the nation and Bilkis the lead protagonist of the narrative discovers that her husband is missing on that night and she has to search for him. In this connection the quote is apt-

Yahya Khan's speeches were peppered with references to the 'alien miscreants' and 'infiltrators' (the Hindus) that were bent on harming the Islamic character of the state. He also frequently invoked the 'Islamic character of the Constitution'. The Bengalis, however, were anxious to establish a secular state where religion was left to the individual and where it was hoped that a common bond of humanity might eventually prevail over a common fear of enemies. (Mascarenhas, The Sunday Times 1971)

The narrative focuses now on fusillades and gunfire indiscriminately targeting innocent people of the city and the camera right away captures the fresh dead bodies piled up in large vans to be carried to mass grave to dump. When the war in the then East Pakistan broke out in March 1971, Mascarenhas was a respected journalist in Karachi, the main city in the country's dominant western wing, on good terms with the country's ruling elite.

In the first of many notorious war crimes, soldiers attacked Dhaka University, lining up and executing students and professors. Their campaign of terror then moved into the countryside, where they battled local troops who had mutinied.

His report captures graphically the barbarism of the west Pakistani brutality in these reports-

'I have witnessed the brutality of 'kill and burn missions' as the army units, after clearing out the rebels, pursued the pogrom in the towns and villages.

I have seen whole villages devastated by 'punitive action'.

And in the officer's mess at night I have listened incredulously as otherwise brave and honourable men proudly chewed over the day's kill.

'How many did you get?' (Mascarenhas, The Sunday Times 1971)

Bilkis- collaborator of Guerilla magazine / working for the freedom fighters' guerrilla operations:

Bilkis is working for the magazine with a zeal and heart of a lion and the director builds her character very strongly- with all her feminine virtues who takes care of her mother-in-law and a loving wife as well as with all the revolutionary spirit as a female freedom fighter who is on her way to lead horrifying guerilla operations with other freedom fighters operating on a large scale in Dhaka.

Altaf Mahmud the celebrated musician, cultural activist, and martyred freedom fighter of the Bangladesh Liberation War is presented here and his cultural engagement bears testimony to the cultural differences for which the liberation war against the Pakistani forces was inevitable. He was also a language activist of the Language Movement and composer of 'Amar Bhaiyer Rokte Rangano'(stained in the blood of my brother), the famous score which is our dearest song to commemorate the historical event of the language movement as well as the sacrifice, to rouse our nationalist spirit. The narrative focuses on the song sung by a girl so soulfully and the composition has the magic to pierce through every Bangladeshi viewer's heart with patriotic tears and feeling. In this connection this short quote might be of relevance-

'Each of the races in Pakistan had its own language: in the West the lingua franca was Urdu, spoken naturally by only a

minority in that wing and by a few in the Eastern wing, where Bengali was used by the great majority. Urdu is in fact a completely different language from Bengali: it is largely synthetic, drawn from Hindi and Arabic (from Persian in particular) and is written in an Arabic-type script. Bengali, on the other hand, comes from Sanskrit and is written in a script akin to Sanskrit.' (Mascarenhas, The Sunday Times 1971)

He is also composing songs for the freedom fighters. The cultural heritage of Bengal is suggested and that we have songs, poetry and we perform dance, drama etc. as part of our cultural expression and freedom. So the director brilliantly upholds the spirit that is history. Bilkis is in search of her husband, so is she bent on assisting the freedom fighters. Altaf upon request from Pakistani wing to compose songs refuses. Bilkis is carrying the scores from Altaf Mahmud to deliver it to Shadhin Bangla Betar Kendra but later it was intercepted.

Directorial Narrative and appropriateness- Military Brutality

The actor-director has brilliantly presented the narrative of Bilkis who has to maintain tricks, diplomacy and confidentiality to carry out her duties and assist in the fight against the occupation forces. A banker she remains wide awake to make sure her mission does not get jeopardized. A baby trolley is used to deliver the scores of music to the freedom fighters. Skillful, she uses codes (Lalgolap) to help succeed in the operations. The conversation of the Razakaars with Mr. Taslim appropriately captures the gulf of difference between truth and falsehood, hypocrisy and patriotism. Speaking in the Urdu accent with Pakistani phrases like (Saccha Musalman) 'genuine Muslim' is the fashion of the Razakaars who are ideologically bent on satisfying their Pakistani administrators. One Razakar tries to convince Mr. Taslim with a form for him to sign (Shanti committee) which he blatantly refuses. One of the first targets of military attack 'The operation searchlight' was the University of Dhaka, the students and the intellectuals. A professor from the University of Dhaka is captured in a concentration camp which documents the fact that Pakistani Army Brutality by Tikka Khan terrorized the Baluchis and broke the betrayers- a fact, perhaps, is used to show the inhuman torture to be meted out to the professor of History. The conversation is like-

The Officer: What do you teach your students?

The Professor: Tied like animal with hands bleeding,
'I teach them history of Indian subcontinent and patriotism'.

The Officer: Jolly good, cut all the 5 fingers of his hands.

Here is the historical appropriateness of the narrative-

From the West wing's point of view these would, so to speak, be the logical categories to eliminate in any campaign aimed at reducing or eradicating the power of Bengali national consciousness.

'Bodies were still smouldering in their burnt-out rooms, others were scattered outside, more floated in a- nearby lake, an art student lay sprawled across his easel. . . The military removed many of the bodies, but the 30 bodies still there could never have accounted for all the blood in the corridors of Iqbal Hall. (Mascarenhas, The Sunday Times 1971)

The roads are littered with dead bodies with hands tied behind with ropes and blood bath, lakes and rivers with dead bodies floating- with signs of ruthlessly inhuman torture.

The operation in the narrative ends in the Dhaka city with Bilkis risking her life successfully assisting in the guerrilla operation by blowing off of the party hall full of Pakistani officers and Pro-Pakistani people and their local collaborators where she accompanies Mrs. Khan. This dauntless act of the narrative reinvents her role as a freedom fighter in the most favourable light. Bilkis and her team got found out and captured as the guerrillas behind the operation and she has to move to her village with the help of Taslim Sarder. Taslim sarder is inhumanly slaughtered by the Razakaars (Local Collaborators) who he refused to join. The Razakaars unleashed their ruthless inhumanity, torture of the minority Hindus and rape of women and atrocities which the narrative captures with care and historical accuracy. When the local collaborators tried to flirt with and assault Bilkis on a rickshaw, she unleashes her deep-seated hatred at them, spitting on them and burst out at them bluntly and that she overrides the 'appearance exerting visual and erotic impact connoting to-be-looked-at-ness (Mulvey, 1973/75) and reemphasizes her single minded devotion to the mission she is called upon to operate as a guerrilla fighter. Her character portrayal rises above the 'practice of patronizing the image of invisible, raped or passive women' (Guyen, 2015).

The train- and the weaving of the nostalgic past and Bilkis's determination

Bilkis travels towards Jolshwari Rangpur to look for his brother khokon who has been portrayed as a persistent symbolic abstraction of positivism, hope, patriotism and courage. Bilkis relocates herself in the new narrative with winning and convincing identity in history now. The fact that men were granted the grace of heroism but women were nothing more than objects of lust

and pity is now altered with the narrative of Bilkis and her indomitable spirit and courage as a guerrilla freedom fighter, in times of 1971 liberation war is recognized with dignity.

Rabeya

Rabeya is the central character of the movie who is the sister of Khaled, a freedom fighter from Mukti Bahini. The film is directed by Tanvir Mokammel. Emdad Kazi, a conservative Muslim, Razakar (Collaborator) of West Pakistani forces of Ibrahimpur across the river Rupsha joins hands with the Pakistani army against the hatred of the villagers in branding Khaled, the freedom fighter whose dead body is lying abandoned on the outskirts of the river-

'The film starts dramatically with some 'razakars' declaring that anyone making an attempt to bury the corpse of an "Indian agent" and "terrorist" killed by the "patriotic" Pakistani army will be shot dead. Despite the looming risk of getting caught, a young woman comes out at night and tries to cover the dead with a shroud, lights incense, places flowers and desperately tries to dig a grave. The woman's name is Rabeya, and the corpse is of her brother, Khaled -- a member of the guerrilla group fighting against the Pakistani army.' (The Daily Star, 2008)

I had read Antigone when I was a student (of English literature) and was moved by the courage of a sister who, against all institutional forces, was determined to bury her dead brother, (Tanvir Mokammel, The Daily Star, 2008).

Humanity is sung continuously by the Baul songs- Rabeya challenges the interpretations of traditional concepts and religious sermons- a free independent spirited young woman-determined to arrange herself a decent burial for her brother. She exposes a sharp contrast with her otherwise more conformist and obedient sister Rokeya. She is a rebel and has the guts to speak the truth and her mind to all. She remains a potential threat to her uncle who does not allow her to listen to the news about the MuktiBahini operations and about the country. She prides herself on her being independent and the daughter of a great father and sister of Khaled. She fails in two attempts to bury her martyred brother who is branded as a traitor and betrayer by the Pakistani Army and by her uncle which she refuses emphasizing upon the Islamic ritual for a burial. She blatantly refuses to play like a girl with dolls, behave like an orthodox and tame woman according to the social binaries set by the patriarchy. She chooses the path of freedom if that incurs death rather than a life that is full of pomp and pleasure. A conversation is here,

Chacha: I fought against the oppressor in 1947. Oppressor has no tribe, no race. A dead body needs burial which is an Islamic obligation.

Emdad: I can't. We are protecting Pakistan. Do you want Hindu rule again? Do you want Islam to be uprooted from the country? What will happen to Islam if there is no Pakistan?

Chacha: Allah will decide for Islam. Your path is not the path of Islam either. You cannot deny Khaled's right for a burial as a Muslim.

Emdad: Pakistani forces will not spare me then. They have empowered me immensely. I can't break it. What will happen to my political career?

Chacha: Think about the future of so many members of the family. Allah is with majority.

The dead body of Khaled is a living voice of protest against oppressions and injustice single handedly. The body lying mute is more alive and deadly to the Pakistani forces, their local collaborators and razakars and the consciousness it bears of enlightenment, of protest, of rebellion and of justice permeates through the imagination and reality of the villagers. His dead body is a mortal threat to the Pakistani brutalizing ways and ruthless inhumanity plaguing the people of Bangladesh. The film narrative revolves around Khaled's dead body and a series of moral, political and philosophical discourses it raises and how Rabeya, the highly progressive and gallant young woman alone battles against the Political and religious propagandist ideologies to protest the immorality and injustice, misrule and misinterpretation of the fact that his brother is no traitor but a freedom fighter and deserves a befitting burial. He stands for the imagination of those in protests and in resistance against the Brutal Pakistani occupation forces. He stands to be a comprehensive cultural reawakening, a spirit of inspiration. In 'Tusculan Disputations', a 5-book philosophical work, Cicero observes,

'Death has even been praised and welcomed as it liberates us from the world of distress and from the numerous evils of humankind. Some literary deaths are more perplexing and less easily closed than others, and some literary heroes have left the life more painfully and dramatically than others.

The memories, emotions and expectations are scattered around from Khaled's corpse in distress and in disgrace which continuously unsettles the political agenda of the Pakistani forces and also demolishes Emdad's plotting. The quote below is apt,

'In tragedy the meaningful existence of the hero is paradoxically created by death but even more importantly, death and storytelling seem to have a fundamental and existential connection.' (Hakola and Kivisto, P8, 2014).

Rabeya's consciousness battles against all prejudices, political ideologies and agenda as well as religious misinterpretations and she insists on giving a decent burial to Khaled's abandoned dead body. Her dialogue with her sister Rokeya is apt-

Rokeya: Bubu (Sister) I am fasting and have prayed 40 Rakats for brother Khaled.

Rabeya: But that does not ensure our brother's burial, does it?

Rokeya: Arranging for the burial is not our job, sister?

Rabeya: I almost did it but the razakkars spotted me there.

Rokeya: (In utter amazement and desperation) Did you go to the embankment by yourself?

Are you out of your senses, sister? They could have shot you dead?

Rabeya: So what? At least our brother's body would be buried and rested for peace.

Rokeya: Sister, are you mad utterly?

Rabeya: If I am mad, am crazy, be it. That is none of your concern.

Rokeya: Sister you haven't eaten anything since last night. Eat something sister.

Rabeya: All things are forbidden for me until I decently bury my brother's corpse in the open sky. Let us go tonight again together and bury our brother.

Rokeya: I don't have that courage to do that sister and it is not also the women's job. You will lose with those on guard of our brother's dead body.

Rabeya: If men can bury women, so can women do for men. Sometimes it is better to lose and become Imam Hossain than win like Yazid.

This is how ideologically clear, sincere and morally pure, transparent and bold is Rabeya. Rabeya's character is by far one of the best portrayals of resistance and revolt in 1971 war narratives.

The fact that abrupt physical death is (nearly) always accompanied by a second, longer and even more painful form of death that takes place in the mind of the survivor who has lost his loved one. (Haruki Murakami, Norwegian Wood)

Khaled's corpse is a personification and operates as a strong metaphor beyond the physical and psychological levels. His body contributes to the emotion, narrative and the development of the plot. It reaches outside literature's own realm and discusses death-related social issues and emotions that are recognizable for the reader (Hakola and Kivisto, P9, 2014). Khaled stands singlehandedly a personified and symbolic abstraction and his tortured dead body, stained in blood, tied with rope problematizes the sight and the cinematic narrative with many personal, philosophical, political, ideological and theological issues and creates anxieties.

Literary descriptions of death are thus not merely preoccupied with the painful scene of dying or individual loss, but the concept of death can be understood more widely as a site of many projections and fantasies and as a metaphor of many social issues. (Hakola and Kivisto, P9, 2014)

For Rabeya Khaled's profound moral and creative, social and cultural impacts are a stepping stone for future milestones she could achieve.

The examination of the past of deceased persons and narrating their moments of death can actually have creative and transformative significance by way of offering imaginable futures. ((Hakola and Kivisto, P9, 2014)

Death is no end in existence for Rabeya who prides herself on her moral and progressive cultural education gained from her secular father and culturally enlightened brother like Khaled. So Khaled's biological death has a strong symbolical influence on her and her society (Hakola and Kivisto, P14, 2014) She is thoroughly determined to prepare for her journey alone against innumerable forces of evil and clarifies that her path is different from Rokeya's who is a home grown conformist and never raises any voice of protest against the dominating norms of patriarchal society in which she lives. No matter what catastrophe lies ahead for her, Rabeya with her rock solid resolution goes out to bury her brother's body and prevent it from being eaten up by animals, thus recognizing his honour as a patriot. All social, political and ethical issues are associated with Khaled as a freedom fighter. Again the debate over religious propaganda between Emdad and his Uncle that Pakistan stands for Islam and going against such monolithic political and cultural domination of the Pakistani agenda is anti-Islamic. The cultural regeneration and secular ideological spirit stamped in the imagination of the freedom fighters find exquisite expression in the narrative when Tariqul, another freedom fighter leaves his Pakistani collaborator father by raising his secular cultural ideas and supporting Rabeya's demands. Rebellious Rabeya influenced Tariqul and leaves the corrupted, gendered and terrorizing religious influences of Emdad's house. She liberates herself and becomes another powerful symbol that took the Mukti Bahini freedom fighters by surprise.

May not be "biologically a living thing but if it has intentional psychology attributed to it, then it has something like a spirit, a soul, an ego lodged within it." (Gell, 1998,p.129)

Rabeya in her final attempt goes alone to bury her beloved freedom fighter brother and is shot dead by the Pakistani forces. The news of her supreme sacrifice spreads across the village like bushfire and shook the very foundation of Emdad Razakar and his

collaborators of Pakistan. Rabeya is recognized by the freedom fighters with honour and they enshroud her martyrdom with the flag of independent Bangladesh. Her act of valour and determination is a testament of truth in the visual narrative history of 1971 and again Rabeya's role and performance is redefined with a relocated identity, empowered and recognized with the honour of a heroic freedom fighter, unlike the stereotyped cinematic narratives of women in the past. Rabeya achieves the status of a glorious freedom fighter and disproves the traditional commercial representation of gendered role of women in 1971 film narratives. She wins the ideological battle, the ethical battle and the cultural battle simultaneously without weapons.

Representation of Cultural identity

Khaled's body presents the conflict not only over the theological justification of a decent Islamic burial but also his cultural identity and recognition in a secular state that is fighting for its right to free creative and cultural expression against the propagandist Pakistani religious agenda, is a major issue. His body is mercilessly exposed and displayed as traitor in public by the Razakars. Khaled, the Mujibodha commander was killed while planting a mine. However, his misrepresented identity pecks into the vitals of his sister Rabeya and she repeatedly tries to bury his brother's decapitated body to prevent it from vultures and to give honour to a Mujibodha. She must destroy Khaled's misplaced identity of disgrace that has been ascribed to him and reestablish his dignified public identity which will recognize his contributions and sacrifice as a freedom fighter and immortalize his spirit.

"In both Durkheim and Weber, death may be the end of an individual, but its associated rites and beliefs can be at the heart of the formation or development of society. (Walter, *The Sociology of Death* P, 317)

Rabeya however, becomes the quintessence of the secular, cultural and ideological spirit of Bangladesh endorsed in the imagination of the freedom struggle in 1971.

Conclusion

In conclusion, let me say that *Joy Jatra, Hangor Nodi Granade, Aguner Poroshmoni, Guerilla and Rabeya* have reinvented and regenerated the portrait of women combating equally against the Pakistani forces hand in hand with their male counterparts successfully. Their position and status no longer remain limited to passive victims of rape and torture but they revive as strong women. The view that Metz supports is that viewing films is only possible through scopophilia, or what Mulvey argues that popular films justify masculine scopophilia can be safely and culturally side-lined if the above film narratives and the characterization of the lead female roles in the films explored in this paper are critically and closely examined.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Publisher's Note: All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers.

References

- [1]. Abdul Majid, M. (2020, May 2). *Ecologies of emancipation: The Mukti Bahini, rivers and the unraveling of Pakistan*. Jamhooor. <https://www.jamhooor.org/read/2020/5/2/ecologies-of-emancipation-the-mukti-bahini-rivers-and-the-unravelling-of-pakistan>
- [2]. Ahmed, H. (1994). *Aguner Poroshmoni* [Film]. Nuhash Films.
- [3]. Ahmed, T. (Director). (2004). *Joyjatra* [Film]. Impress Telefilm.
- [4]. Banglapedia. (2015). *War of Liberation, The*. http://en.banglapedia.org/index.php?title=War_of_Liberation,_The
- [5]. Barthes, R. (1975). An introduction to the structural analysis of narrative. *New Literary History*, 6(2), 237–272. https://www.uv.es/fores/Barthes_Structural_Narrative.pdf
- [6]. Bachchu, N. U. Y. (Director). (2011). *Guerrilla* [Film]. Ashirbad Cholochochitro.
- [7]. Cicero, M. (2002). *Tusculan disputations* (M. Graver, Trans.). University of Chicago Press. (Original work published ca. 45 BCE)
- [8]. Foucault, M. (2002). *The archaeology of knowledge* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- [9]. Gayen, K. (2015). Women, war and cinema: Construction of women in the liberation war films of Bangladesh. *French Journal for Media Research*, 3, 1–20. <https://frenchjournalformediaresearch.com>
- [10]. Gell, A. (1998). *Art and agency: An anthropological theory*. Oxford University Press.
- [11]. Hall, S. (1997). *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*. Sage.
- [12]. Hall, S. (2000). Cultural identity and cinematic representation. In R. Stam & R. Miller (Eds.), *Film and theory* (pp. 704–714). Blackwell.
- [13]. Hakola, O., & Kivistö, S. (Eds.). (2014). *Death in literature* (pp. 7–14). Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- [14]. Hossain, S. (1976). *Hangor, Nodee, Grenade*. Anonya Publishers.
- [15]. Mascarenhas, A. (1971, June 1). Genocide. *The Sunday Times*.

- [16]. Metz, C. (1974). *Film language: A semiotics of the cinema* (M. Taylor, Trans.). Oxford University Press.
- [17]. Metz, C. (1982). From the imaginary signifier: Identification, mirror. In *The imaginary signifier: Psychoanalysis and the cinema* (Original work published 1972). Indiana University Press.
- [18]. Mir, A. (2018, February 16). Selina Hossain about her own work and literature. *Dhaka Tribune*.
<https://archive.dhakatribune.com/magazine/arts-letters/2018/03/03/selina-hossain-work-literature>
- [19]. Mokammel, T. (Director). (2008). *Rabeya* [Film]. Bangladesh.
- [20]. Mulvey, L. (1975). Visual pleasure and narrative cinema. *Screen*, 16(3), 6–18.
- [21]. Murakami, H. (1987). *Norwegian Wood*. Kodansha.
- [22]. Nastasi, A. (2014, March 23). 25 incredible Akira Kurosawa quotes about filmmaking. *Flavorwire*.
<https://www.flavorwire.com/446671/25-incredible-akira-kurosawa-quotes-about-filmmaking>
- [23]. New Age. (2014). Films on liberation war: Directors talk on challenges. <http://archive.newagebd.net/254547/films-on-liberation-war-directors-talk-on-challenges/>
- [24]. Poetry Foundation. (n.d.). *Easter, 1916*. <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43289/easter-1916>
- [25]. Rabbani, F. (2022, January 14). The song of the corpse: An analysis of cultural identity of Bangladesh in *Rabeya* and *Oggatonama* [Conference presentation]. Film and Cultural Studies Conference, Association of Teachers of Literatures in English Bangladesh.
- [26]. Sarwat, N. (2008, December 6). A deconstruction of *Antigone*, set in 1971. *The Daily Star*.
<https://archive.thedailystar.net/newDesign/cache/cached-news-details-66247.html>
- [27]. Sarker, B. (1998). *Higher secondary history*. Hasan Books.
- [28]. Shifat, S., & Ahmed, S. (2019). Representation of Liberation War in the films of 90s. *Communications. Media. Design*, 4, 129–141.
- [29]. Walter, T. (n.d.). *The sociology of death* (p. 317). University of Bath.