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War Heroines of 1971 of Bangladesh: How they are Treated in our Society

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Abstract:

The aim of this paper is during the post war how war heroines were treated what we can do for them. In 1971 women played a very important role during the war. Bangladesh sacrificed a lot of things for her independent. About three million people were killed & 4.50 lakh women were brutally raped by the Pakistani Army & their collaborators. During the war, Women made history. They had sacrificed their dignity, beloved son, husband & their life. Some of the brave women joined the Frontal & Gruella war, some provided food, shelter & medical treatment. But nowadays they were not recognized. During the post war they became remain in darkness. After the war their war didn't stop. They fought against their life, family even society. But father of the nation Bangabandhu acknowledged as a 'Bironggona' (Brave women). Only two women were endowed 'Bir Partik'. But gradually these women didn't have any facilities what they wanted. Some faced money problem, some oppressed the man society, and some lost their fertility some died without proper treatment. So we should take initiative in our own place for them.

Key Words:

Liberation War, Bironggona, Bangladesh, Post- Liberation War

Introduction:

Whenever we conceive the participation of women in the liberation war we only envision the women who were censured and raped. But women also participated in the war as fighters, helping hands, cooks, informers, Diplomats, Inspiration, medical assistants and also as mothers. Most of the woman in Bangladesh participated in the war sometimes directly and sometimes indirectly. Some of our heroines also joined in the front war, among them two

women had been awarded as “Bir Pratik”. We know our Liberation war was not an abrupt matter, so the participation of women in liberation war was also not an astonishing thing. (Md. Shahin Kadir Bhuiyan, 2020)

The liberation war of 1971 was the final step of the exploitation of the Pakistani government. The Bengalis were ruled and then genocide was carried out on the unarmed Bengalis. On the night of March 25 in 1971, students, teachers and innocent Bengalis were killed in different parts of the country. The Bengalis put up resistance to respond to the Pakistani army. Among them women also contributed in the war circuitously and directly. This contribution of women was no less than that of men. In fact, about five lakh women confessed to being raped in the liberation war. The contribution of these women is not to be underestimated. Women have been abandoned everywhere in patriarchal history. They did not receive any acknowledgement or support after the war, even the women who lost their loved ones in the war were neglected or admitted to poverty in various ways after the post-liberation war. These women have to pay a fair price. The government and our society must come forward. Then the epic must be conserved. Ferdousi Priyobhasini exposed the torture of Pakistani forces on her. To see her confession many heroines confessed their torture and altruism during the war time.

Role of women during Bangladesh Liberation War:

When the war of liberation started, women took part in that war in many ways. Muslim-Hindu-Buddhist-Christian women of all religions took part in the liberation war. Not only Bengalis, but also indigenous women have taken part in the liberation war. Although during the war the policy of the Bangladesh government was not to train women in warfare, prepare them for guerrilla warfare and give women parliamentarians the responsibility of leading administrative work, women were adamant in this regard. They expressed a strong desire to take part in the confrontation. In Kolkata, under the guidance of Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury, (a politician and representative of the government) during the war of liberation, 300 young women from the Gobra camp were given weapons training at the Gobra and BLF camps. Among them Gita Majumdar, Gita Kar, Shirin Banu Mital, Dr. Even after Lily Parveen learned to wield a weapon, they were not allowed to go face-to-face. The question of women's direct participation in the war was a dilemma within the then wartime government. On the other hand, a large number of youths were waiting in various youth camps for weapons training. Where boys are not getting arms, they are not able to go to war, they are not getting training, and the importance

of training and giving weapons to girls for liberation war was not in the conventional idea of Bangladesh government and politicians. Negative attitudes towards women were not justified at that time. Even then Almataj Begum took part in the guerrilla war. Karuna Begum of Barisal was a fearless freedom fighter. Shirin Banu Mital and Aleya Begum prevented the Pakistanis from wearing men's clothes in the war. Taramon Bibi was an informer of freedom fighters but she took armed training that time. By this way she participated the frontal war.

The mothers of the freedom fighters also need to be mentioned here. All mothers like Shaheed Rumi's mother Jahana Imam or Shaheed Azad's mother Safia Begum have inspired the children of freedom fighters. Their sacrifice is also part of history. Basically, this is how women have played an indomitable role in the struggle for the liberation of Bengalis. They have worked in camps. Those who have worked in the camp cooking with the freedom fighters, they have also worked as the guards of the freedom fighters with weapons training. He also informed the freedom fighters about the enemies, the position of the Pakistani Army and *Razakars* during the liberation war. Hiding the freedom fighters at home, handing over weapons or providing services and treatment to the war wounded freedom fighters, collecting medicines, food and clothes for them these were the active activities of the women in the bloody war. Sufia Kamal, the then president of the Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, was at her home in Dhaka for nine months of the war under the surveillance of Pakistani forces. Even in that situation he has cooperated with the freedom fighters in various ways. Her two daughters Sultana Kamal & Sayeda Kamal became an informer of freedom fighters. At the middle of the war they provided medical aid as a nurse at the Bangladesh Field Hospital.

Objective:

In this research there are some objects:

1. To know the sacrifices of women during liberation war.
2. To know how a Bironggon or brave women are being exploited by the society.
3. To know how they started their struggle during the post war.

Methodology:

This research is done by historical analysis. The research follows the case study method through qualitative data collection method. For this research primary & secondary data had been used. Primary data had been collected from eyewitness, victim, local freedom fighters &

historian .Scientific Research paper, Newspaper, Books, Archives, Journal Article, Novels, Videos & documentary are the secondary sources of this research. Data had been analyzed Qualitative data analysis method through descriptive way. It also emphasized on discussion through depth analysis .The research has some limitations of data collections & sources.

Women in the post liberation War of Bangladesh

Women who joined the war: women had a great contribution during war time of Bangladesh. The Bangladeshi both rural & urban girls took armed against the Pakistani Army .They showed their heroism the battle field. But after the war they most of them were not recognized.

- *Taramon Bibi* took part in several battles in sector 11 under the leadership of Sector commander Abu Taher, (Bir Uttam). Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's government honoured her with the title of 'Bir Protik' in 1973 for her courageous role during 1971.
- *Nibedita das* was a freedom fighter under the sector five .Also provided the medical services to the wounded freedom fighters but she is not recognized. According to her

“I have not received anything from the government,I have all documents & papers for the proof of my contribution.” (hai, 2012)

- *Kakon Bibi*: The issue of *Kakon Bibi* came to the fore in 1996 after two decades of liberation war. He was given a piece of land by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. However, despite giving her the title of "Bir Pratik", her gazette has not been passed yet. She told about physical illness and liberation war and confessed to unspeakable torture & on the battle field she was shot. Which made her ill. Eventually she died in 2018.
- *Karuna Begum*: She took part in the war in 1971 in different parts of Barisal. While taking part in the battle, he was hit by a bullet fired by Pakistanis on his right leg. He was seriously injured. Eventually he lost the ability to walk due to lack of treatment.
- *Shova Rani Mondol* was took part in the frontal war. She lost her husband during the war .But now she was not recognized a freedom fighter. She leads a poor life & doesn't get proper treatment.

On 29 April 1999, Meera and Halima Khatun, two brave freedom fighters of rural Bengal, were rewarded by the Ekattorer Ghatak Dalal Nirmul Committee

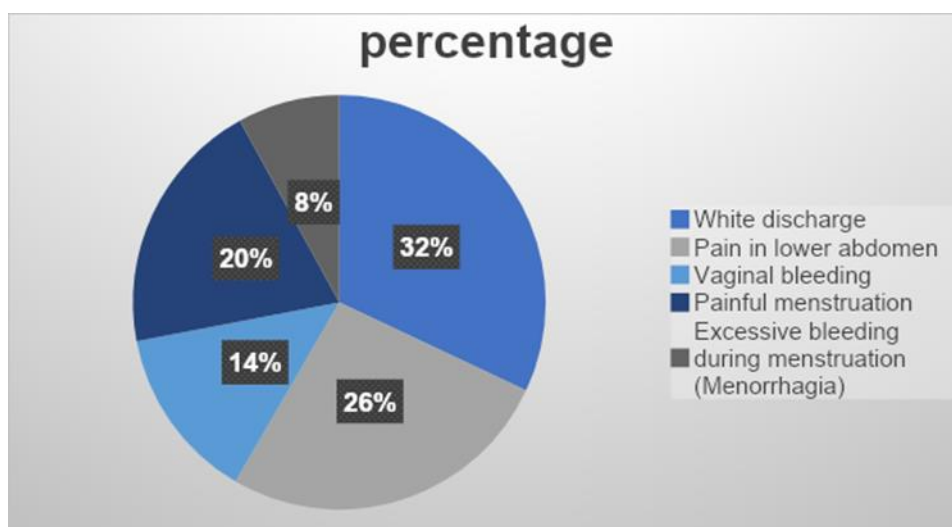
(Committee for the Elimination of Killer Brokers). Among them, Mira's livelihood was collecting and selling wood and Halima was a day laborer. According to the two of them, there are more women freedom fighters from such ordinary families in the country whom no one is looking for and thus they have disappeared from the pages of history.

Birangonas (who were raped during the war time):

The abortion law was enacted from January 1972 to October 1972, with the aim of getting rid of unwanted pregnancies. At the same time, the International Child Welfare Union was formed & Mother Teresa came to Bangladesh for the purpose of raising, nurturing and adopting their 300 children to abroad. But the Bangladeshi family did not come forward. Bangabandhu's call to the youth to marry these women, but the response was very low.

- Many *Birangonas* migrated to India or committed suicide after being rejected by their families.
- *Laily Begum* was pregnant when the Pakistani Army kidnapped her. She lost the baby in captivity and later fought with the freedom fighters. But she said her contribution still remains unacknowledged. Begum got married she did not share her story with her husband. Even now, she is afraid people will make fun of her past. Her husband abused her and threw her out of the house when he found out about her past.
- A Hindu woman lived in Noakhali she was raped by Pakistani collaborators. But the war she & her family migrated to India. They didn't come back & nowadays most of the people don't know her sacrifices. (Mia, 2020)
- Thakurgaon's Tepri Rani was a young bride, only 14 years old, when she was kidnapped by the Pakistani army in 1971. She was kept at a camp for six months and tortured. She managed to come back after the Liberation War, only to find her husband would not accept her. She was pregnant & gave birth a war baby. It was only in 2017 that the Bangladesh government recognized her as a *Muktijoddha*. The daily star recognized Tepri rani as an unsung woman in 2020, 7th March.
- Few women who were raped during war time, were able to return to families or old homes because of this. Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman called the victims Birangona ("heroine"), but this reminded common people that these women were now socially untouchables as they were "dishonoured", and the term became associated with Birangona ("prostitute"). The official strategy of marrying the women off failed.

- In 1972, the independent government of Bangladesh set up rehabilitation centres for Birangonas, which undertook abortion, put their children up for international adoption, arranged their marriages, trained them in vocational skills, and often ensured them government jobs.
- Before Geoffrey Davis came to Bangladesh Many women were eight months pregnant. One lakh seventy thousand women were aborted before the government help. Some of the 30,000 committed suicide. After the birth of war babies, many children had been adopted in Europe and America family. After which no public or private information was collected of those babies (Rokeya Kabir, 2012).
- After the war the women who were raped they had faced a lot of physical problems .Some were lost their fertility to give a birth of child. Some women abused during their pregnancy time they lost their baby & potency forever. According to the war Crime Finding Committee, 32% women faced white discharge, 8% women would face pain in lower abdomen,20% women faced vaginal bleeding, 14% women faced excessive bleeding, 8% women faced menorrhagia during post war.



Woman who lost their beloved person during war time:

Chamona Begum: In 1971, her husband was brutally killed by Pakistani forces at Gopalpur Bazar in Begumganj upazila of Noakhali district. After the war, her husband's brother took thumb impression from her. He don't know why tips were being taken. Unbeknownst to them, his brother-in-law took them home from the government in Dhaka as member of martyr family. Moreover, after the death of her husband, her three sons were forced to work in the

fields by her brother-in-law. If her sons couldn't work, they were beaten by their uncle. For this reason Chamena Begum used to go to the field and work. He lost his eldest son a few days later. Currently her youngest son is alive and living a very poor life. They did not get any help from the government.

Babe Nurjahan: In 1971, her father was a railway officer in Lalmonirhat district. On April 5, 1971, her father, younger brother, private tutor and private tutor's brother standing in a line together & were brushed by Biharis (Pakistani Collaborators) . After the death of their father, they moved to their village home. When they went there, their uncle forcibly took possession of all their lands. Her mother used to run the family with great difficulty and many times they could not even eat properly.

Supriti Dhar: Her father's name was Mudhushodhon Dhar. She lost her father during 1971 in the Bangladesh liberation war. Her father also joined the British Resistance Movement & also a member of Azad -Hind- Fauj. They did not get any help from the government .They had faced a lot of problems during post war time.

Firoja Begum: Her husband was died by Pakistani in Gopalpur Bazar during 1971. After his death, Firoja begum worked at the field & others house as maid servant. She faced a lot of financial crisis as a widow. She is very angry with the government because she did not get any help. They did not treat anything as like as other martyr's family.

Begum Jahanara Imam let her beloved son Rumi go to the war of liberation. Her husband Safi Imam and she helped the freedom fighters with money, clothes, medicine. Moreover, he used to hide the weapons of the guerrillas and feed them. During the war, her home became a haven for guerrillas. But his son was captured by the Pakistanis in the war and never returned. She lost her husband on 13 December 1971. Although she was given the title of Shahed Janani (Mother of Martyrs), she was not honored after the war. Jahanara Imam was injured in a police baton charge and was admitted to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University. A non-available treason case was filed against Jahanara Imam and 24 other prominent people involved in the Gono Adalat (Mass court).The High Court later granted them bail.

Dolly Begum: In 1971, her father Mahmududullah Mia was a political official. In Local area he took part in the liberation war. But Pakistani forces went to the Khalifar hat (local Bazar of Noakhali) area and killed and set fire to several House. Along with Mahmududullah Mia was

killed by Razakars and Pakistani forces. But she & her family did not get any support as the daughter of a martyr.

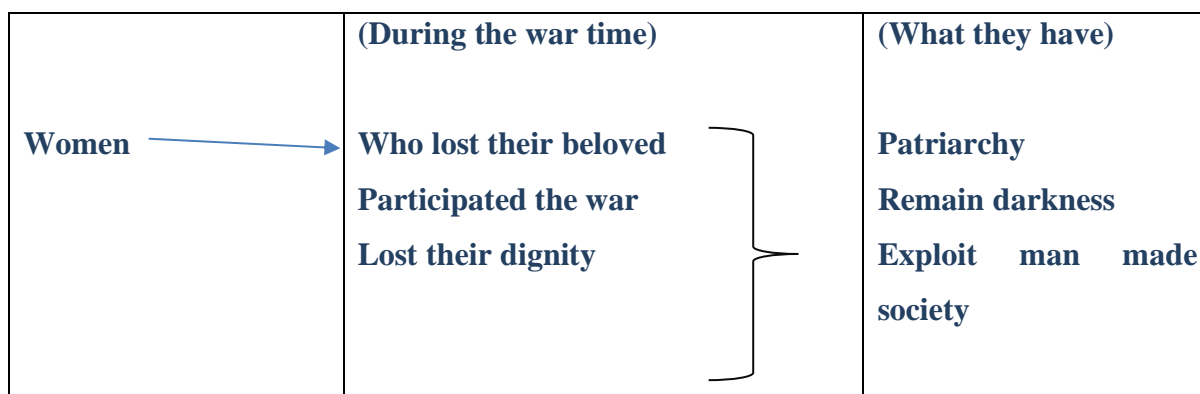
The indifference of the state towards the martyred women is further manifested by the refusal of the state to provide or collect sufficient information about the martyred women. Of the 'Smriti 1971' (Memories of 1971) published by the Bangla Academy, only four women martyrs are known. They are, martyred journalist Selina Hossain, martyred poet Meherunnesa, martyred Lutfun Nahar Helen of Magura and martyred Dr. Ayesha Badora Chowdhury. The story of Bhagirathi, a brave woman from Pirojpur, defeats many histories of the liberation war. As a beggar, she used to bring various inquiries of the Pakistani aggressors to the freedom fighters, later with the help of Razakars, she was captured by the Pakistani soldiers. She was tied to a jeep and killed. That Bhagirathi also did not get a place in the list of martyrs. By throwing Anjuman Ara into the hot coal furnace of a freight train at Parbatipur in Dinajpur, the Murray Biharis, her and her husband's crime, sheltered other Bengalis in their homes. A Khasia girl name kaket from Beyani Bazar in Sylhet, was killed by Pakistanis on charges of spying for the freedom fighters. There is so much more history like this. But it is true that female martyrs have not been recognized in history as compared to male martyrs. The politics of masculinity is also present in their memory. Surabala Devi was martyred at her home in Dinajpur in April. Cultural activists Bhramar, Sufia Khatun, Hosne Akhtar (who was buried alive) and Sarojini Mallick were martyred in Syedpur in the same month. Babni Rajgaur, Lasimun Kurmi, Rangama Kurmi, Salgi Kharia and many others were martyred in Patrakhola tea garden of Sylhet. Kanket, a Khasi girl, had to die in Beanibazar of Sylhet on the charge of spying for the Bengalis. Kanak Prabha Ganguly, Sonai Rani Samaddar, Vidyasundari Das, Savitri Rani Dutta, Shanti Dev and many others were martyred in the attack of the invaders in Patuakhali. Kiran Rani Saha was martyred in mid-July in the demolition of Faridpur.

Discussion:

During the war time women were paid a great sacrifice. Even if they lost their life & beloved person. After the war time some women remained the darkness. About two hundred women took part the frontal war. Five lakh women were raped by the Pakistani army & their collaborators. Any war is terrible. War destroys civilization. War teaches women to humiliate. War is a cruel game. Just as men took part in the liberation war of Bangladesh, so did women. Many women had been raped during the war. Losing everything had just burned the fire of

revenge in their eyes. Women are naturally gentle. However, the attack of the animals made them rough and timid. Even if you can kill an enemy, it is a great success. They took part in the oncoming war. They won the war. They are freedom fighters, they are heroines. They are our pride. According to the information given by the State Minister for Liberation War Affairs in response to a question in the National Assembly on 16 November 2012, two hundred three women took part in the 1971 Liberation War. According to statistics, Dinajpur had the highest number of twenty one women. Besides, fifteen women took part in the liberation war in Chapainawabganj, nine in Jessore and Gopalganj, seven in Sunamganj and Panchagarh and six in Sylhet and Barisal. Only three of them got “Bir Pratik” award (Sohel, 2019).

Liberation War Affairs Minister AQM Mozammel Haque said that there are three women awarded ‘Bir Pratik’ gallantry awarded for their heroism. But one of them the indigenous woman Kakon Bibi her gazette is not published yet. However, the number of women freedom fighters in the gazette is three hundred twenty two. The minister made the remarks in response to a written question from Didarul Alam in Parliament on Thursday (Reporter, 2019).



Bina D'Costa took an interview of Dr. Geoffrey Davis¹ according to the Dr. Davis abortion or delivery they stayed for a little while and then went off to the accommodation provided by the Relief and Rehabilitation Centre. They could stay there for as long as they liked. And then the women went into training programs. I saw a few of them — making clothes on a promotional basis. In Dhaka, Dinajpur, Rangpur, Noakhali.”² (Davis, 2002) .From this discussion we can

¹ Dr. Geoffrey Davis, an Australian doctor, who helped thousands of Bangladeshi women raped by the Pakistani Army during the Liberation War in 1971, has passed away in Sydney on Friday 3-Oct-2008.

² Dr. Bina D’Costa introduces Dr. Davis, the circumstances of the meeting and then follows it with the interview. It was conducted in 2002.

say that, after the war some brave women could able relocate & became establish again. Tara Banarjee she became a nurse in Denmark & started a new life with her husband with dignity.

Conclusion:

Bangladeshi women sacrificed a lot for the independent. But they are not treated wht they deserve. according to prominent feminist scholar Uma Chakravarti remembers that in 2001, at a women's studies Conference in Lahore, women scholars from Pakistan expressed their apologies to Bangladeshi scholars for the rape, killing and sexual torture of 1971 and narrated how the women of Pakistan made efforts in 1971 to make their voices heard against the reports of violence in East Pakistan/Bangladesh.

“Blessed be she who is both furious and magnificent.”- Taylor Rhodes from the immemorial time, women have been treated as icons of beauty, softness, innocence and magnificence. Traditional patriarchal thinking likes to conceive women as passive, soft and innocent. This archetypal psychology prohibits everyone to see them as valiant fighters. It is almost a taboo for women to join the front line of war. Even in the time of crisis like the Liberation War of 1971, men could not easily come out of their remonstrance. The interviews of some forgotten women freedom fighters reveal that the men wanted to take them as their assistants first. It is only because of their irrepressible thirst for country's freedom, the women could join the Liberation War despite the frowning of their male counterparts.

From 1947 to 1971, through a lot of bloody struggles, sacrifices and compromises, December 16, 1971 becomes the ultimate gala day in the history of a freedom aspiring nation. In order to get the national flag, we had to sacrifice the blood of three million martyrs and the dignity of 430,000 women. This historical achievement leads to a 'metamorphosis' by transforming a province to a state, makes the map recognizable in the world atlas. This recognition tells the story of the infinite contribution of the people of Bangladesh. In a patriarchal society like ours any war implies the valiant fight of men. Men are always exalted for their heroism, made legend for their indomitable spirit. Unfortunately, the contribution of women remains untold. In most cases, the performance of women remains as an unrevealed chapter. The women are not portrayed properly. The majority of their portrayal reveals them as vulnerable and as war victims. Their heroic deeds go unnoticed. Out of the 676 gallantry awards, only two have gone

to women. But in fact, there is no way to disgrace the terrible sufferings they have undergone during the time of multifarious roles they have played in the Liberation War 1971.

Bangladeshi women played a significant role in 1971 by working as combatants, sneaks, nurses, and so on. They cooperated with the brave freedom fighters by providing them with food, fund and shelter. Sometimes they collected weapons by playing tricks over the Pakistani army. They showed their unyielding determination by sending their fathers, brothers, husbands and sons to the Liberation War. Sometimes to save the freedom fighters they surrendered themselves to the Pakistani army and became the victims of beastly physical torment. They had to go through mental trauma day after day.

Gobra camp was set up in Kolkata by the government-in-exile, where women freedom fighters were trained up to participate in the frontal war. Shirin Banu, Farquan Begum, Alamtaj Begum, Karuna Begum, Shobha Rani, Bithika Biswas, Meherunnesa and many more women freedom fighters fought for the country. But their stories remain unexplored even today. The nation is not aware about their contribution to the emergence of independent Bangladesh.

While discussing the social services of women during and after the war, Yasmin Saikia said in her book 'Women, War and The making of Bangladesh- Remembering 1971'(2011)- " For them these were not heroic acts but were 'small gestures' owed to family and friends. They talked about them as routine work- to care for others- and did not claim special status as heroes because they responded to the need of another person. Precisely because they did not talk of the work as conscious act of bravado but presented them as 'duty', the work that individual women did during and after the war has gone largely unnoticed in the national register.

Suhasini Devi of Sylhet, Dr Syed Ahmed Nurjahan of Chittagong, Jharna Chowdhury of Noakhali who were social workers, involved in the rehabilitation of distressed women and children during and after the war of 1971. She also mentioned two forgotten women freedom fighters, Laila Ahmed and Mumtaz Begum who willingly joined the 'Muktibahini'.

Jahanara Imam, entitled the mother of martyrs, didn't appear in the battlefield with arms. However, the battle she fought is not the least in comparison with the people who laid down their lives for the sake of the country. Her elder son Rumi joined the Liberation war as a freedom fighter.

He was picked up by the Pakistani army and was not seen any more. Her Husband Shariful Imam and another son were also picked up, and Shariful Imam met a tragic end due to the

terrible torture he endured in the hands of the Pakistan occupation forces. She also played a prominent role in bringing the Pakistani collaborators to book.

On 25 July, 1971, 164 men were brutally killed and many women were raped by the Pakistani army accompanied by their collaborators in Sohagpur, Nalitabari. The village was left as the village of widows bearing the sign of heinous crime, only 57 women survived to tell their harrowing tales. Is there any way to degrade their sacrifice for the liberty of the nation? But they remain behind the curtain. What compensation we have kept for them? We only feel pity.

After the independence, the women who sacrificed their supreme dignity during the Liberation War were pretty neglected by their kith and kin. They are ostracized by the family as well as by the society. At such a time, our undisputed leader Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman became their ultimate shelter. His government declared the rape victims as 'Birangonas' and rehabilitated them by forming 'Women Rehabilitation Board' in 1972. The brutal murder of the father of nation was a setback in this regard. However, now a flicker of hope is visible at the end of the tunnel. Through this they will enjoy all government facilities which are applicable to the freedom fighters. Yes, better late than never. Let's hope for the day when all the women freedom fighters will get their long-overdue recognition even if it is subsequent we can do something for the women who join the war. A new generation can take responsibilities for them. Their historians can play a vital role for women freedom fighters & Birannaonas. Now a days our historians have an interest on women participation during war time.

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Videos

- 1) <https://youtu.be/RUIB1E83V5s>
- 2)https://youtu.be/PxY_kMGdbJQ
- 3)<https://youtu.be/7x9wlJS7-JQ>

Interview

1. Dolly Begum, Gouripur, Sadar Noakhali, 27 September, 2020
2. Chamono Begum, Gopalpur, Begumgang, Noakhali, 20 August 2019
3. Firoja Begum, Gopalpur, Begumgong, 20 August, 2019
4. Mohsin Mia, Monipur, Sadar, Noakhali, 30 January 2020
6. Akter Hossain, Monipur, Sadar, Noakhali, 16 January, 2020
7. Rokeya Begum, Zamidar hat, Noakhali, 17 May, 2019
8. Rahima Begum, Ramhoritaluk, Noakhali, 20 October, 2020