



Graduate School of Development Studies

**Screening War:
Gender, Sexuality and Nationhood in Cinematic
Representation of Liberation War in Bangladesh**

A Research Paper presented by:

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in partial fulfilment of the requirements for obtaining the degree of
MASTERS OF ARTS IN DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

Specialization:
**[Women, Gender and Development]
(WGD)**

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The Hague, The Netherlands
November, 2011

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Acknowledgements:

The completion of this research would not have been possible without the support of many individuals. I would like to express my gratitude to all of them—

To my supervisor Dr. Dubravka Zarkov for her superb guidance, support and advice.

To my reader Dr. Amrita Chhachhi for her valuable directions during seminars.

To my discussants Irmasanthi Danadharta, Shyamika Jayasundara and Shuchi Karim for their constructive feedbacks.

To Rajib Nandy for kindly providing me with DVD sources.

To my fellow colleagues at the University of Dhaka, Bangladesh, specially to Dr. Gitiara Nasreen, Dr. Fahmidul Haq, Khorsed Alom and Kajalie Shehreen Islam for their support throughout my study period in the Hague.

To my fellow Bangladeshi students in the ISS for their hearty company and guidance.

To my WGD classmates for the moral support they have given me in difficult times.

To the Dutch Government for providing me with financial sponsorship through the Nuffic Fellowship Programme.

To my beloved husband Md. Masum Ahmed and my sweetest daughter Progya Paromita Babui – who have suffered so much to support me in the completion of this study programme and have grown tired of waiting since September 2010.

List of Acronyms

BAL	Bangladesh Awami League
BNP	Bangladesh Nationalist Party
JI	Jamaat-e-Islami
GHADANIC	Ghahtok Dalal Nirmul Committee

Abstract

This research examines representation strategies of Liberation war of Bangladesh and also discusses how the issues of gender within that war narrative has been represented in Bangladeshi movies using ten movies from mainstream and independent films. Taking Stuart Hall's theories of representation as broader theoretical background, the study analyses how the war has stereotypically been represented within the dichotomous representation of self-vs. other and how the national identity was represented according to the identity of dominant community of Bangladesh overlooking the existences of 'other' groups.

This paper also found that the films portrayed the nation in 'sacred' and 'pure' image of motherhood and the representation of femininity, masculinity and sexuality has sprung from that feminized image of nationhood. Hence, representation of gender and sexuality was predominantly prejudiced in films around social construction of heterosexuality, manhood and womanhood, and around the exclusivity of female sexuality.

The findings suggest that although representation strategy have been shifting due to national and global political changes, films in both mainstream and independent production have consistently used dominant notions of gender and heteronormativity.

Relevance to Development Studies

Cinema, being a powerful part of mass media, can be a mobilizing tool by educating, informing and facilitating decision making process; therefore it is inextricably linked to development. It can work as a pressure group for the government to safeguard citizens' rights like economic, political and human rights. In Bangladesh, after 40 years of independence, the present generation had to mostly rely on mass media to learn about history of their country. Important part of this was cinematic representation of Liberation War of Bangladesh. Moreover, when the trial of war criminals is the burning issue of the country today, no doubt representation of Liberation War becomes one of the political tools for the government, citizen and for the accused. Representation of gender is directly related to the issue of human rights that can instigate a campaign against existing gender discrimination in the society. This study will pay critical attention to the gendered and sexualized representations of Liberation War which now in Bangladesh received significant concern of the policy makers due to both political and feminist movement.

Keywords

Cinematic Representation, Liberation War, Bangladesh, Gender, Sexuality

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Statement of the Research Problem

This research explores how Liberation War of Bangladesh and the issues of gender and sexuality within the war narratives have been represented in films of Bangladesh. Taking Stuart Hall's theories of representation as a larger theoretical background, this study focuses on the strategies of representing the war, the nation, gender and sexuality in the cinematography of Liberation War.

1.2 Contextual Background and Justification

Recent controversy around the representation of the Liberation War of Bangladesh in film "*Meherjaan*" has inspired me to work on the issue. Main allegation against the film was that it undermines suffering of Bangladeshi women raped by Pakistani forces during the war, by telling a love story between a Pakistani soldier and a Bangladeshi woman. According to the director "the film tried to capture different narrative of the Liberation War, but as it does not follow the dominant theme of the struggle" it is facing controversy (Hossain, 2011). Hence, my quest is how has the Liberation War of Bangladesh been represented in the Bangladeshi cinema since independence.

In this section I will discuss briefly the cinema history of Bangladesh. Nevertheless, since the cinema history is closely related with the national history (Raju, 2000) it is necessary to look at political history of Bangladesh when looking at its history of film. Therefore, I start with the political history of Bangladesh with particular focus on Liberation War of 1971. Afterwards I discuss the representation of nationalist struggle in movies, particularly in war movies, from a feminist point of view and also how this representation process takes place in the cinema of Bangladesh. This in turn creates the paradigmatic rationale of my study.

1.2a Political History of Bangladesh

Bangladesh, earlier named Bengal province, was the part of India under British rule (1757-1947). In 1947, independence came in the form of partition between 'India' and 'Pakistan' incorporating Bengal with Pakistan, renaming it East-Pakistan. The region had experienced major political upheavals as part of Pakistan, and after achieving independence. Chronologically these are: Language Movement (1952), Liberation War against Pakistan (1971), military coup following assassination of President Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (1975), other coups that brought military rule (during 1980s) and mass movement (1990) against military backed autocracy that brought changes to the state power.

1.2b Liberation War of Bangladesh

It is said that, Islam was the sole principle of statehood in East and West Pakistan, with differences in all other respects. Two nations emerged within one state and over the period various administrative, military, linguistic, civil and financial controls by West Pakistan toward the East Pakistan led to a Liberation War in 1971. After nine months bloody war, Bangladesh became liberated and established as the Peoples' Republic of Bangladesh. The war of 1971 is generally referred to by a name: the Liberation War of Bangladesh (Saikia, 2004).

During the nine months of the war, Pakistani Army with the assistance of local Bengali collaborators (*i.e. Razakars, Al-bodor, Al-shams, and Shanti Bahini*¹) killed 300,000 (Mookherjee, 2006) men and women from all walks of life, and raped about 200,000 women and girls (*Ibid*). After the independence, the then government declared all raped women of 1971 as *Birangona* (War Heroines). This was an attempt to reduce social ostracism of rape toward the women and enable their smooth social re-absorption (Mookherjee, 2006).

However, political turmoil did not disappear. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was assassinated in a military coup in August, 1975, and two other military coups followed (3rd November and 7th November of 1975) with killing of political leaders who were involved with Mujibur's Parliament. After that, there were 15 years of military rule (1975-1990) followed by a major change in the ideology of the state power.

1.2c Islamization and Political Turmoil

It is argued that a secular notion of Bengali culture had served as the keystone for the rise of Bengali nationalist discourses that challenged Pakistani-Muslim identity and ultimately made possible the independence of Bangladesh (Raju, 2011). Following this spirit, after independence, the new 'modern' first government (1972-1975) introduced "Bengali nationalism" and "secularism" as principles of the Constitution. Next government of Ziaur Rahman (1976 - '81) introduced "Bangladeshi Nationalism" and declared that "*absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah shall be the basis of all action*" instead of "secularism" in the preamble of Constitution. General Ershad's government (1982- 1990) changed the Constitution again and introduced "Islam" as state religion and took the nation from secular modernist to "Islamic nationalism" (Samad, 1998). This transformation was not limited to the constitutional change but there was a systematic effort to incorporate "Islam as an integral part of socio-cultural life" (Raju, 2011) like making *Islamia*² as a compulsory course in school education, establishing more *madrassa* etc. What is common in all these efforts of changing national identity and promoting new culture is a quest for homogenization –

¹ These are the names of organizations that were formed by local Bengalis during Liberation War to assist Pakistan Army against independence of Bangladesh.

² Text on Islam

propelled toward the majority community. The Bengali identity was respectable and suitable for use when Bengalis were being oppressed in the name of religion by West Pakistan. But once the hegemony of West Pakistan was removed with the creation of Bangladesh, the Muslim identity came to the fore. However, different regimes introduced different identity but never accommodated minorities of Bangladesh³

The process of Islamization was not conducted only through constitutional change. Another major step was the effort of integrating *Jamaat-e-Islami (JI)* - the prominent group involved in war crimes collaborating with Pakistan - into the state power. Immediately after independence, Mujibur's government banned the *JI*. Later on the Islamic Academy was revived and upgraded to Foundation, unconditional pardon was announced for the war criminals, and diplomatic ties with Pakistan were developed (Samad, 1998). Still, secularism was Constitutional principles.

Consequently, the Islamic communalist groups like the *JI*, re-emerged in the politics of Bangladesh during the late 1970s and 1980s and since then are propagates the "establishment of an Islamic State" (Raju, 2011). During the '80s and '90s, under the rule of Ershad, a form of state supported religious communalism gained momentum and *JI* emerged as a powerful political party in the context.

In 1990, Bangladesh faced a mass upheaval that had overthrown the autocratic military regime and brought an atmosphere of democracy with regular national elections. In that democratic environment and with the spirit of '90s mass upheaval, memories of 1970 have emerged that brought up issues of trial of collaborators like Gholam Azum, chief of *JI*. In 1992 *Gono Adalot* (People's Tribunal) - a massively mobilized movement led by 'left-liberate cultural elites' - was held under the organizational support named *Ghahtok Dalal Nirmul Committee* (committee to abolish Pakistani agent - GHADANIC) (Mookherjee, 2006).

The spirit of the '90s protests or the efforts of GHADANIC were not sustained as the two major political parties, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and Bangladesh Awami League (BAL), have found it politically expedient to create space for political Islam in their own campaign rhetoric and to form short- and long-term alliances with Islamist political parties (Hossain, 2010). However, since December 2008 election, government led by the BAL started to bring Bengali collaborators to trials, and as part of its declared election manifesto the latest Constitutional Amendment of 2011 restored secularism (*Daily Star*, 2011). Contradictorily, this Amendment keeps Islam as state religion and allowed religion based politics.

³ Bangladesh is home of 45 different ethnic communities and several other religious communities including Hindu, Buddhist and Christian (Mohsin, 2004).

1.2d The Dilemma of Gendered Contribution to the Liberation War

There is no dilemma encompassing men's role in the Liberation War. The only question mark is about women's contribution. From the very beginning of the independence, women were identified as the victim of war, as raped women who have lost their *izzat*⁴ – who contributed their 'honour' for the sake of the nation. Looking from the patriarchal-mainstream point of view, it will be obvious that the raped women of 1971 are not forgotten; they appear in national history textbooks, popular literature and even in the museums, looking from the feminist point of view, the overall ambiguity around the representation of women in 1971 is apparent (Hossain, 2009). By losing the 'most valuable resource (i.e. *izzat*)' the raped women become 'fallen women' in the eye of the nation and only option for them in the national history was silence, utmost effort to hide the 'dark side' of independence – a crucial interrelationships between memory and secrecy (Mookherjee, 2006).

According to the declaration, '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? It is important to mention that, although there was no specific women's agenda in the nationalist movement in 1971, women took up arms and joined the underground resistance. Taramon Bibi was awarded the title of *Bir Protik*⁵ in 1973 for her courageous contribution with direct fighting in armed conflict. After independence there was no trace of her whereabouts. In 1995 a researcher found out where she lived and consequently the women's organization brought her into the light (Daily Star, 2006). As Taramon Bibi was honoured by the then government, it was possible at least to look for her. However, Geeta Kar (Ibid), Bithika Biswas, Shishir Kona, Shahana Parvin (Murshid, 2008), and other unidentified female freedom fighters fought in the war. Yet they are not honoured, even not recognized in the mainstream discourses of war. After forty years of independence, in 2010, a three member parliamentary sub-committee has been formed to collect information on the role played by women in Bangladesh's Liberation War (Daily Star, 2010).

1.2e Cinema History of Bangladesh and War Movies

For long it was established by notable historians of Bangladesh that cinema of Bangladesh began with the making of *The Face and The Mask* in 1956, directed-produced-written and acted by Abdul Jabbar Khan. However, Raju (2000) argued that "as the film historians were operating from within a nation building, they do not seem to be able to evaluate other possibilities for

⁴ According to dictionary 'izzat' refers to honour, chastity, and dignity. Thus 'loss of izzat' means to lose one's prestige, honour, chastity. In the culture of Bangladesh, especially in public rhetoric, the word is frequently used to indicate the raped women.

⁵ Bir Protik (symbol of bravery or idol of courage) is the fourth highest gallantry award in Bangladesh. Freedom fighters were adorned with four different insignia in recognition of their extraordinary and highest sacrifice in the Liberation War of Bangladesh.

beginning the history of cinema in Bangladesh and so earlier decades are seen only as a pre-historic sense". Hiralal Sen from the East Bengal started first filming actuality footage in Calcutta and Dhaka during 1898-1901 (Ibid). While this earlier history of Bengali and Bangladeshi film is important, I will not address it here because of word limitations⁶.

The film industry of Bangladesh - Bangladesh Film Development Corporation (BFDC) was established in 1957. Since the establishment of the film studio, the theme and story line of Bangla cinema has taken several shifts. The major genre of films made at the end of 1950s and '60s was social realism like *Akash ar Mati* (The Sky and The Soil), *Abanchita* (Unwanted, 1969). In the '70s the genre was social, particularly rural social life such as *Lathial* (The Stick Fighter, 1975), *Sareng Bou* (The Wife of boatswain, 1979); in the '80s costume fantasy like *Nagin* (Serpent-Vergin, 1980), *Beder Meya Jotsna* (The Gypsy Girl Jotsna, 1989). In the '90s there were two genres – teenage romance like *Chadni* (1991) and violence such as *Ammajan* (The Mother, 1999). The 2000 was wholly dominated by violent films with pornographic insertions (Haq, 2008).

There has also been a genre of war movies throughout the years – sometimes with the spirit of the Liberation War and sometime with nationalist spirit. The country's first 'political' film was *Jibon Theke Neya* (Glimpses of Life 1970) by Zahir Raihan. It faced multiple opposition from Pakistan (Raju, 2000). After independence, during 1972-1974 with active encouragement from the government, film industry took the Liberation War as principle theme. Some of the notable war films of that time were, *Ora Agaro Jon* (Those 11 Freedom Fighters, 1972), *Orunodoer Ognisakshi* (In The Flames of Sunrise, 1972), *Alor Michil* (The Procession, 1974) etc.

1.3 Research Objective and Questions

The overall objective of this research is to understand the ways in which the Liberation War of Bangladesh has been represented in movies of Bangladesh and how gender, sexuality and nation have been employed in that representation.

In correspondence with this objective, the main research question is hence: How are gender, sexuality and nationhood used in the cinematic representations of the Liberation War in Bangladesh?

The sub-questions are:

- What aspects of femininities and masculinities, and female and male sexualities dominate the representations? Especially, how are those employed in the representations of sexual violence against women and men?

⁶ See for details Rajadhyaksha (1994), Quader (1993), Zaki (1997), Razu (2000) and Kabir (1979).

- How the nation and national identity are represented within the war discourses, and how are they gendered and sexualized?
- Do the representation strategies vary between Mainstream movies and Independent movies?

1.4 Methodology and Data Collection

This is a qualitative and explorative research based on secondary data. I selected ten movies based on purposive sampling method, for specific reason-differences in the narrative plot, popularity, award winning category, year of release and availability. Most importantly, I selected movies based on the existing categorization of films in Bangladesh - mainstream film and independent films.

Mainstream films have been identified as commercial films that have been released widely all over the country in the movie theatres. Primary goal of these movies is to maximize profits. So they are easily accessible, predictably linear, star centred and tending to tie up a happy ending. They are mainly part of popular culture, although at present the common idea is that mainstream films are throwing popular culture in a crisis, they have no sense of history and are very poor in representing reality (Nasreen & Haq, 2008). Independent films are those that are mainly produced outside the main film studios. Primarily these films were non-commercial, mainly funded by the directors themselves with support of friend and family members. Independent film makers appear to have “at least some social responsibility. They stood against the wave of money-making illusion and presented some remarkable films on Liberation War” (Quader, 1993:22). These films try to provide their audiences with alternative thoughts like raise question to the existing power structure of state, malpractices of society and so on. The target audience of these films are international film festivals and advanced and literate audiences.

Films I analysed based on above mentioned criterion are

	Film	Director (Year)
Mainstream Film	Ora Agaro Jon (Those 11 Freedom Fighters)	Chasi Nazrul Islam (1972)
	Megher Onek Rong (The Rainbow)	Harunur Rashid (1976)
	Kalmilata	Shahidul Huq Khan (1981)
	Aguner Poroshmoni (Touch of Fire)	Humayun Ahmed (1994)
	Joy Jatra (Journey to Victory)	Taukir Ahmed (2004)
Independent Film	Guerilla	Nasiruddin Yousuff (2011)
	Agami (Time Ahead)	Morshedul Islam (1984)
	Nadir Nam Modhumoti (The River Named Modhumoti)	Tanvir Mokammel (1995)
	Etihaas Konya (Daughter of History)	Shameem Akhter (1999)
	Matir Moyna (The Clay Bird)	Tareque Masud (2002)

Ora Agaro Jon is the first Liberation War movie of Bangladesh. *Megher Onek Rong* is the movie praised by several film critiques due to variations in its narrative plot. The film was withdrawn from all cinema theatres just one day after it was released, for yet unknown official reasons (Quader, 1993). *Kalmilata*

is a film of 1981 when Bangladesh was under military rule for the second time. The film was made before 1981 at the reign of President Ziaur Rahman who was the first military ruler of Bangladesh, and it was released on 23rd Dec. 1981 – after the assassination of president Zia – amidst the military rule of president Ershad. *Aguner Poroshmoni* is a national award winning movie directed by Humayun Ahmed – one of the popular novelists of the country. *Joy Jatra* is produced by a private television channel – “Channel I”. Film production by television channels is a recent trend in Bangladesh. The film was firstly released on TV and then in movie theatre. *Joy Jatra* also achieved national cinema award in Best Director category. *Guerrilla* is the latest war movie of Bangladesh based on Syed Shamsul Huque’s novel and the director’s personal war-time experience as a freedom fighter. The movie was released at 13 movie theatres across the country at a time.

Three movies on Liberation War were released in 2011- *Meherjaan*, *Guerrilla* and *Amar Bondhu Rashed* (My Friend Rashed). As stated in the first chapter, *Meherjaan* raised huge controversy all over the country.⁷ *Guerrilla* and *Amar Bondhu Rashed* received both the audience’s and film critique’s compliment. I planned to analyse at least two of these films including *Meherjaan*, but due to the unavailability of *Meherjaan* and *Amar Bondhu Rashed* I analysed *Guerrilla*.

Agami, *Nadir Nam Modhumoti*, *Etihaas Konya* and *Matir Moyna* are four independent movies.. Although there is some controversy around the first independent movie of Bangladesh, “most of the film buffs consider *Agami* as the starting point of independent film making. Because of its critical and commercial success, independent filmmaking arrives as an ‘alternative movement’” (Haq, 2007). *Agami* got the Silver Peacock in the best director category in Delhi International Film Festival in 1985.

Tanvir Mokammel is another pioneer of independent films of Bangladesh. That is why I’ve selected *Nadir Nam Modhumoti*, in addition to its narrative plot. *Etihaas Konya* is directed by a female director Shameem Akhter. It tries to raise some significant questions around the war. *Matir Moyna* won the International Critic’s prize at the 2002 Cannes Film Festival and became Bangladesh’s first film to compete for the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film. Due to some religious overtones, Bangladesh Film Censor Board banned the film, but with the judgement of Appeal Board, the decision of the government was reversed.

I have placed detailed synopsis of these films in *Appendices* and analysed them according to the analytical tools described in chapter two under section 2.4.

⁷ *Meherjaan* is a film I could not see due to its withdrawal from the movie theatres. Nevertheless, I have included a short discussion about the film based on the debate published in daily newspapers in the following chapter, under “Representation of gender in films, particularly in war films”.

1.5 Limitations of the Research

As already stated, my analysis will focus on representational strategies employing gender, sexuality, and nationhood, but not other social relations of power. Furthermore, the proposed research analyses only ten films. This is not enough to make a generalization about the representations of Liberation War movies, but offers insights into some trends. In addition, from my childhood, I have watched films of the Liberation War: in every anniversary national television and all other private TV channels broadcast these movies repeatedly. Thus, I am fairly familiar with the genre and can use my experience in selection and reflections.

Language created a limitation while describing the dialogues in the films. Every language has its own emotion, rhythm, resource that cannot be translated exactly to another language. In Bangladesh, using English subtitle in film is a very recent addition, yet not all films use subtitle. Thus, translating is challenging, specifically keeping in mind the word limits of the dissertation.

Due to personal restrictions, such as the care of my nineteen month old baby, it was not possible for me to go to Bangladesh to collect data. Therefore, I have collected DVDs of the selected films in the Netherlands.

Chapter 2: Drawing Theoretical Connections and Prior Empirical Research

This chapter presents my theoretical perspectives and analytical tools I use to analyse cinematic representations. I use three main analytical concepts: war, gender and the politics of representation, though of course there are many overlaps in terms of sub-groupings and practices. This research can therefore be broken down into two primary areas; the theories related to gender, nation and war and the theories related to the media/cinematic representation.

2.1 Gender and Nation

Researchers (Yuval-Davis and Anthias 1989, Walby, 2000, Enloe, 1990) view nations and national projects as gendered – “whether already stabilised within a nation-state, or energetic political movements aspiring for a state of their own, they hold ideals as to the proper place of women and men in society” (Walby, 2000: 523). The relationship between nation and the state is also seen as gendered, as men and women share differently the goals and responsibilities for a national project.

Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias (1989) provided ground breaking theory exploring the link between nationalism and gender. Drawing from different geographical and political experiences, they sum up various ways in which women can and do participate in ethnic and national processes and in relation to the state practices. Women are: (a) biological reproducers of members of ethnic collectivities; (b) reproducers of the boundaries of the ethnic/national groups, (c) participants in the ideological reproduction of the collectivity and transmitters of its culture; (d) signifiers of ethnic/national differences; (e) participants in national, economic, political and military struggles (Yuval-Davis, 1997). Those women’s roles actually reflect the masculinist definition of femininity and of woman’s ‘proper’ place in the nation.

Classical theorists (i.e. Anderson 1983, Gellner 1983) marginalised the issue of gender in nation formation but praised women’s role as mother. Ideology of ‘woman as mother’ or symbolic representation of woman’s body as the national territory expose the position of women in national projects. Theorists also defined nation as natural expansion of family and kinship relations based on ‘natural’ sexual divisions of labour, in which men protect the women and children (Yuval-Davis, 1997). So what is generally expected from women for the nation is aligned with what is expected from them in the family: caring for others, bearing children, educating etc. Women are subordinated in nationalist movements and politics, being symbolic ‘mother in the fatherland’ (Koonz, in Nagel, 2001) and expected to safeguard the honour of the nation and ‘their’ men.

Cynthia Enloe argues, “nationalism has typically sprung from masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation and masculinized hope” (1990: 45).

Motherland as woman to be protected by brave male warriors is a very common metaphor. It is therefore perceived that the culture and ideology of hegemonic masculinity go hand in hand with the culture and ideology of hegemonic nationalism (Nagel, 2001).

In South Asian perspective, it is argued that the theme of 'women and sacrifice for the nation' is woven into the dominant nationalist thought (Choudhuri, 2000). Lata Mani (1998) analysed the discourse on women, culture and Indian society by critically examining the representation of *sati*⁸ and argued "women are neither the 'subject' nor the 'object' but grounded for discourse of tradition and modernity" (in Manekkar, 1999:107). *Sati* were viewed as 'emblematic of tradition', or 'pathetic or heroic victims'. Even the abolition procedure of *sati* was not on the ground of ethics; it was revived with the logic of "enforcing the truest principle of Hindu religion" (Mani, 1998:15).

Therefore, it can be said that religion has an important place in the discourse of national identity politics particularly in the South Asian context. Religious nationalism also used gendered rhetoric as a political strategy. Agarwal (1995) explained how during 1992/93 Hindu-Muslim riots in India Hindu men were rebuked for not being 'manly enough' to protect the Hindu women and so to protect their national honour. Moreover, rape of 'other' religious group was justified using this language of vindication and dishonour.

Regarding women's participation in Nationalist movement Kabeer (1991) argued, although women participated in the armed struggles for Bangladesh, they relied on the good intentions of the nationalist government to represent their interests and remedy social injustices. But they were accorded a place in state discourse focusing on their domestic role. Researchers⁹ also noticed how the patriarchal Bangladesh excluded women and ethnic and religious minorities from the nationalist discourse.

2.2 Gendered Nature of War

Joshua Goldstein (2001) argues that it is difficult to 'do war' without 'doing gender' and vice versa. He showed, gender norms during war actually reflect the prevailing gender norms of the society. Constructions of manhood and womanhood have been used as the basis for the naturalization of the gender division of labour in wars. Therefore, society tries to develop all men as warrior. To help overcome soldiers' reluctance to fight, cultures develop gender roles that equate 'manhood' with toughness under fire and women are given feminine war support roles (Ibid).

The sexual violence perpetrated in war is gendered from this point of view that all types of sexual attack uphold a metaphorical feminization. It

⁸ *Sati* refers to Hindu widow woman who burns herself to death on her husband's pyre either by choice or by force.

⁹ For instance Mookherjee (2006, 2008, 2011), Mohsin (1984, 2004), Kabeer (1991), Samad (1998), Shafie & Kilby (2009), Hossain (2009), Rahman (2009).

symbolically genders the victor as male and the defeated as female (Goldstein, 2001).

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). 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).

It is also argued that women and girls are the common victims of wartime sexual crime mainly because of their gender, and their bodies are used as figurative and literal sites of combat (Denov, 2006). It can also be said that this is because of the patriarchal society. Where gender inequalities already exist, war actually worsens the existing situation.

Becoming a war refugee is also a gendered experience (Yuval-Davis, 1997). For selective killing in war, most of the time men are selected, taken away, and then disappear. On the other side, as they are often absent, attached to fighting or hiding to avoid being arrested, women, old men and children are left alive.

2.3 Cultural Representation

Stuart Hall describes representation as an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture. It does involve the use of language, of signs and images which stand for or reference objects, people and events in the material world (Hall, 1997). However, the process is not simple or straight forward as they can also reference imaginary things and fantasy world or abstract ideas which are not part of the material world. In fact, representation is the act of re-presenting the object or incidents that connect meaning and language to culture. Meaning are produced at several different sites and circulated through several different processes or practices. Hence, the meaning is not in the object or person or thing nor is it in the world; it is the human being "who fix the meaning so firmly that after a while it comes to seem natural and inevitable" (Ibid: 21). Moreover, the relationship between signs, the concept and the objects is not fixed, but rather entirely arbitrary, intervened by the social, cultural and linguistic convention that change over time, thus never can be finally fixed.

For Hall, ideology and power fixes the meanings. The interpretation of an idea, people or event is constituted through the medium by which it is distributed i.e. image, word, in addition to social and cultural input. The communication of these ideologies is always "linked with power and those groups that have control over what is represented in the media" (Hall, 2006). Thus, those in control of the media have control of the meaning that is represented in the media. Using the example of race, Hall argues that media construct for us a definition of what race is, what meaning the imagery carries and what the 'problem race' is understood to be. Therefore, understanding of

race in the society is through the representation of the society received through media. The media is biased in its representation of different groups of people. Media controls what content we are allowed to invite into our reality and into our world of shared cultural and social perception (Hall, 1996).

2.3a War Films as a Genre

‘Genre’ is a French word meaning ‘type’ or ‘kind’ defined as “a system of codes, conventions and visual styles, which enables an audience to determine rapidly and with some complexity the kind of narrative they are viewing” (Turner, 1999:99). It also includes specific system of expectation and hypothesis which spectators bring with them to the cinema and which interact with film during the course of the viewing process (Ibid).

War film has always been a popular genre all over the world. Generally it contain a certain formula, suggested by Sobchak as a narrative where “a group of men, individuals thrown together from disparate backgrounds ... must be welded together to become a well-oiled fighting machine” (2003:111). Along with the general genre restrictions, war films usually also portray battles of good versus evil and right versus wrong. War films inspires patriotic fervour and a sense of satisfaction in a job well done, reflecting the seemingly undeniable victory for the film producing country (Hill-Parks, 2004). Litchy and Carroll (2008) describe the genre of Hollywood war movies as easy to identify through convention including a plot beginning with training and following a specific unit into battle, troops depicted as heroes; the enemy fanatical.

2.3b Representation of Gender in Film, Particularly in War Film

Feminists like Smelik (1999) observed film as a cultural practice representing myths about women and femininity, as well as about men and masculinity. Clair Johnston (1991) first mentioned how women are mythically represented in movies. Drawing on Roland Barthes' notion of 'myth', she argues women as a structure or convention refers to the ideological meaning that 'woman' is for men and they are represented as 'not –men' (in Smelik, 1999).

Laura Mulvey in her ground-breaking work 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (1975) explained that classical cinema works on the axis of activity and passivity where the binary opposition is gender. Through the concept of scopophilia (desire to see), she argues cinema produce the male characters as 'active' and 'powerful'; female characters as passive and powerless. Dramatic action of cinema is organized around the male characters and women become the object of desire for the male character(s). Cinema has prepared the machinery suitable for male desire (in Smelik, 1999).

Film scholars (Basinger 1995; Gauntlett 2008; Haskell, 1987) also noticed that stereotypes fuel gender representation in films. Female characters are very much passive and let men are the active characters. Nasreen and Haq (2008) researched that the female characters of contemporary mainstream Bangladeshi movies do actually nothing except being the lover girl and therefore a singing partner of hero. Even heroines in profession are not projected in professional life. Contrary to that, men are the heroes in all the films and everything in the plot revolved around them and their actions. Masculinity in culture revolved

around body size of the man, the more muscular the man the more masculine he is (Leham & Lurh, 2003).

Karen Gabriel (2005), in her in-depth research on sexual economies on mainstream Bombay films shows that the construction of sexual economies controls the representation of Bombay cinema and it occurs within normative understandings of gender and sexuality where women's sexual choice interrupts the organization of the sexual economy. She further reveals, cinema as a tool of propaganda whether by government or the industry or by the spectators – they control the representation process.

War has always been presented in media from a patriarchal point of view. Several studies show that media representation supports the theory that popular culture still upholds a masculinist paradigm of war. For instance Zotto (2002) reveals that traditionalism, commercialism and nationalism inform mainstream media, contributing to a gendered coverage of war. Women are seen as passive victims rather than activists and combatants. Even, while with the span of time, other forms of media like journalism and posters started to identify women's different roles, cinematic representations of women focus on dominant imagery and overlook alternative contemporary images (Reynaud, 1999).

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 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 (Masud, 2004).

Nayanika Mookherjee (2002), who did her doctoral thesis on the Liberation War of Bangladesh, finds media's representation strategy gendered. She argues the horrors of rape and raped women in media are predominantly a victim who is muted by the trauma of the war and going through a consequent suffering – physical, social, emotional. Mookherjee (2002) further argues, although the violence on women in war is recognized, what constitutes the history of *Birangona* is still unaddressed.

Saikia (2004) also explored that in media, raped women of 1971 are almost absent, except for news on the rehabilitation programmes, otherwise portraying the subject as 'unthinkable', 'a matter of shame'.

The recent movie *Meherjaan* is an example of what happens to a movie if it does not follow the dominant narrative of war or social construction of gender. This film - directed by a female director Rubaiyat Hossain - portrays a wartime story of love of a local girl (*Meher*) with enemy soldier and agentive role of raped women (*Neela*) who seeks revenge by joining the war. Moreover, there were issues like visibility of women's sexual desire, homosexuality, freedom fighters' tiredness about fighting and indication of the wider structural context within which violence against women is normalized in non-war situation. Such

portrayal introduced huge debate¹⁰ in Bangladesh and the movie was taken out of cinema theatre within 15 days of its release.

If the film is considered a counter narrative of war, its reception is understandable given that “where art is expected to function as reportage, anything outside a dominant narrative of unblemished heroism is seen as insult and hostility” (Mohaiemen, 2011). Hence, the patriarchal Bangladeshi society could not allow different tones that are not woven in the hegemonic discourse about their nationalist movement and also about femininity and female sexuality. It is ‘normal’- if a woman is raped she ‘should hide it’, not exercise her agency. A woman ‘should suppress her sexual desire’. ‘Proper Bengali men’ should feel proud to fight for the country; and most of all, ‘Pakistani soldiers should always be portrayed as villainous’.

2.4 Analytical Tools

For the purpose of the current study I utilized a combination of feminist approach, narrative analysis approach and the Intersectionality perspective. Combination of these three approaches allows for an analysis and understanding of the films’ representation process in relation to society’s existing ideologies.

2.4a Feminist Approach

Feminists argue that communication is gendered and by using feminist approach as a tool of analysis it is possible to identify sex related biases and the social implications of those biases (Deese, 2010).

A key concept in feminist approach is ‘gender’. The post structuralist understanding of gender is continually shifting and interacting in contradictory structural and cultural managements, enacted and articulated in daily life (Zoonen, 1994). Based on post structural explanation, relevant question arising about media discourse are: how is gender discourse constructed in the various ‘moments’ of mediated production? How is gender discourse encoded in media texts; which meaning is available and from which discourses do they draw, what are the related social practices, etc. Such conceptualization of gender as a process and the social interaction and power relation embedded into it were the guideline of my analysis.

2.4b Narrative Analysis

A narrative is defined as organized sequence of events into a whole so that the significance of each event can be understood through its relation to that whole. Therefore, key features of narratives are a) they are chronological (they are representations of sequence of events), b) they are meaningful and c) they are inherently social and produced for a specific audience (Elliott, 2005). Mass media productions are not just an account or representation about events but a

¹⁰See for the debates - Ferdous, Babu, Gayen & Priovashini (2011); Hossain (2011); Mookherjee (2011); Waheed (2011); Chowdhury (2011).

construction of the events created through a narrative and stories within the narrative using textual, audio, visual and other means.

Zarkov (2011) argues, there is usually more than one narrative in media events, often supporting and building each other; sometimes dominant narratives exclude or marginalize alternative accounts of events by silencing them or ridiculing them. In most of the time there is one meta narrative of events that provides the main framework for understanding the meanings of events. She also points out that media narrative often present the world view of special social, corporate, political positions of broadcasters or groups that own, support them and at the same time it is also grounded in historical traditions, myths and their reconstructions in popular ideologies and social practices (e.g. in war related events; Zarkov, 2011). Therefore, this indicates that narratives are represented through the cover of discourses and practices that already exist in a society.

2.4c Intersectionality

Intersectionality addresses the most central, theoretical and normative concern within feminist scholarship by acknowledging the differences among women (Davis, 2008). It addresses the interaction between gender, race and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power (Ibid).

Leslie McCall (in Nash, 2008) has noticed three types of intersectional methodological tools: 'anticategorical complexity' that deconstructs analytical category, 'intracategorical complexity' that look for complexity of lived experience within marginalized groups and 'intercategorical complexity' –used to analyse inequality among social groups. I have used both intracategorical and intercategorical complexity methodology while examining the cinematic representations of war, through the intersectional lens of gender, sexuality and nationhood. It is important to add here that other social relations of power, such as religion, ethnicity and class are also significant for the dynamics of the Liberation War, and certainly for its representation. However, I will not be consistent in examining those intersections due to time and word limitations of this research. For example, I will only look at religion in relation to nationhood, but not gender and sexuality.

To understand the strategic meaning of representation in the larger spectrum of the politics of media representation of gender, sexuality and nationhood in war movies, along with the above dominant approaches, I will also use categorization as an analytical tool, as given by Leudar, Marsland and Nekvapil (2004). The authors explain categorization as a formal analysis of visual and textual representations that gives meaning to the strategies media employ to make sense of other people and their activities. It provides the views that representation and actions are closely related – representations of events provide moral accounts of past actions and prepare the ground for the future actions (Ibid, 2004). Categorization is always situated in a concrete socio-political context, in time and space and given a history to legitimize it.

Chapter 3: Representation of Nation, National Identity and War

This chapter will focus on the representational strategy about the nation, national identity and war. First two segments will analyse how the war movies represented Bangladesh and its national identity and second segment deals with representation of war.

3.1 Gendering the Nation

O my motherland, to thee I bow.
On you are goddess mother's sari's end.
You are mixed with my body; you are mingled with my breath and soul.
Your dark soft image is planted in my essence.
Oh mother, born in your lap, I will die on your breast
I play on you in my joy and sorrow.
You fed me by hand, bathed me in cool water.
You bear all, carry all, you are mother's mother.

Above song by Rabindranath Tagore was used at the very starts of *Ora Agaro Jon*. Through this song the country was addressed as mother and the country's activities toward its citizen were compared with the care of a mother and maternal body for her children. This feminization of the nation through the symbol of mother actually indicates the essentialist gender roles for women within nationalist discourses.

Representation of the nation as mother is found similar in independent films if we concentrate on the following conversation:

“Bachu – What does country mean? Is it paddy field, jute field, river?”

Akhter- It is more than that...Mother and mother land is holier than heaven. Listen carefully, as if a mother is crying. The country is now in deep sorrow”

(Film- Nodir Nam Modhumoti)

Here, the mournful image of mother as “crying” depicts pathos and pain and encourage a patriotic feeling. Because the mother is attacked and raped, she needs protection and urges her sons to remain vigilant, make supreme sacrifices for her cause or for the protection of her honour.

Therefore, woman's position in the nationalist discourse of Bangladesh is restricted within women of certain categories – those who have the procreation capacity. Those who are not part of this maternal model are not included. This is reminiscent of Werbner's theory of “political motherhood” (in Mookherjee, 2008) which is situated at the point that breaks down public/private dichotomy. Werbner argues such feminization of citizenship responsibilities portrayed women not as victims but rather as active agents concerned for family and community. In return, the nation also demands citizenship

responsibilities from its 'sons' to protect and preserve women's honour and purity. This prescribed role of protector and preserver of honour actually establishes hegemony of men over women.

Tagore's song hailing the mother incorporates nature imagery in an attempt to make a connection between several separate cultural and aesthetic constructs, nature, space, earth and motherhood. Using this aesthetic notion of nature, linking it with motherly image, was seen as an inevitable part of the complex sentimentality of the nationalistic feeling of Bangladesh (Kaviraj, 2007). Thus nature has given both political and emotive meaning to invoke nationalism. This is the 'selfing of nature' (Ibid) – giving meaning to abstract image and place through the self. In this representation nature stands for the symbol of beauty, purity and sacred entity while the aesthetics of 'mother Bengal' retell the mother's image as sacred, pure and beautiful as the nature.

The process of representation of gendered nation is evident in the war discourse of Bangladesh. Although women became the ground upon which nationalism flourished, their role has been authorized only within the domestic paradigm: as mother, wife, sister, nurse. Moreover, being only in the role of mother, their sexuality was denied and it was limited to the realms of reproduction and child rearing. Respectability and chastity of mother subverted the existence of raped women in that discourse. In this context, raped women and those mothers who were impregnated unwillingly during war were excluded from the nationalist discourse (will discuss further in chapter 4).

3.2 Construction of National Identity- Intersections with Religion

National identity is not represented only as gendered but also in intersection with religion. Since religion has been used in nation building process of Bangladesh (discussed in chapter 1) through instituting religious ideals into the state structure (Mohsin, 1984), independent film makers have promoted 'national' identity in opposition to the political endeavour of forming an Islamic national identity.

Realising the importance of cinema in forming a secular and democratic Bangladesh, independent film makers organized Independent Film Movement in the mid '80s with the notion to raise the spirit of Bengali nationalism considering it as the only inspiration of Liberation War and to resist religious communalism in the form of Islamism. They mainly focused on Islam as a negative component of the society as a way to resist Islamic communalism.

As a consequence, *Razakars* (Pakistani agent) became one of the common characters of independent movies, visualized as a representative of orthodox Muslim or in the role of *Moulobi* (Muslim priest). They were typically represented as wearing traditional Muslim dresses like *pajama-panjabi*, Islamic cap and beard. This became a stereotypical character who, despite being religious, was involved in atrocious activities like killing, slaughtering, raping, snatching others' assets, etc. (e.g. *Agami*; *Nodir Nam Modhumoti*).

It is true that *Razakars* of the '71 were members of different Islamic political parties. However, not all of them wore Islamic dress or were aged persons as the films represented. Many of them used western dresses i.e. T-

shirts, trousers and were young like freedom fighters represented in the films. Not all *Moulobi* were *Razakar* in '71 (Haq, 2008). Hence, I argue, combining Islamic mannerism with an absolutely negative war role has the motive to propagate anti-Islamic ideology to its audience.

Moreover, despite of three different roots of the Bangladeshi community - Bengaliness, Muslimness and folk religion (Haq, 2008) these film makers wanted to accept only *Bengaliness* - the ethno linguistic identity. They represented this identity within the framework of 'modernity' and 'progressiveness' portraying Muslimness as the 'other', as an 'anti-modern force'. The identity of ethnic minorities is also excluded from this 'modern' discourse. However, this is also an effort to propagate a homogenized national identity through *Bengaliness*, locating Muslimness and other ethnicities outside or against it.

Image 1: Islamic Kazi with a background of 'modern' Bangladesh



Source : Film – Matir Moyna (2002)

The framework of modernity has been represented from another perspective in *Matir Moyna* (image 1) through the reflection of conflict between Islamic and anti-Islamic characters, *Kazi* and *Milon*. *Kazi* is the representative of old, orthodox Muslims who sends his son *Anu* to *Madrasa* for education. Contrarily, *Milon* - young, liberal and progressive, influences the boy *Anu* with his beliefs and practices. *Anu* does not like *Madrasa*'s culture, and during the Liberation War he leaves it as a symbolical representation of his quest for a modern way of life.

Therefore, to resist Islamic national identity, independent film makers, like the state authorities, tend to 'other' Islam.

3.3 Representation of War

This part discusses how the selected films framed the war narratives and what changes and shifts in representation process have been observed within those narratives. First, I will define how the categories of 'victim' and 'perpetrator' in the 1971 war have been represented, then what is the tendency of representation in relation to the historic time lines and social, political context.

3.3a Victim vs. Perpetrators, Self-vs. Other

Representations of victims and perpetrators in the selected films followed simplistic modes – West Pakistan as ‘enemy’ and ‘perpetrators’, Bengalis as ‘victim’. The West Pakistani soldiers were represented as killers of innocent people including children and women, rapists, savages (*Kalmilata*), unjust - depriving Bengalis of their legal rights (*Ora Agaro Jon*). Contrary to that, Bengalis were visualised as kind, humane (*Aguner Poroshmoni*), respectable, responsible (*Ora Agaro Jon*), and careful. Killing by the Bengali freedom fighters was justified as a response to the aggressive attacks and injustice of the West Pakistanis, thus, a way of taking revenge on the ‘janwar’ (animal) like enemy (*Kalmilata*).

Clearly, the identity construction of West Pakistani soldiers and Bengali freedom fighters followed a juxtaposition of binary logic between ‘self’ vis-à-vis the ‘other’ where Bengalis are the ‘self’ and West Pakistanis are the ‘other’. Representation of the West Pakistanis as ‘other’, with negative attributes, was used to provide a moral ground for the Bengalis’ actions. Hence, the same activities (shooting, killing) done by Bengalis were represented as rational, deserved and justifiable. Recalling the category analysis of Leudar, Marsland and Nekvapil (2004) it is very clear that this categorization relies on oppositional context like brutal vs. kind, rapist vs. respectful to women, unjust vs. just.

Compared to the mainstream movies, the focus of independent movies was more on the enemy within the country than on the West Pakistan. It was the Bengali collaborating forces who received maximum emphasis as enemies. So, in independent movies, Bengali collaborating forces were represented as the ‘other’ guilty of ‘opportunism’, ‘mercilessness’, ‘rape’, and ‘brutality’ (*Agami; Nodir Nam Modhumoti*). The freedom fighters were constructed as the ‘self’ who possessed the opposite characteristics, just as in mainstream movies.

3.3b Framing of War - Trends and Changes Within the Narratives

Visualization of war in the mainstream movies mostly revolved around the specific incidents of 1971 like killing of innocent Bengalis, looting, capture of property, abduction, rape of women etc. But how once cherished Pakistan become an enemy is not very clearly depicted. Maybe this is because of “the difficulties in narrating a historical event in popular cultural form” (Viswanath & Malik, 2009). Yet, both the mainstream and independent movies have their own point of view regarding the issue of war.

Generally, war movies follow a linear narrative of war like - there is an enemy party who unjustly invade the territory or attacked the innocent people and there is a native group who fights against the invasion and sacrifices their lives for the sake of their ‘motherland’. At the end, the enemy party had to surrender and the story finished with the theme of triumph of good over evil. Mainstream movies of Bangladesh are also to some extent a reflection of such linear narrative of war: West Pakistan is the enemy and freedom fighters are the heroes. Nevertheless, West Pakistan’s presence in movies was not very visible except the presence of soldiers participating in the war and in some cases in Radio news, like Radio Pakistan, “*Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendre*” (Free Bengal Wireless Station) or Voice of America. In some movies, the name of

West Pakistan was not even uttered. Instead of introducing the enemy clearly they were addressed as ‘military’, ‘*hanader*’ (attacker) ‘*dokholdar*’ (occupier), or ‘*janwar*’ (animal). For instance, in *Kalmilata* the name of West Pakistan or Pakistan was not mentioned in a single statement. The film used indirect words: ‘*they want to kill us*’, ‘*enemy is coming forward*’, ‘*torture by military is increasing day by day*’. Even in the issue of local collaborators there is a message of forgiveness: “*we should hate the crime not the criminals*”. Moreover, *Razakars* activities were not clearly portrayed in the film.

Clearly, mainstream movies do not have a historical or objective documentary approach to war but represent personal statement of directors and their own understanding of the event, coupled with dominant notions of nationhood and patriotism. Yet, this particular strategy of representation indicates a specific resemblance with the country’s changing status of political ideology of the ‘80s when the government was trying to improve relation with Pakistan. Keeping Pakistan hidden in the war discourse and also hiding *Razakar*’s brutal activities, is an attempt to create a positive socio-political environment so that their actions do not seem to be ‘unusual’. *Kalmilata* was released at the midst of changing political ideology of Bangladesh when the party of JI, which is publicly termed as ‘party of *Razakrs*’, was started to be patronized by the government. Hence the representation in this film is an attempt to support government’s activities, to lessen Pakistan’s responsibility and to act as a pro-government agent.

Moreover, this is the first film of Bangladesh that somehow upholds the role of Bangladesh Army in Liberation War. Accordingly, this representation of Army as leaders is obviously a new aspect of war movies of Bangladesh. Earlier, and even after this film, heroism of civilians and middle class young freedom fighters was dominant in representations. Bangladesh Army, Bangladesh Police, and Bangladesh Rifles (BDR)¹¹ were totally absent. New visibility of the Army, it may be argued, carried the influence of the military government and of President Major General Ziaur Rahman, who was the commander of Sector 1 and later of Z Force during the war, and had the intention to highlight Army’s role in achieving independence. The photographic comparison (Image 2) between Zia and the commander of Army in the film shows how one role had inspired the other.

¹¹ A para-military force of Bangladesh that also heroically participated in the war, now renamed as Boarder Guard Force (BGD).

Image 2: Comparison between President Ziaur Rahman (left) and filmic army officer (right)



Source: Film – *Kalmilata* (1981)

Contrary to *Kalmilata*, *Etibaas Konya* tried to give an opposite message to its audience. The film demanded trials of war criminals, apologies from Pakistan's government, and investigation about Pakistani citizen's wartime role. Pakistani female character was acted by Sara Zaker, a Bengali actress. The textual analysis of these two films reveals quite different types of representation. However, if we move from textual analysis to contextual analysis, we will find, these two films were produced and released in different socio-political contexts. *Kalmilata* was released in a military atmosphere of '80s whereas *Etibaas Konya* was released after the mass upheavals of '90s – in a democratic environment. Moreover, with the international recognition of rape as a war crime, the issue of sexual violence in Liberation War re-emerged in the public discourse (Mookherjee, 2003). Hence, directly or indirectly, these films were influenced by the socio-political contexts of '80s and '90s.

Accordingly, *Guerilla* also highlighted directly war time role of Pakistan army and *Razakars*, specifically JI's role. I would like to argue that this representation is also influenced by the present political context of Bangladesh and have some motifs to influence the war crime trials of Bangladesh. The ideology of director Nasiruddin Yousuff - a freedom fighter and one of the members of GHADANIC- is clearly exposed in this film. The production and distribution of *Guerilla* is at the time when BAL started Trials of war criminals. So far, the criminals who were arrested and brought to trial are all members of JI Bangladesh (Khan, 2010). In *Guerilla*, *Razakars* were boldly represented as members of JI. Their brutal activities were represented so vividly and so many times that it obviously indicates the consequence of political context on the film, and the hopes to have impact on the current political elites.

Therefore, with the case of films like *Etibaas Konya* and *Guerilla* it is not only the influence of social context that inspired the directors to look at the issue from different standpoint, it is also a matter of the directors' personal background and interest.

Representation of *Razakars* only through Islamic mannerism or in the characters of *Moulubi* has changed in new millennium. For instance, *Joy Jatra* and *Guerrilla* has the characters of *Razakars*. Simultaneously, they have two other characters: *Taslim Sarder* (*Guerrilla*) and *Imam* (Muslim priest, *Joy Jatra*) who are just the opposite of 'Razakar'. *Joy Jatra*'s *Imam* protested against the atrocious attack of Pakistani military and he is the first martyr of the film. On the contrary, *Taslim Sarder*, being a motivated Muslim, even with typical Muslim attire was represented as protesting against misdeeds of *Razakars*, conscious about women's honour, supported freedom fighters, helped them to escape from Pakistani attack and was eventually killed by the *Razakars*.

The changing ideology about the role of *Moulubi* or the intention to represent Islam positively has a causal relation with 9/11. One of the effects of 9/11 was that the West started to look at Islam and Muslim as the 'other', as the enemy, terrorist. So, while earlier some film makers wanted to be the part of Western modernity by depicting Muslimness as the 'other', after 9/11, they formed symbolic community with that 'other' Muslim, turning it into the 'self'. Furthermore, Haq (2008) argues, due to the changing global politics, audience will also prefer to see Muslim characters in the film in a positive role, even with the sentiment of Liberation War.

3.4 Concluding Thoughts

From the above discussion, a number of representational strategies can be summarised. The first strategy is the metaphoric representation of the nation as mother. The notion of 'sacredness' and 'purity' become an inevitable traits of mother that relates to Butalia's argument: "sacredness and purity is essential for self-legitimizing the nation and the community" (1998:144). This iconography has given the state a 'logical ground' to discuss the history of rape only in collective form and also to aestheticize this brutal history in Bangladesh's nation building project.

Second, representation of national identity followed the dichotomous representation between 'self' and 'other'- Bengaliness as the 'self' and Muslimness and other ethnicities as the 'other'. This representation tends to overlook the existence and rights of the 'other', promotes incorporation of dominant community.

Third, mainstream movies like *Kalmilata* used war discourse to propagate government's activities. Contrary to this, independent films (*Agami*; *Nodir Nam Modhumot*) followed the same strategy to exercise their own agenda to protest government's activities. Hence, although independent movies did not work as pro-government agents, it is undeniable that they tried to highlight their own viewpoint by implying specific representation strategy around the issue of Liberation War.

Fourth, process of representation has been changed over time depending on national and global change. Contextual analysis of state's and world's socio - political shifts helps to unveil the reason behind changes in representational strategies of films and changes in film makers' agenda.

Chapter 4: Femininity and Female Sexuality

This chapter presents analysis and findings related to the question of femininity and female sexuality mentioned in sub question 1.

4.1 Three Faces of Womanhood - Service Provider, Source of Inspiration, Emotional

The majority of women represented in these films were in the role of supporters and service providers like cooking for the male warriors, collecting funds, nursing etc. These roles are explicitly represented as less important than men's role of fighting. When *Khosru (Ora Agaro Jon)* was trying to acknowledge the service of a cook, she replied, "*you are fighting for the country, compared to that I am doing nothing*". While, implicit intention in this statement was to highlight freedom fighters contribution, another meaning has emerged from the practice of "private patriarchy" (Walby, 1990) which considers household work as woman's 'essential' duty, hence valueless.

Guerilla is considered as one of the most progressive cinematic ventures in the history of war movies in Bangladesh due to its unorthodox selection women as the main protagonist and thereby, emphasizes the contribution of women freedom fighters. The director reveals this while talking to journalists:

"Countless women actively took part in the war and sacrificed their lives as fearlessly as their male counterparts. But when it comes to documentation, whether historical or artistic, all we find is an incomplete list of rape victims who, too, were badly treated after the war. Well, then what about the real female fighters? Have we ever paid a tribute to their immense contribution? That's why I've cast a strong female fighter as my protagonist" (Munim, 2011).

It is true; *Bilkis* in *Guerilla* is more heroic and active than any other female character in the war movies of Bangladesh. She courageously works with other male freedom fighters, wants to go to India to find her husband, risks her life providing grenades and explosives to co-fighters, works as messenger, delivers supportive ingredients, publishes a bulletin in support of war, installs explosives at the Pakistan Army's dinner party and so on. Yet, these are all auxiliary jobs compared to fighting on the battlefield, which male characters *Alam*, *Shahadat* or *Bilkis*'s brother *Khokon* frequently do in the film. It seems that the film could not cross the last dividing gender line and show a woman actually fighting in a battle.

Interestingly, the director could not overlook *Bilkis*'s domestic responsibilities – she was represented not only as a selfless, committed freedom fighter and a banker by profession but also an ideal housewife who could not overlook her domestic duties. Therefore, *Bilkis* was represented as the paragon 'perfect woman' who excels in both her public and private sphere as described by Lughod (1998). Moreover, it may be argued that by splitting *Bilkis*'s life between conventional binary opposition – public and private sphere - showing her heartiest efforts to balance between these two, the film indeed

highlighted how problematic it is for women of Bangladesh to enter into a warlike situation.

Megher Onek Rong also represented women's contribution but again, in the stereotypical role –of a nurse, a supportive character who rather than acting agentially, reacts to the conflict and violence around her and to the incidents happening in her life. Furthermore, the romantic relationship between the doctor (*Dr. Omor*) and nurse (*Mathin*) is a very typical representation in most war films. When a nurse becomes a soldier's or doctor's girlfriend, these two roles blend into one another.

This is the only one of the selected films that represents 'other' ethnic group. Yet it represents the Bengali ethnicity as superior (Bengali man as husband, ethnic woman as wife; Bengali man as doctor, ethnic woman as nurse).

The main focus of the film is to represent an 'eternal image' of a woman as mother. *Mathin* possesses the urge to be a mother but hesitates to accept her husband's previous son. At last the '*motherhood hiding into every woman*' achieves the victory. She embraces the child with motherly love. Although *Mathin* had several questions, confusions and, objections regarding her husband's silence around the matter, by accepting the child she was represented as a 'good mother' who reproduces socially dominant discourse about motherhood: there is no rigidity of right or wrong in the relation between a mother and a child. Mother-child relationship achieved more importance than husband-wife relationship.

Mothers were also represented as a source of inspiration who sacrificed their sons for independence (*Ora Agaro Jon; Kalmilata*). For instance, in *Kalmilata*, *Moti*'s mother supported *Moti* in his decision to go to war. Even when his dead body was brought back, she strongly protested saying: "*Why do you bring him back? He told me he would come back after the country become independent! The country is not freed, why did you bring him?*" In response to her patriotic bravery she was admired by the freedom fighters, "*If Bangladesh would have a mother like you in every house, it could have avoided being exploited for 23 years*".

Portrayal of woman as mother and as a source of inspiration is actually a combination of "motherhood, maternity and sacrifice" – indicating three essentialist capacities of women – reproduction, child rearing, and sacrifice. These three capacities are indeed the means through which society maintains patriarchy. Women's child bearing and child rearing functions are seen as 'natural' and 'inevitable'. Consequently, inability to conceive is regarded as a severe threat to ideas of womanhood – unless the childless woman rears a child of another woman. Sacrifice is the main prerequisite for a 'good mother' – it is regarded as the central feature of the ideology of motherhood and is linked with women's 'happiness'. As Seiter demonstrated, "motherhood is discussed only in terms of suffering and sacrifice, omitting through either oversight or deliberate neglect the promise of happiness that should 'naturally' have been the result" (1986:65). The stereotype of the 'good mother' supposes that the capacity to sacrifice is innate in all women. This concept is the product of an oppressive patriarchal social structure, where this mythic ideal quality is impossible to achieve, and therefore put extra burden on women.

Agnner Poroshmoni portrays the image of emotional woman through the character of *Ratri* who was represented as a typical Bengali woman who possesses natural beauty but is governed by her emotions - she cries while reading a novel, suffers from nightmares and eventually falls in love with *Bodi* (freedom fighter cum hero). Although for the first part of the film, she was very annoyed with the hero thinking him just an outsider, when she discovered his real identity as a freedom fighter; she instantly falls in love with him. The symbol of his impressive masculinity was his rifle: after seeing him with the rifle *Ratri*'s feelings turned around. The rifle made the difference between the two *Bodi*'s – from an annoying, foreign man to a lovable man. Here the message can be translated this way: to win female hearts, show your real manhood by signing up for the war and wearing guns.

Ratri's emotional nature is mainly based on the stereotype that women are more emotional as well as more emotionally expressive and more skilled in the use of non-verbal emotional cues (e.g. laughing, crying, annoyance) than men (Brody, 2008). Contrary to *Ratri*, we see in *Ora Agaro Jon* the male hero was urging his friend to control his emotions.

4.2 Imaging Rape

Rape was one of the common themes of Bangladeshi war movies and was invariably represented as being committed either by the Pakistani Army or by their local Bengali collaborators. Within the rape discourses in the selected movies I have noticed three different features, which I discuss below.

4.2a A Distinct Category

Film like *Kalmilata* represented raped women as a distinct category by shooting them in parallels. For example, the anonymous refugee woman who was raped by the Pakistan soldier and lost her husband and daughter in the same military attack is portrayed as totally distressed, hunted by the atrocious memory and always remembering her previous happy family life. Moreover, she was represented as having lost all interest in material life. *Banu*, the heroine of the film, was trying to bring the refugee woman back to life but she (*Banu*) reacted same way when she too was raped. Although we see *Banu* exercised her agency in later life involving herself in the struggle to survive, determined not to beg for support from her rich uncle strongly announcing, “*it is sure everyone will die, still then we should fight for life*”. She also submits to and reproduces patriarchal prejudices about sexuality and femininity concerning rape. When her beloved *Koli*, who lost one leg in the war, offered to marry her, she rejected him saying: “*I won't be able to form a family ever in my life*”. She thinks that being raped she no longer possesses the capability of morality for marriage and motherhood. Although she proposes “*If any day I can remove this disgrace, I will submit myself to you*”, it is obvious, in a society like Bangladesh, where losing virginity makes a women more vulnerable than a one-legged man, the woman will never be able to gain the moral courage to start her marital life.

Banu and the above mentioned refugee woman function as parallels within the film. Both condemn their fate, assuming their future to be hopeless and helpless. Such representation reinforces the assumption that all rape victims are subject to the same treatment, same fate, and same life structure without hope

of forming a family or being happy in life. Additionally, although rape is universally acknowledged as a gendered strategy of war violence, the films portray rape as an inevitable female fate. So the film also instigates the Bengali audience's prejudice expressed in an utterance: 'all is God's will'

Image 3: stereotypical images of raped woman



Source: Film – Ora Agaro Jon (left, 1972) & Nodir Nam Modhumoti (right, 1995)

Symbolic representation of raped women through the stereotypical markers (Image 3) of messy hair and dress, loosely draped *sari*¹², vacant look in eyes, listless walking, imbalanced and hysterical behaviour, is observed as the most common way of framing raped women both in mainstream and independent movies. These common body images are intended to testify to their shocking experience. Research shows that women may face mental unwellness, damage to self-esteem, depression, etc. from the shock they experience (Jordan et al, 2010). Hence, this image also symbolically represents their distress and victimhood – that the incident of rape demolished not only their body but also their life. However, when this representation is applied consistently and stereotypically to every and all raped women, its problematic link is exposed to the social norms of female sexual 'chastity' and 'purity'.

4.2b Female 'Chastity', 'Purity' and Three Unavoidable 'Solutions'

Although raped women of 1971 were declared 'War Heroines', their portrayal in films was as victims rather than heroines. The message surrounding the 'victimhood' is very clear - rape means disgrace, shame, destruction, disappointment. That is why *Banu (Kalmilata)*, *Mita (Ora Agaro Jon)* and *Ruma (Megher Onek Rong)* are all shown to feel that they are "*not able to live with such disgrace ...have lost all of their lives, only death can save*". This is because the discourse around rape in Bangladesh is limited to a context where chastity plays the most

¹² Local dress used by Bengali women.

important social role for women (Hossain, 2009). The metaphor applied to raped women having ‘lost their all’, reinforces a prevalent social norm – that “a women’s ‘all’ lies in her virginity in the case of unmarried women, in her chastity in the case of married women, and in a woman’s sexual exclusivity in general” (Islam, 2009:26). Hence, raped women become stigmatised as ‘fallen’, ‘nosta’ (damaged), ‘sinners’ who have lost their moral position in the society, and with it a chance to marry their beloved or to return to their husband.

Therefore, relying on the myth of female ‘virginity’, and ‘chastity’, the films repeatedly used symbolic purging of such “transgressive females” (Hoek, 2010) from society, to restore the moral order. Death is offered as a primary and immediate solution. Importantly, death is justified by the ‘realisation’ of the victim that the crime which occurred against her is a shame and she is responsible for her fate, *Ruma* in *Megher Onek Rong*, thus declares, ‘*What will I do with my life? I don’t want to live any more. I can’t survive with this shame and disgrace, it is impossible for me*’. She decides to commit suicide. Accordingly, *Shila* and *Keya* (*Ora Agaro Jon*), *Konika* (*Etibaas Konya*), *Hasu’s mother* (*Agami*) embraces same solution - either by choice or due to the cruel torture of the perpetrators.

Sometimes even woman’s choice of death, rather than being raped, is glorified in the films. *Bilkis* (*Guerilla*) killed herself through a suicidal explosion in army camp. When caught by the army and about to undergo sexual assault, she resisted. Rather allowing her body to be molested she blows herself up, simultaneously destroying the enemy camp. Thus, the director actually follows the dominant norms of femininity and reinforced the myth of women’s sexual chastity implying that death is preferable to being raped.

Another solution prescribed for sexually violated women is – silence. *Etibaas Konya* portrays both remedies (death and silence) simultaneously. Two women – *Konok* and *Konika* who were kept in the army camp and faced sexual violence made different decisions about their lives. After independence, *Konok*’s family members all having been killed in the war, both women returns to *Konika*’s family home. Both of them remain absolutely silent about rape. Later *Konika* commits suicide and *Konok* continues with her silence.

In fact, in a patriarchal society like Bangladesh – major decisions about sexuality are determined by the dominant group. Hence, if anything happened which does not match the dominant ‘social norm’, individuals do submit. The importance of virginity of women and the ‘established values’ around female sexuality are important for a woman to be respected or even to survive. As *Konika* came back to such a society and she had all the familiar faces around her who repeatedly make her remember about the incidents and her status in the society. She surrendered to her life failing to face the ‘society’ again and again. On the contrary, *Konok*, being a sheltered woman, and comparatively relieved from social pressure as she was anonymous in this surrounding, could manage to hide herself and so she survived. But she became silent.

Silencing the rape victims also has its roots in the silence about female sexuality. It is a duality of the national politics where by state proclamation raped woman has become available as a public idiom for female sexuality. Judith Butler calls this “regulation that states what it does not want stated” (in Hoek, 2010:146). In reality, the stories about the torture women endured during war were mostly bypassed as being ‘too terrible to describe’. Over the

years, less and less information was available on rapes, with government officials claiming that the material had been lost, destroyed or was not easily accessible (Islam, 2010).

We can explain *Konok*'s attempt to survive as her agentive role, but actually both *Konok* and *Konika* were silent. They didn't protest, didn't share, and were even discouraged from share. They were basically controlled by social 'values' and 'norms'. Representational strategies thus supported the national narrative as stated by Hossain (2009) and Saikia (2004) where the raped women were not allowed any space or freedom to speak about the violence inflicted on their minds and bodies during the nine months period. To avoid social stigma, to save their and their family's face, most importantly due to the absence of support groups, they were supposed to seal their mouths.

Marriage with the rapist is the third solution provided in the films. *Shanti (Nadir Nam Modhumoti)* confirms the value of 'chastity of a woman' from this perspective. Through the characterization of *Shanti* – widowed daughter of a Hindu teacher, the message is conveyed that even marrying a rapist is more moral option for the woman than being raped. *Shanti* therefore asks *Motaleb* (killer of her father and occupier of her property) to marry her before he rape her. The marriage indicates that irrespective of religion and cast, society feels more comfortable with raped woman marrying the rapist than being sexually available to a man who is not her husband, even in a war situation, where rape has been used as a weapon.

Applying the incidents of *Shanti* to the broader context, it may be argued that such representation reinforces the socio-cultural values that consider marriage to be a moral and religious shield. General presumption is that married individuals may have lower victimisation rates than unmarried persons. Moreover, although victimisation by violence varies according to gender, race, ethnicity and religion, benefits of marriage are seen as a universal shield. *Shanti* – being a woman and a member of the minority Hindu community, was more exposed to sexual violence, as well as subject to lose her land property. Although *Shanti* is a wartime story, it also echoes Amena Mohsin's argument about the situation of religious minority women in independent Bangladesh - "since the principles and ideology of the state is to privilege the dominant community, it threatened individuals autonomy" (1984:488). Hence Hindu women become most vulnerable among the vulnerable. That is why *Shanti* needs the protection of a Muslim husband – even the one who raped her - at the cost of her religion and sexuality.

The case of *Shanti* discloses the male hegemony of the state power of Bangladesh that works to deprive and marginalize women from centres of power. Oppression of vulnerable groups such as religious minorities has a specifically victimising effect on minority women, reinforcing the underlying patriarchal nature of the country (Guhathakurta, 2008).

4.2c Masculine Gaze and Visual Pleasure

Jean Marsden (1996) argues, representation of rape is used since seventeenth century as a strategy for sexual display. Projection of rape in war movies of Bangladesh can also be analysed as a form of sexual display. The

cinematography of rape scenes or the image of distressed women is the purposeful representation of female sexuality. The literal visualisation of rape of *Ruma* (*Megher Onek Rong*), involves a close-up shot of upper portion of her body while she is being raped, a scene in which the rapist tears her blouse, thus exposing her brassiere and focuses on soldier's laughter and pleasure (image 4). These shots are an intentional reproduction of sexual imagery and are fundamentally voyeuristic where spectators are the voyeurs and the female character's vulnerable and exposed position is the object of the collective gaze. A common feature of the representation of rape – woman's struggle to resist the rape (*Agami*) and her eventual overpowering - transform the rape into a pleasure spectacle, returning to a male fantasy of control and possession of female sexuality.

The post - rape representation of *Keya* (*Ora Agaro Jon*) standing before the drawn rifles of the enemy was actually erotic. In this footage, she is shown wearing two pieces of cloth that hardly cover her body. She holds one piece of cloth over her breast as a cover. The condition of her clothing signifies both her vulnerability as well her sexuality (Image 5). The way she stands before the camera, the action of covering her breasts, and above all, the long shot which pans slowly from her bloody legs to her face all seem to exhibit the rape victim as a sexual object. The camera traces the contours of her body in voluptuous detail, actually accommodating the viewer's gaze.

Image 4: The rapist and the raped woman



Source : Film – *Megher Onek Rong* (1976)

Image 5: Raped women at the shooting target with anonymous persons (left image), close up long shot from leg to breast (right image)



Visual significance of rape in the war movies of Bangladesh is supported by film theorist Laura Mulvey: “women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness. Women displayed as sexual object is the leitmotif of erotic spectacle, she holds the look, plays to and signifies male desire” (Mulvey 1975/2001:346). Hence, the representation of rape scenes is the accumulation of several elements: woman in her sexual victimization, the camera accommodating the gaze of the viewer and indicating the intentions or actions of the rapist, and the ideologies of the director dictating the scene. Therefore, the politics of representation of rape turn women’s pain into her ‘sexiness’, so rape becomes titillation.

4.4 Concluding Thoughts

This chapter examined the representational strategies around femininity and female sexuality. Through the application of analytical tools, I have identified several key features of representation. Women are represented as a supportive force in war, not directly fighting the armed conflict. The visualization of women is influenced by the dominant notion of femininity existing in patriarchal society – highlighting their ‘essential’ femininity (motherhood,

domestic responsibility). Women are symbolised as victims of war, particularly victims of sexual violence. All the victims are framed as a distinct category with similar stereotypical markers of victimhood.

Within this victimhood, femininity was represented as sexual cinematic material, hence, subject to male gaze. The context of ‘chastity’ and ‘purity’ determined by the patriarchal society played an important role in representing the ‘fate’ (rape and consequent silence or death) of War Heroines. Finally, messages conveyed around femininity in mainstream and independent films are the same.

Chapter 5: Dominance of Masculinity and the Politics of Visibility and Invisibility

The prevalence of the war/masculinity relationship is considered to be grounded on some commonalities like aggression, rationality or physical courage that are identified both as essential components of war and also of masculinity (Hutchins, 2008). This chapter discusses how this relation has been portrayed in Bangladeshi war movies.

5.1 Masculine Men – Eligible to be Freedom Fighter

Ora Agaro Jon is considered as “absolutely a war movie” (Islam, 2001). It shows 11 freedom fighters, all of whom are male and heroic. They dare and are capable to fight without arms, snatching them from the enemy. Through traditional and stereotypical warrior imagery, the film reinforces the idea that ‘war is a masculine activities’.

In the film, the group was led by *Khosru* – visualized as a macho man (Image 6).

Image 6: Macho masculine freedom fighter



Source: Film – Ora Agaro Jon (1972)

His leadership qualities were represented by his masculine muscle, responsibility towards the country and also towards his comrades, toughness while fighting and influences over fellow combatants. On the other hand, he is sympathetic while consoling victims. However, he reproduces gendered divides by scolding his friend “*we should not cry, tears do not match in our eyes*” reinforcing stereotypical manhood lessons embedded in ‘patriarchal masculinity’ (Nagel 2001). Such manhood oblige a self-destructive identity, a mechanistic denial, shrinkage of the self that to be a ‘proper man’ one should destroy ones vulnerable side, to avoid the tag of ‘femininity’.

In *Kalmilata*, there was an attempt to represent female combatants. Arms are seen being distributed among them and they are given fighting training. But

this promising start reaches no conclusion. In no scene are women shown fighting in the front. On the contrary, every young man is depicted as willingly participated in the war. Even *Koli* – who had no interest in material life or injustice done by West Pakistan - was accused by his brother of ‘irresponsibility’ and could not avoid the patriotic call of the country. In fact, this is one of the main reasons why men go to war – to avoid being called ‘coward’, ‘wimp’, ‘pussy’. Avoidance of ‘patriotic call’ may bring the risk of disdain and separation from the family or community (Nagel, 2001). Thus, to avoid such discredit and to be an ‘honourable’ member of society men try to response positively to the call of arms.

Joy Jatra depicts a different story of the Liberation War where a group of affected people start an uncertain journey to escape. Here, *Boidhan* represents hegemonic masculinity. From the very beginning of the journey, he leadership of the team. At the midst of highest tension he decides to fight declaring “*it is time to fight. Sitting hours after hours made us cowards, we should fight*”. In the real world men take part in wars for various reasons – for money, honour, patriotism, brotherhood, in self-defence, for liberation, to liberate others (Cockburn, 2001). But male positioning in patriarchal gender system, and the masculine identities it generates, ignore these reasons. The construction of the masculine fighting force dominates : to be a real man is to be ready to fight and ultimately to kill or to be killed.

Looking through gendered lens, this journey resembles the patriarchal structure of society – a journey governed by men, and women in assisting roles. In fact, masculinity is the discourse intertwined with the concept of patriarchy. The construction of masculinity leads society to establish different role based differences in sexes, patronises heterosexuality and places one gender superior to the other (Sowad, 2010). When the group took shelter in a house to take some rest, there was a clear division of labour: women became involved in cooking and men in searching for food. Division of household labour was thought very traditional where wives take the maximum burden. But household labour remains highly segregated by sex regardless on marital situation (Greenstein, 2000). In this film, all the characters were not married to each other. Hence, it is ‘gendered identity’ that fixes the division of labour. Such division reinforces the ideological framework that essentialises women’s domestic role as ‘natural’ and men as decision maker, controller, and breadwinner as their natural vocation.

Within the context of these films, it is also important to locate how the leadership role is restricted to a particular age group - 25 - 35 years and gender. There was an old man in the journey who was portrayed as inactive but pious. This strategic representation strengthens stereotypical normative ideologies about the qualities of a leader - should be a young male, therefore ignored women and old aged person’s agency.

From the discussion of masculine characters represented in the movies, it is perceived that the films followed the normative approach of masculinity which emphasizes manly ideals, or gender role stereotypes (Nagel, 2001). According to the normative definition, masculinity is a social norm for the behaviour of men, and allows that different men approach the standard in different degrees. So the emphasis on an ideal type of masculinity excludes not

only women but many men too. Main focus of this definition is what men ought to be. Therefore, recalling Connell's (2001) argument, I would also like to argue that this idealised standard of masculinity as represented in the movies can be hardly met by any men. Very few men would be able to acquire this filmic qualities of masculinity. Hence, the construction of masculinity in films creates an imaginary picture and idealises specific characteristics of a man (Sowad, 2010).

5.2 Sexual Victimhood of Men – Under the Carpet?

During the Liberation War, it was also a common occurrence that Pakistani Army and their collaborators sexually harassed Bengali men by undressing them to check the signs of circumcision. As the war had a religious and cultural dimension there was an attempt of systematic 'religious cleansing' of non-Muslim men, "fuelled by an abiding anti-Bengali racism, especially against the Hindu minority" (Rummel, 1997:335). Moreover, one of the main Pakistani discourses about rape of women was that Bengali Muslims were 'Indianized/Hinduized', so rape occurred as a means 'to improve the genes of the Bengali Muslims' (Mookherjee, 2008). From the same perspective, Bengali and other non-Bengali men, regardless of religion, were subjected to harassment through forced nudity in a public place. Looking for the sign of circumcision Pakistani soldiers decided whether the man is Hindu or Muslim and whether he should be killed or not. Hence, this was not only a type of sexual violence that ended with murder of an individual man, but also a deliberate ethnic/religious, and collective humiliation before friends and family, before community and the nation, that made a man a victim where by force he was bound to display his sex organ.

It took 22 years to portray a man as a victim of sexual harassment in a movie, although, in every movie including the first one (*Ora Agaro Jon*) the image of women as rape victim has been projected as a 'common' feature. Only three movies, among the ten selected, showed men as victims of wartime sexual crimes. Those movies, all mainstream, are *Aguner Poroshmoni*, *Joy Jatra* and *Guerilla*. *Aguner Poroshmoni*, directed by Humayun Ahmed, is the first Liberation War movie that visualized men as victims of sexual crime. This film has shown the incident of undressing men comparatively more vividly than the other two. Interestingly, this movie did not show a single image of raped women, but showed the scene of undressed men and the insult they faced as the Pakistani soldiers compelled them to sit and stand continuously, in nude. Hence, this film brings a new dimension into the representation of Liberation War and also attempts to overcome the stereotypical notion that only women become sexual victim. Nonetheless, this film could not bring any revolutionary changes in the pattern of representation as it photographed the nude people from the backside (Image 7) whereas raped women usually pictured elaborately, even sometimes the act of rape are shown very descriptively.

Image 7: Sexual assault on men during 1971



Source: Film – Aguner Poroshmoni (1994)

Representation of nude men from the backside reminds Linda Williams (1991) on ‘sartorial divisions’ in films, as she noted, “men seem to cover up all the more as the women become naked” (Ibid, : 13). So although three men were shown naked, their penis was out of sight. This is because of the tendency of patriarchal society where the camera’s gaze tends to focus solely on the female body, and avoids showing male bodies. Hoek (2010), while researching popular films of Bangladesh reveals that except for the intrusion of Western pornography, males’ sexual organs remain absent from the films. Strategy of such representation is directly related to the patriarchal, heteronormative culture where “cinema is made and consumed by men in groups” (Ibid: 142). For the heteronormative society, showing naked male body before male audience will not give any pleasure or satisfy the heterosexual audience. Thus, it can be said that although Humayun Ahmed did something new in his film, he did it within the dominant gender and heteronormativity frameworks of the society. In addition, the men who were seen naked were not those belonging to the ‘self’. They were the members of minority ethnic-religious groups. Visualizing humiliation of those men remains within the dominant nationalist-cum-religious discourses that define Bangladeshi men as Muslim.

Two other movies - *Joy Jatra* and *Guerilla* - also gave the touch of such incidents but these films did not visualize the acts. The scenes were constructed in different ways: as an attempt to undress the men; as a voice from the background: ‘Oh, it is a *Malaoune*¹³ (*Guerilla*); as an order of the army officer: ‘Take off the *Lungi*¹⁴ and then the sound of shooting (*Joy Jatra*).

¹³ Hindus are locally called as *Malaoune* in Bangladesh

¹⁴ *Lungi* is a local dress used by Bengali men instead of trouser.

The issue of men's sexual victimhood because of their 'otherness' were totally absent in the analysed independent films. This is surprising given that representational strategy of independent movies was around secularism, Bengaliness and against Islamic communalism (analysed in third chapter). Thus, one could expect that – as a critique of mainstream political use of religious identities - victimhood of the 'other' (such as religious minorities) would be highlighted. Moreover, as such violence could be construed also as an ethnic insult to the Bengali nation¹⁵, these films could have upheld the ethnic unity through visualization of Pakistan Army's misdeeds. Unexpectedly, it was not represented in any form, not even as information.

Invisibility of men as a victim of sexual humiliation supports the idea that men's victimhood is directly "related to the position of masculinity and male body" within the dominant political and national(ist) discourses (Zarkov, 2001: 78). As the notion of victimized manhood defeats the dominant notions of power of masculinity, adult men of dominant social groups are seldom depicted as victimized. This is all the more relevant for sexual violence, where national and ethnic belonging intersect with heteronormativity. Thus, next to the stereotypical assumption that women are 'victim' and men are 'perpetrators', there is also an assumption that 'our men' are powerful and manly, while the 'other' men are weak and unmanly (*ibid*).

5.3 Adolescent Youth - Hand in Hand with Masculine Men

Representing juvenile freedom fighters is not new in Bangladesh's war films, yet *Moti (Kalmilata)* received more importance than any other character, and was represented as the only martyr of the film. He was symbolised as an ideal son of the country, whose participation in the war and sacrifice was not born of his childish enthusiasm, but rather of his highly developed patriotic feelings.

Noticeably, *Moti* went to war with the permission of his mother, who didn't hesitate to allow him to fight because she saw a "*different blaze in his eyes to take revenge against the enemy*". This same mother did not contemplate sending her elder daughter to the war, but advised her to run away to her grandfather's village to escape from the military attacks and possible rape. Thus, the mother was portrayed as courageous and in a sense, patriotic. Yet, she was actually supporting the existing norms of patriarchal society where women are not considered capable of fighting armed conflict and where women's 'virginity' is thought to be a resource more precious than the freedom of the country. This is in fact the reflection of "classical patriarchy" (Kandiyoti, 1988) where women nurture patriarchal dominance by guiding the next generation of women (daughters, daughters in law) with the same control they experienced in their lives.

Regarding the representation of adolescent youth, this researcher found some dissimilarities between the representation processes of two film streams.

¹⁵*Sexual humiliation of men along with women also may occur to show the conquered nation less powerful, defeated and as a lesser nation (Denov, 2006).*

For example, *Bachu*, (*Nadir Nam Modhumoti*) has been visualized as opposite to *Moti*: a symbol of confused boyhood, who is interested in theatre, feels love for women and follows his beloved without thinking of right or wrong. He is not clear about “*what does country mean*”, “*what is this war for*”. *Bachu*’s father’s activities as a Pakistani collaborator embarrassed him socially. He was judged by his fellow fighters not as a freedom fighter, but according to his father’s deeds and so frequently faced his friends’ teasing. However, at the end of the film we see that peer pressure has made him mature and determined to fight against his forefathers.

These young boys were portrayed within the existing dominant forms of masculinity with the aim of showcasing patriotic feelings. However, generally, children or adolescent youths are compared to women due to their ‘vulnerability’ to be protected. But in these films male children were represented as being more capable than women in terms of physical strength and operating weapons.

Therefore, it remains a question, why is a young boy considered capable of fighting armed conflict, while an adult woman is not? In fact, it is not an issue of physical power or intelligence. In the patriarchal Bangladeshi society, the discrepancy in the treatment of males and females starts at birth when a male child is welcomed by *Ajan* (call for prayer) but female child is not greeted this way (Chowdhury, 2009). This is also related to socio-cultural ‘norms’ about female sexual exclusivity. In the public arena women are seen as sexual objects and patriarchy is maintained through sexual harassment. So women’s movement outside of the family is restricted, their education and career is hampered and parents are relieved by their early marriage that attaches women’s sexuality to her husband exclusively. Hence, women will not be permitted to enter a risky environment like war, or any other such situation where her sexuality might become accessible to other men.

5.4 Concluding Thoughts

Representation of masculinity in war movies followed the dominant notion of masculinity whether in the case of representing the freedom fighters as heroes, or men as victims, or youth as the carrier of future adult masculinity. Gendering of war through the images of male freedom fighters shows men’s prescribed position and duties in the patriarchal society. Men who possess the characteristics prescribed by hegemonic ideals are depicted as able to fight and to lead. The fighter is represented to be stripped of all ‘feminine’ emotions. Moreover, men’s visualised role resonate men’s prescribed position in the nationhood as protector of women, children and the ‘motherland’. It is also revealed that, compared to women, considering all aspects of existing manhood and female hood, even including ‘capabilities’ of male child – men are represented as an asset for the society where as women is a liability.

The invisibility of male victimisation is also a consequence of patriarchal norms, where men stands for strong, active, protector, not a weak, passive, victim. The representation strategy therefore followed a ‘complex interplay’ of gender, sexuality and hetero-normativity within which men are not considered to be a victim, especially not of sexual crimes (Zarkov, 2007). The male body

can be naked before audience only exceptionally, and in specific visuals, due to the patriarchal norms that sanction seeing and interacting with male and female nudity.

Notably, independent films followed the same strategies like mainstream films regarding the representation of freedom fighters. Normative approach to masculinity excluded women from the discourse of freedom fighters, while it allowed their representation as rape victims. With men, it was the other way around.

There is a strategic silence in portraying the involvement of old aged people in freedom fighting. The war activities and contributions visualized in the movies are restricted to the young and adult. Contrary to that, older generations were either absent or portrayed in a stereotypical image of pious but inactive.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This research analysed the significance of gender and sexuality in national representation of war in cinematic images of the Liberation War produced in Bangladesh. Throughout the paper, I have argued the following points. First, representation of nation and national identity is gendered in both mainstream and independent movies. Both streams have applied particular representational strategies to promote their own agenda. Second, cinematic representation followed the prescriptive gender stereotypes where men are strong, active, warrior and protectors of the nation and women; and women are weak, passive and vulnerable, bearers of national honour. Third, the norms of sexuality as represented in the films have evoked existing patriarchal societal rules, in intersections with nationalist discourses. Fourth, in terms of generic representation, both mainstream and independent films reflect hegemonic normative ideology regarding gender and sexuality.

In this concluding chapter, I will summarize how the research journey has led me to construct the above mentioned arguments.

Chapter three offers that the notions of nation, national identity and war are assembled together under the signs of gender and twinned senses of self-vs. other. The nation has been allegorically compared with mother reinforcing the patriarchal notion of femininity. The feminised notion of motherhood equates the image of a 'good mother' with the concepts of child bearing, child rearing, sacredness and sacrifice. Hence, national discourse excludes those women who physically cannot be mothers or who have been raped. In contrast, men were praised as freedom fighters, protectors of woman's and national honour, hence heroes of the nation. Therefore, I argue that it is within the gendered framework that cinematic representations of the nation "have sprung from masculinized memory and masculinized hope" (Enloe 1990:45).

It has been observed, independent films were far more vocal than their mainstream counterparts regarding the question of national identity. While propagating for a unified, 'secular', modern *Bengali* national identity, independent film makers excluded Islam representing it as an 'anti-modern' force. Islamism was thus represented as part of anti-independence movement. Consequently, representation aimed towards a homogenisation of nationality, incorporating only dominant '*Bengali*' ethnic group, keeping other ethnic groups as outsiders. This mode of representation supports Gabriel's (2005) argument that film production is used as a propaganda tool of its owner's agenda. Similarly, the Liberation War was represented through the dichotomous categories of self (*Bengali* freedom fighters) vis-a-vis the other (West Pakistan soldiers) to claim the moral ground of freedom fighters activities.

Representation of femininity and masculinity in the context of the Liberation War was framed within social constructions of womanhood and manhood. The movies' portrayal in this regard replicates Goldstein's (2001) conceptualisation of war as gendered. Battlefront represented as male domain where women are only supporters, not combatants. Moreover, it essentialises

the normative ideologies of gendered division of labour by linking women with domestic sphere like cooking, nurturing, assisting male freedom fighters. Contrary to that men were represented as warriors, breadwinners, decision makers. Even the male youth were represented as the carrier of male adulthood. Through the stereotypical projection of masculinity and femininity patriarchy has re-established itself in the war movies.

Eberwein argued, “in the dominant versions of men at war, men are permitted to behave towards each other in ways that would not be allowed elsewhere, caressing and holding each other, comforting and weeping together, admitting their love” (2008:112). Bangladeshi war movies, however, portray socially prescribed different images of ‘masculine men’ - muscular and powerful, not shedding tears. The power to provide, protect and defend as well as to control is symbolically represented in the character of freedom fighters. Consequently, adult men as victims of sexual abuse were seldom represented: visualized only once and even then those were not Bengali men – the ‘self’ of the nation. As ‘masculinized nationalism’ praise only heroic masculinity – as the protector, vigilant guard of national honour, victimized manhood received less importance in the representational strategy. Film production of Bangladesh, being a male centred domain represents hegemonic masculine ideology and suppresses what contradicts. Such strategies of representation are grounded in Hall’s (2006) explanation of ‘politics of representation’ as he argued, “ideology of power fixes the meaning. Communication of these ideologies is always “linked with power and those groups that have control over the society, have control over what should be represented in the media”¹⁶. Discourses of sexuality as portrayed in the films have found their roots in the power relations of patriarchal society.

Representation of femininity and female sexuality carries the nationalist burden of ‘chastity’ and ‘purity’. As it is revealed (chapter 3) that the nationalist rhetoric includes only sacred mother, raped women were screened as violated, disgraced, and a separate category which holds no moral position in the nationalist discourse, therefore deserves death or marriage with the rapist; otherwise should be silent about their ‘misfortune’ (chapter 4). Therefore, the representation strategy replicates Hoek’s observation that “the representation of female sexuality comes in the form of punishment, first in rape, then in death. ‘Transgressive’ female characters are cleansed from the order of patriarchy by death” (2010: 146). Rape in these films was framed within the historical and political context of Bangladesh and the film makers draw on cinematic resources based on already established social norms. This includes the representation of rape within the frame of eroticized female sexuality.

Surprisingly, representations of gender and sexuality did not differ greatly in mainstream and independent. Both streams were influenced by the dominant socio-cultural discourses and normative ideologies of gender and

¹⁶ This statement has taken from Hall’s video speech titled “Representation and the media: Featuring Stuart Hall” available at <http://media.litmuse.net/vocabulary/bias/representation>

sexuality. In some cases, this influence is more obvious in the independent films than the mainstream. For instance, male victimhood is absolutely absent from the independent films. Message around femininity and masculinity as well as sexuality are almost the same, differing only in the framing of the war and construction of national identity. It is noteworthy, while independent directors aimed at creating a modern Bengali identity and protesting the state's efforts to create an Islamic state, they paradoxically followed the gender subtext of state policy where "women were positioned primarily as wives and mothers and are persistently bracketed with children in both administrative structures and development plans" (Kabeer,1991:47). Otherwise, "women [were] disturbing spectacle, a deviation from the normal order, if they somehow slipped from their place in the social - and moral – order (i.e. if they are raped or use their sexuality even due to ensure their survival)" (Ibid)

The use of intersectional lens in terms of age, ethnicity and religion, though not thoroughly explored in this research, helps to unpack another strategy about filmic representation. Leadership roles are limited to young male adults, 25-35 of age, strengthening the normative ideology that only young males deserve to be leaders, thereby, ignoring old men's and woman's agency. Religious and ethnic minorities were also represented with less importance than the dominant Bengali group. This is also within the state's patriarchal and nationalist frameworks showing how religious minority worsen women's vulnerable position and how the 'other' ethnic groups are represented as inferior. When representation is considered as a mediated "reality" related to power, non-representation indicates powerlessness. Focusing on one group and excluding 'others', resonate with Gerbner and Gross's(1976) concept of "symbolic annihilation" - exclusion or selective inclusion, broadens or narrows the spectrum of views presented.

Examination of representational strategies has revealed that cinematic representation particularly of gender and sexuality is structured by the varied organisations of patriarchal society. These representations emerge as emblematic of an ideal society where gender and sexuality are mutually regulated¹⁷. Consequently then, all genres employ the same strategy.

I hope that this research has contributed to the exploration of cinema as a complex phenomenon with diverse contents and representational strategies. It brings to light the necessity of analysing movies beyond their texts and images, situating them in their specific social-political and historical contexts. The study reveals complex affiliations of cinematic representation of Liberation War with social relations of power, and helps unpack the politics surrounding

¹⁷Although it can be argued, visibility of incidents does not necessarily mean that the director is in support of such incidents – s/he may portray it from the perspective to criticise the society. Here the strategy lies – if the director wanted to criticise or question the social practice, there must be at least subtle message protesting the practice or – must be some alternate characters doing alternate practices (as we see in *Meherjaan*). Unfortunately, they were nowhere in the films, hence give us the message that through 'reflective' approaches (meaning resides in the real world and representation reflects that meaning) (Gabriel, 2005) films actually reproduced and reinforced existing social practices.

nation, gender and sexuality in particular moments of time of Bangladesh post-independence history. I hope that this study therefore offers a unique contribution to understanding the relationships between cinematic representations of the Liberation War and the dynamics of gender, sexuality and nationhood in contemporary Bangladesh.

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Appendices

(Note: The name is given below under the heading ‘casting’ are the names of the main characters including the names of the actors/actress within bracket.)

Synopsis of Films Analysed in the research Paper

Title	Ora Agaro Jon (Those 11 freedom fighters)
Year/Director	1972/Chasi Nazrul Islam
Genre	Mainstream
Cast	Khosru (Khosru), Mita (Shabana), Parvej (Razzak), Shila (Nuton)
Synopsis	Khosru – a young politically conscious man joined the Liberation War and leads a group of young freedom fighters. His sister Mita – who was a student of medical college also participated the war as a nurse but raped by Pakistani soldiers. Khosru’s fiancée Shila also faced sexual violence who was kept in Pakistani Army camp and she died at the eve of independence. The film is full of fighting which is ended up through the independence of Bangladesh.

Title	Megher Onek Rong (The Rainbow)
Year/Director	1976/Harunur Rashid
Genre	Mainstream
Cast	Dr. Omor (Omor Elahi), Mathin (Mathin), Ruma (Rowshon Ara), Adnan (Adnan)
Synopsis	This is the immediate story after the independence of a family that was affected severely during the war. Dr. Omor was detached from his wife (Ruma) and son (Adnan) in a military attack during the war. Later he joined the war as a doctor where he met an indigenous woman Mathin who was working as a nurse. They were fall in love and after independence got married. Meanwhile, Ruma, who was raped in war, came to rehabilitation centre where Omor was the concerned doctor. But Ruma, hiding herself send Adnan to Omor’s house to ensure his proper care and place. Being ensured she committed suicide.

Title	Kalmilata
Year/Director	1981/Shahidul Huq Khan
Genre	Mainstream

Cast	Koli(Bulbul Ahmed), Oli (Elias Kanchon), Banu(Kobori), Moti(Master Shakil), Moti's Mother (Roji Samad), Talukder (Mustafa), Major (Sohel Rana)
Synopsis	Banu and Moti, brother and sister of a poor family lived with their mother who tried hard to meet their daily necessities. Koli and Oli, two sons of a school teacher Koli was a vagabond and in love with Banu. The war broke, refugee people took shelter in the village and the young boys of the village including Koli and Oli organized to fight under the leadership of a force of Bangladesh Army. Moti also joined the war and became martyr. Talukder, who was portrayed in a negative role used wartime situation to increase his resource. Eventually, after liberation he was caught by the freedom fighters who have a vision to remove poverty. Finally, inspired by the proverb "hate the crimes, not the criminals", they forgave Talukder although at the end he was dead in a cross fighting.
Title	Aguner Poroshmoni (Touch of Fire)
Year/Title	1994/Humayun Ahmed
Genre	Mainstream
Cast	Bodi (Asaduzzaman Nur), Ratri (Bipasha Hayat), Motiuniddin Saheb (Abul Hayat)
Synopsis	Story of a middle class family with husband (Motinuddin Saheb), wife, two daughters (Ratri and Opala) and a maid servant (Binti) living in the blocked Dhaka city always fearing of military attack. Bodi- a freedom fighter came with a specific scheme of operation in the Pakistani military camp situated in the Dhaka city. He took shelter in Motinuddin's house. Ratri was fall in love with Bodi. Bodi was severely wounded in an operation although the film made it unanswered whether he died or not.
Title	Joy Jatra (Journey to Victory)
Year/Director	2004/Taukir Ahmed
Genre	Mainstream
Cast	Boidhan (Mahfuz Ahmed), Howa (Bipasha Hayat), Adom (Azizul Hakim), Ponchanon Saha (Humayun Faridi), Torofdar (Tariq Anam Khan).
Synopsis	The story of the film begins with the Liberation War, when the Pakistani occupation forces attack a small village, killed people randomly and burn the houses of villagers. The villagers' idyllic existence changes forever. The survivors have to embark their ancestral homes on

a journey to reach a safe place. Some passengers were searching for Indian border to find a camp where they can be trained professionally in guerilla warfare so that they can fight the enemy. There is nothing but a small boat that gives them hope to reach another life.

Title	Guerilla
Year/Director	2011/Nasiruddin Yousuff
Genre	Mainstream
Cast	Bilkis (Joya Ahsen), Taslim Sarder (A.T.M. Shamsuzzaman), Altaf Mahmud (Ahmed Rubel), Mrs. Khan (Shompa Reza), Hasan (Ferdous).
Synopsis	<p>The film is divided into two parts – part one from the director's personal experience of war and the other part is based on Syed Shamsul Huque's novel "Nishidho Loban" (forbidden smell). The first part is about the fighting incidents of '71, brutalities of Pakistani Army and their local Bengali collaborators. Bilkis – the main protagonist of the film – while looking for her missing husband actively took part in the resistance with her friends. On the second part, at the eve of Pakistani Army's freedom fighter hunt operation, Bilkis escaped from the city with a target to meet her freedom fighter brother Khokon commander. Before meeting together, Khokon was slaughtered by the <i>Razakars</i> and Bilkis was caught by the Pakistani soldier. While Bilkis was about to face sexual violence by the Pakistani officer, she killed herself with a suicidal Bomb explosion destroying the army camp also.</p>

Title	Agami (Time Ahead)
Year/Director	1984/Morshedul Islam
Genre	Independent
Cast	Azmol (Pijush Banerjee), Hasu (Sohel), Bodor Munshi (Ali Zaker)
Synopsis	<p>The film depicts a comparison between present economic status of freedom fighters of Liberation War and those who moved against the liberation of Bangladesh. Freedom fighters Azmol and his fellow fighters have shown passing miserable days in poverty whereas the village leader Bodor Munshi who collaborated with Pakistani Army and is still doing anti- living a rich life. Hence he is exercising power over the helpless freedom fighters that were begging support from human activity like occupying other's land property is him for their survival. The film projected</p>

hopes on future generation expecting that they will protest against such injustice and bring good days for the country.

Title	Nadir Nam Modhumoti (The River Named Modhumoti)
Year/Director	1995/Tanvir Mokammel
Genre	Independent
Cast	Bachu (Tauquir Ahmed), Motaleb (Ali Zaker), Shanti (Sara Zaker), Akhter (Raisul Islam Asad)
Synopsis	During the 1971 war against Pakistan, in a remote village beside the river Modhumoti, A local leader Motaleb Mollah collaborated with the Pakistan Army. Motaleb had married the widow of his brother who had a son named Bachu. Young Bachu joined the liberation force inspired by his bosom but senior aged friend Akhter. Bachu's unit was deployed on the other side of the river Modhumoti. As Motaleb was Bachu's father, his comrades were procrastination to take action against him. Then one evening Bachu took a decision and crossed the river with a determined sense of mission.

Title	Etihaas Konya (Daughter of History)
Year/Director	1999/Shameem Akhter
Genre	Independent
Cast	Nanu (Abul Khaer), Monica (Rahnuma Ahmed), Konika (Nazneen Akhter Shefa), Anonya (Nasreen Shiraj Any)
Synopsis	The film is about revealing what happened in 1971 by a Pakistani journalist cum feminist researcher named Lalarukh. Her quire is for research purpose and she proceed with her work with the help of a Bangladeshi family who is also affected extremely by the war that was not disclosed until the end of the film. The film upholds the feelings of the family who lost one of their daughters Konika as she committed suicide after being raped during war and given birth to a war child Anonya. The film gives the message that Liberation War was not just about valour and heroism, rape and genocide was also equally a part of the reality of war.

Title	Matir Moyna (The Clay Bird)
Year/Director	2002/Tareque Masud
Genre	Independent

Cast	Anu (Nurul Islam Bablu), Kazi (Jayanto Chattopadhyay), Ayesha (Rokeya Prachi), Milon (Soaeb Islam) Rokon (Russel Farazi)
Synopsis	Set against the backdrop of the turbulent period in the late 1960s leading up to Bangladesh's independence, the film tells the story of a family torn by religion and war. Anu- the shy but curious boy of a village is sent away to a strict Muslim boarding school by his father Kazi – an orthodox Muslim who dominates his family strictly. Anu's uncle Milon- follower of Marxist ideologies accompanies Anu most of the time with his liberal belief. On the breaks of Liberation War liberal Milon participated in the war and become a martyr, extremist Kazi faced a neo conflict in him why and how a Muslim can kill another Muslim. Surrounded by such confusion Kazi decided to stay in his burnt, damaged house ignoring Anu and his Mother Ayesha's repeated request. Amidst of the devastation, Ayesha makes her own life choice to survive and Anu finds a new path into adulthood.