Framing Pain as Spectacle : The Aesthetics of Wartime Films of Bangladesh

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Abstract

The Liberation War of 1971 (Muktijuddho in Bengali) is the most significant and celebrated event in the history of Bangladesh. Covering the films made during the Liberation War, this paper aims to find the language and aesthetics of wartime films of Bangladesh. The traumatic suffering, the human rights abuses against the Bangladeshis, and their revolt against the Pakistani army were the subject of numerous documentary films during the period. Local and international film makers recorded the unfolding events of the war. Scrutinizing the interests and perspectives of different directors both from the local and the international arena, this paper considers how wartime films tackled and negotiated the issues of atrocity, memory, and witness. In addition, I closely analyze the film Stop Genocide (1971) by the Bangladeshi film director, Zahir Raihan (1935-72). Stop Genocide is acclaimed as the most authentic and influential visual text in shaping the cultural memories of the war. Along with its third cinema aesthetics, I look at its re-inscription of gender stereotypes of nationalist struggle. I also pay attention to the complex relationship between language, culture, ethics, identity, and other discourses related to violence and suffering.

On 1st August 1971, Ravi Shankar and George Harrison's 'Concert for Bangladesh', which was staged at New York's Madison Square Garden, drew world attention to the Liberation War of Bangladesh. Documentary footage of the traumatic suffering and human rights abuses of Bangladeshi refugees inflicted by the Pakistani army, which had compelled the refugees to flee to the borders of India, was projected from behind the stage during the interval between each musical set. This footage of 'refugee camps, starving children, and rotting corpses' shocked the audience (Heckman 1971: n.p.). Although the aim of the concert was to raise funds for the refugees, its blanket coverage by different television channels and print media made it possible for international audiences to become witnesses to the atrocious suffering of the refugees.

The footage and the moving songs of this concert attracted critical attention and a demand for action, as 'looking at representations of suffering can be seen to charge the viewer with responsibility, especially where the suffering on screen is "real", i.e. footage of war, genocide or murder' (Downing and Saxton 2010: 20).

These moving images which were projected during the concert, however, represented only a part of the cruelties of the war, as they documented the sufferings and muted stories of just those Bangladeshi refugees who were able to flee to the borders of India. This created a lacuna - a state of imagining or signaling the language of missing images which the camera could not capture - in the pain of Bangladeshis who failed to escape to the borders and went through the inhuman atrocities committed by the Pakistani army. In her reading of Holocaust films, Libby Saxton has regarded such missing images as 'haunted' and stated that 'this haunting [by those missing images] has served as a catalyst for aesthetic and ethical innovation, for an ongoing search for more responsible forms of witnessing' (2010: 2). Similarly, the 'haunted' task for imagining the unseen/ off-screen horrors which the 'Concert for Bangladesh' gestured towards through moving songs but was not able to depict in moving images, stimulated an ethical response in the international community, and the media to come forward and document the Liberation War. The concert also aimed for an appeal to stop these human rights violations by capturing such missing images.

The trauma, the sufferings, the resistance and the revolt of the freedom seeking people of Bangladesh (East Pakistan), yielded numerous documentary films by local and international film makers during the Liberation War. Different international broadcast companies, for example,

NBC, ABC, CBS, ITN, BBC and Granada Television recorded the historical event of the Liberation War of Bangladesh (Hasan 2011: 112). A few film professionals, such as Lear Levin of the US and Shabnam Sukdev from India, came to Bangladesh driven by their personal endeavor to record the war on celluloid (Ahmed 1996: 5). As the Liberation War broke out during the Cold War between the superpowers, when India was supported by the Soviet Union, the US Government did not support Bangladesh but rather backed Pakistan (Schendel 2009: 161). In spite of that, the Liberation War of Bangladesh was well recorded and reported with sympathy in the international media. Drawing on Shahaduzzaman and Khondokar Mahmudul Hasan's references, it can be seen that there were five foreign countries who filmed the Liberation War: the US, Britain, France, Japan and India (2009: 16, 2011: 110). In general, the international media represented Bangladesh as the victim and the Pakistani army as the oppressor.

The sympathy in regard to capturing the pain of Bangladeshis, particularly in the Western media could be, interpreted in terms of what Susan Sontag calls the 'journalistic custom' of the West for exhibiting colonized people as 'exotic' (2003:72). She describes how the desire of the Western media for capturing the images of 'injured bodies' in the East, during different catastrophic events, signifies the convention of creating a tragedy of 'others' who are 'poor', 'backward' or 'benighted' (2003: 70-72). For Eleanor M. Hight and Gary D. Sampson, the convention of 'Western visualization' of the East or native people is an attempt to make them and their surroundings 'primitive' or 'exotic' (2002: 4). This practice is even evident in the layout of the poster (Figure 1) of the 'Concert for Bangladesh'. As a monogram of the concert, this poster formed an iconic image of Bangladesh which was to enter into worldwide circulation. By incorporating the picture of a starving child, this poster emphasised Bangladesh's impoverished condition. In the same vein, most of the films or newsreels shot by Western individuals or institutions highlighted the pain of Bangladeshis and the degradation of their surroundings as exotic or strange 'other'. After

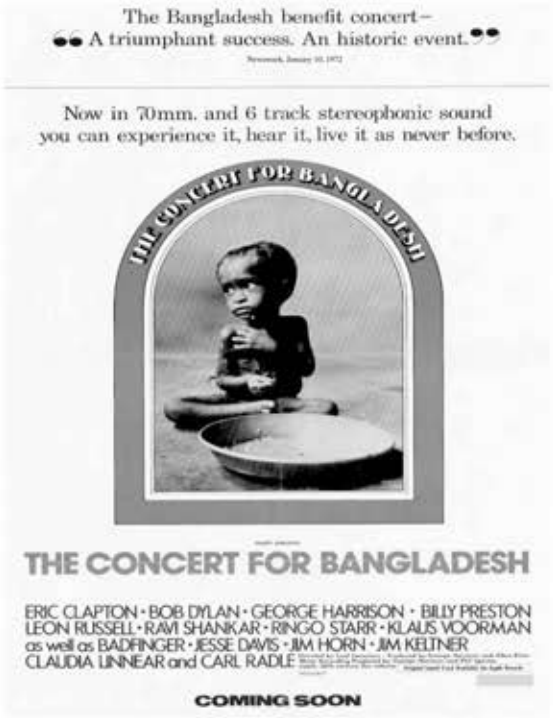

Figure 1. Poster of the 'Concert for Bangladesh'.

achieving independence, Bangladesh could no longer embody the exotic in the same way for the Western media except during certain disasters. Perhaps, due to the absence of this strangeness, 'Bangladesh gradually has lost the importance to Western media' which it once had (Masud 2012: 25). Moreover, very few wartime films produced or directed by Western film makers reached Bangladesh as these were targeted at Western audiences that would respond to their fetishized and stereotyped representations of the East.

But films by Indian directors generated other paradigms of the war where they told their own narratives by highlighting Indian's contribution in this war. For example, Nine Months to Freedom (1975) by Sukdev portrayed the critical issues and context of the political history of Bangladesh since 1947, and the systematic oppression of Bangladeshis by West Pakistan, but did not forget to glorify the role of India in providing help to those helpless people of Bangladesh. Directly or indirectly this same effort to visualize India in the images of a rescuer and protector was evident in

Refugee 71 (1972) and in Loot and Lust (n.d.). However, the common aspect that is found in all the documentaries on the Liberation War is the deliberate effort of making the war a 'mass spectacle', in order to display one's narrative of pain to other (Hoskins 2010: 03).

For Bangladeshi directors, the war was a seminal event that led them, for the first time, to make nonfiction films as a record of their own national history. In doing so, they focused on images of the sufferings of their own people in order to 'publicise' the war's genocidal dimension, as a crime against humanity, to the outside world (Kabir 1979: 48). At the same time, they glorified the training and actions of the Muktis (Bengali guerrilla fighters) in order to strengthen the patriotic sentiment and revolutionary spirit of Bengalis, opposing Pakistani aggression. Wartime documentaries, such as Stop Genocide (1971), Liberation Fighters (1971), Innocent Million (1971), and A State Is Born (1971), are considered, within Bangladesh itself, to be valuable historical records and acts of witness to the events of the Liberation War. David Williams has argued that cinema is a means for exploring the 'past-progressive tense' by bringing the vanished past into the present. Likewise, Bangladesh's wartime documentaries with their combination of sound and images both preserve the past and are able to place that past into, so to speak, the present tense (William 2009: 108-113). Thus, these documentaries have maintained the collective memory of Bangladeshis and shaped their imagination of the Liberation War throughout subsequent decades. They have also helped to induce a strong feeling of national solidarity.

The possible number of documentary films covering the Liberation War when it was occurring is around 12 to 15. It is, however, difficult to arrive at a precise figure, especially when documentaries made by foreign filmmakers are taken into account. Many films made by international directors are still yet to discover, that are never shown before the Bangladeshi audience. For example, in 1995, after the release of Muktir Gaan (Song of Freedom), directed by Tareque Masud and Catherine Masud, Bangladesh for the first time came to know about the challenging voyage by a musical troupe through the war zones, borders, refugee camps and guerrilla training camps during the Liberation War, as the original footage recording their journey had been hidden for 24 years following the war. The American film director, Lear Levin who shot 20 hours of footage from which Muktir Gaan was made, left that footage in his basement in Manhattan upon finding very little response to his documentary entitled Joy Bangla (1972). In this film, Levin's aim was to make a comparison between the post and pre war situation, and let the world know about the suffering of the displaced people of Bangladesh due to the Pakistani army's invasion in this land (Hasan 2012: n.p.). In 1972, after completing the film, Levin could not find a distributer for his film, Joy Bangla, with the result that the film did not reach Bangladesh (Masud 2012: 25). Then, almost 24 years since Levin's film was completed, Tareque Masud and Catherine Masud made the film Muktir Gaan, mostly employing the footage shot by Levin which was extremely popular with Bangladeshi audiences on its release in 1995. The example of Muktir Gaan suggests the possibility that more such undiscovered footage might well exist, including material captured by film makers from overseas. As this film was made almost 24 years after the war, it was shaped by more contemporary concerns of free Bangladesh.

Drawing on a range of sources, including Shahaduzzaman's (2009), Hasan's (2011), and Shakhawat Moon's (2006) studies of Liberation War documentaries, I have divided the films of the period into two broad groups: films made by local and foreign directors. Most of these films, though shot during the war, were only edited and released subsequently. In many cases it has not been possible to cite the release date of these films due to the lack of proper references.

List of wartime films on the Liberation War

1. Films made by Bangladeshi film directors

Stop Genocide (Zahir Raihan, 1971)
Liberation Fighters (Alamgir Kabir, 1971)
A State is Born (Zahir Raihan, 1971)
Innocent Millions (Babul Choudhury, 1971)

Figure 2 : Mother image in Famine series (1943) sketched by Zainul Abedin.

2. Films made by foreign film directors

Joi Bangla (Nagisa Oshima, 1972)
Concert for Bangladesh (Saul Swimmer, 1972)
Joy Bangla (Lear Levin, 1972)
Dateline Bangladesh (Gita Mehta, 1972)
Refugees 1971(Benoy Roy, 1972)
Bengal no Chichi Laman [Rahman: The Father Of Bengal] (Nagisa Oshima, 1973)
Nine Months to freedom (S. Sukdev, 1975)
Human Tragedy (Benoy Roy, n.d.)
Loot and Last (H S Advani, C L Kaul, D S Sainee, Raghunath Sheth, Pandurang Revankar, PN V Rawo, ST Berkley Hill, Mushir Ahmed, GR Thakur, n.d)
The country made for disaster (Robert Rogers, n.d.)
Home coming(Prem Vaidya, n.d.)
Durbargati Paadma (Ritwik Ghatak, n.d.)

As Bangladesh won the war, the wartime documentaries that are still available are acclaimed by Bangladeshis as vehicles for bearing an authentic history and actual evidence of the Liberation War, and they have crystallized the dominant perception of the war. For Bangladeshis, the popular perception of this war lies in the glorification of their resistance, revolt and suffering together with the elimination of those aspects which did not concern their national interest. Consequently, the 'other' documentary films, such as, Betrayal (1971) by Ajay Karder, produced by the Pakistani regime, covering their accounts and propaganda of the war, disappeared or were forgotten in the passing of time (Kabir 1979: 48). In Walter Benjamin's words, 'every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably' (Benjamin 1999: 247). So, the visual memory is selective and greatly dependent on the interest of the receivers. Thus, we find the fact that the films which projected an anti-Liberation view, have been rejected or wiped out deliberately in the act of collective remembrance of Bangladeshis, since these films go against their group's interest.

With regard to portraying female images, these documentary films, particularly by Bangladeshi directors, more or less followed the convention of maintaining the collective interest and traditional

outlook. These films did not contradict the patriarchal ideology of the society and its cultural context, and visualized mostly a representation of women as passive and victimized. The few women, who took part in the frontline battle, including bearing arms, did not appear in these documentaries. Instead, they were either projected as suffering mothers who were fleeing, escaping with their children for a safer place and uprooted by the war, or, as the ashamed figures of raped women who represented the ravaging of the nation.

Like any other written historical work or artefact, the wartime documentaries of Bangladesh, by providing visual accounts and cues, became a key agent for the collective remembrance of the Liberation War, and induce strong national feelings and patriotic sentiments among Bangladeshis. Moreover, the generations who do not have direct experience of the Liberation War are able to perceive the historical past in a form of a live event by the moving images of these films.

Addressing the potential of cinematic images to create memory and identity, the remainder of this article will consider how wartime films of Bangladesh tackled and negotiated the issues of memory, witness, war, and the ideas of nation and gender with a close analysis of the documentary film Stop Genocide (1971) by Zahir Raihan.

Close analysis: *Stop Genocide* (1971)

Zahir Raihan's Stop Genocide is widely considered as the most authentic recording and artistic treatment of the Liberation War (Shahaduzzaman 2009: 31, Qader 1993: 215, Hayat 2007: 44, Mutsuddi 1987: 58 and Hasan 2001: 114). As a documentary film it does not only record the real event of the war in order to project the trauma of Bangladeshis for channeling global attention and action, but it is also committed to unmasking the conditions, complexes and conspiracies of the realities of war, in a stylized approach. By focusing on the inert response of the UN to the barbarous acts against Bangladeshis carried out by the Pakistani forces, this film indirectly criticizes the role of the US in helping spread the atrocities and the genocidal crime in Bangladesh as a result of the enormous support it provided to Pakistan with arms and ammunitions (Basar quoted in Hasan 2011: 120). Thus, by foregrounding a series of radical ideas and questions, Stop Genocide dismisses the narrative that has been formed by the global powers, who define the job of international peace keeping agencies, like the United Nations (UN), to ensure justice, peace and human rights throughout the world. This pledge by the international peace keeping agency is satirically exposed as merely empty words when the visuals reveal the pain and suffering of the Bangladeshis and Vietnamese in two different wars.

Mahmudul Hossain points out that the language of *Stop Genocide* has an 'epic wideness' that transforms the film into a visual document of the oppressed people beyond its time and place (quoted in Hayat 2007: 146). Chinmoy Mutsuddi asserts that in this film Raihan places the Liberation War of Bangladesh as a part of the indomitable struggle of freedom seeking people from all around the world (Mutsuddi 1987: 58). I would suggest that the 'revolutionary conjuncture' from which Third Cinema emerges is the nucleus of Stop Genocide (Wayne 2001: 8). That is what makes this film a narrative of national consciousness at the national level and a discourse of revolutionary consciousness at the international level. At national level it records the struggle for freedom of a stateless nation and at the international level it contextualizes an anti-imperialist struggle in order to bring about a new society ? free from oppressions. Noticing this film's inner revolutionary strength in calling for change and for a new world, Alamgir Kabir states that this documentary is an expression of 'the relentless struggle for better life being waged all around the world by working men and women', along with its evidential images of 'genocidal crimes' against Bangladeshis (Kabir 1979: 49).

Being a revolutionary and a leftist activist writer, Zahir Raihan initially expressed his political aesthetic in writing and then, in 1970, by making the film Jibon Thekey Neya. He utilized the cinema as a symbolic means of expressing the

voices, anger and passion of the oppressed people of Bangladesh under the colonial exploitation of Pakistan. He was the first revolutionary film maker of Bangladesh who took up the camera as a rifle and was committed to employing cinema as a language of the exploited people that articulates their revolutionary and anti-colonial struggle. This commitment and political aesthetic of Raihan led him to be acknowledged as the 'guerrilla film maker of Bangladesh' (Rebeiro, 2000: N.P). Kabir, one of the crew members of Stop Genocide and who also did its voiceover narration, describes Raihan's zeal for recording the reality of the battlefield even to the extent of disregarding the danger of death.

The conditions of this production - the 'revolutionary conjunctures' - under which Stop Genocide is made, therefore signify its status as guerrilla cinema or Third Cinema. This is reinforced by the film's specific content - that is, its representations of 'guerrilla warfare' and the horrific treatment of the populace committed by the imperialist power. Mike Wayne identifies this period as the 'dark times of "neo-liberalism's hegemony" ' , when Third Cinema made many attempts to intervene in political situations (2001: 8). The features of the critical period from which guerrilla cinema emerges are evident in the conditions of Stop Genocide. In black and white film format, the 20-minute documentary Stop Genocide is the first documentary film on the Liberation War, to be made and projected during the Liberation War. It was co-produced by Bangladesh Shilpi-Kushali Shahayak Shamity and Bangladesh Liberation Council of the Intelligentsia (Kabir 1979: 48).

Raihan's *Stop Genocide* begins with the voiceover narration of a quotation from V.I. Lenin. The quotation, calls for the liberation of the oppressed and is accompanied by a triumphant performance of 'The Internationale'.[1] The quotation goes on to argue that those who accuse freedom-seeking

Figure 3 : Mother image in Famine series (1943) sketched by Zainul Abedin.

people of being separatists, are in fact dishonest and dull. In a fixed frame, the reading of the quotation plays out over its graphics and a profile image of Lenin at the left. Thus the film, from its very first frame, clearly conveys its central meaning: a call for the oppressed to rise up against all forms of exploitation and to demand freedom from their oppressors.

The next sequence emerges with a dissolve to a long shot of a village girl and a woman, revealing them working a husking pedal. The sound of the pedal goes on with a repetitive rhythm. The monotonous sound and movement of the pedal, and the girl's and woman's fixed postures as they are operating the pedal, create a shared image, a collective figure of Bengalis as an exploited-working class. Their exploitation is constant, like the sound of the pedal. Then, through a slow dissolve natural scenes of a village appear. By juxtaposing images of women and nature, Raihan illustrates a common Bengali theme - creating an image of the 'mother nation' that is synonymous with nature. This is evident, for instance, in Kazi Nazrul Islam and other Bengali poets' writing, through their effort to create a sublime mother nation by comparing her beauty with nature or the images from a village. For example, Nazrul terms Polli jononi (village mother) in his song Eki oporup rupey ma tomai herinu polli jononi ('I perceived you mother, in such unique beauty, oh my village mother'). However, being a leftist and having a critical approach, Raihan purposely lessens the sentimentality of the 'beautiful mother' appearance of nature by overlapping the monotonous sound of the pedal over these natural sceneries. Afterwards, with the sound effects of marching, bombing and dogs barking, a blank frame appears, connoting a colonial attack on the mother and the limitations of visuals to describe this trauma - the ravage of the mother. Raihan creates this empty space to awaken the viewers' imaginative and intellectual capacities, 'a vision without image', to comprehend the horror of the war (Levinas, quoted in Saxton 2010: 96). The 20 seconds long blank frame, indeed, seeks an ethical engagement from the audience and prepares them for a responsible viewing of other's pain.

Horrifying images of anonymous dead bodies then appear in still images one after another, offering a montage of the genocide? the unnameable shattered bodies in the field, a series of decomposed dead bodies floating on a river, dogs feasting on human corpses, the wounded dead body of a child, half naked and rotting dead bodies of women - and slowly displaying evidence of the atrocities of war and the brutality against Bengalis. As Sontag contends, images of atrocities or bodies in pain both shock us and generate shame in looking at the close-up of the real horror (2003:42). The images in Raihan's film also designate those emotions ? shame and shock. They jolt the intellectual faculty within us to seek an ethical engagement to stop these brutalities, which Raihan emphasizes by inserting the graphic 'Stop Genocide' within the film, accompanied by forceful sound of bombing and gun fire. Again the music of 'The Internationale' begins suggesting a revolutionary spirit that abruptly breaks the shocking mood that was created a while ago. Then the credits appear. Thus, at the very beginning, by introducing 'a new synthesis between the spectator's emotional and intellectual capacities', *Stop Genocide* prepares the spectator for an ethical viewing to interrogate and comprehend the cause behind the genocide of Bangladeshi people and their political struggle for national liberation (Wayne 2001: 42).

Then a typewriter appears in the frame, symbolising an apparatus for history writing on the page. It writes the UN Declaration of Human Rights, arguably the most significant historical document in the history of mankind. The words continue to emerge from the typewriter, whilst the voiceover narration confidently explains that the UN declaration was intended to create hope among the international community, and affirms the faith and determination of the UN to support human rights and to promote the equal rights of every man and woman. This is followed by two different sequences from two different places: one is Saigon, Vietnam; the other is Bongaon, Bangladesh. Still images depict the brutal attacks of US gunships and jetfighters which discharged explosives and bombs on the villages of Vietnam.

Still images of wounded and dead Vietnamese testify to the mass killings. Then we see images from Bongaon: endless lines of malnourished Bengali refuges running across the Indian borders in fear for their lives, some with their few remaining possessions carried on their heads, in search of a safer place. These civilians appear as the visible victims of the turmoil and torture inflicted by the West Pakistani army. Thus, by juxtaposing these three realities - the UN Declaration of Human Rights, the violation of human rights in Vietnam, and the same in Bangladesh - Raihan reveals the contradictory values and beliefs of one of the contemporary's world's ruling ideologies. This evocation of the contradictory nature of history gives rise to a Verfremdungs effect (alienation effect), the central device of Brecht's epic theatre. The Verfremdungs effect does not appeal to the capacity of the audience for empathy, but rather arouses astonishment through an 'uncovering of conditions [which] is brought about through [the] process being interrupted' (Benjamin 1973: 4). At this juncture, Raihan also uncovers the conditions of history as strange so that the spectator can identify the limitations of received history or ideology. This arouses a higher consciousness among the audience to re-position themselves in relation to history. In this way it is intended to awaken a collective political action among them for history to change.

Nearly all the fragments of the film are constructed in this way with the inclusion of dialectical effects to create a moment of interruption. For example, most of the sequences conclude with a freeze-frame for a few seconds, with the word 'stop' imposed in the voiceover narration. With this recurring anti-realist effect, Raihan assigns a mild shock - a break to disrupt the continuity of this war narrative. It creates a distance that can make the audience critically aware about the conditions of the war and holds them to account for the injustices and human rights violations against the Bengalis. They are also charged with the responsibility to seek justice or ways to stop the suffering of others. Luc Boltanski notes 'watching suffering from a

Figure 4 : Mother image in Stop Genocide (1971)

distance can act as a spur to ethical thought and action' (Boltanski quoted in Saxton 2010: 65). Likewise, Stop Genocide, by employing a series of 'stop's in the voice-over and freeze frames, generates a distance between the audience and the images of suffering in the film, and provokes an urgent obligation among the audience to find ways to stop the genocide.

Many filmmakers have anticipated this aesthetic strategy, which is a characteristic of Third Cinema, by involving their audience in a dialectical mode of critical thinking, employed in pursuit of social change. This is evident in *Stop Genocide* in what critics identify as the influences on Raihan coming from the films of Eastern Europe and Cuba. James Leahy, a film historian and screenwriter, claims that *Stop Genocide* would not have been possible 'without the filmmaker's exposure to the exemplary work of [Santiago]Alvarez', for example, during his exile in Kolkata in 1971 (Leahy 2002: n.p). However, Leahy's observation somewhat overstates the influence of Cuban films on Raihan's work. Being a leftist activist, Raihan was involved in a range of political movements and activities from his early life as a student at Dhaka University (Rebeiro 2010: n.p). Raihan took an active part in the Language movement and the various activities of the Communist Party (Hasan 2011: 120). His leftist engagement and the political awareness that emerged from the colonial repression that Raihan, as a Bengali, experienced at firsthand, made him

Figure 5 : A raped girl in Stop Genocide (1971).

desperate to seek out a new cinematic language for the anti-colonial struggle. In 1965, while organising the Pakistan Film Festival in Dhaka, Raihan declared a pledge to reject mainstream cinema; this was the moment in which he first gave public voice to his desire for a new cinematic language:

Star system, a weapon of profit hunting of the capitalist. Greedy businessmen imported this system from America. By destroying this system, we need to foil the insidious plot of the imperialist. Let's create the attitude for collective work (Raihan quoted in Hayat 2007: 30).

Clearly, Raihan's commitment to creating a working practice for the collective interest of his group (Bengali) developed long before his exposure to the Cuban film.

However, even with having the impulse of Third Cinema the representation of nationalist discourse in *Stop Genocide* is not fully gender neutral. Raihan includes and excludes different roles of men and women according to their culturally constructed positions. Men are active, freedom fighters and protectors of the nation; women appear as survivors, victims and bearers of the nation. Although Raihan captures images of different aged women, from teenage girl to elderly woman, he represents them as a collective body of tortured victims who are passive, voiceless and non-combative.

In most cases the victimization of women has been eroticised by picturing them in terms of 'endangered motherhood', whether they are captured in images of dutiful mothers who are running breathlessly while holding their child in their arms during a situation of war, or as raped women signifying a violated and voiceless motherland. In fact, the image of the 'endangered mother' is a common trope developed by the Bengali writers and artists in their works during the national crisis moment. Zainul Abedin, a pioneer painter of Bangladesh, who was given the honorific title Shilpacharya (the great teacher of art), portrayed this 'endangered mother' with deep pathos and sympathy by highlighting the starving, gaunt mother feeding her child in his Famine series. He drew this series during the Bengal famine in 1943 and it is considered amongst the most powerful visuals in Bengal art history. The motivation, composition and content of Abedin's sketches (Figures 2 and 3) are reflected in Raihan's framing of women (Figures 4 and 5) as devoted mothers in Stop Genocide. Indeed, both Abedin and Raihan, have valorized motherhood to determine the child-bearing role of woman, who, until her last breath acts as a devoted mother (Figures 2, 3, 4 and 5). But this valorization of women in their portrayal as 'endangered motherhood' indirectly exposes the ideological functions of patriarchy and its power relations of gender subjectivity where women are situated in the private sphere of reproduction, but not in production which is the male domain.

Most significantly, through this motif of the 'endangered motherhood', Raihan represents the nation as mother/female to reinforce the perception of nationalism within a nation which does not have a state. As Ernest Gellner has argued that the nation is invented by nationalism where it does not exist (1983: 55-6). In *Stop Genocide* the nationalist discourse of the 'mother nation' who is endangered stimulates nationalist sentiment and reinforces the need to free the nation from its enemies. Historically, however, this discourse of nationalism 'has typically sprung from masculinized memory,

masculinized humiliation and masculinized hope (Enloe 1990:45), as can be seen in the way Raihan glorifies the images of the Mukti Bahini (Bengali guerrillas) as mukti pagol torun shingho (freedom snatching young lions), who are determined to free the motherland at any cost. Although they are dressed in lungi and genzi (singlets/vests), their spirit and actions in the second half of Stop Genocide make them appear as the life savers of the Bengali nation. When Raihan portrays the activities of the guerrilla training camp, the dialectical effect of 'stop's are not employed, rather, with the music of 'The Internationale' he creates a loftiness and emotional empathy to highlight the spirit and strength of the Mukti Bahini, similar to the Aristotelian hero. These heroes are adorned with the virtues of pride for performing the duties and responsibilities to their motherland. As they are not paid soldiers like the Pakistani army, pride, aplomb and self-reliance are reflected in their warrior images.

In contrast, care-worn images become synonymous with women, as if they have no nationalist sentiment, except being worried about themselves and their children's lives. Although the intention of Raihan is to highlight the horror of the war by framing the sufferings of the women, he could not avoid re-creating the patriarchal view of women as inferior. This inferiority is sometimes exoticised, particularly while representing a woman who has been raped. A 16-year-old girl, who has been raped by six Pakistani soldiers, appears as silent. The voiceover narration, as a way of making a redemption of her unspeakable history, articulates her violent experience of being raped. She also helplessly watched the killing of her father, uncle and two brothers by the army. Close-up shots of her muted profile face, taken from different angles without her directly looking towards the camera, make her into a spectacle and a passive object. The visuals and the voiceover narration construct the culturally repressed dimension of a raped woman through her, one who is burdened physically and mentally with the feeling of shame. Nayanika Mookherjee has suggested that the portrayal of this raped girl is 'representative of that invisible "shamed" group' of raped women (Mookherjee 2006: 91). The girl is paradoxically threatened with silence.

Figure 6 : Mother image in Stop Genocide (1971)

The male voiceover narration speaks her vicious history as an authoritative account. According to Kaja Silverman the convention of voiceover in classic narrative cinema acts as 'a voice which speaks from a position of superior knowledge, and which superimposes itself "on top" of the diegesis' and is also 'an exclusively male voice' (Silverman 1988:48). In Stop Genocide, the authority of the male voiceover also indicates the cultural code of Bangladesh. Although in some cases the silence of women is explained in this film as their denial to talk or as a syndrome of post-trauma, their muteness overall (re)-creates a masculinized ideological framework of language and representation that connotes women as the lacking other. As G. Spivak observes, the representations of Third World women are regulated by the politics of power and knowledge, where they are represented as oppressed 'others' or 'subalterns', and their voices are never noticed or listened to (Spivak 1988: 271-313).

Women are silenced in *Stop Genocide* despite the fact that the resistance of the Bengalis signifies a war of existence for the whole nation, regardless of class, caste, or gender. Men, on the other hand, are depicted exclusively as heroic

Figure 7 : Images of Muktijoddha (freedom fighters) in Stop Genocide (1971).

fighters, indirectly revealing the film's limitations and drawing attention to its selective approach to events. The direct and indirect participation of women on the battlefield and their various contributions to the fighting of the War are entirely absent from the film. Of course, we cannot demand exhaustive, ideally impartial coverage of the war from a film produced under such volatile and dangerous circumstances. The camera could capture the phenomena that the filmmaker (Raihan) was able to shoot during the gruesome situation of the war. On the one hand, then, *Stop Genocide* cannot, strictly speaking, be interpreted as an inaccurate narrative of the War for not being able to capture every last aspect of the conflict, including the different active roles played by women in the war. But, on the other hand, we do not find any reference to those missing images, as '[the]sense of what is absent always haunts the documentary image[s]' (Geiger 2011: 184).

Instead, women have been documented in such particular but recurring ways that connote them as symbols. The use of female bodies as symbols of the nation are focused upon to boost nationalist sentiment among Bengali men, encouraging them to fight; women's framing as pitiful victims serve to exoticise their suffering for audiences in the outside world. Raihan's aesthetic strategy also aims to make us comprehend the systematic deployment of violence by the Pakistani army during the conflict. Although in this genocide the primary group of victims were Hindus, nearly 200,000 women of both Hindu and Muslim religious affiliation, were systematically raped during the war (Brownmiller 1976: 79). It is partly for this reason that raped woman are foregrounded in Stop Genocide as a spectacle of victimization to narrate the history. However, it also ought to be emphasised that the Pakistani army indiscriminately killed Bengalis from all walks of life during this war and not solely on the basis of gender differences. Raihan himself was the indirect victim of this genocide.[2] However, in portraying the horror of the genocide or the triumph of the nationalist struggle, he frames men and women differently.

In the process of the making sense of the experience of the Liberation War into the collective imagination of Bangladeshis, Stop Genocide is acclaimed as the most authentic and influential visual text. However, the collective trust that has been invested in this documentary needs to be re-examined and contested from different perspectives. In saying this, I do not wish to deny the evidential or factual basis of the film. Drawing on John Grierson's definition of documentary as a 'creative treatment of actuality', I would like to stress the fact that, even as a historically-grounded piece of film making, Stop Genocide nevertheless moves us imaginatively beyond the available evidence. Thus the film creates a new historical reality on the Liberation War and also constitutes the idea of the nation combining both imagined and real aspects. Again, this historical reality is not completely detached from the existing world or socio-cultural reality of its creator. Like any other cinematic genre, documentary is also a discourse that structures historical reality according to the ideology, social interests, cultural practices, political beliefs, and wider experiences of the maker and the receivers. Likewise, *Stop Genocide* reveals that the portrayals of the Liberation War of Bangladesh in documentary films of the period mostly create a new historical reality by the association of the

shared values, practices, and interests of the society to which its director belongs.

1. 'The Internationale' is widely sung as a left-wing anthem, a radical song that expresses the thriving movement for social change, justice and freedom by oppressed people. It was written by Eugène Pottier, a transport worker of Paris, in June 1871, after the Paris Commune was crushed by French government. Later this song was used as the first national anthem of the Soviet Union and the anthem of Communist international until 1944

2. On January 30, 1972, just immediately after the war, Raihan went to Mirpur, a Bihari populated area, in order to find his brother Shaidullah Kaiser, an eminent writer and intellectual of Bangladesh who was captured and killed by the Pakistani army. Then Raihan disappeared. It is presumed that he was killed by the local Biharis who collaborated with the Pakistani army in the mass killing of Bengalis during the Liberation War.

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