A Tribute to Lesser-known Heroes

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The media seldom focuses on ordinary people. Even when it comes to stories on the liberation war, it is always the already known individuals who get coverage. But there are hundreds of freedom fighters who too risked their lives despite living in very underprivileged conditions and who did not hesitate to take up arms to save their homeland.

Kay Kraft, a renowned designer handloom chain store on opening a new showroom at Sobhanbagh awarded certificates of recognition and cheques to such five such craftsmen. All of them come from very humble backgrounds but did not hesitate to rise to the call after the speech given by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on March 07, 1971. Shhambhu Acharya, ANM Habibul Haque, Mohd Sobhan Mia, Mohd Shahjahan and Paresh Nath Basak were the valiant craftsmen freedom fighters who received the awards from Professor Dr Enamul Haque, the director of the National Museum and Shahidullah Khan, the publisher of The New Age.

Shambhu Acharya inherited the exceptional skill of *patchitra* from his father Shargia Shri Sudhir Chandra Acharya. He was only 16 years old when the war broke out. His paintings and writings on the walls during that time were filled with hatred and resentment for the militants that kept the citizens motivated during the war. He was also involved in sending secret messages to the troops. "Although I was not fortunate enough to kill a Pakistani brute with my own hands I feel proud that my role as an informer helped other freedom fighters to save our country."

Weaving is a family business that ANM Habibul Haque is proud to be a part of. In 1971 he ran away to India to train for the war. After the training he came back to Dhaka and fought in the war and went back to his family business after it was over. Although he is a very highly skilled weaver he has failed to go far with his skills in the face of new technology and modest economic conditions. His resentment for authority started during the war against the Pakistani army and sadly continued after independence as none of the governments gave him recognition as a freedom fighter.

It was a very frightening morning for Paresh Nath Basak when he was taken away from his home by the Pakistani army. Along with 27 others he was lined up by the riverside. "I think it was my childlike appearance and the fact that I was an SSC candidate that they decided to let me go". Weaving was also a family business for the Basak family. He was involved in passing secret information between the freedom fighters and had to travel a lot. He did this job excellently without giving a second thought to his security. But Basak is still fighting. Although he has contributed a lot for the independence of the country he and his family are still fighting to make ends meet.



Freedom fighter artists at Kay Kraft's award ceremony that recognised their contribution to the Liberation War.

Mohammad Shahjahan joined the war with his brother, but when the attacking army killed his beloved brother he was determined to get revenge. The poor weaver gave his heart and soul to fighting the war and drove away the Pakistani forces from Saturia thana, Manikganj, his birthplace. Although he was a very successful weaver at that time, after the war he could not make much of a living and fell into poverty.

When some injured freedom fighters took refuge at Sobhan Mia's family home he decided not to sit around anymore but join the war as a freedom fighter. He went to India to train for the war. "No one can imagine how difficult life was in the training camps there," says Mia, "we had to sleep on brick beds. We had to train day and night with very little food in our stomachs. We hardly ever got to bathe." After two and a half months of intensive training he came back to Dhaka and fought from Alinagar, Sylhet. After the war he took up work as a weaver and is now getting only Tk 500 per month from the government as war benefit.

Khaled Khan, the director of Kay Kraft praised the efforts of these craftsmen and said that he hoped Kay Kraft would be able to recognise and help more such valiant freedom fighters in the future.