

Shirin Banu Mitil

We were thinking of the Vietnam war and thought that we may have to fight for years to come. But India intervened as it was a great convenience for them also. About one crore people were already in Calcutta as refugees. But hadn't India came to help us, independence would have taken a longer time.

Do you think Bangladesh is taking a long time to develop just because it gained independence in a very short time?

Our war began from the demand of autonomy for Bengal. Later it was transformed into a war of independence. We dreamt of a country where there would be no hunger and no scarcity of food. After our independence what we needed was a government which would have participation of all political parties. They would be united with nationalistic values. Only then would we be able to make the country we had envisioned.

How do you feel about the women who were victimised during the war?

I don't understand why the society should be so hostile towards the victimised women. I think they should be honoured and accepted as freedom fighters. The war came at their cost as well. In Islam remarrying a widow is considered to be a pious deed. So why wouldn't it be possible to accept a woman who has been physically violated for the sake of her country? Why wouldn't the family accept her as 'Birangona'? Why won't we feel proud that a Birangona is part of my family? It's a pity that even the title 'Birangona' has been mocked at in our country.

Do you think the war criminals should be tried under the existing laws?

Yes, if you ask me. The trial of war criminals was started in 1973. There were 12,500 war criminals in Bangladesh. It is wrongly said that Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman pardoned all the war criminals. Bangabandhu couldn't have pardoned those who were the collaborators of the heinous acts carried out by the Pakistani army. He only meant those who helped the Bangalis, the freedom fighters while acting as friends with the Pakistani army. There were many who saved entire families by feigning to be friends with the enemy. But those who pre-planned to kill the unarmed Bangalis can never be forgiven and we all want to see them under trial for the crimes they committed. ■