regaining acceptance in a conservative society where a woman's worth lay in her virtue and chastity. Oral histories such as Neelima Ibrahim's *Ami Birangona Bolchhi*, however, suggest that this purpose seems to have been defeated, as the label only served to identify within and isolate from society the women in question. The entire discourse surrounding the *birangona*, seems to have been divided and contradictory, almost mythical. Despite the honour associated with the *birangona* label, the fact that many women did not wish to identify themselves as war heroines is a testament to the fact that the simple title did not deliver all that it had promised. The Bangladeshi war heroines, despite such honorifics, were rendered almost invisible, rejected by their families, scorned by society and not given justice by the nation. Perhaps Bangladeshi society was not ready to accept and honour a raped woman as a national heroine. Perhaps instead of singling her out as a war victim, she too could have been considered a soldier who fought with her body while others did so with their weapons, and she, too, could have been labelled a freedom fighter. For, while the title of *birangona* was one of heroism, there were no hero(in)es behind the title.

The ravages of wartime rape have not been effectively addressed and the discourse surrounding the *birangona* in post-war Bangladeshi society has been disempowering for the war heroines. Social stigma leading to a culture of silence around the issue of wartime rape forced these women to remain in the shadows, depriving them of agency and access to legal redress, social justice and personal healing. By trying the atrocities, including the sexual violence, committed in 1971 as war crimes, the nation can take the first step towards honouring the sacrifice of women and men in battle and beginning the process of reconciliation and recovery of a war-ravaged national psyche which has been awaiting justice for close to four decades.

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