

# History and Herstory

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The other was Taramon Bibi also awarded a Bir Protik. For many years Taramon was not just "undiscovered" but forgotten.

It was only in late 1995 that Taramon was "introduced" to the people of Bangladesh publicly, twenty four years after Bangladesh was liberated. Taramon's address was wrongly written as Chilmari, Kurigram, when she was actually from Rowmari (now Rajibpur) in Kurigram, just on the opposite bank of the River Jamuna (Brahmaputra). A teacher cum researcher at Ananda Mohan College at Mymensingh, Bimal Kanti Dey, while researching the whereabouts of Gallantry Awardees and where they were now, found the names of two women. One was quite well known. She was a doctor now living abroad, but no one knew anything about the whereabouts of Taramon Bibi. Mr Dey started his search. He went to Chilmari and while there found that during one of the battles there, a group from Rowmari also participated in that same battle. Someone recollected a young girl with the group. Bimal Kanti Dey was not one to give up; he got in touch with the Muktijoddha Command Council and found the whereabouts of Taramon through another freedom fighter-college teacher Abdus Sabur Faruqui, other members, and the Commander of the Rajibpur Unit of Muktijoddha Sangsad. Taramon was always poor, and at that time living in abject poverty. Having contracted tuberculosis many years back, years of dire poverty and lack of treatment made her weak. Having worked in the area, I knew the members of the Mukti Juddho Sangshad. Women's organisations at that time had become very united due to the movement to bring to justice the three policemen who had raped and killed fourteen-year-old Yasmeen from Dinajpur. We took it upon ourselves to bring Taramon to Dhaka, to ensure she gets her due recognition and to try to ensure her treatment.

Though at first people were sceptical and a whole barrage of questions thrown



Women with dummy rifles.

PHOTO: JALALUDDIN HAIDER/DRIK



Women guerrillas taking part in a parade.

PHOTO: SAYEDA KHANAM

Bir Protik  
Taramon Bibi

at her. The way Taramon answered questions about how one handles a gun, what battles she took part in, through her own ability, she convinced all the sceptics that she was indeed a freedom fighter. As soon as she arrived in Dhaka, she asked us to search out the man who was responsible for taking her in as a freedom fighter, teaching her how to use arms and take part and have her participate in all the battles that the group took part in, her foster father, as she called him, Havildar Muhit. He had by then left service and was living in his home in Moulvibazar. He too was located and the reunion between the two was magical to witness.

Taramon passed away on December 1, 2018, this year. She never fully recovered from the damage that was done to her lungs. She has been in and out of hospitals ever since 1995. Each time it was difficult for her to find the money for her medicines, for her food. She was much better off financially than when she came into the national limelight in December 1995. At that she was literally begging. But whatever she got could not compensate

for the twenty four years, plus the fourteen years before that, all of which she had lived in severe poverty and deprivation. There is so much that has been written about her, details about her can be found very easily.

She kept in touch throughout. Just a few days before being hospitalised for the last time, she called me. I realised that this time it was more serious. She had a warm, lovely, positive and radiant personality. A great sense of humour, a sense of honour tinged with humbleness and sensitivity. The last time, she sounded tired, the spark was gone. She was a fighter, she was a warrior, she was someone I had come to feel I could share many things with. Just as she would share issues she felt concerned about and needed to share with me, matters which would worry her. She was unique and I am not sure we ever valued her the way she should have been. To me, Taramon signified the spirit of 1971, even in her darkest days.

*Khushi Kabir is a rights activist and the coordinator of Nijera Kori.*