

When music paves the way

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"Back in 1971 our society was conservative, but not as ultra-conservative as it is today," he says. "We never had such a thing called 'gender bias' and other than frontal guerrilla combat which many women pitched themselves into, especially in hit-and-run operations in suburban areas, they volunteered as nurses, collected money for the war cause and provided vital intelligence and logistics to the freedom fighters. If one revisits late Tareq Masud's *Muktir Gaan*, you will get a vivid testimony of how women and girls went to the front and liberated areas to imbibe the fighting spirit among our people."

Haque speaks of a famous female actor, who he would rather not name, and how she showcased her love for Bangladesh. "The most enduring image of 1971 which I cherish so much is when the said actor, who was taken for dead, appeared in Bombay tinsel town together in company of the famous filmmaker—the late IS Johar," he says. "What shocked, surprised and captivated everybody is she appeared on stage in full glare of the media, without any makeup, with an ordinary cotton sari, barefooted without a petticoat and surprisingly without a blouse. She made the statement that this is exactly how poor ordinary women in Bangladesh dress up daily and are daily victims of brutality and rape, and that she represented them. It seems that during the entire duration of the war, whenever she appeared in public, she would wear the same attire. In 1971



COURTESY: LUBNA MARIUM

she was the most celebrated actor in Dhaka and her action led to a lot of support for our Liberation War." Freedom fighter Nasreen Rab Ruba, remembers how she was overwhelmed with emotions when she heard patriotic songs back in 1971. "I was crying and listening to the songs and watching other freedom fighters singing along around me," she remembers. "We had finally achieved what we were fighting for!" She could hear everyone screaming around her,



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"We are free! Bangladesh!" "I, along with others, got very emotional and wept!" she recounts. To the Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra singers, everything seems like a dream now. Forty-eight years ago, the women warriors became part of a historical group, which fought the war and brought independence to Bangladesh. Clearly, the role of the female artists back in 1971, and their contribution to inspiring the people to display strength were invaluable.

According to Haque, BTV and Betar were overtaken by pro-independence rebel artists and musicians, signifying the commencement to our collective cultural revulsion towards Pakistan, many of who were women. These rebels trained to fire guns and comprehend the power and effectiveness of the peaceful weapon fired from the human souls.

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A screengrab from the documentary *Muktir Gaan*.