



Memorial for *Birangana*: A Thought Process from History to Future

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Abstract

The liberation war of Bangladesh in 1971 is the most significant, extremely painful, frequently celebrated incident for the whole nation where the countrymen stood against the unjust of Pakistani Rulers and took part in the war to protest their genocide. The noble freedom fighters defended their motherland and won the victory by sacrificing their lives. Along with that, women got tortured by the Pakistani army. After the liberation war, several museums, memorials, and monuments were built to keep the memories alive of the war heroes. Though women had unforgettable contributions; showed their audacity, there is nothing dedicated to them such as the *Birangona* museum or memorial. In this paper, the rationality of such a project has been discussed and a proposal has been given for such a structure. The research was conducted through a historical literature review, perceiving the grief of the heroines and analyzing similar kinds of architectural projects worldwide. Later, the project was conceived considering *Birangona*'s life journey and tortured women now in the country. Hence, the Memorial has two sections: The *Birangona* Museum and The Women empowerment center. The Memorial for *Birangona* exemplifies the veneration to the War women and the center for tortured women gives proper mental care and support to the women who are being tortured nowadays. Therefore *Birangona* memorial will not only be the first national glorification of *Birangona* but it will be a place of hope for the tortured women today.

Keywords: Liberation War, *Birangona*, Museum, Memorial, Honor, Tortured Women

I. Introduction

Moving back to 1947, after the end of the British regime, India was segregated into two different regions India and Pakistan based on religion. The domain of Pakistan was of two topographically and socially discrete zones; East Pakistan and West Pakistan, and India in between. East Pakistan (Bangladesh) was persistently ruled and abused financially and politically by West Pakistan (Pakistan). Language played a vital role in this oppression since the Pakistani Government sanctioned Urdu as the state language, whereas Bangla was the first language of East Pakistan. However, Bangladeshi people opposed the law, and, therefore, a nine-month blood-scattered war was fell between the two countries (Mullenbach 2020, Islam 2012). As a result, three million Bangladeshi people immolated their life and many more were wounded. A nation got birth named 'Bangladesh' through the liberation war. During the war, Pakistani armed forces took the procedure of assault. In Pakistani military camps, between

200,000 and 400,000 women got raped and enslaved (Islam 2012, genocidebangladesh.org). On December 22, 1971, Bangladesh Govt. promulgated women those became physically distressed by the Pakistan arm forces as *Birangona* or war-heroine; courageous women (Mookharjee 2015, Islam 2012). Bangladeshi people celebrate victory every year on December 16th; attain the triumph, besides show honor of those Martyrs. Many museums and memorials have been built across the country to remember the courage of brave soldiers but barely reveal the war heroines' self-denial. Although each of the installations pays homage to the memory of war heroine, the war and warriors deeply affect the human emotion through visiting those places. This paper proposes a project that equally assesses the contribution of women in the war. The main objective of the project is to portray before the countrymen every detailed story of the torment of *Birangona*, the reincarnation, and their conquest. Along it will reflect upon the miseries and heroism of Bangladeshi women before the world.

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II. Methodology

This paper is the outcome of two sequential work processes. Firstly, the research for the design project was done and secondly, the design outcome was generated from the research outcome. The research was done through rigorous literature reviews of historical documents, interviews, video documents, and in-person interviews, practical project surveys, international case studies, and site analysis. Later, the research outcome leads to concept generation for the design project, program generation, and three-dimensional form generation to give the architectural expression of the project.

III. Research Outcomes

Taking a close look at history it is observed that, assault is commonly used as a military tool. It is a form of torture, both physically and mentally, and it is a felony, similar to murder, in which women are often "raped to death." The numbers are often frightening and shocking: About 100,000 and 250,000 women were raped in Rwanda during the genocide in 1994; more than 60,000 women were raped in Sierra Leone during the civil war (1991-2002); more than 40,000 in Liberia during the civil war (1991-2002). (Peltola, 2012).

Women and girls from the ages of eight to seventy-five were sexually assaulted on the spot, gang-raped, then murdered or kidnapped from their homes, public places by the military for sexual slavery to officers and soldiers for the length of the war. Rape in Pakistani custody occurred in full nine months (Brownmiller, 1975). From 8/10 onwards, 100 Pakistani soldiers took part in one mass rape (Hasan, 2008). Pakistani vampires persecuted Bengali women day after day until the war ended.

After the completion of the battle of emancipation, it was stated by the government of Bangladesh that those physically assaulted women are *Birangona*. The idea suggests that the purpose of giving labels seems to isolate women from society. But, many women refused to stigmatize themselves as there were chances to be disdained by family, husband, in-laws; especially, unmarried women who were belittled as slut, despite they earned empathy. Many people pronounced it *Barangona* by distorting the word *Birangona*

which means prostitute, discouraging them to accept this honor (Ibrahim, 1998/2001).

After the horrific sexual abuse, unimaginable humiliation, and physical and emotional trauma, women have lost their self-esteem. She imagined herself as a woman of disability, the source of impurity. She failed to match herself with ten other girls and couldn't fix up the broken shadow of her own. People of the society, relatives, and neighbors all raised their fingers at them and said that girl is unlucky, whore, the shame of society, and sin. Many people came forward to help them, but their impertinent curiosity plunged women into a deeper melancholy.

After 50 years of independence, now in Bangladesh, sexual assault and incidents of violence against women are happening incessantly. Domestic violence, child abuse, sexual assaults are becoming very common in Bangladesh. According to police statistics, from 2014 to 2019, a total of 20835 cases have been filed on charge of rape. There were 1538 rape lawsuits filed in 2019 between January 1 and April 30. Every day, approximately 13 rapes occur in Bangladesh (Rashid, 2019). Between April and August of 2020, a total of 632 rape cases were registered. Every day, on average, four women have been raped in the last five months of the coronavirus pandemic (Rabbi, 2020). Girls aren't safe with family members for going outside. Those desecrated women are slowly appearing mentally disturbed by society and family members. Those survivors need proper exoneration.

Research also found many *Birangona*'s emerged in life, namely, great sculptor FerdousiPriyovashini, Taramon Bibi, Monuara begum Moli, KhodezaKhatun, Nurjahan Begum, Vanu, Begum, Kaminibala Mondol, EitiHazra (Hasan, 2008). *Birangona* not only was tortured, went through trauma, hopelessness but also rebuilt courage and brought new hope to their life and survived courageously. These *Birangona* women could be the inspiration to start over a new life for today's women. Existing museums and memorials are ineffective to express such an awful existence appropriately of those bold women. A similar kind of architectural case study in the world depicts the philosophical expression and emotional attachment that makes the project successful. Hence, the journey of the *Birangona*'s needs to be narrated through the journey of the memorial.

Experiencing the real-life story of *Birangona*, tortured women will boost to have a new passage.

IV. Design Outcomes

This particular project is an idea project on a hypothetical site expressing the idea to build a memorial for *Birangona*'s to take citizens through the life of *Birangona*'s and to construct a center for the tortured women, seeking aid to return to ordinary life. Furthermore, this museum is a tool to delineate the memories of *Birangonas*. It is not just a project is about creating an act of using architecture to tell a story and provoke emotion in visitors by allowing them to feel the effects of the cruelty that occurred to women in 1971. The conceptual site has been taken from one of the community plots of Purbachal new RAJUK city at Dhaka in Bangladesh. The idea is, as the city will expand towards Purbachal and the posterities will reside there who have fewer acquaintances with the liberation war and War Hero or Heroines. Besides, this kind of project will not only carry out the history through the generation but also create a social support center for socially violated women. Visiting such a museum, women will discern how the *Birangona*'s struggled in life, yet survived.

The concept of the architectural project is derived from the research outcome. So, the project has two separate zones. The first one, the museum and the memorial placed over a base, and the other part is the center for tortured women (Fig. 1). The research found that the life of a *Birangona* consists of pain, ignominy, indignity, they are commendable for their irrepressible renunciation, nonetheless. Being ostracized by society, *Birangona*'s passed a bitter-wounded life, begging for food, working as a maid, never thought about suicide; they effectively overcame all obstacles instead. Many women were sheltered or got married to freedom fighters or socially dignified people and thus, they became optimistic and grew prosperous. Therefore, their life journey embraced five core themes; memories, sufferings, support, hope, and recognition. The memory of being tortured during the war, the sufferings from family and society after the war, support from self and surroundings, resurgence, comprehend the meaning of life, and self-determination. Conceptually, the museum has five different galleries, exposing the unambiguous aspects of the journey. The building form originated from the

abstract placement of five different rectangular forms (Fig. 1). The form is generated by connecting pentagons between rectangular shapes that give structure to the building, resulting in a zig-zag building form (Fig. 2). Each pentagon spaces delineate the beginning of a new chapter of their life, considered as a space of emotions, absence, and understanding the things. This space is uniquely designed with a glut of natural lights (Figs. 3-4). At pentagon intervals, natural light will evoke feelings of the experiences in the visitor's mind. The reasons behind the devious building from the pathways of war-women were onerous (Fig. 2).



Figure 1: Master plan (Source: Author)



Figure 2: Form of the museum (Source: Author)

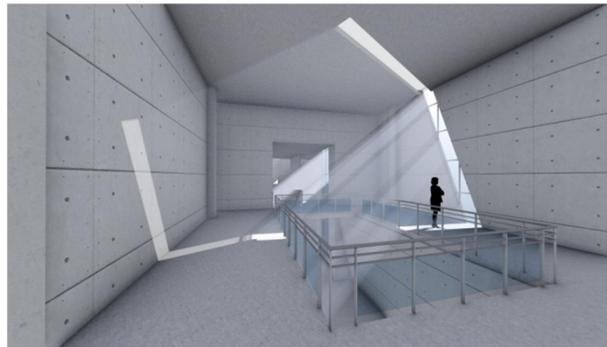


Figure 3: Appearance of sunlight (Source: Author)

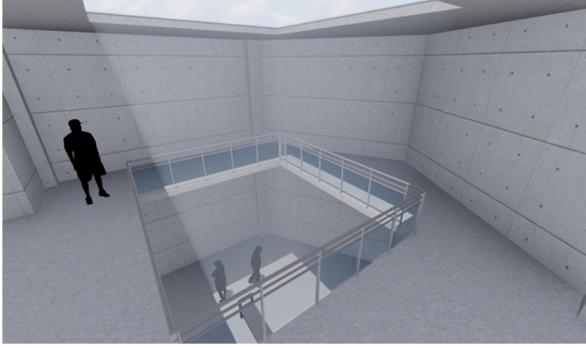


Figure 4: Space of realization (Pentagon) (Source: Author)



Figure 5: The memorial (Source: Author)

Visitors will experience their life journey through this museum and will finally reach the surprise, the achievement, i.e., the victory, the delight although emptiness is extant inside. There, individuals will find the meaning of all those sacrifices, the ultimate termination, and the achievement of *Birangonas*' heroism: the Memorial placed over the water body out in open nature (Fig. 5).

After visiting all galleries, the journey ends up in a plaza where visitors will find the memorial for the respective *Birangonas*', representing honor to them. A circular void inscribed in a rectangular plane interprets obvious victory along with the significant poignant stories that happened with the intrepid women, which never fail to consider. The base of the museum and memorial has all public functions for instance multipurpose hall, administration, cafeteria, and library (Figs. 6-7).

The second part of the project is a center for tortured women consisting of a rehabilitation center, training center, and support center (Fig. 8). At the rehabilitation center, violated women will

get proper mental care and the training center will empower the women (Fig. 9).



Figure 6: The base of the museum (Source: Author)



Figure 7: Public function zone (Source: Author)



Figure 8: View towards center for tortured women



Figure 9: Rehabilitation center (Source: Author)



Figure 10: Section Showing the Interior Spaces of the Museum (Source: Author)

The museum interior tends to be identical to the exterior from the outside, but the interior spaces are incredibly complex (Fig. 10).

Although the rooflines of the galleries are uniform, the height of the space is altered, interpreting the complications of the life of *Birangonas*. The sporadic lines are drawn on the facades (Fig. 2) expressing wounds, compared with lashing on a body and leaving a stain upon it.

The building itself is tortured. Visitors will experience the galleries in diversified ways resulting from still photographs (Figs. 11-12), real-life installations (Fig. 13), audiovisual effects, written stories (Fig. 14), and documents, virtual reality exhibitions.



Figure 11: Still photograph-1 (Source: Author)



Figure 12: Still photograph-2 (Source: Author)



Figure 13: Real-life installations (Source: Author)



Figure 14: Untold stories (Source: Author)

V. Conclusion

Now, it has been 50 years since the war happened and unfortunately, the importance of sacrifices and the real story behind the war are being disappeared increasingly from the core of individuals, especially the newbie. Society, the nation has failed to ensure the respect, women deserve even in the 50 years of independence, and the oppression of girls at every moment is an example of this. The indebted contribution of Bengali women in the war to sustain this existence can be fully demonstrated through Birangana Museum and memorial. The paper has discussed the importance of such structures and the core idea of the project. The paper has revealed the concept of the project and the architectural spaces and expressions where visiting the museum, people will return with the joy of victory similarly will recall those women behind the victory. It has come up with the first such project idea in the country, though it has further scope to detail program generations, site analysis, architectural detailing, and technical detailing. Further study is needed to estimate the project budget in this regard.

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