

Neharika Noor opened the leather journal, her breath shaking and her nerves quaking. She looked out into the audience, the thousands of Bangladeshi's crowded around. This was her moment to make his death worth it. So she began to read.

*14 June 1971*

*Just yesterday this article came out that changed our lives. It was an article that discussed the mass genocide that was going on, that is still going on. Anthony Mascarenhas wrote about these lives that were being taken, and did it so right. People started showing up to the battlefield with signs that read, "Joy Bangla." They started caring. People came out and supported my country. Now people truly understood how important this was. Now they understood why we fight for freedom. Only now do they realize.*

*26 August 1971*

*I saw them grab the women. I watched and cried. I imagined my little sisters being washed away in a crowd of girls, on their way to get raped. I heard that the Imams supported this. They supported old men stealing the innocence of young girls just because of what they called themselves. They called the women "war booty" telling them that their purpose was to please the Pakistani soldiers and give them what they needed. This wasn't right. I saw people of Bangladesh taking a role in this mass rape, throwing around Bihari Muslim women, as they supported Pakistan. How have we turned into this? I thought back to why I was here. Why I took the opportunity to stand around and watch this violence grow. It was my family, the future for them. I was the eldest boy, I needed to reassure myself that my siblings would be free and safe. Even if that meant looking into the eyes of these women, and not being able to answer their cries for help.*

*18 September 1971*

*My body ached. I wasn't sure why I was their target; I hadn't done anything wrong. I wasn't going to tell Ammu about this, but I needed to let it out regardless. They pushed me into a corner, an alleyway, and beat me. They slammed their fists into me. They threw me onto the ground. I didn't even see their faces. They wore Pakistani uniforms. I remember this woman coming to my rescue, helping me up. She asked me if I had any family and I told her no. If I were to be honest then, I would have been banished to return to this war. Ammu would have treated me like a kid, taking care of me day in and out. I couldn't do that to her. She deserves me to be strong. It's the least I could do.*

*16 December 1971*

*Joy Bangla. Today was liberating. I was front and center, holding my sign. I watched as soldiers fought for my country. I watched as the people who ran the local supermarkets cried. I saw the guy my mom bought sweets from, how happy he was. I saw my dad's caregiver and her*

*children celebrating. I was inspired by how much this country meant to these people, your everyday people. I could already hear my mom telling all of my relatives how proud she was that her eldest son, was there. I was in the field where it happened.*

Neharika Noor closed the journal of her uncle, an echo ringing through ‘The Liberation War Museum’ in Dhaka, Bangladesh. She turned to her left, to see her five siblings and mother all joined in hands.

“My uncle sacrificed everything for this country. For his ‘desh.’ Mohammed Alom Noor was a hero. My father, Ahmed Ali Noor, lived a long, safe, and successful life, because his brother allowed him to,” she sobbed.

“Today marks the 50th anniversary of The Liberation War and we use this day to celebrate our freedom. But, we often forget the 500,000 people who were killed during this war. We often disregard, the 200,000 to 400,000 women who were sexually assaulted during this war. There are children, in this country right now, who don’t know who their father is. Women have had thousands of abortions since the war, unable to nurture what some would call a “war baby.” People have taken their lives because of the trauma they had to face 50 years ago. And we are selfishly taking this day for granted, only celebrating the good.” Neharika stood strong as the community cheered her on.

“Mohammed Alom Noor died two weeks after our victory. His left lung was fractured after a beating he took in an alleyway. He had trouble breathing. His sign “Joy Bangla” still hangs from my late Grandmother’s room. My uncle only wanted to make his mother proud. But not only did he make his mother proud, he made our country proud. So let’s continue celebrating the freedom we earned, but, my brothers and sisters, do not forget to send our prayers to the heroes, the martyrs of this war. Allahumdulilah.”