

RISING SILENCE (2018) 75 minutes

A feature documentary by Leesa Gazi

Produced by Komola Collective, Openvizor and Making Herstory

'If no one heeds your call, walk alone'

A journey of relationships between women, dealing with war, violence and daily prejudice to heal and create the future with unconditional love.



Shurjyo: How does youth look like? Rajubala: How does it look like?
Shrujyo: Drops of water on a (Kachu) leaf.
Rajubala: Even if it is a drop of water on a leaf...



KOMOLA COLLECTIVE, OPENVIZOR AND MAKING HERSTORY PRESENT

RISING SILENCE

IF NO ONE HEEDS YOUR CALL, WALK ALONE



DIRECTED BY LEESA GAZI, DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY SHAHADAT HOSSAIN, EDITED BY TIJMEN VELDHIJZEN
MUSIC DIRECTORS SOHINI ALAM AND OLIVER WEEKS, EXECUTIVE PRODUCER ABBAS NOKHASTEH, PRODUCER LEESA GAZI

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RISING SILENCE



KOMOLA COLLECTIVE, OPENVIZOR AND MAKING HERSTORY PRESENT 'RISING SILENCE' DIRECTED BY LEESA GAZI DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY SHAHADAT HOSSAIN
EDITED BY TIJMEN VELDHIJZEN CAMERA MATT KOWALCZUK MUSIC DIRECTORS SOHINI ALAM AND OLIVER WEEKS EXECUTIVE PRODUCER ABBAS NOKHASTEH
PRODUCED BY LEESA GAZI © 2018 KOMOLA COLLECTIVE, OPENVIZOR AND LEESA GAZI

Rising Silence

Rising Silence is a journey of relationships between women. When society refuses to hear them, the Birangona, Heroines of the 1971 Liberation War of Bangladesh; hold closely to tell their stories to each other and the next generation to understand their identity. To never forget how as women they have refused to be diminished as they have tried to heal and overcome the ravages of conflict, violence and prejudice. To create the future with the power of unconditional love.

Documentary feature

Runtime: 75 minutes

Year: 2018

Format: HD

International trailer 1 <https://vimeo.com/257033832>

International trailer 2 <https://vimeo.com/257034219>

The project includes

- Feature Documentary (75 minutes) in Bengali and English versions with subtitles
- Film Soundtrack album
- Development of an online platform of all the women interviewed during the production.
- Development of a Birangona support fund based on proceeds from feature documentary (50 per cent) as well as film soundtrack along with ongoing direct fundraising events.

Brief credits

Director: Leesa Gazi

Director of Photography: Shahadat Hossain

Editor: Tijmen Veldhuizen

Executive Producer: Abbas Nokhasteh (Openvizor)

Producer: Leesa Gazi (Komola Collective),

Co-Producer: Onjali Q. Rauf (Making Herstory)

Production partners: Komola Collective, Openvizor, Making Herstory, Thenandal Studios (TSL)

Countries: United Kingdom, Bangladesh, India

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RISING SILENCE Introduction

A feature documentary by Leesa Gazi

'If no one heeds your call, walk alone'

A journey of relationships between women, dealing with war, violence and daily prejudice to heal and create the future with unconditional love.

In December 1971, East Pakistan became the independent nation of Bangladesh after a nine-month war with West Pakistan. During the Liberation War, the Pakistani army adopted the rape and torture of Bangladeshi women as a military tactic across the country and in camps built throughout Bangladesh. Over the course of nine months of conflict, the Pakistani military and their local collaborators raped and made sex slaves of an estimated 200,000-400,000 Bangladeshi women and children.

Faced with a huge population of hundreds of thousands of survivors of rape and torture, the new Bangladeshi government, only six days after the end of the war, publicly honoured every woman and child subjected to rape in the War as Birangona (brave woman or war-heroine). However, after the assassination of the founder of the nation in 1975, everything went horribly wrong for them. In daily life, Birangona were ostracised and attacked, seen only as symbols of politics and violence rather than as women and freedom fighters.

When society refuses to hear them, the Birangona hold closely to tell their stories to one another and the next generation to understand their identity, to never forget how as women they have refused to be diminished. They have tried to heal and overcome the ravages of conflict, violence, and prejudice to create the future with the power of unconditional love.

Rising Silence is the first documentary feature by Leesa Gazi, a British Bangladeshi actor and playwright and founding member of a theatre group Komola Collective dedicated to telling stories from women's perspectives.

The history behind the making of this film is a very personal one for Leesa. Her father was a freedom fighter. She grew up hearing the stories of the War. When she turned 17, her father told her a story about Birangona women that never left her.

In 2010, Leesa met with 21 Birangona women in Bangladesh. She then started collecting their personal accounts to document their stories and from this, working with Komola Collective, a theatrical piece emerged.

She later co-wrote the play 'Birangona: Women of War'. In 2014, Leesa recorded reactions and discussions to the play in Bangladesh. The Birangona she met, after watching their own stories on stage, were overwhelmed and said, "You heard us, but now we need you to know us".

Leesa then found herself drawn into close relationships with nine Birangona women. In 2015, these women brought Leesa into their homes and villages, beyond history and politics, to share in their lives and experiences as women. They showed her the vital importance of creating an intimate journey of wisdom gained from the fearless generosity of sharing.

They remain defiant as freedom fighters, citizens, daughters, sisters, wives, mothers, and grandmothers. By living, they overcome and grow beyond the monsters of war and daily prejudice that refuse to accept their human capacity to heal on their own terms. This they do with extraordinary courage and the most profound expression of love.

RISING SILENCE

Director's Statement Leesa Gazi

The history behind the making of this film has been a personal journey for me.

I grew up hearing the heroic and harrowing stories of the Liberation War. When I was 17, my father, a freedom fighter in the War, told me about the Birangona women. The women he saw had been captured by the Pakistani forces and their local collaborators and held in rape camps. He told me he had witnessed hundreds of women and girls standing back-to-back on a convoy of trucks like sacrificial animals. That image stayed with me forever.

In 2013, I travelled to Bangladesh to work on a play about the Birangona women - a dramatised account based on the experiences of the women who had been subjected to one of the worst campaigns of rape as a weapon of war in the 20th century. Time after time, audiences would comment on how shocked they were to discover these women actually existed, how successful society had been in wiping out a history that impacted people - particularly women - alive today. But I felt deep in my heart it was not enough.

I began this journey to make a film about them. At the end of the journey, I realised that their sharing of their lives and how they have tried to heal has shown me how to find myself and what I am capable of as a woman.

I wanted to see these women on their own terms, beyond labels and statistics. They are real women: someone's daughter, or sister, or mother, or any woman. Each of them had a childhood, and each of them has a name, a story to tell.

Four of the women died while we were in the post-production stage of this film.

Their existence, in spite of being ignored and shut out for so long, is a testament to their resilience and their refusal to be diminished. They accepted me with no judgment and with an unconditional love that comes so naturally to them as their way to build their lives. They celebrate experiencing the wonder and beauty of friendship, nature, and music because they never give up on life.

Background links:

Leesa Gazi TedX Talk <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fr5UJMG5DGc>

Article in The Guardian re Leesa and her play Birangona: Women of War
<http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2014/apr/15/silence-bangladesh-birangona-women-of-war-play>

Leesa Gazi interview in Huffington Post
http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/onjali-rauf/sexual-violence-summit_b_5487075.html

The Birangona Women of our documentary



Jharna Bashu Halder (late 60's) , Barasat, Kolkata - Left Bangladesh in 1978. She never thought she would have to leave her own country. After the founder of the nation was assassinated in 1975, she witnessed collaborators of the Pakistan Army being rehabilitated politically and socially in independent Bangladesh. One day, she mistook someone for the collaborator who brought to her house soldiers who raped her. Jharna couldn't bear to live in fear, she left the country.



Amina Begum, Mukhlesa Begum and Maleka Begum (late 60's to mid 70's), Ranishoinkul - Three of four sisters, all four siblings were taken to rape camps by the Pakistani army and kept for more than six months. The youngest sister died shortly after liberation owing to internal injuries and infection. When the war ended they were not accepted in their village. They were beaten up and thrown out of their homes by the police and the villagers.

Mukhlesa Begum died 10th of September 2016 in her home at Rajbari, Ranishoinkul.



Raju Bala (late 60's), Shodanandapur. Aged 23-24 at the time of the War, Raju witnessed the murder of her child, aged 2 years old, and was raped repeatedly by soldiers in front of her husband. Following the end of the War, Raju was ostracised by her in-laws, but her husband stood by her.

Rajubala died 11th of December 2017 in her home at Shodanandapur, Sirajganj.



Shurjyo Begum (mid 60's , Sirajganj. Aged 16-17 during the War, Shurjyo was married off overnight when the Army set up camps in their village. Villagers warned her father that if she wasn't married she would be taken away. Shurjyo can still hear the sound of their boots, she can still see them coming.

Shurjyo Begum died 14th of March 2017 in her home at Sirajganj.



Chindau Marma (late 70's), Mohalchhari. Chindau was kept in a rape camp for 6 months. She used to be taken from camps to camps as a sex slave. Chindau was an indigenous casualty of war, although she was not the only one. The rape of indigenous women is a little-known fact even amongst those who have worked on the Birangona issue.

Chindau Marma died 29th of July 2016 in her home at Thalipara, Mohalchhari.



Tepri Bewa (late 60's) , Thakurgaun. Tepri was married at the time, her family gave her up to the soldiers to save their lives. When she was released, she was pregnant. Her family and villagers wanted her to abort the child but she had decided to keep it. Sudhir, her son, has agreed to be filmed to discuss his life as a child of war.



Rijia Begum Mohon (early 70's), Fakinnir Bazaar Slum, Dhaka. Rijia was aged 27 during the war. Her husband went missing and she was caught when she had gone out looking for him. After a few days, she was found unconscious in a dump-yard. She has a daughter and grandchildren and she lives with them in a slum in Dhaka city. Rijia used to work as a cleaner in a market. Every other day she goes to her local bazaar and speaks her mind. She does not care that people don't bother to listen to what she has to say.

Biographies



Leesa Gazi (Director and Producer) actor, writer, and co-founder of Komola Collective. She is the concept developer, co-writer, and performer of 'Birangona: Women of War' theatre production, nominated for The Offies in 2014. Leesa wrote the play 'Daughter of the Forest' that toured the UK in 2016. She is the scriptwriter and performer of 'Six Seasons' and 'A Golden Age' at the Southbank Centre. She worked as a script interpreter for the 2012 Globe festival on 'The Tempest' and worked as the cultural coordinator and as a voice artist for Akram Khan's Olivier Award-winning piece 'Desh'; and for 'Chotto Desh'. Leesa recently wrote and directed three CVE (counter violence extremism) short films. <http://www.komola.co.uk/leesa>



Abbas Nokhasteh (Executive Producer) is a producer and founder of Openvizzor arts organisation based in London, UK, Abbas has produced both documentary and fiction features which have premiered at Sundance, Rotterdam and Cannes, including Alejandro Jodorowsky's latest film Endless Poetry', 'Chuck Norris vs. Communism' and 'Ballad of Exiles'. He is also co-founder/director at Paraa art and architecture practice in Dhaka, Bangladesh and a director at Studio 174 arts academy in Downtown Kingston, Jamaica. <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm4451299>



Onjali Q. Rauf (Co-Producer) founder / CEO of human rights organisation Making Herstory. Following Women's Studies at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth (BA) and Oxford University (M.St) Onjali was a staff writer and Assistant Editor for Emel Magazine; Campaigns Manager for Women for Women International UK, and for the past seven years, worked with grass-roots charities in London, UK to develop programmes, initiate research and raise funds for the most vulnerable communities. In 2011 launched Making Herstory following the murder of a beloved aunt. In 2014 was shortlisted for the Care2Impact Award and Emma Humphreys Memorial Prize. <https://makingherstory.org.uk>



Shahadat Hossain (Director of Photography), with over eight years of experience working on international and domestic media projects as a director, assistant director, cinematographer and photographer. He has worked for Bishari films (Canada), Lotus films (Austria), Mortal Coil Media (UK) Big Blue Communications, Jigsaw Productions and VG Network Norway. Shahadat worked as cinematographer on Sundarbans documentary by Tiger Team UK and on Rana Plaza documentary by Norway Television. He recently worked as the Director of Photography in three CVE (counter violence extremism) short films. He directed and filmed two documentaries. <http://shossain.com>



Tijmen Veldhuizen (Editor) Dutch filmmaker who moved to London in 2007 to study film after completing a MA in marine biology in the Netherlands. After graduation from London Film School, he started to work as a freelancer, editor, cameraman and DoP on documentaries and commercials while simultaneously working as a director. His work has been broadcasted and screened at international film festivals, winning awards at festivals like the Raindance Film Festival and London Lift-Off Film Festival. <http://tijmenveldhuizen.com>



Sohini Alam (Vocalist, Music Director) lead vocalist for the band Khiyo and for Kishon Khan's Afro-Cuban-Bengali jazz band Lokkhi Terra. Sohini is a co-founder of arts company Komola Collective. She has been acclaimed for her work with Tara Arts and Akram Khan's Until the Lions. She also provided vocals for Jocelyn Pook's score of Akram Khan's Olivier Award-winning piece Desh. She is part of In Place of War's GRRRL, a collaboration with international female musicians. Appearances with Lokkhi Terra have included Ronnie Scott's Jazz Club, WOMAD, the closing ceremony of the 2010 South Asian Games in Bangladesh, the Barbican, and the first Dhaka World Music Festival. <http://sohinialam.com>



Oliver Weeks (Musician and Composer, Music Director) read music at Clare College, Cambridge, studying composition with Robin Holloway, obtained a Ph.D in composition from the Royal Academy of Music. His works have been performed by the London Philharmonic Orchestra, the Philharmonia Orchestra, the BBC Singers and the Mercury Quartet, amongst others. His interest in South Asian music has led to the forming of Khiyo, British Council-funded tours of India and Bangladesh with Parapar (a collaboration with Moushumi Bhowmik) and music for the Mumbai and Kolkata theatres. <http://khiyo.com>

Production partners

Komola Collective is a London-based theatre and arts company dedicated to telling the stories that often go untold - stories from women's perspectives. The company was formed in 2012 by four women theatre practitioners from diverse backgrounds: Leesa Gazi, Filiz Ozcan, Sohini Alam, and Caitlin Abbott. They are writer, director, actor, musician, illustrator, facilitator, composer, and designer. Komola wants to revisit history, challenge social taboos, unearth myths, retell known stories, and question accepted beliefs. 'Birangona: Women of War' was Komola Collective's theatre debut production and documentary. In August 2013, Komola Collective travelled to Bangladesh to work on the R&D stage of the play. In 2014, Komola Collective completed the UK and Bangladesh tour of 'Birangona: Women of War', which was nominated for an Offie Award in the UK. Website: <http://www.komola.co.uk>

Openvizor is an international arts organisation, based in London, UK, founded in 2006 by Abbas Nokhasteh. Openvizor produces and presents works and research at cultural and academic institutions including Cannes (Director's Fortnight), Rotterdam IFFR, Sundance Institute, Venice Biennale, Documenta, The Louvre, The Serpentine Gallery, The Victoria and Albert Museum, Tate Britain, The New Museum NYC, The Jewish Museum Berlin, The British Library, The Barbican Centre, The Southbank Centre, The Whitechapel Gallery, Goldsmiths, University of London, Istanbul Biennial, IDARTES, Museo Nacional de Colombia and Museo de Arte del Banco de la República, Colombia. Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/openvizor>
IMDB: https://www.imdb.com/name/nm4451299/?ref=mv_sr_1

Making Herstory is a human rights organisation, founded in August 2012 by Onjali Qatara Rauf, a human rights activist with over ten years' experience in the women's rights sector, and governed by a Board of Trustees from a range of legal, media and grassroots' fields. The organisation has a growing global support base, and delivers all works from its headquarters in London; working to tackle the abuse, enslavement and trafficking of women and girls worldwide. One key way is to partner up with individuals and agencies working to raise awareness of violence against women in any form. Rising Silence is the first feature documentary the organisation is working to support and produce. Website: <http://makingherstory.org.uk>

Thenandal Studios (TSL), Chennai-based Sri Thenandal Studios (TSL) is the fastest growing film entertainment company in India that is currently working on its 100th film, has now set its eyes on expanding its global footprints by exploring new co-production opportunities with like-minded studios in North America and China. TSL has a firm foothold in the film distribution business — both for domestic and overseas films. They have distributed big blockbuster Hollywood films in Southern part of India. Founded by veteran director-producer Rama Narayanan, a household name in South India in the 80s. Website: <https://www.thenandalfilms.com>













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