

## **Actants in the “Object Donor List”: New Materialities of Martyr Ephemera Archives in the Liberation War Museum of Bangladesh**

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### **“Object Donor List” in the Bangladesh Liberation War Museum: Ephemera and New Materialistic Practices**

Salil Tripathi writes that museums of Bangladesh “don’t tell a story that begins in 1971” (34). Archives zoom into the past of the 1757 martyrs of the Battle of Plassey and then move to events that led to 1971. Thereon, war posters, memorabilia, archived documents, and recorded oral histories amplify the narrative of the 1971 Liberation War from macrocosmic perspectives. Ephemera archives of the “Object Donor List” in the Liberation War Museum in Dhaka, Bangladesh, amplify the narrative of historical interjection from microcosmic perspectives. While the former constitute part of the martyr ephemera, the latter comprises those traces of the martyr’s personal remains which had constituted the human identity through various non-human means. Ephemera are minor, transient documents of everyday life (Rickards 7), and this study explores martyr ephemera as actants, structuring the martyr narrative of the 1971 struggle and its multiple and interjectional materialities through the intra-active agency of the human and the non-human within a framework of posthuman museum practices.

While the Liberation War Museum has a category of objects under the souvenirs and ephemera category, containing postcards and pamphlets, the “object donor list” does not only comprise “old paper” but also artefacts. Korzenik (1983) explains ephemera as pieces of paper and the premise of ephemera research as conveying actual practices and commitments of people through circulated images and documents of which the users are themselves aware. The latter point is substantiated by Young (2003) exploring ephemera as cheap print for the

masses. Even as the items enlisted as ‘objects’ belongs to various martyrs, they are never part of conventional historical research on martyrdom or ephemera research. Such ephemera collections are part of the souvenirs and ephemera category of the Liberation War Museum, the British Library for Development Studies Legacy Collection’s holdings of South Asian ephemera at the University of Sussex, ephemera archives at 1971: Genocide-Torture Archive and Museum, Khulna. From international holdings to local historical museums, ephemera constitute paper items and objects with text inscribed on them. Warren and Clarke in their 2009 study on ephemera as an interstitial residue consequent upon an art production expanded the purview of ephemera to include body ephemera like body as canvas and blood as material. Clarke posits clearly about “ephemera created or transformed through acts of performance, objects or props” (55). This study explores print ephemera like notebooks, journalistic writings, letters, to personal belongings as traces or martyr remains to photographs to nationalist ephemera like flags.

Even as this study focusses on secular ephemera and residue objects, martyr objects in Islamic Shia culture have been probed as assemblages, placing the human in a network of sacral image-objects connected through acts of multidirectional gazing (Ruffle 277). In Bangladesh, recent studies on objects and ephemera of the 1971 Liberation War to exactly enumerate the number of martyrs and war crimes perpetrators, have led to projects, numerous archives and scattered biographical studies on martyrs which focus on martyr ephemera objects on an epic and individual scale respectively, without being subject of a sustained academic research.<sup>1</sup> Martyr ephemera archives of donated objects concentrate on the person of the martyr in tandem with the evolving memorial narrative of the object donor families and the archival environment of the museum space. New materialists explore that space between objects and their conceptualization to enable an agency of an assemblage (Bennett 24). An assemblage explores martyr ephemera in terms of a

memorial narrative or a liberation narrative. However, to consider ephemera as an assemblage of donated objects provoking the aforementioned narratives would not take into account an individual martyr's ephemera ranging from the soil drenched in the blood of a martyr naval officer to fins of a martyr naval commander to a handwritten speech of a martyred journalist. The ephemera as object and the naming as the event may constitute reality in object-oriented ontology (Harman 53), but the individuals ennamed as martyrs and the social categories of their ennaming demand an expansion of the explanation of the social to include new actors and assemblages. Veldman, in reviewing Bruno Latour's 2005 work *Exploring the Social* explains that "social forces are found in assemblages of concretely studied actants, not in anonymous social forces. It is the task of ANT to constantly re-study the assemblages that are formed, the constructions as they are made." (602). Latour had clarified that the Actor Network Theory (ANT) has very little to do with social networks and more with social relations of individual human actors or actants, also extending to non-human, non-individual entities (369). This study attempts to explore the range of martyr ephemera comprising the human and the non-human actants. Actants in the new materialistic theory of democracy grant a new meaning to the "political" in the very choice that ephemera or "trash" become things (Bennett 107). Bennett emphasizes the power differentiation that works in differing types of ephemera. In the "Object Donor List," covering around 236 martyrs, ephemera ranges from personal belongings to professional objects, from Liberation war documents to intellectual printed papers, all stained with the remembrance of the martyr, encased within the glass cases of the museum, displayed for viewing by hundreds of visitors each year.

### **The Post-human and the Post-death in the Martyr Ephemera**

A martyr's human identity is constructed through death. Death adds a sacrificial spectacular end to common peoples' life and transmute them into martyrs. Nevertheless, it is not at the

moment of death nor as a human, that a martyr exists. The post-death narratives in the name of martyrs construct their post-human identity in terms of the vital materialism of ephemera. According to Rosi Braidotti, posthuman vital materialism displaces the boundaries between the living and the dying. In the process of living, we are willing towards death. It is as if each of us wishes to die in our own fashion. The concept of “self-styling” (135) that Braidotti uses is like the spectacle which transmutes the human into the more-than-human figure of the martyr. Even as the enaming of a person as a martyr is a socio-political process, martyr ephemera contain those human and non-human traces of the individual’s life that have made the martyr. Ephemera, as minor remains, constitute traces of “self-styling” which are not definitive statements of embracing death like grand war posters and iconic memorabilia. From saucers to pieces of clothing used by the martyr, these actants have an intra-active agency of life and death. She writes of the need to think about new ways of dying in the posthuman context of necropolitics. Braidotti builds on Achille Mbembe’s concept of “necropolitics”, wherein the latter has explored suicide bombers in the context of martyrdom, sacrifice and freedom. While suicide bombing is a contested form of martyrdom, it nevertheless includes martyrdom in the spaces of everyday life where the contested martyr inflicts death on the self and others, with the commonplace self acting as the invisible weaponry (88). This study explores spaces of ephemera and the commonplace self of the martyr. Yilmaz and Erturk (2021) have analysed necropolitical martyr-icons and Smith (2020) has probed the Christian martyrdom of St. Ignatius in the light of life, death and power inscribed in necropolitics, challenging the sovereign power of the empire. This study locates necropolitics not in the sovereign figure of the Pakistan Army who carried out targeted killings of intellectuals in the 1971 Liberation War but in the donated ephemera which bears traces of the sovereign’s imposition of death in the creation of martyrdom.

What this study proposes is not to solely develop a post-human martyr philosophy in the context of the digital martyr. New materialism has traversed into the field of digital materialism in the burgeoning field of software studies (Reichert and Richterich 9). Search engines, hashtags and webpages dedicated to the martyr comprise the digital material objects which construct digital martyrdom (Kurlberg and Mitchell 486). Digitization and resurrection will be explored in this study in terms of digital access to specific kinds of martyr objects and object stories, namely ephemera. Not expected to materially exist beyond the martyr's lived moment in history, ephemera resurrects the martyr's post-human materiality more prominently. Their location in the martyr ephemera archives highlights that this human is subject to the care of archival preservation (Wasserman 3). Hence the lived in an ephemera is both enlivened and outlived. In its interstices lie the entangled materialities of life, death, post-human and post-death in the objects donated in the name of the martyrs. This entanglement does not only entail an overlapping of human being and thinghood or the vibrant agency of things not entirely reducible to the contexts in which human subjects set them (Bennett 4-5) but also includes anegotiation of death 'as *radically* interior to life, as its (material) potentiality' (Hinton 231).

### **Martyr Ephemera Archives and the Posthuman Museum Practice**

New materialism does not only entail a greater agency to the non-human subject but an intra-active agency between the human and the non-human objects. Fiona Cameron in her work on posthuman museum practices explores archives of everyday life. Even as her focus is on the method of mass observation of a museum of objects of everyday life (103), it accommodates the more-than-human world's engagement with ephemera. An object she analyses in the *Posthuman Glossary* is a bucket which was a marker of a man's last attempt to save his house in the Black Saturday's bushfire in the Victoria

Museum, similar to the piece of burial cloth from the body of martyr freedom fighter Nazrul Islam and the “Panjabi” worn by martyr intellectual Altaf Mahmud on the 1971 celebration of 21<sup>st</sup> February Martyr Intellectuals Day. That they are martyr ephemera, emerge primarily through naming. However, naming has from the inclusion of a martyr’s heroic stories in the school syllabus, patriotic songs sung in the name of martyrs on birth or death anniversary days, economic benefits given to martyr families and landmark monuments which we witness on common thoroughfares. It is through these object-oriented environs that we are propelled to visit a martyr ephemera archive in a museum. Cameron mentions that such objects re-work agency away from the human to acknowledge the object’s multiple agencies but martyr ephemera thrives on the intra-active agency of the human and the non-human. The non-human ephemera are always affective traces of the human. Soil drenched in blood where martyr colonel (naval officer) Moazzam Hossain was killed in one glass container, or the soil-stained cotton undervest of martyr Nazrul Islam, explains the affective nature of martyr ephemera. Even as a non-human entity, it addresses the emotive stance of the sacrificed human all the more. Braidotti writes about “biopower” as an organizing agent in the materialist principle of living and dying. In the new way of dying, the corporeality of the human body is simultaneously denied and strengthened (203). The soil drenched in the martyr’s blood adds a material, corporeal specificity to the matter of the body even as the soil is subject to the exigencies of time, not expected to be preserved. Moving beyond the new materialistic agency and biopolitical concerns of the object, blood ephemera intimately demonstrates the tenuous agency and affective economy of the residual soil of mourning. Nayanika Mookherjee’s analysis of the affective economy of artefacts<sup>2</sup> requiring greater allegiance to the dead in the Liberation War Museum is a study in that direction. As a Citizen’s Museum and a Museum of Conscience, the objects “can be mobilized for the

double duties of the dead” (86). There is reverent remembrance for the dead but also critical interpretation. Mourning the loss of the dead, the visitor now has an imperative to sustain that allegiance.

### **Ephemera’s Naming of Martyrs and the Limit of Agency**

It is not that all individuals enlisted are named martyrs. Some, like guerrilla commander and littérateur Mahbub Alam, are named “freedom fighters” while murdered intellectuals like Alim Chowdhury are named “martyrs”. Thus, participation in active combat or sacrifice of life is no fixed category for designation of martyrdom. Some like Aiz Uddin Molla and Raju Ahmed are named ‘martyr freedom fighters’ while some martyrs like Mokhles Ali are defined as “freedom fighters”. An official process of naming of the “freedom fighter” by the National Freedom Fighter Council or inclusion of a person’s name in the list for “martyr” awards depends on or at times is supplemented by, an enlistment in this “Object Donor List.”

Braidotti writes of the “habits in our culture...to frame ‘pain’ within a discourse and social practice of suffering which requires rightful compensation” (213). While the contested fluidity between terms like “martyrs” and “war criminals” easily elides from one person to the other leading to official confusion and historical distortion, it also leads to speculative justice and interpretative reparation. A recent article in the *United News of Bangladesh* stated that the Bangladesh government on Tuesday (June 2, 2020) formally included 1,256 more people in the list of freedom fighters after scrutinizing around 150000 applications, taking the tally to 333,856. Nevertheless “251285 are claimed to be genuine freedom fighters”. Confusions regarding “genuine” freedom fighters easily transmute to “fake” ones, namely “razakars” (war criminals of the 1971 Liberation War) - those who collaborated with the Pakistan Army in sacrificing the lives of freedom fighters. When the government published a list of 10789 razakars in

December 2019, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina assured protesters that the list of razakars would go for further scrutiny. In this article, she reiterated, “I want to say unequivocally that no freedom fighter will be labelled as razakar. It won’t happen...it won’t occur at least during my tenure”. Differentiation between “fake” and “genuine” take place based on examination of the ephemera, and thus the latter demonstrates an agency. Insurgent posthumanism posits the moment of justice and achieving freedom through “communing”, the immediate sociality and materiality of everyday existence (Papadopoulos 138). But in this study, the agency in ephemera is posited in a moment of transient vulnerability when the ephemera does not ostensibly make any radical and long-lasting demand to address grievance but hopes to exist as an open wound in everyday socio-political debates.<sup>3</sup>

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina’s caution in the politics of naming lays down her terms for the progress of Bangladesh. All stakeholders, namely governments and political parties, which utilize the terms are aware of the eliding limits of agency of the ephemera. If ephemera uphold a democratic object ontology, they are easily appropriated by the opposition, who are then deemed anti-Liberation War forces or anti-egalitarian forces, pitted against socio-economic progress. If object-oriented ontology thrives on materialistic agency, there is also scope for the denial of agency of the material. Ephemera, more than the object in new materialism, expose the limit of the agency.

*The Bangladesh Gazette* published on 15 December 1973 does not enlist Major Nazmul Huda, an awardee of the third highest gallantry award in Bangladesh as a “Shaheed” (martyr) even as the archive in the Liberation War Museum does so. Most discussions on Huda do not refer to him as a martyr. In a press conference organized on 7<sup>th</sup> November 2019, children of the freedom fighters (including the daughter of Freedom Fighter Colonel Nazmul Huda) killed on Nov 7, 1975, in a series of coups and counter-

coups following the assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, have demanded trial of the murderers. As ephemera enliven and outlive a moment in history, they can accommodate generational justice through the ascription of martyrdom. In this instance, the martyr is born post-death. The press conference banner, the reports of the event on television and the internet generate ephemera again, albeit with multiple associated naming. The journey towards decoding an object and ephemera is different. While the former are decoded in terms of their materialistic agency, the latter is decoded through its associative agency. The press conference was organized by the Khaled Mosharraf Trust, a martyr colonel. Thus, martyr trusts and martyr funds become important in mobilizing correction of forgotten “martyr” or “freedom fighter” histories. The term “martyr” here encodes an ability to channelize voices for justice. Ephemera archives in the museum (in its usage of the term) revitalize these debates in real-time physical tangibility. Through a containment of larger political structuring of people’s lives and their sacrifices into the micropolitics of the everyday, it brings back a martyr’s legacy into public memory to humanize and correct it, albeit in the timescape of the post-human and the post-death.

### **Social Intra-active Materiality of Martyr Ephemera**

An individual’s martyr status is closely affiliated with his social position. New materialism’s focus on the life of the non-human object and the role of the object in the social construction of martyrdom has been the focus of recent works. Nusrat Sabina Chowdhury’s recent study on crowd politics and the social construction of the “accidental” martyr explores the role of commonplace objects that are not denied “either its power or its significance” (115). Tarikul’s phone, which he bent down to pick up during a revolutionary rally and it was assumed he was going to throw stones, led to his becoming an unintentional martyr. Chowdhury probes the role of the object as ephemera,

in being minor, in being of everyday living, in large activist gatherings, except that Tarikul's rich background hardly made him an expected part of such gatherings. What this study of the ephemera highlights is the interjection of the non-human object of new materialism and the material engagement with social micropolitics of the post-human and the post-death narratives of martyrdom. As a people's war, the 1971 struggle included martyr intellectuals, martyr colonels, martyr police officers, martyr habildars (non-commissioned officers), martyr sergeants, martyr freedom fighter zamindars, martyr civilians, even accidental martyrs. Ephemera objects and artefacts equalize the nature of sacrifice beyond the stratifications of social class by focusing on a similar range of personal belongings and individual photographs for all. Mostly black and white, these visual ephemera were part of a family's remembrance. In the ephemera archives, they memorialize and equalize martyr contributions. Personal belongings like worn clothes, a silver (dirty) mug and specimens of personal handwriting even banalize martyrdom. Yet all breathe life into the martyr's picture, otherwise residing as part of a remote historical imagination. In other cases, specificities of donor ephemera make clear the social status of the martyr. Md. Khalilur Rahman on behalf of the Bangladesh Naval Commando Association donated objects like flapper/fins used by martyr naval commander Md. Zainul Abedin. Photographs of a team of naval commandos hiding in secret in the Sundarban, training during 1971, damaging an American ship anchored at the port of Mongla on 15 August 1971, as associated with the vocational life of the martyr create a palpable presence of the social realm where the sacrifice was undertaken. In both the instances, social stratification is understood from a sociological materialist perspective "in terms of assemblages and affect economies" (Fox and Alldred 64-5). While analysing the ephemera of the latter kind, vocational materiality indicates the social class to which the martyr belongs; in the case of the former, social materiality is

an addition of the layers of symbolism and cultural values. Vocational and social classes are probed through the modality of intra-action between the human and the non-human adopted by Hickey-Moody in dealing with socially engaged practices (726). The piece of personal handwriting or the flapper fins of the martyr's social class become an actant through which ephemera gain agency.

Intra-action also requires things to be constantly changing, exchanging, and diffracting, blending, mutating, influencing, and working inseparably (725). Moody's application of Barad's concept of intra-active agency is here embedded in fluid social identities of the martyr and the social materialities of the martyr ephemera. Either a person is named 'a martyr intellectual lieutenant colonel' like Anwarul Azim without the ephemera giving any indication of his intellectual pursuits. Conversely, a martyrlike Biswas Abdul Kuddus Khokon is gauged as an intellectual, though only named a "martyr freedom fighter". Print ephemera donated in his name comprise oft-turned yellowed pages of books like *Shondhatara*, *Jibon Shopno*, *Jar ja Bhumika*, *Poth Jara payni*, *Banglar Meye* and *Itikothar Porer Kotha*, which co-exist with event descriptions of martyrdom on July 20, 1971, when he was shot and killed by collaborator razakar Guljar while giving training to Nasir and Nurullah (Donor Begum Razia Biswas). Through presence or its lack, a martyr's social categorization is constructed with materiality that may be fixed or fluid.

### **Political Affect, Body Politic, and Ideological-political Martyr Ephemera**

Political figures are deemed martyrs due to not only their political affiliations but also more tangibly through political ephemera. In an entry on "Political Affect" in the *Posthuman Glossary*, John Protevi writes of an "affective turn" (discussed above in the context of ephemera) which has brought about the body politic in focus (323), and his 2009 seminal work explains that in bodies politic, the inherent relations of freedom and

constraint, or individual and group, or subordination and hierarchy, make these systems amenable to political analysis. Protevi has also explored the accidental martyrdom of youths in the group-based case study of the Columbine High School Massacre, but this study explores the political ephemera which act as actants defining the body politic of political martyrs like Tajuddin Ahmed and the ideological martyrdom of Dr. Jyotirmoy Guhothakurta which led to his politically-motivated targeted killing.

In the “Object Donor List”, the martyr status of political figures like Tajuddin Ahmed, the first Prime Minister of independent Bangladesh, is constructed through political artefacts. His wife Begum Johora Tajuddin donated a flag used during the Liberation War. These political ephemera exist in a collection where there are other ephemera like a flag held by Martyr Iqbal Rahman when he was shot dead. Tajuddin Ahmed becomes an acclaimed martyr remembered and revered against the moving symbolism of the flag in future commemorations like a memorial to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the four national leaders (he is one of them) slain on November 3, 1975, at the Liberation War Museum. Ahmed has himself contributed much to the martyr narrative of Bangladesh, declaring 14<sup>th</sup> December as Martyred Intellectuals’ Day. On November 23, 1971, before the vigorous attack on the Pakistani army by Mukti Bahini, Tajuddin Ahmed delivered an inspiring speech to the nation, “As we eliminate our enemies in the battlefield, we have to pledge to build a society that befits the blood of our martyrs” (Yusuf 2018). Such speeches at crucial moments of political transition constitute another range of political ephemera that Ahmed is associated with. This is not to say that Ahmed is only to be seen as a political martyr. He is mostly considered a martyr in the naming of urban spaces (Shaheed Tajuddin Ahmed Sarani in Dhaka) and scant literary works, and not in important political documents. This only entangles the role of Tajuddin Ahmed beyond the political world of the ruling party

Awami League during the Liberation War. From being a close aide of Bangabandhu, he was asked by the latter to submit his resignation in 1974 (Ahsan 2016). This narrative is finally subsumed into a martyr narrative as perceived by the people:

The upper end of this river, flowing by the birthplace of Tajuddin Ahmed, a great martyr of the land, has to flow dehydrated for months altogether in the dry season. None ruling this country so far has shown the least interest in honouring the great sacrifices of this distinguished national leader. Whatever he carried out in 1971 to make his motherland free off evil occupation is just discharged only on paid labour, for some opportunists make the most of it. Right away the authorities should apologize to him and have this part of the river dug deep enough to retain a large bulk of water in winter for various uses, damming over nearby Kapasia upazila headquarters. (Miah 58)

This narrative forges Ahmed as a martyr of the land. This land's aridity demands replenishment. In a language of ecological justice, a call for the sustenance of the martyr's legacy is enabled. People's narrative of political martyrdom irrigates itself into the consciousness of the people in such ways.

While we consider several literary documents written by martyrs, such as the notebook of Dr. Jyotirmoy Guhathakurta, as indicators of their intellectualism, it is important to note that they are not intellectual martyrs because the content of such pages did not exactly propel the West Pakistan Army to systematically kill this English professor at the University of Dhaka. They are martyrs of political causes because of their ideological beliefs. It is because of the spirit of free thought of Guhathakurta that he practised as both teacher and person, and the courage with which he remained in the residential hall of the University during the moment of assault by the Army that he was

martyred. A close analysis of the print ephemera, with its fading ink commenting on the Beauty in the Cupid and Psyche story from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, makes clear the ideological materiality of such martyr ephemera a palpable reality. This is what Costica Bradatan, in his 2015 book, terms a dying for ideas, a death due to political reasons rather than death due to philosophical reasons. When intellectual martyrs figure in this ephemera archive, vocational and professional documents associated with their belief system also substantiate their ideological stance. A prescription pad of martyr intellectual Dr. Alim Chowdhury initially indicates that he could be a physician. In the process of researching his "intellectual" pursuits, we come to know how he "devoted himself to the treatment of injured freedom fighters" (*Banglapedia*2014). He also wrote for literary and medical journals; became vice president of Dhaka Medical College Students' Union (1954-1955), joint secretary of East Pakistan unit of Pakistan Medical Association (1957-1958), general secretary in 1967- 1968, and the general secretary of East Pakistan Ophthalmological Society in 1969. Thus, the medical profession became the ideological tool through which he waged a war. The preservation of pages from the prescription pad is a haunting witness to his sacrifice. Ephemera archives, through their collection of minor, small, transient objects propel us to look for major, larger, immortal object stories.

### **Ephemera Archives and Spatial Actants of Martyrdom**

Ephemera do not only deal with minor and everyday objects but also insignificant and common spaces. The insignificance pertains to space which may be either elitist or civilian but has not been considered historically important to construct the narrative of martyrdom. In dealing with commonplace objects, ephemera archives contain snippets of civilian spaces. "OOE [Object oriented environs] can offer us an altered, or transformed, history. How we structure object relations will transform the questions we

ask of history, just as historical models of perception have already shaped our own.” (Cohen and Yates 95) This study probes object oriented environs in terms of ephemera as spatial actants. Photographs of such spaces are preserved in being intimately associated with the living space of the martyr. They acquire significance as iconic martyr sites later on. Donated by the sons of Martyr Madhushudhon Dey, photographs of “Modhur Restora [canteen]”, University of Dhaka become a medium through which the martyr legacy of a civilian is constructed. The canteen became that seamless site comprising the political space of intellectual churning of the students of Dhaka University, and the everyday space of the canteen where students like Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Ataur Rahman Khan left bills unpaid and Madhu Da lovingly hunted them down (Yusuf 2018). What comprises the ephemera is not just the photograph of the space where the martyr was killed, but the ephemeral nature of the space as it evolved creating a legacy of the martyr space. The space of ephemera as an actant bore witness to Abul Barkat having tea before Barkat joined the march for the Language Movement in 1952 and was shot dead (Jahangir 2016). It was because of fervent student activism in this space that the Pakistan Army shot him along with his family. Martyrdom in this regard does not refer to the death of a person but the legacy it creates through death. It is at this moment that the post-death narrative of the martyr space and the post-human identity of the martyr converge. The black and white photograph of Madhu Da and his wife in the Museum evokes the personal nature of martyrdom along with the socio-political martyr space of the canteen. Today this martyr space is dominated by the 1995 sculpture of Madhu Da with ephemera (like banners and posters) of his sacrifice. It is also significant that these intra-actions between the human and non-human signifiers are existent as pictures in the ephemera archive of the

Liberation War Museum, and the pictures acquire vitality and a possessing power which transmutes the spatial ephemera into spatial actants.<sup>4</sup>

Martyr space transcends class boundaries. Beside the proletarian space of a martyr canteen operator is the feudal space of Martyr Freedom Fighter Zamindar Bhupotinath Chakraborty Chowdhury. While 49 copies of the papers related to his killing establish the instance of martyrdom, photographs of the zamindar estate and the ornate frame of his photograph foreground the elitist social space in which the rebellion against the Pakistan army took place. Assessment of the contribution of the feudal elite to the martyr narrative of the 1971 people's war decreased, especially in the aftermath of the 1946 vote to end zamindari oppression (Chowdhury 2017). Palatial spaces like the Ghughudanga Zamindar bari offered shelter and food to many freedom fighters of 1971 and was vandalized and destroyed by the Pakistan military. Digital text ephemera gives voice to such glossed over voices of historical space. Proletarian or palatial, martyr spaces increased the range of sacrifice undertaken by people who were otherwise segregated by class.

Martyr spaces are structured through both banality and violence. The focus of this study is not only the martyr ephemera but the martyr ephemera archive housed in the Liberation War Museum with its video installations of ruined spaces where the martyr was killed, even as speakers amplify the sounds of gunning the martyr down, with information on genocide emboldened around, as we see remains of destruction splayed on the ground near our feet. Images of physical structures and recreated material remains enable us to tangibly witness or "touch the bottom of some inhumanity that connects to the human precisely in the immanence of its bodily materialism" (Braidotti 208). Human ruination is united to non-human electronic technology to provoke multiple levels of materiality through which martyrdom is embodied, envisioned, and bodily felt by the

viewers. They are not explicitly ephemera but they are part of an aura and atmosphere in which the ephemera archive is justifiably housed. It is also to be noted that visitors may be propelled but always do not undergo the same bodily feeling. When I had visited this archive in the January of 2018, a group of schoolchildren came over for their history educational tour to visit the archive. It was difficult to vouch for their complete bodily immersion in the object-oriented aura but there was a note of pride and happiness in each of their faces as they saw the past coming alive in the ephemera archives, which made the martyrs in their history books come alive before them. In serious deliberation, in simple pride, in the prolonged study, in a short visit, in a faded paper, and in a residue of ruination, ephemera exist because they aptly demonstrate each of these characteristic features. Ephemera were considered trivial at one moment in history, and they may be deemed so again in another moment in history; but their importance and significance are added in their journey from one to the other.

### **Ephemera and Continued Materialities: A Martyr's Construction of a New Martyr**

In the process of intra-active agency, actants acquire vibrancy because of their interjection of one with the other. In this regard, this paper differentiates between objects and ephemera. This study is not about individuated objects and their object stories only. It is more about the agential realism of ephemera in its ongoing intra-activity (Barad 136). Within the ephemera of one martyr are found ephemera of another martyr. Paper cuttings comprise the ephemera collection of Martyr Matiur. Paper cuttings even cover his school notebook. Then he becomes the focus of news articles in newspapers. Among the 8 newspaper clippings in the collection (Donor Azhar Ali Mallik), only 2 are solely dedicated to him: (a) "1969 Martyr Matiur" and (b) "In Memory of January 24, 1969" when he was killed in police firing. Rest are on Martyr Asad and the 1969 uprising. Given martyr Asad's more immediate recognition in the martyr historiography of

Bangladesh, it is surprising that there are no donations in his name except a single magazine from the Shaheed Asad Porishad at the Museum. In the historiographical narrative, it is in the commemoration literature of Martyr Asad that Matiur figures. On January 20, 1969 student activist Asaduzzaman, a final year student of MA in History, died as the police opened fire on demonstrators. At times the names of Matiur Rahman Mallik, a standard IX student of the Nabakumar Institution, and Rustam Ali, a rickshaw-puller figure who died on January 24, 1969. In the 5 August 2020 issue of a leading news publication on student protests, Asad's contribution as an activist who led a procession of about 10000 students violating section 144 of the constitution which prohibited the assembly of more than four persons, is an iconic reference. Matiur's lesser years of living do not feature in martyrdom debates. Asad's brother, Munir-uz-Zaman writes: "Asad always talked about martyrdom. Death wasn't something that he was afraid of," he said. "He was, from head to toe, a politically conscious person. He believed that true independence would not come without any bloodshed and he was ready to sacrifice his own blood as the cost of independence" (Mahmud 2020). Asad was awarded the Independence Award in 2018 along with Martyr Matiur, yet the Martyr Matiur Rahman Puroskar or Award only finds mention in the ephemera archive. January 24 is not dedicated to Matiur just as January 20 is celebrated as Martyr Asad Day. It is celebrated as Mass Uprising Day meaning the narrative of people's martyrdom will teach values of democracy. Thus, Matiur's martyrdom enhances the martyr narrative of martyr Asad in the ephemera archives but itself resides within that enhanced effect. Nevertheless, it leads to important debates about the values of martyr debates in a people's war.

Ephemera's interjectional materialities are continued in the domain of the digital resurrection of the martyr as the "Object Donor List" is being prepared for digital archiving. The digital materiality is part of an outreach programme on the part of the

Government of Bangladesh to explain the narratives of genocide in the 1971 Liberation War. The non-human digital will only add to the power of a humanitarian crisis in Bangladesh that 1971 was. It will propel many of us to study with more care the materialities of the minutiae, the ephemera.

The “Object Donor List” as updated on the official website of the Liberation War Museum in the capital city of Dhaka in Bangladesh contains the greatest usage of the word “martyr” to refer to individuals. With over 500 entries of the word “martyr” in the list, we come across the names of martyrs who were intellectuals or recipients of posthumous gallantry awards or martyr freedom fighters, many of whom are hardly memorialized through the object-oriented environs mentioned earlier. Thus, the ephemera archive is part of a persistent effort to acknowledge the sacrifices of a greater number of people. With an exploration of ephemera as actants, an in-depth study of the everyday sacrifices in the lives of the 1971 Liberation War martyrs has been foregrounded further.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Works include M. A. Hasan’s *War Crimes Fact-Finding Committee* (which published a list of war criminals on April 3, 2008) or the 2017 project to enumerate the martyrs of Dhaka University entitled ‘Martyred Intellectuals of 1971 and the Targeted killings of Enlisted Teachers: The Cultural and Intellectual Consciousness of the Liberation War and the role of the University of Dhaka’ initiated by the University’s history department. Such analytical studies worked on mass graves, medical reports of the dead, oral narratives of tortured women, the residential halls of the University, the sewerage workers the institution to focus on martyr objects and ephemera on an epic scale. Commemorative volumes published by the Bangla Academy like *Jyotirmoy Guhathakurta Smarak Grantha* (2011) by Shahida Khatun comment on individual ephemera like letters and the pen in the process of paying tribute to the martyr.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Songramer notebook’ (Notebook of Struggle), the largest website of Liberation War archives terms these ‘objects’ as ‘artefacts’.

<sup>3</sup> For a similar study on the overcoming of the human and the non-human dichotomy and its specific role in radical politics, read Dimitris Papadopoulos’ 2012 essay “Worlding Justice/Commoning Matter” and Niamh Stephenson and Dimitris Papadopoulos’s *Analysing Everyday Experience: Social Research and Political Change* (2006).

<sup>4</sup> For an extensive reading of living pictures, read W.J.T Mitchell's 1996 pioneering essay "What do pictures "really" want?". Mitchell's image theory in analysing the portraits, photographs and pictures of martyrs in the ephemera archive could be the subject of a separate study.

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