

Women Freedom Fighters during the Liberation War of Bangladesh in 1971: A Geographical Inquiry

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Abstract

The liberation of Bangladesh was achieved through a nine-month long war, in which all patriotic people of the country contributed from their respective positions. The liberation war of Bangladesh is the nation's essential concern and thus required this type of inquisitive research which will see the history in different lenses. It was epitomized by the army of freedom fighters known as *Mukti Bahini* (MB) in Bangladesh. Freedom fighters all around the country participated in the war to free the country and stop the violence of the Pakistani force. Besides men freedom fighter women also fought for liberating the mother land but women fighters of Bangladesh are undetermined history. However, the study is important of portraying the bloodstained history of the great struggle of the women freedom fighters. The study tried to explore the distributional pattern of women freedom fighters 1971 in map. Map is crucial visualized factor which populaces easily can recognize. It is historical research and this study is conducted based on a secondary descriptive literature survey by Fisher reading method. This study has produced database based on Google earth and Mouza map, data presented by Table, Figure, Diagram with SPSS. Map and Hot-spot (Getis ord*) analysis also is conducted by Arc-map 10.4.1 where *Birangana* (women fighters) clustered in Northern region, Women liberation warriors clustered in central region of Bangladesh. There is an immense need of serious historical research on the Liberation War of 1971 in 21st century Bangladesh. It will be helpful for the current generation to know the geographical aspect of a nation's birth.

Keywords

Liberation War, Birangana, Women Liberation Warrior, Women Freedom Fighter, Map, Hot Spot

1. Background

The Liberation War 1971 of Bangladesh will go down in history as one of the most glorious episodes in human history (Hafsa, 2020). It was embodied by the army of freedom fighters known as *Mukti Bahini* (MB) in Bangladesh. The freedom fighters played a vital role in liberating the country of Bangladesh 1971. Freedom fighters all around the country participated in the war to free the country and stop the violence of the Pakistani force. The *Mukti Bahini* or Freedom Fighters, or Liberation Forces; also known as the Bangladesh Forces is a popular Bengali term which refers to the guerrilla resistance movement formed by the Bangladeshi military, paramilitary and civilians during the War of Liberation that transformed East Pakistan into Bangladesh in 1971. An earlier name *Mukti Fauj* was also used (Rahman, 1993).

A freedom fighter is defined by the government of Bangladesh as “a person who has participated/assisted in the Liberation War of Bangladesh acting to the country’s independence between March 26, 1971 and December 16, 1971.” A gazette notification, signed by President Abdul Hamid, was issued on 8 November 2016 which contains the definition. The definition was specifically spelled out in order to assist in the making of an acceptable and reliable list of freedom fighters across the country. The notification also clarifies the age criterion of a freedom fighter, clearly mandating that at that time of Liberation War the minimum age of person should have been 13 years on March 26, 1971 (Star Online Report, 2016). The people of Bangladesh battled a glorious war of independence against the Pakistani occupation forces in 1971. In this Great War the *Bengali* people fought for long nine months and defeated the well-trained Pakistani forces. Bangladesh became a free country. The people who fought against the Pakistani army and the people who took part in the war effort are called the freedom fighters. Many of the freedom fighters sacrificed their lives for the cause of the motherland (Mamun, 2012).

There is still dispute about the actual number of freedom fighters who contributed to the Liberation War in 1971 as successive governments could not prepare a comprehensive list of them in the past 49 years. The incumbent government is yet to complete its latest move to prepare “authentic list of freedom fighters” as the numbers of freedom fighters provided by successive governments on five different lists varied widely (Alamgir, 2017). The lists numbered 230,000 freedom fighters. Present government is going through a scrutiny and currently 184,394 freedom fighters are getting allowances from the government (BSS, 2017).

However, a well-accepted list of about 3500 person who have played significant role in the liberation war of Bangladesh published in a book titled “*Muktijuddher pekkapote baktir obasthan*” (Arefin, 1995). The book lists notable person under different Political Banner, Provisional Ministries and Foreign Delegates, Troops under different Cantonment and Regiment, Civilian under different Sectors and Sub Sectors. A notable number of Doctors, Engineers, Teachers,

Journalists, Actors, and Writers were listed based on their contribution during the liberation war of the country. Different regional and district level books written regarding the liberation war also lists a good number of freedom fighters and their contributions.

The first list of freedom fighters was prepared during the Ershad regime in 1984 and had 102,458 names. The Ershad government updated the list in 1988 and the number dropped to 69,833. The BNP-led government upgraded the list for third time in 1994 and the number increased to 86,000. The list was reviewed twice during the AL government from 1996 to 2001. The *Mukti Barta* (Green) enlisted the names of 186,790 and the *Mukti Barta* (Red) 158,452. The BNP again updated the list in 2006 and the number rose to 198,889, according to ministry sources. By 2018 the Lal Mukti Barta list a total of 149,967. Some 470 committees, 459 at the Upazila level, eight at the city level and three in hill districts, started the scrutiny of both Gazette freedom fighters and new applicants online and manually (Azad, 2017).

Based on the Bangladesh Ministry of Liberation War Affairs a maximum of twenty-four categories of list has been identified for the freedom fighters of Bangladesh. Among this, only two lists are generalized for the whole nation representing the number of freedom fighters in the country—the *Lal Mukti Barta* and the *Prime Minister Signed List* (Lal Muktibarta, 2018) (Table 1).

The Liberation War of 1971 is a chapter of great pride in the history of Bangladesh. It is just not possible to write down the whole history of this glorious war, simply because there are numerous known and unknown stories and events regarding it. However, this study is crucial of depicting the history of the great struggle of the women freedom fighters. Besides men freedom fighters' women also fought for liberated the motherland. Women freedom fighters play a crucial role of Liberation war of Bangladesh. The study considered *Birangana* and *women liberation warriors* as Women freedom fighters 1971. Yet importance's of women freedom fighters of Bangladesh is unfamiliar history. Their contribution to today's Bangladesh was likewise crucial. This study will try to explore about Women freedom fighters during the Liberation war of Bangladesh and their location also represent in map. Map is informative visualize factor which people easily can understand the pattern of women freedom fighters of Bangladesh during Liberation war of 1971. This research paper earnestly studies very crucial points regarding the influences and roles of women freedom fighters in determining planning as well as strategically aspects of the Liberation War of Bangladesh. It will be helpful for the current generation to understand the geographical aspect of a nation's birth. It is a historical research and this study was conducted based on a secondary descriptive literature survey by Fisher method. This study has produced database based on Google earth and Mouza map, data presented by Table, Figure, Diagram with SPSS. Arc-map 10.4.1 software used for generating Map and Hot-spot (Getis ord*) analysis also conducted by where *Birangana* clustered in Northern region, Women liberation warriors clustered in central region of Bangladesh.

Table 1. List of number of freedom fighters by different category.

Type of List of Freedom Fighters	Freedom Fighters
<i>Lal Mukti Barta</i>	149,937
<i>Prime Minister Signed List</i>	42,057
<i>Indian List of the Freedom Fighters</i>	46,902
<i>Army Gazetteer</i>	24,388
<i>Shaheed Armed Force Gazetteer</i>	1583
<i>Air Force Gazetteer</i>	1132
<i>Naval Force Gazetteer</i>	353
<i>Naval Commando Gazetteer</i>	471
<i>BGB Gazetteer</i>	8633
<i>Shaheed BGB Gazetteer</i>	806
<i>Police Force Gazetteer</i>	660
<i>Shaheed Police Gazetteer</i>	406
<i>Ansar Gazetteer</i>	644
<i>Civil Gazetteer</i>	2634
<i>Shaheed Civil Gazetteer</i>	2267
<i>Juddhyahoto Gazetteer</i>	2145
<i>Khetabptapto Gazetteer</i>	676
<i>Mujibnagar Government Gazetteer</i>	498
<i>BCS Gazetteer</i>	672
<i>BCS Senior Officers Gazetteer</i>	54
<i>NAP Communist Party Gazetteer</i>	2365
<i>Birangana Gazetteer</i>	147
<i>Swadhin Bangla Sabda Sainik Gazetteer</i>	118
<i>Swadhin Bangla Football Team Gazetteer</i>	27

Source: Compiled after the Ministry of Liberation War Affairs, 2018.

2. Aim and Objectives

The broad aim of this study is to determine the Women freedom fighters who struggled during the Liberation War of Bangladesh 1971. To fulfill this study researcher, grasp few objectives. These are;

- 1) To find out the list of women freedom fighters during the Liberation War of Bangladesh 1971;
- 2) To develop a comprehensive countrywide geo-database for women freedom fighters of the liberation war of Bangladesh;
- 3) To generate spatial point patterns for women freedom fighters of the liberation war of Bangladesh;
- 4) To document and analysis the spatial distributional pattern of the women freedom fighters during the liberation war.

3. Methodology

The research was conducted to show the distributional pattern of the Women freedom fighters of the liberation war of Bangladesh. To achieve the objectives of the research work, three broad categories of research methods were considered. In the first phase, the collection of information from different published sources was crucial to researcher the depth of the research work. As the collected data were both qualitative and quantitative as well as being historical evidence, are always subject to dispute, the researcher has gone through an in-depth verification process. The verification process was mainly relying on the presence of the information in multiple sources (mostly from sources published from the government organizations or renounced research organization).

The second phase of the research method mainly includes the selection of geospatial tools and techniques to digitalize the collected datasets. The major thrust was to prepare spatial database for the identified women freedom fighters. For this purpose, different GIS and Remote sensing techniques were in operation to produce a geo-database.

The third and final phase of research methodology of this research work includes the analysis and interpretation of the database over the geographical space of the country. Hotspot analysis in Arc-map has been employed to find the concentration zone of the Women freedom fighters. The Getis-ord GI* statistics is used to operate this operation and this operation is automated in Arc-map GIS. This tool identifies statistically significant spatial clusters of high values (hot spots) and low values (cold spots). It creates a new output features class with a z square, *p* value and confidence level for each feature in the input feature class. However, an outline of the adopted tools and techniques to achieve the research objectives is briefly presented below (Table 2).

Authentic description of the liberation war and, interpretation of the events is essential to understand the past. Historical method is very important in research to identify the cause of an incident. In this research, historical method is significant because there is no alternative to explore the issues of the war of liberation

Table 2. Methodology of the study.

Objective	Tools/Techniques	Expected output
To find out the list of women freedom fighters during the Liberation War of Bangladesh 1971	Literature Review	A list of women freedom fighters for the liberation war of Bangladesh
To develop a comprehensive countrywide geo-database for women freedom fighters of the liberation war of Bangladesh	Geo-reference, Digitization, Geo-processing in GIS and geo-tagging in Google Earth	A geo-database in shape file format
To generate spatial point patterns for women freedom fighters of the liberation war of Bangladesh	Spatial Statistical Analysis in Arc Map and SPSS	Spatial point pattern of freedom fighters
To document and analysis the spatial distributional pattern of the women freedom fighters during the liberation war	Data insertion in GIS and Mapping, Getis-ord GI*	Distribution and pattern analysis of women fighters

in 1971. This study basically depends on published data. The liberation war documents' books (1-15 vol.) were very important documents for this study (Rahman, 2011). Numerous information of liberation war of Bangladesh stocked in these books. Although many books published about liberation war, Bangladesh liberation war documents are complete sources of data. Google scholar plays a vital role in collecting data for this research work. Moreover, several freedom fighters write books, journals, magazines, which were also in consideration. This research work mainly uses deliberate source (based on recorded data). Deliberate sources provide data which have been recorded with the conscious effort to preserve information. This research dependent deliberate sources of data because Museum of liberation war and Ministry of liberation war affairs recorded all types of liberation war related information

3.1. Google Maps and Mauza Maps

Google Maps under Google Earth Browser and mauza maps published by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics in 2017 were used to identify the locations of the Women fighters identified in the literature review process. Both two tools help to produce geo-database for the women fighters that contributed during the liberation war.

The information from the deliberate sources such as a location of Women freedom fighters has been converted to geographical information, i.e., creation of geodatabase by identifying latitude and longitude of the site. The cursory search of place names over google browser helps to precisely identify the site with its latitude and longitude. The researcher, for example, using Fisher reading method, identifies the Women fighters who contributed during the Liberation War, 1971. The produced list does not have any latitude and longitude. The researcher geo-tagged the identified list from the different deliberate sources into the Google browser. The points were then saved as kml file (Google browser native file format). These kml files have the ability to geo-visualize the point location with prescribed projection system (WGS_1984 by default, e.g., geographic coordinate system). Although these files can be visualize in any GIS software with accurate projection system and with scale, but they do not display the latitude and longitude of the point files. However, these points, for sure, have the latitude and longitudinal value, as long as they are displaying with accurate projection and scale considerations. Generally, the latitude and longitudinal data were in hidden format. The researcher extracts the hidden value of the point by using the methodology developed by a USA based GIS research organization named *LandViser*.

The researcher then linked the extracted values of latitude and longitude of the sites to ArcMap GIS software for the geo-visualization with latitude and longitude. ArcMap has the ability to create table and other values as required against the spatial locations. The researcher designs a geospatial database for the purpose of this research work in ArcMap.

Places where google browser does not have sufficient information, the researcher uses the mauza maps to identify the locations of the sites. The calculation of centroids in ArcMap works as surrogate data of the women freedom fighters. Although, this could not generate 100 percent accurate data but creating point at mauza level and presenting it at national level is beyond the discussion of accuracy.

3.2. Spatial Distributional Pattern

The spatial distribution pattern has been vital representation of this research work. The researcher developed point data for the distribution of the freedom fighters were presented by district, e.g., under poly data. These data were presented in maps to show the distributional pattern.

Point Distribution

The information of the Women fighters has been converted to geo-database and categorized under different categories. Due to lack of information, especially, presenting information spatially is really a daunting task. The researcher creates spatial database of point features collected from different deliberate sources, Museum of liberation war and Ministry of liberation war affairs.

The maps reveal a spatial distributional pattern and identify the zone of agglomeration for the Women freedom fighters. General readers could easily make a mental frame of the distribution pattern of the Women freedom fighters. This type of distribution map is very helpful for generalization of the specific events as a whole, thus following the induction method adopted in this research work.

Spatial distribution data of Women freedom fighters (having latitude and longitude data) were run over the geographical space of Bangladesh. As Statistical by product, the analysis produces p values at different part of the country which ranges between 0.001 and 0.005. This is also known as the calculated p -value. The Getis-ord GI^* statistics is used to operate this operation and it creates a new output features class with a z square, p value and confidence level for each feature in the input feature class.

4. Freedom Fighters: According to *Lal Mukti Barta*

Lal Mukti Barta, published by the Bangladesh *Muktijoddhya Sangsad Central Command Council* has gone through several level of scrutiny process by the government of Bangladesh, the most comprehensive list of the freedom fighters currently available in Bangladesh. A draft of freedom fighters list has been published under the title of “*Sabuj Mukti Barta*”, which was scrutinized and finally published as the *Lal Mukti Barta* (Lal Muktibarta, 2018). The study explored two categories of Women fighters. One category is *Birangana* (*Birangana*—Brave Women—*Nari Joddha*—War Heroine—Women Fighter) and another category is Women freedom fighters who directly battled with a variety of apparatus during the Liberation War.

Freedom Fighters (*Birangana*)

Birangana: The meaning of the term *Birangana* is “war heroine” (Nayanika Mookherjee, 2017). On 22 December 1971, only few days after victory was achieved (on 16 December 1971), the government of the newly independent state of Bangladesh awarded the women who had been assaulted during the war with the honorary title of “*Birangana*”, meaning “brave woman” and often translated to and associated with “war heroine” (Burden of being a “*Birangona*”, 2017). This was a term coined by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Bangladesh’s founding prime minister, as a way of acknowledging these women’s “sacrifice” for the freedom of Bangladesh. The term was meant to pay respect to the women for their sacrifices during wartime. In turn, this prompted activists to coin a new phrase—*Nari joddha*, or women fighters. It is estimated that more than 200,000 women and girls were systematically raped and tortured by the Pakistan army and their Bangladeshi collaborators during the war. After the war ended thousands of women and girls were rescued from rape camps and Army barracks. During the Bangladesh War of Independence from Pakistan, women were assaulted as part of the Pakistani Army’s war strategy (Rahman, 2011). The ministry of liberation war affairs listed a total of 147 *Biranganas* around the country. The distribution map of the *Biranganas* shown in Figure 1 represents that most of the *Biranganas* are distributed in the Northern half of the country. The list of *Birangana* also presented in Tabulated form and Histogram in below (District-wise) (Table 3).

Figure 2 shows the distribution of *Biranganas* of Bangladesh 1971 which reflected the northern region more weighted than southern region. It also reflected the torture of Pakistani army during this period. Figure 3 represents the hot-spot

Distributional pattern of War fighters 1971 (*Birangana*)

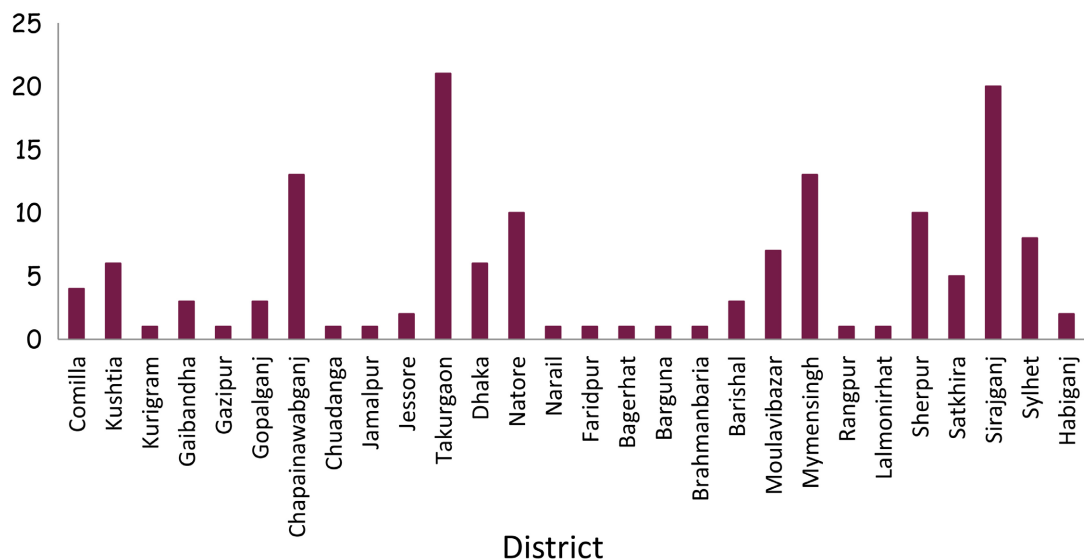
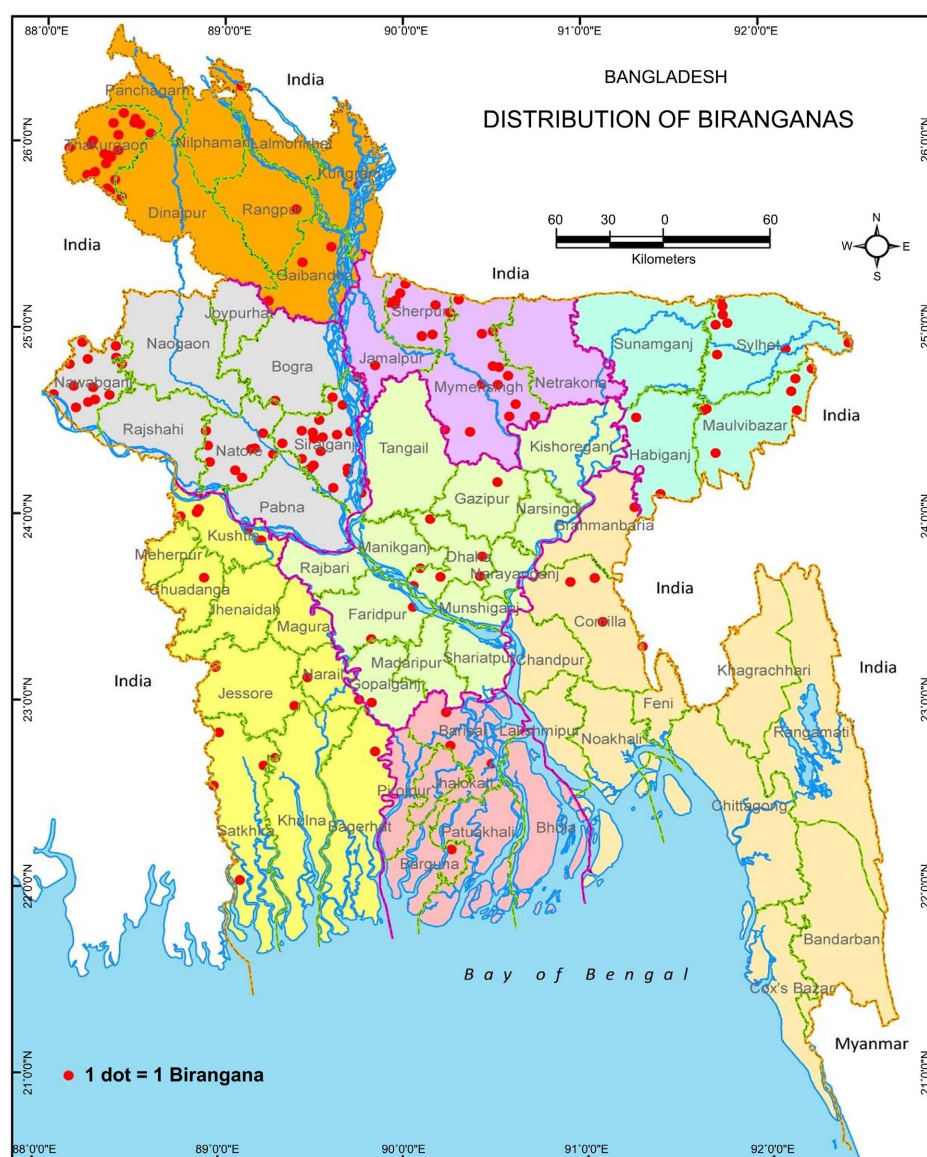


Figure 1. Distribution of *Biranganas* 1971 by District-wise. Source: Compiled by author after Ministry of Liberation War Affairs, 2018.

Table 3. Number of Birangana (District-wise).

District Name	Number	District Name	Number	District Name	Number
Cumilla	4	Takurgaon	21	Mymensingh	13
Kushtia	6	Dhaka	6	Rangpur	1
Kurigram	1	Natore	10	Lalmonirhat	1
Gaibandha	3	Narail	1	Sherpur	10
Gazipur	1	Faridpur	1	Satkhira	5
Gopalganj	3	Bagerhat	1	Sirajganj	20
Chapainawabganj	13	Barguna	1	Sylhet	8
Chuadanga	1	Brahmanbaria	1	Habiganj	2
Jamalpur	1	Barishal	3	Total	147
Jessore	2	Moulavibazar	7		

**Figure 2.** Distribution of Biranganas during the liberation war 1971. Source: Compiled by author after Ministry of Liberation War Affairs, 2018.

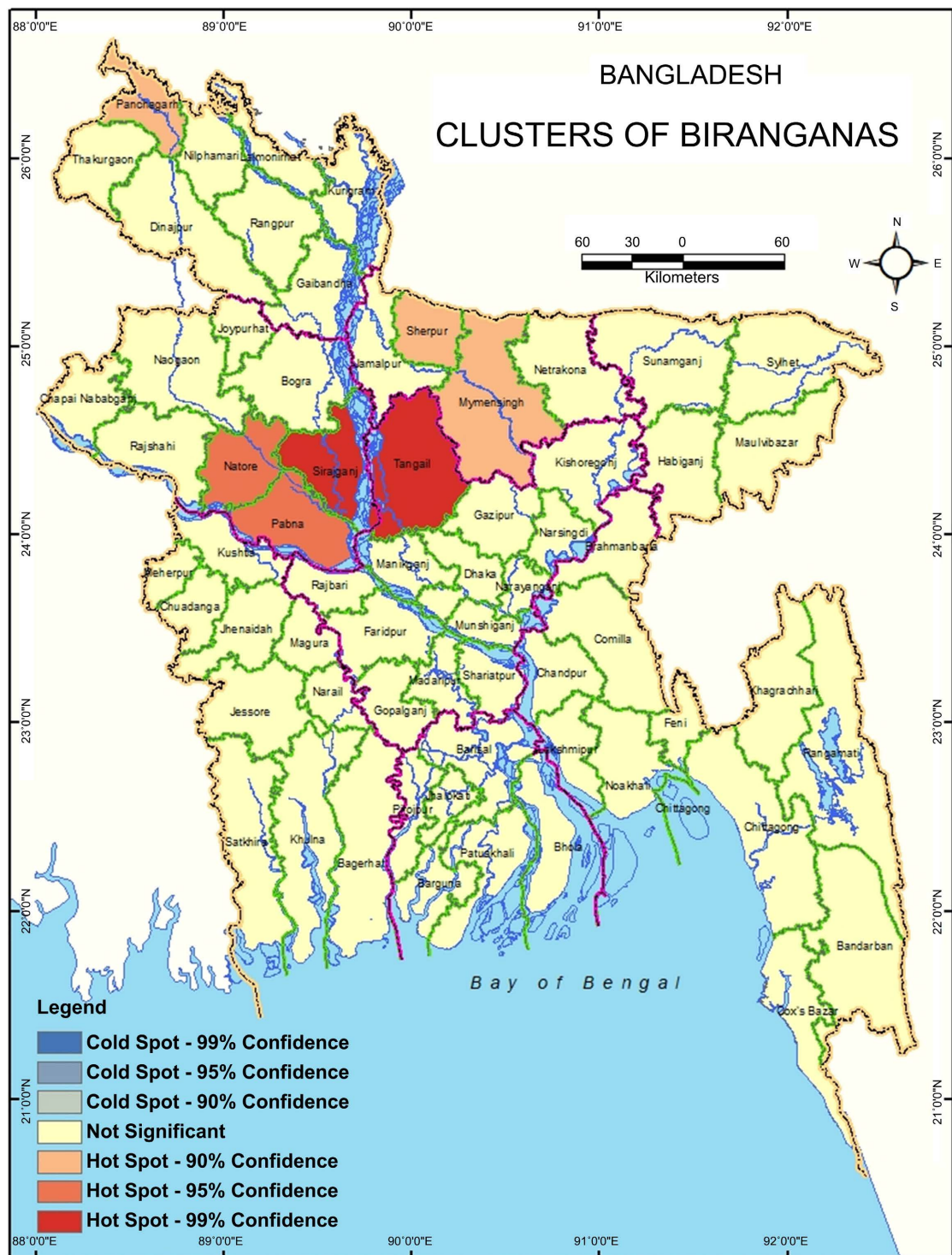


Figure 3. Hot-spot analysis of the location of Birangana of the Liberation War 1971. Source: Compiled by author after Ministry of Liberation War Affairs, 2018.

analysis of *Biranganas* which represents the 99% confidence level Tangail and Sirajganj Districts, 95% confidence level Natore and Pabna District, 90% confidence level Sherpur, Mymensingh and Panchagar District.

Figure 2 and **Figure 4** represents the two categories of Women fighters during

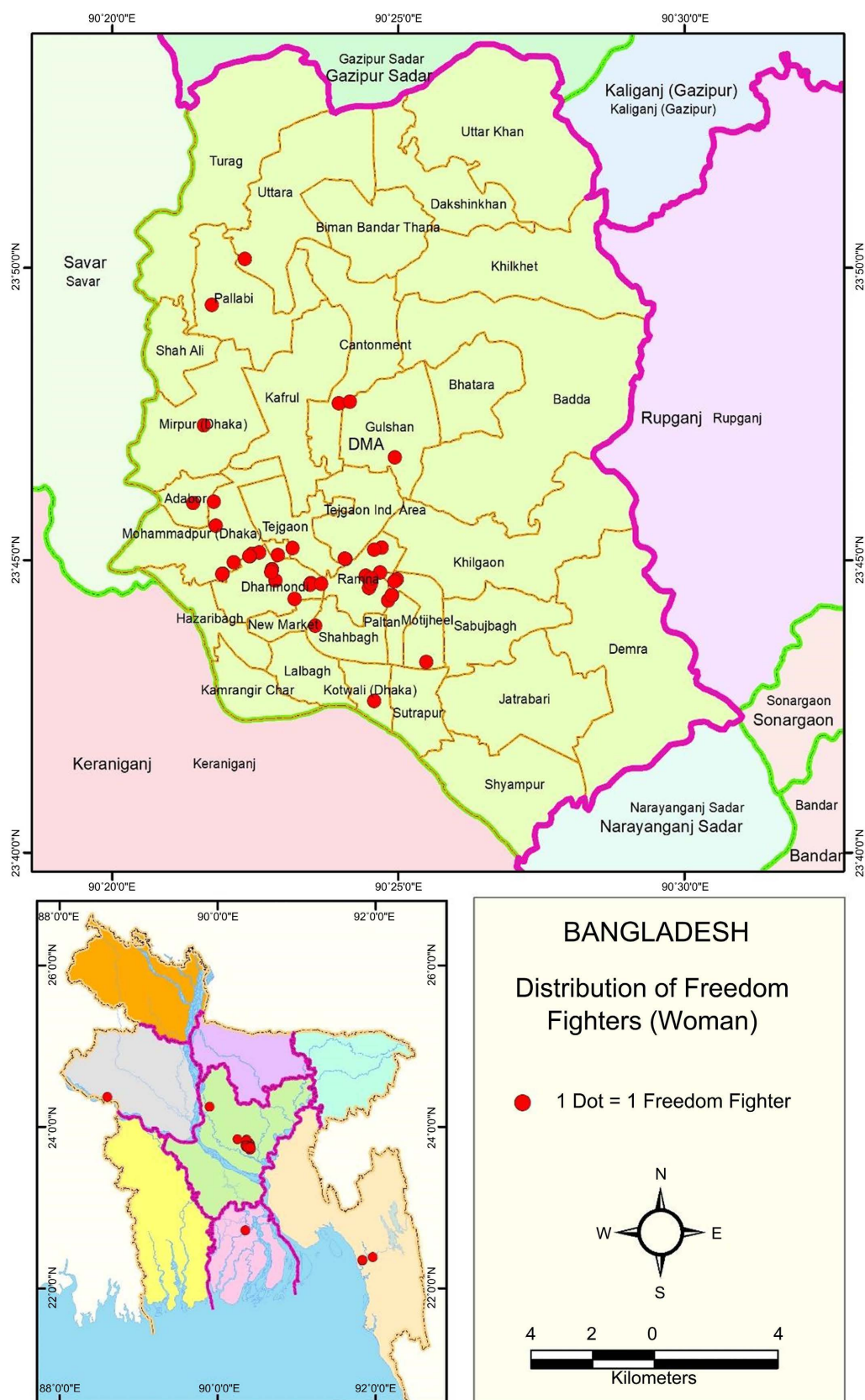


Figure 4. Distribution of women liberation warriors during the liberation war 1971. Source: Compiled by author after Ministry of Liberation War Affairs, 2018.

Liberation war. **Figure 2** reflect the distribution of *Birangana* which distributed all over the country (Without Chattogram region) though Norther region is more clustered than Southern region. It also reflected the torture of Pakistani army during this period. **Figure 4** represent the women liberation warriors clustered in Dhaka region. This research unearthed the 77 women Freedom fighters where 21 locations unidentified, 11 fighters from different districts in Bangladesh and 45 fighters from Dhaka district which shown in **Figure 5**. Almost 60% women liberation warriors distributed in Dhaka district, which is a Capital city of Bangladesh. **Figure 6** represents the hot spot of Women liberation warriors who played a remarkable role during the Liberation war of Bangladesh 1971. Such as;

- ❖ Administrative duty in Mujibnagar Govt.,
- ❖ Politician,
- ❖ Artist,
- ❖ Organizer,
- ❖ Singer,
- ❖ Newsreader,
- ❖ Information collector,
- ❖ Office assistant,
- ❖ Nurse,
- ❖ Writer,
- ❖ Doctor,
- ❖ Drama artist, etc.

The output of the analysis reveals that there are several hot spots at varied degrees of confidence level in different parts of the country. It is only the Dhaka and its surrounding areas that have highest level of agglomeration of women liberation warriors, and it is on 99% of confidence level.

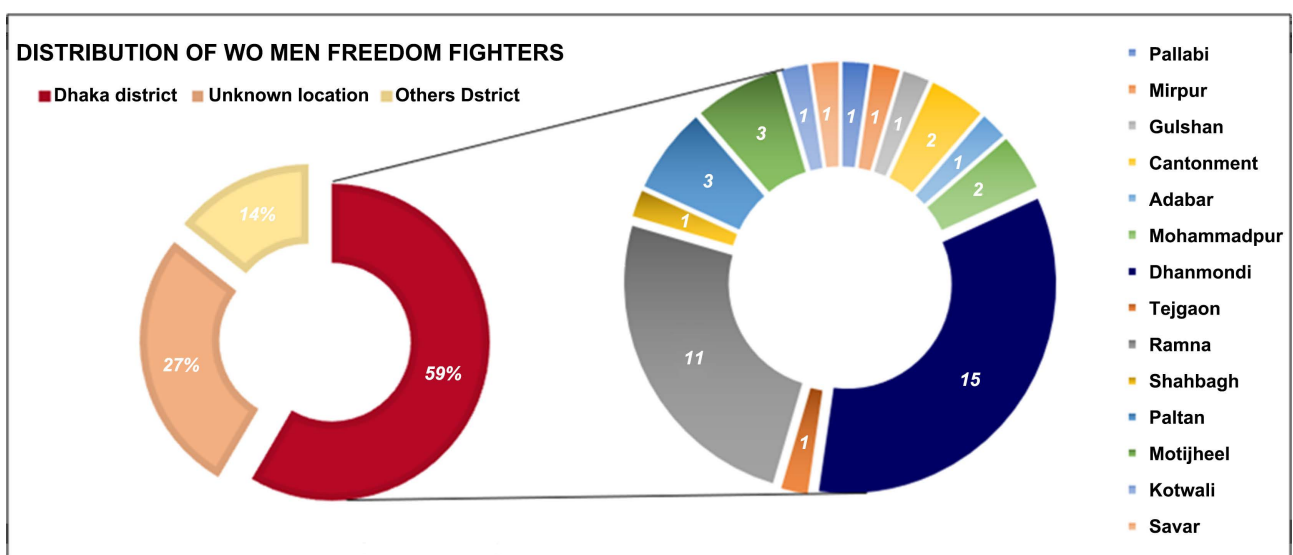


Figure 5. Distribution of women freedom fighters. Source: Compiled by author after Ministry of Liberation War Affairs, 2018.

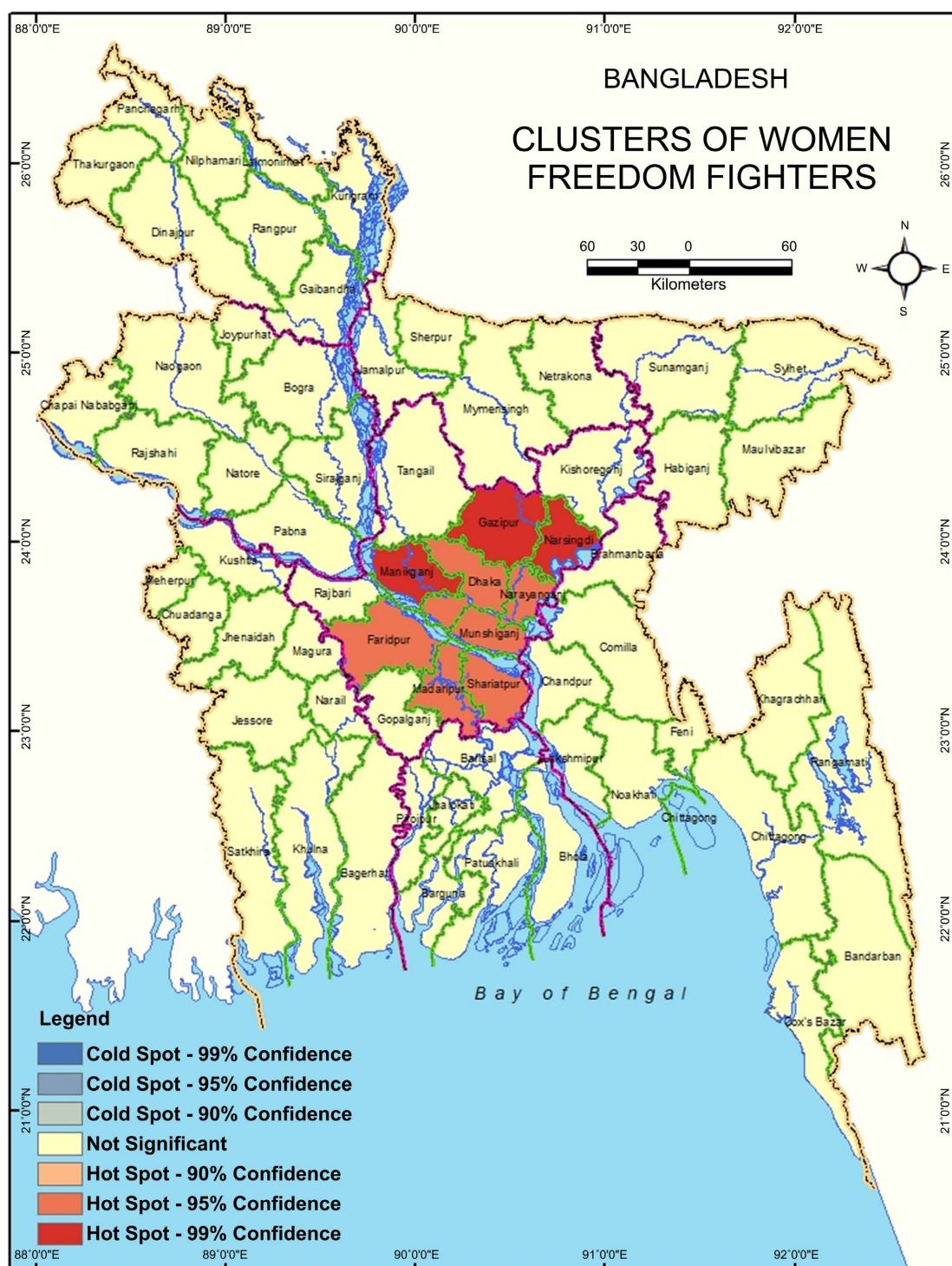


Figure 6. Hot-spot analysis of the location of women liberation warriors of the Liberation War 1971. Sources: Compiled by author, 2021.

5. Conclusion

Bangladesh is celebrating 50 years of independence, but there is no portrait of the distribution of women freedom fighters. This study aims to fill that gap by depicting the distributional pattern of women freedom fighters of Bangladesh.

The study also unearthed the distributional pattern of Birangana agglomerated Northern region, which represents that the brutality of Pakistani army is higher in northern region of Bangladesh and Women liberation warriors agglomerated Central region (Dhaka region, capital of Bangladesh) on 99% confidence level. The Birangana and women liberation warriors are lumped together in this study. These two groups are referred to as “women freedom fighters” since they both contributed to and “sacrificed” for Bangladesh’s liberation war. The researchers encountered numerous limitations when conducting this study, including a lack of data, a change in the place name, and a lack of a location name. This research will have a significant impact on future generations.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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