

Negotiating Ethnicity and Gender Identity in Anisul Hoque's Freedom's Mother and Monica Ali's Brick Lane

Mahaboob Basha, Anil PremRaj

Abstract: Bangladesh has gone under many changes during and after its independence periods. The major one empowering the people of Bangladesh for its freedom from Pakistan. In the process of achieving the freedom, many people lost their lives and many remained without shelter. All these heartbreaking stories are vivid in the land of Bangladesh but a few stories of such pitiable stories are known to us. One among such stories is Anisul Hoque's *The Freedom's Mother* (2012). In fact, many of Dhaka's freedom fighters knew that martyr Azad's mother wasn't her only identity; she herself was a fearless warrior, who had not only offered her son to the nation's freedom struggle but had ruggedly fought her own battles till the very end. And she never succumbed, never bowed down. Similarly, Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2004), a novel tries to bring in the changes that the freedom after Independence in Bangladesh has paved the way for moving towards to the modernity. Modernity becomes the subject to its own hieratical imperative exposed to the acknowledgment of inopportune facts exacerbated risks and threats. This critical condition constitutes a consequence of the development of modernity alone represents an effect of the resistance, regeneration or reconstruction of traditional forms of life. In the novel *Brick Lane* people migrated from Bangladesh to London Tower Hamlet i.e. are of *Brick Lane*. They try to create a new identity by building a knot between two cultures. Nazneen quests her independent identity whereas Chanu her husband was trapped between two cultures having a colonial background he believes and faces racial discrimination.

Index Terms: Diaspora, ethnicity, gender, identity, migration, and partition

I. INTRODUCTION

Bangla Literature dates back to at least the 7th century with three development periods noted as Ancient, Medieval, and Modern. Historically the Bangladesh literature particularly classified as an Ancient period (650-1200 A.D), Medieval period (1200-1800 A.D), and the Modern period (1800 A.D onwards). While the history of Bangladeshi and Bengali literature goes back hundreds of years. It is impossible to separate the literary trends of the two Bengals during the pre-independence period. Especially, India's independence movement and the movement for Pakistan influenced the Bangla-speaking people in two different ways. Despite their allegiance to their common heritage and customs, the poets and litterateurs of this phase, both old and new, were inspired to work for the changed society and life of the new states of

India and Pakistan. The political partition of Bengal was thus accompanied by the partition of its literature as well.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature of Bangladesh may be divided into three phases: first phase 1947-1957, second phase 1958-1970 and third phase from 1971 onward. Post independent Bangladesh has given birth to its own distinct set of litterateurs and literature.ⁱ In a Post-Partition era (1947-1971) the most important development in the intellectual history of Muslim Bengal was the establishment in Dhaka of the Muslim Adithya Samaj in the thirties. The group's principal source of inspiration was Abdul Hussain (1896-1938) and its main writer was Kazi Abdul Wadud (1894-1970). The Samaj's mouthpiece was Shikha which proclaimed the idea of free thought.

Further, the liberation war of 1971 and the independence of Bangladesh mark the third phase of the literature of this region. The fiction of this phase records the saga of the liberation war, the hellish face of the war, the dream of a free and egalitarian Bangladesh and thereafter the realization of independence.ⁱⁱⁱ The people's voice for self-identity which leads to the Bangladesh liberation war (civil war) which took place in 1971 had influenced the writers to form Bangladesh. Though the writers were divided by genre and form, they have a common agenda to portray the people's want for liberty and their determination for self-ruling of their own land. Poetry, short story, essay, drama, and novel are written in the backdrop of Bangladesh liberation war. Marzia Rahman in one of her essays *Bangladeshi Writing in English* states:

What we call Bangladeshi writing in English has come into being after the emergence of Bangladesh. Although the stream is very feeble, it exists. There is, however, no chronological list of the writers of this school. I have tried to make a rough outline which is, of course, subject to further modifications. The first generation of Bangladeshi writers in English includes a few poets. Razia Khan Amin came up with a couple of collections of poems. Her poetry books *Argue Under Anesthesia* (1976) and *Cruel April* (1977) bear the stamp of her preeminence among English poets in Bangladesh. Farida Majid is another distinguished poet and literary translator. Her *Take Me Home*, Rickshaw (1974) is a collection of poems by contemporary Bangladeshi poets translated in English. She has edited an anthology of English poems titled *Thursday Evening Anthology* (1977).

Revised Manuscript Received on December 22, 2018.

Mahaboob Basha, Ph.D Scholar, Department of English Studies, VIT University, Vellore, Tamil Nadu, INDIA

Dr. Anil PremRaj, Senior Assistant Professor, Department of English Studies, VIT University, Vellore, Tamil Nadu, INDIA.



The rise of the novel inscription from Bangladesh got the consideration of the citizens of the world. Exclusively the novels by the Bangladesh writers on Partition, Migration, Diaspora, and Gender have flagged the technique for looking into the Bangladesh writings through the postcolonial and new-historicist lens. Especially Anisul Hoque's *Freedom's Mother* (2012)^{iv}, is considered as the voice of the whole nation, illustrates the pain and agony that the citizens of Bangladesh have undergone during the repressive ruling of Pakistan. Through *Freedom's Mother* (2012) Anisul Hoque tries to recount the socio-cultural and political conditions that made the people of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) rebel against Pakistan which resulted in declaring Bangladesh as an independent country in 1971.

Anisul Hoque's novel on Bangladesh War - *Freedom's Mother* (2012) is another work of literary values taken for the discussion of this paper. Anisul Hoque is the Deputy Editor of Dhaka's leading newspaper, 'Prothom Alo'. Hoque's *Freedom's Mother* is a fiction based on a true story. The idea of freedom and the sacrifices made by people in the fight for independence underlined the theme of the book. Termed it as soul-stirring, thought-provoking story, the book speaks of the price one has to pay to achieve freedom. Anisul Hoque's *Freedom's Mother* is the English translation of his most ambitious and widely researched projects, *Maa* in 2003 which is published in Bangla language. The plot of *Freedom's Mother* involved a woman called Safia Begum, who left her rich husband, in protest against his marrying a second time. She raised her boy, Azad, on meager funds. He was later caught by the Pakistani army, and the mother spent 14 desperate years, trying to locate him.

While speaking in an interview, the novelist Hoque reveals when and how he came to know about the theme of the true story of the martyr mother Safia Begum and her son Azad who was caught by the Pakistani police. Hoque developed the plot giving a shape of fiction adding minor characters which further moves around certain locations in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. But the author says that the main plot of the novel is a real experience and he recollects that the author was of 6-year school going boy by the time of Bangladesh nationalist movement took its great momentum for its own identity.

To deal with the thematic concerns of the novel *Freedom's Mother*, the novel stands as exemplification that gives a great scope for feminist identity in Bangladesh fiction. Though there are established women novelists like Taslima Nasreen, Monika Ali, Tahmima Anam, and others, the Hoque's *Freedom's Mother* may be classified as one the pioneering monument that stressed about Muslim women identity.

In the novel *Freedom's Mother*, Anisul Hoque exposes how a woman should get an identity of herself as a minority and women. Women may get an identity in various ways like one's daughter, later one's wife and further one's mother or grandmother. The self-identify is made secondary to her as she has to feel her own identity in the light of her father, husband or son. But at this point, the writer Anisul Hoque shows the Muslim women individuality in a different manner. He simply privileges that Muslim mother is also a woman with self-esteem and she can get her individuality by showing of her proportion of love and affection on her son by walloping of her troubles and distresses back side of her tears. Though Safia Begum refused her son's intention to take part in Bangladesh's National movement and to involve in a guerrilla war against the Pak police, later she invited her son

to take an active part in the movement. One of the key reasons is that she was very much moved by the atrocities caused to the people of her country and especially the young and college going students were mercilessly rapped again and again by the Pak police.

As a woman, Azad's martyr mother Safia Begum was against her husband who married other women. She left her rich and prosperous husband and lived alone with her only son Azad. It is the amplification of her negritude identity on the issue of feminism. As a mother, she witnessed the cruel atrocities by the Pak police. The Pak police killed the young men and rapped the young women and mercilessly thrown their dead bodies into the running rivers. Finding the dead bodies of her own countrymen and women remained a witness of her day-to-life which made her decision to send her son to take part in the war against the Pak and to re-claim their Bangladesh identity. When her son Azad along with other student activists was caught by the Pakistan police, the martyr mother pleaded her son not to reveal the names of the other citizens who remained uncaught by the police and it shows her determination to see the ongoing fight to be continued till Bangladesh gets its freedom. When Safia Begum was not allowed to feed her son in the jail, she went against the Pak police and did not cook for 14 long years and awaited her son's arrival which remains an unfulfilled wish of the poor mother.

However, the heroic actions of the martyr mother Safia Begum reveal that her actions are of self-respect and heroic against the male dominant society and ruthless Pak government which paved the way for bringing new consciousness among the people of Bangladesh and further for the enlightenment of Bangladesh identity in the true sense of democracy and dignity.

III. PROBLEMTIC OF MODERN LIFE

The problematic of the modern of life disenchanted, rationalized, disciplined, introduces a process of depersonalization which increasingly affects all aspects of human life undercutting, in particular, the possibility of an ethical conduct of life. The more the modern world is rationalized the less the likelihood of living life in an ethically interpretable manner. The opacity of the world in which we are placed to ethical interpretation is the fare with which Weber's *Work Struggles*. It is the consequences or costs of the dissolution of personal and ethical relations synonymous with traditional forms of life that constitutes the central theme of Weber's exploration of the impact of modern reason on social conditions and human experiences.

According to Webster, we can find out the situations in the novel Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*. The people are ready to modern ate where they are living in Europe at Brick Lane here the people are ready to observe the multiculturalism. Through the character, Mrs. Islam is the senior most person who is living for thirty years in Brick Lane area not that she knew very well about all the families who are living there. Since thirty years they are ready to motivate themselves without changing the main body of their religion. Even Mrs. Islam also brought changes in their family culture. The Bangladeshi refugees who are living in Europe they are always struggling to their surviving, they always fight to their Ethnicity and for their Ethical life.



Because of geographical as well as psychological dislocation, migrant people feel a sense of expatriate, homeliness which causes to alienation, loneliness some people were longing to go back to become nostalgic. When they face treatment of outsider, feels homesickness because of lack of acceptance in the migrated country those who assimilate and acculturate culture of the alien country. Lives in between two identities whereas some were created homogeneity between two cultures. Diasporic Identities are usually flowing together of cultural modifications. Diasporic people get confused when they neither identity with native origin nor with a new identity in abroad as recluse and sense of otherness creates insecurity in their mind. They feel a sense of different minor because of the majority of whites and racial discrimination, linguistic differences, social-cultural differences causes an identity crisis. It may be noted here that Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Eswara Chandra Vidhya Sagar and other leaders of the renaissance encouraged the people to adopt the English education not merely secure jobs under the foreign administration. Along with them Shakawat Hussain Sulthana also motivated to the women they try to adopt the foreign culture that is she always encouraged to women to educate and work along with them and she always think in modern way. Not only that she exposed in her writings how a woman could be in this modern way and in scientific way. All these things brought up in "Sultana's Dream" novel. In this novel sultana had mentioned how the women were controlled the war by defeating to their enemies by using of Solar heat controlling machine in her dream world should called as Lady Land, where science, technology and virtue work together in perfect harmony and where women socially and politically govern and dominate men and that supremacy is seen as natural. Rokeya's leading objective is to demonstrate that women are able to work with the level of efficiency that men, in the form of prejudice, mark only as their own. It is clearly understood that women are capable of running a government as successfully as men. Here women are free in all respects. It means that Rokeya imagined women's emancipation from 'purdah' through education and economic freedom, as she gathered bitter experiences in her practical life.

Chanu Ahmed was a middle-class man at the outset he is a confident person. He speaks in English, reads quotes from British literature and considers himself as civilized on the other hand he prohibits Nazneen to learn English, banned her to go outside. He brought sewing machine at home so Nazneen will work at home, whereas Chanu claims that "I don't stop you from doing anything. I am westernized now". Chanu tries to maintain native culture but on the contrast, he drinks alcohol. It seems that he was trapped between double Identities; he was not firm regarding maintaining natal land's culture. Other characters also in the novel caught between denial and acceptance of two cultures. Chanu believes that by effect and adoption of the western culture he could not maintain his and families National Identity. He tells earlier period of Bangladesh to his two daughters Shama and Bibi. Nazneen also finds the difference between two languages she was unable to speak English this language difficulty arises between her husband and herself for the first time. "When Chanu talks in English about philosophy quotation from literature." (Monica Ali, Brick Lane) Even she doesn't know what her husband's work for a living. Nazneen couldn't speak English except for two words "Thank you" and "Sorry". That's why she never go outside and even she has

never spoken to strangers. When she expressed her desire to learn English Chanu replies to her "It will come. Don't worry about it. Where's the need anyway."

Nazneen faces Identity crisis not as an immigrant but also as a woman. Nazneen tries to herself-esteem. When she develops a relationship with Rajia who was an economically independent woman and works in a factory. It brings question in Nazneen's mind about her existence. "How can I just sit and sit? For what and why I am waiting? What is there to see?" such questions haveraised in her. Through Rajia her friend who is modern and westernized woman wears a union jack sweatshirt and trousers, economically independent woman where-as Nazneen timid, village girl. Now obedient and dutiful wife carries the role of wife, mother and connects family together. In these roles, there is nothing which indicates her individual and separate Identity. But lateron, Nazneen transform her Identity as an intellectual and economically independent woman. Nazneen affects by this multiculturalism she has an extramarital affair with Karim young Bangladeshi boy whose enthusiastic nature and confidence attract her. It was Karim who creates a taste for knowledge in her about social and political ideas like Islamification, local and global ummah. Nazneen maintains the native culture she plays and reads the Quran plays the whole role which was imposed her by the society but on the contrary, she breaks Muslim religion's doctrine and ethics. She has physical relation with Karim which was against to the Muslim religion. But Nazneen realizes that it was a crime of adultery she feels shamed she depicts it as "He was the first man to see her naked". It made her sick and desire with shame. They committed a crime and it made them to death. Nazneen felt guilt that she had done the crime of adultery she deceives Chanu. Monica Ali depicts Nazneen's to be or not to be a situation that she was trapped between her loyalties to Chanu her commitment towards children and her love and desire. She could not understand whom to choose Chanu as unsuccessful, unromantic man or Karim as a confident, young and intellectual man through whom Nazneen realizes her sexual Identity, Karim enhance her Identity as an Intellectual and Confident woman. The sense of guilt leads loneliness and for the comfort, Nazneen reads "Quran". Ali criticizes that the relationship of Nazneen with Karim and its effect the immigrant's, political, sociological and philosophical dimensions. But Nazneen relationship accentuates her struggle against her fate and it strengthens her real self-personality. Nazneen thought that about her life while she uses to sit on grass floor. It assumes that Nazneen's flourishing business breakdown the brick lane and widens her horizons. Thus, economically and emotionally Nazneen becomes independent and it strengthened faith in her's-self.

IV. CONCLUSION

In Anisul Hoque's The Freedom's Mother, the protagonist actions of the martyr mother Safia Begum reveal that her actions are of self-respect and heroic against the male dominant society and ruthless Pak government which paved the way for bringing new consciousness among the people of Bangladesh and further for the enlightenment of Bangladesh identity in the true sense of democracy and dignity.



In Monika Ali's Brick Lane, Nazneen, the heroine of the novel creates a strong hybrid identity who remained a persistent character who confines herself for her family despite her differences with her husband Chanu. Thus, Anisul Hoque's Freedom's Mother and Monika Ali's Brick Lane are instrumental in bringing in the ethnic bond among the people of Bangladesh besides addressing the gender issues.

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